



## Be Cool

*Elmore Leonard*

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BE COOL offers a second entertaining installment in the career of Chili Palmer - originally a Miami loan-shark but now a big-shot in Hollywood. Chili gets interested in the music business acting for a girl-singer with a lot of soul. Trouble is, everything that happens to Chili strikes him as being material for another great movie ...

## Be Cool Details

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Author : Elmore Leonard

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## From Reader Review Be Cool for online ebook

### Josh says

I read a lot of reviews saying this book was way worse than Get Shorty and some of Leonard's worst work but I really enjoyed it. In fact, I think I liked it better than Get Shorty. They are both very similar and I don't see how you could like one and not the other because they're different enough to be different books. I'd give this 3.5 stars if I could, I feel like it was a little better than 3 stars because I enjoyed it so much but not enough to give it 4. Don't let bad reviews fool you, just read it and make up your own mind. I'm glad I did

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### Sarah B. says

I liked this book, but I didn't love it as much as other Leonard books. It's set in Hollywood, and although the main character Chili Palmer is out-of-place (having missed both movies, I managed to picture a middle-aged retrosexual and not John Travolta for Chili), the rest of the characters are mostly pretty terrible Hollywood stereotype people. I didn't want to know them better and I didn't care if they succeeded or failed to achieve their superficial desires. Except Eliot: him I loved. Fortunately, Leonard's talent for writing -- especially for writing dialogue -- kept me engaged even when the plot didn't.

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### Verge LeNoir says

5 out of 5

For a fun breezy read from the master of the Crime Fiction genre Mr. Elmore Leonard (RIP)

Chili 'look at me' Palmer, the ex-wise guy (okay so he was 'loosely connected') ex-loan shark from Brooklyn by way of Miami Beach, is in Los Angeles now where he has re-invented himself as a movie producer whose in dire need of material for a new film project. And he gets one; at a lunch meeting with a shady record producer which opens the book with a bang.

Intrigued by this music business thing, he meets a lovely and talented singer by the name of Linda Moon who wants to be in a band of what she describes as a 'rock 'n roll with a twang' thing, but she can't follow this dream because she's currently in another band under contract for a pimp by the name of Raji doing Spice Girls covers (This and many other pop culture touch stones' like CD's, MTV music videos, etc. Makes the book feel a bit dated)

Soon enough Chili becomes the target of the Russian mob, the pimp and his 250 pound gay Samoan bodyguard by the name of Elliot Wilhelm whom for some reason is in the habit of arching his eyebrows. Amid such hostile environment Chili keeps his cool and wits about him. He's like a talkative version of a hero in a Sergio Leone Western.

This is a fun, breezy read and—as always—Elmore has a way of delivering huge chunks of the plot by way

of witty dialog like nobody else in the business. Whenever I'm in need of inspiration in my own 'literary' endeavors I always turn to the works of Elmore Leonard for a jolt of inspiration. Which reminds me I should re-read: Tishomingo Blues, City Primeval, Hombre, La Brava...etc., etc., etc.

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## **Rex Fuller says**

At the Four Seasons...yeah LA not NY, you know I been back a week already. So I'm looking and who comes in but Chili Palmer. Yeah, the man himself. We go back to the old days and he comes over and we catch up. Gives me a Cohiba panatela and we don't light up account of the rules everywhere. And I ask him it bother him the reviews and stuff they say about Be Cool. How they say it don't "measure up" to Get Shorty and "formulaic." And he says, what, he's supposed to read guys who couldn't get something reviewed it would save their life. I nod and say fair point but what does he think about it. Being different than feel. He looks at his cigar and wishes for a nice one inch ash and says box office don't write books. And I say truer words, Chil, truer words. So then he says besides, look at Harlequin and all those chick-lit houses. They got rules for their stuff so tight they want it formulaic. I say I get that and was me I'd make 'em all use normal talk like his books. That'd be my rule. He gives me a wink and leaving says send the books and he'll sign. Then I finish my lunch? They tell me it's all taken care of.

