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From Russia With Love: James Bond, Book 5



Synopsis

James Bond is targeted for elimination by SMERSH, and the malevolent Colonel Rosa Klebb has set a trap in Istanbul. The bait is the Spektor decoding machine, which is to be delivered by the irresistible Tatiana Romanova. The assassin is Red Grant, a psychopath who has defected from the West. Bond and Tatiana become pawns in a game of cross and double-cross that reaches its deadly finale on the Orient Express. This audiobook includes a bonus interview with Toby Stephens. Blackstone Audio, Inc. James Bond and 007 are registered trademarks of Danjaq LLC, used under license by Ian Fleming Publications Ltd

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Customer Reviews

What is most noteworthy about this entry in the extended series is when Bond enters the story. The novel is nearly half over by the time the signature spy is introduced. Fully half the work involves showing the reader the lengths and effort SMERSH is using to eliminate Bond. This approach was wholly original and helped further define Bond (and by extension, the world in which he operates) by offering so much detail about his opposition. While the above mentioned set-up was a welcome change of pace, the overt monologuing at the end of the story was... less so. Indeed, "Captain Nash's" speech at the end of the book proved my biggest dislike. Regardless of how part and parcel that practice is with this particular series, it was still distracting and borderline disruptive. It is one thing to accept Bond's greatest qualities as a secret agent are his fortitude and unearthly luck. It is quite another to find his antagonists regularly explaining every facet of their plan, however minute

(and at times, not entirely relevant to Bond). Yes, it is part of the charm peculiar to this sub genre of spy fiction, but surely there must be other ways to present that information, even if that deviation from the formula is only occasional. All ranting about plot presentation aside, "From Russia With Love" still stands as one of the great pulp spy thrillers. The reasons are many and varied; well worth spending a few hours to discover and delight in. And now for everyone's favorite part of a review... quotes!"They are hard people. With them, what you don't get from strength, you won't get from mercy." "General G. sought for a final phrase to convey the threat without defining it. He found it. "There will be," he paused and looked, with artificial mildness, down the table, "displeasure." "Even the highest tree has an axe waiting at its foot." "A great deal of killing has to be done in the U.S.S.R., not because the average Russian is a cruel man, although some of their races are among the cruellest peoples in the world, but as an instrument of policy. People who act against the State are enemies of the State, and the State has no room for enemies. There is too much to do for precious time to be allotted to them, and, if they are a persistent nuisance, they get killed. In a country with a population of 200,000,000, you can kill many thousands a year without missing them. If, as happened in the two biggest purges, a million people have to be killed in one year, that is also not a grave loss. The serious problem is the shortage of executioners. Executioners have a short life. They get tired of the work. The soul sickens of it. After ten, twenty, a hundred death-rattles, the human being, however sub-human he may be, acquires, perhaps by a process of osmosis with death itself, a germ of death which enters his body and eats into him like a canker. Melancholy and drink take him, and a dreadful lassitude which brings a glaze to the eyes and slows up the movements and destroys accuracy. When the employer sees these signs he has no alternative but to execute the executioner and find another one."

Re-reading this novel for the first time in almost fifty years, I was struck by how many differences exist in the James Bond as created by Ian Fleming and the caricature of that persona that quickly took off in the film equivalents of these books. While the film of this novel adhered more closely to the plot of this book than most of the other films, "From Russia With Love" is clearly rooted in the Cold War world of the 1950s when the Soviets and the Western powers were engaged in covert, and sometimes overt, chess games where, even when one power could not overpower the other through sheer force of weaponry, they would at least win through outwitting their opponents. The British Empire no longer held the ascendant authority as policeman of the planet as it once had. That role had been seized by the

