

# **A Coffin for Dimitrios Study Guide**

**A Coffin for Dimitrios by Eric Ambler**

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# Plot Summary

Detective novelist Charles Latimer becomes fascinated with the dead villain Dimitrios and on a whim begins to investigate Dimitrios's life. His quest leads him to one of Dimitrios's former partners in the drug business, Mr. Peters, whom Dimitrios double-crossed and sent to jail. Mr. Peters reveals that Dimitrios is actually alive and convinces Latimer to help him blackmail the villain. The dangerous and witty Dimitrios, though, tracks his blackmailers down, and Latimer is lucky to escape the gun battle that kills both Peters and Dimitrios.

While mystery writer Charles Latimer is traveling in Turkey, he learns, by chance, about a criminal named Dimitrios who has turned up dead in the Bosphorus River. Latimer goes to the morgue and sees Dimitrios's body. He is curious about the criminal and decides to investigate Dimitrios's past to see what he can learn about the man. Latimer tracks Dimitrios from his first known crime, murder and robbery in Smyrna during the Turkish holocaust against the Armenians, to his immigration to Greece as a refugee, to Sofia, where he was involved in an assassination attempt.

In Sofia, Latimer discovers a man named Mr. Peters searching his room. Peters questions Latimer about his interest in Dimitrios and seems very interested when he learns that Latimer saw Dimitrios's body in the morgue in Istanbul. Peters offers Latimer a chance to make a lot of money, but he does not elaborate. He directs Latimer to an ex-spy to learn about Dimitrios's espionage activities, as an act of good faith, and asks Latimer to contact him in Paris.

After finding out about Dimitrios's involvement in the theft of plans to a minefield, during which he double-crossed the man who hired him, Latimer contacts Mr. Peters in Paris. Dimitrios was head of a drug-smuggling ring in Paris, and Mr. Peters was one of the management. Dimitrios turned his cohorts over to the police and fled when he became addicted to heroin and needed a cure. Peters tells Latimer that Dimitrios is alive. The dead man was also involved in the drug ring and tried to blackmail Dimitrios. Dimitrios killed the blackmailer and faked his own death.

Peters convinces Latimer to help him blackmail Dimitrios, although Latimer refuses to take any of the earnings. They successfully get 500,000 francs from Dimitrios, and Peters believes there is no way Dimitrios can track them down. Peters and Latimer are about to celebrate their victory over champagne before Latimer returns to England, when Dimitrios appears with a gun. He shoots Peters, but Latimer gets Dimitrios's gun away. Latimer gives Peters the gun and goes for the police, though Dimitrios warns him Peters will shoot him. Latimer barely gets out the door before he hears shots. Running back in, he finds both Latimer and Dimitrios dead. Latimer removes all traces of himself and leaves the bodies with the blackmail money. He heads back to his normal life.



# Chapter 1, Origins of an Obsession

## Chapter 1, Origins of an Obsession Summary

Detective novelist Charles Latimer becomes fascinated with the dead villain Dimitrios and on a whim begins to investigate Dimitrios's life. His quest leads him to one of Dimitrios's former partners in the drug business, Mr. Peters, whom Dimitrios double-crossed and sent to jail. Mr. Peters reveals that Dimitrios is actually alive and convinces Latimer to help him blackmail the villain. The dangerous and witty Dimitrios, though, tracks his blackmailers down, and Latimer is lucky to escape the gun battle that kills both Peters and Dimitrios.

As the novel begins, the narrator wonders at the oddity of a man like Charles Latimer becoming involved with Dimitrios. Charles Latimer was a political economy professor at an English university, who wrote three books in his field before writing his first detective novel, which was a brilliant success. Eventually, he gave up teaching to write full-time. After finishing his sixth detective novel, Latimer went to Turkey, where he first learned of Dimitrios.

While in Istanbul, Latimer contacts the wealthy Madame Chávez, an acquaintance of an acquaintance of Latimer's. She invites him to her expensive but uncomfortable villa for four days. Latimer does not fit in with the crowd of party-ers, but on the last day of his stay, the handsome and well-dressed officer Colonel Haki arrives, flirting with the women and acting as the life of the party. Colonel Haki is an admirer of Latimer's detective novels and invites Latimer to lunch the next week. Latimer accepts.

Before the lunch appointment with Colonel Haki, Latimer asks Collinson, the manager of Latimer's bank in Istanbul, about the colonel. Collinson tells him that Haki is an influential man behind the scenes, possibly the head of the secret police, and reputed to have tortured prisoners during his past. Latimer is interested to learn more about Haki. At their lunch, Haki talks about detective stories. Then, he reveals that he has an idea for a detective story of his own. He offers the writer his plot, an amateurish storyline centering around a will as a red herring, where the killer is none of the natural suspects.

Latimer goes to Haki's office to read Haki's notes and barely refrains from laughing. He tries to leave as quickly as possible, remaining ambiguously noncommittal about whether he will use Haki's plot. Haki gets a work-related phone call and with apologies, begins looking through a file. He also sends a clerk to make a copy of his notes. When Haki looks up from his file, he asks Latimer if the mystery writer is interested in real murders.

## Chapter 1, Origins of an Obsession Analysis

The story begins in a narrative voice that is absent through most of the novel. The narrator comments on how odd a coincidence it is that the mundane Charles Latimer



becomes involved with the criminal Dimitrios. The narrator foreshadows the story that is about to unfold, piquing the reader's curiosity and leading the reader into the story.

Charles Latimer is an ordinary if not prosaic man, and his involvement with crime is limited to fiction. Though Latimer writes detective novels, he lives in a world completely protected from crime. As a university professor, his world is an intellectual one. His trip to Turkey is the beginning of his contact with an underworld that Latimer knows little about. Madame Chávez's house is foreign to Latimer, with the heavy-drinking and partying guests, and Madame Chávez's foreign temperament and odd mixture of wealth and lack of conveniences. The setting brings Latimer out of his normal, British world and becomes the gateway to his journey into a criminal underworld.

Colonel Haki's pleasure in his idea for a murder mystery is ironic and pathetic. Haki deals with murders and the underworld every day, but his attempt at a murder plot is contrived and reveals his lack of understanding of Latimer's world. It also shows how false and unreal most murder mystery plots are. Ambler is comparing his more realistic novel to the popular detective fiction of the day and setting the stage for a different kind of novel.



# Chapter 2, The Dossier of Dimitrios

## Chapter 2, The Dossier of Dimitrios Summary

Colonel Haki tells Latimer about a criminal named Dimitrios Makropoulos, involved in drugs, murder, and assassinations, who has turned up stabbed to death and dumped in the Bosphorus River. Dimitrios was born in 1889 in Greece, abandoned by his parents, and adopted. In 1922, Dimitrios cut the throat of a money lender named Sholem and stole his money. Dimitrios set up his accomplice, a black man named Dhris Mohammed, who was hanged for the crime.

Haki tells Latimer that Dimitrios was involved in an assassination in 1924. To find out if it was the same Dimitrios, Haki asked for information from the Greek police and learned that Dimitrios was involved in another assassination attempt in 1923. The information about the man in Greece tallied with information about the suspected murderer and assassin known in Turkey. Two years later, the Turkish police received a request for information about a Dimitrios Talat from the Yugoslavian government. He seemed to be the same Dimitrios, and he was suspected of espionage.

Haki continues his story, telling Latimer that in 1929, the French government intercepted a shipment of drugs hidden in a mattress. After several arrests, the police learned that the head of the drug organization was named Dimitrios. The investigation went nowhere until Dimitrios sent information about the leaders of the organization to the police and disappeared himself. He probably left the lucrative drug business so suddenly because he had become an addict. The arrested drug gang knew Dimitrios under the name Makropoulos.

Colonel Haki gives Latimer his copy of Haki's notes on his mystery story, and Latimer asks if the Turkish police ever heard of Dimitrios after the drug dealing incident. Dimitrios was named in another assassination attempt a year later. Latimer wonders how the police identified the body, since they have no photo of Dimitrios, and Haki says a French identity card with a photo, confirmed as genuine by the French government, was in the man's coat. Haki says that he must go to the mortuary to see the body, and Latimer accepts the offer of a ride to his hotel.

When Latimer and Haki get to the hotel, Latimer asks if he can accompany Haki to the morgue. He claims that he wants to see what a morgue and a dead body are like, for his mystery writing, but really, Latimer is curious about the criminal Dimitrios. He accompanies Haki to the mortuary and sees the criminal's body. The man's clothes are cheap, made in France and Greece. Latimer wonders about the criminal. Where had his money gone? What had he really been like? What had he done during the gaps in the police's knowledge of him? How had he come to his death? Latimer is taken with the idea of investigating Dimitrios. Haki finishes his paperwork and takes one last look at Dimitrios, saying that it is the first time he has met the criminal and wishing Dimitrios could tell them about what he has seen. Then, he takes Latimer home.



## Chapter 2, The Dossier of Dimitrios Analysis

Latimer learns about Dimitrios's criminal record. The information that the Turkish police have is sketchy, tracking a ruthless man who has murdered, stolen, dealt drugs, double-crossed his partners, committed espionage, and attempted assassinations. The cold, hard facts outline a criminal, but there is no true understanding of who Dimitrios is or why he is a criminal. Latimer's imagination is captured by this man. Although Haki, with a seeming lack of any imagination, claims that there is nothing in Dimitrios's story to interest a detective fiction writer, Latimer finds Dimitrios much more interesting than Haki's empty detective plot. The story of Dimitrios has depth because it is real, incomplete, and without a real ending. The grim, sordid actuality of Dimitrios is what captures Latimer's attention, and what is meant to capture the reader's interest.

Haki is not interested in Dimitrios at all. Dimitrios's life is "inartistic," according to Haki, and his death is nothing more than the natural ending to a life of crime. It is not something to be explored or understood. Haki merely accepts the fact of Dimitrios as a criminal and as a corpse. Latimer, in contrast, cannot accept either Dimitrios's criminal life or his death as a natural or normal thing. Latimer is part of a world where criminal behavior like Dimitrios's does not make sense, and he wants to make sense of it. He is driven to investigate Dimitrios in order to understand him.



