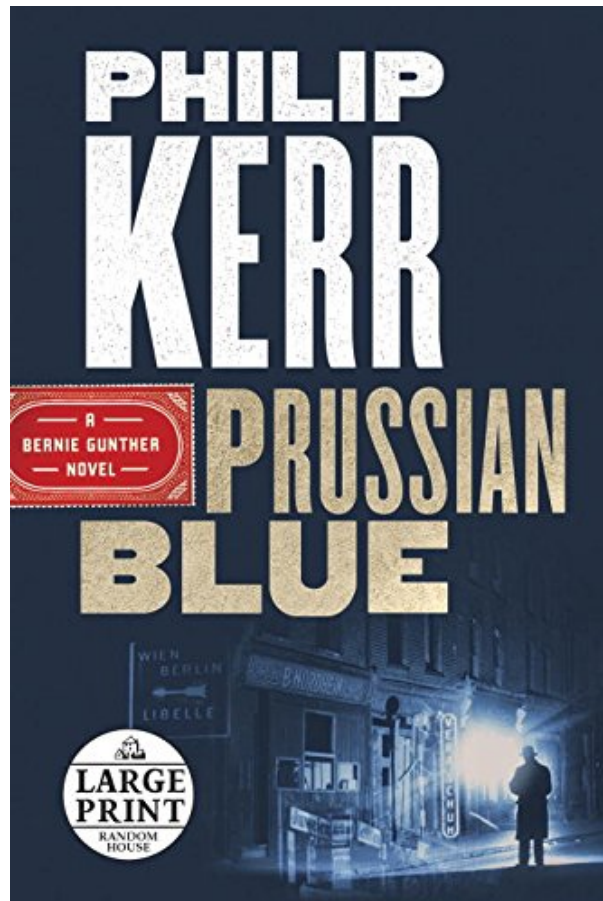
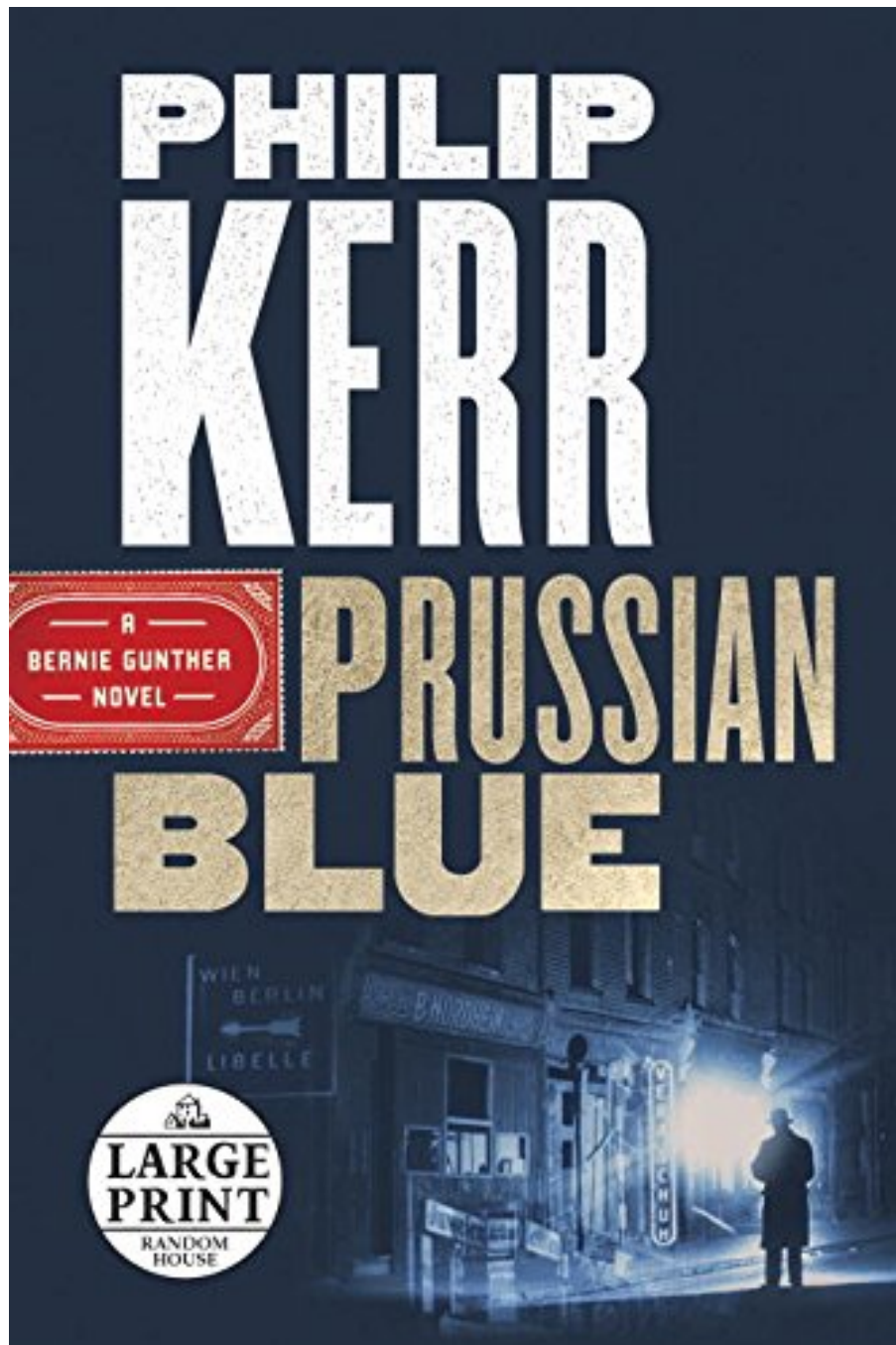


