



Dead Lions

Mick Herron

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London's Slough House is where the washed-up MI5 spies go to while away what's left of their failed careers. The "slow horses," as they're called, have all disgraced themselves in some way to get relegated here. Maybe they messed up an op badly and can't be trusted anymore. Maybe they got in the way of an ambitious colleague and had the rug yanked out from under them. Maybe they just got too dependent on the bottle—not unusual in this line of work. One thing they all have in common, though, is they all want to be back in the action. And most of them would do anything to get there—even if it means having to collaborate with one another.

Now the slow horses have a chance at redemption. An old Cold War-era spy is found dead on a bus outside Oxford, far from his usual haunts. The despicable, 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?

Dead Lions Details

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From Reader Review Dead Lions for online ebook

PattyMacDotComma says

4.5★

“‘You want to know what Lamb wanted, right?’

‘Just a clue.’

‘He’d kill me. And he could do it, too. He’s killed people before.’

‘That’s what he wants you to think,’ River said.

‘You’re saying he hasn’t?’

‘I’m saying he’s not allowed to kill staff. Health and safety.’

And yes, he could. Lamb could. He runs the slow horses, the has-been or the might-have-been spies who’ve been relegated to spook limbo in Slough House where the heavies in MI5 and Regent Park hope they’ll get bored and resign.

Lamb is a deliciously disgusting character, as is his office, where

“The air is heavy with a dog’s olfactory daydream: takeaway food, illicit cigarettes, day-old farts and stale beer. . .”

He’s nearly always grubby and greasy and stuffing himself with bacon sandwiches after which he farts noisily and lights yet another cigarette. I kept expecting him to cause a small explosion or be hoist by his own petard, literally. (*My dad once told me that the origin of the word ‘petard’ was ‘break wind’ in old French, so I looked it up, and it’s true. Goes back to Latin, but I digress. Still, to be hoist by one’s own petard paints an amusing picture, eh?*)

But he’s also learned a lot and forgotten nothing, which make it impossible to get the better of him. Doesn’t know the meaning of politically correct. Dreadful boss. Catherine Standish and River Cartwright approach him in his office, seeking information.

‘We don’t like being out of the loop.’

‘You’re always out of the loop. The loop’s miles away. Nearest you’ll get to being in the loop is when they make a documentary about it and show it on the History Channel. I thought you were aware of that.’”

...

“Lamb plucked a stained mug from the litter on his desk, and threw it at Catherine. River caught it before it reached her head. Lamb said, ‘Well, I’m glad we’ve had this chat. Now f* off. Cartwright, give that to Standish. Standish, fill it with tea.’”**

Catherine Standish had been a fairly important person as assistant to and eventually carer for a very influential, but later disgraced, senior official, now deceased, hence her demotion. River Cartwright bombed out on a training exercise when he was undermined by James “Spider” Webb, who sabotaged it. *The details are in the last book, but this is not a spoiler, if you haven’t read it yet.*)

River is still employed, not by the grace of God but by the grace of Grandad Cartwright, a renowned and retired old spook whom nobody still dares cross. He knows where too many skeletons are buried, figuratively and literally.

“. . . once a spook you were always a spook, and everything else was just cover. So the friendly old man trowelling his flowerbeds with a silly hat on remained the strategist who'd helped plot the Service's course through the Cold War, and River had grown up learning the details.

This case harks back to the Cold War, and River chats to Granddad about it, but finds him pretty circumspect. He will drop the occasional crumb of information about dealings with the Russians, but as for possible ongoing threats, or reasons for them, he speaks only about an imaginary villain, a 'scarecrow' whom the Russians invented to get the British to follow.

But when former spy Dickie Bow is found dead on a bus, a few people take notice. He may have been a washed-up operative, but he had been one of the family, so to speak, in the old days, and Lamb decides to investigate. Not because he cares, mind you.

