

# **Night Soldiers Study Guide**

## **Night Soldiers by Alan Furst**

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



# Contents

<a href="#">Night Soldiers Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Chapter One.....</a>	<a href="#">6</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Two.....</a>	<a href="#">9</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Three.....</a>	<a href="#">12</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Four.....</a>	<a href="#">15</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Five.....</a>	<a href="#">19</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">24</a>
<a href="#">Objects/Places.....</a>	<a href="#">28</a>
<a href="#">Themes.....</a>	<a href="#">30</a>
<a href="#">Style.....</a>	<a href="#">32</a>
<a href="#">Quotes.....</a>	<a href="#">35</a>
<a href="#">Topics for Discussion.....</a>	<a href="#">37</a>



# Plot Summary

Night Soldiers, by Alan Furst, is the fictional story of a group of Soviet trained spies who attend espionage training in Moscow, form a secret bond signified by BF 825, then follows their lives from pre-World War II to the months immediately after the war's end. The story centers on the main character, Khristo Stoianev.

Khristo is nineteen years old and living in Vidin Bulgaria when his brother is kicked to death by a local fascist militia. Soon afterwards, Khristo decides to leave the village where he was born and travels to Moscow with Antipin, a Soviet espionage agent and recruiter.

At the school, Khristo is placed in a unit with several other agents. The men form a bond, naming themselves BF 825, which refers to a training exercise where their unit, 8, should have been named the winner.

Khristo's comrades are Kulic, Voluta, and Goldman. These men are trained in espionage and counterintelligence and are manipulated by their teachers in cruel and horrifying ways. The men become cold and jaded through their experiences, but feel a bond towards each other. Khristo realizes through a series of events at the school that he is irrevocably trapped as a Soviet agent, and that he cannot go home again, cannot trust anyone, and cannot ever escape.

When Khristo is sent into the field, his partner is Sascha. Sascha and Khristo are assigned to work with a man named Andres in Spain, who is feeding information to the Soviets regarding several anarchist groups in Madrid. Madrid is under siege. Sascha is recalled to Moscow because his supervisors are not pleased with his production. Sascha is tortured and then sent to Siberia for a thirty-year sentence. Khristo is directed to get more information out of Andres, or he will face a similar fate. Khristo works with Goldman and Andres on several missions within Madrid. During this time in Madrid, Khristo meets Andres's American girlfriend, Faye Berns, and is impressed with her.

Khristo and Andres are betrayed by the Soviets, but alerted in time by Kulic so they can escape. After a long and difficult journey, Khristo ends up in France. Andres and Faye end up in another part of France. He believes he is finally free from the Soviet grip. He becomes a waiter at an elegant and popular dining club in Paris.

Khristo cannot hide the fact that he is a man set apart from other men because of his training and experience in killing. His headwaiter is a savvy Parisian man who has also emigrated from Bulgaria, and he taps Khristo to become involved in a scheme to steal gold from the Soviets in Paris. The plan is executed well until Khristo stops being involved in it, then it falls apart quickly.

Khristo falls in love with a woman named Aleksandra, and as the Soviets begin hunting down the members of the Bulgarian scheme, Aleksandra is kidnapped from Khristo's apartment. He never sees her again. There is a brief reunion with Faye Berns, who tells



him Andres died and that she is on her way back to America. Khristo is arrested through a deal between the English and French secret services, and begins a life term in French prison. While there, he receives a letter from Faye, saying she is re-entering her life in America. A letter from Goldman indicates he will do what he can to save Aleksandra, but Khristo is never to see her again.

While Khristo is in Paris, Sascha is working his way up from laborer to clerk in the Siberian gulag. Kulic is fighting for the Soviets, but is soon betrayed and set up to be killed. Voluta has escaped from the Soviets and is aiding Poland as a Roman Catholic priest. Goldman is working his way through the ranks of the NKVD.

Robert Eidenbaugh, an American in New York City, is recruited to work for the OSS. He is sent to France, where he is assigned to work with the local resistance fighters.

After three years in prison, it is late in the War, and Khristo receives a cryptic message from BF 825. A few nights later he is led from the prison by a priest and begins his escape from France. Along the way he befriends two sisters, who are running away to a small cottage in the mountains of France. He joins them and is safe from pursuit for a few months. Khristo is never truly able to disguise the fact that he is a trained killer, and is soon recruited by the local resistance to join their group, under Eidenbaugh's command. Eidenbaugh receives his direction from a man named Ulysse. The resistance group wreaks havoc for the Germans in the area of Cambras, France, and later Ulysse pulls the most qualified men to ramp up the espionage and sabotage in an area close by.

One night the team is betrayed, and all but Khristo and Eidenbaugh are killed in a violent attack. Ulysse decides it is time to send Eidenbaugh to America and Khristo to Switzerland.

Goldman has lost favor with the Soviets and is now in charge of interviewing political prisoners in Siberia. There he meets Sascha, who has compiled a large detailed cache of information about Soviets and is willing to give this information to the Allies in return for freedom. Sascha threatens Goldman with revealing the BF 825 conspiracy, so Goldman arranges for Sascha to be transferred to a prison where he can easily escape. Word is sent to Voluta, who is exhausted and in Poland.

Khristo is sent to Prague to gather information there for the OSS. Khristo finds Prague to be horribly dirty and depressing, and he begins to lose his way. One day he is contacted by the BF 825 network and is informed that he is needed to retrieve Sascha for the OSS. During a set up meeting for Khristo and Voluta, Voluta is murdered and Khristo must flee Prague.

Khristo's flight from Prague involves walking hundreds of miles and near starvation. Finally he makes a connection with a defecting German soldier and is able to move down the river faster by rowboat. As the rowboat drifts by a partially sunken barge, Khristo sees BF 825 painted on the side of it. This leads him to Kulic, who is managing



a group of resistance fighters. Through Kulic's connections, weeks later Khristo is at the town where Sascha is supposed to be retrieved by the Americans.

Khristo goes into the old church where Sascha is hiding, and Sascha accidentally shoots him. Sascha commandeers a taxi and the two men are able to meet up with the American contact and are both flown to freedom.

A few months later, a ship lands in New York, and Khristo steps off. There to meet him is Faye Berns.



# Chapter One

## Chapter One Summary

It is 1934 in Bulgaria, in the town of Vidin. Khristo Stoianev and his younger brother Nikko are watching a march by the local fascist militia. Khristo is nineteen and Nikko is fifteen; the two boys have lived in the village all their lives. The militia is newly formed, and they are proud of their uniforms displaying the Nazi symbols. Their hats are conical and adorned with goose feathers. The locals call them Levitzky's Geese, but not to the faces of these militia men, because the men have created an aura of fear about them and their organization. It is an autumn evening, and the brothers have paused on their way back from the bread maker to watch the march. As the militia approach, the brothers are reminded of the geese reference and struggle to keep from laughing at the display. Just before the men reach the spot where the brothers are standing, a stray chicken enters the road and will not move. The militia make the unspoken decision to keep marching, and the chicken gets tangled up in the men's legs, tripping some of them. When the brothers laugh, the man in charge, who had given himself the rank of colonel, faces them. There is a verbal confrontation, and just as it seems to be over, Nikko cannot resist calling the colonel a dog's prick. The two boys are then attacked by the entire militia and Nikko is kicked to death. Khristo is made to watch him die.

The idea of having marches had been introduced to the Bulgarian National Union in Vidin by a German man who had arrived for a visit, carrying literature and movies about Nazi Germany. Soon after Nikko was murdered, another man arrived in town. Antipin came from Soviet Russia, and did not distribute brochures, but spoke to the men of the village as if he were one of them. Antipin soon gained the respect of most of the villagers, and many of them often met at a local café to discuss issues of the day. Antipin spoke to them of independence from landlords and freedom from taxes and oppression.

One night as they are all talking, a window is broken and someone throws a fire into the room. As the men try to leave through the door, they quickly realize the door has been nailed shut. Khristo and Antipin find a way to escape the house through the kitchen and call the others to follow. When the men are standing outside, watching the building burn down, the local policeman approaches them. Encouraged by the men who caused the fire, he arrests Antipin. Antipin punches the policeman and sends him back to the group, telling them they will soon have dirt in their mouths, meaning they will die.

Antipin and Khristo walk away from their fellow survivors, and Antipin encourages Khristo to leave the village and come with him back to Russia. Khristo understands that if he stays in Vidin, he will be next to be murdered, and his family will be in danger as well. The two men agree to leave the next morning. An old fisherman who had been in the house that burned appears at the police house the next morning to make sure the authorities did not think he was part of the communists. The militia listened to his story,



then take him to the basement to torture him for more information. The militia men are choosing their ideology above all else, even their loyalty to the people of their village.

