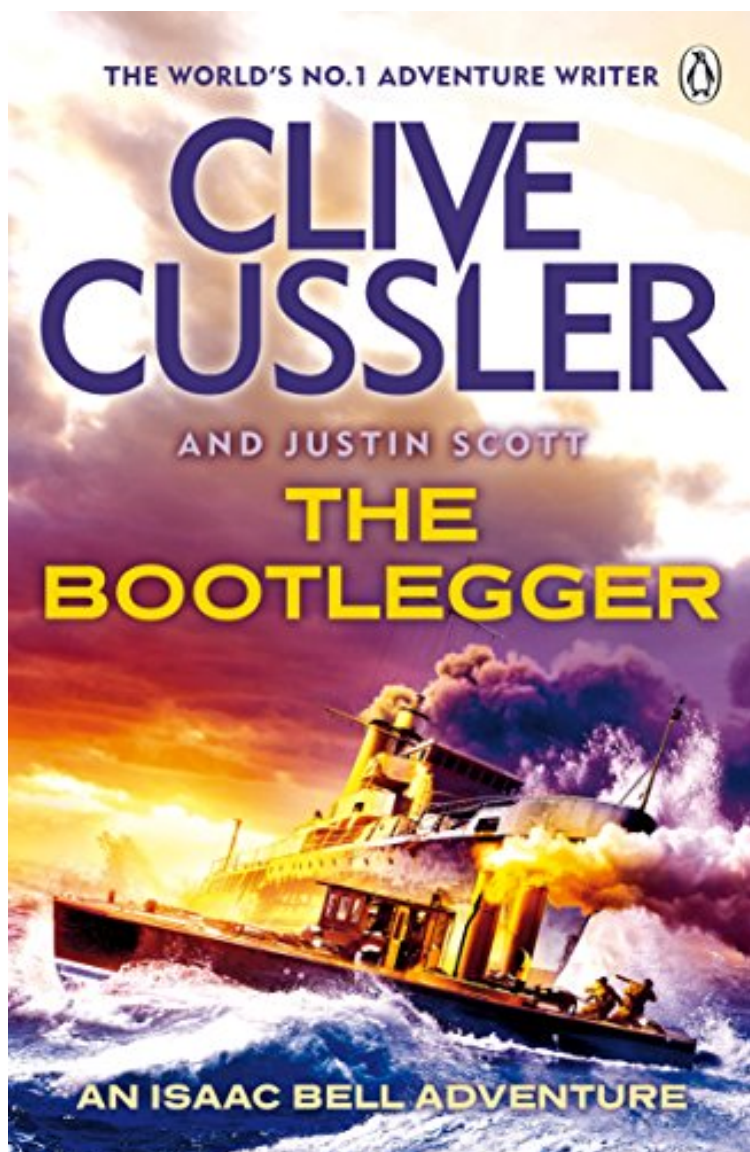


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The Bootlegger: Isaac Bell #7



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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurThe Bootlegger is the seventh of Clive Cussler's bestselling Isaac Bell novels.It is 1920. Prohibition and bootlegging are in full swing. When Joseph Van Dorn is shot and nearly killed while in pursuit of a rum-running vessel, his friend and employee, Isaac Bell, swears to him that he will hunt down the lawbreakers. But Bell doesn't know what he is getting into. When a witness to the shooting is executed in a manner peculiar to the Russian secret police, it becomes clear that these were no ordinary bootleggers.Bell is facing a team of Bolshevik assassins and saboteurs - and they are intent on overthrowing the government of the United States.An adventure laced with secret cargo and assassins, The Bootlegger is the seventh of Clive Cussler's Isaac Bell novels, and follows The Spy, The Thief and The Striker.Praise for Clive

Cussler: Cussler is hard to beat - Daily Mail
The guy I read - Tom Clancy
The Adventure King - Sunday Express
Clive Cussler is the author or co-author of a great number of international bestsellers, including the famous Dirk Pitt adventures, such as Arctic Drift; the NUMA Files adventures, most recently Zero Hour; the Oregon Files, such as Mirage; the Isaac Bell Adventures, which began with The Chase; and the highly successful most recent series, the Fargo Adventures. He lives in Arizona.

