

The Talbot Odyssey Study Guide

The Talbot Odyssey by Nelson Demille

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Plot Summary

A group of lawyers and retired spies, including George Van Dorn, Patrick O'Brien, Tom Grenville, and Peter Thorpe, hears rumors of a Russian plot to take down the United States. Katherine Kimberly is another one of these lawyers, the daughter of former spy Henry Kimberly who was killed in action during World War Two. An English Colonel comes to her one day and gives her a letter that claims that a diary has been found containing new information on Talbot. Talbot is a double agent placed high within the intelligence community of the United States who has betrayed his country to the Russians since World War Two and has never been caught. The Colonel never arrives at the designated meeting location, and the diary is never found.

Kimberly asks a recently retired police officer named Tony Abrams to help her group of amateur spies uncover the plot and in the process solve the long-standing mystery of the identity of Talbot. Tony Abrams agrees, and begins to investigate some of the more suspicious characters in the group. Peter Thorpe, Katherine's boyfriend, appears at a function with blood on his cuff, and Abrams knows that Thorpe is up to no good. He cannot prove anything, however, so keeps his suspicion to himself.

Abrams is seduced by Claudia, a foreign national working for the law firm, and is then attacked by a group of masked men who try to throw him off the roof where the tryst takes place. Abrams suspects that Thorpe has something to do with the attack, and asks Katherine why she trusts Thorpe during a morning trip to the firm's offices, where they discover the recently murdered Arnold Brin, keeper of the files on spies. He has written the call number to the book, "The Odyssey," as his final clue. Patrick O'Brien, Kimberly's boss at the law firm, encourages Abrams to think like a spy and remember that nothing is at it seems. Later that night, Thorpe pushes O'Brien out of an airplane and his body is never recovered.

Thorpe is in fact working for the Russians, and he kidnaps Nicholas West, a CIA information officer, in order to gain information about Talbot so that he can impress his Soviet handler. West resists Thorpe's interrogation and kills himself using cyanide. Thorpe joins Abrams and Kimberly on a morning jog, at which point he attempts to kidnap Katherine Kimberly and kill Tony Abrams. With the help of hired gun Marc Pembroke, Abrams and Kimberly escape.

That night, at a fourth of July party on Long Island, Abrams infiltrates the Russian embassy's weekend house and discovers that they have fortified the home to withstand an electromagnetic pulse that would permanently disable the electronics systems in the United States. He also learns the identity of Talbot and Odysseus when he accidentally comes face-to-face with Henry Kimberly, Katherine's allegedly dead father. He returns to George Van Dorn's estate next door to the Russian house and fills in the rest of the group. They immediately plan a multi-faceted counter attack. Van Dorn warns the group that there are, in fact, three Talbots. Henry Kimberly is only one of them, and the other two must be nearby.



The Russians count down to the detonation in the sky that will signal the EMP, even as a group of armchair spies and semi-retired soldiers sneaks into their mansion. Marc Pembroke kills Androv, the KGB station chief in New York, and spots Patrick O'Brien escaping with the other Russian soldiers. The identity of the second Talbot is known. Patrick O'Brien joins Henry Kimberly, and the two men discuss the identity of the third Talbot, James Allerton, Peter Thorpe's father and close advisor to the President. O'Brien shoots Kimberly so that he can have more power, and then Abrams shoots O'Brien in an act of mercy. Peter Thorpe dies of a stab wound inflicted by another American armchair spy. Katherine Kimberly, Tony Abrams, and their colleagues seize the Russian radio and broadcast the plot to the international intelligence community. The detonation time passes, and no EMP erupts. The team has saved the United States from a total Soviet takeover.



Chapter 1-7

Chapter 1-7 Summary

Tony Abrams and Patrick O'Brien meet on May 1 at the Rockefeller Center, and what begins as a casual discussion of Abrams' background becomes an interview for an operation that is planned to take place in a Russian embassy-owned mansion in Glen Cove, Long Island. Abrams, a former NYPD detective from a Russian immigrant family, is well-suited to the job. The stakes are high for the operation: O'Brien hints that the Russians are planning a major strike against the U.S.

Next door to the Russian mansion, George Van Dorn, O'Brien's partner, is throwing a party to provoke the Russians next door who are celebrating May Day with a party of their own, catered by Karl and Maggie Roth, two suspicious and nervous Americans working for the Russians. Peter Thorpe, a CIA operative and friend of Van Dorn's, arrives at the American party via helicopter and takes the opportunity to interview the pilot on any suspicious Russian activity. He has observed the estate often, both electronically and in-person.

Though the helicopter pilot cannot recall having seen any suspicious activity, Stanley Kuchik, a Long Island high school student, is in the process of discovering some of his own. On a dare, Kuchik hops the fence into the Russians' backyard in order to steal the flag. He successfully nabs the flag just as the Russian estate's floodlights expose him, and he drops into a drainage pipe for cover, and then crawls towards the house. Soon stuck underneath a grate, Kuchik panics until he realizes that the cover of the grate can be lifted away. He climbs into the basement of the Russian house and discovers stockpiled supplies, dried and canned foods, emergency generators and water supplies. Finally, he spots a door to the outside and creeps out to escape, only to immediately be spotted by Russian guards. He runs for it and makes it over the fence into Van Dorn's estate. Just when he thinks he is safe, the Russians hop the fence, too. On Van Dorn's estate, Stanley Kuchik tumbles into the path of Van Dorn and Marc Pembroke, who protect him from the trespassing Russian guards but return the stolen flag before ejecting the foreigners.

Katherine Kimberly, Marc Pembroke, Tom and Joan Grenville have arrived at Van Dorn's party. Kimberly is a partner in Van Dorn and O'Brien's firm. Joan Grenville flirts with Pembroke, who is attracted to her, yet is also intrigued by Kimberly's coolness.

Chapter 1-7 Analysis

The first chapters of the novel set the tone of the entire story. Clipped, perfunctory, and nearly humorless, the first interaction between Abrams and O'Brien reveals exactly how important Abrams' mission will be. O'Brien's actions also prove that he is more than a partner in a law firm. In fact, both O'Brien and Van Dorn are former American spies



whose law offices occupy the same suite that the former Office of Strategic Services, known today as the CIA, occupied during World War Two. While these men refer to themselves as "armchair spies," former professionals who still follow the game on the sidelines, in truth their actions are far more engaged than that. Van Dorn's parties, superficially designed to annoy the Russians on their important holidays, are in fact a machination whose purpose is to force the Russians to sue Van Dorn, and therefore allow them to plant one of their people in the local counsel's office to gain access to the Russian estate.

The interactions between Van Dorn's party guests reveal similarly observational qualities in Katherine Kimberly and Marc Pembroke, both of whom note each glance and word of every other guest. Though Kimberly claims to merely dabble in such observations, her boyfriend Peter Thorpe does not feign triviality; rather, he is the real deal of espionage. Observant, thrill seeking, and charismatic, he has a fascination with the Russians and wants to be as involved with their investigation as possible.

Stanley Kuchik's foray into the foreign mansion serves two purposes. First, through Kuchik's eyes the reader gains invaluable knowledge of the Russian estate and their secret stockpile of supplies, confirming O'Brien's suspicions that something disastrous has been planned for the United States. Secondly, the invasion establishes the dogged persistence of the Russians' security system. The estate is more than well-guarded, and such hostility will necessitate Abrams' under-cover penetration of the mansion.



Chapter 8-10

Chapter 8-10 Summary

Colonel Randolph Carbury delivers a letter to Katherine Kimberly from Eleanor Wingate of Brompton Hall, a woman with whom her father had an affair during World War Two. Wingate has discovered an old journal of her father's, and sends it to Kimberly as it contains valuable insight into the identity of Talbot, the insidious double agent who betrayed Americans to the Russians for decades. Kimberly arranges to pick up the journal from Carbury at an event that evening. As soon as Carbury leaves, Kimberly asks Tony Abrams to follow the older gentleman and find out where he is staying.

