

The Cardinal of the Kremlin Short Guide

The Cardinal of the Kremlin by Tom Clancy

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Characters

At the heart of *The Cardinal of the Kremlin* is the enigmatic, courageous, stubborn, and remorseful Col. Filitov, who has been spying for the U.S. for thirty years. To the CIA, he is known by his code name Cardinal, and only a handful of top CIA officers know his true identity. He works as the chief aide to the Soviet Union's top military leader. His job is to study new military developments and offer advice as to the appropriate military response. He discovers the existence of an ultra-secret Soviet laser base in the mountains north of Afghanistan and passes on what he knows to the CIA, where it comes to Jack Ryan's attention.

The CIA is alarmed; the Soviets have already tested the laser apparatus—seemingly with success.

Filitov is a deeply troubled man who resists easy analysis. He knows that he is committing treason when he hands over information to the Americans. He often drinks himself unconscious and has nightmares of his dead comrades from World War II: How could he justify his treason to them? Filitov himself is uncertain why he betrays his country, but the premature death of his beautiful ballerina wife figures in his motives. One of Filitov's sons died on the battlefield through the incompetence of his leaders. And apparently many of his military comrades were victimized and abused by the state apparatus. When Filitov imagines his World War II compatriots, he sometimes views his treason as revenge for those who fought and died for a foul government.

For all his doubts, Filitov has the decisive mind of a good military field officer.

Having made his decision to aid the West, he boldly goes about the business of passing on the most important of his nation's military secrets. The CIA has wanted to pull him out of the Soviet Union at least twice during his decades of service, but each time he resisted, insisting on taking chances in order to do his job as a spy. With courage and cunning he has outlasted generals he was supposed to serve; finally, he works for Yasov, who needs almost everything explained to him by Filitov, allowing Filitov access to even the most closely guarded secrets.

As a real war hero whose sacrifices to the Soviet Union include scarring from fire, near crippling injuries, and the loss of two sons, Filitov is the last person who would be suspected of treason. Even so, the KGB has many clever and intelligent agents; its head is a man schooled in the arts of betrayal and intrigue. Events conspire against Filitov, and finally a KGB agent digs up evidence of his massive spying for the CIA. As his past actions begin to catch up with him, Filitov emerges as a tragic figure.

The Archer, an Afghan guerrilla leader, is also a tragic character. A former school teacher, he joins the Afghan resistance when the Soviet invaders kill his family.

Memories of his family fill him with bitterness and keep him focused on killing Soviet troops. He earns the nom-de-guerre "Archer" because of his skill at shooting down



enemy aircraft with missiles. The American-supplied missiles have given the guerrillas renewed hope for victory over the communists. The Archer has a keen intelligence that is enhanced by a strong sense of responsibility to his followers and to his nation.

When he learns of the secret Soviet laser base just north of Afghanistan, he reasons that it must pose a danger to his country—one of the many misunderstandings of the novel. Yet, he has the imagination to plan an assault on the base to disable its weapons. When the Archer leads the attack and dies, he fulfills a duty dictated by rage.

Social Concerns

Initiated by President Reagan in the mid-1980s, the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) popularly known as "Star Wars," would defend against nuclear missiles, using an array of technologies, such as anti-missile-missiles launched from aircraft, satellites designed to focus intense energy beams on missiles in the upper atmosphere, and ground-based laser-beam projectors. This last device, set against the backdrop of the Russian invasion of Afghanistan, is the focus of *The Cardinal of the Kremlin*.

As this novel opens, the Soviet Union and the U.S. are each close to perfecting a laser-beam device that could accurately shoot down missiles. One side has solved the problem of generating enough power to kill a missile; the other has solved the problem of targeting missiles accurately enough to score a direct hit with the beam. The side that learns the other's secrets first will have an effective defense against incoming missiles, a significant military advantage.



Techniques

Much of the action of *The Cardinal of the Kremlin* takes place within the characters' minds. Even so, Clancy displays his mastery of the episodic style that typifies his books. Although scenes frequently shift across the face of the globe, Clancy keeps each locale distinct by associating a strong character with each place: the complex Filitov with Moscow; Col.

Bondarenko, a young officer whose ambition and scientific expertise are tempered by an unshakable loyalty to his country, with the Soviet laser base; the Archer with Afghanistan; and CIA officer Emilio Ortiz, who assists the Archer, with Pakistan. The CIA has Jack Ryan, an already well-defined character, and the American laser base is headed by the naive but brilliant scientist, Al Gregory.

By associating strong characters with different aspects of the novel, Clancy need but mention their names for readers to pick up on where the action has moved.

Themes

As in *The Hunt for Red October* (1984, see separate entry), the theme of betrayal is an important one in *The Cardinal of the Kremlin*. Like the Soviet submarine captain Marko Ramius, Col. Mikhail Semyonovich Filitov has chosen to betray his country. Unlike those of Ramius, Filitov's motivations are vague and confused. He is angered by his wife's death, but he partly blames himself for it, just as he sees himself as somehow responsible for the incompetency that killed his sons. He is the only man to have received three Hero of the Soviet Union Medals for his service as a tank commander during World War II, but now he is a spy. And with each new secret he passes to the U.S., he drinks himself into a stupor.

