



## Hotel Moscow

*Talia Carner*

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## Hotel Moscow Talia Carner

From the author of *Jerusalem Maiden* comes a mesmerizing, thought-provoking novel that tells the riveting story of an American woman--the daughter of Holocaust survivors--who travels to Russia shortly after the fall of communism, and finds herself embroiled in a perilous mafia conspiracy that could irrevocably destroy her life.

Brooke Fielding, a thirty-eight year old New York investment manager and daughter of Jewish Holocaust survivors, finds her life suddenly upended in late September 1993 when her job is unexpectedly put in jeopardy. Brooke accepts an invitation to join a friend on a mission to Moscow to teach entrepreneurial skills to Russian business women, which will also give her a chance to gain expertise in the new, vast emerging Russian market. Though excited by the opportunity to save her job and be one of the first Americans to visit Russia after the fall of communism, she also wonders what awaits her in the country that persecuted her mother just a generation ago.

Inspired by the women she meets, Brooke becomes committed to helping them investigate the crime that threatens their businesses. But as the uprising of the Russian parliament against President Boris Yeltsin turns Moscow into a volatile war zone, Brooke will find that her involvement comes at a high cost. For in a city where "capitalism" is still a dirty word, where neighbors spy on neighbors and the new economy is in the hands of a few dangerous men, nothing Brooke does goes unnoticed--and a mistake in her past may now compromise her future.

A moving, poignant, and rich novel, Hotel Moscow is an eye-opening portrait of post-communist Russia and a profound exploration of faith, family, and heritage.

## Hotel Moscow Details

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## **From Reader Review Hotel Moscow for online ebook**

### **Manchester Military History Society (MMHS) says**

#### **A taut thriller set in Russia in the immediate aftermath of the Soviet Union.**

American businesswoman Brooke Fielding joins a friend on a mission to Moscow to teach business skills to Russian women, but finds corruption blocking her efforts at every turn.

Brooke's parents fled Russia in the 1940s as a result of the persecution of their Jewish faith and the underlying anti-Semitism still prevalent in Russia pervades the storyline throughout.

I hadn't realised until I read the end notes that the author, Talia Carner, had been in Moscow a mere sixteen months after the fall of Communism and just as Boris Yeltsin was trying to put down a rebellion. There she joined a group of American businesswomen in exactly the same way as the lead character in the story so many parts of the story are based on her own experiences.

Carner has written a compelling tale of life during the fall of the Soviet Union, that is exciting, and a revelation of the misogynist attitude of many Russian men alongside the appalling corruption that the post-Soviet power vacuum fostered.

However, from these challenges appears an ultimately heartening story of women working together to create change and empowerment with a great moving twist at the end!

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### **Rachel says**

I received an ARC from the publisher - the book will be published in June 2015. This was very different from the other "Russian" novels I've read recently. The story centers around 38-year-old Brooke Fielding, the American daughter of Holocaust survivors, who goes on a citizen's mission to Moscow to teach business skills to Russian women. But it's October 1993 and she ends up in the middle of a war zone when there is an uprising of the Russian parliament against President Boris Yeltsin. I didn't quite follow all of the political and economic plot twists but it is a compelling, well-written story that gave me a greater understanding of the long-lasting, devastating effects of communism on ordinary Russians, especially women. And, one passage in the book particularly struck me: "Had the Russians, and then the Ukrainians, followed by the Nazis, not destroyed her mother's family, her mother would still be here, living like this . . . and Brooke would have been born in the Soviet Union . . . Instead, by several twists of fate and a parade of unbearable miseries, Brooke had become the recipient of the rarest commodity - luck. She had been lucky to be born in the United States of America."

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### **Sharon Chance says**

Plunging her readers into the early 1990s and post-communism Russia, author Talia Carner presents a dramatic, fast-paced rollercoaster of a story that will keep readers on the edge of their seats to the very

satisfying ending.

Combining the main character's background as the child of Holocaust survivors with her present-day position as a woman executive on a mission trip to advise Russian women on how to start up businesses of their own, Carner has molded a fascinating and admirable character who is strong and yet vulnerable to the many horrible situations she runs into.

