



# The Spy Who Came in from the Cold

*John le Carré*

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## **The Spy Who Came in from the Cold** John le Carré

In this classic, John le Carre's third novel and the first to earn him international acclaim, he created a world unlike any previously experienced in suspense fiction. With unsurpassed knowledge culled from his years in British Intelligence, le Carre brings to light the shadowy dealings of international espionage in the tale of a British agent who longs to end his career but undertakes one final, bone-chilling assignment. When the last agent under his command is killed and Alec Leamas is called back to London, he hopes to come in from the cold for good. His spymaster, Control, however, has other plans. Determined to bring down the head of East German Intelligence and topple his organization, Control once more sends Leamas into the fray -- this time to play the part of the dishonored spy and lure the enemy to his ultimate defeat.

## **The Spy Who Came in from the Cold Details**

Date : Published June 1st 1984 by Bantam (first published September 1963)

ISBN : 9780553238259

Author : John le Carré

Format : Mass Market Paperback 219 pages

Genre : Fiction, Thriller, Mystery, Spy Thriller, Espionage, Classics

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# From Reader Review The Spy Who Came in from the Cold for online ebook

## Bill Kerwin says

I am of two minds now that I have finished *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold* for the first time: I am irritated at myself for having postponed the pleasure of reading this magnificent book for so many years, and yet I am exhilarated and excited too, marked by this unqualified encounter with greatness.

I certainly *was* stupid all these years, for I did not read this book—at least in part—because I considered it “just a spy novel” (albeit a superb one), and the “spy novel”—at least since Ian Fleming ruined it—is not one of my favorite genres. But *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold* is only “just a spy novel” in the sense that *Moby Dick* and “The Secret Sharer” are “just sea tales” or “The Turn of the Screw” and “Afterward” are “just ghost stories.” Sure, they fulfill the requirements of their genres. But they are much—oh, so much—more.

In the course of this tale of a complex double-agent operation, which he tells in a style that somehow combines both cold rage and white heat, Le Carre reveals the heartlessness of British Intelligence—and, by implication, of *all* intelligence systems—which will not hesitate to crush the innocent and betray its own in pursuit of secrecy and success. No matter whose side they are on, or what their particular goals may be, there can be no heroes in this dirty, duplicitous game.

I do not think of other spy novels when I think of *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold*. Instead I think of the great writers of the English language: Conrad (the bitter isolation of the characters), Koestler (the fierce subtlety of the interrogations), and Orwell (the bleak vision of the state).

And yet—this is part of what makes the book great—*The Spy Who Came in From the Cold* is an excellent spy story too, with an intricate plot which will keep you guessing all the way to the end. Yes, Le Carre offers the reader of spy stories everything he could wish for.

Except a hero.

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## Agnieszka says

Le Carre’s style is quite recognizable. Economical in words, rough, laconic. Intricate plot, agents, double agents, cat-and-mouse game. Feelings of burnout, cynicism and hopelessness. Atmosphere of a constant threat and fatigue, melancholic gray London, claustrophobic East Berlin. Everything written in harsh almost impersonal prose what only deepens the feeling of coldness in human relations.

*The Spy Who Came In from the Cold* takes place in the time of cold war and we’re following the actions of Alec Leamas, a British agent who having lose his best spy behind the Iron Curtain returns to East Berlin with last job. Once again we meet our old friends: George Smiley, Peter Guillam and Control; though they are not playing the leading roles here. You will not find here striking chases and gunfights, do not seek here a clear distinction between good and evil, you won’t get here in the end an easy consolation. Do know that people

are only pawns on History's chessboard. Prepare yourself that sometimes there is no escape from the cold.

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## **Paul Bryant says**

I hate everything about spies and spying, whether it's the stupid raised-eyebrow-perfect-martini-black-tied begadgeted supermodel-is-in-the-shower my-name-is-Bollocks, *James Bollocks* nonsense or the miserable version : everybody can be bought there are no morals any more in this grey world and also it's always fooking raining, my feet hurt, my dog died, I never have sex and I'll meet you near Checkpoint Charlie in Berlin so you can say something incomprehensible to me and I can back to you and then some guy in Czechoslovakia will get killed because of it two years later who cares.

