

007 in New York

Ian Fleming
1963

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Title: 007 in New York

Date of first publication: 1963

Author: Ian Fleming (1908-1964)

Date first posted: Oct. 18, 2021

Date last updated: Oct. 18, 2021

Faded Page eBook #20211026

This eBook was produced by: Al Haines

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007 IN NEW YORK

By way of a postscript I might say that I am well aware these grim feelings I have expressed for New York may shock or depress some of my readers. In fact, I would be disappointed if this were not the case. In deference to these readers, I here submit the record of another visitor to the city, a friend of mine with the dull name of James Bond, whose taste and responses are not always my own and whose recent minor adventure in New York (his profession is rather an odd one) may prove more cheerful in the reading.

It was around ten o'clock on a blue and golden morning at the end of September and the BOAC Monarch flight from London had come in at the same time as four other international flights. James Bond, his stomach queasy from the BOAC version of 'An English Country House Breakfast', took his place stoically in a long queue that included plenty of squalling children and in due course said that he had spent the last ten nights in London. Then to Immigration—fifteen minutes to show his passport that said he was 'David Barlow, Merchant' and that he had eyes and hair and was six feet tall; and then to the Gehenna of the Idlewild Customs that has been carefully designed, in Bond's opinion, to give visitors to the United States coronary thrombosis. Everyone, each with his stupid little trolley, looked, after a night's flight, wretched and undignified. Waiting for his suitcase to appear behind the glass of the unloading bay and then to be graciously released for him to fight for and hump over to the customs lines, all of which were overloaded while each bag or bundle (why not a

spot-check?) was opened and prodded and then laboriously closed, often between slaps at fretting children, by its exhausted owner. Bond glanced up at the glass-walled balcony that ran round the great hall. A man in a rainproof and Trilby, middle-aged, nondescript, was inspecting the orderly hell through a pair of folding opera-glasses. Anybody examining him or, indeed, any one else through binoculars was an object of suspicion to James Bond, but now his conspiratorial mind merely registered that this would be a good link in an efficient hotel-robbery machine. The man with the glasses would note the rich-looking woman declaring her jewellery, slip downstairs when she was released from Customs, tail her into New York, get beside her at the desk, hear her room number being called to the captain, and the rest would be up to the mechanics. Bond shrugged. At least the man didn't seem interested in him. He had his single suitcase passed by the polite man with the badge. Then, sweating with the unnecessary central heating, he carried it out through the automatic glass doors into the blessed fresh fall air. The Carey Cadillac, as a message had told him, was already waiting. James Bond always used the firm. They had fine cars and superb drivers, rigid discipline and total discretion, and they didn't smell of stale cigar smoke. Bond even wondered if Commander Carey's organization, supposing it had equated David Barlow with James Bond, would have betrayed their standards by informing CIA. Well, no doubt the United States had to come first, and anyway, did Commander Carey know who James Bond was? The Immigration people certainly did. In the great black bible with the thickly printed yellow pages the officer had consulted when he took Bond's passport, Bond knew that there were three Bonds and that one of them was

'James, British, Passport 391354. Inform Chief Officer.' How closely did Careys work with these people? Probably only if it was police business. Anyway, James Bond felt pretty confident that he could spend twenty-four hours in New York, make the contact and get out again without embarrassing explanations having to be given to Messrs Hoover or McCone. For this was an embarrassing, unattractive business that M had sent Bond anonymously to New York to undertake. It was to warn a nice girl, who had once worked for the Secret Service, an English girl now earning her living in New York, that she was cohabiting with a Soviet agent of the KGB attached to the UN and that M knew that the FBI and the CIA were getting very close to learning her identity. It was doing the dirt on two friendly organizations, of course, and it would be highly embarrassing if Bond were found out, but the girl had been a first-class staff officer, and when he could, M looked after his own. So Bond had been instructed to make contact and he had arranged to do so, that afternoon at three o'clock, outside (the rendezvous had seemed appropriate to Bond) the Reptile House at the Central Park Zoo.

Bond pressed the button that let down the glass partition and leaned forward. 'The Astor, please.'

'Yes, sir.' The big black car weaved through the curves and out of the airport enclave on to the Van Wyck Expressway, now being majestically torn to pieces and rebuilt for the 1964-1965 World's Fair.

James Bond sat back and lit one of his last Morland Specials. By lunchtime it would be king-size Chesterfields.

The Astor. It was as good as another and Bond liked the Times Square jungle—the hideous souvenir shops, the sharp clothiers, the giant feedomats, the hypnotic neon signs, one of which said BOND in letters a mile high. Here was the guts of New York, the living entrails. His other favourite quarters had gone—Washington Square, the Battery, Harlem, where you now needed a passport and two detectives. The Savoy Ballroom! What fun it had been in the old days! There was still Central Park, which would now be at its most beautiful—stark and bright. As for the hotels, they too had gone—the Ritz Carlton, the St Regis that had died with Michael Arlen. The Carlyle was perhaps the lone survivor. The rest were all the same those sighing lifts, the rooms full of last month's air and a vague memory of ancient cigars, the empty 'You're welcomes,' the thin coffee, the almost blue-white boiled eggs for breakfast (Bond had once had a small apartment in New York. He had tried everywhere to buy brown eggs until finally some grocery clerk had told him, 'We don't stock 'em, mister. People think they're dirty'), the dank toast (that shipment of toast racks to the Colonies must have foundered!). Ah me! Yes, the Astor would do as well as another.