This is a thoroughly enjoyable read - there is suspense, a bit of romance, and a bit of a history lesson combined. The setting of the violent yet mesmerizing landscape of Russia is gripping and the cast of characters are intriguing as well.

I highly recommend this novel.

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### **Andie says**

Since this book is based on the author's experiences in Russia during the events depicted in the novel, this should have been a compelling read. Instead, what I found was a disjointed, poorly written book totally lacking in character development or plot cohesion

Brooke Fielding is a 38-year-old investment manager in New York and the daughter of Russian Holocaust survivors who harbors not one, but two BIG SECRETS. When her firm is being taken over by another, she is told to take vacation and not come into the office so the acquiring firm's bankers can do due diligence on the purchase. To fill her empty hours, she volunteers to go to Russia to teach entrepreneurial skills to Russian businesswomen & also, while she's at it, add some stellar points to her resume.

The group, seemingly composed of one clueless woman after another, embarks on their journey without any briefings on the current political situation in the country, no Russian speaking members or any idea of the local culture. Naturally disaster ensues almost immediately and things go from bad to worse over the seven days they are in the country. The leader of the group is some kind of starry-eyed New Age thinker who thinks burning scented candles will solve all their problems and another vulgar member of the group seems more interested in making sexual liaisons than in helping the Russian women. Our heroine, Brooke, is reckless in the extreme and totally in the dark as to how she is endangering the very people she has come to help. The villains in this story are stereotypical caricatures who are almost laughably unbelievable. I kept thinking about Boris Badenov twisting his mustache and and saying, "First ve must get Moose and Squirrel." There is a "love interest" of sorts who is also a cartoon character and pretty unlovable in my opion.

As the reviewer in the Philadelphia Jewish Voice wrote in her review of this book, it "ill serves the thousands of courageous Eastern European and Western women who serve in, and benefit from, the support of NGO's—non-governmental organizations bringing aid, training and spiritual support to post-Soviet states. It was disturbing to see the very well-portrayed narcissism of the main character attributed as an issue among children of Holocaust survivors." If I hadn't received this book as part of The Library Thing's Early Reviewer program, I would have quit reading it after the first 50 pages. This book is a mess.

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### **Merle says**

Hotel Moscow, by Thalia Carner is the story of life in Russia during the break up of communism. Brooke Fielding is a thirty eight year old investment manager working for a company in New York City. While her company is in the middle of a take over she is given a two week vacation. She joins a group of women going to Russia to teach business skills to Russian women starting up small businesses.

Brooke is the child of holocaust survivors. She has been affected by the legacy of her parents, who survived the war when so many others did not. Brooke grew up hearing the stories and fears of her parents. Her parents are Russian Jews who were persecuted during the war and sent to concentration camps. As she travels through Russia, Brooke feels the fear and trepidation her parents felt back during the prewar years. As the story progresses Brooke grapples with her feelings about being Jewish. As her character grows she becomes more understanding of her parents and more comfortable with her Judaism.

Brooke is traveling with a group of women entrepreneurs who will be teaching businesswomen in the newly free Russia skills that will help them succeed in the emerging market.

Traveling in a communist country things are not always what they seem. The story develops with many layers and different perspectives of life in Russia during the 1990s.

The reader follow the thoughts and feelings of Brooke as she interacts with the women she is trying to help and educate about independence and business skills. She also runs into a criminal scheme being practiced by a group of upper level government employees. Brooke begins to understand her mother better and feels more connected to her Judaism than she ever has before.

This novel is based on personal impressions this author had while traveling in Russia during the political uprising of the Russian parliament against President Boris Yeltsin. Carner has used her own story to write this novel. In an essay written in December 2011, Carner writes, "There were so many women desperate to provide for their children in a country where the majority of households were run by women because the men often drank, beat their wives, and died of alcoholism at the average age of fifty-seven."

