

The Spy Who Came in from the Cold Study Guide

The Spy Who Came in from the Cold by John le Carré

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Plot Summary

In this story of Cold War espionage in a divided Germany, Alec Leamas is a British secret agent who becomes a double agent in order to bring down the head of the Communist intelligence agency in East Germany. All goes according to plan until Leamas finds himself before a secret tribunal that seeks to expose him as a British spy. His personal and professional loyalties come in to play as he realizes that nothing is how it seems. The novel explores the danger and intrigue of 1960s era Cold War espionage and the individuals caught up in it.

Alec Leamas is the head of British Intelligence in West Germany and oversees the spy missions in East Berlin. When his agent, Karl Riemeck, is killed crossing the border into West Berlin, Leamas returns to London to explain the situation to his boss, Control. Leamas expects to be fired but instead Control gives him a new and complicated mission to bring down the head of East German intelligence, Mundt.

Leamas begins to put the mission into practice. He appears to be slipping into a drunken and desolate state. He loses his job in the Banking Section of British intelligence through a fake embezzlement scam. After a series of low-level jobs, he takes a job at a library, where he meets Liz. Liz is a member of the Communist Party. Liz and Leamas begin a relationship that he breaks off when it is time to begin the next phase of his plan.

Leamas picks a fight with a store clerk and ends up in prison. After being released from prison, Leamas is approached by Ashe, an East German agent. Ashe and his partner, Kiever, present Leamas with the terms of his defection. Leamas is taken to Holland, where Peters interrogates him about everything that he knows about how British intelligence is organized. They are most interested in Rolling Stone, an operation for paying a secret agent through a complicated series of bank deposits abroad.

Leamas continues on to East Berlin, where he meets Fiedler, the second in command of East German intelligence. Fiedler is interested in using Leamas' evidence from Rolling Stone to show that Mundt is the secret agent that is working with British intelligence. Fiedler calls for Mundt's arrest and a Tribunal is called to investigate the case. At the Tribunal, Mundt claims that Leamas is a double agent working for Britain. Mundt calls Liz as a witness to prove his claims. The Tribunal sides with Mundt and arrests Fiedler for making the accusation.

Mundt assists Leamas and Liz in their escape from prison. They drive away from the prison and make their way to the border. When they reach the border, they have to climb a wall. While they are climbing the wall, the searchlights locate them. The guards shoot and kill both Leamas and Liz before they are able to escape into West Berlin.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

In this story of Cold War espionage in a divided Germany, Alec Leamas is a British secret agent who becomes a double agent in order to bring down the head of the Communist intelligence agency in East Germany. All goes according to plan until Leamas finds himself before a secret tribunal that seeks to expose him as a British spy. His personal and professional loyalties come in to play as he realizes that nothing is how it seems. The novel explores the danger and intrigue of 1960s era Cold War espionage and the individuals caught up in it.

Alec Leamas and his CIA contact wait on the Western side of the border between East and West Berlin. A woman, Elvira, crosses the border in her car. She tells Leamas that all of her spy network in East Berlin has been arrested and that her boss, Karl Riemeck, is coming behind her on his bicycle. They give Elvira the address of an apartment where she can stay. They speak to the guards, who explain that they cannot shoot to protect someone crossing the border until he is in their zone. Karl attempts to cross the border on his bicycle but is shot by the Vopos, the East German border guards, before he makes it to the Western side.

Chapter 1 Analysis

At the opening of the book, there is a clear line between the two sides. This division is symbolized by the border situation itself in which the two sides face each other from a distance. Just as there is a clear physical division, there is also a clear division among the people involved. The two people who are making their way across the border are clearly shown as being on the Western side and the other characters are concerned for their welfare.

The overall atmosphere of the chapter is one of intense suspense and a lack of control of the situation on the part of the characters involved. Leamas and the CIA agent appear as though they should have control over the situation, or that they would like to, but that the circumstances are out of their control. This sense of lack of control foreshadows Leamas' future career as a British intelligence agent, in which the things that he is most sure of are still those that he has no real control over.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Leamas returns to London after the death of his last agent, Karl Riemeck. He meets with Control, the head of the British intelligence agency. He expects to be fired because of the deaths of all his agents in Germany. Instead, Control suggests that Leamas return to East Berlin to bring down Mundt, the deputy director of the Abteilung. Control asks Leamas to look up George Smiley and Peter Gulliam to help him on this mission to East Germany. Control invites Leamas to come to his home to further discuss the mission and warns Leamas not to share his new mission with anyone else.

Chapter 2 Analysis

On his flight home from Germany, Leamas stops to consider his career. He assumes that he will have to retire from active spy missions because of the disasters that have accompanied his management of the East Berlin spy network. The reader learns a lot about Leamas' character in this chapter. From his appearance to his behavior, he is shown as very serious about his life and seems to have sacrificed most of his personal life to his career as a British intelligence agent. This portrayal of Leamas as a man foreshadows the conflict that will develop between his personal loyalty and his professional responsibilities.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Leamas leaves the London intelligence community after an embezzlement scandal. Everyone is very concerned about his quick fall from power. Leamas enters a series of low-level jobs, including managing a glue factory and selling encyclopedias door to door. He fails at everything and becomes known by his neighbors as dirty, drunk, and unable to manage his life in the world.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Leamas' fall from grace is meant to be very public and it is. Beginning with the British intelligence community itself, Leamas presents a well-rounded portrayal of himself. The ease and efficiency with which he creates this impression of himself shows his spy training. At the same time, however, this incident provides the first foreshadowing of the complicated nature of the relationship between Leamas the man and Leamas the spy. At this early stage, the people that Leamas has worked alongside for so many years are regarded as outsiders: in effect, the enemy. This first layer of lies within the British intelligence community foreshadows the layers that will be added as Leamas goes forward on his secret mission.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Leamas takes a job at the Bayswater Library for Psychic Research. His boss, Miss Crail, has very specific routines and dislikes Leamas. Leamas begins a friendship with Liz Gold, the other cataloging assistant. He goes over to her apartment many nights, but generally seems uninterested in her. One night she confesses that she is a Communist. Leamas is shocked and stays the night at her apartment. They have sex. When Leamas leaves her apartment the next morning, he sees a strange man disappear into the fog.

Chapter 4 Analysis

The relationship between Liz and Leamas develops in stops and starts. Leamas is clearly not interested in involving anyone else in this time of his life because he knows that he is about to go on a dangerous mission that involves a lot of duplicity and cover ups. The reader has the opportunity to reevaluate the beginnings of Liz and Leamas' relationship given the information that Leamas learns after the Tribunal. It is interesting that in developing the secret mission within a secret mission, the British intelligence agency has taken this relationship into consideration.

In a novel in which all appearances are suspect, even the seemingly innocent and spontaneous relationship between Liz and Leamas takes on the quality of secret maneuverings. The man at the Labor Exchange, Pitt, sends Leamas to the library with the intention of his forming some sort of bond with a known Communist, Liz. Leamas and Liz both unintentionally fall in line with the secret plan and actually make it more useful through their true relationship.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

The week after having sex with Liz, Leamas does not show up for work at the library. The next day, he is again absent, so Liz goes to his apartment during her lunch break. There is no answer at her knock so she gets a neighbor to break down the door. They discover Leamas sick in bed. Liz buys him some medicine and food and nurses him back to health. After six days, Leamas tells Liz to leave and never come back. Soon after, Leamas goes into a grocery store and asks for store credit. When the store owner refuses to give it to him, Leamas attacks him and breaks several of his bones. The case goes to court and receives some public notice.

Chapter 5 Analysis

The relationship between Liz and Leamas provides the most human touch to Leamas' otherwise professional life. Leamas' feelings for Liz will continue to be a cause for concern on his part, even as he is willing to sacrifice his own life. The conversations between Leamas and Liz in the days leading up to his attack on the store clerk and his subsequent stay in prison foreshadow the complicated nature of their relationship and the way that their bond will continue to develop during their separation. Leamas gives Liz just enough information to expose his true profession if she is questioned, without actually explaining it to Liz.

