



Absent Friends

S.J. Rozan

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The secrets of a group of childhood friends unravel in this haunting thriller by Edgar Award winner S. J. Rozan. Set in New York in the unforgettable aftermath of September 11, **Absent Friends** brilliantly captures a time and place unlike any other, as it winds through the wounded streets of New York and Staten Island...and into a maze of old crimes, damaged lives, and heartbreaking revelations. The result is not only an electrifying mystery and a riveting piece of storytelling but an elegiac novel that powerfully explores a world changed forever on a clear September morning.

In a novel that will catch you off guard at every turn, and one that is guaranteed to become a classic, S. J. Rozan masterfully ratchets up the tension one revelation at a time as she dares you to ponder the bonds of friendship, the meaning of truth, and the stuff of heroism.

Absent Friends Details

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Author : S.J. Rozan

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From Reader Review Absent Friends for online ebook

Rubin Vaughn says

This book is cut from the same cloth as Bittersweet Symphony and Falling Man. It's a dark topic but an important one.

Alison says

I'm not going to review the story as many reviewers have already done so. I will say it is a confusing book. This is the first story I've read by SJ Rozan and had no clue as to what it was about; I had read a review of the author and thought I would try her book. It took quite a few chapters before I grasped what the book was about. The author takes us back and forth between 1979 and Sept. 12, 2001 but I had to ask myself why? Just as I was learning about a character, time shifted. It wasn't until I was deeper into the story that the relevance between their lives in the late '70s and the characters' personalities and achievements in 2001 began to make sense. After reading the book I felt like I walked through a maze trying to find my way out...and did. In hindsight, knowing the ending and how we got there, it was an ok book. I understand why the author chose to piecemeal out information to us; but it still resulted in a stop-n-go flow of the story. I'll probably read another of her books as other reviewers have stated they did not disappoint.

Cathy says

This is a real page-turner. Five stars. Set against the backdrop of 9/11, it's the story of seven childhood friends and an event that changes all their lives - the death of one of them at the hand of another of them. But it's not who the book leads us to believe it is.

Since this is on the spoiler board, I'll say I figured it wasn't Jimmy all along. It didn't fit his personality. And not owning up to it didn't fit his personality.

He always took care of Markie. He never would have let Markie take responsibility for what he did.

My mind swirled around one of the women, or perhaps baby Kevin in some weird accident.

Near the end of the story, I thought we'd find out Tom had Markie killed. Apparently not. I didn't see a good reason for Tom not owning up to what he did. I liked Tom but he didn't emerge as a positive character for me.

I'm not surprised that Harry did kill himself. He would have had a really hard time disentangling that mess, plus so many other people would have been hurt by the truth, by that point.

My big regret was that Kevin was killed. That didn't have to happen.

Teresa in Ohio says

This book was not a joy to read. I felt with the title Absent Friends and the setting post 9-11 in NYC. It would be a story that focused on the aftermath of that day and how people picked up the pieces and moved on in their lives. Instead Jimmy a NYFD is killed in the towers and we flash back and forth between 2001 and 1979. It seems a childhood friend was killed and the one who did the shooting is in jail and tragedy happens again. We then spend over 300 pages trying to make sense of a muddled mess. Harry the reporter and his actions are not necessary. Many of the relationships seem disconnected and there is little to reflect on

9/11 in this book. I would of been happy if the ending if Jimmy just walked away from it all on that day and started a new life. That would of been a better story. I enjoy her series with Bill and Lydia and will keep reading these. Not sure if I will give In this Rain a try or not.

Rick Sanchez says

Not since Bittersweet Symphony have I come across a book that gives an accurate portrayal of 9/11 and its effects on people so well. "Absent Friends" is perfect, it needs more of an audience!

Karen Hazzah says

I'm a fan of Rozan's Lydia Chin / Bill Smith series, but it took me a while to get into this standalone. I initially found it hard to keep track of the many characters and changing point-of-view. But I persevered, and I'm glad I did. Good story of buried secrets, old friends, and moving on. Interesting setting -- New York City right after 9/11 -- added a layer of interest.

Una Tiers says

This book didn't live up to Rozan's ability. The writing was clear. The vignettes about a group of friends focused around 9/11 staggered and never fell together.

Ris says

Tried 3x to start, may have been my mood, but cannot get into this one.

Daphne Atkeson says

This book, set around Sept. 11, got rave reviews from top thriller/suspense writers like it was the Second Coming. Multiple POVs of childhood friends, a murder caused by one or more of them, a scandal regarding possible mob money from fallen firefighter hero, suicide/murder of a reporter. Chapter changes insanely frequent, dragged out revelations until you didn't care any more who did what, cliched backstory childhood incidents, overwrought sentimentality.

Evocative writing, gifted stylist, but one of those "single conversation could solve the whole problem" kinds of stories. I think the 9/11 aspect, which was well handled, must account for all the acclaim. They mystery itself was ho-hum and if I could have flipped ahead to solve it, I would have. Trouble was, it was buried in several POVs.

I want to give it 3.5 because of the good writing, but the more I write, the more irritated I become, so I'm sticking with 3.

