

# **Libra Study Guide**

## **Libra by Don DeLillo**

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# Plot Summary

Libra by Don DeLillo is a fictional analysis of a conspiracy behind the assassination of John F. Kennedy. In this novel, the author suggests that Lee Harvey Oswald, a confused and aimless young man, is a pawn of three CIA agents disgruntled over the bungled invasion at the Bay of Pigs. Oswald, whose disruptive childhood and devotion to Communism make him appear to be disgruntled against the American government, is chosen to be a patsy in a plot to make it seem as though Cuban leader, Fidel Castro, is scheming to kill Kennedy. Even the conspirators do not know that Kennedy is to die on that fateful day in Dallas, Texas and Oswald does not know he is not the single shooter until he sees the assassination of a president through his rifle scope. Libra is a complicated look at an often analyzed event that gives readers a sympathetic look at a traditional enemy.

Walter 'Win' Everett Jr. meets with two friends from his days in the CIA, Larry Parmenter and T-Jay Mackey. All three men have been forced out of the CIA in one way or another because of the botched invasion at the Bay of Pigs. Win has brought these men together with a suggestion of how they might be able to repair their reputations and regain their positions within the CIA. Win suggests that Kennedy would be forced to reevaluate his stance on Cuba if he believed Fidel Castro was attempting to have him assassinated. Win suggests that they plan and execute an attempted assassination on the president during a motorcade in Miami.

Win's plan includes finding a person they can manipulate and cause to appear as a disgruntled American who would be susceptible to assassinating the president on behalf of Castro. This person would fire a few shots at the president and then be arrested, giving the government someone to blame for the incident, thus protecting the three conspirators from further investigation.

After his active service in the Marines, Oswald travels to Russia and announces his intentions to defect. Oswald's petition to defect to Russia is accepted and he is debriefed regarding the U2 aircraft. When a U2 plane crashed in Russia and the pilot is recovered, Oswald is brought back to Moscow to help the Russians interrogate the pilot. Oswald soon becomes disillusioned with Russia and returns to America with his new wife and daughter. Back in America, Oswald finds it difficult to find a job to help support his family. During this time, Oswald reconnects with a friend he made in the Marines while they were both prisoners in military prison. With this friend, Oswald learns about the political stand of General Walker. Oswald and his friend, Bobby Dupard, plot to assassinate Walker. On the fateful night in April, the same night three CIA agents plot to make an attempt on Kennedy's life, Oswald takes a shot at Walker and misses.

On the day of the assassination, three trained assassins arrive on the scene. One focuses a high-powered rifle on the motorcade while another takes off for another assignment and the other waits in the car. The assassin fires at the motorcade after each of Oswald's shots. Oswald witnesses the murder of President Kennedy through his own rifle scope. Panicked, it takes a great effort for Oswald to leave the School Book



Depository without arousing suspicion in a police officer searching the building. Oswald rushes to his boarding house to retrieve his handgun before his rendezvous with Ferrie at a movie theater. On his way, Oswald is stopped by a police officer. Panicked again, Oswald shoots and kills the officer.

In the movie theater, Oswald waits for Ferrie. However, Oswald is not aware that another assassin is sitting behind him, waiting for a particularly noisy moment in the movie to kill him. Before this can happen, however, police arrive at the theater and take Oswald into custody. Oswald is beaten, booked, and interrogated over and over before being paraded in front of the press. Among the press is Jack Ruby, a local strip club owner who is known as a friend to the local police. Ruby closes his clubs the weekend after the assassination in respect for his president. As Ruby grieves alone for his president, he is approached by a mob enforcer, who just days before threatened to take Ruby's clubs for outstanding debts. On this day, however, the mob enforcer offers to forgive Ruby's debts if he would assassinate Oswald. Ruby agrees, believing this will make him a hero. Instead, Ruby finds that he will forever be tied to the man who killed President Kennedy.

# Part 1: In the Bronx and 17 April

## Part 1: In the Bronx and 17 April Summary

This novel is a fictional examination of a possible conspiracy behind the assassination of JFK. The author, Don DeLillo, writes in alternating time lines in order to present a sympathetic look at one of the most notorious criminals of modern times, Lee Harvey Oswald.

In the Bronx. Lee Oswald and his mother, Marguerite, live in the Bronx. Marguerite has been married multiple times, once abandoned, once widowed, and once divorced by a man who cheated her out of a reasonable settlement. Marguerite continues to hold a grudge against her last husband, blaming him for the struggles she and her youngest child, Lee, have had to suffer since he abandoned the family. Lee does not attend school regularly, but Marguerite feels she can do nothing to make him go because she is always at work. Marguerite is worried the government will take her child away from her. At the same time, Lee endures teasing and abuse from schoolmates because of his Texas accent from a short stay with his brother in Texas. Lee and his mother have been moving to remain close to his brother, who is a Marine and is now stationed on Ellis Island.

At home, Marguerite stays up late, worried about Lee. Lee pulled a knife on his brother's bride, causing a rift in their relationship. Marguerite makes excuses for him, blaming the untimely death of his father and the bitter divorce from Mr. Ekdahl for his behaviors. Marguerite also knows all their moving around is not good for Lee, but she feels she has no choice. Lee is interviewed by social workers, who are concerned about the way Lee isolates himself from others in the classroom. It is about this time Lee begins riding the subways, discovering a world inside the world that fascinates him.

17 April. Nicholas Branch is in his fifteenth year of researching the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Branch sits in a fireproof room filled with materials regarding the assassination, materials that are constantly being added to by the Curator of the CIA. Branch begins his work this day by entering the date, April 17, 1963 into his home computer.

Walter Everett Jr., or Win, sits in his house in Denton, Texas on April 17, 1963. Win once worked for the CIA, but has been forced out in the chaos after the Bay of Pigs and has returned to his roots as a college professor, currently working at Texas Women's University in Denton Texas. Win plans to have lunch with a couple of old colleagues from the CIA. One is Laurence Parmenter, one of the men behind the coup in Guatemala in 1954 and a fellow veteran of the Bay of Pigs. These two men are later joined by T.J. Mackey, a veteran field officer who trained exiles in assault weapons and was present during the early phases of the landings at Bay of Pigs. The three men drive out of the city and discuss the reasons why the Bay of Pigs invasion failed. They all come to the conclusion that Kennedy had cold feet. Win believes that Kennedy has to



convinced that Castro is still a threat to his personal and political future. Win suggests they stage an attempted assassination of the president but that they purposely miss.

After the meeting, T-Jay attempts to call a former FBI agent who is now a private detective in New Orleans, someone who might be able to help in the conspiracy, but instead he reaches David Ferrie, an investigator for Banister. T-Jay hangs up. Parmenter drives to the airport, thinking over Win's proposal, and hears on the radio that the investigation continues into an attempt made on the life of Major General Edwin A. Walker. Win arrives home to a quiet home in a Denton suburb on this second anniversary of the Bay of Pigs.

## **Part 1: In the Bronx and 17 April Analysis**

The chapter In the Bronx introduces Lee Oswald as a child. Oswald lives with his mother, a bitter woman who feels that all the men in her life have let her down either by walking away or dying. This woman is unnaturally dependent on her children, moving herself and her small son around the country in order to remain close to an older son who is a member of the military. This creates an unstable childhood for young Lee, who finds himself bullied by schoolmates and the object of scrutiny by school and welfare officials. Due to the fact that the reader is most likely aware of the role Oswald will later play in history, this information seems to provide the reader with a motive, a reason why such a young man would grow up to be one of the most notorious killers in modern history.

17 April begins in what was the current time as the author wrote the book, 1988. This small section begins the chapter by revealing that a man has been hired by the CIA to write a book about the assassination of JFK that is to be for the CIA only. This man has been working on the book for more than fifteen years and has come to some strong conclusions. To share these conclusions with the reader, the writer, Nicholas Branch, begins with April 17, 1963, the second anniversary of the Bay of Pigs invasion. The reader does not know the significance of this date until the chapter begins to unfold. Three CIA agents who had strong connections to the Bay of Pigs invasion and were subsequently disgraced and/or pushed out of the agency meet and begin to plan an attempted assassination on Kennedy in order to force him to turn on Castro. The three men do not readily agree to this plan, but they do not immediately denounce it, either. This sets up the conflict that will propel the plot of this novel, piecing together for the reader the reason why the first chapter focused on Lee Harvey Oswald.



