



Rum Punch

Elmore Leonard

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“Powerful...clever...astonishing...a delicious read.”

—*Detroit Free Press*

Rum Punch is classic Elmore Leonard—the electrifying thriller that served as the basis for the acclaimed film *Jackie Brown* by director Quentin Tarantino, starring Pam Grier, Robert DeNiro, and Samuel L. Jackson. Leonard’s story of a not-altogether-blameless flight attendant on the run from her vicious gun-running sometime employer who sees her as a troublesome loose end, *Rum Punch* is “the King Daddy of crime writers” (*Seattle Times*) at his sharpest and most ingeniously entertaining. In fact, *People* magazine calls it, “Leonard’s best work. He brilliantly reaffirms his right to the title of America’s finest crime fiction writer.” Enjoy this sensational noir winner from the creator of the character of U.S. Marshal Raylan Givens, lately of TV’s hit series *Justified*, and see why the great Elmore Leonard stands tall in the company of America’s most legendary crime fiction masters: John D. MacDonald, Dashiell Hammett, James M. Cain, et al.

Rum Punch Details

Date : Published June 4th 2002 by HarperTorch (first published 1992)

ISBN : 9780060082192

Author : Elmore Leonard

Format : Paperback 368 pages

Genre : Fiction, Mystery, Crime, Thriller

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From Reader Review Rum Punch for online ebook

Arwen56 says

Quentin Tarantino ha trovato in questo libro una sceneggiatura praticamente già pronta, dialoghi compresi. Infatti, il film si discosta pochissimo dal romanzo, a parte qualche personaggio minore in meno e un finale leggermente diverso, che è anche più credibile. Prevale indubbiamente l'azione, tuttavia i personaggi acquisiscono un certo spessore proprio in virtù del loro comportamento e di come reagiscono di fronte ai fatti.

Tutto sommato, però, ho preferito la pellicola, forse perché per i film di Tarantino ho un debole, benché questo sia abbastanza convenzionale rispetto agli altri.

Rob says

This is absolutely a high point in a career full of them. Like always, though, I find Leonard's stuff hard to review because all of his books, to one degree or another, are variations on a theme: double- and triple-crosses perpetrated by A) a shrewd woman, B) a world-weary guy (who typically has the hots for the shrewd woman), C) a couple incompetent villains, and D) assorted other Miami and/or Detroit lowlifes. And of course all of it is shot through with Leonard's unerring ear for dialogue.

Rum Punch is no different from a lot of Leonard's other work, but this one crackles even more fiercely. It's hard to pinpoint exactly why, though, except to say that the story – a flight attendant and a bail bondsman attempt to outwit the ATF and a gun-runner – is the perfect confluence of character and con. Quentin Tarantino turned this into *Jackie Brown*, his follow-up to *Pulp Fiction*, which is probably all you need to know. One of Leonard's best.

Camille Dent says

Not my kind of story in general, but I think avid readers of the genre would enjoy it a lot! I was really intrigued by the writing style, even if the plot itself didn't do much for me. Leonard's limited third-person narratives work extremely well as both story-telling and character development media.

Kelly (and the Book Boar) says

Find all of my reviews at: <http://52bookminimum.blogspot.com/>

4.5 Stars

“My ass may be dumb, but I ain’t no dumbass” – Ordell Robbie

Well, call me a dumbass because I had no idea that *Rum Punch* was the real name for

For the past 17 years I've been singing the praises of Tarantino's film – only to find out Elmore Leonard was actually the mastermind behind this product. (In defense of my undying Tarantino love – casting Pam Grier as "Jackie Brown" rather than some rando white broad as "Jackie Burke" was genius). A Facebook discussion regarding "manly authors who write manly books" was the driving force behind me letting the moths out of my wallet and dropping \$15.00 (FIFTEEN MOTHERFUCKING DOLLARS?????? HIGHWAY ROBBERY!!!!) on *Rum Punch* this weekend. When I discovered one of my favorite films was actually a book by an author I *should* have been reading a long time ago (due to my Carl Hiassen fangirl status), I had to come off the cash and read it immediately.

