

Review and Commentary on *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*

Series Introduction

It was first a novel by John le Carré, published in 1974. It became a movie in 2011. However, I have not read the novel, nor have I seen the movie. However, I did see the TV adaptation of the novel, which was made by the BBC and came out in 1979, and this review is about the TV miniseries. The BBC version is in seven parts, the US version is in six parts, and it's the latter that I am reviewing.

I must inform the reader that my review of *Tinker Tailor* will not be free of my own personal moral and social commentary. I think it's quite obvious that John le Carré went to quite some effort to interweave his own views that the lack of personal integrity and the lack of people sincerely believing in what they're doing as a fundamental reason why people betray their country and each other.

When it came out in 1980 in the US, I saw the commercial for it, but it didn't seem to strongly attract my interest at the time. But, for some unknown reason, I found it available on YouTube and I started to watch it. Although I was initially quite interested in it, I was however constantly fighting many obstacles to understand what I was watching. Nevertheless, the acting is great and the faults I find in the production are well worth my effort to overlook to see this otherwise good miniseries.

Some of the impediments I had to overcome to fully enjoy the miniseries, and just to understand what was going on, include learning who are the many characters in the story and be able to identify them by rank and by code names. I had to learn something of the British Secret Service, and not rely only on my 'knowledge' of it through James Bond movies. The audio isn't always perfect, and when you add to that the British accents (I am an American), and colloquialisms they use, I sometimes have trouble even hearing the spoken words, much less interpreting what was said. This can be the fault of the audio man or of an actor who whispers the lines. And this is by no means merely a British filming failing.

My purpose is to provide some sort of chronology and explanation of the six-part series to help the viewer of the show to enjoy it better, and I think it is worth watching. It's not about big explosions and sexy girls of the Bond genre. No. This is real spy-craft, or at least not sensationalized spy craft. le Carré's book and TV series asks and answers the delicate question: How does one investigate and catch a mole placed high up in a secret service, without the mole finding out about it and evading both capture and prosecution?

Before I continue this exposé, I need to state that each of the series episodes will contain many spoilers. So, reader, please be aware of that. I will try to keep the spoilers restricted to the episode I'm currently discussing, but it may not be possible to keep to this restriction all the time because the timeline of the story jumps around a lot. In fact, it has taken me many viewings of the miniseries to get the timeline down, and even at that, I'm not sure I have it all correctly.

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John le Carré portrays the British Secret Service (MI6) in a very demoralized and disgusting state at the beginning of the movie. We find out that the damage done to British secret service operations has been undermined by a traitorous mole working for the Soviet Union. His ability to undermine the effectiveness being supported indirectly by promotion-grubbing, greedy coworkers and disaffected countrymen who look at their work as just a paycheck. I think that one of the takeaways for any secret service is if you find such a person in your secret service, fire him or her immediately.

MI6, British Military Intelligence

Tinker Tailor is a story of the betrayal of the British citizens by a British intelligence agent, placed high up in the service. This service is under the Foreign Service (at least Wikipedia claims that it is so now). I'm afraid that I will depend on Wiki to provide the basic information I need to understand the rudiments of British Secret Service.

This story requires the viewer to figure out and memorize a lot of code names. The code name for MI6 is the Circus. At the top of Circus is a group of characters collectively known as the London Station. Its leader is the aging, but patriotic and dedicated, figure known only as *Control*. Apparently, no one knew his real name, except perhaps our story's central hero, George Smiley (played by Alec Guinness), who was deputy to Control. Under them was Percy Alleline, Bill Haydon, Roy Bland, and Toby Esterhase.

After I watched and re-watched the six episodes many times, I started to understand what was going on. Maybe that's my own fault because I never read the novel, but is that to be a requirement for watching a TV adaptation of a novel? I don't know. You tell me.

Yes, the TV adaptation provides the backstory one needs to understand what's going on in Episode One, but, unfortunately, too much back story is left for following episodes to be presented. This didn't work for me. So, what I want to do right now is to present enough backstory so that the viewer can understand the events of Episode One.

This spy story is unabashed at proclaiming the need for modern-day heroes. The heroes presented in this miniseries include George Smiley, Oliver Lacon, Peter Guillam, Connie Sachs, Sam Collins, Jim Prideaux, Mendel, Jerry Westerby, and all the other characters who risked life, limb, and reputation to unselfishly do the right thing for one's country. Make no mistake: *Tinker Tailor* is just as much a story of morals and personal integrity, as it is a spy story.

Episode One

The opening scene shows us a lackluster meeting of the current London Station, with members Percy Alleline, Bill Haydon, Roy Bland, and Toby Esterhase (who was first to enter the conference room). At this time, Control and Smiley are gone from the Circus for reasons we'll soon understand.

For the next scene, we go back in time to find Control in a highly secret meeting with one of the few people he still trusts, namely, Jim Prideaux. Control is presenting to him his theory about a mole high up in the Circus. He lays out the main five suspects, giving them the code names Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, etc, whom he represented as:

Tinker – Percy Alleline,
Tailor – Bill Haydon,
Soldier – Roy Bland,
Poorman – Toby Esterhase (top lamplighter),
Beggarmen – George Smiley.

By the way, the assistant we see helping Control is just referred to as Mendel. He will be one of the few insiders that Smiley will trust later on.

Note: Lamplighters section -- surveillance and wiretapping

So, obviously, at this point in the drama there weren't many people that Control trusted. He had been digging through files to determine why operations had not been working and to find out who was responsible. He had received some information that some Czech general (code name Testify) had information about the identity of the mole. Control, being desperate to know who he was, sent Prideaux off to Czechoslovakia to contact the general and he would then inform Control who the mole was by use of his code name. The purpose of Operation Testify was to get the name of the mole inside the Circus.

By the way, Prideaux is head of the so-called "Scalp Hunters," who are responsible for the dirty work done by the Circus. Very rough types work there.

Moscow Centre refers to the top of the Soviet spy service. The Soviets refer to their mole inside of the Circus as *Gerald*.