# Part 1: New Orleans

## Part 1: New Orleans Summary

Lee Oswald is living with his mother in New Orleans now. Lee continues to be bullied by classmates, as it witnessed by the beating he has taken as the chapter opens. Lee has one good friend, however, a boy named Robert Sproul. Lee spends a great deal of time at the New Orleans library, reading such books as Das Kapital and the Communist Manifesto. Lee becomes fascinated by Leon Trotsky as well as everything Russian. Lee and his mother, Marguerite, often argue as Lee enters adolescence. Lee knows his mother believes she works hard for the family, but Lee also sees that his mother often gets fired over dumb things, such as her refusal to wear deodorant while working a cosmetic counter. Marguerite often points out to Lee the good things she has done for him, but Lee often focuses on things she has not done.

Lee has a crush on Robert Sproul's sister. In order to impress her, Lee argues in favor of the Rosenbergs with her, causing her parents to ban him from the house. Lee continues to read questionable books, focusing on Marxist writings. Lee dreams of leaving New Orleans, of traveling on a ship to faraway locations. Lee begins studying his brother's training manual from the Marines. When Robert tells him he knows of a gun for sale, Lee goes with him to buy it. The gun is for sale by Captain Ferrie, the commander of a Civil Air Patrol unit Lee and Robert were enrolled in that summer. The boys are surprised when Captain Ferrie opens the door himself. The rifle for sale is broken and Robert decides to leave. However, Lee is fascinated by the gun and decides to stay. Lee and Ferrie talk for a while. Ferrie warns Lee about the FBI, claiming that once the FBI has a file on someone, they are in their files for ever. Lee buys the rifle, but he can never get it to fire. Lee continues to live with his mother, listening to her complain about her difficult life in America.

## Part 1: New Orleans Analysis

In this chapter, teenaged Lee Oswald begins reading about Russia and Communism. Lee is a bored, abused teenager who has difficulty making friends. Lee is often abused by his fellow classmates; therefore, it is no surprise that he finds refuge among books. The reader is not clear why he chose to study about Communism and Russia until they take into account his mother's bitterness about the way society has treated her since her family immigrated to America. Perhaps Lee believes Communism is a better alternative to the difficulties his mother has faced and visited upon her youngest son. It is clear in this chapter that Lee and his mother do not get along and that he resents her frequent complaining about things that Lee can see are partially her fault. In this same chapter, Lee meets with David Ferrie, a pilot and instructor who has instructed Lee and his only friend, Robert, in a Civil Air Patrol camp. Ferrie is mentioned in a previous chapter, making a connection between Lee and the future conspirators earlier than the

reader might have imagined. Where this connection will lead, the reader can guess due to the events of history, but what Ferrie's role will be remains unknown.





# Part 1: 26 April

## Part 1: 26 April Summary

26 April. Win has been thinking about the plot for nearly a week, reviewing the president's schedule, and has decided that it would make the most sense to make the attempt on his life during a motorcade in Miami. Win hopes that if his plan is a success, it will be revealed to the public that Kennedy had wanted Castro dead and his attempted assassination is a direct result of this. At the same time, Parmenter meets with George de Mohrenschildt, a business man who speaks many languages and was known to be debriefed by the CIA after many of his business trips abroad. During this meeting, de Mohrenschildt tells Parmenter about a young man in Dallas whom he believes is responsible for the attempted assassination of General Walker. De Mohrenschildt tells Parmenter he was instructed to speak to this young man by the CIA and that he believes his own dislike of Walker might have influenced the young man to act against Walker.

Nicholas Branch continues his research on the assassination. Branch finds it interesting that many of the peripheral people involved in the assassination have since died. George de Mohrenschildt, a friend of Oswald, died in 1977 of an apparent suicide. David Ferrie is found dead in 1967 just days after his name is linked to the assassination of an apparent brain hemorrhage. However, many find it interesting that Ferrie had time to write a farewell letter before he died. On that same day, Eladio del Valle, a friend of David Ferrie and head of the Free Cuba Committee, is also found dead of an apparent murder. Branch has so much information to read through, autopsy reports and committee transcripts, that he begins to wonder if he is purposely being given excess information to slow his progress.

T-Jay is in New Orleans to speak with Guy Banister. Guy Banister is anti-Castro and is more than willing to help in a plot to make Kennedy pay for mistakes made in Cuba. T-Jay is concerned about David Ferrie, but Banister assures him that Ferrie is trustworthy. Banister also tells T-Jay that he can provide weapons for the plot. David Ferrie comes into the office and hides out with the secretary, Delphine. Ferrie is completely hairless and he tells everyone he has cancer. Ferrie keeps up a conversation with Delphine to cover the fact that he is eavesdropping on the conversation between T-Jay and Banister.

That night T-Jay sits in a room alone, thinking through the plan. T-Jay is eager to participate in this plan because of his deep felt disappointment in the botched invasion at the Bay of Pigs. Back in Texas, Win gets a call from Parmenter telling him about the meeting with de Mohrenschildt. Parmenter thinks de Mohrenschildt's Dallas friend, Oswald, would be the perfect patsy for their plan. Win instructs Parmenter to inform T-Jay about Oswald. Later, in bed, Win talks to his wife about the U-2 planes that spotted the missiles the Russians put in Cuba, sparking the Bay of Pigs invasion.



## Part 1: 26 April Analysis

This chapter shows the beginning stages of the plan to assassinate JFK. The conspirators continue to believe they are only making an attempt, not really killing JFK, in order to encourage him to allow a new invasion into Cuba that will repair damage done during the botched Bay of Pigs invasion. Each of the conspirators has their own reason for participating. Win is participating because the CIA psychiatrists made it appear as though he were insane in the aftermath, while T-Jay is participating because the botched invasion made him feel ashamed of the country he once dearly loved. The motives for Parmenter's participation are not fully known to the reader yet, but the reader is safe in believing his motives are similar to Win and T-Jay's.

As a covert military strategist, T-Jay is given the role of organizing and preparing the assassination attempt. T-Jay approaches Guy Banister, an anti-Castro private detective willing to supply the weapons. T-Jay is concerned about Ferrie's participation, leaving it unclear to the reader how Ferrie will participate, if he does. When Parmenter learns of Oswald, a young man who once defected to Russia and then returned to the United States only to take a shot at a highly visible political figure, he points to him as a possible patsy for the assassination, to turn investigators away from the true conspirators. This connects Oswald to the assassination months before Oswald himself will learn of his intended role.

Nicholas Branch, the man assigned to writing a book about the assassination for the CIA, has stumbled across the reported deaths of some of the peripheral characters in the plot against JFK, including Ferrie. This has led Branch to the idea of a conspiracy. However, Branch is so buried in information he wonders if the CIA ever really wanted a book written, adding to the idea of a government cover-up in the aftermath of the assassination.



# Part 1: In Atsugi

## Part 1: In Atsugi Summary

Pfc. Lee Oswald is stationed in Atsugi, Japan. Oswald, or Ozzie as his bunkmates call him, is on base watching as a U-2 plane lands. Lee and his companions are amazed by the unique, high-flying plane. Lee spends a lot of time in the base library, struggling through his dyslexia to read. One night Lee meets a young woman named Mitsuko that a bunkmate told him about. They have a sexual relationship for several months, leading to Lee meeting Konno, a friend of Mitsuko. Konno and Lee often talk about socialism. This appeals to Lee and his fascination with Communism.

