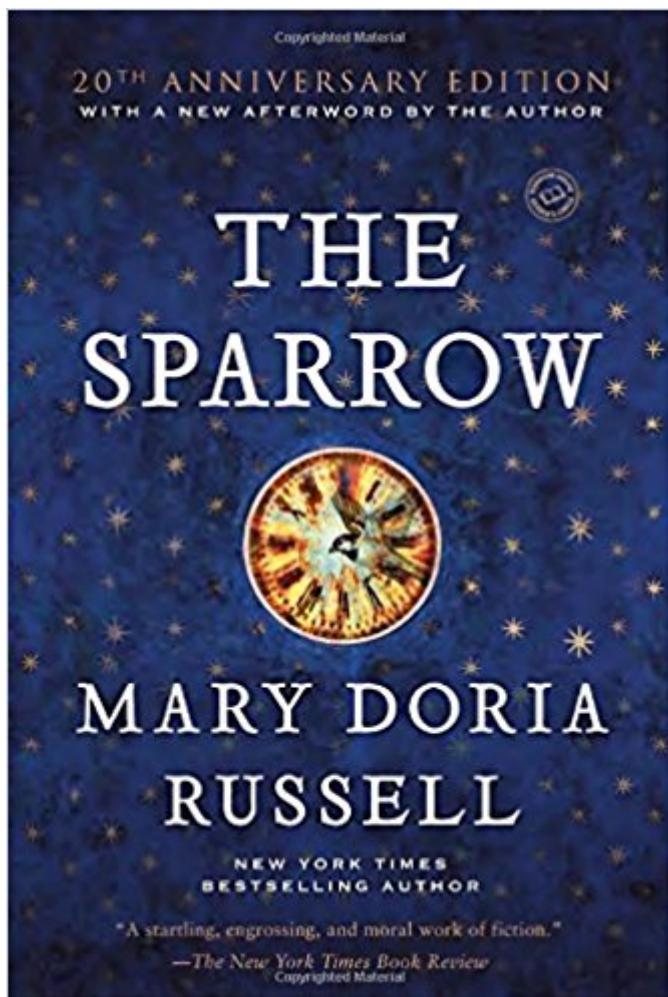


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The Sparrow: A Novel (Ballantine Reader's Circle)



Synopsis

A visionary work that combines speculative fiction with deep philosophical inquiry, *The Sparrow* tells the story of a charismatic Jesuit priest and linguist, Emilio Sandoz, who leads a scientific mission entrusted with a profound task: to make first contact with intelligent extraterrestrial life. The mission begins in faith, hope, and beauty, but a series of small misunderstandings brings it to a catastrophic end. *Praise for The Sparrow* • *The New York Times Book Review* • *Important novels leave deep cracks in our beliefs, our prejudices, and our blinders. The Sparrow is one of them.* • *Entertainment Weekly* • *Powerful . . . The Sparrow tackles a difficult subject with grace and intelligence.* • *San Francisco Chronicle* • *Provocative, challenging . . . recalls both Arthur C. Clarke and H. G. Wells, with a dash of Ray Bradbury for good measure.* • *The Dallas Morning News* • *[Mary Doria] Russell shows herself to be a skillful storyteller who subtly and expertly builds suspense.* • *USA Today*

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This strange, ambitious science fiction novel has already won enough attention for its first-time author to make it a selection by both the Book of the Month and QPB clubs. Father Emilio Sandoz, a Jesuit linguist, heads a team of scientists and explorers on an expedition to the planet Rakhat,

where contact has been established with two apparently primitive races, the Runa and the Jana'ata. The narrative shifts back and forth between 2016, when contact is first made, and 2060, to a Vatican inquest interrogating the maimed and broken Sandoz. A paleoanthropologist, Russell makes the descriptions of the inhabitants of Rakhat both convincing and unsettling. Check out .com's Sparrow feature and read an excerpt from the book! --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

