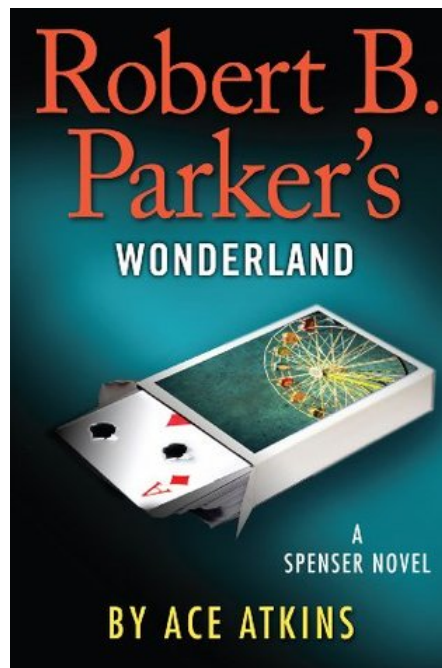




Robert B. Parker's Wonderland

Ace Atkins

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Robert B. Parker's Wonderland Ace Atkins

Henry Cimoli and Spenser have been friends for years, yet the old boxing trainer has never asked the private eye for a favor. Until now. A heavy-handed developer is trying to buy up Henry's condo on Revere Beach and sends thugs to move the process along. Soon Spenser and his apprentice, Zebulon Sixkill, find a trail leading to a mysterious and beautiful woman, a megalomaniacal Las Vegas kingpin, and plans to turn a chunk of land north of Boston into a sprawling casino. Bitter rivals emerge, alliances turn, and the uglier pieces of the Boston political machine look to put an end to Spenser's investigation.

Aspiration, greed, and twisted dreams all focus on the old Wonderland dog track where the famous amusement park once fronted the ocean. For Spenser and Z, this simple favor to Henry will become the fight of their lives.

Robert B. Parker's Wonderland Details

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From Reader Review Robert B. Parker's Wonderland for online ebook

Keith says

This is the second book in the Robert B Parker Spenser legacy series. As I noted in my review of Ace Atkins's freshman effort in this series, having read all 30+ Spenser novels, often more than once, it is difficult to accept someone else writing the series. After reading, *Lullaby*, Atkins's first Spenser book, I generally liked it a lot. I had some issues of tone and description but overall it was well worth reading. *Wonderland* is more of a mixed bag for me. On the one hand Atkins has done the most difficult thing in capturing Spenser's tone, his attitude and general worldview in a thoroughly entertaining manner. The plot is first rate, crime and violence all related to turning the old Wonderland dog track into Boston's first casino. Atkins brings a character Parker introduced in his last novel, Zebulon Sixkill, into the thick of the action. There's no Hawk but Sixkill, the detective in training, provides an interesting companion to Spenser. Two aspects of the novel disturbed me somewhat, first, a sense of over-describing certain actions, For instance, Boston becomes much more present in a travelog sort of manner. This may be due to the fact that Atkins, unlike Parker, doesn't live in Boston. It's not that his descriptions are wrong. I can follow Spenser's journey through the city, over to Cambridge and Revere with ease. It's just that Parker's descriptions were a little more subtle. Another example of over-describing things is the food and drink that is consumed throughout the novel. Again, there seems to be more detail than I remember from the original novels.

Parker's novels are all dialogue and Spenser's inner narration. Atkins becomes a little more detailed in everything and truth be told he has produced a "meatier" Spenser than long-time fans have experienced. What needs to be said is that for all the occasional missteps that Atkins might have taken he is clearly a talented writer who is working hard to make Spenser his own. For me, having more Spenser around is worth the wait.

Gary says

Ace Atkins has done well at continuing Robert Parker's Spenser series, but it's a little melancholy, a little less humorous. I can't imagine a harder job than continuing a long series like the Spenser series.

