



## **An Honorable Man**

*Paul Vidich*

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**‘Cold War spy fiction in the grand tradition, neatly plotted betrayals in that shadow world where no one can be trusted and agents are haunted by their own moral compromises.’ - Joseph Kanon, New York Times bestselling author of *Istanbul Passage* and *The Good German***

Washington D. C., 1953. The Cold War is heating up: McCarthyism, with all its fear and demagoguery, is raging in the nation's capital, and Joseph Stalin's death has left a dangerous power vacuum in the Soviet Union.

The CIA, meanwhile, is reeling from a double agent within their midst. Someone is selling secrets to the Soviets, compromising missions around the globe. Undercover agents have been assassinated, and anti-Communist plots are being cut short in ruthlessly efficient fashion. The CIA director knows any news of the traitor, whose code name is *Protocol*, would be a national embarrassment and compromise the entire agency.

George Mueller seems to be the perfect man to help find the mole: Yale-educated; extensive experience running missions in Eastern Europe; an operative so dedicated to his job that it left his marriage in tatters. The Director trusts him. Mueller, though, has secrets of his own, and as he digs deeper into the case, making contact with a Soviet agent, suspicion begins to fall on him as well. Until *Protocol* is found, no one can be trusted, and everyone is at risk.

**‘As I read *An Honorable Man*, I kept coming back to *George Smiley* and *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*. That’s how good this book is. Pick up this book. You’ll love it.’ – Michael Harvey, New York Times-bestselling author of *The Chicago Way* and *The Governor’s Wife***

## An Honorable Man Details

Date : Published August 25th 2016 by No Exit Press (first published April 12th 2016)

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# From Reader Review *An Honorable Man* for online ebook

## The Real Book Spy says

See this review and more at [TheRealBookSpy.com](http://TheRealBookSpy.com)

It's my belief that the spy genre was at its absolute best during the Cold War era when authors like John Le Carre' were writing thrilling tales of espionage and double-agents with wit and pizzazz. In his debut novel, Paul Vidich takes readers back to that time, dropping them off in 1953 as the world's two greatest superpowers prepare to wage war against one another.

I started this book wanting to like it, and ended up loving it. *An Honorable Man* is a gripping showdown between spies with stakes that couldn't possibly be any higher, and where nobody can be fully trusted.

### THE STORY

The book opens by introducing the reader to George Mueller, an American spy who is trying to find a mole, code-named Protocol, within the CIA.

Mueller watches from across the street, puffing on a cigarette and blowing the smoke into the cold D.C. air (true to the time, everyone is smoking... everyone!) as a joint-operation between the CIA and FBI gets underway. The two agencies finally have a lead on Protocol, and are hoping to capture him and take him into custody before the night's end.

When the target arrived, Mueller noticed several things that ultimately left him unconvinced that the man before them was indeed Protocol. The FBI moved on the target anyhow, storming the building and arresting the man in question. It turned out Mueller was correct, the man was in fact not Protocol. The mission was a total and complete failure.

Mueller was the last to leave the scene, well after the FBI and CIA cleared out. But just as he was preparing to head home, he laid eyes on a shadowy silhouette walking quickly down the street. Something about him made Mueller suspicious – could that be Protocol? Was he there, watching the operation unfold?

Mueller called out to the man and took off to follow him, but the figure had already disappeared back into the shadows of the night. He was too late.

Soon after the unsuccessful operation, the Director of the CIA summoned Mueller to his office. During a closed door meeting, the two discuss the leak of information that has been trickling out of the spy agency's office. From the director's perspective, the entire ordeal is an absolute embarrassment, and his greatest fear is that the American government will learn just how bad Protocol has infiltrated the Central Intelligence Agency.

With several undercover agents already dead, and other operations torpedoed all thanks to the unidentified mole, the director appoints the reluctant Mueller to now lead the investigation.

The FBI wants Protocol too, and technically speaking the two agencies were supposed to be working together to bring him in. Mueller, though, was told to ignore that order and find Protocol before the FBI does. After all, how can the CIA be sure they can trust the FBI?

And therein lies the real problem: When you're dealing with spies, nobody can ever really be trusted.

