



The Woman Chaser

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Richard Hudson, woman chaser and used car salesman, has a pimp's awareness of the ways women (and men) are most vulnerable. One day Richard decides to make an ambitious film, which turns into a fiasco. Enraged, he exacts revenge on all who have crossed him.

The Woman Chaser Details

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From Reader Review The Woman Chaser for online ebook

Chuck Williamson says

Sick, twisted, and deliriously funny. Like Walker Percy's THE MOVIEGOER, but without all that preening and pretentious navel-gazing. An absurdist show-biz story that dives into the sleaziest dives and skuzziest dumpsters of Tinsel Town. A family melodrama that is equal parts August Strindberg and dinner scene from THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE.

Nigel Bird says

“This is what I learned about a story at Mammoth Studios: A likeable and sympathetic hero, one who affords a good measure of viewer-identification, and around whom the story revolves, is faced with the necessity of solving a serious and urgent problem which affects his vital interests. The hero makes an effort to solve his problem, but this only succeeds in making matters worse. (This is me all right). The hero's efforts all lead to a series of increasingly harder complications. Each new complication is related to the original problem. (This isn't me, or is it?) Anyway, there is an integrated series of complications which build up in intensity until a definite point or crisis is reached. It is here that the reader cannot possibly understand how the hero can possibly succeed. But now the hero makes one last and heroic attempt to resolve his difficulties, and in every case it must be his own individual efforts that solve the dilemma (s). Under no circumstances can he accept any form of outside aid to make things easier for him.”

It's a long quote, I know, but a great dissection of a type of story-writing. This comes from the narrator of our story, a successful car salesman called Richard Hudson.

The opening has Hudson watching a used Los Angeles car lot that he intends to buy. He analyses the pros and cons of the place with ruthless application and proceeds with his purchase for the business. It's a classy, beautifully written beginning that really sucked me in completely. Like the quote above says, we have our sympathetic hero with whom we can identify.

From there, we're transported into an analysis of the art of story-telling in the film world. It's a little unsettling, but it's not long before the thread of the narrative is resumed.

Essentially we have a tale being told in flashback. It's a great way of grabbing attention and sows the seeds of tension because we know we're heading for some kind of fall.

Hudson moves back in with his eccentric mother and family. He spends a lot of time with his step-father, a genius of cinema who has lost his way. As they hang around together, Hudson realises that he needs something to fill the emptiness of his life and the creation of a film seems to be the obvious thing for him to do. He has an amazing knowledge of cinema and his step-father allows him an insight that many script-writers might die for.

The creation of the film and the obsession of the writer are gripping. There are many occasions when I wanted to leap in and offer advice - after all, I know already that things aren't set to end well. A huge amount of the book is absolutely brilliant.

What lets it down a little is Hudson's determination to do things his own way. He wants to do something that

is out of the ordinary and he can't bear the interference of the man at the top who wants control of the piece. His obsession turns into a kind of madness and in this madness lies his downfall. The problem for me here is that the book also works to its own calamity of an ending and for me Hudson had become so despicable that I didn't care a hoot for him anymore. He was no longer my slightly flawed hero, but had turned himself into the villain of the piece. While I'm sure that was deliberate, there was something about it that felt a little disappointing. Maybe if I'd realised earlier what a toe-rag the man was (and there were plenty of serious clues, believe me), I might have read in a different way.

Willeford certainly tells an incredible story with great flair and skill. The voice and the whole situation are brilliantly done. Because of that, I'm slightly disappointed in myself for not loving the entirety of the book to pieces. This one's definitely worth a read and I'm sure will ignite a whole batch of questions for you as a reader.

Patrick McCoy says

The Woman Chaser (1960) by Charles Willeford is a curiously titled novel since most of the woman chasing by the protagonist Richard Hudson is away from him. Perhaps, it was a marketing ploy, but this novel is more about artistic integrity and the used car industry than it is about womanizing, although there is some of that. It is a kind of a crime noir for sure with its bleak worldview about "straight society." Hudson is a successful used car salesman who feels the need for more in life, but it is not a family that he longs for, rather he feels that the need to create in order to truly be alive. So he decides to make a low-budget film with his stepfather, a former studio director. However, Hudson is unwilling to compromise, either to pad the film to make it longer for theatrical release, nor is he willing to trim it for airing on TV (cable would have solved this problem today). His partners decide to air in on TV and Hudson spirals into anger and depression, wrecking havoc on anyone who crosses his path. Yet, another entertaining early novel from Willeford.

