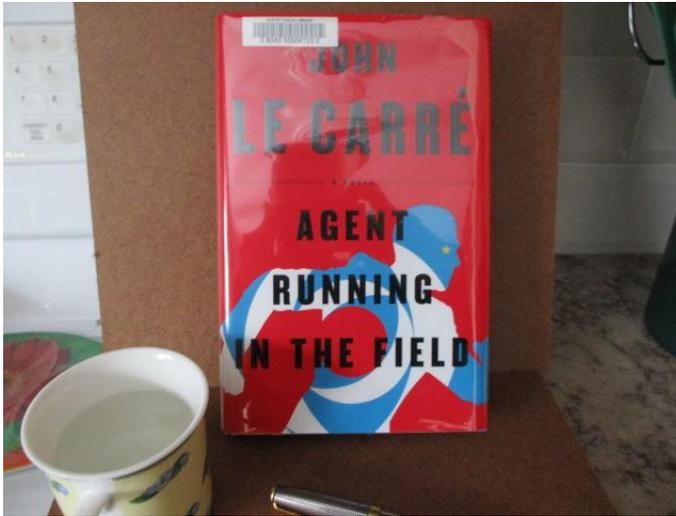


Agent Running in the Field

By Rod Fraser



I learned about John LeCarré's latest novel from Robert Fulford's recent review in the National Post. While it encouraged me to read the book, it also disclosed a number of facts about LeCarré I didn't know.

For example, I didn't know that John LeCarré is the pen name for David Cornwell. And I didn't know that Cornwell's father, Ronnie Cornwell, was a life-long con man who spent many years in jail.

Indeed, during LeCarré's childhood years, his father was often in prison and his visits to his father

took place on prison visiting days. LeCarré found his father to be an interesting man. As an author, he gleaned many useful ideas from the “insatiable criminality” of Ronnie Cornwell.

LeCarré is now 88 years of age and his current novel, *Agent Running in the Field*, is his 25th. This book is a little different from the past. The ‘Cold War’ is over. It deals with international intrigue between the United States and the European Union, with ‘Brexit’ threatening the latter (and encouraged by the former).

For those who abhor ‘Brexit’, Donald Trump’s America, and worship at the altar of international behemoths, you’ll like the politics. Fortunately, they are a minor distraction in the novel—a backdrop necessary to develop a plot of some interest to contemporary readers.

The book opens with the return of the central character, Nat, to Britain, at age 47, after a career with British intelligence. Nat was a spy recruiter and agent runner in Europe, speaks German and Russian, and worked at British embassies in Moscow, Budapest and Helsinki over the years.

His cover was that of a low level diplomat and he considers his best days behind him. Upon his return to Britain, he is reunited with his wife, Prue, and his daughter, Steffie. His personal life revolves around

an athletic club, close to his home, where he is the reigning badminton champion.

Here he meets Ed Shannon, who challenges him to a series of badminton games which take place over the forthcoming months. Ed is a Europhile who speaks loudly and dismissively of Donald Trump, Brexit and the politics of both. As the story develops, it turns out that Ed is also in the spy business, albeit in some kind of clerical capacity.

We also meet Florence in this novel. She works for Nat in his new role of running 'The Haven', a low-level spy station hosting a few foreign agents in the Greater London area. This is not considered to be a demanding post, until Sergei becomes a key property of Nat's, important because he is to be a king pin in a Russian intelligence operation.



With these four characters introduced, it appears the United States is planning to throw in with the 'Brexit' forces to take Britain out of Europe.

While this is the general plot, the story is really about the interaction of these four people, all from the intelligence world, pointing out their loyalties and conflicts, as well as the personal life of Nat, Prue and Steffie.

It's a great story, a page turner and peripherally

a novel about the changing politics in Europe and the United States. Despite your personal views on these matters, I suspect you'll enjoy the story along with its surprise ending.

As for the politics, I was surprised that Le Carré is so obviously a Europhile. During the 'Cold War' in the not-too-distant past, Britain and the United States were very close. For this reason, I expected his sympathies might lie with an Anglo-American future, rather than with a 'Greater Europe'.

But perhaps that is my particular bias, I recall during the early 1970s, when Britain first joined the European Common Market, many people in Canada were disappointed. We felt Britain had turned its back on Canada, the Anglosphere, the Commonwealth countries and a promising future outside Europe.

Brexit was (is?) the mechanism to turn that around, to remove Britain from a Europe, many think arbitrary, delusional and likely to fall apart.

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