So I read this one by John Le Carre who is like the Raymond Chandler of spy books like everyone reads them even if they hate their genres, like some people go on about Bix Beiderbecke who actually hate jazz and some other people bought one non-rock cd in their entire life and it was the Buena Vista Social Club; only Raymond Chandler was a god and he was funny. John le Carre - not so funny.

Well it was okay. It didn't light my sandals on fire or make me hire a van with a PA system to go riding around town extolling its virtues. (Which is something I do with books I like a lot, I've been fined so many times for it, but I think it's worth it.)

But it was who is the mole you are the mole I am the mole we are all moles but the mole is not the mole.

Or wait, maybe that was the plot of *Tinker Tailor Soldier Mole* which I also read.

Blah, moles. Can't tell one from the other.

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## **David says**

Having just indulged my sweet tooth with Ian Fleming's spy candy, I sampled the more refined pleasures of John le Carré, who wrote a tense spy thriller without any gadgets or heroics or sultry seductresses. Instead, Alec Leamas is a middle-aged alcoholic on the verge of retirement from the spy game; burned out, embittered, and about to be cashiered for a string of failures while running England's spy network in Cold War Berlin. He's recruited for one final mission: to target the dangerous East German spymaster who's been responsible for the deaths of so many Western agents. His mission is almost derailed when he falls in love with a naive librarian who also happens to be a member of the Communist Party in England. There's some action and danger, but only in a few quick, confusing encounters in the dark. And there are tons of twists and double-crosses; everything works out logically in the end, but along the way le Carré jerks you around making you think first one person, then the other is the traitor, the double-agent, the one who's really been pulling the strings all along. The ending is a bitter and amoral one as Leamas discovers what he already

knew, that there may be good guys and bad guys in the Cold War, but everyone is gray in the dark.

This was a *great* spy story. Read Fleming for fun, but read le Carré for a more literary thriller where spies actually act like spies, and believable human beings, and everyone is a little bit dirty. Le Carré writes without a lot of excess description, but the dialog brings the characters to life, and it's the plot where he excels. There are no gratuitous scenes catering to the men's magazine readership (like with naked gypsy catfights) and a lot less of the racist, sexist pandering; this is a much more intellectual story. The climax is a showdown between rival secret agents but not on a speeding train but in an East German secret trial where control over the outcome bounces back and forth like a ping-pong ball, carried entirely by characters delivering monologues.

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## **Jaline says**

This is the novel that placed John Le Carré firmly on the path of fame and fortune. It was his breakthrough novel and 50 years later he was still telling people it had nothing to do with his previous job in the Secret Service; that it was a figment of his imagination only; that had it been based on any facts whatsoever, it would never have been allowed into publication.

None of that registered at the time with the media and critics. And those old rumours still hang in shabby tatters to this day. The consensus was that if John Le Carré protested its validity, it was only to save face for the Secret Service. In his 10-page Foreword to this novel, he said that his job involved information gathering and he didn't do it all that well because even then his imagination got in the way. He also said that where the world saw a spy who became a writer, the reality is that he was always a writer first and happened to be in the spy business – on a low rung of the ladder – until he could manage to get by on his writing.

I believe him. Not because his spy novels aren't first-rate; they are. And maybe I might not have been so quick to believe him 50 years ago; I may not have. I do believe him now, though, and if you read the Foreword, you will likely believe him, too.

This novel is the first one that details an actual operation. George Smiley plays a peripheral role as most of the story revolves around Alec Leamas. Another one of his people has been killed and he is getting tired of it. Mundt, who also featured as the “bad guy” in a previous novel, is the one who set it up so Alec gets behind the idea generated by Headquarters of an elaborate sting operation behind the Iron Curtain to eliminate Mundt.