Thus, betrayal is no easy action in *The Cardinal of the Kremlin*; spies betray and even murder friends and colleagues in the novel, and their motivations are complicated and sad. In America, a loveobsessed lesbian betrays her country and friends in a misguided attempt to eliminate a man she sees as her rival; in the Soviet Union, an aging colonel never lets himself forget what his betrayal means.

The betrayers lead anguished, unfulfilled lives.

Another significant theme is that of false impressions. "Those whom the gods would destroy, they first make proud," thinks CIA officer Foley. This aphorism is later applied by CIA Deputy Director of Operations Ritter to Col. Filitov, who in reality feels ashamed of his deeds. The Americans think the Soviets may have a working laser missile killer; they do not.

Two American scientists believe the woman in their car-pool is a good friend; she is in fact a Soviet spy who loathes the man and is infatuated with the woman.

Even at the end of the novel, those who should know what is going on, do not.

The chairman of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union believes that the attack on his country's laser base was conducted by Americans; in fact, the Americans were not behind it. He, like the soldiers in Afghanistan, has underestimated the ability of the Afghan guerrillas to strike back at their Soviet enemies. Throughout the novel, people make decisions and take chances based on information that is not only incomplete, but sometimes completely false.



Key Questions

One of the distinguishing features of Clancy's thrillers is the depth of characterization. In *The Cardinal of the Kremlin*, he seems almost obsessive in his effort to explore what effect their actions would have on their characters. One effect of this is to make nearly every character sympathetic to some degree; another effect is a portrayal that makes Filitov memorable, a figure that may linger with readers long after the details of the plot have been forgotten. A successful discussion could be had by focusing on how characters are affected by their own deeds. Every action seems to have a fundamental moral implication that is reflected in the suffering, dismay, or confusion of an individual figure.

1. What motivates Col. Mikhail Semyonovich Filitov? Why is he so courageous in his spying for the United States?

Why is he also remorseful?

2. Compared to Filitov, Archer seems to have well-focused motivations. What are they? What makes him think the Soviet laser site is intended to harm his people? Are his actions logical, even if based on false assumptions? Is he admirable?

3. Why is it that the Soviets seem utterly wrong in their analysis of what the Americans have supposedly done in the affairs of the laser base and Filitov?

4. How well do the Americans understand what the Soviets are doing and intend to do? How dangerous to the United States are their mistakes?

5. In Filitov and *The Hunt for Red October's* Ramius are two striking figures who betray the Soviet Union. How do their motivations differ? What personality traits do they have in common? Which one is the deeper characterization?

6. How well does Clancy explain the high technology that is the focus of great fears in *The Cardinal of the Kremlin*? Does he make it clear why cutting-edge technology is an important concern for Americans?

7. Clancy has said that he does not create detailed outlines for his novel, that he writes where his imagination takes him from one day to the next. How would this affect narrative structure?

8. Who is the greater traitor, Filitov or Bea Taussig? How do their motivations contrast? Who evokes the greater pity?

Who evokes the greater anger?

9. What are the many different ways death is portrayed in *The Cardinal of the Kremlin*? How do the living remember the dead? Who does the killing? How does death occur?



How random is it? Why do the living try to find logical reasons for why people were killed?

10. With the Cold War apparently over, does *The Cardinal of the Kremlin* remain interesting? Is it a good story that will still hold audiences?

Literary Precedents

The espionage novel is one of the most popular types of literary entertainments.

With its formula of complicated intrigues and scenes of violent action, *The Cardinal of the Kremlin* resembles many such works.

A suspenseful page-turner from beginning to end, the novel nevertheless has greater emotional and thematic depth than the usual espionage novel. In this it resembles the novels of John le Carre, whose works often concentrate more on character than action. For instance, in *Smiley's People* (1980), le Carre portrays the sad and often sordid lives of spies who are not quite sure of who their real enemies are. In that novel, as in *The Cardinal of the Kremlin*, a Soviet spy master defects to the West.

Related Titles

The Cardinal of the Kremlin is part of a series of novels linked by the continuing character Jack Ryan: *The Hunt for Red October* (1984; see separate entry); *Patriot Games* (1987; see separate entry); *Clear and Present Danger* (1989; see separate entry); *The Sum of All Fears* (1991); *Debt of Honor* (1994); and *Executive Orders* (1996; see separate entry). These are sometimes referred to as the "Jack Ryan series." The Cardinal of the Kremlin and the later Ryan novels are linked by the continuing character John Clark to *Without Remorse*, 1993.

Clark returns as the featured character in the 1998 publication of *Rainbow Six*.

The Cardinal of the Kremlin also features other continuing characters such as the CIA officers Admiral Greer, Judge Moore, and Bob Ritter. The submarine captain Bart Mancuso, now nearing the end of his tour of duty aboard his ship, appears to ferry an operative named Clark to the Baltic shore of the Soviet Union so that Clark can pick up and bring back to the submarine the wife and daughter of the head of the KGB. Clark has a bigger role in Clancy's next novel, *Clear and Present Danger*, and is the main character in *Without Remorse* (1993).



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