



London Rules

Mick Herron

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The fifth entry in CWA Gold dagger-winning Slough House series.

London Rules might not be written down, but everyone knows rule one: Cover your arse.

At MI5 headquarters Regent's Park, First Desk Claude Whelan is learning this the hard way. Tasked with protecting a beleaguered prime minister, he's facing attack from all directions himself: from the showboating MP who orchestrated the Brexit vote, and now has his sights set on Number Ten; from the showboat's wife, a tabloid columnist, who's crucifying Whelan in print; from the PM's favorite Muslim, who's about to be elected mayor of the West Midlands, despite the dark secret he's hiding; and especially from his own deputy, Lady Di Taverner, who's alert for Claude's every stumble. Meanwhile, the country's being rocked by an apparently random string of terror attacks.

Over at Slough House, the MI5 satellite office for outcast and demoted spies, the agents are struggling with personal problems: repressed grief, various addictions, retail paralysis, and the nagging suspicion that their newest colleague is a psychopath. Plus someone is trying to kill Roddy Ho. But collectively, they're about to rediscover their greatest strength - that of making a bad situation much, much worse.

London Rules Details

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From Reader Review London Rules for online ebook

Paromjit says

Just superb and sublime! So good that I wished I had more stars to give this ever improving series featuring the Slough House failures from the intelligence services, presided over by the grotesque, corpulent, repulsive and flatulent Jackson Lamb, a man who refers to himself as a pagan deity. This is outstanding espionage fiction, that sharply satirises the car crash that is contemporary British politics with Brexit, and the security services. The unwritten London rules are followed religiously in the world of spies, and the number one rule is covering one's arse at all costs, never letting the truth get in the way of the official version of events. It all begins with an attack on a village that I was sure was located in a developing nation, only to be shocked it was Abbotsfield in Derbyshire, that leaves 12 dead. ISIS are quick to claim responsibility, but all is not as it seems. A shell shocked nation and politicians look for answers and resolution from the security services, riven with rivalries, presided over nominally by Claude Whelan, although the real power behind the throne, is the Machiavellian Diana Taverner, biding her time before she skewers Whelan.

In the meantime, Roddy Ho, a wonder with a keyboard, but nothing else, has his life saved by Shirley, although he is blindingly unaware of this. None of the 'slow horses' have a problem with Ho being taken out, and Shirley is suitably repentant about her ill advised intervention that has Ho still breathing. Still, Slough House reluctantly come to Ho's aid, only to be alarmed when they learn there are connections to the Abbotsfield horror. The terrorists up the stakes by following up with an unspeakable massacre of penguins and a train bomb that luckily is foiled. A populist Brexit politician, Gimball, modeled on Nigel Farage, is the fiercest of critics of the intelligence services and a muslim mayoral candidate, with the expectation of benefiting from his machinations. I could not help laughing when he ends up being 'glossed'. Slough House is under lockdown, which Lamb and the slow horses are not going to take lying down as mayhem and accidents ensue. With Diana looking for any excuse to take out Lamb, she is to find that there are no rules that he will not break.

Much of contemporary British politics surrounding Brexit are almost beyond parody, but Herron incisively does it with style and panache. We at long last come to understand how Lamb ended up at Slough House and why he bought alcoholic mother hen, Catherine, with him. Without doubt, Herron's ingenious caricature that is Jackson Lamb is the shining star of this series, and he is spectacular in this book. If you are an espionage and spy thriller aficionado, and even if you are not, I strongly urge you to read this book, you will not regret it. This is a fantastic and hilarious addition to the series, and I had a ball reading it! Many thanks to John Murray Press for an ARC.

Susan says

Without doubt, Mick Herron has created the best, modern spy series, in his Slough House books and this, latest instalment, is a wonderful addition. It begins with what seems to be a terrorist outrage, with us readers falling into line and imagining we know who is behind it. However, this is Mick Herron, these are the Slow Horses, and plots do not go in straight lines here – they meander, double back, peer around corners and call your bluff.

