

Shaker: A novel

By Scott Frank

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Meet Roy Cooper, stoic, unassuming “errand runner” for various New York criminals. Roy arrives in Los Angeles to shoot a man named Martin Shine a week after a powerful earthquake has knocked out cell service, buckled the freeways, and thrown L.A. into chaos. Roy doesn’t know who Shine is or why he has to die, but he does his job and does it well. Except for one thing: after the hit, Roy can’t find where he parked his car. Wandering the streets of North Hollywood, he stumbles upon a jogger getting mugged and beaten by four young gangbangers. Despite his attempt to simply put his head down and walk away, Roy winds up in the middle of another killing. Things get more complicated when the murdered jogger turns out to be a controversial mayoral candidate. Roy himself is shot twice, hospitalized in critical condition, and mistaken for a hero when a local resident leaks a video that goes viral.

Now meet the rest of the cast of characters, including Kelly Maguire, a disgraced LAPD detective with an anger management problem and strange feelings about L.A.’s newest hero; Science, the teenage gangbanger/shooter, who needs to keep Roy quiet about what he’s seen; Mayor Miguel Santiago, who finds himself facing accusations that he’s just had his opponent whacked; Albert Budin, Roy’s onetime mentor and one of the scariest, creepiest characters in recent crime fiction; and myriad criminals, politicians, and cops who all need Roy to disappear—preferably forever.

Finally, meet Scott Frank, who has created not just one of the most entertaining novels of the year but also one of the most surprising. This first novel is fun and funny as well as moving and textured, nuanced and powerful. *Shaker* is the debut work of fiction by a major new storyteller.

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Editorial Review

Review
“Frank captures the underbelly of Los Angeles’ streets to perfection with sharply written prose and biting dialogue... In *Shaker*, Frank deftly blends action with flashbacks that allow us to get close to these characters and learn their motivations and flaws. The result is a richly layered crime story that is at times moving, humorous and, more often than not, violently bloody.”
— *BookPage*

“Sometimes you just want to curl up with a mindless thriller about a hit man with a heart of gold. But there’s nothing lovable about Roy Cooper, a contract killer who is mistaken for a hero by a nation still in shock in the aftermath of the big California earthquake. And there’s nothing mindless about this tale of chicanery in high places, suspicious cops, relentless gangsters, obsessed gangbangers and a stoic killer who just wants everyone to chill out and leave him alone. Read it before author and screenwriter Scott Frank turns it into a classic movie.”
— *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*

“With its driving narrative, slim chapters and sensational plotline, “Shaker” really moves, and Frank proves himself to be as talented at writing genre fiction as he is at writing entertaining movies, like 1995’s ‘Get Shorty.’ Set against a backdrop of literal seismic upheaval, the novel touches on ideas about politics, justice, race and the powerful bonds of family — both those that we’re born into and those that we choose.

But this novel’s most memorable aspect is its main character, a man who reminds us that in a chaotic world where ‘a blade or a bullet didn’t have any kind of higher purpose’ there’s perhaps nothing more dangerous — or more lonely — than ‘a man who feels nothing.’”
—*Newsday*

“SHAKER is a stunning debut novel - a smart thriller that grabs you by the throat from the opening scene and keeps you on edge as it races to the end. Scott Frank brings an exciting new literary voice to the crime genre - totally unique, with a hint of homage to the great Elmore Leonard.”
— Linda Fairstein

“Screenwriter Frank’s well-plotted first novel will remind readers of Tom Wolfe’s novel *The Bonfire of the Vanities*. Hit man Roy Cooper flies from New York to Los Angeles to kill someone five days after L.A. suffers a major earthquake...Frank integrates Roy’s story, complete with flashbacks, with that of Science, one of the young thugs, and of Kelly Maguire, an LAPD officer with a reputation for racism, along the way revealing their inner lives in impressive psychological detail.”
— *Publishers Weekly*

“I never give quotes. But I love thrillers. And SHAKER is the best thriller I've read in years. Someone needed to say that.”
— William Goldman

"SHAKER is very, very, very good. Hard core and real in every moment. Crazy pure characters, instantly alive and unique. Platinum dialogue – although that was a gimme with Scott Frank – but still. It's sick and funny and perfectly detailed. I was even fooled by the end – never saw it coming until I was supposed to. What's even better is that the title and the seismic device give the whole thing a real weight. What might've been a deus ex machina is turned on its head, literally. What are we anyway but pachinko balls just waiting for fate to tap its ash and flip the lever again? And yeah, it's a page turner."