Justin Scott is the author of twenty-six novels, including The Shipkiller and Normandie Triangle; the Ben Abbot detective series; and five modern sea thrillers under his pen name Paul Garrison. He lives in Connecticut.

Find out more about the world of Clive Cussler by visiting <http://www.facebook.com/clivecussler>

Extrait I
Two men in expensive clothes, a bootlegger and his bodyguard, dangled a bellboy upside down from the Hotel Gothams parapet. The bodyguard held him by his ankles, nineteen stories above 55th Street. It was night. No one saw, and the boys screams were drowned out by the Fifth Avenue buses, the El thundering up Sixth, and trolley bells clanging on Madison. The bootlegger shouted down at him, Every bellhop in the hotel sells my booze! Whatsamatter with you? Church spires and mansion turrets reached for him like teeth. Last chance, sonny. A tall man in a summer suit glided silently across the roof. He drew a Browning automatic from his coat and a throwing knife from his boot. He mounted the parapet and pressed the pistol to the bodyguards temple. Hold tight. The bodyguard froze. The bootlegger shrank from the blade pricking his throat. Who the Isaac Bell. Van Dorn Agency. Sling him in on the count of two. If you shoot, we drop him. Youll have holes in your heads before he passes the eighteenth floor . . . On my count: One! Pull him up. Two! Swing him over the edge . . . Lay him on the roof Are you O.K., son? The bellboy had tears in his eyes. He nodded, head bobbing like a puppet. Go downstairs, Isaac Bell told him, sliding his knife back in his boot and shifting the automatic to his left hand. Tell your boss Chief Investigator Bell said to give you the week off and a fifty-dollar bonus for standing up to bootleggers. The bodyguard chose his moment well. When the tall detective reached down to help the boy stand, he swung a heavy, ring-studded fist. Skillfully thrown with the full power of a big mans muscle behind it, it was blocked before it traveled four inches. A bone-cracking counterpunch staggered him. His knees buckled and he collapsed on the tar. The bootlegger shot empty hands into the sky. O.K., O.K. The van Dorn detective agencyan operation with field offices in every city in the country and many abroad maintained warm relations with the police. But Isaac Bell spotted trouble when he walked into the 54th Street precinct house. The desk sergeant couldnt meet his eye. Bell reached across the high desk to shake his hand anyway. This particular sergeants father, retired roundsman Paddy ORiordan, augmented his pension as a part-time night watchman for Van Dorn Protective Services. Hows your dad? Paddy was doing fine. Any chance of interviewing the bootlegger we caught at the Gotham? The big guys at the hospital getting his jaw wired. I want the little one, the boss. Surety company paid his bond. Bell was incensed. Bail? For attempted murder? They expect the protection they pay for, said Sergeant ORiordan, poker-faced. What I would do next time, Mr. Bell, instead of calling us, throw them in the river. Bell watched for the cops reaction when he replied, I reckoned Coasties would fish them out. ORiordan agreed with a world-weary Yeah, confirming the rumors that even some officers of the United States Coast Guard the arm of the Treasury Department charged with enforcing Prohibition at seawere in the bootleggers pockets. Starting this afternoon, thought Bell, the Van Dorns would put a stop to that. One big hand firm on the throttle of his S-1 Flying Yacht, the other on the wheel, Isaac Bell began racing down the East River for take-off speed. He dodged a railcar float and steered into a rapidly narrowing slot between a tugboat pushing a fleet of coal barges and another towing a bright red barge of dynamite. Joseph Van Dorn, the burly, scarlet-whiskered founder of the detective agency, sat beside him in the open cockpit, lost in thought. The Greenpoint ferry surged out of the 23rd Street Terminal straight in their path. The sight of the slab-sided vessel, suddenly enormous in their windshield, made Joseph Van Dorn sit up straight. A brave and cool-headed man, he asked, Do we have time to stop? Bell shoved his throttle wide open. The Liberty engine mounted behind them on the wing thundered. He hauled hard on the wheel. The Loening S-1 held speed and altitude records but was notoriously slow to respond to the controls. Bell had replaced its stick and pedals with a combined steering and elevating Blriot wheel, in hopes of making it nimbler. Passengers on the Greenpoint ferry backed from the rail. Bell gave the wheel one last firm tug. The Flying Yacht lunged off the water and cleared the ferry with a foot to spare. There ought to be a law against flying like you, said Van Dorn. Bell flew under the Williamsburg Bridge and between the spotting masts of a battleship docked at the Navy Yard. Sorry to distract you from your dire thoughts. Youll distract us both to kingdom come. Bell headed across leaf-green Brooklyn at one hundred miles an hour. Van Dorn resumed pondering how to deal with misfortune. The World War had upended his agency. Some of his best detectives had been killed