However, as Prideaux attempts this rendezvous, he finds out the hard way it's a trap. He gets shot and the whole affair becomes an international scandal for British MI6 incompetence --- exactly what Moscow Centre wanted to get Control removed, and make room for the more politically minded, but spy-craft-incompetent Percy Alleline to take up as head of the Circus.

As I said, the aftermath of this was a public scandal that got Control fired, also got George Smiley fired with him, just in case Smiley was a part of the 'incompetence'. I don't believe that Control was incompetent, just desperate. On the positive side, Bill Haydon was able to get Prideaux returned to England. He was, after all, not the real point of the Soviet operation, anyway.

The next scene takes place in downtown London some six months later. (I'll skip the bookstore scene, except to say that the man apparently looking for him is Peter Guillam.) The now 'retired' Smiley is being socially accosted by a former spy colleague, Roddy Martindale (talk about the power of coincidence). Roddy wants to inform Smiley, over dinner or cocktails, of how incompetent Alleline is, and to inquire who might be the real hidden brains behind him. Maybe it's Bill Haydon? Or, maybe even the pretend-retired George Smiley himself?

We do learn something important from Roddy, namely that the incompetent Percy is apparently getting good results that Control was not able to get, and this contradiction deserves some kind of explanation. Why does the Ministry approve of Percy's work? It makes no sense, claims Martindale. Something must be rotten in the Circus all over again. For all his apparent frivolity, Martindale does make a good point.

We will find out soon that Oliver Lacon, the man who sits between the Ministry and MI6, thinks highly of Percy and the job he is doing. But that won't endure long.

Well, Smiley didn't take well to this or to his overbearing friend's innuendoes about the health of Smiley's unfaithful wife. Yes, Martindale was a creep, but he did give the TV viewer quite some bit of background information. The rightfully offended Smiley doesn't realize at that moment that the information he received from Martindale and all his surmising is about to come in quite handy for what he is about to be called on to do for the Service he no longer belongs to.

By the way, every now and then, throughout the miniseries, we hear of the adulterous love affair between Smiley's wife, Ann, and Bill Haydon. It's a testament to Smiley's patience and character that he is able to endure listening about it so often and in such disrespectful manners. Perhaps adultery was just a given in the England of that day.

Anyway, Smiley finally gets away from him and returns home after dark, only to find that someone uninvited is in his home, waiting for him. Smiley cautiously traverses the hallways until he arrives at his basement to find his former colleague, Peter Guillam, there waiting patiently for him. This is one person Smiley trusts implicitly and will work closely with him throughout all six episodes.

Anyway, Peter tells him that Oliver Lacon wants to see him immediately. Smiley delays only long enough for a cup of coffee and to tell Peter how contemptuous he has become of the spy world, preferring instead to move out of London and find a quiet out-of-the-way cottage amongst a community of elderly retirees to amble about with.

On their way to Lacon's rural estate, which is a long way off, Peter informs Smiley of some of the changes that have occurred since his departure, not the least of which is the fact that Peter is now head of the Scalp Hunters.

At some point on the journey, Peter pulls off to the side of the road, and I don't know why. Perhaps it was to throw off anyone tailing him. Or perhaps it was to gain a bit more time to bring Smiley up-to-date on all the changes at the Circus.

The term 'juju man' comes up. I wish I could explain what it means, but I don't know myself. On the way, Peter explains to Smiley the new structure at the top, called *London Station*, run by Bill Haydon and his deputy is Roy Bland, and Toby Esterhase working under both of them.

Smiley then repeats to Peter the phrase, 'There are three of them and Alleline', which will be repeated by various persons throughout the miniseries. These are the four men, other than himself, shown in the secret meeting at the beginning of this episode.

Smiley asks Peter why Lacon sent him to fetch the old master spy. Peter didn't reply for reasons of professional secrecy, I suppose. But it's a very good question. I shall return to this question after we meet the scallywag Ricki Tarr, who presents information that has scared Lacon into action and then to summon his former master spy George Smiley to his residence.

Why did Lacon send Peter to fetch Smiley? Because Ricki Tarr works under Peter's authority and Ricki went first to Peter. Then Peter went to Lacon, wisely bypassing 'London Station'. The bigger question is

why did Lacon send for the discredited George Smiley. (I assume that Lacon had something to do with the firing of Smiley, so why does he now place trust in him?) This episode doesn't explain this, but it will become clear during the next episode.

After they arrive at Lacon's estate but before they ring the bell, Peter describes Lacon as the permanent watchdog over all intelligence affairs. When Lacon lets them in, he gives Smiley a warm welcome and nearly the same for Peter (using his last name). After a bit of small talk between Lacon and Smiley, which I interpret as Lacon's effort to size up the former agent and to win him over to a new assignment, they head off to an interrogation room, wherein waits Ricki Tarr, who gets reacquainted with Smiley and Smiley with him. By the way, the man in the dark clothes is called Fawn, who works for Peter.

After the handshakes, the four of them sit down in an informal circle of chairs to get down to the business at hand. But before Ricki could get to his fascinating story, Smiley interrupts to ask him what his official status is with the Circus: Absent Without Leave, Smiley suggests. Smiley then puts his glasses on, and he looks like he is back in the role of Deputy Head of the Circus. He is just following his instincts and training: If you can't trust the information, at least try to trust the source of it, and that won't be easy for such an openly independent, smug, and disrespectful agent as Ricki Tarr.

For his part, Tarr seems genuinely afraid of being a target of both Moscow Centre and London Station, because of the secret he is about to present to this auspicious little group. Is Tarr reporting to them for the good of the Service or to bring down the mole that could get him killed? I have yet to figure out where Tarr's loyalties really lie. Though that's a bit unfair of me to my readers. Tarr has not yet informed Smiley of the mole, though he has revealed it to Peter and to Lacon, in that order.

This brings us to the cliffhanger end of Episode One. At the start of Episode Two, Ricki presents his long, involved story of how he came to learn of the top-level mole in the Circus, whom Moscow Centre has code named *Gerald*.

