



Looking For Rachel Wallace

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Rachel Wallace is a woman who writes and speaks her mind. She has made a lot of enemies -- enemies who threaten her life.

Spenser is the tough guy with a macho code of honor, hired to protect a woman who thinks that code is obsolete.

Privately, they will never see eye to eye. That's why she fires him. But when Rachel vanishes, Spenser rattles skeletons in blue-blooded family closets, tangles with the Klan and fights for her right to be exactly what she is. He is ready to lay his life on the line to find Rachel Wallace.

Looking For Rachel Wallace Details

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Author : Robert B. Parker

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From Reader Review Looking For Rachel Wallace for online ebook

James Thane says

This is an early entry (number six) in Robert B. Parker's long-running series featuring Spenser, the tough, wise-cracking Boston P.I. It's also one of the best, before the plots became less compelling and before Spenser's relationship with his long-time lover, Susan Silverman, became virtually insufferable. Susan appears in the book, but she's not at it's center and she and Spenser are not constantly cooing over each other in a manner that would embarrass the average junior high school couple.

In this case, Spenser is hired to act as a bodyguard for Rachel Wallace. Ms. Wallace is an outspoken gay, feminist author whose new book is bound to antagonize a good number of people. The advance reading copies have barely been distributed when Wallace begins to receive threats against her life.

Enter Spenser.

As a determined feminist, Wallace seems suspicious of most men and hates the thought that she might be dependent upon one, even for her own safety. Spenser is a large, tough guy and Wallace makes some snap judgments about him that are not strictly justified. She also does not appreciate Spenser's brand of humor and the relationship gets off to a somewhat prickly start. Wallace lays down some basic ground rules, but Spenser makes it clear that he will defend her as he sees best, irrespective of her directives.

Early on, Spenser acts in a way that displeases Wallace and she fires him. Shortly after that, she is kidnapped, apparently by the people who threatened her initially. Spenser is angry with himself, even though he was no longer on the job, and his moral code demands that he rescue her. This will take some doing.

This is an intriguing plot with one of Parker's better casts of characters. Rachel Wallace is an well-drawn character and watching her and Spenser spar with each other is a lot of fun. There are other interesting characters as well, although Spenser's sidekick, Hawk, is only briefly mentioned and does not make an appearance. Rereading the book reminds one of what a great series this was in its prime and makes a fan of the series more than a little sad that many of the later books did not begin to measure up to this one.

(view spoiler)

Dan Schwent says

When a feminist lesbian author gets death threats, Spenser is hired to protect her. After he is dismissed, Rachel Wallace is kidnapped. Can Spenser bring her back alive?

It's been a couple years since I've read a Spenser book. I spent a lot of time looking for Looking for Rachel Wallace at used bookstores before I gave up and moved on to easier prey. Over the weekend, I was working on my girlfriend's door when my dremmel went dead. While waiting for my dremmel to charge, I ran to the used bookstore to find something to read. Imagine my delight when I found Looking for Rachel Wallace for the modest sum of \$1.95.

Confession time: Spenser has never been one of my favorite series detectives. I get tired of all the talk about his moral code and even more tired of his relationship with Susan Silverman. Given the choice, I'd rather read one of Robert Crais's Elvis Cole books. However, I still catch myself being entertained by Spenser and

this book was no exception.

For a paperback original from 1980, Looking for Rachel Wallace is surprisingly deep. Spenser and company talking about homosexuality, feminism, hate crimes, and Spenser's possibly archaic methods of problem solving. Rachel Wallace was pretty abrasive at times and Spenser's hunt for her nicely contrasted the two characters. Spenser tough-guyed and wisecracked his way to finding her, as he always does.

But it wasn't all kittens and puppies for me. For one thing, Susan Silverman was in it a little too much. For another, much bigger thing, there was no Hawk!

It's a pretty slim book so I don't have a lot else to say. Three stars, leaning toward four.

