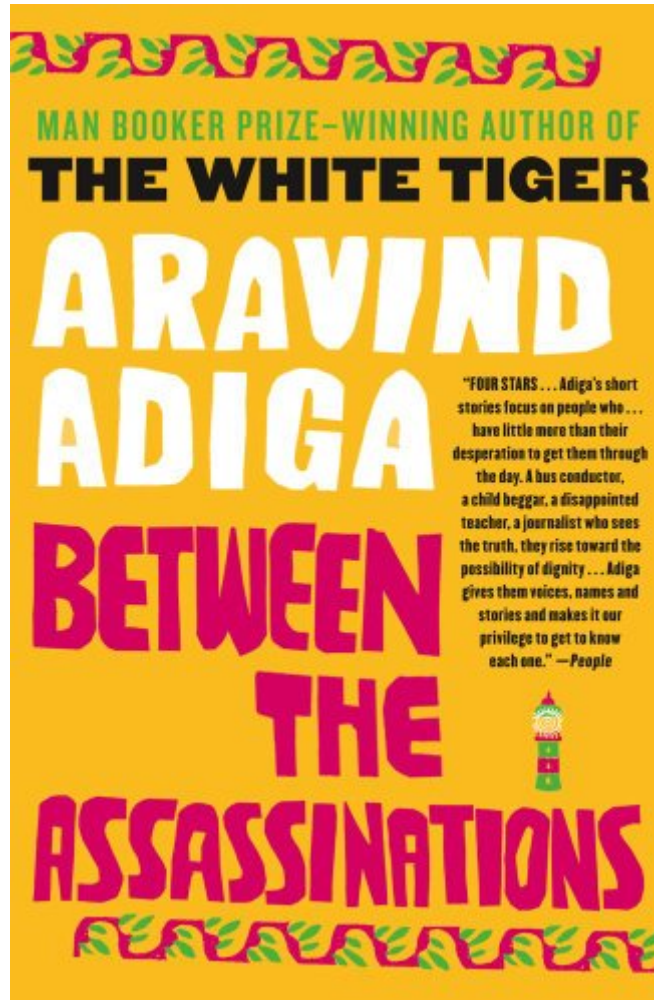


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Between The Assassinations



Synopsis

Welcome to Kittur, India. It's on India's southwestern coast, bounded by the Arabian Sea to the west and the Kalliamma River to the south and east. It's blessed with rich soil and scenic beauty, and it's been around for centuries. Of its 193,432 residents, only 89 declare themselves to be without religion or caste. And if the characters in *Between the Assassinations* are any indication, Kittur is an extraordinary crossroads of the brightest minds and the poorest morals, the up-and-coming and the downtrodden, and the poets and the prophets of an India that modern literature has rarely addressed. A twelve-year-old boy named Ziauddin, a gofer at a tea shop near the railway station, is enticed into wrongdoing because a fair-skinned stranger treats him with dignity and warmth. George D'Souza, a mosquito-repellent sprayer, elevates himself to gardener and then chauffeur to the lovely, young Mrs. Gomes, and then loses it all when he attempts to be something more. A little girl's first act of love for her father is to beg on the street for money to support his drug habit. A factory owner is forced to choose between buying into underworld economics and blinding his staff or closing up shop. A privileged schoolboy, using his own ties to the Kittur underworld, sets off an explosive in a Jesuit-school classroom in protest against casteism. A childless couple takes refuge in a rapidly diminishing forest on the outskirts of town, feeding a group of "intimates" who visit only to mock them. And the loneliest member of the Marxist-Maoist Party of India falls in love with the one young woman, in the poorest part of town, whom he cannot afford to wed. *Between the Assassinations* showcases the most beloved aspects of Adiga's writing to brilliant effect: the class struggle rendered personal; the fury of the underdog and the fire of the iconoclast; and the prodigiously ambitious narrative talent that has earned Adiga acclaim around the world and comparisons to Gogol, Ellison, Kipling, and Palahniuk. In the words of *The Guardian* (London), "*Between the Assassinations* shows that Adiga...is one of the most important voices to emerge from India in recent years." A blinding, brilliant, and brave mosaic of Indian life as it is lived in a place called Kittur, *Between the Assassinations*, with all the humor, sympathy, and unflinching candor of *The White Tiger*, enlarges our understanding of the world we live in today.

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Customer Reviews

I'll be the fool that treads where the critic-angels may fear to go: with Aravind Adiga's *White Tiger* debut, and his *Between the Assassinations* encore, we are being invited to witness the birth of a literary superstar. My argument is a brief one: *White Tiger* (which I loved) won the 2008 Man Booker Prize; *Between the Assassinations* is deeper, richer, even better. What makes *Between the Assassinations* superior literature as well as an absorbingly pleasurable (superior and pleasurable are NOT necessarily synonymous!) read? Several qualities, starting with Adiga's ability to describe his homeland of India with the eye of an eagle, and the heart of a lover. In vivid, accessible, witty, fast-moving prose, the author describes life in an Indian city with a vision that is clear, but not jaundiced, realistic but not morose. *Between the Assassinations* is a collection of fourteen stories that describe one week in the life of Kittur, a city with enough diversity of culture, language, and religion to give Adiga an ample backdrop for stories about inter-faith tension, caste, corruption, gentility, quiet heroism, lost love, environmental devastation, the struggle (and, at times, the smoldering rage) of the abysmally poor, and spectacular irony. The stories are strung like glittering stones on a necklace: each tale distinct, the strong thread of human life in Kittur connecting all. One story involves a Muslim child, ejected from his rural family to fend for himself during the dry season. On his arrival in Kittur, looking for employment, he states "I'm a Muslim, sir, we don't do hanky-panky." How does this creed play out in the face of sleeping on the street and flirting with outright starvation? The ending surprised me.

A short collection of somewhat interrelated short stories set in a supposedly fictional city (closely

based on Mangalore?) in the Karnataka state of India that never fails to be interesting, but feels as if it falls just short of enlightening. A few of the short stories stand out as ambiguous and haunting: the story of a young Muslim boy who finds a job watching trains, the story of a privileged young man who toys with a little harmless nihilistic violence, and the story of the lesser half of an extremely small radical Communist party who is forced to confront the end of Communism and by extension what his life has meant. They're the sort of short stories that burrow into your mind and pop unbidden into your mind for years to come. Unfortunately, the same can't be said of all of them. What's funny is that I can't think of any stories that I disliked. From the little girl, sweetly dedicated to her undeserving father and quite wicked and foul-mouthed to others, to the newspaper reporter who finds quite another world than the one he had been writing about, to the day-laborers who are mercilessly betrayed by fate, the characters do feel realistic and worth knowing. Many of the stories do not depict epiphanies or moments of action, though - quite a few do seem to describe an average day or week in the life of the characters. I quite liked Adiga's writing, which is unsentimental and very direct, though not simple or minimalist. The closely-observed personal interactions are of particularly high quality. His penchant for black humor and picturesque turns of phrase makes for very entertaining reading in short spurts despite the dark and embittering subject matter.

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