The pace of this novel is fast – very fast. The action moves swiftly through the prep work for the operation and as Alec sinks deeper into the role he needs to play it is sometimes hard to tell when he is the ‘real’ Alec Leamas and when he is the ‘character’ playing a pivotal role in the operation. He is just that good. During the race to complete the mission before something goes too far awry, sometimes the bad guys aren't the worst guys, and sometimes the worst guys are better than they seem. Or are they?

It's a topsy turvy world, this spy business, and this book has it all. The ending could have been happier, and I probably would have written it a bit differently. However, no-one asked me to, and I bow to John Le Carré's superior skill in writing a fitting ending for a heart-racing, heartbreaking spy novel.

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## Madeline says

This is on the list of 1001 Books You Must Read Before You Die, which means we are to respect it as a Very Important Book and give it a good rating. If I'm being honest, I guess it deserves this ranking. The characters are compelling, the dialogue is good, there are no superfluous scenes, and the whole thing has a creepy and secretive atmosphere that's very compelling.

But I cannot in good conscience give this more than two stars, for the simple reason that, for the majority of the book, *I never had any idea what was going on.*

The story, to give you some idea of what I mean, can be best summed up like this: Leamas is a British spy in the 50's dealing with the Soviets. He wants to retire from the service and grudgingly agrees to do one last job, even though he is Getting Too Old For This Shit. His job: get fired from the service, fall into disgrace, get recruited by Soviets, double-cross them and take out a former British agent who's working for Berlin now. (if you've seen *The Departed* you can kinda guess how it goes) Then there's a trial, which is weird, because I kinda thought the whole purpose of *being* a spy was the ability to work outside the confines of the law, but whatever. So there's a lot of secrecy going on, and the problem is that Le Carre often doesn't bother to let the readers in on the secrets. Code phrases are used and not explained, past characters and events are referenced frequently as if we're supposed to know who/what they are (to the point where I thought I had accidentally picked up a book that was part of a series), and Leamas (our unreliable narrator) certainly ain't talking.

Also, the book is about Soviet Germany in the 50's, which put me at an immediate disadvantage. Look, I was born in 1989 - I just don't *know* that much about post-WWII Soviet politics, and they frankly don't interest me enough to do background research just so I can understand this story. When I found myself trying to remember which side of the Berlin Wall was the Communist one, I knew I was out of my league. This is a good story, the problem was that it just went over my head completely and I wasn't able to appreciate it as much as I should have.

"There's only one law in this game. ...What do you think spies are: priests, saints and martyrs? They're a squalid procession of vain fools, traitors too, yes; pansies, sadists and drunkards, people who play cowboys and Indians to brighten their rotten lives. Do you think they sit like monks in London balancing the rights and wrongs? ...This is a war. It's graphic and unpleasant because it's fought on a tiny scale, at close range; fought with a wastage of innocent life sometimes, I admit. But it's nothing, nothing at all beside other wars - the last or the next."

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## Jeffrey Keeten says

**"What do you think spies are: priests, saints, and martyrs? They're a squalid procession of vain fools, traitors too, yes; pansies, sadists, and drunkards, people who play cowboys and Indians to brighten their rotten lives. Do you think they sit like monks in London balancing the rights and wrongs?"**

**Checkpoint Charlie where it all begins.**

John Le Carre A.K.A. David John Moore Cornwell while in college started working for MI5 and then later

transferred to MI6. He worked as a consul (code for spy) for the British Embassy in Germany and that is where he saw something that would spur the creation of the most influential spy novel of all time.

*"It was the Berlin Wall that had got me going, of course: I had flown from Bonn to take a look at it as soon as it started going up. I went with a colleagues from the Embassy and as we stared back at the weasel faces of the brainwashed little thugs who guarded the Kremlin's latest battlement, he told me to wipe the grin off my face. I was not aware I had been grinning, so it must have been one of those soupy grins that comes over me at dreadfully serious moments. There was certainly nothing but disgust and terror, which was exactly what I was supposed to feel: the Wall was perfect theatre as well as a perfect symbol of the monstrosity of ideology gone mad."*

This moment spawned *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold*.

