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The Hot Kid

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Synopsis

Great story, typical Elmore Leonard. I expect a film sometime!

Book Information

Audio CD

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Customer Reviews

I generally like Elmore Leonard, this is the twelfth book of his I've read, ranging from his Detroit crime capers, to his L.A.-set Chili Palmer stuff, to some of his Westerns. Other than the terrible "Be Cool", this is probably my least favorite of his books so far. Set in the years between the end of World War I and 1934, the story follows Carlos "Carl" Webster from boyhood to manhood as the son of a wealthy pecan farmer rises to become a hotshot U.S. Marshall. The story takes place in the dusty Midwest, mainly around Tulsa and Oklahoma City, as Carl faces off with various wanna-be desperados seeking to make a name for themselves. Carl is a somewhat vain, cocky lawman, with a keen sense of what kind of quote will get him in the papers. His main foe is the son of a wealthy oil man, a no account young man who has everything he needs, but whose selfish nature and appetite for stirring things up leads him into Carl's path. Mixed into this are kinds of period details, from prohibition to Will Rogers shows to Klansmen vigilantes to "True Detective" writers to striking miners to mentions of various real-life bank robbers Pretty Boy Floyd, John Dillinger, and Bonnie and Clyde Barrow. Despite all this background detail, the story itself failed to engage me. There are none of the clever twists and turns that characterize Leonard's best work. There's a good guy, a bad guy, and an inextricable outcome whose resolution is surprisingly undramatic. In fact, about halfway through the book I realized that the "real story" wasn't going to kick in -- I was in it! And unlike many Leonard books, the supporting cast of characters isn't particularly memorable. Even Leonard's trademark

strong dialogue is mostly missing, subsumed by his attempt to stick to period speech.

I have come to the conclusion that there is no reliable measure by which the magnitude of Elmore Leonard's ability can be gauged. He was at one point referred to, with some accuracy, as America's most popular unknown author. He is no longer unknown; he has, in fact, created his own subgenre of sorts, inhabited by tough guys, clever guys, and tender and tougher women. One can never predict what is going to happen in an Elmore Leonard novel, or even what he will pick as subject matter from one work to the next. At a point when an author of his stature, of his talent, could phone in a reliably entertaining work, Leonard continues to test, and stretch, the boundaries that he previously marked off. So now Leonard favors us with *THE HOT KID*, a work set in the Oklahoma of the 1930s. It is Leonard's most ambitious, and arguably best, work to date, rich in dialogue, characters, and subtle contrasts. Leonard focuses primarily on Carl Webster and Jack Belmont, two men of not-dissimilar backgrounds with divergent career paths. Webster's father is a career Oklahoma pecan farmer who became wealthy quite by accident when oil was discovered on his land. Belmont's father deliberately sought oil and found it, becoming a millionaire by arduous and dangerous trial and error. Both men seem to have their respective courses set in their teen years --- Webster's through a chance encounter with an outlaw, Belmont's through a family tragedy that he precipitates out of misfeasance at best and malfeasance at worst. They each fashion a rebellion of sorts against their fathers. Webster rejects his father's gentle entreaties to continue the family pecan farm business by becoming a U.S. Marshal. He quickly grows famous for his killing of a notorious bank robber, as well as his code of honor.

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