

A Fine and Dangerous Season Study Guide

A Fine and Dangerous Season by Keith Raffel

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Contents

A Fine and Dangerous Season Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Part One, Chapters 1-13.....	5
Part Two, Chapters 1-7.....	8
Part Two, Chapters 8-14.....	10
Part Three, Chapters 1-16.....	13
Part Three, Chapters 17-32.....	17
Characters.....	21
Symbols and Symbolism.....	24
Settings.....	26
Themes and Motifs.....	27
Styles.....	29
Quotes.....	30



Plot Summary

Nathan Michaels, nicknamed Nate, gets a call from the Attorney General of the United States, Robert Kennedy, requesting that he come to the White House. When Nate learns that the request came from the president, he tries to refuse. Nate and Jack were once friends at Stanford, but they had a falling out. Robert Kennedy will not allow Nate to refuse. Nate travels to the White House and learns from Jack that there are nuclear weapons on the beaches of Cuba aimed at the United States. Jack's security council has had a meeting with Maxim Volkov, the head of the KGB in the United States, and Volkov has requested to see Nate. Volkov and Nate's father were once close friends.

Nate reluctantly agrees to meet with Volkov. During the meeting, Volkov tells Nate little but makes it clear he has Khrushchev's ear. Jack is grateful for this information and asks Nate to remain at the White House a little longer so that he can observe several meetings about the crisis and give him an honest opinion. Nate agrees. The following morning, Nate receives a phone call asking him to meet Volkov immediately. When Nate leaves to do so, he is shot at on the street. A mysterious man saves Nate's life, but he has to go to the hospital to have his ear sewn up.

As the Cuban Missile Crisis continues to develop, Nate recalls his past relationship with Jack. When Nate was in law school at Stanford, he met Jack Kennedy while on a date with his girl, Miriam. Jack sat and talked to Miriam for a few minutes. Later, Jack and Nate began hanging out with each other. Miriam warned Nate that Jack was bad news, but he continued to spend time with him. Nate even took Jack home to have dinner with his family one Sunday afternoon. This is when Jack met Volkov the first time. Not long after, Jack took Nate to Los Angeles where he met Robert Stack, Carole Lombard, and Clark Gable. A few weeks later, Nate caught Jack in bed with Miriam.

Jack asks Nate to meet with Volkov again. Nate sets up the meeting, but Volkov is late. As Nate is preparing to leave, someone begins shooting at him. One of two secret service agents with Nate is killed. Nate manages to run. Volkov picks him up in a car. Volkov tells Nate that he did not arrange the meeting the day before and had no idea who was shooting at Nate. Volkov also tells Nate that he needs to tell the president to be careful because there are people in Washington working against peace between their two countries.

The situation becomes even more dangerous when the Cubans shoot down an American plane flying over their country. Jack announces that if the Cubans shoot down another plane, the United States will retaliate. That night, Nate watches a movie with Jack. The next morning, Nate arranges to see Volkov before the American planes are scheduled for their flyover of Cuba. Volkov tells Nate that Khrushchev is not in control of what the Cubans do. Volkov then contacts the head of the KGB in Russia and tells him that the Americans are willing to remove missiles from Turkey and will not claim victory if the crisis ends. Volkov receives a message saying that the Russians agree to this condition and will take their nuclear missiles from Cuba.



Volkov is shot and killed by the GRU. Volkov's assistant, Miss Leontieva, helps Nate escape the safe house where they were meeting. Nate and Miss Leontieva rush to find Jack at the church where he is attending services. They are followed by the GRU and a taxi driver is killed. When they arrive at the church, the police threaten to arrest Nate, but the secret service comes to his rescue. Nate tells Jack what he has learned and Jack stops the plane fly over.

After the crisis has ended, Nate returns home to his wife and twin sons. It is in the final sentence of the novel that the reader learns that Nate married Miriam despite her affair with Jack.



Part One, Chapters 1-13

Summary

Chapter 1. October 24, 1962. Palo Alto, California. Nathan Michaels, Nate, receives a phone call from Robert Kennedy, the attorney general. Kennedy wants Nate to travel to the United States to help with a problem. Nate refuses at first, but Kennedy reminds him that he once served his country and must continue. Nate travels to Washington via a military plane.

Chapter 2. Nate arrives at the White House late in the evening. The President, Jack Kennedy, greets Nate warmly despite Nate's cool reception. Jack seems surprised that Nate is still angry at him for a falling out they had twenty years ago. Jack mentions Nate's service during the war and uses it as a reason why Nate should want to help him now. Jack then tells Nate that the Russians have begun stockpiling nuclear warheads in Cuba. Jack reminds Nate of a time when Nate took Jack to have dinner with his family and Maxim Volkov was there. Volkov is now KGB, the head of Soviet intelligence in the United States. Volkov mentioned Nate and his father during a meeting with the State Department. Jack wants Nate to meet with Volkov in hopes of learning something that could help ease the tension in Cuba. Jack also tells Nate that the CIA is not aware of what he will be doing and he would prefer to keep it that way.

Chapter 3. Nate has dinner with Jack, Robert Kennedy, Ethel Kennedy, and the Bartletts. During the dinner they learn Soviet ships have stopped short of Cuba's shores, making them think that the crisis might be coming to an end.

Chapter 4. Nate is attempting to relax in the guest room at the White House when Jack joins him unexpectedly. Jack shows Nate a message from Russia that claims that the Russian ships have been sent to watch over Cuba and make sure the Americans do not blockading the island. Jack tells Nate that the Americans will not back down.

Chapter 5. Nate calls his wife. They discuss the situation and how dire it could be.

Chapter 6. Nate had breakfast with Lem Billings, another friend of Jack's. Nate is introduced to Miss Collins, a young woman who has been assigned to make sure he has everything he needs. Nate assures her he is fine and sends her away.

Chapter 7. Nate walks to the Russian consulate. The receptionist tells him Volkov will meet him at the Occidental Restaurant at noon.