He'd written two little novels, almost novellas, where he introduces his character George Smiley. Smiley is in this novel as well, a shadowy figure behind the scenes which is where he works best. He can pull strings, and at the same time smooth the path, dropping just the right amount of crumbs to lead enemies into making assumptions. (we all know the ditty about assumptions) Cornwell wrote these books under an assumed name to protect himself from blowback which was prudent given the nature of his clandestine work. When *Spy* is published and it stays on the US bestseller list for over a year all pretenses of anonymity are replaced with the exact opposite...celebrity.

### **The Spy, David Cornwell, who wrote novels, John Le Carre.**

Le Carre has an interest in secrets. He wants to understand them, and the need that people have to keep them. His father Ronnie was a man that probably would have made a great spy if he hadn't decided to be a criminal instead. Much to Le Carre's ongoing embarrassment Ronnie was eventually jailed for insurance fraud and was frequently on the verge of bankruptcy.

*"His father, Ronnie, made and lost his fortune a number of times due to elaborate confidence tricks and schemes which landed him in prison on at least one occasion. This was one of the factors that led to le Carré's fascination with secrets."*

His father also had business dealings with the notorious Kray Twins who were London gangsters in the 1960s. I recently ordered a book on the Kray Twins because...well...look at them. I must know more.

### **Reginald and Ronald Kray**

Spying and committed fraud are not so far apart on the scale of unsavory professions, so those aspects that may have made Ronnie a con artist are exactly the same attributes that made his son a good spy.

So Smiley is relegated to the shadows and in the forefront is Alec Leamas.

*"He had an attractive face, muscular, and a stubborn line to his thin mouth. His eyes were brown and small; Irish, some said. It was hard to place Leamas. If he were to walk into a London club the porter would certainly not mistake him for a member; in a Berlin night club they usually gave him the best table. He looked like a man who could make trouble, a man who looked after his money, a man who was not quite a gentleman."*

**The intensity of Richard Burton playing Alec Leamas in the movie brought the fictional character to life.**

Leamas was head of the Berlin branch until too many things went wrong. His network of spies had been dismantled one by one by his arch enemy Mundt, head of the East German Intelligence. When I say dismantled I mean dead and by dead I mean murdered. Leamas is recalled to London where in a meeting with Control, head of the Circus; and of course, Smiley is there, a plan is hatched to bring Mundt down.

It is going to have to take a con, not the short con, but the long con. It would take time to turn Leamas from a reasonably respectable man into a man that is desperate enough to want to sell his country's secrets.

First step, he must begin drinking copious amounts of alcohol, not a hard chore given his penchant for heavy drinking anyway. Second, they find him a job shelving books in a library a job so mundane for most people (you know... norms) it would create desperation. The plan goes slightly awry when he meets Liz, who also works at the library. Later when he is at one of his bleakest moments behind the Iron Curtain he realizes that Liz has given him something to hope for beyond just the success of this mission.

**Claire Bloom stars as Liz in the 1965 movie.**

*"He knew what it was then that Liz had given him; the thing that he would have to go back and find if ever he got home to England: it was the caring about little things---the faith in ordinary life; the simplicity that made you break up a bit of bread into paper bag, walk down to the beach, and throw it to the gulls. It was this respect for triviality which he had never been allowed to possess; whether it was bread for the seagulls or love, whatever it was he would go back and find it; he would make Liz find it for him."*

To me, anyone who can inspire those thoughts in another person is a beautiful human being.

The diabolical thing about Smiley is that what seems random is simply a carefully planned roll of loaded dice. As the pieces of plot fall into place my respect for Smiley continues grow right along with a leeriness of ever wanting my fate in his hands. Being a weighed risk before men such as Control, Smiley, or Mundt is like waiting for a judgment from Pontius Pilate. Though this is a short book the plot is heavy, forcing the reader to pay close attention, to ponder each revelation, and still be left at the end with doubts about who among the main players pulled the final string. I will defer to Graham Greene's assessment of this book.

