



The Silent Oligarch

Christopher Morgan Jones

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“A happy partner to the work of Deighton, Archer, and le Carré... carried on craftily understated prose that approaches cold poetry... a first-class novel.” (*Booklist*, starred review)

Racing between London and Moscow, Kazakstan and the Caymans, *The Silent Oligarch* reveals a sinister unexplored world where the wealthy buy the justice they want—and the silence they need. Here private spy agencies duel for dominance, governments eagerly defer to the highest bidder, and colossal wealth is amassed through shadowy networks of companies. But where the money actually flows—and who benefits from such corruption—is something necessarily hidden, sometimes in plain sight.

Behind the imposing splendor of the Kremlin rises a run-down office building, home to the Russian Ministry of Natural Resources. A nondescript bureaucrat in a drab government agency, Konstanin Malin secretly controls a vast business that dominates the nation’s oil industry, making him one of the most feared and wealthy men in Russia. Over the years Malin has siphoned billions from the state and poured them into his private empire, hiding what he owns offshore.

The man who has done the hiding is Richard Lock, a diffident English lawyer whose life in Moscow is falling apart: criss-crossing the world administering his master’s affairs, he has seen his relationships with his estranged family and highly practical mistress slowly deteriorating. Lock is bound to Malin by marriage, complacency, greed, and most of all by a complex lie that neither can escape. But slowly, Lock is beginning to realise that the lie will not always hold.

Once an idealistic young journalist, Benjamin Webster now works as an investigator at a London corporate intelligence firm, a mercenary spy for the rich and powerful. Webster’s cynicism and anger were born when he witnessed a colleague murdered in Russia for asking too many tough questions; now, ten years later, he may finally be able to avenge her unsolved murder. Hired by a client to ruin Malin, he discovers that this shadowy figure may have arranged his friend’s gruesome death—to hide a terrible secret buried at the heart of his criminal empire.

Soon Webster realizes that Lock is Malin’s great weakness; and when he starts to apply pressure, Lock’s fragile world begins to crack. His colleagues begin dying mysteriously, his relationship with Malin turns ominously ice-cold. The police begin asking questions, the newspapers smell blood in the water, and Webster’s investigators close in on the truth. Suddenly Lock is running for his life—though from Malin or Webster, the law or his own past, he couldn’t say.

A heart-pounding hunt around the world, through opulent boardrooms and anonymous hotels, *The Silent Oligarch* is a chilling and unforgettable novel of our time.

The Silent Oligarch Details

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Author : Christopher Morgan Jones

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From Reader Review The Silent Oligarch for online ebook

Michael Drysdale says

This financial/espionage thriller is about a shady Greek businessman's attempt to destroy a Russian oligarch, Malin. This is done by employing British investigator Ben Webster who decides to investigate the oligarch's front man, Dutch lawyer Richard Lock. The story is seen through the eyes of these two characters.

I thought the book was very well written with a style similar to John Le Carre. The book describes how a maze of offshore companies might be used for money laundering. I found this interesting if a little text book like. The author really conveys a mood of menace and gives a good description of the moral dilemmas facing Webster and Lock. However I found the pace too slow and the plot lacked excitement. Three and a half stars.

Jaden Terrell says

I would say THE SILENT OLIGARCH is an excellent first novel, except that it doesn't have the feel of a first novel. It's much better than that. Author Chris Morgan Jones spent eleven years working for the world's leading business intelligence agency, and his in-depth knowledge of corporate espionage gives credibility and weight to the book. THE SILENT OLIGARCH has a complex plot and a large cast, both of which are necessary to the portrayal of the shadowy webs of intrigue that take place around corporate tables and in the shuffling of currency.

Protagonist Ben Webster is an investigator for an international corporate intelligence firm. When a wealthy but shady client offers to hire his company to investigate Russian bureaucrat Konstantin Malin, Ben sees a chance to solve and perhaps avenge the murder of a woman named Inessa, Ben's friend and colleague when he worked as a journalist in Russia. Ben has always believed Malin was behind Inessa's death, which still haunts him.

I found Ben a sympathetic and well-drawn character. Richard Lock, the front man for Malin's empire is also well-drawn; I found myself repulsed by some of his actions, even as I felt sorry for him because of the predicament he was in and his desire to break free of Malin's organization and begin again with his wife and daughter. But then, I'm a sucker for redemption.

The action builds slowly in this book. It's an intelligent thriller about corruption, machinations, and the toll these things take on men's souls. I enjoyed the book and look forward to Jones's next one.