When light is cast on secrets from Mueller's past, he too becomes a suspect of investigation. Desperate to prove his innocence and then leave the spy life behind, Mueller must catch the real Protocol before it's too late.

### **WHY I LOVED IT**

First and foremost, I appreciated the character. Mueller isn't James Bond. He does not rely on silly gadgets and weaponry to save him when he gets in over his head. He's a smart, educated guy who is very cerebral and capable of seeing things that others don't. And yet, while he's excellent at his job, all he really desires is a normal life with his family.

Mueller had wanted out of the CIA but stayed at the request of the director, who needed him to find Protocol. You can't fault a man for wanting to spend time with his family, which is one of the reasons it's easy to root for Mueller when everything begins crashing down around him.

At the end of the day this book knows what it is, a good old-fashioned mole hunt. It never tries to be something it's not, nor does it drag on longer than it needs to. It's on the short side because of its lack of "filler," which is a welcomed surprise and something I wish more authors would consider in their writing. Far too often writers try to stretch a good story that's only three hundred pages, into four hundred, which is a critical flaw in my opinion.

That said, Vidich develops his characters, especially Mueller, quite nicely. The story isn't missing anything. On the contrary, it contains only what is needed, moving the plot along rather quickly.

### **WHY YOU SHOULD READ IT**

Like a good movie set years in the past, costumes and set pieces are essential to setting the stage for a believable story. From long overcoats and top hats, to cigarettes and pipes, *An Honorable Man* makes you feel like you're in 1953. If you like movies such as *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* or Tom Hank's 2015 spy flick *A Bridge of Spies*, you need to read this book.

Paul Vidich isn't going anywhere. *An Honorable Man* is one heck of a debut novel, and is just the beginning of what should be a long and brilliant career. If you had the chance to go back in time and start reading John Le Carre' from the very beginning, would you do it? Here's your second chance – don't miss it.

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### **Linda Hepworth says**

This story is set in Washington DC in 1953, against a background of The Cold War, a newly unstable Soviet Union following the death of Stalin and the McCarthy witch-hunts. Failed espionage missions and the deaths of a number of agents, have exposed the fact that there is a double agent, code-name Protocol, within the CIA. This mole must be tracked down as soon as possible and, with the FBI eager to expose any weakness in the CIA, the Director trusts only one man to take on the job. This is George Mueller, a Yale-educated agent with many years' experience in espionage missions in post-war Europe. However, Mueller is disillusioned with espionage work and, having lost his original idealistic patriotism, has decided to leave the service and accept a teaching job. Under pressure from the Director, and feeling that it is the honourable thing to do, he accepts this final mission. However, he is a man with his own secrets and dilemmas. He struggles with concepts of loyalty, honour and patriotism, as well as with the compromises he feels his job forces him to

make. He wants to see himself as an honourable man but how confident can he really feel in his own moral and ethical choices?

Suspicion, paranoia, betrayal, conflicts of loyalty, deception, corruption, traitors and personal sacrifice – all the elements which make for a chillingly good spy-thriller – are skilfully woven together to form the background to Paul Vidich's gripping, page-turning novel. From the opening chapter I felt drawn into the shadowy world of espionage, where no one can be trusted and where danger lingers in every shadow. The parallel story of the influence of Mc Carthyism and the persecution of people suspected of being communist, homosexual or atheist added an extra layer of tension, as well as outrage, to my reading experience. I really liked the main character and found myself urging him to trust his instincts, to resign from the CIA, and to take that teaching post!

As a huge Le Carré fan most spy thrillers fall short of my expectations, but not this one because it has all the hallmarks of the best examples of novels in this genre. The writing style is elegant and the taut, atmospheric prose, as well as the credible characters, made me feel that this is an author who has a good understanding of the murky world of espionage. I thought that he highlighted, in a very convincing way, the effects that living a life in this shadowy world can have on an individual's emotional life and on personal relationships – be those intimate ones or friendships. The fact that one of the characters was modeled on a real-life spy of the period, and the author's creative use of his considerable research, made the story-telling feel authentically convincing to me. I also appreciated the fact that, through the author's "Acknowledgments" at the end of the book, I learnt a lot about this aspect of America's contemporary history.