One night, Lee tells Konno about the U-2 plane. Lee tests Konno, trying to find out how much he knows about such things. Lee keeps back a few details, giving himself some leverage. A few days later, Lee shoots himself in the arm with a .22 Konno gave him, hoping the injury will keep him from being shipped out. Unfortunately, the incident only causes Lee to get in trouble for having an unauthorized weapon on base. Lee is assigned to kitchen duty on ship after he is deployed, due to the incident with the gun. Lee is unhappy with this duty, the only highlight being that he saw John Wayne on a visit to the ship and knew the actor ate a meal he helped prepare.

Lee is placed in the brig back at Atsugi after an altercation with a commanding officer over his desire to be reassigned. Lee is given a cell mate named Bobby Dupard. Dupard is a black man who is often the target of abuse by the guards. Lee is a good prisoner, however, refusing to disobey the rules even when it might mean helping out a fellow prisoner. Lee's strong knowledge of the Marine training manual also helps him when a guard quizzes him on its contents.

After Lee is freed from the brig, he meets Dr. Braunfels, a woman who will teach him Russian. Lee tells Dr. Braunfels that he wants to defect to Russia. Dr. Braunfels tells him to be patient and asks him detailed questions about the U-2 aircraft. Lee does not tell Dr. Braunfels that his courtmartial will not allow him to return to a position that will allow him to get the information on the U-2 and her pilots that she would like to know. Instead, Lee makes up some information and stretches others in order to encourage Dr. Braunfels to keep using him as an informant.

## Part 1: In Atsugi Analysis

In this chapter, Lee Oswald has joined the military. At first Lee appears to be a model soldier, working hard and playing harder like most GI's of his time. However, when Lee befriends Konno and begins telling him things about the highly secret U-2 plane, the reader begins to see that Lee is not as committed to his country as they might have first thought. In fact, Lee is court-martialed twice for actions against superior officers and breaking the rules of the military. Then Lee turns to a woman who appears to be some

kind of spy and asks for help defecting to Russia. Lee's fascination with Russia was at first an apparent attempt to escape the realities of a cruel childhood, but now the reader can see that Lee is truly convinced that life would be better in Russia.

In this chapter, not only does Lee begin appearing as a spy against the American government, but he also befriends a man named Bobby Dupard. Dupard is a black man who is imprisoned with Lee in the military jail in Atsugi. Dupard is badly abused by the guards, showing the reader a sense of the time period in which the book is set as well as the conflict Lee is subjected to most of his life. What is important for the reader to note here is the relationship that develops between Lee and Dupard. This is important because this relationship will be touched on again as the novel's plot continues to develop.



# Part 1: 20 May, In Fort Worth, and 19 June

## Part 1: 20 May, In Fort Worth, and 19 June Summary

20 May. Larry Parmenter travels to the CIA training base in Virginia and visits with T-Jay Mackey. Parmenter tells T-Jay about Oswald, including his sharp shooter record in the military, his wife, and political inclinations. Parmenter then instructs T-Jay that Win wants the presidential limousine to be hit and a Secret Service man wounded, but to not kill anyone. Parmenter also tells T-Jay that they will hit the president in Miami during a motorcade. After Parmenter leaves, T-Jay returns to his trailer and meets with Frank Vasquez and Raymo, two Cuban exiles T-Jay has worked with in the past. They tell T-Jay what it has been like working as migrant workers throughout the south even though the two of them are well educated men. T-Jay tells them about the operation he is planning with Parmenter, Everett, and Banister. They agree to join in.

Parmenter returns to his own home where he lives with Beryl, his wife. Parmenter thinks about the smooth operation in Guatemala and how the Bay of Pigs should have gone the same way, working smoothly with propaganda and intelligent planning. Instead, Kennedy refused to approve air cover for the invasion, leaving Parmenter and everyone else involved hanging out to dry. Parmenter not only lost his standing in the CIA, but he lost several personal business investments he had made in Cuba with the knowledge of the invasion. Parmenter is determined to get Cuba back. That same night, in New Orleans, a young man walks into the Guy Banister offices and asks for an application to be a spy.

In Fort Worth. Lee Oswald returns to Fort Worth for a short time after leaving active duty. From there, Lee boards a ship with the intention of ending up in Russia, but his travel visa says that he is on his way to Albert Schweitzer College in Switzerland.

19 June. Win Everett receives a phone call from Parmenter at his office in Denton telling him that Oswald has shown up in New Orleans where he has taken an office in the building where Guy Banister has his offices. A search of Oswald's office has produced several weapons and pro-Castro leaflets. After the phone call, Everett thinks about the documents he has written in the past and documents he will create now that will not only suggest Castro is behind the attempt on Kennedy's life, but reveal that Kennedy had wanted Castro assassinated himself. In New Orleans, Guy Banister is sitting in a bar, talking about his glory days when he helped take down John Dillinger as he left a movie house. Banister also talks to the bartender about the multiple look alikes Kennedy is rumored to travel with. At the same time, a man named Wayne Elko is in Denver. He makes a call to New Orleans to contact T-Jay Mackey in the hopes of getting a job. That night, Win Everett works on forged documents for the unsuspecting Lee Harvey Oswald.



## Part 1: 20 May, In Fort Worth, and 19 June Analysis

Parmenter, T-Jay, and Win Everett continue to plan the attack against Kennedy, focusing more and more on Oswald. Oswald presents the perfect suspect in an assassination attempt against Kennedy in the name of Castro because of his history of a defection to Russia, a Russian-born wife, and the pro-Castro leaflets found in his office. This focus on Oswald highlights things he has done prior to 1963, although they are things the reader has not been introduced to because Oswald's story is being told in small pieces as the novel progresses. This information contains all things the reader will learn about Oswald, but as the plot develops.

T-Jay is taking charge of the actual assassination attempt. At this point, T-Jay has hired two anti-Castro Cuban exiles who have more reason than anyone to want to see Kennedy forced to deal with Castro. At the same time, Wayne Elko is making his way to T-Jay. The reader knows little about Wayne at this point, but suspects that he too will have a pivotal role in the conspiracy as it begins to play out. Finally, Banister talks about the famous death of John Dillinger outside a movie theater, bringing to mind for the reader the famous capture of Lee Harvey Oswald inside a movie theater, making the reader wonder if the movie theater was something manufactured by Banister and his co-conspirators.



# Part 1: In Moscow and 2 July

## Part 1: In Moscow and 2 July Summary

In Moscow. Lee Oswald arrives in Russia and immediately begins attempting to find a way to remain. When his visa is about to expire, Lee visits both the Russian Ministry offices to ask for permission to remain. Unfortunately, Lee is told that he will have to leave. In response, Lee attempts to kill himself by cutting his wrist. Lee is hospitalized for a time and then moved to a hotel that the government has arranged for him. Lee waits for something to happen, but when it does not he goes to the American Embassy. Lee tells the American Embassy that he wants to defect to Russia and he plans to share secret military information with them. Lee then leaves his passport with the Embassy.

Two men from the government come to interview Lee. They give him many tests, both physical and mental, discovering that he is dyslexic and most likely telling the truth. Lee is interviewed about the military secrets he is said to have mentioned in the American Embassy. Lee tells his interviewers about the U-2 aircraft, insisting that the planes can fly up to ninety thousand feet. However, Lee is not able to tell them anything about the pilots because he never saw their faces, they were always brought to the airfield with their helmets on. However, Alek Kirilenko, the man in charge of his case, decides Lee is harmless. Kirilenko arranges for Lee to be allowed to stay and to have a job in Minsk where he cannot get into trouble.

2 July. David Ferrie goes to see Carmine Latta, a mobster for whom he has done some legal research. Ferrie knows that Carmine Latta dislikes the Kennedys because Robert Kennedy has made it a personal mission to place Latta under surveillance, going so far as to embarrass Latta in front of his family members. For this reason, Ferrie tells Latta about the plot to fake an assassination attempt on Kennedy and asks him to help fund the plot. In Florida, Wayne Elko meets with Raymo who takes him to Frank Vasquez's house. In Denton, Win Everett learns more personal information on Lee Oswald, including his personal taste in reading, his political convictions, and his list of aliases. This makes Oswald more of a person rather than a theory to Everett.

