



## The Lost Get-Back Boogie

*James Lee Burke*

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Iry Paret's done his time -- two years for manslaughter in Louisiana's Angola State Penitentiary. Now the war vet and blues singer is headed to Montana, where he hopes to live clean working on a ranch owned by the father of his prison pal, Buddy Riordan. In prison, Iry tinkered with a song -- "The Lost Get-Back Boogie" -- that never came out quite right. Now, the Riordan family's problems hand him a new kind of trouble, with some tragic consequences. And Iry must get the tune right at last, or pay a fateful price.

## **The Lost Get-Back Boogie Details**

Date : Published 2006 by Pocket Star (first published 1986)

ISBN : 9781416517061

Author : James Lee Burke

Format : Paperback 376 pages

Genre : Mystery, Fiction, Crime

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## From Reader Review The Lost Get-Back Boogie for online ebook

### Cathy DuPont says

I'm just amazed at the ability of James Lee Burke to create characters who have such depth as Ivy Paret the ex-con who served his time in Angola (Louisiana) and is trying to begin a new life far away from his home town.

All of Burke's guys, his characters, think about right and wrong; about trying to find their way in a complicated world and how to make the best of everything they're dealt. Sometimes bad luck just happens, life happens and rising above it all takes perseverance, sometimes more than people have, unfortunately.

I was a bit concerned because most of Burke's books which I've read have been in the lushness of southern Louisiana and south Texas and I loved the his description of the southern part of the U. S.

Burke's second home is in Missoula, Montana, and is the site of this stand-alone.

Silly me, I was concerned that Burke couldn't include his lovely landscape description...it's Montana, for crying out loud. (I admit, I know nothing about Montana never having been there.)

However, there's just no way that Burke can leave out his lyrical landscape descriptions. He could probably describe the North Pole in such a way that I would want to be there and I hate cold.

I just came across this quote which speaks for itself. But I immediately thought of Burke and his finely drawn and unique characters and the burden they carry including one of my favorites, Burke's Dave Robicheaux.

*"In the N.Y. Times Book Review for Feb. 2, 2012, critic Olen Steinhauer was writing about a John D. MacDonald contemporary, Elmore Leonard, but what he had to say about the best crime writers, that: "Our best crime writers are sometimes our most astute social novelists, concerned as much with our country's ills as they are with sensational homicides."*

I certainly put James Lee Burke in that category which is, in my mind, a very small club of writers.

\*\*\*\*\*

Daniel brought me back to this review and when glancing through it, I could not remember the plot. The book was five stars, so I should have written a bit about this five star stand alone featuring Iry Paret.

Iry's a musician from Louisiana, just served two years in Angola and needs to start a new life. A friend, Buddy Riordan, a fellow he met in prison and was released earlier, invited Iry to Montana where his father owns a farm and Iry can begin again. His parole officer is watching to see if Iry can stay afloat on this side of the law. Iry knows that anything close to illegal can put him in handcuffs and back to Angola; manslaughter and murder are against the law in Montana, just like in Louisiana.

Unfortunately that cloud hanging over Iry's head follows him to Montana. Without trying, Iry is back walking the line between turning a blind eye to some troublemakers and the trouble they cause to Riordan's family or getting even and protecting his new family.

Always a presence, the finishing of a song he's started and heading back to Angola. Iry is walking a tightrope hoping he doesn't fall.

Great character, Iry, and don't know if I'll see him again, but would enjoy a second book. Of course, I admit, I'm easy when it comes to Burke...I'll read anything he's written.

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### **Donna Davis says**

Whoa. Okay. I can't BELIEVE what it says in the preface, that this novel was REJECTED 111 times...and then nominated for the Pulitzer. It's raw, it's vivid, and in places so painful that I had to read it in small jags at a time to break it up. That's okay; it made this excellent novel last longer.

Here it is clear that the protagonist (and likely the writer) has ABSOLUTELY NO use for the American prison system or cops in general, though he is careful to avoid stereotyping his characters, and even his bad guys have their better moments as well. Since I agree with his perspective, I found myself nodding in sync with the bald, raw statements made by the narrator as well as multiple characters within the story line.