This is story-telling at its intelligent best, respecting the reader's ability to follow a complex plot. I am delighted that there is to be a sequel – even though this does indicate that George has not yet been able to escape the shackles of his career with the CIA!!

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## Mal Warwick says

Half a century ago we learned from John le Carré about amorality and corruption in the world of espionage. Other authors have written hundreds of books about spies since then. Some, including Alan Furst, Charles Cumming, Olen Steinhauer, Dame Stella Rimington, and Joseph Kanon, for example, have made their own estimable contributions to the genre in recent decades. But only rarely has their work brought to light the sheer ugliness of the espionage craft and what damage it wreaks on those who practice it. However, there is an exception. In his first novel, *An Honorable Man* (2016), the American short story writer Paul Vidich brings to life a veteran officer in the early CIA who is honorable only in an ironic sense. The world he inhabits, and the life he lives, are fraught with dreadful expectations and impossible choices.

"Where once there was a struggle between good and evil," Vidich writes in a vein reminiscent of le Carré, "the clarity was gone, and he was in a new gray-toned world where right and wrong blurred. The many innocent people who were collateral damage haunted him. He knew himself well enough to recognize the signs that he was becoming a burnt-out case."

It's January 1953. Senator Joseph McCarthy (identified in the novel only as "the senator") is foaming at the mouth about alleged Communists and homosexuals in the State Department. General Dwight Eisenhower has not yet moved into the White House, and Allen Dulles is still bitterly serving as deputy director of the CIA (though never identified in the novel). The director is an admiral modeled on the man who actually held that office at the time—the three-star general who had served as Eisenhower's chief of staff in World War II. The CIA, now just six years old, is still largely run by the freewheeling former OSS officers recruited upon

the agency's formation in 1947, but bureaucratic ways have begun to take hold. Younger recruits regard the old hands as past their sell date.

These same old hands, executives at the highest levels of the early CIA, are frantic with worry that there is a Soviet mole in their midst. They're equally worried that the FBI will expose them to Senator McCarthy's witch-hunt if they learn the mole's identity. George Mueller is one of four top CIA officers who have been tasked with identifying the double agent, code-named Protocol. He and his colleagues are investigating a list of suspects that is much too long for comfort, and it is troubling that none of the four is on the list despite obvious circumstantial evidence pointing to them.

George is profoundly unhappy with his life and his work. He has made clear to the director and to all of his close colleagues that he wants to leave the CIA. But the admiral refuses to accept his resignation, insisting that George is the only one of the four men on the top-secret Protocol task force that he can really trust. With great reluctance, George persists in pursuing the mole. He feels surrounded by enemies. One is FBI Special Agent Walker, who does not find it difficult to imagine that George himself is a Soviet agent. Another is James Coffin, the director of Counterintelligence, who sits on the Protocol task force with him. (Coffin somewhat resembles the real-life James Jesus Angleton, the brilliant paranoid schizophrenic who tore the CIA apart in his relentless search for a mole for two decades from the 1950s to the 1970s—a mole he never found.) As evidence mounts that there is indeed a traitor to be found, George finds himself under ever greater pressure.

Officially, the CIA would have us believe that the only traitor who turned up during Angleton's reign as the agency's counterintelligence chief (1954-75) was his close personal friend, the notorious KGB spy, Kim Philby of MI6. However, in the acknowledgments at the back of his novel, Paul Vidich writes the following:

"On the morning of April 1, 1953, James Speyer Kronthal was found dead in the upstairs bedroom of his red brick town house in Georgetown by Metropolitan Police, who had been summoned by his longtime housekeeper when she arrived at 8:30 and found the home suspiciously quiet. He was fully clothed, sprawled on the floor, an apparent suicide. He wasn't shot, as [the mole] is in the novel, but in many other respects my character is based on the sad, troubled life of James Speyer Kronthal." Q.E.D.

If you read espionage novels, you'll enjoy my post, "My 10 favorite espionage novels." You might also be interested in "17 good nonfiction books about espionage." You can find both on my blog at [www.malwarwickonbooks.com](http://www.malwarwickonbooks.com).