Nicholas Branch continues to go through the overwhelming amount of material on the assassination of JFK given to him by the CIA curator, including documents that appear superfluous such as Jack Ruby's mother's dental charts and pubic hair taken from Oswald. Branch continues to find reports of peripheral character's deaths, including the heart attack death of Guy Banister and the murder of Franck Vasquez, a former Cuban teacher.

In Florida in July of 1964, Frank and Raymo meet at a baseball game and talk about the past. Both suffered when the revolution took place. Raymo spent a great deal of time in prison and can still recall the faces of some of the men he saw executed during his imprisonment after the botched Bay of Pigs invasion.



## Part 1: In Moscow and 2 July Analysis

Lee Oswald has decided to defect to Russia. Lee has been fascinated with Russia and Communism since he was a child and someone gave him a leaflet on the subway. This has translated into a desire to defect to Russia. The reader is left to wonder if this was completely Lee's idea, on his own, or if Lee is part of some covert operation run by the American government to spy on Russia. No matter why Lee has decided to defect, he has become a Russian citizen, something that will reflect on him for many years to come.

Ferrie gets money for the plot from a mobster, bringing into the plot the power of an illegal organization that has its own personal reasons for wanted harm to come to the Kennedy family. This makes the reader wonder if perhaps the plot might not get out of hand, to begin moving in directions that the original three conspirators cannot control. At the same time, Win Everett learns more about Oswald, making him a real person in his eyes and not just a means to an end.

T-Jay continues to prepare his end of the deal, allowing Wayne Elko, an ex-missionary, to join the group. This suggests to the reader that T-Jay's team, two Cubans with motivation to hurt Castro, have not only good reason to kill Kennedy for real, but the means to do so. This causes the reader to wonder if one or more of the conspirators might have personal reasons to make this plot more than just a means to an end.





# Part 1: In Minsk

## Part 1: In Minsk Summary

In Minsk. Lee Oswald has been given a job at a plant in Minsk working as a metalworker. In Oswald's first months there, a U-2 plane crashes in Russia. The pilot is supposed to blow up the sensitive items in the plane and kill himself, but the pilot does neither of these things. The government interviews the pilot and he insists that his plane was flying at sixty-five-thousand feet. The government officials do not believe him because of Oswald's testimony that the plane can fly much higher. For this reason, Kirilenko has Oswald brought from Minsk to be present during the interrogation of the pilot. Oswald assures them that the pilot is telling the truth and perhaps it is Oswald who misunderstood how high the planes can fly.

Lee returns to Minsk where he is beginning to make friends. Lee asks his friends to call him Alek when they struggle with the name Lee. Lee meets a young Jewish girl whom he cares deeply for. However, when he proposes to her, she turns him down. Lee begins to date Marina, a young woman excited by Lee's foreign past. Lee and Marina marry a short time after they met. At the same time, Lee's mother drives to Washington and tries to get someone in the government to help her locate her son. When Lee learns Marina is pregnant, he begins searching for a way for him and his family to return to America. Lee writes a letter to the state department and asks for a loan to help them travel. It takes a long time, but finally Lee and Marina prepare for the journey to America soon after the birth of their first child, June Lee. In the weeks before they leave, Lee begins to write compulsively about his time in Russia in what he calls his Historic Diary and also in an article he calls The Kollektive. Lee and Marina arrive safely in New York, despite Lee's fears he will be arrested on arrival.

## Part 1: In Minsk Analysis

Lee Oswald has settled in Minsk as a Russian citizen. When a U-2 pilot is shot down over Russia, Lee is called to sit in on the interviews in order to verify the information the pilot is giving the government. Lee knows little about the planes and can only guess at the veracity of the pilot's testimony. This suggests to the reader that Lee is in Russia of his own accord, not because his government has sent him. However, the reader is still unclear as to Lee's motives for defecting to Russia. At the same time, Lee falls in love with Marina and marries her, bringing a baby girl into the world. This injects a bit of normalcy into Lee's life, but it also adds to his credibility as a disgruntled American to the conspirators who will later drag Oswald into a plot to kill the president. Also, the reader should note the efforts of Lee's mother to find her son, suggesting a strong love on her part even if it is not completely reciprocated by her son.



## Part 2: 15 July, In Fort Worth, and 12 August

### Part 2: 15 July, In Fort Worth, and 12 August Summary

15 July. T-Jay is in Norfolk with an Asian prostitute. T-Jay has come to the conclusion that he does not trust any of his co-conspirators and the final result will be something only he will know ahead of time. Later, T-Jay drives to Miami and gives Wayne Elko his assignment in the plot, one that will take him nowhere near the president, but in a more intimate situation. In Denton, Win Everett listens to his daughter read before bedtime. Everett is aware that his plot has taken on a life of itself, but he is unconcerned by this. Downstairs, Everett listens to his wife's concerns about their daughter's recent odd behaviors.

In Fort Worth. Lee Oswald and his wife, Marina, are now living in Fort Worth with Lee's brother Robert. After a brief visit from his mother, Lee finds himself moving his family into her home. Marguerite is not happy with her new daughter-in-law because she does not speak English, yet she knows who Gregory Peck is, and she refuses to wear the longer shorts Marguerite buys her. Lee finds a job he dislikes as a metal worker, hoping to save enough money to move his family into an apartment of their own. One day a couple of FBI agents come by to talk to Lee. Lee learns his brother, Robert, told them where he lives and this causes Lee to stop speaking to his brother.

Marina has been befriended by a group of Russian immigrants who live in the Dallas area. They buy Marina clothes and things for the baby. Lee dislikes them and the intimate things Marina talks to them about. However, when George de Mohrenschildt seeks Lee out, Lee finds a kindred spirit. George tells Lee that he is often approached by a man named Mr. Collings after his travels abroad. George tells Lee if he will talk to Mr. Collings about his time in Russia and show him *The Collective* and his other writings, that Mr. Collings could get him a better job. Lee agrees.

Lee and Marina begin to struggle in their marriage. Lee begins to hit Marina when he is angry and Marina feels he is a different person than he was in Russia. This is made even more difficult by Marguerite's dislike of Marina. At the same time, Lee has begun sending away for anti-Castro leaflets, causing the post office to wonder about him. Mr. Collings makes the post office and the FBI back off of Oswald and gets him a good job as well as a spy camera.

12 August. Two strippers at the Carnival Club in Dallas talk about their boss, Jack Ruby, who is often obsessed with the general opinion that he is homosexual. Jack is concerned about his club and the fact that one of the strippers, a new girl he has brought from New Orleans to increase business, is dancing too risqué and could cause the club to be shut down. At the same time, Ruby has a visit from Jack Karlinsky, an enforcer for the mob who is trying to collect on a loan Ruby owes. Jack warns Ruby that



if he does not pay up soon, the mob will take over his clubs. Ruby tries to buy time by telling Karlinsky that he knows Tony Astorina, one of Carmine Latta's lieutenants. Later, Ruby and one of his strippers discuss the Kennedys. From there, Ruby buys a large number of sandwiches for cops in the juvenile division. On the same night, Parmenter has dinner with his wife. They discuss Cuba just moments before Everett calls. They discuss the plot, agreeing that the president's schedule will have him in Miami in November. Everett is concerned that T-Jay has disappeared, but Parmenter assures him that T-Jay is only concentrating on the plot and will resurface.

## **Part 2: 15 July, In Fort Worth, and 12 August Analysis**

T-Jay has decided to kill the president. T-Jay does not come out and say this, but his train of thought leads the reader to come to this conclusion. Later, when the other two conspirators mention that he has gone missing, it seems to confirm this opinion. Everything seems to be falling into place to the reader, the only thing missing is Everett's continued insistence that the plot must take place in Miami when the reader knows it will happen in Dallas. This is one detail that has still not been satisfied, but the reader is assured that it will be by the history books.

