

Agent 6 Study Guide

Agent 6 by Tom Rob Smith

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Plot Summary

“Agent 6” is a historical mystery novel by Tom Rob Smith, and serves as the third installment in his Leo Demidov trilogy, beginning with “Child 44” and “The Secret Speech”. Spanning a 31-year period between 1950 and 1981, “Agent 6” involves the 16-year-long efforts of former MGB operative Leo Demidov to find his wife, Raisa’s, killer. When the novel begins in Moscow in 1950, Leo and Raisa have just met, and Jesse Austin, a famous black American singer notorious for his love of Communism, visits the Soviet Union. Leo, along with other MGB agents and government officials, give Jesse a sham tour in order to hide the harsh reality of the Soviet system. In 1965, long-married to Raisa and with two adopted daughters, Elena and Zoya, Leo is worried that his own family will be going on a student good will tour of the United States. Now an obscure factory manager, Leo knows that the Soviets will try to use the trip to their advantage, somehow. As it turns out, Mikael Ivanov, the propaganda expert sent along on the trip, is also working for SERVICE.A, and he has played on Elena’s emotions to seduce and manipulate her into getting Jesse Austin to appear in public and speak outside after the first student good will concert at the UN. During this time, Austin is shot and killed, Raisa is arrested for the murder due to her proximity to Austin, and Raisa is then killed by Austin’s wife, Anna. Leo knows there is more to the story, and vows to find the truth of things, including who actually killed his wife.

Once Leo’s daughters are married and independent, Leo attempts to cross the border into Finland to travel to the United States, but is caught and sent to Afghanistan as a Soviet advisor in exchange for his life. In Afghanistan, Leo falls into despair as the Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan heats up. In addition to serving as an advisor, he begins training Communist Afghans to serve in Afghanistan’s secret police, including beautiful 23-year-old Nara, who develops a romantic attachment to Leo. Leo, realizing he has failed his wife, becomes an opium addict to forget himself and his pains. When the Soviets raze a village in response for a terrorist attack, Leo and Nara are sent along with a military contingent to soothe things over with the locals. There, they discover a young girl has survived the attack, and Leo and Nara turn against the Soviets to save the girl, Zabi. Leo and Nara are then taken hostage by the Afghan rebels, who agree to spare Nara’s life and grant her, Leo, and Zabi freedom in exchange for Leo seeking asylum in America, and offering to garner American support to fight the Soviets. During this time, Leo manages to break his addiction to opium, and decides once more to commit to finding out the truth behind his wife’s death. Leo, Nara, and Zabi are granted their asylum request, and in exchange for Soviet intelligence, are set up in New York.

In New York, Leo and Nara continue the investigation into Raisa’s death. There, they come into contact with former FBI Agent Jim Yates, who reveals that the killing of Austin was a Soviet plot meant to bring about a racially-motivated Communist revolution in America, a plot which failed miserably. While Raisa was indeed shot by Anna, Raisa’s injury was not mortal. Yates, knowing he had to cover up the Soviet plot, allowed Raisa to die in order to make it seem like the three deaths were part of a lovers’ tryst gone wrong. Leo shoots Yates in the same fashion as his wife was shot, but rather than



leaving Yates to die, Leo calls an ambulance to save Yates's life. Against the wishes of Nara and Zabi, Leo decides to return to the Soviet Union upon learning that his daughters have been questioned over his defection. Knowing that Zabi and Nara are safe in America, but that his daughters are in danger in Russia, Leo returns to Russia. There, Leo is arrested as a traitor and imprisoned, and awaits trial at the end of the novel. He is given a brief meeting with Elena and Zoya, who hug their father, for they know the sacrifice he has just made for them.



Pages 1 – 109

Summary

USSR, Moscow, The Lubyanka, Lubyanka Square, Headquarters of the Secret Police, January 21, 1950 – Polina Peshkova, an artist, keeps her diary hidden behind the fireplace where it is found by the Secret Police after Polina accidentally leaves a sooty fingerprint on her writing desk. The simple act of hiding a diary is a crime against the State, for there is no gap between a person's private and public life. MGB State Security Agent Leo Demidov heads up the investigation. At 27, he is a committed Communist and will do whatever is necessary to safeguard the Revolution and the State. He has gone through innumerable journals like Polina's. Leo remembers his first such case, when he is given a journal by his mentor, Nikolai Borisov. Leo had found nothing criminal in the journal, but Borisov pointed out an entry mentioning delight at the new Constitution where he doubted the writer felt delight at all due to the way the wording is composed, saying he felt as the rest of the country, "i.e., delight". The writer of the journal ultimately received 15 years. In the present, Leo not only handles such investigations on his own, but he is now training MGB agents.

His current and fifth mentee, 23-year-old Grigori Semichastny, is very intelligent but shows little promise as an agent. Grigori finds nothing unusual about Polina's diary. Leo then provides an example of a man who, in his diary, felt sad on August 23, 1949 – the then year anniversary of the Soviet-Nazi Non-Aggression Pact. Leo explains the entry did not mention praise for the soldiers who defeated Nazism, or Stalin's military prowess, and as such, was suspect. Grigori counters Leo by saying that not everyone feels sad only on days of historical importance. Polina's diary, he explains, contains nothing more than normal observations about daily life. Leo, reading through the diary himself now, realizes that Grigori, while surveilling Polina, pretended to be a man named Isaac to meet her and assess her character – which forms the basis for an entry in the journal in which she thinks she might have found love with Isaac. Leo tells Grigori that he could have blown his cover, and that the journal they now have is a fake, intentionally planted to fool the MGB. Grigori doubts this. He concludes she is innocent. Polina lives with her mother and two brothers, and perhaps she hid the diary so her brothers would not make fun of her for talking about love. Leo counters that the ones who seem innocent are the ones to watch. It is then that Leo realizes a sketch in the diary has been removed by Grigori. Leo reprimands Grigori for this, saying his judgment has been compromised by Polina's beauty. Leo agrees to overlook Grigori this once, but will not do so again.

KM Tramcar, Moskvoretsky Bridge, Same Day – Leo, in the condensation on the window on the nearly-empty tramcar, uses his finger to draw a sketch of the Statue of Liberty, a rough version of what he had discovered in the diary. He then erases it, hoping no one has seen him. Leo also wonders about love. He has never been in love, and the only love he has known has been for the State. The tram stops to let on a beautiful young woman carrying a heavy bag. It is Lena, who lives near Leo. Leo



nervously goes over to Lena to make conversation. She is a politics teacher, and is reluctant to talk to him, for his status as an MGB agent is clear in the way he carries himself, and the clothes he wears. Lena says she is very tired, and does not appear to be in the mood for conversation, so Leo leaves her alone.

The Lubyanka, Lubyanka Square, Headquarters of the Secret Police, Next Day – Leo is still embarrassed and humiliated from his encounter with Lena. At work, Leo finds he is unable to put the incident out of his mind. He falls asleep at work, and later awakens to discover that Polina Peshkova's case has accidentally been taken ahead of time, and is now being processed.

Same Day – A newsreel from 1934 is shown to Leo's unit, and carries footage of black American Communist and singer Jesse Austin, who has come to visit the Soviet Union. Jesse Austin is guided by men in suits through a beautiful and prosperous Russian village of happy farm workers, clearly contrived propaganda. Jesse Austin says the international stories of Communist starvation, brutality, and poverty are all lies, as clearly indicated by the village he now visits. Leo believes that all of the farmers and people in the footage, aside from Austin, are probably MGB agents in disguise.

Major Kuzmin, Leo's superior, lectures the room about Jesse Austin, whose support of Communism and the Soviet Union is still as strong 16 years later. Austin was born in 1907, in Braxton, Mississippi, Kuzmin explains, and moved at the age of ten to New York with his family. Not only did Austin experience racial persecution in the South, Kuzmin continues to explain, but is hated in the North by whites and by settled, black middle class families who were worried that waves of black immigration into the cities would be disastrous. This class division caused Austin to turn toward Communism. In New York, Austin lived in absolute poverty. There, his father died of tuberculosis, unable to access quality healthcare. His mother then went to work, and Jesse eventually began singing which turned into his career. At the end of every performance, Austin would give a political speech about Communism, causing the audience to walk out. The United States, a conservative nation, is highly critical of, and suspicious of, Jesse Austin's Communist sympathies. Kuzmin explains that Jesse Austin's coming visit may be his last, for it is believed the American authorities will be revoking his passport. Austin will be arriving that very night. Multiple MGB teams are being assigned to watch Austin. He will be in the city for two days, giving a concert the following evening. Kuzmin reminds Leo that Jesse Austin's love for Communist Russia must be protected at all costs.

House on the Embankment, 2 Serafimovich Street, Next Day – Three MGB teams, including Leo's, work independently to make sure everything about Jesse Austin's visit goes according to plan. Austin needs to be shown the Soviet Union as it will be, not as it currently is. Leo understands the need for dishonesty because the revolution is still a work in progress. Austin wishes to stay in a communal housing project. The authorities have given him a place at an apartment house meant for the ruling elite, at No. 2 Serafimovich Street. The residents living in the house apartments have agreed to give their servants a few days off, so as not to confuse or anger Austin. Austin's apartment rooms have all been wired, and a team of agents will be maintaining 24 hour surveillance in the basement. A young and attractive female agent will pretend to be a



resident also staying in Austin's apartment in the house, playing the part of a war widow. As Austin's visit begins, everything goes according to plan. Monitoring a phone conversation with his wife, Leo and the other agents realize Austin is questioning some of what he sees. The agents believe his confidence has diminished. Austin speaks fluent Russian, and speaks to his Russian hosts in their native tongue the next day as they head out for a tour of the city. Austin requests to ride in a standard working car, rather than a fancy State vehicle. Leo himself will now be driving Austin and a State official, along with Grigori.

Yeliseyev's Grocery Store, Grocery Store No. 1, Tverskaya 14, Same Day – Yeliseyev's Grocery Store is a beautiful building with a luxurious interior, and serves only the elite. Austin is not impressed by the visit, and Leo realizes the State has overplayed its hand in an effort to demonstrate comparability to American wealth. The store is stocked with MGB agents who dress shabbily, as though the store is open to all citizens. Leo is sought out by Austin while at the store. Austin feels as if he can approach Leo because Leo is not putting on airs. Austin confesses he wants to see where the ordinary man shops. Leo tells the group of officials with him that he knows they have rules and regulations and itineraries, but he wants to explore the city. As they head down the street, Austin then directly asks Leo about who he is, and what he does. Leo explains briefly that he is a police officer who covers political crimes. Austin then asks Leo about his love life. Leo admits there is someone who has interested him – a schoolteacher named Lena –and Austin insists that Leo bring her to the concert that night. Leo says he will ask her. They then swing into a store meant for common citizens. There, Leo explains that people provide lists of what they want, receive the goods, pay, and leave, so they aren't overburdened with excess and things they don't need by having to browse. Unbeknownst to Austin, however, things are not as they appear. An elderly woman receives a carton of eggs, but instead of eggs, there are rocks inside. Austin, however, seems pleased with the visit. He then decides he wants to go and see a school.

Secondary School Seven, Avtozavodskaya, Same Day – Leo is furious but keeps it to himself as he drives Austin to the school. Austin has unknowingly placed the life of every member of his Russian entourage in peril for breaking schedule in order to gather evidence to prove his detractors back home, wrong. His detractors have said that Austin is naïve to believe Russian propaganda over the reality of things, and Austin wishes to counter them. Leo also realizes that it was a mistake to tell Austin about Lena, for Austin believes now that Leo is in some kind of relationship with the woman. Leo doesn't know how to handle things as they approach the school. Leo, however, is sure that Lena is smart enough that she'll realize what is going on, and improvise. Leo explains to Grigori what is going on, and asks him to slow Austin down while Leo goes ahead to talk to Lena. Austin is held up on the playground of the school by curious schoolchildren while Leo goes ahead to seek out Lena. He finds out her name is Raisa by consulting the school's files. Austin wishes to watch Raisa teach a class, so the entire group heads to Classroom 23. Inside, Leo apologizes to Raisa for the interruption. She sees his uniform, knows who Austin is, and figures out the situation immediately. Austin invites Raisa to the concert as Leo's date that night – and Raisa readily agrees to go.



Serp I Molot Factory, Magnitogorsk, Same Day – A warehouse has been emptied for Jesse Austin's concert. It is intended to show a contrast to the elitism of concerts in the West. Most of the attendees of the concert have been forced to attend, and are workers from nearby factories, and from the warehouse itself. The concert will be filmed and shared across the Soviet Empire. It is then that Raisa arrives, beautifully dressed, having not been told the concert was meant to be informal. Leo escorts her to a seat, compliments her on how she looks, and apologizes for what has happened. Raisa responds mechanically, for she knows she is under intense scrutiny by the State for what will happen there that night. The concert gets underway. There is a disturbance at the back of the concert, however, as a drunken Grigori arrives. Leo goes to him immediately. Grigori is incensed that Polina, the woman he loves, has been arrested despite his having removed the offending page from the diary. Polina has died during questioning. Leo tries to get him to calm down, but Grigori rushes on stage, wanting to tell everyone that an innocent woman has been murdered. Yet, they all know the truth of the system – and know that Grigori's mere presence has now put all their lives in danger. Grigori holds the removed sketch of the Statue of Liberty. It is Austin who seizes the moment. He takes Grigori in his arm and announces that in the Soviet Union, liberty is real. Austin then gets the audience to sing the Soviet anthem. Even Grigori begins singing, unaware of the MGB agents nearing him with murderous intent. Raisa then begs Leo to help Grigori.

Fifteen Years Later, USSR, Moscow, Nobye Cheremushki, Khrushchev's Slums, July 24, 1965 – Leo returns to his home in Apartment 1312 during an intense heatwave, made worse by the concrete building in which he and his family live. Leo comes across his daughter, Elena's, diary, but chooses not to read it beyond the first page, for he is no longer a member of the Secret Police. He is now the manager of a small factory, overseeing shipments and processing receipts. It is then that Raisa returns home. To Leo, Raisa is still as beautiful as the day he met her. They truly love one another now, having not loved one another when they first married. Raisa wonders why Leo has the diary of their 17-year-old daughter. She warns Leo not to be careless, for it has taken a long time for their adopted daughters to trust Leo, and to come to love him. They think of Leo now as a father, and not the agent who commanded the unit that killed their biological parents years before. Leo explains that he is merely worried about Elena, who has been acting strangely lately. Raisa believes Elena is merely nervous about the upcoming trip, but Leo thinks there is more to it. He suspects the State has something else in mind. At Raisa's insistence, he puts Elena's diary back.

Next Day – Leo finds it hard to sleep knowing that his wife and daughters will be out of the country in a few hours. Leo goes to the kitchen, where he finds Elena at the table. She is incredibly sweet and gentle, whereas her older sister, Zoya, is often brusque and has a temper. Leo sits beside Elena, and asks her if anything is wrong. She says she is worried about flying, but Leo believes there is more to it than that. He decides to play cards with Elena. Unable to sleep, Raisa and Zoya also join in.

United States of America, New York City, Manhattan, Lower East Side, Second Avenue Subway Station, Same Day – Osip Feinstein knows he is being trailed by members of the FBI. Anyone with Communist sympathies is suspect. Even their employers are



carefully watching them. Osip, however, is not merely a Communist sympathizer, but an actual spy. He heads to a meeting in an old low-rise building. While waiting, he falls asleep. Osip awakens as a man arrives with a leather sports bag. The man gives Osip some opium, and a camera with a telescopic lens. The man reveals that Osip has not been doing enough for the Soviet Union, and must now do more. Something very important, the man explains, is about to happen. For it, Osip will need a camera. The man himself will need a gun.

American Airspace, New York City, Same Day – Raisa is amazed by the sight of New York City from the air. She has never expected to travel beyond the USSR, and wonders about a country held in such contempt and hatred by her own. Elena and Zoya are glued to the windows of the plane. Their plane, the Tupelov Tu-114, had given Khrushchev a ride on his own visit to the United States in 1959. As the plane flies over New York, the Statue of Liberty can be seen. The plane is full of Soviet students, from the age of 12-23, and are to be partnered with American students. The intent is a crude political exercise designed to foster good will and overcome recent bad relations between the U.S. and the USSR, but the students do not see it this way. They are amazed to be in America.

Raisa is surprised to have been selected to head up the trip, for her husband is known as a pariah in Soviet circles for having walked away from the KGB, even though her own career in education had taken off. Leo's past has made it impossible for him to make the trip. The trip itself has been officially titled the "International Students Peace Tour". It is Raisa who was given the task of nominating all the students who have gone on the trip, including Zoya. Zoya, who has no love for the State, hopes to become a surgeon and so agrees to go, pretending to be a model citizen and doing as the State commands. Zoya also knows she will probably never again have a chance to travel, especially to the United States. As the plane lands, the delegation of students and teachers are stunned to see that thousands of average Americans have turned out to welcome them. Raisa notices a small group of men in suits to the side, and realizes they are America's FBI. Among the FBI members is Agent Jim Yates, who notes how prim and proper the Soviet delegation is – like a machine.