Nicole says

I wasn't sure I was going to be able to read this one when the militant feminist lesbian client says (on page 9!) "John has warned me that you are a jokester. Well, I am not. If we are to have any kind of successful association you'd best understand right now that I do not enjoy humor." Oh man, I thought the portrayal of the militant women's libbers in Promised Land were bad. Still, I gave it another 20 pages and found Spenser confronting a picket line of bigots trying to bar the lesbian author from her speaking engagement:

"As we approached the group they joined arms in front of us, blocking the entrance. In the center of the line was a large man with a square jaw and thick brown hair. Looked like he'd been a tight end perhaps, at Harvard. He wore a dark suit and a pale gray silk tie. His cheeks were rosy, and his eye was clear. Probably still active in his alumni association. A splendid figure of a man, the rock upon which the picket line was anchored. Surely a foe of atheism, Communism, and faggotry. Almost certainly a perfect asshole."

Ok, I'm in.

John Graziade says

A fairly simple case, protect an outspoken author, Rachel Wallace, that has been receiving threats. But Spenser's extreme machismo and the author's extreme feminism do not mix, and he is fired. And then Rachel is kidnapped, leaving Spenser to find her. Very quick story. With some ass kicking and cooking.

Kemper says

If you took the ultimate manly-man, tough-as-nails, smart-ass private detective and paired him with a no-nonsense feminist lesbian, would you get a hilarious new sitcom or a complete disaster? The title of the book should be a clue that it doesn't go all that well.

Political activist and author Rachel Wallace has a new book coming out that will expose discriminatory practices by several prominent corporations, and she's been getting death threats. Rachel chafes at the idea of being surrounded by bodyguards, and will only agree to having a single person at her publisher's insistence. Enter Spenser.

The idea of hiring a female bodyguard is briefly discussed and dismissed because the publisher demands that if Rachel will only agree to one protector, than they say that it has to be the biggest toughest guy they can find in case he has to 'wrestle around' with someone. Naturally, feminist Rachel is extremely unhappy with the set-up even before she meets Spenser.

Spenser is sympathetic towards Rachel's cause, but he has an innate distrust and dislike of all forms of political activism because zealots tend to put principle ahead of people, and her lack of humor about the subject quickly tests his patience. Rachel, already resentful that she's had to agree to be protected by a man with a gun, sees Spenser as little more than a thug who lives by an antiquated macho code.

However, after Spenser gets a first hand look at the daily bullshit that Rachel has to contend with to get her message out, and when Rachel realizes that Spenser is more than just a club-wielding cave man, the two start to grudgingly respect each other. Before their relationship can develop much further, there's an ugly incident during which Spenser can't put his own pride aside to let Rachel do things her way to score some political points. Furious, Rachel fires him.

Spenser realizes that Rachel was right and feels badly about it, but he moves on to other things. A short time later, Rachel is kidnapped and a note is sent to the police indicating that some kind of right wing fringe group has taken her. Feeling responsible, Spenser sets out on a quest to find Rachel Wallace, and he won't be deterred by right wing racist thugs, rich blue-blood bigots or a blizzard that shuts down Boston.

For my money, the golden age Spenser begins here in one of my favorite Parker novels. While the earlier novels have been very good to this point, this is the first book where all the pieces of 'classic' Spenser are in place, and the story is great. The irony that Parker delivers here is terrific and realistic. Rachel is right about Spenser's macho code getting in the way of him doing his job correctly, but it's Spenser's code that makes him so good at his job and drives him so relentlessly to find her. Spenser and Rachel are both right and they're both wrong at the same time, and it makes for a great theme in a book about an old school private detective.

Next up: Spenser kidnaps a fifteen year old boy in Early Autumn.

Evelyn Wilson says

This book is copyright 1980, way before all the LGBT movements of today. It could open some eyes, but I doubt it. It is kind of like religion, you can't stuff it down peoples throats, that doesn't work. Spenser is a macho code man with a sense of humor. Rachel is neither of those things and knows she is always right. Yes, you are going to argue with me but so what. Get over yourself.

Charles says

Rachel Wallace is a lesbian and aggressive in pushing gay and women's rights. She has a new book coming out and is about to go on a book tour. Her very public and forceful stance has made Rachel many enemies, some of which have been extremely hostile and threatening. Given the venom in those statements, Rachel's publisher believes that a bodyguard is in order, and Spenser comes highly recommended.

