

The Great Game: The Myth and Reality of Espionage

Intelligence in Recent Public Literature

By Frederick P. Hitz. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004. 211 pages.

Reviewed by Hayden B. Peake

For connoisseurs of intelligence fiction a few titles epitomize the essence of the craft. Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* is perhaps the most well known. John le Carré's *The Spy Who Came In From the Cold* has become an icon of the anti-hero spy. Somewhat less familiar but equally compelling works include Graham Greene's *Human Factor*, Erskine Childers' *Riddle of the Sands*, Joseph Conrad's *Secret Agent*, and Somerset Maugham's *Ashenden*. But while entertained, most readers are left wondering whether these books reflect the real world of spying. In *The Great Game*, Fred Hitz, former operations officer, Agency inspector general, and more recently a professor at Princeton University, set out to answer that question. His approach is straightforward: he compares issues discussed in these and other great works of fiction—Ian Fleming and the like, excluded—with the writings of Kim Philby and his *My Silent War*, Dewey Clarridge's *A Spy For All Seasons*, Jerry Schecter's *The Spy Who Saved The World*, David Murphy and Sergei Kondrashev's *Battleground Berlin*, and David Wise's *SPY*, to name a few non-fiction books he included.

The 17 chapters in *The Great Game* deal with a variety of functional espionage topics. For example, Hitz shows how agent recruitment in the literary world is seen to follow the classic real world model of spotting, contact, and development of potential agents by the recruiting agency. To illustrate his point, he uses the case contained in David Ignatius's book *Agents of Influence*, an account of agent operations in the Middle East. The central character, case officer Tom Rogers—"loosely modeled on a real CIA case officer killed in the Beirut Embassy bombing in 1983" (p. 10)—cultivates the deputy chief of Fatah intelligence. His intent is to get early warnings about planned terrorist threats to US citizens in the region. Rogers painstakingly develops a rapport with the prospective agent, called PECKOCK, who gradually becomes a source of this vital data. This approach to recruitment, Hitz points out, is based on a very basic principle of human behavior that operates when someone is trying to get someone else to do something he might not otherwise consider—people like to talk and often say more than they should under the right conditions. Recruitment under these circumstances is more cooperative than coercive, at least initially. In this particular case, Ignatius shows how conflict can develop when CIA Headquarters decides to place tighter control on the agent than the relationship, as originally established, permits. The consequence is conflict between the officer in the field, the agent, and Headquarters. And while the story makes for good reading, Hitz uses it to make two

points. The first of these is that, when it comes to such interpersonal issues, fiction can illustrate the basic human stresses of espionage as well as non-fiction, but it doesn't capture "all the ways in which a human spy can scheme, rationalize, justify, and alter his behavior to perform his espionage mission."

The second point, which applies to both fiction and non-fiction, is that the classical recruitment approach is largely theoretical. In the real world, suggests Hitz, most CIA and KGB agents, at least during the Cold War, were walk-ins—volunteers. The challenge for the case officer in such an instance was whether the prospective agent should be accepted. This changes the control aspect in favor of the receiving agency, especially with agents who remain in place and supply secrets. Hitz uses Bill Hood's *MOLE*, as one example of how most Cold War agents came to work for the CIA. It tells the story of a Soviet intelligence officer who became a CIA agent in 1953—a GRU major, Peter Popov, stationed in Vienna. The CIA didn't notice him; he noticed them and eventually dropped a letter into an American's car, thus beginning a valuable relationship of many years. Popov was just the first of such walk-ins who became valuable sources.¹

The Great Game does point out that some recruitment techniques are encountered in both the real world and in fiction. Some coercive techniques, sexual entrapment (the honeytrap), for example, fall in this category. To make the point in the non-fiction world, Hitz uses the case of Marine Corps Sgt. Clayton Lonetree, whose lover in Moscow turned out to be a KGB asset (Swallow). A fictional coercive counterpart is found in Eric Ambler's *A Coffin for Dimitrios*, in which the target's gambling problems are used to gain his cooperation.

In other comparisons, Hitz argues that both fiction and non-fiction can illuminate some issues equally well. In fact, some of the most basic concerns that surface in espionage cases are in this category—what motivates a person to become an agent and betray his country; the complexities of counterintelligence (CI), the problem of potential fabricators; spying on friendly countries, and the role of assassination in intelligence operations, are just a few.

When it comes to motivation, Hitz finds le Carré's works most impressive. Those are followed by Philby's autobiography, *My Silent War*, and Graham Greene's *Human Factor*. In the non-fiction arena, David Wise's treatment of Robert Hanssen and Miranda Carter's recent biography of Anthony Blunt, are both good examples.²

A cautionary note is worth considering. Hitz does not directly suggest that fiction can be a source of learning the espionage business, and this should not be inferred.