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## **Robin Friedman says**

### The Story Of Linda Moon

Set in Hollywood, Elmore Leonard's novel "Be Cool" is a sequel ten years removed from his novel "Get Shorty". Although I haven't yet read the earlier book or the films made from each book, I have been reading a good deal of Leonard. The works I have read are set in Harlan, Kentucky, Detroit, Florida, the Arizona territory, and now Hollywood. Leonard is able to capture something of the places and cultures he describes.

I didn't find it necessary to know "Get Shorty" before reading this book, but it is important to know that "Be Cool" is a sequel, featuring the same main character, Chili Palmer, a former loan shark from Florida and Brooklyn who has managed to evade criminal prosecution and made a life for himself in Hollywood in the movies. His first film, "Get Leo" was a success but its sequel, "Get Lost" failed. Chili is looking for ideas for a third movie. There is a mirroring in Leonard's novel as it too is a sequel to an earlier successful novel and film.

The scene is set in the quick-moving opening chapter which takes a couple of readings to come clear. An old partner in crime, Tommy, approaches Chili suggesting that Chili make Tommy's life the basis for a movie. Alas, Tommy is immediately gunned-down. Much of the rest of the book involves finding the killer. Chili wants to use life as the basis for art and seeks in reality the characters that will drive his film. He also wants a woman involved. Chili is something of a manipulator who tries to control events in a way that will make an effective story portrayed on screen.

The woman in this case goes by the name of Linda Moon. Chili has heard her voice as she works setting up matches for a dating service and he becomes entranced. Linda is also a singer who has fallen on rough times in a competitive business.

The book is a bit too long and cumbersome. The reader has to keep straight the search for Tommy's killer, Chili's ongoing plans for his film, his love and sexual interests, Linda's efforts to establish her musical career, and a host of sub-themes and stories of violence. The book also includes a host of characters, many of whom are well-developed including besides Chili and Linda, characters from the film and music industries, Russian thugs, and a Samoan body guard for one of the many crooked characters in the story.

While Chili is the nominal main character, Linda Moon is the focus of the book. Leonard shows a great deal about her, beginning with her days as a child in west Texas to her love of singing and composing her own songs. Linda sings a mix of rock and country with light accompaniment and is shown as having artistic integrity for her style of music. Linda is also driven by ambition and the desire to make it big-time in popular music. She has a small band called Odessa which must change its name because it is already used by other groups. And so we have another play on words and on things as the band becomes known as the Linda Moon. The novel discusses the compromises an artist must make in the pursuit of success. Linda Moon, her music and her dreams come to life in this book. The seamy, thuggish side of the music business also gets a great deal of attention as well. In addition to Linda Moon, the novel includes several other strong female characters, particularly Elaine, Chili's producer at the studio and a possible love interest.

The humor of the book is sharp and the plot takes many surprising twists with a great deal of mayhem and violence. Some of the broader themes of the book including the relationship between life and art and the search for love pass easily under all the banter and crime. The character development, dialogue, and setting more than make up for the sometimes cumbersome plotting. I enjoyed this book and want to read more of Elmore Leonard.

Robin Friedman

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## Joe Valdez says

Published in 1999, *Be Cool* is the sequel to Elmore Leonard's *Get Shorty*. Whether it was good vibes or his fans or the money, or all three, Leonard felt compelled to continue the misadventures of Miami Beach loan shark turned film producer Ernest "Chili" Palmer in Los Angeles. The reader is quickly brought up to speed that Chili's movie *Get Leo* was not only produced but was a hit. As the story goes, the studio moved forward with a sequel, the producer balked, the studio let him come up with a story, he did, it didn't work, the sequel tanked and now our man is back to square one in the business.

