



## Porno Valley

**Philip Elliott**

Into the Void (Aug 24, 2021)

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In Philip Elliott's hard-boiled mystery *Porno Valley*, an aging private eye tracks down a missing porn star in a case that involves sex, drugs, and rock and roll.

Mickey is seventy-eight and ready to retire when a young porn actress hires him to find her costar and ex, who has gone missing. Mickey's sleuthing takes him from the studio into the San Fernando Valley; he investigates in a pink drug house in Compton and a cabin in the Pacific Northwest, following bewildering, counterintuitive clues.

The scenes focused on Mickey are interspersed with flashback scenes focused on Jemeka, a struggling hairstylist who is sucked into a dangerous, lucrative new line of work because of her boyfriend; and on Richie and Alabama, heroin addicts looking for a big score, who end up in an imbroglio that they are too hapless to extricate themselves from. These stories resolve into a single tale of betrayal, bad decisions, and greed.

The novel hurtles from one violent episode to another, with bodies and metaphors piling up—the latter in excess when it comes to blueness of the LA sky, though most are clever, as of “the water waiting below like a hole in the universe” and “attacking the pie as if it had once betrayed them.” The descriptions of the junkies' highs and withdrawals are terrifying. However, there's some uncomfortable stereotyping involved in the speech patterns of the book's Black characters.

Working toward a brutal, bloody denouement that leaves open the possibility of further violence, the breakneck thriller *Porno Valley* follows an aging detective as he cracks the last, most perplexing case of his career.

RANDI HACKER (September / October 2021)

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