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## Esil says

3 1/4 stars. I swear that I am not a spy thriller fan. But I seem to have read three -- including *An Honorable Man* -- in the past month or so. What attracts me to these books in the first place is the time period -- I have a particular interest in the history and politics of the Cold War. Unfortunately, spy thrillers are rarely the best source of information or insight for this historical period -- although sometimes they are, which is why I keep reading them. *An Honorable Man* didn't deliver what I was looking for. It felt more like a pastiche of the 1950s -- with stylized clipped dialogue and characters that felt like they were drawn right out of black and white movies from the 1950s. But I have to give *An Honorable Man* credit for being good for what it is. It is a tightly constructed story, that conveys the claustrophobia and paranoia that necessarily come with being a spy. James Mueller is an agent with the CIA. He is charged by the Director with figuring out the identity of the mole within who has been leaking secrets to the Soviets. It could be anyone, and Mueller has to keep on

his toes. Meanwhile, Mueller is tired of being a spy, and desperate to get out of the racket, so participation in the chase for the mole is fraught with self-reflection and taking stock of his life so far. You get the drift? It was a quick read. It wasn't really what I was looking for. But it kept my attention. And it turns out to be based on a true story. Thank you to Netgalley and the publisher for an opportunity to read an advance copy.

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### **Paula Kaufman says**

It's been a while since anyone appeared to be a worthy LeCarre successor, but in *An Honorable Man*, Paul Viditch shows great promise of stepping into those shoes. It was so refreshing to read an intelligent novel about intelligent men caught up in the early days of the Cold War, around the time of Stalin's death. And of the choices, wise and unwise, that all people make, no matter their intelligence or education. Viditch not only presents us with characters who think, he forces the reader to think, with the ultimate questions being what is honor, what does losing one's life and giving one's life for one's country mean, and what is an honorable man? I'm eager to read his next book.

Thanks to the publisher and netgalley for an ARC in exchange for an unbiased review.

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### **Steve says**

*I received this from Netgalley (quite a while back) in exchange for an honest review.*

Perfect Cold War/Spy thriller classic-style written in the vein of the old masters, like le Carré or Len Deighton.

The synopsis is simple: there's a Soviet mole deep in the CIA. Only a few agents know, and they need to find the double agent before the FBI finds out, all the while traversing the trials of Senator McCarthy and his Red Scare.

There's not a lot of action, truth be told, but the cerebral scenes, the tenseness building from beginning to end, and the fact that this book was based on true events shortly after the CIA's founding make this an outstanding read. My only regret is waiting so long to read it!

This reminded me a lot of the old 90s movie with Kevin Costner and Sean Young, "No Way Out". Not surprising, since both this book and that movie are based at least loosely on true events.

I'll definitely be looking for more books by Paul Vidich!

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### **Barbara says**

A spy novel based upon a real spy! Fantastic!! Author Paul Vidich used historical information from James Speyer Kronthal's life to write a fiction piece involving the CIA and FBI during the Cold War of the McCarthy era. This is a spy thriller that has literary legs.

The main character, George Mueller seems haunted by his career in the CIA. He's tired, and looking for a



way out. As the book title implies, he seems to be an honorable man who is wrestling with the ambiguity of honor and loyalty: Loyal to whom? Yet, he's drawn back again to track down a double agent who seems to have access to high-level intelligence.

The novel is a great spy thriller. More than that, Vivich explores the emotional toll spying takes on the individual. Vivich writes Mueller's character so well, that the reader feels the angst and the mistrust. Who is honest? Who's above board?

Adding to the pressure of that time was the McCarthy witch-hunts. The political pressure the Agency felt was immense. At the time, the boundaries between the FBI and CIA were fought with strife. It was a complex time.

Although it's a short novel, 274 pages, I didn't breeze through it. I was assessing the characters, finding the holes in stories....basically trying to be a spy. It's an amazing debut by Vidich. And, I'm really not a spy reader.

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### **Gram says**

A dark tale of the search for a Soviet double agent at the heart of the American government. The story is set in 1953, at the height of Senator Joe McCarthy's House Un-American Activities Committee's "show trials" in Washington as a nation panics at the thought of Communists destroying their country from within.