What did I find? The movie "Jackie Brown" literally played in my head while reading this book. Leonard's work is so brilliant that Tarantino didn't even have to change the *dialogue*. I love an author who can toss a billion main characters into one big pot and produce something delicious – and that is what happens with *Rum Punch*.

If you're one of the few who have never seen "Jackie Brown" but are looking for an action-packed tale of double-crossing with a complex plot that, at times, might leave you asking

– then this is the book for you.

If you're like me and have read many "Elmore-inspired" authors, once you read the real thing you will know:

Kathy Davie says

A crime novel involving gun running and smuggling in Florida.

My Take

It has parallels with Janet Evanovich's Stephanie Plum series in its easy, laid back style while it's casually violent on the criminal side. On the cop side, they're also easy and laid back and good with laying it on thick. I would like to know who snitched about the money Jackie's bringing in.

"She said, 'That man works? Has a job?'

'He's a bail bondsman.'

'I wondered,' Simone said, "'cause he don't know shit about robbing people.'"

Jackie is somethin' else; she's smart, she's good. She plays it cool in jail, with Ordell, and with Max as she comes up with plans to jack everyone. Max certainly wonders until he decides not to sweat it.

Poor Louis. He tries to rob a liquor store, and *oopsies*. Stupid move, but it gets so much funnier and stoopider when them jackboys still don't realize they should'a finished high school as they work out the letters so they can figure out the words so they can read them instructions, lol. Actually, they sound a lot like me when I'm trying to figure out what the destructions say when I'm trying to assemble somethin'.

Hmmmm...

Then there's Ordell's women. Man, he is such a user. It's interesting to view these four women, how different they are, the different reactions and fall-outs for each of them. Each is talented in a different way. Well, okay, it's really only Sheronda and Simone who have something going for them. Melanie certainly gets what she deserves.

Leonard pulls you back and forth, keeps you wondering how it'll all turn out. He keeps it spare and clean with definite characters.

Interesting note to leave it on. It does make me wonder if there's a sequel.

The Story

Ordell's good at cleanin' up to protect himself, and some of the people who work with him know it. Kind of a shame how many don't.

Someone tipped the cops off about Jackie, and she's not about to go down for Ordell.

The Characters

Jackie Burke is a middle-aged stewardess, in good shape, working Islands Air. She also brings money in for Ordell.

Max Cherry has been miserably married for twenty-seven years and works as a bail bondsman for **Glades Mutual**. He seems a very gentlemanly sort with honor. **Renee** is his user of a wife with her art gallery, **Gallery Renee**, and her snotty busboy artist, **Da-veed**. **Winston Powell** is another licensed bondsman and a friend of Max's.

Special Agent Ray Nicolet is with ATF these days and **Special Agent Faron Tyler** is with the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE), Division of Criminal Investigation. They've been friends since FSU. **Cheryl** is Tyler's spouse, a housewife. **Anita** is Nicolet's ex, an x-ray technician.

Ordell Robbie, a.k.a., Whitebread, is a light-skinned black man who's a player and thinks he's all that. He certainly has the coldness down. **Louis Gara** is an old friend who happens to be a dark-skinned white man and wants to be a player. Oh, well. An ex-con, he's currently working in Glades Mutual along with Max. Ordell's women include **Sheronda** who likes to cook and puts out in gratitude, **Simone** is a much older woman who mimics the moves of Motown artists and is incredible in bed, and **Melanie** is his white girl who's not much good for anything. **Raynelle** is a new one, a junkie who has lost it, but she'll do for now.

Beaumont Livingston is one of Ordell's people and brilliant with numbers. **Mr. Cedric Walker** is his contact in Freeport in the Bahamas who takes the guns. There are some jackboys who work for Ordell too: **Zulu**; **Cujo**, a.k.a., Hulon Miller, Jr.; **Sweatman**; and, **Snow**.

Big Guy, a.k.a., **Gerald**, is a white supremacist stockpiling a range of weapons. **Richard** was the man Ordell and Louis tried to pull something on some thirteen years ago.

Some of the bondees

Zorro. **Reggie** just had to go to his mom's birthday.

