The Bourne Identity

Robert Ludlum

About the author

In addition to the information about Robert Ludlum in the Introduction, another interesting fact is that the idea for *The Bourne Identity* resulted from his personal experience. After the publication of his first book, *The Scarlatti Inheritance*, Ludlum could not remember 12 hours of his life, and later was informed by doctors that he had had temporary amnesia. This event, combined with real-life spy stories of the day, inspired him to write the Bourne trilogy.

Summary

**Chapters 1–2:** A man wakes up suffering from amnesia. Dr. Washburn, who has been treating the man on a French island for several weeks, after he was found in the sea with gunshot wounds, tries to prompt the man into remembering. The doctor is convinced the patient is intelligent, speaks three languages, has experience using guns, and has had his physical appearance changed many times. He also tells him that he found a Zurich bank account number embedded in the patient's body. The doctor organizes a boat to take the man to Marseilles. In a café, while he is arranging a new passport, he is recognized by a man who then tries to kill him. He hits his attacker and travels to a hotel. Everything is familiar to him in the hotel, but he can't understand why. He then has to sign the hotel form and sees his name, Mr. J. Bourne. He leaves the hotel and, without really knowing why, makes his way to a bank. Inside the bank he discovers he has more than four million dollars in an account and that he worked for a company called Treadstone Seventy-one. On leaving the bank he is attacked by some men but escapes to his hotel. However, the men follow him and attack and injure him there. He grabs a woman, Marie, and forces her at gunpoint to drive him to a restaurant he vaguely remembers. Inside, he is recognized by a fat man, who tells him the address of one of Bourne's previous contacts, a man called Chernak.

**Chapters 3–4:** Bourne and Marie drive to the address. Chernak tells Bourne that a man called Carlos is looking for him and wants to kill him. Bourne shoots Chernak dead. Marie and Bourne then set off for Steppdeckstrasse, another address that Bourne remembers. On the way, Marie escapes. Bourne is attacked in the house by two men and, as he is making his escape, Marie appears with some men who she thinks are the police. They are not, and one of them drives Marie away to a place where Bourne knows she will be killed. He is driven away in another car. He kills the two men and rescues Marie. Marie drives the now seriously injured and exhausted Bourne to a safe house in a village, where they gradually become friends. Marie feels indebted to Bourne for saving her life and can't believe he is a killer. She tries to help him remember his past life. Marie, being a financial expert and having important contacts, decides to help Bourne discover the truth about the Treadstone Company. When Bourne mentions the name Carlos, Marie is terrified and explains to him that Carlos is wanted for the assassination of over fifty people. The two fly to Paris. Bourne, now beginning to suspect that he himself was an assassin, looks into the assassination of an American ambassador in Marseilles. He is relieved to discover he had not been in Marseilles on the date of the killing. When Bourne tries to access his bank account in Paris, he sets in motion a sequence of events: alarms, phone calls, mysterious men arriving and the death of Marie's financial contact.

**Chapters 5–6:** Bourne reveals to Marie that he knows a lot about the killer called Carlos. He then goes to a fashionable clothes shop, Les Classiques, whose phone number is somehow linked to Bourne's bank account. He assumes a false name and invites the owner of the store, Madame Lavier, to dinner. As the two are leaving the shop, the switchboard operator recognizes Bourne and informs the woman's business partner, Bergeron, that Bourne, who he believes is an assassin called Cain, is going to kill the Madame. Far away in Washington D.C. some important men are talking about Cain (alias Bourne). We learn that Cain had worked on a special operations unit called Medusa, in the 1960's in Vietnam. They believe Cain has resurfaced in Europe and is responsible for the recent killings, and they decide on a plan to bring...
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Cain and Carlos together in order to catch them both. Meanwhile, Bourne is talking to Madame Lavier in a restaurant. He tells her he represents an organization that is looking for Cain to recover their lost money from him. He wants her to stop Carlos searching for Cain. She tells him that Carlos will not stop because he is enraged that Cain is trying to take his place. Later, Bourne and Marie see a newspaper headline and Marie’s photo linking her to the murders in Zurich, and to the theft of a large amount of money. Bourne is convinced the newspaper article is the work of Carlos, trying to get to him through Marie.

Chapters 7–8: A group of important men meet in the Treadstone office in Manhattan. They know that Carlos is convinced that Bourne is really Cain. One of the men explains that they had invented Cain, three years before, a killer whose mission was to deliberately upset Carlos’s assassination attempts. A European man then enters the house, kills all the men and leaves incriminating fingerprints on a glass. A day later, there is a meeting of the surviving Treadstone Seventy-one members. The fingerprint on the glass is that of Delta, a man who they had changed into Bourne (who Carlos knows as Cain) and who they now believe has gone mad and is on a vendetta to kill them all. They decide they must kill him first. Bourne and Marie are now on the run and they narrowly escape death in a hotel. Marie calls a number that Bourne had memorized in Madame Lavier’s office. She gets through to General Villiers, a very powerful man in France. Bourne intercepts Villier’s car on a lonely road and accuses him of being in the hands of Carlos. The general vehemently denies it, adding that Carlos had killed his son. They go to the general’s house and see the general’s wife talking to one of Carlos’s men on the steps. The general explains that they had invented Cain, three years before, to make Carlos look for Cain and Carlos together in order to catch them both. The general phones Marie and tells her that Carlos is looking for Cain to recover their lost money from him. He wants her to stop Carlos searching for Cain. She tells him that Carlos will not stop because he is enraged that Cain is trying to take his place. Later, Bourne and Marie see a newspaper headline and Marie’s photo linking her to the murders in Zurich, and to the theft of a large amount of money. Bourne is convinced the newspaper article is the work of Carlos, trying to get to him through Marie.

