



The Moscow Sleepers

Stella Rimington

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For fans of *Spooks*, *Homeland*, *McMafia* and *The Night Manager*, the latest thriller in Stella Rimington's bestselling espionage series sees Liz Carlyle investigating a sinister Russian plot - tense, gripping and global in scope

A man lies dying in a hospital in upstate Vermont. The nurses know only that he is an academic at a nearby university but they have been instructed to call the FBI should anyone visit their patient.

News of this suspected Russian illegal soon reaches MI5 in London where Liz Carlyle has been contacted by a top secret source known as Mischa who is requesting a clandestine rendezvous in Berlin.

Meanwhile in Brussels a Russian sleeper agent who has lived undercover for years is beginning to question his role, while suspicions have been roused about a boarding school in Suffolk that has recently changed hands in mysterious circumstances.

The latest expertly-plotted thriller in Stella Rimington's bestselling series, *The Moscow Sleepers* is a white-knuckle ride through the dark underbelly of international intelligence, simmering political animosities and global espionage.

The Moscow Sleepers Details

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Author : Stella Rimington

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Sid Nuncius says

I didn't get on well with *The Moscow Sleepers*. It felt rather formulaic and wasn't well enough written to convince me of the characters or the plot.

The book is about possible Russian agents ("sleepers") in the west and MI5 and related agencies' attempts to uncover them and their activities, with her principal character, Liz Carlyle of MI5 at the centre of things. Stella Rimington obviously knows this world intimately, but portraying it convincingly in a novel is another matter. She has a slightly forced prose style, as though she hasn't quite moved from official documents to a relaxed, flowing style of her own in fiction. Some stale usages and clichés crop up fairly regularly, like the character who, before going away, "had to get her ducks in a row first" for example, which I found off-putting.

There are an awful lot of characters, almost invariably introduced as they are travelling somewhere or waiting for something and thinking about...followed by a lengthy, sometimes very over-lengthy, potted history. All these rather clunky introductions made each one seem less like a rounded, real person and more like yet another slightly unconvincing character to keep track of. I began to mutter "Oh, for heavens' sake" to myself when, even well into the novel, yet more new characters were introduced in exactly the same way, complete with physical description and biographical background. It gets very wearing.

Rimington does like to tell us things rather than show us, often at tediously painstaking length; there is none of the subtlety and tension of le Carré or the wit of Mick Herron, for example, nor even the slow, meticulous plot and character development of Gerald Seymour. Take this little extract, for example: "Liz window-shopped apparently aimlessly, though a close observer would have noted how she lingered at the fronts with large curved windows, and a professional observer might have concluded that she was using the windows to keep an eye on what was going on behind her. She seemed to conclude that nothing was amiss, for she turned with no hesitation into Stremannstrasse." Quite apart from the infelicity of the use of "conclude" twice so close together, it's a terribly laboured description of something so easy and basic. It all got too much for me, I'm afraid.

All this made the book rather a slog for me. I found it pretty unconvincing throughout, it didn't engage me and I can't really recommend it.

(My thanks to Bloomsbury for an ARC via NetGalley.)

Kathy says

This was my first "Liz Carlyle" espionage read, and I most certainly will be reading more by this author. There are no freaky superhuman feats performed, just modern day, everyday kind of jobs that intelligence agencies perform. While it is not thriller speed, it is well paced with plenty of global action to keep up with. In this outing we get to know Liz as she maintains contact with Russian relative (brother) of agent who leaks enough information to reveal years of effort in building a team of refugee cyber stars. We visit Vermont, Suffolk, Germany and Russia following the action.

Since I am a woman, I do not think it offensive to say there just may be a softer side to espionage books and I am happy to have discovered it. This author lived it herself and writes a good yarn. I'm in!

Jill Mackin says

Too slow of a build-up.

Brittany Larson says

I received a free ARC of this book from the publisher and NetGalley in exchange for my honest review.

This was my first Liz Carlyle mystery that I've read, though they've been on my radar as something I wanted to check out for awhile now. I found this to be a smart, fun global espionage mystery. There were a lot of characters to keep track of, which was difficult at first, but I think that would have been a lot easier if I'd read others in the series. The mystery felt modern yet timeless in some way. Liz Carlyle seems capable and tough, yet somehow I wanted more from her throughout this read for some reason; more personality, more introspection, or just something. Parts of this were quite predictable, yet there were a few major surprises along the way, so it kept me on my toes.

I would certainly read another Liz Carlyle mystery, mostly because I want to know more about her. Fun and smart, and I enjoyed the broad array of characters from far-reaching places.

Lou says

'The Moscow Sleepers' is the tenth book in the Liz Carlyle espionage series by former MI5 agent Stella Rimington. Being a big fan of spy novels, when I read the synopsis I knew this was one I wanted to read. Unfortunately, it didn't live up to my high expectations and was sadly lacking in quite a few different areas.

