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They Write By Night: Spy Noir—First Blood

Suzanne Lummis · Thursday, October 14th, 2021



Arminé Iknadossian

Spy Noir. It's hardbitten and hardbiting. Cynical. Or maybe just realistic. About human nature, or — if we want to make a finer point of it (we do and we will) — humans. The Bad Guys are bad. In this movie, mostly, those'd be the Russians. And the Good Guys, most of 'em? Ain't all that

Good.

Harry Palmer, civil servant and spy, doesn't say *Ain't*. He's English, but not of the most fortunate class. He doesn't say *Ain't* but he doesn't say *R-a-a-ther*. Either.

Michael Caine plays Harry Palmer in *The Ipcress File*, based on the book by the smart spy writer, Len Deighton, who also cooks. (In real life he cooks. It's not only Harry Palmer who cooks, like I tell you in the video. Len Deighton also cooks. He used to. Now he's dead.)

Michael Caine is in his second major film role and about to have a big career as in: big, long career. Long as in L-o-n-g. Right now, for him, it all lies ahead. Meanwhile, Harry Palmer, he's just trying to stay alive. He's surrounded by Russians, and the *Good* guys. He's gonna be tested.

I was 14 when I first saw *The Ipcress File*. For, me also, it all lay ahead. Stuff happened. I did stuff. These days, as you'll find out in this episode, I'm still just trying to stay alive.

A sweet, dark, *Red* poem by Arminé Iknadossian, and [Poetry.LA](#), made this possible — this iteration of They Write by Night. *First Blood*, *Spy Noir*. *The Ipcress File*, a valentine in a noir mood — to Michael Caine.

– Suzanne Lummis

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