fighting in the trenches. Others died shockingly young in the influenza epidemic. A post-war recession in the business world was bankrupting clients. And only yesterday, Isaac Bell had discovered that bootleggers, who were getting rich quick off Prohibition by bribing cops and politicians, had corrupted two of his best house detectives at the Hotel Gotham. Bell climbed to three thousand feet before they reached the Rockaways. Where the white sand beach slid into the ocean like a falling knife, he turned and headed east above the string of barrier islands that sheltered Long Island from the raw fury of the Atlantic. A booze smugglers paradise of hidden bays and marshes, inlets, creeks and canals stretched in the lee of those islands as far as he could see. Thirty miles from New York, he banked the plane out over the steel-blue ocean and began to descend. Can I come in the launch, Chief? Seaman Third Class Asa Somers, the youngest sailor on the Coast Guard cutter CG-9, was beside himself. He had finally made it to sea, patrolling the Fire Island coast for rumrunners on a ship with a cannon and machine guns. Now the fastest flying boat in the world a high-wing pusher monoplane was looping down from the sky. And if the roar of its four-hundred-horsepower Liberty motor wasn't thrilling enough, it was bringing a famous crime fighter he'd read about in Boys Life and the Police Gazette. Mr. Joseph Van Dorn, whose army of private detectives vowed: We never give up!

Never! What's got you all stirred up? growled the white-haired chief petty officer. I want to meet Mr. Van Dorn when he lands. He ain't gonna land. Why not? Open your eyes, boy. See that swell? Four-foot seas'll kick that flying-boat ass over teakettle. Maybe he'll give it a whirl, Somers said, with little hope. Flight Magazine praised the S-1s speed at lot more than its handling. If he does, said the chief, you can come in the launch to pick up the bodies. Up on the flying bridge, CG-9s skipper expressed the same opinion. Stand by with grappling hooks. The flying boat circled lower. When it whipped past, skimming wave tops, Somers recognized Van Dorn, who was seated beside the pilot in the glass-surrounded, open-roofed cockpit, by his red whiskers bristling in the slipstream. The roar of the big twelve-cylinder engine faded to a whisper. Lunatic, growled the chief. But young Somers watched the Air Yachts ailerons. The wing flaps fluttered up and down almost faster than the eye could see as the pilot fought to keep her on an even keel. Back in her tail unit, the horizontal stabilizer bit the air, and down she came, steady as a locomotive on rails. Her long V-shaped hull touched the water, flaring a vapor-thin wake. Her wing floats skimmed the swell, and she settled lightly. Somers! Man the bow line. The boy leaped into the launch and they motored across the hundred yards that separated the cutter and the flying boat. The huge four-bladed propeller behind the wing stopped spinning, and the pilot, who had made an almost impossible landing look easy, climbed down from the cockpit onto the running board that extended around the front of the rocking hull. He was a tall, lean, fair-haired man with a no-nonsense expression on his handsome face. His golden hair and thick mustache were impeccably groomed. His tailored suit and the broad-brimmed hat pulled tight on his head were both white. Somers dropped the bow line. What in blazes are you doing? bellowed the chief. I bet that's Isaac Bell! I don't care if it's Mary Pickford! Don't foul that line! The boy re-coiled the line, his gaze locked on the pilot. It had to be him. Bell's picture was never in a magazine. But reports on Van Dorn always mentioned his chief investigators white suit and it suddenly struck Somers that the camera-shy detective could go incognito in a flash simply by changing his clothes. Heave a line, son! he called. Come on, you can do it on the jump! Somers remembered to let the coil reel out of his palm as the chief had taught him. To his eternal gratitude the rope fell into Bell's big hand. Good shot. He pulled the plane and the boat together. Somers asked, Are you Isaac Bell, sir? I'm his butler. Mums the word Bell is still passed out in a speakeasy. Now, let's get Mr. Van Dorn into your boat without dropping him in the drink. Ready? Bell reached to help Van Dorn, a heavily built man in his fifties with a prominent roman nose and hooded eyes. Van Dorn ignored Bell's hand. Bell seized his elbow and guided him toward Somers with a conspiratorial grin. Hang on tight, son, he's not as spry as he looks. Behind his grin, Bell's blue eyes were cool and alert. He watched carefully as the older man stepped between the bouncing craft, and he relaxed only after Somers had him safely aboard. What's your name, sailor? asked Van Dorn in a voice that had the faintest lilt of an Irish accent. Seaman Third Class Asa Somers, sir. Lied about your age? How did you know? Somers whispered. I worked that dodge to join the Marines. He shot a thumbs-up toward the stern. All aboard, Chief. Back to the ship. Aye, sir. The boat wheeled away from the seaplane. Van Dorn called to Bell, Watch yourself at the Gotham. Don't forget, those shameless SOBs have fifty pounds on you. If a mountain lion could smile, thought Asa Somers, it would smile like Isaac Bell when he answered, Forget? Never. Joseph van Dorn cast a skeptical eye on CG-9, a surplus submarine chaser the U.S. Navy had palmed off on the Coast Guard for Prohibition patrol. With a crow's nest above a flying bridge, six-cylinder gasoline engines driving triple screws, and a three-inch Poole gun mounted on the foredeck, she had been built to spot, chase, and sink slow-moving German U-boats not