I want to end this first review with a little bit more about the enigmatic Ricki Tarr. By his own admission he's a scallywag, but just where do his loyalties lie? Certainly with himself and his family, to whom he is very protective. But is he loyal to the Service itself? I tend to think so, if only now for his own protection. We'll see in the next episode that Tarr had become convinced that Moscow Centre was on to him as the source of information about there being a mole in London Station, which he reported to London Station – go figure – which betrayed him. For this reason, he can't trust London Station (to whom he is regarded as 'absent without leave' as Smiley put it, or 'on the run') or a defector, so the only persons he has left to trust is first Peter, then Lacon, and finally George Smiley.

Episode Two

Last time we left off in the beginning of Ricki Tarr's story of the severe compromise of the Circus by a Soviet mole. To make this long story short, Peter sent Tarr to Lisbon to assist local spy-in-state Thuffy Thessinger, to spy on Soviet spy Boris. In the search of his apartment, Ricki finds Iryna (Irina), who claims to be his wife, and who wants out of her role as a spy consort to get herself to the freedom of Scotland. She tells Ricki about the mole in the Circus.

After Ricki completed his story and explained his reasons for going underground, which was to protect himself from Karla, he answered questions from Smiley about his passport and then Lacon had Smiley accompany him to the yard outside for a discussion of what to do from that point.

Once outside, Lacon modestly admits his mistake in dismissing Smiley's suspicion that there was a mole at the top level of the Circus. He explains that the reason he didn't trust him was because he thought Smiley was acting on behalf of Control in his attempt to rid the Circus of Alleline in an attempt to hang on to power.

But now things have changed. Lacon is finally open to the possibility of the real existence of this mole. Smiley repeats to Lacon the phrase he learned from Control: "There are three of them and Alleline." He goes on to claim that they are what constitutes London Station.

Despite all the growing doubts that Lacon has against Alleline, he remarks to Smiley that he has produced valued intelligence (called Witchcraft) and not produced scandal along with it. The person supplying this in Moscow Centre material is codenamed *Source Merlin*.

Next, both men realize the need to reveal the mole, but are initially at a loss to figure out how they could do so using conventional means, that is, the internal security protocols.

Then Lacon says, "It's the oldest question of all, George. Who can spy on the spies?"

When Smiley suggests that Lacon call in the 'Security Mob' (MI5) to clean up the mess, Lacon replies that the Foreign Minister would not allow that.

Nevertheless, even before Smiley agrees to ferret out the mole, Lacon provides him with current, sensitive intelligence information. Lacon offers Smiley great latitude of investigative powers to settle the matter once and for all. They briefly discuss Bill Haydon and Jim Prideaux's working relationship of years gone by. Their relationship will find further relevance later on in the story.

Smiley finally accepts, and immediately asks for additional help (beyond that implied by Peter Guillam) in the man that was once Control's assistant, Mendel. Smiley quickly sets up shop in some nondescript building, called the Islay Hotel. Smiley will stay at this hotel under the name of Mr. Baricloff [? Sp.]. There will be a few Lacon meetings in this room.

That evening, Peter and Lacon join Smiley in reviewing top-level files about the information provided by Ricki Tarr and the requests the Circus made of him in response. Suspecting that Tarr was betrayed by Gerald, Smiley wanted the file on the Tarr information. Lacon responds that he can't deliver to him any Circus material. So, Smiley turns to Peter to have him steal the file, to which Lacon anxiously tells them both not to take any unnecessary risks.

Episode Two ends with Peter in the middle of his effort to surreptitiously abscond with the Tarr file.

My commentary on Episode Two

So, this brings us to the reason why Smiley was let go in the wake of the Testify operation scandal in Czechoslovakia. Lacon could not at that time absolve Smiley of wrong doing or at least improper motives six months earlier. As for Lacon's boss, I'm sure he told him in no uncertain terms to just fix this thing.

So, here's Lacon, not at all an expert in how the Circus is run, much less London Station, has to go back to Smiley and woo him back into service. He is wont to remind George that he owes this much additional service because he was a part of that generation that set up the faulty spycraft that now needs fixing.

But it all worked out for the best. With Control and Smiley out of the way, and with the incompetent Alleline in command, Gerald felt he could take additional liberties that would probably go undetected.

Three months after Tarr had gone underground, he felt threatened enough that he eventually brought the matter to Peter and Peter to Lacon. What was not explained was how Peter came to have Lacon's home phone number. Perhaps it's in the directory.

Anyway, it couldn't have worked out better if Lacon and Smiley had contrived the whole thing as a scheme to ferret out the suspected mole. With Smiley in retirement, the cocky Gerald overstepped his safety protocols, making mistakes as he proceeded. (Give a man enough rope and he'll hang himself.) It was the mishandling of the Tarr revelations as much as the claims he made (which were brought to Lacon's attention through Peter) that led Lacon to recall Smiley for temporary active duty. Anyway, that's how I see it.

Episode Three

Last time we left Peter attempting to steal the Circus file called Testify, while George is off to Oxford to look up a friend, Connie, a former associate at the Circus (head of research). George asks her for information regarding Aleksey Polyakov. She immediately pegged Polyakov as a Karla spy and former star soldier, and claims that neither Percy Alleline nor Toby believed her about that.

When she pushed the subject with Toby, he tells her to take it to Percy, but Percy isn't interested in her guesses. When Connie refused to back off her claims about Polyakov running an English mole, she gets fired. As George is about to leave, she laments that in the old days, one could be proud to be an Englishman. This is a recurrent theme in the miniseries and the next one, *Smiley's People*. We will see over and over again the negative effects of demoralized people in high places, who refuse to believe in the intrinsic good or benefit of what they're doing.

Sometime after Smiley returned to the Islay Hotel, Peter summarizes to Smiley and Lacon what he found out: All pages referencing communicates about Ricki Tarr and Boris were removed, and all further inquiries to be made to Toby Esterhase.