**"The best spy story I have ever read."**

I also watched the 1965 British movie starring Richard Burton. This was a reread and a rewatch for me, but so much water has went under the bridge that much of it was new again or at least being seen, being read, with older, hopefully wiser eyes. The movie is faithful to the book. Many great novels inspire great movies and many great novels/great movies inspire future writers. The overall impact of this novel on the genre is hard to calculate, but it is impossible to deny that this book set the bar high for all writers who try to write a better one.

My Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy Review

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I also have a Facebook blogger page at: <https://www.facebook.com/JeffreyKeeten>



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## Michael Finocchiaro says

Perhaps the greatest spy novel ever, Le Carré has us in the heart of the cold war with a dicey exchange of spies. It is chilling (as cold as the title) and realistic and hair-raising. A true classic!

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## Steven Godin says

Fleming gave it a glamorous touch, Ludlum brought added thrills, but le Carré writes of espionage with a cold starkness that is far more believable and all the better for it. There are no car chases, gadgets, tuxedos, martini's, or large breasted women walking out of the ocean throwing their long locks back over their pretty faces. This is so far away from the exotic travels of 007, mainly taking in the sights of airports, road checkpoints, chilly rooms and deserted streets, le Carré shows a Europe lingering in the darkness of the cold war, and paints a grey and gloomy picture of just about everyone involved, the pacing in slow but very intelligent in it's full bodied descriptions of life as a spy, and sadly for those involved this is a dull and rather empty existence, where they give up so much for Queen and country, but have little to show for it. It's a boring way to make a living, but someone has to do it right?.

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Events unfold with Burnt out British spy Alec Leamas returning to London after complications regarding an operation in Berlin, and is then seemingly hung out to dry by the agency. Cut adrift he turns to the bottle and tries to make some sort of a normal life for himself, with little funds he takes a job in a library, befriends a fellow worker called Liz, and they strike up an affection for each other. Paranoid, always glancing over his shoulder, he gets the sense of being followed, and here it conjures up images of shady looking individuals, with turned up collars on their dark coloured macs walking through fog, sounding echos coming from footsteps on wet tarmac, yes it really is this way. And after agreeing to return to Germany with other figures of intelligence he appears to turn defector through a friendly interrogation to his previous work, giving up names, banks, phoney passports and members of his organization whilst stationed in East Germany. But of course with this type of setting, nothing is as it seems, there may or may not be, double crossings, set-ups, and lies within our midst!

On the surface the story is pretty basic and easy to follow, but deep within this novel there is so much more going on, that not always makes a whole lot of sense, it's not a case of joining all the dots at the end, although you can look at it this way, it's the taut and murky characters that really get you thinking, how you interpret their actions, and just what is going on behind the scenes, because sometimes it's not so much what's written in front of you, but where this world exists off the pages that truly makes for an authentic reading experience.

Graham Greene quotes it as the best spy novel ever written, who am I to argue.

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## Kai says

*"It is said that men condemned to death are subject to sudden moments of elation; as if, like moths in the fire, their destruction were coincidental with attainment."*

Wow, that was boring. And I did not even have any expectations towards it. But calling it "the best spy novel

ever", as so many reviewers have done, is a teensy bit far-stretched. I don't have much to say about this book. If you want to read it because you expect action and thrill and incredible escape plans or impossible heists, you better move on to the next book. If there was any action, we only hear of it after it has already happened, through reports and dialogues. The characters are overall bland, especially the female love interest, who, of course, is roughly 20 years younger than the main character. She only exists so she can sit prettily and cry a lot. It was a severely well-plotted story, no doubt, but it failed to spark any intrigue from my side. The coolest thing about it is the cover design.

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## **Lyn says**

A few years ago the Broadway musical "Wicked" came to Nashville and my family and I went to experience this production at the Tennessee Performing Arts Theater. I have actually seen a musical on Broadway (Rock of Ages) and I was impressed. But this was something else entirely. I was awestruck by the talent: the singing, the acting, the stage production. As you may imagine, this was not my usual forte. Oh, I can walk across a room and avoid dragging my knuckles (most days) but for the most part a presentation of this sort is beyond me; but I can at least acknowledge the virtuosity of a performance, even if it is not in a medium to which I am normally accustomed.