fast rumrunners. She'd been worked hard in the war and scantily maintained since. The drone of pumps told him that her wooden hull had worked open many a leak. Her motor valves were chattering, even at half speed. She would still pack a punch with the Poole gun and a brace of .30.06 Lewis machine guns on the bridge wings. But even if she somehow managed to get in range of a rumrunner, who was trained to fire them? Her middle-aged skipper was pouch-eyed and red-nosed. Her aged chief petty officer looked like a Spanish-American War vet. And the crew with the exception of young Somers, who had scrambled eagerly up the mast to the lookout perch in the crow's nest as soon as they shipped the launch were pretty much the quality Van Dorn expected of recruits paid twenty-one dollars a month. The skipper greeted him warily. Van Dorn disarmed him with the amiable smile that had sent many a criminal to the penitentiary wondering why he had allowed this jovial gent close enough to clamp a steely hand on the scruff of his neck. A twinkle in the eye and a warm chortle in the voice fostered the notion of an easygoing fellow. I suppose your commandant told you the Treasury Department hired my detective agency to recommend how better to combat the illegal liquor traffic. But I bet Scuttlebutt says we were investigating whos in cahoots with the bootleggers pocketing bribes to look the other way. They don't have to bribe us. They outrun us, and they outnumber us. Or someone I'm not saying who cause I don't know who tips them where we were patrolling. Or they radio false distress calls; were supposed to save lives, so we steam to the rescue, leaving our station wide open. If we happen to catch em, the courts turn em loose and they buy their speedboats back at government auction. Van Dorn took a fresh look at the skipper. Maybe his nose was red from a head cold. Drinking man or not, he sounded genuinely indignant and fed up. Who could blame him? In the year since Prohibition the banning of the sale of alcohol by the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution and the Volstead Act it seemed half the country had agreed to break the law. Millions of people would pay handsomely for a drink. Short of striking oil or gold in your backyard, there was no way to get richer quicker than to sell hooch. All you needed was a boat you could run a few miles offshore to a rum fleet of foreign-registered freighters and schooners anchored beyond the law in international waters. The newspapers had made a hero of Bill McCoy, captain of a schooner registered in the British Bahama Islands. He had come up with the scheme for circumventing the law, which made enforcing Prohibition a mugs game. Like the song says Van Dorn recited a lyric from Irving Berlin's latest hit You cannot make your shimmy shake on tea. How fast are the taxis? While fisherman and yacht owners sailed out to the rum fleet to buy a few bottles, big business was conducted by taxis or contact boats high-powered, shallow-draft vessels in which professional rumrunners smuggled hundreds of cases ashore to bootleggers who paid top dollar. They build em faster every day. Van Dorn shook his head, feigning dismay. Isaac Bell had already convinced him to recommend flying-boat patrols, though God knows who would pay for them. Congress banned booze but failed to cough up money for enforcement. Taxi! All eyes shot to the crow's nest. Joseph van Dorn whipped a pair of binoculars from his voluminous overcoat and focused in the direction Asa Somers was pointing his telescope. Low in the water and painted as gray as the sea and the sky, the rum boat was barely visible at a thousand yards. Full speed! ordered the skipper, and bounded up the ladder to the flying bridge atop the wheelhouse. Van Dorn climbed heavily after him. The engines ground harder. Valves stormed louder. The subchaser dug her stern in and boiled a white wake. Fifteen knots, said the skipper. Subchasers had been built to do eighteen, but the oily blue smoke spewing from her exhaust ports told Van Dorn her worn engines were pushing their limits. Their quarry was overloaded, with its gunnels almost submerged, but it was churning along at seventeen or eighteen knots and growing fainter in the distance. Gunner! Put a shot across his bow. The Poole gun barked, shaking the deck. It was not apparent through Van Dorn's powerful glasses where the cannon shell landed, but it was nowhere near the rum boat's bow. The gunners landed their second shot closer. He saw it splash, but the boat continued to pull ahead. Suddenly, just as it seemed the rummy would disappear in the failing light of evening, they got a break. The taxi slowed. She had hit something in the water, the skipper speculated, or thrown a prop, or blown a cylinder. Whatever had gone wrong on the heavily laden boat, the subchaser caught up slowly. They'll dump the booze and run for it, said the skipper. Van Dorn adjusted his binoculars. But he saw no frantic figures throwing contraband overboard. The boat just kept running for the night. Gunner! Another across his bow. The Poole gun shook the deck again, and a shell splashed in front of the rumrunner. They'll pull up now. The warning shot had no effect and the rumrunner kept going. Van Dorn made a quick count of the cases of whisky he saw heaped on deck, estimated the amount she could hold belowdecks, and calculated a minimum cargo of five hundred cases. If the bottles contained the real McCoy authentic Scotch that had not been stretched or doctored with cheap grain alcohol the boatload was worth thirty thousand dollars. To the crew of a rum boat, who before

