

1) All in all it wasn't a bad book...my favorite ever...No.

It's historical fiction. It's post WWII when Berlin was divided. It's filled with lots of characters that are a bit hard to keep straight...The main character has few if any emotion....never scared and frankly it made it a bit unbelievable. Of course I love the historical context but the book could easily have had a little more emotion.

<http://www.joscountryjunction.com/what-im-reading-leaving-berlin/>

2)

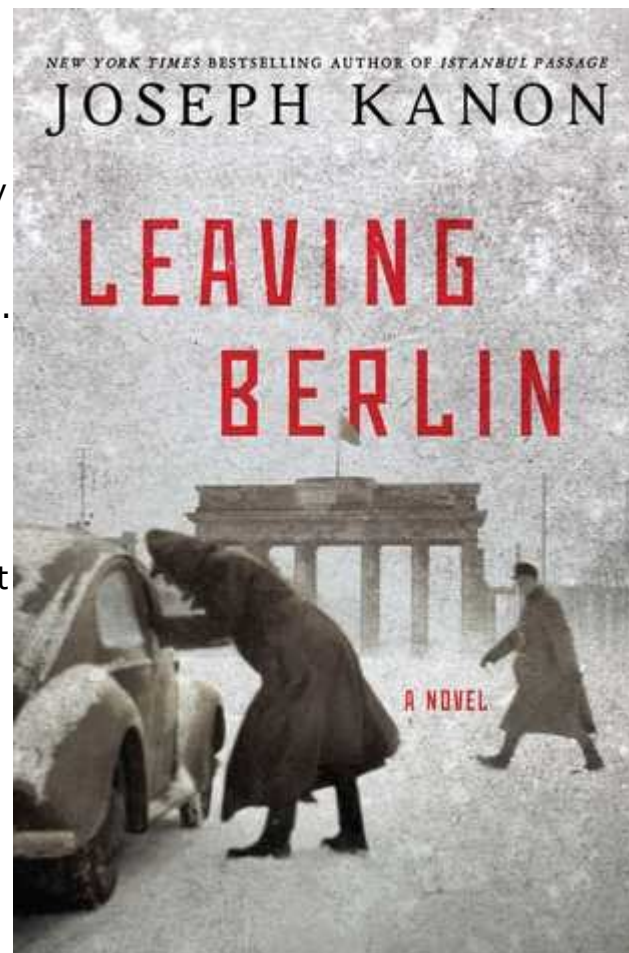
A sweeping novel of postwar East Berlin, a city caught between political idealism and the harsh realities of Soviet occupation

Review by Booklist Review

Setting his latest novel in the postwar Berlin he portrayed so effectively in *The Good German* (2001), Kanon again focuses on a returnee to the now-divided city who is searching for a lost lover. German Jew Alex Meier, a celebrated novelist in America, has opted to live in East Berlin after having defied Joe McCarthy and his witch-hunters. German communists treat Meier's arrival as a publicity coup, unaware that the writer's motivation is purely personal. Hoping to have his name cleared in the U.S., he has agreed to spy on the East Germans, not knowing that his first assignment will involve extracting information from the woman he loves. For a writerly type, Meier picks up his spycraft quickly, and, soon enough, double agents and dead bodies are swirling about him like moths to the flame. Kanon, like Alan Furst, has found a landscape and made it his own. In fact, the two writers make outstanding bookends in any collection of WWII fiction, Furst bringing Paris just before and during the war to vivid life, and Kanon doing the same for Berlin in its aftermath. A quibble or two, maybe, with the slightly overwrought ending, but there's far too much to like in this fine mix of espionage and history to worry over it. HIGH-DEMAND BACKSTORY: *Istanbul Passage* (2012) boosted Kanon onto several best-seller lists, giving his publisher plenty of reason to give his latest a hefty shove in the same direction.--Ott, Bill Copyright 2015 Booklist