Chapter 8. Nate is greeted profusely at the restaurant by his father's old friend. Volkov is loud and overbearing, making Nate feel like a kid again. They talk about their lives. Volkov introduces Nate to a reporter, and then leaves Nate alone to go to the restroom. The reporter tries to interview Nate, but he shuts her down. Volkov returns.



Chapter 9. Volkov walks Nate back to the White House and they hang out by the fence. Volkov points out a man who appears to be following them. Nate assumes the man is following Volkov. Volkov tells Nate that the Soviets are helping Cuba because they asked for help after the Bay of Pigs invasion. Nate tells Volkov that the Soviets have a knife to the American's throats and they will not back down.

Chapter 10. Nate gets lost looking for Mrs. Lincoln, the President's secretary, and ends up outside the green room where the First Lady is giving an interview. Nate watches for a few minutes before backtracking and finding the appropriate office. Miss Collins directs Nate into the Oval Office. Nate tells Jack about his conversation with Volkov. Jack tells Nate he has done well. Jack then asks Nate to remain at the White House to be dispassionate eyes for him during an ExComm meeting.

Nate was a B-17 pilot during World War II. On one particular mission, Nate and his crew were the only survivors. It was at that time that Nate resigned himself to dying.

Nate and Jack attend the ExComm meeting. Nate listens while discuss the situation. Afterward, they return to the Oval Officer where they watch the Security Council meeting on television. Senator Adlai Stevenson interviews Valerian Zorin, the Soviet Ambassador.

Chapter 11. On the local news, the reporter who tried to interview Nate shows his picture and claims he has been brought to Washington to consult with the President.

Nate goes to his room and speaks to his wife before Jack shows up again to talk about the ExComm meeting. Jack tells Nate that some members of his staff are eager to attack Cuba, but he is concerned about casualties.

Chapter 12. Nate gets a phone call from the receptionist at the Russian consulate. The woman tells him that Volkov wants to meet immediately. Nate agrees and quickly dresses before leaving. Nate is walking to the consulate when someone shoots at him. The stranger who had been following Volkov the day before kills Nate's would-be assassin.

Chapter 13. Nate is taken to the hospital to have his ear repaired after a bullet damaged it. Jack shows up at the hospital, demanding to know what happened. As Nate is examined by the doctor, they discover that a notebook he took from his room at the White House stopped a bullet from entering his chest.

Analysis

These early chapters introduce the two main characters. Nate Michaels is a salesman for Hewlett-Packard in Palo Alto, California. Nate and Jack Kennedy were friends when Nate was in law school at Stanford. However, something happened between the two men that left Nate angry and bitter toward Jack. It is this episode that leaves Nate reluctant to help the President, Jack Kennedy, when he asks Nate to come to the White House. Nate goes, however, because he is a patriot and he wants to serve his country.



Jack Kennedy is the young, Catholic president. He has only been in the White House a short time, but he has already made a big impact. Jack calls his old friend Nate because the Soviets have begun stock piling nuclear warheads in Cuba. Nate's father was a communist who was friends with Maxim Volkov, the current head of Soviet intelligence in the United States. Jack wants Nate to speak to this old family friend and see if he can do anything to help the current crisis.

The crisis that is at the heart of the plot is a real crisis that took place in 1962. The United States came dangerously close to entering a nuclear war with the USSR. The Soviets were stock piling nuclear warheads in Cuba in an attempt to help the Cuban government in the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs invasion run by the CIA just months after Kennedy had taken office. The crisis lasted thirteen days.

Nate meets with his old family friend and they discuss the political situation. Nothing is really achieved with this first meeting. Therefore, it is not a surprise when Volkov, the family friend, asks to see Nate again. However, it turns out to be a trick to get Nate out of the White House. Nate is fired at by a stranger. The man is believed to be GRU, (Main Intelligence Directorate) is the foreign military intelligence main directorate of the Soviet Army General Staff of the Soviet Union. This suggests that someone in the Soviet Union does not want Nate and Volkov talking. It is mysterious who saved Nate, but the reader might already suspect which agency that man works for.

Discussion Question 1

Who is Nate? Why does the President ask for his help?

Discussion Question 2

What is the Cuban Missile Crisis? What happened? What might have happened if it had ended differently?

Discussion Question 3

Who is Jack Kennedy? When did he become president? Why is Nate reluctant to help him?

Vocabulary

Firearm, decent, reservoir, fathomless, butcher, stethoscope, discomfoting, presidential, emblazoned, nation, dangerous, communist, piercing, makeshift, faze, stitch, emergency, ambulance, fedora, instead, stationary, collapsed, fusillade, erupted, spasm, median, topsy turvy, embassy, reverie, motored, mugger, jaywalked, plunged.



Part Two, Chapters 1-7

Summary

Chapter 1. October 24, 1940. Nate and his girlfriend, Miriam, go to L'Omelette, a local restaurant in Palo Alto. The restaurant is empty, but the bar is crowded in the aftermath of a Stanford football game. Nate pushes his way through the crowd to get a bottle of wine for him and Miriam. When he returns, Nate finds Miriam sitting with a young man who introduces himself as Jack Kennedy.

Chapter 2. Miriam tells Nate that Jack is auditing classes at the Stanford School of Business. Nate is aware of who Jack is because his father is ambassador to England and he has recently written a book called *Why England Slept*. Jack invites Nate to attend a class on contemporary world politics with him. Nate agrees. Jack leaves with a young tennis player. Later, Nate takes Miriam home, but she will not allow him even a chaste kiss.

Chapter 3. Jack and Nate discuss the war in Europe when they meet next. Nate tells Jack that his father is a socialist lawyer who represents a controversial longshoreman union.

Chapter 4. Miriam and Nate attend the Stanford-Southern Cal football game. During the game, they discuss both the game and politics. Miriam is so excited when Stanford wins that she kisses Nate passionately.

Chapter 5. Nate takes Jack to his family's house on a Sunday to have brunch with the family. When they arrive, they discover that a friend of Nate's father, Maxim Volkov, is there. The family is very impressed with Jack even in the midst of a political argument between Volkov and Nate's sister, Rosa.

