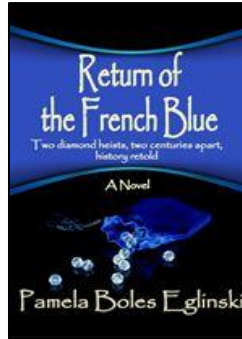


On Writing
Return of the French Blue
History Retold
by
Pamela Boles Eglinski



When I sat down to write my first novel, in August 2001, I knew four things: the book would include spies, diamonds, lovers, and the French Riviera. Simple, you say? No. I wrote four pages, and stopped.

One month after beginning my novel, the world changed forever. 9/11. The World Trade Center. America attacked. Three thousand lives lost. My generation's Pearl Harbor. A nation in shock. The U.S. at war.

At that moment, I decided the novel should mirror life. The antagonist: A would be a rogue al Qaeda. The mission: lure the terrorist into the open. Required: a sting operation. The bait: diamonds. Location: Nice, France. Spies and lovers would come from the CIA and French Directorate.

The story demanded research—lots of it. I'd keep my four elements, but shape them to fit current issues. History and the evening news became my guide. I had to create believable characters, clarify the setting, and weave diamonds into the story. But how? As I researched, everything fell into place.

The days following 9/11 were filled with stories of our new enemy, al Qaeda and the Taliban. I read every newspaper and magazine article that focused on them. Each told me something new about the terrorists and their attack on America. Books on the subject surfaced rapidly, each author trying to get ahead of the other while the story was “hot.” Little did we know how long the topic would remain current.

I downloaded stories and photos from The New York Times, The Guardian, The Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post, expat newspapers, even the Sacramento Bee and Al Jazeera. I reviewed court testimony from past and present terrorist trials. I discovered that al Qaeda was known to trade diamonds for weapons, rarely using cash.

Homeland Security was enacted and “terrorist” was on everyone’s lips. The world around us was in turmoil, and I wanted to know who our enemies were and how to recognize them. Was I tempting fate with my research? It was so focused I began to worry that the CIA might come knocking on *my* door—enforcing Homeland Security. Would they believe me when I told them, “I’m just researching a novel?”

As I continued to read about al Qaeda, I also researched diamonds. The historic French Blue came to light. It was an intense blue diamond first owned by Louis XIV. Not only was it huge [originally 167 carats], it fluoresced bright orange under ultraviolet rays. When I learned that it was stolen during the French Revolution on September 11, 1792, I knew I’d “hit pay dirt.” The perfect backstory for my novel. The expression “I can’t make stuff this stuff up” came to mind.



My research on diamonds didn’t stop there. Tanzanite—one of the most renowned “blood diamonds” in the world—was suddenly very popular. Like the French Blue, it radiated an intense azure and was extremely popular in the early 2000s. I researched de Beers, the largest diamond producer/dealer in the world, and discovered how often they compromised moral values in the process of mining and transactions. I inched closer to the shadowy world of diamond dealing.

Next came research into the diamond cutters in Antwerp, New York City, and villages near Mumbai. It was important to know how the diamonds were cut, traded, smuggled, priced, and sold. I quickly realized how this would apply to al Qaeda.

Adding to my research, I traveled to a famous jewelry store within a few hours’ drive from my home and quizzed the manager on his purchases, listening for any hint of transactions in West African diamonds. He assured me his company was very careful and quite sensitive to the history

behind buying and selling blood diamonds. “The provenance is critical,” he said. I knew that to be true, and quickly learned a system of international standards was in progress.

My research also took me to New York City. I strolled among the diamond exchange shops on West 47th Street—listening and watching with a critical eye. Dark and simple shops held stories I could never conjure.

Gazing at the diamond jewelry on display I noticed, in the reflection of the storefront glass, small groups of men gathering behind me on the sidewalk. They negotiated over packets of diamonds wrapped in tightly folded white paper. This was a system rife with possibility, danger, and fraud. Diamonds held a whole new meaning for me—one that I would most certainly integrate into my novel.

Next, my protagonists—a man and a woman, one American the other French—both spies. She would come from the ranks of the CIA, and he would work for the French Directorate. The female character, Catalina Syrah, incorporated my California upbringing and academic studies. But a much larger aspect of the character came from her role in the CIA and her “special ops” training.

I wanted the male protagonist, Nicholas Bonhomme, to be both sexy, French, *and* immersed in a career with the “French CIA”—the Directorate. These two primary characters would become more than partners as they created a sting operation—a diamond sale to lure the rogue terrorist, Gul Mazeer.

At this point only one more piece of the story needed answering—the setting. Having visited the French Riviera several times, I chose this beautiful part of France as the stage for the sting operation. The Rothschild Mansion on Cap Ferrat was the perfect location—a fabricated diamond auction—the lure. What diamond-loving terrorist could resist? Not Gul Mazeer. He would come.

As the story took shape, I decided to move events to a variety of locations on the Riviera—both before the sting and afterwards. I needed to do more research—again on location. I drew from my knowledge of the Côte d’Azur to focus on specific sites. They included Old Nice, Cap Ferrat, the Rothschild Mansion, Cimez, St. Tropez, St. Paul de Vence, Monte Carlo, and Eze. Each one chosen for its unique setting. They would each play into the plot and suspense packed scenes.



Armed with my camera I traveled to southern France, scouting specific sites and recording them from a variety of angles. Photos taken on this trip would ultimately feed not one, but two novels.

My research took far longer than anticipated, and I enjoyed every moment. But there was something I hadn't anticipated—over the past ten years that I'd been writing, the enemy changed. “Al Qaeda” and “Taliban” began dropping from our daily lexicon. In their place came a single word: terrorist. For my novel to remain current, this required a change in the antagonist's affiliation. He became a “rogue terrorist”—no longer affiliated directly with al Qaeda.

Once the outline of *Return of the French Blue* was written, years of writing, editing and rewriting followed. I worked a full time day job in the non-profit sector, so writing was limited to evenings and weekends.

The final publication date was auspiciously near September 11, 2012. But wait a minute! My first novel is not alone. Over the past three years, two more novels have joined it—both including my favorite protagonists—Catalina and Bonhomme.

I hope you enjoyed the peek into the planning and writing of *Return of the French Blue*. If you read my book, please review it on Amazon when finished. Thoughtful reviews are an author's reward for hard work. Thank you, and keep on reading.

Information on the author and accessing *Return of the French Blue*

1. If you'd like to "look inside," or purchase *Return of the French Blue*, please click: [here](#)
2. If interested in my other novels, please click here: [here](#)
3. If curious about the inner-workings of an author's mind go to:
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