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### Learn the Backstory

### January 2024

#### Authors who were spies:

##### Julia Child

Soon after the United States entered World War II, Julia felt the need to serve her country. Too tall to join the military (she was 6'2"), Julia volunteered her services to the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), which was the forerunner of today's Central Intelligence Agency. She was one of 4,500 women who served in the OSS. (<https://www.cia.gov/stories/story/julia-child-cooking-up-spy-ops-for-oss/>)

Her abilities were eventually noticed, and she was given a more important job working for Capt. Harold J. Coolidge in the Special Projects Division of the Emergency Sea Rescue Equipment (ERE) Section, tasked with developing ideas to keep sailors and downed airmen safe in the water.

"Julia was never actually a spy, but she very much hoped to become one when she joined the agency in December 1942," explained Jennet Conant in 2011 on C-SPAN's "Book TV," where she was discussing her book "A Covert Affair: Julia Child and Paul Child in the OSS." (from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2022/05/02/julia-child-hbo-oss-sharks/>)

- *My Life in France* (B CHILD)
- *Julia's Kitchen Wisdom: Essential Techniques and Recipes from a Lifetime of Cooking* (641.5 CHI)
- *The Way to Cook* (641.5 CHI)

##### Ian Fleming

Before he became famous as the creator of James Bond in the 1950s, Ian Fleming (1908-1964) was an officer in the Royal Navy's Naval Intelligence Department. He devised a number of wartime schemes worthy of a Bond novel. Some were successful and some were too wild to carry out. Although the movies based on Fleming's books have strayed pretty far from their roots, Fleming's novels featuring his creation, secret agent James Bond, are clearly and heavily influenced by his experiences in the war.

(<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/ian-fleming-royal-naval-intelligence-department>)

In 1933, Fleming was dispatched to Moscow to cover the trial of six British engineers charged with espionage. Shortly after, he left Reuters for more lucrative work, resulting in brief stints as a banker and a stockbroker. In the spring of 1939, the Foreign Office recruited Fleming to return to Russia for a secret assignment: to assess and report on Soviet military strength ahead of an almost certain war. Within months, he joined the British Naval Intelligence. Starting in September of that year, he oversaw clandestine operations on mainland Europe. At one point, he flew to America to meet with FBI chief J. Edgar Hoover and later played a strategic role in a raid on the German-occupied French town of Diep. Over the course of World War II, Fleming was instrumental in several

covert operations and rose up the ranks to Commander—a rank he subsequently gave to his fictional British Secret Service agent. (<https://www.audible.com/blog/article-ian-fleming>)

- *Live and Let Die* (FIC FLEMING)
- *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* (FIC FLEMING)
- *The Spy Who Loved Me* (FIC FLEMING)

### Frederick Forsyth

The bestselling thriller author, who was an RAF pilot and a journalist before turning to fiction. Forsyth had previously denied claims that he worked for MI6 – “Some said that I was a spook, but I just knew a few,” he told the *Guardian* in 2001 – but an extract from his memoir in the *Sunday Times* reveals how in late 1968 a “member of the Firm” - MI6 – called Ronnie sought him out.

Forsyth says that he was simultaneously working as a stringer for various newspapers and magazines reporting on the conflict and the humanitarian disaster and keeping Ronnie “informed of things that could not, for various reasons, emerge in the media”.

He told the BBC that he was not paid for the work he did. “There was a lot of volunteer assistance that was not charged for. The zeitgeist was different ... the cold war was very much on,” he said. “If someone asked: ‘Can you see your way clear to do us a favour?’, it was very hard to say no.”

(<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/sep/01/frederick-forsyth-i-was-an-mi6-agent>)

- *The Day of the Jackal* (FIC FORSYTH)
- *The Fist of God* (FIC FORSYTH)
- *The Odessa File* (FIC FORSYTH)

### Graham Greene

Graham Greene’s journalistic assignments took him to far-flung places of turmoil, like Liberia, Sierra Leone, Paraguay, El Salvador and the Congo. The former member of British spy agency MI6 also delivered messages from the British government to Viet Minh leader Ho Chi Minh and maintained an unusual friendship with Panamanian leader General Omar Torrijos.