However, even though he demonstrates some of his literary knowledge, there is a fundamental personality conflict between Rachel and Spenser. She is appalled at Spenser's macho tendencies, letting her feminist views regarding men color her approach to what is a dangerous situation. When Spenser forcefully steps in

to deal with a hostile man, Rachel has had enough and fires him.

Once Spenser is no longer there to protect her, Rachel is kidnapped with no communication from the perpetrators. This goes against Spenser's sense of values and purpose, so he engages in a hunt for her kidnappers and where they are holding her. As expected, Spenser willingly enters the danger zone and extricates Rachel.

The conclusion, where Spenser and Rachel reconcile, is one of the high points of the Spenser series. Parker portrays both as tough, yet vulnerable and Rachel's musings of rescue while she is being held makes the story about more than the actions of Spenser. This is a great book, for it portrays the tough Spenser as vulnerable to more than guns, knives and fists.

Cathy DuPont says

If you're reading the series, go for it. But the storyline was shallow, characters thin, and just wasn't all that good.

I wasn't, at the time, familiar with Spenser, so he was just another character of Parker's. A few months ago I decided that I would begin reading the Spenser series, and what a surprise when I realized that I had read this one last year, out of sequence.

Kind of glad though because this one isn't even close to the great ride I just got off of with *The Judas Goat*.

Ok book, but not up to par with Parker's usual.

William says

(The word "maroon" appears only once in this novel)

The second half of the book is very good, 5-stars. The first half, I felt Parker was trying too hard to show off snappy dialogue between radical feminist Rachel, and surface-troglodyte Spenser. However this irritating dialogue calmed down towards the middle of the book, and became very good in the second half, perhaps the best dialogue I have seen for Spenser.

Much of the good, snappy dialogue in the second half is very well balanced between Spenser's wit and his anger; similarly for Rachel. Susan is again an insightful, wonderful foil for Spenser, teasing out the hero in him, respecting and encouraging it, giving him a safe place to be vulnerable and honest. Full of heart. Great stuff.

The pacing in the second half of the book is also very good, and the collection of clues and violence are well-handled.

There are some fine quotes in the book as well.

See my review of **Crimson Joy** for more Spenser Series opinion...
<https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>

Notes-

48.0% Slow start. Far too much forced banter.

59.0% ... quote

"She watched me looking at her. There stirred behind her face a sense of life and purpose and mirth and caring that made her seem to be in motion even as she was still. There was a kind of rhythm to her, even in motionless repose.""

70.0% ... the banter in the second half of the book really is terrific.

Kevin says

This is #6 in the series, published in 1980, which I will call, "Spenser Raises Consciousness."

Two books back, I mocked *Promised Land* as being "Spenser versus the Straw (wo)Man". In it, a bunch of radical feminists not only made no sense, but were murderers and thieves to boot.

In this, Parker makes clear that he has no problem with academic and/or radical feminism per se. The damsel, Rachel Wallace, is a radical feminist and lesbian, and everything she says makes perfect sense and she carries herself with courage. I suppose that two books back, Parker just randomly selected an ideology and drew jingoistic slogans from it, to make his points about ideology, fanaticism and skepticism. It just happened to be feminism in that case.

The set-up is that Spenser is hired to guard Wallace, because there have been threats against her if she publishes her latest book. In fact, even though Spenser can already quote Simone de Beauvoir, he does make a mistake, in guarding her, by not abiding by her doctrine, which causes her to fire him. He repents and raises his consciousness, but she gets kidnapped anyway, so he pursues. The villains are chock full of irrational hate, from several walks of life.

But Wallace gets her consciousness raised too. She was so damned angry, and she didn't appreciate Spenser, which is clearly an error. But by the end of the book we can see that Spenser, using Parker's New Machismo, can play nicely and achieve mutual respect with clear-thinking lesbians and feminists. Aww. There was sort of a funny scene where their respective love interests (Susan Silverman and Julie Wells) apologize for and explain each protagonist to the other.

But don't worry, there is still a good seasoning of quips, and plenty of poetically described violence.

Series wise, we meet cocky young Officer Foley. Wallace describes Foley as a "parody of machismo". Spenser says no, he's the real thing.

