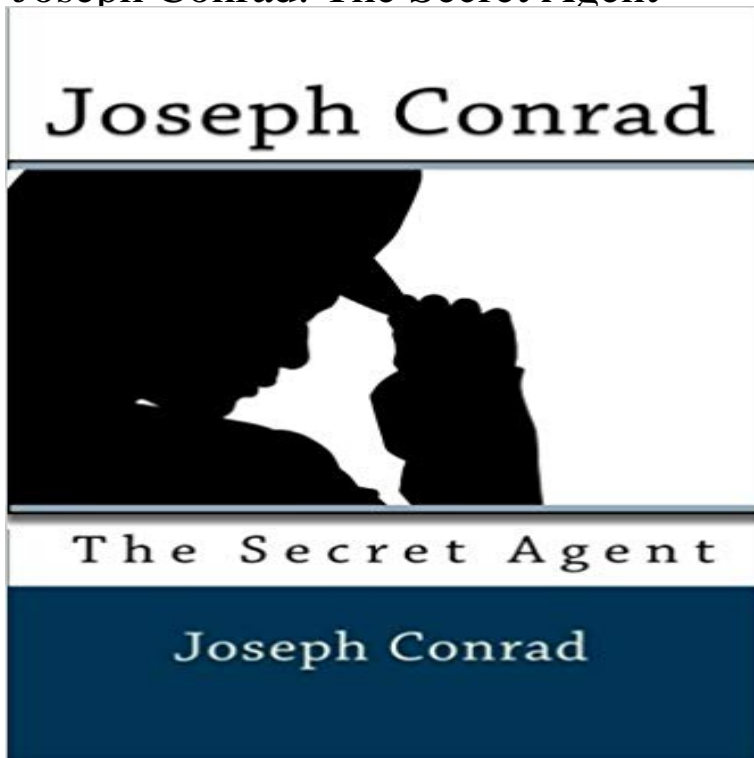


Joseph Conrad: The Secret Agent



Joseph Conrad's novel *The Secret Agent* is referred to in many places as the prototype of today's political and espionage thrillers. The agent of the title, Mr. Verloc, has grown complacent in his role as an informant to a foreign embassy in London and is pressured by his superiors into pulling off a shocking act of terrorism in order to prove his worth to his colleagues. *The Secret Agent* is mostly about the domestic repercussions that occur when things go badly wrong. Joseph Conrad effectively toys with the readers' expectations, introducing several characters and sets the stage for what appears to be a thriller with political overtones: several people have a vested interest (personally or politically) in the outcome of Mr. Verloc's actions. What *The Secret Agent* does well is give its reader a deliciously tangible sense of the seedy underworld at play in late 19th-century London. Joseph Conrad personifies the mist, funk and squalor of London until the city itself nearly becomes a character in the action. Also, for anyone who maybe knows Conrad for being an obtuse, thick writer (especially if your previous knowledge of him comes from reading *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim*), *The Secret Agent* is refreshingly straight forward.

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