



## A Spy in the House

*Y.S. Lee*

Download now

Read Online ➔

# A Spy in the House

Y.S. Lee

**A Spy in the House** Y.S. Lee

**Introducing an exciting new series! Steeped in Victorian atmosphere and intrigue, this diverting mystery trails a feisty heroine as she takes on a precarious secret assignment.**

Rescued from the gallows in 1850s London, young orphan (and thief) Mary Quinn is surprised to be offered a singular education, instruction in fine manners — and an unusual vocation. Miss Scrimshaw's Academy for Girls is a cover for an all-female investigative unit called The Agency, and at seventeen, Mary is about to put her training to the test. Assuming the guise of a lady's companion, she must infiltrate a rich merchant's home in hopes of tracing his missing cargo ships. But the household is full of dangerous deceptions, and there is no one to trust — or is there? Packed with action and suspense, banter and romance, and evoking the gritty backstreets of Victorian London, this breezy mystery debuts a daring young detective who lives by her wits while uncovering secrets — including those of her own past.

*From the Hardcover edition.*

## A Spy in the House Details

Date : Published February 8th 2011 by Candlewick Press (first published April 6th 2009)

ISBN : 9780763652890

Author : Y.S. Lee

Format : Paperback 335 pages

Genre : Mystery, Historical, Historical Fiction, Young Adult, Adventure, Teen, Fiction

 [Download A Spy in the House ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online A Spy in the House ...pdf](#)

**Download and Read Free Online A Spy in the House Y.S. Lee**

---

## From Reader Review A Spy in the House for online ebook

### Joana (in a semi-hiatus) says

I had forgotten all about this series! The first time I read this book, I was 12 and I had absolutely adored it, but I wanted to see if my feelings would change upon reading it a second time (and this time, in french). I'm happy to say that they didn't!

This was still the fun mystery story that I remember reading, and I'm so glad that I picked it up. I won't be writing a full review for this ~~because I'm lazy~~ but I wouldn't hesitate to recommend it.

I mean, there was:

- a **half-asian** MC, I know, just let that sink in. A half-asian MC in Victorian London.
- a pretty cool mystery, even though a bit predictable at certain points,
- fast paced plot
- a great start to a slow-burning romance....
- great banter
- great side characters (I'm looking at you, James Easton)

I will definitely be continuing with this series.

---

### Maud says

Mystery was good, main character was awesome, loved the romantic interest and the ending was amazing.

Go pick up this book right now!

Watch my full review here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lT8hC...>

---

### TL says

Not bad but not great either... the old/classic "good idea but not great execution"

The premise itself sounded interesting but I couldn't get invested in it. We move too quickly from one event to the next in some cases and some of the connections seem too convenient or not quite believable.

I would have loved to learn more about Mary's school years and the "skills" her benefactors thought she displayed that they thought were good qualities for an Agent. Mental red flags popped up from the beginning but I decided to keep going and hope we would get to know Mary better later on.

Mary's background and past life was very interesting... wish more time had been spent on it.

The only characters given some depth were Mary and James, everyone else wasn't really fleshed out. Even the "villain" failed to rouse any strong feelings in me, when they revealed their master plan... the only thing I

thought was "this is it?"

It felt far too short for what was proposed on the back cover... when I reached the last page, I had to double-check I wasn't missing anything else.

It's one of those books that isn't too dark and an easy read... I wouldn't say I had fun reading it but I wasn't completely bored either. Not a bad read for a rainy day I suppose.

I'm interested enough to give the second book a chance but this is one I won't be re-reading in the future.

This is David's fabulous review... he had many of the same issues with the book I did. Give him some love :).