Bond glanced at his watch. He would be there by eleven-thirty, then a brief shopping expedition, but a very brief one because nowadays there was little to buy in the shops that wasn't from Europe—except the best garden furniture in the world, and Bond hadn't got a garden. The drug-store first for half a dozen of Owens incomparable toothbrushes. Hoffritz on Madison Avenue for one of their heavy, toothed Gillette-type razors, so much better than Gillette's own product, Tripler's for some of those French golf socks made by Izod,

Scribner's because it was the last great bookshop in New York and because there was a salesman there with a good nose for thrillers, and then to Abercrombie's to look over the new gadgets and, incidentally, make a date with Solange (appropriately employed in their Indoor Games Department) for the evening.

The Cadillac was running the hideous gauntlet of the used car dumps, and chromium-plated swindles leered and winked. What happened to these re-sprayed crocks when the weather had finally rotted their guts? Where did they finally go to die? Mightn't they be useful if they were run into the sea to conquer coastal erosion? Take a letter to the *Herald Tribune*!

Then there was the question of lunch. Dinner with Solange would be easy—Lutèce in the sixties, one of the great restaurants of the world. But for lunch by himself? In the old days it would certainly have been the '21,' but the expense-account aristocracy had captured even that strong-hold, inflating the prices and, because they didn't know good from bad, deflating the food. But he would go there for old times' sake and have a couple of dry martinis—Beefeaters with a domestic vermouth, shaken with a twist of lemon peel—at the bar. And then what about the best meal in New York—oyster stew with cream, crackers, and Miller High Life at the Oyster Bar at Grand Central? No, he didn't want to sit up at a bar—somewhere spacious and comfortable where he could read a paper in peace. Yes. That was it! The Edwardian Room at the Plaza, a corner table. They didn't know him there, but he knew he could get what he wanted to eat—not like Chambord or Pavilion with their irritating Wine and

Foodmanship and, in the case of the latter, the miasma of a hundred different women's scents to confound your palate. He would have one more dry martini at the table, then smoked salmon and the particular scrambled eggs he had once (Felix Leiter knew the head-waiter) instructed them how to make.* Yes, that sounded all right. He would have to take a chance with the smoked salmon. It used to be Scotch in the Edwardian Room, not that thickly cut, dry and tasteless Canadian stuff. But one could never tell with American food. As long as they got their steaks and sea-food right, the rest could go to hell. And everything was so long frozen, in some vast communal food-morgue presumably, that flavour had gone from all American food except the Italian. Everything tasted the same—a sort of neutral food taste. When had a fresh chicken—not a broiler—a fresh farm egg, a fish caught that day, last been served in a New York restaurant? Was there a market in New York, like les Halles in Paris and Smithfields in London, where one could actually see fresh food and buy it? Bond had never heard of one. People would say that it was unhygienic. Were the Americans becoming too hygienic in general—too bug-conscious? Every time Bond had made love to Solange, at a time when they should be relaxing in each other's arms, she would retire to the bathroom for a long quarter of an hour and there was a lengthy period after that when he couldn't kiss her because she had gargled with TCP. And the pills she took if she had a cold! Enough to combat double pneumonia. But James Bond smiled at the thought of her and wondered what they would do together—apart from Lutèce and Love that evening. Again, New York had everything. He had heard, though he had never succeeded in tracing them, that one could see blue films with sound and colour and that one's

sex life was never the same thereafter. That would be an experience to share with Solange! And that bar, again still undiscovered, which Felix Leiter had told him was the rendezvous for sadists and masochists of both sexes. The uniform was black leather jackets and leather gloves. If you were a sadist, you wore the gloves under the left shoulder strap. For the masochists it was the right. As with the transvestite places in Paris and Berlin, it would be fun to go and have a look. In the end, of course, they would probably just go to The Embers or to hear Solange's favourite jazz and then home for more love and TCP.

James Bond smiled to himself. They were soaring over the Triborough, that supremely beautiful bridge into the serried battlements of Manhattan. He liked looking forward to his pleasures, to stolen exeat between the working hours. He enjoyed day-dreaming about them, down to the smallest detail. And now he had made his plans and every prospect pleased. Of course things could go wrong, he might have to make some changes. But that wouldn't matter. New York has everything.

New York has *not* got everything. The consequences of the absent amenity were most distressing for James Bond. After the scrambled eggs in the Edwardian Room, everything went hopelessly wrong and, instead of the dream programme, there had to be urgent and embarrassing telephone calls with London head-quarters and, and then only by the greatest of good luck, an untidy meeting at midnight beside the skating rink at Rockefeller Center with tears and threats of suicide from the English girl. And it was all New York's fault! One

can hardly credit the deficiency, but there is no Reptile House at the Central Park Zoo.

***SCRAMBLED EGGS 'JAMES BOND.'**

For four individualists:

12 fresh eggs

Salt and pepper

5-6 oz. of fresh butter

Break the eggs into a bowl. Beat thoroughly with a fork and season well. In a small copper (or heavy-bottomed saucepan) melt four oz. of the butter. When melted, pour in the eggs and cook over a very low heat, whisking continuously with a small egg whisk.

While the eggs are slightly more moist than you would wish for eating, remove pan from heat, add rest of butter and continue whisking for half a minute, adding the while finely chopped chives or fine herbs. Serve on hot buttered toast in individual copper dishes (for appearance only) with pink champagne (Taittinger) and low music.

[The end of *007 in New York* by Ian Fleming]