So, things are not what they seem and our current batch of Slow Horses are eager to be involved with events. Except, without even realising it, they are, in fact, already involved. If not central, to what is going on. At

least Roderick Ho ('the Rodster') is. However, so deluded is he – so blindly self assured – that he is not questioning much, including the fact that he has a beautiful new girlfriend; even if she does make excuses at the end of the evening, but too much of a good thing, right? Oh, nor does he realise that someone is trying to kill him. For Roddy Ho is up to his neck in trouble and it is up to Jackson Lamb, who, whatever his faults, will always do his best to protect his Slow Horses, to work out what is going on.

The real joy about Mick Herron is his writing. He makes all his characters human and sympathetic; even those who are doing very bad things. His books are full of deft plotting, dry one liners and bizarre events (the 'paint' scene will stay with me forever). Along the way, we have ambitious politicians with secrets, the wonderful Diana Taverner, longing to be in power and, central to everything, Jackson Lamb. Lamb, who rarely moves from his shadowy lair, but who everyone is wary of, and always seems to be around at the right moment – we see some of his impeccable timing in this novel.

This series is a joy. The latest instalment is intelligent, witty, and will make you long to read more by Mick Herron. He is an author on top of his game and, like Jackson Lamb, he can do no wrong in my eyes. I received a copy of this book from the publisher, via NetGalley, for review.

Phrynne says

Brilliant. Just brilliant. I sincerely hope that Mick Herron is going to continue with this series because it gets better with each book. He kills his characters off and then replaces them with better ones! Who does that in a series?

Mind you he keeps his best characters going, River, Lamb, Catherine, Louisa are in every book. And they are so entertaining. The dialogue is witty and full of black humour. When political correctness was handed out Lamb was obviously behind a door somewhere and missed the message.

Five books down and this has become one of my favourite spy series ever. It needs to be a television show! Please keep writing them Mr. Herron!

Sandy says

In the murky world of the British secret service, there's a tacit understanding that everyone plays by London Rules. These aren't the ones neatly compiled in official binders. No, these are the unwritten rules, the real ones. #1: Cover your arse.

And when it comes to MI5, it doesn't matter whether you work at Regent's Park or Slough House. The former is where all the cool kids get to be spies. The latter is home to agents who've screwed up royally but can't legally (or at least, quietly) be killed.

As the book opens, Regent's is on high alert. A group of armed men drove into the centre of a village in Derbyshire & opened fire. People died, the men vanished & Islamic State claimed responsibility.

News of the attack doesn't exactly brighten the current mood In the UK. The public is still bitterly divided over Brexit, right wing politicians are pushing their xenophobic agenda & previous attacks have left everyone a tad jumpy. MI5 desperately needs a win but before they literally have a clue, a second attack takes more lives. Regent's Park #2 Diana Taverner is running on fumes & the last thing she needs is to deal with Slough House's resident fossil, Jackson Lamb.

Lamb's not sure if he has a problem or not. It seems someone may have tried to run over Roddy Ho. "The Rodman" (as he thinks of himself) is Slough House's IT guy. He has 2 gifts. The first is his way with computers. The second is an unshakeable belief he's a chick magnet with basic social skills. Lamb's at a loss. Why would a stranger want to kill Ho? He'd understand if it was someone who knew him. Everyone at Slough House has thought of killing The Rodman, pretty much on a daily basis. Colleague Shirley Dander was the one who saved him & she's already apologized.

From these 2 threads the story goes haring off in multiple directions before doubling back to give you the big picture. There are several new characters added to the returning cast of (ir)regulars & as usual, not everyone will survive. A couple of things make this outing a little different than the others. We get more one-on-one time with each of the Slow Horses as they reflect on personal problems & the remnants of their career. These more serious moments add layers that make us sympathize with their situations. Well...except Ho. But you do have to admire his refusal to let reality dent his delusions. Herron also shines a light on current issues such as government bureaucracy, the rise of overt racism & how easily the media can influence & manipulate public opinion.

