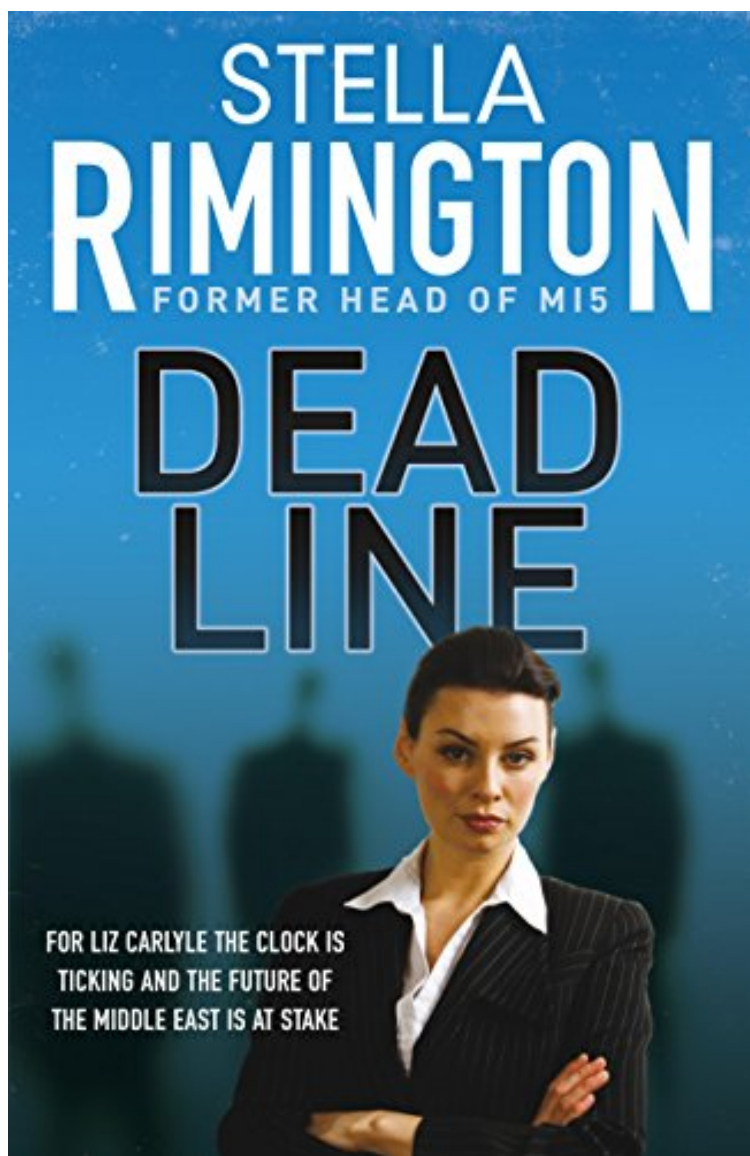


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Dead Line



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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurMI5 Intelligence Officer Liz Carlyle is summoned to a meeting with her boss Charles Wetherby, head of the Service's Counter-Espionage Branch. His counterpart over at MI6 has received alarming intelligence from a high-placed Syrian source. A Middle East peace conference is planned to take place at Gleneagles in Scotland and several heads of state will attend. The Syrians have learned that two individuals are mounting an operation to disrupt the peace conference in a way designed to be spectacular, laying the blame at Syria's door. The source claims that Syrian Intelligence will act against the pair, presumably by killing them. No one knows who they are or what they are planning to do. Are they working together? Who is controlling them? Or is the whole story a carefully laid trail of misinformation? It is Liz's

job to find out. But, as she discovers, the threat is far greater than she or anyone else could have imagined.

The future of the whole of the Middle East is at stake...Extrait1 In his flat near the British embassy in Nicosia, Peter Templeton woke early. For a few minutes he lay staring at the ladder pattern on the wall of his bedroom made by the sun shining through the venetian blinds. Then, with an anticipatory jolt, he remembered the message he had received yesterday: the code word from Jaghir that called him to an urgent meeting. Templeton was MI6's head of station in Cyprus, and Jaghir was one of his most important agents.

