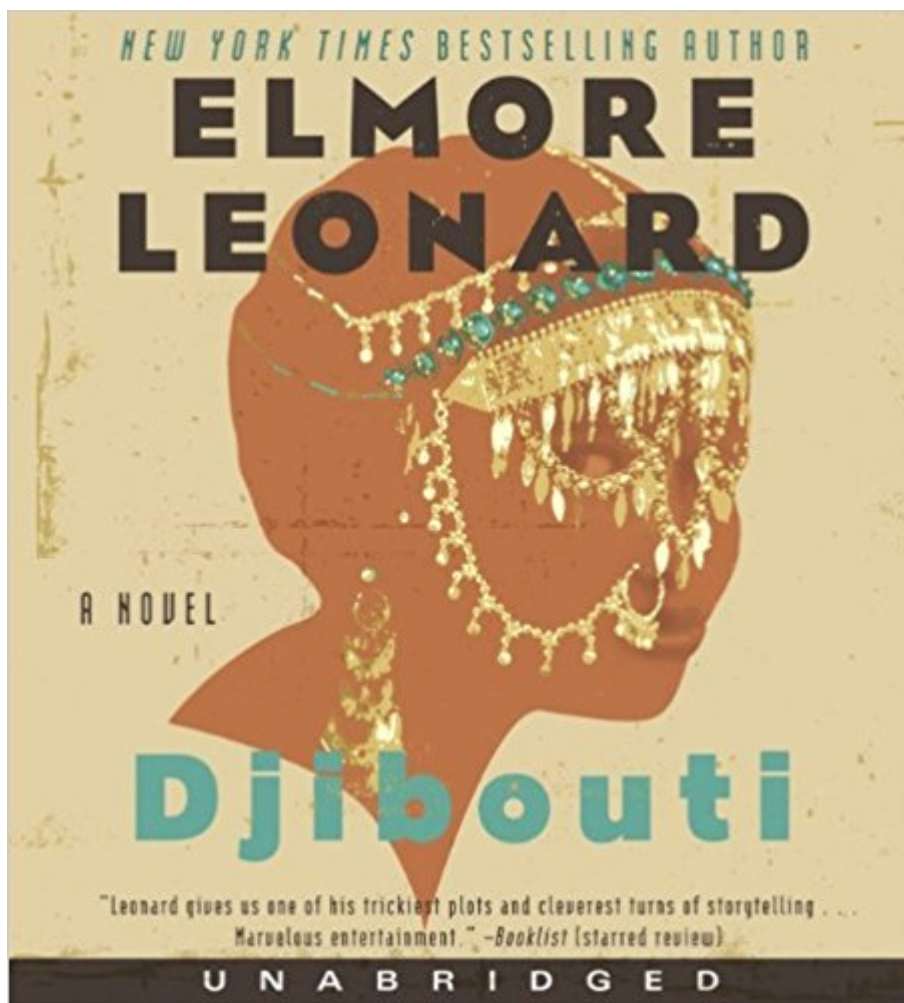


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Djibouti CD



Synopsis

New York Times bestselling author Elmore Leonard brings his trademark wit and inimitable style to this twisting, gripping and sometimes playful tale of modern-day piracy. Dara Barr, documentary filmmaker, is at the top of her game. Looking for a bigger challenge, Dara and her right-hand-man, Xavier LeBo, head to Djibouti to film modern-day pirates hijacking merchant ships. They learn soon enough that almost no one in the Middle East is who he seems to be. The most successful pirate, driving his Mercedes around Djibouti, appears to be a good guy, but his pal, a cultured Saudi diplomat, has dubious connections. Billy Wynn, a Texas billionaire, plays mysterious roles as the mood strikes him. And there's Jama Raisuli, a black al Qaeda terrorist from Miami, who's vowed to blow up something big. What Dara and Xavier have to decide, besides the best way to stay alive: Should they shoot the action as a documentary or turn it into a Hollywood feature film?