Gerald Sinstadt says

John Le Carré casts a long shadow. If not the originator of espionage novels, he has taken the genre to a challenging new level. Books by other authors regularly emerge invoking the Le Carré name as recommendation. Very few - perhaps Alan Furst and Joseph Kanon - justify the claim. But now here is a new name delivering a first novel of quite stunning achievement.

Chris Morgan Jones postulates a pernicious enmity between two men of unimaginable wealth. One, Konstantin Malin, is a Russian oligarch manipulating dubious deals in oil and gas. He employs Richard Lock, a British/Dutch lawyer, to set up a spider's web of interlinked offshore companies to channel money out of Russia and back in again. Ben Webster is employed by a British investigation firm who are hired to bring down Malin. Webster identifies Lock as his target. Inexorably, the two men are drawn together.

The plot works, the detail is convincing, the tension scrupulously controlled, the conclusion implicit throughout but ultimately still surprising. So far, so *Le Carré*. What takes the comparison further is the quality of the writing and the sharpness of the observation. The relationship between Lock and his wife - an estranged couple who are striving to find a way to mend their relationship - is portrayed with almost painful insight.

An Agent of Deceit is as much about human frailty as it is about a shadowy world of money and power. No doubt Chris Morgan Jones will live comfortably for a while on the proceeds from a remarkable book; his readers will hope it is the first of many.

Wendy says

I picked this one up solely because some of it was based in Kazakhstan. If this was the case, there was little or no reference to culture, foods or anything of interest. Therefore, I will not be including it in my World Challenge.

If you readers enjoy conference room back stabbing intrigue, computer savy techies, and a bit of cloak and dagger, you will enjoy the plot. *Silent Oligarch* is heavy in financial forensics- something that does not interest me.

The character Lock is painted as a man who is trying to redeem himself of his sordid past. I only saw a money grubbing money laundering thief who suddenly needs to change his ways because he bloody well got caught. The other main character Webster is still haunted by a decade old murder and is at least a decent man trying to do good.

This book just wasn't for me.

Michael Griswold says

I hate not liking books. My Amazon history will tell people that. And I really hated not liking *The Silent Oligarch* because it had virtually everything a good political thriller would need: a shadowy bureaucrat nestled deep inside the Kremlin, a dummy corporation that makes the connected very wealthy a lawyer meant to be the perfect fall guy, and a tireless journalist still smarting from the murder of his friend, years earlier. All of the motivations seem plausible, and parts of the book do suck the reader in, but at the end, my reaction to the book as a whole is "I read this."

This book just didn't grab me. I thought the set up to the story was a bit slow and plodding and the characters just weren't able to consistently hold my attention. I'm really disappointed because the concept of the book sounds like an absolute winner, but most of the book felt flat and distant to me. I don't think I was ever invested in whether the characters lived, died, or moved to the Bahamas and changed their name and fingerprints. As a book experience, it was just sort of there.

Larry says

Jones has written a fairly engrossing book about the duel between an investigative journalist and the chief financial advisor to a powerful Russian oligarch. It's not suspenseful, but the characters are interesting and the writing is of a high caliber.

Andy Plonka says

I'm not a big fan of spy novels and international intrigue. and this book has both. The first two thirds were slow going for me as the author set up the various parts of the plot. The last third of the book flew by as the characters met their various fates and I found myself understanding and enjoying what I had decided was not my kind of book. This one was published in Great Britain as Act of Deceit so if you enjoyed the British book this is the same thing, different title.

Library_boyfriend says

I felt this book to be a 2 1/2 stars. For such a busy and intricate plot, the author did a very nice job keeping his writing, crisp and clean so that you could follow and fully understand what was happening. But then I kept expecting there to be more exciting events that would bring peaks to the story line but they never came. He also did a nice job of getting you to connect with the main characters, but not enough to be emotionally invested, which is what keeps me turning the page with enthusiasm. Overall, it was a book that was nice enough when I was reading it, but a book I had to remember to pick up to continue.

Orchid says

First Sentence:

"High in the air Webster watches the unbroken desert flow past, a deep copper red in the dawn, the sand ridged like waves rolling down toward the south."

What me to want to read The Silent Oligarch was the premise of a good old-fashion mystery/thriller. Did it make the cut, in that respect yes it did.

I loved for once reading a book that did not have a single damsel in distress or one with content that left me skipping pages left and right.

Admittedly, the first page of The Silent Oligarch did not interest me and left me feeling a little worried over how the rest of the book was going to go. Even so, I kept reading and the story and Mr. Jones' writing really picked up and began to pull me into the story and the lives of the two main characters. The more I read the more invested in the outcome I became.

