



## Moonraker

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## **Moonraker** Ian Fleming , Michael Dibdin (Introduction)

‘Benzedrine,’ said James Bond. ‘It’s what I shall need if I’m going to keep my wits about me tonight. It’s apt to make one a bit overconfident, but that’ll help too.’ He stirred the champagne so that the white powder whirled among the bubbles. Then he drank the mixture down with one long swallow. ‘It doesn’t taste,’ said Bond, ‘And the champagne is quite excellent’

At M’s request, Bond has gone up against Sir Hugo Drax at the card table, on a mission to teach the millionaire and head of the Moonraker project a lesson he won’t forget, and prevent a scandal engulfing Britain’s latest defence system. But there is more to the mysterious Drax than simply cheating at cards. And once Bond delves deeper into goings-on at the Moonraker base he discovers that both the project and its leader are something other than they pretend to be ...

## **Moonraker Details**

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## From Reader Review Moonraker for online ebook

### Jim says

England probably suffered as much from the Second World War as any of the defeated Axis powers, what with rationing continuing until 1954, two years after Ian Fleming began the James Bond series, and the year before Moonraker was published.

Just imagine the English taking in the scene of the duel at Blades between Fleming super-villain Sir Hugo Drax and one "Commander Bond." The gambling club is flowing with rare French champagnes and Beluga caviar. The betting involves thousands of pounds sterling. This to me is the five-star part of the book.

Unfortunately, the ending involves the typical derring-do, as well as the chase of a Scotland Yard policewoman by the name of Gala Brand. Even worse, the villain commits the unpardonable faux pas of explaining his foul deeds ... and then walking away leaving James and Gala simply tied up. This simply won't do!

Fleming's popularity in the U.S. was to come later, with the popularity of such Hollywood productions as **Dr. No**, **From Russia with Love**, and **Goldfinger**. Add to that it was splendid as Cold War entertainment.

But really, why would the Russians ally themselves with Nazis after what the latter did to their country and people in the Great Patriotic War?

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### Robert says

I have to say MOONRAKER didn't have as much action as either of the two previous Bond novels. At least at the beginning anyway. Sure there was the consummate card game and torture scene, but neither hit as hard or as fast as what happened in CASINO ROYALE. But this was certainly an entertaining read, even though the female characters seemed to wilt at the first sign of trouble, or at least gave the distinct impression of the likelihood of such an occurrence.

I know it's too much to ask (and it's certainly not going to stop me from reading the rest of said novels), but just once I'd like to see a woman kick some serious butt in this series. I'd have to say the closest female so far has been Vesper Lynd, and even she had her flaws. Gala Brand held a certain amount of intrigue and promise, but I felt like the afterburner element was missing from her character.

Bond does show a bit of his human side in this one by not actually getting the girl (being just a mere mortal like the rest of us), which does make his character a bit more interesting, even if said girl (Gala) does notice his ample charm. And he, in turn, notices her abundant curves. Yes, these novels might be called fluff, but like Bond, these novels hold a sophisticated air and charm that isn't easily quantifiable, and that's what makes them so gosh darn entertaining.

Cross-posted at Robert's Reads

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## **Philip says**

Much to my surprise, I quite enjoyed *Moonraker*. It's entirely set in England (and Fleming doesn't seem to have noticed the non-white population already here in 1955), so there's no scope for racism unless you count Germans. And the female lead has her own skills, qualities, ideas and, in the end, independent life, very much as if someone had sat Fleming down and had a word with him about the old misogyny.

I really liked seeing Bond in the cheating-at-cards-in-gentlemen's-clubs subplot which comprises the first third of the book -- a survival of the old Establishment which Bond and his ilk were in the process of supplanting, both politically in the real world and in the sphere of popular genre fiction.

It drags a bit in the middle, and Fleming writes himself into a corner a bit with Bond having to listen to the climax of events on the radio, but the rest of it was really fun to read. There's still sadism, snobbery and tedious drooling about fast cars, obviously, and the plot is grandiose and ludicrous and hinges on absurd coincidences (primarily Bond becoming involved in Drax's affairs for entirely unrelated reasons a week before his plans come to a head), but hey, it's Bond.

For the first time I can see why it was felt these novels were worth adapting as films, and how they ended up being the sorts of films they did.

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## **Jason Koivu says**

*Moonraker* gets fiendish with its plot and villains, making this the first of the James Bond books to feel like a James Bond movie.

Pure Cold War spy bliss, this book taps into our collective fear of mass annihilation after the successfully brutal bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. A war hero has offered his vast fortune, ambition and knowledge to create and construct a missile supposedly capable of defending Britain in case of attack. A test of the missile is scheduled soon and Bond is put on security detail, because something just isn't quite right with the whole situation, so thinks he and his boss M.

Iam Fleming's own spycraft knowledge from having worked in intelligence during WWII is put to good use in these books. For a genre guy, he's also a decent writer. Doesn't it seem like all public-school-trained Englishmen know how to string along a decent sentence or two?

This is the first book in the series where we get a real decent in-depth look at M. It was a pleasant and unexpected treat to get to know M more intimately and see a little bit about what makes him tick. The book in general was fun, even if the bad guy and his righthand toady were a bit over-the-top...maybe it was fun because they were soooo dastardly!