Motivated by the Russian women's courage Carner makes a second trip to Russia in October 1993 landing in Moscow two hours after the uprising begins against President Boris Yeltsin. Using the art of the novel, creating wonderful female characters and the intrigue of illegal business dealings, Carner gives the reader a realistic feeling for what it was really like to be in Russia at this time in history.

Also quite fun are the patterns of speech used by the Russian women. Here are some examples of the sayings used by the characters: When the character of Olga is explaining to her husband that she wants to help build a better country for her granddaughter, she is outraged that Yeltsin puts out a directive to give all available jobs to men. She says, "it is easier for a donkey when a woman gets off the cart." Another beautiful saying, "Even nightingales can't live on fairy tales." Then later in the story as the women are figuring the criminal scheme that the mafia is putting together Olga tells Brooke, "Even a blind horse can pull a cart, if he 's being lead to water." One last wonderful quote, as Olga tries convince a friend to help make Russia a better place for women to live and work says, "Make yourself into a sheep, and you'll meet a wolf nearby."

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### **Katie/Doing Dewey says**

This book wasn't at all what I expected from the description on the jacket. Typically when that happens, it doesn't end well, but in this case, I thought the jacket description really undersold the story! To begin with, the book was awesome in all the ways I expected from the description. It takes place during a fascinating

time period in Russian history and I learned a lot from reading the book. It was about impressive female entrepreneurs, both Brooke and the women she was working with. The parts from the perspectives of the Russian women gave even more insight into life in Russia. And the descriptions of the time period and location in general were very vivid.

Beyond these mostly expected things, I was surprised by the spy thriller elements of the story. The book included a lot of action and almost constant tension. I particularly liked how the author worked little details about people and places into her descriptions of events. It was a great way for the fast pace and well-written descriptions to coexist. There was also more violence than I expected, sexual and otherwise, which was even more shocking because it was so unexpected. Despite the horrific events in the story, the descriptions weren't so graphic they decreased my enjoyment of the book. The last surprising bit of awesome was the author note at the end, explaining that much of the book was based on the author's own experience in Russia. As someone who loves learning factual information from historical fiction, this was a cherry on top of a great reading experience. *This review was originally posted on Doing Dewey.*

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### **Sarah says**

Very well written. Interesting story of a woman travelling to Moscow and the issues she encounters under the suspicion of the Russian police. She also has her own prejudices to overcome (her parents were Polish during WW2)

Brooke Fielding, a thirty-eight year old New York investment manager and daughter of Jewish Holocaust survivors, finds her life suddenly upended in late September 1993 when her job is unexpectedly put in jeopardy. Brooke accepts an invitation to join a friend on a mission to Moscow to teach entrepreneurial skills to Russian business women, which will also give her a chance to gain expertise in the new, vast emerging Russian market. Though excited by the opportunity to save her job and be one of the first Americans to visit Russia after the fall of communism, she also wonders what awaits her in the country that persecuted her mother just a generation ago. Her mother was the only survivor from her family as the others died in a concentration camp. Her father's first wife and three children were killed. Thus, Brooke has grown up hearing of the anti-Semitism in Russia.

The story begins in 1993 just weeks after the fall of Communism. Left as a country with no laws, the Duma is busy making up laws as they go. However Yeltsin is frustrated and impatient with them and fires them. As the members of their Duma are democratically elected, Yeltsin did not have the authority to fire them. Thus, a stand-off develops between the members of the Duma and Yeltsin as he calls in the Army to remove the Duma.

Brooke's early family history is revealed slowly, like layers of an onion being peeled away, layer by layer. Being in Russia makes her face parts of her past that she had been running from her entire life. There is a possible love interest for her but she is very distrustful of men. Her past relationships are also slowly revealed making it understandable why she is so distrustful of men. Brooke carries secrets that she is afraid of revealing. One of the secrets could cost her her job. She also struggles with the question of "What does it mean to be Jewish?" Should she hide her Jewish identity in this land that is rampantly anti-semitic?