Abrams follows Carbury, who is aware of his tail and tries to lose Abrams before arriving at the University Club where he is staying. Abrams notifies a friend at the NYPD of Carbury's presence, and then calls two private detectives to watch the hotel while he gets dressed for the evening's black-tie party honoring former OSS and British Intelligence officers.

Meanwhile, Kimberly visits Arnold Brin, a Brit who guards the dead file room where many old intelligence files remain. In Carbury's file, she learns that Carbury was asked to find and kill Talbot by Churchill himself. She also learns that her father's death was a result of this mission to eliminate the double agent. Even though Carbury warned her that any man of her father's generation should be suspected of being the traitor, Kimberly confides in Patrick O'Brien.

Chapter 8-10 Analysis

The O'Brien law firm is more than a swanky law practice. Kimberly is still deeply involved in her father's old work of espionage. Though the government does not endorse their activities, O'Brien and his partners continue to fight the good fight against communist espionage. While her intentions are true, Kimberly's execution is that of an amateur. She does not fully inform Abrams of the importance of his mission to follow Carbury. She also tells O'Brien about Carbury's visit and the journal, even though he himself could easily be the traitor. Kimberly simply refuses to live her life suspecting everyone she trusts of betrayal. Such faith is a trademark of both a loving human being and an inexperienced spy.



Chapter 11-14

Chapter 11-14 Summary

Abrams investigates the University club and bribes an employee to let him into Carbury's room. After finding nothing unusual, Abrams learns that Carbury has stored a briefcase in the club's safe. Abrams fills in the other two detectives, and then departs for the firm's town home to dress for the party that evening. When he arrives, he meets Claudia, a sexually magnetic Romanian political refugee, and shares a drink with Tom and Jane Grenville. They discuss the firm and their suspicion that the Russians are planning an attack, and then depart for the party.

Kimberly, meanwhile, arrives at Thorpe's suite in the Lombardy Hotel. The suite is not only Thorpe's residence but also a CIA safe house. She tells him about her day, including Carbury's visit and the journal's existence. Abrams calls to fill her in, and she begins to prepare for the formal event that night. Before she dresses, she explores the suite and discovers an upstairs room filled with security monitors and interrogation equipment. She realizes that everything she has ever said and done in that house is on tape, and she feels violated, yet curious.

Chapter 11-14 Analysis

Kimberly does not trust Thorpe. In fact, she resists telling him about her day when he asks, noting that he is always too curious about the activities of the O'Brien firm. Nevertheless, she ignores that instinct and still divulges the sensitive information of the day with a man whose trustworthiness is questionable. Again, Kimberly reveals her ineptitude for secrecy and her all-too-human instinct to have faith in others. In the world of espionage, such a trait is a handicap.

Tony Abrams is unaccustomed to the luxuries that the New York aristocrats experience in daily life, and to the peccadilloes of high society. However, he observes these wealthy, powerful individuals and learns from them. He notices that Jane Grenville is a flirt and a tease, and he is immediately suspicious of Claudia's presence at the firm's townhouse. This foreignness to the elite is one attribute that makes him able to hide in plain sight at firm functions; he will be noticed and disregarded in the same breath.



Chapter 15-16

Chapter 15-16 Summary

Peter Thorpe has departed the Lombardy and arrives at the University Club, where he chats with his favorite bartender. The bartender reveals that Carbury is indeed staying at the Club under an assumed name. Thorpe speaks mysteriously of an impending crisis, and then departs for the armory, where his adopted father James Allerton will be honored for his years of service.

The President will be speaking on behalf of his close advisor Allerton. Thorpe immediately runs into Nicholas West, a former professor who is in charge of documenting and compiling the activities of the CIA. West knows that his extensive knowledge makes him a prime interrogation target, and Thorpe manipulates his anxiety by suggesting that the CIA would rather kill him than retire him.

West and Thorpe go to the main dining room, where they sit at the same table with Kimberly, Abrams, the Van Dorns and the Grenvilles. Abrams immediately spots a bloodstain on Thorpe's cuff, but Thorpe laughs it off and changes the subject to Abrams' parents, American communist labor sympathizers in their day. Thorpe acts boorishly and is reprimanded by Kimberly, Van Dorn, and Patrick O'Brien. O'Brien also takes the opportunity to speak with Thorpe about Talbot, Carbury, and the journal. Kimberly's worry grows as the evening marches on with no sign of the Englishman, and she asks Abrams and Thorpe to check on him at the University Club. Thorpe mentions to her that Talbot could be any man of their parents' generation, including O'Brien, Van Dorn, Grenville, or even Allerton.

Chapter 15-16 Analysis

Thorpe's activities are so blatantly suspicious that it seems unlikely that he could be a villain. He is not trusted or even liked by anyone in his social circle, including his girlfriend and her mentor, Patrick O'Brien. Thorpe immediately bristles at Abrams' presence at the dinner, and makes racial slurs against the Jewish ex-cop. Such actions reveal an immaturity in Thorpe's behavior. While he is a cunning manipulator, he is also incapable of controlling his temper when provoked. Abrams's suspicion of Thorpe's trustworthiness is especially shared by Nicholas West, a man who more than anyone has been the victim of Thorpe's manipulations. West's knowledge frightens Thorpe, and he knows that he must keep the academic afraid in order to control him.

In the dinner scenes, the two schools of investigative thought begin to polarize. For the spies and amateur spies, the best way to find the villain is to remain open to every possible suspicion. Though such openness does keep the group from being blindsided, it also creates a mountain of distractions and mistrust that hinders their ability to function as a cohesive unit. Abrams, on the other hand, thinks like a cop. He looks for



proof, and finds certainty in the presence of evidence. Blood on Thorpe's cuff, for example, proves that Thorpe is engaging in violent acts unbeknownst to the rest of the group. Everyone else is distracted by the search for Talbot, and Thorpe is too young to be Talbot, so any blood he sheds is secondary. Thorpe manipulates Kimberly by encouraging these seeds of suspicion towards every older gentleman in her life. Kimberly resists his efforts, but cannot help but see the possibility that Thorpe could be right.



Chapter 17-20

Chapter 17-20 Summary

Kimberly shares Wingate's letter with Abrams. He makes no assumptions about the identity of Talbot and chastises Kimberly for casting suspicion all around her. They dance and share a couple of personal stories, after which she asks for his assistance in helping to discover the identity of the legendary double agent.

Thorpe threatens Abrams to stay away from the Talbot investigation. Thorpe refuses to engage in Abrams' jibes and the two men depart to check Carbury's room.

At the University Club, the two men find no trace of foul play in the Englishman's room. Abrams again asks Thorpe about the blood on his cuff, and Thorpe insinuates that he seized both the journal and its bearer. The two men scuffle in the hotel room, then leave to return to the armory, each wary of the other.

Chapter 17-20 Analysis

Kimberly continues to compromise the secrecy of her information. First, she shares the news of the journal with O'Brien, then Thorpe, and now Abrams. She is an amateur, and Abrams knows that she can cripple the investigation with her willingness to trust the wrong people. At the same time, though, he is attracted to and intrigued by her sharp wit and cool demeanor.

West knows that Thorpe is not quite right in the head. His access to Thorpe's psychological profile coupled with his sharp observation powers confirm West's fear that Thorpe is an unscrupulous thrill-seeker. He believes that Thorpe is a bad man, yet he also believes in Thorpe's loyalty to the United States. Abrams suspects the opposite, that Thorpe is a bad man who has loyalty to none but himself. Though Thorpe claims to have kidnapped Carbury in the interests of National Security, Abrams knows that the spy's intentions are malevolent. Thorpe's hostility towards Abrams stems from his fear that Abrams is observant and bright enough to see through his sometimes charismatic, sometimes abrasive acts of misdirection.