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## **Joyce says**

Once again I am pleasantly surprised by the pleasures of the Bond series. I read them all in high school but my memories are really based on the movies, which don't do the books justice. No gadgets here but lots of action, and a really splendid bridge match that must last for about an hour (the length of my commute today).

Bill Nighy is so good as a reader, ironic yet sensitive. In the interview afterwards he talks about how unexpectedly good the writing is and how sensitively Fleming handles the romantic scenes. Bond doesn't get the girl--and Gala Brand is a great creation, clever and resourceful. Polished prose and vivid character descriptions, lots of action and some violence--but a great car chase--pageturning pace, gritty and intense tone. An immensely entertaining diversion. This is part of a series of audios from Blackstone, all read by celebrities (British actors of note).

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### **Christopher says**

There's a point in this book when a female operative has missed an appointment with Bond because she was kidnapped after discovering a madman's plot to basically destroy the world. M and Bond are discussing her no-show and M says something like, "she probably just had a fainting fit, but I guess we should go look for her to be on the safe side."

That's pretty typical of this book. It's unrepentantly misogynistic and xenophobic, but holy crap snacks is it fun. Can I please enjoy this book even though Ian Fleming was a major douche?

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### **J.C. Greenway says**

What is there that can possibly be left to be written about Britain's favourite secret agent that hasn't already been said a million times before, by feminists, by film reviewers, even by distinguished literary gents? While the cover art is calculated to have any teenage boy's blood racing – girls! guns! rockets! – this book delivers on both the book and recent film versions of Casino Royale's promise of a more appealing, albeit less charming, Bond.

What you know are to become key elements of the films already exist here. Bond's love of gadgetry and the high life are evident, whether that is fine tailoring, his Ronson lighter for use on his own blend of cigarettes, or the little flat off the King's Road. He drives a Bentley, rather than an Aston Martin, an older, classic model he takes pride in racing against foreign engineering, at least until he totals it.

Yet while aiming for effortlessness in all this acquisition, Bond is only one loss at cards away from ruin. We see him chafing at the daily routine and ploughing half-heartedly through the paperwork just like any other office worker, although in the privileged position afforded to a senior civil servant, he is no idle playboy. When away from London on operations, he has a Leica camera in one pocket and a Beretta in the other but perhaps more telling are the gadgets he lacks: having to drive to the next town to telephone allies in Scotland Yard or waiting for essential information to arrive by telegram.

Also lacking is any contact with anyone he isn't working with or for. Perhaps this lack of companionship is compensated for by being surrounded by women, of course possessed of a beauty that mere mortals can only dream of. Whether it is the carefully selected waitresses of the gambling club M frequents, the steely Secret Service secretaries, or a 'severely competent' police woman, the lucky fellow rarely encounters a plain woman. Yet central female characters Gala Brand and Loelia Posonby – though crazily named – are also blessed with a quiet strength, essential to keeping the battered and broken Bond on his feet throughout the action.

Though Fleming laments that Posonby is approaching an age where:

'Unless she married soon, Bond thought for the hundredth time, or had a lover, her cool air of authority might easily become spinsterish and she would join the army of women who had married a career.'

Perhaps this is not the terrible fate he makes it out to be, and it is arguable if a quick tumble with 007 would be a better one, especially as he is facing a similar destiny. His own prospects for a long and happy retirement seem slim, after all. Although contemplating certain death with hopelessness after torture and near defeat, he never questions the rights and wrongs of the power the Service wields over his life. He is good at the essentials of his job, his boss is decent, that is enough. Bond is far more of a bastard than you remember, quite a lot rougher around the edges and unafraid to fight dirty if circumstances dictate. Able to pass with the Lord Basildons of this world, but not quite of them:

'Bond knew that there was something alien and un-English about himself. He knew that he was a difficult man to cover up. Particularly in England.'

Perhaps it is his misfortune that the exotic locations so fundamental to the films are passed over for this tale, which largely happens within sight of the White Cliffs of Dover in the usually sleepy South of England. Moonraker's plot delivers such atomic age fears as a rogue scientists, cities laid waste by the most powerful rocket ever built and an unsettling yet impolitic mistrust of those who have gone from enemies to allies in the blink of an eye.

It is a cracking read, belting along at a great pace and lending a warmth and a human side to its characters that you would perhaps not believe existed if you had only watched the films. You may think you know all there is to know about James Bond, but you won't until you experience him on the page.

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### **Quentin Wallace says**

I continue to enjoy the James Bond novels, but I also continue to be shocked at just how different the novels are than the books. I really shouldn't be surprised, as the novels were written in the mid 50s and this movie, for example, was made in the last 70s. I find it a credit to the movie writers that they are able to take a story and restructure it into what the movie scripts finally became.

So in this one there's no outer space action, no giant snake fight (boo!), and no Jaws. But the Moonraker is instead a rocket that can deliver its atomic payload to anywhere in Europe from Great Britain. I'm guessing at the time that was science fiction. The villain is still Hugo Drax, but his background...well, I don't want any spoilers.

Overall this is a good novel, although a much more straightforward spy action/adventure story rather than the far out movie of the same name. Both are really good in their own way.