After telling his family farewell, Khristo joins Antipin. The men navigate a small boat on the river, beginning a voyage that will end in Moscow. Along the way, Khristo learns from Antipin that he will begin training to be an agent for the Soviets. When they arrive in Moscow, Khristo begins his studies. It turns out he is an excellent student in the craft of spying. He continues to learn and do well at his studies. He finds a lover, Marike, and adjusts quickly to Russian life. Khristo learns to question everything, including every act by everyone he knows. He is amused to be learning these new skills and to be in a city for the first time in his life. He has always dreamed of Paris and Vienna. Khristo is a favorite of his spy school instructors. The man tries to warn Khristo of the dangers all around him.

One night, soon after learning chess from his spy school instructor, Khristo is awoken and taken to meet a man named Sascha. He and Sascha get into a vehicle and go through the streets of Moscow in the snow. When they arrive at a big building, they go down many hallways until they reach a door. Sascha and Khristo enter the room and Khristo must kill the German spy they have found. It is his lover Marike. Khristo shoots her. When he returns to the school, he sees his spy school instructor pulled from the building and taken away. That day he receives a letter from his family, and when he reads between the lines he knows he can never go home again.

Khristo accepts his fate as a member of the Soviet Union legions of spies. He has a group of fellow spies who accompany him through the various studies and exercises. The school has a week in Belov, a small town that has been cleaned of its residents to allow this training, and the students learn how to compete against each other using bribery, manipulation, cheating and stealth. Khristo makes a lasting impression on his supervisors as he moves through his school. When the students return, there are continuing occurrences where Khristo learns that he belongs to the Soviets, that he has no choice, and that he must keep all his thoughts to himself and to guard everything he says to anyone.

The young men at the spy school on Arbat Street in Moscow form a brotherhood. There is Khristo, Kulic, Goldman and Voluta. At Belov, these men work together as Unit 8, and consistently beat the other units; however, at the end of the week, the unit chosen for first place is Unit 2, made up of known ingratiating spies, pets of the commanders. On the train on the way home, Kulic and Khristo discuss this quietly with each other, and Kulic carves some letters and numbers into the train, BF825 - Brotherhood Front and 8,2,5, the proper order for the unit finish.

Sascha comes again to get Khristo, and this time Khristo realizes school is over and it is time to begin using his training. There is an announcement by the Soviets that their government is sending engineers and health workers into Spain for assistance. It is the beginning of the Spanish Civil War.



## Chapter One Analysis

The author uses this chapter to introduce most of the major characters of the novel and to create the atmosphere of daily life for Soviet espionage agents. The Soviet Union was newly formed, and communism appeared to be a workable ideology to men like Khristo, who lived in feudal systems in Eastern Europe, soon to be overrun by Germans and fascists. The brutal and senseless murder of Khristo's brother inspires him to enter a career of espionage, trained by that era's masters of counterintelligence, the Soviets.

The author's use of political facts, geographic descriptions and repeated acts of betrayal and brutality create the world of a man who is trapped by his recruiters. Systematically, with a ruthless logic, Khristo is cut off from his family and his lover, and he forms a desperate bond with his fellow agents in the training school. An innocent code of BF 825 is created by Kulic to ease their disappointment in coming in second place. This code begins a thread that weaves itself through the rest of their lives.

Khristo's life becomes one of suspicion, betrayal, assassination, murder, sabotage and fear. Through a series of violent deaths, attacks, and rumors, the author paints a picture of Khristo trapped by his Soviet puppet masters, never allowed to feel good about this work or himself, always on the verge of being recalled to Moscow, caught by his enemies or murdered himself.

The author uses the bitter cold of a Moscow winter to accentuate the icy world of espionage. The men of BF 825 are taught never to feel comfortable, never to trust anyone above or below them. This creates a constant wariness, and the men are always looking over their shoulders. BF 825 begins innocently as a code name used in caring for a stray dog. The men who created it have no idea how it will mean so much more in their lives.

The author often brings very minor characters into the story as a plot device. Although memorable, these characters are never seen again. The old fisherman who is tortured after going to the police is an example of cold indifference for human life and a relentless searching for more information. The German propaganda official who precedes Antipin into Vidin serves as a basis for comparison of political views of the village.

Khristo seems born to be a spy, with his reserved ways, his lack of real ties to his village, and his unresolved anger at oppression. It comes as no surprise to the reader that he excels in all aspects of the espionage training school.





# Chapter Two

## Chapter Two Summary

It is October of 1936, in the town of San Ximene, Spain. The Aguilar family and its descendents have owned all the property for centuries. In July, there had been a revolution, and now the Aguilar family is held under house arrest and the village is governed by an uneasy alliance between the socialists/communists and the Marxists. Not much is being accomplished, but there are many meetings. A convalescing, wealthy draftsman named Andres, who has business in Tarragona, is allowed to continue his business without interruption because the government needs the funds he brings to the town. Often, two of his clerks from Tarragona come by car to consult with him. Most of the town think these two men are French, but one of the communists knows they are Russian. The surrounding area is a hard scrabble sort of land, where the produce is sufficient but not succulent, and the people good but not kind.

These clerks are Khristo and Sascha, and their business is spying. Andres Cardona is their informant, a man who was living in Madrid and had infiltrated a few local anarchist groups. Sascha and Khristo make the long drives to visit Andres because it is part of their handling of this man. They do not know that Andres is working for many sides in this war.

Khristo and Sascha have just finished a long visit with Andres, but have not learned anything that will make their supervisors any happier. Andres had attempted to arrange for an armory to be bombed, but someone removed his blue lantern signal before the bombing could be accomplished. Sascha tells Andres to find out what happened, and then to take photos of the Soviet tanks entering Madrid. As Khristo drives them home, through the small villages of Spain, Sascha hints that he won't be around much longer and asks Khristo to take care of Andres, who is actually Armenian. Their return home is delayed several hours as they are forced by the local police to participate in a rescue mission of a train that has been bombed by the Germans. When the two men return to their car, exhausted, Sascha tells Khristo he has been recalled to Moscow and will probably be killed.

In Madrid, Faye Burns is an American from New York who has come to Spain to fight with the resistance. She lives in a building in downtown Madrid with her lover, Andres, his friend Renata, and a Belgian journalist named Felix. At night they take turns on guard duty on the roof because the Nationalist Party is attacking the city. The attacking forces claim they have four columns of soldiers, but the victory will come from the fifth column, meaning from their spies on the inside of Madrid. It is about two hours before Faye is scheduled to begin guard duty, but she cannot sleep and her lover is away from town, so she goes up to the roof and joins Renata and Felix.

That night, Faye and Renata are talking, and they notice a blue light on a building top a few streets away. Faye takes a gun to go investigate and goes up the stairs to the roof.



The door to the roof is chained and locked, and she is surprised to see her own combination lock, which has disappeared from her belongings recently, on the door. She opens the door, finds the blue light is a lantern with a blue covering, and blows out the flame. Faye grabs the lantern and runs back to her own building.

Soon after, a lone German plane comes in low over Madrid. Luftwaffe pilot Luders has a bomb to drop on the building with a blue light, but when he gets close to the light, two women manning a machine gun shoot his plane, hitting his foot and his gas tank. He drops the bomb but in the wrong place, makes a forced landing, and some peasants kill him.

Lt. Drazen Kulic, Khristo's closest friend in spy school, is in charge of a badly organized and underequipped guerilla band that is sent by the Soviets to make strategic explosions in the city. When they are not on a mission, the men hide out in the foothills in an ancient village. One day Matsaev, the Soviet embassy political officer, comes to see him there and gives him a paper with the names of four of Kulic's fighters on it. Kulic is instructed to kill these men, or else Kulic and all of his men will be killed. Kulic orders the four men to come with him to collect firewood, and then he fires four shots into the air, telling the men to make a run for it. Kulic takes awhile to return to the camp of his men, and inscribes the letters BF 825 on a nearby tree. The four men who are allowed to leave unharmed are later captured and tortured, and Kulic's act of mercy is discovered. Kulic and his men are then sent on a suicide mission. Kulic is badly injured and his team is destroyed.

