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Dead Lions (Slough House)

By Mick Herron



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The CWA Gold Dagger Award-winning British espionage novel about disgraced MI5 agents who inadvertently uncover a deadly Cold War-era legacy of sleeper cells and mythic super spies.

The disgruntled agents of Slough House, the MI5 branch where washed-up spies are sent to finish their failed careers on desk duty, are called into action to protect a visiting Russian oligarch whom MI5 hopes to recruit to British intelligence. While two agents are dispatched on that babysitting job, though, an old Cold War-era spy named Dickie Bow is found dead, ostensibly of a heart attack, on a bus outside of Oxford, far from his usual haunts.

But the head of Slough House, the irascible Jackson Lamb, is convinced Dickie Bow was murdered. As the agents dig into their fallen comrade's circumstances, they uncover a shadowy tangle of ancient Cold War secrets that seem to lead back to a man named Alexander Popov, who is either a Soviet bogeyman or the most dangerous man in the world. How many more people will have to die to keep those secrets buried?



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Editorial Review

Review

Praise for DEAD LIONS

WINNER OF THE 2013 CWA GOLD DAGGER FOR BEST CRIME NOVEL OF THE YEAR

A BBC FRONT ROW BEST CRIME NOVEL OF 2013

A *TIMES* CRIME AND THRILLER BOOK OF THE YEAR

A *SUNDAY TIMES* TOP 50 CRIME AND THRILLER BOOK OF THE PAST 5 YEARS

A 2014 BARRY AWARD BEST THRILLER NOMINEE

A 2014 MACAVITY AWARD BEST MYSTERY NOVEL NOMINEE

“Smart, sharp British wit at its finest. A uniquely brilliant take on the British spy novel.”

?**Cara Black, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Murder Below Montparnasse***

“Funny, clever . . . Genuinely thrilling. The novel is equally noteworthy for its often lyrical prose.”

?***Publishers Weekly*, Starred Review**

“A great romp.”

?**Jeff Park, BBC Front Row**

“Delightful . . . with a dry humor reminiscent of Greene and Waugh.”

—***Sunday Times*, Best Thrillers and Crime Novels of the Past 5 Years**

“Clever and funny.”

?**The Times**

“*Herron delivers unbeatable entertainment for thriller fans.*”

?***Library Journal*, Starred Review**

“*[A] wickedly clever send-up of the classic British spy novel.*”

?***Crime Writers' Association***

“*If you like your suspense novels told with a smart dash of wit and sarcasm, filled with lots of twists and turns, Herron's your man.*”

?***Shelf Awareness***

“*[Dead Lions] features some of the twistiest plotlines in crime fiction...[and] is beautifully written but also elegantly structured . . . Ever since finishing *Slow Horses*, I've been waiting for a possible sequel. Now that it's here, I have the pleasure of experiencing it, along with the pang of having finished it.*”

?***International Noir Fiction***

“*Herron provides a dour, twisty spy thriller with something for everyone: part post–Cold War miasma, part James Bond heroics, and elliptical withal.*”

?***Kirkus Reviews***

"Dead Lions is at once a finely wrought thriller and a farcical, fiercely pointed tale of political greed and bureaucratic corruption. Mick Herron writes like a dream."

?Open Letters Monthly

"A surreal, cynical, yet amusing look at the world of British intelligence . . . a looking-glass world that features KGB undercover agents, a Russian oligarch, a text message on a mobile phone and the ghost of a fabled Soviet spymaster who may not be real . . . an amusing, serpentine plot that takes readers as far from the glamorous world of Ian Fleming's tuxedo-wearing spy as could be imagined."

?January Magazine, Best Books of 2013

"Full of style and cynical humor . . . Has all the punch-your-lights-out action of a movie thriller."

?Read Me Deadly

Praise for Mick Herron

"Mick Herron never tells a suspense story in the expected way . . . In Herron's book, there is no hiding under the desk."

?The New York Times Book Review

"Stylish and engaging."

?The Washington Post

"[A] masterful thriller . . . The intricate plot, coupled with Herron's breezy writing style, results in superior entertainment that makes most other novels of suspense appear dull and slow-witted by comparison."

?Publishers Weekly, Starred Review

"Like a good movie . . . grabs the reader from the first page."

?Booklist, Starred Review

From the Hardcover edition.

About the Author

Mick Herron was born in Newcastle and has a degree in English from Balliol College, Oxford. He is the author of two books in the Slough House series, *Slow Horses* and *Dead Lions*, as well as the standalone thriller *Nobody Walks*, and the novella *The List*. His work has been nominated for the Macavity, Barry, and Shamus Awards, and he has won the CWA Gold Dagger for Best Crime Novel. He lives in Oxford and works in London.

From the Hardcover edition.

