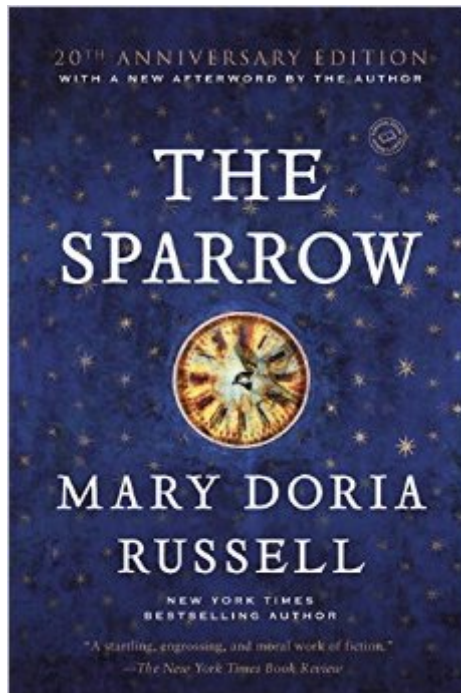


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The Sparrow: A Novel (Ballantine Reader's Circle)



Synopsis

A visionary work that combines speculative fiction with deep philosophical inquiry, *The Sparrow* tells the story of a charismatic Jesuit priest and linguist, Emilio Sandoz, who leads a scientific mission entrusted with a profound task: to make first contact with intelligent extraterrestrial life. The mission begins in faith, hope, and beauty, but a series of small misunderstandings brings it to a catastrophic end. Praise for *The Sparrow* "A startling, engrossing, and moral work of fiction." "The New York Times Book Review" "Important novels leave deep cracks in our beliefs, our prejudices, and our blinders. *The Sparrow* is one of them." "Entertainment Weekly" "Powerful . . . *The Sparrow* tackles a difficult subject with grace and intelligence." "San Francisco Chronicle" "Provocative, challenging . . . recalls both Arthur C. Clarke and H. G. Wells, with a dash of Ray Bradbury for good measure." "The Dallas Morning News" "[Mary Doria] Russell shows herself to be a skillful storyteller who subtly and expertly builds suspense." "USA Today"

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Reading this book was a enriching, rewarding experience for me. As with most books, it isn't for everyone. I was looking for a little lighter read, since I've been reviewing books on death and dying and the Holocaust. Silly me - but I am so glad I made the mistake of thinking this would be an escape from the ultra serious! This is definitely not a light read and in fact, it hits on many of the

issues I've been exploring - the existence and function of God, the meaning of life, the use of suffering and healing, the delicacy and necessity of human relationships. The story switches between the year 2019 - the US has lost its primary position as a world leader to Japan, marketers search the streets looking for ghetto kids with intellectual skills to groom and sell as indentured servants - and the year 2060, when a Jesuit priest is under examination for sins he is assumed to have committed while on a mission to a New World - Rakhat a planet far away from here. We see Father Emilio Sandoz before the journey (2019) as he initiates this venture, traveling with characters so well written, I started to believe they were real. Dr. Anne and her husband, George; the recently freed indentured planner, Sofia; the young man who discovered the existence of the other world, Jimmy Quinn; D.W., their grumpy Jesuit leader. Two other characters are less developed, but make nice backdrop for this riveting story. The book was a little difficult to get into at the start, not because of the writing, but because of the promise of horrors to come. How could this priest, so filled with life in 2019, be so horribly disfigured (did I really want to read the gruesome details?) And how could he have ended up a prostitute, and then murdered a child?

Science fiction is a medium that is tailor-made for investigation of some of humanity's most perplexing questions, most especially questions of his (and the universe's) origin, God, what constitutes moral behavior, man's ultimate purpose. But very few science fiction novels really attempt to tackle these questions, getting caught up instead in the nifty gadgets that can be imagined, and forgetting their human element. Not so here. Russell has crafted a fine work of character, of people both exceptional and very real, in this tale of first contact between a Jesuit sponsored mission and the denizens of the planet Rakhat. Emilio Sandoz is the only survivor of this mission, and most of the story is told from his viewpoint, both as a currently happening time-line and a later recollection under interrogation after he returns to Earth. It is easy to become engrossed in this man's life, as we see him as a great linguist, a priest with very understandable doubts but a solid need to help others, a man with normal desires for companionship, a person suffering under severe stress, a man mangled both physically and mentally. The other mission members are not slighted in the character development area, so that by the mid-point of the book, I felt that I was living with a very tight-knit family, whose individual foibles were all well-known and accepted, whose interpersonal banter was enjoyable and fitting. It is this very depth of characterization that adds poignancy to the mission's fate and starkly highlights the main religious question. How can one believe in a God that allows such terrible things as the mission failure to happen? How can one not believe in a higher power that has orchestrated such an incredibly complex universe of objects,

intelligences, and events?

I've read quite a bit of "Sci-fi". I love authors like Gibson, Stevenson, and Varley- science fiction novelists who hit you with material that combines great writing with action and characters who seem like they popped out of the latest hollywood action thriller. Sci-fi filled with weird devices, cool dialogue, and strange venues. The Sci-fi that computer geeks and teenage punks can't get enough of. "The Sparrow" is not Sci-fi. Russell is a writer of mature, philosophical science fiction in the grand tradition of authors such as Asimov, Clarke, and Huxley. Science fiction that truly makes you wonder about not only the physical (science), but the metaphysical as well. Questions of morality, spirituality, meaning, and destiny are all actively pursued by such authors- not as afterthoughts or decoration, but as the centerpiece of the fiction. Such works create a vital mythology for the postmodern and impending transhuman eras- they weave truths into their tales. "The Sparrow" charts the journey of Emilio Sandoz, a Jesuit Priest and linguist, from the slums of San Juan to the planet of Rakhat, 4.3 Light Years from Earth, orbiting the star Alpha Centauri A. Along with an intriguing little group of well-meaning Jesuits, scientists, and engineers, this modern-day Cortez sets off to a new world in search, not of gold, but of spiritual treasure. Instead, he encounters disease, hardships, and two strange alien races barred from truly understanding humans by millions of years of evolutionary history. Ultimately, his search for god, about to finally be realized, is transformed into a carnal nightmare which destroys his illusions of divinity and nearly leaves him for dead.

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