



The Score

Richard Stark

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It was an impossible crime: knock off a huge plant payroll, all the banks, and all the stores in one entire city in one night. But there was one thief good enough to try — Parker. All he needed was the right men, the right plan, and the right kind of help from Lady Luck. The men and the plan were easy; Lady Luck was another story. She turned out to be a good-looking blonde with a taste for booze and eyes for Parker. And Parker knew this chilling caper could either be the perfect crime... or a set-up that would land him in jail — for life.

The Score Details

Date : Published 1964 by Pocket Books (first published 1963)

ISBN :

Author : Richard Stark

Format : Mass Market Paperback 213 pages

Genre : Mystery, Crime, Fiction, Noir, Thriller

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From Reader Review The Score for online ebook

Mike says

Good semi-noir entry, with Parker pulled into a heist unlike any he's been involved with before - an entire town ripe for the plucking.

Jane Stewart says

Weak 3 stars. There wasn't enough suspense or the unexpected.

This wasn't as good as some of the others in the series, but it was ok. I'm intrigued with Parker, and that keeps me reading.

Edgars has an idea for stealing from several businesses at the same time in a North Dakota town. He tells a guy who brings in Parker to plan and run it. It will require 12 to 20 guys.

The ending was weak. Things felt hanging and not wrapped up well. I would have liked a different ending for some of the good guys who were victims. And I wanted something really bad to happen to Edgars. What happened to him was not painful enough.

The narrator Stephen R. Thorne was good, but I wish he had a rougher, darker or more menacing voice for Parker. His Parker voice was too clean cut and normal sounding.

THE SERIES:

This is book 5 in the 24 book series. These stories are about bad guys. They rob. They kill. They're smart. Most don't go to jail. Parker is the main bad guy, a brilliant strategist. He partners with different guys for different jobs in each book.

If you are new to the series, I suggest reading the first three and then choose among the rest. A few should be read in order since characters continue in a sequel fashion. Those are listed below (with my star ratings). The rest can be read as stand alones.

The first three books in order:

4 stars. The Hunter (Point Blank movie with Lee Marvin 1967) (Payback movie with Mel Gibson)

3 1/2 stars. The Man with the Getaway Face (The Steel Hit)

4 stars. The Outfit.

Read these two in order:

5 stars. Slayground (Bk #14)

5 stars. Butcher's Moon (Bk #16)

Read these four in order:

4 1/2 stars. The Sour Lemon Score (Bk #12)

2 1/2 stars. Firebreak (Bk #20)

(not read) Nobody Runs Forever (Bk #22)

2 1/2 stars. Dirty Money (Bk #24)

Others that I gave 4 or more stars to:

The Jugger (Bk #6), The Seventh (Bk#7), The Handle (Bk #8), Deadly Edge (Bk#13), Flashfire (Bk#19)

DATA:

Narrative mode: 3rd person. Unabridged audiobook length: 4 hrs and 20 mins. Swearing language: mild including religious swear words, but rarely used. Sexual content: none. Setting: 1964 mostly N. Dakota. Book copyright: 1964. Genre: noir crime fiction.

Nate says

Definitely my favorite of the Parker novels since, unfortunately, the first one. Basically it's about Parker and a crew of some known and unknown variables robbing an entire town. I mean, what else can I say? If you're not interested in this book just from reading that sentence, there's nothing I can say to get your attention. These books are short as hell so it's really hard to get bored, and Parker is of course one of the all-time tough guys, a dude for whom it's a routine workday when he kills some guy by socking him in the throat. It's only made a mildly-perturbing workday when he finds out that said guy was an associate of one of his new coworkers. What else do you people need?!

Greg says

The first place Parker heads to in *The Hunter* when he gets to New York City to seek revenge on being double-crossed and beginning Stark's series of novels is the Wall Street area. *The Score*'s basic premise is a group of criminals go to a small factory town in North Dakota with the purpose of robbing every business in town of all it's money during one night. Nowhere in the book is it ever mentioned what will be left of the town after Parker and his friends steal all of the payroll money from the factory, make off with all the money from the vaults of the town's two banks and steal all the money on hand from every other store on the town's main street. One could get the idea that insurance companies will ante up for the losses, or one could see this as Parker orchestrating a job that leaves one small town destroyed.

