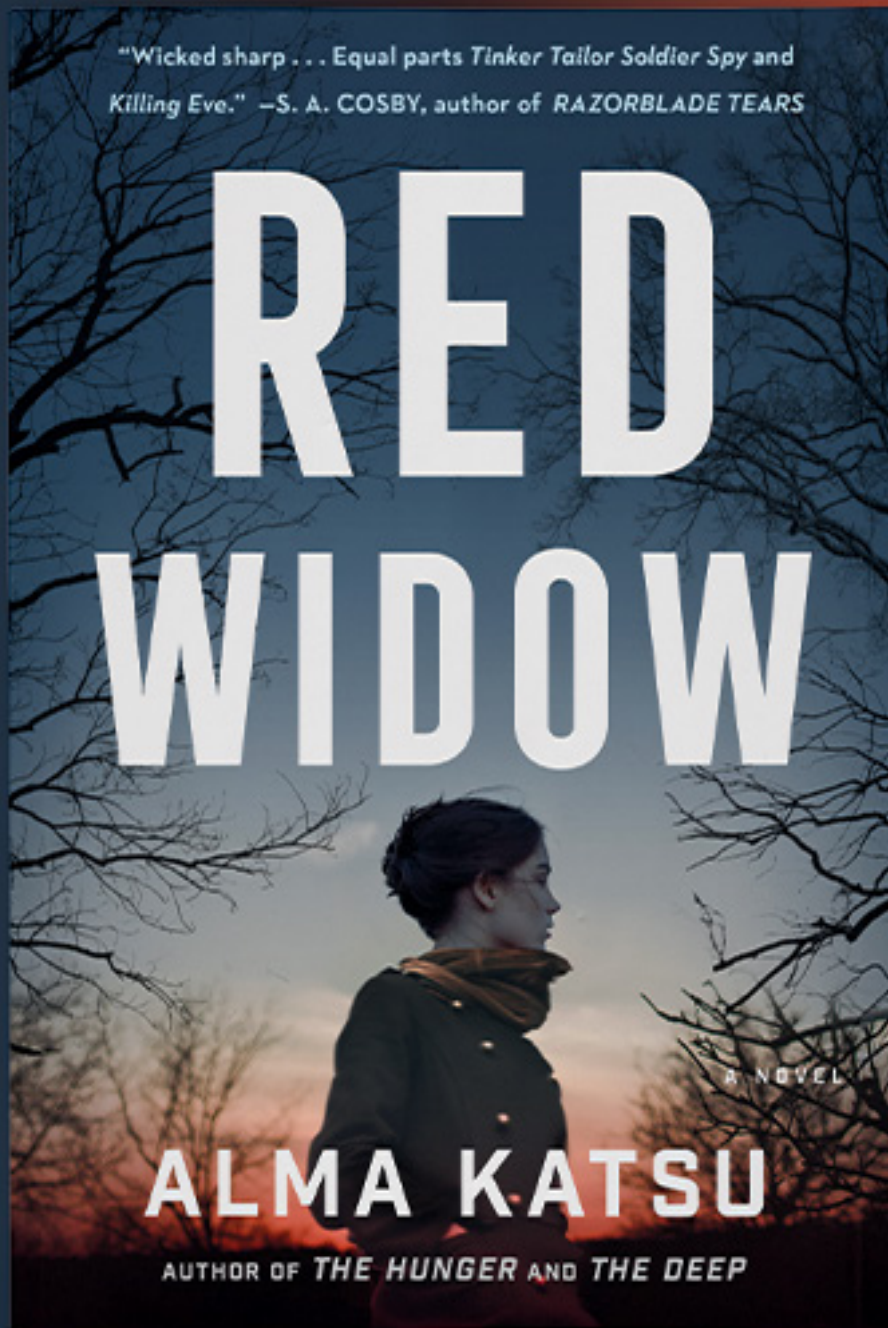


BOOK CLUB KIT



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Red Widow* opens with the murder of Yaromir Popov, one of Lyndsey Duncan's first, and most successful, assignments. Discuss Lyndsey's relationship to Popov. How does his death impact her? In what ways does it fuel her investigation?

