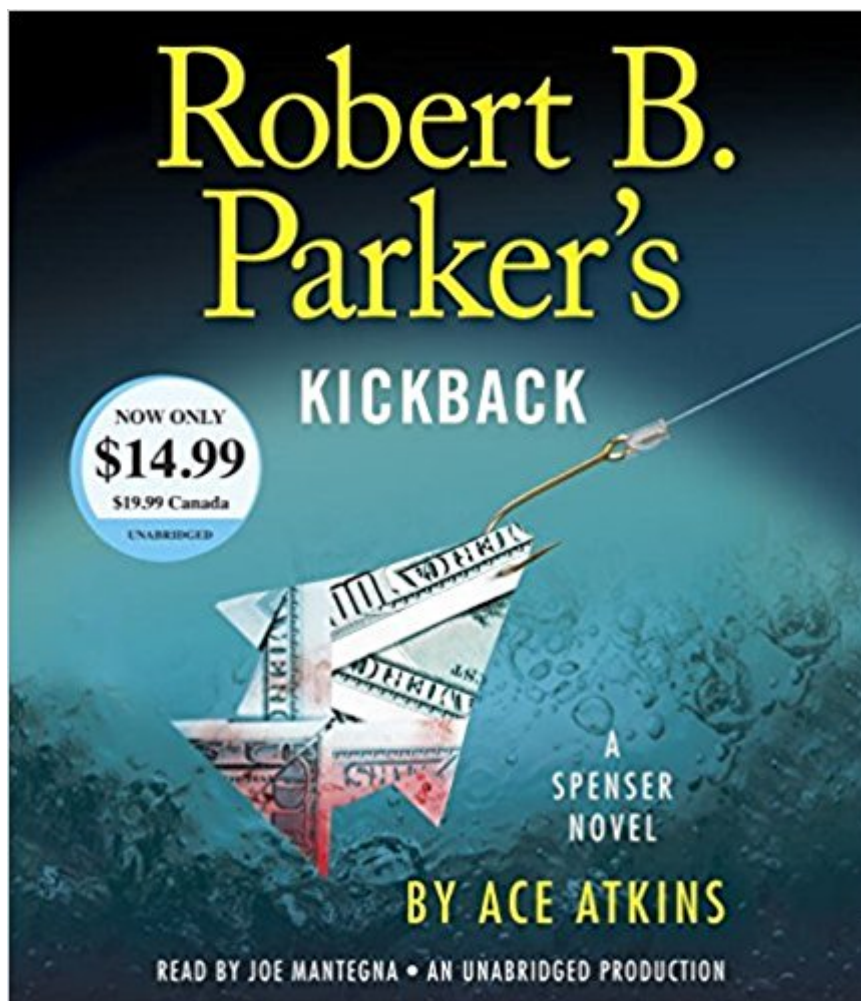




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Robert B. Parker's Kickback (Spenser)



Synopsis

P.I. Spenser, knight-errant of the Back Bay, returns in this stellar addition to the iconic New York Times "bestselling series from author Ace Atkins. What started out as a joke landed seventeen-year-old Dillon Yates in a lockdown juvenile facility in Boston Harbor. When he set up a prank Twitter account for his vice principal, he never dreamed he could be brought up on criminal charges, but that's exactly what happened. This is Blackburn, Massachusetts, where zero tolerance for minors is a way of life. Leading the movement is tough-as-nails Judge Joe Scali, who gives speeches about getting tough on today's wild youth. But Dillon's mother, who knows other Blackburn kids who are doing hard time for minor infractions, isn't buying Scali's line. She hires Spenser to find the truth behind the draconian sentencing. From the Harbor Islands to a gated Florida community, Spenser and trusted ally Hawk follow a trail through the Boston underworld with links to a shadowy corporation that runs New England's private prisons. They eventually uncover a culture of corruption and cover-ups in the old mill town, where hundreds of kids are sent off to for-profit juvie jails. From the Hardcover edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Praise for Robert B. Parker's Kickback: "It's great to see Spenser tackle a social evil with its roots in real life." • "Kirkus Reviews" "A topical plot line propels bestseller Atkins's engrossing fourth Spenser novel. . . . Once again, Atkins has done a splendid job of capturing the voice of the late Robert B. Parker." • "Publishers Weekly" --This text refers to the Paperback

edition.

Ace Atkins is the Edgar-nominated author of seventeen books, including five books in the Quinn Colson series. Selected by the Robert B. Parker estate to continue the Spenser novels, he has also written Robert B. Parker's Lullaby, Robert B. Parker's Wonderland, and Robert B. Parker's Cheap Shot, all of which were New York Times bestsellers. Atkins lives in Oxford, Mississippi. From the Hardcover edition.

