JAMES BOND'S CREATOR AND THE '56 ISTANBUL MASSACRES

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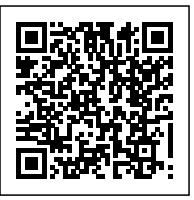

Staff, February 2016

In the '50s Ian Fleming, the creator of British secret agent James Bond, was the foreign manager of the *Sunday Times.* The job frequently took him to cities around the globe. In September 1955

Fleming was in Istanbul to report on the 24th General Assembly of Interpol. During his stay Turkish mobs, egged by government agents, launched the massacre of that city's Christian minorities. In *The Man With the Golden Typewriter* (Bloomsbury, 2015), Fleming's nephew Fergus Fleming described what his uncle had witnessed: a government-engineered ethnic cleansing which forced the majority of the city's Greek to permanently leave the city their ancestors had founded some 1,700 years earlier.

In the introduction of the book Fergus Fleming wrote: "On 6 September, during a single night of violence, Muslim citizens turned against their Greek Orthodox neighbours in a display of ethnic hatred not seen since the great population exchange of 1923 that saw 1.5 million Greeks expelled from Turkey. So widespread and violent was the insurrection that it took an entire army division complete with cavalry and Sherman tanks to restore order. Fleming was at hand to witness it."

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In his *Sunday Times* report, Ian Fleming wrote: "Several times during that night curiosity sucked me out of the safety of the Hilton Hotel and down into the city, where mobs went howling through the streets, each under its streaming red flag, with the white star and sickle moon. Occasional burst of

shouting rose out of the angry murmur of the crowds, then would come the crash of plate-glass and perhaps part of a scream.

"A car went out of control and charged the yelling crowd and the yells changed to screams and gesticulating hands showed briefly as the bodies went down before it. And over all there was the trill of the ambulances and the whistling howl of the new police cars imported from America."

During his stay Fleming also reported on the 30th annual summit of the Association of Former Eunuchs. The visit inspired Fleming to write arguably the best Bond novel... *From Russia With Love*. The book and the movie cited a Soviet Armenian spy who took part in a secret meeting at the Soviet Embassy.

Fleming traveled to Istanbul a second time when *From Russia With Love* was being shot, starring Sean Connery. In 1955 he had been an intrepid reporter roaming the darkened streets as all around him riots raged. Eight years later, suffering from heart ailment, he was a frail figure who struggled slowly over the cobbles, pausing every now and then to rest on a shooting stick, says Fergus Fleming. Ian Fleming died the following year.