Chapter 6. On the drive home, Jack is surprised to learn that Nate's mother comes from the Magnin Department Store family. This seems to prove that the two men have more in common than they originally thought. Jack suggests that Volkov is a spy for the Soviet Union, but Nate denies it.

Chapter 7. Jack and Nate attend a seminar analyzing the imminent presidential election. A young man in the class blames Roosevelt's refusal to get involved in the war in Europe on the Jews. Nate becomes angry, but Jack keeps him calm and intelligent and puts the boy in his place.

Analysis

This section of the book goes back to the days before World War II when there was a great deal of pressure for the United States to become involved in the war in Europe. It is during this volatile time that Nate, who was a law school student at the time, met Jack



Kennedy. Nate and Jack immediately became good friends, discussing politics and family. Nate even took Jack home to meet his family, as well as a family friend, Maxim Volkov.

From the beginning, Nate is aware of Jack's sex appeal and his flirtatious side with women. This seems to set the groundwork for the event that will cause Jack and Nate to have a falling out. Although Jack is dating a tennis player, he is clearly seeing other women at the same time. Nate, on the other hand, is in love with one girl, Miriam. Miriam, however, will not share more than a few kisses with Nate. This also seems to set Nate up for a fall.

Discussion Question 1

What was Nate studying at Stanford? How does this relate to his father's profession? Is Nate studying this because of his dad, or for other reasons?

Discussion Question 2

How does Nate meet Jack Kennedy? Why is Jack at Stanford? What has Jack already accomplished at this young age? What does this suggest about Jack Kennedy?

Discussion Question 3

Who is Miriam? What role does she play in Nate's life?

Vocabulary

landslide, predicted, conversations, determine, bankrupt, control, hatchet, crimson, response, happening, politicians, suspicious, professor, captured, midterm, contracts, convinced, seminar, presidential, revealed, displayed, suspicious, socialists, noncommittal, discussion, influence, romantic, functions, aristocrats, triumph.



Part Two, Chapters 8-14

Summary

Chapter 8. While Jack is in Los Angeles visiting his friend, Robert Stack, Nate has his car. Nate and Miriam go to a movie and then to L'Omelette. While at L'Omelette, Nate overhears Jack's girlfriend complaining that Jack must have lied to her about being out of town because she saw his car. Nate sets her straight.

Chapter 9. Nate goes to Jack's little cottage that he rents. Jack sleeps on a board because he has back problems. They share a drink and talk about their family's expectations. Jack tells Nate that his brother, Joe, is the crown prince of the family so his father does not have high expectations for him despite the fact that his father gave a copy of his book to the Queen of England. They discuss girls, as well, with Jack admitting that he is not a serious relationship kind of guy. Jack then invites Nate to go to Los Angeles with him.

Chapter 10. Jack and Nate vote in the election. As they are leaving, they come across a rally in the quad. Nate is surprised to see that one of the most vocal is his own girlfriend, Miriam. It makes Nate love her that much more.

Chapter 11. Nate is walking to his dorms from Miriam's dorm when he runs into Jack's girlfriend, Violet. Violet and Nate talk about Jack. Violet admits that she has never had sex with Jack and that she does not plan to until they are married because she believes a woman should not have sex with the man she plans to marry until the wedding day. However, Nate already knows that Jack does not plan to marry Violet.

Chapter 12. Jack and Nate are at a party in Los Angeles with Robert Stack. Nate is overwhelmed by the celebrities at the party, so he moves to a quiet corner of the garden and watches Jack talk to Clark Gable. After a short time, Nate is joined by Robert Stack and then Carole Lombard, Gable's wife. They begin talking about politics and in a short time Nate is surrounded by people. Jack and Gable join the circle, but no one seems to notice Jack. Jack is angry afterward and tells Nate not to infringe on his stage again.

Chapter 13. Jack, Nate, and Robert Stack go back to Stack's apartment with three girls. Jack takes one of the girl's into a bedroom where there are multiple flags pinned to the ceiling. He plays a game with the girl where she has to take a drink each time she misidentifies a flag. Nate goes back out and sits on the couch with the two other girls. Nate falls asleep. When he wakes, he finds Stack has taken the girls home. Nate goes searching for Jack and finds him having sex with the other girl in the flag room. The next morning, Nate apologizes for the intrusion, but Jack seems eager to boast about it. Jack even tells Nate that he prefers to be on bottom because of his back problems.

Chapter 14. Nate is studying late at the library because Miriam called off their planned date. The library closes, so Nate decides to go by Jack's to see what he is up to. When



Nate arrives, he peeks through the windows to see if Jack is up. When he does, he sees Jack having sex with Miriam.

Analysis

Nate finds himself getting drawn into Jack's playboy lifestyle. First, Nate must defend Jack to his girlfriend, Violet, by assuring her that Jack did not lie about going out of town. Then Nate consoles Violet who is worried that Jack is cheating on her because she will not sleep with him because she hopes to marry him. Nate already knows that Jack has no intention of marrying Violet, but is only dating her because she is pretty. Then Nate goes to Los Angeles with Jack and gets caught up in the celebrity lifestyle Jack lives there, even accidentally walking in on Jack with a young woman. Jack is clearly a man who feels free to share himself with any woman willing to be with him, while Nate is more of a conscientious young man who prefers the one girl he is in love with.

Nate's relationship with Miriam seems to be growing and getting more serious. Nate is even impressed with Miriam's willingness to share her political beliefs with the world when she joins a rally for Roosevelt on election day. However, this also catches Jack's attention and Miriam begins breaking dates with Nate. It all culminates in Nate finding the two in bed together. The reader has seen the foreshadowing for this event since the first chapter of this section, therefore there is little surprise. However, this does explain Nate's anger with Jack even years later when Jack asks for his help as the President of the United States.

Discussion Question 1

Who is Roosevelt? Why did the young man in the seminar think that Roosevelt was attempting to make the Jews happy by not getting involved in the war in Europe?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Nate go to Los Angeles with Jack? Why does Jack become angry when the party goers are more interested in what Nate has to say than what he is saying?

Discussion Question 3

What is Nate's relationship with Miriam? Why does Nate become upset when he finds Miriam with Jack? Why does this destroy Nate and Jack's relationship?