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A fuse had blown in Swindon, so the south-west network ground to a halt. In Paddington the monitors wiped departure times, flagging everything 'Delayed', and stalled trains clogged the platforms; on the concourse luckless travellers clustered round suitcases, while seasoned commuters repaired to the pub, or rang home

with cast-iron alibis before hooking up with their lovers back in the city. And thirty-six minutes outside London, a Worcester-bound HST crawled to a halt on a bare stretch of track with a view of the Thames. Lights from houseboats pooled on the river's surface, illuminating a pair of canoes which whipped out of sight even as Dickie Bow registered them: two frail crafts built for speed, furrowing the water on a chilly March evening.

All about, passengers were muttering, checking watches, making calls. Pulling himself into character, Dickie Bow made an exasperated *tch!* But he wore no watch, and had no calls to make. He didn't know where he was headed, and didn't have a ticket.

Three seats away the hood fiddled with his briefcase.

The intercom fizzed.

"This is your train manager speaking. I'm sorry to have to inform you we can't go any further due to trackside equipment failure outside Swindon. We're currently—"

A crackle of static and the voice died, though could faintly be heard continuing to broadcast in neighbouring carriages. Then it returned:

"—reverse into Reading, where replacement buses will—"

This was met with a communal groan of disgust, and not a little swearing, but most impressively to Dickie Bow, immediate readiness. The message hadn't ended before coats were being pulled on and laptops folded; bags snapped shut and seats vacated. The train shunted, and then the river was flowing in the wrong direction, and Reading station was appearing once more.

There was chaos as passengers disgorged onto crowded platforms, then realised they didn't know where to go. Nor did Dickie Bow, but all he cared about was the hood, who had immediately disappeared in a sea of bodies. Dickie, though, was too old a hand to panic. It was all coming back to him. He might never have left the Spooks' Zoo.

Except in those days he'd have found a patch of wall and smoked a cigarette. Not possible here, which didn't stop a nicotine pang twitching inside him, or a sudden wasp-sharp sting pricking his thigh, so real he gasped. He gripped the spot, his hand brushing first the corner of an oblivious briefcase, then an umbrella's slick damp nastiness. Deadly weapons, he thought. Your nine-tofivers carry deadly weapons.

He was crowded onwards, like it or not—, and suddenly everything was okay, because he'd secured visible contact once more: the hood, a hat shielding his bald head, his case tucked under an arm, stood near the escalator to the passenger bridge.

So, corralled by weary travellers, Dickie shuffled past and up the moving stairs, at the top of which he sidled into a corner. The main exit from the station was across this bridge. He assumed that was the route everyone would take, once instructions about buses were issued.

He closed his eyes. Today was not ordinary. Usually by this time, just after six thirty, all sharp edges would have been smoothed away: he'd have been up since twelve, after five hours' stormy shut-eye. Black coffee and a fag in his room. A shower if needed. Then the Star, where a Guinness and whisky chaser would either set him right or serve him notice that solids were best avoided. His hardcore days were over. Back then, he'd had his unreliable moments: drunk, he'd mistaken nuns for whores and policemen for friends; sober, he'd made eye-contact with ex-wives, no recognition on his side, and only relief on theirs. Bad times.

But even then, he'd never had a gold-standard Moscow hood shimmy past without clocking him for what he was.

Dickie became aware of action: an announcement about buses had been made, and everyone was trying to cross the bridge. He hung by the monitor long enough for the hood to pass, then allowed himself to be carried forward, three warm bodies behind. He shouldn't be this close, but there was no accounting for the choreography of crowds.

And this crowd was not happy. Having squeezed through the ticket barriers on the other side, it hassled the station staff, who placated, argued, and pointed at the exits. Outside was wet and dark, and there were no buses. The crowd swelled across the forecourt. Crushed in its embrace, Dickie Bow kept both eyes on the hood, who stood placidly, waiting.

An interrupted journey, thought Dickie. You played the odds in this line of work—he had forgotten he was no longer in this line of work—and the hood would have finished processing them before getting off the train; he would go with the flow, make no fuss; continue on his way by whatever means presented. Where this might be, Dickie had no idea. The train had been Worcesterbound, but made plenty of stops before then. The hood could be getting off anywhere. All Dickie knew was, he'd be getting off there too.

And now there were buses, three of them, pulling round the corner. The crowd tensed, pressed forward, and the hood sailed through the mass like an icebreaker carving an Arctic field, while Dickie slipped through spaces in his wake. Someone was calling instructions, but didn't have the voice for it. Long before he'd finished, he was drowned out by the muttering of people who couldn't hear.

But the hood knew what was what. The hood was heading for the third bus, so Dickie sidled through chaos in his wake, and boarded it too. Nobody asked for a ticket. Dickie simply trotted on and headed for the rear, which boasted a view of the hood, two seats ahead. Settling back, Dickie allowed his eyes to close. In every operation came a lull. When it did, you shut your eyes and took inventory. He was miles from home, with about sixteen quid on him. He needed a drink, and wouldn't get one in a hurry. But on the upside, he was here, it was now, and he hadn't known how much he'd missed this: living life, instead of easing through it on the wet stuff.