Chili is reintroduced at Swinger's Diner in L.A. meeting with Tommy Athens, a guy he grew up with in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn who came to Hollywood and started his own recording label, NTL Records. Athens is a promoter for a punk rocker named Derek Stones who he's trying to break, as well as a gangsta rap act called Ropa-Dope who are closer to gangstas than rappers. He pitches Chili a movie idea based on his rock 'n' roll lifestyle. *"You don't have an idea yet," Chili said. "You have a setting, where the idea develops, becomes your plot." He turned to leave and looked back. "You need a girl in it."* Before Chili can return to the table, he watches a man step out of a van and fire five shots at Tommy, hitting him once in the head.

Cooperating with a detective for Organized Crime named Darrell Holmes, Chili's priority is coming up with an idea for his next movie, the last in his three picture deal at Tower Pictures, where Elaine Levin, the production head who greenlit *Get Leo* and who is very partial to Chili, has been hired back. Chili had been working on an idea based on a girl he talked to and tape recorded named Linda Moon, a spunky, aspiring musician from West Texas who answers the phone for the dating service Chili contacted, looking to upgrade

his social life. Using Tommy's murder as the opening scene for his movie idea, Chili figures out that Linda Moon might be the key to the plot.

Linda phones the movie producer to let him know she has a show tonight. Elmore Leonard, like a world champion athlete who can coast for weeks and turn the jets on when it counts, really won me over when Linda Moon entered the story.

*The tape came to Linda saying she appeared with a girl group called Chicks International whenever they had a gig. Linda, a black chick and an Asian chick, a Vietnamese. They played private parties and clubs around town, the Viper Roon, Spaceland, Jacks Sugar Shack, the Martini Lounge. "Look us up and stop by if you want a few laughs. We're Miki, Viki and Tiki on stage, only on stage. I'm Miki. Viki's the black chick; she used to be a Harlette, backing up Bette Midler. She has to get stoned before we go on. Tiki barely speaks English, she fakes the lyrics. I have to put my mind somewhere else, imagine fires burning in the night. That's how embarrassing it is."*

Chili never has and never will know much about music, but is sold on his movie idea being about Linda Moon. He creates his own real-life complication by offering to manage her. Linda's current rep--a Kangol-cap wearing white guy named Raji who struts around like a pimp and travels with a Samoan bodyguard who calls himself Elliot Wilhelm--are notified by Chili in the parking lot that Linda has quit. Chili gets out with his head on by offering Elliot, an aspiring thespian, a screen test. Linda tells Chili her band Odessa (*"It's metal with a twang, and if you can imagine that think of AC/DC meets Patsy Cline."*) cut a record, but when the label tried to mess with her style, she walked out on her deal, handing back the advance.

More characters enter the picture, all serving as material for Chili and his movie idea. Edie Athens, the departed's widow, has gone from washing laundry for Aerosmith in her youth to inheriting NTL Records, which Chili convinces her to hold onto, hiring the music supervisor from his two pictures, Hy Gordon, to run the business end of. Linda puts Odessa back together, her easy-going guitarist Dale Arden and irascible drummer James "Speedy" Gonzalez arriving in L.A. Chili meets Derek Stones sobering up in Edie's pool in his underwear and tries to tutor the youngster in how to be cool. Derek's mohawked girlfriend Tiffany, NTL's executive assistant, has her head screwed on far tighter than the rocker.

Chili returns to his place to find a dead Russian, shot twice in the back. Detective Holmes has moved on from Edie Athens being a suspect in Tommy's murder and with Chili's help, arrives on a Russian criminal named Roman Bulkin, who Tommy beat up for trying to run an extortion scam on NTL Records. It appears one of Bulkin's men was waiting for Chili to get home and was shot by somebody else who wanted Chili dead. That would be Joe Loop, an old gangland hitman who Raji has hired to bump off Chili. In the middle of all this intrigue, Chili works to give Linda Moon her big break and also becomes romantically involved with Elaine Levin, who's curious where his life begins and his movie idea ends.

*Be Cool* reminded me of being dragged into a jewelry store at the mall. The merchandise is beautiful. My feet start to hurt a bit standing at the display counter. The service is impeccable but by now, my feet are really starting to get tired. By the time the transaction is finished, I'm happy to get out of there. By the time I reached the end of *Be Cool*, I'd figured out why, as great a fan as I am of Elmore Leonard, I really didn't cotton to *Get Shorty* or this sequel.