I don't have a great track record when it comes to slowly savouring Herron's books & once again I failed. It was just too damn good to put down. It's well paced & full of colourful characters. Many come across as thinly veiled stand-ins for some of the country's well known figures & you get the sense it's Herron's chance to take satirical jabs at some of the ridiculous behaviour of late. The dialogue is clever & frequently laugh out loud funny. Each of the characters has a personal tic that helps bring them to life or in the case of Lamb, a whole herd of them. They alone ensure this is an entertaining read. What elevates the book is smart, intricate plotting that will have you scratching your noggin as you try to figure out how the story lines tie together.

This is book #5 of what has become my favourite series (Heron also has a number of stand-alones). I adore black humour & for my book dollars, you can't beat smart & funny. So...you may have caught that I'm a fan but this is just me babbling. If you're interested, pick up Slow Horses & see if it suits.

Before I go, I'd like to apply what I learned here & add 2 new rules to the playbook: Never turn your back on a can of paint. Avoid penguins.

William says

A very good spy story, after a bit of a slow, wordy start. When Herron is on top of his game, the book is exciting and gripping, unputdownable. However, in several cases, Herron allows the dialogue to become repetitive and quite dull. I found myself skimming in several places. I think some of this is on-purpose to build tension, but that doesn't really work.

One thing I've noted is the humour and general pacing improve substantially around the half-way mark. The plot is a bit outrageous and unlikely, and Lamb is a cartoon, but the other slow horses are interesting. Flyte is good, but needs to be expanded more as a character. I suspect in some future book she will end up as a slow horse. Molly-from-Smiley-World is always good. Some other recognisable characters from real life are acceptable plot devices.

I really, really love how Boris "the dangerous clown" Johnson (Gimball) is treated in this book. Brexit fans are trashed, Troy stupidity and greed is spotlighted, and the avarice and cowardice of the rulers of the Regent's Park facility are skewered again and again, as we expect.

One thing: Slow Horses are damaged, but Ho is seriously mentally ill... psychotic, almost.

The central terror plot seems quite absurd. I've never heard of anything like this in any western democracy from the [evil country] Herron has chosen.

Herron has not fallen into the megalomania of "Hollywood script writing" in this book, which is very good because he's terrible at it. His best work is in the dialogues and fast-paced action. Here, many of the dialogues are wonderful: Witty and sharp and surprising, deepening his characters and making the book deeper and more complex. However, there are too many places where the dialogue and/or description bog down. I found myself skimming pages at a time. Nothing worse than dialogue that does not inform, that does not drive the pacing, that does not deepen the characters. I suspect Herron was trying to "reach a page count" for his publisher. Far too many authors do this these days.

The climax and ending were terrific (bar some overwritten, overlong passages), and the epilogue and Lady Di interaction with Lamb at the end was very satisfying.

3.5 stars

Thank you NetGalley for this ARC.

Notes and quotes:

It began to rain that morning, about the time London was coming to life; a series of showers that rolled across the city, reminding its inhabitants that summer wasn't a promise, merely an occasional treat. The skies loomed grey and heavy, and buildings sulked beneath their weight. On the streets traffic played its wet-weather soundtrack, a symphony of hissing and slurring against a whispered backbeat of wipers ...

when you held a gun in your hands, the people around you lost definition. They became wraiths, and anything they carried of personality dropped away, no longer of consequence. If you wished to retain your

human stamp, stay away from the battlefield.

‘Jackson Lamb,’ [Molly] said. ‘I hardly need to ask, do I? You’re after something.’

‘Would I be here otherwise?’

‘Pay the troll.’ He bent and kissed one over-powdered cheek.

For Welles, it felt like a moment that should have been preserved somehow, though not on a camera, not on a phone. It needed Goya, with a lump of charcoal.

*Molly’s lair was a long room lined with upright cabinets, set on tracks allowing them to be pushed together when not in use; like library stacks, and imbued with a similar sense that knowledge, information, **words**, never really died, but simply burrowed down out of the daylight and waited for curiosity to dig them up again.*

Sooner or later he’d wind up swinging from it –nobody could be Jackson Lamb forever without paying the price –but the certain knowledge that aiding him would give Lady Di the screaming abdabs was good enough for Molly Doran.