But the guy is no bleeding heart; he also recognizes that people sometimes make some terrible choices to get inside those walls, and that those newly emerged often wreak a lot of damage to themselves and sometimes to others before they hit their stride, supposing that they do.

This is brilliantly written, and I don't know what more to add to those who say that it is as much fun to read what he leaves unsaid as what he says outright. This early work shows a real gift, and it's fun to go back and find out where he started.

Highly recommended.

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### **Jerry B says**

Burke's drama better than mystery, but plot still weak...

This book reminds us of what in music is called a "tone poem". The melodies and harmonies swirl in an entertaining, sometimes captivating, pattern; but when it's all over, it doesn't amount to much that's memorable. We wanted to read this novel to possibly cure ourselves of our disappointment with one of Burke's Dave Robicheaux mysteries. Our findings of that one ("Cadillac Jukebox") was that his imagery surely is vivid, but his skills in developing the plot and populating it with just the right number of support characters were lacking. That tends to kill a mystery, which after all must have a story with a somewhat logical structure.

In "Boogie", we do feel the drama category works better for Burke. The mind pictures he draws, especially of the Montana landscape where leading man Iry heads after getting a parole transfer out of his native Louisiana, continue to exhibit's Burke's mastery of descriptive prose. Alas, the plot is still not as strong as we might like, although the sheer drama of his story doesn't require the pace and form of a mystery. We found it difficult to empathize with the beer-swilling, guilt-laden brawlers generally depicted herein. But get by the alcohol content, and there is on display a fair degree of understanding the human condition. Interesting that

this book was both nominated for a Pulitzer after publication, but (according to Burke's own web site) was rejected first by over 100 publishers!

After we read the Robicheaux book, we opined: Burke is probably better at drama, and he is. We think he might excel at poetry -- wonder if he's ever tried his hand at that? As with the musical counterpart, we probably wouldn't remember his "melody and harmony" *per se*, but would settle for the slide show he can create with words to go with our coffee and red wine.

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### **Kay says**

So far I love this even more than the Dave Robicheaux books. The descriptions, which I often skip in a book, get re-read; the characters are engaging and I care about them; the story is in the fine American realist groove, painful but shown with deep understanding and no excuses. The writing is superb, not a wasted word and the words used are the pick of the litter. I was not expecting to be able to get into this book; now I cannot put it down.

Every time I rest the book for a moment I feel Emily Dickinson's "formal feeling." In the grit of a tough story there is a softness, the kind of ache that would disqualify a person from social work altogether. And everywhere in this book is a quiet truth and a sharp beauty.

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### **John says**

Most of the Burke I've read is from the 90's and 00's, and in those books his main characters are more or less clean with dark pasts. Robicheaux is a recovered alcoholic, while Billy Bob Holland has violent tendencies and a darkly violent past.

In this book, the characters are in the midst of their darkness, some trying to break free, others determine to go deeper. The characters booze heavily from the perspective of a modern person. Part of that is that the book was written in the 70s, when boozing was more the norm, but it's also true that the story is about redemption.

I've read half a dozen Burke mysteries and this isn't a mystery. It's more of a literary novel. Not that his other books aren't 'literary', but they fit squarely into the mystery genre, whereas this book is, in my mind, just literature. And fine literature at that.

On many levels, this is my favorite Burke yet.

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### **Vincent Eaton says**

Still a winner, 40 years after appearing and netting a Pulitzer nomination.

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## Cathrine ?? says

4.5 ★

### “You’re a strange mixture of men, she said.”

This is the one that was rejected 111 times (I sort of get that) before being published 9 years later and nominated for a Pulitzer (I totally get that).

It’s quite unique from the others that would follow and a bit hard to describe. Despite not having a typically focused plot scheme, it was a fascinating read on the dynamics of a complicated male friendship and men are just . . . different.

It chronicals two ex-cons who drink and smoke from sunup to sundown and do stupid shite in Montana whilst fighting their demons, townfolk, and each other. The exchanges between them and how they support and fail each other are straight from Testosterone, and women as we know, are from Estrogen. Does that make any sense? No? Well, neither do they most of the time. They’re also the kind of men who can be rejected 111 times and still keep coming. This is certainly an open window into the soul of the author.

