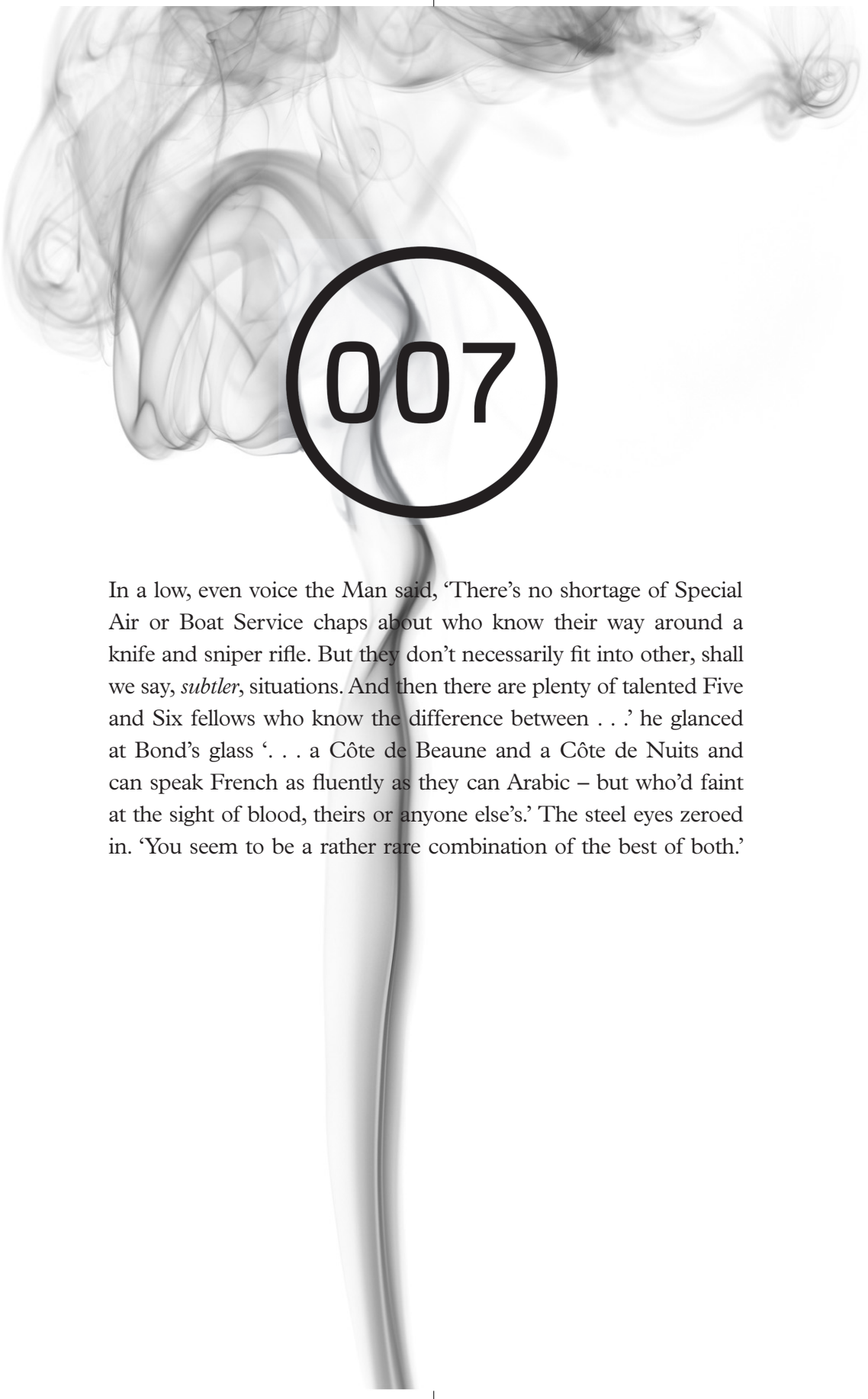

In a low, even voice the Man said, 'There's no shortage of Special Air or Boat Service chaps about who know their way around a knife and sniper rifle. But they don't necessarily fit into other, shall we say, *subtler*, situations. And then there are plenty of talented Five and Six fellows who know the difference between . . .' he glanced at Bond's glass '. . . a Côte de Beaune and a Côte de Nuits and can speak French as fluently as they can Arabic – but who'd faint at the sight of blood, theirs or anyone else's.' The steel eyes zeroed in. 'You seem to be a rather rare combination of the best of both.'

