



The Darkling Spy

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London, 1956. A generation of British spies are haunted by the ghosts of friends turned traitor. Henry Bone, a Mandarin spymaster, learns that "Butterfly" is the Holy Grail of Cold War Intelligence. In reality, he is an aristocratic pervert whose political tastes are as ugly as his sexual preferences. But worst of all, Butterfly can identify each traitor and every serving British spy who helped them.

Enter Catesby, a British spy with his reputation in tatters, who sets the trap by pretending to defect in order to uncover Butterfly. Pressured into becoming a lure, Catesby's mission leads him from Berlin, through a shower of Molotov cocktails in Budapest, and finally to dinner alone with the East German espionage legend, Mischa Wolf. The novel's shocking conclusion will change your view of the Cold War forever.

"Wilson's smart, finely written sequel to 'The Envoy' mines an underutilized place and period of cold war history: Berlin, 1956. Catesby will delight those readers looking for less blood and more intelligence in their spy thrillers." -Publishers Weekly

"A tense, cerebral, dark story, Wilson's latest will appeal to fans of John Le Carre" -Portsmouth Herald, July 31, 2011

"A gem of an espionage thriller. A mystery based spy novel that will hold the reader by the throat from beginning to end. Anyone familiar with the era will recognize the accuracy of Wilson's historical context and anyone seeking a thriller of page-turning brilliance needs look no further." - I Love a Mystery

The Darkling Spy Details

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Author : Edward Wilson

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From Reader Review The Darkling Spy for online ebook

Anthony Saunois says

Wilson at his best once again

Rob Kitchin says

The Darkling Spy is a cold war spy story in the mould of John Le Carre – a dark, complex, layered tale of small heroic, compromising and treacherous acts and mind games, rather than the action, thrills and womanising of Fleming. Wilson creates a world in which no-one quite trusts anyone else, even family, friends and allies; in which the wrong decisions can have fatal consequences. It is a world of pervaded by lies, deception, mis- and dis-information, politics and ideology. There is a strong sense of atmospherics and sense of place throughout and the story is told through an engaging voice. Bone and Catesby are convincing characters with interesting back stories that are nicely portrayed and the other characters are well penned. The plotting is very nicely done, with the various pieces of the jigsaw manoeuvred into place and the final picture only being revealed in the last few pages. The denouement felt a little flat, although in keeping with the understated telling of the rest of the story. Overall, a very good cold war spy tale.

Sophie says

Review also posted on my blog <http://www.reviewedthebook.co.uk/2014...>

The Darkling Spy is an excellent novel – full of suspense and very well written. As a Cold War spy novel, this book needed a lot of research but the author did that so well. It was tense, the settings strong and effective and the complex plot gripped me instantly but also got stronger as the book went on.

Edward Wilson's characters are always great to read – discovering who is who and separating the (minimal) trustworthy characters from the ones ready to betray is always enjoyable and Wilson weaves the twists in brilliantly. Catesby was a likeable character which is more than I've come to expect from this genre of novel. He was loyal and easy to root for throughout his mission to uncover Butterfly.

Stand out parts in The Darling Spy for me included the interaction between Catesby and Bone which was very entertaining and brought a bit of light relief to a darker plot. I also loved how strong the research of settings and history felt – it didn't distract from the novel and instead, was more interesting and intriguing. I imagine, although this is fiction, that people who lived in the age this book was set in will have had memories brought back from some of the events during this era too.

The Darkling Spy is the third Edward Wilson novel I've read and my favourite so far. The plot was strong and captivating and the characterisation, as ever, was flawless. Starting this late at night, I couldn't put it down and was disappointed when it ended yet looking forward to Wilson's next book, The Midnight Swimmer. A great novel.

4.5/5.

Cphe says

A tautly woven espionage novel set during the Cold War. This is quite a dense read, nicely atmospheric for the time period and has some excellent characterisation. I have to say that I found the second half of the book more compelling, events moved at a much faster pace. The plot is multi layered and complex which I enjoyed and I also enjoyed not being certain of who really were the "good guys".

My understanding is that this is the second book in a trilogy however there is sufficient history supplied for the main characters.

I'll read more novels by this author, I like their style.

Ian Brydon says

Nearly forty years ago my grandmother's response to watching 'The Sting' was, 'Och, well, I'm none the wiser!' which has passed down into family lore as a byword for utter bemusement.