## Chapter 3, 1922

### Chapter 3, 1922 Summary

In 1922, the Turkish army attacks the Greek army, forcing them back toward Smyrna, and in their retreat, the Greeks wreak as much destruction on the Turkish people as possible, burning down villages in their wake. The Turkish army pursues the Greeks into Smyrna, sending refugees flooding into Greece. Armenian locals are trapped in Smyrna, where the Turks slaughter them, setting the whole city on fire, except for the Turkish quarter. Anyone trying to escape the flames is killed. Over 120,000 people die, but Dimitrios lives.

Sixteen years later, Latimer arrives in Smyrna, feeling a fool for pursuing his probably impossible whim of investigating Dimitrios. He can think of no reasonable way he can see the police records of the trial of Dhris Mohammed. However, he finds Smyrna pleasant and comfortable, so he stays. Latimer cannot forget about Dimitrios, and he hires a Russian interpreter named Fedor Muishkin to translate the police records of Dhris Mohammed. Latimer does not know how to get the records and asks Fedor for advice. Fedor, realizing that Latimer does not have a legitimate right to the records, offers to get them for a price. He asks for 500 piastres, less than one British pound, but Latimer bargains him down to 300.

Muishkin delivers a translated document to Latimer, and Latimer is convinced it is genuine based on what Colonel Haki has told him. It relates that Sholem was a moneylender, a former Jew converted to Islam, and that he was found murdered with his money missing. Sholem's brother reported that Dhris Mohammed had been showing off large amounts of money that he claimed Sholem lent him without interest. When arrested, Dhris could not explain why Sholem would have given him money, and Dhris was condemned.

Latimer gives his interpreter a second drink, commenting that the evidence against Dhris seemed vague. Muishkin replies that everyone knew the man was guilty. Latimer reads Dhris's statement after he was convicted, which claims that Dimitrios, a Greek by adoption, who worked with Dhris as a fig-packer, convinced Dhris to help him rob Sholem. They got into Sholem's apartment by claiming to be an army patrol, and Dimitrios held Sholem while Dhris searched for the money. Once Dhris had the money, Dimitrios slit Sholem's throat. The two robbers split the money and parted, and Dhris was glad because he feared Dimitrios would kill him too. Dimitrios must have escaped on a ship to Greece, buying passage with his money. Dhris believes Dimitrios knew Dhris would give himself away by spending the money and bragging. A vague description of Dimitrios is attached, and a note that Dhris was put to death on October 9, 1922. Latimer finds the confession believable.

Latimer pays the interpreter and offers the man dinner. Muishkin gets drunk over dinner and admits to Latimer that he overcharged him, because he already had copies of the





transcripts. He bribed officials for the records three months ago, for another client who looked like a Frenchman. Muishkin guiltily returns 50 piastres.

## Chapter 3, 1922 Analysis

Ambler gives a factual, graphic, and disturbing description of the Turkish genocide of Armenians in 1922. This is the bloody backdrop for the emergence of Dimitrios as a criminal. The world is heartless and ruthless, much as Colonel Haki appears to be. Within this ruthless world, a criminal like Dimitrios makes sense. Dimitrios is reflecting the society around him.

Latimer begins to learn about Dimitrios through the records Muishkin provides, but the information he gets is related by Dhris, taken down by the police, and then interpreted by Muishkin. It is only a vague reflection of Dimitrios, giving only slightly more information than Haki's stark outline of Dimitrios's career. Dimitrios does emerge as a cold man, who uses the gullible Dhris for his own benefit. Dimitrios does not merely commit murder and robbery for gain, though. All Greeks in Smyrna are in danger of their lives, and Dimitrios hopes to flee on a ship for Greece. Having money for bribes increases his chances of escape. This first crime may, on one level, be interpreted as an act of self-defense.

Perhaps the most intriguing thing that Latimer learns is that someone else is also interested in the same records. He doubts that anyone else would be investigating Dimitrios, but the reader is able to guess that the mysterious French-looking man is on the same trail as Latimer. Their paths will likely cross in the future.



## Chapter 4, Mr. Peters

### Chapter 4, Mr. Peters Summary

Latimer writes down a timetable of what he knows of Dimitrios's life. After Smyrna, Dimitrios went to Sofia, where he was involved in an attempted assassination of Bulgaria's prime minister. He likely went through Athens. Latimer leaves for Athens, where 800,000 Greek refugees fled from Turkey in 1922.

Boatloads of Greeks arrive, packed in miserable conditions, carrying their dead children or riddled with disease. Greece is short of food and medicines, and the refugees are packed in camps, where many die. Only money from the League of Nations provides relief and stops more tragedy. Latimer's friend Siantos tells him about the influx of Greek refugees in 1922. Latimer explains that he is trying to track one of the refugees for a book he is writing, a convenient excuse. Siantos finds that there is a register of refugees, and after a week, Latimer gets permission to view it.

Latimer goes to the office, but all records are by last name. An official helps him search. There is no Dimitrios Makropoulos. Latimer suggests the name Talat. The official finds a record of a fig-packer named Dimitrios Taladis, a Greek version of Talat. Latimer copies the information. Dimitrios claimed to have lost his identity card and have no money. Later, he was charged with robbery and attempted murder and fled, likely by sea to Bulgaria, where Stambulisky was head of a liberal government. After an assassination attempt, Stambulisky was overthrown by the military and killed while organizing a counter-revolution.

Latimer is proud of his success. He needs information about Bulgarian politics in 1923 and asks Siantos for help. Siantos refers him to a Greek journalist in Sofia named Marukakis. He warns Latimer that Marukakis is a communist, but Latimer is not put off. He takes the train to Sofia, Bulgaria, and on the train he shares a sleeping car with an annoying, fat, middle-aged man named Mr. Peters who talks of the predestination of a higher power that leads people to act as they do. The man recommends a hotel in Sofia, and Latimer mentions where he is staying.

### Chapter 4, Mr. Peters Analysis

The story of the Greek refugees fleeing Turkey is touched with hope. The League of Nations provides relief funds, stopping the tragedy that has inflicted so much death and suffering. The contrast between the massacre of Turkish, Greek, and Armenian people and the civilized, humane reaction of the League of Nations reflects the difference between Dimitrios and Latimer. Dimitrios embodies the warlike, conflict-oriented savagery of man. Latimer reflects the push to become civilized, peaceful, and cooperative. The actions of the League of Nations give hope that Dimitrios's world is passing out of existence, and that the civilization embodied by Latimer may replace it.



Latimer tracks Dimitrios to Greece, where he repeats his crime of robbery and assault, and he is childishly pleased at his own success. To Latimer, his search is a game that he is playing. He is happy when he is "winning" at playing detective. He will soon find that his quest is more than just a game. On the way to Sofia, Latimer meets the very odd Mr. Peters. Peters believes in a kind of predestination, where no one is in control of their own actions. A higher power is responsible for everything. This relates to the opening of the novel, where the narrator downplays the idea that any higher power could be responsible for Latimer's relationship with Dimitrios, at the same time emphasizing how oddly coincidental the whole series of events seems.



# Chapter 5, 1923

## Chapter 5, 1923 Summary

Latimer contacts Marukakis in Sofia, Bulgaria, and the journalist agrees to give him information about the Stambulisky assassination attempt of 1923 at dinner that night. They meet at Latimer's hotel, and Marukakis brings him to a small restaurant attached to a grocery store. After they have a drink, Marukakis complains that Latimer has lied about wanting the information for a detective story. He asks for the truth. Latimer is reluctant to tell his real reasons because they seem so strange, but he agrees to tell Marukakis his reasons after Marukakis gives him the information.

Marukakis relates the history of the assassination attempt. Stambulisky led the Bulgarian Peasant Agrarian Party and was Prime Minister. His party was filled with internal conflict and self-destructed. In 1923, the Serbian (now Yugoslav) government complained that Bulgarian troops had made raids into their territory. Early in February, the King and Princess were attacked with a bomb at the National Theater. Stambulisky had been promoting friendly relations with the Serbian government, but the Macedonian Revolutionary Committee feared that the Serbs and Bulgarians would unite against them and so were behind the attacks.

Stambulisky arranged for new elections, which would consolidate his power since he was popular with the people. Two assassination attempts followed soon after. The Agrarian Party did not fear the small Macedonian contingent, not realizing they were backed by reactionary factions in Bulgaria. Stambulisky's government was overthrown in a military coup, and he fled to organize a response but was shot before he could reclaim power. Marukakis says the driving force behind the coup was the Eurasian Credit Trust, a suspicious bank rumored to be involved in financing drugs and likely to lose large amounts of money if the value of the Bulgarian Lev continued to increase.

Latimer tells Marukakis about his curiosity about Dimitrios and what he has learned so far. Marukakis offers to try and find the name of a woman who knew Dimitrios, mentioned in the Turkish police reports, and three days later, Marukakis has a name: Irana Preveza. He also discovers that there is a second, secret, file about Dimitrios in Bulgaria and that a man named Anton Vazoff had gotten Dimitrios released when he was scheduled for deportation. There is also a description of Dimitrios, purportedly from Irana. Latimer finds it odd that it describes Dimitrios's height in exact centimeters.

Latimer and Marukakis meet for dinner again, and Marukakis reveals that he has found Irana Preveza. She owns a local nightclub, La Vierge St. Marie. Marukakis also discovered that Vazoff was a wealthy lawyer who died three years ago. Latimer mentions the oddity of Dimitrios's exact height, 182 centimeters, in the description, and wonders if the description comes from the secret file. Vazoff, who was a director of Eurasian Credit Trust, might have been the middleman between Eurasian Credit Trust and Dimitrios in the assassination attempt.



## Chapter 5, 1923 Analysis

Marukakis sees through Latimer's white lie about his reason for wanting information. This sets up Marukakis as someone who knows what is really going on. His perceptions about what is happening can be trusted, and his interpretation of the events surrounding Stambulisky in the 1920s are accurate. Unlike Colonel Haki, Marukakis is insightful. He also has imagination, since he is willing to accept Latimer's reasons for wanting to know about Dimitrios. Latimer's lie is a necessary lie, but only when the people he is associating with are narrow-minded and lacking in imagination, the same kind of people who hanged an innocent man for Dimitrios's crime in Smyrna.

Marukakis is also a communist, and the positive portrayal of Marukakis among many more short-sighted or narrow-minded people portrays communism itself in a good light. Stambulisky is a left-wing leader, a man of the people, and he is portrayed as a positive leader doing the right things, but somewhat naive, being victimized by greedy capitalists and right-wing reactionaries. The fact that the Eurasian Credit Trust, the murky and villainous organization behind Stambulisky's downfall, is a bank, an institution of capitalism, seems to portray capitalism, or at least unregulated capitalism, as villainous.



