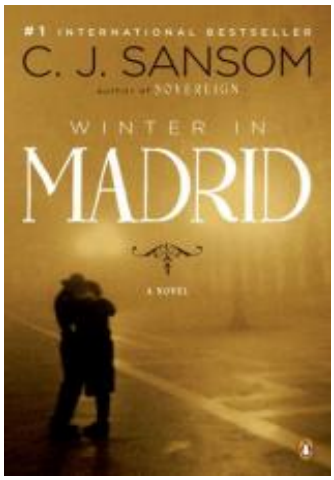
Winter in Madrid

by C. J. Sansom



About the Book

In 1940 Spain, as Franco determines whether to ally himself with Hitler and enter World War II, Madrid lies in ruins, its once majestic streets ravaged by the Spanish Civil War, its people starving and bitterly divided by political conflict. This historical backdrop forms the setting for C. J. Sansom?s **Winter in Madrid**, an intense thriller and love story that examines the dangers of ideology and loyalty.

As the aching chill of winter falls on the Spanish capital, reluctant spy Harry Brett lands in Madrid, sent by the British Secret Service to win the confidence of his old school chum Sandy Forsyth, a businessman with some very shady investments. Wounded at Dunkirk, Harry is an upper-class Englishman, with an affection for his old school, Rookwood, and an unshakable sense of loyalty and honor. In contrast, his old classmate Sandy is corrupt and dissolute, a jaded risk taker expelled as a teen from Rookwood, who still resents his father?s disapproval. The two are connected by the memories of their school days --- as well as by Sandy?s girlfriend, Barbara, a former Red Cross nurse who was once in love with another mutual Rookwood friend, Bernie Piper.

Unlike the principled Harry or disreputable Sandy, Bernie is passionate. His zeal for the Communist cause brought him to Spain in 1937 to fight with the International Brigades against Franco?s fascists. On the bloody battlefields of the Jarama, Bernie disappears, listed missing and believed killed. Left behind heartbroken, Barbara begins a relationship with Sandy, but she never stops hoping that Bernie might still be alive. Eventually, with hefty bribes, Barbara uncovers information about Bernie and develops a plan to help him escape.

Bernie is alive --- albeit barely --- imprisoned in a brutal labor camp in the harsh Tierra Muerta, or dead land. Injured, malnourished, and physically exhausted, Bernie gains strength from his belief and fervor for the ideals of Communism, strength to keep fighting against the prison guards, the intrusive piety of the Catholic church, and the squabbling of his fellow Communist prisoners.

As another long winter descends on Madrid, seeping cold brings a growing sense of despair. Can Bernie conserve his strength until he is rescued? Will Harry uncover Sandy?s secrets without being unmasked as a spy? And in the chaos and corruption of post?Civil War Spain, can anyone be trusted? Carefully researched, layered with details both harrowing and beautiful, **Winter in Madrid** is at once an ambitious love story and a candid portrait of a war-torn country caught between false ideology and authority.

Discussion Guide

1. Institutions loom large in the book, from public school (which is the equivalent of private school in the US), to the Communist party, to the Catholic Church. How do the main characters reinforce and/or defeat them?

2. Bernie begins the book as a devoted Communist, yet eventually becomes disillusioned with its ideology. Disillusionment with the Catholic Church also plays a large role in the book. Why does the author juxtapose the two? What are the dangers of ideology?

3. The threat of approaching winter permeates the book. What does the cold weather symbolize? Why did the author choose to set the book during the winter?

4. Each of the book?s main characters is tempted by corruption and bribery. Is corruption a by-product of war? Can corruption ever be positive?

5. Bernie is a fervent believer in communism and also an atheist. Yet in the labor camp, he is threatened by the power-hungry Estalbo, a fellow prisoner and Communist, and shown kindness by Father Eduardo, a Catholic priest. Why did the author choose to upend Bernie?s perceived notions of good and bad? What does Bernie learn about kindness and cruelty?

6. How does Harry?s parentless background and experiences at Dunkirk shape his character? Is his reluctance to spy on Sandy justified?

7. Have you read any other novels about the Spanish Civil War? How does this book compare?

8. Bernie and Sandy are very different characters, yet Barbara forms a relationship with both of them. What draws her to each? Is her relationship with Sandy believable? Why or why not?

9. Harry, Sandy and Bernie are all classmates at Rookwood, but each of them has a vastly different experience at the school. Why did the author choose to connect Sandy, Harry and Bernie in this way? How do their experiences at Rookwood define them as characters?

10. How do you feel about the book?s conclusion?

Author Bio

C. J. Sansom was a lawyer but now writes full time. He holds a Ph.D. in history and is the author of **Dissolution, Dark Fire,** and **Sovereign** in the Matthew Shardlake series. **Winter in Madrid** was a major bestseller in England and is being published in twelve countries. Sansom lives in Brighton, England.

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Publication Date: January 27, 2009
Paperback: 544 pages
Publisher: Penguin (Non-Classics)
ISBN-10: 0143115138
ISBN-13: 9780143115137