



Lenin's Roller Coaster

David Downing

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Winter 1917: As a generation of Europe's young men perish on the Eastern and Western fronts, British spy Jack McColl is assigned a sabotage mission deep in Central Asia, where German influence is strong. As he quickly realizes, the mission only becomes more dangerous the closer he gets to its heart.

Meanwhile, the woman Jack loves, Irish-American suffragette journalist Caitlin Hanley, is in Bolshevik Russia, thrilled to have the chance to cover the Revolution. Caitlin knows Moscow is where she is meant to be during this historic event even if she is putting her own life at risk to bear witness.

But four years of bloody war have taken their toll on all of Europe, and Jack and Caitlin's relationship may become another casualty. Caitlin's political convictions have always been for progress, feminism, and socialism often diametrically opposed to the conservative goals of the British Empire Jack serves. Up until now, Jack and Caitlin have managed to set aside their allegiances and stay faithful to each other, but the stakes of their affair have risen too high. Can a revolutionary love a spy? And if she does, will it cost one of them their life?

Lenin's Roller Coaster Details

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From Reader Review Lenin's Roller Coaster for online ebook

Lis says

Third in the series, and I still don't love it.

The book gives a picture of how precarious the situation in Russia was after the 1917 revolution, with multiple factions and interests. All through the eyes of Jack McColl (English spy, though he mostly has no idea of what his masters actually intend) and Caitlin Harley (American journalist and Bolshevik sympathizer.)

But the title suggests we'd see something of Lenin, or at least an overview of what was going on in Russia. It doesn't. This is a view from below, where participants have only a partial and confused view of what is going on.

wally says

finished this one yesterday round about seven seventeen pee em...the 16th of february 2018, what was it, thursday? yeah, thursday. good read, i liked it...barely. three stars. or maybe two. it was okay. didn't ring any bells for me maybe because one of the heroes of the story is a socialist, starry-eyed, rose-colored glasses and all. if the story continued she'd been calling stalin uncle joe. there is an afterword from downing and apparently he tried to stay true to history, people, events to a degree. the big ones, this, that, the other. one thing missing, i thought, was any form of "piece"...journalism, from one of the heroes, the woman...there are two, a man and a woman...one a brit spy male and the other an american woman journalist. thought it would be nice to have seen her reportage in person instead of being told...such and such. the opportunity was certainly there, wasn't delivered, no news on the door-step. anyway...some parts of the story were good, more entertaining than others and that is a plus...they both engage in a kind of journey toward a destination and the reader follows along with them.

Marie says

3.5

The story is good, but the writing is mostly pedantic. Especially in the Caitlin parts. I found Caitlin to be an unsympathetic character. Hero-worshipping, rather shallow, unable to see any nuances in the political situations and in her "heroic" acquaintances' stances and activities. Given her personality (extreme: all or nothing at all), I really can't see her relationship with Jack having made it this far. Though, admittedly, I didn't read the two books that preceded this in the series.

Jack McColl is a bit of a mystery. How did he become so amazingly proficient in so very many languages? I love the MacGyver-like ability he has to rig and fix just about anything, in order to: get away, save the boy (or girl), fool the enemy, bluff the situation, forage some sustenance, or melt into the local crowd.

John Walker says

The newest Jack McColl/Caitlin Hanley espionage thriller continues the love affair between the two star crossed lovers. Only this time things are not as it seems. Caitlin has become enthralled by the revolution of 1917. It has become everything she could hope for.

Meanwhile Jack, our dare-doing secret agent fights the secret war which leads him to Russia, only in the opposite direction from Caitlin coming in from the Far East. Only to miss her by months.

Lenin's revolution rolls on in various directions. The Cheka, the Trust and even old Sidney Reilly shows up for a final (?) show down between Jack and Caitlin's relationship.

Downing always does a grand job of his history of the times and although I thought the book was a trilogy it seems that there will be a fourth, which makes me waiting again.

Alexandra says

The story didn't do much to captivate me but the historical detail was illuminating.

Liviu says

kind of boring and couldn't care less about either of the main characters; having Bolshevik leaders as even partially 'good guys' tops it off; not a 1 star as on occasion it reminded me of the superb ww2 series of the author' still, such a hugely disappointing series...

will check volume 4 just for completion

Robert Scott says

+McColl is left a home when Caitlin Hanley returns to Russia, but then he ships east with a partner to try to keep the Germans from obtaining essential materials. Caitlin returns to the US and then after covering part of the trial of the IWW leaders in Chicago, she continued on west and returned to Russia via Vladivostok. Train service is often interrupted or stopped all together and the trip to Moscow is not without incident. Meanwhile Jack is making his way through German occupied territory on his way to Kiev and befriends an orphaned boy after his escape from Kiev. Lots of walking, train problems, imprisonment by different groups, a split of the bolsheviks with the LSR, all manner of problems and ethical and other challenges to belief systems. All in all an amazing look inside history in the making.+