Spy novels, likewise, are not in a genre to which I am inclined. Nonetheless, I know when I see greatness and this must certainly be, like Graham Greene stated, the best spy novel I've ever read.

First of all, I was astounded by Le Carre's mastery of prose language.

"They walked to her flat through the rain and they might have been anywhere – Berlin, London, any town where paving stones turn to lakes of light in the evening rain, and the traffic shuffles despondently through wet streets."

Le Carre delivers this level of artistry in page after page of prose reminiscent of Graham Greene, or obliquely, like Malcolm Lowry. This is simply a very well written book.

Add to that the psychological depth and the labyrinthine twists and turns of the interactions between east and west operatives and there is little doubt why this novel has collected such accolades. A book that rises above its labeled genre and becomes simply a brilliant story. Le Carre could have described competing stationary merchants and this would have been interesting.

Most impressive is that Le Carre eschews convention, deliberately rejects Hollywood sentimentality and tells this straight. He makes his case as it should be, as it must be.

Bravo.

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## Jason Koivu says

Okay, I'm fully ready to dive into a non-stop Le Carré bender!

These are great spy novels. And these are quality books, period. The man can write. Plus, his experiences in intelligence work paid off HUGE. The intricacies of spy networks and secret government agencies are spread over these pages like caviar and go down like a perfectly aged wine. Shit damn, this is sweet stuff!

Now, before you get all amped up, John le Carré does not write James Bond stuff. There are no car chases and inventive gadgetry. No femme fatales succumb to his heroes. Sure, love is involved, but it's generally more realistic. It's all more realistic, when it comes down to it.

In *The Spy Who Came In from the Cold* a pissed off agent, who lost his network of spies to a crafty and conniving bastard of a super agent, is sent out into the field again as a plant to ferret out the bad guy. The agent is a pawn without knowledge of the whole affair and he knows it. But hell, he's willing to do anything to get revenge. This emotional attachment to the job puts him at yet another disadvantage. But he's good, so he should be able to handle himself...right?

Read and find out! Another highly recommended novel from John le Carré!

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## Kemper says

It's been over 20 years since the Berlin Wall fell, and as someone who grew up in the 1970s - 80s, reading about dueling Cold War spies gave me a weird nostalgic rush. "The Soviets? East Germans? Damn! We used to HATE those guys!"

In this era where decades of misdeeds by intelligence agencies are common knowledge and the notion of elaborate spy games are widely used fictional plots, it's a little hard to imagine how groundbreaking this book was back in 1963. James Bond was in full literary swing and just beginning his cinematic career, and most people in the western nations still trusted their governments and believed that their spies were the good guys who would hold back those dirty Commies with sheer moral superiority.

It had to have been a hell of a shock to read a novel like this from a writer who had worked for British intelligence who convincingly told a story where the conflict between the two sides was a series of elaborate con games about either hiding what you knew or tricking the other guy into believing a lie. And as demonstrated here, both sides fully believed that the ends justified the means.

Alec Leamas is with the British intelligence service nicknamed the Circus and runs their operations in West Berlin. However, he's lost every valuable agent he had to a ruthless East German operative named Mundt. Leamas is recalled by the Circus back to London where he is offered a dangerous new assignment. The Circus demotes Leamas. He pretends to become a disgruntled drunk who eventually loses his job and his pension, and he briefly gets sent to prison after assaulting someone. The ploy is to make the other side think that Leamas is ripe to turn on the Circus so that they can plant false intelligence and get back at Mundt. However, Leamas may have made a critical mistake by actually falling in love while playing a drunken disgrace.

Even with nearly 50 years worth of spy stories after this using similar plots, this book still had enough twists and turns to keep me guessing. The theme about how the supposed 'good guys' were just as willing to use any individual or deal with any devil to get the job done as the 'bad guys' were is just as relevant today as it was when it was first written. I can't believe it took me this long to read this book.