Which was what he'd been doing when he'd spotted the hood. Right there in the Star. A civilian's jaw would have hit the table: what the hell? A pro, even a long-defunct pro, checked the clock, drained his Guinness, folded the Post and left. Loitered by the bookies two doors down, remembering the last time he'd seen that face, and in whose company. The hood was a bit player. The hood had held the bottle, poured its contents directly into Dickie's clamped-wide mouth; strictly a non-speaking role. It wasn't the hood who sent electric shivers down Dickie's spine . . . Ten minutes later he emerged, and Dickie fell into step behind him: Dickie, who could follow a ferret through a wood let alone a leftover ghost. A blast from the past. An echo from the Spooks' Zoo.

(Berlin, if you insisted. The Spooks' Zoo was Berlin, back when the cages had just been unlocked, and frightened thugs were pouring from the woodwork like beetles from an upturned log. At least twice a day, some sweating would-be asset was at the door claiming to have the crown jewels in a cardboard suitcase: defence details, missile capability, toxic secrets—and yet, for all the flurry of activity, the writing was on the newly dismantled Wall: everyone's past had been blown away, but so had Dickie Bow's future. Thanks, old chap. Afraid there's not much call for your, ah, skills any more . . . What pension? So naturally, he'd drifted back to London.)

The driver called something Dickie didn't catch. The door hissed shut and the horn was tapped twice; a farewell note to the lingering buses. Dickie rubbed his thigh where the edge of a briefcase or umbrella-tip had nipped him, and thought about luck, and the strange places it dragged you. Such as, from a Soho street into the tube and out the other end; into Paddington, onto a train, then onto this bus. He still didn't know whether that luck was good or bad.

When the lights went out the bus briefly became a travelling shadow. Then passengers switched overhead bulbs on, and blue screens gleamed upwards from laptops, and fists wrapped round iPhones grew spectrally white. Dickie fiddled his own phone from his pocket, but he had no messages. There were never any messages. Scrolling through his contact list, he was struck by how short it was. Two seats in front, the hood had rolled his newspaper into a baton, wedged it between his knees, and hung his hat upon it. He might be asleep.

The bus left Reading behind. Through the window, dark countryside unfurled. Some distance off, an ascending sequence of red lights indicated the mast at Didcot, but the cooling towers were invisible.

In Dickie's hand, the mobile was a grenade. Rubbing his thumb on its numberpad, he registered the tiny nipple on the middle button that allowed you to orient your fingers in the dark. But nobody was hanging on Dickie's words. Dickie was a relic.

The world had moved on, and what would his message be anyway? That he'd seen a face from the past, and

was following it home? Who would have cared? The world had moved on. It had left him behind.

Rejection came softer these days. Dickie heard occasional whispers on the Soho songlines, and these days even the useless were given a chance. The Service, like everyone else, was hamstrung by rules and regulations: sack the useless, and they took you to tribunal for discriminating against useless people. So the Service bunged the useless into some godforsaken annex and threw paperwork at them, an administrative harassment intended to make them hand in their cards. They called them the slow horses. The screw-ups. The losers. They called them the slow horses and they belonged to Jackson Lamb, whom Dickie had encountered, back in the Spooks' Zoo.

His mobile gave a blip, but there was no message; only a warning that it was running out of power.

Dickie knew how it felt. He had nothing to say. Attention wavered and refocused elsewhere. Laptops hummed and mobiles whispered, but Dickie had no voice. Had no movement, bar a feeble flexing of his fingers. The tiny nipple on the keypad's middle button scratched beneath his thumb: *scratch scratch*.

There was an important message to deliver, but Dickie did not know what it was, nor to whom it should be sent. For a few luminous moments he was aware of being part of a warm, humid community, breathing the same air, hearing the same tune. But the tune slipped out of earshot, and became beyond recall. Everything faded, save the scene through the window. The landscape continued unrolling one black fold after another, dotted with pinpricks of light, like sequins on a scarf. And then the lights blurred and dimmed and the darkness rolled over itself one final time, and then there was only the bus carrying its mortal cargo through the night, heading for Oxford, where it would deliver one soul fewer than it had gathered, back in the rain.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Dustin Alvarez:

Book is to be different per grade. Book for children till adult are different content. As you may know that book is very important normally. The book Dead Lions (Slough House) has been making you to know about other knowledge and of course you can take more information. It is extremely advantages for you. The reserve Dead Lions (Slough House) is not only giving you far more new information but also to become your friend when you experience bored. You can spend your current spend time to read your book. Try to make relationship while using book Dead Lions (Slough House). You never truly feel lose out for everything should you read some books.

Johnnie Gonzales:

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Christopher Suttle:

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