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3) In his new novel, Kanon (*Istanbul Passage*) stays firmly in his traditional milieu-intrigue in post-World War II Europe-with this solid story about a German emigre, Alex Meier, returning to the divided city of East Berlin in 1949. It's not an entirely voluntary return for Meier, a successful novelist who had been working in Hollywood: a refusal to testify about Communists before Congress results in the forced repatriation; if he wants to return to the States, he must become a spy. The book is full of real-life historical figures, mostly writers like Bertolt Brecht, Arnold Zweig, and Ruth Berlau who are, like the fictional Meier, warmly welcomed home by the Communists. Meier's assignment is to spy on the cultural apparatus of East Germany and, in particular, to investigate a state security bigwig, Major General Maltsev, the consort of Elspeth von Bernuth, one of his childhood friends. There's



a fair amount of action, including a shootout in a dark street that results in a shocking act of violence, but the appeal of the book is how it conjures the atmosphere of post-War Europe, in the vein of Alan Furst and David Downing. There's too much backstory and the period details sometimes bog down the narrative, but once all the pieces are in place the story hits its stride. Kanon likes to wrestle with the moral dimensions of spying (a la le Carré)-and what's more, he's very good at it. Agent: Amanda Urban, ICM Partners. (Mar.)
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Review by Library Journal Review

4) Starred Review. In his seventh thriller, Kanon (*Istanbul Passage*) turns to postwar Berlin and in particular to the Soviet sector during the difficult months of the blockade (1948-49). Noted author Alex Meier fled Germany for the United States when the Nazis began persecuting Jews. Now, he has been invited back, along with other renowned authors, as culture becomes part of the cold war between East and West. But Alex's situation is precarious. He was actually forced to leave America (and his young son) owing to his intransigence when facing the congressional witch hunt for communists. Recruited as a spy with the promise of exoneration, Alex soon finds himself dealing with issues of trust and his own survival as the East German secret police force him to become an informer. Kanon's evocation of Berlin in ruins is masterly, but his most striking trait is his depiction of characters under stress, not only Alex but all those he must entangle, including family members who survived the war. VERDICT A pleasure from start to finish, blending literary finesse with action, this atmospheric historical thriller will appeal not only to Kanon's many fans but to those who enjoy Alan Furst, Philip Kerr, and other masters of wartime and postwar espionage fiction. [See Prepub Alert, 9/8/14.]-Ron Terpening, Univ. of Arizona, Tucson (c) Copyright 2015. Library Journals LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc. No redistribution permitted.

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5) Joseph Kanon began his career in publishing while an undergraduate at Harvard, reading manuscripts for *The Atlantic Monthly*. Kanon traveled to England for graduate school, then returned to the United States to work as a book review editor and writer for the *Saturday Review*. Rising through the ranks of the publishing world, he eventually became president and CEO of E.P. Dutton, and then executive vice president of Houghton Mifflin's Trade and Reference Division.

Kanon is the author of *Los Alamos* (1997), an authentic fictional recreation of the waning days of World War II during which the murder of one of the Manhattan Project's security officers occurs. *The Prodigal Spy* was published in late 1998.

His novel, *Leaving Berlin*, is a 2015 New York Times bestseller.

(Bowker Author Biography)

https://www.bookbrowse.com/bb_briefs/detail/index.cfm/ezine_preview_number/10416/leaving-berlin

6) Leaving Berlin by Joseph Kanon

From the bestselling author of *Istanbul Passage*, called a "fast-moving thinking man's thriller" by *The Wall Street Journal*, comes a sweeping, atmospheric novel of postwar East Berlin, a city caught between political idealism and the harsh realities of Soviet occupation.

Berlin 1948. Almost four years after the war's end, the city is still in ruins, a physical wasteland and a political symbol about to rupture. In the West, a defiant, blockaded city is barely surviving on airlifted supplies; in the East, the heady early days of political reconstruction are being undermined by the murky compromises of the Cold War. Espionage, like the black market, is a fact of life. Even culture has become a battleground, with German intellectuals being lured back from exile to add credibility to the competing sectors.