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Customer Reviews

Exclusive: Joe Hill Reviews Djibouti The author of the critically acclaimed novels Heart-Shaped Box and Horns, Joe Hill is a two-time winner of the Bram Stoker Award and a past recipient of the Ray Bradbury Fellowship. His stories have appeared in a variety of journals and Year's Best collections. Read his guest review of Djibouti: In the spirit of Elmore Leonard's 10 Rules for Writing, here are ten reasons why Elmore Leonard rules a fact that has never been more obvious than in Djibouti, his 48th novel. 10. The babes. The heroine of Djibouti would be one Dara Barr, who has touched down in Africa to make a documentary about the booming piracy business and maybe win herself another Oscar. Dara is as laconic and unflappable as any of

Leonard's finest heroes (see: *Hombre*, *Swag*, *The Hot Kid*), with a creative and curious streak that marks her as special. Throw in an underwear model named Helene looking to make a married man out of a billionaire who likes to play C.I.A. agent, and you've got a book in which the gents are waaaaaay overmatched. 9. The bad boys. Creative writing teachers who want to show their students how to draft an unforgettable antagonist ought to tear out chapter 18 and pass it around. That's where Leonard tells us the story of James Russell, a clever Miami lowlife, who reinvents himself as Jamal Raisuli, al-Queda bomb-thrower—all in 7 pages of breezy, economical characterization. 8. The talk. Plenty has been written about Elmore Leonard's mastery of dialogue, and I don't need to rehash it. Why bother, when I could just quote some of it? An elderly terrorist, jailed in The States, gets talking with James Russell: "What is it you hope to become in your life?" "Famous," James said. "I been looking at ways." "Become a prophet?" "I don't tell what will happen. I do it." 7. The walk. Everyone hustles in an Elmore Leonard novel; you can't stand still and hope to score. From the slums, where life is the only thing cheaper than khat, to the clubs, where it's easier to find a pirate than out on the open ocean, everyone is on their way up or on their way down—in a hurry. 6. The sound. Leonard famously said that if his sentences sound like writing, he rewrites them, but don't be fooled. These sentences jump to their own dirty, hothouse jazz rhythm. There isn't a better stylist anywhere in American letters. 5. The seduction. Dara isn't just curious about piracy; she spends thirty days on a boat with 73-year-old Xavier LeBo, long enough to fall a little in love with her best friend, and wonder if the old dude can still get it up. Xavier bets her ten-thousand dollars he can. It's the book's biggest gamble; trust me, it earns out big. 4. More boom for your buck. A lot of the suspense in *Djibouti* revolves around a tanker filled with enough liquefied natural gas "to set off an explosion a hundred times bigger than the Hindenburg disaster." It's an atom bomb with a rudder and all it needs is a target. 3. The place. Leonard doesn't beat anyone over the head with his research, but from Djibouti to Eyl to New Orleans (the three backdrops for this story), the details are crisp, unforgettable, and right. You don't read *Djibouti*. You live there. 2. The pay-off. Everyone in an Elmore Leonard story wants one, but only the reader is guaranteed to get one, and boy do they, in a final chapter that seems inevitable, yet comes as completely unexpected. 1. The know-how. Let's get to it. In the fifty-plus years he's been turning out lean, loose, laid-back thrillers, Elmore Leonard has cast his indelible stamp on American crime fiction, inspired his peers, and spawned a thousand imitators. He's the kind of guy critics describe as old school, but that's missing it.

Elmore Leonard isn't old school. He built the school. (Photo of Joe Hill by Shane Leonard)
--This text refers to the Preloaded Digital Audio Player edition.

In Leonard's new novel, Oscar-winning documentarian Dara Barr and her 73-year-old assistant, Xavier LeBo, travel to the Horn of Africa to film Somali pirates. They get exciting footage, but Leonard, almost perversely, provides much of the action as exposition, with the filmmakers safe and sound in hotels or on yachts, discussing their adventures over champagne. This is not good news for thriller lovers, since thrills are in short supply. But it's tremendous fun for those who can't get enough of the author's snappy patter. For Tim Cain, it's a chance to demonstrate his ability to deal with pages of witty dialogue, and he shines, demonstrating quick vocal shifts, wide-ranging accents, and well-thought-out pacing. The result is a smoothly efficient, entertaining drawing room comedy in which not even terrorism is taken too seriously. A Morrow hardcover. (Nov.) (c) Copyright PWxyz, LLC. All rights reserved.

one of his last, this story takes us to the eponymous city-state in east Africa, the crossroads of criminality, poverty, and ambition. Dara, a documentary filmmaker, wants to tell the story of Somali pirates, but can't seem to get a story straight. Xavier, her 72-year-old cameraman, and muscle, backs her up in encounters with pirate princes, unsavory sheikhs, and all sorts of exotic Africans and middle easterners. and one particularly dangerous American terrorist. the story is not so easy to follow, bouncing between flashbacks of Dara and Xavier reviewing film already in the can, and live-action drama. but it's got plenty of Leonard's hilarious dialogue, and a swift-moving plot.