---

## **Priscilla says**

Quick paced, fun, and yes, a cute mystery read! Ah, YA, you are my comfort zone. :)

Initial Thoughts:

1. Great female protagonist! Mary Quinn is strong, independent, determined, and a smart character. She really breaks through society's expectations of 'hollow housewife', and takes risks in finding the necessary information for the case.
2. Ah, sweet romantic tension. This novel is not overly romantic, but the tense relationship between Mary and James is just cute. Seriously, how they meet made me grin from ear to ear.
3. Loved the setting and time period. Issues of gender roles are challenged, and expectations are shattered.
4. Although the pacing was quite quick, the actual story line/mystery was okay. It didn't capture me, and became secondary to other aspects of the story, like characters and side stories.
5. Identity, and race are addressed, and it was very refreshing to read about. I haven't come across a book that deals with racial identity.

You can check out my video review [here](#)!

---

## **K. says**

3.5 stars.

I loved the concept of this book. I mean, a school in Victorian London that trains working class girls to NOT be reliant on men for an income or a roof over their heads? And a school that's actually secretly an agency that sends women out on covert missions for Scotland Yard or whoever, because nobody pays attention to maids and housekeepers and companions? PERFECTION.

I also loved that Mary is a mixed race protagonist. This fact doesn't come out until half way through the book, but I DON'T CARE A PROTAGONIST'S ETHNICITY IS NOT A SPOILER. Her father was Chinese, and she's changed her name in order to pass as white. So it's great not only to see a Victorian London that contained (as it ACTUALLY DID) people of colour, and I'm interested to know if her ethnicity plays more of a role in subsequent books.

Anyway, while I loved the concept and the fact that it featured a person of colour protagonist, this dragged for me a lot of the time. My favourite thing about it was the banter filled relationship between Mary and James, and I'm intrigued to see if he crops up in the other books in the series. So it was fun, but not outstanding for me.

---

### **Phrynne says**

Having accidentally read book three in this series first I went back and read this one - book one. It's always better to begin at the beginning.

It was nice to see how Mary began her career and how and when James came into the story. Now I understand that later book much better. I always enjoy a good historical mystery especially those set in Victorian London. There's something very special about the history of that city and the spookiness of the docks, the fogs and the streets at night.

I thoroughly enjoyed this story and I am looking forward to reading Mary's future adventures - in order:)

---

### **Jana says**

Eine sehr gute historische Jugendbuch-Reihe. Diese Bücher hätten meiner Meinung nach etwas mehr Aufmerksamkeit verdient, ich höre nämlich praktisch nie etwas über diese Reihe. Deshalb eine grosse Leseempfehlung von mir, nehmt dieses tolle Buch einmal zur Hand!:)

---

### **Sara Grochowski says**

First read: 6/28/2010

Second read: 4/17/2016 (Just as wonderful as the first time around!!)

I sometimes find that novels with historical settings can be a bit dry, but Y.S. Lee has rekindled my love affair with Victorian England. *A SPY IN THE HOUSE* is a fast paced read, narrated by a feisty heroine, bursting with mystery, lies, greed, secret alliances, and, of course, romance.

With her quick wit and adventuresome spirit, Mary Quinn has quickly become one of my favorite main characters! *A SPY IN THE HOUSE* is set in Victorian London, where Mary's secret life as a spy is one of the many traits that sets her apart from her peers. Even with her schooling and fine manners, she doesn't fit the mold of a typical Victorian woman. Her history is a bit blurry, her origins are unknown, and she's bursting with opinions. Mary definitely stands out in Victorian London, but her character is so vibrant that I believe she'd have a difficult time blending into any setting.

I admire Lee's ability to use just the right amount of foreshadowing: too much and a novel will lose much of its mysteriousness, too little and the reader will become frustrated and completely confused. There were enough clues present that I could determine some of the lies and secrets, but the biggest aspect of the mystery remained a riddle for most of the novel. I was also impressed with Lee's ability to weave seemingly independent plot lines into a complex and compelling mystery, while still keeping the mystery intact.