There was little traffic in Nicosia this early, so when Templeton's black saloon pulled out of the car park beneath his block of flats it had the street to itself. But within thirty seconds a small, battered hatch-back swung round a corner and began to follow closely behind the saloon. The two cars went south through the old walled city, a cautious convoy, avoiding the UN Green Line and the Turkish sector in the north. They took the narrow side streets, past old stone houses with ornate balconies, their tall wooden shutters still firmly closed, and shops that were not yet open for business. Driving through an opening in the old Venetian wall, former boundary of a once much smaller city, they crossed the Pedieos River. The two cars proceeded carefully, their drivers alert and tense; another vehicle could have followed their labyrinthine progress, but not without being detected. As they emerged from the outskirts of the city, a hinterland of white concrete apartment blocks, the cars accelerated and drove on towards the Troodos mountains. Slowly the road began to climb, and at the base of the range it split, its main artery moving north around the mountain, a smaller track heading in a tortuous zigzag up the mountain itself. In the crook of the junction sat a small café, just half a dozen tables in a dusty courtyard under an overhanging awning rigged to block the sun. Templeton lifted his hand briefly from the wheel in a quick salute to his colleague, and drove on up the track. The hatchback pulled into the café's small parking lot and the driver got out to sit at a table, ordering a coffee when the proprietor emerged blinking in the bright light. But the driver's eyes watched the road he had come along. It was barely seven o'clock and cooler here than in Nicosia, but already the temperature was nearly 90 degrees. As Templeton made his way up the treacherous track that cut through the large stands of umbrella pines lining the mountainside, he kept an eye on his rear-view mirror, but all he could see was the cloud of dust his car was stirring up. It was just three miles to his destination, yet he knew it would take at least another fifteen minutes. He manoeuvred carefully up the incline with its seemingly infinite twists and curves, catching glimpses through the trees of an ancient monastery ahead of him, nestled neatly into a wide ledge halfway up the mountain. Its walls of white ashlar blocks seemed to grow out of the mountain, enfolding a group of buildings, their tiled roofs aged over the years to a dark mocha brown. After a final twist of the road, he reached the walls and, driving through an arch, he left his car parked at the base of a short, steep flight of steps. He climbed them slowly, allowing his eyes to adjust to the shade after the blinding sunlight of the hillside. At the top, on a long terrace tiled in white stone, he stopped and gazed down at the road he had come along. Beside him a roofed portico stretched to a large squat chapel with a cloister on one side, from which came the sound of the monks going to prayer. That would keep them occupied for the half hour Templeton required for his meeting. He sat down on the ledge that overlooked the mountainside and the valley below, picking a shady corner where the terrace joined the portico. The air was scented by the dry, dropped needles of the pines and by the thyme growing in cracks in the walls. Perched here, he could see the café, not much bigger than a speck. As he waited, the mobile phone in his jacket pocket vibrated. Yes, he said quietly. He could hear the whirr of cicadas on the hillside below. On his way. Alone so far. Okay. Keep me posted. He watched patiently, until far below him he saw dust kicking up in small clouds from the track, then a moving dot that gradually turned into a car, a Mercedes, grey with dust. The noise of its tyres grew louder as it came quickly up the track, and braked with a small squeal next to Templeton's car. A moment later, an Arab in a smart light-grey suit appeared at the top of the stairs. He was in his forties, trim and thin, his hair short but expensively cut, and even in the heat his shirt was crisply pressed, the collar uncreased. Seeing Templeton, he came over to the corner, his eyes alert. Salam aleikum, Abboud, said Templeton as he stood up to shake hands. He spoke classical Arabic, learned in six months intensive tuition at the language school in the hills outside Beirut, then honed to fluency by twenty years of postings in the Middle East. Aleikum-as-salam, the man named Abboud replied, then switched to English. We are alone, I take it. Entirely, said Templeton. He gave a small smile and nodded at the chapel. The brothers are all at prayer. They sat on the ledge, Abboud peering warily down the mountainside. Templeton said, You must have something important to tell me. Their next meeting had not been due for a month, but the message from Abboud/Jaghir had been unambiguously urgent. I do, said Abboud. He took a cigarette case from his pocket, waving it towards Templeton, who shook his head. Lighting a Dunhill with a gold lighter, Abboud inhaled deeply, then blew

