

Bad Actors

Mick Herron

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Mick Herron's satirical thriller *Bad Actors* follows a singular band of British intelligence agents as they investigate the disappearance of a Russian spy.

As a Russian operative seeks to take down the corrupt assistant to the British prime minister, disparate members of a group of misfit British secret service agents work together to locate the spy and destroy the assistant. But instead of behaving as a cohesive team, the agents act in individual and idiosyncratic ways (one has Jedi fantasies, for example), though still managing to find and make use of information that leads to a mutually desired conclusion.

Within the novel, the second act precedes the first, moving through dense digressions that emphasize the quirkiness of the characters. Herron's intelligent prose satirizes government operations in an incisive and funny manner. This extends to a satisfying trolling of the US's 45th president. Other characters are repulsive to the extreme, with their stories marked by exaggerated, gross humor.

Two women in the cast prove to be tough, even fearless: their reactions when they find themselves in life-threatening situations are cool and hard-boiled. Further, this thriller includes some marvelous observations, as with "The good thing about snap judgement was that you could be doing something else while making them" and "The list of who 'they' might be was a long one. But then, the question of who 'we' were could be equally knotty."

With a bombastic climax in which the book's disparate elements come together, and from which tough dames emerge triumphant, *Bad Actors* is a send-up of contemporary British international espionage that turns a jaundiced, droll eye on the undercurrents and corruption of government.

RANDI HACKER (May / June 2022)

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