Their relationship remains unresolved in this chapter and the reader remains aware of this fact as Leamas departs on his secret mission. The unresolved nature of their relationship keeps the reader wondering how it fits into Leamas' mission and what sort of balance can be created between Leamas' loyalty to his job and his country and the loyalty he feels toward Liz.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Leamas goes to jail for attacking the store clerk. He spends some time in jail where he does not participate in prison life. After he is released, he has a chance meeting by a man who calls himself Ashe. The two men go out to lunch together and then agree to meet the next day. Leamas takes a long and complicated route before meeting up with his contact, who takes him to George Smiley's house where Control is waiting for him. Control explains that George is reluctant to take part in the mission.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Leamas' spy training comes to the forefront in this chapter as he maneuvers skillfully through the staged attempts of the Communist agents to contact and recruit him. His attitude toward Ashe shows both his own training and the confidence that he has in regard to his mission. In retrospect, this confidence seems to be a weakness for Leamas, allowing him to think that he knows everything that is going on. It shows the level of trust that Leamas has for British intelligence and his personal relationships with his fellow British agents.

Leamas' complicated route to meet up with Control and George Smiley also show his spy training. In addition, Leamas expresses a great deal of pride and confidence that he has been successful in eluding the Communist agents and that he has played the spy game to perfection in arranging these meetings. This pride becomes increasingly ironic as he interacts with Control and George Smiley, the very people who are orchestrating his betrayal in order to protect someone on the other side. The level of trust that Leamas feels for them is translated to the reader, who also feels a sense of trust in Leamas and the British intelligence community. In this way, the reader, along with Leamas, is set up for a sense of betrayal when the real secret mission is revealed at a later point in the novel.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Leamas attends his second meeting with Ashe. Ashe learns that Leamas has no money or place to stay. He invites Leamas to stay with him at his apartment in Dolphin Square. Leamas calls in to give his location. Ashe introduces Leamas to Sam Kiever. The three men go to a strip club together. Leamas dismisses Ashe as a middleman and discusses the terms of the arrangement with Kiever. Kiever offers him the cover job as a freelance writer to be paid 15,000 pounds. They go back to Kiever's luxurious apartment and Kiever explains that they will be flying to Holland to meet another contact, all expenses paid, and with fake documents.

Chapter 7 Analysis

In this chapter, Leamas once again shows his comfort and confidence in his spy instincts. His meetings with Ashe and Kiever allow him to show that he knows what he thinks are the real rules of the spy game. His dismissal of Ashe as a middleman gives him a sense of control over the situation. Similarly, his confidence and demands in discussing the idea of defection with Kiever allow him to be the master of the situation. Though Ashe and Kiever handle all the arrangements for him, Leamas continues to feel a sense of confidence and strength in his role in the mission.

This confidence and strength become increasingly ironic given the hidden plot that neither Leamas nor the reader is aware of at this point. Leamas and the reader are given the impression that they know the real purpose of the mission and gain confidence and eagerness in fooling those around them. Leamas is given many opportunities to build this kind of confidence and it contributes to his continued sense of loyalty to British intelligence and to the other spies that he knows there. At this point, he sees his mission as serving the interests of his country in setting up the removal of one of his personal and professional enemies, Mundt.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Leamas and Kiever fly to The Hague. Kiever leaves Leamas at a hotel called Le Mirage. Here he meets Peter, the man he is supposed to tell all his secrets to. He tells Peters that he needs to go into Soviet territory for protection after defecting. Leamas tells Peters his life story. His career as a spy begins in 1939 when he is recruited to a linguistic squad and stationed in Holland. In 1943, he moves to Norway, and then returns to Holland in 1945. He takes a break before returning to service in 1949. He names his contacts in British intelligence and explains that he served in the London office for several years until putting together the Berlin spy network in the 1950s. This takes them up to the death of Karl Riemeck. Peters asks him for more details about the Berlin operation from 1951 to 1961.

Leamas describes an event with agent de Jong, who is given photographs of secret records of the Praesidium of the East German Communist Party. Leamas tries to discover where the photographs have come from without informing his boss in London. He discovers that the spy is Karl Riemeck. Leamas recruits him to spy on East Berlin. Peters tells Leamas that Elvira has also been murdered. Peters insists that Riemeck did not act alone.

Chapter 8 Analysis

This chapter provides the most significant example of the way Leamas' confidence has compromised his ability to see the real secret mission. In explaining his life story to Peters, Leamas shows his confidence in carefully crafting the stories that will give the impression that he has been told to give. He mentions everything that he can think of to show that he feels betrayed and abandoned by British intelligence when really he continues to work for them. The irony here is that British intelligence is, in fact, betraying him and setting him up to be exposed as part of the greater secret plot.

When describing his mission in Germany, Leamas' confidence takes on an increasingly tragic sense of irony. While he realizes that part of his role is to give evidence that someone in East German intelligence is a double agent while denying that such a person really exists, in his own mind, he really does believe that there was no other secret agent. His own confidence in his leadership and control in Germany blinds him to many of the clues that he should be looking for in this situation. This attitude will continue to be not only the attitude that he pretends to have for his role but also the one in which he truly believes.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Leamas talks about his time in London, and includes the names he remembers from his time in the Banking section of British intelligence. He describes the secret operation called Rolling Stone. In Rolling Stone, Leamas takes huge cash payments to Scandinavian countries in order to pass them on to a secret agent. The plot involves a lot of formal deception, including fake passports and signatures.

Peters suggests that the mystery agent that the money went to was Karl Riemeck's collaborator in East Germany. Leamas argues that the secret agent could not possibly be German because he, as head of British intelligence in Germany, would have met him during his long mission in Germany.

Chapter 9 Analysis

In this chapter, Leamas continues developing his own role in the secret plot. As he provides the details that he believes to be created and planted to frame Mundt, in his own mind he is confident that Mundt is not really a double agent. While this allows him to act with disbelief during his interrogation, it also continues the tragic irony that takes over his situation from this point through the end of the novel.

Leamas believes that he is providing the evidence to bring down one of his most hated enemies. For this reason, he feels full of confidence and is actually proud of the lies that he has been part of inventing to use against his enemy. The irony of this attitude and limited perspective continues to show that, despite all of Leamas' training and professed callous, unfeeling nature, he really does continue to have a sense of strict right and wrong and the ability to reconstruct his life and his experiences to support this sense of right and wrong. This attitude shows the most human qualities of Leamas and foreshadows the swift changes of thought that will have to be accomplished by Leamas to justify his role in the plot later on.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Peter disappears for a day and Leamas is reminded of Liz and looks forward to a life with her after this mission is over. Peter brings him information from England. Leamas' picture is in the newspapers and he is wanted in England for not checking in with his prison monitor. Leamas assumes all of this has been arranged through Control. Peter arranges a new fake passport under the name Alexander Thwaite and takes him to East Berlin in order to avoid capture by the British authorities.

Chapter 10 Analysis

This chapter provides an interesting insight into Leamas' relationship with Liz. The chapter begins and ends with thoughts of Liz. While alone in Holland, Leamas thinks of Liz and allows himself the very domestic fantasy of spending his life with her. In strong contrast to his exciting and dangerous life as a spy, Leamas imagines a quiet and simple life with Liz after the mission is over and he can be reunited with her. Though their relationship has been very short, Leamas continues to think about her and wish for the ability to develop the relationship with the freedom of a normal person without the difficult responsibilities of an international spy.