“There was no brotherhood code. If Dickie Bow had succumbed to a mattress fire, Lamb would have got through the five stages without batting an eye: denial, anger, bargaining, indifference, breakfast.”

(Bacon sandwiches, no doubt.) His investigation does unearth a phone.

“It was an ancient thing, a Nokia, black-and-grey, with about as many functions as a bottle opener. You could no more take a photo with it than send an e-mail with a stapler.”

It seems, the Russians are coming, the Russians are coming!

Oh. To do a trade deal? Sounds kind of boring, and is . . . until suddenly, it isn't. Spider Webb is set to make a name for himself, River gets sent to the countryside, tracking down a lead, and Min Harper and Lousa Guy are assigned to look after the Russians.

Many characters return, and new characters are added. This may be funny and entertaining, but the job is deadly and people do die. Sadly. I was starting to enjoy someone who won't be back, but no hints.

The action does get pretty heavy (well, I said somebody didn't make it), so it's not all fun and games.

All in all, another absolute delight. I didn't guess the plot or the connections, and I certainly didn't guess the ultimate ending. There are hints along the way, so there's no sudden surprise revelation, just a peeling back of information which I find very satisfying.

I should add that it's well-written and the descriptions of place and atmosphere are as good as those of the characters. A church spire in a country town reached **“a skyline it had kissed for hundreds of years”**.

Incidentally, I think this would read fine as a stand-alone. Enough background is given here and there to appreciate the characters' histories.

Thanks again to NetGalley and Hachette Australia for the preview copy from which I've quoted. On to #3 in the series!

Carolyn says

This was an excellent sequel to the brilliant *Slow Horses*. Jackson Lamb and his team of misfits, exiled by MI5 to the backwaters of Slough House, are back at their desks churning through paperwork when an ex-cold war spy is killed on a bus. Jackson Lamb believes his death may be linked to an old Russian spy network that may or may not have existed and the 'slow horses' suddenly find themselves involved in an operation. River Cartwright is dispatched to a sleepy village to hunt for Russian spies while two of Lamb's team are seconded by Spider Webb to help him recruit a wealthy Russian businessman.

This is a complex, multilayered plot that unfolds carefully to pull all the threads together into a thrilling conclusion with enough twists and underhand deals to keep you guessing. The characters are the real strength of this series, particularly the shambolic smoking, drinking, farting, bacon-sandwich eating Lamb who looks incompetent but whose brain is as sharp as ever and remembers everything. River and the rest of the team are keen to work together to redeem themselves with MI5 in the hope that they'll be invited back to head office. Throughout a dry wit and dark humour keeps the characters and their exploits grounded and makes this a very entertaining read.

With thanks to Netgalley and Hachette for a digital copy of this book.

Liz says

Dead Lions is the fabulous second book in Mick Herron's Slough House series. It's got spies. And Russian mobsters. And planes and bombs and terrorist plots. Enter the Slow Horses of the British spy world, who will foil these evil plots in the nick of time! Well, the point is they'll give it their best.

James Bond, they are not. Disgraced British MI5 agents are also known as the "slow horses," sent to the Slough House to keep them out of the way and out of the field, in hopes that they'll eventually give up and quit altogether. But the murder of an MI5 agent from a bygone era triggers an investigation which is taken up by the leader of Slough House, and soon they're on the trail of a near-mythical Russian terrorist who may not even be real, and who may or may not have a sleeper cell ready to be unleashed.

I really loved this smart, snappy, well-written book. Engaging from the first chapter, the story unfolds quickly and picks up the pace right away. The chapters are short and give all protagonists good screen time, while becoming progressively more intense and revealing all the way up through the final pages. If you're a fan of British crime or spy fiction, I highly recommend this series! The first book is called *Slow Horses* (what else?), also very good and with more background on each of the horses.