17.0% ... kind of dull. Some very long-winded politics, especially concerning blow-hard clown Boris Johnson, thinly disguised as Dennis Gumball.

48.0% ... I must say I enjoy Herron's repeated trashing of all things Brexit and Tory.

61.0% ... fabulous dialogue in the office scene with Welles !

Brenda says

I love this series! Mick Herron has created these unique characters that feel like old friends now. If you decide to try this series, do yourself a favor and start with the first book, *Slow Horses*.

The book starts out with a terrorist act, claimed by ISIS, but it's not in some small village in the Middle East. There are two more events, one involving penguins and the other a train. There is an attempt on Roddy Ho's life, and Shirley regretfully saves him. It happens a second time, again unsuccessfully. So who would want poor delusional Roddy dead and why? Diana Taverner puts Slough House on lockdown. She couldn't seriously think that would keep them in. The slow horses, River, Louisa, Shirley, and the relatively new J. K. Coe, actually almost act like a team, even though they don't like each other. I didn't think Jackson Lamb's disgusting habits could get much worse. Surprise! I don't know how den mother Catherine puts up with him. The first London Rule is “cover your arse.” There's a whole lot of that going on.

This was a great addition to the series. I love the black humor and the insults and the sarcasm. I admit many of the British political references probably went right over my head, but I could infer meaning and they made the book feel very timely. Add in the characterization of day and night, and the book also felt darker and more threatening than its predecessors. Events at the end made me wish the next book was available right

now. Not an abrupt cliffhanger, but there are threads that aren't completely woven into the Slough House fabric yet.

Maine Colonial says

There are so many excellent reviews already posted that I'm not going to go into a lot of detail here. What I do want to say is that this is my favorite of the Slough House series since the first book—and none of them is a dud.

Where le Carré was the master of the Cold War espionage story and nailed that sense of betrayal lurking around every corner, Mick Herron writes for our era, when there is no defined enemy state, but there are mindless agents of all kinds of screwed-up organizations who could plant a bomb on your subway car or shoot up your neighborhood. "Terrorbots," as MI5's people like to call them.

And if you thought le Carré's characters were cynical, well, they were babes in the woods compared to Herron's. As the book says, #1 in the London Rules is "cover your arse." Every politician and every security agent has that rule firmly in mind and can pivot from one position to its opposite without effort or qualm as long as CYA is involved.

Correction: not quite every security agent. Jackson Lamb is not a CYA kind of guy. The opposite, really. Sure, he likes to keep what goes on in Slough House on the down low, but he doesn't care about protecting his position or maneuvering to move up. Slough House may be everyone else's idea of a pit of misery, but Lamb is where he wants to be and he only connives against security service colleagues if necessary—or when it's too entertaining to resist.

In London Rules, the Slow Horses get involved in a terrorbot spree, as usual defying HQ in the process. We learn some more back story, including exactly how Jackson Lamb got to Slough House. And there are so many great lines that I kind of regretted getting this on audiobook and not being able to highlight them. But if you are tempted to get the audiobook, go ahead, the reader is good.

If you've never read any of the books in the series, you could still jump in with this one. Ideally, though, you'd at least read Slow Horses first.

Marianne says

London Rules is the fifth book in the Slough House series by prize-winning British author, Mick Herron. During a sweltering summer in Slough House, the slow horses perform, with a minimum of enthusiasm, the tasks their boss, Jackson Lamb has dreamed up: Louisa Guy scans library records for borrowers of possible terrorist texts; River Cartwright pretends to compare rate payments with the electoral roll to reveal possible terrorist safe houses, while he worries about his demented grandfather; and J.K. Coe composes fake emails for agents who need to disappear after interacting too closely with the general public.