An enigma wrapped inside a mystery sets up expectations that prove difficult to fulfill in Russell's first novel, which is about first contact with an extraterrestrial civilization. The enigma is Father Emilio Sandoz, a Jesuit linguist whose messianic virtues hide his occasional doubt about his calling. The mystery is the climactic turn of events that has left him the sole survivor of a secret Jesuit expedition to the planet Rakhat and, upon his return, made him a disgrace to his faith. Suspense escalates as the narrative ping-pongs between the years 2016, when Sandoz begins assembling the team that first detects signs of intelligent extraterrestrial life, and 2060, when a Vatican inquest is convened to coax an explanation from the physically mutilated and emotionally devastated priest. A vibrant cast of characters who come to life through their intense scientific and philosophical debates help distract attention from the space-opera elements necessary to get them off the Earth. Russell brings her training as a paleoanthropologist to bear on descriptions of the Runa and Jana'ata, the two races on Rakhat whose differences are misunderstood by the Earthlings, but the aliens never come across as more than variations of primitive earthly cultures. The final revelation of the tragic human mistake that ends in Sandoz's degradation isn't the event for which readers have been set up. Much like the worlds it juxtaposes, this novel seems composed of two stories that fail to come together. BOMC, QPB and One Spirit Book Club selections. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Father Emilio Sandoz of the Society of Jesus has never considered himself to be a mystic or a saint. His faith is not founded in a "feeling" about God, or even in any kind of love for Him. Sandoz was attracted to the centeredness, the morality of the faith as a mere boy, when he was rescued from the slums of La Perla by a Texan Jesuit priest with a penchant for swearing and an eye for diamonds in the rough. So when first contact is made with an alien world in the neighboring galaxy of Alpha Centauri, and that first contact comes in the form of lovely, wistful, transcendent music, Father Sandoz is astounded and amused and intrigued. But when he and each of his closest friends turn out to have the precise skill sets required to make the journey out to this new world, he is

shaken. And when, against all possible odds, Father Sandoz and those dearest to his heart land on that far away alien Garden of Eden just eighteen short months later, he is transported. For the first time, he feels, he has encountered and fallen in love with the Living God. But crossing languages, cultures, and species is a treacherous business. As missionaries throughout the millennia of human history have learned, the cost of leading the vanguard of discovery can be very, very high. How will a fledgling faith hold up in the face of loss and suffering and despair? Can we love a God who takes away as much as He gives, who is neither simple, predictable, or safe? Mary Doria Russell accomplished in her debut, award-winning novel what I thought was impossible in the modern age. She married the foremost theories of medicine and technology with one of the oldest and most rigidly structured religious faiths. She took atheist and Jesuit characters and treated each with the same honest affection, bound them together as a family unit, and then dissected them in a ruthless pursuit of literally "universal" truths. She did not shy away from a single charged, political question. She looked the reader in the face as she led us to an abyss we all recognize, but work very hard to ignore. I have a new favorite book, folks. And I am challenged, once again, to expand my own view of what's possible to achieve in fiction.

"Visionary" this may be, but if these are the visions, I would rather avoid them. The strength of the premise of this book led me to pick it up, but the more I read, the more depressing it all got. This is one of those books I finished and was afterward left with a sordid, unpleasant feeling. The beginning of the book sets it up to be a story of companionship and faith, a story of reaching out to another civilization, a story of ethnography and religion in space. The end of the book is more along the lines of "God gives the hardest challenges to those he loves most", which is rather a different story. From fairly early on, it is clear the expedition is doomed, and most of the book is like watching a slow-motion train wreck. As a reader, you sit there thinking, "Oh, they seem happy. In what horrible way that they are completely unprepared for will their lives end?" The aliens are somewhat ancillary to the story, they did not feel entirely real to me throughout. After reading the notes at the back, what the author was attempting to do was interesting, but it did not seem fully realized in the book. I will say that it felt much more contemporary than I would have expected, given when it was written, but I will certainly not be reading the second book.

One of the most original narratives I have ever read. Shifting from the "past" of 2019 to the "present" of 2060, we are drawn into a riveting mystery of what happened to a crew sent to meet the residents of a distant planet. But that's just the barest outline. There are some weak links - why I withheld that

fifth star. It is nevertheless an engrossing story, with characters you care about deeply, especially the central protagonist, the Jesuit priest, Emilio Sandoz.

The book is slow going at the beginning maybe because of the two storylines literary device. It does grip you midway and then I could hardly put it down. The book is magnificently written and the characters are dear especially for me, Sofia Mendes. Unfortunately, I couldn't relate at all to the main character of the book, the priest Emilio Sandoz, except maybe for his uprooting linguistic experiences. One of the story lines works in the present with flashbacks to the first storyline with constant reference to a terrible event that happened. They seem to intersect at the point the characters made contact on Rakhat. There are also two narratives. One is a story of first contact from an anthropologist's point of view and how, although we meant well by introducing our culture and civilization to an alien world, it could have disastrous consequences just like the discovery of the new world did. The other is a story about faith, God, and free will. I did enjoy the cultural extrapolations about the aliens but if you were looking for insights into how different was their intelligence from the extrapolation of their technology, you will be disappointed. It has been said that the times we live in has blurred the distinction between science-fiction and fiction. Is this story science-fiction or anthropology in space?

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