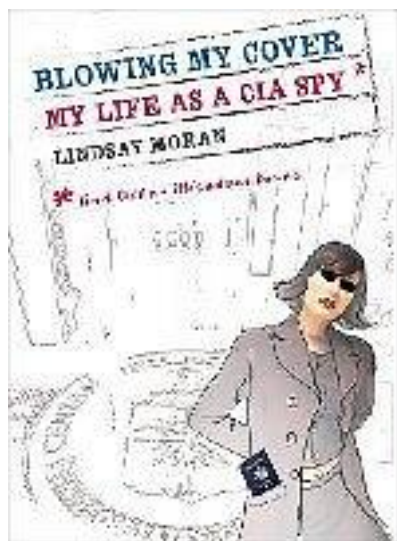


BLOWING MY COVER MY LIFE AS A CIA SPY



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Call me naive, but when I was a girl - watching James Bond movies and devouring Harriet the Spy - all I wanted was to grow up to be a spy. Unlike most kids, I didn't lose my secret-agent aspirations when I became an adult. So as a bright-eyed, idealistic college grad, I sent my resume to the CIA. My dad - who I secretly suspected was a spy himself - told me I wasn't their type. That only made me more determined.

Getting into the CIA was a story in itself. I peed in more cups than you could imagine, and was nearly condemned as a sexual deviant by the staff psychologist. I passed a lie-detector test in which a previous applicant allegedly admitted that he'd dismembered his wife and buried her in the basement. Meanwhile, my roommates were getting freaked out by government background investigators lurking around, asking questions about my past.

Finally I made it: I was in training to be a CIA case officer. A spy. They taught me to

crash cars into barriers at sixty miles per hour. Jump out of airplanes with cargo attached to my body. Survive interrogation, travel in alias, lose a tail.

One thing they didn't teach us was how to date a guy while lying to him about what you do for a living, where you live, and your entire identity. That I had to figure out for myself.

But I passed it all (except the dating part) with flying colors, much to my father's amazement. Then I was posted overseas. And that's when the real fun began...and when I began to truly understand that being a spy was nothing at all like I'd expected.

In Lindsay Moran's *Blowing My Cover: My Life as a CIA Spy*, the author comes across as an amusingly candid cross between Bridget Jones and James Bond, with a little Gloria Steinem thrown in to remind readers of the inherent sexism that runs rampant both in the US government and abroad. Moran, a few years out of Harvard and fresh from a Fulbright scholarship in Bulgaria, decides to follow her childhood dream of becoming a spy and, after a grueling interview process that involves several polygraphs and an abandoned foreign boyfriend, goes to work for the CIA. What follows is a surprisingly honest behind-the-scenes look at what it takes to become a real-life CIA agent, signal-sites and all.

Yet more than an insider's guide to the life and times of an undercover agent, *Blowing My Cover* is a story about a highly educated, obviously intelligent yet occasionally insecure young woman trying to figure out what she wants to do with her life, and who she wants to have beside her. As we follow Moran to the "Farm", a six-month training camp where new recruits are forced into alarmingly real POW situations and asked to perform death-defying car chases reminiscent of old *Dukes of Hazard* episodes, we also witness her extreme loneliness at being cut off from her friends and family and her fear that she'll never meet "the one" and settle down. One of the most poignant scenes happens early on in Moran's training, when she meets up with some friends in New York at a party and realizes she can't even tell her closest confidants what she does for a living.

For anyone who's ever wondered what it really means to be a CIA agent, Moran's tale is a worthwhile read. Better yet, for anyone who's ever wondered what she wants to be when she grows up (even at age 30), *Blowing My Cover* is an ultimately hopeful story of possibilities.

--Gisele Toueg

If Hollywood decided to match Bridget Jones with MI6, the result might look a lot like Moran's memoir of her five years with the CIA. She went in young and idealistic; she left matured and disillusioned, but engaged to a wonderful guy (whose work had nothing to do with spying). Moran, a former writing teacher who, one imagines, is a much more entertaining writer than your average CIA bureaucrat, maintains a sense of humor about her own dashed expectations while raising serious questions about an organizational culture that encouraged operatives to prey on informants' emotional and financial vulnerabilities and, ultimately, kept the agency from predicting and preventing the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. The volume has no index.

When Harvard grad Moran entered CIA training in her late 20s, her expectations had more to do with Harriet the Spy and James Bond than with drudge work or service; the reality, as she represents it in this memoir of her training and case work, was a sexist environment filled with career-oriented, shallow people, "an elaborate game for men

who'd never really grown up." Beginning in 1998 as a case officer in Macedonia, Moran finds the work dull and admittedly achieves little of note in her brief career; smooth writing and wit regarding the humdrum mechanics of spookdom—from having her alias's credit card rejected for nonpayment to the thousands of little lies she must invent and remember—carry the book. Her apprehension about preying on people from cash-poor economies with bribes is easily overcome; a boyfriend in Bulgaria helps ease her loneliness. During the events of 9/11 neither she nor her field boss have any idea what is going on ("We worked for the CIA for chrissake. Shouldn't we have known?"). Though Moran is a likable spy, the wait for significant insights or breakthroughs goes mostly unrewarded for writer and reader alike. Expressing disillusionment with the U.S. invasion of Iraq, frustration with excessive bureaucracy and desire for a more fulfilling personal life, Moran simply quits one day.

