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# Jackpot: High Times, High Seas, And The Sting That Launched The War On Drugs



## Synopsis

In the late 1970s and early '80s, a cadre of freewheeling, Southern pot smugglers lived at the crossroads of *Miami Vice* and a Jimmy Buffett song. These irrepressible adventurers unloaded nearly a billion dollars worth of marijuana and hashish through the eastern seaboard's marshes. Then came their undoing: Operation Jackpot, one of the largest drug investigations ever and an opening volley in Ronald Reagan's War on Drugs. In *Jackpot*, author Jason Ryan takes us back to the heady days before drug smuggling was synonymous with deadly gunplay. During this golden age of marijuana trafficking, the country's most prominent kingpins were a group of wayward and fun-loving Southern gentlemen who forsook college educations to sail drug-laden luxury sailboats across the Mediterranean, the Atlantic, and the Caribbean. Les Riley, Barry Foy, and their comrades eschewed violence as much as they loved pleasure, and it was greed, lust, and disaster at sea that ultimately caught up with them, along with the law. In a cat-and-mouse game played out in exotic locations across the globe, the smugglers sailed through hurricanes, broke out of jail and survived encounters with armed militants in Colombia, Grenada and Lebanon. Based on years of research and interviews with imprisoned and recently released smugglers and the law enforcement agents who tracked them down, *Jackpot* is sure to become a classic story from America's controversial Drug Wars. The adventures, the long-gone economy, and the sting that ultimately brought them down and changed US drug policy are meticulously documented and lucidly spun. Part *New Yorker* feature-part Jimmy Buffett song. . . . The result is adventuresome, lavish, informative fun. "GQ" "A rollicking story, Ryan manages to pack in one amusing tale after another.... *Jackpot* is a rip-roaring good read." "Charleston City Paper" "High times on the high seas: Investigative reporter Ryan recounts the glory days of dope smuggling and their terrible denouement.... A well-told tale of true crime that provides a few good arguments for why it should not be a crime at all." "Kirkus Reviews" "Reads like an international thriller. . . . chock-a-block with hilarious and hair-raising anecdotes of fast times." "New York Journal of Books" "[A] thoroughly researched account of Operation Jackpot, the drug investigation that ended the reign of South Carolina's 'gentlemen smugglers'.... Ryan recreates the era with a vivid, sun-drenched intensity." "Publishers Weekly" " " " " "

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Ryan writes a thoroughly researched account of Operation Jackpot, the drug investigation that ended the reign of South Carolina's "gentlemen smugglers," marijuana kingpins who kick-started Reagan's war on drugs. As a result of Operation Jackpot, more than 100 men were charged with smuggling, racketeering, tax evasion, and conspiracy, relatively tame charges, as Ryan stresses, compared with the violence surrounding contemporary drug trafficking. Ryan draws on extensive interviews, grand jury and trial transcripts, personal correspondence, news articles, and police reports. Still, rather than a comprehensive survey of marijuana and hashish smuggling in the 1970s and '80s, his book profiles personalities, focusing on "a few talented smugglers" and their wild exploits, such as a 1976 incident in the Florida Keys when the approach of police caused smugglers to scatter, sending a 65-foot sport fishing yacht with 15,000 pounds of marijuana on autopilot toward Cuba "never to be seen by the smugglers again." The last member of the crew to go to prison, having evaded the law for 25 years, pleaded guilty in 2008. Ryan recreates the era with a vivid, sun-drenched intensity. (Apr. 20) (c) Copyright PWxyz, LLC. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

â œEndorsement of The Day: A Great Book About the Early Years of the War on Weedâ |. Before Juarez was a war zone, before coke-rich Colombia was the hostage capital of the world, and before an ex-B-movie actor with a good haircut declared War on Drugs, a group of wayward Southern gentlemen yachted the globe with unseen amounts of marijuana and hashish, and did it with style. The adventures, the long-gone economy, and the sting that ultimately brought them down and changed US drug policy are meticulously documented and lucidly spun by reporter Jason Ryan in Jackpotâ |. Part New Yorker feature-part Jimmy Buffett song. . . .Â The result is adventuresome, lavish, informative fun. Try it. Youâ ll like it.â • â "GQÂ â œOver the course of Jackpotâ s rollicking story, Ryan manages to pack in one amusing tale after another: the day after a shipment,

the crew stumbles upon a bale of marijuana accidentally left on the side of the road; they pilot a pot-filled sailboat that is taking on water all the way back from Jamaica; â | they help U.S. forces during the invasion of Grenada, earning one trafficker, Bob â ^The Bossâ ^™ Byers, the nickname rocket launcher.... Jackpot is a rip-roaring good read.â • â "Charleston City Paper â œHigh times on the high seas: Investigative reporter Ryan recounts the glory days of dope smuggling and their terrible denouement.... The protagonists are, in the main, decent and hardworking guys who just happen to be engaged in something very illegalâ "a trade that, as Ryan notes, is an ancient one along the South Carolina coast, where contraband smuggling is a big intergenerational business, whether of cigarettes, booze or pot. The principals of the story long enjoyed a place at the top of the smuggling pyramid, landing, in one year, more than 30,000 pounds of marijuana in three moves alone.... A well-told tale of true crime that provides a few good arguments for why it should not be a crime at all.â • â "Kirkus ReviewsÂ â œ[Â]Â thoroughly researched account of Operation Jackpot, the drug investigation that ended the reign of South Carolinaâ ^™s â ^gentlemen smugglers,â ^™ marijuana kingpins who kick-started Reagan's war on drugs.... Ryan recreates the era with a vivid, sun-drenched intensity.â • â "Publishers Weekly Â â œMr. Ryan has hit the jackpot with this tale of drug smuggling on the high seas. . . . [Jackpot] reads like an international thriller. . . . chock-a-block with hilarious and hair-raising anecdotes of fast times.â • â "Sam Millar, New York Journal of Books

