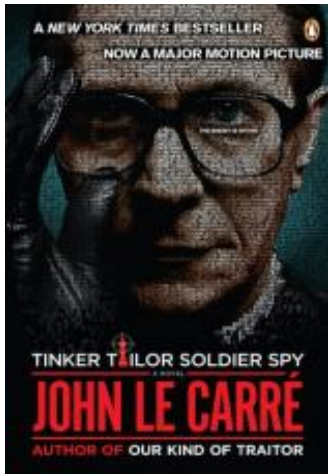


Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy: A George Smiley Novel

by John le Carré



About the Book

The first novel in John le Carré's celebrated Karla trilogy, **Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy** is a heart-stopping tale of international intrigue.

The man he knew as "Control" is dead, and the young Turks who forced him out now run the Circus. But George Smiley isn't quite ready for retirement --- especially when a pretty, would-be defector surfaces with a shocking accusation: a Soviet mole has penetrated the highest level of British Intelligence. Relying only on his wits and a small, loyal cadre, Smiley recognizes the hand of Karla --- his Moscow Centre nemesis --- and sets a trap to catch the traitor.

The feature film adaptation of **Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy** is directed by Tomas Alfredson (*Let the Right One In*) and features a cast that includes Gary Oldman as Smiley, Academy Award® winner Colin Firth (*The King's Speech*) and Tom Hardy (*Inception*).

Discussion Guide

THE FOUR AGES OF GEORGE SMILEY

?He has a strong moral compass, even though he recognises the dark, unethical, ugly side of what he does. Also, there?s a sadness within George. It isn?t accidental that his name is Smiley.?

Gary Oldman on being Smiley

On page one of *Call for the Dead* (1961), his very first literary appearance, George Smiley is described like this:

?Short, fat and of a quiet disposition, he appeared to spend a lot of money on really bad clothes.?

Smiley does not fit our more romantic preconceptions of the British Cold War spy. The post-war myth of the spy as a sort of action hero is undermined by Smiley's superficial ordinariness. On first appearance he seems like a rather unremarkable accountant. But behind the large glasses lies a brilliant mind with a prodigious memory. His pale, unassuming face conceals a ruthless streak and a dogged determination to get at the truth. In looking so disarmingly unthreatening, George Smiley *is* the perfect spy.

Over the course of eight novels, Smiley remains reticent about his personal history. The reader is told that he went to Oxford. He studied the German Romantic poets and when he was about to embark on an academic career he was saved from a life of cloistered obscurity by accepting a position in the obscure cloisters of the British secret service. In this capacity he worked abroad before, during and after the Second World War, running networks of spies. At the end of the war he married Lady Ann Sercomb, a ravishingly beautiful and utterly promiscuous aristocrat, who ran off soon after with a racing-car driver. With the war over Smiley found himself no longer able to work abroad. There was to be no more running agents in foreign countries. And so he found himself working in security clearance, the fag end of the intelligence services.

For George Smiley, abandoned by his wife and in the twilight of his career, the future seems rather bleak as we begin the first of the eight novels in which he will appear.

1. IN THE BEGINNING

Call for the Dead and A Murder of Quality

Call for the Dead (1961)

As *Call for the Dead* opens, George Smiley is about to receive some shocking news. Samuel Fennan, who works for the Foreign Office, has just committed suicide. The day before, Smiley had interviewed Fennan after an anonymous letter had accused him of being a member of the Communist Party. Their informal meeting, Smiley had thought, had gone rather well. Fennan had been assured he had nothing to fear. So why on earth did he kill himself?

Though Smiley is warned by his superior, Maston, at the Circus (the name the intelligence service uses to describe itself and its headquarters in Cambridge Circus) simply to tidy matters up, Smiley's investigation discovers revealing discrepancies in the suicide story.

The investigation brings Smiley into conflict with Maston. But, with the assistance of Peter Guillam ? who will feature prominently in future novels ? Smiley probes further into a dark conspiracy that leads from a quiet Surrey house into the halls of Britain's Foreign Office, from a packed provincial theatre all the way to East Germany. There, a former recruit and wartime friend of Smiley, who now works for the other side, is slowly trying to undermine and bring down an old ally.