Frank Thirdeyed says

So what is this book about?:

- a. Richard Hudson, the used car dealer who tries to write a very bitter, cynical and dark humoured movie about hard working people and the flaws of the American Dream.
- b. Script writer Richard Hudson who wrote a very bitter, cynical and dark humoured movie script about a used car dealer trying to make a movie about hard working people and the flaws of the American Dream.
- c. Author Richard Hudson who tries to write an autobiographical book about writing a very bitter, cynical and dark humoured movie script about a used car dealer trying to make a movie about hard working people and the flaws of the American Dream.
- d. All of the above.
- e. Neither, it's a structurally different storyline all together.
- f. Shut up, little man! You're overthinking it!

Well, this was weird...changing tones and perspectives all the time. One time being told as "first person", switching to "third person" midway and sometimes landing somewhere in the middle with the voice of Charles Willeford himself shining through. It's marketed as "crime pulp" and while being very "noir-ish", harsh, violent, bleak, bitter and way way funny in the way of the doomed loser characteristics of Jim Thompson it defies clear genres all together. You would have to call it "soapy satire psychothriller loser-noir

comedy". There, I did it: bullshit.

It's confusing, but amazing. I already said too much. Read it if you like rotten-, doomed characters, bleak atmosphere and pitchblack humour.

Putting this in my "favorite books" shelf. Will eventually need to buy a physical copy and read it again and again. Already looking forward to that. I'm watching the movie next week. Should be good, i love Patrick Warburton's acting and delivery.

Ed says

Charles Willeford is one of those rare authors who makes me laugh out loud in book after book. Donald Westlake is another. It's their deadpan delivery or something. Anyway, Richard Hudson is a fun-loving used car salesman (one of Willeford's favorite characters to use) who gets bored and decides to make a movie. He runs into all types of crazy problems, including making a short movie of sixty-odd minutes instead of the conventional ninety minutes. Entertaining even if not one of his best, this Willeford novel can be downloaded at munseys.com.

Guy Salvidge says

Ingenious packaging, in the sense that this is to some extent presented as a faux film-script, but otherwise this is the same old Willeford. His protagonists are nearly always unpleasant misogynists, as is the case here, although there is some merit to this as 'crime fiction without much in the way of actual crime'. I suppose this is somewhat in the terrain of Jim Thompson, but where Thompson's narrators are hysterical and often genuinely disturbing, Willeford's are normally just low down and mean.

Laird Jimenez says

bad santa

wally says

dunno what # willeford this is for me...#7 or higher i believe. kindle. heh! the kindle version has the man/woman in the convertible..."the chase was furious--the capture was rapacious--the prize was luscious!"

aaaargh!

hoooo-rah!

".50" up at the top. heh! fifty-cents! now here, on the kindle, i dunno what i am ashamed to say i paid for a version that cost little, certainly less, than it cost to print that paperback version, yay, all those years ago. petition congress. or better yet...begin some civil disobedience...read...it was against the law! oh what the

momma saw! it was against the law!

story begins:

start here

*using the thumb and forefinger of the right hand, get a little slack and pull the film through this little thingama-jig. clamp here. leave a small loop so it won't flutter, and then go up over this, down under this, around this, and then tight around the big one. [sounds like he's tying a bow-line] (it has to fit tight on the sound drum). then under this, over this, under this again, around this, and down.
[or knitting a sweater?]*

onward and upward!

heh!

this story is hilarious! i've laughed out loud a number of times...although i dunno if that's because the sun has not shined here for a day or three and there's this s.a.d. business that may or may not be at work and play...not much of either, alas.