2. Talk about the relationship between Lyndsey and Theresa Warner. Why do you think they are drawn toward each other? In what ways are the two women similar? How do they differ?

3. Eric was a mentor to Lyndsey during her early years at the Agency. How do you think she feels when she discovers the ways in which he's changed as he's risen through the ranks?

4. *Red Widow* takes place within the halls of the CIA, but it shows a side not often seen in film and television. At times Langley feels like any other office building, with rows of cubicles and office supplies and computer logs. How did the representation of the Agency differ from your expectations? Were any elements surprising?

5. How did the inclusion of Dmitri Tarasenko's perspective impact your view of the investigation? Did you have any suspicions as to who Kanareyka was?

6. Halfway through the novel, a new point of view is introduced that changes every-

thing. What was your reaction to this? How did it shape your understanding of the characters?

7. Loyalty—whether it be loyalty to one's loved ones, one's country, or to the truth—is a major theme in this novel. Who do you think Lyndsey is loyal to? What about Theresa? How does loyalty differ from duty in both cases?

8. If you were placed in Theresa's position, how would you react to losing your husband? What would you do with her anger and rage? Do you agree or disagree with her actions?

9. What do you think of Theresa's relationship with her son, Brian? Do you feel she did a good job as a mother, or did she let her grief and anger influence her child-rearing? Do you think she was a good parent, risking what she did?

10. Many of the characters in *Red Widow* inhabit a moral gray area, and the line between following the rules and doing what is right is often blurred. Are there any characters who you think maintained a strong moral code by the end of the novel? Why or why not?

11. What do you imagine is next for Lyndsey? For Theresa?

DEAR READER,

People always want to know if being a spy in real life is anything like the way it's depicted in books and movies.

It's a question I heard a lot during my thirty-five-year career in intelligence—just as I often heard my colleagues scoff at the latest *Mission: Impossible* or installment of *24*.

So, when I decided to write a spy novel, I knew it had to be realistic. In *Red Widow*, protagonist Lyndsey Duncan is trapped in a cat-and-mouse game with a traitor, and must use every means at her disposal to find the mole inside CIA. When your quarry is another intelligence professional, there are no easy answers, and I used just about every technique I learned as a master analyst at CIA and NSA to make Lyndsey's pursuit of the traitor as twisty and difficult as it would be in real life.

CIA is a unique place to work. It doesn't matter if you're in the clandestine service—where your job is to convince foreigners to give up secrets that could cost them their lives, where the practice of manipulation has been raised to a high art—or in the analytic corps, where you must solve tough and complex problems, and be confident enough in your judgments that you can present them to the president. The pressure is intense—and so is the competition. You won't survive long without a sense for when you're being manipulated, when a colleague might be working you for their own purpose. Having a strong moral code is important, too, because eventually you're going to come up to the line you

swore you'd never cross. Only someone who's spent a good deal of time inside can accurately convey the highs, the thrills, the challenges, and the terrors of the job.

The worst thing that can happen? It's when an operation goes bad and someone ends up in a foreign prison. In enemy hands. And there's nothing you can do about it. The government can't even acknowledge you. You're expected to remain silent, to keep your secrets to yourself, and to wait. Because that's part of the job. You knew this was a possibility when you signed on.

I took this nightmare scenario and added a twist: What if the captured man was a CIA officer? And what if his wife worked at the Agency, knowing her husband was imprisoned

FUN FACT #1

If you listen to the scuttlebutt inside the Agency, there's a rumor that the Starbucks located inside the CIA's new headquarters building is the highest-grossing outlet inside a corporate setting in the company's chain, but that's probably an urban legend. The same thing is said about the Starbucks inside the NSA and the one inside the Pentagon.

FUN FACT #2

In addition to the Starbucks, there's a Dunkin' inside CIA headquarters. And it's not there for the donuts.

by the enemy and the Agency refused to help? What would she do with all that anger, all her rage? Whom would she blame—the Russians who were holding her husband, or CIA? Or her husband, for putting his job above his family?