George claims that Connie's report to him confirms the belief that Karla has been successful in setting up high-level spying on British agents, and that Polyakov is his agent spying on London Station. Lacon complains to George that he is broadening the scope of his inquiry too wide and to tighten it up. After he leaves, Peter suggests that Lacon has a point. But George disagrees and recounts a discussion he had with Control in Control's office, while Percy was there.

Control has George read the highlights of a file concerning Soviet naval maneuvers. George asks the source and he is told that it is from Merlin, and material from him is called Witchcraft. Percy is sly about taking full credit for Source Merlin, and he has the support of other officers in the Circus who see him, not Control, as leading the service into productive ventures, for a change. After Percy leaves the room, Control accuses him of being pure opportunist, and loyal to nothing but himself.

Smiley asks if perchance Merlin was genuine. Control doesn't think so, and surely wouldn't pick Percy as his contact if he were. What conclusion then follows? Percy is a Soviet patsy, aiding Karla's cause? Then, desperate to know who is on his side, Control asks Smiley if he was per chance part of the cabal that supports Alleline. George is somewhat put off by this accusation, and Control signals a nonverbal apology.

When asked by Smiley what he intends to do about the situation, he states that he has to bide his time until the situation clarifies itself.

The next scene shows Control, Smiley, Lacon, Percy, Bill Haydon, Toby Esterhase, and Roy Bland in a meeting. As Control looks off out the window, Percy seems to run the meeting and brag about the high praise Witchcraft material has received from the Foreign Office.

The next scene shows Control and Smiley back in Control's office and Control is insisting that Smiley sweat Alleline and the other three of them to give him (Control) time to ferret out the mole in the Circus. Smiley looks like he isn't going to like this assignment.

The next scene George takes on Toby. Remember that Control has ordered Smiley to strong arm Alleline and the other three. So, in this sense, Smiley is interviewing Toby about his failure to stay current on his section's report filings. Toby is put off by the question. Then George gets right to the point and suggests that the reason the filings are late is because he has been doing jobs for someone, using his lamplighter people, that are not supposed to get official recognition.

Toby refuses to answer the question, though he does plead his enduring loyalty to the Service, and assumes that Smiley will leave it at that. Toby volunteers a bit of personal feelings to Smiley. He claims to resent being given orders from people his junior in the Service. Smiley will later on in the series suggest this as a motive for treason.

Well, that wasn't all that successful. Smiley's next interview is with Roy Bland. They have their chat on a rainy walk in the park. Bland is not slow to push back on Smiley's stated concern that Control feels that Bland may be getting in over his head with extraneous associations. Bland seems to feel entitled to whatever machinations he goes for.

Bland's self-justifying lack of interest in the scruples of his job or to any sense of loyalty to anything but his own furtherance is, I suppose, disheartening to Smiley. And again, the after-effect of the demoralization about the point of their own careers in the Service, seems to leave them disheartened and then self-entitled to whatever material gains they can muster – the fate of the country be damned. Bland reminds Smiley that if he thinks that he (Bland) has gone to the bad, then he has only himself to blame for having recruited Bland. (Perhaps this is an example of what Lacon means when he often accuses Smiley as being responsible for the problems that arose in his generation of spies. And for his part, I think Smiley feels somewhat responsible as well, so it always works on him.)

Smiley asks Roy if this demoralization he has now is the result of Bill Haydon's anti-British, anti-materialistic sentiments. Bland sees himself on the up-and-coming when the new regime takes over on the graves of Control and Smiley. What a bunch of traitorous losers they are. Well, there is a day of reckoning coming.

The last of the cabal to interrogate is Bill Haydon. It's not clear if Smiley interviewed them in some predetermined order, or if he chose that order at random. Bill is honest in admitting that the lower ranks are envious of promotion to take over both Control's job and Smiley's. He refers to it with the euphemistic term "ambition."

Smiley directly asks Haydon who Merlin is, but Bill refuses to answer the question. Instead, he suggests that the well-meaning Control is too long in the depths of failure. Whereas, he – Haydon – is on to something that produces real gold dust. Haydon claims that his networks haven't been good enough to get Merlin, but Percy somehow has. At this point, George is exasperated, as he knows that all three members of this cabal have been stonewalling him.

Haydon then suggests that Smiley stop being loyal to Control, who seems to be unsupportive of Smiley. He then claimed that Control was doing deep research into old files and personnel that is irrational. Haydon claims that Control is dying. That may be the only thing that Haydon told Smiley that was the truth.

The next scene places us back with Peter and Smiley (after Lacon had left). Smiley tells us that Control died about six months after Haydon's prediction. Smiley then claims that Operation Testify was Control's undoing, sending him to an early grave. George asks Peter to find even more information on Testify.

It seems that Peter's presence in the building did not go unnoticed by Alleline, who ordered him to attend the next London Station meeting, in which Percy upbraids him for not keeping tabs on Ricki Tarr. Peter admits that Tarr has been labeled as a defector. Percy threatens Peter with criminal action if he doesn't get with the program – that's Percy's program, of course. Percy directly asks Peter why Tarr should be in England. Peter pretended ignorance. Percy orders Peter to run to anyone at the table if he should get wind of where Tarr is.

In the next scene, Peter is driving and Smiley is in the passenger seat and they bring up the unreliable Tarr. Peter is angry at Tarr for bringing his wife and child to London, endangering him and the sting operation that Lacon are setting up. However, Smiley is thankful to him for proving that Source Merlin is Moscow Centre.

Episode Four

Last time we left Peter having to answer rough questioning from Alleline. This episode begins with him driving Smiley and he is venting his anger at Ricki Tarr, who got caught bringing his family into England – or being in the process of doing so. George tries to calm the angry Peter down. Smiley sums up Tarr's contribution to the puzzle that they now know that Source Merlin works for Moscow Centre. Apparently the Magic Circle found out about Tarr from Moscow Centre.