Writing wise, it's a good set up for Parker to blow off some steam about publishing. Parker reveals a deep annoyance with the requirements of promoting books, from insipid interviewers who haven't read the books, to inane repetitive questions like "where do you get your ideas?". The publishing industry comes off surprisingly well, albeit deeply commercial. The publishers treat Wallace very courteously and generously. When her safety is threatened, they immediately offer to release her from her contract, though they would want their advance back. Of course.

I noticed another thing mentioned every book, Syrian Bread, whatever that is.

Joy says

This was another Parker book that I gave a five-star rating. In this book Spenser is hired to protect a radical feminist lesbian writer. He modeled for me a gracious attitude toward someone whose lifestyle and attitudes were very opposed to his, but he looked for common ground and built a relationship on that. I just love the way Spenser can joke with his black friend, Hawk, on racial issues and now with Rachel Wallace on feminist/lesbian issues in a non-judgmental, but very funny way. The book also gave more insight into the character of Spenser.

Rachel: Why do you engage in things that are violent and dangerous?

Spenser: Well, the violence is a kind of side effect, I think. I have always wanted to live life on my own terms. And I have always tried to do what I can do. I am good at certain kinds of things; I have tried to go in that direction.

Rachel: The answer doesn't satisfy me.

Spenser: It doesn't have to. It satisfies me.

Susan: What he won't say, and what he may not even admit to himself is that he'd like to be Sir Gawain. He was born five hundred years too late. If you understand that, you understand most of what you are asking.

Spenser injects lots of words of wisdom into conversations.

Example -- "It's good to know what you can. I'm not sure even what I'm up to. I'm just gathering information. There's so much that I can't know and so many things I can't predict, that I like to get everything in order so when the unpredictable stuff comes along I can concentrate on that."

Bill Kerwin says

Robert B. Parker is at his best when characters with disparate manners and perspectives come to realize the ties of personal honor and moral principle which bind them together. And no book of Parker's exhibits this aspect of his work better than *Rachel Wallace*.

Rachel Wallace is a lesbian, a writer, and a feminist who is receiving death threats and needs a body guard. Spenser gets the job, but soon the two are at loggerheads because the autonomy her self-respect demands conflicts with the control he requires to keep her safe. They clash, she fires him, and she is subsequently kidnapped. He vows to find her and bring the kidnappers to justice.

The dialogue between the two principals is crisp and effective, and--given the feminist issues--holds up remarkably well (the book was first published in 1980.) It is enlivened with the customary Spenserian witticisms and his employer's able retorts, and reveals both Spenser and Wallace to be serious moral individuals committed to honorable codes. Susan Silverman is good too, in this particular book, giving Spenser the perspective he needs to understand this woman who is different from any he has encountered

before.

Don't get me wrong, though. This isn't a dry exercise in sexual politics, but a good mystery filled with humor, suspense, cynical cops, bigoted villains, sharp scenes of violence, and a very exciting rescue.

It is also one of the best books in a superb series. In some ways, it is as light as a comedy of manners, yet it still packs a hell of a a punch.

Tanvir Moushum says

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Jane Stewart says

Not bad. Nothing really special, but I enjoyed it because of the author's wit.

About once a chapter he says something that makes me chuckle. For example: Spenser is talking to a guy who is a member of the Ku Klux Klan. "I heard you were regional manager or grand high imperial alligator or whatever from Massachusetts."

Rachel Wallace is a women's activist author who is a lesbian. She does not like Spenser's macho abilities. She needs him, but she doesn't like needing him.

The narrator Michael Prichard was very good.

DATA:

This is book #6 in the Spenser series.

Narrative mode: 1st person Spenser. Unabridged audiobook length: 4 hrs and 45 mins (224 pages). Swearing

language: strong with racial slurs but not often used. Sexual language: none. Number of sex scenes: one,

referred to no details. Setting: current day Boston, Mass. Book copyright: 1980. Genre: PI mystery.

Jeff Yoak says

This is probably the weakest Spenser yet. None of the characters save Spenser and Silverman are compelling. The mystery isn't very engaging. It felt phoned in. Still going to forward with the series, though.