The newspaper stories about Leamas' disappearance and the manhunt for him in England give Leamas another opportunity to think about his loyalty to his British intelligence contacts and to question the loyalty that they have for him. Leamas is surprised by the speed with which British intelligence put his story in the press. At this point, the mission changes from Leamas' expectations. He had expected the whole thing to take place in Holland, but now he must continue into East Germany. Leamas is still trusting of British intelligence and assumes that he is simply playing out the role that was assigned to him. The irony is that he is playing the role he was assigned but that he does not know what this real role is.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

After Leamas goes to prison, Liz continues trying to find out information about him. She remains loyal to him and waited to hear news about him. One day, George Smiley comes to see her, pretending to be a police officer. He asks her what she knows about Leamas and how many people knew about their relationship. She tells him the little she knows and assures him that no one else knew about her relationship with Leamas. Smiley gives her his telephone number and encourages her to call him if she needs anything.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Although Leamas made it very clear that Liz was not to be involved in anything related to this mission, George Smiley contacts Liz and makes a very strong impression on her. This seems odd given the super-secret nature of the mission. George gives Liz a card with his name and telephone number. He does so in such a way as to leave a very strong impression on her so that if Liz is called to give information she will remember him. The meeting between Liz and George gives some of the first clues that something is going wrong with the mission that Leamas thinks he is on.

Leamas is not aware of these developments but the reader is. This allows the reader to build some clues about the real nature of the mission. At this point, however, Leamas' overwhelming confidence applies to the reader as well. The significance of the incident seems clearer in retrospect, when the reader knows that British intelligence plan to use Liz during the mission. At the same time, Liz shows that she is not entirely convinced by those who are using her. She is suspicious of George Smiley in the role of a police officer. This suspicion foreshadows the doubts that she has over her invitation from the Communist Party.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Leamas arrives in East Berlin and meets Fiedler, the second in command to Mundt. Fiedler explains that Leamas has been brought to East Berlin to complete his interrogation. Leamas remembers Control's advice that Fiedler could be used to bring down Mundt. The next morning, Fiedler continues asking Leamas about the Rolling Stone. Leamas describes the process of handling for the Rolling Stone. He remembers that Peter Gulliam is involved. Leamas insists that he would have been aware of another agent in Germany.

Chapter 12 Analysis

When Leamas meets Fiedler, he begins the next phase of the secret mission. Both Leamas and Fiedler are being tricked at this point, but neither of them knows it. Leamas continues to feel confident that his role is to pass on fake evidence about Mundt. Despite his own background with Communist Germany, most of Leamas' information about Fiedler and Mundt seems to be very vague and based mainly on rumor.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Fiedler asks Leamas about his political philosophy and he confesses that he does not really have one. Fiedler continues asking questions about the Rolling Stone, trying to discover the identity of the special agent. Fiedler suggests that Leamas use the fake signature he used on the bank documents in order to learn more about the activities of the special agent. Leamas settles into his role as double agent. He wonders if Fiedler might be the special agent that Control is trying to protect.

Chapter 13 Analysis

Fiedler's character is presented in a very positive manner despite the fact that he is an East German agent. His philosophical principles and sense of duty and honesty are very appealing to Leamas. Leamas is sympathetic to Fiedler and imagines that he is the secret agent. This assumption on Leamas' part is based more on Leamas' personal belief that Fiedler is a good person than on any hints that Fiedler drops about his sympathies to democracy. In this way, both Leamas and the reader get the impression that the struggle between good and evil, and right and wrong, has been justified in the idea that a good person like Fiedler is not really an enemy.

Fiedler stands apart from the other figures introduced as Communist East Germans. For the most part, he treats everyone humanely and shows a great deal of idealism when it comes to his political views. Like Liz, he provides a more idealistic understanding of Communism and in many ways overlooks the more practical ways that the system is enforced. Fiedler's own innocence in political intrigue and his desire to do the right thing are contrasted with Mundt's Nazi tendencies and his brutal treatment of British agents. The portrayal of Fiedler in this light allows both the reader and Leamas to think that there is a good purpose behind the mission.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Fiedler and Leamas discuss Mundt's time in London. They refer to an important assassination called the Fennan case. Mundt manages to escape because the British intelligence officer involved is afraid of the damage to his own career. Fiedler learns more about Karl's interactions with Control. Fiedler asks Leamas about Mundt. Fiedler claims that Mundt might be the special agent. A reply has come from one of the banks Leamas wrote to, using his fake signature. It states that the money he deposited was withdrawn during a trip that Mundt took to the same city at the same time. Leamas insists that this is not possible. He does not believe that there could be a double agent in Berlin that he would not know about. When Fiedler mentions Liz, Leamas warns him that she cannot be brought into the mission for any reason.

Chapter 14 Analysis

At this chapter, Leamas continues to play his role with confidence. His insistence that Mundt was not a double agent is something that Leamas truly believes but he also knows that it is part of his mission to provide evidence that Mundt is a double agent. Leamas assumes that the Rolling Stone operation is something invented by the British intelligence for his own mission and does not question when the evidence comes back confirming that he was planted. He does not stop to think that Mundt might really be involved.

Despite Leamas' claims that he does not believe in anything, he does clearly see the world in terms of black and white. His trust in Fiedler grows with the understanding that Fiedler dislikes Mundt as much as he does. He sees a clear gain to be made in bringing down a bad person like Mundt and feels that this is what his mission is designed to accomplish. This personal feeling is emphasized in the way he speaks about Liz and refuses to let her be brought into the situation. All of these personal feelings compromise Leamas' ability to see the situation clearly.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

Liz meets Ashe at a Communist Party meeting. He takes her out to tea and asks her many personal questions. Liz receives a letter from the Centre of the District Communist Party inviting her to participate in a youth exchange with Communists in East Germany. The letter offers her an all expenses paid trip to East Germany. Liz is skeptical at first. She does not think that she has done anything special enough to deserve this honor. She is not interested in a lot of the international side of the Communist Party and views it more as an interesting hobby than anything else. She does not know very much about Germany except for World War II. She trusts that the party has her best interests at heart and agrees to go.

Chapter 15 Analysis

Liz's understanding of Communism and her role in the Communist Party are explored in this chapter. Liz, like Fiedler, presents a personal image of Communism that is based on ideals rather than on practical matters. Her experiences working with the Communist Party in England are often comical and she regards them as more of a hobby than a strong political belief structure. Liz's knowledge of the Communist Party makes her suspicious of the letter and makes her suspect that there is something more going on than is explained in the letter.

Liz's suspicions about the letter from the Communist Party follow the same line that Leamas' feelings about British intelligence take at this point in the narrative. Though there are hints that something is not right, they both dismiss their suspicions because they trust the organization that they belong to. Despite Leamas' claims that he is not interested in ideals, he shows himself to be very similar to Liz in his trustfulness to his bosses in British intelligence. This sense of trust foreshadows the subsequent betrayal that both of them will experience.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

Fiedler and Leamas are walking on the grounds of a country house when some unknown soldiers surprise Fiedler. Leamas is sent into the house. Inside the house, Leamas' room is dark. He hides in the dark until the first guard enters. He knocks out the guard. The lights turn on and Leamas sees a group of soldiers. They beat him until he passes out. When he wakes up, his hands and legs are bound and he is lying in a small cell. The door opens and Mundt enters.

Chapter 16 Analysis

This chapter provides a quick turn of events in relation to the other chapters. To this point, the story has moved very slowly and Leamas has not been in real danger. Leamas has experienced a long stretch of calm, particularly as he builds the bonds of trust between himself and Fiedler. In this instance, Leamas and Fiedler are literally on the same side and both of them fight against Mundt. Leamas assumes that this reflects their relationship as spies for British intelligence.

Leamas' spy training comes into focus again in this chapter as he fights against the guards. The treatment that Leamas receives, however, is more of the elaborate plot to protect Mundt. Leamas continues believing that he is fighting against Mundt when in fact he is working for him. The confidence that Leamas feels in his mission and in his abilities allows him to fall into the trap of reacting to Mundt in the way that his bosses planned. This confidence will not serve Leamas well in figuring out what is really going on.



Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

Mundt takes Leamas to another interrogation room. He says that Fiedler has been arrested and that Leamas is being arrested on charges of espionage. Leamas is told to give his confession at Fiedler's public trial. Mundt presses for details in Leamas' plans to be a double agent. In particular, he asks about meetings with George Smiley. Leamas cannot remember any details and passes out again. When he wakes up, he is in a hospital room.

Chapter 17 Analysis

Mundt's interrogation of Leamas is delicate in that Leamas is denying what he believes to be true in order to stay within his role. Up to this point, no one has questioned Leamas' determination to work for the East Germans and Leamas has been in control of the information that has been presented and explained during his interrogation. With Mundt, however, Leamas is not in control and is confronted with stories that he cannot refute other than by his own word. Leamas is not prepared for this part of the plot because it was not planned out during his mission. This lack of preparation, however, fits well into the real secret plot because Leamas is so sure of his version of events that he does not suspect that he has been betrayed to Mundt.

Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

Fiedler explains the situation to Leamas. On the day of his arrest, Fiedler had applied to the Praesidium for a warrant to arrest Mundt based on the evidence provided by Leamas and other sources. There is to be a Tribunal to investigate Mundt and Fiedler and Leamas will be called as witnesses. Fiedler expresses his dislike of Mundt, who beat him during his interrogation because he is a Jew. Leamas is encouraged by Fiedler's attitude and hopes that they will work together to bring down Mundt.

Chapter 18 Analysis

Fiedler's stories about his interrogation by Mundt reaffirm Leamas' trust in Fiedler. Fiedler's idealist understanding of his role in the Communist Party makes him particularly vulnerable. Leamas believes in Fiedler and feels that they will work together to bring down their mutual enemy, Mundt. The relationship between the two of them is very important in this development of the plot. This presents a sense of trust in the reader that underscores the betrayal that is about to become clear during the Tribunal.



Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

Liz arrives in Germany and enjoys meeting the common people. She is excited to attend a political meeting for the District but is disappointed when only seven people show up at the meeting. The meeting reminds her of the meetings that she attended in England. She wavers in her political belief and wonders if Communism is the real answer to the problems in the world and in her own life. At the end of the meeting, an official from the Praesidium arrives and tells her that she is needed at a special meeting. They take her to this special meeting in a military style car.

Chapter 19 Analysis

Liz's disillusionment with the Communist Party in East Germany foreshadows the disappointment that Leamas is about to feel about his own role with British intelligence. Liz wants to believe that the Communist Party in a Communist country will be more authentic and more motivated than her branch in England. Her disappointment comes in realizing that the Communist Party in both places reflects a strong disinterest on the part of the common people and that there is no perfect political system available to her. This discovery foreshadows the one that Leamas is about to learn about British intelligence. At this point in the story, he believes in clear right and wrong, where he and Fiedler are on the side of right and Mundt is on the side of wrong. Like Liz, Leamas is about to learn that there is no perfect spy network any more than there is a perfect political system.



Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

The Tribunal opens. Fiedler begins his case, describing Mundt's beginning work for the Communist Party, including assignments in Scandinavia. Fiedler describes Mundt's time in England and the suspicious way that he was able to escape from that country without negative consequences. Fiedler argues that Mundt became a British agent during that period. He brings Leamas to the stand to explain the banking procedures behind the Rolling Stone. Leamas insists that he did not have any knowledge of Mundt as an agent. Fiedler argues that Mundt recruited Karl Riemeck to be a direct intermediary between himself and British intelligence. Fiedler also argues that Mundt killed Riemeck in order to keep him from exposing Mundt as a British spy.

Chapter 20 Analysis

This chapter presents the version of events that Leamas has been involved in creating. This part of the Tribunal goes according to the plans that Leamas set out in the beginning of the novel during his secret meetings with Control. Leamas continues to have strong confidence in his ability to carry off the mission and actually gloats about how simple it has been to keep the mission going in the right direction. He and Fiedler are united and show this in the way they approach the Tribunal procedures. Leamas plays his part very well and is sure that everything is going according to plan.



Chapter 21

Chapter 21 Summary

Mundt's representative, Karden, states his version of the events. He argues that the Tribunal is the culmination of a British mission to destroy Mundt. He accuses Leamas of being a double agent, setting up false evidence against Mundt. Leamas insists that he has had no contact with British intelligence since he left the agency. Karden calls a surprise witness to show that Leamas is lying. The witness is Liz.

Chapter 21 Analysis

Mundt's defense relies on the truth that Leamas is a double agent. Leamas is able to fend off these accusations with strong denials, though Mundt's representative is able to set up a strong accusation through a collection of evidence about Leamas' behavior after his supposed departure from British intelligence. Leamas feels confident that he will be able to make these accusations go away until Liz enters the room. Leamas knows that Liz does not know anything about the mission but he is also unsure of how she became involved in it. Liz's presence brings all the evidence together in one place. She ties in the clues given to the reader about George Smiley into the context of the Tribunal.



Chapter 22

Chapter 22 Summary

Karden asks Liz about her relationship with Leamas. Liz admits that after Leamas went to prison, George Smiley visited her. She also describes how some unknown person paid her debts and the debts that Leamas left. She also recalls some conversations that she had with Leamas. She remembers that he told her goodbye the day before he fought with the store clerk. He also told her that he had to do something to get revenge against someone but that afterwards everything would be better. Leamas gets very angry, realizing that the agents in Britain have spoiled the mission by involving Liz. He wonders why they have turned on him and thinks of a way that he can save Fiedler and Liz.

Chapter 22 Analysis

The presence of Liz destroys all of Leamas' plans. He is not sure how to incorporate her into his plans. Leamas is in a state of confusion. He is unable to believe that his British intelligence contacts could have botched the mission so thoroughly. His biggest conflict is between his professional loyalty to his mission and his personal loyalty to Liz and Fiedler. The confidence that Leamas has presented throughout the novel shatters at this point. At the same time, however, part of the confidence survives in his belief that he can somehow fix the situation and keep those he cares about from harm.



Chapter 23

Chapter 23 Summary

Leamas confesses that he is a British double agent but expresses disappointment at the British intelligence community for botching the mission by contacting Liz. He defends Fiedler and insists that Fiedler was never involved in the plot. The Tribunal judge states that Fiedler is relieved of his duties until the Praesidium decides what to do with him. Leamas remains under arrest. Leamas realizes too late that it has all been a trick.

Chapter 23 Analysis

Leamas' confidence continues to push him down the planned path of the mission without his knowledge. His confidence allows him to play the hand that his bosses and Mundt need him to. Even Fiedler's resigned acceptance of what is going on shows that he has realized that the situation has radically changed and that Mundt is going to win. Leamas does not realize what has happened until Mundt replies to the question about how he found out about Liz. Leamas realizes that Mundt must have gotten his information from a source in British intelligence. At this point, Leamas is able to put all the information and evidence together and realize the story that his trust and pride would not let him see earlier.

Throughout the mission, Leamas has been working under the assumption that he was providing evidence to frame Mundt in order to have him removed from power. Now, as it becomes clear that Mundt has been behind every move he has made, Leamas realizes that the story he was sent to fake is actually true. Mundt is the secret agent working for the British and Leamas' real mission was not to destroy him but to protect him.



Chapter 24

Chapter 24 Summary

Liz goes to prison where she asks the commissar to give her more information about the case. The commissar tells her that Leamas and Fiedler will be killed. Liz spends the night in prison until Mundt arrives. He takes her out of the prison and leads her to a car outside where Leamas is waiting. Leamas explains that the two of them are leaving Germany. He explains that Mundt was the mystery agent. Leamas' true mission is to have Fiedler discredited and killed in order to protect Mundt.

