



The Jugger

Richard Stark

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Not many men knew what Parker did for a living, because what he did was steal. But Joe Sheer, a retired safecracker — also known in the business as a jugger — knew. He knew Parker's alias, his whereabouts, his plans... and because he knew too much, he knew to keep his mouth shut. Or die. But Joe was more than ready to trade what he knew for a soft mattress, windows without bars on them, and what every man needs — his freedom. So Parker had come to Nebraska to find the old jugger... and probably murder him. But what Parker found was trouble: Joe was already six feet under; something very valuable was missing; and somebody was planning a funeral... Parker's. Too bad for somebody — that Parker wasn't an easy man to kill.

The Jugger Details

Date : Published 1965 by Pocket Books

ISBN :

Author : Richard Stark

Format : Paperback

Genre : Mystery, Crime, Fiction, Noir, Thriller

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From Reader Review The Jugger for online ebook

Jane Stewart says

An average story most of the way, but I liked the twists and turns at the end.

Parker comes to town after receiving a strange letter from one of his guys. The guy died after sending the letter. Strange things are happening. A bad cop is involved. Parker is trying to figure it out. Then Parker kills someone which shocked me. I shouldn't like this because he killed a kind-of-good person. But the "shock" was what I liked. And the ending I liked. It seemed Parker had everything all nice and neat and packaged, and then a little thread here and there didn't fit. The investigating cop pulled, and things began unraveling. The result was twists and turns that I did not expect.

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 6 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 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 10 mins. Swearing language: Christ used once. Sexual content: none. Setting: 1965 mostly Sagamore, Nebraska. Book copyright: 1965. Genre: noir crime fiction.

F.R. says

‘The Jugger’ is an atypical Parker novel.

There are others, true, which don’t focus on a robbery, but instead deal with the aftermath. But in ‘The Jugger’, there’s no robbery in the background, it’s all aftermath. Yet even though this is quieter and more restrained than other Parker novels, that doesn’t mean the stakes aren’t high, as what ends up being threatened here is one of the most fundamental things of all – Parker’s secret identity.

We’ve already in these books seen Parker come back from the dead; we’ve already seen him as the strongest, smartest, most powerful man in any room he’s in. It’s not a huge leap then to see Parker as the series’ Super-Hero, or at least Super Anti-Hero. And like all good super individuals, Parker has a secret identity.

When he’s on, he’s Parker, super thief extraordinaire; but on downtime, he’s mild-mannered businessman and laundromat owner, Charles Willis.

Maybe it’s not the best of disguise as those who are a little dubious themselves look at him and realise that he isn’t quite comfortable in those clothes, that he looks more dangerous than your average businessman. But then your proper businessmen do see him as one of their own, even sticking their necks out for him as “*the federal government doesn’t understand businessmen*”.

But what’s particularly interesting is that the book explicitly states that Parker only works for a couple of months a year, the rest of the time he is Charles Willis. That’s the name he uses and that’s the life he lives. So even though – in these pages – the character of Willis is a lot vaguer, you could argue that Parker is more Willis than Parker – it’s just that novels about him hanging out in Miami doing nothing aren’t as much fun.

If only Parker hadn’t checked in using the Willis name when he went to investigate the death of his old friend, Joe Sheer, then he wouldn’t be in this mess. Now though he finds himself trapped in a small town with dead bodies piling up around him, a dodgy cop who is after money which doesn’t actually exist and a sharper cop who might just blow things apart. But the fact that Parker has used Willis’s name and Willis’s actual address means he has potentially more to lose here than anyone can imagine.

As such Parker is forced to play detective so he can extricate himself cleanly from this town, but Parker is the kind of detective who might commit more murders than he solves.

For all that it’s different, ‘The Jugger’ is an understated and thrilling read. And in the third section – you know that section in every Parker book where focus drifts away from the man himself – we do get the tale of an old man tortured and beaten to the point of suicide by a vicious bully, and it’s some of the best and most affecting writing anywhere in the Stark books.

David Schaafsma says

The Jugger, Stark’s sixth Parker novel, is not written in a typical Parker formula. Parker travels from Miami to Nebraska ostensibly to help his old colleague, Joe Sheer, a jugger (safecracker!) and finds him dead.

