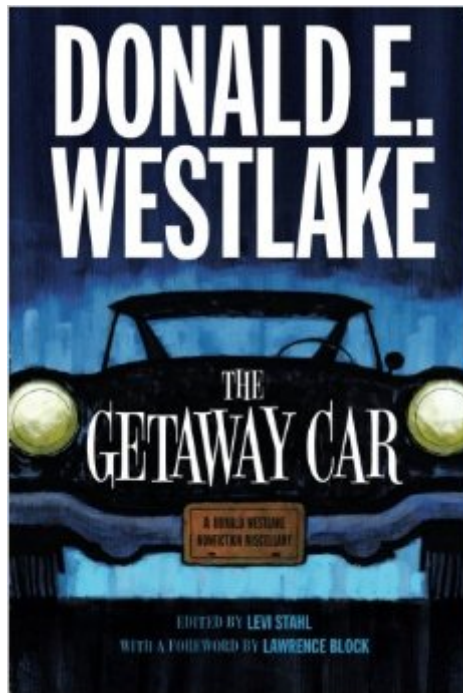


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# The Getaway Car: A Donald Westlake Nonfiction Miscellany



## Synopsis

Over the course of a fifty-year career, Donald E. Westlake published nearly one hundred books, including not one but two long-running series, starring the hard-hitting Parker and the hapless John Dortmunder. In the six years since his death, Westlake's reputation has only grown, with fans continuing to marvel at his tightly constructed plots, no-nonsense prose, and keen, even unsettling, insights into human behavior. With *The Getaway Car*, we get our first glimpse of another side of Westlake the writer: what he did when he wasn't busy making stuff up. And it's fascinating. Setting previously published pieces, many little seen, alongside never-before-published material found in Westlake's working files, the book offers a clear picture of the man behind the books—including his thoughts on his own work and that of his peers, mentors, and influences. The book opens with revealing (and funny) fragments from an unpublished autobiography, then goes on to offer an extended history of private eye fiction, a conversation among Westlake's numerous pen names, letters to friends and colleagues, interviews, appreciations of fellow writers, and much, much more. There's even a recipe for Sloth à la Dortmunder. Really. Rounded out with a foreword by Westlake's longtime friend Lawrence Sanders, *The Getaway Car* is a fitting capstone to a storied career and a wonderful opportunity to revel anew in the voice and sensibility of a master craftsman.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I've been a huge Donald Westlake fan for many years. I'd like to say I've read everything he's ever

written, but with all of his pen names, I'll never really know. As a Westlake completist, I appreciated this volume so much. It gave a huge insight into a very funny, smart, talented writer. He was a craftsman of the first order, and my favorite parts of the book are the parts that show him as such. Westlake was a consummate professional, a pro's pro. Or a prose pro, if you prefer; most instructive were some of his letters where he offered advice to other writers. Other highlights for me: Abby Westlake's thoughts on living with a series of husbands inhabiting the same skin; Westlake's kind and funny correspondence with other writers he called friends (the letter to Stephen and Tabitha King after the accident that nearly killed Stephen is witty and sweet. It'll make you wish you could sit and talk with Westlake over a few beers.); his thoughts on writing novels vs. writing screenplays; his gentle resistance to having his letters and papers collected by Boston University. Oh hell. The entire damned book is good. If you're a fan of Westlake, Richard Stark, Tucker Coe, Sam Holt, or Timothy J. Culver, buy the book. Read it and say a long goodbye to one of the great American novelists. Thank you for everything, Don.

This book is a sort of scraping of the bottom of the Westlake barrel to publish anything one of the greatest writers of all time has ever typed on a bit of paper for those of us who loved his work and know we won't be getting anything new. Westlake was probably the first celebrity who died where I thought true sadness that there will be nothing new created by that great artistic mind to experience in the future. The book warns in its opening pages that this isn't a book for everyone, and is really just for hard core fans and having finished it I would have to agree. I've read every novel published under Westlake's own name as well as all under the Richard Stark pseudonym. I've read most of his other pen names work although some is so rare and expensive to obtain I haven't managed to read for example *Comfort Station* he wrote as J Morgan Cunningham. With some of the entries in here such as the dialogue of a meeting of Westlake and all his pen name characters in a room, you really need to have at least read a few stories by each of the pseudonyms to get the most out of Westlake's different fictional personalities. Other stuff you'll find in here is a list of all his novels under his own and pen names, although it isn't quite as complete. It mentions the republished title name of some of the books but not others. I remember back in 2007 ordering *Dancing Aztecs* and *A New York Dance* and finding out they were the same book under different titles when they arrived. That one's not mentioned in this list. At the back of this book is a list of titles Westlake had thought would be good for future books with a few crossed out that he actually wrote after he typed that list. Not picked up by Levi Stahl is the fact that there are some that were used but weren't crossed out such as *Corkscrew* which was also published as *The Hook*. That's the thing with some of the found