Chapter 24 Analysis

Liz' experience in the prison is the final piece of information that she needs in order to end her faith in the Communist Party. Listening to the wardeness, she sees that there is no place for her in this system. At the same time, Liz assumes that Leamas and Fiedler are on the side of right and therefore will come out of the situation. Her personal beliefs that Leamas and Fiedler are good men and that Mundt is a bad one motivates her opinion on the matter instead of relying on political terms to determine what is right and wrong.



Chapter 25

Chapter 25 Summary

Leamas explains the plot to Liz. Mundt, the British double agent, was about to be exposed by Fiedler. Leamas' mission was arranged to get Fiedler discredited and allow Mundt to conduct investigations into his own staff. Liz expresses her displeasure at this plot. She believes that Fiedler is the good one and that Mundt is not. She thinks it is wrong for the good to be punished and the bad to be protected. Leamas explains that this is how the spy game works. When they approach the border, they leave the car and go to the wall on foot. There is a small hole in the barbed wire for them to sneak through but they only have a short window before the border guards catch them.

Chapter 25 Analysis

Liz and Leamas have both gone through some disillusioning experiences. Liz has lost her faith in Communism, but Leamas tries to hang on to his faith in the British intelligence community. Though both Liz and Leamas recognize that Fiedler is the good person and that Mundt is the bad one, Leamas is willing to rationalize his role in helping the person he thinks is bad and destroying the one he trusted. Leamas' argument follows a very controlled pattern of thinking: whatever his bosses decide to do is right and he has no right to question it. Liz is unconvinced by this argument and uses her recent experiences with the Communist Party to show that there is no political justification for what has happened.



Chapter 26

Chapter 26 Summary

Leamas and Liz go toward the wall. They climb up to the top of the wall. When they reach the top, the searchlights locate them. The guards start shooting at them. Liz is shot and falls to the bottom of the wall. Leamas hears the voices of his British intelligence contacts on the other side of the wall. Instead, he stands up and allows himself to be shot.

Chapter 26 Analysis

Despite Leamas' insistence that he is comfortable with the role he was forced to play by his superiors in British intelligence, his personal feelings overcome his professional ones in the ultimate moment of his life. His connection to Liz and to the personal side of his life triumphs over his feelings for British intelligence. Though he can hear the voices of his fellow agents on the other side of the wall, he no longer trusts them or that what they decide to do is the right thing. Instead, he allows himself to be shot in order to join Liz in death, to admit his betrayal by his friends and his belief system, and to release himself into the purely personal.



Characters

Alec Leamas

Alec Leamas is a career British agent. Except for a short period following World War II, Leamas' professional life is tied to the British intelligence community. Much of Leamas' work is in Germany creating spy networks in Communist East Berlin. Leamas does not have a very clear personal philosophy other than the conviction that his work is important and that it demands the sacrifice of individuals in the overall goal of fighting against the Communists.

After Leamas returns from West Berlin to report the death of his last agent in East Berlin, he is recruited for a secret mission in which he pretends to fall out with the British intelligence community. This plan is designed to gain the attention of the Communist agents and make them think that Leamas is open to changing sides and to giving them all the information he has about the British intelligence system. During this time, Leamas develops a relationship with Liz Gold. What Leamas does not know is that he, too, is being fooled on this mission, and that it is part of the plan for him to be caught as a double agent by the Germans.

After leaving England, Leamas is taken to Holland and then to East Germany. He plants the story of Rolling Stone, to convince his East German boss, Fiedler, that Mundt is secretly working for the British. What Leamas does not know is that both he and Fiedler have been sacrificed to protect Mundt, who is indeed a British agent. Leamas slowly figures out the plan during a secret tribunal in which Liz is called as a witness. After Fiedler is arrested, Leamas and Liz escape with Mundt's assistance. When they approach the wall at the border, however, they are shot and killed by border guards. Leamas chooses loyalty to Liz rather than to his British intelligence contacts.

Liz Gold

Liz Gold is a young cataloging assistant at the Bayswater Library for Psychic Research. She is also a member of the local Communist Party. Leamas takes a job at the Library through the suggestion of the man at the Labor Exchange office, who is really part of British Intelligence. Leamas and Liz begin a very tentative relationship that leads to a strong bond between them. After Leamas goes to prison, George Smiley visits Liz. He offers to help her out financially.

Liz receives a letter from the Communist District Centre inviting her to visit East Germany. When she gets there, she is taken to be a witness in the Tribunal. She tells about the money she was offered after Leamas' disappearance. Her testimony destroys Fiedler. She and Leamas are taken out of the prison late at night and given directions for escaping from East Germany. However, when they reach the wall, a border guard shoots Liz.



Hans Dieter Mundt

Mundt is the deputy director of the Abteilung, the East German intelligence agency. During Mundt's early career, he had a job in England. During his time in England, he is captured by British intelligence. The British turn him into a double agent for their side. After Mundt returns to East Germany, the British establish an elaborate payment plan called Rolling Stone so that Mundt can collect secret funds when he makes trips abroad. When Fiedler is about to expose Mundt, British intelligence sends Leamas to bring down Fiedler and protect their agent, Mundt.

Fiedler

Fiedler is the second in command of the East German intelligence community. He is Jewish. He suspects that his former Nazi boss, Mundt, is secretly acting as a double agent for Britain. Fiedler gathers evidence about Mundt's connection to the British. Leamas is sent to him to provide more evidence against Mundt in order to trick Fiedler into calling for Mundt's arrest. Leamas' role as a British double agent is revealed in order to end Fiedler's career and leads to his death after the Tribunal.

George Smiley

George Smiley is a British agent who comes out of retirement to assist on Leamas' last mission. His role in the mission is to contact Leamas' girlfriend, Liz, in order to provide evidence that Leamas is a double agent.

Peter Gulliam

Peter Gulliam is another British agent who works with Leamas on his last mission. Gulliam remembers Mundt's time in England during the time when he became a double agent for the British.

Control

Control is the name used for the man who runs the British intelligence service. He gives Leamas his last mission and makes the arrangements for everything.

Karl Riemeck

Karl Riemeck is the last secret agent that Leamas has in the field in East Berlin. Karl gains his information from his boss, Mundt. When Karl tries to flee East Berlin, the border guards shoot him. The death of Karl Riemeck sends Leamas home in disgrace and encourages him to seek revenge against Mundt.



Ashe

When Leamas emerges from prison, he meets Ashe. Ashe tries to pretend that this meeting is by chance; but in reality, he is a Communist agent trying to recruit Leamas as an agent for Communist Germany. After Leamas goes to Holland for interrogation, Ashe visits Liz's Communist Party meetings and takes her out to tea to learn more about her and her relationship with Leamas.

Sam Kiever

Sam Kiever is the contact that Leamas is introduced to by Ashe. Leamas dismisses Ashe as a middleman and come to the terms of his defection with Kiever. Kiever pretends to be involved in the publishing business and offers Leamas freelance work writing for international magazines. In reality, he is offering Leamas money to tell everything he knows to Communist agents.

Peters

Peters is the man who interrogates Leamas in Holland. Peters records all the information that Leamas gives him and sends it on to East Germany. When he discovers that Leamas is wanted in England, Peters provides Leamas with new false documents in order to leave Holland and go to East Berlin.

Miss Crail

Miss Crail is the librarian at the Bayswater Library for Psychic Research. Leamas and Liz work for her.

Pitt from the Labor Exchange

Pitt is the man who gives Leamas his unemployment checks at the Labor Exchange. In reality, he is a British agent assigned to getting Leamas to take a job in the library in order to meet Liz.



Objects/Places

The Circus

The Circus is the name given to the headquarters of British intelligence in London.

Abteilung

The Abteilung is the name for the East German intelligence agency.

East Berlin

After the division of Germany after World War II, the east side of Berlin becomes Communist territory.

