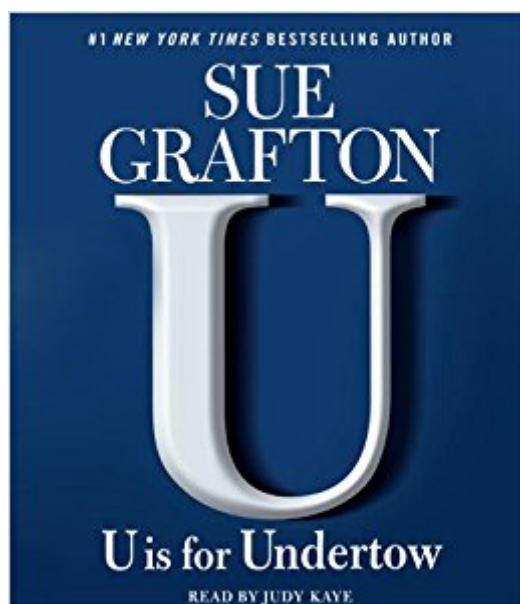


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U Is For Undertow: A Kinsey Millhone Novel



Synopsis

It's April 1988, a month before Kinsey Millhone's thirty-eighth birthday, and she's alone in her office catching up on paperwork when a young man arrives unannounced. Michael Sutton is twenty-seven, an unemployed college dropout. More than two decades ago, a four-year-old girl disappeared, and a recent newspaper story about her kidnapping has triggered a flood of memories. Sutton now believes he stumbled on her lonely burial and could identify the killers if he saw them again. He wants Kinsey's help in locating the grave and finding the men. It's way more than a long shot, but he's persistent and willing to pay cash up front. Reluctantly, Kinsey agrees to give him one day of her time. But it isn't long before she discovers Sutton has an uneasy relationship with the truth. In essence, he's the boy who cried wolf. Is his story true, or simply one more in a long line of fabrications? Moving effortlessly between the 1980s and the 1960s, and changing points of view as Kinsey pursues witnesses whose accounts often clash. Gradually, listeners come to see how everything connects in this twisting, complex, surprise-filled thriller. And as always, at the beating heart of her fiction is Kinsey Millhone, a sharp-tongued, observant loner who never forgets that under the thin veneer of civility is a roiling dark side to the soul.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Robert B. Parker and Sue Grafton: Author One-on-One In this exclusive, we brought together blockbuster authors Robert B. Parker and Sue Grafton and asked them to interview each other.

Robert B. Parker's wise-cracking, street-smart Boston private-eye Spenser earned him a

devoted following and wide critical acclaim. Before his death in January 2010, Parker also wrote the bestselling Jesse Stone novels and a new series of Westerns featuring two guns-for-hire, Virgil Cole and Everett Hitch. Read on to see Robert B. Parker's questions for Sue Grafton, or turn the tables to see what Grafton asked Parker.

Parker: Tell me about you and Kinsey Millhone and the connection between you. Grafton: Kinsey Millhone is my alter ego, the woman I might have been had I not married young and had children. She's younger, thinner, and braver than I, but a good companion nonetheless. Since she can know only what I know, I've taken classes in criminal law and self-defense. I've studied police procedure, private eye procedure, toxicology, ballistics, and crime scene investigation. Beyond that, the prime agreement between us is that I don't tell her, she tells me. When readers ask what she'll be doing after Z is for Zero, I assure them I haven't the faintest idea.

Parker: Describe your writing process (e.g., I get up in the morning, have a martini to get my heart going). Grafton: I take a 5.4-mile walk five days a week, so my writing schedule is often dictated by the weather. If it's too hot or too cold, I walk first thing in the morning, come home, shower, dress, and reach my desk at 9:45 or so. I work until lunch, when I take a short break, returning to my desk until mid-to-late afternoon. If I haven't done a morning walk, I walk when my work is done. Then I drink.

Parker: You've spent time in Hollywood. Tell me about that. Grafton: I refer to that period of my life as "doing one to fifteen in Hollywood." I loved it at first, as dazzled as anyone who hasn't figured out yet how treacherous life there can be. As I've said on previous occasions, I learned two things about myself in Hollywood: one, I'm not a team player; and two, I'm not a good sport. The producers I met were well-educated and articulate, and usually offered me a cup of coffee before they set in to savaging my work. I got too old and cranky to put up with that, so I invented Kinsey Millhone as my way out. I liken it to digging my way out of prison with a teaspoon.

Parker: Do you read reviews? Pay attention to them? Find them helpful? Have an opinion on them? Grafton: Where possible, I avoid reviews. The good ones only encourage swell-headedness and the bad ones hurt my feelings or infuriate me. In either case, by the time reviews appear, the book is written and out on the stands. What's a poor girl to do? There's no point in subjecting myself to the reactions of readers and reviewers, since their response is nothing I can control.

Parker: People sometimes ask me why I write what I write, and I answer, "Because that's what I know how to do." (Then they say, "Would you please stop?" but I'm sure they're just kidding.) Talk about why you write what you write. Grafton: I write what I write because when I put in my application for a position at Sears, they never got back to me. I'm still hopeful, especially with the Christmas season coming up. Aside from that, I write what I write because when the work is going well, it makes me happier than just about anything except my kids and grandkids. When the work is

not going well . . . which is maybe thirty-five percent of the time . . . I know it's my job to sit patiently and keep at it until I figure out what's wrong. In large part, writing is the only thing I know how to do.

