



Appaloosa (Virgil Cole & Everett Hitch Book 1)

By Robert B. Parker

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When Virgil Cole and Everett Hitch arrive in Appaloosa, they find a town suffering at the hands of a renegade rancher who's already left the city marshal and one of his deputies dead. Cole and Hitch are used to cleaning up after scavengers, but this one raises the stakes by playing not with the rules—but with emotion.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. It's been years since Parker has won a major literary award for a novel (he did collect a Grand Master trophy from MWA in 2002), but that may change with this stunning western, a serious contender for a Spur. This is only Parker's second western, after the Wyatt Earp story *Gunman's Rhapsody* (or third if you count the Spenser PI quasi-western *Potshot*), but he takes command of the genre, telling an indelible story of two Old West lawmen. The chief one is Virgil Cole, new marshal of the mining/ranching town of Appaloosa (probably in Colorado); his deputy is Everett Hitch, and it's Hitch who tells the tale, playing Watson to Cole's Holmes. The novel's outline is classic western: Cole and Hitch take on the corrupt rancher, Randall Bragg, who ordered the killing of the previous marshal and his deputy. Bragg is arrested, tried and sentenced to be hung, but hired guns bust him out, leading to a long chase through Indian territory, a traditional high noon (albeit at 2:41 p.m.) shootout between Cole's men and Bragg's, a further escape and, at book's end, a final showdown. Along the way, Cole falls for a piano-playing beauty with a malevolent heart, whose manipulations lead to that final, fatal confrontation. With such familiar elements, Parker breaks no new ground. What he does, and to a magnificent degree, is to invest classic tropes with vigor, through depth of character revealed by a glance, a gesture or even silence. A consummate pro, Parker never tells, always shows, through writing that's bone clean and through a superb transferal of the moral issues of his acclaimed mysteries (e.g., the importance of honor) to the western. This is one of Parker's finest. *Agent, Helen Brann. (June)*

From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

Taking a break from his long-running series of Spenser novels, Parker moseys back to the Old West. He's eyed this back-acre before in *Gunman's Rhapsody*, a fictionalization of the Wyatt Earp story, but critics feel *Appaloosa's* original plot allows him more room to develop his trademark themes of personal honor and masculine camaraderie. With sharp dialogue and a plot that "gallops to a perfect, almost mythical ending," it's clear that Parker can swap genres and not lose a step (*St. Petersburg Times*). In fact, a few critics even note that he seems refreshed by the change of scenery.

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From [Booklist](#)

Randall Bragg owns the small frontier town of Appaloosa. He and his crew assault the women, steal from the merchants, and shoot anyone who gets in the way (including the marshal). Virgil Cole and Everett Hitch have wandered through the west cleaning up towns like Appaloosa. They are hired guns, but they doggedly revere the law. Cole and Hitch back Bragg down with a minimum of bloodshed and, with the help of a formerly recalcitrant witness, convict him of murder. But Cole's weakness for the beautiful but deeply flawed Allie makes possible Bragg's escape. When he eventually returns with a presidential pardon and a veneer of civility, Cole is trapped: if he kills Bragg, he'll have violated his own code, but if he doesn't, he'll lose Allie to his rival. Narrating the story over the distance of many years, Hitch takes stock of his friendship with Cole and achieves a degree of independence. Parker, author of the Spenser, Sunny Randall, and Jesse Stone series, writes ceaselessly about male bonding, codes of honor, and hard men doing hard things. But never has he explored so convincingly the selflessness--and the acceptance of another's flaws--that forms the core of any true friendship. Parker fans will expect the action and the smart-ass banter, but it's the sense of melancholy and irrevocable sacrifice that will separate this fine novel from most of the author's recent work.

Wes Lukowsky

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Viola Hassell:

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