West Berlin

After the division of Germany after World War II, West Berlin becomes Democratic territory.

Vopo

Vopo is the term used for the East German border guards.

Banking

After Leamas returns from West Berlin, he is put in the Banking Section of the British intelligence agency in order to have the proper cover story for his mission to pretend to defect.

Rolling Stone

Rolling Stone is the code name given to a banking operation. In this operation, Leamas brings large amounts of cash to banks in Scandinavia and deposits them using false passports and signatures. Then the secret agent would pick up the money using his own false papers. Leamas describes Rolling Stone to his East German contacts. The evidence collected from this operation show that Mundt is the secret agent receiving money from British intelligence.



Bayswater Library for Psychic Research

Leamas is encouraged to take a job at this library in order to meet Liz Gold, a member of the Communist Party. British intelligence plans to use his relationship with Liz to provide evidence in Mundt's trial.

Bayswater Branch of the Communist Party

Liz Gold is the Branch Secretary of the Bayswater Branch of the Communist Party. While her position in the party is only a matter of convenience, it provides the East Germans with a reason for offering her a free trip to East Germany with the aim of having her testify against Leamas in the Tribunal.

Dolphin Square

Dolphin Square is where Ashe takes Leamas after he makes contact. The apartment is designed to make Leamas think that Ashe is who he says he is, but Leamas sees through the deception.

The Hague, Holland

When Leamas agrees to cooperate with the East German agents, they bring him to The Hague in Holland for interrogation.

Le Mirage

Le Mirage is the name of the small hotel that Leamas is taken to in Holland. It is in this hotel that Peters conducts his interrogation of Leamas.

Praesidium of the East German Communist Party

The Praesidium of the East German Communist Party is the ruling council of East Germany. Notes from the meetings of this organization are smuggled out of East Berlin by Karl Riemeck. This is also the final decision-making body that determines the guilt and innocence of Mundt, Fiedler, and Leamas.

Leipzig

Leipzig is the East German city that Liz is invited to for a Communist exchange.



Tribunal

The Tribunal is called to investigate Mundt on charges that he is a British agent. The Tribunal is presided over by three judges and hears testimony from Fiedler, Leamas, and Liz. The Tribunal eventually decides that Fiedler is guilty and that Mundt is innocent.

The Berlin Wall

The wall that is mentioned in the novel is one of the beginning parts of the wall that divided East and West Berlin. Leamas and Liz have to climb through the barbed wire on the top of the wall in order to escape from East Germany.



Social Concerns And Themes

The fact that le Carre is sensitive to political fashion and is able to anticipate a timely issue is considered his most important achievement. Ostensibly, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* addresses the tensions in the 1960s between East and West Germany, and in general between the East and the West. The construction of the Berlin Wall became a symbol of this ideological conflict, and le Carre at the beginning of his career and thereafter was able to seize upon a timely situation, well-documented because of his own personal experience in Germany, and convincingly presented.

There is, however, a deeper concern in *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, and in basically all of le Carre's espionage novels. Le Carre addresses the moral ambiguities facing everyone in contemporary society. There are no absolutes, neither in one's private nor one's political life. World War II evoked patriotism; there were clear-cut issues, divisions of enemies and allies.

Since the Vietnam War, in particular, these distinctions have become obscured; good is no longer justifiable, and evil is accepted as a part of life. Le Carre's creation of the double agent exemplifies this blurring of values, as does the image of mist so prevalent in his novels.



Techniques

As an espionage story, this work reveals all the labyrinthine intricacies of the profession of the spy. In developing the plot, Le Carre is able to withhold information from his readers and keep them in suspense. *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* has a remarkably simple plot, is not overburdened with characters, and develops in a linear fashion. Le Carre is sparing of description, although his own familiarity with Germany is evident. The Wall, which begins and ends the novel, is presented with starkness and strength, and becomes almost a person.

Le Carre is a master of language. He is particularly gifted in the use of dialogue, often presented like an overheard conversation. It is by dialogue more than by description that the characters reveal themselves. Le Carre is able to capture the naive questioning and unquestionable dedication of Liz, the cynical disgust of Leamus, and the cunning of Mundt through the words they speak. His sentences are crisp and terse; his vocabulary exact and creative.

The greatest asset of this novel is the change it brought to the typical espionage story. In contrast to the nineteenth-century figures, dedicated to the service of their country, Le Carre has created a shadowy type, a profoundly unhappy person with doubts about his profession. He shows espionage as a cruel, cold, and bitter business. He evokes the political climate in the 1960s and the great postwar malaise with surprising clarity and intuition.

Themes

Appearance versus Reality

One of the defining themes of the novel is the difference between appearance and reality and the inability for anyone, no matter how trained and experienced, to separate the two. Alec Leamas is a British intelligence agent. His whole life revolves around presenting one reality while living another. Leamas presents himself as a man who is above all deceptions; a man who easily sees through the deceptions of others. His own experience, however, shows that even the master spy is able to be deceived when something appears to be what he wants it to be.

Shortly after returning to Britain, Leamas goes on a secret mission that involves destroying his personal life. He works to deceive all of those he knows and works with so that they think he has lost his ability to work as an international spy. After first deceiving those people, he goes on to create an image of himself as a drunk and a failure. This is all crafted to deceive those around him into thinking that he is ready to turn and defect for the other side. Leamas believes that he knows the line that divides his appearance from the reality of his mission.

The Tribunal brings the issues of appearance and reality to the forefront. Though Leamas is confident in his role in the Tribunal, he is quickly shown to be wrong in his understanding of the situation. The Tribunal changes the reality of the novel repeatedly in a very short period. At first, Leamas is accepted as the defector. Then he is the double agent. At the same time, Leamas' understanding of the roles that Fiedler and Mundt have played in the narrative undergoes huge transformations as he realizes that he has been deceived from the very beginning.

Espionage Morality

In a novel about the intelligence community, there is a lot of discussion about the rights and wrongs in the spy world. On the one hand, each side professes that the spy world runs by a different moral code in which individual lives are sacrificed for the greater good. In this way, they excuse the murder of other agents. However, at the same time, each side argues for the moral superiority of its own political system and uses that moral superiority to justify the acts that are committed in its name.

At the beginning of the novel, Control takes Leamas aside to discuss the difference between their side and the Communist side. Control goes to great lengths to convince Leamas that the Communists are willing to go to evil lengths that their side is not. He argues that everything that their side does is in reaction to what the Communists do. In this way, he tries to show how their side is not responsible for the violence and intrigue involved in the spy world. Leamas has a very similar conversation with Fiedler, in which Fiedler asks him what the philosophical justification is on his side. Fiedler, like Control,



expresses a belief that his side alone is morally justified and that the sacrifices needed to promote that philosophical system are justified by the ends that they will achieve.

Leamas claims to be above all of these moral considerations. At the end of the novel, he tries to maintain this sense of moral neutrality when he claims that he understands why British intelligence has protected someone as clearly evil as Mundt. His final action, however, in choosing to die with Liz, shows that he is not convinced by his own arguments.

Personal and Professional Loyalty

Alec Leamas is a professional spy and has generally put his career ahead of all his personal goals. During his final mission for British intelligence, however, his professional and personal lives begin to show some strain. His connection to his coworkers and his girlfriend Liz show a side of him that he would rather not be shown. Alec Leamas must eventually choose where his true loyalty lies.

Leamas' professional life is complicated by his personal loyalty to those he works with. George Smiley, Peter Gulliam, and Control have taken over a lot of the personal feelings that Leamas has. He views them as his friend more than as his coworkers. In this way, when he realizes their betrayal, he does not feel betrayed on a professional level, but on a personal one. The same applies to his trust for Fiedler. When he is forced to recognize that Fiedler has been sacrificed for professional reasons, he is unable to overcome his personal loyalty to the man, and, at the same time, cannot feel a personal connection to the man who is technically on his side, professionally, Mundt.

