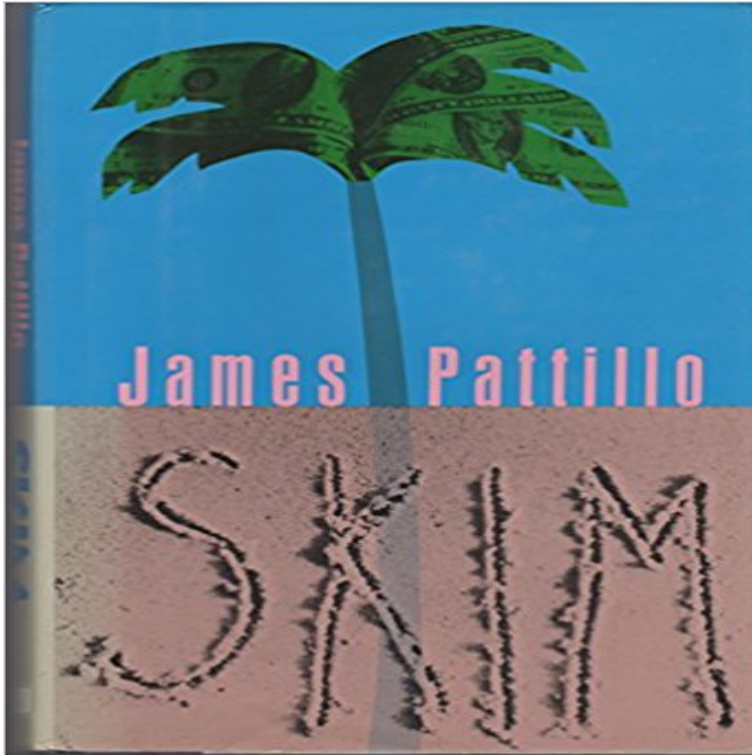


## Skim: A Novel



David Pike, a Los Angeles lawyer, is consulted by Maurice Baranowitz, a movie producer with a problem. Maurice thinks money is missing from the bank account of one of his production companies. But he doesn't want to offend his Director, Michelle (Mickey) McDonald by being the one who asks questions about it. He's worked with her often, and almost thinks of her as a daughter. So he wants Pike to say he's acting on behalf of another investor in the production company, get the books, and have them audited -- but without saying it was Maurice's idea. When Mickey finishes the project she's working on for Maurice, she wants to make her own film -- a film that will establish her reputation as a director. She's optioned the movie rights to a book by a major novelist, and wants to film the book using her own money so she won't have to make compromises with producers or studios. Although it's only gradually revealed, she skimmed \$50,000 from Maurice's production company and used the money to buy cocaine, which she has been selling to raise working capital for her production. These events form the plot armature of the novel, but there's a lot more going on -- subplots involving the guys that Mickey buys the cocaine from, the ex-FBI agent whom Pike hires to audit the books of the production company, Pike's about-to-be ex-girlfriend, and more. The characters are all well drawn and are real people. They do outrageous things, but the things never feel forced -- they're driven by the characters' personality and motivations. After they happen, they're logical, but you don't see them coming. When it's over, you feel as if you've just walked away from a near collision in your car -- shaken, jangled, and fizzing with adrenaline.

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