Where is the super-villain, bent on world domination? What happened to the beautiful Blessing? And how on earth did Bond flag down a taxi on page 163? Clearly, I am not going to answer these questions, but I’m able to give you one or two facts which should not diminish your pleasure in reading this well-written and enjoyable story, in which Bond comes across as more literary and reflective than we might have expected.

Like the BJD, the Bond novels are 60 this year. Ian Fleming published Casino Royale in 1953. He wrote another thirteen Bond books, and twice as many more have been produced by other authors, including Kingsley Amis and Sebastian Faulks. William Boyd has been described as an Ian Fleming geek, and included him in his novel Any Human Heart. He counts among his friends three actors who have played Bond and have also acted in films that he has written — Sean Connery, Pierce Brosnan, and Daniel Craig.

Solo is no Fleming pastiche — it is all Boyd, cleverly plotted and elegantly written, at ease with Bond and comfortable in Africa, where he spent some of his childhood. His idiosyncratic choice of the Jensen Interceptor for Bond’s wheels may raise eyebrows — the Bentley was being mended. Bond, of course, gets the girl, two of them in fact, knocks back heroic quantities of alcohol and smokes like a chimney. Boyd introduces us to two appealing formulae for Martinis, and to Bond’s very own salad dressing.

In the first half of the story Bond is sent by M, and minimally equipped by Q, to Zanzarim, a small and potentially extremely oil-rich West African state in the grip of civil war, and where things do not go entirely smoothly. In the second half the action moves to Washington DC, where a more complex web of domestic and geopolitical intrigue begins to emerge, and where Felix Leiter makes a welcome appearance. The hokum is never on the scale at which Fleming’s more deranged villains have operated, so come on Mr. Boyd! We medics have coped with Andrew Lansley and Jeremy Hunt; let’s have another one when you write your next Bond book.

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