Leamas' relationship with Liz is the true wildcard in the conflict between personal and professional loyalty. She is a surprise to him and he is unable to separate his feelings for her from his mission. Leamas feels a connection to Liz that he is unable to incorporate into his life as a spy. When Liz's safety becomes involved in the Tribunal, Leamas' first concern is to protect her even if it means the failure of the mission. In the final scene of the novel, Leamas makes the ultimate decision to die with the woman he loves rather than live with the professional friends who betrayed him.

Style

Points of View

The novel is told in the third person limited omniscient. Only Alec Leamas and Liz Gold have their thoughts examined. The reader is invited to see how these two characters go through the events that challenge their personal belief as well as their emotions. By comparing and contrasting the thoughts of these two characters, the reader gains insight into the ways they trust their superiors and the difficulties they have in carrying on their relationship within the context of their professional lives.

The limited point of view keeps the reader from understanding all the elements of the plot until they are revealed. By keeping the thoughts of Fiedler, Control, Mundt, and others hidden, the novel keeps the reader from having all the information necessary to see the secret plot within the secret plot. By giving the reader only some of the tools for understanding, the novel maintains a sense of suspense and mystery and keeps the reader thinking along the same lines as the two main characters.

Setting

The novel primarily takes place in two locations in Europe. The parts of the novel that occur in England set up the personal life of Leamas and track his movements from London, to prison, and on to defection from England. Leamas' use of British geography allows him to elude, or at least think that he is eluding, those who follow him around. London is shown in very different ways, including the luxury apartments of the spies and Leamas and Liz's small and ugly apartments.

East Germany and the city of East Berlin form the other major setting in the novel. East Germany is presented as a very utilitarian environment that carries the Communist stamp of being very poor and having little industrial development. Liz is often used to show the difference between the working class environments of East Germany and those in England. When the English characters enter East Germany, they always comment on the low level of personal comfort in the country, particularly relating to furnishings and food.

Language and Meaning

The novel uses very simple language that is easily understood by the average reader. Although much of the novel takes place in Germany, and presumably the German language is spoken, there is no German in the novel for the reader to translate or figure out. Instead, the novel records everything in simple English.

The major language issues in the novel relate to the historical and political context. These include vocabulary and terminology for the various spy networks, including both



the Communist side and the British side. Most of these things are explained in context, though there are some points where the reader needs to remember that the novel was written in the opening years of the Cold War, during the 1960s. For example, the wall mentioned in the conclusion of the novel is not necessarily referring to the famous Berlin Wall, which was only in the beginning stages in 1962.

Structure

The novel is written in twenty-six chapters. Most of the chapters are very short and cover the events of only a few minutes to, at most, a few days. There are very few times when the narrative is interrupted to give background information on the characters. One of the longest instances of this is in the explanation of Liz Gold's work with the Communist Party. For the most part, all of this background detail is incorporated into the plot by the interrogation in Holland where Leamas gives an account of his life story.

The novel is told in chronological time order with the exception of some flashbacks to explain what has happened to Liz while Leamas is being interrogated. The story takes place over several months, though most of the action is concentrated on only a few weeks during which Leamas is interrogated and then testified for the Tribunal. Once this phase of the story begins, the events unfold very quickly.



Quotes

"Pushing up the collar of his jacket, Leamas stepped outside into the icy October wind. He remembered the crowd then. It was something you forgot inside the hut, this group of puzzled faces. The people changed but the expressions remained the same. It was like the helpless crowd that gathers around a traffic accident, no one knowing how it happened, whether you should move the body. Smoke or dust rose between the beams of the arc lamps, a constant shifting pall between the margins of light." (Chapter 1)

" 'Thus we do disagreeable things, but we are *defensive*. That I think, is still fair. We do disagreeable things so that ordinary people here and elsewhere can sleep safely in their beds at night. Is that too romantic? Of course, we occasionally do very wicked things.' He grinned like a schoolboy. 'And in weighing up the moralities, we rather go in for dishonest comparisons; after all, you can't compare the ideals of one side with the methods of the other, can you now?'" (Chapter 2)

"But those less impressed by Leamas' criminal potential pointed at his large consumption of alcohol, at the expense of maintaining a separate household, at the fatal disparity between pay at home and allowances abroad, and above all at the temptations put in the way of a man handling large sums of hot money when he knew that his days in the service were numbered. All agreed that if Alec had dipped his hands in the till he was finished for all time - the Resettlement people wouldn't look at him and Personnel would give him no reference - or one so icy cold that the most enthusiastic employer would shiver at the sight of it." (Chapter 3)

" 'That's because you don't *want* to think, you don't dare! There's some poison in your mind, some hate. You're a fanatic, Alec, I know you are, but I don't know what about. You're a fantastic who doesn't want to convert people, and that's a dangerous thing. You're like a man who's . . . sworn vengeance or something.'" (Chapter 4)

"Opinions later differed as to what happened next. Some said the grocer, in trying to recover the bag, pushed Leamas; others say he did not. Whether he did or not, Leamas hit him, most people think twice, without disengaging his right hand, which still held the shopping bag. He seemed to deliver the blow not with his fist but with the side of his left hand, and then, as part of the same phenomenally rapid movement, with the left elbow; and the grocer fell straight over and lay as still as a rock." (Chapter 5)

"Ashe was typical of that strata of mankind which conducts its human relationships according to the principle of challenge and response. Where there was softness, he would advance; where he found resistance, retreat. Having himself no particular opinions or tastes, he relied upon whatever conformed with those of his companion. . . . To Leamas this observably passive role was repellent; it brought out the bully in him, so that he would lead the other gently into a position where he was committed, and then himself withdraw, so that Ashe was constantly scampering back from some cul-de-sac into which Leamas had enticed him." (Chapter 6)



"On the other hand they would expect *practical* objections. They would expect him to be afraid; for his Service pursued traitors as the eye of God followed Cain across the desert. And finally, they would know it was a gamble. They would know that inconsistency in human decision can make nonsense of the best-planned espionage approach; that cheats, liars and criminals may resist every blandishment while respectable gentlemen have been moved to appalling treasons by watery cabbage in a department canteen." (Chapter 7)

"That out of the blue I got a letter from the Department: would I like to go back? But I'd had enough of all that, I thought, so I said I'd think about it and rented a cottage on Lundy Island. I stayed there a year contemplating my stomach, then I got fed up again so I wrote to them. By late forty-nine I was back on the payroll. Broken service, of course - reduction of pension rights and the usual crabbing. Am I going too fast?" (Chapter 8)

"Peters was writing all the time now. Leamas assumed there was a tape recorder hidden somewhere in the room but the subsequent transcription would take time. What Peters wrote down now would provide the background for this evening's telegram to Moscow, while at the Soviet Embassy in The Hague the girls would sit up all night telegraphing the verbatim transcript on hourly schedules." (Chapter 9)

"He knew then what it was that Liz had given him; the thing that he would have to go back and find it if ever he got home to England: it was the caring about little things - the faith in ordinary life; that simplicity that made you break up a bit of bread into a paper bag, walk down to the beach and throw it to the gulls. It was this respect for triviality which he had never been allowed to possess; whether it was bread for the sea gulls or love, whatever it was he would go back and find it; he would make Liz find it for him." (Chapter 10)

"First, she thought he had a quarrel with Mr. Ford, some deep-rooted hatred going back for years. Something to do with a girl, or Alec's family perhaps. But you only had to look at Mr. Ford and it seemed ridiculous. He was the archetypal *petit-bourgeois*, cautious, complacent, mean. And anyway, if Alec had a vendetta on with Mr. Ford, why did he go for him in the shop on a Saturday, in the middle of the weekend shopping rush, when everyone could see?" (Chapter 11)

