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Fictional biography of James Bond

James Bond: The Authorized Biography of 007 Details

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Author : John George Pearson

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From Reader Review James Bond: The Authorized Biography of 007 for online ebook

Andy Wixon says

I'm on record as being officially grumpy when publishers and public see fictional characters and settings as somehow independent of their creators. You know the sort of thing I mean - Eoin Colfer being retained to knock out a new Hitch Hiker novel, the children of famous writers writing 'official sequels', based on a conversation they vaguely recall having 35 years ago. And so in order to maintain my integrity I suppose I should dislike this book, what's effectively a James Bond novel not written by Ian Fleming.

Bond is somehow different, though, isn't he? As a character he has burst free of his original context and loomed large in the popular consciousness for half a century (mainly due to the movies), and other people have been writing 'new' Bond novels since the Sixties. Some of these have been pretty distinguished writers (Kingsley Amis, Sebastian Faulks, Charlie Higson), some haven't. Jeffery Deaver is publishing a new one this summer.

This odd independence of Bond from Fleming is sort-of acknowledged in Pearson's book, which purports to be... well, the narrator of the book is a fictionalised version of Pearson, who wrote a well-received biography of Ian Fleming. In the novel, he receives some odd correspondence suggesting Fleming knew a real man named James Bond - a man of whom there is no official record.

His investigation is pulled up sharply by MI6, but then the service relents and admits that Bond is real, and the books (excepting Moonraker, for reasons anyone who's read it will appreciate) are fictionalised versions of actual events. He is invited to visit Jamaica, where Bond is currently on a sabbatical, in order to collaborate on his memoirs.

The rest of the book is an account of Bond's life from his birth in 1920 through to the early Sixties, when Fleming died - although the very first of the non-Fleming Bond novels, Amis's Colonel Sun, is mentioned in passing. The events of the books are not gone into in detail, and this is largely an exercise in filling in the gaps between them.

Prior to this is a lengthy account of Bond's youth and career before the early Fifties, which is in many ways the most interesting part of the book (needless to say, Charlie Higson's Young Bond books do not adhere to this). I should say that this book is almost completely concerned with the literary Bond, not the big-screen version (Bond is aghast when Sean Connery starts appearing as him in cinemas), a harder, crueler, more complex character by far. I would recommend the books to anyone who enjoyed the films, and I suspect fans of the Fleming books will respond to this one in one of two ways.

Some people will probably find it a rather superfluous exercise in I-dotting and T-crossing. What's the point of trying to give a credible background to, and explain the psychology of, someone who's famously a bit of a cipher anyway? I can kind of see where this criticism is coming from.

On the other hand, Sherlockians have been doing roughly similar things for ages and no-one seems to complain about it. As a game, it's quite good fun, even if the central conceit of the novel never quite convinces. One of the things about Bond as a character is that the nature of the stories dictates that we're never going to learn that much about him as a person. The chance to do so is the appeal of a book like this (it may also explain the success of the last movie version of Casino Royale, but that's another topic).

Pearson does a good job of reanimating Fleming's Bond and explaining quite why he's as messed up as he is, and he inventively sustains his narrative. Not all of it quite rings true to Fleming, however - which Pearson would doubtless explain by saying that he's sticking closer to the truth than Fleming did in his account of Bond's career. And it sort of fizzles out - there's no actual climax, but then, as we all know, Bond is immortal and his life story can never end.

My understanding is that, when the book was written in the early Seventies, Pearson was in the frame to become the official chronicler of Bond's adventures, and this book was intended to lead in to that. Of course, it didn't happen (John Gardner eventually took the role in the early Eighties), and on the strength of this book I don't think we missed much - the novel concludes with Bond off to do battle with irradiated mutant man-eating rats, something I couldn't even imagine the people at Eon thinking a good idea for a Bond plot.

The rest of Pearson's book remains a fun and comprehensive pastiche of Fleming's style - on this occasion, suggesting that the author didn't create his greatest character is, in a strange way, a definite compliment. Still, probably really only one for fans of the Fleming novels.

PurpyCookie says

The book has an interesting idea behind it: What if James Bond were real. What things would have happened to him?