Larry says

Ace Atkins, author of the excellent Quinn Colson series, captures Spenser's voice, though it's more the voice of the last couple of dozen Spenser novels and not the more tautly paced first dozen. Spenser's old pal, Henry Cimoli, is being pressured out of his condo (along with all of the other older people who live there) by gaming interests who are out to build a giant casino. Spenser and his protege, Zebulon Sixkill (Hawk is in Miami on a job, unfortunately) move against the thugs who are pressuring Henry, but flounder around trying to make sense of the financial end of things. (Read Peter Speigleman's John March books, especially "Black Maps," to see how a p.i. can unravel financial crime.) It takes a long time to prove the obvious, and too much of the book is dedicated to the redemption of Zee (Zebulon). There is one mild surprise at the heart of things, but it's not much of a surprise. It's a pleasant book, but not as good as it's predecessor, and I still miss early Spenser. Like Hawk, Susan is out of town. That's not bad, actually, though she has a nice scene when she and Spenser dine out with two of the would-be developers. (This week's re-reading doesn't change my

judgment, but it's a sign of how much I miss those early books. Still, Atkins gets the big pieces down cold, and Spenser wasn't a detective as much as a smart thug who knew how to make people overreact.)

James Thane says

This is the second novel written by Ace Atkins featuring Boston P.I. Spenser, the late Robert B. Parker's best-known and best-loved series character. As the story opens, Spenser is approached by his long-time friend and trainer, Henry Cimoli, who owns the gym where Spenser works out. Henry has never before asked Spenser for a favor, but he needs one now.

Henry lives in a condo complex near an abandoned dog racing track called *Wonderland*. The units in the complex are owned mostly by elderly citizens like Henry and someone is making a play to buy them out. The developers are working through dummy agents, and when Henry and some others refuse to sell, the developers or their agents send in some thugs to intimidate them.

Naturally Spenser agrees to help. His long-time sidekick, Hawk, is out of town and so Spenser recruits his new apprentice, Zebulon Sixkill, a Cree from Box Elder, Montana to assist. Sixkill is no Hawk, at least not yet, but Spenser has high hopes for the young man and feels an obligation to pass on the knowledge and skills he has acquired through the years to someone who might follow in his footsteps.

Spenser and Sixkill deal pretty easily and effectively with the two hoods that have been threatening Henry and his pals, but of course the developers who want the land will not surrender the field nearly that easily. Upon further investigation, Spenser discovers that the developers have ambitions of bringing casino gambling to Boston and have settled on the *Wonderland* site for their development. Henry's condo complex is the last piece of property that they need to acquire, and so Spenser negotiates with the developers, as only he can, to get Henry and the other residents a much better price for their property. Now everyone is happy--until everything turns to crap. All of a sudden, people are dying and a sinister web of greed, ambition and violence threatens to ensnare and take down Spenser, Sixkill, Henry, and a whole lot of others.

With this book, Atkins hits the sweet spot that Robert B. Parker had achieved about halfway through the series. By then, the characters and their relationships were pretty well established and Parker was still writing complex and interesting plots. That's a polite way of saying that *Wonderland* is, frankly, a better book than some of the ones that Parker himself was churning out later in the series. By then, Parker seemed to be writing these stories about as fast as he could type. The plots were thin and not very believable, and the books seemed to exist largely as an excuse for Parker to write witty dialogue. And by then, the relationship between Spenser and his main squeeze, Susan Silverman, had become so saccharine as to seriously antagonize lots of long-time fans.

In this case, Atkins provides a lot of snappy dialogue but gives us a great plot and a number of interesting characters to go along with it. In particular, he handles the development of Zebulon Sixkill very nicely. Sixkill may not yet be ready for prime time and watching him react to the challenges that face him as the action progresses is one of the pleasures of this novel. And, mercifully, Atkins has also sent Susan out of town for the duration of the book. Readers have to endure a few telephone calls between the two and one weekend spent together, but virtually all of us I'm sure are in Atkins's debt for sparing us any more of this.

I'm a huge fan of Ace Atkins's other work, particularly his Quinn Colson series which has become one of my current favorites. It's nice to see that another of my favorite series characters has been left in such capable hands. (And you were right as always, Kemper.)

Dan says

I've read every one of the Spenser, Jesse Stone and Sunny Randall books. I wasn't sure if I wanted to keep reading the non-Parker novels. Even after reading the first Atkins book I wasn't totally convinced. The story was ok, and seemed Parker-ish but the dialogue seemed forced to me and it seemed like Atkins was trying a bit too hard. After reading his new book, Wonderland, I'm definitely in for the long haul. I really enjoyed it. The story is good, and the dialogue much better. I even like Spenser's new apprentice, Z. Lots of Spenser characters show up in this one, at least briefly. I'm glad I continued with them and look forward to many new Spenser books to come!