Mark says

Hired by her publisher, Spenser is assigned to protect the feminist-lesbian writer Rachel Wallace, who is

ruffling feathers left and right with her new book that exposes prejudice in high office and business. When his macho ways include getting into a fight to protect her, Rachel fires Spenser and when, three weeks later she's kidnapped, he feels duty-bound to find her. Told with engaging wit and nicely playing the whole spectrum of sexual politics, this novel sees Parker fitting into the rhythms he'd use for the remainder of the series and promotes Susan Silverman to full partner (she plays a considerable role in the story too). The characters are well rounded, the mystery falls into place well and Quirk and Belson have much more to do than usual (though Hawk doesn't make an appearance, more's the pity). In keeping with the earlier stories, this is more violent (Spenser kills two people at one point), but Parker also tries to explain the 'male code', which is interesting (and sets up a nice relationship with a young cop called Foley). With a cracking climax - Spenser breaking into a right-wing stronghold - that takes place against a blizzard that brings Boston to a stand-still, this zips along at a rapid pace and is never less than interesting. Well worth a read!

2018 update - I'd completely agree with my original review only to add that's there a lot of humour in this, which is very enjoyable ("if I'd had tires, she'd have kicked them").

Bobby Underwood says

Though one of the early Spensers, there are elements here which make this one rank surprisingly low within the Spenser canon. First, we have too much Susan Silverman. While she isn't plopping down in the bathroom sink, so that she can be close to a mirror while putting on her makeup, as in *Hugger Mugger*, a little of her still goes a looong way for this reader. Also, there is no Hawk, as even towards the end, Spenser wants to do this one on his own. As yet there is no Vinnie, my favorite of the Parker posse.

The real problem with this one, however, is the thoroughly dislikable Rachel Wallace. She is a caustically angry and hostile gay feminist whose few valid points are muted by her own chip-on-the-shoulder hatred towards men, and anything related to them. As Spenser explains to her when her publisher hires him to protect her — because of threats about a book she is releasing — her being lesbian isn't a problem for him, but her being angry and impossible to work for, and get along with, might become an issue. And it does, because even back when Parker wrote this, the "victim" culture so prevalent today had begun to surface.

While the dialog and story are average to above average for the series, and there are some nice moments, having such an unlikable client wears on the reader more than it does the very Boston-liberal/libertarian Spenser. Frankly, when Rachel Wallace fires Spenser, the reader wants to breathe a sigh of relief that she won't be in the story any longer. Her absence, however, drives the second half of the book, because unlike the reader, Spenser feels obligated to go find her.

Spenser's sense of guilt seems a literary contrivance on this occasion. It simply gave Spenser a reason to go looking for her — and therefore give us a resolution — something the reader did not always get in later Spenser entries. The good part is that because she's been kidnapped, Rachel Wallace and her palpable anger isn't in the second half of the story until Spenser finds her. The bad part is that her presence is always abrasive and in some way unpleasant for both the reader, and Spenser.

The psychobabble and gobbledygook at the end of the book is just eye-rollingly inane. Other than learning that Parker must have been on a Syrian bread kick around this time — Spenser must eat it at least three times in the book — there was nothing new when I went back to read this again after many years. It's rare for one of the earlier Spenser novels to rank as low as a small handful toward the end of this great series do, but this one unfortunately does. I have friends who like this one more than I do, but it wasn't my favorite when I first read it many years ago, and having read so many great ones in the series since then, it really pales in comparison now.

Paula Dembeck says

This is the sixth book in the popular Spenser series. In this novel, the smart mouthed private investigator is hired by Rachel Walling, a feminist lesbian activist and writer. She has just published another book but this time she names people in high places who have discriminated against gay women, making credible accusations that have raised the ire of her opponents. Walling has been harassed about her writing by members of anti-gay right wing organizations before, but things have now escalated to threatening phone calls. Her publisher is wary and hires Spenser as a body guard although Rachel is not keen about hiring someone who seems to represent everything she does not like. Spenser works hard at being a wise guy and Rachel, who is not fond of humor, finds his constant quips annoying. She is also not partial to his muscles or his macho ways, but her publisher knows that Rachel needs someone who is tough enough to get in the way of someone who might target her and feisty enough to get them out of the way if need be.