# Chapter 6, Carte Postale

## Chapter 6, Carte Postale Summary

Latimer and Marukakis go to La Viérge St. Marie to see Irana. They arrive early, and the nightclub is mostly empty. The wine is bad, and Latimer hastily rejects offers of company from the girls. Latimer is reluctant to go upstairs, where the prostitutes service customers, and suggests waiting in the club for Irana. Over the next hour and a half, the club fills with seedy clientele, and then Irana finally appears, looking expensively dressed but slovenly.

Irana comes to their table, but she flies into a rage when they ask about Dimitrios, telling them to leave but then recanting. When she learns that Latimer and Marukakis are not policemen, and that Dimitrios is dead, she flies into a rage again, ordering them out again. Dimitrios owed her a thousand francs, which she will now never see. She recants kicking them out once more, brings them to her office, and tells them about Dimitrios.

Dimitrios had money that he owed Irana, due on February 15, 1923. She told him he could borrow the money, but he never paid her back. In fact, he owed her other sums that he never repaid. Irana met Dimitrios when she was living at a hotel and working as a prostitute. The hotel owner kept the residence safe from the police, even if they did not have papers. Dimitrios was behind on rent, and tried to get money from Irana. Then, he offered her 2,500 leva to write a note to a man asking for 5,000. She did not recognize the name, but later realized Dimitrios had used the note to blackmail one of her clients. Though Irana lost the client, Dimitrios offered to bring her more, better clients, and he became her pimp.

Later, Dimitrios became involved in politics, but Irana knows little about that. She relates a time when Dimitrios got angry at her for laughing at him and almost cut her with a broken glass, but he stopped himself at the last moment so as not to disfigure her. After the assassination attempt on Stambulisky, Irana realized Dimitrios was probably involved. He was upset, nervous, and in disarray. Irana accepted an offer of an apartment from a man, leaving Dimitrios. He promised to return her money in three days, but he never showed up.

Dimitrios contacted Irana again, but instead of returning her money, asked her to receive letters for someone named Talat. She agreed, but a policeman came and checked their papers and took down their names. Dimitrios was agitated. No letters ever came for Talat. Irana wrote to Dimitrios once, and a man, probably Vazoff, gave her 5,000 to keep the name Talat from the police. After Irana tells her story, Latimer takes leave of Marukakis, promising to write. His next planned stop is Belgrade. He returns to his hotel and finds it in complete chaos, his books destroyed, and Mr. Peters there with a pistol.



## Chapter 6, Carte Postale Analysis

Irana is able to reveal one small piece of Dimitrios's life. She was afraid of him, almost from the first moment she met him. Dimitrios was not merely a pimp. Acting as a pimp was just the first step on his climb up the criminal ladder into politics. As Dimitrios ascended into a more sinister realm, he moved further and further away from Irana. Despite the fact that Dimitrios owed her money, Irana seems glad to be completely rid of him. She cannot imagine him being dead, and her relief is what leads her to talk about Dimitrios. Irana is an emotional woman. She lives in a world governed by passions. Dimitrios frightens her because his emotions are dark and violent and only partially controlled.

Ambler ends this chapter on a cliffhanger. The mysterious Mr. Peters has reappeared, and he has searched Latimer's room. Now, he is holding a gun on the detective novelist. The chapter ends, forcing the reader on to the next in order to find out who Mr. Peters is and what he wants. This marks a turning point in the novel. Latimer has been delving into the past, and there have been few hints that his investigations will have anything to do with his present life. However, the sight of Mr. Peters with a gun makes Latimer's investigation suddenly more urgent. By poking his nose into Dimitrios's life, he has stirred up dangerous trouble.



# Chapter 7, Half a Million Francs

## Chapter 7, Half a Million Francs Summary

Latimer is shocked at encountering Peters and does not know how to react. Peters did not expect Latimer back so soon. Latimer demands to know what Peters is doing. Peters seems to think Latimer would know why he was there. Finally, Peters asks Latimer about Dimitrios. Latimer thinks about this and finally asks Peters to exchange information and put down the pistol to talk. Peters keeps the pistol and shows Latimer the notes Latimer made about Dimitrios's history. Peters guesses that Latimer has been reading police files on Dimitrios, and Latimer unthinkingly admits that he knows more than what is in his notes. Still, Peters seems to realize that Latimer does not know much.

Latimer asks Peters if he has ever met Dimitrios, but instead of answering, Peters puts away his gun and prepares to leave. At the last minute, Peters wonders whether Latimer is heading to Belgrade, following Dimitrios's tracks chronologically, and Latimer realizes that his face has given away that Peters is right. Latimer asks Peters if he was the person who looked at Dimitrios's police records in Smyrna three months ago, but Peters denies it. Peters was, however, the person who came to the records bureau in Athens while Latimer was searching for Dimitrios's immigration record. That is why Peters followed Latimer by train and searched Latimer's hotel.

Latimer guesses that Peters might be looking for the money Dimitrios made in Paris, and he tells Peters that he saw Dimitrios's body and that his clothes were poor. He had no money. Peters is suddenly interested, asking again if Latimer saw Dimitrios's body. Peters offers to send Latimer to a Polish man named Grodek who lives near Geneva and knows about Dimitrios's life in Belgrade in 1926. In exchange, Peters hopes Latimer will look him up in Paris afterwards. Peters offers Latimer the chance at sharing a million francs, if the two pool their information. Latimer tries to explain that he is just a detective writer who is curious about Dimitrios, but Peters is undeterred. He gives Latimer a letter of introduction to Grodek, a former spy, and an address to contact Peters in Paris.

## Chapter 7, Half a Million Francs Analysis

The scene in the hotel room is, as Latimer realizes, right out of one of his detective novels. Latimer returns to find his hotel room being searched and a mysterious stranger holding a gun on him. The two are at an impasse. Latimer wants information from Peters, and Peters wants information from Latimer. In the end, Latimer is the loser in this battle of wits. Unlike his detective-story heroes, he is caught off guard, does not know what to say, gives himself away with facial expressions, and blurts out information without thinking. He answers questions without receiving any clear-cut answers. Just as Latimer gave Peters information on the train, he gives away even more now.





Latimer ends up giving Peters more information than he finds out. Peters is still completely mysterious, and the offer to share a million francs is tantalizing. The reader is drawn further into the novel, wondering who Peters really is and how Latimer could have information worth a million francs. The key is Dimitrios's body, since Peters only becomes interested in Latimer's information when he finds out that Latimer saw Dimitrios at the morgue.

However, the introduction of Grodek guarantees that the reader will have to wait until a later chapter to find out about Peters. Like Irana, Grodek is another source of information, another piece of Dimitrios's life. Latimer will need to visit Grodek and find another small piece of the puzzle before he unravels the mystery of Mr. Peters and the million francs.



# Chapter 8, Grodek

## Chapter 8, Grodek Summary

The next morning, Latimer examines the papers that Peters has left him. He wonders who Peters is and why he knows a former spy, and he recriminates himself for his poor handling of the situation the previous night. He wishes he had used violence to force information out of the man. As Latimer is wondering about Peters, he realizes that Dimitrios was murdered. Perhaps Peters is the murderer. Still, he cannot envision Peters stabbing someone and has no real evidence. Further, he cannot fathom where a million francs comes into the picture. Latimer wonders whether to give up his pursuit of Dimitrios or go to Geneva. He makes his mind up to stop his obsession and get back to his detective stories, but then he begins to inquire about traveling to Geneva.

In Geneva, Latimer meets with Grodek at his expensive villa. He is greeted by two ill-tempered Siamese cats, whom Grodek adores. Grodek seems unlike a former spy to Latimer and the two make small talk. Grodek is writing a biography of St. Francis, or at least pretending to write so that he has an occupation. When finally Latimer broaches the subject of Peters and Dimitrios, though, Grodek's expression makes him nervous. Grodek questions Latimer's reasons for being interested, and Latimer tells Grodek about his encounter with Peters.

Grodek questions how Latimer learned that Dimitrios was in Belgrade in 1926, and also learns that Peters became interested in Latimer's information after realizing that Latimer had seen Dimitrios's body. Grodek suddenly laughs and offers Latimer another drink. He calls Peters a clever man and offers Latimer lunch. After eating, he will tell Latimer all about Dimitrios in Belgrade in 1926. Before going in to lunch, he advises Latimer to go see Peters in Paris.

## Chapter 8, Grodek Analysis

Latimer, the detective novelist, is faced with a real-life spy and a real-life mystery. He seems ill equipped to understand the reality of either, underscoring the difference between mystery novels and real life crimes. Grodek, after questioning Latimer and finding out how he got his information and what happened between him and Peters, seems to realize something that Latimer does not. Latimer is in the dark.

Can the reader make the leap of logic that Latimer cannot? What importance could Latimer's witness of Dimitrios's body hold? If the reader is paying close attention, he realizes that Haki mentioned specifically that he had no photos of Dimitrios and never saw his face. Irana also says she destroyed all the photos. Dimitrios's body was identified, but only by a French identity card. The reader can probably guess what Latimer has not fathomed: that Dimitrios is alive and that Latimer can identify the body as someone else's.

Ironically, while the author is creating a distinction between the "real-life" problem of Dimitrios and the false detective stories that Latimer writes, he is also creating a very traditional, contrived mystery plot. The body is not who it appears to be. When Grodek laughs, he is probably laughing at this very irony.



# Chapter 9, Belgrade, 1926

## Chapter 9, Belgrade, 1926 Summary

Latimer writes to Marukakis, telling him the tale that Grodek related, using only Grodek's initial G., to hide his identity. In 1926, Grodek is working for Italy, and he goes to Belgrade, in Serbia (then part of Yugoslavia). There are rumors that Yugoslavia has planted mines in the ocean to prevent any attacks from Mussolini's Italy. Grodek's job is to find out the location of the mines.

Grodek pretends to be a representative of a manufacturer in Dresden. He goes to the Ministry of Marine, pretends to be headed for the supply department, and then finds his way to the defense department. There, he looks at the personnel. Over several days, he follows three clerks to their homes and finds out their names, addresses, and other information. He targets a man named Bulić.