Manhattan, Hotel Grand Metropolitan, 44th Street, Next Day – Zoya's desire to become a doctor has to do with her hatred of the State, and her desire to avoid politics, and merely help people. Zoya is anxious, however, to try out English, meet Americans, and to travel. Zoya has been captivated by American television, from cartoons to the Ed Sullivan Show. Of special interest to Zoya are the commercials, where she sees everything from ice cream being advertised to products being promoted with the background of American neighborhoods. Mikael Ivanov enters Zoya's room. Mikael is about 30 years old, is the one of the propaganda experts assigned to the trip, whose job it is to ensure that the members of the trip do not embarrass the State, and that members of the trip are not unduly influenced by America. Zoya hates him. Mikael warns Zoya about the dangers of American television, and tells her not to watch it. He says the television shows are all propaganda specifically designed for the hotel visit, and that everything in the fridge – from Coca-Cola to chocolate – are not enjoyed by the vast majority of Americans. Mikael tells Zoya it was a mistake to bring her, and that she



is quite unlike Elena. Elena, meanwhile, is in the bathroom, and feels as though she will be sick again, even though nothing is coming up. She then tells Zoya she is going to head down to take a swim at the pool. Elena then goes and meets with Mikael instead, telling him she is ready.

Manhattan, United Nations Headquarters, First Avenue & East 44th Street, Next Day – Raisa is still in awe that she is in the United States of America. She is to meet with key Soviet delegates to discuss the coming concert that night, intended for the UN. The concert the following day would be for the public and broadcast around the world. After that, a set of concerts is to be performed in Washington, D.C. Raisa meets with Ministry of Education member Vladimir Trofimov, and Evan Vass, a tall man in his late fifties. Evan's real name is Evgeniy Vasilev, having been in America so long and having been so corrupted by American ways that his fellows having jokingly renamed him. The lighthearted humor puts Raisa ill-at-ease, for she realizes she is among men who exist in a place where they are not subject to the State. Raisa goes over the plans for the meeting with the two men, and Trofimov tells Raisa that they trust her completely. Raisa is stunned that the meeting is so casual and easy. She believes that Leo's instincts about the trip have been correct.

New Jersey, Bergen County, Town of Teaneck, Same Day – Jim Yates heads out to work. As he does, he looks at his house and his yard, all in a state of disrepair against a beautiful American suburban neighborhood development. Jim's wife, Diane, is hypersensitive to noise, and so maintenance is difficult. Nevertheless, Jim is grateful and thrilled to be an American living in the United States. Jim hates people who don't appreciate how well they have it. He hates the riots in the cities, wondering why people would choose to trash their home rather than trying to fix it. Jim has secretly been seeing a girl 20 years younger than him named Rebecca, who works as a waitress at a basement bar called the Flute, off Broadway. Jim is not proud of his affair, wanting to be a good husband, but finds his home life difficult. His wife is more than just hypersensitive to noise – she is psychiatrically imbalanced, rarely gets out of bed, and is referred to as most by crazy. Jim has done his best to have a good marriage with her, but it has simply not worked out.

Jim usually drives to Manhattan, a trip which takes thirty minutes. Today, he drives to Harlem. In Harlem, Jim is angered to see kids playing in the street while men sit in doorways doing nothing. Jim does not look down on them because they are black, but because they are not working. Jim, within the FBI, works for COINTELPRO, the agency's counter intelligence program. He has worked for COINTELPRO since the department's inception in 1956. Jim deals with the CPUSA, the Communist Party of the United States of America, in his work. Jim cannot stand Communists, and looks forward to seeing the CPUSA dissolved. Currently headed by Moscow's International Lenin School graduate Gus Hall, COINTELPRO is doing all it can to counteract the CPUSA, from infiltration to psychological warfare to legal harassment. Jim's own specific function is to neutralize troublemakers before they commit to violence or misdeeds. He enters an apartment building in Harlem to meet with Jesse Austin, codenamed by the FBI as "The Big Red Voice".



Analysis

The theme of Communism – and all of its ill-effects – is on clear display from the very start of the novel. This all begins with Leo's mentoring of an MGB trainee to look beyond the apparent innocence of an individual. Essentially, Leo argues that, although someone may not be overtly guilty of a crime, that someone is definitely not innocent, either. Overt examples of Communism's corrosive nature extend far beyond police work. Raisa's refusal to speak to Leo on the tram car owes in large part to the collective fear that his MGB uniform conjures up, a fear which has plagued the minds of the people for decades. They have every right to fear Leo and the MGB. Polina is tortured and executed merely for having drawn a picture of the Statue of Liberty in a private diary. In addition to the fear and the brutality enacted upon the people by the State, there are other hardships and discrepancies as well, which come to light during Jesse Austin's visit. For example, only the elite are allowed to shop at well-stocked grocery stores, while the average Soviet citizen is forced to stand in line for rationed, pre-approved foods. Even then, not everything meets the eye. The reader should pay careful attention to the scene with the egg carton full of rocks. Nothing is what it seems in the Communist world.

In the American world, however, the Soviets do their best to make it seem as if everything is not as it appears to truly be, either – but in the opposite fashion. Zoya's experiences in New York early in the novel provide a stark contrast to the harsh living conditions of the Soviet Union, and provides the basis for the theme of the differences between the United States and the Soviet Union. While most Americans take commercials for granted at best, and as an annoyance at worst, Zoya delights in them. She is amazed to see the variety and quality of products available to average Americans in the United States, as well as how bright and cheery things in even New York City seem in comparison to Russia. She is stunned to discover that the refrigerator in her room has been stocked full of Coca-Cola and chocolates, and is able to see right through Mikael's near-comical explaining away of this as a show of opulence, that nearly all average Americans do not have access to Coca-Cola and chocolate. Even more pathetic is Mikael's explaining away of television programming as having been specifically formulated for the students' visit.

The beginning of the novel also sees the rise of the theme of family – a theme that will continue to be important throughout the broad extent of the novel. Family, thematically, can be readily seen between Leo, Raisa, Elena, and Zoya. Though Elena and Zoya are adopted, they have truly come to embrace Leo as their father, knowing he has fully turned his back on his past, and has done everything his power to make up for it, including providing for them, and making sure they have every opportunity imaginable. Likewise, Leo is infinitely afraid for his family as they travel to New York, for he suspects that the Soviets have something other in mind than a mere good will tour.



Discussion Question 1

Why are the Soviets so desperate to keep Jesse Austin on a tightly-ordered, scheduled tour of Moscow? How do things work out? Why?

Discussion Question 2

How does Mikael attempt to explain away the presence of Coca-Cola, chocolate, and American television programming to Zoya? Why?

Discussion Question 3

What notable differences are there between the Soviet world and the American world? How does Jesse come to view the Soviet world? Why? How does Zoya come to view the American world? Why?

Vocabulary

sedition, vigilant, inelegant, provocation, inexplicably, deference, insolence, imprudent, artifice, tantamount, pantomime, flummoxed, ornate, intricate, ostentation, excess, reticence, spontaneously, incongruity, polemic, inadvertently, prestigious, provincial



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Summary

Harlem, Bradhurst, West 145th Street, Same Day – Jesse Austin and his wife, Anna, meet Jim at their apartment door. Both have aged dramatically. Anna has remained beside her husband despite the rumors and accusations of adultery and the harassment of white girls that have plagued him. Jim gets tough with Jesse, telling him that the FBI knows that the Soviets have been trying to get in touch with Jesse, especially given the student trip. Jim antagonizes the couple by demeaning their looks, but Jesse keeps his calm. He says they no longer have contact with the Soviet authorities, and that they know nothing about the trip. Jim brings up the fact that Jesse used to sing for the Soviets. Jesse counters that Jim put an end to his singing career. Jim tells Jesse that one of the things that makes him angry are people like Jesse who come from nothing, making something of themselves in America, and then turn against America. Jesse asks them whether or not there might be Soviets who hate the Soviet Union, and would gladly trade places with Jesse and Anna. Jim tells Jesse and Anna to stay away from the concert.

Uptown Manhattan, Same Day – Elena sneaks out of the hotel. Mikael, at the Propaganda Ministry, works in a secret department called SERVICE.A, where he is entrusted with promoting the positive differences between Communism and capitalism overseas. Mikael is an ideological purist, knowing that the State has made mistakes in the past – such as the killing of Elena’s biological parents – but that true Communism must shine through. He and Elena have been lovers for a while now. Elena has the same viewpoint as Mikael when it comes to her parents and the State. Elena is ready to do her part to defend true Communism. She knows that SERVICE.A operates in passive ways, such as funding publications and subsidizing sympathetic figures. Elena loves Leo, but knows the State’s past corruption has destroyed Leo’s idealism. She will not let it do the same thing to her. Elena and Mikael take a cab to 145th Street in Harlem.

Harlem, Bradhurst, West 145th Street, Same Day – As Jim leaves the building, he mockingly asks the man sitting in the doorway if they are having a busy day. Jim wonders why the Soviets have attempted to contact Jesse Austin and get him to attend the student concert that night. Outside, Jim finds a group of well-dressed young men smoking cigarettes. He asks them to roll him one. They know he is the law, and cannot refuse. Jim takes pride in this. He then tells the men they are smoking cheap tobacco, and leaves. Elena’s taxi then pulls up. The white driver asks Elena if she is sure, as a 17-year-old white girl, that she wants to be in that place. Elena gives the driver money to wait for her. He will wait no more than 20 minutes. As Elena heads toward the building, she sees Jim and knows he is an American law enforcement official. She then continues past the building, and hides around the corner, knowing she cannot get in, and cannot get back to the cab.



Same Day – Jesse knows that his wife is, above all things, resilient and loyal. While most former friends, family, and colleagues turned their back on Jesse, Anna never did, not matter how bad things got. In the 1930s, at the height of his career, Jesse played for millions worldwide. Now, not even the smallest music hall or venue will book him. Called before the House Un-American Activities Committee in July, 1956, for his trip to the Soviet Union, Jesse was unable to defend himself and the statements he made while on that trip. Though not convicted of any crime, his passport was revoked and his music career ended. A man named Tom Fluker, who runs the corner hardware store, knocks on Jesse's door. With him is Elena. Though Tom vehemently disagrees with Jesse's Communist sympathies, he will not rat Jesse out, and leaves Elena with Jesse.

Same Day – Anna knows that things can only end badly, as she and her husband have lied to the FBI about being contacted by Communists. Elena explains she is a messenger, and explains she is a student traveling with the Soviet mission of good will. Elena communicates with Jesse in Russian. She explains that whether or not Jesse comes to the concert, he has not been forgotten in Soviet Russia, where his music is still being played. Elena tells Jesse that the students will clap for him if he gives a speech on the sidewalk outside the concert, and photographs will be taken, making it the defining moment of the trip. She even puts her hand on his arm to convince him. Elena also mentions that she has been seen by the FBI, which is why she came in through the back of the building with Tom.

Same Day – Osip Feinstein, on a neighboring rooftop, takes photos of Elena with Jesse, including one with her hand on his arm, and Jesse's rumpled bed in the background.

Manhattan, Hotel Grand Metropolitan, 44th Street, Same Day – Raisa returns to the hotel, and wonders if she is merely being paranoid by imagining there are American agents all around her. On her floor, Mikael meets her, asking her how the meeting went, and if she has been photographed. Raisa says she was not photographed, and that the meeting went well. Raisa wonders why Mikael is annoyingly delaying her. In her room, she asks Zoya where Elena is, and Zoya explains that Elena went swimming. Raisa notes how Mikael closely watches her.

Same Day – Jim enters the hotel lobby, nodding to all his colleagues. He is intensely curious as to who it was he saw in Harlem. Most of his colleagues are too relaxed, for they are dealing with kids. Jim, however, suspects the Soviets are seeking to use the trip for exploitative purposes of some kind or another. He heads to the ballroom, which is command central for the duration of the Soviet stay in New York. There, he looks through files until he finds a photo of 17-year-old Elena, and questions other agents about her movements. It is revealed that Elena went swimming. Jim then heads for the pool.

Midtown Manhattan, Fifth Avenue, Same Day – Elena rushes back to the hotel, knowing she may be late for afternoon rehearsal. She sneaks into the building, stripping down to the bathing suit she wears beneath her clothing, and realizes the American agent, Jim Yates, is at the pool. But it is Raisa who finds Elena. Elena, sweaty and hot from having rushed to get back in, claims she was in the sauna. As they pass Jim, Jim tells them



both he'll be watching them very closely from now on. Raisa, in private, demands to know from Elena what is going on, and what she is involved in. Elena says nothing. Raisa does not believe her.

USSR, Moscow, Nobye Cheremushki, Khrushchev's Slums, Same Day – Leo is lonely without his family. He tries to pass the time playing cards with himself, but to no avail. It is then that a young KGB officers picks Leo up, and brings him to Lubyanka.

United States of America, New York City, Manhattan, Hotel Grand Metropolitan, 44th Street, Same Day – Raisa awaits her husband on the phone. She asks about Leo's father's health, which he recognizes as a pretext for calling. She tells Leo she is worried about Elena. Leo tells Raisa to refuse to allow Elena to attend the concert, but the connection is lost.

USSR, Moscow, The Lubyanka, Lubyanka Square, Headquarters of the Secret Police, Same Day – Leo requests he be put through to his wife again. The secretary handling the phone call suggests trying again the following day. Leo realizes that he, as well as the KGB agents listening in on the call, have no idea what is going on in New York.

United States of America, New York City, Manhattan, Hotel Grand Metropolitan, 44th Street, Same Day – Mikael refuses to allow Raisa to attempt to contact her husband again. In her room, Raisa tells Elena she will not be attending that night's concert because it concerns Leo. This prompts Elena to cry, saying Leo is sick and paranoid. Elena says she is not a child anymore, and that if Raise refuses to let her attend the concert, she will never forgive Leo.

Same Day – Jim Yates questions the FBI's Russian translator, who has translated the conversation between Raisa and Elena. The translator is a 40-year resident of America, teaching linguistics in the Ivy League. Jim tells the room of agents that Raisa is a better agent than all of them, because she knows something is going on that they don't. He tells them all to do their jobs. Jim orders Raisa, Elena, and Zoya to be watched every step of the way to the UN. A field agent then approaches Jim, saying they have successfully followed Soviet agent Osip Feinstein to 145th Street in Harlem.

Manhattan Global Travel Company, 926 Broadway, Same Day – Osip develops the film behind his office in his storeroom. At 59 years old, Osip is one of the longest-serving spies in the United States, having ironically grown attached to the country he is now betraying. He originally came to the United States in 1934 avoiding Communist persecution for being Jewish, ultimately falling in with the CPUSA in New York. He doesn't care about the CPUSA, but uses them for money, to make a living, saying he has been sent to New York to foment revolution in the midst of economic depression. The CPUSA had eaten it up, and he'd become the proprietor of the travel agency, helping Soviet spies come over for the past 30 years. A man comes into the store – a man Osip recognizes must be an FBI agent despite his cheap suit, and is the same man he saw outside of Jesse Austin's apartment building. Jim Yates comes right out and reveals he is an FBI agent, reveals that Osip has been under surveillance for years, and that he was near the home of Austin, taking photos. Osip has no choice but to proceed



according to his plan. He admits to leaving the Soviet Union due to persecution, but denies the 325 people he has helped to immigrate are spies. He says he now wishes to work for the U.S. government, and wishes to prove his loyalty and desire to do so. Osip reveals the SERVICE.A plot to get Jesse Austin to speak outside the UN that night. Jim finds it hard to believe that a washed-up has-been singer could matter so much. Osip explains that, after that night, he will be more famous than can be imagined.

Harlem, Bradhurst, West 145th Street, Same Day – Jesse watches and listens to the streets at night while his wife works the late shift at a 24-hour restaurant. Jesse doesn't know if he will give the speech, but Anna is still worried about him as she heads to work. Jesse reflects on why he became a Communist. It had nothing to do with racism or class or poverty, but being loved on stage for singing and dancing not being enough. He had to do more.

Manhattan, United Nations Headquarters, General Assembly Hall, First Avenue & East 44th Street, Same Day – Raisa reassures Elena before the concert, telling her to have fun and to enjoy it. She says the worry is hers, not Leo's. Elena then tells Raisa that she would never be involved in anything that wouldn't make her proud. As Elena takes the stage with her friends, she is certain that her mother will be proud of her when the truth of her mission becomes apparent. Jesse Austin will be part of a second revolution for the world in which Communism will provide the vehicles for civil rights.

Harlem, Bradhurst, Nelson's Restaurant, Eight Avenue & West 139th Street, Same Day – Anna gets to work. She then realizes she already knows her husband will accept the invitation, excuses herself from work, and then rushes home. When she gets home, she finds Jesse standing on the bed, rehearsing his speech.