The most scathing review of this book is by Donald Westlake (using Richard Stark as a pseudonym) himself:

"I spoiled a book by having him do something he wouldn't do. The sixth book in the series is called *The Jugger*, and that book is one of the worst failures I've ever had. The problem with it is, in the beginning of the book this guy calls him and says 'I'm in trouble out here and these guys are leaning on me and I need help,' and Parker goes to help him. I mean, he wouldn't do that, and in fact, the guy wouldn't even think to call him! (laughs)"

Most reviewers agree with Westlake that this is a bad book, but not me. I don't think Parker was ever really going to help Sheer; he was worried that Sheer, older, mentally losing it, might betray Parker's secondary identity. I have this feeling that Westlake/Stark may have forgotten some of the details of his own book (he was writing 2-3 of them a year!), but I'm just one reader here.

Unlike an elegantly written and typical heist tale, such as the previous *The Score*, this one involves no heist at all, though it appears he and others are looking for Sheer's supposed fortune. In that venture, he has to match wits with, Younger, a corrupt police chief; a slick FBI agent, a doctor and a sleazy thief, Tiftus, that Parker would never EVER work with at any time. He gets entangled with Tiftus's girlfriend for a time, too. There is some money involved, maybe, but the main purpose of Parker's hanging around is to protect his fake identity. So is this as interesting as a heist? I don't think so, though it is still well-written, with some clever twists.

The book takes some time to slow down and share some of Parker's philosophy, which is intriguing:

"... a man never apologized for what cards he'd been dealt; what did Joe Sheer think all of a sudden at age seventy, he was the captain of his fate? A man was what the world decided he would be, and where the world decided he would be, and in the condition the world had chosen for him. If the world decided to deal Joe a bad hand this time, it wasn't up to him to apologize for not having better cards."

The novelist John Banville says of Parker, that he is "the perfection of that existential man whose earliest models we met in Nietzsche and Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky." Or Camus's *The Stranger*. Brutal, pragmatic, amoral, possibly also sociopathic.

No actual jugging takes place in this book; in fact, not that much memorable really happens, though the primary reason he went to Nebraska to protect his false identity (the one he uses ten months out of every year when he is not supporting himself doing heists) is a kind of failure, which I assume is a set up for the next book or so.

Krycek says

I guess a "jugger" is a guy that breaks into safes, and Joe Sheer was one of the best, *was* being the operative word. Now he's come down with a bad case of dead and Parker's concerned, not because Sheer was his golf buddy or anything, but he was one of the few people with a direct connection to Parker and Parker's got a sweet little cover identity set up. He doesn't want anyone nosing around Sheer's death to blow it. Throw in an aging crook who looks like he failed an audition for *The Monkees* and a greedy small-town cop looking for a big payoff and you've got yourself another great Parker read.

The *Parker* novels are consistently excellent books (at least for me so far) and there's basically nothing to say

about the writing that I haven't said before. The writing is sharp as a tack and is a welcome respite from today's bloated five-hundred page thrillers.

There are a couple of interesting things that I've noticed about this one. For one, there's no big heist in *The Jugger*. Parker's just out to preserve his cover identity, but I find that an interesting analog to Donald Westlake's own "cover identity," Richard Stark.

Also, we get a little glimpse into Parker's philosophy of life:

...a man never apologized for what cards he'd been dealt; what did Joe Sheer think all of a sudden at age seventy, he was the captain of his fate? A man was what the world decided he would be, and where the world decided he would be, and in the condition the world had chosen for him. If the world decided to deal Joe a bad hand this time, it wasn't up to him to apologize for not having better cards.

It's an interesting look into the fatalistic worldview of Parker, whom John Banville in the introduction describes as "the perfection of that existential man whose earliest models we met in Nietzsche and Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky." Parker's a symbol of Sisyphean revolt, making no apologies for the cards he's been dealt because he's always got another one up his sleeve.

William says

A little slow developing, but the last third was excellent. Parker is a viper; don't mess with him.

Dan Schwent says

Parker heads to Nebraska to help out a friend in trouble, Joe Sheer, a retired safecracker (or jugger). Only when he gets to town, Sheer is dead and a crooked cop and a crook both think Parker knows where to find Joe's stash of stolen money. But does the money even exist?

The Jugger is a break from the usual Parker formula. Instead of planning a job, Parker has to get a crooked sheriff off his back and convince the interested parties that Sheer didn't have any money. Of course, Parker does it in his inimitable style. I was surprised as hell at the fate of one of the other people looking for the cash. And the end set up the next few books nicely, as did Sheer's death since he was Parker's go-between.

The Parker books are worth every crime fiction fan's time and money. Put down your Nora Roberts and go get them!

Jim says

I really liked this one. Stark was getting too formulaic & this one broke out of that mold in a great way. Parker is still himself, but the circumstances were not what he's used to. As usual, Steven R. Thorn did a

good job of reading. Very well done!