Chili Palmer is a douchebag.

No, I don't mean John Travolta in the two movies, although opinions vary. I mean that Chili is still measuring virtually every woman he meets in terms of her appearance, what she's wearing, what her

temperament is and what her physical features are like. It's no mystery why this guy's wife left him, why Karen Flores (from *Get Shorty*) has left him and to be honest, why he doesn't seem to have any good friends either. Chili may be cool and he may handle his business, but he's superficial and boxes people into those who can help him and those who can't. I'll give Elmore Leonard credit for writing a believable film producer, but I really didn't find the character of Chili Palmer compelling.

When discussing the genesis of *Rum Punch*, Leonard has stated that he started out with the character of the bail bondsman, Max Cherry, thinking that guy's line of work has to lead to some interesting situations, but when the character of airline stewardess Jackie Burke (or Jackie Brown in the movie) entered the story, Leonard realized it was about her. For me, personally, when Linda Moon entered the story, I thought it should be about her, one way or another. Chili was a supporting player with a colorful background and eccentric habit of staging real-life situations for the movie idea he's working on in his head, but I didn't want to spend a lot of time with him. I wanted Linda!

No! I did not see this character as being anything like Christina Milian on the page. I'm not sure where the producers of *Be Cool* were coming from in 2004. I saw Linda Moon a lot more like this:

Carey Mulligan. One is a girl and the other is a woman. One is Latoya Jackson and the other is Janet. The casting session I'm holding in my head has nothing to do with my opinion of the novel. I guess I just got carried away.

Where Elmore Leonard surpasses *Get Shorty* was his across the board portrayal of female characters. Each of them has moxie and much more going for them than what they can do for Chili Palmer. In addition to Linda Moon, who struts into the story in control, each of the female characters, from Edie Athens to Tiffany to Linda's former bandmate Vita, are given a real voice and something to do in the story, which I often did not find with Karen Flores in *Get Shorty*. Chili's relationship with Elaine Levin, which segues from professional to intimate, is handled with a great deal of sweetness. The pair have chemistry, and the way that Leonard describes Elaine seems based on a woman he met and was in love with.

*She shrugged in the loose cotton sweater, looking away and back again. The jeans surprised him. At the studio she wore suits and pushed the sleeves up; he'd watch her walk around the office barefoot talking and smoking, going over to her giant ashtray to stub out a cigarette, walk away and the cigarette would still be burning. She was the girl who ran production at a major studio and she was respected. At home she was a softer version. Looking at him with calm brown eyes.*

I never felt tension that something bad might befall Chili Palmer/ John Travolta. That's not really Elmore Leonard's fault; I was just too familiar with the movies to be really surprised by anything that happened on the page. Chili waltzes through the story, acting cool, a former wiseguy reading the riot act to various Hollywood types who only know from the mob what they've seen in Scorsese movies. It's haltingly fun and the dialogue is excellent, but I think that Chili is in many ways the least interesting character in these books. I would not recommend anyone who I might have tempted to give Elmore Leonard a try start with these two books.

Here's my list of Elmore Leonard novels ranked from favorite to least favorite:

1. *Stick* (1983)
  2. *Killshot* (1989)
  3. *Pronto* (1993)
  4. *Be Cool* (1999)
  5. *Get Shorty* (1990)
  6. *LaBrava* (1983)
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### **Jim says**

Elmore Leonard pisses me off because he writes so well that, in my nimble mind, the task of writing a novel seems to be a no-brainer. I DO know better. Leonard is so much fun to read because he's so easy to read. That's not to say his writing is simple, far from it. He just does it so well, with a perfect flow to dialogue and exposition. *Be Cool* is the continued adventures of Chili Palmer and the usual cast of miscreants. Have fun.