Prohibition had barely eked out a living catching fish, it was a fortune that might make them more brave than sensible. For thirty thousand dollars, six bootleggers could buy a Cadillac or a Rolls-Royce, a Marmon or a Minerva. For the fishermen's families it meant snug cottages and steady food on the table. The skipper switched on an electric siren. CG-9 screamed like a banshee. Still, the rum boat ran. They're crazy. Fire again! the skipper shouted down to the gun crew. Get em wet! The shell hit the water close enough to spray the crew. The rum boat stopped abruptly and turned one hundred eighty degrees to face the subchaser that was bearing down on them in a cloud of blue smoke. Stand by, Lewis guns! Grinning Coasties hunched over the drum-fed machine guns mounted on pedestals each side of the wheelhouse. Van Dorn reckoned that good sense would prevail at last. The Lewis was a wonderful weapon—fast-firing, rarely jamming, and highly accurate. Rumrunners could be expected to throw their hands in the air before the range got any shorter and let their lawyers spring them. Instead, when the cutter closed to a hundred yards, they started shooting. Shouts of surprise rang out on the Coast Guard boat. A rifle slug crackled past the mast, a foot from Van Dorn's head. Another clanged off a ventilator cowling and ricocheted against the cannon on the foredeck, scattering the gun crew, who dove for cover. Van Dorn whipped his Colt .45 automatic from his coat, rammed his shoulder against the mast to counter the cutter's roll, and took careful aim for a very long pistol shot. Just as he found the distant rifleman in his sights, a third rifle slug struck the Coastie manning the starboard Lewis gun and tumbled him off the back of the wing to the main deck. The big detective climbed down the ladder as fast as he could and squeezed into the wing. He jerked back the machine guns slide with his left hand and triggered a three-shot burst with his right. Wood flew from the taxi's cabin, inches from the rifleman. Three more and the rifle flew from his hands. Another taxi! came Asa Somers's high-pitched yell from the crow's nest. Another taxi, astern. Van Dorn concentrated on clearing the rumrunners cockpit. He directed a stream of .30-06 slugs that made a believer of the helmsman who let go the wheel and flung himself flat. Somers yelled again, Taxi coming up behind us! Fear in the boy's voice made Van Dorn look back. A long, low black boat was closing fast. Van Dorn had never seen a boat so fast. Forty knots at least. Fifty miles per hour. Thunder chorused from multiple exhaust manifolds. Three dozen straight pipes lanced orange flame into the sky. Triple Liberty motors, massed in a row, each one as powerful as the turbo-supercharged L-12 on Isaac's flying boat, spewed the fiery blast. The gun crew on the foredeck couldn't see it. Charging from behind, slicing the seas like a knife, the black boat turned as the subchaser turned, holding the angle that screened it from the cannon. The port machine gunner couldn't see it either, blocked by the wheelhouse. But Joseph Van Dorn could. He pivoted the Lewis gun and opened fire. The vessel began weaving, jinking sharply left and right, agile as a dragonfly. A cold smile darkened Van Dorn's face. O.K., boys. That's how you want it? He pointed the Lewis gun straight down the middle of the weaving path and fired in bursts, peppering the black