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The Moonshine War



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Authors, A-Z > (L) > Leonard, Elmore

Customer Reviews

Elmore Leonard continues his sojourn from Detroit to eastern Kentucky (6 hours down I-75 by car.) There be lots of interesting characters in the hills and hollers. This time it's pre-weed, Oxycontin, and Raylan Givens, and it's Prohibition time. Leonard stirs in a couple of buddies from WW I (one with a secret and the other with a great big gun), a doctor, a mule-shooter who get's bumped off a little too early and easily, a (sorta) heroic bellboy, a widow, and, of course, the prostitute with the heart of gold--all caught up in the quest for hidden moonshine. As usual, Leonard's dialogue is conceivable, vernacularly appropriate, nicely paced, and flows the story forward, but the secret ain't necessarily that concealed, and, shucks, after all the blatin', things never quite come together to provide an answer to, "Ok, so that was fun, but what's the point?"

Leonard's story of prohibition era moonshiners is a great companion to Wallace Stegner's Big Rock Candy Mountain. It's grittier and has to do with making, rather than selling, bootleg liquor during prohibition. It's a fascinating chapter in American social history, and in Leonard's spare but riveting telling you can smell the mash and the woodsmoke, not to mention the gunpowder.

Bootlegger Son Martin has 150 barrels of whiskey his dad made stashed away somewhere and his old war buddy, Frank Long, now a crooked prohibition agent, has his sights set on them. Will Son cave in under the pressure and hand over the whiskey or will he put Long and his cronies into the ground? Reading an Elmore Leonard book is like drinking a few cold ones with an old friend on their front porch. In this case, it would be whiskey we'd be drinking instead of a couple frosty beers. Rural Kentucky in the 1930's is far from Elmore Leonard's usual haunts but after watching several

seasons of *Justified*, I figured he could handle it. I was right. *The Moonshine War* plays out like a lot of Elmore Leonard books. The promise of violence keeps building until the glorious shootout at the end. Frank Long trying to strongarm Son Martin out of his valuable whiskey is more of the same. It went a little differently than I thought it would near the end, which is always a plus for me. The country dialog is very well done and drives the plot forward. Like in most Leonard books, Son Martin is just a little slicker than Frank Long and the others. Son reminds me of Raylan Givens a bit of Raylan was running moonshine instead of being a US Marshall. He's a conflicted character, his young wife dying from the flu while he was in the army leaving him somewhat directionless. He's got a bit of that Givens inner rage going as well. When his neighbors started turning on him when he wouldn't roll over for Long and the others, I knew the violence was coming. *The Moonshine War* actually feels like a western more than anything else. Any gripes? Not a one besides wanting to read more about Son Martin.

Loved the dialogue, loved the characters, loved the plot. I could taste the sour mash that oozed from the stills in this unabashingly witty novel. Son Martin is another in a long line of Leonard characters that are unforgettable. The little creep, *Duel* was contemptible and I cheered when he met his demise. The two women characters were stereotypical, but amusing. The Doctor was a nasty villain and the prohibition man was a perfect counterpoint between the Doctor and Son, our hero. I am hooked on Leonard. Looking forward to his next novel.

I picked up this older Elmore Leonard at a used book sale -- very glad I did. It is one of the best Leonard books I've read. The main (male) character is a strong, silent type -- even more inscrutable than many of Leonard's other leading men. And there's a nice mixed bag of bad guys. The plot has very good momentum, and though it may seem to end somewhat "abruptly" I liked the ending because it wasn't pat.

Early and delicious Elmore Leonard story of Prohibition-era (1931) Kentucky moonshiners and bootleggers. Fine anti-hero/protagonist Son Martin, who makes the best hooch in the region and is also sitting on 150 barrels of barrel-aged whiskey that his father made early into the prohibition period. The highly-valuable cache of liquor attracts a wide range of crooks and conmen who want a crack at the liquid fortune; and the novel is mostly about Son Martin's efforts to keep them at bay. As is the case in most all of Leonard's stories, the characters and the dialogue between them is direct, spare and engrossing. There's plenty of violent action and a dynamite ending. One of the joys of

most of the author's writing (for me, at least) is the guarantee that good/virtue will more or less triumph over evil in the end. Nothing hokey in that--it just happens naturally. A second happiness with Leonard is that fact that he has written so many good books over 40+ years that there is always something new to read.

Maybe I'm biased because I'm from Kentucky and my mother's side of the family ran a still during prohibition. Nonetheless, this book dazzled me. The story and characters are of course fantastic, even gauged against Leonard's many other fine novels. But, the language and dialogue make *Moonshine War* a really phenomenal experience. As you read it, you can feel Kentucky staring back at you from the pages. If you've paged down this far, then you've already heard about the unique ending. Albeit abrupt, the ending still justifies the rest of the story. Pick up this hot little story in paperback and enjoy.

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