Fascinating chronicle of a drug gang. What drove me to the book was that one of the smugglers is my first cousin..from the low-land of South Carolina, and born into a proud and hardworking farming community and son of a respectable family. No one would have guessed this handsome lad, youngest of a 5 children, could wind up this way. Tragically, and unforgivably, he abandoned a little daughter (now a successful entertainment industry member) and wife.I never knew details of his involvement until I read the book. His dad and mom died without ever seeing him again after he fled to Mexico and he couldn't attend their funerals as he knew the FBI watches obits for the very purpose of catching him in a vulnerable lapse when his guard was down. Sad. Tragic. And I feel so sorry for living siblings and for his parents, who all our family adored.I guess that is the point. We expect drug smugglers to be uneducated, mob-type gangsters and career criminals, part of the underworld, not college students from good families.And, justice has been served but the carnage in lives has never been redeemed.

You will enjoy this book if you are interested in getting a flavor for the lives of marijuana smugglers of the Southern Coastal US in the late 70's, and the evolution of the then-novel multi-agency

(federal, state and local) task force approach in trying to combat the surge of drug imports by going after these smuggling "kingpins". While the anecdotes are fascinating, the book as a whole suffers from lack of cohesive thesis, narrative, or other means of organization. It's basically a chronological journey, with hiccups, flashbacks, tangents and asides, all with an interesting window into the underbelly of the "gentlemen smugglers" and their governmental adversaries.

I am a voracious reader of non-fiction books, including true crime, famous legal cases and courtroom dramas. I just finished reading Jackpot and would rate it among the top 5 books that I have enjoyed over the past few years. Having lived in Beaufort, SC, since 1977, I was familiar with Operation Jackpot from the occasional newspaper stories, and I knew of some of the people from the Beaufort and Hilton Head area that were ensnared in the pot smuggling investigation. However, until I read Jason Ryan's book, I had no idea of the breadth and scope of the smuggling operations and the law enforcement investigations that reached along the entire Eastern Seacoast and involved hundreds of people over an entire decade. Ryan did an incredible job in writing a fascinating story that was obviously well researched and written in a style and prose that matches or exceeds that of most seasoned and successful authors that I have read. It is just unbelievable how Ryan was able to take mountains of information and organize and reduce it to a compelling and very readable story of pot smuggling activities (and related investigations) along the Eastern coastal areas and around the world from the mid-1970's to mid 1980's - including the inner-workings and novel investigation and prosecution techniques of the Jackpot drug task force, the means and methods used by the so-called "gentlemen smugglers," the courtroom drama in the trials of those unwilling to plead guilty, and the background stories of the major participants in what has come to be known as one of the most successful operations (smuggling and law enforcement) in the history of the war on drugs. While not over-glamorizing the lifestyles of the criminal smugglers, Ryan told their interesting stories of short-term riches with yachts, world-travel, woman and partying. This book has it all, and in my opinion would provide the basis of a fantastic movie. I look forward to Ryan's next book. [My only complaint is that it did not have a Kindle edition - this was the first hard copy book I bought in over 5 years.]

Jackpot is the story of a group of marijuana smugglers, living the high life and making tons of money during the late '70s and early '80s. It concentrates on a group of young men, most of them with ties to the state of South Carolina and details their rise and fall as drug kingpins. === The Good Points ===\*Parts of the tale are truly spellbinding. Jason Ryan does an excellent job of leading us through

several of the smuggling trips, mostly by boat. The details of some of these trips are amazing, as "drug kingpins" run out of gas, food, water, get lost, drop drugs in the ocean, and generally resemble McHale's Navy.\*We watch as a number of high school dropouts become quite rich, with their biggest problems being what to do with all the money.\*As the enterprises begin to unwind, there is a fascinating saga of these men turning on each other, giving state's evidence, and leading worldwide tales of evasion, false-identities, narrow escapes from law enforcement and living the high-life with one eye cast over their shoulders.\*We meet an ambition group of law enforcement officials and US Attorneys, some of whom seem to be at least as ambitious as the smugglers, although they were playing for different stakes.===The Bad Points===\*The book definitely needed a better editor. The first few chapters border on unreadable due to the constant introduction to new characters, many of whom are not important to the storyline. Most of these characters are indistinguishable from one another in the plot, and their descriptions become so intermingled and forgettable that I almost put the book down.\*Ryan never gets beyond the surface of the tale. We are not privy to the details of setting up a smuggling operation, any of the background on setting up the deals, or any of the interpersonal conflicts that doubtless existed among the smugglers. We also miss out on the story behind the story- for example Ryan relates how there was a temporary cease-fire in Lebanon so the smugglers could onload a cargo of smuggled drugs. Quite a claim, and one that requires a bit more detail and explanation than a simple statement that it happened.\*Parts of the book were very slow-going, making it tempting to put the book down. === Summary ===The good parts of the book were good, but the bad parts were pretty bad. Overall I'd say the book was just good enough to keep reading, although I was tempted to stop several times. The middle of the book, describing actual smuggling runs, was the best part, while the beginning and end were boring and often mundane.If you are a fan of true crime, it is probably worth a read, but don't be afraid to skim the first few chapters, you won't miss much.

Good non fiction but not to my taste.

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