Chapter 21-24

Chapter 21-24 Summary

Kimberly reflects on how she came to be a part of this firm while she waits for Abrams and Thorpe to return. She and O'Brien share their fears that Carbury has been murdered and that his murder is the first step towards a national calamity. O'Brien reveals that he forged the journal in order to force Talbot out of hiding. Just then, Abrams and Thorpe return and tell a slightly manipulated version of their search of Carbury's room. The inner circle of armchair spies retreats to a private conference room down the hall to discuss the events of the evening. Abrams, meanwhile, calls NYPD Captain Spinelli and fills him in as much as he can. O'Brien returns, and reminds Abrams of his promise to go under cover into the Russian mansion on the 4th of July, then asks him to make sure that Kimberly is protected. The two men return together to the private conference room and the rest of the group. Kimberly, Thorpe, O'Brien, West, and Allerton welcome Abrams to their group, and tell him the story of Talbot, and how his betrayal led to Henry Kimberly's death when Katherine was only two-years-old.

Chapter 21-24 Analysis

Katherine Kimberly trusts O'Brien because he has protected and guided her through her entire life. Her loyalty to him is one reason she fights the necessity for paranoia. To O'Brien, however, the spy craft is still a game. He gambles in creating a fictitious diary that ultimately gets its courier killed. O'Brien cares not for the human loss, but is rather pleased that the enemy has proved his existence once again.

Kimberly becomes even more humanized with the story of how she lost her father at such a young age. The group dynamic is one of outward support and solidarity contrasted with closeted suspicion and unacknowledged guilt. Abrams is baffled at the group's willingness to rely on gut instinct. As a police officer, his job has been to integrate known facts into a calculated, provable conclusion. These spies, on the other hand, see a good day's work as being rigorous speculation followed by a meal with the enemy.



Chapter 25-28

Chapter 25-28 Summary

The group departs the armory and Abrams notes that Kimberly does not join Thorpe in his suite at the Lombardy. Finally, Abrams arrives at the company town home, where he will spend the night. O'Brien calls to inform him that Eleanor Wingate has perished in a fire that consumed Brompton Hall. He retires to the study for a drink, where Joan Grenville propositions him. He hears someone in his room and races upstairs to find Claudia in his bed. She suggests that they make love on the roof of the building, and Abrams agrees, slipping his pistol into one of the pillowcases he carries up. As soon as he gets onto the roof, two men dressed as burglars belay onto the roof, pour whisky down Abrams' throat and throw him off the roof. Abrams fends them off and spends the evening in a chair in Joan Grenville's room.

The next morning, after notifying his friend Spinelli of the dead burglar outside the town home, Abrams joins Kimberly for a trip to the midtown office of the O'Brien firm, where Kimberly hopes to spend the day researching files in the dead file room. As soon as she arrives, she discovers that Arnold Brin is dead, having apparently choked to death on a biscuit. Horrified, Kimberly realizes that Brin was murdered, and that he left a clue before dying. He wrote the call number of the book "The Odyssey" on a nearby sheet of paper. Abrams and Kimberly try to decode the clue, but cannot make sense of it. Abrams touches on his suspicion of Thorpe, and Kimberly does not defend her boyfriend.

Chapter 25-28 Analysis

Even sex is a tool for strategy. Although Abrams immediately doubts Claudia's loyalty to the United States, he still wants to sleep with her. She manipulates his attraction in order to put him in harm's way, knowingly or unknowingly, Abrams does not know absolutely. Abrams has been drawn into the armchair spy circle. He believes that Talbot is now killing out of desperation, and that he will kill anyone that he even suspects of having knowledge. Abrams also believes that Thorpe hired the burglars on the roof the night before, not out of desperation but for personal satisfaction.



Chapter 29-30

Chapter 29-30 Summary

Patrick O'Brien is about to dive out of an airplane into the Pine Barrens and spend the night in meditation. This Sunday evening ritual is his favorite personal tradition, and he enjoys the solitude of the jump into a deserted forest. This time, however, Thorpe has snuck on board, telling the pilot that O'Brien will be pleased to have some company, then knocking the pilot unconscious and engaging the autopilot. Thorpe confesses to O'Brien that he is working for the Russians, not for political reasons but for personal satisfaction. Thorpe shoots O'Brien with a truth serum capsule, but before he can be interrogated, O'Brien leaps out of the airplane. Thorpe follows, and observes the old man pass out on the way down.

Thorpe quickly returns to the city, where he calls Nicholas West and asks him to meet for a drink, using a secret code word that signals an emergency. Thorpe tells West that his life is in danger and that West must go with him tonight if he wants to avoid being brainwashed. West goes up to his room where a "double," an actor who resembles him, is waiting to change into his clothes and draw off anyone following West.

Chapter 29-30 Analysis

There are no more delusions that Peter Thorpe may be innocent. In fact, he is as guilty as he appears to be. His actions on O'Brien's airplane confirm for the reader that which only the dead know. Abrams suspects him still, and his suspicion begins to sway Kimberly, for although she believes that he is loyal ideologically to the United States, she cannot trust him.

It may well be that Thorpe is loyal to the ideology of the United States. His betrayal has nothing to do with communist versus capitalist or east versus west partisanship, but rather it is the result of the thrill-seeking, danger-loving arrogance that allows him to believe he can show up to a dinner in a room full of semi-retired spy hunters with blood on his shirt and no one will catch on.

He pursues Nicholas West without subtlety, pressuring the apparently panicky intellectual to do exactly as Thorpe wishes him to do. West returns to his room and there he finds both an actor and a thug, the actor to distract both the villains and the guardians who protect him, and the thug to whisk him away to Thorpe's interrogation room.



Chapter 31-32

Chapter 31-32 Summary

Thorpe calls Kimberly to confirm that she will be attending Van Dorn's 4th of July party that evening at Glen Cove. Kimberly wakes up Abrams, who slept on her couch, and he leaves for home to change for the morning's run with Kimberly. First, though, he checks in with Spinelli, who fills him in on Thorpe's wife's boating accident seven years earlier, and the appearance of two more dead bodies: one, the actor who doubled as Carbury, distracting the team sent to protect the Englishman, and also the bartender from the University Club with whom Peter Thorpe has such a rapport.

Thorpe is at that moment forming a new kind of rapport with Nicholas West, who is strapped down to Thorpe's interrogation table, connected to electrodes, a polygraph, and a voice stress analyzer. Thorpe shocks West whenever he lies, and Eva gives him a massage when he tells the truth. Thorpe confesses to West that he works for the KGB, but still does not know the identity of Talbot. He desperately wants to know the truth about the legendary double agent in order to impress his Russian superiors with his deduction. Thorpe also tells West that his fiancée, Ann Kimberly, killed herself, and that Thorpe will soon kidnap Katherine Kimberly and interrogate her in the same room as West.

Chapter 31-32 Analysis

Thorpe's profile keeps getting higher and higher, but only the police know enough to give credibility to their suspicions. Abrams has enough information to conclude beyond a shadow of a doubt that Thorpe is a murderer, but he cannot prove that he is a traitor yet. He also cannot understand why Kimberly, a beautiful and classy woman, would choose a man like Thorpe for her companion. The sexual tension between the two is unspoken yet powerful, and although they both want each other badly, Kimberly knows that this is the time for work and not personal interludes.

Thorpe's actions point to the fact that he is a sociopath. He exists outside a world in which he must make decisions about what is right or wrong. In fact, his entire world functions on the assumption that he is always right, no matter how dastardly his actions or how deceptive his plots. He is a systematic and cruel torturer, not only physically shocking Nicholas West, but also attempting to psychologically cripple him by telling him that Ann Kimberly is dead.

West knows that Thorpe only has leverage with the Russians so long as he continues to live and give good information. He begins to plan a way to reach one of the many failsafe devices designed for him by the CIA, poisoned objects that he can use to kill himself if he falls into enemy hands.



