

Espionage: In From the Cold  
By Michael Pucci

It is widely accepted that the heyday of the spy novel ended with the Cold War. That the fall of the Berlin Wall and the demise of the Soviet Union — the setting and nemesis, respectively, of so many memorable books — marked the end of one era of espionage storytelling.

Most of these seminal postwar novels were written by authors (typically British, always male) who knew the playing field intimately. John le Carré, Ian Fleming, and Graham Greene all spent time in various levels of intelligence, and their service ensured that whatever perspective they offered in their novels would define tradecraft in popular culture for years to come, lending their work an unrivaled authenticity.

For a generation of readers, this fixed two images of the quintessential secret agent in their minds: the debonair, swashbuckling ladies' man, or the jaded old veteran called in from the cold one last time. When the Wall came down, those archetypal characters seemed like relics, and these same authors struggled to adjust to the new reality.

### **The 21st Century Spy Novel**

There is ample evidence to suggest that, after a barren stretch in the 1990s, the spy novel may be entering a new, fruitful period of inspiration and creativity. The post-9/11 geopolitical landscape has introduced a host of challenges and opportunities for modern novelists, who are beginning to move past the looming shadows of their predecessors and take the spy novel to new directions.

One needs look no further than today's headlines to see what global issues are available to the present-day storyteller that weren't even 20 years ago; namely, a global war on terror that has turned our enemies more faceless and forced us onto unfamiliar terrain.

Technological capabilities have also evolved far beyond anything George Smiley could have imagined. What once required an entire intelligence apparatus can be communicated in moments by the average cell phone. We can wreak massive havoc with a keystroke thousands of miles away. All this while we adjust to a world that expects privacy less and less, and total anonymity has become nearly impossible to maintain.

Despite the changing enemies and settings, the essential pleasures of espionage fiction remain the same: they're high-stakes mysteries played on a grand scale, forcing readers to become active participants as they tease out what's true in a story filled with professional liars.

They can be glamorous and action-packed, or they can incisively consider the nature of identity and loyalty as well as any other work of high-minded literature (as in le Carré's *A Perfect Spy*, which Philip Roth called "the best English novel since the war".)

Another nod to the changing times: the world of espionage is no longer strictly a man's game. More women are beginning to pop up in prominent roles, and Stella Rimington, former head of MI5, has been writing a successful series for years.

For those still nostalgic for those glory years of Cold War espionage, there are current novelists still tapping that rich vein, notably Alan Furst and Joseph Kanon (as well as the Ian Fleming estate, who continue to enlist top-notch writers to continue the Bond franchise).

Libraries shouldn't necessarily weed their old Cold War stories yet: datedness is not always a negative in this genre. In addition, many important spy novels have gone out of print, titles that are cornerstones of the genre. Any libraries with still-readable copies of Somerset Maugham's **Ashenden**, Len Deighton's **The Ipcress File**, or any of Eric Ambler's great novels would be well advised to keep them circulating.

In June, LJ spotlighted some notable spy fiction coming out this year (LJ 6/16/15); what follows is a rundown of the best titles past and present every library should have in its collection. Starred titles are essential additions to all collections.

### The Classics

Conrad, Joseph. **The Secret Agent: A Simple Tale**. 1907. Penguin Classics, 2007. 320 p. ISBN 978-0141441580. **pap.** \$12.00

Conrad's novels were known for plumbing the depths of the human soul, and this unsettling masterpiece — often cited for its prescience— still resonates. A London shopkeeper doubling as a Russian spy is persuaded to bomb the Greenwich Observatory for political ends.

Fleming, Ian. **Casino Royale**. 1953. Thomas & Mercer, 2012. 178 p. ISBN 978-1-61-218543-9. **pap.** \$14.95.

If all you know of James Bond, the most recognizable character in all of espionage fiction, comes from the decadent films (fast cars, beautiful women and lots of alcohol), you owe it to yourself to check out the source material, which keeps the pulpy spirit without the excess. Thomas & Mercer recently reissued all 14 of Fleming's Bond books, and the first, *Casino Royale*, remains a fun, fresh, and thrilling read 60 years later.