the narrative starts out...quirky...see above...seems to be headed toward a kind of 3rd-person...and then converts to an eye-narrator who has just stuck his tongue in his step-sister's mouth, between the pearly whites. completely unexpected...the result, a laugh. isn't there some smarmy term used for stories like this?...does meta-fiction fit?...an eye-narrator aware of himself, telling the story...likening the telling to the making of a movie

time & place

may, los angeles...either the 1940s...perhaps the 1950s...there's mention of a 1940 automobile...houses cost...what was it? \$6,000. (i paid that for my house...alas...)

crenshaw boulevard...873 cars one way and 927 cars the other every 15 minutes

the redstone building

222 club

the house of lumpy grits...home of alexandra

parkman towers in san francisco...where honest hal resides

toastmasters meeting

basement rehearsal room

exposition park...los angeles museum

"for several months in 1953..." ...so, the story takes place after 1953...

driving down vermont

mammoth studios

laguna...where laura and richard spend a day at the beach

hangover house...restaurant where the above go

hollywood hills...where richard takes laura after it all..but nope...

biltmore hotel...downtown l.a.

hill street bars on the other side of pershing square

dragon's mouth entrance of the hong king club

quiet saloon on normandie

bimmi baths...where richard met frances

white cabin...where richard wanted to take above for cokes,burgers
the office of the man, mammoth studios, culver city, california
the tiny producer's theatre next to sound stage a
sound stage f
santa barbara, burbank, san fran
van nuys...where the shantz clan resides
lobero theatre
an orange grove in okai
a beer joint

characters

richard hudson, chief representative of honest hal parker, san francisco, for ten years the star used car salesman for honest hal parker...is 30 yrs old
the used car dealer across the street, mr. george ehlers
o'keefe and cullinan, hudson's (parker's?) lawyers
hudson's mother: alexandra horotsoff hudson blake steinberg...has the body of a 25-yr-old...ballerina...is possibly 51...or 53...or who knows?
hudson's father, divorced from above, an instructor of romance languages at the university of chicago
harry blake...hudson's 1st stepfather...he committed suicide
lupe runoz...a calypso singer employed by top ten tunes...did a rendition of "lumpy grits" that harry 'wrote' and labored over
becky steinberg...hudson's stepsister
new stepfather, leo steinberg, an ex-movie director, 37 yrs of age
don...someone honest hal could send down for a couple of weeks
leona...maid of hudson's mother...cook...etc..she married again and lives w/her new husband down on 39th street...is from anniston, alabama..and is...a negro (fdr is a cripple, may it do ya fine)
mr raymond moore...ass't manager of triple a finance company...for richard's purchase for honest hal of the car lot owned/run by george ehlers
on-the-premises negro mechanic hired called graphite sam
richard hires william (bill) conan harris, master sergeant u.s. army retired...to manage the car lot...38-yr-old...married, father of two children, owned his own home in fullerton
bill hires a kid to run a grill on the lot...hot dogs...once a week
bill hires an old lady who typed about 80 words a minute
bill hired and fired salesman until he had three of the best
friend of the girl...hollywood high girl friend who had been attending too many drive-in (passion pit) movies
dr. rums featherstone, a gynecologist...imaginary...who testifies against richard in his hypothetical courtroom of the mind
a woman, blowy, engulfed in a snotgreen housecoat...
...gathered a play of children about her...
the toastmasters...where richard is a member...*the man who is unable to talk to his fellow-american today is unable to eat.*
twenty members present and 3 guests including richard
sergeant-at-arms of a telephone company toastmaster's club
the bored guard
piomkin...a possible director..."one of the few artists we have"...but nope, not him.
the man...all caps...at mammoth studios
elgee productions...richard and leo...a variation on lumpy grits...or...s'posed to be
laura harmon...tall, heavily-breasted young woman of 24 or 6...secretary to richard for a time

