

**LETTER FROM
OUR PRESIDENT**

LOUISE URE

Segue

June 20 marks the Summer Solstice, and for many people that's the starting bell for summertime plans. For firming up that reservation at the cabin or the lake. For buying the supplies to complete that long delayed project. For packing the kids in the car and hitting the road.

For some inland folks it means getting out the fans for the first time since Labor Day. For us San Franciscans, it means watching the fog roll in and adding another blanket to the bed.

For many writers, seasonal changes and the traditional summer planning done by most of the country don't matter much. For us it's just a segue; a smooth transition from one section to the next without any break.

Many of our MWA NorCal members have ongoing book contracts and their annual calendar centers around manuscript deadlines and pub dates instead of a change of seasons. For them, all of the solstices and equinoxes in the year don't matter a hill of beans compared to the Scrooge-like apparition of a June 11 or October 4 deadline looking over your shoulder.

For others without that powerful deadline, the seasons still don't matter. We write everyday – through hail, hurricanes, hangovers and Hanukah. Writing is a beast that needs to be fed year round, even when our families are clamoring for that little getaway weekend to Yosemite.

Of course, there are also those writers – like Rhys Bowen, Michelle Gagnon, Kelli Stanley and Simon Wood – with July book releases, and for them the solstice probably signals the moment to get out the

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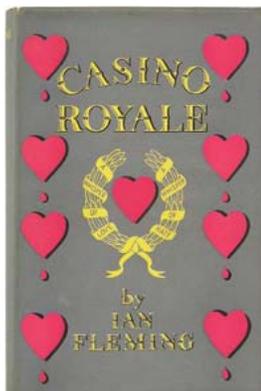
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LONG LIVE IAN FLEMING

By Tony Broadbent

With the centenary of his birth being celebrated this year Fleming, Ian Fleming, the man who created James Bond, is seemingly everywhere. There's a major exhibition — "For Your Eyes Only" — at the Imperial War Museum, in London. Recently there was the worldwide release of a new 'Ian Fleming' book commissioned by the Fleming estate and written by novelist Sebastian Faulks. The book, *Devil May Care*, is already the fastest selling hardback in Penguin's fabled history. Then of course there's the much-anticipated 're-imagined Bond' film *A Quantum of Solace* — the 22nd in the series — due for release later this year. Nearly all of the hoopla, I would suggest, is inspired more by worldwide interest in 'the film Bond' rather than Fleming's own James Bond novels and short stories. Which is a great pity, because the Bond books well reward any time or effort spent in reading or rereading them in or out of sequence.

First, let us count the ways: *Casino Royale*, *Live and Let Die*, *Moonraker*, *Diamonds Are Forever*, *From Russia with Love*, *Dr. No*, *Goldfinger*, *For Your Eyes Only*, *Thunderball*, *The Spy Who Loved Me*, *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, *You Only Live Twice*, *The Man with The Golden Gun*, *Octopussy* and *The Living Daylights*.



Not that everyone would agree. The British critic Paul Johnson famously lambasted the Bond phenomenon in an essay titled "Sex, Snobbery, and Sadism" and even the uber-spy novelist John le Carré (David Cornwall) criticized Bond's immorality: "He's a sort of licensed criminal who, in the name of false patriotism, approves of nasty crimes." I couldn't agree more with the charges of 'sex and snobbery', but I have to say I think it did wonders for developing teenage minds everywhere. It certainly did mine. And as to the accusation of

'false patriotism,' wasn't it, in fact, 007 that rekindled the dying embers of a lost empire and helped maintain the fiction of Britain being a world power? There should be a bronze statue of James Bond — or at the very least Ian Fleming — in Parliament Square.

So what of the man Fleming?

He was handsome in a bland sort of way in that he could stand out in a crowd just as easily as he could disappear into it. He had that effortless sort of assurance that spoke of a private income and a public school education. But he also sported a blue spotted bow tie, an ebonite cigarette holder, a gunmetal cigarette case and a black oxidised lighter that said he didn't give a fig about fitting into anybody else's idea of what was proper. As lunch had progressed, it'd become pretty obvious he was someone who followed his own tastes and amusements; and in that, I suppose, we were very similar. Most of the time he'd had a faint hint of a smile on his face that could've easily been read as supercilious had it not also looked so knowing. And I could see how his sardonic grin and wicked humour could easily be taken for arrogance and cynicism. It didn't bother me, though, I just took it as his way of testing people and gave as good as I got, which seemed to go over well. Another thing, he always seemed to be veiled in smoke, like a destroyer on convoy duty, and I put him at thirty or forty cigarettes a day, and not cheap ones, either, but Turkish and handmade. And I suppose that summed him up, really; he was as restless as blue smoke caught for a moment in a spotlight, before it drifted and disappeared from view.