Wanda says

The denizens of Slough House are at it again—those slow horses, the disgraced spies, are trying to be relevant and get in on the Intelligence Service action. You've gotta love the repulsive head of Slough House, Jackson Lamb, who goes to great lengths to make himself look like a homeless guy and to torment all those under his supervision. Likewise, it's hard not to be fond of River Cartwright, whose grandfather was a successful spy with MI5 back in the day—when River needs encouragement, he goes to visit the old man and listen to his war stories, gleaning hints to help him in his current predicament. Maybe you don't love the other characters (or maybe you do), but they are entertaining and have their own back stories of banishment to Slough House. I must admit a soft spot for Roderick Ho, the stereotypical Anglo-Asian computer geek

who can't figure out why he is in the dog house. Turns out, he did nothing exactly wrong, but he is obnoxious and no one wants to work with him despite his virtuoso skills as a computer nerd.

Lamb isn't one to let his slow horses loose in the field very often and they always manage to get into trouble when he does. Cartwright is probably the sharpest of them (except maybe the new guy with the gambling problem) and he still manages to get himself into situations where that "how to withstand torture" training comes in useful.

This book and its predecessor, *Slow Horses*, are extremely entertaining and perfect for those who enjoy the spy novel. References to the Cold War with the Soviet Union are especially à propos during these days of Russian and Ukrainian turmoil and posturing by both Putin and the United States, two former superpowers both struggling to retain their relevance in the 21st century.

Brenda says

As Dickie Bow followed the hood, keeping him/it in sight, it felt good to be back on the job – even though no one else knew about it. The problem with the trains meant the frustrated commuters queued to catch the replacement buses, so Dickie kept the hood in view and stepped onto the same bus, sitting two seats behind him.

But when Dickie was found dead at the end of the route, Jackson Lamb – head of Slough House, where the disgraced MI5 spies were put out to pasture – was positive Dickie had been murdered. And he knew he needed to find the answers. His misfit agents in their search for the truth found a dark web of Cold War secrets. Danger was afoot; people would die; but Lamb wanted to know - did Dickie die of natural causes, or was it murder?

Humorous and dark, *Dead Lions* by Mick Herron is the 2nd in the Slough House series and though there are many characters, the odious Jackson Lamb stands out. Always one step ahead of the rest, with his often rude and snarky comments he runs Slough House with aplomb. Twists and turns are littered with dry humour and sarcasm – the plot is complex and entertaining. Highly recommended.

With thanks to NetGalley and the publisher for my digital copy to read and review.

Phrynne says

This is proving to be a very addictive series. Fortunately I have all of them sitting on my Kindle so I will be able to feed my addiction:)

As in the first book we watch our group of MI5 misfits bumble and stumble their way through situations they do not understand and which are usually not what they seem. In this book several of the Slow Horses are involved in really serious situations and one dies. This author is not afraid of leaving corpses behind, including those of the good guys!

What is it that is so appealing about these books? I think it is mostly down to the characters who are all

appealing in their own varied ways. The dialogue is smart, a bit dark, and frequently funny. And Jackson Lamb is perfectly cast. Overweight, drinks and smokes too much, doesn't care what he says to anybody, frequently extremely rude and yet he is always at least one step ahead of anybody else in what is going on.

I would recommend this series to anyone who likes their spy stories with a touch of irreverence and humour.

Anmiryam says

I am so addicted to this series of thrillers chronicling the exploits of a group of disgraced MI5 agents in internal exile at a holding pen called Slough House that I'm deeply sad that I have now read all that are, or will soon be, available.