Joanne says

I am surprised that I read this book to the end. It got good reviews from significant sources, so I kept at it. It was very tedious through the first half of the book. Then I began to keep the characters straight and it became more interesting,, and the individuals became important to me. I kept reading to find out what happens to them all.

It was a very sad story, set against a backdrop of 9/11, and at the end I felt angry with the author, feeling "what was the point?"

I won't be reading any more of her books.

Rebecca McNutt says

How does *Absent Friends* have such low ratings? It's indeed a very dark story about one of our world's most tragic and unexpected events, but in this book, the September 11th Attacks are just the tip of the iceberg. Readers also get a glimpse of the troubled lives and relationships of those trying to work through the aftermath, not to mention a look back at earlier tragic events that parallel 9/11 in shocking detail. This book isn't for everyone and its style is a little unconventional, but all the same I would still highly recommend it.

LJ says

ABSENT FRIENDS (Novel-NY-Cont) – G+

S.J. Rozen – Standalone

Delacorte Press, 2004 – Hardcover

James McCaffery, a NYFD captain, is one of the fallen heroes of 9/11. But reporter Harry Randell seems to believe James may not have always been so heroic and was involved with a known mobster. When Harry dies of an apparent suicide, a fellow reporter picks up Harry's leads.

*** Not as much a mystery as a character study, it vacillates between multiple characters and two time periods, which I found tiring and a bit confusing. Rozen's depiction of 9/11 and its aftermath are remarkable and sad, and the characters are a reflection of that. However, I found the end very unsatisfying. Parts of the book are very well done and, as Ms. Rosen is a resident of NYC, I certainly understand its impetus. But personally, I'll admit I am anxious for the return of Bill and Lydia.

Kirsty Darbyshire says

This tale concerns a group of friends who grew up on Staten Island in the 1970s and mostly takes place in late 2001 in New York just after the attacks on the World Trade Center. I was looking forward to reading it but in the end felt disappointed.

Despite the fact that I've loved and adored Rozen's other books I never really got into the swing of this one and the plot always felt a little clunky and culminated in an ending that seemed very so-so to me. Just didn't

seem to be as well written as I'd hoped. And though I found some of the sections dealing with life in Manhattan after September 11th interesting I didn't find them as emotionally involving as I thought I should and it started to feel voyeuristic reading the book.

I guess I'd just hoped for better.

Richard Thompson says

This book is very different structurally and thematically from most of Rozan's novels. Not part of the Chin/Smith series.

The story revolves around the lives of seven friends — three girls and four boys — who grew up together in the community of Pleasant Hills (think Pleasantville as in the movie) on Staten Island. We switch back and forth from their lives and relationships in the late 60's and into the 70's and the "present day" which is the period immediately after 9/11. One of the boys from the Pleasant Hills group became a firefighter and a much decorated hero of very years, and his status as a hero is confirmed when he dies in the collapse of the North Tower while rescuing people trapped in the building. However, a reporter who has been given the job of profiling some of the 9/11 heroes suspects that there is a darker story lurking in Jimmy McCaffery's past.

With this book we have read either on our own or as read-alouds in Rozan collection (this since March of this year). Hopefully, she has another one in the pipeline...

(The two local radio stations in the building on Third Avenue. An airplane crashes into the building and it collapses.)

Geoff Wooldridge says

The story covers two distinct periods of time.

Firstly, in a battered post 9/11 New York, around 6 weeks after the collapse of the World Trade Centre Towers, as the city mourns, deals with the shock and life slowly regains a degree of normality.

Secondly, in the suburban environment of Pleasant Hills on Staten Island in the late 1970s, where a group of friends, 4 men, three women, are growing up, forming relationships and, for some at least, finding trouble.

A fireman, Jimmy McCaffery, with a reputation for heroic acts, is killed in the maelstrom of 9/11. A memorial fund in his name is established, administered by old friend and lover, Marian.

An ageing journalist, Harry, pursuing a back story to Jimmy's death, suspects that events of 1978, when Jimmy's friend Jack, is shot and killed by another friend, Markie, who subsequently dies in a prison fight, might not be all that it first seems.

When Harry apparently suicides by jumping from the Verrazano Narrows Bridge while still working on the story, his colleague and now younger lover, Laura, who suspects Harry's death may not be suicide, takes up the story in pursuit of the truth. What really did happen in 1978, involving Jimmy, Markie, Jack and his brother Tom, and what is the true source of payments made to Markie's widow Sally ever since that time?

The story alternates between these time periods, telling elements of the story from the various perspectives of key characters, until the truth is eventually revealed.

This is a tale of deep friendships and affections, honour and deceit, heroism and sacrifice, crime and corruption, linked to Irish and Italian crime families and a bent police system.

Roza has done a competent job in revealing the story, managing a complex structure and multiple voices, and maintaining a degree of dramatic tension for as long as possible.

The prose is often clunky and mundane, much of the dialogue unconvincing, but she has managed to capture the atmosphere of immediate post-9/11 New York with a sense of authenticity. In that aspect, she is occasionally poetically eloquent.

Overall, competent and engaging, but never reaching any great heights. It was a solid 3 star novel, probably 3.5, but short of a 4 star rating from me.
