



The Eiger Sanction

Trevanian

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Jonathan Hemlock lives in a renovated Gothic church on Long Island. He is an art professor, a mountain climber, and a mercenary, performing assassinations (i.e., sanctions) for money to augment his black-market art collection. Now Hemlock is being tricked into a hazardous assignment that involves an attempt to scale one of the most treacherous mountain peaks in the Swiss Alps, the Eiger.

In a breathtakingly suspenseful story that is part thriller and part satire, the author traces Hemlock's spine-tingling adventures, introducing a cast of intriguing characters—villains, traitors, beautiful women—into the highly charged atmosphere of danger. The accumulating threads of suspicion, accusation, and evidence gradually knit themselves into a bizarre and death-defying climax in this exciting, entertaining novel that will keep readers on the edge of their seats until the last absorbing page.

From the Trade Paperback edition.

The Eiger Sanction Details

Date : Published (first published 1972)

ISBN :

Author : Trevanian

Format : Kindle Edition 336 pages

Genre : Fiction, Thriller, Mystery, Spy Thriller, Espionage, Adventure, Mystery Thriller

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From Reader Review The Eiger Sanction for online ebook

Jim says

I first read this sometime in the late 70s or early 80s after seeing the movie (1975) starring Clint Eastwood & George Kennedy. Both were perfectly cast & the movie followed the book very well. There's a little difference in the ending, but the same revelation was done well in both. It was more a matter of time & media. No complaints.

As an audio book, this rocked. Joe Barrett perfectly captured the rhythm & style of the book. It's a little bit 70s & Trevanian loves to sneer at everything, but he does so in a way that's usually amusing. For instance, he constantly pokes fun at the CII (a thinly disguised CIA)

...but there was no unraveling the serpentine patterns of check and double check, of distrust and redundancy that substituted for security in CII...

He doesn't stop there, but peoples those watching the climb with well known figures who are never named but described well enough that they're obvious & never seen as anything but objects of derision. I suppose some will have an issue with some things which are now in the realm of political correctness. For instance, there is a gay guy who has a dog named Faggot, possibly because he likes to hump people's feet & legs.

The motivations were all very well done & the characters well drawn. He paid loving attention to all the details of mountain climbing & most other things, although he did have Hemlock click the safety off a revolver with a silencer. Sigh. Ignore the guns.

The mystery was a good one, too. Even knowing what was going to happen did nothing to dim my enjoyment of the story. Highly recommended both as a book & a movie.

Chris says

Many readers and reviewers swallow this book whole without realizing it is a satirical spoof on spy novels and movies of the 1960s, James Bond and the like. Should there be any doubt, examine the silly character names: Randy Nickers and Cherry Pitt, for example. He attacks the CIA by naming the book's bloated intelligence service as CII. There's the over-the-top macho sexuality, most of the characters (gay and straight) have daily one night stands. The leader of the assassin organization is an eerie, physically infirm albino, who in reality would be unable to lead anything of the sort. The hero/assassin, Jonathan Hemlock, is a college professor, historian, world-class mountaineer, and self-aggrandizing art collector who lives in a Gothic church. How does one make a ruthless assassin out of a character type that would or could never exist in reality? You can't, except through exaggeration and satire. The book is very funny when read correctly.

The humor is enhanced by the shocking pink dust jacket of the 1972 first edition of the book (see it here: [The Eiger Sanction](#).) It's too bad that cover was never used on later editions and printings because it visually nails the spoof up high. No sane author or profit-minded publisher would advertise a serious spy novel with "effeminate" pink, not even in the disco-steeped year of 1972. It screams "joke" to the interested buyer.

Add to this the high literary tone throughout, almost elitist, not targeted to the average airport thriller reader, and you can appreciate Trevanian's playfulness. Ironically, most American professional reviewers of the time

read it literally. It seems only those in Europe realized what it actually was. No further comment from me on that.