mr. knowles, the personal manager...who sent laura to richard
miss hartwell...richard's high school english teacher
tone in fullerton...a wholesale car dealer...or something
barefoot pete in santa monica, ditto
fred mccullers in pasadena...ditto
the man's (all caps), secretary, an old white-haired man of about 65
milo linder...helps richard w/casting
a salvation army captain, louise, 47-yr-old
elevator operator...busboy...waiters...bartenders...waitresses
two very young, importuning private soldiers
a blonde and a chief petty officer, u.s. navy
frances...a girl swimmer richard knew as a 14-yr-old
flaps heartwell, negro guitar player, music, for movie
six superfluous musicians (how the industry works...union, verily, hallelujah and amen, now and
forevermore)
tom ruggerio, film editor for the movie
zelda, a stripper from the trinidad club, provokes the appropriate audience reaction...a kind of unholy glee
tommy allison, the director of photography for movie
cameramen, grips, sound technicians, make-up men, sweepers, painters
frank shantz, a man of about 40, van nuys
a tired old gentleman in a white smock
mrs mildred curry shantz, plays trucker's housewife in movie
mrs larsen...owns orange grove where chet worked
chet wilson, an out-of-work actor hired to play the truck driver

a note on the narration

willeford has headings, **fadeout...montage...ripple...background...go to black...wipe...more
background...dissolve to...snyopsis**...as if the entire story is a movie script? i take it? no idea, me, not
having read an actual *script* prior...but that's what i suspect. meh...okay.

story

richard is bored. *this period of [his] life should have been a happy one*... he has the time to worry about the
plight of the american worker, laboring and so forth...so...he decides to make a movie to awaken the worker.
aaaargh...hoo-rah! "one thing!...one creative accomplishment could wipe away the useless days" ...so...a
movie, "the man who got away"...about a truck driver drives 12 on 12 off between between l.a. and san
fran...hits a child...and will not stop..."the message was important! it had to be brought to the attention of the
public!"

a quote or two

it may be fun to know, but it's even more fun to be fooled.

update, finished, 18 dec 12, 9:45 p.m. e.s.t. tuesday evening

...grrrrrr!! had this typed out last night and hit save but the fecking system had crashed...or something.

anyway...

i liked the telling of this one...that quirky start...the way willeford set it up as if the reader is viewing a movie...sorta...the change from 3rd to 1st...and feck it! i wish i could recall my thoughts from last night...when i actually finished the fucking story.

..okay...just went to my "notes and marks" on the...was not going to try to recall as it slipped...was rather going to simply complete the character list above.

...but there is a swift and sudden mood change in the 4th-5th act of this one...the bottom dropped out...richard had the rug pulled out from under him....and there's a santa claus outfit involved. heh! thought the timing of that could not have been much better...

i think i'm marking this one as a favorite...as much for the way the story is *told* as for how the temperature changes to that brutal freeze at the end.

Jake says

Willeford is one of my favorites but I couldn't connect with this one. A send up of the movie industry in the same way his *Burnt Orange Heresy* is a send up of the art world, it has the sarcastic tone and dark humor but lacks *Orange*'s energy and quality ending. I get the point he was trying to make with the character and the script but it still felt incomplete. Or at least wasn't reaching me.

Mharper Harper says

This is a very strange book in it's way.

The first half of the book Richard Hudson, a used-car salesman, has returned to his native L.A. to establish a franchise. He sets up the car lot, wanes philosophical about American greed (dividing the world into Feebs, feeble-minded rubes, and those who-understand-how-the world-works), sets up house at his childhood home with his prima-donna mother and her disgraced movie producer husband, and beds his sister. It reads a bit like American Psycho.

Then in act two Hudson decides to makes a movie. He writes the script, which is dark and bizarre, and directs the thing. The book keeps things flowing with most of the action focusing on selling the movie to the studio and gathering people to make the movie. Things don't go the way he expects and all hell breaks loose.

The last act is his running around doing insane things. I don't want to give away too much.

The book in someways mirrors the plot of the movie, but not too much as to be tacky.

The writing and pacing of the story is great, and while the main character isn't likable in the least, you can understand him. I suppose the theme of the book, or rather it's moral, is that we are the people who, carelessly, make the world a rotten place. We remember that girl who broke our hearts and callously disregard those hearts we broke. We're thieves that complain bitterly when robbed.

Not a polite read, but a fun one.