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### **Gaele says**

An interesting mix of historic elements, a mystery and self-discovery are highlights of this story that flashes back to the fall of the Soviet State formerly known as the USSR. Brooke is traveling to Moscow with a group of Americans, intending to share their business acumen and help establish some level of capitalist-style businesses run by Russian women. The daughter of Russian Jews that are also Holocaust survivors, the history and stories about ‘mother Russia’ were a constant companion in her childhood, and the whispers of those stories are omnipresent. Brooke’s uneasy relationship with her Russian family roots and her determination to provide the women she is working with the best possible advantages, she’s an interesting character to learn about.

With the political and social climate in upheaval as power brokers scramble for new advantageous positions, the seemingly open opportunities: Carter uses those multiple elements to fuel the story’s emotional texture layering it with caution, optimism and fear. Changes are scary, and particularly so for those who hold power, and it is just that fear and greed that motivates the mystery / suspense portion of the story, bringing Brooke into danger.

I’ve got several friends and acquaintances who had left Russia just before and during this era, and many shared the stories of life and attitudes. Hotel Moscow brought some of those stories forward again, even as I was intrigued with the freshness and perspective of the book. Several secondary characters bring depth and background as the search to answer the mystery build the setting and add to Brooke’s curiosity in her own family history. It was an interesting journey as all the elements combined, clashed and sometimes ignored one another as the story came to an end. A huge twist and some interesting revelations for Brooke that brought her unexpected answers to questions she didn’t know existed.

While not a ‘couldn’t put it down’ book for me, I kept wanting to get back and see more: do the women succeed with their businesses, will the culprits behind the sabotage ever be found, and where will all of the new experiences lead Brooke are all answered for me, and done with a sense of rightness. As a political junkie, I loved seeing a foreign insider’s point of view of the time that was simplified and sanitized in much of the media of the day.

I received an eArc copy of the title from the publisher via Edelweiss for purpose of honest review. I was not compensated for this review: all conclusions are my own responsibility.

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### **Lynn (Ellesea Loves Reading) says**

Having studying 20th century Russian history in high school, this title piqued my interest because this book is based after the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union; some years after I finished my education. The fact the plot is built around some of the author's own experiences at this time added to my curiosity.

Bertha Feldman or Brooke Fielding as she's now called is the daughter of two Russian Jewish holocaust survivors who escaped to America. Growing up was difficult as she was burdened by her older parents experiences whilst wanting to embrace her cultural background. She escaped and move to the west coast to study at Berkeley but a change of circumstances meant she had to do all she can to survive; to achieve her goals.

Years later, she jumps at the chance to go to the very place her parents escaped to help the women of Moscow re-build their lives and livelihood after the fall of communism, not realising that the experience would have a profound affect on her own life.

What shocked me was how quickly post-communist Russia turned even more sinister. I naively thought that the corruption came later, although common sense should have told me otherwise.

I loved Brooke Fielding's go-getting attitude even when the challenges became just too big and how easily she developed such empathy with the women she met. She's naïve to believe she can change things for the better for Svetlana and the women at the factory. It is also interesting to understand how these women of Moscow perceived Brooke too.

*"Thank-you for not judging me," she whispered.*

*"But I do. And I find you an amazingly accomplished woman who's gone through a lot but never allowed it to defeat you."*

The romantic aspect of Brooke's story is subtle, but there all the same; Judd Kornblum...what's his secret?

The ending is thought provoking. Will Brooke meeting Sage? A relationship with Judd? Svetlana & Natalia's new life in Germany? The fact I have so many unanswered questions is down to the author engaging me sufficiently to think about what happened after Brooke arrived back in the U.S. I wonder too if Irina exploited the market successfully using stolen goods? What became of Sidarov?

Hotel Moscow is well written, intelligent and interesting read that kept my attention. A very welcome and enjoyable diversion from the fiction I usually read.

