

Greetings Club Member

A first edition copy of *Casino Royale* (inscribed by Ian Fleming to a lifelong friend, Lisl Popper) will set you back over USD175 000. Just what makes this 72-year-old novel carry such a hefty price tag?

The first book in the James Bond series partially answers the question. A limited print run of +/- 5 000 is another. No doubt the Broccoli film franchise generated a following for the Bond character over the years. But it's also because in 1953 one author brought a new dimension to the espionage genre. Where Graham Greene gave us agents with a conscience, le Carré complexity, Fleming was all about speed and spectacle.

Sure his stories move through settings of gadgets, girls and glamour, but they're side-shows to the central character whom the author labelled "a compound of all the secret agents and commando types I met during the War." Fleming worked in Naval Intelligence during World War 2, helping plan covert operations, deception missions and commando strikes. Here he rubbed shoulders with men who had sharp observation skills, an ability to maintain composure in chaotic situations, knew what had to be done and when to pull the trigger. Characteristics that came to embody Agent 007.

But he was not the unshakeable hero of the movies. Fleming built him up, broke him down and left him more human in the end. And that's what brought readers back to the 12-book series. Bond's vulnerability made him relatable, and his resilience, compelling.

He even got married (albeit briefly) in *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*. A book many consider to be Fleming at the peak of his craft. Here's a picture of my first-edition copy:



Some fun 007 facts:

- In the book series Bond drives various Bentley models – but never an Aston Martin.
- Bond was a heavy smoker – up to 70 cigarettes a day.
- He referred to tea as "mud" and blamed it for the downfall of the British Empire.
- From *Casino Royale* to *From Russia, with Love*, Bond carried a .25 Beretta pistol - until a weapon adviser told Fleming that James Bond would never carry a .25 Beretta. "It's really a lady's gun—and not a very nice lady at that!" From then on Bond had a Walther PPK 7.65mm.

That's all for now. As my final newsletter for 2025 I wish everyone a blessed Christmas and see you again in 2026.

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