Also by Ian Fleming

Casino Royale
Live and Let Die
Moonraker
Diamonds are Forever
From Russia with Love
Dr. No
Goldfinger
For Your Eyes Only
Thunderball
The Spy Who Loved Me
On Her Majesty's Secret Service
You Only Live Twice
The Man with the Golden Gun
Octopussy and The Living Daylights

Non-fiction
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For children
Chitty Chitty Bang Bang: The Magical Car

CARTE BLANCHE

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A Maiden's Grave
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The Blue Nowhere
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The Bodies Left Behind
Edge

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THE LINCOLN RHYME THRILLERS
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The Empty Chair
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The Vanished Man
The Twelfth Card
The Cold Moon
The Broken Window
The Burning Wire

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CARTE BLANCHE

A JAMES BOND NOVEL

HODDER &
STOUGHTON

First published in Great Britain in 2011 by Hodder & Stoughton
An Hachette UK company

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A CIP catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library

Hardback ISBN 978 1 444 71647 4
Trade paperback ISBN 978 1 444 71648 1
Ebook ISBN 978 1 444 71644 3

Typeset in Plantin by Palimpsest Book Production Limited,
Falkirk, Stirlingshire

Printed and bound by
Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

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To the man who taught us
we could still believe in heroes,
Ian Fleming