Why, are you asking am I so fond of Mick Herron's *Slow Horses* (*Slough House*, *Slow Horses*, obvious but funny)? To begin with, the books center around a compendium of flawed and unappealing characters that it is ridiculously easy to love. There's the group's slovenly, curmudgeonly leader, Jackson Lamb, whose off-putting manner and deplorable personal habits never quite manage to disguise his loyalty to his crew of fuck-ups, or his deep well of smarts and hard won tradecraft. Then there's his recovering alcoholic PA, Catherine Standish. Once the aide of the head of MI5, she ended up at Slough House after her boss who was spying for the other side, either committed suicide or was shuffled off this mortal coil by those in MI5 looking to avoid another embarrassment. Over the years Catherine has learned more about spying than her uptight and rather repressed exterior would lead you to believe. There's also my personal favorite, computer geek Roderick Ho, who can transform lives, usually not for the better, with a few minutes at a keyboard. I doubt I'd want to meet him, certainly none of the other members of Slough House want to talk to him if they can avoid it, but his cyber canniness make him someone you have to admire. Other members of the team are serving out their days in the worst sort of administrative spade work for sins that range from gambling, to anger management, to getting on the wrong side of Diana Taverner, the agency's Second Desk, who will stop at nothing to get promoted to First Desk.

Herron sets his motley crew into action in service of deliciously convoluted plots using some creaky techniques -- sudden cliffhanger cuts that mislead, conversations that are reported as taking place with the content deliberately elided, but it works because it's all done with a wink and nod. We're supposed to enjoy the obvious gusto of with which these hackneyed elements are employed. For the most part it works and we read on complicit with Herron's humorous appropriation of old-time serial fiction conventions. It helps that his plots are indeed ingenious and while you know the connections between disparate developments will be made clear, it's only the most jaded and experienced of readers who will discern exactly where it is all going before the final pages.

These books should come with warning labels: read at your own risk. The series is highly addictive and starting to read them will result in lack of sleep and desperation over when the next installment is going to be published.

Andrea says

This series is turning out to be such a treat, with this second instalment equally as thrilling and funny as the first.

The slow horses, led by Jackson Lamb, have settled back down after their unprecedented operational antics of the previous book, but the underlings still remember what it felt like to be *part of something*, and working as a team. So when a Cold War era British spy turns up dead on a train-replacement bus, without a ticket, eyebrows are raised and some low-key investigations begin. Meanwhile, Spider Webb has seconded two of the slow horses to manage security on a meeting with the owner of a Russian oil company. We also have two new team members - Shirley and Marcus - and nobody is really clear about why they have been relegated to Slough House, or indeed whether one of them is reporting back to MI5 second desk, Lady Di Taverner.

In this instalment, River is still champing at the bit for some action and a chance to redeem himself, Catherine steps up to take on an almost 2IC role while Lamb is in the field, and Roddy Ho is... still Roddy Ho.

*Catherine knocked and entered. "You busy?" she said [to River]. "This can wait."
"Ha bloody ha."*

Catherine fills River in on what she knows about the dead spy:

*"So why's Lamb interested?" River mused.
"No idea. Maybe they worked together." She paused. "A note says he was a talented streetwalker. That doesn't mean what it sounds like, does it?"*

Once the two are both up to speed, they approach Lamb:

*Lamb's door was open. Catherine tapped, and they went in. Lamb was trying to turn his computer on: he still wore his coat and an unlit cigarette dangled from his mouth. He eyed them as if they were Mormons.
"What's this, an intervention?"*

When Lamb realises two of his horses have had the temerity to check up on him:

*Lamb shook his head in disbelief. "What happened? Someone come round and sew your balls back on? I told you not to answer the door to strangers."
"We don't like being out of the loop."
"You're always out of the loop. The loop's miles away. Nearest you'll get to being in the loop is when they make a documentary about it and show it on the History Channel. I thought you were aware of that."*

I could go on, there's just so much humour in Herron's writing, but I won't.

But it's not all laughs, there are some pretty tense moments and lots of thrills. And much like the writers of one of my favourite TV series of all time, *Spooks*, Herron is not afraid to kill off his characters if need be...

Hopefully there's a lot more to come in this series. On to #2.5 next!