What if you were the officer assigned to find the mole who was sending CIA informants to certain death, and the path led to someone you knew? Someone whose life and happiness had been sacrificed in the line of duty—someone you considered a friend? Torn between duty and loyalty, knowing in your heart what was right, what would you do?

There are years of on-the-ground experience and hard-won truths from my intelligence career in *Red Widow*, obfuscated to protect national secrets, but the heart and soul of my profession are in there: service to the American people, and speaking truth to power.

I hope you enjoy *Red Widow*. I can tell you from experience that it is very much like the real thing.

SINCERELY,
ALMA KATSU

VESPER MARTINI

INGREDIENTS

3 ounces gin

1 ounce vodka

½ ounce Lillet Blanc aperitif

Garnish: lemon twist

STEPS

Add the gin, vodka, and Lillet Blanc into a mixing glass with ice and stir until well chilled.

Strain into a chilled cocktail glass.

Express the oils from a lemon twist over the drink, rub the twist along the rim of the glass, and drop it into the cocktail.

Recipe from Liquor.com
www.liquor.com/recipes/vesper



DO YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES TO BE A SPY?

At one point during author Alma Katsu's career, she spent a year as a recruiter for the CIA, traveling to top schools in the country to find the next generation of intelligence analysts. Using that knowledge, she's put together this short quiz you can take to see if you have the attributes that would make you well suited for a career with a federal intelligence agency.

First, you should know that what most people call a spy—someone like James Bond, who works for MI6 and meets with foreigners who are ready to spill secrets—is what we in the business would call a case officer, or handler. Case officers recruit spies or assets, the foreigners who have inside information or knowledge that we need.

Now that we have that clear, let's talk about the kind of temperament you'd need to make a good intelligence professional. The following questions have to do with your general suitability. In order to qualify for a top-secret clearance, you'll need to demonstrate your ability to live under certain restrictions:

- How important is it to you to be able to talk about your work?
- Are you good at keeping secrets or is it something you struggle with?
- Can you follow directions or guidance, even though you might not agree with orders you've been given or think you have a better way to tackle a problem?
- Do you need routine or a predictable workday, or are you okay with being asked to change your plans on short notice?
- Are you a quick study?

Intelligence agencies need people with a range of talents and personality types in order to fulfill their mission. The following questions will give you an idea of whether you'd be better suited to be a case officer or an analyst, two of the more common positions in the intelligence community. We've already explained what a case officer does; an analyst puts together the clues and briefs the president and other high-level officials, and often develops a deep expertise in a particular field or subject.

DO YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES TO BE A SPY?

*Answer the following questions for yourself,
but also have book club members rate each other.*

1. Do you have a good memory? Are you good at remembering names and faces? Can you quickly memorize a sequence of numbers or would you need to write them down? How about a series of instructions, such as directions to a place you've never been before?
2. Are you good at noticing small details that others might miss?
3. Are you a risk-taker? Do you find it boring to play it safe?
4. Would it be sheer torture to sit at a desk for eight hours a day?
5. Are you able to form relationships easily? Are you gregarious and outgoing? At a party, are you the type to seek out people you don't know?
6. Or, at a party, are you likely to hang out with your friends, speak to one person for most of the night, or maybe prefer to stay home rather than go to the party at all?
7. Do you enjoy sifting through a lot of information to find one or two pieces that you need—or are you at least undaunted by the prospect?
8. Do you like doing puzzles?
9. Would it feel odd to go an entire day without reading a long and detailed article, newspaper story, or a few chapters of a book?

IF YOU ANSWERED **YES** TO A MAJORITY OF QUESTIONS 1–5,
you are more suited to being a case officer

IF YOU ANSWERED **YES** TO A MAJORITY OF QUESTIONS 6–9,
you are more suited to being an analyst

IF YOU ANSWERED AN UNEQUIVOCAL **NO** TO QUESTION 3,
you are not suited to be a case officer

IF YOU ANSWERED AN UNEQUIVOCAL **NO** TO QUESTION 7,
you are not suited to be an analyst