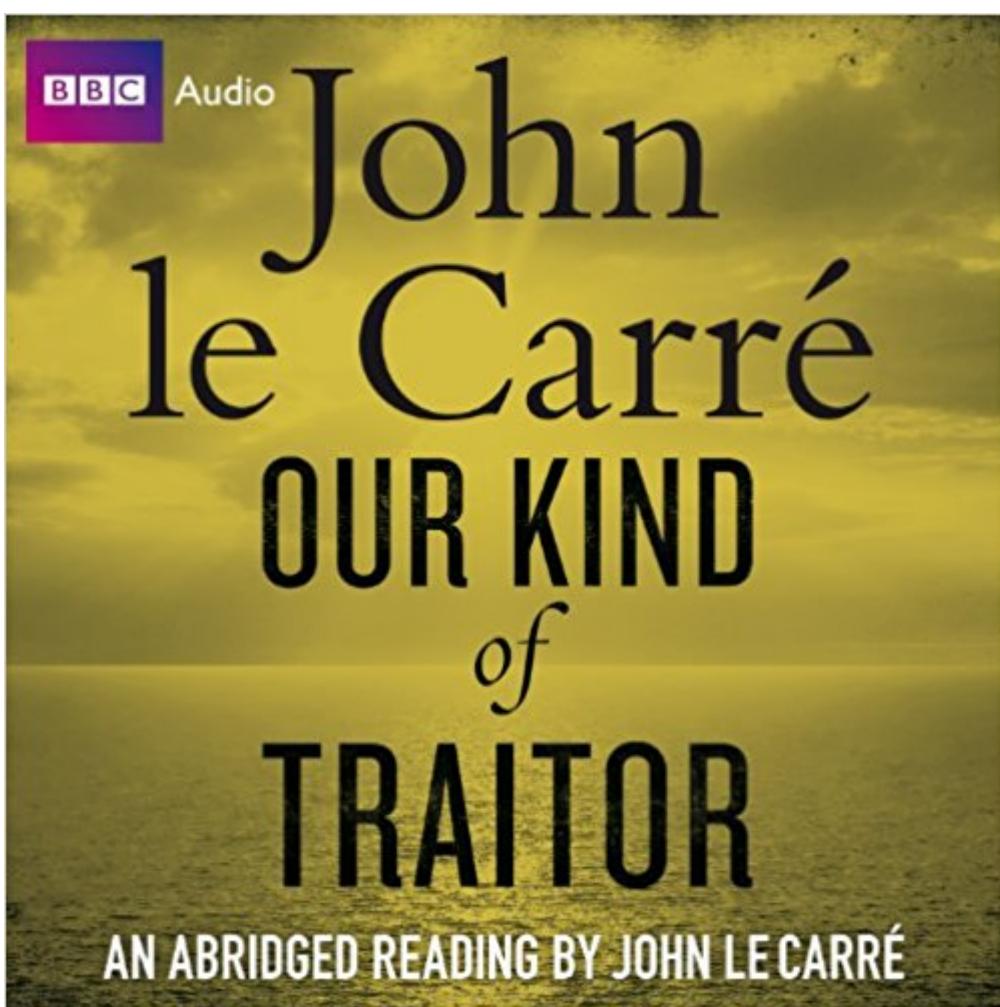


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Our Kind Of Traitor: An Abridged Reading By John Le Carré



Synopsis

Britain is in the depths of recession. A left-leaning young Oxford academic and his barrister girlfriend take an off-peak holiday on the Caribbean island of Antigua. Seemingly by chance they bump into a Russian millionaire called Dima, who owns a peninsula and a diamond-encrusted gold watch. He also has a tattoo on his right thumb, and wants a game of tennis. But he wants something else too, something which propels the young lovers on a tortuous journey through Paris to a safe house in the Swiss Alps, to the murkiest cloisters of the City of London and its unholy alliance with Britain's Intelligence Establishment. John le Carré reads his own taut, suspenseful tale of dirty money and dirtier politics.

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Those readers who have found post-“cold war” le Carré too cerebral will have much to cheer about with this Russian mafia spy thriller. While on holiday in Antigua, former Oxford tutor Perry Makepiece and his lawyer girlfriend, Gail Perkins, meet Dmitri “Dima” Vladimirovich Krasnov, an avuncular Russian businessman who challenges Perry to a tennis match. Even though Perry wins, Dima takes a shine to the couple, and soon they’re visiting with his extended family. At Dima’s request, Perry conveys a message to MI6 in England that Dima wishes to defect, and on arriving home, Perry and Gail receive a summons from MI6 to a debriefing. Not only is Dima a Russian oligarch, he’s also one of the world’s biggest money launderers. Le Carré ratchets up the tension step-by-step until the sad, inevitable end. His most accessible work in years, this novel shows once again why his name is the one to which all others in the field are compared. Copyright

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Much to the dismay of many longtime fans, le CarrÃ© chose to keep up with the times after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Yet, despite his shift from Cold War-era espionage to more contemporary themes, le CarrÃ©'s signature stark prose, pitch-perfect dialogue, authentic characters, and moral indignation have stood the test of time. The critics were pleased to see "the master" (Telegraph) back in action, but some had reservations: While the Guardian lamented the "long, fussily narrated opening," the Scotsman praised Traitor's "long and elegantly paced plot." Others quibbled about some dubious plot devices and cartoonish villains, but these complaints paled beside "the old magic" (Telegraph). Intriguing and tense, Traitor shines a blinding, angry, and welcome light on shady international finances and underhanded intelligence agents. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Another reviewer has commented somewhere on the increasing darkness in Le Carre's later novels, and the impotence of the goodness & compassion of ordinary people confronted with human nature depraved by power. And the most corrupting power is that of secrecy - the spying Game. Le Carre has no answers, but he can't stop writing his observation either. so his novels are ending now on the edge of a cliff without a wrap-up or conclusion regarding the characters for whose fate we have come to hope. This does not make for a satisfying reading experience; and it does not speculate about what could be done to neutralize the corruption and cynicism of the bureaucratic State that depends on the Spying Game. (By the way, the writing is only fairly good, certainly not as good as his Smiley novels).