Ed says

Somewhat of a departure from Parker's usual storyline, we find our favorite thief returning to a small town in Nebraska. He ties up a few loose ends at the death of his former partner, a safecracker ("jugger"). This is one of my favorite Parker books, to date. Lots of close shaves, greed, and desperados. Westlake's hardboiled writing is sharp. Not much humor or wisecracks distracts the reader.

Mark says

The sixth Parker novel is somewhat of an oddity, there is no heist involved at all. Parkers' general job as organizer and enforcer does not come into play this time.

Parker gets a letter from one of his previous work-partners, a safe cracker aka a jugger, who due to his retirement became a go-between for Parker and something that resembles a acquaintance in Parker his world. This letter makes Parker seek out his previous co-worker and if necessary take action. Parker finds the man deceased and already buried.

He then finds himself in a search for wealth by the various parties and is directly involved by all parties.

A very well written book that deviates from usual books by Stark, and does so in a very exciting way. It is more a mystery with Parker thrown in as a sort of detective.

The end of the story however changes a lot for Parker in the future.

Well advised.

Benoit Lelièvre says

Not bad, but kind of a clusterfuck. The premise is very seducing, Parker's trusted man Joe Scheer has recently passed away and left an intangible treasure and a bunch of greedy rats in his wake. The idea was great, but the execution left to be desired. The characters keep shuffling and bumping into each other to try and get to Joe's money and miserably fail while Parker has to keep up appearanced at all times because someone always finds a compromising piece of information on him. There's a satisfying resolution, but the themes were not the best fit for Parker's universe. Too bad, it had the potential to be great.

Andre says

The Jugger is the 6th novel in the Parker series. "Where's the money?" Everyone is looking for Joe's elusive stash, but does it even actually exist? Parker lands in the middle of it all and tries to sort out who is who, who knows what and who has blood on their hands. The local police captain Younger soon becomes the ball on Parker's proverbial chain. Together they rush headlong to the inevitable conclusion.

For someone who churned out two or three Parker novels a year during the time this little gem was written,

Stark weaves an intricate little yarn of deception and deceit.

It's highly entertaining pulp fiction. I loved it! I just don't understand why a 160 page novel needs to cost me almost AU\$ 15 on Amazon.

David says

Parker is a problem-solver, and usually these problems arise in the course of planning and committing robberies. In *The Jugger*, however, Parker's problems are the residual result of a life of crime. Sometimes, Parker must solve problems not to earn money but just to stay out of jail. The staying-out-of-jail Parker is less interesting than the earning-money Parker, but Parker is always Parker, which is to say that *The Jugger* is a good read.

Kemper says

When Parker gets a couple of letters from retired safe cracker Joe Sheer saying that he's having problems, he's worried that the old man is getting pressured into revealing secrets. Since some of those secrets would be about him, Parker packs a bag and is off to Nebraska thinking that he may have to permanently shut Joe up.

After he arrives in the small town that Joe had settled in, Parker learns that Joe is already dead, supposedly from a heart attack. But the police chief is instantly on Parker's tail, and another thief is in town and won't leave Parker alone. Everybody seems to be looking for something that Joe hid and assumes that Parker is there for the same thing.

This was a change-up from the pattern of the Parker stories to date since there was no robbery or real revenge motive going on. Parker just blundered into a situation, and is trying to get out without blowing his best fake identity. This isn't about getting away with the loot, it's about getting away without a warrant being issued against his phony name.

This also really took Parker's ruthless nature up a notch. We know from the previous books that Joe Sheer was one of the few people that Parker would even remotely consider a friend, but he doesn't have a moment's regret about potentially having to kill him. Plus, Parker will stop at nothing to pin the crimes involved on other people to preserve his cover ID.

The ending also has the usual habit of having some element carry over from one Parker book to the next.

Greg says

Richard Stark doesn't give much a description of what Parker looks like. He's a big guy with gnarled tree trunks for hands. This description is given in just about all of the early novels.

It's probably safe to think of Parker as looking sort of like a Lee Marvin type, and since he has probably most

famously portrayed Parker, maybe this is what some readers use as their mental image:

Some people might like to think of him as a raving wife-beating anti-semit:

Parker has also been portrayed as an African American in *The Split*:

Or as an older balding white man:

Or as this guy:

And then there is Jean-Luc Godard's take on Parker, one which doesn't jive well with the text itself, but in my opinion is the most attractive of the bunch:

Leave it to the French to portray a sociopath thief as a beautiful woman who is sort of the postergirl of sexy intellectual 1968 French radical chic.