Their next stop is the safehouse where they have Ricki Tarr in seclusion. Once there, they interrogate him for information about Swiss passports and his knowledge of the whereabouts of his wife and daughter, or he's keeping their whereabouts secret.

After they rough up Tarr a bit, Smiley is satisfied that Tarr doesn't know where his wife and daughter are, or that he, Smiley, can live with not knowing, and that he hadn't made a deal with Karla. Smiley is one cool cucumber.

After that, Guillam and Smiley go to a restaurant to talk about Karla in particular. Smiley claims that the Circus knows little about him, but that he was in England in 1936 and 1941, which was likely the time when he recruited his mole, Gerald. Smiley then recounts when he met Karla long ago in Deli in the mid-50s.

While Smiley was attempting to recruit Karla to his side, he refused to defend the morality of the West as being superior to the morality of the Soviets. But if he really believed that, then why should he fight against the Soviets? Are we to believe that if two opposing sides are each imperfect that neither can be judged to be better or worse than the other? I don't believe that Smiley believed that, even during that interview.

When Smiley and Peter leave the restaurant, Peter suggests that Karla is fireproof. But then Smiley reacts angrily, saying, "Not fireproof! Because he's a fanatic. I may have behaved like a soft dope -- the very archetype of a flabby Western liberal. But I'd rather be my kind of fool than his. One day that lack of moderation will be Karla's downfall."

No doubt, Smiley believed it would not be long at least until the mole would be found, which is why he told Tarr that it won't be long. In the next scene, daytime, Smiley is at Hotel Islay, reading books, to prepare for the next meeting.

In the next scene, Smiley is joined by Mendel, Guillam, and Lacon when he reads some of the material he has about Alleline bragging that Merlin is worth the price for his information and that the safehouse for meeting the go-between must be kept highly secret. Information coming to the Magic Circle was that Tarr had false information about a mole in the Circus. Lacon tells Smiley that his minister is devoted to Merlin, so how is he to tell him that Merlin is a fraud. Smiley suggests that he tell him that Merlin receives information through his mole Gerald.

Smiley's next interview will be with Jim Prideaux, if he can find him. He wants to know why Testify happened. Mendel claims that they've located Prideaux in a boys's school. Prideaux discovered Mendel loitering down the road from the school, apparently to inform Prideaux that he will soon be visited by someone from the Circus.

Smiley's next interview is with Sam Collins, the man who was duty officer during Testify when Prideaux was shot, recently returned from extended stay in Japan and ushered to Control by Mendel. Upon request from Smiley, Collins tells him the story of what he saw during Testify.

Control had cleared everyone out of the building to let Testify produce its expected outcome -- the name of the mole, given by codename, of course.

Later that evening, Collins is informed that the operation had gone awry, and that a British spy had been shot in Czechoslovakia. When Collins reports what he knows to Control, at first Control seems to be in shock, but then he claims that he has some time to respond officially. Bill Haydon shows up at the office to be informed by Collins that Jim Prideaux was shot. Haydon seems to take it rather hard. Haydon orders Collins to call Toby Esterhase and have him arrest two Czech agents in country to be used to swap for Prideaux. Soon after that, Control is sick in hospital and Percy Alleline is acting chief.

Smiley leaves his conversation with Collins and that is the end of this episode.

Episode Five

Last time we left Collins explaining to Smiley the events that occurred just after Testify went bad and public, and how Bill Haydon took over the London response to the crisis.

Smiley guesses that Collins knew to call his house to find Haydon, who would be with his adulterous wife.

In the next scene, Smiley was interviewing Jim Prideaux. Smiley invites Jim to a quiet hotel room to talk things over. Prideaux explained how he tried hard to forget about Control's Tinker Tailor while in prison in Czechoslovakia. He tried his best to deal with the interrogation, the torture, the uncertainty, and afterward he was released, the guilt that he may have betrayed members of the network he helped to establish. Smiley listened intently to it all. By the end of Jim's recollections to Smiley, he divulged that he had tattled on Control and Tinker Tailor. And, finally, that his last interrogator was Karla, who had asked about Smiley.

Later that evening, we see Smiley interrogating Jim about his quarantine back in England. He learned that Haydon did not visit him, but that Toby did, as a messenger for the status quo about how that the Circus was under reconstruction to match Whitehall's expectations. Smiley is curious why the Circus hadn't asked Prideaux anything about Operation Testify or especially about Tinker-Tailor. The obvious unstated implication is that one of Alleline, Haydon, Bland, or possibly even Esterhase wanted to bury the matter while the reorganization continued. Smiley learned that Toby mentioned Tinker-Tailor to Prideaux.

In the next scene, presumably the next day, Smiley descends stairs down to a restaurant to look up an old friend from the service, Gerald (Jerry) Westerby. Smiley quickly explains to Westerby that his meeting him was not a mere chance event. And that he had received the letter that Westerby had sent him, which he burned. Westerby apologizes for sending it, but Smiley justifies him sending it, as an act done in good conscience. (The good guys acted out of loyalty and good conscience; the bad guys out of self-interest or spite.)

Then Westerby informs Smiley that when he was in Prague, that he ran into a soldier on leave (supposedly) who was quite interested in telling him the truth about the British spy operation that went bad in Czechoslovakia. This apparently disaffected or gossipy Czech soldier wanted to let Westerby know that behind the Czechs knowing in advance that a British operation was to happen, that the Russians were also there and in wait.

Then Westerby explains how after he return to London and explained all this to Toby that the condescending Toby was at first receptive, but after talking things over with the higher ups, he came down hard on him. He was ordered to forget all of it. So, at every turn, Smiley finds out that The Magic Circle was endeavoring to cover up the whole operation Testify. It had accomplished what mole Gerald wanted it to. But that Toby was answering to the top brass about the Russians knowing ahead of time about the operation, this suggests that Toby might not be the mole, and he might be the logical person to pressure next.

In the next scene we find out that Jim Prideaux has gone missing from the school.