Grodek pretends to run into Bulić by accident in a cafe and strikes up an acquaintanceship. After a while, Grodek brings up the Ministry of Marine, pretending to think that Bulić has a powerful position there. Bulić is flattered. Grodek says that he works for an optics firm based in Dresden and has bid for a contract to make binoculars. He asks Bulić to use his influence to help his firm get the bid, offering 20,000 dinar in exchange. Bulić accepts. He knows there is nothing he can do, but if the contract happens to go to Grodek's firm, he thinks he will get 20,000 dinars for nothing.

Grodek starts wining and dining Bulić and his wife, and Bulić revels in being treated as an important personage. His wife is also flattered and enjoying the high life. Meanwhile, Grodek learns of a useful man named Dimitrios at the Eurasian Credit Trust and recruits his help. Dimitrios and Grodek make a deal, but Grodek is distrustful of Dimitrios.

The contract for binoculars is given to a Czech firm, and Bulić thinks that he has lost his 20,000 dinars. However, Grodek pretends that the Czech firm is a subsidiary of his Dresden firm, making fake business cards to convince Bulić. Bulić gets his money and is thrilled with his good fortune. Then, Grodek asks Bulić to help get another contract, this one for range-finders. Bulić again agrees, this time asking for half the money up front.

A few days later, Grodek introduces Bulić and his wife to Dimitrios, who is playing the role of Freiherr von Kiessling, a wealthy and important man of business. Bulić thinks this is finally his chance to gain an important position. A few days later, the Freiherr dines with them and flatters Bulić's wife. He buys her a flower, revealing that he is carrying thousands of dinars in cash. When asked about it, he mentions that he won the money at Alessandro's gambling house.

Grodek and Dimitrios get Bulić and his wife to come to the gambling house, and Bulić's wife loses 12,000 dinar. Still, Bulić believes he is on the brink of opportunities worth



millions. When Bulić pays off the debt, he gambles himself, losing all the money he has made, plus his savings, and going 38,000 dinars into debt. Over several nights at the fixed gambling house, Bulić wins a little and then loses, until Alessandro calls in Bulić's debt for 25,000 dinars. Grodek says he cannot help but sends Bulić to the Freiherr. When Bulić comes to him, Dimitrios asks Bulić to bring him the maps of the mines of the Yugoslavian coast in exchange for 50,000 dinars. He gets rough with Bulić, beating him, and finally Bulić gives in.

The next night, Bulić brings the chart. Grodek, concealed in the other room, photographs it. Bulić takes the money and the chart and leaves. The operation is successful, but Dimitrios takes the photos of the chart at gunpoint and disappears. When Grodek cannot find Dimitrios, he turns in Bulić for copying the chart, so that the Yugoslav government will change the positions of the mines, making the stolen photos worthless. Bulić goes to prison for life. When new charts are made, Grodek acquires them using a different method.

## Chapter 9, Belgrade, 1926 Analysis

Grodek's tale is a story within the story. The espionage tale is separated out from the rest of the narrative by being told in a letter from Latimer to Marukakis. The spy story is really about the clever way that Grodek designs to steal the map of mines in the ocean off the coast of Yugoslavia. Latimer prefaces it by another comparison of "real life" to fiction, this time delving into spy fiction. Grodek does not read spy stories, finding them naive. Latimer, the writer, has no idea how he would approach such a problem if he were a spy. Ultimately, Grodek's plot is more mundane than Latimer might expect from a fictional plot.

Grodek's method of extracting the plans is very much like a con-artist story. He lures in a mark, and he uses the man's own greed against him to get what he wants. The fake gambling casino and the fake man of business are both traditional elements of a modern con-artist tale. Bulić, as the victim, is unlikeable, greedy, and stupid. Even Grodek, when questioned, says he does not feel sorry for Bulić and that the man brought his own downfall on himself, the same sort of line fictional con artists take about their own victims.

Dimitrios shows himself to be a double-crosser. This is a theme for Dimitrios throughout his career. First, he sets up his partner for murder after robbing Sholem. Now, he steals the plans that he has just helped Grodek steal, so that he can sell them himself to a rival power. Latimer thinks it is odd that Grodek would suddenly realize that Dimitrios was not to be trusted, considering that both were already engaged in an untrustworthy sort of activity. However, not every criminal will double-cross his cohorts. Dimitrios steals from Irana, and he steals from Grodek. His nature is to have no concern for anyone but himself, and this leads him to always turn against his partners.



# Chapter 10, The Eight Angels

## Chapter 10, The Eight Angels Summary

Latimer arrives in Paris and goes to look at the address Peters gave him, though Peters said the house belongs to someone else. Number 3, Impasse des Huit Anges is a run-down house in an empty, dead-end court. Only one of the apartments is occupied, in the name of Caille. Latimer, having learned nothing, sends a postcard to the address, as Peters has asked.

While waiting for news, Latimer reads articles about the Paris drug gang that was broken up in 1931. The newspaper reports arrests of six men and a woman, without mentioning the information sent anonymously from Dimitrios. A companion article talks about drugs, mentioning that both morphine and heroin are opiates, describing the symptoms of drug-taking, and giving superficial information about the drug trade. The sentences were short, one to three months plus fines. The information is minimal, but Latimer sees a photo of the seven drug dealers who were caught.

Peters comes to see Latimer, and Latimer asks if Peters brought his gun. When Peters denies it, Latimer locks the door and reveals that he knows Peters is Frederick Petersen, one of the drug dealers in Dimitrios's gang. He insists on knowing what Peters is up to, threatening violence. Peters confirms that Latimer is right, and that Dimitrios turned the gang in because he was addicted to drugs. Latimer accuses Peters of killing Dimitrios for his money. Peters says Latimer is fortunate that he is wrong, considering that Peters does, after all, have his gun. He points out that he would be unlikely to get Dimitrios's money by killing him.

Peters and Latimer go to a restaurant and then to Peters' apartment in the Impasse des Huit Anges. Peters is Caillé. The buildings belonged to Dimitrios, but he had them in Petersen's name. When Petersen got out of jail, he sold the buildings to himself under a false name, Caillé, and changed his own name to Peters. The inside of the apartment is decorated in an overdone Moroccan style with blue walls with gold stars, and cushions on the floor. Peters shows Latimer a secret passageway between the houses. Peters makes coffee, and then shows Latimer a photo. Latimer identifies it as Dimitrios. Peters, pleased, settles down to tell his story.

## Chapter 10, The Eight Angels Analysis

In Latimer's second encounter with Mr. Peters, he reenacts the first encounter, as he wishes he had done it. He regrets not using violence to force Peters to tell him what he wants to know, so he locks Peters in his room and threatens him with violence. Latimer again proves himself incompetent. He does not belong in the dog-eat-dog world of criminals. His first mistake is in naively trusting that Peters is telling him the truth when he denies having a gun. Latimer is trusting and takes people at their words, even



Peters, who has only behaved suspiciously. Latimer's threats of violence turn out to be meaningless. Peters puts off all requests for information until he gets the confirmation that he wants, Latimer's identification of the photograph as Dimitrios.

The only advantage Latimer gains is by learning Peters' true identity. His accomplishment is more lucky chance than detective work. Latimer runs across a photo of Peters in the paper, and so he detects that Peters is really Petersen, one of Dimitrios's partners in the drug business. Latimer is proud of his advantage, though he had not used his intelligence or skill. Latimer has few instances in which he truly uses intelligence or detective skill. He thinks to look for records of Dimitrios under the name Talat. Other than that, he relies on the help of others, luck, and coincidence to make most of his strides forward in his search for information.



# Chapter 11, Paris, 1928-1931

## Chapter 11, Paris, 1928-1931 Summary

Peters reminisces about his life and beliefs. Latimer dislikes him, yet is oddly attracted by him. Peters is oily and hypocritical, believing himself to be a philosopher and lover of arts, while his beliefs only excuse his criminal lifestyle. Still, Peters is also personable. Peters relates his history with Dimitrios.

Peters meets Dimitrios in Paris in 1927, when he co-owns a nightclub called Le Kasbah Parisien with a man named Giraud. The nightclub is Moroccan-themed, and it becomes a success as a popular night spot. Then, the success dies down. When Giraud and Peters are no longer making as much money, Giraud brings in Dimitrios. Dimitrios trades in women, transporting them through France to other countries, to be kept as concubines. The laws have been changed so the women must prove they have work in France to come to the country. Peters does not like trafficking in women, and he is not impressed with Dimitrios. Still, he reluctantly agrees to let Dimitrios use his nightclub as the girls' ostensible place of employment.

The first time, Giraud and Peters have no problems and easily collect 5,000 francs for nothing. Later, however, Peters suspects that there were no real women the first time. The second group of Polish women does cause problems. The police investigate the women's employment, and Giraud and Peters must have them in the club. They cannot dance and do anything useful. Afterwards, Dimitrios agrees not to use Polish women, since the police are too much trouble. Things go smoothly for a while, until the Italian police make trouble over another group of women.

Peters is fed up with the hassles caused by Dimitrios's trade. He has never liked his partner, and Peters and Giraud argue. Peters offers to let Giraud buy out his half of the nightclub, and Giraud accepts. They tell Dimitrios that Peters is backing out of the nightclub. When Dimitrios and Peters are alone, Dimitrios asks Peters to meet him later.

When Dimitrios and Peters meet, Dimitrios says that he is leaving the business of trafficking in women, since it is too dangerous. He offers Peters a chance to work with him smuggling heroin. Peters' job is to acquire the heroin from dealers Dimitrios knows and bring it into France. Peters accepts. He goes to Bulgaria and buys 20 kilos of heroin through Vazoff and the Eurasian Credit Trust, and he smuggles it into France inside a coffin. Dimitrios scorns Peters for being romantic, and they make arrangements for future transport future shipments by boat.

The seven people who were later arrested worked the drug business, arranging to sell drugs in clubs and checking out new clients. The one woman involved, known as the Grand Duchess, could size up customers and weed out police detectives. Manus Visser, another member, deals with clubs and bars that distribute the drugs. The drug business expands into heroin and cocaine. One week in 1929, a shipment traveling by





train is seized, and another shipment of heroin and morphine is lost. There is no supply. After that, the drug ring keeps a backup supply in the houses on Impasse des Huit Anges.

Peters describes to Latimer the process of addiction. The new addict at first experiences pleasure, but denies that he is addicted. Over time, he needs more and more drugs to obtain his high. Eventually, he is hooked. Peters abhors drugs, but justifies his own role, saying that he is not responsible for the addicts and that if not for him, someone else would surely supply them. Then, Peters continues his story.

