

Need to Know

An Archive of Journalistic Pursuits

JEREMY DUNS

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Also by Jeremy Duns

FICTION

Free Agent

Song of Treason

The Moscow Option

Spy Out the Land

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Introduction

IN THE LAST decade or so, I've written five full-length books. Along the way, I've also self-published several shorter works, most of which have expanded on articles I've written that I felt warranted more space than was possible in newspapers or magazines, but which didn't deserve full-length treatments.

This book collects all these shorter works and a few other pieces that haven't previously appeared in book form, including some of my early journalism. In creating this compilation, I wondered what motivated me to write about some of these topics, many of which I researched over the course of several years. Most of the time, I think, I simply wanted to find answers to questions that intrigued me, and then doggedly (or perhaps stubbornly) pursued them. Sometimes this has seemed like a distraction, a way to let off steam when wrestling with writing my 'main' books. Sometimes it has been as a result of my research for my novels (mercenaries in Africa, for example) or fed into them: my interest in Antony Terry and Sarah Gainham led to the creation of Sandy Harmigan and Rachel Gold in my novel *Spy Out the Land*, and eventually resulted in *Agent of Influence*.

NEED TO KNOW

The section titled *Blunt Instruments* is part of a much longer abandoned work in which I aimed to look at some of the forgotten influences of Ian Fleming. I abandoned it for a few reasons, one of which is that it became increasingly unwieldy and I despaired at how long it would take me to research fully: I had pencilled in chapters examining in detail the penny dreadfuls, Biggles, American pulps and much more besides. Another reason was that my research into Dennis Wheatley's work had convinced me that his was the most striking forgotten influence on Fleming, and that eventually became *A Spy is Born*.

This collection comes full circle with *Cabal*, the first piece of fiction I wrote that I felt had any value. Rather than taking a strictly chronological approach, I've tried to arrange the material in an order that makes sense – but this probably isn't a book to read sequentially anyway. I hope you find something in it of interest.

Jeremy Duns

Mariehamn, December 2020

Belgian Angles

THE FOLLOWING EIGHT articles are all from my early years as a journalist, when I was writing for *The Bulletin*, an English-speaking magazine in Brussels. It was here I got my first taste for throwing myself down rabbit-holes in search of arcane pieces of information—the goal was always to find an unusual story with broad appeal that also had a ‘Belgian angle’, however tangential that might be. I interviewed Jean-Claude Van Damme about his early life as a ballet dancer, Alan Moore on Hollywood and pornography, Marti Pellow about his heroin addiction, and tracked down unreleased music by soul legend Marvin Gaye. During these years I was also researching my first novel, *Free Agent*, and some of my fascination with spies, mercenaries and assassins seeped into my day job. I wrote dozens more articles in this time, but I think these few stand up well enough to be aired again all these years later.

The Scientist Who Knew Too Much

IT WAS A cold wet evening in the Brussels suburb of Uccle, and Jerry was glad he was nearly home. His assistant had given him a lift to Avenue François Folie, and as he stepped through the gates of the Residence Minerve he was still smiling at the story she had told him about a female colleague asking her out on a date.

He took the lift up to the sixth floor. He was 62 now and the stairs didn't appeal. Besides, he was carrying his large black canvas bag. Today, it was even heavier than usual: as well as the usual documents from the office, it also contained \$20,000 in cash. Jerry came out of the lift and turned left and left again, until he came to number 20: his apartment. He took out his keys, registering the sound of footsteps further down the corridor. That was nothing unusual—it was a busy building. Then the footsteps stopped.

Three shots were fired into Jerry's back, forcing his body into the door. Although he was dead, the killer didn't flee. Instead, he leaned over and placed the pistol—a 7.65-millimetre automatic with a silencer—against the back of Jerry's neck. He pulled the trigger twice more, spraying the corridor's carpet with blood and fragments of bone.

The job was done.

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THE ABOVE IS not an excerpt from Frederick Forsyth's latest thriller, but a reconstructed account of real events that took place on March 22, 1990. Jerry was Doctor Gerald Vincent Bull, and the story leading up to his assassination in Brussels encompasses Saddam Hussein, weapons of mass destruction and several of the world's intelligence agencies. It's the story of the downfall of the greatest gun designer of the 20th century and how it ended here, less than 15 years ago.

Gerald Bull was born in Ontario, Canada, in 1928, the second youngest of 10 children in a middle-class family. When he was three, his mother died of complications following the birth of his younger brother. His father suffered a nervous breakdown as a result, and Bull found himself living on a farm with his uncle and aunt. At 10, they sent him to a nearby Jesuit college, where he studied until he was 16.

After receiving two model aircraft kits for Christmas, Bull became interested in aeronautics, which he went on to study at the University of Toronto. By 24, he was working at the university's Institute of Aerophysics. Largely funded by Canada's Defence Research Board, the institute was investigating supersonic aerodynamics. In a 1953 interview with the Canadian magazine *Maclean's*, Bull enthused about the possible civilian applications of the work he was doing: 'It can provide us with safer and faster air travel. It will help us conquer space, man's last frontier. Some day, guided missiles will carry mail instead of a warhead, and a letter mailed in Vancouver will be in Halifax an hour later.'

Bull's idealism would not last long. In 1949, the Canadian government gave the Institute funding to create a tunnel capable of producing winds travelling at seven times the speed of sound. The project would lead to breakthroughs in supersonic science—and allow Canada to develop new kinds of aircrafts, rockets and

missiles. The Cold War was hotting up, and Bull was to take a leading role in the arms and space races.

In 1951, he started working for the Canadian Armament Research and Development Establishment, where he helped design an air-to-air guided missile codenamed Velvet Glove. Mixing with leading scientists in his field from around the world, Bull soon realised that Canada did not have the funding or vision of the superpowers. He cultivated contacts in the American military who, in 1961, co-sponsored a project called HARP in the island of Barbados. HARP—High Altitude Research Project—was Bull's brainchild: its result was a massive space-cannon that fired projectiles into the ocean.

In 1967, Bull set up his own company, Space Research Corporation. As a result of discoveries he had made working with missiles, conventional artillery weapons now had greater range and accuracy. SRC began to provide the Pentagon with long-range shells for use in Vietnam. Bull's work was so important that he was made an American citizen by an act of Congress, something that had only happened twice before, to Winston Churchill and the Marquis de Lafayette.

SRC quickly expanded: at its peak, the company had a staff of over 300 people. It sold cannons capable of firing ammunition over great distances, to Britain, Egypt, Israel, Thailand, Italy and others. Bull was now a player in the world of international arms-dealing.

In 1980, he was arrested in the US for selling arms to South Africa, and was imprisoned for seven months. He felt he had been made a patsy, and became embittered. He relocated to Brussels, then one of the capitals of the international arms trade. It was here that he became involved with the Iraqis. Saddam Hussein was using Soviet-supplied Scud missiles to attack the Iranians, but was frustrated by their limited range and accuracy. Through other countries, Saddam had bought cannons designed by Bull; their effectiveness had impressed him. So in 1988, Bull was invited out

to Baghdad to discuss cooperation. He convinced the Iraqis that, to gain real power, they would need the capability for space launches. He offered to build a cannon that could do the job: a ‘Supergun’ 150 metres long, with a bore of one metre.

Bull built a prototype, nicknamed Baby Babylon, at a secret site in Jabal Hamrayn in central Iraq. It blew up on its first test, but he kept trying. However, word started to get around intelligence agencies that SRC was developing a ‘doomsday weapon’ with the Iraqis. The Supergun could dump a nuclear bomb, or nerve gas, on any Middle Eastern city. Even if never used, it would be a powerful propaganda tool for Saddam.

Sections of the Supergun were being built in the UK, Spain and the Netherlands. In Brussels, Bull’s apartment was broken into several times. On one occasion, his drinking glasses were replaced by a new, very obviously different, set. He was convinced his phone was being tapped, and his post being opened. He told friends he felt he was being sent a warning. Then, on March 22, he was silenced forever. The studious boy obsessed with model aircraft had ended up dead in the corridor of a Brussels apartment block, three bullets in his back and two through his head.

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SO WHO KILLED him? There’s no shortage of candidates: over three decades, Gerald Bull had worked for and sold arms to several dozen countries. Was it MI6, because Bull might have revealed that the British government was involved in shady arms deals with Saddam? That revelation did come about, after his death, creating an enormous scandal in the UK. And just one week before Bull was gunned down in Brussels, Farzad Bazoft, a journalist with The Observer, was arrested in Baghdad, charged with being a spy and hanged in Abu Ghraib prison. Bazoft had been discovered by Iraqi secret police near one of SRC’s Supergun test sites.

Or perhaps it was the work of the CIA, who some thought Bull had worked for in the '60s. Others still think the Iranians may have killed him, in the hope of stopping the Supergun project. It could have been the Iraqis themselves—had they fallen out with their star scientist?

Nobody has yet been brought to justice for the killing, but the Belgian authorities' prime suspect has always been Mossad, Israel's intelligence agency. Three months before Bull was murdered, two men rented an apartment opposite his and paid three months' rent in advance, only to vanish 10 days later. However, to get the electricity connected in the apartment, one of the men had had to present identification at the utility company's offices. Tracing this back to his entry into the country, the police discovered that the other man had entered with a false passport, and was an Israeli. That said, it seems unlikely Mossad to have left such an obvious trail, and many assassins-for-hire during that time were Israeli.

Last year, the state prosecutor revealed that they had new information from 'a reliable source' who had identified a Mossad agent as one of Bull's assassins. According to the source, the killer took a piece of jewellery from Bull's body, which he still wears. In January, the same source apparently alleged that a Western intelligence agency helped with the killing, and the signs pointed to the British. The case is now at the Brussels' public prosecutors' office. The next step is 'requisition'—the drawing up of a list of charges. 'We don't have the name of the killer,' says spokeswoman Estelle Arpigny, which suggests that the charges will be against 'persons unknown' and will continue to languish unless new information is uncovered.

At the moment, it seems unlikely we will ever know for sure who killed Gerald Bull—the scientist who perhaps knew too much.

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Being Jean-Claude

‘YOU’RE GOING TO be a very good father,’ Jean-Claude Van Damme tells me. ‘Better than lots of people.’ Thanks, I say. ‘Worse than lots of people, too,’ he continues. He puts a hand on my shoulder. ‘But you’re going to be on the high side.’ He pauses dramatically. ‘And you’re going to have more than one kid.’

My wife is eight months pregnant and I’m chatting about it with the Belgian action star, father of three and part-time prophet as we sip espressos on the balcony of his room at London’s Philippe Starck-designed Sanderson Hotel. It’s taken me three weeks to arrange the meeting: I’ve spoken to Van Damme’s agent, assistant, sister and mother, and followed him by phone and fax from California to Moscow to Cannes.

Van Damme has been getting around: in recent weeks, he’s announced that Kylie’s buns of steel are a result of the exercises he taught her on the set of *Streetfighter* (this is, after all, the man who once claimed he could crack walnuts between his buttocks); been reported as under consideration for a starring role in an English National Ballet film of *Swan Lake*; and said to be considering an offer to spend a week in the French version of the *Big Brother* house.

But, despite the publicity, things haven’t been going too well for the self-proclaimed ‘Fred Astaire of karate’. A decade ago, he was one of the planet’s biggest stars, commanding \$6 million a

film. But now, like Chuck Norris, Sylvester Stallone and Stephen Seagal, Van Damme is discovering that his kind of testosterone-laden action flick is no longer in fashion: his last three have gone straight to video.

He wasn't always the muscleman, of course. The boy who was born Jean-Claude Camille François Van Varenberg in 1960, in the Brussels commune of Berchem Sainte-Agathe, was, by all accounts, shy and sensitive. He liked to read comic books, and would admire the physique of superheroes like the Silver Surfer. When he was 12, his father Eugène, a florist, took him along to the nearest karate school. 'He was weak, short and wore glasses,' says Claude Goetz, a burly man in his sixties who still runs the school, 'But he was keen to learn.'

Goetz put the boy onto a rigorous regime that set him on his way to a pumped-up physique. But Van Damme wasn't all brawn. While working in his parents' shop, the teenager had noticed an attractive older woman who came by regularly. She ran a ballet school around the corner; he enrolled.

'When he turned up at my school,' says Monette Loza, 'I had no idea he was the Van Varenbergs' boy. But he was extraordinarily flexible—he could do the splits, which is quite rare in a man. I said to him "Finally! Someone comes into my school who I can really make into a dancer." "I don't want to be a dancer," he replied. "I want to make lots of money."'

Loza, who had had a brief career as a singer and performed on French TV with Jacques Brel, says he made the right decision. 'Dancers' careers don't last long,' she says. 'Jean-Claude was clever—he was ambitious, and he knew exactly what he was doing. He would come to my class, do what he had to do, then head off to the gym.'

Van Damme kept up the ballet for five years and, according to Loza, could have become a professional. But his sights were set on America: after a karate contest in Florida and a visit to California's famous Gold's Gym, it was all he could think of. He left school

and, with his father's help, set up his own gym in Brussels, the California. He was 18. An admirer of Chuck Norris, who had parlayed his job as a martial arts instructor to the stars into a successful film career, Van Damme would tell people who visited his club that, one day, he too would be a movie star.

In 1979, he went to Hong Kong to try to break into the burgeoning martial arts film industry there. Nothing came of it, so in 1981 he moved to Los Angeles with \$2,000 in cash. He worked as a chauffeur, carpet-layer, bouncer and pizza delivery boy, sleeping in a rented car and showering at the gym, before a chance meeting with Norris led to a bit part. In 1983, he adopted the surname Van Damme, after a family friend. Shortly after, he landed a small role as a gay martial arts expert in *Monaco Forever* but, five years after leaving Belgium, he still wasn't much nearer his dream. He'd regularly call his parents and Goetz to update them on his progress. 'If things didn't work out,' says Goetz, 'we were going to open a chocolate shop in Brussels.'

But Neuhaus and Godiva were not to have a new rival. In 1986, Van Damme made a move that was to become Hollywood lore: spotting the influential action film producer Menahem Golan leaving a restaurant in Beverly Hills, he aimed a 360-degree kick at him, stopping just a hair's breadth from his face. Golan gave Van Damme his card, and told him to come by his office the next day. The meeting led to Van Damme's breakthrough: *Bloodsport*, in which he played real-life underground martial arts champion Frank Dux. The film was a surprise hit, making \$35 million from a budget of just \$1.5 million. A string of others followed, and Van Damme started earning serious money: a million dollars for *Universal Soldier* in 1992, \$3 million for John Woo's Hollywood debut *Hard Target* in '93, and over \$6 million for the following year's *Streetfighter*. The puny boy with the glasses had become one of the world's biggest movie stars.

Yet even as his career was sky-rocketing, Van Damme was in trouble. His first marriage had ended in 1984: before long, he had

two other failed marriages behind him, and had wed former model Darcy LaPier. In 1996, Van Damme admitted he was addicted to cocaine, and checked into the Daniel Freeman Marina Hospital in LA: he checked out after a week. LaPier filed for divorce, claiming that Van Damme had physically abused her under the influence of the drug, and had threatened to kidnap their son Nicholas and leave the US.

Van Damme's *annus horribilis* was 1998: he was back on cocaine, was beaten up by one of his former stuntmen in a topless bar in New York, and was ordered by a Californian court to pay LaPier \$27,000 a month in child support and an additional \$85,000 a month in alimony. In 1999, he remarried his second wife, Gladys Portugues, a former bodybuilder. He was fined for drunk driving in 2000, but he seems to have settled down, shooting four movies in the next three years.

Which brings us to today. Van Damme has promised on the phone he will tell me things about his life he hasn't told anyone before, so I've prepared a list of questions covering everything from his childhood to his struggle with drugs.

Things don't go quite as planned. As I enter his suite, his assistant, an attractive American in her early thirties, is about to leave. He kisses her goodbye on the lips, then turns to me and grins.

'Do you fuck around?' he asks.

I shake my head.

'That's good,' he says. 'You shouldn't. I fuck around.' He laughs. 'Not really, of course.'

'Nice way to start the interview, Jean-Claude,' says the assistant.

Van Damme smiles boyishly, and asks her to order some coffees for us on her way past reception. 'And cookies.' He points at me. 'This guy's too skinny.'

We head to the balcony. Sporting a crew-cut and tan, he looks in good shape, and younger than 42. He's wearing a grey sweatshirt, dirty white trainers, and a pair of stonewashed jeans

with the number 7 down one leg—part of his own ‘Dammage 7’ collection, launched in 2001.

Then he lights a cigarette and tells me that he doesn’t want to discuss ‘anything physically real’.

It’s hard to describe what happens next. Van Damme loves to talk, but it’s stream-of-consciousness stuff, and his English is often hard to follow. For much of the time, it feels as if I’m not there.

‘You know, I have to be very aware of what I say to you,’ he begins, with an ironic smile. His emphasis is deliberate: *Parlez-vous le Jean-Claude?*, a book of carefully chosen extracts from 20 years of interviews with him, is a runaway best-seller in France. The word that crops up most in it is ‘aware’, and it has made him an object of ridicule in the French-speaking world.

‘A guy like me, when I say something to people, I’ve got nothing to gain,’ he says. ‘I get into trouble, because I speak too fast and I don’t explain myself too well. But now I became better. It took me a long time because, you know, when you leave school at sixteen and you have your own way of talking...’ He tails off.

Van Damme claims that the media has misrepresented him. ‘They cut me, left and right,’ he says. ‘Like butchers. Why butchers? Because butchers are killers.’

I can see his point: his sentences sometimes go on for 10 minutes, making him hard to quote. As he winds up a long monologue on the ‘speed of thought’, I decide to risk a question on the physically real. ‘I spoke to your former ballet teacher...’ I begin.

‘The problem is—I’m gonna cut you—all those people I met in my life, they’re past. The present is all that counts. Those people you spoke to met me when I was 15. But let’s say something happened to me. Something wonderful. And since then, the man changed, okay? Wow. But he was educated that way. But he remembers stuff. And, in fact, even when he wants to remember something now it doesn’t come until it’s supposed to come.’ He slaps his head. ‘Now I knew it.’

So you've changed, I say.

'Completely. And I wrote a script.'

The script is called either *The Choice* or *The Tower*, and it's Van Damme's obsession. 'It's what keeps me alive,' he says. It's about a professional motorcyclist who has a crash and slips into a coma, where he discovers himself inside a seven-level tower he has to move his way up. Van Damme has been working on the project for six years, and plans to direct and star in it. After a long, abstract explanation of the plot, he gives me a broad grin. 'Wow,' he says. 'Profound. You see, if you want to do an interview with me, you have to spend three, four days. Because then you start to know a person. After this meeting, we can go on the street and talk normal. Listen, sometimes I smoke, I train every day, I go three hours to the gym. My favourite ice cream is vanilla. I can say that—it's more nice for the people, because it's more about the physical, here. But I'll prove it to you. I'm on paper here. I believe in my stuff.'

He returns to the plot of his script, and there are some interesting thoughts beneath the twisted grammar and leaps of logic. I'm especially struck by his idea that any moment from our past can revisit us to guide our actions. I tell him it reminds me of the Russian-Armenian mystic Gurdjieff's explanation of vivid childhood memories as 'moments of consciousness'. Hey, if you can't beat 'em... Van Damme is fascinated by this. Gurdjieff was right, he says: our past is the key to our evolution.

'Look, I'm still on a huge process of learning. Life. Myself. Remembering. You. Love. Bigger. Faster. Smarter. But everything what you're doing in life, what I do in life, is also attached to what we call our past life. I was born skinny, and I was laughed at in school, you know—I was with glasses and I didn't speak well. I was having a lithp. Big lithp—I was talking like that.' We laugh at his joke.

'Plus I lost my few first girlfriends. I was so much in love with them, only with a kiss. And you know, at that time, sex was not

existing—strong Catholic family. So I was waiting, waiting, afraid to do, and nothing happened. And I was hurt, big time. So karate came to my life. And I became very good. Very strong. And guess what? Ladies came at me! More than enough. Too much! Then I go to America, with this package called muscles,’—he hunches his back in the classic body-builder position—’Carapace, the turtle, you know? It’s my cover. And I show that to people, and with that I become a star. But now I’ve got to say ‘Wait a second—what else can I do in my life? I show and show and show, but it’s still on the low shakra, on the primal way.’”

He started having these thoughts while using cocaine. Instead of using the drug to party, he sat at home in his room, contemplating suicide. He quit coke, he says, because he realised that he hadn’t yet created anything. ‘You just created an illusion,’ he says, recounting his dialogue with himself. ‘What you think is real, it’s not real. You have to create inside you, JC. You have to go inside and ask the question to yourself ‘What do you want in life?’ You cannot talk to yourself, JC. You’re scared to think you’ve got something powerful inside you who can tell you what to do, who knows every answer in the universe? But you have to believe in the question, knowing the answer is already in your head. So I take a different stage to create a movie where I’m gonna try to do something very special.’

Understandably, he’s worried how his fans might react. ‘My people are from the street,’ he says. ‘Those people made me. So if they hear me talking about the universe, this and that, they think ‘This guy is fucked up.’ This is why, he says, the film will start from the mundane and gradually move to the mystical. ‘I will take them through different levels. Then if they don’t like it, they can walk back. But they cannot refuse me, Jean-Claude Van Damme. Those are my people and I am your people, guys! I’m still the guy if I see a person crossing the street or a young guy getting hit for his lunch box at school who’s skinny like I was, I will go and fight the group and say ‘Guys, give back the food!’ Because I’m still a

hero. A real hero. I mean, somebody gets attacked—I'll protect. I'll do my best. I'm for real, okay? I'm not made of cable.'

I tell him that perhaps a spiritual action movie is just what his fans want. Look at *The Matrix*. He doesn't like the comparison.

'The background of *The Tower* will not be sci-fi,' he says. 'It will be made of wood, stone, trees, water: elements. Earth elements. And lots of wisdom. We'll have a gnome in the tower. An old person. A gnome.'

I notice he says 'we' a lot. At one point, he proclaims 'The most important people are the gurus', and I ask him if he has one. 'Of course. My guru is someone very close to me, someone I speak to every day. But if I say that in your newspaper they're going to think we're having sex or something.'

I assure him I can avoid that insinuation. The good thing about having a guru, he continues, is that he has someone who can listen to him 'from the heart'—and who can correct him. 'I make notes like this,' he says, showing me a pad of paper. 'I have something to add to them now, in fact. Today, because of you, I just saw something.' He's talking about Gurdjieff. 'This guy doesn't know shit about the script, but he remembers his destiny,' he says, pointing at me. 'He told me the answer without knowing it! How did you give me the answer?' I have no idea, I say, already imagining my name on the film's opening credits. 'We all have a path. The path is perfection. We're all here to search for perfection, to be able to cry without tears. Being able to compress your emotion to one point.'

Monette Loza told me that she found you very self-contained, even as a teenager.

'What does that mean, "self-contained"?'

I tell him, and he starts writing down my definition. 'A very beautiful word,' he says. He tells me he was in love with Loza. 'I was 16, 17, and she was 40. But to be as in shape as an 18-year-old at her age, it's very sexy. Also, when a woman is that age, you

can talk with them. You can have dinner for two or three hours before love-making. And talk about life. And the wine.'

As we're clearly now in physically real territory, I ask him about his plans. He says he's yet to be approached by English National Ballet, and that he's now too old for ballet, anyway. *Hell*, which has also been titled *The Shu* and *The Savage* at various stages, and *The Order*, which features Charlton Heston as his father and was shot in Israel, have both been released on video and DVD, but his agent has told me that *The Monk*, in which Van Damme—rather implausibly, I'd thought prior to meeting him—plays a Shaolin monk, may not see any kind of release. Van Damme admits he's done 'a few shitty movies'—he tears into last year's *Derailed*, in which he played a secret agent battling terrorists on a train—but says he's excited about upcoming projects: *After Death*, a revenge thriller directed by Ringo Lam (*Maximum Risk*, *Replicant*), and *Lone Wolf*, 'a cool story—very commercial', which he won't discuss more for legal reasons. After that, it's *The Tower/The Choice*. What about the remake of *The Great Escape* he's mentioned in several interviews? His plans to make a Jacques Brel biopic? Or the long-rumoured sequel to *Streetfighter*, which both Holly Vallance and Dolph Lundgren have been connected to in recent weeks? His eyes harden: 'The plan is what I just told you.'

Eventually, his publicist appears by the table, and I realise we've been talking for nearly two hours. Van Damme looks like he could carry on for a few more, but I feel drained. He wishes me luck with fatherhood, which brings me back to earth. As we shake hands, I start worrying about how I'll break the news to my wife: we're going to have more than one child.

First published in The Bulletin, May 2003

The Healing Years

IT'S WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON: schoolchildren out for the holidays careen along the promenade in cuisse-tax buggies, while pensioners buffeted by the biting North Sea wind struggle to keep hold of tubs of shellfish bought from seafront stands. Gulls circle overhead, and there is an inescapable fishy smell in the air.

Ostend is not a sexy town. And yet it is in this faded coastal resort that one of the 20th century's sexiest songs was written—a song that sold over a million copies and won a Grammy on its release in 1982, and that has since been the soundtrack to countless midnight trysts the world over. Its plaintive evocation of longing and lust has entered the pantheon of great soul classics. The song is, of course, *Sexual Healing* by Marvin Gaye.

The singer's life reads like a Hollywood script: the rapid rise to fame in the 1960s, when he had a string of R&B hits for Motown, including the blistering *I Heard It Through The Grapevine*; the broken marriages, drug abuse and financial problems in the 1970s; the self-imposed exile in Europe; the comeback; the murder.

In 1980, Gaye was living in London, partly to escape the US tax authorities. Partying with aristocrats and overdoing the cocaine, Gaye's life was spiralling out of control until, in September that

year, music and boxing promoter Freddy Cousaert stepped onto the scene.

Cousaert, a flamboyant Fleming in his early forties (like Gaye), was best-known for having arranged a Belgian tour for the young Cassius Clay. A huge fan of R&B since the mid-Sixties, he had once owned a nightclub in his native Ostend.

In London to talent-scout, Cousaert heard that Gaye was in town, and down on his luck. He immediately sought out the singer and the two became friends. Then, after Gaye raved to Cousaert about a recent trip to Brighton to escape the pressures of London, the Belgian invited him, and his 24-year-old Dutch girlfriend Eugenie Vis and five-year-old son Bubby to Ostend. Gaye agreed, and on February 15, 1981, the trio boarded a Sealink ferry.

Gaye's 18-month sojourn in Belgium was to be a pivotal period in his life. Ostend's windswept promenade would become the backdrop to a multi-million-dollar record deal, set in train the disintegration of three relationships and trigger an internal battle. The trip would rekindle Gaye's career, but would also lead him toward madness and a violent death.

On his arrival in Ostend, Cousaert loaned Gaye \$30,000 and set him up in a fifth-floor apartment (77 King Albert Promenade) with a sea-view. Cousaert owned a small hostel nearby, which he ran with his wife Lilliane. Gaye was a frequent visitor, soon becoming integrated into the Cousaert family.

Cousaert planned to relaunch Gaye's career from Ostend; Gaye, imagining himself as a general regrouping, also viewed the trip as an opportunity to cool his heels after the chaos of the preceding months.

The first task was to divorce Gaye from Motown. After 20 years with the label and a bitter dispute over previous album *In Our Lifetime*, Gaye wanted out. His lawyer Curtis Shaw contacted Larkin Arnold, who had been responsible for luring Michael Jackson from Motown to CBS. Arnold headed for Ostend, where

he brokered a deal: CBS paid off Motown to the tune of \$1.5 million, and agreed to give Gaye \$600,000 per album. Gaye immediately turned his attention to producing new material for CBS, and regaining a normal life.

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GAYE WAS NO recluse in Ostend. He strutted down the promenade, made friends and gave interviews. But perhaps the most revealing document of the time is a half-hour film shot by Belgian director Richard Olivier, *Transit Ostende*.

I met Olivier in his spacious flat in Brussels. An elegant man with carefully-coiffed grey hair and an ever-present cigar, he was keen to talk about his collaboration with Gaye. ‘This is a story that has been with me for twenty years,’ he told me. ‘And it isn’t finished yet.’

Olivier had read about Gaye’s arrival in Ostend in *Tele-Moustique* magazine. ‘It was just three lines, but I knew it was big news. It was like Frank Sinatra turning up in Chaumont-Gistoux.’ He immediately called a friend at the magazine and asked for Gaye’s contact details.

With the agreement of Cousaert and Gaye for the project, Olivier put up most of the cash and the film was shot in a matter of days. The spontaneity paid off: Olivier’s film contains some of the most candid footage of the singer in existence. In one scene, Gaye chats and plays darts—badly—with some regulars in an Irish pub. ‘He had nothing to lose, but he knew how to present himself,’ says Olivier. ‘Every take was good. Freddy hated the pub scene, though, because he thought it belittled Marvin. But Marvin loved that scene.’

The film opens with Gaye’s mellow voice-over, drawn from a long interview Olivier recorded in the singer’s flat: ‘My father was a minister...’ he says, going on to talk about how happy he was growing up. The unedited version reveals a more confused

perspective: when asked what he remembers of his childhood, Gaye's first response is: 'Being alone.'

Gaye is also shown rehearsing with his band in the basement of Ostend casino—Cousaert had set up a date there for July, 1981—in which the singer lies back on a bench and languidly ad-libs through *I Want You*. Another scene shows him walking into a church in Middelkerke in his Adidas running gear and breaking into an extraordinary a cappella rendition of The Lord's Prayer. 'That was a strange day,' says Olivier. 'The moment Marvin finished singing, this guy came running into the church to tell us that the Pope had been shot.'

Gaye liked Olivier's film: a note thanking the director for 'making me immortal [sic]' is conspicuously displayed in his flat. The film has never been released, due to the prohibitive cost of paying for song rights, but it is often shown on TV—channels only pay a one-off fee for the broadcast rights. Olivier has recently been negotiating to release a record of Gaye singing The Lord's Prayer, which is not covered by copyright. He plans for Gaye's voice to be accompanied by 'other famous names'. Olivier also showed me a book he has taken 15 years to complete, a 60-page semi-fictionalised account of Gaye and Cousaert's relationship, with illustrations by Louis Joos.

As Olivier's film shows, Gaye liked hanging out with the locals. His keyboard player, Odell Brown, had come to Ostend to work on some new material, and was staying with the Cousaerts. After befriending a local couple Donald and Maggie Pylyser, Brown ended up staying with them for three months. He introduced them to Gaye, and they became great friends. 'We didn't really know who he was,' Donald Pylyser says today when I visit the couple's apartment. 'I was only twenty. I was vaguely aware of his Motown stuff, but in those days it was hard to find his records in Belgium.'

The couple were charmed by the singer. 'He was very charismatic and good-humoured,' says Maggie. 'We knew

nothing about his problems. He rarely talked about his past.’ Despite the age difference, the Pylyzers seem to have had an easy relationship with the singer. ‘Marvin was young at heart,’ Maggie says.

The couple remember visiting Gaye in his flat and watching him tinkering around on a synthesizer. ‘He asked for requests,’ says Donald. ‘So I said the only song of his I knew—*I Heard It Through The Grapevine*.’ Slightly taken aback, Gaye struggled to remember the opening chords.

Donald played guitar with various local bands. Soon, Gaye, Pylyzer and Brown were regularly jamming. ‘Marvin was a great improviser,’ says Donald. ‘It was just magic.’ He reels off a list of six or seven songs he recorded with Gaye and Brown on a Portastudio. I ask if he has by any chance kept any of them, and after some rummaging he finds a tape and puts it on the stereo. A few chords on a keyboard ring out, and then that unmistakable voice appears.

In the demo, titled *Rubato*, Gaye takes Pylyzer’s sheet music as a prompt for his lyric, working the denotations into a metaphor in which he suggests to his lover that they take things fortissimo or pianissimo. On the last track on the tape, Gaye embarks on an extended romantic litany, crooning:

‘It’s all right to make love tonight
It is good to love you like I should
It is correct
To get your feet soaking wet...’

Is it a classic Marvin Gaye song? No. But it’s exhilarating and somewhat eerie to hear that pure voice echoing through the apartment. Gaye’s tone is as astonishing as it ever was, as is his seemingly effortless gift for making one believe anything he sings. This was a man, after all, who on *Sexual Healing* would bring a

yearning urgency to lines like ‘I’m hot just like an oven/I need some lovin’.’

When the music wouldn’t come, Gaye wound down by watching television, mostly the BBC on cable, as he spoke no Dutch and hardly any French. He also loved to cook—the Pylsers fondly remember his lamb chops and moussaka. Vis says that, after the maelstrom of life in London, they both savoured the domesticity. ‘It was great,’ she says. ‘Marvin could finally breathe fresh air and spend time with his son.’ Bubby attended a local school, and Vis also taught him at home, reading him Mr Men books with Gaye.

‘Marvin was hiding out,’ says David Ritz. ‘He wanted to kick the drugs and get clean.’ Ritz was a 38-year-old journalist who had worked for Rolling Stone. He had been approached by Gaye after the singer saw Ray Charles’ autobiography, which Ritz had co-written. The two had talked extensively in Los Angeles a few years previously, but had fallen out of touch. Ritz decided to go over to Belgium ‘to see what was going on’.

He arrived in Ostend in March 1982. When he visited Gaye at his apartment, he was shocked. ‘Marvin had huge bags under his eyes. He had aged ten or fifteen years since I had last seen him. He looked like a man who had been through hell and back.’ Seeing that Ritz was disturbed, Gaye leaned over and whispered in his ear: ‘Don’t worry—the worst is over.’

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ON THE SURFACE, that seemed to be true. Gaye spent his mornings running on the beach, visited local churches, and grew to love the work of Ostend’s most famous son, Belgo-British painter James Ensor. ‘He used to hang out at the (Ensor) museum a lot,’ says Ritz. ‘The irony and the sexual ambiguity appealed to him.’ Gaye was particularly fond of Ensor’s *Self-Portrait in a*

Flowered Hat—like his father, Gaye had a predilection for cross-dressing.

According to Ritz, the singer had a love-hate relationship with Ostend. ‘Marvin liked being a big fish in a little pond, and he loved the calmness. He liked the open expanse of sea, which seemed to symbolise hope at a time when his world had been very closed in and claustrophobic. But, at the same time, he felt restricted by the bourgeois, provincial feel of the place: he complained that everybody walked their dog at five o’clock.’ Not surprisingly, Gaye could hardly go incognito in the city. ‘He once told me that he felt like a raisin in a bowl of milk,’ says Ritz.

Gaye wasn’t out of trouble yet. Although his drug use was more sporadic, he never managed to kick his habit entirely. A visit by his ex-wife Janis Hunter in the summer of 1981 also upset his new rhythm. ‘Marvin was still holding a torch for Jan,’ says Ritz. ‘He was hoping for a reunion.’ When her visit ended in yet more recriminations, Gaye sunk into depression. His relationship with Eugenie Vis had become increasingly strained, and she left to study in Amsterdam, returning to Ostend at weekends. ‘I didn’t want to get between Marvin and Jan,’ she says, ‘but I was hooked on him.’

Meanwhile, Ritz was getting the scoop of his life. The proud Gaye had started to resent having to live off Cousaert. Now, he had a new record deal, and a new listener. He talked to Ritz extensively.

‘It was a biographer’s dream,’ says Ritz. ‘To have your living subject isolated in this little town with nothing much to do—it was a gift.’ Ritz was enamoured of his subject: ‘Marvin was an enormously charismatic individual,’ he says. ‘Everybody loved him. He was sweet, good-looking, smart, spiritual. You just wanted to be with him all the time.’ Ritz accompanied Gaye on trips to Bruges and Brussels, and the two would discuss art and poetry. ‘We would talk until two am about Dante, Jackson Pollock, John Lennon, John Keats.’

Like Keats, Gaye was himself ‘half in love with easeful death’. His father’s sect, which mixed Pentecostal rigour with Old Testament fury, had given him a unique perspective on the subject, and he had witnessed violence at home throughout his childhood. On his 1973 album *Let’s Get It On*, he sang: ‘If I should die tonight...’

In the original tapes for Olivier’s film, Gaye mentions his desire to come back to Ostend later on, to ‘revisit the scene of the crime’. ‘Of course,’ he adds, ‘there hasn’t been a crime yet.’

Gaye was torn over his religious beliefs and his sexual appetites; he felt under pressure to live up to his self-created lover-man image, but was ashamed of his lifestyle. He also suffered from premature ejaculation. To combat his loneliness, Gaye immersed himself in hard-core pornography and visited prostitutes. A sequence in *Transit Ostende* has him cruising the city’s red-light district, while his voice-over proclaims: ‘I love women, but I hate womenkind.’

One day, in Gaye’s apartment, Ritz found some misogynistic cartoons in a book of illustrations by Georges Pichard. In a moment that would change both men’s lives, he suggested to Gaye that he needed ‘sexual healing’.

Gaye had been trying for months to fit lyrics to one of Odell Brown’s rhythm tracks—a catchy, reggae-tinged number—with little success. Taken with Ritz’s phrase, he asked the journalist to write words to go with the song. Ritz’s lyrics—the first he had ever written—reflected Gaye’s tortured soul at the time, referring to waves building and threatening to capsize the singer. Ritz says that Gaye never fully understood the lyrics’ positive message, although his improvisation toward the end of the recording, when he sings ‘Please don’t procrastinate/ If you do, I’ll have to masturbate,’ shows at least partial recognition of his own problems.

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RITZ SAYS THAT he never knew if Gaye would use his words. ‘I thought that at least I could tell my grandchildren that I had once given lyrics to Marvin Gaye.’

Gaye set about fitting the new lyrics to the track, trying many different approaches. ‘It looks like we’re going to put the ‘Get up’s at the beginning,’ he says at one point on the tapes the Pylyzers have kept of him working through the song by himself.

Sexual Healing would become Gaye’s biggest hit, but would signal the end of his friendship with Ritz. When the song was released with Gaye and Brown listed as the writers and Ritz merely thanked in the liner notes for the title, the journalist sued for a lyric credit, eventually winning the case after the singer’s death.

Cousaert also fell out with Gaye. Dreams of being the man who would resuscitate his idol’s career were dashed when he was sidelined by the music moguls. When Gaye’s old mentor Harvey Fuqua arrived at the studios in Ohain, outside Brussels, where Gaye was recording the new album, the writing was on the wall.

Cousaert’s problems were compounded by a mix-up over a Swiss bank account that left Gaye thinking his friend was trying to rip him off. And Gaye and Brown were both forced to leave Belgium a couple of times during their stay, because neither was registered there. At one point, Interpol turned up at Cousaert’s home looking for Gaye in connection with a drug shooting in Denmark. Belgium was becoming a hassle.

Then, Gaye heard that his mother was due to go into hospital for a kidney operation. The singer, who had a classic Oedipal complex, rushed back to the States. Freddy Cousaert was not in Ostend when he left, but Gaye told Lilliane Cousaert that he would return in a couple of weeks. He probably meant it—he and Eugenie Vis had just bought a 21-room mansion in Moere, outside Ostend, which had been a Nazi headquarters during the Second World War. ‘But as soon as he left Belgium,’ says Ritz, ‘that was it.’

In a brief detour to Rotterdam, Gaye fell out with Vis. She returned to the house in Moere, cleared out all the new furnishings, and left for Amsterdam. She never saw the singer again. Gaye arrived in the US in the autumn of 1982, his career reborn, but his life falling apart.

He toured to support *Sexual Healing* and its accompanying album *Midnight Love*, but soon slipped into his old ways: backstage, he had a preacher in one room and a stash of drugs in another. Eventually, he moved in with his parents, and retreated into paranoia. On April 1, 1984, after a petty argument over a lost insurance form, Gaye's father shot him twice in the chest at close range with the .38 calibre handgun his son had given him for protection. The singer would have celebrated his 45th birthday the following day.

Eugenie Vis is now a clothes designer in Amsterdam.

Freddy Cousaert went on to promote acts like Isaac Hayes and Rufus Thomas. He died in a car crash in Bruges in August 1998.

Donald and Maggie Pylyser still live in Ostend. Donald 'does lots of different things', including teaching music.

Richard Olivier continues to make films, and is currently trying to find a publisher for his book.

Odell Brown worked with Curtis Mayfield and Muddy Waters, among others, but suffered from depression and panic disorder in the 1980s and 1990s, and was homeless for a while. The Veteran's Association helped him get back on his feet—he had been in the army in the early 1960s. He is now married and lives in Richfield, Minnesota.

David Ritz's conversations with Marvin Gaye in Ostend became a central part of his book *Divided Soul*, widely recognised as the definitive biography of the singer. Ritz also co-wrote the autobiographies of Ray Charles, Smokey Robinson and Aretha Franklin, and has written lyrics for Smokey Robinson and the Isley Brothers. 'Ostend was a particularly important time in Marvin's life,' Ritz says, 'It was where he should have got it together.'

NEED TO KNOW

Richard Oliver agrees. ‘You can’t ignore Marvin Gaye’s time here,’ he says. ‘It would be like a history of Napoleon without Elba.’

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Extraordinary Gentleman

THE PALAIS DES BEAUX-ARTS in Charleroi is a fitting place for an exhibition on Alan Moore. Belgium, after all, is the home of the comic strip, with *Tintin*, *Lucky Luke* and *The Smurfs* all originating there. And, like Moore's hometown of Northampton, Charleroi is a former industrial hub not far from the capital. *Alan Moore: Les Dessins du Magicien* is part of the city's ongoing campaign to shed its image as a cheap but uncomfortable coach journey from Brussels, and reinvent itself as an art-lovers' destination. Put together by Paul Gravett, an internationally renowned expert on comic-book art (he also curated last year's Comica festival at the ICA), the exhibition features a mass of original, rare or never-seen-before art created for Alan Moore works over the last 25 years, as well as previewing *The Mindscape of Alan Moore*, an 80-minute documentary on the writer.

'It's an enormous honour,' Moore says of the show. 'Even if it makes me feel like I'm almost dead.' Fans from around the globe will flock to the exhibition, but Moore admits that he probably won't get to it himself unless it transfers to London (as Gravett hopes). 'I don't even have a passport,' he says, and points out that

in today's political climate anyone looking like him (ie, Old Testament prophet/Motörhead roadie) probably wouldn't even be allowed on the plane.

Moore is famously eccentric, and one can't help feeling that he relishes the reputation. On turning 50 last year, he announced that he was retiring from mainstream comics to devote himself to magic. He converted to gnosticism in the mid-1990s, and is fond of stating that he worships the Roman snake-god Glycon. More recently, he claimed to have had information that the world will end between 2012 and 2017. He has also written and starred in his own magick extravaganzas, one-off mixed-media stage performances such as *Birth Caul (Shamanism of Childhood)* of 1995, a spoken-word piece dealing with the death of his mother. In 1999, he took part in *Ananke*, a London event billed as a 'symposium of real magick and global ritualism'—Moore took his audience on a wild tour of the capital's secret past—themes he would also touch on in *From Hell*. More recently, in his extravagantly illustrated series *Promethea*, he attempted to provide an overarching diagram of occult lore.

The Charleroi retrospective has fun with Moore's image, presenting the stands in a cabbalistic pattern, and placing a single lit candle on one of his old computer keyboards (which he accurately remembers as being filled with 'hair, dust, hashish and ash'). He's delighted that the Charleroi show takes on a cabbalistic pattern. 'That shows real care,' he says, admiringly.

Regardless of the Aleister Crowley persona, Moore is a towering figure on the international comic-book scene. His best-known work, *Watchmen*, of 1987, was a 400-page deconstruction of the superhero myth that revitalised the comics industry and brought us the phrase 'graphic novel'. For the first time, comic books were taken out of the clutches of adolescent boys and into the homes of adults.

Moore discovered comics pre-adolescence, but it wasn't until he fell ill and his mother bought him a copy of *The Fantastic*

Four by mistake (he'd wanted *Blackhawk*) that he became truly obsessed. During his teens, he devoured copies of *Mad*, *Oz* and the works of Robert Crumb. By his twenties, he was writing and drawing strips for *Sounds* and the *NME* (some of which are on show in Charleroi).

He soon realised that he was never going to be a great artist, and so devoted himself to writing scripts for *2000AD* and, later, *Warrior*. There he wrote *MarvelMan* and *V For Vendetta*, among others, before being hired by DC, one of the two American giants in the field, which asked him to reinvent its moribund *Swamp Thing* series. Groundbreaking work on *Superman* ('The Man Who Has Everything' and 'Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?') and *Batman* ('The Killing Joke') followed, before the graphic novel *Watchmen* rocketed him into the stratosphere.

Moore eventually fell out with DC, became a hired hand, and finally set up his own company, rather ironically titled America's Best Comics. His recent successes have included *From Hell*, his re-examination of Jack the Ripper, and *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, which brought together characters from the works of Bram Stoker, Conan Doyle, H Rider Haggard, and others. Both of these have recently been filmed, the former with Johnny Depp and Heather Graham, the latter with Sean Connery and Peta Wilson. *From Hell* transformed Moore's layered text into Grand Guignol, while *LXG* (as it was marketed) added explosions and a new character, Tom Sawyer, to gratify American audiences. Moore still hasn't seen either film, but has clearly heard enough about them. His initial attitude towards adaptations was neutral: he wouldn't take the credit or the blame. Now he's changed his mind.

'I thought that by not getting involved, I could keep a distance between the books and the films,' he says. He now realises that this was naive, as most film-goers would presume any film to be reasonably faithful to his work. Having 'learnt his lesson', he has

told his agents to reject any proposals to film his work, and in the case of work he no longer owns, to insist that his name be taken off any adaptation and his share of the money be divided among the artists.

Moore may have had enough of Hollywood, but it hasn't had its fill of him. *Constantine*, based on a character he created for *Swamp Thing*, is due out before the end of the year, with a woefully miscast Keanu Reeves in the title role. Moore didn't grant his permission for the adaptation: he doesn't own the rights to the character, so he had no say either way. Neither does he have any control over *Watchmen*, which is due to start shooting in Prague this year, from a script by David *X-Men* Hayter. (A screenplay that the Wachowski Brothers wrote for *V For Vendetta* around the time they were writing the first *Matrix* film may be a few years off, however: its hero is a terrorist.)

With his name removed from these and any other projects Hollywood might like to develop, Moore relishes being able to speak his mind. 'I won't have to do what most writers do, which is either keep quiet about it or try to sound enthusiastic.' He certainly doesn't mince his words regarding the casting of Depp, or the ethos of Hollywood as a whole, which he classifies as being a giant firework show. 'If I write a crappy comic book, it doesn't cost the budget of an emergent Third World nation. When you've got these kinds of sums involved in creating another two hours of entertainment for Western teenagers, I feel it crosses the line from being merely distasteful to being wrong.' His decision seems to have been prompted in part by repeated exposure to critics deriding films for their 'comic-book plots'. 'To paint comic books as childish and illiterate is lazy. A lot of comic books are very literate—unlike most films.'

A case in point is *Lost Girls*, Moore's 240-page graphic novel illustrated by his partner Melinda Gebbie, to be published in December. Having reinvented the fantasy, science fiction, crime, superhero and other genres, in *Lost Girls* Moore turns his

attention to pornography. ‘All of us have got some kinds of feelings and thoughts about sex, but the only genre connected to it is this grubby, shameful one,’ he says. ‘That’s a real pity. Sex is glorious, it’s how we all got here, and it’s most people’s favourite activity—I felt it deserved something a bit more elevated than *Anal Grannies*.

‘I saw no reason why you couldn’t create a work of pornography that adhered to all the same standards as the best art or literature. The big difference between art and pornography is that art, at its best, makes you feel less alone. You see a painting or read a piece of writing that expresses a thought that you had but didn’t express, and you suddenly feel less alone. Pornography, on the other hand, tends to engender feelings of self-disgust, isolation and wretchedness. I wanted to change that.’

In the event, *Lost Girls* has been 15 years in the making. It sees *The Wizard of Oz*’s Dorothy, *Peter Pan*’s Wendy and Lewis Carroll’s Alice meeting in a hotel room in Europe in 1913 and discovering their sexuality. The fun Moore had with out-of-copyright characters eventually led to him thinking up *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, perhaps his most inspired idea, and one to which he says he hopes to return. In the meantime, he is frantically working to finish up his various series for America’s Best Comics (notably *Promethea* and *Tom Strong*).

And after that? He may write another novel, get back into music (he has been in two bands, The Sinister Ducks and The Emperors of Ice Cream) or even take up his ‘wretched drawing’ again. Alan Moore may have retired from mainstream comics, but we certainly haven’t heard the last of him.

Moore magic: Highlights of Alan Moore’s career

V FOR VENDETTA

Begun in 1982 but not completed until 1988, this is a bleak futuristic thriller about Britain under a fascist dictatorship,

featuring a vigilante in a Guy Fawkes mask stalking the streets. David Lloyd's wonderful chiaroscuro artwork is one of the high points at Charleroi, with 80 original panels on display, as well as several of Moore's typewritten scripts. Moore marks this as a turning-point in his career, and credits Lloyd for encouraging him to write the script without sound effects or thought balloons.

FROM HELL

More than a decade in the making, Moore's masterful investigation of the Jack the Ripper story pulls no punches. 'I looked at several other famous murders, but Jack had everything: London, royalty, Freemasonry...' Twenty-four panels from *Dance of the Gull-Catchers* are on show in Charleroi.

WATCHMEN

Beautifully complemented by David Gibbons's artwork, this is arguably Moore's best work: a dense, many-layered deconstruction of the superhero myth, set in an alternate Cold War. *Watchmen* was partly responsible for a renaissance in comic strips. Terry Gilliam was interested in adapting it into a film, or possibly a mini-series; it now looks as though David Hayter has taken on the challenge.

BIG NUMBERS

Set in Northampton and influenced by chaos theory, this unfinished work was even more troubled than Moore's other grand schemes—the artists Bill Sienkiewicz and Al Columbia both dropped out of it. A panel from the unpublished third issue, and some of Moore's script, is on show in Charleroi.

THE LEAGUE OF EXTRAORDINARY GENTLEMEN

Having used out-of-copyright characters in *Lost Girls*, Moore moved on to a more elaborate game. 'Many superheroes have their origins in the fantasy and adventure fiction of the late 19th

NEED TO KNOW

century, and I saw the potential of that.' Queen Victoria asks the head of British intelligence, Mycroft Holmes, to gather the likes of Allan Quartermain, Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde and the Invisible Man to combat a new threat to Britain. Moore has completed two volumes so far, with the illustrator Kevin O'Neill, and says he would like to do more.

Published in The Independent, March 2004

Dry Dry Dry

SOME SONGS INVADE your subconscious and refuse to budge. You find yourself humming them on the way to work without even realising it. In 1994, the Scottish band Wet Wet Wet's cover of the Troggs' hit *Love Is All Around*, recorded for the soundtrack of *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, was such a tune. But after going to number one in 15 countries and staying at the top slot in Britain for an astonishing 15 weeks, the song finally—and, for some, thankfully—faded from view.

Two albums later, the group collapsed. After selling 15 million albums (must be their lucky number) and notching up 25 UK top 40 singles, singer Marti Pellow announced that he was leaving. A heavy drinker for years, Pellow had become increasingly depressed and isolated. In 1997, he had turned to the darkest substance he could think of: heroin. He was hooked in a week. After collapsing in a hotel room in London in 1999, he sought treatment for his addiction, and today he is off drink and drugs and relaunching his career.

I met him in a hotel in downtown Brussels last week. Sporting t-shirt, jeans and a tan, he looked relaxed and contented. He had reason to be: *Close To You*, the first single from his solo album *Smile*, had just entered the British charts at number 9, and he was booked to perform on Top of the Pops two days later. Although the album is not a million miles away from the sound of his former group, there's an undeniable maturity to the songs. I asked him if leaving Wet Wet Wet had loosened him up.

'Well, I was in the band for nearly twenty years,' he replies in his Glaswegian burr. 'And I was part of the writing team. But the beauty of going solo was that there were a lot of people willing to work with me who could take me in different directions.'

Chief among these was Chris Difford, guitarist and singer with Squeeze, who had written a track on the Wets' *Picture This* album. Now Pellow, a huge Squeeze fan, asked Difford to write lyrics for his new material. He lived in Difford's house for about a year and a half, during which time they wrote over 150 songs together.

The singer also returned to Memphis, which he had visited early on in his career, and worked with legendary band-leader Willie Mitchell, who had produced work by his idol, Al Green. Going clean gave Pellow renewed energy. 'I had been in a very dark place,' he says. 'But when I left behind the drinking and the drugging, I rediscovered my passion for music. I became a maniac for creating songs: the structures, the arrangements, even the producing.' As he talks, his eyes light up like the proverbial schoolboy's in a sweet-shop.

The resulting album is a mix of songs recorded in various studios, mostly mellow piano-based pop with the occasional Memphis flourish. I ask if he's pleased with the way the first single has been received. 'Enormously,' he says. 'I'm very proud of the whole album—if it was up to me, I'd be delivering it to the shops myself—so naturally I'm happy if others like it. But I understand

that I don't have a God-given right to the same kind of success I had with Wet Wet Wet.'

Nevertheless, Pellow hopes to be around for some time to come. 'I just love singing,' he says. 'And as long as there's a place in the market square for me, I'll continue to do it.' He reveals that an entire album of country songs is waiting to be released, and that he and Difford are working on a pet project entitled *London Life*, a musical set in contemporary London. 'I'm thinking of asking [*Trainspotting* author] Irvine Welsh to do the story,' he tells me. 'Just throw it at him and see if he likes the idea.'

Pellow says he spent years worrying about Wet Wet Wet's lack of credibility. 'You know, a lot of people thought, 'Oh, there's that band with the pretty-boy singer—why the fuck is he always smiling?' Perhaps it would have been better if I was the Elephant Man: "Such a beautiful voice, isn't it a shame...?" He catches my expression and laughs. 'But I'm over that now, honestly.'

We chat for a little more, and he tells me why he loves Tony Bennett, the Eagles, Destiny's Child and Limp Bizkit. He's modest, articulate and very charming. After the interview, I go home and give some songs from his album another listen. And now I can't get the damn things out of my head.

First published in The Bulletin, June 2001

A Cry in the Dark

ON OCTOBER 12, 1915, a British nurse called Edith Cavell was shot by a German firing squad at the rifle range in Etterbeek. Her crime: helping Allied soldiers escape from behind enemy lines.

Her execution shocked the world and, along with the sinking by a German submarine of the ocean liner *Lusitania*, was instrumental in bringing the US into the war. Brussels has a street named after her, and a statue of her stands in London's St Martin's Place, just off Trafalgar Square.

Now, 88 years after her death, Edith Cavell's secret service file has been declassified. For the first time, the dramatic story of the urgent message she tried to send her mother—and how its delivery was held up by bureaucracy until it was too late—has been revealed.

Born in 1865 in Swardeston, six kilometres south of Norwich, Cavell was the daughter of the local vicar. At 26, she travelled to Brussels to work as a governess. She stayed for five years, before returning home when her father fell ill. In caring for him, she found her vocation, and moved to London to study at the Hospital Nurses' Training School. After qualifying, she worked at infirmaries in St Pancras and Shoreditch.

When a Belgian surgeon, Dr Antoine Depage, invited her to run a new nursing school in 1907, Cavell returned to Brussels. Depage and his wife had set up the Berkendael Institute in Rue Franz Merjay after becoming frustrated with local medical practices. The doctor had been inspired by the methods of British nurse Florence Nightingale, and wanted to introduce them to Belgium.

By 1911, Cavell was training nurses for three Belgian hospitals, 24 schools and 13 kindergartens. But while visiting her by then widowed mother in Swardeston in August 1914, she heard that Germany had invaded Belgium. 'I am needed more than ever,' she is reported to have said. She left for Brussels immediately.

Although she was an enemy national, the Germans allowed Cavell to continue as matron at the Institute, whose teaching school was converted into a Red Cross Hospital. But by the autumn of 1914, Cavell had a new, secret role—helping more than 200 Allied soldiers trapped behind the advancing German front escape through northern France to neutral Holland.

The Institute became the Brussels safe house for an underground lifeline that began at the château of the Prince and Princess de Croy in Mons. Cavell and others sheltered the soldiers, provided them with false papers, and escorted them to Place Rouppe to meet the guides who were to lead them to the border.

But the Germans were closing in on Cavell. On July 20, 1915, her friend the Count de Borchgrave visited her home in Rue de la Culture. He was greeted by a man with 'a reddish face, fair, short military moustache and a very Cockney accent'. The man was a German plain clothes policeman, and he and his colleagues were searching the house for documents that might incriminate the nurse.

De Borchgrave got a message to Cavell about this, and she recognised his description of the man—she had met him before, when he had told her that he owned a florist's shop in London's Forest Hill, and that he could travel to England whenever he

wanted. De Borchgrave was then approached by a 'friend of Cavell's' who asked him to deliver a message to the nurse's mother, warning her not to speak to anyone about her daughter's activities in Brussels.

De Borchgrave's wife lived in Reading, so he immediately sent her a letter, and included a description of the mysterious red-faced Cockney. 'If [Mrs Cavell] talks to people about her daughter, it might get known to the Germans and there would be no telling what her fate might be,' he wrote.

On July 28, the Countess de Borchgrave sent her husband's letter on to the police at Reading, asking them to forward it to their Norfolk colleagues.

But the Reading chief constable instead sent the note to the Berkshire Constabulary, whose Major Mills was mystified by it. Mills sent a memo to his superintendent Goddard the same day: 'Would you please ascertain from the Countess de Borchgrave, a Belgian subject residing at Crowthorne, further particulars in regard to the enclosed, which has been sent to me by the Chief Constable, Borough Police, Reading, as I do not quite understand what she means.'

Goddard interviewed the countess on August 1, and sent a report to his chief constable that essentially repeated the contents of the original message. On August 3, Mills sent the letter to Vernon Kell, the head of the War Office's Directorate of Military Operations and Intelligence, otherwise known as M.0.(I).5, soon to be renamed MI5, Britain's internal security service.

Kell didn't send the letter to the Norwich constabulary until August 10. In the meantime, he instigated an investigation, with the help of Scotland Yard (MI5 having no powers of arrest at the time), into the 'alleged German in a florist's shop in Forest Hill'.

The investigation was a wash-out: there didn't seem to be any florist matching the description known in that area of London, and MI5 concluded that the information had probably been false.

On August 19, Chief Constable Finch in Norwich finally wrote to Kell to report that Mrs Cavell had been handed the letter by Detective Sergeant Plumb, and that she had agreed to contact the police if anyone asked for her daughter's address in Brussels. Of course, the 'Cockney florist' already knew where Edith Cavell lived—he had searched her house a month before. But, like Chinese whispers, the message had become diluted.

It's not known if Mrs Cavell spoke to any strangers about her daughter while the letter from Brussels was being sent around England. But by the time she received the warning, it was already too late: her daughter had been arrested on August 5.

After being interrogated in Saint-Gilles prison, Cavell was tried in early October, along with Philippe Baucq, an architect who had also helped Allied soldiers escape. The trial lasted just two days. They were both sentenced to death and, despite vigorous protests from the Spanish and US ambassadors in Brussels, were shot at the National Firing Range in Etterbeek, at 02.00 on October 12.

The outcry over the execution of a female nurse was immense. In Britain, *The Times* printed letters about the noble Englishwoman spared no mercy by the monstrous Germans, and the Manchester Guardian headlined its account 'Heroic Spirit Unshaken To The Last'. Public sentiment in the US was also aroused. The New York Herald wrote: 'The official report received today will cause a wave of horror to sweep over the world at the possibility of a nation which will perpetrate such a terrible thing as a mere matter of military routine succeeding in this war and dominating Europe.'

The Allies successfully exploited Cavell's death for propaganda: recruitment doubled in the two months following it. Posters of Cavell bearing the simple legend 'Remember' were particularly effective.

But MI5 took a more cold-blooded attitude, concluding that the Germans had been right to shoot her, and that Britain should alter its policy to do the same. On October 16, just four days after

Cavell's execution, MI5 opened a file entitled 'Women Spies, Sentences on'. A Major Drake noted that a lenient sentence on a German spy the previous year meant that Britain was now threatened with 'an influx of German women agents'. He added that Cavell's case showed that the enemy had no such reluctance—and she hadn't even been accused of espionage.

'I agree,' wrote Kell the next day. 'It is high time we put aside all false sentimentality. A spy in war time wherever caught, and of whatever nationality, should be tried by Court Martial and dealt with expeditiously... The employment of women as German spies in this country is on the increase, and one must consider the fact that the class of information they can acquire is very often of more value than the ordinary male spy can obtain, and just as effective.' He concluded: 'I am advocating no vindictive methods, but in a clear case of female espionage, we should not hesitate to apply the full penalty.'

Some of the other documents in Cavell's file are equally gripping.

In December 1915, MI5 put out feelers about the Count de Borchgrave. It is unclear whether this was as a result of the public interest in the case or because they distrusted his story. It was established that he was about 55, had greying hair and wore a pince-nez, but nobody seemed to be able to vouch for or condemn him.

'There are many counts of this name,' one agent reported. 'Some of them have turned out badly.' Another added: 'Agree there is so little to go upon. We shall probably hear no more about him.'

But they did eventually track him down—he was in Reading, with his wife—and seemed satisfied he had told the truth. He also revealed, perhaps unsurprisingly, that the acquaintance of Edith Cavell who had asked him to deliver the message to her mother had, in fact, been the nurse herself.

The file then jumps forward to November 24, 1917, when Capitaine Béliard of the Grand Quartier Général des Armées du Nord et Nord-Est in Folkestone wrote to MI5. ‘Dear Colonel Kell, I am sending you herewith two photos, one showing the Tir National at Brussels used by the Germans as an execution ground, and the other showing the graves of several victims, notably that of Nurse Cavell.’

Béliard said he had been sent the photos from Brussels, and asked Kell to send them on to Mrs Cavell, ‘to whom they will doubtless prove a sad but precious souvenir’.

After making inquiries to see if Cavell’s mother was still living at the same address, Kell sent the photos on December 4. ‘I have been directed by the French Authorities to forward you the enclosed photographs which, they consider, you would like to possess in memory of your daughter,’ he wrote. He also included copies of the photographs.

Mrs Cavell replied to thank him, saying that she had sent the copies to her other two daughters, but would keep the originals for herself. ‘I very much appreciate your kind expressions of sympathy with me in my great loss.’

The file ends there. After the war, Edith Cavell’s body was exhumed and returned to Britain. A memorial service was held at Westminster Abbey, attended by the King. Cavell was then reburied in Norwich Cathedral.

The popular perception of Edith Cavell remains that of a young, patriotic nurse who had little idea of the danger she was facing. She certainly served her country courageously, although she is famously reported to have said minutes before her execution: ‘As I stand here in the presence of Eternity, I find that patriotism is not enough.’ She wasn’t that young, either: she died two months shy of her 50th birthday. And we now know that she was well aware what might happen to her if she were caught.

But perhaps even more fascinating is the glimpse into the workings of the British police force and fledgling secret service

NEED TO KNOW

during World War One—and their bungling attempts to help a resistance fighter in peril.’

First published in The Bulletin, January 2003

Point of Honour

OF ALL THE stories of heroism in World War Two, one of the strangest is that of Paul Anspach, the fencing champion who defied the Third Reich on a matter of principle.

Anspach was born in Brussels on April 1, 1882, of good stock: his uncle had been mayor of the city and his grandfather governor of the national bank. Paul, who qualified as a lawyer, was a keen footballer and tennis player until he discovered the sport that would dominate his life: fencing. After becoming national champion, the 26-year-old travelled to London for the 1908 Olympics, where his team won bronze. But it was at the Stockholm Games in 1912 that he secured his place in fencing history, winning gold medals in both the individual and team épée events.

Some fencing nations had not taken part in the Stockholm Games, because they applied slightly differing rules. Anspach realised that for the sport to progress, it needed its own governing body: the fact that he was the best épée fencer in the world and spoke fluent French, German and English helped him make

contacts across the continent, and in 1914 he became Secretary General of the newly-formed International Fencing Federation (FIE). Five years later, he and the Marquis de Chasseloup-Laubat set down the rules of the sport—their document remains the basis for all competitive fencing today.

Anspach competed in a further two Olympics, winning silvers in both, before deciding to concentrate on his law career and the administrative side of the sport. He rented a house in Brussels' Rue de la Victoire and moved in with his second wife and their six children. In 1939, he was elected president of the FIE for a second time: his tenure was due to run until the end of 1940, but the war suspended the organisation's operations.

On May 27, 1940, Belgium surrendered to the Nazis. In the preceding days, several Germans had been murdered near Brussels, and the occupiers rounded up suspects, including Anspach, who was a military prosecutor. He was imprisoned for a week, and cleared of any involvement in the murders. However, his position as head of the FIE was noted and included in the report sent to Nazi Party headquarters in Berlin.

The report reached Obergruppenführer Reinhard Heydrich. Head of the Sicherheitsdienst, the internal security section of the SS, Heydrich was widely considered Hitler's likely successor. He had won the Iron Cross for 60 flying missions, and was a brilliant swimmer, sailor, tennis-player, equestrian and concert-level violinist.

His greatest passion, however, was fencing. With its carefully controlled violence, elegant costumes and rigid code of honour, the sport appealed to many Nazis and fascists: Benito Mussolini and Oswald Mosley were also fanatical about it. Heydrich was an outstanding saber fencer—but not quite good enough to make the German Olympic team, despite several attempts. When he realised he would not succeed at the highest level as an athlete, he turned his attention to the governing of the sport. As war raged across Europe, Heydrich was spending much of his time finagling to

become president of the German Fencing Association. When he read the report on Anspach, he saw the chance to grab a greater prize—and made his first move. He sent the Gestapo back to Rue de la Victoire.

The only person in the house was the nanny, Edith Neufeld: Anspach's wife, Marguerite, was visiting her mother in Aachen and the children were at school.

Neufeld was a 22-year-old half-Jewish German who had fled Berlin for Brussels in 1937. 'There were three or four of them,' she says. 'They were in plain clothes, but I recognised them from when they had arrested Monsieur Anspach the week before. Gestapo. They said they needed everything in the house to do with fencing. What could I do? They went into his study and took everything. Then they left.'

As president of the FIE, Anspach was keeper of all the organisation's records, archives and diplomas. The entire collection was now transported to Berlin. On hearing of the theft, Anspach, still in prison, immediately wrote a letter to Hans von Tschammer und Osten, the Reich's sports minister, to demand that the files be returned. Von Tschammer und Osten sent a reassuring reply—but nothing happened.

In December, Heydrich achieved his ambition and became head of the German Fencing Association. This prompted his next move, which was to send the Gestapo back to Anspach, requesting that he come to Berlin. 'His friends warned him not to accept any cigarettes Heydrich offered him,' says Neufeld. 'In case they were poisoned.'

Anspach arrived in the German capital in the first week of February, 1941. He took a hamper to Neufeld's mother, who still lived in the city, and she drove him to the Kaiserhof, a luxury hotel that the Nazis were using as a base.

Anspach and Heydrich's meeting lasted several hours. The German argued that Berlin was a better home for the federation's documents, as the city was the communications centre of Europe,

and pointed out that Anspach's tenure as president of the FIE should theoretically have expired two months previously. The Belgian replied that the federation's activities were in suspension because of the war, and that he would remain the leader until it was over, after which a new leader could be appointed. Heydrich parried by suggesting that Anspach do the decent thing and hand over the reins to him.

Not many people would dare say no to the Obergruppenführer's 'invitation', but Anspach did just that, and for good measure reiterated that the organisation's archives should be returned to him.

Although Heydrich was one of the most powerful men in the Third Reich and could easily have had Anspach either imprisoned or executed, he agreed to let the Belgian return to Brussels, on the condition that he was accompanied by two SS officers. Why Heydrich did this is a mystery, but perhaps he was saving harsher measures as a last resort: if he could 'honourably' take over the fencing world, so much the better.

On February 17, one of the SS officers turned up at Anspach's house in Brussels, armed with a letter stating that he would relinquish his presidency of the FIE to Heydrich, and asking him to sign it. Anspach asked the SS officer for 24 hours to consider his reply. The next day, he wrote an extraordinary letter that is now in the Fencing Museum in Brussels. 'As I am mandated by thirty-seven national fencing federations,' Anspach wrote, 'nothing can permit me to abdicate my powers to one affiliate.'

Heydrich immediately counter-attacked, inviting the head of the Italian federation, Giulio Basletta, to Berlin. At a gala dinner on March 6, 1941, Heydrich told Basletta he thought it was time they took over the running of the FIE. In a letter written to FIE members after the war, Basletta claimed that he tried to counter Heydrich's proposal, but that his German had been too weak.

Heydrich then wrote to Anspach. 'I agree with Giulio Basletta,' he wrote, 'that during the war it is I and he who will protect the

FIE's interests. The question of the next presidency can be resolved after the war.'

But once again, Anspach refused to give up his post, and cleverly used Heydrich's argument against him, pointing out that as he did not have any of the official documents of the federation, he was hardly in a position to hand over the reins. Heydrich did not reply, perhaps because he had more pressing matters to attend to: a month later, Hermann Goering authorised him to make preparations for the implementation of the 'final solution to the Jewish question'. Heydrich was responsible for everything from the mobile death squads to the transport of Jews to the camps. Ten months later, his car was ambushed by Czech agents in Prague, and he was assassinated.

After the war, Anspach bought the house in Rue de la Victoire, divorced Marguerite and married Edith Neufeld. She was 35 years younger than him, 'but it never felt like that,' she says. 'We grew close as a result of what happened during the war. It's true that he could be sharp, but he never was with me. He was only ever kind.'

Anspach tried to recover the federation's archives, but the building they were housed in had been burned to the ground during the war. He was re-elected president of the FIE, a post he held until 1948, and the organisation awarded him its highest honour, the Challenge Chevalier Feyerick, for 'defending the interest and prestige of the FIE during the war'. A servant stole his gold medal for the team épée, but the individual gold, his other Olympic medals and all his certificates are intact. Later on, Anspach became an Olympic referee, and at the age of 90 attended the 1972 Munich Olympics. He died, five months short of his 100th birthday, in 1981.

'He rarely spoke about what happened between himself and Heydrich,' says Pierre Raes, curator of Brussels' fencing museum. 'I think because he found it tragic that someone in the higher echelons of the fencing world was so dishonourable.'

‘It’s very difficult to outlive him by so many years,’ says Edith Anspach, who inherited the house in Rue de la Victoire and is now 87 years old. ‘But he was an extraordinary man, and I have some magnificent memories.’

Paul Anspach was an extraordinary man: in the most surreal but frightening contest of his life, he held his head high—and did his sport proud.

With thanks to Edith Anspach and Pierre Raes

Further reading

Books:

The Life and Times of Reinhard Heydrich by G.S. Graber (Hale, 1981) *Heydrich* by Charles Wighton (Odhams, 1962)

By the Sword by Richard Cohen (Macmillan, 2002)

Websites:

‘Genocide in World War Two: Who Were the Guilty?’ (Article discussing Heydrich’s role in the Holocaust:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/war/genocide/guilt_identity_02.shtml

The International Fencing Federation: <http://www.fie.ch>

PDF document of Anspach and Chasseloup-Laubat’s rules:

<http://www.fie.ch/download/rules/fr/RINTRO.pdf>

First published in The Bulletin, January 2005

The Real Dogs of War

ON NOVEMBER 30 1968, *Paris Match* published a story titled ‘Biafra: Final Mission’. Dramatic black-and-white photos by Gilles Caron showed a group of Nigerian soldiers carrying a large white man across a river. The man, who had been shot in the stomach and heart, was Marc Goossens, a Belgian mercenary. When the soldiers reached the other side of the river, Goossens’ fellow mercenaries searched his pockets and found his last pay-check—4,000 US dollars—and a photograph of his girlfriend back in Ostend.

Goossens was one of several Belgian mercenaries in Africa in the 1960s. As a colonial power and home to one of the world’s most prestigious arms manufacturers, Fabrique National, Belgium was a natural recruiting ground for mercenary operations—some say it still is. In 2005, Mark Thatcher, son of the former British prime minister, pleaded guilty to breaking anti-mercenary laws in Equatorial Guinea, following accusations that he had financed a coup attempt in the oil-rich West African state. Newspapers focused on Thatcher and other high-profile British establishment figures alleged to have been involved, and on the background of

the mercenaries' leader, Simon Mann, an Old Etonian and former member of Britain's special forces.

Few reports mentioned that the coup attempt had been a shambolic affair: the 'mercs' had flown into Harare in a plane that still carried the markings of the American Air National Guard, and had compounded the error by travelling with their weapons. Within minutes of landing, Mann and his associates were arrested by Zimbabwe's security forces. Many of the plotters were imprisoned.

The exploits of 'soldiers of fortune' have been told in countless books and films, but rarely do the accounts linger on the manacled, humiliated mercenary rotting in a jail cell, or the half-naked corpse being dragged through the bush.

Many of the myths of the modern mercenary started in the Congo. In the days after its independence from Belgium in June 30, 1960, the country rapidly spiralled out of control. Following a mutiny in the army, the local leader of the province of Katanga, Moise Tshombe, declared independence from the rest of the country. In February 1961, the country's first democratically elected prime minister, Patrice Lumumba, was assassinated with the complicity of the American and Belgian governments.

In 1964, Tshombe became prime minister, only to be deposed by General Joseph Mobutu the next year. Friends of Tshombe planned a second secession of Katanga, and on July 5, 1967, a 36-year-old Belgian plantation owner-turned-mercenary, Jean 'Black Jack' Schramme, who had been involved in the first secession, took 11 white mercenaries and around 100 Katangans to Stanleyville, where they fired on a Congolese army camp, killing troops and their families.

The Congolese army retaliated by killing 30 Katangan mercenaries (who had not been involved), after which Schramme's private army, nicknamed the Leopard Battalion, grew to around 1,000, 160 of which were foreign fighters. The Congolese army was around 30,000 strong. After weeks of

fighting, the Leopard Battalion retreated to Bukavu, a coastal resort that had once been favoured by the Belgian colonisers.

Schramme set up a headquarters in the city's Royal Residence Hotel and issued an ultimatum to Mobutu in Kinshasa, giving him 10 days to negotiate peace. His terms included a return to democratic rule in the country and to appoint Tshombe—who was imprisoned in Algeria on treason charges—to his cabinet.

Mobutu refused, saying he would never negotiate with assassins (an ironic charge, considering that he is likely to have smoothed the way for the Americans and Belgians to assassinate Lumumba). Schramme warned that he might attack Kinshasa. 'We have shown that the Congolese National Army is incapable of defeating us.'

Schramme's men held Bukavu for seven weeks, after which Mobutu sent in paratroopers, followed by 15,000 regular troops. Frenchman Bob Denard had his own brigade of mercenaries—the infamous 'Affreux'—in Angola and tried to cut across to help Schramme, but was driven back by air strikes. On October 29, the Congolese army moved into Bukavu; a week later, the surviving members of Schramme's 'white giants' fled over the border to Rwanda.

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While Schramme and his men were taking on the Congolese army, mercenaries were also flying into Nigeria. In May, the eastern region of the country had formed a breakaway state called Biafra. In the ensuing civil war, both sides recruited foreign mercenaries. There were about a dozen on the Biafran side, including Frenchman Denard, Briton 'Mad Mike' Hoare, 'Taffy' Williams, a South African of Welsh origin, and a German, Rolf Steiner. The Nigerians had Egyptian pilots loaned to them by the Russians, and John Peters, a Brit who had also been in the Congo.

It was an unusual situation: groups of mercenaries hadn't fought on opposite sides since the Carlist wars in Spain in the 19th

century. The fear of killing old friends sometimes led to stalemates, and some commentators feel that the use of mercenaries helped prolong the civil war: more decisive action from them might have meant an end to their monthly salaries (transferred into Swiss bank accounts).

From 1968, Steiner, a former member of the Hitler Youth who had fought in Indo-China and Algeria, led the Biafrans' 4th Commando Brigade, which adopted a skull and crossbones insignia. The brigade was 3,000-strong at one point, and 'Big Marc' Goossens was one of around a dozen mercenaries serving in it. He had never planned to go to Biafra, but after a row with his girlfriend had left Belgium on an impulse.

In September '68, the 4th Commando mercenaries went on strike over outstanding salaries; according to the memoirs of Major-General Alexander Madiebo, who was commander of the Biafran Army, the transfer of fresh funds was negotiated by Steiner's interpreter at the time, former BBC and Reuters journalist Frederick Forsyth. Two months later, in an assault on Onitsha, Goossens met his end. 'One good thing about this war is that we're fighting the English on the other side!' he was reported to have said just hours before his death, seemingly forgetting that several Brits were also on his 'side'.

'Black Jack' Schramme never reappeared after the Congo, although rumours about him continued to be spread through books and films: one was that he fled to South America. Forsyth wrote a non-fiction work about the Nigerian civil war, *The Biafra Story*, before turning his hand to fiction. In 1978, after the worldwide success of his thriller *The Day of The Jackal*, an article in *The Sunday Times* claimed that in 1973 Forsyth had helped fund an attempted coup in Equatorial Guinea by mercenaries who had previously worked in Biafra.

Forsyth denied the allegation, but he had already written *The Dogs of War*, which featured fictionalised versions of Steiner and the other mercenaries he had met in Biafra attempting to take over

a mineral-rich West African country; Goossens was the inspiration for the character ‘Tiny’ Marc Vlaminck. Forsyth had written and researched much of the novel in Equatorial Guinea, and in 2006 he admitted that he had played a small part in the aborted coup attempt, posing as a South African arms-dealer to attend a meeting of gun-runners in Germany—his cover was apparently blown when one of the arms dealers saw his photograph in the window of a Hamburg bookshop promoting the German edition of *The Day of The Jackal*.

No books or films will be made about Marc Goossens—all that remains of ‘Big Marc’ from Ostend are a few photos in an old issue of *Paris Match*.

First published in The Bulletin, February 2005

Diamonds in the Rough

Investigations into the Worlds of Ian Fleming and James Bond

For Johanna, with love

Introduction

THIS BOOK IS a short collection of six articles about the cinematic and literary worlds of Ian Fleming and James Bond. Both have, of course, already been covered in scores of other books, articles and documentaries, and one would be forgiven for thinking there's no ground left to cover. But in the last few years, I've investigated some lesser-known, and in some cases completely unknown, facets of Ian Fleming's world, and I hope found a few diamonds lurking in the rough. Some of the material in this book has previously been published in newspapers, magazines and online, but all of it has been revised and in some cases greatly expanded.

The opening article, *Gold Dust*, is about my hunt for *Per Fine Ounce*, the lost James Bond novel by South African thriller-writer Geoffrey Jenkins. This first appeared in issue 2 of *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* magazine back in 2005, and I've made just a few revisions. The full draft of the book has sadly still not been found, but Jenkins' estate published a novel with the same title by Peter Vollmer in September 2014 as a result of this story, inspired by the surviving material.

Uncut Gem builds on research I published in *The Sunday Times* in 2010, examining the attempts to film Ian Fleming's non-fiction book *The Diamond Smugglers*. I've gone into a lot more detail here than in previously published versions, about the background of the book, the contents of the screenplay I unearthed, and the prolonged efforts to turn the property into a serious rival to the Bond films. John Collard's family very kindly gave me access to a huge amount of material, including private correspondence, IDSO agents' reports, and the complete manuscript of Collard's book.

In *Commando Bond*, I look at how Ian Fleming incorporated elements of real life into his novels, and explore the numerous references and allusions to special forces. Fleming's use of real operations had a curious cinematic echo after his death, as I explore in *Black Tie Spy*, an extension of an article I originally submitted to *The Sunday Telegraph*. The seed for my research here was planted when I was writing a novel. I'd plotted out a chapter set during the Second World War in which my protagonist, a British secret agent, is sent on a mission to an island in the Baltic. But as I came to write it, I realized I was unsure how he should reach the island. Would he have been sent by parachute? By submarine? Or some other way? I reached for one of my most thumbed books, M.R.D. Foot's official history of the Special Operations Executive, to refresh my memory on how that organization had inserted secret agents behind enemy lines during the war. To my surprise, I found myself reading a passage I hadn't paid sufficient notice to before, which mentioned an operation undertaken by MI6 in 1941. Those few lines took me on a fascinating journey into the origins of one of the best loved moments in modern cinema: the opening scene of *Goldfinger*.

For *SMERSH vs SMERSH*, I hop over to the other side of the Iron Curtain to compare the real organization of that name with the one Fleming created for his novels, tracing his research into Soviet intelligence. Who inspired Rosa Klebb and Red Grant? This is where you'll find out.

NEED TO KNOW

Finally, *Bourne Yesterday*, first published on my website, looks at Ian Fleming's influence on the Jason Bourne series, and the influences on his own work.

So please, grab your wetsuit and Champion harpoon gun and join me as I dive in to the world of Ian Fleming and James Bond.

Jeremy Duns

Mariehamn, December 2014

Gold Dust

SINCE IAN FLEMING'S DEATH, a few snippets of information have cropped up that have both fascinated and frustrated Bond fans. One of these is the 'lost novel' *Per Fine Ounce*. A James Bond adventure written by a friend of Ian Fleming, the plot of which Fleming was aware of and might even have contributed to, officially commissioned by Fleming's estate but never published... Unsurprisingly, this book has become something of an Eldorado for Bond-lovers. So what was *Per Fine Ounce*, exactly?

After Ian Fleming's death in 1964, British journalist John Pearson sat down to write a biography of the creator of James Bond. Pearson set about contacting as many people he could find who had known the novelist, asking for their recollections. On 6th June 1965, he wrote to Geoffrey Jenkins, a South African who had become friends with Fleming in the 1940s, when they had both worked at *The Sunday Times*.

Jenkins had returned to South Africa and become a thriller-writer—his first novel, *A Twist Of Sand*, published in 1959, sold three million copies worldwide.¹ Fleming thought highly of it—or at least valued Jenkins' friendship enough to praise it in print: 'Geoffrey Jenkins has the supreme gift of originality,' he wrote in

The Sunday Times. ‘*A Twist of Sand* is a literate, imaginative first novel in the tradition of high and original adventure.’² In 1962, Fleming reviewed Jenkins’ third novel *A Grue Of Ice*, also for *The Sunday Times*. Comparing him favourably to John Buchan, Hammond Innes and Geoffrey Household, he concluded that Jenkins was ‘in the ranks of the great adventure writers’.³

It’s not surprising Fleming raved about Jenkins—he knew the writer, and in many ways his work was similar to his own. This was noted by other publications: *Books and Bookmen* felt Jenkins’ style combined ‘the best of Nevil Shute and Ian Fleming’,⁴ while *The Times Literary Supplement* wrote: ‘Ian Fleming is Geoffrey Jenkins’ spiritual headmaster and Mr Jenkins stands in the not unenviable position of being Mr Fleming’s most brilliant pupil’.⁵ When he received Pearson’s first letter in 1965, Fleming’s pupil had four best-sellers under his belt—he would go on to write 12 more.

On 24th September 1965, Jenkins sent an eight-page type-written reply to Pearson, in which he recounted his memories of Fleming, who he had met while he was on Lord Kemsley’s Commonwealth Scholarship scheme:

‘Later Lord Kemsley himself asked me to stay on and gave me a job in the Foreign Department, of which Fleming was the head.’⁶

Jenkins related how Fleming took him out to lunch early on in the job, he suspected out of duty, but that they quickly became friends: ‘In the next eighteen months or so he had introduced me to many leading London clubs.’⁷ According to Jenkins, Fleming was, unlike Bond, ‘essentially an introvert’; nevertheless, he was surprised, on meeting his old friend for lunch at The Caprice in London in 1961, when they had both become best-selling authors, that Fleming was full of doubts about his creation: ‘Fleming was gloomy; publishing and film worries were in his mind; he was searching for a theme for his next Bond, which was due the following spring, nine months away. “I have created a monster,”

he told me. “I have written every permutation of sex and sadism, and still the public wants more? What shall I write about?”⁸

The result was *The Spy Who Loved Me*. But despite Fleming’s dark mood, something triggered off the old spark between the two: ‘In a moment we were kicking around—in a light-hearted, gay mood, completely in contrast to that of a few minutes before—the idea of making Bond a necrophile. Both of us threw our ideas into the melting-pot as they were minted; scene after scene built up, each more hilarious than the last, each more censorious than the last, until we found that most of the afternoon was gone and that we were the only diners left, with waiters standing by in patient protest: something which had happened many times before in the Fleet Street days.’⁹

In the next paragraph, Jenkins drops a bombshell. A few years before the Caprice lunch, he and Fleming had kicked around ideas about Bond altogether more seriously:

‘I tried very hard to get him to come out to South Africa to write a James Bond set in this country. Twice he nearly came. I wrote him the outline of a plot which he thought had great possibilities (this was before *A Twist of Sand*) bringing in a secret/spy escape route through a magic lake named Fundudzi in the Northern Transvaal, towards Mozambique. “I must know how everything smells, tastes and looks for myself in South Africa,” he wrote to me. “Without them, it is not for me.” On both occasions when he decided to come and see for himself, something arose and he postponed it.’¹⁰

Jenkins goes on to discuss Fleming’s views on writing thrillers: expertise was essential, and could almost over-rule the need for a decent plot (Fleming apparently felt his own plots were thin). Jenkins says that at one of their last meetings Fleming had told him that he felt success had sapped him of energy and creativity, and also reveals that the writer’s favourite city had been Hong Kong, on account of its vibrancy.

In his covering note for the letter, Jenkins asked Pearson if his Bond outline was in Fleming's papers, as he seemed to have mislaid it. 'It ran to about 25 pages of typescript, and [Fleming] was pretty keen on it.'¹¹

On 1st October 1965, Pearson replied, thanking Jenkins for his 'splendid letter', which he had enjoyed hugely—especially the idea of making Bond a necrophile: 'he would have done it so well, too'. He added that he had found Jenkins' Bond outline, and asked if he should send it to him. 'Perhaps you should write it yourself now?'¹²

Unknown to Pearson, that idle comment would open up a hornet's nest. Encouraged by Pearson's enthusiasm, Jenkins replied to him on 6th October 1965, saying that he would appreciate seeing the outline again: 'Ian was very keen on it, as I mentioned, and we discussed it verbally at length and made quite a few changes. I know what was in his mind for it and the approach he contemplated.' He ended the letter by saying he would be in London in November—'perhaps we could meet?'¹³

The two men did meet, on 2nd November 1965; the next day, Pearson wrote to Jenkins:

'I did enjoy meeting you last night, although I meant to buy you the whisky. You must let me do so properly before you go back to the sun.

I hope that you write that book. Just reading your synopsis through I can understand why Ian got so excited about it, and you can't possibly allow such magnificent material to go to waste. Gold bicycle chains and baobab wood coffins. What else can the Bond-lover ask for?

All best wishes,
John Pearson.'¹⁴

Later that same November, Jenkins met with Charles Tyrrell of Glidrose Productions Limited, the corporate owners of the James Bond literary copyright and Bond film co-producer, Harry Saltzman, at Bucklersbury House in London to discuss the idea of

him developing his outline into a book.¹⁵ Glidrose were already considering commissioning ‘continuation’ Bond novels,¹⁶ so a friend of Fleming’s, and a best-selling thriller-writer to boot, appearing with a plot that Fleming had apparently considered writing himself may have initially seemed like a gift. The fact that John Pearson had found the outline in Fleming’s papers proved Fleming had known about it—and had taken it seriously enough to keep it.

Jenkins’ ideas certainly sound like promising material for a Bond adventure. Fundudzi is a real lake in the Zoutpansberg Region of South Africa; hidden in a valley, locals believe it is sacred and enchanted. A white crocodile and a huge python are said to live in the lake, guarding its ancestral spirits. Jenkins’ 1973 novel *A Cleft Of Stars* is set in the region:

‘It is primarily the home of the grotesque baobab trees, whose bulbous, purple-hued trunks reel across the arid landscape like an army of drunken Falstaffs, blown and drowsed with stored water...’¹⁷

Baobab trees are also seen as sacred in many parts of Africa, and are sometimes used as coffins: the bodies of important individuals are placed in a hollowed-out baobab trunk to symbolise the communion between the forces of the plant gods and the body of the deceased.¹⁸

Precisely what Jenkins had planned for the baobab coffins and gold bicycle chains is a mystery, but his pitch must have worked: Jenkins felt that Tyrrell and Saltzman were both very keen on the idea.¹⁹

Negotiations over the contract took months. Jenkins wanted his regular publisher Collins, rather than Cape, the Bond books’ usual home; and Fleming’s widow, Ann, became perturbed about the issue of ‘the original copyright’—‘whatever that means,’ Jenkins wrote.²⁰

On 12th May 1966, Glidrose cabled Jenkins to tell him that they had agreed to grant him permission to write the book, and would

get the contract drawn up with his London solicitors, Harbottle and Lewis.²¹ However, it wasn't until 24th August 1966 that Harbottle and Lewis sent Jenkins a contract—and even this looks like it wasn't the final version. The covering letter mentions that Glidrose were making noises about adding a clause stating that Jenkins would not be entitled to profits from merchandising related to any film of his novel. The contract in Jenkins' papers is undated and unsigned, but does contain such a clause. It seems likely that in the autumn of 1966, Glidrose and Jenkins' solicitors wrangled over the small print. The contract we have states that Jenkins would be paid £5,000 on signing the contract and £5,000 on publication of the novel. He would also be entitled to half of Glidrose's 2.5-percent share of global profits of any film or serial adaptation (excepting merchandising). He had six months to write the manuscript, which had to be at least 65,000 words long. He was to send four copies of the finished draft to Glidrose, but there was a clause giving them the right to refuse to publish if they saw fit.²²

Jenkins was not the only iron Glidrose had in the fire, however: Kingsley Amis was approached at least five months before Jenkins was sent his contract. Alarmed by several attempts to publish unlicensed Bond novels, the estate had decided to enter the fray by commissioning an official new Bond writer, and Amis was one of the authors under consideration.²³ He was an obvious candidate: as well as being one of Britain's most respected novelists, Amis was a self-confessed "Fleming addict".²⁴ Since Fleming's death, he had proof-read *The Man With The Golden Gun* and published two books about Bond (*The James Bond Dossier* and *Every Man His Own 007*, the latter under the pseudonym Bill Tanner).²⁵

Ann Fleming was 'violently against' the idea of a continuation novel, and of Amis writing it, but Ian's eldest brother and Glidrose director Peter Fleming was in favour and he eventually won her round. On March 15th, 1966, he wrote a letter to her that concluded:

‘As you know, I was originally less than lukewarm towards the idea of a Continuation Bond; but, having seen more of the ramifications and repercussions of this extraordinary market, I now feel strongly that the right thing to do is to tell Kingsley Amis to go ahead.’²⁶

According to Peter Fleming’s biographer Duff Hart-Davis, Glidrose were ‘forced’ to commission Jenkins as he had ‘claimed in a letter to the board that his would be the only true continuation, because he had written the outline of the plot (set in South Africa) at Ian’s request, and Ian had seen it and “indeed was most enthusiastic about it.”’²⁷

This suggests that Jenkins might have been aware that he wasn’t the only writer being considered. It seems he became impatient with the amount of time it was taking for permission to be granted him, and told Glidrose he would write the book anyway. As Jenkins had letters from Fleming’s biographer praising his synopsis and confirming that it had been in Fleming’s possession, he might have been much harder to stop than the pirates the continuation idea was meant to suppress. Perhaps for this reason, Glidrose granted him permission to write the book, but kept the right to refuse publication.

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WHEN JENKINS SUBMITTED *Per Fine Ounce*—probably in early 1967—they exercised that right of refusal. Despite an exhaustive search of Jenkins’ papers with the help of his son David, a small army of archivists and even a psychic, nothing of the final draft of *Per Fine Ounce* has yet been discovered. Four pages of an earlier draft of the novel have come to light, however.

The pages are numbered 86, 87, 88 and 89. Each contains numerous handwritten corrections and additions in the margin, and has one faint diagonal pencil mark through it. Jenkins may have later decided to abandon the scene, or end it differently, or

(perhaps most likely) the pages were simply typed up again with all the corrections added, a clean proof to be copied and sent to Glidrose.

The scene takes place in M's office. Present are M, Bond and a financier called Sir Benjamin. Page 86 starts in the middle of a discussion between the three men:

“Expensive powder-puff—£137 millions,” said M.

Bond argued on. “This gas cylinder business wasn't big enough to kill the pound. It was bound to be discovered. I say it was meant to be discovered...”²⁸

In the first page and a half, Bond argues that an incident with some gas cylinders that M and Sir Benjamin feel was designed to knock the rate of the pound was merely a smokescreen, and that some gold flights from South Africa are someone's or some organisation's real target. Sir Benjamin admits that if the gold flights were downed, it would ‘send sterling for the count’. Much discussion ensues about these gold flights, which are due to travel from Luanda to London via Angola and Las Palmas, helped along by CIA surveillance, American fighter planes from their base on Ascension Island and nuclear subs carrying surface-to-air missiles. ‘Finger-on-the-tit stuff,’ Bond murmurs.

Bond wants to return to South Africa (where, it seems, the cylinder incident took place), and have another look at the situation. M thinks this would be a waste his time, and refuses to authorise it—it's ‘outside the province of the 00 Section’. Then it really heats up:

‘Bond stood up, looking down from across the desk into the old sailor's face. “I'm sorry, sir.”

M put down his pipe. “Sorry about what, 007?” The voice was ominous.

“In just over two months, this department won't exist,” he said. As he did so, he regretted the pain he saw in the face of the man

whom he admired above anyone he knew. “You recalled me because the Treasury wanted help. Fair enough. But do you think you’ll get any more than an appreciative minute for today’s discovery? Do you really think they’ll reprieve your department because of a couple of piddling things like soda-water syphon cylinders?”

“I am ordering you, 007.” Bond heard the sharp intake of breath from Sir Benjamin behind him.

“And I,” said Bond, “Am—for once—refusing that order...”

Bond uses an extended gambling metaphor to argue his case—there are references to *chemin de fer*, and ‘the click of the chips, the silver chandeliers and the quiet monotones of the croupiers’—and concludes: ‘It’s the man who has the nerve to climb in when the Casino tries to keep him away who breaks the bank’. M says that Bond has done that many times in the past and Bond says yes, he has—‘But I did it for your department.’ When Sir Benjamin asks Bond if he intends to back no more than a hunch, Bond replies: ‘To the point of resigning.’

As the excerpt—and the chapter—ends, a VC10 takes off to South Africa and we learn that ‘James Bond, for the first time, was going on a mission without the blessing of M.’

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THE SCENE ITSELF is expository—the usual Bond and M in the office set-up—and such scenes are rarely exciting. However, it’s clear from these pages that Jenkins knew Bond. This wasn’t just a friend of Ian Fleming’s who wrote thrillers—he was clearly a Bond aficionado. This is evident in Bond’s voice, the descriptions of M, and the general atmosphere. Aside from a few typos and the odd clumsy phrase, it feels like it could be an excerpt from a Fleming Bond novel. It is also ahead of its time: at least 14 years before John Gardner’s *Licence Renewed*, Jenkins had the idea of

disbanding the Double 0 Section, and 22 years before the film *Licence to Kill*, Bond went rogue.

So why was the book rejected? According to Peter Janson-Smith, Ian Fleming's literary agent and former chairman of Glidrose, *Per Fine Ounce* was rejected on the grounds that it wasn't up to par. 'Frankly,' he says, 'I thought it was extraordinarily badly written.'²⁹

This seems at odds with the standard of the four draft pages and the four best-sellers Jenkins had published before 1966, two of which Ian Fleming had praised highly. 'There was a rumour going round that Jenkins was very good at creating plots but wasn't much of a writer, and that he had an editor at Collins who wrote his books up,' said Janson-Smith. 'When I read his Bond story, I could believe that rumour. It just wasn't good enough.'

Jenkins was a close friend of his publisher Sir Billy Collins, and sometimes took advice on small points from him (in much the same way Fleming did from William Plomer), but there is no evidence in Jenkins' notes, correspondence or drafts that Collins or anyone else was effectively writing his books on his behalf. Even if the rumour were true, Jenkins' previous books had all been best-sellers: did nobody consider editing *Per Fine Ounce* in the same way? Janson-Smith said he felt no editing could have saved the novel, but added: 'Possibly we were a little stricter with [continuation novels] in those days.'

Janson-Smith had a vague recollection that the book had had 'something to do with gold'—and that the plot had been 'rather good'. He said Ann Fleming had not been involved in its rejection—'she played no part in editorial decisions'. And he had one other twist to the tale: he didn't believe that Glidrose (or Ian Fleming Publications, as the company is now called) would still have a copy of the book. 'They would have returned it to him,' he said firmly. This was because of the problem of plagiarism. Even while Fleming was alive, unsolicited typescripts had poured in to Glidrose—the standard practice was to return them, for fear of

being sued later. As Glidrose didn't think Jenkins' novel was good enough to publish, Janson-Smith suggested, they would have no reason to keep it—and good reason to send it back, to help ensure that Jenkins didn't sue them for any similarities in any subsequent continuations. 'They would have sent a note saying the story was his to use again, but he just wouldn't be able to use Bond, M and so on.'

Indeed, the version of the contract Glidrose sent Jenkins that is now stored in his papers included precisely such a clause:

'If the New Bond Book offered by Glidrose for publication hereunder is rejected by Glidrose nothing herein contained shall prevent Geoffrey Jenkins from using elsewhere any part or the whole of the plot of such rejected New Bond Book and any of the characters appearing therein other than James Bond and the Bond characters.'³⁰

It seems likely that Jenkins would have wanted to take Glidrose up on this. Writing a novel is no easy business, and why waste a plot you have already worked out? Many of Jenkins' books have similarities to and echoes of Fleming's work—could one of them be a reworked *Per Fine Ounce*? John Pearson was, unfortunately, unable to remember anything specific about the book, and had no firm memories of his correspondence and meeting with Jenkins in 1965.³¹

Some writers have speculated that the plot was about diamond-smuggling.³² This is possible but, in the draft pages at least, it is about gold. Added to this are Jenkins' references to gold bicycle chains, Peter Janson-Smith's vague memory of 'something to do with gold', and that 'per fine ounce' is a common abbreviation of 'per Troy fine ounce', the standard unit of weight for gold. The standard unit of weight for diamonds is the carat. (Carats are also used for gold; this refers to the proportion of gold in an alloy, rather than the weight, and is now spelled "karat" in some countries to avoid confusion.)³³

Jenkins' 1983 novel *The Unripe Gold* is about another precious metal: iridium. Set in the diamond mining town of Oranjemund in south-west Africa, it features a crazed German scientist who has discovered a ton of the extremely rare metal, which he intends to use to tip the balance of the Cold War. As in Fleming's *Thunderball*, a group of terrorists masquerade as prospectors. The town is protected by a Major Rive, the head of a security service employed by Consolidated Diamond Mines.³⁴ As a terrorist approaches the town's perimeter fence, the guard on duty mistakes him for Rive:

'What was bugging him tonight? Sneezer asked himself. Maybe one of his hunches—and no one could deny that on a famous occasion Major Rive's hunch had paid off when there had been a James Bond attempt to land a plane upcoast and fly out a parcel of stolen diamonds.'³⁵

This appears to be a reference to an incident described by Ian Fleming in *The Diamond Smugglers*, which coincidentally was also used as the basis for the pre-titles sequence of an unfiled screenplay adaptation of that book by the Australian writer Jon Cleary in 1964. [And that's the subject of the next chapter.]

In several of Jenkins' novels, the protagonists are ruthless Brits with naval backgrounds. *A Cleft Of Stars'* Guy Bowker has had commando training and served in the Royal Navy in the Second World War, while Ian Ogilvie, the hero of *The Watering Place of Good Peace* (1960), is a Scot who was crippled by a shark, also while in the Royal Navy. He joins an organisation constructing anti-shark barriers 'a fast car, a pretty girl, and half a dozen drinks' after his accident.³⁶

The clearest echo of Bond, however, is Geoffrey Peace, the debonair and cruel-mouthed hero of *A Twist Of Sand* (1959) and *Hunter-Killer* (1966). The latter was the first novel Jenkins wrote after Fleming's death, and includes a wry and touching tribute to his old friend.

Published a year before the release of the film *You Only Live Twice*, the novel's narrator is John Garland (note the reversed initials), who was Geoffrey Peace's first mate in *A Twist of Sand*. Garland has not seen Peace for years when he suddenly receives a cable from his old friend asking him to come to meet him in Mauritius. Garland is a navigational expert, and Peace says he wants to collaborate with him on a system he has devised. But when Garland arrives, he finds that Peace is distracted. He wants to sail around some remote islands in the Seychelles used by one of his ancestors, a pirate—and when he's finished doing that, he decides to go spear-fishing. Garland is not pleased:

'My irritation with the whole affair increased when I found that I would have to stage back to Johannesburg via East Africa, and that the aircraft was an old flying-boat which only made the leisurely trip once a week. That meant a further delay of three days in the Seychelles. I cursed the soft languor of Limuria.'

As Garland has dinner in his hotel that night, a naval officer interrupts his meal and hands him a note, which says that Peace has been found dead in the water half a mile north of Frigate Island.

All this is told in flashback as Garland looks at Peace's coffin on board Peace's luxury yacht in Mahé. He is grief-stricken by the loss of someone he admired so much, dismayed by the publicity surrounding his death—elaborate preparations are underway to bury Peace at sea with full naval honours—and perversely angry that Peace died 'no more excitingly than an overfed businessman who drops dead after a dip at Ramsgate'.

Just a few pages into this novel, Jenkins made several references to both James Bond and Ian Fleming, some more obvious than others. The opening chapters are a clever spin on Fleming's 1960 short story *The Hildebrand Rarity*, published in the collection *For Your Eyes Only* in 1960. In that story, Bond was sent to Mahé by M to see if it would be feasible for the Admiralty to relocate its fleet base there from the Maldives:

‘Bond’s report, which concluded that the only conceivable security hazard in the Seychelles lay in the beauty and ready availability of the Seychelloises, had been finished a week before and then he had nothing to do but wait for the SS *Kampala* to take him to Mombasa. He was thoroughly sick of the heat and the dropping palm trees and the interminable conversation about copra.’

Like Bond, Peace goes spear-fishing; like Bond, Garland is forced to while away his time waiting for the weekly boat to East Africa. In a wry touch, in *Hunter-Killer* the British now have a missile base in the islands.

Fleming wrote *The Hildebrand Rarity* after visiting the Seychelles for the *Sunday Times* in 1958: he searched for buried pirate treasure on Fregaté, also known as Frigate Island (the hotel he stayed in, the Northolme, now has an Ian Fleming Suite.)

The remark about Ramsgate may be a reference to *Goldfinger*. James Bond stayed there before playing golf with the eponymous villain at the nearby Royal St George course in Sandwich—Ian Fleming died of a heart attack shortly after a meeting there.

Few people who read *Hunter-Killer* at the time would have been likely to have spotted these references—they are skilfully woven into the action. But I think there is another layer to these scenes that was entirely personal to Jenkins, and which related to his Bond synopsis. He had sent that to Fleming and suggested that he come out to South Africa to research and write it—in effect proposing a business partnership. In *Hunter-Killer*, the situation is reversed: it is Peace/Fleming who asks Garland/Jenkins to come out to see him for business. When Peace seems more intent on having fun than collaborating, Garland sourly begins to view what had been the chance to work with an old friend as a failed ‘deal’. When Peace dies, he is racked with guilt about this. Was the opening of *Hunter-Killer* a metaphor for how Jenkins felt about his Bond collaboration with Fleming?

Perhaps to compensate, Jenkins said goodbye to Ian Fleming in his fiction. Garland watches Peace's steel coffin, 'shrouded by a tarpaulin', fired from a British destroyer's depth-charge mortar in the company of Peace's former boss, the Director of Naval Intelligence. Ian Fleming, of course, had been personal assistant to the DNI in the Second World War. A helicopter then hovers over Peace's grave and a huge wreath floats down at the end of a parachute.

Having given his newly Bonded version of Fleming this marvellous send-off, Jenkins then brings him back—and in a way that Fleming would surely have enjoyed. In the next scene, Garland visits the DNI in a cottage on Mahé, where he is living with a beautiful young Seychelloise called Adele. As the three of them talk, Garland senses someone approaching. It is, of course, Geoffrey Peace.

'I blinked in disbelief. Peace stood on the terrace in the same black rubber suit in which I had seen him in his coffin. A long diving-knife was in his hand. I tried to speak, but the words would not come...

Mam'zelle Adele was still on my arm. Peace's greeting to her was level, comradely.

'Hello, Mam'zelle Adele.'

She detached herself. 'Good evening, Commander. Was it a good trip?'

'Get me a drink and I'll tell you,' he replied.'³⁷

Over wine and turtle steak, the burial at sea is revealed to be a hoax by the DNI to persuade the US Air Force, the CIA and others that Peace is dead so he can embark on a secret mission involving a new type of space missile: 'the ultimate weapon'. Later in the novel, Peace introduces himself as "Peace—Commander Geoffrey Peace".

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JENKINS' NOVELS OFTEN feature tough men scrabbling for a prize across harsh terrain—in Africa, the ocean or, particularly effectively in *A Grue Of Ice* (1962), Antarctica. None, however, feature Lake Fundudzi, gold flights, attempts to kill the pound or gas cylinders. Of them all, I think *A Cleft Of Stars* gives the best sense of what a Jenkins Bond novel might have been like. It shares an antecedent with *Diamonds Are Forever*: both books owe a debt to John Buchan's 1910 adventure *Prester John*, which concerns the tracking down of an illicit diamond pipeline in Africa. *A Cleft Of Stars*, which involves both diamonds and gold, is set in precisely the same region of South Africa as Jenkins' Bond outline from the '50s; the main character even spends some time hiding out in a hollowed-out baobab tree. It's a superb thriller: the descriptions of landscape and physical discomfort—Jenkins' trademarks—are exceptionally vivid and well drawn, and the tension builds to a highly Bond-like conclusion. Like many of Jenkins' novels, it would make a terrific film.

Jenkins was attracted to many of the same subjects as Fleming. Natural oddities abound in his work, as in *A Twist of Sand*, in which two characters see a 'double-sun', a phenomenon that had been recorded by meteorologists in 1957. He was fascinated by real-life mysteries: *Scend of The Sea* involves the search for the *Waratah*, a ship that sank without trace in 1909. Jenkins' villains also feel of the same stamp as Fleming's: *A Cleft Of Stars*' Doctor Manfred von Praeger keeps a hyena for a pet, while in *A Grue Of Ice* Carl Pirow is known as 'The Man With The Immaculate Hand' on account of an uncanny ability to imitate the fist of any ship's radio transmission. Jenkins' novels were meticulously researched, and packed with just the kind of schemes and scrapes Fleming loved. Fleming was right—Jenkins was a great adventure writer.

How to square that assessment with Glidrose's decision not to publish? Times, and attitudes, change: due to the enormous cultural influence of Fleming's creation, it's easy to forget that his

novels were unusually digressive, leisurely and stylised in comparison to other thrillers of the time. Geoffrey Jenkins wrote straightforward adventure novels, sometimes short on style but always long on atmosphere and suspense. In the immediate wake of Fleming's death, it's perhaps unsurprising that Glidrose weren't keen—especially as a writer of the literary stature of Kingsley Amis was also interested in tackling Bond.

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WE DON'T KNOW how Jenkins reacted to *Per Fine Ounce's* rejection—his son says he was very much “a closed shop” when it came to his professional life. Jenkins continued to write best-sellers, though, and the film world soon spotted his potential: *A Twist of Sand* was released by United Artists in 1968, directed by Don Chaffey. Richard Johnson—who had been Terence Young's favourite to play James Bond³⁸—starred as Commander Geoffrey Peace, alongside Honor Blackman and Guy Doleman. Geoffrey Jenkins died in 2001, aged 81.

Could *Per Fine Ounce* have been a cracking Bond adventure? Jenkins' published novels and the four draft pages strongly suggest it might have been—but it may also have needed a sensitive editor to bring in some of Fleming's literary flair, an idea that would probably not have been attractive at the time. We might never know. David Jenkins is mystified as to why the manuscript of *Per Fine Ounce* is not in his father's papers: ‘My dad kept everything.’ Indeed, his papers include notes and drafts of all his novels, newspaper clippings, maps, pamphlets, publicity material, photographs, invitations to award ceremonies and hundreds of letters—even correspondence regarding a desk he commissioned. But, aside from the four draft pages, nothing more about Bond or Ian Fleming. We only have Geoffrey Jenkins' word that Ian Fleming approved of his story and contributed his own ideas to it—without the correspondence between the two men, it is

impossible to gauge the exact extent of their collaboration, beyond the fact that Fleming had the outline. It might be that Jenkins destroyed the manuscript of *Per Fine Ounce*, or kept that and all his other Bond-related material in some place as yet unknown. For the moment, the search has been called off.

John Pearson's *The Life of Ian Fleming* was published in 1966. The book ended with Fleming's death, making no mention of *Per Fine Ounce*. In his initial letter to Geoffrey Jenkins of 6th June 1965, Pearson had said his deadline for the book was Christmas of that year—as Jenkins did not get the go-ahead for his novel until August 1966 at the earliest, it may be that Pearson decided not to mention the book in case it did not pan out (as, indeed, it did not). In the introduction to the 2003 reprinting of the biography, Pearson wrote that some new information had come to light since 1966, but that on balance he stood by his original assessment.³⁹

By May 1967, Amis had finished writing *Colonel Sun*.⁴⁰ The book was published the following year, and James Bond continuation novels have continued in some form since. But one can always wonder about what might have been. Jenkins' novels are all out of print now, but are easily found in second-hand bookstores and online. Why not try a couple—and then imagine the same author, who knew Fleming and his books well, writing a book about James Bond on a mission in South Africa, having handed in his resignation to M... And who knows? Perhaps, at the bottom of a drawer somewhere, this lost piece of Bond history is gathering dust—Eldorado may yet be waiting to be discovered.

Notes for this chapter:

1. 'Master of the adventure yarn passes on', *Daily Dispatch*, South Africa, November 15, 2001.
2. <http://www.geoffrey-jenkins.co.za>
3. Front and back covers of the 1966 Fontana edition.

4. Quoted in the back pages of several Jenkins novels: see, for example, Fontana, 1975, p223.
5. John Pearson begun his first letter to Geoffrey Jenkins (June 6, 1965): ‘Dear Mr Jenkins, I worked with Ian at Kemsley’s some time after you, and so made contact with the same spiritual headmaster, but never with the depth and success you seem to have done...’ In his reply of September 24 1965, Jenkins quoted the part of the *TLS* review reproduced here.
- 6-11. Jenkins to Pearson, September 24 1965, Jenkins papers.
12. Pearson to Jenkins, October 1 1965, Jenkins papers.
13. Jenkins to Pearson, October 6 1965, Jenkins papers.
14. Pearson to Jenkins, November 2 1965, Jenkins papers.
15. Letter to Stanley Gorrie (Jenkins’ accountant), March 22, 1966. Jenkins refers to the novel as *Per Fine Ounce* in this letter.
16. *Peter Fleming: A Biography* by Duff Hart Davis (Oxford University Press, 1987), pp374-5.
17. *A Cleft Of Stars* by Jenkins (Fontana, 1975), p20.
18. *Sacred Trees* by Nathaniel Altman (Sterling, 2000), p170.
19. Letter to Stanley Gorrie, March 22 1966, Jenkins papers.
20. Ibid.
21. Letter to Stanley Gorrie, May 13 1966, Jenkins papers.
22. Ibid.
23. *Peter Fleming: A Biography* by Duff Hart Davis (Oxford University Press, 1987), pp374-5.
24. Letter from Amis to Victor Gollancz on 1.05.1964, *The Letters of Kingsley Amis* edited by Zachary Leader (Miramax Books, 2001), p677.
25. It has been rumoured that Amis wrote or rewrote parts of this novel, but his letter to Tom Maschler of Jonathan Cape of 05.10.1964 (Leader, pp685-6) makes it clear he was simply asked to proof-read it.
26. *Peter Fleming: A Biography* by Duff Hart Davis (Oxford University Press, 1987), pp374-5.
27. Ibid.
28. This and the following passages are all from *Per Fine Ounce* draft pages, Jenkins papers.
29. This and subsequent quotes from interview with Janson-Smith, 25.02.2005.
30. Jenkins papers.
31. Interviews with Pearson, 25.02.2005 and 28.08.2005.
32. For example, *The Bond Files* by Anthony Lane and Paul Simpson, (Virgin Books, 2002), p433. One possible reason for the confusion might

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be that the only two books Fleming wrote that featured Africa were *Diamonds are Forever* and *The Diamond-Smugglers*.

33. *Precious Stones* by Max Bauer (Dover, 1968), p104, and *CRC Handbook of Materials Science* edited by Charles T Lynch, 1988, p21.

34. A similar job to Percy Sillitoe's for De Beers, both in real life and in *Diamonds are Forever*. See Chapter 2, *Uncut Gem*, for more.

35. *The Unripe Gold* (Fontana, 1973), p212.

36. *The Watering Place of Good Peace* (Fontana, 1974), p25.

37. *Hunter-Killer* (Fontana, 1973), p86.

38. Dana Broccoli interview on *Inside Dr No*, written and directed by John Cork, 2000.

39. *The Life of Ian Fleming* by John Pearson (Aurum Press, 2003), p8.

40. Amis to Philip Larkin, May 21 1967, Leader, p712.

Uncut Gem

A MAN RUNS across a beach, desperate to reach a plane at the far end of it. He hands something to the pilot just as it takes off. The plane rises into a bank of fog, whereupon it erupts into a ball of flame. The man rushes toward the crash, scrambling through the wreckage until his foot hits something. Looking down, he sees a small metal canister. He picks it up and fumbles it open. Diamonds spill into his hand...

If this sounds like the pre-titles sequence of a Bond film, it's not a coincidence. It *is* a pre-titles sequence, and it's from a screenplay based on one of Ian Fleming's books. For the past 45 years, its existence has remained unknown outside the small group of men who tried to film it.

I first became aware of the story when reading *The Letters of Kingsley Amis*. I was intrigued by a short letter he had sent fellow writer Theo Richmond in December 1965:

'I have been having a rather horrible time writing a story outline for one George Willoughby. Based on an original Fleming idea. Willoughby and the script-writer change everything as I come up with it. I gave W. the completed outline five days ago and he has been too shocked and horrified and despairing to say a word since. However, he has already paid me. (Not much.)'¹

I smiled at the familiar writer's complaint, then stopped in my tracks. What 'original Fleming idea'? I'd never heard of it, and couldn't find any reference to it anywhere else. I decided to investigate. My first step was to contact Zachary Leader, Amis' biographer and the editor of his letters, to ask him if he had any idea where the outline might be. He wasn't sure, but put me in touch with the Huntington Library in California and the Harry Ransom Center in Texas, both of which hold Amis' papers. Researchers there sent me inventories of everything they held, and I started trying their patience by asking them to go through boxes that sounded as though they might conceivably contain the outline. After weeks of this, and feeling as though we had examined practically every scrap of paper Amis had saved, I called time. Wherever Amis' outline was, it didn't appear to be stored with the rest of his papers.

My attention turned to the other clue mentioned in Amis' letter: 'one George Willoughby'. And here I got a little luckier. Willoughby, I discovered, was a Norwegian who had moved to London and become a medium-sized fish in the British film industry. In 1951, he had been an associate producer on *Valley Of Eagles*, directed and co-written by Terence Young and filmed at Pinewood, the studio owned by The Rank Organisation, at that time Britain's largest film company. Young went on to direct several of the Bond films, shooting large parts of them at Pinewood.

In 1954, Willoughby had been an associate producer on *Hell Below Zero*, an adaptation of a Hammond Innes novel made by Warwick Films. Warwick was a company founded by Irving Allen and Albert 'Cubby' Broccoli, and it specialised in making relatively inexpensive but exciting action films. In 1962, Cubby Broccoli would part ways with Allen and form a new company, Eon, with Harry Saltzman. One of the scriptwriters for *Hell Below Zero* was Richard Maibaum, who Broccoli would take with him:

he would go on to have a hand in the scripts to over a dozen Bond films.

Finally, in 1957 George Willoughby had been the associate producer on *Action Of The Tiger*, another Terence Young-directed film, this one featuring a young Sean Connery. So he had worked with three of the men who would become key players in the Bond franchise: Broccoli, Young and Maibaum. But while this was intriguing, I was no closer to finding the outline of the ‘original Fleming idea’ Amis had written for Willoughby.

But after several months of consulting authors’ societies, literary agents and film libraries, I finally found what I was looking for. To my surprise, a lot of the story had been hiding in plain sight since 1989 in a book called *In Camera*, a volume of memoirs by Richard Todd.

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DURING THE SECOND World War, Todd had served in the Army’s 6th Airborne Division—he was the first man of the main force to parachute out over Normandy on D-Day. After the war, he had become one of Britain’s biggest film stars. He was nominated for an Oscar for *The Hasty Heart* in 1949, after which he went on to play several leading roles, including starring opposite Marlene Dietrich in Alfred Hitchcock’s *Stage Fright*. However, he is probably best remembered today for playing Wing Commander Guy Gibson in the classic war film *The Dam Busters*.

Like Willoughby, Todd had also worked with many of the people who were to become central to the James Bond series. Although he was a contract player with Rank’s main rivals, the Associated British Picture Corporation (ABPC), who were based at Elstree Studios, he sometimes worked on ‘loan-out’ for Rank, for example on *Venetian Bird*, an adaptation of a Victor Canning thriller.

He had also made a film for Cubby Broccoli: *The Hellions*, a quasi-Western shot in South Africa in 1961. The following year, he was one of the star-studded cast of *The Longest Day*, an adaptation of Cornelius Ryan's account of D-Day. Todd played Major John Howard, who had been his superior officer on the day in real life. On the set in Caen in France, he met a 'rather shy' young Scottish actor with a small part in the film: Sean Connery.²

In April 1962, while Cubby Broccoli and Harry Saltzman were busy finalizing their contract with United Artists for the first Bond film, *Dr No*³, Todd was informed that his contract with ABPC would not be renewed the following year. This was a body blow: it meant that he would now have to fend for himself in the jungle of Britain's rapidly declining film industry, which was under increasing pressure from Hollywood. But he had at least one iron in the fire, in the form of his friend George Willoughby, who 'had secured an option on the screen rights of an Ian Fleming book, *The Diamond Story* [sic], an intriguing exposé of illicit diamond-buying in Africa and of the undercover activities of agents who worked to counteract it'.⁴

So here it was: this was the elusive project Amis had been working on. *The Diamond Smugglers* was Fleming's first foray into full-length non-fiction, and apart from the guidebook *Thrilling Cities* remains the only one of his books not to have been filmed. It was originally published in 1957, collecting a series of articles in *The Sunday Times* in which Fleming had explored the shady world of diamond trafficking. A new edition of the book was published in 2009, with an introduction by Fergus Fleming, the writer's nephew. 'The success of Bond tends to eclipse Ian Fleming's other talents,' he tells me. 'It's often forgotten that he was also an accomplished journalist, travel writer and children's author.'⁵

Ian Fleming had become fascinated by the illegal trade in gemstones in 1954, when he had discovered that the world's biggest diamond-seller, De Beers, had set up its own private

intelligence agency, the International Diamond Security Organisation, to try to combat it. IDSO was run by Sir Percy Sillitoe, who had previously been the head of MI5. Fleming met with Sillitoe and other diamond industry insiders, and used much of what he learned as background material for *Diamonds Are Forever*, largely set in the United States.⁶

Three years later, Fleming was drawn back into the world of diamonds. IDSO had blocked several plots by international criminal networks to bring diamonds illegally out of the mines of South Africa, Sierra Leone and elsewhere, and had been disbanded. Sillitoe, irritated that he and the organization had not been given more credit for their successes, decided to publish a book about it. His intention was for it to be a sequel to his 1955 memoir *Cloak Without Dagger*, and with that in mind he commissioned one of IDSO's senior agents, John Collard, to ghost-write an account.

Collard was an old hand in the espionage game. He had been in MI5 in the early part of the Second World War, but had then moved to the counter-intelligence agency MI11, becoming its head by 1946. He then rejoined MI5 and played a major role in the capture and conviction of the 'atomic spy' Klaus Fuchs, before heading off to South Africa to join IDSO.⁷

Collard revisited his and other agents' reports and wrote the book. Sillitoe sent the manuscript to Denis Hamilton at *The Sunday Times* for his view; Hamilton liked it, but Leonard Russell on the paper felt that a professional journalist would be able to spice it up. They suggested that Ian Fleming, who worked for the paper, interview Collard with the aim of producing a series of articles. All involved agreed, and so in early April 1957 Fleming took an Air France Caravelle to Tangiers to meet John Collard. The two men quickly established a rapport, and Fleming started work.⁸

This mainly consisted of editing and redrafting the original manuscript. Collard had detailed the organisation's frustrations,

failures and successes in clear, lively prose, and it probably would have sold well had it been published as it was. But it was no thriller. Fleming went through the text, cutting anything he felt was dull or overly complicated and heightening the most exciting passages as only he knew how. He also adapted information from Collard's source material: one IDSO agent's report in Collard's papers has 'Passage omitted I.F.' and 'Name omitted I.F.' all over it in Fleming's distinctive scrawl.⁹

The biggest change Fleming made was not to the content, but to the perspective. Collard had written the book as though Sillitoe were the narrator. Fleming kept most of Collard's material, but rewrote it so that he, Ian Fleming, became the narrator, the intrepid investigative journalist flying out to Tangiers to interview the mysterious hero of the tale, who he made Collard instead of Sillitoe.

This switch was clever in several ways. Firstly, Sillitoe was at that point nearly 70 years old, and was not nearly as compelling a subject as Collard, who was in his mid-forties and therefore a man with whom readers could more readily identify. Sillitoe was largely a desk man, while Collard had seen extensive action in the field, both with MI5 and with IDSO—indeed, he wrote of his own actions in the third person throughout his manuscript. Sillitoe was the M figure of the organisation, and Fleming must have realized that the public would be drawn to someone more like Bond.

This shift of focus from Sillitoe to Collard allowed Fleming to create something more reminiscent of his own famous thrillers, as well as to add some local colour and texture. The framing device of the interview allowed Fleming to break up Collard's long passages of close exposition about the diamond industry with some of his own brand of intrigue, bringing in references to life in Tangier, other spies such as Richard Sorge and Christine Granville and, of course, James Bond.

Either prompted by others or on his own initiative, Fleming also gave several of the people featured in the book different names, including Collard. The book discussed at length how IDSO had foiled several unscrupulous gangs, so there might have been some concern about blowback following publication. For Collard, Fleming chose the rather Bond-ish ‘John Blaize’—in the germ of a scene in one of his notebooks, he had had Miss Money Penny suggest ‘Major Patrick Blaize’ as a cover name for Bond.¹⁰

Fleming portrayed Collard/Blaize as a quieter, shyer character than Bond, although readers would learn that he owned 24 fine white silk shirts and intended to spend 48 hours gambling intensively in Monte Carlo ‘to wash the last three years and the African continent out of his system’.¹¹

In 1965, Leonard Russell wrote to Collard to ask him about his recollections of Fleming for a biography he was writing of him with John Pearson—Pearson eventually took over the job completely—and Collard gave a detailed account of how the book had come about and how he had met Fleming. In much the same way he’d ghost-written himself into Sillitoe’s memoir, he also wrote this up in the third person. He reveals the week included them playing golf together and attending parties, and that they kept in touch in subsequent years:

‘In the bar at the Royal St Georges or Rye Golf Club, they could sometimes be seen having a private yarn.’¹²

The two men evidently got on well in Tangiers, but Fleming’s presentation of their meetings in the book is largely fiction. No doubt he asked Collard for clarification on some points, but his work was largely editorial: he took passages from Collard’s book, rearranged and simplified them, and then had ‘Blaize’ speak them aloud while he, Fleming, supposedly leaned in and listened, interjecting occasional questions. In this way, the book took on the tone of a fascinating secret story being told in a darkened corner of a bar in the tropics, automatically giving it more vigour.

Fleming could probably have done most of this work in London—but then, that wouldn't have been as exciting, or got him a few days' golf and partying in Tangiers.

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TO PRE-EMPT ANY legal difficulties, Fleming sent proofs of his version of the book to The Diamond Corporation, De Beers' distribution arm in London. The move didn't work. Although the company initially appeared pleased with the text, it later took exception to several elements, and Fleming was forced into rewrites.¹³ But finally, in September 1957, the articles began to be serialised in *The Sunday Times*. Readers learned about 'Monsieur Diamant', a 'big, hard chunk of a man with about ten million pounds in the bank'. Outwardly a respectable entrepreneur, his diamond-fencing activities had made him 'the biggest crook in Europe, if not in the world'. Another episode concerned a bravado attempt to fly 1,400 stolen diamonds out of Chamaais Beach in South-West Africa, which failed when the plane crashed on take-off.

The articles were collected to form a book, titled *The Diamond Smugglers*, which was published in November with an introduction by Collard (under the Blaize pseudonym). The book didn't differ a great deal from the manuscript Collard had originally written, but it had been souped up, texture had been added and, above all, Fleming's name had been appended to it. As a result, it received a level of marketing almost equal to that afforded to the Bond novels at the time.¹⁴

Fleming was happy with his scoop, but not entirely satisfied with the way the project had turned out. On the fly-leaf of his own copy of the book, now stored at Indiana University's Lilly Library, he noted:

'This was written in 2 weeks in Tangiers, April 1957. The name of the IDSO spy is John Collard. Sir Percy Sillitoe sold the story

to the Sunday Times & I had to write it from Collard's M.S. It was a good story until all the possible libel was cut out. There was nearly an injunction against me & the Sunday Times by De Beers to prevent publication of the S. T. serial. Rightly, they didn't like their secrets being sold by an employee. Lord Kemsley & Collard shared the profits of this—a third each, which was a pity as I sold the film rights to Rank for £12,500. It is adequate journalism but a poor book & necessarily rather “contrived” though the facts are true.’¹⁵

Perhaps as a result of his irritation at the suppression of some of the story's more exciting aspects, Fleming's view was overly pessimistic. The fact that Rank was prepared to pay a sizeable amount for the rights to a compilation of newspaper articles he had written in a fortnight was a sign of the growing interest in his work from the film industry. In 1954, Gregory Ratoff had taken a six-month option on his first novel, *Casino Royale*, for \$600, and shortly after that CBS had bought the television rights to the same book for \$1,000. The following year, Rank had snapped up the rights to *Moonraker* for £5,000. *Casino Royale* was rapidly made into an hour-long TV adaptation, with Barry Nelson as James ‘Jimmy’ Bond and Peter Lorre as Le Chiffre. Rank's *Moonraker* film never got off the ground.¹⁶

Rank was, initially at least, keen to publicise the fact that it had bought the rights to the book. *The Bookseller* noted that it had bought the rights for ‘an unusually high figure’, and had ‘commissioned Ian Fleming to prepare the film treatment’¹⁷, and ‘*The Diamond Smugglers Story*’ was included in Rank's programme for 1958 along with *The Thirty-Nine Steps* and *Lawrence of Arabia* (both of those were prematurely announced, being released in 1959 and 1962 respectively). But 1958 passed, and the film didn't materialize.

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THAT'S THE TRADITIONAL story of *The Diamond Smugglers*, mentioned in passing in dozens of books and articles. A slightly obscure Fleming work, not featuring James Bond. A success, but not one of his greater ones. The film rights sold, but no film made. Case closed.

Well, not quite. There *were* attempts to film *The Diamond Smugglers*, serious and prolonged attempts, as Todd's memoir showed. I contacted the actor's agent, but was told that due to frailty and a hazy memory he didn't feel he could add to what he had already written. This was understandable: Todd was approaching ninety and, unknown to me, suffering from cancer. I had by now also contacted John Collard's family, who kindly provided me with a great deal of material, including both his relevant correspondence from the time and the original manuscript of his book. Adding this to the information in Todd's memoirs and other sources, I started to piece together the rest of the story.

Willoughby set up his own production company in 1959, and at some point between then and 1962 obtained the film rights to *The Diamond Smugglers*. In a letter to a former colleague in 1965, John Collard wrote that he had met Willoughby 'about five years ago at the request of Ian Fleming'.¹⁷

From subsequent events, it seems that Rank may have told Willoughby that they had given up on trying to adapt the book, but that if he could put together the elements of a commercially viable film, they would distribute it. They later did just that with another Willoughby production, *Age of Innocence*, which had featured Lois Maxwell and Honor Blackman.

Todd and Willoughby became partners in 1962, and set to work: Derry Quinn, who had worked as a story supervisor on *Chase A Crooked Shadow*, a thriller Todd had made in 1958, was hired to write a treatment. As well as Todd's contacts within the industry and star power—presumably the original intention was for him to play Blaize—the actor also knew South Africa. While

making *The Hellions*, he had been struck by the potential for a film industry there: it had widely varying scenery and climate, a lot of investors looking for overseas outlets, and a large pool of English-speaking actors.¹⁸

As *The Diamond Smugglers* took place in that part of the world, Todd now returned to his South African contacts, inviting to London Ernesto Bisogno, a businessman he had met on his *Hellions* trip who had dabbled in small-scale film production and was now forming a production company in Johannesburg. Bisogno was accompanied by an official of the South African Industrial Development Corporation, who Todd had also met the previous year. Their reactions to the project were apparently very favourable, and Todd was optimistic that he would be able to persuade ABPC to distribute the film once it was made. However, work on the screenplay was slow, with Todd's flat becoming 'a charnel-house of abandoned drafts and screen treatments'.¹⁹ Fleming's book was essentially a series of unconnected episodes: crafting an exciting, coherent and commercial script from them would prove no easy task.

In April 1963, a full year after starting work on the project, the two men had a breakthrough: John Davis, the head of Rank, put them in touch with Earl St John, who was in charge of productions at Pinewood. St John had been an executive producer on *Passionate Summer*, a film Willoughby had produced in 1958. He liked their pitch, and as a result Rank funded a trip to South Africa and South-West Africa (now Namibia) in May 1964 to scout locations in which to set the screenplay for *The Diamond Smugglers*.²⁰

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BY NOW A new writer had arrived on the scene: the Australian Jon Cleary, then best known for his novel *The Sundowners*, the film of which had starred Robert Mitchum and Deborah Kerr and

had been nominated for five Academy Awards. Now in his nineties, he still vividly recalls his work on *The Diamond Smugglers*. ‘My doctor says my body is ninety but my head’s fifty,’ he laughs when I speak to him on the phone from his home in Sydney. According to Cleary, Rank had originally bought the rights to the book because of Fleming’s name. ‘They disowned it when they realised it was a grab-bag of pieces he had written one wet weekend. There was no story. So they put it on the shelf.’²¹

But now *The Diamond Smugglers* had another shot. It was not only back on Rank’s radar—they were putting up money to develop it. Accompanying Todd, Willoughby and Cleary on the trip to Africa was the American director Bob Parrish, who, according to Cleary, had agreed to direct the film subject to a satisfactory script being developed. Cleary and Parrish both lived in London and knew each other; Cleary says Parrish put him forward for the project. Parrish, who had won an Oscar as an editor, had directed an adaptation of Geoffrey Household’s *A Rough Shoot*, from a script by Eric Ambler, and *Fire Down Below*, co-produced by Cubby Broccoli.

‘We landed in Johannesburg on a Sunday afternoon,’ Cleary remembered. ‘There were three thousand people there to meet us at the airport! We stayed in the Langham Hotel, which was the place to be. Everything was laid on for us, and all kinds of avenues of research were opened—I knew nothing about diamonds. One day, a European woman—Contessa something-or-other—turned up at my hotel room to discuss the business, and emptied her chamois bag, spilling diamonds onto the table. It was about three or four million Rand, just sitting there!’

After spending a few days in South Africa, where they scouted locations in Johannesburg, M’Tuba’Tuba and Pretoria, the group flew to South-West Africa’s capital, Windhoek. They were shown around by Jack Levinson and his wife Olga, who lived in a castle-like residence that had been built for the Commander-in-Chief when the country had been a German colony. The Levinsons

were ideal guides for their mission: as well as being the city's mayor, Jack was also a lithium entrepreneur who had discovered diamonds on the Skeleton Coast, while Olga had recently published a history of the country.²²

By now, the Bond films were big business, and with the release of *Goldfinger* in September, about to become a global phenomenon. Was the intention to leverage Fleming's material into a Bond-style plot? Not according to Cleary: 'It was always going to be much more realistic than the Bond films. We wanted to make use of the fact that we had these remote, exotic locations, but craft something much more down-to-earth, that nobody had seen before.'

Cleary, like Derry Quinn before him, was desperately looking for a way to connect the disparate elements of Fleming's book into an exciting plot. In South-West Africa, he finally hit upon an idea. 'Bob liked it. We told Richard—it would involve him being the villain, for a change. He jumped at it. The idea was for Steve McQueen to play the lead. I've forgotten who they wanted for the girl, but it was one of the top stars.'

McQueen, who had become well known after *The Magnificent Seven* in 1960, had just made *The Great Escape*, which had catapulted him to greater fame. Whether or not he would have been interested or available for *The Diamond Smugglers* is another question, but it's fascinating to think of him in a Fleming adaptation.

Cleary's original idea for the script was based on a story he had heard while the team were scouting the Skeleton Coast, about a man who sets up a model aeroplane club in the De Beers'-protected town Oranjemund, and then uses the model planes to try to smuggle some diamonds out. Fired up with the potential of this idea, Cleary 'went away and wrote a screenplay'. I ask him to repeat this to be certain I've heard correctly. There are no references to a completed screenplay in Todd's memoirs—or anywhere else. A script of an unfilmed Ian Fleming book, written

in the Sixties by a well-known novelist, with funding by Rank... well, that would be something. 'Did you keep a copy?' I ask quietly. Cleary chuckles. 'I'm afraid I've never been a hoarder,' he says, and my heart sinks. He tells me that the State Library of New South Wales has his papers, but that they often call, begging him to send them his latest manuscript 'before I throw it out'.

This doesn't sound hopeful, but I contact the library anyway. And they have it. After obtaining permission from Cleary and his literary agency, I am sent a copy. I crack it open, and stare at the title page with amazement. 'The Diamond Smugglers by Ian Fleming. Draft screenplay by John Cleary.' I had gone looking for Amis' story outline, and had instead found a completed screenplay.

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THE SCRIPT IS dated October 28 1964, and is 149 pages long. It begins:

'EXT. BEACH. SOUTH WEST AFRICA. EARLY MORNING.