Godard borrowed (stole if you are of the opinion of Donald Westlake AKA Richard Stark) heavily from this novel to make his movie *Made in the U.S.A.* Westlake prevented this film from ever being shown in the United States, and it wasn't until after his death that it finally premiered in America, and has since been released by Criterion. The book and the movie work together in an interesting way, the technicolor stylization of Godard contrasting with the bleak middle America setting of the novel.

Having seen the movie first, and only about a month or so ago, just before I decided I'd read all of the Parker novels I couldn't help seeing some of Godard's bastardizations in the book. It definitely created a different reading experience than if I had read the novel first.

It made me think about how each of us has a totally different reading experience from one another for any book we read, and reminded me how much memory in my case colors and shapes the way I picture the world a novel is taking place in. I think it would be interesting, although ultimately boring to anyone besides the reader (or at least in my case) to know where people imagine the stories they are reading to take place, how they picture the characters. In my case there are a handful of places and houses from my past that reoccur and work as the setting for most of the books I read (in this case it would be one of my grandmother's houses, which worked out nicely for how the book developed, her basement had just the right features that would be needed in the story, something I had no idea about when I unconsciously started to think of the action taking place there). I'm not sure what triggers between the text and my memories are necessarily at work when this happens, and how much I probably ignore actual description and just jam the setting into some place familiar. I imagine other people do this too, but I have no proof.

This has been a very un-Parker like review. To rectify the situation tonight when I get back from watching grown men beat the shit out of each other I'm going to just sit with the lights off and stare at nothing, an activity that Parker seems to genuinely enjoy.

Erik says

"When the knock came at the door, Parker was just turning to the obituary page."

Lynn says

Parker surprised me in this book. In previous stories I'd come to think his thieves' code made him moral. His behavior isn't out of character here, but I mistakenly started thinking he was basically a good guy....not really. He can still shock me with swift brutality. Great book.

Charles says

This was the slowest starter of the Stark books I've read so far, but it picked up well after about the halfway point and finished strong.

David says

In Richard Stark's *The Jugger*, everybody's favorite sociopath Parker (AKA Charles Willis) has to beat cheeks to Green Acres when his osteoporotic middle man Joe Sheer sends out a distress signals, and Parker, looking out for Numero Uno, is worried that Sheer's goose is cooked and that there might be a lot of bread crumbs lying around the joint leading straight back to him. And—as we all know—Parker doesn't do criminal celebrity. This leads to successive run-ins: first with a shady crook from Parker's past dolled up like Liberace on crack, and then with the local heat—a dim-witted hay-chawer with a mind for one thing—*loot*. He's sniffed out a quick payday, but Parker is in the dark as to why the vultures are circling. Well, Sheer, natch, is toast by the time Parker rolls in and nobody can seem to keep their sticky fingers out of the stiff's pockets. Parker needs to act-wise to get to the bottom of it all before he misses out on the score and has his cover blown sky-high.

This one's better than *The Score* (the only other Stark I've read as of this writing), but the plot (at times) bends in such implausible ways that it's enough to make a contortionist's neck snap. Gritty realism, it ain't. But Stark isn't in short supply of small-town grotesques to liven up the show, including a nosy neighbor kid who's tapping out the plot in Morse code from one house over. As a way to kill a few hours, you could do worse than *The Jugger*. It hums along real nice and the ending is a doozy because of how it goes down—which is to say *rotten...*

Skip says

A bit of a departure from the usual Parker fare. One of his old comrades, Joe Sheer, writes to Parker, initially telling him he has some problems he is handling, but then asks Parker to come help. Joe was a safecracker and one of the people who could reach Parker about a job. Parker decides to help his friend, but arrives too late: Joe is dead and the circumstances of his death are shrouded in mystery; however, another crook shows up looking for money and the local sheriff wants the loot too. As always, Parker's best work is improvising a solution when things go awry, and he crafts an artful solution to this problem.

James Love says

Jugger (Noun): Box man, Safe-cracker.

The Jugger is the 6th book in the gritty, hard-nosed, action, suspense, thriller series by Richard Stark (a Donald E. Westlake pseudonym). The novel opens with Parker (under the guise of Charles Willis), in Nebraska, trying to find out how a friend and former heist partner Joe Sheer (aka Joseph T. Shardin) died. Joe had retired from the heist game and lived a quiet existence in the American heartland until his untimely demise. Parker is forced to match wits against a corrupt police chief, an "out-of-his-element" doctor and an unscrupulous thief that Parker would never EVER work with at any time.