Those experiences influenced his literary work, inspiring books like *The Quiet American*, which Richard Greene describes as “a love story and a story of betrayal among friends in a complex political environment” during the end of French colonialism in the country. (<https://www.utm.utoronto.ca/main-news/new-biography-traces-storied-life-writer-graham-greene>)

Greene worked for Britain’s foreign intelligence service, MI-6. (He was recruited there by his sister.) And while he was there, he worked for Kim Philby, the real-life Third Man, the notorious double agent – probably the most notorious spy of the twentieth century. After Philby defected to Moscow, Greene supported him. He wrote an introduction to Philby’s memoirs in which he depicted Philby’s treason with sympathy, suggesting that his devotion to Communism was a higher morality than loyalty to his country.

It seems nearly impossible to imagine now, but there were whispers at the time: Philby wasn’t just a double agent working for the Soviets...he was a triple agent, secretly posing as a traitor in order to penetrate the KGB in Moscow. And this grand theory wasn’t just concocted by a salacious press or some idle screenwriter with time on his hands...the KGB itself thought it might be true.

What would that mean for Greene? Ron Rosenbaum, writing one of his typical magnum opuses in 1994, speculated on the consequences:

Imagine Greene’s distress, then, at the possibility that Philby had been not a Soviet double agent but a British triple agent. Greene had gone out on a limb to portray Philby as a passionate pilgrim, a sincere devotee of the Marxist faith — radically innocent rather than radically evil. But if, in fact, his friend had all along been an agent of the Empire, a hireling of Colonel Blimp, it would mean that Philby had been laughing at Greene. Not merely

laughing at him, but using him, using him as cover. Graham Greene would turn out to be Kim Philby's final fool. (<https://jackewilson.com/2016/04/28/to-catch-a-spy-graham-greenes-deathbed-revelation/>)

- *Our Man in Havana* (FIC GREENE)
- *The Unquiet Englishman* (B GREENE)
- *The Tenth Man* (FIC GREENE)

## Ernest Hemingway

Up till now, this has been a notably cheerful year for admirers of Ernest Hemingway – a surprisingly diverse set of people who range from Michael Palin to Elmore Leonard. Almost every month has brought good news: a planned Hemingway biopic; a new, improved version of his memoir, *A Moveable Feast*; the opening of a digital archive of papers found in his Cuban home; progress on a movie of *Islands in the Stream*.

Spies: *The Rise and Fall of the KGB in America* (Yale University Press), which reveals the Nobel prize-winning novelist was for a while on the KGB's list of its agents in America. Co-written by John Earl Haynes, Harvey Klehr and Alexander Vassiliev, the book is based on notes that Vassiliev, a former KGB officer, made when he was given access in the 90s to Stalin-era intelligence archives in Moscow.

Its section on the author's secret life as a "dilettante spy" draws on his KGB file in saying he was recruited in 1941 before making a trip to China, given the cover name "Argo", and "repeatedly expressed his desire and willingness to help us" when he met Soviet agents in Havana and London in the 40s. However, he failed to "give us any political information" and was never "verified in practical work", so contacts with Argo had ceased by the end of the decade. Was he only ever a pseudo-spook, possibly seeing his clandestine dealings as potential literary material, or a genuine but hopelessly ineffective one?

The latter reading would chime with his attempts to assist the US during the second world war in his fishing boat El Pilar, patrolling waters north of Cuba in search of U-Boats, making coded notes but only one sighting.

(Hemingway Revealed as a Failed KGB Spy <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/jul/09/hemingway-failed-kgb-spy>)

- *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (FIC HEMINGWAY)
- *Islands in the Stream* (FIC HEMINGWAY)
- *A Moveable Feast* (B HEMINGWAY)

## John Le Carre

Le Carré worked full-time in the intelligence service, for MI5 in London and for MI6 in Germany, from 1958 until 1963, when his fame as the author of *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (his third book but the first with significant sales and recognition) made him useless as a spook, even under a pseudonym. (Kim Philby had blown his cover to the Soviets by this time anyway.)

John le Carre was his pen name. He was born David John Moore Cornwell. Before writing espionage novels, le Carre was a spy. He worked for Britain's domestic intelligence service, MI5, and its foreign intelligence service, MI6. He was still working for MI6 when his third book, the Cold War novel "The Spy Who Came In From The Cold," became an international bestseller. One of the characters in that novel, George Smiley, became the main character in several of le Carre's later books.

