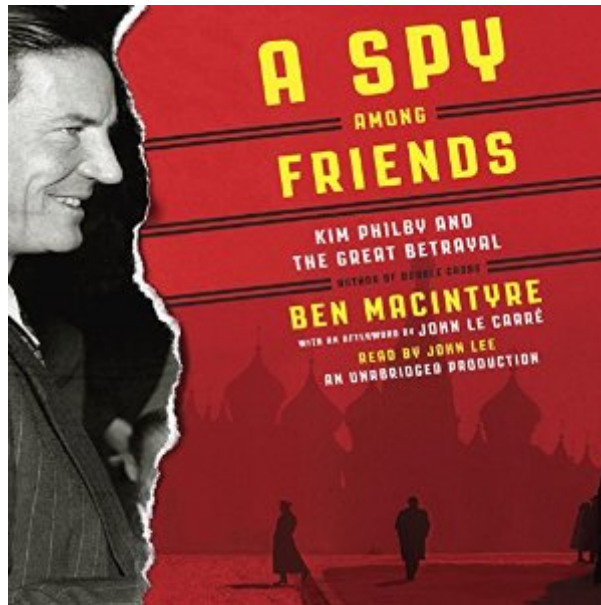


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A Spy Among Friends: Kim Philby And The Great Betrayal



Synopsis

Master storyteller Ben Macintyre's most ambitious work to date offers a powerful new angle on the 20th century's greatest spy story. Kim Philby was the greatest spy in history, a brilliant and charming man who rose to head Britain's counterintelligence against the Soviet Union during the height of the Cold War - while he was secretly working for the enemy. And nobody thought he knew Philby like Nicholas Elliott, Philby's best friend and fellow officer in MI6. The two men had gone to the same schools, belonged to the same exclusive clubs, grown close through the crucible of wartime intelligence work and long nights of drink and revelry. It was madness for one to think the other might be a communist spy, bent on subverting Western values and the power of the free world. But Philby was secretly betraying his friend. Every word Elliott breathed to Philby was transmitted back to Moscow - and not just Elliott's words, for in America, Philby had made another powerful friend: James Jesus Angleton, the crafty, paranoid head of CIA counterintelligence. Angleton's and Elliott's unwitting disclosures helped Philby sink almost every important Anglo-American spy operation for twenty years, leading countless operatives to their doom. Even as the web of suspicion closed around him, and Philby was driven to greater lies to protect his cover, his two friends never abandoned him - until it was too late. The stunning truth of his betrayal would have devastating consequences on the two men who thought they knew him best, and on the intelligence services he left crippled in his wake. Told with heart-pounding suspense and keen psychological insight, and based on personal papers and never-before-seen British intelligence files, *A Spy Among Friends* is Ben Macintyre's best book yet, a high-water mark in Cold War history telling.

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Customer Reviews

Ben Macintyre is a great writer and, in this latest book, he has turned his attention to Kim Philby – “one of the Cambridge Spies. Historically, this book may not offer much that is new, but it does tell the story from a different viewpoint ; that of his friendships, most notably with Nicholas Elliott. In other words, this is not really a straight-forward biography of Philby, but focuses on his personality and on the Old Boy network that enabled him to evade detection for so long. The book begins with the meeting between Philby and Elliott in Beirut in January, 1963, with Elliott confronting his former friend about his betrayal of his country and trying to obtain a confession. He must certainly have felt betrayed personally too, as he had done much to protect Philby from earlier suspicions by MI5 – “defending and helping him when he was in difficulty. This fascinating account looks at the early life of both men, their meeting during WWII and their career in the Secret Intelligence Service. Kim Philby was, from the beginning, a Soviet agent. Along with the Cambridge Spies; Guy Burgess, Donald Maclean, Anthony Blunt and John Cairncross, he was so successful that his Soviet spymasters suspected him of being a double agent. As well as being a close friend of Elliott, he also became the mentor of James Jesus Angleton, an American and one of the most powerful spies in history. The Old Boy network which had brought both Elliott and Philby into the intelligence service meant that while agents were secretive outside of their immediate circle, they were horribly indiscreet within it, trusting on bonds of class and social networking to protect them.

This is an excellent, readable account of Kim Philby's life, and indeed of the whole culture of espionage from the lead-up to the Second World War, through the war years, and then into the period of the Cold War, when Russia, not Germany, was seen as the enemy by the West, and particularly by the UK and America. Author and journalist Ben Macintyre is clearly fascinated by the subject of espionage as he has written several other factual books on this topic. His research is extensive, and this particular book has a revealing postscript by John le Carre, who of course also worked in the Secret Service. Macintyre starts his book with that very well known, and also in some ways, given the time of its writing, (1938) that very shocking statement by the novelist E.M. Forster: "If I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friends, I hope I should have the guts to betray my country" What in the end the Forster quote implies is that 'country' like ideology itself, can, taken to an extreme, lead to the devaluing of an individual life. The ism elevated above the humans who live within the ism, or believe the ism. Fidelity to the ism (nationalism, specific faith or political ideology ism) can lead to the terrible things that happen when not just the other person's ism, but indeed, the person themselves, becomes expendable for the sake of devotion to MY ism. The fascinating dichotomy in this book however, became the clash

between the 'club' - an upper class, public school, Oxbridge educated elite - a friendship of same background, bonded together with heavy drinking, those who were loyal to those friends, and would never betray their friends, and those, like Philby, whose loyalty was to the country of ideology.

I corrected the review to remove an error caught by Hamilton Beck in which I incorrectly stated the author had described the same event in inconsistent ways. This is a patchwork quilt of a book, stitching together the colorful bits from about two dozen popular accounts of the Philby affair. The author has a good ear for light anecdote and there's certainly plenty of dramatic material to mine. The result is an amusing story. Unfortunately it is more fiction than fact. The problem is that the underlying sources, while varying widely in reliability, average about equal amounts of truth and untruth. Picking the colorful bits biases the sample, and combining material uncritically introduces additional error. A good example is this quote from early in the book: "The daughter of a Russian-Jewish gold tycoon, Solomon was another exotic bloom in the colorful hothouse of Philby's circle: as a young woman she had had an affair with Aleksandr Kerensky, the Russian prime minister deposed by Lenin in the October Revolution, before going on to marry a British First World War general." Later in the book, we meet the same woman again: "Flora Solomon had lived a life that stretched, rather bizarrely, from the Russian Revolution to the British high street: after an early affair with a Bolshevik revolutionary and marriage to a British soldier. . ." It doesn't seem that the author has merely forgotten that he has already introduced Flora, the descriptions are so different that he perhaps doesn't recognize that she's the same person. Both descriptions are wrong. The affair with Kerensky (who was not a Bolshevik, he belonged to the Trudovik opposition) began when Flora was 32, eight years after she married Harold Solomon.

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