Given the satirical purpose of the book, what was surprising to me were the realistic technical climbing scenes, using accurate (for the 1960s) techniques, such as where and how pitons should be placed, and correct rope management and belaying. Trevanian knows the minds of climbers, their psychology, the various moods they have the night before a big climb, and then on the dark rock and ice beginning well before dawn the next morning. His accurate descriptions of the extreme mixed Alpine climbing found on the Eigerwand are only excelled by the published reports from real expeditions—Heinrich Harrer's classic *The White Spider*, and Jon Krakauer's *Eiger Dreams: Ventures Among Men and Mountains* come to mind.

There is also a preparatory multi-pitch first-ascent climb of a sandstone tower in the American Desert Southwest. Just like Trevanian's climber, I've left plenty of skin and blood tracks behind, jamming my hands in cracks, and frictioning up over ledges, knees and hands scraped bare by the "sandpaper" rock found there. Readers who aren't climbers can be assured of getting a substantial taste of what climbing is all about. Witness this sentence, where the psychology of the rope that only a real climber would likely know, is precisely expressed in Trevanian's language: "The rope connecting two men on a mountain is more than nylon protection; it is an organic thing that transmits subtle messages of intent and disposition from man to man; it is an extension of the tactile senses, a psychological bond, a wire along which currents of communication flow."

I saw the movie years ago, but I don't remember enough to compare it to the book. Who cares, reading is better anyway.

Cathy (cathepsut) says

One of the treasures on my parents' bookshelf, when YA got boring. Loved it and read it several times as a teenager. I loved the Clint Eastwood movie as well. I'm actually not sure what came first for me, book or movie...

Very likeable main character, although he's an assassin. Well done and suspenseful climbing scenes and climax. Maybe it's time for a re-read...

Mark says

To be honest I have seen the movie three or four times and mostly because of Clint Eastwood.

I did expect the movie to be different from the book as most movies tend to be, so I was kind of surprised that this was not the case. The Eastwood movie is rather faithful to the novel.

That is perhaps the reason I kept seeing Eastwood's face when I read the novel. The book like the movie is not one in the vein of the 007 movie series albeit that some aspects like the "M" in this book were quite Flemingesque in his appearance.

That said it is a straight spy/assassin book from the '70's which can be by some readers argued as not up to the standards of the modern spy novel with all the technology that is around. Well this is a book that has a main character that is not so dependent on Gadgets hence his assignment to kill a possible foreign agent during a climb on the Eiger mountain in the Alps.

I do prefer the characters as they are written to the modern spy novels which are more scary as they seem to be able to spit on your freedoms with all the stuff they know and can find out about you.
This book is more about those skilled men/women who operated in the shadows to make the world a "safer" place.

A real male thriller.

I do now want to read the Loo-sanction as the title amuses me and I would not mind to read one more Hemlock story.

Arun Divakar says

It is rather unremarkable a fact now that James Bond has nudged along people's thoughts as to what would make an intelligence operative. Flashy cars, globe-trotting, bedding women all seemed to me to be the epitome of being a secret agent. But two things happened eventually : one was the realization that I am not Brosnan (not even in the wildest imagination was this an even a remote approximation !) and two were the other books and movies. I will forego my (ahem !) comparison with Bond and look at the counter-Bond events that I encountered. Authors like Len Deighton and John Le Carre, movies like Johnny English and TV series like Archer are all so much more exciting than 007 ever will be and then along came Jonathan Hemlock and CII. Trevanian creates a hilarious espionage thriller which blends multiple genres in a brilliant fashion.

