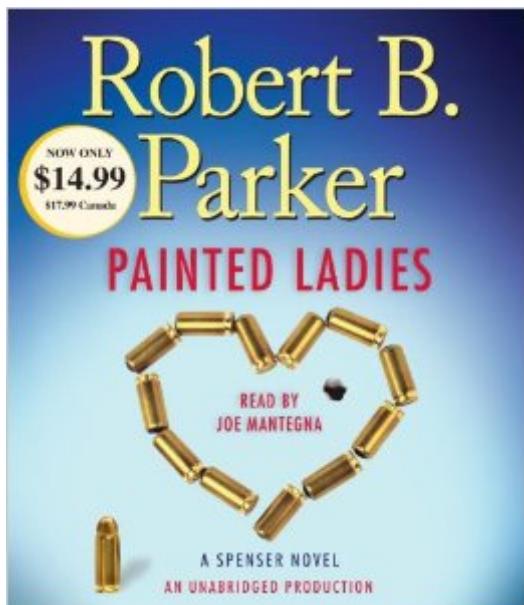


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Painted Ladies: A Spenser Novel (Spenser Novels)



Synopsis

The brilliant new Spenser novel from the beloved New York Timesâ “bestselling author Robert B. Parker. Called upon by The Hammond Museum and renowned art scholar Dr. Ashton Prince, Spenser accepts his latest case: to provide protection during a ransom exchangeâ ”money for a stolen painting. The case becomes personal when Spenser fails to protect his client and the valuable painting remains stolen. Convinced that Ashton Prince played a bigger role than just ransom delivery boy, Spenser enters into a daring game of cat-and-mouse with the thieves. But this is a game he might not come out of alive. . . . Completed the year before he passed away, Painted Ladies is Spenser and Robert B. Parker at their electrifying best.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

...is not what I would have hoped for from the first of the impromptu trilogy of Spenser's final adventures. But Robert B. Parker wasn't planning on the heart attack that took him away. The primary hole in this book is: no Hawk. He's said to be in Central Asia (presumably Afghanistan though it isn't stated) working for the CIA. As a result, the dialogue suffers from a lack of Parker's trademark repartee. There's also at least one minor continuity breach but nothing that mars the book. It's reminiscent of the earliest books where Spenser referred to the mother who had, in the later books, died while giving him birth. The plot also, at least in the first 2/3rds of the book, almost reads like a re-write of the previous Spenser novel, "Rough Weather": really bad guy reappears to reclaim a long-lost daughter. But the two novels are alike only in bare outline. The villain is one of Parker's

weaker ones. Unlike Rugar, or Joe Broz or Marty Anaheim, there's almost nothing to distinguish him from The Generic Standard Bad Guy from Central Casting. He's not painted with the complex palette that Parker's best villains and anti-heroes usually have. Instead he's essentially one color and a drab one at that. As I said, tho' it resembles "Rough Weather" it takes a sharp turn, presenting Spenser with one of his trademark dilemmas. The solution, however, is not. While, to reiterate, I would have preferred a stronger book, this one, despite the flaws listed above, meets all, if not exceeds, the standards we've come to expect from Parker.

The plot of Parker's latest novel, *Painted Ladies*, which centres on the theft of a Dutch masterpiece, is handled with all of Parker's customary deftness, tautly maintaining the tension and interspersing typically sharp Spenserian dialogue with scenes of sudden, shocking violence. But is the new novel a success? Would we pay much attention to it if it had appeared without the context of the preceding series? The two great strengths of the earlier Spenser books - that delving into Spenser's own persona and also into the layers of American society - are largely missing. Despite its Jewish elements the novel makes no real attempt to penetrate the cultural and moral maze of Jewish America. And perhaps it would be unrealistic and over-demanding to expect it. However there are characteristic and welcome Parker touches, such as his sympathy for the young and vulnerable, which typically even extends as far as the villains. Even the bad guy Herzberg started out with good intentions and, as Susan points out in the closing pages, his descent into crime was in part driven by the historical damage inflicted on him and his family. Also characteristic is Parker's merciless skewering of the phoniness and pomposity of academe. What the novel does succeed in doing is to explore and link various kinds of deception and bad faith. Its dominant theme is fraudulence and inauthenticity, themes that perhaps spoke particularly to Parker in age. The 'painted ladies' are not just the figures in the genuine and fake paintings but false-seeming characters. No-one is as they seem. Set against their falseness is Spenser's gritty integrity - but even Spenser's occasional attempts to masquerade as a cop in order to get information is emphasised in order to underscore the central theme.

Robert B. Parker's Spenser has been my favorite tough guy private eye for decades. Based in Boston, the ex-boxer has faced several rounds with bad guys of every stripe, and confronted all the moral ills of our society. I love Parker's dialogue in the books, and I love the cast of characters that have become part of my extended family. *Painted Ladies* starts off with a bang - literally. The art professor Spenser agrees to bodyguard during a buyback from art thieves gets blown to

smithereens in Robert B. Parker's latest (and sadly, one of his last) novels. Of course, Spenser being Spenser, the detective needs to do something to square the balance. He sets off to figure out who killed Ashton Prince, and that's going to require finding out why and what the stakes are. The novel doesn't really introduce anything new into Spenser's world, or into the reading experience of a long-time reader. There are a lot of good one-liners, but fans have come to expect them, and there are the relationship discussions with Susan, and fans have come to expect those as well. Spenser does his sleuthing in a round-about fashion, something the series has become known for, and gradually steps on the toes of the menacing killer waiting in the wings. There's even some gunplay, which is over entirely too quickly for my tastes, and a boxing sequence that is well done. I enjoyed seeing Quirk and Belson, seeing how Spenser shared points of view with both men, and I enjoyed seeing Rita Fiore again, though the comparison Susan did with Rita was a bit off-putting. I don't know where that came from and it went on too long and lingered more than it probably should have.

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