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### **Lori says**

I didn't realize when picking this up (another book sale cheapo) that it was the sequel to *Get Shorty*, which I don't think I've ever read or seen. (I kept being bothered by the idea of Travolta as Chili Palmer, though that must be the role he plays.) Even as I figured it out, though, I decided to read it anyway. It certainly looked like it could stand on its own.

And for the most part, it did. Fast plot, fast characters, fast action, fast read.

Which is basically the problem. Even though billed as the master of contemporary crime fiction, Leonard has no substance in *Be Cool*. I need to look through my older lists to see what of his I've read -- I seemed to think he was more satire, less face value. But I couldn't find any more than what was on the surface.

Blink and you miss it.

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### **Amanda G. Stevens says**

Why I Stopped Reading on p. 50: Apparently Leonard is hit and miss for me. I love the character Raylan Givens (the TV show *Justified* being how I discovered this author in the first place), and I've enjoyed a couple others of his, when I'm in the mood for an over-the-top caper of violence and tension and cool dialogue. But none of the characters here, least of all Chili himself, make me want to keep reading. And though Leonard's craft is always good, my TBR shelf is too crowded to press onward with this one.

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### **Dave says**

The return of the charming thug Chili Palmer does what too many sequels do by capturing some of the spirit of the original but not much else. Although this is a pleasant enough jaunt with Chili using his magic on the



music industry this time, the story is too much of a retread. What was once surprising and innovative is now too familiar. My expectations were perhaps too high, but this is just a merely adequate thriller with paint-by-numbers background characters.

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## **Sincere W. says**

Jesus, if I'm ever able to write dialogue this well I can die a happy man.

This is a fun read, full of interesting characters and very funny scenes. There's Shylocks, gay Samoans, rappers, music execs and a healthy dose of gangsters. The characters develop in unexpected yet logical ways. And the interactions between characters is crisp and authentic.

The story concept - if that's what you'd call it - is damn clever, too. The main character, Chili Palmer is putting together what's to be his third movie, and this the backbone of the book's plot. Palmer's creative process flows along with the story, so that "actual events" in the book become possible scenes for Palmer's upcoming flick. It made reading the book feel like having a magician explain the trick while he's doing it - and still finding yourself amazed.

I haven't read this book's prequel (*Get Shorty*). But I was never lost or confused; *Be Cool* stands on it's own. And the small segments of backstory are so well integrated as to be invisible.

Great story. Looking forward to reading it again.

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## **Nekouken says**

Elmore Leonard's *Be Cool* was the long-awaited sequel to *Get Shorty*, but as eager as I was to read it, after I was finished, I was not only disappointed but I realized why it was a terrible idea in the first place. In my review of GS, I described Chili Palmer as a neanderthal at a fencing match. In BC, he's the same neanderthal, except he's learned to fence just in time to go bowling. At the time the book starts, Chili is part of the Hollywood machine; his mobby directness is gone in favor of Hollywood hemming and hawing, or, more accurately, a simpering hybrid of the two.

When he faces a threat on par with the limo guys from GS, he's Chili again, except not nearly as clever and quite tired. When he's dealing with the dating service telemarketer he wants to promote as a music act so he can get a movie idea out of it and finish the three-picture deal that came from the end of the first book, he's compromising everywhere, saying one thing and doing another, and generally behaving like a Hollywood douchebag.

This brings me to the reason it was such a bad idea: there's no way Chili could have stayed in Hollywood and become anything but. Chili was an engaging character because he was a fish out of water, but the shift from shylock to movie producer is considerably more drastic than the shift from movie producer to music producer. Perhaps a natural way to make a sequel possible, but the book being something of a satire of sequels itself, it falls as flat as most of its kind. *Be Cool* follows up an excellent story about conflicting dynamics with a weak one about a multimedia project with attitude.

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## Jamie says

Mr. Chili Palmer says it himself in this one, his own sequel: “A sequel has to be better’n the original or it’s not gonna work.” And I don’t know that it’s better than *Shorty*, but it’s sure about as much fun.