That was how I felt reading this book. It certainly started well complementing Wilson's previous book 'The Envoy'. This is not exactly a sequel as it fits around the events in the earlier book, telling the story from a different perspective. It did, however, suddenly lurch from London to Pest in Hungary. I presume I must have blinked or something because I felt completely lost. None the wiser, in fact. I was reading it in e-book form so I wondered whether someone had deleted part of it in transit!

As with The Envoy, Wilson cleverly merged real events with his Byzantine plot, and the principal protagonist, William Catesby, is very sympathetic, battling against class prejudice as he works his way up the greasy pole of the secret service.

I am, however, not convinced overall that the story was sufficiently rewarding for the mental effort required.

Mal Warwick says

Reading The Darkling Spy by Edward Wilson is a lot like finding yourself caught in the middle of that classic old Abbott and Costello routine, "Who's on first?" When Costello asks him for the names of the players on a baseball team,

Abbott says: . . . Who's on first, What's on second, I Don't Know is on third . . .

Costello: That's what I want to find out.

Abbott: I say Who's on first, What's on second, I Don't Know's on third.

Costello: Are you the manager?

Abbott: Yes.

Costello: You gonna be the coach too?

Abbott: Yes.

Costello: And you don't know the fellows' names?

Abbott: Well I should.

Costello: Well then who's on first?

Abbott: Yes.

Costello: I mean the fellow's name.

Abbott: Who.

Costello: The guy on first.

Abbott: Who.

Costello: The first baseman.

Abbott: Who.

Costello: The guy playing...

Abbott: Who is on first!

Costello: I'm asking YOU who's on first.

Abbott: That's the man's name.

And it goes on from there. In *The Darkling Spy*, paranoia is endemic. Everyone suspects everyone else, nobody seems sure who's working for whom, and the only certainty is uncertainty. If this is meant to be the theme of the novel, Wilson has richly succeeded in getting the point across. Unfortunately, it's confusing in the extreme for anyone who tries to follow the thread of the story.

Cold War espionage in the shadow of two wars

The tale begins in the troubled year 1956, not long after the Korean War ended with an armistice and barely more than a decade after World War II. Two of the five members of the Cambridge Spy Ring, Donald Maclean and Guy Burgess, have recently resurfaced in Moscow, where they fled four years previously. Their colleague, Kim Philby, remains in place, though he has been named Persona Non Grata by the U.S. and is no longer working in the British intelligence establishment. The UK, France, and Israel are soon to invade Egypt, to seize the Suez Canal from the regime of Gamal Abdel Nasser. The Hungarian people, egged on by the irresponsible programming on Radio Free Europe, are about to revolt against Soviet occupation. As the story unfolds, these events recede into the past. The Hungarian uprising plays a central role in the novel.

The Darkling Spy is a sequel to Wilson's The Envoy, the sad tale of an able young American foreign service officer turned CIA spy. In the sequel, the perspective shifts from the CIA to MI6, the UK's counterpart, and from Kit Fournier, the American, to Will Catesby, a talented young MI6 officer. The story revolves around the tense relationship between the working-class Catesby and his aristocratic boss, Henry Bone.

Historical facts in the background

Wilson's portrayal of intelligence field is clearly based on first-, or at least second-hand knowledge. The picture he paints of the Hungarian uprising is based on fact as well. Historical events that include the funeral of Bertolt Brecht and prominent figures such as Markus Wolf, the long-time head of the East German intelligence service, and the high-ranking American CIA officer Bill Harvey appear in highly visible roles in the story. Even Kim Philby surfaces in the tale as "the art historian" who is a close friend of Henry Bone.

About the author

Edward Wilson has written a total of six novels, five of them espionage fiction. He served as an officer in the U.S. Special Forces in Vietnam. He gave up his U.S. citizenship to become a British subject.

Paul Huggett says

A complex espionage novel with many narrative threads and interwoven identities which was a struggle to follow at times. However, this is likely a reflection on a spy's job and lifestyle. It also demonstrates how messed up you can become if you're a spy. A good but not breathtaking read.

Corny says

An exceptionally well plotted spy novel which takes place in 1956 against the background of the Hungarian uprising. William Catesby of SIS,(now MI6) has been instructed by his boss Henry Bone to find an agent named Butterfly. Catesby dutifully seeks out his elusive target in Hungary and Germany. However, this is only a small part of the story. I have no intention of revealing any of the many twists and turns that take Catesby to the denouement. The fact is that nothing is as it seems and the motivations of the chief players are never clear, not even at the end. The novel is an exposé of the dirty business of spying which sacrifices the few in favor of the many. Nowhere is that clearer than in this well written Cold War novel.

