

Forward

Introduction to THE COMPLEAT CHANCE PERDUE

Mike Resnick

A couple of decades ago I went to the bookstore, looking for a nice, hard-boiled detective novel in the Raymond Chandler mold. I picked up The Stranger City Caper, primarily because of the cover art, which showed a private eye in a trenchcoat. I'd never heard of the author before, but I bought it anyway. Well, let me tell you: covers can be misleading. I got home, opened the book -- and twenty minutes later I was laughing so hard that I was literally gasping for breath. I knew long before I finished the book that Ross Spencer was a comic genius -- an opinion that has only become firmer over the years -- and I spent the next couple of days scouring the stores for any other Chance Perdue adventures that I could find. Writers don't write fan letters to other writers, but within a week I had written one to Ross, a charming man who then lived about 40 miles away from me in Illinois. (We have both since moved to Ohio, though we're now a couple of hundred miles apart.) He responded not with a letter, but with an audio cassette -- he actually hates to type -- I responded in kind, and we've been friends ever since. When I finally met him, he turned out to be a fun-loving, white-haired, cigar-smoking gent with a twinkle in his eye -- exactly the kind of person you would pick to be the creator of the immortal Chance Perdue. Ross kicked off his late-in-life literary career by writing and selling five Perdue novels. He's since sold a batch more books, and has gone on to greater fame than Chance ever brought him -- but to me Chance Perdue is classic, archtypal Ross Spencer, than which nothing is funnier. It's the kind of thing he does both effortlessly and better than anybody else. Perdue is the perfect parody of the hard-boiled detective. He doesn't feel much pain, especially if you hit him above the neck. He's just about irresistible to women. He's so dumb that he can't even spell FBI. If there are twenty right ways to solve a crime and one wrong way, he'll invariably opt for the wrong way and solve it anyway. He is incapable of writing a two-sentence paragraph. (Footnote for historians: Ross once showed me the unfinished manuscript of his very first creation, detective Clay Pierce, who is a clone of Chance Perdue in every way but one: Clay is incapable of writing a paragraph of less than two thousand words.) Shortly after discovering Ross's work, I loaned a couple of the Perdue books to my friend, the award-winning science fiction writer Barry Malzberg. His comment upon returning them: "I never saw so many one-liners in my life. The man is the Henny Youngman of mystery novelists." Actually, Ross isn't a mystery novelist at all. What he is is the funniest writer alive. I know this, because when I sit down to write humor I am the second-funniest writer alive, and I can't hold a candle to Spencer. So what lies ahead of you in this five-in-one volume? Well, let me give you a very brief hint. First there's The DADA Caper, in which we meet Chance Perdue, a detective so dumb that his IQ would freeze water, as he goes up against DADA, an enemy whose acronym stands for "Destroy America! Destroy America!" -- which will show you how committed (and redundant) they are. Next comes The Reggis Arms Caper, in which Chance saves the world from another Japanese invasion, and first meets the CIA's sexiest agent, Brandy Alexander. Then there's The Stranger City Caper, in which Chance must ferret out mystery among the minor-leaguers -- which in this case include a catcher with a wooden leg, a first baseman named Attila, and a left-handed shortstop who gets a triple hernia while pivoting to turn a double play. After that there's The Abu Wahab Caper, a saga of gambling and corruption, in which Chance crosses paths with Quick Cash Kelly, Opportunity O'Flynn, Bet-a-Bunch Dugan, and a cud-chewing racehorse with two huge humps on its back. And finally there's The Radish River Caper, which reunites Chance with Brandy Alexander and the infamous Dr. Ho Ho Ho, as he courts mystery and danger on the football field with such memorable characters as Suicide

Lewisite and Zanzibar McStrangle. If you've never read Chance Perdue before, I envy you, because you've got a few evenings of uproarious laughter awaiting you. If you have encountered him before, you'll be pleased to know that he hasn't changed one iota: he's still funnier than any of his competitors by quite a few levels of magnitude. And, as editor, I will make a solemn pledge to you: if enough of you buy this book, I will harass Ross Spencer day and night until he completes that Clay Pierce novel and Alexander Books brings it to a helplessly laughing public.