Sascha returns to Moscow and is told he will receive the Order of Lenin, and he is to return to work with a promotion in Moscow. Sascha relaxes his guard, begins to believe he is safe, and it was all a mistake. This is exactly what his supervisors want, and as soon as he feels safe again, Sascha is abducted in the middle of the night, tortured, and forced to tell them everything he knows. Soon afterwards, Khristo is called to task by Sascha's supervisor, Bloch, and only escapes being sent to Moscow himself for a similar fate by pleading with Bloch to assist him to become a better spy. Khristo is ordered to lean harder on Andres than Sascha did. Khristo's new partner is Lubin, who is connected to the high officials through his father.

Lubin is the type of man who blindly follows all orders, even if they do not make sense, and Khristo is very frustrated with his new partner. He has no idea what has happened to Sascha, and assumes he is dead. Khristo does his work because he has no other choice.

Khristo goes to Andres's apartment and meets Faye and Renata. Khristo, Goldman and Andres are involved in an attack upon the deserted Finnish Embassy, and Khristo realizes he is growing tired of these operations. He and Andres decide to get drunk that night. They are playing cribbage with Faye and Renata when the phone rings. Goldman tells them they have about twenty minutes before Matsaev comes to arrest them.

The four leave immediately, and spend hours trying to get out of Madrid. The city is under siege, and there are soldiers of every army on every street. Exhausted and



frightened, they keep running and finally end up finding a sea captain who will take them to France. Their arrival in France involves them jumping off the boat and wading to shore. At the fishing village a policeman finds them and places the entire group under arrest.

In the summer of 1938, San Ximene is liberated from the communists by the Nationalist Party, the mayors shot, and the Aguilars returned to their homes. The experiment of running the town by committee has ended.

## Chapter Two Analysis

In times of great conflict, of wars and strife, people of every economic and social strata are thrown together. Faye is a Jewish American young woman, living with a much older Armenian spy she believes is a French resistance fighter. Khristo is a Bulgarian national pressed into service by the Soviets. Moving the story from frigid Moscow to the warm hills of Spain lulls the reader briefly into thinking life might become better for Khristo. Just as he is growing comfortable with Sascha as his partner and learning his trade in the field, Khristo finds himself begging not to be recalled to Moscow as Sascha was, and forced into taking more risks to make his Soviet masters happy with him again. His situation is doomed, of course, because the Soviets are unforgiving about mistakes. Just as he is about to be arrested, one of the BF 825 warns him to escape. The escape from Madrid involves four very diverse characters, and the description of their trials and fear is exhausting. Then, as soon as they emerge on French soil, they are captured.

Sascha is played, and played well, allowed to believe that the recall was a huge misunderstanding and he is in the arms of his beloved supervisors. A week later he is hauled away in the middle of the night and tortured for information. The skill, cunning and logic of the Soviet secret service is terrifying.



# Chapter Three

## Chapter Three Summary

It is Paris in 1937, and Khristo has found work in an elegant restaurant as a waiter. He works for a Bulgarian expatriate named Omaraeff, who is the headwaiter. Khristo's good looks and reserve make him very popular with the restaurant customers. Khristo finds the elegance and decadence a far cry from the life he lived in Bulgaria. The customers in the restaurant are glamorous and wealthy people from America and European countries, and each night they drink heavily, eat sumptuously, and play out intrigues with each other as lovers and friends.

Khristo thinks of his arrival in France, how he and the others were placed in internment camps until the French government could decide what to do with them. Khristo met a man named Vladi Z. who gave Khristo the name of Omaraeff, the head waiter. While in the camp, Khristo changed his name to Nikko Petrov, and he changed his nationality to Russian. Khristo attempts to hide his true identity in case the Soviets come looking for their missing spy. One night a man comes to Khristo while he is working and offers him a business card, saying he wanted to photograph Khristo. The man is Roger Fitzware, and Khristo is not aware this man is with the British secret service. Khristo decides not to call him.

Khristo's life in Paris is the one he has dreamed of all his life. He is not a spy, but a man who works for a living, comes home to a wonderful woman, and keeps his secrets. Khristo's girlfriend Aleksandra is a mysterious, beautiful woman who thinks up different ways to seduce him each night. Khristo has not forgotten his training, and is very careful not to follow routines, to keep his acquaintances superficial, and even Aleksandra does not know his real name. One evening Omaraeff, who has never been fooled by Khristo's assumed identity, asks Khristo to purchase a gun for him.

This is the beginning of an elaborate scheme where Omaraeff plans to disrupt the Soviets by stealing briefcases from their couriers. Omaraeff knows these briefcases contain gold. Omaraeff is Bulgarian and wants revenge for his country. He asks Khristo to purchase a gun for him and then arrange for surveillance of these couriers. Khristo agrees to help with the surveillance, but tells Omaraeff that is all he will do in the plot. Omaraeff is happy to have such an experienced partner. Khristo does his part, then backs away. When Omaraeff attempts to steal the satchel from one of the couriers, a Bulgarian man is killed and the police begin taking a second look at the immigrants in Paris.

A small group of local thugs have been joined by a mysterious man named Barbette, who has access to money and weapons. Barbette takes two of the thugs with him to the restaurant. They create a distraction with their machine guns while he kills Omaraeff and escapes. A number of events occur that begin to bother Khristo. A new tenant arrives in the building where he and Aleksandra have their apartment. He meets with



Goldman in a cemetery and as he leaves, there is a blind veteran that has a cultured voice. Kerényi, one of his comrades from the spy school, is killed. Then there is Omaraeff's botched attempt to attack the Soviets, and a few nights later three gangsters come to the restaurant and Omaraeff is killed. When Khristo and Goldman meet, Khristo learns that the German spy in the spy school was not Marike but Voluta. Goldman asks Khristo to give him any information he receives, and Khristo says he wants to continue his life without spying anymore.

When Khristo returns to his apartment, Aleksandra is not there, and he assumes she has gone to the theater without him. After a few hours, he realizes that what has really happened is that the Soviets have taken her. He reexamines the apartment and finds four deep marks in the wood near the door, where her fingernails dug in to keep her from being pulled out. Khristo contacts Goldman and asks that Aleksandra be returned. Goldman says he doubts there is anything he can do. Khristo realizes he is now being followed. While in the bookstore where Aleksandra used to work, Khristo runs into Faye Berns. Faye tells him that Andres has died of an unknown fever, and she is going back to America. Faye and Khristo have a strong attachment to each other, but the timing is very wrong.

Fitzware is having lunch with Theaud, his equal from the French secret service. Fitzware tells Theaud about the intricacies of Omaraeff, Goldman and Khristo. This is not good news to Theaud, whose government is now on great terms with the Soviets. Fitzware suggests that Theaud just pull Khristo in and not allow the rest of the story to be told in public. Khristo is arrested, given a short trial, and sentenced to life in prison.

While in prison, Khristo receives a cryptic note from Goldman, indicating that Aleksandra is alive, but Khristo should never again try to contact her. He receives a letter from Faye, who is about to marry and become a wife and mother in America. Khristo reflects that two women who were important to him are now completely out of his life.

Sascha is in a Siberian gold mining operation, where he has worked his way up under horrible conditions from a common laborer to a clerk. He survived his torture, was sentenced to thirty years of hard labor, and is working daily on his plan for revenge against the Soviets who put him here. He still writes poems, thinks of the past, and whenever someone new comes to the gulag, he slowly but surely extracts all the information they can give him, and keeps secret records that he knows will someday be his ticket to freedom.

## Chapter Three Analysis

Khristo has always dreamed of Paris, and now he is in the city, working as a common man, with a good job and an exciting lover, Aleksandra. But Khristo's training and bearing will always be an indicator to those who are watching him closely that he is not a waiter by trade. He is brought into schemes, he is introduced to other Bulgarian expatriates, and it seems he cannot hide from his training.



The long, intricate arm of the Soviet spy system has found Khristo, even though he is using another name and employing all his trade secrets to prevent exposing himself. His future and life are being used as pawns between the forces of the secret services of France, England and the Soviet Union.

A series of events foreshadow the end of Khristo's happy existence in Paris. A new roomer at the boarding house, a botched resistance attempt against the Soviets, and a meeting with Goldman the NKVD officer, Khristo's own mocking of a British agent combine, and result in the kidnapping of Aleksandra, the murder of the headwaiter and a failed attempt to flee the city. Khristo's meeting with Faye just before his incarceration brings the American woman back into the plot, and this is a red herring for the reader for future events.

Sascha uses his training to secure an indoor position as a clerk. He uses his instincts to build a file saving the secrets he gathers from other incoming political prisoners over the years.

As the chapter closes with Khristo imprisoned for life, Sascha imprisoned for a term of thirty years in a frozen wasteland, Andres dead and Faye in America, the reader is in suspense as to how these characters will endure and survive.



