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Synopsis Books:

The Barnes Noble Review: *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*, which first appeared in 1974, is arguably Le Carr's masterpiece and is surely one of the great spy novels of the 20th century. Loosely inspired by the career of Kim Philby, a Russian double agent who worked his way into the upper reaches of the British Secret Service, *Tinker, Tailor* tells the story of donnish, unprepossessing master spy George Smiley and his quest to identify the "mole" -- the deep-penetration agent -- who has turned Britain's Intelligence Service (commonly known as the Circus) inside out.

Rumors of the mole's existence had circulated through the corridors of power for years and contributed to the disgrace -- and ultimate demise -- of "Control," Smiley's mentor and the nameless former leader of the Circus. As the primary narrative opens, Smiley is recalled from his restless, unhappy retirement when a renegade British agent unearths corroborative evidence that the mole -- Code Name Gerald, identity unknown -- really does exist, and has sabotaged countless British intelligence initiatives and betrayed innumerable agents. In the face of all this, a panicked Whitehall minister enlists Smiley's aid, charging him to "go backwards, go forwards, do whatever is necessary...to clean the stables," and to put the elusive Gerald out of business.

Internal evidence suggests that Gerald -- who is run by Smiley's opposite number in Moscow Centre, the legendary Karla -- is one of four highly placed Circus officials: Percy Alleline, the slick, ambitious politician who has inherited Control's position as Chief of Intelligence Operations; Roy Bland, a former left-wing intellectual recruited into the Service by Smiley himself; Toby Esterhase, a hard-edged Hungarian eacute;migreacute; with ambitions of his own; and Bill Haydon, a dashing, romantic figure -- the Circus's own Lawrence of Arabia -- who was formerly the lover of Lady Ann Smiley, George's promiscuous wife. For all its inherent drama -- and this really is an enthralling novel -- *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* is a quiet, leisurely, almost bloodless book, a hugely elaborate paper chase whose central investigation proceeds by means of interviews, research, and reflection. When he isn't poring over the drab, endless documentation of the Circus bureaucracy, Smiley -- sometimes alone, sometimes in the company of former colleague Peter Guillam -- solicits the memories of a large cast of secondary characters, many of whom strayed uncomfortably close to the secret of Gerald's existence and were punished accordingly. Included among them are Connie Sachs, an eccentric Oxford don and the former resident expert on Soviet Intelligence; Sam Collins, a Circus veteran who finds himself in the wrong place on the wrong night; and Jerry Westerby, a journalist and Circus irregular who will go on to serve as the eponymous hero of Le Carr's subsequent novel *The Honourable Schoolboy*. These and more than a dozen other supporting players are brought to life through the Dickensian flair for characterization that is one of Le Carr's most distinctive qualities.

In the end, two crucial Circus operations provide Smiley with the evidence he needs to unmask a traitor. One is Operation Witchcraft, which was designed to accommodate the nameless Russian source known as Merlin, whose steady stream of high-grade intelligence may be too good to be true. The other is Operation Testify, Control's desperate, last-ditch attempt to identify the mole. Testify ended in disaster more than a year before the story begins, with Control discredited, the Circus disgraced, and a blindly loyal British agent named Jim Prideaux shot, captured, and nearly killed. Slowly, with great deliberation, Smiley picks up the threads of these very different operations and follows them through the labyrinth to a

startling, but inevitable, revelation.

Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy may be the most influential, widely imitated spy novel of modern times. For years after its publication, an endless procession of novels dealing with the unmasking of Soviet moles flooded the marketplace. Some of them -- Len Deighton's *Berlin Game*, Bryan Forbes's *The Endless Game*, John Gardner's *The Garden of Weapons* -- were actually rather good, but none of them came close to equaling Le Carr's achievement, which set an exacting, perhaps impossible, standard.

Le Carr's many virtues -- his faultless deployment of atmosphere and language; his ability to convey the inner workings of an arcane, insular profession; his profligate sense of character; his profound grasp of the moral ambiguities endemic to life in "the secret world" -- are fully evident here, and seem as fresh and compelling today as they seemed more than 25 years ago. If you've never read this amazing book, I urge you to do so now. *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* is a world-class entertainment and an important, enduring novel, one of the few legitimate classics to arise from its highly specialized field.

--Bill Sheehan

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