United States. Britain's impotence was underscored by high profile defections of agents Burgess and Maclean, both of whom are cited in this novel. However, SMERSH, the real-life Soviet counterintelligence agency, still sees Britain as a formidable opponent as exemplified in the exceptional agent James Bond. They list their recent defeats at his hand i.e. incidents recounted in most of the preceding novels of the series and devise a circuitous plan to kill him and embarrass the British Secret Service in a fresh scandal, using a beautiful Russian agent who wants to defect but only with the aid of the great spy James Bond, with whom she has fallen in love at first sight of a photograph. In return for Bond's aid, Tatiana Romanova will deliver the Spektor, a prized Soviet decoding machine. Bond's superior, M, directs Bond to accept the job despite his disapproval of Bond's amorous escapades. M and his colleagues are enticed by the prospect of obtaining this machine (inspired by the Enigma decoding machine used in World War II) and see Bond as the most qualified for this job as escort for the love-smitten young Russian agent. They, and Bond, see it, naively, as a fairly straightforward operation. While Bond has the obvious reputation as something of a playboy, unlike his cinematic counterpart he actually seems somewhat monogamous. At the beginning of the novel he is still recovering from the slow dissolution of his romance with Tiffany Case, the female protagonist of the previous novel, *Diamonds are Forever*, and is not initially eager to plunge into another romantic intrigue. Of course, once he meets Tania (as her friends call her) he quickly becomes intrigued and a bit infatuated to the point that he is concerned about her fate (and theirs as a couple) after this operation is concluded. The Soviet scheme is devised by chess master Kronsteen and Rosa Klebb, head of Operations and Executions. They enlist the homicidal Red Grant as Bond's killer. Most of this is unknown by Tatiana, who is a pawn with limited knowledge of the extent of the game she is playing. There is no single diabolical villain who lusts for world domination, just a few psychopathic Soviets out to embarrass the decadent Brits. As I read this novel, I noted how much space is devoted to what Bond eats for breakfast, the cigarettes he smokes, the martinis he drinks (although the phrase *shaken not stirred* is not used once), how he dresses. Fleming is describing a lifestyle that he envies or at least idealizes as much as he is writing a spy thriller. There are so many passages that don't obviously propel the plot but simply add atmosphere to the tale. Fleming's books have been described as travelogues and they definitely fit that description but they are also depictions of a fantasy lifestyle of romance, danger and the good life or what Fleming would like to persuade his largely male readers is a good life. Regarding Bond's *license to kill* I

noticed how, when his Turkish ally Darko Kerim vows revenge against a Bulgarian refugee named Krilencu, Bond accompanies him but inwardly recoils at Kerim's killing of the man in cold blood (shooting the man in the dark using an infrared sight after he escapes from a trapdoor embedded in a movie billboard, emerging from Marilyn Monroe's mouth). I sense that Bond is at heart still tied to an ideal of sportsmanship. I don't recall if the license to kill was depicted in the novels as consent for Bond to kill with discretion as it seems to be in the films. I will have to revisit more novels and films to make an assessment of that feature. I will not be revealing a spoiler by stating that it ends with Bond being stabbed by a poison tipped blade emerging from Rosa Klebb's shoe and falling to unconsciousness as *From Russia With Love* is only Novel # 5 of 12 (Fleming also wrote a couple of collections of James Bond stories). He certainly intended to leave Bond's fate up in the air at the novel's conclusion. Perhaps he saw this as a possible exit strategy much as Arthur Conan Doyle had done with Sherlock Holmes at the end of his story "The Final Problem." Obviously, he continued the series. Far from being the final Bond novel, *From Russia With Love* falls clearly within the first half of the series. Although Fleming's Bond fantasies bear only a tenuous resemblance to real life MI6 operations (it took John Le Carre to bring a sense of authenticity to the real life of a British secret agent in the Cold War era), they still seem more rooted in a world resembling ours than the film series that grew progressively more absurd and exaggerated. Fleming describes a character that is not simply a killing machine or a seduction machine or a shaken not stirred martini drinker. While he is never as conscience-ridden as most of Le Carre's protagonists, James Bond is a recognizable man who worries and berates himself for not measuring up to ideals that have been set for him or that he has set for himself. I think he basically wants to be a good agent (it's the only job for which he's really qualified) but he'll live as much of this good life as he can along the way.

Much better than the Bond movie! The plot is tight-knitted and it's not that predictable. The sex scenes are delightful but not overly exploited. The actions are explosive, but not overly violent or gory. I found the Bond character much more believable than the movies, with real emotions and human flaws. Very likable indeed. Lots of fascinating details to entertain. Probably there are some

parts uncomfortable for today's readers such as bias toward cultures and nations other than British. It reflects the period of time when the book was written.

JFK's like of this book is understandable. Bond is caught up in a battle with the bad guys that presents a beautiful girl to pry the needed info from him. The information was not as important as the the girl falling in love with Bond. Nothing like doing your job and have a romantic relationship in the process. Fleming does a great job of presenting the plot that includes espionage along with an intimate romance of an innocent lady that was recruited to pry the info needed from Bond regardless of the romantic moves that Bond was known to use. JFK may have used some of these tactics in his job at the White House.

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