As a huge James Bond fan, I'm not sure why I have waited so long to read the novels but I'm glad I'm finally getting around to it.

If you like the movies, you'll probably like the books even with the differences. If you don't like the movies, you may still like the books because they are more realistic and pretty good reads.

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## **Joe Valdez says**

*The two thirty-eights roared simultaneously.*

So begins *Moonraker*, the third novel by Ian Fleming. Published in 1955, it continues the exploits of British Secret Service agent James Bond following *Casino Royale* and *Live and Let Die*, with the long-running film series adhering to Fleming's bibliography neither in order or in story content. This smooth, spare spy thriller bares next door to zero similarity to the film released in 1979 and while I grew restless with the acrobatics of the back half, I loved the business in the front half, which takes readers through a day at the office with a gaming expert and modern male sophisticate occasionally called on to assassinate enemies of the state.

The novel starts with James Bond having a bad case of the Mondays, worked over in the basement firing range by his instructor (his sidearm is a Colt Detective Special) before going up to his eighth floor office of Secret Service headquarters, "Radio Tests Ltd" to any curious pedestrians in Regent Park. Bond, also known as Agent 007, might field an assignment two or three times a year that require his particular skills, but is typically tasked with the chores of a civil servant--reviewing dockets and files full of geopolitical or technological data--while playing cards or golf with a few close friends on the weekend.

A red phone on Bond's desk summons him to the ninth floor office of the head of the Secret Service, known as "M." Bond is caught off guard when his boss refers to him by his given name and asks for his opinion on Sir Hugo Drax, a British industrialist who cornered the market on a ore called Columbite, which has a very high melting point. Drax is nearing completion of a rocket called the Moonraker, which will have the range to strike any city in Europe, guaranteeing Britain's security. A member of the private card club Blades, M has come by information that Drax cheats at bridge. Seeking to avert a national scandal, M requests Bond join him at the club to investigate.

*There are one or two other small refinements which contribute to the luxury of the place. Only brand-new currency notes and silver are paid out on the premises and, if a member is staying overnight, his notes and small change are taken away by the valet who brings the early morning tea and The Times and are replaced with new money. No newspaper comes to the reading room before it has been ironed. Floris provides the soaps and lotions in the lavatories and bedrooms; there is a direct wire to Ladbroke's from the porter's lodge; the club has the finest tents and boxes at the principal race-meetings, at Lord's, Henley, and Wimbledon, and members traveling abroad have automatic membership of the leading club in every foreign capital.*

At the gaming table, Drax is a crass, larger than life man, with one side of his face shiny from scar tissue left over from the war, when he survived a bombing on a rear-liaison headquarters by German saboteurs known as The Werewolves that left many Allied soldiers killed or maimed. Put off by the man's bluster and sweat, Bond ascertains that Drax is using the reflection of his silver cigarette case to sneak a peek at the cards he deals. Partnering with M, Bond agrees to the high stakes Drax enjoys, ultimately switching a hand dealt by Drax with a stacked one Bond slips out of his pocket, gutting the obnoxious multimillionaire for £15,000 and M hopes, teaching him a lesson.

Nursing a hangover at work the next day, Bond barely has time to consider what he'll spend his winnings on when M calls him into his office, this time on business. Four days before the test launch of the Moonraker, two men have been killed at Drax's plant on the cliffs of Dover and Deal. An RAF security officer in charge

of protecting the perimeter was shot by one of Drax's men, a German worker who was apparently jealous of the officer's relationship with Gala Brand, Drax's secretary, who unknown to the industrialist, is an agent of the Special Branch. Not wanting the launch delayed, the Cabinet has opted to replace the murdered security officer.

Bond reports to Drax Metals and is impressed by the multimillionaire. Drax's "dogsbody" Willy Krebs comes across as a sneak while Gala Brand refuses to partake in Bond's repartee. 007 uses his predecessor's files to discover that the man observed an object in the sea and was likely killed for it. Bond and Gala Brand are nearly buried during a walk on the beach when the cliffs above them are blown up. Brand discovers that Drax plans to strike London with the Moonraker. Her boss abducts her and reveals he is a German seeking revenge for his homeland. Bond gives chase in his Bentley but is captured. Taken to the plant with Gala, Bond receives a lecture by Drax but is no longer impressed.

*"Yes," said Bond. He looked levelly at the great red face across the desk. "It's a remarkable case history. Galloping paranoia. Delusions of jealousy and persecution. Megalomaniac hatred and desire for revenge. Curiously enough," he went on conversationally, "it may have something to do with your teeth. Diastema, they call it. Comes from sucking your thumb when you're a child. Yes, I expect that's what the psychologists will say when they get you into the lunatic asylum. Ogre's teeth. Being bullied at school and so on. Extraordinary the effect it has on a child. Then Nazism helped to fan the flames and then came the crack on your ugly head. The crack you engineered yourself. I expect that settled it. From then on you were really mad. Same sort of thing for people who think they're God. Extraordinary, what tenacity they have. Absolute fanatics. You're almost a genius. Lombroso would have been delighted with you. As it is you're just a mad dog that'll have to be shot. Or else you'll commit suicide. Paranoiacs generally do. Too bad. Sad business."*

Nearly all the wonderful things about *Moonraker* occur in the first half of the book. I found the details about James Bond's office space to be cheeky and fun. I can't remember seeing the 007 of film really doing anything but gambling, smoking, being briefed on his mission, seducing women and then blowing shit up. Does this man have an office? A secretary? (Miss Moneypenny is M's secretary) What are his work hours? What's his take home pay? Does he take the tube to work, or carpool? This material grounds the novel as it segues into an *Esquire* article on how to spot a card cheat or how to drink vodka (add pepper).

