

Reading Group Guide

1. Alistair Renault has assembled many teams of spies during his time working for the Office of Strategic Services, but the five young men and women of Dragonfly have struck a special chord for him. Why do you think this group, in particular, is different?
2. When we first meet Sam “Bucky” Barton, on his twenty-second birthday, he carries a dark secret—the enthusiastic businessman father who raised him may not be his father after all. How would you describe Sam and Horace’s relationship? How is it affected by Sam’s original, accidental revelation in 1934, and by his additional discoveries during his time in Paris in 1942? In what ways do you believe fatherhood is either tied to biology or independent of it? Give examples from the book or your own life.
3. Discuss the relationship between Bridgette Loring and her best friend, Gladys, at the beginning of the book. Do you sympathize with one young woman over the other? Do you understand why Gladys did what she did? How far have you gone—or would you ever go—to try to hold on to a loved one who was ready to move on?
4. One year before the novel opens, Chris Brandt’s childhood mate, Dirk Drechsler, had left their German-American community in Texas to fight alongside the Nazis. He told Chris, “We’ll see who will be branded a traitor when the war is over—the Germans in America who remembered the country from which they came, or the Germans who forgot.” In your opinion, what loyalty do immigrants and their children owe to the country where they have settled versus the culture from which they came? If there is no clear-cut answer, what mitigating factors do you think should affect an individual’s moral, ethical, and cultural obligations in a choice like this? In a situation where the two countries are at war, how does the answer change, or does it? Is Mr. Knowle right to investigate the Brandt family’s loyalty to America?
5. Discuss Dirk’s fate by the end of the book. Is it deserved? Do you wish anything had turned out differently?
6. Why do you think Alistair did not send Brad Hudson the initial invitation letter the way he did for the other four dragonflies? Why visit him directly, with a cover story about fly-fishing? What does this tell you about Alistair as a character, or about Brad?
7. In Victoria Grayson’s first meeting with her boss at G. P. Putnam’s Sons to discuss novelist Beaumont Fournier’s unwanted attentions, Victoria doesn’t let on how much of the situation she understands. When she returns to her desk, she observes that men’s “subterfuges were as subtle as a broadsword in the hand of a ham-fisted amateur and no match for a woman.” Do you agree with this? Do you think Victoria’s expertise as a

fencer makes her unique in her ability to size up her adversaries, or is there something else about her that sets her apart? Do you think this hypervigilance and quick mind serve her well in her work in Paris, or do they backfire? Why or why not?

8. In your opinion, how does the metaphor of the dragonfly operate over the course of the book? Does it change and develop, and if so, how?
9. Why do you think Alistair chooses Bridgette to be his radio operator and the head of the team? Do you think he made the right choice? Who would you have chosen, and why?
10. Things go wrong from the moment Dragonfly arrives in Paris. Why do all the members of the team believe their drop box is compromised? Do you think they make the right choice in keeping it? Why or why not?
11. Chris makes the dangerous choice to protect young Wilhelm March from his tormentors at the danger of not only his job but his safety. Would you have done the same in his shoes?
12. The American spies come to the wrong conclusions about both Derrick Albrecht and Konrad March, who are not entirely as they appear. How did you feel about this twist when it came? Do you think you would have fallen for the same trap?
13. Who are your favorite characters in the book?
14. If you had received a letter from the OSS at age twenty-two, what would you have done? Are there causes you would be willing to sacrifice everything for?

A Conversation with Leila Meacham

You are famous for your sweeping American sagas, ever since *Roses* splashed its way onto the bestseller lists. But for this fifth novel, you've taken your readers to a whole new world. What inspired you to tell this story now?

Unlike the subjects of my other novels that I feel I pluck from whatever goes by in the air, I believe I have always had in mind that if ever I were to write a novel, the gist would have something to do with WWII espionage. Spy stories for a while were my favorite genre to read for pleasure. I enjoyed reading about heroes and heroines, for that's what folks are who elect to risk life and limb, painful treatment and death for the sake of a greater cause. It just took me longer to get around to doing it.

The five members of *Dragonfly* are immensely appealing, optimistic youngsters, fighting for their country. We expect them to be likable. Yet some of the most

compelling characters in *Dragonfly* are the Germans themselves. Where did those characters come from?

Mainly my belief that the enemy is not always evil. The history of German resistance to Hitler's rule bears me out on this, but regardless of the research that proves the premise, I would have created the major Germans in *Dragonfly*. How could there not be decent, moral human beings even in the military ranks of a foe who has given to the world so much to make it a better place? It was from that precept that I drew Major General March and Colonel Derrick Albrecht.

While the time and place are clearly deeply researched, I couldn't help but wonder: is there any part of this story that is drawn from real life, a true story you might have heard?

I am afraid not. Imagination can introduce you to people you've never met or ever thought to know, as well as to sites and locations, events and situations you've never been or experienced. I find it often a thrilling place to visit.

What is your writing process like? Do you start out with a scene or a character or a situation and build out from there?

When I begin a novel, I approach it like an eight-to-five job, five days a week, with maybe a short stint of writing slipped into Saturdays and Sundays. I am often asked to explain what prompts the story line and characters I write about, and I am at a loss. I spoke the truth when an interviewer asked me once if could answer the question in three words, and I replied, "Yes. How about 'I don't know.'" I have always begun a novel with a trigger that comes out of the blue and without a clue to where the story is headed. It simply evolves. My favorite example is the single line that developed into *Tumbleweeds*. It reads, "The call he'd been expecting for twenty-two years came at midnight when he was working late at his desk." I looked at that line and thought, *Now what?*

Did the final book turn out just as you expected it to, or did it change over the course of your writing, and if so, how?

Well, as I've explained, I didn't know enough when I started to have expectations, but once I had the first chapter in place, based on my research, there was only one logical way to go, and I believe the conclusion reflects that. In war, there are winners and losers, the winners not always having won the battle, and the losers not always having lost it. Endings of my books somehow have a way of concluding as they should be, or at least, I'd like to think so.

What are you working on next?

It is a contemporary story of an attractive but ordinary housewife who believes she is being stalked. The title is *April Storm*. Its setting is in Avon, Colorado, at the base of the Beaver Creek Resort. Unlike my other novels, the action takes place in one month, time enough to unravel the mystery of who is pursuing Kathryn Walker and why.