Laura says

In "The Darkling Spy" Wilson has created a tense spy thriller set in the heart of Cold War. America and Russia are fighting a war of ideals, and Europe finds themselves uncomfortably situated in the bull's eye/no man's land between the two super powers. As Henry Bone (a British intelligence officer) aptly put it "The aim of the Americans is to win the Cold War. Our aim is to survive it...and surviving it and winning it may not be the same thing. If America and Russia fight World War Three they're going to do it on our turf."

And so Catesby finds himself in Berlin, Hungary, and elsewhere in a veritable soup of various espionage factions. His goal is to secure intelligence for Britain, but his missions are often vague, he's never sure of

whom he can trust, and danger lurks at every corner. Along the way he does his utmost to protect his beloved sister (who also works in intelligence), and must choose between his duty and love. A thoroughly enjoyable novel!

Pros: Pacing and dialogue are expertly done, and move the storyline along well.

~~Wilson clearly did his homework, and the background of 1950's Europe is based in sound fact.

~~Catesby, Bone, Petra, and Freddie (among others) are realistically drawn characters with struggles I could identify with.

Cons: Some typos in the book made reading a tad bit difficult in places.

~~There are a fair number of foreign language words and phrases without translation which make reading a bit tedious, although at times when I had a computer handy and looked the words up it added to my knowledge base which is always nice :)

Overall 4.5 stars or Outstanding! Definitely recommend.

Avid_D says

I think that it was only last year that I came upon Edward Wilson's Catesby series. Deliberately, I am making my way through them slowly because I find them a complex, morally ambiguous delight to be savoured.

Jak60 says

I started off this book with a lot of enthusiasm in the wake of The Envoy, which I had just finished and adored. And the start was promising, with a reprise of the storyline of the previous novel as seen from the perspective of different protagonists (some in common, some new) - an interesting technique, which one can find in some of Len Deighton books (the Bernard Samson series).

But after a while, the story loses tension and becomes rather convoluted and fragmented along different directions in space (a long digression in Hungary at the time of the spring revolution of 1956) and in time (other long digressions during WWII) not really functional to the main storyline.

The story is definitely overworked; you end up with so many traitors, double agents, triples, double agents doubled back that you lose tracks of who's betraying who and you are left with too many loose ends.

All in all, it is a flat, dull and somewhat confused book, not an easy reading, nor very enjoyable; I had reviewed The Envoy as a "hidden gem", there is here more "hidden" than "gem"....big disappointment, pity.

Huw Rhys says

This is good, standard espionage fare, but don't believe the dust sheet blurb - the author is no le Carre.

Terry Parker says

Very interesting spy novel

For readers of Alan Furst. The author takes readers through different times in Eastern Europe during WWII and the Cold War. Very English, very unsure who the good guys are and who are the bad. Very literary also, frequently quoting poetry and Shakespeare's plays. I liked it.

KOMET says

"THE DARKLING SPY" reintroduces the reader to William Catesby, a dedicated top ranking MI-6 agent operating under diplomatic cover in Berlin as Cultural Attaché. The time is August 1956.

Catesby is called back to London by his mentor Henry Bone, "a Whitehall intelligence mandarin", who has learned that a master spy - codenamed "Butterfly" - currently working for the Soviets and East Germans - is poised to defect to the Americans, who are eager to know all his secrets. Secrets including the names of all active British agents behind the Iron Curtain, as well as various intelligence operations and programs that MI-6 has promoted. Indeed, Butterfly's brain is an archive of secrets from both East and West. Lives and reputations are at risk of being destroyed should Butterfly succeed in going over to the CIA. Butterfly has also been a thorn in the flesh for Bone over the previous 20 years. So, Bone hatches a plan in which Catesby, a fluent German speaker, would return to Berlin to track down Butterfly through a painstaking and elaborate process in which he would pretend to defect to the East. Consequently, what ensues is a suspenseful, nail-biting, heart-rending drama that takes Catesby from a Hungary convulsed in counter-revolution during October and November of 1956 into the inner sanctum of the East German intelligence apparatus during the following year, as represented by the mysterious espionage legend Mischa Wolf.

Once again, Edward Wilson has created a winner with "THE DARKLING SPY." It may alter your views about what really went on during the Cold War.

Steve says

A hidden gem. Not as complex an array of characters as a Tinker-era Le Carre - in fact Wilson keeps it very to a very tight group - but the plotting coupled with the British class and European Cold War atmospherics are first class.