*"It's a trick the Russians taught me that time you attached me to the Embassy in Moscow," apologized Bond. "There's often quite a lot of fusel oil on the surface of this stuff--at least there used to be when it was badly distilled. Poisonous. In Russia, where you get a lot of bath-tub liquor, it's an understood thing to sprinkle a little pepper in your glass. It takes the fusel oil to the bottom. I got to like the taste and now it's a habit. But I shouldn't have insulted the club Wolfschmidt," he added with a grin.*

*M grunted. "As long as you don't put pepper in Basildon's favorite champagne," he said drily.*

The buildup to Bond and Drax's bridge duel is sophisticated, exciting and fun but climaxes everything that follows it. The goings-on of an arms factory aren't anywhere near as compelling as the action at Blades. While Gala Brand doesn't do the business with Bond (Ian Fleming being less chaste than Walt Disney but quite austere), she doesn't do much but earn 007's professional respect. Fleming's comfort zone is clearly the snapshots of modern male living, with a little gambling and some pyrotechnics thrown in. I enjoyed the glimpses into 007's job and the novel's setting precludes the rampant racism of *Live and Let Die*, but neither the villains or Bond's straits are memorable.

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## Richard says

7.5/10

This was the best Bond I've read to date (admittedly, it is only my 3rd) with the book split into three parts and each one having a different feel to them. The action is toned down compared to what some would expect from Bond and there was no action in space – not once did Bond go Pew Pew, which I'm pretty sure he did in the film.

First things first, my approach to all the Bond books will be tainted by the films. With "Live and Let Die" I knew the film well and enjoyed it – the book less so. I must have watched "Moonraker" once as a child and my memory of it was very poor. I remember Bond in space and Jaws (not the shark) – I don't even remember the theme song which is unheard of! So with no preconceptions I was able to enjoy this for what it was.

As I mentioned it felt like the book was split into 3 distinct parts:

The 1st part where Bond is playing cards to find out why Hugo Drax is cheating at an exclusive club. This was a little like Casino Royal but the tension builds well and it was a good battle of wits. Admittedly I didn't know the card game they were playing so I was lost on some of the terms but it shows how well it was written to draw me in.

The 2nd part is Bond being sent to the Moonraker site after someone is murdered. This felt like Agatha Christie/Shutter Island in the mystery of why someone was murdered in a secure community leaving Bond to find out what has gone on and unravel a deadly plot.

This leads to the 3rd part where everything kicks off. I won't spoil anything but it was a good, if not great, finish to the story with some emotional toying with Bond at the very end.

Overall, this was Bond but not as I know him but that didn't alter the fact that it was a good read and a welcome improvement over "Live and Let Die".

If you like this try: "The Mozart Conspiracy" by Scott Mariani

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## BrokenTune says

*"Why do all the men wear moustaches?" asked Bond, ignoring Drax's question. Again he had the impression that his question had nettled the other man.*

*Drax gave one of his short barking laughs. "My idea," he said. "They're difficult to recognize in those white overalls and with their heads shaved. So I told them to all grow moustaches. The thing's become quite a fetish. Like in the RAF during the war. See anything wrong with it?"*

*"Of course not," said Bond. "Rather startling at first. I would have thought that large numbers on their suits with a different colour for each shift would have been more effective."*

*"Well," said Drax, turning away towards the door as if to end the conversation, "I decided on moustaches."*

Moonraker, the third Bond novel, was an odd read.

The book has scenes that are very similar to Casino Royale, i.e Bond being pitched against a villain who cheats at cards. Yet, Bond seems to be a rather different character in Moonraker. He's not the condescending rake of the first two books, but comes across as quite the normal human being in this one - he has to do chores and paperwork and, like many of us, Bond doesn't like Mondays.

Of course, as in the previous books, part of the plot also has Bond in pursuit of the girl - in this case a smart, confident agent by the name of Gala Brand, who is one of my favourite female characters so far - not hard if we consider how little character Fleming has given to the ones in the first two books.

What is strange as well is that while Fleming spent more time fleshing out Bond and Gala in this one, he spent much less time on the villain of the piece - Sir Hugo Drax, who, by the way, looks nothing like his film counterpart.

*"Drax gave the impression of being a little larger than life. He was physically big - about six foot tall, Bond guessed - and his shoulders were exceptionally broad. he had a square head and the tight reddish hair was parted in the middle. On either side of the parting the hair dipped down in a curve towards the temples with the object, Bond assumed, of hiding as much as possible of the tissue of shining puckered skin that covered most of the right half of his face. Other relics of plastic surgery could be detected in the man's right ear, which was not a perfect match with its companion on the left, and the right eye, which had been a surgical failure. It was considerably larger than the left eye, because of a contraction of the borrowed skin used to rebuild the upper and lower eyelids, and it looked painfully bloodshot."*

Drax is a mere cliche, a comic book villain([view spoiler](#)).

