



Ratlines

Stuart Neville

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Ireland 1963. As the Irish people prepare to welcome President John F. Kennedy to the land of his ancestors, a German national is murdered in a seaside guesthouse. Lieutenant Albert Ryan, Directorate of Intelligence, is ordered to investigate. The German is the third foreigner to die within a few days, and Minister for Justice Charles Haughey wants the killing to end lest a shameful secret be exposed: the dead men were all Nazis granted asylum by the Irish government in the years following World War II.

A note from the killers is found on the dead German's corpse, addressed to Colonel Otto Skorzeny, Hitler's favorite commando, once called the most dangerous man in Europe. The note simply says: "We are coming for you."

As Albert Ryan digs deeper into the case he discovers a network of former Nazis and collaborators, all presided over by Skorzeny from his country estate outside Dublin. When Ryan closes in on the killers, his loyalty is torn between country and conscience. Why must he protect the very people he fought against twenty years before? Ryan learns that Skorzeny might be a dangerous ally, but he is a deadly enemy.

Ratlines Details

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Author : Stuart Neville

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Lisa B. says

Excellent!

I have decided that I like Irish authors and this book is a perfect example why. There so much history to draw from. This book had it all - murder mystery, plot twists, back stabbing.....what more could a reader ask for?

Thank you to Soho Press and Netgalley for allowing me to read this ARC in exchange for an unbiased review.

Publish date: January 1, 2013

Gayle says

Well-plotted albeit violent thriller set in Ireland on the eve of John F. Kennedy's visit, Ratlines is a tale of the enemy of my enemy is my friend or is he? The protagonist is Lt. Albert Ryan, a member of Ireland's G-2 Directorate, an intelligence agent. His assignment is to find out who is threatening Otto Skorzeny, the Austrian Nazi who rescued Mussolini in 1943. The paradox of our hero is that he finds out that the Irish government tolerates the presence of Nazis (human beasts) and their collaborators while he and his family suffer financially and in other ways for Ryan's voluntary service in the British army during WWII. It doesn't help that Ryan and his family are Protestant in the overwhelmingly Catholic Irish Republic.

The Irish government wants the case solved before JFK's visit but all this must be done quietly. If the presence of Nazis in Ireland becomes known, the visit might be canceled. Think of the furor that erupted when Reagan visited a German war cemetery that turned out to contain the remains of SS officers. They were dead and the visit caused a major scandal. Skorzeny et al are alive and that is a huge problem if their presence becomes widely known at this critical time.

There are many twists and turns which kept me turning the pages. Additionally, there is a love interest who is interesting because she is not cowed by the potential for social condemnation that a sexually non-conforming woman faced in that time and place. There is a nicely handled commentary of a spy's life being light years removed from the world depicted in the then new James Bond films of the early 1960s.

Barbara says

A good compelling read about Nazis in Ireland in the 1960's.

Carey Combe says

Really enjoyed this. Great idea for a novel, although had to skip the torture scenes...

Tony says

RATLINES. (2013). Stuart Neville. **.

My expectations of this novel were higher than it was able to deliver against. Previous novels by Mr. Neville have been excellent, especially “The Ghosts of Belfast.” This latest was formulaic to the max. Our hero was Albert Ryan. He is ordered to identify and deliver over to authorities the people responsible for the murder of a man who was known to be a former Nazi, but had emigrated to Ireland after the war under an assumed name. What made this assignment critical was that a visit was scheduled for John Kennedy to speak to the Irish people. The government didn’t want his trip cancelled because of the threat of any wider conspiracy. During WW II, Ireland was a neutral country, and there were even, supposedly, overtures made by Hitler’s regime to the Irish government that they should ally themselves with the German program, and help them in their efforts against the British. After the war, Ireland was a sanctuary for Nazis, and this novel takes advantage of that fact to posit a leader of the Nazi group who was in charge of facilitating their move to the Green Isle. There was a huge fund established to aid such moves, and procedures were set up that made such moves easier. These procedures and money together represented the “ratlines” by which ex-Nazis moved. The head of this system, in the novel, was ex-Colonel Otto Skorzeny – a fiend who is now pitted against Ryan. Ryan is, however, a super hero of the highest caliber. Killing in its various forms is no stranger to him. He feels pain, of course, but has the ability to shrug it off like water off a duck’s back. I was impressed that after a torture session by the bad guys, where they used an improvised cattle prod to induce pain in various parts of his body, including a deep-frying of his genitals, Ryan could make love to the heroine of the book only a couple of days later. What a guy. The novel is total escape writing that follows the rules laid down in Thriller 101 exactly. I got the feeling that it was written in response to a term in a book contract. Maybe his next book will get him back on track.

