



The Winter Queen

Boris Akunin , Andrew Bromfield (Translator)

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Moscow, May 1876: What would cause a talented young student from a wealthy family to shoot himself in front of a promenading public in the Alexander Gardens? Decadence and boredom, most likely, is what the commander of the Criminal Investigation Division of the Moscow Police thinks, but still he finds it curious enough to send the newest member of the division, Erast Fandorin, a young man of irresistible charm, to the Alexander Gardens precinct for more information.

Fandorin is not satisfied with the conclusion that this is an open-and-shut case, nor with the preliminary detective work the precinct has done—and for good reason: The bizarre and tragic suicide is soon connected to a clear case of murder, witnessed firsthand by Fandorin. There are many unresolved questions. Why, for instance, have both victims left their fortunes to an orphanage run by the English Lady Astair? And who is the beautiful "A.B.," whose signed photograph is found in the apparent suicide's apartment? Relying on his keen intuition, the eager sleuth plunges into an investigation that leads him across Europe, landing him at the deadly center of a terrorist conspiracy of worldwide proportions.

The Winter Queen Details

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From Reader Review The Winter Queen for online ebook

Dawn says

I don't think I am actually that big a fan of the detective himself in this book. He was a bit dense and immature.

What I did like was the era, the setting and the rest of the cast. I thought the author did a great job of making me feel like I was in 1876 Russia without being overly descriptive. I also thought the rest of the characters were quite interesting, the boss and the bad guys, the girl and her father, the femme fatale and the young men, all good.

The end was maybe a little over the top too but all in all I really enjoyed this book.

Jest says

I have no idea why this series is so popular. It fails as historical fiction. It fails as detective fiction. It fails in pretty much every way imaginable.

I did enjoy the part where the hero was saved by his own vanity in the shape of a 'Lord Byron' corset.

Richard Derus says

The Book Report: Young, orphaned Erast Fandorin has landed a comparatively cushy job for one whose comfortable future in czarist Russia was snatched away by the machinations of capitalists, beggaring and causing the suicide of his father: Erast is a fourteenth-class state functionary, serving a police official as amanuensis and errand-boy. It leads him into some odd alleyways, serving his about-to-retire master; his wit, his proficiency with language, his unquenchable curiosity lead his boss to allow, amused and indulgent of his junior's silly fascination with nothing criminal, Erast to investigate some odd goings-on among Moscow's Bright Young Things, including the suicide of a youth whose estate, over a million rubles, is left to elderly English philanthropist Baroness Adair.

That one fact, that odd itchy ill-fitting wool sock of a fact, unravels an international conspiracy touching every government in the world, though it is unclear that this conspiracy has any evil intent, at least to me. Erast, extremely young and naive at the outset of the book, ends it extremely young, concussed, and in no possible sense naive and inexperienced any more. How that comes about is a page-turning pleasure to read.

My Review: For once, I am glad I read the second book in the series before the first. I felt much more like I was investing my time wisely after reading Turkish Gambit than I might have had I read this book first. It's good, don't mistake me, but it's not as good as "Gambit" and it's not as clear and succinct, either.

But good golly Miss Molly, it's a ripping good read full of explosions, betrayals, and general all-around wickedness and sneakiness. It's got young love, it's got hopeless infatuation, it's got comradeship and affection, and even a **very** memorable wedding scene. I am completely entranced with its picture of czarist Russia; I am excited to discover the roots of some of Erast's oddities; and I hanker to see these books turned

into movies or TV shows, like Montalbano has been. I really feel I can SEE the action as I'm reading, and that's usually so much less of an issue for me; but this series is supremely visual.

Read, and enjoy, and don't fear the commitment of time a new series requires, because like Rutledge, like Montalbano, there are a lot of 'em and they get better as time goes by.

César Carranza says

Wealhtheow says

In 19th century Russia, young Fandorin yearns to do exciting police work. When he finds clues that imply that a recent strange suicide was actually murder, he excitedly throws himself into the investigation. Along the way he comes to the attention of Bezhetskaya, a woman as coldly efficient as she is beautiful, Brilling, a detective with a brilliant analytical mind, and Zurov, a deadly marksman who lacks any ambition. The plot is a wonderful series of twists and turns, none of which I expected. And Fandorin himself proves to be surprisingly likable. There's one moment that particularly springs to mind, although it's part of the seamless characterization of the young man: after he's fooled his enemies into thinking they've killed him, he listens with bated breath hoping to hear what they thought of him, only to dejectedly listen to their dinner plans.