Dimitrios becomes addicted to heroin, and soon he shows it through his behavior at the drug ring's meetings. A few months later, Dimitrios insists on selling off the ring's back stock, saying that the police will be looking for the stocks. No one suspects he is liquidating his assets before fleeing. Then, he sends information on all his co-conspirators to the police and disappears.

After Peters finishes his story, Latimer asks about the million francs. Peters shows Latimer the photo again, and Latimer confirms that it is Dimitrios. Peters corrects him. The photo is of Manus Visser. The dead body Latimer saw was Visser. Dimitrios is alive, and Peters tells Latimer that Dimitrios is the murderer.

## Chapter 11, Paris, 1928-1931 Analysis

Ambler's novel gives the reader a tour of the criminal world. Dimitrios does not just stick to one criminal activity. Instead, he delves into prostitution, espionage, drug-smuggling, trafficking in women, and political assassination. Dimitrios's varied career gives Ambler a means to take the reader sight-seeing through all the different sides of the underworld. In this chapter, the reader gets to learn about trafficking in women and about the real inner workings of a drug-smuggling ring.

Ambler's description of Dimitrios's drug-smuggling ring contrasts notably with the superficial article that Latimer reads earlier in the newspaper, purportedly giving the real story of what the inside of a drug ring is like. Throughout the novel, Ambler contrasts his story with fictional detective, mystery, and spy stories. Here, he also contrasts his story with the popular news media. The reader gets the impression of truly being shown the inside story of drug smuggling.

Dimitrios has no sense of others' well-being. He casts Giraud aside as soon as Peters leaves, without consideration. He sees Giraud as a fool, and no use to him. In the end, Dimitrios also casts aside Peters, and all his cohorts in the drug-smuggling ring. When Visser comes after Dimitrios, Dimitrios callously gets rid of him. At every turn, Dimitrios is only interested in himself. Perhaps Dimitrios's arrogance is one of the things that makes him prey to drug use. Dimitrios would surely never believe that a drug could take power over him.

The title of the novel is "A Coffin for Dimitrios." In the beginning of the novel, Haki uses this term, saying that the sooner Dimitrios is buried in his coffin, the better. In this



chapter, the reader learns that Dimitrios is alive. Where is his coffin? Another coffin does appear, the coffin that Peters delivers to Dimitrios, filled with drugs. This coffin can be interpreted symbolically. Not only are the drugs themselves a form of death, but ultimately Peters will deliver true and final death to Dimitrios.



# Chapter 12, Monsieur C. K

## Chapter 12, Monsieur C. K Summary

Peters explains that he suspected Dimitrios faked his death, and Latimer is important because he has seen Visser's body and can identify it. The French identity card would be easily faked. Peters continues his story.

After getting out of jail, Peters goes abroad. He meets Visser some time later, in Rome. Visser asks him for money, telling Peters his story. Visser and Dimitrios had clashed during the meetings of the drug-smuggling ring. Visser distrusted Dimitrios and followed him, finding an apartment, where he lived under the name Rougemont. He also found a house belonging to a high-class woman Dimitrios was involved with, whom Peters calls la Comtesse. After getting out of jail, Visser wanted to kill Dimitrios. Then, he thought of blackmail.

Visser tracked Dimitrios to a drug-cure clinic, and then, Visser broke into la Comtesse's house. He found letters from Dimitrios signed "C.K." Dimitrios had been in Rome, in an expensive hotel. Armed with this information, Visser finds out Dimitrios's new name. Now, he needs money to go back to France to trace Dimitrios. Peters finally lends Visser the money, never expecting to see it back. However, Peters later receives a letter from Visser with the money. Visser must have found Dimitrios and made him pay. Peters sees an opportunity to collect from Dimitrios himself.

Peters has little luck at first. La Comtesse is no longer at the same address. He finds her, though, pictured in a social magazine, in St. Anton. C.K. had been there, too. Peters tracks him to Cannes. Though C.K. is abroad, Peters can wait. He finds out C.K. has become an important man, and he tries to collect more information to blackmail C.K. with. He reads about the discovery of "Dimitrios's" body, and he runs into Latimer. Then, Peters finds Dimitrios has returned to his identity as C.K. in Cannes.

Peters outlines how he imagines Dimitrios killed Visser, on a yacht cruise in Greece. They would go ashore in Istanbul, where Dimitrios would kill Visser then impersonate him for a night before heading back to Paris. Peters knows exactly where Dimitrios is now, in Paris. He has seen him recently. He offers to partner with Latimer to blackmail Dimitrios. Latimer wants to go to the police, but Peters argues convincingly that Latimer has nothing the police will act on. Latimer objects to blackmail on moral grounds but agrees to help Peters, on two conditions. First, Latimer refuses to take any money. Second, he must know who "C.K." is. Peters reveals that C.K. is on the board of the Eurasian Credit Trust.

## Chapter 12, Monsieur C. K Analysis

The mystery of Peters and the million francs is now revealed, as well as much of Dimitrios's history. Latimer's original investigation is at an end. He is no longer the



detective unraveling a criminal's path. Like a drug addict slowly slipping into dependence, Latimer has slowly slipped deep into the criminal world. In fact, the mystery writer whom Peters characterizes as overly moral and righteous is now prepared to embark on a scheme of blackmail, in concert with a former drug-smuggler and partner in a sex-trade ring. The journey from the normal, civilized, British world into a sordid, seamy underworld is completed.

Latimer does not become completely immersed in the criminal underworld, however. At one level, he is still a passive observer of what is going on around him. Like Peters, whose argument is that the drug business would go on with or without him, Latimer becomes involved in a passive role, allowing the blackmail to continue through inaction. Latimer refutes Peters' arguments, but he seems to be following a similar role. He cannot truly stop Peters from trying to blackmail Dimitrios, since that was Peters' plan all along. He is lulled into participation through a feeling that he cannot stop what is going to happen in any case. However, he refuses full participation by not accepting money for going along with the blackmail scheme. Latimer's moral aversion to blackmail is also quelled by the nature of the victim. Latimer has few qualms about harming the criminal Dimitrios.



# Chapter 13, Rendezvous

## Chapter 13, Rendezvous Summary

After leaving Peters, Latimer cannot sleep. He goes to Le Kasbah Parisien, but he finds that there are new owners. The Moroccan decor is also gone. Latimer asks about Giraud, but the new owner does not know him. Latimer leaves, still feeling a sense of unreality after his talk with Peters. Latimer goes to his room and thinks over all he has learned about Dimitrios. Dimitrios is evil, but Latimer finds the explanation unsatisfying. The world is full of evil. Latimer finally goes to bed, with the unsettling realization that he is afraid of Dimitrios.

Peters' plan is to write a letter to Dimitrios, arranging a meeting at a hotel. At the hotel, Peters will use his old name Petersen, and Latimer will call himself Smith. They will present their blackmail demands and make sure they are not followed away from the hotel. Directions will be sent to Dimitrios by letter to have a woman (so the messenger cannot be Dimitrios) drop off the money to two men in a hired car, who will make sure they are not followed.

Latimer finds waiting for events to unfold nerve-racking. He also suffers from pangs of conscience, imagining what a judge would say about his case. Latimer finally makes up his mind to go to the police. He finds the station and asks for the commissioner, mentioning a case of blackmail. The policeman on duty asks for his identification, but Latimer has left his passport at the hotel. The policeman recriminates him and sends him away, asking him to reappear with his passport, which he should always carry. Latimer is offended by the officious man. He becomes committed to the blackmail scheme.

Peters and Latimer check into the hotel. Peters has his gun, and Latimer is nervous. They hide Latimer's face so he will not be recognized from the newspapers or one of his book jackets. They wait, and the time of the appointment approaches. Finally, they hear someone approaching. A knock comes at the door. Peters, his gun handy in his pocket, answers the knock. Dimitrios is at the door.

## Chapter 13, Rendezvous Analysis

Chapter 13 acts as an emotional build-up to the climactic scene with Dimitrios. Latimer's nerves are frayed, and so are the reader's, wondering what will happen next. The anticipation is drawn out throughout this chapter, which describes the events that are supposed to happen. The reader knows the plan, but will events unfold as they have been laid out? Suspense comes from the reader's anticipation.

Latimer also battles against his conscience, and the reader is left to make a judgment (as Latimer is) about whether Latimer has crossed a line into moral wrongdoing. Certainly, what Latimer is doing is illegal. He is a straight-laced, moral man, and he



believes in law and justice. However, he has been easily led away from the path of law. Latimer makes a simile, comparing Peters to Lady MacBeth, who led MacBeth to the path of murder. Though Latimer is on the road to blackmail, murder is not far away.

When Latimer tries to return to the path of lawfulness, he finds himself blocked by bureaucracy. He is not very resolute, since one self-important policeman nitpicking about regulations dissuades him from pursuing going to the police. Latimer is afraid of Dimitrios, and he is also afraid of being condemned for what he has already done. Morally, he is confused, and the reader must decide whether Latimer should be condemned. The underworld, though, has definitely been a corrupting influence.



# Chapter 14, The Mask of Dimitrios

## Chapter 14, The Mask of Dimitrios Summary

Latimer is shocked at how respectable Dimitrios looks. His criminal, immoral nature is hidden beneath a mask. His voice, though, is ugly. Peters introduces Latimer as "Monsieur Smith." Then, Peters proceeds to blackmail Dimitrios, asking for a million francs to keep silent about everything from Dimitrios's involvement in the Paris drug ring to the murder of Visser, explaining that Latimer has seen Visser's body and can identify it.

Peters suggests that he and Latimer will be returning for more blackmail money, but he tells Dimitrios that they will not be greedy. Peters tells Dimitrios that he will receive instructions to deliver the million francs. Dimitrios seems to acquiesce, but the hatred between Dimitrios and Peters is palpable. Latimer feels that the two men might easily kill each other. Dimitrios tries to suggest to Latimer that Dimitrios will kill him after they get the money, fomenting conflict between Latimer and Peters. Latimer is about to blurt out that he is not taking any of the blackmail money and so has nothing to fear, but Peters stops him. Before leaving, Dimitrios questions Latimer about Visser's body, and Latimer shows clearly that he has seen the corpse.

Dimitrios leaves, and Peters confesses that he would have cheated Latimer out of his half of the money, if Latimer had accepted the money. Latimer assures Peters that he never thought Peters might kill him. When Latimer and Peters leave, they are followed. Peters shakes the tail by darting into a metro train as it is just about to leave. Peters asks Latimer to stay in Paris another day and accept a glass of wine in celebration after they collect the money. Latimer reluctantly agrees, insisting on an expensive bottle of champagne.