Still on the wagon, Catherine Standish mops up after Lamb while also monitoring the psychological temperature of their reduced number, in particular: grief over those recently lost, the effect of (now-drug-free for 62 days!) Shirley Dander's anger management course, the stability of the ever-silent, traumatised Coe,

River's concerns for the O.B., and Roddy Ho's continuing over-inflated belief in his own popularity.

Meanwhile, in the real world, a terrorist attack on a Derbyshire village leaves twelve dead, a pipe bomb at a zoo has a similar death toll, and the discovery of a bomb on a train averts another potential disaster. As Regent's Park searches for terrorists, First Desk Claude Whelan also has to cope with the PM's demands for certain background checks, an MP with PM ambitions, the MP's tabloid journalist wife and of course, his Second Desk, Lady Di Taverner, who has designs on his job.

When there's an attempt on Roddy Ho's life, the slow horses are at first incredulous, then puzzled. Coe seldom contributes, but when he does open his mouth, it's worth listening, even if Lamb's sharp mind is already a long way towards figuring it out. And once again, the slow horses are out on an op. Apart from a generous helping of snappy dialogue, fists, knees, elbows, a wrench, a knife, a coat-hanger, guns, a bottle of bleach, and a tin of paint come into play.

As always, Jackson Lamb is rude, inappropriate, sharp and sly. He has a lot of fun with addressing the unfortunately-named Devon Welles. This instalment sees the first of the London Rules, "cover your arse" adhered to by many players, and ultimately, Ho maintains his oblivion regards the general opinion of his appeal. The idea that "...Lamb will go to any lengths to protect a joe, but would watch in mild amusement if the rest of the world hanged itself" is soundly reinforced.

Herron's plot is imaginative but easily believable, with the odd twist to keep it interesting; there's plenty of humour, much of it black, that will have readers snickering, giggling and laughing out loud. This fifth instalment of the series, while it contains some spoilers for earlier books, can easily be read as a stand-alone, but with a series as entertaining as this one, why would you? Another excellent dose of British spy fiction.

Carolyn says

Another brilliant addition to Mick Herron's brilliant espionage series based on a group of misfit spies (the 'Slow Horses') exiled to Slough House, where the dregs of the British secret service are sent to serve out their days with mind-numbingly dull tasks. Ruling over them all is Jackson Lamb, an odious man who drinks and smokes too much and whose sense of personal hygiene and lack of sensitive dialog makes him reviled by all. But he is not incompetent at his craft and is wily enough to know what secrets are being hidden by those in charge of the service, including those of the current head, Claude Whelan and the one who wields the real power behind him, Di Taverner.

All the favourites are back in this fifth novel, although still reeling from the events played out at the end of the previous one. They all have issues which have all helped to land them at Slough House, problems with drugs or alcohol, anger management, difficulty with interpersonal relationships, or ability to follow orders. River Cartwright is the least damaged of the Slow Horses, but even he finds himself in trouble when sent to protect a politician.

The action kicks off with two inexplicable events. A terrorist attack on a small, quiet village in Derbyshire and a failed attempt on the life of Roddy Ho, the Slough House IT specialist. Roddy (self-named "The Rodster") sees himself as God's gift to women. After all, he has a girlfriend called Kim (who is always asking him to do favours, like wiping debt off her credit cards, but always has an excuse for not staying the night with him).

As always, Herron's dialogues are sharp with dark, incisive humour as the Slow Horses encounter a terrorist group almost as inept as themselves and find themselves unofficially operational again. Hugely entertaining and enjoyable, I can only hope there will be many more books to come in this series.

Gram says

These days, one of the highlights of my life is getting to read the latest in Mick Herron's "Slow Horses" series. This is Number 5 and it's the best yet. At times, Herron's writing is almost poetic and then he fires in a smart-ass one liner that just nails it. He can veer from a beautiful description of dawn breaking over London to incisive analysis of Britain's current political woes and the evils of terrorism.

I lost count of the laugh-out-loud moments in "London Rules" and there's a line about BBC TV chat show host, Graham Norton, which on its own is worth the price of this book. Luckily for me and all other fans of Jackson Lamb & Co, it seems another "Slow Horses" story is headed our way. Can't wait!