I was thrilled to discover that there was a romantic plot line in *A SPY IN THE HOUSE*. Mary is forced to

hide in a wardrobe when she is nearly discovered poking through an off-limits office, only to find the wardrobe is already occupied. One can assume that if you meet a man in a wardrobe, he probably isn't the boring sort. Mary has met her match in James Easton, who, against his better judgment, is intrigued by "Miss Closet." The conversations between James and Mary were humorous and tension-filled; the chemistry between the two is evident from the moment they tumble out of the wardrobe.

James is one of my favorite male characters/romantic leads. Not only is he funny, smart, and mysterious, I always end up picturing him as James McAvoy. This definitely enhances my reading experience.

I like mystery and historical novels, but I don't usually love them. Somehow, I have come to love the Mary Quinn mysteries. I've read the next novel, *A BODY AT THE TOWER*, which will be released in August, already and it is just as good, if not better, than the first installment. If you have any interest in mysteries, James McAvoy, or kickass girl spies, you need to read this book!

Grade: A+

---

### **Katie says**

Hmmm, I liked this, but it also seemed maybe quite not all there? I'm not sure if I think Mary should've put more pieces together or if I think the book should've had more clues. There was also a bit of Mary concealing stuff from the reader--not terribly so, but it inched near the line of being annoying.

Wish I shipped the ship more, too. It's not a major thread, but I always like my romance.

---

### **Krystle says**

Dude, this book rocked my world in all sorts of ways. Asian-American (Woops sorry, she's Asian-*Canadian* actually) author? Bingo! Asian-ish character? Double bingo! Feisty main character with an even crackalicious chemistry between the two leads? JACKPOT.

My favorite part of the book has to be the interactions between James and Mary. I must've cracked up tons of times from their hilarious banter. They just sizzle in their scenes together. After all, if she meets him in a closet there is bound to be some sparkage going on there. You just want them to have some hot make out scenes to, you know, seal the deal. Ahahaha. Don't mind me, that's just my dirty mind talking.

The plot was fast paced and the mystery yanked me along without letting me take a breather. I just could not stop reading. I loved how she carefully built up aspects of Victorian Era society, because that time period is so intriguing with its inner contradictions and hypocrisy. There's a bit of a feminist pro-attitude tone in the book and it might throw off some people but not me. I've read a lot, *lot* of essays, stories, and plays written from famous authors/advocates from that time period which is filled with dense language and vocabulary that forced me to grab the dictionary quite a few times, heinously long and complex sentences, and opinions and beliefs forcibly stated and shoved down my throat, so I didn't really have any problem with it whatsoever.

There's a bit of suspending belief circumstances; such as there being a secret spy society of females set out

to correct the wrongs and bring justice to the underprivileged, and the fact that Mary gets away with things a bit too easily, but I think it just gives the book a lot more character. Real Victorian society is gritty, depressing, and downright bleak at times, though it was a monumental time of changes and had a huge effect on the conflict of belief. (Don't get me wrong, a lot of good things happened at this time too.) I think by doing these things the author is able to introduce us to Victorian society while also trying to give us the hope that not everything is so horrible, that there's a certain light at the edge of things.

Mostly because in a lot of ways, Victorian society is almost a near reflection of our current society where we can find a lot of common aspects in both, but anyway, the main point is: **THIS BOOK ROCKS!**

I love it! Totally recommended.

---

## **David - proud Gleeman in Branwen's adventuring party says**

*Mary Quinn displays plenty of charm and wit while working as **A Spy In The House**. Sadly, tiresome cliches and one-dimensional supporting characters prevent this good read from becoming a great one!*

It's 1853 in London, England, and 12-year old Mary Quinn has just been sentenced to die! Convicted for thievery, Mary is saved from the gallows pole at the last moment by a mysterious stranger and brought to Miss Scrimshaw's Academy for Girls. But much like Mary herself, the Academy is full of secrets. Mary soon joins a secret agency which trains young women to become detectives and spies so that they can work within a society that foolishly underestimates them. Now Mary has been given her first case, infiltrate a rich merchant's home and learn why his cargo ships keep disappearing. But when Mary's investigation earns her a dangerous new enemy, will she be able to cheat death a second time?