Like many of us, Lindsay Moran harbored espionage fantasies from a young age, nourished by James Bond films depicting dangerous assignments in exotic lands, sleek black catsuits and intriguing foreign liaisons. Unlike most of us, she chose to realize her spy-girl daydreams by joining the CIA. In *Blowing My Cover*, she lifts the lid on her cloak-and-dagger adventures from 1998 to 2003, when she underwent an education in espionage and then put her new skills to work in Macedonia. She discovered just how disenchanting the realities of the spying life are for the aspiring modern Bond girl. Forget about catsuits and karate chops; think business suits and report-writing. Above all, have no illusions that the CIA offers a smart young woman, ready to serve her country, anything but distinctly bad dating options. Indeed, if Moran's example is anything to go by, the life of a spy girl is far less *Pussy Galore* and much more *Bridget Jones*.

Certainly now is the time for a smart exposé about "real" life inside the CIA. Since Sept. 11, revelations about the agency's inability to connect al Qaeda-related dots that were there, or counter its leadership's slam-dunk certainty about an Iraqi doomsday arsenal that wasn't, have shone a spotlight on the CIA and the impact of its work on policymaking. Yet we have gained little sense of the CIA's human face -- of what intelligence officers actually do, who they are and what makes them tick.

Blowing My Cover only partly fulfills this need. Moran provides an unusually candid glimpse into the operational training and culture of America's clandestine services -- rare in itself, and even more so from a female perspective. But this glimpse is intensely personal and takes place within the familiar story of a young woman's journey toward emotional fulfillment. We learn a good deal about the ins and outs of spy work, but we learn more about Moran herself, her own misgivings about the spying profession and, above all, her unhappy love life.

Take, for example, Moran's schooling at "The Farm," the CIA's super-secret training facility for new recruits. She endured courses in defensive driving ("Crash and Burn"), assembling explosives, handling weapons, hand-to-hand combat, parachuting, maritime skills and a final, grueling exercise in which the trainees were captured, held prisoner and interrogated for days. Her experiences offer a revealing account of the most extreme physical, mental and emotional demands that might be required of a CIA case officer.

But while Moran sometimes found real satisfaction in meeting these challenges, she spent more time worrying about her crumbling relationships and seemingly impending spinsterhood. On a training exercise, driving blindfolded through the woods, she asked herself, "What the hell am I doing with my life? At some point, didn't I just want to find a nice guy and settle down?" But things did not go well with Sasho, the Bulgarian

rock-climber, and her liaisons with Chris, the tapas chef, and Venci, the bingo hall security guard, also floundered. Being required by her employers to lie to friends and family about her espionage activities took an emotional toll on her, and she felt increasingly insular and alone. Moran's mother, unable to deny or confirm a neighbor's speculation that her daughter was a high-end hooker, was forced to comment, "How would I know? I'm only her mother."

Regrettably, the workplace offered slim pickings. She was distinctly unimpressed with CIA men, who, by contrast, seemed to be having a good deal of fun. She recounts how the head of the clandestine service, for example, was once discovered in flagrante delicto in a steamed-up car in the CIA's parking garage. (She writes that officers noticed unusual activity on the security cameras, thought he was having a seizure and rushed to his aid.) That the CIA turned a blind eye to such behavior did not appear to concern Moran as much as the fact that "personally, I could not have been less romantically intrigued by anyone even associated with work."

Readers will be relieved to hear that there is a happy ending to Moran's story. Yet her disillusionment with the spying life is so self-evident throughout *Blowing My Cover* that one can't help but wonder why she wanted to stick it out in the first place. "I wasn't naive enough to think that the life of a CIA agent was all Hollywood glamour," she writes, "but I was pretty sure I'd be good at it." What she seems to have neglected to think about, however, was whether the CIA would be good for her. Even for spy girls, it seems, a good man is hard to find.

Reviewed by Alexis K. Albion

Fresh out of Harvard with a head full of memories of the *Harriet the Spy* series, Moran approached the CIA about becoming a spy. But after five years of isolation from regular life and mounting disappointment in the agency's effectiveness--especially after 9/11--Moran left. In this alternately amusing and disturbing memoir, she recalls the recruitment process, including lie-detector tests and psychological screening; the grueling training at the Farm; and the sexist attitudes of male instructors and fellow recruits. Among her classmates were a former Green Beret and a fellow Harvard grad. Finally posted to Macedonia, Moran is charged with recruiting spies, and she has to use all her training and smarts to keep from being killed. Tired of the lying and the subterfuge and the failure of the CIA to predict or prevent the terrorist attacks of 9/11, Moran--on leave for her brother's wedding--meets a man who pulls her back into the mainstream. Fans of the spy show *Alias* will enjoy this insider look at a spy agency that has lost its luster.

Vanessa Bush

Blowing My Cover offers an inside look at America's recent failures of intelligence, the CIA, and its tragic missteps in the Iraq war. Moran, a disenchanted CIA case officer between 1998 and 2003, relates her (mis)adventures with wit and intelligence--she's an unglamorous Bond Girl with *Bridget Jones's* sensibilities. Most critics embraced Moran's personal approach--her honest, humorous descriptions of grueling training (defensive driving, assembling explosives, handling weapons) and journey toward emotional fulfillment. Who's a young CIA agent to date, anyway? A few reviewers thought that Moran shirked some larger issues, like her espionage posting in Macedonia, but this may be a matter of editing. In the end, Moran makes a persuasive case to revamp American intelligence.

Lindsay Moran is a freelance writer whose articles have appeared in *The New York*

Times, The Washington Post, and USA Today. From 1998 to 2003, she worked as a case officer for the CIA.

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Life of a spy is not that glamorous after all...

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