Alex Cantone says

London Rules is the fifth in the series featuring Slough House - the offshoot of MI5's Regent Park, where disgraced spooks while away their days in administrative obscurity, headed by former cold war joe, Jackson Lamb - and the best yet. The team are in lock-down, following seemingly random terrorist attacks on British soil, and two foiled attempts to kill Roderick Ho, Slough House's cyber-idiot in residence. J K Coe establishes a link, which suggests the acts follow a blueprint for destabilising a small country: an own goal. With that in mind everyone is scrambling to halt the train of events and more importantly "cover your arse".

While Ho is under "protection" in the bowels of 'the Park' the others split into squabbling pairs of River Cartwright wanting out, placed with J K Coe seeking some kind of acceptance, and retail junkie Louisa Guy with Shirley Dander, a coke-addict and recently released from Anger f..kin' Management sessions, all normally desk-bound but let loose in the outside world. Memories of Sid and Marcus are revived through a gun and a set of universal keys.

In Jackson Lamb, Herron mines a vein rich in seediness, sloth and rat-cunning, master of the innuendo, and more than a match for Five's Second Desk, Diana Taverner and the 'Dogs' at MI5.

'How unpleasant do you want this to be, Mr Lamb?'
'The last person who asked me that charged eighty quid.'

Part spy spoof, part social commentary, aside from laugh out loud lines, Herron produces some visual gems, especially in the deluded 'Rodster's' house with it's first floor glass wall.

There was little point in adding features to London houses. If you wanted to increase the value of a property, you only had to wait five minutes.

Characters from earlier books put in a cameo appearance, notably wheelchair-bound Molly Doran. *Here was where she felt alive, especially now, on the late shift, when night was out of its basket and prowling behind her as she propelled herself along the aisles.*

Herron gifts personalities to 'dusk, dawn, night and day' and time itself seems elastic as events reach their climax and hint at another book to follow. I'm sure celebs will be lining up to get their names mentioned. But for me I savoured his descriptions of the everyday.

The origins of the killers' odyssey were shrouded in static. Their jeep first appeared on CCTV eight miles north of Sheffield; backtracking took it to the outskirts of that city, where it disappeared in an electrical storm: the jerky whirr and buzz of too many cameras watching too much traffic, and skipping too quickly between too many points of view. Even a jeep could disappear in the stillness between digital breaths.

Verdict: a welcome addition to any bookshelf.

Gary says

This is the 5th book in the 'Slough House' series by author Mick Herron. Slough House is a dumping ground for British intelligence agents who have messed up a case. The "slow horses," are given menial tasks rather than be trusted on bigger cases.

I found the 1st book I read in this series OK but although loving the idea of Slough House and the relegated spies was not fully committed to reading further books. In spite of my doubts I decided to carry on regardless and I am so pleased I did. For me the series has developed and the characters have become endearing. The more I read of this series the more I like it and I never anticipated when I started book 1 that I would be looking forward to more of authors Mick Herron's work. This is yet another successful novel following the adventures of the rejected spies .

I would like to thank Net Galley and John Murray Press for supplying a copy of this novel in exchange for an honest review.

Sid Nuncius says

This is another absolutely brilliant book from Mick Herron. It is rare for me to rave so unreservedly about a book, never mind a series, but Herron's Slough House series has been outstanding. London Rules is the fifth; its predecessor, Spook Street, was perhaps not quite as good as the others (which still meant it was at least as good as anything else I read last year), but this is possibly the best so far. It can be read as a stand alone book, but for maximum enjoyment I would recommend reading the books in order, beginning with Slow Horses.

In London Rules, the Slow Horses become semi-officially involved in trying to track down a terrorist cell on the loose following a number of outrages committed by them. Slough House is recovering from its own bloodbath, including Lamb's expense returns for repairs: "Catherine waded through the day's work...replacing his justifications ("because I blanking say so") with her own more diplomatic phrasing." (I have substituted the word "blanking" for a considerably more robust copulatory term which would be unacceptable in an review here.) This sets the tone for the first half of the book, with Jackson Lamb in magnificently offensive, repellent form. I highlighted lots of gems; this is one of the more printable ones: Flyte looked at Lamb. 'Ever consider disciplining your staff?