I kind of like to think that the latter is what happened. And in that case I like the reading of this book as an analogy to Wall Street fucking over Main Street (to borrow simple minded contemporary slogans), or as a no less criminal or unethical version of a *Wall Street*'s Gordan Gecko dismantling of large groups of peoples lives in order to feed his greed (which is always good, but in Parker's world Gecko-ian greed would probably led to the early death of the man whose eyes are bigger than his stomach). This can be seen as the coast (because all the major players on Parkers side seem to come from the East Coast) pissing all over the poor little fly-over states.

I loved the idea of a whole town being robbed. One of the problems with the book was that it got a little clunky with so many characters moving around in so short of a book, and a lot of the characters kind of blended into a blob of a cookie-cutter professional criminal who is good at his job but doesn't have any other defining characteristics. But, I think Stark might have been using this book to populate Parker's criminal world with some names and faces that he will be able to use in future books, sort of like he did in some of the side stories of *The Outfit*. This book was almost as much fun as *The Outfit* but with not nearly as many

crimes and heists being pulled in *the Score* it just doesn't quite live up to book number 3.

Next up, *The Jugger*, where I'll probably write more about Jean-Luc Godard and Anna Karina than the actual book.

Mike (the Paladin) says

So, Parker...you knew better than to get involved in this cluster.....errr, flop. We all hope you learned from this experience that when your instincts tell you to pass a job by, pass it by.

Lots of action in this somewhat convoluted overly complicated heist...and Parker knew it was too complicated. he almost walked away, and I'll bet by the time it was over he was wishing he had.

Okay so I like the series it's good full of action...and makes me feel a little creepy about liking them. I mean Parker is a pretty nasty customer.

Still the books are good reads.

Enjoy.

Lynn says

This is my favorite Parker yet. We get a sliver of insight into Parker's character and a very exciting heist story.

David Schaafsma says

This is Parker #5, and a good one. For 3/4 of the story this is a pretty straightforward story of a group of men who decide to "take" (i.e., steal all the money from) a small isolated North Dakota town. Parker decides that it is just a crazy enough plan to work, though he also is the lead architect of this meticulous plan. He's worried about a couple aspects of it, but it works like clockwork. Most of the way. What did you expect, a heist that just works perfectly?! Part of the beauty of this carefully crafted tale is anticipating just when it is the double-cross will come down.

But "score" the boys do, in spite of a few cogs in the machine. That's one reason to read this, that this is just a carefully crafted story of how this could work, very lean and straightforward, with a mean, tough, unsentimental guy, Parker, at the helm.

From a writer's perspective, it is hard to sell a book where a guy just hates small talk. Or any talk, really. So you need some foil. Most characters are less polished than Parker, less disciplined, so they are mostly variously colorful "characters," but he does trust the steady and no-nonsense Handy McKay. With Handy out of the picture for this book--he's retired, maybe--Stark introduces actor Alan Grofield, who quotes Shakespeare (on the job! comparing the heist to Shakespearan drama: "all the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players") and is very talkative and humorous. He supports his acting career by doing

these pretty lucrative jobs. Grofield is one of the best aspects of this story.

And in the end, another score, for Parker, with a woman, of course:

"Parker, are you gonna be nice to me?

"Why should I? What would happen if I did that?"

"I don't know. Maybe I'll turn into a butterfly."

"Hmm, let's see."

[Things ensue, but this is a family social media site, sorry]

"Hmm. A butterfly!"

:)

Here's another version of The Score I liked, #3 of 4 comics adaptations of Parker books, by Darwyn Cooke, my review here:

<https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>

F.R. says

Even though 'The Score' is a short novel – my copy runs to a distinctly svelte 158 pages – this is clearly Richard Stark going for epic. The idea of robbing not just a bank, or a factory pay-roll, but an entire city is just genius. It's a big idea, but one Stark puts across with a beautiful economy. Of course a raid like this needs a sizeable crew and each of the gang of rogues who are pulled together for this heist is beautifully and efficiently sketched in just a few sentences. (What's more for fans of the series this is the very first appearance of Alan Grofield, Shakespearean actor, thief and the other character the Richard Stark name would write books about. (view spoiler)) It's a fantastic concept and the actual heist is terrifically executed, so it's just a shame that it all falls flat towards the end, with the final quarter being a lacklustre tying together of loose ends. Yes, it fits Stark/Westlake's view that these are books about professionals as that last section is about the downtime and bickering for a gang of professionals after such a crime, but – as other Parker novels expertly prove – you can marry that professionalism to drama and suspense. Here Stark fails to do that, so ends with a damp squib rather than more explosions.