Alex Meier, a young Jewish writer, fled the Nazis for America before the war. But the politics of his youth have now put him in the crosshairs of the McCarthy witch-hunts. Faced with deportation and the loss of his family, he makes a desperate bargain with the fledgling CIA: he will earn his way back to America by acting as their agent in his native Berlin. But almost from the start things go fatally wrong. A kidnapping misfires, an East German agent is killed, and Alex finds himself a wanted man. Worse, he discovers his real assignment is to spy on the woman he left behind, the only woman he has ever loved. Changing sides in Berlin is as easy as crossing a sector border. But where do we draw the lines of our moral boundaries? Betrayal? Survival? Murder?

Filled with intrigue, and the moral ambiguity of conflicted loyalties, Joseph Kanon's new novel is a compelling thriller and a love story that brings a shadowy period of history vividly to life. (less)

Paperback, 371 pages

Published September 3rd 2015 by Simon & Shuster (first published November 6th 2014)

ISBN13 9781471137068 <http://josephkanon.com/books/leaving-berlin/> AND
<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/21943244-leaving-berlin>

7) Telegraph Book Review, Jake Kerridge, Dec 2014 A gripping spy novel set at the height of the Berlin Airlift depicts an East Berlin literally and psychologically gutted. Kanon has a very distinctive style, employing staccato prose and elliptical dialogue that conveys information as quickly as possible so that the story hares along. With a less careful writer this approach would lead to unintended ambiguities, but in the whole book I don't think there were more than half a dozen times when I had to reread a sentence - excluding those I reread in admiration when Kanon allows himself an occasional burst of lyricism in praise of this wonderful city that sank so low. The novel is hugely exciting, and just as heart-breaking.

8) NYT JOSHUA HAMMER MARCH 24, 2015

Joseph Kanon's 'Leaving Berlin'

Heroes in espionage fiction tend to fall into two categories: the world-weary professional and the rank amateur. Milo Weaver, the killer-spook of Olen Steinhauer's "The Tourist," and John le Carré's MI6 agent George Smiley are cynical veterans of the spying game, old hands at duplicity and betrayal. At the other end of the spectrum is the mild-mannered engineer of John Buchan's "The Thirty-Nine Steps," Richard Hannay, who stumbles across a German spy ring and finds himself framed for murder.

In Joseph Kanon's "Leaving Berlin," another novice takes center stage. Kanon, the author of the Edgar Award-winning "Istanbul Passage," sets this engaging thriller in 1949. The Berlin airlift is underway, and Soviet and Western spies circle one another in the ruins of the defeated Nazis' capital, recruiting informants and jousting for advantage. Into this fraught environment tumbles Alex Meier, a German Jewish socialist who escaped to Los Angeles before the Holocaust and made a name for himself as a novelist. Swept up by the Red Scare, Meier refused to name names before a Congressional committee, a principled decision that has cost him his marriage, cut him off from his 10-year-old son and turned him from celebrity author into a pariah facing jail or deportation. Making a desperate deal with the Central Intelligence Agency, Meier has returned to Berlin, posing as a disenchanting exile. If he can deliver valuable information about Soviet intentions and recruit agents to the cause, he'll get a second chance in America.

But, of course, things don't go according to plan. After checking into the partially burned-out Hotel Adlon near the Brandenburg Gate, Meier crosses to the American sector for his first meeting with his handler. "It's Dodge City here," the man warns him. "You want to watch your back. Everywhere. The sectors don't mean anything. They think it's all theirs. People disappear. . . . People get killed too." Not long thereafter, East German agents who have been tailing him try to wrestle Meier into their car. A gunfight breaks out, leaving one assailant dead and the C.I.A. man mortally wounded. Dying, he urges Meier to finish off the surviving attacker. "Take the gun. No witnesses." Overcoming his revulsion, Meier shoots the East German at point-blank range.