Oswald has returned to the United States but finds himself constantly harassed by the government and unable to give his family the life he wants, leaving him frustrated. This leads to discord between Lee and his wife. It also causes a bit of a rift between Lee and his mother and brother. As a result, Lee finds himself trusting a man he barely knows and becoming something of an informant for the CIA. It seems a theme in Lee's life, international intrigue, is continuing even upon his return to America.

On the opposite side of things, Jack Ruby comes into the picture. Ruby is a middle-aged Jewish man who has grown up in harsh circumstances to become a business owner. As a result, Ruby is a patriotic man who has a great deal of respect for everything government, from the president to the local police department. However, Ruby is also in trouble with the mob for a loan that must be repaid, leaving his business in danger. This places Ruby in a precarious position with an obvious end coming sometime in the not too distant future.



## Part 2: In Dallas, 6 September, and In New Orleans

### Part 2: In Dallas, 6 September, and In New Orleans Summary

In Dallas. Lee Oswald is separated from his wife, so he goes to a laundromat to do his laundry. Lee realizes the laundry attendant is his old cell mate, Bobby Dupard. Lee and Dupard get to know one another once again. After a few days they begin talking about General Walker, an outspoken opponent to civil rights and Fidel Castro. Lee and Dupard decide to assassinate Walker. Lee orders a .38 revolver through the mail using the name A.J. Hidell. Lee also begins attending a typing class because he is afraid he is about to lose his job for lack of information to Collings. Lee and Dupard continue to get together, planning the assassination. A few months after ordering the .38, Lee orders a 6.5 millimeter rifle, a Manlicher-Carcano. The two guns arrive on the same day. Lee makes Marina take pictures of him with the rifle and a couple of magazines for his daughter, June. Dupard borrows a car and picks Lee up on April 10. Lee takes the shot from a hundred yards, but misses. A few days later, George de Mohreschildt comes by to see Lee and his family. Lee tells him he has sent him something in the mail. When George checks his mail, he finds a picture of Lee with a rifle. George knows that Lee shot at Walker.

6 September. Wayne Elko is in Florida with Raymo and Ferrie in an Alpha-66 camp. T-Jay wants them secluded, Wayne and Raymo in particular. They talk politics frequently. Frank is in Mississippi, driving quickly toward a rendezvous with T-Jay. Frank has been checking out a local group of Alpha-66, a militant group that often attacks Russian ships. Frank has discovered that they plan to assassinate the president in Miami as well. It is during this meeting that T-Jay admits to Frank that his ultimate plan is to kill Kennedy.

In the present, Nicholas Branch reads through autopsy reports on both JFK and Oswald. Branch is overwhelmed by paperwork. Branch also begins to notice that many of the players involved in the assassination plot had more than one name, including Walter Everett.

In New Orleans. Lee Oswald runs to New Orleans after the attempt on General Walker, taking his family with him. Marina is pregnant again. Marina is afraid Lee wants to send her back to Russia in order to avoid the responsibility of a family. Lee has gotten a job, but he spends his lunch hour passing out pro-Castro leaflets. An FBI agent takes him to lunch one day and threatens to harass him every day unless he agrees to work for him in gathering information on an ex-FBI agent named Guy Banister. All Lee has to do is take an office in Banister's office where he can report on his actions. Lee agrees. Lee takes an office in Banister's office and opens a local chapter of The Fair Play Committee with the hopes of gaining favor with Cuban officials. Lee runs into David Ferrie at



Banister's and recalls he was once his commander in the Civil Air Patrol. They become friendly again and start spending time together.

Lee gets into a fight with an anti-Castro activist and is arrested. Lee has the police call FBI Agent Bateman, almost blowing his cover. Lee becomes something of a celebrity, doing a local radio show after his arrest. Marina returns to Dallas with a friend and Lee goes into the swamps to shoot his rifle with Ferrie and a few friends, including Wayne Elko and Raymo. Lee wants to go to Mexico to get a travel visa to go to Cuba. Ferrie discourages him, but finally uses it to encourage Lee to think about joining their plot to kill Kennedy.

## **Part 2: In Dallas, 6 September, and In New Orleans Analysis**

Lee Oswald reunites with an old friend, Bobby Dupard, with whom he shared a cell in the military brig in Atsugi. Lee most likely continues to feel some guilt over the many times he was not able to come to Dupard's rescue when the guards were beating him. Therefore, Lee quickly falls in with Dupard's politics and comes up with a plan to kill General Walker with Dupard. It is a plot that goes wrong, leaving Walker alive. This leaves the conspirators convinced that Lee would not be capable of killing the president even if he wanted to. This goes perfectly with their plans, however, because they do not want Lee to kill the president.

Lee runs away to New Orleans, the city of his birth, and begins handing out pro-Castro literature. This brings him to the attention of the FBI again and he becomes an active pawn in their investigation into Guy Banister. Ironically, this brings Lee right into the hands of David Ferrie. Lee recalls Ferrie from his past and the two become friends again. It seems everything is getting closer and closer to the moment the conspirators have been waiting for since they conceived their plan. The added information that Alpha-66 plans to kill Kennedy in Miami only seems to encourage T-Jay to continue with his desire to kill Kennedy, finally admitting it to Frank Vasquez.



## Part 2: 25 September, In Mexico City, 4 October and In Dallas

### Part 2: 25 September, In Mexico City, 4 October and In Dallas Summary

25 September. In New Orleans, Ferrie tells Lee about a bar in Dallas where he should go when he returns. In Dallas, Ruby goes into work where he meets with Tony Astorina. Ruby hopes Astorina can help him get a new loan from Carmine Latta to save his business, but Astorina offers him no help. Instead Astorina talks about a lover JFK has been rumored to have stolen from a mobster. In New Orleans, Banister talks to Ferrie about Oswald, instructing him to fly Oswald to Miami the night before the appointed time. Ferrie asks what will happen if Oswald refuses to help and Banister tells him they will create their own Oswald.

In Mexico City. Lee Oswald is given the runaround by the Cuban Embassy. When Lee turns to the Russian Embassy for help, thinking if he is going to Russia he can get a Cuban visa easier, he is given the runaround there as well. Lee gives up and returns to the United States.

4 October. Win Everett's wife is growing more concerned about the odd behavior of her daughter. Everett worries about his wife's health. Everett thinks about the president's upcoming trip to Dallas as he prepares for bed. Suzanne, Everett's daughter, believes her parents are not her real parents.

In Dallas. Marina has settled in well with Ruth Paine. Lee returns to Dallas, but takes a room at a boarding house instead of living with his wife at Mrs. Paine's. Lee comes to visit often. Shortly after Lee's second child, a girl named Audrey Rachel, is born, Lee goes to a rally where General Walker is the main speaker. He wonders how long it will be before they leave Castro alone. About the same time, Lee takes driving lessons from Mrs. Paine. The FBI take notice of Lee again, visiting Mrs. Paine's house on several occasions.

Nicholas Branch reads a transcript of an informant talking about an assassination plot against Kennedy in Miami. Branch believes T-Jay fed this information to the informant. As a result of this testimony, the motorcade in Miami is cancelled. Branch has also become aware of multiple sightings of Oswald in the days leading up to the assassination, leaving him thinking that the conspirators were extra careful to set up their patsy eve as he continued to cooperate.

Wayne Elko, Raymo, and Frank make their way to Dallas, talking about the cancelled appearances in Chicago and Miami that resulted in rumors of attempts on Kennedy's life. In Dallas, Ferrie finds Lee on the street and takes him for a ride. They talk about the motorcade. Ferrie convinces Lee that it is his destiny to participate in the plot against



Kennedy. Lee later meets with T-Jay, who gives him specific instructions on the assassination. T-Jay even provides Lee with the rare bullets for his rifle. The night before, November 21, Lee visits his family and asks Marina three times to come live with him again. Marina refuses. In the morning, Marina finds Lee gone and more than one hundred dollars on the dresser.