The thing is —> the prose, the prose, the prose. I have never read an author who can write about such seriously flawed, frequently unpleasant people, and make me enjoy it so much. There is always beauty with the ugliness. Artichokes come to mind—all those pokey leaves, then that hairy stuff, but then that heart to die for. I live in California. If JLB wanted to, he could sell me sunshine. If I met up with Iry Paret in a bar (*a man who doesn’t do well with women because he always thinks of them as just women*) would I go home with him? You bet. See, Jimmy even makes me say stupid shite.

Seriously now, what can I say, except that this book is better than anything I can write about it. I’m just a reader blinded by literature that shines so bright.

A special shout-out goes to Louisiana State University Press for finally saying “Yes Mr. Burke, we think you’re a hell of a writer.”

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## Sandi says

Another early work of the author's that revolves around his usual themes though, while it starts in the Angola prison in Louisiana, most of the book is set in Montana. Listened to the audio version which was ably read by **Will Patton**.

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## Sandra Petree says

What a storyteller!

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## Cindy says

If you like reading about alcoholics, or if you like reading about the drug addicted, or if you like reading about living conditions in prison, or if you like seemingly never ending personal dramas then this is the book for you. The story line and the characters wore me out! At half way through the book I realized it wouldn't

get any better and I sped read to the end.

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### **georgia lyster says**

This book snuck up on me. I thought it a bit raw but as I continued to read it I could not put it down. The characters are so real and the descriptions of Louisiana and Montana are lyrical. It is a gem

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### **Marvin says**

*The Lost Get Back Boogie* is a slap of cold water in the face. Burke writes with the cultural empathy of Tony Hillerman, the passion for nature and the environment of a Edward Abbey, and the socio-psychological suspense of a James Lehane. This is literary suspense at its finest. While Burke is often called a mystery writer, there is no mystery in this novel. We follow the main character as he is released from a Louisiana prison of which he was sentenced for making a bad choice and watch him helplessly as he makes more bad choices. Yet we feel for this character and the others in this sensitive portrayal of American rural life. Highly recommend and certainly not just for mystery fans.

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### **J.R. says**

James Lee Burke is one of those rare writers who can describe a character or place so well you almost expect to bump into them or see the scenery out your window.

This novel was his introduction (or reintroduction in some cases) to a reading public after his earlier work had been out of print for 13 years. The fact that it was published in 1986 by a university press (LSU) after being rejected 111 times by commercial presses over a nine year period says something not very flattering about the taste of those big name publishers who in that same time period were publishing works by writers who haven't an ounce of Burke's talent. This opinion is justified by the fact *The Lost Get-Back Boogie* was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize (it should have won).

This was a re-read for me, so I'm not going to go deep on the plot. In brief, Iry Paret, a country musician fresh out of jail, accepts an invitation from Buddy Riordan, a prison friend, to come work on the family ranch in Montana. There Iry becomes deeply involved in an environmental dispute causing havoc for the family and falls in love with Buddy's ex-wife, providing a hitch in his loyalty to a friend. It's not a crime novel, though it has enough crime, violence and danger to satisfy the most jaded.

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### **Bonnye Reed says**

This book was written before I 'found' James Lee Burke, and I have managed to miss it until now - Please read this book. It is a remarkable look into a world we all know someone involved with. Finding your way back into society after serving time, turning your life around after prison has to be the most difficult thing I can imagine. James Lee Burke's vision of this transition is astonishing and much better than my imagination

could have come up with.

This book was rejected 111 times, and after a publisher finally printed it, was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize. Imagine that.

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### **P.J. Coldren says**

Iry Paret has done his time in Angola, which is no country club prison, then or now. He's gone home, but there's nothing there for him any more. His family would just as soon he leave, and he does. He heads for Montana, because his prison pal Buddy Riordan has promised him a job and a place to live. Buddy is a musician, like Iry, and they both have a predilection for the bottle, although Buddy likes his dope, too. Iry is on parole, which means he has to behave in Montana or he can be yanked back to Louisiana to finish out his time. This is not something he wants to do.