Chapter 33-35

Chapter 33-35 Summary

Thorpe knows that Ann Kimberly works for the National Security Agency as a code breaker, and that she has recently discovered some suspicious activity. The Russians have been testing the electronic vulnerability of their home in Glen Cove and strengthening their circuits. West continues to resist telling Thorpe the truth, and he tries to kill himself by smoking his poisoned pipe, but Thorpe has exchanged the poisoned pipe with an innocuous duplicate. West is forced to admit that he knows that there is not only one Talbot, but three.

Kimberly jogs to Brooklyn and meets up with Abrams. Before setting out on their run together, they kiss. Together, they run through the city, hoping to draw out an assailant. They discuss Thorpe's suspicious behavior and their lack of proof against him. They also debate how the Russians may be planning to take down the United States. In the park, they see two horse-mounted men approach them. They draw their weapons and prepare for a confrontation.

Chapter 33-35 Analysis

This is a time of heightened tension. Physical danger lurks, national security teeters in the balance, and sexual attraction smolders. For West, this time is the most anxious of his life. His life is not the only one at stake; if he fails to resist Thorpe's torture, then he could betray his country and endanger an entire nation. Similarly, Thorpe knows that if West does not fail, if Thorpe cannot draw out good intelligence from the academic, then his Russian handlers will wonder if Thorpe is as useful as he seems to be. Kimberly and Abrams make decoys of themselves, hoping to initiate some action on the part of Talbot. At the same time, they are blindly attracted to each other, yet fully committed to discovering and disabling the plot against their country.



Chapter 36-38

Chapter 36-38 Summary

West tries to convince Thorpe that if he learns the truth about Talbot and the electrical experiments then the Russians will have to kill him. West reveals that the Russians have protected themselves against an electromagnetic pulse, or EMP, a massively destructive electric current that would end all technology in the United States. West convinces Thorpe to unstrap him for a moment so that he can stretch, and West shocks Thorpe with the electrodes. He nearly escapes when Eva returns and whips him unconscious.

He wakes up strapped to the table only a few minutes later. He is face-down and only strapped down on his legs. His arms are free so that Eva can watch him flail while she whips him. Thorpe compliments the former professor on his bravery and prepares to leave West with Eva and her whip. Just then, West pulls a handful of hairs from his head, chews the hair, and dies. The artificial hair contained cyanide. Thorpe knows that he has just lost a major asset for his Russian handlers. He shoots Eva so that he can blame her for West's death, then leaves to meet up with Katherine Kimberly in Brooklyn.

At that moment, Kimberly and Abrams study the two horsemen, and then finally determine that they are simply equestrians and not assassins. They continue their run and discuss the possible meanings of "Odysseus," Arnold Brin's last clue.

Chapter 36-38 Analysis

West ultimately wins the confrontation with Thorpe, because he controls his own destiny. He empowers himself to decide when to end his own life, and he takes any information he may have had into eternity, unspoken. His death is the first of Thorpe's victims that is drawn out in gruesome detail.

Kimberly and Abrams form a more powerful connection, and therefore a stronger opponent to Thorpe and to Talbot, whoever he is. Abrams respects Kimberly's poise under pressure, and she trusts the former detective far more than she does the man she's slept with.



Chapter 39-40

Chapter 39-40 Summary

Abrams and Kimberly jog through the park and finally meet Thorpe at Grand Army Plaza. Abrams notices Thorpe's wounds from his struggle with West, but Thorpe shrugs them off, and then suggests a jog through a deserted cemetery. In the cemetery, the group is surrounded by a bunch of men disguised as gravediggers. Abrams bluffs, saying that he has a tracking device and a car full of cops waiting for him and Kimberly. He knows that Thorpe will have to reveal that he is the one who hired these men. Thorpe pulls a gun, Abrams punches him, and Kimberly fires at the gang of thugs.

Suddenly, another group of men appears, this one led by Marc Pembroke, and kills Thorpe's thugs. O'Brien, before his disappearance, asked Pembroke to watch out for Kimberly. Pembroke leaves Thorpe unconscious so that he will lead the group to his Russian handlers. Kimberly and Abrams leave the park and prepare for the evening's work in Glen Cove. Abrams will infiltrate the Russian estate and Kimberly will brief the rest of her colleagues on the developments of the day.

Chapter 39-40 Analysis

The showdown in the park is a strange one, because no one sees the same line drawn in the sand. Abrams and Kimberly follow Thorpe into a deserted, well-covered area despite the fact that all day they have been sharing and strengthening their suspicion of his betrayal. They want to draw out his attack, yet they also want to survive this interlude. Abrams believes that Thorpe wants to appear as innocent and surprised at the sudden presence of the henchmen as the other two runners are. Once Thorpe introduces hired henchmen, he admits that Abrams is too much for him to handle on his own. That admission strengthens Abrams, and gives him the psychological upper hand in the scuffle.



Chapter 41-42

Chapter 41-42 Summary

Abrams arrives at Penn Station and boards a train to Long Island. He reflects on his growing attachment to Kimberly and the day that they spent together. When he arrives in Long Island, he is briefed by Huntington Styler, the lawyer that the Russians hire for their lawsuit against George Van Dorn. Abrams will be under cover as a new arrival in Styler's firm. Abrams learns of his mission's goal, to spot certain electric apparatus and look for gold weather stripping that would conduct the EMP around the house and not through it. He also learns how to dupe a voice stress analyzer, with the help of some voice spray and evasive answers.

Together, Abrams, Styler, and another lawyer arrive at the Russian mansion. After passing through intensive security during which Abrams loses his knife, the group sits with Viktor Androv. Abrams immediately spots inconsistencies in Androv's persona while the group waits for Van Dorn to begin the fireworks display that harasses the Russians next door. Mr. Kalin, allegedly a Russian embassy lawyer, joins the group and surreptitiously pulls out a voice stress analyzer. Androv asks Abrams many questions about his background and Abrams manages to pull off a convincing performance. Androv finally gives up on waiting for Van Dorn to begin the fireworks and asks the group to leave. Abrams excuses himself to go to the bathroom, and he discovers a basement where all the Russian embassy staff is hiding with their families. On his way back upstairs, he makes a wrong turn and meets Henry Kimberly.

Chapter 41-42 Analysis

This domestic espionage staged against foreign nationals living within the borders of the United States is borderline illegal. However, Abrams and the rest of the armchair spies know that this mission is crucial to the security of the United States. Abrams discovers that the Russians are prepared for a calamity this very night, and are in fact hiding in their basement in order to protect themselves from whatever strike they have planned to decimate the United States.

Abrams also learns the identity of Odysseus. Henry Kimberly never died on his mission to uncover Talbot. In fact, Henry Kimberly is Talbot. Abrams now has the conflict of whether or not to share this information with Katherine Kimberly, a woman who has idolized her father's memory for her entire life. He knows that he must inform the group in order to mount a well-planned counter-attack, but on a personal level, he does not want to distress Katherine.



Chapter 43-46

Chapter 43-46 Summary

Pembroke watches the Russian house from Van Dorn's party, watching for the flashing headlights that signal trouble from Abrams. When Kimberly comes upstairs looking for Abrams, Pembroke fills her in on the situation next door. Meanwhile, downstairs, Karl Roth, who has catered Van Dorn's party, sprays the food with an oily mixture. He says that he wants to make the spread look more appealing, but when his wife tries to sample something, he stops her. Under Claudia's supervision, he has sprayed the food with poison. Maggie tries to stop Karl from serving the poisoned food, but Claudia chloroforms her. Claudia also reveals the Russian plan to gain control over the United States.

Abrams leaves the Russians' house and flashes the headlights, since he was discovered snooping in the basement. He drives to the train station, where he is supposed to board a train to Manhattan, but he is jumped by a group of Russians. Abrams shatters the light bulb in the underground passageway and makes his way out through the darkness. At Van Dorn's, Abrams tells Pembroke that Claudia is working for the Russians.