So, the positives firstly, there was a lot of intricate details to the plot which I appreciated, but unlike some of the better thrillers, there is a classic case of overcomplicating the plot leading to a convoluted and sometimes confusing storyline. There are also a plethora of characters that are barely developed, so because of their lack of depth you find you don't remember their names or how they fit into the book. Rimington is a great writer and knows how to grab the reader, but I always feel that the espionage genre requires books to be exceptionally thrilling, page-turners. However, I felt it was sadly lacking in that department, too. There was not much going on for large chunks of the book, and I feel the author missed a trick with not executing this premise to maximum affect. The use of topical issues, such as our relationship with Russia could've created a tension that slowly ratcheted up the suspense aspects of the plot and led to a veritable thrill ride.

The topical nature of the plot needed more attention paid to making a fast-paced, intense read. Instead, it was pedestrian, cliched and rather clumsy.

Many thanks to Bloomsbury Publishing for an ARC. I was not required to post a review, and all thoughts and opinions expressed are my own.

Chris Hawkins says

Having now read all of the books in this series, they're very definitely dropping off a cliff. The characters aren't developing at all, if anything more time is devoted to regurgitating their past exploits than fleshing them out more, and the more books in the series the more rehashing there is.

Every new character introduced seems to just be a new name for a predictable caricature used in a previous novel. There certainly appears to be a deficit in the originality department.

The plot itself doesn't seem to make any sense, and even as the completely unsatisfying and improbable explanation is reeled off at the end, it feels more like an apology than anything.

I quite enjoyed the first few books in the series, but everything has become more and more formulaic since. This felt very much like a contractual obligation rather than a story the author felt worth writing.

I feel I should add I just read *Lethal White* yesterday (if you want a book that can actually keep you hooked, with suspense and intricate character relationships, much recommended), which probably skews things against this book somewhat. It certainly does not live up to expectation though.

Elizabeth says

Excellent, right back on form.

Sandy says

Thanks to Netgalley for providing an ARC of this book, in return for a fair and honest review.

An enjoyable entry in the Liz Carlyle series. I've enjoyed all of the books so far, and was delighted to see a new one!

One particularly appealing part of this book is that it involves the cyber warfare that is so important now. While we certainly have some of the "traditional" cloak and dagger spy v. spy type action, a central plot here is the use of bright teenage refugees to be trained as computer hackers. So, up to date issues, with the growing number of refugees (in this case, particularly from Syria) and Russia's use of computer technology.

Another appealing part of the book is the growth of characters. We're seeing Liz dealing and perhaps getting beyond her grief over Martin Seurat, moving to a new home, perhaps starting a new relationship. Peggy, too, has moved past Tim, the boyfriend who created such trouble for her previously, and is moving ahead professionally. Even Bruno MacKay is developing.

The characters are growing in interesting ways, and the plot is staying up to date - the series continues to be intriguing, and I'm looking forward to the next one!

Giles Burrows says

I really enjoyed this. It's a story with many threads that comes to a satisfactory conclusion. It features all the usual suspects that we've come to know and love. It's quite short but in a good way.

Greville Waterman says

I love good spy thrillers and read them voraciously and yet I had never read one of the previous nine books in the Liz Carlyle series.

I was looking forward to putting this omission right but however hard I tried - and believe me, I tried very hard - I just could not engage with "The Moscow Sleepers."

Stella Remington obviously knows everything there is to know about the world of espionage from her own personal experience and yet, and yet, to me the book never really took off, there was something missing.

Of tradecraft there was much evidence, and high impressive it was but of characters, there was very little.

I know from personal experience just how hard it is to write a book but in my opinion this book is just a bit clumsy and clunky and I found it hard to engage and I never really felt a connection or even a real sense of interest in any of the characters.

I will try another of her books but I found this just a bit insipid.

Tony Nielsen says

Coming from her illustrious career as MI5 Director General in the 1990's Stella Rimington was uniquely placed to start a new career as a thriller writer, similar I guess to John Le Carre a few decades earlier.

The Moscow Sleepers is a ripping read which leaps from Britain to the States to Germany and beyond as a mysterious operation aimed supposedly at educating young refugees in IT skills. Rimington's character Liz Carlyle is the leading investigator charged with finding out the secret intentions of the shady characters behind this initiative.

It takes a huge effort and the ingenuity of both Carlyle, her British colleagues and her American counterparts to finally nail what turns out to be an ambitious Russian plot to gain control of key Western computer systems.

Rimington's character Liz Carlyle is clever, personable, somewhat flawed emotionally but comes across as real and lays down the basis for an excellent read in "The Moscow Sleepers".

Ian Brydon says

I remember that when the Berlin Wall came down, and the Russian suzerainty over the Warsaw Pact countries dissolved, some commentators speculated that the spy novel was more or less obsolete as a consequence.