"It is said that men condemned to death are subject to sudden moments of elation; as if, like moths in the fire, their destruction were coincidental with attainment. Following directly upon his decision, Leamas was aware of a comparable sensation; relief, short-lived but consoling, sustained him for a time. It was followed by fear and hunger." (Chapter 12)

"He was a great cynic. But what he meant is still true: a movement which protects itself against counterrevolution can hardly stop at the exploitation - or the elimination, Leamas - of a few individuals. It is all one, we have never pretended to be wholly just in the process of rationalizing society. Some Roman said it, didn't he, in the Christian Bible - it is expedient that one man should die for the benefit of many?" (Chapter 13)



" 'Peter Guilliam told me he didn't reckon they wanted to catch Mundt, that's all I said. We had a different setup then - an Advisor instead of an Operational Control - a man called Maston. Maston had made a bloody awful mess of the Fennan Case from the start, that's what Guilliam said. Peter reckoned that if they'd caught Mundt it would have made a hell of a stink - they'd have tried him and probably hanged him. The dirt that came out in the process would have finished Maston's career. Peter never knew quite what happened, but he was bloody sure there was no full-scale search from Mundt.'" (Chapter 14)

"And the letter had that awkward, semi-bureacratc, semi-Messianic style she had grown accustomed to without ever liking. It was stupid to say she had a good record of stimulating mass action at the street level. She hadn't. As a matter of fact she hated that side of party work - the loudspeakers at the factory gates, selling the *Daily* at the street corner, going from door to door at the local elections." (Chapter 15)

"Usually, because he was good at that kind of thing, because he was observant and had an accurate memory - because, in short, he good at his job - he spotted them anyway. He knew the formations favored by a shadowing team, he knew the tricks, the weaknesses, the momentary lapses that could give them away. It meant nothing to Leamas that he was watched, but as he walked through the improvised doorway from the lodge to the hut and stood in the guards' bedroom, he had the distinct feeling that something was wrong." (Chapter 16)

"It was part of Mundt's extraordinary self-confidence, perhaps, that he did not speak unless he specifically wished to, that he was prepared to allow long silences to intervene rather than exchange pointless words. In this he differed from professional interrogators who set store by initiative, but the evocation of atmosphere and the exploitation of the psychological dependency of a prisoner upon his inquisitor. Mundt despised technique: he was a man of fact and action. Leamas preferred that." (Chapter 17)

" 'I wouldn't have minded - I don't think I would have minded, not so much anyway - if he had hurt me for myself, for hate or jealousy. Do you understand that? That long, long pain and all the time you say to yourself, 'Either I shall faint or I shall grow or bear the pain, nature will see to that' and the pain just increases like a violinist going up the E string. You think it can't get any higher and it does - the pain's like that, it rises and rises, and all that nature does is bring you on from note to note like a deaf child being taught to hear. And all the time he was whispering Jew . . . Jew. I could understand, I'm sure I could, if he had done it for the idea, for the Party if you like, or if he had hated *me*. But it wasn't that; he hated - '." (Chapter 18)

"Seven people and Liz and the Branch Secretary and the man from District. Liz put a brave face on but she was terribly upset. She could scarcely concentrate on the speaker, and when she tried he used long German compounds that she couldn't work out anyway. It was like the meetings in Bayswater, it was like midweek evensong when she used to go to church - the same dutiful little group of lost faces, the same fussy self-consciousness, the same feeling of a great idea in the hands of little people. She always



felt the same thing - it was awfully real but she did - she wished no one would turn up, because that was absolute and it suggested persecution, humiliation - it was something you could react to." (Chapter 19)

"Leamas' attention was again drawn to the three figures at the center table. To the President's left, a youngish man, dark. His eyes seemed to be half closed. He had lank, unruly hair and the gray, meager complexion of an ascetic. His hands were slim, restlessly toying with the corner of a bundle of papers which lay before him. Leamas guessed he was Mundt's man; he found it hard to say why. On the other side of the table sat a slightly older man, balding, with an open agreeable face. Leamas thought he looked rather as ass. He guessed that if Mundt's fate hung in the balance, the young man would defend him and the woman condemn. He thought the second man would be embarrassed by the difference of opinion and side with the President." (Chapter 20)

" 'Comrade Mundt took one precaution while the British, with Fiedler's aid, planned his murder. He caused scrupulous inquiries to be made in London. He examined every tiny detail of that double life which Leamas led in Bayswater. He was looking, you see, for some human error in a scheme of almost superhuman subtlety. Somewhere, he thought, in Leamas' long sojourn in the wilderness he would have to break faith with his oath of poverty, drunkenness, degeneracy, above all solitude. He would need a companion, a mistress perhaps; he would long for the warmth of human contact, long to reveal a part of the other soul within his breast." (Chapter 21)

"It was insane, fantastic. What were they trying to do - kill Fiedler, kill their agent? Sabotage their own operation? Was it just Smiley? Had his wretched little conscience driven him to this? There was only one thing to do - get Liz and Fiedler out of it and carry the can. He was probably written off anyway. If he could save Fiedler's skin - if he could do that - perhaps there was a chance that Liz would get away." (Chapter 22)

"She glanced past Leamas at Mundt. But Mundt was looking at Fiedler with the dispassionate regard of a hangman measuring his subject for the rope. And suddenly, with the terrible clarity of a man too long deceived, Leamas understood the whole ghastly trick." (Chapter 23)

" 'The Party knows. The Party knows more about people than they know themselves. Haven't you been told that?' The wardress looked at her, shook her head and observed, 'The English! The rich have eaten your future and your poor have given them the food - and that's what's happened to the English.'" (Chapter 24)

"What do you think spies are: priests, saints and martyrs? They're a squalid procession of vain fools, traitors too, yes; pansies, sadists and drunkards, people who play cowboys and Indians to brighten their rotten lives. Do you think they sit like monks in London, balancing the rights and wrongs? I'd have killed Mundt if I could, I hate his guts; but not now. It so happens that they need him. They need him so that the great moronic mass you admire can sleep soundly in their beds at night. They need him for the safety of ordinary, crummy people like you and me.'" (Chapter 25)



"Shielding his eyes he looked down at the foot of the wall and at last he managed to see her, lying still. For a moment he hesitated, then quite slowly he climbed back down the same rungs, until he was standing beside her. She was dead; her face was turned away, her black hair drawn across her cheek as if to protect her from the rain." (Chapter 26)

Adaptations

was successfully filmed by Paramount in 1965, starring Richard Burton, who was nominated for an Academy Award for his brilliant portrayal. Le Carre has not participated in the filming of any of his works, and remains generally detached from them.

Sister Irma M. Kashuba, S.S.J.



Topics for Discussion

Compare and contrast Alec Leamas' loyalty to British intelligence with Liz Gold's loyalty to the Communist Party.

Consider the roles of good and evil in this novel. What commentary does the conclusion of the novel make about right and wrong?

How does Mundt's role as a former Nazi, a current Communist, and a secret British agent work into the novel's spy culture that has two distinct sides?

In looking back over the novel, what added information can the reader add to the earlier chapters given the revelations at the end?

Compare the ideals expressed by Control, by Fiedler, and by Leamas regarding morality among spies. Are any of these ideals shown to be false or dishonest by the events of the novel?

What commentary is made about the political systems of Communist Germany and Democratic England? Is there any clear bias?

What role does spy training play in the novel? Is it shown to be effective? Are there any blind spots or problems with the training that Leamas shows that allow him to be deceived?

Literary Precedents

As an espionage story, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, and all of le Carre's works, with the possible exception of *The Naive and Sentimental Lover* (1971), belong to the tradition of Somerset Maugham, Authur Conan Doyle, and especially Graham Greene; although he has created a more restless, ambiguous hero. In the literary world, he has echoes of Balzac, Stendhal, Dickens (especially *Bleak House*), and Henry James. Joseph Conrad is also one of his masters, especially in his later works.



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