That's Ian Fleming as described by Jethro, the cat burglar and protagonist in my novel *Spectres In The Smoke*, in a scene that takes place in Boodles, one of London's most exclusive gentlemen's clubs. But what of the facts behind the fiction?

Fleming, son of a Conservative MP and grandson of a Scottish banker, was born into a family of wealth and privilege. He was educated at Eton, in England; then went on to universities in Germany and Switzerland. He was a journalist for Reuters in Moscow, after which he worked as a banker and stockbroker in London. During World War II he was a high-ranking officer in British Naval Intelligence, where apart from dreaming up ever more outrageous schemes for SOE (Special Operations Executive) to take the fight to the enemy, he was also very instrumental in drawing up the blueprint for the OSS (Office of Strategic Service),

the forerunner of the CIA. After the war he was foreign manager of the London *Sunday Times* and then managing director of a small publishing house. And all that before he married one of London's top socialites, Lady Ann Rothermere, then retired as it were, still in his early forties, and sat down at his desk at Goldeneye, the home he'd bought on Jamaica's North Coast to avoid the harsh English winters, to write, as he put it, "the spy story to end all spy stories."



And who better suited to do that, than Ian Fleming? An accomplished former Intelligence officer, he thought like a spy and wrote like one. And so what of his writing?

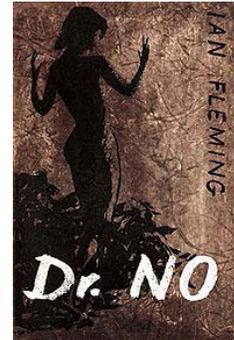
First attempt: *Scent and smoke and sweat hit the taste buds with an acid thwack at three o'clock in the morning.*

Second try: *Scent and smoke and sweat can suddenly combine together and hit the taste buds with an acid shock at three o'clock in the morning.*

And finally: *The scent and smoke and sweat of a casino are nauseating at three in the morning.*

Whatever the highbrow critics may have said since about the weaknesses inherent in *Casino Royale*, the essential outline of James Bond appears in full within the first few pages. Secret Service agent 007 has cold and ruthless eyes. He drives a 1933 4.5 litre Bentley. He carries a concealed weapon, a .25 Beretta automatic. He smokes Morland cigarettes; a special Balkan and Turkish blend with their triple gold band, that he keeps in a flat gunmetal box. He drinks Taittinger champagne and takes his dry Martinis, shaken, not stirred: "Three measures of Gordon's, one of vodka, half a measure of Kina Lillet. Shake it very well until it's ice cold; then add a large thin slice of lemon peel." Soon after which he meets the enchanting Vesper Lynd who wears a black velvet dress "simple and yet with the touch of splendour that only half a dozen couturiers in the world could achieve." Harry's Bar or the House of Dior couldn't have said it any better.

And the rest as they say is history, at least in the field of mystery writing. None other than Raymond Chandler was an early Fleming fan. As he said in his blurb for *Casino Royale*: "A superb gambling scene, a torture scene which still haunts me, and, of course a beautiful girl."



All still perfect grist for the millwheels of the would-be teenage mind or would-be mystery writer. Long live Bond. Long live Ian Fleming.

Tony Broadbent is the author of *THE SMOKE*, *SPECTRES IN THE SMOKE*, and the forthcoming *SHADOWS IN THE SMOKE*.

JACK LYNCH

We were sad to hear of the passing of Jack Lynch, who was an Edgar nominee and for many years a member of the NorCal chapter. He worked as a reporter for the San Francisco Chronicle and then turned to writing mystery novels, launching the Peter Bragg series with *BRAGG'S HUNCH* in 1981. Eight novels appeared in the series, and *PIECES OF DEATH* was nominated for a 1982 Edgar Award. Lynch enjoyed hanging out at the no name bar in Sausalito. The Chronicle's Carl Nolte wrote a complete obituary here:

www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2008/06/05/BAO9113C86.DTL&hw=jack+lynch&sn=001&sc=1000

