



The Human Factor

Author: Graham Greene
Genre: Literature
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There are lots of spy books around, and so to stand out, each protagonist needs a gimmick, a unique selling point. This spy has just such a one: he's human.

Ahh, the Cold War... when men were men and women fancied them... when heroes like the great James Bond took on the baddies and looked good doing it. In the real world of course, these characters were few and far between, if indeed they ever existed at all. No, the *real* heroes were the spies that got on with it *without* being noticed, often spending most of their career behind a desk somewhere and without an Aston Martin to be seen... someone just like Maurice Castle in fact.

Spread over about 260 pages divided into various 'parts' and 'chapters', this is the story of a group British Secret Service operatives who try to plug a leak in their department, Section 6. The protagonist, Castle, his assistant Davis, and indeed many others are suspected of passing on information about Apartheid South Africa to the dreaded Soviets. But can 'C', the man at the top, find the culprit before his department loses face around the world? Well, yes, he can, if the sinister Dr. Percival, C's 'fixer', has anything to do with it. Undoubtedly, it is the African angle that makes this book different to its contemporaries, commenting favourably on such taboo subjects as inter-racial marriage, the British class-system and just about everything else that might have been controversial at its time of publication (1st edition 1978). Yet *The Human Factor* does all this in a humorous and entreating way, and an emotional one; throughout I found myself genuinely empathising with Greene's characters, even the 'baddies'.

In the end, then, this is a novel more about gentleman spies than explosions, written in the beautiful flowing prose of one of the twentieth century's great writers. So, if you've only heard of Graham Greene but not really read him, or like spy thrillers, of just fancy reading a good book with a great twist at the end, I recommend giving this a whirl. Do just bear in mind, though, that this isn't a blood-fest, super-duper body count type of affair. After all, that would be most un-British.

8 sausages out of 10

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