

# Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy (2012)

Rated R. Our ratings: V -4; L - 2; S/N-1 . Running time: 2 hours 8 min.

*For there is no truth in their mouths;  
their hearts are destruction;  
their throats are open graves;  
they flatter with their tongues.  
Make them bear their guilt, O God;  
let them fall by their own counsels;  
because of their many transgressions cast them out,  
for they have rebelled against you.  
Psalm 5:9-10*

Director Tomas Alfredson's spy British Intelligence agent film is based on John Le Carre's George Smiley is no James Bond. grimly realistic 1974 novel set

during the Cold War. George Smiley is brought out of forced retirement to sniff out a Soviet mole in the British Intelligence agency known as "The Circus." The film is as far from the light-hearted James Bond spy adventures as one can get. No high speed chases, shoot outs, exotic women and locales, or geeky gadgets—just men talking together and purloining and analyzing secret files in settings sinister and as drab as a slum flat. The murky script is sometimes difficult to follow, with so many characters to

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follow, so I was very happy when a friend loaned me his copy of the book. Now I understand better what I saw, I think, and recommend that other filmgoers also read the book.

Someone at the Circus is a mole leaking secrets to the Soviets that cost lives. Control (John Hurt) is forced to resign when a deal in Budapest goes terribly wrong, the former head of Intelligence believing the botched incident in which an agent was shot was a plan to reveal who the mole is. George Smiley (Gary Oldman) seeks to discover which of four persons it is.

I won't even try to summarize the rest of the complex plot. Smiley's is a cheerless world without much trace of grace, a world in which one never knows if a colleague is speaking the truth because lying and concealment are the everyday tools of the trade. For a decent man concerned about truth and honor I cannot imagine anything closer to hell than having to live and work in such an organization—and we're talking about the good guys, not the Soviet spy system.

**Note:** Discussion questions are available with this review for those subscribing to the Visual Parables journal. The journal also includes many extras—book reviews, the use of films for church seasons, a lectionary related column, and more. Hundreds of old reviews are also available in the subscribers; section. Check out the [sample issue](#).