**4½ stars**

\*\*\*arc generously received courtesy of the publisher William Morrow\*\*\*

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### **Maggie Franz says**

Books contain an intense magic, so powerful that it can transport us to a different time and place. Their authors wield the wands and the cant the spells that craft these journeys for readers. These wizards of words have the ability to not only teach us about history, to but make us live it, to feel it. They weave together the threads of history, humanity, thought and perception to create the most vivid tapestries, which tell the stories of places, people and the events in which they partake. Talia Carner's wand has created such a tapestry that vibrantly depicts a time and a place that most of us know almost nothing about. In her new book Hotel Moscow Carner tells us of the exciting yet tumultuous and dangerous time that she spent in Russia. During the year 1993, when she visited Russia she became caught up in a rebellion against President Yeltsin. Her story, Hotel Moscow is a vehicle to tell of the corruption, the violence and the hardships faced by Russian women and their families. I was very glad to have read this story as it taught me a history that I never would have known. It taught me lessons about humanity, about what we as people are capable of, both good and bad. And in the darkness, the corruption and the hardship, it demonstrated the indomitable power of hope.

What began as a treasure hunting holiday for one American business woman quickly became anything but. Brooke Fielding, an investor for a large firm in New York, cashes in her vacation days when the firm undergoes an acquisition. Unsure of what the future holds, Brooke travels to the newly opened Russia in search of potential business opportunities. Brooke is unsure of what she'll find on her travels, as she returns to the land that her people fled not too long ago. In no way would she be able to prepare herself the situation that awaits her group in Moscow. Hoping to teach local women about business, Brooke quickly becomes the

student as the group teaches her about the corruption, the mafia and the dangers that they face as business owners. As friendships grow Brooke finds herself being drawn into their situation, looking for a way to get to the bottom of the corruption and intimidation, and provide a better life for these women. I highly suggest picking up a copy of this book, as I believe that no one can better describe what Russia in 1993 was like better than Talia Carner.

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### **Sharron E. says**

Read this for my English assignment. Politics is so not my forte especially international politics.

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### **Melanie says**

In 1993, Brooke Fielding heads to Russia, with a group of other women, to teach entrepreneurial skills to Russian business women. It's nothing like she had envisioned it would be. She quickly learns that the women over there live under difficult circumstances and the mafia is in control.

This was such an interesting book! I was feeling sorry for Brooke and all she was dealing with. Then we meet two Russian business women, Svetlana and Olga. They put up a front for the Americans but their personal lives are hard. Food is hard to come by and their living conditions are less than ideal. Svetlana also has a young daughter to care for so some of her decisions are made to keep her safe and fed.

Brooke was a likable character. She wanted to help the women the best she could but also found the entire situation too difficult to deal with. She was wary of some of the men "helping" them and, with the help of Svetlana and Olga, was able to uncover some corruption. Her parents are Russian Jews and Holocaust survivors who barely escaped from Russia years earlier and she heard their stories growing up. Through her experiences, she was able to better understand her parents and came to appreciate her Jewish heritage.

This book takes place within a week. There were times that it seemed a bit disjointed but it was fascinating! It was hard to read at times and I would need to put it down but found myself drawn back to it to see what would happen next. This book will interest anyone looking for a thought-provoking novel set during this time period.

There is some content to note: There is some violence and swearing, including two uses of the "f" word. There is also a short, descriptive rape scene and a short, descriptive sex scene.

I received a copy of this book to review. My opinion is 100% my own.

### **Mel's Shelves**

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### **Raven Haired Girl says**

As the story unfolds I found myself questioning its plausibility, partly due to its presentation which comes across in a rather brusque manner. I wavered back and forth as to the occurrences and situations given. What

left me in suspended doubt, piquing my curiosity even more – Carner was in Moscow months after Communism tumbles along with Yeltsin stomping a rebellion. Carner was part of a group of American female business professionals as portrayed in both the lead protagonist and narrative, loosely the plot is based on Carner's experiences. I wish she mentioned this factoid in the beginning as opposed to the end, I certainly would have approached the book differently.

Compelling narrative of the difficulties and harshness post Communism complete with portraying the undeniable misogynist attitude of Russian men, the rampant corruption, the struggles of citizens.