I can see that this might still have been an exciting idea in 1955, when the book was written, I really can. However, I've really grown tired of this plot line - so when this background was revealed in the book I was disappointed. I guess, one of my favourite aspects of the Bond books are the colourful villains. So, when the villain is a mere two dimensional character, my enjoyment of the book suffers because of it - and, as I dislike Bond, more page-time for Bond doesn't make up for that failure.

What was kind of interesting, was that Fleming based Drax's background story on a real event([view spoiler](#)). However, it is unlikely that Fleming intended for any historical facts to spoil a good story, so he doesn't go into a lot of detail (and of course leaves out that the same tactic was employed by all parties).

Which brings me to my biggest gripe about the book: Fleming's shoddy research.

I had a good discussion with my reading buddy, Troy, about this very issue and I guess we dissected the life out is trying to find an explanation for Fleming's odd use of military address. All I can say is that, to my mind Fleming messed up. Big time.

([view spoiler](#))

Shoddy research.

Also, Drax's real name doesn't work. It seems grammatically erroneous to me, but I'm happy to be disproved on that point. ([view spoiler](#))

Anyway, rant over. This was not the best Bond novel ever, but not the worst either and probably quite enjoyable if you're into pulp fiction, comic books, or card games.

What it certainly was not, was a space adventure. The book's plot once again had nothing to do with the film, but how could it when it was written before the space age really began?

So, less "Bond in Spaaace" and more "Bond in a ventilator shaft" or "Bond for Die Hard Fans" or "Bond and Gala discuss the Ethics of Flower Picking".

Yeah, it doesn't have the same ring to it.

*Bond smiled warmly at her. "I'm jealous," he said. "I had other plans for you tomorrow night."*

*She smiled back at him, grateful that the silence had been broken.*

*"What were they," she asked.*

*"I was going to take you off to a farmhouse in France," he said. "And after a wonderful dinner I was going to see if it's true what they say about the scream of a rose."*

*She laughed. "I'm sorry I can't oblige. But there are plenty of others waiting to be picked."*

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## **Richard Derus says**

Rating: 4\* of five

Yes, again I'm rating the 1979 movie, not the 1954 book. Get over it.

The pre-credits sequence of this film is the absolute all-time best thrill ride in the Bondiverse. Seeing it again on the teensy netbook screen was just as thrilling and pulse-pounding as it was to see it in the theater 34 years ago. A parachuteless Bond flung from a plane, chasing a villain with a parachute, wresting the parachute from the villain, and death to baddie while Bond tiptoes lightly to earth.

It's WONDERFUL.

The plot's standard Bond piffle. Villain with all the money in the world manages to hide a space base in the jungles of Brazil, creates a supermegaultra whiter-than-white Master Race, blah blah you know the drill. What makes this fun to watch are the chase scenes in Venice...so beautiful, Venice!...Rio de Janeiro's cable cars, which had me whimpering in terror...and lastly, most campily, in outer space. That bit, the last half-hour or so, hasn't aged well.

I really love this film for its sheer, balls-to-the-wall speed of pace. Unlike many Bond films, the yip-yap seems to take less time than usual. This perception is helped along by the forgettability of the yip-yap, I think.

Possibly the stupidest thing that happens in the film is the 7ft2in tall assassin, Jaws, who repeats from *The Spy Who Loved Me*, turns good because of the love of a (tiny, blonde) woman. Jeez. Possibly the best thing that happens, after the amazing opening sequence, is the launch of six space shuttles...filmed before even one had actually launched! It's quite impressive.

Shirley Bassey's back, singing "Moonraker", the last one she'd ever sing. Thank goodness. Apparently the producers asked her to do this after Kate Bush (!!) said no. The tune's just about what you'd accept in a 1959

film, not a 1979 film.

All there is to say con, I still give this one a pro rating.

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### **Marisa says**

My favorite James Bond yet! A thrilling card game, a sinister plot involving a nuclear warhead, and a good old fashioned car chase fulfilled all of my action needs. I quite liked the relationship Bond had with Ms. Brand (specifically that it didn't go at all as he expected it to) and the detailed writing in this novel is just absolutely luxurious.

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### **Fiona says**

Here you are, sat on a balcony in a faraway part of the world, at three o'clock in the morning because you have All The Jetlag - and have I mentioned this might be the hottest place you have ever been? - and you realise that what with one thing and another, you have not actually finished reading a book in close to a month.

The last time this happened was probably five or six years ago.

It has been a month full of very brain-intensive work, and you have only just managed to escape. Yesterday was the only day in the last fortnight that you weren't at your desk at 10pm. You are glad, at least, to work from home.

You are very tired.

What you are not, here, is terribly comfortable: it's your first trip abroad in an embarrassingly long time, and as you waited at the baggage carousel when you got off the plane, you heard the woman who was sat next to you, and who you chatted with on the flight (third flight in 24 hours) say excitedly to her friend, "She's from SCOTLAND. She *doesn't like the heat*."