United Nations Headquarters, General Assembly Hall, First Avenue & East 44th Street, Same Day – Jim Yates watches the performance. The American liberals who organized the event, as liberal as they were, wouldn't allow any pro-Soviet songs to be sung, and neither would they allow any pro-American songs to be sung. This annoys Jim. He thinks the entire mission trip is grotesque, and is appalled that any American parent would let their kid participate. He believes those parents warrant further investigation.

Outside the United Nations Headquarters, Same Day – Jesse Austin carries an apple crate from Nelson's to the UN in order to stand on to give his speech. The police are out in force, as are anti-Communist protestors and antiwar protestors. Jesse, with Anna holding his hand, is directed by an unidentified man to a certain spot beside the barricade. The man tells Jesse that this is his time.

Same Day – As Jim Yates goes outside, he sees Jesse Austin standing on the crate, and the police moving forward to get him to change spots. Jim tells the police the man is Jesse Austin, and not to bother with him, because no displays of force can be tolerated that night with the world watching and a propaganda way underway.

Same Day – Jesse is recognized by an old antiwar protestor. As word of his presence travels through the crowd, many begin shouting accusations at him, from his opposition



to the Vietnam War to his love of Communism. Anna steps up beside her husband to hold him and defend him. With the crowd largely silenced, Anna steps down and Jesse begins his speech. Yet, as he speaks, a growing number of protestors begin to shout opposition to him for his love of Communism. Jesse argues that the government does not create human rights, but that rights come first. He says that governments exist to serve and protect rights. He continues to speak, excited for the moment when the Soviet kids will appear and applaud him.

Global Travel Company, Broadway, Same Day – Osip Feinstein, chained to the radiator in his storeroom, comes face-to-face with the Soviet operative who gave him the camera. The operative douses Osip with hydroquinone, used to develop film, and sets Osip on fire.

United Nations Headquarters, General Assembly Hall, First Avenue & East 44th Street, Same Day – The concert ends successfully. Offstage, Zoya is happy to see Raisa smiling and laughing with an American principal. Zoya looks around for Elena, but cannot find her. Zoya then follows Mikael Ivanov through the crowds. Raisa also follows Mikael, seemingly unfazed that he is being photographed. He watches the demonstration outside through the window. Raisa asks Mikael where Elena is. Seeing that Mikael is considering what lie to tell her, Raisa tells him that she will kill him if anything happens to Elena.

Outside the United Nations Headquarters, Same Day – During dress rehearsal, Mikael had told Elena that plans had changed. Only she could be secretly taken outside, for the FBI was personally monitoring the transfer of students back to the hotel. After the performance, Elena makes her way outside. She is to hold Jesse's hand, making a photo op of the gesture, in which two nations and two generations will be joined, and demonstrating the Soviet Union's equality. She hopes her performance will earn her Mikael's trust and love. Elena arrives near Jesse, amazed at his speech. She climbs up beside Jesse, and unfurls a Soviet flag. Some members of the audience cheer, while others boo in disgust. It is then that Jesse is shot, falling to the ground and pulling Elena with him. She is stepped on and trampled by fleeing protestors. The police move in, and Raisa rushes to Elena's side. She pulls off the red coat Elena is wearing, in the pocket of which is a gun.

Bellevue Hospital Center, 462 First Avenue, Same Day – Jesse is dead. Anna is beside herself with grief. She believes the authorities are to blame.

17th Police Precinct, 167 East 51st Street, Same Day – Raisa is stunned at what has happened, and humiliated she did not listen to Leo. She and Elena have been arrested. Raisa knows that Elena is an idealist, seduced by promises only to end up with blood on her hands. Jim Yates then comes to collect Raisa for moving. As they move through the police station, a black woman pulls out a gun and fires it.

Harlem, Bradhurst, Nelson's Restaurant, Eight Avenue & West 139th Street, Next Day – The customers at Nelson's watch unfolding news coverage of the events of the night before. The story is that the assassin is a Russian woman who Austin promised to



marry to get her out of the Soviet Union, but Austin was already married, and so the woman killed Austin. Afterwards, Austin's wife killed the woman, and then killed herself. Nelson begins to collect a fund to hire a private investigator to find out what truly happened.

Analysis

As the novel continues, the reader is given greater insight into the differences between the United States of America, and the Soviet Union in two important ways. The first is in the reader's exposure to the FBI by way of Jim Yates. Whereas their KGB counterparts wear uniforms and strike fear into the hearts and minds of Russian civilians, FBI agents wear suits and blend into the population, the vast majority of which supports their work and feels safer with the FBI around. While Jim Yates speaks in a demeaning manner to Jesse and Anna Austin, and while the IRS and other organizations have harassed them, the Austins have never been arrested for their beliefs or their attitudes toward Communism and the United States. This gives rise to the second stark difference between the United States and the Soviet Union. Jesse ironically argues to the public against the United States and in favor of Communism that human rights come before law, and that governments are intended to protect those rights. Yet Jesse does not realize the truth of things in the Soviet Union, where the government he loves so much ruthlessly arrests, tortures, and kills people even suspected of disagreeing with Communism. If Jesse had been a Soviet citizen speaking in Moscow about the greatness of America, he would have been dragged away, tortured, and executed almost immediately for his speech. Yet, as an American, Jesse criticizes the very same country which has allowed him to succeed. It is something that annoys Jim Yates to no end, but Yates, who truly believes in America, also believes in the freedom of speech, even if the speech is wrong.

As it quickly becomes apparent to the reader, there is more than meets the eye to Elena's imploring of Jesse to come and speak in public. Here again, the theme of Communism, with all its warped and twisted aspects, comes back to the fore as Jesse Austin is only brought out in public view to be assassinated. The reader, and Jim Yates both learn that Elena is being manipulated by Mikael, who uses love as a way to ply Elena into compelling Jesse to appear in public. Raisa herself figures out that Elena has a part in the events as they unfold, leading her to threaten Mikael's life if anything should happen to Elena. But the true extent of the Soviet plot is not yet known, apart from the fact that Jesse was meant to appear in public. Only a country as corrupt as Communist Russia would willingly put the lives of children at risk in order to achieve some kind of political and strategic end. This is all confirmed by Osip Feintstein, who speaks to Jim Yates about the unfolding Soviet plot shortly before it happens.

It is also in this section of the novel that idealism emerges as an important theme. Idealism here applies to the characters of Elena and Jesse Austin, who are both unfailingly devoted to Communism, and the Communist State. Much of Elena's idealism can be chalked up to her youth, naiveté, and her infatuation with Mikael, who uses both Elena's love and idealism to manipulate her into becoming an unknowing part of a



larger Soviet plot, though she believes her role in the plot is merely to get Jesse outside for a photo op. Like Leo was years before, Elena is blinded by her idealism and her love, and so cannot see the truth that there is indeed something else going on without her knowledge. Jesse Austin, by the time he comes to speak at the UN, is a nearly-broken man. His career is largely washed-up due to his vocal support of Communism, and a series of rumors and invented scandals that have plagued his life. Even run-down, Jesse Austin is still not out, and still remembers the old fire within him. Though his preaching about human rights and Communism is ironic, it is plain to see for the reader that his idealism has not aged along with him. His idealism is still as strong as it was in the 1930s, and this blind idealism lures him into becoming part of a Soviet plot.

Discussion Question 1

How is Elena able to convince Jesse Austin to come out and speak again in public? Why does Jesse decide to do so?

Discussion Question 2

Describe the irony in Jesse Austin's public defense of Communism – both in what he says, and in the act of speaking. Why does he not realize the irony of what he says and does?

Discussion Question 3

Why is Elena blind to the larger Soviet plot that is behind her? How does Raisa figure out that something is going on? How does she react? What happens as a result? Why?

Vocabulary

tactile, institutionalized, inequalities, rejuvenate, ideology, servile, suppliant, resilience, affidavit, draconian, cantankerous, countenance, condescending, squalid, escapade, lecherous, apogee, boisterous, proximity, insidious, aplomb, stultified, introspection



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Summary

One Week Later, USSR, Sheremetyevo Airport, Twenty-nine Kilometers Northwest of Moscow, August 4, 1965 – Frol Panin watches as the plane carrying the returning students touches down in the rain. Panin reflects on how news of Jesse Austin's assassination has become worldwide. At home in the Soviet Union, the papers cast doubt on the official version of events in New York. The students will need careful debriefing and meetings with KGB agents, officials, psychologists, and propaganda officers, all of whom have flooded the airport. Panin is 61, is trim, and is well-accomplished, having most recently helped Chairman Brezhnev oust the aged Khrushchev to lead the Soviet Union. Panin awaits the plane out of loyalty to Leo, with whom Panin has worked in the past, even having managed to become something of friends with Leo.

Mikael Ivanov is the first person off the plane. Panin informs Mikael he has been reassigned and will be leaving immediately by train. Panin tells Mikael that Leo is well-aware of what has happened. Panin does not know where Mikael is going, so he can tell Leo the truth about not knowing where Mikael has been reassigned. Panin then moves on and watches as the students disembark. He meets Elena and Zoya, seeing the pained look of love on Elena's face as Mikael is led away. Panin knows that Elena has merely been used by Mikael.

Panin introduces himself, apologizes for the loss of their mother, and brings the girls to his car. He then explains how the international media has gone with the story that Raisa and Austin had an affair back in 1950, which became an obsession for Raisa. Learning of the student delegation to New York, Raisa had forced her way to go on the trip, had a sexual encounter with Austin at his apartment, after which time Austin told her that he would never leave his wife, and Raisa would have to go back to Russia, leading to the assassination. Elena says it is not true, and Panin says he knows. It is a story agreed upon by the United States and the Soviet Union – a grieved, lone shooter, avoiding any bad press between the superpowers. Panin then goes on to explain that Raisa's death has changed Leo in a very bad way. Panin hopes seeing the girls will help Leo. He explains Leo will want answers, and it is up to the girls what they tell him, though Panin advises against lying.

Moscow, Novye Cheremushki, Khrushchev's Slums, Same Day – Elena worries about talking to Leo, for something about him has always unsettled her, despite her love for him. Zoya reminds Elena that Leo loves her very much. Panin tells the girls he'll be with them both, and not to worry. At home, Leo is stricken with grief, and is nearly unrecognizable to the girls as they man they know as their father. The furniture in the apartment has been pushed to the sides of the room, except for a table and chairs under the light. The room is full of photos of Raisa and news clippings of the assassination. The apartment resembles an interrogation cell. Leo asks Elena to tell him



everything, which she does. Leo asks where Elena's diary is. She explains it was confiscated by the Americans. Leo says out loud that he should have read it when he had the chance, for he would have learned about Mikael sooner – and he could have stopped the whole thing. Leo tells Elena she was blinded by love, and that he himself planned similar operations which required love and optimism to blind the individual to the truth of the plot. Elena says everything is her fault, but Leo says it is not – that his decision to shelter Elena from the harsh realities of the world led to what has happened. Leo asks where Mikael is now, and Panin says that Mikael is on a train, but to where, he does not know. Leo wants to know who the real killer was – and Panin says he does not know. Leo demands to go to New York to find his wife's killer, not believing the official version of events that it was Anna Austin. He promises he will find his wife's killer.

Same Day – Leo stands on the roof in the pouring rain, and then heads back downstairs, determined to make good on his promise.

Eight Years Later, Soviet-Finnish Border, Soviet Checkpoint, 760 Kilometers Northwest of Moscow, 240 Kilometers Northeast of Helsinki, New Year's Day, 1973 – Any civilian caught in the border area between Russia and Finland is shot for assumedly attempting to defect to the West. Eli Romm, in charge of a particular zone of the border, examines the backpack contents of a man recently shot and imprisoned while trying to cross into Finland. Gold is found in a secret compartment in the backpack, proof of defection, for gold is nearly impossible for a citizen to get his hands on. Along with the gold, Romm finds photographs of two women in their twenties on their wedding days, newspaper clippings about Jesse Austin from 1965. Eli interrogates the man, but no answers are forthcoming.

Seven Years Later, Afghanistan, Province of Greater Kabul, Lake Qargha, Nine Kilometers West of Kabul, March 22, 1980 – Leo is using opium to numb the pain of his past. He nearly commits suicide while high on opium by walking into the lake, but the opium wears off, and he returns to shore.

City of Kabul, Karta-I-Seh District, Darulaman Boulevard, Same Day – Leo returns to his apartment, depressed and sad, having been unable to get to the bottom of his wife's murder. His apartment is sparsely furnished and in the city, rather than behind guarded gates like other Soviet officials. Everything he does – from his living arrangements to the way his apartment is barely decorated – is done to keep Raisa out of his mind. He uses opium so he will feel detached from his own body. His superiors know about his addiction, but turn a blind eye to it. Soviet soldiers and officers are allowed to indulge in certain pleasures to supplement their poor wages and their stationing in Afghanistan. Leo reflects on how he has tried for years to get to New York, without any success. He remembers his wife's body being returned to Russia, remembers demanding a second autopsy which confirms the American report that Raisa had been shot from a distance of ten meters, a single bullet from a powerful gun that entered just beneath her ribs. Leo then examined the body himself, a horrifying process. He found it almost impossible to believe the dead woman before him could be his wife, for there was no longer any life to her. Leo realized the wound Raisa received would not have been immediately fatal, but death would have been slow and agonizing. Knowing that Raisa could have been



saved, and that the official version of events was a lie, Leo did everything he could to get to New York. During that time, there had been brief moments of happiness – Zoya becoming a doctor and marrying, and Elena marrying at the age of 21. Both girls now live in their own apartments. After their weddings, Leo had returned to the case of his wife's murder by tracking down Mikael to the city of Perm. There, he discovered that Mikael had become an alcoholic, and had died after walking out on a frozen lake, falling through the ice and contracting pneumonia. Knowing he could not waste any more time, Leo had attempted to cross the border into Finland, only to be shot and captured. It was Panin who saved Leo, saying that he could not save Leo again. The State then told Leo that Leo could take a job no one else wanted, or spend life in prison.

City of Kabul, Soviet Embassy, Karta-I-Seh District, Darulaman Boulevard, Next Day – Captain Anton Vashchenko gets dressed to go running, bringing along his semiautomatic Makarov pistol as he runs. Having been a child in Stalingrad, bad situations do not bother Anton. He has been tasked with the security of the city, and so decides to live in the city rather than in more secure places. Anton, though he has a wife and children, knows he is not truly a family man. He prefers to be tested every day, to always need to carry out a mission. It makes him feel alive. As a member of the elite Spetsnaz unit, Anton had been among the first Russians in Afghanistan to help save a failing Communist government. It is an all-out invasion of 50,000 Russian troops under the guise of a military aid program. The factions at war with the government turn on the Russians. Many local tribes also revolt against the Russian presence. Anton worries about the notion that the Afghans have never lost a war.

City of Kabul, Karta-I-Seh District, Darulaman Boulevard, Next Day – Leo wakes up, unclean and unkempt. It is his seventh year serving as a Soviet advisor to the Afghan Communist regime. Numerous other advisors before Leo have been savagely killed. Leo also serves as a member of the Secret Police, returning to his old trade, but now in Afghanistan. Leo knows that Communism cannot be exported to Afghanistan without exporting the police force to back it up. Leo's current role as advisor and policeman rest on his dedication to duty. If he fails or if he deserts, his daughters will have to pay the price. Leo's advice that the police force be moderate is ignored in favor of a brutal, Stalinist-style system of vendettas and indiscriminate arrests. The current president of Afghanistan, Babrak Karmal, is essentially a Soviet stooge, but has promised a change to the past. The police force is reorganized into the KhAD – the State Information Agency – and is the Afghan equivalent of the KGB. Brutality will be replaced with restraint. Leo, in addition to his duties as an advisor and agent, trains new agents as well. Leo wears a mixture of Western and local-styled clothing, which the authorities tolerate due to the unconventional and dangerous nature of the Soviet occupation. Leo is not accepted as a friend by the locals, and is considered to have gone native by many Soviet troops. He appears to be a man without belief or conviction.

City of Kabul, Dih Afghanan, Kabul Police Headquarters, Same Day – Trainee agent Nara Mir reads books while waiting for her teacher, Leo, to arrive. Nara is 23, and despite Leo's bizarre nature, enjoys learning from him. She will become an agent supervising ideological education at schools, and monitoring students to see which can be used by the regime. Among the beliefs the regime is seeking to get rid of is the local



idea that victory is predetermined. Leo is three hours late when he arrives, with everyone in his class except Nara having left. Leo recognizes idealism in the girl, almost to the point of naiveté. Leo also recognizes that her desire to stay in the classroom long after everyone else has gone must have to do with something she is avoiding or trying to hide from, perhaps at home. As Leo is about to tell Nara she can leave, Captain Anton Vashchenko appears. Anton gets right to the point. A high-ranking officer from the 40th Army disappeared the night before, believed to be a desertion. Anton's men need Leo's help finding the officer. Above all, it must be demonstrated that desertion will not be tolerated. Leo is ordered to bring Nara along for field work experience.

