



The Dreyfus Affair: The Scandal That Tore France in Two

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July 20, 1894. The German military attaché in Paris receives a visit from a seedy-looking man who claims to be a French army officer in desperate need of money, offering to sell them military secrets.

Captain Alfred Dreyfus was a rising star in the French artillery command. Reserved yet intelligent and ambitious, Dreyfus had everything: a family, money, and a clear path to a prestigious post on the General Staff. However, Dreyfus had enemies as a result of his ambition. Many of them came from the impoverished Catholic aristocracy and disliked Dreyfus because he was rich, bourgeois, and, above all, a Jew.

On the basis of flimsy evidence, Dreyfus was placed under arrest for the crime of high treason. Not long afterward, he was sentenced to spend the rest of his life on the legendary, lethal Devil's Island. The saga of Dreyfus's many trials—he was not exonerated until 1906, twelve years after first being arrested—the fight to free him, and the intrigues on both sides, is a fast-moving mystery story rife with heroes and villains, loose women, loyal wives, bisexual men, tricksters, and charlatans. But this was no mere sideshow. The anti-Semitism and deceit on display in the Dreyfus case was an ominous prelude to the Holocaust and the long, bloody twentieth century to come.

In an era when religious conflict, fierce patriotism, and charged debates over national identity pervade the public sphere, the scandal of Captain Dreyfus still has much to teach us. In the hands of prizewinning novelist, biographer, and narrative historian Piers Paul Read, this real-life morality tale comes alive for a new generation. Using his storytelling skills and a nuanced, deep knowledge of French history, Read rediscovers l'affaire Dreyfus as a rich, riveting tale.

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