--This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

False memory syndrome provides the core of bestseller Grafton's intriguing 21st crime novel featuring wry PI Kinsey Millhone (after *T Is for Trespass*). In 1988, Kinsey takes on client Michael Sutton, who claims to have recovered a childhood memory of men burying a suspicious bundle shortly after the unsolved disappearance of four-year-old Mary Claire Fitzhugh in 1972. But Sutton has a track record of unreliability, and Kinsey must untangle and reconfigure his disjointed recountings to learn if they are truth or fiction. Chapters told from the point of view of other characters in other time periods add texture, allowing the reader to assemble pieces of the case as Kinsey works on other aspects. A subplot involves Kinsey wrestling with conflicting information about her estranged family. Though whodunit purists may be a bit disappointed that the culprit is revealed well before book's end, both loyal Kinsey fans and those new to the canon will find much to like. Author tour. (Dec.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

All of the Kinsey Millhone novels are good. Sue Grafton has maintained an unmatched level of quality throughout this entire series. I don't think she gets enough credit for this. In contrast, Marcia Muller's recent Sharon McCone stories have gone off the rails a bit. Bill Pronzini, my other fave private eye novelist, also seems to be getting a little tired. Grafton just keeps on chugging through the alphabet, releasing good fresh Kinsey stories. Writing novels is hard work, and writing a series of this length so well is unprecedented. In *U is For Undertow* she skilfully weaves past and present, draws complex, believable characters, and builds a simple but satisfying puzzle that is complex for Kinsey to unravel. I especially appreciate Grafton's attention to detail. She gives detailed physical descriptions of her characters, and introduces them in a way that makes it easy to remember and keep track of them. I even like the turn-by-turn driving directions and other details of the character's activities, because it creates a flowing visual in my mind like a movie. Lesser authors gloss over these things so I have to go back and re-read passages to keep track of who's who, and what they did. Thumbs up for *U is for Undertow*, and a big thumbs up for consistently delivering the goods throughout this whole series.

Don't get me wrong. I really enjoyed this installment. But as she did with a few books preceding this,

Ms. Grafton has taken to interspersing several different characters' viewpoints to move the plot along. The premise of the book was intriguing, so I stuck with it...but man...you need a PowerPoint chart to keep track of all the characters. Especially when you're reading it on Kindle...you can't just flip back and say "Ohhhh that's who that guy is!" Anyway, the plot is quite interesting and Kinsey is Kinsey, so that's good. The only loose end for me was POSSIBLE SPOILER the buried dog was never explained to my satisfaction, especially considering where the body and money ended up being buried. And the date mix-up by Michael Stratton was never resolved either....it had to have been a different week...so what were they doing out there burying a dead dog before the child was even dead? Anyway, the second ending - Kinsey's reuniting with Grand - was bittersweet and lovely.

It was a great read...until about the middle. There is a chronological error I believe--could you really order a McDonald's burger with tomato and lettuce in 1967? I don't think so. Since the location of the initial "dig" in relation to the various homes in Horton Ravine is so significant, it would have been helpful to have a map with the names of the streets and the locations of the homes. The author describes all Kinsey's travels in almost too much detail. And then...the ending was just...limp. Almost like it was time for the book to end, so let's just wrap it up. But I'm not giving up on Kinsey...on to V is for Vengeance...

I enjoy reading Sue Grafton's alphabet series. Although these books are not complex they are enjoyable. I like to read a variety of genres of books with varying complexity. If you know that these books are light-hearted before you begin, you will thoroughly enjoy them.

One of the most awful things about falling in love with a series author is that once you read all the existing one's you have to wait for them to write another! That's been the case for Sue Grafton and her alphabet series... And here we are at "U", the 21st Kinsey Millhone mystery. I do have to lament though, that of all, "U" is just not up to the standard set by the preceding 20 books. It's good, don't get me wrong, but the level of excitement and intrigue just never build the way they have before. The case is only moderately interesting, lacking build and impact, and the climax left me wanting. Another issue I had difficulty with is something I am seeing more and more from various writers, with varying levels of success. That is, switching back and forth between telling the story in first person and then going to a third person telling to reveal what the main character could not know from their own point of view. I do see that this particular story needs the back-story in order to let the reader

understand it, but the ever expanding cast of characters left me confused and needing a road map. Add to that the fact that much of the back tale takes place 20+ years in the past, and it just left me spinning trying to keep up. I suppose that, had the story been more engrossing, or the history been learned through Kinsey's detective work, I would have been able to overlook, or even embrace the style. In the end though, I did like the story, but felt a little let down. In Grafton's defense though, she has written 20 outstanding Kinsey Millhone novels over more than two decades. I really do appreciate the loyalty she has shown to her characters and their lives. "U" takes place in 1988, because the stories do follow closely one after the other. Kinsey has aged only a few years, despite the passing of time for us in reader land. As a result, Grafton must tell the stories without the gadgets and trinkets that life in 2010 requires for mere existence. There are no cell phones, personal computers, internet, DVR's, caller ID, etc... She never wavers from the fact that they aren't yet invented; I dare you to try imagining such a day to day world, let alone writing detailed novels about that time. I do recommend U is for Undertow to Grafton fans, but caution that the preceding books are better. If you've never read Sue Grafton, the only way to do it is to start with "A" and enjoy watching her world unfold.

I haven't read a Kinsey novel in years and I'm glad to be back! Will get the V book ASAP! This one seemed to go on a bit too long but all in all I enjoyed it.

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