Tapa-E-Tajbeg Palace, Headquarters of the 40th Army, Ten Kilometers South of Kabul, Same Day – Leo and Nara travel to 40th Army Headquarters, located on a ridge with a beautiful view. The missing officer, Fyodor Mazurov, has already been named a deserter. In his early thirties, Fyodor is a career soldier with little experience abroad. Leo explains to Nara that even minute differences between people who live the same way, such as soldiers, can be telling. For example, even though soldiers are issued the same standard supply kit, how they lay their kit out could be telling. There are also many things not standardized, such as cigarettes, money, letters, papers, or even diaries, which are often kept by soldiers. Fyodor's room is in perfect order, indicating that Fyodor planned to disappear, and that he took pains to clean the room because he knew it would be searched. Leo discovers a mirror in Fyodor's room – one of the few undamaged mirrors in the palace – meaning he was vain, meaning he has met a woman.

City of Kabul, Murad Khani District, Same Day – Nara helps Leo navigate the list of women that Fyodor has had contact with, for she knows many of them personally. They discover that Fyodor has had regular meetings with a government minister who has a daughter named Ara, who is in her mid-twenties, educated, and fluent in Russian. They find the house where the minister and his daughter live – a beautiful building – and they sneak in. They then confront Ara, demanding to know where Fyodor is. Leo promises to help them in exchange for information. Ara, realizing the danger she is in, relents. She leads them to the cellar, being used as a storeroom, where Fyodor is hiding. He admits that he and Ara are planning to travel to Pakistan – a dangerous journey. Leo realizes that the couple's final goal is not Pakistan, but America. He tells Fyodor to return to his unit, and to promise them that such a thing will never happen again. Suddenly, Soviet soldiers pour into the basement. Nara explains that she has merely been keeping Anton informed of her movements with Leo. Leo compliments her without emotion, saying she has the makings of an excellent agent. Leo knows she has been sent along not for field experience, but to spy on Leo. Ara is not arrested. Her punishment will be dealt out by her father.

City of Kabul, Murad Khani District, Same Day – As Nara prays, she wonders whether or not she shouldn't have reported the locations of herself and Leo to the captain, worried for the safety of Fyodor and Ara. Nara then realizes that she only did as she was instructed, and that the actions of Fyodor and Ara were their own. Nara looks around her own room to see what others might think of it, like Leo. She hides her textbooks outside so no one knows she is attending university, and keeps hidden the



fact that she now works for the secret police. Nara's father, Memar, is one of the country's leading architects, and leader of his guild, elected as liaison to the State functionaries. Nara's brother, handsome and spoiled, cares more about socializing than anything else. Nara's own unmarried state is something of an embarrassment to the family, for no one is even courting her because of her education and work for the secret police. Nara knows she could move out, but stays with her parents out of love. That night, two men break into the house, and savagely attack Nara, telling her she has betrayed her country by wanting an education. Nara fights back by stabbing one of the men in the neck with her pen, and escapes onto the roof. She is pursued by the second attacker off the roof and into the alley. She appeals for aid from a woman at another door, but Nara's half-naked state causes the woman to shut the door in her face.

City of Kabul, Karta-I-Seh District, Darulaman Boulevard, Same Day – Since returning from the arrest, Leo has smoked opium to force himself to forget his failure to get to New York and find his wife's killer, as well as to forget Fyodor and Ara. A knock at the door reveals Nara, who stumbles in. A few moments later, Leo passes out from having smoked so much opium. Nara quickly takes hold of her situation. She is behind a locked door, but angry men are gathering in the street, no doubt due to seeing a half-naked girl run into a Soviet man's house. Nara awakes Leo by burning him with his lighter, causing Leo to regain consciousness and some of his senses. She informs him as to what is going on. The mob outside begins to break down the door. Leo piles up all of his possessions in front of the door, and lights them on fire. He and Nara climb onto the roof. The mob, stunned by the fire, stops the attack. Leo now hopes that a patrol will save them. He now owns nothing except for the clothes he is wearing, unfinished letters to his daughters in his pocket, and some opium in another pocket. Leo puts his arm around Nara.

Surobi District, Barqi-Surobi Dam, Fifty Kilometers East of Kabul, Same Day – Fahad Mohammad and a group of terrorists attack the dam, under control of Soviet and Afghan troops, to cut off the generation of electricity. Their plan is to damage the tunnels beneath the dam, forcing it to close down for repairs, and crippling Soviet activity in Kabul. Among the group is Samir, Fahad's younger brother. They are spotted by the guards, and the guards open fire, killing everyone but Fahad. Water is released from the dam, washing away Fahad downriver, who wonders why he is not dead.

Greater Province of Kabul, City of Kabul, Dih Afghanan, Kabul Police Headquarters, Next Day – The night before, Leo and Nara are saved at the last minute by a Soviet patrol, and are brought to the police station where they are tended to. Martial laws has been imposed on the city, for the attack on Nara is not isolated, but part of a series of attacks, of which Nara is the only survivor. Fifteen are dead – nine students and six family members. Anton meets with them, congratulation Nara on surviving. Anton is to the point. The murders are intended to create sensation. Anton believes it is not coincidence that the dam was also attacked the previous night. The bodies of the would-be attackers are currently being identified. Just as Fyodor is to be executed for desertion, the murders must be responded to by making an example of the killers and returning life in the city to normal. Leo and Nara are to be tasked with finding the killers. Nara's parents have been brought in for questioning.



Greater Province of Kabul, Eight Kilometers East of the City of Kabul, Same Day – Leo and Nara drive a Soviet version of the American jeep, the UAZ-469, full of supplies and weapons, to Pul-i-Charkhi Prison. The vehicle is bulletproof, but it doesn't make Leo feel any safer. He thinks the entire Soviet occupation of Afghanistan is doomed to failure. The prison itself is home to all kinds of torture, the favorite being the use of broken American-brand Fanta soda bottles to hurt and kill.

Greater Province of Kabul, Pul-I-Charkhi Prison, Ten Kilometers East of the City of Kabul, Same Day – The prison, isolated and heavily-guarded, has been reputed to be the place of 15,000 deaths and executions. Leo can see mistrust is high at the prison, between the Soviet guards, newly-hired Afghan guards, and the old guard under the former president that the Soviets shot to replace. Nara worries how her parents will respond to her uniform, and worries about her ability to question her own parents. Leo tells Nara she must do whatever the State demands. Nara asks how Leo would feel questioning his own parents – and Leo responds that everything new to Nara is now very old to him.

Same Day – Important political prisoners are kept in better areas of the prison. A professional interrogator, Vladimir Borovik, a recent arrival to the country. Vladimir Borovik believes Nara's parents were involved in the attack, for they haven't asked about her safety once, and don't seem to care that she has been viciously attacked. While the mother has been mostly silent, the father has ranted and raved about various political issues. Borovik explains that there should be at least a minute between his entrance with Leo, and then Nara's entrance. In the cell with Borovik, Leo sees how defiant Nara's father is, confirming to Leo that he either sanctioned, or was a party to, Nara's attack. When Nara enters, her father is unsurprised, clearly already knowing what his daughter did for work. Nara says she can help her parents, but her father tells them they have shamed her worse than a whore for working with the Soviets. He admits to drawing a map for the attackers, and indicated with an X where Nara would be sleeping. Nara's brother, also having been arrested, is brought into the room. Borovik drinks a bottle of orange Fanta soda, and breaks the bottle. He intends to use the son as leverage to get names of the attackers out of the mother. Leo heads outside to take a nap under a tree. When he awakes, Nara is sitting nearby, having recently cried. She tells Leo that her mother offered up a name to save her brother.

Analysis

The theme of family can be seen clearly in this next section of the novel, as Leo is devastated by Raisa's death to the point that even young, idealistic Elena can see that something in Leo has died. Leo vows to find his wife's killer, and to avenge the wrong that has been done to his family, no matter who the culprit is. Despite Leo's desire to seek out the killer and uncover the larger plot at hand, Leo knows that he must continue to love and care for his daughters until they are married and out on their own. This he does flawlessly, even coming to enjoy different periods of life over the next several years, including when his daughters are married. It is at this point that Leo recommits to his search, which ultimately leads to his attempt to illegally cross the border into



Finland, and as a result, his being sent to Afghanistan as a Soviet advisor, a job that few others would willingly seek out.

It is in Afghanistan, 1979, that the theme of war comes to the fore of the novel. War is seen firsthand by Leo and the Afghans, as the Russian 40th Army invades the country under the pretext of military assistance to the flailing pro-Communist Afghan government. The pro-Communist government is overthrown by the very same military forces supposedly sent to protect it, and a puppet Soviet government is set up in its place. The local factions and rebels previously fighting the pro-Communist government now turn against the Soviets themselves, resulting in a protracted conflict that will ultimately last ten years. The war itself brings a wide array of issues for the Soviet military presence as well. For example, Leo and many other soldiers become addicted to drugs during their time in Afghanistan, which is tolerated in order to compensate for the inhospitable nature of the posting. Many other Soviet troops partake in various immoral activities, such as rape and securing prostitutes, but all of this is overlooked by the Soviet government due to the unorthodox nature of the war.

The theme of Communism also comes back to the fore during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. The government they have come to save and replace is pro-Communist. The early years of this government are eerily reminiscent of the early years of the Communist Russia, and the ensuing reign of Joseph Stalin, in which mass arrests, torture, execution, fear, and intimidation were daily occurrences. All things that were done were done in order to protect and defend the State; and in Afghanistan, this is no less true. Leo sees the intense idealism of Communism in the heart and mind of Nara, who is willing to do whatever is needed in order to keep the revolution alive. Much of this support of Communism from Nara comes by way of her status as an Afghan woman. Islam and Afghan culture frown on female education, for example, while the Soviets value education as a method of indoctrination. While Communism gives Nara greater freedoms, she – and everyone else – also loses greater freedoms as their lives are made terrifyingly inferior to the life of the State itself.

Discussion Question 1

Though Leo vows revenge, and determines to get to the root of the Soviet plot that led to Raisa's death, as well as to find her killer, he waits to act until after his daughters are married. Why?

Discussion Question 2

Why do Soviet authorities allow immoral behavior on the part of their agents, soldiers, and advisors in Afghanistan? Why has Leo become addicted to opium? How do the authorities treat him?



Discussion Question 3

For what reasons does Leo sense idealism in Nara? Why does he find this to be dangerous?

Vocabulary

repercussion, asylum, criterion, imperative, mystique, aphorism, flippancy, picturesque, retinue, desiccated, fathomed, incongruous, besotted, onerous, perturbed, audacious, palatable



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Summary

City of Kabul, Sar-E-Chowk Roundabout, Same Day – Leo looks over Sar-E-Chowk, a busy intersection and marketplace. Captain Anton Vaschenko is determined to make an arrest that day, and Leo wishes to comply. The individual given up by Nara's mother is Dost Mohammad. Brute force will be used in broad daylight. Night arrests in Russia are feared; in Afghanistan, they are considered cowardly. Dost sells sweetened foods at the market, and so Leo is on the lookout for such a man. Dost is in his late twenties or early thirties, and was the mastermind behind the attacks. Leo finds such a man whose hatred of Soviets shows past his careful restraint, and Leo buys some sugarcoated almonds from him before returning to report to Anton. Leo tells Anton it will probably end badly, but Anton says it will not end badly for him. Leo and Nara head back into the roundabout as Soviet soldiers bear down on the area, led by Anton. Above, a Soviet helicopter hovers. Within seconds, the Soviets have cornered Dost, who is shot in the arm, and who Nara confirms is one of the men who attacked her. Before Dost can be apprehended, he lights himself on fire, and burns to death. Numerous people look on. Anton has achieved his display of Soviet power.

Border of Laghman and Nangarhar Provinces, Village of Sokh Rot, 116 Kilometers East of Kabul, Nine Kilometers West of Jalalabad, Next Day – 7-year-old Zabi remains indoors making the colors needed for dyeing the carpets her mother and her friends are making. Pretending to need more water, Zabi runs outside happy to be outdoors. Many of her female friends do not like to be outside, and Zabi reflects on what her mother has recently told her, that she is almost a woman now. Zabi thinks that if being a woman means she is not allowed to be outside, then she wishes to remain a girl. As she walks, she comes across Sayed Mohammad, a 14-year-old boy from the village. Sayed writes political poems. He takes interest in Zabi describing the taste of the color of pomegranate rinds – red – to be bitter. Red is also the color of the Soviet Union. Sayed explains his brothers, including Samir, are fighting the Soviets. When they return victoriously, Sayed will turn their triumphs into the best poems anyone has ever heard. Sayed sings a poem critical of Lenin and the Soviet invasion. Suddenly, they hear noise, and Sayed puts Zabi into a tree to see what is going on. Two helicopters pass overhead, and attack the village. She and Sayed run toward the water channel, where Sayed throws her forward into the water. She cannot see Sayed anywhere.

City of Kabul, Jada-E-Maiwand District, Microrayon Apartment Complex, Three Days Later – Leo's residency has been changed to a recently-completed complex patrolled by Soviet soldiers for his safety. All Soviet residents living in the city have been removed to the compound for their security following the death of Dost Mohammad, in fear of reprisals. As Leo prepares to smoke opium, he hears music from his neighbor, Nara's, apartment. Nara has been granted such accommodations because she is a symbol of the failure of the attackers to kill all their targets. Leo forces himself not to smoke and



goes next door. She is listening to a bootleg copy of an American singer, Sam Cooke. It reminds Leo of Jesse Austin's singing.

Nara asks about Leo's family, but before Leo can say he doesn't want to talk about it, and leave, Nara tells him her own father will be executed, her mother and brother imprisoned. It is then that Anton arrives, and ask to speak to both Nara and Leo in Leo's apartment. He explains that the body of Samir Mohammad, a known bomb-maker, was identified at the dam, and Samir was the brother of Dost Mohammad. Their eldest brother is a hardened fighter named Fahad, and their youngest brother is a boy named Sayed. A ground team sent to the family's village apparently came under fire, and in response, two Hind helicopters killed hundreds in the village. The massacre has sparked outrage, even among Afghan allies. Leo is assigned to broker a peace, offer compensation, to do something to make amends. Nara is assigned to go with him. Leo knows the only thing that the villagers may want will be for the Soviets to leave the country.

The Road from Kabul to Jalalabad, 100 Kilometers East of Kabul, Twenty-five Kilometers West of Jalalabad, Next Day – Leo and Nara travel in a small convoy consisting of themselves, a military officer, Anton, and a support vehicle with four Soviet soldiers, and air support standing by. Leo and Nara do not speak much as they travel. The night before, she and Leo had kissed, after which Nara quietly left the room, and Leo smoked. They are now at Darwanta Dam, not far from the destination of the village of Sokh Rot. Leo tries to talk to Nara about the night before, but he cannot bring himself to say anything rational.

A short time later, Anton explains his greatest disappointment since coming to Afghanistan. During the invasion, Anton was part of the group that was to take the presidential palace, where the 40th Army is now headquartered. Anton believed that the Afghan resistance would melt away as it had elsewhere, but the palace guards fought for every inch of the palace. Anton had hoped to be the one to capture the president. As he fights, he is amazed to see priceless works of art and treasure destroyed. Anton chooses the wrong room to go into in search of the president, who is in his own private bar. He is shot in the back drinking Scotch. Anton and his men then celebrate by drinking the Scotch. Anton regrets having picked the wrong room, having always wanted to kill a dictator. Anton smirks, saying if the chance ever comes again, he'll head straight to the private bar. Leo then realizes that Anton knows about the kiss, and the rooms must have been bugged.

Border of Laghman and Nangarhar Provinces, Village of Sokh Rot, 116 Kilometers East of Kabul, Nine Kilometers West of Jalalabad, Same Day – The village of mud huts has been reduced to mounds of dirt. Anton explains the villagers themselves brought destruction upon them for harboring terrorists. The village was flattened by fuel-air bomb, which produces blasts of long duration, sucking up oxygen from the surrounding air, making the attack much harder to survive. Anton says they'll need to move up into the hills to conduct negotiations, to see what the people want. The orchards will be replanted, the water will be cleaned, and the land will be given to relatives of those who were killed. They will also receive a medical center or a school. Leo says he and Nara



will go alone. Anton refuses to allow this, and comes along with his five soldiers. They come upon the goat-herding village of Sau, where a large crowd has gathered.

Village of Sau, 118 Kilometers East of Kabul, Seven Kilometers West of Jalalabad, Same Day – Leo, Anton, and the others are surprised to find the crowd in the village in a celebratory mood. Leo and Nara address the crowd, asking what can be done to make things right. An elderly man says that the Soviets will be driven out or killed when all is said and done. They have a sign that this will be so, as there is a survivor of the attack – a child. Anton demands to see the child. The crowd becomes angry then, and a rock is thrown, hitting Nara in the face. Anton helps Nara to her feet, and fires his weapon into the air, demanding again to see the child. When everyone refuses, the captain goes to a house with a pile of presents and gifts heaped outside, and goes in with Leo and Nara while their soldiers form a perimeter outside. Inside, they find a boy of 14, dressed in white, with no hair of any kind on his head. An elderly man explains the boy was found amidst fire and devastation, naked, walking without any hair on his body, a sign and a reason that the Soviets will be defeated. Anton then shoots the boy in the head.