## Chapter 14, The Mask of Dimitrios Analysis

Latimer finally comes face to face with Dimitrios. He is a carefully controlled man, but he is also seething with maliciousness. Dimitrios and Peters are both driven by hatred, greed, and self-preservation. Their mutual existence hangs in a tenuous balance because it depends only on these three things. The violent nature of man, on both a large scale and a small scale, is governed by these impulses. Dimitrios hates Peters. He wants to keep his money and his high place in the world, and he wants to preserve his own life and well-being. Only the dangers of getting caught prevent Dimitrios from murdering Peters on the spot. He places no value on others' lives and welfare.

Peters has the same impulses. He hates Dimitrios, and he is willing to use violence against him at the slightest provocation. He also is greedy, and he sees Dimitrios as a means to getting money. Dimitrios wants to keep his money, and Peters wants to take it away. This is a constant tension between those who have money and those who have

none. Peters also is driven by self-preservation. At all costs, he must protect himself. The balance is tenuous, because given the smallest opportunity, one of the two will strike. A miscalculation could easily lead to mutual destruction.





# Chapter 15, The Strange Town

## Chapter 15, The Strange Town Summary

Peters and Latimer wait for the money to be delivered. The night is cold, and it begins to rain. They wait in discomfort, and Latimer regrets coming. Finally, the car arrives. Peters picks up the package, and by the light of a match, he sees the currency notes inside. Peters and Latimer take a taxi back to Peters' apartment, with Peters regretting not having asked for more money and talking philosophically about the stars. He comments on the insignificance of all human interaction.

When Peters and Latimer arrive, Peters thinks that he will sell the run-down houses before heading to South America. Inside the apartment, Peters unwraps the package and calls for a celebration. Peters heads to get the champagne, but he stops suddenly. He raises his hand. Dimitrios appears, holding a revolver. Latimer puts up his hands. Dimitrios sneers at Peters, saying that he saw through the fake sale of the properties. The run-down houses would not be easy to unload. They stood empty for ten years before Dimitrios bought them.

Dimitrios orders Peters to drop the money, and it falls to the floor. Peters calls out, and Dimitrios shoots him. Dimitrios then turns to Latimer and fires, but Latimer instinctively jumps at just the right moment. He accidentally stumbles over one of the rugs that cover the floor, falling and barely missing being shot. Latimer throws himself at Dimitrios, and Dimitrios drops his gun. Latimer throws a tray, hitting Dimitrios in the head. Latimer then throws a table, grabbing for the gun. The table hits Dimitrios in the shoulder, giving Latimer just enough time to cover Dimitrios with the revolver.

Dimitrios offers Latimer a million francs to let him go. Peters is still alive, but badly wounded in his neck and chest. Peters asks for his pistol, and Latimer gets it from Peters' pocket. Peters then covers Dimitrios and tells Latimer to get the police. There is no telephone in the house. Seeing how badly Peters needs a doctor, Latimer agrees to go. Dimitrios begs Latimer not to leave, saying that Peters will surely shoot him. Latimer refuses to stay, and Dimitrios offers him five million francs. Latimer hesitates. Dimitrios seems to truly believe he is going to be killed, but Latimer thinks Dimitrios is tricking him. He leaves.

Latimer is barely out the door when he hears four shots. Irrationally, his first thought is for Peters' safety. As Latimer enters the room, Peters is in his last moments of life. Dimitrios is shot dead. Latimer washes his hands, thinking about what he should do. What would he tell the police? He removes all traces of himself from the apartment, wiping for fingerprints, and he puts Dimitrios's revolver by the dead man. He leaves the money as it is. Then, he leaves and goes to a cafe.

Latimer can't stand the thought that Dimitrios and Peters will lie dead, unfound, to rot. He searches the paper for news of a crime and chooses the theft of some furs. Then, he



sends an anonymous note to the police, implicating Peters' house in the theft. A few days later, he sees a report of the bodies found. The police believe the two men killed each other over the money. He also receives a letter from Marukakis that the Eurasian Credit Trust is still fomenting discontent in Eastern Europe. Marukakis sees no cure for men like Dimitrios. Latimer returns to his civilized world and his prim murder mysteries.

## Chapter 15, The Strange Town Analysis

Latimer's quest ends with a coffin for Dimitrios. The story, which Colonel Haki warned would have no closure, is closed by death. Peters and Dimitrios, two criminals motivated by greed and hatred, mutually self-destruct, the eventual fate, Ambler seems to say, of violent factions throughout the world. Still, violence lives on. The Eurasian Credit Trust is still operable, and war is still threatening Eastern Europe. Civilization cannot take hold because the Dimitrioses of the world, creatures created by the political situation of the world, continue the cycle of the world's violence. The cycle seems to have no beginning and no end, except death.

Latimer escapes from death by a pure accident. He trips over a rug, giving him the opportunity to get Dimitrios's gun. Latimer could easily have been killed and forever lost to the criminal underworld. This accident is one of the string of coincidences the narrator talks about at the beginning of the novel. Is Latimer tripping over a rug something that is predestined? Is there a force of luck, or chance, or a greater power at work?

At the end of the climactic scene, Latimer, like MacBeth, finds his hands bloodied. He distrusts Dimitrios, and surely Dimitrios would try to kill him if he could. Still, must not Latimer, on some level, realize that Peters, who is dying and filled with hatred, will shoot Dimitrios if he has a chance? Does Latimer make a, perhaps unconscious, decision to give Dimitrios the coffin that he deserves? If so, Latimer is single-handedly eking out justice, and yet goes back to his comfortable life of murder mysteries and civilization, seemingly unsullied by his foray into the criminal world. Can he truly be unchanged?



# Characters

## Charles Latimer

Charles Latimer is a detective novelist from England. He began his career as a university professor, but he has since left teaching to become a full-time writer. He is an ordinary and even prosaic man, with a strong sense of right and wrong. Mr. Peters considers the morality in Latimer's novels to be black and white, and even prudishly moral. Latimer must leave his clear-cut world to investigate the murky, criminal underworld of Dimitrios.

Latimer is vacationing in Turkey when he learns about Dimitrios by accident. He is taken with curiosity about this real-life criminal. From Dimitrios's sketchy criminal record, Latimer wonders what the man is really like, how he lived, and why he died. Although Latimer tells himself, rationally, that it would be silly to try to investigate Dimitrios, he cannot stop himself. His curiosity has overcome him, and Dimitrios has become an obsession. Dimitrios embodies crime, and Latimer needs to understand the existence of crime and criminals in the world.

As Latimer investigates Dimitrios, he becomes entangled in Dimitrios's dangerous world. Latimer allows himself to be enticed by the equally criminal Mr. Peters to help blackmail Dimitrios after Latimer learns Dimitrios is still alive. Blackmail is completely opposed to Latimer's moral code, and yet, although he refuses to take any of the blackmail money, Latimer is drawn into the scheme through his desire to understand Dimitrios. He becomes a blackmailer, and when he leaves Mr. Peters holding a gun on Dimitrios, he arguably becomes a murderer. Dimitrios begs not to be left with Peters, telling Latimer that Peters will kill him. Has Latimer determined that Dimitrios is unredeemable, and that Colonel Haki was right in saying that the sooner he is in a coffin, the better?

## Dimitrios Makropoulos/Talat/Taladis/Rougemont, a.k.a C.K.

Dimitrios is the subject of Latimer's investigation. He was found abandoned as a child and adopted by Greek parents. Latimer discovers little about Dimitrios's childhood or the circumstances that cause him to turn to crime. The first anyone knows of Dimitrios is when he appears in 1922 in Smyrna, during the time of the Turkish genocide against Armenians. Dimitrios kills a Jewish money lender, who the police will likely care little about, and he steals the man's money, framing a black man who the police will care equally little about. He takes advantage of the prejudices of the world to hide his own crimes, as he slips away into Greece himself. As a refugee, Dimitrios also takes advantage of the world's confusion to obscure his identity.



Dimitrios is a spy and a double-crosser, always looking out for his own good. When he is hired by an intelligence agent to help steal secret papers, he turns on the man who hired him. When he decides it is time to get out of the drug business so that he can kick his heroine addiction, Dimitrios turns in all his cohorts to the French police and disappears. This willingness to throw his partners under the bus goes back to his first murder in 1922, when Dimitrios sets up his partner to be hanged for the crime. Dimitrios sheds his old identity by killing a man who is trying to blackmail him, putting a false identification card on the body so that the man will be identified as Dimitrios.

Although Dimitrios is cold-blooded and a criminal, he is smart. He lacks compassion, sympathy, or wisdom, but he is able to outwit any opponent. He survives by destroying any obstacle and escaping any situation. He tracks down Mr. Peters and Latimer by outwitting Peters, and he nearly kills them both. Even though Peters is holding a gun on Dimitrios, when Latimer hears the shots, he is worried that Peters, not Dimitrios, might have been killed. However, even Dimitrios cannot escape death indefinitely. Death seems like the only solution to the problem of Dimitrios, who cannot be dealt with by the police and who is infinitely ruthless.

## **Mr. Peters/Petersen/Caillé**

Mr. Peters is one of the central operators in Dimitrios's drug operation in Paris. Peters finds out that Latimer is investigating Dimitrios, and he recruits Latimer to help him blackmail Dimitrios. Peters spouts philosophy that the Creator has made him a criminal for some unknown reason, and that his criminal actions are all part of the unknowable plan of God. He claims to regret his actions, but Peters does not stop behaving as a criminal. He claims no responsibility. He was simply made to be a criminal, for some reason beyond his knowledge or control.

Dimitrios outwits Peters and tracks him down to the house in the empty courtyard where Peters lives. Peters thinks that he has made his plans well and is safe, but Dimitrios is smarter than Peters. Peters is shot, but Latimer is able to get Dimitrios's gun. Peters convinces Latimer to go for the police, while Peters watches Dimitrios. Probably, Latimer knows on some level that Peters will not simply watch Dimitrios. Peters is dying, and it is clear that Peters hates Dimitrios. Latimer does not even get down the street before he hears gunshots. Peters' final action is to murder Dimitrios.

## **Madame Chávez**

Latimer goes to stay with Madame Chávez for a weekend while he is in Istanbul. At her expensive but uncomfortable villa, Latimer first meets Colonel Haki.

