My Personal Review:
Gary Jennings has carved out a niche for himself in modern fiction - long, intricately plotted novels based around a single character in a little known historical area. Great reads, full of love and violence, colourful and exciting. And educational - history comes alive in his books, virtually bursting out of the page to take you by the throat. Or the heart. In Spangle he has outdone himself. This is my favourite of all his books, and perhaps the most poignant. We follow Zachary Edge, a colonel riding away from Appomattox, from his chance meeting with the down at heel circusman Florian through post Civil War America across the Atlantic to Europe, all the way to Moscow and back, ending in the besieged Paris of the Franco-Prussian War. Along the way Florians circus grows and prospers, until he performs before the very crowned heads of Europe. Colonel Edge learns the circus trade, all its tricks and traditions, and we learn along with him. It is a road story of course, as all circus stories must be, but this one is longer than most, and travels a more colourful, exciting road than the circus itself. It is a grand entertainment from start to finish, at every page revealing the fruits of Gary Jennings research into the history of the circus. And in these latter days, where the animals are mostly gone, and circuses are fewer than they were, it is a journey back to freer, happier days. One of my personal favourites, as much for the wealth of detail as for the story.

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