Bernie says

Lenin's Rollercoaster

This is the third instalment Jack McColl and Caitlin Hanley series written by David Downing. This time the protagonist are in Russia after the fall of the short-lived Kerensky government. The Bolsheviks under Lenin have come to power. There are however many factions who are fighting each other within Russia. Some want peace with the Germans others want to fight on. The supporters of the Czar the White Russians want

the old order restored. This forms the backdrop to the adventures of Jack McColl and Caitlin Hanley. The background really highlight a time when there as optimism and the thought that the Russian revolution would yield a utopian workers' paradise. As the story progresses the idyll is slipping away. The Bolsheviks execute the Czar and his family and the state security apparatus is emerging. The terror that follows the spring of hope is more than just rumour. Our heroes Jack and Caitlin are traversing the Russian landscape separately he a spy she a journalist. Narrow escapes and shady characters are the order of the day. Their adventures are always crisscrossing but separate. In some ways it is two stories in one. A wonderful way to have glimpse of this turbulent time in history.

Stephen says

this book took awhile to get going and felt the ending was rushed hence why only giving the book this rating. the book itself is based in 1917 Russia after the second revolution as the war goes on the intelligence services change their priorities.

Rich Saskal says

This must be a good series, because I intend to finish it out.

Even though there is a lot to quibble with.

The lead characters, with their modern sensibilities, come off more as displaced time travelers than creatures of the World War I era when the series takes place.

And a continuing series of impressive conincidences throws them together repeatedly on a canvas of events that literally spans the globe.

But the plot, and the likability of the characters, is enough to keep me going, particularly given that the books reflect thorough historical research about interesting events that aren't particularly well-known anymore.

Mal Warwick says

When the Russian Revolution erupted in 1917, it was by no means clear that Vladimir Lenin's Bolsheviks would come into power. Even after Lenin and his allies seized the reins of government in Moscow and Leningrad late in the year, the Communist Party's control of the country was deeply in doubt. The party was indebted to a shaky coalition partner, the Left Revolutionary Socialists. Royalist forces, later dubbed the Whites, were forming armies led by former czarist officers and rapidly regaining territory. A Czech army of 50-100,000 men was operating in tandem with the Whites. And the Western Allies—British, French, and Americans—were invading the country from the north. Chaos reigned in Russia.

In the midst of this fluid and uncertain situation, Jack McColl, a Scot employed by the nascent Secret Service (MI6), enters the country on a mission to help undermine the Bolsheviks. Meanwhile, his unlikely lover, Irish-American journalist Caitlin Handley, is in Russia reporting on the Revolution. Caitlin is a radical with friends among the Bolsheviks and the Left Socialist Revolutionaries. This is the premise on which Lenin's Roller Coaster is based. It's the third novel in David Downing's series featuring Jack and Caitlin.

Somehow, in an earlier book in the series, the two fell in love in the midst of a Secret Service operation in

Ireland. There, they were on different sides, too. In fact, Jack was responsible for the death of Caitlin's younger brother, Colm, who "had been hanged in the Tower of London two years earlier, after taking part in an Irish Republican plot to sabotage the transporting of British troops to France. McColl had caught and arrested him, albeit after offering to let him escape." Improbably, Caitlin is well aware of Jack's role in Colm's death and fell in love with him, anyway.

Mansfield Cumming (the original "C" of MI6) has sent Jack to Russia with vague orders to connect with other agents already in place there. Cumming explains, "Our job is to shore up what's left of the Eastern Front and prevent the Germans and Turks from exploiting the Russian collapse."

Lenin's Roller Coaster relates Jack and Caitlin's experiences as they make their way to Moscow with painful slowness. Jack enters from the south, through Iran. Caitlin's route takes her to Vladivostok on Russia's easternmost coast, then westward on the Trans-Siberian Railway. Both trips take many weeks and expose the lovers to repeated danger. While Downing's description of the Russian Revolution as it unfolded across the vast expanse of the country is fascinating from an historical standpoint, the slow progression of the plot is tedious. The book works well as historical fiction, not so well as a thriller.

Rayrumtum says

I thoroughly enjoyed this 3rd installment in the Jack McColl series. Most of it happens in 1917 Russia after the Bolsheviks have seized power. Many fellow reviewers had problems with it as being too complex or too favorable to the Bolsheviks in their struggle against the Whites. I think much of that is because Russian history at this particular time was extremely complex and Downing caught the complexity. The apparent sympathy for the Bolsheviks was true of many at that particular time as many contemporary observers thought it would unleash a new and better world. Plus the Whites against whom they were pitted were equally vile--especially against Jews. At this time many people/especially artists traveled to Russia to develop art and it was considered an exciting period of free expression. I suspect by the next volume those positive vibes will turn to dust as they have started in that direction towards the end of this one.

Lorin Cary says

This is an historical novel, and Downing explains at the end his take on that genre. It's an excellent explanation which fits the story he's crafted that takes place during the first year of the Russian revolution. Jack McColl is a Scotsman and a British secret agent and Caitlin Hanley is an Irish-American journalist and supporter of the Bolsheviks. And of course they are in love. The novel follows them in separate chapters as Jack gets to Russia and as Caitlin works to record history-in-the-making and then to become part of it. Downing captures the context beautifully, the fragility of the regime in that first year, as myriad forces work to crush the revolution, and as the terror-to-come showed some ragged edges. It's a powerful story, and an excellent read.