While the mystery of who was pulling the strings was kind of vague-up until the very end- I had my personal theories, and I must say that I nearly spot on. I would tell you what my theory was and the conclusion, but then the whole entire outcome would be exposed and that is the last things I want to do to ya'll. I'll just say

this, it was well written from beginning to end and kind of stressful at times as both characters very nearly met their end at one point or another throughout the book.

I really liked how all the details slowly painted the full picture of corruption in Russia-in the book-and how the big the scope of Malin's empire was. I was also intrigued to see how exactly Lock fit into the whole scheme and what his role was. While the plot and story building were really good, what really makes this book is Lock and Webster and the changes that are wrought in the both of them as their stories progress.

At first I did not care for either Lock or Webster, the two main characters of the book. I thought that Lock was a weak willed character with absolutely no chance of breaking out of the life that he had come to be a part of. I know that probably sounds mean, but it's the truth. I did not think that he would ever get the nerve to try and walk a better path, so I pleasantly surprised when he started to evolve and get a backbone.

As for why I did not care for Webster in the beginning, well, let's just put it down to he was not very likable at first. But as the story progressed and you saw how what he did affected him and the way he thought I could not help but start to warm up to him. I loved the fact the he had doubts as to whether what he did was actually helping or hurting those that he got involved with.

In short, both characters go from being kind of meh, to ones you want to see survive the ordeal that they currently found themselves in.

What I really liked best about *The Silent Oligarch* would have to be how the tension slowly built through out the book. By the time I hit the half-way point in the book I did not want to sit it aside because I needed to know how things were going to turn out for both Lock and Webster, which meant that I was not much company on New Year's Eve because I wanted to finish the book before the year ended.

While I really did enjoy reading *The Silent Oligarch* there are two things that very nearly made me throw the book across the room in disgust. My first and biggest problem with this book would have to be how the Lord's name was taken in vain. A LOT. I was really enjoying the story and then the characters started throwing around the Lord's name left in right and not in a reverent manner. This irks me to no end while reading.

The other thing I did not like was there was bit more language then I had originally thought there was going to be, though it was not nearly as bad as my first complaint. These two reasons are why this is not a five pineapple read.

Final Verdict: *The Silent Oligarch*

The Silent Oligarch earns 4 out of 5 pineapples.

Review taken from my blog, *The Haunting of Orchid Forsythia*.

Crystal says

This is a different type of spy/industrial espionage book. It's so much more plausible than the others I have read and the characters are created as realistic people, they are not simply one sided and mysterious.

The book drags a little in some parts, as if it could have been a bit shorter and not quite so detailed, but at the same time I think that's part of what makes it so realistic. And despite that I still felt myself wanting more detail, not about the land scape which was constantly talked about, but about the "business outside of business", the few parties and dinners, that sort of thing.

All in all a great, but different, book.

Received as a goodread, thank you!

Ian Young says

An Agent of Deceit is an intelligent and convincing thriller set in the world of international finance. The story is told alternatively from the perspective of two lead characters.

Lock is a Dutch lawyer, brought up in the UK, who is employed by a shadowy Russian businessman. Over the course of a decade or so finds himself irrevocably tied to an increasingly complex network of companies whose chief purpose appears to be to disguise the passage of large sums of money originating somewhere in Russia. Lock is the ostensible owner of the entire network while retaining a very low media profile, but in practice is irrevocably in thrall to his mysterious Russian boss. In terms of business, Lock has become enormously wealthy and successful, but this has been at the expense of the breakdown of his family life and he has become increasingly dissatisfied. When one too many of Lock's deals goes wrong, he finds himself at the centre of an investigation by Webster, an employee of a private intelligence agency. Webster has his own reasons for pursuing the investigation with particular vigour - a decade previously he witnessed the murder of a Russian journalist and believes that Lock's boss may have been linked to this. The book follows the course of the investigation as seen by each of the two men.

Chris Morgan Jones worked for almost 10 years for a private intelligence agency and specialised in Russia. Therefore, he writes about a topic that he knows well, and this comes across clearly. Stories about shadowy Russian oligarchs are common in the newspapers and other media and the themes which are explored in this novel therefore have some significance. This is territory which has been covered effectively by John Le Carre, and I suspect that this novel will appeal to the same sort of readers who enjoy Le Carre's books.

This is not the sort of novel which I read very often. However, it is an engaging story with plenty of twists and turns which manages to avoid the obvious ending. In general, the characters seem to have real substance. Perhaps the one exception is Lock's boss, Malin, who is not completely convincing as the lead villain. However, this may be a deliberate choice on the author's part for reasons which become clear as the book reaches its climax. Not everything is tied up in the finale, and there is potential here for at least one follow-up. A good book for the holiday period for a reasonably serious reader or anyone with an interest in this genre.