Rachel is a tough cookie, a gay woman out of the closet with a clear mind and a determined voice. She wants the world to listen to what she has to say, sometimes appearing abrasive and difficult. She advocates for things not everyone likes to hear, but she will not let her opponents frighten, stifle or silence her.

Rachel finally agrees to accept Spenser but insists he not get in her way. She has books to write and publicize, speeches to give, causes to support and a life to live. She will not hide out or change her ways. And she has an active and diverse sex life. She wants him to stay out of her way unless her life is in danger. She wants him to simply be a shadow. After much discussion, the two decide to give the relationship a try.

After one event in which protestors try to remove her from entering a location in which she has been invited to speak, Spenser saves her in his usual macho fashion and she, disgusted with his behavior fires him. This particular assignment has just not worked out and so Spenser goes blithely on his way. But later that evening he has a telling conversation with Susan, who points out to him how he has failed Rachel by acting according to his own needs rather than that of his client. He had failed to allow Rachel to express herself, to act the way she felt she should act, to do what she felt she had to do. Instead he followed his own needs rooted in pride and did what he felt as a man, was not just necessary but right. The conversation gives Spenser pause for thought. He is not so set in his ways that he cannot listen and entertain ideas that are contrary to his own. It shows the respect Spenser has for Susan's point of view and his ability to accept her analysis of his behavior without striking back. It is an important scene. It also reinforces Spenser's personal moral code, showing once again why he behaves the way he does. But more importantly how he is ready to change his behavior based on modifying his outlook.

A few months later when Rachel is kidnapped Spenser feels responsible. He knows that if he had behaved appropriately, Rachel would never have fired him. If she had never fired him, he would still be in her employ. And if that were the case, she would never have been taken while under his watchful eyes. So he sets out to find and rescue her, up against a wealthy family who don't appreciate Rachel's politics, values or her writing. And there is some substantial winter weather to contend with as well.

There are a few signature moments in this novel. First, the conversation between Susan and Spenser when she explains from a very different point of view what happened when Spenser felt he had rescued Rachel from those taunting her. Spenser listened carefully and accepted her analysis of his behavior as he began to incorporate this nugget of information into the personal code that determines his actions. The other critical moments relate to his sensitivity, his ability to understand and appreciate how others feel, moments described deftly by Parker. The first occurs after Rachel is harassed by a crowd and ends up silently crying as Spenser drives her from the scene. He grasps her hand and says, "Don't let them do this to you, Rachel". He

continues to hold her hand as they drive away and does not let go. Not a typical macho male move. And another important moment occurs when he finally rescues her from her captors and Rachel cries at the sight of him. Spenser cries. And with those two words, Parker tells us so much about who Spenser really is. In those moments, both Spenser and Rachel learn important lessons, not only about life but about themselves and each other. And in revealing Spenser's more sensitive side, Parker has stuck to the well known but true writing principle: show the reader, do not tell the reader. It was, I think, especially well done.

Although Rachel and Spenser initially appear to be very different characters Parker hints at the qualities they share: both are confident about the lifestyle they have chosen, both are intelligent and well read, both care about others and try to be fair to those who are not like them. Parker has skillfully captured those similarities without specifically spelling them out in the narrative.

Given that this novel was published in the early eighties, it does take on a social issue in a very positive way. This was not a period of time when lesbianism was widely and openly discussed. Parker has handled it carefully and sensitively.

Once again Parker includes some very funny dialogue, sometimes in unexpected moments. Some readers find it annoying and I also had similar feelings when I started the series. But as I have worked my way through the first few novels I have come to enjoy those moments.

Parker moves the plot along at a brisk clip with good writing and a solid storyline. Such a fast moving tale leaves little room for character development and this is disappointing. It would have been interesting to know Rachel better. She was a complex figure and well worth going a little deeper than Parker chose to present her.

All in all a good, satisfying read.

K says

My first foray into this series, and it was a pleasant introduction. The plot is a bit thin and I found myself growing impatient for a mystery to appear during the 1st quarter or third of the book.

I like the protagonist and his smart-aleck persona well enough, but by the end of the book I didn't feel much connection. I'd place this in the "palate cleanser" category-- a good one to pick up in between more serious or complex novels.

Vincent Lombardo says

Another great one. The one negative is No Hawk. Love that guy.