Vocabulary

Jurisprudence, adrenaline, simpler, avoiding, hideaway, narrower, paramour, blanketed, uninterested, reaction, avoiding, except, seminar, term, switched, windowpane, directly, revolving, explanation, maneuvered, promised, grayer, answer, master, agent, started.



Part Three, Chapters 1-16

Summary

Chapter 1. October 26, 1962. Nate and Jack return to the White House to have breakfast. Jackie is there when they arrive. Jackie is polite, but quickly excuses herself to go check on the children. They discuss the morning's events.

Chapter 2. Nate gets lost going to his room and runs into Jackie again. Jackie asks Nate to explain to her what is going on because Jack will not. Nate explains it briefly before Jackie directs him to his room. Nate goes to his room, comparing what he had gone through that morning with the danger he experienced in the war.

Chapter 3. Jack asks Nate to go view new photos coming in of Cuba, hoping Nate will spot something that the analysts do not. Jack also instructs Nate to have Miss Collins buy him more clothes. Nate is escorted to the secret headquarters by two secret service agents. Nate and the government employees look over the photos as they come in, and Nate spots something unusual.

Chapter 4. Nate shows Jack the new U2 photographs. They clearly show that there are five of six missile launch systems ready to go on the beaches of Cuba.

Chapter 5. Jack goes up to say goodnight to his children. While he is gone, Nate helps himself to a cigar. Robert Kennedy comes into the room. Khrushchev has sent a message. When Jack returns, the three men sit and read the message. The essence seems to be that if the Americans promise not to invade, the Soviets will remove the missiles.

Chapter 6. Nate is talking on the phone with his wife when Miss Collins comes with his new clothes. As Miss Collins starts to leave, she asks about the missile crisis and then throws herself at Nate. Nate politely brushes off her advance.

Chapter 7. Jack arrives shortly after Miss Collins leaves. On his heels is Jackie, accusing Jack of doing something inappropriate. Jack calms her and sends her back to bed. Nate is annoyed that Jack has changed so little since their friendship ended. Jack tells Nate he should get over his indiscretion with Miriam.

Chapter 8. Nate meets Jack in the pool room the next morning. Jack wants Nate at the ExComm meeting that morning. Nate agrees.

Chapter 9. Jack gets word that Khrushchev has released another letter to him. The letter expresses the desire for the Americans to remove missiles from Turkey before the Soviets will back off from Cuba. Jack tells Nate he needs to meet with Volkov again.

Chapter 10. Nate wants to walk to the Russian Embassy, but Jack has sent an order to the secret service that Nate is to be escorted everywhere he goes. Two secret service



agents are waiting for Nate when he leaves the White House and insists he ride with them. They arrive at the embassy, but it is closed. The receptionist, Miss Leontieva, tells Nate she will deliver a message to Volkov for him.

Chapter 11. Nate waits for Volkov at the Bernard Baruch Bench in Lafayette Square for several hours. A half hour past the meeting time, Nate decides to give up. As Nate and his secret service escorts prepare to leave, someone begins firing on them. One of the agents is hit in the arm. While still under fire, Nate removes his sock to use as a tourniquet. However, the agent and Nate are both hit by splinters from the bench. The agent is struck in the throat and bleeds out. The other agent instructs Nate to run. Nate notices the fedora-wearing stranger who saved his life previously join the gun fight before someone pulls him into a passing car.

Chapter 12. The car belongs to Volkov and his people. Volkov tells Nate that he does not know who the assassin or the mysterious protector are. Volkov then treats Nate's wounds while suggesting that the GRU, Soviet military intelligence, might have a reason to want Nate dead. Volkov then tells Nate that the missiles in Turkey make the Soviets feel as though they have a noose around their necks. They must be removed, or the Soviets are prepared to fight in Cuba.

Volkov drops Nate off outside the White House. As Nate walks up to the building, he sees Jackie as she and the children leave for their country home. Jackie asks Nate to help Jack.

Chapter 13. Nate enters an ExComm meeting and listens to the discussion. The military advisors are discussing strategy for attacking Cuba. Ted Sorensen calls Nate out and takes him to the president. Nate tells Jack what happened and what Volkov said. Jack thinks that Khrushchev is having the same problem he is: he wants to avoid war, but his military advisors are anxious for it. Nate receives a phone call. During the call, a doctor comes in and gives him an injection and a handful of pills. Nate feels that Jack allowed this to happen in front of him because Jack trusts him.

Chapter 14. Nate sits in on a meeting between Robert and the Soviet ambassador in the aftermath of the news that the Cubans have shot down one of the U2 planes the United States had sent over the island to conduct reconnaissance. Robert warns the ambassador that if the Cubans shoot down another of the American planes, the Americans will have no choice but to retaliate. The man refuses to give an answer, but tells Robert he will discuss it with his government. However, he makes it clear that if the Americans fire on Cuba, the Soviets will have no choice but to retaliate.

Chapter 15. Robert and Nate join Jack and Dave Powers at dinner. They eat and drink a great deal as they discuss the meeting with the Soviet ambassador.

Chapter 16. Kennedy follows Nate to his room and they discuss the impact of any decision in this crisis would have on NATO.



Analysis

Nate meets Jackie Kennedy. Nate is instantly impressed by her and surmises that Jack married her because of her quiet dignity. However, it is clear to Nate that Jack is still as sexually irresponsible as he had been earlier in their friendship. This is illustrated by Jackie's arrival at Nate's bedroom door that night, accusing Jack of straying. Although Nate had begun to develop some respect for Jack again, he realizes that Jack still has not grown up and this tempers his respect.

Nate becomes deeply involved in the meetings surrounding the crisis in Cuba. Time is quickly growing short as the Soviets prepare six missile launch locations on the island. Nate finds evidence that five of these launch locations are ready to go. Discussion and negotiations continue with each side arguing over what should be done. Khrushchev wants the Americans to remove missiles from Turkey. However, when the Cubans shoot down an American plane, it appears that the Americans have few choices about what their next move should be. For this reason, Jack has little choice but to tell the Soviets that he will retaliate if another plane is shot down.

