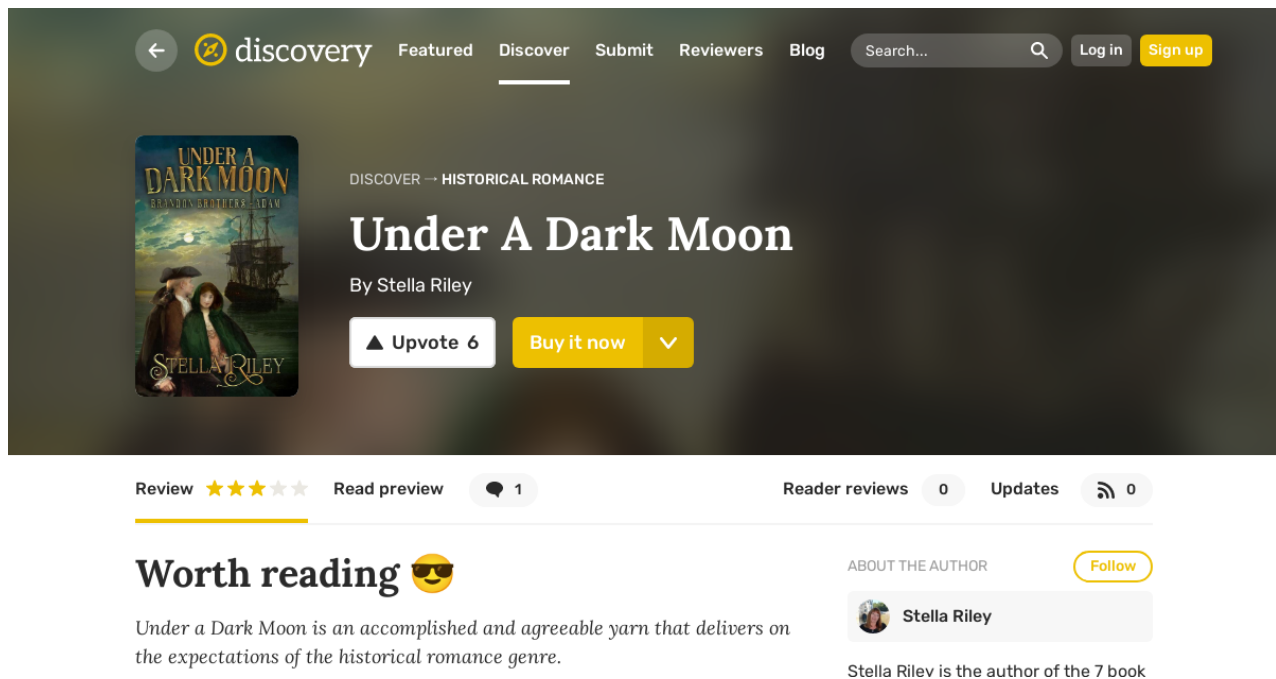


Under A Dark Moon

reedsy.com/discovery/book/under-a-dark-moon-stella-riley

Amanda Ellison



The screenshot shows the Reedsy.com interface for the book 'Under A Dark Moon' by Stella Riley. At the top, there is a navigation bar with 'discovery' and links for 'Featured', 'Discover', 'Submit', 'Reviewers', and 'Blog'. A search bar and 'Log in'/'Sign up' buttons are also present. The book cover is displayed on the left, and the title 'Under A Dark Moon' is prominently featured in the center. Below the title, it says 'By Stella Riley' and 'DISCOVER — HISTORICAL ROMANCE'. There are buttons for 'Upvote 6' and 'Buy it now'. At the bottom of the screenshot, there is a 'Worth reading' badge with a sunglasses emoji, a 'Read preview' button, and a 'Reader reviews 0' indicator. The 'ABOUT THE AUTHOR' section shows a profile for Stella Riley with a 'Follow' button and a note that she is the author of 7 books.

Master swordsman and eligible bachelor Adam Brandon undertakes a covert mission to expose a smuggling operation – and win the heart of the tale’s wilful heroine – in this historical romance.

The novel opens in Paris, where the mysterious Goddard eyes Adam’s potential for espionage and pursues him as a recruit to the equally oblique “M Section” (12). Despite Adam’s “icily sarcastic” (12) demeanour and “chilly courtesy” (15), his interest is piqued by the prospect of such “cloak-and-dagger stuff” (15). The role sees Adam travel to London where he undergoes extensive training – think Georgian-era James Bond – and encounters adamantine singleton and fellow M Section member, Camilla (Millie) Edgerton-Foxe. Following a crushing betrayal by her husband-to-be, the defensive Millie wears her single status like a suit of armour and views all men with scepticism. Enter Adam, and cue verbal sparring and witty exchanges á la Shakespeare’s Beatrice and Benedick. For seasoned fans of historical romance, the narrative signpost couldn’t be pointing the way any more clearly – predictability that is as familiar and reassuring as it is clichéd. When Millie insists on retreating into spinsterhood at her family home, Dragon Hall, Adam is charged with accompanying her. It is here, on this marshy stretch of Kent coastline, that he is to discharge his assignment. A gradually thawing Millie reluctantly joins forces with the protagonist, realising that “his morals [are] as good as his manners” (155). One’s interest is maintained in the action via a certain element of tension and suspense: Is Millie’s erstwhile younger brother Guy, heir to Dragon Hall, somehow involved in the illegal goings-on? Can the pointed and guarded silence of the locals ever be penetrated? Will Adam’s legendary swordsmanship be called into action? Will hero and heroine turn out to be the “very effective team” (15) Goddard prophesied? Across 37

chapters, Riley judiciously unfolds an accretion of detail, expounded with the confidence of an author who knows her niche. The tropes of the genre do make an appearance – for instance, there are references to “firm, perfectly-proportioned torsos” and “neat, well-defined muscle” (174); then we have the female protagonist whose defences are ultimately infiltrated by the male love interest. But there is an element of tongue-in-cheek humour to counteract the platitudes: Millie’s references to fainting and having the “vapours” (174) at the sight of male flesh could even be interpreted as subversive. These characters are somewhat more hinterland than the usual stereotypes of historical fiction.

An accomplished and agreeable yarn that delivers on the expectations of the historical romance genre.