On your e-reader, you are reading *Moonraker*, which someone has told you earnestly is nothing like the film. They are quite correct. You also, you realise now, have somehow picked the only James Bond book there is that doesn't leave the British Isles. It literally takes place in London and Dover. It assumes you know the rules of bridge. (Fortunately, you learned them at university, and can just about remember.)

Your hotel room has a coffee machine, but no kettle, and no teabags. You feel like you have arrived here, not just from the UK, but also from actual 1955.

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### **El says**

The movie *Moonraker* is the one I like to refer to as *Bond! In! Spaaaaace!* or *Star Wars: Attack of the Bond*. I figured the book would be relatively similar, but you'd think I'm new at this project. Silly rabbit! The book was published in the mid-50s, the movie came out in the late 70s - the book's *Moonraker* referred to a

nuclear weapon whereas the movie's Moonraker referred to a space shuttle. Clearly making a movie about spacelandia would be appealing to the masses following the release of *Star Wars*. Good job, masses - going and ruining it for the rest of us.

Again the trailer above shows very few things that appeared in the book, but it's my own fault for thinking one of these times there's going to be something more in common than simply the title and the James Bond character.

But, see... the book has this whole long beginning sequence involving a card game between James Bond and the one-who-turns-out-to-be-the-villain Hugo Drax. As fascinating as that can be in print, card games don't translate well to film - at least not until the later Bond movies like *Casino Royale* because Daniel Craig makes a hot-damn poker player. But I digress. Space, however, especially on the tail of *Star Wars* can be *really* exciting, even if rationally it makes *no sense whatsoever*.

The Bond girl in the movie is (hehe) Holly Goodhead, a much better name (to 14 year boys across the world) than Gala Brand of the book. And then there's this whole Nazi busy in the book and blah blah blah. But SPACE! And LASERS! And Jaws in space! These things are in the movie, so therefore the movie is better.

Clearly.

Theme song by (OMG NOT AGAIN) Shirley Bassey. I think so far she's had the most theme songs for Bond movies? It was great at first, but now it's like Share the love, Shirley, give someone else a chance, mmkay?

Not the best Bond book by any stretch of the imagination. Had there been a laser or two then maybe it'd be decent enough, but this was a bit ho-hum for my tastes. Movie was better. Implausible but better.

Next up... For Your Eyes Only.

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### **Estelle says**

First time I'm trying a James Bond novel, and even though I wasn't blown away or anything, it was still an enjoyable read... Well, an enjoyable "listen" actually, since I picked this on audiobook. And I'm glad I did, because the always excellent Simon Vance does a great job narrating Bond's adventures.

I'm sure I'll listen some more in the future. Hopefully the next one will have a bit more action and a better female character.

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### **Carmen says**

For all of you who read my previous James Bond reviews (*Casino Royale* and *Live & Let Die*) this four-star review will be giving you quite a shock.

James Bond is going about his normal life as a Double 0 Operative. And I really mean normal! He reads boring reports and goes to the shooting range. Then, he's called into M's office. He and M discuss a man who's a current English celebrity: Sir Hugo Drax. A very rich man who has invested tons of money into creating a Moonraker, a large rocket/thing that will be launched into the sky, and from there able to defend

England from foreign threats. A loud redhead with very bad teeth, lots of hair on his face and body ... and a huge scar on half his face from when he was found injured after WWII. He was so injured, in fact, that little is known about him. He doesn't even remember anything before the explosion. He got out the hospital and went to work making money, becoming a millionaire in 5 years. Everyone admires him and is grateful for his gift of the Moonraker to England. It's going to be tested in a few days.

Bond knows M isn't one to chew the fat, so he's waiting rather impatiently for M to get to the point. This is the point: Drax cheats at cards. M is worried about this for a few reasons. Why would such a wealthy man risk everything by cheating at some lowly card games? Also, if he gets caught cheating at the super-exclusive club he belongs to, he will disgrace himself and England. So, M invites Bond to the ritzy club to beat Drax at his own game, so to speak.

Bond elegantly and brutally reduces Drax to nothing, earning 15 thousand pounds in the process. Drax is angry and humiliated and threatens Bond.

That night, while Bond and Drax are playing at cards, two men in Drax's employ on Moonraker are killed in a murder-suicide. Allegedly over a beautiful woman who is also a secret agent: Gala Brand. (Her full name is Galatea, so Gala is pronounced Gah-lah.) M knows that blaming her for the murder-suicide is bullsh\*t. She is a professional and an agent. Even Drax had hit on her repeatedly, and she always refused him, wearing an engagement ring. When he gets too aggressive, she's forced to defend herself physically, which she is able to do, being an agent.

Bond is assigned to take the dead man's place working for Drax. Right into the heart of enemy territory. What is in Drax's past? Why are all his men sporting shaved heads and mustaches? Why are they all German? Is the Moonraker mission going to be sabotaged?

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This was a thrilling, engaging, edge-of-your seat mystery. Fleming leads you along with little tantalizing clues and glimpses of what's REALLY going on with the Moonraker, and you are right alongside Gala and Bond as they work together to figure it out before the impending launch.