Randy Briggs says

I was devastated when Robert B. Parker died in 2010, as he was one of my favorite writers for decades. I have read every one of his books, and his death left a huge hole in my literary pleasure. I was hugely skeptical when I learned that his books were to be written by an unknown (to me, at that point) author. Thankfully, his estate hand-picked a fitting writer to carry on the tradition. "Wonderland" is the second Spenser novel written by Ace Atkins, and it's a dandy. The language is the same, as are the relationships. The witty repartee remains, and the highbrow (and lowbrow) snark is intact. RBP would be proud that his legacy is yet untarnished. My only complaint is a minor one; I missed Spenser's other half. Don't get me wrong, I like Z, but he's no Hawk. But then, who is? The mysteries remain fresh, and Spenser never bores.

Angela Juline says

I just enjoy these Spenser books - certainly not works of fiction, but I've always appreciated how well the stories are told. Atkins does a respectable job of keeping the books as Robert B. Parker would have written them - I love books with lots of dialog, especially well written dialog.

Paul says

Brilliant Wonderland

Having read Wonderland by Robert B. Parker I can see why they called him "...one of the greats of the American hard-boiled genre" because this book is brilliance defined. If you want to know how to write about private detectives then he has to be a must read. For me, Spence is the best private detective in modern American crime fiction. I know want to read more of what Parker has written as he is succinct does not drag anything out and his prose speaks Bostonian hard working blue collar meets bourbon. Spenser is the new Phillip Marlowe for our age.

Spenser is asked by his old friend Henry Cimoli to find out who is putting pressure to sell their condos on Revere Beach and worse still who sent thugs to scare pensioners out of their homes. As Spenser digs deeper in to who is doing what he finds that someone has bought the old fairground Wonderland but is hiding behind various front companies and a beautiful English woman.

After digging around Spenser finds that a Vegas casino mogul has been buying up land and is hoping to buy up the condos. Things seem to go well until his head turns up minus the rest of him, this is when Spenser comes in to his own and gets to the bottom of which gangster and corporation is doing what to whom and who is taking bribes up at the State House. Spenser finds the answers as the bodies drop and somehow keeps himself from dodging the bullets.

Wonderland maybe only 190 pages long but it such a brilliantly paced crime thriller no words are wasted and all count to build up the story. This was a wonderful read in that I would love to be able to get my hands on the back catalogue read and review them. This brings a new definition to short but sweet and worth every minute of reading the novel.

David Anthony Sam says

A good effort at channeling Robert Parker's Spenser: Better than some Parker wrote near the end, but not anywhere as good as *Mortal Stakes*, *Judas Goat* and others from the period thru *Pale Kings*---but then not much is that good.

Jay Connor says

This is the second outing for Ace Atkins as the successor to the great Robert B. Parker in continuing the Spenser series. Though not quite as strong as *Lullaby*, *Wonderland* is a fine addition.

New authors picking up the baton from a deceased author has been done before. Parker himself wrote two Philip Marlowe novels. John Gardner took a run at James Bond. Eric Van Lustbader picked up Jason Bourne. Joe Gores gave us a new Sam Spade novel. And Sherlock Holmes has been tackled by everyone from Stephen King and Caleb Carr to Loren D. Estleman and Michael Chabon.

On that last point, Holmes serves as a good illustration of a larger issue. Atkins didn't succeed by trying to do a paint-by-numbers impersonation of Parker, rather he succeeded by understanding what in fact Robert B. Parker had created.

When done well, a series character tends to take on a life of his (or her) own. No one writes Holmes as well as Doyle, but since we keep lapping up new variations on the old boy (there's a TV series with Lucy Liu as Watson), Holmes himself must have qualities that extend beyond the excellence of Doyle's writing. I'm sensitive to the argument that no one could ever write Spenser as well as Parker (I'm utterly convinced of it, in fact), but I must say I am intrigued by the idea that Parker might have created a character who could conceivably become as archetypal as Holmes, Spade, and Marlowe.

Unlike Walter Mosley's continuing development of Easy Rawlins, Parker did not see fit to evolve his hero beyond a certain point. You don't turn to Spenser for originality. You turn to him for familiarity. Forget the new stuff, play your hits! This is why Spenser stopped aging sometime in the 1980s (and why he stopped talking about serving in Korea). Parker wanted the character to be the perpetual embodiment of a certain kind of emotionally aware masculinity: self-possessed and autonomous, but also selfless and capable of intimacy. These qualities found their expression in a formula as dependable as a three-minute pop song. Spenser in his office smart-mouthing a new client. Spenser and Susan Silverman flirting over dinner. Hawk showing up about halfway through, his bald head gleaming and his face coolly bemused. Spenser hilariously

insulting some would-be tough guy. Spenser handing that guy his ass when the doofus can't take a hint. And, most of all, Spenser sticking to his code of ethics even as he navigates the nasty end of the Boston underworld. You read Spenser to watch him keep being Spenser: the perfect man in an imperfect world.