## **Colonel Haki**

Colonel Haki is a mysterious figure in the Turkish police force in Istanbul. He is rumored to be head of the secret police and possibly a torturer. He is also a rakish man, flirting



with women. Haki is a wannabe murder mystery writer, and he offers Charles Latimer a contrived, amateurish mystery plot to use. While Latimer is not at all interested in Haki's mystery plot, he is interested in the portrait of a real murderer that Haki presents when he tells Latimer about Dimitrios. Colonel Haki lets Latimer come with him to the morgue to see Dimitrios's body.

## **Collinson**

Collinson is the manager of Latimer's bank in Istanbul. He tells Latimer that Colonel Haki is an influential man behind the scenes, possibly the head of the secret police, and reputed to have tortured prisoners during his past.

## **Sholem**

Sholem was a former Jew converted to Islam. He was a moneylender who Dimitrios robbed and killed in Smyrna in 1922.

## **Dhris Mohammed**

Dhris Mohammed was a black man Dimitrios convinced to help him rob Sholem in Smyrna in 1922. Dimitrios killed Sholem and left Dhris Mohammed to be arrested and hung for the murder.

## **Fedor Muishkin**

Fedor Muishkin is an interpreter that Latimer hires in Smyrna to translate the police records of Dhris Mohammed's trial. Muishkin is able to procure and translate the documents, and later he admits that he had already acquired the documents for another client.

## **Siantos**

Siantos is a friend of Latimer's in Athens, who tells him about the influx of Greek refugees following the Turkish holocaust against Armenians. He gets Latimer access to records of Greek refugees and later recommends a journalist in Bulgaria who can help Latimer find more information.

## **Marukakis**

Marukakis is a communistic journalist working in Sofia, Bulgaria. He is smart and insightful, and he helps Latimer find out information about the assassination attempt on Stambulisky in 1923.



## Stambulisky

Stambulisky was a left-wing Prime Minister of Bulgaria, beloved by the people. He was a victim of an assassination attempt that Dimitrios was involved in during 1923. Later, Stambulisky was overthrown by a military coup and later killed.

## Anton Vazoff

Vazoff was a lawyer who was involved with the Eurasian Credit Trust, a suspicious bank probably involved in illegal activities. Vazoff was likely involved in the assassination attempt on Stambulisk, left-wing Prime Minister of Bulgaria, who was too successful at improving the Bulgarian economy. The rising Bulgarian currency would result in a loss to the Eurasian Credit Trust bank and its shady owners. Vazoff got Dimitrios out of jail when he was about to be deported from Bulgaria for associating with criminals.

## Irana Preveza

Irana is a prostitute who owns a nightclub called the La Viérge St. Marie. She lived at a boarding house with Dimitrios, and he became her pimp and brought her new clients, after using her as his unwitting accomplice to blackmail one of her customers. Dimitrios disappeared owing Irana a large quantity of money, and she mourns the fact that she will never get her money back now that Dimitrios is dead.

## Wladyslaw Grodek

Grodek is a former spy who lives in a villa in Geneva and has two Siamese cats that he adores. Grodek hired Dimitrios to help him steal the plans to minefields in the oceans protecting Serbia from Italy. Dimitrios double-crosses Grodek.

## Bulić

Bulić was a clerk in the Yugoslavian Ministry of Marine in Belgrade. Grodek lured Bulić into gambling away a lot of money and then used Dimitrios to get Bulić to steal the plans for the mines off the coast of Yugoslavia.

## Giraud

Giraud is Peters' partner in the nightclub Le Kasbah Parisien. He introduces Peters and Dimitrios when Giraud involves Dimitrios with the nightclub, as a cover for Dimitrios's trade in women.

## **The Grand Duchess**

The Grand Duchess is the one woman among the leaders of Dimitrios's drug ring. Her role is to size up potential customers and weed out police detectives.

## **Manus Visser**

Visser is one of the men who run Dimitrios's drug operations, dealing with clubs and bars on the distribution end. Visser goes after Dimitrios after he gets out of jail, and he blackmails Dimitrios. Dimitrios stabs Visser and plants a false identification card on him, so the police will think Dimitrios is dead. The body that Latimer sees in the morgue in Turkey is actually Visser.



# Objects/Places

## Istanbul, Turkey

Istanbul is where Latimer's adventure begins. He meets Colonel Haki in Istanbul and learns about Dimitrios's supposed death. In Istanbul, Latimer views Dimitrios's body at the morgue and learns what the Turkish police know about Dimitrios's career in crime.

## The Mortuary

Latimer accompanies Colonel Haki to the stifling mortuary to see Dimitrios's dead body.

## Smyrna

Smyrna is the place where Dimitrios commits his first known murder in 1922, when Smyrna is occupied by Turkish forces who burn down much of the city and massacre over a hundred thousand Armenians. Dimitrios murders a money lender named Sholem, steals money, and escapes to Greece.

## Sofia, Bulgaria

Dimitrios enters Sofia, Bulgaria through Greece, and he becomes involved in a plot to murder the Bulgarian Prime Minister Stambulsky.

## The Train to Sofia

Latimer first meets Mr. Peters on the train to Sofia, where Peters learns from Latimer what hotel he will be staying at.

## Eurasian Credit Trust

The Eurasian Credit Trust is a bank. Since it is registered in Monaco, its officers are secret. The Eurasian Credit Trust is a shady organization, possibly involved in the heroin trade. It was likely the source for financial backing of the assassination attempts against Stambulsky, because he was too successful at helping the Bulgarian economy. If the value of the Bulgarian currency continued to rise, the bank would lose money. When Latimer discovers that the Dimitrios is still alive, he learns that Dimitrios is on the board of the Eurasian Credit Trust.





## La Viérge St. Marie

La Viérge St. Marie is a nightclub owned by Irana Preveza, and Dimitrios and Marukakis go there to find information about Dimitrios.

## Villa Acacias

The Villa Acacias is Grodek's house near Geneva, in Switzerland. Latimer comes to the Villa Acacias to meet with Grodek, a former spy, and learn about Dimitrios's foray into espionage in Belgrade in 1926.

## Belgrade

In Belgrade in 1926, Dimitrios participates in an espionage scheme run by Grodek to steal plans to mines off the coast of Yugoslavia for the Italian government. Dimitrios double-crosses Grodek.

## Alessandro's

Grodek and Dimitrios lure Bulić into coming to Alessandro's gambling house and gambling away all his earnings, plus money he does not have. Once Bulić is in debt from the crooked gambling house, Dimitrios is in a position to ask Bulić to steal the plans to Yugoslavia's mines for him.

## Impasse des Huit Anges

The Impasse des Huit Anges is a run-down, dead-end courtyard where Peters lives in Paris. The houses were originally owned by Dimitrios, but in Peters' name. Peters transferred ownership of the courtyard to another name and believes that Dimitrios cannot track him to the empty houses. However, Dimitrios sees through Peters' ploy and catches Peters and Latimer at number 3, Impasse des Huit Anges.

## Peters' Apartment

Peters' apartment in the Impasse des Huit Anges is ostentatiously decorated in a Moroccan theme. It contains a passageway that leads outside and across to the next door house. Dimitrios makes his way into Peters' apartment through the passageway.



## **Le Kasbah Parisien**

Le Kasbah Parisien is the Moroccan-themed nightclub co-owned by Peters and Giraud, which Dimitrios uses as a cover for transporting women through France for the sex trade.

## **The Hotel Room**

Peters arranges to meet Dimitrios in a hotel room to blackmail him.



# Themes

## Civilization versus Violence

Latimer is a civilized man from a civilized society. He comes from a university, a bastion of thought and consideration. He writes moralistic detective stories, where the world is neat and tidy, detectives use logic and intellect, and where villains and murderers get their just punishments. The worldview of Latimer is embodied by the League of Nations, which comes to the humanitarian rescue of dying Greek refugees from Turkey, indicating that reason and humanity can conquer war and tragedy.

Dimitrios is the literary foil of Latimer; his opposite. Dimitrios represents the uncivilized, violent, animalistic nature of man. He is spawned in the midst of horrors inflicted by man against man. Dimitrios's worldview is not one of cooperation. Instead, Dimitrios lives for himself alone, and he is willing to stab anyone in the back to protect himself. He murders and robs to gain the money to leave Smyrna for Greece, and then he robs and commits attempted murder again. He is out for only himself, and he has no compunctions against violence. In fact, Dimitrios has no moral code to govern his behavior. His only code is self-benefit.

One of the reasons Latimer is so curious about Dimitrios is that Dimitrios is so foreign to Latimer's world. The lawless world of Dimitrios is the mirror image of the law-abiding world of Latimer. Because Dimitrios is completely lawless, there is nothing Latimer can do to stop or contain Dimitrios. He cannot be reasoned with or corrected. He cannot be held or contained. The only solution for Dimitrios is destruction. He must have his coffin. The violent and lawless side of humanity must self-destruct.

## Predestination

In the beginning of the novel, the narrator relates Latimer's background, but he also comments on the bizarre coincidence of a man like Latimer becoming involved with a man like Dimitrios. He downplays the idea that it could be the contrived workings of a higher power, but he notes that the story is dependent on a bizarre string of coincidences. The introduction leaves the reader with a feeling that, although the reason is incomprehensible, the role of Latimer in Dimitrios's life, and vice versa, is somehow predestined.

When Latimer meets Mr. Peters, Peters tells Latimer about his philosophy of the universe, and that philosophy is one of predestination. A higher power governs everyone's actions, and understands that criminals cannot help being criminals. Peters can only behave in the way he is meant to behave, and no one can understand the mysterious reasons of the creator. In a way, Peters' theory of predestination can be applied to Latimer and Dimitrios. Latimer is a product of his society. His morality and



civilization is learned. In a similar way, Dimitrios is a product of a savage, deadly society. His violent nature is learned.

When Latimer talks to the communist journalist Marukakis, the journalist claims that Dimitrios is an argument for communist theory. He is the product of a dysfunctional society that oppresses the masses. Marxist theory itself is a kind of predestination, based on the idea that a revolution of the masses is inevitable. The book seems to theorize that social change is inevitable, probably not a communist revolution, but the self-destruction of the violent world of Dimitrios and the emergence of the cooperative, law-abiding civilization of Latimer.

