



Sergio Leone: Something to Do with Death

By Christopher Frayling

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Sergio Leone is a singular figure among Italian filmmakers of the postwar years; his films grow in reputation year after year. Groundbreaking westerns such as his Dollars trilogy and the authoritative *Once upon a Time in the West* have made Leone one of the most popular and influential directors in world cinema. Christopher Frayling's remarkable biography of Leone—the first ever—affectionately explores his body of work and casts light on little-known details of his life. A wealth of research, story, and insight, *Sergio Leone: Something to Do with Death* stands as the definitive study of this master filmmaker, crafted by one of our most acclaimed critics and historians.

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

Sergio Leone is identified with spaghetti Westerns—violent, visually imaginative Sixties and Seventies films that exploded the clichés of the Hollywood Western. Leone brought stardom to TV actor Clint Eastwood, who was cast as an antihero alien to Westerns and who admitted that Leone "really doesn't know anything about the West." Instead, the director's West existed as a sort of fever dream, and his tales, the author notes, were "fairy-tales for grown-ups." In the first detailed study of this original director, Frayling (*Spaghetti Westerns*) explores Leone's years of apprenticeship on American films shot in Italy, such as *Ben Hur* and sword-and-sandal epics like *Colossus of Rhodes*, which refined Leone's distinctive visual storytelling style. His imagination, however, was fired by the classic Westerns of John Ford. Frayling discusses the director's offbeat humor and considers the charges of misogyny and excessive violence without defending him. These features were evident in Leone's last film, *Once Upon a Time in America* (1984), an all-star gangster saga that confounded critics and admirers. This informative look at an underappreciated director should spark reappraisals of his work. Recommended for all film collections. DStephen Rees, Levittown Regional Lib., PA
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From [Booklist](#)

Sergio Leone said he was "obsessed about detail, as everyone knows," so he might have enjoyed this massive biography. Frayling details the late director's life and career, starting with the quirky story lines and prescient casting of the spaghetti Westerns that first brought Leone to public attention and saved Clint Eastwood's career. Nowhere is Frayling's detailing more evident than in the description of the project that became *Once Upon a Time in America*. The script was based on a possibly autobiographical book by a taciturn recluse who may have been a retired gangster. Leone immersed himself in the story's milieu, which licenses Frayling's ample explanation of the surprising ethnic diversity Leone discovered in the gangsters of the mean streets of the Lower East Side in the 1920s and 1930s. The finished film's viewers will concur that, despite its rather preposterous climax, it looks great and positively drips atmosphere, as so many of Leone's films did. More active than introspective, despite its length, the book drips atmosphere, too. Leone fans and others will find it flavorful and informative. *Mike Tribby*

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Review

"Comprehensive in scope, epic in achievement, *Sergio Leone: Something to Do with Death* is likely to be the definitive work on Leone." —*Times Higher Education Supplement*

"Anyone who cares for these violent and poetic films will want to take a look at Frayling's painstaking biography." —Michael Dirda, *Washington Post*

"Comprehensive and scrupulously prepared." —*Publishers Weekly*

"Frayling is a perceptive, witty writer . . . [who] depicts the zany, underconsidered Italian cinematic watershed with haunting clarity." —*Kirkus*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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