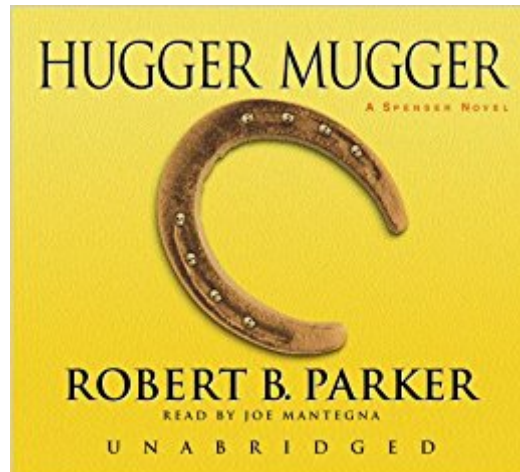


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Hugger Mugger: A Spenser Novel



Synopsis

Cd's 6 1/2 hours Read by Joe Mantegna Spenser is back and embroiled in a deceptively dangerous and multi-layered case: someone has been killing racehorses at stables across the south, and the Boston P.I. travels to Georgia to protect the two-year old destined to become the next Secretariat. When Spenser is approached by Walter Clive, president of the Three Fillies Stables, to find out who is threatening his horse Hugger Mugger, he can hardly say no: he's been doing pro bono work for so long his cupboards are just about bare. Disregarding the resentment of the local Georgia law enforcement, Spenser takes the case. Though Clive has hired a separate security firm, he wants someone with Spenser's experience to supervise the operation. Despite the veneer of civility, Spenser encounters tensions beneath the surface southern gentility. The case takes an even more deadly turn when the attacker claims a human victim, and Spenser must revise his impressions of the Three Fillies organization- and watch his own back as well.

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Customer Reviews

Why is somebody shooting Walter Clive's horses at Three Fillies Stables in Lamarr, Georgia? That's what toothy, patrician Walter wants the droll, hulking Boston detective Spenser to find out. Walter worries that his racetrack phenomenon Hugger Mugger, worth millions, is next. So Spenser goes south to a place where "the heat felt like it could be cut into squares and used to build a wall," as he puts it in the crisp Chandleresque lingo that made him famous in dozens of novels. The Clive clan is one weird bunch. Take Walter's daughters, his three "fillies." Penny is like her dad, all impeccable looks and icy efficiency. Stonie and SueSue take after their sinister mom, who left the family to live

with a guitarist in San Francisco and changed her name to Sherry Lark. Penny helps Dad run the business, while her soused sisters cheat on their pathetic husbands, Cord and Pud. (Pud's short for Puddle; his dad was named Poole.) As unsightly family secrets spill, Spenser feels like he's in a Tennessee Williams play. Then someone on two legs takes a bullet, and the mystery gets tense. Spenser gets plenty of sarcastic mileage out of upper-class horse-country twits, crooked security guards, dumb jocks gone to seed, and wily Southern lawyers, and the story saunters well. What's best are the endless wisecracks, the unflattering thumbnail character sketches, and sharp sentences like this one: "Like all jockeys, he was about the size of a ham sandwich, except for his hands, which appeared to be those of a stonemason." --Tim Appelo --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Despite frequent appearances by Susan Silverman (longtime love of Boston PI Spenser) and the absence of Hawk (his enigmatic sidekick), the latest entry in Parker's estimable series is a worthy one. Missing is the sap that can stickie-up scenes between Spenser and Susan, and in Hawk's place strides a new sidekick, Tedy Sapp, who's gay and as tough as they come. Tedy's only a temp replacement, though, because the reason he's here and Hawk's not is that most of the action takes place in rural Georgia, where Tedy owns a gay bar. Spenser travels there on his own temp job--to find out who's been shooting horses at Three Fillies Stables, owned by Walter Clive, the most powerful man in the county, and to keep that someone from shooting Clive's prize thoroughbred, Hugger Mugger. Spenser roots through the highly dysfunctional family of Clive's three daughters and their husbands (one a pedophile, one a drunk), annoys Clive's security men and befriends both Tedy and the local sheriff, with whom the PI discusses doughnuts. When Clive is shot dead, Spenser is fired by the alpha daughter, only to be rehired by Clive's mistress, who believes there's more to the mayhem than horseplay. This novel offers more traditional mystery elements than many Spenser tales, although most readers will finger the prime villain way before Spenser does. The pacing is strong, the characters are fresh as dew and the prose is Parker-perfect. The Spenser-specific personal drama that drives the best of the tales is lacking, but overall, the story will fit Parker fans like an old shoe. (Apr.) FYI: Parker's most recent novel, Family Honor, will be filmed starring Helen Hunt. Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I had skipped this book in the Spenser canon somehow, and now that I've read it, I wish I'd read it sooner. It's as if Parker longed to return to the