Trish says

Mick Herron wrote a two-book Slough House series featuring River Cartwright which began with *Slow*

Horses and ended with *Dead Lions*. ‘Slow Horses’ is a nickname given to disgraced spies who live out the rest of what might generously be termed their careers in the M15 Slough House, as opposed to working in pin-stripes at Regent’s Park. Too knowledgeable to be cut loose and too damaged to handle edgy assignments, these talented but dismissed spies are called upon in *Dead Lions* to chase a ghost—a Russian spy long hidden from view.

I’ve been reading backward through Herron’s work, beginning with his soon-to-be released *Nobody Walks* published by Soho Crime, which is a cornucopia of rich characterizations, cynical observations about the business of spying, and imaginative spycraft. I have not gotten to *Slow Horses* but I can tell you that these works are all of a piece. River Cartwright was ostensibly the main man in the first two books, though his involvement was not as pronounced in *Dead Lions* as Tom Bettany’s is in *Nobody Walks*.

Mick Herron has an eye for the ways individuals can look absurd in large bureaucratic organizations: who gets ahead, who stays ahead, and who stays alive are all subject to his scrutiny and imaginative doodlings. The failings of ordinary folk provide a rich vein of material.

Dead Lions is written like the screenplay for a TV series in that much of the novel is conversation. Unless one is a Londoner, this presents a little bit of a challenge in being able to follow the action especially when being told by a cynical and wily old sidelined spy. One never knows what is true and what is not even if one understands his language. When one grows up in an organization, there is a specific vocabulary for insiders. If one is not part of the group, understanding can be as difficult as crashing a company’s Christmas cocktail party. But like that theoretical Christmas party, if one holds on long enough for understanding to dawn, the ride is quite fun enough.

Herron is good at writing spy thrillers, very good, indeed. If this is your special genre, his books are a must-read. If British spy thrillers are only an occasional treat for you, he is still one of the best, and getting better all the time. Start with *Nobody Walks*.

Susan says

This is the second in the Slough House series, where the ‘Slow Horses’ reside – those M15 operatives who have made mistakes and have been shunted off to do administrative tasks. Slough House is presided over by Jackson Lamb, who, although now he appears to be slovenly, unkempt and cruelly sarcastic, was once an undercover operative during the Cold War and, despite his appearances, is not only still quite capable of outmanoeuvring those at the Park, but he is fiercely loyal to those he is responsible for and anyone he considers to be one of his own.

One such was Richard Bough, obviously known as ‘Dickie Bow,’ who was an operative long ago. Still, being a spook, even if you are pensioned off, leaves its mark and when Dickie spots a face he recognises from the past, he immediately begins shadowing him and, when Dickie is found dead, Lamb is not convinced his death was natural. In a separate storyline, Min Harper and Louise Guy are seconded by River Cartwright’s old enemy, Spider, to babysit a Russian oligarch, who is visiting London for, ‘talks about talks.’ All of the Slow Horses are desperate to go back into the field and some of them will get the chance in this book.

Author Mick Herron has created a realistic spy setup, which is less James Bond and more Harry Palmer.

There is always the threat of cuts and cost cutting, there is a lot of dark humour and there is real danger. Characters in these novels, and in *Slough House*, change and that is because there is a very real possibility that they could get killed. A desk is empty and becomes filled by someone else and you realise that these novels work so well because of their sense of realism and the wonderful menace of Lamb when he shuffles out of his lair and prepares to do battle... The two storylines in this novel are soon linked and there is an exciting and action packed finale, but the real joy of these books are in the characters.

Paromjit says

This is a superior, intelligent and a darkly comic novel located in the world of spooks and espionage. *Slough House* is the destination for failed spies known as 'slow horses', a play on *Slough House*. All want to return to the real action and are even prepared to work with one another in an effort to realise that dream. They are to have their chance when Dickie Bow, an old has-been cold war spy, is discovered dead on a Oxford bus. The difficult and hard to like Jackson Lamb is certain that Dickie was murdered. The politically ambitious Spider Webb annexes two of Lamb's spies to protect and meet the demands of a Russian oligarch, from whom Webb expects to profit personally and politically. This is a tale of a mythic and legendary spy, sleeper cells, the Russian Mob, and the past coming to infiltrate the present.

