



The Shake

Mel Nicolai

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Kirkus Reviews gives THE SHAKE its coveted "Star" rating:

"A philosophically inclined vampire turns gumshoe and investigates an unsolved murder.

"Century-old vampire Shake has lived anonymously in central California for decades, in large part because of his rules of thumb concerning his victims--"eat and run," and never get emotionally involved. But after sucking dry his latest "donor"--the severely depressed, 28-year-old widow of a murdered cop--his curiosity gets the best of him and he searches through the woman's belongings. When Shake finds news clippings and photographs concerning the officer's unsolved homicide, particularly a picture of a local real estate tycoon with the word "bloodsucker" written on the back, he decides to investigate. His motivation has absolutely nothing to do with the humans involved, but rather Shake's curiosity. "For me, a certain fascination for the complexities of chance, awe before the world's infinite contingency," he muses, "was probably as close as I ever got to finding a guiding context for myself." What Shake finds at mystery's end, however, leaves him anything but contented. Although the vampire element is obviously significant, the book is more a thinly veiled noir mystery. Nicolai's writing is contemplative but lean and stylish, his characters cynical, the tone decidedly unsentimental. The protagonist references Zen master Aitken in one passage, remarking, "the point isn't to clear up the mystery, but to make the mystery clear." It's a quote that exemplifies this intriguing narrative blend of philosophy and crime fiction. While the author doesn't expand the vampire mythos in any significant way, he creates a story that succeeds on numerous levels--one that is simultaneously thought-provoking and relentlessly entertaining.

"An utterly readable fusion of vampire fiction and labyrinthine whodunit powered by a highly intelligent narrative containing deep existential speculation and numerous philosophical references; Anne Rice meets Dashiell Hammett at a Zen Buddhist monastery."

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