



Fair Game

Stephen Leather

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The eighth book in the bestselling Dan 'Spider' Shepherd series.

Kidnapping is one of the cruellest crimes - lives are put at risk for cold, hard cash. But when Somali pirates seize the crew of a yacht off the coast of Africa, they bite off more than they can chew.

One of the hostages has friends in high places and Spider Shepherd is put on the case. He goes deep undercover in an audacious plan to bring an end to the pirate gang's reign of terror.

But as Shepherd closes in on his quarry he realises that there's much more at stake than the lives of the hostages and that the pirates are involved in a terrorist plot that will strike at the heart of London.

Fair Game Details

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From Reader Review Fair Game for online ebook

Phil Altimas says

what a great book, Somali pirates seize the crew of a yacht off the coast of Africa and they have friends in government, spider is put onto a ship that they know is targeted by the pirates. but there is much more to it than that

well written and well paced
a great read

Erin says

I adore Stephen Leather books and this one doesn't disappoint. A great modern plot with Somali pirates, with Dan Shepherd living up to his usual hero status.

James says

Again, this is Stephen Leather at his best. He normally produces books that make most authors look sub-standard, but this and its predecessor have blown even his standard away. Maybe it's because the books I have been reading around them have been, shall we say, disappointing. So maybe that makes me see these in an even better light than previously. But even if that were the case I will stand by this; these books, this series, is amazing.

When I reviewed the first book in this series I claimed it reminded me of McNab's work, as if that shows you how good his books were that they'd be even considered equal. Now I'd have to say that in many ways this series far outstrips McNab's. Easily.

Five Stars

Plot: Five Stars

Somali Pirates. Terrorist Plot. RIRA targeting his family. A ghost from the past. Further development on the Liam Front. Spider's step over the line. These are just the taglines of the main aspects of the plot, and if I could really be bothered I could come up with many, many more. This book was awash with action, intrigue, human emotion, hard-hitting questions, drama and much, much more. Very few books manage to pack as much into their covers as this one does and not make it seem stuffed and forced. Simply amazing.

I loved the parts with Katie as I found the whole emotion that was conjured up was just brilliant to behold and really helped add to the atmosphere of the book. You could argue that she had a little bit too much time, but one of the aspects of this series that I love so much is the way he reveals the stark nature of the world to us. These scenes played perfectly into that.

I also loved the danger to Spider's family. When Katra put the key into the ignition I thought I was going to die. For an author to manage to conjure that much emotion up over, what is in some respects, a secondary

character... wow. Seriously, I didn't turn the page for a few moments as my mind raced through all the implications.

And the time on the ship... action junkies, you'll just love this. Imagine Under Siege, just compressed and made ten times cooler with a much better lead actor. Pure adrenaline and brilliant writing.

My favourite part though was the very end. The way that spider crossed that line - and by agreeing with him you crossed it too - was stunning. In fact, I thought the last line of the whole book was the best ending I've seen in a long time.

Anyway. In between these landmark moments for me, this book was a non-stop adrenaline fuelled, action packed, mind numbing broadside of brilliance. You were picked up and never let go. I read this in seven hours straight; I just couldn't put it down. One of the top five plots in the genre, ever - and even then, most of the others are Leather's anyway.

Characters: Five Stars

As I said in my previous review, one of the main draws this series has for me is the stark, gritty realism that pervades everything in it. This is perfectly enhanced by the characters that have been crafted to fill it.

Dan 'Spider' Shepherd is the main character and is, simply put, startlingly deep and complex. He deals with a high sense of morality as he battles in a world of dark grey and light black. We see, in this and the last book, how he deals with a threat to his family and how far he is willing to go to protect them. In this book he goes even further than the last book, and the scenes that it created were simply some of the best I've read. But what really sells his character is the way that he comes to the decision. You see and feel his mind working over the situation, how he comes to the conclusion and actions that he does. And at the end you can't help but agree with him as he crosses that line. But, despite the really dark things that he does, you see the good in him, the simple rightness of what he does. Throughout the series you have seen him become darker and darker, until now he is killing left right and centre. But even then, even when he crosses that line into the pitch black, you see his goodness. He is a battleground of good and evil acts, dark and light, right and wrong. He is one of the most complex characters that I have ever read. He is a good man doing bad things - or is he? He makes you question what is truly bad, and that is a quality no other character has ever had that I've read.

And the rest of the cast are equally deep. Liam and his Father's relationship is so real, so realistic in every aspect. How he deals with Dan's absences and how he comes to a conclusion is heartbreaking, and yet, amazingly mature. What's more, you come to care for these characters and everything that they are. When Katra puts that key in the ignition, you will realise how much you have come to care for both Liam and Katra, how they have become a part of you, and how much they have wormed their way into Dan. At that moment you can see how they aren't just single characters, but are real people who are defined by the people around them and how, without them, Dan's world will fall apart and vice versa. Amazing.