<https://www.npr.org/2017/09/05/548632065/novelist-john-le-carr-reflects-on-his-own-legacy-of-spying>

<https://www.npr.org/2023/10/27/1209012058/novelist-john-le-carre-reflects-on-his-own-legacy-of-spying>

<https://www.bookforum.com/print/2904/the-correspondence-of-spy-turned-novelist-john-le-carre-25148>

- *The Pigeon Tunnel* (B LECARRE)
- *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (FIC LECARRE)
- *Tinker, Tailor, Solider, Spy* (FIC LECARRE)

## Criminal Pasts:

### Jeffrey Archer

On July 19, 2001, Archer was sentenced to prison for four years. He was convicted of three charges of perverting the course of justice and one of perjury over a 1987 libel case around allegations he had sex with a prostitute.

He was acquitted of one charge of perjury.

Archer, who pleaded not guilty to all charges, was accused of lying and creating false diaries to win £500,000 in libel damages from the Daily Star newspaper in 1987.

He took the tabloid to court after it alleged that he paid a prostitute, for sex in September 1986.

The prosecution said he faked two diaries he presented during the libel trial to back up his alibi that claimed he was somewhere else on the night in question.

He was released from prison on July 22, 2003, after serving two years of his four-year sentence.

(<https://www.the-sun.com/news/6767158/who-jeffrey-archer-prison/>)

- *Honor Among Thieves* (FIC ARCHER)
- *A Prison Diary* (B ARCHER)
- *Sins of the Father* (FIC ARCHER)

### Norman Mailer

In 1960, in a mark of Norman Mailer's desire to be 'hip', not 'square', he threw a riotous party bringing 'recently released offenders' together with the great and the good of the New York book world. In the aftermath he stabbed his second wife, the painter Adele Morales, missing her heart by a quarter of an inch.

He was running for mayor of New York at the time, dropping out of the race only after he pleaded guilty to a charge of assault, for which he received a three-year suspended jail sentence.

Yet there was also wild acclaim, not least for his Pulitzer-winning 'non-fiction novel' *The Executioner's Song*, about Gary Gilmore, an armed robber sentenced to death for murdering two men in Utah in 1976.

Mailer's research for the book brought him into the orbit of Jack Abbott, who had read about the work in progress while jailed for manslaughter. When he wrote to Mailer offering his insights into prison life, Mailer helped him publish the letters as a successful book, *In the Belly of the Beast*.

Abbott's literary skill represented grounds for his early release, or so Mailer argued — but six weeks into his parole, he stabbed a Cuban waiter to death after an argument in a restaurant. Mailer stuck by him. 'I am willing to gamble with certain elements of society to save this man's talent,' he said.

(<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/home/books/article-11629179/Norman-Mailer-stabbed-one-six-wives-adored-women-did-women-adore-him.html>)

- *The Castle in the Forest* (FIC MAILER)
- *Mind of an Outlaw: Selected Essays* (814.54 MAI)
- *The Naked and the Dead* (FIC MAILER)

### Delia Owens

The commercial success of the novel (and film adaptation) *Where the Crawdads Sing* has been clouded by renewed questions about Owens's conservation work in Zambia, which was clouded by controversy following the death of a suspected poacher in 1995. The death happened during an anti-poaching patrol, which was part of a conservation project run by Owens and her then husband, Mark Owens. The shooting was recorded by an ABC crew that was filming a documentary about the work the Owenses did there. After the episode aired in 1996, Zambian officials opened an investigation, but the victim was never identified, and the case was never solved. The case and the Owenses' connection to it was first extensively covered by Jeffrey Goldberg in a 2010 New Yorker article. Asked about the incident during an interview with The New York Times in 2019, Owens said she

had nothing to do with the shooting and was never accused of wrongdoing but declined to elaborate on the circumstances.

But Zambian officials have not closed the case, and still want to question Mark and Delia Owens about the incident, according to new reporting by Goldberg in The Atlantic. Goldberg recently returned to Lusaka, Zambia's capital, and spoke to the director of public prosecutions, who confirmed that the case was still open. "There is no statute of limitations on murder in Zambia," the country's director of public prosecutions, Lillian Shawa-Siyuni, told Goldberg. "They are all wanted for questioning in this case, including Delia Owens."