El says

Boris Akunin is actually a pen name of Grigory Chkhartishvili (bless you), according to the "About the Author" section in the back. "Akunin" is Japanese for "villain", a rather fitting pen-surname for someone who is apparently legendary in Russia for his crime novels. *The Winter Queen* is one of three mysteries featuring the detective Erast Fandorin. I understand all three of them were made into big Russian blockbuster movies. I think I might like the better movie. I'm just sayin'. This particular story is being remade into an English film coming out next year. Thank god for Wikipedia for those of us who live under rocks.

Akunin has the opportunity to create a really awesome detective, a Russian James Bond, if you will - yet I found Fandorin to be rather a wiener. He's a 20-year-old detective, still wet around the ears, who uncovers a plot for world domination. In Moscow, 1876. The concept seems pretty awesome, but my literary planets were clearly not aligned and I found myself mentally snoozing most of the way through this. Which is sort of a hard feat if it's meant to be a conspiracy novel. I expect these sorts of books to grab me from the beginning, shake me like a dog toy, and not let go until the end, when my proverbial neck is broken.

I might check out the other two Fandorin novels. I want to like this guy because he's Russian, but I'm wondering if maybe I have a problem with contemporary Russian authors (ugh, Victor Pelevin) and may just need to stick to the classic Russian writers who had to write to save their lives.

I wouldn't tell others to not read this book. I think a lot of people probably like it. Hell, all of Russia can not

be wrong. They love this guy there, so I figure the fault is on my own side. So knock yourself out, and I promise to someday (no rush) check out another book by him. In the meantime someone needs to recommend a contemporary Russian author who isn't crap.

Laura says

This is the first book of the series Erast Fandorin Mysteries.

The plot is based on Erast Fandorin's investigation of the suicide of a wealthy student at Alexander Gardens in Moscow. He then discovers this a part of the "American Roulette" which was very well portrayed in the movie The Deer Hunter (1978) with Robert de Niro among others.

A quite promising historical mysteries series.

Saman Kashi says

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Neil says

A to Z project, book 6

What a delightful mystery/adventure! Set in 1876 in Russia (and other parts of Europe) it follows an energetic but naive young man who has just begun a career as a minor functionary in the Moscow police. Erast Fandorin is something new (or perhaps something old made new again), a character who succeeds not through his abilities, although he is not without talents, but because fate seems to be on his side.

Akunin catches the tone of Victorian adventure very well. Plotwise, this reminded me of one of Sherlock Holmes's escapades: a small local crime that expands into a big (and admittedly rather silly) international conspiracy.

There's a dark twist at the end that has me anxious to continue in this series. On to The Turkish Gambit!

Andy Weston says

Erast Fandorin, a young policeman in 19th Century Moscow, is certainly a fresh and original character, and it is not hard to see why this series of books featuring him as the 'detective' have been so successful. Though quoted in some reviews as a Russian Sherlock Homes, his antics and miraculous escapes are more reminiscent of James Bond. Though starting out with subtlety, the plot evolves into a wild, improbable extravaganza, which for me is a bit over the top, I prefer the subtlety. The setting of Moscow and Fandorin's

travels across Europe to England is an attractive backdrop, and there is a story within the story going on, that of young Fandorin's loss of innocence as he becomes aware of the evil in the world. As I say, not really for me, but appreciated anyway.

Tatiana says

I don't know if the charm of this novel translates well into English, but in its original (Russian) language this short historical mystery is delicious.

The Winter Queen (or as it was originally titled, *Azazel*) is the first book in a series of detective stories whose main character is Erast Fandorin. In this novel (set in 1870s Russia) Erast is a 20-year old wide-eyed youth who accidentally comes to investigate a strange case of public suicide. In spite of his naivete and innocence, Erast proves himself an astute detective and manages to untangle a world-wide conspiracy.

The best thing about this novel is that while it manages to give a taste of Russian history, culture and mentality, it never stops being a first-class entertainment, dynamic and fun.

I would recommend this book to anyone remotely interested in 19th century Russia, but who is intimidated by Tolstoy and Dostoevsky.