A Murder of Quality (1962)

George Smiley is no longer with the Circus (a number of the novels begin with Smiley having retired or been pushed out, only to be brought back in when his skills are suddenly required) and this story, which is really a countryside murder mystery set in and around a boarding school, moves away from the world of intelligence.

Smiley has been contacted by a Miss Brimley a former wartime colleague who now runs a magazine seeking advice.

Miss Brimley has received a letter from the wife of an instructor at Carne College, one of the old public schools. The correspondent, Stella Rode, believes that her husband is trying to kill her. Smiley, who knows Carne, offers to help but after making a phone call he discovers that Stella Rode is already dead.

Wanting to reassure Miss Brimley that she is not to blame but also intrigued by what could have happened at Carne College ? a friend from the Circus is there and his wife Ann grew up in the area ? Smiley decides to go down to Dorset and take a look into matters himself. In the process of uncovering the identity of the murderer he scratches away at the respectable veneer of this bastion of the English class system, and finds something rather repellent beneath.

2. THE COLD WAR AT ITS HEIGHT

The Spy Who Came in from the Cold and The Looking Glass War

?The best spy story I have ever read?

Graham Greene on *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*

The appearance of the Berlin Wall in 1961 marks a new and disturbing phase in the Cold War. For the spies who work in its bleak shadow it will become yet another lesson in the moral compromises of their calling.

George Smiley has by now rejoined the Circus and under the direction of Control, its leader, helps to run some of its key operations, though often he remains a hazy background figure. In both *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* and *The Looking Glass War*, Smiley appears fleetingly but crucially to advance the objectives of the secret service in carrying out some of its dirtiest conspiracies and in revealing and fixing its instances of cock-up and incompetence.

***The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (1963)**

The story begins with agent-handler Alec Leamas returning in disgrace to London. All his agents have been either exposed or killed by Hans-Dieter Mundt, of the *Abteilung*, East Germany's secret intelligence service. Operationally, Leamas knows he is a spent bullet. But Control, the unnamed head of the Circus, decides that Leamas is the man for a daring and dangerous job. When he indicates that it would mean taking revenge on Mundt, Leamas accepts.

So Leamas, with the covert assistance of George Smiley, allows his professional and personal life to fall apart. He slowly becomes what he always feared: a disreputable no one, ripe for the taking by East German agents on the look-out for a bitter and twisted former spy. Leamas, his mind preoccupied by his failures, his heart throbbing with hate, allows himself to be seduced by their offers, knowing that his career will be rescued from ignominy by this last achievement.

And there, somewhere in the background, is Smiley, ready with every dodge, trick and stratagem to make the game play out just as Control wants.

***The Looking Glass War* (1965)**

If *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* concerned a conspiracy on the grandest scale, then *The Looking Glass War* examines the other end of the spectrum ? the tawdry, day-to-day reality of a clapped-out service trying to recapture the past successes of its glory days.

In this book the Circus, run by Control, to whom George Smiley reports, is not the main player. Instead we follow the

activities of 'the Department', a military intelligence outfit that by some fluke or bureaucratic error has survived the ending of the Second World War.

After the mysterious and unexplained death in Finland of one of its agents and the loss of the vital film he was carrying, the Department becomes convinced that it has stumbled on a major Soviet military secret. But its imperilled operatives are desperate to keep this intelligence to themselves and not to have to hand it over to Smiley and Control at the better-funded Circus. Instead they seek and obtain permission to mount an operation in East Germany 'though they haven't run an operation in a very long time.

Using as their agent an old London Pole who many years ago proved his mettle, and providing him with equipment that was last used in the war, they remain convinced they can pull it off. But when the mission slowly unravels before their terrified eyes, who will be there to pick up the pieces at the end?

3. THE KARLA TRILOGY

'By the end, you should feel that Smiley and Karla are in some way interchangeable. Both lonely men. Both using similar methods. And both of them, as le Carré says in the book, causes of the same malady.'

