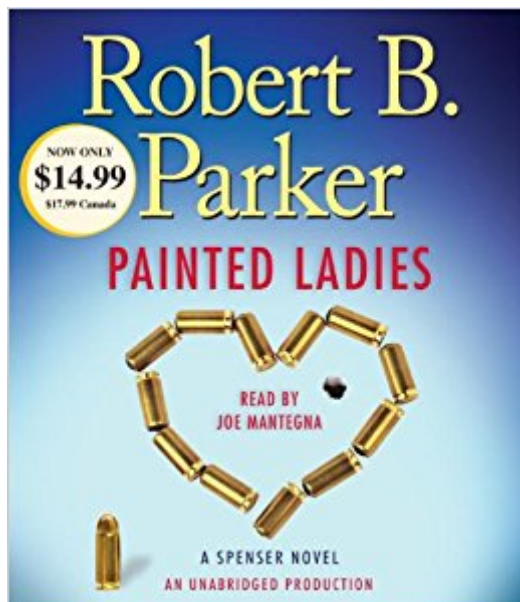




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Painted Ladies: A Spenser Novel



Synopsis

The brilliant new Spenser novel from the beloved New York Times 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 exchange—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

At the start of the lackluster 38th Spenser novel from late MWA Grand Master Parker, the iconic Boston PI agrees to protect art historian Ashton Prince during the exchange for cash of a rare painting held for ransom, 17th-century Dutch artist Franz Hermenszoon's Lady with a Finch. When a bomb kills Prince during the botched exchange, Spenser naturally plans to even the score. And naturally, Spenser's probing--into the painting's complex history, Prince's twisted life, the museum that owned the painting--leads to violent reactions. Spenser's habitual wisecracking often comes across as merely smart-alecky, but as always he backs the attitude with performance. While this crime thriller is short on the kind of grit and character that earned Parker (1932--2010) an Edgar Award and numerous Shamus nominations, fans should still relish this probably final

opportunity to enjoy the inimitable Spenser, who made his debut in 1973's *The Godwulf Manuscript*.
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Starred Review In *Spenser's End* is his beginning. In this posthumously published novel (Parker died in January), the Boston PI tries to retrieve a priceless work of art and deals with the rarefied and nasty world of academics, as he did in his very first caper, *The Godwulf Manuscript* (1973). Thirty-seven novels later, Spenser can still nail a person's foibles on first meeting, still whip up a gourmet meal in a few minutes, still dispatch the thugs who haunt his office and his home, and do it all while maintaining a fierce love of Susan Silverman and English poetry (which he quotes frequently and always to good effect). The plot this time spins off from *Spenser's Shame* over the murder of a client, a college art professor who asked him to provide backup during a delicate ransom exchange for a rare seventeenth-century Dutch painting. Spenser, ever true to his modern-day chivalric code, cannot let himself off the hook for the professor's death. His investigation unveils the professor's avocation as a sexual predator of coeds, and it digs deeply into both the world of art theft (reaching back to Nazi thefts of great European works). Halfway through this thoroughly entertaining mystery, Parker writes a perfect valedictory for the much-loved Spenser: "Sometimes I slew the dragon and galloped away with the maiden. Sometimes I didn't. . . . But so far the dragon hadn't slain me. • Long live Spenser." --Connie Fletcher --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

...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 crisp, crackling writing; the colorful names (although, thankfully, he doesn't push this to the point of parody as did Lawrence Sanders) and many of the usual cast of characters that have populated Spenser's Boston for the past 25 years. If you're a dedicated Spenser fan like I am (been reading the novels for 24 years), then I think you'll be filled if not full. If you've never read one of the books before, I highly suggest you either start at the beginning, "The Godwulf Manuscript" or plunge in, mid-stream, with the best of the novels, *A Catskill Eagle* (Spenser Novels (Dell)). What maybe the last full-length Spenser novel will be published next May called *Sixkill* (Spenser Mystery). Before "Sixkill" there is an "Untitled Spenser Holiday Story" scheduled for publication next month. Whether this is another full length novel or the last one of the "young adult" books that began with "Chasing the Bear" isn't made clear. I certainly hope it's the former and not the latter.

Sad because like several of his contemporaries, most notably Tony Hillerman, the end and posthumous novels do not read or ring true to form, as if finished in a hurry, or by a second rate forger. When Parker finished a book started by a voice he often quoted like a good jazzman quotes their sources, it was almost serene. This book is almost a farce. The elegant conversational timing, Spenser's often internalized angst filled soliloquies, even his vaunted sexual prowess all feel contrived here. There is no anxiety in the shoot out scene, it almost reads like an Elmore Leonard "Surprise! Shot ya!" without the surprise. I must also add that I have been tired of Susan since "A Catskill Eagle", and especially in recent times since whatever the book was where she bought the leather couch for Spenser's office. Which is also a strange part of this book as Spenser's office reverts back to the early 80's, cheap, old, underfurnished but with an Aeron chair(!). Product placement, anyone? So continues the out of sync feeling of this book. When it is suggested by Spenser's law enforcement friends that he might seek assistance from his short and diverse list of dangerous associates, Spenser states that he'll do this one alone. He was wrong. Spenser needed all the colorful companions he could muster here to help take the bland off of this outing. This might have been a decent *Murder She Wrote* episode, but it's a far cry from a real Spenser. Three stars just because he showed up is generous. True Spenser fans will find something here to like, true Parker fans may not be so lucky.

As always the characters and humour were there, but the plot was a bit convoluted and I missed some of the secondary characters, such as Hawk and some of the bad guys that Spenser has a complex relationship with.. The story is about an art thief and the murders committed to hide the criminals involved in a train gone wrong. Any Parker readers will enjoy time passed READING about the lovable Spenser

Every time I read a Spenser story I know exactly what I will experience. They are all like conversation over dinner with an old friend. The topic of discussion may vary a bit, but in the end there are always comfortable constants. And, in the end you are never dissatisfied. This incarnation was a tiny bit less fulfilling than some others. No Hawk, no Vinnie, no Chollo or Tedy. But, in the last analysis it was still a good tale, with plenty of twists and turns to hold the participant's attention. And, there will always be Susan and Pearl. My only regret is that very soon my relationship with them will end. But, again, like the old friend there will always be fond memories.

Knowing the ins and outs of a crime, watching it unravel thru Spenser is educational as well as informative. Great characters

I have devoured Robert Parker's books for years. My only negative comment is that he speaks in two-word sentences (or close to it). Same with his western Appaloosa.

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