Speesh says

First, to say what it isn’t about. Ratlines. To be honest, it would have been more interesting if it actually had been an investigation into these escape routes for ex-Nazis, their workings and that of the Israelis in trying to expose them. If it had been, it may well have been more exciting, more tense and more of a thriller, than what we got from after the half way mark, which boils down to an ordinary extortion and robbery set in Ireland just after the Second World War.

Our main man, Albert Ryan, is a decent man, an ex-soldier. Unfortunately for him and many of his fellow country men’s opinion of him, he was fighting for the ‘wrong’ side. The English side. This presents one of the novel’s (several) interesting points. That the Irish may well have been more anti-British in WWII than they were anti-Germany. A theme echoed and perhaps more fully realised in the situation of the Breton nationalist characters’ situation. Where they were so anti-France, that they used the opportunity of the Nazi invasion, to ally themselves with the Nazis against the rest of France. Though they try to excuse themselves from being tarred by the holocaust brush. It is pointed out several times that they can’t pick and choose. He works for the Irish government’s intelligence services and is set to investigating the murders of several foreign nationals

which may or may not be linked to the presence of a successful German businessman/ex-Nazi, living quite openly and participating quite prominently in Dublin's social life in the early 1960's. As his investigations progress, links to Skorzeny become more compelling and more dangerous. He also gets on the wrong side of an Israeli Mossad officer, who contrary to expectations, doesn't want Skorzeny dead and also claims not to know who has been killing Skorzeny's associates.

I did feel a bit short-changed, when it became clear it was basically about a gold robbery and kind of money-laundering operation. But that may just be me. The style reminded me a little of Len Deighton in *SSGB*. Which is a good thing. Yeah, the Nazi link, but more the period feel. Neville doesn't go so much in for the descriptions as Deighton does, but there's a real sense of time and place about the writing. The plotting is good and tight, the characters believable and interesting.

As I say, it does raise some very interesting ideas and themes concerning the aftermath of WWII in Europe, in Ireland. Apart from the possibility of Mossad operating unchecked, under Europe's radar in tracking ex-Nazi war criminals, there is the Irish position during and after the war. And the Irish attitudes to those of their countrymen who fought for one old enemy, the English, against a new enemy, the Nazis. There was one conversation, where I got the idea that a thought prevalent in Ireland at the time of the Second World War and when the book was set, would be that the Nazis were an enemy on paper, but the Irish could clearly see they wouldn't be one that would last too long, so it really wasn't worth hating them in the way they should the English. The Nazis would soon be gone, but the English had been and would be (unfortunately, in Irish eyes) an enemy for a long time yet. I thought the book suggested an Irish view towards war-time Germany, was 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend'. But it also posed the question of what was the Irish view of those Irish people who had fought for Britain, when they returned to Ireland? And what of Charles Haughey? I'm guessing he's dead, because he doesn't come out of this book very well at all. These really interesting themes are raised, but not for me, developed and taken where they should be. They seemed to be swept aside at the expense of what started out as looking like an intriguing exploration of the Nazi escape routes from justice in Europe, but then became a more traditional-feeling bullion robbery heist.

It got bogged down around the half to two thirds mark in some eventually much too drawn-out, unnecessarily unpleasantly detailed torturing and people basically just moving things on by just questioning other people. I think as a whole, it does all hang together. Just. I could have done with, as I say, with more of an espionage angle, less of a Great Boat Robbery angle.

I think over all I'll allow it hang by its fingertips to a 4. But with reservations. It did grip me - I read it in two days (though I never know if that's good or bad to get so little time out of a £16.99 spend), it is well put together and plotted and it does all make sense with believable characters, believable situations and plenty to keep you thinking about under way.

Linda says

So pleased that I have discovered this author, I just love his style. This is a standalone and so compelling that when I had to put it down for a few days I was annoyed!