I read a remark the other day about the existential nature of the Parker books, and there is a definite lack of a God, be it either the religious kind or the omnipotent god of crime fiction who generally makes sure that the rules of basic morality are upheld and bad people get their comeuppance. Instead these books are about men who make their own rules and carve out their own kind of chaotic order from the void. But for all their shaping of their own world, since they only really come alive when they're working and committing these crimes, they are essentially like Sisyphus just pushing a rock up a hill again and again and again. The money always runs out and a fresh scheme – or is it always just variations on the same scheme? – always starts up.

It's a theory I'll think over more as I re-read the rest of these books, but what certainly struck me about this

one is that it has a kind of gleeful nihilism. The city that's raided – Copper Canyon – is small town Americana at its finest: a sleepy police department; teenagers who are a bit rebellious but respectful; a place where everybody knows everybody else. It's a town that should have its own Jessica Fletcher, the kind of city David Lynch would love. And here it's blown apart. It's peace and serenity destroyed, and there's no authority figure who can make it right, no Jessica Fletcher who can solve the crime. From being a sleepy berg its suddenly dragged to the edge of the abyss for seemingly no reason whatsoever. The book revels in this destruction, but then forgets about it – the men who cause this chaos walk away with a shrug of their shoulders and scarcely a glance back. There is no authority, no rules, no moral God – this is Parker's world and you better get used to it.

Tyler says

As I've stated before, these Parker books fucking rule. Of the ones I've yet read, this one may rule hardest.

Mark says

Parker is lollygagging in Miami in-between jobs when he gets a tip on a big score. The job is loaded with red flags, but the take is too tempting; rob an entire town in North Dakota. It will take loads of coordination, a team of thieves, an insider, and more than a little luck. The story is a straightforward account of the set-up, execution and aftermath, but the sparse writing keeps it clipping along. A little far-fetched at times (still not sure why the entire town is under a night curfew), and a little predictable, but I enjoyed it. The changing narrative let's us get into other character's heads, and although this book doesn't really advance Parker as a character, I feel like I know him a little better. That's actually an interesting aspect of this story, as Parker is not the lead, but simply part of the cast. The Score doesn't pack the punch of the first three books but I like where things are headed.

Jim says

I think I've hit my limit of Parker books for now. The formula was a bit too predictable, although this was his most ambitious job yet. Unfortunately, I guessed most of the high points pretty much from the beginning. Still, the details were fun to follow & Parker is a wonderful anti-hero. While I have #6, I'm missing the odd numbers after that through #12. I'll see if I can't get them for another Parker marathon at another time.

Dan Schwent says

An amateur named Edgars hires Parker, Grofield, and ten others to help him with an outlandish plan: to rob an entire North Dakota town! Things go smoothly until it turns out Edgars has ideas of his own...

After reading five of the Parker novels, I figured out why love them so much. It's two aspects: Parker's superb ability to plan heists and trying to figure out how the inevitable double cross is going to go when it happens. The Score illustrates this nicely. As usual, Parker's cruel professionalism drives the story. Even though you know Edgars is going to be a problem, you have no idea how big of a problem he'll be until the

big reveal.

Yet another home run from Richard Stark and Parker.

Krycek says

Parker, bored with hanging around at the beach, decides to check out another larcenous job opportunity, but there's something hinky about the guy organizing the whole thing. Against his better judgement, Parker deals in because the payoff could be big. This time Parker and the gang knock off a *whole town!* But you know what happens when things seem to go *too* smoothly...

I've read Parker #1, #3 and now #5. You'd think I was hitting all the odd ones first. Nah. That's just what my local library has readily available without placing a reservation for a specific copy. Doesn't matter, though. I'll catch up on them all, but I am really digging this series now and even get a real sense of continuity, even though I skipped a couple. Salsa, whom I last saw in *The Outfit* (and for some reason I imagine as looking like Henry Silva) is in on this job. Handy, also appearing in *The Outfit* has a brief mention. So I am getting the sense of continuity and world-building that makes me feel very comfortable and looking forward to each next volume. Other new-to-me characters are introduced as well, each with a distinct and amusing personality.

Stark's (Westlake's) writing is as crisp as a freshly printed hundred-dollar bill, making these novel eminently readable. Like Parker himself, there is nothing unnecessary or extraneous. This is something of a rarity, I find, among many of the novels of today that are often five or six-hundred pages long. I sometimes wonder if the art of economical language has been lost.