Evgeny says

This is the first book of a very popular Russian series which brought fame to its author Boris Akunin (real name Grigory Chkhartishvili). Boris Akunin considers mystery genre to consist of several sub-genres - his own classification; he wrote each book of the series in each sub-genre (conspiracy, spy, political, Agatha Christie-type, etc.) In the first book we are presented with a conspiracy mystery.

The main hero of the series is Erast Fandorin: a young man in 19th century Russian Empire; the first book takes place in 1876. A talented student from a wealthy family shot himself in a broad daylight which seems to be the obvious case of a suicide resulting from trivial reasons, but our hero is not satisfied with this conclusion. He starts digging deeper and eventually stumbles upon a vast conspiracy.

The book gives a depiction of Russian Empire at the turn of 19th century; I found the historical background to be excellent and Moscow feels really alive. As a mystery novel it fails on several accounts. A hero of a detective series can make it or break it. Consider the most famous detectives: Sherlock Holmes, Hercule Poirot, Nero Wolfe, and others. All of them have very interesting and bright personalities. Erast Fandorin falls flat for me.

He is not that smart to begin with and he usually solves the mystery right after the solution practically jumps into his face; but I really need to cut him some slack here as this is his first case. So what does he have going for him? He is incredibly lucky; quite often an assassin sent to dispatch him stumbles in the very last moment, something falls on his/her head and so on. His luck extends to gambling: he never loses a game of cards or dice. To me this looks like a cheap trick to make up for his deficiency in 'grey cells' area.

Conclusion: 2 stars for mystery, 4 stars for historical background which makes up for 3 stars overall.

This review is a copy/paste on my BookLikes one: <http://gene.booklikes.com/post/754063...>

Nancy Oakes says

Absolutely and totally fun novel, reminiscent of those old cliffhanger series things. I would recommend this book to readers who like what I would call "literary" mysteries, rather than the more fast-food type of reads (although, I must say, some of the ffrs (fast-food reads) are pretty good so I'm not slamming them -- I have read hundreds in my time). Anyway, this one demands a little more of your patience & time, but you will be rewarded in the long run.

brief plot review w/o spoilers

Set in Moscow in the czarist Russia of 1876, the novel opens with a young man (a student named Kokorin) standing in front of a bench in a square full of people. The man takes out a revolver, puts it up to his head, and informs a young girl sitting there with her governess that unless she kisses him, he's going to blow his brains out. She doesn't and he does. Of course, the police are called in, and it turns out that on that same day, there were other public suicide attempts, all using the same method, all over town. The police are left baffled, but one enterprising young man, Erast Fandorin, sees that there must be more under the surface. Erast is just a newbie in the police department, but he is sharp. What follows keeps Erast on the edge of danger, and leads to a crime so vast it spills out of Russia's borders.

I could say more, but I'd wreck the story and I HATE when people do that!

Considering that this is the first in a series, the main character comes off very strong, enough to where I found myself rooting for him the entire way. You might agree with some reviewers that it's a stretch to believe that a relative newbie to the police department would be the one to be put on this case, and that a joe nobody would rise up so quickly, but hey...it's fiction. No one says this must be believable. And it's a fun story.

Jill says

I discovered Boris Akunin last year and immediately fell into his prosaic style. His novels are full of humor and suspense and there are parts that made me laugh aloud. These books are a fun, riotous read that you don't want to put down until you've completed each and every one of them.

Nick Davies says

For the first half of this book, I was of the opinion that this was an 'ok' crime thriller, but one (like a few others I have read) which felt a bit thin. Some historical crime thrillers feel to me a bit like once the well-researched chosen cultural and chronological aspects are stripped away, you're not left with much except a simple story dressed up in unusual words. This had some strange names and social ranks, and the story set up in a fairly likeable way, the first half was fairly enjoyable.

But the second half, especially the final twist(s), was just silly. The repetitive superhuman and seemingly

psychic qualities of the central character just got unbelievable, yet his blundering stupidity to get into the scrapes he then extracted himself from in amazing manner.. this was ridiculous too. There wasn't much wrong with the writing and much of the characterisation, but the plot was just daft. Meh. I read the last hundred pages quickly, rolling my eyes at the multiple sillinesses.

Armina says

Damn.

What the hell was that..?!