The genius of this book lies in its tongue-in-cheek humor and the jokes it pulls at the expense of the CIA. The CII as an espionage agency is a very lightly veiled version of the CIA which Trevanian says was built to house the multitude of governmental agencies which were lying unused post the great war. The agency is an apotheosis of bureaucratic inefficiency and hidden in its labyrinthine maze is a covert group of assassins who get paid (albeit grudgingly) for services rendered. Jonathan Hemlock is a covert assassin whose alter ego is that of an art professor. Hemlock is a remorseless assassin, a serial womanizer, a dare devil and...and...well you know which character it reminds you of doesn't it ? The names of his women consorts are a riot. Can you imagine going to bed with a woman named Felicity Arse ? Or Anna Bidet ? Or Randie Nickers ? Well, so much for Pussy Galore ! Trevanian however does not treat Hemlock seriously, he lets the reader know time and again that the whole thing is a farce and that spies and assassins in fiction have too much of an opinion about themselves. They are also highly prejudiced when it comes to people, places, nationalities and almost everything under the sun. In short most of the characters have their heads stuck up their unmentionables and they are unbearably full of themselves but the author seems to be at our side laughing at the follies of them all. 75% of the book is verbal acrobatics and hilarious ripostes from one character to the next and all of which is highly enjoyable. The other 25% is the actual Eiger sanction where four men pit themselves against a merciless mountain and the elements. When it comes to man against nature, Trevanian really excels himself as has been the case with *Shibumi*. This final few chapters are a real cliffhanger and all levity of the earlier part disappears to be replaced by nerve-wracking suspense.

Enjoyable and totally hilarious but don't make the mistake of taking the story seriously !

Lyn says

Devilishly hilarious. Imagine a Bond film narrated by Bill Maher.

Some reviewers have described Trevanian's 1972 novel as blending elements of adventure and satire, others have stated that this is an action adventure with some humor. I am going to the other end of the spectrum and say that this is delicious satire that also includes some good adventure writing. This is not the absurd spoof a fan of Austin Powers or Inspector Clouseau would be looking for – but not far off either.

Truth be known, the humor is for the most part in the writing – Trevanian's wit is unmistakable, although perhaps somehow this has been lost on some readers. His clever talent for names is Dickensian. We meet Jonathan Hemlock, Yurasis Dragon, Jemima Brown, Clement Pope and the cream of the crop – no doubt inspired by Bond girl Pussy Galore - Felicity Arce (pronounced Arse).

Further, Trevanian possesses a sharp, observant intelligence and his wry comments, dry humor, and laugh out loud sense of understated irony is extraordinary. His relentless and erudite monster truck verbal assault on government ineptitude, especially the CIA, was funny as hell.

I have not seen the 1975 Clint Eastwood film, but if the production leaves out the satire – then the audience has lost the better half of Trevanian's work.

Dr. Jonathan Hemlock, the protagonist, is an art professor and mountaineer; who has a side job as an assassin. He needs money for a rare painting and so takes a job as a counter – assassin and agrees to carry out "sanctions" (contract assassinations targeted specifically against killers of American agents). The task leads him to the Alps where Trevanian leads us on some unexpected twists and turns that are also quietly uproarious.

All joking aside, and there are many laugh out loud scenes; Trevanian's action writing is top shelf, especially the inspired mountain climbing sections that briefly made me forget the droll satire.

Fans of his 1979 novel Shibumi will also enjoy this earlier work.

Lobstergirl says

Two things work well in this novel: the opening chapter, featuring a haplessly mediocre spy being eliminated, is very funny and delightfully written, and the penultimate sequence in which three men climb the Eigerwand is harrowing and suspenseful. Everything else is terrible.

The main flaw is the horrendous misogyny. You could argue this is part of the satire, or parody; clearly Trevanian is mocking the James Bond-style romp in which nearly every woman's name is a homonym for something sexual (or just dirty) and the suave spy can get anyone into bed. So we have the characters Randy Nickers, the virginal Cherry Pitt, and Anna Bidet (pronounced on-a). The spymaster is named Yurasis Dragon (your ass is draggin'?). His ugly receptionist is Mrs. Cerberus. The black stewardess the protagonist falls in love with is Jemima Brown (she and the protagonist have a meta discussion of how idiotic her name is). There's also a little dog named Faggot, owned by a gay man. But the parodic tone is dropped completely when the mountain-climbing scene happens; it feels like a complete switch of gears (and a much better

book).

Ten-dollar words are awkwardly sprinkled throughout: abacination, lepidote, ambushcade, ranine.