It is a convoluted trail that Lamb's spies follow. River Cartwright, whose grandfather was a senior spy, finds himself in the unremarkable village of Upshott with a defunct military base and a number of influential inhabitants. The murder of one of their own has the team determined to get justice of one kind or another. Nothing is as it seems, and Roddy Ho is key to uncovering a number of discrepancies and sleights of hand. There are bombs, explosions, and a deadly search for vengeance amidst the Stop the City protests in London. The two separate storylines turn out to be connected. With betrayal, political infighting and manoeuvring, our spies fight for their lives and reputations.

This is an impressively plotted and beautifully written book packed with twist after twist. It is a superb trope on the smoke and mirrors world of espionage. The author has constructed a wonderful cast of characters that include River Cartwright's grandfather. I love the dry wit and humour in the story. This is a terrific and entertaining novel, after all, it won the 2013 CWA gold dagger! Brilliant read which I highly recommend. Thanks to John Murray Press for an ARC.

Marita says

“Slough House, which was not its real name – it didn’t have a real name – was openly acknowledged to be a dumping ground: assignment here was generally temporary,

because those assigned here usually quit before long. That was the point of sending them: to light a sign above their heads, reading EXIT."

Slough House was the home of the slow horses with stalled careers, i.e. the incompetents, failures, has-beens and misfits from British Secret Service MI5. *"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."*

Winner of the CWA Gold Dagger Award, this second novel of a series starts with the death of an old Cold War-era spy. *"The Cold War was history, but its shrapnel was everywhere."* It soon blows up into a case of much action and a game of mirrors in which people and situations are not what they appear to be. Where big fish pretend to be minnows and minnows pretend to be big fish. Where lying and watching and waiting and hiding and lying are the elements of the game. Games which are not games, as people's lives are at stake.

"Lying, after all, is what spooks do best."

"'Diana,' he lied. 'That would never happen.'

'And you've told me everything.'

'Yes,' he lied.

'I want regular updates. Every tiny detail. Good or bad.'

'Of course,' he lied."

and later:

"Nothing to hide, she thought. Nothing to hide. Nothing at all to hide."

It is easy to recognise the spooks in this tale, because they all say "gunna" instead of "going to". Here are some of the characters involved:

#

Slough House - the slow horses:

Jackson Lamb - leader of the horses. Obese, unkempt, extremely rude and very, very sharp.

Roderick Ho - computer geek whose busy little fingers destroy lives at the drop of a hat. His life is one long online game. *"He wasn't someone you engaged in casual chat, because if you didn't come with broadband, you weren't worth his attention."*

Catherine Standish - *"Catherine Standish was wound pretty tight, and with her curiously old-fashioned way of dressing resembled Alice in Wonderland grown middle-aged and disappointed."*

Min Harper - *"And trust nobody. That was the most important thing. Trust nobody. Except Louisa, of course. He trusted Louisa completely. Which didn't necessarily mean keeping her in the loop."*

Louisa Guy - let's just say that Louisa has a bone to pick with someone, and that someone had better watch out!

Plus two newbies: **Shirley Dander** and **Marcus Longridge** newly arrived from Regent's Park - which one is spying on the other horses?

#

Regent's Park - MI5, including the Achievers* and the Dogs**

Lady Di (Diana Taverner) - in a senior position, but always ready to stab someone in the back. *"The sensible thing would be to torch him here and now, she thought. Thirty seconds of verbal creosote, and he'd leave sooty footprints all the way back to his office, and never have an idea again."*

Spider Webb (James Webb) - *"... James Webb was scaling heights like Spider-Man's smarter brother."*
"Webb was a suit. He wasn't actually wearing a suit today - he wore fawn chinos and a dark-blue roll-neck under a black raincoat - but he wasn't fooling anyone: he was a suit, and if you cut him open he'd bleed in pinstripes." *"The corridors of power were where he left his shoes out overnight."* Sleek, but definitely venomous!