I really can't say how great these characters are. All of them. If I really tried this would be an even larger, more unwieldy review.

Writing: Five Stars

I'm actually going to copy and paste this part from the previous review, because it sums up my opinions so perfectly any re-write I did wouldn't be accurate enough and would be a re-write for a re-writes sake.

The whole writing is, in a word, captivating. I read this, straight, for 7 hours. That's right, seven hours straight. Stopping only for food, drink and the call of nature. This book was addictive. The pacing was brilliant, so every time you thought it was slowing down to relax you, you were picked up and thrown a mile

by another, brilliant scene. The dialogue was, frankly, amazing - speaking so realistically into your head. And the narrative... well, just brilliant.

Stephen Leather really knows how to write. Of that there can be no doubt.

Overview: Five Stars

I will admit that the previous book probably has the edge on this one, but this is still one of the best books this genre has ever created, and with it Leather shows why he is one of my favourite authors of all time. It is simply amazing; a fantastic plot, with deep complex characters, written with a deft and compelling hand. Full of action, intrigue, pace, emotion, thought provoking scenes and ideas... it's got everything and then some.

Have Fun Reading.

Meghalai Sadasivam says

Extremely good and solid story

Big Bertha says

If you like action and violence there's plenty of it in this book. It starts out with an undercover operation within the Real IRA not going according to plan and Dan 'Spider' Shepherd beating a hasty retreat back to the UK mainland. MI5 Intel have been keeping tabs on 'Crazy Boy', a powerful man in the London Somali community who they believe to be behind shipping that is being hijacked and the crew taken hostage off the coast of Somalia. When the crew from a private yacht being sailed from Dubai to Sydney are taken and Intel is received that a large container ship has been targeted, Spider is placed on board as a consultant from head office, ready and waiting for the pirates when they arrive. The workings of a big container ship was obviously extremely well researched and to a certain extent it was relevant to the story to understand the layout and workings but I felt the storyline dragged because of this without much being gained.

On a positive note the portrayal of the Somali kidnappers was really well done, their almost childlike erratic behaviour and violent treatment of their captives was truly quite scary. As always the scene setting and locations was very well researched and easily visualised.

Not my favourite book in the series, at times it seemed that Spider was the only operative available to MI5 as he dashed from scenario to scenario. Don't get me wrong this was not a bad book by any means; I've read all of the series so far and will continue to do so. I was torn between giving it a 3 or 4 star rating, and settled on a 4 as parts of it, in particular the portrayal of the Somali kidnappers was really well done.

Jeanette says

I liked this, the latest outing for Dan 'Spider' Shepherd. The book takes us on a journey involving Somalian Pirates (Forget Johnny Depp, these pirates mean business), Irish terrorists with a grudge , and Muslim fanatics. As usual , the story builds and builds and ends with a gripping finale, a feat that many writers can't seem to manage these days.

The next Spider Shepherd book is due in July, I can't wait

Simon Gelling says

Good book

Nick Brett says

One has to admire the author's bravery. He has taken his popular British Police undercover operative "Spider" Shepherd and moved him into the UK Intelligence Services. Partly, I think, it is because the controls and political correctness of the Police, did not give sufficient wriggle room to take his character where Mr Leather wanted to go. So now Shepherd and his boss are with MI5 and the story starts in explosive fashion as Spider breaks cover in Ireland to halt the execution of another undercover agent. This action will have consequences for Spider as he moves onto his next assignment.

Spider finds that the new world is different, but the problems that made his previous role difficult still exist. Spider does speak for "everyman" in his frustrations that sometimes we are our own worst enemies in that overly liberal attitudes create many problems and then dilute our ability to resolve them. So it is a slightly jaded and frustrated Spider that goes undercover to identify how Somali pirates are identifying target ships and then a situation arises where Spider needs to get a lot closer to the action, not knowing that the fall-out from his previous assignment is still slowly catching up with him.

Stephen Leather's bravery in letting Spider evolve into a new role and reflecting changes in society does not detract from another winning thriller. This balances plot and action perfectly and while there are references to the previous books and characters, they will not stop you enjoying this if you haven't read them. Having said that, this is a great series that deserves being read from the very start.

Rachel Amphlett says

Oh yes! Dan Shepherd is back with a vengeance in Fair Game. I was slightly disappointed with Rough Justice (previous book in the series) but this one is back to Stephen Leather's usual fast-paced, action packed story-telling. This was also the first of Stephen's books I've bought as a Kindle edition.

Rachel Amphlett
Author of White Gold
www.rachelamphlett.com

Midnight says

Spider spins another thrilling web of action & intrigue!

Dan (Spider) Shepherd works for MI5 and 'Fair Game' is the latest in the present series of eight tales of his undercover escapades.