Obviously, subsequent events demonstrated that nothing could be further from the truth, and the various intelligence services, both in the West and the former Soviet demesne are busier than ever, prompting a commensurate explosion in the spy fiction genre. Old hands such as John le Carre merely moved the focus of their novels away from the traditional Cold War to embrace the tensions emerging in the former Soviet republics, and then the War Against Terror.

Stella Rimington wasn't writing spy novels back in the Cold War period – she was living the life in her role as Director General of MI5, a provenance that naturally imparts a strong assumed verisimilitude to the novels she has written since her retirement. Certainly, her protagonist Liz Carlyle is very capable, likeable and above all plausible. While she can call upon a fair degree of technical support from her team, she does not exist in James Bond's product endorsement world, and has to rely upon her own resourcefulness.

As it happens, the plot in her latest novel seems to be bringing us back to the cold war. As it opens, MI5 and MI6 are still disinterring the full ramifications of the outcome of Rimington's previous novel, in which a Russian spy cell involving deep-placed sleeper agents was uncovered. It now appears that the network extending further than previously believed, and the British intelligent services and their American counterparts are trying to round up the final participants. Meanwhile, a German official working in the European Union Commission in Brussels has been living a double life for years, and is becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the burden that his secret is placing upon him. Liz Carlyle finds herself and her team called upon to intervene as they receive intelligence from reliable sources that suggest an extensive cybersecurity threat is being developed.

Rimington's experience enables her to deploy a range of frighteningly contemporary issues, giving this novel has a vivid topicality.

Jacki (Julia Flyte) says

I enjoyed this more than my three star rating suggests. Until near the end, it juggles multiple characters and a complex plot with aplomb. But the best thing about Stella Rimington's books is the way that she utilises her knowledge and experience as the former Director General of MI5. I find the way that she describes spycraft utterly fascinating - from minor things (an FBI character doesn't bother trying to follow a suspect's car because he knows it's pretty much impossible - not the norm in books of this genre) to the way that an agent is infiltrated and later extricated from a hostile country.

The plot is complicated to explain, but it centres on Russian efforts to use facilities in other countries to train individuals to conduct cyber-attacks. Scraps of intelligence from various sources gradually harden into firm data and the need to investigate a Russian operation on British soil. It develops at a good pace and there are

several moments that are genuinely tense.

However towards the end, it fizzles away. The villains make a couple of decisions that don't add up and are never explained. A couple of key characters get killed off, but "off camera", which is unsatisfying given that we've got to know them. The central characters need to have a meeting to discuss it to make sense of it all.

This is the 10th book in the series. It's a standalone story but the characters do refer quite often to events from previous books.

Kristen says

In Stella Rimington's The Moscow Sleepers, the 10th installment in the Liz Carlyle espionage thriller series, this novel follows a riveting tale that could take place in our own country. For Liz Carlyle, an agent with MI5, it all started when a mysterious Swiss man visited a Russian man in an American hospice before he died. That started the investigation on who the man was and what he was after, when the FBI had contacted London. With a thorough background search, they followed the leads to a mysterious school called the Bartholomew Manor in Southwold. For Liz and her partner Peggy Kinsolving, they dig a little bit deeper into what made that school so unsavory and what purpose did they have to teach refugee students computer skills. Before it unraveled faster than a ball of yarn, one of their own agents, Bruno MacKay, did his own investigation in Russia and discovered the truth between two Russian brothers while in Germany, Dieter Nimitz thought he had knew his wife Irma. But she had her own secrets of her own to share and she's connected to the English school. When the secretary wound up dead and a brave student escaped the school, things heated up and took a dangerous turn for Mi5 and in Germany, when they managed to tie up loose ends and extract Bruno out safely before his cover would be blown.

Jen says

Stella Rimington's latest espionage thriller Moscow Sleepers kept me engaged throughout.

Dame Stella Rimington, DCB is a British author and former Director General of MI5, a position she held from 1992 to 1996. She was the first female DG of MI5, and the first DG whose name was publicised on appointment. [Wikipedia](#)

I've read one other book by Rimington and was pleased that I enjoyed this one as well. The story begins in Vermont with a dying university professor in a hospice. When a visitor finally arrives, the nurse notifies the FBI, as she has been instructed to do.

From Vermont, to London, to Brussels and Berlin, to a school in rural England--the plot involves the unraveling of the importance of the dying Vermont academic to a conspiracy involving immigrant children and computer hacking. Liz Carlyle is back on the job with MI5.

As a result of Stella Rimington's nearly 30 years of experience with MI5, her plots have a realistic feel. Rimington's work is more concerned with putting together puzzle pieces than the more violent works of other espionage writers. I enjoyed the puzzle and the characters.

Read in August. Blog review scheduled for Nov. 1.

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