James Bond definitely has a type: so far, every single "Bond girl" has been black-haired and blue-eyed.

Gala Brand is one of the best additions to the book and by far the best "Bond girl" yet. Fleming makes her an agent, and he doesn't hesitate to show us how smart, capable, strong, and determined she is. Unlike Vesper who was sulky and sullen, and Solitaire who was obedient, trusting and submissive to Bond, Gala really holds her own - even against England's most dangerous agent, 007. Fleming really hammers home this point by letting Gala narrate (3rd person) the story at numerous points. This was very exciting to me and also helped me relate to and sympathize with the character in a way I never could with other "Bond girls." I loved seeing the world through Gala's eyes, and seeing her spy, plan, and figure things out (often even before Bond!).

Bond himself is scads better regarding sexism in this book (I can't comment on racism since there are no people in this book except whites). I mean, he's no liberal woman's rights activist, and that's not what I'm asking - that's not what I expect him to be. ALL I ASK from James Bond is that he a.) sees the woman he's with as a person - not a toy or a stupid nuisance and b.) that he only engages in/fantasizes about consensual sex and doesn't hurt/want to hurt the "Bond girl." THAT'S IT. Those are my only requirements. I'm not even asking him to treat a woman as his equal - only asking that he consider her a human being with feelings and

desires of her own. You'd think this wouldn't be too much to ask, but then again - it's James Bond.

ANYWAY. He is ALMOST perfect in this book. He really looks after Gala - he wants to protect her. When she's in danger he worries about her (instead of planning to let her die, as he so coldly did with Vesper in Casino Royale). He saves Gala's life numerous times, often shielding her body with his and taking most of the punishment: once during a landslide and once during an explosion. He does his best to protect her and save her and keep her from harm. He never made any snide, angry comments about how useless or weak she was (which he often did with Vesper). I was very proud of him.

And on Gala's part, she is amazing! Even Bond admits "she's got a great head for numbers." Gala impresses Bond with her bravery and intelligence again and again. She even comes up with the final plan to save England at the end. Bond is going to do something that would save England but kill a lot of people and she's tells him that he expects her to just take orders from him, but instead she's got a better plan. Bond listens to her. He trusts her. In the end it's her own plan that saves England.

The only times I was angry with Bond and this book didn't get 5 stars because of it. 1.) Stealing a kiss from Gala - even that I could forgive, if it had been the only infraction. 2.) And this is really my main problem - Bond wanting to kick Gala as a punishment for (get this) not flirting with him. o.O This kind of male entitlement annoys me to no end. And after the Isla Vista killings, I can't even stand reading about this kind of man who wants to hurt women simply because they are not sexually interested in him. If I didn't have enough to worry about from simply being born female, now in addition I find myself fretting over turning men down for dates. I can't even tell you how awful and scary it is to think that rejecting a guy will lead to him hurting/killing you. My friend asked me the other day, "How do I reject a guy in a way that he won't murder me?" and it just BROKE MY HEART. For these reasons, I could not forgive Bond for thinking this way, and if the Isla Vista killings had never happened this might not have affected me so strongly, but they are still fresh my mind and the minds of my friends/family.

Bond's relationship with M is explored more in this book and it's very touching. I was even going, "Awwwww" sometimes when Bond and M were talking to each other. Fleming really shows what a strong friendship the two of them have together.

Lastly, I feel like Fleming did a great job of showing Bond's humanity. He doubts himself, second-guesses himself - even berates himself for mistakes in this novel. He's human both mentally and physically - he takes quite a few beatings in this novel and Fleming does a great job (as usual) of showing a pretty realistic recovery period and how injuries would affect Bond's fighting abilities. I really appreciated this more human side of Bond's mind and body.

Overall, this is a great book. Bond really steps up and improves his behavior, Fleming provides us with our first capable love interest, and in addition we get a mystery that is fun to try and put together. I can only hope that other books in this series continue with these trends. I don't want to have to write a 1 star Bond review again - BUT I WILL IF I HAVE TO. Do you hear me, Fleming? ;)

UPDATE: Okay, I saw the 1979 film with Roger Moore. Um.

The only reason to watch this film is to see all the beautiful women in it. There are tons of gorgeous women in the movie.

However, if you're not attracted to women, or you actually want some kind of quality in your movie - there's nothing else. No cute men, no acting abilities, and zero plot. It's confusing, silly, and nonsensical. Almost a

parody of a spy film. I do not find Roger Moore attractive in the least.

If you're choosing between the book and film, DEFINITELY pick the book. It's 100x better.

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## Df doom says

*Moonraker* was the fourth of Ian Fleming's James Bond novels, appearing in 1955. By that time Fleming had the formula well and truly nailed and the result is wonderful entertainment.

A mysterious businessman has announced plans to build a missile that will ensure Britain's defences. He is prepared to finance the project himself as a kind of gift to the nation. The rocker, known as the Moonraker, will be able to reach any city in Europe (which in 1955 made it a super-weapon).