At the same time Jack is working the situation diplomatically, Nate is attempting to make contact with his friend, Volkov. As happened the last time he tried to meet with Volkov, Nate is fired upon. This time a secret service agent is killed. Nate learns that the would-be assassins are likely GRU, Soviet military intelligence. This underscores that idea that, just like on the American side, the military advisers are eager to go to war while the president and his counterpart would rather not.

Discussion Question 1

Who is Jackie Kennedy? What is Nate's impression of her? Why does she accuse Jack of nefarious conduct?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Jack want Nate to speak with Volkov? What does he hope will come from these discussions? How might this help the situation in Cuba?

Discussion Question 3

Why is the GRU interested in killing Nate? What are they attempting to stop him from doing? What would happen if they succeeded?

Vocabulary

Determined, diplomatically, NATO, answered, innocent, opener, perfection, acquired, hungrily, anticipation, spiral, exaggerated, secretary, ambassador, ostensibly, unfeigned, presence, missiles, pardon, capital, perilously, insurmountable, difficulties, assurances, quarantine, suitable, safeguards, understand, commander.



Part Three, Chapters 17-32

Summary

Chapter 17. In the Exomm meeting, Nate learns that the Soviet ambassador refused to look at a formal map of the interception line, that Castro refused to stop building the missile launch sites, and that the reconnaissance flights over Cuba should continue. It is decided that if the American planes are fired on the following morning, the Americans will have no choice but to retaliate.

After the meeting, Nate sits in on a meeting between Jack and the head of the CIA. The CIA man accuses Nate of working with the Soviets. Jack practically laughs at him, but Nate does learn that the man who has now twice helped him against the GRU is a CIA agent.

Chapter 18. Jack comes to Nate's room and invites him to watch a movie with him. Nate stops to call his family first. Nate tells his twin sons that he has decided to buy them a car even though they had previously agreed the boys would have to pay for half. Nate's wife is not happy because the boys cut school the day before. Nate tells her they had the right idea and then sends her to a remote hotel in Mendocino.

Chapter 19. Nate watches Roman Holiday with Jack and his friend, Dave Powers. Nate tells Jack about meeting Clark Gable during the war. Jack then sends for Mary Meyer, a friend. Nate leaves, not wanting to be a part of Jack's relationship with Mrs. Meyer.

Chapter 20. Nate runs into his former commander, General Curtis Le May. LeMay wants Nate to take him to Jack, but Nate refuses. LeMay then insists that Nate go with him to see something.

Chapter 21. Nate and LeMay go to the Pentagon. LeMay takes Nate to a command room where he shows him that the country is on nuclear alert and where there are hundreds of planes armed and ready to fly. LeMay is trying to make the point that the United States is ready to go to war, confirming the idea that the American military advisors want to go to war.

Chapter 22. Nate has breakfast with Robert McNamara, Secretary of Defense, after a sleepless night. McNamara confirms that American planes will fly over Cuba just after noon Washington time. It is clear that everyone expects to go to war in a few hours.

Chapter 23. Nate is attempting to get some sleep, thinking about the impending battle. As he lies in bed, he recalls getting leave during the war. When he arrived home, Miriam was waiting for him. As a WAAF, Women's Auxiliary Air Force, she was able to track his travels. Miriam told him that Jack meant nothing, that she loved him. Nate ignored her and walked away. Nate calls his family to be sure they made it to Mendocino, but the call is interrupted.



Chapter 24. Volkov tells Nate he has to keep the American planes from flying over Cuba because Khrushchev cannot stop Cuba from firing at them. Nate asks to meet.

Chapter 25. Nate and two secret service agents travel to a safe house on Swann Street to meet with Volkov. Miss Leontieva opens the door. Volkov takes Nate to a small room at the back of the house and tells him that they are trying to avoid the GRU. Volkov explains that the Soviet military is prepared for war and wants it to happen. The Soviet ambassador, whom Jack is hoping will help diffuse the situation, is really on the side of the military. However, Khrushchev would be willing to leave Cuba if the Americans will remove the missiles from Turkey and not claim victory in the aftermath. Nate tells Volkov that Jack would go with that. Volkov transmits a message to Khrushchev and he and Nate sit back to wait for an answer. Just as Volkov finishes translating the answer, he is shot in the head.

Chapter 26. Miss Leontieva comes into the room and tells Nate he must leave immediately. Nate quickly takes the message and follows Miss Leontieva through a trapdoor in the ceiling. They can hear the GRU agents close behind them. They run across the roof and jump to a nearby roof.

Chapter 27. Miss Leontieva did not make the jump and she dangles over the edge by Nate's grip on her arm. Nate pulls her up as the GRU agents come into view. They jump off that roof and catch a taxi.

Chapter 28. They are speeding down the street when gunfire erupts behind them. The taxi driver is killed. Nate leans over the front seat to grab the wheel, but the taxi driver's foot is still wedged against the accelerator. Miss Leontieva moves into the front seat to help. Nate climbs into the front seat and pushes the driver out of the car in order to cause a distraction behind him, which he hopes will slow the GRU.

Chapter 29. As Nate and Miss Leontieva approach the church where Jack is attending services, they run into a barrier. They get out of the car only to be detained by the police who have been following behind them. Nate and Miss Leontieva are put in cuffs and detained in the police car.

Chapter 30. The secret service agent whose partner was killed defending Nate recognizes him and convinces the police to let him and Miss Leontieva go. The agent then escorts Nate into the church to speak with Jack. Nate shows Jack the translated message from Khrushchev. Jack orders the scheduled reconnaissance mission canceled. Jack also instructs someone to inform Robert of what is happening and for him to arrange to see the Soviet ambassador.

Chapter 31. Robert reports that the Soviets intend to remove the missiles from Cuba. Jack orders his press secretary to inform the television and radio news agencies not to tout this as a victory for the Americans. Nate, Jack, and Robert celebrate while Jack jokes that he should make plans to go to the theater.

Chapter 32. Nate flies home to his family. Nate is greeted by his sons. Nate's wife comes outside. It is Miriam.