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### **Matthew says**

I think if I had lived through more of the Cold War I would have enjoyed this book more. Even though it is not a very long book, I found it somewhat slow. Also, it was a fairly complicated story that had me confused and going back to figure out if I missed something.

I may have given it two stars, but the ultimate point and climax of the story was interesting. I kept having to clear my mind and put myself back into the serious mentality of the Cold War. I am too used to the James Bond/Hollywood ideal of spies and espionage in this era. It was much darker and convoluted than that. Having the Berlin Wall as a locale a few times in the book definitely stressed the intensity of the time period.

If you like serious historical fiction, post WWII cold war tales, and don't mind your characters grittier than James Bond, I think you will enjoy this one a lot.

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### **Adina says**

In the last two years I started watching more spy movies/tv-series and also read a spy-thriller by Daniel Silva. I saw two movies based on Le Carré's books (Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy and A most Wanted Man) which I enjoyed. As a result, I was looking forward to reading one Le Carré book.

This is a different kind of spy novel, a smart one with a brilliant plot and some exciting twists. There are no hot dudes drinking martinis with a women on each leg, shooting every terrorist in sight. Despite that it still is gripping and additionally, it makes you think. The characters have personality and the line between good and evil is not as clear as in other spy thrillers. It meditated around what are the limits that a spy should or should not cross to achieve the Goal and what are the motivations behind choosing this job.

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### **Emily May says**

I'd like to start by saying "woah" and various other exclamations of surprise and wonder. This was a book that completely changed the way I view spy novels. My previous prejudice stems from quite an obvious source - Ian Fleming - who never gave me anything much of what I would want to read about or what I even find remotely interesting. Big guns, fast cars, hot girls... surely every teenage boy's wet dream, but not what tends to be my cup of tea.

Fleming, like most writers of spy novels, caters exclusively for the straight male reader. His books were

never intended to be read by women because in real life women don't fall back with their legs in the air for every guy in a tux who says "shaken, not stirred". Laughable.

And, yes, there is a point hidden somewhere amidst the waffle... John le Carre is a genius, an inventive and wonderful writer. I effin loved this book... it was gripping, sad and funny! Alec didn't waste his time drinking martinis and shagging his way through the women of Europe, he had emotion and he had personality. Alec Leamas would run rings around James Bond any day and in every way possible.

Written in 1963, it was inevitably entwined with the Cold War and the darkest side of East German Intelligence. There's nothing like fiction with aspects of historical and/or political truth! And I guess what I'm really trying to say is that I simply adored it... and I want more of John le Carre right now. Highly recommended, even to you chick-lit lovers who will automatically think "no thanks", trust me you want to give this one a chance.

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## Diane says

What a marvelous spy thriller this is! I can see why it's considered such a classic.

I'm late to the John le Carré book party, but I've been enjoying my time here so far. I loved his memoir *The Pigeon Tunnel*, and I thought his novel *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* was brilliant. When his latest book, *A Legacy of Spies*, was released and got positive reviews, I decided to go back and catch up on the George Smiley series.

Smiley plays a minor role in *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, but it doesn't matter because Alec Leamas is such a compelling character. We follow Leamas as he gets involved in a tangled revenge plot against a powerful East German agent. There are a lot of twists and turns, which I won't spoil. I had seen the movie version starring Richard Burton, but I enjoyed the book more because it got deeper into the mindset of Leamas.

Highly recommended for fans of spy novels.

## Favorite Quotes

"He knew then what it was that Liz had given him; the thing that he would have to go back and find if ever he got home to England; it was the caring about little things — the faith in ordinary life; the simplicity that made you break up a bit of bread into a paper bag, walk down to the beach and throw it to the gulls. It was this respect for triviality which he had never been allowed to possess; whether it was bread or the seagulls or love, whatever it was he would go back and find it."

