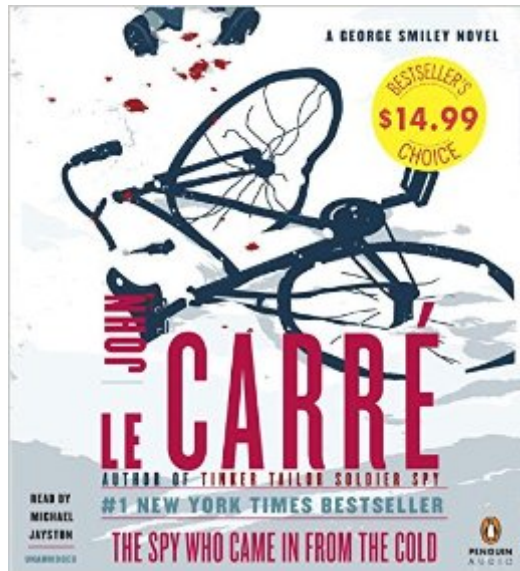


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The Spy Who Came In From The Cold: A George Smiley Novel



Synopsis

John le Carré's third novel "A #1 New York Times bestseller for 34 weeks" and the book that launched his career worldwide. In the shadow of the newly erected Berlin Wall, Alec Leamas watches as his last agent is shot dead by East German sentries. For Leamas, the head of Berlin Station, the Cold War is over. As he faces the prospect of retirement or worse "a desk job" Control offers him a unique opportunity for revenge. Assuming the guise of an embittered and dissolute ex-agent, Leamas is set up to trap Mundt, the deputy director of the East German Intelligence Service "with himself as the bait. In the background is George Smiley, ready to make the game play out just as Control wants. Setting a standard that has never been surpassed, The Spy Who Came in from the Cold is a devastating tale of duplicity and espionage.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

What is to be said about John Le Carré's THE SPY WHO CAME IN FROM THE COLD? It's shockingly entertaining, it's genuinely unpredictable, and it doesn't offer up a cheap get-out-of-jail-free ending. The characters are cursory without being shallow, the plot moves with amazing speed, and the action keeps bouncing along. In short, this is pretty much the perfect spy novel. As engrossing as it is realistic, and as absorbing as it is intriguing. SPY is a book based almost entirely around its plot, and while I usually give a storyline summary in my reviews, I don't think I'll be doing that this time. You see, the novel relies so much upon its double-crosses and back-stabbings that even the parts in the beginning (which are usually fair game for reviewers to

spoil) can be puzzling and fun to follow. Every part of the story is interesting. Where other novels would still be setting up the premise, SPY has already started playing the game. Apart from the deviously clever plot, there is one additional thing I want to single out for praise -- the relationship that takes place between two of the main characters. On paper, it's a fairly standard idea: an older male spy paired with a younger, idealistic, innocent woman. But in execution it's a very nicely unstated bit of romance. It felt real, in part because Le Carré didn't beat us over the head with the details, merely sketched in the broader strokes and let the reader's imagination do the rest. SPY isn't a story where the characters trade artificially witty banter in between their death-defying action sequences. The protagonist spends most of the book tired, battered and confused. It can be a mystery at times guessing whether he really knows what's going on, whether he is the chess-player or the pawn.

John Le Carré's disillusioned, cynical and spellbinding spy novels are so unique because they are based on a wide knowledge of international espionage. Le Carré, (pen name for David John Moore Cornwell), acquired this knowledge firsthand during his years as an operations agent for the British M15. Kim Philby, the infamous defector, actually gave Le Carré's name to the Russians. The author's professional experience and his tremendous talent as a master storyteller and superb writer make "The Spy Who Came In From The Cold" one of the most brilliant novels I have read about spying and the Cold War. Graham Greene certainly agreed with me, or I with him, when he remarked that it is the best spy story he had ever read. The novel won Le Carré the Somerset Maugham Award. The novel's anti-hero, Alec Leamas, is the antithesis of the glamorous action-hero spy, James Bond. A successful espionage agent for the British during WWII, Leamas continued on with counter-intelligence operations after the war, finding it difficult to adjust to life in peacetime. He eventually became the head of Britain's Berlin Bureau at the height of the Cold War. Leamas, slowly going to seed, drinking too much, world weary, had been losing his German double agents, one by one, to East German Abteilung assassins. Finally, with the loss of his best spy, Karl Riembeck, Leamas has no agents left. His anguish at Riembeck's death is palpable. He has begun to tire of the whole spy game, as his boss at Cambridge Circus, (British Intelligence), seems to understand. Leamas is called back to London, but instead of being eased out of operations, called "coming in from the Cold," or retiring completely, he is asked to accept one last, dangerous assignment.

A word of warning: "The Spy who Came in From the Cold" is not just an espionage thriller, it's a

horror story. British MI-5 agent Alec Leamas, the eponymous hero of John Le Carre's brutal little espionage masterpiece "The Spy Who Came in From the Cold", discovers that being a secret agent at the height of the Cold War is a little like being a man outside in the cold, looking in on the friendly warmth of home and hearth but unable to come in---so close, yet so far. His life depends on keeping up a charade, on cloaking his intentions and lying about his work. He can trust no one but himself, and he keeps an eagle eye on himself. To make matters worse, a botched defection at the Berlin Wall sends Leamas's career into free fall, prompting his recall to London, a subsequent reassignment to a desk job in Personnel, and, simultaneously, the hatching of one of British intelligence chief Control's more byzantine little schemes: use Leamas's fall from grace as a means of ferreting out and destroying Hans Dieter Mundt, a high-ranking East German master spy and Leamas's shadowy nemesis. To say more would be unfair to the reader. Le Carre, himself a former British intelligence officer, is perfectly suited to composing the elaborate, excruciating fencing match between London and Moscow that lies at the heart of so many of his best tales. The typical Le Carre protagonist and his handlers are not James Bondian pulp heroes with Union Jacks painted on the pommel of their 9MM Walther PPKs; instead, they tend to be bland, non-descript ciphers, poker-faced and cynical creatures who hide their machinations under bland exteriors. "The Spy" is Le Carre at his deftest, and the Cold War at its coldest.

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