# Chapter Four

## Chapter Four Summary

It is early December of 1941, in New York City. Robert Eidenbaugh works as a copywriter in an advertising firm downtown, but he is bored with the job and trapped in an engagement to a young woman he does not love. Eidenbaugh's father had been a soldier in World War I, assigned to France, and had loved the country so much he brought his family to live there after the war ended. In 1930, Robert had been sent to the United States to attend university. He had taken the job at the advertising job out of boredom. One day he is at a sporting event with his friend Van Duyne, and there is an announcement on the loud speaker. It is Pearl Harbor Day, 1941. Van Duyne turns to Robert and asks him if he would like to be involved in something that will take him away from his life in New York City, and Robert says he would like that very much. Van Duyne introduces Robert to people who induct him into the OSS, the American version of the secret service. Eidenbaugh is especially valuable because of his fluent French, his reserved manner, and his ability to blend in.

Khristo has been in the French prison for three years, and is losing hope. He exercises, tries to keep his mind active, but knows that if he is not freed soon, he will die inside, as he has seen some of the other prisoners do, with their eyes empty. He hears through prison yard gossip that the Germans are about to take over France, and one night he receives a slip of paper with his meal that has the old code of BF825 on it. Soon afterwards, a priest comes alone to his cell, and Khristo walks out of the prison with the priest. He is left to his own devices at the point, and uses the old training to get clothes, money and a car, then departs Paris. His departure is slowed by the huge number of refugees also leaving Paris, and the failure of the vehicle he has stolen. He is found by two sisters and their employer, who is ailing, and he travels to the employer's hideaway in the mountains near Cambas, France. He spends a winter with these two sisters, after the employer dies, and he is able to heal emotionally from the trauma of being in prison.

Eidenbaugh parachutes into France in October of 1943, with the cover name of Lucien, and with orders to organize a resistance fighter group with the people of Cambas. His operative will be a man named Ulysse. Eidenbaugh forms an alliance with the men and women of the small village, becoming the leader for the resistance group that includes Gilbert, Daniel, Vigie, Sable, La Brebis, and later Fusari and Khristo. It soon becomes obvious to Eidenbaugh that Fusari and Khristo have similar intelligence, weapons and combat training as he has received.

Eidenbaugh's squad, under the direction of the aristocratic but clever Ulysse, wreaks a measure of havoc for the German troops by disabling locomotive roundabouts, attacking critical transportation sites, and arranging for late night supply drops from England. There is a long description of the types of sabotage that is used, and the





danger these men are in. They are careful that the attacks do not implicate any local innocent citizenry.

The situation in France is described. Germans are occupying the country, but there is an active resistance within the French people. People are poor, food is scarce, and there is a great and justified fear of the Gestapo. Yet some citizens are quietly and effectively working against the Germans, with the aid of the Russians, British, and American infiltrators.

The resistance group operates gently and low key, pulling down communication poles, placing trees in the way of German convoys, causing problems and delays but in such a manner that local citizens would not face reprisal for these actions. Eidenbaugh, with the assistance of Fusari and Khristo, spends many hours teaching the resistance group how to fight and how to survive. Early in the training, Daniel and La Brebis are badly injured in a surprise encounter with a German officer, who is out birdwatching with his guard. Danger increases when a doctor must be found to assist the resistance group, and refuge is discovered in a local brothel.

As winter sets in, the group sends their members back to their homes to wait out the bad weather. Ulysse comes to Cambras for a few weeks, and arranges to meet with Khristo and get to know him. Khristo recognizes that Ulysse is a man who is born for war, like himself. Ulysse asks what Khristo plans for after the war, and Khristo replies he honestly does not know. Ulysse says everything will be put right, and Khristo ponders this statement for many months afterwards.

The retribution for acts of sabotage is quick and horrible for the citizens of France. People are tortured, shot, hung and entire villages killed. Independent acts of writing resistance slogans or standing up to the Germans sometimes resulted in many innocent bystanders being murdered. Ulysse feels something has changed in the area of Cambras, so he pulls Eidenbaugh, Fusari, Khristo and Vigie to roam the area of the Belfort Gap. This is one of the areas being watched by the Germans as critical to any invasion by the Allies. The team's assignment is to gather intelligence, increase the level of sabotage in the area, and increase the training of other resistance fighters.

Many forms of sabotage are used, including sugar cubes in gasoline tanks, thumbtacks into signals cables, burying soup tureens upside down to make it look like a mine; hundreds of ways to stop, delay, confuse and hamper the Germans in their day to day lives, thus slowing down the progress and providing a way in for the Allied troops if and when the invasion occurred.

One evening the team reaches Cabejac, a remote mountain village where they have been told there are men who wish to join the fight. Khristo feels uneasy about the village, but they go in. It is a trap, and Fusari and Vigie are killed. Eidenbaugh and Khristo escape with the aid of a young boy, and a long, slimy tunnel. Afterwards, Eidenbaugh clearly has been emotionally affected, especially when he learns the entire town of Cambras has been murdered.





Ulysse pulls both men out and sends them to Switzerland. Eidenbaugh is sent home to New York so he can recover. Khristo and Ulysse have a conversation about Americans and their stomach for war. Khristo is assigned to assist a Swiss professor in interpreting radio signals from Bulgaria and the region, compare them with official reports and try to discern the truth. It is easy work, and Khristo settles into a quiet life of working, recovering, and even a regular Thursday evening with a lady friend.

As Robert re-enters his life in New York, he finds that unlike other men who were in the war, he does not want to talk to anyone about what his duties were when overseas. When asked, he tells friends and family that he was in London for the duration, doing paperwork. He realizes that this does not make him look heroic to them, but Robert has learned much about courage and secrecy in his time during the war. He senses he will need to keep this part of his life separate from his family.

One day as Khristo is reviewing the newspaper clippings, he discovers he has been given clippings from an American newspaper, not from Europe. There he sees an article and a photograph about Faye Berns, who has not married, as her letter to him when he was in prison said, but is single and now involved as the fund raising director for the World Aid Committee. There is an address in the article, and he writes it down. Khristo begins writing a letter to Faye, but changes his mind, thinking she had changed so much from the woman he knew in Paris that she would not welcome contact from him. He returns the file to the professor, saying it was the wrong one, and continues his work. Faye's picture remains in his mind, and he thinks often over the next day or so about seeing Faye in Paris, their flight from Madrid, and wonders if his receiving the wrong file was really a coincidence after all.

Bulgaria is cleared of Germans and turns its sights to Russia as its chosen conqueror. One morning in October, Ulysse turns up at Khristo's office.

## Chapter Four Analysis

The world of espionage is shown from the view of the Americans, with the newborn OSS and the new recruit Robert Eidenbaugh. Eidenbaugh is similar to Khristo in temperament but vastly different in background. These two men are symbolic of their own countries. America is wealthy, comfortable, unconquered, with the luxury of high ideals. Bulgaria has been conquered and overrun for centuries, with the common people living in poverty, with survival being their only ideal.

Robert and Khristo meet in France, fight the resistance together and never know the truth of each other's existence. They fight, commit murder and sabotage, shed their blood and those of their comrades in a land that is not their country, but for ideals of freedom from oppression.

The combination of extremes in living conditions, constant fear of capture, little rest, irregular meals, and nights spent on the hard ground in the weather, give the reader insight to how difficult and exacting life as a resistance fighter was for these men.

A lessening in the suspense occurs when Khristo and Robert emerge from a terrible night of fighting and scrabbling for survival and their operative, Ulysse, decides to send them both to Switzerland instead of back to their previous roles. What appears to be an act of kindness from Ulysse is revealed to be a method of delivering Khristo to the Americans so they can have a turn at using him.

Robert is sent back to America, so he can recover from his exhaustion and the misery of his years in France. Khristo is not so fortunate, as he is pressed into service for the Americans. The Americans are not nobler, nor less manipulative than the Soviets, just newer at their jobs.



# Chapter Five

## Chapter Five Summary

Ilya Goldman is at the Utiny Gold Fields in Siberia, in December of 1944. Once a rising star in the Soviet Secret Service, Goldman has fallen from favor. He took pity on the people he was ordered to extract goods from in his home country of Romania, and was caught by his supervisors. Now it is his job to go from gulag to gulag and interview the lifeless shells of men who were sent there as political prisoners for thirty year terms. Goldman is finally beginning to question the purpose of his life with the Soviets, and the cruelty of his keepers. The experience in Romania showed him the Soviets are no better than the rulers before them, and that communism is not equal to all, but a system of keeping an elite few wealthy.