And Parker, of course, is a great character. He is completely, uncompromisingly amoral; the epitome of the practical man. There was a moment when I thought Parker was getting a little soft, but later learned that he was just being practical. While he is goal-oriented when a job is on, afterward he's sexually ravenous and never seems to have any trouble finding someone to release some tension with. He is totally independent, outside the system. No ties, no obligations. It occurred to me that this is perfect material for my mid-life crisis. I don't have enough money to buy a red sports car. I'm not successful enough to mess around with an age-inappropriate girlfriend. I don't need a toupee (yet). If one is going to hit a mid-life crisis one could certainly do worse than a Parker novel.

Ed says

I've been a long fan of Richard Stark's (aka Donald Westlake) hardboiled Parker the thief series. THE SCORE is set in a boxed-in Western town where Parker and a large gang hit several banks and the mine's payroll at once. A clever twist is dropped into the last part. Parker is like Mr. Spock, all business and no time for humor or fools. One of the gang members, Alan Grofield, appears later in LEMONS NEVER LIE published by Hard Case Crime.

Kemper says

When Parker first hears about the plan to loot all of Copper Canyon, he thinks it's insane. How can you rob an entire city? However, when he sees the details and realizes that this is an isolated town that could be completely cut off and its police force neutralized, Parker starts thinking that it just might be possible if he can find the right men for the job.

A solid crew is put together, a plan developed, and even the amateur who came up with the idea, Edgars, seems smart and willing to let Parker call the shots. Parker is about to pull off one of the boldest heists of his career. Of course, it's never that easy.

Stark (a/k/a Westlake) makes what seems like an over-the-top plot of a gang of thieves taking over a town to crack multiple safes in one night seem feasible. I loved the plotting and preparations for this job, and the complications thrown at Parker in this one are surprising.

This book also introduced another thief, Grofield, who would star in several other Stark novels. Where Parker is the emotionless professional, Grofield is a chatty actor who funds his career with his robberies. An increasingly exasperated Parker is always telling Grofield to shut up, and his character adds a fresh and fun dynamic to the caper.

Skip says

A superb caper. An amateur gets in touch with Parker, who is getting antsy from inactivity and a dwindling bank account. Eventually, he is convinced that a small town in North Dakota, Copper Canyon, can be robbed, even though it is accessible by only one highway, and is completely isolated with a state police station just outside of town. Lots of targets for a big payday: a mine payroll, two banks and several stores with large daily receipts, a small cadre of defenders, few conduits with the outside world, and a enforced nighttime curfew. Great planning until the amateur's agenda is revealed and all hell breaks loose. Very enjoyable.

David says

Well, let's see here. There's been a lot of Richard Stark hoopla around our little corner of Goodreads lately, and I am proud to offer this review as minor corrective to the unbridled enthusiasms unleashed herein. Despite whatever I may say in the course of this review that might lead you to believe otherwise, I did actually enjoy this book. But it is slight, insubstantial, and clunky at times. I'd like to say, with some slippage in the analogy, that it's the equivalent of watching one of those women-in-peril television movies that Lifetime rebroadcasts. They're kind of dumb and pointless and obvious, but the fact of the matter is that at the end of the two hours you've somehow sat on your ass and watched the whole damn thing, so it must have been successful in some important sense. (This is an especially noteworthy success—for me, at least—since not even the big-budget, much-loved *Inception* achieved it.) Despite the fact that the TV movies are often poorly-executed and have all their plot points transmitted via smoke signals from miles off, I stick around to see if psychotic stalker Jack Wagner manages to rape Judith Light in an empty hockey arena or to find out if the vindictive blonde sex-kitten in Shannen Doherty's college rock band murders her in retaliation for Doherty beating her in a talent contest when they were kids.

Richard Stark—at least in *The Score*—is not really what I would call a very good writer. And Richard Stark's editor is not what I would call a very good editor. Witness this passage:

The prow car was a Ford, two years old, painted light green and white, with *Police* written in large letters on the doors and hood and trunk. The dashboard lights were green, and there was a small red dot of light, like a ruby, on the radio.

I don't know about you, but I am kind of disappointed that Stark didn't tell us whether the upholstery was contrast stitched or whether the heater vents were set to floor or bi-level. (Before you start second-guessing, none of the details Stark reports RE: the police car is relevant to anything in the book. For instance, the small red dot of light does not later blind a would-be assassin—or some other comparable hijinks. These used car ads are just written up by Stark, inserted into the text, and never referred to again.)