Same Day – Leo is stunned, but not surprised by the killing, for the boy is old enough to carry weapons and old enough to cause hatred. The mission had never been to negotiate, he realizes – but to disprove the miracle of a surviving boy. Leo realizes he had been blind to the mission's true purpose, dulled by opium, lack of sleep, and worrying over his kiss with Nara. The elderly man in the room comes at Leo with a knife, and the captain guns him down. He then shoots a second elderly man, seated in the room nearby. A battle breaks out outside. In the kitchen of the hut, Leo and Nara discover a group of women huddling with a small girl, who has blistered skin and missing clumps of hair. Leo realizes the girl is the true survivor, and the boy was merely a local who had been shaved to appear as the survivor. No Afghans would rally around a girl. With enough of an advantage gained, Anton decides to move out, but Nara calls Anton into the kitchen.

Same Day – Nara points out the girl to Anton. Leo knows that Nara is choosing the State and the Party over her own moral code, which Leo knows Nara has. Anton explains he himself has handled the mission because he knew no one else would have the stomach for it. Leo puts a hand on Anton's shoulder, but Anton hits Leo with the butt of his gun, and then carries the little girl outside. Leo then picks up the dead elderly man's knife.

Same Day – Three of Anton's Spetsnaz troops are dead. The fourth is still firing with a fifth serious injured. Anton brings out the little girl into the middle of the village, and shouts out for everyone to see him. As he is about to kill the girl, Leo attacks Anton. The final soldier is killed, and Anton flees down the mountain. Leo tells the little girl she is safe. Fahad Mohammad arrives with his men, introduces himself, and asks who Leo is. Leo explains he is a Soviet advisor, but has no allegiance to men who would kill a child. Nara cannot hide the surprise on her face. Fahad is stunned to be recognized, and his men train their guns on Nara.



Same Day – Anton, bloody and bruised, heads toward the jeeps. He will radio in for an air raid that will flatten everything in the area.

Nangarhar Province, Rodat District, Fifteen Kilometers South of Jalalabad, 3,100 Meters Above Sea Level, Next Day – Leo struggles under the weight of opium withdrawal, having used the drug for seven years. It forces him to confront the fact that he had given up on his mission of finding his wife's killer by submitting to the addiction of opium. The village of Sau and the surrounding area has been flattened by Soviet bombing. Leo hallucinates about his wife, calling out her name, and bringing Nara to his side. Leo then steps outside of the cave in which he and Nara are being held, to see village campfires burning, and realizing that he is not yet done with the world. He stares with childlike wonder at the beautiful view.

Next Day – Nara watches the sun rising. She reflects on how she called Anton's attention to the girl, Zabi. She knows that with her real family gone and against her, she only has one family now – the State. She was not prepared to lose it. However, she feels morally reprehensible for what she has done. As such, she feels as if she no longer belongs to the State for feeling morally wrong, and feels as if she no longer belongs to the Afghan people for having sided with the State. Zabi complains to Nara about her skin itching, and Nara begins to cry. She tells Zabi she will make her an ointment from juniper berries to treat the burns.

Same Day – Leo awakens from his first real sleep in days. The opium withdrawal has settled enough for Leo to be able to think more clearly, and with his own conscience and voice. Leo has decided on a course of action. Nara and Zabi are now his new family. He will escape to Pakistan with them, and seek asylum in America in exchange for information about the Soviets. He will then travel to New York, and find his wife's killer. He knows his defection will prove dangerous to Elena and Zoya, and must think that problem through. As Leo eats breakfast with Zabi and Nara, Zabi asks what was wrong with Leo. Leo says he had been in despair. Zabi asks if Lenin is his god, and Leo says that Lenin is not his god. Zabi says her own family was killed in the first helicopter attack. Leo realizes the girl is in shock, showing no visible display of emotion. Leo is impressed by the ointment that Nara has produced, from juniper berries, oil, and blue flowers. Zabi says the color red is bitter.

Same Day – Leo tells Nara not to think on her mistake of giving up Zabi to Anton, but to learn from it, and make it right. Perhaps Nara can become Zabi's guardian, Leo suggests. He then begins speaking of escape before Fahad Mohammad appears. Fahad says a jirga, or council, has convened, and Leo, Nara, and Zabi must now stand before it. Leo will be taken away and protected from the Soviets. Nara is deemed a traitor and will be executed immediately.

Same Day – Leo tries to argue for Nara's life, but she is dragged away immediately. Leo argues that she can be of value to them, but the council elders say she is of more value dead than alive. As Nara is about to be executed, Leo offers to exchange weapons for Nara's life: 10,000 machine guns and 1,000 mortars. These could come from the Americans, who could be persuaded to support the fight against the Soviets. The



Americans would have a chance to deliver a blow to the Soviet military by means other than nuclear. Leo says he has nothing to lose, that he is already a traitor by having attacked Anton and saving the little girl's life. Leo promises to defect and rally American support. The Afghan fighters will need modern guns and missiles to bring down jets and planes – and the Americans have such weapons. A meeting can be arranged with the CIA using the Pakistani secret police, with whom the Afghan fighters have contact. Leo will bring Nara and Zabi with him as payment for his work. The council decides to vote on Leo's proposal.

Afghanistan-Pakistan Border, Hindu Kush Mountain Range, Khyber Pass, 1,000 Meters Above Sea Level, 180 Kilometers Southeast of Kabul, Thirty Kilometers Northwest of Peshawar, Pakistan, Next Day – A slim majority of the council believes American aid would help the war effort, rather than insult it. Fahad himself escorts Leo, Nara, and Zabi, with the goal being Peshawar, where the CIA will be contacted. Leo knows the case for American involvement in Afghanistan will not be easy in the aftermath of Vietnam. Even U.S. President Jimmy Carter's decision to boycott the Olympics in reaction to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan has met with criticism in the United States. Afghanistan was a remote, backwater place, perhaps of little interest to the Americans – but the ability to fight the Soviets covertly might be tempting. Leo imagines his own defection will perhaps, as well, be of little use. Yet Leo knows if he fails, Fahad will surely kill them all without hesitation. Fahad leads Leo, Nara, and Zabi along the Silk Road, an ancient trading route, through the Khyber Pass, heavily defended. In the midst of a coming storm, the Soviets bomb the land near the pass with butterfly mines. The group is trapped, unable to go forward or back.

Same Day – Unable to move, everyone hunkers down for the night. Leo and Nara hold hands, keeping Zabi warm between them. As the hail begins to fall, it hits the mines and detonates many of them. Fahad calls the mission blessed, for a path has been provided out. Zabi rides on Leo's back through the remaining mines.

Pakistan, City of Peshawar, Capital of North West Frontier Province, Forty-Three Kilometers Southeast of Afghan Border, Two Days Later – After reaching the small town of Dara, Fahad arranges for transport into Peshawar, where the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence group, an Islamic fundamentalist group, could be reached. In Peshawar, Fahad brings them to a guest lodge intended for Westerners called the Good Night Lodge. Fahad then leaves to make contact with ISI, while Leo explains to Zabi what is going on, telling her it is very dangerous for her to be in Afghanistan. The Soviet military fears defeat because it will make them look weak, and will do whatever they need to do, including killing innocent men, women, and children, to make this happen. Leo and Zara explain they will hopefully be traveling to America. It will not be easy to get to America, and it will be difficult to adjust to life in America, but life will ultimately be better, there. Zabi asks if they will make it to America. Leo says he hopes they will. Zabi asks what will happen if they don't. Nara says she will never leave Zabi.

Next Day – Leo anxiously watches through the window and checks the hallway, for Fahad has been gone for ten hours. A short time later, Fahad returns with a Pakistani secret agent, Abdur Salaam, and an American CIA agent named Marcus Greene.



Greene has already been made aware of Leo's request for asylum for himself, Nara, and Zabi, and now he asks Leo what kind of information Leo can provide. Leo explains he has been serving as an advisor in Afghanistan for the past seven years, and before that, worked for the KGB. He explains he can provide detailed information on everything from the specs of Soviet armor to the positions of troops in Afghanistan. Marcus explains that the United States does not want to become officially involved in the war, and so the United States cannot accept Leo.

Same Day – Leo follows Greene and Salaam along, begging them to reconsider. As they head outside, they are met by Anton Vashchenko in civilian clothing, along with two Afghan special operatives, all armed. Anton tells Greene that the CIA cannot take Leo. Greene and Salaam decide to sit down with Anton and Leo while Fahad and the two Afghans remain outside. Anton does not waste any time. He tells Leo that Leo is a war hero, says he does not really want to defect, understands his desire to protect the little girl, and will allow Leo, Nara, and the girl to live in the Soviet Union if they so wish, along with a considerable salary. Anton then goes on to say that Leo's own daughters will never again see him, and may even be subject to an investigation. Anton then tells Greene to consider carefully whether Leo would be an asset or a liability. Greene quickly responds that Leo's case has already been considered, and he has been accepted for asylum. Greene goes on to state that Anton's presence in Pakistan is unauthorized, and could become an international embarrassment at best. Anton warns Greene about allowing the United States to become embroiled in Soviet affairs that are of no concern to the United States, and says that any aid the United States provides will never be to their benefit in the end. Suddenly, Leo lurches forward with a knife, stabbing Anton in the throat, while Fahad kills the two Afghan operatives. Leo explains that Anton would never have allowed him to leave alive. Greene tells Leo that he is clearly worth more to the Soviets than Greene had considered. He officially grants Leo's request.

Analysis

As the novel continues, so does the theme of war, and the theme of Communism in conjunction with war. The Soviets have invaded Afghanistan not merely to keep a pro-Communist government in power, but to actually bring the entire nation of Afghanistan into the Soviet Empire, part and parcel. Only a few months into the conflict, the situation has already grown desperate for the Soviets. Beyond the immoral behavior of many advisors, soldiers, and officials, the Soviet war machine approaches the war with overwhelming and unjust retaliatory attacks. For example, the failed attack on the dam warrants the dropping of numerous fuel-bombs on the attackers' home village, leading to the deaths of hundreds of innocent people. Some call these retaliatory attacks disproportionate, and unjust due to the deliberate targeting of innocent people, but the Soviet military justifies the bombings as a demonstration of Soviet power and force. They conclude that the Soviet military cannot lose even an inch in the fight in Afghanistan, and so will continue to carry out such attacks. In accordance with Communism, anything done in support of the State, and the Revolution, is just. This can be most clearly seen when Anton shoots and kills the 14-year-old boy, and then tries to kill Zabi. The reader should bear in mind here the idea that red is the bitterest color,



according to Zabi – an important observation that has striking depth in relation to the evils of Communism.

It is also Anton's attempted assassination that brings out the theme of idealism once more. Anton's idealism – his faith in Communism and the Soviet Union – are unfaltering and unhesitating as he raises the barrel of gun to the back of a little girl's head, with the intent of killing her in cold-blood. The danger that Leo previously sensed in Nara's idealism also comes to pass, as it is Nara who outs Zabi to Anton, though she quickly comes to regret the decision, and almost immediately endeavors with Leo to make it right. Nara later confesses as much to Leo, wondering how she will ever come to live with herself after her idealism perversely affected her moral humanity. Leo reveals that he himself has once gone through such terrible situations, and had realized too late what he had done. He helps to counsel Nara on what to do next, and that includes caring for Zabi no matter what may come. Nara still has her entire life ahead of her to do good and make things better in the world. Leo, as well, is regaining much of his normal self, having broken the addiction to opium. He recovers his desire to find his wife's killer, and doubles his endeavor to make it to the United States.

In Pakistan, Leo meets with CIA operative Marcus Greene. Greene is decked out in an sharply-tailored suit, providing more distinction between the way in which the United States handles its affairs, and the way in which the Soviet Union handles its affairs. Greene, though technically an enemy of Leo's, nevertheless treats Leo with respect and is willing to hear Leo out even though Green is at first skeptical of what Leo has to offer. Rather than behaving as the Soviets would in that given situation – grabbing a potential defector and torturing him to extract information before killing him – Greene allows Leo to come and go freely. Ultimately, Greene grants Leo's request for asylum, along with Nara and Zabi.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Greene ultimately grant Leo's request for asylum? Would you have done the same given the situation? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Leo kill Anton? Do you believe he is right in having done so? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

How do the Soviets handle their invasion of Afghanistan? What is war like for both the soldiers and the civilians? Why do the Soviets conduct their war in this fashion?



Vocabulary

nonchalance, guile, aberration, serene, prehistoric, introspection, precipitous, shrewdly, profoundly



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Summary

Six Months Later, United States of America, New York City, Manhattan, United Nations Headquarters, First Avenue & East 44th Street, November 15, 1981 – Leo often goes to the very spot where Jesse Austin was killed 16 years before. Questions remain unanswered. Leo cannot imagine why Austin was shot, why both the U.S. and Soviet governments covered it up, why the gun planted on Elena would be used to frame Raisa, and who it was that murdered Raisa. Leo knows he is followed by the FBI, and usually doesn't mind, except for that day, since he has real investigative work to do.

Harlem, Bradhurst, West 145th Street, Same Day – No matter how many times Leo asks about Jesse Austin at his old apartment building, he never receives any real answers. He heads over to a nearby café to ask questions, but a woman working there howls at Leo to get out. Leo is not deterred. He will not give up in his quest for answers.

New York City, Brighton Beach, Same Day – As Leo travels on the subway, he sees an ad of a beautiful young girl in a bikini holding a bottle of Fanta soda. For the Americans, Fanta is a delicious soft drink for fun times, whereas in Afghanistan, broken Fanta bottles are instruments for torture. Leo watches families on the subway, feeling horrible that he cannot contact Elena or Zoya. Though America is pleasant enough, Leo cannot consider it home without them. Leo lives in an apartment next to Nara and Zabi. Nara has officially adopted Zabi. Everything about their lives is different and better – from air conditioning to reliable electricity. As Leo arrives home at his apartment in Brighton Beach, he has a visitor.

Same Day – Marcus Greene visits Leo. He explains he is on leave, visiting his family. Greene reveals he has also come home to relay news to Leo about Zoya and Elena, which might be mere rumors intended to flush Leo out, for the Soviets suspect he is alive. They, along with their husbands, have been brought in for questioning, but not arrested. Greene advises laying low and not responding, to make it seem as if he is dead. Leo tells Greene that he doesn't have much time, for he knows how the KGB works.

Same Day – Leo knows that only the worst will be in store for Zoya and Elena if he does not surrender to the KGB. At dinner, Nara and Zabi can sense something is wrong. Leo explains he must travel to Washington, to look over some Soviet files for the American authorities, and that he will only be gone a few days.

Washington, D.C., J. Edgar Hoover Building, FBI Headquarters, 935 Pennsylvania Avenue, Next Day – Leo knows he only has a matter of weeks before the KGB acts against his daughters. Leo meets Simon Clarke. Clarke is a patient, kind man who hopes that Leo will be able to help unravel many mysteries related to Soviet documents and espionage. There is 70 years' worth of material that needs scrutiny. Leo is free to



explore and explain documents as he wishes, but there is a specific selection that Clarke asks Leo to also deal with. As Leo explores, he discovers not only files and documents, but physical objects ranging from counterfeit money to microscopes to scientific equipment – anything used by the Soviet spies. As Leo continues on, he discovers the suitcase Raisa had taken to New York 16 years before.

Same Day – Raisa's bag is empty. Leo looks at the other suitcases – 27 of them – knowing that Elena and Zoya's bags must also be somewhere. Clarke then finds Leo, bringing him a catalogue of all the items and documents stored in the facility. Leo agrees to look at several boxes of specific interest to Clarke, and when Clarke leaves to give Leo some time to himself, Leo references the catalogue for Raisa's suitcase, coming across the words "Investigation Red Voice 1965". Leo finds the associated box to the case, and in it, finds Elena's diary.

New York City, Harlem, Bradhurst, West 145th Street, Three Days Later – Leo has transcribed the most important details from Elena's diary into a notebook which he now carries. Leo reads about Elena's unfolding love for Mikael, and how blind she was to his manipulation of her. Every mistake Elena made was motivated by her love for Mikael. She also refers to many of the people she encounters by number, rather than by name. For example, Mikael becomes Agent 55, whereas Jesse and Anna Austin become 71 and 17, respectively. Leo discovers that there are some individuals who he cannot figure out. One, in particular, stands out – Agent 6, who Elena says scares her. It refers to an FBI detective that Elena saw at Austin's apartment, and then followed her back to the hotel. Leo explains everything to Nara, who agrees to help him. They head to the hardware store mentioned in Elena's diary, where they meet Tom's son, who is aware that Leo has been asking around about Jesse Austin. Leo explains that Raisa, the woman blamed for the murder, was his wife.