(<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/19/books/where-the-crawdads-sing-delia-owens-murder-investigation.html>)

- *Where the Crawdads Sing* (FIC OWENS)

## Anne Perry

Late crime novelist Anne Perry, dubbed the "queen of Victorian crime," was widely known for her best-selling murder mysteries until 1994, when her dark and deadly past came back to haunt her and cast a shadow on her success. By that time, Perry had long published her debut novel *The Cater Street Hangman* in 1979, following up the popular Charlotte and Thomas Pitt series with dozens more books. But by the time its 14th installment *The Hyde Park Headsman* was put out, news of Perry's real-life murder tale unraveled with the release of Peter Jackson's *Heavenly Creatures*, a film starring Kate Winslet and Melanie Lynskey, based on the shocking crime. (<https://people.com/crime/movie-starring-kate-winslet-melanie-lynskey-revealed-crime-novelist-anne-perry-killed-someone/>)

Born Juliet Marion Hulme, she later became known as Anne Perry. At Christchurch Girls' High School, Juliet and her new best friend, Pauline Yvonne Parker, bonded, invented an elaborate medieval-like fantasy world and worshiped celebrities, especially the opera singer Mario Lanza, as saints. When Juliet's parents decided to divorce and leave New Zealand, the girls came up with a solution to avoid being separated: murder Pauline's mother.

(<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/12/books/anne-perry-dead.html>)

- *The Fourth Enemy* (MYS PERRY)
- *The Sunless Sea* (MYS PERRY)
- *A Truth to Lie For* (MYS PERRY)

## Story Inspirations:

### Justin Cronin

His young daughter worried that author Justin Cronin was writing boring books. So, the writer challenged her to help him come up with a story that was interesting to her.

She said he should write a story about a girl who saves the world. And that one of the characters should be a redhead because she's one.

So, when Cronin would go for runs, his daughter would follow along on her bike. And they'd use that time to come up with the story. But Cronin said he didn't necessarily intend to actually write it. But one day he did, and it changed his life.

The story became *The Passage*, the first of a best-selling trilogy about vampires – but without the magic.

(<https://www.houstonpublicmedia.org/articles/shows/houston-matters/2019/02/22/322838/how-a-challenge-from-justin-cronins-daughter-turned-into-a-best-selling-vampire-trilogy/>)

From Justin Cronin's Facebook page: January 14, 2019

To celebrate premiere day, may I present my amazing daughter, Iris: the original "Amy," who, at the age of eight, challenged me to write a story about "a girl who saves the world." For three months in 2006, she helped me build the story that would grow to become *The Passage* Trilogy. She's all grown up now, a senior in college, heading into life. I couldn't be more proud. Love you, kiddo.

- *The Passage* (FIC CRONIN)
- *The Twelve* (FIC CRONIN)
- *The City of Mirrors* (FIC CRONIN)

## Stephen King

In September 1974, Stephen King and his wife, Tabby, spent a night at The Stanley Hotel (room 217, to be exact) and were the only guests on the entire property. That night, King had a nightmare about his 3-year-old son running and screaming through the hotel's corridors being chased by a fire hose. According to King's website, he woke up "sweating all over, within an inch of falling out of bed." By the time he got up and finished a cigarette, he had the entire premise of the book mapped out in his head. (<https://www.popsugar.com/smart-living/the-hotel-that-inspired-the-shining-47691142>)

- *Different Seasons* (FIC KING)
- *Insomnia* (FIC KING)
- *The Shining* (FIC KING)

## Flannery O'Connor

Born Mary Flannery O'Connor in Savannah, Georgia, to an Irish Catholic immigrant family, the young writer was largely encouraged to write and draw by her father, who died of lupus when she was 15 years old. Devastated by her father's death, but also motivated to pursue her literary ambitions, O'Connor began studying writing during World War II in Georgia before attending the Iowa Writers' Workshop and then being admitted to the famed Yaddo writing program in Saratoga Springs, NY. O'Connor dropped her first name, Mary, around this time. After her time at Yaddo, O'Connor remained on the East Coast for a while longer to write her first novel, "Wise Blood" (published 1952). The family she was boarding with at the time, Robert and Sally Fitzgerald, remembered that one day, O'Connor told them: "I think I'd better see a doctor, because I can't raise my arms to the typewriter."

When O'Connor returned to Georgia to see a doctor, he diagnosed her with lupus, but only told the diagnosis to O'Connor's mother, Regina. "Her mother, knowing that the father had died of the same disease, thought that the shock would be too great for Flannery and decided not to tell her," said Sally Fitzgerald.

In 1951 when O'Connor became intensely ill, she continued to think it was merely arthritis that was bothering her. She moved out to the family's dairy farm with her mother. By then, O'Connor was using crutches to get around. Both women lived on the ground floor of the home so that O'Connor had no need to climb the stairs.