Corinne Edwards says

This is a brilliant book. The plot is clever and full of those "no way!" moments that I love in mysteries. I laughed out loud more than once - Fandorin is such a silly and unassuming hero, and his use of the "male corset" was absolutely divine. I did see a few things coming - but the writing was such fun to read, that it didn't spoil the book for me.

I appreciate it as a work of Russian literature (excellently translated) - of course, the ending was incredibly Russian (we can't have things be TOO happy, can we?), as well as the banter between characters about famous Russian novelists and poets - even reciting some Russian poetry. I liked getting a feel for Russia and Europe during the late 19th century - and how different detective work stretching across nations must've been before the telephone and internet. This book was a pleasure on many different levels, I'd read Akunin again.

John says

I read #3 in this series, *Murder on the Leviathan*, a few years ago, and liked it a very great deal . . . which is why, of course, I picked up this volume. I've just noticed, while creating that link, that I read *Leviathan* because I'd enjoyed a different Akunin novel a couple of years before *that*; so the chain continues, link by link . . .

Poor but bright and well educated Erast Fandorin has acquired a dogsbody job at the Moscow CID, where his avuncular boss predicts he'll go far. His opportunity comes when an aristocratic university student bizarrely commits suicide in a local park. Unpicking the ramifications leads young Fandorin to the Winter Queen Hotel in London and thence to love and to the core of an international conspiracy to subvert all the world's great powers . . .

The book's described on the cover as "an Erast Fandorin Mystery," implying that it's a detective novel, but (unlike *Murder on the Leviathan*) it doesn't really fit easily into that genre; although the description will almost certainly mislead, it's more of a James Bond-movie-style caper, with its great conspiracy, the quest of its villains for world domination, their infiltration of the corridors of power and all other influential walks of life, and so forth. This is not to say that Fandorin is a James Bond figure -- he most certainly isn't -- or that the book has anything of the feel of a James Bond movie; merely that the plot belongs more to that genre.

The telling is decidedly quirky (with lots of little parenthetical observations, mainly humorous, interpolated all over the place). This quirkiness makes for a certain lack of fluency and rubs up oddly against the tale's not infrequent moments of stark grimness, in particular its ending, which is as bleak as you could ask for.

By the time I got to that ending I was in two minds as to whether or not I was enjoying myself. I found a lot to admire and certainly I'll be reading more Akunin, but at the same time I wanted to tell the author waspishly to tighten his text up a bit, to be a tad more disciplined about his tendency to self-indulge. At a guess, someone *did* tell him this, because I don't recall having the same reaction to the (later) *Murder on the Leviathan* . . . or, perhaps, I was just in a different mood while reading that other novel!

Paradoxe says

Το βιβλ?ο ξεκιν?ει με μια δυναμικ? εισαγωγ?, παραπ?μποντας μ?λιστα σε μια φρ?ση απ' το Ημερολ?γιο Συγγραφ?ως του Ντοστογ?φσκι που με τη σειρ? της δ?νει την αρχικ? υπ?θεση εργασ?ας που βασ?ζεται στο κοιν? (σχεδ?ν) θ?μα του εξαιρετικ? Ευγ?νιος Ονι?γκιν και του Θε?κο? Ημερολ?γιο εν?ς περιττ? ανθρ?που (επιβεβαι?νεται αυτ? ?λλωστε απ' την αγ?πη που ?τρεφε ο Ντοστογ?φσκι για τον Πο?σκιν). Οι περιττ? ?νθρωποι που τα βρ?σκουν ?λα ?τοιμα στη ζω? κι απ' αρχ?ς γε?ονται κ?θε χαρ?, πολυτ?λεια, λαγνε?α, κακοδιαχε?ριση της ζω?ς του που μπορε? να αγοραστε? με τα χρ?ματα και την κοινωνικ? τ?ξη. Δεν ?χουν καν?να κ?νητρο για ζω? και οδηγο?νται σταδιακ? στην πλ?ξη κι απ? 'κει στην παρα?τηση. Με μια τ?τοια δ?φνη το μυθιστ?ρημα ?βαλε πολ? ψηλ? τον π?χη. Σε αυτ? το σημε?ο δε με απογο?τευσε, το κλ?μα του παραπ?μπει τ?σο στις ιστορ?ες μυστηρ?ου του Ντ?κενς, ?σο και στην ατμ?σφαιρα που πρωτοστατε? στο Ημερολ?γιο του Τουργκ?νιεφ. Επιπλ?ον το χιο?μορ του βιβλ?ου ε?ναι πολ? καλ? και ο Φαντ?ριν ?νας εκκολαπτ?μενος ντετ?κτιβ με τους λ?θος συλλογισμο?ς και τους σωστο?ς, την απειρ?α, τις γκ?φες του.