At the Van Dorn house, Van Dorn, Pembroke, and Tom Grenville prepare to take action against the Russians. Stanley Kuchik is also at the party, and chats with the pyrotechnicians allegedly on hand for festive fireworks, but who are armed with mortars.

Chapter 43-46 Analysis

These chapters build momentum to the climax of the novel. The discovery of Henry Kimberly triggers the rapid-fire preparation for a massive counter-attack. Most importantly, the armchair spy team begins to communicate without reservation. As soon as they understand that the Russians have planned a legitimate attack against the United States, the group is united against their common enemy. However, they are still mindful of the existence of Talbot. Specifically, Abrams refuses to fill Pembroke in on the events in the Russian house, for example, until they are joined by the rest of the group. Abrams has no way of knowing where Pembroke's loyalties lie.

Abrams' interlude is an apt allegory for the world of espionage. He is being hunted in the darkness by an unknown number of enemies. He cannot see them, nor can he hear them. He can only grope his way blindly through the tunnel towards the light. Much like the armchair spies, who cannot tell by sight or sound who their enemies truly are, Abrams can rely only on his feelings.



Chapter 47-50

Chapter 47-50 Summary

Kalin returns to Androv and reports that Abrams has escaped. Androv berates Kalin, then introduces him to Henry Kimberly and announces that Peter Thorpe will soon be joining the group. Henry Kimberly is uneasy, but does not seem particularly attached to either of his daughters. Even when Androv reveals that everyone at Van Dorn's has been poisoned, Kimberly expresses no preference for or against saving Katherine. Thorpe arrives and tells Androv that Nicholas West is dead. Thorpe and Henry Kimberly discuss Katherine while waiting for a Russian security attaché to arrive with Moscow's message about the night. Next door, Abrams tells Katherine Kimberly that her father is alive.

Chapter 47-50 Analysis

Henry Kimberly is in many ways a ghost. He is totally unattached to the only people who connect him to reality and humanity. Although his detachment springs naturally from his long-term separation from his daughters, his callousness about Katherine's safety is nevertheless shocking. Meanwhile, she has spent her entire life in reverence for her father's memory, and when she learns that he is still alive, and has spent his entire life betraying the United States, she is visibly shaken. She has just learned the ultimate lesson in espionage, that nothing is what it seems to be, even death.



Chapter 51-55

Chapter 51-55 Summary

Abrams calls Spinelli and discovers that the Russian buses returned to the embassy as usual, but that the vehicles were nearly empty. Most of the Russian population remains in Glen Cove. This news confirms that the Soviets are planning a strike for this very evening. Abrams briefs Van Dorn on the results of his reconnaissance in the Russian house, and Van Dorn reveals his suspicion that the Russians are planning to use an EMP to cripple the United States government. He calls the Pentagon, but struggles to get anyone on the phone. Van Dorn finally tells the group that there are three Talbots.

Ann Kimberly arrives in Long Island from Munich and ends up sharing a taxi with a young Russian attaché. She arrives at Van Dorn's house just in time to hear about the three Talbots. She postulates at how the EMP will be effective in crippling the United States. Molniya 36, a Russian satellite, will be in position over Nebraska at just past midnight that night, at which point it will detonate in the atmosphere and destroy the electronic capability of the country.

Spinelli calls Abrams and brings him up to speed on his raid on the Lombardy suite, in which he found Nicholas West's body. The group knows that Thorpe is next door, and they formulate a plan to invade the Russian house.

Chapter 51-55 Analysis

The United States has failed to anticipate this threat, and so now, at the very last minute, a group of semi-retired and amateur spies must take up arms in order to prevent the destruction of the entire nation. Ironically, the same widespread suspicion that has hampered their clear-sightedness throughout the entire novel is what has allowed them to be prepared for this reality. Van Dorn has hired pyrotechnicians who know how to fire mortars, and his basement is outfitted with emergency medical supplies.



Chapter 56-60

Chapter 56-60 Summary

The counterattack begins on multiple fronts. Two of Pembroke's men chase Claudia into the Russians' yard, the perfect distraction while the team gets into place nearby. Meanwhile, Karl Roth sneaks a group of the Americans into the Russian mansion. Pembroke and Ann Kimberly take out the Russian gate guards. Meanwhile, Tom Grenville and a team of World War Two paratroopers prepare to parachute onto the Russian mansion roof. Finally, Joan Grenville and Stanley Kuchik crawl through a service duct to the basement of the Russian house.

While the team invades, Van Dorn stays by the phone and checks in with the mortar technicians. He still cannot get any of his colleagues from the Pentagon on the phone.

Chapter 56-60 Analysis

The team of lawyers and retired spies summons unanticipated reserves of strength and courage in order to protect the nation. Joan Grenville, for example, agrees to put herself in danger and crawl through a tiny pipe in order to facilitate the team's safe penetration of the Russian house. However, while each member of the team has a similar motivation to protect the nation, not everyone is comfortable with the violence that must happen in order for that protection to happen. Ann Kimberly, especially, must fight an inner battle to accept the violent murders of the guards that happen right in front of her face. Ultimately, this team is comprised of human beings who feel fear, hesitation, and compassion.



Chapter 61-64

Chapter 61-64 Summary

Androv and Kimberly chat about the night's plan. Androv has re-routed Van Dorn's telephone line to his own attic, so Van Dorn has not in fact alerted anyone of the imminent threat. Claudia arrives in the Russian estate and demands to be taken to Kalin, whom she seduces.

Unbeknownst to the Russians, the American team moves through the estate. Abrams and Katherine Kimberly ambush the remaining guards patrolling the guards and prepare to penetrate the home. Roth takes Pembroke and Ann Kimberly inside the Russian house. As soon as they are inside, Pembroke kills Roth and changes into a Russian uniform. The group sneaks up towards the communication room in the attic. On the way, they run into the Russian attaché, and he confirms to Ann Kimberly that the Russians will use the Molniya satellite to produce an electromagnetic pulse. He also tells her that Talbot three will be in Glen Cove that very night. In fact, Talbot three has followed Tom Grenville and the paratrooper team out of the airplane over Glen Cove.

Chapter 61-64 Analysis

Van Dorn has underestimated his enemy and paid a price for it. Androv is a brilliant strategist, as is evidenced by the plot to cripple the United States without shedding a drop of blood. He could not have planned such an operation without the help of traitors. Talbots one and two, James Allerton and Henry Kimberly, are powerful, well-regarded men who have chosen to betray their country. However, just as Americans turn against America, so can individuals turn against the Russians. Karl Roth and Claudia Lepescu, though less politically powerful than Kimberly and Allerton, nevertheless have the power to cripple the Russian operation.



Chapter 65-67

Chapter 65-67 Summary

Stanley Kuchik and Joan Grenville finally emerge in the basement of the Russian house. The glue the door to the shelter closed, sealing the Russians into their own basement, then put sleeping gas into their ventilation system. Stanley returns to Van Dorn's, and Joan remains behind and goes in search of her husband.

As Claudia seduces Kalin, she shoots him. She goes to Androv and tells him that Roth sprayed the food with vegetable oil, not poison. She prepares to shoot Androv, but Talbot three surprises her.

The Americans infiltrate the mansion entirely and begin their search for Androv and Henry Kimberly. Tom Grenville realizes that another jumper has followed the team out of the airplane and is shooting the other paratroopers. He lands on the roof with what remains of his team. His wife, meanwhile, wanders through the basement of the Russian mansion and discovers Thorpe trapped in an interrogation room. They scuffle, and Joan stabs him. She runs away and hides in a dumbwaiter.