This book's premise sounds amazing, right?!? Unfortunately, the execution suffers right from the very beginning. While some authors make the mistake of taking too long to get to the point, Y.S. Lee has the opposite problem...she barrels through so quickly, it's hard to make a connection with any of the characters! After a brief prologue in which Mary's execution is interrupted by Anne Treleaven from the Academy, Chapter 1 immediately jumps ahead 5 years! In the first chapter, teachers Anne and Felicity reveal to 17 year-old Mary that her performance at the school and her interactions with the other girls has convinced them she is a perfect candidate to be trained for espionage. We have to take their word for it, since we never see any of these events ourselves! Then Lee manages to make the same exact mistake a second time, when Chapter 2 skips past all of Mary's training and jumps right into her first case! All the experiences that have made Mary who she is are completely glossed over. Imagine if the second chapter of Harry Potter's first novel featured him graduating from Hogwarts, and you now understand exactly what reading this book is like!

While Lee thankfully stops skipping past long periods of time in between chapters, narrative problems still persist once Mary begins her first case. In order to infiltrate the home of shipping magnate (and chief suspect) Henry Thorold, Mary gets a job working as a companion for Henry's teen-age daughter Angelica. It doesn't take long for all of the people Mary encounters to fall into their one-note roles. For example, since the stereotype of the spoiled, bratty heiress has been done to death, it would have been nice if Angelica had been given a bit more depth upon her introduction...instead, she immediately proceeds to carry on like this...

The other characters don't fare much better, all of them are pretty much shallow and one-dimensional. Even Anne & Felicity seemed hollow in the beginning, but I had chalked that up to how quickly Lee had moved past their segment. But as the story moves on, Mary is the only character that displays any real depth at all, and even that isn't handled very well. In fact, most of Mary's traits aren't evident from her actions, but merely from what other people tell us about her! Early on, Mary encounters James Easton, the younger brother of one of Henry Thorold's potential investors. By Chapter 4, (**spoiler insta-love alert**) James is already infatuated with Mary...and from then on, many of the chapters are told from his point of view (silly me, when the banner on the book's cover said "A Mary Quinn Mystery", I just assumed that meant Mary would get to be the star of her own book)! Because of this second narrative voice, we constantly have James telling us about who Mary is, instead of Mary showing us for herself. James so often comments about how feisty and independent Mary is, it sure would have been nice to see more of her in action!

However, despite these problems, I did find myself enjoying much of this book (once I got past the really clunky ramp-up portion). While Mary and James quickly fall into cliched rom-com roles, I can't deny that I often laughed at the witty banter between them. And when Mary was *finally* given a chance to shine, she did so brilliantly. In the book's best moments, Mary is revealed to be a very sympathetic and endearing character. Also, the overall mystery was a nice change of pace from the usual whodunit style. While the characters themselves could be boring, I can't say the same for the mystery itself, as Lee throw in enough twists and turns to keep things interesting. Although the mystery is sometimes hampered by Lee's tendency to fall back on tired old cliches...one evildoer even launches into a monologue so hackneyed, it would make even the corniest of James Bond villains blush!

If you've just read something really heavy and want your next book to be light and fluffy, then you might have fun with "*A Spy in the House*". But if you want a deeper reading experience that invokes any kind of real emotion, I'm afraid you'll have to look elsewhere. Disappointing, since so much more could have been done with such a promising concept.

---

## Paige Bookdragon says

I thought this is a mystery, action packed book with a dash of romance.

The mystery?

I didn't feel anything.

The action?

Me:I want some dirty fist fight and "running around in London while being chased by the damn crooks" moment.

The book: LOL!No!

The romance?



?Give me love! Give me love!?

---

### **Tara Chevestt says**

A must read for fans of historical fiction, mystery, and strong heroines. Picture Nancy Drew living in Victorian England and you have the new spunky Mary Lang aka Mary Quinn.