When Iry gets to Montana, Missoula and the Bitterroot Valley, he finds out that Buddy forgot to mention a thing or two. Buddy's father is a real piece of work, and has managed to piss off the vast majority of people in and around Missoula by filing a lawsuit and getting an injunction against the new pulp mill. He believes, and rightly so, that the pulp mill is an environmental disaster, polluting the water and the air now and as long as it is in business. Frank Riordan doesn't seem to much care about all the people he's going to put out of work; they, on the other hand, see him as the here-and-now problem and don't really want to worry about the long-term damage being done by the pulp mill.

Buddy has an ex-wife, and he'd like to get back together with her. Beth has no interest whatsoever in any kind of relationship with Buddy, although she thinks it's a good idea that he still sees himself as an involved parent with their two sons. She's not so happy about the drinking and the drugs. Iry and Beth are attracted to each other, which presents some obvious problems, since Iry and Buddy are living in the same house.

THE LOST GET-BACK BOOGIE is an amazingly powerful book, even after twenty years. Burke has such wonderful descriptive passages; it's easy to see that he loves Montana, at least the wilderness and the not-so-civilized portions of it. His people are just that: people, not characters in a book. Sometimes it's more like reading non-fiction than anything else, because these people do all the stupid things people do, make all those bad choices people make . . . but Burke lets the reader know them so well that these choices seem to be the only, the obvious choice to make. Even when we want to smack Iry upside the head and tell him not to go out with Buddy, don't have that one more drink, keep your mouth shut . . . we know that Iry can't do any of those things.

THE LOST GET-BACK BOOGIE is Burke's first novel. It was nominated for a Pulitzer. It deserved the nomination. While this isn't a perfect book (skip the Epilogue, and it probably comes close), Burke's talent is so obvious, so true, that no one should be surprised at the quality of his body of work. He's good enough that I kept picking it back up even though I could see the train wreck coming, put it down because I didn't want to read what was going to happen next, but had to pick it back up because I was drawn back into Iry's life by the writing. It doesn't get much better than that.

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### **skein says**

4.9999 stars. Read this one summer while housesitting - I would never have picked it up otherwise - and Burke surprised the hell out of me. I thought it would be a light, easy read. Nope.

The *sensation* of reading it stays with me - like my first time reading James Joyce or Vladimir Nabokov - Burke's style is so distinctive, without in the least bit altering from 'normal'.

And he is affecting. I haven't yet read his other works because it took such an emotional toll on me. That's all I can remember disliking about it: how goddamn *sad* it was, not in any overcooked 'best-laid plans gang aft agley' way, but with terrible realism: some people are just unlucky, some people are violent and mean, and god help them when they meet up.

Burke passed on judging his (intense & well-drawn) characters. Whether your run or fight isn't a reflection on your courage, he says; we do what we do because acting in character is the only choice open to us. It's how we're made. Repeating mistakes and acting like a dipshit is part of it.

A grim view of things, to be sure. But probably a realistic one.

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My only quibble was the sexism - there are very few women and none of them useful, if I remember aright - but again, that's probably realistic of the characters, as well.

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### **Matt Phillips says**

Brilliant rural noir...Tragic and heartbreaking and--in a way--joyous as all hell.

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### **Blair says**

Just a dynamo of a book. The reader can get utterly lost in the descriptive passages about the landscapes. The author's love for his characters and scenery is immense and heartfelt. The prose flows like Southern Comfort into a chilled glass with ice. The story revolves around a man named Iry, an ex-con trying to restart his life in Montana upon his release from prison. He gets a helping-hand from a friend he made in prison that gets him work on his father's farm.

The father is currently not a popular man with the town locals after repeatedly trying to have the local pulp mill shut down. Iry gets pulled into the situation and struggles to stay on the right side of the law.

This is just an absolute tour-de-force and deserves a spot in my favorites list.

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### **Elena-Sofia Manea says**

One wouldn't believe it but this book has some simple but I bet delicious foods mentioned in it.

These guys were really leaving healthy. To bad for the amount of alcohol they would accompany those foods with.

Also, all men were professional in cooking, apparently. Where did they learn to cook like that since they

seemed to work, sing, play instruments and drink a lot throughout the day and night?

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**Rebecca McNutt says**

Many elements, from a polluting paper company to a small town choosing to look the other way, make *The Lost Get-Back Boogie* a riveting, exciting novel.

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