On this day, the last prisoner he is to interview turns out to be Sascha, the man who was Khristo's partner after spy school. Sascha rants and raves like a madman, but this performance is only for those who might be listening. Goldman plays along, and as Sascha leaves the interview, meets the man's eyes to let him know he has compassion for him. The two men exchange a meaningful glance before Sascha returns to his role as a madman and leaves the room. Sascha gives Goldman two letters, and later, when Goldman is away from the gulag and on his way by train to the next assignment, he reads them.

Sascha knows about the BF 825 group, and threatens to expose them as conspirators unless he is transferred to another camp by April of 1945. As Goldman reads the letters, he thinks about the location of the camp and sees that Sascha is planning an escape. Sascha is ready to give the information he has gathered over these years to the Americans or the British in order to exact revenge on the Soviets who put him in prison. Although there is no conspiracy of BF 825, Goldman is very tired of the Soviet systems, so he forges the papers and the transfer is made.

Through an intricate network of spies and counterintelligence work, word is sent to Voluta that Sascha will be available in April in the Romanian region of Bessarabia, and someone trusted would need to be sent to retrieve him. The network includes many minor characters, whose dedication to freedom and courage to go beyond being a victim is apparent in their behavior. This network displays the tremendous amount of trust, threats, betrayals, bribes and faith it takes to make things happen in countries at wartime.

Voluta is now working in Poland, a sad place under occupation by Germans, made sadder when occupied by the Russians. People are starving, and there is no rest for Voluta. Voluta loves his country and had fought so hard to remove the Germans. When he sees the way the Russians are treating his country, it breaks his spirit beyond repair. He receives a coded message in January about Sascha and leaves for Prague to



contact Khristo, knowing that although he is needed in Poland, Voluta knows he is the only man Khristo would trust.

Khristo is asked by the American OSS, in December of 1944, to take on a mission that involves him posing as a Yugoslav machinist, working in Prague. He is trained to use new American technology in the form of the J-E radio. This radio works by sending a message to an overhead airplane that relays the messages back to headquarters. Khristo is impressed with the fact the Americans have so much airplane fuel that they can afford to keep this plane in the sky just to receive one agent's messages. Khristo is dropped into the countryside near Prague in January of 1945, but his intelligence information does not prepare him for the reality that is Prague. The city is choked in dirty smoke, there is no food, and the desperation, fear and hatred is so strong in the residents that it is palpable. Khristo reacts to this environment by letting his guard down and sleeping with many women, and paying them to do so. One of them, Magda, is a married woman who likes the romance of having a lover. One afternoon in bed, she tells him that a man approached her and says he knows Khristo. The man also mentioned asking about a postal box, BF 825. Khristo spends the next several days at the restaurant where Magda says the man approached her.

Khristo continues gathering information and passing it on to the OSS using the J-E radio. On March 23, Voluta joins him at the restaurant. A note is passed, and Khristo learns this is about Sascha. A meeting is arranged on a bridge for the next night, with three different times. Khristo is somewhat surprised that his friend would set up a meet at the same place for each time, but he is eager to hear the details and to potentially get out of Prague. On March 24, Khristo makes his report on his radio, then goes to meet with Voluta. The OSS mission operations code named FELDSPAR never hears from their operative Khristo again. They assume he is dead or compromised, and the mission ends.

Khristo makes his way through the dark city and watches the bridge. He sees Voluta, then watches in horror as his old friend is shot. Khristo heads back to his warehouse office home, and is followed by a German Gestapo Officer. This Gestapo officer and his partner are extremely cruel men, who have made much money off their victims. They are ruthless and cocky. As the officer follows Khristo, he laughs to himself about the numerous mistakes these espionage agents are making, and how he will enjoy killing Khristo. He follows Khristo to the dark warehouse and sees a light. The officer crosses the dark warehouse confidently, intent on shooting Khristo, and does not realize the floor has been burned away. He falls to his death and Khristo is able to escape. Khristo runs to Magda, his old lover and friend, to ask her for help in leaving the city.

Magda calls some of her female friends and a taxi driver well known to them, and they hide Khristo on the floorboard of the backseat. The women crowd together on the back seat, covering him, and use a quilt to cover their legs. This way they travel through the guard checkpoints, drinking and laughing with the guards. Many times the checkpoint guards attempt to lift the cover and the women flirt and joke and distract the men enough to be sent on their way. When they reach Bratislava, Khristo bids his friends goodbye and sets up watching the river for a chance to escape that way. This is the



same river that runs besides his childhood home of Vidin, and he feels comfortable on it.

Khristo manages to swim to and board an ancient tugboat, piloted by a stern and huge woman named Annika. The two form an uneasy alliance, and she turns the tug east, taking Khristo where he wants to go and allowing her to escape as well. As they make their way downstream, they see bodies in the water, people screaming for help along the shore, and pass through a horrendous battle. They are joined by seven other tugboats. Just before they reach Budapest, Khristo speaks to the tug drivers and arranges for their safe passage through the waters by creating a large flag with a hammer and sickle on it. The soldiers on either side of the river cheer loudly as Khristo and a young boy stand on the prow of the boat and wave, as if they were honoring the Soviet forces. The tug drivers all are welcomed into the Soviet Army, Khristo is questioned lightly, and released.

Khristo moves on towards Yugoslavia, walking. He loses strength after four days of little water and food, and is surprised at how much his feet hurt. He almost becomes delirious and is drinking the polluted river water when a German soldier in a rowboat beckons him over. The soldier is defecting, has food and water, and needs assistance in rowing. The soldier, Andrej, had stepped on a mine and has no legs, using crutches to walk around. As Khristo is rowing down the river, they pass an old sunken barge where a man is perched on the top fishing. On the side of the barge is lettering: BF 825. Khristo makes an excuse to go to shore, abandons Andrej, and goes to the barge. Andrej is angry and hurt, but the pull of BF 825 is too strong for Khristo. The man who is fishing takes Khristo to the camp where Kulic is waiting.

Drazen Kulic survived the Soviet attempt to kill him, but is crippled and has a useless arm. Khristo is welcomed into the camp of thirty plus who are working for the Allies in Yugoslavia. Kulic tells Khristo he knows of the attempt to reach Sascha, and encourages Khristo to go to Trieste instead, to be safe, and not to trust the Americans because they may soon pull out of Europe and OSS may fold.

Khristo decides to continue his mission. Kulic takes Khristo up a mountain and shows him Aleksandra's grave, telling him that Goldman had extracted her from the Soviets and sent her to him, where she fought in the resistance, and never took another lover. Kulic finds passage for Khristo on another tug, and his journey continues. At one point, the tug passes by Vidin, Khristo's childhood home, and he waves to an unknown woman on the shore.

It is April of 1945 in Palestine, and many Jewish refugees are arriving and waiting to be processed and allowed to enter. The interviewer is tired, and wonders how they will find room in their new country for all these people. He frowns, thinking that so many of them expect a free handout, unwilling to work at more than being a clerk. A man presents himself to the interviewer and says his name is Itzhak Gold from Lithuania. It is Ilya Goldman, who has finally escaped the Soviet Union. After a few questions, the interviewer decides this refugee will do well working for the security service.



The little town of Sfintu Gheorghe on the shores of the Black Sea has a memorable night in April of 1945. First a Russian madman arrives and holes up in their church tower. Then baskets of fruit, ham, bread and exotic vegetables arrive for them with a note signed by The Fortunate One. A Soviet official and two guards arrive as the feast is being prepared, but the official is distracted by two of the village girls and is rendered harmless. Another visitor arrives, and it is Khristo, but he seems harmless as well. The village is happy to have the food, unconcerned about the visitors, and are enjoying the night of feasting.

Khristo learns from the priest that there is a stranger at the church. Khristo goes into the dark church, calling out Sascha's name in Russian. This confuses Sascha, so he fires, shooting Khristo in the abdomen. Khristo is injured badly, and Sascha is frantic to save him. Khristo does not remember the trip very well, thinking it is a dream, but Sascha commandeers the taxi that brought Khristo, gets them to the Black Sea and a seaplane where an American has been waiting, and then Khristo slips into unconsciousness.

In September of 1945, two women who volunteer for the USO in Manhattan go to meet an arriving ship with servicemen on it. They bring donuts and arrange for coffee for the arrivals. They soon see there are only a few soldiers. One of the women is watching the soldiers and wondering about them. The last to get off is a Slavic man in a suit, who looks out of place and a bit lost. She begins to feel sorry for him until she sees a woman has come to meet him. She watches as the man sees the woman and calls out "Faye!". The story ends as Faye Berns and Khristo walk off towards a car together, arm in arm.