An orphan destined for the gallows, Mary is rescued by a school for girls that is an agency on the side. Her first assignment: Pose as a lady's companion and extract as much information as she can about stolen goods from India. We meet an interesting cast of characters as Mary becomes embroiled in more than the bargained for. The ladies of the house have mysterious comings and goings. Perhaps an illicit love affair or two is in the works? The sexy yet frustratingly arrogant, James Easton, keeps popping up at the worst moments, in wardrobes and broken into warehouses. Also Mary suspects a young boy is following her about, spying on the spy.

While all these goings on are occurring, Mary's own family history begins to come to light and may even have some bearing on the present case. Either way, Mary must come to terms with who she is.

A fun read and it's staying on my shelf, eagerly awaiting the rest of the series.

For those that are interested, the author has a great contest going on her blog. Finish this sentence and be entered for a prize. "If I were a spy..." See my entry below if interested and join yourself for the fun of it!

"If I were a spy... I certainly wouldn't be a "Bond" girl, that's for sure. No "Octopussy" or "Holly Goodhead" name for me.. I would have a code name like "The Ball Collector." I would wear all black and take my dog, Lola, a black pekingnese with me everywhere I went. She is a an excellent judge of character. She is also quite fierce despite her size (14 pounds) and she would detain the bad guys by holding on to their pant legs and growling in the brief amount of time it takes me to grab my 9mm (or my pruning shears, whatever the job requires...gotta earn that code name!). When not spying and nabbing bad guys, Lola and I would be cruising around in our Aston Martin. Oh and every now and then I would enlist some "aide" from Paul Walker."

---

### **Sharon says**

I like it. It was interesting. I love the spying and espionage aspect. Also, I have never seen a heroine with a Chinese heritage (she's mixed) in a Victoria era novel before.

The love interest, James, is cool too. I like the bantering.

I don't really have much to say. I like it, but also I can't say that it knocked my socks off. I did get bored at some parts.

I am hoping to see great developments in the later books. **3 stars**

Things that you might want to know (**WARNING: Spoilers below**)

Happy/satisfying ending? (view spoiler)

Love triangle? Cheating? Angst level? Other things to note? (view spoiler)

Tears-worthy? (view spoiler)

Humor? (view spoiler)

Favorite scenes? (view spoiler)

What age level would be appropriate? (view spoiler)

---

## **Nafiza says**

This read like a dream. Yes, I said it. Now if you are anything like me and your bibliophilic life started with raunchy mills and boons (Australian and Kiwi editions) and then widened to include historical romance (which were just as raunchy but did teach me a lot about Bonaparte) you will have some level of familiarity with historical novels boasting of a strong heroine and an intriguing hero. This, I hasten to add, is not to imply that *The Agency* is a romance novel. Oh no, far from it. Or that there are heaving bosoms involved...well, there might be but they're certainly not the heroine's. Anyway, what I'm trying to say, albeit not very well, is that first book in the trilogy asserts its position not just as a YA Historical fiction (rare in its genre) but as, dare I say it, brilliant YA Historical fiction.

Let me count the reasons I say this.

There is a fluidity in Ms. Lee's writing that, quite frankly, grips you by the collar and jerks you into the novel and holds you captive and enthralled until you are unaware of the time that has passed and the work that you have left undone. Her writing is on par with authors that have several novels under their belt and there is no sense of awkwardness in her prose that is so common with debuting authors. You have to love smooth writing, you guys.

Her characterizations are bloody awesome. Mary Quinn is by no means perfect and it is her imperfections that, ironically, make her perfect. The beginning grips you with the bleakness of her fortune, with the depths of despair that have led her to that point and the ending leaves you bemused by the distance she has traveled within the scope of the book alone. I like the fact that Mary is human enough to be relatable to me. That she can give in to human vanity and despite having had to grow up so fast, still retain that sense of childishness, that intrinsic immaturity that is so common to people of her age. Not that I mean anything negative by that. It's just that she reads like the teenager she is despite being put in a situation where she could have been written like a woman in her twenties. I like that.

