



The Spy in the Ointment

Donald E. Westlake

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Author : Donald E. Westlake

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From Reader Review The Spy in the Ointment for online ebook

Spiros says

J. Eugene Raxford, surprisingly enough, is not a character in a W.C. Fields movie: he is a nebbish sharing a hovel on the Lower East Side with a recalcitrant mimeograph machine. As the head of a pacifist organization with a "present membership of seventeen, twelve of whom are on the inactive list", he is under constant FBI surveillance. All is not bleak, however: he is shacking up with a beautiful, blonde heiress, with an empty head and a heart of gold.

Owing to a clerical error on the part of the FBI, Gene is recruited into a terrorist cabal, who are planning an ambitious campaign to blow up the U.N building. Working for the Feds, can Eugene overcome his deep-seated pacifist principles to actively foil the plot?

The result of this set up feels very much like an early Woody Allen reconfiguring of The Man Who Was Thursday: highly entertaining.

Jessica says

This was a fun book to read. The tone and humor reminded me a lot of Tom Robbins, and I love the ordinary-guy-turned-spy storyline. It was a smart, fun, quick read. Highly recommend this, it would make a great vacation book as it is relatively short and fast paced.

William says

Sure, some of the references in a book written almost fifty years ago will be dated, but this is still a fair amount of fun to read. And one could argue that a story about terrorist plots is actually very timely in today's world.

Gene Raxford, the central character, is pleasantly distinctive. He is certainly not hard-boiled, but also not incompetent, so perhaps "soft-boiled?" I found Westlake's humor effective, and the plot, while zany to the point of absurdity, still somehow holds together pretty well.

Certainly not "literature," but a diverting read, and there's a lot to be said for that.

Book Concierge says

2.5 stars.

This is not his best, but still an entertaining crime caper from 1966. Cold war counter spies play a big role, so it's obviously dated.

Karyn says

My first ever Donal E Westlake... read this back in jr. high. What a great book! It caused me to become a

lifelong Westlake fan. Very funny book.

Rob says

I very much enjoyed this book. Fast and light read, clever and pretty funny, and a plot pulling you quickly through.

Basic story is about a pacifist guy who is head of a pacifist group. Due to an FBI typo, his group gets confused with a real terrorist org and he ends up involved in a terrorist ring planning to blow-up the UN. Very clever and funny premise, no?

The book was written in 1966, but didn't feel particularly dated to me.

Patty says

Another wacky comedy caper.

Ken Deshaies says

A fun read by a creative and funny spy novelist. Good reading when you want something light and not requiring a great deal of deep attention.

Denise M. says

AKA: Alan Marshall, Alan Marsh, James Blue, Ben Christopher, Edwin West, John B. Allan, Curt Clark, Tucker Coe, P.N. Castor, Timothy J. Culver, J. Morgan Cunningham, Samuel Holt, Judson Jack Carmichael, Richard Stark, Donald E. Westlake

Tiletha Melendez says

It was an OK read very dated book about spy espionage and it reminds me of that movie The Naked Gun where that he is on a mission but in a humorous way.

Zora says

It may be dated, but I still love this book, the second seriously funny Westlake he wrote. The hapless hero is a pacifist who is forced to work with the FBI to catch some serious terrorists. The tone of the narrative is a good chunk of the fun, here. We see the beginning of Westlake's clever word-play jokes (later, these are sometimes hard to find--you have to study the books to discover some of them).

Peggy says

I first read this book as a teenager and have loved it ever since. I pick it up again every few years (usually when I run across it in a box or when cleaning shelves) and enjoy it all over again. Hopelessly out dated now it still has some timely topics. It's light and funny and just a great read.

Mike says

I think this is one of Westlake's earlier comic novels. It's kind of funny to realize as he describes a secondary character's house that the dude basically lives in Archie Bunker's basement.

Mary Newcomb says

Gene Raxford starts and ends this tale as a pacifist. In the middle, he is a spy and a few other things. Only Donald Westlake could pull off this quest, save the UN and kill off most of the "terrorists" while keeping the tale highly amusing.

Nils Andersson says

I remember - something like 40 years ago! - lying in a rocking hammock on a sunny summer afternoon reading Dancing Aztecs. It was my first experience of Donald Westlake - borrowed from my mum - and I was hooked. By now, I have read pretty much all his comedy capers and I remain hooked. This book, which is a fairly early example, did not disappoint. The message is simple. It is not always easy being a pacifist.

Tony Gleeson says

A very early Westlake romp, silly and fun.... but having a rather dated mid-60s feel and lacking the discipline that would enhance the gleefully subversive humor of his later work. Hey, he was still learning, and it's fun to watch him learning . This one pokes fun at naïve activism and political extremism, as well as at the staidness of Federal agents. The plot-- for what it's worth-- involves a youthful zealot who gets caught up in the weirdest, most Byzantine conspiracy imaginable and is recruited by an unnamed agency as a reluctant undercover operative.

Westlake was usually willing to push the envelope and take chances, and while he tends to overwork the gags and the plot twists in this one, they do produce a few laughs. A Westlake completist such as yours truly will want to read this one-- but I do not suggest it as an introduction to the writer.