\*Greene, Graham. **Our Man in Havana**. 1958. Penguin Classics, 2007. 228 p. ISBN 978-0-14-243800-8. **pap.** \$16.00

Greene's vintage "entertainment" deftly satirizes the whole genre, exposing the essential absurdity of tradecraft in the form of vacuum cleaner salesman James Wormold, whom British Intelligence unwittingly recruits an agent in Havana. Wormold's hapless attempts to pass off invented knowledge — including the blueprints of one of his

prized vacuums as a potential atomic weapon — provide laughs before reaching a mournful climax.

\*le Carré, John. **The Spy Who Came In from the Cold**. 1963. Walker & Company, 2005. ISBN 978-0-80-271454-1. \$25.00 **pap**. Penguin, 2013. ISBN 978-0-14-312475-7 \$15.00 **ebk**. ISBN 9781101573181.

Generally considered the greatest spy novel ever written, and with good reason: it is a flawless model of the form. The former MI6 agent would stretch out in later novels, but this one comes lean and mean, with not one wasted word. le Carré's world-weary protagonist Alec Leamas feels like a corrective to the flamboyance of James Bond. Time Magazine included this novel in its list of the 100 best English-language novels since 1923, and no fiction collection is complete without it.

McCarthy, Charles. **The Miernik Dossier**. 1973. Overlook Press, 2007. 256p. ISBN 9781585679423. \$15.95. **ebk**. ISBN 9781590203750.

The first of 10 novels to feature American spy Paul Christopher, McCarthy's debut boasts an ingenious conceit: the story is told as a series of reports, telephone transcripts, and diary entries, without authorial narration to offer needed context. The central mystery — is the titular Polish diplomat really a spy for the Soviets, or the victim of an elaborate conspiracy of circumstance — is never directly answered.

### **Masters of Contemporary Historical Fiction**

Furst, Alan. **The Spies of Warsaw**. Random House. 2009. 304p. ISBN 9780812977370 **pap**. \$16.00 **ebk**. ISBN 9781588367167.

Perennial bestseller Furst's *Night Soldiers* sequence is among the best historical fiction currently being published, adding a touch of romance to the seedy world of espionage. *The Spies of Warsaw* is a good place for a new reader to begin, concerning a French military attaché assigned to glean information about the rising Nazi threat in the Polish capital.

Duns, Jeremy. **The Dark Chronicles: A Spy Trilogy**. Penguin. 2012. 794p. ISBN 9780143120698. \$25 **ebk**. ISBN 9781101589441.

Collecting the three novels starring MI6 double agent/anti-hero Paul Dark, the relentless action spans several decades and continents. **Free Agent**, the first and best of the trilogy, opens with Dark shooting his chief in the head during his regular briefing, setting the tone for the rest to come. This is riveting Cold War espionage told at a breakneck pace.

\*Wein, Elizabeth. **Code Name Verity**. Disney-Hyperion. 2012. 352p. ISBN 9781423152194. \$16.99. **pap**. ISBN 9781423152880 \$9.99. **ebk**. ISBN 9781423153252.

A quick-witted British girl whose plane has crashed in Nazi-occupied France is forced by the Gestapo to confess to her country's war plans. Her writings detail her friendship with Maddie, the pilot who crashed the plane. A must-own for young adult collections, as is its companion novel, 2013's **Rose Under Fire**, its intelligence and emotional depth will

appeal to adult readers as well. In addition, Pearl Cornioley's autobiography **Code Name Pauline**, covers similar ground and can provide needed context to Wein's novel.

Kanon, Joseph. **Leaving Berlin**. Atria. 2015. 371 p. maps. ISBN 9781476704647. \$27. **ebk**. ISBN 9781476704661.

The bleakness of postwar Berlin serves as the setting for Kanon's evocative novel about Jewish author Alex Meier, who fled the Nazis to America but faces persecution by the McCarthy witch hunts. He agrees to spy on behalf of the CIA in Berlin to ensure his return to the States and his family.