Harlem, Bradhurst, Nelson's Restaurant, Eighth Avenue & West 139th Street, Same Day – William Fluker, son of Tom Fluker, brings Leo and Nara to lunch at Nelson's. He explains his father disagreed with Jesse, but nevertheless cried when Jesse was killed. At Nelson's, they also speak to Yolande, daughter of Nelson. She explains that no one in the neighborhood ever believed that Raisa killed Jesse. After Jesse's death, Nelson got involved politically, which caused many people to stop coming to his establishment. The restaurant became a political hotspot, but eventually became too much for Nelson to handle. When Yolande took over, she turned it back into an actual business, and the place thrived again. Based on the clues in Elena's diary, Yolande tells Leo that Agent 6 must almost certainly be FBI Agent Jim Yates.

New Jersey, Next Day – Nara worries that her investigation with Leo might jeopardize their asylum. Leo has learned through old newspaper clippings provided by Yolande that Jim Yates had retired not long after the Austin murder to tend to his wife's health, but Leo doubts that was the real reason. Leo also admits to Nara that he will be returning to the Soviet Union, risking his own life to ensure the safety of his daughters. Nara is horrified that Leo will be leaving, believing his quest for the killer of Raisa is nothing more than hateful selfishness. Leo considers this, but decides that the investigation is vital, and that Nara cannot possibly understand it.



New Jersey, Bergen County, Town of Teaneck, Cedar Lane, Same Day – As Leo and Nara arrive at the home of Jim Yates, whose wife died some years before, Nara panics. She cannot imagine her life without Leo in it. She tells him there would be no shame in letting things rest. Leo explains that he cannot rest until the truth is known. Yates lives in a beautiful neighborhood in a large house, but his house and yard are in neglect. Leo and Nara break into the house. It is dusty, dirty, and only a few rooms, such as the kitchen, appear to be used. It is then that Jim Yates appears at the top of the stairs.

Same Day – Yates is aged and thin, but has lost none of his confidence. Yates cracks open a beer, and tells Leo that he has been expecting him, having been informed about Leo's presence in the country. Yates says that modern agents are dumb and too soft. Yates knew from the second that he learned of Leo's asylum, what Leo's true intentions were. Yates says that now, FBI agents can no longer do what they need to get the job done, but must have multiple permissions given to do anything, and must do everything according to the book. Yates says that he was fired, rather than retired. Leo realizes that Yates has a story he wants to tell, that Yates is just as bothered by the truth being covered up as Leo. Yates explains that he values loyalty above all things. He is loyal to the United States, and he was loyal to his wife even up until the end, even when they no longer loved one another. Yates asks if Leo is there to kill him. Leo says he wants to find out who killed his wife. Yates says it wasn't him. Leo is disappointed because he knows Yates is telling the truth.

Same Day – Yates says that three people died that day – Jesse Austin, Anna Austin, and Raisa. Many black people assume Yates is the murderer, though Yates was on the other side of the street with his hands in his pockets when the killing occurred, and had numerous witnesses to back up the claim. Yates swears to God that the FBI never even considered, never even discussed the potential of killing Austin. Yates explains that it was a Soviet agent who killed Austin. Yates also knows that Elena's idealistic naïveté was key to flushing Austin out into the open. He reveals the plan of the Soviets, who believed Austin was more valuable dead than alive, the tinderbox to spark a revolution among minorities to rise up. No one in the black community, Yates goes on to explain, could ever believe the plot was hatched by the Soviets. Instead, they would blame the FBI. The official version modified events to be suggestive rather than full of hard-evidence, for conspiracy theories are born when the truth is too plain to see. Rather than a Communist plot, the assassination became a lover's tryst gone wrong. The Soviets could never prove that it was an FBI plot, so they merely cast doubt on the American story of events. Yates reveals his source of information as a gay, drug-addict Jew named Fip Opstein, who switched loyalties more than anyone Yates ever met. Yates didn't know whether or not to believe Opstein, so he handcuffed Opstein to his office radiator before heading out. Yates, though not part of the plot, decided to let things play out to see if what Opstein said was true, and because he didn't believe it was in the FBI's interests to save a traitor like Austin. Yates knew that there would be no revolution, because one of the distinguishing characteristic between American blacks and Communists is that black Americans believe in God. Decent, God-fearing Americans, of any skin color, will not kill innocent people in a revolution. Leo then asks who killed Raisa. Yates explains that Anna did, accidentally. Anna turned up at the police station intending to kill Yates, but fired several shots wildly, one of which hit Raisa



and was seen by numerous people, before Anna herself was shot and killed. Upper levels of power tied together the shooting of Austin and the shooting of his wife in the love tryst story to avoid race riots in Harlem. Osip and his store were torched in retaliation for betrayal by Soviet agents. Yates is later fired for having failed to stop the murder of Austin in the first place. Leo realizes Yates thinks of himself as a wronged hero. Leo knows that there is still something else Yates is not telling him about Raisa, so he knocks Yates to the floor and shoots Yates.

Same Day – Leo has shot Yates in the same place Raisa had been shot. He explains there was at least twenty minutes for Raisa to be saved. Yates confesses he allowed Raisa to die, that it would tie the murders together. Leo demands to know what Raisa's final minutes were like. Yates explains that Raisa forgave Elena, and gave Elena her love. Leo begins to cry. Yates begs for an ambulance. Leo does not want to call one, knowing men like Yates will never reform, that they will never admit wrongdoing, and such men deserve to die. Nevertheless, Leo instructs Nara to call an ambulance while Leo tends to Yates.

New York City, Brighton Beach, Same Day – Leo watches the sunset from Brighton Beach, which attains a small amount of red before the sun disappears. He realizes that Zoya was right. His investigation has not brought him any solace. Leo then says goodbye to Nara and Zabi, saying there is something he must do.

One Month Later, USSR, Soviet Airspace Above Moscow, December 13, 1981 – Leo is under heavy guard as he is brought back to Russia in the most luxurious kind of plane the Soviets have. The Soviets are experiencing financial difficulties, but spend lavishly to show the world that this is not true. The Americans, knowing Leo is a troublemaker following the incident with Jim Yates, are glad to be rid of Leo. Jim Yates had survived the injury, readily agreeing to cover over the incident as an armed robbery gone wrong. Yates tells the papers that the intruder was black. Leo has been granted only one demand for his return – that no harm will ever come to his daughters.

USSR, Moscow, Butyrka Prison, Pretrial Detention Center, 45 Novoslobodskaya Street, One Week Later – Leo has now been in Moscow for a week, and has yet to see his daughters, the only form of torture applied to him. The door to his cell opens, and a KGB officer tells Leo that his daughters will not be seeing him that day.

Same Day – A man arrives to visit Leo. The man explains he used to go by the name of Mikael Ivanov. Ivanov says he has become a man of great power and influence, having once pretended to be dead. Though he is unable to influence the events of the coming trial, he has been able to arrange for Zoya and Elena to come and see him. He asks Leo not to reveal his part in getting his daughters access, for it would ruin it for Elena. Leo asks why Ivanov would do this. Ivanov explains he is doing his best to be a good man in the eyes of his wife.

Next Day – Zoya and Elena are brought to visit Leo. Elena is pregnant. Both girls, now women, reach out and hug their father, who begins to cry.



Analysis

As the novel comes a close, so do the major themes found throughout the book. The differences between the United States and the Soviet Union are directly experienced by Leo, Nara, and Zabi in their time in New York. They are amazed to be able to travel around freely without being stopped by the police for papers, and are likewise amazed at the things that many Americans take for granted – such as clean water and air conditioning. Leo is likewise amazed to be living in his own apartment, which is well-designed, well-built, and well-maintained, whereas in Moscow, most families lived several to an apartment, and Leo's own home was in a squat, concrete slum. Even the smallest differences are immense. Leo, while riding on a subway train, is amazed to find a massive advertisement of Fanta, featuring a beautiful girl in a bikini, with the idea being that Fanta is something to be happily enjoyed with friends and family in times of good will. In the Soviet Union, Fanta is consumed by interrogators in order to break the glass bottle in which it is comes, to use the broken bottle as an instrument of torture.

By the time Leo returns to the Soviet Union in November, 1981, the Soviet Empire has less than ten years before it falls, and eight years before it abandons the war effort in Afghanistan. Though Leo feels at home in Moscow, he knows that he is returning to a system of supreme hatred and malice, in which his defection to the United States will likely result in his own death. Yet even then, Leo cannot help but note the changes already taking place. As anti-Communist feelings begin to fracture the Eastern bloc, Communism's hold on the Soviet world becomes tenuous. It is among the many reasons why Soviet-Communist efforts in Afghanistan matter so much. To gain a new nation in the Communist Empire would be cause for celebration, renown, and resources, and a clear demonstration that the Soviet Union is still strong; but to lose the war in Afghanistan would become symbolic of the corroding composition of Communism, and the decline of Soviet power. This cannot be tolerated, which is among the reasons why Soviet execution of their war in Afghanistan is so brutal and uncompromising. Additionally, the war is crippling Soviet finances, and having expended so much money and blood in the country, the Soviet Union will not call for retreat.

The novel ultimately closes with the theme of family. While Leo has discovered the truth behind not only Raisa's death, but the entire Soviet plot around Jesse Austin's assassination, he does not feel any better about things. In large part, this is because he suspected the truth of things all along. In another part, just because he has solved the mystery doesn't mean Raisa will come back. Leo becomes something of a father figure to Zabi during their time in New York; and while Leo has flirted with romantic feelings for Nara, who quite obviously harbors romantic feelings for Leo, Leo cannot bring himself to remain in the United States knowing that his daughters face persecution and imprisonment back in Russia.

Leo ultimately decides to return to Russia, knowing that Nara and Zabi will be safe and sound in America in their new home. When Leo returns to Russia, he is arrested and sentenced to trial for betraying Soviet Russia. The only likely outcome of this will be that he is to be put to death. Yet, the love of family sustains him. When he shoots Jim Yates,



he considers for a moment letting Yates die, but in honor of his wife's memory, and her having given Leo back his soul, Leo decides to call an ambulance to save Yates's life, allowing him the chance he never gave to Raisa. Leo's love for Raisa, and his family, has completely and irrevocably transformed him. When his children are given a brief opportunity to visit Leo in prison, Elena and Zoya hug him with all they have, for they know what kind of sacrifice he is now making. In "Child 44", a man in Leo's unit murdered Elena and Zoya's biological parents in front of them as children, only afterward to be adopted by Leo and Raisa. In "The Secret Speech", Leo risks his life again and again to save Zoya from a gang, and to save Elena from severe depression. In "Agent 6", things come full circle as Leo, the adoptive father, gives up his life in order to ensure that Zoya and Elena have real lives of their own. In this instance, he becomes a Christ-like figure, giving up his own life for others, so that others may live in his stead. It is a sacrifice that Zoya and Elena both clearly recognize, and are grateful for.

Discussion Question 1

Why does so much depend on the Soviet efforts in Afghanistan for the Communist world? How does the Soviet Union continue to falsely present itself to the world at large?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Leo decide to return home to Communist Russia? If you were in Leo's place, would you have stayed in the United States or gone home? Why or why not? Or would you have attempted something different? If so, what would you have attempted to do differently, and why?

Discussion Question 3

Why does getting to the root of Raisa's killing and uncovering the Soviet plot not have any real effect on Leo?

Vocabulary

rebuffed, rudimentary, frivolity, disjointed, malice, procedural, annotated, repatriation, spitefully, alleviate, truncheon, apparition



Characters

Leo Demidov

Leo Demidov is the main character and principal protagonist in the novel "Agent 6" by Tom Rob Smith. Leo is approximately in his fifties when much of the novel occurs. He is the husband of Raisa, and adoptive father of Zoya and Elena. Formerly a member of the KGB, Leo now works as the manager of a small factory, relishing his quiet life and family. When Leo's family is selected to be a part of a goodwill student trip to the United States, Leo is very uneasy about the idea. He is horrified to discover, soon after, that Raisa has been killed. Upon their return home, Elena and Zoya explain all they know to their father, particularly Elena, who has been manipulated through her love of Miakel Ivanov to be a party to events in New York. Leo does not believe the official version of events of his wife's death, and he endeavors to find out what happened to her. He spends the next several years helping Elena and Zoya begin their own lives, and with each one of them being married, Leo returns to the search for his wife's killer, determined to go to New York. However, he is apprehended trying to cross illegally into Finland. He is presented with a choice: he can serve in Afghanistan as a Soviet advisor to the pro-Communist government, or he will face life in prison.

Leo spends the next seven years as a Soviet advisor and secret police officer and trainer in Afghanistan, believing his mission to find his wife's killer to be a failure. He becomes addicted to opium to forget the past, and continues to train Afghan natives to become pro-Soviet members of the Afghan secret police. Among his trainees is a 23-year-old girl named Nara, who Leo brings along on various assignments for field experience, and because she becomes the sole survivor of a terrorist attack on all of Leo's students. Leo and Nara nearly have a romantic tryst later on. Leo and Nara are called to handle the aftermath of a Soviet bombing of a rural village, in order to soothe tensions. There, they discover a young girl, Zabi, has miraculously survived the bombing, which leads to Soviet authorities trying to kill Zabi to prevent the Afghan insurgents from using her for propaganda purposes. Leo and Nara save Zabi's life, and are taken prisoner by the local insurgents. While in captivity, Leo is forced overcome his opium addiction, and decides to defect in order to save the lives of Nara and Zabi, and to return to his mission of finding his wife's killer. The local insurgents allow this, with most hoping it will mean American support against the Soviets.

Leo ultimately comes to live in New York, with Nara and Zabi in the next apartment over. Leo and Nara continue Leo's search for Raisa's killer. Nara pleads with Leo to let the past stay in the past, but Leo will not rest. Leo has learned through the CIA that Elena and Zoya have been questioned by the KGB, and Leo knows that he is now racing against the clock to solve the crime, return home, and surrender to the Soviet authorities to save his girls. Leo discovers that the plot to kill Jesse Austin was Soviet-hatched, but covered up by the Americans, specifically by FBI Agent Jim Yates. Leo tracks down and shoots Yates, demanding to know if Yates killed his wife. While Yates did not personally shoot her, he allowed her to die to help cover up the Soviet plot.



Rather than let Yates die, Leo saves his life by calling an ambulance. Yates, a true pragmatist, is happy to help cover up the incident. At home in Moscow, Leo is arrested and awaits trial as the novel ends, given one brief meeting with his daughters.

Raisa Demidov

Raisa Demidov is the wife of Leo, and adoptive mother of Elena and Zoya. Raisa is stunningly beautiful, having married Leo out of fear years before due to his position as an MGB agent. She later comes to love him as he turns his back on the brutality of the Communist regime. While Leo becomes an obscure man devoted to his family, Raisa's career in education takes off, and she becomes responsible for a student good will tour of the United States. She makes sure Elena and Zoya are a part of the trip, and is warned to be careful by Leo before leaving the country. Raisa eventually learns that Elena is part of a Soviet plot concocted by Mikael Ivanov. As the plot unfolds, Raisa rushes to help Elena as Jesse Austin is killed. Gathering Elena into her arms, Raisa discovers a gun in the jacket Elena is wearing – which Raisa is then caught holding, and thus blamed for Austin's killing. At the police station, Raisa is accidentally shot by Anna Austin as she attempts to kill FBI Agent Jim Yates. Yates, knowing a cover-up is needed, allows Raisa to die rather than call an ambulance. Her last words are of forgiveness and love for Elena.

Zoya Demidov

Zoya Demidov is the older sister of Elena, and the adopted daughter of Leo and Raisa Demidov. Fiery, independent, and beautiful, Zoya is in her late teens or early twenties when she accompanies a student trip of good will to New York. There, she is amazed by the size, scope, and affluence of America, especially by television. After Raisa's death, Zoya returns to the Soviet Union to live with Leo, where she ultimately becomes a doctor, and gets married, beginning a family of her own.

Elena Demidov

Elena Demidov is the 17-year-old younger sister of Zoya, and the adopted daughter of Leo and Raisa Demidov. Elena is beautiful and unerringly kind, as well as idealistic and naïve. She is lured into a sexual affair with Mikael Ivanov, believing it to be love, and is in turn manipulated to bring Jesse Austin into the public square so that Austin can be assassinated, though Elena does not know this much. When Austin is killed, she is stunned, and when Raisa is killed, she is devastated. When she learns that she was part of a wider plot, and that her love was never returned by Mikael, she is heartbroken. She does, however, eventually marry, and becomes pregnant by the end of the novel.