We open on a LONG SHOT of a desert, grey-blue and cold looking in the dawn light...'²³

The protagonist has been renamed: instead of John Blaize, he is now Roy O'Brien, a tall, quiet American secret agent who is sent to a diamond mine in Johannesburg under cover as a pilot. His mission: to infiltrate and break up a ring of smugglers preparing to make a huge deal with the Red Chinese. O'Brien reads very much as though written with McQueen in mind. We are told he is 'marked with the sun and the scars of a man who has spent a good deal of his life in the outdoors' and that 'he was a boy once quick to smiles' but is now 'a man who has seen too much of sights that did not provoke laughter'. He is quick-witted, laconic, but very likeable.

We first meet him in Amsterdam, where he is staking out Vicki Linden, a beautiful young South-West-African diamond-smuggler

of German descent. She is reminiscent of the character Tiffany Case in Fleming's novel *Diamonds Are Forever*, but somewhat softer and more naive (without being irritating). He follows Vicki to South Africa, and she tells him her ambition is to have a diamond 'for every day in the week'. He asks how far she has got in this and she wrinkles her nose and replies 'Only Monday', to which he retorts: 'Give me the chance and I'll try and dig up Tuesday for you.'

Despite the change from Blaize to O'Brien and the addition of new characters, Cleary's screenplay is remarkably faithful to the tone of Fleming's book, and takes a lot of cues from it. Cleary used locations, incidents, technical information and a lot of other elements and ideas from the book, and wove a thriller plot around them. The opening sequence is clearly inspired by the failed attempt to fly diamonds out from Chamaais Beach, although this time the plane doesn't simply crash but explodes mid-air. China's increasing interest in the illegal diamond trade, discussed at several points in the book, becomes the political backdrop of the plot; the description of security measures employed by mining companies is dramatised in a scene in which O'Brien is X-rayed; like Collard/Blaize, he makes use of a safe house in Johannesburg's back streets; and so on.

It is a very different beast to the Bond films. There are no nuclear warheads or hidden lairs: it is, as Cleary says was the intention, a gritty, down-to-earth thriller. Nevertheless, there are some suitably baroque and Fleming-esque touches. One of the villains is a diamond-smuggler called Cuza, who weighs over four hundred pounds 'but walks with a delicate step' and likes eating chocolates: 'Stone-bald, he wears dark glasses; a balloon head rests on a balloon body; he could be a clown or a killer.'

Cuza and his black sidekick Daniel work out of a windswept drive-in cinema projectionist's office. In one memorable scene, Daniel stalks O'Brien with a sniper rifle from his position on a catwalk running along the top of the cinema screen.

Cuza is in competition with a villain in a similar mould to Fleming's: Steven Halas is a wealthy German South-West-African businessman who likes giving lavish parties (at which he serves Bollinger '55) and taking photographs of big game, but beneath the veneer of sophistication he is greed personified. However, the real villain of the piece is revealed in the final act to be Ian Cameron, a womanising Scot who is the mine's field manager, and who is gently reminiscent of both Bond and Fleming. This, presumably, is the role that had been earmarked for Todd.

As well as drawing incidents and ideas from Fleming's book, the script is faithful to its tone, especially in its evocation of the sticky climate of fear and temptation permeating a diamond mining community. The shabbiness of O'Brien's accommodation provokes the script's one direct reference to Fleming's best-known creation, when his colleague Spaak is amused at its unsuitability and asks what has become of spies who only operate in five-star hotels. 'You need a nice low number,' O'Brien replies, 'Like 007. Whoever heard of a spy called 42663-stroke-12568?' 'What's that?' asks Spaak. 'My social security number,' comes the dry reply.

Highlights include two brutal hand-to-hand fights, one of which ends with the death of the monstrous Cuza, and a climactic car chase, which happens during an elephant stampede.

All told, the script is a cracker: a taut thriller with believable characters, snappy dialogue and a compelling plot. Its strongest features are its evocation of the Skeleton Coast—you can almost feel the dust and the dirt of this place that 'breeds seals, jackals and madmen', as one character describes it—and the subtle shading of the relationship between O'Brien and Vicki. Cleary also added some extra spice to the traditional police/spy story with elements of the Western and film noir, in a manner occasionally reminiscent of Orson Welles' *A Touch Of Evil*. His script is free of the troublesome plot holes, inconsistent characterisation and mixed tones common in many films of the time.

According to Todd's memoirs, in the summer of 1965 Rank signed an option to buy and produce the film, while on 14 June of that year, Willoughby wrote to John Collard to tell him that the production looked like it was back on the table:

'You may recollect that we met a few years ago in connection with the proposed production of a film based on Ian Fleming's "The Diamond Smugglers". Due to various circumstances at the time, these plans did not materialise. It is now a possibility that I shall be able to set up a production on this subject.'²⁴

The letter is headed 'Willoughby Film Productions Limited' with an address in Sackville Street in London—but next to it Willoughby typed another address for Collard to reply to: Pinewood Studios, Iver Heath, Bucks.

Willoughby was contacting Collard again because he wanted his permission to use the character of John Blaize (the name O'Brien seemingly having been dropped). As a sweetener, he offered Collard a role as a technical adviser to the production.

Collard replied that De Beers should be consulted about the latest plans for the film, and asked for more details about it: would it be a documentary sticking closely to the book, or partly fictional?²⁵ On 21 June, Willoughby wrote to Collard again, writing that the film he had in mind was a 'feature entertainment', which would necessitate departing from Fleming's book, as that had mainly consisted of 'a number of incidents without a dramatic story line or link'. He understood that Collard might feel they were straying too far from the facts, but gave a surprising precedent for it:

'Fleming himself wrote for the Rank Organisation, a film treatment on this subject and although he used the name of John Blaize for the hero, his treatment had, nevertheless, very little to do with the actual articles he wrote for the "Sunday Times".'²⁶

This is the first mention of the existence of a film treatment for *The Diamond Smugglers* by Ian Fleming since *The Bookseller's*

report of its commissioning in 1957—but it would not be the last. On 1 September 1965, Collard received a letter from B.J. Rudd, an old acquaintance, who had enclosed a small cutting from *The Sun* from 25 August, titled ‘Fleming film’:

‘An 18-page outline for a film about illicit diamond-buying written by Ian Fleming, creator of James Bond, is to be turned into a £1,200,000 film.’²⁷

Collard and Willoughby, meanwhile, continued to correspond, with the producer revealing two new pieces of information in a letter on 27 August: a script was being completed by yet another writer, Anthony Dawson (‘who lives not far from you in Sussex’) and that the protagonist’s surname had now been changed from Blaize to Blaine, to avoid confusion with Modesty Blaise.²⁸

For anyone familiar with the James Bond films, the reference to Anthony Dawson is almost surreal: could this be the British character actor who had played Professor Dent in *Dr No* and who had been the presence (although not the voice) of arch-villain Ernst Stavro Blofeld in both *From Russia With Love* and *Thunderball*? It would seem so. Terence Young, who directed all three of those Bond entries, cast Dawson in several of his films, including *Valley of Eagles* and *Action of the Tiger*, both of which had had as associate producer one George Willoughby. It seems implausible that there were *two* Anthony Dawsons who worked on Ian Fleming projects in the Sixties, and that Willoughby collaborated with both. Dawson’s son confirms that his father lived in Sussex during this period, and wrote several film scripts.²⁹ Unfortunately, he wasn’t able to locate any material relating to *The Diamond Smugglers*.

A few weeks later, Barbara Bladen, a critic at the *San Mateo Times* in California, reported breathlessly on the film in her column:

‘We’ll have to start getting used to someone else playing James Bond in the Ian Fleming stories! Sean Connery has gone back to

being Sean Connery and the Fleming pictures roll on. Latest before the cameras is “The Diamond Spy” on location in South Africa, Amsterdam and the Baltic coast of Germany. Richard Todd will play the slick agent. The author first wrote the book as a series of newspaper articles in 1957 and came out in book form as “The Diamond Smugglers.”³⁰

The changing of the protagonist from a newly coined character to the world-famous James Bond is probably either Willoughby or Bladen’s hyperbole—perhaps even a way around the fact that they had not yet resolved what to call the character. The locations listed are intriguing: South Africa and Amsterdam were both featured in Cleary’s 1964 screenplay, but the Baltic coast of Germany was not. Could there have been another script by this time—or did Willoughby merely have an idea for one?

The title *The Diamond Spy*, which now started appearing in the press, did not please John Collard. On 3 January 1966, he wrote to Willoughby at Pinewood:

‘If the revised title is seriously proposed, I am afraid that as far as I am concerned the film will start off on the wrong foot, whether it is described as fictional or coincidental, and the object of this letter is to advise you in the friendliest possible manner to bear in mind my personal interest and the need to consider the risk of libel.’³¹

In a more placatory hand-written postscript, Collard explained that Fleming had originally planned on calling his book *The Diamond Spy*, but had changed it at Collard’s request: ‘The description “spy” carries with it a derogatory meaning,’ he explained to Willoughby, ‘and quite apart from its inappropriate use to describe “Blaize”, I myself take strong exception to it.’ The word ‘spy’ was often used in books and films at the time, and Fleming had of course used it in one of his titles, but Collard had worked for MI5, and in that and other intelligence agencies, the word was usually used to refer to informants and traitors.

Collard's letter seems to have been the first between the two men since August 1965, but it began another flurry of correspondence. Willoughby immediately tried to reassure Collard that *The Diamond Spy* was merely a working title, which they were using 'because this is the title Fleming used for his story-line'. He invited him to lunch the next time he was in London to tell him more about the film.³²

By now, Willoughby had hired Kingsley Amis as a 'special story and script consultant'. This news was reported in the American film industry magazine *Boxoffice* in January 1966:

'Kingsley Amis, novelist, critic and authority on the work of Ian Fleming, creator of James Bond, has been engaged as special story and script consultant on the new £11/4 film of Fleming's "The Diamond Spy", it was announced last week by British producer George Willoughby. The film, to be made early next year by Willoughby, in association with Richard Todd's independent company, is based on a story outline written by Ian Fleming but never completed by him. This outline was drafted by Fleming following his own investigations into international diamond smuggling, which he wrote up as a series of articles for a Sunday newspaper in 1957. Later, these articles were collected and published in book form under the title of "The Diamond Smugglers".³³

Now Amis, author of the recently published "James Bond Dossier", has been called in as a Fleming expert to develop the story, characters, situations and incidents so as to give "The Diamond Spy" film an authentic Fleming flavor. When he has completed this task, W. H. Canaway, who wrote the script of "The Ipcress File", will take over all the material, from which he will write the final screenplay.'³³

This article repeated some material that had been published in *Boxoffice* in the same column a few months earlier³⁴, but the screenwriters' names were new—and brought a significant amount of prestige and experience to the table. *The IPCRESS File*, which had been produced by Harry Saltzman and featured

the talents of several other Bond alumni, had been a great success, and Amis' status as a Fleming 'expert' would receive another push later the same month, when it was announced that he had been commissioned to write the first James Bond novel since Fleming's death.

On January 27 1966, Willoughby wrote to Collard to finalise the details of a meeting they were both to attend in London on 4 February:

'Thos [sic] present at the meeting, in addition to myself, will be Mr Kenneth Hargreaves of Anglo Embassy Productions Ltd., and Mr David Deutsch of Anglo Amalgamated Film Distributors.'³⁵

It seems Willoughby had found yet new partners. Anglo Embassy was the English arm of Joseph E Levine's Embassy Pictures, which had produced *Zulu* and *The Carpetbaggers*. Levine would go on to produce *The Graduate*, *The Producers* and *The Lion In Winter*. Anglo Amalgamated's main claim to fame was the *Carry On* films, and in 1964 it had distributed *The Masque of The Red Death*, which Willoughby had associate-produced. But it was becoming increasingly high-brow, backing the first features of both John Boorman (*Catch Us If You Can*, released in 1965), and Ken Loach (*Poor Cow*, released in 1968). It had also released the highly controversial *Peeping Tom* in 1960.

On January 31, John Collard received a letter from Glidrose Productions: the owners of the James Bond literary copyright. It was from Beryl Griffie-Williams, 'Griffie', who had been Ian Fleming's secretary. She enclosed a newspaper cutting about Anglo Amalgamated Distributors. It seems that in advance of his meeting with Willoughby, Hargeaves and Deutsch, Collard has asked Glidrose what they made of Anglo Amalgamated. Griffie-Williams wrote that the feeling was that they were not very ambitious, and that the resulting film might be 'mediocre'. She also revealed that Rank were unwilling to sell the book's film rights, which had been sold to them outright, but that despite

Willoughby's option with Rank being due to expire, the company were prepared to 'play along' with him. She added: 'On checking past correspondence, it does seem that Willoughby will make an entirely different film from the book. He does, I think, intend to create a new character which he can follow up in any subsequent film.'³⁶

This was a potentially crucial point. Three years earlier, another independent producer, Kevin McClory, had provided a massive legal headache for Ian Fleming over *Thunderball*, and had won the right to remake that film (which he later did, as *Never Say Never Again*). As a result, Glidrose had sound reasons for wondering whether, were *The Diamond Smugglers* to prove a box office success, Willoughby and Todd might try to produce sequels to it featuring 'John Blaine'. And if they did, who would own the rights to this character, who was an amalgam of a real agent, John Collard, a fictionalised version of him created by Ian Fleming, and a further re-imagining by Jon Cleary, Kingsley Amis and several other writers?

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WE DON'T KNOW what happened at Collard's meeting with Willoughby, Hargreaves and Deutsch, but at any rate Willoughby pressed on. On 9 February 1966, another article appeared in *The San Mateo Times*, headlined 'Newspaper Stories by Ian Fleming In Film':

"'The Diamond Spy', an unpublished story by the late Ian Fleming, creator of James Bond, will be brought to the screen by Joseph E. Levine's Embassy Pictures in conjunction with Anglo Amalgamated Film Distributors, Ltd. of London, headed by Nat Cohen and Stuart Levy.

The five-million dollar co-production will be produced by George Willoughby, from screenplay by W. H. Cannaway [sic] and Kingsley Amis. Director and cast for the adventure-thriller

have not yet been set. “The Diamond Spy” also will be based in part on a series of newspaper articles written by Fleming and published in paper-back form under the title, “Diamond Smugglers”. The story of the smashing of a huge international band of diamond racketeers, it will be filmed in color on location in South Africa, Beirut, Amsterdam, Germany and London. Embassy Pictures will distribute the film worldwide, with the exception of the United Kingdom. The last film venture involving the two companies was “Darling”, which has won acclaim at both the box-office and from critics everywhere.³⁷

This was an advance on the article that had appeared in the same newspaper five months earlier. The ‘James Bond’ error was not repeated, although a new one was introduced—that the story was unpublished—and then contradicted. Two new locations were listed, Beirut and London, neither of which were in Cleary’s script.

The next piece of news came four days later, in one of Ian Fleming’s favourite newspapers, Jamaica’s *Daily Gleaner*. It was titled ‘Another Bond film’:

‘Of the making of James Bond films there seems to be no end. It has recently been announced that British novelist Kingsley Amis, an authority on the work of Ian Fleming, is to be special story and script consultant on “The Diamond Spy”, which George Willoughby is to make in association with Richard Todd’s independent company.

The film will be based upon a story outline which Fleming never completed. It was drafted after his investigations for the London Sunday Times into international diamond smuggling. The series of articles he wrote were later published in book form and entitled *The Diamond Smugglers*. *The Diamond Spy*, which is scheduled to cost about £1,500,000, will be filmed almost entirely on location in South Africa, Beirut, Amsterdam, the Baltic coast of The Federal Republic of Germany and London. It has not yet been announced who will play Bond.’³⁸

This is similar to the previous *San Mateo Times* piece, but Embassy and Anglo-Amalgamated have now been replaced by ‘Richard Todd’s independent company’ and we have another reference to an uncompleted story outline by Fleming. Canaway is not mentioned: in a letter to John Collard on 19 April 1966, Willoughby explained that he had fallen ill and been replaced by Robert Muller, who had completed his first draft that week. Muller was a former theatre and film critic who had written for the prestigious *Armchair Theatre* TV series in Britain; he later married the actress Billie Whitelaw. As with the outlines by Fleming and Amis and the work of Derry Quinn and Anthony Dawson, the whereabouts of his script are unknown.

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ON 14 MARCH 1966, *Boxoffice* reported that Nat Cohen had left for New York the previous week for ‘a series of production discussions’ about four projected Anglo-Amalgamated films: an adaptation of *Far From The Madding Crowd*, slated to star Julie Christie; *Rocket To The Moon*, based on Jules Verne’s novel; *Lock Up Your Daughters!*, the Lionel Bart musical; and *The Diamond Spy*, ‘based on the Ian Fleming story’.³⁹ The other three films would all be produced and released within the next three years: only the Fleming project failed to make it onto celluloid.

Willoughby’s letter to Collard on 19 April had contained another oddity: instead of the usual ‘Willoughby Film Productions Limited’ heading, the letterhead now read ‘Cleon Productions Limited,’ and listed the company’s directors as Richard Todd and George W. Willoughby. The company was mentioned in another article in the *San Mateo Times*—evidently Willoughby’s preferred outlet for his press releases—in August 1966:

‘Film on Diamond Racketeers Being Made From Fleming Book

Robert Muller has been set to prepare the final screenplay of Joseph E Levine's "The Diamond Spy", the unpublished story by the late Ian Fleming, which will be bought to the screen by Levine's Embassy Pictures in conjunction with Nat Cohen's Cleon Productions Ltd.

The five-million-dollar co-production will be produced by George Willoughby, and is tentatively set to go before the color cameras late this year. The story of the smashing of a huge international band of diamond racketeers, it will be filmed in color on location in South Africa, Beirut, Amsterdam, West Germany and London.

Embassy Pictures will distribute the film worldwide, with the exception of the United Kingdom.'⁴⁰

So it would appear that Nat Cohen had set up a new company with Willoughby and Todd, Cleon Productions. Perhaps it was a cheeky take on Eon, with Cohen and Levine's initials added.

On June 7 1966, Willoughby wrote to Collard to invite him to a meeting at his offices with the director John Boorman, then just starting out on his career.⁴¹ But at this point, the correspondence and the newspaper articles dry up—it seems that Willoughby had finally run out of steam. Expectations for the project had changed: from the early idea that it should not try to emulate the James Bond films but have its own flavour, as time went on, the pressure had increased to make it more Bond-like. In a letter to John Collard on June 1 1966, Willoughby had said that the film's distributors 'equate Fleming with Bond and our difficulty is to strike a story line that has all the excitement that people expect from Fleming's stories, without going into the ridiculous fantasy of the present Bond films'⁴²

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SHORTLY AFTER THIS, it seems the project finally petered out, and *The Diamond Smugglers* went the way of countless other film projects—although not for want of trying. Kingsley Amis returned

to writing novels, and a couple of years later was commissioned to write the first post-Fleming Bond adventure, which was published as *Colonel Sun*. Bob Parrish became one of the five directors to work on Charles Feldman's Bond spoof *Casino Royale*, while John Boorman went on to direct the likes of *Point Blank*, *Deliverance* and *The Tailor of Panama*. Richard Todd continued his career as an actor on stage and screen until his death from cancer in December 2009.

Jon Cleary became a best-selling thriller-writer, penning a long-running series about a Sydney cop called Scobie Malone. The first novel in the series, *The High Commissioner*, was published in 1966. Malone is charged with arresting the Australian High Commissioner in London for murder, but finds he has to stop an assassination plot against the same man by a gang of Vietnamese terrorists. The character of Malone—tough but honest, laconic but empathetic—is not a million miles from Roy O'Brien. By the end of the novel, Malone has fallen in love with a young Dutch-born Australian girl called Lisa Pretorious, herself not dissimilar to Vicki Linden; they later marry. At one point in the novel Malone lets slip to Lisa that he is a civil servant, and she asks if he has a number, 'like James Bond'.⁴³ The book was filmed in 1968 as *Nobody Runs Forever*, with Rod Taylor as Malone; Ralph Thomas directed.

According to Cleary, the death knell for *The Diamond Smugglers* was internal politics at Rank. 'Rank liked my script,' he says. 'But then Earl St John, who was handling the project there, fell ill. A London lawyer whose name I forget [Michael Stanley-Evans] succeeded him, and his first step was to publicly announce that he was discontinuing all projects that had been started by St John.'

Cleary remained justifiably proud of his screenplay of *The Diamond Smugglers*: as well as being a gripping story, it has the DNA of Fleming's book running through it, and is infused with both the intrigues of the diamond-smuggling business and the

dramatic landscape of South Africa. It remains a fascinating what-if in cinema history, as we are left to wonder what impact it might have had if George Willoughby had succeeded in bringing it to cinema screens in the Sixties, and John Blaine had battled it out with James Bond at the box office.

Notes for this chapter:

1. *The Letters of Kingsley Amis*, edited by Zachary Leader (HarperCollins, 2001), pp664-665.
2. *In Camera: An Autobiography Continued* by Richard Todd (Hutchinson, 1989), p196.
3. *United Artists: The Company that Changed the Film Industry* by Tino Balio (University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), p257.
4. *In Camera* by Todd, p205.
5. Personal correspondence with Fergus Fleming, January 27 2010.
6. *Ian Fleming* by Andrew Lycett (Phoenix, 1996), p258.
7. Obituary of John Collard, *The Times*, 13 November 2002.
8. Lycett, p310.
9. 'Memorandum on diamond-buying operations in Liberia, April/May 1955', annotated by Ian Fleming, in John Collard's papers. John Collard's book, correspondence and other papers, all courtesy of Paul Collard and the Collard family. Henceforth Collard Papers.
10. *James Bond: The Man and His World* by Henry Chancellor (John Murray, 2005), p113.
11. *The Diamond Smugglers* by Ian Fleming (Pan, 1965 edition), p150.
12. Collard to Russell, handwritten letter, December 30 1965, Collard Papers.
13. Lycett, p316.
14. Chancellor, p85.
15. 'The Ian Fleming Collection of 19th-20th Century Source Material Concerning Western Civilization together with the Originals of the James Bond-007 Tales', Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, United States.
16. Lycett, p264.
17. *The Bookseller*, Compendium of Issues 2698-2714 (Publishers' Association, Booksellers Association of Great Britain and Ireland, 1957), p1808.

18. *In Camera*, p187.
19. Ibid., p215.
20. Ibid., p237.
21. This and all subsequent Jon Cleary quotes from a telephone conversation with the author, November 30 2007.
22. *The Ageless Land: The Story of South-West Africa* by Olga Levinson (Tafelberg, 1961).
23. This and all subsequent quotes from *The Diamond Smugglers* screenplay by Jon Cleary courtesy of Jon Cleary; Curtis Brown, London; and the Mitchell Library, the State Library of New South Wales, Australia.
24. Letter from George Willoughby to John Collard, June 14 1965. Collard Papers.
25. Letter from John Collard to George Willoughby, June 17 1965. Collard Papers.
26. Letter from George Willoughby to John Collard, June 21 1965. Collard Papers.
27. Letter from B.J. Rudd to John Collard, September 1 1965, with cutting from *The Sun* attached. Collard Papers. According to Andrew Lycett, Ian Fleming had told Rank at the time they had taken the option on *The Diamond Smugglers* that he would provide them with a 'full story outline' for a further £1,000, but would not be able to bind himself to writing 'the master scene script' or to be available in England for consultations. Lycett, p317.
28. Letter from George Willoughby to John Collard, August 27 1965. Collard Papers.
29. Personal correspondence with Anthony Dawson Jr, 2007-2009.
30. 'The Marquee column', Barbara Bladen, September 16 1965, *San Mateo Times*, p21.
31. Letter from John Collard to George Willoughby, January 3 1966. Collard Papers.
32. Letter from George Willoughby to John Collard, January 11 1966. Collard Papers.
33. Anthony Gruner, 'London Report', *Boxoffice*, January 3 1966. The same column also announced that Ursula Andress and David Niven were to join Peter Sellers in the cast of Charles Feldman's *Casino Royale*.
34. Anthony Gruner, 'London Report', *Boxoffice*, November 29, 1965.
35. Letter from George Willoughby to John Collard, January 27, 1966. Collard Papers.

NEED TO KNOW

36. Letter from Beryl Griffie-Williams to John Collard, January 31, 1966. Collard Papers.
37. *San Mateo Times*, California, February 9, 1966. An almost identically worded paragraph appeared in Anthony Gruner's 'London Report' column in *Boxoffice* on 7 February 1966.
38. *The Gleaner*, Jamaica, February 13, 1966.
39. Anthony Gruner, 'London Report', *Boxoffice*, March 14, 1966.
40. *San Mateo Times*, California, August 26, 1966.
41. Letter from George Willoughby to John Collard, June 7, 1966. Collard Papers.
42. Letter from George Willoughby to John Collard, June 1, 1966. Collard Papers.
43. *The High Commissioner* by Jon Cleary (Fontana, 1983 edition), p62.

Commando Bond

‘MI6 LOOKS FOR maladjusted young men who’d give little thought to sacrificing others to protect queen and country. You know—former SAS types with easy smiles and expensive watches...’

So says Vesper Lynd to James Bond in the 2006 film *Casino Royale*. Although it doesn’t get as much mileage in the finished film as it did in the press before its release, *Casino Royale* took a daring approach to the Bond mythos, presenting an ‘origin story’ for the character. Bond is a newly appointed member of MI6’s Double O Section—the film opens with him earning his stripes by cold-bloodedly murdering a traitor—and it would appear from his reaction to Vesper’s comment that she has hit home and that he is in fact a ‘former SAS type’. This was confirmed by the film’s official website, which provided a chronology of Bond’s pre-MI6 career, including a military dossier detailing his time at Britannia Royal Naval College, his intelligence role on HMS Exeter and special forces training at Plymouth and Brize Norton. The site

even claimed Bond had been part of an invented outfit called ‘030 Special Forces Unit’.¹

Special forces have developed a particular image in popular culture in recent years. Britain’s SAS is probably the world’s best known special forces outfit, having featured in dozens of films, books and magazine articles, many of them generated by the worldwide media interest surrounding the storming of the Iranian Embassy in London in 1980 after terrorists took hostages inside, which was screened live on British television.

Members of the SAS have a popular image as gung-ho operators who shoot first and ask questions later: not really the type to create their own cocktails (or sport easy smiles). The use of tough SAS types in fiction has also become something of a cliché, with a whole genre being formed in the wake of Andy McNab’s 1993 memoir of an SAS operation in Iraq, *Bravo Two Zero*. It’s not quite James Bond territory. Or...?

In an article in *TIME* published shortly before the release of *Die Another Day*, Lee Tamahori, the director of that film, made the following remark about the direction he felt the character had been taken in the previous few films:

“I was worried that he was turning into an SAS man, machine-gunning everyone,” says Tamahori. “I’ve been trying to make him more of an Ian Fleming Bond.”²

This is a misapprehension. While copious use of a machine gun is not a hallmark of Ian Fleming’s novels, the idea that James Bond might be an SAS man is not out of keeping with them. In fact, Fleming included several clues that point to James Bond having just such a type of background.

The Special Air Service didn’t always have the popular reputation it has today. The group was founded by David Stirling in 1941 to undertake acts of sabotage behind enemy lines. The son of a Scottish general, Stirling began a degree in architecture at Trinity College, Cambridge, but his studies were curtailed by his

fondness for the local nightlife. He was eventually read out a list of 23 offences and asked to choose the three for which he wished to be sent down. He then decided to become the first man to climb Everest and enlisted in the Supplementary Reserves of the Scots Guards—he trained in the Swiss Alps and the Rockies. When war broke out he was 24, and was sent to the Guards Depot in Pirbright:

‘Pirbright was a mere hour from the attractions of London. During one lecture, possibly after a night at White’s Club or the gaming tables, Stirling fell asleep. He probably fell asleep in many, but on this occasion he was woken by the lecturer, asking him to repeat what had just been said. Stirling repeated it verbatim.’³

After this, Stirling volunteered for an expeditionary force setting off to fight a winter campaign in Finland—ski training was in Chamonix—before joining the commando group Layforce, after which he founded the SAS.

It’s hard to imagine a more ‘James Bondish’ background than this, but Stirling is one of the few leading commandos from the Second World War not to have been claimed as a model for 007. Fleming was certainly inspired by the real-life experience of such men, however, as he made clear in an interview with *Playboy* published after his death:

‘I think [Bond is] slightly more true to the type of modern hero, to the commandos of the last War, and so on, and to some of the secret-service men I’ve met, than to any of the rather cardboard heroes of the ancient thrillers.’⁴

Fleming knew several heroic commandos and secret-service men who had served in the war. Perhaps the best known among them is Patrick Leigh Fermor, who worked for the Special Operations Executive (SOE) in Crete, where he led the party that kidnapped General Kreipe in 1944. That mission was immortalised in W Stanley Moss’ book *Ill Met By Moonlight*, published in 1950,

which was made into a film in 1957, with Dirk Bogarde playing Leigh Fermor.

In an afterword for the 2001 edition of Moss' book, Leigh Fermor wrote about the operation for the first time. He modestly refuted the 'Baroness Orczy—John Buchan—Dornford Yates' status that the episode has gained over the years, but at the same time revealed that during a prolonged stay in Cairo with SOE colleagues, the villa they had stayed in had been filled with gelignite disguised as goat's droppings, magnetised trouser buttons that turned into compasses and gossamer-thin maps stitched into the lining of clothing. Many of these items were created by a Major Jasper Maskelyne, who Leigh Fermor recognised as a stage magician he had seen perform in London as a child.⁵

After the war, Leigh Fermor took up writing, drafting some of his first book, *The Traveller's Tree*, during a stay at Goldeneye in 1948. He loved Fleming's Jamaican retreat and commented in his book that it could become a model for new houses in the tropics.⁶ The two men became friends, and Fleming repaid Fermor's plug for Goldeneye by quoting a long passage on voodoo from *The Traveller's Tree* in *Live and Let Die*.

Another of Fleming's friends mentioned in his novels was David Niven, whose manners Kissy Suzuki so admires that she names her cormorant after him. Niven also served as a commando of sorts in the Second World War: while serving with 'Phantom', the regiment responsible for ferreting out information in forward areas and radioing it back to GHQ, he worked on joint operations with the SAS, whose command it came under from 1944.⁷

Another friend, Anthony Terry, was captured during Operation CHARIOT, the daring commando raid on the harbour installations at Saint-Nazaire in 1942, and was awarded the Military Cross for it.⁸ After the war, he worked for Fleming's Mercury News, as well as continuing his contacts with MI6, and in 1960, he guided Fleming around Berlin, helping him with much of the research for the short story *The Living Daylights*.⁹

Closer to home, Ian Fleming's brother Peter was also engaged in commando work during the war. In 1940, he and 'Mad Mike' Calvert—who later found fame with the SAS—prepared for a guerrilla defence of Britain the event of a German invasion. Later that year, Peter Fleming led a reconnaissance party into the Norwegian port of Namsos and the following year he formed and took a small commando team to Greece (the latter mission under the auspices of SOE). Neither expedition was a great success: Peter was reported to have been killed in Norway and an obituary even ran in *The Daily Sketch*, causing his family great distress until he arrived, alive and well, in Scotland. It may be that this episode later gave Ian the idea for Bond's false obituary in *You Only Live Twice*: it can be useful for a secret agent to have the world believe him dead.

In Greece, the Yak Mission, as Peter's group was nicknamed, wrecked the path of advancing German paratroops—Peter even booby-trapped a bridge by fitting a London double-decker bus with flame-throwers on it—before it was attacked from the air near the island of Milos. A 400-ton yacht that had been commandeered by the Navy burst into flames and sank, and Peter was again very lucky to come out alive.¹⁰

Peter Fleming was also a celebrated travel writer and journalist. His novel *The Sixth Column*, published in 1951, was a gentle send-up of the thrillers he had enjoyed growing up, and was dedicated to Ian, also an aficionado of the genre. One of the main characters is a former commando called Archie Strume, who has great success with a thriller based on his war-time experiences titled 'Hackforth of The Commandos'. Colonel Hackforth is always saying things like:

'Tell the Minister of Defence to have a midget submarine alongside the Harwich customs jetty not later than last light on Tuesday. It's important.'¹¹

The Sixth Column may have been a spur for Ian Fleming to knuckle down and write his own thriller, which he had been promising to do since the war: he started writing *Casino Royale* just a few months after the publication of his brother's book. Archie Strume and Colonel Hackforth were partially based on the author Dennis Wheatley—who Peter had become friends with during the war—and his secret agent character Gregory Sallust, but the references to wartime commando adventures involving midget submarines may have been for Ian's eyes only,

In 1942, Ian Fleming set up what he liked to call his 'Red Indians'. No. 30 Assault Unit was a small roving commando outfit made up of men from the Army, Navy, Marines and Air Force. Its task was to go in after the first wave of Allied attacks and scavenge for technical intelligence: codes, weapons, equipment, maps and documents left behind by the Germans. The commanding officers were Dunstan Curtis, who had played a leading role in the Saint Nazaire raid, and the Antarctic explorer Quentin Riley.¹²

One of 30 AU's most enterprising officers was Lieutenant-Commander Patrick Dalzel-Job RNVR, who led missions in France, Belgium and Germany in the latter stages of the war. Dalzel-Job had an unusual background: after the death of his father in the Somme, he spent his formative years in Switzerland, where he learned to cross-country ski and speak French fluently. While still in his twenties, he built his own schooner and sailed to Norway with his middle-aged mother and a Norwegian schoolgirl as his crew.

This experience stood him in good stead when the war came. In April 1940, when Peter Fleming was in Namsos, Dalzel-Job was in Narvik, where he countermanded orders not to evacuate civilians. Later on, he worked behind the scenes developing the Royal Navy's midget submarines, used in the attack on the Tirpitz, and finally went behind enemy lines with 30 AU, where

among other things, he accepted the formal surrender of the city of Bremen and captured the Nazis' own midget submarines.

Dalzel-Job did not care overly for his boss back in London, finding Ian Fleming cold, austere and egotistical, although he appreciated his 'amusing and pungent' minutes on operational intelligence reports.¹³ Dalzel-Job's 'Nelson touch' even brought him into conflict with Fleming at the end of the war, when he sent a signal to the British Flag Officer in Oslo as though it were from the Admiralty, sending himself on a fairly pointless mission to Norway so he could find the schoolgirl he had sailed with before the war. Fleming was furious at not being consulted, and gave Dalzel-Job an earful about it, but off he went, found the girl, and married her.

Another member of 30 AU who saw action in France was Tony Hugill. Also a lieutenant-commander in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, he was awarded the Croix de Guerre for his part in D-Day and won the Distinguished Service Cross for taking the surrender of 280 troops under a Luftwaffe officer at a radio station near Brest. From 1945-6, he led the Forward Interrogation Unit in Hamburg, Germany.

After the war, Hugill went into the sugar industry, managing Tate and Lyle's West Indian operations between 1954 and 1966. In Fleming's last novel, *The Man With The Golden Gun*, Bond is vouched for by local sugar executive Tony Hugill, who, we learn in Chapter 4, was in Naval Intelligence during the war: 'sort of Commando job'. Bond's cover name for this mission, Mark Hazard, may have been inspired by the title of Hugill's war memoirs, *The Hazard Mesh*, published in 1946, but if so Fleming either hadn't read the book or was in a generous mood, because Hugill's depiction of him (although he is not named) is not flattering:

'One of the Admiralty pundits signalled us that he was about to honour us with a visit. We none of us liked him much. He was one of those very superior professorial type R.N.V.R.s who got

their claws into Their Lordships early in the war and have kept them in ever since. As our proprietary deity he felt himself entitled to demand offerings of Camembert and libations of captured cognac of the better sort (But my dear feller this stuff's undrinkable!) from time to time. He also interfered with us on a higher level.¹⁴

After Fleming's death, Hugill described Fleming in gentler terms.¹⁵ In contrast to the popular perception of commandos today, the British commandos Fleming knew from the war were often, beneath their tough exteriors, cultured men of great sensitivity: Patrick Leigh-Fermor and Peter Fleming were both acclaimed travel writers, Tony Hugill's memoirs are filled with poetry and Patrick Dalzel-Job's autobiography is, at root, a love story.

Fleming never saw action in the field himself, although he may have liked to have done. John Pearson recounted in his biography that Fleming liked to tell people, Gatsby-ishly, that he had once killed a man, but that the story seemed to change with each telling¹⁶, and some of his other claims of prowess have been similarly questioned.

This sense of inconsistency extended to James Bond. In his fiction, Fleming made use of those real-life episodes he found most fascinating and exciting; ensuring that all of his novels' re-imagined tidbits meshed together was of secondary concern. For example, Fleming fans the world over know that James Bond killed twice in cold blood to obtain his licence to kill—nobody cares to dwell on the irritatingly inconvenient sentence in Chapter 19 of *From Russia, With Love* in which Fleming baldly states:

'Bond had never killed in cold blood.'

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THE TWO KILLINGS described in *Casino Royale* are both examples of operations usually undertaken by special forces: assassinations. Governments and conventional intelligence services cannot be seen to sanction extra-judicial murder, so such jobs inevitably fall to less accountable units. As Bond's second kill, in Stockholm, involved a Norwegian 'who was doubling against us for the Germans', it appears that both these missions took place during the war. According to MRD Foot's official history of the SOE, Stockholm had been the initial base for that organisation's activity in Scandinavia¹⁷, so perhaps Fleming had heard of a similar operation through intelligence contacts and embellished it.¹⁸

Bond's first 'wet job', in New York's Rockefeller Center, was inspired by Fleming's visit to the British Security Co-ordination's offices in the same building in June 1941; he accompanied BSC officers as they burgled a Japanese cipher clerk's office on the floor below theirs.¹⁹ The clerk was unharmed, but SOE, whose affairs in the Western hemisphere were controlled by the BSC in New York²⁰, did have an assassination capability. This was officially abandoned at the end of the war, but many SOE officers joined MI6, so the expertise may have remained in place²¹. During the war, SOE operatives were commonly referred to as 'terrorists' by the Nazis; MRD Foot, who was a member of SAS during the war, recalls being captured and over-hearing one of his interrogators saying: 'If he is a terrorist he is shot at once'.²²

After the war, the SAS evolved into more of a counter-insurgency regiment; the 1969 Army Training manual stated that its tasks included 'the ambush and harassment of insurgents, the infiltration of sabotage, assassination and demolition parties into insurgent-held areas, border surveillance liaison with, and organisation of friendly guerrilla forces operating against the common enemy'.²³ The SAS executed some of these responsibilities in the Mau-Mau rebellion in Kenya during the 1950s and in Aden in 1967.²⁴ More recently, it has seen action in Afghanistan, Northern Ireland, Gibraltar and, latterly, Iraq.

Despite the above rather lurid description, members of the SAS have not always approved of assassination. When I asked former SAS sergeant Jacques Goffinet in 2005 if he had been tempted to assassinate Joachim von Ribbentrop when he discovered him in hiding in a flat in Hamburg in June 1945, he replied simply: ‘That would have made me as bad as them.’²⁵

James Bond is often concerned with the same dilemma: outside of the episodes mentioned in *Casino Royale*, he makes for a rather shaky assassin. In the short story *Octopussy*, he travels to Jamaica on a private war crimes investigation. His target is Dexter Smythe, who as a member of the Miscellaneous Objectives Bureau—a (fictional) wartime commando outfit formed by the Secret Service and Combined Operations—had murdered one of his early mentors. But while Bond had no qualms about murdering double agents or cipher clerks, this time he does not draw his weapon, leaving Smythe the options of suicide or disgrace.

In *The Living Daylights*, Bond’s mission is strategically defensive—to stop another assassination—but here he also has reservations, and deliberately muffs the assignment because of the ‘sharp pang of longing’ he feels for his female target—a sackable offence, as he admits himself at the end of the story. In *For Your Eyes Only*, Bond undertakes the mission to assassinate Von Hammerstein as retribution for the murder of M’s friends: an ‘eye for an eye job’. In the event, however, the deed is done by the friends’ daughter, although Bond kills another of the villains and comforts the girl afterwards. In *The Man With The Golden Gun*, Bond is a little less circumspect, eventually shooting Scaramanga five times.

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JAMES BOND IS neither straightforward assassin nor pure commando in Ian Fleming’s novels: most of the time he works as a counter-espionage agent, sent by M to head off an emerging

threat, rather than initiating offensive action against the enemy. Nevertheless, Fleming incorporated many details of war-time commandos into his novels: apart from the references to old colleagues and friends who had been involved in special forces, Q Branch's weapons and gadgets parallel the work done by similar departments in SOE and elsewhere. Bond's self-reliance and stamina are reminiscent of the commando ethic, as is his basic fitness regimen described in Chapter 11 of *From Russia, With Love*. His habit of taking Benzedrine was also common practice among commandos during the war, when remaining alert for long periods was often necessary.

Bond is also a martial arts aficionado—we know from M's obituary in *You Only Live Twice* that he founded the first judo class in a British public school. In Chapter 10 of the same novel, Tiger Tanaka tells Bond he will show him one of his service's secret ninja academies in the mountains, and Bond replies that MI6 also has a commando training school for unarmed combat attached to its headquarters. This is an example of Fleming carrying details across his books successfully, because in Chapter 8 of *Moonraker* Bond is happy to have his Unarmed Combat class with 'that dam' Commando chap' cancelled for a meeting with M. Bond is clearly a good student, though, because in the first chapter of *Goldfinger* we find him nursing the hand that has killed a Mexican with a 'Parry Defence against Underhand Thrust out of the book' and a hand-edge blow to the Adam's Apple that had been 'the standby of the Commandos'. A little later, in Chapter 5, we learn that Bond is writing *Stay Alive!*, a 'handbook of all methods of unarmed combat'.

But Bond also uses weapons, of course. In Chapter 18 of *Live and Let Die*, he tries to kill an octopus using a commando dagger 'of the type devised by Wilkinson's during the war'. This would be the Fairbairn-Sykes Fighting Knife, issued to the SAS and other special forces outfits and eventually adopted as the Commando Association's emblem. It's still made by Wilkinson's, still in use by

British special forces²⁶ and is currently the shoulder-flash of the Royal Marine Commandos.²⁷

The idea that this character has had some sort of experience with special forces is not implausible—but what form might that have taken? In *The James Bond Dossier*, Kingsley Amis wondered what a Commander from Naval Intelligence had been doing in the Ardennes sector in 1944²⁸ (which Bond recollects in Chapter Nine of *Dr No*). This may simply have been an oversight on Fleming's part, like the 'cold blood' boo-boo in *From Russia, With Love*, but it may also have been deliberate. In his obituary in *You Only Live Twice*, M tells us that Bond joined the Special Branch of the RNVR in 1941. Between that date and 1944, Peter Fleming undertook missions for both MI R and SOE; army intelligence officer Anthony Terry was captured in a naval commando raid; RAF men took part in 30 AU's amphibious landings with Royal Naval Commandos; and Patrick Leigh Fermor and SOE colleagues arranged for guides to help Special Boat Service (SBS) officers across the mountains of Crete.²⁹ The Second World War was a time of irregular warfare, and resourceful young men barging into offices in Whitehall demanding to mount their own raids against the Nazis were not uncommon. Dozens of small commando units were formed, changed names or were subsumed into larger groups during the war, and as a result some enterprising men had extremely varied resumes by the cessation of hostilities. Churchill also set up Combined Operations under Lord Mountbatten, which ensured that commando groups worked together (like Dexter Smythe's outfit in *Octopussy*). For Operation FRANKTON, for example, a raid on Bordeaux Harbour in December 1942, the Royal Marine Boom Patrol's Detachment used limpet mines that had been developed by SOE³⁰—or 'those things our saboteurs used against ships in the war', as Bond describes them in Chapter 15 of *Live and Let Die* (later in the book he attaches a limpet mine to the hull of the *Secatur*).

Against this background, it's not so unlikely for someone in the Special Branch of the RNVR to have heard machine-gun fire in the Ardennes. Unless Fleming meant for Bond to have been an infantry soldier at the Battle of the Bulge—which seems even more unlikely for someone in the RNVR—by far the most likely way for him to have been in the area would have been on a special forces mission. SOE's Operation CITRONELLE, which sought out *maquis* in the Ardennes in April 1944, for example: he could have been a member of one of the famous Jedburgh teams, all of which contained one Brit, one American and one Frenchman—early training for working with Felix Leiter and René Mathis, perhaps. SOE produced more than its fair share of successes during the war: one of its best-known agents was the Polish-born countess Krystyna Skarbek, best known as Christine Granville.³³

Another plausible explanation is that Bond was seconded to the SAS: it drew and still draws men from all armed forces (the 'Air' in its name was used to fit in with an earlier deception operation), and undertook several missions in the Ardennes during 1944.³⁴ Fleming might easily have heard about one of these operations from David Niven or another friend who had worked with the regiment, and stored it away as being a suitable field of operation for Bond during the war.

Most obviously, perhaps, Fleming's own brainchild, 30 Assault Unit, also undertook reconnaissance work in Belgium at around this time, and in his 2013 novel *Solo* William Boyd has Bond remember this episode and suggests he was attached to that unit. Boyd wasn't the first author after Fleming to emphasise 007's special forces ties: John Gardner—who served in the Royal Marines' 42 Commando during the war—had Bond train with the SAS and the SBS in his novels.³⁵ The relationship has been even more overt onscreen: the closing scenes of many of the films, for example, are spectacular commando-like raids on villains' lairs. HALO jumps, bungee jumps, parachute landings and shooting while skiing are all areas of special forces expertise. The recent

Bond films continue the series' habitual nods to special forces work: in *Casino Royale*, as well as Vesper's appraisal, Bond holds up an embassy single-handedly and engages in plenty of hand-to-hand combat—he seems to have paid attention in his classes with that dam' Commando.

The Bond novels and films have never purported to be realistic portrayals of clandestine work: they are fantastic adventures with one toe in the real world. James Bond is an amalgamation and elaboration of the most exciting bits of espionage and commando lore, filtered through the prodigious imagination of his creator. He is not, therefore, an out and out commando, but as a back story for the character, 'former SAS type' is not out of place: it is entirely fitting with his heritage. And, as I'll explore in the next chapter, some of the special forces history that inspired Fleming would also inspire the Bond film-makers.

Notes for this chapter:

1. Now archived, but accessed December 20 2014 from:
https://web.archive.org/web/20061129205105/http://www.sonypictures.com/movies/casinoroyale/site_html/dossier/military_record.php
2. *TIME*, November 10 2002.
3. *The Originals: The Secret History of The Birth of the SAS In Their Own Words* by Gordon Stevens (Ebury Press, 2005), p4.
- 4.. *The Playboy Interview: Ian Fleming* by Ken Purdy, *Playboy*, December 1964.
- 5.. *Ill Met By Moonlight* by W Stanley Moss, The Folio Society, 2001: afterword by Leigh Fermor, pp193 and 205–206.
6. *The Traveller's Tree* by Patrick Leigh Fermor, Penguin, 1984, p327.
7. *The SAS: The Official History* by Philip Warner (Sphere, 1983), p139; and obituary of Captain Charles Moore, *The Daily Telegraph*, May 13 2004.
8. *The Greatest Raid Of All* by CE Lucas-Phillips (Little, Brown, 1960), pix.
9. *Ian Fleming* by Andrew Lycett (Phoenix, 1996), p371.

10. *Peter Fleming: A Biography* by Duff Hart Davis (Oxford University Press, 1987), pp221-227 and 239-255.
11. *The Sixth Column* by Peter Fleming (Tandem, 1967), p23.
12. *The Life of Ian Fleming* by John Pearson (Companion Book Club, 1966), p134.
13. *Arctic Snow to Dust of Normandy: The Extraordinary Wartime Exploits of a Naval Special Agent* by Patrick Dalzel-Job (Pen & Sword, 2005), p115.
14. p60 *The Hazard Mesh* by JAC Hugill, Hurst & Blackett, 1946.
15. *Ian Fleming's Commandos* by Nicholas Rankin (Faber & Faber, 2011), pp247-48.
16. p210 Pearson.
17. p208 *SOE: 1940-1946* by MRD Foot, BBC, 1984
18. As well as his colleagues in Naval Intelligence, Fleming crossed paths with many people involved in clandestine work during the war.
19. p124 Pearson
20. p42 Foot
21. pp 611-612 *MI6: Inside the Covert World of Her Majesty's Secret Intelligence Service* by Stephen Dorril, Touchstone, 2000
22. p57 Foot. James Bond is also described as a terrorist, in his MGB file in Chapter Six of *From Russia, With Love*. Incidentally, Foot feels that Fleming was one of the few non-SOE officers in Britain's wartime intelligence organisations to appreciate SOE's worth (personal communication, November 17 2007)
23. British Army Land Operations Manual, volume 3, counter-revolutionary operations. Cited in *British Intelligence and Covert Action* by Jonathan Bloch and Pat Fitzgerald (London 1982), p42.
24. 'The SAS, their early days in Ireland and the Wilson Plot', Alexander Platow (Seán Mac Mathúna), first published in *Lobster* 18 (1989).
25. See *Whisper Who Dares* by Jeremy Duns, June 16 2005, *The Bulletin*, Brussels; reprinted in *5 SAS' Veterans' News*, Issue 70, 2005.
26. p389 *Jane's Special Forces Recognition Guide* by Ewen Southby-Tailyour, Collins, 2005
27. p47 *British Commandos 1940-1946* by Tim Moreman, Osprey, 2006
28. p17 *The James Bond Dossier* by Kingsley Amis, Signet, 1966
29. p194 Leigh Fermor afterword, Moss
30. *Cockleshell Heroes* by CE Lucas-Phillips (Pan, 1974), p36. FRANKTON was masterminded by Herbert 'Blondie' Hasler, who went on to play a leading role in the founding of the Special Boat Service (SBS),

a sister service to the SAS. The operation was the subject of the 1955 film *The Cockleshell Heroes*, produced by Cubby Broccoli and co-written by Richard Maibaum.

31. Granville has been repeatedly claimed to have been Fleming's model for Vesper Lynd following a post-war affair with the author. The source for this appears to be p151 *17F: The Life of Ian Fleming* by Donald McCormick, Peter Owen, London, 1993. McCormick is known to have been a hoaxer, notably on matters related to Jack the Ripper, and I believe he fabricated the evidence for this plausible-sounding assumption. Regardless, there seem very few similarities between Granville and Vesper Lynd other than their both being beautiful female agents with dark hair.

32. Ewen Southby-Tailyour does not agree with me on this point, being adamant that Fleming's Bond would have been more likely to have been SBS than SAS. He points to Bond's naval background and the fact that every member of the SBS was trained in skiing, parachuting, mountaineering and combat (underwater) swimming—but very few members of the SAS undertook training in all of these (personal communication). However, the SAS often collaborated and exchanged personnel with naval units during the war, and the SBS never undertook any operations in the Ardennes.

33. See, for instance, p15, *Icebreaker* by John Gardner, Berkley, 1983; and p28 *Scorpius* by John Gardner, Charter, 1990

Black Tie Spy

IT'S ONE OF the most iconic—and coolest—scenes in modern cinema. A secret agent emerges from water at night wearing a wetsuit, creeps onto a heavily guarded wharf, knocks out a sentry, and plants some plastic explosive in a storage tank. He then unzips his wetsuit to reveal that he is wearing a dinner jacket beneath it, complete with a carnation in the buttonhole. He walks into the nearest bar, glances at his watch and lights a cigarette just as the storage tank erupts into flames behind him.

This, of course, is the opening scene of the third James Bond film, *Goldfinger*. Released in 1964, it turned Bond into a global phenomenon, and 007 peeling away his wetsuit to reveal black tie has become one of the most recognisable moments of the series. No such scene featured in Ian Fleming's novel of the same title, but in many ways it defines the character of James Bond: one moment a tough secret agent focused on a dangerous mission, the next a high-living playboy. It's pure fantasy, of course, and light years away from the world of real espionage.

Or perhaps not. Surprisingly enough, it seems that the scene may have been inspired by an extraordinary mission undertaken by British intelligence during the Second World War.

The operation was planned in the autumn of 1941, in a small flat above 77 Chester Square, the London residence of the exiled Dutch queen, Wilhelmina. Three young Dutchmen—Bob van der Stok, Peter Tazelaar and Erik Hazelhoff Roelfzema—had an idea for a method of inserting an agent into occupied Holland, from which they had recently escaped.¹

As students, the Dutchmen had often spent time at the seaside resort of Scheveningen, near The Hague. They knew that the Palace Hotel there had been taken over by the Germans as a headquarters for their coastal defence forces, and that every Friday night they held a large and boisterous party there. Their idea was both ingenious and audacious—approach Scheveningen in

darkness by boat, and then take Peter Tazelaar into the surf by dinghy. He would strip off his watertight suit into evening clothes and make his way ashore, right under the noses of the Germans. If stopped by sentries, he would drunkenly claim to be one of the party-goers. From there, he would continue his mission.

Dutch intelligence in London was mired in political intriguing, and not interested in running the operation—but the British were. They were initially sceptical of the method of inserting Tazelaar onto the beach, which sounded more like a student prank than a serious proposal for an espionage operation, but the head of MI6's Dutch section, Colonel Euan Rabagliati—nicknamed 'The Rabbi' by the Dutch—eventually agreed to the plan.

The mission's aims were twofold: first, Tazelaar was to make contact with a Dutch wireless operator at a safe house and begin transmissions with London at pre-arranged times; secondly, he was to set up a wider intelligence-gathering network to provide reports, maps, photographs and other items that couldn't be transmitted over the wireless but that would be picked up by sea and taken back to London by Motor Gun Boat (ie the same way he had come). In the latter category were also two people, Dr Wiardi Beckman and a Captain Tielens, both of whom Queen Wilhelmina wanted to join the Dutch government-in-exile in London.

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TO PREPARE FOR the operation, The Rabbi sent Hazelhoff Roelfzema and Tazelaar to train at various secret establishments. They learned to shoot at a pistol range beneath Baker Street Underground station and practised boat landings off the coasts of Cornwall and Devon. An experimental watertight suit was made for Tazelaar and, so that his contacts would be in no doubt of his credentials, Queen Wilhelmina was persuaded to write a note in her own hand verifying his mission. MI6 reduced her message to

the size of a fingernail, and it was placed inside the collar of Tazelaar's dress shirt.

The operation itself proved harder to pull off than anticipated, due to poor weather and the difficulties of locating Scheveningen's promenade in the dark. But after several frustrating false starts, at just after half past four in the morning on November 23 1941, Hazelhoff Roelfzema, Tazelaar and another Dutchman, Chris Krediet, along with Lieutenant Bob Goodfellow, disembarked from British Royal Navy Motor Gun Boat 321 onto a small dinghy. The Dutchmen slipped out of the dinghy as they neared the surf, and Hazelhoff Roelfzema and Tazelaar waded onto Scheveningen's beach. Hazelhoff Roelfzema helped Tazelaar unzip his watertight suit: beneath it he was wearing immaculate evening clothes. Hazelhoff Roelfzema poured a generous dose of Hennessy XO (Tazelaar's favourite) from a hip flask over his friend, and returned to the dinghy.

Now reeking of brandy, Tazelaar proceeded to stagger convincingly past the sentries stationed around the hotel. Against all odds, the first part of his operation had succeeded. He made contact with the wireless operator, and within three days had also made contact with Dr Beckman and Captain Tielens. Then things started to go wrong. Tielens didn't want to make the journey to London, and couldn't be persuaded, but Beckman agreed to the plan. However, the return rendez-vous was beset by problems: the Motor Gun Boat didn't navigate to the meeting point on time, and then a collaborator betrayed the fact that landings were taking place at the beach to the Germans.

On January 18 1942, Hazelhoff Roelfzema arrived on the beach at a prearranged time to deliver two vitally needed transmitters to Tazelaar. But his friend was not there. Thinking quickly, he decided to bury the transmitters in the sand, to be picked up later. But how to let Tazelaar know where to find them? He knew from his student days that there was a telephone booth near the hotel.

If he could reach a member of the Resistance, they could tell Tazelaar where the transmitters were buried.

Borrowing a British naval uniform from the motor gunboat, which he hoped in the darkness would resemble a German one closely enough, Hazelhoff Roelfzema embarked on his own Bond-like mission. Once ashore, he safely passed several sentries and managed to reach the telephone, where he discovered to his horror that it no longer accepted the old Dutch coins he had brought with him. Frustrated, he beat a hasty retreat to the motor gunboat, and headed back to England.

Unknown to him, Tazelaar had had a very good reason for not making the rendez-vous—he and a member of the Resistance had been picked up by the Germans while walking down to the meeting point. Amazingly, they managed to bluff their way out of it: both were wearing dinner clothes, and stuck to the cover story of being drunken revellers. Tazelaar had even brought along a bottle of genever, which he generously passed around. A local policeman, luckily also a member of the Resistance, vouched for the pair, and the Germans let them go. Dr Beckman was not as lucky: he was arrested on the beach waiting to be picked up by motor gunboat, and later died in Dachau.

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THE IDEA OF landing a secret agent on an enemy coastline in a watertight suit, only for him to strip it off to reveal full evening dress and mingle with the local nightlife festivities is an exceptionally unusual one—so much so one would think it must be unique. But it is also, of course, remarkably similar to the opening sequence of the film *Goldfinger*.

The director of *Goldfinger*, Guy Hamilton, was an officer in the Royal Navy's 15th Motor Gunboat Flotilla during the war, and was involved in landing MI6 agents onto coastlines in much the same way as was done with Peter Tazelaar. But, now 87 and living

in Mallorca, Hamilton says he has never heard of the operation in Holland. ‘I was indeed inserting agents into enemy territory from motor gunboats during the war, but they were always as farmers or something along those lines, to blend in with the locals—never in black tie!’²

So if Hamilton wasn’t the scene’s instigator, how *did* the idea behind this remarkable wartime operation make it into *Goldfinger*? The operation wasn’t public knowledge when the film was made, but it was a *cause célèbre* within British intelligence circles. According to M.R.D. Foot’s official history of the Special Operations Executive (SOE), published in 1984, MI6 pulled off this operation ‘in a style SOE envied’.³

The answer might have been hiding in plain sight. The scene in *Goldfinger* was written by a former member of SOE, Paul Dehn, who had been brought in to polish the first draft of the screenplay by Richard Maibaum. Dehn recalled how he had got the job in a 1972 interview:

‘For twenty-five years, I was a critic in Fleet Street, working for the old *News Chronicle*, and originally when I was a critic I started writing manuscripts because I found it so hard to allocate praise and blame justly in a composite work of art like a film. The first one I wrote, in collaboration with Jimmy [James Bernard, Hammer Film composer and Dehn’s professional and personal partner], was called *Seven Days To Noon*, and for which we both received an Oscar, and we also received 485 pounds from the dear Boulting brothers. So, after the Oscar film, I thought we would be rushing around writing for everybody, but two years went by and we did nothing at all. During the war I was an instructor to a band of thugs called the S.O.E. (Special Operations Executive, to which Christopher Lee was also attached for some time [as were Xan Fielding and Pierre Boule]), and I instructed them in various things on darkened estates, so I got a pretty good view of what counter espionage was like, as a result of which, when I joined the *Daily Herald*, I was offered by Anthony Asquith, a dear, dear friend of mine, the film *Orders To Kill*, because I’d had this

experience during the war, and it was about an agent who went out to kill a man and found that he couldn't kill him, and this, along with my other experiences, lead [sic] to *Goldfinger*.'⁴

Dehn was being rather modest here—he didn't just have a 'pretty good view' of such matters, but had in fact been one of Britain's best experts in counter-espionage techniques during the Second World War, if not the best. He had been a senior instructor at SOE's training school in Beaulieu, and co-wrote a manual for the organization's agents, bizarrely enough with Kim Philby. Between 1943 and 1944, he was a senior instructor at Camp X, the centre in Canada set up to train SOE and OSS agents to be inserted behind enemy lines to conduct sabotage operations. Dehn also apparently took part in SOE operations himself, in both France and Norway and, according to John le Carré, was even used as an assassin.⁵

It's sometimes claimed that Dehn and Ian Fleming met each other at Camp X, but there doesn't seem to be any concrete evidence for this assertion. Dehn did cross paths with Fleming later, though. In 1959, he was approached to write the screenplay for *Thunderball*—according to Fleming, he turned down the offer because he wasn't interested in 'this bang, bang, kiss kiss stuff'.⁶

Richard Maibaum's draft of *Goldfinger* had opened with James Bond in black tie watching a dancer stamp her heels in a waterfront nightclub, when a warehouse bursts into flames off-screen. Everyone scatters in turmoil, but 007 stays seated calmly, until Sierra, 'a well-dressed and good-looking young Latin' enters the club and approaches Bond. 'Forgive me for being late,' he says. 'There were last-minute complications.'⁷

Dehn evidently decided it would be more exciting if we saw how the operation to blow up the warehouse had been done—and if Bond were the one doing it. His version of the scene first appears in his draft of December 23 1963, albeit in a less playful form than the version filmed: the 'hairless distended cadaver of a dead dog, legs pointing stiffly skyward' drifts through water

‘scummed with flotsam, refuse and vegetable rind’. The dead dog then rises clear of the water, revealing James Bond with his teeth ‘clamped to the cadaver’s underbelly’.⁸

This was deemed too grotesque, and the dead dog became a seagull in the film. But the scene is otherwise almost identical to the finished product. Bond comes ashore in ‘a black water proof suit, zip-pocketed all over and a water proof ruck-sack’, dispatches a couple of sentries, breaks into a storage tank, squeezes gelignite ‘like toothpaste from a stocking’, then clears the wall and reaches comparative safety. Then, ‘in one smart gesture’, he unzips the top of his water-proof suit, revealing a white dinner jacket ‘complete with red carnation.’

Paul Dehn knew a lot about the use of gelignite, attacking storage tanks, and inserting secret agents into enemy territory. Camp X’s syllabus, which he co-wrote and taught, contained detailed instructions on how to kill sentries silently, place explosives in storage tanks and camouflage oneself when crossing water. Here are three passages on those subjects from the manual:

‘Killing a sentry, if you are armed with a knife.

Attack from the rear. With left forearm, strike violently on left side of opponent’s neck and instantly transfer the left hand to cover his mouth and nostrils. Simultaneously with the blow on the neck, thrust the knife (held in the right hand) into his kidneys. If equipment interferes with the kidney thrust, bring the hand round to the front and thrust into the abdomen. Note that once the left hand covers mouth and nostrils, the adversary is dragged backwards and downwards...’

‘Rivers.

When the stream is deep and slow moving try to find a ford. A good point to cross is at a bend—there is often a gravel bottom and firm ground on both banks. Also it is more difficult for people to see you. Use driftwood or floating vegetation to camouflage the head. If you swim, try to land amongst rushes or beneath

overhanging trees. But ensure that the bank is not too steep to climb...’

‘Attacking Storage Tanks.

- i) Tanks below ground extremely difficult to tackle.
- ii) Above-ground Tanks are often surrounded with anti-blast brick walls and inaccessible except near the inlet valve. In principle the method of attack will always be to get the fuel out into the air, having arranged an incendiary parcel or several individual incendiaries to receive and set fire to the fuel...’⁹

The scene is also reminiscent of the raids conducted by SOE-trained commandos against Vemork power station in Telemark, Norway. In Operation GUNNERSIDE, carried out in February 1943, the commandos infiltrated the power station and placed explosive charges on the heavy water electrolysis chambers. Dehn gave Bond an SOE-style operation, but the manner in which he is inserted was one used by MI6 of which SOE had been envious.

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PETER TAZELAAR UNDERTOOK his mission in November 1941 with MI6, but joined SOE later in the war. Following his brief capture by the Germans in January 1942, his use as an agent in Scheveningen was over. After escaping via Switzerland and Spain, he made his way back to Britain in April 1942, whereupon he was promptly dismissed from the Dutch navy for insubordination, a victim of political intrigues beyond his control. After a stint with the Commandos, Tazelaar also became a training instructor in Canada, at the Dutch military base in Guelph, following which he was recruited by SOE and parachuted back into Holland in 1944, from where he maintained radio contact with London for six months.

There is no evidence Dehn ever met Tazelaar, either in England or Canada, but it seems very likely he would have heard about such a remarkable operation from colleagues either during or after

the war. One possible occasion came the year before he started work on *Goldfinger*. In December 1962, former SOE officer William Deakin organized a conference on wartime resistance in Europe at St Antony's College, Oxford, of which he was warden. One of the lectures was by Dr Louis de Jong, the director of Holland's State Institute for War Documentation, and in it he described Tazelaar's 'evening dress' operation in detail. De Jong's lecture was published in the proceedings of the conference in a limited mimeograph of fewer than 100 copies.¹⁰ It may be that Dehn attended the conference or read de Jong's lecture in the proceedings afterwards.

At any rate, the idea of the operation seems much too bizarre to have been thought up independently twice, and the fact that Dehn had not only been a senior figure in British intelligence during the Second World War but included several other very specific references to real wartime espionage in the scene points to it being a deliberate reference. It seems likely that, one way or another, Paul Dehn heard of this MI6 operation through his contacts in Britain's close-knit intelligence community, among whom it was a cause célèbre, and decided it was just the sort of daring mission suitable for James Bond. In drawing on real espionage history and expertise, Dehn created a sensational opening sequence that would become an iconic cinematic moment, but perhaps also paid secret tribute to the ingenuity and bravery of Allied secret agents he had worked with and heard about during the war. If so, that would have been very much in the spirit of Ian Fleming, who did much the same in his novels.

In the years immediately following the Second World War, there were dozens of books and films celebrating the derring-do of the Allies, and Fleming's novels were part of that tradition, as were the films adapted from them. Paul Dehn's use of real-life espionage techniques in his screenplay for *Goldfinger* also undermines the widespread perception of the Bond films as unadulterated fantasies, or in the dry words of M in his obituary

for 007 in *You Only Live Twice*, ‘high-flown and romanticized caricatures’ of the intelligence world.

Dehn went on to work on the screenplays for *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, *The Deadly Affair* and several other films. He died in 1976. There are still gaps in his secret career we don’t know today: curiously, his SOE file still hasn’t been declassified.

Erik Hazelhoff Roelfzema continued to run operations on the coast of Holland, inserting agents, weapons and transmitters, before joining the Royal Air Force—he flew 72 missions in a Mosquito and was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, as well as the Militaire Willemsorde, the Netherlands’ highest military decoration. After the war, he emigrated to the United States. His autobiography, *Soldaat van Oranje* (‘Soldier of Orange’), was published in 1971 and was made into a film by Paul Verhoeven in 1977, with Rutger Hauer starring as a fictionalised version of him and Jeroen Krabbé as a composite of several characters, including Peter Tazelaar. Edward Fox played a version of Euan ‘The Rabbi’ Rabagliati.

Soldier of Orange was the most expensive Dutch film made to date, and helped pave the way for Verhoeven and Hauer’s careers in Hollywood. It was also a calling card for Krabbé, and brought him to the attention of the James Bond films’ producers, leading to him playing the role of Koskov in *The Living Daylights*.¹¹

In 2003, Hazelhoff Roelfzema published *In Pursuit Of Life*, an expanded autobiography in English, including most of the material from *Soldier of Orange*. The introduction was by Len Deighton. Hazelhoff Roelfzema died in Hawaii in 2007.

Bob van der Stok also joined the RAF, but his Spitfire was shot down in France in 1942 and he was captured by the Germans. He was imprisoned in Stalag Luft III, but was one of the three men to tunnel his way out. In the film *The Great Escape*, James Coburn’s character was partly based on van der Stok. He died in 1993.

Peter Tazelaar’s life could have provided enough material for several films. Queen Wilhelmina also awarded him the Militaire

Willemsorde, and in May 1945 he and Hazelhoff Roelfzema became her aides de camp. Tazelaar wasn't satisfied with that, though, and went off to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) to fight the Japanese. After that, he served with the military police during the Dutch colonial war in Indonesia, then became a CIA agent, carrying out several missions in eastern and central Europe during the 1950s. He died in 1993.

'He had a lot in common with James Bond,' says Victor Laurentius, author of the biography *De Grote Tazelaar: Ridder & Rebel* ('The Great Tazelaar: Knight and Rebel'). 'He was good looking, a cool womanizer, and in many ways an atypical spy.' Laurentius points out that, like Bond, Tazelaar was an inveterate daredevil: during his operations, he spent significant amounts of time in casinos and other places crowded by German officers.¹²

Real espionage is of course much less glamorous than a Bond film, even if you're wearing black tie. Peter Tazelaar was one of the lucky ones: many Dutch agents ended up captured, tortured and shot. Nevertheless, his remarkable brandy-soaked stroll past the sentries at Scheveningen stands as one of the most imaginative and daring espionage operations of the Second World War. Next time you watch *Goldfinger*, spare a thought for the real spy who dared to journey behind enemy lines in a dinner jacket.

Notes for this chapter:

1. Unless otherwise noted, details about the operation and the careers of those involved are all from *Soldier of Orange* (Sphere, 1982) and *In Pursuit of Life* (Sutton, 2003), both by Erik Hazelhoff Roelfzema, and *De Grote Tazelaar, Ridder & Rebel* by Victor Laurentius (Stichting Peter Tazelaar, 2010).
2. Hamilton to author, March 11 2010.
3. *SOE: The Special Operations Executive, 1940-1946* by M.R.D. Foot, (BBC, 1984), p86.
4. *Cinefantasique Planet of the Apes* special issue, summer 1972.

5. *How to be a Spy: The World War II SOE Training Manual* (PRO, 2004) introduced by Denis Rigden, p17; *Beaulieu: Finishing School for Secret Agents* by Cyril Cunningham (Pen & Sword, 2005) pix; interview with John le Carré on *The Spy Who Came In From The Cold* Criterion Collection DVD, 2008.
6. *The Battle for Bond* by Robert Sellers (Tomahawk Press, 2008), p29.
7. Maibaum draft of *Goldfinger*, Special Collections, University of Iowa Libraries.
8. This and subsequent quotes from Dehn's draft of *Goldfinger*, December 23 1963, Special Collections, University of Iowa Libraries.
9. All from *How to be a Spy: The World War II SOE Training Manual* (PRO, 2004) introduced by Denis Rigden.
10. *Britain and Dutch Resistance, 1940-1945* by Louis de Jong (delivered at a conference on Britain and European resistance, St Anthony's College, Oxford, December 10-16, 1962).
11. Michael G. Wilson in the documentary *Inside The Living Daylights*, John Cork and Bruce Scivally, 2000.
12. Laurentius to author, February 11 2010.

SMERSH vs SMERSH

‘SMERSH.’

The word just *sounds* sinister. It instantly conjures up an image of the Soviet Union, the Cold War and, of course, James Bond.

Many presume that the organisation was invented by Ian Fleming, but SMERSH really existed—albeit in a somewhat different form than that described in his novels. Fleming never revealed precisely where he learned about SMERSH, although according to John Pearson’s biography, he first came across it in ‘a magazine article soon after the war, and he embroidered on what little information he had about the organization and introduced it melodramatically into *Casino Royale*.’¹

If so, this would probably have been in connection with *SMERSH* by Nicola Sinevirsky, which was published in English in 1950. It was at around this time that Fleming was trying to introduce himself into literary circles more prominently, meeting Jonathan Cape, Edith Sitwell and William Plomer, and keeping up with all the latest literary magazines.² So one candidate for the book coming to his attention is *The Saturday Review of*

Literature, which ran a review of it by its Eastern European expert Hal Lehrman in its issue of November 25 1950. The same issue had Winston Churchill on the cover in connection with the latest installment of his autobiography, and included reviews of Vladimir ‘Popski’ Peniakoff’s memoirs and Ludwig Moyzisch’s *Operation Cicero*. Fleming was fascinated by all three of those subjects. Churchill’s obituary of his father was on display wherever he lived in his later years; he had met Popski at the Savoy Hotel in London to discuss his book at the request of Jonathan Cape; and Operation Cicero was mentioned in *Moonraker*, while the attempted assassination of Van Papen in Ankara a year before the affair would inspire the ‘men in straw hats’ incident in *Casino Royale*.

SMERSH was the first book to name the organisation. Sinevirsky was a pseudonym for Mikhail Mondich, a Ruthenian member of an anti-communist group called the National Alliance of Russian Solidarists, or NTS. He claimed to have infiltrated SMERSH and worked undercover in the organization for seven months before escaping to West Germany where, in 1948, the NTS newspaper *Possev* published his diary. The 1950 English translation of *SMERSH* published by Henry Holt & Company was an edited version of Mondich’s diary that had been put together by two American journalist brothers, Kermit and Milt Hill. Lehrman’s review of the book was dismissive:

‘Dragooned into the Soviet Army, [Mondich] is accidentally drafted as interpreter for—guess what—the secret police. Sinevirsky, his editors, and publishers think it is something new and special called SMERSH... but it is really just an NKVD counter-espionage branch.’³

Despite this, it appears Fleming was intrigued enough to seek out the book himself, because when he started writing *Casino Royale* 14 months later,⁴ he drew much of his material for SMERSH directly from it. Mondich’s book had been published in the United States at the height of McCarthyism and fears of Communism. As a result, the emphasis was very much on the

propaganda benefits of a first-hand account of Soviet brutality. The back cover hailed the book as being ‘of vital significance to an America that is already engaged in a political struggle against Bolshevik aggression’, while the flyleaf proclaimed:

‘This book reveals for the first time the intimate details of Stalin’s secret weapon—Smersh. What is it? What does it mean? It means “Death to Spies” and is a contraction of the Russian words, Smert Shpionam... It is the new supersecret counter-espionage elite whose creed is “Let thousands of innocents die lest one guilty go free!” Its weapons are terror and fear and unbelievable brutality. It is the absolute of depravity, degeneration, and the power-corruption which is Russia today...’

It’s not hard to see why this would have appealed to Ian Fleming—for an aspiring thriller-writer, a ‘new supersecret counter-espionage elite’ must have been like manna from heaven. As an experienced journalist, Fleming was constantly scouring the world around him for tidbits of information he could process and transform into gold. In his 1963 article ‘How to Write a Thriller’, he revealed a little of his methodology:

‘You must know thrilling things before you can write about them. Imagination alone isn’t enough, but stories you hear from friends or read in the papers can be built up by a fertile imagination and a certain amount of research and documentation into incidents that will also ring true in fiction.’⁵

Pearson noted that experts on Soviet affairs were quick to point out that ‘SMERSH was really a body which worked very largely with the Red Army during the war, rounding up German spies and saboteurs and Russian traitors, that it was a mistake to think that it had operated outside the borders of the U.S.S.R., that it was never a counter-intelligence unit in the sense that it worked against enemy secret services, and that in any case it had changed its name at the end of the war. Fleming, who always knew a good

thing when he met one, took no notice and continued to base himself on his outdated conception of SMERSH.’

When Fleming started writing *Casino Royale* in early 1952, Mondich’s book was the only account of SMERSH’s activities to have been published anywhere in the world. However, he might also have had his own sources for information on the organisation: as the assistant to the Director of Naval Intelligence during the Second World War, he was well-placed to hear of counter-intelligence activities. Fleming also established 30 Assault Unit, an intelligence-gathering commando group that followed the Allied troops into Germany, Austria and elsewhere searching for documents and equipment left behind by the Nazis late in the war.⁶ SMERSH were active in the same area at the same time, hunting down suspected traitors to the Soviet Union—members of the National Alliance of Russian Solidarists, for instance, as well as Latvian and Ukrainian nationalists who had joined the Waffen SS and the Nazis’ mobile killing squads.⁷

But even with Fleming’s war work, it seems highly unlikely that he would have had the level of detailed knowledge about SMERSH’s structure that is depicted in Mondich’s book—especially as a study of it reveals that Fleming seems to have drawn his material in *Casino Royale* directly from it. Mondich omitted the fact that SMERSH was no longer operating under that name by 1950—it was disbanded and all its duties handed over to the Main Administration of Counter-Intelligence (GUKR) of the MGB in 1946⁸—presumably because any mention of this would have greatly lessened his book’s impact. *Casino Royale* also features a still-active SMERSH, albeit with the proviso that it has been reduced in size. Mondich provided the basic background material on the organization, but Fleming made sure he adapted it to make it more thrilling.

In Chapter 6 of his book, Mondich gave a complete rundown of the organization’s structure:

‘SMERSH counter-intelligence, I learned, was divided into five departments.’⁹

When it came to writing MI6’s dossier on SMERSH in *Casino Royale*, Fleming followed these pages very closely:

‘The organization itself was thoroughly purged after the war and is now believed to consist of only a few hundred operatives of very high quality divided into five sections.’

According to Mondich, the First Department was attached directly to the front, where it monitored political trends inside the Red Army. Fleming rendered this as:

‘Department I: In charge of counter intelligence among Soviet organizations at home and abroad.’

This is both broader and vaguer in scope. Perhaps the idea of a super-secret elite working in ordinary uniforms as informers at the front didn’t seem as thrilling.

Fleming adapted the other departments’ roles into similarly concise and exciting prose. The Second Department, according to Mondich, was Operations, which was responsible for seeking out ‘organised enemies of the system’. Anyone suspected of committing a crime against the Soviet Union ‘must die’. Fleming neatly summarised this as:

‘Department II: Operations, including executions.’¹⁰

Mondich claimed that the Third Department was Administrative, but that he knew little about it, that the Fourth was the Investigation Department, and that the Fifth was the Prosecuting Department. Confusingly, he then mentioned two further departments, the Personnel Department and the Finance Department, which makes seven, not five. Fleming got round this by adding Finance to Department Three and Personnel to Department Four:

‘Department III: Administration and Finance.
 Department IV: Investigations and legal work. Personnel.
 Department V: Prosecutions: the section which passes final judgement on all victims.’

Mondich also claimed that SMERSH’s headquarters were in Moscow. Perhaps this seemed too predictable, because Fleming placed them in Leningrad instead, with a sub-station in Moscow (although he would change this in *From Russia, With Love*). He also attributed Trotsky’s assassination to the organisation, even though it took place a year before it was formed (a mistake many subsequent writers have repeated). And instead of being ‘Stalin’s secret weapon’, Fleming wrote that it was ‘believed to come under the personal direction of Beria’.¹¹

One thing Fleming did not alter from Mondich’s book was its trumpeted information about the meaning of the organization’s name:

‘SMERSH is a conjunction of two Russian words: ‘Smyert Shpionam’, meaning roughly: “Death to Spies”.’

As John Pearson noted, Ian Fleming knew a good thing when he met one.

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FLEMING’S USE OF SMERSH in *Casino Royale* was a master-stroke: right at the start of the Cold War, he stole a march on the legions of thriller-writers who would follow him, almost all of whom would use branches of the MVD or the KGB as the enemy. By settling on a little-known Soviet intelligence group instead, Fleming invested his work with an aura of originality and inside knowledge that would ‘ring true in fiction’. At the same time, he put his own stamp on the genre—nobody else could use SMERSH after him without seeming unoriginal.

Fleming also cleverly—and unusually for a thriller-writer of his era—ignored the crude propagandistic elements of his source material. In Chapter Nine of *Casino Royale*, we learn that in order to join the prestigious Double O Section of the British Secret Service James Bond assassinated two men, one of whom was a double agent. The elimination of treachery, then, is something that MI6's Double O Section has in common with SMERSH's Department II, which seeks out 'organised enemies of the system' and kills them.¹²

But Fleming didn't stop there: although Bond casually tells Vesper Lynd over caviar and hot toast that he has killed in cold blood, after he is tortured by the villain, Le Chiffre, he reappraises the situation, admitting to Mathis that the Norwegian traitor he killed 'just didn't die very quickly', and agonising over 'the nature of evil', as the chapter title puts it:

'Take our friend Le Chiffre. It's easy enough to say he's an evil man, at least it's simple enough for me because he did evil things to me. If he was here now, I wouldn't hesitate to kill him, but out of personal revenge and not, I'm afraid, for some high moral reason or for the sake of my country.'

Bond's anxieties here—and the confusion of hero and villain and patriotism and personal motive—may have been influenced by Geoffrey Household's classic 1939 thriller *Rogue Male*, in which the narrator, trapped in an underground burrow, is forced to face the fact that he is not morally superior to his tormentor, a tall, fair-haired Nazi officer who has taken on the cover role of an English gentleman, 'Major Quive-Smith', and repeatedly calls him 'my dear fellow'. In the first chapter of *Rogue Male*, the narrator tries to assassinate Hitler, but the shot misses due to a sudden change in the wind: later, as he is questioned by 'Quive-Smith' on his motivation for the assassination attempt, we learn that it was not out of a sense of patriotism or some high moral reason, but the fact that the Germans had shot his lover:

‘I declared war upon the men who could commit such sacrilege, and above all upon the man who has given them their creed. How ridiculous that one person should declare war upon a nation! That was another reason I hid from myself what I was doing. My war was a futile cause to me, to be smiled at sympathetically just as I used to smile at her enthusiasms. Yet in fact my war is anything but futile. Its cost in lives and human suffering is low. Seek out and destroy the main body of the enemy—and I should have destroyed it but for a change of wind.’¹³

This theme is echoed in the final chapter of *Casino Royale*, in which James Bond vows to go after the men who engineered the death of his lover, Vesper Lynd:

‘SMERSH was the spur. Be faithful, spy well, or you die. Inevitably and without question, you will be hunted down and killed.

It was the same with the whole Russian machine. Fear was the impulse. For them it was always safer to advance than retreat. Advance against the enemy and the bullet might miss you. Retreat, evade, betray, and the bullet would never miss.

But now he would attack the arm that held the whip and the gun. The business of espionage could be left to the white-collar boys. They could spy, and catch the spies. He would go after the threat behind the spies, the threat that made them spy.’

Such nuanced delineations are rare in espionage thrillers written so soon after the Second World War, and the popular perception of Fleming as a gung-ho patriot often fails to address these moments in *Casino Royale*. This is partly of Fleming’s own doing, though, because in his second novel, *Live and Let Die*, he discarded the hard-earned lessons Bond had learned in the first book. And just as the scar on Bond’s hand is erased, so too is the research of the first novel: SMERSH did not employ foreign gangsters. In *Live and Let Die*, Fleming moved his depiction of the organization from broadly reflecting the role it played in

reality—the hunter of enemies of the Soviet state—to a more amorphous, if still gloriously sinister-sounding, ‘red menace’.

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SMERSH IS ONLY tangential to the plot of *Live and Let Die*, but for its next appearance in a Bond novel it took centre-stage. In *From Russia, With Love*, Fleming brought all his skills to bear to create perhaps the most famous depiction of a villainous organisation in fiction.¹⁴ Fleming now used the Russian word ‘Otdely’ instead of Department, and heading up Otdely II—memorably described by Tatania Romanova as ‘the very whisper of death’—he introduced the fearsome Rosa Klebb.

Fleming’s interest in SMERSH had been reignited by the case of the Russian cipher expert Vladimir Petrov, who had defected to Australia in 1954. Writing about the case in his *Sunday Times* column ‘Atticus’, Fleming brought in his knowledge of Beria’s ‘messengers of death’ and also mentioned a mysterious ‘Madame Rybkin’, who he thought might be the most powerful woman in espionage.

Colonel Zoya Rybkina, alias ‘Madam Yartseva’, was the head of the NKVD’s German section throughout World War Two.¹⁵ She discovered the Nazis’ plan to attack the Soviet Union in June 1941 and told Stalin about it five days before the invasion—he didn’t believe her.¹⁶ Under the name Zoya Voskresenskaya, Rybkina later became famous in Russia as a children’s writer with a series of stories following the adventures of Lenin as a boy, two of which were made into successful films. Fleming may also have been inspired by a description Rachel Terry had given him of Emma Wolff, a hideous NKVD agent based in Vienna, adding some of her physical attributes to Klebb.¹⁷

One final inspiration for Klebb may have been Major Tamara Nicolayeva Ivanova, one of Russian intelligence’s ‘few female high officials’ and ‘an over-worked nervous spinster’, according to

Soviet Spy Net by E.H. Cookridge.¹⁸ Cookridge was a pseudonym for former British agent Edward Spiro, and this book, published in Britain in 1955, was a highly coloured account of the activities of Russian intelligence agencies around the world—according to Henry Chancellor, Fleming used it as the background source for most of his Cold War novels.¹⁹

Although it only mentions SMERSH once, and that's on the first page of its introduction to state that it no longer exists, this book contains the germs of many of Fleming's greatest ideas. Ivanova is also only mentioned once, but Spiro claimed she was an instructor of Captain Nicolai Evgenyevich Khokhlov, the MVD agent who defected to the Americans in Germany in 1954, claiming to have been sent to assassinate Georgi Okolovich, chairman of the NTS in Frankfurt. Khokhlov is mentioned several times in *From Russia, With Love*, and is central to Fleming's construction of the book. In Chapter Three, the entirely fictional General Grubozaboyschikov tells the real Serov "We don't want another Khokhlov affair", while in Chapter 26, Bond is told that his current predicament will 'knock spots' off the Khokhlov case.²⁰

Spiro claimed that Khokhlov was a member of the MVD's 'Otydel for Terror and Diversion', and gave a graphic account of this division's activities, most of which has never appeared in any creditable non-fiction work about Soviet intelligence. Chapter Eight of the book is dedicated to training, and reveals the general syllabus taught to MVD agents between 1948 and 1953, including the principles of Marxism, the history of other systems of government, 'the Problems of Negroes and other Colonial Peoples', codes and ciphers, and physical training:

'Lt. Colonel Nicolai Godlovsky, director of the Cheka small arms section, is the Soviet rifle marksmanship champion... The training for the budding "executioners" is carried out in a barrack-like building on the corner of Metrostrovskaya Street and Turnaninsky Pereulok in Moscow. The director of this training establishment is Colonel of the M.V.D., Arkady Foyotev. The

syllabus includes rifle and pistol shooting, driving (motor-cars and motor-cycles), judo, boxing, photography and elementary courses in radio technique. This course is only for beginners. Graduates of the “Section for Terror and Diversion” are trained at special establishment at Kuchino, a large country house outside Moscow, where they are prepared for their “special tasks”, and for which the syllabus includes the use of special weapons and poisons.’²¹

Fleming used this chapter as the basis for Donovan ‘Red’ Grant’s training, attributing the MVD’s methods to his imaginary version of a still-active SMERSH:

‘The next year was spent, with only two other foreign students among several hundred Russians, at the School for Terror and Diversion at Kuchino, outside Moscow. Here Grant went triumphantly through courses in judo, boxing, athletics, photography and radio under the general supervision of the famous Colonel Arkady Fotoyev, father of the modern Soviet spy, and completed his small-arms instruction at the hands of Lieutenant-Colonel Nikolai Godlovsky, the Soviet Rifle Champion.’

Quite apart from switching all this to SMERSH, Fleming adapted Spiro’s text in such a way that even if it had been true, it could no longer be. Spiro listed judo, boxing and so on as being taught to beginners, with only graduates moving on to Kuchino. Perhaps because the details of the beginners’ course were more compelling and more concrete than the much vaguer description of the graduate course, Fleming listed the beginners’ activities as being taught at the graduates’ school. In doing so, he got all the authentic-sounding material in—all the activities taught, the names of both instructors, the menacing name of the school and the place-name—even though it meant contradicting his source.

Fleming’s aim was not to describe the inner workings of Soviet espionage accurately, but convincingly. He was writing novels, not non-fiction, and he used artistic licence as and when he saw

fit. The details he used sound authoritative, and lure us into believing we are in the hands of a true espionage insider.

Fleming also built cleverly on the true circumstances. Khokhlov was a genuine agent, but he had defected before completing his assassination mission. In *Red Grant*, Fleming created a rather less squeamish opponent for Bond:

‘SMERSH has made one or two mistakes lately. That Khokhlov business for one. Remember the explosive cigarette case and all that? Gave it to the wrong man. Should have given it to me. I wouldn’t have gone over to the Yanks.’²²

Khokhlov did not work for SMERSH, of course, but when he defected he brought with him an array of weapons, including a cigarette case that fired dum-dum bullets through the tips and an electrically fired miniature revolver that could be hidden in the palm of a hand: it was a propaganda coup the Americans fully exploited, showing off both the would-be assassin and his paraphernalia at a packed press conference at the American High Commission in Bonn on April 22, 1954.

Spiro commented on the case as follows:

‘It was said that if a popular writer of thrillers had invented a tale of disguised secret agents carrying such weapons to kill their victim in the centre of a European city, even ardent readers would say the story was incredible. But, in fact, these things have been done, and done successfully, by Cheka agents before.’²²

Such a sentiment must have been almost a provocation to Ian Fleming! Not only did he give *Red Grant* an even more fanciful weapon, hidden inside a copy of *War and Peace*, he took Spiro’s line and ran with it. In *How to Write a Thriller*, he wrote that his plots were ‘fantastic, while being based upon truth’:

‘They go wildly beyond the probable but not beyond the possible. Every now and then there will be a story in the newspapers that lifts a corner of the veil from Secret Service work. A tunnel from

West to East Berlin so that our Secret Service can tap the Russian telephone system: the Russian spy Khokhlov with his cigarette case that fired dum-dum bullets; “The Man Who Never Was”—the corpse with the false invasion plans that we left for the Gestapo to find. This is all true Secret Service history that is yet in the higher realm of fantasy, and James Bond’s ventures into this realm are perfectly legitimate.’

The idea of using a tunnel to listen in on the Russians also made its way into *From Russia, With Love*, incidentally, albeit on a much smaller scale than the technical feat that was Operation GOLD: Darko Kerim and James Bond eavesdrop on a Soviet meeting with a submarine periscope while standing in Istanbul’s sewers. Kerim mentions that Q Branch are trying to find a way to wire the periscope for sound.

Fleming’s insistence that his work was ‘based upon truth’ and ‘not beyond the possible’ is nevertheless intriguing. Firstly, Spiro’s book was not the truth, and Fleming, an experienced journalist, must have suspected that. Even if he took it all to be true, Spiro only mentioned SMERSH once in his book, where he said it no longer exists. Fleming either didn’t read Spiro’s introduction or disregarded it, feeling that the defunct SMERSH sounded more exciting than the real MVD—and as he had already used it in *Casino Royale*, it was his organization, in a way.

A more ingenious example of the way Fleming used research is evident from Grant’s cover identity, Captain Norman Nash. Grant posing as an English gentleman and repeatedly calling Bond ‘old man’ appears to be a further reference to *Rogue Male* and ‘Major Quive-Smith’. And, as Henry Chancellor has pointed out, Fleming took his surname from the glossary of terms in Spiro’s book:

“‘Nash’: “Ours”, Cheka description for a sympathiser or potential informant.’²³

Fleming has Tania tell Bond this, presaging the revelation that ‘Nash’ is not all he seems:

“‘What did you say his name is?’”

“Nash. Norman Nash.”

She spelled it out. “N.A.S.H.? Like that?”

“Yes.”

The girl’s eyes were puzzled. “I suppose you know what that means in Russian. Nash means ‘ours’. In our Services, a man is *nash* when he is one of ‘our’ men. He is *svoi* when he is one of ‘theirs’—when he belongs to the enemy. And this man calls himself Nash. That is not pleasant.”

Tatiana Romanova doesn’t appear to have any direct historical counterpart, but much of her background is also taken from Spiro’s book; it contains a chapter on the Central Index, where Tania works, which we are told mostly employs women. This is also where Fleming found the information about the Russians’ files, *zapiski*, the Russian for ‘top secret’, and many other details. But while most thriller-writers research to make their fiction as realistic as possible, Fleming was concerned if it was interesting first, and plausible second. He also used his research material as a jumping-off point for ideas. As well as providing Fleming with a lot of authoritative-sounding jargon, Spiro’s book seems to have triggered plot ideas. In a passage about the use of mercenary spies, Spiro wrote:

‘The conflict of the hot and cold war ideologies since 1939 has resulted in the eclipse of the professional “free lance” spy, beloved of the pre-war thriller writers—the Mata Haris and the glamorous blondes of the Orient Express.’²⁴

There were indeed many thrillers predating the 1950s that featured beautiful female agents and the most famous train in the world—but perhaps this was the trigger for Fleming to write his own variation of the form.

A few lines later, Spiro discussed the exploits of the Switz Gang, a syndicate of spies who trapped leading French officials into revealing defence secrets, which they then sold to both the Nazis and the Soviets:

‘It was as romantic as any thriller lover could desire. A few blonde hairs adhering to a roll of camera film, which fell into the hands of the Deuxième Bureau, was the clue that led counter-espionage agents, with the help of Scotland Yard, to Mrs. Marjorie Switz.’²⁵

As well as the echoes of the photo blackmail plot in *From Russia, With Love*, the Switz Gang sounds like it might also have been an inspiration for S.P.E.C.T.R.E. in *Thunderball*.

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FLEMING CHEEKILY PREFACED *From Russia, With Love* with a note insisting on the accuracy of the information about SMERSH contained within the novel. Apart from sheer bravado—the organization had been disbanded over a decade earlier—this may have been because he was helped with his research by the Russian rocket scientist Grigori Tokaev, who had defected to Britain in 1947.²⁶ Tokaev—who later took the name Tokaty—was the only Soviet official to defect to Britain between 1945 and 1963. But while he had some knowledge of Russia’s intelligence structure, he had never been a member of SMERSH; he also spent much of his time in Britain assisting the Information Research Department, a secret group within the Foreign Office that created anti-Communist propaganda.²⁷

Fleming was happy to chop and change information as it suited him. The truth was a starting point, and it was always more important that it sounded like it could be true than whether it was. And a little note at the start would be enough to convince most people that it was the truth, and that they had been given an insider’s glimpse into the espionage world. As we can see, that was hardly the case. Far from being an accurate description of the

workings of SMERSH, the ‘most secret department of the Soviet government’, as Fleming claimed in his author’s note, *From Russia, With Love* in fact gives an exciting but rather inaccurate representation of the workings of another Soviet organization entirely, the MVD, based on a publicly available account that itself was dubious, even before he attributed its methods to the long-defunct SMERSH.

Regardless of historical accuracy, *From Russia, With Love* established SMERSH as spy fiction’s greatest villains to date. Considering the wealth of projects that exploited the success of Bond in the ‘60s, it seems surprising that there weren’t more books about SMERSH during this period. One reason, of course, was the difficulty in getting hold of first-hand information.

One book claiming to offer this is *Nights Are Longest There: SMERSH From The Inside* by A.I. Romanov, which was published in English in 1972. ‘Romanov’—a fitting pseudonym—writes that he was recruited into Department I during the war, meaning that we get lots of insight into life on the front-lines, as well as a thorough history of the organisation. It’s a world away from Fleming: Romanov spent most of his time questioning people about garrisons and troop movements in hutments, occasionally being dragged out to a forest with his comrades to witness an execution. And where Mikhail Mondich verged on the hysterical, Romanov takes understatement to excess:

‘In Poland... I witnessed the execution of one of our officers, who had raped a young Polish girl in her parents’ home. The order of sentence in this case was widely publicised, both to our forces and the local population. Later, in Budapest, I was present when a group of leaders of the Hungarian pro-fascist party ‘Crossed Arrows’ was hanged. All these scenes left me with an impression that can in no way be described as pleasant.’²⁸

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IAN FLEMING ONLY used SMERSH once again: Auric Goldfinger is its treasurer. But here, as in *Live and Let Die*, this was more a convenient prop to explain Bond's interest in the mission than anything else. And in his next novel, *Thunderball*, Fleming finally did away with SMERSH altogether, replacing it with the wholly fictional S.P.E.C.T.R.E. In an interview given to *Playboy* shortly before his death, Fleming gave his reasons:

'I closed down SMERSH, although I was devoted to the good old apparat, because, first of all, Khrushchev did in fact disband SMERSH himself, although its operations are still carried out by a subsection of the K.G.B., the Russian secret service. But in that book—I think it was *Thunderball* that I was writing at the time of the proposed summit meeting—I thought well, it's no good going on if we're going to make friends with the Russians. I know them, I like them personally, as anyone would, as anyone would like the Chinese if he knew them. I thought, I don't want to go on ragging them like this. So I invented S.P.E.C.T.R.E. as an international crime organisation which contained elements of SMERSH and the Gestapo and the Mafia—the cosy old Cosa Nostra—which, of course, is a much more elastic fictional device than SMERSH, which was no fictional device, but the real thing.'²⁹

The makers of the Bond films felt the same, preferring to use the elastic S.P.E.C.T.R.E. than the real-life SMERSH (and *SPECTRE* is the title of the next film, due out in 2015). But the idea that a 'subsection of the KGB' might still be carrying out SMERSH's duties (which, in fact, it had been before Fleming started writing about it) found favour with John Gardner when he came to write his James Bond novels. In *Icebreaker*, SMERSH was transformed into 'Department V'. This was a real subsection of the KGB, although it was in fact descended from the Special Administration of Special Tasks, a sabotage and assassination division during the Second World War often confused with SMERSH, rather than

from SMERSH itself. However, as with Fleming, historical accuracy was not the name of the game, and Gardner took his readers back to Fleming's original fascination with this strange, sinister Soviet group:

“Smersh has what I understand is called, in criminal parlance, a hit list. That list includes a number of names—people who are wanted, not dead but alive. Can you imagine whose name is number one on the chart, James Bond?”³⁰

If such hit lists seem ‘beyond the possible’, one only has to consider the fate of Nicolai Khokhlov, whose case so inspired Fleming when writing *From Russia, With Love*. That novel ends with James Bond being poisoned by a kick from Rosa Klebb. Five months after it was published, in September 1957, Khokhlov himself was poisoned with the metal thallium, which had been inserted into a cup of coffee. He eventually recovered, but not before he had gone bald, blood had seeped through his pores and his entire body had become disfigured with black-and-blue swellings. The obvious similarities to the cases of both Viktor Yushchenko and Alexander Litvinenko suggest that Ian Fleming's conception of the Russian secret services may not have been so wide of the mark after all.

Notes for this chapter:

1. *The Life of Ian Fleming* by John Pearson (The Companion Book Club, 1966), p285.
2. Pearson, p184.
3. eg ‘NKVD Counter-Espionage’, *Saturday Review of Literature*, November 25 1950, p40.
4. Pearson, p203.
5. ‘How to Write a Thriller’ by Ian Fleming, *Books and Bookmen*, May 1963.
6. *Ian Fleming* by Andrew Lycett (Phoenix, 2002), p156.

7. SMERSH screened over five million people during this time, including Soviet POWs—many were transported to the gulags and died. The British government aided the ‘freeing’ of Soviet POWs, later claiming not to be aware of the fate awaiting them, most controversially forcibly repatriating the Cossacks held at Lienz in Austria, an incident that forms part of the plot of the film *Goldeneye*. In June 1945, SMERSH managed to track down a group of Cossack White generals in the area; KGB defector Vasili Mitrokhin claimed in 1999 that the SMERSH men were aided by the British, bribing a lieutenant-colonel with fourteen kilograms of gold to arrange their capture. SMERSH photographers recorded the handover. One wonders if Fleming had heard about this incident, as some of the elements of it are similar to events in his short story *Octopussy*. See *The Sword And The Shield: The Mitrokhin Archive and The Secret History of the KGB*, Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin (Basic, 1999), p134-135.
8. *KGB: The Inside Story Of Its Foreign Operations From Lenin To Gorbachev* by Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky (Sceptre, 1991), pp350-1; and *Nights Are Longest There: SMERSH From The Inside* by A.I. Romanov (Hutchinson, 1972), pp192.
9. *SMERSH* by Nicola Sinevirsky (Henry Holt & Co, 1950), p74.
10. Chapter Two, ‘Dossier for M’.
11. Fleming had to refer back to this in *Live and Let Die* because—in events that would seem almost too fantastic for a James Bond novel—Beria was arrested at the push of a secret button at a meeting of the Praesidium in June 1953, and executed, possibly on suspicion of being a British agent, shortly after.
12. ‘SMERSH: Soviet Military Counter-Intelligence during the Second World War’ by Robert Stephan, *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 22, No. 4, *Intelligence Services during the Second World War: Part 2* (October 1987), pp 585-613.
13. *Rogue Male* by Geoffrey Household (Penguin, 1985), p154.
14. It is perhaps just pipped to the post by S.P.E.C.T.R.E., although the film due in 2015 might make this point moot.
15. ‘Court Life Street Life’ by Igor Zakharov, *The Moscow Times*, February 15 1997.
16. ‘Women Add Glamour to Cloak and Dagger Profession’ by Irina Titova, *The St Petersburg Times*, June 25 2004.
17. Lycett, pp290-291.
18. *Soviet Spy Net* by E.H. Cookridge (Frederick Muller, 1955), p161.

NEED TO KNOW

19. *James Bond: The Man and His World* by Henry Chancellor (John Murray, 2005), p212.
20. *From Russia With Love* by Ian Fleming (Pan, 1959), p191.
21. Cookridge, p99.
22. Cookridge, pxiii.
23. Cookridge, p91-92.
24. Ibid.
25. Cookridge, p157.
26. Lycett, p84.
27. Obituary of Tokaty in *The Independent*, November 25 2003.
28. Romanov, p98. The book was translated into English by Gerald Brooke, the British lecturer who three years previously had been in the world's spotlight when he was exchanged for the Krogers.
29. 'The Playboy Interview: Ian Fleming' by Ken Purdy, *Playboy*, December 1964.
30. *Icebreaker* by John Gardner (Berkley, 1983), p190.

Bourne Yesterday

‘HE HAS A stolid face and solid musculature, which we know because he goes topless more than his leading ladies do. He has vigorous skirmishes on roofs, in cars and in hotel rooms. He takes as severe a beating—and shows as much emotion—as a crash-test dummy. He’s a government spy whom his government wants dead, and he’s mourning the violent death of his girlfriend. He so resembles another famous agent that you half-expect him to say, “The name is Bourne. Jason Bourne.”’¹

So ran *TIME*’s review of the 2008 James Bond film *Quantum of Solace*. It was one of several that felt that the film was imitative of or influenced by the Jason Bourne films starring Matt Damon. The films are loosely based on the novels of the same name by Robert Ludlum, primarily *The Bourne Identity*. Published in 1980, that novel features a man who is shot and falls into the sea, but manages to survive and make it to dry land. His former colleagues presume him dead, but he recovers, with one crucial setback: he has lost his memory, and has no idea that he is in fact a ruthless secret agent. On discovering his identity in a Swiss bank, he is stunned: ‘My name’s Bourne. Jason Bourne...’²

The book was a worldwide best-seller on publication in 1980, as were its two sequels, and a new writer, Eric Van Lustbader, has

written several further novels featuring the character since Ludlum's death in 2001. The films took the central premise of Ludlum's novel and fashioned new plots around it, reinvigorating the spy genre in the process. But that premise, of a secret agent on a mission presumed dead at sea, surviving, but discovering he has amnesia, has a surprising legacy of its own—and its most immediate precursor is Ian Fleming.

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IN THE CLOSING scenes of Fleming's 1964 novel *You Only Live Twice*, James Bond is on a mission in Japan under cover as a local fisherman when he is hit on the head and plunges into the sea. He survives, but loses his memory:

'The tremendous impact with the water had at first knocked all the wind out of Bond, but the will to live, so nearly extinguished by the searing pain in his head, was revived by the new but recognizable enemy of the sea and, when Kissy got to him, he was struggling to free himself from the kimono.

At first he thought she was Blofeld and tried to strike out at her. "It's Kissy," she said urgently, "Kissy Suzuki! Don't you remember?"

He didn't. He had no recollection of anything in the world but the face of his enemy and of the desperate urge to smash it. But his strength was going and finally, cursing feebly, he allowed her to manhandle him out of the kimono and paid heed to the voice that pleaded with him.

"Now follow me, Taro-san. When you get tired I will pull you with me. We are all trained in such rescue work."

But, when she started off, Bond didn't follow her. Instead he swam feebly round and round like a wounded animal, in ever-increasing circles. She almost wept. What had happened to him? What had they done to him at the Castle of Death? Finally she stopped him and talked softly to him and he docilely allowed her to put her arms under his armpits and, with his head cradled

between her breasts, she set off with the traditional backward leg-stroke.

It was an amazing swim for a girl—half a mile with currents to contend with and only the moon and an occasional glance over her shoulder to give her a bearing, but she achieved it and finally hauled Bond out of the water in her little cove and collapsed on the flat stones beside him.

She was awoken by a groan from Bond. He had been quietly sick and now sat with his head in his hands, looking blankly out to sea with the glazed eyes of a sleepwalker. When Kissy put an arm round his shoulders, he turned vaguely towards her. “Who are you? How did I get here? What is this place?” He examined her more carefully. “You’re very pretty.”³

Bond comes to believe that he is his cover identity, Taro Todoroki. But his amnesia has a very unusual side-effect: he has become a complete innocent in matters of the flesh, having apparently forgotten ‘how to perform the act of love’. This is soon remedied, and Bond finally regains a glimmer of memory triggered by seeing the word ‘Vladivostok’. The novel ends with him leaving setting off for the Soviet Union, unaware that he is heading straight into enemy territory.

Robert Ludlum was a fan of Ian Fleming. In 1992, he wrote the following in an article for *Entertainment Weekly* on the 30th anniversary of the Bond films:

‘Fleming was a contemporary nexus, a vital connection, as well as a necessary contribution, that forced my generation of suspense writers to look deeper into the intrigues—political, geopolitical, and international—than we might have before he arrived in print. Fleming was a bridge over critical waters: He romanticized terrible inequities by obliterating them. But by doing so, he led those who followed him, followed in the wake of the extraordinary promotion and acceptance worldwide of the novels and the movies and eventually the videocassettes, to make those genuine inequities and intrigues perhaps—only perhaps—a touch more literary (a pretentious term, and certainly arguable).’⁴

Ludlum certainly followed Fleming in *The Bourne Identity*. The opening and premise of the novel were both clearly inspired by the ending of *You Only Live Twice*: another writer's musing on the idea of what might happen if James Bond forgot who he was. Fleming himself didn't follow it up particularly satisfactorily; his next and last novel, *The Man With The Golden Gun*, opens with Bond returning to London. As he recaps to M what has happened to him since we last saw him, his journey between Japan and the Soviet Union is not explored:

“I'm afraid there's a lot I still can't remember, sir. I got a bang on the head”—he touched his right temple—“somewhere along the line on that job you sent me to do in Japan. Then there's a blank until I got picked up by the police on the waterfront at Vladivostok. No idea how I got there. They roughed me up a bit and in the process I must have got another bang on the head because suddenly I remembered who I was and that I wasn't a Japanese fisherman which was what I thought I was.”⁵

Bond has in fact been brainwashed by the Soviets and sent to London to kill M. When this fails, he is swiftly un-brainwashed and sent on a new mission, and his amnesia is never mentioned again. It seems Robert Ludlum felt that there was more mileage to be had from the premise, and spun out a new story along the lines of what a James Bond who had lost his memory might have gone through between leaving Japan and ending up on the waterfront at Vladivostok. Ludlum made his character an American agent and gave him some different characteristics from Bond, but the core idea is the same, and both Jason Bourne's initials and the wording of his discovery of his identity make the homage to Fleming clear.

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BUT, IRONICALLY, IT seems that Ian Fleming's idea for James Bond to lose his memory may *also* have had its roots in previous

thrillers. In Dennis Wheatley's novel *Faked Passports*, published in June 1940, British secret agent Gregory Sallust travels to Petsamo where, after taking a hit to the back of his head with a spent bullet, he finds he has lost his memory:

“Petsamo?” Gregory murmured vaguely. “Petsamo? Where’s that?”

“Wake up, man!” Freddie laughed. “It’s the Finnish port in the Arctic circle.”

A look dawned in Gregory’s eyes that none of them had ever seen before; a frightened, hunted look. “But, but—” he stammered, “the Arctic! What am I doing up in the Arctic?”

They all stood there in silence for a moment regarding him anxiously until, in a very small voice, Erika said suddenly: “You do know me, darling, don’t you?”

“Of course I do,” he laughed uneasily. “As though I could forget your lovely face in a million years! But wait a minute—that’s very queer—I can’t remember your name.”

“I’m Erika,” she said softly.

“Erika,” he repeated. “That’s a pretty name, isn’t it—and marvellously suitable...”⁶

And just as In *You Only Live Twice*, amnesia has a very unusual effect on his sex life, as Erika laments:

‘In those hectic days they had spent in Munich and Berlin together early in November they had been the most passionate lovers. When they had met again in Helsinki his absence from her had seemed only to have increased his eagerness; but their opportunities for love-making had been lamentably few. Then his injury at Petsamo had changed his mentality in that respect as in all others. On waking on their first morning in the trapper’s house he had accepted quite naturally that he was in love with her, but it had been an entirely different kind of love. He was tender and thoughtful for her and followed her every movement with almost dog-like devotion, but he did not seem to know even the first steps in physical love-making any more.’⁷

This is soon remedied, and Sallust regains his memory and completes his mission. It is likely that Fleming had read this novel: Wheatley was an acquaintance, and also a friend and close colleague of his brother Peter, who modelled the protagonist of his novel *The Sixth Column* on him. Wheatley was also one of Britain's best-selling thriller-writers, and Fleming was a thriller aficionado. In addition, both the central plot premise of *From Russia, With Love* and many of the biographical details of James Bond in *You Only Live Twice* were influenced by another Wheatley novel, *Come Into My Parlour*.

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IN *FAKED PASSPORTS*, as in *You Only Live Twice*, the device of a secret agent contracting amnesia is more of an intriguing incident than a driving engine of the plot. Not so in *Pray Silence* by Manning Coles, published in October 1940, just six months after *Faked Passports*.

Coles was the pseudonym of two writers, Adelaide Manning and Cyril Coles. Their first novel, *Drink to Yesterday*, was published in March 1940 to great success (the jacket of the 1947 edition proclaimed it 'The thriller that made Manning Coles famous in a day'). *Drink To Yesterday* is set in the First World War, and ends with British secret agent Tommy Hambleton being hit on the head and shoved into the sea while undercover as a German. His colleagues in London presume he has drowned. *Pray Silence* reveals he did not, but was washed ashore, discovered, and nursed back to health. Unfortunately, he has also forgotten who he is. He is presumed to be German, and presumes so himself. As 'Klaus Lehmann', he rises to become Deputy Chief of Police in Berlin until in 1933, gazing into the flames of the Reichstag fire, he suddenly remembers his true identity and resolves to get back in touch with London and defeat the Nazis:

“I am Hambleton, an agent of British Intelligence. Bill, where is Bill?”

There was a crash and a roar of flame as one of the floors fell in, and Hambleton looked up. That was the Reichstag burning. “Good God,” he thought, “and now I am a member of the Reichstag. It’s enough to make anybody feel faint, it is indeed.”⁸

Despite its quaintness and implausibility, *Pray Silence* is a beautifully constructed, witty, and thoughtful spy thriller, and a real masterpiece of the genre. It led to twenty-four sequels. Tommy Hambleton doesn’t have a sex life to speak of, so we’re not told of the effect of his amnesia on it, but it seems clear that Fleming also read this novel, and combined the details of both it and *Faked Passports* to come up with a new twist on the idea. Amnesia is a staple plot device of thrillers, and it has taken many forms: doctors with amnesia, murderers with amnesia, and so on. But this is much more direct. *You Only Live Twice* has four very precise correspondences with *Faked Passports*. In both novels,

1. *A British secret agent*
2. *is struck on the head*
3. *and recovers to find he has amnesia,*
4. *with the unusual side-effect that he has also forgotten how to have sex.*

There are not many novels one could say all four of these about. But *You Only Live Twice* also has six precise correspondences with *Pray Silence*. In both:

1. *A British secret agent*
2. *on a mission under cover as a foreigner*
3. *plunges into the sea.*
4. *He survives but has amnesia,*
5. *and comes to believe he is his cover identity,*
6. *while he is presumed dead by his colleagues back home.*

Taken together, there are *eight* correspondences between *You Only Live Twice* and these two novels:

1. *A British secret agent*
2. *on a mission under cover as a foreigner*
3. *is struck on the head*
4. *and plunges into the sea.*
5. *He survives but has amnesia,*
6. *which has the side-effect that he also forgets how to have sex.*
7. *He comes to believe he is his cover identity,*
8. *and is presumed dead by his colleagues.*

So many correspondences seem very unlikely to be coincidence, especially as Ian Fleming was both a connoisseur of thrillers and, as a journalist and former intelligence officer, something of a magpie. In his book on Operation Mincemeat, Ben Macintyre quotes a document written in September 1939 that, although signed by the Director of Naval Intelligence, Admiral John Godfrey, ‘bore the hallmarks’ of having been written by Fleming, who was his personal assistant. The ‘Trout Memo’ was circulated to other wartime intelligence chiefs, and was a list of ideas for deceiving the Germans. Number 28 on the list was headed ‘A Suggestion (not a very nice one)’:

‘The following suggestion is used in a book by Basil Thomson: a corpse dressed as an airman, with despatches in his pockets, could be dropped on the coast, supposedly from a parachute that had failed. I understand there is no difficulty in obtaining corpses at the Naval Hospital, but, of course, it would have to be a fresh one.’⁹

Fleming was also interested in the fictional potential of amnesia: it featured in two of his other novels. The villain of *Casino Royale* was a displaced person at the end of the Second World War who feigned amnesia until being transferred to Strasbourg and adopting the name ‘Le Chiffre’. And in *Moonraker*, renowned British industrialist Hugo Drax is revealed to be the villainous Graf Hugo von der Drache, a former Nazi commando who in the latter stages

of the war is captured while wearing a British uniform. Like Le Chiffre, he also pretends to have amnesia and is nursed back to health as a missing British soldier by the name of Hugo Drax. This is somewhat similar to *Pray Silence*: Hambledon is the hero and genuinely has amnesia, but he is also nursed back to health by his enemies after being mistaken for one of them, and rebuilds his new life under a false identity he has adopted.

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PRAY SILENCE AND *Faked Passports* were published just six months apart, and even in the fast-moving publishing schedule of the war it seems unlikely that they influenced each other. It is more likely that some earlier source triggered the thought in the minds of Dennis Wheatley and ‘Manning Coles’ that led to both their novels featuring British secret agents losing their memory: perhaps an earlier novel (although I haven’t found any), or a news item about a soldier returning from war with amnesia, or something similar. In *Pray Silence*, the idea has a pleasing neatness to it: what if a secret agent were under cover on a mission, somehow lost their memory, and ended up believing that they were their cover identity? In *Faked Passports*, the idea is a strangely ineffective digression that misses the idea’s potential: Gregory Sallust is not under cover and so does not believe he is anyone else.

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WE MAY NEVER know where the idea originally sprung from, but the ripples of it can be traced from 1940 onwards. It seems likely that Ian Fleming read both these novels and refashioned the concept into a new mixture to his own taste, featuring James Bond in Japan. Some sixteen years later, the chain continued with Robert Ludlum presenting a fresh twist on the idea. It has taken

on several more forms since, from the film *The Long Kiss Goodnight* to the graphic novel series *XIII*.

The idea, with some tweaking, was also resurrected in the 2012 Bond film *Skyfall*. Taking its cue from *You Only Live Twice*, Bond is shot and plunges into water. He is presumed dead, his obituary written. We see him in a beach hut with a woman and, as in *You Only Live Twice*, he ‘looks blankly out to sea with the glazed eyes of a sleepwalker’. However, there is no amnesia. *The Guardian* noted several antecedents for the film’s theme of resurrection:

‘Bond’s watery plunge harkens back, of course, to the granddaddy of such feints—Holmes’s plunge from the Reichenbach Falls in Arthur Conan Doyle’s story *The Final Problem*, a death prompted by Doyle’s weariness with his own creation...

Maybe it was inevitable that as film franchises mushroomed... resurrection would pass up the food chain from TV soaps to high-end Hollywood movies, following the example Lt Ellen Ripley in the *Alien* films, who perished in a vat of molten lead at the end of *Alien 3* only to be cloned from surviving flesh tissue for *Alien: Resurrection* in 1997.

The conceit still groaned with the memories of a hundred horror sequels—from *Halloween* to *Friday the 13th*. The movie that gave resurrection its current respectability was released just a few years later: Doug Liman’s *The Bourne Identity* in 2002.

In that film, you’ll remember, Jason Bourne is shot in the back and plunges, like Bond, into another of those watery graves that never seem to last...’¹⁰

But of course, as we have seen, Bond’s watery grave preceded Bourne’s. The story has come full circle, and the influence of Ian Fleming’s novels—and the vintage British thrillers that influenced them—continue to live on in surprising ways.

Notes for this chapter:

1. 'Quantum of Solace: Bourne-Again Bond' by Richard Corliss, *TIME*, November 13, 2008.
2. *The Bourne Identity* by Robert Ludlum (Granada, 1980), p61.
3. *You Only Live Twice* by Ian Fleming (Pan, 1966), pp181-182.
4. 'James at 30' by Robert Ludlum, *Entertainment Weekly*, Issue no. 123 June 19, 1992.
5. *The Man With The Golden Gun* by Ian Fleming (Pan, 1967), p21.
6. *Faked Passports* by Dennis Wheatley (Arrow, 1966), pp249-250.
7. *Ibid.*, p404.
8. *Pray Silence* by Manning Coles (Hodder & Stoughton, 1953), p40.
9. *Operation Mincemeat* by Ben Macintyre (Bloomsbury, 2010), p7.
10. 'James Bond's resurrection: how coming back to life became a film favourite' by Tom Shone, *The Guardian*, October 18 2012.

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Bourne Yesterday

Enid Schantz and Steve Coles.

NEED TO KNOW

Rogue Royale

The Lost Bond film by the 'Shakespeare of Hollywood'

For Johanna, with love

Author's Note

In this short book I look at some early attempts to film Ian Fleming's first novel, *Casino Royale*, and in particular the surviving material by screenwriter Ben Hecht. Some of this research featured in an article I wrote for the *Sunday Telegraph* in March 2011 and two articles I published on my website in August 2010, but the majority of what you're about to read is previously unpublished. I hope you enjoy it.

Jeremy Duns

Mariehamn, Åland, September 2013

IN 2006, AUDIENCES around the world flocked to see Daniel Craig play James Bond for the first time, in an adaptation of Ian Fleming's first novel, *Casino Royale*. The film was a commercial and critical triumph, but it wasn't the first attempt to adapt the novel—in fact, it was the third, and the book had had a rocky journey at the hands of screenwriters and producers over several decades.

Fleming had started writing the story in January 1952, by his own account to counter his 'hysterical alarm at getting married at the age of forty-three'¹. He wrote the book at his holiday home in Jamaica, inspired by some of his own experiences and memories of the Second World War. The resulting short novel was a heady brew of espionage, gambling and betrayal in northern France that deftly merged the traditions of vintage British thrillers with the more brutal style of hardboiled American writers such as Dashiell Hammett. Published in 1953, it was well-reviewed in Britain, but failed to become a bestseller. Fleming nevertheless had high hopes that James Bond would become a success, either through his books or through screen adaptations of them.

He didn't have to wait too long for the latter to appear. The first adaptation of *Casino Royale* was a one-hour play performed live on American television in October 1954: Barry Nelson starred as crew-cut American secret agent Jimmy 'Card Sense' Bond, on a mission to defeat the villainous Le Chiffre, played by Peter Lorre, in a high-stakes baccarat game. Due to the format, this was a

¹ 'Bon Vivant and the Scourge of SMERSH: The Master of Agent 007' by Tim Green, *Life*, August 10 1962.

much-simplified and stagey version of Fleming's novel, with little of its extravagance or excitement. The book features a wince-inducing scene in which Le Chiffre, desperate to discover where Bond has hidden a cheque for 40 million francs that he needs to save his life, ties Bond naked to a cane chair with a cut out seat and proceeds to torture him by thrashing his testicles with a carpet-beater. This clearly couldn't be shown on television in 1954, so instead Bond was shown being placed fully clothed in a bathtub and viewers watched him howl with pain as, off-screen, Le Chiffre's men attacked his toenails with pliers.

Other changes included transforming the character of Felix Leiter, an American agent in the novel, into Clarence Leiter, a horsey British agent who at times seems more sophisticated than Bond. The novel's characters of Vesper Lynd and René Mathis were combined to form Valerie Mathis, a French agent, and the major plot twist of the novel, that Vesper is a traitor, was dropped.

To Fleming's disappointment, CBS's adaptation of *Casino Royale* came and went with little fanfare: however, other plans to film the novel were already afoot. A week before CBS had bought the television rights to *Casino Royale*, Gregory Ratoff bought a six-month film option on the novel, and in 1955 he bought the rights outright.

An extravagant bear of a man who had fled Russia at the time of the Bolshevik Revolution, Ratoff was a well-known actor, producer and director—he had directed Ingrid Bergman's first Hollywood film, *Intermezzo*, in 1939. He was also a close friend and confidant of two of Hollywood's most powerful men, Darryl F. Zanuck of Twentieth Century-Fox, and Charles K. Feldman, the playboy super-agent of Famous Artists who represented Marilyn Monroe, Gary Cooper, Richard Burton and Lauren Bacall. Feldman was also a producer, and had already had huge success with *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *The Seven Year Itch*.

Shortly after buying the rights to *Casino Royale*, Ratoff set off on a tour of Europe, ostensibly to seek out locations. 'In fact, he

was gambling,’ says Lorenzo Semple Jr.² Now a well-established scriptwriter, having co-written *Papillon*, *The Parallax View*, *Three Days of the Condor* and, most relevantly, *Never Say Never Again*, Semple was then an unknown in his early twenties: Ratoff had scooped him up as a promising new talent and invited him along for the trip.

‘Charlie Feldman and Darryl Zanuck were helping Gregory out by sending him money, as they did for years,’ Semple says. ‘He was a friend and someone they liked playing poker with, and Gregory knew where all the bodies were buried. But it all had to be above board—had to be for work. So there had to be a script we were working on.’

Semple says he was essentially acting as Ratoff’s ‘slave’—a term he uses without rancour—working on a variety of scripts for him as well as performing errands and writing letters on his behalf. Semple says that although Ratoff was genuinely interested in filming *Casino Royale*, he also used it as a pretext to travel around Europe, ostensibly researching locations but mainly gambling with funds from Feldman.

‘We were going around everywhere,’ Semple says, ‘Paris, Lisbon, Estoril.’ Ratoff was an eccentric master. In Estoril, he discovered that *Intermezzo* was playing and he and Semple went to see it. In the middle of the showing, Ratoff suddenly leaped out of his seat and pointed at one of the actors, shouting out that he was dead. ‘Everyone thought he was crazy,’ says Semple, ‘some crazy guy in the audience.’

But when he wasn’t gambling or interrupting film screenings, Ratoff was thinking about *Casino Royale*. One wild idea he mentioned was to have Bond played by Susan Hayward, but

² Semple to author, January 11 2011. All subsequent quotes from Semple from same interview.

Semple says ‘that was just Gregory talking’³. He was also putting decidedly more serious wheels in motion. In January 1956, the *New York Times* reported that Ratoff had formed an independent production company, Maribar, which he had set up in partnership with Michael Garrison, an actor-turned-agent who would go on to create the TV series *The Wild Wild West*. The article mentioned that Maribar was working on two projects: an adaptation of Sylvia Regan’s 1953 play *The Fifth Season*, which Ratoff had directed on Broadway, and *Casino Royale*:

‘The company also has acquired rights to “Casino Royale”, a novel by Ian Fleming, and the plan is to film it in CinemaScope and color this summer in England, Estoril in Spain and San Remo. Twentieth Century-Fox is slated to release this feature, too.

Although the author has written an adaptation, Mr Ratoff, who is now in Paris, is negotiating with a “noted scenarist, as well as with two well-known stars to play the leads,” Mr Garrison said. “Casino Royale”, he explained, “may be described as a World War II spy story, set partially in the gambling casino of the title and dealing with a search for stolen Government secrets which take the principals through such colorful places as Estoril and San Remo.”⁴

It seems that, notions of gender-swapping 007 notwithstanding, 10 months after he had bought the rights to *Casino Royale* Ratoff was still serious enough about filming it to be announcing the project in the *New York Times*, and had even secured an agreement from Twentieth-Century Fox to release it. He also appears to have been negotiating with well-known actors and a scriptwriter, and had decided where he was going to shoot the film. He knew the Italian port of San Remo well, having filmed *Operation X*, starring Edward G Robinson, there in 1950. Estoril

³ Semple has told this story before—see ‘Lorenzo Semple, Jr: The Screenwriter Fans Love to Hate’ by Steve Swires, *Starlog*, Issue 75, October 1983, and Semple’s ‘Journal’ article in *Slate*, November 25 1997.

⁴ ‘By Way of Report’ by A.H. Weiler, *New York Times*, January 8 1956.

is in Portugal, not Spain, and is a very interesting location to have chosen, as Ian Fleming's visit there in May 1941 had been an inspiration for the novel. Fleming mentioned this incident many times—here he is discussing it with his editor William Plomer in an interview from 1962:

‘Well, the gambling scene in my first book is more or less a blown up version of what happened to me during the war, because I was flying to Washington with my chief, the Director of Naval Intelligence, and we came down at Lisbon and were told that if we wanted to go and meet some German secret agents, they were always gambling in the Casino at Estoril in the evening. So we went along and my chief didn't understand the game of *chemin de fer* they were playing. I explained it to him and then it crossed my mind to have a bash at the Germans who were sitting around, and see if I couldn't reduce their secret service funds. Unfortunately, I sat down and after three bancos my travel money had completely disappeared. Now that, greatly exaggerated, was the kernel of James Bond's great gamble against Le Chiffre in which he took Le Chiffre to the cleaners.’⁵

The *New York Times*' article mentioned England as another filming location and the Second World War for the setting, so it may be Ratoff was considering cleaving the story more closely to Fleming's own wartime experiences instead of making a modern-day version, or one with an American agent as its hero, as CBS had done in 1954.

But the most intriguing aspect of this brief item is the passing comment that Ratoff was negotiating with a scriptwriter even though ‘the author has written an adaptation’. The idea that Ian Fleming himself wrote a film adaptation for *Casino Royale* is a highly tantalizing one. Could it be true? On the one hand, articles such as this, even when in newspapers as respected as the *New*

⁵ ‘The Writer Speaks’, Ian Fleming and William Plomer in conversation, 1962—precise date unknown, transcript courtesy the Archives and Special Collections, Durham University Library.

York Times, often contain inaccuracies—the location of Estoril, for instance—and the grand plans discussed in them don't always come to fruition. On the other hand, the information about Fleming having written an adaptation was not being cited to build up the film, because Michael Garrison was quoted as saying that they were choosing *not* to use it but were instead in negotiations with a 'noted scenarist'. Garrison was promoting the idea that a well-known screenwriter would be used, so it's hard to see what would be gained from inventing the idea that the relatively-unknown Fleming had written an adaptation they wouldn't use. In context, it seems an unlikely thing to have fabricated.

In addition, Fleming had already written a film adaptation of his own work, and would do so again. In 1955, the Rank Organisation had optioned his third novel, *Moonraker*, but had failed to develop it. Frustrated by his dealings with Rank's script department, Fleming had written his own screenplay of the novel.⁶ Two years later, Rank paid £12,500 for the film rights to Fleming's non-fiction book *The Diamond Smugglers*, which collected a series of articles he had written for *The Sunday Times*. According to trade publication *The Bookseller*, Rank also 'commissioned Ian Fleming to prepare the film treatment'.⁷ Fleming apparently agreed to provide Rank with a 'full story outline' for a further £1,000, but declined writing 'the master scene script' or to be available in England for consultations.⁸

The rights to *The Diamond Smugglers* were later bought by producer George Willoughby. In 1965, he claimed that Fleming had written a film treatment for the book for Rank that had had very little in common with the articles he had written for *The Sunday Times*, and that, for the film he was planning, the basic

⁶ p276, *Ian Fleming* by Andrew Lycett, Phoenix, 1996.

⁷ p1808, *The Bookseller*, Compendium of Issues 2698-2714, Publishers' Association, Booksellers' Association of Great Britain and Ireland, 1957.

⁸ p317, Lycett.

story ‘would be based mainly on the treatment written by Ian Fleming himself.’⁹

Neither Fleming’s screenplay of *Moonraker* nor his treatment for *The Diamond Smugglers* have yet come to light. Could it be that there is also an undiscovered film adaptation of *Casino Royale* from the 50s, written by Ian Fleming? If so, what could it be like? Is it set in the 1950s, like the novel, or based on his experiences during the war? And how might it differ from the James Bond films we know and love? These questions remain unanswered—for now, at least.

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DESPITE THE PROMISE of the *New York Times*’ item, Ratoff doesn’t seem to have made any progress on *Casino Royale* following it. Before long, he had an added complication in the form of competition—from Ian Fleming. Along with his friend Ivar Bryce, Fleming had teamed up with a young producer called Kevin McClory and they were planning on filming a newly written Bond adventure, which would eventually become *Thunderball*. In his dealings with McClory, Fleming didn’t fully consider the ramifications of his having already sold the rights to his first novel to Ratoff four years earlier. Instead, he promised McClory and Bryce the right to make the first Bond feature film, based on a treatment he would write.¹⁰

By the summer of 1959, Fleming and McClory were feeling confident enough to give an interview about the film to the *Daily Express*. Fleming had a close relationship with the *Express*: it had been serializing his novels since 1956 and had been running comic

⁹ Letter from George Willoughby to John Collard, June 21 1965, courtesy of the Collard family. For more about the long-running attempts to make a feature film of *The Diamond Smugglers*, see my article in *The Sunday Times* of March 7 2010: ‘How Ian Fleming’s book on gems was neglected’.

¹⁰ p25, *The Battle for Bond* by Robert Sellers (Tomahawk Press, 2008).

strip adaptations of them since the previous year. On June 11, the paper published an article titled ‘Who do *you* think fits the part of James Bond?’, which featured a gentle—and fairly obviously staged—disagreement between McClory and Fleming as to who should be cast in the part:

‘James Bond, the tough action hero who has made £30,000 for author Ian Fleming in six best-sellers, is to be brought to the screen in a British film.

But last night author Ian Fleming was not satisfied with the star selected to play his hero: Trevor Howard. Which is likely to cause complications for producer Kevin McClory, who is keen for Howard to have the part...’¹¹

This was a more intriguing way of letting it be known that the film was forthcoming than a simple announcement. McClory gave the argument for Howard, who he felt looked as though he had ‘lived it up’ enough to be convincing as Bond. Fleming then provided the knock-down to this:

‘Howard is not my idea of Bond, not by a long way. It is nothing personal against him. I think he is a very fine actor. But don’t you think he’s a bit old to be Bond?’¹²

Howard was 43 at the time, and Fleming stated that Bond was in his early thirties, adding:

‘I wonder how many people who follow the James Bond strip in the Daily Express would see Howard as that character. Not many, I bet.’¹³

¹¹ ‘Who do *you* think fits the part of James Bond?’ by John Lambert and Peter Evans, *Daily Express*, June 11 1959.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

Fleming said he felt that Peter Finch was ‘nearer to it’. When it was pointed out to him that Finch was just a year younger than Howard, he reconsidered, saying:

‘I would be happier if the part could be given to a young, unknown actor, with established stars playing the other roles. Otherwise I am keen on the project. The film will not be an adaptation of one of my books. I am writing an original screenplay for it.’¹⁴

The authorship and ownership of the resulting story would later be a matter of much more serious disagreement between Fleming and McClory, but for now they had succeeded in stoking a ‘controversy’ over who should play Bond in a national newspaper, and as a result readers wrote in with their own choices, some of which were printed in the paper’s letters page of June 15 1959: picks included Richard Burton, Michael Craig and Richard Todd.¹⁵

Peter Finch, British-born but Australian, and now best known for his role as the deranged news anchorman Howard Beale in 1976’s *Network*, may seem an unusual actor for Fleming to have picked, but in the ‘50s he was a leading man and his latest film, which had been released by Rank in Britain in January, was *Operation Amsterdam*, a thriller about commandos trying to secure a stock of diamonds during the Second World War, with a key scene featuring a spectacular bank raid.

McClory, Fleming and Bryce continued with their plans, for the time being. On June 28 1960, *The Times* published an article titled ‘Big American Film Plan For England’, which began:

‘Mr. Spyros P. Skouras announced at a meeting in London yesterday that 20th Century-Fox Film Corporation, of which he is president, has decided to make almost the whole of seven films

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ ‘The Rush To Cast James Bond’, *Daily Express*, June 15 1959.

in Britain and to release 12 British films now in the course of being prepared. The cost, placed at \$20m., was estimated as probably being higher than it would be if the same programme were to be carried out in Hollywood, where the corporation's normal output of films will not be reduced as a result of the work now to be done in Britain.'¹⁶

The article detailed some of the proposed films:

'Of the British films to be released by 20th Century-Fox, *Casino Royal* [sic], based on a novel by Mr. Ian Fleming, will have a cast including both the recent interpreters of the character of Oscar Wilde—Mr. Robert Morley and Mr. Peter Finch...'¹⁷

This was once again news of Ratoff's production. Ratoff, it seems, had not yet given up on making *Casino Royale*, and still had interest from Twentieth Century-Fox—enough for the president of the company to include it in its future roster and announce it to the press.

The two actors named are also interesting. To be announced to the press in this way by Skouras, it seems likely they had both committed themselves to the film—they may even have signed contracts. Finch, of course, had been Fleming's pick for James Bond the previous year. Was his involvement coincidence, or had Ratoff or Skouras read the article in the *Express*? If so, what did they make of the fact that there was another Bond film in production, and one that Fleming was promoting? Had they snatched Finch from under the rival production's noses—and had he committed to being the first film Bond? In a further ironic twist, Finch had played the lead in *The Trials of Oscar Wilde*, which had opened in cinemas the previous month. That film was made by Warwick Films, and was co-produced by Cubby Broccoli, who had yet to enter the Bond fray. Ratoff had directed

¹⁶ 'Big American Film Plan For England', *The Times*, June 28 1960.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

his own film, *Oscar Wilde*, starring Robert Morley as the playwright, which had also been released the previous month. It is unclear whether Ratoff was considering the avuncular Morley for the part of M, Le Chiffre or another character.

The news that Twentieth Century-Fox was planning to release *Casino Royale* was also reported in the *Los Angeles Times*, on July 7 1960, mentioning Ratoff as the director and Finch as the star.¹⁸ McClory read it and was furious. He had been told that his company had the right to make the first Bond film. He confronted Bryce, and the acrimony spiralled towards litigation.¹⁹

On December 14 1960 Gregory Ratoff died, and his widow subsequently sold the remainder of the rights to *Casino Royale* to his former agent, Charles K. Feldman. But within months of securing the rights Feldman was leapfrogged, when it was announced in the press in June 1961 that some new players had entered the arena:

‘The remarkable James Bond thrillers are to be filmed at last. This will be splendid news for the several millions fans—which includes President Kennedy—of Ian Fleming’s blood curdlers. They have been bought by English producer Harry Saltzman, who produced “Saturday Night and Sunday Morning”, and Albert “Cubby” Broccoli. “Actors are falling over themselves to play Bond,” Saltzman says. “Cary Grant, David Niven, Trevor Howard, James Mason, all are interested. But I want to use an unknown...”²⁰

In July, the *New York Times* filled in some of the details:

‘WHOLESALE LOT: In the frenetic business of acquiring properties for the movies, it is standard procedure for a company to buy a book, play or script in competition with others. But it is extremely rare for a producer to snag practically all of an author’s

¹⁸ ‘Hamilton Leads in “Act One” Race’, *Los Angeles Times*, July 7 1960.