The solidarity of women determined to educate, seek social justice, change and empower themselves despite the misogynist attitudes and discrimination surrounding them is inspiring and affecting.

The mafioso aggression by means of sexual assault, horrific torture, vandalizing business property as well as the businesses themselves appears far fetched, strictly inserted to shock the reader. However, after reading of Carner living in Moscow during the fall of Communism lends credibility to the horrendous acts described. A case of I wasn't there, very well could have occurred, can't rule anything out during this period of turbulent transition.

Brooke Fielding failed to woo me, mixed feelings about her. Wasn't a fan of the romance portion and Brooke's 'secrets' ALL felt misplaced especially due to the bleakness and severity of the narrative, would have been received better if these two nonsensical and unnecessary instances were omitted. The entire narrative had a rough, awkward feel, deterred from the delivery as well as impact. Difficult to delve into completely.

True to its billing it is an eye-opening portrait of post-communist Russia and a profound exploration of faith, family, and heritage.

For this and other reviews visit <http://ravenhairedgirl.com>

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### **Neil McCrea says**

The two stars are for competence. This is a novel that has been polished to a shine, a novel that has been workshopped until the structure was bulletproof. This is the writing of a successful business person who, after deciding they had a story that needed telling, took creative writing course after creative writing course until a methodology for storytelling became clear. It is a novel devoid of any troubling idiosyncrasies and arguably devoid of any style.

It is 1993 and Brooke Fielding is a successful investment manager and the daughter of Jewish Holocaust survivors. When she is forced into an involuntary paid she from her job, she accepts an invitation to go to Russia to teach entrepreneurial skills to Russian businesswomen. She arrives just as Yeltsin is about to fire parliament and the newly post-Communist Russia is in an uproar. Corruption is rampant and the new economy is in the hands of the Russian mob. Brooke not only finds a variety of obstacles to what she expected to be a straightforward job, but an unexpected degree of danger as well.

A quick glance at Talia Carner's bio reveals her to be smart, successful and likely more accomplished than I'll ever be. Moscow Hotel is to an unknown degree based on the events she encountered doing the same volunteer work at the same time as the protagonist. I applaud her volunteerism and bravery in taking such a

position, and I find myself hesitant to question the validity of her depiction of the state of Moscow at the time.

The novel never stops cheerleading for Capitalism. Rah! Rah! The free market will save us all! Gooooo Invisible Hand! If ever there was a time to express the virtues of Capitalism in this manner, without caveat or nuance, it would be when looking down on the aftermath of the ruined Soviet state. . . . and yet this uncritical, unwavering cheer still manages to grate. Brooke's character doesn't seem to grow much throughout the novel. She begins incredibly naive about Russia's ability to adapt to Capitalism and the degree of its willingness to do so, and she ends a bit more savvy to the situation. Brooke struggles with the balance between her secular Jewish identity and the possibility of embracing a spiritual Jewish identity. She concerns herself with how to go about confronting anti-Semitism. In the end Brooke doesn't really change or modify her convictions, she just reinforces them. There is also a semi-romance subplot in the novel that seems to be included just to check off the romance box.

It took me ages to write this review for two reasons. I'm congenitally unhappy writing negative reviews, and I wanted to talk with a few Russian friends who had lived through the events described in the novel. After a couple of spirited discussions, my takeaway is that Hotel Moscow is a type of poverty porn akin to the way the media portrays sub-Saharan Africa. The widespread corruption is true, the open actions of the mob is true, the conditions of Svetlana's communal living situation would be quite common even if it is not the way the majority lived. The problem is not with the veracity of these things, but that the unrelenting focus on only these things makes for a distorted lens in which to view the Russia of the time. Here is a depiction that revels in pointing to how backwards Russia was in comparison to the US. There is truth there but the depiction should never be so easy.

This is not an awful novel, just a narrow one.