The only shortfall by Atkins here is his handling of a character Parker bequeathed in his last Spenser novel, Sixkill. As yet it is not clear whether this is just a fumble or a game-changer for Atkins as the keeper of the Spenser flame. The problem is not the use of Sixkill as Spenser's wingman, instead of Hawk, for it is totally appropriate to the story. Rather, the issue is the the story diminished Sixkill. A central strength of Parker's style was the fact that each of his characters advance -- no longer chronologically, but as crisp personalities. They learn. Whether it is thug or therapist, the characters remain true to themselves yet not stuck in themselves. We did not see this with Sixkill.

At this point I'm very comfortable in chalking it up to Atkin's learning curve. But it will be something to watch in future installments. We hope to see in Atkins hands, that Spenser becomes something larger than a character in thirty-nine novels by Robert B. Parker. If that becomes true—if Spenser can continue beyond the prose and plots of the original books—then it will only deepen Parker's achievement. That is the testament we are all hoping Atkins can deliver.

Janet Major says

Ace Atkins continues his winning ways with the Robert Parker series. Spenser is asked to help Henry Cimoni, owner of the gym where he and Hawk have trained for years. Cimoni currently lives in a high rise condo on Revere beach which is under attack from someone who wants to buy the whole condo building. It has turned dangerous for those who haven't signed the agreement. Spenser and his sidekick-in-training, Zebulon Sixkill, endeavor to solve the situation. It seems that groups want the land to build a luxurious casino. And so the adventure begins...

Both Hawk and Susan are away: Hawk working in Miami and Susan teaching out-of-state. Wish Mattie Sullivan from Lullaby had made an appearance. Hope to see more of her.

While I enjoyed Lullaby more, this story held my interest. Brisk banter and male bonding, staples of Parker, were evident. The reader learns more about "Z", his past trials and current challenges.

Well done, Ace!

Lee Goldberg says

Ace Atkins flawlessly captures Parker's narrative voice and has produced the best Spenser novel in years. It reads like Parker in his prime, even without Hawk appearing in the book. There isn't a single false note in the plotting, character or voice. It's an astonishing feat. It's actually better, and truer to Parker and his characters, than the last few Spenser novels that Parker himself wrote. It's a shame Atkins can't take on Jesse Stone and Virgil Cole, too.

Lori says

You all know how I love Spenser.

And if you remember I was concerned when author Robert Parker died and Ace Atkins took over the Spenser series. His first book, *Sixkill* was good, had that Parker feel, almost seamless in the turnover. **Edit: This is actually Parker's last book, Atkins took over the next one...d"oh!**

This one...well, it was good, still has the Parker feel but something was a little bit off. Not bad...but off.

At first I thought it was because Atkins didn't have enough of that quick, witty dialogue that defines Parker's writing. Often throughout the book I thought, "Oh please, don't lose all the conversation, the fast paced back and forth between characters." Now that I'm done I'm not sure that was the case. It might just have been that many of the characters were guest stars so they didn't have the history with Spenser, the give and take of smart remarks. See Hawk is in Florida for this book so we are not treated to his witty repartee. Susan is teaching in Berkeley and while she comes in for a visit and there are phone calls, she's essentially on the back burner. Even the old police friends are not there for more than a few short scenes. I'm hoping this is because of this complicated storyline and not a sign of things to come.

The Z character is intriguing...and he did get developed a lot so that may even be part of it.

None of this will, of course, cause me to break up with my Spenser. We are likethis, destined to always be together.

(And no, that last sentence is not in any way weird or awkward...shut up.)

Monnie says

Writer Ace Atkins continues the Spenser tradition established by the late Robert B. Parker, and once again, he hits the nail on the head nine times out of 10. In this one, private investigator Spenser at first takes on a *pro bono* job for old friend and boxing trainer Henry Cimoli; he and members of his condo association are being harassed both mentally and physically as they steadfastly refuse to sell their building for a bargain-basement price.