One day, as Fitzgerald was driving O'Connor around to do errands, Fitzgerald revealed her lupus diagnosis. "She said something again about her arthritis. I said, 'Flannery, you don't have arthritis. You have lupus.'" Fitzgerald recalled. "Her hand was shaking. My knee was shaking on the clutch.

"We drove back up and down the road, and a few minutes later she said, 'Well, that's not good news. But I can't thank you enough for telling me. I thought I had lupus. And I thought I was going crazy. And I'd a lot rather be sick than crazy'."

"She looks at the darkness unflinchingly and she approaches it with clarity and with precision. And that I think is her greatness," the writer Mary Gordon said of O'Connor's work. "I think that it's inevitable that her dark view of the body and not nature, but the bodily world as being only a source of dark things, has to be connected to her lupus. The deformed body, the broken body, the afflicted body is very much a theme that recurs in her work."

Her work reflected flawed characters who interacted with disabled characters in what she herself referred to as "grotesque" scenarios and often violent narratives. But O'Connor also used that violence as a vehicle for internal transformations for her characters who were in pursuit of God's grace — a way to explore religion and morality through the grotesque. (<https://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/how-did-flannery-oconnors-writing-reflect-her-disability/17614/>)

- *The Complete Stories* (SS OCONNOR)
- *The Habit of Being* (B OCONNOR)

- *A Prayer Journal* (282.092 OCO)

## Just Interesting:

### Rock Bottom Reminders (aka The Reminders)

Dave Barry, Stephen King, Amy Tan, Sam Barry, Ridley Pearson, Scott Turow, Joel Selvin, James McBride, Mitch Albom, Roy Blount, Jr., Barbara Kingsolver, Robert Fulghum, Matt Groenig, Greg Iles, Aron Ralston, and more. The group burst upon the world at the 1992 American Booksellers Association convention in Anaheim. A write-up in the Washington Post described it as “the most heavily promoted musical debut since the Monkees.” Hailed by critics as having “one of the world’s highest ratios of noise to talent,” the Reminders have no music videos, no record contract, no Grammy® nominations—but do have over 159,000 hits on Google. In addition to the literary band members, rock legends such as Bruce Springsteen and the late Warren Zevon have done guest appearances. Rock Bottom Reminders have raised more than \$2 million dollars for charity through their concert tours.

### Robert Ludlum

From *The Ludlum Conspiracy*:

While that is certainly true, the commercial value can also be hard to determine. In Ludlum’s case, since his death in 2001, his net worth has only increased. Eighteen books with his name on the covers have been published posthumously – largely books written by others in franchises he created – nearly equaling the number released during his lifetime. The Bourne franchise has been a huge success, with three films and five new books released since 2001 (not to mention videogame tie-ins). Often appearing in *Forbes*’ list of top-earning dead celebrities, Ludlum amassed an estate some estimate could now be worth \$1 billion.

One party sharing the \$1 billion estimate with media recently has been Kenneth Kearns, Robert Ludlum’s nephew and longtime physician, who will soon be publishing a book that poses new questions about his uncle’s death. Kearns had originally planned it to be a biography and remembrance, but when he started investigating Ludlum’s last days he made some troubling discoveries. Ludlum died of a heart attack, but a month prior he’d been badly injured when, while in a reclining chair at his home in Naples, Florida, he burst into flame, the alleged culprit being a lit cigarette. When emergency responders arrived at the scene, his second wife – Karen Ludlum, married to Ludlum for less than four years – reportedly refused to help them, instead retreating to the kitchen to fix herself a drink. It was her fifth marriage – one she assented to only after Ludlum dropped the idea of a prenuptial agreement – and she had been written into Ludlum’s will only sixteen days earlier. Kearns says the trauma from those burns could have played a role in causing Ludlum’s heart attack at age 73, though, as Ludlum was a longtime chain smoker who’d undergone quadruple bypass surgery, a physician like Kearns would certainly admit there may have been other contributing factors. His research also yielded reports of an attempt on Ludlum’s life that occurred in Montana and was investigated by former members of the FBI. Ultimately, Kearns draws no conclusions. Karen Ludlum died in 2008, but Kearns is still hoping to open an investigation into his uncle’s death.

- *The Bourne Supremacy* (FIC LUDLUM)
- *The Osterman Weekend* (FIC LUDLUM)
- *The Scorpion Illusion* (FIC LUDLUM)