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### **Ioana says**

**In a nutshell:** after the fall of the USSR, Russia was a lawless place in which everyone experienced at least a crime daily or watched their friends and neighbors get attacked while doing nothing about it, in which many husbands beat their wives and all men looked lecherously at women while wanting to rape them, in which union workers refused to serve tea at hotels because it was not part of their job description, in which people were lazy and hopeless and helpless (except for those women who drew hope from their American idols), and in which everyone needed "saving" by noble-hearted American women willing to drop their jobs working for princes of Morocco for a few days to come lecture them on the beauties of capitalism.

**Update:** I've softened my appraisal a bit, and upgraded from 1 to 2 stars after forcing myself to finish (I didn't think I'd be able to at first). The upgrade is because Carner and her characters do *mean* well, and they are/come across as essentially good, just very misguided, people. I still was offended by the tone and found the framing quite unpalatable but I will give Carner this: in all her pity for Eastern Europe, she at least doesn't seem to hold it in obvious disdain, and doesn't dismiss the culture out of hand like some others (Nelson DeMille, for example, who interestingly wrote a cover-blurb for this novel).

Before I go on, a disclaimer: I was born and raised in communist Romania. Not quite Russia, but close enough in quotidian experience.

My first (and second and last and only) reaction to this novel: UGH - **what a pitying, over-privileged,**

**naive, and self-righteous "Western" perspective** on post-communist Eastern Europe. I so wanted to read this book - it's the first one I've ever "pre-ordered" on Amazon and eagerly awaited its arrival this summer, but, alas, I was not only thoroughly disappointed but also pretty offended and angered.

While I am in awe of Carner's bio and accomplishments, and while it's admirable that she cares about empowering women business leaders in developing countries and that she takes concrete actions to do so, her tone in this novel is one of paternalistic condescension and her style is that of a high-school student attempting to follow a formula for good writing presented in an English class. Carner is a businesswoman, and she writes as such - this reads partly like a business plan/document, and partly like what a businessperson might imagine creative writing to be - random insertions about the birds flying over the city, explicit statements about how everyone feels, what they are thinking, etc.

But, whatever, I've read badly written books before, and if their content is somewhat interesting, as the blurb on this promised, I've dealt with it and even doled out 3 or so stars for the story and effort. *Hotel Moscow*'s content, however, consists of **dressed-up poverty-porn** oozing capitalistic-cheerleading, blatant self-admiration, adulation, and congratulation, as well as a thorough misunderstanding of the Eastern-European psyche. A breakdown:

The novel is structured as a linear unfolding of a seven-day trip to post-Soviet Russia; throughout, everything that is bad and that could happen does: assault after assault after attempted rape and murder after actual rape after looting and plunder after corruption after arson and terrorist acts, and so on. The police are nowhere to be found - they go home at 4pm; multiple mafias run the streets; no one helps anyone when they are attacked; there are no hospitals to turn to when one is bleeding profusely or burnt (in another attack or attempted rape); people steal each other's food, money, clothes, dignity; everyone is helpless, hopeless, and desperate.

Now, on the surface, these things are true: there was a breakdown of the law in post-communist Eastern-block life; there was an increase in crime; there was widespread corruption and life was pretty bleak for people, BUT STILL life there wasn't ANYTHING like the Wild Untamed Jungle described by Carner. I mean, come on: even at a "high" crime rate, it wasn't like everyone was always being attacked all the time (in the span of a seven day period!). That's just ridiculous. It's like Carner wanted to show just how bad post-Soviet Russia was (see: poverty-misery-porn), and thus she condensed all the negatives into a HIGHLY concentrated dose and made the events of a year happen over a 7-day period.

In reality, the **breakdown of the law was much more subtle** and affected corruption MUCH more so than visible, overt crime: for example, it was a time for a mad-dash of property-buying, when finally people were allowed to purchase property they had previously owned and that had been collectivized (but that they had to prove was theirs by jumping through many hoops and paying off many intermediaries). And I can guarantee it certainly didn't manifest as police going home at 4pm, or as ALL people standing silently by ALWAYS as others were attacked in front of their noses All The Fucking Time (yes, people were scared, but by G\*d, not THAT immune to human feelings other than fear).

