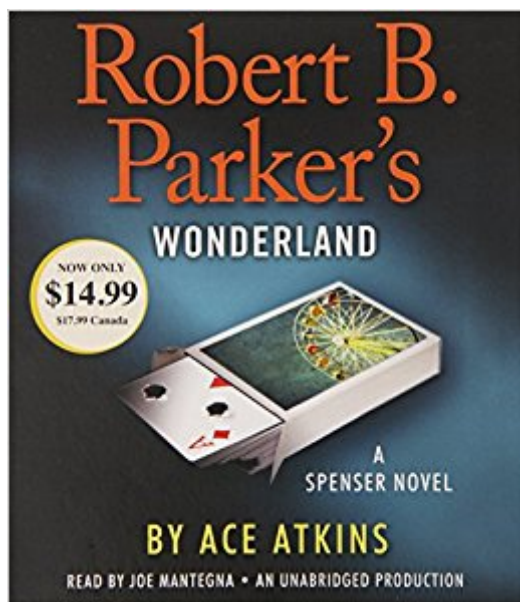


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Robert B. Parker's Wonderland (Spenser)



Synopsis

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.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Atkins's second novel based on the late Robert B. Parker's famous series finds private detective Spenser and young apprentice Zebulon Sixkill sleuthing their way into a scheme involving the beachfront property occupied by the shuttered Wonderland dog track. Narrator Joe Mantegna has long been associated with the popular Spenser series, portraying the title character in several TV adaptations and narrating numerous audiobooks. That he has done so with Parker's blessing is understandable. The novel contains large sections of fast-paced dialogue which Mantegna deftly handles. Additionally, the narrator perfectly captures Spenser's sarcastic and flippant tone. And when dealing with friends during times of trouble, Spenser as interpreted by Mantegna drops his

brittle attitude and becomes more compassionate and less hardboiled. A Putnam hardcover. (May)
--This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Boston PI Spenser and Henry Cimoli, owner of a Boston gym, formerly a haven for boxers but now supported by spandex-clad exercisers, have been friends for years. Now Henry needs help. Developers are bullying the mostly older occupants in Henry's condo in an attempt to make them sell cheap. So far it's been mostly intimidation, but folks are scared. Hawk, Spenser's longtime cohort, is out of town, so the PI enlists the assistance of Zebulon Sixkill, an intern of sorts. They send the developer's thugs on their way and then negotiate a lucrative buyout for Henry and his neighbors, but it could be all for naught when the developer is decapitated and a plethora of greedy, jealous, and ambitious players attempt to take control. After an uneven start at re-creating Spenser (Robert B. Parker's Lullaby, 2012), Atkins finds his footing this time, settling into the character more comfortably and concocting a fairly complex caper with urban development, organized crime, and sex all playing roles. Atkins still isn't Parker, of course, but this is quite a good crime novel. --Wes Lukowsky --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

With *Wonderland*, Ace Atkins has demonstrated once and for all that Robert B. Parker's creation, Spenser is alive and well. Atkins' first effort *Lullaby* was enjoyable, but felt a bit forced. Some of the dialogue (particularly that of Hawk) didn't quite ring true. With this book, the writing seems more relaxed. Atkins is clearly having fun stretching at the fabric of Parker's tapestry and the novel is all the better for it. Longtime fans will be pleased to see Henry Cimoli come to the forefront in this one. Zebulon Sixkill is also along for the ride. The pleasure of reading Parker's books over the years was found in his ear for dialogue. While Atkins understands this, he injects the book with plotting and pace that invigorates the characters. In short, this is a meatier plot than the books Parker wrote late in his career. Thus, Atkins gives us the feeling of vintage Spenser while also acknowledging that the character is aging a bit. I enjoyed Atkins' first effort, but he crushes this one out of the park. Those who are hesitant to give this a try should not be. This book confirms that Ace Atkins is the right person to guide Spenser's continuing adventures. Should fans join him for the journey? To borrow a certain turn of phrase, "We'd be fools not to."