"What do you think spies are: priests, saints, and martyrs? They're a squalid procession of vain fools, traitors too, yes; pansies, sadists, and drunkards, people who play cowboys and Indians to brighten their rotten lives. Do you think they sit like monks in London balancing the rights and wrongs? I'd have killed Mundt if I could, I hate his guts; but not now. It so happens that they need him. They need him so that the great moronic mass that you admire can sleep soundly in their beds at night. They need him for the safety of ordinary, crummy people like you and me."

"A man who lives apart, not to others but alone, is exposed to obvious psychological dangers. In itself, the practice of deception is not particularly exacting; it is a matter of experience, of professional expertise, it is a facility most of us can acquire."

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## Susan says

Alec Leamas is the Head of the West Berlin office, who is recalled back to London after losing another agent. Afraid that he is heading for a desk job, or worse, he is asked to undertake one more mission – the fake defection of a senior British agent to frame an East German operative; Hans-Dieter Mundt, who escaped in “Call of the Dead,” the first George Smiley novel.

In order to bring Leamas to East German attention, the Circus sacks him and Leamas ends up working in a run-down library, where he embarks on an affair with a young Party member, Liz Gold. What unfolds is a clever, convoluted plot, where nothing is as it seems. Slowly, the trap is set and we follow Leamas from London, back across the curtain into East Germany.

Although this is listed as one of the Smiley series, George Smiley appears only briefly in this novel. However, you are always aware of him in the background and of his relationship with Mundt, from the very first book. Leamas is an interesting character, while Liz adds the touch of innocence, in this world of espionage, which underlies the personal cost – not only to her, but to those who work in the murky work of spying.

Like all classics, this book works because you care about the characters and what happens to them. Le Carre captures perfectly a time, and a place, and inhabits that world with confidence. I look forward to continuing the series and reading all of Le Carre’s backlist.

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## Stephen says

4.5 to 5.0 stars. Okay to begin this review I want to point out that, except for a number of Tom Clancy novels, I have only read a handful of spy thrillers so what impressed me about this book may be pretty typical stuff in the better works of the genre. Also, I have not seen the movie adaptation based and knew nothing about the plot coming in (a condition I highly recommend if you have the chance).

With that introduction made, **I LOVED THIS BOOK**. For a book published in 1963, once you get past some obvious anachronisms (e.g., the Berlin wall, who the bad guy are, the sense of optimism that the world may not be totally fucked....sorry couldn't resist...), the book did not feel dated at all. I was absolutely captivated from the opening scene to the incredible ending and I highly recommend this book.

The plot deals with a British case officer working in West Berlin who, after losing his last agent operating in East Berlin, returns to London and contemplates retirement. However, his superiors have one last assignment for him and one for which his current state of mind is ideal for. They want him to “defect” and set up his nemesis in the end game of a plan that has been in the works for years. All of this takes place at the very beginning of the novel so I don’t think I am giving away any spoilers.

From here, this tightly woven, brilliantly executed plot moves at an incredibly fast pace and is filled with superb twists, amazing dialogue and great characters, all of which blur the lines between good and bad. In fact, one of the most impressive aspects of the novel is the way it portrays the world of espionage as being a world filled with “grey” people doing often immoral things but for what they consider “the greater good.” This aspect of espionage work has always intrigued me and I have never come across a book that portrays this better.

Bottom-line, this was a great read that packed a very enjoyable, detailed story in its slim, svelte 224 pages. **HIGHLY RECOMMENDED!!**

One final note: I listened to the audio version of this book read by Frank Muller (one of my favorite narrators who tragically passed away a few years ago) and thought he did a superb job and added to the enjoyment of the story.

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### **Sanjay Gautam says**

A profound book, that surpassed all my expectations. A hell of a ride from the first page till the last word. It's a cold and dark book which is written very intelligently.

It was hailed as one of the best among the world's top classic espionage-books ever written. And, now that I see in hindsight, it has truly surpassed all the spy thrillers, in terms of quality and scope, that I've read before reading this one; and it has now climbed the ladder to reach the top - in my all time favorite list.

**Highly Recommended!**

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