I've read Many of his novels, everything from his early westerns to his final novels. He is one of my favorite writers; his characters are believable and 3D, their character revealed mostly by interesting, quirky dialogue. I love the way his plots are sometimes derailed by unforeseen occurrences. One of my favorite Leonard novels is LaBrava, where his protagonist's interior world is shown alternating between current experience and his memories of the female lead's performances in a movie. Leonard perfected a similar technique in Get Shorty. It seems to me that Leonard's experiences in the film world got the better of him in Djlbouti. The cinematic editing of the novel went to far and became more distracting than expressive.

I normally love everything Elmore Leonard writes but this was not one of my favorites. It jumped around too much and was sometimes confusing to follow. I would not read it again.

There are a number of reasons not to like this novel, all of them valid. It's disjointed and hard to follow. The central characters seem uninvolved in the events around them. There's really no one with whom the reader can identify. The dialogue seldom crackles. People who approach this novel with certain expectations based on their past brushes with Elmore Leonard's fiction will be disappointed. As the reviews here demonstrate, they have been. Nonetheless, I enjoyed it. If a graphic novel is storytelling with pictures instead of words, then think of *Djibouti* as a graphic novel told with words instead of pictures: then you get the ambiance. Dara Barr the documentarian goes to exotic East Africa to shoot Somali pirates. She reviews her footage with her one-man crew Xavier LeBou, her Nawlins neighbor who's been around the world many times, the hard way. The stuff in the can lacks zip. The real story isn't the guys with guns in the skiffs boarding boats in the Gulf of Aden, but the money men on the other end and in between the ransom drops, and that's not exciting stuff for the screen. But things take on a different cast when Dara learns the subjects of her story have roused a couple of al Qaeda operatives from a seized natural gas tanker and are turning them in for bounty. The tanker's ransom paid -- and bombs placed on board? -- the floating container of liquid propane is headed off to port in Lake Charles, LA, where, perhaps, bin Laden plans to detonate a firebomb more massive in destructive scope than Hiroshima. Now that would be a story worth filming -- if the ship ever makes its way past Djibouti. There are colorful characters, including one of the temporarily captured al Qaedas, a black American who started as a gang banger before becoming a Muslim in prison and heading off to join a jihad that matched a vocation to his skills; a Texas billionaire sailing around the world with his fashion model girlfriend, drinking champagne and piecing together intelligence; pirate bosses who want only to get one more big score before retiring in comfort to Europe. They are all mixed together, and if the story doesn't move with the speed and direction of a locomotive (which admittedly it doesn't) it certainly does float along on a decidedly dangerous current. You might just want to put aside any expectations and come along.

Any Elmore Leonard novel has individual pages or short sections that are as good as anything he has ever written. But when they are separated by long stretches that just don't work, as in *Djibouti*, the thumb has to turn down. Leonard's narrative style means that his readers never know anything that his characters don't participate in or observe. If he puts his characters in foreign countries, there is just a tentative quality to the scene-setting that leaves the reader uninformed or confused. Even if that is consistent with the characters' own narrow focus or uncertainty in a strange land, it makes a

problem for the reader. There are other narrative problems. In one segment Dara, our film-making protagonist, and her assistant Xavier watch video and comment on what they captured. There's a sense in which that's a clever narrative approach: reveal professional and personal relationships in the conversation between two lead characters while they set a necessary piece of narrative background before the reader. But there's a reason you don't see that kind of scene more often in the most involving novels. Characters doing something are inherently more interesting than characters talking about something they did. Leonard is one of American's great narrative voices and prose stylists. This book simply doesn't show him to best advantage. Nice try, no joy. Odds are the next one will be better. (Edited Nov. 2011 to fix a sentence fragment and typo. Yikes! Should have caught those in the first place.)

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