Chapter 65-67 Analysis

The action of these chapters moves very quickly and through multiple points of view. As the Americans have planned a complex, multi-faceted attack, the various teams all have their own obstacles. Talbot three has finally arrived in the Russian mansion, and his arrival signals the climax of the novel. The third traitor to the United States is inside the Russian house.

Joan Grenville also reveals that she has more depth than she appeared to have. She is not swayed by Thorpe's claims of innocence, and even wins a fight against a skilled intelligence officer who has killed more than she can imagine.



Chapter 68-74

Chapter 68-74 Summary

The team, knowing that security has been alerted to their presence, makes its way through the house more aggressively. Katherine Kimberly and Abrams discover a television studio from where Henry Kimberly planned to broadcast his inaugural speech after the EMP cripples the United States. Katherine sees her father and confronts him. She rejects his offer of reconciliation but allows him to walk away alive. Pembroke shoots Androv and sees the face of Talbot three. It is Patrick O'Brien.

With time running out, Van Dorn realizes that his calls to the Pentagon have been sabotaged. He resigns himself to the fact that he will have to mortar the Russian house with his team inside. He does not know that inside the house, Ann Kimberly has seized the Russian radio and is broadcasting to the international community about the Russian plan. The minutes pass, and the Molniya satellite passes on through space intact. The EMP never happens.

O'Brien reveals himself to Henry Kimberly, who is shocked that the apparent patriot is a traitor. O'Brien kills Kimberly so that O'Brien can be the president of the new United States. Abrams discovers O'Brien standing over Kimberly's body and is disappointed to have Pembroke's assertion confirmed. He shoots O'Brien.

Chapter 68-74 Analysis

Androv's plan to manipulate the American public with Henry Kimberly's presence is as devious as his more direct plan of taking out the military capability of the nation. However, Henry Kimberly himself makes the most poignant strike against his former life when he makes a laughable offer of friendship to his daughter. The reader knows that this offer is not genuine, as only hours earlier, Henry Kimberly shrugged off Androv's offer to protect Katherine and Ann from the poisoned food.

Talbot three's identity is revealed in these chapters. Patrick O'Brien, Katherine Kimberly's role model and long-time armchair spy, has betrayed his country for as long as Androv has been with the KGB, and has hidden his guilt from the group with an elaborate smoke and mirror show. Much of the misdirected suspicion has stemmed from O'Brien's prompts, asserted to distract the team from O'Brien's own betrayals. Abrams realizes that O'Brien was always guilty, and that Abrams always understood that O'Brien must have been Talbot. Yet each person in O'Brien's life found a good reason to refuse to believe what they all felt to be true.



Characters

Tony Abrams

Abrams is a Brooklyn-born Jewish lawyer who works in a junior position at the Kimberly law firm. A former NYPD detective, he works with Katherine Kimberly to determine the identity of infamous double agent Talbot. Quick, observant, fluent in Russian, with a superbly analytical mind, Abrams has a clearer eye for the situation around him than most of his peers. Since he is a former detective, he is less given to suspicion and conjecture than are his espionage-based peers. Instead, he observes evidence, personality, responses to specific stimuli, and inconsistencies in stories, and arrives at a conclusion that will hold up in court and not just in the suspicious minds of spies. Patrick O'Brien has asked him to go undercover into the Russian estate at Glen Cove in order to gain valuable information about a secret plan to cripple The United States. Though Abrams does want to legitimately practice law, the threat against the national security of the United States trumps his law career.

Abrams is immediately suspicious of Thorpe, immediately intrigued by Katherine Kimberly, and instantly respectful of Patrick O'Brien. His judge of character seems unshakable, especially when Claudia, a foreign national with him he feels both attraction and guarded suspicion, sets up an attempted murder.

Peter Thorpe

Thorpe is the son of two spies who were killed in action and the adopted son of James Allerton, personal advisor to the President. He works in intelligence and has questionable alliances, motives, and alibis. He fends off pointed questions that he doesn't want to answer with his charm and often brash humor. He is very motivated to discover the identity of Talbot, and uses his relationship with Katherine Kimberly to learn the activities of the Kimberly firm to that end. In fact, he uses every relationship in his life to some other end. A skilled manipulator, Thorpe knows exactly how to pressure any person into any act, whether it is through psychological torment, physical pain, or the adroit use of fear.

Peter Thorpe has no scruples and does not subscribe to the commonly held system of right and wrong that holds society together. Instead, he believes passionately in survival and in high-risk living. He loves the thrill of danger, and therefore puts himself in harm's way as much as possible. In the same vein, he is also quite a ladies' man, and even though he plans to propose to Katherine, he never stops his sideline romances and flings. Katherine believes that he is untrustworthy yet loyal. Nearly everyone else close to him knows that he cannot be trusted, and most doubt the state of his sanity.



Katherine Kimberly

Katherine is the daughter of Henry Kimberly, the former spy killed in action on a mission in Russia after World War Two. She works now at his former firm as a partner, and spends her free time investigating the identity of Talbot, the double-agent who killed her father. She is in a relationship with intelligence officer Peter Thorpe, a charismatic, enigmatic professional who lives in a CIA safe house.

Talbot

Talbot is the legendary double agent who betrayed the United States to the Russians for decades following World War Two. Skeptics believe that no such double agent ever existed, but rather that he was a fictional character invented to cover up the mistakes of the well-regarded spymasters. However, most believe that Talbot was not only real, but also one of the highest-ranking individuals in American espionage in that era. Such a person would have had access to nearly every anti-soviet operation run through the CIA or OSS, which explains in many ways how so many American agents were lost over enemy lines. Katherine Kimberly's father, Henry Kimberly, and Peter Thorpe's biological parents were only a few of those agents. The letter from Eleanor Wingate revealing a lost diary with clues as to Talbot's identity stirs up the controversy once again, and the armchair spies fear that Talbot may still be an active operative among them.

Patrick O'Brien

O'Brien is a senior partner at the Kimberly firm and former anti-soviet spy. Patrick O'Brien is considered to be sharp, devious and altruistic, willing even in retirement to do whatever it takes to protect national security. He has a personal stake in discovering the identity of Talbot, since he has lost close friends to the double agent's betrayals. He has a close relationship with Katherine Kimberly and respects Tony Abrams, but he holds Peter Thorpe in suspicion.

Nicholas West

West is a high-ranking intelligence officer who knows far too much about the CIA's history to be safe. Because of his extensive knowledge, he is constantly guarded by both private and agency-hired guards, and constantly very nervous. He is also engaged to Katherine's sister, Ann Kimberly, an NSA code breaker.

Claudia

Claudia is a Romanian ex-pat who lives at the Kimberly firm's town home. She flirts with Tony Abrams and nearly seduces him.



George Van Dorn

Another member of the inner circle of armchair spies, Van Dorn owns the house next door to the Russian estate in Glen Cove, Long Island. He takes great pleasure in provoking the Russians, especially on their national holidays when he blasts patriotic music and shoots off fireworks over their house.

Marc Pembroke

Pembroke is a British employee of the Kimberly firm whose work tends towards personal protection and espionage. He is the son of Arnold Brin, guard of the dead file room at the Kimberly firm.

Tom and Jane Grenville

Tom is a compatriot of Patrick O'Brien's and George Van Dorn's. His wife, Joan, is known to sleep with Tom's younger, more attractive friends. She makes passes at both Tony Abrams and Marc Pembroke. While both seem to be easily dismissed, those who look closely notice deep reserves of strength and courage in both of them.

Stanley Kuchik

Kuchik is a Long Island high school senior who infiltrates the Russian estate on a dare. He runs track and manages to escape the Russian security and land in George Van Dorn's hands. Van Dorn uses him for his inside knowledge of the compound.

James Allerton

Allerton is a close adviser to the President and Peter Thorpe's adoptive father. He is one of the generation of spymasters and, by that virtue, also one of the generation of suspected Talbots. Though Katherine refuses to believe he could betray his country, Peter Thorpe continues to assert that, simply by the books, it is possible. Allerton owns the suite in the Lombardy Hotel where Peter Thorpe lives and interrogates his prisoners.