My history is somewhat ignorant, so I really enjoy novels that incorporate slices of history.

Ratlines are the escape avenues set up by the Nazis, ways out, channels, escape routes. In 1963 Ireland, someone is killing off the "Nazis" that have escaped there. Lieutenant Albert Ryan is ordered to investigate the killings but at the same time protect Colonel Skorzeny, one of Hitler's commandos and once the most dangerous man in Europe, who is now living in Ireland. Soon Ryan's loyalties are being tested as he starts

thinking why should he be protecting people he fought against during the war. Other factions enter the mix and its who is double crossing who. Very readable!

Gloria Feit says

Starting with the historical fact that many Nazi war criminals escaped after World War II with fortunes stolen from their victims and became ensconced in various countries like Franco's Spain, Peron's Argentina and anti-British Ireland, Stuart Neville has created a first-rate mystery. The protagonist is a Lieutenant in the Directorate of Intelligence, Albert Ryan, who lied about his age to enlist in the British army and fought in the European theater, Egypt and Korea before returning home.

Ryan is asked at the behest of the Minister of Justice to investigate the murder of a German national, weeks before a pending visit by Pres. John F. Kennedy because he fears the publicity might force cancellation of the trip. The authorities are desirous of hiding the fact that the country is providing sanctuary to a bunch of Nazis. Ryan's efforts become more complicated than a mere murder investigation, and thereby hangs one helluva tale.

The title refers to escape routes by which Nazis were able to travel, avoiding detection, and the methods used to finance their travels to and establishment in new locations. While based on historical fact, more important is the plot, which twists and turns in wholly unexpected directions. And the character study of Ryan is deep and penetrating. Another top-notch novel from this author, and highly recommended.

K says

A stand alone novel from the talented Stuart Neville, Ratlines explores a fascinating premise that includes historical fact with mostly fiction. Though I would not consider this a work of historical fiction, the basis for the story line is grounded in the post WWII movement of both Nazis and their ill gotten gains out of Germany into countries such as Ireland, Argentina, and other refuges.

In Ratlines, we have a protagonist, Lt. Albert Ryan, assigned to investigate the murders of several German Nationals who had been living quite well in Ireland. These murders, occurring at a most inconvenient time for the politicians (just a week before then President of the US, John F. Kennedy was scheduled to visit Ireland), prompt the involvement of the Directorate of Intelligence and Lt. Ryan instead of the local constabulary. What separates this from a typical murder mystery is the primary antagonist, former Nazi Col. Otto Skorzeny, who has managed to amass a fortune and wields considerable political influence in Ireland. The "ratlines" for which the book is named, refer to the connections through which Skorzeny manages to facilitate the safe passage of both persons (former Nazis) and monies out of Germany, thus facilitating quite an empire for himself.

To say more might spoil the story, which is a corker, but for one complaint-- I was irked by how often Lt. Ryan screws up, getting himself into untenable situations that anyone with his military and law-enforcement experience would have avoided. It serves the plot but fails the sniff-test and I found it bringing down my overall enjoyment of what is otherwise a well told and interesting story. Nevertheless, I continue to enjoy Neville and his tales involving Ireland and its inhabitants.

Eric says

Before getting into my review, I have to give full disclosure -- I almost never read historical fiction. In fact, the only other historical fiction novels I can think of that I've read are *Operation Napoleon* (review) and *The Guns of Navarone* (review). Also of note is that I am a poor student of history, and did not know that Otto Skorzeny or ratlines were real, non-fictional aspects of this book, though the specifics of the plot were entirely fabricated.

With that out of the way, I'll admit that I enjoyed this book, although not as much as I thought I would from its description. The prologue -- where an as-of-yet unidentified murderer palavers with and then kills a former Nazi -- was great for setting the mood, but that same slow, tense, minutely descriptive style ran through the entire book, slowing the pace down far too much for my personal tastes.

For example, if two characters are having a conversation in this book, and one is smoking a cigarette, and the other is drinking a whiskey, the reader will be made aware the cigarette being lit, how many puffs were taken of it, how many pulls were taken of the whiskey, which of its owners' hands they were being held in, and where they were ever put down, if, in fact, they were.