Identity: Throughout the book, Bourne is constantly trying to remember his past and to discover who he really is. He recognizes people and places but he doesn’t know why. Slowly, with the help of his girlfriend, he remembers. Bourne’s identity is known to the people who made him into what he is, but paradoxically, the identity of everyone’s arch rival, Carlos, is known only to Bourne.

Intrigue: The book is a spy novel and so is full of mysterious characters. One is never quite certain who people really are and for which side they are working for. The plot is very complicated, has many twists and turns, and jumps form situations in Vietnam, Europe, and the United States.

Love: Most novels have a love story of sorts, but not many portray the love story beginning with the man kidnapping his future love. Also, one could doubt the believability of Marie’s love for Bourne, bearing in mind she is going out with a man who is continually shot at and puts her in many life threatening situations.
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Discussion activities

Chapters 1–2
Before reading
1 Discuss: Explain to the students that The Bourne Identity is both a book and a movie and that it is a spy thriller with a lot of action, intrigue, guns, assassins, secret organizations, etc. Put them in small groups and ask them to make a list of all the movies they have seen with the same theme. Then ask them to discuss the following questions: Do you like these types of movies? Which movie on your list is the best/worst and why? Do the good guys always win in the end? Do the movies always have a love story in them? Is a man or a woman usually the hero/heroine?

While reading (p. 10, after “Let’s go.”)
2 Role play: Put the students into pairs and tell them they are going to act out a conversation between the man and Marie. Marie is scared and doesn’t want to go with the man. See Discussion activities key for an example start to the conversation.

After reading
3 Write and ask: Write Why did the doctor lose his job in London? on the board and elicit the answer (Because he was drunk.). Ask students to write another question about something in Chapters 1–2. Now have students walk around the classroom, asking and answering each other’s questions.

Chapters 3–4
After reading
4 Write: Ask the students to write a summary of what happened in Chapters 3–4. Tell them the summary must be exactly fifty words long. Then put them in groups of four to read their summaries to each other.

5 Pair work: Write the following words on the board: bell, doctor, river, garbage, newspaper, 50,000, throat. Have the students talk and write in pairs to say how these words were used in Chapters 3–4.

Chapters 5–6
While reading (p. 32, after “These are some of our designer’s finest works.”)
6 Discuss: Put the students into small groups and ask them to discuss the following questions: What are the names of the most famous clothes shops in your country/the world? Do like shopping for clothes? Do you buy fashionable clothes? Who is the most fashionable person you know? How much money a year do you spend on clothes?

After reading
7 Write and guess: Write Bourne had had a long flight from Vietnam, on the board. Elicit which word is wrong from the students (Bahamas not Vietnam). Now students choose a sentence from Chapters 5–6 and rewrite it changing one word. Students interact, reading out their sentences and the other students have to identify and correct the mistake.

Chapters 7–8
Before reading
8 Predict: Tell the students that one of the characters in Chapter 8 was a general in the army. Put them in pairs and ask them to predict the answers to the following questions: Is the general French, American, or English? Is the general now a politician, a spy, or an assassin? Is the general married? Is the general working for Carlos? Did Carlos employ, kill, or help the general’s son?

While reading (p. 49, after “He was a politician, too, and very popular.”)
9 Discuss: Put the students in small groups and tell them to discuss the following questions about politics: What political systems do you know? What system is used in your country? Are you interested in politics? Can you name any famous politicians? Do you think all politicians are good people? Do you think some politicians accept money to do things that are not always legal?

Chapters 9–10
While reading (p. 63, after “in case you’ve forgotten.”)
10 Write and discuss: Write the word Birthday on the board. Then put the students in pairs to make a list of all the important things people can forget and put them on the board. Then ask them to discuss the following: Do you have a good memory for faces/names/numbers? Have you ever forgotten someone’s birthday? Have you ever forgotten your wedding date or an important appointment? Have you ever forgotten to take your house keys or car keys with you? Have you ever forgotten you have left something cooking on the stove? What do you do to help you remember things?

Chapter 11
After reading
11 Research: Ask the students to look for information on the Internet about the movie that was made from this book. Tell them to look for answers to the following questions: When was it made? Who were the actors in it? Was the movie story different from the book? How much money did the movie make? Did the newspaper journalists like the film? The students then give an oral presentation of what they have discovered.

12 Discuss: Put the students in small groups and ask them to make a list of all the main characters in the book. Then ask them to talk about each character, their personalities and what they did, and to grade them 1 to 10 on whether they were a good person or not.