The director of the fledgling CIA knows that J. Edgar Hoover's FBI will also try to unmask the traitor, code named "Protocol", in order to embarrass and weaken the agency. He assembles an elite team of four to ensure that it's the CIA which finds the double agent within their ranks. One of them is George Mueller, an experienced spy who's run secret missions throughout Eastern Europe. So Mueller joins in the investigation of his colleagues, some of whom he has great respect for. But Mueller is a man with secrets and suspicion falls on him after he makes contact with a senior Soviet agent in a bid to recruit him and help identify the Communist spy within the CIA.

In this debut espionage novel, Paul Vidich painstakingly recreates the paranoia of the "Red Menace" in the USA during the early 1950's. This is a great addition to the spy novel genre and I look forward to the next book in the series featuring George Mueller.

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### **Brandon Forsyth says**

Aspires to be le Carré, but never quite gets there. Some great scenes, but never resonates emotionally. The afterword, where Vidich talks about the historical incident this was inspired by, sounds fascinating and deserves a non-fiction perspective.

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### **Judy Collins says**

*A special thank you to Atria and NetGalley for an ARC in exchange for an honest review.*

## **Old-Fashion Spy Fiction** *at its Finest!*

*Paul Vidich* delivers a fascinating adventurous debut **AN HONORABLE MAN**—richly atmospheric, inspired by true events. Suspenseful—powerful and gritty; *a chilling Cold War spy mystery thriller!*

The dark shadows are lurking from the past. How personal is the political? Is the past ever past? A riveting mystery with a poignant cast of characters – *Complex, emotional, rich in history.*

In the grand tradition—Classic spy fiction genre of literature involves espionage, emerging from the early twentieth century, inspired by rivalries and intrigues between the major powers, and the establishment of modern intelligence agencies.

Who can be trusted? *Agents haunted by their own compromises.*

**Set in Washington DC in the 1950s**, The Cold War is heating up. Joseph Stalin's death. An unsettling time. Tensions, stresses, enemies, corruption, bureaucracy, secrets, hypocrisy, and betrayal. A time when people lived the life that was expected of them.

*From communism, homosexuality, atheism.*

**There is a double agent.** Someone is selling secrets to the Soviets. A traitor. Code name – Protocol. The Soviets had penetrated the Agency. Someone inside had provided the Soviets with drop points, and later the names of CIA assets. Everyone worried about a Soviet agent in their midst. *A traitor.*

**George Mueller** is the perfect man to assist. Find the mole. Muller liked to keep private matters away from his job, but the daily grind made that hard. Politics had taken over everything. *He was tired of the double life, the daily mask.*

Lonely. Holding onto secrets. Life changing secrets. A desire to escape. Muller wants out. A polygraph test. College, the war, Vienna. Loneliness. Secrets were restless things. Secrets got out. The motivations of men around him were suspect and he no longer knew whom to trust.

The Council selected men who they believed had access to the Agency's secrets and a motive. Twenty names. Each suspect. The list was secret. Secrecy protected the investigation from compromise, but is also protected the reputations of the innocent.

**Based on the sad troubled life** of *James Speyer Kronthal*, found dead 4/1/1953 similar to Robert Altman-- a brilliant young deputy of Allen Dulles's who had worked in the OSS with Dulles in the Bern Station during the WWII. He was one of the original 60 whom Dulles brought to the CIA. The initial recruits were not required to take a polygraph test. Later the CIA discovered a questionable life. In order to keep arrest and scandal under wraps, he was later set up, blackmailed, and became the first Soviet mole in the CIA. These acts later came to light. Forced to honor and duty—compulsions destroy careers—leading to apparent suicide (his death), in order to prevent political embarrassment. Read more at the end of the book, in the acknowledgements.

**Taut storytelling** Reminiscent of old-school *John Le Carré* spy thrillers -- Vidich uses well-researched references, books, websites, and quotes of poetry and literary prose—an intriguing Ivy League educated young man who lived a secret life within a secret career. Layers of secrets. A hostile political environment—hushed, during the Cold War.

“Oh, my worse sin was in my blood; Now my blood pays for it.”—*John Webster*

**Quite interesting** how spy fiction has taken on different roles throughout history: from the Nineteenth century, WWI, Inter-war period, WWII, the early/late Cold War (British/American), Post Cold War, to Post-9/11 and the subsequent War on Terror, with a reawakened interest in the peoples and politics of the world beyond its borders-- with new authors emerging in the espionage genre.