Also slowing down the plot were the flashbacks to Skorzeny's time in Spain, which added little to the overall plot of the book. And then there was the anti-climactic climax. (view spoiler)

Despite the issues I had with the pacing and climax, this novel has a lot of good qualities -- the aforementioned prologue, a few very well written torture scenes (this book is not for the faint of heart), the overall tension, and a number of interesting -- if not thoroughly developed -- characters.

Megan says

Set yourself in Ireland 1963, 18 years after the end of WWII but 18 years is hardly enough time for people to forget the horrors that occurred in and by Nazi Germany. During the war Ireland stayed neutral not wanting to get pulled into another one of Britain's fights, though some like the main character Ryan, did fight with the British. Many Nazi's sought refugee in Ireland after the war to try and save themselves persecution. It is true that Skorzeny, like in the novel, lived in Ireland. It isn't hard to believe that many people hated that he was there and would have liked him to be dead.

This is an interesting article about several Nazi's in Ireland: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews...>
While only the roots of this book are fact the most part is fiction though it is not hard to believe that parts could be true.

This mystery was creative in the fact that you hated both sides, you hated the victim and you hated the villain.

The Victim:

[image error]

Otto Skorzeny aka The Most Dangerous Man in Europe

With the scar on his face I couldn't help but thinking of Scar from The Lion King, the head of the Nazi hyenas.

But back to Skorzeny. Like most I was aware of the name and that he was a Nazi but besides that I knew little about him, which luckily my father is a big WWII buff so I learned more about him then what I asked. In the book Skorzeny is filthy rich, he has "friends" in the government and isn't afraid to break off people's fingernails. While I still don't know a lot about Skorzeny in reality in the book he is a cold hearted jerk. It wouldn't surprise me that a lot of people want him dead. In the book several other Nazi's are being killed all of them in the inner circle of Skorzeny and one corpse has a note for him with the words: "We are coming for you."

This is the start of it all and trying to find out who is blackmailing and threatening Otto Skorzeny. But he isn't even in the book for 10 pages and I already hated the man, as did almost everyone else in the book.

The Villain(s):

The villains of the book you don't know much about at first. Are they Jews wanting to kill Nazi's and especially Skorzeny for revenge? Are they just Irish citizens not wanting Nazi Germans to live in their country? All you know is that they are good at killing, they have a plan, and they aren't going to let anyone get in the way of their plan.

Pretty much the detective of the novel is going to have to choose the lesser of two evils... if a lesser evil even exists.

The Detective: Lieutenant Albert Ryan, Directorate of Intelligence

Pretty much he is a man torn between his country and his conscience. He is a soldier, and quite a good one actually, so he has been taught to always follow orders from your superior officers and when someone high up from the government asks him to investigate the murders he takes it. But as he gets deeper into the mystery he is not only tortured and beaten several times his moral compass also tells him to stay as far away from Skorzeny as possible. He finds that Skorzeny is not only a dangerous enemy but a dangerous friend. So what will he choose to do? How can he fight these two evils?

I would highly recommend this book, it was a very good mystery and I really was unclear at how it was going to end which is a very good thing when you are talking about a mystery novel. This is the first book that I have read by Stuart Neville but after how good this one was i am going to have to pick up another one. I also found it funny how the G6 was compared to British MI6 and near the beginning of the novel Ryan goes on a date to see James Bond: Dr. No. It is commented on how unlike real life it is and how being a spy isn't so glamorous which while this book wasn't nearly as glamorous as a James Bond movie there were a lot of parallels which I found enjoyable. Again I would recommend this book to those that like mystery novels of those that have some footing in the issues of WWII. **4.5/5 stars.**

Andy says

Have enjoyed his series with DI Jack Lennon immensely with the style of writing spot-on, down with excellent levels of "grit". Having caught up with all of DI Lennon & wanting more of the Neville fix it was time to turn to this standalone work whose plot centres on Nazis in Ireland C 1963, namely one Colonel Otto Skorzeny, a Nazi commando, famed for rescuing El Duce from the Italians after they'd changed sides & their Ratlines. If yer not familiar with the term I won't spoil for you.

The central character is a tough no-nonsense protestant who fought for the Brits in the war, then the directorate of Intelligence (G2) since demob & this alone brings him into conflict with many of the local

populace where Albert Ryan rubs/grates along jus so.