— Tony Gilroy, writer and director of *The Bourne Legacy* and *Michael Clayton*

"The only blurb I've given in the past fifteen years was for BETWEEN THE BRIDGE AND THE RIVER, a brilliant first novel by Craig Ferguson. When some twit called me to task, I told him if he (a) got himself a network TV show and had me on it, and (b) wrote something absolutely dazzling, well, what the hell, I'd give him a blurb, too.
Scott Frank's SHAKER is brilliant and dazzling and everything good. Reading it, it's not hard to believe the author wrote two perfect-pitch adaptations of Elmore Leonard novels. He also wrote and directed a perfect-pitch adaptation of my own A WALK AMONG THE TOMBSTONES, and I figure that's as good as hosting The Late Late Show. This is one hell of a good book, and I can't stop myself from saying so."
—Lawrence Block

"'Thriller' is the perfect way to describe SHAKER because it's a rush to read. It's smart, funny, compelling, and complex. It's kick ass entertainment."
— Janet Evanovich

About the Author

SCOTT FRANK began his career writing such films as *Little Man Tate* and *Dead Again*. His screenplay adaptation for *Get Shorty* was nominated for a Golden Globe Award and a Writers Guild Award for adapted screenplay. Frank's adaptation *Out of Sight* received an Academy Award nomination and won a Writers Guild Award. Frank has also written the screenplays for *Heaven's Prisoners, Minority Report, The Interpreter, Marley & Me,* and *The Wolverine.* He wrote and made his directorial debut in 2007 with *The Lookout,* which won the Independent Spirit Award for Best First Feature. Most recently, Frank adapted and directed *A Walk Among the Tombstones*. *Shaker* is his first novel.

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One

Five days after the quake, Roy Cooper boarded USAir flight 626, LGA to LAX, to pay a visit to a man named Martin Shine who had been, according to Harvey's brief message earlier that morning, "hiding out with his Armenian whore somewhere in North Hollywood." Roy packed a bag, unsure as to whether or not his kit would make it through security, and took a bus to the airport. At LaGuardia, he watched the ground crew out the window and, for a second, pictured his dad down there on the tarmac, leaning against a trailer full of luggage. The man in his thick glasses with the black frames, all the time grinning, pointing his index finger like a gun as he said hello to anybody who happened by. Roy stared until they called his flight over

the PA and the image vanished.

When he checked in, the tall gentleman behind the counter with what Roy was sure had to be dyed red hair and wearing what Roy felt equally sure was eye shadow, somehow got Roy to admit that he'd never flown before.

"Never?" the guy asked, one hand on his chest. "Never ever?"

"No, sir," Roy said in his usual polite tone. He'd been inside lots of planes, but never up in the air.

"Well, then, let's see if we can't find you the best seat in the house," the counter agent said as he began typing away at the terminal in front of him.

The guy was smiling at Roy the way everyone smiled at Roy. Like he was a child or mildly retarded.

Once they were in the air, Roy, bumped up to First Class, watched a flight attendant with real red hair and a nametag that said her name was MEG work her ass off, passing out first drinks, then trays of some bright yellow cat vomit that, according to the little menu they gave him, was supposed to be some kind of curried chicken.

Roy sipped his Sprite and was trying to figure out exactly where to plug in his free headphones, the opening credits of some superhero movie now up on his personal screen, when the guy sitting across the aisle from him, a lean and tan gentleman in his forties wearing jeans that looked pressed, tasseled loafers, and a striped dress shirt, flagged down Meg. The guy launched into a loud harangue about how his meal wasn't what he ordered. How last week when Gail, his assistant, booked the flight for him, he had her ask specifically for a special meal.

Meg asked, "And what was it, sir, you specifically asked for?" Hitting the word the way he did. Giving him something back.

Roy liked her immediately.

"The gluten-free."

Meg said, "I'll go back and check my list, but I didn't see your name on there the last time I looked."

"This chicken is breaded," the man said. "I can't eat it."

"We have one vegetarian meal."

The man closed his eyes partway, trying to stay calm. "I need protein."

