

Big Over Easy Discussion Questions

by Jasper Fforde

Author Bio: (<http://www.penguin.com/read/book-clubs/the-big-over-easy/9780143037231> & Wikipedia)

Jasper Fforde (b. 1961) traded a varied career in the film industry for staring vacantly out of the window and arranging words on a page. He lives and writes in Wales. The Eyre Affair was his first novel in the bestselling Thursday Next series. The Big Over Easy is the first in his new Nursery Crime series.

Fforde's books are noted for their literary allusions and wordplay, tightly scripted plots, and playfulness with the conventions of traditional genres. None of his books has a chapter 13 except in the table of contents where there is a title of the chapter and a page number.

Characters:

- **Detective Jack Spratt** – Detective Inspector and head of the Nursery Crimes Division. Married and has 5 kids
- **Sargent Mary Mary** – Detective Sargent newly assigned to the Nursery Crime Division. Assigned to DCI Jack Spratt.
- **DCI Frieland Chymes** – Superstar Detective Inspector who can solve cases through the tiniest of clues.
- **Constable Ashley:** An alien (Rambosian) that can stick to walls and speaks binary code.
- **Constable Baker:** Jack's helper and part of the Nursery Crime Division. Has a perpetual cold.
- **Superintendent Briggs** – Police Superintendent who plays the trombone and tried to change his name to "become more interesting."
- **Gretel Kandlestyck-Maeker:** Sister of Hansel and forensic scientist/accountant to the Nursery crime Division
- **Madeline Spratt** – Jack's wife. Photographer. 5 children: Pandora, Ben, Megan, Jerome and Stevie, the baby.
- **Mrs. Singh** – Assistant Pathologist who assists the Nursery Crime division.
- **Humpty Dumpty** – Giant egg. Dead from an apparent fall from a wall. A conman.
- **Laura Dumpty** – Humpty Dumpty's ex-wife. She comes from old family money.
- **Mrs. Hubbard** – Humpty Dumpty's landlady.
- **Doctor Quatt** – Humpty Dumpty's psychologist. Works at St. Cerebellums Hospital. Has been known to perform experiments

- **William Winkie:** The insomniac neighbor of Humpty Dumpty.
- **Lord Randolph Sprogg IV** – Owner of a failing foot care factory in which Humpty Dumpty invested heavily. Lives in a crazy mansion outside town.
- **Winsum and Loosum** – The other foot care company (Sprogg’s main competitor). Owned by Grundy.
- **Jellyman** – Mystic powerful figure. The president of the UK.
- **Georgie Porgia** – Crime boss put in jail by NCD and Spratt.
- **Gingerbread man** – Serial killer put in jail by NCD, Chymes, and Spratt.
- **Seymour Weevil** – Brooke’s lawyer.
- **Prometheus** – The titan from Greek mythology. Brought fire to mankind. Was the reason Pandora (from Greek mythology) let all the evils out of her box.

Things you might like to know:

- The Jellyman was a character created by Fforde. He has no Nursery Rhyme accredited to him.
 - Fforde described him as “just the president of the UK who has certain God-like characteristics. Sort of like Abe Lincoln, Nelson Mandela and the Pope all rolled into one.”
- There is no Sacred Gongga in nursery rhyme history. It was a plot device developed by Fforde.
 - It is an early Splovian art artifact
 - The Sacred Gongga’s new visitors center will be dedicated by the Jellyman.
- Wood Murders – a woodcutter and his wife are killed. The shotgun used was found in Humpty Dumpty’s closet.
- A verruca is a wart.
- Fforde gave an interview to Humpty Dumpty which has book spoilers and can be found here: <http://www.jasperfforde.com/nurserycrime/special/js1.php>

Discussion Questions:

1. Did you like the book? Why or why not?
2. Of all the nursery rhyme characters Fforde reinvents, which was your favorite? Why?
3. Do you think that Jack knows that he is a Nursery character? What about Mary Mary?

4. Fforde begins each chapter with a relevant excerpt from a book or article. Did you enjoy this device? How does it relate to the importance the story places on the media's reaction to crime?
5. Much of the book involves writing up solved crimes for the public and for fame. What would be the advantages and/or disadvantages real life police officers doing this?
6. The Guild of Detectives aims to provide audience-friendly crime stories—even at the expense of the facts. Are there any parallels between this and today's TV and tabloid news culture? Which recent news stories support your argument?
7. As the book progresses, you begin seeing rules permitting or disallowing certain plot devices in Guild of Detectives' crime stories (No dog walkers reporting crimes, no twins, no Red Herrings, having a "the butler did it" moment, etc.) What do you think of those rules for mystery story writing?
8. Fforde plays with the idea of celebrity in various forms in *The Big Over Easy*, from Friedland Chymes to Lola Vavoom. Can you identify a particular message in Fforde's depiction of these characters?
9. Who is the Jellyman? Who would his real-life counterpart be?
10. Lord Spong explains that, in the foot ailment industry, the money is made through the treatment, not the cure. What other business examples seem to follow this formula? What do you think of this practice?
11. "I've been underestimated before," says Jack at several key moments. What other crime-solving characters are famous for being solitary, unappreciated, or otherwise marginalized? In what other ways does Detective Spratt fit the traditional hero model?
12. How does Fforde rework the usual mystery plot clichés? What about the conventions of fairy tales and nursery rhymes? Which does he use to his advantage and which does he abandon altogether?
13. Before Jack solves Humpty's murder, was there a moment where you thought you knew who the killer was? Who did you initially think the culprit would be and why?
14. Which nursery rhyme or fairy tale would you like see Fforde tackle next? How would you update it?
15. Did this book make you want/need to go back and reread a few nursery rhymes?
16. Did you find the clever names and sly plotlines funny, interesting, or distracting?
17. The next book in this series is called "The Fourth Bear." Will you read it? He has 2 other series. Will you read any of those?

References:

- Jasper Fforde - <http://www.jasperfforde.com/phorum/read.php?13,77942>
- Fantastic Fiction - <http://www.fantasticfiction.co.uk/ff/jasper-fforde/>
- Penguin - <http://www.penguin.com/read/book-clubs/the-big-over-easy/9780143037231>
- Plainfield Library - <http://www.plainfieldlibrary.info/pdf/ReadAlikes/JasperFforde.pdf>
- Wikipedia - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Big_Over_Easy
- Wikipedia - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jasper_Fforde

If you liked *The Big Over Easy*, try...

- *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency* - Douglas Adams
- *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* – Michael Chabon
- *Guards! Guards!* – Terry Pratchett
- *To Say Nothing of the Dog* – Connie Willis
- *Ella Minnow Pea* – Mike Dunn

Jasper Fforde Books

Nursery Crime

1. *The Big Over Easy* (2005)
2. *The Fourth Bear* (2006)

Shades of Grey

1. *Shades of Grey* (2009)

Last Dragonslayer

1. *The Last Dragonslayer* (2010)
2. *The Song of the Quarkbeast* (2011)
3. *The Eye of Zoltar* (2014)

Thursday Next

1. *The Eyre Affair* (2001)
2. *Lost in a Good Book* (2002)
3. *The Well of Lost Plots* (2002)
4. *Something Rotten* (2003)
5. *First Among Sequels* (2007)
6. *One of Our Thursdays Is Missing* (2011)
7. *The Woman Who Died A Lot* (2012)