Ε?ναι ενδιαφ?ρον επ?σης σα σκεπτικ? ?τι ο Μπρ?λινγκ του μαθα?νει να εξ?γει συμπ?ρασμα μ?σω του μηχανισμο? αλληλοεξαρτ?μενων επιχειρημ?των της Λογικ?ς και που ωστ?σο ?μως καταντ?ει πολ? κουραστικ? κ?θε λ?γο αυτ? το πρ?τον, δε?τερον κλπ εν? ταν βλ?πουμε π?ρα απ' αυτο?ς τους δ?ο να το χρησιμοποιο?ν κι ?λλοι, ?πως πχ η Λα?δη γ?νεται ως και ενοχλητικ?. Υπ?ρχουν παρ?λληλα υπερβολ?ς τ?σο στο λ?γο, ?σο και σεναριακ?ς πατ?τες σαν τους δυο κακοποιο?ς, το Φραντς και τον ?γγλο, που με το σακ? κ?θονται και πα?ζουν την κολοκυθι?.

?να ενδιαφ?ρον στοιχε?ο που βλ?πουμε να κ?νει χρ?ση ο συγγραφ?ας ακ?μη και με το ψευδ?νυμο του "Ακο?νιν" που β?βαια ο ?διος ισχυρ?ζεται πως δεν παραπ?μπει στο Μπακο?νιν, αλλ? σε μια γιαπων?ζικη λ?ξη, ε?ναι πως χρησιμοποιε? ομ?ηχα ον?ματα, με αποτ?λεσμα να οδηγε?ται η σκ?ψη σε ?λλα μονοπ?τια. Πχ το ?νομα του Πιοτρ Κοκ?ριν παραπ?μπει σ' εκε?νο του Πιοτρ Κροπ?τκιν, που εν? τον παρουσι?ζει αρχικ? σαν Περιττ? ?νθρωπο, ?ταν κ?νει τη σ?νδεση των Μηδενιστ?ν με την Αναρχ?α, ε?ναι πολ? ε?κολο να δεις μια σ?νδεση που δεν υπ?ρχει απαρα?τητα.

Δεν αφ?νει λεπτομ?ρειες στην πλοκ?, ε?ναι καλοδουλεμ?νο, ως προς το μυστ?ριο ?ταν ικανοποιητικ?. Ε?χε τα περιθ?ρια ν' αποφ?γει κλισεδι?ς, δυστυχ?ς δεν το ?κανε. Επιπλ?ον, εν? η ατμ?σφαιρα ε?ναι πολ? ωρα?α, ειδικ? το βρ?δυ της Κυριακ?ς που το ξεκ?νησα, μου ?ρεσε, με διασκ?δασε. ?σο ?μως κι αν ερεθ?ζει διανοητικ? και δημιουργε? ωρα?ο κλ?μα που σε πε?θει για την εποχ? που πραγματε?εται -μου ?ρεσε επ?σης η σπουδ? του π?νω στη Φυσικ? Κλ?ση του Σοπεν?ουερ και η παραπομπ? στο Δαρβ?νο – δεν ξυπν?ει καν?να συνα?σθημα, τουλ?χιστον ?χι σε 'μενα.

Με λ?γα λ?για, ?ταν ?να καλ? αστυνομικ?, καλ?τερο απ? ?λλα, που υποστ?ριξε επ?σης το ατμοσφαιρικ? στοιχε?ο των αριστουργημ?των στα οπο?α παραπ?μπει, ε?ναι διασκεδαστικ? και οι χαρακτ?ρες ?χουν μια δομ? που σχεδ?ν τους κ?νει ν' αποκτο?ν διαστ?σεις. ?ταν ?να σχεδ?ν καλ? πρωτ?λειο αστυνομικ? μυθιστ?ρημα, πιστε?ω.

Dessislava says

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