"Let me see if maybe there's a boxed meal in the back that you might like."

"From the back? That's gonna be awful." But talking to her ass, as she was already walking away.

The man turned and saw that Roy was looking at him.

"There a problem, bro?"

“No,” Roy said. “I’m sorry.” And turned back to his movie.

When the plane landed, the pilot announcing the temperature in L.A. at near eighty, in early September, Roy couldn’t believe that just that morning, he was in Queens, feeling the new fall chill as he walked to the Mail Boxes Etc. on College Point Boulevard and 14th Avenue and picked up a legal-size envelope containing the plane ticket, Martin Shine’s address out in California, and thirty-five hundred dollars in crumpled twenties that looked like they’d been buried the last few years under Harvey’s prize-winning azaleas.

Roy rented a Ford Fusion from Payless Car Rental, a white one with a good radio according to the tiny black woman behind the counter who looked like she was still in high school. Roy thought if he hurried, he could make it out to Martin Shine’s place by dark and still be back in New York City, asleep in his own bed, by morning. He didn’t like new places. And the warm weather was already making him feel strange. Exposed.

The rental car smelled like a mixture of popcorn and stale cigarette smoke. Roy rolled down the windows. It was loud on the 405, but it didn’t matter, the radio was busted, so there was nothing to listen to. Instead, Roy thought about North Hollywood and wondered if it was part of regular Hollywood, where all the movies were made. That got him wondering, what was he rushing for? Maybe he would take a tour of one of the movie studios while he was here. Roy wasn’t much of a movie fan. In fact, he rarely went. He preferred sports, especially baseball. But he thought since he was already out this way, what the hell? Maybe he should go have a look at a movie studio, too.

The traffic on the freeway was barely moving, half the lanes shut down for repair, so Roy took the opportunity to glance at the map the lady at the Payless counter had given him. She’d taken a bright green pen and highlighted the route out to North Hollywood. There was a GPS on his phone, but Roy didn’t like to use them. He had a terrible sense of direction and, no matter how specific the voice was, telling him to turn right in one thousand feet, Roy would just get confused. He preferred to study a map beforehand, commit the directions to memory, do it that way.

It appeared as if he would have to take every freeway in L.A. The 405 to the 101 to the 170. All these numbers. No names. He had just merged onto the 101 South and was moving through some place called Sherman Oaks, but without an oak tree in sight. This stretch of the 101 near Studio City was down to one lane, road crews out repairing the cracks and holes that had turned the freeway into an obstacle course. Roy passed what looked like a bombed-out tanker truck that had been dragged off to the shoulder. The truck was lying on its side and charred completely black. It struck Roy as odd that no one had yet towed it, things being still pretty fucked up even five days after the quake.

He was glad he wasn’t there for the big event. He found the idea of the earth moving underneath him truly frightening. He imagined himself standing there while buildings fell all around him. Thousands of people rushing into the streets in a wild panic. He’d lived through a couple of tornadoes as a kid. But all he could remember was the family sitting in the cellar playing board games and binging on junk food while they waited for the wind to die down.

Roy got off in North Hollywood at Laurel Canyon and looked out the window at the dark warehouses and thought there’s no way they make movies around here, the place is way too ugly. Hell, Queens was nicer than this. But then he thought, it was getting dark, and the shadow of the big quake hung over everything, so maybe he wasn’t being fair.

He followed Laurel Canyon north and gradually the warehouses became apartment buildings. There were palm trees in front of each complex, but they were so tall you didn’t really see them, just the long trunks, the

bushy heads way up high, out of sight. It seemed to Roy like every building had a FOR RENT or a VACANCY sign out front. Some looked like they were falling down. Roy stopped at a red light, checked out the building on the corner and saw that it actually was falling down. The gate was boarded up with plywood, but he could see chunks of concrete on the ground inside the courtyard. Several windows across the front were broken. A balcony had partially collapsed, but still clung to the building at a slight angle, a black Weber barbecue lay on its side, ready to fall onto the patio directly below.

As the light changed, Roy remembered his neighbor, Rosa, telling him about how the quake was a seven something on the earthquake scale, and about the aftershocks—how some of them were like small quakes themselves.

Forget about the studio tour.

Just get this done, and go straight back home....

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Julia Gilmore:

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Lauren Clarke:

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Fannie Vincent:

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