The plot entails Dr. Jonathan Hemlock, an art professor who lives in a converted gothic church on Long Island and keeps a basement full of stolen Impressionist masterpieces, who has a side job as spy to earn the money to buy more art and pay the mortgage on his house. His current task is to assassinate (sanction) the killers of an agent who was murdered in the book's opening scene. He dispatches the first one quickly, but the second assassin remains anonymous. He is told only that the man has a limp and he will be climbing the Eiger. Jonathan happens to be an ace mountaineer so he brushes up on his skills and joins the climbing team. He expects to be given the identity of the assassin before the climb starts, but he murders the only man who knows (the owner of Faggot). So he climbs not knowing whom to trust.

"Wormwood's step was crisp along the emptying street. He felt uplifted by a sense – not of greatness, to be sure – but of adequacy." (The promise of this writing, which makes you think of Waugh or le Carré, dissipates once the first chapter ends.) Wormwood's sense of adequacy is misplaced, because "the men at home base were already referring to him as the "one-man Bay of Pigs.""

There was such an avalanche of crudeness that I didn't even bother to document half of it.

Jonathan was raised by a foster parent, a spinster with a "sandpaper crotch." He knows this because she begins to sexually abuse him.

"...there were only two kinds of women with whom he had never had experience: Australian Abos and Eskimos. And neither of these ethnic gaps was he eager to fill, for reasons of olfactory sensitivity."

"Am I your first black?" asks Jemima Brown after they have sex.

"He had begun to enjoy the game of estimating the ballistic competence of the various young ladies around the pool..."

"...her wide-cheekboned, oriental face." "Her eyes too had a Mongol cast..." "...[her] eyes locked on his, expressionless in their Oriental mold..."

"As he showered, he promised himself to use the girl sparingly."

"In the back of my mind I may be carrying the image of impaling her – stabbing her to death, or something."

"He was eager to use her as sexual aspirin..."

"She's on my payroll, and she's got to do more to earn her keep than just be a spittoon for your sperm." (At the end of the novel we find out that the girl under discussion is the daughter of the man whose payroll she's on.)

"It used to be said that British women's shoes were made by excellent craftsmen who had had shoes carefully described to them, but who had never actually seen a pair firsthand. They were, however, comfortable, and they wore well. And those were also the principal virtues of the women who wore them."

"But the mountain retained its hymen."

“I’m yours to do with, man. You could kiss me, or press my hand, or make love to me, or marry me, or talk to me, or hit me,” says Jemima Brown to Jonathan.

Zeynep Nur says

Neresinden ba?lasam bilemiyorum... Gerilimi iliklerinize kadar hissetti?iniz, heyecan dozu yüksek harika bir da?c?l?k kitab? diye toparlanabilir asl?nda.

Olay, bir üniversite profesörü, koleksiyoncu ve mükemmel bir da?c? olman?n yan? s?ra profesyonel suikastç? olan Jonathan Hemlock'un çok istedi?i bir tablo için bir 'onaylama' görevi almas?yla ba?l?yor. İlk ba?ta klasik bir aksiyon gibi görünse de olaylar beklenildi?i gibi gitmiyor. Geçmi?ten gelen ve kapanmayan davalardan, birbirini tan?mayan 4 adam?n ve insan?n do?an?n gücü alt?nda ne kadar ezilebilece?ini anlatan bir t?rman??a dönü?üyor atmosfer.

Belirtmeden geçemeyece?im Jonathan Hemlock, ?ubimi'nin ana karakteri Nikolai Hel'in bir tasla??.

Vee kitaptaki bütün 'her ?ey'lerin 'her?ey' olarak yaz?lmas?, ?ngilizce'de s?kça kullan?lan 'oh' ünleminin Türkçe bask?s?nda bulunmas? okurken sinirimi bozan detaylar oldu.