Carla Remy says

The Pope of Psychopulp. Okay, I read that on the first page. The 3rd book I've read by Willeford, and I liked it the best. Awesome. Weird.

Andy says

Very funny noir about a psycho used car dealer who gets the itch to make a movie and walks all over everybody in sight to get it done. If the film version ever shows on the Sundance Channel or IFC drop everything and watch it. This is one of the few movies that totally gets the book right. Charles Willeford rules!

Jim says

The title has little relevance, the book moves along and is cleverly organized as a film treatment. Williford is a unique talent, and an acquired taste. If I find the movie based upon the book, I will certainly watch it.

Tom Mooney says

THE WOMAN CHASER by Charles Willeford.

Willeford is impossible to pin down. He wrote all sorts of novels, always pulpy and economic, always good. The Woman Chaser follows Richard, a wildly successful used car salesman who, bored by his brilliance, embarks on a vanity film project in 50s LA.

Richard's movie dreams dissolve around him and he decides to take revenge on those who have wronged him.

Slightly creepy, always uncomfortable, it serves as an insight into the psyche of American males of the era, particularly in LA, where the American Dream was still a romantic possibility.

Not my favourite Willeford (see Cockfighter and Pick-Up) but very good reading as always.

Cathy DuPont says

Hummm. Another book by Charles Willeford and again, how would this be classified, what genre?

As a writer, Willeford is very difficult to categorize and rightly so. I've read almost all of his books and they range from absurd to zany from intense to humorous.

The Woman Chaser falls somewhere between a to z starting with the opening paragraph which begins like a movie script. For good reason, too. After a few chapters that's what it's about; a movie script and Richard Hudson's life in humdrum Amercia, living (or not) the Amercian dream.

Hudson is an off-the-chart great used car salesman who gets bored with all the money he's made selling used cars. With the big 'thumbs up' from his boss in San Francisco, Richard buys a used car lot in Los Angeles, gussies it up, staffs it, reconnects with his family (he grew up in LA) and soon thereafter leaves for a hotel room to write his first movie script. He has a strong desire, an urgent need to be creative apparently having lost his himself in making money in the used car business. Richard is like 'is this all there is?' or 'What's it all About, Alfie?'

His family consists of his 'forever a ballerina' mother, step-father who is about his age and a down and out movie producer, and his step-sister, a nubile teenager. Beginning with absurd or ending with zany, either term will do, my favorite part in the book is when he finds his mother in the well-appointed basement ballet dancing to *The Miraculous Mandarin*. He strips off his shirt and begins dancing with her becoming the "the Miraculous Mandarin himself, the damndest Chinaman anybody ever saw! I chased, I pursued, I made impossible leaps and came down as lightly as a wind-wafted cigarette paper." What a sight, in my mind, to behold when Richard "pranced, cavorted, darted, turned, glided, bent, stretched, and did a mad *fouettee* on one leg" until he almost lost reason, he says. That was the turning point, when he decided that writing and directing the movie was his destiny. The only reason for his existence at this point in his life.

I found myself from time to time thinking about the movie *American Beauty*, a mid-life crisis in the making. Here's Richard, in mid-life crisis mode, and I'm reading it line by line. And the title, well, women are throwaways for him, but then so is everything else when he decides his life is not complete until his movie is written, directed (by himself, of course) and in the theaters as the biggest success since *Gone With the Wind*. When his masterpiece is completed, well, that's the story, so I'll leave it up to you to take the time to read this little jewel of a book, a scant 192 pages.

In my view, Willeford is underestimated, if estimated at all on anyone's radar. He's relatively unknown except for those interested in noir (he wrote from the 1950's-1980's) although he can't, in my mind, be classified in that category either. But he was a great underrated talent who should be studied in creative writing classes and read by even more readers than some of the noted authors of today. He's a vivid and a simply great writer in my opinion.

In my list of favorite authors, Willeford is right up there with my favorites. My only regret is that he went long periods of time (12 years) without writing or publishing anything so he has a very small library of books; unfortunately, I'm near the end of reading them. Too bad for me but good for you if you haven't read him. He's a must in on my list and you are missing out if you haven't read him yet.
