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Sudden Mischief (Spenser Mysteries)



Synopsis

Spencer comes to the aid of his ladylove, Susan, and finds himself in the midst of a deadly conspiracy in Robert B. Parker's masterful new thriller. When Susan's ne'er-do-well ex-husband turns to her after he is charged with sexual harassment, a host of other wrong-doings comes to light and Spencer reluctantly agrees to take the case. Dark, contemplative, and morally complex, "Sudden Mischief" is a brilliant mediation on the meaning of justice, love and passion.

Book Information

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Audio CD

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Average Customer Review: 3.9 out of 5 starsÂ Â See all reviewsÂ (101 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

Somehow, I feel a batch of people have missed the point here. This is a pivotal novel, one in which Susan has to face some things she would prefer not to. Susan's ex-husband comes to her for help. Of course, she doesn't understand the kind of help he's looking for and her misunderstanding involves Spenser and eventually turns up a batch of stuff that the ex is involved in. Human emotions are dealt with here, and it's revealing to watch Susan as she begins to realize some of her own hang-ups. As far as the mystery goes, there isn't great mystery here. We learn what's going on at the same time that Spenser does and much of it isn't a surprise. Parker does telegraph much of the time and I believe this to be purposeful. More and more, in these later Spenser stories, Parker does something unexpected. This time, it's the ending which is unusually abrupt. There's reason here, and Parker does know exactly what he is doing in the way he's crafting these stories.

After Small Vices, perhaps the best of Parker's Spenser series, a letdown was expected. It would have been inappropriate to have so intense a story follow so quickly -- the suspension of disbelief would have been unsustainable. So Sudden Mischief focuses on relationships more than

action. While Pastimes illuminated Spenser's childhood, details of Susan's pre-Spenser history are exposed in Mischief. This isn't as bad as it might seem. Earlier in the series, I found Susan to be so self-absorbed I almost stopped reading. However, she's since matured, developed, and become more an asset to Spenser's work than a liability. I actually found her presence enjoyable here. The "mystery" part of the book is more ordinary by Spenser standards. As others have pointed out, there's all the usual Spenser elements, including his annual rejection of supermonogamous temptations. But the story is hardly very compelling. There isn't much mystery there. The reader is left in a more passive role, turning the pages to see what will happen next, without much speculation into or concern over what that will be. Still, the story isn't overtly bad. Even if it was, Parker's writing is always a joy. So, if you're a fan of the Spenser series, Sudden Mischief is a worthwhile investment of your time, and not only for the development of Susan's character.

There are some characters who have been around so long and are so consistent that they fit like an old pair of jeans; there are some books that are so easy and go down so smooth that they can be read in one gulp. The character, of course, is Spenser; the book, Sudden Mischief, the latest Spenser novel from the typewriter of Robert B. Parker. These books are designed for one-stop reading. They take three hours, give or take for your reading speed, and are meant to be devoured by the fire with a bottle of Jack Daniels for company. The plots are pretty similar, and many of the same things happen (Spenser cooks. Spenser quotes Spenser. Spenser beats people up. Spenser and Hawk trade jibes.). Basically, the Spenser novels are genre fiction, formulaic, pure and simple. But they're GOOD genre fiction. Spenser is an easy guy to like, as long as you're not on his bad side. He's intelligent, he makes a mean plate of spaghetti, he's got the cutest sidekick in the business (Hawk can rough me up any time!), he knows his medieval literature, and he's pretty good at walking the balance between solving crimes and committing them. What's not to like?

Sometimes I wonder if those of us who read series (especially long-standing series like Spenser) have unrealistically high expectations for each new book. I think the truth of the matter is that some books will be great and some will be just okay, and maybe a few will genuinely suck (though not too many, we hope). After all, who has a great year every year? Some are good, some better than others. That's just real life. And Parker's series seems to do a good job of replicating this aspect in Spenser's life. Some years have huge crises and brushes with death; others not much happens. This volume is one of the mid-level ones. It's okay, not bad, not great either. One aspect I think rather unrealistic is the idea that Spenser and Susan have been together for twenty years and

have never talked about her past. In most dating relationships, this comes up in the first month. In some ways, perhaps this is Parker overcompensating for unduly neglecting this aspect of Susan's character in the past. He probably felt like he had to get it in sometime, and though it would have been more appropriate some ten or fifteen books ago, it's probably good that he got it in now. Parker has said that he doesn't have a favorite Spenser book; he feels like all of them are just episodes in an ongoing series and they sort of blur together. And maybe in this way, Spenser really reflects life. So if this book wasn't a dazzler, that's okay. That's just life.

I'm not as pessimistic as "judge" above. Yes, Parker slipped badly in the early 90s - I was particularly annoyed by several short books with very wide margins. But this and the last entry ("Small Vices") were much improved. In both these books Spenser and Susan deal with substantive issues in their relationship: whether or not to adopt a child in the first, and Susan's silence about her past and her loyalty and commitment to men not worthy of her in this one (Spenser, of course, both does and does not fit that category.) Where Parker is lacking is precisely those places that Judge identifies - Spenser's wonderful relationships with the supporting cast, and the excellent characterizations found there. I read these books as much for Hawk and Belson and Quirk, and the more of them the merrier. At least Rachel Wallace makes a cameo here. Another significant shortcoming is the waste of a truly worthy white-collar foe for Spenser, a viciously corrupt Brahmin lawyer/judge who meekly shows up at the end and writes a check.... Boo! You'd be hard pressed to beat the climaxes of both this book and Small Vices, though. I found them gripping and believable, and Spenser's restraint both times is quite impressive. Get it from the library, or wait for the paperback, however - I haven't bought Parker in hardcover since "A Catskill Eagle."

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