The Cover

The cover switches between black and red: the top half is a red background with the author's name in black while the bottom half is a black background with the title in red. To ensure we know it's a balmy, yet dangerous, place there's a blue crane holding a belt of dropping bullets.

The title is code for Ordell's operation out of the Bahamas, it's a *Rum Punch*.

Sara Zovko says

Zanimljiva, brza radnja, pomalo duhovita, bez filozofije(jer je i nepotrebna u pri?i koja se vrti oko pohlepe, novca i šverca oružjem).

Nije ni ?udo da je Tarantino napravio film Jackie Brown prema ovoj knjizi jer stil je vrlo sli?an njegovom.

Matt says

I wouldn't have even thought of picking this up if it wasn't on the cheap rack at a book store, and if it didn't say on the cover that it was the film that inspired Quentin Tarantino's film 'Jackie Brown.' To say that inspired it is understating the significance of the book slightly. If I didn't know better, I would think it was actually just a novelization of the film.

In the end this gives me a positive view of Elmore Leonard and lessens the significance of 'Jackie Brown' the film, because pretty much everything that was great about the film is straight out of the book. Aside from two very minor subplots in the novel, Tarantino filmed the book. It turned out to be a very good film because this is a very good book. It's not a life-changer by any means, and it doesn't have a message, but as pure escapist fiction, it is hard to argue with this. Leonard's dialog is absolutely pristine, and *Rum Punch* is overall a fun, quick, and worthwhile read.

Jamie says

I finally made it over to my winter stockpile of Rick Bass and was settling in. Getting used to the rhythms of it again (which takes no getting used to at all, for me). Letting the slow, deep, calm, quiet solitude fill up my soul. Then I was housesitting for a few days. There, I watched *Jackie Brown*. Then, I had to pull out *Rum Punch*.

I thought, oh boy. This can't work. Rick and Elmore, Bass and Leonard? My two favorites but, so so different. I thought, what if one taints the other? What if one makes the other seem ponderous, boring? What if one makes the other seem flashy, cheap? Some things just jangle too much if they're together. You keep

your loves apart, sometimes.

But oh my God, no.

The very opposite of that, where I was sitting on couches and porches (the mild winter sun) with Montana in one hand and Palm Beach in the other. Back and forth I'd go for hours. The buried sea, the balmy beach.

And one didn't taint or tarnish the other. Each deepened and expounded on it all. My two loves: the deep wilds of nature, the deep wilds of humanity. No moralizing to be found. Complexities galore. The crime and the hunt. The love and the mischief.

So if you want to get drunk on a fifth of Rick Bass and down chasers of Elmore Leonard? Here's my stamp of approval, but: only if I get to drink along.

[The Rick Bass accompaniment was *Where The Sea Used To Be*, if that's your kind of thing.]

[Boy howdy did I love the book more than the movie. How did Tarantino bloat the story and yet cut out the best parts?]

Leftbanker says

I picked this up the other day in a pawn shop for 1€ in English and reread it in a day. The book is brilliant with dialogue so authentic that it barely qualifies as English at times. Elmore Leonard has the ear of a great musician when it comes to writing dialogue from the street. I used to live down in this area of south Florida so I appreciate his eye for detail in his descriptions of this tacky suburban hellscape.

I read this book many years ago and when I saw Quentin Tarantino's shitty film version I wondered if he even bothered to read the novel. He left out some of the best and funniest moments from the book and his casting was pure crap. Two has-beens and Robert DeNiro looking like a deer in the headlights, and we get it, you really like that stupid song. Sam Jackson was great but it just wasn't enough and the movie made the unforgivable mistake of being slow and boring at times—not something I look for especially in what should have been a sort of action comedy. So the viewers get to hear that dumb Delfonics song more than once instead of the scene in the book where Urdell and crew rob the Nazi bikers. Does that sound like a good cinematic choice?

Ethan says

Absolute fun. I had not read anything from Elmore Leonard before, and I had seen Jackie Brown; so this felt like a safe option. Now I can explore Leonard a little further.

Trish says

Of all the books by Elmore Leonard that I have read, this is my least favorite. The story line and characters wandered all over the place, making the plot somewhat difficult to follow.

