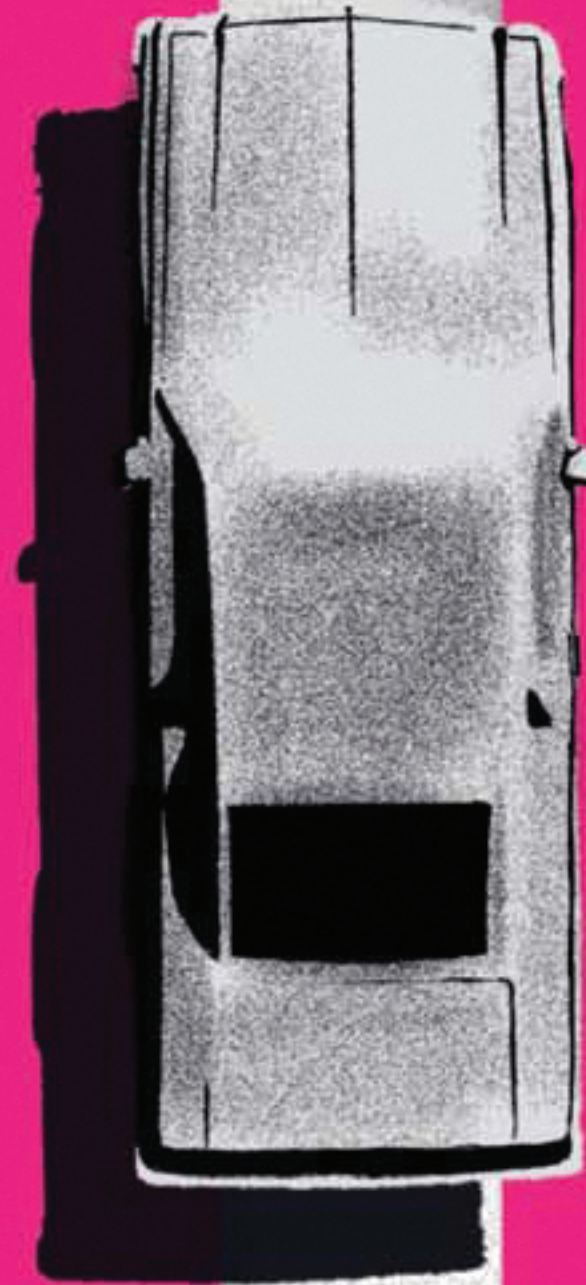


JAMES SALLIS

**“A perfect piece
of noir fiction.”**

—NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW

A NOVEL



THE INSPIRATION FOR THE
MAJOR MOTION PICTURE

DRIVE

READING GROUP GUIDE

1. The main character of the book remains unnamed throughout. Does that change your perception of him? What *do* we know about Driver?
2. Describe Driver's childhood. Why do you think he stole his foster parents' car when he left? Do you think they ever tried to find him?
3. Driver says he turns down much more getaway work than he takes. What are his rules, and how do they fail him throughout the book?
4. What role do family ties play throughout the book? Who do they protect, and who do they endanger?
5. Increased demand for Driver's services leads him to lose his stunt agent. When and why did he start turning down legit jobs for criminal work?

6. Finding a decent radio station cheers Driver up after he takes Jodie's truck. When was the last time something seemingly inconsequential turned your day around?
7. Nino keeps targeting Driver, even after getting his money back and losing several men. What is he after?
8. Though Driver isn't much for conversation, he seems to get along with most people he meets. Why was he so isolated even before he became involved in crime?
9. Bernie Rose and Driver discuss free will, and Driver suspects that our lives seep in around us whether we want them to or not. How much do you think you choose your life? Do those choices change who you are?
10. Perhaps the least justified murder in the book occurs when Driver punches a kid in the throat with his keys for commenting on his car. How does that moment compare to Bernie Rose's death at the end of the book? What do these two deaths, as well as any others that stood out to you, tell us about Driver? What do you think is next for him now that Nino and Bernie are gone?

A CONVERSATION WITH THE AUTHOR

What was your first inspiration for *Drive*?

I wanted to write a contemporary novel modeled on original-paperback novels, such as those published by Gold Medal Books, the kind about which I wrote in my book *Difficult Lives*—something with that momentum and muscularity but with more penetration, more verticality.

What were your priorities as you developed Driver as a character? Why did you decide to keep his name and title synonymous?

As always, once the character came to me, I simply listened to him. (It's a bit like character acting: you become the character, burrow into his head, and remain there.) I was aware that, as well as writing a contemporary Gold Medal, I was writing a contemporary Western. (He even drives off into the sunset at book's end.) The man in Westerns who rides into town to set things right is often unnamed, a complete outsider, a man who *is* what he *does*. (And who then rides away again.)

How did you balance such a bloody story with Driver's quieter moments of connection with other characters?

Driver is, as are we all, an individual deeply marked by his past—a castaway to a world he doesn't understand—and trying as best he can to survive. But he has also the desire to rise, to find a better self. (Deeper readings could suggest that I'm writing a parable of grace here.) His world, again as with all of us, manifests on two levels, the public (a violent one) and the private (his connections with others). How does one find a balance? *Can* one?

How, if at all, has your understanding of this story changed since its translation to film? What surprised you most about the differences between the final book and final movie?

Film works with quite a different vocabulary than do novels. I love the film, love Hoss Amini's script. As I've said before, the heart of my novel beats there, and the blood of my novel moves through it.

What attracts you to noir writing as a reader and a writer? Who are your biggest influences?

Terribly overused, the term *noir* has lost all meaning, in much the sense that *jazz* has; we can no longer know what's meant by it. Classic noir is classic tragedy liberated from nobles and set down among ordinary folk. As one of noir's great writers James M. Cain put it: "Force of circumstances driving the protagonists to the commission of a dreadful act."

My biggest single influence is the science fiction writer Theodore Sturgeon, whom I've been reading regularly since I was eleven or twelve. He opened the world for me, guided me into other minds, other lives, other ways of living. Sturgeon showed me what could be done as a writer—that one could take

vast portions of the world and its wonders into one's hands—and made me believe I might be able to do the same.

What books are on your bedside table?

A collection by Michael Bishop titled *A Few Last Words for the Late Immortals*, *The Novels of Julio Cortázar* by Steven Boldy, *Save Twilight* (Cortázar's poems), a copy of the recent French edition of my novel *Sarah Jane*, a couple of collections of poems by friends, and my brother John's new book, *Songs of Nature: On Paintings by Cao Jun*.