¹⁹ pp86-87, Sellers.

²⁰ ‘A Rush To Be James Bond’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, June 25 1961.

works for filming. Such was the case the other day when the independent production team of Harry Saltzman and Albert Broccoli, in association with United Artists, bought no fewer than seven novels by Ian Fleming, British newspaper man, to be made under the Saltzman-Broccoli corporate banner of Lowndes Productions for U.A. release.²¹

Ironically, Broccoli was a former employee of Charles Feldman, having worked as an agent at Famous Artists early in his career. Broccoli and Saltzman would soon settle on a different name for their company, Eon Productions, although Saltzman would later form his own production company called Lowndes independently of Broccoli, with which he made such films as *The IPCRESS File* and *Battle of Britain*. The article said that the first of the films would be filmed in England and the West Indies that autumn, that it was likely to be *Dr No*, and that they were in negotiations with Wolf Mankowitz to write the script.

But in the meantime, Charles Feldman was sitting on a potential goldmine. In March 1961, *Life* magazine had listed *From Russia, With Love* as one of John F. Kennedy's 10 favourite books, and sales of the Bond novels were now soaring in the United States. At some point in 1962, Feldman approached Howard Hawks to direct *Casino Royale*, and the two met with screenwriter Leigh Brackett to discuss it. Hawks liked the idea of Cary Grant as Bond, but after seeing a print of *Dr No*, which premiered in London that October, he dropped out of the project.²²

Unbowed, Feldman commissioned Ben Hecht to write a script. Known as 'the Shakespeare of Hollywood', Hecht was an acclaimed novelist, poet and playwright. He had worked on several classic screenplays, including *The Front Page*, based on the play he co-wrote, and had been nominated for six Oscars and won

²¹ 'Passing Picture Scene' by A.H. Weiler, *New York Times*, July 16 1961.

²² p595, *Howard Hawks: The Grey Fox of Hollywood* by Todd McCarthy (Grove Press, 2000).

twice, for *Underworld* at the first Oscars ceremony in 1927 and for *The Scoundrel* in 1935. With *Underworld* and *Scarface*, he created the template of the modern gangster film, and he also had a fruitful collaboration with Alfred Hitchcock, writing *Spellbound* and *Notorious*, as well as working uncredited on dozens of other classic screenplays, including *Gone With The Wind* and *Foreign Correspondent*.

Feldman had worked with Hecht before: in 1954, he had commissioned him to ghost-write the memoirs of his client Marilyn Monroe, although Hecht's resulting work would not be published for another 20 years. Hecht had also worked for Feldman uncredited on the scripts for *Walk on the Wild Side* and *The 7th Dawn*.

Hecht's papers are stored in the Newberry Library in Chicago. According to Alison Hinderliter of the library's Manuscripts and Archives section, the collection arrived in 'total chaos' in 1979 as the result of the death of Hecht's widow, which resulted in the urgent need to gather everything from her apartment in New York before it was thrown out. Much of the sorting of the 94 cubic feet of material was done by a single volunteer in 1981.

The Newberry houses over 3,000 folders of material relating to Hecht's prodigious output, including drafts, correspondence and other material related to over 70 screenplays, many of which are classics, so it's perhaps unsurprising that the contents of Box 3, Folders 131-136, 'Casino Royale, 1967', have never received any critical analysis or attention from outside the library. But these papers shed light on an extraordinary lost chapter of cinema history, and feature some of the most surprising and exciting adaptation of Ian Fleming's work, written by one of the greatest screenwriters of the 20th century.

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THE NEWBERRY'S *CASINO ROYALE* folder contains over 500 pages of material, including six screenplays, at least five of which are by Hecht. An early screenplay dated April 20 1957 with no name on the title page may be a vestige of Ratoff's European excursions, and is a faithful adaptation of the novel in several ways but for one crucial element: James Bond isn't in it. Instead of the suave but ruthless British agent, the hero is Lucky Fortunato, a rich, wisecracking American gangster who owns a string of casinos and is an expert poker player.²³ Semple says he didn't write it, but there were others Ratoff might have called on, including his assistant George St George. Some of Charles Feldman's papers are stored at the Louis B Mayer Library in Los Angeles, but they were unable to yield a date or further context for the following note from Feldman to Hecht:

'Dear Ben,
Please call me after you have read the enclosed script and attached notes. My telephone number at the house is CRestview 5-2339. Am sure I'll be there. Best,
Charlie.'²⁴

It may be that the 1957 draft is this 'enclosed script' Feldman sent Hecht, perhaps as a starting point to see what he could do with it.

²³ April 20, 1957, Box 3, Folders 131, 131A, 131B, 131C and 131D, Ben Hecht Papers, Midwest Manuscript Collection, Newberry Library, Chicago.

²⁴ This message was visible via searching the Louis B Mayer Library section of the American Film Institute's website in January 2011. Unfortunately, library manager Robert Daicopoulos was unable to find either this or any other correspondence between Feldman and Hecht in the register or archives, and the collection has been closed for several years and doesn't appear likely to reopen in the near future. Daicopoulos to author, January 1 2011; see also 'The lost Feldman files and the loss of direction at the AFI: A personal reflection on archives' by Thomas Kemper, *Film History: An International Journal*, Volume 22, Number 3, 2010, pp309-312.

With Hecht's expertise in gangster films, he would have been a natural choice.

Of the remaining material, two of Hecht's drafts are undated and the rest are from various points in 1964. There are also handwritten notes, correspondence (one letter mentions it has enclosed two cheques for his work, valued at \$2,000 each²⁵) and some notes for an outline dated December 17 1963—just two months after the premiere of the second Bond film, *From Russia With Love*, in London. The last dated pages are from April 14 1964, so it looks like for at least four months Hecht worked on adapting Ian Fleming's first novel.

For Hecht, this was a remarkably long time. He was an infamously fast writer, often working around the clock; he wrote *Nothing Sacred* in two weeks and finished the script of *Scarface* in just nine days. But *Casino Royale* was a problematic novel to adapt for film. On the one hand, it is one of Fleming's strongest novels (Raymond Chandler and Kingsley Amis both felt it his best): intense, almost feverishly so, and rich in characterization and atmosphere. But it is also very short—practically a novella—with little physical action other than the torture scene. Bond falls in love with his fellow agent on the mission, Vesper Lynd, and even considers proposing marriage to her before he discovers that she has been coerced into working for SMERSH and has betrayed him, leading to his being tortured. Vesper kills herself, and the novel ends with Bond savagely reporting to London that 'the bitch is dead now'.

Hecht was approaching the novel 10 years after it had been published, but these aspects of the book still presented a challenge. His December 1963 outline notes appear to be his first attempt at coming to grips with the novel, and particularly the problem of its brevity. Across eight pages, he sketched out a prelude to the

²⁵ Letter from Famous Artist Productions to Ben Hecht, Box 57, Folder 1227, Hecht Papers. The letter is undated, but mentions that the cheques are dated February 7 and 15 1964.

novel's plot that would serve as a first act and bring the running time up to scratch.

The set-up he outlined is that M sends Bond on a mission to find Gloria Dunn, a beautiful young singer and the daughter of England's leading nuclear scientist, who has gone missing. Hecht had clearly read Fleming's *Thunderball*—published in 1961 and soon to lead to legal action from Kevin McClory—as the main villain here is not SMERSH operative Le Chiffre, but 'Number 1', the head of international crime syndicate 'Specter', an Americanised spelling of that novel's SPECTRE. Number 1 has built a sex- and drug-trafficking empire using 5 million rubles he has been given by Soviet intelligence, and he now invites a Russian intelligence officer, Tautz, to join Specter and help them all become richer. His plan is to sell Moscow highly classified intelligence, which he will obtain by extorting senior figures around the world: Gloria Dunn has been kidnapped and fed drugs until she has become an addict, and the threat of her becoming a prostitute will force her father to work for them. The action moves from Baghdad to Algiers to Naples, and culminates in a raid on a German castle that Specter is using as a brothel: Gloria and her father are both tortured and killed, and Hecht ends the notes with the phrase: 'Here begins the Casino Royale plot'.²⁶

These pages contain plenty of intriguing ideas, but as a whole the plot isn't an exciting one: several elements of it feel hackneyed, and apart from Bond and M none of the characters from the novel feature, making the fact that it has been tacked on all the more obvious.

Hecht soon abandoned the missing daughter plot, which feels a little too run-of-the-mill for a Bond film—though it's interesting to note how similar it is to recent films such as *Spartan* and *Taken*—but developed another strand from these pages much further. Fleming's novel opens with Le Chiffre already in trouble:

²⁶ pp1-8, Notes for an outline on *Casino Royale*, December 17 1963, Box 3, Folder 136a, Hecht Papers.

he has embezzled SMERSH funds to run a string of brothels in France but has lost huge sums as the result of a new law that has closed many of them down. Now he is desperately hoping to win his money back at baccarat before SMERSH discover it is missing and kill him. Bond, the British Secret Service's finest gambler, is sent to the casino in France to make sure he loses.

Le Chiffre's brothel-keeping establishes that he is villainous, and seedily so, but we never see him in that line of business in the novel. Hecht made vice central to his plot, with Colonel Chiffre, as he becomes, actively controlling a network of brothels in which he secretly films powerful figures in order to extort secrets out of them for Specter.²⁷ So just as the theme of Fleming's *Goldfinger* is avarice and power, the theme of Hecht's *Casino Royale* is sex and sin. It's an idea that seems obvious in hindsight, and Hecht used it both to raise the stakes of Fleming's plot and to deepen the story's emotional resonance.

This is visible in the surviving pages of two separate but overlapping drafts. Neither has a date attached, but judging from some of the scenes both were written after the December 1963 notes but before drafts from February and April 1964. Among the few surviving letters about *Casino Royale* in Hecht's papers is one he wrote to Feldman on January 13 1964 in which he says he has 110 pages of 'our blissful Casino Royale' ready to be typed and sent, but that if Feldman can wait three days he will have finished the finale, resulting in 130 pages of what he refers to as a first draft. As there is no other material dating from January 1964 in the folders, it seems likely that these excerpts are from then. Hecht also added that he had 'never had more fun writing a movie'.²⁸

²⁷ The idea of blackmailing senior figures by listening in to their conversations in a brothel may have been inspired by the Salon Kitty, a famous Berlin bordello that was taken over by German intelligence in the Second World War.

²⁸ Letter from Hecht to Feldman, January 13 1964, Box 67, Folder 1888, Hecht Papers.

NEED TO KNOW

Both drafts feature a British secret agent called James Bond, who gambles against a Colonel Chiffre, alias Herr Zero (there are no references to 'Number 1' here or in any subsequent drafts), is aided by an American agent called Felix Leiter and a French agent called René Mathis, and falls in love with Vesper Lynd. Both drafts stick very closely to the atmosphere of the novel, while adding several new plot elements and characters. These include one of Chiffre's former brothel madams and a former lover of Bond's: at different points she is named Mila Brant, Mila Vigne and Giovanna Scotti, but in all guises she is a classic *femme fatale*, trying to seduce Bond by breaking into his bedroom:

'Bond becomes alert in the shadows. He listens intently. He hears a faint sound in the adjoining bedroom.

Gun in hand, Bond moves cautiously to the bedroom. He switches on the bedroom light, and stands with his gun aimed at the lovely occupant of his bed. It is Giovanna. She is in a transparent nightie.

BOND

(politely)

Good evening, Giovanna.

GIOVANNA

You are not surprised?

BOND

No.

He starts undressing.

How much did you pay the concierge to get in?

GIOVANNA

Twenty francs. A bargain. May I have a cigarette?

NEED TO KNOW

BOND

(handing her one)

Here. Don't set the bed on fire.

GIOVANNA

I do not need a cigarette for that.²⁹

The dry cynical wit and unashamed sexual appetite are more in keeping with Sean Connery's version of Bond than Ian Fleming's, although both elements had already become synonymous with the character, and have remained so. For James Bond, the natural response to finding a semi-clothed beautiful woman in his bed is to start undressing himself, and a subsequent stage direction has him continuing to do so 'as calmly as if he were alone in the bedroom'. Giovanna notes his lack of hesitation:

'GIOVANNA

(smoking)

You remind me of my first lover. No kissing. No hugging. Boom!—his clothes off and into bed.

She pats his naked belly.

Darling, you're adorable.

BOND

In what way?

GIOVANNA

You know I am employed by Colonel Chiffre. And you say nothing.

²⁹ p31, undated material. Box 3, Folder 132, Hecht Papers.

BOND

It would only spoil an interesting night for both of us.’³⁰

Hecht pulled off a very neat trick here: the dialogue sounds as though it must have featured in a Bond film before, and yet is wholly original. That’s hard enough to do for any writer, but Hecht was tailoring his story to fit a formula that was being established as he wrote. Elsewhere, he has Bond wine and dine in much the same way as in the novel—he even creates a new cocktail, mixing Black Velvet for Vesper in a crystal pitcher with Champagne, Bass Ale and rye whiskey as they eat caviar.³¹ But the tone here is unmistakably that of the cinematic Bond, recalling some of the more overtly sexual moments in the early films, such as this exchange in *From Russia With Love*:

‘TATIANA

I think my mouth is too big.

BOND

I think it’s a very lovely mouth. It’s just the right size—for me anyway!’

Hecht takes the innuendo just so far, and then withdraws. Bond’s banter with Giovanna is suddenly interrupted by Vesper telephoning the room, claiming she has been poisoned. Bond leaves at once, disappointing Giovanna. ‘Be brave,’ he tells her as he closes the door.

~

ANOTHER NEW CHARACTER in these drafts is Dr Mesker, who is also working for Chiffre. However, he is a much weaker addition than the playful Giovanna. He can read minds, and

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., p26.

scratches his cheek and taps his nose while watching the baccarat to signal to Chiffre which cards his opponents have. When Felix Leiter implausibly figures out what is happening, Bond responds in the next round of the game by thinking of different cards when he looks at his own, so that Mesker transmits the wrong signals to Chiffre, who then starts to lose. This is absurd and rather hammy, though it leads to an effective scene in which Chiffre accuses Mesker of betraying him, and Mesker reads Chiffre's mind and realizes that his own death is imminent at the hands of a brutal henchman:

'MESKER

Never! I did not! No, no! I never betrayed you. Don't! Colonel Chiffre, don't say it! Don't say it! Oh, God, don't speak it—no!

CHIFFRE

(quietly)

Erik. Finish.'³²

Hecht may have been inspired here by Fleming's second novel, *Live and Let Die*, in which the villainous Mr Big is aided by a fortune-teller, Solitaire, but it's hard to imagine film audiences accepting the idea in this form. There is no ambiguity about Mesker's telepathic powers—it's no trick but a real supernatural gift—and Bond accepts the possibility too readily to be convincing.

Much more effective is a scene that directly follows, in which Chiffre is informed that Bond and Vesper have been spotted on the beach at Royale. One of his henchmen, Black Patch—the

³² p20, undated material, Box 3, Folder 133. A version of this scene is in the other undated draft (p37, Box 3, Folder 132), but there the henchman is called Otto.

novel's character, given more to do—suggests killing Bond with a telescopic rifle:

'CHIFFRE

No shooting. Bullets inspire police inquiries. Inquiries might interfere with my Casino play tonight and tomorrow. I have no more time than that. The death of Bond must seem an accident.

BLACK PATCH

(smiling)

The boat?

CHIFFRE

Yes. Bond will go swimming.'³³

This is followed by Black Patch and another henchman, Anton, attacking Bond's boat on water-skis. Anton places a bomb on board, but Bond kills him by skewering him with a boat hook and leaps into the water before the explosion, later to be picked up by René Mathis and the French coastal patrol.³⁴

These two undated drafts share a lot of similar material, but only one continues to the end of the narrative: Bond returns to London following Vesper's death, where M tells him to take a holiday in Jamaica. Bond says he would rather stick around in case M has any errands for him, clearing the way for his next mission.³⁵ Perhaps Feldman planned to slot *Casino Royale* into the existing Eon series, as he didn't have the rights to any other Bond novels—or

³³ p39, undated material, Box 3 Folder 132.

³⁴ Ibid., pp40-41. In the other undated draft, Bond swims out to a raft and two henchman, here named Jago and Mitzik, approach him on water-skis via a speedboat, and one clubs Bond over the head—the pages then skip ahead so the end of the scene is missing. pp21-23, Box 3, Folder 133.

³⁵ pp56-57, Box 3, Folder 132.

perhaps he felt there was a possibility of creating sequels of original Bond stories using his existing rights.

~

THE 47 SURVIVING PAGES of the draft dated February 20 1964 elaborate on many of the scenes and ideas from earlier pages, with varying degrees of success. The draft opens with a pre-titles sequence—itsself a nod to the ongoing films—in which Felix Leiter arrests senior United Nations diplomats and several beautiful prostitutes who have ensnared them in honey traps.

This is followed by the most unusual sequence in all of Hecht's material, and his boldest departure from both the source material and the film series. On the surface it's the traditional briefing scene between M and Bond, complete with a prelude of Bond flirting with Miss Money Penny, but for one change—he is no longer James Bond. Instead, he is an unnamed American agent who M gives the name James Bond. M explains that 'since Bond's death' MI6 has put several agents into operation using his name: 'It not only perpetuates his memory, but confuses the opposition.'³⁶ He adds that Bond, as he will henceforth be known by everyone, will have to change his tailor, haberdasher and gun to fit in with his new identity.

The new Bond comments that he won't drink martinis but will stick to his bourbons, and there is some discussion of his having previously owned a casino in Jamaica. But after this scene the character is referred to as Bond both in the script and by all the other characters, and is in every way indistinguishable from Bond. It's a very odd addition, but there may have been pragmatic reasons for it: Feldman could have decided to make the film with someone other than Sean Connery as Bond, and instructed Hecht to add a short scene to explain it. Perhaps he had an actor in mind,

³⁶ p9, February 20 1964 draft, Box 3, Folder 135.

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as the obvious strategy would have been for M to give the operation to another British agent rather than an American one.

M briefs his new Bond on Specter's extortion operation in the United Nations and elsewhere, and sends him to Hamburg to work with fellow MI6 agent Vesper Lynd to investigate one of Chiffre's palatial brothels. Bond isn't keen on the idea of a woman being involved in such a mission:

'BOND

I should think a female on this job would be sort of coals to Newcastle.

M

Not Miss Lynd. Extremely upright, honorable and moral.

BOND

Sounds like quite a novelty.

M

Her father Jonathan Lynd was an 0-0-7 man. Killed in our service two years ago. Vesper has been in training to take his place. Fine linguist, and her target score for last year was ninety five, point four.³⁷

Hecht introduced some new characters in this draft. One of them is cleverly extrapolated from Fleming's novel: in Chapter Two of the book, there is a passing reference to an MI6 agent who has infiltrated Le Chiffre's set-up as one of his mistresses, 'a Eurasian (No 1860) controlled by Station F'. From this, Hecht created Lili Wing, a beautiful but drug-addicted Eurasian madam working for Chiffre. Like the earlier Mila/Giovanna character, she has previously had a fling with Bond, but she is bisexual and is now

³⁷ Ibid., p12.

doted on by her girlfriend Georgie, who carries a black kitten on her shoulder.

This draft has a notably dark, adult sense of humour. The theme of vice corrupting virtue is writ large: Vesper is poised, graceful but initially priggish, while Bond is an unrepentant lady-killer who makes fun of her innocence—until he falls in love with her. Some of the sexual references are politically incorrect even for the 60s—even for a Bond film in the 60s—with politicians attracted to children and a car chase through Hamburg’s red light district concluding with a sequence in which Bond escapes his pursuers by diving into an arena where two women are mud-wrestling. He accidentally tears the wig off one, and eventually manages to escape in a blizzard of confusion and laughter from the crowd:

‘His body covered with mud, the bewigged Bond rises out of the ooze...’³⁸

It’s Roger Moore’s Bond a decade in advance, with some added kinkiness. It doesn’t really work.

~

THE DRAFT PETERS out, with several of the latter pages paraphrasing passages from the novel, and the final scenes are missing altogether. The most significant—and successful—addition is the character of Gita: Chiffre’s wife. She returned in the final surviving drafts, which are dated April 8, 10 and 14 1964. The April 8 section is 85 pages, and covers most of the plot: a handwritten scrawl above the date on the first page marks it as ‘Incomplete Script’. The April 10 screenplay is 157 pages long and is a complete script, from ‘FADE IN’ to ‘FADE OUT’—the title

³⁸ Ibid., p42.

page also has a handwritten note by Hecht saying ‘Copy of the draft sent to Feldman 4/10/64’. The April 14 material is 49 pages long and is marked ‘Rewrite’: this contain variations of many scenes from the drafts of April 8 and 10, as well as additions and improvements to earlier material. Combined, these drafts give us Hecht’s final and complete screenplay of *Casino Royale*.³⁹

Much of the material is familiar from earlier drafts, but gaps are filled in and it’s now noticeably more assured and coherent. The dialogue crackles throughout. Bond has several bone-dry one-liners, and one can easily imagine Connery’s style and delivery when reading them. In one scene, he drives around hairpin bends overlooking the Mediterranean at four o’clock in the morning, and Vesper notices a car in pursuit. Bond wants to slow down to let her jump out, but she insists on staying to help and crawls over the top of her seat into the back of the car:

‘VESPER

(as she does)

I’ll shoot at their tires.

BOND

No. At their heads, if you don’t mind.’⁴⁰

In two lines, Hecht punctures a cinematic cliché and nails James Bond’s laconic but ruthless humour. There are many such satisfying moments, particularly in the interplay between Bond and Vesper. She feels Bond is rash and sexist, while he sees her as a school-marmish irritant. It’s very recognizably the relationship of the novel, as well as of a thousand mismatched cop films since, but Hecht makes it sing. The 2006 adaptation had a few scenes

³⁹ One peculiar difference between the pages is the question of Bond’s identity: in the April 8 and 10 drafts he is the real Bond, while the April 14 pages revert to the counterfeit idea.

⁴⁰ p69, April 10 1964 draft.

along these lines, with Vesper's initial meeting with Bond on the train being perhaps the highlight. That flirtatious needling dynamic suffuses the April '64 pages. When Vesper gives Bond twenty million francs from M, she asks him to turn away as she takes it from a money belt beneath her dress. 'It's going to be quite a strain working with you,' Bond notes wearily.⁴¹

The first third of the story follows Bond and Vesper as they track down thousands of rolls of film incriminating leading politicians that Chiffre has collected for Specter, which are being transported from a warehouse in Hamburg by guarded van (Specter himself is, as SMERSH is in the novel, a largely unseen threat). Vesper infiltrates Lili Wing's brothel as one of the escorts, and Bond pretends to be one of her customers while they are being filmed, but with no sound, trying to prise information from her while feigning a seduction.

The Hamburg chase—the mud-wrestling scene remains—culminates in Lili Wing being captured by Chiffre's men and fed into the crusher of a rubbish truck, while Bond uses Chiffre's beautiful wife Gita as a shield. She is shot by Chiffre's men by mistake. Bond manages to commandeer the van by impersonating one of the henchmen in the darkness, but during a subsequent car chase across the Swiss Alps the van goes over a cliff and explodes with the film rolls in it, Bond naturally escaping at the last moment.

This means Bond has wrecked the extortion operation, and Chiffre has lost half of the funds Specter has allocated to him to boot. Chiffre now needs to get the money back before Specter realize it is missing and kill him. The action relocates to the resort of Juan-les-Pins on the Côte d'Azur. Bond, in a white-jacketed tuxedo at the wheel of his Bentley, waits outside a hotel for the glamorous young Giovanna. They visit a nearby casino, where Bond coolly wins two thousand dollars at roulette, but he is then summoned to his room, where Vesper is waiting for him with

⁴¹ Ibid., p65.

instructions and twenty millions francs from M. They're to leave at once for Casino Royale, a five-hour drive down the coast, where Chiffre is determined to win back the money he lost at baccarat. The car chase ensues, they arrive at Casino Royale, and we are into the main plot of the novel.

There are many bold and ingenious ideas here. In the book, Le Chiffre and Bond duel without ever having met previously—there is also little build-up to it, as Hecht realized in his earliest outline ideas. By making Bond directly responsible for Chiffre's precarious situation, and the reason he sets up the baccarat game in the first place, Hecht uses the main body of the novel as a second act rematch between the two men. In addition, Chiffre's wife has been facially disfigured as a result of Bond's actions, so she and her husband are doubly hell-bent on vengeance.

The character of Gita Chiffre served another purpose for Hecht, who felt that the novel's extended torture sequence was seriously flawed. In a handwritten letter, unaddressed but most likely to Feldman, and undated but from context probably written after the release of *From Russia With Love* in October 1963, he explained that he felt that Le Chiffre's monologues while he tortured Bond in the novel were 'fatally inept', 'cheap' and 'comical', and that to feature one man torturing another while naked in any film adaptation would seem not only to be indulging in 'a far-fetched and unmotivated type of cruelty', but that Bond himself would come across as a 'yelping pansy'.⁴²

The language is distasteful, but these were the times Hecht was working in, and he was being paid to write a film that would appeal to a mass audience—anything that didn't serve that aim would have to be changed. Like many supremely talented people, Hecht could be arrogant and scathing about flaws he perceived in others' work: 'Even Saltzman has known better than to let such Fleming pitter patter seep into his two movies,' he wrote in the

⁴² pp2-3, undated handwritten letter, Box 3, Folder 134, Hecht Papers.

same letter.⁴³ Hecht knew Harry Saltzman, as he had worked on a 1956 Bob Hope-Katharine Hepburn film Saltzman had produced, *The Iron Petticoat*—Hecht had become so incensed by Hope’s gag writers reworking his script that he had insisted his name be removed from the credits, and had even placed an advert at his own cost in *The Hollywood Reporter* denouncing Hope.⁴⁴

The second and third acts of the April ‘64 pages are broadly faithful to the novel. In a closely followed game of baccarat, Bond beats Chiffre and cleans him out to the tune of 80 million francs, with Chiffre taking ‘loud slow sniffs’ from his inhaler as the tension rises. The mind-reader Mesker is still present, but there is no subsequent scene in which he is killed while foreseeing his own death, which leaves the possibility for undiscovered deception rather than supernatural gifts. As it becomes clear Bond is winning, Chiffre’s henchman Otto approaches Bond’s chair and sticks a cane in his spine, announcing it’s a silent gun and Bond will seem to have fainted if he doesn’t withdraw his bet by the count of ten. The tension mounts as he counts quietly in Bond’s ears, before Bond heaves back and smashes down on the cane with the crossbar of the chair, breaking it in half. The crowd is shocked as Bond goes sprawling across the floor, but he is soon back at the table and the game resumes. This is all almost identical to the corresponding scene in the novel.

Bond wins, leaving Chiffre slumped at the table to collect his winnings, then Vesper is seemingly kidnapped from the casino and he pursues her. He is waylaid by iron spikes thrown on the road, only to be captured by Chiffre, who wants Bond’s cheque to save him from Specter’s wrath. Now we have Hecht’s version of the torture sequence—and it is a virtuoso piece of writing. Bond is

⁴³ Ibid. The reference to ‘two movies’—if I have correctly read his handwriting—suggests this was written after *From Russia With Love*’s release.

⁴⁴ ‘Ill-Fated Bob Hope-Katharine Hepburn Comedy, Gone for Four Decades, Returns’ by Mike Barnes, *The Hollywood Reporter*, October 25 2012.

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stripped naked and tied to a chair with the seat cut out, as in the book, but now Chiffre is accompanied by his wife, who we see for the first time since she was shot as a result of Bond's actions: part of her jaw is missing, so that the right side of her face 'hangs unhumanly boneless', and she speaks metallically through a tube inserted into her ripped out larynx:

'GITA

You remember me, Mr. Bond?

BOND

(coolly, as he stares up)

You're a bit changed.

GITA

You will be changed, too, Mr. Bond.'⁴⁵

Chiffre demands that Bond tell him the location of his winning cheque, while goading his wife into thrashing him with a special weapon:

'It is a thin, four-foot-long wooden rod. On its end is a thin slab of wood, six inches square. The implement looks like a cross between an oversized fly-swatter and undersized rug beater.

Gita's misshapen face grimaces at the implement in her hand. She is possibly smiling.'

Gita strikes Bond repeatedly, but Bond still refuses to reveal where he has hidden the cheque. At one point Chiffre tells his raging wife to stop hitting Bond for a moment, adding, in a line a hundred European character actors would surely have sold their

⁴⁵ p141, April 10 1964 draft, Hecht Papers.

grandmothers to deliver: ‘M’sieur Bond may want to change his mind while he is still a m’sieur.’⁴⁶

Bond still refuses to break and, when asked about the cheque again, manages to force out a reply through the pain: ‘Up your gizzard, you fat pimp.’⁴⁷

Chiffre also waterboards Bond with whisky in an attempt to get him to talk, forcing his mouth open with the barrel of a gun while he pours the liquid down his throat. The whole scene is watched by two Doberman Pinschers, who howl excitedly along with Bond. It’s an electrifyingly sinister scene.

Just as it seems that Bond is destined to die, he is rescued by masked Specter agents, who scar his hand so they will be able to identify him in any future operations, rather as happens in the novel. The agents then shoot Chiffre, who has hidden in a cupboard. The ‘brothel Napoleon’, as Bond calls him, dies fittingly, with silk dresses and negligées draping his blood-soaked corpse.

Bond recovers, but is rendered impotent, and Vesper visits him in his clinic, all much as in the novel. After Vesper acts suspiciously over a mysterious phone call, Bond accuses her of lying to him, but when she becomes hysterical Bond apologises, explaining he is ‘a bit of an amateur about love’⁴⁸:

‘VESPER

(softly)

Don’t hate me.

BOND

You’re quite mad.

He holds her in silence for a moment. Then –

⁴⁶ Ibid., p145.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p146.

⁴⁸ p53, April 14 1964, draft, Box 3, Folder 136A, Hecht Papers.

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Will you marry me, Vesper?

VESPER

(whispering)

Marry you?

BOND

Yes. I think we ought to legalize our quarrels. Care to answer me, now?

VESPER

Yes! Yes! I'll marry you! For as long as you want.

BOND

Good.

VESPER

(clinging)

Only—don't look at me with 007's eyes.

BOND

(grinning)

I guarantee the bridegroom will wear a grooming look. I'll dig up a parson tomorrow—in London.

They stand locked in an embrace.⁴⁹

But, as in the book, it all goes wrong. The next morning, Bond waits in the lobby of the Royale with suitcases packed, ready to fly back to London, but Vesper isn't answering the phone in her room. Perturbed, he runs up the stairs and enters: Vesper is lying, undressed, on the bed. Bond thinks she is ill, but she tells him she

⁴⁹ Ibid., p54.

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has written him a letter explaining everything, and he sees that her eyes are cloudy:

'BOND

What have you taken?

VESPER

Cyanide. You can't help. It's almost over. Painless and efficient.

BOND

Why?

VESPER

I think you know.

Bond is silent.

You've known, but you refused to believe. That I'm a fraud. A double agent. For M—and for Specter. That telephone call last night—Specter insisting I continue my activities—for them. I've been very remiss, for some weeks.

Bond sits in silence and stares at her.

I was going to be married a year ago. My fiancé worked for M. he was captured by Specter. Death sentence. I pleaded for him. They made a deal with me. They'd let him live and hold him as a hostage for three years, if I worked for them. I agreed. Because he was young, and I thought I loved him very much.

Her voice has lowered.

Can you hear me darling?

BOND

Yes. Plainly.

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VESPER

It was easy at first. They were after Chiffre—same as you. It was like working together—with you.

BOND

You kept Specter informed of my movements.

VESPER

Yes.⁵⁰

Unlike in the novel, Vesper didn't stage her kidnapping, as she was working for Specter, not Chiffre, but she knows Bond can never believe her or trust her again, so she has taken her own life. Bond tells her he believes her anyway, and the scene ends with her dying, Bond sitting motionless beside her.

Also unlike the novel, there is no payoff of Bond calling M in London and uttering the infamous line 'The bitch is dead now'. Instead, a grief-stricken Bond is consoled by his doctor, who prescribes him with testosterone. A minor character, Georgie, returns to offer her consolations, and Bond embraces her. He is delighted to find that his body responds, and order is restored as he plants two solid kisses on her mouth and we fade out.

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DESPITE THIS CONVENTIONAL ENDING, Hecht's April 1964 draft is phenomenal, and could have made for an extraordinary Bond film. Hecht captured all the best elements of the novel and wove them into a rich, thrilling adventure. His James Bond is a blend of Fleming's character and Connery's interpretation of him, and yet—impossible to imagine before reading it—with greater depth than either.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp56-57.

In parts it's reminiscent of one of his most famous scripts, that for the Hitchcock classic *Notorious*. Like *Casino Royale*, *Notorious* is both a spy thriller and a love story. Cary Grant plays T.R. Devlin, a suave and ruthless secret agent who is charged with looking after Alicia (Ingrid Bergman), the 'notorious' daughter of a neo-Nazi who drinks too much. But the cynical Devlin slowly falls in love with her, and becomes increasingly desperate to protect her from the dirty espionage game he has brought her into. Hitchcock's *North by Northwest* is often cited as an influence on the Bond films, but the character of Devlin is much closer to the character of 007 than advertising executive Roger Thornhill, even if the action in the film is much more subdued. In Hecht's *Casino Royale*, the cynical agent also falls in love with the woman he initially sees as a nuisance, although Bond drinks almost as much as Alicia.

The Bond films Hecht's drafts most resemble are *From Russia With Love* and *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*. As in the former, the plot involves sex extortion, although it is not Bond who is the target here. And as in *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, Bond falls in love and proposes, only for his woman to die—although these are also similarities in the two novels, of course. Hecht's treatment of the romance element is powerful and, even with the throwaway ending, it's perhaps darker than any existing Bond film. There are several false notes, particularly with the sexual shenanigans, but the drafts are stuffed to the brim with ideas, the vast majority of which are dazzlingly effective. Hecht managed to cram in all the excitement, glamour and dry wit one would expect from a Bond film, and several moments of fantasy, but the themes are adult, and the violence is brutal rather than cartoonish—just as in Fleming's novel. It's a master-class in thriller-writing.

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BUT, OF COURSE, it was never filmed. On Thursday April 16 1964, Hecht sent a letter to Feldman saying he would write up a critique of their ‘current script’ on Monday. He added some comments on Bond, including that he felt the character was ‘the first gentleman-Superman to hit the silver screen in a long time’, as opposed to Spillane, Hammett and Chandler’s ‘roughneck supermen’.⁵¹ But Monday never came: Hecht died of a heart attack at his home on Saturday April 18 while reading.

Feldman went on to try to strike a deal with Broccoli and Saltzman, asking them to loan Connery to him for *Casino Royale*. When they turned him down, Feldman offered to make the film in partnership with them. According to Broccoli, he entered negotiations with a completely untenable offer: 75 percent of the profits for him, the remainder for Broccoli, Saltzman and United Artists:

‘I loved Charlie. We had been friends for years. But the deal he proposed was so bizarre, if he had been my agent he would have tossed the offer—and the person making it—out of the window.’⁵²

Having finally managed to get his hands on a working screenplay for *Casino Royale*, it does seem bizarre that Feldman made such an offer. But perhaps the time it had taken, together with the expense, had led him to feeling he needed that sort of stake for it to have been worth it. He may also have overestimated how far he could push his former employee. The truth was that Broccoli no longer needed him—and wasn’t afraid to say so.

The deal fell through. It seems that at one point Feldman even claimed that the film of *Goldfinger* plagiarized ‘a key situation’

⁵¹ p96, Letter from Ben Hecht to Charles K Feldman, April 16 1964, Box 3, Folder 136B, Hecht Papers.

⁵² pp199-200, *When The Snow Melts* by Cubby Broccoli with Donald Zec (Boxtree, 1998).

from *Casino Royale*, and threatened to sue⁵³—it's unclear what the basis for this claim is, although the scene in *Goldfinger* in which gangster Mr Solo is crushed at a scrap yard is somewhat reminiscent of Lili Wing's death.

Furious that he had not come to an agreement with Broccoli and Saltzman, Feldman then approached Sean Connery to see if he would be interested in jumping ship. Connery said he would for a million dollars, but this was too much for Feldman's blood and he turned him down.⁵⁴ He decided to take a new tack, signing an unknown Northern Irish actor, Terence Cooper, who he kept on salary for two years, and recruiting Orson Welles, David Niven, Peter Sellers, Ursula Andress, Woody Allen and several others to the project, which was now to be a wacky send-up of the Bond films. A set report in *Time* in May 1966 revealed that after Hecht's 'three bashes' at the script, it had been completely rewritten by Billy Wilder, after which Joseph Heller, Terry Southern, Wolf Mankowitz, John Law and Woody Allen had all taken their turn at it. Much of the film was improvised on the spot.⁵⁵

Very little of Hecht's material made it to the screen, and parts that did—such as the blackmail films and the idea of calling other agents James Bond—mushroomed to absurd proportions, joining a plot that featured Bond's daughter by Mata Hari being kidnapped by a flying saucer. Feldman's budget and ambitions spiraled out of control: *Time* noted that, having failed to secure Connery, he had decided to make *Casino Royale* 'the Bond movie to end all Bond movies',⁵⁶ while in an interview with *Look*

⁵³ p267, *United Artists* by Tino Balio (University of Wisconsin Press, 2009).

⁵⁴ p57, *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* by Alan Barnes and Marcus Hearn (The Overlook Press, 1998).

⁵⁵ 'On Location: Little Cleopatra', *Time*, May 6 1966.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

Woody Allen said Feldman wanted to ‘eliminate the Bond films forever’.⁵⁷

If any film could have done that, it was this one. Eventually released in 1967, it was a bloated and incoherent comedy that wasted the prodigious talent it had assembled, and the title *Casino Royale* was linked for decades with a cinematic disaster rather than Fleming’s novel. Finally, in 2004 Eon gained the rights to the novel, and set about filming it with Daniel Craig soon after.

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THERE ARE STILL SEVERAL intriguing gaps in the *Casino Royale* story. Who wrote the 1957 Lucky Fortunato script? Did Fleming write a script or treatment, and if so, what was in it and what happened to it? Little research has been done into some of the other scripts for this film, some of which were by world-renowned writers. But Hecht’s material nevertheless fills in a missing chapter in the history of the James Bond series.

Perhaps the most significant question raised by Hecht’s drafts is what would have happened if Feldman had come to an agreement with Broccoli and Saltzman, and *Casino Royale* had been made around 1965 or 1966, or if he had gone it alone and made the film much as Hecht scripted. Perhaps such a film would have flopped, with or without Eon and with or without Connery, as even a disfigured villainess and water-ski chases might not have been enough for viewers so recently awestruck by Odd Job’s hat and the Aston Martin DB5’s ejector seat. There are very few gadgets—although in one draft Vesper saves Bond’s life with a purse that has a pistol built into its side—and although Hecht’s Bond is as suave, ruthless and laconic as Connery’s incarnation of the character, as

⁵⁷ ‘Who Is the Real James Bond Anyhow?’, *Look*, November 15 1966.

in the novel he falls in love, and pays the price for it, both of which would have been radical departures at this point in the series.

Then again, perhaps such a film would have been a commercial and critical success. Hecht's drafts deepen Bond as a character, but they're still breathlessly exciting. A film based on this material would have taken the series in a different direction, and if popular might have averted the superficiality and excess that afflicted many of the films after *Goldfinger*. If Hecht's *Casino Royale* had been a success, more heavyweight scriptwriters might have been tempted to write Bond films, and the series might have gained far greater critical stature, perhaps being seen more along the lines of Hitchcock's films. *Casino Royale* might have been regarded as not just a great Bond film, but as a great thriller.

The idea that a Bond film could be a great film in its own right has been unthinkable for most of the series' duration. But Hecht's scripts represent the possibility of a Bond film that combined all that was great about the early Connery films and *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, and might even have bettered them. Writing after the 2006 version of *Casino Royale* starring Daniel Craig, the fact Hecht managed to do this doesn't seem quite as unbelievable as it would once have been. Before then, the idea of Fleming's first novel as a straight adaptation seemed fraught with problems. Would the title, tainted by the 1967 farrago, resonate with new audiences? How could one ever hope to update a taut novel set solely in a small resort in northern France for the expectations of a modern Bond film?

The 2006 film proved it could be done, and expectations of what can be done with Bond have been pushed still further in *Skyfall*. But it is nevertheless almost head-spinning to think of the possibility of Connery doing something like this in the 60s, bringing all we think of as great in his performances and, without losing any of it, managing to bring even more. That's the truly enthralling what-if of this film that never was. We'll never know, of course, but Hecht's surviving material offers a glimpse into a

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cinematic genius at work, and an alternate James Bond adventure as rich, compelling and visceral as anything yet brought to the screen.

With many thanks to Alison Hinderliter and the staff of the Newberry Library, and to Ihsan Amanatullah for his perceptive advice.

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Catch-007

Introduction

My research for *Rogue Royale* began in November 2009, when I was idly searching the internet and came across a finding aid for the Newberry Library that listed Hecht's material. If you're not familiar with finding aids, they are simply documents that list the contents of an archive for ease of reference, with the corresponding boxes and folder numbers. These have traditionally been available at the library or institution itself, but in recent years, as collections have become digitised, finding aids have increasingly been placed online. The difference between one being online and not is akin to the difference between travelling the world visiting museums on the off-chance they might hold material you're interested in (which you might not even know exists), and entering some broad terms into a search field and letting Google find any libraries in the world that turn up a match, which is what happened here.

It wasn't all plain sailing, though. As you can see from footnote 24 in *Rogue Royale*, I still encountered obstacles when trying to uncover certain parts of the story; in this case, a library in Los Angeles that didn't allow access to the public, or researchers, or in fact anyone. A glimpse of a note between Feldman and Hecht on

the library's website had been all that I could dig up, and everything else connected with the Feldman papers led down blind alleys—until 2020.

By this time, I was writing regularly for *The Times* as their thriller reviewer, and one day suggested to the literary editor that it might be an idea to run something about James Bond to tie in with the (at that point) imminent release of the next film in the series, *No Time To Die*. I proposed a piece that explored how some surprising literary heavyweights had tried to write Bond films, and he told me to go ahead.

I already knew something about this thanks to my research into Ben Hecht and general Bond nerdiness. I could mention Hecht, of course, but there was also Roald Dahl, Anthony Burgess, George MacDonald Fraser... They all fitted the bill, but who would really spice up the story for people who knew their onions when it came to Bond? I could mention Kingsley Amis' work on *The Diamond Smugglers*, but it wasn't Bond and would take a bit of explaining. Ideally, I would be able to throw something completely new into the mix.

No. Come on, knuckle down, Duns. You can't always find new stuff. You pitched this for publication before the film's release in a few weeks, you know the subject well enough, so just get on with it.

I knuckled down and drafted an article. But while I felt it would make for a fun, literate, surprisingly informative read over breakfast tables, I wasn't entirely satisfied with it. It didn't quite land. There was very little in it that Bond connoisseurs wouldn't already know. Think, Jeremy. It's *The Times*. You want to pull something special out of the bag here. Well, what about *Casino Royale* '67, I mused slightly desperately over yet another filter coffee as my deadline rapidly approached; are we sure that's definitely a dead end? After all, it was infamous for its use of famous talent, and it wasn't just Hecht on the list. Wasn't Joseph Heller also meant to have worked on it? Presumably for a couple

of days, contributing a few one-liners, but still... the author of *Catch-22*. That would certainly spice it up, even if I only managed to find the faintest sliver of new information about it. I started googling.

And came across the finding aid for the Charles K. Feldman Collection in Los Angeles. It was dated 2017, but the url suggested it had only been put online a year or so earlier. It turned out that a new archivist had been appointed, and she had methodically gone through the boxes and prepared the inventory, which she had put online. And there in Box 121 were four folders of script material with Joseph Heller's name in them. This looked to be rather more than a few one-liners.

What follows is an expanded version of my *Times* article. As I conclude at the end of it, this opens up new avenues of research into this film that we didn't really know were there. However, at the time of writing *No Time To Die* still hasn't been released, and the Charles K. Feldman Collection is once again closed to the public, this time shuttered by a pandemic. But perhaps one day I'll return to this topic, and see if I can untangle anything else about this craziest of cinematic misadventures. And if I can't, perhaps someone else can.

Catch-007

THE JAMES BOND series is the most successful film franchise in history, even if the latest instalment, *No Time To Die*, has been plagued with problems and is now delayed, again, until the autumn. There was a stir last year when it was revealed that Phoebe Waller-Bridge had been hired to work on the script, but the series has called on famous writers before, including Roald Dahl (*You Only Live Twice*), George MacDonald Fraser (*Octopussy*) and Anthony Burgess (*The Spy Who Loved Me*).

However, one writer is rarely mentioned in connection with the series: Joseph Heller. Fittingly, the story of how the author of *Catch-22* tried to write a Bond film is one filled with chaos, paranoia and obsession.

In early 1965, four years after *Catch-22*'s publication, Heller received a phone call from Charles K. Feldman, one of Hollywood's most powerful figures. Feldman's talent agency Famous Artists represented everyone from Marilyn Monroe to Gary Cooper, and from the late 1940s he had also produced movies, notably *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *The Seven Year*

Itch. Feldman was a glamorous, Gatsby-esque figure, as a 2003 *Vanity Fair* profile of him described:

“Charlie had all the qualities of a movie star,” says David Picker, head of production at United Artists from 1969 to 1973. “He had the charm and the style.” Off-camera, he defined “debonair” as much as Cary Grant defined it on; and with his first wife, actress Jean Howard, Feldman helped set the standard for Hollywood glamour during the glamorous 30s. He was movie-star handsome and wore a pencil-thin mustache that made him look like a Jewish Clark Gable. In fact, Loretta Young used to call him “Gabe.” A prodigious womanizer, he was romantically involved with Garbo, Hayworth, Hedy Lamarr, Joan Fontaine, Olivia de Havilland, Ava Gardner, and many others. “Women loved him,” says his widow, the former Clotilde Barot. “He was very kind, made a woman feel terrific. He liked actresses and models, and his taste in girls was very good. He was a big, big charmer, but you wanted to protect him.”

Feldman was the last of the playboy producers, the men-about-town with the voracious appetite for life, the Bentleys in the garages, the French art on the walls, the starlets on the arm and in the bed. He bought handmade suits by the carload from an exclusive Beverly Hills tailor in only two colors, blue and gray, and owned 300 ties from Sulka, all identical, dull blue and red stripes. (He had sets of identical clothes wherever he had a home, in New York, Los Angeles, London, Paris, and his friends always envied him for being able to travel without baggage.) He partied with Jack Kennedy when the future president was still a pisher, and had done business with his dad before that. As Samuel Goldwyn once put it, “He could charm you off your feet. When you left Charlie you're lucky if you still have your pants left.”⁵⁸

In late 1960 Feldman had obtained the film rights to Ian Fleming's first novel, *Casino Royale*, but just a few months later he had been leap-frogged by producers Cubby Broccoli and Harry Saltzman

⁵⁸ ‘The man who minted style’ by Peter Biskind, *Vanity Fair*, April 1 2003

when they had bought up the rest of Fleming's work. By early 1962 their company, Eon Productions, had started filming *Dr No* in Jamaica, and a year after that they embarked on *From Russia With Love*.

Broccoli had previously worked at Famous Artists, so it may have niggled Feldman that he had been beaten to the punch by a former protégé. But Eon's breakthrough also meant he now owned the rights to a book whose hero was a proven box office success. Deciding to produce a rival Bond film, Feldman commissioned several scripts, including one by legendary screenwriter Ben Hecht that retained much of Fleming's novel while incorporating the larger-than-life action sequences and sardonic humour of Eon's films. But when Hecht died of a heart attack two days after completing his script in April 1964, Feldman steered the project in a radical new direction. Inspired by another film he was producing, the madcap comedy *What's New Pussycat?*, he began looking for writers to reshape Hecht's material into something much more extravagant.

This led him to Heller, who he offered \$150,000 to work on *Casino Royale* for a fortnight. Heller, by his own account 'a pushover for pretty girls, booze, easy money, fame and frivolity', agreed, and brought in a childhood friend, novelist George Mandel, to help out. The job would be undemanding, Heller figured: after all, 'there was no danger of failing, since somebody else had already done that'.

Heller later wrote a long account of his and Mandel's experiences with Feldman. Titled 'How I found James Bond, lost my self-respect and almost made \$150,000 in my spare time', it's a brilliant satire of the film-making business that has several *Catch-22*-ish moments: Feldman, paranoid that everyone wants to steal ideas for his film, initially refuses to let Heller see the script he's hired him to rewrite, and then has his Bulgarian bodyguards follow him around New York to ensure he doesn't talk to anyone about the project.

All the script material for *Casino Royale* is stored in the Charles K. Feldman Collection at the American Film Institute in Los Angeles, where it has been sitting unread since it was donated by Feldman's family in 1969. For most of that time the collection has been closed to the public, but it is now open again. The collection includes over a hundred pages of Heller and Mandel's material, and shows the two taking on the challenge of writing a Bond with gusto, while grappling with a producer who didn't know what he wanted, and wanted it by yesterday.

The earliest material in the files dates appears to be from February 2 1965: several pages of free-floating ideas for scenes that Heller and Mandel felt could be incorporated into the film. One is titled 'Automated Garage':

'An automobile chase that ends in an automated garage, in which the cars are lifted away out of sight high above the elevators and cranes used in such places. A fight can occur there and end with Bond either killing his man, or escaping him, by turning the key that lifts away the platform on which his adversary is standing or lying and files him away with the cars stored on the floors above.'

Another, more detailed, expands on how Marseilles' waterfront and tradition of fishing could be used, 'with fish knives, ice tongs, and commercial fishing equipment used as weapons' or with high-powered fishing boats used to 'net' Bond. Another page is titled 'Death by Steam':

'Beneath the sidewalks of New York, and of other cities as well, there is a vast network of pipes that carry steam to office and factory buildings for heating, cleaning, and industrial purposes. Not long ago, in fact, two pedestrians were killed in a freak accident when they slipped into a street excavation containing a broken steam pipe and were "steamed" to death. A broken steam hose in an excavation or factory, therefore, could be used as a lethal weapon with which Bond kills one or more persons.'

In *Closing Time*, Heller's belated sequel to *Catch-22* published in 1994, the subterranean electric cables, passageways and 'pipes of steam to bring heat in winter to the offices' beneath the ice rink of New York's Rockefeller Center prompt Yossarian to consider Dante's circles of hell. Ideas can float around writers' minds for a very long time before coming to the surface.

On February 21 1965, Heller wrote a letter to Feldman attaching 67 pages of script material, representing around a third of the film, 'rewritten and rethought thoroughly from top to bottom and end to end, with many locations and names changed and with a number of wholly new scenes written and inserted.' Heller promised to deliver more scenes in a few days, which would give Feldman around half of his film. 'The question is, what are you going to do about the other half?' He then refers to 'Sayer', meaning Michael Sayers, an Irish writer Feldman had hired. 'If you have not put Sayer to writing—and writing with extreme care and originality—those parts I suggested he work on in my letters to you last week, you might find yourself with half a picture that might be good enough to win an award—if they gave awards for half a picture.'

This bitingly sardonic admonishment feels like Heller putting his foot down. Feldman was treating him like a hack, keeping him incommunicado with other writers so they were unable to match up their ideas. 'The time may be at hand,' Heller wrote, 'when it is necessary to put Sayer and us in touch with each other—or at least to show him the sections we have redone.'

Heller's emphasis on 'extreme care and originality', and by extension his own professionalism, is fully justified by the accompanying pages. They begin with a virtuoso opening sequence with Bond in the Caribbean stealing microfilm, winning at roulette, blowing up a submarine and getting the girl. Heller and Mandel had gone to see *Goldfinger* to prepare, and there are similarities to the opening of that film: a tropical coastline, a bomb planted by Bond that goes off while he is living the high life—he

even wears a white dinner jacket. But it's exciting, glamorous, amusing, somewhat ludicrous and very neatly put together: a Bond film in miniature. 007 himself is perfectly pitched, a deadly professional carrying out a tense mission but also devil-may-care with it, coolly executing all his necessary tasks to circle back to the girl just in time. As with the *Goldfinger* opening sequence, it stands alone from the rest of the plot. One can read it and easily imagine what a decent director could have done with it and Sean Connery, but one can also simply read it as a jewel of a self-enclosed James Bond story.

The remaining pages feature several elements one might expect from Joseph Heller: subversive, sly humour with lashings of absurdity. The villains are a front group for SMERSH based in the Middle East calling themselves the Society for the Collection and Harnessing of Mundane, Elemental and Cosmic Knowledge, or SCHMECK. *Schmeck* is a Yiddish word meaning a tiny portion of food, while *schmeckel* means small penis—evidently Heller and Mandel were having fun.

However, the absurdity is a single strand of this material, and far from its overriding tone. The name aside, SCHMECK is treated as straight rather than lampoon throughout, essentially a stand-in for SMERSH. The main villain is Colonel Chiffre, who sniffs cocaine through an inhaler and wears a gold octopus lapel pin that squirts real octopus ink. As in Ben Hecht's previous drafts, Chiffre is using beautiful *au pairs* trained at a honey trap school in the French Riviera to seduce the West's leading politicians and nuclear scientists, who he then blackmails with the compromising films. Assisting Chiffre are his cousin Helga, a countess who has escaped trial for her work at Buchenwald, and Fleurot, whose favourite toy is an electric cattle-prod. M sends Bond to find and destroy the blackmail films, and to beat Chiffre at baccarat to put him in MI6's debt against SCHMECK. Bond is outfitted with an array of gadgets by MI6's Research and Equipment boffin Powell—Q in all but name—including glasses that double as a

NEED TO KNOW

transmitter and a cigarette lighter that, if provided with its pair by another agent, will trigger a small atomic bomb.

The papers also include material dated February 26, which runs to 31 pages and includes a tense car chase with Bond commandeering a Rolls Royce and being chased through Marseille by Chiffre's henchmen in a panel truck and a sedan equipped with rocket launchers.

'The car spurts ahead. Otto presses a button and a rocket launcher rises out of the hood. A gun sight appears on the windshield. The back-shoot of each rocket will flame out behind the car through the exhaust pipe.'

Bond reaches for his transmitter glasses so he can communicate with his friend and ally on the mission, French agent René Mathis.

'The rocket whooshes past and strikes a large barn up ahead. Instantly, the whole structure is in flame.
Bond returns to the road.'

MATHIS' VOICE

What was that?

BOND

Rocket! Afraid I'm being chased as well! Tried to reach you earlier.

MATHIS' VOICE

We've been raiding the school. Thanks for stirring things up.'

Bond sees a plaza ahead, and decides to turn the tables on his pursuers.

NEED TO KNOW

'Bond races into the plaza, turns around the monument there, and goes racing directly back towards Otto's car.

INT. OTTO'S CAR. NIGHT.

Otto is ready to fire another rocket.

OTTO

What is he doing?

As Bond's headlights loom closer and closer without swerving.

OTTO

He's a maniac! Turn! Turn!

The terrified driver turns the wheel.'

After the car has crashed into a stone wall, Bond reverses back in his original direction and resumes contact with his friend:

'BOND

Mathis, there's been a dreadful automobile crash. Check the police report and you'll know where I've been.'

Bond is chasing down Dr Lili Wing, who runs the honey trap training school; he has bribed her to turn on the others, but she ends up frozen to death in a locker in a fish-freezing factory (building on some of the suggestions from the notes section discussed earlier).

A further 14 pages from March 1 contain the baccarat duel between Bond and Chiffre. This sequence is largely faithful to Ian Fleming's novel, but sees the death of Mathis, who is strangled by Countess Helga as he listens in to Bond's transmitter from the casino manager's office.

All this represents around half of the film, and is hugely entertaining. The skeleton of Fleming's novel can still be seen, as can several elements from Ben Hecht's scripts, but it has its own tone, with a real sense of menace and suspense. While there are comedic elements, this is not a spoof of the series but a traditional Bond film, with M, Moneypenny, spectacular action scenes, gadgets, sadistic villains and beautiful women.

The papers also include a revised outline of the whole film by Heller and Mandel from March 8. Fifteen pages long, this is notably much more over the top. It's unclear how much of it was dreamt up by Heller and Mandel and how much is their summary of others' work—there are dozens of boxes of material, with many pages out of order or misplaced. However, the tone is so different from the duo's earlier material and ideas that it seems possible it was an attempt to patch together a hotch-potch of material written by others. The project was slowly but surely drifting into a surreal, psychedelic spoof.

In these pages, Colonel Chiffre now reports to none other than infamous Nazi doctor Joseph Mengele. The brilliant Caribbean opening sequence has gone, replaced with Mengele in a surgery being interrupted by Bond as he operates on a patient's skull. It transpires he is removing the brains of leading scientists and storing them at SCHMECK's headquarters:

'In a long tier of glass cases, naked human brains are seen immersed in a chemical bath from which electrodes lead to computers. Scientists work among these brains and computers, taking information.'

In the film's second half we meet Vesper Lynd, who as in the novel assists Bond while secretly working for the enemy. In one scene, Chiffre tortures Bond by throwing him, bound and wearing horns, into his own private bullring. When Bond is moments away from being gored to death by three attacking bulls, SCHMECK gunmen in black hoods rescue him—assisted by Vesper. He is

flown to SHMECK's base, which is hidden within a dormant volcano. Vesper realizes she has been double-crossed by SHMECK when she sees her father's brain stored with the others. Mengele prepares to remove Bond and Vesper's brains, but allows Bond to smoke a cigarette. Vesper gives him the lighter, now with the paired trigger attached: 'At once Bond sets off the blue light fuse of the atom bomb.'

Bond and Vesper escape from the base, chased by Mengele, who tries to kill them with a gun that shoots electricity bolts. This electrifies the ocean surface, scorching Bond, but reactivates the volcano. The base explodes, and a tide of lava swallows the screaming Mengele while Bond and Vesper 'sink down in the choppy sea'. The final scene has them checking into a hotel as man and wife and Bond ignoring a radio message from M on his walkie-talkie as he takes Vesper in his arms.

The biggest surprise is the climactic sequence. It is strikingly similar to that of *You Only Live Twice*, but also to the ending of the James Coburn-starring Bond spoof *Our Man Flint*, which premiered in December 1965. In all three, the villain's base is hidden inside an island's dormant volcano, from which the hero escapes, leaving the base to explode and the volcano to erupt. In Heller's outline, Bond escapes from the base by using an atomic bomb triggered by a cigarette lighter. Derek Flint intends to use a gadget lighter to do the same, but it's disabled by the villains and he escapes using other means. In *You Only Live Twice*, Bond escapes by causing a distraction with a miniature rocket fired from a cigarette.

There are several precedents for hidden bases in the genre: Sax Rohmer's 1941 novel *The Island of Fu Manchu* has the Oriental doctor operating a submarine base from the crater of a dormant volcano in Haiti. Cigarette-based gadgets were also common, and had been used by Fleming in *From Russia, With Love*. Still, the number of precise similarities between these ending sequences, all released in cinemas within a couple of years each other, suggests

there could have been a previous source for all three, or some cross-pollination between the productions—especially as Heller’s outline was written before the other two were released. It’s tempting to imagine that Feldman’s paranoia over script leaks was deserved, *Catch-22* style, with the writers working on these rival productions secretly meeting up in a bar somewhere to share the latest crazy ideas they were working on.

Feldman was so worried about ideas for his film being plagiarised that he put a police guard on every entrance to the set at Shepperton and denied the film’s actors and cutters access to the full script. His main fear, he told the press in March 1966, was TV writers getting hold of an idea and turning it around faster than them, but he noted that even in the film business one occasionally had to accept ‘a case of people thinking along the same track’:

‘For example, in “Our Man Flint” they use a cigarette lighter for all sorts of deadly purposes. We had the same sort of idea eight months ago and had to throw it out when Flint appeared though it would have played an integral part in one of our sequences.’

In the same interview, he revealed that he had ‘dreamed up’ the idea for the film:

‘It came to me in a nightmare in which I realized the plagiarists were already plucking those James Bond stories yet to be filmed.’⁵⁹

He expanded on this in another interview three months later:

‘I had a nightmare,’ said “Casino Royale” producer Charles Feldman. ‘In color. On the big screen, everyone was called James Bond. Young men. Old men. Women. Children. Even the animals. They were all James Bond.’

⁵⁹ ‘Producer Seals Off Filming of Bond Story Against TV Pirates’ by Robert Musel (United Press International), *Fort Lauderdale News and Sun-Sentinel*, March 6 1966.

He woke up screaming but he had the idea of how to make his film—the first of all the 007 spy stories written by the late Ian Fleming—different. Multiple Bonds.’⁶⁰

He also raised the idea of litigation against Eon:

‘When we started off we had six strikes against us. All the gimmicks in [the novel] *Casino Royale* had been used without permission in the other Bond pictures. We could sue if we wanted to.’⁶¹

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JOSEPH HELLER’S INVOLVEMENT on the film seems to have ended in March 1965. His article about the experience concludes with him becoming so enraged by Feldman’s admission that several other writers are simultaneously working on the same material that he sarcastically proposes to Feldman that he does away with scripts entirely, hires multiple directors and makes everyone in the cast James Bond. Heller was having fun at Feldman’s expense, as this was of course essentially what happened to the resulting film. The article ends with him telling Feldman to keep the money, and his name out of the credits.

It didn’t stop Feldman’s obsession. He continued with the project, hiring more writers, as well as actors and directors: David Niven, Peter Sellers, Orson Welles, Peter Sellers, John Huston... on it went. By May 1966, the budget had ballooned to \$12 million, with at least half a million his own money. According to a set report in *Time*, Feldman had decided to make a ‘Bond movie to end all Bond movies’.⁶²

⁶⁰ “‘Casino Royale’ Puts Stock In Lots of Bonds’ by Sheilah Graham, *The Indianapolis Star*, July 1 1966.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² ‘On Location: Little Cleopatra’, *Time*, May 6 1966

Some of the filming took place at Pinewood, and Feldman even met with Broccoli and Saltzman to discuss going into partnership on the film. However, they couldn't agree terms: the Eon producers apparently offered him \$500,000 and 25 percent of the profits, but Feldman demanded he retain 75 percent.

Feldman realized his biggest challenge in taking on Eon was the main part. To the public, Sean Connery *was* James Bond, and any other actor in the role risked making the film look like a poor man's imitation. Even thin material would be accepted with Connery at the heart of it; without him, every weakness would be laid bare.

Connery was known to be unhappy with Eon. He complained to *The Los Angeles Times* from the set of *A Fine Madness* in October 1965 that nobody appreciated he had a track record before Bond:

'It's a well-kept secret that I'd done anything before Bond. When one does something that gets as much attention as Bond, the presumption is that you came from nowhere to do it. It's an ironical joke, which I appreciate. I have the feeling the legend is that I drove a truck into UA, smashed somebody on the head and dragged Cubby Broccoli up the street and said "Make me Bond". But one has done and one will do other things.'⁶³

In the same interview, he offered up his own script idea for helping Feldman out of the jam of not having himself in the role:

'What one could do,' he said over drinks after work the other day, 'is open with a shot past the back of Bond's head into M's face. M is saying, "James, for this assignment I'm afraid no simple disguise must do. I must ask you to undergo massive plastic surgery." Cut to an operating room shot. Cut to the bandages

⁶³ 'Connery Breaks Out of Bonds' by Charles Champlin, *The Los Angeles Times*, October 22 1965.

being removed and, voila, there is whoever the blazes is going to do the part.’⁶⁴

By the time he was on the set of *You Only Live Twice* nine months later, he had become convinced that Broccoli and Saltzman had cheated him out of a fortune, and his resentment had deepened:

‘This is the last one, and the sooner it’s finished the happier I’ll be. I don’t talk to the producers (Cubby Broccoli and Harry Saltzman). It’s been a fight since the beginning. If they’d had any sense of fairness, they could have made me a partner. It would have been beneficial for all. Fewer and fewer of the people who started with them are with them now. More and more of those concerned with the success of the Bond pictures are not with them. It could have been a very happy thing if they had been fair. Each Bond picture grosses about forty to fifty million dollars. They’d play Bond themselves if they could—to save the money.’⁶⁵

A few weeks earlier, Connery had revealed that Feldman had approached him to play Bond in *Casino Royale*, and that he had asked the producer for one million dollars to take on the role:

‘He hung up. Now he blames me, saying I cost him millions.’⁶⁶

Connery later claimed he had run into Feldman in a London nightclub some time afterwards, and the producer had regretted

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Hollywood column by Harold Hefferman, *The Scranton Times*, July 26 1866

⁶⁶ ‘Bond Role Proves Costly’ by Leonard Lyons, The Lyons Den column, *The Salt Lake Tribune*, July 1 1966. The idea to use plastic surgery to explain the presence of a new actor in the role was considered by Eon a few years later when preparing *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service*, but soon abandoned. See ‘Richard Maibaum: 007’s Puppetmaster’ by Lee Goldberg, *Starlog*, March 1983.

not paying up: ““You know something,” he told me, “at a million dollars for you I’d have got off lightly””.⁶⁷

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CASINO ROYALE WAS finally released in April 1967, two months before *You Only Live Twice*. It was perhaps the greatest squandering of talent in cinematic history, a tonally erratic spoof jumbling hundreds of half-formed ideas. Bond is played by David Niven as a stuttering priggish English gent, with variations of him played by a nebbish Peter Sellers, an even more nebbish Woody Allen, and so on.

Feldman had commissioned so many competing drafts of the script that it had become an incoherent compilation. Some of Heller’s ideas were used, but transformed almost beyond recognition. A scene at a grouse hunt on a Scottish moor in which a replica bird attacks Bond using a homing device was inflated until a flock of such birds, controlled by a dozen beautiful young women disguised as beaters, attack David Niven’s Bond, who ends the scene tripping over himself with his trousers around his ankles: a tense action scene had become psychedelic farce.

There was also no volcanic lair. It’s unclear if the idea was dropped because of cost, because Feldman didn’t like it, or because he got word that Eon was planning something similar. One wonders what the public’s reaction would have been had Heller’s sequence been filmed, and what that would have done for *You Only Live Twice*’s release a couple of months later. Then again, few noted the similarities between that and *Our Man Flint*, so perhaps little would have changed.

Casino Royale made money, but did not dent Eon’s success. The company finally obtained the rights to the Fleming novel in 2004, and set about adapting it from scratch as Daniel Craig’s first

⁶⁷ p57, *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* by Alan Barnes and Marcus Hearn (The Overlook Press, 1998).

film. Feldman's experiment, long seen as the black sheep of cinematic Bond, was reduced to little more than a footnote in the tidal wave of interest in the new version.

Joseph Heller put the experience behind him, and his article about working on the film is a miniature classic that is well worth exploring. As Eon now own the rights to *Casino Royale*, they can use any of his material should they wish. Unlikely, perhaps, but audiences were surprised in 2015 to see Kingsley Amis' name in the credits to *Spectre*, the result of the scriptwriters using dialogue and ideas from his 1968 Bond novel *Colonel Sun*.

Charles Feldman died in 1968, *Casino Royale* his last completed project. It wasn't quite the success he had craved, but the film seen in cinemas was just the tip of an iceberg, the result of seven years in development. Too many cooks finally spoiled the broth, but if we go back and examine some of the individuals' contributions there is plenty to satisfy the palate. For cinema and literary scholars, the *Casino Royale* material is a lesson in the madness of the creative process under huge pressure, and offers insights into the methods of several of the 20th century's best-known writers and their as-yet-unexplored work on an iconic film series. There are 25 boxes of material on the film in Los Angeles, totalling thousands of pages. It could take years for researchers to assess it all, if there is an appetite to do so, and to finally untangle this film's chaotic history. In time, other secrets might also emerge from these archives.

All quotes from Casino Royale material are part of the Charles K. Feldman Collection, courtesy the American Film Institute.

With many, many thanks to Jordan Charter for his efforts above and beyond the call of duty.

NEED TO KNOW

NEED TO KNOW

Agent of Influence

*Antony Terry and the Shaping of
Cold War Fact and Fiction*

Introduction

WHY WRITE ABOUT Antony Terry? He was a giant of British journalism during the Cold War, but is largely forgotten today. When he is mentioned now it's usually in relation to Ian Fleming, although this rarely goes beyond noting their friendship and that Fleming occasionally consulted him for his novels. That's one reason I've written about him, as I believe he had a much more significant influence on Fleming's work than has yet been acknowledged.

In 2007, Terry was the subject of a slim but fascinating biography written by his step-daughter, Judith Lenart, who had discovered his papers while making his funeral arrangements in 1992. She amassed much of the information in them and elsewhere in an attempt to cover 'what he did through what he left behind'. In an admirable break from the tradition of the seemingly-omniscient biographer, Lenart posed several direct questions to her readers where her information was scant, and I've

tried to give answers to some of them here using newspaper archives, declassified government files and several other sources, including more recently published ones.

However, this isn't an attempt at a new biography. Fleming wasn't the only spy novelist to have been influenced by Terry, and in the following pages I'll explore those cases as well as the impact he had on shaping public perception. I also hope to shed light on how British intelligence used journalists during the Cold War; the ethical problems this practice raised then and raise for historians of the era now; and something of the inner workings of journalism and novel-writing.

The book unashamedly contains some speculation on my part regarding motives that in many cases were intended to be hidden, or at least submerged. As spies are professional deceivers, this is unavoidable when discussing their activities, and writers don't leave behind records of their every thought, either. But I hope my guesses are at least well-educated, and that even if a few miss the mark the general thrust of my arguments hit home. This is a book of 'close reading' literary criticism as much as of investigative journalism, and I've done my best to distinguish the hard facts from where I've followed my intuition.

The seed for this book was research I did into journalists' involvement in espionage for a Radio 4 documentary in 2013, titled *MI6 and The Media*. Ian Fleming's Mercury cropped up several times in interviews I conducted for the programme, but I couldn't find a way to insert that strand into it. One of my interviewees, the espionage historian Stephen Dorril, also commented that the revelations of this kind of activity meant that 'We really need to go back and look in detail at some of the key events of the Cold War: look at the newspapers, see what was planted, who were the journalists, and what was it they were trying to put out and say to the British public.' The remark stayed

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with me, and this is an attempt to address it through the study of the work of one of those journalists.

As someone who also writes espionage fiction, this book is in some ways intended as a defence of the genre. I believe spy novels can offer another kind of reportage than journalism, and in some cases can get to the heart of events in a way non-fiction accounts of espionage activities rarely do.

I hope you enjoy going on this journey as much as I did.

Jeremy Duns

Mariehamn, July 2018

I

The London Station

FOR SEVERAL YEARS during the Cold War, including while he was writing the James Bond novels, Ian Fleming was also working for the Secret Intelligence Service, popularly known as M.I.6.

He was part of a network that at various times also counted among its members Malcolm Muggeridge, Kim Philby, George Blake and Frederick Forsyth. At one point M.I.5 had a long-term plan for John le Carré within the network, but he backed out at the last moment. Had he joined, le Carré would have worked directly for Fleming: a tantalising what-if in espionage history.

M.I.6 ran this network using the somewhat absurd codename 'BIN'. It was exposed by the Soviet press in 1968, when *Izvestiya* and others published M.I.6 documents that listed several of its members and their accompanying code numbers, but the story quickly blew over in Britain after a flurry of scornful denials.

BIN was informally known as 'the London Station', and had its headquarters at Londonderry House in Victoria. At one time employing 20 officers, it was part of a larger department within M.I.6 with the title 'Controller of Production Research', which arranged all operations against the Soviet Union that used

resources within Britain. This was controversial, as intelligence operations within the U.K. were M.I.5's domain.

BIN was initially overseen by Frederick 'Fanny' vanden Heuvel, the dandyish son of a papal count and a friend of Fleming. Vanden Heuvel's code number was Z-1, an indication that the department had its roots in the Z Organisation, a network of British businessmen who gathered intelligence in parallel to M.I.6 before and during the Second World War, and in which vanden Heuvel had been a leading figure.

In line with the Z Organisation's old role, BIN ran the 'frequent travellers': Brits who regularly went behind the Iron Curtain for business purposes and agreed to report what they had seen when they returned home. One of these was Greville Wynne, who would become Oleg Penkovsky's link-man with M.I.6 in Moscow. BIN also targeted foreign diplomats and businessmen working in Britain for recruitment, and carried out the monitoring of embassies' communications.

Finally, it developed and controlled a network within Britain's newspaper industry. The press section, BIN/KOORD, had three main roles: to arrange journalistic cover for M.I.6 officers travelling behind the Iron Curtain and elsewhere; to persuade bona fide journalists to gather intelligence for them on the side; and to encourage journalists to produce articles that had a propaganda benefit for Britain.

The concept of journalists working with intelligence agencies is a familiar one in popular consciousness, but hard evidence of it taking place in Britain was scant during the Cold War, and even now this is a relatively neglected area of research among historians of the era considering the central role journalists played in shaping perceptions through those decades.

In their 1998 book, *Britain's Secret Propaganda War*, Paul Lashmar and James Oliver wrote that 'if large numbers of British journalists were also on M.I.6's payroll, this would be one of the

last great secrets of the Cold War.’ Twenty years later, we still don’t have a precise picture of how common this practice was. The existence of the BIN network has been public for several decades, but it has mostly been ignored, glossed over or as in the case of the *Izvestyia* articles, simply denied.

That this significant aspect of British intelligence history is not better known is probably due to several factors. One is that the Cold War is not long dead, and has arguably been reanimated in the last decade or so. M.I.6 has yet to declassify any material dating after the Second World War, and the agency also holds the power of veto over the memoirs of its former staff through the Official Secrets Act.

In addition, newspapers have, perhaps unsurprisingly, been reticent about revealing their own secrets and investigating former colleagues. Journalists are supposed to be independent thinkers who speak truth to power rather than deceivers in service of the secret state, but even those who weren’t engaged in the practice would likely have reported to editors or proprietors who were, and who would have considered it their patriotic duty. Exposure of M.I.6’s work with journalists might have been prosecutable, risked betraying colleagues, and created a working assumption overseas that all British correspondents were spies, which in turn could have endangered lives.

Many British journalists and former journalists wrote spy fiction during the Cold War, so one might expect the idea to have featured there, especially as the genre provides ample opportunity to reveal secrets between the lines. But while characters working as correspondents for TASS or *Pravda* were routinely portrayed as undercover KGB operatives—with the unwritten implication that this was the case in real life (as it often was)—British spy fiction of the era featured very few *Western* intelligence operatives working under journalistic cover. Even in thrillers this topic was, if not taboo, rarely under the spotlight.

Despite all of this, in the last few decades several glimpses of this network and how it operated have emerged, in memoirs, diaries, articles, novels and elsewhere. There is now enough information in the public domain to piece together how it was carried out.

One of the most significant figures recruited to the network by M.I.6 was Ian Fleming. During the Second World War, Fleming had been the personal assistant of Admiral John Godfrey, the Director of Naval Intelligence (D.N.I.). Years later, he would take inspiration from Godfrey when creating James Bond's boss M, and as a result many have likened his wartime activities under Godfrey to those of Bond under M. However, Fleming's role at Naval Intelligence was much more akin to that of the character Bill Tanner, M's trusty chief of staff: he drafted memos on Godfrey's behalf, navigated Whitehall's politics, and helped arrange and oversee operations. Fleming was a desk man, expressly forbidden from taking part in the field on the grounds that, were he to be captured by the Germans, he knew far too much.

Throughout the war, Fleming was in contact with other branches of British intelligence, including the Special Operations Executive, Bletchley Park, M.I.5 and M.I.6. He also worked with the Political Warfare Executive, a group responsible for disseminating propaganda. Fleming was fluent in German, and was used in P.W.E. broadcasts 'telling the Germans that all their U-boats leak'.

At the end of the war M.I.6 were interested in taking on people who already knew the espionage ropes, who had proven themselves discreet, efficient and trustworthy, and whose skills would be useful in the coming Cold War. Fleming fitted the bill. Before the war, he had been a reporter for Reuters, most notably covering the Metropolitan-Vickers Trial in Moscow, and also briefly in the same city as a 'special correspondent' for *The Times* in 1939—the latter occasion had opened connections to the

espionage world that had led to his job in Naval Intelligence. Now he was to combine journalism with work for M.I.6, as in the war not as a field operative but as a desk man. In late 1945, he accepted a job at the Kemsley newspaper group, the offer having likely been facilitated through his friendship with Fanny vanden Heuvel.

The Kemsley group included *the Sunday Times*, putting Fleming right at the heart of Fleet Street. Fleming wrote articles for the *Sunday Times*, chiefly colour pieces as he had a gift for projecting a simultaneously worldly-wise and boyishly enthusiastic view of subjects that took his fancy. From November 1953, he also compiled the paper's gossip and miscellany column 'Atticus', and reviewed books. However, his main job was as 'foreign manager' for the whole Kemsley group, which provided copy for over 20 British national and provincial newspapers and around 600 papers overseas. Fleming managed 88 foreign correspondents, many of whom had also worked for British intelligence in the Second World War—several of whom now continued to do so in peacetime.

The group was officially called the Kemsley Imperial and Foreign Service, but was generally known as 'Mercury', its cable address. While M.I.6 had similar arrangements at other newspapers, Mercury was the jewel in its Fleet Street crown, and one mark of its success is how little an operation taking place at one of Britain's best-known newspapers is known about even today.

During his lifetime, Ian Fleming often discussed his intelligence work during the Second World War in interviews, but he never publicly mentioned his subsequent work for M.I.6, as it was ongoing and he would have been blowing his own cover. However, in his 1995 biography of the writer, Andrew Lycett explore the issue further and quoted a private letter in which Fleming made his M.I.6 role explicit. As a member of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, Fleming was obliged to spend two

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weeks a year on a training course, but in the summer of 1951 he argued that he should be exempted from this on account of the clandestine aspect of his day job:

‘As foreign manager of the *Sunday Times* and Kemsley Newspapers, I am engaged throughout the year in running a world-wide intelligence organization, and there could be no better training for the duties I would have to carry out for the D.N.I. in the event of war. As you know, I also carry out a number of tasks on behalf of a department of the Foreign Office and this department would, I believe, be happy to give details of these activities to the D.N.I.’

As Lycett pointed out, ‘a department of the Foreign Office’ could only have been a euphemism for M.I.6. The ploy didn’t work and Fleming resigned his R.N.V.R. commission as a result, but it gives us clear evidence in his own hand that he was working for M.I.6 while at Kemsley—and that he was well aware he was fulfilling that role.

The phrase ‘world-wide intelligence organization’ is also telling: Fleming might have been exaggerating Mercury’s importance to get out of a training course, but one senses he was also hinting at his real pride in the network he now controlled, and the power he held through it. A 2012 article in the *Sunday Times* put this in striking terms:

‘On his office wall at Gray’s Inn Road was a canary-yellow map depicting the Mercury News Service—the huge nexus he set up to service the whole Kemsley group of newspapers. This was the nerve centre of Fleming operations—an ambitious, grandiose plan for world domination that would have done Ernst Stavro Blofeld himself proud.’

Fleming might well have viewed his role with M.I.6 along such lines, but other than the letter unearthed by Andrew Lycett he appears to have kept such thoughts to himself: there are no hints

of it in his interviews, articles or novels. He was a key cog in the agency's machine, but he appears to have carried out his role discreetly. A gentle nudge would have been easily understood in a network largely consisting of old hands in the intelligence game, and activities like this were arranged over liquid lunches at the club or between the lines of letters rather than in ciphers retrieved from dead drops.

An example of the routine, almost casual way in which journalists acted for British intelligence at this time can be seen in the diaries of Malcolm Muggeridge. He had worked for M.I.6 during the war, but by 1950 was an editor at *The Daily Telegraph*, where he performed the same role for the agency as Fleming at *The Sunday Times*. In January 1950, he recorded a visit to a very ill George Orwell, before adding:

'Visited in the evening by M.I.6 character who wants cover to go to Indo-China.'

And it was as simple as that.

For Fleming, involvement with M.I.6 was mutually beneficial. Thanks to his pulling strings in the background, several M.I.6 operatives received the excellent cover of working for one of Britain's best-known newspapers while they were carrying out secret assignments around the world. But Fleming also used the role for his own purposes, incorporating intelligence he learned or sought out from these operatives into his novels. In turn, more by accident than design, his books would come to serve as propaganda for M.I.6 in particular, and for Britain in general.

II

Mercury Man

ANDREW LYCETT'S CAREFUL piecing together of previous mentions of Mercury's secret role, including Fleming's own admission of his part in it, brought the network's true nature into focus for the first time. In 1998, the veteran *Sunday Times* journalist Phillip Knightley was able to write in that newspaper that Mercury had been 'one of the largest rings of intelligence officers, agents and "assets" masquerading as reporters in the history of journalism or espionage'.

But even then, the dam didn't break. There have now been several full-length examinations of Fleming's role in intelligence during the Second World War, but his work for M.I.6 during the Cold War remains little-known. It's established that Fleming ran this group—but what exactly did they get up to? A sizeable book could be written answering this, taking in this network's intelligence and propaganda roles, its impact on Fleming's fiction and more, but my focus here will be on just one of the Mercury Men, Antony Terry.

Described by one writer who had dealings with him as 'a cocktail of duplicitous charm and amorality', Terry was a complex and enigmatic figure, with many significant parts of his life

remaining hidden from view even after his death in 1992. His obituaries unsurprisingly made no mention of his decades-long work for M.I.6, but they also had several other notable omissions: for instance, the *Times* noted only two of his four marriages.

With Ian Fleming's guidance and support, Terry would become a near-legendary figure in Fleet Street, and the *Sunday Times*' longest-serving foreign correspondent. His obituary in that paper attributed his 'prodigious memory and relentless attention to detail' to his name becoming 'a byword among his peers', while *The Independent* described him as a journalistic 'giant', 'a one-man listening post, a fastidious checker of facts, a burrower into dark corners and a traveller who never complained of fatigue'

Among the stories he investigated were the Thalidomide scandal and the missing treasure known as the Amber Room, but his main beats were espionage and crime, and his journalistic archive is a roll-call of spies, smugglers, arms dealers and, above all, war criminals.

But while a few reporters of the old-school might occasionally still mention Terry's name reverently, most of his scoops have long faded from memory and his legacy today is felt more through others' work, notably in the fiction he inspired. His reporting and expertise sparked the interest of several thriller-writers, who drew on his experiences as an intelligence operative and his deep knowledge of Germany, Austria and Central Europe.

Born in London in 1913, Antony Frédéric Aimé Imbert-Terry was a descendant of a French aristocratic family that had settled in Britain. He grew up in Berlin, where his father, who had lost his title and been disowned by the family after eloping with a suffragette, was a minor functionary at the British Embassy. Terry was schooled by tutors and his mother at home, and grew up completely fluent in German, even mastering many of its dialects.

Few Brits at that time lived in Germany and were able to speak the language like a native, and Terry evidently realized early on

that he could exploit this, writing articles for the *Sunday Dispatch* from the age of 14. In 1935, Terry married Eileen Griffiths, but the marriage collapsed within a year after she fell pregnant and he insisted that she have an abortion. It seems that Terry was virulently opposed to the idea of having children of his own. Griffiths remarried, becoming Julia Greenwood (Julia being her given first name) and forged a career as a broadcaster and, under the pseudonym 'Francis Askham', a writer: George Orwell favourably reviewed her 1946 novel *A Foolish Wind*.

Terry's career, meanwhile, led him in a different direction. After several years working in film publicity—possibly involving some espionage activity—in 1940 he joined M.I.19, a branch of British military intelligence, as part of its Prisoner of War Interrogation Section. He was posted to 6-7 Kensington Palace Gardens, 'the London Cage', where many captured Germans were imprisoned and interrogated under the leadership of Colonel Alexander Scotland. Terry was given the legend of 'Anton Schroder', a German newspaper correspondent working as an aerial cameraman whose plane had been shot down by the British over Aylesbury in 1940. No further details survive of this operation, but presumably the false identity enabled him to pose as a prisoner to loosen the lips of the others. He also appears to have become a very effective and valued interrogator.

Bespectacled, with thinning hair and cold eyes that gave him the look of a sinister hypnotist in a B-movie, Terry probably didn't match most people's idea of a daring commando and decorated war hero. But he became both. In March 1942, he volunteered to be a part of the intelligence contingent of Operation CHARIOT, the daring British raid on the dry dock at St Nazaire in Nazi-occupied France often referred to as 'The Greatest Raid of All'. Terry was attached to No. 2 Commando with the idea that if any enemy combatants were captured he would be on hand to interrogate them on the spot to obtain 'hot' intelligence.

However, it didn't turn out that way. Instead, the group he was in found itself surrounded by the Germans. Terry decided to carry out a reconnaissance mission of the town and ventured out into the streets alone. According to his Military Cross citation after the war, he did so 'at great personal risk, armed only with a revolver and showing total disregard for his own safety'. He managed to return with 'the most valuable information concerning the actions and whereabouts of the enemy', but it wasn't enough. *The Times* described the incident in his obituary:

'Major Terry and his men drew German fire as they crossed an iron bridge, bullets ricocheting against its girders, and were captured. His team was actually being lined up against a wall by German soldiers to be shot when saved by the distraction of another British team's limpet-mines going off under the battleship *Tirpitz* a short distance away.'

Along with several others, Terry was imprisoned in Spangenberg Castle until the end of the war; while there, he kept his fellow prisoners informed by running a daily news bulletin, collating everything that could be gleaned from the German press and broadcasts listened to on a radio set built from components that had been smuggled piece by piece in aid parcels into the camp and, when that was detected in a search by the Germans, a new model built from stolen valves and hidden inside a gramophone.

After his release from Spangenberg in 1945, Terry returned to the London Cage, now renamed the War Crimes Investigation Unit, to interrogate high-ranking Nazis as the deputy to Colonel Scotland. Years later, he recalled in a documentary that he was known as 'the shit with the glasses' by those whose testimonies he unravelled.

In April 1946, he returned to Germany, visiting Dachau. The notorious concentration camp was now a detention centre run by the Americans, and one of its prisoners was General Nikolaus von

Falkenhorst. The Nazis' supreme commander in Norway, in October 1942 von Falkenhorst had ordered the execution of seven British commandos who had been captured during MUSKETOON, the operation to destroy the hydro-electric plant in Glomfjord. The laws of war envisaged imprisonment in such circumstances, not being shot through the back of the head, but these men were the first victims of the Nazis' 'Commando Order'.

Terry's interview in Dachau helped secure von Falkenhorst a guilty verdict in an Allied military tribunal. He was sentenced to death, but this was then commuted to life imprisonment, and he ended up being released in 1953 due to ill health. This would likely have infuriated Terry. He never wrote or spoke publicly of it but one of the seven commandos, Joe Houghton, had also been at St Nazaire. Terry would have known this from his research into the case, and so would also likely have been conscious of the fact that while in the earlier operation Houghton had escaped and he had been captured, at that point in the war the Nazis had still played by the established rules of war and had only held him as a prisoner. Their fates could easily have been reversed.

Terry was recruited by M.I.6 shortly after his return from Dachau. It's not hard to see why they were interested. He was ideally qualified for work behind the Iron Curtain: he had operated under cover (as 'Anton Schroder'); had shown great physical courage at St Nazaire; had been a highly effective interrogator both during and after the war; was as ardently anti-Soviet as he was anti-Nazi; and was completely fluent in German.

While the latter point had been an asset for the London Cage, it was even more so for M.I.6. The post-war division of Austria and Germany meant that cities such as Vienna and Berlin, where East and West were separated by still-porous borders, had become key targets for the agency. It was eager to gather intelligence on Soviet bloc activities and intentions without taking the far greater

dangers involved in recruiting or infiltrating agents deeper inside the U.S.S.R.

This was soon to be Terry's new role, but first he needed cover. Considering his background, both from his teenage years and his time preparing a news bulletin inside a German P.O.W. camp, journalism would have been an obvious option. In 1947, someone from the London Station asked Ian Fleming if Mercury could take on Antony Terry.

Terry's heroic war record would probably have appealed to Fleming, especially as it involved a commando raid. In March 1942, Fleming had drafted a memo proposing the creation of a 'Naval Intelligence Commando Unit', a small force that would go ahead of advancing Allied units to snatch codes, documents and even valuable personnel. He'd signed it 'F' with a flourish. This eventually came into existence as 30 Assault Unit, two leaders of which were veterans of the St Nazaire raid: Robert 'Red' Ryder and Dunstan Curtis.

Terry also fitted many of Fleming's other requirements for the job. In an essay for *The Kemsley Manual Of Journalism*, he had given the criteria for his ideal correspondent, which included their being 'either a bachelor or a solidly married man who is happy to have his children brought up abroad', as well as the sort who would 'enjoy having a drink with the meanest spy or the most wastrelly spiv', could speak at least one foreign language fluently with another to fall back on, and was 'able to keep a secret'.

Much of this description could, of course, also apply to an intelligence operative acting under cover as a foreign correspondent. Fleming agreed to take Terry on, and M.I.6 then instructed Terry to marry 'one of his girlfriends at the time', a 32-year-old divorcee named Rachel Nixon. M.I.6 did not employ bachelors: a 'solidly married man' made for more plausible cover and was thought to dissuade the Soviets from attempting honey-traps. Rachel later recalled that she was vetted by M.I.6, after

which the couple married at a civil ceremony in Kensington in June 1947. She was informed of his intelligence role, Fleming 'arranged the cover', and they moved to Vienna.

There, Terry reported to two masters: George Kennedy Young, head of M.I.6's station in the city, and Ian Fleming in London. The cover role was no mere formality: he was expected to excel at both jobs. Fleming wanted to enliven *The Sunday Times'* foreign coverage and had high expectations of his new correspondent. Young, meanwhile, was running a network of agents and informers in the city, several of whom Terry took on. In October 1948, after M.I.6 agent Kavan Elliott had been interrogated and released by the Hungarian secret police in Budapest, he was sheltered by Terry in his flat in Vienna, where M.I.6 debriefers concluded 'he had had a tough time, but he had held up well'.

Terry and Young's relationship was not always a smooth one, perhaps in part because Terry wasn't confined by the agency's traditional hierarchy. He doesn't appear ever to have been a fully salaried member of M.I.6 but rather a highly trusted and capable freelancer with a degree of autonomy from local stations.

According to a barely fictionalized version of this part of his life, he 'enjoyed the right of direct communication with the Intelligence Directorate in London'. If so, this would presumably have been with someone at the London Station, perhaps Vanden Heuvel or his successor, Nicholas Elliott.

It seems Terry was in his element, but his marriage was already in trouble: within a month of arriving in Vienna, Rachel discovered he was being unfaithful to her. She stayed with him nevertheless and started to explore her new home, with mixed results. Vienna in 1947 was divided into four zones of occupation and was rife with espionage and danger. While her husband pursued stories, intelligence and women, Rachel found work at the Allied Control Council, which governed the four zones.

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Having never left England before, she was shocked by life in the city, and her 'ignorant adulation' of the Russians for their heroic part in defeating Nazism soon vanished, as she later described:

'It was nothing to see a Russian soldier raise the stock of his machine pistol (they were always armed) against someone in his way in the street, and even to strike out with it.

To a Londoner that was as horrifying as the constant accounts of "men in military uniform" raping, looting and killing, for such things could not happen to me and were at first discounted out of the prevailing Allied hatred of everything German. But a man trying to escape from a police jeep being dragged along the street by one foot until a crowd gathered and he got away, his head covered with blood ... a shape lying on the pavement covered by a blanket from which blood seeped ... such sights in a major city are shocks one does not forget. They were made sharper by the strict discipline of the three other occupying armies. My hero-worship was replaced by a fear that sometimes reached horror, much deeper than the fear caused by bombing during the War. The cure was permanent.'

Also reporting from Vienna at this time was a *Daily Express* correspondent, Peter Smollett, who was not all he seemed. Viewed by his enemies as 'an uncouth bull of a man with a decidedly shady air', he had been born Hans Peter Smolka in Vienna. A Jewish Communist, with the rise of the Nazis he had helped dissidents escape through the city's network of sewers before fleeing himself to London, where he became a naturalized British subject and briefly ran a press agency with Kim Philby.

Thanks to files smuggled out of Russia by Vladimir Mitrokhin, we now know that Philby and his Austrian wife Litzi recruited Smolka into Soviet intelligence in 1939. He became one of their most effective agents, codenamed ABO.

During the Second World War, Smolka ran the Russian Department within the Ministry of Information, spearheading

Britain's efforts to paint its major ally in a good light to the public. This was a significant propaganda coup for the Russians, as Smolka managed to paint a rosy picture of Communism while suppressing reports on Stalinist persecution. He was awarded an O.B.E. for his efforts.

After the war, Smolka returned to Vienna as a correspondent, carrying out much the same job for Soviet intelligence as Terry was for M.I.6. Smolka was a familiar face in the British press pack, but Rachel Terry soon began to distrust him:

'In November (1947) *Picture Post* wanted an article on a foreign correspondent's life in an Occupied city, and Peter Smolka proposed this to my husband as something in his gift. Smolka had the permits necessary to go to such places as Klosterneuburg, impossible to get from the Russians except on an official level. He also invited us and the photographer, the wife of the editor of *Picture Post*, to dine at the British Officers' Club in Palais Kinsky with a woman Russian colonel, whose picture duly appeared with us all in the magazine. This was something so unheard-of that even I could see something odd in it. It could only have occurred with official Soviet approval, and to get permission for foreign publicity of that kind proved intimate and high-level contacts.'

Rachel Terry wrote this in 1984, and even then was being a little coy: the 'woman Russian colonel' was in fact Emma Wolff, a senior Soviet intelligence officer.

It seems likely that Antony Terry would have come to similar conclusions about Smolka as his perceptive wife and reported back to M.I.6 that he must have connections with Soviet intelligence. And yet the British did not act against Smolka. Two years later, he was even invited to help out with a film that provided a covert role for British intelligence, and was asked to show the screenwriter around the city.

This was Graham Greene, and the film became *The Third Man*. Smolka gave Greene many of the ideas for the film,

including the workings of the city's black market in penicillin and its sewer system. According to Smolka's godson, Peter Foges, the character of Harry Lime was partly based on Philby and partly on Smolka himself.

In 1949, Fleming had a new assignment for Terry: Germany. He was initially based in Dusseldorf before settling in Bonn, but he also had stints in Hamburg and Berlin. On posting him to the country, Fleming wrote to Terry to stress he had free rein to travel and pursue stories as he saw fit:

'I shall never mind being beaten on spot news, if I feel that you are devoting your time to becoming really acquainted with all aspects of your fascinating and dangerous territory and its psychosis ridden inhabitants.'

Such a flexible remit, of course, was perfect cover for espionage work. Fleming also furnished Terry with at least one source with intelligence links. In October 1949, he sent him the details of a Herr von Mouillard in Hamburg, who he said he had been recommended as being 'particularly well-informed, especially regarding Russian manoeuvres in Germany' and from whom he felt sure Terry would be able to extract 'useful material'. He added that von Mouillard was 'well-known to a mutual friend of yours and mine'—a not-so-subtle reference to M.I.6.

III

Our Man in Germany

IT WAS IN Germany that Terry began to make a name for himself as a correspondent. For the *Sunday Times*, he was now increasingly called on to write the ‘big picture’ reports on political developments, treaties, industry and the like, while elsewhere he tended to file more sensational material, sprinkled with ‘tabloiditis’ as he referred to the style years later.

These stories often implicated the Soviets in the clandestine backing of a resurgent Nazi movement—Terry had left the War Crimes Investigation Unit, but he would continue to investigate war criminals by himself for the next half-century.

Several of Terry’s articles from this period concerned Martin Bormann, Hitler’s deputy, who had vanished in Berlin in the final chaos-strewn days before the German surrender. Bormann’s skeleton was eventually discovered in 1972, and as a result we now know from forensic evidence and dental records that he died shortly after he escaped from the bunker, probably as the result of biting down on a cyanide capsule. But in the decades before his body was found, journalists were free to speculate that he might be alive and up to all kinds of activities.

Terry was an avid purveyor of such theories, producing a stream of lurid stories about Bormann. In February 1952, he wrote that Bormann was not only still alive but was now working as an agent for the Soviets. Citing West German intelligence as his source, Terry claimed that since the end of the war Bormann had visited China, India, Turkey, South Africa and elsewhere, disguised as a businessman and leaving ‘a trail of murder and rioting wherever he goes’.

In October the same year, he provided further details in a follow-up article:

‘Martin Borman, under his new name, “Borner,” is in charge of “Operation Borner”—a forcing school designed to turn out a regular supply of thousands of trained Red spies.

Acting under Stalin’s personal orders, Bormann has now “trained” no fewer than 1,200 Russian agents, who are now at work inside Russia, in Poland, in Eastern Germany, and Africa.’

Once again, he cited anonymous intelligence sources to support his claims, although we now know that these must have been nonsense. In today’s parlance, Terry was peddling ‘fake news’. He might have suspected as much himself, but as intelligence agencies are compartmentalized and rarely comment on press reports, he could have been fairly confident that none of his claims would be publicly contradicted.

These articles are also, by today’s standards, almost laughably crude propaganda: the uncritical parroting of unnamed intelligence sources claiming to expose a succession of sensational and sometimes absurd conspiracies without documentary evidence, and with the Soviets repeatedly portrayed as a vehicle for a resurrection of the Nazi Reich.

Faked identities and hidden Nazi pasts were a recurring theme in Terry’s articles. Bormann did not become ‘Borner’, but many escaping Nazis did change their identities. Also in Terry’s sights

were the likes of Otto Remer, ‘the new Nazi Fuhrer of Germany’, and Fritz Roessler, alias Franz Richter, a former Nazi leader with Soviet support who had apparently fooled the German and Allied authorities by ‘remarrying’ his own wife under a different name after the war.

It’s not clear if these articles were the result of Terry operating on his own initiative as a kind of private extension of his war crimes investigations work, or whether M.I.6 had steered him towards this topic. It might have been both. As well as his own imprisonment by the Nazis and interrogations of war criminals, Terry may have been motivated by a sense that the British government had not pursued these men as persistently as they should have done after the war, and in some cases had turned a blind eye to them. In a 1988 *Sunday Times* investigation into Wilhelm Mohnke, a former S.S major-general accused of ordering the murder of 80 unarmed British P.O.W.s in 1940, Terry commented:

‘There’s always been a reluctance on the part of Whitehall to pursue these people. I don’t know what the reasons were, but I discovered later there were political reasons why they didn’t want to pursue Nazis at that time. We certainly did our best to collect the material, but we were hamstrung in London.’

Whatever Terry’s motivation, thanks to files declassified in 2009 we know that his articles on Bormann met a chilly reception from some in British intelligence. After his February 1952 article was syndicated in several countries, the South African police sent the version published there to British military intelligence headquarters in Germany, asking if there were any truth to it. The article was also shared with M.I.6, whose reaction we don’t know, and M.I.5—who were distinctly unimpressed. A letter signed on behalf of Sir Percy Sillitoe, the head of the agency, singled Terry out for stinging criticism:

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‘A British Press correspondent in Germany, named Antony TERRY, published last January a series of articles in the English Sunday newspaper “Empire News”, alleging that there was a widespread underground neo-Nazi movement active in Germany. The articles were exaggerated, sensational and distorted. Although links between neo-Nazi individuals or small groups and Communist agencies undoubtedly exist, there is no evidence of any large underground organisation. TERRY’s main source of information was Baron Gero von GALERA, who was born 17th May 1926, and is known to the authorities as a common swindler, who styles himself as a freelance journalist. He was at one time employed by the Amt fuer Verfassungsschutz in Berlin, but was dismissed for openly stating that he was so employed. His reports were described by the Head of that office as “packed with lies” and “fabricated”.’

Five months after this letter, American intelligence officials in Berlin arrested Gero Von Galera on suspicion of spying for the Russians.

It looks as if Terry had been duped by a dodgy source, of which there were plenty in Germany at the time. He might not have cared one way or the other, as claiming that the old bogeyman Nazi was now working as a ruthless secret agent for the new bogeymen Soviets had valuable propaganda value, and nobody could disprove his assertions. Only those really in the know—like the head of M.I.5—would be aware it was untrue, and even then doubts would always remain. Such might be the calculations of a busy reporter, and it would be naive to think Terry was above this considering his reliance on anonymous and unnamed sources in the intelligence world, and his hidden allegiance to M.I.6.

In the 1940s and ’50s, Terry openly admitted in several of his articles that the information in them originated from Allied officials, but they were not his only source in the intelligence world. In 1948, the British government set up the Information Research Department, a partially clandestine branch of the

Foreign Office that produced a wealth of anti-Communist material and distributed it to selected journalists. Terry would likely also have been on their distribution list.

He would also have had local sources. Some, like Gero von Galera, might also have tried to feed him distortions or even outright fabrications. Another possible source along these lines is Werner Stephan, a former Gestapo officer given a four-year prison sentence in 1957 for selling thousands of pages of 'secrets' over a decade, all of which he had concocted at home using two typewriters. Terry's report on the sentencing strikes a curiously bitter note as he celebrates the imprisonment of the 'amateur spy' and 'dilettante' who has now left the trade in intelligence in Berlin to the professionals. One might almost think he had been stung by the man himself.

But sometimes Terry was the one distorting information. For many years one of his most important sources was Tony Divall, an M.I.6 agent with his hands in all kinds of bizarre intrigues who fed Terry intelligence for decades. Divall had been in the Royal Marines in the Second World War and then joined T-Force, hunting down suspected war criminals in Germany. Terry might have first met him there. Recruited into M.I.6 in Germany, Divall had 'developed a talent for running agents' and had been placed in charge of an operation codenamed JUNK. This involved 'an underground railway that ran agents and consignments of Swiss gold watches into the satellite states in exchange for defectors and illegal roubles'. According to an article on the 'Goldfinger'-style operation by Terry in 1968, the double agent George Blake took over the running of JUNK in 1955 and blew it to his Soviet handlers.

Divall was also at various times an arms dealer in Hamburg and mixed up with mercenaries in Biafra and elsewhere, all the while working for M.I.6, until his relationship with 'The Firm' turned

sour and he threatened to blow the whistle on their joint activities by way of a *Spycatcher*-style book. This never materialized.

Terry and Divall were close friends for decades, and what survives of their correspondence reads like a running commentary on the Cold War from two old hands. However, some of the material also shows that Terry distorted information Divall gave him.

In the winter of 1991, the publishing magnate Robert Maxwell was found dead in the sea after disappearing from his yacht. Born Ján Hoch in pre-Second World War Czechoslovakia, Maxwell was a controversial figure, and his death made headlines around the world. From New Zealand, Terry called Divall to see if he could provide any inside information Terry could give the *Sunday Times*. The transcript of the call has Divall claiming Maxwell had been deeply involved in espionage:

‘Can’t see a man of his type and mentality doing himself in. Somebody must have given him a push. He’s been involved with Mossad as a source, in connection with arms deals and in particular with the Bulgarian connection.’

Divall was convinced that Maxwell had been recruited while he was serving with the British Army in Germany, where he had met him in 1948. Hoch/Maxwell had been in charge of distributing quarters and furnishings in the British sector of Berlin, and Divall’s T-Force unit had discovered a house he was responsible for laden with loot. Divall now told Terry he was convinced that Soviet intelligence had backed Maxwell financially from immediately after the war, and that in return Maxwell had worked for them ever since—while also working for Mossad. Some of his musings on this veered into racial prejudice, alleging that as Maxwell wasn’t ‘a pure Czech’ but came from the Karpathenraus, this meant he had been ‘born into intrigue and duplicity’. His work for Mossad was also put down to his religion:

NEED TO KNOW

‘With Jewish people it’s all one firm, it’s like the Russians, they’re supposed to do it.’

A day later, Terry wrote to London:

‘Following our conversation I have had some talks to intelligence sources on the Mossad connection. They keep coming back to the Bulgarian operation...’

He then repeated Divall’s claims about that operation, before moving onto a new topic:

‘The other suggestion I have come across in conversation in these circles is that at least during his dates in the British army in Berlin after WWII (when he was in charge of providing accommodation in requisitioned headquarters for the British occupation forces) Maxwell was under suspicion of having NKVD and later KGB connections...’

This, too, was followed by a repetition of Divall’s claims about Maxwell’s activities. The precision of them makes it clear that his only source for both was Divall, but he had cleverly made his single spy seem like an army of them. The Bulgarian information was presented as having come from intelligence *sources*: plural. He then presented the allegations about wartime Soviet connection as if told at another time as part of ongoing discussion with ‘these circles’. Divall had told Terry he believed Maxwell had been ‘nothing more nor less than a bloody KGB agent’ all his life. Within a day, Terry had transformed Divall’s stream of theories into the detached and authoritative language of a newspaper report. Even if all Divall had said had been true, which seems doubtful, Terry had presented his one source as a conglomeration of sources, making it sound like he had been consulting a veritable den of spooks.

This is a rare glimpse into journalistic malpractice, as it comes from Terry’s own surviving papers, and it raises the obvious

question of when else he had massaged information his sources gave him in this way.

However, it is undeniable that he was also capable of the fastidiousness of research so often mentioned in his obituaries. Ironically, this was often most in evidence when he was doing legwork for others. In 1956, Elizabeth Nicholas, a *Sunday Times* travel correspondent, asked Terry for his help on a book she was writing about seven female S.O.E. agents. Terry tracked down former concentration camp officials and was the first to find evidence that the unknown fourth agent who had been killed at Natzweiler, previously presumed to have been Noor Inayat Khan, was in fact another woman, Sonia Olschanezky.

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ANOTHER THEME TERRY investigated in the 1950s was the clandestine construction by the Russians of a series of missile bases in Europe. In September 1949, after American spy planes detected radiation on the edge of the Kamchatka Peninsula, Harry Truman declared that the Soviet Union had tested a nuclear weapon for the first time. American and British intelligence had been caught by surprise: they had considered the Soviets several years away from achieving this. Overnight, the Cold War had become several degrees chillier, and rhetoric on both sides hardened as a result.

In the aftermath of Truman's statement, newspapers in the West were filled with alarming stories of Soviet capabilities. One of the first, by the United Press agency, claimed that 'Anglo-American intelligence sources' had confirmed a report from a German expert who had escaped Russia that the Soviets had 'virtually ringed Western Europe with secret V-2 rocket-launching bases' aimed at strategic points 'from the English Channel to the Adriatic'. Some of these bases were said to be in

the vicinities of Cologne, the island of Rügen and the Brenner Pass between Italy and Austria.

This story was widely picked up by other agencies and newspapers, and was followed by similar claims from others. Antony Terry published several stories about Soviet missile bases in the next few years, with details about the locations, the personnel involved and the technology behind the weapons building on or in some cases contradicting his previous reports. All made for sensational reading.

In October 1952, Terry reported that Western intelligence had been startled by information from ‘reliable sources in the East German government’ that the Soviets were building a huge underground launching site off the tiny island off Walfisch, just 25 miles from the British Zone of Germany, with a larger base at Poel. The project was said to be under the technical leadership of German ‘wartime flying-bomb expert’ Professor Luettgens, who was under the close supervision of the Stasi in the Soviet Zone.

In February 1953, in an article headlined ‘Britain, Red Target’, Terry returned to the theme, claiming that Stalin was building a ‘secret, atom proof island fortress in the Baltic’. The alleged location was again Rügen, where locals had supposedly been evacuated and where thousands of slave labourers were now working in shifts to complete underground fortifications, U-boat pens and ‘missile-launching sites, some of them trained on London, Manchester and other big cities in Britain’. Three Soviet paratrooper divisions were said to have been flown in, and Russian torpedo bombers ‘piloted by women’ were already stationed there. Terry also reported that Marshal Zhukov had recently visited the island, and that the Soviets were working from a Nazi plan for a bomb-proof U-boat base. This connection to German wartime operations was highlighted with the mention of another location:

‘Using German rocket experts sent from Russia, and guarded day and night, the Soviets are hollowing out thousands of acres of cliffs

on the island and at Peenemunde, where Hitler had his much-bombed rocket-research station.'

Three months later, Terry returned to the subject:

'British intelligence in Germany, working on agents' reports and cross-checked refugee stories, are now convinced that the Russians have a V-weapon arsenal more gigantic and deadly than anything Hitler ever hoped to control.'

Peenemünde is once again mentioned, and then we are informed that the Russians are 'believed to have massed giant atomic-war like rockets which could destroy Europe in a night'. A couple of paragraphs later, he repeats the assertion that this emanates from intelligence sources:

'This is what eye witnesses have told of the Soviet scheme—information which has been carefully cross-checked with secret intelligence sources.

The main flying bomb base which the Russians are building is centred around the Baltic port of Rostock.

Six underground rocket firing stations are located in an area of 20 miles square so cleverly concealed that they cannot be detected either from the ground or by aerial photograph.'

Terry claimed that Russia was using 20,000 German engineers and forced labour to put into effect its 'fantastic plan'.

In January 1954, Terry branched out a little, with an article alleging that German scientists were building weapons in countries outside Europe, biding their time for when the Fatherland could once again become a great military power. He reported that Henrich Focke had spent a year in a secret factory in the Brazilian jungle 'building a superhelicopter of his own design for the Brazilian Government', and that several others were working in South America and even in the U.S. However, behind the Iron Curtain 'German aircraft designers stand by their wind tunnels

watching the results of their latest experiments, which the Kremlin hopes will put Russia ahead of the West in aircraft design’.

Like his stories about Martin Bormann, these articles clearly had a propaganda value for the West, as they were alleging secret war-mongering on the Soviets’ part and painting them as a major threat. Declassified but still partially-redacted C.I.A. files show that the United States gathered intelligence on Soviet activities along the Baltic coast from the late 1940s on. The agency collected material in the public domain, such as articles in the foreign press, as well as rumours and tip-offs. Dozens of such reports were collated, some from on-the-spot informants. Many were contradictory: the Soviets were said to be levelling an unusable German wartime installation and abandoning the area, or they were building a naval harbour in its place, or they were constructing a missile launch site, and so on.

This was military decision-making across a wide area over many years, and easily misinterpreted through Chinese whispers. The Soviets did develop their fortifications and bases around the Baltic during the Cold War, just as Western allies strengthened theirs. However, there’s no evidence of any serious intent to launch unprovoked strikes as Terry suggested in his articles, any more than the West had that intention. These bases were instead part of the stand-off between East and West that the Cold War embodied, codified as the ‘Mutually Assured Destruction’ model of deterrence once the nuclear arms race was underway. That’s not to say it was an impossibility that the Soviets might have launched an attack on the West, or that it wasn’t worth keeping an eye on, but the posture on both sides was fundamentally defensive.

But once again, the truth of his reports might have been a moot point for Terry. Like his articles on Martin Bormann, the claims were virtually impossible to disprove—even if the Soviets were to bother denying them, they wouldn’t have been believed. In some ways, then, he was doing much the same work as the C.I.A.

NEED TO KNOW

analysts: reading material published in the German press and other open sources, seeking out sources of his own, and honing the details over several months.

But there are crucial differences. Intelligence agencies build up a picture through multiple reports, which they then analyse in context—in and among the rumours, distortions, Chinese whispers and fabrication, what is the probable truth of the matter? And even then, they can get things catastrophically wrong. But as well as working for M.I.6, Terry was writing for publication to tight deadlines, often filing several articles a week. The time and resources he had for evaluating his information was nowhere near comparable to the C.I.A.'s, and his motives were also different: his articles were not for figuring out the Soviets' true intentions behind closed doors but were both his means of making a living and a way of attacking the Soviets publicly.

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BACK IN LONDON, Ian Fleming appears to have been reading Terry's articles about hidden missile bases with close interest. Fleming had by now become an author, with his first novel, *Casino Royale*, being published in March 1953, and his second, *Live and Let Die*, already written. With James Bond now in the world, Fleming was on the hunt for new ideas. In an essay written several years later, he gave the following advice to those wishing to follow in his footsteps as a thriller-writer:

'You must know thrilling things before you can write about them. Imagination alone isn't enough, but stories you hear from friends or read in the papers can be built up by a fertile imagination and a certain amount of research and documentation into incidents that will also ring true in fiction.'

Fleming acted on his own advice, and he had several advantages any aspiring thriller-writer would have given their right arm for: he was editing and commissioning articles for a newspaper group, often on topics he found personally interesting, and many of his friends and colleagues were former or serving intelligence officers. They had plenty of thrilling things to tell him that he could build up with his fertile imagination.

From the start of his career as a novelist, Fleming used the Mercury correspondents as his own private research bureau on the side. For *Casino Royale*, he sought out background information for the gambling scenes from Mercury's correspondent in France, Stephen Coulter, who had been in the Royal Navy in the war and also had a history in intelligence. (Coulter would also go on to have a successful career as a thriller-writer.)

Of all the Mercury correspondents, Terry was the one he relied on most. Later, this would involve asking him directly for information, but even parts of his first novel evoke the tenor of Terry's journalism. The villain, Le Chiffre, works for a Soviet intelligence agency, SMERSH, not for ideological reasons but because he wants their financial backing. He is a *mittel*-European of the type that had been seen in the work of Eric Ambler and others, but he is also of a kind familiar from Terry's reporting: a criminal backed by the Soviets, a displaced person with a mysterious past in Dachau, a survivor of the rubble and chaos of post-war Europe who has created a new life for himself under an assumed identity.

In September 1953, Fleming wrote to Terry in Berlin:

'Dear Tony,

Many thanks for the V-2 book, and here is one more request. Has a book or a series of articles been published on the 'Were-Wolves' who were organised to harass us at the end of the war? Would you please let me have anything that there may be available?

NEED TO KNOW

Incidentally, did they ever achieve anything? and what happened to them all?’

The Werewolves were the Nazis’ last-ditch guerrilla resistance movement, and Terry had written about an attempt to revive the phenomenon the previous year, writing of a ‘widespread plot to revive Hitler’s werewolf murder gangs’ in the American Zone that had included a list of political targets to be ‘liquidated’.

Terry might have forgotten this as he didn’t mention it in his reply to Fleming, instead noting that he wasn’t aware of any books about the Werewolves but that he recalled there had been rumours about them when he had been on the march out of Spangenberg at the end of the war. Or perhaps he judged it tactful not to respond to his boss by effectively telling him to look up what he had already written on the topic. The seemingly casual reference to his own extraordinary wartime experiences might also have served as a subtle reminder of just how in the know he was if Fleming were looking for an expert on such matters.

The book he had sent to Fleming looks to have been *V-2* by Walter Dornberger, which had recently been published in Germany. Dornberger had headed the Nazis’ rocket programme, and Fleming presumably requested the book as a result of discussing Terry’s articles on the Soviets’ V-2 type bases with him.

The novel he was working on when he wrote this letter, *Moonraker*, would eventually feature a few technical terms from Dornberger’s book to help make his plot ‘ring true in fiction’. The novel’s focus is a base manned by German scientists housing an advanced rocket developed from the Nazis’ wartime V-2s to use against Britain, just as Terry had claimed was happening in reality. While the base in *Moonraker* is not in the Baltic but on the English coast, there are several other striking similarities: hollowed-out cliffs, references to Peenemünde, a plan for a devastating first strike against the West. In May 1953, Terry had claimed in one of his articles that two German defectors to the

West had provided vivid details of the activities at the bases near Rostock and Gellenstrom and a training camp in Kaliningrad:

‘The V-weapon men wear a characteristic blue-green stripe on their shoulder pieces and caps. All have taken an oath of secrecy not to reveal details of their work or its location.’

This reads unmistakably like a description of what we now view as the classic ‘Bond villain base’ convention: a secret army of fanatics, all wearing their own uniforms, hard at work on a fantastical plan to blow the West to smithereens with advanced missiles.

This is now a standard trope in the thriller genre, but its first appearance was in the novel *Moonraker*. In Chapter 12 of the novel, Bond inspects the base being overseen by Sir Hugo Drax, and finds a group of experts with ‘the look of a well-knit team, almost of a brotherhood’, and goes on to note their clothing:

‘With the exception of Drax they all wore the same tight nylon overalls fastened with plastic zips. There was nowhere a hint of metal and none wore spectacles...’

Later, when Drax is revealed as the villain, he regales Bond with his life story. Like Martin Bormann, he is a Nazi war criminal who vanished at the end of the war—but, as in Terry’s reporting, he survived and is now in league with the Soviets. His backstory includes a stint in the Werewolves at the end of the war and culminates in his becoming a rich man visiting Moscow with plans to destroy Britain:

“I got to the right people. They listened to my plans. They gave me Walter, the new genius of their guided missile station at Peenemunde, and the good Russians started to build the atomic warhead,” he gestured up to the ceiling, “that is now waiting up there...”

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Drax's aim is to attack Britain with a missile, echoing Terry's articles on the Soviets' bases and intentions against the West in general and Britain in particular.

Fleming's letters to Terry about Werewolves and V-2s establish that he was an influence on *Moonraker*, while Terry's articles on rocket bases in the Baltic suggest either a closer reading of them by Fleming or, perhaps more likely, the subject gradual seeping into his consciousness through exposure to Terry's repeated reporting on it.

IV

Terryland

FLEMING ASKED TERRY for his advice and expertise on several further occasions, and seems to have consistently received answers that went well beyond the tasks set for him. In February 1954, Terry replied to a request from Fleming for information on escape routes for agents from East to West with several pages of detailed material in English and German. Terry managed to provide this even when reporting from the Four Power Conference in Berlin, which was then taking place in near-Arctic temperatures.

In his accompanying letter, Terry stated that the information provided in the dossier was ‘authentic’, and it certainly reads as such, with details including that Soviet agents were usually appropriately dressed in Western-made clothing but could sometimes be betrayed by their shirts, which tended to be made in East Germany. It could again have been a case of Terry being fed intelligence by a dubious source, but it reads much more like the raw, unvarnished material of real tradecraft.

And yet Fleming didn’t use any of it. It could be that it came too late in the publishing process for him, or was more detailed for what he had in mind. In the end, *Moonraker* only contained a brief reference to Bond memorizing ‘a long type-written

memorandum headed *Mainline: A well-established Escape Route from East to West.*'

It could also be that the material rang *too* true. Fleming was not interested in exploring the full dimension of the despair and futility of the espionage business, but was looking for a veneer of authenticity that could dilute some of the more sensational elements of his work. Terry's pages presented a bleaker vision of the intelligence world than one sees in most of Fleming's fiction, with desperate refugees making their way by foot across Europe for unseen spymasters.

In June 1956, Ian Fleming and his wife Ann visited Bonn, during which they finally met the Terrys. Fleming was now working on *From Russia, With Love*, and had created the character of Rosa Klebb, based in part on reports of one of Nicolai Khokhlov's instructors, a Major Tamara Nicolayeva Ivanova. On hearing this, Rachel Terry entertained Fleming by telling him about Emma Wolff, the hideous Soviet intelligence officer she and Antony had dined with in Vienna on the arrangement of Peter Smolka. Fascinated, Fleming rejigged Klebb, incorporating some of the physical characteristics of Wolff he had been told by Rachel.

On his return home, he wrote to Antony thanking the two of them for their hospitality, and for a copy of *Time Right Deadly*. This was a thriller written by Rachel under the pseudonym Sarah Gainham, which was due to be published the following month. Fleming promised to try to 'shovel it into the Kemsley machine', ie secure a review of the novel in the *Sunday Times* or another of the group's newspapers. He added that the first chapter looked 'very promising', and in a postscript noted that Rachel had also written him a charming letter.

A few weeks later, he wrote to Terry again, saying he needed 'a couple of addresses in Berlin' for his 'next opus', i.e. *From Russia, With Love*. These labours would be in exchange for his 'I

hope successful, efforts to get Sarah Gainham's excellent work into the *Sunday Times* and also the Group machinery'.

One would forgive the Terrys if they had been irritated by this approach. Firstly, Fleming had offered to do this in his previous letter without attaching any conditions to it. Now he was positioning help Antony gave him with his new book as payment for aiding his wife's career—and there was no consideration that she might have deserved such a review in the newspaper without it.

Fleming could also easily have written the review himself. He knew from his own experiences with Raymond Chandler how powerful an endorsement from an established writer could be for a new author on the scene, and he had reviewed books by friends and acquaintances without any apparent fear of a conflict of interest. Just eleven days before writing this letter, in fact, he had reviewed Eric Ambler's *The Night-Comers* in the *Sunday Times*, calling it an 'excellent thriller'; Ambler's publisher were using an excerpt from the review, with Fleming's name attached, in press ads by the end of the month. Even a single word he used in his letter to Terry ('excellent'), if published with his name attached, could have been a major boon to Gainham's career at this point, and he surely knew it. Perhaps he didn't genuinely believe the novel was excellent, or perhaps there was some other reason, a submerged dynamic lost in British obliqueness and politesse.

At any rate, Fleming now had three fresh requests. He wanted the address of British military intelligence headquarters in Berlin's Western sector about five years earlier, as well as 'a sensible sounding address' in the same sector 'for the head of a German Intelligence Group working for the British and Americans'. The final request was thrown in as though it were a small piece of sub-editing:

'Please correct and expand with geographical details the following sentence: 'When he had collected the day's outgoing mail from

the Military Intelligence Headquarters he made straight for the Russian sector, waited with his engine running until the British Control gate was opened to allow a taxi through, and then himself tore through the closing gate at 40 m.p.h. and skidded to a stop beside the concrete pill-box of the Russian frontier post.”

The first two items were probably fairly easy for someone of Terry’s experience to answer, but the last might have intimidated him a little. This was a much bolder request than previous ones. In effect, Fleming was asking him to fill in a piece of a Bond novel. In addition, he didn’t provide any context for the scene the excerpt would feature in, how much he wanted it expanded, or even who the character involved would be—Terry, not unreasonably, assumed it was James Bond, although in fact it was for a scene featuring Red Grant.

Fleming treated it like just another Atticus request, as he had done for his earlier question on the Werewolves, but Terry was not a novelist. It took him three days to reply. Accompanying the 3,000-word response was a casual-sounding note that surely belied the effort that had been put into compiling it; in it, Terry said the document had been a combined effort with his wife, who would gladly provide more details if required.

The document is fascinating in several ways. As with the material on escape routes, this was a dispatch from the world of real espionage. A journalist and M.I.6 operative gathered intelligence on the Berlin sectors and spy groups in the city, and his wife, who would become one of the Cold War’s finest spy novelists, refashioned the raw material. Instead of simply presenting Fleming with one possibility, they provided him with three alternatives, one of which read:

‘...from the office he made straight for the Soviet Sector, down the Charlottenburger-chausse [note: it is now renamed Strasse des 17 Juni after the ’53 riots] and turned half-left at the gilded Victory Column looming over the deserted wastes of the Tiergarten. Just

like Hitler to have thought that thing beautiful and to have moved it where it could be staring in its pinchbeck grandeur up the wide boulevard he had just come down.... As he waited for the lounging blackclad People's policeman to come up to him he saw the white caps and fluttering aprons of a group of nurses from the Charite Hospital across the road...'

This gives us an intriguing glimpse into what someone other than Fleming writing Bond at this point might have looked like. While such a thought would have been anathema while Fleming was alive, it doesn't read as strangely as one might think. It's not a pastiche, and it's in keeping with the mood of the opening Fleming had provided. It's a long way from the more fantastical side to his writing, but many of his novels and stories contain scene-setting descriptions that use precisely this kind of detailed but briskly inserted local knowledge and inside expertise. (Indeed, Fleming had contacted Terry to obtain that.) It's easy enough to imagine such a passage in *From Russia, With Love*, one of the most down-to-earth of the Bond novels.

Fleming replied two days later thanking Terry for the 'vast and splendid memorandum', adding:

'You really shouldn't have taken so much trouble. You have practically written a thriller and I was fascinated by all the gen.'

However, other than adding in a reference to the Reichskanzlerplatz he didn't use any of the material, as he hadn't with his earlier request on East-West escape routes. The fulsome thanks reads like a very British sort of polite exaggeration employed when something isn't quite right. The information might have been too detailed or unadaptable for what he had in mind for the scene, or possibly intimidating: the level of expertise employed in the passages is somewhat overwhelming. To modern eyes (at least these ones), much of the material wouldn't have seemed out of place in the novel, and could even have enhanced

it, but it might have struck Fleming very differently. He was insecure about his writing ability at the best of times, particularly as his wife and many of her literary friends were very snooty about it. But Fleming was also in the midst of writing a novel, and writers are often even more insecure then. He'd asked for a sentence to be corrected and had received excerpts from several brilliant alternate thrillers in return. He might well have been worried that some of the passages appeared better crafted than his own efforts.

In August 1959, Fleming turned once again to Terry, this time for personal advice. He wanted to buy a new car: was a convertible model of the Mercedes 220 SE available? Terry sent him the catalogue, and Fleming then flew to Germany to visit him, with Terry showing him around Hamburg and crossing the border into East Berlin. The next May, Fleming was back in the city and was met by Rachel and Antony, who now gave him one of his 'spook's tours' of the city, introducing him to a German agent working for the British in East Berlin. Terry was no longer providing text about escape routes and checkpoint controls, but an experience of the espionage world up-close.

Fleming wrote about his travels in Germany for the *Sunday Times*, who were keen to capitalize on the growing fame of their writer. One article turned into several, and before long Fleming was on an all-expenses-paid round-the-world trip. In September 1960, Fleming asked Terry for help with *Thrilling Cities*, a book that compiled these travel articles. Like other Mercury correspondents who had hosted him on his travels, Terry provided a mass of detailed information about restaurants, hotels and night clubs to visit in Hamburg, Berlin and Vienna, virtually all of which made it into the book unchanged.

Shortly after, Fleming was succeeded as Foreign Manager of the *Sunday Times* by Frank Giles. By now Mercury, judged too costly for its contributions, had been wound down. Terry continued as

a senior correspondent for the *Sunday Times* in Paris and reported from Budapest, Biafra and finally New Zealand.

Terry's influence on Fleming went much deeper than providing him with occasional background information. Dozens of letters between the two men survive, but they also talked regularly on the telephone, and met. Over the years, they became friends. Terry was Fleming's chief link with the realities of Cold War espionage in the field and those insights, along with his investigations into war criminals propped up by Soviet intelligence and Nazi treasure hidden in lakes or beer cellars, all gradually seeped into the bloodstream of Fleming's fictional universe.

One example of Terry's incremental influence is *Octopussy*, a short story published after Fleming's death. It's perhaps his most intimate piece of published writing, with the character of Major Dexter Smythe a savagely warped self-portrait of an ageing spook living on unearned wealth in the tropics. The story harked back once more to the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, and to several topics Terry had been involved in and written about: war crimes, hidden Nazi gold and dark secrets emerging from the past. In a 1966 review in *The Spectator*, Philip Larkin noted that it was easy to see Smythe's career as 'an allegory of the life of Fleming himself! The two Reichsbank gold bars that the major smuggles out of the army on his discharge from the Miscellaneous Objectives Bureau are Fleming's wartime knowledge and expertise; he emigrates to Jamaica and lives on them—selling a slice every so often through the brothers Foo (presumably his publishers), and securing everything his heart desires: Bentleys, caviare, Henry Cotton golf clubs.'

Some aspects of Smythe's career also closely echoed Antony Terry's: we learn that he volunteered for the Commandos in the war, and his fluent German had 'earned him the unenviable job of being advanced interrogator on Commando operations across the Channel', precisely the role Terry had volunteered for in the St

Nazaire raid. Smythe was decorated for his role in the war—an O.B.E. (Military) rather than Terry’s Military Cross—and then roamed Germany with a British unit tracking down fugitive Nazis, again very much as Terry had done. Although not a central focus, once again the intriguing details of Terry’s life and expertise had crept into Fleming’s work.

Perhaps the best example of this is *The Living Daylights*. In October 1961, Fleming once again wrote to Terry asking for help on geographical matters in Berlin: he wanted to check which sector the building he had set a short story was in. He added that he hoped the story would ‘arouse memories of our stay in Berlin and of the ‘friend’ we met when there’. This was a reference to Fleming’s visit to Terry the previous year, and the British agent he had introduced him to.

Four days later, Terry replied that the address Fleming had given was in the U.S. sector, and informed him that it was currently closed to civilian traffic because the road led to Checkpoint Charlie ‘and the West Berlin authorities try to discourage West Berliners from going there in case there is trouble at the border like last weekend when they tried to beat up some Russians’. He added some further incidental information Fleming might find useful.

On the surface, Terry’s input here might seem insignificant, but the resulting story was a kind of culmination of his influence on Fleming. In the years since Fleming had posted him to Germany, many of his articles about the strange and sinister ‘spy jungle’ of Berlin had crossed his boss’s desk and, as Fleming had mentioned, his recent visit to Terry had also left an impression. Now he had decided to take James Bond there.

This was far from an obvious step to take, as he usually sent Bond to much more exotic locales—007 rarely approaches the Iron Curtain. But while Fleming hadn’t made direct use of Terry’s dossier about escape routes for *Moonraker*, or his detailed material

on movements in Berlin for *From Russia, With Love*, the atmosphere of them all dominated *The Living Daylights*.

The story concerns an agent working for the British, codenamed 272, who has been ‘holed up in Novaya Zemlya since the war’, as M tells Bond in his clipped briefing for his mission:

‘Now he’s trying to get out—loaded with stuff. Atomic and rockets. And their plan for a whole new series of tests. For nineteen sixty-one. To put the heat on the West. Something to do with Berlin. Don't quite get the picture, but the FO says if it’s true it’s terrific. Makes nonsense of the Geneva Conference and all this blather about nuclear disarmament the Communist bloc is putting out. He’s got as far as East Berlin. But he’s got practically the whole of the KGB on his tail—and the East German security forces, of course. He’s holed up somewhere in East Berlin, and he got one message over to us. That he’d be coming across between six and seven p.m. on one of the next three nights—tomorrow, next day, or next day. He gave the crossing point.’

Due to a double agent, the KGB knows when and where 272 will make a run for it back into West Berlin, and have put their best sniper on the job to shoot him as he crosses. Bond has to kill the sniper before he (or, as it turns out, she) kills 272.

The story is much more downbeat and sophisticated than most of Bond’s other adventures, an examination of the low-key spy war taking place across the no man’s land between East and West. When Bond arrives at the address in Berlin, he observes the ‘waist-high weeds and half-tidied rubble walls stretching away to a big deserted crossroads lit by a central cluster of yellowish arc lamp’. Rather than being tortured by Smersh operatives or put through obstacle courses by Fu Manchu-style masterminds, Bond now has to do battle with the K.G.B. Bond the famous man of action is forced to sit in the dark like a real spy... and wait.

The plot, too, bears Terry’s imprint. Fleming’s letter makes clear that 272 is at least in part inspired by the ‘friend’ Terry

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introduced him to, a man who was either one of his journalistic sources or agents, or quite plausibly both: the roles had, from the start and with Fleming's aid, intertwined. 272's intelligence—'atomic and rockets', 'a whole new series of tests'—also recall Terry's succession of stories from the previous decade. James Bond is no longer in his usual world of casinos and yachts. He is in Terryland.

V

Out of the Shadows

TERRYLAND WAS NOT simply the world of Antony Terry: it was also the world of his wife. Rachel's acquaintance with Ian Fleming also had an impact on the Bond novels, and it too went deep, with the two influencing each other. Parts of *The Living Daylights* built on the facts of Antony's world, but the prose is often reminiscent of the descriptive passages about Berlin in the material he'd requested for *From Russia, With Love*—and the subsequent thrillers by the woman who had crafted them.

Rachel Terry would no doubt have been intrigued to meet her husband's boss in 1956, partly to see the man Antony was going to such trouble for around the clock, and for whom she had worked for in her way, but also because by then he was a successful novelist. It may be that Fleming's success had contributed to her feeling she could try her own hand at thriller-writing, despite Antony disapproving of her having a career. Their marriage ended in 1960: by then she had started her own affair. When she left Terry, he cut her off financially and she had to support herself. She did this through writing thrillers and finding work as a political journalist specialising in Central European affairs. By the late '50s, she was writing for *The Spectator*, *Encounter* and others. She

eventually also became an acclaimed and best-selling literary novelist.

She was helped at an early stage by Fleming. Although he didn't use the material she had prepared with Antony in *From Russia, With Love*, he did soon recognize her talents. He perhaps should have spotted it earlier. Two and a half years before she had gripped his attention with her tales of Emma Wolff in Vienna, he had been informed that his correspondent's wife was a force in her own right. In late 1953, Antony had interviewed Frank Kelly, a British soldier who had been released by the Soviets after seven years' imprisonment for espionage, for the *Empire News*. The paper's editor, George Grafton Green, sent Fleming a memorandum about his reporting:

'We are accustomed to getting good service from Terry in Berlin but I think he has really surpassed himself in his handling for us of the Kelly story at Hanover. It involved a good deal of very delicate manoeuvring and Terry brought his wife to help him, with the most satisfactory results. I am sure the presence of Mrs. Terry did a great deal towards establishing the sort of atmosphere in which negotiations could go on smoothly.'

Fleming forwarded this on to Antony with a handwritten note reading 'Hear Hear! & Happy Christmas to you both.'

Antony was an old-school reporter, adept at hunting down facts and marshalling them, either for a lucid summary of political developments or in a more sensational format that would grab readers' attention. But Rachel had sensitivity, empathy and another kind of insight into people, places and events.

Fleming seems to have realized this in late 1956. The Terrys were in Budapest during the Hungarian Uprising, and Fleming took the unusual step of publishing a long report by her on the situation as she had experienced it in the British Legation. It had a light touch, complete with British stiff upper lip humour, but also a vividness and attention to detail that was lacking in most foreign

correspondents' reports, including her husband's. She ended the piece on a chilling note, describing the noise of passing tanks on the city's cobbled streets:

'After they passed, shadows flitted along the street from door to door. Sometimes they got shot. One man lay on the pavement for three days. Someone put a newspaper over his face. The Russians did not bother about their dead. They never left the safety of their steel monsters.'

The report was published in *Atticus*, which rarely featured bylines or political reporting. It was introduced as being by 'Mrs Antony Terry, the wife of our correspondent', who was 'with him in the Budapest Legation until last Sunday', and was accompanied by a photograph of her captioned 'Mrs Antony Terry—alias Sarah Gainham the novelist'.