'All the time. I favour the carrot and stick approach.'

'Carrot or stick'

'Nope. I use the stick to ram the carrot up their arses. That generally gets results.'

It is truly laugh-out-loud funny in lots and lots of places; I read some of it over breakfast and nearly did myself some serious internal damage trying not to spray mouthfuls of muesli over my Kindle. Herron also creates a very good, tense story which he develops with skill, wit and real tension in the second half.

What makes Herron's books so good is this brilliant combination of excellent storytelling, a lot of genuinely hilarious moments and a very shrewd skewering of many of the absurdities and hypocrisies of our time. The tense internal politics of MI5, political opportunism, ludicrous Twitter theories based on no knowledge and so on all come in for excoriating comment, often from Jackson Lamb whom I regard as one of the truly great creations of 21st-Century literature.

I don't think I can give London Rules any higher praise than to say it is one of Herron's best. Very, very warmly recommended.

(I received an ARC via NetGalley.)

PattyMacDotComma says

4★

“Eight months of anger f*king management sessions, and this evening she’d officially be declared anger free. It had been hinted she might even get a badge. That could be a problem – if anyone stuck a badge on her, they’d be carrying their teeth home in a hankie. . .”**

More of Herron's trademark humour, off-beat characters, and action in and around London. Plus his wonderful mood setting where the weather and the time of day become their own characters. I love this part of his style.

This fifth book in the series isn't dependent on the first four, but readers who haven't met Jackson Lamb or the others before are less likely to enjoy the interaction between characters. Lamb is unique. Often drunk, living in a cloud of cigarette smoke, and more of a bear than a lamb.

“The smoke from his cigarette was a blue-grey spiral, but broke into rags when it hit the ceiling. Still daylight outside, barely evening yet, but Lamb punched his own clock, and won on a technical knockout.”

Roddy Ho, who self-identifies as “The Rodster”, is the pivot-point for this instalment. He is an IT whiz who thinks he's a lady-killing Mr Cool because he has a "girlfriend", Kim, whom we met in Spook Street. We know she's been using him for wiping credit card debt and such while holding out the promise of a loving relationship eventually— just not “yet”. This time, we meet her people.

The book opens with an attack in a village that sounds like it's in the middle of a war zone. Herron moves us between the attackers, the Slough House crew, the real spy headquarters at Regent's Park, and politicians.

I found this slow going for a while and lost interest in some of the characters, but as the plot thickened (sorry, I'm not as inventive as Herron), I enjoyed it like the others in the series. I particularly enjoyed seeing more of J.K. Coe, the deadly newcomer to Slough House.

“And as for J. K. Coe, Catherine recognised a hand grenade when she saw one. And she didn’t think

his pin was fitted too tight.”

In **Spook Street**, Coe’s was the final act in a

“... series of events so painfully compromising to the intelligence services as a whole that – as Lamb had observed – it had put the ‘us’ in ‘clusterf**k’, leaving Regent’s Park with little choice but to lay a huge carpet over everything and sweep Slough House under it.”

Poor old Regent’s Park isn’t going to be any happier about this series of events either, especially as the finger of suspicion begins pointing in their direction. But Lamb warns against alerting them yet.

“*Yeah, but before committing Hare Krishna, let’s see if we’ve got wiggle room when it comes to assigning blame.*”

‘*Hara-kiri.*’

‘*You’re welcome.*’

Lamb is such an unseemly character (grubby slob, often drunk, bitingly insulting), that the higher-ups wish they could get rid of him. But they can’t,

“*Because I have so much dirt on you, I’ve started an allotment.*”

The question is asked.

“*Is he like this all the time?*”

‘*I expect so,*’ said Catherine. ‘*I don’t work weekends.*”

I can answer that. YES. Yes, he is. But he’s smart and clever and surprisingly nimble when the need arises. An unlikely saviour, if ever there was one.

