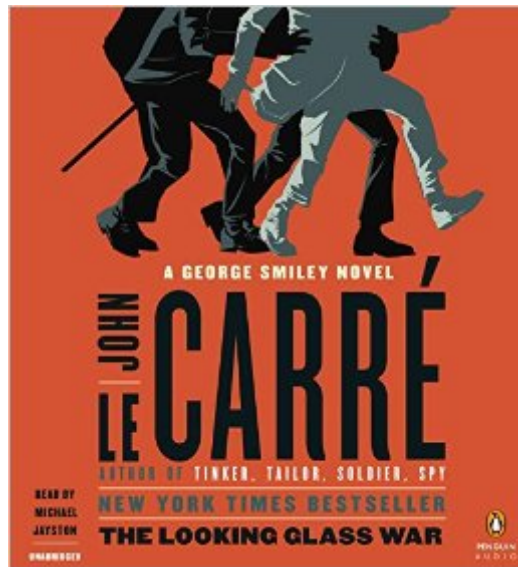


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The Looking Glass War (Penguin Audio Classics)



Synopsis

"You are either good or bad, and both are dangerous." It would have been an easy job for the Circus: a can of film couriered from Helsinki to London. In the past the Circus handled all things political, while the Department dealt with matters military. But the Department has been moribund since the War, its resources siphoned away. Now, one of their agents is dead, and vital evidence verifying the presence of Soviet missiles near the West German border is gone. John Avery is the Department's younger member and its last hope. Charged with handling Fred Leiser, a German-speaking Pole left over from the War, Avery must infiltrate the East and restore his masters' former glory. John le Carre's *The Looking Glass War* is a scorching portrayal of misplaced loyalties and innocence lost. With an introduction by the author.

Book Information

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[Authors, A-Z > \(L \) > Le Carre, John](#) #3173 in [Books > Books on CD > Mystery & Thrillers](#)

#4917 in [Books > Books on CD > Literature & Fiction > Unabridged](#)

Customer Reviews

A marvelous, bitter novel of ad hoc espionage and bureaucratic intrigue--though it dates from the Cold War, its ethical concerns are as timely as ever. The quality of writing throughout far surpasses the requirements of genre and the conclusion retains a spine-chilling power. A previous review here demands refutation. A so-called "Reader" insists that "Le Carre knows nothing about espionage, foreign affairs, international relations, spy technology etc." "Reader"'s argument? "In the 1960's Czechoslovakia was surrounded by the world's most sophisticated security perimeter.... To Western espionage, however, this iron curtain was easily permeable; high-tech espionage aircraft and satellites routinely overflew Soviet [sic] territory, mapping government installations with a precision

far greater than any earth-bound surveyor.... [I]n [Le Carre's] world the Czech border has a chicken-wire fence guarded by local boys with rusty Mannlichers. Aerial spying is carried out by airline pilots, presumably leaning out of their jets to snap a few candid with concealed polaroids!"A few comments in response:A) The U-2 spy plane and Corona spy satellite were U.S. programs--Britain's aerial espionage technology lagged well behind in the mid-60's. "Reader" imagines a "Western espionage" monolith that did not exist. While the U.S. and Great Britain were, of course, close allies, their interests were by no means identical and their intelligence agencies were not joined at the hip. "The Looking Glass War"--which, of course, concerns (fictional!) operations by British intelligence--includes passages offering explicit rationale for not immediately involving the U.S., thus necessitating the use of relatively primitive information-gathering techniques.

As a complete book, "The Looking Glass War" isn't perhaps one of Le Carre's crowning achievements. But in its specific anatomy of the human deterioration, moral depravity and sometimes inhumanness of the cold war it is one of his deepest studies. If "The Spy who came out from the Cold" and "Smiley's People" are symphonies, then this is a tight piece of chamber music. It could have been tighter -- cutting off about a forth of the book would have improved it -- but it offers a hermetic, very troubling experience. It is less about suspense and action and more about relations, morality and compassion. For my part, it is the one book of Le Carre's that remained with me and troubled me the longest. If you liked the more serious aspects of Le Carre's work, then this one will engage you. If you enjoy his work mostly for the action and suspense, however, this one may come on as a little tedious. Albeit a cameo by Smiley (in one of his least attractive moments), the characters are mostly new. The plot itself is simple: a small, practically defunct British spy agency with a mandate for military targets that has been lagging on aimlessly since WWII, gets one more shot at mounting an intelligence operation. WWII was their best of times, the source of their pride and nostalgia: since then, stripped from financing, backwards on technology, they are no more than a bureaucratic specter. But the gods of warfare reward their zealots, and out of the blue, the agency is offered to retrieve some crucial information about military installations beyond the iron wall (I'll be stingy with details so as not to spoil too much). Everybody wakes up. As they do not have even a single operational agent (nor a radio, weapons, vehicles etc.

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