How or why this made it into *Atticus* is unclear; even presented as a kind of letter home from a correspondent's wife, it was totally at odds with the column's usual tone and content. One can imagine an editorial wrangle and Fleming insisting it go into the paper somehow or other. It was a small gesture, perhaps, but it would have reached a wide audience, and it seems to have been her first credited piece of journalism in print.

The events in Budapest were instrumental in Gainham's development as a writer. She had seen menace and violence in Vienna, but despite the tone of her *Atticus* piece this had been another experience entirely, and the terror instilled by totalitarian rule informed most of her work for the rest of her life.

It was of course probably no coincidence that she and Antony were in the British Legation in Budapest during the uprising—M.I.6 would have received their own reports from Antony. A proximity to violence seems not to have ruffled him. Just as he had unthinkingly set out into the streets of St Nazaire in 1942, in Budapest he paid little attention to his own personal safety, as the

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British journalist Peter Fryer revealed in his account of the uprising:

‘Antony Terry of the *Sunday Times*, his wife and I had crossed the ‘lines’ (in fact, of course, there were no real lines—just pockets of resistance) without realising it, into an area, five minutes away from the National Theatre, where brisk fighting was still going on. I felt not in the least brave, but Terry insisted on forging ahead, heedless of prowling tanks and stray bullets. He ventured into the Lenin körút, a centre of heavy battles, amid the bricks and the stinking corpses, with me creeping after him, trying to look small and not worth shooting. A Freedom Fighter in a steel helmet, hidden in a doorway near one of the 95 damaged cinemas, told us to get to hell out of it. ‘Fine,’ said Terry, ‘I just wanted to make sure they had bazookas. That bloke had.’ In my fear I had not even noticed.’

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BY 1956, RACHEL was starting to emerge from her husband’s shadow, and she pulled few punches in doing so. Although framed as a crime novel, *Time Right Deadly* feels more like it belongs to the espionage genre, in the same way *The Third Man* does. As it is also set in the fog of post-war Vienna, it can’t help but recall that film. The plot revolves around the murder of a British journalist, Julian Dryden, in the Russian sector of the city, and set out the stall for many of her subsequent books: thrillers containing a background depicting the harsh realities of life behind the Iron Curtain; deep knowledge of the worlds of European politics, journalism and intelligence; and beautifully written insights into human behaviour under intense pressure.

Time Right Deadly was not reviewed in the *Sunday Times*, but it gained a fair amount of momentum anyway and was short-listed for a Crime Writers’ Association Crossed Red Herring (the

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precursor of the Gold Dagger award for the year's best crime novel). The jacket flap stated that Gainham knew 'at first hand what she is writing about' on account of living in Central Europe with her foreign correspondent husband, but this turned out to be a double-edged point to advertise. Most reviewers agreed that the book's background rang true, but some simply took her expertise as an adjunct of Terry's. 'The story is as exciting and convincing as one would expect from the wife of a foreign correspondent' was the *Oxford Mail's* verdict, damning her with her own blurb.

Few seemed to notice that the novel's murder victim is a philandering British journalist with the same scansion to his name as her husband. But he would have done.

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IN THE NEXT four years four more Sarah Gainham thrillers were published, all of them remarkable. They share a claustrophobic atmosphere with the works of Graham Greene and Eric Ambler, but have their own unique stamp.

In these novels, she made extensive use of topics and settings she knew from her life with Terry, and the plots often feel like the behind-the-scenes stories of his articles—and his spying. We know from various accounts, including a couple by his own hand, that Terry worked for M.I.6 while a journalist, but the precise details of his espionage activities have yet to be declassified (and might never be). Under the guise of fiction, Gainham revealed a wealth of information about precisely what Western intelligence got up to behind the Iron Curtain, and the psychological toll it often took on its practitioners.

In the 1970s, Gainham stated that she often used real incidents as the basis for her plots, and outlined her motives for doing so:

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‘I had a special feeling for using the thriller as a vehicle for ideas, or rather anti-Russian propaganda. All the best spy thrillers whose origins are known seem to be based on reality. Certainly my own stories were: they are not really fiction at all, only written as fiction.’

A case in point is her second novel, *The Cold Dark Night*, published in January 1957. Set in Berlin during the aforementioned Four Power Conference of 1954, it is stuffed with the kind of ‘gen’ she had helped provide Fleming for *From Russia, With Love*, but of course now on entirely her own terms.

Most of the main characters are Western correspondents occupying the city, and we learn about their daily work and play: the round of diplomatic parties, nights out venturing through checkpoints, the constant calls from waiters to the telephone to report back to London, the sound-proof booths in the Press Centre. It all feels entirely authentic, as does the depiction of daily life among the ruined city for locals.

But a major theme of the book is Western intelligence’s exploitation of desperate refugees as spies in East Germany, and the mechanics of espionage traffic between the sectors. This was very much of the same stamp as the information on escape routes in 1954, which she had probably also had a hand in providing, and at the same time is part of the same world Fleming would send James Bond into for *The Living Daylights* three years later, bringing the influence full circle. The action is worlds away from Terry’s ‘tabloiditis’ fantasies of Martin Bormann running Soviet spy schools: this is the nitty-gritty of espionage in the back alleys of Cold War Berlin. In a preface to the first edition, Gainham noted that all the characters were invented but one:

“‘Horst Schill’ was a real man, and his story is true. Unfortunately, it was not possible to ask his permission to include him. He has gone where nobody is likely ever again to ask his leave for anything.’

Perhaps this was judged to be a little too close to the bone, as subsequent editions dropped it. Schill appears to have been based on Hans Bartschat, an East German soldier who defected to West Berlin only to be sent back by American intelligence for 20 dollars a trip, before finally being arrested in the Soviet Zone. The details of his and his wife's predicament match that of the novel, and Terry reported on the case in 1954, the same year as the book is set.

The protagonist of the novel, a journalist, has a one-night-stand with Schill's wife, and it may be that Gainham was exorcising some ghosts in her failing marriage. The plotline also feels like a rebuke to Terry professionally, in particular his agent-running activities. It is unlikely Bartschat was one of Terry's agents, as he had written about him in print, but we know he ran agents and, from his trip to East Berlin with Ian Fleming, that he had at least one man there. Terry sometimes dismissively referred to Germans as 'gooks', dehumanizing them, and the novel highlights the desperation of Eastern refugees' thrown to the wolves by uncaring Allied spymasters too afraid to do the dirty work themselves. 'They play at security,' Horst Schill's wife remarks at one point:

'They're safe enough. Only the outside agents are in danger and they don't count. They're 'gooks'. I think that means foreigners, or perhaps Germans. But all that rendezvous with passwords stuff... that's just for fun.'

The novel suggests that the Horst Schills of the world were all too replaceable for their handlers in the West. Most '272s' probably weren't unlucky enough to face KGB snipers on crossing back into West Berlin, but some ended up in East German prisons.

Although it isn't named in the novel, the American intelligence group in West Berlin using a naturalized German as an agent-runner was almost certainly inspired by the Gehlen organization. The novel also features a scandal involving a British official in

black marketeering after the war being blackmailed into spying by the Soviets as a result. This reads remarkably like some of the information Terry later investigated concerning Robert Maxwell, suggesting that those allegations were already in currency in the '50s.

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GAINHAM'S NEXT NOVEL, *The Mythmaker*, published in late 1957, was set in Austria shortly after the Second World War. The protagonist is a half-British, half-Hungarian agent, Captain Christian 'Kit' Quest. He is sent by British intelligence to Vienna to find Otto Berger, Hitler's devoted personal servant, who is believed to have escaped the Bunker in Berlin and hidden a cache of platinum and precious stones to be used to fund a neo-Nazi revival: the book ends with a chase through a tunnel in the Alps.

This echoed her husband's reporting on Martin Bormann and other escaped Nazis planning a revival of the Third Reich, but the novel also seems to contain a light critique of Fleming's work. The name 'Kit Quest' sounds like a pastiche of James Bond, as well as being a play on the tradition of gallant spies fighting for God and country. As with Bond in *Casino Royale*, Quest is a handsome, somewhat arrogant young agent who ruthlessly uses women for his own pleasure with minimal emotional commitment, who falls unexpectedly in love:

'In Kit's many small loves his main preoccupation had been to protect himself from involvement without losing his pleasure. A vulgar concern which was not his choice but simply the accepted attitude to love of nearly all young men of his kind, and the very worst preparation possible for the feelings that now filled him. Not only was Deli a member of his own world and therefore not to be trifled with without serious consequences, but he found with a momentary fear that only traces remained of his habitual

self-defence against emotion, he was defenceless against her simply because she was unarmed and brave. Yet he could not at once give up the essentially hostile posture which had hitherto been his real attitude to the women he had desired and who had desired him. This fear and this reservation showed in his eyes after the first flash of recognition, and in answer to them a familiar smile of ironical understanding came into Deli's eyes. Kit looked away from her, shamed that he had betrayed a coarse caution in a moment that could never return, and spoilt it for both of them. 'Let's dance,' said Deli, still with the ironical smile.'

Quest's selfish desire to 'protect himself from involvement without losing his pleasure' and reluctance to relinquish his 'real' attitude to women—an 'essentially hostile posture'—recalls that of Bond's on meeting Vesper, when he wants to 'shatter, roughly' her candid gaze with its 'touch of ironical disinterest'.

There might also have been a subtle dissection of Bond's creator beneath this. A couple of years after she wrote *The Mythmaker*, Ian Fleming had tried to seduce her on one of his visits to Berlin. By then she had been estranged from Antony and had been tempted by the offer. She thought Fleming 'highly intelligent and accomplished', as well as 'tall, good-looking, highly presentable and with the slightly piratical air given by his broken nose'. Nevertheless, she turned him down, thinking his emotional age was set at 'pre-puberty'. However, the two had first met in June 1956, around which time she would have been writing or planning this novel, and she would have had plenty of time to size him up.

Gainham was now starting to establish her reputation as a top-notch thriller-writer. Christopher Pym gave *The Mythmaker* a rave review in *The Spectator*, calling it 'ingenious, stylish, amusingly informative' and 'well-plotted', while in *The Observer* Maurice Richardson felt it a 'well-written, thoughtful and intelligent thriller'.

Her next novel was *The Stone Roses*, published in 1959. It's chiefly remembered now as a footnote in popular culture because of the British band that took its name from it, but it's a brilliant spy novel. Set in May 1948, the narrator is Toby Elyot, a British correspondent who served with the commandos and S.O.E. during the Second World War. He has now been approached by an old S.O.E. colleague, who asks him on behalf of British intelligence to find and exfiltrate a local agent working for them in Prague, using his civilian job as cover. He is initially reluctant:

'I wanted to go on being a foreign correspondent and I could think of nothing that would disqualify me so thoroughly as getting mixed up with that crazy outfit again. Whatever it calls itself now.'

However, he then realizes that his press employers won't disapprove of him carrying out such a job, because they are in on the idea. As a result, he re-evaluates:

'If that was the wheel within the other wheels I could do nothing but harm to myself but refusing. So I haggled for a bit, refusing to take pay, making a favour of it. And finally agreed on condition that I wasn't to be asked again.'

One has to wonder what Antony Terry, Ian Fleming and their masters in M.I.6 thought of Terry's wife writing thrillers in which British journalists are shown to be working under cover for intelligence. The book effectively blew Terry's cover and indeed the very existence of the BIN network, but perhaps as it was presented both as fiction and in plain sight it was dismissed: 'The wife of a foreign correspondent, just fantasies—nobody takes thrillers seriously.' Nevertheless, at least one American reviewer noted it:

'Perhaps she does the cause of Western diplomacy no favor when, after pointing out that all Communist newspaper reporters are

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spies, she attires in the same sort of cloak a British newsman, Toby Elyot.'

Elyot is an intriguing protagonist. The mechanics of his dual roles as correspondent and intelligence operative are clearly closely modelled on Terry's experiences, but his character is much closer to that of James Bond, a coolly efficient and ruthless British agent hiding a romantic streak. Although the background and prose are still reminiscent of Greene and Ambler, this is the closest Gainham came to writing something akin to Fleming at any length, and one can readily imagine aspects of it appearing in a Bond story, particularly the antagonist, Colonel Franciska Horak, a chilling young Soviet agent who wears full motorcycle leathers and passes for a man. She's a brilliant creation, and all but steals the novel from the other characters.

In the early days of her career, Gainham was seen as a dilettante. Part of this is likely down to good old-fashioned sexism. At the time, it was rare enough for women to be taken seriously as journalists, and in the thriller field Gainham was rarely considered alongside the likes of Ambler or Greene, as her male contemporaries were. In an interview in the 1970s, she said she had 'always wished I had taken a man's name for my pseudonym', and it's hard not to agree that she might have become a lot better known as a spy novelist had she done so.

Attitudes to her work gradually changed with each successive novel, and changed irrevocably in 1967 with the publication of *Night Falls On The City*. This was not only a brilliant novel but became an international best-seller, topping the *New York Times* list for months and giving her financial security for the rest of her life.

Set in Vienna at the onset of the Anschluss, it and two sequels traced the lives of a cast of characters coming face to face with life under Nazi rule. The books were a departure in that they were

not thrillers or set in the Cold War, but many of her old hallmarks were there.

In 1983, Gainham returned to the world of her earlier work one last time with *The Tiger, Life*, her final novel. Almost completely forgotten now, it deserves to be known as a classic of spy fiction. All the themes of her earlier thrillers are there, but with the freedom, assurance and maturity of her *Night Falls* trilogy.

Set, like *The Cold Dark Night*, among the British press community of Berlin in the early Cold War, the novel is a slow-burning masterpiece. No longer the basis for a flawed hero, Terry here is barely disguised as Freddie Ingram, an outwardly eminent foreign correspondent and abusive husband who is also working for British intelligence. The protagonist is Gainham herself in the guise of Rose, Freddie's wife, who is underestimated by him and most other characters but works out what's going on beneath the surface of events and forges a new life for herself from the ashes of her ruined marriage. The novel lays to rest the ghost of Terry once and for all, and her portrait of him in particular is damning.

Terry read the book, but either misunderstood or pretended to misunderstand how badly he came out of it. In a 1987 letter he mentioned that he had recently celebrated 60 years as a journalist and 40 years with the *Sunday Times* by being interviewed on the radio in New Zealand, where he then lived:

'The forty years' anniversary goes back to my being hired by Ian Fleming in 1947 to be the Vienna correspondent, after my seven years in the army. In Vienna I was actually doing two rather exciting jobs, but after what happened to poor old Peter Wright recently I was a bit disconcerted to find that my activities in this field have received an unwanted airing by someone here somehow identifying me as the non-hero character in that bestseller about espionage in post-war Berlin by my former wife Rachel, pen name Sarah Gainham. The reputation I have acquired from her description of her journalist husband is of a

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tough, fast-living, ruthless 007 (or in the words of the *Sunday Telegraph* lady reviewer, ‘a clever bully’, though in the personal sense I must admit Rachel let me off rather lightly). She turned the story round a bit to cover her tracks and made what happened in Vienna happen in Berlin but most of the characters are well drawn from life and in most cases quite identifiable.’

This letter is an admission in his own hand that he had worked for M.I.6 while working for Fleming at the *Sunday Times* during the Cold War, but it also shows just how closely Gainham cleaved to reality in her novels. Terry was right that Freddie Ingram was a ‘non-hero’, tough and ruthless, but he is a world away from 007: he’s one of the most chilling and loathsome characters in spy fiction. At one point, he insists Rose have an abortion despite it endangering her life, an event that seems to have been even more shocking in reality. A friend found her alone, ‘lying in a pool of blood’, her husband having deliberately abandoned her. This was a side of Antony Terry that didn’t make it into his obituaries.

VI

Through the Looking Glass

JUDGING BY SARAH Gainham's novels, various memoirs and his own correspondence, M.I.6 made ample use of Antony Terry's journalistic postings during the Cold War. Not all their picks proved so fruitful. A story recently appeared in the British press that shed new light on the BIN network, and its shortcomings.

In February 2018, the *Sunday Times* reported that, following the defections to Moscow of Soviet agents Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean in 1951, another diplomat came forward and confessed to the Foreign Office that he had passed secrets to the Soviet Union—and that the Foreign Office had covered this fact up. Instead of prosecuting the man, David Floyd, they had decided it was a 'youthful indiscretion' and, with the help of Malcolm Muggeridge, had found him a job as 'Communist affairs correspondent' for the *Daily Telegraph*.

The *Sunday Times* neglected to mention that Floyd had left the *Telegraph* in 1970 and become Communist affairs correspondent for its sister paper *The Times*, a fact that *The Daily Mail* pointedly did mention in its follow-up article. Most of the British press ran their own articles following up the *Sunday Times'* article, but none mentioned the story lurking just beneath the surface. Why

would the Foreign Office help an admitted Soviet agent begin a completely different career in journalism, and at the top of the heap at one of the country's best-known newspapers to boot? The answer is surely that Floyd had not simply been a diplomat, but that that had been his M.I.6 cover role, and that having considered his confession they decided—rightly or wrongly—that he was still reliable but perhaps not worth risking giving further access to secret files in an embassy. As a rare fluent Russian-speaker, the obvious path would then be to keep him on, and so BIN was charged with finding him a job as a foreign correspondent.

A couple of years later, British intelligence had its eye on another candidate for BIN, a modern languages undergraduate at Oxford University. His name was David Cornwell, but he would go on to become better known under the pseudonym John le Carré. Fluent in German, le Carré was already something of an old hand in the intelligence world by the time he arrived at Oxford, having served as an interrogator for the Intelligence Corps in Austria in 1951. In that role, he had roamed displaced persons camps looking for potential recruits for British intelligence. As his biographer Adam Sisman put it, this was no easy task, and he had to constantly ask himself questions: “Is this man who he says he is? Is he a security risk? Is he a criminal? Does he have any intelligence we need?” At this time, le Carré had to deal with Austrian officials, almost all of whom he soon realized had been Nazis.

Three years later, Cornwell was in danger of being forced to leave Oxford because Ronnie, his conman father, was struggling to pay for his college upkeep. Cornwell had been recruited by M.I.5 the previous year, although his intelligence connections went back further. Now the agency stepped in with a radical proposal for his future:

‘A new possibility had arisen, now that his MI5 handler, George Leggett, had departed for Australia, where he would undertake an

extensive debriefing of the KGB defector Vladimir Petrov. Dick Thistlethwaite, Head of Operations at MI5, was talking about 'taking him all the way through', meaning that David would masquerade as a secret Communist intellectual and become a double agent while pursuing a conventional career as a journalist, probably as a foreign correspondent. David was sent to see Denis Hamilton, then editorial director of the Kemsley Press, the newspaper group that included the Sunday Times as well as several tabloid and regional newspapers. Hamilton, a war hero known as 'the brigadier' by his staff, had strong intelligence connections, and expressed willingness in principle to employ David should he be forced to leave Oxford prematurely. Ann was indoctrinated by Thistlethwaite; as an air vice-marshal's daughter she was deemed suitable as a potential wife, and signed the Official Secrets Act.'

Le Carré spent some time seriously considering accepting this offer, although he confided to his tutor and friend Vivian Green that he would be 'committing myself to something I don't really want to do'. In the event, the matter was taken out of his hands. He was summoned to a meeting with Dick White, Percy Sillitoe's successor as head of M.I.5, who decided that placing a double agent role on such a young man would be far too much pressure.

And so le Carré did not work for Ian Fleming as a correspondent alongside Antony Terry, reporting back to British intelligence. Nevertheless, he and Terry's careers in the Cold War were often in parallel. Terry had carried out work for British intelligence in Austria just two years prior to le Carré. He had worked for M.I.6's Head of Station in Vienna, George Kennedy Young, who le Carré would later use as the model for Percy Alleline in *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* and its sequels.

In 1960, le Carré left M.I.5 and joined M.I.6, having been interviewed by a board that included Nicholas Elliott, at that point head of the London Station (and therefore Terry's ultimate boss within the agency). Le Carré and Elliott eventually became

friends, with the latter sharing a wealth of inside knowledge about the running of M.I.6, including details about his friend Kim Philby's treachery, that would no doubt have informed the background of several of his novels.

Le Carré's first posting with M.I.6 was to Bonn, where his task was 'to investigate and detect potential Nazi cells or organisations, and to recruit German sleepers who would join any such groupings in order to provide information on them... As it turned out, there was very little for him to do, because the feared Nazi revival never materialised.'

Nevertheless, le Carré once again faced the fact that many German officials had been Nazis and gone unpunished. Describing the genesis of *The Spy Who Came In From The Cold* in 2013 as part of an event celebrating the 50th anniversary of its publication, le Carré said:

'We were fifteen years after the end of the hot war, and West Germany, for all the attractive portraits that were painted of it, was an extremely disagreeable place to live in, I found. It was necessary to forget the past as a matter of doctrine, and the West German government and the assistants, the administration, were peppered with unredeemed Nazis, as indeed they were in east Germany... So it was for a young, and I suppose you could almost say idealistic diplomat, living and operating from our embassy in Bonn, it was sometimes a very hard ticket to swallow, if you swallow a ticket.'

From 1954 to 1963, Terry was also based in Bonn, where he was reporting on escaped Nazi war criminals and the threat of Nazis coming to power again in the new Germany. Could le Carré, working on 'potential Nazi cells or organizations', have been one of his sources? In 1994, French journalists Roger Faligot and Rémi Kauffer published a book on Cold War espionage that had a chapter on le Carré's intelligence career. In it, they quoted his 'friend' Antony Terry:

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‘John was constantly ruminating on some new scene. We often took the little ferry together that he described in *A Small Town in Germany*.’

Le Carré has said in interviews that he suspects Kim Philby blew his cover as an M.I.6 officer to Moscow along with countless others, but according to his biographer Adam Sisman Terry was partially responsible for blowing le Carré’s *literary* cover, revealing the name behind the alias:

‘Perhaps it was inevitable that the press would uncover the real John le Carré sooner or later, especially as David had not concealed his identity from the *Observer*’s Bonn correspondent Neal Ascherson, and perhaps not from other members of the local press corps either. Early in the new year 1964 David was at his desk at the Hamburg Consulate when he received a telephone call from Nicholas Tomalin of the *Sunday Times*, who had been tipped off by the paper’s Bonn correspondent, Anthony Terry. David felt forced into a half-truth: he readily admitted to being John le Carré, but protested that he was no spy... The reason for keeping his name hidden was ‘the usual Civil Service one’, he told Tomalin. *The Sunday Times* printed an account of the telephone conversation in its ‘Atticus’ column, accompanied by a recent passport photograph of the author.’

Terry’s surviving cache of published letters gives us one further link between the two men. In March 1986, Terry’s friend and frequent source Tony Divall wrote to him mentioning ‘Cornwell/Le Car’ and ‘his odd letter of last November’. Whether this had been to Terry or Divall is not clear, but the mention of it means both he and Terry knew about the contact so it seems likely this would have been in connection with an area they both knew about. ‘Espionage’ is the obvious answer to that, but one related possibility is that le Carré was already conducting tentative research for *The Night Manager*. Divall was heavily involved with arms-dealing, and was one of Terry’s most significant sources for

his reporting on the topic. Le Carré might then have reached out to Terry to ask him if he knew anyone he could speak to, and Terry then put him in touch with Divall. If so, le Carré either didn't know Terry had blown his literary 'cover' years earlier, or hadn't been bothered by it.

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NOVELISTS ARE SCAVENGERS by nature, and le Carré's brush with the BIN network was the impetus for at least two of his characters, both in *The Honourable Schoolboy*, published in 1977: two characters are journalists who also work for 'the Circus', his fictional stand-in for M.I.6. The character of Jerry Westerby shared a similarity with David Astor in that he is the young heir of a newspaper baron, while Bill Crow was inspired by Dickie Hughes, the *Sunday Times*' correspondent in Australia. Crow's role has a slight similarity to the proposal for recruiting le Carré as an intellectual left-winger into Mercury, in that he writes an article that appears to criticise the Circus in order to help it. Had le Carré become a foreign correspondent in the vein his handlers envisaged, it's the kind of piece he might have written, too.

Le Carré was not the first to immortalize Dickie Hughes as a character in spy fiction: a key part of the Mercury network, Ian Fleming had used him as the model for Dicko Henderson in *You Only Live Twice*. Le Carré and Fleming were at two opposite poles of British spy fiction in the Cold War, but they were often drawn to the same topics, even if their treatment of them was different. One example of this can be found in le Carré's fourth novel, *The Looking Glass War*, published in 1965. Following the enormous international success of *The Spy Who Came In From The Cold*, the novel centres around a British spy agency, 'The Department', a fictionalised version of the Special Operations Executive had it managed to survive beyond the Second World

War, which deludedly manoeuvres itself into an operation it is ill-equipped to carry out.

The plot was heavily influenced by le Carré's own experiences in the intelligence world: the realities of spying as he had known them 'on the ground', he later wrote, 'had been far removed from the fiendishly clever conspiracy that had entrapped my hero and heroine in *The Spy*'. With the follow-up, he aimed to show 'the muddle and futility' of the espionage world he had experienced by describing a British intelligence agency 'that is really not very good at all; that is eking out its wartime glory; that is feeding itself on Little England fantasies; is isolated, directionless, over-protected and destined ultimately to destroy itself'.

This, of course, was radically different from Fleming's much more romanticised portrayal of British intelligence work. Bond occasionally questions the justness of his orders, but there is never much doubt that M.I.6 is playing with a straight bat and that Bond is an extremely competent operative on the side of the angels.

Le Carré intended *The Looking Glass War* as a rebuke: to his own success, and to what he felt was his own mythologising of the intelligence world in his previous book. But it may be that the novel is also a kind of rebuke to journalists, Antony Terry among them, and their willingness to turn a blind eye to fabrications when it suited their purposes.

The Looking Glass War takes place in the shadow of the Bay of Pigs disaster and the Cuban missile crisis. It opens with a scene at an airfield in Finland that is perhaps the best piece of prose le Carré has yet written. The plot concerns intelligence reports of a Soviet missile base near Rostock—the very topic Terry had written so much about in the early '50s and which had fed into *Moonraker*. But while Ian Fleming had expanded on Terry's claims to make them even more fantastical, *The Looking Glass War* does the reverse: the reports about the base turn out to be non-existent, fabrications fed them by a dodgy source. The

Department officer who discovers this finding buried in the files decides to ignore it and proceed with the operation to locate the base anyway, with disastrous results. The has-been spooks want another chance to relive their wartime glory days, even if it's only imagined, and even if they know this themselves in their hearts:

“You’re thinking of Peenemünde, aren’t you?” he continued.
 ‘You want it to be like Peenemünde.’”

The details of the plot seem too close to those newspaper stories of the late '40s and '50s to be a coincidence, but it could be that le Carré hadn't read press articles about it at the time but rather had had access to the original intelligence reports about these bases, the filtered content of which had then been passed on to journalists. But there is a hint that a press that was willing to be used by the intelligence agencies was one of his targets. Early in the novel *Leclerc*, the head of The Department, asks a ministerial under-secretary for permission for an overflight in the area around the supposed base. This is turned down and he is asked to suggest other proposals:

“There’s one alternative, I suppose, which would scarcely touch on my Department. It’s more a matter for yourself and the Foreign Office.’

‘Oh?’

‘Drop a hint to the London newspapers. Stimulate publicity. Print the photographs.’

‘And?’

‘Watch them. Watch the East German and Soviet diplomacy, watch their communications. Throw a stone into their nest and see what comes out.’”

This proposal is also rejected, but in the real world more than a hint had been dropped to Antony Terry, and perhaps for similar reasons, ie to gauge the Soviets' response to the stories by 'letting

them know we know'. It would certainly have been a cheaper option than overflights.

In a prefatory note to the novel, le Carré claimed that none of the characters or institutions in it existed in reality. This was no doubt the case, but the ideas behind them were all too real. The book was so downbeat that it was a commercial and critical failure in comparison to its predecessor. The novel was also greeted with outright hostility by the intelligence community.

In an article for *The Guardian* in 1989, le Carré referred to the novel's rejection by critics and the public, adding that 'this time the spies were cross':

'And since the British secret services controlled large sections of the press, just as they may do today, for all I know, they made their fury felt'.

In a circumlocutory way, he seems to have been suggesting that the intelligence agencies could have had a hand in the book receiving poor reviews. If so that seems unlikely, but it's perhaps not such a surprising view for him to have held: his invitation into Mercury as an undergraduate meant that he knew M.I.6 ran a wide-ranging network within Fleet Street.

VII

Rise of the New Nazis

IN THE WINTER of 1964, John le Carré and his wife moved to Vienna. While there, he consulted the Nazi-hunter Simon Wiesenthal for material for a novel. Like Fleming and Terry before him, he too was interested in the rise from the rubble of war criminals whose pasts had been given a polish.

This was research for *A Small Town In Germany*, published in 1968. Set in Bonn, it concerns Klaus Karfeld, an extremist politician gaining popularity in West Germany. Wiesenthal had helped le Carré build up a plausible backstory for the character, which is crucial to the plot: under an alias in the war, Karfeld was responsible for the gassing of 31 Jews as part of a Nazi medical programme.

As well as the themes of hidden pasts and resurgent Nazi leaders, the novel also mentions British war crimes investigations units in Germany and the post-war hunt for Nazi scientists to recruit for the West. It also features a minor character, Sam Allerton, an arrogant but influential British correspondent with ‘dead yellow eyes’ who ‘represents a lot of newspapers’ in Bonn. Allerton doesn’t work for British intelligence, but appears to have some knowledge of their activities and personnel. He remembers the

protagonist, M.I.6 officer Turner, from two previous spy scandals, in Belgrade and Warsaw, which the press pack had been required to hush up ‘or the Ambassador wasn’t going to give us any more port’. Once again, le Carré seems to have been getting in a dig that the supposedly independent British press could be manipulated into towing the government line.

Le Carré might have been the first spy novelist to seek out Simon Wiesenthal, but he wouldn’t be the last. Terry was still on the trail of former Nazis, and was digging up new intelligence on their activities. In March 1963, he filed a report that presented dramatic new dimensions to his old stories from a decade or so previously on German missile scientists:

‘In Egypt’s closely guarded missile center Project 333, near Cairo, nearly 400 German scientists and technicians, most of them from the wartime German V-2 missile center at Peenemunde, are working on the first Egyptian-made rocket missile with warheads containing radioactive materials designed for President Gamal Abdel Nasser.

Details of this work have been known to Bonn authorities for some time and have caused some concern here.

Israeli anxiety over the military effects of Egyptian rocket development on the power balance in the Mideast at a time when talks on federation of Egypt, Syria and Iraq are getting underway has led to the recent “underground war” by Israel agents in West Germany.

Their aim has been to buy off or scare off German experts engaged on this rocket work.

Though their efforts have been widespread and, according to some German sources, as efficiently organized as Eichmann kidnapping commandos, they have met with only moderate success.

One of the West Germans who vanished mysteriously last September is Heinz Krug, a former insurance clerk who ran a firm with headquarters in Munich, whose job was to purchase

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materials and technical equipment in Europe for Egypt's missile research and construction.

After the war and before joining the Egyptians, Krug was a member of the German research physics under West Germany's best-known missile expert, Prof. Eugen Saenger, who was among the first to advise Nasser on his rocket program.'

Terry reported that the core of this German scientific colony in Egypt were unrepentant Nazis, many of whom wanted 'to continue the fight against the Jews'. Heading the German atomic missile research team in Cairo, he said, was

'Prof. Wolfgang Pilz, another Saenger man who during the last war was on Wernher von Braun's staff in Peenemunde research station designing the V-1 flying bombs.'

Terry was far from the only journalist to write about this, but he explored the topic in much more detail than most, no doubt aided by his having studied it in-depth since the early '50s and cultivated sources as a result. His article caused enough alarm to be cited in full in the U.S Congress's House of Representatives.

He continued to investigate ex-Nazis' activities until his death, but in 1967 he wrote an article on the theme that in many ways defined his career. On 23 July, the *Sunday Times* ran a story in which he had interviewed Simon Wiesenthal at length. In the article, Terry gave credence to Wiesenthal's claim that Martin Bormann had escaped to south America with the help of a secret organization of former S.S. members known as ODESSA. The article caused a sensation, and was to have a ripple effect on the British thriller lasting several decades.

Terry's description of ODESSA in the article could have come straight from a Fleming novel, with all the ingredients for a real-life version of S.P.E.C.T.R.E.:

'It still has branches in West Germany, the Middle East and South America; its contacts inside the West German ministries, the

police and security services of a dozen countries provide wanted top Nazis with an early warning system of attempts to arrest and extradite them.

With its network of “cells” all over the world, ODESSA has become a welfare fund to help Nazis who get caught, and to support their families while they are in jail...’

This was fantastic copy, bordering on the incredible. Terry even purported to know that ‘ODESSA’s leaders’ believed Bormann, ‘now 67’, was unlikely to be caught. It’s hard to see how he could possibly have known such a thing unless he had managed to earn the confidence of the group’s leaders and decided not to name any of them, which would have made for a significantly bigger scoop.

As with some of his previous reporting, his claims were next-to-impossible to disprove at the time. However, in 2009 British historian Guy Walters was able to investigate the history of ODESSA in declassified intelligence files. He concluded that there was no ‘vast and sinister network of former Nazis’ of that name; while there had been many small groups that had tried to assist Nazis in escaping justice after the war on an ad hoc basis, no ‘globalized tentacled monster’ of the kind Terry had described existed. Walters also pointed out that ODESSA’s acronym was supposed to derive from ‘Organisation der ehemaligen SS-Angehörigen’, meaning ‘The Organization of Former S.S. Members’, and that this was a supremely unlikely name for a ‘highly secret society of cunning former S.S. men’ to use.

Walters concluded that Simon Wiesenthal had been fed bogus information about ODESSA by Wilhelm Höttl, a former counter-intelligence chief in the Sicherheitsdienst (SD) who had managed to escape prosecution for war crimes by acting as a witness against his former colleagues at Nuremberg. U.S. intelligence had used Höttl to run agent networks, but sacked him in 1949 as they felt he was untrustworthy. A 1950 report to a U.S. counter-intelligence unit in Austria claimed that Höttl had since been

recruited by Wiesenthal as a source on Nazi escape organizations, but that the content of the intelligence he was providing was ‘grossly exaggerated’.

Walters concluded that Wiesenthal had in turn duped Antony Terry with Höttl’s information:

‘If Terry’s editor had known that the ultimate source of much of the piece was a duplicitous former SD man, then he might have put the article on the spike. Or probably not. After all, it was a great story.’

The following year, Terry reported another sensation: he had found Martin Bormann alive. Well, nearly: he had found a former S.S. corporal named Erich Wiedwald who insisted he knew how Bormann had escaped from Berlin and that he was now living in Brazil, ‘a mile inland from the west bank of the Parana river’ on an estate named Kolonie Waldber 555. Terry had spent 11 days interviewing Wiedwald and insisted that his story, while unproven, constituted ‘the most detailed, consistent and verifiably accurate account of Martin Bormann’s post-war existence that has so far been offered’. Once again, none of it was possible to disprove at the time, and even after Bormann’s remains were discovered the stories kept appearing.

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TERRY HAD NOT single-handedly created the fascination with Bormann, though with the imprimatur of the *Sunday Times* he had given such stories much more legitimacy than they deserved. The same could be said of his reporting into Odessa, which captured the imagination of Frederick Forsyth, who was looking for a follow-up to his bestselling debut *The Day of The Jackal*.

The Odessa File was nearly as big a hit as its predecessor, and it was triggered by Forsyth reading Terry’s *Sunday Times* article on

it. Forsyth had been a journalist himself, working for Reuters and the B.B.C, and like Terry had reported from Biafra. In his 2015 memoir *The Outsider*, he admitted that he had also helped out M.I.6 with several assignments, using his status as a correspondent as a cover. Although he didn't name it, Frederick Forsyth, too, was part of the BIN network.

The novel's protagonist is Peter Miller, a German reporter who gets wind of a powerful secret organisation helping former Nazis. The first half of Miller's investigation into ODESSA closely follows Forsyth's own research, including a visit to Simon Wiesenthal and another to Antony Terry himself in Bonn. In the novel, the 'doyen of the British foreign correspondents' corps' is named Anthony Cadbury, a pun on the fact that Terry and Cadbury are both British brands of chocolate. The shrewd-eyed Cadbury shows Miller his reports of Nazi war crime tribunals he had covered, just as Terry did Forsyth in real life.

'Fortunately, Cadbury was a methodical man and had kept every one of his despatches from the end of the war onwards. His study was lined with box-files along two walls. Besides these, there were two grey filing cabinets in one corner.

'I run the office out of my home,' he told Miller as they entered the study. 'This is my own filing system, and I'm about the only one who understands it. Let me show you.'

Forsyth also pulled in another story Terry had reported on: the German missile scientists helping Nasser in Egypt. As in Terry's 1963 article on the subject, they plan to 'destroy the Jews once and for all', now as part of ODESSA, working out of a rocket factory north of Cairo known as 'Factory 333'.

'To open a factory is one thing; to design and build rockets is another. Long since, the senior supporters of Nasser, mostly with pro-Nazi backgrounds stretching back to the Second World War, had been in close contact with the Odessa representatives in

Egypt. From these came the answer to the Egyptians' main problem—the problem of acquiring the scientists necessary to make the rockets.

Neither Russia, America, Britain nor France would supply a single man to help. But the Odessa pointed out that the kind of rockets Nasser needed were remarkably similar in size and range to the V.2 rockets that Werner von Braun and his team had once built at Peenemunde to pulverise London. And many of his former team were still available....

The Odessa appointed a chief recruiting officer in Germany, and he in turn employed as his leg-man a former SS-sergeant, Heinz Krug. Together they scoured Germany looking for men prepared to go to Egypt and build Nasser's rockets for him.

With the salaries they could offer they were not short of choice recruits. Notable among them were Professor Wolfgang Pilz, who had been repatriated from post-war Germany by the French and had later become the father of the French Véronique rocket, itself the foundation of De Gaulle's aerospace programme. Professor Pilz left for Egypt in early 1962. Another was Dr Heinz Kleinwachter; Dr Eugen Saenger and his wife Irene, both formerly on the von Braun V.2 team also went along, as did Doctors Josef Eisig and Kirmayer, all experts in propulsion fuels and techniques.'

Terry would not have been the only source for all of this information: some of these details had been reported by other journalists and Forsyth doubtless dug up more in own research, either by consulting Terry directly as he had done for ODESSA, or through other sources he cultivated within intelligence and the arms industry (he, too, looks to have been involved with Terrys's friend Tony Divall). Nevertheless, with the novel's information about ODESSA supplemented by a mass of background material on the history of German missile scientists, Terry's influence had once again seeped into a thriller-writer's fictional world.

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As he had done in *The Day of the Jackal*, Forsyth was pushing a technique Ian Fleming had favoured into new territory. This was to treat sensational background material as though reporting it in a newspaper. By using the language of journalism to relay authentic or authentic-sounding information, the excitement of a thriller became more intense, because one had the eerie impression one was reading about real events. This technique, known as 'faction', would dominate British thrillers of the latter part of the Cold War, pioneered by Forsyth. A large number of these thrillers featured surviving Nazi war criminals, quite frequently Martin Bormann. That all kicked off with *The Odessa File* in 1972.

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ANTHONY CADBURY WAS a well-informed source for Peter Miller, but Forsyth carefully avoided any suggestion that the character was *currently* involved in intelligence work. Perhaps he needn't have been so coy: after all, Sarah Gainham had openly had a protagonist playing such a role in *The Stone Roses* over 15 years earlier.

Not too long after that novel appeared, the Soviets learned about BIN. In the summer of 1959, M.I.6 officer and double agent George Blake returned from Berlin to take up a position at the London Station, where he worked with the frequent traveller programme, and also learned all about the wider work of the department. His designation was BIN 01/A.

As of that date, then, Soviet intelligence almost certainly knew the names of everyone who had been involved in the network before Blake joined it and while he was there. Confirming this, in 1968, the Soviets exposed the existence of the network in their press, using Blake's knowledge of it and possibly also information provided by Kim Philby, who had also been involved in it shortly before his defection: David Astor at *The Observer* had given him

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a job on the paper, reporting to M.I.6. All the British journalists and editors named by the Soviets denied any involvement, and the scandal soon died down and was forgotten. But some of these secrets had been there all along, hidden between the lines of spy novels.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

Antony Terry worked for a newspaper group that syndicated its content in several countries, so many of his articles appeared in multiple publications, often with different headlines and slight variations in text. These sometimes appeared weeks or occasionally months apart; I've generally tried to cite the earliest examples I could find.

I. The London Station

'BIN': 'Intelligence Service BBC, usw....', *Horizont*, March 1969, p20;
 'a flurry of scornful denials': A typical example came from one of the accused journalists, the *Sunday Times*' Washington correspondent Henry Brandon: 'The Soviet press has always found it difficult to understand that the British press or British foreign correspondents work independently of their Government. It simply assumes that what applies to Soviet foreign correspondents must also be true of British foreign correspondents.' 'Russia Accuses Fleet Street' by Kyril Tidmarsh, *The Times*, 21 December 1968. For more, listen to *MI6 and the Media*, Document, Radio 4, presented by Jeremy Duns, broadcast 4 March 2013, available from: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01r0hsx>

'the London Station': see *The Perfect English Spy* by Tom Bower (Mandarin, 1996 edition), p159; *No Other Choice* by George Blake (Jonathan Cape, 1990), pp184-185; *John le Carré: The Biography* by Adam Sisman (Bloomsbury, 2015), p210. An excellent summary of existing evidence for the network can be found in 'Russia Accuses Fleet Street:

Journalists and MI6 during the Cold War’ by Stephen Dorril, *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, vol. 20 no. 2, April 2015, pp204-227.

‘Z-1’: ‘Intelligence Service BBC, usw....’, *Horizont*, March 1969, p21.

‘the Z Organisation, a network of British businessmen’: *MI6: The History of the Secret Intelligence Service 1909-1949* by Keith Jeffery (Bloomsbury, 2010), p379.

‘Finally, it developed and controlled a network’: *The Perfect English Spy*, p159.

‘If large numbers of British journalists were also on M.I.6’s payroll’: *Britain’s Secret Propaganda War* by Paul Lashmar and James Oliver (Sutton Pub, 1999), p75.

‘expressly forbidden from taking part in the field’: *Ian Fleming* by Andrew Lycett (Phoenix, 1996), pp122 and 139.

‘telling the Germans that all their U-boats leak’: *ibid.*, p133.

‘the latter occasion had opened connections to the espionage world’: *ibid.*, pp96-98.

‘likely been facilitated through his friendship with Fanny Vanden Heuvel’: *ibid.*, p169.

‘over 20 British national and provincial newspapers and around 600 papers overseas’: *British Newspapers and Their Controllers* by Viscount Camrose (Cassell & Co, 1947), p69; *British Propaganda and News Media in the Cold War* by John Jenks (Edinburgh University Press, 2006), p21.

‘As foreign manager of the *Sunday Times* and Kemsley Newspapers’: Lycett, p212.

‘On his office wall at Gray’s Inn Road’: ‘My Secret Life At The *Sunday Times*’ by Mark Edmonds, *Sunday Times*, 14 October 2012.

‘Visited in the evening by M.I.6 character’: January 12 1950 entry, *Like It Was: A Selection from the Diaries of Malcolm Muggeridge*, edited by John Bright-Holmes (Collins, 1981), p371.

II. Mercury Man

‘one of the largest rings of intelligence officers’: ‘Good spies like to be in the news’ by Phillip Knightley, *The Sunday Times*, 20 December 1998.

‘a cocktail of duplicitous charm and amorality’: *I Spy* by Geoffrey Elliott (Little, Brown & Co, 1998), p22.

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‘the *Times* noted only two of his four marriages’: Obituary of Terry, *The Times*, 3 October 1992.

‘prodigious memory and relentless attention to detail’: ‘Veteran reporter Terry dies at 79; Antony Terry’ by Paul Eddy, *Sunday Times*, 4 October 1992.

‘giant’: Obituary of Antony Terry by Cal McCrystal, *The Independent*, 2 October 1992.

‘a one-man listening post, a fastidious checker of facts: *ibid.*

‘Born in London in 1913’: Obituary of Terry, *The Times*.

‘writing articles for the *Sunday Dispatch* from the age of 14’: *Berlin to Bond and Beyond* by Judith Lenart (Athena Press, 2007), p14.

‘virulently opposed to the idea of having children’: *ibid.*, p49.

‘Griffiths remarried, becoming Julia Greenwood’: ‘Julia Eileen Courtney Greenwood’, Contemporary Authors Online, Gale, 2001, Biography in Context; and various marriage certificates.

‘George Orwell favourably reviewed’: Review of *A Foolish Wind* by George Orwell, *Manchester Evening News*, 7 November 1946.

‘Anton Schroder’: Appendix I, *Berlin to Bond and Beyond*.

‘very effective and valued interrogator’: see *The London Cage: The Secret History of Britain's World War II Interrogation Centre* by Helen Fry (Yale University Press, 2017), p39 and the other references to him peppered throughout the book.

‘hot’ intelligence’: *The London Cage*, p40.

‘at great personal risk, armed only with a revolver’: Military Cross Citation for Antony Terry, January 1946, British National Archives, WO 373/100/523.

‘Major Terry and his men drew German fire’: Obituary of Terry, *The Times*.

‘a radio set built from components’: *I Spy*, p127.

‘hidden inside a gramophone’: *ibid.*

‘the shit with the glasses’: Cited in *Berlin to Bond and Beyond*, p27. I haven’t been able to trace the programme in question.

‘visiting Dachau’: *The London Cage*, pp173–181.

‘Fleming had drafted a memo’: ‘Proposal for Naval Intelligence Commando Unit’, Ian Fleming, 20 March 1942, British National Archives, ADM 223/500

‘either a bachelor or a solidly married man’: *The Kemsley Manual of Journalism* (Cassell & Co, 1950), p244.

- ‘one of his girlfriends at the time’: *Berlin to Bond and Beyond*, p45.
- ‘arranged the cover’: Lycett, p169.
- ‘he had had a tough time, but he had held up well’: *I Spy*, p210.
- ‘a highly trusted and capable freelancer’: *Berlin to Bond and Beyond*, p52.
- ‘enjoyed the right of direct communication with the Intelligence Directorate in London’: *The Tiger, Life* by Sarah Gainham, 1983, pp173-174.
- ‘It was nothing to see a Russian soldier raise the stock of his machine pistol’: ‘Smolka “The Spy”’: a letter from Vienna’ by Sarah Gainham, *Encounter*, December 1984, pp 78-79.
- ‘an uncouth bull of a man with a decidedly shady air’: ‘My Spy’ by Peter Foges, *Lapham’s Quarterly*, 14 January 2016. Available from: <https://www.laphamsquarterly.org/roundtable/my-spy>
- ‘codenamed ABO’: *The Mitrokhin Archive: The KGB in Europe and the West* by Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin (Penguin, 2000), p84.
- ‘Picture Post wanted an article’: ‘Smolka “The Spy”’, pp 78-79.
- ‘This was Graham Greene’: *British Cinema and the Cold War* by Tony Shaw (I.B. Taurus, 2001), p28.
- ‘According to Smolka’s godson’: ‘My Spy’ by Peter Foges.
- ‘I shall never mind being beaten on spot news’: Letter from Ian Fleming to Antony Terry, 4 October 1949, *Yours Ever, Ian Fleming*, edited by Judith Lenart (Printhouse Nelson, 1994), pp10-11.
- ‘particularly well-informed, especially regarding Russian manoeuvres in Germany’: Letter from Ian Fleming to Antony Terry, 20 October 1949. *Yours Ever*, pp11-12.

III. *Our Man in Germany*

- ‘tabloiditis’: Letter from Antony Terry to unnamed correspondent, 19 January 1990, *Berlin to Bond and Beyond*, p167.
- ‘a trail of murder and rioting wherever he goes’: ‘Herr Bormann—What Next’ by Antony Terry, *The Singapore Free Press*, 14 February 1952.
- ‘Martin Borman, under his new name, “Borner,”’: ‘Bormann Reported in Russia’ by Anton (sic) Terry, *The Marion Star*, Ohio, 13 October 1952.
- ‘the new Nazi Fuhrer of Germany’: ‘New Nazis Will Eye Berlin Trial Anxiously’ by Anthony (sic) Terry, *The Singapore Free Press*, 29 July 1952.
- ‘Fritz Roessler, alias Franz Richter’: ‘Reds Support Families of Jailed Nazis, NANA-Kemnews, *The Times* (Shreveport, Louisiana), 13 April 1952.

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‘A British Press correspondent in Germany, named Antony TERRY’: Letter from Sir Percy Sillitoe, M.I.5., to Major General J.A. Brink, Commissioner of South African Police, 31 March 1952. British National Archives, KV 2/3033, p15.

‘American intelligence officials in Berlin arrested Gero Von Galera’: ‘U.S. Agents Seize Baron’, Reuters, *The Salt Lake Tribune*, 22 August 1952.

‘amateur spy’: ‘The Spy Tangle of Berlin’ by Antony Terry, *The Straits Times*, Singapore, 12 December 1957.

‘Terry would likely also have been on their distribution list’: see *British Propaganda and News Media in the Cold War* by Jenks, p85.

‘Divall had been in the Royal Marines’: *M.I.6.: Inside the Covert World of Her Majesty's Secret Intelligence Service* by Stephen Dorril (Touchstone, 2000), p296.

‘developed a talent for running agents’: *ibid.*

‘JUNK’: *ibid.* Divall was evidently the inspiration for the character of Charles Henry Duggan in Anthony Horowitz’s 2015 Bond novel *Trigger Mortis*.

‘According to an article on the ‘Goldfinger’-style operation’: ‘A Spy Tale With A Real Goldfinger’ by Antony Terry, *The Times* (Shreveport, Louisiana), 10 March 1968.

‘Can’t see a man of his type and mentality doing himself in’: Transcript of call between Divall and Terry, 6 November 1991, *Berlin to Bond and Beyond*, pp137-138.

‘With Jewish people it’s all one firm’: *ibid.*

‘Following our conversation I have had some talks’: letter from Terry to unnamed correspondent, 7 November 1991, *Berlin To Bond and Beyond*, p140.

‘The other suggestion I have come across’: *ibid.*

‘nothing more nor less than a bloody KGB agent’: *ibid.*, p138.

‘Terry tracked down former concentration camp officials’: See *Flames In The Field* by Rita Kramer (Michael Joseph, 1995), pp182-183.

‘Anglo-American intelligence sources’: ‘Red A-Bomb Rocket Bases In Europe’, *The Singapore Free Press*, 26 September 1949.

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'reliable sources in the East German government': 'Red-Controlled V-2 Base Threatens British Zone' by Antony Terry, *The Evening Review*, Ohio, 29 October 1952.

'secret, atom proof island fortress in the Baltic': 'Britain, Red Target', *The Marion Star*, Ohio, 27 February 1953.

'Using German rocket experts sent from Russia': *ibid.*

'British intelligence in Germany, working on agents' reports': 'Reds' V-Bombs Ready to Sweep All of Europe' by Antony Terry, *The Boston Sunday Globe*, 31 May 1953.

'This is what eye witnesses have told of the Soviet scheme': *ibid.*

'fantastic plan': *ibid.*

'building a superhelicopter of his own design': 'German Scientists Keep Busy In Exile, Awaiting Comeback of Fatherland', Antony Terry, *Syracuse Herald-American*, 28 February 1954.

'Many were contradictory': See, for instance, 'Airfield and Seaplane Base of Bug, Isle of Ruegen', 29 March 1950, C.I.A., Document Number (FOIA) /ESDN (CREST): CIA-RDP82-00457R004700530001-8; and the numerous follow-ups to it.

'You must know thrilling things before you can write about them': *How To Write A Thriller* by Ian Fleming, *Show*, August 1962.

'For *Casino Royale*, he sought out background information': *The pearl of days: an intimate memoir of the Sunday Times, 1822-1972* by Harold Hobson and others (Hamish Hamilton, 1972), p260.

'Dear Tony, Many thanks for the V-2 book': Ian Fleming to Antony Terry, 1 September 1953, *Yours Ever*.

'widespread plot': 'Germans Uncover Widespread Plot To Revive Nazi Werewolf Gangs', *Deseret News*, October 30 1952.

'The V-weapon men wear': 'Reds' V-Bombs Ready to Sweep All of Europe' by Antony Terry, *The Boston Sunday Globe*, 31 May 1953.

IV. Terryland

'In February 1954, Terry replied to a request': Letter from Antony Terry to Ian Fleming, 2 February 1954, *Yours Ever*, p50.

'In June 1956, Ian Fleming and his wife Ann visited Bonn': Lycett, pp290-1.

'shovel it into the Kemsley machine': Letter from Ian Fleming to Antony Terry, 20 June 1956, *Yours Ever*.

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‘a couple of addresses in Berlin’: Letter from Ian Fleming to Antony Terry, 12 July 1956, *Yours Ever*.

‘next opus: ibid.

‘I hope successful, efforts to get Sarah Gainham’s excellent work into the *Sunday Times* and also the Group machinery’: ibid.

‘excellent thriller’: ‘Forever Ambler’ by Ian Fleming, *The Sunday Times*, 1 July 1956. Lycett suggests this review was part of Fleming’s attempts to ingratiate himself with Ambler, who he often had lunch with, and who introduced him to his literary agent, Peter Janson-Smith (p278). Supporting this, Fleming called *The Night-Comers* ‘better than the last two but still not quite the good old stuff we remember’ in a letter to Raymond Chandler, while the review was much more enthusiastic, hailing it as a return to form and concluding ‘it is very good to have this fine writer back with us again’. His letters show he was quite often more generous in reviews than in private. Fleming to Chandler, 22 June 1956, printed in *The Man with the Golden Typewriter*, edited by Fergus Fleming (Bloomsbury, 2015), p230.

‘Ambler’s publisher were using an excerpt’: Heinemann advertisement, *The Guardian*, 13 July 1956, p6.

Letter from Ian Fleming to Antony Terry, 12 July 1956, *Yours Ever*.

‘Accompanying the 3,000-word document’: Letter from Antony Terry to Ian Fleming, 15 July 1956, *Yours Ever*.

‘...from the office he made straight for the Soviet Sector’: Letter from Antony Terry to Ian Fleming, 15 July 1956, *Yours Ever*.

‘vast and splendid memorandum’: Letter from Ian Fleming to Antony Terry, 17 July 1956, *Yours Ever*.

‘You really shouldn’t have taken so much trouble’: ibid.

‘he wanted to buy a new car’: Letter from Ian Fleming to Antony Terry, 18 August 1959, *Yours Ever*.

‘Terry showing him around Hamburg: Lycett, p354.

‘spook’s tours’: ibid., p371.

‘In September 1960, Fleming asked Terry for help’: Letter from Ian Fleming to Antony Terry, 9 September 1960, *Yours Ever*.

‘an allegory of the life of Fleming himself!’: ‘Bond’s Last Case’ by Philip Larkin, *The Spectator*, 8 July 1966.

‘arouse memories of our stay in Berlin and of the ‘friend’ we met when there’: Letter from Ian Fleming to Antony Terry, 31 October 1961, *Yours Ever*.

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‘and the West Berlin authorities try to discourage West Berliners from going there’: Antony Terry to Ian Fleming, 4 November 1961, *ibid.*

V. Out of the Shadows

‘We are accustomed to getting good service from Terry in Berlin’:

Memorandum from G. Grafton Green to Ian Fleming, 22 December 1953, auction catalogue, IAA International Autograph Auctions.

‘After they passed, shadows flitted along the street’: Atticus, *The Sunday Times*, 18 November 1956.

‘Antony Terry of the *Sunday Times*, his wife and I’: *Hungarian Tragedy* by Peter Fryer (Index Books, 1997 –reprint, first published in 1956), pp83-84.

‘I had a special feeling for using the thriller’: *Who’s Who In Spy Fiction* by Donald McCormick, pp82-83.

‘Schill appears to have been based on Hans Bartschat’: ‘Reds Jailed Her Husband As Spy, Escapee Relates’, NANA, *The Marion Star*, Marion, Ohio, 27 May 1954.

‘Gainham’s next novel, *The Mythmaker*’: The text about this novel here is adapted from a previous essay of mine, ‘In Fleming’s Footsteps’, published on my website on 21 March 2013.

‘highly intelligent and accomplished’: Lycett, p371.

‘pre-puberty’: *ibid.*

‘ingenious, stylish, amusingly informative’, ‘well-plotted’: ‘It’s A Crime’ column, Christopher Pym, *The Spectator*, 22 November 1957.

‘well-written, thoughtful and intelligent thriller’: ‘Crime Ration’ column, Maurice Richardson, *The Observer*, 29 December 1957.

‘Perhaps she does the cause of Western diplomacy no favor’: ‘Survival Fight in Red Domain’ by C.W. Johnson, *Springfield Leader and Press* (Springfield Missouri), 28 June 1959.

‘always wished I had taken a man’s name for my pseudonym’: *Who’s Who In Spy Fiction*, p82.

‘topping the *New York Times* list for months and giving her financial security for the rest of her life’: *Independent* obituary.

‘The forty years’ anniversary goes back’: Letter from Antony Terry to unnamed correspondent, 15 September 1987, *Berlin to Bond and Beyond*, pp161-162.

‘lying in a pool of blood’: *ibid.*, p49.

VI. Through the Looking Glass

‘various memoirs’: see for example *I Spy*. He also crops up in *But What Did You Actually Do?* by Alistair Horne (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2011), who also reveals in the book that he carried out a similar role to Terry for M.I.6 while *The Daily Telegraph*’s correspondent in Bonn.

‘In February 2018, the *Sunday Times* reported’: ‘David Floyd: the traitor who was forgiven and forgotten’ by Jeff Hulbert, *The Sunday Times*, 25 February 2018.

‘Is this man who he says he is?’: Sisman, p100.

‘A new possibility had arisen’: *ibid.*, p139.

‘committing myself to something I don’t really want to do’: *ibid.*, p149.

‘the model for Percy Alleline’: *ibid.*, p210.

Le Carré and Elliott eventually became friends’: see le Carré’s afterword to *A Spy Among Friends* by Ben Macintyre (Bloomsbury, 2014).

‘to investigate and detect potential Nazi cells’: Sisman, p223.

‘We were fifteen years after the end of the hot war’: ‘John le Carré in Conversation’ at the Royal College of Music, London, interviewed by Anne McElvoy, broadcast on BBC Radio 3, 29 July 2013.

‘John was constantly ruminating’: *Les maîtres espions: Tome 2* (Robert Laffont, 1994), p438. Quoted excerpt translated by me. Faligot confirmed the quotes via email, saying he had initially been put onto the connection by a journalist friend of Terry. (Email to author, June 13 2018.)

‘Perhaps it was inevitable that the press’: Sisman, p251.

‘had been far removed from the fiendishly clever conspiracy’: Introduction to the Lamplighter edition of the novel, 1991.

‘The novel was also greeted’: ‘Real-Life British Spies Did Not Like John le Carré’ by John le Carré, 12 September 2016, *Literary Hub*. Available from: <https://lithub.com/real-life-british-spies-did-not-like-john-le-carre>

‘And since the British secret services controlled’: ‘Smiley’s People Are Alive And Well’ by John le Carré, *The Guardian*, 16 November 1989.

VII. *Rise of the New Nazis*

‘In the winter of 1964: Sisman, p273.

‘U.S Congress’s House of Representatives’: Proceedings of Congress and General Congressional Publications, Cong. Rec. (Bound)—House of Representatives: March 25, 1963, Volume 109, Part 4 (March 15, 1963 to April 3, 1963). Available from:

<https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/GPO-CRECB-1963-pt4/pdf/GPO-CRECB-1963-pt4-5-2.pdf>

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Terry's article appears and is discussed on pp25-26. A shorter version of the article appeared in several American newspapers, eg '400 German Experts Build Egypt Rocket' by Antony Terry, *The Los Angeles Times*, 24 March 1963.

'On 23 July, the *Sunday Times*': 'The Secret Lifeline for ex-Nazis on the Run' by Antony Terry, *The Sunday Times*, 23 July 1967.

'It still has branches in West Germany': *ibid.*

'ODESSA's leaders': *ibid.*

'vast and sinister network of former Nazis': *Hunting Evil* by Guy Walters (Bantam, 2010 paperback edition), p202.

'globalized tentacled monster': *ibid.*, p203.

'highly secret society of cunning former S.S. men': *ibid.*, pp201, 203.

'grossly exaggerated: *ibid.*, p223.

'If Terry's editor had known': *ibid.*, p225.

'a mile inland from the west bank of the Parana river': 'Former SS Man Tells 'True' Bormann Story' by Antony Terry, *Los Angeles Times*, 7 January 1968.

'triggered by Forsyth reading': 'The truth behind *The Odessa File* and Nazis on the run' by Guy Walters, *The Daily Telegraph*, 1 December 2010.

'take up a position at the London Station': *No Other Choice* by George Blake, pp182 -184.

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Blunt Instruments

*The British Thriller and the Secret Roots
of Ian Fleming's James Bond*

Enemy Action

The Literary Assassination of Ian Fleming

IT'S GENERALLY ACCEPTED today that writers of popular fiction can be worthy of serious analysis, and Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett, Georges Simenon, Patricia Highsmith and many others have received it in scores of essays, dissertations and books.

For a brief moment in 1953, Ian Fleming seemed poised to enter the ranks of such writers when his debut novel, *Casino Royale*, received a string of highly favourable reviews in Britain's broadsheets and literary magazines.

The book had a lot of competition for the public's attention, with dozens of other thriller-writers seeking a similar audience; only a clairvoyant could have predicted that this novel's hero would become an iconic fictional character. Alan Ross perhaps came closest with his review in the *Times Literary Supplement*, noting how it had built on its antecedents in the genre:

‘Mr. Ian Fleming’s first novel is an extremely engaging affair, dealing with espionage in the Sapper manner but with a hero who, although taking a great many cold showers and never letting sex interfere with work, is somewhat more sophisticated. At any rate he takes very great care over his food and drink, and sees women’s clothes with an expertness of which Bulldog Drummond would have been ashamed. The main plot of *Casino Royale* deals with the attempt of a British agent to outgamble a Communist agent whose sexual predilections have cost him a lot of money and who must play for high stakes to make up the Party funds and carry out his programme. The game concerned is baccarat and the especial charm of Mr. Fleming’s book is the high poetry with which he invests the green baize lagoons of the casino tables. The setting in a French resort somewhere near Le Touquet is given great local atmosphere and while the plot itself has a shade too many improbabilities the Secret Service details are convincing. Altogether Mr. Fleming has produced a book that is both exciting and extremely civilized.’

Fleming cherished this review, perhaps partly because he had long been an admirer of the *TLS*, and knew that it awarded him significant literary status to be reviewed in it. The review is also perceptive about what Fleming was trying to do with the novel, as well as being highly flattering. Ross was right to point out that *Casino Royale* was an attempt to add sophistication to the heroic tradition Sapper was part of, but he could just as well have written of ‘the Sax Rohmer manner’, or ‘the Valentine Williams manner’, or a number of others—the novel isn’t especially in debt to Sapper. Ross might have mentioned Sapper simply because he was more familiar with his work than others in the genre: in his memoir *Blindfold Games*, published in 1986, he wrote that his ideals ‘had once been A.J. Raffles, amateur cracksman and cricketer—at least the initials were the same—The Saint and Bulldog Drummond, and even more so their originators.’

The reference might also have been a result of expectations. Ross, a poet, was a friend of Fleming's wife, Ann, and Ian Fleming was well known in this circle as an elegant and fastidious dresser concerned with the finer things in life. He wrote the *Sunday Times* column Atticus and was a member of Boodle's, the exclusive gentlemen's club in Pall Mall, where he would sometimes sit and read thrillers quietly in a corner. The idea that Fleming had written a thriller in the Sapper mould with added flair and sophistication fitted the image of the man, even if it didn't quite fit the novel, which had plenty of sophistication but was as indebted to American *noir* as the overall tradition of British thrillers. This misconception can be seen in the first published parody of James Bond. *His Word, His Bond* by 'Ixn Flxmxng'—in fact, Fleming's colleague at 'Atticus', John Russell—appeared in *The Spectator* in December 1956:

'Chapter XIX

YMCA Again!

The whole room smelt of the Mexican.

'Take him away,' said Bond, as he straightened his old Mauresque's tie. 'His igguda's broken. It's a trick I learned from the YMCA.'

The YMCA! Ensign Squarehead's eyes narrowed at the mention of the Soviet Counter-counter-under-the-counter group.

'Where'll I put him, Boss?'

'Down the lift-shaft,' said Bond. The traffic would cover the scream.

As Squarehead made off with his twitching burden, Bond turned to the internal television apparatus.

'Canteen,' he said evenly, and one of the most beautiful women he'd ever seen stood before him on the cazonated uviform frumpiglass screen.

'Two double Martinis,' said Bond, specifying the Old Fusty and a dash of Miss Dior.

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As the woman bent over her blotter the sun sparked on her spectacles ('f.9/34 Spitzer Weichmann lenses,' Bond noted automatically). The wind from the open window stirred the blue ridge of her facial hair, there was pre-stressed concrete in the bridge of her nose, and her 1294 mm. bust lay like an unwrapped parcel on the top of her desk. She reminded him of something he'd once seen by Rembrandt, the artist.

One day he'd take her away from this filthy business. There'd be a seat for her on the racing tricycle that old W.O. Bentley had built for him with his own hands in the bad year before Munich. They'd pedal down N.63... And he'd see how she shaped.

'Shaped?' He was forgetting himself. 'And get me something to eat.'

'The usual, Commander?' Her nostrils showed the admiration she felt, in spite of herself, for the trim, slim man with the pressurized waistcoat and the ankles of a gambler.

'Hippo steaks,' said Bond, 'with a double portion of Mobiloil dressing. Those mussels you get for me from Danzig, with some chopped rhinestones. No béarnaise, of course, but some very fresh okapi trotters, boiled in Jordan water, and a carton of Old Hatstand crackers.'

The simple meal was nearly finished when the blood-red telephone went galloo-galoo.

'B.,' said the familiar voice; and Bond leant forward on his malleable inscuffed drabba-tested gros-point cuffs.

'Would you know Blotkin-Plotkin if you saw him?'

'The YMCA chief?' said Bond. 'The hunchbacked seven-foot negro with the long red beard and nine fingers to his right hand? I don't think I'd mistake him.'

'He's in Surrey again. I told the PM I could count on you.'

All tiredness forgotten, Bond called to his aide.

'Leatherhead, Squarehead,' he said evenly.

The fight was on.'

Perhaps it's unfair to give too much thought to an ephemeral piece of fun written more than six decades ago, but it's striking just how

wrong this parody gets James Bond. There are some great touches, such as the spot-on first sentence, which could almost be out of a Fleming novel, as well as Bond's prissiness and the authoritative use of precise terms about the tiniest of matters. But it doesn't read as though it has been written by someone who knows Fleming's novels, or has even read them. The main reason most of it isn't very funny is because it doesn't seem anything like a Bond novel. Despite a few modern and even futuristic ideas, as a whole it feels more like a parody of thrillers from the Twenties or even earlier, with telephones going 'galloo-galoo'. The inclusion of an aide/batman for the hero is completely out of character for Fleming: they were a staple of earlier thrillers, but there is no such figure in the Bond novels.

But all this was still a few years away, when Fleming was on the verge of best-sellerdom. In April 1953, he was just embarking on the journey. The reviews for *Casino Royale* in the *TLS* and several other well-respected publications were coups for a debut thriller, but they had come about in large part because Fleming was exceptionally well connected: he was a journalist at the country's most prestigious newspaper, his brother Peter was a famous writer, and his wife was a noted literary hostess who had been married to the press magnate Viscount Rothermere. *Casino Royale* was also positively reviewed in the *Daily Telegraph* by the poet John Betjeman, another friend, but the most favourable review appeared, unsurprisingly, in the paper Fleming wrote for, the *Sunday Times*. Written by Cyril Ray under the pseudonym Christopher Pym, it also sought to put the debut thriller into context:

'Here is a new writer who takes us back to the casinos of Le Queux and Oppenheim, the world of caviar and fat Macedonian cigarettes. But with how much more pace in the writing, how much less sentimentality in the tone of voice, how much more knowing a look!... From the first evocative words to the last

savagely ironic sentence, this is a novel with its own flavour and its own startlingly vivid turn of phrase... If Mr Fleming's next story has half the swiftness of this, as astringent an accent, and a shade more probability, we can be certain that here is the best new English thriller-writer since Ambler. One is pretty certain already.'

However, a backlash began to take shape the following year with the publication of his second novel, *Live and Let Die*, and the critical verdict on Fleming soon swung violently the other way, with his work being not just criticized but attacked, sometimes in the same publications in which he had earlier been praised. Fleming's literary standing has been in decline ever since, and despite some stirrings over the decades, remains at a lower point today than it did on the publication of his first novel.

In the same period, his books and the films adapted from them have become increasingly popular with the public, leading to the curious situation whereby one of the most successful novelists Britain has ever produced, and the creator of a globally popular and enduring fictional icon, is largely looked down on in Britain today. Fleming is now rarely discussed in literary publications, and although the Bond novels are sometimes written about in respected newspapers and magazines, it is usually in terms that describe Fleming as a fantasist, a sadist and a purveyor of cheap pulp fiction.

For some publications over the years, bashing Fleming's work has been a way to try to establish their literary credentials, because most of the coverage of James Bond has been related to the films. The phenomenal success of the Bond series has also made Fleming an attractive target for some. William Cook, writing in the *New Statesman* in 2004, summed up the situation:

'Without the movies, [Fleming would] have sold fewer books, but he'd be taken far more seriously by the cognoscenti. Class-bound Britain rarely holds bestsellers in high regard, bestselling thrillers least of all. Raymond Chandler called Fleming the most

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forceful thriller writer in England. It's high time he shared some of Chandler's highbrow acclaim.'

This has yet to happen. Chandler, Kingsley Amis, Anthony Burgess, John Betjeman, Christopher Isherwood and several others praised Fleming, but there has been remarkably little serious criticism of his work since the Sixties. It could be, of course, that the reason for this is simply that his work is not worth taking seriously. But I think William Cook hit on a truth. Most criticism of Fleming today, such as it exists, simply recycles attacks on his work from the Fifties and Sixties that are not only outdated in terms of their moral objections, but were mostly written by critics with very scant knowledge of the thriller genre. In addition, some of those who have criticized Fleming over the years had very little knowledge of Fleming's own work. Inconveniently for those with short deadlines and flexible principles, the Bond novels are often very different from the films, and surprisingly varied. If you only read, say, *The Spy Who Loved Me*, you would come away with a very different view of Fleming's work than if you only read *Casino Royale*, or *From Russia, With Love* or *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*. But if you express an opinion on a book, it only holds any weight if you've read it. And if you express an opinion on the entirety of an author's work, that opinion is likewise only worth considering by others if you have in fact read the entirety of their work.

This might seem obvious, but criticism of Fleming's work tends to be sweeping and the basic tenets of literary criticism have often been abandoned when approaching it. Having watched a couple of Bond films and read a few chapters of *Goldfinger* several years ago doesn't give someone a good overview of Ian Fleming's oeuvre, however prestigious the publication they write for or strongly they express themselves.

On top of all of these problems, some of the most influential articles about Fleming's work have been highly unprofessional

personal attacks disguised as literary criticism, and I feel they should be discounted by anyone seriously wanting to assess Fleming's significance.

~

The first sign that Fleming's pending membership of the literary club was in danger of being blackballed was a review of *Live and Let Die* by Hilary Corke in *Encounter* in August 1954. Corke was then a poet and lecturer in Medieval English Studies at Edinburgh University, and it is clear from his article, titled *The Banyan Tree* as it was paired with a review of Nigerian novelist Amos Tutuola's *My Life In The Bush Of Ghosts*, that not only did he know very little about thrillers, but that he intensely disliked them:

'And whose little banyan is the detective story? If it is Poe's, if we can lay this at his door as well as all the sadder excesses of French 19th century poetry, he has certainly as much to answer for as his two illustrious compatriots, Henry James and Mr. Eliot, put together.'

This is part of a review of an Ian Fleming novel, but it reads more like a condemnation of an entire genre, and is written in a tone so pious that it wouldn't have been out of place in the Victorian era.

Corke loved Tutuola's novel, but loathed Fleming's. Bizarrely, he objected to the fact that Bond's accomplice on his mission, American agent Felix Leiter, is not killed when attacked by a shark, but survives to play a role in the remainder of the book:

'We do not want ex-faithful assistants about the place on crutches. The thriller deals in cruelty, not pity.'

Corke had two chief objections to Fleming's work: firstly, that it was morally dubious, appealing 'to a baser human instinct than the smudgy postcards hawked at the more central London tube-

stations’, and secondly, that it was being acclaimed in quarters that should know better:

‘It is with a rather wry amusement therefore that I note what my contemporaries apparently have to say of Mr. Fleming’s previous essay in this vein: “Both exciting and extremely civilised” (The T...s L.....y S.....t); “Thriller for an intelligent audience” (The N.w S.....n). Intelligence? Civilisation? Mr. Tutuola, have you a vacancy for me in that Bush of Ghosts?’

~

Hilary Corke’s complaint that Fleming’s work was immoral and that the literary establishment had lowered itself by praising it would become the rallying cry of others who wanted to keep Fleming out of the literary club. These cries became increasingly shrill in the next few years, as Fleming’s books became increasingly popular.

In March 1958, the critic and poet Bernard Bergonzi wrote a long essay about Fleming’s work in the prestigious journal *The Twentieth Century*. In that essay, *The Case of Mr Fleming*, Bergonzi both quoted and agreed with Hilary Corke’s 1954 review of *Live and Let Die* in *Encounter*, from which he also seems to have taken many of his cues; like Corke, the thrust of his argument was that Fleming’s work was unwholesome, with Bergonzi stating that ‘the erotic fantasies in which Bond is continually involved are decidedly sinister’, that the character was a ‘hardened amorist’ and that critics who took Fleming’s work seriously were making a grave error:

‘It is interesting to recall that the *New Statesman* described this book as a ‘thriller for an intelligent audience’ and that a reviewer in *The Times Literary Supplement* found it ‘both exciting and *extremely* civilized’ (my italics: one would like to know what this gentleman considers even moderately barbarous).’

It is also interesting to recall that Bergonzi has quoted the precise same phrases from the same two reviews of *Casino Royale* as Hilary Corke.

As examples of the ‘sado-masochistic note’ in Fleming’s work, Bergonzi also referred to the fate of Felix Leiter, as Corke had done:

‘An American Secret Service colleague of Bond’s gets thrown into a tank containing a man-eating shark (he reappears two books later with two artificial limbs and a lot of plastic surgery on his face), and Bond evens the score subsequently by kicking the man responsible into the same tank...’

Corke had objected to Leiter being seriously injured in *Live and Let Die* and then reappearing in the novel on the grounds that the thriller ‘deals in cruelty, not pity.’ But Bergonzi cited Leiter’s injuries and subsequent reappearances as evidence of sado-masochistic tendencies and barbarity in Fleming’s work. This is self-serving logic, and can be twisted whichever way one wants in order to make Fleming come off poorly. If Leiter had died of his injuries instead, both critics could have pointed to it as evidence of sadism in the novels. If he had died peacefully in his sleep, Corke could have claimed that the thriller deals in cruelty, not mundanity.

Bergonzi went on to claim that there was a ‘total lack of any ethical frame of reference’ in Fleming’s novels. To illustrate this, he quoted a passage from *Casino Royale* in which Bond longs for Vesper physically. He didn’t mention that Bond is changed by the events of the book, having fallen in love with Vesper and considered proposing to her, nor that Bond and Mathis argue about ethics at great length in the novel. Instead, he made much the same objections as Hilary Corke had done, in similar terms:

‘Mr Fleming, I imagine, knows just what he is doing: but the fact that his books are published by a very reputable firm, and are

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regularly reviewed—and highly praised—in our self-respecting intellectual weeklies, surely says more about the present state of our culture than a whole volume of abstract denunciations.’

Bergonzi’s essay was well-written and elegantly scornful—and everyone enjoys a good literary dust-up. ‘Reputable’ and ‘self-respecting’ intellectuals who didn’t much appreciate that Fleming’s novels were selling well and being praised by some of their colleagues now had something to crow about: Fleming had finally been cut down to size, and his work had received a public kicking. Others soon joined in, but in doing so they overstepped the bounds of legitimate literary criticism and veered into personal abuse.

On March 31 1958, *The Manchester Guardian*, as it then was, ran an unsigned article on Bergonzi’s article:

‘Ever since George Orwell analysed the social significance of Greyfriars School, increasing attention has been paid to “popular” literature by those eager to spot trends in contemporary British life. The latest patient on the operating table is Mr Ian Fleming’s secret service hero, James Bond (or 007). In a recent article in the “Twentieth Century” Mr Fleming, whose book “Dr No” is published to-day (by Jonathan Cape at 13s 6d), is taken severely to task. His books are said to contain a cunning mixture of sex, sadism, and money snobbery, and their popularity to be a bad symptom of the present state of civilisation in this country...’

The article went on to defend Fleming from the charges, but claimed that what was more ‘sinister’ in his work was ‘the cult of luxury for its own sake’, taking him to task for presenting an ‘advertising agency world’ to his readers.

Fleming responded to this charge in a letter to the newspaper, which was published on April 5:

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‘I am most grateful for the scholarly examination of my James Bond stories in your leader columns on Monday but, since this follows close upon a nine-page inquest in “The Twentieth Century,” I hope you will forgive a squeak from the butterfly before any more big wheels roll down upon it.

It is true that sex plays an important part in James Bond’s life and that his profession requires him to be more or less constantly involved in violent action. It is also true that, as in real spy-life, when the villain gets hold of Bond, Bond is made to suffer painfully. What other punishment for failure would be appropriate—that Bond should receive an extra heavy demand note from the Inland Revenue, or that he should be reduced in his Civil Service rank from principal officer to assistant principal? But, as you, sir, put it “What is more sinister is the cult of luxury for its own sake—and the kind of luxury held up for the reader’s emulation. The idea that anyone should smoke a brand of cigarettes not because they enjoy them, but because they are ‘exclusive’ (that is, because they cost more) is pernicious and it is implicit in all Mr Fleming’s glib descriptions of food, drink, and clothes.”

I accept the rebuke, but more on the score of vulgarity, than on the counts you recite. I have this to say in extenuation: One of the reasons why I chose the pseudonym of James Bond for my hero rather than, say, Peregrine Maltravers was that I wished him to be unobtrusive. Exotic things would happen to and around him but he would be a neutral figure—an anonymous blunt instrument wielded by a Government Department.

But to create an illusion of depth I had to fit Bond out with some theatrical props and, while I kept his wardrobe as discreet as his personality, I did equip him with a distinctive gun and, though they are a security hazard, with distinctive cigarettes. This latter touch of display unfortunately went to my head. I proceeded to invent a cocktail for Bond (which I sampled several months later and found unpalatable), and a rather precious though basically simple meal ordered by Bond proved so popular with my readers, still suffering from war-time restrictions, that expensive, though I

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think not ostentatious, meals have been eaten in subsequent books.

The gimmickry grew like bindweed and now, while it still amuses me, it has become an unfortunate trade-mark. I myself abhor Wine-and-Foodmanship. My own favourite food is scrambled eggs, (in “Live And Let Die” a proof-reader pointed out that Bond’s addiction to scrambled eggs was becoming a security risk and I had to go through the book changing menus) and I smoke your own, Mancunian, brand of Virginia tobacco. However, now that Bond is irretrievably saddled with these vulgar foibles, I can only plead that his Morland cigarettes are less expensive than the Balkan Sobranie of countless other heroes, that he eats far less and far less well than Nero Wolfe, and that his battered Bentley is no Hironnelle.

Perhaps these are superficial excuses. Perhaps Bond’s blatant heterosexuality is a subconscious protest against the current fashion for sexual confusion. Perhaps the violence springs from a psychosomatic rejection of Welfare wigs, teeth, and spectacles and Bond’s luxury meals are simply saying “no” to toad-in-the-hole and tele-bickies.

Who can say? Who can say whether or not Dr Fu Manchu was a traumatic image of Sax Rohmer’s father? Who, for the matter of that, cares?—Yours &c.,

Ian Fleming’

This letter is vintage Fleming. Its length suggests he felt it was necessary, but he was doubtless also aware that to complain about criticisms of one’s work, even if they are ludicrous and unwarranted, is frowned on in Britain, and so the tone of the letter is studiedly self-deprecating and airy. He also slyly manages to show just how ignorant of the genre the criticisms are, pointing out that trappings such as fancy cigarettes were common in the thriller and mentioning the Saint’s luxury car.

It was a well-executed reply, but Fleming’s suspicion that there might be more big wheels rolling down on his work was to prove

correct. By the time *The Manchester Guardian* had published his letter, a new attack was already hitting the newsstands. Paul Johnson's review of *Dr No* in the *New Statesman* upped the ante Bergonzi had already upped from Corke. As Fleming would write in *Goldfinger*: 'Once is happenstance, twice is coincidence, three times is enemy action.'

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Johnson's article was memorably titled *Sex, snobbery and sadism*, a phrase that looks to have been adapted from *The Guardian's* article on Bergonzi of March 31. The title alone has served as a handy three-pronged weapon for over half a century for journalists and critics to brandish as 'evidence' against Fleming. But Johnson's article should not be taken seriously as a piece of literary criticism: it ranks as one of the most vitriolic and unprofessional literary pieces published in Britain in the 20th century.

Johnson classified the three elements of the title as *Dr No's* basic ingredients, and said they were 'all unhealthy, all thoroughly English':

'the sadism of a school boy bully, the mechanical two-dimensional sex-longings of a frustrated adolescent, and the crude, snob-cravings of a suburban adult.'

Johnson showed here that he knew very little about thrillers. Let's take the sadism first. One wonders what Johnson would have written if he had reviewed, say, Sax Rohmer's novel *The Devil Doctor*, in which Fu-Manchu has one of the protagonists placed in a wire cage in order to torture him. That was published in 1916 and, as in Fleming's novels, it is not the protagonists who are sadists, but the villains. A fight between good and evil is, after all, more effective if the evil is vividly and demonstrably so. The sadism and unambiguous evil of Fleming's villains help provide

precisely the ethical framework Bergonzi claimed was missing in his work, but which is in fact central to it.

And it is not as if scenes such as Rohmer's mentioned above had fallen from favour by 1958 and Fleming was reviving them: these had been hallmarks of the thriller for over half a century, and were common currency throughout that time. In Dennis Wheatley's best-selling thriller *Come Into My Parlour*, published in Britain in 1946—12 years before *Dr No*—the heroine is captured by Gestapo chief Grauber and forced to watch the torture of another woman strapped to a chair with electrodes.

Johnson's second putative ingredient was sex. It is true that *Dr No* contained more sex than most literary novels published in Britain in the 1950s, but it was commonplace in thrillers. It is partly because of the influence of Johnson's review that it sounds odd to say that there wasn't all that much sex in Fleming's work for the time, but the Bond novels are mild in comparison with the works of Dennis Wheatley or Peter Cheyney. They're also mild in comparison to some passages in the work of Paul Johnson. Here's an excerpt from his 1959 novel *Left of Centre*:

'Henry found his gaze straying to her round and rosy bottom, which rose and fell gently to the rhythm of her breathing. What to do? Henry pondered in the doorway... "There's nothing more calculated, old man, to excite a woman than a good hard slap on her behind. None of your playful taps, mind. A real stinger. They come up foaming at the mouth."

Dora's bottom invited him. Here was his chance, at one blow, to reassume his masculine, paramount role in their relationship. Draining his glass and setting it down decisively on the dressing table, he advanced purposefully over Dora's sleeping form and brought his hand down with tremendous force.'

The final 'ingredient' is also very telling: in accusing Fleming of snobbery Johnson sneered that the snobbery wasn't quite sophisticated or metropolitan enough: 'the crude, snob-cravings

of a suburban adult'. This is snobbery in itself, as was the article as a whole, because it was not so much an objection to Fleming's work—none of the elements Johnson excoriated were in the least remarkable in a thriller at the time—as an objection that the work was being taken seriously by the literary establishment and high society.

This is clear from the next part of the essay, in which Johnson abandoned any remaining pretence that he was writing a serious piece of literary criticism:

'This novel is badly written to the point of incoherence and none of the 500,000 people who, I am told, are expected to buy it, could conceivably be giving Cape 13s. 6d. to savour its literary merits. Moreover, both its hero and its author are unquestionably members of the Establishment. Bond is an ex-Royal Navy Commander and belongs to Blades, a sort-of super-White's. Mr Fleming was educated at Eton and Sandhurst, and is married to a prominent society hostess, the ex-wife of Lord Rothermere. He is the foreign manager of that austere and respectable newspaper, the *Sunday Times*, owned by an elderly fuddy-duddy called Lord Kemsley, who once tried to sell a popular tabloid with the slogan (or rather his wife's slogan) of 'clean and clever'. Fleming belongs to the Turf and Boodle's and lists among his hobbies the collection of first editions. He is also the owner of Goldeneye, a house made famous by Sir Anthony Eden's Retreat from Suez. Eden's uneasy slumbers, it will be remembered, were disturbed by (characteristically) giant rats which, after they had been disposed of by his detectives, turned out to be specially tamed ones kept by Mr. Fleming.'

Everything following the word 'moreover' is not literary criticism but personal attack.

Johnson ended with the same melodramatic and unfounded complaint made by both Corke and Bergonzi, that the literary establishment was shockingly at fault for praising work that was

symptomatic of the decline of society as a whole. Johnson went even further than Corke and Bergonzi, in fact, suggesting that Fleming's works might even somehow have contributed to such a decline:

'Bond's warmest admirers are among the Top People. Of his last adventure, *From Russia, With Love*, his publishers claim, with reason, that it 'won approval from the sternest critics in the world of letters.' *The Times Literary Supplement* found it 'most brilliant', the *Sunday Times* 'highly polished', the *Observer* 'stupendous', the *Spectator* 'rather pleasant'. And this journal, most susceptible of all, described it as 'irresistible'. It has become easier than it was in Orwell's day to make cruelty attractive. We have gone just that much farther down the slope. Recently I read Henri Alleg's horrifying account of his tortures in an Algiers prison; and I have on my desk a documented study of how we treat our prisoners in Cyprus. I am no longer astonished that these things can happen. Indeed, after reflecting on the Fleming phenomenon, they seem to me almost inevitable.'

The implication that the success of Fleming's thrillers had any bearing on torture taking place in Algiers and Cyprus is absurd, and not borne out by any sensible reading of Fleming's novels as a whole, let alone just *Dr No*.

But Johnson's article did the trick: it was so vicious that it became news elsewhere. On May 11 1958, V.S. Pritchett reported on it in his column in *The New York Times*:

'There has been some violent criticism in the serious press of a very different kind of writer, Ian Fleming... Paul Johnson, writing in the *New Statesman*, and with the Algerian atrocities in mind, thinks the taste for sadistic thrillers has a political side to it...'

The attacks on Fleming intensified after his death, when he could no longer respond to them. There's a revealing entry in Malcolm

Muggeridge's diaries from 1961. On June 7 of that year, the British writer and broadcaster flew to Hamburg for a meeting with editors at *Stern*, after which he sampled the city's nightlife, which he found 'singularly joyless':

'Germans with stony faces wandering up and down, uniformed touts offering total nakedness, three Negresses and other attractions, including female wrestlers. Not many takers, it seemed, on a warm Tuesday evening. Had the feeling that all this had been set up in place of the rubble out of habit. It was there before, so put it back.

Dropped into a teenage rock-and-roll joint. Ageless children, sexes indistinguishable, tight-trouserred, stamping about, only the smell of sweat intimating animality. The band were English, from Liverpool, and recognized me. Long-haired; weird feminine faces: bashing their instruments, and emitting nerveless sounds into microphones. In conversation rather touching in a way, their faces like Renaissance carvings of saints or Blessed Virgins. One of them asked me: 'Is it true that you're a Communist?' No, I said; just in opposition. He nodded understandingly; in opposition himself in a way. 'You make money out of it?' he went on. I admitted that this was so. He, too, made money. He hoped to take £200 back to Liverpool.'

It is characteristic of Muggeridge that he should happen to step into a nightclub in which The Beatles were starting their career—his diaries are filled with such encounters, with figures such as A.A. Milne, Graham Greene, Kim Philby, George Orwell, Enoch Powell, Somerset Maugham and many others. It's also unsurprising that The Beatles recognized him, as he was a well-known figure in Britain at the time, with memorable facial features. As he acknowledged to one of the band (Lennon?), he was 'in opposition'. When television and radio programmes discuss burning topical issues, the producers usually try to make sure that they have a cross-section of views. If everyone agrees on

an issue, discussion of it is dull, and can also be seen as unfair. However, it's sometimes hard to find someone who is prepared to express a more unpopular view, or even holds it. Luckily, there is a pool of professional disagree-ers, or people who are 'in opposition'. Such people can usually be relied upon to take a contrary view to the popular one, be available to turn up at the studio on time, be articulate and provide compelling programming. They often drive their fellow guests into apoplexy, and large sections of the audience as well.

Muggeridge was a genius at this: he often took the opposite view from everyone else, and presented it caustically and memorably. He was one of the best-known journalists and critics of his time, and a powerful voice in British cultural life: he was the host of several BBC programmes, deputy editor of *The Daily Telegraph*, and the editor of *Punch*. A few weeks before bumping into The Beatles in Hamburg he had interviewed Oswald Mosley, the former leader of the British Union of Fascists, for Granada Television, and talked to the sculptor Henry Moore at a meeting of the Tate Gallery Brains Trust.

In 1932, Muggeridge travelled to Moscow. He went there a Communist, but his experiences in the Soviet Union changed his mind. To his credit, he was one of the first Western journalists to report on the famine in the Ukraine, and he continued to do so even when it was politically inexpedient for him. He left the Soviet Union shortly after several British engineers were arrested on charges of espionage by the Soviet government and *The Manchester Guardian* downplayed his reports about the subject. He left before their trial began, and so did not meet Ian Fleming, who had been sent out by Reuters to cover it. But the two men met 20 years later. In late 1952, Muggeridge was offered the job as editor of *Punch*, which he accepted. Shortly afterwards, he had lunch with his wife Kitty and an old acquaintance, Lady

Rothermere, who had recently divorced her husband to marry Fleming. Muggeridge noted in his diary:

‘Ian gave me a slight pang by saying there had been talk of making me Editor of the *Sunday Times*. Ian definitely a slob, and difficult to see why Ann fell for him.’

I think it’s possible there’s a link between those two sentences. Fleming worked for *The Sunday Times*, and had just told Muggeridge that he may have had the opportunity of editing it. This was a much more prestigious job than the editorship of *Punch*, but it was too late for Muggeridge to do anything about it. But, thanks to Fleming, he would always know he had missed out. Muggeridge may have held the bearer of the news responsible, especially if Fleming had told him it maliciously, or if Muggeridge felt he had. Despite claiming to have had just a ‘slight pang’ at hearing this, Muggeridge was not always entirely forthright in his diaries, and it may be that this perceived slight festered over the years. Muggeridge met Fleming on many subsequent occasions, but perhaps this first unfavourable impression of him hardened. It may not have been improved by Fleming’s increasing success.

There’s no harm in disliking or envying Ian Fleming, of course: plenty of people did. But I think it’s clear that on account of his personal animosity towards Fleming Malcolm Muggeridge repeatedly attacked his work in public, using his considerable reputation as a critic to make it all the more damaging.

While at *The Sunday Times*, Fleming had suggested in an editorial meeting that the paper commission a series of essays on the seven deadly sins, with well-known authors each tackling a different sin. In 1962, this idea was used, and Fleming arranged for the essays to be published in book form in the United States. He also wrote a foreword for it, in which he explained the genesis of the book:

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‘The project was outside my own sphere of action on the paper and I heard nothing more of it until I had left the *Sunday Times* to concentrate on writing thrillers centred round a member of the British Secret Service called James Bond. So I cannot describe what troubles the Literary Editor ran into in his endeavours to marry the Seven Deadly Sins to seven appropriate authors. So far as I can recall, the marriages I myself had suggested were closely followed, except that I had suggested Mr Malcolm Muggeridge to write on the theme of Anger on the grounds that he is such an extremely angry man.’

W.H. Auden wrote on anger instead, but it’s not clear whether Muggeridge was asked or not. Muggeridge viewed himself as a noble iconoclast and famously had a thin sense of humour, so he may have viewed the request to write an essay on anger as a slight. Had Fleming proposed this as a genuine brainwave, the famously caustic Muggeridge let loose on the topic of anger, or had it been a dig? We don’t know, but while Fleming’s post-mortem of the idea in the foreword to the book is amusing, it might not have seemed so to Muggeridge. As we’ll see, he was indeed an extremely angry man. And before long, Ian Fleming would be a target for his anger.

Two years later, Ian Fleming died. Four months after his death, in December 1964, the American men’s magazine *Esquire* published an article by Muggeridge in the regular book column he wrote for it:

‘By curious coincidence, I decided to read my first James Bond book (*You Only Live Twice*, New American Library, \$4.50) with a view to writing about it in this column, just about a week before Fleming died. Indeed, I was actually mulling the piece over in my mind when I heard on the radio that he was dead. Though we were never exactly friends, I used to see quite a bit of him at one time.’

Despite admitting to having read just one of Fleming's 12 Bond novels, in the long article that follows Muggeridge attacked Fleming's work as a whole, as well as the man himself:

'He knew the requisite ingredients for a dish to set before (his readers)—money, sex and snobbishness, beaten into a fine rich batter, with plenty of violence to make it rise in the pan; then served hot and flambé with Sade flavoring, and washed down by a blood-red wine. A true chef, he dished up himself, flushed with bending over the oven. That flush which so often comes to the rich and the avid! I suppose in poor Fleming's case it was due to the heart condition of which he died, but somehow I always saw it as the pigment with which he colored in Bond.'

The first part of this passage is a dramatic rephrasing of the charges made against Fleming in 1958 by Johnson and Bergonzi, and as it can only be based on the one Bond novel Muggeridge had read, has to be discounted. The latter part of the passage is personal, and rather unpleasant considering Fleming had only died in August. With the lead-in times required by magazines like *Esquire*, Muggeridge had probably written this several weeks or perhaps even months before December.

This passage also comes after six long paragraphs in which Muggeridge was at pains to show that, while he was 'never exactly friends' with Fleming, they were well acquainted. He explained how he had known Ann, who been married to Lord Rothermere 'before going off with Fleming, or Bond as he already was in embryo':

'Bond had a sort of private apartment at the top of the house where he kept his golf clubs, pipes and other masculine bric-a-brac. We would sit up there together sipping a highball; like climbers taking a breather above a mountain torrent whose roar could still faintly be heard in the ravine below.'

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This was before the Bond series began, but I well remember his telling me about his plans for writing the first one (Casino Royale), which he deliberately intended to be exciting, successful, lucrative and, as he scornfully remarked, not in the least “literary”. Well, as it turned out, he achieved his purpose to a fabulous degree. The Bond books have so far provided excitement for some eighteen million readers and heaven knows how many film-goers; they have certainly proved successful, and lucrative, and no one (except, perhaps, Kingsley Amis) could possibly contend that they were “literary”.

Muggeridge was, of course, in no position to judge whether Fleming’s novels were literary or not, as by his own admission he had only read one. Fleming was sometimes self-deprecating about his literary worth, but it’s clear from his conversation with Raymond Chandler on the BBC and elsewhere that he had a firm understanding of how thrillers could aim higher, and wished to do so himself. In his 1962 article *How To Write A Thriller*, for example, he wrote:

‘I also feel that, while thrillers may not be Literature with a capital L, it is possible to write what I can best describe as “thrillers designed to be read as literature”, whose practitioners have included such as Edgar Allan Poe, Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, Eric Ambler and Graham Greene. I see nothing shameful in aiming as high as these writers.’

Next, Muggeridge attacked the consumer ethic in the Bond novels:

‘Partly, too, though, Fleming really was Bond, who truly represented all his hopes and desires. He wanted Bond to be this rusé chap who knew what was what, where to go for what. Bond in Bond Street. (Was that, by the way, the derivation of the name? I never asked Fleming, but it might well be so, Bond Street being

the repository of the very expensive, very English haberdashery, etc., nowadays sold almost exclusively to Americans.)’

Having admitted he had read only one Bond novel and that he was an acquaintance of Fleming, Muggeridge felt qualified to state that Bond ‘truly represented’ all Fleming’s hopes and desires. He also had the cheek to criticize Fleming for creating a character with good taste who knew where to find the best things in life in an article in *Esquire*, a magazine largely dedicated to such pursuits. Note the way he switched between scorning Fleming for wanting Bond to know ‘where to go for what’ and then does the very same thing himself, informing his American readers that Bond Street is the place to go if you want expensive English haberdashery. He then condescended to the same readers by suggesting the street wasn’t quite what it used to be because it had taken to selling ‘almost exclusively to Americans’. This is snobbery.

Muggeridge also seems to have been pleased with himself for spotting a possible connection between Bond and Bond Street, wondering whether that might have been the derivation of the character’s name. It wasn’t—Fleming took the name from the author of *Birds of the West Indies*—but if Muggeridge had read *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service* he might have found an intriguing discussion of the topic there. It’s in the chapter titled ‘Bond of Bond Street?’.

After boasting that he once attended an MI6 meeting at the Garrick Club at which Fleming had been present, Muggeridge went on to claim that Fleming may have been ‘the last true fan’ of the British Secret Service and a ‘valiant chronicler’ of its activities. And yet when he finally gets around to ‘reviewing’ *You Only Live Twice* in the piece, Muggeridge is disappointed that the portrait of MI6 is *not* valiant, with Bond’s mission to get a look in at Japanese cipher traffic that the Americans already have access to, ‘or something like that’:

‘It’s all rather a muddle, and scarcely in the highest tradition of Secret Service fiction.’

Having set up a straw man, he is disappointed to find it doesn’t exist. After mentioning that he has ‘no intention’ of reading any further Bond novels, although he did ‘turn over the pages of *Thrilling Cities*’ (which he didn’t find thrilling), Muggeridge ended his article with a final attack on the man himself:

‘Like so many of his class he never grew up; a Peter Pan of the bordellos; a gentleman junkie and Savile Row beat; a Blade of Blades.’

Five months later, on May 30 1965, *The Observer* in Britain published another article on Bond by Muggeridge. Nominally a review of Kingsley Amis’s book *The James Bond Dossier*, it recycled and reworked much of the *Esquire* article. Muggeridge had delivered on his promise in *Esquire* not to read any further Bond novels, which he now boasted about:

‘With his accustomed Eng. Lit. expertise, Mr Kingsley Amis has produced, in his *The James Bond Dossier*, a primer which will enable anyone of average intelligence to reach O-level standard without having to open a single Fleming book—a dispensation for which I am profoundly grateful.’

It’s a tenet of literary criticism that it is unacceptable to review work you haven’t read. Muggeridge joked about it, and encouraged other ‘students’ of Bond to use Amis’ book as a shorthand ‘cheat sheet’ to mug up on Fleming’s novels instead of reading them.

Worse, Muggeridge clearly hadn’t even bothered to read *Amis’s* book! Although he was supposed to be reviewing it, he didn’t mention a single specific thing about its contents. *The James Bond Dossier* was an extended argument for Fleming’s gifts as a writer

and his right to a place in the canon, and Amis explicitly took on the absurdly misplaced moralizing of earlier attacks, which Muggeridge now echoed without even realizing Amis had already countered them.

Muggeridge also mentioned Mickey Spillane, on the grounds that he was also a very successful writer who ‘may be said to work in the same *genre*’ as Fleming. After noting a few superficial similarities between the jacket designs of Fleming and Spillane’s novels—very superficial, as they were both thriller-writers—Muggeridge sarcastically asked whether readers might expect ‘a detailed comparison between their two oeuvres one day from Mr Amis’. But Amis directly compared Fleming to Spillane in the second chapter of his book, and made it clear he didn’t feel Spillane was worth much further consideration. Muggeridge might have taken his own advice, and used Amis’ book as a cheat-sheet—but even that seems to have been too much effort. Instead, he chose once again to make several blanket statements condemning the novels:

‘In so far as one can focus on so shadowy and unreal a character, [Bond] is utterly despicable: obsequious to his superiors, pretentious in his tastes, callous and brutal in his ways, with strong undertones of sadism, and an unspeakable cad in his relations with women, toward whom sexual appetite represents the only approach...’

Other than the claim he has pretentious tastes, none of these charges are true. Bond is not a sadist: his enemies are. Obsequious to his superiors? Bond is frequently resentful of authority in Fleming’s work, for example drafting his resignation letter in *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service* and countermanding a direct order in *The Living Daylights*. In the latter story, Bond’s mission is to assassinate a Soviet sniper, who turns out to be a woman. Despite her being a stranger to him, an enemy agent, and one of his

colleagues being dependent on her being put out of action, Bond cannot bring himself to kill her in cold blood. That's far from callous or brutal. The story ends with Bond saying that if M were to sack him he would thank him for it. No doubt some women Bond comes into contact with in the novels would regard him as a cad, but he doesn't simply have sex on his mind: he falls in love with at least two women, one of whom he marries.

After recycling his misleading synopsis of *You Only Live Twice*, Muggerridge ended the article—in for a penny—with yet another personal attack on Fleming the man, saying that he felt a 'pang' on hearing of his death, not, like Amis, because it meant that there would be no new Bond adventures, but because 'it seemed a pity that Fleming's life should have been expended on peddling dreams so unilluminated':

'I thought of his Thunderbird car and other props, of the exaggerated impression of shirt-cuff he always created, of the indifferent drinks he so elaborately mixed and the inaccurate travelling lore (set forth so unthrillingly in "Thrilling Cities") he so eagerly purveyed; of his woebegone left eye, and of Mr Connery and the monstrous regiment of girls. Alas! Yet (as Dr Johnson justly observes) why alas, since life is such?'

This article prompted an extremely stern letter to the editor of *The Observer* from the usually even-tempered Peter Fleming, who was Ian's elder brother, ward of his literary estate and a best-selling writer himself:

'Sir—The curiously unpleasant article about my brother to which you gave such prominence last week was a rewrite of a similar piece which Mr Muggerridge contributed to the American magazine *Esquire* several months ago. I assume you did not see the original version. If you had, there are various grounds on which you might have thought twice about publishing the stuff.'

He went on to detail several problems with the article. He pointed out that *The Observer* had stated that they had invited Muggeridge, who ‘had strong views on the subject’ to comment on ‘the whole Bond cult’. But in the *Esquire* version of the article, Muggeridge had stated that he had only read one Bond novel and had no intention of reading any more. Peter also pointed out that Muggeridge had laden his article with personal abuse, crediting his brother with ‘squalid aspirations’ in *The Observer* piece and calling him a ‘Peter Pan of the bordellos’ in *Esquire*. And, he noted, Muggeridge had been remarkably sly in his attack:

‘There is one significant aspect in which the two versions of the diatribe differed, and which might have jeopardized Mr Muggeridge’s chances of promotion from the back pages of *Esquire* to the front page of *The Observer* Weekend Review. To an American public Mr Muggeridge was prepared, and indeed appeared anxious, to reveal that he knew my brother well, was a great friend of his wife’s and had frequently enjoyed their hospitality; from British readers, who sometimes have finicky views about what is decent and what is not, he shrewdly concealed these facts.

To vilify publicly, within a few months of his death, a friend from whom he had received nothing but kindness is not the sort of thing that it would occur to many of us to do; nor would a reputable literary critic pontificate at length about a writer with whose work he was almost totally unacquainted. But Mr Muggeridge’s standards of conduct have always been idiosyncratic, and for him, I imagine, the only abnormal feature of this shoddy transaction is that it has—thanks to *The Observer*—brought him two handsome fees instead of one.’

Muggeridge’s response in the newspaper was shameless, claiming that Peter Fleming had only pointed out ‘minor discrepancies’, painting himself as a victim and completely misrepresenting the two pieces he had written. He concluded:

‘I shall not take up the various abusive references to myself except to say that my purpose was to separate Ian Fleming whom I liked from Bond whom I abominate. Clearly, Colonel Fleming did not appreciate the endeavour.’

This sounds reasonable if you haven’t read Muggeridge’s articles: it suggests that Peter Fleming was simply over-reacting and sticking up for his brother. But far from trying to separate Ian Fleming from Bond, Muggeridge had gone out of his way to claim in *Esquire* that they were one and the same: ‘Partly, too, though, Fleming really was Bond, who truly represented all his hopes and desires.’ He even referred to Fleming as Bond in the piece. And it’s hard to see why he would abominate a fictional character that appeared in just one novel he had read. As a result of Muggeridge’s article and reply, Peter Fleming never contributed to *The Observer* for the rest of his life.

Despite this public rebuke, Muggeridge, rather astonishingly, went on to publish *further* versions of this article. Around a month later, on July 11, *The Los Angeles Times* published another review of *The James Bond Dossier* by Muggeridge. Billed as an exclusive, it was in fact a very light rewrite of the *Esquire* and *Observer* articles. And Muggeridge published yet another version of the same article in the August–September 1965 issue of *The Critic*. This time it was titled ‘The Late Mr Fleming’, and under his byline read:

‘British author, critic, former member of the British Secret Service and friend of the late Mr. Ian Fleming.’

Muggeridge might have provided this biographical snapshot himself. If so, I think the message in mentioning he was formerly in intelligence is clear: ‘I used to be a spy, so I know how things really are, not like they are in these silly books.’ And the purpose in saying he was a friend of Fleming would be to add: ‘But I knew

Ian rather well, so I have a right to say I disliked him and his work intensely.’

A version of the article was also contained in a 1966 American anthology of his work, *The Most of Malcolm Muggeridge*, under the title *The Century of the Common Bond*.

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Muggeridge’s article, in all its forms, was a baseless attack on Fleming’s work. If it had been a review of *You Only Live Twice*, it would have been a shoddy one: from his description of it I doubt he even read that novel all the way through. But he attacked the entirety of Fleming’s work, and in doing so rekindled and inflated all the old Corke/Bergonzi/Johnson nonsense, spreading it to millions more readers and entrenching it even further. Muggeridge set out to give the literary establishment more ammunition to damn Ian Fleming—for good measure, he added in as many personal insults he could think up.

In 2010, newspapers and websites around the world reported on an interview Muggeridge conducted with John le Carré on the BBC in 1966, which had been dug up from the archives and put online. In that interview, le Carré made some disparaging comments about Ian Fleming’s work—as did Muggeridge. In fact, Muggeridge goaded le Carré into insulting Fleming. Le Carré has since admitted that he felt ashamed of his behavior in the interview, telling the *Radio Times*: ‘I was putting on a performance and so was the Mugg. We were two fakes performing, that was the long and short of it.’ He also called Muggeridge ‘the last of TV’s upper-class, bogus, intellectual pontificators, exuding piety and superior knowledge, and adoring his canonisation.’

Muggeridge had a talent for making memorably scathing remarks, and his supercilious outrage sold newspapers and made

for good television. He is still regarded in some circles as one of the pre-eminent critics of the 20th century (especially if you happen to be writing an article in which you agree with one of his conclusions), but I think John le Carré was right about him. He was a fake, and he doesn't deserve to be taken seriously as a critic. It is not acceptable that Muggeridge behaved this way because his target was a popular novelist, or because it was 'only Ian Fleming', who wasn't much good anyway—that view is partly a result of attacks such as this. Muggeridge's admission in print that he had only read one Bond novel discredits his literary criticism as a whole, just as a student's body of work is discredited if it is found they have not read a work they have written about.

Under the guise of friendship and knowledge, and using his considerable reputation and reach, Malcolm Muggeridge repeatedly published and broadcast his views on his distaste for Fleming's work. He was a prolific writer and tackled a huge number of subjects, but this was a ruthlessly pursued vendetta, a campaign to damage Fleming's literary standing and ensure that others looked down at it as much as he must have done Fleming the man. He loaded into his articles every variation of the attacks that had previously been made on Fleming's work and personality, amplifying them by using even more vicious phrasing for maximum impact.

And his campaign worked. Hilary Corke's review has been forgotten, while Bernard Bergonzi's essay is often footnoted but the contents rarely discussed. Paul Johnson's review is still frequently cited in articles about Ian Fleming, mainly because of the title and because it was so extreme as to be noteworthy. But Muggeridge's views were more extreme still, and have been cited over the years in *Time*, *The Washington Post*, *Life*, *The Baltimore Sun*, *The Times*, *The Sun*, *The Chicago Tribune* and many other publications: he and Johnson's view of Fleming's work has become the dominant view of it. You still hear people proclaiming

loudly at parties that James Bond is a sadistic misogynistic snob in the books. In my experience, people who say or write this usually haven't read much or any of Fleming's work. Instead, they've read a few chapters of *Diamonds Are Forever* years ago—or have read the views of others. It's much easier to read a couple of articles and make your mind up that way than to bother to read Fleming's novels. But it's not an opinion that means much.

On seeing The Beatles in Hamburg in June 1961, Muggeridge felt they were 'bashing their instruments, and emitting nerveless sounds into microphones'. Today, we recognize that sentiment for what it was: a man then in his late fifties not equipped to understand an emerging form of popular culture, let alone recognize that it might contain the seeds of great art. Muggeridge's views of Ian Fleming are as archaic as his view of The Beatles, and should be taken even less seriously, as it seems his opinion of The Beatles had no personal agenda but was simply based on listening to them perform.

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In 1965, Kingsley Amis laid down a challenge in *The James Bond Dossier* for Fleming to be seen in a similar light to other great practitioners of popular fiction. It is now over half a century since the attacks on Fleming's work began, and yet some still give weight, consciously or not, to the sanctimonious moralizing of critics who were both ignorant of the thriller genre, and in at least one case of Fleming's own work.

I think it's high time to consign the essays by Corke, Bergonzi, Johnson and Muggeridge to the dustbin, and reassess Ian Fleming's standing as a writer of popular fiction—by giving his work the professional critical analysis it deserves.

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Agents of Influence

In his review of *From Russia With Love* in April 1964, the critic Colin Bennett wrote of the film's opening sequence:

'Our James makes his pre-credit appearance this time in the dark of a Marienbad garden, where he is neatly strangled by a blond Russian killer. (The gimmick used to keep him alive could only have been more effective if it had not also been used in *Adrian Messenger*.)'¹

Alan Resnais' *Last Year at Marienbad*, released in 1961, explored the nature of memory and dreams against the backdrop of an elegant *château* and its grounds.

John Huston's *The List of Adrian Messenger*, released in 1963, featured George C Scott as a retired MI5 agent investigating a series of apparently accidental deaths; several famous actors, including Kirk Douglas and Burt Lancaster, appeared heavily disguised by make-up, which they removed at the end of the film to reveal themselves. The opening scene of *From Russia With Love* concludes with the revelation that the dead James Bond is in

fact another man wearing a mask, and we realize we have witnessed a gruesome murder by an organization training to kill 007.

Bennett was right on at least one of his observations. In 1991, the director of *From Russia With Love*, Terence Young, discussed the film's opening scene:

'This was entirely stolen. I'd just seen a very pretentious picture called *L'année dernière à Marienbad*, where everybody was wandering down moonlight paths with sculptures and Christ knows what, so we put Sean in there...'²

Despite feeling Resnais' film was pretentious, Young was nevertheless influenced by it. As well as drawing us into an opulent and elegant world, the opening scene of *From Russia With Love* is also, like *Last Year at Marienbad*, puzzling, eerie and dream-like. Dreams often consist of compelling and vivid episodes: we've all woken feeling as though we have just experienced some amazingly intricate adventure in which we were pursued by unseen forces, one person suddenly became another, and so on.

The opening of *From Russia With Love* has something of that feeling and, as with a dream, it's only after it's over that we realize it didn't make any sense. If an organization wanted to train to kill James Bond, they probably wouldn't go to the trouble and expense of creating incredibly lifelike masks to put on sacrificial human targets. And why stalk someone who looks like Bond through the gardens of a country house when, judging from the rest of the film, they have no intention of trying to trap Bond in such a place? But even if we recognize these logical flaws, they don't overly bother us. This is clearly not the sort of training exercise any organization would undertake in real life, but it's not meant to be a realistic portrayal of espionage. It's a fantasy, and it uses dream logic – or film logic.

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The opening of *From Russia With Love* helped establish the often fantastic atmosphere of the Bond films, and proved influential in its own right – *Mission: Impossible*, which made its debut on US TV two years later, frequently featured lifelike masks being peeled off by secret agents, in a kind of repeated variation of the shock that comes at the end of this scene.

Another film some critics felt was influenced by *Last Year at Marienbad* was *Inception*, released earlier this year. In an interview with *The New York Times*, director Christopher Nolan discussed this perception:

‘Everyone was accusing me of ripping it off, but I actually never got around to seeing it. Funnily enough, I saw it and I’m like, Oh, wow. There are bits of “Inception” that people are going to think I ripped that straight out of “Last Year at Marienbad.”

Q. What do you think that means?

A. Basically, what it means is, I’m ripping off the movies that ripped off “Last Year at Marienbad,” without having seen the original. It’s that much a source of ideas, really, about the relationships between dream and memory and so forth, which is very much what “Inception” deals with.’³

Several other critics felt that *Inception* was heavily inspired by the James Bond films. Nolan confirmed to *Empire* that it had been:

‘This is absolutely my Bond movie... I’ve been plundering ruthlessly from the Bond movies in everything I’ve done, forever. I grew up just loving them and they’re a huge influence on me. When you look at being able to construct a scenario that’s only bound by your imagination, I think the world of the Bond movies is a natural place your mind would go.’⁴

In particular, Nolan confirmed the influence of the 1969 film *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service*:

‘I think that would be my favorite Bond. It’s a hell of a movie, it holds up very well. What I liked about it that we’ve tried to emulate in this film is there’s a tremendous balance in that movie of action and scale and romanticism and tragedy and emotion. Of all the Bond films, it’s by far the most emotional. There’s a love story. And *Inception* is a kind of love story as well as anything else...’⁴

Influence, then, can be hard to pin down and at several removes, or it can be hard to miss. Colin Bennett was right that *From Russia With Love* was directly influenced by *Last Year At Marienbad* – Terence Young confirmed it. We don’t know whether or not *The List of Adrian Messenger* was also an influence. Critics who felt *Inception* was directly influenced by *Last Year At Marienbad* were wrong, but those who felt there were references to *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service* were right. In the latter case, the similarities are not just thematic, but precise. As in the finale of *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service*, the characters in *Inception* storm a clinic that is built like a fortress and is positioned on a snowy mountainside. The accompanying music, costumes and other details all make the connection explicit.

An even clearer example of influence occurs later in *From Russia With Love*, in the scene in which James Bond is chased across a barren stretch of country by a low-flying helicopter. He tries to head for shelter, but as the helicopter passes over him he flattens himself on the ground. Terence Young also confirmed that this was a ‘steal’ from the famous crop-dusting scene in *North By Northwest 2*, but we hardly need proof: common sense tells us it must be.

The situation is somewhat similar when one looks at Ian Fleming’s novels. In some cases, we know what Fleming’s influences were because he commented on them in interviews or in writing. In others, we can guess he was inspired by certain works, but have no confirmation of it. Our guess might be a very

plausible one, but still be incorrect. But sometimes the level of correspondence is so high that proof is not needed, and common sense will do.

But why focus on influence at all? Does it make any difference who was inspired by whom? Not always, no. We can just sit back and enjoy the story. If it works, who cares what inspired it? But if we want to examine Ian Fleming's place in the literary canon, his influences matter, and by looking at them we can place his writing in a literary as well as cultural context.

There are also degrees of influence. The scene with the helicopter chasing Bond in *From Russia With Love* is a direct and unmistakable reference to *North By Northwest*. The opening scene, on the other hand, is relatively lightly influenced by *Last Year At Marienbad*.

Influence can be more general still. *Inception* features a scene in which the protagonist, Cobb, is being chased through the streets of Mombasa by men shooting at him. He finds a side street and runs down it. He slams against a wall and realizes it is part of a narrower alleyway, which he quickly decides to head down to evade his pursuers. But as he makes his way down the alleyway it narrows further and further, until it becoming impossibly tight, the walls seeming to close in on him. Cobb pushes against them desperately as the men behind him gain ground, and finally manages to squeeze his way through into another street.

I don't think this is inspired by anything in particular. It's simply a convention that is often seen in thrillers, and I doubt anyone would be able to trace its origins. And as well as being a thriller convention, it is also, of course, a classic anxiety dream moment, which is no doubt why Nolan used it. Thrillers often echo dreams: many a synopsis proclaims that the protagonist is 'plunged into a nightmare'. In a 1965 interview for French television, Alfred Hitchcock described *North By Northwest* in these terms:

‘Everything seems real in a dream: you are glad to wake up because it’s so real. So you take a dream idea like [*North by Northwest*]. It’s a nightmare... and you make it real. The audience are looking at a nightmare, and crazy things are happening. But it must be real.’⁵

Inception features dreams that echo films – the scenes inspired by *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service* – but I think the narrowing alleyway scene in Mombasa is a feedback loop: a dream sequence reminiscent of thrillers reminiscent of dreams... Where you start the loop can change your interpretation of the film. Great thrillers don’t simply recycle conventions in a mechanistic working through of plot: they use them to tap into deeper concerns and emotions. I think one purpose of this scene may be to suggest (or perhaps implant) the idea that, just as cinematic and fictional conventions often echo our dreams, perhaps our dreams are also affected by fictional archetypes.

Influence can flow in unexpected directions, which make it harder to untangle. Sexton Blake and other characters in the penny dreadfuls led to the likes of Dan Dare – the success of which probably influenced the ongoing Sexton Blake series.

The same can be said of James Bond. Once Bond became successful, several characters that predated Fleming’s novels – including Sexton Blake – were either repackaged or completely updated to jump on the bandwagon. This can be seen with Jean Bruce’s OSS 117, Leslie Charteris’ *The Saint*, Sapper’s *Bulldog Drummond* and many others. Roger Moore played *The Saint* before he played James Bond; coupled with that TV series’ increased aping of the Bond films, the impression is that Simon Templar is a character imitative of James Bond, when the reverse may be true.

Influence is not always cut and dried, and can be difficult to trace, but that doesn’t mean it should be ignored. Exploring it

sensibly can open up our perceptions of what individual works have to say, and how fiction works in broader terms.

All of which brings me to *White Eagles Over Serbia*. Published by Faber in Britain in July 1957, this was ‘an adventure story for the young’ by the acclaimed novelist Lawrence Durrell. After four months in the jungles of Malaya, Colonel Methuen returns to his London club and is looking forward to a fortnight’s fishing in Ireland when he is summoned by Dombey, his chief in the British intelligence unit known to a few highly placed officials as Special Operations Q Branch. Peter Anson, the military attaché in Belgrade, has been found in the mountains near Novi Pazaar with a bullet through his head. Anson was investigating the underground Royalist movement in the country: Methuen’s assignment is to go out and discover what happened to him. But before he sets off for Serbia, Methuen gets prepared:

‘In the armoury at Millbank he presented his service order and was allowed to play about with pistols of every calibre and shape. Henslowe, the artificer, followed him about benevolently, showing him his wares with absurd pride. “You never turned in that Luger you borrowed, Colonel Methuen,” he said reproachfully. “I have to answer for it to the War Office.”

Methuen apologized. “It’s lying in a swamp somewhere,” he explained, and was immediately given an elaborate form to fill up with a description of how the weapon had been lost. “Just put L on D (lost on duty),” said Henslowe sorrowfully. “Now you say you want one with a silencer.”

“Small,” said Methuen. “Pocketable.”

“There’s a new point three eight,” said Henslowe regretfully, but with the air of a haberdasher finding the right size of neck and wrist for a man of unusual shape. “Only for heaven’s sake bring it back! You see,” he added, “it’s still on the experimental list. First time they’ve fitted a silencer of this pattern to a point three eight. It’s a sweet weapon, worry sweet.” He pronounced the word “weepon”. He found the pistol in question and pressed it upon

his visitor, holding it by the barrel. It was small but ugly looking. “The balance is not all it might be, sir. But it’s a werry sweet weapon.”

They tried it downstairs on the miniature range. “It’ll do me very well,” said Methuen. “I must say it hardly makes any noise at all.”

“Just a large sniff, sir. Like a man with a cold.”

“Send it up to me,” said Methuen, and Henslowe inclined his head sorrowfully with the air of a man who is glad to serve but who feels that he is in danger of losing a much-cherished possession. “You won’t leave it in a swamp, will you, sir?” Methuen promised faithfully not to. “It’s hard when we get so few nice things these days.”

“I know.”⁶

Dr No, published the following year, features some of the same conventions as *White Eagles Over Serbia*, such as the secret agent sent overseas to investigate the mysterious death of a colleague. In an early scene, M calls in MI6’s Armourer, Major Boothroyd, to assess Bond’s choice of weapon for his forthcoming mission:

‘M’s voice was casual. “First of all, what do you think of the Beretta, the .25?”

“Ladies’ gun, sir.”

M raised ironic eyebrows at Bond. Bond smiled thinly.

“Really! And why do you say that?”

“No stopping power, sir. But it’s easy to operate. A bit fancy looking too, if you know what I mean, sir. Appeals to the ladies.”

“How would it be with a silencer?”

“Still less stopping power, sir. And I don’t like silencers. They’re heavy and get stuck in your clothing when you’re in a hurry. I wouldn’t recommend anyone to try a combination like that, sir. Not if they were meaning business.”

M said pleasantly to Bond, “Any comment, 007?”

Bond shrugged his shoulders. “I don’t agree. I’ve used the .25 Beretta for fifteen years. Never had a stoppage and I haven’t missed with it yet. Not a bad record for a gun. It just happens that

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I'm used to it and I can point it straight. I've used bigger guns when I've had to – the .45 Colt with the long barrel, for instance. But for close-up work and concealment I like the Beretta.” Bond paused. He felt he should give way somewhere. “I'd agree about the silencer, sir. They're a nuisance. But sometimes you have to use them.”

“We've seen what happens when you do,” said M drily. “And as for changing your gun, it's only a question of practice. You'll soon get the feel of a new one.” M allowed a trace of sympathy to enter his voice. “Sorry, 007. But I've decided. Just stand up a moment. I want the Armourer to get a look at your build.”

Bond stood up and faced the other man. There was no warmth in the two pairs of eyes. Bond's showed irritation. Major Boothroyd's were indifferent, clinical. He walked round Bond. He said “Excuse me” and felt Bond's biceps and forearms. He came back in front of him and said, “Might I see your gun?”

Bond's hand went slowly into his coat. He handed over the taped Beretta with the sawn barrel. Boothroyd examined the gun and weighed it in his hand. He put it down on the desk. “And your holster?”

Bond took off his coat and slipped off the chamois leather holster and harness. He put his coat on again.

With a glance at the lips of the holster, perhaps to see if they showed traces of snagging, Boothroyd tossed the holster down beside the gun with a motion that sneered. He looked across at M. “I think we can do better than this, sir.” It was the sort of voice Bond's first expensive tailor had used.⁷

Boothroyd recommends Bond use a Walther PPK 7.65 mm. or Smith & Wesson Centennial Airweight Revolver .38, and gives a lot of information about both. In May 1956, gun enthusiast Geoffrey Boothroyd wrote to Fleming suggesting that Bond change weapons from the ladylike Beretta to a Walther PPK. Fleming replied that he appreciated the advice and proposed changing Bond's weapon in the next book he wrote, adding ‘I

think M. should advise him to make a change'.⁸ He didn't specify that he would create an armourer character, or name him after Boothroyd, but the idea seems a natural enough way to introduce the change.

But there are still some intriguingly close similarities between these two scenes. Both Henslowe the artificer and Boothroyd the armourer are condescending towards the agent they are fitting out: Henslowe has 'the air of a haberdasher finding the right size of neck and wrist for a man of unusual shape', while Boothroyd speaks in 'the sort of voice Bond's first expensive tailor had used'. This seems natural now, but upper-class Brits discussing lethal weapons as though they are bespoke clothing items is a convention we usually date to the Bond series, and particularly the films. In some ways, Durrell's scene is more reminiscent of a Bond film than Fleming's: Methuen's nonchalance about having lost his previous weapon while conducting his most recent mission and Henslowe's anxiety that he might lose the costly experimental weapon he is now giving him would become staples of the scenes between Bond and Q in the films.

Durrell's reference to 'Special Operations Q Branch' may appear to be a reference to Fleming, as 'Q Branch' had been mentioned in passing in several earlier Bond novels. But in Durrell's novel it is not the name of a technical department, as it is in Fleming and would later be in the Bond films, but of an intelligence unit – so more like the Double O Section. After the Second World War, MI6 established a section called Q Branch for the administration of stores and equipment, which was run by 'an experienced army quartermaster colonel with the designation Q'.⁹ Fleming might have known this through his own contacts in the organization, as might Durrell, who had worked for British intelligence in Belgrade in the early Fifties.¹⁰

Fleming started writing *Dr No* in January 1957, but it wasn't published until in March 1958, several months after *White Eagles*

Over Serbia. Fleming might, then, have read Durrell's novel as he was writing or editing *Dr No*. I think it's plausible it would have been on his radar. As well as having worked in several countries as a British diplomat and intelligence officer, Durrell was a well-established poet, novelist and travel writer, and this was a well-reviewed adventure story about the British secret services, a throwback to the sorts of novel Fleming had enjoyed as a boy. Durrell was one of the closest friends of the travel writer Patrick Leigh Fermor, who was also a friend of Fleming's, and who had written part of his first book, *The Traveller's Tree*, at Fleming's house in Jamaica in 1948.

But all this is guess-work. As far as I know, Ian Fleming never mentioned Lawrence Durrell's book as an inspiration in any interviews or correspondence, and the similarities between the scenes, while numerous, are not close enough to be a 'smoking gun', with or without experimental silencer. It may simply be coincidence or, perhaps more likely, that Durrell and Fleming were both inspired by similar scenes in earlier thrillers. I'm not aware of any prior to 1957 that involve a weapons expert picking out a pistol for a secret agent's forthcoming mission, but there are lots of thrillers I haven't read or seen. Suggestions gratefully received.

Regardless, the scene in *White Eagles Over Serbia* tells us several things. Most obviously, it tells us that Ian Fleming did not create this particular convention, which we might otherwise have thought he did. Durrell might not have originated it, either, but we know Fleming didn't.

It also shows how influence diverges and takes new shapes. Durrell's scene was itself a variation of a more general and well-established convention, that of 'preparing before setting off for an adventure'. An example of this can be found in the opening pages of Erskine Childers' *The Riddle of the Sands*, published in 1903, in which Foreign Office official Carruthers is contacted by an old

acquaintance, Davies, and asked to join him on a sailing trip. Carruthers duly runs around London collecting equipment Davies has specified he bring along. Similar scenes can be found in many early British adventure stories involving exploration. Durrell's and Fleming's scenes are a more specific version of that convention; a *secret agent* being *assigned a weapon* by an *expert*. Ie, not just a man being shot at, but a man being shot at from above by a low-flying craft while he runs across barren countryside.

White Eagles Over Serbia is a love letter to the British adventure story, but while the plot is reminiscent of the works of John Buchan and Rider Haggard, the romance is occasionally sprinkled with a dry and melancholic tone more akin to Somerset Maugham or Graham Greene. In a general sense, the same could be said of the Bond novels, but both sets of influences are much weaker. Durrell and Fleming were drawing on some of the same sources, but developed a very different mixture.

Finally, these two scenes might be an example of influence turning inward on itself. The armourer Major Boothroyd didn't appear in any other Fleming novels, but he did appear in a similar scene to this in the film of *Dr No*. In subsequent films, he was played by Desmond Llewellyn, and became known as Q. Instead of simply being an armourer, he was now head of the Q Branch mentioned but never seen in Fleming's novels, responsible not just for providing Bond with weaponry, but also a range of ingenious equipment. The convention took on a new form with the films, then, and hundreds of thrillers followed with dotty inventors kitting out spies with outrageous gadgets.

In 1968, Lawrence Durrell published *Tunc*, which featured Felix Charlock, an inventor who works for the sinister international conglomerate Merlin, sometimes known as 'The Firm'. Charlock goes on the run; trying to bring him back is Merlin's shadowy director, Julian, who Charlock has never seen. The sequel, *Nunquam*, published in 1970, opens with Charlock

in a luxurious but anonymous sanatorium-prison in the Swiss Alps. He is released by The Firm and finally meets Julian, for whom he builds a lifelike robot, a perfect replica of a beautiful dead actress with whom Julian is obsessed. The robot also rebels, wreaking havoc and destruction.

Several critics detected similarities between these two novels and the Bond series. Kirkus wrote of *Tunc* that ‘the plots criss-cross round a gigantic international “firm” called Merlin (somewhat like a spectre in the Bond dream World)’ [sic], referring to S.P.E.C.T.R.E., while France’s *Journal de l’année* wrote that in *Nunquam* Durrell wanted to simultaneously evoke James Joyce and James Bond. Reviewing the same novel in *The Observer*, Benedict Nightingale noted: ‘There are times when one wonders if one isn’t reading some unholy coupling of Swinburne and Ian Fleming’.¹¹

Perhaps these novels were influenced directly by Bond or perhaps, as with *Inception* and *Last Year At Marienbad*, by other thrillers that were influenced by Bond. But it may also be that Lawrence Durrell influenced Ian Fleming directly in 1957, only to be influenced by Fleming himself a decade later.

Notes

1. ‘Thrills and Tricks’ by Colin Bennett, *The Age*, April 25 1964.
2. From *Russia With Love* audio commentary, Criterion Collection, Laserdisc, 1991.
3. ‘A Man and His Dream: Christopher Nolan and ‘Inception’ by Dave Itzkoff, *The New York Times*, June 30 2010.
4. ‘Crime Of The Century’ by Dan Jolin, *Empire*, July 2010.
5. Hitchcock s’explique, *Cinéma Cinémas*, directed by André Labarthe, 1965.
6. pp27-28 *White Eagles Over Serbia* by Lawrence Durrell, Faber, 1957.
7. pp18-19 *Dr No* by Ian Fleming, Pan, 1965.

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8. Letter from Ian Fleming to Geoffrey Boothroyd, May 31 1956. See 'Letters to The Armourer' by 'SiCo', Absolutely James Bond, September 12 2004. Available at:
<http://jamesbond.ajb007.co.uk/lettersupdate>
9. pp644-645 *MI6: The History of the Secret Intelligence Service 1909-1949* by Keith Jeffery (Bloomsbury, 2010).
10. p81, *British intelligence, strategy, and the cold war, 1945-51* by Richard James Aldrich (Routledge, 1992).
11. *Kirkus Reviews*, March 25 1968; p228, *Journal de l'année*, Larousse, 1971; 'Dance of Seven Veils' by Benedict Nightingale, *The Observer*, March 22 1970.

Gardens of Beasts

THE 2006 JAMES Bond film *Casino Royale* has its share of influences. Most obviously, the opening scene is reminiscent of the film *Dr No*, in which a seated Bond coolly shoots Professor Dent from the shadows. This scene was also shot in such a way as to evoke Cold War-era spy films such as *The IPCRESS File* and *The Spy Who Came In From The Cold*. Later in the film Bond runs through the streets of Venice, and there's a deliberate reference to Nicholas Roeg's *Don't Look Now* as he catches sight of Vesper's red coat. Many have also pointed out that the film's tougher, more realistic action scenes seem to have been stylistically inspired by the Jason Bourne films. And finally, the decision to 'reboot' the series showing Bond as a newly minted Double O agent was probably helped along by the enormous commercial success of *Batman Begins*, which presented the origins of that character with a darker edge following films many had felt veered too close to fantasy.

This sounds like a lot of influences when listed, but for filmmakers and film-goers alike they are easily absorbed. In a previous chapter I discussed *Inception*, a film some critics felt had been influenced by Alain Resnais' *Last Year At Marienbad*, but which director Christopher Nolan claims not to have seen beforehand. But would it surprise us to learn that Nolan had seen *The Matrix*, *The Godfather*, *Star Wars*, *Apocalypse Now*, *Psycho*, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *Strangers on a Train*, *The English Patient*, *The Third Man* and dozens of other films, and that they might in some ways have been an influence on his work? Of course not, and one could no doubt add many more films to the list, for Nolan or any other major film director working today.

I also discussed a scene in the film of *From Russia With Love* in which James Bond is chased across barren countryside by a low-flying helicopter. Terence Young, the director of *From Russia With Love*, has confirmed that this was inspired by the scene in *North by Northwest* in which Cary Grant's character Roger Thornhill is attacked by a crop-duster. This would have been clear even if Young had not confirmed it, despite the scene in *From Russia With Love* featuring a helicopter rather than a crop-duster, because the two scenes share several precise and unusual elements. It would be easy to cite scenes in thrillers in which a character is shot at by villains while running away from them: that's a very basic similarity. It would be much harder to cite scenes in which a man is being persistently shot at by an aircraft that swoops down on him while he runs across a barren landscape. And all such scenes would, I suspect, have been filmed after *North by Northwest*, and be directly or indirectly inspired by it. There's no line in the sand about this sort of thing, but sometimes – as in this case – common sense tells us when something is directly influenced by something else.

The influence of *North by Northwest* on this scene in *From Russia With Love* is fairly unimportant when we're sitting back

and watching the film – but it's crucial if we want to assess the importance of the scene in modern cinema. If a critic were to claim that this scene was the most inventive and suspenseful action scene ever to have been filmed, omitting any reference to the Hitchcock film that inspired it, they would be completely mischaracterizing its place in the genre.

When Ian Fleming sat down to write *Casino Royale* in January 1952, he was familiar with many thrillers that had come before. He had been reading thrillers since he was a young boy, and in articles, interviews and the novels themselves showed that he had a wide knowledge of the genre, as well as a passion for and deep understanding of it. Literary criticism of Fleming's work has tended to focus on a very narrow band of inspirations, but the reality, I think, is that he was influenced by dozens of other writers, not just three or four.

And just as Terence Young and others were sometimes *directly* influenced by thrillers that had gone before, so was Fleming. He often drew on other authors' work, adding dozens of new elements and ideas, as well as his own glittering prose style, to transform them into something else entirely. But the original can sometimes still be seen peeking through.

