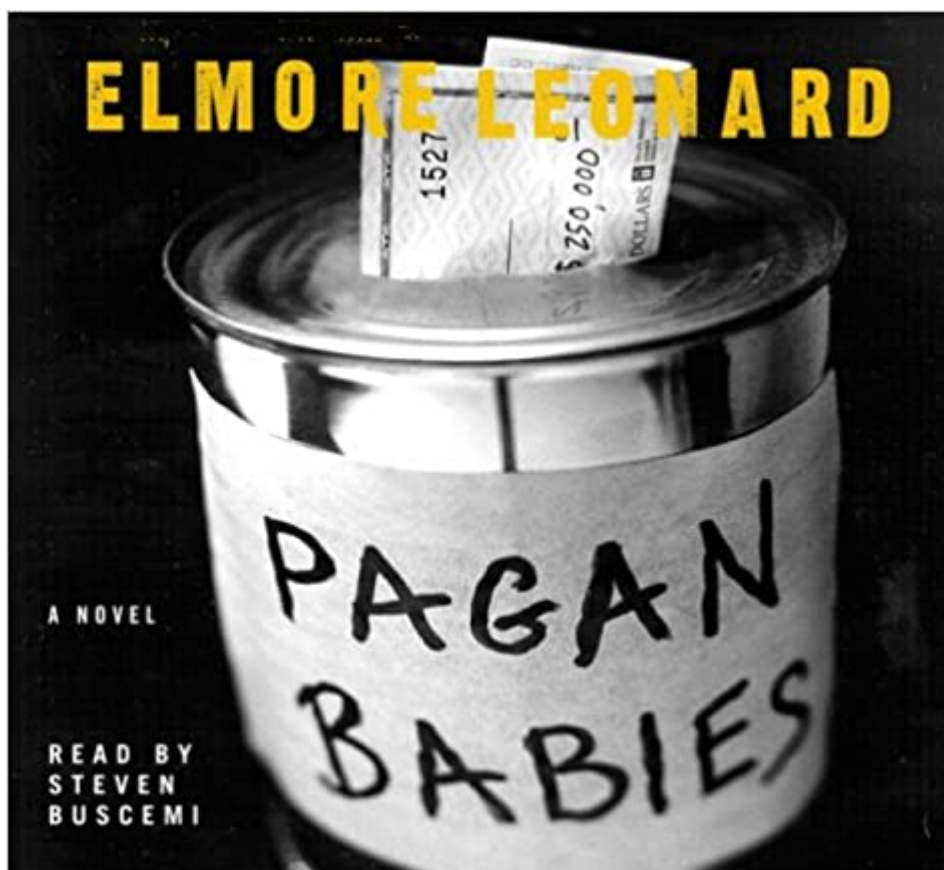


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Pagan Babies



Synopsis

Five CD's, 6 hours
Read by Steve Buschemi
In Rwanda during the genocide, Hutu thugs storm into a church and kill everyone except Father Terry Dunn, on the altar saying his first mass. He's powerless to do anything about it--until one day he faces several of the killers and exacts a chilling penance. But is Terry Dunn really a priest? He doesn't always appear to act like one. He comes home to Detroit and runs into Debbie Dewey who's doing standup at a comedy club. In her set, Debbie tells what it was like in prison, down for aggravated assault with a deadly weapon. Terry and Debbie hit it off; they have the same sense of humor and similar goals in that both are out to raise money. Terry says for the Little Orphans of Rwanda; Debbie to score off a guy who conned her out of sixty-seven thousand dollars. This is Randy, now wealthy, who runs a fashionable restaurant and is connected to the Detroit Mafia. It's Debbie who keeps prying until she learns the bizarre truth about Terry; Debbie who sells him on going in together for a much bigger payoff than either could manage alone. What happened in Rwanda remains alive through the unexpected twists and turns of the plot. But even with this tragic background, *PAGAN BABIES* comes off as Leonard's funniest straight-faced novel to date.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

After 30-odd novels, one might think that Elmore Leonard has nothing left to prove. But *Pagan Babies*, a novel filled with his signatures (tight plotting, scathing wit, and that grittily realistic dialogue), shows once again why he sets the standard against which other crime novels are measured. In fact, Leonard has raised the bar. How many authors would dare use the Rwandan

genocide as backdrop for a story that moves gaily between romantic comedy and a massive, labyrinthine con? More to the point, how many of them would pull it off? Father Terry Dunn doesn't have qualms about substituting punishment for penance. If that means killing four Hutu murderers who slaughtered his Tutsi congregation, so be it. Being an instrument of divine wrath has certain disadvantages, however, so Dunn breaks camp and heads for Detroit, where he's welcomed by family, a five-year-old federal indictment for tax fraud, and a fast-talking fireball named Debbie Dewey. Fresh from a stint in prison for assaulting her former fiancé, Randy, with a Ford Escort, Debbie is out for revenge: "I still can't believe I fell for it. He tells me he's retired from Merrill Lynch, one of their top traders, and I believed him. Did I check? No, not till it was too late. But you know what did me in, besides the hair and the tan? Greed. He said if I had a savings account that wasn't doing much and would like to put it to work... He shows me his phony portfolio, stock worth millions, and like a dummy I said, 'Well, I've got fifty grand not doing too much.' I signed it over and that's the last I saw of my money." It's only a matter of time before Debbie's desire for cold, hard cash and Dunn's fundraising for Rwandan orphans join forces in a carefully plotted financial assault on Randy's benefactor, Tony Amilia, who just happens to be the last of the old-school Detroit Mafia. Throw in a couple of hit men to whom loyalty is a foreign word, and you've got vintage Leonard: a fast-paced, roller-coaster ride of a novel where deceiver and deceived are gloriously shifty signifiers.