Jc says

Trevanian's stories of suspense fell somewhere between the adventurous romantic thrillers of Fleming and the dark, grimy reality of le Carre. While Trev. has his own following, I find Fleming to be more engrossingly entertaining and le Carre to be more disturbingly down-to-earth. Eiger Sanction I also don't think aged as well much of the works of the other two authors. While the basic plot is good, and well written, the sexuality of the book seems very forced and artificial, even a bit backwards for the time it was written. It is as if the author had a good idea but was compelled by his editors to add more sex to up the sales numbers. Also, the characters seem very unnatural and 2-dimensional, if that. However, there are a lot of exciting, tense scenes that more than make up for the goofy parts leaving me with still recommending the book if you are in search of a 60's-70's style espionage book and have read all the Smiley and Bond you can find. Certainly he did his research when it came to how to scale a mountain.

Deven says

I read this book ages ago with other Trevanian books. They were great reads. My favorite was "Shibumi". Eiger Sanction's side plot is about climbing mountains, Shibumi's is about defending into caves.

Zade says

Fun! Trevanian manages to be both vulgar and erudite. His story drips with satire of the spy genre, but also delivers a great spy/assassination tale. It's a delightful paradox. I think the best thing is that Trevanian has a huge store of knowledge about really diverse subjects (mountain climbing, literature, art, wine, etc.), but is also able to enjoy the more trite bits of the genre. Jemima Brown? Really. Randie Nickers? Yes, really. Yurasis Dragon. Of course. Trevanian's double-visioned ability to laugh at and still enjoy the inanities of

1960s and 70s culture and the James Bond films in particular is unparalleled. And, oh, is he rough on the Swiss—who knew they could be such delightful targets for abuse? I don't know how this will read for the next generation who won't have first-hand memories of how the 70s were for women and minorities. I suppose, if they watch a lot of James Bond and blaxploitation films, they'll get it. I really hope they don't write him off as a dinosaur simply because they lack the context in which to appreciate Trevanian's wit.

Sabrina says

I saw the movie long before I knew it was a book and seeing it on the shelf I decided to read it, and a few chapters in I wish I had left it to collect dust on the shelf. This was written around the time James Bond was at the height of popularity and I'm guessing this was supposed to ride its coat tails. However the author is misogynistic, extremely sexist when he has anything decent (not being used as a sex toy at the moment) to say about women, racist to the point I want to skip any part where the main character has any interaction with non-whites or non-Americans so I can avoid cringing. The main guy has every woman on the planet throwing themselves at him, in the case of his virginal neighbor Cherry Pitt literally...give me a break!

The satire/parody or whatever this is supposed to be is cringe worthy not funny and any attempt at a joke made falls flat. The characters are all one dimensional, shallow stereotypes and not real or relate-able in any way at all. I despised the main character, a bona fide genius who is handsome and who can do almost anything. He is so full of himself it's amazing his head isn't the size of a bolder to go with his ego.

Stick to the movie, it's much better!

James Adams says

This starts off as a fun satire of the Bond-ian subgenre before turning into a straight(ish) thriller with themes of failure, aging, and loss.

Hemlock is an assassin for a covert, but inept, branch of the US government. He has an expensive habit, collecting the works of famous artists, which keeps him from being able to go legit.

Look, you've got sex, murder and a climax on the treacherous mountain of the title. It mocks the macho horse-s**t that infuses the subgenre, has characters with names like Urasia Dragon and Felicity Arse, and has the main character succumb to premature ejaculation when he eventually finds someone he cares for. It's a hoot, I'm saying, but is also a strong thriller in its own right.

If you're looking for a fun spoof, this is a great choice for you.

wally says

i'd seen the clint eastwood movie years ago. television. description on the back says "part thriller and part satire" but for me any satire musta went over my head.

this guy lives in a renovated catholic church, new york, art collector, assassinates people upon request. sanctions them not to put too fine a point on it.

he gets the call, but he's semi-retired and needs to get in shape. does so. the eiger is a mountain.

trevanian trots around the globe w/his fiction. where hasn't he been? entertaining suspenseful read. while you're trying to figure out who did what (in a good way) things are being done. yeah, okay, now i remember the satire. people watch.

the mountain. pretty good story.

Jeffrey Keeten says

"Niceness is an overrated quality. Being nice is how a man pays his way into the party if he hasn't the guts to be tough or the class to be brilliant."