### **The Modern Spy Novel**

Fesperman, Dan. **The Double Game**. Knopf. 2012. 355p. appendix. ISBN 9780307700131. \$26.95. **pap**. ISBN 9780307744401. \$15.95. **ebk**. ISBN 9780307960900.

Newspaperman and avowed spy junkie Bill Cage embarks on a secret mission of his own when he finds a riddle written on a page from one of his favorite books and curiosity gets the better of him. This clever novel is packed with affectionate winks and nods to classic espionage books, even coming with a helpful bibliography of the best spy novelists and their works (some of whom are fictional characters within the story).

Cumming, Charles. **A Colder War**. St. Martin's Press. 2014. 400p. ISBN 9781250020611. \$26.99. **pap**. ISBN 9781250025548 \$16.99. **ebk**. ISBN 9781250020604.

Set in present-day Turkey, disgraced agent Tom Kell is brought back into the fold when the female head of British Intelligence recruits him to find a mole suspected of engineering a plane crash that killed her lover. Cumming is considered one of the foremost spy novelists writing today, and this book shows why.

\*Hayes, Terry. **I Am Pilgrim**. Atria. 2014. 624p. ISBN 9781439177723. **pap**. ISBN 9781439177730. \$16. **ebk**. 9781439177747.

This hefty debut from long-time screenwriter Hayes was 2014's most memorable thriller, filled with cinematic twists and turns. Retired CIA operative Pilgrim connects a seemingly random murder in a New York hotel room to the case of a young, brilliant Saudi doctor who synthesizes an incurable strand of smallpox with designs of releasing it in the United States as a biological weapon. Hayes stakes his claim as the rightful heir to Tom Clancy's brand of geopolitical espionage.

Ignatius, David. **The Director**. Norton. 2014. 384p. ISBN 978-0393078145. \$26.95. **pap**. ISBN 9780393350593. \$16.95. **ebk**. ISBN 9780393244175.

The long-time columnist for the *Washington Post* wrings suspense from the growing threat of cyber-espionage with this tale of a reform-minded CIA director who learns the agency has been hacked. It isn't long before he begins to suspect the computing whiz

kid he hired to fight the hack, who may be running a nefarious cyber-operation of his own.

Rimington, Stella. **Close Call**. Bloomsbury. 2014. 352p. ISBN 9781620406168. \$27. **pap.** ISBN 9781620406182 \$17. **ebk.** ISBN 9781620406175

Rimington was the first female director general of MI5, a distinction that adds a verisimilitude to her Liz Carlyle series, without sacrificing their gripping momentum. *Close Call*, Carlyle's counterterrorism unit is monitoring the delivery of a clandestine arms shipment that could fall into the hands of terrorists in the wake of the Arab Spring.

\*Steinhauer, Olen. **The Cairo Affair**. Minotaur. 2014. 416p. ISBN 9781250036131. \$26.99. **pap.** ISBN 9781250036155 \$16. **ebk.** ISBN 9781250036148.

Steinhauer is best known as the author of the *Tourist* series featuring Milo Weaver, but this standalone story is a prime example of how a modern spy novelist navigates the current terrain. Set during the Arab Spring, an American diplomat's violent murder in Egypt sends his wife looking for answers.

### **Audiobooks**

\*Matthews, Jason. **Red Sparrow**. 15 CDs. Unabridged. 17hr 55 min. Simon & Schuster. 2013. 9781442365520. \$49.99.

Longtime CIA vet Matthews hit the jackpot with this up-to-the-minute "sexpionage" thriller set in Putin's Russia. One-time ballerina Dominka Egorova has graduated from Sparrow School, where they teach girls how to seduce information out of enamored men. Actor Jeremy Bobb handles the narration, which includes various Russian dialects, with aplomb. A sequel, **Palace of Treason**, was published in June.

Silva, Daniel. **The English Spy**. Xx CDs. Unabridged. 12 hr 5 min. Harper. 2015. 9780062320193. \$39.99.

