



Book Club Discussion Notes

Spies Without Borders

T.M. Parris

A thriller set in Hungary featuring populism, LGBT rights and extremism.

Fifth in the Clarke and Fairchild spy thriller series. Published January 2022.

Around 320 pages (Paperback version), 77,000 words

Average rating 4.2/5 on amazon.co.uk (285 ratings as of Jan 2023)

Available on Amazon as an e-book, paperback and case laminate hardback

Universal link: <https://books2read.com/spieswithoutborders?store=amazon>

Blurb

Some old secrets still have the power to destroy.

A global hacking empire plans to manipulate popular fear and resentment to serve the unscrupulous rich. Rootless intelligence mercenary John Fairchild has ostracised himself from everybody to infiltrate the group, but is taken in a completely different direction. Falling through a hole in his own network, he discovers something shocking that changes everything he thought he knew about himself.

MI6 officer Rose Clarke has followed the hackers to Hungary, but is diverted into discovering an unsettling Cold War secret that causes her to rethink her whole life. Her path crosses with a former agent who bears a grudge, and a lost boy who found everything he wanted in the city, only to lose it again. Their rage threatens devastation.

Battling their own bruising discoveries, can Clarke and Fairchild get ahead of a ruthless mind that's manipulated them both?

Real-life reference: In June 2021 the Hungarian government passed a set of new anti-LGBT laws. The author visited the bar that used to be Tilos as A in October 2021: her waitress told her that her parents had met there twenty-odd years earlier.

Discussion questions:

1. Fairchild thinks he's found a home, then it's ripped away again. But he gets what he wants in the end. Do you believe that his search for answers is now truly over?
2. Tas leaves his village and goes to the city to reinvent himself. But does he really leave everything behind?
3. Has Walter saved MI6 from mediocre yes-men, or is he a self-interested manipulator?
4. Walter seems more convinced about Fairchild's apparent betrayal than either Rose or Zack. What does that say about these characters and the relationships between them?
5. There's a lengthy recounting of an incident from 1990, at the time the Berlin Wall came down. What's the relevance of this to current events in the book, thematically as well as for the plot?
6. Rose is forced to deal with difficult memories, from Croatia and Beijing. Does she realise herself how important these are for her to move on?
7. We spend a lot more time with Grom in this book than in previous volumes. Is he merely a powerful sociopathic baddy, or is there more to him than that?
8. There's a lot of history in this book, both of nations and relating to individuals and their past. How important is it to the story and the themes of nationalism and identity?
9. Why did Bálint and his crew choose that particular action for their protest? What did it symbolise?