Dr No, published in 1957, features perhaps the best known and most cited example: the titular character is widely recognized as emulating Sax Rohmer's villain Dr Fu-Manchu. There's no proof of this – such things are usually difficult, if not impossible to prove – but Fleming named Rohmer as an influence on his work several times and both characters are Oriental masterminds with grand plans to shift the balance of power in the world. Physically, they are also described in similar terms:

“Imagine a person, tall, lean and feline, high-shouldered, with a brow like Shakespeare and a face like Satan, a close-shaven skull, and long, magnetic eyes of the true cat-green. Invest him with all the cruel cunning of an entire Eastern race, accumulated in one

giant intellect, with all the resources of science past and present, with all the resources, if you will, of a wealthy government – which, however, already has denied all knowledge of his existence. Imagine that awful being, and you have a mental picture of Dr. Fu-Manchu, the yellow peril incarnate in one man.”¹

And from *Dr No*:

‘Bond’s first impression was of thinness and erectness and height. Doctor No was at least six inches taller than Bond, but the straight immovable poise of his body made him seem still taller. The head also was elongated and tapered from a round, completely bald skull down to a sharp chin so that the impression was of a reversed raindrop, or rather oildrop, for the skin was of a deep almost translucent yellow.

It was impossible to tell Doctor No’s age: as far as Bond could see, there were no lines on the face. It was odd to see a forehead as smooth as the top of the polished skull. Even the cavernous indrawn cheeks below the prominent cheekbones looked as smooth as fine ivory. There was something Dali-esque about the eyebrows, which were fine and black, and sharply upswept as if they had been painted on as makeup for a conjurer. Below them, slanting jet black eyes stared out of the skull. They were without eyelashes. They looked like the mouths of two small revolvers, direct and unblinking and totally devoid of expression. The thin fine nose ended very close above a wide compressed wound of a mouth which, despite its almost permanent sketch of a smile, showed only cruelty and authority.’²

Several shared precise and unusual elements – and common sense – have led to many critics noting the similarities between Dr No and Dr Fu-Manchu. Fleming first came across Rohmer’s character at his prep school, Durnford’s, where he and the other boys were read stories by the headmaster’s wife every Sunday evening. According to Fleming biographer Andrew Lycett, the favourites

among the boys were *The Prisoner of Zenda* by Anthony Hope, *Moonfleet* by J. Meade Falkner and, ‘towards the end of Ian’s time, Bulldog Drummond’. Of these, Fleming ‘preferred the populist works of Sax Rohmer, who opened up a more fantastic world with his “yellow devil” villain Dr Fu Manchu.’³ (Literary tastes at English boarding schools move at a slow pace, it seems, as I was also read Sapper’s Bulldog Drummond and *Moonfleet* at prep school in the 1980s, while *The Prisoner of Zenda* and similar 19th-century adventure stories were staples of the library at my public school.)

The influence of juvenile fiction on Fleming is rarely discussed, even though the two writers who are most often cited as his major inspirations, Sapper and John Buchan, were first read by him at school, and mainly appeal to schoolboys. James Bond, of course, also appeals to a good many teenage boys. Fleming acknowledged the influence, though, mentioning his schoolboy reading in several interviews. He also acknowledged it privately: in April 1953, when Somerset Maugham wrote him a letter praising *Casino Royale*, Fleming replied thanking him profusely for ‘the kind things you say about these leaves from a Cosh-boys own paper’.⁴ This was an ironic – and telling – reference to *The Boy’s Own Paper*, a monthly publication that had been launched in the 19th century to provide thrilling adventures for teenage boys, and which was still going strong at the time. A ‘cosh-boy’ was a slang term for a delinquent teenager.

Fleming was being falsely modest, but he was also making an interesting point: his debut novel was much more violent and adult in themes than Boy’s Own stories, but it nevertheless recognizably related to that tradition. In 1950, *The Times* reported on a small experiment.⁵ For seven years, one Martin Parr studied the reading habits of 150 boys who attended a club in Shoreditch, aged between 14 and 18 and drawn from grammar schools, central schools and senior schools. This was a very small

sample, but I think it's nevertheless revealing about the climate leading up to the publication of *Casino Royale*. Some of the more popular authors included Jules Verne, John Buchan, Baroness Orczy, Robert Louis Stevenson, GW Henty, Rider Haggard, Erskine Childers, Dorothy Sayers, Mark Twain and Sidney Horler. But the most popular were Arthur Conan Doyle, Richmal Crompton, Sapper, Peter Cheyney, WE Johns and, 'the king of books', Leslie Charteris' The Saint series.

Some of these writers' creations have endured: Sherlock Holmes, Biggles, The Saint, Huckleberry Finn and Lord Peter Wimsey are all seen as iconic characters of popular fiction, even if the books are not as widely read as they once were. Others rest in the drawer marked 'forgotten favourites', and among these I would include Bulldog Drummond, Raffles, Just William and Allan Quatermain – adventures featuring these characters are read by few today, but their names are still widely recognized, as is their influence. Some of the others, such as Sidney Horler's Tiger Standish, have all but vanished from the popular lexicon.

Fu-Manchu is, I think, a forgotten favourite. Many are familiar with the character today, but few have read Sax Rohmer's novels. But we know Fleming did, and that they were among his favourites as a boy. Rohmer was born Arthur Ward, and worked as a civil servant and songwriter before becoming a novelist. The Rohmer pseudonym and the character Fu-Manchu both made their first appearance in *The Story-Teller* in October 1912, in a story called *The Zayat Kiss*. This was the first installment of *The Mystery of Dr Fu-Manchu*, as it was called when published in book form on June 26 1913. There had been similar villains before: Guy Boothby's Dr Nikola, for example, and the criminal masterminds of the penny dreadfuls such as Count Ivor Carlac, one of Sexton Blake's deadliest foes – indeed, the critic Julian Symons later dismissed Rohmer's novels as 'penny dreadfuls in hard covers'.⁶

But there was nevertheless something about Rohmer's ruthless Oriental villain that captured readers' imaginations, and Fu-Manchu would go on to feature in dozens of stories, films and radio shows. Imitators sprung up very quickly. On June 28 1913, just two days after the first Fu-Manchu adventure was published in book form, *The Union Jack* began a new Sexton Blake series, *The Brotherhood of the Yellow Beetle*, in which the detective battled a Chinese mastermind called Prince Wu Ling. Sexton Blake had himself originated in a similarly opportunistic manner, appearing a week after Sherlock Holmes had appeared to die in *The Strand*. In *The Brotherhood of the Yellow Beetle*, Wu Ling sends Blake and others poisonous yellow beetles to cause them harm, just as Fu-Manchu sends Sir Denis Nayland Smith and others centipedes.

Rohmer is one of the few writers Fleming named as an influence on his work. Another is Henry 'Sapper' McNeile, whose Hugh 'Bulldog' Drummond novels he had also been read at Durnford's. Drummond, a tough former soldier looking for adventures in peacetime, battled several villains, but the first and most impressive of them was Carl Peterson, a suave master of disguise assisted by a mysterious woman called Irma, who sometimes posed as his daughter but who seemed more like his mistress. Fleming's master-villain Ernst Stavro Blofeld was also assisted by a woman called Irma. Even had Fleming not acknowledged Sapper as an influence, this is too unusual a name for a character with such a position plausibly to be anything other than a direct reference to Sapper's novels.

Sapper has won out in the field of literary criticism and is today the most frequently cited influence on Fleming's work. John Buchan comes a close second, followed perhaps by Dornford Yates, with Rohmer trailing a distant fourth, usually only mentioned in passing and in reference to Dr No. Sapper is often stated as a major influence on Fleming without much explanation

given as to how he was, and I think this has become something of a conditioned response. Kingsley Amis and OF Snelling both discussed him as a major influence so, runs the logic, he must have been. He certainly was an influence, but I think over time the extent of it has been exaggerated, and that Fleming was influenced much more directly and pervasively by several other writers, among them Rohmer. In fact, I suspect that several of the elements in Sapper's work that Amis and others felt had influenced Fleming can be traced to Rohmer. Here's a passage from *The Mystery of Dr Fu-Manchu*, Rohmer's first novel, published in book form in 1913:

'I stifled a cry that rose to my lips; for, with a shrill whistling sound, a small shape came bounding into the dimly lit vault, then shot upward. A marmoset landed on the shoulder of Dr. Fu-Manchu and peered grotesquely into the dreadful yellow face. The Doctor raised his bony hand and fondled the little creature, crooning to it.

"One of my pets, Mr. Smith," he said, suddenly opening his eyes fully so that they blazed like green lamps. "I have others, equally useful. My scorpions – have you met my scorpions? No? My pythons and hamadryads? Then there are my fungi and my tiny allies, the bacilli. I have a collection in my laboratory quite unique. Have you ever visited Molokai, the leper island, Doctor? No? But Mr. Nayland Smith will be familiar with the asylum at Rangoon! And we must not forget my black spiders, with their diamond eyes – my spiders, that sit in the dark and watch – then leap!"⁷

Later in the novel, Fu-Manchu shows off his poisonous mushrooms:

"This is my observation window, Dr. Petrie, and you are about to enjoy an unique opportunity of studying fungology. I have already drawn your attention to the anaesthetic properties of the lycoperdon, or common puff-ball. You may have recognized the

fumes? The chamber into which you rashly precipitated yourselves was charged with them. By a process of my own I have greatly enhanced the value of the puff-ball in this respect. Your friend, Mr. Weymouth, proved the most obstinate subject; but he succumbed in fifteen seconds.”

“Logan! Help! HELP! This way, man!”

Something very like fear sounded in Weymouth’s voice now. Indeed, the situation was so uncanny that it almost seemed unreal. A group of men had entered the farthestmost cellars, led by one who bore an electric pocket-lamp. The hard, white ray danced from bloated gray fungi to others of nightmare shape, of dazzling, venomous brilliance. The mocking, lecture-room voice continued:

“Note the snowy growth upon the roof, Doctor. Do not be deceived by its size. It is a giant variety of my own culture and is of the order *empusa*. You, in England, are familiar with the death of the common house-fly – which is found attached to the window-pane by a coating of white mold. I have developed the spores of this mold and have produced a giant species. Observe the interesting effect of the strong light upon my orange and blue *amanita* fungus!”

Hard beside me I heard Nayland Smith groan, Weymouth had become suddenly silent. For my own part, I could have shrieked in pure horror. FOR I KNEW WHAT WAS COMING. I realized in one agonized instant the significance of the dim lantern, of the careful progress through the subterranean fungi grove, of the care with which Fu-Manchu and his servant had avoided touching any of the growths. I knew, now, that Dr. Fu-Manchu was the greatest fungologist the world had ever known; was a poisoner to whom the Borgias were as children – and I knew that the detectives blindly were walking into a valley of death.

Then it began – the unnatural scene – the saturnalia of murder. Like so many bombs the brilliantly colored caps of the huge toadstool-like things alluded to by the Chinaman exploded, as the white ray sought them out in the darkness which alone preserved

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their existence. A brownish cloud – I could not determine whether liquid or powdery – arose in the cellar.

I tried to close my eyes – or to turn them away from the reeling forms of the men who were trapped in that poison-hole. It was useless:

I must look.

The bearer of the lamp had dropped it, but the dim, eerily illuminated gloom endured scarce a second. A bright light sprang up – doubtless at the touch of the fiendish being who now resumed speech:

“Observe the symptoms of delirium, Doctor!” Out there, beyond the glass door, the unhappy victims were laughing – tearing their garments from their bodies – leaping – waving their arms – were become MANIACS!

“We will now release the ripe spores of giant empusa,” continued the wicked voice. “The air of the second cellar being super-charged with oxygen, they immediately germinate. Ah! it is a triumph! That process is the scientific triumph of my life!”

Like powdered snow the white spores fell from the roof, frosting the writhing shapes of the already poisoned men. Before my horrified gaze, THE FUNGUS GREW; it spread from the head to the feet of those it touched; it enveloped them as in glittering shrouds...

“They die like flies!” screamed Fu-Manchu, with a sudden febrile excitement; and I felt assured of something I had long suspected: that that magnificent, perverted brain was the brain of a homicidal maniac – though Smith would never accept the theory.

“It is my fly-trap!” shrieked the Chinaman. “And I am the god of destruction!””⁸

It’s not hard to see the influence on Ian Fleming here: a megalomaniacal super-villain wields great knowledge in a sadistic and elaborate fashion, and the scene is described in vivid, baroque and frightening prose. There are no passages in the works of John Buchan, Dornford Yates or Leslie Charteris remotely like this.

There are passages somewhat like this in Sapper – because Rohmer was one of Sapper’s chief influences.

Sapper’s first novel, *Bulldog Drummond*, was published in August 1920, and was swiftly followed by several more in the series. Sapper’s greatest villain, Carl Peterson, was directly inspired by Fu-Manchu. Not his physical appearance, which is never fully established and which constantly changes, along with his identity: we never even learn his true name. But although Peterson is not a bald Oriental mastermind, his plots and the methods he uses against Drummond and his friends are unmistakably those of Fu-Manchu. In *The Si-Fan Mysteries*, published in 1917, Fu-Manchu tries to kill Nayland Smith and Petrie by sending them a ‘Flower of Silence’, a Burmese specimen whose blooms contain a hollow thorn that releases poison, tying the tongue of victims before killing them. Smith and Petrie then visit their friend Sir Lionel Barton at his home, where they encounter more peculiarities:

‘In turn, Graywater Park had been a fortress, a monastery, and a manor-house. Now, in the extensive crypt below the former chapel, in an atmosphere artificially raised to a suitably stuffy temperature, were housed the strange pets brought by our eccentric host from distant lands. In one cage was an African lioness, a beautiful and powerful beast, docile as a cat. Housed under other arches were two surly hyenas, goats from the White Nile, and an antelope of Kordofan. In a stable opening upon the garden were a pair of beautiful desert gazelles, and near to them, two cranes and a marabout. The leopards, whose howling now disturbed the night, were in a large, cell-like cage immediately below the spot where of old the chapel altar had stood.’⁹

They discover that Barton has been drugged by Fu-Manchu, and escape with his servant Kennedy through a passageway beneath the park:

‘Now my sight was restored to me, and looking back along the passage, I saw, clinging to an irregularity in the moldy wall, the most gigantic scorpion I had ever set eyes upon! It was fully as large as my open hand.

Kennedy and Nayland Smith were stealthily retracing their steps, the former keeping the light directed upon the hideous insect, which now began running about with that horrible, febrile activity characteristic of the species. Suddenly came a sharp, staccato report... Sir Lionel had scored a hit with his Browning pistol.

In waves of sound, the report went booming along the passage. The lamp, as I have said, was turned in order to shine back upon us, rendering the tunnel ahead a mere black mouth – a veritable inferno, held by inhuman guards. Into that black cavern I stared, gloomily fascinated by the onward rolling sound storm; into that blackness I looked... to feel my scalp tingle horrifically, to know the crowning horror of the horrible journey.

The blackness was spangled with watching, diamond eyes! – with tiny insect eyes that moved; upon the floor, upon the walls, upon the ceiling! A choking cry rose to my lips.

“Smith! Barton! for God’s sake, look! The place is alive with scorpions!”

Around we all came, panic plucking at our hearts, around swept the beam of the big lamp; and there, retreating before the light, went a veritable army of venomous creatures! I counted no fewer than three of the giant red centipedes whose poisonous touch, called “the zayat kiss,” is certain death; several species of scorpion were represented; and some kind of bloated, unwieldy spider, so gross of body that its short, hairy legs could scarce support it, crawled, hideous, almost at my feet.

What other monstrosities of the insect kingdom were included in that obscene host I know not; my skin tingled from head to feet; I experienced a sensation as if a million venomous things already clung to me – unclean things bred in the malarial jungles of Burma, in the corpse-tainted mud of China’s rivers, in the fever

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spots of that darkest East from which Fu-Manchu recruited his shadow army.’¹⁰

There are many scenes like this in Rohmer’s work, and they are echoed in *Dr No*, where James Bond has to go through No’s ‘killing ground’, and discovers a cage filled with scuttling animals:

‘What was it? Bond listened to the pounding of his heart. Snakes? Scorpions? Centipedes?’¹¹

They turn out to be giant tarantulas. Rohmer’s influence can also be seen in *You Only Live Twice*, which features a ‘Garden of Death’ filled with toxic plants, snakes, scorpions and spiders, and poisonous fish in its ponds.

Like Fu-Manchu, Sapper’s Carl Peterson also has a fondness for deadly animals, as Bulldog Drummond discovers:

‘He felt his way along the hall, and at length his hand touched the curtain – only to drop it again at once. From close behind him had come a sharp, angry hiss...

He stepped back a pace and stood rigid, staring at the spot from which the sound had seemed to come – but he could see nothing. Then he leaned forward and once more moved the curtain. Instantly it came again, sharper and angrier than before.

Hugh passed a hand over his forehead and found it damp. Germans he knew, and things on two legs, but what was this that hissed so viciously in the darkness? At length he determined to risk it, and drew from his pocket a tiny electric torch. Holding it well away from his body, he switched on the light. In the centre of the beam, swaying gracefully to and fro, was a snake. For a moment he watched it fascinated as it spat at the light angrily; he saw the flat hood where the vicious head was set on the upright body; then he switched off the torch and retreated rather faster than he had come.

‘A convivial household,’ he muttered to himself through lips that were a little dry. ‘A hooded cobra is an unpleasing pet.’¹²

Peterson doesn't have a pet marmoset, but like Fu-Manchu he keeps a primate: a gorilla (with which Drummond grapples).

Many of Rohmer's stories featured attempts on people's lives in locked rooms. The heroes, usually Nayland Smith and an associate, investigate, only to find they are targeted in the same way. In *The Quest of The Sacred Slipper*, a novel that doesn't feature Fu-Manchu, the narrator is attacked with a blowpipe:

'What looked like a reed was slowly inserted through the opening between door and doorpost! It was brought gradually around... until it pointed directly toward me!

I seemed to put forth a mighty mental effort, shaking off the icy hand of fear which held me inactive in my chair. A saving instinct warned me – and I ducked my head.

Something whirred past me and struck the wall behind.

Revolver in hand, I leapt across the room, dashed the door open, and fired blindly – again – and again – and again – down the passage.

And in the brief gleams I saw it!

I cannot call it man, but I saw the thing which, I doubt not, had killed poor Deeping with the crescent-knife and had propelled a poison-dart at me.

It was a tiny dwarf! Neither within nor without a freak exhibition had I seen so small a human being! A kind of supernatural dread gripped me by the throat at sight of it. As it turned with animal activity and bounded into my bathroom, I caught a three-quarter view of the creature's swollen, incredible head – which was nearly as large as that of a normal man!

Never while my mind serves me can I forget that yellow, grinning face and those canine fangs – the tigerish, blazing eyes – set in the great, misshapen head upon the tiny, agile body.

Wildly, I fired again. I hurled myself forward and dashed into the room...'¹³

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This novel was serialized in the magazine *Short Stories* between November 1913 and June 1914, and was published in book form in 1919. A very similar scene occurs in *Bulldog Drummond*, in which the hero is ambushed in his room at the Ritz:

‘The light flashed out, darting round the room. Ping! Something hit the sleeve of his pyjamas, but still he could see nothing. The bed, with the clothes thrown back; the washstand; the chair with his trousers and shirt – everything was as it had been when he turned in. And then he heard a second sound – distinct and clear. It came from high up, near the ceiling, and the beam caught the big cupboard and travelled up. It reached the top, and rested there, fixed and steady. Framed in the middle of it, peering over the edge, was a little hairless, brown face, holding what looked like a tube in its mouth. Hugh had one glimpse of a dark, skinny hand putting something in the tube, and then he switched off the torch and ducked, just as another fly pinged over his head and hit the wall behind...

He listened for a moment, but no movement came from above; then, half facing the wall, he put one leg against it. There was one quick, tremendous heave; a crash which sounded deafening; then silence. And once again he switched on his torch... Lying on the floor by the window was one of the smallest men he had ever seen. He was a native of sorts, and Hugh turned him over with his foot. He was quite unconscious, and the bump on his head, where it had hit the floor, was rapidly swelling to the size of a large orange. In his hand he still clutched the little tube...’¹⁴

Fu-Manchu usually favours *dacoits* – Burmese assassins – to do his dirty work, having them place insects, spiders or poison in the rooms of his enemies:

‘Every nerve in my body seemed to be strung tensely. I was icy cold, expectant, and prepared for whatever horror was upon us. The shadow became stationary. The dacoit was studying the interior of the room.

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Then it suddenly lengthened, and, craning my head to the left, I saw a lithe, black-clad form, surmounted by a Yellow face, sketchy in the moonlight, pressed against the window-panes!

One thin, brown hand appeared over the edge of the lowered sash, which it grasped – and then another. The man made absolutely no sound whatever. The second hand disappeared – and reappeared. It held a small, square box. There was a very faint CLICK.

The dacoit swung himself below the window with the agility of an ape, as, with a dull, muffled thud, SOMETHING dropped upon the carpet!

“Stand still, for your life!” came Smith’s voice, high-pitched.

A beam of white leaped out across the room and played full upon the coffee-table in the center.

Prepared as I was for something horrible, I know that I paled at sight of the thing that was running round the edge of the envelope.

It was an insect, full six inches long, and of a vivid, venomous, red color! It had something of the appearance of a great ant, with its long, quivering antennae and its febrile, horrible vitality; but it was proportionately longer of body and smaller of head, and had numberless rapidly moving legs. In short, it was a giant centipede, apparently of the scolopendra group, but of a form quite new to me.

These things I realized in one breathless instant; in the next – Smith had dashed the thing’s poisonous life out with one straight, true blow of the golf club!

I leaped to the window and threw it widely open, feeling a silk thread brush my hand as I did so. A black shape was dropping, with incredible agility from branch to branch of the ivy, and, without once offering a mark for a revolver-shot, it merged into the shadows beneath the trees of the garden. As I turned and switched on the light Nayland Smith dropped limply into a chair, leaning his head upon his hands. Even that grim courage had been tried sorely.’¹⁵

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In Sapper's *The Final Round*, published 14 years after this passage, Bulldog Drummond receives an equally unpleasant gift from Peterson:

'With the paper-knife he prised open the lid, and even he gave a startled exclamation when he saw what was inside. Personally it filled me with a feeling of nausea, and I saw Toby Sinclair clutch the table.

It was a spider of sorts, but such a spider as I have never dreamed of in my wildest nightmares. Its body was the size of a hen's egg; its six legs the size of a crab's. And it was covered with coarse black hair. Even in death it looked the manifestation of all evil, with its great protruding eyes and short sharp jaws, and with a shudder I turned away.'¹⁶

Peterson has also sent a female of the species, which Drummond bashes with a poker. Both these scenes may have been in Fleming's mind for the scene in *Dr No* in which Bond wakes to find a centipede crawling over him:

'What had woken him up? Bond moved softly, preparing to slip out of bed. Bond stopped moving. He stopped as dead as a live man can. Something had stirred on his right ankle. Now it was moving up the inside of his shin. Bond could feel the hairs on his leg being parted. It was an insect of some sort. A very big one. It was long, five or six inches – as long as his hand. He could feel dozens of tiny feet lightly touching his skin. What was it? Then Bond heard something he had never heard before – the sound of the hair on his head rasping up on the pillow. Bond analysed the noise. It couldn't be! It simply couldn't! Yes, his hair was standing on end. Bond could even feel the cool air reaching his scalp between the hairs. How extraordinary! How very extraordinary! He had always thought it was a figure of speech. But why? Why was it happening to him? The thing on his leg moved. Suddenly Bond realized that he was afraid, terrified. His instincts, even

before they had communicated with his brain, had told his body that he had a centipede on him...'¹⁷

This scene is a virtuoso piece of writing from Fleming, with his powers of description at full throttle. He takes this rather stale convention and prolongs the visceral reaction for much longer than Rohmer or Sapper. Their prose is vivid, occasionally even chilling, but this is a rare example of suspense in Fleming, with time almost seeming to slow down, and his eye zooming in on every hair of the centipede's legs as it traverses across Bond's body. In the film adaptation, ironically, the centipede became a spider, the latter being thought more visually impressive.

Fleming drew on the work of both Sapper and Rohmer in *Thunderball*, *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* and *You Only Live Twice*. The master-villain of those three novels, Ernst Stavro Blofeld, is directly inspired by both Carl Peterson and Dr Fu-Manchu. Like Peterson, he changes identity and appearance, transforming himself into the Comte de Bleuville and Dr Shatterhand (Peterson poses as the 'Comte de Guy' and many others). Like Peterson, he is a highly organized criminal trying to alter world events primarily for profit; and like Peterson he makes use of biological warfare to do it, among other schemes. These are specific similarities, but they were not all that unusual in thrillers before Fleming. The combination of them is more telling, and coupled with Blofeld having a female accomplice called Irma this confirms Sapper as a direct source. I suspect Fleming called her that to make the inspiration more obvious, and perhaps to pay tribute to Sapper.

But like Fu-Manchu, Blofeld heads a secret organization that intends to bring down the world: the Si-Fan in Rohmer, S.P.E.C.T.R.E. in Fleming. In Rohmer's 1936 novel *President Fu Manchu*, it is suggested in passing that Japan's real-life Society of the Black Dragon is associated with the Si-Fan. In *You Only Live Twice*, Blofeld has surrounded himself with former members

of the same society. In *The Devil Doctor*, published in 1916, Fu-Manchu traps Nayland Smith and his friend Dr Petrie, and speechifies about seppuku and other Japanese traditions:

“‘The weapon near your hand,’” continued the Chinaman, imperturbably, “is a product of the civilization of our near neighbors, the Japanese, a race to whose courage I prostrate myself in meekness. It is the sword of a samurai, Dr. Petrie. It is of very great age, and was, until an unfortunate misunderstanding with myself led to the extinction of the family, a treasured possession of a noble Japanese house...”¹⁸

Fu-Manchu places Nayland Smith in a wire cage called the ‘Six Gates of Joyful Wisdom’ and lets starving rats loose inside it. He then offers Petrie the samurai sword with which to kill his friend before the rats gnaw him to death. Petrie swipes at Nayland Smith with the sword, nearly decapitating him, but the two are rescued at the last moment by Fu-Manchu’s female assistant Karamaneh, who has switched sides, something she did regularly. In *You Only Live Twice*, Blofeld makes several speeches that echo Fu-Manchu’s in this novel, and also uses a samurai sword:

“‘The account I have to settle with you is a personal one. Have you ever heard the Japanese expression ‘kirisute gomen’?”
Bond groaned. “Spare me the Lafcadio Hearn, Blofeld!”
“It dates from the time of the samurai. It means literally ‘killing and going away’. If a low person hindered the samurai’s passage along the road or failed to show him proper respect, the samurai was within his rights to lop off the man’s head. I regard myself as a latter-day samurai. My fine sword has not yet been blooded. Yours will be an admirable head to cut its teeth on.”¹⁹

Bond manages to best Blofeld in the sword fight, in a chapter titled ‘Blood and Thunder’, which was a phrase often used to describe boys’ adventure stories and similar tales from the late 19th century

onwards. Reading such speeches in isolation, it's hard to tell if it's Blofeld speaking, or Dr No – or Fu-Manchu. The 'mocking, lecture-room voice' and megalomaniacal rhetoric of Fleming's villains has its origins in Rohmer's work.

Although Fleming first encountered Rohmer as a boy, it seems he kept up with the series as an adult. One bizarre similarity comes in the story *Green Devil Mask*, which was serialized in the Canadian publication *Star Weekly* in January and February 1952. In it, Nayland Smith stops a plot by Fu-Manchu and his daughter to turn the gold bullion in Fort Knox into a worthless base metal using a new type of X-ray. This may simply be an uncanny coincidence because in *Goldfinger*, published in 1959, the titular villain merely wants to rob Fort Knox of its gold. But when it came to making the film of the novel a few years later, the scriptwriters felt that this didn't work, and changed the plot so that Goldfinger plans to irradiate the gold in Fort Knox, rendering it worthless for decades.

A novel that seems very likely to have influenced Ian Fleming directly is *The Island of Fu Manchu*, which was published in 1941. Fu Manchu has set up a sisal mine in Haiti using cheap labour, having frightened the locals by the fraudulent use of voodoo. The mine is a diversion: inside a hollowed-out volcano, Fu Manchu operates a secret base in which he keeps experimental underwater craft that will help tip the balance of world power. He captures Denis Nayland Smith and Bart Kerrigan, and threatens to throw them in a massive swamp, which contains Burmese soldier spiders.

This sounds like a James Bond adventure taken to the extreme. In *Live and Let Die*, Mr Big – described by Antony Boucher in his review of the novel for *The New York Times* as 'a sort of blackface Fu Manchu'²⁰ – uses voodoo to frighten locals in Jamaica into submission. *Dr No* features a guano mine on Crab Key, and No uses cheap local labour to build his base. A base in a hollowed-out volcano was used by Blofeld in the film of *You*

Only Live Twice, but not in Fleming's novel, where Blofeld operated from a castle. Rohmer did not only provide elements that Fleming built on to create what we now recognize as his style: in many ways, Fleming toned down those elements, and despite Rohmer's lack of convincing characterization and archaic prose style, his work often seems more in line with the popular perception of James Bond stories than Fleming's own novels.

A major difference between Fleming and Rohmer is in their protagonists: James Bond is a very different character from the anodyne Denis Nayland Smith and his assorted accomplices. Bentley-driving Bulldog Drummond is more similar to Bond, although I think there were several closer models. But Fleming's villains – their conspiracies, strategies, ways of working, manner of speaking and treating others – as well as the locations and overall tone of his novels, all owe a lot to Rohmer's work. Rohmer was a very prolific author, and it would take much more space to do justice to this topic, but I hope this article has at least gone some way to showing that he was a major source of inspiration for Ian Fleming – and often a very direct one.

Notes

- 1, 7, 8, 15. All quotes from *The Insidious Dr Fu-Manchu* (the American title) by Sax Rohmer: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/173/173-h/173-h.htm>
2. p127, *Dr No* by Ian Fleming, Pan, 1965.
3. p10, *Ian Fleming* by Andrew Lycett, Phoenix, 1996.
4. pp239-240, *The Life of Ian Fleming* by John Pearson, Companion Book Club, 1966.
5. What Boys Read, *The Times*, February 15, 1950.
6. p210, *Bloody Murder: From the Detective Story to the Crime Novel* by Julian Symons, Viking, 1985.
9. p176 *The Hand of Fu-Manchu* (American title) by Sax Rohmer, Borgo Press, Wildside Press edition, 2001.
10. pp209-210 *The Hand of Fu-Manchu*.

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- 11, p158, *Dr No*.
- 12 pp67,68 *Bulldog Drummond* by Sapper, House of Stratus, 2001.
13. pp20-21, *The Quest of The Sacred Slipper* by Sax Rohmer, Borgo Press, 2002.
14. p168 *Bulldog Drummond*.
16. pp60-61 *The Final Round* by Sapper, House of Stratus, 2009.
17. pp55-58, *Dr No*.
18. p192 *The Devil Doctor* by Sax Rohmer, BiblioBazaar, 2007.
19. pp170-171, *You Only Live Twice* by Ian Fleming, Pan, 1966.
20. 'Criminals At Large' by Anthony Boucher, *The New York Times*, April 10, 1955.

‘It is certainly necessary for
you to die’

IN THE 1997 film *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery*, villainous mastermind Dr Evil captures Austin Powers, who he then introduces to his son, Scott:

‘DR EVIL

Scott, I want you to meet Daddy’s nemesis, Austin Powers.

SCOTT EVIL

What? Are you feeding him? Why don’t you just kill him?

DR EVIL

I have an even better idea. I’m going to place him in an easily escapable situation involving an overly elaborate and exotic death.’

This is an obvious parody of James Bond, and raises a laugh for that reason. One of the best-known examples of such a scene takes place in *Goldfinger*, in which Bond is captured by the eponymous super-villain, a gold-smuggler said to be ‘the richest man in England’. In the novel, published in 1959, Bond is bound to a table and threatened with a buzz saw:

‘Bond glanced down the table on which he lay spread-eagled. He let his head fall back with a sigh. There was a narrow slit down the centre of the polished steel table. At the far end of the slit, like a foresight framed in the vee of his parted feet, were the glinting teeth of a circular saw...’¹

Bond, increasingly desperate as the saw approaches his body, suggests that he and his companion Tilly Masterton could work for Goldfinger. The offer is rejected:

‘Bond said politely, ‘Then you can go and — yourself.’ He expelled all the breath from his lungs and closed his eyes.
‘Even I am not capable of that, Mr Bond,’ said Goldfinger with good humour. ‘And now, since you have chosen the stony path instead of the smooth, I must extract what interest I can from your predicament by making the path as stony as possible...’²

But then, on a whim, Goldfinger changes his mind. He decides he does need a couple of assistants after all, and shuts off the saw.

When it came to adapting the book for film, this scene proved problematic for the scriptwriters. The first problem was the one that Austin Powers poked fun at: why would a villain go to such extravagant lengths to kill the hero when it would be much simpler (and safer) to just shoot him through the head? Secondly, how does Bond get out of the situation? Fleming’s solution seemed highly implausible, and might elicit groans from a cinema audience. And finally, the entire set-up was a cliché: along with being tied to train tracks, such scenes had been a staple of the early

radio and film serials, pulps and cartoons. In Columbia Pictures' *Captain Midnight* in 1942, for example, the titular hero finds himself on a log rapidly heading towards a buzz saw, while in the 1933 Disney cartoon *The Mad Doctor*, Mickey Mouse has an extended nightmare in which he is strapped to an operating table by a Doctor XXX before a spinning saw descends from the ceiling to cut him in two.

While he was working on the treatment for *Goldfinger* in April 1963, Richard Maibaum wrote to the film's producers, Cubby Broccoli and Harry Saltzman, to explain his solution to this problem:

'That BUZZ SAW in the torture scene must go. It's the oldest device in cheap melodrama. The villain strapping the heroine to a work bench, etc. It's comic by now. Instead, I am dreaming up a machine which utilizes the new LASER BEAM. It was featured in LIFE magazine and I have sent for the article to send on to you. It's a coiled light around an oblong-shaped ruby. When the light is turned on a beam of red light is emitted from the ruby. A ten-thousandth of a second exposure to the beam can remove a cancer. It also can be used, when developed, to cut steel, etc. I visualize a demonstration of the beam, from an overhead contraption hanging from rails on the ceiling, showing it cutting through steel like a razor through paper. And then used, as the buzz saw was in the book, threatening to cut Bond in half. The beam will look like a fiery red concentrated thin long blade emerging straight down from the contraption overhead, coming closer, closer. With the same electrical whine as the saw would have. This out-Flemings Fleming. Using the very latest scientific discovery in the old way of scaring the wits out of people.'³

The futuristic extravagance of the laser beam distracted from the fact that the essence of the scene remained the same, with the same problems: there seemed no reason for *Goldfinger* not to just shoot Bond, no reason to spare him, and equally no way for Bond to

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plausibly escape from the table. Maibaum and Paul Dehn, who was called in to work on the script, both struggled with these problems. Eventually, Dehn worked out a solution whereby Bond overhears Goldfinger refer to ‘Operation Grand Slam’ earlier, and by mentioning it piques the villain’s interest and fear enough to have him shut off the machine. Dehn also added the famous dialogue in the scene:

‘BOND

Do you expect me to talk?

GOLDFINGER

No, Mr Bond, I expect you to die!’

Goldfinger was the film that made James Bond a global phenomenon. As a result, this scene is popularly regarded as the prototype of the villain arranging an elaborate death for the captured hero, as parodied in *Austin Powers* and elsewhere.

But this convention doesn’t simply predate *Goldfinger*: it was so common that it was already being parodied decades before the novel and film were released. In Leslie Charteris’ 1930 novel *Knight Templar* (later retitled *The Avenging Saint*), Simon Templar renews battle with villainous mastermind Dr Rayt Marius. In the third act, Marius captures The Saint, who sardonically remarks that he hopes he has invented a ‘picturesque’ way for him to die:

“It is certainly necessary for you to die, Templar,” said Marius dispassionately. “There is a score between us that cannot be settled in any other way.”

The Saint nodded, and for a moment his eyes were two flakes of blue steel.

“You’re right, Angel Face,” he said softly. “You’re dead right... This planet isn’t big enough to hold us both. And you know as

surely as you're standing there that if you don't kill me I'm going to kill you, Rayt Marius!"

"I appreciate that," said the giant calmly.

And then the Saint laughed.

"But still we have to face the question of method, old dear," he murmured, with an easy return of all his old mocking banter. "You can't wander round England bumping people off quite so airily. I know you've done it before – on one particular occasion – but I haven't yet discovered how you got away with it. There are bodies to be got rid of, and things like that, you know – it isn't quite such a soft snap as it reads in story-books. It's an awful bore, but there you are. Or were you just thinking of running us through the mincing machine and sluicin' the pieces down the kitchen sink?"

Marius shook his head.

"I have noticed," he remarked, "that in the stories to which you refer, the method employed for the elimination of an undesirable busybody is usually so elaborate and complicated that the hero's escape is as inevitable as the reader expects it to be. But I have not that melodramatic mind. If you are expecting an underground cellar full of poisonous snakes, or a trap-door leading to a subterranean river, or a man-eating tiger imported for your benefit, or anything else so conventional – pray disillusion yourself. The end I have designed for you is very simple. You will simply meet with an unfortunate accident – that is all."

He was carefully trimming the end of his cigar as he spoke; and his tremendous hands moved to the operation with a ruthless deliberation that was more terrible than any violence.⁴

This is essentially the same gag as the one in *Austin Powers*, only 67 years earlier – and 23 years before James Bond was created. Charteris was poking fun at well-established thriller conventions, as well as at himself, as he had used many of them. But he also made sure not to undermine the idea so much that he couldn't use similar plot devices later:

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‘The Saint knew as well as anyone that the blood-curdling inventions of the sensational novelist had a real foundation in the mentality of a certain type of crook, that there were men constitutionally incapable of putting the straightforward skates under an enemy whom they had in their power – men whose tortuous minds ran to electrically fired revolvers, or tame alligators in a private swimming bath, as inevitably as water runs downhill. The Saint had met this type of man.’⁵

Knight Templar features several other conventions now associated with James Bond. In the novel’s opening chapter, Simon Templar is held at gunpoint; he throws a cigarette onto the floor that fills the place with white smoke, allowing him to make his escape. ‘Altogether a most satisfactory beginning to the Sabbath,’ he remarks to his sidekick, Roger Conway, as they speed away in his eight-cylinder Hirondele:

“I won’t say it was dead easy, but you can’t have everything. The only real trouble came at the very end, and then the old magnesium cigarette was just what the doctor ordered...”⁶

If you were to feature such a scene in a film or novel today, it would be seen as a parody of James Bond. But Ian Fleming also spoofed this precise plot idea. In *From Russia, With Love*, published in 1957, Bond is caught unawares on the Orient Express by SMERSH assassin Red Grant, who aims a copy of War and Peace at him that can shoot –.25 dum-dum bullets fired by an electric battery. Bond stalls for time by saying that SMERSH seems to have thought out their operation very well, but for one thing. Grant asks him to elucidate:

“Not without a cigarette.’

‘Okay. Go ahead. But if there’s a move I don’t like, you’ll be dead.’

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Bond slipped his right hand into his hip-pocket. He drew out his broad gunmetal cigarette case. Opened it. Took out a cigarette. Took his lighter out of his trouser pocket. Lit the cigarette and put the lighter back. He left the cigarette case on his lap beside the book. He put his left hand casually over the book and the cigarette case as if to prevent them slipping off his lap. He puffed away at his cigarette. If only it had been a trick one—magnesium flare, or anything he could throw in the man’s face! If only his Service went in for those explosive toys!”⁷

The joke in *Austin Powers* about villains not shooting heroes when they get the chance is immediately associated with the Bond films, testament to how successful they have been. A knock-on effect of their global popularity has been that Ian Fleming is now thought to have originated many conventions of the thriller genre that predate his novels by decades. A related convention to the villain preparing overly elaborate methods of doing away with the hero is that while doing so he also boastfully explains his plans. Once the hero has escaped, he is then armed with enough information to stop the plot. Red Grant makes this mistake in *From Russia, With Love*:

“I expect you’d like to know what this is all about. Be glad to tell you. We’ve got about half an hour before you’re due to go. It’ll give me an extra kick telling the famous Mister Bond of the Secret Service what a bloody fool he is.”⁸

This device also features in *Knight Templar*. when Rayt Marius captures The Saint, he conveniently outlines ‘the bare and sufficient essentials of an abomination that would set a torch to the powder-magazine of Europe and kindle such a blaze as could only be quenched in smoking seas of blood’.⁹

Even the popular conception of what constitutes a ‘Bond villain’ predates Ian Fleming. Marius is an arms-dealer trying to start a war on behalf of a group of financiers. Said to be ‘one of

the richest men in the world', he is nicknamed the Millionaire Without A Country. He is also a giant, and an ugly one at that (his face 'might have served as a model for some hideous heathen idol'), which is why The Saint repeatedly calls him 'Angel Face'.

In fact, this sort of megalomaniacal super-villain plotting wide-reaching conspiracies has existed since the beginning of the 20th century, featuring in thrillers by the likes of William Le Queux and E. Phillips Oppenheim. These characters were often physically deformed foreigners who wined and dined the hero with great sophistication while pontificating on their grand schemes. Here's an excerpt from *The Man With The Clubfoot* by Valentine Williams, published in 1918, in which Prussian spymaster Dr Adolph 'Clubfoot' Grundt entertains British secret agent Desmond Okewood:

“You smoke?” queried Clubfoot. “No!” – he held up his hand to stop me as I was reaching for my cigarette case, “you shall have a cigar – not one of our poor German Hamburgers, but a fine Havana cigar given me by a member of the English Privy Council. You stare! Aha! I repeat, by a member of the English Privy Council, to me, the Boche, the barbarian, the Hun! No hole and corner work for the old doctor. Der Stelze may be lame, Clubfoot may be past his work, but when he travels en mission, he travels en prince, the man of wealth and substance. There is none too high to do him honour, to listen to his views on poor, misguided Germany, the land of thinkers sold into bondage to the militarists! Bah! the fools!”

He snarled venomously. This man was beginning to interest me. His rapid change of moods was fascinating, now the kindly philosopher, now the Teuton braggart, now the Hun incorporate. As he limped across the room to fetch his cigar case from the mantelpiece, I studied him.

He was a vast man, not so much by reason of his height, which was below the medium, but his bulk, which was enormous. The span of his shoulders was immense, and, though a heavy paunch

and a white flabbiness of face spoke of a gross, sedentary life, he was obviously a man of quite unusual strength. His arms particularly were out of all proportion to his stature, being so long that his hands hung down on either side of him when he stood erect, like the paws of some giant ape. Altogether, there was something decidedly simian about his appearance... his squat nose with hairy, open nostrils, and the general hirsuteness of the man, his bushy eyebrows, the tufts of black hair on his cheekbones and on the backs of his big, spade like hands. And there was that in his eyes, dark and courageous beneath the shaggy brows, that hinted at accesses of ape-like fury, uncontrollable and ferocious.

He gave me his cigar which, as he had said, was a good one, and, after a preliminary sip of his wine, began to speak.

“I am a plain man, Herr Doktor,” he said, “and I like plain speaking. That is why I am going to speak quite plainly to you...”¹⁰

Since the publication of *Casino Royale* in 1953, dozens of articles and books have been written about Ian Fleming. Surprisingly, very few have looked at his influences in any depth. In *The James Bond Dossier* (1965), Kingsley Amis repeatedly compared Bond to H. ‘Sapper’ McNeile’s character Bulldog Drummond. But while Drummond was certainly an influence – a two-fisted hero in a Bentley battling arch-villain Carl Peterson and his mistress Irma – he was much less of one than Charteris’ The Saint, who is surprisingly absent from most literary criticism on Ian Fleming (Bernard Bergonzi being a notable exception). The early serials, pulps and other authors barely get a look-in, and the idea has solidified over the years that Fleming was influenced primarily by Sapper and John Buchan. He was inspired by both, but I think several other writers were greater influences.

The result of Amis’ and others’ misconceptions is that later critics have read a couple of Sapper or Buchan novels and come away with the idea that they represented the last markers before the arrival of James Bond on the scene: it is as though the thriller

between around 1928 and 1953 has been completely forgotten. This has led to the even firmer idea that while the so-called ‘clubland heroes’ may have defeated a few foreign baddies and driven fast cars, there was no sex, sadism or snobbery in thrillers before Fleming.

When Ian Fleming sat down to his typewriter in Jamaica in January 1952, he created an iconic fictional hero. Like Sherlock Holmes, Robin Hood and King Arthur, as long as stories are told James Bond will live on. Kingsley Amis wrote *The James Bond Dossier* as a rallying cry for Fleming to be granted a place in the canon of literature as a genius of popular fiction alongside the likes of Jules Verne, Rider Haggard and Conan Doyle. But that cry has largely been ignored, and a great deal of analysis of Fleming’s work has misunderstood his place in the canon of the thriller.

With many thanks to Colleen Kelley at the Special Collections of the University of Iowa Libraries.

Notes

- 1, 2. pp145-148 *Goldfinger* by Ian Fleming, Pan, 1964.
3. Richard Maibaum to Cubby Broccoli and Harry Saltzman, April 30 1963, Papers of Richard Maibaum, Special Collections of the University of Iowa Libraries.
4. pp148-149, *The Avenging Saint* by Leslie Charteris, Hodder & Stoughton, 1954.
5. p150, *ibid.*
6. p16, *ibid.*
7. p195, *From Russia, With Love* by Ian Fleming, Pan, 1972.
- 8, p189, *ibid.*
9. p145, *The Avenging Saint*.
10. pp98-99, *The Man With The Clubfoot* by Valentine Williams, BiblioBazaar, 2008.

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11. 'What Became of Harting?' by Richard Boston, *New York Times*, October 27 1968.

NEED TO KNOW

A Spy Is Born

*Dennis Wheatley and the Secret Roots
of Ian Fleming's James Bond*

Introduction

A COMMON VIEW of Ian Fleming today is that he was a pulp novelist: that his stories are fun, but not to be taken seriously as literature. No full-length analysis of his work has been published since Kingsley Amis and O.F. Snelling's books in the Sixties. At the same time, it's a cultural commonplace that many of the thriller's most popular conventions originated with James Bond, either in Fleming's work or the films, and that Bond is therefore worth looking at as an originator in the genre.

I think both these views are wrong. I feel Fleming has been unjustly critically neglected and deserves recognition as one of the great writers of popular fiction, the creator of an iconic character whose appeal still burns bright today and who is as worthy of study as Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett, Patricia Highsmith or Georges Simenon. But I don't believe he originated most of the genre conventions it's generally believed that he did—many of

them were not merely well-established but hackneyed by the time he used them in his work. I think he was a great thriller-writer for other reasons.

This short book has had a long gestation. In 2005, Ajay Chowdhury was putting together the first issue of a new James Bond magazine, *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang*, and asked me to write about the literary roots of Fleming's debut novel, *Casino Royale*, in advance of the release of the film adaptation starring Daniel Craig. While researching the article, I looked again at the 'usual suspects' from the clubland era, but as I dug more deeply I started to wonder if a thriller-writer who had come after them had not been much more of a significant influence. I first read Dennis Wheatley's spy thrillers as a teenager, but on rereading them thought I sensed something much closer to the Bond novels than John Buchan and Sapper. There was virtually no mention of Wheatley as an influence on Fleming in the previous literature, but rereading him had thrown up several similarities that seemed unmistakable.

After I wrote that article, *Cold Male*, I started out on a similar one examining *Live and Let Die*, but the magazine folded before it was published. However, my research into Fleming's second novel also threw up striking similarities with Wheatley's books, and I decided the subject warranted closer analysis. This took me a couple of years (Wheatley was very prolific), and I also expanded my reading to other writers in the genre to fill gaps in my research and make sure I wasn't taking unjustified leaps or succumbing to confirmation bias. The result was a much longer essay, *The Secret Origins of James Bond*, which is the basis for this book. Since publication of it on the website Spywise.net in 2010, a domino effect has led to Wheatley becoming much more widely identified as one of Fleming's major influences, including by his current publisher—but that wasn't in the air at all when I started researching this topic.

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In the last decade or so, I've edited and added to the Spywise essay, expanding my analysis with more context and research, including digging into newspaper archives and declassified M.I.5 files. I was greatly helped in this by the publication of Phil Baker's wonderful biography of Wheatley, *The Devil Is A Gentleman*, which threw me down many new avenues. This fresh version is over double the length of the previous one; unlike Wheatley, I haven't kept myself working through the night with cigarettes and Champagne, but instead have mainly relied on strong Swedish coffee. I feel this now makes the case as best as I can while also, I hope, providing an interesting look at the development of the British thriller, some of the ways in which intelligence activities fed into the genre in the 20th century, and the intricacies of novel-writing. I hope you enjoy it.

Jeremy Duns
Mariehamn, May 2019

I

The Mind of a Nazi

DURING THE SECOND World War, he worked in the upper echelons of Britain's intelligence establishment, helping to plan ingenious operations against the Nazis. He was one of the most popular thriller-writers of the 20th century, but his literary reputation has faded in recent years, with critics lambasting his novels as xenophobic, sexist fantasies. And he created a suave but ruthless British secret agent who was orphaned at a young age, expelled from his public school, smoked exotic cigarettes, had a scar on his face, bedded beautiful women and repeatedly saved the world from the threats of megalomaniacal villains.

His name? Dennis Wheatley.

Since the death of Ian Fleming in 1964, Kingsley Amis, O.F. Snelling and many other critics following in their footsteps have claimed that James Bond's main literary forebears were characters from the early 20th century usually referred to as 'the clubland heroes'. In 1968, the critic Richard Boston claimed that 'the short step from Bulldog Drummond to Ian Fleming's James Bond consisted in giving the hero a sex life', and this perception has

lasted: in the 2006 edition of *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, Fleming's novels are described as 'updated versions of [William] Le Queux and [John] Buchan designed for the Cold War consumer boom and changed sexual *mores* of the 1950s and 1960s'⁶⁸

But in fact the clubland heroes had already been updated, and given sex lives, at least two decades before James Bond's first appearance. There are several characters, incidents and conventions in Fleming's novels inspired by the above-named writers, but a huge number of thrillers were published between the end of the clubland era in the 1920s and *Casino Royale* in 1953, and the genre evolved in that time. Among these post-clubland writers, Wheatley's influence on Fleming has gone almost entirely overlooked, despite it being much more significant than that of the writers usually cited—and playing a crucial role in the development of James Bond.

~

BORN IN 1897, 11 years before Fleming, Dennis Yates Wheatley fought in the trenches in the First World War before taking over his father's wine business in London. Following the 1929 Stock Market Crash he was bankrupted, and in 1933 embarked on a new career as an author, and soon became a best-seller. Dubbed 'the prince of thriller writers' by the *Times Literary Supplement*, he wrote over 70 books, which have sold over 50 million copies in 28 languages. Today, he is best remembered for his novels dealing with black magic and the occult, but he also wrote straight suspense stories, swashbuckling historical adventures and spy thrillers.

⁶⁸ 'What Became of Harting?' by Richard Boston, *New York Times*, 27 October 1968 (a review of John le Carre's *A Small Town In Germany*); *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, edited by Margaret Drabble (Oxford University Press, 2006), p963.

By the time the Second World War began, Wheatley had established himself as one of the country's best-selling writers, counting King George VI as one of his fans.⁶⁹ At 42 he was too old to fight, but he desperately wanted to help his country. Thanks to a chance encounter made by his wife, a chauffeur for M.I.5, in May 1940 he was asked to submit ideas to the War Office on how Britain could resist an invasion. Fourteen hours later, having worked through the night, Wheatley produced a 7,000-word essay stuffed with inventive suggestions. He was immediately asked to write another paper, this time from the perspective of the enemy: if he were in the Nazi High Command, how would he go about trying to conquer Britain? Helped along by two hundred cigarettes and three magnums of Champagne, Wheatley worked at 'dynamo speed', and within 48 hours had produced a 15,000-word paper on the topic.⁷⁰ Its contents shocked the Chiefs of Staff, as Wheatley recalled with laughter in an interview long after the war:

“Wheatley's got the mind of a Nazi,” they said, “while we're used to running a war like playing a game of cricket.”⁷¹

After completing further papers, he was invited to become a member of the London Controlling Section, a seven-man team within the Joint Planning Staff of the War Cabinet that was responsible for devising deception operations against the Axis powers. He was the only civilian to join it.⁷² To celebrate his new position, Wheatley had his tailor create a greatcoat lined with scarlet satin, and persuaded Wilkinson's to design him a couple of

⁶⁹ *The Devil Is A Gentleman* by Phil Baker (Dedalus, 2009), p413.

⁷⁰ *The Time Has Come* by Dennis Wheatley (Arrow, 1981), p662.

⁷¹ 'The Man Who Can't Help Hitting The Jackpot' by Martin Fox, *The Daily Mail*, 30 August 1966, as cited in *The Devil Is A Gentleman*, p640.

⁷² Many of the papers he wrote during the war were collected in his book *Stranger Than Fiction* (The Anchor Press, 1959).

swagger sticks concealing 15-inch blades ‘as a precaution against trouble in the blackout’.⁷³

Wheatley was now in his element, given free rein to exercise his thriller-writer’s imagination to help defeat the enemy. He spent his time ‘thinking up rumours that would cause alarm and despondency’⁷⁴ among Germans as well as helping to plan several deception operations, notably GRAFFHAM and HARDBOILED.

The L.C.S. also oversaw deception operations proposed by other parts of the British intelligence apparatus. In 1943, it approved Operation MINCEMEAT, whereby a corpse was dressed as a major in the Royal Marines and washed ashore in Spain with forged documents indicating that the Allies would invade Greece and Sardinia instead of their real target, Sicily. Wheatley was also involved with Operation COPPERHEAD in 1944, whereby an Australian named Clifton James impersonated Field Marshal Montgomery.⁷⁵

During the war, Wheatley became both a colleague and friend of another well-known writer, albeit of travel books rather than novels: Peter Fleming, who worked on deception planning in India and the Far East, and often collaborated with the London Controlling Section.

Like Wheatley, he was a keen advocate of the use of deception as a weapon, and was sometimes frustrated by the lack of resources assigned to it. ‘This is a one-horse show and I am the horse,’ he complained in a letter to Wheatley from India in mid-1942. Fleming felt that what was needed from the L.C.S. was not merely red herrings to mislead the enemy, but ‘purple whales’—the phrase was later given as a codename to an operation whereby the

⁷³ *The Deception Planners: My Secret War* by Dennis Wheatley (Hutchinson, 1980), p41.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p154.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp151–153 and pp191–193.

Chinese were used to sell false documents (written by Fleming) to the Japanese.⁷⁶

Wheatley described Peter Fleming in his memoir of his wartime intelligence activities, *The Deception Planners*, which was published posthumously:

‘Unlike many authors of travel books, who turn out to be pale, bespectacled little men, his bronzed, tight-skinned face always gave the impression that he had just returned from an arduous journey across the Mongolian desert or up some little-known tributary of the Amazon. His lithe, sinewy figure, dark eyes and black hair reminded one of a jaguar, until his quiet smile rendered the simile inappropriate. Physically, he was as fit as any troop-leader of Commandos and, in fact, he had been Chief Instructor at the London District Unarmed Combat School before being sent out to initiate deception in the Far East. He was always immaculate in the gold-peaked cap and freshly-pressed tunic of his regiment, the Grenadier Guards. There was only one thing I disliked about Peter. He smoked the foulest pipe I ever came within a yard of, and when he used to sit on the edge of my desk puffing at it, I heartily wished him back in the jungle. But we were most fortunate in having such a courageous, intelligent and imaginative man as our colleague for the war against Japan.’⁷⁷

Wheatley also knew Peter’s younger brother Ian, who was thinking up his own outlandish ideas for operations over at Naval Intelligence, where he was the influential personal assistant of the Director, Admiral John Godfrey. According to Dennis Wheatley’s biographer, Phil Baker, Wheatley and Ian Fleming dined together from time to time—like Fleming, Wheatley was very good at what

⁷⁶ *Peter Fleming: A Biography* by Duff Hart-Davis (Oxford University Press, 1987), pp271-274.

⁷⁷ *The Deception Planners*, p98.

today would be called ‘networking’, and during the war often hosted lunches, inviting interesting and influential figures:

‘Wheatley would lunch them at the Hungaria and he was a good host, with exceptional wine from his own cellars. As well as colleagues and the occasional writer he lunched a host of others including J.C. Masterman (Bill Younger’s old tutor, the MI5 man who later wrote *The Double Cross System*), Peter Fleming, Brigadier Colin Gubbins, who scotched Germany’s atomic bomb plans with a raid on its deuterium or “heavy water” plant, Ian Fleming, John Slessor, Max Knight and a legion of others, often in groups of four or six; over a hundred and sixty guest lists survive in his papers.’⁷⁸

Wheatley also hosted dinner parties, to which he invited Ian Fleming on at least two occasions: November 10, 1942, and a New Year’s Eve party the same year. Both took place at Wheatley’s home in Earl’s Court. For the November dinner, Fleming was accompanied by Joan Bright, an on-off girlfriend who was also an influential assistant to General Ismay, Churchill’s Chief of Staff in the War Cabinet, and so a colleague of Wheatley. She had typed out one of his earliest papers for the L.C.S.⁷⁹ The two other guests were Roland Vintras of the Joint Planning Staff and Colin Gubbins, both also heavily involved in the secret world.⁸⁰

We don’t know what was discussed on this or the other occasions these two men met, but it seems likely that they would have been intrigued by each other: they were engaged in similar secret work, and had a similar approach to it, both being noted for their ability to concoct ingenious if occasionally overly fanciful

⁷⁸ *The Devil is a Gentleman*, p420.

⁷⁹ *The Deception Planners*, pp36-37

⁸⁰ Phil Baker to author, 18 April 2007. Also see *Ian Fleming* by Andrew Lycett (Phoenix, 1996), p134, which mentions Wheatley was ‘an occasional dinner guest’ of Ian Fleming.

ideas. On the evening of November 10, Wheatley would have had good reason to have been pleased: Operation TORCH, the Allies' successful invasion of north Africa two days earlier, had been aided by several deception operations cooked up by the L.C.S. to once again fool the enemy into believing that the real objective had been elsewhere.

Fleming would also have been in a celebratory mood: 30 Assault Unit, the intelligence-gathering commando group under his command ('my Red Indians', as he called them), had just captured the Italians' naval code-books from a villa near Algiers. Wheatley would, one suspects, have been eager to hear the details of that mission, as it was both a success story related to his own work with TORCH and just the kind of daring escapade that featured in his thrillers—despite his day job, he had published seven novels since the start of the war.

Fleming and Wheatley had a lot else in common. Both appreciated the finer things in life: Wheatley liked to savour elaborate meals, and often followed them with his favourite cigarettes, a Turkish mixture made by Sullivans in the Burlington Arcade. Fleming preferred a Turkish and Balkan mixture by a rival tobacconist, Morlands, who were based in Grosvenor Street—in 1944, one of his girlfriends was killed in a German bombing raid a few hours after collecting two hundred cigarettes for him from the shop.⁸¹

Wheatley and Fleming also shared a boyish delight in gadgets and weaponry: Wheatley had his special swagger sticks from Wilkinson's, Fleming a small commando dagger made by the same company that he carried with him on foreign assignments. Both men were keen book collectors, and relied on a mutual friend, the antiquarian dealer Percy Muir, to suggest suitable investments.

Wheatley was also friends with Maxwell Knight, who headed M.I.5's countersubversion section and had some eccentric

⁸¹ Lycett, pp151-152.

tendencies: he kept a host of animals in his home, and would sometimes be seen taking his pet bear Bessie for a stroll around the streets of Chelsea.⁸² However, there's no credible evidence that Fleming knew Knight, and the oft-repeated idea that the two of them, along with Wheatley and the occultist Aleister Crowley, were involved in luring Rudolf Hess to Britain in 1941 stems from a fabrication by serial hoaxer Donald McCormick. Fleming did approach Crowley about trying to influence Hess *after* his arrival in Scotland, but nothing came of that.⁸³

Wheatley did know Crowley, having been introduced to him in 1934 by his friend and neighbour Tom Driberg, a journalist who became one of Knight's agents, codenamed M/8; he later became a Labour MP, was compromised by the K.G.B., and became a Soviet asset.⁸⁴ Wheatley became fascinated by Crowley, and used him as the basis for two of his villains: Mocata, the black magician in 1935's *The Devil Rides Out* (later played in the film adaptation by Charles Gray opposite Fleming's cousin, Christopher Lee); and Sean O'Kieff, an occultist with 'a hard rat-

⁸² *Her Majesty's Secret Service* by Christopher Andrew (Penguin, 1987), p334.

⁸³ See *The Life of Ian Fleming* by John Pearson (The Companion Book Club, 1966), pp117-118. For more on McCormick's deceptions, see my article 'Licence to Hoax' in *Tradecraft* (2016). Writers who have repeated McCormick's fabrication about Hess include Anthony Masters in his 1984 biography of Knight, in which he claimed without any evidence that Fleming was 'fascinated' by Knight and modelled 'M' in part on him. See *The Man Who Was M* (Grafton, 1986), p157.

⁸⁴ Driberg introducing Wheatley to Crowley: *The Time Has Come*, pp605-607; M/8: *M: Maxwell Knight, MI5's Greatest Spymaster* by Henry Hemming (Preface Digital, 2017), loc3397; Driberg's career as a Soviet agent of influence: *The Mitrokhin Archive* (Basic Books, 1999), pp400-403. In the late 1930s, Wheatley was 'inclined towards' Mussolini's fascism, but throughout his life was friends with figures from all walks of life and across the political spectrum – he was anything if predictable. When a friend brought William 'Lord Haw Haw' Joyce to one of his parties, Wheatley was amused to hear Joyce's claim that Hermann Goering was a fan of his novels – and his inclusion of a long scene with Goering in one of his novels might be have been a result of this. But he was also already aware of the Nazis' persecution of the Jews and others, and was unimpressed by Joyce otherwise. See *The Time Has Come*, pp640-641.

trap of a mouth' in the 1939 novel *The Quest of Julian Day*. We don't know if Fleming read this novel, but one can't help feeling it would have been up his street: Day, a half-Austrian half-British old Etonian with a double-first from Oxford in Oriental Languages, is up against not just O'Kieff but the rest of 'The Big Seven', the men behind a massive criminal organization involved in espionage, blackmail, dope-running, diamond-smuggling and white-slave trafficking.

At any rate, one suspects thrillers would have been uppermost in Ian Fleming's mind while dining with Dennis Wheatley, for he was a long-standing aficionado of the genre, and harboured the ambition of writing 'the spy story to end all spy stories' himself after the war.⁸⁵

Somewhat ironically, his brother Peter beat him to it—in a manner, anyway. *The Sixth Column*, published in 1951, was a light send-up of the books he and Ian had enjoyed since their schooldays at Eton, when they had devoured the works of Sapper and Sax Rohmer. It also seems to have been something of a send-up of Dennis Wheatley. One of the novel's main characters is a former commando, Archie Strume, who has had unexpected success with a thriller based on his war-time experiences, which he has written as 'an antidote against boredom'. Strume is visited by British intelligence, who ask him to use his thriller-writer's brain to think of ways the enemy might try to harm Britain, so that they can take precautions against them. This, of course, is precisely what Wheatley had been asked to do in 1940, and as he was the only thriller-writer to have been asked to carry out such a job, it seems certain that Peter Fleming got the idea from his friend and former deception-planner.

⁸⁵ The quote is from *The Life of Ian Fleming* by Pearson, p140. Andrew Lycett also gives an account of a typical Fleming evening, which includes him reading a volume of poetry, a copy of the *New Yorker* and 'latest U.S. thriller' at Boodle's; Lycett, p261.

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Strume's melodramatic best-seller featured a dashing commando called Colonel Hackforth, who is fond of saying things like: 'Tell the Minister of Defence to have a midget submarine alongside the Harwich customs jetty not later than last light on Tuesday. It's important.' This, too, appears to be a reference to Wheatley, whose secret agent Gregory Sallust behaves in a similar manner. In *The Black Baroness*, published in 1940, Sallust calls his superior from the Netherlands to ask if permission can be obtained for him 'to be taken on board any naval vessel which might be leaving Harwich for Belgian waters'. His boss says he will 'get in touch with the Admiralty at once'.

Peter dedicated his novel to Ian, and it might have been both a nod to their shared love of such thrillers and a spur for the younger brother: a few months after the publication of *The Sixth Column*, he started writing *Casino Royale*. Strangely enough, its protagonist would also resemble Gregory Sallust.

II

Two Traitors

IAN FLEMING WAS an aficionado of thrillers, and his ambition to write his own was informed by decades reading the genre. When he finally sat down to do so, he was keen to update some of its stuffier conventions. In a letter to *The Manchester Guardian* in 1958, he explained how even the name of his hero was intended to move things on:

‘One of the reasons why I chose the pseudonym of James Bond for my hero rather than, say, Peregrine Maltravers was that I wished him to be unobtrusive. Exotic things would happen to and around him but he would be a neutral figure—an anonymous blunt instrument wielded by a Government Department.’⁸⁶

⁸⁶ ‘The Exclusive Bond: Mr Fleming on his hero’, letter from Ian Fleming, *The Manchester Guardian*, 5 April 1958, p4.

Nevertheless, there were old-fashioned elements to his work. Fleming was not a plagiarist, but he sometimes used other authors' characters or plot ideas as springboards. When asked in October 1963 what writers had influenced him, he pointed to Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler, adding almost parenthetically:

'I suppose, if I were to examine the problem in depth, I'd go back to my childhood and find some roots of interest in E. Phillips Oppenheim and Sax Rohmer. Perhaps they played an important part.'⁸⁷

This is what his brother might have called a 'purple whale'. Hammett and Chandler were influences on his prose style, but they also had great cachet for Fleming, who wanted to be as up-to-date and hard-boiled. Oppenheim and Rohmer were both rather forgotten and fusty English thriller-writers, but their influence on his work was far greater. Rohmer's 'Oriental mastermind' Dr Fu Manchu was the inspiration for Dr Julius No, while Oppenheim's glamorous spies were precursors to his hero in a way Philip Marlowe and Sam Spade never were, as Fleming obliquely acknowledged through Gala Brand's musing about James Bond in *Moonraker*.

'Well, at any rate she had put him in his place and shown him that she wasn't impressed by dashing young men from the Secret Service, however romantic they might look. There were just as good-looking men in the Special Branch, and they were real detectives, not just people that Phillips Oppenheim had dreamed up with fast cars and special cigarettes with gold bands on them and shoulder-holsters.'

⁸⁷ *Counterpoint* by Roy Newquist (Rand McNally & Company, 1964), pp211-212.

Oppenheim and Rohmer were nevertheless largely indirect influences, predecessors who had helped establish the formula of the thriller. But Fleming sometimes drew on other authors' work much more extensively, working directly from scenes, adding dozens of new elements and ideas, as well as his own glittering prose style, to transform them into something fresh and new. But the original can sometimes still be seen peeking through.

An example of this can be found in Chapters 5 and 6 of *Thunderball*, in which we are introduced to one of Fleming's most famous villains, Ernst Stavro Blofeld. The opening description of Blofeld, and his effect on others, is modelled on a similar passage in Sapper's first Bulldog Drummond novel, published in 1920. We first meet Sapper's nemesis Carl Peterson at a hotel in Switzerland, where he is in disguise as a French count:

'To even the most superficial observer the giver of the feast was a man of power: a man capable of forming instant decisions and of carrying them through...

And if so much was obvious to the superficial observer, it was more than obvious to the three men who stood by the fire watching him. They were what they were simply owing to the fact that they were not superficial servers of humanity; and each one of them, as he watched his host, realised that he was in the presence of a great man.'

In *Thunderball*, Fleming described Blofeld in similar terms, punched up several notches:

'Any man seeing No. 2, for that was the chairman's number of the month, even for the first time would have looked at him with some degree of the same feelings, for he was one of those men—one meets perhaps only two or three in a lifetime—who seem

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almost to suck the eyes out of your head. These rare men are apt to possess three basic attributes—their physical appearance is extraordinary, they have a quality of relaxation, of inner certainty, and they exude a powerful animal magnetism. The herd has always recognized the other-worldliness of these phenomena and in primitive tribes you will find that any man singled out by nature in this fashion will also have been chosen by the tribe to be their chief. Certain great men of history, perhaps Genghis Khan, Alexander the Great, Napoleon, among the politicians, have had these qualities. Perhaps they even explain the hypnotic sway of an altogether more meagre individual, the otherwise inexplicable Adolf Hitler, over eighty million of the most gifted nation in Europe. Certainly No. 2 had these qualities and any man in the street would have recognized them—let alone these twenty chosen men. For them, despite the deep cynicism ingrained in their respective callings, despite their basic insensitivity towards the human race, he was, however reluctantly, their Supreme Commander—almost their god.’

In both cases, the super-villain is introduced by discussing the effect of his mere presence on others, a decisive force that is noticeable to anyone, but which to his fellow criminals is evidence of a great man or, in Fleming’s inflation, makes him almost a god.

But while this passage owed a debt to Sapper, the basic idea and structure of these chapters draws much more directly on a far more obscure source: *The Outlaws of the Air*, a novel by George Griffith published in 1894. Griffith had been a successful author in his day, but by the time Fleming sat down to write *Thunderball* in 1960, basing it partly on his aborted film script with Kevin McClory and others, this book was very obscure. However, in 1957, its opening scene had been extracted in *The Spy’s Bedside Book* by Graham Greene and his brother Hugh. Along with work by E Phillips Oppenheim, William Le Queux, Eric Ambler and Graham Greene himself, the anthology also included excerpts

from *Casino Royale*, *Moonraker*, and *From Russia, With Love*. Fleming reviewed *The Spy's Bedside Book* in *The Sunday Times* in November 1957, using it to get down some of his own thoughts about the bleak realities of the espionage world that, he argued, too rarely seemed to feature in spy fiction:

‘Here, it seems to me, is the stuff of a great novel which no one has attempted and whose fringes have been only touched on by Somerset Maugham, Eric Ambler and Graham Greene. Seduced from the drab truth by the emotive lushness of espionage, most writers of spy fiction (or spy fact for the matter of that) choose the easier and more profitable thriller approach and, with the exception of the three I mention above, it is only the best of the others—Buchan, George Griffith, and O. Henry—who can be reread except as a joke. They do date so terribly, these fairy stories of our teens—their language, their steam-age wars, their moustaches, their exclamation marks! Even their gimmicks lack the high seriousness with which the thriller writer should approach his subject. One shivered pleasurably at Khokhlov’s explosive cigarette lighter, but, surely, even in those days of other smoking habits William Le Queux’s explosive cigar which blew the Privy Councillor’s face off must have made our fathers chuckle rather than shiver.’⁸⁸

This is a peculiar review in several ways. Fleming had a somewhat conflicted relationship with Graham Greene, and it could be his insistence on ‘the high seriousness with which the thriller writer should approach his subject’ is mickey-taking, or perhaps a kind of passive-aggressive swipe at Greene editing a collection of excerpts that were largely from the more fantastic end of the spy fiction spectrum, including Fleming’s work—he had used Khokhlov’s explosive cigarette lighter as inspiration in *From*

⁸⁸ ‘The Tragic Spy’ by Ian Fleming, *Sunday Times*, 17 November 1957, p8.

Russia, With Love. But it's the mention of Griffith that is especially striking in terms of what would follow. It's pretty odd for Fleming to have placed John Buchan in the same category of writer tackling the 'drab truth' of the spy world as Maugham, Ambler and Greene himself, but it is downright bizarre to have also placed in this category O. Henry, a well-known short story writer excerpted in the book but not in any way known as a spy writer, and George Griffith, also excerpted, but a science fiction novelist long out of favour, whose novels had dated and were filled with 'steam-age' wars. Part of the reason the Greens had included these writers was for the fun of finding spyish bits popping up in unexpected places.

The excerpt they used from Griffith's *The Outlaws of the Air*—which is preceded by one from Peter Fleming's *Invasion 1940*—follows 'the most dangerous man in Europe', Max Renault, through the streets of London as he makes his way to a secret meeting of 'Autonomie Group Number 7', the anarchist terror group he heads. The group's headquarters are in the building of the 'Social Club and Eclectic Institute', all of whose genuine and law-abiding members have long since gone home. As he enters the premises, Renault greets the four men and three women seated around a table, then draws a gun on one of the men, Victor Berthauld, and accuses him of being a traitor:

'Berthauld sat for a moment speechless with fear. Then, with an imprecation on his lips, he leapt to his feet. Not a hand was moved to restrain him, but as he rose to his full height, Renault's arm straightened out, there was a crack and a flash, and a little puff of plaster reduced to dust leapt out of the angle of the wall behind him; but before the bullet struck the wall, it had passed through his forehead and out at the back of his head, his body shrank together and collapsed in a huddled heap in his chair, and Max,

putting his pistol back into his pocket, said, just as quietly as before:

“It’s a curious thing that even among eight of us we must have a traitor. I hope there aren’t any more about. Take that thing down to the cellar, and then let us get to business; I’ve something important to tell you.”⁸⁹

In *Thunderball*, we are taken inside a meeting of the Special Executive for Counterintelligence, Terrorism, Revenge and Extortion at the Paris headquarters of its front organization, the *Fraternité Internationale de la Résistance Contre l’Oppression*. Unlike Renault, Blofeld deliberately accuses the wrong man first, and the method of execution is different—he is electrocuted in his chair rather than shot.

The corpse is also left in the room rather than being cleared away, which is rather nastier, but the idea of this scene is unmistakably the same as Griffith’s: a terrorist organization meets around a table at its front headquarters and the ruthless leader kills one of the group’s member on the spot on suspicion of treason, thereby setting a chilling example for the others. In both scenes, the traitor is a Corsican, which set alongside all the other similarities seems too unusual a choice to be coincidental. What makes it unmistakable, though, is that Griffith’s traitor is named *Berthauld*, while Fleming’s is *Borraud*. A Corsican traitor being killed in a scene so similar in conception, with a two-syllable surname starting with the same letter and ending with the same phonetically pronounced syllable is the smoking gun, if needed, that Fleming worked from Griffith. So much so that it seems Fleming was deliberately pointing to it: the name ‘Borraud’ said in an English accent sounds like ‘borrowed’, which reads like a dry admission he had borrowed it from Griffith.

⁸⁹ *The Spy’s Bedside Book*, edited by Graham and Hugh Greene (The New English Library, 1957), p37.

That might sound implausible, but there are other examples of Fleming placing markers about his influences in his novels to head off any criticism he had worked too closely from them. A couple of weeks after the release of the first Bond film, *Dr No*, in October 1962, I.T.V. broadcast a programme examining the Fleming phenomenon and putting it into context:

‘Before Bond came Bulldog Drummond, who saved the country from foreign subversion in a score of “Sapper” novels. He has a DSO from World War I, a lethal straight left, a plus handicap at golf. He had also had a topping wife called Phyllis who kept getting captured. His principle enemies were Carl and after Carl’s death Irma Peterson, but for Drummond all foreigners were suspect, whether Dagos, wops, huns or Russkies.’⁹⁰

It’s highly likely that Fleming would have watched this, as it was a nationally broadcast television programme about his work that was also promoting the first film adapted from it. If so, he might well have flinched at the mention of Drummond’s nemesis Carl Peterson. At any rate, Fleming decided to embrace the similarity spotted by the programme. In *On Her Majesty’s Service*, published in April 1963, he had Blofeld disguise himself as a count, and gave him a partner named Irma. The message was clear: ‘Oh, I am well aware of the similarity, thank you, it’s a deliberate homage.’ Any complaint about the proximity of Blofeld to Peterson in *Thunderball* would now be undercut by the surfeit of even more unmissable similarities in the later novel. I think the mention of Griffith in his *Sunday Times* review of *The Spy’s Bedside Book* might have been for similar motives: if any reader were to spot the similarity between these scenes—as Graham

⁹⁰ Script for ‘Tempo’ programme on Fleming and Bond, broadcast on I.T.V. on 14 October 1962, 14.25. My thanks to Philip Purser for the copy of his original script.

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Greene might well have done—Fleming would have been able to point out he was simply trying out his own spin on a writer who he had already stated in print he rated as one of the great practitioners of spy fiction.

III

Scars and Girls

ALSO EXCERPTED IN *The Spy's Bedside Book* was Dennis Wheatley's short story *Espionage*, featuring a showdown in a bathroom at the Paris Ritz, and it was to Wheatley's work that Fleming would most often return, particularly his character Gregory Sallust. Sallust first appeared in 1934 in *Black August*, a bleak tale set in an undated future in which Britain is rapidly descending into anarchy. Advance copies sent to libraries and booksellers led to so many orders that the book had to be reprinted six times before it was even published.

Sallust, the novel's protagonist, is described as 'cruel', 'cynical' and 'fatalistic'. A journalist by profession, he initially appears to be in a similar mould to Leslie Charteris' Saint: a devil-may-care lady-killer with scant respect for the law. His response to the crisis is to hire a general's uniform and commandeer an unwitting platoon to help him make good an escape to the West Indies. But along with the heroics customary for a thriller of the time, Sallust is unusually brutal and cavalier, at one point confessing that while the

worsening situation has been hell for many people, he's enjoying it. Facing the prospect of being shot by firing squad towards the close of the book, he quotes Rudyard Kipling's bawdy poem *The Ladies*: 'I've taken my fun where I've found it and now I must pay for my fun.'

Wheatley partly based Sallust on the extravagantly named Gordon Eric Gordon-Tombe, a charismatic officer he had met during the First World War who became a petty criminal and fraudster and was murdered in an infamous case that Wheatley was a little too involved in for his own comfort. Another inspiration was Sapper's Bulldog Drummond—we learn that a scar on his 'lean, rather wolfish face' is a result of a blow received during his night-time excursions across the trenches in the First World War; Drummond famously favoured precisely the same sort of expedition. Wheatley once tried his hand at writing an outline for a Drummond story, which survives.⁹¹

The following year, Wheatley tried another tack, with a new protagonist. The hero of *The Eunuch of Stamboul* glories in the ludicrous moniker Swithin Destime, which is about as 'Peregrine Maltravers' as one can imagine. Destime takes the Orient Express to Istanbul, where he soon meets a beautiful Russian bookseller called Tania Vorontzoff. Living under the threat of her invalid mother being deported back to Russia, Tania is forced to work as an agent for the fearsome Kazdim Hari Bekar, a terrifying eunuch and head of the city's secret police. Before long, Destime has uncovered a plot by Islamic fanatics plotting a revolution in Turkey, which if successful could lead to world war. He falls in love with an aristocratic English girl, who chides him that he is in over his head: the gifted amateurs of fiction might always be able to know how to act when faced with such events, she tells him, but in real life you need to know what you're doing.

⁹¹ See http://www.denniswheatley.info/sams_books/misc6.htm

In the latter stages of the book, Destime is captured by Kazdim and two of his henchmen, and he wonders what the gifted amateurs of fiction would do in his place:

‘No doubt Bulldog Drummond would grab the two thugs, crack their heads together and carry the twenty-stone Eunuch off on his shoulders as a memento of the occasion. The Saint, he feels, would be more likely to poke the Eunuch in the stomach, grab the pistol of the thug nearest to him and reverse it, before remarking: “Brother, permit me. You are not holding that correctly—it should point the *other* way.”

Those were the sorts of things he should be doing, Swithin knew quite well, but as it was, he sat there staring dumbly at the Eunuch, while the great brute placidly lit another cigarette and puffed at it thoughtfully, watching him with that unwinking stare by which a snake fascinates a bird.’

It’s an amusing scene that shows how closely Wheatley had studied the genre—but it also fatally undermines his protagonist as a hero. Apart from breaking the fourth wall, in drawing so much attention to the fact that Destime doesn’t know what he’s doing, we simply hanker for the characters he mentions who do.

The novel sold well nevertheless, and was made into a film released the following year, titled *The Secret of Stamboul* (*The Spy in White* in the US). Now renamed Captain Larry Destime, the hero was played by James Mason in one of his earliest starring roles. Frank Vosper played Kazdim, and the similarity to a Bond villain in the mould of Le Chiffre is unmistakable. Tania and Destime dine on caviar and champagne when Destime is called away by an urgent telephone call. This is a distraction, as Kadzim then summons Tania to his box—he is slowly revealed from shadow, a bulky bald figure in formalwear with a strangulated but sinister and commanding voice: ‘You are dining with an Englishman...’



DESPITE THE RELATIVE success of *The Eunuch of Stamboul*, it seems Wheatley realised that he was at his best when he played it straight: the novel had a solid Buchan-style plot, but Swithin Destime was too ineffectual a hero to last for more than one novel. Wheatley had previously written a thriller with a character who combined the bravado and style of The Saint with the physical ruthlessness of Bulldog Drummond, but *Black August* hadn't quite worked for other reasons. Now Wheatley went back to Gregory Sallust and tried again, this time inserting him into the kind of adventure he had just put Swithin Destime through.

Published in 1936 after being serialized in *The Daily Mail*, *Contraband* was in many ways the real start of the Sallust series. Wheatley dedicated the book to a friend who liked 'straight' thrillers', and that's just what it is, following a familiar pattern: a gentleman adventurer reports to an older man in the secret service, and is given a mission to stop a villainous plot that has international implications; he races through glamorous casinos and hotels at home and abroad, using his fists and firearms against assorted henchmen until he is drugged, struck unconscious and captured by the rich, deformed villain, who interrogates and/or tortures him; after learning the full particulars of the villain's plan (usually from the villain himself), he escapes, saves the beautiful woman in the cocktail dress he took a fancy to in the first chapter and assures the safety of the realm.

This had been the formula of British secret service stories since the 19th century, but while all its elements are present in *Contraband*, the tone of the novel is often surprising: casinos and luxury hotels had never before been pervaded with quite such a feverish atmosphere of sweat, fear and danger, and the hero's ethics are, as in *Black August*, unusually ambivalent—he ends his

adventure protecting the villain's moll from the law because he has fallen in love with her.

In the first chapter of *Contraband*, titled 'Midnight At The Casino', we are introduced to Gregory Sallust as though for the first time: he has been transformed from his previous incarnation as a journalist in a dystopian future into a secret agent in the here and now, gambling in Deauville ten days before *la grande semaine*. Sallust is about to call it a night when he catches sight of an English aristocrat he recognizes, accompanied by a beautiful woman he does not:

'She must be a *poule*, Gregory decided, but a devilish expensive one. Probably most of the heavy bracelets that loaded down her white arms were fake, but you cannot fake clothes as you can diamonds, and he knew that those simple lines of rich material which rose to cup her well-formed breasts had cost a pretty penny. Besides, she was very beautiful.

A little frown of annoyance wrinkled his forehead, catching at the scar which lifted his left eyebrow until his face took on an almost satanic look. What a pity, he thought, that he was returning to England the following day.'

The line about Sallust's scar giving him an almost satanic look appears, with minor variations, in several novels in the series: it tends to show 'a livid white' against his dark features when he is angry. Like *Contraband*, *Casino Royale* opens with a handsome, world-weary British secret agent gambling late at night in a casino in northern France (the fictional resort of Royale-les-Eaux, which Fleming modelled loosely on Deauville and Le Touquet.⁹² In Chapter 8 of *Casino Royale*, we learn that Bond also has a scar on his face, although it runs down his right cheek rather than lifting his left eyebrow. It makes him appear 'faintly piratical' and, along with his comma of black hair and cruel mouth, would become

⁹² Pearson, p207.

part of Fleming's standard description of the character. In the same chapter, we are given the following description of Vesper Lynd:

'Her dress was of black velvet, simple and yet with the touch of splendour that only half a dozen couturiers in the world can achieve. There was a thin necklace of diamonds at her throat and a diamond clip in the low vee which just exposed the jutting swell of her breasts. She carried a plain black evening bag, a flat oblong which she now held, her arm akimbo, at her waist. Her jet-black hair hung straight and simply to the final inward curl below the chin.

She looked quite superb and Bond's heart lifted.'

In *Contraband*, the woman who lifts Sallust's heart is Sabine Szenty, a Hungarian who turns out to be part of a smuggling gang (the English aristocrat, Gavin Fortescue, a half-crippled dwarf, being the master-villain). Sabine has 'sleek black hair', a 'fresh and healthy' complexion, and wears 'light make-up'. In *Casino Royale*, we are told that Vesper is 'lightly suntanned' and wears no make-up, except on her mouth.

As well as sharing their taste in women's looks, Bond and Sallust have remarkably similar attitudes to the fairer sex:

'He knew from past experience that he could sweep most women off their feet inside a week with the intense excitement of a hectic, furious, laughing yet determined pursuit, and what magnificent elation could be derived from carrying a rich man's darling off from under his very nose despite her better sense and the rich man's opposition. Gregory had done it before and he would certainly have attempted it in this case if only he had had a few days left to work in.

The more he studied her, between making bets, the more the desire to do so strengthened in his mind. He could never bring himself to be anything more than "uncle-ish" to "nice" girls, however attractive, and he barred respectable married women, except on rare occasions, on practical grounds. The aftermath of

broken hearts and tear-stained faces with possible threats of being cited as co-respondent by an injured husband was, he considered, too heavy a price to pay. He preferred, when he took the plunge into an affair, a woman whom he could be reasonably certain was content to play his own game. Nothing too easy—in fact it was essential to his pleasure that she should move in luxurious surroundings and be distinguished of her kind, and so quite inaccessible except to men of personality even if they had the wealth which he did not. Then, when victory was achieved, they could laugh together over their ruses, delight in one another to the full and, when the time came as it surely must, part before satiation; a little sadly, perhaps, but as friends who had enriched life's experience by a few more perfect moments.'

This, despite being written by another writer in 1936, will nevertheless be recognizable to anyone familiar with Ian Fleming's work. It chimes very closely with James Bond's attitudes in *Casino Royale*:

'With most women his manner was a mixture of taciturnity and passion. The lengthy approaches to a seduction bored him almost as much as the subsequent mess of disentanglement. He found something grisly in the inevitability of the pattern of each affair. The conventional parabola—sentiment, the touch of the hand, the kiss, the passionate kiss, the feel of the body, the climax in the bed, then more bed, then less bed, then the boredom, the tears and the final bitterness—was to him shameful and hypocritical. Even more he shunned the *mise en scène* for each of these acts in the play—the meeting at a party, the restaurant, the taxi, his flat, her flat, then the weekend by the sea, then the flats again, then the furtive alibis and the final angry farewell on some doorstep in the rain.'

Published 17 years later, this is more sexually explicit than the passage from *Contraband*, as well as being notably darker, more cynical and better-written. But the core of it is the same, with

Sallust's desire to avoid 'the aftermath of broken hearts and tear-stained faces' echoed in Bond's disdain for 'the tears and the final bitterness'. Wheatley's depiction of sex was also notably graphic for the time: he has his hero ponder whether a major character is a high-class prostitute—while desiring her.

After the opening chapters, the plots of *Contraband* and *Casino Royale* diverge considerably, although they share a markedly similar tone. Towards the end of the novel, Sallust urges Sabine to turn King's Evidence. She refuses. 'Then there's only one thing for it,' Sallust replies: 'I've got to get you out of England before the police decide to act':

'That would mean your having to give up your job, no?'

'Oh, to hell with the job! I would have given a lot to be in at the death, when we corner Gavin and the Limper, but that's a bagatelle compared with your safety.'

'Are there not extradition laws so that they could bring me back?'

'There are, but I don't think they would apply them. You see, your having saved Wells and myself makes the police reluctant to prosecute you in any case now. It's only that they're bound to do so by the law if they catch you.'

She nodded thoughtfully. 'Where could we go?'

Gregory stood up and, forgetting the abrasions on his chest and back, stretched himself. He grimaced suddenly and lowered his arms. 'The world's big enough and there are plenty of places where the two of us could lose ourselves very happily for a time.'

This, too, feels familiar. After the end of the mission to bankrupt Le Chiffre in *Casino Royale*, Bond initially desires only to sleep with Vesper and, once the attraction has worn off, gently drop her. If that proved too difficult, he considered taking another assignment abroad or 'which was also in his mind, he could resign and travel to different parts of the world as he had always wanted'. He then decides he wants to marry Vesper instead—only for her to kill herself.

Contraband was a best-seller: it was already in its fifth impression within a month of publication.⁹³ It added ‘spy novelist’ to Wheatley’s established reputation in other genres. In 1938, he was asked by Hutchinson to edit *A Century of Spy Stories*, part of their highly successful series of anthologies, and in the same year he provided an endorsement for *The Oldest Road*, an old-fashioned spy novel that mixed a Buchan-esque international conspiracy with the occult. Wheatley claimed this was a ‘really first-class thriller’ that had ‘the genuine ring of an adventure actually culled from the annals of our Secret Service’. The novel’s author, ‘D.G. Waring’, was Dorothy Waring, also known by her ex-husband’s surname Harnett. She had briefly led the British Fascists, and at the time the novel was published was on the Committee of the Nazi-sympathising group The Link.⁹⁴

The Oldest Road made little impact on the thriller despite Wheatley’s endorsement, but the genre was rapidly changing, with newcomers ripping up what had previously been acceptable in it. A few years previously, Wheatley had become friends with Reg Cheyney, a brash East Ender who had turned his hand to several professions, including news editor of the *Sunday Graphic* and private detective. Reg was nearly as dodgy as Wheatley’s old friend Gordon Eric Gordon-Tombe and, like Dorothy Waring, had also been involved with the far right: in 1931, he had joined Oswald Mosley’s New Party, and was in charge of its ‘thug section’, known as ‘Biff Boys’.⁹⁵ He was also a writer. After trying out

⁹³ Hutchinson advert for *Contraband* in *The Observer*, 6 November 1936, p7.

⁹⁴ Hodder & Stoughton advertisement for *The Oldest Road* by D.G. Waring, featuring Wheatley’s praise of it, *The Observer*, 28 August 1938, p4. For Waring/Harnett and The Link, see *Fellow Travellers of the Right: British Enthusiasts for Nazi Germany, 1933-1939* by Richard Griffiths (Faber Finds, 2015), location 6513. It seems likely Wheatley was introduced to her via Maxwell Knight, who between 1924 and 1927 had been Director of Intelligence for the British Fascists, before turning poacher on them. See *The Devil Is A Gentleman*, p351.

⁹⁵ *The Devil Is a Gentleman*, p344.

several pseudonyms, he had settled on Peter Cheyney, under which name he published several newspaper and magazine serials, including stories featuring a Raffles-esque jewel thief called Alonzo MacTavish. Cheyney became increasingly influenced by hard-boiled private eye and detective fiction from the United States—the pulps—and in 1936 found enormous success with his debut novel *This Man Is Dangerous*, featuring a wise-cracking, machine-gun-toting F.B.I. agent called Lemmy Caution. The first page gives a fair idea of its tone:

‘Take a look at me. My name’s Lemmy Caution by rights but I got so many aliases that sometimes I don’t know if I’m John Doe or it’s Thursday. In Chicago—the place that smart guys call Chi just so’s you’ll know they’ve read a detective book written by some punk who always says he nearly got shot by one of Capone’s cannoneers but didn’t quite make the grade—they used to call me “Two-Time” because they said it always took two slugs to stop me, an’ in the other place where coppers go funny colours when they think of me they call me Toledo.’

This was a million miles from Wheatley’s prose style, but the idea of a hero as brutal, ruthless and even lawless as the villains he tackled was something new in the British thriller—and Wheatley noticed. The following year, he wrote the introduction for Cheyney’s second book, a collection of short stories titled *You Can’t Hit A Woman*, saying he was putting readers ‘on to a real good thing’.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Ibid., p345.

IV

Day and Knight

WHEATLEY'S NEXT SPY novel was *The Quest of Julian Day*, published in January 1939. Day's full name is Hugo Julian du Crow Fernhurst, which outdoes even Swithim Destime, but the character is referred to as Julian Day by most. Day is up against 'The Big Seven', a gang led by the occultist Sean O'Kieff. Like Le Chiffre in *Casino Royale*, he condescendingly calls the hero 'my dear boy', apparently one of Crowley's most-used expressions.⁹⁷

The other members of The Big Seven are revealed to be Lord Gavin Fortescue, the deformed aristocrat of *Contraband*; Ismail Zakri Bay, an Egyptian; Inosuki Hayashi ('the Jap'); Azreal Mozinsky, a Polish Jew; Count Emilio Mondragora; and Baron Feldmar von Hentzen. While this sounds very much like a prototypical S.P.E.C.T.R.E., Wheatley was drawing on a long-established fondness in thrillers for sinister organizations like this; they can be found in the work of John Buchan, Sax Rohmer and many earlier writers, among them George Griffith.

⁹⁷ Pearson, p211.

With a plot featuring a hunt for treasure in Egypt, *The Quest of Julian Day* is a straightforward, but rather forced, adventure story. Day is a reasonably capable hero, but not an especially interesting one. He's very much a return to the gentlemanly tradition: an old Etonian baronet with a double-first from Oxford in Oriental Languages and an expert fencer, he also has a sweet tooth, continually interrupting his mission to find some pralines to nibble.

Wheatley's fantasies about the espionage world were now being overturned by events in his own life. Maxwell Knight recruited Wheatley's stepson Bill, an undergraduate at Oxford, to spy on potential fifth columnists among his fellow students, and not long afterwards asked Wheatley himself to help out with his work. The same month as the publication of *The Quest of Julian Day*, Knight approached him about a young Austrian woman, Friedericka 'Fritzi' Gaertner. She had divorced her husband, a German Jew, a few years earlier and in 1938 had come to Britain to visit her sister, who had recently married the brother of Stewart Menzies, who was the deputy head of M.I.6.⁹⁸ She had offered to work for British intelligence in return for being allowed to stay in the country.

Knight had become convinced Gaertner would make an excellent agent to infiltrate Nazi-sympathising circles for him, but there was a snag. She needed a work permit to avoid being interned as an enemy alien, and 'working for M.I.5' obviously wasn't feasible. Knight's first suggestion had been that she get a cover job as 'a sort of super high-class mannequin'—on meeting her he'd noted that 'there is no doubt whatever about her very considerable personal attractiveness'—but she wasn't keen on the

⁹⁸ The previous edition of this book stated in error that Menzies was head of M.I.6; he did become 'C', but in November 1939, following the death of Hugh Sinclair.

idea.⁹⁹ Knight now turned to Wheatley: could he not employ her as his secretary/research assistant?

Wheatley interviewed her and, fairly unsurprisingly, was in favour of taking on the attractive young sister-in-law of the deputy head of M.I.6. He wrote to the Ministry of Labour, assuring them that in employing her he wouldn't be taking work from a British subject; he was planning a new novel set in Central Europe that required a translator with a knowledge of local customs across the region, and he 'should certainly not be able to employ a British subject in this capacity'.¹⁰⁰ Knight was delighted by Wheatley's swift response, and wrote to him to say that 'when you turned your attention to literature the intelligence department lost a great opportunity, though I fear the financial rewards in literature are greater than in the world of intrigue!'¹⁰¹ Wheatley's role within the L.C.S. was still 18 months away.

If he didn't have a plan for a new book at that point, Fritzi Gaertner might well have given him an idea for one. Wheatley prided himself on his research, but while he had visited Germany in 1919, his knowledge of the country under its current regime was, much the same as everyone else's, gleaned from the newspapers and radio broadcasts, with little hope of improving it from his house in London. Now fate had thrown an intelligent and sympathetic native German-speaker onto his doorstep, giving him the opportunity to get the inside track on a locale few British writers could hope to depict with much authority at this moment: Nazi Germany. Even better than that, Fritzi's close family

⁹⁹ Unsigned letter marked 'Stottinger' (her maiden name), 16 June, 1938, UK National Archives, KV 2/1280; and memo signed B.5b (Knight's section), 20 May, 1938, *ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Wheatley to F.W. Leggett, 10 January 1939, UK National Archives, KV 2/1280. She looks to have been employed by him until at least January 1943: a letter from Inspector Hamilton Miller of Edinburgh City Police that month says Gaertner is 'described as a Translator and Research Worker for Mr Denis [sic] Wheatley, 8 St. John's Wood Park, London, N.W.8.', UK National Archives, KV 2/1277.

¹⁰¹ Knight to Wheatley, 11 January 1939, UK National Archives, KV 2/1280.

connection to the uppermost level of British intelligence gave him a *second* inside track most thriller-writers would have killed for. For the next few months, her days were kept busy researching and translating information about leading Nazi figures, giving Wheatley ‘invaluable’ material for many novels to come as well as background knowledge he would later put to use in his L.C.S. papers. And by night, Fritz became M.I.5 agent GELATINE, attending cocktail parties and dinners hosted by pro-Nazi groups such as The Link, reporting back to Knight.¹⁰²

While she was doing that, Wheatley was hard at work, writing *Sixty Days To Live*, an adventure in a similar vein to *Black August*, featuring an impending comet hitting the earth and ensuing chaos and martial law. It was published on 24 August 1939, and *The Observer* recommended it as ‘homeopathic treatment for crisis tensions’.¹⁰³ Nevertheless, it was a flop, probably because the title alone was much too grim in the political climate.¹⁰⁴ Eight days following its publication, Germany invaded Poland, and two days after that, Britain was once again at war.

Wheatley didn’t waste any time. While trying to persuade Knight and anyone else who would listen to find him a job in which he could serve, he was feverishly writing his next novel. He already had authentic background material gathered by an Austrian-German M.I.5 agent, and a war to set it in. A story set in Germany now would mean going behind enemy lines, an impossible feat—except perhaps for a secret agent. Another spy story was in order, but a mission into Nazi territory would require someone rougher and tougher than a Swithin Destime or Julian Day. Wheatley decided to return once again to Gregory Sallust.

¹⁰² *The Time Has Come*, pp641-642; *The Devil Is A Gentleman*, pp401-402.

¹⁰³ Hutchinson advertisement featuring this line in *The Observer*, 24 September 1939, p4.

¹⁰⁴ See Wheatley’s inscription in his copy of the book, available at <http://www.denniswheatley.info/museum/room.asp?id=7&exhib=18>

He started writing *The Scarlet Impostor* on September 6 1939, just three days after Britain declared war, and finished it on October 19. It was published on January 7 1940, making it one of the first spy novels to be set during the Second World War.

It's also one of the most exciting thrillers of any era, with Sallust jumping from frying pans into fires at every turn across 172,000 words. In *Contraband*, Sallust had been working in an unofficial capacity for the authorities with the understanding that official backing would be provided if necessary; now British intelligence wants him to make contact with a faction of anti-Nazi generals in Germany, and so he is put on a more formal footing. He's even allotted a number:

“In view of the importance of your mission, it's a very special number, too; one which has long been vacant and about which there can be no possible mistake. You are now listed by us as Secret Agent No. 1.”

Gregory grinned. “I'm deeply flattered.”

Wheatley dedicated the novel to Maxwell Knight: ‘My old friend and fellow author, who has often given me good reason to believe that truth really is stranger than fiction’. Knight had become a thriller-writer in 1934, and had dedicated his second novel, *Gunman's Holiday*, to Wheatley and his wife. A 1986 biography of Knight was subtitled ‘The Man Who Was M: The Real-life Spymaster Who Inspired Ian Fleming’, although there is little evidence this was the case other than the admittedly striking fact that Knight was known as ‘M’ within M.I.5. Despite being three years younger than Wheatley, he might have been at least part of the inspiration for Gregory Sallust's white-haired mentor and spymaster, Sir Pellinore Gwaine-Cust. In Arthurian legend, King Pellinore or Pellimore hunts the Questing Beast: Knight was an avid hunter and naturalist, later becoming well known as a broadcaster on wildlife, and one obituary described him as ‘a sane

and more effective version of kind King Pellinore'¹⁰⁵. Coincidence, perhaps, but it would be fitting for a Knight-like mentor to be the agent-runner sending Wheatley's wish fulfilment figure Sallust on his quests.

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THERE IS SIGNIFICANTLY more action in *The Scarlet Impostor* than *Contraband*, and Wheatley had to work much harder to make his often-implausible plot developments convince. He did this by supporting the breakneck pacing with a strong degree of verisimilitude regarding the situation in Nazi Germany, thanks to Fritzi Gaertner. One of the novel's main characters is Erika von Epp, a beautiful German whose Jewish lover has been killed by 'the brutalities inflicted on him in the concentration-camp at Dachau'. Dachau and the other Nazi concentration camps were not often discussed in Britain this early in the war, but Gaertner would likely have heard about their horrors in some detail. Like Gaertner, Erika's former lover being Jewish makes her a determined opponent of the Nazi regime, but by the same token her not being currently involved with a Jew means she is able to keep up the pose of being a loyal Nazi in order to gather intelligence for the British.

Providing some relief from the depiction of the horrors taking place inside Germany, the novel also featured Wheatley's usual insider's feel for the finer things in life, given added force by his use of real names. Publishers generally required authors to rename any real-life brands they featured, not wishing to provide free advertising. So E. Phillips Oppenheim's novels featured the Milan Hotel, modelled on the Savoy, and Valentine Williams' characters smoked Melania cigarettes, a non-existent brand that could only be bought at London's non-existent Dionysus Club. In Sax

¹⁰⁵ Obituary of Knight in *Growing Point*, Volume 6, 1968, p1092.

Rohmer's novels, real-life political figures were also disguised, so Hitler became 'Rudolph Adlon' and Mussolini 'Monaghani'. An exception seems to have been cars. Although Leslie Charteris' Saint drove non-existent Furillacs and Hirondeles, and Dornford Yates' characters favoured the equally fictional Lowland, many other thriller characters drove Rolls Royces, Daimlers, Mercedes-Benzes and Bentleys. Another exception was EF Hornung's Raffles, who smoked Sullivans, perhaps inspiring Wheatley to do the same (there are several references to Raffles in his novels).

Wheatley took this idea and ran with it—his thrillers were set in the real world, with real people in the midst of real events using real brands. While other writers had dabbled in this sort of 'product placement', with *The Scarlet Impostor* Wheatley became the first to feature it on a grand scale. During the course of his mission, Gregory Sallust smokes Sullivans' Turkish mixture cigarettes, escapes from pursuing Nazis on a twin-cylinder BMW motorbike and tells a beautiful German aristocrat he hopes to dine with her in the Ritz after the war. He drinks two Bacardis and pineapple juice (his favourite cocktail, we are told), some pre-1914 Mentzendorff Kümmel, a Vermouth Cassis and a few swigs of unspecified brandy, and we learn that his gun is a Mauser automatic and his tailor West's of Savile Row.

Wheatley integrated many of these details into his plot. When Sallust is in danger of being interned in a concentration camp in Holland for the rest of the war, he sends a message to his chief in London that he knows will be intercepted, asking after an 'Otto Mentzendorff'. Sir Pellinore immediately recognises the name of the Kümmel they drank together a few weeks earlier and sends Sallust's former batman Rudd to help him escape. Rudd turns up disguised as an English gent:

'He was wearing one of Gregory's smart blue lounge suits with a Sulka tie, Beale and Inman shirt, Scott hat and Lobb shoes—all from Gregory's wardrobe.'

NEED TO KNOW

The tie is later revealed to have a hidden compartment, and in a subsequent novel Sallust's Beale and Inman shirt stops him from getting shot after a Russian general checks its label to make sure he's not a Nazi spy. Wheatley used many of these brands himself, and was sprinkling his knowledge into the action to draw readers into a life of luxury, much as he had done when writing catalogues to entice customers as a wine merchant.

Ian Fleming is, of course, famous for using brands in his work in this way. In his 1962 essay *How To Write A Thriller*, he discussed why such details were irresistible to him:

'I'm excited by the poetry of things and places, and the pace of my story sometimes suffers while I take the reader by the throat and stuff him with great gobbets of what I consider should interest him, at the same time shaking him furiously and shouting "Like this, damn you!"'¹⁰⁶

Later in the same essay, he cites the use of real places and things as one of two devices in which a thriller-writer can bring a reader along even when the plot is wildly improbable:

'First, the speed of narrative, which hustles the reader quickly beyond each danger point of mockery and, secondly the constant use of familiar household names and objects which reassure him that he and the writer have still got their feet on the ground. Real names of things come in useful: a Ronson lighter, a 4½ litre Bentley with an Amherst-Villiers super-charger (please note the solid exactitude), the Ritz Hotel in London. All are points to comfort and reassure the reader on his journey into fantastic adventure.'¹⁰⁷

Fleming, like Wheatley, used this device to reassure readers he still had his feet on the ground, but it was also important that it was

¹⁰⁶ *How To Write A Thriller* by Ian Fleming, *Show*, August 1962.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

rather *special* ground. This entailed more than simply throwing in lots of well-known brands. In *The Scarlet Impostor*, Gregory Sallust keeps his Sullivans cigarettes in a ‘plain engine-turned gold case with no monogram or initials’. The simple and unnamed becomes the ultimate brand, its anonymity telling us that this is a man who appreciates a well-crafted object regardless of whether its manufacturer has a reputation. The case is still made of gold, though, and, the crucial telling detail, is ‘engine-turned’—there’s the solid exactitude. The unadorned case also gives added credibility to the special Turkish mixture cigarettes it contains: Sallust doesn’t smoke them for their cachet, but through the same love of good quality. It’s pure coincidence that they’re so exclusive.

Wheatley used this technique to great effect in *The Scarlet Impostor*. In the second half of the novel, Sallust arrives in Paris searching for members of a Communist anti-Nazi cell:

‘Whenever he stayed in the French capital he put up at the St Regis, in the Rue Jean Goujon, just off the Champs Elysées. It was a quiet hotel and Gregory preferred it to the larger places, although it was quite as expensive, because each of the rooms was furnished with individual pieces. Many of them were valuable antiques, giving the place the atmosphere of a beautifully furnished private house rather than of an hotel, and Gregory liked luxury and comfort whenever he could get it.’

Moments of luxury and comfort have been mainstays in the lives of fictional secret agents since the birth of the thriller, but Wheatley knew that the devil was in the details, and took the convention much further than previously. After checking into the St Regis, Sallust’s mission ‘requires’ him to woo a beautiful young Frenchwoman, Collette. He’s not sure where to take her to dinner. After considering and rejecting the Tour d’Argent, the

Café de Paris and Pocardi's for varying reasons, he remembers the Vert Galant, 'down by the river on the right bank':

'Quiet and unostentatious, it was yet one of the oldest-established restaurants in Paris, and the cooking there was excellent.'

Collette approves of his choice:

'Real French cooking—not the sort of messed-up things they make for you English and the Americans in the smart places—so I have been told. I have never been there and I'd love to go, but I'm afraid you will find it very expensive.'

What's the purpose of this for readers in a fast-paced thriller? We are being shown that Sallust is not simply a man of means (although he is that, too), but that he has a *connoisseur's* tastes—and in 1940 as today, knowing the place beloved by the locals is the ultimate insider one-upmanship. We can trust Sallust as a guide to this sort of lifestyle, and perhaps imagine ourselves in his shoes. One day, if we visit Paris, we might follow in his footsteps and not make any schoolboy errors by taking attractive young women to overly ostentatious restaurants.

In the short story *From A View To A Kill*, published two decades later, Ian Fleming upped the ante on this device even further. In Paris, we learn, Bond doesn't stay in a lesser known but nevertheless expensive hotel like the St Regis: no, he stays in the Terminus Nord, 'because he liked station hotels and because this was the least pretentious and anonymous of them'. And, as in Wheatley, the restaurants Bond chooses to dine in are never the obvious ones:

'For dinner, Bond went to one of the great restaurants—Véfour, the Caneton, Lucas-Carton or the Cochon d'Or. These he considered, whatever Michelin might say about the Tour

d'Argent, Maxims and the like, to have somehow avoided the tarnish of the expense account and the dollar.'

This is one of those 'points to comfort and reassure the reader on his journey into fantastic adventure', but it also reveals character. Fleming used 'the real names of things' to show Bond's inner self. *From A View To A Kill* also features a long description of Bond in a Parisian café:

'James Bond had his first drink of the evening at Fouquet's. It was not a solid drink. One cannot drink seriously in French cafés. Out of doors on a pavement in the sun is no place for vodka or whisky or gin. A *fine à l'eau* is fairly serious, but it intoxicates without tasting very good. A *quart de champagne* or a *champagne à l'orange* is all right before luncheon, but in the evening one quart leads to another quart and a bottle of indifferent champagne is a bad foundation for the night. Pernod is possible, but it should be drunk in company, and anyway Bond had never liked the stuff because its liquorice taste reminded him of his childhood. No, in cafes you have to drink the least offensive of the musical comedy drinks that go with them, and Bond always had the same thing—an Americano—Bitter Campari, Cinzano, a large slice of lemon peel and soda. For the soda he always stipulated Perrier, for in his opinion expensive soda water was the cheapest way to improve a poor drink.'

This might appear aimless, but by giving his character forceful, unexpected and intriguing feelings about such an apparently trivial matter as ordering a drink, Fleming brings it to life and puts it centre-stage: this is not a trivial matter to *James Bond*. This, as Fleming put it, is 'the poetry of things'. It's not simply a scene in which a character decides what to drink at a Paris café, but a statement of intent, a philosophy, a weighted moment.

Fleming was not simply interested in brands, but in an attitude towards them. They are sometimes very strong attitudes: Bond

knows the best cafés in Paris and knows a lot about drinks, so much so that he's a close-to-insufferable snob about them. He condescends to have a 'musical comedy drink' in a famous Paris bar. He doesn't care what Michelin says about Maxim's—he knows what *he* feels about it, and that's what matters. He doesn't follow the crowd or parrot advertisements and tourist guides, but makes up his own mind about what is the best or most sophisticated option. He has utter faith in his own taste, and as readers we are invited to do the same. Fleming's use of real names and places didn't simply hustle readers past improbabilities in his plots, but established a crucial part of Bond's character: that he is his own man. Bond brands everything around him with his own taste.

The first germs of all this can be seen in *The Scarlet Impostor*.

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THE NOVEL WAS a turning point for Wheatley, who had been trying for several years to create a hero in the vein of Raffles, Bulldog Drummond and the Saint. Like those three characters, Sallust is a 'bad hat' with vigilante tendencies. But he is also on the right side of the law, a secret agent working in Britain's interests. He has the courage and duty to country of Richard Hannay and the streak of hedonism and decadence of Simon Templar, but a fondness for ungentlemanly behaviour that would have outraged both. Despite the focus on luxury and the nod to Baroness Orczy's Scarlet Pimpernel in its title, *The Scarlet Impostor* has a much more violent tone than most of its antecedents. In this novel, Wheatley introduced Gruppenführer Grauber, who plans to drop our hero into an acid bath; he would become Sallust's arch-enemy as the series progressed. Sallust himself is recognisably the same character as from *Contraband*, a suave, hedonistic, resourceful secret agent, but his brutality is more pronounced:

‘Before the Nazi could open his mouth Gregory’s left hand shot out, caught him by the throat and, swinging him round, forced him back against the wall. With complete ruthlessness Gregory raised his right fist and smashed it into the little man’s face.

As his head was jammed against the wall he caught the full force of the blow. A gurgling moan issued from his gaping mouth, but Gregory knew that his own life depended upon putting the wretched man out, and with pitiless persistence he hammered the German’s face with his right fist, banging his head against the wall with each blow until it began to roll about on his shoulders and Gregory knew that he had lost consciousness.’

The world was now at war, and this novel was the direct product of it: Gregory Sallust wasn’t in favour of playing cricket against his enemies any more than his creator.

Wheatley hadn’t set out to make Sallust a series character, but he would prove so popular (several books in the series sold over a million copies) that he ended up writing more adventures for him than he’d foreseen. In doing so, he created a new kind of secret agent character: as debonair and patriotic as the clubland heroes who had come before, but significantly more sexually active, violent and morally ambivalent. Among the first to follow in the footsteps of *The Scarlet Impostor’s* success was his old friend Peter Cheyney: June 1942 saw the publication of his novel *Dark Duet*, the first in a new series featuring a secret unit of sophisticated but brutal British agents who kill suspected Nazis wherever they find them.

In the next novel in Wheatley’s series, *Faked Passports*, published in June 1940, Sallust travels to the Arctic Circle. We are given the most complete description of the character to date, learning that he is in his late thirties, ‘dark, lean-faced’ with ‘smiling eyes and a cynical twist to his firm, strong mouth.’ After taking a hit to the back of his head with a spent bullet near Petsamo, he loses his memory. In and of itself, this is not a

particularly unusual plot device, but amnesia has an unusual effect on Gregory Sallust, as his girlfriend, the Countess von Osterberg, reflects:

‘In those hectic days they had spent in Munich and Berlin together early in November they had been the most passionate lovers. When they had met again in Helsinki his absence from her had seemed only to have increased his eagerness; but their opportunities for love-making had been lamentably few. Then his injury at Petsamo had changed his mentality in that respect as in all others. On waking on their first morning in the trapper’s house he had accepted quite naturally that he was in love with her, but it had been an entirely different kind of love. He was tender and thoughtful for her and followed her every movement with almost dog-like devotion, but he did not seem to know even the first steps in physical love-making any more.

Erika had known the love of many men but to be treated as a saint and placed upon a pedestal was an entirely new experience to her and she had thoroughly enjoyed it. There was something wonderfully refreshing in Gregory’s shy, boyish attempts to hold her hand or steal a kiss on the back of her neck when the others were not looking; and she had known that at any moment she chose she could reawake his passions...’

This is strong stuff for a novel published in 1940, with broad hints at both pre-marital sex (the pair would not wed until *They Used Dark Forces*, published in 1964) and promiscuity. But the most striking thing about it is its similarity with the closing scenes of Fleming’s *You Only Live Twice*, in which James Bond also loses his memory and in doing so becomes an innocent regarding ‘physical love-making’.¹⁰⁸

The eponymous villain of *The Black Baroness*, published in October 1940, is a middle-aged Frenchwoman with a ‘dead white face’ and jet-black eyes and hair who acts as ‘Hitler’s great whore

¹⁰⁸ For a fuller analysis of this, and its similarities with another thriller, see my article ‘Bourne Yesterday’ in *Diamonds In The Rough*.

mistress'. Using her position in society, she discovers the types of women senior military figures in Allied and neutral states are attracted to and gives instructions to the Gestapo, who consult their 'list of beautiful harpies' and send the appropriate matches to her; she then sets them to seduce their intended victims. Sallust meets one of these women, Paula von Steinmetz, who naturally tries to seduce him, but he fends her off by pretending he isn't man enough for her:

“The sort of man you want is a chap who'd treat you rough and give you a beating if you played him up.”

“*Mein Gott, nein!*” Paula protested quickly.

“Oh yes, you do,” Gregory assured her. “Every woman does. I don't mean a drunken blackguard or anything of that kind, but a chap with a will of his own who wouldn't stand any nonsense and if he saw you flashing those lovely eyes of yours at anybody else would take you home and give you a good spanking.”

Paula's colour deepened a little under her make-up and Gregory knew that he had judged her rightly. She was a strong, highly-sexed young woman who would thoroughly enjoy occasional rows with her lovers and derive tremendous kick from a mild beating-up in which she was finally possessed forcibly, so that her sobs of anger gave way almost imperceptibly to gasps of passionate emotion.

“Well,” she admitted slowly, “if one loves a man one naturally expects him to assert himself at times, otherwise how can one possibly respect him?”

The irony, of course, is that Sallust is precisely the sort of man he is describing, as is made clear elsewhere in the series. This would find an echo in the infamously disturbing passage in *Casino Royale* in which Bond fantasises about Vesper in a very Sallust way:

‘He felt the bruises on the back of his head and on his right shoulder. He reflected cheerfully how narrowly he had twice that day escaped being murdered. Would he have to sit up all that

night and wait for them to come again, or was Le Chiffre even now on his way to Le Havre or Bordeaux to pick up a boat for some corner of the world where he could escape the eyes and the guns of SMERSH?

Bond shrugged his shoulders. Sufficient unto that day had been its evil. He gazed for a moment into the mirror and wondered about Vesper's morals. He wanted her cold and arrogant body. He wanted to see tears and desire in her remote blue eyes and to take the ropes of her black hair in his hands and bend her long body back under his. Bond's eyes narrowed and his face in the mirror looked back at him with hunger.'

Towards the end of *The Black Baroness*, Gregory Sallust meets the baroness herself, who takes the opportunity to poison his wine. Sallust is pinned to his chair, paralysed, and the villain, in the traditional style, calmly discusses his imminent death:

“Good-bye, Mr. Sallust; you will die quite peacefully and in no great pain.”

She is proven wrong, naturally: Sallust is rushed to a doctor and soon recovers. In *From Russia, With Love*, published in 1957, James Bond would also be poisoned by an older female villain with a penchant for pimping out beautiful young women to extract information from the enemy, although it comes not in a glass of wine but from a dagger concealed in Rosa Klebb's boot.

After *The Black Baroness*, Wheatley left Sallust again to write a standalone thriller, *Strange Conflict*, published in 1941. This, too, seems to have been on Ian Fleming's radar. It features a privileged group of British and American agents trying to discover how the Nazis are predicting the routes of the Atlantic convoys. The trail leads to Haiti, but before the group even arrive on the island they are attacked by sharks. They are saved by a Panama-hatted Haitian called Doctor Saturday, who puts them up at his house and then takes them to a Voodoo ceremony, where they

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witness a sacrifice to Dambala. Two women wearing black are shooed away by the priest; one of the group asks Doctor Saturday why:

‘He replied in his broken French that they were in mourning and therefore had no right to attend a Dambala ceremony, which was for the living. Their association with recent death caused them to carry with them, wherever they went, the presence of the dreaded Baron Samedi.

“Lord Saturday,” whispered Marie Lou to the Duke. “What a queer name for a god!” But the Doctor had caught what she had said and turned to smile at her.

“It is another name that they use for Baron Cimeterre. You see, his Holy Day is Saturday. And it is a sort of joke, of which the people never get tired, that my name, too, is Saturday.”

It is, of course, not a joke at all: Doctor Saturday, they soon discover, is the physical incarnation of Baron Samedi, and the villain they have been trying to track down. In *Live and Let Die*, published 13 years later, Ian Fleming featured a villain with the same name transplanted to Jamaica, where he wrote all his books. In that novel, Samedi is revealed to be a front for a black American gangster known as Mr. Big, as Bond learns from his assistant Solitaire:

“‘You’re thinking I shan’t understand,” he said. “And you’re right up to a point. But I know what fear can do to people and I know that fear can be caused by many things. I’ve read most of the books on Voodoo and I believe that it works. I don’t think it would work on me because I stopped being afraid of the dark when I was a child and I’m not a good subject for suggestion or hypnotism. But I know the jargon and you needn’t think I shall laugh at it. The scientists and doctors who wrote the books don’t laugh at it.”

Solitaire smiled. “All right,” she said. “Then all I need tell you is that they believe The Big Man is the Zombie of Baron Samedi.

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Zombies are bad enough by themselves. They're animated corpses that have been made to rise from the dead and obey the commands of the person who controls them. Baron Samedi is the most dreadful spirit in the whole of Voodooism. He is the spirit of darkness and death. So for Baron Samedi to be in control of his own Zombie is a very dreadful conception. You know what Mr. Big looks like. He is huge and grey and he has great psychic power. It is not difficult for a negro to believe that he is a Zombie and a very bad one at that. The step to Baron Samedi is simple. Mr. Big encourages the idea by having the Baron's fetish at his elbow.”

Mr. Big is exploiting a fear of the supernatural to quell the island's believers, an idea Fleming would re-use in *Dr No* four years later, but this is also the only Bond story to take a leaf out of Wheatley's books and treat the occult as a real force: James Bond believes voodoo works, and we as readers are also asked to accept the supernatural. Solitaire could be mistaken in her belief in Mr. Big's 'great psychic power', but she appears to be genuinely telepathic herself.

V

From Germany, With Love

AFTER ANOTHER SALLUST novel, *V for Vengeance*, Wheatley left the character for a while before returning to him in 1946 for *Come Into My Parlour*. I believe the premise of this book, and the events of three of its chapters, directly inspired *From Russia, With Love*, published 11 years later. It also contains the seeds of James Bond's biography.

Chapter One, titled 'The Spider's Lair', opens with a description of Berlin on the morning of June 23, 1941, introducing us to the status of the war at that date, including the Germans' attitude to it:

'For them, to expect victory had now become a habit of mind, and defeat unthinkable.'

After a few paragraphs, we move indoors:

'Their confidence was shared by the quiet little middle-aged man who sat at his desk in a spacious second-floor room that looked out on a sunny courtyard at the back of the great S.S Headquarters on the Alexander Platz.'

Fleming used information from dozens of sources, mixed and distilled through his imagination, when writing *From Russia, With Love*, but one long scene was directly inspired by this chapter. Chapter Four of Fleming's novel, 'The Moguls of Death', begins with a short introduction to SMERSH, 'the official murder organization of the Soviet government'. Then we again move indoors, only this time to SMERSH headquarters at 13 Sretenka Ulitsa in Moscow:

'The direction of SMERSH is carried out from the 2nd floor. The most important room on the 2nd floor is a very large light room painted in the pale olive green that is the common denominator of government offices all over the world. Opposite the sound-proofed door, two wide windows look over the courtyard at the back of the building.'

The office's occupant, Colonel General Grubozaboyschikov or 'G', is the head of SMERSH. In both Wheatley and Fleming's scenes, we are introduced to a very senior figure in the hierarchy of the hero's deadliest opponents—the S.S. in Sallust's case, SMERSH in Bond's—as they prepare for an important meeting at enemy headquarters. Cementing that Fleming worked directly from Wheatley's scene, both characters also happen to work in large offices on the second floor that overlook courtyards at the back of their respective buildings.

That isn't in itself all that remarkable, but the pattern of building off Wheatley's structure continues throughout the scene. The inhabitant of the office in *Come Into My Parlour*—who we learn is none other than Heinrich Himmler—now moves into his conference room to hold the monthly meeting of the country's intelligence chiefs:

'The three Directors of Intelligence for the Army, Navy and Luftwaffe were present, and the civilian Intelligence Chiefs for the Foreign Office and Economic Warfare. At the far end of the table

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sat Himmler's Principal Assistant, the S.S. General Kaltenbrunner; the only man, so it was whispered, of whom Himmler himself was afraid. Behind Kaltenbrunner, at a small separate table against the far wall, two S.S. majors waited, unobtrusive but observant, to act as secretaries and take notes of all that passed at the meeting.'

The scene in *From Russia, With Love* also moves to a conference room:

'On the far side of the table sat Lieutenant-General Slavin, head of the G.R.U., the intelligence department of the General Staff of the Army, with a full colonel beside him. At the end of the table sat Lieutenant-General Vozdvishensky of R.U.M.I.D., the Intelligence Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with a middle-aged man in plain clothes. With his back to the door, sat Colonel of State Security Nikitin, Head of Intelligence for the M.G.B., the Soviet Secret Service, with a major at his side.'

In both, we are being shown the senior level of the enemy's spy machinery, and the bland bureaucracy of it becomes increasingly chilling. Wheatley's detail that two S.S. majors sit at a separate table unobtrusively taking notes at the meeting is a wonderfully sinister little touch: it also sounds authoritative, as though Wheatley really knew how these meetings worked. Fleming does much the same, but has each officer in the room accompanied by an A.D.C.:

'In the Soviet Union, no man goes alone to a conference. For his own protection, and for the reassurance of his department, he invariably takes a witness so that his department can have independent versions of what went on at the conference and, above all, of what was said on its behalf. This is important in case there is a subsequent investigation. No notes are taken at the conference and decisions are passed back to departments by word of mouth.'

This is even more sinister—‘in case there is a subsequent investigation’—but essentially performs the same task: it sounds like Fleming knows how these meetings really take place, and that we’re getting an inside look, right inside ‘the spider’s lair’. And, like Wheatley, he also had an inside source, in his case the Soviet defector Grigori Tokaev.¹⁰⁹

Wheatley’s chapter continues by relating the meeting’s progress. Initially it is about the course of the war, but then Himmler comes to an unexpected item on the agenda:

‘At item thirteen, he read out: “Gregory Sallust”—paused for a moment, frowned, and added: “What is this? I seem to know that name.”’

“I had it put on the agenda, Herr Obergruppenführer,” said Canaris, quietly.

Himmler squinted at him. “Well, Herr Admiral?”

The Admiral looked round, gathering the attention of his audience. “As you are all aware,” he began, “in some respects the British Intelligence Service has deteriorated since the last war. It cannot be denied that they are extremely efficient in securing certain types of information. For example, captured documents prove beyond dispute that their appreciations of our ‘Order of Battle’ in various theatres of war are uncannily accurate. On the other hand, they seem to have very little idea as to what is going on inside Germany itself. Generally speaking, our internal security is highly satisfactory; but the British do possess a limited number of ace operators who, from time to time, have succeeded in penetrating some of our most closely guarded secrets, and my people tell me that Sallust is the most dangerous of them all.”

Admiral Canaris was the real-life chief of the Abwehr. His raising of Sallust’s name is immediately objected to by Gruppenführer

¹⁰⁹ *Historical Dictionary of Ian Fleming’s World of Intelligence* by Nigel West (The Scarecrow Press, 2009), pp220–221; and see Fleming’s inscription in his author’s copy of the novel: <http://www.indiana.edu/~liblilly/etexts/fleming/index.shtml#IF03133>

Grauber, who registers his surprise that ‘the case of any individual enemy agent’ would be of sufficient importance to occupy the time ‘of such a high-powered meeting as this’. Grauber is fictional, Sallust’s arch-enemy from the previous four books. He controls ‘the operations of all Gestapo agents in countries outside the Reich’, and is liable to pop up anywhere at any time to capture Sallust or one of his allies and sadistically torture them. We haven’t seen him previously in a bureaucratic setting like this, and his presence is the equivalent of drawing the camera back to show a new, bigger picture perspective on his run-ins with Sallust.

By openly acknowledging the implausibility of a single agent being so significant as to be discussed by Himmler and other senior Nazi figures, Wheatley hopes to blunt readers’ disbelief. He takes this further by having Canaris make the case that Sallust is enough of a threat that he could soon cause their side significant damage:

“‘The progress of our ‘K’ series of new secret weapons has now reached a point at which their further development necessitates a much greater number of people having knowledge of them. This will automatically increase the danger of the enemy getting wind of these immensely important devices, by which we hope to bring the war with Britain to a successful conclusion without undertaking the hazards of an invasion. If a leak does occur, the British will obviously put their best men on to the job of securing for them the secrets of Peenemünde. Sallust speaks German as well as if he was born here, so all the odds are that he will be allocated to this task. Prevention being better than cure, I should like to have the Herr Gruppenführer’s assurance that adequate precautions are being taken against him.’”

The pattern of this is repeated in Fleming’s novel. The Russians also discuss the progress of the war—the Cold one—with references to events in Morocco, Yugoslavia, Cyprus and elsewhere. They speak rather more highly of the British than the Germans do, and their meeting doesn’t have any points on the

agenda other than Bond, but scepticism over the importance of the single enemy agent under discussion is similarly expressed:

“Within the Secret Service, this man may be a local hero or he may not. It will depend on his appearance and personal characteristics. Of these I know nothing. He may be fat and greasy and unpleasant. No one makes a hero out of such a man, however successful he is.”

This doubt is immediately countered:

Nikitin broke in. “English spies we have captured speak highly of this man. He is certainly much admired in his Service. He is said to be a lone wolf, but a good looking one.”

In *Come Into My Parlour*, Himmler checks Canaris’ analysis of the threat by asking Grauber what he knows of the British agent:

‘Grauber shrugged his great shoulders. “The Herr Admiral exaggerates the danger. Sallust is certainly a man to watch. He is resolute and resourceful, and he has pulled off some very clever coups. So far he has always managed to elude us; but if he puts his nose inside Germany again, I’ll get him.”

Even monstrous Gestapo chiefs can have their turf unexpectedly invaded by other departments. Grauber’s response to the pressure is to airily talk down the idea that this single British agent is a major threat, while at the same making it clear that he is a danger. In doing so, he is defending his department and trying to evade personal blame for having failed to stop Sallust. His underplaying of Sallust’s impact is in itself suggestive of his effectiveness, as he can’t afford to pretend that he’s no threat at all—the best he can do is admit he has proven to be a menace in the past, but not so notable one that a whole operation proposed by another agency need be devoted to catching him. The act might be enough to

fool the others in the room, but for readers of the series to date there's a pleasing irony: implausible as it might seem that Himmler and other senior Nazis would have discussed a single agent in a meeting such as this, we know that Canaris' assessment was the right one: Sallust is in fact capable of changing the fate of world events, and Grauber having to pretend otherwise considering their history is rather delicious. By having his fictional arch-villain interact with real-life senior Nazis like Canaris and Himmler, and doing so in a closely detailed and seemingly authentic setting, Wheatley is also deepening the stakes of the series so far. The evil Grauber is himself under pressure from men we know to be even more evil. At the same time, Wheatley is making Sallust a more credible figure: the real-life head of the Abwehr knows his name, and will set in motion the plot of the novel.

Fleming does something very similar in his scene. General Vozdvishensky defends having initially failed to recall the agent under discussion:

“Certainly I know the name of this Bond. He has been a great trouble to us at different times. But today my mind is full of other names—names of people who are causing us trouble today, this week. I am interested in football, but I cannot remember the name of every foreigner who has scored a goal against the *Dynamos*.”

Vozdvishensky is the (fictional) head of Soviet foreign intelligence efforts. He is a new character to the series, so there is not nearly as much irony in his assessment of Bond, but Fleming is using the jostling for position among the enemy's spy chiefs in a very similar way to Wheatley, to give a higher level view of the novels to date by showing how they have been viewed by senior intelligence figures. Like Grauber, Vozdvishensky responds to pressure from his colleagues by denying the single British agent is a major threat, but as readers we know he is.

The irony of Grauber being forced to claim that Gregory Sallust isn't too much of a problem would have been lost on new readers to the series. Wheatley was conscious of this. To bring them up to speed on the context, he has Canaris rattle off a few examples of his hero's activities:

“He even had the effrontery to beard Reichsmarschall Goering at Karinhall, and got away with it; and I have good reason to believe that he completely fooled von Geisenheim, one of our astutest Generals, less than a month ago in Paris.”

The first incident appeared in *Faked Passports*, the second in *V for Vengeance*.

Similarly, Fleming uses the bickering intelligence chiefs to give us a potted history of Bond's previous exploits:

“Comrade Colonel Nikitin will no doubt refresh our memories further, but I recall that this Bond has at least twice frustrated the operations of SMERSH. That is,’ he added, ‘before I assumed control of the department. There was this affair in France, at that Casino town. The man Le Chiffre. An excellent leader of the Party in France. He foolishly got into some money troubles. But he would have got out of them if this Bond had not interfered. I recall that the Department had to act quickly and liquidate the Frenchman. The executioner should have dealt with the Englishman at the same time, but he did not. Then there was this Negro of ours in Harlem. A great man—one of the greatest foreign agents we have ever employed, and with a vast network behind him. There was some business about a treasure in the Caribbean. I forget the details. This Englishman was sent out by the Secret Service and smashed the whole organization and killed our man. It was a great reverse. Once again my predecessor should have proceeded ruthlessly against this English spy.”

Colonel Nikitin broke in. “We had a similar experience in the case of the German, Drax, and the rocket. You will recall the matter, Comrade General. A most important *konspiratsia*. The

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General Staff were deeply involved. It was a matter of High Policy which could have borne decisive fruit. But again it was this Bond who frustrated the operation. The German was killed. There were grave consequences for the State. There followed a period of serious embarrassment which was only solved with difficulty.”

Here we have the action of *Casino Royale*, *Live and Let Die* and *Moonraker* summarised from the perspective of senior figures in SMERSH. (The only novel in the series to date whose events are not mentioned is *Diamonds are Forever*, which had no connection to Cold War espionage.)

In both novels, the scenes develop the idea that the hero of the series is a worthwhile target to be the focus of the attention of the chief enemy’s most senior figures. Wheatley concludes his chapter with Himmler rapping out his verdict:

“If this man is so dangerous he must be eliminated before he has a chance to do us any further mischief. Lure him here. Set a trap for him and kill him. See to that, Grauber, or I will make you answer for it personally. Within three months, I require a certificate of Sallust’s death from you.”

One can almost follow Ian Fleming’s thought process as he read these lines. The idea of Grauber having to not only kill Sallust but also provide his death certificate is wonderfully menacing, but Fleming thought of a way to better it:

‘General G.’s hand went to the internal office telephone. He spoke to his A.D.C. “Death Warrant,” he said harshly. “Made out in the name of ‘James Bond’”.

The scene ends with the men at the table passing around Bond’s death warrant, each of them signing it in turn, after which we are introduced to Rosa Klebb.

There are, naturally, thousands of differences between these long scenes, but their structure and tone are strikingly similar, and

the core premise the same in both: the leaders of the enemy camp hold a meeting at their headquarters, snipe at each other, but eventually agree to set a trap and kill Britain's greatest secret agent. Both scenes set up the main plot of the novels. In Wheatley's, the Germans predict that the agent in question will be sent to find out about their new 'K' series of weapons. SMERSH's *konspiratsia* adds a sweetener to the British to make sure Bond is sent—Tatiana's supposed adoration of him—but the main lure is also a piece of top-secret technology, the Spektor cipher machine. Both plots also involve the manipulation of a beautiful woman, albeit in different ways.

But this is not the end of *Come Into My Parlour's* influence on Fleming. He also drew on it for another of his novels, and in a way that goes to the heart of James Bond's identity. In the chapter following the meeting at S.S. Headquarters, Grauber approaches Canaris to ask his advice on trapping Sallust, asking if he has any further details about the man. Canaris' response is worth quoting at length:

“Sallust comes of good middle-class stock, but his parents were only moderately well off and both of them died when he was quite young. He was an imaginative and therefore troublesome boy and after only two and a half terms was expelled for innumerable breaches of discipline from his public school, Dulwich College. With the idea of taming him, his uncle sent him as a cadet to H.M.S. Worcester. The freer life seems to have suited him, but again, owing to his refractory nature, he was never made a Petty Officer, as they term their Prefects. On leaving he did not go to sea, because he did not consider that such a career offered a sufficiently remunerative future: instead he used a portion of his patrimony to give himself a year on the Continent. He has a quite exceptional flair for languages so he could soon speak German and French like a native. He was still at an age when he ought to have been at school, but he was already his own master and a handsome, precocious young blackguard. The

women adored him and he had an insatiable curiosity about the night life, both high and low, of all the cities he visited, so there wasn't much he hadn't done by the time the war broke out and he returned to England."

Canaris paused for a moment, then went on: "He got a commission at once in a Territorial Field Artillery Regiment, and in due course was sent to France. At the age of twenty-one he was serving on the staff of the Third Army. At the battle of Cambrai he was wounded and carries the scar to this day. It lifts the outer corner of his left eyebrow, giving him a slightly satanic appearance. He showed great gallantry at the time he was wounded and was given the M.C.