James Easton is delicious as the unwilling hero of the tale. Not that he takes over the tale entirely. No. We see glimpses of the story through his eyes and what this does is deepen our appreciation of Mary and the entire novel. James is not as fleshed out as Mary is but that's okay. He is defined enough that you can, through his unwilling fascination with Mary Quinn, structure the hierarchy in the story and place the social status of the various characters. He also spices up the narrative because the romantic tension between him and Mary Quinn is enough to make a girl swoon.

The other characters are also interestingly hewed. I love it when the author spends enough time to create original characters no matter how small their part in the narrative is instead of using stereotyped, stock characters. This shows that the author has imagined the world she has created down to the last detail. And furthermore, that she respects the intelligence of her readers.

The narrative brings up some very interesting points. The role of women in the society at the time the novel is set in is one of the things discussed. Their limited freedom and the stereotypes they lived under. And what breaking away from these stereotypes and expectations would mean to a woman. What interested me more than that, however, is Mary's internal conflict about her mixed heritage. In fact, this is one of the most interesting things about the novel. How she addresses these issues and whether they will influence the manner in which she lives her life and the decisions she makes for the future is one of the reasons I'm looking forward to the next two books in the trilogy.

So the verdict? Read the book. It has everything a good book needs and is everything a wonderful book should be. I recommend it to everyone who likes good literature.

---

## **Wendy Darling says**

I really, really wanted to like this book. I'm a fan of novels set during the Victorian era, as I've always been very interested in how thinking, reasoning people-especially women--manage to survive in such a repressive society. It's the same reason I like Jane Austen novels, because the yearning for connection with other human beings is so often at odds with the strict customs of the day.

There's a tendency now in books for authors to just ignore those rules and just barrel forward with whatever story or agenda they may want to promote. I know that it's difficult from a modern standpoint to write about a spirited heroine without bending some rules here and there, but it's annoying that so many authors go ahead and just plain break them. Don't get me wrong--the author clearly has done a lot of research into the time period, and I believe it was also her educational specialty. But I find it tiresome that girls in historical novels keep getting put into breeches or constantly talk back at their superiors or go out and linger unattended on the streets. I know, I know, Mary is supposed to be a detective and whatnot, but girls of this time and in her position would never dream of behaving in this way. Showing courage and spirit and passion when extraordinary circumstances call for it is one thing, but to blithely move about everyday life as if expressing your wishes and opinions is commonplace is just plain wrong for this time period. If this is something an author wants to do, he/she is better off writing a steampunk novel or a story set in an alternate universe. I would argue that there must be a way for a gifted writer to make the book more true to the period of the time while keeping the spirit of adventure alive.

The writing itself is something that bothered me, too. The language of the time is fairly formal and specific, with a distinct wording and rhythm of its own. I just didn't feel convinced by the tone that was struck here, nor were the plotting or the mystery or the characters particularly unique. I happened to have the follow-up book from the library and I skimmed through that one as well to see if it was any more engaging, but for me, unfortunately, these books just don't work.

Readers who want a great Victorian mystery that holds true to the customs of the time would do better to try out *The Poisoned House*, *The Case of the Baker Street Irregular* (young readers) or *The Cater Street Hangman*.

---

## Rachel says

Very disappointed in this one as the premise was quite promising. Set in Victorian London, a 17 year old girl goes undercover as a paid ladies companion in a wealthy family to uncover a smuggling scheme. The girl is a student of 'the agency' - a group that takes poor, smart girls and turns them into spies for hire.

One of the things that really caught my attention about this book is that the author has a Phd in Victorian literature and culture. I expected the book to 'ring-true' in terms of the place and people. It did not. The dialogue (in particular) and behavior of the characters all seemed very, very modern (annoyingly so).