Which brings me to **my biggest problem** with *Hotel Moscow*, which is how Carner describes humans: Westerners-good (Americans in this case) vs. Eastern-Europeans-bad (Russians). First, Carner's Americans have a stated purpose of blatantly exploiting Russia (but it's evident from her writing that Carner sees nothing wrong with this). For example, the main character, after passing through many life-harrowing ordeals within hours of arriving in Moscow (because Moscow was such a crime-ridden place that something bad happened to everyone every 5 minutes), "decided that rather than hold on to her negative first impressions, she would keep an open mind. **There must be great ways to reap profits here.**" Later, her

love interest explains his reason for being in Russia: "**You can raid this country and come up with incredible loot**". There's also a lot of union-bashing. You see, people in unions don't do anything outside their job description. So if you ask a waiter who is unionized to serve you tea, but his job is only to serve you coffee, I kid you not, he refuses to serve you tea and smirks when you ask for tea. Because. Unions are BAD. Etc, ad infinitum with the **capitalist-cheerleading-unions-are-evil-let's-plunder-the-earth-mentality**.

Then, there's the ways in which our Americans just feels SO GOOD about themselves for risking their lives in this dangerous jungle to help the poor unhappy women of Russia (after all, "the month before, [the main character] had helped Prince Jamal of Morocco buy a Rolls-Royce at an auction. What was she doing on this clanking bus-and in this dammed country?"... Why, being the savior of Russian women, of course!). Being a savior includes not only teaching Russian women about what they need and want, but also "**preparing them for a world that holds kindness in high regard**"; because... Russian women are distrustful to the point of extreme selfishness; they ask questions of our American benefactresses such as "Why would I help someone I've never met?" This whole attitude is summed up at the end by our heroine, who claims that "**the local women couldn't have done it without me. All I want now is to save them and get out**".

Now, if Carner had stuck to describing the feelings of American women, I might have swallowed the anti-Eastern-Block-peoples-propaganda a bit less reluctantly, but I was simply furious when she started pretending to know how Russian women felt, especially when all they seemed to feel was desperation and unhappiness at their own situations, and pure adulation for their American guests (The main character "**had encountered such adulation when visiting distant villages in southeast Asia, but had never expected to see it in Russia**" /gag/).

You see, Carner believes Russian women believe that "**no Russian woman is happy**"; further, they all accept that Russia "failed to embrace individual accountability [and] doesn't even place expectations" upon its people. Rah-rah, personal accountability! Further, Russian women also apparently are obsessed with Western women and with adoring them and fawning over them and propping up Western women's image of themselves as saviors of Eastern-Europe. /gag/ Finally, Russian women cannot stop talking about how their **men are "always inept, drunk, or absent from their families"** (for Carner, Russian women are capable of salvation but Russian men are beyond any hope -only one presented in this book has any redeemable qualities)

Anyways - overall, **NOT AT ALL** an accurate picture of post-Soviet Russian life, but rather, a **judgmental pile of pity-filled observations pandered from a pedestal**.

Finally, the one aspect of Carner's writing I didn't touch at all in my review is her and her main character being Jews - unquestionably, Jews suffered immensely at the hands of the Russians. I will grant her every single comment aimed at the Russians re: discrimination, murder, and criminal acts against Jews. Absolutely.  
But my point is, my screed against this book has absolutely NOTHING to do with Carner or Brooke's Jewishness, and I also did not read this as the root of Carner's disdain for the current situation in Russia - rather, it's her glorification of an uber-capitalist-savior-mentality, a fascination with pitying the Russian people for their backwardness and helplessness, a privileged naivete about approaching the Russian people as in-need-of-saving by superior and more-knowledgeable, kind, and compassionate American entrepreneurs.

Lastly, If you would like a **truly accurate depiction of modern-day poverty and problems in Russia**, without feeling the need to immerse yourself in poverty-porn, PLEASE check out **Ludmilla Petrushevskaya** . She is a class act, and not only does she depict Russian life in a much more authentic way, she's also a true literary talent.