Characters are fictional whilst others real, drawn from Irish History of the post-war era, all our believable as is the plot which goes at a good pace throughout combining intrigue, double-cross & crime noir as we go. I use Crime Noir as a genre term which encompasses this style of crime thriller.

Really enjoyed it, a pg turner for sure & recommend to all my crime reading goodfarians who need to "find" Stuart Neville on their trl lists!

Rob Kitchin says

The strengths of Ratlines are the characterisation, plot, contextualisation, and pacing and prose. Neville revels in tales of conflicted, outsider characters placed in difficult circumstances. The lead character in Ratlines is Albert Ryan, an Irishman, but also protestant who has served in the British army fighting the Germans, who has some sympathies with those administering justice to Nazis on the run. He thoroughly dislikes his mission of protecting Skorzeny and the politics underpinning it, but he's prepared to do his duty. However, when all around are using you as a pawn with little regard for your well-being or justice, fulfilling that duty stretches resolve and loyalties, and Neville very nicely explores such tensions. Moreover, by using real events and characters, such as Haughey and Skorzeny, and capturing some of the social constrictors of 1960s Ireland, Neville firmly embeds Ryan and the story in the political landscape of Ireland of the time. The result is a thriller that is not simply framed as good versus evil, but is much more textured, nuanced and ambiguous. The prose is tight and expressive, and the story rattles along at a fair clip. Overall, a thoroughly enjoyable read.

Lorraine says

It's often the case that a well-crafted novel can teach the reader about a subject. In this case, I learned something I never knew: that Ireland had sheltered high level Nazis after WWII. Ireland was officially neutral in WWII. However, perhaps due to the animosity between Ireland and Britain, the Irish government chose to allow a large number of high level Nazis as well as sympathizers to settle in Ireland after WWII.

I also learned that some Bretons of the French province of Breton (Brittany,) had aligned themselves with the Germans after being promised that they would be given autonomy when the Germans won. (One can only wonder at the naivete of someone who would believe that when the Nazis were rolling over most of Europe they would exempt Breton, but I guess there are always people who will want to believe.)

This book is a sharp departure from Neville's "Belfast Trilogy" which take place after the IRA has accepted peace and is now burrowed in Ireland's political hierarchy.

"Ratlines" takes place in 1963 just before the scheduled visit of President John F. Kennedy to Ireland. A high level Nazi, Otto Skorzeny, who has been living in a luxurious compound in Ireland. (Skorzeny is a real person, but who lived in Spain under the protection of Franco and also in County Kildare, Ireland.)

Lt. Albert Ryan of the Directorate of Intelligence is assigned to find out why a German national was killed.

The first Irish-Catholic President of the US is about to visit Ireland. The authorities don't want any problems. Soon Ryan finds himself up to his shoulders in Nazis and plots and sub plots. At the same time he meets a beautiful young woman.....

This book, to be honest, is not my usual choice, but Neville is such an incredibly good writer, I had to read it. I'm glad I did. It's fast paced and dark and often violent and ugly. However, Neville is a terrific writer. As always, after reading his books, I look forward to the next one!

Michael Griswold says

Ratlines by Stuart Neville is a weird book for me. On the basis of plot alone, I should've loved this book. A secret underground network known as the Ratlines smuggles Nazi perpetrators and collaborators out of Germany and onto the somewhat friendly territory of Northern Ireland. But now, days before a visit by US President John F. Kennedy, someone is murdering Nazi collaborators. Political leaders are desperate to solve the case out of fear of what having a Nazi-murdering killer could do to the country's international reputation. There's plenty of action told at a brisk almost cinematic pace with an interesting sounding premise. This book seemed to be crying out "LOVE ME", but I could not.

The entire book just sort of happens. There was not that moment that sucked me in that I feel needs to happen with any mystery and thriller that I read. The best books tend to linger with the reader for hours, days, even years later. That did not happen with Ratlines. In spite of the engaging premise that drew me to first pick up this book, I never felt part of the world that Ratlines is supposed to inhabit. Whether that is a problem with the writing and characterization process Neville went through or whether I just missed something, I'll leave that to other readers.

Oh Ratlines, how I wanted to love you.