## Chapter Five Analysis

The final chapter of the novel brings closure to the story of BF 825 in the war, and sets the stage for another novel for most of these characters.

Sascha's long held dreams of escape arrive in the form of Goldman at his gulag. With the threat to expose the BF 825 "conspiracy", Sascha is transferred to another prison and escapes with his long held book of secrets.

The irony is that there is no conspiracy, and that BF 825 is simply a code that lets Kulic, Khristo, Goldman and Voluta know the message is from them. The war and the life of an espionage agent, whether actively working for the Soviets or running away as a defector has taken its toll on the friends, aging and damaging their souls. Kulic is crippled, but fights on. Goldman defects to Israel, where he will use his espionage skills for the country of his people.

Voluta dies unnecessarily in a tragically stupid meet up in Prague, because the longtime freedom fighter is exhausted and careless. Khristo comes close to dying in a long journey to rescue his friend Sascha. The reader wonders at Khristo's motives for putting his own life at risk for the sake of a man he worked with for only a few months, in the years before the war. It could be loyalty to the Americans, Khristo's realization that



providing Sascha could grant him favor from the OSS, or perhaps it is the character of Khristo to do as he is told, to carry a mission to its finality, no matter the cost.

Khristo's journey represents the conflict in this novel. It involves themes of man against society, man against the elements, and the brotherhood of man. At the end of the story, Khristo is rewarded for his labors by being reunited with the American woman, Faye Berns, and the stage is set for the lives of these characters to once again intertwine in the espionage ridden years of the Cold War.





# Characters

## Khristo Stoianev

Khristo Stoianev is the protagonist of the novel. Although the author sometimes takes the reader into the minds of other characters, the story soon returns to the actions and thoughts of Khristo. As a young man born and raised in the small town of Vidin, Bulgaria, Khristo knows nothing of the world, but he is intelligent and strong. When he is nineteen, Khristo's brother is murdered by fascists. Still reeling from the emotions of this event, Khristo meets a Soviet named Antipin who convinces him to move to Moscow and become a Soviet espionage agent. The young Bulgarian is taught to murder, fight, commit sabotage and perform all acts of a counterintelligence agent. Khristo does as he is told, and keeps his opinions to himself. Khristo excels in espionage work, always placing first or second in any competition. He forms a bond with three other men who train with him, Voluta, Goldman and Kulic, and these bonds last throughout the war.

Khristo is a lean, tall man with Slavic features and blue eyes. He does not attempt to begin friendships or form alliances, and concentrates on surviving through Soviet handlers, defection to France, working undercover in Prague and making his way alone across Eastern Europe to save Sascha.

The character of Khristo can be described as the strong, silent type of man. Khristo uses words and displays emotions sparingly, yet the reader is drawn to his resilience and determination. Khristo is loyal until betrayed, yearns for a normal life, and even finds love briefly with Aleksandra in Paris. However, all other semblances of a normal life elude him during the war, as he fights to stay alive.

Khristo is a killer because it is his career. He identifies an enemy and works with all his soul to destroy it. He learns to trust no one, to fight complacency and spend his days running, looking over his shoulder, and doing whatever is necessary to survive. His one loyalty that remains unchanged is to his friends in the brotherhood, and throughout the novel, each of these men step in to assist him. Goldman gives him advance warning in Madrid, then arranges for Aleksandra to be sent to safety with Kulic. Voluta arranges for Khristo to escape from the life sentence in the French prison. Kulic appears to smooth Khristo's travel across Eastern Europe.

Khristo and Robert Eidenbaugh make a strong team, as both men are dedicated, highly skilled killers, yet they have not allowed the horrors of war dehumanize them.

This novel is about Khristo's adventures from the mid-1930s to 1945. In these years, Khristo goes from being a naïve village resident in Bulgaria to becoming an attack weapon for the Soviets. He defects from the Soviet Union from Madrid and lives for a time in Paris, where he has a brief time of normal living before he is thrust back into espionage. He becomes a pawn for the French, British, Soviet and American secret services, and is sentenced to life in a French jail.





Escaping from jail, Khristo makes his way to the French mountains where he becomes a resistance fighter with Robert Eidenbaugh, an American espionage agent. After several months of fighting and barely escaping one attack, Khristo is sent to Switzerland to work for the American OSS. The Americans send him into Prague, and it is a black time for Khristo. When called upon by Voluta to participate in extracting Sascha from Romania, Khristo begins the journey of his life, fighting and scheming his way across Eastern Europe, determined to save Sascha. When he finally reaches Sascha, Sascha does not recognize him and shoots him.

Khristo is rushed to safety by the Americans and survives. The novel ends with Khristo in America in late 1945, meeting Faye Berns, a woman he escaped Madrid with before the war.

## Sascha

Sascha is a Soviet agent who is assigned Khristo as his partner in the Spanish Civil War. He has been an agent for some time, and one of the village women in San Ximine who observes Sascha when he comes to see Andres, describes him best when she says he has snakes in his brain and they bite him. Sascha drinks heavily and has lost his edge in the field work assigned. He is recalled to Moscow, tortured and beaten, then sent to Siberia to serve a thirty-year prison sentence. He bides his time, gathering information from the incoming political prisoners at the gulag, and when the moment is right, threatens Goldman to transfer him to another prison where he can escape and trade the information to the Americans in return for their sanctuary. Sascha makes good on his plan, accidentally shooting Khristo in the process, but manages to get the young man to safety and they both escape.

## Robert Eidenbaugh

Robert is an American man who is working in New York City at a job he does not enjoy and is engaged to a young woman he does not love. He is not being challenged by his life, and when the opportunity comes to join the new OSS organization, he does not hesitate. He has good French, since he lived there as a child, and knows the culture.

Robert is given the code name Lucien, and is parachuted into France to work with the resistance. He does not intend to confront the Germans directly, but to use espionage and sabotage to delay and confound their progress. He is highly effective, and more so when he is joined by a true professional, Khristo. Robert's team works the area of Cambras and then a mountainous area until they are betrayed and almost killed in a small town. All of his team, with the exception of Khristo, are wiped out, and the two men escape through a nasty sewage tunnel. Robert is exhausted and shell shocked after this experience and is sent home to America soon after. His return to America and his family is at the end of the war, and Robert finds that he does not want to talk to family and friends about what he has experienced.



Robert and Khristo, although from completely different backgrounds, are similar in character and nature. Both men are trained to kill but see it as a part of their jobs, not a welcome chore, as neither are sadists. Both have a strong sense of survival and cunning and have that quality that makes men follow them to the death if necessary.

## **Ilya Goldman**

Goldman is a Romanian Jew who has been recruited to be a Soviet agent and takes his training as part of Khristo's unit. Goldman does well in the NKVD, and rises in rank until he is assigned to Romania and takes pity on the people there. The Soviet Union NKVD has no room for pity, and reassigns the young officer to Siberia, where he has the thankless task of interviewing political prisoners. While at one such gulag he encounters Sascha, and a series of events are set in motion that cause Goldman to defect to the new state of Israel. There the reader learns he will be involved in the Israeli secret service, thus setting the stage for Goldman's character to be seen in any future novels regarding these night soldiers.

## **Drazen Kulic**

Drazen is a tall Yugoslavian man who has been recruited to be a Soviet agent and takes his training as part of Khristo's unit. It is Kulic who creates the code BF 825, inscribing it on the inside panel of a train that takes Unit 8 back to Moscow after the training exercises at Belov. Kulic is in charge of a resistance unit in Madrid, but is betrayed by his own Soviet leaders and is badly injured. He retreats to Yugoslavia where he mounts his own fights against the Germans and the Russians.

Kulic, through his vast network of spies and intelligence gathering, learns that Khristo might be coming his way, so he places the code BF 825 in a prominent place on the river. Khristo sees the message and the two men are reunited. Kulic is crippled now, but determined as ever to fight. As Khristo leaves Kulic, the two men know they share the brotherhood of men who have been oppressed and who fight to end it.

## **Ulysse**

Ulysse is the handler in charge of Robert Eidenbaugh's operations in Cambras. Ulysse is described by his men as an aristocrat, a steely man accustomed to being in charge and making decisions. Ulysse is the one who recognizes Khristo's capabilities and gives him to the OSS, and the one who knows Robert Eidenbaugh can be of no more use to them after the surprise attack.