Eva

The housekeeper at the Lombardy suite/safe house, Eva is an eastern-European ex-pat who assists Peter not only with housework but also with company duties, like interrogations, torture and surveillance.

Androv

The United States station commander of the KGB, Androv is in charge of handling all double-agents, including Peter Thorpe and Talbot, as well as executing the plot to seize control of the United States.



Objects/Places

OSS

Predecessor to the CIA, the OSS was the Office of Strategic Services during World War Two. This office coordinated espionage efforts throughout the war.

KGB

The Russian combination of the CIA and the mob, the KGB is a Gestapo-type police force that not only controls Russian citizens but also seeks to uncover and destroy any foreign influence that interferes with Russian state security. Most of the Russian embassy staff in New York is also affiliated with the KGB.

Sodium pentothal

Sodium pentothal is a truth serum used by government agencies to extract legitimate information from prisoners. It is introduced into the blood stream with a syringe or bullet, and then produces a similar effect to drunkenness.

The Armory

The armory is the location of the OSS dinner at which James Allerton is honored by the President. An old building, it features stunning architectural details.

The University Club

The University Club is the exclusive, discreet Club from which Thorpe snatches both Carbury and West.

Glen Cove

Glen Cove is the small city in Long Island that holds both George Van Dorn's summer home and the Russian embassy's weekend retreat mansion.

The Lombardy Hotel

The Lombardy Hotel is Peter Thorpe's residence and CIA safe house. The Lombardy suite is outfitted with exhaustive security systems and a state-of-the-art interrogation room.

Molniya

Molniya is the name of the Russian satellite that will detonate in the atmosphere over Nebraska, creating the EMP that will wipe out all of the electronics in the United States.

EMP

An electromagnetic pulse is a surge of electric energy that can, essentially, blow the fuse for an entire nation. The Russians are planning to use one against the United States in order to wipe out communications systems, cripple the President's ability to strike back, and ultimately gain control of the nation.

Handler

A handler is a spy's contact within an organization. For example, Peter Thorpe's handler within the KGB is Mr. Kalin, who passes information from Thorpe to the KGB, and orders back to Thorpe.



Themes

Appearances

Not one person in this novel is as he appears to be. The double agents and betrayers of the novel need a false face in order to successfully undermine the government of the United States. Talbot looks loyal enough to have survived as a well-respected intelligence officer, yet he is not. In fact, three men within the intelligence community appear to be protect this country but have spent their careers sabotaging it. Patrick O'Brien appears infallible. Henry Kimberly appears to be dead. Neither illusion is supported by reality. Thorpe looks loyal, but is not. In fact, he is a long-term betrayer of the United States and a cold-blooded killer of his own friends and colleagues.

Illusions characterize the many protagonists in the novel as well. Similarly to the villains, the protagonists use their appearances to manipulate situations to their favor. Nicholas West appears meek and timorous, yet he weathers intense interrogation using strength of will and clarity of mind. George Van Dorn comes across as a belligerent buffoon, but he plans meticulously for the worst-case scenario. Joan Grenville appears to have nothing but sex to offer, yet she contributes mightily to the effort when her talents are needed. Abrams, on paper, looks like nothing but a cop who went to night school, but his mind is sharper than those of many former spies and secret agents are. The world of espionage demands a certain amount of deception. The world of this novel maintains that demand.

Trust versus Loyalty

Multiple characters make the distinction between trustworthiness and loyalty. Katherine Kimberly justifies Thorpe's untrustworthiness with the knowledge that he appears to be loyal to his country. Even though Peter's actions, words, and charm are all tools of deception, in effect enhancing his untrustworthiness, nevertheless Katherine believes that anything he does, he does to ensure the safety of this country. Thorpe uses her confidence in his motives to blind her and then gain information from her, proving that he is neither trustworthy nor loyal.

No one trusts anyone - the armchair spies all believe that everyone else must be lying. A major reason they cannot trust each other is that all are repeatedly guilty of lies of omission. As Abrams puts it at a party, each person in the ring of semi-retired and amateur spies is constantly "forgetting," to inform the rest of the group of some crucial detail. Trust cannot exist in such a group. However, each person believes that his colleagues are loyal to the cause. A few lies or forgotten facts are acceptable. Treason is not. Therefore, a group of half-truth tellers bands together against a double agent.

The only character who remains both trustworthy and loyal is Tony Abrams. If he must conceal something from the rest of the group, he openly informs his colleagues that he



is concealing something. He does not lie to anyone, nor does he abandon loyalty. This ability to tell the truth and stay loyal is one he cultivates as a police officer, and makes him a unique asset in the group.

Evidence versus Suspicion

Spies suspect; Cops calculate. Katherine, Van Dorn, and Thorpe all exist in a world of espionage, and therefore they remain open to every possible permutation of how the situation at hand may end. They consider evidence, but they also know that evidence can be manipulated, falsified, and planted by a skilled agent. More important than concrete facts are possibilities and postulations. This method of investigation allows the spies to remain unsurprised by any conclusion, yet it also divides their energies significantly, and therefore slows their progress toward such a conclusion.

Tony Abrams, on the other hand, a former cop, believes that a case is not a case unless it has facts behind it. Therefore, he takes facts, details, and evidence, and allows them to tell the story that they want to tell. The blood on the cuff of Peter Thorpe tells Abrams that Thorpe is violent, at ease with deception, and very dangerous. The rest of the spies look past Thorpe because he is too young to be Talbot. The advantage to a police-style investigation is that Abrams is confident in the conclusion he makes, and he cuts a direct path toward that conclusion. The disadvantage is that he can be blindsided, since he has not taken the time to fully consider every possibility as Katherine and the other spies have.

Style

Point of View

This story is told from the point of view of third person omniscient. The narrator not only has access to the visible actions and spoken sentiments of every character, but also the inner thoughts of such. As the scenes of the book change, so does the narrator's focus, as it follows the present action. The narrator is honest and trustworthy, and informs the reader of facts that not every other character in the book can know. The reader is far more informed than any other character in the book, which allows for deeper understanding and heavier judgment to fall on characters like Peter Thorpe. Thorpe looks so guilty that his peers believe he could not possibly be guilty. However, less than halfway through the novel the reader watches as he tortures his longtime friend, Nicholas West. Though Abrams and Patrick O'Brien do not trust Thorpe, another fact learned through the omniscient narrator, they do not have the eyewitness evidence that the reader gains as a fly on the wall.

This point of view allows DeMille to develop a complex, action-filled novel filled with unique characters. From a first-person perspective, this novel would move incredibly slowly, as the first-person narrator would have to be present at every single one of the events in the novel, many of which happen simultaneously, and the reader would be in the dark as to the arc of the plot. In the same way, if the third-person narrator remained outside the characters' heads, the reader would be left with nothing to judge but actions and words, and would therefore be equally as informed as the other, easily fooled characters.

Setting

Most of the novel takes place in New York City and on Long Island. In New York, much of the action takes place within private residences. This setting enhances the intimacy of such exchanges as Katherine and Tony's first kiss, as well as Peter and Nicholas' question-and-answer session. By placing the action behind locked doors, DeMille heightens pressure and isolates the characters geographically as much as they are isolated psychologically. However, just because the door is locked does not mean that the people inside are safe. Inside the firm's town home, for example, Tony Abrams is very nearly murdered. Peter Thorpe's Lombardy suite exists only as a mousetrap. The sanctity of the home does not exist in this novel, and on a personal level represents the kind of violation that an act of domestic terrorism might have on the nation's sense of security.

