

In Over His Head

Canadian consul in diplomatic debacle

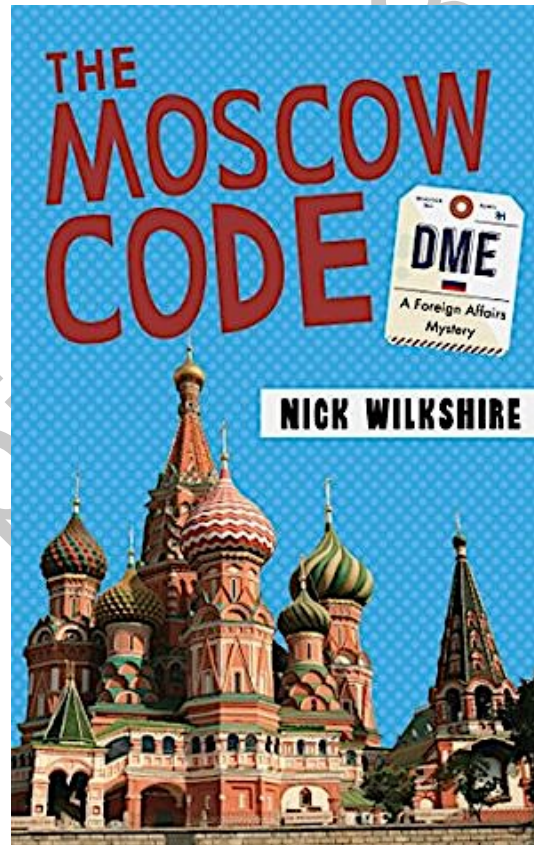
Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

After an eventful first posting with External Affairs in Havana, neophyte Canadian diplomat Charlie Hillier has been moved to Moscow and assigned to be the embassy consul. He's scarcely arrived when, emerging from a bar, he is confronted by a pair of local cops who ask him for his passport. When Charlie discovers that his pocket has been picked and his diplomatic passport and government-issued Blackberry are missing, he lands in Butyrka Prison overnight. Not the best beginning in his new job.

The experience isn't a total loss, however, for while he waits for his release Charlie encounters Steve Liepa, a thirty-something writer and fellow Canadian being held for possession of marijuana. Liepa says he's innocent, and that he's been denied any contact with his embassy. He implores Charlie to look into his case when he's released. Since that's a large part of Charlie's consular job description, he can hardly refuse.

So begins Charlie Hillier's introduction to his new posting. It's not long before he's caught up in the intrigue underlying plans by a local shaker-and-mover to persuade the Canadian government to relocate



from their present (and inadequate) digs to a major new building complex in Moscow; the man behind it is reputed to influence much of what goes on in the city, and in doing due diligence on the potential move Charlie comes to realize that in the convoluted machinations of the Russian business world, everything is connected to everything else. But his efforts to help Liepa to be released from prison hit a wall when he is

informed that Steve Liepa has hanged himself in his cell. Welcome to Moscow, Charlie.

When Steve's sister Sophie arrives from Canada expecting Charlie to have her brother released from prison, it falls to him to break the news. She's desolated, of course, but determined to get to the bottom of Steve's death. Although they're up against the Russian bureaucracy, Charlie discovers information that connects some of the dots in Liepa's recent past in a larger picture that puts both his and Sophie's lives in danger. Ottawa is looking better all the time.

The Moscow Code is the second in Canadian author Nick Wilkshire's

entertaining new crime series featuring the earnest but hapless diplomat Charlie Hillier. While Wilkshire's debut novel, *Escape to Havana*, often focused on the lighter side of diplomatic life, in *The Moscow Code* the author has noticeably cranked up the action—and the suspense. The tense atmosphere is anchored in a gripping plot, and both benefit from Wilkshire's informed account of modern-day Russia. This is a book that will appeal to a broad range of readers, from fans of action thrillers to those simply seeking a well-constructed and entertaining look at a nation that few outsiders understand.

Previously posted on the *Ottawa Review of Books*, March 2018.

Jim Napier is a professional crime-fiction reviewer and novelist based in Canada. His book reviews and author interviews have been featured in several Canadian newspapers as well as on such websites as *Spinetingler Magazine*, *The Rap Sheet*, *January magazine*, *Reviewing the Evidence*, *Crime Time*, *Shots Magazine*, *the Montreal Review of Books*, the *Ottawa Review of Books*, and *Amazon.com*, as well as on his own award-winning site, <http://deadlydiversions.com>. His debut crime novel *Legacy* was published in the Spring of 2017, and the second in the series, *Ridley's War*, is scheduled for release in the Fall of 2018. He can be reached at jnapier@deadlydiversions.com