Jonathan Hemlock teaches art at a university, but the modest sum he makes teaching doesn't cover his extravagant habits. He is renovating a Gothic church on Long Island, expensive real estate as we all know, and the upgrades involve only the very best in Italian marbles and rare woods. Jonathan is building a shrine to his self-image. He has a collection of twenty-one rare masterpiece Impressionists paintings. Monet, Cezanne, Utrillo, Van Gogh, Manet, Seurat, Degas, Renoir, and Cassatt are tucked away in a special room below his church. Like any collector he is never satisfied and when a Pissarro comes available he is willing to do what he has to do to buy it.

Some people might pick up a second job doing security work, or working in a restaurant or with Hemlock's background maybe he could write an extra paper for publication. The problem is nothing pays well enough to meet the asking price for the Pissarro except for something the military found out he was perfectly mentally and physically predisposed to do...assassination. When he is in need he gets in touch with the C2 organization. Hemlock, in particular, is used to revenge spies who have been killed in the line of duty. The head of this organization is an albino, going by the name of Dragon. He keeps his office in near complete darkness as any light is detrimental to his already shaky health. The negotiations are ruthless between Hemlock and Dragon, one trying to get as much money as he can from each job and the other trying to make sure he never pays him enough that he quits being an asset.

Hemlock drinks Laphroaig Scotch Whisky.

Hemlock seduces beautiful women, because not only are they making themselves available to him, but they are desirable to collect. My favorite name for a woman in film and literature is still Pussy Galore, (when I first saw *Goldfinder* I can remember LOL, when she is introduced, nervously.)

Honor Blackman playing Pussy Galore

but Trevanian takes a stab at suggestive names as well. Felicity Arce, yes pronounced the way you think, and Randie Nickers to name a couple. After his encounter with Miss Arce, he had helped her enjoyment by suggesting she press down with her feet, Jonathan reflects on the results of the evening. *"In the hall, as he waited for the elevator, he felt pleased about the evening. It had been simple, uncomplicated, and temporarily satisfying: like urination. And that was the way he preferred his lovemaking to be."*

That is until he meets Gem.

Vonette McGee plays Gem in the movie

She is smart. She is witty. She is beautiful and sexy and she seems to understand him. For the first time in his life he is starting to experience something more than physical relief with a woman.

She betrays him.

Her actions ensnare him further under the control of Dragon. He has to take one final job that may very well kill him. Jonathan used to be an avid climber, but it has been years since he has done any serious climbing. When C2 manages to get him on the team climbing the Eiger, so that he can determine which of his fellow climbers is the target, he has to reunite with his old friend Big Ben to get himself back into climbing shape. As an added point of stress Hemlock had tried to scale the Eiger twice before, much younger, and had failed.

While training Hemlock runs into his old friend Miles Mellough, the man who betrayed his best friend Henri. *"Tall, brilliant in his physical trim, he pulled off his epic homosexuality with such style that plebeian men did not recognize it, and worldly men did not mind it. As always, girls were attracted to him in gaggles, and he treated them with the amusing condescension of a glamorous Parisian aunt visiting relatives in Nebraska.* Needless to say Miles knows that Jonathan is not going to let bygones be bygones and thus begins a struggle to see who can gain the upper hand long enough to live.

Eiger Mountain

The scenes in Switzerland are supposed to be amazing in the movie. I haven't seen the movie, but intend to watch it this week. I can tell you the last 50 pages with the characters on the mountain, hit by a Foehn that melts and refreezes the mountain slope, had me on the edge of my seat. Mental games are put aside and it takes all of them working together to have a chance to survive.

This book was a guilty pleasure, an early working of what by many is considered his best book Shibumi with a similar character living outside the normal perimeters of society with a shady sense of morality. Trevanian definitely evolves his dialogue, adding more humor, in his later books. I liked the book, but it is most assuredly a "male" adventure story. To enjoy the book you must read it with the idea that it is a relic of the 1970s and to my mind written with a certain degree of tongue and cheek.

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