"After the War he took up journalism; not regular work, but unusual assignments that took him abroad again. As a special correspondent he saw the high spots of the Graeco-Turkish war of nineteen nineteen, and the Russo-Polish war of nineteen twenty. Then he spent a lot of time in Central Europe, studying the development of the new states that emerged from the Versailles and Trianon Treaties—Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and so on. It was through his articles on such subjects, I believe, that he came into touch with that formidable old rascal Sir Pellinore Gwaine-Cust."

Grauber's solitary eye flickered slightly and he suddenly sat forward. "So you know about him, do you? My compliments, Herr Admiral; he keeps himself so much in the background that I thought hardly anyone here had the least idea of the power he wields behind the scenes on every major problem concerning the British Empire."

"Oh, yes, I know about him." The Admiral's thin mouth twisted into a cynical smile. "He took seven thousand marks off me at baccarat one night at Deauville in nineteen twenty four, drank me under the table afterwards and sent the money back next morning with a charming little note to the effect that, seeing the poor state of Germany's post-war finances, he did not feel it fair to take such a sum off one of her secret agents at a single sitting. You can repeat

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that story if you like. I have often related it as a lesson in good manners to my subordinates...”

Fleming and Wheatley both added a great deal of their own tastes and experiences to their characters (Wheatley was wounded at Cambrai), and fictional secret agents tended to be good-looking, fluent in languages, with extensive combat experience. But the similarities between the biography of Sallust presented here and that given for Bond in his obituary in *You Only Live Twice*, published in 1964, go far beyond the conventions of the genre, or coincidence:

‘James Bond was born of a Scottish father, Andrew Bond of Glencoe, and a Swiss mother, Monique Delacroix, from the Canton de Vaud. His father being a foreign representative of the Vickers armaments firm, his early education, from which he inherited a first-class command of French and German, was entirely abroad. When he was eleven years of age, both his parents were killed in a climbing accident in the Aiguilles Rouges above Chamonix, and the youth came under the guardianship of an aunt, since deceased, Miss Charmian Bond, and went to live with her at the quaintly-named hamlet of Pett Bottom near Canterbury in Kent. There, in a small cottage hard by the attractive Duck Inn, his aunt, who must have been a most erudite and accomplished lady, completed his education for an English public school, and, at the age of twelve or thereabouts, he passed satisfactorily into Eton, for which College he had been entered at birth by his father. It must be admitted that his career at Eton was brief and undistinguished and, after only two halves, as a result, it pains me to record, of some alleged trouble with one of the boys’ maids, his aunt was requested to remove him. She managed to obtain his transfer to Fettes, his father’s old school. Here the atmosphere was somewhat Calvinistic, and both academic and athletic standards were rigorous. Nevertheless, though inclined to be solitary by nature, he established some firm friendships among the traditionally famous athletic circles at the school. By the time he

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left, at the early age of seventeen, he had twice fought for the school as a light-weight and had, in addition, founded the first serious judo class at a British public school. By now it was 1941 and, by claiming an age of nineteen and with the help of an old Vickers colleague of his father, he entered a branch of what was subsequently to become the Ministry of Defence. To serve the confidential nature of his duties, he was accorded the rank of lieutenant in the Special Branch of the R.N.V.R., and it is a measure of the satisfaction his services gave to his superiors that he ended the war with the rank of Commander...'

To summarize: James Bond and Gregory Sallust both lost both their parents at a young age; Fleming specifies at what age and how it happened. Both were sent to public school (the same one as their respective authors), but expelled after similarly short amounts of time. As terms at Eton are known as 'halves', this may be why Bond did not last quite as long as Sallust: 'two and a half halves' wouldn't have worked. Wheatley was himself expelled from Dulwich, whereas Fleming lasted the duration at Eton.

Both Bond and Sallust had naval training while young, although Bond's is significantly more extensive. Wheatley based his character's experience on his own: he had also been a cadet on HMS Worcester. Bond ends the war a Commander in the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve, as did Fleming. (In *Traitors' Gate*, published in 1958, Sallust would become a Wing Commander in the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve, which was Wheatley's rank by the end of the war.) Both Bond and Sallust have fluent German and French. Both discovered the attentions of women at a young age, Sallust while roaming the cities of Europe and Bond a little earlier with the maid incident. Both are decorated: Sallust an M.C. and Bond a C.M.G.

Then there is Canaris' anecdote about losing money to Sir Pellinore at baccarat in Deauville in 1924. This is very reminiscent

of the incident that Fleming claimed, in an interview with *Playboy*, had inspired *Casino Royale*:

‘I was on my way to America with the Director of Naval Intelligence, Admiral Godfrey. We were in Estoril in Portugal, and while we were waiting for transport, we killed some time in the casino. While there, I recognised some German agents, and I thought it would be a brilliant coup to play with them, break them, take their money. Instead, of course, they took mine. Most embarrassing. This incident appears in *Casino Royale*, my first book—but, of course, Bond does not lose.’¹¹⁰

Fleming told several versions of this story, but a British operative’s attempt to deliver a blow to Germany’s fortunes in a foreign casino is the ‘hook’ of the anecdote in all its forms, and it’s a strikingly unusual idea. So what happened here? In *Casino Royale*, Fleming changed the location of Estoril to Royale-les-Eaux, a fictionalised version of Deauville, and baccarat was also the game played. It seems unlikely, therefore, that Fleming had told Wheatley about the incident, as they would have then both to have independently decided to relocate it to northern France, with Wheatley doing so first. So perhaps it was the other way around: Wheatley had heard of such an incident happening and told the anecdote to Fleming, who then decided to try it out himself while in Estoril, after which he used it in the plot of *Casino Royale*.

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Come Into My Parlour was an unusually violent novel for 1946. Erika falls into the clutches of Grauber, who forces her to watch a woman being tortured with electrodes. After escaping from the Lubyanka and the bowels of a U-boat, Sallust infiltrates the *Schloss* in which Erika is being held and follows Helga, a vivacious

¹¹⁰ Interview with Fleming, *Playboy*, December 1964, p104.

Gestapo gaoler with ‘good legs and provocative breasts’ to her room, where she strips off her fur coat for him. He shoots her in the back, but the bullet goes through her spine in the area of her kidneys and doesn’t kill her outright. Reasoning that the lower part of her body is the life of such an ‘over-sexed young animal’, Sallust doesn’t hesitate:

‘He knew what he would have wished himself had he been her. Putting the point of his gun within a few inches of the base of her skull he blew out her brains. He felt no compunction at all about the act. It was the merciful thing to do.’

Four more Sallust novels followed, the final adventure in the series, *The White Witch of The South Seas*, being published in 1968. Wheatley outlived Fleming, but doesn’t seem to have ever publicly mentioned that his work was an influence on James Bond. This might be because to have done so would have detracted from his sense of his own achievements. Wheatley often blew his own trumpet—sometimes even within the pages of his own novels—but having sustained millions of sales over several decades, he would have had reason to believe his characters would be regarded by subsequent generations in much the same way as the Scarlet Pimpernel, the Three Musketeers and Richard Hannay. But his star quickly faded, and he is all but forgotten now. His books soon dated in part because of his politics: although he could throw in some unexpected perspectives, he was for the most part an unabashed reactionary imperialist who made Fleming look like Jeremy Corbyn. He had always felt that other writers had trapped themselves by focussing on just one character, so had alternated his series, and genres; but this strategy seems to have backfired, as he has not been remembered for one character the way Fleming is for James Bond. Indeed, his spy novels are barely remembered at all. There were successful film adaptations of Wheatley’s work, but none captured the public’s imagination to anything like the

same degree as the Bond films. None of the Sallust books were ever adapted for film, Wheatley thought in part because the necessity of vast crowds and battle-scenes would have made them too expensive to produce.¹¹¹

It could also be that Wheatley was unaware of the extent to which he had influenced Fleming. In his memoirs, he mentioned that he had been friends with Fleming, but didn't elaborate on it. But he was well aware of Fleming's success. In his novel *The Unholy Crusade*, published in 1967, he even referred to himself in the same sentence as Fleming, who had died three years earlier. His hero, aspiring novelist Adam Gordon, visits his cynical publisher, from whom he learns the hard facts of a writer's life:

'He must not be misled by the incomes made by such writers as Agatha Christie, Somerset Maugham, Dennis Wheatley, Ian Fleming, J.B. Priestley, A.J. Cronin, Howard Spring and a few others of that kind. They could be counted on the fingers of two hands.'

This is a classic piece of self-advertising from Wheatley, although there's a touch of desperation to it, almost as if he is reminding himself as well as his readers that he is in the same league as the others. Later in the same book, he makes a bid for establishing himself as one of the thriller greats, when he has a Wing Commander marvel at his hero's adventures:

"So you are now Richard Hannay, Gregory Sallust and Uncle Tom Cobby and all." His face suddenly became serious. "But this is a dangerous game you're playing, and your pals in the Mexican Security set-up won't equip you against all emergencies. I mean, real secret agents don't have daggers that spring out of the soles of their shoes, cars that eject flame and tintacks in the path of their

¹¹¹ *Fyra decennier med Dennis Wheatley* by Iwan Hedman (Morelius) and Jan Alexandersson (DAST, 1973), p177.

pursuers, and all those other silly, amusing gadgets that one reads about in the Bond books.”

A few paragraphs later, this character warns our hero that if his enemies realize what he is planning to do he may find a knife stuck into him faster than he can ‘take the first sip of a dry Martini’. Wheatley is going to some lengths to position Gregory Sallust as having followed in the line of Buchan’s hero. At the same time, he appears to be belittling Bond, who is not just heroically intrepid like Hannay and Sallust, but completely unrealistic to boot. Or perhaps not, as most of the ‘silly, amusing gadgets’ in Fleming’s work were inspired by real devices, something that Wheatley, with his experiences in the war, might well have known.¹¹²

However, Wheatley doesn’t seem to have known James Bond all that well: 007 drinks *vodka* martini, of course. This chimes with research done by Phil Baker: according to an exhaustive catalogue Wheatley made of his 4,000-strong library in 1964 for insurance and tax purposes, he didn’t own any of Fleming’s books.¹¹³ Nevertheless, he did comment directly on Fleming’s work on at least one occasion. In 1971, Swedish thriller expert Iwan Morelius asked Wheatley what he thought of James Bond. ‘I enjoyed Ian Fleming’s books,’ he replied, ‘particularly the first, *Casino Royale*, which I thought was his best, but some of the others such as the

¹¹² The spikes Le Chiffre uses against Bond’s Bentley in *Casino Royale* are assumed by Bond to be ‘an adaptation of the nail-studded devices used by the Resistance against German staff-cars’. Britain’s Special Operations Executive also had a device called the Tyreburster, a charge that was to be ‘placed on the road or in ground where vehicles are likely to move’. See *Secret Agent’s Handbook*, introduced by Roderick Bailey (Max Press, 2008), p42. The book is derived from Descriptive Catalogue of Special Devices and Supplies, 1944, UK National Archives, HS 7/28. S.O.E. didn’t create a shoe with a dagger, but did have an incendiary attaché case very much like the one used by Bond in *From Russia, With Love*; *ibid.*, p121.

¹¹³ Phil Baker to author, 19 April, 2007.

one about the Chinese doctor in the Caribbean were, I thought, so improbable as, to my mind, he was written out.’¹¹⁴

This seems a peculiar remark coming from Wheatley, whose plots were often extremely improbable, but perhaps he felt that Fleming’s strengths lay more in traditional spy thriller territory: *Casino Royale* was certainly much more low-key than *Dr No*.

It might also be that Wheatley *was* aware of his influence on Fleming, but didn’t think it particularly remarkable. Fleming took some elements of his work, but dramatically refashioned them into something entirely new. One could call it derivative, but Wheatley was himself a highly derivative writer: Gregory Sallust was built on the shoulders of Bulldog Drummond and the Saint. He added fresh twists to them, and Fleming did the same to Sallust. In his memoirs, Wheatley remarked of his 1938 novel *The Golden Spaniard* that ‘the main theme was a plagiarism of Alexandre Dumas’ *Twenty Years After*’, before commenting that he felt it was one of the best books he had written.¹¹⁵

Fleming also never acknowledged Wheatley’s influence on his work, but that’s hardly surprising. He acknowledged the influence of John Buchan, E Phillips Oppenheim, Sax Rohmer and Sapper, but these were all writers long past their heyday and comparisons between his work and theirs didn’t show him up as being derivative, simply because he didn’t draw as much from them. Hammett and Chandler were writing crime fiction in another vernacular: nobody could think they were too close, and an association with their work made his seem up-to-date. Wheatley, on the other hand, was still writing spy thrillers, and drawing attention to his influence might have been revealing a little too much of what went into making the Bond ‘sausage’. Fleming was also notably naïve about the perils of using others’ ideas as a springboard for his own work; his use of George Griffith’s *The*

¹¹⁴ *Fyra decennier med Dennis Wheatley*, p176.

¹¹⁵ *The Time Has Come*, p628.

Outlaws of The Air in *Thunderball* went unnoticed in the storm of accusations of plagiarism and legal proceedings over that novel, which producer Kevin McClory claimed was too similar to a script he and others had worked on prior to its publication. Fleming settled out of court.

But then how has Wheatley's influence been so overlooked by Fleming's critics? It's no coincidence that Kingsley Amis, O.F. Snelling and others hopped from the clubland heroes to Bond, leaving a gap of three or four decades between—they had read the former in boyhood and moved on to other fare as adults before being drawn back into the genre by Fleming's huge success and new spin on it. Sometimes the coincidences of personal taste left gaps that were never filled in. Snelling skipped over Leslie Charteris as a potentially significant influence on Fleming in two sentences because he didn't personally find *The Saint* a memorable character, while Julian Symons claimed that a 'characteristic Wheatley book contains chunks of pre-digested history served up in a form which may appeal to readers with a mental age of twelve'.¹¹⁶ That's a little harsh, I think, but then I wasn't much older when I first devoured the Sallust novels, and of course millions of teenagers have read James Bond stories. It's no great surprise when later in the same book Symons claims:

'Fleming is the heir of Buchan and 'Sapper', and James Bond was a more sophisticated version of Bulldog Drummond.'¹¹⁷

This is a view that has solidified over the decades, but which, I hope I've shown, is far too bald. But neither am I saying that Wheatley was Fleming's only influence. As well as his own

¹¹⁶ *Bloody Murder: From the Detective Story to the Crime Novel* by Julian Symons (Viking, 1985 revised edition), p202.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p223.

experiences and fertile imagination, he drew on a large and disparate body of material when writing his novels: it was the way in which he collated it all that created their magic. So he might take a dose of authoritative-sounding facts from E.H. Cookridge's *Soviet Spy Net*, snippets of inside information on life in Berlin from *Sunday Times* correspondent Antony Terry, testimony from a Soviet defector, add a plot premise and the structure of a couple of chapters from Wheatley's *Come Into My Parlour*, throw in his own observations of the international situation, and fashion from it all a rich but distinctive stew. One testament to Fleming's originality is that his voice is so unmistakable—wherever the ideas came from, he transformed them into something else entirely.

Fleming also outgrew Wheatley's influence, and those of writers like Buchan and Sapper. Even as early as *Moonraker*, we find an ending that subverts the genre's expectations, and James Bond adopts a pose that is much more self-reflective than Gregory Sallust could ever have managed:

“I'm going to marry that man,” she said quietly. “Tomorrow afternoon.” And then, as if no other explanation was needed, “His name's Detective-Inspector Vivian.”

“Oh,” said Bond. He smiled stiffly. “I see.”

There was a moment of silence during which their eyes slid away from each other.

And yet why should he have expected anything else? A kiss. The contact of two frightened bodies clinging together in the midst of danger. There had been nothing more. And there had been the engagement ring to tell him. Why had he automatically assumed that it had only been worn to keep Drax at bay? Why had he imagined that she shared his desires, his plans?

And now what? wondered Bond. He shrugged his shoulders to shift the pain of failure—the pain of failure that is so much greater than the pleasure of success. The exit line. He must get out of these two young lives and take his cold heart elsewhere. There

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must be no regrets. No false sentiment. He must play the role which she expected of him. The tough man of the world. The Secret Agent. The man who was only a silhouette.'

As his career progressed, Fleming strained at the shackles of the genre even further, eventually writing short stories that owed more to Graham Greene and Somerset Maugham. And while Wheatley and Fleming's tone, plots, characters and even world views were often very similar, their style and pace weren't. The Sallust series is about a secret agent on the run, usually behind enemy lines, constantly in physical danger and managing to survive by the skin of his teeth. He is also constantly changing into uniforms to impersonate Nazi officers and other figures, and these aspects of his work helped pave the way for the likes of Alistair Maclean's *Where Eagles Dare* and Adam Hall's Quiller novels.

In contrast, Fleming removed pace almost entirely from his thrillers, concentrating instead on the excitement of the various elements: the outlandish villain, the beautiful girl, the extraordinary conspiracy, all pulled together by his unique voice and filtered through the eyes of James Bond. Wheatley used incidental atmospheric details to make his peripatetic plots more realistic; Fleming used peripatetic plots as diversions to showcase the main action of his novels, which *was* the atmospheric details.

But despite these differences, there can be little doubt that Wheatley's novels were a lodestar for Fleming, and the seeds of both the character of James Bond and of many of his adventures are contained within them. Bond shares attributes with Bulldog Drummond, Richard Hannay, The Saint and other characters, but they pale in comparison to the similarities with Gregory Sallust. Sallust is Britain's greatest secret agent, dark-haired and cruelly handsome, has a facial scar, was orphaned at a young age, was expelled from his public school, has a naval background, falls in love with and eventually marries a Countess, but is also a womanizer, is fluent in French and German, a daredevil, ruthless

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and yet frequently sentimental, well-informed, fond of gambling, Champagne and Savile Row suits. James Bond is every single one of these. In addition, Fleming was clearly inspired by the Sallust novels for several key plot ideas. It's time to classify Dennis Wheatley as a major influence on Ian Fleming.

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News of Devils

The Media and Edward Snowden

'In night when colours all to black are cast,
Distinction lost, or gone down with the light;
The eye a watch to inward senses plac'd,
Not seeing, yet still having power of sight,

Gives vain alarums to the inward sense,
Where fear stirr'd up with witty tyranny,
Confounds all powers, and thorough self-offence,
Doth forge and raise impossibility:

Such as in thick-depriving darkneses,
Proper reflections of the error be,
And images of self-confusedness,
Which hurt imaginations only see;
And from this nothing seen, tells news of devils;
Which but expressions be of inward evils.'

Fulke Greville

The Fog of Outrage

THE MILITARY THEORIST Carl von Clausewitz famously wrote of the ‘fog of war’, whereby events in a conflict pile on one another until it becomes impossible to understand what’s happening.

The same could be said of the fog of news, or the fog of outrage. Headlines blare out telling us of shocking events or revealing previously unknown information. In the ensuing hubbub, parts of the story are sensationalised, embellished and misunderstood, and inaccuracies multiply and spread. It’s usually only in the aftermath of such events that the true facts, and the bigger picture, can be found. Sometimes that’s too late, as the initial distortions might have become too embedded in the public consciousness to be shifted, or have had other consequences.

Since June 2013, a fog of outrage has swirled around the world of intelligence thanks to the actions of Edward Snowden and the

journalists to whom he gave many thousands of classified documents he took from the National Security Agency. The main thrust of the disclosures isn't new: it's that in the last couple of decades, and particularly since September 11 2001, the NSA and its allies have stepped up their surveillance capabilities to an extent that oversteps the line of invading civil liberties. This is familiar from the ECHELON scandal, revealed in 1988 largely via reporting by investigative journalist Duncan Campbell, and from the 2005 story, broken by the *New York Times*, that the Bush administration ordered warrantless wiretapping.¹¹⁸

The gist of the revelations has also long been a familiar element in popular culture. In 1999, filmgoers watched the Hollywood thriller *Enemy of the State*, in which Will Smith plays a lawyer unwittingly targeted by the NSA, his every movement and communication tracked by satellites. In the Bourne films starring Matt Damon as an American operative on the run, the CIA is able to track characters' moves via telephone records and surveillance cameras in other countries. The TV series *Person of Interest*, which began in 2011, involves a computer genius who in the wake of 9/11 creates a near-omniscient surveillance system for the US government, before deciding to try to put it to good use.

All of these are entertainment rather than fact, of course—although one of the advisors on *Enemy of the State* was a former NSA technician¹¹⁹—but along with journalistic investigations and whistleblowers have added to the public's conception—and fears—

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http://web.archive.org/web/20070103071501/http://duncan.gn.apc.org/ec_helon-dc.htm
<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/12/16/politics/16program.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>

¹¹⁹ Larry Cox. See: <http://www.martykaiser.com/enemy.htm> and <https://vticcae.files.wordpress.com/2010/04/cox-saic-bio-010810.pdf>

of how intelligence agencies, particularly American intelligence agencies, operate.

Edward Snowden has had such an impact because he wasn't simply *saying* that there was surveillance overreach, as whistleblowers had done before him and as spy films have long suggested, but provided evidence for it in the form of documents. Unfortunately, they weren't the only documents he took.

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BOTH SNOWDEN AND the journalists who have reported on his cache of material have talked about the disclosures sparking a debate about privacy, surveillance and constitutional rights. They have done. The leaks have unquestionably highlighted a lack of oversight regarding several aspects of US (and British) intelligence activity, and many would agree that some form of reset is needed to avoid intrusions into everyone's privacy.

The disclosures have been a public relations disaster for the intelligence community—it's surely no coincidence that since the stories began the directors of the NSA, MI6 and GCHQ have all been replaced—but their response has been overwhelmingly inept, and has included wild accusations, abuse and threats directed at Snowden and the journalists. The NSA has singularly failed to persuade the public of its case.

As I write this, the 'USA Freedom Act', a bill designed to curb the NSA's surveillance activities, has been blocked by the US Senate. If passed, it would have ended the NSA's open-ended bulk collection of metadata. Privacy advocates had hailed it as a significant step towards surveillance reform, albeit a compromised one.¹²⁰ Michael

¹²⁰ <https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2014/11/usa-freedom-act-week-whats-come-and-what-you-need-know>

Hayden, a former director of the NSA, had argued that it would make it even harder for the agency to follow up suspect communications than in simple criminal investigations, and that it would benefit groups such as Islamic State.¹²¹

For now, Hayden's side of the argument has won the day. The bill might still pass in an amended form, and if not some other legislation to curb the NSA will probably emerge. But it will be some time before we know if any measures that are introduced have been constructive, cosmetic or counter-productive.

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THE SNOWDEN STORY has been the biggest spy case of this century and perhaps of the last, too, but with the focus on the privacy debate there's been far less analysis of how the journalists Snowden entrusted with the material have handled the task he assigned them. I think the fog has now cleared enough for this to be worth taking a closer look at. The terms of the debate Snowden has opened up have almost entirely been set by the reporting on this. Without access to the documents or the full context for precisely who created them, in what circumstances, for what audience and with what purpose, it's impossible to weigh the significance ourselves. Our only context as members of the public is the parts of documents journalists have selected to publish, and their explanations for what they mean in accompanying articles. So to judge the material's significance, we have to consider the reporting. Has it been credible? Has it been responsible? Has it been honest?

I think too much of it has been none of those things. There has been some excellent reporting, but there has also been a catalogue of

¹²¹ <http://online.wsj.com/articles/michael-v-hayden-and-michael-b-mukasey-nsa-reform-that-only-isis-could-love-1416268847>

exaggerated claims, distortions, errors that have gone uncorrected and unacknowledged, security breaches and stories that have completely misunderstood the NSA's remit and the complexities of how intelligence is gathered and how hostile forces work. I think with much of the reporting little or no distinction has been made between revealing wrongdoing by the NSA and revealing valid espionage activities and methodologies directed at legitimate targets.

Journalists are often reluctant to criticise other journalists. Sometimes this is out of a sense of comradely loyalty, sometimes due to an unwillingness to burn bridges in case paths cross again. It can also be difficult to persuade editors that stories about the media interest readers. But journalists can—and I believe should—criticise other journalists when they think they've gone seriously amiss in their work. In this particular case, there's an added impetus, as the stakes are extremely high.

So this short book isn't about Edward Snowden's private life, or his decision to flee to Moscow, or whether he's a hero or a traitor. Neither is it about the private lives of the journalists who have reported on the material. It's about the reporting itself.

If that subject isn't sensational enough for you, please read another book. This one is *about* sensationalism, and what sadly now seems to be viewed as an old-fashioned journalistic principle: the public interest.

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A GOOD TEST of a journalist is how they react to criticism, and how they deal with errors. Everyone makes mistakes, but how one responds to them being pointed out is often more important. Do you refuse to admit the error, or ignore it, or question the motives of whoever pointed it out, or find ways to claim it wasn't an error after

all in a succession of long-winded ‘updates’? Or do you consider such criticisms carefully, and if wrong swallow your pride and correct the record clearly for your readers?

The journalists Snowden entrusted with his material have all been the subject of criticism, some of it unwarranted, some of it personally abusive, some of it constructive. It can be hard to distinguish between them if you’re on the receiving end of it. Nobody likes having their work criticised, of course, but it’s vital to listen to it because otherwise you might find yourself in an echo chamber. Considering criticism is key in an ongoing story such as this, because it is far too easy to become hunkered down and as a result remain blind to problems in one’s approach.

In researching this book, I’ve watched many lectures, interviews and panel discussions featuring the journalists and others involved in the story. All of them are highly intelligent, gifted individuals. But there is also a complacency and unshakeable conviction with many of them. There is a worrying lack of doubt. If doubts are mentioned, they are firmly in the past tense and have been resolved. ‘Oh, yes, we discussed that. We agonized about that.’ But there is no sign of anxiety at possibly having made a wrong decision, or acknowledgement that it’s possible it might have happened and what that would mean. This might be because to do so would cause problems—if a journalist shared a moment of doubt that they might have inadvertently endangered national security, it would be handing ammunition to critics of Snowden and the media at large, and the project might not recover the public’s goodwill.

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IN 2011, *THE Guardian’s* science correspondent Ben Goldacre said:

‘Ideas in science and medicine improve because they’re criticized. That’s not a sort-of side issue: that’s the core of how ideas progress. If you go to any academic conference, you’ll see scientists being absolutely vicious with each other about their ideas, and that’s because it’s really important that our ideas improve, because in science and medicine you can do great harm even when you think you’re doing good...’¹²²

The same applies, or should, to journalism. Note that Goldacre said scientists were vicious about each other’s *ideas*. The journalists Snowden gave access to these documents haven’t spent 18 months combing through them looking for evidence of good practice by the NSA—because that isn’t a story. A journalist’s role is to speak truth to power and uncover wrongdoing, so it’s no surprise that the reporting has barely mentioned anything the NSA have done right. Similarly, while some of the reporting was well executed and fully justified, my focus here is also wrongdoing. I’m being rather brutal in my condemnation of the ways in which this story has been reported, but I’m criticising the reporting, not the people. In the same way scientists peer review and criticise problems in methodologies, I’m pointing out problems I see with their methodologies and working. I’m not attacking these journalists personally.

This might seem obvious, but part of the reason the reporting hasn’t been criticised more is, I suspect, because of the nature of the debate, which has become very confrontational and often personally abusive, from all sides.

But criticism doesn’t need to be a vicious personal attack. Journalists have put the NSA, GCHQ and other intelligence agencies under the microscope, but they shouldn’t be immune from

¹²² Goldacre interviewed in the documentary ‘See You In Court’, BBC One, May 3 2011.

substantive scrutiny themselves. It's the job of journalists to speak truth to power, but that can also include holding other journalists to account. The reporters Snowden entrusted with these documents wielded and still wield enormous power, and there is a potential to do great harm even when they think they are doing good. With a lot of reporting, journalistic errors tend to have relatively minor consequences: a restaurant fails to receive a few bookings because a phone number is misprinted, or a celebrity is irritated that their age is stated incorrectly (or perhaps correctly).

But with this story, the stakes could scarcely be higher. A *Der Spiegel* article from July 2013 noted that the magazine had withheld some details from the documents because they 'could endanger the lives of NSA workers'.¹²³ The same month, Glenn Greenwald, one of the journalists at the heart of the reporting and in many ways its most prominent voice, claimed that Snowden had sufficient information to 'cause more damage to the US government alone in a minute than anyone else has had in the history of the United States'¹²⁴ and that this included 'basically the instruction manual for how the NSA is built'¹²⁵:

'In order to take documents that proved that what he was saying was true he had to take ones that included very sensitive, detailed blueprints of how the NSA does what they do, and so he's in possession of literally thousands of documents that contain very specific blueprints that would allow somebody who read them to

¹²³ <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/secret-documents-nsa-targeted-germany-and-eu-buildings-a-908609.html>

¹²⁴ <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1600674-glenn-greenwald-snowden-tiene-informacion-para-causar-mas-dano>

¹²⁵ <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/greenwald-snowden-docs-contain-nsa-blueprint> An accompanying video can be seen at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FoxP70oojfY> ('Greenwald: Snowden Has NSA Blueprint')

know exactly how the NSA does what it does, which would in turn allow them either to evade that surveillance or to replicate it.’¹²⁶

He added that the American government should be praying every day that nothing happen to Snowden, because several people around the world had been given access to the full trove of his documents, which would be released in its entirety if he were to be harmed, and that this would represent the United States’ ‘worst nightmare’.¹²⁷

We don’t know who has had access to the full trove, or how strong their security measures are. The reporting has slowed down but this remains an extraordinarily sensitive situation, akin to a mine that might go off at any moment. Thousands of documents are currently in the hands of journalists, and the box can’t simply be closed. Over time, many of the secrets in the documents are likely to lose their ability to compromise national security, but not all of them will.

The worst-case scenario would be the one Greenwald raised: a full release of all the documents, WikiLeaks-style, with no redactions made to protect national security. That hasn’t happened yet, but it still could. The circle of journalists with access to this material has widened in the last year and a half, as Greenwald pointed out in a recent tweet:

‘Your periodic reminder: there are at least 5 media outlets w/huge parts of the Snowden archive (NYT, WPost, Guardian, ProPublica, Intercept)’¹²⁸

We don’t know the number of people within those organisations who have had or still have access to the documents, and there are

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1600674-glenn-greenwald-snowden-tiene-informacion-para-causar-mas-dano>

¹²⁸ <https://twitter.com/ggreenwald/status/534753327066931200>

other gaps in the story. *The New York Times* has revealed that in June 2013 when *The Guardian* didn't move as quickly as Greenwald and Laura Poitras wanted with the first story based on the documents,

'...Greenwald discussed taking it elsewhere, sending an encrypted draft to a colleague at another publication. He also considered creating a Web site on which they would publish everything, which he planned to call NSADisclosures. In the end, The Guardian moved ahead with their articles. But Poitras and Greenwald have created their own publishing network as well, placing articles with other outlets in Germany and Brazil and planning more for the future. They have not shared the full set of documents with anyone.'¹²⁹

Human nature being what it is, relationships and agreements between journalists with access to the documents could change, and indeed already have—in October 2013, Greenwald left *The Guardian* and helped found the online publication *The Intercept* with Poitras (conceptually akin to the mooted NSADisclosures), and took Snowden documents with him.

The journalists involved would no doubt argue that reasons of source protection and personal security demand it, but there's an irony in there being so many calls for greater transparency from the NSA in the media when it remains a secret which journalists have had access to these documents. Greenwald named five organisations, but didn't mention *Der Spiegel*: perhaps it received fewer documents than the others, but it has published several stories drawing on them, most with Laura Poitras listed as a co-author. It also seems from articles in *The Independent* and *The Register* that Duncan Campbell has some of the documents from the cache, although it's unclear how he got them and Snowden has denied providing him with them. It

¹²⁹ <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/18/magazine/laura-poitras-snowden.html?smid=tw-share&r=0&pagewanted=all>

would be unsurprising if encryption specialist Jacob Appelbaum, who has collaborated closely with Laura Poitras and accepted the Whistleblower Prize on behalf of Snowden in 2013, had also had access to some of the documents.

These journalists don't all share the same concept of what constitutes wrongdoing by the NSA, and what deserves to be revealed in the public interest. Barton Gellman of the *Washington Post*, for instance, has been notably more cautious than some of the other journalists. It may be that Duncan Campbell published material exposing British intelligence operations in *The Register* because larger publications didn't feel it was warranted. Appelbaum now appears to have his own source inside the NSA feeding him documents, and is notably less stringent about what he regards as being in the public interest than most of the others.

It might be—let's hope—that the mine never explodes, but it might also be that in a month, or a year, or five years, parts or even all of Snowden's cache will leak into the public domain and cause catastrophic damage. To be anxious about that possibility doesn't nullify the importance of the wrongdoing exposed by some of the reporting. A lot of people seem to have approached the Snowden disclosures in a binary way: you're either for or against them, as though they were all necessarily of the same nature. But with such a long-running story—there have been 290 primary reports from the documents so far—more nuanced positions are possible and, I think, appropriate. One can, after all, do a useful and noble thing on Monday and do a reckless and damaging thing on Tuesday, especially if the latter is inadvertent.

It is also the case that just because the worst possible damage hasn't yet been done, that doesn't mean that a lot of serious damage hasn't already been. The Snowden leaks may be simultaneously the most significant exposure of illegitimate activities by Western intelligence

agencies in recent history and the most significant exposure of *legitimate* ones. At least one espionage expert has referred to the disclosures so far as representing ‘the West’s greatest intelligence disaster’.¹³⁰ Some feel that’s hyperbole and claim there is no proof of it, but intelligence agencies will likely have had to presume the worst in many cases: if there has been a chance of an operation being compromised, it would have been closed down if possible rather than risk exposure.

Edward Snowden and several of the journalists involved have repeatedly dismissed NSA officials’ claims that the leaks have harmed US national security on the grounds that there is no proof of it. The NSA are in a bind there, of course. To reveal the specifics of how some bad actors have used the leaks to their advantage would run the risk of revealing this to other bad actors who haven’t yet taken advantage of the same information.

It may be that no serious damage has been caused, but there are several reasons why accepting the journalists’ word on this as proof is also unwise. One is they have made some basic mistakes: a review by Associated Press in February 2014 found that six NSA employees had been accidentally named in the reporting due to redaction errors.¹³¹ Another is the way several of them approached the story. Responsible journalists would view the documents Snowden gave them as a trove of information that needs to be read very carefully because it could contain evidence that one of the United States’ intelligence agencies has overreached its remit and committed some wrongdoings that need to be exposed. But some of the reporters have, from the outset, instead approached the cache of documents as though it *necessarily* contains multiple examples of serious

¹³⁰ Edward Lucas – his ebook on the saga, *The Snowden Operation*, is subtitled ‘Inside the West’s Greatest Intelligence Disaster’.

¹³¹ <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/media-sometimes-try-fail-keep-nsas-secrets>

wrongdoing, and seem in some cases to have approached this story with the view that the NSA is an almost entirely and unequivocally malign organization.

There's also the danger of accepting a premise of false balance. For instance, if it were the case that journalists reporting this story have judged the public interest correctly 80 percent of the time, one might say they'd done their job well. But it's not as simple as percentages. A single article might, as a whole, reveal serious wrongdoing in the public interest, but also reveal a name or a plan or an activity that could also be extremely useful to enemies of the United States and/or its allies.

Glenn Greenwald has made some encouraging comments about his approach to this, such as this remark in an interview with *The Daily Beast*:

“I do not want to help other states get better at surveillance,” Greenwald said. He added, “We won't publish things that might ruin ongoing operations from the U.S. government that very few people would object to the United States doing.”¹³²

He has reiterated this, and all the others involved have said they've taken national security concerns into due consideration. But stating this and doing it aren't the same. This has been an unprecedented disclosure of secrets—many thousands of documents—and with each story the potential for damage is renewed.

With nearly 300 stories published over a period of 18 months, the idea that legitimate secrets haven't been exposed in a perfect run of decisions would be remarkable. If you feel that the journalists in question cannot possibly have misjudged any of these stories, that's a lot of faith in these individuals, and as I think I show in the coming

¹³² <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/06/25/greenwald-snowden-files-are-out-there-if-anything-happens-to-him.html>

pages the pattern of their work doesn't warrant such faith. You might well still disagree with me by the time you finish this short book, but if you've been following the Snowden saga I hope you'll find it an interesting look at the story from another angle. And with the fog of outrage over surveillance overreach largely lifted, you might be surprised at what remains in plain sight.

2

The Spy's Lot

IT'S NO SECRET that spies aren't always saints—even when doing good, they can cross ethical boundaries. But when a spy agency's secrets are exposed, pretty much anything they get up to looks bad, and it can be very difficult to remind everyone why we need them at all. When the curtain is drawn back on spooks' activities, the public tends to lap it up. We're getting a glimpse into what we're not meant to know, like seeing how a magician performs their tricks.

The danger is that this fascination can seem justification enough for secrets to be revealed. Most people understand that espionage involves deception, and that we can't expect our intelligence agencies to gather information on our enemies by simply asking them what they're doing, so instead must resort to other means: recruiting assets, pretending to be people they aren't, and all the rest. As long as the aim of this is to gather intelligence on our enemies, we accept this as necessary.

Intellectually, we might know that espionage is often justified and extremely important, but the thrill of discovering how it's done can blind us to that, especially because to deceive people nowadays, and to deceive terrorist cells and other spies, our intelligence operatives are being much sneakier than we could possibly have imagined. So the complexity of their techniques can seem bewildering, shocking—and *de facto* wrong.

But the significant point ethically is not *how* they do it, but *why* they do it. As long as they are trying to extract intelligence needed for the security of our country—and it doesn't needlessly invade people's privacy—it doesn't make any difference if the method is simply to swipe a USB drive filled with Russian passwords, as we're used to seeing in Hollywood thrillers, the seconds counting down as the hourglass icon hangs on the screen and the footsteps in the corridor outside grow louder, or if they've set up an entire fake cyber-café to lure in surveillance targets.

This strange concoction of emotions, where readers are fascinated to learn how spies operate and at the same time are shocked that they behave in such ways and feel it must be wrong regardless of the intentions or success of these activities, isn't new to the Snowden affair. It happened in Britain with Peter Wright and his memoir *Spycatcher*, and with David Shayler and Richard Tomlinson. All three were disgruntled British intelligence officers who did their best to paint MI5 and MI6 in the blackest light they could. Many of these revelations were spurious or exaggerated, but the agencies had very little comeback: who would believe the spooks?

So unfortunately, we tend to be interested in reading about top secret information even if it's a leak from our own side, and it's all too easy to forget or dismiss that people's lives may depend on it. I'd personally find it fascinating to read all of the CIA's and MI6's operational documents from the last fifty years, but my interest

doesn't mean they should all be declassified. As is frequently pointed out but more frequently ignored, public interest doesn't mean 'what the public is interested in'.

To give an example, one of the most important spies of the Cold War was Oleg Penkovsky, a colonel in Soviet military intelligence who passed reams of classified material to the CIA and MI6 in the early Sixties. His intelligence is widely credited as having been instrumental in forestalling a nuclear conflict during the Cuban Missile Crisis. But in 1961 someone with access to material about the operation might have been shocked by some of the practices involved in it: Penkovsky's intelligence was so highly valued that MI6 and the CIA went to great lengths to keep him sweet, even going so far as to arrange for prostitutes for him. One can easily imagine a leak of this distasteful fact to an enterprising reporter, who could then have splashed their scoop all over the *Guardian* or the *New York Times*. 'British And US Intelligence Buy Prostitutes For Soviet Asset' would be a juicy headline, and lots of people would have been outraged by such an exposé. But the lapse in scruples is miniscule when placed against the wider scheme of things, and had the operation been exposed in the Western press in such a way, the KGB would have launched an immediate enquiry and might have identified Penkovsky sooner than they did as a result—and I might not be here writing this nor you reading it.

I'm not suggesting that all the revelations from the Snowden documents have been as small beer as that indiscretion—but I think some have been, and a few haven't been indiscretions at all. And the principle is the same: in exposing a wrongdoing one might in the process traipse into exposing legitimate and even very valuable activities and methods.

The rise of the Islamic State and Russia's invasion of Crimea have both put into stark relief the fact that, although it is clear surveillance

practices have overstepped the mark in several areas that endanger civil liberties, we still very much need our intelligence agencies. One hopes further events won't make that clearer, but if they do that will likely be a result of our intelligence agencies not doing enough rather than doing too much.

And let's not be complacent about what is at stake here. A common argument I've seen on social media is that Snowden's disclosures can't have caused damage because those who could benefit from knowing about these techniques would have already known about them and taken measures to avoid them. This doesn't withstand scrutiny. Firstly, there's no way of knowing that every cyber-criminal, terrorist or person with ill intentions against the United States and its citizens already knew about each revelation. Such people take security measures into greater consideration than the average person, naturally, but that doesn't afford them clairvoyance into the every movement of the NSA, GCHQ or other agencies whose methods and activities have been revealed. If everything these agencies do or consider is known to their targets, both agencies might as well pack up and go home.

If it were the case that the Bad Guys know about everything already, leaving these agencies only to spy on Us Good Guys, no terrorists or cyber-criminals' plots would have been foiled, and the American administration would be spending an enormous budget thinking up operations and schemes that have no chance of working because they have already been guessed at by the targets. And yet the documents contain numerous instances of NSA staff noting that this or that method had yielded useful intelligence.

Common sense suggests a far more likely scenario: that prior to the Snowden disclosures there was a range of knowledge among bad actors of what the NSA can do. Perhaps some of their methods were

suspected—but confirmation in black and white could nevertheless prove useful.

One of the clearest examples of this is *The Guardian's* story revealing that in 2009 the NSA, working with GCHQ, had spied on the then Russian president Dmitry Medvedev when he'd visited London for the G20 summit.¹³³

There was no public interest in revealing this, and it could only really have caused national security and/or diplomatic damage, even if it were minor. Bizarrely, *The Guardian* effectively acknowledged the damage the exposure they'd chosen to pursue would likely cause:

‘While it has been widely known the two countries spy on each other, it is rare for either to be caught in the act; the latest disclosures will also be deeply embarrassing for the White House as Obama prepares to meet Vladimir Putin, who succeeded Medvedev as president, in the margins of the G8 summit this week.’¹³⁴

The Guardian seems to have been under the impression that this was activity worth exposing in the public interest because the NSA was operating on British soil:

‘The new revelations underline the significance of RAF Menwith Hill and raise questions about its relationship to the British intelligence agencies, and who is responsible for overseeing it. The 560-acre site was leased to the Americans in 1954 and the NSA has had a large presence there since 1966.’¹³⁵

The UK and the US are close allies, and the NSA and GCHQ working in tandem to intercept communications such as this has been

¹³³ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/16/nsa-dmitry-medvedev-g20-summit>

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

standard for decades and isn't evidence of wrongdoing. Both are part of Five Eyes, and the article indicates the intelligence was shared within that group. It might say something about the relative power dynamic that the US has intelligence officers operating with Brits in the UK like this, but that's simply common knowledge: it was a theme in John le Carré novels three decades ago. The fact that the NSA has been at Menwith Hill since 1966 is a clue that this isn't news.

As for who's responsible for overseeing such activities, an article published by *The Guardian* the same day on this and other attempts to intercept communications at that summit seems to provide an answer:

'The documents suggest that the operation was sanctioned in principle at a senior level in the government of the then prime minister, Gordon Brown, and that intelligence, including briefings for visiting delegates, was passed to British ministers.'¹³⁶

That second article mentions that the NSA and GCHQ were trying to intercept communications of diplomats from 'long-standing allies such as South Africa and Turkey' and that it wasn't to stop terrorism or nefarious acts but 'the more mundane purpose of securing an advantage in meetings'. There is an ignorance of *realpolitik* here, and either real or feigned naivety. If the NSA's remit were only to stop terrorism or nefarious acts, there might be a point. But it isn't. It's 'to gain a decision advantage for the Nation and our allies under all circumstances'.¹³⁷ GCHQ's remit also includes this, and has done since 1994:

¹³⁶ <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2013/jun/16/gchq-intercepted-communications-g20-summits>

¹³⁷ <https://www.nsa.gov/about/values/index.shtml>

‘We are primarily a foreign-focused intelligence agency, with a signals intelligence role that can only be exercised for three limited purposes:

In the interests of national security

In the interests of the economic well-being of the UK

In support of the prevention or detection of serious crime.’¹³⁸

The nature of allies often shifts, and diplomatic discussions at the level of the G20 or G8 are often of crucial importance to how nations operate in many different fields, most of which interconnect. Natural resources like gas and oil are often not just economically important, but politically vital—Russia uses its control over them as a weapon. And away from shocked headlines, it’s well known that all intelligence agencies spy on diplomats of apparently friendly countries, even as their leaders shake hands for the television cameras and talk about how strong the ties are between them.

Pointing more to the interpretation of feigned naivety is the conspicuous absence in the second, wider article of listing Russia as an ally along with Turkey and South Africa despite also mentioning that Medvedev was a surveillance target at the summit. This is surely because it was common knowledge even in 2009 that the Russians were allies in name only. The assassination of Alexander Litvinenko in London in broad daylight in 2006 caused a serious diplomatic chill between Britain and Russia, and recent events have only made clearer what had long been known: Putin’s regime has simply been play-acting as a democratic state on the diplomatic stage. Attempting to intercept the Russian president’s communications is something American and British intelligence should have been doing in 2009, and should still be doing today if possible. Russia isn’t mentioned as

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[http://www.gchq.gov.uk/how we work/running the business/oversight/Pages/the-law.aspx](http://www.gchq.gov.uk/how_we_work/running_the_business/oversight/Pages/the-law.aspx)

an ally in the second piece, so that it isn't part of the public interest of the first. There was no real public interest in exposing it, in fact. I suspect Russian intelligence would have been grateful to *The Guardian* for revealing details about this—and next time (if they are still attending such summits) they'll be more careful.

3

‘Make Them A Little Bit Angry’

I THINK THERE have been four major factors contributing to problems in the reporting of the Snowden affair, all of which have led to a darker picture of the NSA’s activities than the raw material published so far indicates, as well as to the needless exposing of Western secrets in some cases:

1. Confirmation bias from journalists with access to the documents, in at least three cases a strong assumption going in that the agency would be proved to be corrupt/malign.
2. A lack of scepticism about deceptive or exaggerated statements by Edward Snowden regarding the NSA’s motives and intentions.

3. Gaps in basic knowledge about how the intelligence world operates, and a failure to grasp how strong the public interest defence needs to be when dealing with thousands of national security secrets.

4. A desire to up the ante and find ever-more shocking ‘scoops’ to publish from the documents. This has been exacerbated by Snowden effectively pitting journalists against each other by giving people at different publications access to the cache.

The latter has also applied to newspapers without access to Snowden’s cache, creating an NSA disclosure feeding frenzy. *Der Spiegel* has gone to town in particular, but so have others. In June 2013, a couple of weeks after the first stories, *The Observer*—part of the Guardian Media Group but with a completely different editorial staff from *The Guardian*—published a front-page ‘scoop’ about the NSA. The story was based on information that a single source, one Wayne Madsen, had given in an interview to the website *privacysurgeon.org* about a secret deal European governments had done with the NSA. *The Observer* didn’t even interview Madsen for the article, but simply repeated his claims to the website. Madsen himself is an extreme conspiracy theorist who believes, among many other things, that Anders Breivik was a Mossad agent carrying out a false flag attack on behalf of Israel.¹³⁹

The story was soon taken down from *The Guardian’s* website, which *The Observer* shares with its sister paper, but even that was done shoddily, with an error page conspicuously avoiding admitting to what the error was:

¹³⁹ <http://www.infowars.com/wayne-madsen-link-between-breivik-and-israeli-mossad> Michael Moynihan wrote an excellent dissection of this fiasco: <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/07/01/nsa-nutjob-anatomy-of-a-fake-observer-story.html>

‘Sorry—the page you are looking for has been removed
This may be because of a legal objection, a rights consideration or
for another reason.’¹⁴⁰

On the problem of confirmation bias, there’s an obvious potential flaw in my argument. What if, despite my best intentions, *my* assessment of this is misjudged, and I’m the one with the confirmation bias? Well, that could be the case, of course. I’ve tried to come to an honest assessment after a year and a half following the story, but it’s for you as a reader to decide if I’ve been unfair, and the journalists themselves are of course free to disagree with any of my points.

But there is a crucial difference between this book and the reporting I’m criticizing. I don’t think I’ve misjudged my assessments or been biased, obviously, but if I have then I’ve simply unfairly criticized some journalists. That’s regrettable, but it happens every day of the week, and having one’s work criticized is part of the job. If you can’t take the sort of criticism I’m offering here, you should probably look into a new line of work. But if the journalists working on this story have misjudged *their* assessments, the potential in each and every case is for a risk to the national security of the US and/or its allies, and individuals’ lives may be at stake.

I’ve also examined elements of the reporting that are less open to bias. I’ve looked at where stories have directly misrepresented information in the Snowden documents; conflicts of interest; ignorance of basic security and *realpolitik* matters, and knowledge of which countries are valid intelligence targets.

None of this is as hard-and-fast as a table of results for an experiment in, say, the efficacy of a drug in combating dengue fever,

¹⁴⁰ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jul/01/european-private-data-america>

but I hope that even readers who are sympathetic to Snowden's aims might see I haven't imagined these problems.

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LET'S START WITH the issue of bias, and Laura Poitras. In her case, her bias against the NSA isn't just political, but deeply personal. A film director who mixes journalism and art, Poitras's documentaries on the United States after 9/11 have included interviews with two NSA whistleblowers, and it is because of her interest in the agency and criticisms of its domestic surveillance programs that Snowden contacted her. But her work had also had consequences: she has discussed how she was repeatedly detained at airports by Customs and Border Patrol agents from the Department of Homeland Security, and she eventually moved to Germany to escape all the hassle.¹⁴¹ So she isn't simply an observer of government surveillance, but also a high-profile *victim* of it.

The focus of Poitras' work is often an appeal to emotion. In an interview in 2011, she said:

'I think 9/11 has affected all Americans and, being an artist working in these times, the work I've tried to do is to document it, the repercussions, and also to try to tell human stories that we can relate to on a more, I guess, emotional level.

But the real motivation for the work that I've been doing is not actually the events of 9/11, but how the US has responded to those

¹⁴¹ CORRECTION: This sentence originally stated that Poitras had been subject to surveillance by the NSA at this time. My thanks to Alan Kurtz for pointing out to me on Twitter that there is no proof that that particular agency was monitoring Poitras then. For more about her being questioned by border agents and the Department of Homeland Security, see http://www.democracynow.org/2012/4/20/detained_in_the_us_filmmaker_laura

events: the invasion of Iraq, Guantanamo, legalization of torture. And those are the things that were not created on 9/11—those are things that we chose.

The job of an artist is to express things, right? So we're not activists, we're not organizers, we're not politicians, right? So even though I do have political beliefs, my job as an artist is to express how I'm perceiving the world. And so the work I've tried to do as a storyteller, as a filmmaker, as somebody who captures images, is to create documents, to create a record, and to create a record that's grounded in human stories.'¹⁴²

Despite Poitras saying she avoids pushing her political beliefs or operating as an activist in her films, these strands are extremely obvious in her work, and indeed are obvious even as she denies it—it doesn't take a genius to figure out her position on the War on Terror from her comments on Iraq, Guantanamo and torture. She seems to feel that by not explicitly stating her political positions in her work she isn't getting them across to her audience, but the people she chooses to interview and the information she selects and omits all form a narrative framed by her world-view and political thinking.

In November 2012, Poitras discussed a new film she was working on, investigating domestic surveillance. She also explained that she had come to documentary-making after she had taken art classes and 'fallen in love with story-telling':

'I really care about the craft, I really care about taking an aesthetic approach towards story-telling, but it's about the people for me now, it's about going on that journey and having that emotional connection and trying to bring that to the audience... What I'm often trying to do is look at big themes, but ground them in human experience. And so, as a viewer you don't necessarily have to care so

¹⁴² <http://www.nytimes.com/video/arts/100000001028097/laura-poitras.html>

much about the big themes that I'm interested in, but I do want you to care about the people I'm spending time with and go on the journey with them and then through that experience maybe reflect on those bigger themes. And so there's a really tangible experience you have when you spend a lot of time with people documenting what they're going through.'¹⁴³

This is a good description of how to craft compelling narratives, but it has obvious risks when it comes to journalism, not least an abandonment of ethics in favour of empathy. An example that springs to mind is *My Silent War*, the memoir of Kim Philby. A senior MI6 officer in the Cold War, Philby had secretly been working as a double agent for the KGB since he was a student at Cambridge University. *My Silent War* was published after his defection to Moscow with a foreword by Graham Greene, and is largely a stodgy account of his career, with several notable omissions and misrepresentations. But Philby was partly such a successful double agent because he was extraordinarily charming, and over the course of a book by him it's very difficult not to succumb to it at any point. This is a man who betrayed hundreds of secrets, and as a result many British agents went to their deaths. But he was still a human being. He was often astute and witty.

This is often an effect of spending a lot of time with people. Nick Broomfield, Jon Ronson and Louis Theroux often interview people who do or have done awful things, but the more time they (and we) spend with them, the harder it is to not to like them. Poitras' approach can work extremely effectively, but the people she elects to spend time filming in this way are going to end up being people we are emotionally attached to—that's her self-declared aim. And

¹⁴³ <http://creativetimereports.org/2012/11/28/an-interview-with-laura-poitras>

that's fine. But her selection of who those people are becomes pretty important.

The interviewer asked her if the idea for her new film had come about because she had herself become a subject of domestic surveillance. She replied:

'I think my personal experience definitely informs it because being targeted, it really does impact the way you do everything in your life. Every phone call you make, you imagine it's being listened to by somebody else, every email you send, you imagine it's being read by other people. And that's not paranoia, I mean, that's really happening. And several of the people I've been filming with I know are targets as well—three of the people. So we're four targets. So there's a good chance that everything's getting monitored.'¹⁴⁴

Towards the end of the interview, she briefly discussed her plans:

'I'm also going to probably do something else on the NSA, which would be more web-based, collaborative, a lot of fun—make them a little bit angry.'¹⁴⁵

She seems to have been planning a film based partly around NSA whistleblower Thomas Drake. On the eve of Drake's espionage trial in 2010, Poitras and her cinematographer Kirsten Johnson had met William Binney, another NSA whistleblower, who was one of Drake's defence witnesses. Binney turned to Poitras and Johnson and said 'Just so you know, I'd never commit suicide'. Poitras comments on this in the interview with dark humour: 'The government does things—we know that.'

The government dropped espionage charges against Thomas Drake. William Binney is, at the time of writing, still alive, and an

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

openly vocal critic of the NSA. In August 2012, *The Program*, Poitras' 'Op-Doc' short film about Binney, appeared on the *New York Times*' website. In the accompanying article, Poitras revealed just how thin the line is between her politics and her storytelling instincts:

'In this Op-Doc, Mr. Binney explains how the program he created for foreign intelligence gathering was turned inward on this country. He resigned over this in 2001 and began speaking out publicly in the last year. He is among a group of N.S.A. whistle-blowers, including Thomas A. Drake, who have each risked everything—their freedom, livelihoods and personal relationships—to warn Americans about the dangers of N.S.A. domestic spying.

To those who understand state surveillance as an abstraction, I will try to describe a little about how it has affected me. The United States apparently placed me on a "watch-list" in 2006 after I completed a film about the Iraq war. I have been detained at the border more than 40 times. Once, in 2011, when I was stopped at John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York and asserted my First Amendment right not to answer questions about my work, the border agent replied, "If you don't answer our questions, we'll find our answers on your electronics." As a filmmaker and journalist entrusted to protect the people who share information with me, it is becoming increasingly difficult for me to work in the United States. Although I take every effort to secure my material, I know the N.S.A. has technical abilities that are nearly impossible to defend against if you are targeted.'¹⁴⁶

With this background and these views of it, how critical of NSA whistleblowers is Poitras capable of being? In her film, Binney makes

¹⁴⁶ <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/23/opinion/the-national-security-agencys-domestic-spying-program.html? r=0>

some fairly extreme claims. He says the amount of information gathered by the NSA is out of control, and then states:

‘This is something the KGB, the Stasi or the Gestapo would have loved to have had about their populations.’¹⁴⁷

In March that year, he had told journalist James Bamford that the US was on the verge of becoming ‘a turnkey totalitarian state’. In his first interview with *The Guardian*, Snowden spoke of the danger of ‘turnkey tyranny’ coming to the US.¹⁴⁸ But totalitarian regimes don’t allow people to repeatedly state they are totalitarian in the media. Snowden is currently in Moscow, fearing imprisonment if he were to return to the United States. But Binney remains a free man. Similarly, a compelling piece of evidence to refute Snowden’s fears that the United States is on the brink of becoming a totalitarian surveillance state is the fact that the NSA was unaware he had stolen their documents, or who he was, until after he’d fled the country.¹⁴⁹ They don’t appear to be watching everyone all the time quite yet.

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THERE ARE SIGNS of Laura Poitras’ focus on emotional narrative in her approach to the Snowden story. In a recent interview with the *New Yorker*, she explained that after Snowden contacted her in January 2013 she corresponded with him for several months, becoming emotionally and psychologically drawn in. She had wanted

¹⁴⁷ <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/23/opinion/the-national-security-agencies-domestic-spying-program.html>

¹⁴⁸ http://www.wired.com/2012/03/ff_nsadatacenter/all/1;
<http://www.theguardian.com/world/video/2013/jun/09/nsa-whistleblower-edward-snowden-interview-video>

¹⁴⁹ CORRECTION: The word ‘refute’ was accidentally omitted from this sentence. My thanks again to Alan Kurtz for pointing it out.

to film him for her documentary on domestic surveillance—she wasn't initially interested in publishing the documents he had taken or conducting the straight factual reporting of them herself:

'Snowden urged her to find a collaborator for publishing the documents, which were complex and voluminous, and she agreed to do so. She didn't care about sharing, or even losing, a scoop—the documents were a print story. She was interested in Snowden. She wanted to know what drove him to risk everything. "Unlike my previous films, this was somebody I had built a dialogue with, and wanted to meet," she told me. "Because I cared."

In May, Poitras flew to New York and was informed by Snowden that she should travel to Hong Kong to meet him. She wanted someone else to be in the room with her when she filmed him:

'She never shot herself conducting interviews—it broke one of the tenets of *cinéma vérité*. When she had trouble enlisting someone, she began to panic.

Snowden asked her to involve Greenwald, who at the time was a columnist for the *Guardian*. In fact, he had approached Greenwald before Poitras, but Greenwald hadn't made the effort to install encryption software for e-mails, and Snowden had moved on. Greenwald was contacted again, and in late May he flew from Rio to New York. Now Poitras had a partner.'¹⁵⁰

A few problems stand out here. Poitras's level of emotional commitment to a still-anonymous source suggests she had convinced herself that he was credible before meeting him. This is a common problem for journalists when they have a sniff of a scoop, but Poitras

¹⁵⁰ <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/10/20/holder-secrets>

wasn't at this point interested in the hard graft of investigative journalism: she was interested in Snowden.

Her search for a journalist to do the reporting on the facts while she told the human story led to two newspapers competing for the same scoop. In late May 2013, she informed Greenwald that there was a snag with the story: she'd spoken to a journalist at the *Washington Post* about some of the documents, but the source was now worried by how the paper had reacted. Snowden then contacted Greenwald online, as Greenwald relates in his book *No Place To Hide*:

'We spoke online that day for two hours. [Snowden's] first concern was what was happening with some of the NSA documents that, with his consent, Poitras had talked about to a *Washington Post* reporter, Barton Gellman. The documents pertained to one specific story about a program called PRISM, which allowed the NSA to collect private communications from the world's largest Internet companies, including Facebook, Google, Yahoo!, and Skype.

Rather than report the story quickly and aggressively, the *Washington Post* had assembled a large team of lawyers who were making all kinds of demands and issuing all sorts of dire warnings. To the source, this signaled that the *Post*, handed what he believed was an unprecedented journalistic opportunity, was being driven by fear rather than conviction and determination. He was also livid that the *Post* had involved so many people, afraid that these discussions might jeopardize his security.

"I don't like how this is developing," he told me. "I had wanted someone else to do this one story about PRISM so you could focus on the broader archive, especially the mass domestic spying, but now I really want you to be the one to report this. I've been reading you

a long time,” he said, “and I know you’ll be aggressive and fearless in how you do this.”¹⁵¹

The PRISM story was indeed an unprecedented journalistic opportunity, and Snowden was right to be concerned about the security issue of involving others. But there’s also a lot of ground between potentially compromising your source’s security by dithering and involving too many people and reporting a story ‘quickly and aggressively’. There was some need to act rapidly, as Snowden was a fugitive but also offered the promise of being able to provide additional context to the documents. But why report ‘aggressively’? Why not simply responsibly and accurately? What if Snowden’s documents weren’t as damning as he was claiming? Perhaps in part because he wanted the scoop over *The Washington Post*, Greenwald seems to have sided with Snowden on the issue and presumed in advance of seeing any of the documents he’d taken that they would be as damning about the NSA as he was suggesting.

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LAURA POITRAS’ EXPERIENCES of being repeatedly stopped and questioned by government agents informed the documentaries she made before Snowden appeared on the scene, and in them she focused on narrative journeys revolving around interviewees for whom she felt a strong connection. That’s all well and good in those documentaries—her Binney film, for instance, was labeled an ‘Op-Doc’ because like an op-ed it contained her own opinions rather than being hard news. But as the Snowden story developed, Poitras switched from being a storyteller-cum-artist to a straight journalist,

¹⁵¹ Chapter 1, ‘Contact’, *No Place To Hide* by Glenn Greenwald (Penguin, 2014)

with her name on the bylines of several news reports on the Snowden documents, at *Der Spiegel*, *The Intercept* and elsewhere. In doing so, I wonder if she has put aside her pre-existing bias towards the agency she wanted to make ‘a little bit angry’, her caring about Snowden and her penchant for empathizing so thoroughly with the subjects she covers.¹⁵²

Early on in the Snowden saga, she did make some attempt at the kind of source verification that is more akin to news reporting than documentary storytelling, but that also contained the feedback loop of confirmation bias. In May 2013, she informed Jacob Appelbaum, who also lived in Berlin, that she was in contact with someone claiming to be an NSA whistleblower, and asked if he could provide some specific technical questions she could pose to check he was the genuine article and not a provocation of some sort. Appelbaum, a former hacker and encryption expert who had been a volunteer for WikiLeaks, sent a detailed list of questions, which was later published by *Der Spiegel*.¹⁵³

Appelbaum had more technical knowledge of the intelligence apparatus than Poitras, but she was hardly reaching out to test her own confirmation bias: Appelbaum lives in Berlin for the same reason as she does, and shared many of her views on the issues.

At a surveillance ‘teach-in’ at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York in late 2012 at which Poitras had been a key participant, Appelbaum had interviewed William Binney on stage. Like Poitras, he uncritically believed Binney’s claims, and stated:

¹⁵² UPDATE: This paragraph is new to this edition, as I realised that I hadn’t made it clear enough that Poitras switched approaches and has been one of the major bylines in straight news reports about the Snowden documents. My thanks to Willard Foxton and Max Dunbar for their feedback on this.

¹⁵³ <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/interview-with-whistleblower-edward-snowden-on-global-spying-a-910006.html>

‘[Binney] left the NSA because each and every one of us was being targeted by the NSA as Americans on American soil, talking to other Americans. That scares the shit out of me. And it’s especially amazing to have him here saying this, because all this time I thought I was paranoid, I wasn’t paranoid enough.’¹⁵⁴

Snowden’s documents have confirmed that the NSA has a huge surveillance capability, but by no stretch of the imagination does it suggest that each and every American on American soil is being targeted. Before Snowden emerged, Appelbaum was already convinced that the United States was turning to totalitarianism. In 2012, he told *Democracy Now* he couldn’t elaborate on his treatment at the hands of federal agents ‘Because we don’t live in a free country’.¹⁵⁵

Since the Snowden story broke, Appelbaum has also worked on several articles about NSA activities for *Der Spiegel*, including some that draw on internal NSA documents, although he hasn’t revealed his source for those. His articles use the idiom of news reporting, but this can act as a façade of neutrality to give political points more authoritative force: ‘Well, it’s been reported in *Der Spiegel*. Away from the printed page and the screen, Appelbaum is barely able to conceal that, for him, a large part of the NSA/Snowden story is payback against the intelligence agencies who have hounded him and people he knows. In a discussion with journalist John Goetz at the “Whatever happened to Privacy?” International Activism Conference in Berlin in December 2013, he was asked to put himself in the shoes of the then-NSA director General Keith Alexander. Appelbaum replied:

¹⁵⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s976iyaO39A>

¹⁵⁵ [http://www.democracynow.org/2012/4/20/we do not live in a](http://www.democracynow.org/2012/4/20/we_do_not_live_in_a)

‘Well, it’s really hard to put myself into the shoes of someone who is such a fucking asshole. But I’ll try to do a good impression here, which is something along the lines of “Damn, I wish we understood this internet thing”. Because I suspect that Keith Alexander is sort of having a lot less sleep these days.’¹⁵⁶

He went on to say that he felt Alexander might be anxious about not knowing what material Glenn Greenwald and other journalists had in their possession. He pointed out that intelligence officials could no longer make blanket assertions about intelligence activity without the risk of being contradicted, because the Snowden cache provided hard evidence of their programmes. ‘And so I suspect that that’s a really awful experience for them,’ he said, ‘and I’m so glad that I can return the favour, and that the rest of us can return that favour to them.’ Goetz asked him what he meant by this, and Appelbaum expanded:

‘For years, Julian [Assange], myself and a number of other people, some of whom are in this audience, have suffered immense harassment from the US government and from these spy agencies themselves—almost certainly the NSA. And so it’s really nice actually to be able to give them a little bit of the stress, a little bit of the *Zersetzung* they gave to us.

You know, when they wouldn’t give me files on myself or my family or my friends, I had to look into how the systems work for collecting these things so that I could understand what could be in those files. So it’s ironic because in a sense they created this situation, for a lot of people. This is a sort of natural reaction to it.

So I hope that Keith Alexander is kept up at night a little bit, you know—that some of the other people that are working on this spying, they have to think about the Nuremberg principles a little bit and maybe something’s going to come to light about that. I really hope that that is on their conscience. Not in a terrorizing way, but

¹⁵⁶ <http://www.boell.de/en/whatever-happened-privacy>

in a “Truth is coming, you motherfuckers, and you cannot stop it” kind of way.’¹⁵⁷

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GLENN GREENWALD ALSO has a history with the NSA, albeit not as personal a one as Appelbaum or Poitras. In 2012 he wrote about Poitras being put on the watch list, and this seems to have led to a relieving of pressure on her.¹⁵⁸ Greenwald’s view of the government before the Snowden story is reminiscent of Binney’s and Appelbaum’s view that the US was on the verge of being a totalitarian state:

‘Poitras is afraid to talk on a US telephone to anyone involved in her project, travel into her own country with any materials relating to her film work, or physically keep any of her unedited film on US soil. Does that sound like the behavior of a citizen and a filmmaker of a free country?’¹⁵⁹

There is a very clear pattern of hyperbole in Greenwald’s work: if he reads an article by another journalist presenting evidence that the government may be doing something wrong, he might write an op-ed about it. But in his hands the original concern about circumstantial evidence will often be ramped up until he has made it seem like proof of systematic and wide-reaching abuse.

In 2010, the *Washington Post* ran a series of articles on the NSA that caused a lot of commotion. Greenwald wrote an op-ed about it

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. Thanks to Martin Keegan for deciphering the word ‘Zersetzung’ in the clip.

¹⁵⁸

http://www.salon.com/2012/04/08/u_s_filmaker_repeatedly_detained_at_border

¹⁵⁹ <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/dec/04/us-constitution-and-civil-liberties>

for *Salon*, but rather than write, say, that it showed that 9/11 had created a disturbing shift in US intelligence methods and that the NSA was in dire need of increased oversight, he wrote that the *Post*'s journalism illustrated an 'out-of-control, privacy-destroying Surveillance State' and concluded that the United States had 'become a militarized nation living under an omnipotent, self-perpetuating, bankrupting National Security State'. He claimed that the world of national security 'is so vast, secretive and well-funded that it's very difficult to imagine how it could ever be brought under control.'¹⁶⁰

This is impressive rhetoric, but it is all from someone else's reporting. It also relies on distorting and cherry-picking information from that reporting that suits his more amped-up narrative.¹⁶¹

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BEFORE SNOWDEN CAME into their lives, Poitras, Appelbaum and Greenwald all believed that the United States was, if not a totalitarian state, on the verge of becoming one. Poitras and Greenwald, far from being neutral observers of the NSA, went into the story already feeling that the agency was a malign force, and so were looking for material that would support that pre-existing view. I'm not the first to make that observation—it was a criticism levelled by many people

¹⁶⁰ http://www.salon.com/2010/07/19/secretcy_6/

¹⁶¹ There are many examples of this, but I discuss a few here: <http://www.jeremy-duns.com/blog/2014/5/30/some-thoughts-on-the-reporting-of-prism?rq=greenwald> His characterisation of the 2010 *Washington Post* excerpt is particularly misleading, as the entire idea in the original was to point out how bureaucracy has made over-collection unmanageable and near-useless. For examples of Greenwald citing sources he hasn't read – including citing three sources saying the same thing because he hadn't realised two simply cited the original findings of the third – see this blogpost: <http://www.jeremy-duns.com/blog/2014/5/30/the-perils-of-googledemia?rq=greenwald>

from the start of the reporting. But Greenwald had a response ready for anyone who raised this objection: his bias was in fact noble because he had never hidden it, and because it was the truth.

4

Bias as Truth

IN THE 2002 film *8 Mile*, Eminem played B-Rabbit, a young man from Detroit who takes part in local rap battles with peers to prove his mettle and attain recognition. In the final round of one rap battle, he cleverly pre-empts all the attacks he thinks his opponent is about to make against him and ends his allotted time by throwing the microphone to the other rapper with the line: ‘Here, tell these people something they don’t know about me.’

When it comes to criticism of his work and approach, Glenn Greenwald has adopted a B-Rabbit approach. Just as he engages in hyperbole in his articles, he often shoots down criticism in overegged terms—or, as he might put it, points out the unbelievable ignorance and dishonesty of unwarranted attacks from drooling national security establishment shills and authoritarian idiots. Occasionally, he’ll refrain from *tu quoque* accusations and address the substance of criticisms, but even then it’s most often in aggressive and condescending terms, and almost always at such tedious length that

nobody will bother to read it all to untangle it to see why the original criticisms were correct. The back and forth becomes so convoluted that few are prepared to take the time and be branded a pedant and/or neo-conservative security state shill for their trouble.

Some people who criticize Greenwald's work *are* idiots, and no doubt some are drooling establishment shills. But I think his work has received so much criticism for a broader reason, which is that his view of events is often more extreme than the evidence he draws on for it, because he hasn't properly researched the topic. A striking statistic dug up by another journalist or organization is sometimes enough for him to draw blunt or even apocalyptic assumptions, and over time this tendency in his work has been noticed. He unwittingly put his finger on the problems in his own approach in a tweet about Sam Harris:

'Anyone who ever criticizes his writing is either lying, misrepresenting, or too stupid to understand his genius.'¹⁶²

That Glenn Greenwald is more interested in re-affirming his own prejudices than researching to get at the truth is something he has himself admitted. He told the *New York Times* shortly after the first Snowden story broke 'I approach my journalism as a litigator. People say things, you assume they are lying, and dig for documents to prove it.'¹⁶³

The problem with this, of course, is that it's entirely the wrong way round, and the definition of confirmation bias. If a scientist goes into an experiment already convinced of what the result will be, he or she might end up fudging the data so that result will be produced. It's healthy to treat new information with scepticism—I wish he'd

¹⁶² <https://twitter.com/ggreenwald/status/522446923610202112>

¹⁶³ http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/07/business/media/anti-surveillance-activist-is-at-center-of-new-leak.html?_r=1&

shown more of his litigator's side with some of Snowden's statements. But rather than assuming people are lying and then trying to find evidence to prove your worst suspicions, a journalist should simply be trying to find evidence of the truth. Other journalists who have worked on this story, from *The Guardian*, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, seem to regard trying to ascertain the truth of statements regardless of their preconceptions as their aim, as professional journalists should.

Greenwald's litigator approach to journalism is most obvious in discussions on how to gauge the risk to national security. He acts from a position not just of scepticism of government claims—which all journalists should have—but a premise that they are almost certainly lying. On November 5 2014 he tweeted a link to a Reuters report, saying:

'By the way, U.S. is still killing lots of people via drones in places like Yemen—don't worry: "suspected militants"'¹⁶⁴

With no evidence at all—there is none in the Reuters piece—he simply decided that the government must be guilty of wrongdoing here. And not just wrongdoing, but deliberate murder of innocent civilians.

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GREENWALD'S MOST ADEPT B-Rabbit move has been to head off early criticism that he approached the story with a set of pre-existing biases by not only openly admitting it but attempting to make a virtue of the fact. His argument is that he can ignore the fundamental

¹⁶⁴ <https://twitter.com/ggreenwald/status/529768277740756992> He linked to this Reuters article: <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2014/11/04/yemen-attack-drones-idUKL6N0SU1YQ20141104>

principles of journalism because, in effect, everyone else does, too, and he's the only honest soldier prepared to admit it. Here is what he wrote in an exchange in the *New York Times* with Bill Keller in October 2013:

'I don't think anyone contends that what has become (rather recently) the standard model for a reporter—concealing one's subjective perspectives or what appears to be "opinions"—precludes good journalism.

But this model has also produced lots of atrocious journalism and some toxic habits that are weakening the profession. A journalist who is petrified of appearing to express any opinions will often steer clear of declarative sentences about what is true, opting instead for a cowardly and unhelpful "here's-what-both-sides-say-and-I-won't-resolve-the-conflicts" formulation. That rewards dishonesty on the part of political and corporate officials who know they can rely on "objective" reporters to amplify their falsehoods without challenge (i.e., reporting is reduced to "X says Y" rather than "X says Y and that's false").

Worse still, this suffocating constraint on how reporters are permitted to express themselves produces a self-neutering form of journalism that becomes as ineffectual as it is boring. A failure to call torture "torture" because government officials demand that a more pleasant euphemism be used, or lazily equating a demonstrably true assertion with a demonstrably false one, drains journalism of its passion, vibrancy, vitality and soul.

Worst of all, this model rests on a false conceit. Human beings are not objectivity-driven machines. We all intrinsically perceive and process the world through subjective prisms. What is the value in pretending otherwise?

The relevant distinction is not between journalists who have opinions and those who do not, because the latter category is mythical. The relevant distinction is between journalists who

honestly disclose their subjective assumptions and political values and those who dishonestly pretend they have none or conceal them from their readers.’¹⁶⁵

This is an extraordinary justification for unprincipled journalism. He is absolutely right, of course, that good reporting should involve stating what is demonstrably true or false without having to create a contrived sense of balance, and it is unfortunately the case that many journalists fall down on that score. It’s perhaps most pronounced in broadcast media: the BBC, for example, is required to present an ‘impartial’ editorial view, and this can lead to precisely the sort of equivocations Greenwald mentions.

But if a claim is false it should be clearly stated as such, *whoever makes it*. Greenwald’s claim that it’s acceptable for journalists to do otherwise as long as they honestly disclose their subjective assumptions is contrary not just to well-established journalistic tenets, but to common sense. There’s a path between the two extremes of failing to call demonstrable falsehoods lies and approaching a story with a set of assumptions and letting them influence one’s reporting. Scientists are also human beings, and yet are capable of putting their opinions to one side in order to seek out hard evidence. If they weren’t, science wouldn’t advance.

Greenwald’s confirmation bias against the corporate-political establishment is so entrenched he fails to see that his argument doesn’t only apply to it. Biases exist and can seep into work, but this is poor practice whether it’s in support of statements by corporate or political officials or in opposition to them. If a journalist can’t separate their prejudices from their responsibility to report the truth, the problem occurs regardless of what those prejudices are. It isn’t only political

¹⁶⁵ <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/28/opinion/a-conversation-in-lieu-of-a-column.html>

and corporate officials who can be dishonest. A willingness to accept the claims of those *opposing* government or establishment claims is also toxic.

Additionally, as Keller pointed out in his response to Greenwald, reporters rarely produce work alone, and checking for such blind spots is an essential part of preparing a story for any publication valuing good journalism:

‘I don’t think of it as reporters pretending they have no opinions. I think of it as reporters, as an occupational discipline, suspending their opinions and letting the evidence speak for itself. And it matters that this is not just an individual exercise, but an institutional discipline, with editors who are tasked to challenge writers if they have given short shrift to contrary facts or arguments readers might want to know.

The thing is, once you have publicly declared your “subjective assumptions and political values,” it’s human nature to want to defend them, and it becomes tempting to omit or minimize facts, or frame the argument, in ways that support your declared viewpoint. And some readers, knowing that you write from the left or right, will view your reporting with justified suspicion.’¹⁶⁶

Journalists and their colleagues shouldn’t be embracing their preconceived notions, as Greenwald suggests, but simply trying to find out what is true. If you don’t believe it’s even possible to keep an open mind when researching a story, let alone believe that’s worth doing, you’re in the wrong profession. A journalist’s prejudices can affect the way they report facts, but this is something they should *try to avoid*.

The hypothetical problem raised by Bill Keller applies in practice to Greenwald, who has a history of omitting or minimizing facts and

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

framing arguments in a way that supports his established views predating the Snowden story.

That Greenwald's hollow argument has largely been left unchallenged and even praised by some as a valid and bold new direction for journalism is both a depressing indictment of modern journalism and evidence of the problem of confirmation bias. Greenwald claims to despise it in others' work, but feels it's justified in his own because he is open about it.

So: a source gives selected journalists an unprecedented number of US intelligence secrets. One of the reporters says that he isn't trying his best to put his biases aside and looking at the documents with as neutral an eye as possible so he can determine what is properly in the public interest, but admits he is looking at them to see what he can publish that will suit his political beliefs and fit his argument. This simply isn't an acceptable principle.

Most have ignored this, but I think it's important to respond to Greenwald's B-Rabbiting. An argument doesn't become true simply because it counters received wisdom and is stated boldly. Reporting hard news from a position of bias is the opposite of good practice. All journalists have biases, but good ones try to combat, not pander to them. The Snowden stories are presented as hard reporting, not opinion columns, and need to be as devoid of any agenda as is possible. Journalism isn't a science, but the idea of looking for evidence and *then* making your conclusions rather than vice versa is a sound one that, until this story, was widely accepted. Greenwald has admitted he went into the laboratory having already decided the NSA is almost wholly malignant, so his 'finding' that all the evidence fits that view should be viewed askance

Greenwald's self-declared biases are also obvious if one has read his columns in the past couple of years, but despite his claims to transparency his views aren't stated anywhere in the news reports

about the Snowden documents that bear his and others' bylines. Readers of such articles can't be expected to be aware of the previously stated political opinions of the articles' authors in opinion pieces in order to judge how they have spun the information.

But Greenwald's political position, which is similar in several ways to that of Laura Poitras and Jacob Appelbaum, is a significant factor in his reporting. Greenwald supported the war in Iraq and then had a change of heart. Like many converts, he has leaped with zeal from one extreme to another and has adopted some of the views he once attacked. In 2005, he railed against the 'anti-Americanism' of the European Left, which he saw as eager to find fault and evil with the United States to the extent that this had become their primary goal:

'That goal is then fulfilled by selectively and endlessly highlighting and exaggerating America's faults and downplaying, ignoring and even defending far worse flaws in others. In its most virulent (and quite common) form, this extends to making common cause with the most abusive and genuinely evil regimes and movements around the world, whose only virtue—the only one the European Left needs—is that they are opposed by the U.S.

This is a deeply dishonest and manipulative syndrome, having nothing whatever to do with the principles to which its adherents claim fidelity. Indeed, their supposed "principles" (human rights, the sanctity of human life, individual liberty) are simply weapons, pretexts, used to promote the only real principle they have—that the U.S. is a uniquely corrupt and evil country. And the reason one knows that to be the case is because these same individuals systematically overlook and even excuse far more severe violations of their ostensible principles when perpetrated by the countries and governments with which they inexcusably sympathize (sympathy

which itself can be explained by a desire to sit in opposition to any and every American interest).¹⁶⁷

Greenwald's views have changed so much since he wrote this that it's odd to read these words from him. While he would no doubt strenuously object to being called anti-American, his current focus on highlighting the faults of the US government is one he admits to and defends robustly. In the last couple of years, he has repeatedly cited Noam Chomsky's argument for focusing on abuses by United States administrations, in interviews¹⁶⁸, on Twitter¹⁶⁹ and in two of his *Guardian* 'Comment is Free' columns, one from 2012 on Julian Assange, Ecuador and Pussy Riot¹⁷⁰ and one from April 2013 on Sam Harris, 'New Atheists' and Islamophobia¹⁷¹. In the latter, he wrote:

'...I find *extremely suspect* the behavior of westerners like Harris (and Hitchens and Dawkins) who spend the bulk of their time condemning the sins of other, distant peoples rather than the bulk of their time working against the sins of their own country. That's particularly true of Americans, whose government has brought

¹⁶⁷ <http://glenngreenwald.blogspot.com/2005/12/true-character-of-european-left.html>

¹⁶⁸ <http://talkingpointsmemo.com/livewire/tom-ricks-glenn-greenwald-edward-snowden>

¹⁶⁹ For example:

<https://twitter.com/ggreenwald/status/224959524069588992>

<https://twitter.com/ggreenwald/status/439110549419606016>

<https://twitter.com/ggreenwald/status/433625820972580864>

<https://twitter.com/ggreenwald/status/401150706779815936>

<https://twitter.com/ggreenwald/status/392757657154490368>

<https://twitter.com/ggreenwald/status/380841278943920128>

<https://twitter.com/ggreenwald/status/376331652143673345>

¹⁷⁰ <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/aug/21/human-rights-critics-russia-ecuador>

¹⁷¹ <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/apr/03/sam-harris-muslim-animus>

more violence, aggression, suffering, misery, and degradation to the world over the last decade than any other. Even if that weren't true—and it is—spending one's time as an American fixated on the sins of others is a morally dubious act, to put that generously, for reasons Noam Chomsky explained so perfectly:

“My own concern is primarily the terror and violence carried out by my own state, for two reasons. For one thing, because it happens to be the larger component of international violence. But also for a much more important reason than that; namely, I can do something about it.

“So even if the U.S. was responsible for 2 percent of the violence in the world instead of the majority of it, it would be that 2 percent I would be primarily responsible for. And that is a simple ethical judgment. That is, the ethical value of one's actions depends on their anticipated and predictable consequences. *It is very easy to denounce the atrocities of someone else. That has about as much ethical value as denouncing atrocities that took place in the 18th century.*”

I, too, have written before about the hordes of American commentators whose favorite past-time is to lounge around pointing fingers at other nations, other governments, other populations, other religions, while spending relatively little time on their own. The reason this is particularly suspect and shoddy behavior from American commentators is that there are enormous amounts of violence and extremism and suffering which their government has unleashed and continues to unleash on the world. Indeed, much of that US violence is grounded in if not expressly justified by religion, including the aggressive attack on Iraq and steadfast support for Israeli aggression (to say nothing of the role Judaism plays in the decades-long oppression by the Israelis of Palestinians and all sorts of attacks on neighboring Arab and Muslim countries). Given the legion human rights violations from their own government, I find that Americans and westerners who spend the bulk of their energy on the crimes of others are usually cynically

exploiting human rights concerns in service of a much different agenda.’

Greenwald’s position in 2005 and his position today are two sides of the same coin: people who only ever criticize US actions and minimize those of authoritarian regimes aren’t to be trusted, but neither are people who only criticize other states and turn a blind eye to American abuses. It is, of course, possible to have a more balanced view of world affairs. One can condemn the US for the abuses at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay and also object to, say, Russia’s oppression of gay people and murder of journalists and dissidents.

Binary positions can seem attractive in their purity, but the real world tends to be much messier. Greenwald’s hyperlink for the Chomsky quote in that *Guardian* piece takes readers to a ‘Noam Chomsky Quotes’ Tumblr, but the passage is in fact from a lecture Chomsky gave in March 1986 at the Universidad Centroamericana in Nicaragua—the lecture series was later printed as a book, *On Power and Ideology*. The full lecture is worth reading, because Chomsky couldn’t even maintain his own position over the course of a few minutes. In the paragraph following the one Greenwald quotes, he said that political actions were most significant when one had a chance of influencing and controlling their consequences, and that for him this ‘overwhelmingly’ applied to American actions. He added:

‘But I am also involved in protesting Soviet imperialism, and also explaining its roots in Soviet society. And I think that anyone in the Third World would be making a grave error if they succumbed to illusions about these matters.’¹⁷²

¹⁷² *On Power and Ideology* by Noam Chomsky, p51 (Black Rose Books, 1990)

This ruins his previous paragraph's argument that, quoted out of context, Greenwald now admires so much. By Chomsky's own logic just a couple of minutes earlier, protesting Soviet imperialism would have had 'about as much ethical value as denouncing atrocities that took place in the 18th century'. So why did Chomsky protest Soviet imperialism, then, and why did he add this statement to his argument? Presumably because he realized that the argument collapsed when faced with reality. If he couldn't even bring himself to object in any way to the self-evident totalitarianism of the Soviet Union, he was doing precisely what 2005 Greenwald objected to: overlooking and excusing violations of his professed principles in order to attack the United States instead.

Greenwald understood the weakness of such a position very well in 2005, but he has now adopted it wholeheartedly. On November 4 2014, he tweeted a link to a new article by Chomsky:

“It's official: The U.S. is the world's leading terrorist state, and proud of it”—new Noam Chomsky <http://www.truth-out.org/opinion/item/27201-the-leading-terrorist-state> ...¹⁷³

There's nothing 'official' in the claim: it's just Chomsky overstating the finding of a declassified CIA study that covert aid has often been ineffective in order to list a string of now-familiar American abuses. It's an extension of the same point Greenwald made in his 2013 piece on Sam Harris et al, that the American government 'has brought more violence, aggression, suffering, misery, and degradation to the world over the last decade than any other'.

In that *TruthOut* article, Chomsky wrote:

¹⁷³ <https://twitter.com/ggreenwald/status/529414514249191424>

‘Jihadism’s most fearsome current manifestation is the Islamic State, or ISIS, which has established its murderous caliphate in large areas of Iraq and Syria.

“I think the United States is one of the key creators of this organization,” reports former CIA analyst Graham Fuller, a prominent commentator on the region. “The United States did not plan the formation of ISIS,” he adds, “but its destructive interventions in the Middle East and the War in Iraq were the basic causes of the birth of ISIS.””

Chomsky doesn’t give a source for where Graham Fuller ‘reported’ his view on this, incidentally, but it was in an interview he gave to *Al-Monitor* in September.¹⁷⁴

This is the political view Greenwald has brought to his reporting. Like Jacob Appelbaum, he is skilful at using formalistic news reporting idioms to make his political points, so much so that even when he reveals his agenda nobody bats an eyelid. Greenwald has given many interviews, but his more extreme views of the NSA situation have been largely missed. Many people who support Snowden’s actions feel that the NSA’s surveillance reach has spiralled beyond what is needed to protect the US since 9/11 and infringed on civil liberties in the process. But that isn’t Greenwald’s view. He’s convinced that the NSA aren’t carrying out surveillance to protect citizens from threats at all, but that their goal is to spy on civilians to subvert the democratic process. You don’t believe me that he’s that extreme? Here’s what he said in an interview with the New Zealand TV programme *The Nation* in September 2014:

‘If these agencies were using this technology to spy on Al Qaeda and to spy on terrorists, to spy on ISIS, there would never have been an

¹⁷⁴ <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/politics/2014/09/turkey-usa-iraq-syria-isis-fuller.html#>

Edward Snowden in the first place. There would be no public debate. It's precisely because that is the pretext and not the actual reason that this spying is being used that there is these disclosures and there is a public debate.¹⁷⁵

This is an astonishing idea, and if it were true would be deeply troubling—but none of the documents published so far indicate that this is the case at all. In fact, many of them detail the value of intelligence gained. Many thousands of people work for the NSA, the CIA, MI6, GCHQ and other intelligence agencies in the West. Many work for decades for no recognition and put their lives in danger in order to protect their countries from terrorists, hostile governments and other bad actors. The idea that they are simply pretending to do this as a pretext so they can read innocent citizens' emails is not just absurd, but insulting.

¹⁷⁵ <http://www.3news.co.nz/tvshows/thenation/interview-glenn-greenwald-2014091311>

5

Skypefail

THERE HAVE BEEN and remain two major areas of danger to national security in this story. The first is reckless or inadvertent exposure of information in the articles and the excerpts of documents published. The second is in Snowden or those with access to the documents practising poor security measures, or simply not knowing what they're doing to make sure the material doesn't fall into the wrong hands.

Before travelling to Hong Kong to meet Snowden, Glenn Greenwald asked him to send him some documents so he could have some idea of what he was letting himself in for:

'To do that, [Snowden] told me again to install various programs. I then spent a couple of days online as the source walked me through, step by step, how to install and use each program, including, finally, PGP encryption. Knowing that I was a beginner, he exhibited great

patience, literally on the level of “Click the blue button, now press OK, now go to the next screen.”¹⁷⁶

Snowden then sent Greenwald a file containing around 25 documents:

‘I un-zipped the file, saw the list of documents, and randomly clicked on one of them. At the top of the page in red letters, a code appeared: “TOP SECRET//COMINT/NOFORN/.”

This meant the document had been legally designated top secret, pertained to communications intelligence (COMINT), and was not for distribution to foreign nationals, including international organizations or coalition partners (NOFORN). There it was with incontrovertible clarity: a highly confidential communication from the NSA, one of the most secretive agencies in the world’s most powerful government. Nothing of this significance had ever been leaked from the NSA, not in all the six-decade history of the agency. I now had a couple dozen such items in my possession. And the person I had spent hours chatting with over the last two days had many, many more to give me.’¹⁷⁷

Earlier, Greenwald and Poitras had discussed the possibility the source might send them forged documents, perhaps as part of a trap by the government. But as soon as he received this first batch of documents, Greenwald seems to have forgotten about that possibility and immediately assumed they must be authentic, apparently simply on the basis that the acronyms at the top of the documents were ones used in real life. This was, for him, ‘incontrovertible clarity’. Clearly, they looked real, and in fact were. But they might nevertheless not have been. He doesn’t seem to have reconsidered the possibility they were doctored or well-crafted fakes, despite his knowledge that

¹⁷⁶ Chapter 1, *No Place To Hide* by Greenwald.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

nothing coming close to their purported significance had ever been leaked before. It's a basic tenet that the larger a claim the more evidence you need to back it, and forged and fabricated intelligence documents are extremely common in the espionage world. But his scepticism, fact-checking ability and cold eye to the possibilities of unseen issues that all good journalists have as second nature seems to have been entirely lacking here.

On top of this, having spent a couple of days being walked through programs by his source to ensure their communications were secure, Greenwald doesn't seem to have grasped the reason why Snowden had bothered to do that with him. His dedication to protecting his source was so minimal that as soon as he'd read this first batch of documents he called Janine Gibson, the editor-in-chief of the American edition of *The Guardian*, via Skype to tell her, as Gibson remembers it, that he thought he might have 'the biggest intelligence leak in a generation—if not ever'.¹⁷⁸

That behaviour is astonishing enough, but even more so when you consider that the second document of Snowden's he'd just looked at was a PowerPoint presentation revealing an NSA program to collect information 'directly from the servers of these U.S. Service Providers: Microsoft, Yahoo, Google, Facebook, Paltalk, AOL, Skype, YouTube, Apple'.¹⁷⁹

Yes, Glenn Greenwald was sent a document saying that the NSA could access Skype's servers, and the first thing he did was call his editor to discuss his source *on Skype*.

Gibson hadn't read the document, of course, but even so was already aware that Skype wasn't a particularly safe form of technology because of the WikiLeaks story.¹⁸⁰ She told Greenwald to get off

¹⁷⁸ <http://www.journalism.columbia.edu/event/901/14>

¹⁷⁹ *No Place To Hide* by Greenwald.

¹⁸⁰ <http://www.journalism.columbia.edu/event/901/14>

Skype at once and catch a plane to New York so they could discuss it in person instead. But that was some way into their Skype chat: by then Greenwald had already told her he had a source with access to ‘a large amount of top secret documents from the NSA’ and that the source was in Hong Kong.

Technical ignorance is one thing, a basic lack of common sense another—even allowing for excitement at the scoop, this was stunning carelessness. Had anyone been listening in—if the NSA were as omniscient as Snowden has claimed¹⁸¹—he wouldn’t have been in Hong Kong by the time Greenwald arrived there on June 2, but more likely on his way back to the United States in handcuffs.

Unlike Greenwald, Janine Gibson didn’t instantly believe that the documents were real. The verification process at *The Guardian* was, she says, ‘really intense’.¹⁸² The first step in that process was for Greenwald and Ewen MacAskill to interview Snowden face to face in Hong Kong. The initial feedback from that meeting worried Gibson, because Snowden appeared too young to be as senior as he had claimed. After three days of grilling Snowden on his career and credentials, MacAskill and Greenwald were convinced by him, but Gibson and others at the paper were very conscious that all their work on the story could be in vain, and it might still be nothing but ‘a massive, massive hoax’. It wasn’t until a Verizon spokesperson called *The Guardian* back regarding the FISA court order story and

¹⁸¹“Perhaps I am naive,” he replied, “but I believe that at this point in history, the greatest danger to our freedom and way of life comes from the reasonable fear of omniscient State powers kept in check by nothing more than policy documents.” and “It is not that I do not value intelligence, but that I oppose . . . omniscient, automatic, mass surveillance. . . .”:

http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/code-name-verax-snowden-in-exchanges-with-post-reporter-made-clear-he-knew-risks/2013/06/09/c9a25b54-d14c-11e2-9f1a-1a7cdee20287_story.html

¹⁸² <http://www.journalism.columbia.edu/event/901/14>

journalists at the paper had spoken to the administration that Gibson was finally convinced that the documents were genuine.¹⁸³

Greenwald's hunch had been right, of course—but his concern about the material's authenticity seems to have been much less pronounced. In the past year and a half, he has repeatedly claimed that there is no possibility any foreign intelligence agency could have accessed Snowden's documents, either through Snowden, through any of the journalists he gave the documents to or some other way. But his amateur-hour cock-up with Skype straight after receiving Snowden's first documents don't give those statements much credibility.

Neither does his knowledge of espionage.

“He was very insistent he does not want to publish documents to harm individuals or blow anyone's undercover status,” Greenwald said. He added that Snowden told him, “Leaking CIA documents can actually harm people, whereas leaking NSA documents can harm systems.”¹⁸⁴

Did Snowden really say this and, if so, did Greenwald believe him? The NSA employs intelligence officers, runs agents and assets around the world, and even a codename or hint about an operation might blow someone's cover and harm living, breathing human beings. Neither does one need to be under cover to be at risk of harm.

Gauging the risks to national security is a hard task and this story is on an unprecedented scale. But one's confidence that these issues are being considered carefully is seriously undermined if one of the journalists publishing this material doesn't even understand such fundamental issues. His own source—a human being, not a system—

¹⁸³Ibid.

¹⁸⁴<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/06/25/greenwald-snowden-s-files-are-out-there-if-anything-happens-to-him.html>

NEED TO KNOW

had worked for the CIA and the NSA, and in both cases information about his role, if picked up by bad actors, could have led to him being harmed. It's hard to believe he is oblivious to the possibility of harm coming to people in the NSA from careless exposure.

6

Conspiracies, Conflicts And Evaluations

THE JOURNALISTS REPORTING this story have two sources to consider: the cache of documents Snowden took, and Snowden himself. They're entirely separate, but have often been conflated.

Glenn Greenwald has often accused other journalists of being 'in the tank' for the intelligence community, which might well be the case, but he and the other journalists reporting the NSA documents all seem to have fallen heavily for Snowden. Despite insisting that Snowden is not the story, his material is, they have made him a key part of it. Snowden wanted to reveal his identity, but the *Guardian* video interview with him and accompanying story put him centre-stage, and was unequivocal in its support. Snowden has appeared in several interviews since, and even delivered a 'Christmas message' on

British television in 2013. Poitras has now made a film about him, *Citizenfour*.

It would have been possible to separate Snowden's claims from the documents he took, but this hasn't happened. After the initial shock of discovering he wasn't a grizzled old-timer, as Greenwald and Poitras had thought he would be from his correspondence and self-descriptions, and having questioned him for hours in his hotel room in Hong Kong, all questions seem to have vanished. As someone with direct intelligence experience, which none of the reporters appear to have, Snowden clearly has the capability of providing some context to the documents—but how valuable and reliable is his information? How sceptical have the journalists been of his claims? How independent has their thinking been, and how much has his narrative led their reporting? There are obvious dangers in relying on his take on the documents, because he has very tangible motives for painting the NSA in the blackest light possible. Both his credibility and his self-image since he fled the United States in 2013 depend on his narrative being wholly true. If the documents don't show catastrophic levels of wrongdoing, it's hard to justify his having taken them. He seems highly unlikely, therefore, to be swayed by evidence suggesting that the truth might not be as dark as he makes out.

Several comments Snowden's made suggest he has delusions of grandeur. 'Truth is coming, and it cannot be stopped,' he said in a live chat with *Guardian* readers in June 2013.¹⁸⁵ He seems convinced he's on a noble quest to change the world—and perhaps he is, or perhaps he partly is. There's a pattern in his interviews: he's softly spoken, calm and very articulate, but he'll often say a few things that are not just implausible but absurd. Everyone grandstands from time

¹⁸⁵ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/17/edward-snowden-nsa-files-whistleblower>

to time, even the most credible of sources, but in his Christmas message on British TV, for example, he said:

‘A child born today will grow up with no conception of privacy at all. They’ll never know what it means to have a private moment to themselves, an unrecorded, unanalyzed thought.’

Really? What about all the unrecorded thoughts I’ve had in the last year, then? Does he genuinely believe this? How has he predicted the development of telepathy?

He’s made several statements like this, and they’ve gone virtually completely unchallenged by the journalists. In August 2013, *The Independent* recklessly published a story by Duncan Campbell and several others hinting at the location of a British intelligence base in the Middle East, citing information they claimed was from documents from Snowden’s cache.¹⁸⁶ Instead of considering the most likely scenario, that someone from *The Guardian* with access to the trove had sent some of the documents to Campbell, Snowden came up with a preposterous conspiracy theory to explain it: he accused the British government of leaking the information to *The Independent* so as to discredit him and the journalists he’d worked with. Greenwald quoted Snowden’s statement to him on this in an article in *The Guardian*:

‘It appears that the UK government is now seeking to create an appearance that the *Guardian* and *Washington Post*’s disclosures are harmful, and they are doing so by intentionally leaking harmful

¹⁸⁶ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/exclusive-uks-secret-mideast-internet-surveillance-base-is-revealed-in-edward-snowden-leaks-8781082.html> The following few paragraphs on this are adapted from a blogpost I wrote in August 2013: <http://www.jeremyduns.com/blog/2014/5/30/what-if-glenn-greenwald-is-wrong-about-a-national-security-threat?rq=greenwald>

information to *The Independent* and attributing it to others. The UK government should explain the reasoning behind this decision to disclose information that, were it released by a private citizen, they would argue is a criminal act.’¹⁸⁷

Note Snowden’s slide between the first sentence and the second. In the first, he says it ‘appears’ the British government have done this: his opinion, his theory, with no substantiation for it at all. In the second sentence, he calls on the British government to ‘explain the reasoning behind this decision’—not to answer if they made the decision, but to explain why they did it. So he assumes as fact that they did, but without any evidence for it. This is very troubling, because Snowden has made a lot of bold statements that are impossible to check without full access to the documents he has—as this is how he reasons here, one has to question if he has done so with previous statements. It is the classic behaviour of a conspiracy theorist: in a single bound, he’s convinced himself of something most people would dismiss as absurd on its face. Anything is possible, of course, but considering Duncan Campbell’s history with the British state this is extremely far-fetched.

Not for Greenwald, though. Equally troubling is that he reported Snowden’s theory totally unquestioningly. He didn’t call *The Independent* and ask for comment, or contact the British government. He didn’t ask Snowden for any substantiation for his allegation. He didn’t pursue any other avenues at all, but simply took Snowden’s out-there conspiracy theory as fact, seemingly without any critical thought at all, and even added to it:

‘In other words: right as there is a major scandal over the UK’s abusive and lawless exploitation of its Terrorism Act—with public

¹⁸⁷ <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/aug/23/uk-government-independent-military-base>

opinion against the use of the Terrorism law to detain David Miranda—and right as the UK government is trying to tell a court that there are serious dangers to the public safety from these documents, there suddenly appears exactly the type of disclosure the UK government wants but that has never happened before. That is why Snowden is making clear: despite the *Independent's* attempt to make it appear that it is so, he is not their source for that disclosure. Who, then, is?'¹⁸⁸

Most likely someone at *The Guardian*.

~

GREENWALD ISN'T ALONE in this sort of behaviour. Snowden has been painted by most of the journalists who have access to his documents as almost wholly selfless and noble—despite several glaring holes in his story. His expertise on espionage matters in general, and on matters relating to this story in particular, has gone virtually unquestioned. His more extravagant claims for the NSA's capabilities and intentions have been eaten up, even though none of the material released so far support them. The journalists are so close to the source who provided them these documents as to represent a major conflict of interest.

The Guardian's code of conduct states that it is 'always necessary to declare an interest when the journalist is writing about something with which he or she has a significant connection', and that this applies 'to both staff journalists and freelances'. It also says that 'full transparency may mean that the declaration should appear in the paper or website as well'.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ <http://www.theguardian.com/info/guardian-editorial-code>

Greenwald and Poitras currently sit on the board of the same non-profit organisation, the Freedom of the Press Foundation, which was established in 2012. Jacob Appelbaum is on its technical advisory board, as are several *Intercept* contributors. Snowden came onto the board in February 2014. *The Intercept* launched on February 10 2014. Under the terms of *The Guardian's* sensible code, Greenwald and Poitras sitting on the board of directors of the same non-profit as Snowden should have been mentioned in every article they've published since then, but it hasn't been. The conflict of interest is clear, as is the abandonment of any pretence of trying to approach their source with any scepticism. In the FPP press release on Snowden's appointment to the board, Greenwald said:

'We began this organization to protect and support those who are being punished for bringing transparency to the world's most powerful factions or otherwise dissent from government policy. Edward Snowden is a perfect example of our group's purpose, as he's being persecuted for his heroic whistleblowing, and it is very fitting that he can now work alongside us in defense of press freedom, accountability, and the public's right-to-know.'¹⁹⁰

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ONE SIGNIFICANT PIECE of information that hasn't been addressed is Snowden's much vaunted concern for the public interest. In the first interview he gave *The Guardian*, in which he argued that there was clear blue water between his approach and that of Daniel Ellsberg and Chelsea Manning, he said:

¹⁹⁰ <https://freedom.press/blog/2014/01/edward-snowden-join-daniel-ellsberg-others-freedom-press-foundations-board-directors>

“I carefully evaluated every single document I disclosed to ensure that each was legitimately in the public interest,” he said. “There are all sorts of documents that would have made a big impact that I didn’t turn over, because harming people isn’t my goal. Transparency is.” He purposely chose, he said, to give the documents to journalists whose judgment he trusted about what should be public and what should remain concealed.’¹⁹¹

This sounds encouraging, as it appears to contain not one but two safeguards. Snowden claimed he was very careful to ensure that every single document he passed to journalists was legitimately in the public interest, but he didn’t trust his own evaluation on that point completely, because he also deliberately selected journalists whose judgement he trusted to decide precisely that. In principle, this sounds like someone who has given the issue serious attention.

But if we look a little closer at it, questions come to mind. The first is: how does this square with Glenn Greenwald’s statements that Snowden also had ‘thousands of documents that contain very specific blueprints that would allow somebody who read them to know exactly how the NSA does what it does, which would in turn allow them either to evade that surveillance or to replicate it’? It seems those are documents he didn’t hand over to journalists, but why did he take them at all if he was so concerned with exposing wrongdoing in the public interest? Greenwald has suggested they were needed to prove his claims, but he had already taken many thousands of documents. And as a trained intelligence official, he would surely have known that retrieving such a huge cache of US secrets would not only have been an intense goal of the NSA, but also of hostile groups.

¹⁹¹ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/09/edward-snowden-nsa-whistleblower-surveillance>

Then there's his claim he 'carefully evaluated' every single document he handed to journalists. What could that mean? Greenwald has also commented on this. He's claimed that although Snowden had access to 'enormous' sums of top-secret documents that would be 'incredibly harmful' if published, Snowden had taken this into consideration:

'He went through and turned over only a small portion of those documents to us, all of which he read very carefully. And I know that not only because he told me that, but also because the way we got the documents was in extremely detailed folders all divided by content, that you could have only organized them had you carefully read them. And when he gave them to us, he said, "Look, I'm not a journalist. I'm not a high-level government official. I am not saying that everything I gave you should be published. I don't want it all to be published. I want you, as journalists, to go through it and decide what is in the public interest and what will not cause a lot of harm." He invited—in fact, urged—us to exercise exactly the kind of journalistic judgment that we have exercised. And so, had it been his intention to harm the United States, he could have just uploaded all these documents to the Internet or found the most damaging ones and caused them to be published. He did the opposite. The NSA and the rest of the country owe him a huge debt of gratitude for all of the work he has done to inform the American public without bringing about any harm to them.'¹⁹²

It strikes me that Mr Greenwald is protesting a little too much on this point. Regardless, this is simply an impossible claim by Snowden, and obviously so. Firstly, his claim that he wanted these journalists to filter the documents he handed them and decide which were in the public interest is contradicted by the *Washington Post's* account of their reporting of the PRISM story. Barton Gellman revealed that in

¹⁹² http://www.democracynow.org/2013/6/10/on_a_slippery_slope_to_a

late May 2013 Snowden had decided to apply for asylum in Iceland or somewhere else with strong internet freedoms:

‘To effect his plan, Snowden asked for a guarantee that The Washington Post would publish—within 72 hours—the full text of a PowerPoint presentation describing PRISM, a top-secret surveillance program that gathered intelligence from Microsoft, Facebook, Google and other Silicon Valley giants.’¹⁹³

In the event, both *The Washington Post* and *The Guardian* decided to publish only a few of the slides from that presentation, citing national security reasons. This suggests that Snowden was correct to say that his ability to gauge the public interest is not as well-attuned as that of professional journalists—but he tried to impose his judgement with the very first story, contradicting his own statements on this issue.

Secondly, it’s not physically possible. If you skim-read a few paragraphs of a document, you might have evaluated it, but to carefully evaluate it you would have to, at a bare minimum, read the whole thing. Otherwise, you might miss crucial information. But there are far too many documents for this to make sense. In September 2013, the *New York Times* ran a story on the NSA’s battle against encryption, working from ‘newly disclosed documents’ provided by Snowden, and noted:

‘The documents are among more than 50,000 shared by *The Guardian* with *The New York Times* and ProPublica, the nonprofit

¹⁹³ http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/code-name-verax-snowden-in-exchanges-with-post-reporter-made-clear-he-knew-risks/2013/06/09/c9a25b54-d14c-11e2-9f1a-1a7cdee20287_story.html

news organization. They focus on GCHQ but include thousands from or about the N.S.A.’¹⁹⁴

As Snowden had had no access to classified material between June and September 2013, this figure must refer to the material he claimed he’d carefully evaluated. But if that figure is true, Snowden must be lying about this. The most basic requirement to carefully evaluate a document is to have read the whole thing in its entirety, but Snowden can’t even have done that.

On January 14 2014, Janine Gibson was asked in a panel discussion how many documents Snowden had taken. She replied:

‘There are 56,000 in one cache alone, which was the cache that Edward Snowden gave to Ewen [MacAskill], but there are several other caches.’¹⁹⁵

She added that she doubted anyone knew the complete number of documents Snowden had taken, either journalists or the NSA. In an interview with the New Zealand TV programme *The Nation* in September 2014, Greenwald was asked how he knew that the New Zealand spy agency Government Communications Security Bureau engaged in mass surveillance on the country’s citizens. He replied:

‘Because I happen to have access to hundreds of thousands of documents in the possession of the NSA in which they discuss both amongst themselves and with the GCSB and the New Zealand government exactly what it is they’re doing.’¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ <http://nytimes.com/2013/09/06/us/nsa-foils-much-internet-encryption.html>

¹⁹⁵ <http://www.journalism.columbia.edu/event/901/14> Thank you to Cryptome for pointing me to this information.

¹⁹⁶ <http://www.3news.co.nz/tvshows/thenation/interview-glenn-greenwald-2014091311>

Why does this matter? Well, either the *New York Times*, the editor-in-chief of *The Guardian's* American edition and Glenn Greenwald have all lied about a central aspect of the Snowden story—how many documents they received—which would be a serious journalistic breach and for which there doesn't seem any plausible motive—or Snowden lied that he had carefully evaluated them all. It's simply not humanly possible in the time-scale he had—December 2012 to May 2013. Even if one redefines the word 'document' to mean a page and take just the one cache given to MacAskill, 56,000 pages would be the equivalent of well over 100 thick books. And that is an extremely generous interpretation, as some of the documents he took ran to many pages: the Black Budget was 178, for instance.¹⁹⁷ Factor in that these are mostly highly technical documents about intelligence work, not all of which Snowden can have been familiar with, and the level of concentration and expertise needed to evaluate them all carefully is well beyond reading, say, 100 Hardy Boys adventures, or even 1,000.

It's simply not feasible, and any independent-minded journalist should have realised this. There are several reasons he might have had for lying about this point—for instance, to give himself more credibility because he knew that WikiLeaks had been branded reckless—but the real question is: if he lied about something as fundamental as this, what else has he lied about? This is a source prone to exaggeration and prepared to lie about basic facts.

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¹⁹⁷ http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/black-budget-summary-details-us-spy-networks-successes-failures-and-objectives/2013/08/29/7e57bb78-10ab-11e3-8cdd-bcdc09410972_story.html

THE FIRST DISCLOSURES from Snowden's cache appeared in two publications almost simultaneously.¹⁹⁸ Both the Verizon and the PRISM stories were covered by *The Washington Post* and *The Guardian*, and triggered outrage and a media frenzy. But the reporting was sloppy and overstated from the start, with both newspapers having to dial back inaccuracies in their initial claims. On the Verizon story, *The Washington Post* had to add an embarrassing correction to the top of the story, reading:

‘Correction: A previous version of this story incorrectly stated the National Security Agency had been able to receive information including customers’ names, addresses and financial information through a court order. This version has been corrected.’¹⁹⁹

With the PRISM story, both papers claimed to have a top-secret document showing how the programme allowed officials to tap directly into the central servers of companies such as Facebook, Apple and Skype to extract audio and video chats, photographs, emails and other information to ‘enable analysts to track foreign targets’.

That last bit was overlooked in the ensuing uproar. The idea was not simply to spy on your email or Facebook updates, and no evidence was presented that this was the case. Snowden was yet to reveal his identity, but the way *The Washington Post* addressed the issue of their source was telling:

¹⁹⁸ The following paragraphs on this are adapted and expanded from my June 2013 blogpost: <http://www.jeremy-duns.com/blog/2014/5/30/some-thoughts-on-the-reporting-of-prism?rq=greenwald>

¹⁹⁹ http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/verizon-providing-all-call-records-to-us-under-court-order/2013/06/05/98656606-ce47-11e2-8845-d970ccb04497_story.html

‘Firsthand experience with these systems, and horror at their capabilities, is what drove a career intelligence officer to provide PowerPoint slides about PRISM and supporting materials to The Washington Post in order to expose what he believes to be a gross intrusion on privacy. “They quite literally can watch your ideas form as you type,” the officer said.’²⁰⁰

One of the bylines on that article is Laura Poitras, who hadn’t worked on the story but had facilitated Barton Gellman receiving the presentation. In his first email to Poitras, Snowden had claimed to be ‘a senior government employee in the intelligence community’.²⁰¹ But by the time this story was published, Poitras had filmed Snowden in Hong Kong and watched as Glenn Greenwald and Ewen MacAskill had questioned him closely about his career. She should have known, and told Gellman, that Snowden had exaggerated. He was clearly an accomplished computer analyst, and was able to gain access to major secrets within the NSA, although it’s still not clear precisely how he did that. But one has to be wilfully blind to reality to call him a ‘career intelligence officer’. He was a 29-year-old systems analyst with seven years of experience in intelligence. At the time he wasn’t even an employee, but a consultant with Dell.

Here we have direct evidence of what can happen when journalists report on secret sources. When the article was published, nobody was in any position to challenge the newspaper’s characterisation of their source—how could they, as he hadn’t been revealed? We only had their word to go on. It’s a prestigious newspaper, so most would trust that they would play with a straight bat. But they didn’t. From the get-go, when they thought nobody

²⁰⁰ http://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/us-intelligence-mining-data-from-nine-us-internet-companies-in-broad-secret-program/2013/06/06/3a0c0da8-cebf-11e2-8845-d970ccb04497_story.html

²⁰¹ <http://www.wired.com/2014/10/snowdens-first-emails-to-poitras/>

could find out, they overegged the pudding and gave their readers the impression that their source had much more experience and gravitas than he in fact did. As they were untrustworthy on such a basic issue as this, it erodes trust that they were fair in their reporting of the contents of the document.

And indeed, it soon appeared that they hadn't been. The central claim in both papers' articles on PRISM, that the NSA was 'tapping directly into' or had 'direct access' to these companies servers without needing to obtain individual court orders, turned out to be a misinterpretation, as *The New York Times* reported:

'Each of the nine companies said it had no knowledge of a government program providing officials with access to its servers, and drew a bright line between giving the government wholesale access to its servers to collect user data and giving them specific data in response to individual court orders. Each said it did not provide the government with full, indiscriminate access to its servers.'²⁰²

This error is bad enough, but neither paper posted a clarification on the articles. *The Guardian* slipped in a revision of the mistake in a later article with much less prominence, and even then managed to make it sound as if their categorically false claim had in fact, somehow, been true:

'The Guardian understands that the NSA approached those companies and asked them to enable a "dropbox" system whereby legally requested data could be copied from their own server out to an NSA-owned system. That has allowed the companies to deny that there is "direct or indirect" NSA access, to deny that there is a "back

²⁰² http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/08/technology/tech-companies-bristling-concede-to-government-surveillance-efforts.html?_r=1&

door” to their systems, and that they only comply with “legal” requests—while not explaining the scope of that access.’²⁰³

This is very slyly done, because it makes the difference between direct and indirect sound as if it’s a corporate use of weasel words, when it is in fact their own, and slides past the paper’s claim about bypassing individual court orders with the use of scare-quotes. It also tries to deflect attention from the fact they inaccurately explained the terms of this access by blaming the companies for not having explained it fully. If you had read this paragraph quickly, and you were a *Guardian* reader not predisposed to liking massive companies like Google and Facebook—well, who does?—it would no doubt have elicited the desired reaction, which is to feel that the companies have pulled a fast one, as usual, rather than that *The Guardian* cocked up their story.

The Verizon and PRISM stories were the first two scoops, and remain some of the best known disclosures even after 18 months of reporting. Their impact was enormous, but it was nevertheless a shoddy start to the reporting, littered with sensationalism, errors and a misunderstanding of the basic context of the documents, exacerbated by a refusal to admit any of this openly once it had become clear.

Within a day of publication of the first story, Glenn Greenwald was on CNN and explaining to Piers Morgan’s viewers the context as he saw it:

‘There is a massive apparatus within the United States government that with complete secrecy has been building this enormous structure

²⁰³ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/12/microsoft-twitter-rivals-nsa-requests> With thanks to Little Green Footballs, who spotted this: <http://littlegreenfootballs.com/article/42121> The Guardian quietly walks back their PRISM overreach without correcting previous reporting

that has only one goal. And that is to destroy privacy and anonymity not just in the United States but around the world.²⁰⁴

Had Greenwald read all of the material to come to such a bald conclusion that would have been fine, but of course he hadn't. When he said this, it had been just a week since he had received the first Snowden documents.

²⁰⁴ http://piersmorgan.blogs.cnn.com/2013/06/06/glenn-greenwald-on-the-nsa-and-prism-its-well-past-time-that-we-have-a-debate-about-whether-thats-the-kind-of-country-and-world-in-which-we-want-to-live/?hpt=pm_mid

7

Wrongry Birds

A FEW DECADES from now, I suspect historians will be excavating Twitter's servers to analyze the Snowden saga. Although the platform is still routinely dismissed as trivial—usually by those not using it—it has radically transformed how journalists and their readers communicate with each other, and it has been the public square in which a lot of the Snowden debate has taken place.

Almost all of the journalists and editors who have worked on the Snowden story are active on Twitter, and some are very avid users of it. Glenn Greenwald currently has over 400,000 followers, but a tweet from him will usually reach many more people, because lots of his followers will retweet him to their followers, who will then see it even if they don't follow him, and so might in turn retweet it to their followers.

This has had a considerable impact on the debate around Snowden's disclosures, because a tweet can and often is read by more people than an article it links to. There has been research suggesting that people often share links on social media to material that they haven't fully read, listened to or watched. Traffic analysis company Chartbeat has examined this in some detail.²⁰⁵ In a discussion about Upworthy in February 2014, the CEO of Chartbeat tweeted that the company had 'found effectively no correlation between social shares and people actually reading'.²⁰⁶

That statement of his was retweeted over 100 times, and most people who did that would surely have read it. It's simply a lot easier to read a few tweets than slog through a whole article, or even a book, and we've become used to it.

In effect, tweets often act like banners or headlines, and frequently give the Twitter user's spin on an article. This can be very influential, especially if you then don't read the story in full. Most of the Snowden documents that have been covered by the media have very complicated contexts: a bite-sized explanation of what a long article exploring an even longer document can be an attractive proposition, but also often results in a black and white impression. This is convenient for any journalists who are fudging a story or making it seem more important than it is. A lot of people will click on a new Snowden story, glance at the headline and the first few paragraphs and stop. If already shocked by previous revelations, there's a good chance they'll be shocked anew by the 'take-home' of the latest one.

²⁰⁵

http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/technology/2013/06/how_people_read_online_why_you_won_t_finish_this_article.html

²⁰⁶ <http://www.theverge.com/2014/2/14/5411934/youre-not-going-to-read-this>

But if they read the whole story, a more nuanced picture would emerge.

A vivid example of this effect in practice is the story published by *The Guardian*, *The New York Times* and *ProPublica* in January 2014, working with each other. *The Guardian's* headline was 'Angry Birds and "leaky" phone apps targeted by NSA and GCHQ for user data'. The first three paragraphs read:

'The National Security Agency and its UK counterpart GCHQ have been developing capabilities to take advantage of "leaky" smartphone apps, such as the wildly popular Angry Birds game, that transmit users' private information across the internet, according to top secret documents.

The data pouring onto communication networks from the new generation of iPhone and Android apps ranges from phone model and screen size to personal details such as age, gender and location. Some apps, the documents state, can share users' most sensitive information such as sexual orientation—and one app recorded in the material even sends specific sexual preferences such as whether or not the user may be a swinger.

Many smartphone owners will be unaware of the full extent this information is being shared across the internet, and even the most sophisticated would be unlikely to realise that all of it is available for the spy agencies to collect.'²⁰⁷

Most people who read this far and who had ever played Angry Birds or anything like it were shocked and outraged. The impression they drew was that the NSA was spying on their apps and games, and extracting information about their lives from them. But if you read the whole piece, paragraph 17 states:

²⁰⁷ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jan/27/nsa-gchq-smartphone-app-angry-birds-personal-data>

‘The documents do not make it clear how much of the information that can be taken from apps is routinely collected, stored or searched, nor how many users may be affected. The NSA says it does not target Americans and its capabilities are deployed only against “valid foreign intelligence targets”.’²⁰⁸

So there’s no evidence of wrongdoing, then—and the public interest defence in the story collapses as a result. If GCHQ and the NSA tried to do this on valid foreign intelligence targets, it’s a fair guess those targets weren’t aware that their apps could be accessed in such a way, making valuable intelligence vulnerable to being captured. But thanks to these articles, they might well have been alerted to the possibility. Western intelligence agencies might have lost several targets as a result of this—targets whose communications they wanted to infiltrate because they might provide valuable intelligence that would help protect national security.

The takeaway most people got from this story would have been ‘the NSA is currently exploiting Angry Birds’, and in some cases ‘the NSA might be gathering intelligence on me while *I* play Angry Birds’. This is a result of misrepresentations in the reporting. For instance, ProPublica’s headline was ‘Spy Agencies Probe Angry Birds and Other Apps for Personal Data’.²⁰⁹ ‘Probe’ is in the present tense and the headline suggests the agencies are extracting personal data from it. But paragraph 19 of *The Guardian’s* article revealed that there wasn’t any evidence that Angry Birds had been exploited in this way—instead, a GCHQ document in 2012 had listed the code needed to do this, using the game as a case study to show what *could* be extracted from it. And to find the year of that GCHQ document I had to triangulate the reporting, as it’s mentioned by ProPublica

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ <http://www.propublica.org/article/spy-agencies-probe-angry-birds-and-other-apps-for-personal-data>

and *The New York Times*, but not *The Guardian*. With all of these stories, there's a bait and switch: an alarming claim at the top of the stories that, as you read further, you realise isn't supported by the evidence. *The New York Times* story opened:

'When a smartphone user opens Angry Birds, the popular game application, and starts slinging birds at chortling green pigs, spies could be lurking in the background to snatch data revealing the player's location, age, sex and other personal information, according to secret British intelligence documents.'²¹⁰

Well, yes, they *could* be. But there is no evidence they *are*. It's not until paragraph 6 that the story comes clean and admits this:

'The scale and the specifics of the data haul are not clear. The documents show that the N.S.A. and the British agency routinely obtain information from certain apps, particularly those introduced earliest to cellphones. With some newer apps, including Angry Birds, the agencies have a similar ability, the documents show, but they do not make explicit whether the spies have put that into practice.'²¹¹

And yet the reporting in all three publications leaned towards suggesting to their readers that this very thing was put into practice, and was current. ProPublica's headline was flat-out misleading, but *The New York Times* and *The Guardian* did at least make some effort to add caveats early on. Attentive readers will have noted that hypothetical 'could' undermining the significance of the story in *The New York Times*' opening paragraph, for instance. It's true that spies could be lurking as you play Angry Birds, but they could be doing anything. These articles would have been in the public interest if they

²¹⁰ <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/28/world/spy-agencies-scour-phone-apps-for-personal-data.html? r=0>

²¹¹ Ibid.

had presented any evidence that GCHQ and/or the NSA were indiscriminately accessing and actively using information of people who they had insufficient reasons to suspect were a threat to national security—but none of the three articles did that. Indeed, of nearly 300 articles published to date from Snowden’s material, almost none of them present evidence of that.²¹²

The Guardian, meanwhile, used a photograph of Angry Birds in their piece but noted in the caption that this was as part of a case study. But newspapers know that people generally won’t read as carefully as this, and that they will give the wrong impression. They are trying to give the wrong impression, in fact, because they want the headline and early paragraphs to generate outrage among readers, so they read it and share it. That’s more likely to happen if they imply that a hypothetical proposal from 2012 is a current operation, and that it might be aimed at their own readers. That *Guardian* caption, for instance, read ‘GCHQ documents use Angry Birds—reportedly downloaded more than 1.7bn times—as a case study for app data

²¹² I can think of two exceptions. One is the ‘LOVEINT’ story: <http://blogs.wsj.com/washwire/2013/08/23/nsa-officers-sometimes-spy-on-love-interests> The number of cases where that was done deliberately seems very small, however. The other is the *Washington Post* story on ‘incidental collection’: http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/in-nsa-intercepted-data-those-not-targeted-far-outnumber-the-foreigners-who-are/2014/07/05/8139adf8-045a-11e4-8572-4b1b969b6322_story.html This is more alarming, and raises questions of where one draws the line in surveillance – the comparison with the FBI’s requirement to stop listening to a wiretapped call in a criminal investigation if a suspect’s partner or child is using the phone is an apt one, and would be worth emulating, I think. But it isn’t an easy problem to solve, as that example illustrates: it’s rather hard to conduct surveillance on a suspect and not also see what is going on around them. It’s also worth noting the many caveats in that *Washington Post* story as to how much valuable intelligence was being collected – this rather goes against Glenn Greenwald’s idea that the entire NSA is using surveillance of communications as a pretext to spy on innocent civilians.

collection’. Most won’t have read that caption, but simply seen the accompanying image and presumed that Angry Birds was being exploited. But even if you did read the caption, you would probably have assumed by its use of the present tense that the GCHQ documents in question were current rather than from two years earlier. One could argue that the caption was technically correct, as the documents exist in the present, but it’s misleading nevertheless, and deliberately so. Because ‘Internal GCHQ documents from 2012 discussed the hypothetical use of Angry Birds to collect intelligence against suspected targets’ isn’t as exciting a story. In fact, it’s not a story at all, as there’s no public interest to it—there’s no evidence of wrongdoing here, just the exposing of classified information about an idea our intelligence agencies had. It was an interesting story, certainly. But it wasn’t in the public interest.

This clickbait sensationalist approach is the pattern of a lot of media today, of course, but it’s disheartening to see it applied to our national security secrets, especially by newspapers as respected as *The Guardian* and *The New York Times*. And once it had appeared there, the Chinese whispers began and the story became even more baldly stated and lurid. In a White House press conference, Victoria Jones of Talk Radio News Service said: ‘The NSA is lurking in the background of your game of Angry Birds, waiting to scoop up all your personal data as you lob hapless creatures into the air. It feels like this is the last bastion of American freedom that’s been breached.’²¹³ ABC News ran a story headlined ‘A Little (Angry) Bird Told the NSA What You’re Up To’.²¹⁴

²¹³ <http://www.politico.com/story/2014/01/angry-birds-nsa-surveillance-question-jay-carney-102671.html#ixzz3Hr151xgl>

²¹⁴ <http://abcnews.go.com/Technology/angry-bird-told-nsa-youre/story?id=22251583>

That headline epitomises one of the biggest problems with the media's approach to the Snowden leaks: it distorts the truth to drive traffic, misrepresenting an unrealized idea from 2012 to legitimately target suspected bad actors as a current operation directed at invading the privacy of *you*, the reader. This sort of story—and there have been hundreds of them in the coverage of Snowden's documents—has created a new kind of scaremongering. Where national security state hawks once sold the public the message 'BE AFRAID—THE TERRORISTS ARE PLANNING TO ATTACK US!', the Snowden story has repeatedly sold the public a new but equally terrifying narrative: 'BE AFRAID—YOUR GOVERNMENT IS SPYING ON YOU!' As the public only knows what the Snowden documents contain through the distorted lens of this kind of coverage in the media, it's little wonder that the debate over surveillance reform has largely been framed as being about the needless invasion of citizens' privacy.

8

Chinese Whispers

‘Edward Snowden: US Government Has Been Hacking Hong Kong and China for Years’ by Lana Lam, *South China Morning Post*, June 13 2013²¹⁵

‘Internet exchange at Chinese University seen as target for hackers’ by Joshua But, Joyce Ng and Ernest Kao, *South China Morning Post*, June 13 2013 (updated August 29 2013)

‘Edward Snowden: Classified US data shows Hong Kong hacking targets’ by Lana Lam, *South China Morning Post*, June 14 2013 (updated June 15)

IN JUNE 2013, Snowden bypassed the other reporters to show documents from his cache to the *South China Morning Post*. The

²¹⁵ <http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/1259508/edward-snowden-us-government-has-been-hacking-hong-kong-and-china?page=all>

resulting series of articles, the above three of which discussed his material in detail, are usually skipped over by those who claim Snowden can't have done any harm to US national security, perhaps because it's very difficult to see how they didn't.

The claimed public interest was the exposure of NSA activity in Hong Kong and China:

'The detailed records—which cannot be independently verified—show specific dates and the IP addresses of computers in Hong Kong and on the mainland hacked by the National Security Agency over a four-year period.

They also include information indicating whether an attack on a computer was ongoing or had been completed, along with an amount of additional operational information.

The small sample data suggests secret and illegal NSA attacks on Hong Kong computers had a success rate of more than 75 per cent, according to the documents. The information only pertains to attacks on civilian computers with no reference to Chinese military operations, Snowden said.'

There's no public interest here. There might have been for citizens of *Hong Kong*, but that is (at the time of writing) under Chinese jurisdiction. And China is no ally of the United States—quite the opposite. The US spies on China for very good reasons, and none of these stories presented a shred of evidence that the NSA was engaged in anything other than legitimate espionage activity.

That Snowden thought revealing any of these activities was even remotely in the public interest is mind-boggling, and should have raised serious alarm-bells about his judgment in the minds of Gellman, Poitras, Greenwald and the others working on the story. The closest we have to that happening is the following from a *Daily Beast* interview with Greenwald the same month:

‘Greenwald said he would not have published some of the stories that ran in the *South China Morning Post*. “Whether I would have disclosed the specific IP addresses in China and Hong Kong the NSA is hacking, I don’t think I would have,” Greenwald said. “What motivated that leak though was a need to ingratiate himself to the people of Hong Kong and China.”

However, Greenwald said that in his dealings with Snowden the 30-year-old systems administrator was adamant that he and his newspaper go through the document and only publish what served the public’s right to know. “Snowden himself was vehement from the start that we do engage in that journalistic process and we not gratuitously publish things,” Greenwald said. “I do know he was vehement about that. He was not trying to harm the U.S. government; he was trying to shine light on it.”²¹⁶

These two paragraphs are a good example of the slapdash way other media outlets have examined the methods both of Snowden and the journalists with access to the documents. The first paragraph directly addresses the hole in the claims by Greenwald and others that no damage could have been caused. Instead of pressing Greenwald on this, the reporter segues into a claim by him that *other* stories haven’t caused damage. Greenwald might well have found Snowden to be adamant that gratuitous information not be published in *his* dealings with him, but that doesn’t justify these particular stories—Greenwald’s reason for feeling he wouldn’t have published this information is the unanswered question.

Snowden also might well have felt ‘a need to ingratiate himself to the people of Hong Kong and China’—but at what cost to US national security? This is the interview in which Greenwald stated that *The Guardian* ‘won’t publish things that might ruin ongoing

²¹⁶ <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/06/25/greenwald-snowden-s-files-are-out-there-if-anything-happens-to-him.html>

operations from the U.S. government that very few people would object to the United States doing’—but this is precisely what Snowden had just done.

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THESE STORIES ONLY become more troubling when you look at them in detail. Snowden not only gave the *South China Morning Post* information about the NSA’s operations against Hong Kong and ‘the mainland’, ie China itself—self-evidently damaging US national security in the process—but he showed reporter Lana Lam documents in an online interview he had with her and gave specific intelligence about NSA targets’ IP addresses and dates of activity. Again, there is no public interest here. Snowden’s attempt to justify handing this information over is a mix of contradictions, unsupported statements and an apparent total misunderstanding of what constitutes illegitimate espionage activity on the part of the United States:

“I don’t know what specific information they were looking for on these machines, only that using technical exploits to gain unauthorised access to civilian machines is a violation of law. It’s ethically dubious,” Snowden said in the interview on Wednesday. Snowden, who came to Hong Kong on May 20 and has been in hiding since, said the data points to the frequency and nature of how NSA operatives were able to successfully hack into servers and computers, with specific reference to machines in Hong Kong and on the mainland... One of the targets Snowden revealed was Chinese University, home to the Hong Kong Internet Exchange which is a central hub of servers through which all web traffic in the city passes.

A university spokeswoman said yesterday that staff had not detected any attacks to its “backbone network”... “The primary issue of

public importance to Hong Kong and mainland China should be that the NSA is illegally seizing the communications of tens of millions of individuals without any individualised suspicion of wrongdoing,” Snowden said. “They simply steal everything so they can search for any topics of interest.”

There are several problems with these stories, mainly as a result of the unknown quantity of the newspaper and its journalists. As well as exposing plenty of legitimate intelligence activity in specific terms, the elephant in the room is whether Chinese intelligence had access to any of the raw intelligence mentioned in these articles. It’s impossible to say with certainty, but considering the situation it would be surprising if they hadn’t at least tried to access it. In a follow-up piece explaining how she had come to interview Snowden this year, Lana Lam revealed the extent of Snowden’s consideration of this possibility—blind trust in a stranger:

‘At points throughout the interview, Snowden was clear that certain information he gave me—often in order to better explain what at times were complex technical issues—could not be published and that he trusted me not to reveal it.

That wish for confidentiality was complied with at the time and is an ongoing commitment of mine and this newspaper.’²¹⁷

Well, if you say so—pew!

Snowden was taking a risk trusting anyone with this information, but he at least had a very good idea who Poitras and Greenwald were and had built a relationship with Poitras over months of correspondence before handing her any documents. It’s hard to see what good reasons he could have for entrusting US intelligence secrets with a newspaper in Hong Kong. Lam has denied having any

²¹⁷ <http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/1530403/post-reporter-lana-lam-tells-her-journey-secret-world-edward-snowden>

intelligence links, but by the time she interviewed Snowden on June 12, Chinese intelligence would have been acutely aware Snowden had access to a trove of American secrets. They would have used every trick in the book to access whatever Lam and the paper learned. If they hadn't, they wouldn't have been doing their jobs.

These articles not only ask readers to pretend they are straight pieces of reporting shorn from any political context, but also to take Snowden's wild claims at face value, without even a pretence at an attempt to determine if they're true.

But it's really Snowden who comes off worst here. His claim that it's unethical for the NSA to gain 'unauthorised access' to 'civilian machines' in a university carries the implication that only military computers would be legitimate targets in China. This suggests either a complete ignorance of the intelligence world or someone looking for a justification for an unjustifiable leak. Snowden had been in the CIA, where officers often use civilian cover, so it's even less convincing. Universities are often focal points for intelligence activity—academics make good cover roles—and university computer networks often contain classified data on technical subjects relevant to national security.

In that article, Snowden then goes on to say he doesn't even know what information the NSA is looking for. How does he know this isn't legitimate activity against foreign targets, then? Let's say the NSA knew an important ring of Chinese intelligence assets was operating out of Chinese University in Hong Kong. Let's say the content of their emails contains intelligence that is highly significant to the security of US personnel in the region. If this, or anything like it, were the case, why on earth would we want the NSA not to access it?

The same story presents no evidence for Snowden's assertion that communications belonging to tens of millions of people are being

intercepted in China without any cause for suspicion—we are again simply asked to take his word for it.