## **Part 2: 25 September, In Mexico City, 4 October and In Dallas Analysis**

Ruby is struggling to save his clubs, but is having no luck. At the same time, Lee Oswald is trying to get to Cuba, but finds some resistance. Both these things seem to have no relation, but the reader will soon see that fate has conspired against these two men. At the same time, T-Jay manipulates the Secret Service and makes it impossible for anyone else to make an attempt against the president, leaving him a free and clear shot at JFK when he arrives in Dallas. It appears to the reader that this has been T-Jay's desire all along. T-Jay wants revenge for what he sees as a disgraceful act, an act that left him ashamed of his beloved country.

Lee's personal life is in disarray. Lee is not living with his wife because of money concerns. Lee is attempting to make things better between him and his wife, which is most likely a small portion of the reason he agrees to help Ferrie and T-Jay kill the president. Lee has nothing against the president himself, but the idea of being more than just an average guy and the idea of running away to live out a quiet life with his wife and children appeals to him. Lee agrees to shoot at the president from his vantage point in the School Book Depository. Lee believes it is fate.





## Part 2: 22 November, In Dallas, and 25 November

### Part 2: 22 November, In Dallas, and 25 November Summary

22 November. The president and his wife arrive at Love Field surrounded by excited people calling their names. The Kennedys are quickly put into their car along with the Texas governor, Connally, and his wife. Lee Oswald is waiting for the motorcade in the Texas School Book Depository with the rifle he used to fire at General Walker. Lee fires three times and is sure he hit Connally and possibly JFK in the neck. However, Lee is watching through his rifle scope when JFK is hit in the head. Unbeknown to him, Raymo is firing from the grassy knoll on the other side of the plaza. Lee suddenly realizes he has been used as a patsy. Lee quickly hides the rifle and manages to escape the interest of a cop in the building looking for a possible shooter.

Lee goes back to the boarding house and gets his .38 before running to the movie theater where he is supposed to meet the contact who will take him to Ferrie in Galveston. However, before he can reach the theater, Lee is stopped by another cop. Lee argues with the cop, finally panicking and firing several times into the cop's chest and head. Lee arrives at the movie theater, unaware that Wayne Elko is waiting there to kill him. Before he can, however, the police come into theater and arrest Lee. Lee is interrogated, beaten, and paraded in front of the press. Ruby is at the press conference handing out business cards. Lee knows he did not kill the president. Lee is prepared to name names.

In Dallas. Ruby closes his businesses for the weekend in respect for JFK. Ruby drives around, often passing Dealy Plaza to see where the president was shot. Ruby briefly investigates a possible connection to some ads in the paper, but cannot find the connection. That same weekend, Lee Oswald receives visits from his mother and wife, who are both being held in protective custody. Lee is afraid the cops are recording them, so he will not allow them to say or ask anything about the assassination. Jack Karlinsky comes to see Ruby and they discuss the assassination. Karlinsky tells Ruby that someone has got to kill Oswald, to make him pay for what he has done. Karlinsky convinces Ruby he would be hailed a hero if he killed Oswald. Not only this, but Karlinsky promises that Carmine Latta will front him the money he needs to save his business and forgive the loan. Ruby agrees. The next day, Ruby sends a money gram to one of his strippers on the way to the police station. Ruby kills Oswald in front of dozens of reporters and police officers.

Nicholas Branch continues to read all the material regarding the assassination, growing increasingly convinced that the Curator is trying to bury him in paper. Branch again notes that peripheral players in the assassination died in the intervening years, including Bobby Dupard, who died in a hold up in a hardware store where he worked and the





stripper Ruby sent the money gram to, who died of a suicide. In the past, Ruby thought he would be a hero but he soon came to realize he had just become a part of the crime he so despised. Beryl Parmenter found herself watching the footage of Oswald's murder over and over again.

25 November. The Oswald family cannot find a preacher to say a prayer over Lee's body. The body is not even admitted into the church. Marina cries over her husband's body, but Marguerite believes she is not sincere. Marguerite loves her son and she is sure she can prove his innocence. Marguerite believes people conspired against her beloved son, but she cannot even begin to understand the truth.

## **Part 2: 22 November, In Dallas, and 25 November Analysis**

On November 22, 1963, President John F. Kennedy is assassinated. The reader is allowed to see the murder through the eyes of the man who has been blamed for his death for more than forty years. Oswald realizes immediately he has been set up, but he is not smart enough to make an escape on his own. Despite what he now knows has happened, Lee goes to the movie theater to meet with the men who set him up in the first place. Lee is arrested and several days later another man, a desperate patriotic man, is convinced that he would be a hero if he killed Oswald. Instead, Ruby is infinitely tied to the notorious murder that he so despised. In the end, no one knows for sure what happened that afternoon. Maybe Oswald fired the shot that killed Kennedy. Maybe he did not. The only people who know for sure are all dead. Branch, studying the case twenty years later, cannot find proof one way or the other. He has a solid theory and some definitive proof, but nothing that can change public opinion after so many years.

Lee Harvey Oswald has been vilified in the years since Kennedy's death. In the days immediately following his death, Oswald's family could not even give him a decent burial. This is a comment on the desperation of people, of the shock and chaos created by this assassination, and of the need for people to have someone to blame. The conspirators blamed Kennedy, the people blamed Oswald. The only victims are the family members who had nothing to do with the crime or the conspiracy, but who were injured just the same.



# Characters

## Nicholas Branch

Nicholas Branch is a researcher for the CIA who has been given the task of writing a book about the assassination of John F. Kennedy. Branch has a special, fireproof room in his house that the CIA had built for him where he goes over the many, many documents the CIA has collected on the assassination. Branch finds himself reviewing material that has little or nothing to do with the case except perhaps in someone's wild imagination. With the amount of material collected and given to him, Branch begins to wonder if someone, somewhere has decided to sabotage his efforts in the hope that he will never find the truth.

As Branch sifts through the growing pile of information, he begins to find patterns and clues that point to a conspiracy. Branch discovers that a growing number of the peripheral players in the assassination died within a short period of time after the assassination. Some of these deaths are obvious acts of violence, others are made to look innocent, but small clues make them appear questionable. This novel appears to be a collection of the evidence Branch is able to find of a conspiracy to kill the President of the United States for perceived faults with Cuba.

## Walter 'Win' Everett Jr.

Win Everett is a college professor who was once drafted into the CIA. Everett found his work in the CIA exciting; therefore, when the Bay of Pigs invasions goes wrong and he is diagnosed as motivationally fatigued, Everett is returned to his career as a college professor. Everett lives in Denton, Texas with his wife and child, a bored professor who would do almost anything to get back into the excitement of the CIA. It is Win Everett who brings together two other members of the CIA also damaged by the Bay of Pigs invasion and presents his idea on how to restore their reputations and return to their former glory.

Win Everett wants to take a shot at the president and miss in order to make the CIA investigate the possibility of Fidel Castro's desire to have the president assassinated. Everett also hopes that this investigation will reveal that Kennedy himself wanted Castro assassinated. It seems like a win-win situation for everyone, except for the poor soul they will need to pin the attempted assassination on.

## Laurence 'Larry' Parmenter

Larry Parmenter is an opportunist who used the turmoil in Cuba to make a few personal investments. Expecting Cuba to go the same way Guatemala went, Parmenter arranges for several buddies to become involved in American businesses in Cuba. Parmenter expects to make a great deal of money when Castro is overthrown and America invades



the country. Instead, Kennedy calls off the air support, causing the invasion at the Bay of Pigs to fail miserably.

Parmenter has been in on many attempts to get back into Cuba since the Bay of Pigs. Not as badly damaged in his career by the Bay of Pigs, Parmenter still has his clearance and job security with the CIA. Parmenter uses this and his contacts to help Everett in his scheme. When it becomes clear that T-Jay has gone off on his own, Parmenter does nothing to stop him, hoping that Kennedy's assassination will get him back into Cuba.