This killing propels Meier into a treacherous pas de deux in which he must satisfy the demands of his C.I.A. sponsors while staying one step ahead of the Communist investigators on his trail. His initial assignment — rekindling a romance with his first love, Irene von Bernuth, the survivor of a gang rape by Russian troops who has become the mistress of a Soviet State Security operative — makes his position even more precarious. Meier falls for her again, and after her desperately ill brother escapes from a slave labor camp run by the Soviets in eastern Germany, they must hide him while trying to engineer his flight to the West. Irene's brother has been mining uranium for the Soviet nuclear program, working under terrible conditions, and Meier calculates that if he can get this story on the air the United States will score a huge propaganda victory. Meier will thus have fulfilled his duty and be able to go home. But then, in rapid succession, come another murder, the disposal of a corpse in the River Spree, a Party purge in the Kulturbund and the threat of betrayal by a mole in the American spy circle.

Kanon populates the blasted landscape of Berlin, in which the Third Reich has been replaced by yet another odious regime, with a gallery of corrupted characters. Irene's sister, married to an unrepentant Nazi doctor who worked for the Third Reich's euthanasia program, insists that her husband was only doing what was legal at the time.

(“He’s a good man. A wonderful father.”) Markovsky, the Soviet spymaster sleeping with Irene, represents the thuggish new order. “Fleshy, but not fat, blunt hands,” Meier observes at a Kulturbund event. “A wife in Moscow. Trying to be pleasant, not an occupier. . . . Holding Irene’s arm in his, her protector. What had it been like, at the mercy of the Russians? Frau, komme. Sometimes several in one night, gangs of them.”

There are a few walk-ons by Bertolt Brecht, who has returned from exile and become a willing tool in the Communist propaganda machine. As Kanon portrays him, Brecht is a cigar-chomping rationalizer, willing to turn a blind eye to Soviet abuses if it will help him gain audiences for his plays. “Sometimes you have to work with things as they are,” he tells Meier, justifying his decision to participate in a radio interview denouncing capitalism. “Look at the church, the real one. All those crimes, so many years, and yet there’s the music. The art. We’re not priests, we’re artists. We accommodate. We survive.”

Kanon deftly captures the ambience of a city that’s still a wasteland almost four years after the Nazis’ defeat: “Standing walls were pockmarked by shelling, marooned in empty spaces where buildings had collapsed and been hauled away, holes now for the wind to rush through. . . . Even the smell of bombing, the burned wood and the sour lime of broken cement was still in the air.” At Alexanderplatz, once the heart of the capital, Meier “could make out . . . the dark hulk of the palace, singed with soot, the dome just a steel frame, but still standing, the last Hohenzollern. Across from it the cathedral was a blackened shell. . . . Unter den Linden was dark, the lindens themselves scorched clumps.”

Kanon’s dialogue sometimes verges on Cold War noir parody, and a few of his plot twists seem contrived. Meier’s near-overnight transformation from naïf to superspy, flawlessly anticipating the moves of his antagonists, is a bit hard to swallow. And it took me three readings of the denouement – a complicated operation involving a vanished corpse, an American double agent, a German intelligence officer and a tense dash across Berlin – before I fully grasped what was happening

Still, Kanon keeps the story humming along, enriching the main narrative with vignettes that heighten the atmosphere of duplicity and distrust. Toward the end, Meier spots the wife of a fellow member of the Kulturbund, an architect who has been threatened with imprisonment for lack of Party loyalty, huddling with a German intelligence officer, trading information for her husband’s freedom. “A small price, except you keep paying. Coffee every week, powdered milk, and little betrayals, the neighborhood, the Kulturbund, Herb’s architect friends, all overheard now,” he observes. “It was just the way things were. . . . This was the future.” It’s merely one of many powerful images of a city that has traded its murderous past for a brutish new reality – and of the moral compromises engaged in by its citizens simply to survive.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/29/books/review/joseph-kanons-leaving-berlin.html>

9) The Scotsman: ALLAN MASSIE 29th Novemebr 2014

JOSEPH Kanon has established himself as an accomplished writer of thrillers set mostly in the years after the 1939-45 war. All his books are concerned with the impact of politics and public events on his fictional characters.