Many librarians will attest to how often Daniel Silva's novels circulate, so any library that is caught up with his series featuring art restorer/Israeli assassin Gabriel Allon (*The English Spy* is the 15th) should be sure to add the audiobooks to their collection as well. George Guidall's crisp and dramatic narration is the perfect vessel for Silva's latest international thriller, which involves Allon tracking down an Irish bomb maker suspected of killing a former English princess on her boat.

### **Nonfiction**

\*Macintyre, Ben. **A Spy Among Friends: Kim Philby and the Great Betrayal**. Crown. 2014. index, photos. 368p. ISBN 9780804136631. **pap.** ISBN 9780804136655. \$16 **ebk.** 9780804136648.

Likely the most infamous spy of all time, Kim Philby was a high-ranking British Intelligence agent later revealed to have been spying for the Soviets. Relying on newly-declassified files, Macintyre's account of the tortured relationship between Philby and his long-time best friend Nicholas Elliot has the psychological depth and high-stakes suspense of great fiction, and provides indispensable context for any fan of espionage fiction.

Snyder, Robert Lance. **The Art of Indirection in British Espionage Fiction: A Critical Study of Six Novelists**. McFarland. 2011. 217p. bibliography, index. ISBN 9780786463794. **pap.** \$40.

This survey of spy novelists past and present and how they use techniques unique to the genre includes careful but readable analysis. The nature of the text will appeal primarily to academic libraries, but it also works as a supplement for any public library with an extensive spy fiction collection.

### **Graphic Novels**

Rucka, Greg, & others. **Queen & Country: The Definitive Edition, Vol. 1** Oni Press. 2007. 362p. ISBN 9781932664874. \$19.99.

Filled with plenty of action, this vastly entertaining story follows British agent Tara Chace as she leaves a bloody trail in her wake. Each section is illustrated by different artists, which can be confusing. Three more *Queen & Country* collections have been published since.

Johnston, Antony (author) and Sam Hart (ill.) **The Coldest City**. Oni Press. 2012. 171p. ISBN 9781934964538. \$19.99. **ebk.** ISBN 9781620100608.

A spy noir set in the final days of the Berlin Wall. An undercover agent is killed, but the document he was carrying — which supposedly lists the names of every agent in Berlin — has disappeared. Experienced agent Lorraine Broughton is sent to retrieve it. The dark, minimalist illustrations add to the mystery.

\*Brubaker, Ed & others. **Velvet: Before the Living End**. Image Comics. 2014. unpag. ISBN 9781607069645. \$9.99.

When a top agent is killed, all signs point to secretary Velvet Templeton as the one who set him up. This has been described as a James Bond movie with Miss Money Penny as the heroine. The first of an exciting new series; the second volume, **The Secret Lives of Dead Men**, was published in May.

### **Movies**

\***Skyfall**. color. 138 min. 20th Century Fox. 2012. \$19.99. Directed by Sam Mendes. Opening with a breathless sequence and featuring Javier Bardem as the best screen villain since Heath Ledger's Joker, the 23<sup>rd</sup> installment is the best Bond movie in decades, injecting new life into the long-running franchise.

\***The Americans: Season 1**. color. 572 min. 20th Century Fox. 2014. \$29.99.

Criminally overlooked, this FX drama has quietly emerged as one of the best shows on television. Keri Russell and Matthew Rhys star as Soviet spies raising two kids as suburban American parents in 1981, soon after Ronald Reagan becomes president and ratchets up his Cold War rhetoric. Add the first season to your collection and patrons will soon be clamoring for more.

**A Most Wanted Man**. color. 121 min. Lionsgate. 2014. Directed by Anton Corbijn.

This adaptation of John le Carré's 2008 novel focuses on a German anti-terrorism spy unit searching for the true motives of a Chechen immigrant with ties to Islam. Timely and well-acted, led by the late Philip Seymour Hoffman in one of his final roles.

**The Conversation.** color. 113 min. Lionsgate. 2010. \$14.99. Directed by Francis Ford Coppola.

Gene Hackman's Harry Caul is as far from the traditional spy figure as you can get, but his peerless ability to surveil people (in 1974, anyway) and the personal price he pays for such intrusiveness serves as a timely fable for our post-Snowden era.

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