Alec Guinness on *Smiley's People*

In the Karla trilogy the story of George Smiley moves into the 1970s. Smiley has been forced out of the service, but is about to be brought back in dramatic fashion. These three stories are an extended cat-and-mouse game between Smiley and Karla, the man who runs Moscow Centre and whose ruthlessness and genius have almost destroyed the Circus. It will be Smiley's task to first save and then rebuild the reputation of the British intelligence service.

Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy (1974)

It is now some time since Control died after being dismissed from the service for running a secret, bungled operation in Czechoslovakia that led to an agent being shot. Smiley, pushed out of the service along with Control, is summoned to a meeting with Oliver Lacon, a civil servant who liaises with the intelligent services.

Lacon has evidence that a high-ranking member of the Circus is a mole working for Karla in Moscow Centre. Smiley and Peter Guillam are told to investigate without alerting anyone in the service. This is crucial because the mole could be any of those currently in charge: Percy Alleline and his deputies Bill Haydon, Roy Bland and Toby Esterhase.

Diligently, quietly and with no official support, Smiley and Guillam set about uncovering 'Gerald', Karla's mole at the heart of the Circus.

The Honourable Schoolboy (1977)

George Smiley is the acting head of the Circus. His job is to take a broom to the place and rebuild its tattered reputation. But he is also aware that there are those who think it should either be closed down entirely or handed over to someone else. Smiley decides that he must make it clear that the Circus is still operationally useful. It can still deliver important results. He therefore plans to embark on a risky piece of espionage.

By re-examining cases and investigations that the mole 'Gerald' caused to be aborted or abandoned, Smiley hopes to discover traces of Karla's hand. Finding a suppressed investigation into money-laundering in Laos, which points to

Karla's indirect involvement, Smiley decides to reactivate Jerry Westerby, a journalist and former agent now living in Italy.

Westerby heads to Hong Kong where he begins his investigations into the sources of the money-laundering operation. Meanwhile Smiley and his new team try to get to the bottom of what it is that Karla might be using the money for.

With Whitehall and the Americans breathing down his neck, Smiley launches an operation to take out a key Karla operative in the Far East and bring the Circus back from the brink of death.

Smiley's People (1979)

George Smiley has twice stung Karla, removing key figures in his British and Far Eastern operations. But far from being rewarded he has found himself sidelined once again, a man for whom his world has no more use.

However, when General Vladimir, a Soviet defector who was once one of Smiley's cases, is assassinated on his way to deliver what he believed was crucial information to the Circus, Smiley is called back.

Oliver Lacon, sceptical of Vladimir's claims, wants Smiley to look into the killing ? but not too hard. Just tidy up any loose ends. But Smiley, who knew Vladimir's worth and always trusted his intelligence, is not to be constrained.

His investigations reveal what had got the old defector so excited and also killed: Karla had been concealing certain operations from Moscow Centre. Smiley, realising that he has been presented with the means to engineer the downfall of his nemesis, follows the clues which take him to Hamburg, Paris, Bern and, lastly, the Berlin Wall, and the final ? but ambiguous ? victory.

4. SMILEY RETURNS TO THE PAST

The Secret Pilgrim (1990)

In the final book of the George Smiley novels, the Berlin Wall has fallen. With the Iron Curtain pulled back, the world that Smiley knew and understood is gone.

Ned, who learnt so much of his tradecraft under the tutelage of Smiley, runs Sarratt, the spy-training school. However, his own spying career was a series of ups and downs, small triumphs and setbacks, which ended in semi-disgrace (for that story read *The Russia House*).

Trying to make sense of all that he has seen and done, and wanting to impart some wisdom to the new intake of students now that the old enemy is no more, Ned invites Smiley to speak to this year's class.

To his surprise, Smiley accepts.

The story that follows is that of Ned and Smiley as both recount some of the lows and highs in their respective careers. Each tries to draw some moral sense from their lives, especially now that all they had struggled for seems little more than history to this new generation of young spooks.

Author Bio

Critical Praise

"One of those writers who will be read a century from now."

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