smoke in a long snow-coloured stream over the ledge. A hundred yards out a hunting kestrel hovered high over the mountainside, its wings fluttering slightly to steady itself against the movement of the thermals. I was in Damascus last week. Tibshirani called me back. Templeton nodded. Tibshirani was the deputy director of Idarat al-Mukhabarat, one of Syria's dreaded secret services, and Abbouds direct superior. He was a man who mixed intellectual sophistication (he had been a postgraduate student at Berkeley in California) and peasant brutality. What did he want? We are having some problems with the Turks. They arrested one of our agents last month in Ankara. It could have consequences especially here in Cyprus. He took another drag on his cigarette. But that is not why I wanted to see you. I had dinner with Tibshirani on my second night. In the old quarter. No wives, though there was some other female entertainment. He gave the briefest flicker of a smile. Afterwards Tibshirani started talking about another operation. I thought he was just drunk and being indiscreet. He knew me since I joined the service but then the next morning in his office he briefed me formally about it. He paused for a moment, looking down the mountain, then stood up to gain a better view. Satisfied that nothing was coming up the track, he sat down again on the ledge, throwing down his cigarette and grinding it out with the heel of his tasseled loafer. He said, You've heard about these talks between my country and the Americans. Yes, replied Templeton. It was a sore point in Whitehall, since the British had been excluded from the discussions. It's commonly thought they are going nowhere without Israeli involvement, it's said, the Americans cannot agree to anything. If they do, the Jewish lobby will just block it in Congress. That's what the media says, at any rate. This was true. The original enthusiasm that the two hostile governments were actually talking to each other had gradually given way to a widespread cynicism that nothing of consequence would emerge from the secret meetings the whole world now knew about. Abboud tugged at one of his cuffs and stared out at the arid valley towards Nicosia. The kestrel was lower in the sky now, moving patiently above the slope, like a gundog working a field. He said, I tell you, my friend, this time the odds are wrong. For once talks may lead to something the administration in Washington seems determined to break the impasse in the Middle East at last, even if it means standing up to Israel. They want a legacy and they have chosen this to create it. Was this why Abboud had called an urgent meeting? wondered Templeton. It was all interesting stuff, but hardly worth the risk each man had taken coming here. Sensing Templeton's impatience, Abboud held out a reassuring hand. Do not worry I am coming to the point. I don't want to stay here any longer than I have to. He looked at his watch, a sliver of gold that glinted in the harsh, still-rising sun. In two months time there is going to be an international conference in Scotland. You may know about it. It has not attracted much interest so far because only the moderates have agreed to attend. But my government wants progress. We need a settlement for the stability of our country. So we have decided to attend. I am to be part of our delegation, which is why Tibshirani told me the story. He raised his eyes to the sky. What story? We have information that certain parties are working to disrupt the process. We know of two individuals acting to prevent any peaceful solution to the current stalemate. They intend to blacken the good name of Syria and thus to destroy all trust at the conference. How will they do that? I don't know. But I can tell you, my friend, that if they succeed there will be a bloodbath in the region. Do you know who they are, who is directing them? I know they have connections to your country, and I know their names. But Tibshirani does not know who is controlling them. He does not think it is the British. He smiled, a gleam of white teeth in the sunlight. Then he gave Templeton two names, reciting each one twice, quite slowly, to make sure there was no misunderstanding. Nothing was committed to paper by either man. Okay, said Templeton, having memorised the two names. Where does this information come from? That I cannot tell you. Abboud laughed as he saw the irritation spreading across Templeton's face. But only because I do not know myself. Believe me, it's not worth my trying to find out; I already know more than I should. I believe it to be true, and so does Tibshirani. But listen to me; here is the most important thing. These people, these two parties who are working against us my colleagues are going to move against them before they can do harm. Move? Abboud merely nodded. They both knew full well what this meant. When will they move? Soon, very soon. They will do it in the United Kingdom. Secretly. So it will not be known who has acted. My side does not want anything to disrupt this conference. We see much for Syria to gain we hope to get back our country from the Israeli invaders. So my superiors consider that action against these people is worth the risk if it keeps the conference alive. Personally, I fear that if they make a mistake it may have the opposite effect, which is why I am telling you. But now I must go, said Abboud, standing up. Templeton stood up too, looking down the mountainside. The kestrel was no longer circling; it must have found its prey. *Revue de presse* "Several former spies have tried their hand at espionage fiction with great success, but Dame Stella trumps all." --Baltimore Sun Fast moving, engrossing, and well

constructed . . . absolutely sweat-inducing. Booklist Packed with the sort of detail that only an insider could bring. Irish Independent The impressively Ludlumesque plot will keep readers blissfully turning the pages until the end. Publishers Weekly