Analysis

As the situation in Cuba becomes dire, Jack turns to his favorite vices, women and Hollywood. Nate is somewhat disgusted by the fact that Jack clearly has not grown up. At the same time, Nate is dragged to the Pentagon by his former commander. Nate discovers that the United States military is more than prepared for a possible war. It is a sobering situation that inspires Nate to send his family as far from any potential targets as possible.

Nate is called by Volkov who seems to have more answers to the situation than the Soviet ambassador. Nate and Volkov work out a compromise that will benefit both countries and end the standoff. Volkov, however, is killed in the process. Nate manages to get the message to the president despite the assassins following him. It is a tense few minutes that ends in victory for everyone. Nate has ended the thirteen day standoff almost singlehandedly.

At the end of the book, the reader finally finds out why Nate has refused to forgive Jack for his transgressions even more than twenty years later. Nate was in love with Miriam and she with him. If the reader will recall what Violet said about not sleeping with the man you want to marry because it might ruin the chances of marriage, the reader might begin to understand why Miriam slept with Jack. Miriam was not in love with Jack, but was clearly attracted to him and excited by his charm. However, Miriam really wanted Nate. Therefore, it is little surprise to the reader to discover that Miriam is Nate's wife.

Discussion Question 1

Why does the Soviet Union want missiles removed from Turkey? Why are the missiles there? Why does Jack want to remove the missiles as well?

Discussion Question 2

Why does the Soviet Union not want the Americans to declare victory when the missiles are removed from Cuba? What would this mean to the Soviets?

Discussion Question 3

Who is the GRU? Why are they trying to stop Nate? What do they think Nate is capable of doing?

Vocabulary

Prancing, passengers, uniformed, darkened, caravan, extracted, request, personal, loyalty, pantomimed, relief, perky, pardon, wrangle, international, engines, continent,

shouting, pressure, silhouetted, counter, nonstop, goodbye, residents, resolution, encircling, unfinished, mortification, business.



Characters

Nathan 'Nate' Michaels

Nate is a law student when he first meets Jack Kennedy. Jack is already the author of a best selling book when they meet, an impressive young man who clearly has a good future. Nate feels overshadowed by Jack, which makes Jack happy. Nate enjoys his friendship with Jack and does not mind being left in the shadows. That changes, however, when Nate finds Jack in bed with his girlfriend.

Twenty-two years later, Jack wants Nate to help with the Cuban Missile Crisis. Nate was once friends with the head of the KGB in the United States. For this reason, Jack wants Nate to renew his friendship and see if he could help negotiate a compromise with the Soviets to prevent war. Nate is worried about the impact of war on his country, so he agrees to help. He is deeply disappointed, however, to discover that while Jack is a good president, he has not outgrown his playboy ways.

Nate finds himself a target of the GRU (the Soviet military intelligence) as he negotiates with Volkov. Nate is shot at three times and wounded once. In the end, however, Nate manages to make the compromise that will end the potential war.

Jack Kennedy

John Fitzgerald Kennedy, or Jack, is the thirty-fifth president of the United States. Jack and Nate met twenty-two years prior to the opening of the novel when Nate was a law student at Stanford and Jack was auditing classes at the school. Jack and Nate had a lot in common and shared some political views. However, Jack was a womanizer and Nate was more of the monogamous type. When Nate caught Jack having sex with his girlfriend, Miriam, Nate ended the relationship.

Jack has his brother, Robert, call Nate during the Cuban Missile Crisis because a man Jack knows was a friend of Nate's family drops Nate's name during a meeting. Jack hopes that Nate can meet with this man, Volkov, and negotiate a compromise with the Soviets. Jack is surprised that Nate has not forgiven him for his actions twenty years before. Nate is surprised that Jack still sleeps around even though he has a very kind and gentle wife.

In the end, Nate plays an important role in ending the Cuban Missile Crisis. Jack expects Nate to continue to be loyal to him, but Nate returns home rather than spend any more time with someone he dislikes.



Robert Kennedy

Robert Kennedy is Jack's brother and the attorney general. Robert works alongside his brother in an attempt to work out the crisis in Cuba with the Soviets. Robert does not appear to like Nate at the beginning, especially when Nate attempts to refuse the command to travel to Washington at the beginning of the novel. However, by the end of the novel, Robert appears to have come to trust Nate.

Maxim Volkov

Maxim Volkov is a friend of Nate's family. Volkov was stationed with the Soviet embassy in San Francisco, where he befriended Nate's father, a socialist lawyer. Years later, during the Cuban Missile Crisis, Volkov drops Nate's name, and Jack decides that he would be willing to speak to Nate to negotiate the missile crisis. For this reason, Jack has Robert summon Nate to Washington.

Volkov meets with Nate, but does not appear to have much information at first. However, as time passes and the crisis becomes dire, Volkov begins to negotiate with Nate. Nate and Volkov work out a compromise, but Volkov is killed before they can get the compromise to Jack. For this reason, Nate must run for his life to get the message to Jack before it is too late.

Nikita Khrushchev

Khrushchev is the First Secretary of the Soviet Union during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Khrushchev appears to be as unwilling to enter a war with the United States as Jack Kennedy is to enter a war with the Soviets. However, Khrushchev's military is taking steps to promote a war. At the same time, Khrushchev is in a position in which he must defend Cuba against the actions of the United States as witnessed during the Bay of Pigs Invasion the spring after Jack took office. That is why Khrushchev needs to create the appearance of a victory for the Soviets. Khrushchev asks for the removal of missiles in Turkey that belong to the United States. Since these missiles are not important, Jack has already requested their removal, so taking them out will not be a problem. By bypassing the military, Jack and Khrushchev reach an agreement.

Violet

Violet is a girl who is dating Jack during his time at Stanford. Violet is very jealous, and clearly aware that Jack is not a faithful man. Violet corners Nate at one point and tells him that she wants Jack to marry her, which is why she has thus far refused to sleep with him. The reader will recall this when it is revealed that Nate is married to Miriam, the girl who slept with Jack, yet would barely offer Nate a kiss.