Despite the end of the Cold War the spy genre has flourished but changed to keep up with the shifts in the political landscape post 9/11.

**Gripping!** Red-baiting fifties--a term commonly used in the US and its history, often associated with the McCarthyism, which originated in the two historic Red Scare periods of the 1920s (First Red Scare) and 1950s (Second Red Scare). Due to mounting Cold War tensions and the spread of communism --- "McCarthyism" being coined to signify any type of reckless political persecution or witch-hunt.

After reading, you will understand why *Publishers Weekly* named **AN HONORABLE MAN** the Top Ten Mysteries & Thrillers of Spring 2016 (plus many other mentions and awards). Most certainly on my radar! *Impressive*. Looking forward to listening to the audio version narrated by, *George Newbern*.

JDCMustReadBooks

Watch Video

The Literary Spy Novel: *Five Recommendations by Paul Vidich*.

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## **Ralf says**

This book is a great read, I could not stop hearing it to the end. The book invites comparison with *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* from John Le Caree. The hero named George, the traitor homosexual, the turmoil in NKWD after Stalins death and a few other resemblances. But the book can stand this comparison much more than any other spy novel I read.

It goes slightly beyond the pure thriller by choosing the McCarthy area as a background. Not as much as Graham Green in the *Quiet American*, but it has a serious background.

The picture of Vienna after WWII reminded me a bit to the *Third Man* from Graham Green, maybe even more the movie. Yet, again it goes beyond taking Vienna in this time as a cheap background, giving a more nuanced picture. The language is very concise. And the author, in contrast to Le Carré, is able to take a woman and some romance credibly into his story.

I will definitely read Paul Vidichs next book.

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## **Truman32 says**

It's the 1950's in Washington, D.C. The height of the McCarthy communist witch hunts. In the C.I.A. there is a traitor. A mole code-named "Protocol" is on the loose. Nobody can be trusted; the safety of countless agents as well as homeland security is imperiled.

This is the setting of Paul Vidich's debut novel, **An Honorable Man**, and it's a good one.

There is only one man the Director of the C.I.A. trusts to ferret out this mole—George Mueller—an Ivy League educated operative with a lot of experience in the espionage game in post war Europe. George is devoted to his work to the extent that he is bordering on burnout, his marriage is shattered, and he lives in an desolate apartment pining for the young son he may never see again.

**An Honorable Man** reads like the best of John le Carre, the espionage is realistic and gritty like dirty sand chafing your privates underneath your bathing suit, the character of Mueller is like a noir detective—battered and beat down but still fighting the good fight with every last ounce he has despite the cost.

Setting the action in the 1950's increases the breadth of the story. Like a literary Rachel Ray throwing various items into a 30-minute casserole, Vidich tosses in such tasty morsels as class conflict, post-WW2 America, Russian clashes, the secret shame/loathing of homosexuality of the era. There is very little the author puts in his "garbage bowl" which is surprising in such a slim novel. He even gives George the opportunity for a new start at love. Will he take it or crumble under the weight of all his secrets, subterfuge and mendacity?

This is a superior spy story that reads like a detective novel—I look forward from more from this great new author.

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### **Nahid Rachlin says**

The novel engaged me from the first page and kept me interested to the end. I particularly like the characterization of the people in it.

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### **Joshua says**

Slow-moving, unsurprising, but enjoyable. Certainly well-written, but it has a pretense of intellectualism that was sadly not warranted by a sophisticated story. The dramatic ending is almost comical (and it's not supposed to be).

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### **Arthur Okun says**

The Subject:Soviet and American Espionage In The 50's.  
And the Senate,McCarthy Communist Investigations.  
The author was intrigued by the idea and fact of Ivy League educated young men lived a secret life-within secret work.For the CIA you couldn't tell anyone-even your wife what you did for a living.

George Mueller seems to be the perfect man to help find the "mole" in the CIA.  
Yale educated,extensive experience running missions in Eastern Europe.He was  
so dedicated to his job that it left his marriage in tatters-and his son lost to him.  
With excellent prose,crisp phrases that kept you in suspense---you wanted to find the"mole"  
who delivered secret CIA secrets to the Russians.  
BEST SPY NOVEL I HAVE READ IN A LONG TIME.

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