The story begins with Spider working undercover in Ireland. After a very brief sojourn at home, his next assignment involves Somali Pirates who have seized a yacht complete with five crewmembers. Intelligence garnered by MI5 suggests plans are also afoot to seize a container ship. The pirates have connections in London so their activities have implications and possible repercussions in the UK.

Familiar characters are still in the background: Spider's son, Liam; the au pair Katra; his MI5 controller, Charlotte Button; and psychologist, Caroline Stockmann.

I have long admired the authors astonishing ability to write stories that capture a reader's attention and the Dan Shepherd series is one I have followed with enthusiasm since the publication of the first in the series, *Hard Landing*. The author has the knack of transporting his readers into a carefully crafted world where they can immerse themselves in Spider's exploits.

The scenarios are bang up to date with such well researched, topical story lines that it makes these fictional works more than plausible. Combine this with the talent to correctly pace the narrative and deftly weave necessary detail and explanations into the story and you begin to understand why the books are such hugely successful bestsellers.

Personally, I have thoroughly enjoyed all of the Spider Shepherd books but think 'Fair Game' is right up there with the best and reinforces Stephen Leather's international bestseller status.

Each of the books can be read as standalone novels – but be warned, once you've enjoyed this, you'll want to read all in the series.

If you only read one book this year, I would emphatically recommend this; if I could award five stars plus, I would certainly do so.

The order for the series and the dates first published are:

Hard Landing (2004); *Soft Target* (2005); *Cold Kill* (2006); *Hot Blood* (2007); *Dead Men* (2008); *Live Fire* (2009); *Rough Justice* (2010).

I believe all have now been released to download as ebooks.

Monnie says

Finally, I've made my way through eight of Stephen Leather's series featuring Dan "Spider" Shepherd; the only one remaining is the newest, *False Friends*, which was released this past August (and I have yet to get). It's been a great ride, and while some of the books are better than others - as is the case with most authors who write a series of books based on a single character - I can honestly say I've enjoyed each and every one.

In this one Shepherd, who's now with MI5 but continues to work for the same boss, the very capable Charlotte Button, finishes up an undercover assignment that goes awry - blowing his cover and opening up the possibility that he, his son Liam and au pair Katra could be tracked down by Irish militants. A new assignment, though, means there's no time to worry about such matters.

As usual, Shepherd *does* find time to express his conflict over the fact that increasingly, law enforcement's

hands are tied as a result of over-emphasis on politically correctness and protecting human rights that the bad guys and gals rarely get the punishment they deserve. Besides that, he still wrestles with guilt over not being there for his son, who has suddenly decided he wants to go away to boarding school.

But of course, an assignment interrupts his thoughts, and he's assigned first to work in a boring office job in an effort to infiltrate a Somali money-laundering operation. That accomplished, he expects to get in some quality time at home, but alas, that's not in the cards now, either. Instead, he's sent to sea on a huge cargo ship that's thought to be the target of pirates who are actively capturing ships and their crews and passengers, then demanding that the ship-owners pay large ransoms in exchange for the safe release of the prisoners. It's become big business on the high seas, and the basic plan is to catch these particular pirates in the act.

There's plenty of action, plenty of murder and mayhem and even a couple of big surprises along the way - one that threatens to change Shepherd's outlook on life permanently.

Neil says

Book 8 in the Dan 'Spider' Shepherd series. I am very pleased to say that unlike many such books of this type, this series has never felt stale. Since the beginning of the series, the reader has followed Spider's career path since leaving the SAS. He has worked as an undercover Police Officer, been a member of the Serious Organised Crime Agency, and in this book he now works for MI5, the British Secret Service.

The whole book is fast paced, but everything is well told. The Real IRA feature, as do Somali pirates, perhaps there appears no obvious link but with careful writing everything slots neatly into place. Some characters and events from previous books in the series are revisited, which helps give an extra twist along the way.

Michael Parker says

Great thriller writer. Knows his craft. Spider Shepherd fits the bill as a hard man, the kind of alter ego many male readers might aspire to, although preferring to let Shepherd dish out and take the punishment. I rank Leather alongside the top writers of this genre.

Sue says

It seems to me that sequels seldom match up to the originals in either books or movies, and "heroes" quickly become dated, with a few exceptions - DeMille's John Corey and Leather's Dan Shepherd. Amazingly, 8 books in, I'm not yet bored with "Spider". I'd recently read a Wilbur Smith pirate adventure and wasn't keen to read another, but this was so much better, perhaps because of the clever inter-weaving of 3 story lines. The only thing which always seems a little stilted to me is Spider's relationship with his son, but perhaps that's inevitable in an "action adventure".

Pauline Dawson says

Stephen Leather is one of my all time favourite authors and Fair Game didn't dissappoint. Dan 'Spider'

Shepherd is up and running from the first page and the action and story is full on and fast paced. In this novel he is up against Somali Pirates who are holding hostages.