The novel is set in the recent past, within the larger context of World War Two and the Cold War. The Soviet Union poses the most immediate threat to national security in this novel. This concern reflects the long-held paranoia of the Cold War period, when Russian communists successfully turned high-ranking intelligence officers against their



mother country. To set such a novel in the 1920's or, at the other extreme, in present day, would be an anachronism. Russia was no threat in the 1920's, and today the United States' energies are focused on enemies elsewhere in the world. DeMille places the action of the novel in a time period not so long ago to be forgotten, but long enough ago that the enemy can be vilified instead of humanized.

Language and Meaning

The tone of the novel is pragmatic and focused. DeMille wants to tell a story, not write a poem. Although some language is lyrical and descriptive, the majority of the text is characterized by the necessity of communication rather than style. There is an even balance of narrative and dialogue, though many of the major themes of the novel play themselves out more in dialogue than in narrative. Because this novel deals so deeply with interaction between people, the way that they speak to each other reveals a great deal in terms of plot and characterization. For example, when Peter Thorpe meets Tony Abrams at the OSS party, he does not pontificate inwardly on his dislike of the man, nor does he attempt to communicate that sentiment by physically turning away. Rather, he speaks rudely to Abrams, laying bare his disdain for all to hear. Abrams proves his poise when he coolly responds without losing his temper.

The characters possess distinct voices. Abrams tends to be blunter than many of his counterparts. Claudia, Androv, and other non-native English speakers often mix up diction and syntax, as is normal for newcomers to the language. Katherine speaks diplomatically, and Thorpe speaks brazenly, often with the intent to irritate.

Structure

The novel is divided into seven books and 74 short chapters. The seven books are "The First of May," "The Wingate Letter," "Reunion," "Revelations," "The Russian Mission," "Battle Lines," "The Assault." The short books and chapters allow the action of the novel to move rapidly, and in a fragmented way that mirrors the confusion that the characters experience in their search for the truth. Although the majority of the novel focuses on one plot, the protection of the United States from domestic terrorism facilitated by an infamous double agent named Talbot, multiple sub-plots shade the emotional resonance of the main action. For example, Talbot himself remains unknown, and the suspicion held by each member of the armchair spies affects them all differently. For George Van Dorn, suspicion is his lifelong bedfellow. For Katherine, that same doubt is destructive and hurtful. The way that the characters deal with suspicion as they work towards learning the identity of Talbot makes up a major sub-plot.

Other principal sub-plot include the romance that develops between Abrams and Katherine Kimberly; the romance that already exists between Ann Kimberly and Nicholas West; Stanley Kuchik's foolish stunt; Joan Grenville's path to redemption; and ultimately how the characters deal with deep feelings of betrayal when the identity of Talbot is revealed.



Quotes

"Joan Grenville finally spoke. 'I wish to God everyone would just calm down. This makes me nervous.' Her husband replied, 'We'll be past here in a minute.' Katherine responded, 'I think Joan was speaking in a larger sense. This makes me nervous too.' Pembroke nodded and put his drink on the bar. He said, 'I think I hear war drums.'"
Chapter 6, pg. 42-3

"The psychiatrist had added an insight that West thought was disturbing: 'Thorpe suffers greatly from ennui; he must live on the edge of an abyss in order to feel fully alive. He considers himself superior to the rest of humanity by virtue of knowing important secrets and belonging to a secret and elite organization. This is evidence of an immature personality. Further, his relationships with his peers, though good-natured, are superficial, and he forms no strong male bonds. His attitude toward women is best described as outwardly charming but inwardly disdainful.' West stared at Thorpe.
Chapter 18, pg. 132

"Thorpe lit a cigarette, then spoke as though to himself. 'Cops look for things like motive, opportunity, clues... like the cuff, for instance. In my business, we have different needs. We don't care to know the actual name of the culprit. That's meaningless. We want to know the name of his employer. We do not try to perfect a case against a murderer. We always find that the motive for a murder or a kidnapping is a perfectly legitimate one... from our perspective. So we don't talk about legalities. Police think in terms of crime and punishment. We think in terms of sin and retribution.'"
Chapter 20, pg. 142

"Katherine thought of Peter. He belonged only in a peripheral way, and that, she knew instinctively, was a good decision on O'Brien's part."
Chapter 21, pg. 150

"Abrams said, 'I don't trust Peter Thorpe.' Katherine didn't respond immediately, but when she spoke, there was no reproach in her voice. 'Of course you don't. Who does? He's an intelligence officer. He lies, cheats, and steals. But we don't speak of trust in this business. We speak of loyalty. Peter is loyal.'"
Chapter 27, pg. 190

"There are basically five ways to hunt - baiting, trapping, stakeouts, beating the bush, and decoying. It depends on the animal you're after, the season of the year, and the terrain. With the human animal, you can use all methods, or combination of methods, in any season and terrain. Just keep in mind that when the human animal approaches, he may take any form, including the guise of a friendly animal. He may wave a cheery hello, or ask for a cigarette. But you must realize that you are being attacked, and in that split second of realization you have to act, because a second later it's too late."
Chapter 35, pg. 260



"Picture a psychiatrist trying to cure a lion of his nasty habit of ripping living things apart. The lion is confused. His behavior is instinctive. The lion does not believe he's nuts. And he isn't. He's a lion, doing his thing. And if he'd been raised in a penthouse on Park Avenue, it would make no difference in his behavior. If you dropped in to chat with him when he was hungry or cross about something, he'd rip you apart and not lose any sleep over it. Lions are not guilty of murder, and some people with strong killing instincts are not guilty either. Nonetheless, a bullet in the heart is the correct way to deal with dangerous animals."

Chapter 37, pg. 277

"When you were a cop, did you ever go into a dangerous situation, unarmed, with partners who would turn on you, with no radio backup, and with no one who would help you or feel responsible for your safety?"

'No. I never did that.'

'Well, welcome to the great world of espionage, chump.'

Chapter 41, pg. 312

"Abrams quickly perused the other photographs and recognized vaguely familiar faces, perhaps men and women who had come into the office, or people from the OSS dinner. Some of them, he realized, he'd seen just a few minutes ago, much older now, wandering in the shadows outside, like premature ghosts."

Chapter 49, pg. 384

"Thorpe regarded Kimberly. All was obviously not well in his attic. Thorpe recognized that his own peculiarities of the mind were inherent and inborn. He was certain that Kimberly's strangeness was acquired. The old term brainwashing came to him. But it was more than that. Forty years, he thought. Not only was the brain washed, but so was the heart and soul. In fact, though, they had probably done nothing more to him than they had done to 270 million other Soviet citizens; they had made him live there."

Chapter 50, pg. 387

"... Androv finally said, 'We never could have beaten them militarily. But as the fates would have it, there was a small gap in the complex structure of their country's armor. They recognized it, and rushed to fill the gap. We recognized it, and rushed to exploit it. We arrived first; they were too late. Space wars, indeed. Protons and neutrons, laser beams, and killer stellites. We could never have kept up. But on their way to the stars, they forgot to close their one window of vulnerability. And we jumped into it.'"

Chapter 50, pg. 392

"Van Dorn picked up his pocket calculator and looked at it, then said, 'Every civilization has its Achilles' heel. If we introduced a rice blight into China and wiped out their crop, they would suffer mass starvation. If they did the same thing to us, no one would notice much. Do you see? Do you understand why we're on the threshold of extinction?'"

Chapter 54, pg. 412



Topics for Discussion

Is a lie of omission still a lie? What excuses can there be for keeping the truth from another person?

Which strategy is more effective in solving a mystery: widespread suspicion or focused evaluation? Which characters employ which strategies?

Spycraft is often described as a dangerous game. Who plays this game? What are some of the specific games played throughout the novel?

Who is the villain of the novel? Is it more damnable to betray a friend or an idea?

Describe how physical and psychological violence appear in this novel. Which is more effective in helping violent characters achieve their goals?

Who is trustworthy in this novel? Who is loyal? Are they one and the same?

How does the setting of the novel enhance the immediacy of the plot to take down the United States?