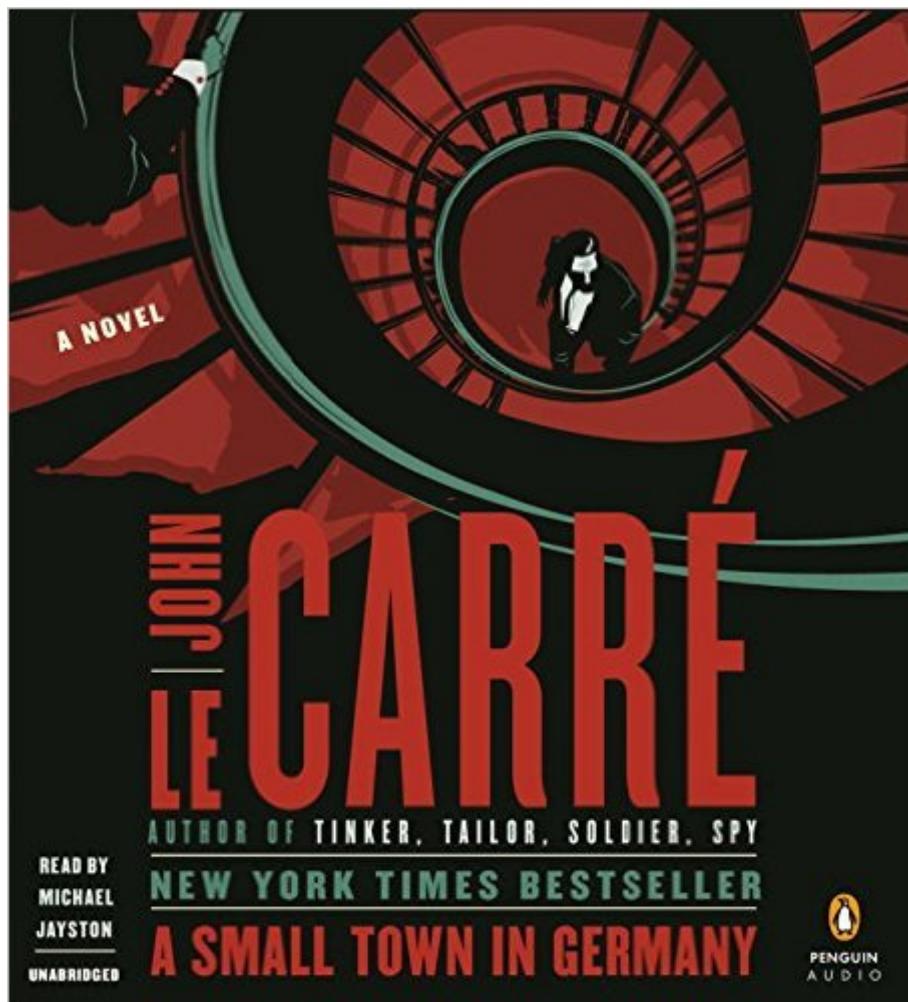


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A Small Town In Germany (Penguin Audio Classics)



Synopsis

"Haven't you realized that only appearances matter?" The British Embassy in Bonn is up in arms. Her Majesty's financially troubled government is seeking admission to Europe's Common Market just as anti-British factions are rising to power in Germany. Rioters are demanding reunification, and the last thing the Crown can afford is a scandal. Then Leo Harting, "an embassy nobody" goes missing with a case full of confidential files. London sends Alan Turner to control the damage, but he soon realizes that neither side really wants Leo found "alive. Set against the threat of a German-Soviet alliance, John le Carré's *A Small Town in Germany* is a superb chronicle of Cold War paranoia and political compromise.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

When Leo Harting, a German employee of the British Embassy in Bonn (the titular small town in Germany), goes missing with confidential files, London sends Alan Turner to investigate. With anti-British sentiment at a fever pitch in Cold War West Germany, Harting's disappearance takes on significant importance. Is Harting a communist? A neo-Nazi? As Turner pursues his investigation, it soon becomes clear that Harting was a fixture about the embassy, known to all and yet completely unknown. Moreover, Turner comes to the realization that Rawley Bradfield, head of the embassy, is not interested in helping Turner, despite his assurances to the contrary. "A Small Town in Germany" is my first John Le Carre novel. It won't be my last. Le Carre's reputation as a master of the spy-thriller is well-founded. Publically, writing as the "anti-Ian Fleming," Le Carre concentrates on

plausibility (in fairness, Fleming's early books were more plausible than the films). The plot of this book is single-minded: Turner's tenacious search for Harting and his conflict with Bradfield even as events are straining German domestic stability and international relations. Indeed, instead of a lengthy chase novel with Turner trading shots with Harting through the streets of Bonn, Le Carre writes of Turner's more realistic battle with a distracted bureaucracy as he pieces together just who Harting is, and why Bradfield felt compelled to keep him around for so long. Le Carre is quite careful to obscure the truths of his plot. The answer as to why Harting has vanished and how this relates to the unrest in West Germany is surprising, and speaks to Le Carre's gift for misdirection. While this novel is plot driven, Le Carre allows his characters to grow.

I first picked up *A SMALL TOWN IN GERMANY* in the late 60s, but, finding it too slow, couldn't finish. My appreciation of John le Carre having increased over the years, I recently gave it another go. The book is set in the then West German capital of Bonn during the heyday of the Cold War. The British Embassy is beset with a number of mysterious disappearances: a document trolley, a tea machine, an electric fan, and some cups from the Caf. Oh, and a twenty-plus year employee named Otto Harting and a Top Secret "Green File". Meanwhile, on the other side of the embassy fence, a West German industrialist, Karfeld, is inflaming the populace with nationalist speeches, advocating stronger ties with Moscow, and undermining Bundesrepublik support for Britain's entry into the Common Market. Has Harting bolted to Moscow? The Foreign Office in London dispatches its troubleshooter, Alan Turner, to Bonn to ferret out some answers. Like le Carre's other books, *A SMALL TOWN IN GERMANY* is short on action and long on character and plot development. For these very reasons, my appreciation of his later books, especially *TINKER, TAILOR, SOLDIER, SPY* and *SMILEY'S PEOPLE*, both featuring the author's most famous hero, George Smiley, lead me to think that my literary tastes have matured over the years, at least when it comes to trashy novels. If the reader of this book squints, he may perhaps see in Turner's dogged pursuit of the puzzle pieces a forerunner of the Smiley character, though the latter is infinitely more subtle and imperturbable. And Turner is not above slapping a lady in his quest for the Truth. Such conduct would be anathema to George, always the gentleman. That Turner never endears himself to the reader is perhaps the novel's greatest shortcoming.

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