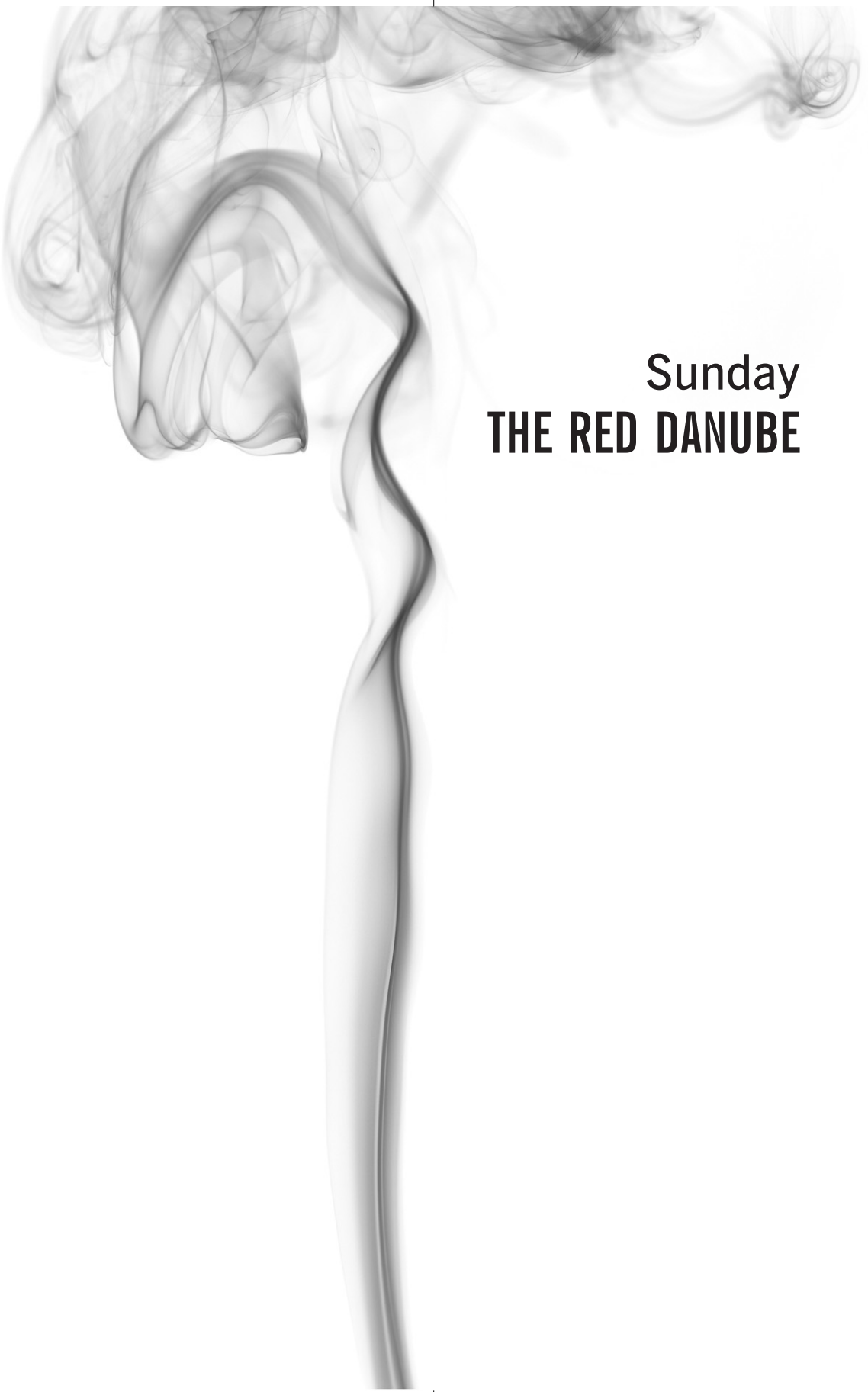
AUTHOR'S NOTE

This is a work of fiction. However, with a few exceptions, the organisations referred to are real. The world of intelligence, counter-intelligence and espionage is one of acronyms and shorthand. Since the alphabet soup of security agencies can be a bit daunting, I thought a glossary might prove helpful. It appears at the end of the book.

J.D.

'What is needed is a new organisation to co-ordinate, inspire, control, and assist the nationals of the oppressed countries . . . We need absolute secrecy, a certain fanatical enthusiasm, willingness to work with people of different nationalities and complete political reliability. The organisation should, in my view, be entirely independent of the War Office machinery.'

– Hugh Dalton, Minister of Economic Warfare, describing the formation of Britain's Special Operations Executive espionage and sabotage group at the outbreak of the Second World War.



Sunday
THE RED DANUBE

1

His hand on the dead-man throttle, the driver of the Serbian Rail diesel felt the thrill he always did on this particular stretch of railway, heading north from Belgrade and approaching Novi Sad.

This was the route of the famed Arlberg Orient Express, which ran from Greece through Belgrade and points north from the 1930s until the 1960s. Of course, he was not piloting a glistening Pacific 231 steam locomotive towing elegant mahogany-and-brass dining cars, suites and sleepers, where passengers floated upon vapours of luxury and anticipation. He commanded a battered old thing from America that tugged behind it a string of more or less dependable rolling stock packed snugly with mundane cargo.

But still he felt the thrill of history in every vista that the journey offered, especially as they approached the river, *his* river.

And yet he was ill at ease.

Among the wagons bound for Budapest, containing coal, scrap metal, consumer products and timber, there was one that worried him greatly. It was loaded with drums of MIC – methyl isocyanate – to be used in Hungary in the manufacture of rubber.

The driver – a round, balding man in a well-worn cap and stained overalls – had been briefed at length about this deadly chemical by his supervisor and some idiot from the Serbian Safety and Well-being Transportation Oversight Ministry. Some years ago this substance had killed eight thousand people in Bhopal, India, within a few days of a leak from a manufacturing plant there.

He'd acknowledged the danger his cargo presented but, a

veteran railwayman and union member, he'd asked, 'What does that mean for the journey to Budapest . . . specifically?'

The boss and the bureaucrat had regarded each other with the eyes of officialdom and, after a pause, settled for 'Just be very careful.'

The lights of Novi Sad, Serbia's second-largest city, began to coalesce in the distance, and ahead in the encroaching evening the Danube appeared as a pale stripe. In history and in music the river was celebrated. In reality it was brown, undramatic and home to barges and tankers, not candle-lit vessels filled with lovers and Viennese orchestras – or not here, at least. Still, it *was* the Danube, an icon of Balkan pride, and the railwayman's chest always swelled as he took his train over the bridge.

His river . . .

He peered through the speckled windscreen and inspected the track before him in the headlight of the General Electric diesel. Nothing to be concerned about.

There were eight notch positions on the throttle, number one being the lowest. He was presently at five and he eased back to three to slow the train as it entered a series of turns. The 4,000-horsepower engine grew softer as it cut back the voltage to the traction motors.

As the cars entered the straight section to the bridge the driver shifted up to notch five again and then six. The engine pulsed louder and faster and there came a series of sharp clangs from behind. The sound was, the driver knew, simply the couplings between wagons protesting at the change in speed, a minor cacophony he'd heard a thousand times in his job. But his imagination told him the noise was the metal containers of the deadly chemical in car number three, jostling against each other, at risk of spewing forth their poison.

Nonsense, he told himself and concentrated on keeping the speed steady. Then, for no reason at all, except that it made him feel better, he tugged at the air horn.