## Justice

Latimer's detective novels portray a perfect justice. A criminal commits a crime, and a moral detective works to bring the criminal to justice. A murderer is proved responsible for his crime and put to death. Justice is clean, neat, and clear-cut. When Latimer enters the underworld of crime, the idea of justice becomes much less clear. The drug dealers who were arrested and sent to jail received minimum sentences. Dimitrios was able to play on the prejudices of the police to get away with murder and frame a black coworker. Latimer finds that he cannot go to the police and turn in Dimitrios. He tries, and the police seem more concerned with whether Latimer is carrying his identity papers than with a serious crime like blackmail.

Latimer himself becomes a less clear-cut character as the novel progresses. Latimer escapes back to his normal life at the end, with no punishment. However, Latimer has participated in blackmail, something that he considers reprehensible. He also left Dimitrios alone with Peters, even though Dimitrios warned Latimer that Peters would kill him. Latimer knew that Peters hated Dimitrios.

On some level, Latimer must have known that Peters would kill Dimitrios, if only out of fear and self-defense. Latimer is afraid of Dimitrios. He is horrified by the depth of immorality and selfish violence of the man. Perhaps Latimer has decided that Dimitrios must finally have his coffin. This is a unilateral decision, not a cooperative decision of humanity or of a jury of twelve peers, and it makes Latimer a party to murder. Still, he remains unscathed. Instead of receiving justice, the violent die by violence. The police look the other way, and the civilized Latimer goes back to his civilization.



# Style

## Point of View

The novel is from a third person limited omniscient perspective. Throughout most of the story, the narrator is objective, telling the story from the point of view of Latimer. The tale of Dimitrios unfolds as Latimer finds out more about the criminal. As in many detective stories, the reader is able to follow along as the detective slowly uncovers the truth of the mystery. The detective is a surrogate, and the reader gets the thrill of slowly uncovering secrets.

The novel changes point of view at times to tell events in an epistolary manner or to narrate historic events from an objective third person viewpoint. The events of the Turkish holocaust of Armenians in Smyrna is told objectively, breaking out of Latimer's point of view to detail events that Latimer did not witness. The spy Grodek tells a lengthy tale to Latimer, and Latimer relates this story in an epistolary form in a letter. Again, this tale is not part of Latimer's experience, and like Latimer, the reader hears it only second hand. Latimer reads the translated documents relating to the man Dimitrios set up for murder in Smyrna, and he reads articles about the drug ring being broken up after Dimitrios gives his cohorts over to the police.

Additionally, at the beginning of the novel, the narrator breaks out of his objective role and talks directly to the audience. In the beginning of the novel, the unnamed narrator, who speaks with complete omniscience, tells the reader what to expect from the upcoming novel. He comments on the oddness of the coincidence of Latimer becoming involved with Dimitrios. The narrator, omniscient and unnamed, theorizing on the possibility of a higher power and the contrived coincidences of the story is ironic, since the possible identities of the unnamed narrator are the writer, or perhaps a higher power.

## Setting

The story begins in Turkey and leads Latimer to Greece and France. Latimer is an Englishman, and the foreign setting makes the story of Dimitrios exotic. More than that, Latimer is a stolid, average person living in a world where drug smugglers, assassins, and spies do not exist. Latimer's only involvement in crime is fictional. When he travels into Dimitrios's world, he is traveling into an underworld, a criminal world that is completely foreign to Latimer.

Elements such as Mr. Peters' strange Moroccan decorating make the world seem foreign throughout the story, keeping Latimer off kilter. The empty, abandoned houses where Mr. Peters lives, as well as the secret passages between them, are unsettling. The cold and unimaginative Colonel Haki with his disturbing association with torture and the strangeness of the retired spy with his Siamese cats both contribute in a similar way



to the Wonderland feeling of a normal man torn from his normal world and immersed in a bizarre world of crime.

Dimitrios's story is also combined with actual political events, grounding it in reality at the same time as Latimer is thrust into an unreal-seeming world. The Armenian holocaust in Turkey creates a bloody backdrop for the emergence of Dimitrios and his first murder. Dimitrios is a bloodthirsty man, and he is born of a bloodthirsty world. The journalist who helps Latimer in Greece is a socialist, and in some ways the story of Dimitrios reflects the journalist's belief that the criminal Dimitrios can only be explained by the social forces of oppression. Dimitrios is a close-up view of one man's story within the context of the political world.

## Language and Meaning

Eric Ambler uses language, and particularly naming, to make distinctions between characters in his novel, contrasting the uncivilized underworld with the civilized world of Latimer. Peters, for example, a philosophical criminal, is always referred to as Mr. Peters, creating a sense of formality that separates him from the other characters. Marukakis and other sympathetic characters are referred to more informally, by their last names only. Referring to Peters as "Mr. Peters" keeps him distant from Latimer, just as Latimer is distant from the criminal world that Peters inhabits. Similarly, Colonel Haki is referred to along with his title. He is a distant, suspicious character.

Dimitrios, however, is known by his first name. In part, this is because Dimitrios changes names so often, but it also makes him a close and familiar character, perhaps uncomfortably familiar, considering his nature. Latimer, the polar opposite of Dimitrios, feels a fascination with him which creates a bond between them. This bond is accentuated by the familiar use of Dimitrios's first name.

Latimer, Marukakis, and other likeable, moral characters, as well as neutral characters, are referred to by their last name alone. The use of the last name alone is friendly but also creates a comfortable distance, like polite people who do not stand too close together on a train. The balance of distance and familiarity is civilized, the mark of Latimer's character.

## Structure

In the beginning of the novel, the narrator introduces Latimer and his past, and through this introduction, the narrator portrays the normal, civilized, law-abiding world of Latimer. This is the world of the reader as well, and it is a world that the reader will be leaving, along with Latimer. The novel starts in Turkey, a country portrayed as not fully civilized. The head of the secret police seems to have a history of torture and little concern with finding a murderer. Latimer enters Turkey, and through this foreign land, he enters an underworld of criminality. Latimer learns of the murderer Dimitrios, and he begins a journey to retrace Dimitrios's steps.



The novel moves in time and space through Dimitrios's life, as Latimer retraces Dimitrios's steps, beginning in Smyrna, moving to Greece, then to Sophia. Latimer does not follow Dimitrios's path from Sophia geographically, because he is diverted by Peters. Peters is able to point Latimer to the information that reveals Dimitrios's next activities, but this geographic diversion is also a symbolic change in the story. Latimer is moved away from an intellectual exercise in following Dimitrios's footsteps and brought into Peters' control.

Latimer continues on to Paris, but instead of merely following Dimitrios's path, he is now following the lead of Peters. Latimer becomes completely embroiled in Dimitrios's underworld, led into blackmail. Although Latimer escapes seemingly unscathed in the end, back to his normal, civilized world, he has been involved in blackmail and murder, marked by crime.



## Quotes

"The important thing to know about an assassination or an attempted assassination is not who fired the shot, but who paid for the bullet." —Colonel Haki, Chapter 2, p. 23.

"By the time that dawn broke on the fifteenth of September, over one hundred and twenty thousand persons had perished; but somewhere amidst that horror had been Dimitrios, alive." —Chapter 3, p. 38.

"One cannot fight against one's Destiny. If the Great One wills that we shall do unpleasant things, depend upon it that He has a purpose even though that purpose is not always clear to us." —Mr. Peters, Chapter 4, p. 70.

"His face was smooth and oval and pale and he had very brown, anxious eyes that made you think of a doctor's eyes when he is doing something to you that hurts. He frightened me." —Irana Preveza describing Dimitrios, Chapter 6, p. 107.

"'What the hell does this mean?' he demanded harshly and then swore. It was not what he had intended to say and he was a man who rarely swore." —Chapter 7, p. 118.

"He tried to remember at exactly what point in their encounter Mr. Peters had changed his tactics so abruptly. He had an idea that it had been when he had said something about having seen Dimitrios in the mortuary. But there could surely be nothing in that." —Chapter 8, p. 147.

"It is such a poor story, isn't it? There is no hero, no heroine; there are only knaves and fools. Or do I mean only fools?" —Latimer's letter to Marukakis, Chapter 9, p. 179.

"Mr. Peters put away his pistol wearily. 'Mr. Latimer, this is not a detective story. There is no need to be so stupid.'" —Chapter 10, p. 191.

"We go on year after year, ever seeking, ever hoping—for what? We do not know. Money? Only when we have little. I sometimes think that he who has only a crust is happier than many millionaires. For the man with a crust knows what he wants—two crusts. His life is not complicated by possessions." —Mr. Peters, Chapter 11, p. 198.

"Latimer considered him for a moment. Then he said: 'Has it occurred to you that I might not want that particular three thousand pounds? I think, my friend, that prolonged association with criminals has made it difficult for you to follow some trains of thought.'" —Chapter 12, p. 246.

"It made no difference to remind oneself that Dimitrios was a criminal. Blackmail was blackmail, just as murder was murder. Macbeth would probably have hesitated at the last minute to kill a criminal Duncan just as much as he hesitated to kill the Duncan whose virtues pleaded like angels. Fortunately, or unfortunately, he, Latimer, had a lady Macbeth in the person of Mr Peters. He decided to go out for breakfast." —Chapter 13, p. 258.





"A man's features, the bone structure and the tissue which covers it, are the product of a biological process; but his face he creates for himself." —Chapter 14, p. 269.

"Can one explain Dimitrios, or must one turn away disgusted and defeated? I am tempted to find reason and justice in the fact that he died as violently and indecently as he lived. But that is too ingenuous a way out. It does not explain Dimitrios; it only apologizes for him." —Marukakis's letter to Latimer, Chapter 15, p. 303.



## Topics for Discussion

Does Charles Latimer ever learn anything that explains Dimitrios's criminal nature? Why might Dimitrios be such a hardened criminal?

How does Mr. Peters explain away or apologize for his criminal behavior? Does Mr. Peters really believe the philosophy he espouses and discloses to Latimer?

Why does Charles Latimer agree to help Mr. Peters blackmail Dimitrios? What could Latimer have done instead?

Why is Charles Latimer so interested in finding out about Dimitrios? What is his motivation for investigating the criminal?

Will Charles Latimer be able to go back to his normal life as a mystery writer? Has his experience investigating Dimitrios changed him at all?

When Latimer leaves to get the police, does he know on some level that Mr. Peters is planning on shooting Dimitrios? What other choices does Latimer have at this point in the story?

Is Dimitrios admirable in any way? Why or why not?