I enjoy Ace Adkins' Spenser books for the most part, but this one wasn't as good as the others. The plot was dull and not very believable. Parker could paint awful, evil, repulsive badguys with just a few strokes, then have Spenser come in and bust them up, and we cheered. This badguy is just meh, the detective work is meh, and the climactic scenes are meh-meh-meh. I was amused by Spenser's small concessions to age. I was surprised to find him drinking Sam Adams beer and even - I think - micro brews? Seriously? And I was happy that Susan made only brief and inoffensive appearances. The last few actual Parker/Spenser books were sort of shrines to vain, shallow, bitchy, smart-talking, micro-eating and -drinking tiny older Jewish women with PhDs from Harvard. So it was okay, but it wasn't wonderful. Good to see Hawk, of course.

I thought this was the best effort from Ace to date. It felt like a RPB book. I am sure many will agree there will never be another RPB but I have come to peace with my choices. Enjoy Ace's efforts at face value and stop comparing him to RPB. When you do this you will be much happier with the book. I think Ace continues to improve and get closer to RPB with each new entree and with somewhat mixed emotions, I also applaud his efforts to show Spenser as a bit more vulnerable and also that he is aging just like all of us. I know many would prefer that he remain a perfect specimen like it was 1980 again. But a "glimpse" of him aging and having some physical ailments is not only believable but also endearing. I feel for him more. He can still kick butt and shoot out with the best!

I was looking forward to reading this new Spenser novel since I really enjoyed Ace Adkins' two previous efforts (Wonderland and Cheap Shot). Unfortunately, this third novel in the reboot of the series is not as good as the other two. Make no mistake, Adkins has Parker's voice nailed. You can hardly tell the difference in the writing between the two, and Adkins shows the proper respect for the characters. He also seems to be taking on some of the bad habits that Parker indulged in at the end of his career. This book has several third person passages from the point of view of a young juvenile

who runs afoul of the corrupt Blackburn, Mass judicial system. These passages seem to be inserted to beef up the page count. While they do boast the suspense a tad, I found myself dreading them whenever I came to a new third person section. The plot is a bit far fetched. Not only are the cops inept and corrupt, but they could never get away with the kind of stuff portrayed in this novel. Neither could the corrupt judges, who are in bed with organized crime. The third person sections have a brutal corrections officer nicknamed "Robocop." The villains in this one are so mean and evil, they're virtually caricatures. The plot really moves well in the Spenser passages, and Atkins has the redoubtable detective, and his pal, Hawk, partake in the customary fist and gun fights. These are handled with Atkins' usual aplomb, but the ending slows to a shuffle and meanders into an anticlimax. Don't get me wrong. If you're looking for pure Spenser, you probably won't be disappointed because, as I said, Atkins has captured Parker's characters and voice perfectly. But this one is not up to his usual standards.

Since Robert B. Parker's death in 2010, I've sorely missed reading his work, and probably always will. No one can truly replace him or his writing, but I do appreciate Atkins' take on Parker's tough but sensitive Boston private eye. In this novel, Spenser is recovering from knee surgery and almost back to his fighting weight when Sheila Yates from Blackburn, a small town north of Boston, asks Spenser to help her teenage son Dillon who has been incarcerated in a juvenile detention center for a school prank. He's the latest in a long line of kids facing harsh sentences for minor infractions by Judge Joe Scali, a man famous for his stance of zero tolerance for bad behavior. But Sheila suspects Scali's motives are not so noble and hires Spenser to find the truth. Spenser uncovers corrupt judges and a mysterious corporation that runs New England's private prisons, both with links to Boston's criminal underworld. All the while, Dillon befriends a new arrival at the detention center, a young teenager who refuses to bend to the harsh treatment, particularly from one guard known only as "Robocop." As Spenser and Hawk do battle with a variety of criminals, ranging from powerful judges to the latest line of Boston mobsters, the race is on to save the boy, along with countless others languishing on an island purgatory. Atkins keeps the story moving at a brisk clip, with colorful characters old and new, and saucy dialogue throughout the novel. Though Spenser's age has slowed to a crawl (his Army service in the Korean war is no longer mentioned), the shadows of time and mortality pop up again and again in the story, from Spenser's troublesome knee to missing Boston landmarks to once powerful criminal figures like Joe Broz or Tony Marcus either dead or diminished. All in all, a good entertaining read. Ace Atkins isn't quite on Parker's level, but he's probably as close as anyone is likely to get.

Ace Atkins does a great job with the Spenser series in general. This one was more of the same, bringing Spencer and his cohorts to life nearly as well as Parker himself. However, perhaps because I was quite familiar with the real-life kids for cash scheme in Pennsylvania, I felt like I knew exactly how most of the story would play out. Still a few surprises, but I felt like I knew exactly where it was going from the start. Still, Ace does Spenser like no other living writer can, and it's always a pleasure to go to Parker's and Spencer's Boston.

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