He usually includes some real-life ones too; in this novel we have Berthold Brecht and

Helene Weigel, preparing for the first production of Mother Courage in East Berlin .

...

In short this is an enjoyable thriller, high-class entertainment, one that moves fast enough to allow you to suspend disbelief as Kanon skates elegantly over the improbabilities of his plot. It's good stuff and I read it with pleasure, but *Le Carré* it isn't because in the end the only complexity is of plot and the moral ambiguity the publishers speak of fades away.

Read more: <http://www.scotsman.com/lifestyle/culture/books/book-review-leaving-berlin-by-joseph-kanon-1-3620081#ixzz40Gdwspnp>

10) Washington independent review of books Philip K. Jason April 3, 2015

This taut page-turner captures the contradictions and complexities of the post-WWII German capital.

Kanon's portrait of postwar (and Cold War) Berlin is a splendid achievement. The city itself becomes a character, not only as a physical entity with its shattered neighborhoods, remnants of grace and sophistication, and network of roadways, but also as a moody, despairing personality grasping at hope and bluffing confidence.

In the "Mother Courage" section and elsewhere, Kanon's descriptions are gorgeously cinematic. Having had one of his novels, *The Good German*, turned into a movie, he might not be surprised to find film executives interested in taking on his latest title. It seems destined for the big screen.

Kanon also creates dialogue that is at once stylized and unusually realistic. Characters frequently drop words at the end of sentences. This is not because they are interrupted, but because that's actually how people talk – we're just not used to seeing such dialogue in print. Context and familiarity with the other person allows the dropped word – the preposition without its object – to register without being there. On occasion, the dropped word is a natural hesitation or a shift in direction of the speaker's thoughts. Such exchanges amplify our sense of a collective hesitancy born of people's uncertain footing in a new, unsettled social environment.

Though Kanon's third-person narrator and carefully crafted dialogue convey enormous amounts of information, the expository function of the dialogue feels incomplete. Do you ever walk into a situation in which everyone knows what's going on except you? It's something like that. Every word and sentence is crystal clear, yet the context and import remain undefined.

This, too, I believe, is a stylistic device shaped to express uncertainty – what living in Berlin at this time feels like. Readers feel the overwhelming pressure of facts that don't mesh. At first, such stylistic risks might seem annoying, but soon one becomes indoctrinated into Kanon's language milieu. The pieces fit more and more easily. It's like standing back from a busy montage to perceive the pattern.

Reading Joseph Kanon was a new – and, indeed, captivating – experience for this resolute but often jaded reviewer. It is easy to understand the plaudits his work has received. Story, suspense, substance, and style are inextricably linked in a work that masterfully exploits and exquisitely transcends spy-genre possibilities.....

<http://www.washingtonindependentreviewofbooks.com/bookreview/leaving-berlin>

11) Berlin 1949. Alex Meier, a young Jewish writer, fled the Nazis for America before the war. But the politics of his youth have now put him in the crosshairs of the McCarthy witch-hunts. Faced with deportation and the loss of his family, he makes a desperate bargain with the fledgling CIA: he will earn his way back to America by acting as their agent in his native Berlin. But almost from the start things go fatally wrong. A kidnapping misfires, an East German agent is killed, and Alex finds himself a wanted man. Worse, he discovers his real assignment - to spy on the woman he left behind, the only woman he has ever loved. Changing sides in Berlin is as easy as crossing a sector border. But where do we draw the lines of our moral boundaries? Betrayal? Survival? Murder? Filled with intrigue and the moral ambiguity of conflicted loyalties, Leaving Berlin is a compelling thriller and a love story that brings a shadowy period of history vividly to life.

<https://bookshop.theguardian.com/leaving-berlin-2.html>

ALSO:

<http://josephkanon.com/tour-berlin-after-wwii-with-author-joseph-kanon/> - video with Kanon (an American) in Berlin

About crossing the lines - or not - even the one to survival.