

Our Kind of Traitor (2016)

Rated R. Running time: 1 hour 46 min.

Our content ratings: Violence 4; Language 5; Sex/Nudity 3.

Our star rating (1-5): 4

Many proclaim themselves loyal, but who can find one worthy of trust?

Proverbs 20:6

The theme of trust (and mistrust) is at the heart of director Susanna White's film, adapted by Hossein Amini from the novel by John le Carré. Film buffs will be reminded of Alfred Hitchcock's 1956 film *The Man Who Knew Too Much*. Both films have scenes set in Marrakesh, and both feature an ordinary couple caught up in international intrigue so dangerous that they risk their lives if they continue on.

Perry Makepeace (Ewan McGregor) and his lover Gail (Naomie Harris) have come to North Africa to revive their flagging relationship. It does not seem to be working, because she leaves Perry alone at the restaurant dinner table to do some work. Over by the bar a loud party of Russians has been making them aware of their presence.

Perry, a British professor of literature, is not alone for long until the loudest of the Russians invites him over to join their party for a drink. The man introduces himself as Dima (Stellan Skarsgård), and after Perry reluctantly accepts a drink, he shows what a patsy he is by agreeing to come to an all night party hosted by Dima. It is one of those lavish affairs with lots of scantily clad imported women, fireworks, food and drink, and anything else a host with tons of money to throw away can provide.

Gail is not thrilled by his late return to their room or the news that he has accepted an invitation to play tennis with Demi and for them both to join the Russian's family for dinner the next night—it is, as she petulantly reminds him, their last night in the city. To skip over the details, Demi is the money launderer for the Russian mafia. Its head, known as the "The Prince" (Grigoriy Dobrygin) is notorious for having his employees killed once he has no further use for them. At the beginning of the film we saw the murder of a well dressed man and wife driving on a lonely road through a snow-covered forest. The husband had just been congratulated by the Prince and given a valuable pistol as part of his reward. The assassin, after shooting the man and chasing down and killing the fleeing wife, reaches into the car and retrieves the ornate gun case. He wipes away the blood so it will be clean for the next unfortunate recipient.

Demi gives Perry a USB drive that lists all the accounts and names of crooked Westerners who work with the Russian criminals. He urges the startled man to turn it over to British Intelligence so that he can make a deal to supply further information in exchange for asylum for his family. Demi is very devoted to his wife and daughter, as we see when the going gets rough later in Paris and then in the Alps. This is the redeeming factor in Demi's character, plus his growing affection and concern for Perry and Gail. Perry is reluctant at first, and Gail very much opposed to becoming involved in any way with the Russian.

When Perry hands over the drive to MI6 agent Hector (Damian Lewis), the latter wants to help broker the deal, but his immediate superior refuses to give him any authorization or man power to protect the Russian. Hector apparently has been suspicious for a long time about some of the higher ups in M16 and the government. This has put him on the outs with his superiors.

Demi is in a position to show that high placed corrupt

officials in Britain, and indeed all over Europe, have become rich by cooperating with the Prince. He is about to set up a new bank in London that will become the main money laundering channel. But what can the would be "traitor" do, especially when the Prince, learning of his involvement with Perry and Gail (now all for helping), has dispatched a small army of goons to kill them all?

Of the four main cast members Stellan Skarsgård is the standout as the exuberant Russian who lights up any gathering he is in. His loud, boisterous manner covers up the inner fear of his family being murdered. So devoted is he to saving his wife and daughter, he has gambled on a stranger whom he has never met , entrusting the very lives of his family into his hands. When Perry asks him why he chose him, Demi smiles and replies, "You were the only one left in the restaurant that night."

It is good to see a thriller that does not depend on car chases, gun battles and fist fights, or chases over rooftops or through narrow streets and tunnels in order to keep our interest. This probably is not a spy drama for youth, but for adults who want an adventure that is (somewhat) believable.

This review with a set of discussion questions will be in the July issue of VP.