In addition, Leonard's prose wasn't as crystalline as usual.

Rob Epler says

If you like Elmore Leonard--and you should--this is another fun read. Though the basis of the Quentin Tarantino film *Jackie Brown*, it's quite different. But if you're looking for the usual tight plotting, vivid characters, & crackling dialog, pick it up. Leonard's books are all quick reads, & are generally what I'd call snappy. At this point I've read 29 of his books (& listened to 4 more of 'em), so take my fandom for what it's worth.

Sagheer Afzal says

A highly skilful book. Elmore Leonard is a master of this genre. And like Stephen King, having read just one of his book, I have purchased the rest of his crime books. I doubt very many writers are able to animate characters so vividly through dialogue alone. This book also has some wry humorous touches as well. The only reason why it was not a five star rating was the decidedly weak ending.

You may ask why read this book when you can watch the film 'Jackie Brown' The fact that the movie does not diminish in comparison to the book is a testament to the best writer of dialogue today. Quentin Tarantino is better at dialogue than Elmore Leonard. The way he has appended and amended the novel for the movie is brilliant.

Mike says

This is the novel that eventually gave birth to JACKIE BROWN,Tarantino's best film. There are some differences; Jackie is white, location is Miami Beach, there is much more sex and so on. Writing is excellent, crystal clear and tight, dialogues are splendid - Leonard is Tarantino's favourite writer and plotting is without flaws. Up until this novel I found Leonard to be a bit overrated, but after this little masterpiece I'm close to being a fan.

Stefanie says

Unlikeable, un-root-for-able characters, rampant sexism, and not a lick of excitement. Huge disappointment for my first (and likely last) Leonard book.

Joni says

Clásica novela policial de los noventas que Tarantino filmaría par de años después. Un ritmo vertiginoso y los personajes y situaciones típicas del género hacen una lectura rápida y entretenida.

Paul Bartusiak says

After all these years, my first Elmore Leonard book.

What a Punch it packs!

Narrative form is truly different, even the tense of what someone speaks, and perspective can change in a heartbeat, so effective.

The dialogue pops, makes you really see the characters, makes you laugh out loud:

"Man, this shit works on my nerves," Ordell said. "Tells me I should change the plans around. First thing, I have to find somebody to take Simone's place."

"Don't look at me," Louis said.

"I'm not looking at you, I'm thinking who I can use."

"You're looking at me," Louis said in the dark.

"You could do it."

"Walk in the women's fitting room? How would I work that?"

"Shit," Ordell said. "Lemme think."

It's no wonder the popularity of his work. Truly marvelous.

Glenn Russell says

I recall someone saying how Elmore Leonard isn't old school 'cause he built the school. Very true. My favorite Elmore Leonard novels are Tishomingo Blues and Pagan Babies; Rum Punch is my very favorite, thus this review. Also, in addition to reviewing the book, let me plug the audiobook read by Joe Mantegna. The voice of Joe Mantegna is pitch-perfect, his rhythm and inflections capturing each of the characters, male and female, as well as the mood and charged atmosphere of the entire story.

Perhaps readers know that Elmore Leonard listed his own 'Rules of Writing'. You can easily find them with a quick Google search. Here is how Leonard follows his own rules in Rum Punch:

Rule: Never open the book with the weather or a prologue.

The novel's opening line: "Sunday morning, Ordell took Louis to watch the white-power demonstration in downtown Palm Beach." ----- A gripping scene right from the start; not a prologue or mention of the weather in sight.

Rule: Never use a verb other than 'said' or an adverb modifying 'said' to carry dialogue.

A snatch of dialogue from the first page: ""Young skinhead Nazis," Ordell said. "Look, even little Nazigirls marching down Worth Avenue. You believe it? Coming now you have the Klan, not too many here today. Some in green, must be the coneheads' new spring shade. Behind them it looks like some Bikers for Racism, better known as the Dixie Knights. We gonna move on ahead, fight through the crowd here," Ordell said,

bringing Louis along.