Robert Stack

Robert Stack is an American film and television star. Stack and Jack were good friends. Jack would often go to Los Angeles to spend time with Stack. On the occasion that Nate travels to Los Angeles with Jack, he meets Stack and discovers that Stack and Jack have a game they play to get women drunk and seduce them. Stack and Jack appear to have a great deal in common.

Carole Lombard

Carole Lombard is an American film star who is friends with Robert Stack's mother. Nate meets Ms. Lombard at a party he attends with Stack and Jack. Ms. Lombard is interested in Nate's political opinions, causing Nate to become the center of attention at the party. This fact causes Jack a moment of jealousy that reveals his true colors to Nate. Ms. Lombard would die a few years later in a plane crash.

Clark Gable

Clark Gable is an American film star. Gable appeared in the movie, *Gone With the Wind*, among others. Gable is at a party Jack, Nate, and Robert Stack attend in 1940. A few years later, Nate would meet Gable again during the war. Gable became a gunner in the Army Air Corps, but the government would not allow him to fly too many missions because of the danger. Gable wanted to fly missions, however, because his wife had recently died and he apparently had something of a death wish.

Miriam

Miriam is the girl Nate was dating while in law school. Nate met Jack while he was on a date with Miriam and Jack sat to flirt with Miriam. Miriam was weary of Jack and his type. She knew that Jack liked to use his charm to get girls into bed with him. Miriam was not the kind of girl to fall with a guy like him. She barely allowed Nate to kiss her. However, after Jack became intrigued with Miriam because of her passion for politics, she began sleeping with him. Nate caught them and immediately ran off to join the Canadian Air Force. Nate never forgave Jack. However, he apparently forgave Miriam because they were later married.



Symbols and Symbolism

Roman Holiday

Roman Holiday is a movie starring Aubrey Hepburn. Nate watches this movie at the White House with Jack and Dave Powers.

Gone With the Wind

Gone With the Wind is the movie in which Clark Gable played Rhett Butler. Nate would later meet Gable at a party with Jack.

Seven Days in May

Seven Days in May is a political thriller by Fletcher Knebel and Charles W. Bailey II. Nate is reading this novel when he arrives at the White House during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Why England Slept

Why England Slept is the bestseller Jack Kennedy wrote shortly before auditing classes at Stanford in 1940.

Khrushchev Radio Message

Nate risks his life to get Jack a message from Khrushchev that will end the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Khrushchev Letters to Jack Kennedy

Khrushchev writes two letters to Jack Kennedy discussing why the Soviets have sent ships and nuclear warheads to Cuba.

Flags

Jack Kennedy and Robert Stack have a room at Stack's apartment that has flags pinned to the ceiling. The men use these flags in a game with women that require the flags to be identified. Those who cannot identify the flags must take a drink.



Notebook

Nate takes a notebook from his guest room at the White House to take notes in. When he is shot at on the street while walking to the Soviet Embassy, he is shot directly in the notebook. The notebook saves his life.

Newspaper Articles

Although he is aware of what is happening, Nate is startled by the articles in local papers describing the Cuban Missile Crisis.

New Clothes

An assistant at the White House, Miss Collins, buys Nate new clothes because his stay has been extended longer than expected.



Settings

Washington, D.C.

Nate travels to Washington, D.C. to consult with the president, Jack Kennedy, on the missile crisis. While there, Nate travels through some of the neighborhoods near the White House.

White House

While in Washington, Nate stays at the White House in a guest bedroom. Nate also visits the Oval Office and the Green Room. Nate also spends time in the family wing of the house, dining with Jack and his advisors and family. Nate also views a movie in the White House's theater.

L'Omelette

L'Omelette is a popular restaurant in Palo Alto where Nate often takes his date, Miriam. It is here that Nate meets Jack for the first time.

Stanford

Stanford is a university in Palo Alto, California. Nate attends law school at Stanford and meets Jack Kennedy when he goes to Stanford to audit classes at the business school.

Soviet Union

The Soviet Union, or USSR, is the country that is now referred to as Russia. During the 1960s, the Soviet Union and the United States were in the midst of a cold war that began after World War II and would continue for another twenty years.



Themes and Motifs

Military vs. Government

In this novel, the author takes pains to separate the government from the military. The author believes that the Cuban Missile Crisis was an attempt by the Soviet military to begin a war with the Americans. The American military advisers also seemed prepared to go to war if the Soviets continued to be aggressive toward the Americans.

Nate speaks with his old commander from the war and sees just how prepared the American military is to go to war. It frightens him and he begins to feel the pressure of impending war. This war will be different, however, as the weapons will primarily consist of nuclear warheads. In contrast to their behavior before the United States entered World War II, Nate and Jack are both less eager to enter into war with the Soviets. Khrushchev, too, seems reluctant to go to war. It is the military pushing the issue. It is also the military attempting to stop Nate from negotiating with Volkov. The military has become a liability to the government, creating the theme of the military versus the government.

Betrayal

Betrayal is a theme of this novel on two levels. The first instance of betrayal is that between the military and the government. The GRU has betrayed Khrushchev by refusing to follow his lead. Instead, the GRU is attempting to promote a war with the United States, going so far as trying to stop Volkov and Nate from negotiating a compromise. The American military is doing the same by increasing their defenses and preparing airplanes with nuclear warheads in anticipation of war. It is a betrayal in that these military entities are doing the opposite of what their government leaders want.

The other betrayal is a personal one. Nate and Jack were once friends. Nate was aware of Jack's carefree attitude toward women and sex, but never expected Jack to betray their friendship by sleeping with Nate's girlfriend, Miriam. At the same time, Nate never thought that chaste, innocent Miriam would betray him with Jack. Twenty years later, this betrayal is still difficult for Nate to deal with. Jack finds this childish, but the reader understands when it is revealed that Miriam is Nate's wife.

Friendship

There are several friendships in this novel that are important to the plot. The first is the friendship between Nate and Maxim Volkov. Volkov is a Soviet who befriended Nate's father when Nate was younger. Volkov asks for Nate when negotiations begin during the Cuban Missile Crisis. It is this friendship that brings Nate to Washington, not his former relationship with Jack Kennedy. It is also this friendship that eventually brings an end to the crisis.