#

Miscellaneous Russians and others...

It is a cynical and a darkly funny novel, with a convoluted plot full of shenanigans, bodies and bugger-ups. *"Slow horses came and slow horses went, and the passage between was spent tethered in their stalls."* But in this second novel the slow horses are taken off their leads, let out of their stalls and even participate in an 'op'.

###

***Achievers:** SWAT team - the guys in balaclavas who cause chaos

****Dogs:** internal Security team who go sniffing after their colleagues

Brenda says

Dead Lions is the second in the Slough House series, which is based on disgraced MI5 agents called slow horses. Most of the slow horses from the first book are here, along with the addition of two new ones. It seems there is a good supply of them.

As in the first book, these spies just can't help themselves. They sneak around, spy on each other, listen through closed doors, and do anything other than the boring work assigned to them. They absolutely distrust the higher-ups in MI5, but would love to be back there. The boss is Jackson Lamb, and he recognizes a name from the past who has recently been found dead on a bus. Thus starts their illicit investigation.

I enjoyed this book just as much as the first. I like the characters a lot. I like the humorous, snarky, sarcastic dialog. I like how the author presents several "fronts" where characters are handling certain tasks and how those "fronts" all come together to reveal the nefarious plans of their opponents.

I plan to read The List, a #2.5 novella shortly. And I'm looking forward to reading the remainder of the series.

Marianne says

Dead Lions is the second novel in the Slough House series by British author, Mick Herron. Slough House is where the spook screw-ups from MI5 who, for some reason or other, can't be sacked, are sent. There they are set such tedious, mind-numbing tasks it's hoped they will be fed-up enough to quit. Slough House doesn't have a big staff, currently just seven under the control of Jackson Lamb. They had a bit of unexpected action a few months ago, so there are empty desks and a few new faces.

Ordinarily, there are no ops from Slough House: the Slow Horses can't be trusted with anything that matters. But the recent death, on a bus, of Cold War spy, Dickie Bow has Jackson Lamb looking closer, and soon his smartest young spy, River Cartwright is in place in a sleepy Cotswolds village trying to track down a Russian agent. Meanwhile, two of Lamb's slow horses are seconded by River's nemesis at Regent's Park, James (Spider) Webb, for "babysitting" duty in Russian oil talks. Is there a connection?

Once again, Herron gives the reader a fast-paced spy novel of a very different sort. The premise is original, and the execution is inspired. The characters are all credibly flawed, their dialogue is full of dry wit, and there is plenty of humour, most of it very black and very British, with an abundance of laugh out loud moments. There are twists and red herrings and the reader will find it hard not to cheer these misfits on as

they do their best. Readers will be pleased to learn there are two and a half further volumes of this series for their entertainment and enjoyment. Another brilliant read!

Gary says

This is the 2nd book in the Slough House series by author Mick Herron.

I appear to be in the minority but I personally struggled to connect with this novel and found it hard work. Thankfully for the author there are plenty of people who disagree with me but an honest review is what I promised.

Slough House is where all failed MI5 spies go to carry out trivial chores because they have messed up on the job. One thing they all have in common, though, is they all want to be back in the action. When an old Cold War-era spy is found dead on a bus outside Oxford, far from his usual haunts. The despicable, irascible Jackson Lamb is convinced Dickie Bow was murdered. The agents 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.

I liked the idea of failed spies trying to resurrect their careers and there were some very promising characters in the book, but maybe a few too many to keep track of. I am not put off easily and will try another one in the series and who knows I may be converted.

I would like to thank Net Galley and John Murray Press for supplying a copy of this novel in exchange for an honest review.