Sir Hugo Drax is very mysterious indeed. In fact no-one is absolutely certain of his identity. During the German breakthrough in the Ardennes in 1944 a British headquarters was destroyed, and a badly burned man was found among the wreckage claiming to have total amnesia. He was tentatively identified as a former dockworker from Liverpool. After the war this man made a fortune speculating on precious metals and by the early 50s he had been knighted and with the announcement of his Moonraker project had become a sort of national hero.

Sir Hugo Drax just happens to belong to the same club as M, the head of the British Secret Service, and M had noticed something peculiar and disturbing- Sir Hugo cheats at cards. It's peculiar because he is so wealthy he has no need to do something so petty, and it's disturbing because in 1955 being exposed a card cheat could still mean social ruin. So it has the potential to become a matter of national security and M asks James Bond as a personal favour to find out how he does it and find a way to cure him of this unfortunate habit before a scandal erupts.

This sets up the obligatory gambling scene without which no Bond novel would be complete. Fleming was fascinated by the dangerous glamour of high-stakes gambling and always liked to find a way not only to include such a scene but also to make it integral to the plot.

The very next day a double murder takes place at the headquarters of the Moonraker project and Bond finds himself working undercover as Drax's chief of security. Naturally there's a beautiful woman involved, in this case a policewoman from Special Branch also working undercover in Drax's operation. Her name is Gala Brand. At this stage of course it is still assumed that Drax is a patriotic hero and that some outside group is trying to sabotage the Moonraker. Bond will soon discover there's more to Sir Hugo Drax than meets the eye.

Fleming's success with the Bond novels was based on making use of the traditional ingredients of the spy thriller but adding extra sex and violence and most importantly, adding extra glamour. He more or less created the stereotypical secret agent as handsome, charming, sophisticated, witty, cultured and as an all-round bon vivant. Fleming loved to drop the names, not of famous people, but of famous and luxurious products. The pages of the Bond novels are littered with references to luxury products. He was sometimes mocked for this but on the whole it was a very effective technique. Spy thrillers are after all escapist fantasies so you might as well make the fantasy as exciting as possible.

Bond also differed from earlier heroes of this type such as Richard Hannay and Bulldog Drummond in being

sexually amoral. Bond is as patriotic and as courageous as Hannay and Drummond but you can't imagine those earlier spy heroes indulging in the sexual adventures that Bond gets up to.

Fleming's *Moonraker* bears little resemblance to the outrageous 1979 Bond movie of the same name. By 1979 technology had moved on and the Moonraker rocket of the novel would have seemed very dated.

The novel is immense fun and if you've never sampled the delights of Fleming's spy fiction it's as good a place to start as anywhere since there's no particular need to read the novels in sequence. Highly recommended.

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### **Jerome says**

Moonraker has a good premise, a very human and quirky main villian who has an interesting background, but the pace of the book is really slow. James Bond doesn't even fire his gun the entire book. I don't expect Bond to shoot someone every page, but he doesn't even engage in combat. There is very little hand-to-hand combat, a couple car chases, and no gunfire. If there is only a little action, I expect deep and thoughtful espionage to substitute, but the book doesn't give you that either. There are some interesting chapters here-and-there, I like the card playing scenes, and the story Drax tells bond at the end, but the book is kind of non-eventful as a whole. I have read several of Ian Fleming's Bond books, this one is at the bottom of the list.

The most infuriating thing about this book is the middle third section which gets bogged down in pointless detail about rocket ships, missiles and physics. We also get more pointless details about food and drink in the casino scene and this obsession gets so dull that at one point, I almost put the book down for keeps. Should you decide to read Moonraker be warned that it gets EXCEEDINGLY boring at points and will require some perseverance and resolve to get through. Another negative for me was the formulaic quality of some of the scenes. They appear to be lifted straight from Casino Royale without the freshness and tension of that first novel - there's the casino stand-off, the night-time car chase, the kidnapping of the girl, the kidnapping of Bond and so on. It does appear that Fleming was struggling with ideas at this point and it shows.

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### **Wanda says**

#### **\*\*\*2018 Summer of Spies\*\*\***

The oddest so far in the James Bond series. I was about two thirds of the way through when I started to wonder when something of significance would happen! The last third, however, held all the action that I'd been asking for.

A very slow start, back to Bond & his card expertise. Having just read Tim Powers' Last Call, which heavily involves poker and other games of chance, I was maybe a bit worn out with the card games! However, what I did find fascinating in the opening pages of the book was Fleming's description of James Bond's schedule:

"It was the beginning of a typical routine day for Bond. It was only two or three times a year that an assignment came along requiring his particular abilities. For the rest of the year he had

the duties of an easy-going senior civil servant—elastic office hours from around ten to six; lunch, generally at the canteen; evenings spent playing cards in the company of a few close friends, or at Crockford's; or making love, with rather cold passion, to one of three similarly disposed married women; weekends playing golf for high stakes at one of the clubs near London.”

This is Fleming, the now-married man, describing his life during his stint in naval intelligence! It could almost have been written by his biographer, Andrew Lycett.

The third book in the Bond series, this is first one in which Bond doesn't get the girl. I found the last sentence to be a bit sad: “He touched her for the last time and then they turned away from each other and walked off into their different lives.” Fleming drew so much from his personal life for these books that it makes me wonder who he had in mind when he wrote such a melancholy final line.

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