"There's a man I want to show you. See who he reminds you of. He told me they're gonna march up South County and have their show on the steps of the fountain by city hall. You ever see so many police? Yeah, I expect you have. But not all these different uniforms at one time. They mean business too, got their helmets on, their riot ba-tons. Stay on the sidewalk or they liable to hit you over the head. They keeping the street safe for the Nazis." ----- Right on, Elmore. No need for ornamentation here since Ordell's words speak for themselves.

Rule: Avoid using exclamation points (in other words, Leonard is telling us to let the action itself communicate power and excitement).

Vintage Elmore: "He saw the two bikers standing in kind of a crouch with their rifles, shoulders hunched, looking this way, nearer the house now than the gun range. He saw them out there in the open, cautious. Saw them both look toward the driveway at the same time and start to turn in that direction, raising their rifles. Louis heard the sound of automatic weapons, not as loud as he heard them in Ordell's gun movie or in any movie he had ever seen, and watched the two bikers drop where they were standing seem to collapse, fall without firing a shot, the sound of the automatic weapons continuing until finally it stopped. Pretty soon the jackboys appeared, the kids with their Chinese guns, curved banana clips, looking at the men on the ground and then toward the house."

Rule: Use regional dialect and jargon sparingly.

Elmore Leonard wrote to be read. When he writes dialogue, it doesn't matter if the speaker is from the inner city or the rural hinterlands, you can read it. Case in point: ""All right, go ahead," Simone said. "You find any other guns, or you find something else and you take it? The man's gonna come after you. Understand? Man that has more guns'n you ever saw in your life." ----- True to the character, in this case an older Black woman, but, again, you can read it. Every piece of dialogue in Rum Punch is equally clear.

Rule: Avoid detailed descriptions of characters and don't go into great detail describing places or things.

Here is how the author describes bail bondsman Max Cherry, one of the main characters, through the eyes of Ordell, another main character: "The man himself appeared neat, cleanshaved, had his blue shirt open, no tie, good size shoulders on him. That dark, tough-looking type of guy like Lewis, dark hair, only Max Cherry was losing his on top. Up in his fifties somewhere. He could be Eyetalian, except Ordell had never met a bail bondsman wasn't Jewish." ----- That's it-short, crisp, a few telling details.

Rule: Cut out parts the reader tend to skip.

The hardback edition of Rum Punch is 297 pages. I've read the novel three times, never skipping a page, ever. Why would I skip pages? What happens and what is said on every page drives the story.

Rule (the last and most important rule): If it sounds like writing, rewrite it.

Rum Punch does not sound like writing. That's a fact. A Victorian romance, it isn't. What Rum Punch sounds like - regarding dialogue - is a verbatim transcript from living, breathing people. And the world the characters inhabit is described in enough detail that we get a clear picture.

If you haven't read any of Elmore Leonard's 45 published novels, Rum Punch is a great place to start.

wally says

this is the....17th...18th...from leonard for me...

dedicated for jackie, carole, and larry

story begins:

sunday morning ordell took louis to watch the white-power demonstration in downtown palm beach.

"young skinhead nazis," ordell said. "look, even little nazigirls marching down worth avenue. you believe it? coming now you have the klan, not too many here today. some in green, must be the coneheads' new spring shade. behind them it looks like some bikers for racism, better known as the dixie knights. we gonna move on ahead, fight through the crowd here," ordell said, bringing louis along.

"there's a man i want to show you. see who he reminds you of..."

okee-dokee, then...onward & upward.

update, 28 dec 12

for whatever reason...this was a bit hard to follow, initially...could be me...could be the narration...probably me...reading too fast or concerned about my liver.

time & place

*looks like the late 80s, early 90s...as there's a couple 80s model cars around..okay, early 90s, for sure, as there is a reference to desert storm...the modern era..hoo-rah

*sunday morning...the white-power demonstration in downtown palm beach

*worth avenue, palm beach, florida

*florida

*south ohio correctional

*ocean boulevard

*the middle bridge heading back to west palm

*a one-story building, storefront with max cherry bail bonds printed on the window...glades mutual casualty company

*gun club jail

*the records office

*first union...across the street from max's bail bonds place

*ocean mall & a bar named casey's...restaurant portofino

*blue heron...a street

*lake worth

*macarthur state park

*a glass-partitioned office in this remote wing of palm beach international airport

*snack bar...souvenir shop

*a dim parking structure

*fdle...8th floor glassy gray-blue bldg on centrepark boulevard in west palm

*apt in palm beach gardens...jackie

*an '89 seville...an '85 toyota...an '85 mercury

*the stockade...jackie... "f" dorm

*the first appearance courtroom

*gallery renee...max's wife (they're separated)...her gallery

*good samaritan hospital...a nurse's station...a room

*wolfie's deli...