The attacks, Henry believes, are coming at the hands of developers who desperately want the property (which used to be an on-the-water amusement park called Wonderland) to give them an edge in winning the right to build a gambling casino there - Boston's first and only such facility. But it's possible there's another faction at work here - a group that wants that deal to fall through so it will win the gambling license. The question is, who's behind it all? The answers run from Boston to Vegas to the mob, and Spenser - aided by his P.I. apprentice, Zebulon Sixkill ("Z"), a native American of the Cree tribe - needs to figure it out without getting himself, Z or Henry killed. Meanwhile, Z has problems of his own learning the business as Spenser runs it; he still tends to act before he thinks and has a fondness for alcohol.

When one of the major casino players ends up dead, Spenser is hired to find out what happened. As things go from bad to worse, the body count and number of close encounters Spenser and his sidekick must skillfully survive increase as well, although the outcomes are fairly predictable (with one surprise near the end). Spenser's dry humor and penchant for fine cuisine are fairly close to Parker's originals - and all that adds up to an enjoyable experience.

If I have a complaint, it's that there seems to be an overabundance of characters. I know I'm getting old and my memory isn't what it used to be, but I had a bit of a struggle keeping all the who's who straight in my

head. Also, two characters are noticeably gone from the day-to-day action: Spenser's long-time companion Hawk, who's said to be on a job in Miami, and Susan Silverman, Spenser's beautiful psychiatrist girlfriend. Susan does make an occasional appearance, but Hawk never shows his face. I'm not sure why unless Atkins is trying to establish a character that's all his own, but I do know I miss Hawk (although I admit Z makes a rather likable substitute).

Kemper says

I recently got to see some mystery writers including Ace Atkins and Megan Abbott at an event and signing in St. Louis and got one of my proudest moments when I met Atkins and mentioned that I liked the homage he'd done to True Grit in his first Spenser novel *Lullaby*.

"You know, you're only like the third person I've talked to who picked up on that, and Megan Abbott there was one of the other ones," Atkins told me. This made me so happy that I walked around with a big stupid grin on my face for the next week. Nothing like the current writer of one of your favorite characters telling you that you picked up on something that few others did to boost the old ego. (See the full write-up on my trip to St. Louis at Shelf Inflicted .)

I don't think that I've got any equally insightful observations about *Wonderland* so I guess I'll just have to stick to a basic review. Spenser's old friend and former boxing mentor Henry Cimoli needs some help. Someone is trying to buy out the tenants of his building and they're using hired thugs to intimidate people into selling. With Hawk out of town, Spenser relies on his protégé Zebulon Sixkill (a/k/a Z) to back him up. When it turns out that someone is looking to buy Henry's building as part of a larger scheme to bring a casino to Boston, Spenser and Z find themselves in the middle of a mess that involves gangsters, politicians and a Las Vegas gaming tycoon.

In the first Spenser novel that Atkins wrote after taking over for the late Robert B. Parker, he took the character back to basics and proved that he could write a compelling story that wasn't imitation but rather a new phase that kept familiar elements. In *Wonderland*, Atkins shows that he isn't content to just keep Spenser in the same familiar cocoon that RBP had put him in during the later years of his career.

One sign that Atkins isn't playing it safe is that in only his second book on this series is how he strips away two of the main supporting characters for most of the book. Hawk is off on his own mysterious mission in Miami, and Susan spends a lot of the book out of town for work. This means that Atkins has to make Spenser work without his trusty cohort and with minimal conversations with his girlfriend. Like many long-time Spenser fans, I believe that the less Susan, the better, but I still think that limiting their interactions was a brave choice because it means that Atkins deliberately put himself in a position where Spenser has to carry the book without two of the biggest RBP crutches.

It also allows the development of the Z character that RBP had introduced in his final book. Spenser took Z under his wing and the young man is showing a lot of potential as a tough guy detective, but he still has things to learn. There's a nice sub-plot with Z trying to deal with an incident where he feels he didn't meet expectations, and his disappointment in himself threatens to undo the progress he's made.

If there's anything unsatisfying in the book, it's that it almost seems like a set-up for future stories in some ways. However, that's not entirely a bad thing. RBP had Spenser in such a state of stasis for so long that getting some plot that may carry over to another book is welcome at this point. Plus, (view spoiler)

Ace Atkins shows again that he was the right writer for the job to continue the Spenser stories.

Also posted at Shelf Inflicted.

Next Up: Spenser huddles up in Cheap Shot.