This latest book speaks of Brexit and Trump, and we have politicians in the line of fire, but the focus of the plot is finding the person or group who perpetrated the attack on the village. When another event occurs, the usual hermit-like J.K. Coe breaks his silence with a suggested connection which means there’s a mole.

By the end, I was ready for the next book, and judging by a sudden brief phone call to River Cartwright (the main character in previous books), there must be one in the works. I hope so.

Thanks to NetGalley and Hachette – John Murray for the preview copy from which I’ve quoted.

P.S. For anyone who knows London, you might enjoy this lengthy excerpt. I did.

“**Noon comes with bells on, because this is London, and London is a city of bells. From its heart to its ragged edges, they bisect the day in a jangle of sound: peals and tinkles and deep bass knells. They ring from steeples and clock towers, from churches and town halls, in an overlapping celebration of the everyday fact that time passes. In the heat, it might almost be possible to see their sound travel, carried on the haze that shimmers in the middle distance. And in time with the bells, other devices strike up: clocks on corners and hanging over jewellers’ premises strike the hour in their staggered fashion, all a little behind or a little ahead of the sun, but always – always – there’s one single moment**

when all chime together. Or that's what it would be nice to pretend; that twice a day, around midnight and noon, the city speaks as one. But even if it were true, it would be over in a moment, and the normal cacophony re-establish itself; voices arguing, chiding, consoling and cracking jokes; begging for ice cream, for lovers to return; offering change and seeking endorsement; stumbling over each other in a constant chorus of joy and complaint, bliss and treachery; of big griefs, small sorrows, and unexpected delight. Every day is like this one: both familiar and unique. Today, like tomorrow, is always different, and always the same."

Nigeyb says

Wonderful. The Slough House series of novels just gets better and better. London Rules is the fifth in the series.

When a friend suggested that Mick Herron was up there with John Le Carré, I was dubious. John Le Carré is an all time great, a titan, however she is quite correct. Not only does Mick Herron achieve similar levels of literary greatness, he has also managed to update Le Carré's Cold War settings into a recognisable and contemporary 21st century. It's an extraordinary achievement. Herron's irreverent Slough House series breathes new life into the spying and espionage genre.

Slough House is the dumping ground for MI5's misfits and failures, rather than risk unfair dismissal, the hope and expectation is that the soul destroying work at Slough House will eventually result in resignation. Needless to say this makes for a marvellous collection of eclectic and memorable characters. Jackson Lamb, the Slough House boss, being the most memorable of the lot. What a magnificent creation. Think of a brutal Falstaff in charge of a bunch of misfits and losers: "*I don't think of you as a team, I think of you as collateral damage*". Instantly dislikeable, he wears his obnoxiousness, and disgusting personal habits, as a badge of honour. Underestimate him at your peril though. And, beneath that gruff exterior perhaps he does ultimately look out for each and every slow horse? They are all his "Joes" after all.

London Rules opens with a now familiar plot idea - a terrorist atrocity in the UK - with ISIS claiming responsibility, however it then veers off into a more unexpected direction.

Although each of the Slough House books is a standalone novel, part of the pleasure (and pain) of these books is the ongoing narrative and character development. People can, and do, suffer and die during the course of these tales.

London Rules (Slough House #5) continues the now familiar combination of clever prose, memorable characters, action, humour, and deftly handled, twist-laden plots. As usual, Mick Herron takes the world of John Le Carré's espionage, but updates it for a very contemporary story which, in this instance, includes Brexit, a Farage-esque politician, a Daily Mail columnist, a modern and moderate Muslim standing for major, security alerts, Twitter, and an incessant swirl of political manoeuvring.

In common with the previous books in the series, London Rules is funny, dramatic, tense, and awash with wonderful, believable, and all too human characters.

London Rules (Slough House #5) will be published on 1 February 2018. I received a free review copy from the publisher in exchange for my honest unedited feedback.