As with most of us who grew up with the 007 movies, we forgot that they started out as excellent novels by Ian Fleming. Pearson uses the bits and pieces of Bond's personal history available in Fleming's books to construct an authentic feeling biography which details how Bond got his physical and emotional scars. Pearson gives some depth to Bond and gives us insight into why 007 behaves as he does.

As a bonus, Bond's history is bracketed in the "present" giving the reader one version of what might have happened to Bond had he not been the ageless agent of fiction and film that he remains today. The future of several classic bond women is also revealed with Bond sailing off with one of his former flames.

It is excellent literature and is recommended for anyone who wants to read a good book and, at the same time, fill in the blanks about our favorite spy, 007. I was amazed. I wasn't sure if Bond was real or not, the plot was completely believable. When I finished it I still wasn't sure then I found that it was a fictional work. Apart from being slightly gutted, I was impressed.

Book Details:

Title James Bond: The Authorized Biography of 007

Author John Pearson

Reviewed By Purplycookie

Steve Mitchell says

The idea behind this book is actually really good. John Pearson, who was Fleming's biographer, begins to search for the inspiration of the character of James Bond and begins to unearth details of an actual James Bond that knew Ian Fleming. When the Secret Intelligence Service take an interest in the book it is suggested that rather than trying to censor and suppress it, they could control the flow of information by cooperating. The theory being that the truth is bound to come out sooner or later, so it is better to get the facts correct from the start.

Pearson ends up in Bermuda where he meets the real James Bond who tells his life story for the record. The earlier parts dealing with Bond's childhood and ancestors are really good and begin to flesh out the character that Fleming only sparingly described. The book moves on to Bond's life during the second world war and his introduction to the world of espionage through Fleming at naval intelligence. The book continues and links the obituary to Bond from the novel You Only Live Twice to the actual James Bond.

Just as the secret service tricked the Nazis with Operation Mincemeat - where a corpse of a supposedly drowned Royal Marine officer revealed the allies plans to invade Sardinia; when the true objective was Sicily - some of the Bond novels were actually accounts of SIS action against the Soviet Union and an attempt to fictionalise the main protagonist to dissuade SMERSH from killing him. Casino Royale and Live and Let Die are genuine missions that Bond carried out; but the totally fictitious Moonraker is thrown in to confuse the Soviets. If the SIS can convince them that Bond is not actually the superhero Fleming made him out to be in real life then he can live without constantly peering over his shoulder for the next SMERSH assassin. It is a plot that Fleming would have been proud of for its sheer over-the-top audacity. Where it all falls down is the suggestion that Goldfinger and Dr No were also real operations instead of suggesting that they too were in the Moonraker camp. I particularly liked the way that The Spy Who Loved Me is explained as a true story in this context but felt disappointed that Felix Leiter only got a single mention: was he a real character like Bond or an invention of Fleming's to make the stories better.

If you are a serious Bond fan then this represents a more than passable addition to the series of novels written by Fleming, Gardner, Benson et al. It is not an outstanding book on a par with Casino Royale, From Russia with Love, Colonel Sun or Devil May Care; but neither is it as poor as The Man with the Golden Gun. The

idea that Bond was a real person makes it a good read but when you look at what are actually described as real events and what are dismissed as fiction, you realise that this could have been so much better.

Alex Van Beek says

For a book with such an un-Bond-like title written by an author nobody has heard of before or since, *James Bond: The Authorized Biography of 007* accomplishes something few other spy thrillers, or even works of capital-L Literature, do: complete and total immersion in its world. While reading this book, I became convinced James Bond was real. Not even an exaggeration. Pearson worked with Ian Fleming, later writing a biography of him, and he is successful in incorporating his knowledge of the creator and his creation into a work that honors both, punctiliously follows the template of a non-fiction work, and is overall a fun read.

What shatters the illusion? The ending. It's so unbelievable and stupid it makes the movies *Moonraker* and *Die Another Day* seem like Le Carré could have written them. Because of this, I'm glad Pearson never wrote a follow-up Bond adventure. But what's here is something any Bond fan can enjoy, the last two pages notwithstanding.