And after that, Toby Esterhase entered a trap set by Smiley, and fronted by Peter Guillam. Toby meets Peter in some familiar safe house, I suppose, unaware that it's a trap. Then he is interrogated by Smiley. He begins right off taking them all back in time 18 months to when Control was still in charge. Smiley's purpose just then was to put sufficient pressure on Toby that, if he were the mole, he would confess to it, but, if he wasn't, he would join himself to Smiley and Peter's sting operation to catch Gerald.

Smiley then explains his thesis to Toby to get some kind of reaction back from him. Gerald was to supply intelligence from a Russian source, code named Merlin, the material codenamed Witchcraft. Percy sat on top of this Magic Circle within the Circus and benefitted politically from it, but Control thought it all

wrong and stated so. What we saw was the interim where Control was still in the boss's seat, but Alleline was de facto operational leader through Operation Witchcraft. It was a perfect setup to oust Control and instill Alleline.

But at some point, Gerald had to reveal to Alleline that Witchcraft material had a soviet operative in London, who was Polyakov. When Smiley asks Toby who of the Magic Circle were meeting with Polyakov, Toby at first refuses to give up that information.

No matter, Smiley suggests reasons why each of the four of them had discussions with Polyakov. In particular, Toby would have tradecraft materials to get from him. Eventually, the intimidated Toby starts to defend himself and his particular actions regarding Polyakov. He claims that all he ever did was to provide Polyakov with chickenfeed and receive back gold dust.

Smiley then outright asks Toby, "So, are you Polyakov's agent inside the Circus?" Toby doesn't bother to reply, which I found odd, but I suppose he had his reasons, even if he were innocent. Anyway, Smiley goes on to explain how that Polyakov had to have a history of having won over some Circus agent so that he can explain how he gets his information from the Circus. The odd thing about this line of presentation is that Smiley already knows that the Circus agent was not won over by Polyakov, but rather was a longstanding mole that Karla had recruited decades earlier. Smiley continued to pressure Toby by suggesting that his personal habits and resentments make him the logical suspect in this betrayal of the Circus.

My guess is that Smiley used this fiction as a means to force Toby to clear himself immediately. Anyway, he does. Smiley provides Toby with some wiggle room to suggest that the Big Three had been handing him little packets of supposed chickenfeed, but they were in reality the 'crown jewels.' Perhaps this much wiggle room was enough for Toby to figure that he should rat out the Big Three as a means of self-preservation.

Then Smiley confesses to Toby that Gerald is a Russian mole, which as much as admitted that Smiley had merely been lying to him, and now it's Toby's moment to seek friends of Smiley and Peter and to distance himself from Alleline, Haydon, and Bland. Very cleverly pulled off, I'd say.

When Smiley asked Toby where he got the order to tell Jim Prideaux to forget about Tinker-Tailor, he insisted that he didn't know what that even meant. I think that Toby must have been convincing in telling Smiley his actions, which seems to have convinced Smiley that he was telling the truth. It was a breakthrough moment. Smiley could then reduce the list of possible traitors to just three.

Toby offers his services to Smiley for the good of the Circus, and Smiley asks him where the Polyakov safehouse is located, to which he is told 5 Lock Gardens, Camden Town.

Smiley seems satisfied with the information and so Toby stands and takes his hat to leave. But Smiley takes the hat from him and sets it down, saying, "You're going to be staying here for a night or two."

Toby doesn't seem to like it, but it was no doubt in the best interest of Smiley's sting operation that Toby remain incommunicado. This also protects Toby from any further suspicions should things not go well.

Episode Six

Last time we left Smiley interrogating Toby Esterhase, who eventually decided to reveal the safehouse of meeting with Polyakov, which effectively was turning against the Magic Circle, to which he had many resentments for having to play their lackey. Smiley used this as psychological leverage to win over Toby to his side. Toby will, for a day or two, remain at the current place, incommunicado, except to make the necessary excuses by phone to the Circus and his wife that he will be unavoidably detained for a while.

Smiley and Guillam leave together from there and meet up at the Hotel safehouse, where they will later meet with Lacon and Mendel.

Lacon officially begins the meeting, but makes it clear that the Minister has one overriding concern and that is to avoid any further scandal over the behavior of the Circus. After that was made clear, Smiley asks if they should proceed, and Lacon says yes.

Then, Smiley speaks aloud his ideas on how to flush out the mole, claiming that now there are only two of them and Alleline, definitely absolving Toby. The list has shortened.

Smiley devises a scheme to get the mole sufficiently nervous to request a meeting with Polyakov at the safe house. The sting operation. To set events in motion, Ricki Tarr will go to Paris and use the usual communication facilities there to send the message that scares the mole into having this meeting with Polyakov. A meeting vital to the safeguarding of the Service. So, Peter meets with Tarr to hand him this new assignment, which he accepts.

While waiting for Gerald to arrive, Peter and George are busy setting up the safehouse for automatic recording in certain rooms, for tapes of conversations that will be used for evidence against Gerald. Smiley reveals his nervousness at being a field agent once again, in harm's way. Remember that in the first episode he told Peter:

“I’ve been reviewing my situation in the last half-hour of hell, and I’ve come to a very grave decision. After a lifetime of living by my wits and on my memory, I shall give myself up fulltime to the profession of forgetting. I’m going to put an end to some emotional attachments which have long outlived their purpose; namely, the Circus, this house, my whole past....”

And now, waiting to spring this dangerous sting operation, pistol in pocket, he still wonders if he isn't perhaps too old for this kind of thing. In any case, the end is near.

Mendel waits in a nearby building, observing the frontage of the safehouse. Someone arrives. He telephones Smiley to let him know that Soldier (Roy Bland) had arrived. Smiley is then seen fiddling with his pistol and Peter is about to leave the building to search the grounds outside.

When Mendel calls Smiley to report that one of the three have left in a taxi, the reveal is on. He tells Mendel to join him in the arrest. Then they wait for Polyakov to arrive. Once Smiley recognizes Bill Haydon's voice in the downstairs, he signals by flashlight for Peter to come in quickly. (This mini-scene of Peter running to get back to the safehouse, strikes me as overdoing the suspense. The director made it look like Peter was three blocks away.)