--Kelly Flynn --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The opening paragraph depicts a corner of hell on earth: a church in Rwanda after the recent (real-life) genocide, "a tomb where forty-seven bodies turned to leather.... " That's a grim start for a Leonard book, and the rest of this 36th novel from the old master doesn't shy from its dark promise. The world depicted here is a treacherous place, infested with diseased souls. While some of the spiritually afflicted are villains, however, some are merely scoundrels. It's to the latter that Leonard lends hopeDmost notably to two appealing felons: "Father" Terry Dunn, who ministers to the Rwanda church's surviving flock although he is on the lam and only posing as a priest, and Debbie Dewey, just released after serving three years for driving over her (now ex) husband with a Ford Escort. When Terry guns down four men responsible for the massacre in the church and flees to hometown Detroit, he meets Debbie and the two fall in lust pronto. It takes only minutes for Terry to inform Debbie, who's trying to make it as a stand-up comic telling prison jokes, that he's a sham priest, and only days for him to clue her in on his new scheme: to bilk the soft-hearted for dollars supposedly for Rwandan orphans but really for Terry's pockets. Great idea, Debbie thinks, and why not get the money from her now rich and mob-connected ex, and maybe even from mob boss Tony

Amilia himself? The narrative ricochets through the ensuing caper and its gallery of players as lifelike as they are unlikely. As readers watch an erstwhile hoodlum pal of Terry's, one Johnny Pajonny, link up with a dim-witted hitman known as "Mutt," they'll know that they're standing at ground-zero Leonard, surrounded by some of the sweetest prose between covers this year and caught up in a crime thriller that takes admirable chances Daesthetically and morally. Film rights sold to Universal and Danny DeVito's production company, Jersey Films. Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

As the book says, not too many people really know about the genocide in Rwanda. I didn't, but I do now. The story is not mainly about that subject...but maybe it is. You will come away from this book being entertained in typical Elmore Leonard fashion, but he has something more to say this time about how things can easily turn in this world. If you don't know anything about what happened in Rwanda, look it up first on Wiki. It will make *Pagan Babies* even more interesting and poignant.

Certain writers are so distinctive, you can read a couple of their books, and then picking up an uncredited manuscript, be relatively certain of its author. Read *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*, and then, without peeking, gaze at *Mansfield Park*, and you know Jane Austen penned its paragraphs. Turn the pages of *Decline and Fall* and *Vile Bodies* by Evelyn Waugh, and you will at once see his unmistakable pessimistic humor in *A Handful of Dust*. On a much less literary level, there is the prolific crime novelist Elmore Leonard. Like all who engage in that genre, his plots, what Maugham called the skeleton of the story, have multiple layers. What sets Leonard apart though, is his mastery of dialogue. Wry and funny, sexy without being gross, with an ear for the way people talk rather than the way writers think they should, his books are centered on the interaction between people, most of them off-center, but never off-putting. In *Pagan Babies*, there is Father Terry Dunn, or at least the alleged Father Dunn, who gets ordained, sort of, in Rwanda. He is also, sort of, on the lam from the law, having been involved in illegally running cigarettes. He witnesses genocide of the Tutsis by the Hutus in his church, and five years later shoots four of the murderers before heading back to Detroit. He gets involved with a cute ex-con named Debbie, just out of the slammer for trying to run over her former boyfriend with a Ford Escort because the sweet guy stole \$67,000.00 from her. Terry and Debbie develop a plan to swindle a quarter of a million smackens from her ex-lover, a wise guy wannabe, who is paying the mobsters a significant street tax. In theory at least, the dough is supposed to be used for Rwandan orphans. In reality, the money is intended for their pockets. The plan, turning here and there as circumstances require, goes all the way up to

the local Mafia Don, who likes the image of being a charitable contributor to good deeds. Leonard's crime novels have a consistency about them. Some, like *City Primeval* and *Get Shorty*, are masterful. But the quality never dips below a 7.5 on a 10 point scale. Perhaps this is because Leonard really cares about his work, although he must pound it out with tongue firmly in cheek. Somewhere, I read he can spend weeks just thinking up the names of his characters. Just imagine how long he works on the dialogue. In *Pagan Babies*, there is a scene where a none-too-bright hitman named Mutt is assigned to whack Terry Dunn: "Yeah, I'll do'er. But now, which person was it again?" "The priest." "Oh. I guess it's okay, I'm a Baptist." Nobody but Dutch Leonard could have put it in such perspective.

I realize the thing I really love about Mr. Leonard's novels is that they are so wildly unpredictable. I should say one of the things I love. The stories are always great and this was no exception. It's a terrific story that is shockingly sad at first and then becomes fun. I loved it.

It's Elmore Leonard. Great yarn. Fun characters. One of his best.

I actually read this years ago but kept thinking about it so I bought a copy for my kindle. What can you say, there is no one like Elmore Leonard. I grew up just a few miles from him and he (still) an institution. Great read!

Good old, Elmore! Bit different in parts from the normal fare but pacy enough and just as satisfying. leaves you grinning.

Good read, but not my favorite Elmore Leonard book. This book gets pretty dark in a few places and you can almost feel the intensity of the moment.

As always Leonard at his best.

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