

Review of In Secret Service

Review of In Secret Service by Mitch Silver

This alternative historic thriller is a deftly accomplished debut novel, given the ambitious scope of the storyline. Silver's cast of characters include Ian Fleming, Winston Churchill, the Duke and Duchess of Windsor – and that's just a few of the majorly famous people in this plot. The premise of the story is a clever one, as is the interweaving of a series of charismatic, famous people into this conspiracy.

Amy Greenburg, an American scholar specialising in the Middle Ages, finds she has inherited the unknown contents of a safe deposit box in a Dublin bank. Taking time out from her very busy life to travel to Ireland, she discovers that she is in possession of a manuscript by the famous author, Ian Fleming. However, it isn't another James Bond novel. Fleming, wearing his other hat as a World War II Intelligence Officer, has stumbled across a devastating secret that goes right up to the highest echelons of British society. Its consequences reverberate down the years, causing the deaths of several innocent people – including Princess Diana. And as Amy starts reading this manuscript and the sheaf of supporting documents on her journey back to the States, people around her begin dying...

Silver ensures that the novel moves along at a reasonable pace - which given the complex mixture of story narrative, Fleming's account and the oddments apparently gathered as evidence – is no mean feat. It would have been all too easy to get derailed amongst all these different strands. The book builds to a suitably exciting climax and because Silver has managed to make us really care about his heroine – something that doesn't always happen in this genre – the reader is fully engaged in the action.

You don't have to be a history student to appreciate all the ramifications of Silver's conspiracy as he fully explains the characters involved along with their flaws and strengths and does it very well. We are treated to some interesting thumbnail sketches of famous characters – the most memorable being Wallis Simpson, the Duchess of Windsor, whose fictional lifestyle in this book is outright scurrilous. To be fair to Mitch Silver, he makes it very clear in the Author's Note that this is a work of fiction and while certain details about the characters are real – Simpson actually did have an Aunt Bessie whom she regularly wrote to – the other more salacious details about Simpson have been already been discussed during the intervening years.

I think there should be an honourable mention about the excellent quality and range of the different print faces and reproductions of the supposed primary artefacts. Given their importance to the story, it was crucial that these looked as good as possible – and they do. In these days where the print quality of books can be decidedly variable, it was a refreshing change to see such a solidly good job done.

My major misgiving about this book is that the conspiracy at the heart of the novel isn't such a big deal, given what we now know about the character involved. While I am fully aware that when Fleming supposedly wrote his manuscript, it would have been dynamite, I think it is questionable whether people would be dying over this secret nowadays. However, I was fully prepared to suspend my belief over this detail whilst engrossed in the plot and look forward to reading Mitch Silver's next book.

7/10