boat with a hundred rounds in ten seconds. Nearly half his shots hit. But to Van Dorn's amazement, they bounced off, and he realized, too late, that she was armored with steel sheathing. He raked the glass windshield behind which the helmsman crouched. The glass starred but did not shatter. Bulletproof. These boys had come prepared. Then the black boat fired back. It, too, had a Lewis gun. Hidden below the deck, it pivoted up on a hinged mount, and Van Dorn saw in an instant that the fellow firing it knew his business. Scores of bullets drilled through the subchaser's wooden hull right under where he manned his gun and riddled the chest-high canvas that protected the bridge wing from wind and spray. Van Dorn fired long bursts back. A cool, detached side of his mind marveled that he had not been hit by the withering fire. Something smacked his chest hard as a thrown cobblestone. Suddenly, he was falling over the rim of the bridge wing and plummeting toward the deck. The analytical side of his brain noted that the taxi they were chasing was speeding away, covered by machine-gun fire from the black boat, and that, as he fell, the Coast Guard cutter was wheeling to bring the Poole gun to bear. In turning her flank to the seas, she took a wave broadside and heeled steeply to starboard, so that when he finally landed it was not on the narrow deck but on the safety railing that surrounded it. The taut wire cable broke his fall and bounced him overboard into bitter cold water. The last thing he heard was Asa Somers's shrill, Mr. Van Dorn! *Revue de presse* Praise for *The Bootlegger* Cussler and Scott have written another wonderful page-turner . . . This is historical action-adventure fiction at its rip-roaring best! *Library Journal* (starred review) The Isaac Bell series continues to tell compelling stories. Tidbits of history are sprinkled throughout the narrative, and it's fun to filter out fictional characters and events from historical facts. *Associated Press* As always in this series, the novel is very exciting, with excellent pacing and some very well drawn characters. With his combination of mental and physical prowess, Isaac Bell could easily become a sort of superhero (imagine a blending of Sherlock Holmes and Doc Savage), but the authors do a nice job of keeping him from crossing that line.

Another fine entry in a strong series. Cussler is a perennial A-lister, popularity-wise, and his Isaac Bell novels are the pick of his prodigious litter. Booklist [A] laudable historical action novel. Publishers Weekly Praise for The Striker This adventure might be the best yet in the series. The history is fascinating reading. Add a James Bond style flair with sabotage and villainy, and the end result is a great action thriller.-- Associated Press Interesting historical scene-setting facts; action that shifts from the dangerous depths of a coal mine to Wall Street, to a confrontation in a tunnel being dug for the New York subway and to a riverboat battle between two paddle-wheelers; deft characterizations; and hard-boiled dialogue. Classic Cussler."--Kirkus s The Isaac Bell series is by far the most interesting and enjoyable of Cussler's novels. They continue to show him at his best, commercially and literarily."--Booklist Exciting The action flows swiftly, and the authors do a good job depicting the work conditions and the class warfare of the time.-- Publishers Weekly