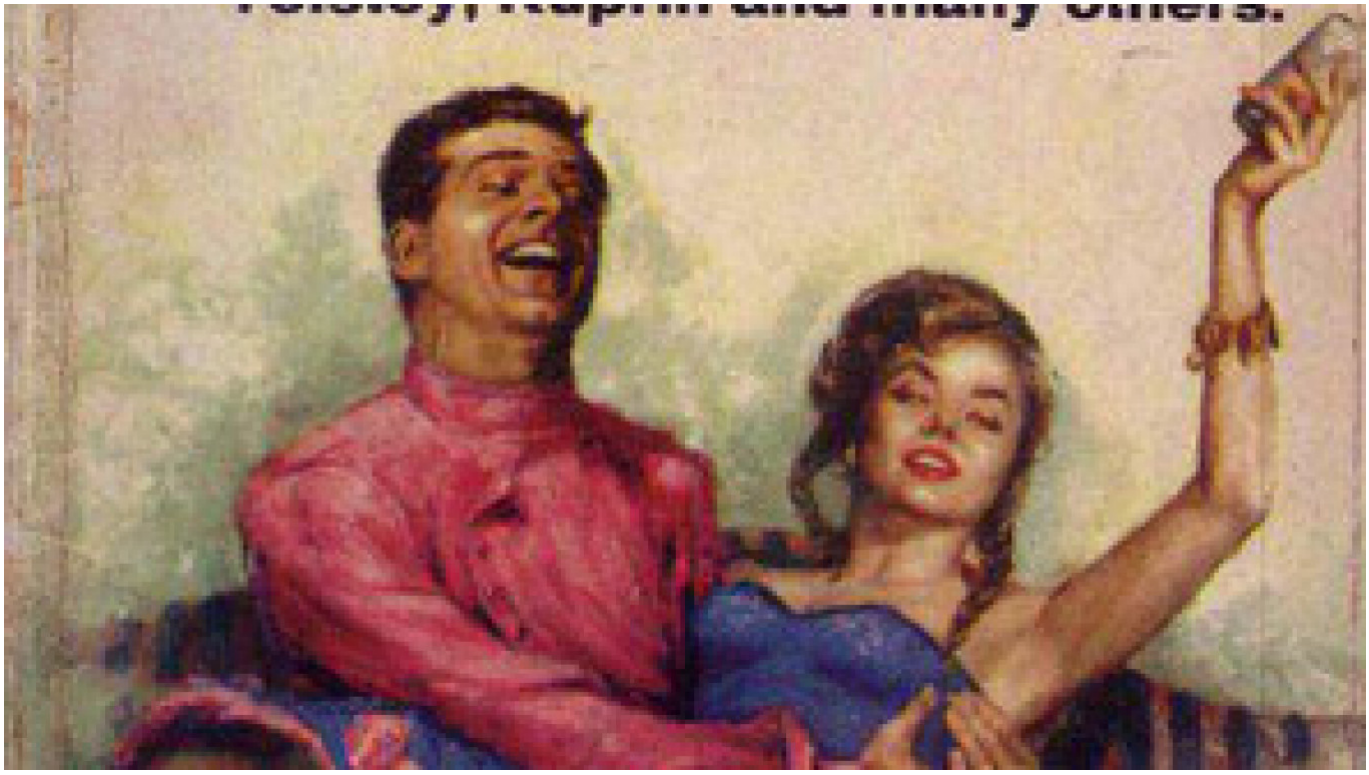
The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

The Top 10 Summer Books for Russia Watchers

By The Moscow Times

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How Russian literature was sold to readers.

Here at The Moscow Times culture desk, we like to think of ourselves as highbrows. We like opera. We spend our evenings reading the "Great Authors." We think we understand the "Black Square."

But even we like to kick back on a hot summer weekend with a can of beer and a good trashy novel.

For us, a good trashy novel is a thriller or murder mystery that takes place in Russia or with Russian characters — who are usually the bad guys, although we sometimes root for them. In a pinch, we'll read nonfiction about Russia, but only if it's scandalous and has a two-line title that reveals everything about the book before you even open it.

'Trident Code' by Thomas Waite

When a U.S. nuclear submarine is held hostage by a lunatic cyber criminal and the world as we know it is about to end, NSA operative Lana Elkins joins forces with a mysterious computer genius and the world's intelligence agencies to save the day.

'Skandal' by Lindsay Smith

In this follow up to Smith's first book, "Sekret," the year is 1964 and the main character — the clairvoyant Yulia — has escaped the Soviet Union with her father and boyfriend. Her mother remains behind, forced by a nefarious KGB agent to develop a drug to induce telepathic abilities to use against the Soviets' ideological enemies. The Cold War rages.

'The Latchkey Murders' by Alexei Bayer

When economist and erstwhile Moscow Times columnist Alexei Bayer isn't thinking about macro-economic trends, he's writing about murder and mayhem in Soviet Russia. His first novel, "Murder at the Dacha," introduced Senior Lieutenant Pavel Matyushkin, who returns in a prequel about a serial killer in 1960s Moscow.

'Cold Blood' by Alex Shaw

For a change of pace, this thriller takes place in Kiev, Ukraine with a former British Special Air Service agent who comes to teach after being hurt in a terrorist attack. But chalkboards quickly give way to attempted murder, cross-border arms shipments, an assassin with the wrong address and general mayhem.

'Palace of Treason' by Jason Matthews

Star-crossed Russian foreign intelligence agent Dominika Egorova and CIA agent Nate Nash, who wanted but couldn't get together in "Red Sparrow," continue their fraught relationship. Only now Dominika is a CIA mole working in Moscow, trying to evade her psychotic boss, keep from being killed by Iranians, and avoid detection by her own agency.

'Last Kiss' by Jessica Clare

In the latest installment in the Hitman series, Naomi, an American computer hacking genius with Asperger's syndrome, continues her tortured relationship with her sociopathic Russian mafia captor. There are near-escapes and escapes, and lots of erotic tension.

The 'Child 44' Series by Tom Rob Smith

The three books in the series — "Child 44," "The Secret Speech," and "Agent 6" — take you to Stalinist and then post-Stalinist Russia, where almost everyone is so despicable and everything is so relentlessly grim and dreary that today's Russia seems like a picnic on a sunny day.

'The Spy's Son: The True Story of the Highest-Ranking CIA Officer Ever Convicted of Espionage and the Son He Trained to Spy for Russia' by Bryan Denson

The true story of Jim Nicholson, the highest-placed CIA operative ever be convicted of espionage, and how he turned spying into the family business. Even after being arrested, convicted and put in prison, he trained his son to follow in his footsteps and continue to sell secrets to the Russians.

'A Very Dangerous Woman: The Lives, Loves and Lies of Russia's Most Seductive Spy' by Deborah McDonald

A biography of Russia's most seductive spy, Moura Budberg. Born a baroness in 1892, Budberg kept up a life of spying, counter-spying and counter-counter-spying for decades, bouncing between England and the Soviet Union and the beds of diplomats, government figures and two writers — Maxim Gorky and H. G. Wells.

'Once Upon a Time in Russia: The Rise of the Oligarchs — A True Story of Ambition, Wealth, Betrayal, and Murder' by Ben Mezrich

This is history written as if it were a thriller. It's the story of the rise and fall of Boris Berezovsky and his once-protege Roman Abramovich, telling the tale of corruption, conspicuous consumption on an epic scale, friendship, betrayal, industry, politics — you know, the story you read in the paper every day, only juicier.

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