Thankfully, the paper didn't publish any content of the documents Snowden handed over, which would have meant others would have been able to glean intelligence from it as well—but this also means the precise extent of what he passed the newspaper couldn't be determined by the NSA. The paper mentions Snowden was in the CIA—might he have told the reporter intelligence about that agency? How many documents about cyber-espionage in China did he hand over, and were they simply relating to Chinese University or was the newspaper—perhaps instructed by the MSS—omitting other targets to see if they could turn the information on the Americans? In such an uncertain environment, the NSA might have decided to cease several activities and operations instead of risk further exposure, even if they were providing valuable and entirely legitimate intelligence.

As for 'unauthorised access', what does he think espionage is about? If our spies obeyed all the laws in hostile territory, they'd never have any success at all. 'Dear Chinese University, can we please see the emails of the following operatives working under academic cover? We've attached the relevant forms. Thanks, guys!' It's mind-blowingly naïve, to the extent that it suggests Snowden doesn't even understand the basic principles of espionage. By this logic, there is virtually no such thing as legitimate intelligence-gathering. If the NSA shouldn't spy on *China*, who should it spy on?

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A FURTHER STORY relating to China was published in *Der Spiegel* in March 2014, revealing that in 2009 the NSA had launched 'a major intelligence offensive against China, with targets including the

Chinese government and networking company Huawei'.²¹⁸ The supposed public interest in this story was that poor little Huawei was being spied on, but this is not just naïve in the extreme but flatly contradicted by the very documents the piece relies on. In one of the documents, the NSA puts forward its reasons for this being a valid operation: many surveillance targets use Huawei products, so knowing how to exploit them would be a valuable intelligence boon from that standpoint; and Huawei's widespread infrastructure would provide China with SIGINT capabilities.

This is hardly controversial: Huawei is known to do just that.²¹⁹ Some have pointed to an apparent hypocrisy in the US conducting cyber-espionage against China when they have complained of China doing the same to them, but this is to miss the point. Most intelligence agencies have cyber-espionage operations against hostile actors, and China is a hostile actor to the West and vice versa.

The story also suggested that the NSA might be targeting Huawei to boost American industry—but presented no evidence for it and quoted a denial from the NSA. It's perhaps unlikely that the Chinese could learn much from the entirely unsurprising fact that the NSA were spying on them in 2009, as they almost certainly are still doing so today, but several specific points in this story, such as the fact that the NSA managed to access Huawei's source code and that it had read a large amount of email traffic from its Shenzhen office starting from January 2009, must at best have been of interest but no real significance to Chinese intelligence, but at worst of some use, in which case the story damaged US national security. It's hard to see how that risk was deemed worth taking by the unnamed writers of

²¹⁸ <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/nsa-spied-on-chinese-government-and-networking-firm-huawei-a-960199.html>

²¹⁹ <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/huawei-probed-for-security-espionage-risk>

the article when there was no public interest for Germany or the West in the revelations.

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THIS STORY ALSO featured a common thread in much of the Snowden reporting: no evidence of wrongdoing and a denial from the NSA that wrongdoing had been done. Because the language of official denials tends to sound stilted, the unsupported insinuations lodge in readers' minds despite the basic requirement for a public interest defence—evidence of wrongdoing—not being met. A denial from the NSA has almost become a substitute for such evidence.

It seems scant comfort that, so far at least, Snowden's entire trove hasn't simply been uploaded for all the world to read. But I hope I've shown that, even without that happening, the media has hardly covered itself in glory so far.

Where will the Snowden saga go next? It might, finally, fizzle away as responsible journalists conclude there are no further wrongdoings of note to expose in the documents, and that one can't honestly argue that the United States or Britain are on the brink of becoming totalitarian regimes because their intelligence agencies try to access the communications of targets in Russia or China, or of Islamist supremacists intent on global expansion, and that such revelations are likely to cause more harm than good. On the other hand, the story could spring back into life again, and more damage could be done.

Some of the journalists who have reported on this story have criticized what they see as a hidebound establishment culture in which journalists instinctively believe intelligence officials when they tell them information needs to be withheld to protect national security. There's no doubt some truth to that. But the Snowden story

has also solidified the emergence of a new culture that has more in common with WikiLeaks and Anonymous, and that is a trend of believing *nothing* intelligence officials or anyone in a position of authority says. The Greenwald position: assume they're lying, then look for evidence to prove they are.

It's the edgier option, of course, to believe that all government officials are corrupt liars and that our democracies are akin to totalitarian regimes. But if journalists take that approach too far, they might be surprised to wake up one day and find that corrupt liars in real totalitarian regimes have taken advantage of their blinkered rebellion against the status quo, and that the imagined devils they heralded emerge from the darkness in shapes they hadn't anticipated.

NEED TO KNOW

Tradecraft

Collected Journalism on Spy Fact and Fiction

Introduction

IN MY TWENTIES, I found myself living in Brussels and working as a journalist for an English-speaking magazine, *The Bulletin*. Its readership largely consisted of expatriates working for the European Union institutions, and the average length of time they spent there was less than three years. It seems Eurocrats have a taste for spy novels, because the shelves of the city's second-hand bookshops were heaving with paperbacks by Len Deighton and others that had been dumped as their owners moved on to new assignments. As a boy, I'd stayed up many a night engrossed in *The KnowHow Book of Spycraft*—as I picked my way through the bookshops of Brussels, I became a devotee of spy thrillers.

Eventually, I considered writing a spy novel of my own, set in the Cold War. In the meantime, I continued with my day job as an editor and writer at *The Bulletin*. I wrote about a wide variety of subjects, but whenever possible I tried to pursue stories with espionage angles, or that I thought might help with the background for my novel. The

first article in this collection, *Whisper Who Dares*, published in June 2005, is an example of this. I hadn't known that the SAS investigated Nazi war crimes after the war, and writing this piece led me to research the topic further. That eventually fed into my novel, which I titled *Free Agent* and which was published in 2009.

I've written several more books since then, and quite a few articles along the way. In this collection, you'll find 20 pieces I've written for newspapers, magazines and for my own website, and if you've read any of my books you'll see how some of them inspired topics and themes in them.

The second piece, *Rendezvous With a Spy*, is an exception in that it's previously unpublished. It also has a Brussels connection, as it happens. This dates from 2011, when I was writing *Dead Drop (Codename: Hero in the US)*, my non-fiction book about MI6 and the CIA's joint operation to run agent-in-place Oleg Penkovsky in the early Sixties. I had planned to write the book with my own footsteps following the operation as a focus, but one strand I'd written in that vein unbalanced the tone of the rest of it and so I cut it. I think that was the right decision for the book, but I remain fond of this as a piece of writing in its own right. I've left in a few sentences that made it into the final version of the book for context, and hope it gives some interesting insight into the research process as well as what makes spies and intelligence officers tick. Pete Bagley died of cancer at his home in Brussels in February 2014.

From the inner sanctum of a former CIA officer, let's head into the world of British spookdom. *The Spies We've Loved* is an overview of spy fact and fiction I wrote for *The Sunday Times* in May 2009 to coincide with the centenary of the British intelligence services being established.

Several topics and themes I discuss in this piece will crop up in other ones. One is a focus of the next four articles: propaganda. The

first combines two articles, both originally published on my website (*Close Encounters* in May 2011, and *The War of Ideas* in May 2013), in which I look at how MI6 and the CIA tried to influence public opinion during the Cold War by surreptitiously using writers. *When Julian Met Graham* and *Secreted in Fiction* (published on my website in March and September 2013) both deal with the Russian spy novelist Julian Semyonov, and the ways in which he tried to subvert the KGB's grip on the narrative. And *Spies of Fleet Street* is an article I wrote for the BBC's website in March 2013 to accompany a programme I wrote and presented for Radio 4 about how MI6 used journalists.

A couple of lighter pieces are up next: *A London Spy Walk* was first published in *Time Out London* in May 2009, while I wrote *Top Ten Spy Gadgets* for *The Times* the same month. *In From The Cold* is a review of the late Keith Jeffery's official history of the early years of MI6, published in *The Mail on Sunday* in November 2010.

A version of *Paperback Writers* was first published on my website. I wrote the article in 2002, and it features interviews with Martin Cruz Smith, John Gardner, Donald Hamilton and William Boyd. The first three I essentially just called up after tracking down their numbers, while I interviewed Boyd in person as part of my day job while he was promoting *Any Human Heart*. I've tweaked a few sentences in the article, but left its description of the spy fiction scene as it was at the time. Few of the film projects mentioned panned out, and sadly John Gardner and Donald Hamilton are no longer with us, but this is a chance to read rare interviews with both of them, and journey back to the world of vintage spy paperbacks.

Published on my website in February 2011, *From Sweden, With Love* is an interview with the thriller aficionado and muse Iwan Morelius. Iwan died in 2012—I named a character after him in *Spy Out the Land* in tribute.

From February 2009, *Deighton at Eighty* is an article I wrote for *The Guardian* paying tribute to the great Len Deighton on his 80th birthday. This is followed by my interview with Deighton expert and biographer Edward Milward-Oliver, which was published on my website in April 2013. It has a brief update appended.

I interviewed the spy novelist Joseph Hone in 2002 with the intention of including him in Paperback Writers, but for various reasons he didn't quite fit there. *The Forgotten Master of British Spy Fiction* was first published on my website in March 2010, and became the basis for my forewords to new editions of Hone's novels published by Faber Finds in 2014. If you haven't read him yet, I can't recommend him highly enough.

As can be seen from many of the previous articles, it's virtually impossible to write about spies and ignore the influence of James Bond on the genre—even John le Carré was a little fixated by the character. I'm no exception, and the next few articles are something of a Bond buffet.

Waiting for Deaver is an article I wrote for *The Daily Telegraph* in May 2011 on the eve of publication of Jeffery Deaver's James Bond novel *Carte Blanche*, looking at how Fleming's reputation has changed over the decades.

From the same month, *The Lives of Ian Fleming* is a piece I published on my website on two excellent biographies of Bond's creator, by John Pearson and Andrew Lycett. *When William Met Ian* delves into a rare interview between Ian Fleming and his editor William Plomer, and was published on my website in September 2015. *A Letter from '008'* is the most recent piece here, first published on my website in October 2015, and as well as being a curio on Fleming is about how technology is easing research and changing our perceptions as a result.

Finally, in *Licence To Hoax* I look at another Fleming biographer, but one who put his interest in espionage fact and fiction to more unethical use than one might expect. This article was first published on my website in December 2014.

So there we are: 20 articles on spy fact and fiction from my career to date. I hope you enjoy them as much as I did researching and writing them.

Jeremy Duns

Mariehamn, February 2016

Whisper Who Dares

‘YES, I WANTED vengeance in 1945. But if I had killed the Nazis I tracked down, that would have made me as bad as them, wouldn’t it?’

Jacques Goffinet is speaking to me on the phone from Reguisheim in France. Sixty years ago yesterday, aged just 22, he arrested Germany’s foreign minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop, in Hamburg. Tracking down Nazi war criminals was his final job after four years as a member of one of the Allies’ most successful units: the Belgian SAS.

Britain’s Special Air Service—motto ‘Who dares wins’—is regarded as one of the world’s greatest fighting forces, and there have been hundreds of books, articles and films about its exploits. But very little attention has been given to its Belgian squadron.

It started life in 1942 as the Belgian Independent Parachute Company, in Malvern Wells in western England (about 30 kilometres from Hereford, where the SAS is now based). The BIPC. was mainly made up of soldiers who had escaped from occupied Belgium and Belgian volunteers from the US and Canada. It included

men who had been farmers, lawyers and dentists—as well as three barons.

The company was led by Eddy Blondeel, a former engineer from Ghent nicknamed ‘Captain Blunt’. Despite the difficulties of leading a multi-lingual group, Blondeel commanded the absolute respect of his 130 or so men. They learned parachute jumping, hand-to-hand combat and sabotage techniques at various locations, including Inverlochy Castle in Scotland, where they trained alongside members of the SAS.

The SAS had been set up in 1941 by British officer David Stirling with the intention of wreaking havoc on the Nazis in northern Africa: it consisted of small commando units, who were usually parachuted behind enemy lines.

In February 1944, the B.I.P.C. moved to a training camp in Galston, near Ayr, where it was merged into the SAS. Although a relatively small brigade, 5 SAS, as it was now known, was not some obscure wing of the regiment: it completed several crucial missions. Some of its operations involved just a handful of men being dropped into France, after which they would sabotage the Germans’ communications or blow up bridges. Some involved the entire company—Operation TRUEFORM in August 1944, for example, when, along with British SAS, they landed in Normandy and inflicted substantial damage on the retreating German armoured columns, who were trying to cross the Seine. Others still were long-term missions: Operation FABIAN was carried out by five Belgian SAS members from September 1944 to March 1945, near Arnhem in the Netherlands.

FABIAN was led by one of the first members of the Belgian SAS, Gilbert Sadi-Kirschen, who spent much of the war using the alias of ‘Fabian King’. The son of the barrister who had defended Edith Cavell in a German military court in World War One, Sadi-Kirschen

qualified as a lawyer himself, but when war broke out, joined the Sixth Artillery Regiment. When Belgium surrendered, he, like many others, was arrested, and was put in a truck to be taken to a POW camp. He escaped from the truck, and travelled through France, Algeria, Tangier, Portugal and Gibraltar, being imprisoned for two months on the way, before finally making it to England, where he joined the Belgian parachutists. The aim of FABIAN was to find the locations of the Germans' V2 rocket launch sites: it was meant to last eight days, but ended up taking six months.

Sadi-Kirschen also led Operation BENSON, in which a six-man team jumped near Beauvais in north-eastern France in August 1944. A couple of the men suffered minor injuries on landing, and were taken to a doctor trusted by the local Resistance. The doctor told them that the previous day he had been sitting in a café with a German major, and had sketched down the map the man had left on his table when he went to the bathroom. The sketch was very simple—but showed every German division on the Somme, and even the position of Army Headquarters.

The SAS men immediately retreated to a barn to transmit the information, but were interrupted by Germans using a self-propelled gun. Quickly hiding their sets, they escaped from the barn, and took cover under some corn-stacks in a nearby field. The Germans searched frantically for them, but gave up once it got dark. The SAS team returned to the barn, rescued their sets, and made their transmission. It was one of the major coups of the latter stages of the war.

Members of the Belgian SAS were the first Allied troops to set foot in Belgium, and the first SAS unit to enter Germany. When one considers all the information they received and all the damage they caused the Germans, it's by no means far-fetched to say that they made a substantial contribution to the Allied victory. Their success

rate was phenomenal, and by the war's end, only 15 men of the unit had been killed. One of these was Corporal-Signaller Raymond Holvoet, who was captured, tortured and finally executed by the Germans in April 1945, in Zwolle, in the Netherlands. Three years earlier, Hitler had issued his infamous *Kommandobefehl*, or Commando Order, in which he stated that Allied special forces would not be afforded the terms of the Geneva Convention—any member of an enemy 'sabotage unit' captured alive would be shot.

FOR MANY IN the SAS, this was a step too far. In the closing stages of the war and in the months following it, British and American counter-intelligence groups began tracking down and arresting Nazis suspected of war crimes. After the liberation of Brussels, some members of the Belgian SAS were attached to these groups. They travelled across Europe, and arrested many leading Nazis, including Admiral Karl Doenitz, the commander of the German navy and, for 20 days following Hitler's suicide, Germany's president; Alfred Rosenberg, the minister for the eastern occupied territories; and Joachim von Ribbentrop, the Nazis' foreign minister.

'It was a tough job,' says Jacques Goffinet with typical understatement. Post-war Germany was an anarchic place: liberated P.O.W.s and refugees lined the roads, food and drinking water were scarce and electricity and gas often unavailable. In some of the cities, sewer lines ran into bomb craters and bodies rotted under the debris of destroyed buildings. Neither did peace mean an end to violence: Russian agents were combing D.P. camps hunting down and executing 'traitors' to the Soviet Union, and some soldiers and civilians were conducting their own searches for enemies to avenge. Members of the British Army's Jewish Brigade assassinated several Nazis around this time.

As a sergeant in the Belgian SAS, Goffinet had taken part in operations CHAUCER and NOAH. Now he was assigned to a British counter-intelligence operation in Hamburg. On the morning of June 15 1945, he arrived at headquarters as usual. Two German civilians were waiting outside the building—they told him that they knew von Ribbentrop was hiding out in an apartment in Hamburg, using the name Von Riese. They gave him the address.

Goffinet wasn't hopeful—most such leads were dead-ends—but together with a British lieutenant called Adams and a couple of colleagues, he set out for the apartment. The door was locked, but as Goffinet began to try to prise it open, it was opened by a woman in a nightdress. Coming into the bedroom, Goffinet and his colleagues surprised a sleeping von Ribbentrop, who was wearing silk pyjamas. He knew at once that the game was up, and didn't try to flee. Goffinet checked that he didn't have a cyanide capsule under his lip and removed a razor from him as he packed. Hidden in the apartment was 200,000 marks and a rambling letter to 'Vincent Churchill' blaming the British for 'anti-German bias'.

Von Ribbentrop was found guilty at Nuremberg the following year and hanged. Considering the execution of Raymond Holvoet, I ask Goffinet if he was at all tempted to hand von Ribbentrop his fate himself. 'No,' he says. 'He was just another Nazi to me.'

The Belgian SAS eventually 'returned' to Belgium, where they were based in Tervuren. Blondeel faced many difficulties in keeping such a specialised force operating in a small country in peacetime, and the squadron was merged with the paras. In 1952, the paratroopers and the commandos merged into one regiment, which remains the case today. Belgian SAS veterans, of which there are now around 60, are still very active, though. As well as their own newsletter, they meet up at their club in Brussels once a month, and

hold an annual 'Blunt Lunch' in honour of their commanding officer, who died in 2000, aged 93.

Jacques Goffinet is about to go into a nursing home. He tells me he rarely thinks about his days in the Belgian SAS, but seals it off in a compartment in his mind. I ask him why he thinks his old squadron is not as well known as some of the others, despite its extraordinary achievements. He laughs, and I try to imagine the face of the intense-looking 22-year-old in the photographs I've seen at 82 as he answers. 'Perhaps we're just modest,' he says.

With thanks to Des Thomas, Marc Backx, Paul Marquet and Jacques Goffinet.

Rendezvous With A Spy

I HAD IMAGINED it would be raining in Brussels, but as I step out of the airport terminal I find myself blinded by bright sunshine. When I lived here years ago I had longed for days like this, but now I'm slightly disappointed: it feels like the wrong weather for a rendezvous with a spy.

I find a taxi and the driver speeds me through the streets, past drab factories and glass-encased office complexes. As we reach the city centre, the familiar hodge-podge of architectural styles flits by: a brown monstrosity from the Sixties, soot-stained Art Nouveau villas, a modern hotel in marble and granite, and then a run of pharmacies, kebab restaurants and photocopy shops. My cabbie, conducting an argument with someone through his Bluetooth earpiece, takes a stomach-churning swing of the wheel and guns up a wide tree-lined boulevard. We are now in the diplomatic quarter. I catch sight of a bloom of red roses in an otherwise sparse garden, the flag of a South American nation hanging from elaborate cornices above.

A few minutes later, we reach a quiet crossroads with a flashy-looking Italian café positioned on one corner, customers in sunglasses smoking and drinking beer by the side of the road, squinting at their smartphones and laptops. I pay my taxi driver and walk to the block of flats directly opposite the café.

It is a squat building encased in dark grey brickwork: not beautiful, but not especially ugly either. That, at least, feels right. Because unknown to the Eurocrats sipping Hoegaarden behind me, this nondescript building is home to secrets. The present is unspooling in the sunshine, but I am about to journey back in time, deep into the heart of an espionage operation that changed the course of the Cold War fifty years ago.

I click the door open and walk into the foyer. A bank of buttons has names printed on it, and one of them reads 'BAGLEY'. I push it, and a few seconds later a speaker crackles with static. 'Good morning!' says a tinny voice. 'Come up.' I step into the tiny lift and wonder what I will find when I emerge from it. It has taken me weeks to set up this meeting, and Tennent Harrington Bagley—known to most as Pete—has offered to talk to me for several hours.

I'm nervous. I have spent years researching the Cold War for my spy novels, and Pete Bagley has featured in several of the books on my shelves. Now 85, he is one of the few survivors of the upper echelons of the CIA who battled against the KGB, and has been described as 'a legendary spy'. He was appointed deputy head of counter-intelligence in the CIA's Soviet Russia division in 1962 at the tender age of 30. According to one former colleague, there were few in the agency more 'nakedly ambitious', while CIA director Dick Helms has said he was a 'golden boy' who was seen as a potential future head of the agency.

But Bagley never made it to head of the CIA: instead he became embroiled in a controversy that nearly tore the agency apart, and he

ended his espionage career as Chief of Station in Brussels, where he has long since retired. That controversy, the handling of the defector Yuri Nosenko, has featured in several books and films, including a 1986 BBC/HBO production in which Tommy Lee Jones played a fictionalized version of Bagley, ‘Steve Daley’, and Robert De Niro’s 2006 film *The Good Shepherd*.

In 2007, Bagley wrote a memoir focusing on the Nosenko operation, but at several points his account intersected with another story. The handling of Russian colonel Oleg Penkovsky, codenamed HERO, had the highest stakes of any operation ever run by either agency. Taking place during two of the most dangerous episodes in recent history—the Berlin crisis in 1961 that led to the building of the Wall and the Cuban missile crisis of 1962—the operation was packed with human drama, as well as espionage tradecraft familiar to millions from fiction: microfilmed documents, assignations in safe houses in London and Paris, and coded messages and dead drops in Moscow. If it sounds like the plot of a John le Carré novel, this is no coincidence: it inspired one of his best-known books, *The Russia House*.

I have long been fascinated by Penkovsky and the unanswered questions, conspiracy theories and Chinese whispers that have surrounded the operation, and I looked at it in greater detail when researching a novel set in Moscow during the Sixties [*The Moscow Option*]. Pete Bagley’s memoir, although primarily about another operation, seemed to me to present new evidence about Penkovsky that warranted further investigation. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Bagley had taken advantage of the new spirit of openness to travel to Russia. He met with several former KGB officers with whom he had fought invisible battles for years, and in time became friendly with a few of them. The days of openness were

all too brief, and the door soon shut on many such exchanges, but Bagley had found some answers, and he detailed them in his memoir.

Some of the information was simply staggering. Bagley claimed that former Soviet intelligence officers had told him that the KGB had discovered that Penkovsky was working for the West earlier than they had claimed: the official story was bogus. Bagley wrote that Penkovsky had most likely been betrayed by a double agent working for the Soviets in the West, perhaps a very high-ranking member of CIA or MI6.

I've read a lot of books about espionage, and many contain outlandish conspiracy theories, but Bagley's book stayed with me for months. I realized that it was not simply a matter of detail about a half-century-old espionage operation: Penkovsky's information is credited as having helped Kennedy face down Khrushchev during both the Berlin and Cuban crises. If Bagley's claims were true, they had a knock-on effect on both those events for a simple reason: if the KGB had known throughout that a military intelligence officer was giving the West highly classified military secrets, why had they let him continue to do so—and how had it altered their own actions? In short, Bagley's information had the potential to change the accepted history of two of the major events of the 20th century, both of which had nearly led to nuclear war.

I began reading other material about Penkovsky, a lot of which has been declassified in recent years, and Bagley's theories became harder to dismiss. In particular, one point he had spotted that is already in the public domain seemed irrefutable, and completely overturned the established version of events. But other information in his book, such as that from former KGB officers, was frustratingly attributed to anonymous sources. I decided I had to see him to find out more.

The lift doors shudder to a standstill and I step out into a narrow corridor. Bagley has ‘vetted’ me in several long phone calls and emails before agreeing to see me, asking a series of questions to test my knowledge about the topic, my journalistic techniques and more. He has strongly hinted on the phone that he might now reveal the names of some of his sources to me, and precisely what they told him—but what if he has had second thoughts, and decides to clam up?

A door to my left is ajar, and I glimpse a parquet floor covered by several Oriental carpets. Pete Bagley steps forward. He is a still-handsome man, standing tall in a light blue button-down shirt, grey flannel trousers, and polished brogues a deep burgundy colour. His crisp white hair is smartly cut and his face is tanned. We shake hands, and he quickly ushers me through the living room and into a darkened study. The walls are decorated with framed prints and photographs, many of which have a maritime theme. Bagley is from a famous naval family—born in Annapolis, his father was an admiral, as were both his brothers and two of his great-uncles. Bagley enlisted in the Marines in 1943 aged 17, and after the war studied political sciences, taking a Ph.D at the University of Geneva. In 1950, aged 25, he joined the CIA.

Apart from the naval theme, the room is a kind of Cold War cocoon, and strangely familiar to my own study. I recognize many of the books in his shelves from my own, only the spines of his have handwritten reference numbers taped to them: his own private library system. Most of the books are non-fiction, but there are also some novels by John le Carré and Alan Furst. On top of a filing cabinet I spot a paperback of my first novel, and my palms feel a little sticky: more vetting. Behind a sturdy desk, home to a computer and copious piles of paper, are further bookshelves, some of which are taken up with large blue binders. ‘My archives,’ he smiles, seeing me

spot them. 'I'm going to tell you about what's in some of them today.' He points to a low gold-coloured sofa. 'Please, take a seat.'

I AM HERE to interview Pete Bagley, but at times it feels like he is interviewing me: trying to eke out answers from a man trained to do the same with others is not always easy. He speaks in a quiet sing-song voice, almost professorial in tone, and every often he lobs a question of his own into the conversation, about certain books, or certain operations, checking for my reactions. I weigh my words very carefully, conscious that he might at any moment decide that I'm not the person to talk to after all.

Bagley's replies are equally careful, but his recall of names, dates and facts from decades ago is remarkable. As we circle each other and the reason I have come here, I sense that he misses the old days, when he was involved in the highest echelons of the espionage game. At several points his eyes film over when he mentions officers he knew who have died.

After around an hour of discussion, he tells me he has booked a table for lunch nearby, and we take the lift down to the street and walk a few blocks until we reach a large townhouse that has been converted into a restaurant, and which also acts as the clubhouse for a local tennis club.

We walk through a dark vestibule and a waitress spots us and rushes over. 'Ah, Monsieur Bagley, comment allez-vous?'

'Très bien, merci,' he replies, and she leads us to a table near the windows. Once she has left, Bagley asks me if I think the location is okay. 'She said it was a little windy outside, and I'm not so sure, but this has a nice view and its position means we can talk undisturbed.'

I smile at the small piece of tradecraft. Old habits...

We take our seats and order, both of us going for the plat du jour, and continue our discussion, still feeling each other out. I gently probe to see if I can persuade him to reveal more about the sources for some of his information on Penkovsky. Bagley's memoirs were primarily about another Soviet agent-in-place, Yuri Nosenko, but the Penkovsky and Nosenko operations overlapped in several intriguing ways, and it's this I want to discuss. Our dishes arrive, and Bagley looks up for a moment and stares into the middle distance.

'I'm dying,' he says suddenly, his tone matter-of-fact. 'My doctors have given me a few weeks. I don't know if they're right this time—they've said it before—but they could be.'

I look at him, stunned. He seems a picture of health, a pink glow under his unlined tanned face, and apart from the whiteness of his hair could be a spry 60-year-old about to play a game of tennis here.

'I'm very sorry to hear that,' I manage.

'Oh,' he says, waving his hand. 'It's not the end of the world. Well, it's the end of my world, maybe.' He smiles ruefully at the poor joke. 'I only mention it to underline that there is perhaps a little more urgency to these matters, and to our meeting.'

I stare down at my blanc de volaille. The moment passes, and Bagley continues talking. 'So you wanted to know about Zepp,' he says...

The Spies We've Loved

IN THE SPRING and summer of 1909, Colonel James Edmonds presented himself at a sub-committee of the grand-sounding 'Committee of Imperial Defence' in Westminster. Although nominally head of Britain's military counter-intelligence, Edmonds' budget was tiny and he only had two assistants—most intelligence was still being gathered by the Admiralty, the War Office and the Foreign Office. But this sub-committee had been convened to analyse the threat of a German invasion, and Edmonds saw his chance. Over the course of three secret sessions, he made the case that Britain was all but over-run with German spies, presenting detailed information about suspicious barbers and retired colonels plotting dastardly deeds across the land.

When this failed to convince the committee, a dramatic document arrived at the War Office at the last minute. It was said to have been discovered by a French commercial traveller who had shared a compartment on a train between Spa and Hamburg with a German who had happened to be carrying a similar bag. The German, it was claimed, had disembarked with the wrong bag. When the

Frenchman perused the one he had left behind in the compartment, he discovered ‘detailed plans connected with a scheme for the invasion of England’. This pushed the sub-committee over the edge: a few weeks later, it recommended to the prime minister the creation of a Secret Service Bureau, divided into two sections, Home and Foreign. These sections would later split, and become known as MI5 and MI6.

If the idea of the country being overrun by German agents sounds like the stuff of spy novels, that is because it was. In a desperate bid to stop the police from taking over what he saw as his rightful domain, Edmonds had brazenly taken many of his ‘cases of German espionage’ from a novel called *The Spies of The Kaiser*. This had been written by a friend of his, William Le Queux, and had been published a few months earlier. The mysterious document discovered by the French commercial traveller also has all the hallmarks of a Le Queux story.

SPY FICTION, THEN, played a key role in the birth of Britain’s intelligence apparatus. In the century since, this curious relationship has continued, with spy novels often reflecting real-life espionage events and occasionally, as in 1909, influencing them.

The First World War was not much of a success for the Secret Service Bureau, nor any other intelligence agency in Europe for that matter. Most discovered to their cost that it was relatively simple to discover the location and strength of the enemy’s forces, but extremely difficult to gauge what they planned to do with them. Spy fiction prospered during the war, though: Le Queux, John Buchan, E. Phillips Oppenheim and others turned out a stream of thrilling if implausible tales of gentlemen heroes who save England from dastardly plots.

It was not until the 1920s that the genre would receive its first dose of reality. This came from Somerset Maugham, whose short stories about British writer-turned-agent Ashenden were the first to present espionage as a rather shabby occupation, filled with loose ends and frustrating bureaucratic muddles. Ashenden is sceptical of the spying game from the start, when a colonel in British intelligence known only as R. tells him about a French minister who is seduced by a stranger in Nice and loses a case full of important documents as a result. Ashenden laconically notes that such events have been enacted in a thousand novels and plays, but R. insists that the incident happened just weeks previously. Ashenden is not impressed, remarking that if that is the best the Secret Service can offer, the field is a washout for novelists: ‘We really can’t write that story much longer.’

Maugham had personal experience of the espionage world, having worked for British intelligence during the war. But his greatest follower in this new school of spy fiction had no such background, having worked as an advertising copywriter. This was Eric Ambler, whose centenary will also be celebrated this year: on May 28, five of his novels will be reprinted as Penguin Modern Classics.

Ambler brought a new psychological dimension to the genre, and in novels such as *The Mask of Dimitrios* and *Epitaph for a Spy* he exposed the murky underworld of European politics and finance. His 1930s novels were also dominated by the spectre of the coming war—but he was not the only one to see the writing on the wall. Published just a few months before the war began was *Rogue Male* by Geoffrey Household. This is arguably the forefather of the modern action thriller: a British gentleman tries to shoot an unnamed dictator, fails, and is pursued by enemy agents across the English countryside. Like Ambler, Household looked beyond the simplistic

vision of good and evil of earlier novels, as well as introducing a dose of physical toughness to the genre.

Household's unnamed narrator acts not out of patriotism, but principle. Once war had been declared, though, the genre would again struggle to make that distinction. The blackout created a huge demand for escapist reading material, and one of the first to capitalize on this was Dennis Wheatley. His thriller *The Scarlet Impostor* was published on January 7 1940, making it the first spy novel to be set during the Second World War.

Wheatley was firmly in the Le Queux and Buchan school of scrapes and fisticuffs. In order to make his baroque plots more believable, he also used brand names on a grand scale—the first thriller-writer do so. In *The Scarlet Impostor*, British agent Gregory Sallust is on a mission to make contact with an anti-Nazi movement in Germany. During the course of the novel we learn that he smokes Sullivans' Turkish mixture cigarettes, drinks Bacardis and pineapple juice, carries a Mauser automatic and has his suits made by West's of Savile Row. The romantic vision of the spy had returned with a vengeance.

Wheatley spent the war balancing the fictional and real worlds of intelligence. While still regularly publishing thrillers, he was a member of the London Controlling Section, a team within the Joint Planning Staff of the War Cabinet dedicated to planning deception operations against Germany (such as Operation MINCEMEAT—'The Man Who Never Was'—and Montgomery's double). His novels of the time are curious mixtures of thrilling potboilers packed with up-to-the-minute analysis of the politics of the time.

WITH THE END of the war, the Soviets became the new enemy, and it was felt that new methods were needed to defeat them. The Special

Operations Executive—‘Churchill’s secret army’—was rapidly disbanded and replaced by the Secret Intelligence Service, more commonly known as MI6.

While a new breed of professional secret agents were trained and sent into the field, the spy novel was also changing. The genre had long been dominated by male writers, but after the war female spy writers emerged, notably Helen MacInnes and Sarah Gainham. But the big development came in 1953, with the publication of Ian Fleming’s *Casino Royale*. With his Balkan cigarettes, vodka martinis and Savile Row suits, Fleming’s James Bond was a Gregory Sallust for a new age: the age of the Cold War.

In 1962, the first Bond film was released, and Britain’s fictional spies dominated the rest of the decade. Britain’s real-life intelligence community, however, was in disarray: paranoid, disillusioned, and turning on itself. This was the result of the discovery of an alarming number of double agents operating in its ranks, most notably the Cambridge Ring. As the extent of the deception became clear, spy novelists turned away from the fantasy of Bond. Led by Len Deighton and John le Carré, plots increasingly revolved around the hunt for these ‘moles’—a term coined by le Carré but later adopted in intelligence circles. Like Maugham and Greene before him, le Carré had first-hand experience of espionage, and was able to give readers the impression they were privy to the inner workings of the spy world.

The genre had again turned from gung-ho physical action to the darker world of human psychology. In the Seventies, the more realistic school of Deighton and le Carré gave way to fantasy once more—albeit fantasy presented as realism. Frederick Forsyth emerged as the inheritor of Fleming, with plausible but highly melodramatic thrillers that paved the way for a new field called ‘faction’. Thriller-writers began to explore the Second World War in earnest, and for

the first time Nazis were portrayed in an empathetic light (in Jack Higgins' *The Eagle Has Landed* and Ken Follett's *The Eye of the Needle*, for example).

During the Seventies and Eighties, the real world of espionage sometimes seemed more extraordinary than its fictional counterparts. A Venezuelan terrorist-for-hire eluded the world's security forces in a way that would have made Eric Ambler's Dimitrios gasp—he was even dubbed the Jackal by the press after a copy of Forsyth's most famous novel was said to have been found among his possessions. In London, the dissident Bulgarian writer and broadcaster Georgi Markov was poisoned with a ricin-tipped umbrella as he walked across Waterloo Bridge. A thousand would-be spy novelists picked up their pens—but as Alexander Litvinenko's murder in 2006 shows, such techniques were not a one-off, and have not disappeared.

As the Cold War wound down, so too did the spy novel. Innovations included forays into speculative fiction (Robert Harris' *Fatherland*) and new territories (Martin Cruz Smith's *Gorky Park*, while not strictly a spy novel, certainly felt like one). Deighton retired and le Carré moved on to new subjects. But eventually the genre rose from the ashes, in new forms. Robert Ludlum's frantic conspiracy thrillers and David Morrell's brutal action novel *First Blood*—inspired by Household's *Rogue Male*—led to the SAS adventures of Andy McNab and Chris Ryan in the Nineties, and Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* in 2003.

In this decade, the spy story has flourished: on television and in cinemas, *Spooks*, *24* and the Bourne films are reflecting the current reality, while novelists such as Charles Cumming, Henry Porter and Tom Cain explore it in print. Meanwhile, writers such as Alan Furst and Tom Rob Smith shed new light on espionage history—I hope to do the same with my own novels set in the Cold War. Nobody

NEED TO KNOW

can know what will happen in the next century of espionage, but one thing is for certain: spy novelists will be there to tell the story.

The War of Ideas

‘THE PROPAGANDIST WRITES solely with the intention of appealing to his readers’ interest. He aims to hit, because he cannot afford to miss.

Accordingly his work is based on the formulae of modern advertising, to whose task his own runs broadly parallel.

It differs only in that the propagandist is at greater pains than the copywriter to disguise his medium. The reader of an advertisement should never be provoked into feeling: “This is only an advertisement.” The reader of propaganda should, if possible, never be allowed even to suspect that he is reading propaganda.’

These words, written in April 1943, are contained in the syllabus used at the Special Training Schools of the Special Operations Executive, which were declassified in 2001. Variations of the same text were used in different schools, and this comes from the syllabus

used by STS 103 in Canada, also known as Camp X, where members of SOE and OSS were trained together.

As this was document was used to train secret agents, its authors names do not appear anywhere in it, but we now know that two senior SOE instructors wrote it: Paul Dehn and Kim Philby. Dehn, a poet and novelist, became a well-known scriptwriter after the war, working on the screenplays of both *The Spy Who Came In From The Cold* and *Goldfinger*. Philby went on to rise through the ranks of MI6 and was tipped by many to head it, but was eventually exposed as being a double agent working for the Soviets, having been recruited while a student at Cambridge University in the 1930s.

There is a chilling irony in the fact that Kim Philby was one of the writers of the syllabus used to train British secret agents during the war—and one has to wonder how much of it might be propaganda.

This is what James Jesus Angleton famously referred to as the ‘wilderness of mirrors’ that populates espionage. Even when being taught about propaganda, I may be subject to it.

In October 1953, a new monthly magazine was launched in Britain: *Encounter*. An Anglo-American publication, it was a literary magazine that also dabbled in politics: it was liberal but broadly anti-Communist. Its first editors were Irving Kristol and the poet Stephen Spender and it was funded by the Paris-based Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF). It soon became very influential, publishing the work of many of the most famous writers and thinkers of the day, including WH Auden, Vladimir Nabokov, Iris Murdoch and Bernard Russell. But in 1967, it was revealed that the CCF was a CIA front, and that most of the finances for the magazine had come straight from the CIA’s coffers, with the remainder being provided by the British Foreign Office’s innocuously named Information Research Department—a secret propaganda group.

This isn't a conspiracy theory, but fact, as the CIA itself now acknowledges. Stephen Dorril also discusses it at length in his excellent book, *MI6: Inside the Covert World of Her Majesty's Secret Intelligence Service*. The idea for the magazine grew from meetings between MI6 and the CIA, who wanted a way to influence the thinking of the liberal intelligentsia in Britain. The mastermind behind the idea was CIA officer Michael Josselson, a former member of the US Psychological Warfare Division. On the British side, the two leaders of the project were initially Tosco Fyvel, a member of the IRD who had been a close friend of George Orwell, and Malcolm Muggeridge, a senior journalist at *The Daily Telegraph* who also worked for MI6 'part time'. Muggeridge eventually grew disillusioned with the way the behind-the-scenes machinations and withdrew from the project. He was replaced by Goronwy Rees, another MI6 agent. But we now know that before the war Rees had passed information to the Soviets, who had given him the codenames FLEET and GROSS.

To ensure that *Encounter's* propaganda was effective, its audience could not perceive that it was propaganda. As a result, the CIA and MI6 left the majority of the content alone. That way, the magazine established itself, and was taken by British intelligentsia as a genuine and unadulterated liberal voice. Articles that criticized censorship of the arts behind the Iron Curtain were quietly encouraged, and articles that criticized American foreign or domestic policy were quietly discouraged. Stephen Dorril also reveals in his book on MI6 how British agents write articles in magazines under pseudonyms, and discusses articles about the former Yugoslavia published in *The Spectator* in 1994.

As a result of this, figuring out today which of *Encounter's* articles were written with no agenda and which were placed to plant ideas in readers' minds is a difficult task. Similarly, some articles might have

been sincerely meant by their authors, who had no idea of the magazine's real backers, but were published either because they served as good propaganda, or because they served as good cover for other propaganda to be slipped between.

A good example of this dilemma is the issue of May 1966. It contains articles by, among others, Anthony Burgess, Eugène Ionesco, Robert Graves, Frank Kermode (by then an editor of the magazine), Tom Driberg, Malcolm Muggeridge and John le Carré. It's an extremely impressive line-up of contributors, but also an intriguing one from a political perspective. Some of these writers might have been used, without their knowledge, by the CIA and MI6—and some might even have been used *against* the CIA and MI6.

An example of the latter could be Tom Driberg's article. Driberg was a prominent journalist, Labour MP and later Baron Bradwell. He was also gay, and on visiting Moscow in 1956 to interview the British double agent Guy Burgess, he made the mistake of frequenting a lavatory behind the Metropole Hotel to try to pick up men. The KGB showed him 'compromising material' of these photographs, and he was recruited as an agent, codenamed LEPAGE. One of his first acts was the publication of a book on Burgess that claimed he had never spied for the Soviet Union. But Driberg broke off contact with the KGB in 1968, and his very dull 1966 article about Edith Sitwell is not a piece of propaganda for either side in the Cold War. Still, it is intriguing that a Soviet agent of influence was writing articles in an MI6/CIA-fronted magazine.

Another article in this issue was titled 'Africa Without Tears'. It was written by Rita Hinden, a socialist South African academic at the University of London, in reaction to news of a series of political murders that had recently taken place in Nigeria—murders that turned out to be the firing shots in what would become a lengthy

civil war. I don't know whether Hinden wrote the article directly on the behest of the CIA or MI6, but I think it might well have suited their aims, as she essentially argued why everyone should turn a blind eye to the worsening political situation in Nigeria and, in effect, let them get on with it.

Hinden made this argument in a way that appears extremely heartless with the knowledge of the deaths that resulted in the civil war, but even without hindsight it is an example of the sort of bizarre double-think some intellectuals engaged in at the time. She developed her thesis over several thousand words, but I think a sense of what she was doing can be seen in the callousness of the title, and the article's final paragraph:

‘As long as we continue to regard Africans as a “special case” to be courted, flattered, excused, expected-greater-things-from, grieved-over, explained-away, we will still not have recognized that they have, once and for all, severed the naval cord which used to bind us. And Africans will continue to regard us with the irritation—merging eventually into pity—which marks the attitude of grown-up children to their anxious, ridiculous parents.’

I've read this article many times, because my first novel *Free Agent* was set in the Nigerian civil war and I discovered a lot about it while researching. The article shocks me every time I read it. Hinden was the editor of another magazine, *Socialist Commentary*, which reflected the views of the pro-American right wing of the Labour party at the time, and was also involved in the Fabian Society's journal, *Venture*, which was funded by the CCF. Michael Josselson described her as a 'good friend of ours' and said that the CIA relied heavily on her advice for their African operations.

This article might not have been CIA propaganda, but it was nevertheless CIA-funded, and I think it was propaganda. Its aim was to plant the idea in readers' minds that post-colonial guilt was the real crime on which they should focus. She argued that a 'guilt complex' and 'emotionalism' was preventing people from seeing Africa in its proper perspective, and suggested that anyone who felt that Britain had a responsibility to its former colonies was being condescending to Africans—and perhaps even racist. But her claim to respecting Africans was insincere, a pretence that offered readers a convenient excuse for ignoring a growing crisis in a country that, in 1966, had been independent just six years, following 160 years of British rule. It's not callous to be indifferent to the situation in Nigeria, she argued: it's treating them as the adults they want to be. It plants some very unpleasant ideas, which were no doubt repeated at dinner parties across England in various forms in May 1966 and after.

The British government did become involved in the war in Nigeria, but mainly as a supplier of arms to the side they thought had the greater chance of winning and continuing their oil contracts following a ceasefire (the federal side). Many in Britain didn't feel the way Rita Hinden did, and were deeply shocked and moved by the events that took place in Nigeria, and many did something about it. Many Nigerians were irritated by Western involvement but many others weren't, as lives were saved by organizations such as the International Red Cross, Caritas and others.

Finally, there's the article by John le Carré, which is perhaps the most intriguing of the lot. In 1966, he was already very much against American foreign policy, and it is hard to imagine a writer less likely to work for the CIA than him. Even unknowingly, his article goes against what both MI6 and the CIA would have liked the magazine's readers to think, because although it attacks many of the problems in

the Soviet Union, he concludes that ‘there is no victory and no virtue in the Cold War, only a condition of human illness and a political misery’.

In February 1966, three months before this issue was published, le Carré had been interviewed on the BBC’s *Intimations* programme by Malcolm Muggeridge. In that interview, Muggeridge had revealed with a mischievous glint in his eye that he had been a spy during the Second World War. In fact, he was still involved in the espionage world. Le Carré didn’t reveal that he too had been an intelligence officer, and I suspect he had no idea he was then used by MI6 and others in service of an elaborate propaganda operation. The part he played in the operation was tiny: he wrote an article about James Bond.

Did Muggeridge put him up to it? Considering his connections with *Encounter*, his recent interview with le Carré and his own appearance in the same issue, it seems likely he played a part. In his article, le Carré also expanded on remarks he had made to Muggeridge in the BBC interview about Ian Fleming’s character:

‘I’m not sure that Bond is a spy... I think that it’s a great mistake if one’s talking about espionage literature to include Bond in this category at all. It seems to me that he’s more some kind of international gangster with, as is said, a licence to kill. He’s a man with unlimited movement, but he’s a man entirely out of the political context. It’s of no interest to Bond who, for instance, is president of the United States, or who is president of the Union of Soviet Republics. It’s the consumer goods ethic, really—that everything around you, all the dull things of life, are suddenly animated by this wonderful cachet of espionage: the things on our desks that could explode, our ties which could suddenly take photographs. These give to a

drab and material existence a kind of magic which doesn't otherwise exist.'

The previous year, le Carré had commented in a similar vein to Donald McCormick. In *Who's Who In Spy Fiction*. McCormick quoted le Carré as saying that Bond would be 'the ideal defector' because 'if the money was better, the booze freer and women easier over there in Moscow, he'd be off like a shot'.

Titled *To Russia, with Greetings*, his article in *Encounter* took the form of an open letter to the editor of *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, the Soviet Union's leading literary magazine of the day, concerning an article it had published several months earlier by a V. Voinov reviewing two of his novels, *The Spy Who Came In From The Cold* and *The Looking Glass War*. Voinov had argued that, by assuming the role of impartial observer in the Cold War, le Carré was playing a subtler, but more insinuating, game of propaganda than that played by Ian Fleming, and that his fame in the West was a result of readers growing tired of Fleming's 'cheap romanticism'. Voinov also alleged that le Carré had been an intelligence agent.

Le Carré ignored the latter charge (which was true), but rebuffed the rest, pointing out that he was not an apologist for the Cold War at all, but opposed to the methods of both sides:

'In espionage as I have depicted it, Western man sacrifices the individual to defend the individual's right against the collective. That is Western hypocrisy, and I condemned it because it took us too far into the Communist camp, and too near to the Communist's evaluation of the individual's place in society.'

The letter/essay ends with his analysis of Bond:

‘The problem of the Cold War is that, as Auden once wrote, we haunt a ruined century. Behind the little flags we wave, there are old faces weeping, and children mutilated by the fatuous conflicts of preachers. Mr Voinov, I suspect, smelt in my writing the greatest heresy of all: that there is no victory and no virtue in the Cold War, only a condition of human illness and political misery. And so he called me an apologist (he might as well have called Freud a lecher).

James Bond, on the other hand, breaks no such Communist principles. He is the hyena who stalks the capitalist deserts, he is an identifiable antagonist, sustained by capital and kept in good heart by a materialist society; he is a chauvinist, an unblinking patriot who makes espionage exciting, the kind of person in fact who emerges from Lonsdale’s diaries.

Bond on his magic carpet takes us away from moral doubt, banishes perplexity with action, morality with duty. Above all, he has one piece of equipment without which not even his formula would work: an entirely evil enemy. He is on your side, not mine. Now that you have honoured the qualities which created him, it is only a matter of time before you recruit him. Believe me, you have set the stage: the Russian Bond is on his way.’

I discovered this article while browsing in a second-hand bookshop in Rome about a decade ago (and some of the ideas in it influenced me when creating my own character, Paul Dark). But while I find le Carré’s comments on Bond fascinating, I think they address a popular perception of the character, especially as seen in the film adaptations, that isn’t borne out in Ian Fleming’s work. Fleming’s first novel, *Casino Royale*, published in 1953, is by no means a magic

carpet taking us away from moral doubt. Yes, James Bond smokes, drinks and dresses well. But he is also betrayed and tortured, and wracked with doubts about his profession, motivations and more besides. Here is a speech Bond gives in the novel:

‘Take our friend Le Chiffre. It’s simple enough to say he was an evil man, at least it’s simple enough for me because he did evil things to me. If he was here now, I wouldn’t hesitate to kill him, but out of personal revenge and not, I’m afraid, for some high moral reason or for the sake of my country.’

Fleming’s character is a patriot, but as can be seen here he is by no means an unblinking one. And if he were, how would that square with le Carré’s idea that he would defect to Moscow if he thought he could have a better time there?

In this passage and elsewhere, Fleming was influenced by earlier British thriller-writers, notably Geoffrey Household. But he also knew and was a great admirer of Graham Greene, Eric Ambler and Somerset Maugham. The influence of the latter is very clear in his short story *Quantum of Solace*, published in 1960—one could scarcely get further from the idea of ‘banishing perplexity with action’ than that story.

I think le Carré’s article acted as a lure: it was featured on the cover of the magazine, and his name would have attracted readers. But it also acted as cover, because readers of that article might also have then read, for example, Rita Hinden’s, and been influenced by it.

In his article, le Carré wrote of his own novel, *The Spy Who Came In From The Cold*:

‘I tried to touch new ground when I discussed the phenomenon of committed men who are committed to nothing but one another and the dreams they collectively evoke. At heart, I said, professional combatants of the Cold War have no ideological involvement. Half the time they are fighting the enemy, a good deal of the time they are fighting rival departments. The source of their energy lies not in the war of ideas but in their own desolate mentalities; they are the tragic ghosts, the unfallen dead of the last war.’

There were, doubtless, a lot of professional combatants who were involved in the Cold War in just this way. But the irony is that, unknown to le Carré, his own words were being used by men who *did* have an ideological involvement, and who were channeling their energies into the war of ideas.

When Julian Met Graham

JULIAN SEMYONOV WAS the Soviet Union's most famous spy novelist. A bearded, burly Hemingway-esque figure of a man, he was best known for his Second World War-set thriller *Seventeen Moments of Spring*. A bestseller in the Soviet Union on publication in 1969, Semyonov adapted it into a 12-part television series four years later, and it became an indelible part of Soviet culture. It's regarded in Russia to this day with roughly the same degree of reverence as Brits have for the BBC adaptation of *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*.

I was looking at Semyonov when researching *Dead Drop*, because I realized there were incidents in one of his later novels that closely echoed the real events I was writing about. Semyonov died in 1993, but his [official website](#) is crammed with information, including interviews he both gave and conducted (Semyonov was a journalist as well as a novelist). And buried in that website is [this remarkable interview](#) he did with Graham Greene.

In early 1989, Semyonov travelled to Antibes to meet Greene in his home there. He had tried to contact him before, in Moscow in 1985, although Greene doesn't seem to have been aware of this when he mentions it. Greene, who was 84 at the time and would die just two years later, initially seems a little stiff, but soon seems to forget that he's being filmed, and the interview feels very much like eavesdropping on a private conversation. It's also fun to catch a glimpse of how Greene lived—if you look *very* carefully, you can spot a Scrabble box in the background.

This conversation between two of the great spy novelists of the 20th century runs at around an hour and a quarter, and there are several gems in it if you're interested in the Cold War or espionage. The two men happened to meet at a crossroads in history when, finally, they could speak relatively openly with each other, although there are some guarded moments. Semyonov is by turns solicitous and pushy, while Greene occasionally seems a little lost: despite the almost tangible end of the Cold War—the Wall would fall within a few months—the gulf between their worlds is still palpable. Semyonov repeatedly mentions Greene's books, and even offers to buy one to translate into Russian (Greene suggests his 1934 novel *It's A Battlefield*), but only refers to one of them by title, and doesn't ask a single question about their content.

Similarly, Greene seems either unaware or disinterested in the fact he is talking to one of the Soviet Union's most prominent writers. When he relates how a book of his had sold some 14,000 copies in Czechoslovakia despite a decree forbidding it to be reviewed or advertised, Semyonov lets him in on a secret about the Soviet literary scene: a book often sells more if it *hasn't* been reviewed or publicized, because word-of-mouth is much more valued by readers than state approval. Later in the conversation, Semyonov asks if Brits can immediately distinguish shades of sense of humour, such as 'Eton

humour’, ‘Cambridge humour’ and ‘Oxford humour’. Greene visibly squirms. Both writers were masters at delineating the idiosyncracies and nuances of their own countrymen but, perhaps unsurprisingly, seem to have had much less of a grasp of each other’s cultures.

Greene talks at length about his close friendship with the Panamanian leader Omar Torrijos, the subject of his book *Getting To Know The General*, and both men say they disbelieve that his death in a plane crash had been accidental—Greene even points to who he feels is the most likely person to have masterminded a plot to assassinate him! The culprit, he is sure, was Colonel Dario Paredes del Rio.

He also discusses how he ‘detested’ Ronald Reagan, his hopes that the newly elected US president, George Bush Snr, will be more progressive, his time in Czechoslovakia, and reveals his thoughts on Russia and Afghanistan—the latter being a topic both men knew well (Semyonov was fluent in Pashto).

They also discuss censorship, which was something Semyonov was very familiar with: his father had been the editor of *Izvestia*, but had been arrested by the NKVD and spent time in the gulags. Semyonov talks about how he too had been summoned to the Lubyanka, by Yuri Andropov shortly after he had been appointed head of the KGB in 1967. But rather than being put in a cell, Andropov had wanted to help him with his novels—in a 1987 interview, Semyonov revealed that this included being granted access to KGB operational files. Semyonov tells Greene how Andropov had advised him on avoiding the censor’s pen, by simply adding three lines to any potentially controversial scene setting out the other side of the argument. This technique is a hallmark of Semyonov’s work, and it’s fascinating that it was suggested by the head of the KGB. Semyonov played both sides of the fence like this

throughout his career, praising the KGB in his books but doing so in such a way as to almost shame them, by making them conspicuously nobler and more empathetic than their real-life equivalents. His characters often eloquently condemn precisely the sort of narrow-minded behaviour that plagued Soviet bureaucracy as ‘anti-Soviet’, and there are ambiguities galore in *Seventeen Moments of Spring*. [See the next article, *Secreted In Fiction*, for a detailed look at this.]

Greene doesn’t seem to have been aware of any of this, and rather peculiarly seems to have seen Andropov as a reformer who paved the way for Gorbachev’s reforms, something Semyonov agrees to. But Greene had also mentioned, almost in passing, how he had blocked all Soviet translations of his work as a result of the Daniel-Sinyavsky trial in 1966, a restriction he had only lifted a couple of years earlier. Andropov had hardly been a saint in that affair, as Greene must have known. Both men seem to dance around the other’s politics, anxious to please and not offend. Safely ensconced in the era of *glasnost*, Semyonov reveals he felt the Soviet invasions of Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan were mistakes, but he also shows a lot of inside knowledge, and one wonders if it crossed Greene’s mind that Semyonov knew a great many people in the KGB, and that their meeting might well be discussed back in Moscow. At one point, Semyonov asks Greene to sign some books for Raisa Gorbachev, which he duly does. The entire Gorbachev family, he rather unconvincingly claims, are fans of Greene’s work. It seems more likely this would have been a totemic gift for Semyonov, who was a wily networker.

Perhaps the most fascinating part of the discussion comes about halfway through, and revolves around Kim Philby. Greene had known the KGB agent well during the war, when they had both been in MI6, and had (controversially to many in the West), written an introduction to his memoir *My Silent War*. Semyonov is keen to

get his sense of the man, and Greene talks about how fond he was of Philby, and how they had gone to the pub together during the Blitz. He says that he had sometimes asked himself what he would have done if Philby had indicated to him, 'in an unwise moment' over such a drink, that he was a Soviet agent. Greene felt he would have 'given him twenty-four hours to leave the country and then I'd have reported him. In other words, I'd have given him twenty-four hours to get away!'

Perhaps enlivened by the discussion of his old friend Kim, towards the end of the interview Greene suddenly perks up, and he starts to prepare a gin and tonic for the camerawoman, commenting as he does on his most recent (and, it would turn out) last novel, *The Captain and the Enemy*, which he reveals he wasn't fond of, as he felt it had 'too many echoes of other books', and that at one stage he had even abandoned writing it.

And there the footage suddenly ends, with two of the great espionage novelists from either side of the Cold War looking as if they are about to get a little drunk together, in a flat in Antibes in 1989.

Secreted In Fiction

I'VE WRITTEN ABOUT the ways in which spy fiction can influence spy fact in *The Spies We've Loved*, but I came across another intriguing example of this when writing my non-fiction book on the Oleg Penkovsky operation, *Dead Drop*. My research involved interviewing surviving members of the operation, consulting all the available declassified material on it, including debrief transcripts, memoirs, articles and documentaries—and reading spy fiction.

Three novels were particularly helpful. The first was *The Russia House* by John le Carré, which was loosely based on the operation and which contains several details suggesting inside knowledge of it, perhaps as a result of le Carré's long friendship with Dickie Franks, who recruited Greville Wynne for MI6 and would later become 'C'. One snippet, for example, is that the operation in the novel is run from a CIA-funded command centre in London—I discovered in my research that the CIA did fund such a centre, in Pall Mall, but this hadn't been revealed in any previous literature.

The second spy novel I read was *Wages of Treason* by Paul Garbler, who was the CIA station chief in Moscow during the operation (its first station chief in the city, in fact), but later came under suspicion of being a traitor in the feverish molehunts of James Jesus Angleton. His novel, self-published in 2004, was an attempt to explain how Angleton had been fooled by a Soviet deception operation into seeing moles where there were none, and also provided some insights into how Penkovsky was handled, and how the CIA worked in Moscow.

The third novel was a Russian one: Julian Semyonov's *TASS Upolnomochen Zaiavit* ('TASS Is Authorized To Announce'), published in 1979, which I had read a few years earlier but which my other research suggested contained incidents that closely echoed the Penkovsky operation. It's hardly surprising that a Soviet spy novel would draw on one of the most famous operations of the Cold War, just as le Carré had done: in the Soviet Union, Penkovsky was as famous as Kim Philby was in Britain. However, as in *The Russia House*, some information in the novel wasn't public knowledge at the time it was published. And one plot point suggested a way that the KGB could have realized the CIA and MI6 were running an agent in Moscow.

Semyonov—whose real surname was Landres—was one of the Soviet Union's most popular spy novelists. His war-time thriller *Semnadtsat mgnoveniy vesny* ('Seventeen Moments of Spring'), was made into the country's most successful and best-loved television series. In his conversation with Graham Greene [see previous article], Semyonov discussed how Yuri Andropov called him out of the blue in the summer of 1967, shortly after he had been appointed head of the KGB, and asked if he would be interested in being given access to the organization's operational archives

From then on, he told Greene, Andropov had ‘supported him a lot’, although he had occasionally objected to a passage, saying ‘Julian, it is impossible to publish this, because you have bitten us more than Mr Solzhenitsyn!’ On those occasions, instead of cutting his text, Andropov had suggested that Semyonov simply ‘add three lines’ presenting the opposing view: ‘thesis and antithesis’ was the best method. Semyonov told Greene he had never had any problems with censorship as a result, because he simply always added the proverbial three lines presenting the other side of the argument. In another account of this incident, Semyonov said of *TASS Is Authorized To Announce*: ‘If I asked Mr. Andropov to give me materials, of course he liked my books, and he will give me these materials.’ He also interviewed several KGB officers for the novel.²²⁰

Having been called by the head of the KGB in this way made for an entertaining anecdote, but the reality must have been at least a little problematic. On the one hand, he was being given an extraordinary opportunity—what spy novelist wouldn’t leap at the chance of being given access to a secret agency’s most classified operational files? On the other hand, even with Andropov’s three lines he would not be free to treat the material however he wished.

His solution was to push the three lines as far as he could. While much of the novel reads like crude propaganda to Western readers today, at times he appears to have been playing a double game. To the KGB and their censors it may have seemed as if he had done precisely what they had wanted him to do, which was to produce an exciting story in which heroic Soviet agents thwarted ruthless imperialist hyenas.

But between the lines, Semyonov smuggled through slivers of satire and criticism of the Soviet system. The wife of one of his

²²⁰ ‘KGB link adds to author’s intrigue’, Steve Huntley, *Chicago Sun-Times*, October 13 1987; and ‘In Yulian Semyonov’s Thrillers the Villains Are CIA Types – and Some Say the Author Works for the KGB’, Montgomery Brower, *People*, April 6 1987.

protagonists, KGB officer Konstantinov, works as an editor at a publishing house, and he berates her over a manuscript she has asked him to read, calling it a collection of clichés: ‘the bad factory director and the good party organizer, the innovator whom they gagged at first and who in the end gets a medal, the one drunkard in the whole of the workshop... Why do people have to *lie* so? If there was only one drunkard in ever factory shop, I’d be placing lighted candles in the church! The desire to please—*whoever* you are trying to please—is a form of insincerity. And then public opinion suddenly realises what is going on, and everyone starts shouting: “Where have all the whitewashers sprung from?”’

It’s mild by modern comparisons, but in 1979, in a novel approved by the head of the KGB and using KGB materials, quite a remarkable thing to have written. He got away with it by balancing it with more obviously ingratiating material. At one point, KGB officer Vitaly Slavin teases undercover CIA officer John Glebb that he would like to make a film:

‘Or not so much make as finish one off. Take *From Russia With Love*—all I would add is just one more shot! I would put it in just after Bond carried off the coding girl in triumph to London. Just a single line on the screen: “Operation Implant successful. Over to you, Katya Ivanova...”’

This was a crowd-pleasing dig at one of the Soviet Union’s most loathed propaganda figures, James Bond, which also celebrates Russian intelligence’s fondness for *maskirovka*: deception operations. It is a clever piece of propaganda in itself: an apparent Soviet defeat turned to a cunning victory with a twist at the last moment, MI6’s great triumph revealed as the first stage in a plan to infiltrate a Soviet agent into Britain.

Having warmed the patriotic cockles of his readership, and hopefully had the KGB censors smiling benignly down on his manuscript, Semyonov then added another layer. Konstantinov and his wife visit a film director, Ukhov, who is making a spy thriller. Konstantinov is, on the surface, simply being asked his professional advice as a KGB officer about the authenticity of the film: in reality, there is a more sinister subtext. He is acting as its censor, in just the same way Semyonov's books, and indeed the films adapted from them, were being overseen by Andropov. Ukhov shows a scene in which his lead actor plays a traitor to the Soviet Union:

'In the next sequence, the actor tried the role of a spy. Konstantinov immediately reacted against his hunted look: from the very first shot, he conveyed terror and hatred.

'It would be no fun chasing him,' he observed. "You could see him a mile off!'

"So what? Do you want us to make the enemy heroic?' Ukhov exclaimed. "They'd have my head!'

"Who?' Lida asked, placing her hand on her husband's cold fingers. "Who would have your head?'

"I'm afraid it would be your husband, first and foremost.'

"Nonsense,' Konstantinov's face puckered. "If you remember, right through the film I've kept emphasizing that your enemies seem naive and stupid. Whereas they have intelligence and talent—that's right, talent!'

"Can I quote you, when I speak to the Artistic Committee?'

"Don't bother, I can say it myself. I feel sorry, not so much for the audience as for a talented actor. It's humiliating to be forced to speak a lie, while making out it's the truth."

Semyonov appears to have discovered an ingenious way of skirting his own Artistic Committee. On the one hand, by having his wise, cultured and noble KGB protagonist point out the foolhardiness of using crude stereotypes, he was laying down a good rule of propaganda: if you make your enemies caricatures, your audience will not be convinced by your arguments, and your efforts will backfire. He was hoping his own censors would see the sense in this and choose to adopt the same line—and in doing so, this would give him greater leeway to insert subtle criticisms of the system. If they objected, he could counter: ‘Do you really want to be like that fool Ukhov, pretending our enemies are all stupid? I thought you might be mature and sensitive enough to realize that such crude propaganda never persuades anyone...’ The tactic apparently worked, as the passage made it into print, although there is also a rather chilling self-awareness in the line that it is humiliating to be ‘forced to speak a lie’.

This novel, then, seems to be propaganda laced with disguised criticism. If so, it was itself a kind of miniature deception operation, carried out by Semyonov against the KGB. Given access to their files on the unspoken understanding that anything he wrote had to be sufficiently flattering, he smuggled a more critical view past Andropov and the censors.

It seems unlikely he was writing with any hope of being read or interpreted this way in the West, but with the benefit of hindsight several details about KGB operational methods in the novel that were let through because they were part of an overall picture painting the intelligence services in a heroic light now suggest a different story, and offer a glimpse into the KGB’s mindset and techniques during the Cold War, and specifically how it might have discovered, and reacted to, the Penkovsky operation.

Spies Of Fleet Street

IN DECEMBER 1968, the state-controlled Russian newspaper *Izvestia* ran a series of articles accusing several high-profile British journalists of being spies—listing their names and alleged codenames. The articles caused a storm of protest in Britain: the Russians were claiming journalists and editors at *The Sunday Times*, *The Observer*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Daily Mail* and the BBC worked directly with MI6.

The Soviets' evidence for all this? A cache of documents they claimed were MI6 memos, and which looked to have been photographed with a miniature spy camera. One showed a table listing each publication, the journalist or editor MI6 had as its contact there, their codename and the codename of their MI6 'handler'. Another discussed the procedure for the BBC to broadcast prearranged tunes or sentences that could be used by MI6 officers in the field to prove they were acting on behalf of the British government.

At the time, the claims were dismissed as nonsense by all the newspapers and journalists concerned. The head of the BBC's External Service—later renamed the World Service—called the articles 'a fantastic example of secret police propaganda'.

It is true that during the Second World War the BBC had broadcast coded messages to British secret agents behind enemy lines, and that some journalists had worked with MI6 in producing propaganda. But could such activities have really continued into the post-war peacetime period?

When examined by BBC Radio 4's *Document* programme, the format, language and tone of the documents all rang true, but establishing whether they were genuine was not simple: MI6 never discusses its operations or declassifies files and all the people named are dead. But a clear consensus emerged among espionage historians and former correspondents contacted by the programme: despite all the denials, the memos were genuine.

'These are genuine MI6 documents,' says Stephen Dorril, author of a history of MI6, adding that former MI6 officer Anthony Cavendish had told him before his death that the organisation used journalists in the Cold War.

A clue as to how the Russians got hold of them lay in the date of one of the documents—September 1959. The memos were most likely passed to the Soviets by George Blake, a KGB agent working within MI6, Mr Dorril believes.

At the time, Blake was often the night duty officer at MI6 headquarters in London, and he would roam the corridors with his Minox camera photographing every file he could find, before passing the films to his KGB controller.

Professor Christopher Andrew, MI5's official historian and an expert in Soviet espionage techniques, suggested an even more intriguing theory. Blake might have originally photographed the

documents and passed them over, but the Russians could then have consulted the greatest double agent of all time, Kim Philby, about how they should be used.

Before he had defected to Moscow in 1963, Philby had been under suspicion by MI6 and had been working part-time as a journalist for *The Observer* and *The Economist* in Beirut. Philby had been employed at *The Observer* by the paper's editor, David Astor—who was one of those named by the Soviet press as an MI6 asset. Mr Astor always denied he was a member of MI6, but the circumstances which led to him being named suggest Philby's involvement.

'What Philby was very good at was identifying those things which would be, from the point of view of the British public, the most effective propaganda,' Professor Andrew said.

Izvestia's allegations created a brief media storm in the UK in late 1968, but the denials were effective enough that the charges made little impact on how the British public viewed Fleet Street. But at least some of the journalists and editors named by the Russians did have links with MI6.

Phillip Knightley, the *Sunday Times* journalist, said it was well known among the press pack that his colleague Henry Brandon, who was named by *Izvestia*, worked for MI6. Mr Knightley also said that one of the others named by the Soviets, *The Daily Telegraph's* managing editor Roy Pawley, had arranged journalistic cover for MI6 officers. He said Mr Pawley was 'notorious' in Fleet Street for his MI6 connection.

The historian and biographer Sir Alistair Horne also confirmed to *Document* that he had run three agents for MI6 while working for *The Daily Telegraph* in Germany in the 1950s, and that Mr Pawley had been aware of his role. 'A whole new generation has the impression the Cold War wasn't serious,' Mr Horne told *Document*.

‘For those of us who lived through it, it was. We felt we were at war.’

The BBC’s official historian Jean Seaton said the claim that the BBC had broadcast prearranged messages during the post-war period was ‘very plausible’.

The Soviets naturally put the worst slant possible on the memos, but in the main they were telling the truth: during the Cold War, MI6 did have a network of journalists and editors embedded in the British press.

According to Stephen Dorril, the documents offer a rare glimpse into the workings of MI6, and open up a new field of research. ‘We really need to go back and look in detail at some of the key events of the Cold War,’ he says. ‘Look at the newspapers, see what was planted, who were the journalists, and what was it they were trying to put out and say to the British public.’

A London Spy Walk

‘A SOUTH KENSINGTON address is definitely an asset’.

It sounds like an estate agent’s blurb, but it’s actually a secret agent’s. It’s from a report on London written by a Soviet spy in the 1930s, seized by MI5 during the war. The agent recommended South Kensington as a base because it had a good reputation with the police—so furtive-looking men meeting in cafés would be less likely to be questioned.

The whole of Kensington and Chelsea is teeming with espionage locations, in fact. To get a flavour, here’s a quick tour—and don’t forget to check for tails!

First, take the Tube to South Kensington. Head west on Pelham Street and turn left down Old Brompton Road. Take another left at Roland Gardens, turn right to keep on it, and then take a left into Drayton Gardens. If you peek into Holly Mews about halfway down, you’ll find *Grove Court*. The late-Victorian basement flat at number 18 once belonged to the mother of Kim Philby, the notorious double agent who spied for the KGB while heading up MI6’s anti-Soviet section. In 1955, Philby held a press conference in this flat to gloat

over the fact that he had been officially cleared of being ‘the Third Man’. But eight years later the trap finally closed in on him in Beirut, and he fled to Moscow, never to return.

Walk back onto *Drayton Gardens* and head down to number 102a. In 1941, it was at this address that the poet Stephen Spender and his bride Natasha celebrated their wedding—at the time it was being rented by their friend Cyril Connolly. And the spy connection? The reception was attended by, among others, Philby’s fellow double agent Guy Burgess and the Hungarian-born architect Ernő Goldfinger, whose surname Ian Fleming would later appropriate for one of his best-known villains. One can’t help wonder whether Burgess and Goldfinger chatted at the party, about life behind the Iron Curtain, perhaps—or ways to cheat at golf.

Head back down Drayton Gardens. Cross Fullham Road and head all the way down until you reach the King’s Road. Turn left and walk up the King’s Road, past Chelsea Town Hall (a good meeting point according to the 1930s Soviet handbook), until you reach *Wellington Square* on your right. In Fleming’s novels, James Bond lived in a comfortable flat in a ‘plane-tree’d square’ off the King’s Road. And according to his biographer John Pearson, this is the most likely candidate.

A very short walk from 007 is the address of another famous fictional secret agent: George Smiley. Head back up to the King’s Road and cross over into *Bywater Street*—John le Carré’s shy but brilliant spy lived at number 9. It’s probably a better location than Bond’s flat, as cul-de-sacs are harder to keep under surveillance.

Now head back up the King’s Road and turn left at Anderson Street. This soon becomes Sloane Avenue, and at number 87 you’ll find *Chelsea Cloisters*. During the Second World War, this rather posh block of flats was used by the Special Operations Executive to

debrief agents on their return from missions overseas. My fictional MI6 agent, Paul Dark, also lives here.

Keep heading up Sloane Avenue and it becomes Pelham Road. Soon we'll be back at South Kensington Tube, but if the walk has made you hungry or parched, take a right onto Thurloe Square and then a left onto Thurloe Street. At number 20, you'll find *Café Daquise*. This cheap, cosy Polish restaurant opened in 1947, and during the Cold War was a stomping ground for Eastern European spies, as well as Christine Keeler, who used to meet here with Yevgeny Ivanov, the senior naval attaché at the Russian Embassy. Savour the atmosphere over some *barszcz*, round it off with some vodka, and then head up Thurloe Street and back to South Kensington Tube again.

Top Ten Spy Gadgets

1. Poison-tipped umbrella

Probably the most infamous real-life spy gadget is the umbrella used by the Bulgarian secret services—with KGB help—to kill the dissident writer and broadcaster Georgi Markov. KGB technicians converted the tip of the umbrella into a silenced gun that could fire a pellet containing a lethal dose of ricin. On September 7, 1978, Markov felt himself being jabbed in the thigh as he walked across Waterloo Bridge. A man behind him apologised and stepped into a taxi. Markov died four days later. No arrests have ever been made.

2. Dart gun

It wasn't just Soviet bloc spies who used such techniques, though. In a 1975 US Senate hearing, CIA Director William Colby handed the committee's chairman a gun developed by his researchers. Equipped with a telescopic sight, it could accurately fire a tiny dart—tipped with shellfish toxin or cobra venom—up to 250 feet. Colby

claimed that this and other weapons had never been used, but couldn't entirely rule out the possibility.

3. Compass buttons

During the war, the Special Operations Executive—'Churchill's secret army'—created a wealth of Q-like devices. One ingenious invention was magnetized trouser buttons, which were to be used for agents who got lost—if they were taken prisoner, for example. By cutting off the buttons and balancing them on each other, they turned into compasses.

4. Exploding briefcase

Another SOE invention was a briefcase designed to hold sensitive documents, but which would act as a booby trap for any enemy agent. If the right-hand lock was held down and simultaneously pushed to the right, the case would open safely; otherwise, the left-hand lock would ignite.

5. Exploding rat

If an exploding briefcase weren't enough, the SOE boffins created something even more outlandish to battle the Nazis—an exploding rat. Developed in 1941, the device used the skin of a real rat, with a fuse concealed inside. The idea was to use them to blow up German boilers, but they were quickly discovered and so never put into production.

6. Cigarette-case gun

In 1954, Soviet agent Nikolai Khokhlov was sent to Frankfurt to assassinate an anti-Communist leader. But Khokhlov had a last-minute attack of nerves, and instead defected to the Americans. The Americans wasted no time in showing the world press the would-be

assassin's equipment, which included a gold cigarette case that concealed an electrically operated gun capable of firing cyanide-tipped bullets. In Ian Fleming's novel *From Russia, With Love*, fearsome assassin Red Grant tells his masters at SMERSH that they gave the job to the wrong man: 'I wouldn't have gone over to the Yanks.'

7. HOLLOWED-OUT LIGHTER

In 1960, MI5 broke up a ring of KGB spies, at the centre of which were two Americans, Morris and Lona Cohen. The Cohens lived in a bungalow in Ruislip under cover as antiquarian booksellers Peter and Helen Kroger. But when MI5 searched the bungalow, they discovered an astonishing array of spy paraphernalia, including a cigarette lighter made by Ronson (the same brand as favoured by James Bond), inside of which were hidden several one-time cipher pads. These were printed on cellulose nitrate and impregnated with zinc oxide so they would be easy to burn, thus destroying the evidence. But the Cohens weren't quick enough, and they served eight years in prison before being exchanged with Gerald Brooke in 1969.

8. WALLET DOCUMENT CAMERA

Most intelligence agencies want to recruit people with access to top-secret material, but once they have been recruited they still have to photograph the documents you're after. If the security is too tight to remove them from the premises, one way of doing this is to smuggle in a camera. During the Cold War, the KGB developed several disguised cameras, including one that looked just like a wallet—the edge of it was rolled against a document to expose the film. In the Sixties, signals intelligence technician Douglas Britten was blackmailed by the KGB into using one of these to photograph

material at RAF Digby. But Britten was in turn photographed by MI5 at the Soviet Consulate in London, and when confronted pleaded guilty to treason.

9. Microphone in an olive

Also in the Sixties, American private detective Hal Lipset became famous when he demonstrated an unusual bugging device at a Senate subcommittee on surveillance: a miniature microphone hidden inside a fake olive. Perfect for placement inside a vodka Martini, the toothpick acted as an antenna. The range was short—about thirty feet—but Lipset's show convinced the Senate to toughen the laws on recording people without their consent.

10. Rock bug

These days, bugs can act as cameras, 'reading' digital documents and communicating in other ways. But however hi-tech espionage becomes, it seems nobody can resist an old-fashioned disguised gadget. In 2006, Russian television claimed it had footage of British embassy officials transmitting information via a receiver disguised as a rock in a Moscow street. The British government denied the claim.

In From The Cold

KEITH JEFFERY'S *MI6: The History of the Secret Intelligence Service 1909–1949* (Bloomsbury) is the first authorized history of the organization best known for being James Bond's employer—and at times it reads like the script for a Bond film. For example, MI6 really did have a research department that created clandestine weaponry and gadgets, a section of which was called Q Branch and was run by a former army quartermaster colonel designated 'Q'. According to a memo extracted in the book, in 1947 MI6's boffins were busy trying to perfect gun silencers, knock-out tablets, methods to open safes, instantaneous ways to burn paper and a 'device which will increase the security of operators on burglarious enterprises'.

The book is packed with this sort of wonderfully euphemistic jargon, which will no doubt provide fodder for spy novelists for years to come. Professor Jeffery is the first independent historian to have been given the combination to MI6's safe—although the National Archives regularly declassifies files from its sister service MI5 and its wartime rival the Special Operations Executive, MI6 has never released any of its files, claiming that might jeopardize current

operations. As a result, this book reveals little substantial new information, but instead offers a comprehensive and authoritative summary of MI6's early years.

Although the book is a doorstopper, I wished Jeffery had lingered a little longer on some of the more intriguing operations. For instance, in 1941 MI6 landed two Dutch agents onto the coast of occupied Holland by motor gunboat. One of them, Peter Tazelaar, was dressed in a watertight drysuit, under which he wore formal black tie. When he got ashore his colleague, Eric Hazelhoff, helped him strip off the drysuit and splashed brandy over his evening clothes, and Tazelaar then wove his way past German sentries pretending to be a drunken partygoer in the area, after which he managed to make contact with the Dutch Resistance. This extraordinary operation is about as James Bond-ish as one can imagine, and is in fact strikingly similar to the opening of *Goldfinger*. But although the operation has been mentioned in several books over the years, including MRD Foot's official history of the Special Operations Executive and Eric Hazelhoff's autobiography, Jeffery only quotes a handful of phrases from the MI6 file, leaving us none the wiser about it other than that it happened.

It seems a missed opportunity, but is no doubt less to do with compromising current operations and more to do with space. Jeffery had a lot of material to choose from. He dedicates a few pages to a fascinating double-cross operation in the war conducted by a glamorous but unnamed 22-year-old Central European woman living in Lisbon who took up with a senior Abwehr officer and volunteered to help the British. She was given the codename Ecclesiastic and handled by 'Klop' Ustinov, father of the actor Peter Ustinov who, judging by the excerpts of his reports, felt she was enjoying the deception too much without any concrete results. But despite his initial scepticism, Ecclesiastic went on to pass her lover

reams of disinformation that had been specially manufactured by MI6 to look as though it had been fished out of wastepaper baskets, which he obligingly sent back to Berlin for the rest of the war.

Other operations were not as successful, and one of the strengths of the book is that even when relaying the events through snippets of reports—MI6 destroyed many of its files as it went along, reasoning that none of it would ever be published anyway—the human stories shine through. We learn that Sidney Reilly, the famous ‘ace of spies’ who was MI6’s man in Russia from 1918 on, was regarded from the offset as ‘entirely unscrupulous’ by some in the intelligence world, and as he was pursuing his own personal mission to bring down the Bolsheviks some of his material was inevitably slanted—proof, if needed, that the idea of sexed up dossiers is nothing new.

Reilly is one of many agents whose motivations proved problematic for MI6. It is often said that spies work for money, ideology, coercion, ego or a combination of these. A steady salary seems to have been the motivation for many agents in the field, and led to a lot of confusion. Sources who initially appeared to be rock solid turned out to be serving several masters at once, sometimes offering all of them forged material—a problem fictionalized in the novel *Our Man In Havana* by Graham Greene, whose service with MI6 in Sierra Leone is also detailed.

More alarming than greed was deception for the sake of ideology: from the 1930s onward, the Soviet double agents Kim Philby and George Blake were making their way up the ranks of MI6 undetected. For the four decades it covers, Jeffery has provided a comprehensive look at MI6’s successes, failures—perhaps missing Philby being the greatest—administrative struggles within Whitehall and its liveliest characters. Unfortunately, the organization has said that its archives will remain closed to the public and that it has no

NEED TO KNOW

plans for a history of any later years. On the evidence of this landmark account, it would seem a shame if the agency didn't one day offer its side of the story on the Cold War.

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Paperback Writers

BOND IS BACK. Although the 50th anniversary of 007's first appearance, in Ian Fleming's *Casino Royale*, is next year, Penguin has nipped in early and has already reissued all the Bond novels in classy new covers to celebrate. A wise move, perhaps, considering the hype about to engulf us all: 2002 is also the 40th anniversary of the first Bond film, *Dr No*, and to help hammer that home, the 20th film in the series, *Die Another Day* (due out on November 22), promises to include several nods to classic Bond moments—including Halle Berry ascending from the ocean in a bikini, *à la* Honey Ryder. We're in for a Fleming fest.

But while 007 and his creator seem destined to hog the limelight in coming months, some old foes are lurking in the shadows, gathering strength to do battle with the tuxedoed super-spy once again.

Bond, James Bond is now such a dominant cultural figure that it's easy to forget that Fleming fashioned him after adventure heroes such as The Scarlet Pimpernel, Bulldog Drummond and The Saint. But following the success of the first few films in the early Sixties, Bond

began attracting imitators of his own: TV series such as *The Man from U.N.C.L.E* and *Mission: Impossible*, Hollywood films such as *Our Man Flint*, and a slew of gaudy paperbacks promising slick, sexy and sadistic secret agents.

Most of the ‘Bond clones’ have rightly been forgotten. But for every Man from O.R.G.Y., there was a Harry Palmer. Behind some of the scantily clad sirens on these now dusty covers lurk believable characters, gripping plots and dazzling prose. One lesser known example is John Braine. Braine is most famous for being one of the Angry Young Men, a group of British writers in the 1950s—including Alan Sillitoe, John Osborne and Kingsley Amis—who rebelled against the establishment in excoriating novels and plays about working-class life. Braine’s novel *Room at the Top* is a modern classic; the 1959 film adaptation of it, starring Laurence Harvey, won two Academy Awards, despite receiving an ‘X’ certificate in Britain.

The work of the Angry Young Men had a great impact on the spy novel—until their arrival it had predominantly featured patriotic upper-class gentlemen beating off plots by Johnny Foreigner with a customized walking stick as something to while away the time before the hunting season begun. The nameless anti-hero of Len Deighton’s *The IPCRESS File* and its sequels owes a lot to *Room at the Top*’s Joe Lampton.

It also worked the other way around: Deighton helped legitimize the spy novel, but the gentlemen adventurers still prospered, notably in the work of Ian Fleming. James Bond might have been expelled from Eton, but he still wore Savile Row suits. ‘Bondmania’ took hold in the Sixties, leading to a proliferation of imitators. In 1968, following Fleming’s death, Kingsley Amis, former Angry Young Man and a friend of Braine, wrote the Bond novel *Colonel Sun*. This and an earlier book by Amis on the Bond phenomenon went some

way to legitimizing Fleming's brand of adventures. But it wasn't for another eight years that Braine tried his hand at a spy thriller.

The Pious Agent was marketed as a Bond clone: the cover of my edition has a young woman wearing black lace underwear being held by a man holding a gun, with a rosary wrapped round his wrist. And there are certainly plenty of Flemingesque (or should that be 'Flemish?') touches. Braine's hero Xavier Flynn is a half-Irish, half-British counter-espionage agent. He drives fast, has easy sex with beautiful women and goes after a S.P.E.C.T.R.E.-style terrorist group named F.I.S.T., standing for Fear, Insurrection, Sabotage and Terror. So far, so preposterous. But stylistically, the novel is much more akin to early Deighton (or the other way round). Flynn is working class, a rough diamond, religious but still deeply cynical.

A sequel, *Finger of Fire*, was published in 1977. While it's not quite as good as the previous installment, it's still great stuff. At one point in the novel, a villain calls Flynn 'a smudged carbon-copy of James Bond'. He's much more than that, although one of the reasons I like these two books is to see a twist on the familiar themes. Here's a chance to get all the stuff you like about Bond, but with the thrill of the unfamiliar; to immerse yourself in another formula, a new iconography. Flynn drinks Bison vodka, prays for his victims, and his agency uses CS Lewis' Narnia novels as a base for its codes. Somehow, it doesn't feel contrived: Flynn is as much his own man as Deighton's unnamed narrator or Bond. What really lifts these two books, particularly the first, is the writing: you start out thinking you're reading a well-crafted Bond clone but by the end feel like you've put down a minor classic.

Another writer who managed to mine similar territory to Fleming but created a substantial following of his own is Peter O'Donnell. A script-writer for newspaper comic strips—among them the Daily Express' adaptation of *Goldfinger*—O'Donnell was asked in 1962 to

come up with a new spy series. He remembered an incident when he had been stationed with the British Army in the Caucasus Mountains during the war: a 12-year-old girl had boldly walked into the camp looking for food. The girl inspired the character of Modesty Blaise, an orphan from Hungary who had grown up to head a global criminal organisation called The Network, before packing it all in to carry out hair-raising missions for the British government.

The strip appeared in the *Evening Standard* the following year—and has been there ever since. In 1966, it was made into a dreadful film starring Monica Vitti, Terence Stamp and Dirk Bogarde. Now, Hollywood is trying again: Miramax has already finished shooting *My Name Is Modesty*. It's directed by Scott Spiegel, but 'presented' by Quentin Tarantino, who has long harboured the wish to see the character return to the silver screen. It follows the Modesty's early years as a refugee and criminal, seemingly with the aim of introducing a series. Unknown British actress Alexandra Staden plays the lead.

O'Donnell isn't in favour of the prequel idea, and says he won't comment publicly on the film. But, in the meantime, his 13 novels featuring the character—arguably the best drawn female in the genre—are available at your nearest second-hand book emporium, and are well worth seeking out.

Modesty Blaise isn't the only former Bond rival to be resurrected. Even MGM—the makers of the Bond films—are getting in on the act. In the mid-Nineties, they bought the rights to Elleston Trevor's series about Quiller, a bitten-eared Cold War alley-cat of a British agent. It was reported that they planned to release a Quiller between each of Bond's excursions, but so far nothing has materialized.

But perhaps the most surprising cold warrior to be slated for a comeback is Matt Helm. In February, Dreamworks announced that they have optioned Donald Hamilton's 27 Helm thrillers, and that

Gary Luketic (*Legally Blonde*) has already signed on to direct the first film.

Helm previously hit the silver screen in the Sixties, in four Bond spoofs starring Dean Martin. That carousing lush bore no relation to the Helm of the books, who was a ruthless government assassin. Hamilton himself is a little kinder on Dino: ‘Well, he was not the guy I would have picked,’ he says from his home in Gotland, off the coast of Sweden. ‘He was never going to be as tough as I would have liked the character, but I think he did a pretty good job considering the baggage he came with.’ Had he been given the choice, however, he says he would have picked Richard Boone for the role.

After writing several pulps and Westerns, Hamilton wrote his first Helm novel, *Death of a Citizen*, in 1960. ‘I didn’t know any killers or secret agents or anything. I was just looking to write about a good, violent character,’ he says. At the start of the novel, Helm is a married photographer living in Santa Fe, but he is soon drawn back into a world he thought he had left behind in the war. The transformation from family man to killer is chilling, and it contains some of the greatest hardboiled prose outside Hammett and Chandler.

Although the character has often been called ‘the American Bond’, there are few similarities—Helm is a lanky, laconic Swedish-American who wouldn’t know what to do with a tux—and Fleming was not yet very popular in the US in 1960. Still, Hamilton admits to being a Fleming admirer. And, like Bond’s creator, he has never been popular with feminists. ‘A lady came up to me at a party once and screamed that she detested my monstrous, misogynistic character Matt Helm,’ he chuckles. What did you reply? “That’s too damn bad.”

Now 86, Hamilton is increasingly frail, and losing his memory; our conversation is peppered with long pauses. Last year, he completed his 28th Helm adventure, *The Dominators*, which is set

on the East Coast of the US and has Helm trying to stop a plot to assassinate the President. He says it will probably be his last novel, although he plans to write some short stories when he feels up to it.

Although over 20 million Helm books are estimated to have been published around the world, Hamilton's publisher, Ballantine, has declined to take up *The Dominators*, saying that there's no longer a market for this genre. Hamilton probably made more money from Martin's films than he ever did from his books, but he may have irreparably damaged his legacy in doing so. One can only hope that Dreamworks manage to produce a film worthy of his talent, and that the stain of being a Bond knockoff is finally removed from his character.

Another novelist stigmatised as being a 'mere thriller writer' is John Gardner, who holds a peculiar position in the genre: having penned a series of Bond parodies in the Sixties, he was approached by Glidrose, Ian Fleming's literary estate, in 1979 and asked if he would turn gamekeeper and continue the series proper.

After Fleming's death in 1964, Kingsley Amis had written one Bond novel, *Colonel Sun*, under the pen name Robert Markham. Now Glidrose were looking for someone to bring 007 to a new readership. 'We didn't want another Amis,' says Peter Janson-Smith, Fleming's former literary agent and Glidrose board member at the time. 'We reasoned that someone that famous wouldn't want to take on another writer's character for any length of time.'

Gardner, who had written numerous spy thrillers and a continuation of the Sherlock Holmes stories, fitted the bill. Still, he was reluctant. 'I didn't fancy the idea at all,' he admits. 'But when I told my agent—Glidrose had approached me separately—he said 'You know you could do it. And if you don't, someone else will.' Then I started thinking about accepting.'

When he did, he decided not to watch any more of the films, so as not to be distracted. He published *Licence Renewed* in 1981, and went on to write another 13 original Bond novels. But despite maintaining solid sales over the years, Gardner was much maligned by many Fleming aficionados, ‘mainly for not being Ian Fleming’, he says. Older fans blanched at a Bond who cried at funerals and visited EuroDisney, and Amis lambasted Gardner in the press for letting the agent smoke, drink and gamble less.

Does he regret having taken the job? ‘In a way I do, yes. Bond is a formula, and I was intrigued by the idea of taking that on but, ultimately, it was a no-win situation from the start.’

Ironically, some of Gardner’s earlier novels are more like Fleming than his Bond efforts (perhaps because they were written in the Sixties). His eight novels featuring Boysie Oakes, an assassin for the British government who is so squeamish that he sub-contracts his ‘liquidations’ out, are enormous fun. The first was made into a film in 1965, complete with Shirley Bassey title number. ‘Boysie was a piss-take of Bond,’ he says. ‘But he was mine. Bond was never mine, and he always felt unreal to me. Nobody, however brave, is never afraid. So I tried to put a little of Boysie into him.’

In 1995, Gardner was diagnosed with oesophageal cancer. ‘I didn’t think I had much time,’ he says. Without telling Glidrose how ill he was, he resigned from the job. Or, as Janson-Smith puts it: ‘We mutually decided he was running out of steam.’

By the time Gardner had recovered, his wife had died of liver cancer, and a new Bond writer had been appointed: Raymond Benson, a computer-game designer and Fleming fanatic (his sixth novel, *The Man With The Red Tattoo*, was published earlier this year, and he is soon to ‘novelize’ *Die Another Day*). Gardner, elated to be alive, nevertheless felt bitterly disappointed with Glidrose. ‘I

was appalled that they chose an American,' he says, in an odd echo of Amis' scorn towards him.

Now in his mid-70s, Gardner lives in Basingstoke and continues to write every day. He is working on *The Streets of Town*, the second in a series about a female detective-sergeant in World War Two London (the first, *Bottled Spider*, has just been released in paperback). I ask him what has inspired him to write all these decades. 'Hunger, mainly,' he replies. 'And the desire to live extremely well.'

The survival instinct is strong in writers. Martin Cruz Smith, bestselling author of *Gorky Park* among many others, began his career dashing off thrillers under pseudonyms. Between 1972 and 1973, he wrote three Nick Carter adventures to feed his family: *The Devil's Dozen*, *Code Name: Werewolf* and *The Inca Death Squad*.

Carter was one of the most published characters in fiction—a detective in dime novels since the 19th century, he had been given a swift makeover in the Bond-fuelled spy fever of the early Sixties. By the Seventies, the gung-ho American agent for AXE was battling Russians, Arabs and Orientals around the world and bedding beautiful women along the way in what seemed like a new adventure every week. 'There isn't a writer in America today who hasn't written a Nick Carter novel,' Cruz Smith notes wryly when I ask him how he got involved. 'Anyone who has been desperate enough has succumbed.'

Cruz Smith wrote each in six days flat, using locations he already knew well. 'I tried reading one recently, and couldn't make any sense of it at all,' he says. Despite his dismissiveness, all three show glimpses of the writer he would become. There are some particularly delicious descriptions: 'The odds of survival were slimmer than a scorpion's waist', for example. 'They're the closest to noir I ever came,' Cruz Smith says. He also admits to having a soft spot for *The Devil's*

Dozen, in which Carter figures out a way of smuggling opium undetected. I won't give the method away—but it is pleasingly ingenious.

After Carter, an editor told Cruz Smith that he was looking for someone to write a new paperback series. 'I wasn't interested in another Nick Carter kind of thing, so I proposed my own series,' says Cruz Smith. 'I thought it was a fairly entertaining idea, and so did the editor—but we were about the only ones.' The Inquisitor, an assassin working for the Vatican, featured in six books, and they're all great fun. Particularly good is *The Midas Coffin*, in which our hero joins forces with a former British agent called James Carlin to steal 14 million dollars of gold. 'What those books taught me was pace,' says Cruz Smith. 'Then you need to learn how to step away from the pace.'

Cruz Smith's new novel, *December 6*, set on the eve of the attack on Pearl Harbour, is released in the UK this week, but he's already set his mind to the next, which will be the fifth in his Arkady Renko series. All he will reveal for now is that Renko returns to Russia, 'because that's pretty much all I know myself right now. I've got a few ideas, but those can change dramatically as I start to research the book.'

Cruz Smith has left his Cold War capers behind him, but a few so-called 'literary' writers are turning to just such stories for inspiration. In his 1997 novel *Death Will Have Your Eyes*, acclaimed American poet, crime writer and biographer James Sallis turned in a riff on the spy genre. 'I'd long been a fan of Donald Hamilton and Philip Atlee,' he says, 'And the novel began as a homage to them.' Sallis decided to take various clichés of the genre—the spy drawn unwillingly back into service, rendezvous with glamorous women and counteragents—and 'like a jazz musician working off a pop tune,

see what might be in there.’ The resulting novel is a winding road trip that becomes an elegy for the Cold War.

William Boyd—whose latest novel, *Any Human Heart*, has Ian Fleming as a minor character—is also considering writing an espionage novel. ‘I think it’ll be in the Fifties—that’s period now. Spy thrillers probably need to be set before the Wall came down to deliver the full weight of the genre,’ he says. ‘I do feel like the Cold War has impinged on my life: I vividly remember being a terrified ten-year-old during the Cuban missile crisis.’ He doesn’t have much time for the internet conspiracies of Clancy et al: ‘I think technology has killed the spy story, in a way. When everyone’s got a cell phone, you lose some of the tension. A Western doesn’t work if they’re driving jalopies around. They’ve got to be on horses with guns around their waists.

As many established novelists hit middle age, could a new wave of Cold War spy thrillers emerge? If so, don’t be diverted by the continuing flurry over Fleming—you might miss out.

From Sweden, With Love

‘I WAS MARCHED smartly across the dark, snow-covered parade ground and shown into an office where a man dressed in civilian clothes awaited me. He wasn’t a civilian, though, because he said, “I am Captain Morelius.” He had watchful grey eyes and a gun in a holster under his jacket. “You will come with me.”’

If you’re a fan of thrillers, this passage from Desmond Bagley’s 1977 best-seller *The Enemy* may contain a familiar, perhaps even comforting, element: the name Morelius. Over the years, characters with that name have appeared in thrillers by several writers. In Raymond Benson’s 2000 James Bond novel *Doubleshot*, for example, Dr Iwan Morelius is the plastic surgeon who operates on a mercenary to create a doppelganger of 007, while in Walter Wager’s 1982 thriller *Designated Hitter*, Colonel Iwan Morelius is a target for assassination.

But few people know of the real Iwan Morelius. A deeply tanned ex-soldier with a white beard, he looks fit and lively for a man in his seventies as we sit in the Stockholm sunshine discussing his remarkable place in the history of the thriller. For as well as his cameos, Morelius—also known as Iwan Hedman-Morelius or just Iwan Hedman—has been a friend, supporter and researcher for several renowned thriller-writers, and has known many more. I first noticed him mentioned in the author’s note of Colin Forbes’ *The Stockholm Syndicate*, and after coming across him a few more times decided to do some research. I eventually traced him to Spain, where he retired in the 1980s after a long career in the Swedish army, and we struck up a friendship over our shared love of vintage thrillers.

When I was at school in England in the 1980s, there was a healthy *samizdat* trade in creased paperbacks by the likes of Alistair Maclean, Frederick Forsyth, Jack Higgins and Dennis Wheatley. The latter provided the most illicit thrills. He is best remembered now, if at all, for his occult thrillers, but he also wrote epic swashbucklers and spy stories: they were racy, violent, fun books, with cliff-hangers at every turn, and they kept me awake many a night. Morelius had a similar experience. ‘I read my first Dennis Wheatley novel when I was eleven,’ he says. ‘That sort of book was forbidden to youngsters like me—there was sex in them. But for that reason they were quite interesting for a boy to read!’

In his twenties, Morelius joined the army, and started to collect Wheatley’s work. He discovered that Wheatley had written several books that had not yet been translated into Swedish, and in 1961 wrote to the author—‘in bad English’—and received a reply and a signed book. The two corresponded intermittently for years, and became friendly, eventually meeting. ‘Later on he called me Iwan. But at the beginning it was always Sergeant-Major. He was quite old-fashioned.’

Morelius didn't just read Wheatley, though. He devoured works by Leon Uris, Ian Fleming, Donald Hamilton and others. He also wrote to them, and in many cases received replies. In 1968, he set up the magazine *Detective Agent Science fiction Thriller*, known as *DAST*, which opened more doors. His magazine promoted the work of dozens of British and American thriller-writers in Sweden, and Morelius soon found himself invited to conferences and other events, and became friends with several thriller-writers. Subscribers to *DAST* were given a special card and number: Leslie Charteris, creator of *The Saint*, had number 005, while Wheatley had 008—007 went to a friend at Bonnier's, the Swedish publisher of Ian Fleming's novels.

Morelius' closest bond in the thriller world was probably with Desmond Bagley—known as Simon to friends—and he and his first wife frequently holidayed with the Bagleys. As well as their friendship, Bagley appreciated Morelius' expertise on firearms, and consulted him on that and other subjects. *The Tightrope Men*, published in 1973, was set in Norway and Finland, and a key scene involved the failure of a Husqvarna Model 40 to fire at a crucial moment: Morelius had shown Bagley a peculiarity with the pistol's barrel that meant if it were not forced back the trigger wouldn't pull. *The Enemy*, published in 1977, was partly set in Sweden, and as well as featuring Morelius as a minor character was dedicated to Iwan and the other 'DASTards'.

Morelius also struck up a friendship with Geoffrey Boothroyd, a Scottish gun expert who had written to Ian Fleming to tell him that the Beretta pistol 007 used in the early novels was 'a ladies' gun', and advised him to change it to a Walther PPK. Fleming did, and immortalized Boothroyd as MI6's armourer, Major Boothroyd of Q Branch (the films changed the character to 'Q'). Morelius has some splendid photos of Geoffrey Boothroyd both in Sweden and Scotland.

Morelius never met Ian Fleming, but he wrote and had bound and printed *007—Secret Agent*, a lavish reference work that only had four copies. One went to Hugh Hefner at *Playboy*, and Morelius shows me Hefner's enthusiastic letter thanking him for it. But Ian Fleming is just about the only thriller-writer Morelius has not known or interviewed, and over the years he amassed an enormous collection of signed first editions, many of which he has since sold, as well as a photograph album that is both a private scrapbook and a behind-the-scenes archive of 20th century thriller-writers. Alistair Maclean, Leslie Charteris, Patricia Highsmith, Donald Hamilton, Helen MacInnes, James Leasor, Jon Cleary... he met them all. There's a wonderful snap of Duncan Kyle, Ellery Queen and Desmond Bagley laughing together—all have similar owlish glasses and beards (they were often mistaken for each other) and the result is almost like a thriller version of the Marx Brothers. Here he is with Jack Higgins at his home in Jersey, and there's John Gardner at an event at the Grand Hotel in Stockholm in 1981, where he demonstrated the gadgets on a specially designed Saab. Many give a sense of the community of thriller-writers that has developed at conferences and similar events over the last few decades, such as a photo of Desmond Bagley holding court to Jack Higgins, with Morelius looking on.

Morelius later went into the publishing business himself, being commissioned by Swedish publisher Lindqvists in the '70s to hand-pick his own line of books, which were sold as 'Hedman Thrillers'. I suspect that it is, above all, his taste that has stood him in good stead as much as his passion and expertise for the genre, and talking to him, one quickly realizes that this is why so many writers were drawn to him. If you've sold millions of books, it can become hard to find anyone willing to give you honest feedback. But Morelius is the archetypal Swedish straight-talker. When Dennis Wheatley

dedicated his novel *The Ravishing of Lady Mary Ware* to Morelius, he told his idol he was honoured, but also that he felt the novel had too much exposition, and pointed out several errors.

Even in retirement, Morelius keeps busy, editing the online thriller journal *Läst & hört i Hängmattan* ('Read and heard in the hammock') with his wife Margareta in Spain. A stickler for detailed research, Morelius helped Desmond Bagley, Colin Forbes and several other writers create some landmark novels in the genre. If you find yourself reading a British thriller set in Scandinavia, he probably played a part somewhere behind the scenes, securing contacts, scouting locations, and digging out the type of local classified information that only true insiders can. When it came to my own debut thriller, *Free Agent*, as soon as I had a finished draft I sent it to Iwan for his view. His reply came a few agonizing days later, and was short but to the point: 'Excellent. But there's too much talking, and not enough action.' I didn't like to admit it but he was right, and I went back and rewrote several scenes as a result. I'm proud to have continued that thriller tradition.

Deighton At Eighty

‘IT WAS THE morning of my hundredth birthday.’

So begins Len Deighton’s *Billion Dollar Brain*, published in 1966. Yesterday, Deighton himself turned 80. Last year, the centenary of Ian Fleming saw a resurgence of interest in James Bond’s creator—could it be Deighton’s turn? HarperCollins has announced it will reprint eight of his novels this year, including *The IPCRESS File*, *Funeral in Berlin* and *Billion Dollar Brain*, all with new introductions by the author. Quentin Tarantino has also said he is contemplating filming the *Game, Set and Match* trilogy, featuring Deighton’s embattled British agent Bernard Samson.

Now is the perfect moment for a Deighton revival. In the current political climate, his novels—particularly his Cold War spy stories—act as a refresher course in what happened last time round. Unlike John le Carré’s work, they don’t make for bleak or melancholic reading, and are often rather jaunty in tone. But running through them is a deep mistrust and cynicism of the powers that be. His protagonists are anti-authoritarian, laconic, past their best, bitter and seething at the absurdity of their business.

The books have one foot in the realist camp of the espionage genre, in the tradition of Eric Ambler and Graham Greene, depicting

the spy game as a bureaucratic muddle. But Deighton was often very funny, and he had a way of nailing the atmosphere concisely. In *An Expensive Place to Die* (1967), a courier from the British embassy passes the narrator a dossier and asks him to read it and hand it back while he waits. ‘It’s secret?’ asks our hero. No, the courier tells him—the photocopier’s bust and this is his only copy.

Deighton reinvented the spy thriller, bringing in a new air of authenticity and playing with its form. He added footnotes and addenda on arcane (but always interesting) aspects of espionage, and mocked the genre’s conventions. His first novel, *The IPCRESS File*, was framed as a story told by the narrator to the Minister of Defence, who is cut off sharply when he tries to elicit an elaboration of a point:

‘It’s going to be very difficult for me if I have to answer questions as I go along,’ I said. ‘If it’s all the same to you, Minister, I’d prefer you to make a note of the questions, and ask me afterwards.’

‘My dear chap, not another word, I promise.’

And throughout the entire explanation he never again interrupted.’

In an excoriating essay written in 1964, Kingsley Amis suggested that the reason for this was that the minister had fallen asleep. But he later he changed his mind somewhat: in a letter to Philip Larkin in 1985, he wrote that Deighton’s work was ‘actually quite good if you stop worrying about what’s going on’.

Deighton’s complex plots might be a reason why he is not more widely read today, in a world where we are impatient to cut to the chase, unmask the villain and move on to the explosive finale. Even at the time, Amis wasn’t alone in being befuddled: Deighton initially submitted *The IPCRESS File* to Jonathan Cape, Ian Fleming’s

publisher, but after they asked him to simplify the plot he took the manuscript to Hodder & Stoughton. Their edition became a huge bestseller, bigger than Hodder had prepared for, and Deighton went back to Cape, who published his second novel, *Horse Under Water*. It sold 80,000 copies in two days. Deighton was feted as ‘the poet of the spy story’, the new Fleming, the anti-Fleming, and much more besides. Soon, the film world came knocking. James Bond producer Harry Saltzman produced three films from Deighton’s work, and Michael Caine rocketed to world fame as the bespectacled, gourmet-food-loving cockney spy Harry Palmer.

Deighton’s output has been enormously varied, from novels about the film industry (*Close Up*) to cookbooks to military history. But, for me, it has always been his spy novels that have held the most attraction. When I decided to write a spy novel of my own, I avoided rereading Deighton for fear his influence would be too strong. But as my book was taking place in the late 1960s, and partly in London, I did use one of his books for research purposes: *London Dossier*, a guidebook he compiled and co-wrote in 1967. In it, I found everything from what was on the menu at Ronnie Scott’s to the history of Chinatown—but most of all I found the atmosphere of the era, captured in a beautifully written snapshot.

They don’t, as they say, write them like this anymore. Deighton’s novels usually contain enough elements for several books. *Horse Under Water*, for instance, featured a wrecked submarine, forged currency, heroin, ice-melting technology and British Nazis. But it was often what Deighton omitted from his books that made them so appealing. It is typical that the protagonist of his first novels wasn’t even named—‘Harry Palmer’ had to be thought up for the films. Deighton’s complexity can initially be off-putting, but persist and you will be entertained, informed, thrilled and dazzled. Long may he, and his creations, live on.

The Deighton File

I HAVE A treat in store today: an interview with Edward Milward-Oliver, author of the excellent reference book *The Len Deighton Companion* and a forthcoming biography of Deighton.

JD: Edward, thank you so much for agreeing to do this. Can I start by asking you which Len Deighton book you first read?

Edward Milward-Oliver: It was the Hawkey-jacketed Penguin edition of *Funeral in Berlin*, with the black and white halftone of Michael Caine across the top half of the cover, and diagonal orange and white hazard lines filling the lower half. On the rear cover was a photo of Len looking very cool in aviator sunglasses with a helicopter lifting off in the background and a quote from *LIFE* magazine claiming ‘Next, big soft girls will read Len Deighton aloud in jazz workshops’. It was the mid-1960s and I was a teenager. The whole look and feel of the book was very sharp, modern and hardboiled, a

frontline report from inside the sodium glow of Europe's Cold War capital.

A decade later I met Len. We were introduced by a mutual friend, the Italian restaurateur and illustrator Enzo Apicella, at his Meridiana restaurant in London's Fulham Road. We stayed in touch and in the early 1980s when I was living in Bonn, then capital of West Germany, we'd meet up in Berlin, where he was researching *Game Set & Match*.

I'd read all his books by that time. Having started my working life in publishing, I retained an interest in the publication data, so I wrote a slim bibliography, really intended to satisfy a few readers and modest collectors like myself. Then each time we met, Len told me more stories—he loves to impart knowledge, stir up discussion—and I felt that unless someone wrote them down, they'd be forgotten. So that led to *The Len Deighton Companion* which I wrote in Germany before I moved to Hong Kong, and I was surprised and delighted when it sold so well in hardcover and then paperback.

What were you doing in Hong Kong?

Before living in Germany I worked for several years with David Hemmings and retained a strong interest in film and TV. I moved to Hong Kong in the mid-1980s as part of a start-up with ambitions to launch the first private satellite system in South-East Asia. Our main interest was in the TV programming opportunities. We secured an option on a refurbished C-band satellite and a deal for an orbital relaunch on NASA's Space Shuttle. The relaunch was cancelled following the 1986 Challenger disaster and China stepped in and offered the services of its Long March rocket. That was April 1990 and marked not only China's first commercial space launch but also the first time in history a satellite was returned to orbit. Today AsiaSat

is a public company and serves the communications needs of over two-thirds of the world's population.

You stayed in touch with Len through this time?

Intermittently—one forgets that as recently as the early 1990s, distance created practical hurdles; there was no internet to speak of, no email. I lived in the region for nearly 15 years and was very focussed on its media opportunities. I helped found what became Asia Business News in Singapore, today known as CNBC Asia. It was the region's first satellite-TV business channel, delivering local, regional and global business news to viewers across the Asia Pacific. After I sold my interest in that I was drawn to the emerging internet-driven economy; this was about 1994. We built several companies and I served as an exec in a couple of publicly listed corporations involved in digital media, first in Hong Kong, and then Tokyo. Summarising it like this makes it sound like one easy ride, but as every founder will tell you, creating any business is a long hard slog and an emotional rollercoaster. But I remain powerfully attached to Hong Kong and the region

When did you start on the biography?

In 2005 Lion Television and Len invited me to act as the adviser on the documentary *The Truth About Len Deighton*, which was broadcast by the BBC in 2006. Len and I got to see a lot more of each other, and of course by then the ubiquity of email meant one was only a keystroke away. As a result of working on that programme, I was keen to explore the whole *IPCRESS* phenomenon: the book, the movie, the iconography, the early 60s context. I've always felt that *The IPCRESS File* is where the Cold

War meets the Royal College of Art. Alongside some of the pop art of that era, it elevated spies, nuclear paranoia and the commonplace in daily life to the level of fine art. One might go so far as to describe *The IPCRESS File* as a work of pop art itself. Wrapped in its groundbreaking monochrome Ray Hawkey jacket, it should have a place in art galleries alongside the works of Peter Blake, Richard Hamilton and Colin Self!

As a footnote for ipcressphiles, it's fascinating to see how Deighton's fictional acronym has gained widespread use, cheekily adopted for a high-profile clinical trial at the University of Bristol ("Internet PsyChotherapy for dePRESSion"), as a product name for High Grade Internet Protocol Cryptographic equipment used by the Government, an IT programme, a Tokyo fashion shop, a record label, a London DJ, and even a pedigree of golden retriever!

Anyway, once I got seriously into the research I quickly recognised that a history of *The IPCRESS File* couldn't be isolated from the story of its author.

When will the biography be published?

It's a work-in-progress, with no set publication date. I'm squeezing it in while developing a digital project that will enable millions of people to pursue their cultural passions while benefitting the arts organisations they love and support.

Alongside the biography, I'm working on a comprehensive bibliography of Deighton's work and the associated material with Jon Gilbert, whose recent 736-page Ian Fleming bibliography has set the benchmark for bibliographic scholarship.

Does all this have Len's blessing? Is it an 'official' biography?

Yes, this has his blessing, and no, it's not an official biography. I never explicitly sought Len's permission but the lines of research kept expanding and he couldn't have been more generous with his time and his introductions. He's never once tried to impose a preferred point-of-view, direct my research, or steered me away from talking to anyone. There have been occasions, not many, when I've found that an incident or an event differed significantly from Len's recollection. There's no easy way to tell a subject that they have misremembered something important. But when that's happened, Len has readily accepted that he got it wrong. There's no question he appreciates solid research.

Even when you have the facts, is there such a thing as an 'authentic' version of the past?

André Aciman recently wrote a wonderful *New York Times* opinion piece about memoirs, in which he suggested there is no single past, just versions of the past. "Proving one version true settles absolutely nothing, because proving another is equally possible". I think this is right, and when the *IPCRESS* project expanded into a full biography, I decided to follow the themes and events that I found most compelling, wherever they led, and hope that the things that most interest me also interest the book's readers.

So I've been following a virtual trail from below-stairs life in pre-war London via the camera towers of Tokwe Atoll to the blue skies of Southern California. It's taken me through St Martin's School of Art and the Royal College of Art, espresso bars in Old Compton Street and jazz clubs in Greenwich Village, convivial gatherings in South London kitchens and the fashionable Trattoria Terrazza in Soho's Romilly Street, quiet photographic studios, international film

sets, Chicago's Playboy Mansion, and abandoned *poste restante* addresses in Europe's Cold War capitals. And it hasn't ended yet.

Writing is a solitary profession. How do you make that life interesting to readers?

That isn't a challenge in Len Deighton's case. The working title, *DEIGHTON: An Uncommon Man*, tells you everything. His lasting influence extends across photography, cooking, design, marketing, publishing, mass media, and movies, in addition to his reinvention of the spy thriller and a body of work covering half a century. The description 'renaissance man' never had a more deserving subject.

Matthew Kirschenbaum, who is researching the crossover between computing and literature for a book entitled *Track Changes: A Literary History of Word Processing*, recently wrote in *Slate* about how *Bomber* was the first novel written with a word processor, which is entirely consistent with Deighton's early adoption of practical technology.

I recall you pointing out that one of Len's intriguing influences on the spy genre was that after *The IPCRESS File* everyone started using 'The' in the title of thrillers! And do you know, he's among the top 1000 authors and works cited in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, and is currently quoted 472 times. In six instances he provides the first evidence for a word: *pommes allumettes* (*The IPCRESS File*); Stasi, Grepco and Shin Bet (*Funeral in Berlin*); Stolichnaya (*Billion-Dollar Brain*), and *merguez* (*Yesterday's Spy*), and in another 47 instances the first evidence for a sense of a word.

If we step back, we can see that the heart of Deighton's story is the 1960s, when he played an incalculable role in reshaping popular culture in Britain. A decade which opens with him sitting in the garden of the Hôtel Sainte Anne on the island of Porquerolles filling

a notebook with ideas for a story about someone much like himself, except that he makes him a spy which he never was, and closes with the publication of what many consider his finest novel, *Bomber*, which signals a renewal of his creative energies after his bruising experiences in the film trade.

The 1960s has a powerful appeal today because like our current digital era, it was a time of massive disruption and transformation. The rate of change was extraordinary. And Harry Palmer was, to quote Clive Irving, a metaphor for creative insurrection. If you want to understand how the 1960s has shaped our modern world, there's no better way to begin than exploring the life of Len Deighton.

You spoke about there being different versions of the past. Has your research thrown up any big surprises?

Not really, just what I might call course corrections. For me, the most important rule is to go to the source. Don't accept anything as given. I'm very keen on timelines. They're a framing mechanism. I build them for every major event, every milestone in the story. I look for unambiguous dates and then add in detail around them to build reliable chronologies. Establishing when things happened helps determine why they happened. And as more detail is added, I'm able to verify people's recollections against them.

Early on I discovered that *The IPCRESS File* didn't start life in the way that's always been reported. A typically self-effacing publicity line by Len following its stunning success—that the manuscript had lain in a drawer unread and unloved until he unexpectedly met a literary agent at a party—was repeated and reprinted so many times that even Len came to remember it as fact. Whereas what actually happened is much more compelling, and revealing about its author.

Incidentally, I found the woman who typed that *IPCRESS* manuscript (sadly now lost). Paid by Len with a second-hand television set, she went on to achieve fame and celebrated status in the music world.

Although today we have Google and access to unlimited information online, people reach a certain age and frequently drop below the radar. I was thus delighted to locate and correspond with Robin Denniston, who sadly passed away last year. He was the editor at Hodder & Stoughton who bought *The IPCRESS File* after it had been turned down by Jonathan Cape and Heinemann. Denniston was a talented publisher—he later brought John le Carré over from Gollancz—whose family was closely associated with the security services. His father, Alistair Denniston, set up and ran the Government Code and Cypher School, the ancestor of today's GCHQ, and his sister at one time worked for Graham Greene, Kim Philby and Tim Milne in an MI6 London outstation.

Like the manuscript of *The IPCRESS File*, the film's screenplay—which had early drafts by Lukas Heller (*What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?*, *The Flight of the Phoenix*, *The Dirty Dozen*) and the author Lionel Davidson—has been frustratingly elusive. But I've been able to reassemble some of the scenes and plot developments that were substantially changed or thrown-out during shooting, giving me a much better appreciation of what a great job director Sidney Furie did and how it could have been a lesser film in other hands.

The movie's title theme is widely remembered for the sound of the cimbalom. I searched for and found John Leach, who introduced John Barry to this hammer dulcimer instrument and played it on the *IPCRESS* soundtrack. Sitting in his home and listening to him pick out those distinctive notes on the very cimbalom he played in the CTS recording studio in February 1965, I could have sworn I smelled

coffee brewing . . . John Leach knew Kim Philby in Beirut. Another of the unexpected connections among the neural pathways of this vibrant story.

When examining any life, one quickly recognises how serendipity can play a significant role in determining the outcome. Deighton's books, with their radical covers, would have looked very different had Ray Hawkey left London for Venezuela as the art editor of Shell's South American publications. The *IPCRESS* movie would be unrecognizable had Richard Harris not committed to *Il deserto rosso* opposite Monica Vitti, and Christopher Plummer to *The Sound of Music*. . . And we might not be discussing Len Deighton author, had he not left the Robert Sharp advertising agency after six restless and unsatisfactory months in 1959.

The journey continues, across a terrain that's always striking. Deighton's fans run the gamut from the former Chief of Staff of the United States Air Force and the historian Simon Schama, to Rolling Stone guitarist Keith Richards and the celebrated author J.G. Ballard. Friends and former friends, people from many walks of life who worked with him, they've all given generously of their time. I have over 70 hours of interviews, of which nearly 40 are with Len. Transcribing them is a major undertaking!

A few years ago it seemed that Len Deighton was a recluse, or close to one—he didn't give interviews at all. But recently he has given several, written articles, and even published an ebook about Ian Fleming and James Bond. It's wonderful. Do you think we'll hear more of him—perhaps even another novel?

Len writes every day. It's a lifetime habit. But now it's no longer with an eye for publication. He's written a 30,000-word exploration of fountain pens, the way they work and the changes they've

undergone, and is completing a study of aero engines called *The Secret History of Airplanes*. Both reflect private passions, and maintain his reputation for exceptional research. The ebook you mention, *James Bond: My Long and Eventful Search for His Father*, is a cinematic memoir written at the request of Amazon as part of the launch of their Kindle Singles.

Over the past four years, he's also been writing new introductions for the complete edition of his 28 novels, which have provided a platform for him to reflect on half a century of writing and the truth of his observation made many years ago that anyone can write one book, even politicians do it; starting a second book reveals an intention to be a professional writer.

The future? To my knowledge, there's no unfinished novel lying in a drawer and I don't expect Len to write a new one, but as recent history reminds us, one should never say never...

What do you make of the news about the Bernard Samson TV series?

There's a great team behind the project that appears to have the talent and confidence necessary to create an authentic world around Bernard Samson with its own set of implicit values and touch-points. At the core of Len's nine novels is a matrix of narratives about the choices people make, and the series has the potential to engage audiences on a very different level to the cold techno-driven apocalyptic approach of, say, *Spooks* [*MI-5* in the US]. Clerkenwell Films clearly recognise this. It was a masterstroke to secure Simon Beaufoy, who I understand is due to start working on the adaptation later in the year.

These aren't the only Deighton novels headed for TV. Originally conceived as a feature film, *Bomber* is currently in development as a television mini-series by Roger Randall-Cutler and Robert Cheek

of First Film Company in partnership with a major broadcaster. This will give them the screen time to develop the multiple storylines of the novel. I expect news on the writer of this project very soon too. It's all part of an encouraging commitment to long-form drama on television right now. Many notable film writers are working in the medium. The new UK high-end TV tax relief scheme, which is heavily modelled on the successful film tax credit regime, should help sustain this.

And I know that film and TV rights to another two books are currently optioned. That makes 12 of Deighton's novels in development today.

Aside from Len Deighton, who are your favourite authors?

John Gregory Dunne and Joan Didion, le Carré, and my late friend Jim Ballard. These are the authors whose work I most frequently return to. Beside the bed right now I have *The Infatuations* by Javier Marías and Tim Bouquet's gripping *617: Going to War with Today's Dambusters*.

Thanks again for your time, Edward—I very much look forward to reading the biography.

Postscript

Since this interview, Edward Milward-Oliver has uncovered new material for his Deighton biography, in particular concerning filming *The Ipcress File*, and there's no publication date yet. He has also taken the opportunity to follow the various television adaptations of Deighton's novels that we discussed in the interview. The first to reach the small screen is *SS-GB*. Directed by Philipp Kadelbach from

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scripts by Neal Purvis and Robert Wade, and with a fine cast including Sam Wiley, Kate Bosworth, Aneurin Barnard, Lars Eidinger and Rainer Bock, the five-part series will be broadcast by the BBC in autumn 2016.

For more information about Len Deighton, do check out Rob Mallows' great website [The Deighton Dossier](#).

The Forgotten Master of British Spy Fiction

SPY FICTION CAN be divided, very roughly, into two camps: Field and Desk. James Bond is a field agent—we follow his adventures, not M's. John le Carré's novels, on the other hand, tend to focus on the people back at headquarters—George Smiley is a senior man at the Circus (he later becomes head of it, for a time). Broadly speaking, I think Field tends to win out on the sales front, whereas Desk gets more critical acclaim.

I enjoy both genres, but sometimes find myself wishing that the Field book I'm reading were as deft at characterization and prose style as it is at the suspense and atmosphere. Similarly, I often find myself reading a Desk book and desperately hoping that something will happen. It's all beautifully drawn, but is everyone going to be searching their filing cabinets for that manila folder forever?

In my own work, I've tried to have my cake and eat it: Paul Dark is a Desk man sent unwillingly back into the Field. In this I was partly influenced by the British spy novelist Joseph Hone, who combines the best of both camps in a way that leaves me breathless—and sick

with envy. I spoke to Hone about his work in 2002 (his number was in the book and he picked up—sometimes you get lucky), and afterwards he sent me a very charming and touching letter, and enclosed copies of many of his reviews. That probably sounds a little vain of him, but it's not if you've read his novels. While it was reassuring to see that others had also highly valued his work, I found the reviews rather depressing reading. When I see a quote from a newspaper on the back of a novel, I'm conscious that it may have been taken wildly out of context. 'Better than Deighton' may, for example, have originally been part of the sentence 'Better than Deighton at describing the intricacies of Nicaraguan bee-keeping customs Mr Fortescue undoubtedly is; as to the nature of espionage, he hasn't the foggiest.' A jacket that trumpets 'One for le Carré lovers... real suspense' may have been culled from a review in the local paper that read: 'One for le Carré lovers in search of a stop-gap only—despite occasional glimmers of real suspense, *No Checkpoints for Charlie* is dull as ditchwater, with a protagonist so irritating I kept wishing he would use his blasted cyanide capsule and put us all out of our misery.' (My publishers would never do this, by the way.) But here were perceptive and laudatory reviews of Hone's work from *Time*, *Newsweek*, *The Times Literary Supplement*, *The Washington Post*, *Kirkus* and many more, comparing him favourably with Ambler, le Carré, Deighton and Greene. And yet, sadly, he is pretty much completely forgotten today, a footnote in British spy fiction. He deserves to be much better known.

Hone's main protagonist—'a man with almost no heroic qualities', as he describes himself—is Peter Marlow, an MI6 desk man turned field agent. He is repeatedly being taken out of his grubby office in the Mid-East Section in Holborn and dragged into the line of fire. The plots come thick and fast, and feature ingenious twists, action, mayhem, chases—all the great spy stuff you'd want. But it's all

wrapped up in prose so elegant, and characterization so subtle and pervasive, that you put the books down feeling you've just read a great work of literature.

Marlow himself is a wonderful character, and I think deserves to be as well known as Smiley. He's the constant outsider, peering in at others' lives, meddling where he shouldn't, and usually being set up by everyone around him. He's a kind and intelligent man, and terribly misused, but he's also a cynic—he sees betrayal as inevitable, and tries to prepare for it.

We first meet him in *The Private Sector* (1971), as an English teacher in Cairo who is gradually drawn into a spy ring. It's one of those 'innocents in too deep' stories, but the evocation of both Egypt and the shifting loyalties of the protagonists is dazzling. Hone alternates between third and first persons, which he makes look like the easiest thing in the world. Set in the run-up to the Six Day War, it is superficially about Soviet moles, but the subtext is about how we can never know anyone else. That's a poor description of it, though, so here's LJ Davis writing about it in *The Washington Post* in July 1972 instead:

'There are moments in this book—indeed, whole chapters—where one is haunted by the eerie feeling that Joseph Hone is really Graham Greene, with faint quarterings of Lawrence Durrell and Thomas Pynchon. His tone is nearly perfect—quiet, morbidly ironic, beautifully controlled and sustained, moodily introspective, occasionally humorous and more often bitter, with a persistent undertone of unspeakable sadness and irrecoverable loss.'

The May 8 1972 issue of *Newsweek* featured a full-page review of the book, calling it the best spy novel since Deighton's *Funeral In Berlin*:

'Joseph Hone knows what counts in this kind of fiction: ambiguity, romantic weariness, morality suspended, a precise sense of place, and a hall-of-mirrors effect in which double and triple agents are each caught in a plot more twisted than he can comprehend yet each imagines a plot more twisted yet. The fun is in watching everyone second-guess everyone else.'

The review concluded:

'Hone answers to all the criteria of good spy fiction; his story is not only good but reinforced by his dalliance. He remembers, as some ambitious but less skilful writers forget, that a good spy story subordinates everything—characters, atmosphere and all—to the necessities of plot. A good spy novel is quite different from a good novel about spies—Conrad's *Secret Agent*, for instance, or le Carré's *Looking Glass War*—in which plot is sacrificed for the sake of character and atmosphere.'

In the second novel in the series, *The Sixth Directorate* (1975), Marlow has become just a little wiser. MI5 has caught a chap called George Graham red-handed as a Soviet sleeper, and locked him away. But they need to know more. Marlow looks enough like Graham that he is sent on a mission to impersonate him. The book is partly set in New York. Here's Marlow describing his arrival there:

‘The city had climbed up in front of us long before, when we’d passed under the Verrazzano bridge eight miles out; the towers, points, all the steps and cliffs of Manhattan growing up on the horizon, poking gradually into the sun, like an ultimate geography lesson—some final, arrogant proof in steel and concrete that the world was round.

From a distance the city was a very expensive educational game, a toy not like other toys. And one had seen those towers so often in so many images—in polychrome and black and white, moving or with music—that all of us standing on the forward deck that morning had the expression of picture dealers scrutinising a proffered masterpiece, leaving a polite interval before crying ‘Fake!’

These preconceptions were a pity since, from a distance, in the sharp light over a gently slapping metal-blue sea, the place looked better than any of its pictures, like the one advertisement layout that had escaped all the exaggerated attentions of the years, come free of Madison Avenue, the press, all the published myths and horrors of the city.

Sharp winds had rubbed the skyline clean, light glittered on the edges of the buildings and all I saw was a place where I was unknown, where unknown people bore ceaselessly up and down those cavernous alleys, between bars and restaurants and offices, all busy with an intent that had nothing to do with me.

The city stood up like a rich menu I could afford at last after a long denial.’

Marlow has come to Manhattan because Graham had a mistress there years ago, and he has studied her letters to learn all about her. But when the MI6 liaison in the city introduces Marlow to his wife, we

realize that she was Graham's lover. Ouch. Before long, Marlow finds himself entangled with her, as well as fending off the advances of a beautiful African princess who works for the United Nations. Yes, only in spy novels, but Hone somehow manages to make the whole thing seem real:

‘Having coffee with a spy.’ She said it in a deep, funny voice.

‘Do you carry a revolver?’

‘No, as a matter of fact. No guns, no golden Dunhills, no dark glasses.’

‘No vodka martinis either—very dry, stirred and not shaken. Or is it the other way round?’

I felt the skin on my face move awkwardly, creases rising inexplicably over my cheeks. Then I realised I was smiling.

‘Yes, I drink. Sometimes. Bottles of light ale, though. I’m a spy from one of those seedier thrillers, I’m afraid.’

‘Let’s have a drink then.’

‘Here?’

‘God, no. Upstairs.’

I looked at her blankly.

‘Women are out too, are they? Not even “sometimes”? What a very dull book you are.’

‘I disappoint you.’

‘Not yet.’

She stood up and tightened her belt a notch. She was already pretty thin.’

It’s not that seedy a thriller, of course. Here’s Anatole Broyard’s verdict on it from *The New York Times* of March 2, 1984:

‘Joseph Hone’s *Sixth Directorate*, which was published in 1975, is one of the best suspense novels of the last ten years. It has elegance, wit, sympathy, irony, surprise, action, a rueful love affair and a melancholy Decline of the West mood. Only the crimes in its pages separate the book from what is known as serious novels.’

The book also came with a cover quote from the American spy novelist Charles McCarry, who Hone is similar to in some ways. McCarry was forgotten for years, before being rediscovered in the last decade by a new generation of readers. Hone told me that Tony Richardson, the director of *Look Back in Anger* and *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner*, had intended to film *The Sixth Directorate*, taking an option on it and commissioning a script, but it didn’t go ahead as result of Joseph Andrews performing poorly at the box office. That’s a real shame, as it could have made a terrific film, and introduced Hone to a wider audience.

After *The Sixth Directorate*, Hone wrote a standalone spy thriller, *The Paris Trap* (1977), although its narrator, Harry Tyson, is in much the same vein as Marlow. The plot sounds preposterous when précised, and doesn’t do it justice, but I’ll give it a go. A film, called *Hero*, is being shot in Paris, starring Julie Christie, Jean-Paul Belmondo and (the fictional) Jim Hackett. The plot of the film: a group of Palestinian terrorists have taken Christie’s husband, a minister in the French government, hostage. Belmondo plays a cop reluctantly working alongside British agent Summers, who is played by Hackett.

The screenplay for *Hero* is based on the long-running TV series of the same name, which in turn was based on a novel by John Major (really). Major was a pseudonym of Harry Tyson, who now works for British Intelligence (in the same section as Marlow, with the same

boss). Former spy writer Tyson and film star Hackett are old friends, but now Tyson is having an affair with Hackett's estranged wife—and Hackett secretly seeing Tyson's.

In the meantime, a Palestinian terrorist cell, known only as The Group, takes Tyson, his daughter, and Hackett's wife hostage. Their demands? Unusual, to say the least. They want a rewrite of the Hero script by Tyson, restoring the original grittiness of Summers' character (he was a kind of Harry Palmer, but has become more like Bond), and a more sympathetic depiction of the Palestinian cause. The leader of The Group's operation turns out to be a middle-class British radical: think a younger Vanessa Redgrave to the power of ten.

If you can't imagine how on earth any of this could make a believable (or coherent) thriller, here's the opening paragraph, which is typical of the tone throughout:

'Nothing should ever surprise us. The warnings were all there in the past, ignored or disbelieved, and so all the more devastating when they at last take effect—as a marriage will suddenly explode for the lack of something years before, some mild ghost not laid in bed then, which rises up one fine day and takes a brutal shape from the years of waiting.'

Hone's next novel, *The Flowers of the Forest* (1980), brought Marlow back. The book was published in the US as *The Oxford Gambit*, a move that did not impress the critic of *The New York Times Book Review*:

'The title was changed here, I suppose, to identify it more clearly as a complicated thriller and tap the wide market for such books. Pity. It is all of that but a bit more. It is a deft

story laced with a mordant wit and deserves a wide readership.’

Like the previous two Marlow novels, the plot again revolves around Soviet penetration agents. The man in question this time is Lindsay Phillips, a senior MI6 officer who suddenly disappears while tending his bees. Has he been kidnapped, murdered—or was he perhaps, as some are now starting to fear, a mole all along? Our man Marlow is sent in to investigate, and begins prying around the family: how much did Phillips’ wife and daughter know of his secret life? The basic set-up is familiar from several spy novels of the era, and would be put to great and best-selling effect by le Carré in *A Perfect Spy* six years later, but Hone handles it very differently. The narrative is once more a mix of first and third person, and features murders at funerals, chases across Europe, faked deaths and hidden affairs galore. Isabel Quigly wrote of it in the *Financial Times*:

‘This is the best thriller I’ve found in years, perhaps the best I remember—too serious and rich for the world thriller and what it implies, though sticking closely to the thriller genre—a novel about the mysteriousness of human beings rather than the mysteries of intelligence and diplomacy. The weaving of the story is so close, so tight, that no image, no hint, is ever wasted: everything links up with something else pages or chapters ahead... It all works without pretentiousness, going far beyond the limitations of its genre.’

That ellipsis isn’t to cut parts that weren’t as flattering, by the way, but rather a couple of hundred more words raving about the novel’s merits. Ms Quigly, I salute your good taste.

The Valley Of The Fox (1982) was the final novel in the series. Marlow has retired to the Cotswolds, where he is slowly writing his memoirs. Then a man breaks in and shoots his wife, and he goes on the run. This is a classic chase thriller, in the tradition of Geoffrey Household's *Rogue Male*. Some passages pay explicit homage to that book, with Marlow surviving on his wits in the countryside. Here's how it opens:

'He'd trapped me. But had he intended to? Had he meant to drive me up against the old pumping shed by the far end of the lake? Or had I carelessly allowed him to do this, moving after him into this impasse where there was no soundless exit, either across the stream ahead or up the steep open slopes behind the ruined building. Either way, I couldn't move now. And since the laurel bush only partly hid me I knew that if he moved past the corner of the shed he must see me and I would have to kill him...'

So there you have it. Five novels, all superb, all pretty much forgotten. All are also long out of print, but are easily found online, and well worth seeking out. Faber Finds also has the four Marlow novels as print-on-demand titles. They are not only very readable and exciting, but also psychologically astute and beautifully written. The passages I've quoted from them give only an inkling of their impact: it's the melding of the prose style with the twists and turns of the plots that make Hone so special, and it has to be experienced over the course of a novel to appreciate.