Jim Yates

Jim Yates is an American FBI agent. He is unfailingly loyal to the United States, and is very pragmatic, willing to do almost anything to ensure the desired ends of things. While he is by no means akin to a Soviet MGB agent, he is nevertheless morally suspect for how he handles things. He is married to a woman who is mentally disturbed, yet he remains with her out of loyalty, carrying on an affair with a woman 20 years younger instead. He allows the plot to kill Jesse Austin to go on without intervening, for he believes Austin to be a traitor to his own country. He later allows Raisa to die, rather than to call an ambulance to save her, to cover up the Soviet plot to kill Austin and incite a racially-charged revolution in 1965. When Leo and Nara confront him in 1981, Yates explains everything to Leo, who then shoots Yates and allows him to suffer until he admits he did not save Raisa. Rather than returning to his mindset as a KGB agent, Leo calls an ambulance to save Yates's life. Yates becomes a willing participant in the cover-up of his own near-death experience, blaming it on a black robber, and protecting Leo and Nara instead.

Jesse Austin

Jesse Austin is a black American singer who is a fierce and idealistic Communist. He is married to Anna Austin, and enjoys the height of his career during the 1930s. However, Jesse's devotion to Communism ultimately mars his career, and by the 1950s, he is largely forgotten and shunned. Rumors of infidelity and other vices only further alienate him from the public, as well as his final visit to the Soviet Union in 1950. By 1965, he is a broken-down has-been who has still not given up believing in Communism. It is Elena's naïve idealism and urgent request that he speak outside the UN that compels Jesse to do so. Standing on a crate and speaking to the crowds gathered outside the UN during the children's good will tour concert, Jesse unwittingly and unknowingly becomes the center of a Communist plot to jumpstart a revolution, as he is killed by a Soviet agent to inflame racial tensions in the United States.

Anna Austin

Anna Austin is the black American wife of Jesse Austin. She is unfailingly loyal to her husband and his beliefs, standing beside him through thick and thin. When Jesse is asked to speak outside the UN, Anna dutifully accompanies him, and is devastated to see him killed. She immediately believes the FBI is to blame, for the FBI has been harassing them for years. She goes to the police precinct where Raisa is being held, and opens fires, intending to kill Jim Yates but accidentally hitting Raisa instead. Anna herself is then shot to death, and used as part of the American cover-up of the Soviet plot to begin a racially-charged revolution in the United States.



Mikael Ivanov

Mikael Ivanov is the 30-something Soviet propaganda expert sent to accompany the student good will tour of the United States. He has two purposes. First, he is to explain away all the things the students see and hear in America, making sure America does not rub off on the students. Second, as a member of the secret group SERVICE.A, Mikael has been tasked with carrying out an operation to assassinate black American singer Jesse Austin, thereby inciting a racial revolution which will give rise to American Communism. To this end, Mikael seduces Elena, pretending to love her in order to manipulate her to draw Jesse out in public. Returning to Russia, Mikael goes into hiding, faking his own death in order to avoid revenge by Leo. Mikael later marries, and like Leo before him, attempts to right the wrongs of his past however possible. When Mikael learns that Leo has returned to the Soviet Union, Mikael arranges for Leo to see his daughters before his trial.

Nara Mir

Nara Mir is a beautiful 23-year-old Afghan girl who has not only gone to university, but is studying under Leo to become a pro-Soviet Afghan secret agent. As such, she is singled out by her family to be killed, along with all of Leo's other students. Nara miraculously survives, and her devotion to the Communist State is increased as a result. Though she is much younger than Leo, Nara ultimately falls in love with Leo, though he does not return her feelings. Leo sees much of himself in Nara, who begins to make the same mistakes Leo once made, valuing legal absolutism over morality and ethics. When Nara betrays Zabi to Anton, she realizes almost immediately what she has done, and helps Leo to make things right by defecting with him to the United States, carrying on his investigation into Raisa's death, and adopting Zabi herself. Nara begs Leo not to return home, but to stay with them instead. Leo gently refuses, saying that Nara and Zabi are now safe in America, but Elena and Zoya are in danger in Communist Russia.

Zabi

Zabi is a 7-year-old girl from the village of Sokh Rot, which harbors, and is home to, terrorist insurgents. Zabi is the only survivor from a massive Soviet air raid on her village. Her fame for surviving the bombing is transferred to a boy from a neighboring village, who is then assassinated by Soviet Spetsnaz troops. When Zabi is discovered by Leo and Nara, Nara sells Zabi out, only later to come to her protection. Zabi travels with Leo and Nara to the United States, where she quickly falls in love with her new home, and comes to view Leo as something of a father figure, and Nara as something of a mother figure. Zabi understands why Leo must return to the Soviet Union, but she is terribly saddened that he must do so.

Symbols and Symbolism

Red

Red, as a color, is an important symbol in the novel. It is not only the color chiefly associated with Communism, but is described as the bitterest color by Zabi, who tastes red pomegranate rind juice. Her observation is salient, for it describes Communism to its core – bitter and foul. In 1981, while in New York, Leo watches the sunset from Brighton Beach, of which only a small part of the sky turns red and quickly disappears. This is a deeply moving and symbolic moment which represents the beginning of the end for the Soviet world, for within ten years, the Soviet Union will shatter, Communism will fall apart, and Russia will become a quasi-democracy. The small patch of red in the sky also represents the ultimately small place Communism has in history, as well as Leo's life. Just as Communism will mostly fade from the world, Communism has mostly faded from Leo's life, and he will continue to do what is right and just in order to overcome his bitter past.

Photographs

Photographs of Elena and Jesse Austin in Jesse's apartment in Harlem are taken by Fip Opstein, who works as an agent for the Soviet KGB. The photographs are to be used as evidence of an affair between Elena and Austin, and are later doctored to include Raisa to cover up the Soviet plot to incite a racially-charged revolution.

Elena's diary

Elena's diary is kept around the time Elena is 17. It describes her love for Mikael, her naïve idealism, and her efforts as part of an operation to get Jesse Austin to return to the public square. It proves to Leo that Elena was unwittingly used and manipulated by Mikael. Elena's diary also serves as a way for Leo to track down the man he believes killed his wife, referred to by Elena as Agent 6, Jim Yates, though Leo discovers that Jim was not the one to shoot Raisa, though he allowed her to die.

Intelligence

Intelligence on Soviet affairs in Afghanistan is revealed to the United States government in exchange for the asylum of Leo, Nara, and Zabi in America. The Americans put this information about the Soviets to good use, not just in Afghanistan, but diplomatically as well. For example, the Americans become aware of the dire financial straits the Communist State finds itself in, exacerbated by the invasion of Afghanistan.



Hind Helicopters

Hind helicopters are powerful combat aircraft used by the Soviet military in their attempts to quell the Afghan insurgency. Hinds are specifically used to level the village of Sokh Rot. They are designed to be able to deliver a payload of fuel-bombs, and make the Hind a devastating weapon.

Apple crate

An apple crate is carried and used by Jesse Austin to stand upon to speak outside of the UN. The apple crate is symbolic in two ways. First, the apple crate is an ironic symbol, for apples are considered to be a traditional American food – and Jesse's preaching of Communism is very antithetical to the American system of government and culture. Secondly, apples are a holistic fruit that can represent youth and idealism, and are thus appropriate given Jesse's idealism, but ironic given that he is no longer young.

Carton of Eggs

A carton of eggs is purchased by a woman at a store in Moscow that Jesse Austin visits. The carton of eggs is actually full of rocks, and demonstrates the hollow nature of the Communist system at best, as well as the deceptive façade that the State has erected to secure the dire truth of things – from wrongful imprisonment and torture to Communism itself being untenable.

Fuel-Bombs

Fuel-bombs are used by Hind helicopters on the village of Sokh-Rot. Fuel-bombs, when detonated, cause a massive explosion which sucks in oxygen from all around it in order to feed the explosion, making the chances of survival incredibly slim-to-none.

Suits

Whereas uniforms are worn by the KGB, suits and ties are worn by American operatives in the CIA and the FBI. They are worn as a matter of professionalism and the desire to blend in with the general public, as well as the fact that American operatives are, in most respects, vastly different than their KGB counterparts. For example, while the FBI had Jesse Austin harassed by the IRS and hounded him out of his singing career, the FBI had never considered killing Austin or imprisoning him. His views, though un-American, were considered protected in a free society, and as such, many of the guardians in a free society, such as Jim Yates, do not need to wear uniforms to threaten and intimidate. In the Soviet Union, if Jesse Austin had done what he had done in America, but in opposition to Communism rather than in support of it, he would have been arrested and tortured to death by uniformed KGB thugs.

Fanta

Fanta is popular American soft drink that represents one of the many striking differences between Communism and American democracy. In the United States, Fanta is a fun and refreshing beverage to be enjoyed with friends. In Communist-controlled countries, interrogators drink Fanta before smashing the bottle to use as a torture device. Leo comes to see this in stark reality between the use of a Fanta bottle as a weapon of torture in Afghanistan, and the advertisement of a beautiful girl in a bikini with Fanta in a New York City subway train.



Settings

Moscow

Moscow is the capital city of Communist Russia, and the capital city of the Soviet Union. Moscow is the home of Leo, Raisa, Elena, and Zoya. Leo works in Moscow as a small factory manager, while Raisa works in the education system, having originally begun as a teacher. Moscow is the place where Leo and Raisa first met, having lived near each other, and is later where they get married. Moscow is also the setting for Jesse Austin's 1950 visit to Russia, where Leo and other KGB and government officials guide Jesse around the city. Moscow is also the place which Leo considers to be his true home. Though he later feels welcome in New York, he does not feel at home. Even returning to Soviet Russia as a traitor, he still feels at home being back in Moscow.

New York City

New York City is a major city on the Eastern American seaboard in the lower part of the state of New York, and is a cultural and commercial center in the United States at large. New York is the setting for the Soviet children's good will tour of the United States, and is where Raisa, Zoya, and Elena travel early in the novel. It is in New York that the Soviet plot to kill Jesse Austin leads to the deaths of Jesse Austin, Anna Austin, Raisa, and the manipulation of Elena by Mikael. It is in New York that Nara, Zabi, and Leo later come to live, having sought asylum in American in exchange for intelligence on the Soviet presence in Afghanistan. It is also in New York that Leo attempts to track down his wife's killer, which ultimately leads him to New Jersey and Jim Yates.

New Jersey

New Jersey is a state in the eastern United States, directly south of, and bordering, New York. New Jersey is home to the town of Teaneck, which in turn is the home of FBI Agent Jim Yates. There, Jim remains married to a mentally-ill woman out of loyalty to her, even though he carries on an affair with a much younger woman in New York where he works for the FBI. When Leo and Nara seek the killer of Raisa, they track down Jim Yates to his home in New Jersey, and there question him about what happened 16 years before.

Afghanistan

Afghanistan is a country in the Middle East that is invaded by the Soviet Union under the pretense of military intervention to support the struggling Communist regime that controls the nation, but in reality to fully bring the nation into the Soviet empire. Leo is sent to Afghanistan as a Soviet advisor, and is later tasked with helping to train and prepare the Afghan secret police. It is in Afghanistan that Leo both becomes addicted to,



and breaks his addiction to opium, and meets and nearly has a romantic affair with Nara. It is in Afghanistan that Leo regains his sense of purpose after being captured by the insurgency. It is in Afghanistan that Leo trades his defection to America for the lives of Nara and Zabi, gaining their freedom in the process.

Pakistan

Pakistan is a country in the Middle East that borders Afghanistan. It is where the American CIA and other pro-Western nations have set up operations to monitor the situation in Afghanistan. It is in Pakistan that Leo, Raisa, Zabi, and Fahad travel to a meeting with CIA Agent Marcus Greene. It is in Pakistan that Leo negotiates for asylum and earns when Soviet captain Anton Vaschenko arrives to either bring Leo back or kill him.



Themes and Motifs

Communism

Communism is a major theme in the novel “Agent 6” by Tom Rob Smith. Communism is a political and economic system in which propaganda claims the individual is meant to be free and equal, but in reality, is subordinate to the State and the elites of the country. Communism comprises absolute State control of the lives of citizens in every aspect, relying on brute force, barbaric secret police, and military power to dominate and achieve its ends. Though Communism, by the time of much of the novel’s setting in the 1960s, 1970s, and early 1980s does not resemble the terror-like Communism of Stalin’s days in power prior to 1953, it is still very dangerous and still very feared, and has terrifying consequences for those it sets its sights on.

In the novel, the Soviet state security and secret police force, the MGB-turned-KGB, conducts operations of sheer brutality against its own citizens and against foreign nations. Early in the novel, Leo is training a new agent, Grigori, urging him to read between the lines of the diaries of suspected counterrevolutionaries. A diary with a torn-out sketch of the Statue of Liberty leads the torturing-to-death of a poor girl, while another man’s way of describing joy at the passing of the Soviet Constitution earns him a death sentence. In order to survive, the State requires absolute control through whatever means necessary, and Leo and many others in the KGB and government are willing to do whatever it takes to ensure the survival of the State, including to torture, force confessions, and kill.

Afghanistan proves to be an example of Soviet-Communist foreign policy in the 1970s. Looking to expand its empire and bring Afghanistan into the Communist fold, the Soviet Union launches an invasion of the country under the guise of providing military aid to a flailing Afghan Communist government. There, they overthrow the existing government to replace it with a stronger pro-Communist government, and begin what will become a 10-year war with the local Afghan insurgency. The Soviet military, in order to maintain control, brutally bombs villages and towns into dust, arrests and kills thousands of innocent people, and is quick to assist pro-Communist Afghans in carrying out Stalinesque prison sentences and torture. No one is safe from the Soviet military, including children as demonstrated by Captain Anton Vaschenko, who shoots an unarmed 14-year-old boy in the head, and later tries to kill Zabi, a 7-year-old girl.

Even by the 1980s, Communism proves to be a dangerous and barbaric threat to even Russian citizens. Leo knows that his defection will prove to be problematic in the least. In New York, Leo learns that his daughters have been brought in for questioning by the KGB. Though they have not been arrested, Leo knows it is only a matter of time before they are. Although times have changed, and some things, such as interrogation cells, have been done away with, the KGB still remains barbaric. They are no longer wolves in wolves’ clothing, but are now wolves in sheep’s clothing. Leo’s understanding of the way in which the KGB operates is so acute and exacting that he voluntarily gives up his



asylum in the United States to return to Russia to protect his daughters. As the novel ends, Leo is awaiting trial. As a traitor to Communism and to his country, his fate seems certain: execution.

Idealism

Idealism is an important theme in the novel “Agent 6” by Tom Rob Smith. Idealism, thematically, is the pursuit, defense, desire for, or upholding of a set of beliefs, values, or ideas, sometimes good and sometimes bad, and often in spite of reality. In the novel, idealism appears in various ways, forms, and relating to various characters.

Much of the existence of idealism in the novel is seen through the eyes of Leo Demidov, a former idealist himself. For Leo, the ideal was Communism, and legal absolutism and extreme utilitarianism were the ways in which the ideal was to be upheld and expanded. Now a moral absolutist, Leo is able to see through to the reality of things: that Communism is a corrupt system, that it devalues human life, denies human rights, and the practices of upholding Communism – from intimidation to arrests, torture, and executions – are morally wrong. Leo ruminates many times throughout the novel on his own past, including the training of Grigori, and on the way in which Communist idealism in the present is destructive. For example, in order to uphold Communism and the Soviet presence in Afghanistan, Leo is horrified that Captain Anton Vaschenko would shoot an unarmed 14-year-old boy in the head, and try to kill an unarmed 7-year-old girl to that same purpose.

Leo also sees the idealistic streak in Nara, one of his young trainees in Afghanistan. Nara has grown up in a repressive Islamic society, where as a female, she has few rights, and is to spend her life in total submission to men. The rise of a pro-Communist government in Afghanistan is ironic: while it increases the rights of women and allows them to attend school, for example, and allows women the ability to work in places like the state security and secret police, it also strips away human rights in general. Tens of thousands of innocent Afghan civilians are killed in Soviet bombings, and in Soviet-run prisons. For a young woman like Nara, the promises of equality and advancement obscure the harsh and brutal realities of the Communist regime. With her own family turning against her, and with Afghan society in general opposed to her education and her work, Nara becomes all the more dedicated to the State. Leo sees Nara beginning to make many of the same mistakes he made when he was younger, such as when Nara gives away Zabi to Vaschenko. Fortunately, due to her romantic interest in Leo, and due to Leo’s moral guidance, Nara is able to recognize the path down which she is sliding before it is too late, and thus is able to back away from Communist idealism.

The other place that Leo sees idealism provides an interesting contrast to the idealism of Communism. That comes through the loyalty of Jim Yates for the United States of America. Jim Yates is intensely pro-American, and utterly devoted to his work as an FBI agent. Yates’s idealism is not based on the promise of what America might be, but already is – a land of freedom and opportunity for all. Yates is angered daily by the behavior of Americans like Jesse Austin, who thrive in the American system, but call for



it to be overturned in favor of Communism. Likewise, Yates despises Americans who would rather trash shops and burn down homes instead of making an effort make things better for themselves and their children. Yates is determined to do whatever is necessary to protect the United States, but all within some reason. While he is not bloodthirsty and barbaric the way his KGB counterparts are, Yates is still morally suspect for his pragmatic behavior. For example, while he never contemplates or even considers killing Jesse Austin, he does not intervene to save Jesse Austin when the Soviet plot is exposed. While Yates does not kill Raisa himself, he allows her to die in order to cover up the Soviet plot.