Martha Nance says

3.5, not quite a 4, but still a good read. Going to start Downing's John Russell series as I find WWII more interesting than WWI.

Daniel Kincaid says

EDIT (18.9.2018):

Having thinking about the book all night, I remembered another scene that showed perfectly why I hate Caitlin so much (yeah, hate. She may be only a fictional character, but man, she is so annoying): towards the end of the book, she's interrogated by the Cheka when they discover McColl is in Russia. It's obvious they want him dead. She decides to go and warn him, but there's an exposition there where she thinks to herself that she's so angry with McColl. Why, you ask?! Not because he might die if they catch up with him but because IF THE CHEKA DISCOVER THEY'RE STILL IN CONTACT SHE MIGHT GET DEPORTED!

Read that again.

Sure, that's a rational thinking. The man you claim you love, who saved your life- might die because of his job. But you're angry with him because you might get deported and land on your feet in your cushy life in America.

I. HATE. YOU. CAITLIN.

What a struggle to finish this book it was. I'm surprised by this- it's the first it happened to me with David Downing, but in all honesty- this was a very bumpy ride.

Now, don't get me wrong. the book got three and a half stars from me. It wasn't all that bad. As with the second book in this series, the story was divided into two storylines that somewhat connects in the end- the first, and most interesting, is McColl's spying adventure, and the second, and most useless and pointless, is Caitlin's adventure (AKA Snoozefest Galore).

The good- McColl's storyline, his adventures, his insights into politics and war. The subplot with the boy, Fedya, was very touching and wonderful. I love how McColl doesn't follow blindly after anything and anyone and has his own opinion, and while he is very loyal to his country, he also questions the motives and justifications of many actions politicians, generals, and indeed- the ordinary people, make. The things he did toward the end of the book just made me appreciate him even more.

While at heart it is a spy-novel, it's also very much historical-fiction- confirmed as much with the author's note at the end of the book. One of the reasons I loved the "Station" series, by Downing, is his remarkable and fantastic attention to historical detail, extraordinarily weaving fiction and history together and puts you there. His love for history is very evident throughout his works, and it was done to the nth degree here as well (as I also learned new things I didn't know before- the book was very enlightening, and I do need to do more research now).

But what drags this whole book- or indeed, the whole series down, is the second main character, Catilin Hanley. Can somebody, please, shoot her?! Or me?!

Where to begin...?!

As a person- she's annoying, arrogant, coward, and mostly boring. Her storyline is boring and makes you hope she will die in a train accident or something. SHE DOES ABSOLUTELY NOTHING! She's not even doing her job as her reporter- she's just blindly follows the revolution, forgetting why she's really there in Russia, endlessly ruminating how much loves Jack- but a split-second later curses his name when he shows up because the man she loves so much interferes with her important work as... no, not a reporter... Actually,

I'm not even sure what she is doing, besides being the most indecisive person in the world.

If McColl's character actually evolves throughout the series, Caitlin's character just becomes more arrogant, argumentative, and yet also very cowardly. She actually, literally, runs to the other side of the world because she realizes she can't handle the fact that other people think differently from her.

Bottom line- it wouldn't be a problem at all, but since her storylines occupies more than 50% of the book- and considering nothing of importance happens in her storyline, and her "journey", like herself, is mostly boring and a drag, this makes reading this book a chore. Honestly, even though I have only one more book in this series, i'm almost giving up- especially as I know she's also a major part of that one.

Read it for McColl's adventure and the wonderfully historical fiction crafted by Downing.
Otherwise, skip Caitlin's chapters and spare yourself the headache.

Three and a half stars. Barely.

Favorite quote:

Fedya had been saving up questions. "Why are the Germans here in Ukraine?" he asked McColl. "What do they want?"

"Grain for their people back in Germany, who are hungry because of the war. And oil to run their armies and factories. They don't have enough of their own."

"Because of the war?"

"Yes." "

But didn't they start the war? If they hadn't started it, they wouldn't need more food and oil, would they?"

McColl couldn't help smiling. "No, they wouldn't."

"So why did they start it?"

McColl considered. "You know there are some men who can never get enough. Of food or possessions or land or whatever. Well, if one of those men ends up in charge of a country, then it becomes the country that can't get enough. And when it tries to take what it wants from other countries, then you end up with a war." Fedya thought about that. "When I asked my uncle why Germany attacked Russia, he said it was because someone was killed somewhere else—I don't remember where he said it happened, but the man who was killed wasn't a German or a Russian."

"It was an Austrian that was killed. By a Serbian. In a place called Sarajevo."

"So why . . . ?"

"Because Austria was friends with Germany and Serbia was friends with Russia." Fedya was silent. "Do you understand?"

"Yes. I understand. But I've never met a Serbian. And I don't think my father did either. It seems stupid." McColl sighed. "You're not alone in thinking that."