## **Aleksandra**

Aleksandra is a woman of unknown nationality, who completely seduces Khristo when he arrives in Paris. She is smart and funny, loving and dear to him. Khristo finally feels



safe in Paris, the city he has dreamed about forever, and falls in love with Aleksandra. She claims her spirit is Russian, but he never truly knows. She is small, with blond hair, pale skin and enormous eyes. She loves to play act with him and to surprise him. She has a quick temper.

When events turn against Khristo in Paris, Aleksandra is captured by the Soviets, and the only sign Khristo finds is where her nails dug into the apartment door as they pulled her away. She is saved by Khristo's plea to Goldman, and sent to Kulic for safekeeping. Kulic puts her to work in his small army, and one day Aleksandra is killed in a battle.

## **Voluta**

Voluta is one of the Soviet agents in training with Khristo, and a member of the unit. He is Polish, and it later turns out he was the spy in the training academy. Voluta stays aware of the unit while he works to free Poland first from the Germans, and then from the Russians. Tired, overworked and discouraged, Voluta receives a message from Goldman to facilitate Sascha's retrieval, and travels to Prague to get the information to Khristo. There, Voluta makes a fatal error in espionage practice, and is murdered.

## **Faye Berns**

Faye is a Jewish woman from America, who comes to Spain to help fight the fascists in Madrid. Her motivations for doing so are not clear, but she is ensconced in a building with fellow resisters, and does her share of the fighting. She is the lover of Andres, who is being managed by Sascha and then Khristo, and is one of the four who make the mad flight from Madrid the night of Khristo's defection to France. Faye stays with Andres until he dies, and then goes back to America. She stays in touch with Khristo and remains in his thoughts over the years, until they are reunited in America.

## **Andres**

Andres is a minor but pivotal character in the novel since he is the one who brings Khristo and Faye together. An Armenian posing as a French resistance fighter, Andres is a double and triple agent, using his information and skills to create the best scenario for his own survival. He dies after the group escapes from Madrid, and the reader learns by accident through another intelligence conversation that he was actually poisoned slowly by the Soviet secret service.



# Objects/Places

## BF 825

The letters and numbers stand for Brotherhood Front, Unit 8, Unit 2, Unit 5. The symbolism is a result of a training exercise in Belov where Khristo's Unit 8 was declared second place, and this listing, 825, is where Kulic believed the standings should have been. This simple code, first etched on a train panel on the return trip to Moscow from Belov, was used briefly again when Khristo, Kulic, Voluta and Goldman hid a stray dog from their supervisors in the school. As the young men went out into the field of espionage and war, they found this code to be a way of letting the others in the unit know that a message was from them, or that one of the unit was going to be instrumental in assisting them in their moment of need. It never represented any sort of conspiracy, but Sascha believed it was an elaborate scheme.

## Eastern Europe

In this novel, Eastern Europe is the land with the most strife, the worst conditions, and the most struggle during the prewar era and the war itself. Khristo begins his life in Bulgaria but almost loses his life in an epic journey across Eastern Europe from Prague to Romania to save Sascha. The author describes a ravaged countryside, with the population exhausted and starving.

## World War II

The world wide conflict beginning in 1939 and ending in 1945 pitting the Allies against the Axis. The novel is set in the time just before the war and during it, and the characters are either Soviet agents or counterintelligence agents from France, England or America.

## Germans

The Germans in this novel are the ones fighting for the Nazi military, during World War Two. They represent a cunning and ruthless enemy.

## Paris

A city in France. Before Paris is occupied, Khristo and Aleksandra enjoy a brief time of romance and peace. In this beautiful city in France, people are living life to its fullest, and as if there is no tomorrow. Yet, the Germans are at the city limits, Khristo is in considerable peril, and Aleksandra is abducted. Forces work behind the scenes to bring Khristo to the attention of the authorities, and he is imprisoned.



## **Vidin**

Vidin, Bulgaria, is Khristo's home town, and in this novel, represents the innocence of the man who becomes a dangerous Soviet agent and a trained killer.

## **Cambras**

This is a small town in France where the French resistance is able to make a difference in the effectiveness of the German army for a short time during the war. It is also where Khristo comes to the attention of the American OSS.

## **Guns and Knives**

These weapons play a large part in the life of Khristo and his unit, as well as members of the forces around them. Who wins, who lives, who dies; all depends on the quality and quantity of their weaponry.

## **NKDV**

This is the name of the Soviet Secret Service.

## **OSS**

These are the initials referring to the American Office of Secret Service, formed during World War II and later called CIA.



# Themes

## Brotherhood

The Soviet Union recruited their espionage agents from many countries, as shown by the nationalities of the men who share Khristo's training class. It may well have been the intention of the Soviets to choose these men in hopes they would not find a commonality, but in the case of Khristo, Kulic, Voluta and Goldman, the experience of becoming a unit and working together formed a brotherhood that could not be broken.

The brotherhood was jokingly named by Marike, Khristo's lover in Moscow. The men are designated Unit 8, for training exercises in Belov, a small town a train's ride from Moscow. During this time they are pitted against other units and they are wildly successful; however, their unit does not win first place. Kulic creates a code, BF 825, which innocently represents Brotherhood Front, with the listing of the units as they should have been, with Unit 8 in first place.

The brotherhood was implemented when the men return to Moscow and use the code BF 825 to communicate with each other regarding the care of a stray dog in their building.

When the men begin their careers as espionage agents, the brotherhood is forged and solidified through their contacts with one another, helping each other through war, betrayal and injuries. Khristo benefits the most from the brotherhood. When he is about to be arrested, Goldman alerts him in time to escape. When Khristo's love, Aleksandra, is abducted by the Soviets, Goldman arranges for her to be transported to Kulic for safekeeping. When Khristo is in prison for life, Voluta arranges his escape. Kulic assists Khristo in reaching Sascha.

The author's theme of brotherhood is the strongest message in this novel. Brotherhood has little to do with bloodlines, nationalities or even patriotism. Each of these men were loyal not to the Soviets, and in the end, not even to their original countries, but to each other. Friendship between the night soldiers, comradeship with men who are set apart from society because of their training and outlooks; this is the brotherhood that is woven through the story and emerges as the predominant theme of this novel.

## Individual and Society

The very nature of espionage requires a person to be at odds with society. An ideal espionage agent is very intelligent, creative, quick on their feet, athletic, with a mind that is always prepared for danger. This novel is not a spy novel per se, because its characters are not inhumanly strong, or able to dispatch their enemies without remorse.

The espionage agents in this novel are very real. They kill because it is their job, their assignment. They dream of normal lives, of children and homes, but realize this can



never be their life as long as they are agents. These men are survivors, problem solvers and saboteurs, but they also need recuperation time, feel trapped and shell shocked, and fear death.

The qualities shared by Kulic, Khristo, Voluta and Goldman that make them separate from society appear to be their tendency to be reserved and quiet, their exceptional strength and problems solving skills, their youth, and an extraordinary ability to survive against huge odds.

Khristo's alienation from society began with the murder of his brother. Antipin made Khristo realize that by staying in Vidin, he would be placing his parents and sister in more danger, so Khristo left. Suddenly he was in a strange country, strange city, and thrown together with other strangers. Yet, Khristo's personality and attitude allows him not only to adapt, but to excel. He enjoys the intrigue, the challenges and the comradeship; yet, when he is finally in the field, faced with the betrayals and politics, he soon grows tired of it.

## Courage

Night Soldiers is a story of courage and very few of the main characters lack this trait. The author shows the reader the different levels of courage in the face of seen and unseen enemies.

There are many examples of this courage in the novel. Khristo leaves his childhood home to save his family from retribution from the Nazis who killed his brother. Sascha's courage is shown in befriending Andres at the risk of his own career. Aleksandra is courageous when she joins Kulic and fights with him. Khristo, as he faces his prison sentence for the first three years, shows courage in the face of hopelessness.

Kulic finds courage to continue fighting even though he was crippled for life. Voluta fights for his beloved Poland, even though he is fatally exhausted. Goldman risks everything to help Sascha to freedom, then defects and begins a new life in Israel.

Khristo's story holds the tale of most courage, as he makes his way across Eastern Europe, the ravages of war all around him, with the mission to save Sascha, his longtime friend and partner. He suffers pain, hunger, thirst, and sleep deprivation to fulfill his commitment of brotherhood to Sascha.

The author brings many minor characters into the story to illustrate a time in the world when small courageous sacrifices were daily occurrences, and all combined with the larger courageous acts to bring freedom back to the world.

# Style

## Point of View

The novel *Night Soldiers* is told with the omniscient third person point of view, with an unseen narrator. This narrator is trusted and reliable for the reader.