Nate and Jack were also friends. However, this friendship was short and ended badly. Jack does not understand how Nate could still be angry with him after all the years that have passed. Jack is the kind of man who uses charm to make even the worst hurts better. It also does not hurt that he is President of the United States. This is why he does not understand Nate's problem. However, Jack is not the type who would understand loyalty and betrayal.

Another friendship important in this novel is the one that once existed between Nate and Miriam. While they were intimate companions, they were also friends. Nate felt doubly betrayed when he found Miriam and Jack in bed together. However, Nate was able to forgive Miriam because she was the only woman he ever loved. Therefore, the reader is not surprised to discover that Miriam is Nate's wife.



Styles

Point of View

The novel is written in the first person point of view. The narrator is Nathan 'Nate' Michaels, an employee of Hewlett-Packard. Nate was once friends with Jack Kennedy and is called to the White House to help with the Cuban Missile Crisis when it becomes apparent that an old family friend who is now the head of the KGB in the United States will only talk to Nate.

The point of view of this novel works throughout most of the novel. The point of view keeps the reader close to Nate and creates a relationship between reader and character that makes the reader care what might happen to Nate. However, the point of view limits the narration to only what Nate would know. Therefore, it makes some parts of the novel unrealistic, such as the idea that Nate would be allowed to attend a sensitive meeting between Robert Kennedy and the Soviet ambassador.

Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is simple English. The author uses very little slang or other modern language tricks that might not have been used during 1962, the time in which this novel is set. The language of the novel does include some questionable grammar that is used to show that one character, Maxim Volkov, does not speak English as his native language.

The language of this novel is appropriate to the novel. While some of the language is a little too casual and too modern for the time period, most of the language does fit the time in which the novel is set. The language appears to be authentic to the characters and the setting of the novel.

Structure

The novel is divided into three parts. Each part has its own set of chapters. The numbers of the chapters are unique to each part of the novel in which they appear. The novel begins in 1962 in the middle of the Cuban Missile Crisis. The second part goes back in time to show the reader how Nate and Jack met and the event that ended their friendship. The third part returns to the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis.

The novel contains two main plots and several subplots. One main plot follows Nate as he attempts to help Jack Kennedy negotiate a compromise that will end the Cuban Missile Crisis. The second main plot focuses on the relationship between Nate and Jack and the thing that has come between them. One subplot follows Nate's relationship with his family. Another subplot follows Nate's relationship with family friend Maxim Volkov. All the plots come to a conclusion at the end of the novel.



Quotes

I wouldn't have tried to be polite to Jack, but Bobby, well, I'd never met him, and he was head of the Justice Department – even if his appointment could be attributed to bloodlines rather than achievement.

-- Nate Michaels (Chapter 1)

Importance: This quote is the first that introduces the rift between Nate and Jack and the fact that Nate is still angry with his old friend.

See if there's a way to get the knife out of our ribs without blowing up the world.

-- Jack Kennedy (Chapter 4)

Importance: This quote illustrates the way in which Kennedy sees the movements of the Soviet ships outside of Cuba.

Antennas sprang from the gray mansion's roof like stalks in an Iowa cornfield. I didn't know what kind of clandestine signals were sneaking in or out from all that radio equipment, but I couldn't think of who would need it besides America's Cold War nemesis.

-- Nate Michaels (Chapter 7)

Importance: This quote touches on the idea of the cold war, one of many motivations behind the Cuban Missile Crisis.

A bullet stuck out about an eighth of an inch from its back. He came over and held the pad against the rectangle on my chest. A perfect fit.

-- Nate Michaels (Chapter 13)

Importance: Jack holds up a notebook that fits a bruise forming on Nate's chest. It is clear the notebook saved Nate from a serious chest wound.

Young Mr. Kennedy's presence at Stanford had rated notice in The Palo Alto Times and The Stanford Daily.

-- Nate Michaels (Chapter 2)

Importance: This is the first meeting between Nate and Jack. This shows that Jack already had quite a reputation, in part because of a book he had recently written and, in part, because of the fact that his father was the American ambassador to England.

No place could have been more bourgeois, but because Forest Hill was run by a homeowner's association, Dad's conscience was saved. 'The commune' he called it.

-- Nate Michaels (Chapter 5)

Importance: This quote introduces Nate's father as a socialist lawyer. It also sets up the



atmosphere inside the house as Nate and Jack enter to find Maxim Volkov at the dinner table.

He continued, 'Nate, for Christ's sake, I don't like being outshone like that. The world situation, that's mine.

-- Jack Kennedy (Chapter 12)

Importance: This quote shows not only how self-centered Jack could be, but might also be motivation for what Jack does later, ending his friendship with Nate.

Then, as if sensing my gaze, she opened her eyes and looked over Kennedy's head. Directly at me through the windowpane. Miriam.

-- Nate Michaels (Chapter 14)

Importance: This is the moment Nate realizes that Jack has betrayed him by sleeping with his girl, Miriam.

Yesterday, I was supposed to go with him to all the ExComm meetings. Now I was going to interpret the photo interpreters. It was like he was trying to keep me busy.

-- Nate Michaels (Chapter 3)

Importance: This expresses Nate's frustration with Jack, a frustration that only seems to grow after Nate has met Jackie.

Bobby said that any linkage between our missiles in Turkey and theirs in Cuba would lead to the end of NATO.

-- Jack Kennedy (Chapter 16)

Importance: This quote shows that the president has to consider more than just the likelihood of war when dealing with the Cuban Missile Crisis.

As he leaned over to hand me a celebratory smoke, his melon-shaped head exploded.

-- Nate Michaels (Chapter 25)

Importance: This quote is the moment Nate realizes Volkov has been killed just as he was trying to give Nate the message from Khrushchev that could end the crisis.

Here I was back home again with my children, my future, and the only woman I'd ever wanted.

-- Nate Michaels (Chapter 32)

Importance: This is the moment Nate arrives home and expresses his motivation for helping Jack Kennedy with the Cuban Missile Crisis. It is also the moment he reveals to the reader that his wife is Miriam.