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The Moonshine War



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Customer Reviews

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.

This reader stands amazed of how Elmore Leonard could be from the North and yet have his finger on the pulse of the South. His characters can be intelligent and offensive. This is not an easy road

to travel and yet whenever I read his books I feel as if I am either watching a John Wayne movie or I am a child sitting at my great grandfather's feet listening with bated breath as he tells all of cousins all about what is good and bad about the South. The stories are rich in Southern heritage.

A very peculiar semi-fictional world of masculine struggle for relevance and self-esteem is exposed by the genius author Elmore Leonard in his usual grand style. The backdrop for this peacock display of virility in this early book by Leonard consists of extreme 1931 Tennessee poverty, isolation, lack of oversight and American male machismo. In Spain, machismo is defined by bullfighting, in Russia and China they have hierarchical domination, but in America it's the loner.Being female, I recognize the displaying of tail feathers that is as much about the thumping of the male's chest as displaying sexual prowess. Anyone familiar with America's ways knows that the movie character of Clint Eastwood is THE male icon for our men, with his display of large pistols and silent judgement. Nobody captures this image in more clever ways than Elmore Leonard, and no one can skewer it with style of smirking intellectualism while helplessly admiring it at the same time as Leonard. I also find myself helplessly full of admiration while a sneer is on my lips.Son Martin is living on a forested mountain farm hollowed by mine shafts, passed down to him by his father. The art and living of making moonshine, hard liquor, has also been passed down, along with a secret cache of superb whiskey hidden for 8 years and reputed to be worth $150,000 in this Prohibition time. If it exists, Son has never sold it, but envious rumors abound in this small community of poor moonshiners spread out among the trees.A different kind of prodigal son returns in the form of a Federal Prohibition agent, Frank Long. He is eager to make a name for himself in Washington, D.C. by recovering this hidden whiskey and he doesn't care how he does it, short of murder. When threats only get him a silent stare, he decides to hire some of the thugs he has arrested in his career, particularly a sociopathic dentist, who had served time for raping his unconscious female patients under ether, to harass all of the moonshiners to force a showdown. Long thinks if he burns down everybody else's stills, the entire community will put pressure on Martin to give up the whiskey. It works as far as organizing the neighbors to talk to Son about giving the cache up, but Son Martin politely says no.This is a big mistake. For who, I'm not going to say (politely staring, polishing my gun).

Early and delicious Elmore Leonard story of Prohition-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 barrell-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.

This was the best Elmore Leonard book that I have read so far. The characters were engaging as always. He had his strong silent hero in the person of Son Martin. What differentiated this book from the ones I have read previously by Leonard was the action. He was able to ramp up the action and then bring it back down only to ramp it up again. This was the first of Leonard's books that I have read so far that had me on the edge of my seat during the action sequences. He seemed to be coming into his stride. Again, just like some of his previous books, he ends the story with unanswered questions making the reader want more. I'm starting to see recurring devices in his books.

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