*south miami beach...santa marta on ocean drive near sixth

*a liquor store on dixie highway in lake worth that thursday evening

*the polo lounge
*tyler's chevy caprice parked on greenwood
*an industrial area of warehouses and loading docks, a few small businesses, in riviera beach
*the gardens mall...sears...bloomingdale's...burdine's
*barnie's coffee & tea company
*loxahatchee...near the glades i think...farm...the nazi gerald's spread is here...or this is "close" to the glades
*self-service storage place off australian avenue in a warehouse district
*macy's second level...fitting rooms
*a room in the holiday inn

characters

***ordell robbie**, bad guy...gun-runner...mover, shaker...pony-tail and an obama-voter...*rum punch was the deal he had going in the bahamas*...guns/money...
***louis gara**, 47-yr-old, ex-con, florida state prison/starke
*young skinhead nazis
*even little nazigirls
*the klan
*dixie knights...bikers for racism
*police
*a girl in front of them smiled over her shoulder
*a grownup skinhead nazi...call him big guy...possibly richard, his real name's gerald...doesn't like to be called jerry
*melanie
***max cherry**, 57-yr-old bail bondsman, representing glades mutual casualty company out of miami for the past nineteen years, the company now under new management, guys w/organized crime connections, separated from his wife, renee...he spent ten years in law enforcement, w/the sheriff's office...and...he has been married for 27 years
*a con named j.j.
*mr. cedric walker...in freeport, grand bahama, a two-bit fishing guide w/a whaler until ordell showed him where the money was
*renee, max's wife, separated, not yet divorced, 53-yr-old
*reggie...
***beaumont livingston**, jamaican, lives riviera beach, dies/murdered
***winston willie powell**, licensed bondsman, former boxer/fighter, nine years together now w/max cherry...and at one point, the reader learns he fought tommy laglesia and jesus diaz...*hey-soos*....who appear in that other story from leonard, Gold Coast
*zorro...little puerto rican housebreaker
*david...i mean daveed...cuban guy, w/max's wife...david de la villa...and he is a previous cuban busboy...david ortega...ex-jailbird
*jackboys...ordell's boys he uses to jack cars and things
*cujo...one of the jackboys...hulon miller, jr...twenty years old, arrested seventeen times...our troubled youth
*sweatman, snow, zulu...more jackboys
***sheronda**, living in the house on 31st street, one of ordell's three women, off greenwood avenue, west palm
***simone harrison**, cute for her age, 63, from detroit, living in a spanish-looking house on 30th near windsor...simone hires "straw buyers" for ordell
***melanie**...ordell's white woman, living in the apt in palm beach shores, located at the south end of singer