There is really no psychological depth in this book whatsoever. People merely do things and say things. Occasionally things they say allude to a hypothetical human emotion or a living, breathing subjectivity, but more often than not these allusions are of the explicitly useless varieties. (In one scene, for example, two accomplished safe 'juggers' argue about whether to blow up the safes or drill them. The fact that preferences exist seems to indicate that they are not wholly automatons. This is encouraging.) There is one character—named Grofield—who likes to quote Shakespeare and has a lot more personality than the rest, but still... it's only a relative difference and wouldn't count for much in any other book.

Another problem with Stark's writing style (at least in this outing) is that he doesn't have much sense of pacing and narrative momentum. In the first half of the novel, we hear the characters discuss their plans for a heist in specific detail. And in the second half of the novel, we see the characters actually execute this same plan, for the most part successfully and in keeping with the plan (until near the end). This redundancy seems to violate a commandment of Writing 101 to me. If I were Stark's teacher, I would have told him merely to explain the big picture of the heist at the beginning and then allow us to see the plan as it unfolds. (Again, a good editor probably should have edified him. But I keep forgetting that this is genre fiction; devoted fans probably find these tropes and weaknesses essential to the 'comfort food' quality of the books.)

Anyway... would you believe I still kind of enjoyed the book? It was pretty dumb, but I enjoyed it. It would be ideal for a short plane ride or a long wait in the doctor's office where the other reading options are *Parenting* and *Golf Digest* magazines.

Eric says

This best comparison for this book is *Ocean's Eleven*, if it were more hardboiled than flashy and the goal was to steal an entire town instead of a casino. Yes, you read that right, an entire town -- not the town's bank, jewelry store, or mining payroll, but all of them simultaneously. What could possibly go wrong?

This is the first Parker book I have read -- in fact, it is the first I have read by author Richard Stark/Donald Westlake. I enjoyed reading about Parker and would definitely read another of his heist adventures.

Richard says

The plan might sound completely nuts but it's too tempting for Parker to pass up. This time, he signs onto a heist to rob the entire town of Copper Canyon, North Dakota! Author Richard Stark had a real knack for conceiving really original plots for his various heist novels. As I've mentioned in other reviews, these books are so simple and although there's not really a whole to talk about, so far they've been consistently enjoyable for what they are. The omniscient POV style that is a trademark to the Parker novels works damn well here as the heist reaches its crescendo. The pace really starts to move as we jump from one point of view to another. If you're looking for a quick, dependable read, so far you can't go wrong with these Parker books, and *The Score* is a great example!

brian says

a small town in north dakota sits deep in a narrow valley. a single road the only way in or out. parker and eleven men head down at midnight and methodically take over the tiny police department then the fire department then the phone switchboard. once the town's defenses have been neutralized and communication is cut off from the outside world, the team knocks over the town's two banks, the jewelry store, and then robs the town's entire payroll. a heist to the extreme! forget one bank, one store, one person, one job... let's do an entire town in a single night! that's *the score*. and it's terrific. spare and cold and angry and intelligent -- and there are some good women in there, too: one trashy, one sweet, both willing to toss it all away for a life of adventure and crime and hard-as-rocks men.

fleshy asked, after my review of *slayground*, why, with such a rapturous review, did i only slap it with four stars? well, i think it is a 4 star book but *the score* might very well be a 5. but i'm still giving it 4. lemme explain.

charles ardai, in his introduction, writes:

"Reading the Parker novels is a little like watching a jazz musician at work. The performance begins with a familiar melody, the unadorned restatement of a theme, but then the performer cuts loose, interpreting, elaborating, inverting, transforming, improvising.

At a certain level of abstraction, of course, the Parker novels are all the same... and yet, Stark somehow manages to assemble these elements into a thoroughly new book. Bix Biederbecke famously said he never played a solo the same way twice, and neither did Stark. It may be the same song each time, but all the notes are different."

yup. stark works off a familiar template and it's great: he usually begins with the second act, as the action is already moving along, and then explains all we really need to know from the first act along the way. we then watch parker create and interact with his team, intellectually figure out how best to do 'the job', and then it all goes into effect and we watch parker improvise as shit falls apart and/or goes wrong.

now i believe *the score* to be, on one level, a perfect little crime book. but it definitely feels a part of something larger: as if this individual book is just one chapter in 'the life of parker' -- analogous to, say,

updike's rabbit stories in which the individual novels might deserve 3 or 4 stars, but taken as a whole, it's an undeniable fiver. so, maybe i judge too harshly. maybe a five star book doesn't need to be a giant epic encompassing and totaling much more than the sum of its parts... who knows? who cares? i know parker wouldn't. he'd grunt and walk away.

next up: *the hunter*