In *Lullaby*, Ace Atkins' first attempt to continue the Spenser series after Robert B. Parker's death, he seemed to be on a learning curve for the first third of the book, unsure as to how to maintain the

Boston private investigator in Parker's style. Then he gained his footing and the book turned out well. In *Wonderland*, it is more clear that Atkins is revising the character, but only slightly. He is keeping the essence of Spenser, but renewing him as well to fit his own perceptions of him in a current time. No writer can exactly copy another, and Atkins should be given credit for the way he is going about the task. He is putting new edges on the detective, and is better at plot than Parker, who spent most of his effort on character, and was only occasionally superior in twisting and turning the plot into the forefront of the story. Devotees of the Spenser novels might find themselves thinking, "Parker would not write that line" or "Spenser would not say that." That would be unfair. If the standard view of aging a detective is the commonly accepted one fictional year for every four real years, Spenser is close to 50, a bit world-weary around the edges. Keeping a trend that existed in the last few Spenser novels written by Parker, he drinks more, not to excess in any one sitting necessarily. But there are a lot of sittings. True the language is more crude, but we live in a more crude and callous society than when Parker wrote the debut novel, *The Godwulf Manuscript* 40 years ago. If George Carlin arose from the grave to perform his famous routine about the seven words you can't say on television, the audience would just yawn. *Wonderland* sees the emergence of Henry Cimoli as a full character. Long a minor part of the Spenser books, the owner of the health club where Spenser works out, Cimoli, an ex-fighter now about 70, is being hassled to sell his condominium, as are his elderly neighbors. There is a gambling license up for bid, and the building is needed for a beachfront view. Despite his age, the fighter remains in him, cocky, no nonsense and not unwilling to throw a punch. You can just see him walking down the street with the swaggering, pigeon-toed glide that all successful boxers have. The bad guy seems to be a Las Vegas casino mogul, Rick Weinberg, a glad-handing dreamer with big plans to convert an abandoned dog track, *Wonderland*, into a casino. He has a wife Rachel, not exactly the demure type, and a beautiful and utterly ruthless assistant, Jemma Frasier, both involved in the mix. But Weinberg is killed, and the mystery deepens. There is a competitor, Harvey Rose, an expert in predicting consumer behavior, a mob boss, political corruption, and some out of town hit men. There are also more deaths. Zebulon Sixkill, the Cree Indian who is Spenser's protegee, takes a beating at the point of a gun, and has problems dealing with it. He drinks too in his confusion, not seeking anyone's help, going it alone for the most part. Right now, Z is a weak character, not more than additional muscle. Hawk is entirely absent here, a minus, and Susan Silverman mostly so, a plus. Perhaps I am nitpicking, but here goes. For the first time, we can place the action in a particular year, 2012, because Spenser gripes about how lousy the Red Sox are playing, and that was the year they tumbled into last place. If Atkins is going to do that, it would be wise to stop referring to

real people that would have been recognized by a lot of readers forty years ago, but not now. Unless you are a boxing historian or an old codger, you've never heard of Willie Pep, last prominent in the ring the year Eisenhower became President. Tallulah Bankhead is remembered only by those who saw her in the Hitchcock film, *Lifeboat*, made in 1944. Harry Lime? He was the terribly evil criminal in *The Third Man*, made in 1949. I am sure Atkins is aiming to find younger readers than those who began putting their dollar bills down for the Spenser novels in the 1970's and 80's. as he should. But today's generation thinks the world started the day they were born. And so Ace should keep that in mind. However, that is a small point. What is large is Atkins' talent for making an old character interesting again. And *Wonderland* contains the funniest Spenser line yet written. When Weinberg asks Spenser if he admires Picasso, he replies, "I prefer my guitars without noses." Age may be creeping up on Spenser, but that isn't affecting his sense of taste.

My only disappointment in Ace Atkins' previous Spenser novel "*Lullaby*" was his characterization of Hawk. Hawk was too wordy, too contemplative. "*Wonderland*" doesn't have that problem because Hawk is not in the book. Instead we have Spenser's protege, Z. Sixkill. Z comes across a little too much as the victim a little too often in "*Wonderland*" to be badass enough to substitute for Hawk. But due to his previous single appearance in Parker's Spenser series, this character can be fleshed out and molded considerably more than is possible with the already set in stone Hawk character. I understand this but I miss Hawk...the original Hawk. However--overall--I gotta say I like this book and I feel Spenser is in good hands with Ace Atkins. Much better hands than Jesse Stone and that series which is really shaping up to be the pits. The plot is not deep but I don't recall any of Parker's books being plot driven. Parker's Spenser series was based on the characters and Atkins has generally done a very good job with keeping them flowing. If he continues with the series at this level, I will stay with him throughout.

There is nothing really wrong with it but very little that is right. He is trying too hard to be cute and not hard enough to write an entertaining story. I do like the fact that Susan plays a very limited role but wish he would get away from Z and include Hawk in the story. I've been a Spenser fan for years (characters seem like old friends) so I will continue to buy the books but, I doubt that this level of writing will attract many new fans.

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