With the supposed certainties of the Cold War a distant memory for many years, the author in his recent novels, as in this latest, must contend with a more ambiguous international world: where is the line drawn between legitimate business and criminal enterprise; at what point do high-level politicians become compromised in dealing with real-world issues; have national security policies and agendas changed in the post Cold War era, in particular, in regard to Russia; has the ground thereby shifted under clandestine services. This is the setting in which the old-line British spies, financial facilitators/money launderers, Parliamentary members, unsuspecting civilians, Russian businessmen/crime bosses, etc, portrayed in this book operate. Oxford professor, Perry Makepeace, and his long-time girlfriend, up-and-coming barrister, Gail Perkins, are attempting to regroup by

taking a vacation in Antigua in the Caribbean, when he is practically forced into a tennis match by a man Dima who would be perfectly cast as a Russian mafioso, that is, with heavy accent, shaved head, powerful, disdainful, garish, etc, which as it turns out, he is. In the shifting power relations in the Russian crime world, Dima has become a liability. As their money launderer par excellence he is a man who knows too much, especially their dealings with respectable British aristocrats, members of Parliament, and the like. Dima identifies Perry as a man of "fair play," and in a rather orchestrated, overly dramatic scenario convinces Perry to take recordings to British intelligence that request a safe place in England for his family in exchange for names, foreign bank account numbers, etc. Presumably his past prevents him from simply applying for residency on his own initiative. The book largely consists of the somewhat drawn out, increasing involvement of Perry and Gail in this entire affair from initial debriefings with a large amount of skepticism on the part of their questioners before moving on to higher-ups to agreeing to travel to Paris to play a role in the operation of springing Dima. Though at times tedious, the author's captures so well the language of the spy world: not only crisp but cunningly indirect where questions and suggestions are crafted for the unsuspecting to stumble on. It is interesting to see the innocents, Perry and Gail, forge naively ahead, cast aside doubts, and buy into the noble cause perspective, all the while never suspecting untold possible complications, probably not an untypical response. For those who enjoy the world of spying as depicted by the author: his weary, almost cynical characters who nonetheless have made their realistic compromises, this book will be welcomed; others may find it only tiresome. It can be said that the plot line is pretty thin and questionable at some points and matters proceed in rather detailed slowness. Again, it is the flavor of the spy world and its impositions that is the book's greatest appeal. The outcome, while not necessarily inevitable, does reflect the aforementioned ambiguities and the forces of realpolitik.

An interesting cast of characters who normally would not find themselves intertwined in the fate of one another's future. The tale is well told and in typical le Carre fashion, full of interesting twists and turns. Don't bother with the movie of the same name as the script writer literally lost the plot, inserting . . . and violence found no where in this fine read. didn't like my original post and apparently the word used where the . . . appear. This is a common term and one used in their own descriptions. Therefore, this may well be my last review as it has become so difficult to be Politically Correct these days that it's not worth the bother.

Another twisty, well-paced, emotionally grabbing spy novel from John le Carre, who does thwarted

idealism as well as any English language novelist since Graham Greene. Dima's a Russian gangster, a world class money launderer for various Russian mobs. For years he's played a high risk, high reward game, but now his luck's run out. While on vacation in Antigua he bumps into Perry, an Oxford tutor. After a game of tennis, Perry's invited to Dima's house, where he learns that Dima has a basket full of scandalous secrets involving high level British businessmen and politicians. He's willing to trade them in return for asylum in England for him and his family. Once back in England, Perry and his girlfriend Gail, a junior barrister, connect with the Secret Service. They convey Dima's offer, and the game is afoot. The British spies in charge are Luke, home from Bogota to a shaky marriage and a career on the slide, and Hector, an aging scorpion with some sting left, with a righteous streak that frequently roils his cautious, career-minded superiors. Le Carre has always understood the buried religious impulse that drives spies, their desire to surrender to something larger, as well as the ways in which that impulse can lead to self-immolation. Perry, and, to a lesser extent, Gail, are looking for larger meaning in their lives, making them willing co-conspirators with Luke and Hector to spirit Dima and his extensive family away from the contract killers waiting for the word to take Dima out. At first, the operation on the ground in Switzerland proceeds smoothly, but soon enough, Hector gets ambushed by the cover-your-behind bureaucrats in the Service and the politicians who don't want Dima's information spattering their hard won respectability. Things end as they often do in le Carre novels: win or lose, no one escapes unscathed. The meta theme of le Carre's last several novels has been the destructive spread of unregulated global finance. It's a major theme of this book too, featuring post Lehman City of London bankers, gangster capitalists, politicians on the take around the globe. What disturbs Hector, and, by extension, le Carre, is the amorality of capitalism. The flow of money, like the physical flow of energy, is a dynamic beyond good and evil. Le Carre's spies, though no strangers to ambiguity, want to believe that the system they defend, and the politicians who represent it, do in fact stand for some higher virtue than piling up pounds in secret Cayman accounts. Le Carre remains intent on making us see that even though Soviet style communism has been defanged, the money sluicing in ever greater volume outside the bounds of democratic political systems is now a far more potent threat.

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