## **T.J. 'T-Jay' Mackey**

T.J. Mackey, or T-Jay, is a pseudonym for a CIA agent who was involved in multiple covert operations. T-Jay was at the Bay of Pigs, all set to go in with his men when he learned that Kennedy had refused to approve air support. This decision left T-Jay and his men hanging out to dry without anyone to rescue them. One of T-Jay's men was arrested and several others executed. T-Jay cannot remember ever being more ashamed of his beloved country.

T-Jay takes control of Everett's plot, planning the mission like the covert missions he ran in the past. T-Jay makes arrangements for weapons from Guy Banister and recruits two Cuban exiles and a covert operations veteran to run the operation with him. In the end, T-Jay goes rogue and decides that Kennedy must die. T-Jay assigns one man to kill Kennedy while another will kill Oswald to keep him from talking. In the end, T-Jay succeeds in killing the president for what he sees as his crimes against the country, but is killed by an unknown source before he can enjoy the fallout.

## **Guy Banister**

Guy Banister is an ex-FBI agent who has become a private investigator in New Orleans. Banister was one of the agents at the capture of John Dillinger, a story he often tells when he is drunk. Banister was also damaged by the failed invasion at the Bay of Pigs and has become an outspoken opponent to Fidel Castro. It is Banister that T-Jay turns to when Win Everett first outlines his plan. Banister not only gives T-Jay weapons, but he draws Oswald in just when it looks like he was trying to fall off the radar.

## **David Ferrie**

David Ferrie is a pilot who once taught young men to fly and possibly sexually abused a few of them. Ferrie is an odd character, a lonely man who has a rare disorder that causes his hair to fall out. Ferrie tells everyone he has brain cancer. Ferrie knew Oswald as a child and is therefore chosen to be the one to contact him and guide him when the plot to assassinate the president begins to unfold. In the end, Ferrie convinces Oswald that it is his destiny as a Libra to kill President Kennedy.



## Lee Harvey Oswald

Lee Harvey Oswald is a young, naive man who has grown up struggling with his single, overly dependent mother. Lee joins the Marines as a sixteen-year-old child and finds himself being manipulated by people more intelligent than he. Lee defects to Russia, but finds that it is no more exciting living in a Communist country than living in a democratic one. Lee returns to America, only to be hounded by the FBI and CIA. Lee teams up with an old acquaintance to attempt to kill Major General Walker, but misses. In the end, Lee finds himself manipulated into taking a few shots at John F. Kennedy as he passes his workplace in a motorcade. Through his rifle scope, Lee witnesses Kennedy's death at the hands of another shooter and realizes he has been set up. However, destiny has already been set in motion and there is little Lee can do to stop it.

## Jack Ruby

Jack Ruby is a strip club owner in Dallas. Ruby had a difficult childhood and he feels overly blessed to live in a country where he can come from humble beginnings and become a business owner. Ruby pays this country back by treating the police to food every few days and doing all he can to be a good citizen. However, Ruby's club is in danger of closing, due to a loan he cannot pay back. It is this loan that people use to convince Ruby to kill Oswald, forever keeping him from pointing fingers at the conspirators.

## Carmine Latta

Carmine Latta is a mobster who lived during the time period prior to and just after Kennedy's assassination. Carmine becomes the source of funds for the conspiracy to assassinate the president. Later, it is Carmine who is able to pull the strings to make Ruby kill Oswald. Carmine does all this because he has become the subject of surveillance in Bobby Kennedy's attempts to crack down on organized crime.

## George de Mohrenschildt

George de Mohrenschildt is a business man living in Dallas who befriends Lee Oswald. George knows many languages and travels extensively, often answering to the CIA with information on the countries he has gone to visit. George recruits Lee to do the same based on his defection to Russia. At the same time, George tells Parmenter about Lee when Parmenter needs someone to be a patsy for his plot to attempt to assassinate President Kennedy.



# Objects/Places

## Oswald Pictures

Oswald has his wife take pictures of him dressed in black and holding a rifle for his daughter, June, in the days before his attempt on Walker's life. These pictures are later found after the assassination of Kennedy and released to the press.

## Pro-Castro Leaflets

Due to his strong beliefs in Communism, Lee begins to collect and distribute pro-Castro leaflets after returning to the United States from Russia.

## Historic Diary

The Historic Diary is a diary in which Lee Harvey Oswald would record his experiences in Russia in the weeks before he ended his defection and returned to America.

## .22 Gun

Lee Oswald shoots himself in the arm with a .22 during his time in Atsugi in the hopes of avoiding being deployed on a ship.

## Mannlicher Rifle

Lee Oswald buys a Mannlicher rifle in the spring of 1963 in order to assassinate General Walker. This same rifle is the one Oswald will use to attempt to assassinate President Kennedy.

## Polygraph

Win Everett dislikes the polygraph machine because he believes failed tests are what led to his being pushed out of the CIA.

## Texas School Book Depository

Oswald gets a job at the Dallas School Book Depository after returning to Dallas in the fall of 1963 through a friend of his wife.



## **Dealey Plaza**

John F. Kennedy is shot while driving through Dealey Plaza in Dallas, Texas.

## **Texas Women's University**

Texas Women's University is a school based in Denton, Texas where Win Everett teaches when the novel opens.

## **Dallas Texas**

Lee Oswald lives in Dallas, Texas off and on after returning to the United States from Russia.

## **Atsugi, Japan**

Lee Oswald is stationed at Atsugi, Japan in the late fifties. It is at Atsugi where Lee sees the U-2s that he will later use as a bargaining chip to defect to Russia.

## **Minsk, Russia**

After defecting to Russia, Lee is settled in Minsk, where he is given a good job. It is in Minsk that Lee meets and marries Marina.



# Themes

## Placing Blame

The novel begins with three CIA agents blaming President John Kennedy and Fidel Castro for the bad things that have happened in their careers and their lives. Win Everett and T-Jay Mackey blame Kennedy and Castro for the downfall of their careers. Larry Parmenter blames the failed invasion of the Bay of Pigs on his loss of reputation and business profits. This blame leads these three men to conspire together to take an unsuccessful shot at President Kennedy and eventually to assassinating the president.

Marguerite Oswald blames the men in her life for the hardships she has suffered. Marguerite has been abandoned, widowed, and divorced by the men in her life. Marguerite believes this is why she cannot keep a job and why she has such a hard time raising her beloved youngest son, Lee. All of Lee's childhood Marguerite openly blames these men, especially her last husband Mr. Ekdahl. Lee grows up with this negativity and the reader can only wonder how it has affected his sense of responsibility.

After Kennedy is shot, the world needs someone to blame. Lee Harvey Oswald is picked up at a movie theater, accused of the crime because of a rifle belonging to him found in the School School Book Depository. When Ruby kills Oswald, taking away the world's only chance to find out why, the world begins to focus on Ruby. Ruby suddenly becomes inexorably linked to the very crime that outraged him and pushed him into action in the first place. Everyone needs someone to blame.

## Manipulation

Win Everett has come up with a plan to regain his dignity in the fallout of the Bay of Pigs invasion. Everett wants to take a shot at the president and make it appear as though Castro has tried to kill him. To do this, Everett needs someone to take the fall, to keep the investigators from looking too closely at the plot. This requires Everett to find a man who could believably have taken a shot at the President on behalf of Fidel Castro. This man is Lee Harvey Oswald.

Oswald has defected to Russia and then returned to America. Oswald has married a Russian woman. Oswald has taken a shot at Major General Walker, an outspoken opponent to civil rights. All these things imply that Oswald is an anti-government believer who might believably attempt to kill Kennedy. To push Oswald, Everett creates fake documents. All of this works to manipulate the world into believing Oswald is the assassin.

When Oswald meets David Ferrie for the third time in his life, he makes a friend he believes he can count on. Oswald has no way of knowing that Ferrie works with the conspirators who wants to turn Oswald into an assassin. Ferrie manipulates Oswald into



taking shots at Kennedy by telling him that he was destined to do it because of his star sign.