Tony Fitzpatrick says

This book has a simple pretext. James Bond is real. He works (or rather worked) for MI6 before and after the war, and did much important work for the secret service. However in the early to mid 1950s his notoriety with the Soviets was such that they were determined to have him killed. To save his life, Ian Fleming and "M" came up with the idea of a novel based on his life, pretending that Bond was fiction. The Soviets would be hugely embarrassed at the idea of committing so much time and energy to kill a fictional character that they would wind up any such activity. Key Soviet Colonels would be relieved that face could be saved, and Bond could go back to his work. Eventually a young British author after some snooping is engaged to write his life story, and so travels to Jamacia where Bond is relaxing with his mistress (Honeychile) and is granted the necessary interviews.

Having read the canon of Fleming's books on 007 I was amused and entertained by this book. It fills in all of the back story that Fleming only hinted - Bond's parentage, his expulsion from Eton, his recruitment to the "service" in Paris where he is living with the madam of a French bordello, his first few assignments, his first "kill", how he got his taste for high living, how he learnt to ski, how he became a card sharp, his war service etc etc. The story of his life with MI6 maps closely to the books, and Fleming appears regularly in walk on parts. The timeline is all a bit long however. At the time of these interviews Bond is supposedly 55, but "M", Bill Tanner, Moneypenny, and May the housekeeper are all apparently still going strong. Never mind - all very amusing and rather fun. I especially like the points where the fictional Bond and the "real" Bond diverge (Fleming being apparently prone to exaggeration). Bond's smoking habit was never as ridiculous as Fleming suggests, and he is actually quite good at office work.

The ending is silly - Bond is on holiday in Jamacia awaiting a call from "M". He wants to get back to work. The call doesn't come. Eventually he decides to resign/retire and marry Honeychile. As he does a party from London arrive to ask him to take on an assignment in Australia to do with giant rats - genetically modified by Blofield's former sidekick (who wasn't apparently killed with him in "Live and Let Die"). He wants to refuse but Honeychile persuades him otherwise. The book ends with Bond in a Vulcan bomber heading for

Australia to help Queen and Country yet again.

Thomas Myers says

I'm very fond of this sort of fictional non-fiction, and this one is particularly meta. Pearson handles it very well, and it was fun to read the extended adventures of James Bond and hint at his past. Although much of it has been subsequently over-written in the Young Bond Series, it is more than we got in the original series. So overall a great and fun read.

Gary says

I'll confess that I fell for the ruse the first few pages of the book. I knew that John Pearson had written several "straight" biographies and was a personal acquaintance of Ian Fleming, so when he began by saying he had uncovered a lead that Fleming might have indeed based his novels on a real MI-6 agent named Bond, I thought, "Oh? What an interesting rabbit trail to follow!" But then I caught on. Pearson just wanted to write a "biography" of 007 that was something of a Bond novel itself.

In picking up the book, I had assumed it might be presenting a biography of Bond by stitching together all the various here-and-there background tidbits Fleming himself had dropped about Bond throughout the novels. And Pearson certainly does some of that, but all with the context of inventing his own Bond story itself, complete with mini-adventures not contained in any of Fleming's work.

The "real" Bond that Pearson "uncovers" bears little resemblance to the suave superspy of the popular imagination (but of course, Fleming's own conception was much more down-to-earth too). The problem is that, once put through the sanitization process of demythologizing, Bond comes across as a pretty dull figure.

There's a particular revelation in the book that's pretty wild--that Fleming wrote his novels in cahoots with MI-6 to confuse the Russians as to whether Bond was a real agent or not. One doesn't have to think that through too long without concluding it doesn't a whole lot of sense. Furthermore, if Bond were a real agent, even if Fleming wanted to write a novelized version of his exploits, would anyone in the security services--including Bond himself--want to have his real name exposed to the world?

There's a lot more within these pages that doesn't hold much water. The mini-adventures for Bond that Pearson invents aren't that exciting--or at least aren't written in a compelling enough way to make them exciting.

Two stars according to the Good Reads scale connotes the book "was OK." Yes, it was a diversion, not really awful, but sort of "meh."