documents republished here, with Westlake not around, we don't know what were still active for him or were something he started and forgot about. I would have also liked to have seen a list of his short stories and the anthologies and various author collections they were published in, but that's not included in *The Getaway Car*. There's some great insights into Westlake's mind, he started an autobiography that he didn't continue with much after the beginning and those pages are in here. In that we learn of his childhood including the fact the world almost missed out on his great books, as when he was born if that had happened in a different location or had occurred three months earlier, he would have died at eight days old. Westlake remembers the first word he ever read and understood at three (this is one of many where you don't know if he is pulling your leg or this is a serious memory, since he's not around to clarify), we learn of his first job that resulted in his writing career and a other interesting stuff. Elsewhere in the novel we learn of his last days in the military and how a radio show taunted him when stranded at an isolated airport. There's also letters to other writers, interview responses he gives to an ex prisoner who did time for bank robberies where he murdered a bank guard, who asked to interview him. There's introductions to his own republished books, if you're like me and weren't alive when the original novels were published you've probably read those before though. Some you won't get much out of if you haven't actually read those novels or at least know what they are about. Correspondence with others about the movies he wrote, his novels which were turned into or optioned to be movies. Westlake reviews the work of other authors which originally appeared at the front of their republished novels and other places, but I have to be honest and say I'd never heard of any of them, most seem to have been successful around the start of Westlake's writing career or were a prior influence to it. There's a really interesting non fiction piece on prison escapees where Westlake tells the tales of their escapes. That would be my favourite entry in these pages. As a big fan of Westlake I enjoyed reading most of the stuff in here, but if someone had only read a couple of Westlake's novels, I would probably recommend giving *The Getaway Car* a pass and just track down more of his masterpiece novels that they were yet to read.

I came late to Westlake, and the more I learn of him, the better I like him, both as a writer and as a man. This potpourri of non-fiction—letters, essays, book introductions—is sometimes serious, more often funny, but always well crafted. Lawrence Block's introduction takes editor Stahl to task for referring to Westlake's jokes, and is right to do so. There's not a joke in the book, though there are lot of laughs. Westlake's strength was his wit, which showed itself in his ability to phrase what would have seemed commonplace

coming from anyone else in such a way the corner of your mouth can't help but turn up. Read this, even if you're not a Westlake fan. Not only will it be great fun, but you'll likely become a fan.

When you've read anything and everything from an author, there's always the other stories behind the stories. This is a miscellany but fun if you're into understanding further who DEW, the father of so many fictional characters, ticked.

Interesting details about how authors write stories - but found it boring after several chapters. I was forewarned that it wasn't a novel - but somehow I ignored it because of my respect and enjoyment of Westlake's other books.

Donald E. Westlake was one of the great crime writers of the twentieth century. He wrote brilliant hard-boiled stuff and then could turn around and write some of the best comic novels ever. This posthumous collection of nonfiction takes us under the hood and shows us a bit of how we worked and the thinking behind the great fiction. There is, for example, a confession of a teenage crime that clearly inspired the best part of his stunning novel THE AX. Plus hilarious reflections on the series of disasters that led to his Dortmund novel JIMMY THE KID. (A novel based on a screenplay based on a true crime which was ITSELF based on a novel.) Then there are Westlake's adventures in Hollywood (he was nominated for an Oscar for his script for THE GRIFTERS). And his brilliant, funny reflections on almost everything. If you love Westlake or his alter ego Richard Stark, you want this book.

In the introduction to this book there is a warning, don't read it unless you are thoroughly familiar with the works of Donald Westlake. I have a passing acquaintance with Westlake and I feel I would have gotten more from the book if I knew him better. The book consists of non-fiction odds and ends by a master writer of crime fiction. There are a few gems: like Laurence Bloch's introduction and Westlake's list of his recommended crime fiction he suggests we read. The book did perk my interest to read more of Westlake's fiction.

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