island, 34-yr-old,
***jackie burke**, flight attendant for islands air, divorced, remarried, widowed, is 44-yr-old
*mike, davey, michael...jackie's husbands or almosts...all dead
***ray nicolet**, 31, a.t.f., has a wife or ex-wife...yes, ex...anita
***faron tyler**, 31, fdle...fiddle...florida department of law enforcement, married to a girl named cheryl he met at fsu...two little boys, four and six
*zorro's women...his two sisters, mother
*rosemary, beaumont's mama
*zorro's probation officer, karen
*deputies wore dark green
*deputy w/the sergeant's stripes, terry, by name
*a woman deputy at the stockade...miss kay
*black women, one or two hispanic...at the stockade...houses 16 but only 7 in there now
*ramona williams...jackie's dorm-mate...advises jackie
*a judge...a public defender...male prisoners in dark blue outfits like scrubs
*bug eye...a convicted felon named aurelius miller
*a guy wearing makeup and tits
*a waitress named cricket w/a georgia accent...max almost told her he loved her
*an older guy behind the counter
*a dark-haired girl in leotards and heels coming along the sidewalk
*a piano player...a waitress...
*a deputy came out of the gatehouse
*terry boland...max had worked under his dad, harry boland, when harry ran the detective bureau at the sheriff's office...terry is a source for max
*two deputies in dark green stood by the open door to a room
*couple of the bikers for racism, target-shooting at gerald's farm
*a living mannequin
*freida...saleswoman/cashier, macy's
*girls offering perfume samples
*two mall security guys in their green blazers
*black people on the sidewalk hanging out
*a woman in riviera beach he used to see now and then...raynelle
*wendy...communications section
*a sheriff's deputy w/a shotgun...then another one

update, finished, 28 dec 12, friday evening, 8:06 p.m. e.s.t.

i think i read/scanned a review or two or three dozen that spoke about a movie...blah blah blah...never saw a movie based on this story...so i was spared the burden of imagining lieutenant dan up on the mast, blow winds! spit fire! spout rain!

lear...act 4, scene 3...right after the little dogs and all.

i enjoyed this story...it moves and shakes...*it has a kind of wry and youthful gallantry* about it...heh! as i'm reading, i'm thinking, the only characters who scheme more are the characters in a john grisham novel...and they're lawyers. the big payoff...always the big payoff...

a poem...real or imagined, i dunno yet
guy named gifford, called "to terry moore"

Robin Friedman says

The Flight Attendant And The Bail Bondsman

Elmore Leonard's novel "Rum Punch" (1992) tells a tangled tale of crime, violence and double-crossing written in a punchy style with sharp dialogue. The plot is confusing to follow at first, but it works out. Most of the story is set in West Palm Beach, Florida; but the setting is not the primary focus of the book. The main interest of the work lies in the snappy writing and in the characters and their relationships.

While the book is full of sexual scenes and of comments about women, the primary character is Jackie Burke, 44, a flight attendant for a cut-rate airline flying from Florida to the Bahamas. Jackie has been smuggling large sums of dirty money from the Bahamas to Florida derived from the illegal weapons trade. On one eventful trip, she is caught by Florida and Federal law enforcement agents. Jackie is eager to stay out of prison and wants to live through mid-life and beyond in comfort. She is thrice divorced. Jackie works both sides of the fence with law enforcement to stay out of prison and with a group of hard, violent criminals to play them off against each other and to try for a stash of cash. She is a tough, sharp no-nonsense woman in this novel.

When Jackie is first arraigned, she needs the services of a bail bondsman. Max Cherry, 57, has been in the trade for years but is growing tired of it, particularly because his business has been infiltrated by criminal elements. Cherry has long been separated from his artsy-craftsy wife but continues to give her money. When Jackie is bailed out by Ordell Robbie, a hardened criminal in his 40s involved in illegal arms and drugs, she is in danger of her life due to Robbie's fear that she will turn. Max becomes interested in Jackie and becomes involved in her difficult balancing act to save her life, stay out of jail, and walk off with some of a \$500,000 stash.

The gritty story builds in tension and complexity with many acts of violence and many twists and turns as the cops, the crooks, and Jackie devise plots and counter-plots to get the money. The story also manages to show human situations, including the feelings of purposelessness expressed by many characters as they age. More than once, a character states that he doesn't know what he wants from life. The relationships of the crooks with each other and of law enforcement with each other also is explored. The developing relationship between Jackie and Max also is worked in to what otherwise would be a brittle, complex story of various groups trying to walk off with a heist.

"Rum Punch" is a fast-moving book which works as effective crime fiction and as writing with its characterization and style. The book was filmed by Quentin Tarantino under the title "Jackie Brown". The Library of America, which aims to publish the best in American literature, has included "Rum Punch" in its three volume collection of crime novels by Elmore Leonard. It is valuable to see the breadth of American literature, including its tradition of crime writing. Leonard's writing is worth getting to know.

Robin Friedman