Terry Cornell says

A must read for fans of James Bond. Supposedly a writer is persuaded to interview the 'real' James Bond partly to give positive publicity to British intelligence, and supposedly to help an aging Bond deal with the

possible end of his service. The first half of the book is Bond's back story before the British secret service, the other half sort of a behind the scenes of what really happened compared to Ian Fleming's novels. Pearson does an excellent job of mixing fictional characters and real persons throughout the book. Pearson seems to be the world's leading Bond expert--and for a good reason. He worked as Ian Fleming's assistant at the 'Sunday Times', and went on to write the first biography of Ian Fleming, 'The Life of Ian Fleming'. Some of the reasoning on why the Bond novels seems a little shaky, but otherwise an interesting and fast read.

Richard Bartholomew says

This book is not so much a sequel to Ian Fleming's Bond novels as to Pearson's biography of Fleming, published shortly after Fleming's death (reviewed here). Pearson was initially warned off by the authorities when he began following leads that suggested that Bond may have been a real person, but the secret service then changed its mind and agreed that Pearson could be the agent's official biographer. Pearson was flown out to meet Bond, and he conducted extensive interviews in which Bond talked about his family background and career, and corrected some of Fleming's distortions. The result is a fascinating read that retains Fleming's mix of romanticism, cynicism and discursive attention to detail while convincingly adding a new layer of introspective and elegiac realism to the character we all know so well.

The novels were Fleming's idea – initially, the secret service needed to persuade the Russians that Bond was a fictitious character, and by the time the Russians realised the truth they had their own reasons not to expose Bond's real existence. The later books were seen as good publicity for the service – although Bond was particularly appalled when Fleming put his name to a work actually written by Vivienne Michel, a Canadian woman Bond had encountered in the USA.

Given the purpose of the “authorized biography”, it seems strange that in the end it was itself only allowed to be published as a work of fiction, like Fleming's novels (and Amis's *Colonel Sun*). Did the secret service get cold feet about revealing its biggest secret? Or was it that M was annoyed and embarrassed by an anecdote in the book about his private life?

David says

A fun read for 007 fanatics. The conceit explaining how the 'real' Bond became fictional I have always found amusing.

Roberto Lagos Figueira says

Novela biográfica ficticia, basada en la premisa de que James Bond existió realmente. Este es un recurso ya utilizado ampliamente con otros personajes de ficción. En este caso, nos relatan de primera mano los primeros años de Bond, a través de una entrevista a él mismo, donde nos enteramos de que las novelas de Ian Fleming realmente ocurrieron y que todas ellas responden a una estrategia del MI6 para proteger a Bond y enaltecer al mismo Servicio Secreto Británico. También se nos cuentan someramente otras misiones menores, su relación con otras mujeres, sus visiones sobre la vida, su trabajo y sobre sí mismo. Hago hincapié que es una biografía oficial del personaje, autorizada por los herederos de Fleming. Que yo sepa no existe una versión en español de este libro, y ocasionalmente es reimpresa en su idioma nativo inglés.

Entretenida y por momentos reveladora, este libro del Bond literario- no del filmico- es lectura obligada a cualquier fan del personaje.

Daniel says

Mucho mejor que lo que esperaba.

Es la traducción del libro de John Pearson "James Bond: The Authorized Biography of 007" ISBN 0394621409 (ISBN13: 9780394621401)

Nigel says

I read this when it first came out in 1973 (45 years ago when I was still at school) It is a real must for any Bond enthusiast. It fills in quite a few gaps in Bonds life nicely woven round a current story. Was Bond real or a figment of Flemming's imagination at the time of reading I was not sure a all am I now?? Nice to see reference to some old characters and girlfriends. I really enjoyed and am so pleased it is now available in kindle version so I could read again.

Mark McCallum says

I never knew, or even believed that James Bond was a real character until I read this book.

Many of the Ian Flemming novels are largely based on the real life of James Bond, as hard as that is to believe.

For anyone who loves James Bond, this book is a must read. You won't be able to put it down.

Paul says

1st read in 1973 40 years ago. Fun book for a Bond fan.