early days of Spenser, and wrote a throwback. He sheds *the* for the largest part of most of the formulaic earmarks of the series readers have come to expect at this point *i.e.* Boston, because this one is set in rural Georgia, and Hawk, who is in France with a woman. There is a phone conversation with the most interesting character in the series, Vinnie, and with Captain Martin Quirk, for nostalgia's sake, but overall this is more like the early books in the series. The vain and annoying Susan Silverman is still around, of course just to make Spenser appear like a love-sick wuss, apparently but it's easy to glide over the couple's snobbish banter and just enjoy the refreshing Georgia setting and an array of interesting characters. The most interesting of them is Penny, who Spenser and the reader initially find adorable. So much so, that I heaved a wistful sigh that this wasn't an early entry in the series, because like Linda in *Valediction*, she is, at least at first, a breath of fresh air, and it was certainly no mistake that Parker wrote her that way. Even the ending is refreshing in this one, with a conclusion more Ross Macdonald in nature than Parker, as if he is doing some vague homage to him. In essence, though this is about Georgia horse country, and horse racing, it is more about a Georgia family of immense wealth and social standing which is as damaged and dysfunctional as it is powerful *Ross Macdonald territory*. There is even an enjoyable and unexpected detour when Spenser is booted off the Georgia case and returns to Boston. What transpires back on familiar turf again harkens back to the early Spensers. Also woven into the fabric of the narrative is a nice trip to San Francisco to question an aging flower-power child. It turns out to be more important to the story than we'd thought. Parker creates great atmosphere in this one, and in tune with the setting, makes the pace more languid than usual. This serves to give Parker room to write a story a bit more nuanced than many of the later formulaic entries. I can definitely see fans of the series being divided on this one, but I enjoyed it a lot. I'm probably giving this one an extra star, just because Parker changed the setting, returned a bit to early days, and because of Penny. *Hugger Mugger* begins with Spenser hired to find out who is shooting at race horses, and for a while, this one appears to come up lame. If you stay with it, however, it makes a quick move along the inside rail during the final furlong, and by a nose becomes one of the better entries in the series.

This book possesses one of the most original plots, and certainly most original structure, of any of this world famous series. Our man Spenser is hired by the very wealthy Clive Family to protect the interest of a horse (of all things) - admittedly, a horse bound for superstardom and mega wealth for

its owners - after failed assassination attempts at other horses on the same property brought the existence of a lunatic to the attention of everyone in town. This book will stand out, too, because for once, it is not set in Beautiful, Downtown Boston. Spenser heads south to Georgia, without the majority of his friends and associates. Hawk is in France on personal business, Susan is busy educating and analysing the lucky few back home who come across her. Captain Quirk is busy running the Boston Police Force and Vinnie and his associates are all busy being busy. So our Spenser is forced to make new friends. And he does, as well as one or two (short term) enemies. They are a very tight knit group, The Clives. Also *very, very* powerful. So powerful, in fact, that their domination of the running of the town almost ruins the story. In fact, it does, up to a point. Spenser is closed out of the investigation by a sudden plot twist as you approach the halfway mark, and before you know it, he is back with the woman he belongs to, in the town where he belongs, solving a minor but potentially ugly case of stalking. Solve this, he does, but before the reader can say *Spenser Is Cool* he is hired by a different member of the Clive family to get back down to Georgia to finish what he started. And this is where the book *really* gets interesting. As I have already said, HUGGER MUGGER is unique for several reasons. But it remains a top notch mystery, written by one of the all time great crafters of the genre. Even without the added attraction of Hawk's presence in the story, we still have (somewhat limited) input from Susan, and as we know, she is able to help both Spenser (and the reader) to see just about everything in a whole different light. This may not be the best book Mr Parker ever wrote but, at its peak, it is just as enjoyable, fulfilling and satisfying as any other volume in the series I can think of. And that in itself is its own reward. Four stars for a very solid and hugely enjoyable read. BFN Greggorio!

Normally I love the Spenser series by Robert Parker, but this one I found rather disappointing. I felt as if he had found it difficult to decide what the plot was to be, as the first half dozen chapters bore no discernible relation to the remainder of the book. I also thought it had a disappointing ending. When it finished I was not sure if the greatest villain had escaped unscathed while someone else had taken the blame or quite what had happened. And since the real villain truly deserved a most condign punishment, that would be an unsatisfying result. The story is set in the deep south, with a horsey background, with much heavy boozing and unpleasantness. The heaviest drinker, more sinned against than sinning, managed to beat his alcoholism overnight, a truly surprising outcome. Even Spenser's relationship with Susan seemed rather contrived in this book, and it lacked Hawk's amusing touch. Someone who is already a Robert Parker fan will either love this book or be

deeply disappointed by it.

What can I say? The storyline was hardly believable, and it left the murder unsolved at the end, leaving us wondering who the real killer actually was. I guess this leaves something for the readers to discuss among themselves.. Also, I don't want to sound like a prude; I'm an old farm boy, so I'm used to gutter language, but I think Mr. Parker's use of the (f) word is carried to excess in most of the Spenser series..

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