Kathleen McFall says

A Distinctive Debut

Of late, I've noted a nascent theme embedded in some new fiction writing, especially the thriller/suspense variety: a scathing critique of capitalism, in particular, its human impact. It's not a surprise, I suppose, to see a vanguard of contemporary American fiction seeking to make sense of the most pressing intellectual topic in society today - the literary manifestations of the Tea Party and Occupy movements.

This new work is in some cases fantastical with authors honed into conspiracy theories or shadowy illuminati as primary fodder. Others seek out the holy grail of le Carre documentary-style faux realism. Others still are intimate portraits of lives ruined (or realized) from wealth (or its absence).

All are important and exciting to read; it's a trend that's akin to what happened in the sci-fi pulp fiction of earlier eras, the glory days of Phillip K. Dick and the like, when new authors bravely excavated and extrapolated contemporary realities, inserting fiction into social dialogues where it belongs.

The Silent Oligarch falls into this emerging genre (whose label has yet to coalesce), a quiet thriller in the le Carre category noted above, a plot heavily anchored in - and moved along by - the financial details of doing business in the new Russia. *The Silent Oligarch* is a very good book and well worth my time to read.

As described by the publisher, "A nondescript bureaucrat in a drab government agency, Konstanin Malin secretly controls a vast business that dominates the nation's oil industry, making him one of the most feared and wealthy men in Russia."

But it's really Richard Lock, a British neer-do-well attorney, who is the front man for this vast wealth machine. Rewarded with a life of un-surpassing ease and luxury, Lock signs the documents, sets up the fake offshore accounts, and carries the various electronic keys that make the oil and gas industry in Russia just barely legal - and legitimate enough to lure foreign investment.

Unsurprisingly for the plot, Lock suddenly wants out of this "sinister" underworld (a middle-age crisis, the motivation is unclear...), to return to a simple life with his wife and daughter. A host of government agencies, shadowy and otherwise, are only too happy to help him, granted he provides the goods on the real oligarchs pulling and pushing the Russian levers of business. The good guys, located in London, are represented in the plot by journalist-turned spymaster Benjamin Webster, brought in to apply pressure on Lock as he takes timid baby-steps toward changing his life.

But wait, does this nefarious plot go all the way to Putin? Of course it does.

And that's what makes this book work. The storyline is ripped from the headlines of business media from around the world. Anyone paying attention to the billion dollar ups and downs of the oil and natural gas industry in Russia (heard of Sakhalin?), the imprisonment of Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the assassination of journalists just doing their job, and the simple fact that Putin is once again President of Russia would have little trouble believing the premise of this solidly researched and well-written thriller.

My threshold for reading fiction of this type is twofold: Do I learn something and is it entertaining? Both were easily met, with the first more so than the second. The focus on financial realism - deeply important and clearly an area in which the author has considerable knowledge and expertise - made the book a bit tough to access. In turn, this is also what makes the book distinctive, and probably will make it stand the test of literary time.

Russia is one of the most interesting places in the world today, and probably one of the most dangerous in this time of rapid transformation. *The Silent Oligarch* provides a glimpse into the havoc that unbridled capitalism and the lure of wealth (along with the sense of violent entitlement) can wreak on the fabric and culture both of a country and its people. Take note America.

Liz Lipperman says

I don't normally read thrillers, preferring lighter mysteries, but the premise of this book intrigued me. Not only was I pleasantly surprised, but I also got a great history lesson as a bonus. The author weaved his fast paced plot through Russia, London, Berlin, and the Riviera and carried me right along with him. By the time I hit the halfway mark, I began to wonder why it has taken me so long to read this genre. If *The Silent Oligarch* is representative of the genre, count me in for more, especially if they're penned by Mr. Jones.

Richard says

This is the first novel written by Mr. Jones, following an 11-year career working "at the world's largest business intelligence agency." He has drawn heavily on his experiences advising Middle Eastern governments, Russian oligarchs, New York banks, London hedge funds, and African mining companies.

The story quickly moves between London, Moscow, Kazakhstan and the Cayman Islands. It explores a sinister unexplored world where the wealthy buy the justice they want and the silence they need. The main character is Richard Lock, an English lawyer who has spent many years in Moscow at the bidding of the Russian mafia and has been well rewarded financially. It is his job to hide all the transactions taking place and launder the money in the process. When his world begins to fall apart, and his friends begin to die in strange ways, he believes that he will be next -- and tries to find a way out.

Stephen says

Great. Could hardly put it down. Cliche but true. On to Ben Webster #3!