So, I've given away that our mole is Haydon, but he'll be arrested soon enough. Bill Haydon may be brilliant as a mole, but he's a rank amateur as a field agent. He's cocky and arrogant. It's not even occurred to him to think this meeting was a trap.

When the trap is sprung and the criminals arrested, Smiley orders Peter to contact Alleline then Bland, then Lacon and Toby. On the tape we hear Haydon surmising that Ricki Tarr must have the goods on Haydon being the mole, Gerald. Still, what else could Haydon do under the circumstances? If his surmises about Tarr were correct, then he's in a lot of trouble. But if the whole thing was part of a sting operation, he was still in trouble, because he would be at the top of a short list of Magic Circle agent suspects.



Left to right: Bland, Alleline, Esterhase, and Lacon listening to the sting tape.

I'd love to believe that the show of embarrassed and sickened states that the remaining Magic Circle members have on their faces – displayed best by Alleline – is their sincere remorse at the damage done to the Service, to the lives of compromised agents in the field, and to the reputation of Britain. But I'm sure it wasn't. Alleline, Bland, and Esterhase had to realize, as they listened to the tape, that their cherished careers in the Circus were finished. And it all adds up to their own character flaws. Yes, it's true that Control played the fool, but Percy Alleline had played it far worse. In the end, Control was vindicated and Alleline was shown to be the buffoon that he is. Maybe he can admit to that and find a humble way to move on in life.

That look on Percy's face. We've all been there at one time or another. We've all felt that sinking feeling in the pits of our stomachs that it's just a matter of time until we must face the full consequences of our folly. Control had been right. Smiley had been right. And Percy and even Lacon in the beginning had been wrong. But, as Smiley himself had observed, in another context, what Karla had accomplished could be thought of as beautiful.

Who are those that will, in the end, come out looking righteous in all this? All those who put doing a competent job and being loyal to the service as more important than monetary gain or career advancement or taking out vengeance on the wrong people for the wrong reasons – a personal vendetta. As Ilfinor once said, "You either get control of your lusts and feelings of entitlement or they will get control of you."

When the tape is over, Toby congratulates Smiley, and Lacon asks what the next step should be. He's lucky that Smiley is there to advise him, for they have a difficult pathway to navigate out of the mess the Service is in.

Smiley suggests to Percy that they need to use Haydon to salvage the networks that Haydon has betrayed. Percy agrees, though I think he's in a state of shock and not able to formulate any sort of plan on his own. Smiley suggests that they sell Bill Haydon to Moscow Centre to save as many field agents as they can. Smiley convinces Percy that it's he who will have to negotiate this with Karla through Polyakov.

So, for the time being, Alleline remains the titular head of the Circus, with Lacon and Smiley running it under the table, so to speak. Haydon is taken away in a van to a safe location, run by the Scalp Hunters. It's a sort of mini-prison in the English countryside.

Meanwhile, Jim Prideaux is on the outskirts of this drama, watching all and plotting revenge, instead of being a teacher at that boys' school. I don't know how Prideaux was able to get to this safehouse at that time to see someone being arrested by Smiley and Lacon, but he would be able to put together that the arrested person was the mole who was responsible for him getting shot, arrested by the Soviets, and tortured for who knows how long. Perhaps there is some payback due in his mind.

In the next scene, Smiley and Peter are in Smiley's house, relaxing and discussing the matter. George takes this opportunity to thank Peter for his help and for a job well done. Anyway, now we know the answer to who successfully spies on the spies. Lacon picked them well, didn't he?

The next scene is Smiley interrogating Haydon for the reasons for his betrayal of his oath and service. For his part, Haydon saw himself as a victim and England as some kind of monster that had to be humbled. I really don't understand his motive, though I'm sure that it has nothing to do with what he claimed it did. It was something deeply psychological in him. But, of course, the reader is free to believe what he or she wants. Is Bill Haydon a victim or a demon. You decide. If Haydon really had a 'rational' reason to hate democracy and betray his own country, he didn't make it clear. I think that all Haydon put forward in his own defense was a bunch of rationalizations to hide his own greed, feelings of entitlements, and emotional/psychological instability.

So, Haydon began to look to the East when he saw that Britain had become trivial in world affairs – all the way back in the mid-40s? Ridiculous. That claim is patently untrue. If he really believed such nonsense he was deluded. You know, I've heard it said that some people on psychotropic meds come to find that they prefer to live within the delusional world of their illness, rather than to live within the reality afforded them by their medications, so they stop taking them. Or, is it a case of Anosognosia? Maybe Haydon was an undiagnosed bipolar person. (I want to stress that I'm referring to that subset of persons who stop taking their psychotropic meds, not because of their side-effects, but because of their desired effects.)

The Bible says that one of the qualities of life that God intends to give His followers is a sound mind. If you ever should attain it, please strive to keep it. But every lie we believe undermines our soundness of mind.

The next scene Lacon is visiting Smiley in Smiley's home. Of course, they're discussing the Haydon situation. Lacon is not satisfied with the information they have received from him so far and presses Smiley for more. But George dodges the subject and claims that the facility Haydon is in is slovenly run. George states his concern for Haydon's safety, though he doesn't give a good reason for his concern.

However, whatever his concerns, Lacon is more interested in keeping the whole debacle as secret as possible, so regular patrols around the perimeter must, of necessity, be dispensed with.

I haven't yet said much about the love affair that Haydon had long maintained with Smiley's wife, Ann, but it seems that I *should* at this point because it came up between Lacon and Smiley. (According to Bill, the affair business with Ann was Karla's idea to keep Smiley off kilter.) Lacon insisted that she should be told about the Haydon affair so that she shouldn't accidentally let the whole affair (no pun intended) slip out about the mole. Smiley insisted that he had planned on telling her anyway, as he put it, "You might call it balancing the books." George Smiley is the most sangfroid individual I've ever seen. Never let them see you sweat, right, George?