Waiting for Deaver

JAMES BOND FANS around the country are biting their nails as they wait for the midnight publication of *Carte Blanche*, the latest novel to feature the world's most famous secret agent.

The book, launched earlier today lavish in style at London's St Pancras Station, is written by American thriller-writer Jeffery Deaver. Deaver's stab at Bond follows on from Sebastian Faulks, whose *Devil May Care* was published in 2008 to mark the centenary of Ian Fleming's birth. Fleming's original novels have been reissued several times in recent years, most recently as ebooks.

As a result of the shrewd choices made in the last decade by both the literary estate and the film-makers, it seems that Fleming's reputation is finally being reappraised. Fleming is, after all, one of Britain's greatest popular novelists and the creator of a globally renowned icon. During his lifetime, his work was admired by writers as diverse as Raymond Chandler and Kingsley Amis, but the more successful the books—and the films then adapted from them—became, the lower Fleming's stock fell in literary circles. In 1958, Paul Johnson famously decried *Dr No's* 'sex, snobbery and sadism' in the *New Statesman*—a bizarre claim to anyone familiar with the likes of Dennis Wheatley and Peter Cheyney, and in 1964, Malcolm Muggeridge attacked Bond as 'utterly despicable: obsequious to his

superiors, pretentious in his tastes, callous and brutal in his ways, with strong undertones of sadism, and an unspeakable cad in his relations with women, toward whom sexual appetite represents the only approach’.

But the James Bond of Fleming’s novels isn’t any of those things, which is perhaps unsurprising considering Muggeridge appears to have only read one Bond book. In fact, Bond falls in love, countermands orders, delights in discovering new cultures and never shows any signs of being a sadist in the novels—the latter is his enemies’ vice, as is often the case in thrillers. There are some embarrassing passages, but on the whole Fleming’s 12 novels and nine short stories hold up remarkably well as fluid, versatile and often beautifully written thrillers.

The best of them, I think, are his first novel, *Casino Royale*, from 1953, and *From Russia, With Love*, published four years later. *Casino Royale* is a short, sharp shock of a thriller. It follows Bond on a small-scale mission at a coastal resort in northern France, and the atmosphere is palpably sticky and disturbing—Bond is far from the superhuman he would become in some of the films. *From Russia, With Love* is a delectably plotted thriller set in Moscow and Istanbul and featuring one of the genre’s greatest villains, the loathsome Rosa Klebb. Fleming’s phrasing is often journalistic—he worked for *The Sunday Times* for several years—giving even the most implausible of scenes vividness and authority. The technique would later be developed by Frederick Forsyth, Ken Follett, and indeed Jeffery Deaver.

So let’s resist the temptation, on the publication of the latest James Bond novel, to mock one of Britain’s greatest exports. Let’s instead cheer on Mr Deaver, enjoy his adventure—and pay tribute to the writer who created a character still taking the world by storm nearly sixty years later.

The Lives of Ian Fleming

IAN FLEMING LED a fascinating life: born into privilege, he had three successive and highly successful careers: one as an intelligence officer during the Second World War; another as a journalist in the years immediately after it; and his final stint as one of the world's most popular novelists. There have been several books and films about his life, but for a complete portrait it's hard to beat the biographies by John Pearson and Andrew Lycett.

Published by Jonathan Cape in 1966, John Pearson's *The Life of Ian Fleming* was the first biography of the writer, coming just two years after his death. Pearson was ideally suited for the job, having been Fleming's assistant at *The Sunday Times*. He also ghosted the autobiography of Donald Fish, *Airline Detective*, for which Fleming had written the foreword, and had written *Gone to Timbuctoo*, a thriller set in Africa, and *Bluebird and the Dead Lake*, about the British land speed record-holder Donald Campbell.

Helped by *The Sunday Times*' Leonard Russell, who initiated the book, Pearson had access to a staggering collection of people for his biography. As well as members of Fleming's family and former colleagues, he had the input of several world-renowned writers (Raymond Chandler, Graham Greene, Kingsley Amis, Truman

Capote, Evelyn Waugh, Somerset Maugham), politicians (Anthony Eden, Hugh Gaitskell) and other notable figures (Carl Jung, Alfred Hitchcock, Lord Beaverbrook). Unfortunately, the precise nature of their contributions are not given. This was very much the tradition at the time, but biographies have changed since: for instance, in his 2006 biography of Kingsley Amis, Zachary Leader scrupulously footnoted all his sources.

There are several arguments for Leader's approach. Chiefly, information is rarely fixed. What a biographer takes in good faith at the time may later prove wrong—this is much harder to spot if one doesn't know who said it, or in what context. As a result of this and a minimal use of direct quotes, Pearson's is a highly stylised biography: the idea seems to have been to make the research seamless, so that the entire book reads as effortlessly as an extended character sketch. Tonally, Pearson's prose is frequently reminiscent of Fleming in its lucidity and appreciation of telling detail, and one can't help wondering while reading it how he would write a Bond novel (Fleming's estate evidently felt the same, as they commissioned him to do just that a few years later).

A persistent theme in the book is Fleming's attitude to women. We learn that he had a particularly domineering mother, and that after she vetoed his engagement to a French-Swiss girl in 1931, Fleming told his friend Ralph Arnold 'I'm going to be quite bloody-minded about women from now on... I'm just going to take what I want without any scruples at all.' Pearson quotes extensively from Fleming's notebooks, and they often don't make pleasant reading: 'The woman likes the door to be forced', for instance. But at what age he wrote these snippets, and with what purpose in mind, is not entirely clear.

It's tempting to see the roots of James Bond in Fleming's life, and indeed that idea stems primarily from this biography: Pearson

describes Bond as Fleming's 'dream-self' and convincingly shows how Fleming's attitudes and opinions informed the character. But it can occasionally be frustrating: was 'M' really modelled on Fleming's mother? Surely the more likely explanation is that he was inspired by Fleming's wartime boss, Admiral Godfrey, perhaps with a smidgeon of the Special Operations Executive chief Colin Gubbins, who Fleming knew and who was also known by that initial, and perhaps with elements of Fleming himself. Similarly, Pearson's assertion that Le Chiffre was modelled on Aleister Crowley has become an unshakeable tenet of Bond lore, but it seems far more likely that Fleming used only a few very superficial elements of Crowley for the character. Pearson cites Le Chiffre's use of the expression 'my dear boy' as evidence, but this was a common expression in the British upper classes of the day and was often used by villains in thrillers. Crowley was menacing, but Le Chiffre's general physical appearance, presumed ethnicity, character and role in the book do not resemble him at all.

But these are rare mis-steps. Some writers, given the kind of access Pearson was afforded and the expectations surrounding such a project, might have pulled their punches and painted a portrait of a brilliant and kind genius. It is to Pearson's great credit that, with a few exceptions, he didn't flinch from discussing some of the darker sides of Fleming's life, and was not afraid to criticise his writing. By doing so, he probably enhanced Fleming's reputation on both counts, because the praise he does give seems doubly authoritative.

The result is a novelistic insider job, with Fleming a richly drawn protagonist: at turns ambitious and shockingly selfish, one can't help hoping for the turning point in the book, when his persistent and shameless thrusts at best-sellerdom finally pay off. The ending is rather bleaker: Pearson presents Fleming as a somewhat Jay Gatsby-

esque figure in later life, jaded by success but hinting darkly to people that he may have killed people in dastardly ways during the war.

Writing in 1966, Pearson had direct access to many of the key figures in Fleming's life, but also had to adopt a certain amount of discretion to the living. This became clear with the publication of Andrew Lycett's biography, titled simply *Ian Fleming* and published in 1995 by Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

Lycett was something of a younger Pearson: he had also worked for *The Sunday Times*, and had written a non-fiction work about Libya. Although he by necessity repackaged much of Pearson's material, his is a much more traditional biography. It is still not footnoted, but does have an index, and while Pearson was vague on some names and dates, Lycett is usually much firmer. As a result, the book is a lot less impressionistic, but much more useful as a reference manual on Fleming. A few tiny errors aside (and all books contain errors), it is very well researched, and makes two substantial additions to the picture provided by Pearson three decades earlier: the story of Blanche Blackwell, Fleming's lover in later life; and a much deeper context for the success of James Bond that followed the writer's death. Neither of these were in Pearson's book, the first presumably for reasons of diplomacy and the second because most of it hadn't happened yet. At times Lycett slightly overdoses on the connections and backgrounds of extremely minor figures in Fleming's life, but he leaves few stones unturned. While the book is generally more sympathetic than Pearson's, he spares us no detail, even of Fleming's sexual preferences.

Ian Fleming was a much misunderstood man during his life, and remains an undervalued writer. The popular perception is that his novels are superficial fantasies, simple Boy's Own adventures. His biographers reveal them to be deeply ingrained fantasies and rather complicated Boy's Own adventures. These two books also give a

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context to the era in which Fleming lived and worked, and his achievement both in that time and beyond it. While no book could ever present the complete portrait of a writer, taken together one feels that Pearson and Lycett come very close. All Bond and Fleming aficionados should read these two books.

When William Met Ian

ON 5 OCTOBER 1962, the first James Bond film, *Dr No*, had its world premiere in London. Since then, the Bond films have become the most successful cinema series of all time, and they were directly responsible for the ‘spy-mania’ of the Sixties. But James Bond was a household name long before *Dr No* was made into a film. Fleming’s novels had already sold millions of copies internationally, were reviewed and debated in the world’s leading newspapers, and were imitated, parodied and had even been turned into a successful comic strip. Fleming was a major force in spy fiction, and an enormous influence on several other thriller-writers, prior to October 1962.

But from the beginning, his novels had divided opinion—even before publication, in fact. Michael S. Howard, who was one of the founders and later became the managing director of Fleming’s publisher, Jonathan Cape, was initially against publishing the first James Bond novel, *Casino Royale*:

‘(Fleming) went busily to work, devising headlines for the chapters and ideas for the jacket. To discuss these we met, towards the end of that October (1952), for the first time since

the Popski dinner, and I enjoyed his enthusiastic interest in the technicalities of production. I did not tell him that the book itself had repelled me, and caused me sleepless nights. It had troubled me to be associated with its publication, for I thought its cynical brutality, unrelieved by humour, revealed a sadistic fantasy which was deeply shocking; and that the book would do discredit to the list. But in this I was alone; and although my conscience was uneasy I had accepted the majority opinion, especially William's judgement, and withdrawn my protests.'¹

Howard's reaction might seem quaint, but *Casino Royale* was a very dark novel for 1952. James Bond considers Vesper Lynd in the following terms, for example:

'He found her companionship easy and unexacting. There was something enigmatic about her which was a constant stimulus. She gave little of her real personality away and he felt that however long they were together there would always be a private room inside her which he could never invade. She was thoughtful and full of consideration without being slavish and without compromising her arrogant spirit. And now he knew that she was profoundly, excitingly sensual, but that the conquest of her body, because of the central privacy in her, would each time have the sweet tang of rape. Loving her physically would each time be a thrilling voyage without the anticlimax of arrival. She would surrender herself avidly, he thought, and greedily enjoy all the intimacies of the bed without ever allowing herself to be possessed.'²

This passage makes difficult reading even now. The novel also features a long scene in which Bond has his genitals whipped with a carpet-beater. Fleming's brother-in-law, Hugo Charteris, felt that the concluding chapters of the book contained 'the most disgusting thing I've ever seen in print—torture such as Japs and Huns eschewed as not cricket'.³

Michael Howard wrote that, despite his concerns over *Casino Royale*, he accepted the majority opinion in Jonathan Cape, 'especially William's judgement'. William was William Plomer, one of Ian Fleming's closest friends, and perhaps the man who affected his career more than anyone else. Plomer was born to English parents in South Africa, where he started his career as a writer. His first novel, *Turbott Wolfe*, caused a sensation on its publication in 1925, as it dealt with inter-racial marriage, making him famous in South Africa. It was published in Britain by Leonard Woolf's Hogarth Press, and gained him a fan in Ian Fleming, who wrote to Plomer directly to say how much he had enjoyed the novel. Plomer replied from Japan, and when he moved to London in 1929 looked up Fleming. It was the start of a friendship that would last until Fleming's death over three decades later.

Plomer wrote librettos, including that of Benjamin Britten's *The Prodigal Son*, as well as poetry, biography, memoir, stories for children, essays and reviews. In 1933, he submitted a volume of short stories to Jonathan Cape. The firm's resident reader and adviser, Edward Garnett, advised publishing it but warned that it would probably not make much money:

'Plomer is certainly about the most original and keenest mind of the younger generation... He is emphatically in the minority, i.e. of the section of writers, the real intelligentsia, the unconventional critical-minded literary artist whom the

British Public in general don't like, and therefore only buy in restricted quantities. He is a Left-winger in popularity, i.e. what D.H. Lawrence was to Hugh Walpole, and Cape mustn't expect more than a quiet rise in sales, even after Plomer's *The Case is Altered* was "Chosen by The Book Society". Of course he ought to have gained "The Book of the Month" years ago—as far as original literary excellence goes. But he is too unconventional and keen.'⁴

Cape published Plomer's book, and following Garnett's death in 1937, he took over his job at the firm. The war interrupted this, and Plomer worked alongside Fleming in Naval Intelligence for the duration of it, before returning to his job at Cape.

On the face of it, this 'critical-minded literary artist' seems an unlikely champion for James Bond. His friendship with Fleming was clearly a factor in it, but perhaps his unconventionality also allowed him to see something in *Casino Royale* that Michael Howard had not. Plomer felt that many of the submissions Cape was receiving were 'safe, genteel, and a bit dull'⁵, so it is perhaps not surprising that when, during lunch at The Ivy on May 12 1952, Ian Fleming revealed to him that he had written a book, he was intrigued.

Plomer liked *Casino Royale* and recommended it be published, but he met with resistance from his colleagues: not just from Michael Howard, but from Jonathan Cape himself. Cape didn't like thrillers, and rarely published them. He also didn't think *Casino Royale* was very good, but Ian Fleming had another 'in' as well as Plomer: his elder brother Peter was one of the country's best-known travel writers, and was published by Jonathan Cape. He had also been one of the company's editorial aides since 1946. With entreaties from both Plomer and Peter Fleming, Cape reluctantly agreed to publish *Casino Royale*, but he was far from happy about it, telling another

author, Frank Pakenham, that ‘Peter’s little brother’ had written a book that was ‘not up to scratch’ but that he would publish it ‘because he’s Peter’s brother’.⁶ According to Michael Howard, Jonathan Cape never read another James Bond novel after *Casino Royale*.⁷

Fleming’s first novel sold moderately well and, due to his position at *The Sunday Times*, was reviewed in all the right places. In fact, that was one of the oddities about Fleming’s novels. Just as Jonathan Cape didn’t like thrillers, neither did many of those in Britain’s literary establishment. But Ian Fleming had loved thrillers since his days at Eton, devouring books by Sapper and E Phillips Oppenheim. He had continued to read thrillers into adulthood, and although he had dabbled in poetry it was a thriller he ended up writing. His influences were his boyhood reading, American writers like Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett, and the new generation of thriller-writers such as Peter Cheyney and Dennis Wheatley, the latter of whom he knew. Wheatley was one of Britain’s best-selling writers, but while his novels were advertised and serialized in newspapers, they were rarely reviewed.

By virtue of being published by Jonathan Cape, and through his considerable network of friends, family and acquaintances in literary circles and high society, Fleming was taken a great deal more seriously. *The Times Literary Supplement* called *Casino Royale* ‘both exciting and extremely civilized’, while *The Sunday Times*, Fleming’s own paper, said he was ‘the best new English thriller-writer since Ambler’.

The subsequent Bond novels sold better than *Casino Royale*, and in 1958 *The Daily Express* started adapting them into comic strips. The same year, Fleming became a talking point in the literary world when he was attacked as vulgar by the critic Bernard Bergonzi, and accused of being a purveyor of ‘sex, snobbery and sadism’ by Paul

Johnson in *The New Statesman*.⁸ This was part of a backlash against Fleming, perhaps partly as a result of his having been launched in establishment circles: other thrillers might have had a lot more of all three of those elements in them, but they didn't make any claims to being literature. Some people didn't want Fleming seated at the high table—one could argue that they were the snobs, not he, but that their snobbery concerned the world of books, rather than clothes or food.

Despite these brickbats, or perhaps partly because of them, the Bond novels became more successful, and when it came to review *Goldfinger*, the seventh book in the series, in March 1959, *The Times* noted that:

‘A new novel by Mr. Ian Fleming is becoming something of an event, since James Bond has now established himself at the head of his profession, a secret service agent who indeed plays for England but who has much in common with the highly sexed “private eye” on the other side of the Atlantic.’⁹

James Bond was on a roll, and nothing could stop him. Fleming settled into his routine of writing his books in Goldeneye, his holiday home in Jamaica, and receiving editorial encouragement and criticisms from ‘my gentle Reader William Plomer’ (as he wrote in the dedication of *Goldfinger*). Plomer had always been Fleming's champion and supporter behind the scenes, but in 1962 he briefly stepped into the limelight, when he interviewed Fleming for a radio programme. I have been provided with a copy of the complete transcript, which is held with Plomer's papers at Durham University, and which makes for fascinating reading.

The interview was part of a series of programmes titled ‘The Writer Speaks’, which had been produced by The New American

Library—Fleming’s paperback publisher in the United States. Other writers interviewed for the series included Norman Mailer, Ayn Rand, Irving Stone, Erskine Caldwell, James Jones, CP Snow, Theodore Jones and Gore Vidal. The intention seems to have been for these interviews to have been offered free of charge to any radio station that wanted them, but it’s not clear if any took up the offer in this case: it may be that it was never broadcast. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it’s a rather cosy chat, and it covers a lot of familiar ground. Fleming tells the story of his visit to Estoril during the war that inspired the plot of *Casino Royale*, mentions the influence of Chandler and Hammett on his writing and says he started writing novels ‘to take his mind off the prospect of getting married’.¹⁰

But some of his remarks are more revealing, and often amusing. When asked by Plomer where the best place in the United States would be for a rendezvous with a spy, he offers either the traditional park or a crowded public swimming pool, or this unusual solution:

‘I once had this discussion with Raymond Chandler and he said that, supposing it were a beautiful spy as opposed to a rather dull spy, the place to take her would be to the Rainbow Room at the top of the Rockefeller Center because he said that was a very attractive place to meet anyway, and also almost entirely used by out-of-town Americans and tourists, so that one would be unlikely to run into a friend or an acquaintance.’¹¹

Plomer also raises the question of Paul Johnson’s damning review of *Dr No* in *The New Statesman* four years earlier:

‘William Plomer: Do you think your books are studies in sex, snobbery and sadism?’

Ian Fleming: Well, I don't think they are studies in any of those quite proper ingredients of a thriller. Sex, of course, comes into all interesting books and into interesting lives. As to snobbery. I think that's pretty good nonsense, really. In fact, we'd all of us like to eat better, stay in better hotels, wear better clothes, drive faster motor-cars, and so on, and it amuses me that my hero does most of these things. As for sadism, well, I think the old-fashioned way of beating up a spy with a baseball bat has gone out with the last war, and I think it's permissible to give him a rather tougher time than we used to in the old-fashioned days before the war.'¹²

Plomer also asks Fleming if he has any idea of how many books he has sold to date, to which Fleming replies:

'Well, that's a very difficult thing to discover because they've been published in about thirty foreign languages. But I should say that my sales in England over my last ten or eleven books would be around two or three million, and in America I think they're certainly that and possibly more. I think they may well be up to four million because they've gone into the New American Library paperback edition and been very smartly dressed up and seem to be selling like hot cakes in the States.'¹³

This seems to be a rather obvious puff, so it may be that if the programme was not broadcast it was because it was felt to be a little too clearly promotional material. But it's revealing nevertheless, because this interview was conducted before the first Bond film had been released, and the numbers are huge. The sales figures in the States were probably partly the result of an article about John F

Kennedy's reading habits that had appeared in *Life* in March, 1961, in which the president had listed *From Russia, With Love* as one of his 10 favourite books.¹⁴ Plomer asks Fleming how he had met the Kennedies:

'Well, it was rather interesting. About a year before Mr Kennedy became President, I was staying in Washington with a friend of mine and she was driving me through, it was a Sunday morning, and she was driving me through Washington down to Georgetown and there were two people walking along the street and she said, "Oh, there are my friends Jack and Jackie," and they were indeed very close friends of hers, and she stopped and they talked. And she said, "Do you know Ian Fleming?" And Jack Kennedy said, "Not *the* Ian Fleming?" Of course that was a very exciting thing for him to say and it turned out that they were both great fans of my books, as indeed is Robert Kennedy, the Attorney General, and they invited me to dinner that night with my friend, and we had great fun discussing the books and from then on I've always sent copies of them direct and personally to him before they're published over here.'¹⁵

'I think that was an historic encounter,' Plomer replies. Fleming told his tale masterfully, but he didn't mention the name of his friend. This wasn't simply tact: to do so would have ruined the story, as the friend was Marion 'Oatsie' Leiter, whose surname Fleming had given James Bond's friend in the CIA, Felix Leiter. Leiter had introduced Kennedy to the Bond novels, and had just stopped off at the Kennedies' house to ask if she could bring Fleming to dinner that evening. They weren't in, but on the drive away she and Fleming

happened to see them walking on the street.¹⁶ But that wouldn't have made as good an anecdote as JFK saying 'Not *the* Ian Fleming?'

And it is perhaps the keen publicist that lurked beneath the drawling upper-class English veneer that helped catapult Ian Fleming's thrillers to global success. In an interview in 1964, John le Carré said that for his first two novels he had 'remained an anonymous and contented civil servant who reckoned on producing a book a year for a fairly small readership, and going on doing an honest and unspectacular job'.¹⁷ Fleming was much more ambitious. He had realized very early on in his writing career that selling subsidiary rights, and particularly television and film rights, would be the key to financial security, and he had pursued them relentlessly. At the time of his interview with William Plomer for 'The Writer Speaks', those ambitions were finally coming to fruition, as the following exchange shows:

'William Plomer: You know people often think your books ought to be films. Am I not right in thinking that the first film based on one of your books has just been made?

Ian Fleming: Yes, it has. It was filmed mostly in Jamaica this last winter. And it's been done by United Artists through a subsidiary of theirs over here called EON Productions, and it's been produced by the producer of Saturday Night and Sunday Morning, which was a very great success both here and in America.

Plomer: Have you seen a preview of your film?

Fleming: Yes, I have. I've seen the rough cut and I must say I think they've certainly managed to hit it off very well. They've got a very good star as James Bond, a man called Sean Connery, a Scotsman, who weight-lifts in Scotland and boxed for the navy and a very good Shakespearean actor and

so on, and they've got plenty of excitement and gunplay and what all in the film and I think it'll probably be a very great success.

Plomer: Well, let's hope it will be the first of a succession of films.'¹⁸

And the rest, as they say, is history.

With many thanks to Caroline Craggs, Mike Harkness and Denise Condron of the Archives and Special Collections, Durham University Library.

Notes

- 1, 4, 5, 7. All quotes are from Jonathan Cape, Publisher by Michael Spencer Howard, Penguin, 1971.
2. From Chapter 23, *Casino Royale* by Ian Fleming, Jonathan Cape, 1953.
- 3, 6, 16. All quotes and information from *Ian Fleming* by Andrew Lycett, Phoenix, 1996.
8. 'The Case of Mr Fleming' by Bernard Bergonzi, in *Twentieth Century*, March 1958; and 'Sex, snobbery and sadism' by Paul Johnson, in *The New Statesman*, 5 April 1958.
9. From *The Times*, March 26, 1959.
- 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 18. All quotes from 'The Writer Speaks', Ian Fleming and William Plomer, 1962, courtesy the Archives and Special Collections, Durham University Library.
14. 'The President's Voracious Reading Habits', by Hugh Sidey, in *Life*, March 17, 1961.
17. 'John le Carré Brings Realism To Spy Fiction', Matinee Highlights, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, broadcast May 30, 1964.

A Letter From '008'

JAMES BOND HAS been with us since the publication of *Casino Royale* in 1953. Since then, there has been a vast amount of literature about the character—so much that one would be forgiven for thinking that every stone had been turned. It's a surprise to find in 2015 that this isn't so, as several new books are showing.

Some Kind of Hero: The Remarkable Story of the James Bond Films (The History Press) by Matthew Field and Ajay Chowdhury (disclosure: a friend, and I helped out with the book in a miniscule way) tells the story of the Bond films in loving detail over 700 pages, which are packed with nuggets of juicy new information. It's a real labour of love by the authors, drawing on a passion for the films stretching back decades: as well as filtering information from a vast range of sources, they have carried out over 100 new interviews, with actors, directors, producers, cameramen and others involved, to present what I am sure is the most comprehensive examination of the Bond films yet published. Some of the highlights include a long interview with George Lazenby in which he recounts how he was cast as Bond, one of the most extraordinary stories in showbiz history; interviews with people who have written Bond scripts,

including Purvis & Wade and Len Deighton; and the new light shed on Johanna Harwood's contributions to the genesis of film Bond, finally putting her voice centre-stage. With around 20 in-depth pages devoted to each film, I reckon even the most hardcore Bond fanatic will find their fill of new dope.

Also just published is *The Man With The Golden Typewriter* (Bloomsbury), a collection of letters to but mostly from Ian Fleming edited by his nephew Fergus. Many of these have been published in full or part elsewhere, but lots haven't been, and offer all sorts of insights into how Fleming wrote and edited his books, his relationships with other writers, and more besides. It's essential reading if you're interested in Fleming and Bond.

In February 2016, John Blake will publish *James Bond: The Secret History* by Sean Egan, for which I've written a brief foreword. This very entertaining book looks at all aspects of the Bond phenomenon—books, films, comics, video games—and includes some of the more obscure detours the character has taken over the decades. Egan has interviewed several key people, but for me it was not so much the information as the opinions that made the book so rewarding, as they forced me to re-think some of my own hardened views.

There's a rash of books published with the advent of every new Bond film, but the last decade or so feels different. I suspect a book of Fleming's letters wouldn't have been thought commercially viable last century, when Bond's—and Fleming's—critical stock was lower. Now Oscar-winners direct the Bond films and acclaimed novelists write the books, and Bond seems to be rightfully seen as the great fictional icon he is. This renewed interest and advances in technology means that a lot of fresh information is being revealed, which in itself feeds others' curiosity, provides new avenues of inquiry and leads to further discoveries.

In that spirit, I am now throwing a little something into the pot. I think I have just stumbled across something unknown about Ian Fleming. It's this letter to *The Spectator* in June 1956, purporting to be from '008'. The OCR has slightly mangled some of the text, but you can see a scan of how it originally appeared over on the right of that page. I don't believe this has been spotted before—and I think it's a hitherto unknown letter by Ian Fleming.

The letter is in response to an article by Anthony Hartley published in the previous issue that praised John Buchan's heroes in comparison to 'Mr. Ian Fleming's appalling James Bond'. Hartley's chief complaints were that Bond was a sadist, a snob about food and clothes, and vulgarly sexual. Intriguingly, these were the three key charges that would be made against Fleming two years later, by Bernard Bergonzi in *The Twentieth Century*, an editorial in *The Guardian* and, most famously, Paul Johnson in *The New Statesman*.

The author of this letter defending Fleming has taken on the amusing device of pretending to be a colleague of Fleming's, '008' of Regent's Park, London:

'SIR,—The Secret Service has had to suffer some hard knocks recently, but none unkindier than Mr. Anthony Hartley's disparagement of the head of their 00 section, James Bond. I share an office with Bond and, since I know even more about him than does his biographer, Mr. Ian Fleming, I have exceptionally obtained the permission of M. to break the rules of silence of our Service and come to his defence.'

He goes on to wryly point out why Bond is not the clubland hero Hartley presumed him to be—indeed, that he is if anything 'sub-consciously in revolt' against the Buchan-style Establishment—that

his tastes are much simpler than described, and that sex and violence were elements of the modern world.

There are a few people who could conceivably have written this, but I think '008' was most likely Ian Fleming himself. Firstly, the letter doesn't simply demonstrate a lot of knowledge about James Bond, but is very presumptuous with it. It would take some bravado to claim more knowledge of another man's characters than he himself did, and to then co-opt his characters into the bargain: 'I have exceptionally obtained the permission of M.' If someone else had written this, I think it would have to have been someone Fleming would have been happy to have done so. His editor William Plomer, say.

But I think all signs point to this being by Ian Fleming himself. He sometimes wrote for *The Spectator*, and knew the magazine well: he later became its motoring correspondent. At the time of this letter, his brother Peter had written a column in the magazine under the pseudonym 'Strix' for a decade (the style and content was similar in many ways to 'Atticus' at *The Sunday Times*, which Ian had taken over in 1953). Peter knew his brother's books well and would have been in a position to have written such a letter, but it seems highly unlikely he would have intruded in such a way and in doing so claimed to know more about Bond than Ian, who was quite capable of defending his own work.

But the 'smoking gun', I think, comes courtesy of *The Man With The Golden Typewriter*. On May 31 1956—just a week earlier, and the same day as Anthony Hartley's article attacking Bond for his amorality was published in *The Spectator*—Fleming wrote to Geoffrey Boothroyd, a reader who had written him a long letter about Bond's guns. Fleming was delighted by Boothroyd's evident expertise, and wanted more:

‘At the present moment Bond is particularly anxious for expertise on the weapons likely to be carried by Russian agents and I wonder if you have any information on this. As Bond’s biographer I am most anxious to see that he lives as long as possible and I shall be most grateful for any further technical advices you might like me to pass on to him...’

The chances of someone else calling Fleming Bond’s biographer just a week later seem slim. Neither was this the only time Fleming used the device of pretending Bond was a real person in this way. At the end of *From Russia, With Love*, published in April 1957, Fleming left a cliffhanger that suggested Bond had been killed by Rosa Klebb. When *The New Statesman* published an article bemoaning Bond’s apparent end, Fleming sent them a letter about it and, according to Fergus Fleming, it became his standard reply to fans who wrote to him regretting Bond’s demise. In that letter, he described himself as ‘Commander Bond’s official biographer’.

The *Spectator* letter is signed by ‘008’, rather than Fleming, but it casts Fleming and Bond in the same roles and makes several points Fleming made elsewhere. In a letter to what was then *The Manchester Guardian* in April 1958, Fleming argued that in the real espionage world a spy would likely face more violence than in older thrillers, that Bond’s tastes were perhaps not as outlandish or high-flown as they initially appeared, and mentioned the security risk of the character’s absurdly conspicuous consumption of scrambled eggs. *The Man With The Golden Typewriter* also reveals that in June 1959, Fleming wrote to a reader who had sent him a card for the Aston Martin Owners Club:

‘Thank you very much for your splendid letter of June 17th and for your kind invitation for James Bond to join the A.M.O.C.

Since neither Bond nor his biographer are owners of an Aston Martin, I can do no more than pass your invitation on to the head of Admin. at the Secret Service from whose transport pool the DB III was drawn.’

As in the 1956 letter from ‘008’, Fleming pretended Bond was real, that he was his biographer, and similarly added some business suggesting that he had to navigate the Secret Service bureaucracy of Bond’s world.

In October 1962, *The Spectator* published a letter from Fleming under his own name. As with the 1956 letter he was defending his books from criticism, this time responding to three separate comments about his work in a previous issue of the magazine. Once again, he adopted the pretext of his character being a real person, starting the letter by saying that ‘since Bond is at present away in Magnetogorsk, I hope you will allow me to comment on his behalf.’

Later in the letter he referred to his novels as ‘my serial biography of James Bond’, and defended the character from a charge of fascism by stating that Bond’s politics ‘are, in fact, slightly left of centre’—this echoes 008’s point in 1956 that Bond is not quite the Establishment character he has been mistaken for.

Fleming took the conceit to its furthest point in *You Only Live Twice*, in which M. writes an obituary for a presumed-dead Bond and expands on the idea of Bond being a real figure and Fleming being merely a reporter of his adventures:

‘The inevitable publicity, particularly in the foreign press, accorded some of these adventures, made him, much against

his will, something of a public figure, with the inevitable result that a series of popular books came to be written around him by a personal friend and former colleague of James Bond. If the quality of these books, or their degree of veracity, had been any higher, the author would certainly have been prosecuted under the Official Secrets Act.'

So, presuming the letter was written by Ian Fleming, what does it tell us? Perhaps not a huge amount, but I think it adds something to the picture of how Fleming defended his work. He would later use his own name, but adopt the same amused tone and claim to be Bond's biographer, and it is a disarming tactic: had he written these responses 'straight', it might seem that he was genuinely offended and kicking up a fuss. The technique of pretending Bond was real allowed him to make all his arguments but to do so in a dry, airy way that made him seem unconcerned. In several of these responses, Fleming was defending spurious claims based on misreadings of his own work and the genre as a whole: a secret agent with a knowledge of good food, drink and tailoring had been a staple of the British thriller since at least the first decade of the 20th century, something Fleming knew very well because he had drawn on some of those thrillers for inspiration. Fleming knew the genre better than his critics, but was in the curious position of seeing, in his own lifetime, his creation become synonymous with an entire genre.

It might be that Fleming's letters along these lines acted as an unconscious trial run for the passage in *You Only Live Twice*, as over time he became attached to the idea. Fleming's letters, journalism and novels are littered with passing ideas that he subsequently picked up in later stories. For instance, in April 1956 he reviewed *Scarne on Cards* in the *Sunday Times*: the book, and its topic of cheating at cards, had featured prominently in *Moonraker*.

Fleming ended the review by saying that, because of the criminal uses the book's contents could be put to, libraries and clubs should issue it to readers 'with the proviso "For Your Eyes Only"'. That expression would, of course, be used by Fleming for the title of his collection of short stories published in 1960.

The date of the 008 letter is also interesting, in that 1956 is two years before the main attacks on Fleming's books, and those attacks were on very similar grounds. We also tend to presume that Bond had little cultural impact before the films, but here we see that just three years after the publication of the first novel, *Casino Royale*, James Bond was a significant enough force that he was being discussed at some length in a British magazine, to the degree that a letter from its author making an in-joke about a character who didn't even exist in his books, ie 008, would presumably have been understood by most of the publication's readers.

Finally, I think this letter shows how the trickle of fresh information about Fleming and his work is gathering pace. This letter hasn't been picked up before, I suspect, in part because it was not signed by Ian Fleming. But it is also thanks to scanning technology that it's appeared on *The Spectator's* website, where it came up in a Google search I ran for something else. Armed with new information from *The Man With The Golden Typewriter* and elsewhere, I was also able to put it into more context than I would have been able to a few years ago. So while it's a very minor discovery in terms of Ian Fleming's work, I think it's part of a pattern that suggests there is more out there than previously thought—for example, the latest Bond novel, *Trigger Mortis*, written by Anthony Horowitz, includes snippets of original material by Ian Fleming that I don't think were previously on record as having even survived.

What else might be out there?

NEED TO KNOW

With many thanks to Ihsan Amanatullah and Tom Cull for additional information and insights.

Licence To Hoax

‘THE CREATION OF real life intelligence operative and old Etonian Ian Fleming, Bond borrowed his 007 title from Dr John Dee. The 16th century British secret agent used the code for his messages to Queen Elizabeth I. The two zeros meant “for your eyes only” ...’¹

BBC News, November 22 2002

‘At the outbreak of war, the Beast found himself caught up in further intrigue as the occult and espionage worlds collided. Ian Fleming, working for naval intelligence in M15, contacted him with an outlandish plan to lure Rudolf Hess to Britain by using mystical enchantments and astrology...’²

The Daily Telegraph, May 30 2009

‘Behind every great James Bond thriller there is a great Bond girl. The actress Eva Green is winning plaudits for her sultry portrayal of Vesper Lynd in the new film of Ian Fleming’s 1953 novel

Casino Royale. But was this exotic femme fatale just a product of the author's imagination?

As a noted womaniser who had worked in Naval Intelligence during the Second World War, Fleming had plenty of personal experiences upon which to draw. He also enjoyed a cocktail called the Vesper. But more importantly, in the years immediately before writing *Casino Royale*, he had been regularly seeing a woman named Christine Granville.

She was really the Countess Krystyna Skarbek. When she was born, half-Jewish, in Warsaw on a stormy night, her father, an impoverished count, gave her the pet name "Vespérale"...

The Times, November 18, 2006

'The story of beautiful wartime spy Christine Granville, who was Ian Fleming's lover and the inspiration for the James Bond character Vesper Lynd, is to be made into a major film...'

The Daily Mail, February 27, 2009

Newspapers *love* stories about James Bond. The world's most popular secret agent provides several elements that attract readers: glamour, intrigue, sex and danger. Ian Fleming worked in intelligence during the Second World War, and knew a lot of people in the espionage world. This has led to dozens of articles over the years about his exploits and those of others he knew. Some of these have little truth to them, while some are based on outright fabrication.

In the last few years, I've noticed that a lot of newspaper articles about James Bond lead back to the same source: *17F: The Life of Ian Fleming* by Donald McCormick. Billed on the cover as 'the definitive biography with important new material', this short book was published in 1993, 27 years after the publication of John Pearson's biography of Fleming and three years before Andrew

Lycett's. Pearson and Lycett had both worked for *The Sunday Times*, and both had access to Fleming's own papers, as well as interviewing many of the people Fleming had known.

On the face of it, McCormick was also well qualified to write a biography of Ian Fleming. A journalist and author of several decades standing, he had published over 50 non-fiction books about espionage, many under the pseudonym Richard Deacon. During the war he had been in the Royal Navy, and after it Fleming had hired him for the news agency Mercury, which was part of the Kemsley empire. For his biography of Fleming, McCormick didn't have access to Ian Fleming's papers, but he did make extensive use of newspaper archives, the papers of Ian Fleming's brother Peter, and consulted several notable names in the Bond world, including Ian Fleming's former literary agent Peter Janson-Smith.

But unknown to these people, McCormick was a fraud. Between the facts that had already been set out in John Pearson's book and a sprinkling of new but not especially significant information, McCormick's biography contained several elaborate hoaxes about the life and work of Ian Fleming, all of which have been reported in creditable newspapers and books, and continue to be to this day. I think it's time to dismantle McCormick as a source on Ian Fleming once and for all, and to expose both his fraudulence, and how he did it.

MCCORMICK HAS ALREADY been unmasked as a hoaxer in other fields. In 1959, the author and broadcaster Melvin Harris read McCormick's book *The Mystery of Lord Kitchener's Death* and realized that its 'only new evidence (telling first-person "revelations") was simply manufactured.'⁵

Harris then turned his attention to McCormick's book *The Identity of Jack the Ripper*, published the same year. He concluded that McCormick had fabricated key documents that he quoted in the book, claiming they were the papers of a Dr Dutton, including a poem supposedly found in the police archives, 'Eight Little Whores'. In advance of a TV programme on which McCormick would be exposed as a hoaxer, Harris called McCormick to tell him how he knew the Dutton documents were fake, that McCormick was the forger, and that he had fleshed out the rest of his book with 'uncheckable and bogus documents and statements.'⁶ McCormick initially denied it, but after a while apparently became philosophical about his imminent exposure, especially as Harris softened the blow by saying he would not name him as the forger but was prepared to describe the hoax 'as the work of a man with a wicked sense of humour'. The TV programme was cancelled, but Harris eventually met McCormick:

'I asked him if he now wished to publicly name the faker of the poem, but he said he was not ready. He was still happy, though, for me to use the old formula, that it was faked by "A very clever man who enjoys his quiet fun", and he winked as he said it! Yes, he was a likeable rogue. But he was trapped by his very likeability. Over the years he had kept up the bluff with so many people that he found it hard to disentangle himself, as I found out when I later wrote to him. He was, by then, unwilling to commit himself in writing, instead he wrote letters full of teasing, enigmatic clues.

Finally in October 1997 I wrote to him and asked him to stop the fooling and write a candid letter fit for publication. Sadly the reply that came back read "I have an ulcer on my right eye and have great difficulty in writing at present. Please let the matter drop." I did and there was never to be a further chance. Within a short while I learned that he was dead.'⁷

Harris himself died in 2004. He also wrote that McCormick told him that the starting point for his books was usually the Kemsley newspaper library, which contained cuttings dating back to the Victorian era: ‘Other newspapers, he advised, held similar archives. They saved him a journey and a search at Colindale.’⁸ This technique can be seen in *17F*: dozens of newspaper articles are cited and often quoted at length. These make the book seem more authoritative and give McCormick lots of genuine sources to footnote, helping to disguise the fabrications woven around them.

I FIRST REALIZED McCormick was a hoaxer because of the Rudolf Hess story in *17F*, which has been reported dozens of times in the press but is utterly preposterous. In his 1966 biography of Fleming, John Pearson had described how, following the unexpected landing of the Deputy Führer in Scotland in May 1941, Fleming had contacted the infamous black magician Aleister Crowley:

‘This immensely ugly old diabolist and self-advertiser had thrown himself into certain more unsavoury areas of the occult with a gusto that must have appealed to Fleming, and when the interrogators from British Intelligence began trying to make sense of the neurotic and highly superstitious Hess [Fleming] got the idea that Crowley might be able to help and tracked him down to a place near Torquay, where he was living harmlessly on his own and writing patriotic poetry to encourage the war effort.’⁹

According to Pearson, Crowley wrote a letter to the Director of Naval Intelligence offering to help, but nothing came of it:

‘It is a pity that this had to be one of Fleming’s bright ideas which never came off: understandably, there was hilarity in the department at the idea of the Great Beast 666 doing his bit for Britain.’¹⁰

Pearson deals with this episode in four paragraphs. McCormick took the ingredients of it—Fleming, Hess, Crowley and the occult—to invent an entirely new story. In his version, Fleming didn’t merely get the idea to approach Crowley after Hess had landed: Hess’ arrival in Scotland was itself the result of an elaborate operation hatched by Fleming to lure him to Britain by means of forged astrological charts. McCormick larded his story with details about meetings in Portugal and Switzerland, Hess’ ‘chief astrological adviser Ernst Schulte-Strathaus’ and the like, with footnotes referring to letters sent to him by several parties, and in one case saying ‘See German Intelligence Personnel Records’, with no indication as to where those might be.

The profusion of names, dates and sources were presumably to give credence to what is, on the face of it, a totally implausible story. McCormick claimed, for example, that Fleming and Crowley engaged in occult rites in Ashdown Forest involving a dummy dressed in a Nazi uniform on a throne-like chair. McCormick quoted at length on this ‘Amado Crowley, Aleister Crowley’s son’. He neglected to mention that Amado was in fact Andrew Standish, a writer on the occult who claimed to be Crowley’s secret illegitimate son and had changed his name as a result. Standish is generally recognized to have been a hoaxer himself.

On reading this chapter, I immediately suspected it was pure fabrication, but two sources cited by McCormick gave me pause for thought: Peter Fleming and Sefton Delmer. Delmer was a well-known journalist who had been a major force in British propaganda and psychological warfare against the Nazis, and who had known Ian Fleming fairly well. Peter was Ian’s older brother, and also a veteran of several ingenious deception operations during the war, a few of

them somewhat surreal (although nowhere near as surreal as this episode). In 1940, Peter Fleming had published a best-selling comic novel called *The Flying Visit* about Hitler dropping into Britain. According to McCormick, Ian Fleming had urged Peter to write the book, ‘doubtless seeing it as a possible means of signalling to the Germans that the British might talk if someone were lured to Britain—if not Hitler or Hess, then possibly Canaris’:

‘When Hess himself enacted Peter Fleming’s fictitious ploy, no doubt it secretly delighted Ian, but the sheer coincidence of *The Flying Visit* narrative and Hess’s arrival must at the same time have been somewhat embarrassing for him.

However, there is no evidence that the brothers colluded in Ian’s secret operation. Peter Fleming stated long afterwards that Ian had not told him about ‘this idea’, which he described as ‘a new legend about my brother’. On the other hand, Sefton Delmer, who knew Ian Fleming well and had worked with him, commented: ‘As an idea, inducing Hess to fly to England by means of astrological hocus-pocus—and the bait of the Duke of Hamilton—was something that might have appealed to Ian Fleming, or even to have been conceived by him. I am quite ready to believe that.’

Later, anxious to stress that he had no knowledge of any such plans and, by implication, denying that his own novel had any connection with them, Peter Fleming affirmed that he did not believe ‘the elaborate ruses were ever carried out, or even planned’. None the less the undisputed fact remains that Fleming was anxious, once Hess had landed, to follow up his own hunches on the best way to handle him. He not only begged the authorities to allow Aleister Crowley to interview Hess, he even managed to persuade Crowley to offer his services for this purpose. Unfortunately the offer was not taken up...’¹¹

And we have come full circle, back to the incident in John Pearson's biography from which McCormick seems to have developed the entire story. McCormick footnoted his quotes from Delmer and Peter Fleming to issues of *The Times* from September 1969. I looked them up, and found that McCormick had omitted a rather salient fact: both Delmer and Peter Fleming had written about this incident in terms of dismissing an earlier telling of it. By none other than Donald McCormick.

In 1969, McCormick's book *A History of the British Secret Service* was published under the pseudonym Richard Deacon. In it, he wrote that Ian Fleming had masterminded an operation to lure Rudolf Hess to Britain using fake astrological charts. Shortly before the book was published, *The Times* ran an article on this 'remarkable claim' but, very sensibly, sought out the opinions of Sefton Delmer and Peter Fleming on it. Both men dismissed McCormick's story. Delmer admitted that the idea was the sort of thing that might have appealed to Ian Fleming, or even been conceived by him, as quoted above, but went on to say that he found the details of the story unconvincing:

'It is all too pat and does not fit the fact that the flight on May 10 was not Hess's first attempt to fly to Britain.'¹²

Peter Fleming said that Ian had never mentioned the idea to him, and indeed called it 'a new legend about my brother'—ie a legend created by Donald McCormick. Three days later, Peter wrote a letter to *The Times* explaining in greater detail why he thought the story was nonsense:

‘Sir, -- I agree with Mr. Sefton Delmer that the idea of decoying the Deputy Führer of the Third Reich, with the aid of astrology, to rendez-vous with a Duke in Scotland during the opening phase of the German offensive in Europe in May 1940 was one that my late brother, Ian, might well have conceived. But he did not conceive it, nor do I believe that the elaborate ruses described by Mr. Deacon in his *History of the British Secret Service* were ever carried out, or even planned...’¹³

Peter Fleming went on to explain that because he had written *The Flying Visit*, he thought it highly unlikely his brother would have neglected to mention to him that he had been involved with such a similar real-life event later on in the war. Peter did not mention, for security reasons, that he had himself been an important figure in deception operations during the war, so there was no question that Ian would not have trusted him with such information.

Ellic Howe, who had also been involved in deception and propaganda operations in the war, wrote to *The Times* on the same day to dismiss the story, reporting that he had discussed with Ernst Schulte-Strathaus, Hess’ supposed adviser on astrological matters, whether there might be any such esoteric background to the case, and he had said there wasn’t. In addition, Howe wrote, Schulte-Strathaus wasn’t Hess’ astrological adviser, ‘but merely talked to him occasionally about astrology’.¹⁴ Unfortunately, by discussing such nuances, Howe probably gave some readers the impression that there was something in McCormick’s story.

Undaunted by the three-pronged assault from Delmer, Howe and Peter Fleming, McCormick replied to *The Times*, insisting that he respected their views but asking them to wait for publication of his book before offering their final judgment on it.¹⁵

One of the advantages of fabricating information about intelligence operations is that it is very difficult for anyone to prove

you wrong. It's a further advantage if the people you're making the claims about are dead, as Ian Fleming was in 1969. When McCormick revived his hoax 24 years later, Delmer, Howe and Peter Fleming had all since died. McCormick shamelessly quoted their dismissals of his fabrication as evidence to support it. In doing so, he altered some of their words. Peter Fleming wrote: 'But he did not conceive it, nor do I believe that the elaborate ruses described by Mr. Deacon in his History of the British Secret Service were ever carried out, or even planned.' McCormick altered this, for obvious reasons, quoting Peter Fleming as not believing 'the elaborate ruses were ever carried out, or even planned'. No ellipses, either. In doing this, he was not simply misquoting Peter Fleming and disguising the context of his comments, which would have revealed that it was his story under discussion by Peter Fleming, and being dismissed by him. He was also subtly but offensively insinuating that Peter Fleming's disbelief of his fabrication was in some way evidence that he had been covering up the 'real' conspiracy. This insinuation is in the words 'anxious to stress': he was suggesting that Peter Fleming had been protesting too much, and wanted to hide what had really happened.

In fact, Peter Fleming had had Donald McCormick pegged.

THE 'Fleming-lured-Hess-to-Scotland-with-astrology' story, despite being an obvious hoax, still pops up in the press sometimes, and often crops up online. Another of McCormick's hoaxes that is blindly reported as fact is his claim that the 16th-century English mathematician John Dee was a spy for Queen Elizabeth I and signed his missives with a stylized 007. McCormick wrote that Aleister Crowley introduced Ian Fleming to the works of Dee, and that this was how James Bond got his codename.¹⁶

This was debunked by Teresa Burns in 2010, who wrote that McCormick's 1968 book *John Dee: Scientist, Geographer, Astrologer, and Secret Agent to Elizabeth I*, written under the Richard Deacon pseudonym 'seems the source of the persistent printed and Internet legend that John Dee signed his name "007"':

'Did Dee really sign his name this way? A painstaking search through many, many Dee signatures has convinced this writer that he did not. His real signature took many forms, but looks more like a whirlwind than a 007.

Yet even this writer has fallen for that non-fact. Deacon footnotes works of natural philosopher Robert Hooke (1635-1703), including his *Posthumous Works* presented to Sir Isaac Newton (which does actually exist) and an alleged work called *An Ingenious Cryptographical System*, which, though quoted in several scholarly and non-scholarly works since, and listed in two of them as being among the "Gwydir Papers, Manuscript Collection," seems not to exist at all.

Yet for one who has studied much of the Dee material which has become available after 1968, Deacon's book reads like a blurred, excited rehashing of ideas slightly out of focus and in the service of someone else's ego: he footnotes here and there as if for kicks, referring to letters and legend one can find no record of, but weaving a story that is almost plausible...'¹⁷

This is a good description of McCormick's technique: alongside genuine material correctly sourced, he added elements he had invented, citing fictitious but authoritative-sounding sources. Much of *17F* is recycled material from his earlier works, sometimes barely repackaged and often only tenuously linked to Ian Fleming. His account of the failed plan to block the Danube in 1940 is the same as the one he gave in *The Silent War: A History of Western Naval*

Intelligence, published under the pseudonym Richard Deacon in 1988, with hardly a word changed. There is some justification for that: Fleming was heavily involved in that operation, so it makes some sense to recap his research. But in many cases McCormick repeated material from his previous books that had nothing whatsoever to do with Ian Fleming, and simply repackaged them with Fleming now playing a central role in the incidents in question.

The greatest example of this is Chapter 9 of the book, which is about the celebrated SOE agent Krystyna Skarbek, better known as Christine Granville. McCormick had already written about Granville in both *A History of the British Secret Service* and *Spyclopaedia*, the latter published six years earlier, but in neither had he mentioned her in connection with Ian Fleming. In this chapter he repeated a lot of material about Granville from those books, and justified its inclusion in a biography of Ian Fleming by fabricating a story that Fleming had had an affair with her.

To bolster this story, McCormick presented several pieces of ‘evidence’. These included quotes and correspondence from Ed Howe, who had been a Kemsley correspondent in Istanbul. Howe and Granville had genuinely known each other, and perhaps it was this convenient fact that inspired McCormick’s tale, because it placed Granville a degree of separation from Ian Fleming. McCormick claimed that after the war Christine Granville had met Howe in Cairo and told him she was looking for work:

‘Howe told me: “As a long shot I gave her Fleming’s address, as I felt sure he would be interested in her—as a fascinating personality certainly and maybe as a correspondent somewhere or other.”’¹⁸

McCormick didn’t provide a date or any other reference for this quote, so we have to take it on trust that he accurately recalled

Howe's words—and that Howe even said any such a thing at all. McCormick claimed that Fleming was interested in Granville, and quotes a letter from Ian Fleming to Howe about her: 'She literally shines with all the qualities and splendours of a fictitious character. How rarely one finds such types.'¹⁹

A letter by Fleming! If true, compelling evidence of a connection, at least. But it isn't shown in the book. McCormick instead footnoted this quote, writing that the letter had been shown to him personally, and had been dated 12 May 1947. He did not reveal the current whereabouts of the letter, again leaving readers with just his word that it ever existed.

McCormick claimed Fleming met Granville for lunch at Bertorelli's in London and that they went on to have an affair, his source being 'one of Christine's Polish friends', Olga Bialoguski, who told him about it. Conveniently, Olga also revealed to McCormick that Granville was very secretive, often made up stories to cover her tracks so you could never know when she was telling the truth, and that she, Olga, was one of Granville's only friends to know about the affair.

She's also one of Granville's only friends not to be mentioned in connection with Granville anywhere else. She has a convincingly Polish-sounding surname, though. It's the same surname as Dr Michael Bialoguski, the Polish-born Australian agent who was instrumental in Vladimir Petrov's defection in 1954, as related in the world's press and by McCormick himself in his book *Spyclopaedia*, published a few years earlier. Perhaps Olga was related in some way to the doctor? If so, McCormick didn't mention it. More likely, I think, is that McCormick wanted a second source, decided it would be a Polish friend of Granville's and simply looked through his own work for a real Polish surname.

Olga also revealed to McCormick, in long fluent English quotes with no dates or other information given for them, that Granville had once confided to her that Fleming had taken her to a hotel named the Granville ‘somewhere in the region of Dover’. This brought back memories for McCormick, who recalled just such a hotel being mentioned in passing in *Moonraker*. After quoting the passage in question, he noted that ‘to introduce Christine to a hotel actually named after her would be just the kind of joke Fleming would enjoy.’²⁰

Ian Fleming certainly knew of Christine Granville, as he mentioned her by name in *The Diamond Smugglers* when discussing different types of secret agents:

‘Then there are the colourful spies like Sorge, the brilliant, luxury-loving German who worked for Russia in Tokio, and girls like Christine Granville who was murdered by a love-crazed ship’s steward in a Kensington hotel in March 1952, after a fabulous record in wartime espionage for which she earned the George Medal.’²¹

Granville was well-known, and Fleming knew of her, but there is no evidence anywhere other than in Donald McCormick’s book that Ian Fleming ever even met her, let alone had an affair with her. Considering the access that both John Pearson and Andrew Lycett had, and the thoroughness of their research, one would have expected them to have mentioned a connection with such a well-known woman. All the more so, as someone Ian Fleming did have an affair with was Blanche Blackwell.

Pearson didn’t mention this at all in his biography, perhaps because Ian’s widow Ann was still alive at the time he was writing, as was Blackwell. Writing in 1996, long after all the parties were dead, Andrew Lycett revealed the affair and the extent of it. But he didn’t mention Christine Granville once. Writing in 1993,

McCormick devoted a whole chapter to the supposed affair with Granville, his only evidence for which was oral testimony from a friend of Granville's who has never been identified elsewhere and a letter from Fleming to Edward Howe never seen anywhere else. But Blanche Blackwell isn't mentioned once in the book.

McCormick went on to theorize that Granville had been the model for Vesper Lynd in *Casino Royale*. His 'evidence' for this is very thin indeed. Yes, the description of Vesper sounds a little like Christine Granville, in that she was a beautiful dark-haired woman. The descriptions of Solitaire in *Live and Let Die* and Tatiana Romanova in *From Russia, With Love* are also rather similar. But there's nothing out of the ordinary in the physical description of Vesper: she was standard fare for the genre.

McCormick noted that Vesper Lynd speaks French 'like a native', and that according to people who had known her, Granville was also fluent in French. But that's hardly surprising for an SOE agent who was sent to France. McCormick reported that Granville thrived on disaster—just like Vesper in the novel. But that's a passing comment from Bond, not a serious assessment of her character, and anyway, Vesper is also involved in espionage: one could say that James Bond thrives on disaster, too. McCormick also noted that Vesper is in love with a Pole in the R.A.F., while Granville had been great friends with a gallant Pole in the British Army (and was Polish herself). All of this is inconsequential, and a game that could be applied to dozens of people.

But McCormick did provide *one* piece of information that seemed to point firmly and unequivocally to Christine Granville. In the novel, Vesper tells Bond that she was given her unusual name by her parents because she had been born on a stormy evening. This, McCormick revealed, was a secret clue:

‘Further inquiries established the fact that Christine Granville was born on a stormy night and that her father gave her the nickname of ‘Vespérale’, or, as he himself explained, ‘*qui a rapport au soir claret vespérale*.’²²

McCormick provided a footnote for this, citing Madeleine Masson’s 1975 biography *Christine: A Search for Christine Granville*, but he didn’t provide the corresponding page number. There was a very good reason for that: that particular piece of information didn’t in fact appear anywhere in Masson’s book. Instead, Masson noted:

‘Count Jerzy was relieved when his daughter Krystyna, Christine, born in 1915, seemed to have inherited his own good looks.

From the start there was a complete rapport between father and daughter. He called her his ‘Happiness’ and his ‘Star’.’²³

So the one piece of information McCormick gave that compellingly suggested Granville was the model for Vesper is not in the book McCormick claimed as his source for it. And instead, that book contradicts McCormick’s account, saying that her father nicknamed her Happiness and Star. And while vesper can refer to the evening star, that isn’t what McCormick wrote, and ‘Star’ is not a nickname one gives for being born on a stormy night.

This false citation completely undermines McCormick’s claim Vesper was based on Granville, both because he falsified it and because the rest of his evidence is so flimsy: there were plenty of dark-haired French-speaking beauties before, during and after the war on whom Fleming could have based the character, and he also might not have based her on anyone. One could find details in the biographies of many women who could be linked in this sort of way to Vesper Lynd’s first name, her surname, her appearance, or lines

snipped from *Casino Royale*. Vesper is also the name for common kinds of bat, sparrow and mouse. The daring, beautiful, dark-haired, French-speaking SOE agent Violette Szabo used a code based on *Three Blind Mice*. ‘Vespers’ are evening prayers in various denominations. SOE agent Nancy Wake grew up in a strict religious background, and was known to the Gestapo as The White Mouse. One could claim any woman was born on a stormy night, or was known by friends to attend evening prayers, or anything else. But without any credible evidence to substantiate a claim of an affair or that Fleming based the character on a particular person, such as correspondence or other material by Granville or Fleming, there would be no reason to believe any such theory.

Why choose Christine Granville? Well, McCormick already knew quite a lot about her, having written about her twice before, and he had presumably sensed already that she was a good subject for his audience: beautiful, heroic, and fascinating to the public. So I think he created the tale of the affair, and to support it he pointed to a book that didn’t contain the evidence he claimed it did, invented a letter from Fleming to a friend who had died, and added a mysterious Polish friend Olga, who nobody’s ever seen. Presumably, he was hoping that the footnote pointing to Masson would in and of itself seem authoritative, and that nobody would bother to look it up, or that if they did would soon give up looking when they couldn’t find the reference, presuming it was in the book somewhere or other. And he was right: a lot of people have taken him a face value. Not everyone was fooled, though. In 2006, John Griswold published an exhaustive examination of Fleming and his work, and did look up McCormick’s reference to Masson’s book. But, he noted, he ‘could not find this information stated anywhere within it’.²⁴

IN 2004, A Canadian company, Queen Fine Arts, bought the film rights to Masson's biography of Christine Granville. The following year a new edition of her book was published by Virago, now retitled *Christine: SOE Agent and Churchill's Favourite Spy*. In a new afterword, Masson discussed some developments that had taken place since the book had first been published in 1975:

'Once it became known that my researches might become the basis for a film, a tide of new information about Christine alerted me to the fact that there were lacunae in my book that would need further digging and verification.'²⁵

Chief among these lacunae was Granville's SOE file, which had been declassified in 2003, the contents of which Masson discussed and quoted, and Donald McCormick's claim that Granville had an affair with Ian Fleming, which Masson discussed at some length. She also mentioned the idea that Granville might have been the model for Vesper, noting their supposed similarities in appearance and that she tells Bond her name is the result of her being born on a stormy evening:

'In fact, Countess Krystyna Skarbek *was* born on a stormy night, and her father, Count Jerzy Skarbek, had given his baby daughter the nickname Vespérale or, as he explained, 'like the evening star'.

One of the many biographies of Fleming—Donald McCormick's—majors on his affair with Christine. I cannot confirm that Fleming used Christine as the model for Vesper Lynd but there is a real passion in Fleming's novel and his account of Vesper's beauty and character adds up to a fair description of Christine.'²⁶

Masson was in her nineties when she wrote this afterword, so allowances should be made. But there are several troubling aspects

about it. Firstly, it seems that she didn't dig very far or verify very much about this particular lacuna. She doesn't seem to have realized that McCormick had given *her* as the source for Granville's nickname being 'Vespérale'—or that that detail had not in fact been in her book. Instead, bizarrely, she repeated most of McCormick's information, including the crucial detail he had supposedly got from her. More worrying is the way she did this: in the paragraphs before she mentioned McCormick. This gives the impression that she knew about the nickname some other way, omitting that her source was the same as for the affair she couldn't confirm mentioned in the next paragraph. If she couldn't confirm the affair, what was her evidence for the nickname?

So in 1993 McCormick had disguised his fabrication by crediting Masson as his source when she wasn't. And in 2005, Masson disguised the fact that she got all her new information about Fleming from... McCormick.

This isn't anywhere near the same as McCormick's fabrications, but it calls into serious question Masson's reliability as a source on Christine Granville. Masson said she could not confirm the affair with Fleming—but devoted a couple of pages to it nevertheless. If she had been a thorough researcher, McCormick's claims should have raised alarm bells at once, because: she herself was the cited source for the information; she wasn't in fact the source for it; she hadn't come across any evidence of an affair in writing the first edition of her book; and neither had any of Fleming's other biographers come across it.

In repeating McCormick's story, she unwittingly extended his hoax beyond the grave. Now she can accurately be quoted as having mentioned the affair. (Her new edition also added one more myth to the mix: although the title now proclaimed Granville was

‘Churchill’s favourite spy’, that information is not mentioned at all in the book itself, let alone a reference for it cited.)

It is as a result of this sort of Chinese whispers that McCormick’s hoaxes about Ian Fleming and James Bond have survived to date. There’s a lot of other information in *17F* that doesn’t appear in either John Pearson or Andrew Lycett’s biographies. Some of it is verifiably true, but in general the more interesting McCormick’s information, the harder it is to ascertain the source. In many cases, he simply states something as fact, as in that Charles Fraser-Smith was ‘unquestionably’ the brains behind Fleming’s Q Branch. Fraser-Smith certainly created ingenious gadgets during the Second World War, but he admits in his own memoir that he only knew Fleming slightly, and there were plenty of other boffins in British intelligence who worked in that line—SOE had a special workshop for them in Welwyn Garden City. McCormick also quotes a KGB file, apparently declassified after the fall of the Soviet Union, which discusses keeping an eye on Fleming’s work for any mentions of SMERSH, but gives no reference to the document’s whereabouts or reference number. There are dozens of such minor snippets of information in the book, many of which have been repeated and expanded on by other writers and in the process made firmer over the years. Unpicking them all would be impossible, but I hope that this article sheds light on some of McCormick’s most widely accepted myths and hoaxes about Ian Fleming and James Bond.

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NEED TO KNOW

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More Tradecraft

Sillier than Fiction

‘BUT WHERE’S THE twist?’ As new information about the resignation of CIA director David Petraeus emerges, this is the thought uppermost in my mind. As someone who writes about espionage for a living the episode seems both bizarre and unsatisfying. In my own spy novels, I would never dare to write such a story—my readers wouldn’t stand for it.

There have been several twists to the Petraeus scandal, of course, from the news of another woman being involved, to an FBI officer emailing bare-chested pictures of himself, to the emergence today—this was almost too much—of one of the women involved having an identical twin. But none of this would pass muster as fiction, except perhaps as a light spoof. As screenwriter Zack Stentz tweeted: ‘Really, General Petraeus? Paula Broadwell? The Roger Moore-era Bond girl name wasn’t a tipoff that this was a bad idea?’ The spy chief with his trousers around his ankles is less *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*, more *Spy Hard*. Many photographs of Broadwell show her in elegant gowns the likes of which are usually saved for that scene in which

the secret agent and his accomplice infiltrate a swanky cocktail party—all she's missing is the tiny earpiece with which she can communicate with Tom Cruise while he sips a vodka martini and furtively looks around for the villain.

In fictional terms, 'The Petraeus File' is not just clichéd, but poorly written. Events that only occur as a result of characters' ineptitude frustrate readers—especially if, as in Petraeus' case, they are a senior official. As head of the CIA, he will have been extremely familiar with the concept of men being compromised by sexual attraction. As a 'reader' of the story, the revelation that he and Broadwell communicated by draft emails in a joint account they set up has a satisfying irony, in that Al Qaeda has used the same technique, but it is still staggeringly naïve. If this had happened in a novel, readers would have flung the book across the room: 'Come on! The head of the CIA doesn't even encrypt his own emails?'

The episode points to a truth not usually acknowledged by real life spies: yes, fiction often makes them seem more exciting, but it also makes them look better at their jobs. Novelists need unpredictable twists to keep readers guessing, and characters need to be clever to engage attention. Petraeus's foolishness foils the attractive notion in both fiction and real life that intelligence officers are detached masterminds playing with the rest of the world like pawns. When the film of this is made, as it inevitably will be, the scriptwriters will have a mountain to climb to make it seem more believable.

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This is How Five Eyes Dies

(This was a speculative piece, written in 2017 but as if looking back from 2019.)

FEBRUARY 2019—“It sounds like a Frederick Forsyth novel.”

The Western intelligence alliance that had held firm since the end of World War II was finally shattered this month by U.S. President Donald Trump. To understand how it came to this, one must consider the above quote, which appeared in the *New York Times* back in the heady spring of 2017 and would quickly be lent the undue authority to eventually jeopardize the entire Five Eyes intelligence-sharing program.

The speaker was former CIA analyst Larry C. Johnson, who left the agency in 1993, and the comparison he wished to draw was between the U.S. government’s relationships with its closest allies and the plots of best-selling British pulp spy novels. In March 2017,

Johnson claimed on his blog that Britain’s signals intelligence agency GCHQ—or, as he repeatedly called it, “GHCQ”—intercepted communications within Trump Tower during the 2016 U.S. presidential election. His evidence for this? GCHQ Director Robert Hannigan had resigned three days after Trump’s inauguration. Hannigan announced that he would be caring for his ill wife and elderly parents, but Johnson saw a darker plot in the timing, writing, “I do not believe in coincidences.” Like many a conspiracy theorist before him, Johnson sought out a reassuringly malevolent order amid the world’s daily churn of chaos. The real reason, he surmised, was obvious: The Brits had passed intelligence they had gathered on Trump to the Obama administration, and as soon as Trump was apprised of this, Hannigan had been forced to step down.

Johnson repeated this fanciful claim on the Kremlin-funded network RT, after which it was picked up by Andrew Napolitano, a Trump confidant and pundit for Fox News. Two days later, White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer cited Napolitano’s comments at a briefing, provoking an unusually forceful denial from the Brits.

Intelligence insiders were aghast. Johnson was best-known for a hoax in 2008 in which he claimed Michelle Obama had been caught on tape using the racist term “whitey.” More recently, he had claimed, without evidence, that it wasn’t the Russians who had hacked the Democratic National Committee but the CIA.

In normal circumstances, nobody close to power would have taken seriously the conspiracy theories of this discredited crank. But since January 2017, the American president has been a man of the same stamp, having entered politics propagating the lie that Barack Obama wasn’t born in the United States. Spicer, with Trump’s blessing, clutched at Johnson’s claims in a desperate attempt to bolster Trump’s own fabrication that Obama had wiretapped him illegally.

The invoking of Frederick Forsyth was fitting, though ironic. Best-known for the classic thriller *The Day of The Jackal*, the British novelist's specialty is making fantastical near-future plots seem plausible. But even he would have struggled to sell the story of an American president giving credence to a conspiracy theory, fanned by a Russian propaganda network, that the British had spied on him at the behest of his predecessor.

In light of subsequent events, this farcical episode seems less like Forsyth than John le Carré at his most downbeat.

Before its disbandment, Five Eyes was the world's most significant intelligence alliance. Founded in the aftermath of World War II with an agreement between the United States and the U.K., and later expanded to include Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, it entailed the mutual sharing of signals and communications intelligence between these countries—and the understanding they would not spy on each other. The terms of the arrangement had not always been upheld, and relations had occasionally been fraught, with Washington previously threatening others with expulsion or suspension from the group.

But the alliance had borne fruit on countless occasions, particularly between Britain and the United States. Anglo-American cooperation had been crucial in tracking Soviet ballistic missile-carrying submarines during the Cold War, and the United States had for decades relied heavily on British listening posts in its former empire for signals intelligence in the Middle East and elsewhere. Following 9/11, American and Pakistani intelligence arrested Osama bin Laden's aide Khalid Sheikh Mohammed on the strength of an intercepted text message, leading to a wealth of intelligence about planning against British targets.

Some spies in the alliance's member countries had initially welcomed Trump's presidency, imagining they would be able to take

advantage of his ignorance to increase their budgets and minimize interference in their activities. But looming over everything was the specter of Russian interference. In late 2016, former MI6 officer Christopher Steele had handed the FBI a dossier detailing dozens of sourced claims that Russian intelligence had cultivated and compromised Trump years before he became a presidential candidate.

Investigations by Congress into the relationship between the Trump administration and Russia sparked a Cold War between the U.S. president and his own intelligence agencies. Trump derided every new piece of evidence as fake news, and coupled with the public's fatigue at a seemingly never-ending political circus, that managed to reduce a scandal that in scale and severity eclipsed Watergate to a mere sideshow for most Americans. But U.S. intelligence officials were less easily distracted and began to wonder how they could share secrets with a president who might be compromised by a hostile power.

The best-selling memoirs of Trump administration survivors have now confirmed Trump's own insistence that intelligence briefings be as brief as possible ("you know, I'm, like, a smart person") gave them some leeway. Under the guise of concision, they omitted as much potentially sensitive information as possible. On the rare occasions that Trump asked for more, they buried him in a mix of bureaucratese and espionage jargon. If National Security Agency analysts intercepted a message in Damascus from a terrorist courier working with minimal information about the rest of the organization, they would provide the president with a 45-page report titled "Provisional assessment of ELINT take from interception of cutout to handler in Syria," knowing he would almost certainly not read it. Pressed to explain the operation face-to-face, they would use similar tactics and retreat to explaining procedures for protecting

sources in excruciating detail. Trump, increasingly distrustful, started intimating that he would cut budgets for time-wasters who couldn't give him straight answers.

Halfway through Trump's first year in office, even the Russians had concluded that Trump was too volatile. In September 2017, a clip was uploaded to YouTube in which someone looking and sounding exactly like Trump was heard giving explicit requests to prostitutes in a hotel room once frequented by the Obamas in Moscow, backing the most sensational claim of the Steele dossier. And yet even this proved unable to penetrate Trump's "fake news" defense. There was a media frenzy, and senior Democrats and some Republicans alike called for Trump to resign or be impeached, but Trump claimed the clip had been concocted with an actor and produced by his enemies.

The real bombshell came in December 2018. Overnight, WikiLeaks published a cache of high-level correspondence between British and American intelligence analysts about their investigations into Vladimir Putin's business dealings. One document quoted by Julian Assange in an interview on conspiracy site and Trump favorite InfoWars seemed to suggest the Brits had recommended that the president be "taken out." The full context made it clear the suggestion had been to remove Trump from the distribution list for reports on Putin, but the damage was already done. Watching the interview over breakfast in Mar-a-Lago, the president reached for his smartphone.

Trump's subsequent Twitter rant eclipsed even the wiretapping crisis. In a series of rapid-fire tweets, Trump accused the British of plotting to assassinate him. By the end of the day, he had fired the directors of the CIA and NSA and ordered all U.S. agencies to suspend sharing intelligence with the British. He even temporarily added Britain to the list of countries whose citizens could not enter

the United States. After several frantic calls from British Prime Minister Theresa May, who promised an investigation into the allegations, he quietly rescinded that order.

Reporters pressed Trump and his aides for evidence for the assassination claim other than an obvious linguistic misunderstanding but had as little success as they had had with previous claims.

Despite pleas from the intelligence community, Trump's order to suspend all cooperation with Brits was not lifted but extended. His anger with the British dated back to the Steele dossier and the idea that GCHQ had spied on him. Now he took his revenge, ordering the dismantling of projects with British intelligence piece by piece. This eventually brought to an end Five Eyes' founding agreement. In response, the Brits naturally also stopped sharing their intelligence, including the fruits of their listening posts in the Middle East, Africa, and elsewhere. Terrorist cells started thinking about how to benefit from the new blind spots.

Today, Britain, already weakened from Brexit and no longer a member of Europol, is looking for alliances elsewhere in this field. Australia and New Zealand are still too small to risk losing their access to U.S. signals intelligence, but Canada has decided to take Britain's side. The United States has reportedly tried to woo Germany and France into a closer arrangement, but the leaders of both countries envisage their own resignations if WikiLeaks or anyone else ever exposed that they had made a deal with an American administration despised by their voters. Italy, Denmark, and others have filled in some of the gaps left by the Brits and the Canadians, but decades of infrastructure and expertise have not been easy to replace.

Five Eyes had lasted through the Cold War and beyond but had finally been undone by Donald Trump misunderstanding a mischievous leak distributed through Russian cutouts. What happens next depends in large part on the upcoming U.S. presidential election

in November 2020. If Mike Pence, who has resigned as vice president to challenge Trump in the Republican primary, wins the election, as the polls indicate, some in the intelligence community are optimistic that Five Eyes could be resurrected under his presidency. Terrorists, criminals, and tyrants around the world have benefited from the collapse of the arrangement, but perhaps, slowly, things can start to return to something like normal again—and the day of the crackpots will finally be behind us.

First published in Foreign Policy, March 30 2017

Spy Fake

IN MAY 1989, WH Allen published *Quiller KGB*, the thirteenth in a series of spy thrillers by Adam Hall, a pseudonym for the British writer Elleston Trevor. The novel was Hall's swan-song for the Cold War, with the bulk of it set in November 1989. British agent Quiller foils a plot by Soviet hardliners to assassinate Mikhail Gorbachev on an official visit to Erich Honecker in East Berlin. They don't plan to carry out the assassination themselves, but have farmed out the job to a Brit. Completed in 1988, the novel successfully predicted Gorbachev's visit to East Berlin the next year. There were, however, never any claims of an assassination attempt taking place during the real visit.

Until now.

In September, Hodder & Stoughton published *Pilgrim Spy*. This claims to be a memoir by 'Tom Shore', the pseudonym for a former SAS operative. 'Shore' relates how he undertook a series of incredible missions during the Cold War including, pivotally and most

spectacularly, that he foiled a plot by Soviet hardliners in October 1989 to assassinate Mikhail Gorbachev when he visited Erich Honecker in East Berlin.

Hodder have marketed *Pilgrim Spy* as ‘one of the great untold stories of the twentieth century’, but if anything that’s underselling it. In real life, British operatives rarely carry out solo missions, let alone get involved in gunfights with terrorists while saving world leaders from assassination. Add in that the gunfight in question apparently took place in Colditz Castle and that throughout his operation ‘Shore’ repeatedly encountered a young KGB major called Vladimir Putin, who he suspects of being involved in the assassination plot, and it becomes even more remarkable.

This extraordinary operation has never been so much as hinted at in any previously published accounts, and its daring and scale go far beyond any other operation we know about during the Cold War. Without the actions of ‘Tom Shore’, Germany would likely not have been reunited at that time, or perhaps ever. Such an operation would clearly be Western intelligence’s greatest coup of the 20th century, greater than the running of Oleg Penkovsky or Oleg Gordievsky, and ‘Shore’ deserves all our thanks, and several medals.

The book was initially treated as news by both the *Sunday Times* and *The Guardian*, perhaps unsurprisingly: Hodder is a highly respected publisher, and it’s very rare for an entirely unknown episode of Cold War history to be revealed; even rarer for it to feature British intelligence; almost unheard of for it to be involved in a spectacular, history-altering operation. It might seem bizarre that the operation has gone completely unknown of for so long, but ‘Shore’ had a ready explanation for this: the only other people who could confirm any of the events he relates are the dead members of the Red Army Faction, his dead SAS commander, and the MI6

officer, ‘Mark Scott’, who sent him on the operation unbeknown to anyone else and who then vanished without a trace.

‘Scott’ turns out to be a rogue MI6 officer chasing after a little black book that contains ‘the NOC list’. It’s complicated, but if you’ve seen the first *Mission: Impossible* film with Tom Cruise you’ll get the drift. ‘Shore’ ends the book absolutely furious at having been used by ‘Scott’, who along the way has also murdered two innocent people, including Kirstin, the beautiful blonde with ‘cornflower blue eyes’ who he has fallen for. ‘Shore’ notes that some readers might think this sort of skullduggery is just par for the course for spies, but that it really isn’t, you know:

‘Well, perhaps it’s because we have been brought up reading books and watching films about the likes of James Bond, George Smiley and Jason Bourne that we now expect such agencies to be duplicitous, ruthless and murderous as a matter of course. But, in my experience, the sort of duplicity and murderous intention that Scott showed towards someone on the same side—me—was a complete outrage to all the codes and standards by which these organisations live and work. I can honestly say I have never come across or heard of anything similar.’

No, me neither. Outside of spy fiction, anyway, where, as he notes, the agent discovering he’s been used as a pawn by someone on his own side is indeed a cliché. ‘Shore’ says that unless he happens to bump into ‘Scott’ again—‘which wouldn’t end well’—he will likely never know what the man’s true motives had been. But strangely, he doesn’t call on the security services to open an investigation into this criminal within their ranks. Forgetful, perhaps.

Of course, the publication of *Pilgrim Spy* presents an even more puzzling mystery: how on earth did Adam Hall know about ‘Tom Shore’s mission over a year before it happened? Like Hall’s hero Quiller, ‘Shore’ is shot at, chased down, and has a liaison with an

East German woman intent on overthrowing the Soviet system, before saving the free world virtually single-handedly. ‘Shore’ doesn’t hang off a window ledge as Quiller does, but even more impressively recounts a pursuit across a rooftop which he escapes by jumping between buildings. The chapter ends *in media res* with him on the verge of doing so—incidentally, a trademark of the Quiller series. It’s also extremely striking that these plots to assassinate the same leader, in the same place, at the same time, masterminded by the same group of people, both happen to be foiled by *British* agents; on the face of it both the visit and the idea of an assassination plot during it are Soviet–East German affairs, with little ostensible reason for the UK to be involved. Both books give pretty tortuous motivations for British intelligence to insert itself into the events. This is a familiar suspension of disbelief in British spy fiction, of course: as with the Bond films, Adam Hall constantly had to figure out reasons for the UK to play the lead role in averting disasters around the globe. In the real world, though, British agents only very occasionally save the world, and when they have done it tends not to have involved rooftop chases and gunfights.

In *Pilgrim Spy*, we’re told that MI6 only received a hint of the assassination plot nine weeks prior to it taking place, and ‘Shore’ only figured out who the target was days in advance. So was British spy novelist Adam Hall a psychic with access to future plans for intelligence operations?

The truth is perhaps more mundane: *Pilgrim Spy* is not spy fact but spy fiction, and atrociously bad spy fiction at that. Every cliché in the genre pops up, and great gobbets of factual exposition are lifted from the internet, sometimes word for word. The plagiarism is insultingly clumsy, with most of the lifts taken from Wikipedia entries. Here are just a few excerpts from *Pilgrim Spy*—the text in bold has all been plagiarised from Wikipedia’s entry on the Stasi,

while the text in italics is from the entry about *Zersetzung*. These are all straight lifts, with barely a word changed:

‘I knew all about the East German Stasi. **It was the official state security service of the DDR, and has often been described as one of the most effective and repressive intelligence and secret police agencies in history...**’

‘One of the Stasi’s main tasks was to spy on the population, mainly through a vast network of citizens turned informants.’

‘They fought any opposition to the regime using both overt and covert measures including the process of *Zersetzung*.’

‘During the Honecker era—from May 1971 to October 1989—the Stasi used the accusation Zersetzung to silence political opponents by repression. German historian Hubertus Knabe wrote: “The goal was to destroy individuals’ self-confidence, for example by damaging their reputation, by organising failures in their work, and by destroying their personal relationships.” The use of Zersetzung is well documented due to numerous Stasi files published after the fall of East Germany, where it is estimated that up to 10,000 individuals had fallen victim to this barbaric process, with over 5,000 sustaining irreversible damage.’

‘In addition, its Directorate for Reconnaissance was responsible for both espionage and for conducting covert operations in foreign countries and, under its long-time head Markus Wolf, this directorate gained a reputation as one of the most capable intelligence agencies of the Cold War.’

Wikipedia’s Stasi entry also mentions Dynamo Dresden, Vladimir Putin’s time with the KGB in Dresden, and the agency’s military training with the Red Army Faction—all of which feature in *Pilgrim Spy*.

Wikipedia's entry on the Red Army Faction contains the following paragraph:

'Sometimes the group is talked about in terms of generations: the "first generation", which consisted of Baader, Ensslin, Meinhof and others; the "second generation", after the majority of the first generation was arrested in 1972; and the "third generation" RAF, which existed in the 1980s and 1990s up to 1998, after the first generation died in Stammheim maximum security prison in 1977.'

Pilgrim Spy contains this paragraph:

'The group is often talked about in terms of generations. The first "generation" consisted of Baader, Ensslin, Meinhof and others. The "second generation" came about after the majority of the first generation was arrested in 1972. The "third generation" RAF existed in the 1980s, 1990s and up to 1998.'

An enormous amount of the book's material is lifted from Wikipedia in this way. 'Shore' tells us that in intelligence circles 'agents under Non-Official Cover (NOC) are operatives who assume covert roles in organisations without any official ties to the government for which they work'. That, too, is virtually word-for-word the same as the opening of the Wikipedia entry on the topic. The hardback sells for just under £14, but Wikipedia, of course, can be read for free.

And 'Shore' doesn't only plagiarise from Wikipedia. The biography of his SAS commander is taken directly from *The Independent's* obituary of the man he is based on, Andy Massey, and to whom the book is brazenly dedicated. It's almost as though this

former SAS operative knows virtually nothing about espionage or the Cold War himself.

The dedication to Massey has proven the book's undoing with veterans of the SAS, a group of whom were so outraged by what they felt was comparable to 'stolen valour' that they complained to Hodder, who have apparently now removed the dedication as a result. SAS and BRIXMIS veterans also pointed out several other discrepancies with the book's claims, such as gunfights happening at Colditz with none of them ever hearing of it despite being on good relations with the staff there at the time. A former commander of the SAS also believes the book's claims to be 'utter rubbish'.

Pilgrim Spy isn't the first special forces memoir to be greeted with such scepticism, and it won't be the last. This field is open to abuse: it's hard to disprove a tale of a top-secret operation told by an author whose name is itself withheld. When questioned by *The Independent*, Hodder admitted that the book contains plagiarism but downplayed this as 'sloppy but not criminal' and insisted that there were only three sentences taken from Wikipedia. *The Independent's* article already listed several more than that, as have I above, and one passage on coffee plagiarises seven sentences in a row from Wikipedia.

'Sloppy but not criminal' is a shocking response from a serious publisher to such an allegation—not long ago they would have investigated this properly and withdrawn the book as a result.

Adding to the mystery over the publisher's reaction is *Pilgrim Spy's* peculiar back-story. It looks to have started life as a totally different book: *The Colditz Conundrum*, a 'new complete history' of the POW camp that promised startling revelations about a 'hidden hand' at work behind the famous escapes from it. This had the same ISBN number and publication date as *Pilgrim Spy*, and the author biography read:

‘Tom Shore was educated at Woolverstone Hall school in Suffolk and Birmingham University in the 60s and 70s.’

On the Amazon page for *Pilgrim Spy*, we learn:

‘Tom Shore joined the British army in 1970, a few days after his eighteenth birthday.’

So... how was he at university in the 60s and 70s if he joined the army just after he turned 18 in 1970?

When I asked *Pilgrim Spy*'s editor about this eye-popping discrepancy, he claimed that *The Colditz Conundrum* ‘with accompanying biography was a dummy title substituted for the real book on the day of publication’. Strange: publishers usually trumpet their ground-breaking books well in advance to try to drum up publicity, rather than giving them detailed synopses for totally different non-existent books, complete with contradictory biographies for the author. Why the subterfuge, especially for a pseudonymous author? What would Hodder have done if a journalist had approached them wanting to write an article about the promised revelations in *The Colditz Conundrum*? It seems like an unusual PR strategy, let's say.

Hodder have also been ‘sloppy’ in other ways. Despite their marketing of the book as a memoir and claims to five British newspapers that it gives an honest account of events during the Cold War, the book's frontispiece features the disclaimer:

‘All characters in this publication are fictitious and any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.’

Quite how that applies to Putin and Gorbachev, and whether it was inserted by a sceptical Hodder employee to cover their backsides, isn't clear—but as Hodder have stated in print that it's fictitious, even

while insisting it isn't everywhere else, they can't very well sue the book's critics for stating the same.

A few years ago, *Pilgrim Spy* would likely have been more of a scandal: the plagiarism is so blatant, the original writing is so poor, and the supposed events are so transparently ludicrous. *A Million Little Pieces*, *Surviving with Wolves* and other fake memoirs have been the subject of enormous interest, and this is probably the most blatant case of it I've seen. However, Hodder's response in the face of the obvious has simply been to double down, Trump-style, and insist they believe 'Shore's preposterous story, while shrugging off the kind of plagiarism that would see a student thrown out of university.

The book remains on sale, and little looks to be able change that. It feels like it was an attempt to emulate *Soldier Spy*, the memoir of pseudonymous ex-MI5 officer 'Tom Marcus', which was a bestseller in 2016 and also garnered national newspaper coverage while having its share of doubters (see reviews on bookseller sites). The consequences for failing to replicate that success with a rubbish spy novel masquerading as a sensational memoir are close to nil, both for the author and publisher. Hodder are large enough for their reputation to take this hit—they publish hundreds of books a year, and this is already water under the bridge. The book might not sell as well as they'd hoped, but they will probably still feel it was worth taking a chance on. It's a shame: it's a brilliant publisher with a storied history, and this isn't worthy of going out under their banner.

AS A LONGTIME fan of Adam Hall, 'Tom Shore' ripping off one of my favourite spy novelists' books has its funny side. But as someone who also studies Cold War espionage, it feels like a dispiriting defeat: fake history in a time of fake news. The lack of fuss or consequence

is partly because chicanery is no longer remarkable in public discourse. Information about espionage has also become so much of a part of our culture that even the most outlandish ideas can seem plausible, because we're used to seeing them: jumping across buildings is so familiar from spy films that we don't stop to think how unlikely that is to happen in real life.

Recent years have also seen an inflation in conspiracy theorism, and the line between a genuine expert and someone who has watched a lot of YouTube videos or read a few Wikipedia entries has become eroded. Today, we know more—or think we know more—about the inside workings of the intelligence world thanks to the likes of Wikileaks and Edward Snowden. A few years ago, both appeared to promise a brave new era in which the shadowy actions of those in power would be held more accountable. In reality, this has mostly been confined to the West.

Wikileaks has itself become a power whose actions are often obscure, while Snowden's focus on surveillance by the United States' spy agencies has almost totally overlooked the actions of the likes of Russia, who have ramped up their use of disinformation and meddling in US politics. Vladimir Putin's operatives have committed murder on the streets of Britain, and when exposed claimed to be clueless tourists to troll the British authorities and public—this has received scant condemnation from Wikileaks' and Snowden's supporters, and in some cases outright denial.

But while the truth doesn't matter to Russia, it should to us. In his book, 'Tom Shore' speculates that a young Putin was involved in a plot to assassinate Mikhail Gorbachev, but one doesn't need to invent fables about his past to understand his motives or figure out how to tackle his actions. You can't learn from history if you lie about it, and in muddying the waters between fact and fiction publishers aren't simply being unprofessional, but playing a dangerous game at a time

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when clarity and trust are increasingly valuable. It's already hard enough to figure out what happened during this period. With propaganda, disinformation and even assassination being used to undermine democracies by numerous states, publishers backing simplistic, self-glorifying falsifications risk distorting understanding of the intelligence world and the lessons we can learn from the real Cold War.

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Spooks in the Mirror

READ ANY LIST of great thrillers and you will usually find John le Carré's third novel, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, somewhere on it. Published in 1963, it has sold millions of copies and was adapted into one of the decade's most successful films. Le Carré's next book, written in the unexpected glare of fame, is usually overlooked.

And yet *The Looking Glass War* is his most underrated novel, its themes resonating especially sharply in today's climate of distrust and disinformation. Penguin is reissuing it in paperback this month as part of its "Smiley Collection", providing the perfect opportunity to investigate this forgotten gem if you haven't already, or revisit it if you have.

George Smiley's role in the book is small, but crucial; he acts as the *deus ex machina* to an operation run not, as in most of Le Carré's novels, by the Circus, his MI6 stand-in, but a rival agency known as the Department. This half-forgotten group, housed in a "crabbed,

sooty villa of a place with a fire extinguisher on the balcony” in Southwark, is staffed with veterans from the Second World War who obsess over their status in the Whitehall hierarchy—are they entitled to an office car?—and are desperate to recapture their glory days.

The Cold War has left these spies behind and they now barely function. Until they catch a glimpse of an operation; an agent informs them that the Soviet Union has established a medium-range ballistic missile base near Rostock, close to the border with West Germany. A man is dispatched to Finland to collect overflight photographs of the area, but is killed in a car crash when he gets there.

In London this is taken as evidence that the Soviets murdered him because he was on to the truth. In fact, as the reader knows, it was a purely accidental hit-and-run—and the tip-off about the missile site is fabricated.

Such a plot could have provided the basis for a dark satire of the espionage world, but Le Carré, writing in the wake of the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban missile crisis, instead played the absurdities straight, giving it the quality of tragedy. The Department, convinced its moment has come again in what could be “a sort of Cuba situation” only “more dangerous”, re-recruits one of its agents from the war to cross into East Germany and locate the missiles. We watch in horror as the deluded operation stumbles inexorably towards disaster.

The novel was panned on its publication in 1965, seen as a flop after *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*. It is an austere, uncompromising book; Le Carré felt his breakthrough had glamourised the spy game (not a charge many would level at it) and so decided to tell a story in which everyone is deceived—by themselves, others, or both.

Despite the critical drubbing, its influence has quietly spread through the genre in the intervening decades, and echoes of it—the

unsanctioned operation behind enemy lines, the expendable agent, the shabby, underfunded rival agency—can be seen in the work of Gerald Seymour, *The Sandbaggers* TV series and, more recently, Mick Herron’s Slough House novels and Luke Jennings’s Villanelle novellas (adapted into the TV series *Killing Eve*).

The book angered some in the intelligence community. One MI6 officer, furious that Le Carré had painted British spies as “heartless incompetents” in it, bellowed, “You utter bastard,” at him at a diplomatic reception. The CIA’s John Stockwell recounted that he was reprimanded by superiors for using the novel to teach case officers because its bungled operation was too close to reality.

It had its admirers, though, among them Allen Dulles, who was forced to resign as CIA director after the Bay of Pigs fiasco. He wrote in 1969 that the novel’s “jumble of unusual personalities, their speech and behaviour, their daily business, and even the awful scheme which carries them in their enthusiasm far from reality—all ring true”.

More than half a century later, *The Looking Glass War* feels refreshingly sharp, with prose at least the equal to Le Carré’s more famous work, especially in the virtuoso opening sequence. Le Carré was writing with the awareness that the book would have a global audience, but refused to pander to expectations by redeeming his characters’ flaws or softening blows with anything but the driest wisps of irony. Smiley’s final intervention is no bittersweet triumph, as it would be in *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*, but merely bitter defeat masked by British restraint, all blame left unsaid.

The former head of MI6 Sir Richard Dearlove recently lambasted Le Carré for his “nihilistic” and “corrosive” depictions of British intelligence. This is the most nihilistic and corrosive of all his books, and yet its portrayal of how influential men end up taking decisions with terrible repercussions through faulty intelligence and delusions of grandeur doesn’t feel excessive today. We live in a time in which

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bluff and deceit are rewarded, disinformation and incompetence are rife, and Pentagon officials anxiously check their screens to learn whether the president of the US has provoked a nuclear war on Twitter.

The Looking Glass War is a bleak and devastating read, but few other novels have so brilliantly described how a thirst for power breeds worlds of fantasy and failure.

First published in The Times, February 17 2020

The Best Spy Thrillers

The Mask of Dimitrios by Eric Ambler (1939)

A prototype for the thriller as a quest, Eric Ambler's masterpiece follows the crime novelist Charles Latimer's obsessive attempts to trace the life of a murdered gangster through the grimy streets of Istanbul, Sofia, Athens, Belgrade and Paris. Ambler expertly seeds political and social commentary through Latimer's voyage into a frightening world of conspiracy and intrigue.

Casino Royale by Ian Fleming (1953)

James Bond's mission in Ian Fleming's first novel, set around a casino in northern France, is to defeat the grotesque Le Chiffre at baccarat, thereby putting the man at the mercy of his ruthless Russian paymasters. However, things don't go to plan. There are no gadgets or volcanic lairs here, and Bond himself is a much more complex and thoughtful character than his popular image; his anguished

discussions of ethics with the French agent René Mathis are closer to Camus than quips with Q. A dark, taut and brutal read.

The Spy Who Came in from the Cold by John le Carré (1963)

If you've struggled with Le Carré's longer or later works, you may be surprised how different *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* is from them. The plot is Byzantine, but the prose is sparse and gem-hard, at times reading like hard-boiled poetry. Alec Leamas, the archetypal pawn in a wider spy game, is our seemingly cynical companion all the way to the devastating finale at the Berlin Wall.

The 9th Directive by Adam Hall (1966)

Forgettable titles and pulpy cover art might have contributed to Adam Hall—a pseudonym for Elleston Trevor—not being as well known as the writers above, but his 19-strong series about a British agent known only as Quiller are the most exciting spy thrillers ever published. They're sheer suspense, written in near-hallucinogenic prose that seems to slow time. In this instalment, Quiller must stop an assassin from taking out a British royal by assassinating him first.

Seventeen Moments of Spring by Yulian Semyonov (1969)

Spy fiction isn't solely the preserve of Brits, as this superb Soviet thriller shows. Both it and the subsequent TV adaptation remain iconic in Russia today, but while its patriotic appeal is clear there's a lot more going on. Our hero, Max von Stierlitz, initially appears to be a mid-ranking SS officer in Berlin in early 1945. But we soon learn that von Stierlitz is in fact Maxim Isayev, a long-term deep-cover Soviet agent. Ordered by Moscow to discover which high-ranking Nazi is conducting secret peace talks with the Americans, he soon finds the net starting to close in on him.

Berlin Game by Len Deighton (1983)

Two decades after rocketing to fame with *The IPCRESS File*, Len Deighton reinvented the spy story a second time for the latter leg of the Cold War. MI6 desk man Bernard Samson is sent back into the field and to his beloved Berlin to help a defector to come over, but quickly realises there is a high-level traitor within British intelligence. The novel has eight sequels and a prequel, forming a labyrinthine espionage epic lightened with laconic wit.

The Tiger, Life by Sarah Gainham (1983)

Best known for *Night Falls on the City*, Sarah Gainham's Cold War spy thrillers are now scandalously out of print. They are all well worth discovering: her tense, intricate plots take place against a brilliantly realised backdrop of eastern Europe, and often drew on real espionage operations. Her final novel, this is an autobiographical tale set among the press pack of Berlin in the late 1940s. It's haunting, thrilling and beautifully written.

Red Sparrow by Jason Matthews (2013)

The first in a trilogy by a retired CIA veteran, *Red Sparrow* follows two mole-hunts, one Russian and one American. The star of the show is Dominika Egerova, a beautiful and hyper-intuitive ballet dancer turned Russian operative. Featuring honey traps, a psychopathic Spetsnaz "mechanic" and surveillance on the streets of Moscow, Helsinki, Washington and elsewhere, this is a great sprawling spy story that revisits the Cold War classics and recasts them for the era of Putin.

Real Tigers by Mick Herron (2017)

Mick Herron's series about disgraced spooks exiled to a shabby London office known as Slough House has reinvigorated the

espionage genre. Jackson Lamb, the brash but cunning overseer of the “Slow Horses”, is a genius creation who will have you howling with laughter. You could start with the first novel in the series, *Slow Horses*, but I’m opting for this, the third, in which one of the crew is kidnapped. Intricately plotted and tense, it also offers poignant insights into human foibles and follies.

To the Lions by Holly Watt (2019)

While this novel doesn’t technically feature any spies, there is plenty of spying in it, specifically the investigative journalist Casey Benedict and her colleagues, who go undercover to infiltrate a horrifying corporate “sport” in the north African desert. The techniques and ethical conflicts of Benedict’s work are expertly explored, but Watt never neglects the suspense. An excellent sequel, *The Dead Line*, has just been published.

First published in The Times, June 9 2020

A Heroine of the Resistance

NOVELS ABOUT REAL-LIFE secret agents often arrive in waves, motivated by the declassification of files or some other trigger that sets writers' minds racing and publishers' wallets opening. It's unusual for two inspired by the same person to be released within a week of each other, but that's the case this month with *Liberation* by Imogen Kealey and *Code Name Hélène* by Ariel Lawhon.

Their subject is Nancy Wake, who was born in New Zealand but grew up in Australia before fleeing at 16. She eventually made a new life in France, first as a freelance journalist, then as a socialite wife, and finally as a courageous agent with a price of five million francs put on her head by the Gestapo.

After the fall of France she helped Allied servicemen and refugees to escape to Spain with false papers. But with the Nazis closing in on her in 1943 she had to escape by the same route, made her way to England, joined the Special Operations Executive, and was parachuted back into France to assist the Resistance in the lead-up to D-Day. She lived and fought alongside the Maquis in the Auvergne

and earned their respect, bicycling hundreds of miles to reach a radio operator to restore contact with London.

Her extraordinary story has been told before, but Kealey and Lawhon use the freedom of fiction to breathe new life into it. *Liberation* has been adapted from a screenplay due to be filmed with Anne Hathaway; Imogen Kealey is the pseudonym of the screenwriter Darby Kealey and novelist Imogen Robertson. Lawhon has bestsellers exploring the *Hindenburg* disaster and the mystery of Anastasia Romanov to her credit.

There are, naturally, huge areas of overlap between the two books. *Liberation* focuses on Wake's struggles to carry out her mission in the Auvergne amid the warring egos of the Resistance men, while *Code Name Hélène* interweaves this with episodes from her prewar career in journalism, her glamorous affair with and marriage to the industrialist Henri Fiocca, and her work with the Resistance's escape routes in Marseilles and its surroundings.

Wake was given the sobriquet "The White Mouse" by the Gestapo, and both books dramatise the hunt for her through fictional figures. In *Liberation* this is Major Markus Böhm, a Cambridge-educated officer determined to stamp out the Resistance. Lawhon creates two nemeses for Wake: Marceline, a French collaborator, and Obersturmführer Wolff, first seen wielding a whip against an elderly Jewish woman in a Vienna square. It's virtually impossible to portray Nazi officers without summoning up leather-coated Herr Flick caricatures, but these are suitably chilling and distinct antagonists.

Which to read? *Code Name Hélène* is the richer of the two, and the more thoroughly researched; the chapters devoted to Fiocca's courtship of "Noncée" and their luxurious lifestyle in peacetime Marseilles give the opening third of the book a slower pace, but subsequent events gain power from the juxtaposition.

Liberation is, perhaps unsurprisingly, a touch more Hollywood. In one scene Wake enters a café to meet a contact, despite being warned that the Nazi-collaborating Milice have sealed the town; she coolly introduces herself as the woman pictured in the Wanted poster above the counter before shooting two Milice men dead and killing another with his knife. Another exploit features her disguising herself as a prostitute to infiltrate Gestapo headquarters and then poisoning the officers' wine. Wake did kill Nazis, but neither of these incidents took place, and these depictions in *Liberation* of her defiance and courage occasionally feel overly insistent — several scenes ending with her being cheered.

Lawhon's novel has more than its share of action, but since it is largely told in the first person we see the danger from Wake's perspective and are rarely instructed what to make of her. These are exciting and well-written accounts of wartime valour, and their protagonist's qualities shine through. As the authors' note to *Liberation* observes, Nancy Wake's life was too full to be contained by any single novel, and these are two fine additions to the literature on this extraordinary woman.

First published in The Times, March 16 2020

NEED TO KNOW

Cabal

A Short Story

I will resign soon – before the end of this month. I'll write a letter to Mr Cohn explaining that I can't go on like this. I can't stand it anymore: the insecurity, the boredom, the overtime. And I never get to see Erica.

She works nights. Well, I say 'works' – it's a pretty peculiar form of employment. She's Swiss, Erica, and very beautiful. But that's neither here nor there. What is both here and there is that she speaks a lot of languages: French Swiss, German Swiss, Italian Swiss. Even, I think, Swiss Swiss. Apparently not many people can speak all those languages; few can do so fluently; and fewer still are in Brussels and willing to work for such poor wages. In all there are twenty-one of them, working in shifts around the clock.

Her employer is a large and very exclusive Swiss bank. For legal reasons I can't tell you its name, but even if I did you'd be none the wiser. Nobody's ever heard of it. It doesn't have any branches, and its website consists of two paragraphs of grey print on a white screen. It's a bank that owns lots of other banks, as well as a car manufacturer, an electronics conglomerate and part of a space station. So they have no need for anything as banal as a physical location where you go

and speak to the manager about your overdraft. You don't have an overdraft. People at this bank are seriously underdrafted.

Erica is smart – she went to the university in Geneva and has a PhD in computer design. I occasionally find pieces of paper around the flat with diagrams and footnotes and very long words in French and sometimes German.

Her parents live in Geneva, but Erica left as soon as her studies were completed. It's a bad time in Switzerland right now. Something to do with terrorists, terrorising. It's happening all over Europe. There are even terrorists here now, in little old Belgium – the bins in the *métro* are closed off because of a spate of bombs last month. Far right nationalists, they think, but as different groups have claimed responsibility the motive for the attacks remains unclear. The terrorists don't seem to have any fixed idea what they're doing. Perhaps that's the idea; it's more terrifying. At Schuman, where I catch the train every morning, Coke cans and chocolate bar wrappers lie in small heaps along the platform. It feels like London in the Eighties.

But life's not bad here. Rent is cheap. Erica doesn't want to go back to Geneva, she keeps telling me that. She'd rather stay here with me and work this shitty job. Things will get better, we keep telling each other, even though neither of us is really sure it will.

Erica is twenty-six. I'm twenty-three, soon to be twenty-four. We both moved to Brussels last year. I'd never been before, but my cousin Sammy was out here and said he might be able to get me an internship at his office, so I came out for a few weeks to see. That was in December.

I met her three months ago. It was odd – she picked me up. That had never happened to me before. I was out with Sammy and a couple of the guys from work, in this club near the office. It was a very small place and I wasn't dancing, just standing under an air-

conditioning unit sipping an over-priced Becks. Erica walked up and started dancing right in front of me, shaking her hips the way girls know how to.

I wasn't sure she was interested at first. Perhaps she'd just found herself a decent spot in the club where she could let loose. I'm quite short-sighted, and with the lights and the smoke and everything I couldn't make out her eyes, whether or not they were looking at me. I think this worked to my advantage, incidentally – she told me later that she thought I had played it very cool.

But soon her body was near enough to mine to make the message unequivocal, and I slowly started to dance with her. There was an immediate connection. Her beauty helped, of course, but her innocence also appealed to me, that someone who looked like that felt they had to impress me. She took the task of demonstrating her body's appeal very seriously, and as she danced it seemed as if she was concentrating on remembering some ancient, complex code: step this way, then jerk your head that way...

Later, sitting down on a fashionably grotty sofa that hurt my back, I asked her what she did for a living. She laughed, and I felt I had made a mistake. I remembered dances at school, girls going to powder their noses halfway through a conversation and never coming back.

'Let's not talk about work,' she said. But after a while we did, of course. Everyone talks about work eventually.

That's when she told me about the bank. Her laughter hadn't been directed at me, but herself. She was ashamed to be doing something so beneath her, but she'd had to leave Switzerland after university and finding work had been harder than she'd expected. She screamed at me over the music that she didn't really know what she wanted to do with her life. Perhaps she would return to academia one day: she likes to read, and then write about what she has read. But in the meantime she had taken this job, using her languages.

That was three months ago, and now we live together. She's still at the job, working for the people who work for the bank. Specifically, for the people who *run* the bank. Have you ever wondered where bankers keep their own money? I hadn't, until I met Erica. But the way it works is that the people who own the bank keep their money there too, only in very special accounts. And they have special cards which they can use anywhere to access their accounts. These cards can be used in any machine in the world. When you're rich enough, even the banks you don't own are nice to you.

But occasionally, very occasionally, something goes wrong. One of the elite loses his card, or has it stolen, or perhaps just clean forgets his PIN. Crisis! Can you imagine how angry one of these bigwigs would get if he couldn't withdraw money from his own bank?

So the bank set up a little nest, away from their administrative headquarters. The political landscape of Switzerland is bleak, so they found a discreet furnished office in downtown Brussels: the beating heart of Europe, a trusted hiding place. For this is a camouflaged nest – it would be bad for morale if the staff knew the lengths to which their company goes to protect its directors from the slightest chance of a mishap, all because they might forget their own damn PIN. How can these people run the bank if they can't even remember that? Even the lowliest clerk who spends all day counting change knows his own card number. Stolen, you say? Why can't they call the regular number, like everyone else?

So. A secret office: twenty-one people, working in shifts, all fluent in the necessary languages. Mr Freyer forgets his number in Capetown and calls the 24-hour hotline in Brussels – a young woman with an attractive voice and an efficient manner quickly establishes his identity through a series of pre-arranged questions and provides him with the correct code or, if necessary, a new card is immediately dispatched by the company courier to his hotel.

There are only ten people in the world who have these special cards.

NEED TO KNOW

Erica knows their names by heart – she dreams them and recites them to the ceiling in bed: Aik, Backer, Berger, Cassil-Grum, Ephs, Forget, Freyer, Martin, Vuighl, Yves.

In the six months she has been at the bank, not one person has received a call from any of the ten. Nor have any of the twenty-one worked with anyone who has ever received such a call. So while they wait for Mr Berger to drop his wallet down a drain in Cairo, they spend their hours watching television, surfing the Internet, listening to music at low volume, filling in crossword puzzles, planning their escapes. Occasionally, their supervisor will call and pretend to be a card-holder, but they always know it's him. They have become inured to spending their hours on a blunted knife-edge. They are playing golf in a thunderstorm. They are floating in a zone midway between dreaming and consciousness, where every moment promises danger but never delivers it.

This is what my girlfriend does while I sleep. She's on the night shift, as we need the money. I work as much overtime as I can, saving for the skiing trip in the Ardennes we're always talking about. When I can, I ring her from work, if she has already left the flat, and half-heartedly pretend that I have had my card stolen by thieves in the night, I'm calling from Jakarta, this is urgent. But I do this less now, as her colleagues always know it's me by my abysmal accent, and even Erica has tired of the joke.

I call her now to tell her I'm on my way home, and she whispers to me that she loves me. This always pleases me, and I imagine her holding the receiver away from her colleagues, looking out the window to my building across town, as I am to hers. I almost wave.

'Any luck?' I ask, meaning has anyone called.

'I wish,' she replies. 'I'm the only one awake.' They often let each other doze for half an hour at a time, setting up elaborate sequences of alarms and rotas within rotas. 'You know, Danny, this is wearing me down.'

'I know. I can feel it too.'

'I just wish...' her voice falters. 'I'm sorry, but I just wish one of these bastards would get their wallet stolen. It's driving me fucking mad!'

I laugh. But I also silently curse the men who have such sway over my girlfriend's well-being, conferring brutal muggings on them each in the back alleys of my mind. Aik, Backer, Berger, Cassil-Grum, Ephs, Forget, Freyer, Martin, Vuighl, Yves.

'Sorry,' I say to Erica. 'If I could, I'd steal one for you.'

'I know you would, darling.' She sighs. 'It would just be great to feel I was here for a reason. I feel like I'm wasting my life away. But forgive me, let us not be depressive – how is everything with you, my pretty Englishman?'

NEED TO KNOW

'Same as usual,' I say, which is code for terrible but I can't go into it because people are around.

'I understand. Shall I wake you when I get home?'

'Yes,' I say. I like the way she wakes me.

I sleep badly. I've been having nightmares recently, about dogs chasing me through dark fields and men wearing caps calling my name, their voices jagged with rage.

But now Erica is there too, and I am strapped to some sort of a reclining chair. She is wearing a uniform, explaining something about the shape of my head to an audience of doctors. Braces are placed on my temples, and the chair starts to tilt further and further back, until I am sure my head will meet the ground. All the while Erica keeps talking in this very matter-of-fact way, and I can't understand what she's saying, but I know it's not good news. Finally, she reaches over with a small metal ruler and begins to very carefully measure my nose, first the length and the sides and then the bridge, as she drones on to the soldiers in a voice I do not know.

I wake in a sweat to feel Erica sitting naked astride me, her hands stroking my face. She sees my horrified expression and she looks very guilty and now she is hugging me and kissing my lips, my eyelids, the tip of my nose.

'Oh my baby, I am sorry I scared you, it's just me.'

I look over at the clock and see that it is seven. Erica starts to move her hips, and the room slowly rearranges itself, the light from the

street hits her neck and her lovely gold hair, and the dream recedes, leaving just a small hole.

By eight, I'm in the shower and behind schedule. As I walk towards the dresser, I stop to kiss her again, a long lingering kiss, and she blinks at me.

'Take care now, won't you?' she says, and I smile as I know what is coming.

'Yesh Money Penny,' I reply in my best Sean Connery, 'You know I always take care.'

'You mad Englishman!' she laughs, throwing a pillow at me. I pin her down. 'It's not just me,' I object. 'You should know that all Englishmen think they are Bond.'

'Bond?' she asks, mimicking me, raising one eyebrow.

'James Bond.' I throw the duvet to the floor, exposing her. 'Now tell me who you really are. You're not Money Penny, are you?'

'No, James,' she says. 'I am Erica.'

'Who sent you? The Swiss government? Are you spying for the Swiss government?'

'But James, everyone knows that Switzerland is neutral.'

I touch her and she squeals. 'That didn't sound neutral to me.' I say.

'Oh James...' she sighs, closing her eyes and arching her back for me. But my eyes are not on her. I am distracted by a glimpse of something lying on the floor, poking out between the bed and the discarded duvet, something sharp and shiny. My glasses case lies on the bedside table, out of reach. Without altering the pressure of my touch, I squint at the object, slowly forcing it into focus. From here, it bears a remarkable resemblance to a small, metal ruler.

I walk into the Hilton at ten past nine and take the lift to the eighteenth floor, which we're renting out for the month. I discovered on the way over that my glasses case, which I deposited in my pocket as I ran out of the flat, is empty. The prospect of an entire day squinting, coupled with yet another rainy morning, makes me suddenly feel very tired.

Mr Cohn looks up from his bowl of cereal and frowns at me. Fruit juice and a banana lie atop his writing bureau. He is wearing a napkin tucked into his collar, and droplets of milk are dripping from his beard.

'You're late, Danny,' he says.

I have my excuse prepared. 'There was a bomb in the *métro*, sir. I had to take the bus.'

He stares at me as if I had just announced I were the Pope.

'Today?' he says. 'This morning?' I nod, trying to look harried, which isn't too hard. 'Which station?'

I glance over at the windows, and the grey rain hitting the glass. 'Arts-Loi,' I say.

I turn to see Cohn grinning at me. He places a stub-like hand on my shoulder.

'If I hadn't overheard you use that one last week with Mr Shapiro, I might well have fallen for it.' I start to protest but he shushes me affectionately. 'Come, come, Danny, you're among friends now.'

I think over my options and decide that honesty is looking favourable.

'I do my best, sir,' I smile ruefully, as if to say I can't help being such a rogue.

'Stop calling me sir,' he smiles. 'You know I prefer Ben.' But before I can say anything he has called Sammy over from the fax machine. 'He's quite something, this cousin of yours,' he says, and Sammy glares at me. He makes to apologise on my behalf, but just then Cohn gives him a hearty slap on his back. 'Quite something.' Seeing his mood, Sammy drops the glare and readily agrees.

'We're all quite something in our family, Ben,' he says, and good-naturedly pokes me in the stomach.

'Man, look at you!' Cohn says to me. 'Nothing but skin and bones! Here, have a bagel at least.' He strides over to a coffee-table and brings over a tray, foisting it in my direction. 'Eat, eat! We can't have skeletons like you running around. What will people think?' I take a smoked salmon and cream cheese bagel from the tray.

'Now Danny,' Cohn continues, 'today you'll be working with Sammy in the Commercial Department. Something has come up, and we need as much help as we can get. Samuel will fill you in.'

The Commercial Department? That was the hub of the whole organisation! I wonder why Cohn is suddenly so fond of me, and make a mental note to be late for work more often. I usually work in the Media Department, maintaining our contacts in Hollywood and elsewhere. It isn't nearly as exciting as it sounds, as it's pretty much a done deal. To all intents and purposes the media is ours, and it's mainly a matter of executing relatively simple procedures honed over many years to ensure things remains that way.

Mr Cohn pokes me in the ribs and places a sweaty palm on the back of my neck for a meaningful moment, before heading back to his bowl of cereal and his copy of *Fortune*. I follow Sammy into the Commercial Department, which is usually the Honeymoon Suite.

Four mahogany dining-room tables are linked to form a square, around which everyone is working. Shirt sleeves are rolled up to the elbow, and four small electric fans sit on each corner of the carpet, moving their heads back and forth as though watching a very slow tennis match taking place on the ceiling. The air-conditioning broke down yesterday, and technicians are kneeling by one of the units trying to fix it. Mr Cohn has already negotiated a ten percent reduction on our rent as a result of this inconvenience.

I look out at the greyness of the morning: pigeons pecking in a damp gutter. By the door, two receptionists field calls. They are dressed identically, and I still find it hard to tell them apart. Both phones suddenly start ringing, and their hands reach out as though synchronised. A brief intake of breath, and then their adenoidal voices merge: 'Bonjour, le Complot Juif Mondial, good morning, World Jewish Conspiracy, can I help?'

Sammy hands me a cup of coffee. 'Everything has changed as of last night,' he is saying. 'I don't suppose you've seen the news this morning?'

'No,' I admit, 'I haven't.' I sip from my coffee and burn my tongue. 'Just how I like it,' I say, smiling weakly.

Sammy eyes me with utter contempt before continuing. 'At four-thirty this morning, our head honchos in New York held a teleconference via satellite with the chairmen of various major Swiss banks. This is good news, Danny, very good news. They have increased their offer by one thousand percent.'

'A thousand?' I say, surprised. He grins at me.

‘It just goes to show you what a bit of pressure can do.’ He nudges me, dislodging some of my coffee. ‘You’re with the big boys now – this is where it all happens.’ And he gestures at the flurry around us. I find myself nodding, but then I stop as my head is throbbing.

He is talking about the money. You may have seen something about it. It has been in the news for years now: our efforts to get the Swiss banks to repay some of the money they stored in private accounts during the war. There have been endless protests, meetings, debates. But until now there had been no real progress. The figure the banks were offering was paltry, laughable. It hadn’t been anything I paid much attention to. It wasn’t my department, and anyway nobody expected it to be resolved any time soon. I had teased Erica a little about it, to be sure, being in the employ of possible Nazi collaborators, et cetera; but it was another stale joke, and a little too near the knuckle to be repeated often.

‘So, what do you want me to do?’ I ask Sammy.

‘Haven’t you been listening to me?’ I hadn’t. ‘This is it – action stations!’

‘What do you mean?’

‘I mean that in an hour we’re going to the airport to pick up the Swiss delegation, and at noon we are holding a press conference downstairs, where Mr Cohn and the Swiss will sign a joint document agreeing to the sum in question.’

‘What do you mean by ‘we’?’

‘I mean you and me, Sammy. Now get yourself to the Recovery Suite and shave, and give your shoes a polish while you’re at it – we can’t have you turning up to reclaim our money looking like you just walked out of Dachau, can we?’

As we step out of the limousine we are greeted by a crowd of protesters. Most are young men wearing black, waving banners which read 'DON'T THE GOLDBERGS HAVE ENOUGH GOLD?' and 'LEAVE THE MONEY WHERE IT BELONGS'.

Neo-Nazis.

There is a line of police separating us from them, but I'm still close enough to hear their chants, to see the hatred spread across their faces. Walking into the Arrivals Terminal I am spat at by one of them. Shaved head, gaunt face, baggy trousers – he looks not dissimilar from a concentration camp inmate himself. His brilliant blue eyes burn into me as he screams his insults. I recognise him from countless news bulletins, and from files kept at work. He is Adolf von Schmidt, leader of the Racist Aryan Skinhead Alliance. They originally called themselves the Racist Aryan Nazi Skinhead Alliance, but the government banned any party from using the word 'Nazi' in their name shortly after.

Belatedly, I notice the camera crews circling the scene. Most of them are also thin, intense, and wearing black – some hold prompt cards above their heads for the interviewers to read from, which I had presumed were simply more fascistic banners. Von Schmidt turns to a camera and is suddenly very calm, smiling sweetly as he no doubt assures the Western world of our depravity and greed.

NEED TO KNOW

A few minutes later, we are drinking beer in a cafe on the second floor. I can still see the skinheads protesting outside, and at one point von Schmidt breaks free from the police line and runs toward the revolving doors, yelling obscenities all the while. He is swiftly escorted back to the rope but continues his raving, flicking his left arm out repeatedly in a gesture of precarious legality. Sammy follows my gaze, has another swig of his Hoegaarden. Figures clatter on a board above us.

‘They’re here,’ he says, fishing a couple of notes from his pocket and placing them under his glass. I look up to see doors swinging open and a group of men in dark suits carrying briefcases march into the marble hall.

On the eighteenth floor of the Brussels Hilton, we are celebrating. The table is strewn with debris. Empty plates, bottles, bread baskets, corkscrews and napkins: an aerial view of a vanquished city. A treaty has been signed and we are celebrating with our new friends, the Swiss bankers. My right leg is shaking beneath the table, but otherwise there's nothing to suggest I am anything but relaxed and contented after a long day of work.

Mr Cohn, resplendent in a pinstripe suit that shows off his belly to great advantage, sits at the head of the table drinking grappa. A black velvet skullcap clings to his balding head at an impossible angle. Mr Cohen, one of the finance directors, sits beside him. He wears a top hat and is smoking a fat little cigar. I contemplate excusing myself to make a phone call, but think better of it. Erica will be leaving the apartment soon.

'Here, Danny, young man, have another glass of grappa,' Mr Cohn calls from the other end of the room. 'It'll make you feel like a hero!' He hands it to Cohen and it is gradually passed along the table until it reaches me. Now everyone is staring at me, waiting. I hate grappa. 'Do I have to?' I ask.

Cohn turns red. 'Do you have to? Do you *have* to?' he splutters. And then laughs very loudly, as is his way. Everyone joins in. 'If you don't down that in one, boy,' he says, 'you are fired.' His face is serious again.

All thoughts of Erica, of the bankers, of anything, vanish. The room is silent, except for the distant sound of a tap dripping. I know better than to question Mr Cohn. 'We are all heroes tonight,' I say, lifting my glass and downing its contents.

'That's my boy!' shouts Cohn, and before I know it everyone is cheering. My throat is on fire and I think I am going to be sick, but somehow I manage to keep it down.

It is later still, and the stars are going out. Most of the staff have left now. I estimate I have done over twenty hours of overtime this week. I watch as, far below, a solitary businessman walks out of the boutique next door and two men start to pull down the grille. The television flickers to itself in the corner. Large armchairs have been pulled up, brandy is sipped, chocolate liqueurs are sucked on.

Sammy is deep in conversation with one of the interpreters, a Flemish woman wearing a red trouser-suit and too much make-up. I wonder what his mother in Golder's Green would think if she could see him now, laughing as he pulls a cocktail stick from the olive in his mouth.

I am talking with Gil, Mr Cohn's bodyguard. He came here from Mossad, and has on previous occasions drawn me diagrams showing how to kill three men with a single bullet. But tonight we are discussing literature. He is a Doris Lessing enthusiast, and is promising to lend me a copy of *The Good Terrorist*.

I feel a hand on my shoulder. Mr Cohn is eyeing me importantly. There is a tall man with round glasses I recognise from the airport by his side. Gil slips away with a soft smile, and takes up his position by the lift.

'Danny, I'd like you to meet Monsieur Forget, who is with...' and he mentions the name of Erica's bank, which for legal reasons I cannot disclose at the present time. 'Danny here has been with us

since the start of the year. He has proven a great asset to us so far, and I expect big things of him in the future. Very big things.'

'Indeed?' says Mr Forget. One would never guess from looking at him how much he is worth. Of course, the moment I catch his name and bank I know for certain what I have both prayed for and dreaded all evening: one of them is here.

Forget is one of the ten.

'What brings you to Brussels, Mr Levi?' he is asking me. 'It surely can't be whatever Ben is paying you.' The two men start laughing.

'No,' I say, 'It certainly isn't that. It's the grappa.' The two redouble their efforts and Forget glances at Cohn approvingly. I see my opportunity and run with it. 'Monsieur Forget, if I may be so bold, may I ask you something?'

He stands back for a moment to show me that he is a serious man willing to listen to any question from a keen young mind. 'Of course,' he says grandly. 'Fire away.' I note his faultless English and Windsor knot.

'Where do you bank?'

There is a long pause, and I think I have made a terrible blunder. Finally Forget tilts his long frame towards me confidentially. 'I must confess, Danny – I have a Swiss bank account.'

Again much merriment, and Cohn is delighted. Frustrated that Forget has answered my question so feebly, and unable to look at him for any longer, I excuse myself to make a phone call.

Downstairs, and Erica is crying into my ear. 'I'm going to kill myself, Danny. I mean it.'

'Don't say that.' I pause, gathering strength. 'Let's talk about this. You can talk, can't you?'

She stops crying to laugh, or at least to make a sound a little like laughter. 'You mean am I worried that some fat businessman is going

to get their wallet stolen in the next five minutes? I think we can take our chances, don't you?'

'Baby, calm down, please, calm down.' I don't tell her that Forget is actually quite slim. I don't tell her anything.

'No, I won't calm down. I've been stewing here all night. They've all gone to sleep, the lot of them. And I'm the stupid fool sitting here rotting away as usual.' I stare at the pattern on the carpet, trying to find the symmetry but failing.

'Erica,' I begin, 'I have some good news.'

The line could be dead, for all I know.

'What?' she asks finally in a very small voice.

'It's Mr Cohn,' I say, stumbling a little, but then I right myself. 'I was talking to him over dinner, and I told him about our plan to go skiing for a few days, and he said not only could I have the time off, but he would take us to Zosterbach, all expenses paid! He has a spare chalet up there, apparently, and we can stay in it. Isn't that fantastic?'
Silence.

'What's wrong, my love?' I ask her. 'I thought you wanted to. You can get the time off, can't you?'

'Yes, I suppose.'

My mind is moving, but far too slowly. 'You don't like Mr Cohn, do you?'

'What?' she explodes. 'How can I not like Mr Cohen when I have never met him?'

'It's Cohn,' I say, 'not Cohen.' I must have told her about the two of them a hundred times.

'Whichever.' But then: 'Oh Danny, I am so sorry. Of course that's great news, it's just I feel like I am being sucked in here, like time has frozen or something. I can't think with all this nothingness!'

'I know,' I tell her. 'I know.'

Back on the eighteenth floor, I nod to Gil and make my way to the Recovery Suite.

There is someone buried under the blankets in the bedroom, I think Mandelbaum from Technology. An alarm clock sits beside him – he must be taking a quick nap. Probably done in from all the drinking. Those Tech guys are a notoriously ascetic bunch.

A wide-screen television shows a football game on mute, the European Cup live. One half of the field is in shadow, the other in sunlight. England are down a goal to Germany. I suddenly long to be there, on the pitch, in the sun, worrying about equalising. I think of school, how we used to play three-and-in on a Sunday afternoon. I watch the game for a few minutes, and then tip-toe away from the television and Mandelbaum. The Germans always win, anyway.

After a quick shower, I slap on some cologne and rummage around for a fresh shirt. I have my own shelf now, and tend to keep a couple of changes of clothing here for really late nights. Feeling somewhat invigorated, I step across the hall to the bathroom.

The urinals gurgle loudly as I walk in, and the sudden combination of strip lighting reflecting off white tiles nearly blinds me. It takes a few seconds for the spots to go away, and then I am aiming for the blue ring.

Someone flushes behind me, and shoes click to the sink.

‘Danny,’ I hear. ‘Liberating your bladder of some of that grappa, are we?’ His voice is very even, but clipped as a brigadier’s. I look over my shoulder at Forget adjusting his belt.

‘That’s right,’ I say, zipping up. I join him at the sink. We both turn taps.

‘Danny, Ben has been telling me about what a good job you’ve been doing here.’

I keep cool. ‘That’s very nice of him.’

‘He also tells me you have a Swiss girlfriend – is this true?’

Cohn! ‘Yes,’ I admit. ‘She studied at Geneva University.’

‘Really?’ says Mr Forget, but he doesn’t ask me what subject, or what she is doing in Brussels. He doesn’t care, is merely making chit-chat with a peasant while he washes his tanned, manicured hands. I have never seen such brown hands. He looks like he has dipped them in something. Gstaad, I think, the bastard probably got so brown skiing. I never get a tan skiing. My nose just goes red and I end up with large lines under my eyes from my goggles, which are always far too tight.

Without taking his eyes off me, Forget places his hands under the dryer and begins to slowly turn them, first this side, now that side. I think of the place Erica took me to downtown, where you can see the chickens rotating on a spit from the street.

Then, very slowly and deliberately, he reaches into his jacket pocket, his left jacket pocket, and removes a small wallet, the leather a dull greenish-black. From it, he produces a small creamy business card, which he slowly caresses between his thumb and forefinger. The dryer suddenly turns itself off and the room goes very quiet.

‘If you are ever in Zurich,’ he says, handing it to me, ‘please give my assistant a call.’

I stare at the card and mutter my thanks. Forget smiles as he places his wallet back in the confines of his jacket.

‘Not at all,’ he says, adjusting his little spectacles, ‘not at all.’

Cohn is showing the Swiss round his lair, pointing out the security precautions, the video cameras, the satellite hook-up facility. I find myself sitting alone, drinking coffee and eating chocolate mints. It’s now nearly one o’clock in the morning.

Hanging on the back of my chair is a jacket. The fans have been still for hours now, and in the quiet of the early morning nobody thought to switch them on again. Throughout the course of the night, people have removed their jackets absent-mindedly and flung them on chairs around the room, myself included.

NEED TO KNOW

But this is not my jacket. My jacket is lying in a pile on the armchair opposite me.

Without thinking, I feel behind me and reach for what I somehow know is there. A dull, slightly tatty, greenish-black wallet. For a moment, I am transfixed by the texture of the leather, and then I wake up.

It is a simple black card. The name of the bank is printed in grey, and underneath that: 'C. FORGET'.

I look up. Nobody. Cohn's voice in the distance. I place the card in my pocket, and return the wallet to its home.

I reach for another After Eight.

It is nearly two now, and the nightmares have come to life. I am standing in the lobby of the Hilton shaking hands with Mr Forget and his compatriots. The limousine is waiting to take them to the airport – they have a flight back to Zurich to catch. Forget will buy a sandwich in the departure lounge and, opening his wallet, will notice that the card is not in its usual place. Or perhaps on the plane he will be seized with a sudden urge to glance at the photograph of his wife. A stewardess will be called, a satellite phone will be fetched. I am screaming inside. Will he suspect a theft? Will they search me? But they can't prove anything, I have thrown the card in a skip down the street, there is no evidence. Video cameras, I think. Cohn's fucking video cameras.

The limousine is finally off, and I try to calm myself. He will think he has dropped it. He might not even notice for a couple of days. Erica, my love, I did it for you. And the rich shit deserved it, your honour! I can call his assistant? As the Americans might say: 'I don't think so'. I think of how my girlfriend will laugh when I tell her I was responsible. I imagine the two of us on the bed in Mr Cohn's chalet, hysterical as we re-enact Forget's panic.

Now Cohn is suggesting a drink. I hate these situations, as I never know what is expected of me. I tell Cohn I will see him next week,

and make as if to hail a taxi, but he is having none of it. ‘What, are you crazy in the head?’ His voice suddenly has an eastern-European tinge and I wonder where he is from, originally. ‘Of course you are coming. We need to test how much you can drink!’ Cackling, he punches me in the stomach.

‘One for the road,’ says Sammy as we walk back through reception, ruffling my hair in a cousinly manner.

The suites are deserted and quiet without the Swiss. All the lights are off, and it gives me the creeps, seeing the desks unmanned in the moonlight. ‘This way,’ says Cohn, grinning, and Sammy and I pad down the corridor after him, our footsteps in synch.

In the Recovery Suite, someone is sitting on the bed. Mandelbaum has slept through his alarm! Static plays over the television. Cohn switches the lights on, and I feel my head start to pulse.

The man is not Mandelbaum. He has the organisation’s badge on the lapel of his jacket, and is wearing a red kippah like Mandelbaum’s, but he is not Mandelbaum. His face is gaunt and his eyes are a brilliant blue.

‘I’ll have a schnapps please, Adolf,’ says Cohn, sinking into an armchair. Von Schmidt walks over to the mini-bar and over his shoulder asks what Sammy and I would like. Without thinking, I say ‘Grappa’.

The three of them are explaining to me how it works, taking turns. Adolf is actually fairly amenable, making jokes and helping out the other two when I lose the gist.

Cohn is addressing me now, drawing a simple diagram on a napkin to show the flow through the departments. But why, I ask, *why*? And so Sammy tells me why we are paying the Nazis – and through the fog of a thousand grappas, it gradually becomes clear.

NEED TO KNOW

The leaders of the organisation realised a few years ago that it makes us look good on television and in the press to have raving lunatics objecting to us. It puts people on our side. But it was always hard to find a group of lunatics who would say the right things – you could never rely on them being consistently rabid. So we simply created our own group, and then set up a team to write their speeches, design logos, the whole bit. This was a branch of the Media Department I hadn't been aware existed. As a humble *stagiaire*, I was too low down the ladder to be trusted. Until now.

Adolf pushes a small saucer of olives in my direction, and lights a cigarette. 'Welcome to the club,' he says, inhaling.

I am running through the park, past a group of homeless people loudly playing cards. I am running down empty streets, past the former Commission building in its luminous white wrapper, an imitation Christo. I am running past vacant shops, Irish pubs, building sites. There is sand beneath my boots, and holes in the walls, and I could be in Jerusalem. I am running towards a gang of boys drinking from giant bottles of Jupiler that hang by their sides. There is a force-field of tension fizzing around them. I see one of them catch a fly in his fist and let it go. They are waiting for something to materialise from the dregs of their wasted night, something to wake them up and show them what life is all about: violence, or perhaps love. They are waiting.

But I am running, up the stairs to our apartment, taking the steps three at a time. I am fiddling with my key ring, and jamming the key in the lock.

I am standing in the bedroom, reading her note.

'Dear Danny,' it reads, 'I have gone back to Geneva to stay with my parents for a while. I think it is for the best.'

'Monsieur Forget called at about five-thirty this morning, from somewhere over France. The line was not altogether clear, but someone had stolen his card and he needed a new one sent to him'

immediately, along with emergency funds. I was the only one awake, but I was struggling to keep my eyelids open. For the first few minutes I refused to believe it was him, as he spoke English. He sounded just like you. Perhaps I had been hoping you would call again. But I accused him of being you, and that made him even more furious. By the time I finally realised that it was him I was a mess, and my training deserted me. It all went out of the window, and I just panicked.

'I know what you did. He said he had come from Brussels, and now I understand why you sounded so strange on the phone earlier. You stole his wallet, Danny. I can't believe you did that. I know you must have thought you were doing a good thing, but I just can't be with someone this irresponsible right now. What were you thinking?'

'They would have fired me today anyway, so it's probably for the best that I am leaving now. I don't think I could cope with the humiliation. The first genuine call the helpline receives and I completely fuck it up.'

'I will always remember the times we had together, Danny. You will always be my sweet little English boy in Brussels. I know it's your birthday on Saturday, and I got you a little something, for the trip we were going to go on. Maybe you can still use them, I don't know. I hope you have a happy birthday without me, and a happy life too. Please don't try to call me. It is over. Erica.'

I am staring at the table, at my glasses and Erica's gift lying next to them, and tears are running down my stupid English face.

The snow is good this year. Crisp and crunchy, the way it should be. As the chair-lift carries us up to the black run, Cohn, wearing purple salopettes a couple of sizes too small for him, is explaining to me once again how everything works.

I understand it all, I tell him. I understood it in the middle of the night in the Recovery Suite on the eighteenth floor of the Brussels Hilton. But Cohn is hushing me, is patting me on the back and calling me old boy. Because it seems that things may be more complicated than he originally let on.

Now he is telling me that they are not satisfied with Sammy, and that perhaps I would like to take his position. They had never really trusted him, so they hadn't quite told him the whole deal. And though they were a little hasty in promoting Sammy, Cohn has seen something in me, a spark he says, and he has now procured the necessary consent from his superiors: it is time for me to learn the truth.

It appears that, in fact, the Nazis are paying *us*. You see, it looks good for them to have a readily identifiable enemy. And, of course, it's difficult to find enemies who will say the right thing – you can never rely on them being consistently rabid. So they created us, and paid a team to write speeches, design logos and all the rest.

NEED TO KNOW

The chair-lift lets us off at the top of the slope. Cohn is laughing about something beside me and rubbing his gloves together boyishly. I turn away from him and look down at the slope through my new prescription ski-goggles. Through the carbonflex lenses I can make out every mogul and patch of ice from here to the red tape at the foot of the mountain. Erica always did get me perfect gifts, and these are no exception. Attached to the front of them is a special visor, of her own design, which fits over my nose to protect it from the sun. A nose visor, made from expensive plastic, like tinted car windows, or computer disk boxes. Who would have thought of such a thing? It's a perfect fit too, snug across the bridge. A bright girl, Erica. She'll go far.

The snow is good this year, crisp and crunchy. It's a glorious day. Before Cohn realises it, I have jabbed my sticks in the snow and jumped over the ridge, the Bond theme racing through my head at top volume.