Although the majority of the action, thoughts and dialogue involve Khristo, this form of point of view allows the reader to be present for critical plot movements where Khristo will be affected but not present. This view also allows the narrator to show the reader how the main character is seen by others.

The narrator in this novel returns to the minds of Sascha, Goldman and Kulic often enough for the reader to understand their motivations and personalities. This will be important when bringing the character back into the action in this or a subsequent novel.

## Setting

The novel *Night Soldiers* covers many settings, but true to its title, most of the action occurs under the cover of darkness. This symbolizes the men who serve as its main characters, agents and resistance fighters, whose work is done away from the light, away from prying eyes, and conducted in darkness.

The novel begins in an impoverished village in Bulgaria, a country often conquered. All of Eastern Europe is being picked over by either the Nazis or the Soviets, with the British and Americans making brief appearances.

To become a ruthless killer, Khristo is transported to icy Moscow, and taught coldness for his veins. The author then transports Khristo and others of his unit to warm Spain, but the warmth of the land does not match the people there.

Each setting chosen by the author symbolizes its plot movement: Cambras is rugged and hard to know. The area where Khristo and Robert nearly perish is difficult to traverse even on foot, remote and the people are blank.

Khristo's time in Paris, surrounded by elegant, rich and cultured people, symbolizes his childhood dreams of coming to the city. His two hour walk home from work every night is symbolic of this man's long journey in his soul.

Switzerland, a neutral country, is a sanctuary for both Robert and Khristo after their harrowing experience in France, and a time for both men to reflect.

The author uses weather, time of day, topography of the area, and the feelings of the characters to give the reader a strong sense of place in each setting.





## Language and Meaning

Night Soldiers was originally written in English. The detail in local custom, political nuances, geography, topography, and location of troops during this time period reveals considerable research and investigation by the author.

Dialogue is brief, with few orations. Descriptions are full, but limited to providing all the reader needs to know in order to form a picture of what is happening, where it is happening and who is involved. The plot moves quickly along, and is easy to understand.

The characters speak clearly, and few foreign words or phrases are interjected into the text. The reader can move along with the plot with few referrals to dictionaries or a world atlas.

## Structure

Night Soldiers is 456 pages long, divided into five chapters. Each chapter is a bit over 100 pages long. There is a map of the course of the Danube River at the front of the novel.

The novel moves in chronological order, beginning in 1934 with the murder of Khristo's brother in Bulgaria, and ends just after the war, in the United States in 1945.

Chapter One is entitled Levitzky's Geese, referring to the derogatory term used by the Vidin villagers to talk about the pompous and self absorbed fascist military in their town. The author uses this title to expose how innocent the villagers were in the face of the Nazi juggernaut headed their way. Khristo witnesses his brother's death and soon thereafter leaves with a Soviet agent to live in Moscow. This chapter takes Khristo from an innocent and naïve young man in remote Bulgaria to Moscow, where he begins training for his life's work as an espionage agent. In chapter one, Khristo meets the men who will play a part in his survival over the next few years. At the end of training, Khristo, Kulic, Goldman and Voluta are sent to Spain to begin their lives as Soviet agents.

Chapter two is titled Blue Lantern, which refers to the method used by Andres to show the German pilot which house in Madrid is to be bombed. Since Andres is supposed to be working with the Soviets and with the resistance fighters, the blue lantern symbolizes betrayal on many levels. The chapter begins in Madrid, introducing the reader to Faye Berns, an American who has come to fight in the Spanish Civil War. Her lover is Andres, and through him, she meets Khristo. The relationship between Sascha and Khristo is solidified in this chapter. Kulic and Goldman are forced to choose allegiances in this chapter, and Khristo commits the act of defection by fleeing Madrid with Andres, Faye and Renata.



Chapter three is titled Paris, 1937. Khristo is living a life almost normal, with a job as a waiter in an elegant cosmopolitan atmosphere in Paris, has an apartment he shares with a beautiful woman, and has fallen in love. He believes himself to be hidden from the eyes of the espionage world, but he is soon disabused of that notion when Aleksandra is abducted and he is imprisoned for life.

Chapter four is Plaque Tournant, referring to the specific piece of machinery in a locomotive roundhouse which is the most critical to the operations of the roundhouse, and whose destruction will cause the most delays. This chapter goes into considerable detail about this type of sabotage and many others used by the resistance fighters in France. Once Khristo escapes from prison, makes his way to the mountains near Cambras, and recovers his health, he joins the resistance group led by Robert Eidenbaugh, an OSS agent. Khristo hones his craft as a night soldier in this chapter and narrowly misses death many times over. When Ulysse pulls Robert and Khristo out of France, Khristo begins working for the OSS, and is reminded of Faye Berns once again.

Chapter five is titled Bessarabia, the remote section of Romania, where Sascha has come to be retrieved by the Americans. This chapter causes the unit to once again work as a team to help Sascha. Sascha tells Goldman what he wants, and Goldman grants the request, not because of the threat to expose a nonexistent conspiracy, but because Goldman is tired and wants out. Voluta is contacted and instructed to send Khristo to Romania. Voluta contacts Khristo while he is on a hopeless mission in Prague, and is killed. Khristo begins a long journey to Romania, aided midway by Kulic, and arrives in Bessarabia only to be shot by Sascha in a misunderstanding. All ends well for Khristo, though, as he is transported by the Americans to a safe place, and when he is healed, he rejoins Faye Berns in America.



## Quotes

"But these were political times, and it was very important to think before you spoke. Nokko Stoianev spoke without thinking, and so he died."

Chap. 1, p. 1

"She kept her eyes on the pavement in front of her, but then, just for a bare instant, she glanced at him, then looked down again, and he realized that she knew who they were. She knew what they were, what he was, and she was afraid of him."

Chap. 1, p. 87

"This Bulgarian dolt has been with us two years and more, yet he has seen nothing, heard nothing, learned nothing. He still thinks - this trusting child - there must be reasons!"

Chap. 2, p. 135

"We chained the officers to their steamer trunks full of uniforms and threw them into the sea. They too pleaded. A great deal of pleading in 1917, one grew bored with it."

Chap. 2, p. 145

"Time and again he touched the wall, traced with agonizing slowness, the faintly marked outlines of the four scratches her fingernails had made as she'd been taken through the door."

Chap. 3, p. 240

"Suddenly, in this necropolis of ice and flatness and dead gray light, he had a reason to live, for the first time in his life. At last, there was something he wanted. He wanted to hurt them as they had hurt him."

Chap. 3, p. 261

"Prison had changed him. He came to understand that on his first day of freedom."

Chap. 4, p. 311

"But I have seen the world, and whoever runs that country will want to start fresh - they won't have much use for people who have seen the world."

Chap. 4, p. 351

"The transfer followed immediately. He tried making certain telephone calls. But they'd marked him, and his friends knew enough to leave him alone lest the virus touch them



as well."

Chap. 5, p. 367

"Khristo believed him. It was not a fantasy of the oppressed, it was a plan, a lucid, thought-out ritual of justice, and the day of its reality was not far off."

Chap. 5, p. 385

"Yet it had happened, and Khristo finally understood how it had happened. Moving across the countryside made one prey, over time, to a series of small mishaps, none of them serious in and of itself, but cumulative over time."

Chap. 5, p. 424

"'You killed me,' Khristo said, voice sorrowful and tired. The pain in his chest was fierce and there was no air to breathe. In the distance, the violin began to play a new kind of song."

Chap. 5, p. 452



## Topics for Discussion

What type of people come to mind when you hear the term Night Soldiers? How are Khristo, Robert, Goldman and Kulic working in darkness?

Why do you think Khristo decided to help Sascha escape? Why did Goldman approve Sascha's transfer? Why did Sascha feel so protective towards Andres?

Compare Aleksandra and Faye Berns. How are these women different and how are they similar? Which woman is better suited for Khristo?

When faced with the choice of Nazis or Soviets, why did Khristo choose to go with Antipin to Moscow?

Describe the espionage training school. The men were learning far more than the tools of their craft, they were also learning distrust, betrayal and favoritism. Discuss how these traits were taught.

Which of the surviving characters would you like to see in subsequent novels? Why?

The author uses many minor characters for just a few pages and they are never seen again. What are some of your favorites?

Discuss the different forms of sabotage practiced by Khristo and Robert. Do you think these forms of fighting were effective?

Why do you think the Americans were involved in supplying instructions and personnel to aid the resistance groups in France?

Discuss Paris of 1937 and Khristo's life there before being discovered as an espionage agent. Why was there such a mix of cultures and nationalities gathering in Paris at this time?