Next are some follow-up discussions between Smiley and Haydon, which I shall leave unreported on, as they seem pretty straightforward.

That night, as Bill sat by himself on a bench outside, he was approached stealthily by Jim Prideaux, who seemed to have surprised Bill, by the reaction Bill gave him. After a few words between them, Jim executes Haydon with one blow of his fist to Bill's neck. And thus we see Haydon for the evil man that he was. He was not a victim. And not a hero. He was not a forger of a new and better world government, or righteous avenger as he may have imagined himself to be to excuse his self-promotion and self-indulgence and maniacal hatred of things he never really understood about the West. He was, just as Karla was, a self-servicing man who would betray anyone at any time to promote his own interests, and the rest of the world be damned. Well, Jim Prideaux wasn't having it.

The next scene takes us to a religious service back on the boy's school, in which Jim Prideaux sits in service as though everything involving Smiley and the Circus and Bill Haydon had been just a dream of the previous night, to be forgotten about as soon as possible.

The next scene we find Smiley, Lacon, Peter, Percy, Toby, and Bland sitting at a large table, discussing the murder of Bill Haydon. Lacon, not having even a short list of viable suspects to Haydon's murder, yells out irritably, "Well, who, then?!"

I have no idea if Smiley suspected Jim Prideaux as the murderer, but he would be a natural candidate. Prideaux had, on his first recent re-meeting of Smiley, threatened to kill him for less offence.

Then Smiley says, "We will all, of course, have to account for our movements last night. A necessary formality. Also Mendel, Fawn, Ricki Tarr."

Anyway, Ricki Tarr had been right in his initial assessment that the Circus would have to get itself a whole new management, not just to find and replace the mole. How did he know? I think he drew this conclusion on how he was stonewalled by the Magic Circle when he first tried to inform them about Gerald. He must have figured that everyone besides the mole had collaborated with Gerald, either because of outright complicity or of ignorant incompetence – the latter being the actual case.

Anyway, Smiley reports that he's been asked to take over the Circus for a while. He ordered everyone to take some time off and if they want to return to the service, perhaps some position could be found for them. (He called it a 'redeployment'.) Personally, I don't think it matters for any of them, because they're all going to die of cigarette-smoke induce lung cancer in any day.

By the way, out of the Magic Circle (the remaining Big Three) only Toby Esterhase will find some manner of redemption (he will have a respected place helping Smiley in the next mini-series *Smiley's*

People). As for Peter being included in the time-off order, that was, I think, for him to finally recuperate after that North-African operation that went bad (it was mentioned between Smiley and Mendel).

The next scene, Smiley drives to some country manor estate to talk to Ann. Their conversation about Bill Haydon is clear enough. To me, she lives her life as though she's still an adolescent, with no sense of personal responsibility or loyalty to anyone other than herself. Perhaps she and Haydon were meant for each other.

When she claims to George, in a pitying way, that life is bewildering to him ('life's such a puzzle to you'), she takes on an air of superiority. But I think she's wrong. She seems to think that she's one up on her husband about how the real world works, but I don't think that's true at all. I think the only difference between them in that regard is of a philosophical and moral nature: George believes that a person should keep his or her promises to spouse and country, but she believes that such promises are made to be broken, if only for the sheer fun of it. Ann treats her life as though it's one long joyride, paid for at the expense of all the innocent people around her. How entitled.

Wisdom is better than weapons of war: but
one sinner destroyeth much good.
-- Ecclesiastes 9:18

Afterthoughts:

When Smiley asks Haydon to explain why he betrayed his country, he explained that he felt betrayed by a country that had recruited him on the promise that they were the heroes, upholding freedom's cause ("freedom's protectors") "Do you know what's killing Western democracy, George? Greed."

I'm not going to repeat any more of his demonic nonsense. Haydon was himself a man greedy for power and recognition and self-importance. As Ann told George, Haydon loved being the center of the contest between Moscow Centre and the Circus. He loved being a traitor. Smiley's appraisal of him seems more accurate, "Yet another man trying to find a little place in history."

Haydon was a twisted character, no better than the Unabomber or any other sociopath who enjoys publishing his Manifesto to the world and masterminding his own self-righteous drama on the world stage.

So, Haydon pretended to be the righteous upholder of international morality by betraying his own country, murdering his own countrymen and other people around the world, and committing adultery with his boss's wife. If he even half-believes this tripe he told Smiley, he's of a very unsound, deluded mind.

Haydon claimed that he hated America because of its economic repression of the masses. Really? What planet had he been living on? Well, I have one for Bill Haydon and Lenin: "Self-importance and entitlements are the opiates of the people."

The world is full of such mad people as Bill Haydon, who see themselves as righteous avengers. And they have a talent for convincing others that they are right and everyone else is wrong. I hope that we have

learned how to require psychological tests to applicants that would weed out such unstable people for the secret service.

Apparently, Oliver Lacon does not agree with my philosophy, for he tells Smiley in the first episode of *Smiley's People* that the British Secret Service is not to think of itself as being on some holy mission, saying, "George, we are pragmatists. We adapt. We are not the keepers of some sacred flame. I ask you; I commend you to remember this."

However, Smiley did not agree with him. He believed that it was the individuals with courage, integrity, and loyalty that are the true upholders of democracy and morale in the service. There must be some sweet spot between over-selling these virtues and under-appreciating them.

There is only one thing of many things I heard Henry Kissinger say that I remember agreeing with, which is (approximately), "You can't expect infallibility from any organization." Now, *there's* a statement that leans toward the practical side.

I do not support the wrongs my own country does, but I refuse to become cynical, like Bill Haydon did. I have to continue to support the best qualities of my country, and so should you for *your* country. It's far better to do that than to get cynical over its imperfections.

I agree with Smiley's belief of the situation. I would rather be an imperfect liberal in an imperfect democracy than a perfect communist in a perfectly totalitarian country.