In fact, the only thing denting this one is that in between the two, I watched the movie *Get Shorty*. Travolta is a love-him-or-hate-him kind of actor, I think, and I lean towards the latter. He was so not the Chili in my mind and I wish I didn’t have to work so hard in this one to picture anyone else but him. In other words, back to the Chili I liked.

But that’s all my problem, not the book’s. From the looks of it, I’ll steer clear of the abomination of the movie *Be Cool*, thank you very much. Which, funny enough, looks to prove the thesis here: once the machine of Hollywood gets its teeth in something, sit back and laugh at how much gets botched.

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## Kandice says

I think I like this more because of the reader (Campbell Scott) than the story. When I stop listening and go about my day, I try to think about the plot and what is going on in the tale. It just isn’t that great. I get back in the car, turn it on and am immediately sucked in. Scott’s voice is just so lovely. It’s deep and a bit throaty. He doesn’t “do” voices, but somehow you always know when a woman is talking. To me, that’s the **real** mark of a great reader.

It’s a bit unfair to Leonard that I’ve reviewed his narrator and not his book. This is the sequel to *Get Shorty* and is only interesting because Chili Palmer is the star. “Look at me...” I love when Chili says that! I try not to, but I see Chili as Travolta in my mind. The young, thin, beautiful Travolta, like he was in *The Boy in the Plastic Bubble*, but with a great haircut and clothes. I may drool for a sec here.

Anyway, the characters are what make this worth the effort. The plot is sort of lame, but Elaine as Chili’s love interest is every bit as interesting as Chili himself. I almost wish Leonard would have gone on to write some *Who Dunnits* with Chili and Elaine as the Tommy and Tuppence of the series. I’d read those!

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## Peter says

*Be Cool* (1991) is the second in Elmore Leonard’s Chili Palmer series. Ernest (Chili”) Palmer was introduced in *Get Shorty* as a mob-connected Miami loan shark chasing down a deadbeat in LA. The deadbeat, Harry Zimm, is a producer of B movies and Chili joins with him to produce a movie called *Get Leo*. The movie is a success and the profits pay off the producer’s loan and give Chili an asset boost. But a sequel named *Get Lost* tanks at the box office.

Chili comes out of it with cash and a reputation as a movie producer. Now Chili has another movie idea and he meets at a restaurant with Tommy Athens, a record producer, to discuss it. Just as he leaves, a shooter puts a bullet in Tommy’s head. That will undoubtedly be a scene in the movie—as we know from *Get Shorty*, Chili’s life is so exciting that it becomes the script. Chili’s greatest talent is his mouth. He can talk

his way out of, or in to, anything. In *Be Cool* we watch him do just that.

The murder brings Chili into contact with a rich cast of characters: Raji, a record producer and manager of an all-girl band (Odessa, “rock n’ roll with a twang”); Linda Moon, the band’s lead singer; Elliot Wilhelm, a huge Samoan who is Raji’s bodyguard and a movie wannabe; Nick Carcaterre, Raji’s partner; Darryl Holmes, an LA cop and former friend from Miami; Edie Athens, Tommy’s widow and now owner of his record company; Elaine Levin, Chili’s old flame and a film producer at a major studio. Oh, not to forget the Russian mob and Joe Loop, an aging hit man hired by both the Russians and Raji.

Chili becomes Linda Moon’s manager, stealing her from Raji who, in turn, sends Joe Loop to kill Chili. But the Russian mob (who had hired Joe to kill Tommy) has also sent a shooter to kill Chili at his house because they think he could connect them to Joe as Tommy’s killer. When Joe walks into Chili’s house to kill him, the Russian is there waiting in the dark for Chili. Mistaking the Russian for Chili, Joe kills the Russian. So now the Russians will double up on Chili, as will Raji. It’s a Keystone Cops of homicide!

So we follow Chili around while he’s managing a new singing group, pitching a new movie, evading the Russians and Raji, fending off the vultures roosting on Edie’s recording company, getting a contract for the Linda Moon band, enjoying life with Elaine, and outsmarting everyone. This is a very busy man, but not up to the Chili Palmer of *Get Shorty*.

Three stars.

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