Readers of spy fiction often do not realize that CI is the theme of most espionage books, with the mole and the double agent dominating the topics. Hitz cites John le Carré's Smiley trilogy as excellent examples and spends considerable space on the CI problems developed in several non-fiction books about the Ames, Hanssen, and Edward Howard cases to illustrate the complexities. CI is less of a problem for some countries, Hitz suggests, and he quotes "Paul Redmond, America's version of George Smiley—and a profane, brash, outspoken, caustic, courageous one at that" [p. 62]—as saying that "Americans are just too nice to do counterintelligence well."

With regard to assassination in the world of spy fiction, Hitz describes the dilemma created when the British intelligence service, as described by Graham Greene in *The Human Factor*, poisons a staff member erroneously thought to be a KGB penetration. The issue developed is not so much whether the death solved the immediate problem but whether it is ever right. In the nonfiction world, although the KGB under its legendary leader Lavrenty Beria once

employed this alternative, Hitz shows that today the method is "emphatically not on among the Western intelligence services in handling problems with their countrymen." (p. 115).

In the chapter titled "Sci-Fi," Hitz discusses the technology employed by fictional characters, including the time-honored tradecraft described in the George Smiley trilogy.³ "None of this does justice to the real world of espionage," he concludes (p. 129). And while there is an element of truth here that becomes evident as Hitz discusses the role of satellites and codebreaking in the Cold War era, there is irony too when one considers that George Smiley's "time honored tradecraft" is still in use, as Hitz's own account of the Ames and Hanssen cases makes quite clear.

Throughout *The Great Game* Hitz provides a number of interesting details. Unfortunately, some of them are contradictory or inaccurate. For example, his assertion on page 13 that "Sergeant Lonetree was induced by the Soviet intelligence service to open the vaulted area of the US embassy in Moscow to the Soviets for espionage purposes" is contradicted on page 105, where he says it didn't happen "as originally thought."⁴ Of a somewhat lesser nature, Arnold Deutsch, the man who recruited Kim Philby, was Austrian, not Hungarian; Philby defected in 1963, not the "early 1950s" (p. 33); Ames was arrested on 21 not 22 February 1994 (p. 35); Larry Wu-Tai Chin was caught in the 1980s not the 1970s; and Greville Wynn was anything but "the unsung hero of the Penkovskiy operations" (p. 94). It is also incorrect to say that Robert Hanssen "alone selected the hiding places or 'dead drops,' where he concealed the spy information he was providing them and received the cash in payment" (p. 69). He did choose the first one, but the KGB selected the rest, although he was asked to approve.⁵ Finally, the "first CIA intelligence chief in Moscow" was *not* compromised in a honeytrap and sent home; it did happen to the first intelligence officer sent to Moscow in connection with the Popov case.

In answering his original question, Hitz concludes that, "no fictional account adequately captures the remarkable twists and turns that a genuine human spy goes through in pursuit of his mission of treachery and betrayal" (p. 189). This is a remarkable position when it is remembered that many of his academic colleagues hold the opposite view.⁶ They would do well to rethink their positions. On the other hand, what he doesn't say is that no non-fiction account portrays all the vicissitudes of the espionage world either, although some of the recent studies of Cold War cases based on archival materials come close. *The Great Game* shows the real value of fiction when it examines the morality of espionage. Even when dealt with in the abstract, such issues are worth thinking about before the fact, and fiction does that well.

If precedence is an indicator, one thing seems certain. As long as the Great Game continues, we can expect more fiction and non-fiction books about this calling. As Kipling wrote, "When everyone is dead the Great Game is finished. Not before."⁷

Footnotes

1. For the story of another walk-in, see Barry G. Royden, "Tolkachev, A Worthy Successor to Penkovsky," *Studies in Intelligence* 47, no. 3: 5-33.

2. David Wise, *Spy: The Inside Story of How the FBI's Robert Hanssen Betrayed America* (New York: Random House, 2002) and Miranda Carter, *Anthony Blunt: His Lives* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2001).

3. Although Smiley appeared briefly in *The Spy Who Came In From The Cold*, the Smiley trilogy

generally refers to *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier Spy* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1974); *Smiley's People* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980); and *The Honorable Schoolboy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977).

4. See Pete Earley, *Confessions of A Spy: The Real Story of Aldrich Ames* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1997).

5. See Wise.

6. Wesley Wark, *Espionage: Past, Present, Future?* (Portland, Or: Frank Cass, 1994).

7. Rudyard Kipling, *Kim* (London: Macmillan, 1949).

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