Also, while this is marketed as a mystery, it is really more romance than mystery. The plot of the mystery is REALLY thin and a bit on the silly side. Most of the book has the heroine and her beau arguing for the sake of arguing (or for the sake of romantic tension?). I could see the plot twists coming a mile away and there were LOTS of cliches. There were also some really incredible coincidences (The heroine gets an assignment with the one family in London that can lead her to the one person in the world who can give her information on her father - But it's just a coincidence?)

The theme of the book (women are better off pursuing their dreams rather than getting married and having babies) isn't subtle. I got sick of hearing about it. The only married woman in the story is shown as a horrible person and the single girls who run from marriage are all heroic. (Um... Okay...)

The one thing I did like is the heroine's ethnicity. I wished that had been explored more.

---

## Shantelle says

An interesting mystery story! I enjoy a good mystery in an intriguing historical setting - such as the Victorian era, in this case. \*smiles\* And though they were rather rude and infuriating at times, I do like both Mary and James and want to see more of them! There was a smidgen of romance, but mostly arguing, between our two main characters.

Some minor language and misuses of God's name. Also, mentions of mistresses and affairs. If I ever collected this series, I'd have to do a bit of whiting-out. Nothing extreme though.

I look forward to reading the next book in THE AGENCY series by Y.S. Lee!

---

## Minli says

Oh, the Agency. I read you in hopes of reading a version of the Gallagher Girls (spy school!) in the Victorian period (petticoats!), but alas. Here are the ways in which you disappointed me:

1. You play Victorian dress-up, but really, you're a modern girl at heart who likes to swear and call boys by their first names. Also, being a "lady"--I do not think it means what you think it means.

2. I was teased completely by Mary being half-Chinese, but then Lee spoke very little to that experience. That's one of my main problems with books set during this time. When I look for diversity, I either get a completely sanitized version of it, or nothing at all.

3. The book seemed to be a collection of scenes, with the solution to the mystery all infodumped in a few paragraphs. There are way more elegant ways to write mysteries!

Honestly, this book was fluff. Probably satisfying fluff when one's in the mood, but I've read better developed stuff. Nothing really managed to pack an emotional punch--betrayal, anger, remorse, etc. all felt quite superficial. There're some nice shades of depth to Angelica and Mrs. Thorold, but the only thing that could have saved this book would be more kissing (James is definitely my type--a tad too charming, shows disdain for social niceties, incisive, brooding and actually man of trade as he is an architect) but there wasn't enough of it. Sigh.

This will sound like I'm jumping ahead a year, but I would recommend Gail Carriger's upcoming novels, *Etiquette* and *Espionage* over this for a similar flavour; it is a) more tongue-in-cheek, b) not professed to be historical fiction, and c) way funnier.

---

## **Sesana says**

I like the basic concept of *The Agency*. A group of female spies in Victorian England! It sounds fabulous. A woman posing as a servant, a governess, for example, or a lady's maid or companion, could overhear and quietly collect a lot of things. So I came in ready to love this series.

Unfortunately, Mary Quinn goes directly from being informed that the Agency exists to arriving at her first job. She is apparently given "intensive" training in between, but we don't see even a moment of it. And I don't remember Mary thinking about her training much. It's a shame, because it's a huge missed opportunity. I would have very much liked to have seen that training. And since Mary does spend quite a bit of time screwing up in her first assignment, I'm left to believe that the Agency's training and selection procedures aren't quite as strict as they should be.

I don't doubt that Lee does know a fair bit about and has done some research into Victorian England. And times, it shows. But Mary herself reads more like a modern girl than a Victorian girl in a delicate situation. Her behavior (including arguing politics with a guest of her employer) just didn't ring true for the period. This won't bother some readers, but it did sometimes take me out of the story.

But I think those two things might not have bothered me as much if I liked Mary more. It's not that I disliked her. I was sympathetic towards her and her circumstances, but not attached to her. She just didn't stop to think quite as much as I like to see in my heroines. A shame, because I really did want to like this series.

---