United States vs. Soviet Union

The comparison and contrasting of the United States and the Soviet Union is an important theme in the novel "Agent 6" by Tom Rob Smith. The comparison and contrasting of the two countries serves to underscore the evil and corrupt nature of Communism, and the promise and hope in the American system.

The differences between the United States and the Soviet Union can be glimpsed early on in the novel, between Jesse Austin's visit to Moscow, and the Soviet children's visit to New York. In Moscow, Soviet citizens are banned from shopping at certain shops and stores if they are not members of the ruling class. In the average store, Soviet citizens must wait on lines, and are apportioned rationed food and drink. Even then, nothing is as it appears to be. The show of a woman buying eggs in front of Jesse Austin masks the truth to Jesse Austin that the egg carton itself is full of rocks, representative of the kind of hardships the State forces the average person to endure, while the ruling class does not. In New York, Zoya is fascinated by American television, and by, above all, commercials. She is amazed to see the refrigerators stocked with items like Coca-Cola and chocolate, which Mikael dismisses as propaganda. Mikael tells the Soviet children that most Americans do not have access to luxuries like Coca-Cola and chocolate, and these are merely a superficial show for the Soviets. Readers, however, know better. It is hard to find a house in America without either chocolate or soda.

Other surprising differences between the Soviet Union and the United States emerge through the course of the novel. While the Soviets need paperwork to travel anywhere for any reason in the Communist empire, Americans are free to move around at will for any reason in their country. The standard of living is also unlike anything Leo, Nara, and Zabi have experienced before, either. Their apartments are air-conditioned, and are home to individual families and individual people. The building in which they live in New York is a well-designed, well-maintained place, while the apartment building in which Leo lives in Moscow is a squat, concrete slum, with many apartments home to more than one family. While traveling on the subway, Leo sees an advertisement of a beautiful girl in a bikini, enjoying a bottle of Fanta orange soda. In the Soviet world, Fanta is used not for fun afternoons with family or friends, but for torture. An interrogator will drink the Fanta, smash the bottle, and use the broken bits to torture the prisoner. In the United States, a man like Jesse Austin can freely criticize and condemn his own country, even calling for a Communist takeover, without being arrested by the police. In



the Soviet Union, anyone even suspected of harboring Western sympathies or anti-Communist feelings is tortured and executed. Jim Yates explains that the reason why the minorities in the United States would never rise up in a murderous Communist revolution is because they believe in God, and are decent, good people because they have a higher moral authority than the government and themselves.

One of the most marked differences between the United States and the Soviet Union has to do with their respective police agencies, the FBI and the KGB. In the Soviet Union, KGB agents are feared and avoided at all costs. In the United States, FBI agents are often stood up to on an equal level, such as when Anna Augustin and Jim Yates verbally throw back and forth at the apartment in Harlem. In the Soviet Union, KGB agents wear uniforms that distinguish them and strike fear into the hearts of citizens. In the United States, FBI agents wear suits and blend in with the average citizen, inspiring feelings of security and comfort rather than terror. When dealing with a man like Jesse Austin, though Jim Yates is certainly impolite, and even downright mean in how he speaks to Jesse, Jesse's love of Communism never once causes Jim Yates to consider killing Austin. In the Soviet Union, a man like Jesse, speaking of love for the West, would be executed without hesitation. While the IRS harassing Jesse is certainly morally questionable, it pales in comparison to Soviet-styled torture, such as the using of a broken Fanta bottle on a prisoner.

War

War is an important theme in the novel "Agent 6" by Tom Rob Smith. War involves open combat in various forms between two or more adversaries. Thematically, war not only involves actual combat, but the effects of war itself on the men, women, and children who fight and suffer through war.

The novel principally deals with the Soviet War in Afghanistan, a conflict that would ultimately come to last ten years, stretching between 1979 and 1989. Years before the war begins, Soviet advisers, including Leo, are dispatched to Afghanistan to aid the growing Communist movement there, and to support the pro-Communist government when it comes to power. When it does, Leo continues on in his efforts not only to advise, but to begin training Afghan operatives for an Afghan version of the KGB. In 1979, the Soviet military officially invades Afghanistan under the guise of providing military assistance to the unstable Communist government, but in reality, to bring Afghanistan squarely into the Soviet fold. The Soviet 40th Army, comprising tens of thousands of Soviet conventional troops, along with thousands of Soviet special forces, including Captain Anton Vashchenko's Spetsnaz contingent, handles the invasion and securing of Afghanistan. This includes an assault on the presidential palace and the killing of the pro-Soviet, Stalin-like president in order to replace him with an obsequious Soviet puppet.

While the Soviets gain strategic control of much of the country, at the tactical level, they struggle to fight Afghan insurgents and rebels, including the mujahedeen. The insurgency launches terrorist attacks on Soviet troops and pro-Soviet Afghan citizens



like Nara, and launches terrorist attacks on places like electricity-generating dams. Small skirmishes occur on a regular basis with Soviet troops. In response to terrorist attacks and unconventional warfare, the Soviet military shows no mercy and no compassion when they use fuel-bombs to flatten entire villages and kill thousands of people at a time. This includes innocent civilians, who suffer tremendously as a result, such as Zabi. Soviet reprisals, such as the killing of the fourteen year-old boy by Captain Vaschenko, are commonplace and intended to demonstrate Soviet power and supremacy.

The war also has numerous consequences on people on both sides. While countless innocent Afghan civilians are butchered and killed, so too are countless pro-Soviet civilians, including women who have dared to seek an education. The Soviets themselves do not escape the consequences of the inhospitable region and a war that is quickly becoming tiresome. Much leniency is granted to the Soviet troops in the area, who are allowed to carry on with things like drugs, rape, and other crimes, because of the difficult circumstances in Afghanistan. These Soviet troops commit to these immoral acts as a way to escape their present situation, and to have the false courage to continue on in the war.

Family

Family is an important theme in the novel "Agent 6" by Tom Rob Smith. Family, thematically, includes the mutual love, compassion, loyalty towards, and emotional, spiritual, and even physical support of, individuals who may or may not be blood-related, but who behave in the way of the traditional family unit. The love of family becomes a driving force in the life of Leo Demidov.

Leo, eager to put his past as a brutal KGB agent behind him, has no qualms about providing for his family as the manager of a small factory. He deeply loves his wife, Raisa, and his adopted daughters, Elena and Zoya, for whom he would do anything. They, in turn, have come to love Leo as a father, and often seek his advice and compassion on different things. Leo worries about his family's traveling to the United States as part of a good will tour. His worry isn't borne simply of love for his family, but of fear of the idea of knowing that the Soviets will seek to use the tour to their own advantage in some way, shape, or form. When a Soviet plot to kill Jesse Austin is carried out and Raisa is killed, something inside Leo dies. He is no longer the same man without Raisa, for Raisa has been his world. With her gone, Leo vows to find her killer, but first makes sure that Zoya and Elena enter young womanhood successfully and independently. Only after the girls are married does Leo commit to the search for Raisa's killer.

After caught attempting to cross into Finland illegally, Leo is offered his life in exchange for becoming a Soviet advisor to Afghanistan. It is in Afghanistan that Leo ultimately comes to meet 23-year-old Nara Mir, who develops romantic feelings for Leo, and for whom Leo almost returns the feelings. After saving Zabi from the Soviets, Leo, Nara, and Zabi form something of a unorthodox but conventional family, where Leo protects



and comes to love Nara in an unromantic way, and comes to love Zabi in a fatherly way. In New York, he cares for them, provides for them, and teaches Zabi about many things. Indeed, Nara even goes on to help Leo investigate his wife's death,.

Yet, while Nara and Zabi are safe in the United States, he knows his own girls, Elena and Zoya, are in danger in Russia. Though Nara pleads with Leo to remain in New York with them, Leo knows they are safe, and must return to Russia to make sure Elena and Zoya remain safe. To this end, Leo repatriates to the Soviet Union, and is declared a traitor, awaiting trial as the novel closes. Only then is he granted the opportunity to briefly visit with his daughters, now young women, and both of whom are well-aware of the sacrifice their father, Leo, has made for them. They know that their safety now is owed to the fact that Leo was brave enough, and loving enough, to return, given that his sentence will almost certainly be execution.



Styles

Point of View

Tom Rob Smith tells his novel “Agent 6” from the third-person limited-omniscient perspective. The novel deals with a series of events and encounters with numerous people over the course of 31 years, from 1950 to 1981. As such, the third-person narrator provides a consistent and unifying voices that ties together the disparate ends of the novel. The third-person narrative mode also provides the author the ability to speak at great length about the backgrounds and motives of various characters unknown to the other characters, and also provides the ability for the author to provide good historical context to the situations in which his characters find themselves. The limited-omniscient aspect of the narrative lends a sense of reality to the novel, for no character will be able to know everything at all times. The limited-omniscient aspect also provides for a degree of mystery and suspense, as the reader only learns and discovers things as the characters themselves either learn or reveal them. For example, neither the reader, nor Leo, know who was really responsible for the death of Raisa until the very end of the novel.

Language and Meaning

Tom Rob Smith tells his novel “Agent 6” in language that is simple and straightforward. This gives the novel a sense of briskness and urgency, as Leo scrambles to try to protect his wife, and later, to find her killer. The simple and straightforward language also lends urgency to various situations, such as the standoff with Vaschenko over Zabi, and the chaos and quick action of a war being waged across Afghanistan. The simple and straightforward language also serves a third purpose, and that is to allow the reader to come to conclusions and understand important points the writer is trying to make clearly and without confusion. For example, it is difficult to miss the writer’s showcasing of the evils and barbarities of Communism, and the Soviet military in Afghanistan.

Structure

Tom Rob Smith divides his novel “Agent 6” into 100 unnumbered, chronological, titled chapters that cover a stretch of time from 1950s Moscow to 1960s New York to 1970s Afghanistan to New York and Moscow in the early 1980s. The titles of each chapter refer to the place and time in which the chapter itself is to occur, giving the reader immediate orientation to the events that will unfold. For example, the chapter “Afghanistan-Pakistan Border, Hindu Kush Mountain Range, Khyber Pass, 1,000 Meters Above Sea Level, 180 Kilometers Southeast of Kabul, Thirty Kilometers Northwest of Peshawar, Pakistan, Next Day” not only gives the chapter a title, but orients the reader to a specific place and time – in this case, the Khyber Pass on the border of Afghanistan

and Pakistan, as Leo, Zabi, Nara travel to Pakistan in the hopes of meeting with the American CIA.



Quotes

The people who seem innocent are often those we should watch the most carefully.
-- Leo Demidov (USSR, Moscow, The Lubyanka, Lubyanka Square, Headquarters of the Secret Police, January 21, 1950 paragraph 39)

Importance: In a display of Leo's original MGB mindset, and his extreme devotion to the State, Leo lectures a student, Grigori, about the appearance of innocence. In typical Communist paranoia and barbarity, Leo explains that the innocent are the ones who should be most closely watched, for the feigning of innocence is a cover for counterrevolutionary activity. This is indicative not only of the brutality of the State, but how it manages to force false confessions out of people, by finding reasons why people are not innocent, even if they are not actually guilty.

The teams' role was to ensure that Austin was shown a projected vision of Communist society, a representation of its potential, rather than the reality of that society as it now stood.

-- Narrator (House on the Embankment, 2 Serafimovich Street, Next Day paragraph 2)

Importance: Leo, several MGB operatives, and other government officials bring Jesse Austin around Moscow to carefully-selected locations in order to demonstrate the very best of Russia, while glossing over and hiding the vast majority of what Russia is truly like under Communism. This willful deception is explained away as a work-in-progress, rather than deliberate scheming and falsifying of reality. It further underscores the corruption of the Communist system.

Raisa had become his conscience.

-- Narrator (USSR, Moscow, Nobye Cheremushki, Khrushchev's Slums, July 24, 1965 paragraph 7)

Importance: Leo, formerly a hardened MGB agent, has come to realize the error of his ways, and has devoted his life to making up for the past. In no small part is that owed to Raisa, his loving wife, who proves to be Leo's moral center, for she has never been corrupted by the State, merely victimized by it in the past.

Nothing angered him more than people who didn't appreciate how lucky they were to live in a country like this.

-- Narrator (New Jersey, Bergen County, Town of Teaneck, Same Day paragraph 7)

Importance: FBI Agent Jim Yates reveals his own idealism and loyalty to the United States in this statement. While Yates's loyalty is no less intense than Leo's once was to the Soviet Union, Yates understands that his country is morally superior in every conceivable way. Even Yates's criticism of unappreciative Americans is a vast and striking contrast to the Soviet-Communist position on the subject. Unappreciative Americans are criticized; unappreciative Russians are imprisoned, tortured, and executed as enemies of the state.



Government policy does not create human rights. Those rights came first! Governments exist to serve and protect those basic human rights.

-- Jesse Austin (Same Day (page 199) paragraph 41)

Importance: Jesse Austin, returning to the public square, addresses the audience gathered outside the UN. This particular quote, pulled from Jesse's speech, demonstrates supreme irony. His description of what the Soviet system is purported to be, rather than what it actually is – protecting human rights – is emblematic of his blind idealism and his willingness to believe in deception. The irony of the statement is also apparent in the fact that his own country, the United States of America, is exactly what he is describing – and criticizing. For his support of Communism in America, Austin is boycotted, heckled, and booed. In the Soviet Union, if Austin had spoken out against Communism, he would have been summarily arrested and executed – his human rights utterly denied in the process.

Something has died inside of him.

-- Elena Demidov (Moscow, Novye Cheremushki, Khrushchev's Slums, Same Day (page 230) paragraph 16)

Importance: Elena realizes how deeply losing Raisa has affected Leo. Earlier in the novel, the narrator had explained that Raisa was Leo's conscience, and was the source of all that was good in him. Without her guiding light and love, Leo has become hollow and devastated, and it is indeed as if something has died inside him.

A million Afghans are all that should remain alive – a million Communists. And the rest, we do not need. We'll get rid of all of them.

-- Prison Commander Aarif Abdullah (Greater Province of Kabul, Eight Kilometers East of the City of Kabul, Same Day paragraph 7)

Importance: Here, the sheer barbarity of even pro-Communist Afghans toward their own non-Communist people is readily apparent as a prison commander has essentially called for genocide. The system of Communism itself lends itself to such a pogrom, for in Communism the State is supreme, and all that it does is just and legal.

She was a traitor in the eyes of the Communist State and a traitor in the eyes of the Afghan people.

-- Narrator (Next Day (page 388) paragraph 3)

Importance: Here, the narrator reflects on Nara's difficulty following her assistance in saving Zabi after giving her up. Nara, a young Afghan woman, is considered a traitor by her people for not only siding with the Soviets, but for working with them. The Soviets now consider her a traitor for having turned her back on the Communist State in order to protect Zabi. Nara has no more options except to go with Leo to America.

Despair can make a person sick.

-- Leo Demidov (Same Day (page 393) paragraph 14)



Importance: Here, Leo explains to Zabi what has been the matter with him. Though he spares her the talk of his recently-crushed drug addiction. Leo reveals that despair – sadness and hopelessness – can make a person become sick, and this is what has happened to him. It is a tunnel from which Leo is now emerging, as he prepares to once more find his wife’s killer.

It is a place without war, with clean water, with food, somewhere safe, a place where we have a chance.

-- Nara (Pakistan, City of Peshawar, Capital of North West Frontier Province, Forty-Three Kilometers Southeast of Afghan Border, Two Days Later paragraph 40)

Importance: When Zabi asks about America, Nara, who has had more exposure to the West than most, reveals what a wonderful place the United States is. Some of the simplest things about America – which most Americans and Westerners take for granted – are the most beautiful to Nara and Zabi. These things include the lack of war in the country, and clean water.

I see my life only in relation to the people I love.

-- Leo Demidov (New Jersey, Next Day paragraph 22)

Importance: Nara questions why Leo wishes to return to Russia when it would most assuredly mean the end of his life. Leo responds that he only views his life as it relates to the people that he loves, and never himself. He is not afraid to die, but afraid to see his loved ones hurt because of him. He has risked his life to make sure Zabi and Nara are safe. Now, he will travel to Russia to ensure the safety of Elena and Zoya.

He was a man who’d fought proudly as a Soviet soldier and he would gladly have died for his country. Yet he’d ended up betraying it.

-- Narrator (USSR, Soviet Airspace Above Moscow, December 13, 1981 paragraph 1)

Importance: Here, the narrator describes how much Leo has changed over the course of his life, and between the events of the novel “Child 44”, “The Secret Speech”, and “Agent 6”. Leo was once a blind-eyed idealist who would have given everything he had for the State, but betrayed his own conscience in the process. Now he is a traitor to his state, but no longer a traitor to himself. He has honored his wife’s memory by protecting their children.