

# Glitz Short Guide

## Glitz by Elmore Leonard

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# Characters

Vincent Mora of the Miami Beach police force, on medical leave after having been shot during a mugging, is honest and open, the personification of a decent man, and unambitious except to succeed with the ladies. Through the course of the novel he interacts primarily with those who function just barely within legally acceptable bounds (Tommy Donovan, Jackie Garbo, DeLeon Johnson) and who do not bother to distinguish between morality and immorality. All of them are involved in the risky, high stakes world of big-time casino gambling.

The men's women — Iris, Linda, Nancy, et al. — are similarly amoral, but have compassion and heart as well as greed and ambition; further, they are brighter and more fearless than the men, often act independently of them, and are even more willing to take risks. Except for Iris, they also are survivors.

Although Leonard devotes much of the novel to the casino world and its denizens, the plot is fundamentally simple, involving little more than a chase, and serves primarily to showcase the characters. Mora is being stalked by Teddy Magyk, who has just been released from prison after serving his second jail sentence for rape. Mora had been the arresting officer. Magyk is also a psychopathic killer (murdering a man and two women while he is hunting Mora). He is a harmless looking blond fellow ("Kind of guy, you can see him riding a three-wheel bike selling ice cream," says Mora), who lives with his domineering mother and her parrot when he is not in prison, on the run, or badgering Mora. Confident about his invulnerability (the tattoo "Mr. Magic" says it all), Magyk actually is an immature mama's boy, insisting upon being called the diminutive "Teddy" rather than "Ted". Thus Leonard has two diametrically opposed characters: a policeman hero versus a killer ex-con, a sexually normal man versus a rapist of elderly women.



## Social Concerns/Themes

One of the best selling detective novels of 1985, *Glitz* is set in Puerto Rico, Miami Beach, and Atlantic City, though the credible settings are less important than the characters. It is a story of people on the make—gambling casino moguls; gangsters; marginally talented cabaret performers; a San Juan taxicab driver — and the all-consuming desire for revenge, personified by an ex-convict who has dubbed himself "Mr. Magic." Counterpointing all of them is a Miami Beach police lieutenant, the quintessential good guy confronted by evil forces; and typically, for a Leonard novel, the decent man is the hunted: Mora discovers that he is being pursued by someone he had helped to convict almost eight years earlier.

Once more, Leonard develops a favorite theme: An ordinary man, fundamentally good, gets into a scrape, but (in this novel anyway) ultimately prevails over the greedy, evil, and amorally ambitious. Leonard in this book again is reworking a prevalent theme of the westerns he wrote for so long, but the variations he weaves in *Glitz* on that hackneyed theme sustain it through this complex novel.



## Techniques

Realistic dialogue is a noteworthy feature of the novel, and Leonard has said that he got "lots of good Mafia dialogue" from the 1983 Philadelphia crime commission's report. He tries a significantly new narrative technique in the novel, presenting an episode from a variety of points of view: "I would write it from one character's point of view and then switch around and do the same scene again from another character's point of view and find that it had a lot more life in it, that it was a little more dramatic, more colorful, more interesting. I'm going to continue to do that."



## Key Questions

The police procedural is a popular crime fiction sub-genre, among the practitioners of which are the late J. J. Marric (John Creasey) of England, who wrote the Gideon of Scotland Yard novels, and the American Ed McBain, whose 87th Precinct books are highly regarded. A useful starting point for a discussion of *Glitz* would be to consider how this novel parallels and departs from the standard patterns of the police procedural.

1. Like that of *Pronto*, the plot of *Glitz* is simple, involving little more than a chase. Are the novels, then, essentially the same except for their different casts of characters?
2. Do you agree with Leonard's judgment that his style, tone, and sound are the same in *Glitz* as in earlier novels such as *Fifty-Two Pickup*?
3. The major women characters are independent and brighter than the men. In what other Leonard novels do the females stand out in this way?
4. Leonard's crime fiction is atypical for the genre in that he does not have a recurring detective who confronts cases predictably in book after book.

This said, does Vincent Mora have obvious precedents (albeit by different names) in any of the fifteen or so Leonard crime novels that precede *Glitz*?

5. Is Teddy Magyk realistically drawn? Does Leonard want the reader to sympathize at all with this psychopathic murderer?
6. A critic has called Magyk Leonard's "creepiest villain." Do you consider him more unsettling than others?

Why?

7. Magyk has a determined sense of his invulnerability, which his tattoo symbolizes. In this regard, does he fundamentally differ from Leonard's other villains?
8. Leonard said, about his use of shifting points of view in *Glitz*, "I'm going to continue to do that." Has he done so in subsequent novels?
9. Is *Glitz* a police procedural novel, in the manner of Ed McBain's "87th Precinct" series?
10. Central to *Glitz* is the conflict between two diametrically opposed characters. Does Leonard use the device elsewhere, or is it peculiar to this novel?

## Related Titles

Because of its realistic dialogue, *Glitz* echoes previous Leonard works in a significant way. Indeed, speaking of the novel, Leonard has said: "It's not noticeably better written. I think you'll see the same style, the same tone, the same sound ever since '74, ever since *Fifty-Two Pickup* [1974] that I would call the beginning of what I'm doing now."

The basic plot pattern of *Glitz* is similar to that of *City Primeval* (1980) and *Split Images* (1981), and central to it is a love story, a commonplace element in Leonard crime novels.



# Copyright Information

## Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Editor - Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Library of Congress  
Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Includes bibliographical references.

Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for fiction, nonfiction, and biographies written for young adults.

Includes a short biography for the author of each analyzed work.

1. Young adults—Books and reading. 2. Young adult literature—History and criticism. 3.

Young adult literature—Bio-bibliography. 4. Biography—Bio-bibliography.

[1. Literature—History and criticism. 2. Literature—Bio-bibliography]

I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952

Z1037.A1G85 1994 028.1'62 94-18048 ISBN 0-933833-32-6

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Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1994