At the same time Oswald was used and manipulated, Ruby too was manipulated. A mobster plays with Ruby's patriotism and convinces him that he must kill Oswald to become a hero in a country he has been forever grateful to live in. This manipulation works, but Ruby comes to realize that he has just become a murderer, a man forever connected to the assassination that shocked and caused him great outrage.

## Political Beliefs

In the sixties, many people have strong beliefs in one thing or another. Cubans believe in Castro until he embraces Communism and begins executing people at the drop of a hat. Many Americans believe in civil rights, while others are frightened by and reject civil rights. Most Americans believe in democracy. Lee Harvey Oswald believes in Communism.

The beauty of a democracy is that Americans are allowed to believe in almost anything they want to believe in. As a result, Lee Oswald is allowed to believe in Communism, even allowed to defect to Russia, and is embraced when he returns. Lee suffers some scrutiny by the government, but not enough to be called harassment. In the end, however, it is these unusual beliefs that lead to Oswald being targeted as a patsy for the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.



# Style

## Point of View

The novel is written in multiple points of view. In the beginning, the point of view moves back and forth from a third person point of view to a first person point of view. The novel then settles into a third person point of view that is not omniscient, but has some element of the authorial voice. The novel is written as though in report form with little of it presented in scene form, allowing the reader to almost believe the novel is written by Nicholas Branch, one of the many narrating characters whose responsibility it is to write a complete analysis of the assassination of John F. Kennedy.

The point of view of this novel is restrictive, leaving the reader with little insight into the emotions and motives of the characters. The reader is only aware of what the author wants them to be aware of, keeping the motives of some characters unseen until the final moments of the novel. Even in the small sections that continue to be presented in the first person point of view, the reader is allowed very little information into the true emotions of the character, leaving many of the characters in a two-dimensional appearance. It is a unique point of view that allows the novel to be presented in an almost report style that fits the plot of the novel.

## Setting

The novel is set in multiple locations. The novel begins in the Bronx but quickly moves to Texas. Win Everett lives in Denton, Texas, a medium-sized town north of Dallas. The novel also includes the setting of Dallas, a large metropolis in Texas that will eventually be the setting of John Kennedy's assassination. The novel also includes multiple settings in the New Orleans area, Russia, and Japan.

The setting of the novel is not very important in the early parts of the novel, except where they impact the development of the plot. The Bronx opens the novel, but it is only a small passage that has little impact on the plot, except that it introduces the idea that Lee Oswald moved around a lot as a child because of his mother's need to remain close to her grown children. Later, Oswald joins the Marines and lives in Atsugi, a Japanese base where he sees the U-2, an aircraft that will play a major role in his attempts to defect to Russia. In Russia, Oswald is at first desperate to stay and then desperate to leave, showcasing Oswald's naivety and the question of his motivations in going to Russia in the first place. Finally, Dallas plays an important role in the climax of the novel as Oswald discovers he has been made a pawn in the assassination of John F. Kennedy.



## Language and Meaning

The language of the novel tends toward simple English, with few foreign words and phrases despite the foreign locales in some of the settings. Oswald desires to become a Russian citizen, but there are no Russian words in the text except those known universally to all English readers. Oswald is stationed in Japan for a short time in the text, but again no foreign words are used, despite this setting.

The novel is written with something of a detached, formal tone, despite its simple language. The novel is an analysis of a conspiracy behind the assassination of the President of the United States in 1963. This conspiracy is being researched by an employee of the CIA and the novel is almost a reporting by this employee as though he has already written his book and the reader is exploring his work for the first time. For this reason, the writing is a little disjointed and dry, using language that is a little more formal than a novel of this genre might normally utilize.

## Structure

The novel is divided into twenty-four chapters, each denoted by a date leading up to the assassination of JFK or a location in which Lee Oswald spent time at some point in his life. These differing names of the chapters allow the reader to be aware of the time period in which the chapter takes place, either in Oswald's past or the months leading up to the assassination of the president. The novel is written mostly in exposition, filled with data that describes the actions of the characters with little dialogue that showcases specific conversations important either to the conspiracy to kill JFK or the life changing moments in Oswald's life.

The novel has one main plot and several subplots. The main plot follows three disgruntled CIA agents who conspire to make an unsuccessful attempt on JFK's life. This plot includes the life and experiences of Lee Harvey Oswald, a young man the conspirators decide to use as a patsy in the plot in order to keep the investigators away from them. Several subplots move in and out of the main plot, including the story of Lee's life, the motives of the three men involved in the assassination plot, and the final act that ends three men's lives.



## Quotes

"Never again in his short life, never in the world, would he feel this inner power, rising to a shriek, this secret force of the soul in the tunnels under New York."

Part 1: In the Bronx, p. 13

"'But we don't hit Kennedy. We miss him,' Win said."

Part 1: 17 April, p. 28

"Somewhere in his room of theories, in some notebook or folder, Nicholas Branch has a roster of the dead."

Part 1: 26 April, p. 57

"All foreign troops are U.S. troops. Every Westerner is an American. Every American serves the cause of monopolistic capital."

Part 1: In Atsugi, p. 87

"Dreams sent terrors you could not explain."

Part 1: 19 June, p. 148

"He was a man in history now."

Part 1: In Moscow, p. 149

"The woman knew some ways to disappear."

Part 2: 15 July, p. 217

"Next day they had an idea. Let's put a bullet in General Walker's head."

Part 2: In Dallas, p. 272

"Hide the L in Lee. No one will see."

Part 2: 25 September, p. 341

"Welcome Jack and Jackie to Big D."

Part 2: 22 November, p. 392

"He felt the heat of the corridor mobs every time he got off the elevator, the actual roil of moist air. Assassin, assassin."

Part 2: 22 November, p. 415

"No matter what happened, how hard they schemed against her, this was the one thing they could not take away—the true and lasting power of his name. It belonged to her now, and to history."

Part 2: 25 November, p. 456



## Topics for Discussion

Who is Lee Harvey Oswald? What has he done that the reader should know before beginning to read this novel? How does this book change the impression of what the reader should have already known about Oswald? What kind of a person was Oswald? What mistakes did he make in his life? How did these mistakes lead to his ultimate notoriety and death?

Who is Win Everett? Why does he come up with a plot to make an unsuccessful attempt on JFK's life? Who does he include in the plot? What does Win expect the outcome of this plot will be? Does Everett get what he wants? Why or why not? What does Nicholas Branch eventually learn about Everett? What does this suggest about the players in the novel? Who is the loan survivor? What does this say about him?

What is the Bay of Pigs? What happened there? Why did Kennedy refuse air support? How did that impact the actions of the people at the Bay of Pigs? How does history view the Bay of Pigs? What led to it? How did it end? Who is Castro? What was his role in the Bay of Pigs? How does the Bay of Pigs affect the characters in this novel?

Who is David Ferrie? What role does he play in this novel? How does Oswald know Ferrie? Why does he befriend him in the weeks leading up to the assassination of Kennedy? How does Ferrie convince Oswald to participate in this plot against Kennedy? Does Oswald realize what Ferrie has done to him? Did Ferrie know how the plot would end? Did Ferrie know Oswald was in danger of death?

Who is Marguerite Oswald? Why is her narration different from the other characters in the book? What kind of person was Marguerite? What impact did her attitude have on Oswald? What role did Marguerite play in the events that led to the end of Lee Oswald's life? How does Marguerite react to her son's death? What does this tell the reader that perhaps they might not have thought of before?

What is the significance of the pictures of Oswald with a rifle that are widely published after his death? Why did Oswald have those taken in the first place? What was his intention? What does the American public think of these pictures? What does it say about Oswald? For what reason? Why does Marina hide several of these pictures in her shoe after Oswald's arrest? What is she afraid of?

Who is Jack Ruby? How is he tied to this plot against JFK? Why does the author introduce him when he does? What is going on with Ruby's clubs? Why is Ruby afraid of losing them? What is Ruby's connection to Cuba? To the mob? Why does Ruby agree to shoot Oswald? Did Ruby know Oswald? What was Ruby's intended result after he shot Oswald? Did he get it? Why or why not?