# PRUSSIAN BLUE (RANDOM HOUSE LARGE PRINT) BY PHILIP KERR



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## Review

### Praise for Philip Kerr

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The intricacies of the plot, partly based on Maugham's history as a British spy in charge of a team of secret agents, make this one of Kerr's best technical efforts. But it's the characterization of Maugham and the sound of his voice . . . that makes this novel memorable. "The New York Times Book Review"

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Readers who love hard-boiled heroes fell for Bernie Gunther back when he was a Berlin cop talking tough to Nazi thugs ("March Violets," 1989), and we loved him just as much when he was forced to become an SS soldier on the Eastern Front ("Field Gray," 2011). And yet, those whose own dark core runs deep may well love the postwar Bernie most of all, the Bernie whose cynicism has slowly morphed into black despair, like whiskey gradually eating its way through a defenseless liver. . . . "The Other Side of Silence" is one of the best in a sterling series. "Booklist" (starred review)

Kerr carefully develops his plot, sense of place, and characterizations, enabling readers to imagine what it must have been like to have lived in a postwar morass of political and moral ambiguity. This is more than a crime or espionage novel; it's a marvelous, hard-boiled political read. "Library Journal" (starred review)

Intricate enough to satisfy puzzle-minded readers . . . right out of the Agatha Christie playbook. "The Washington Post"

"

Blackmail, murder, deception, sexual shenanigans of every sort, and an undercurrent of black humor pervade Philip Kerr's 11th novel featuring the unsinkable German detective Bernie Gunther. "Pittsburg Post Gazette"

## About the Author

Philip Kerr is the author of eleven previous Gunther novels. In order of publication, *Field Gray*, *Prague Fatale*, *A Man Without Breath*, *The Lady from Zagreb*, and *The Other Side of Silence* were all New York Times bestsellers and *Field Gray* and *The Lady from Zagreb* were finalists for the Edgar. Kerr has also won

several Shamus awards and the British Crime Writers' Association Ellis Peters Award for Historical Crime Fiction. As P.B. Kerr, he is the author of the much-loved young adult fantasy series Children of the Lamp.

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one

October 1956

It was the end of the season and most of the hotels on the Riviera, including the Grand H<sup>TM</sup>tel Cap Ferrat, where I worked, were already closed for the winter. Not that winter meant much in that part of the world. Not like in Berlin, where winter is more a rite of passage than a season: you're not a true Berliner until you've survived the bitter experience of an interminable Prussian winter; that famous dancing bear you see on the city's coat of arms is just trying to keep himself warm.

The Hotel Ruhl was normally one of the last hotels in Nice to close because it had a casino and people like to gamble whatever the weather. Maybe they should have opened a casino in the nearby Hotel Negresco-which the Ruhl resembled, except that the Negresco was closed and looked as if it might stay that way the following year. Some said they were going to turn it into apartments but the Negresco concierge-who was an acquaintance of mine, and a fearful snob-said the place had been sold to the daughter of a Breton butcher, and he wasn't usually wrong about these things. He was off to Bern for the winter and probably wouldn't be back. I was going to miss him but as I parked my car and crossed the Promenade des Anglais to the Hotel Ruhl I really wasn't thinking about that. Perhaps it was the cold night air and the barman's surplus ice cubes in the gutter but instead I was thinking about Germany. Or perhaps it was the sight of the two crew-cut golems standing outside the hotel's grand Mediterranean entrance, eating ice cream cones and wearing thick East German suits of the kind that are mass-produced like tractor parts and shovels. Just seeing those two thugs ought to have put me on my guard but I had something important on my mind; I was looking forward to meeting my wife, Elisabeth, who, out of the blue, had sent me a letter inviting me to dinner. We were separated, and she was living back in Berlin, but Elisabeth's handwritten letter-she had beautiful SŸtterlin handwriting (banned by the Nazis)-spoke of her having come into a bit of money, which just might have explained how she could afford to be back on the Riviera and staying at the Ruhl, which is almost as expensive as the Angleterre or the Westminster. Either way I was looking forward to seeing her again with the blind faith of one who hoped reconciliation was on the cards. I'd already planned the short but graceful speech of forgiveness I was going to make. How much I missed her and thought we could still make a go of it-that kind of thing. Of course, a part of me was also braced for the possibility she might be there to tell me she'd met someone else and wanted a divorce. Still, it seemed like a lot of trouble to go to-it wasn't easy to travel from Berlin these days.

The hotel restaurant was on the top floor in one of the corner cupolas. It was perhaps the best in Nice, designed by Charles Dalmas. Certainly it was the most expensive. I hadn't ever eaten there but I'd heard the food was excellent and I was looking forward to my dinner. The m%oitre d' sidestepped his way across the beautiful Belle Epoque room, met me at the bookings lectern, and found my wife's name on the page. I was already glancing over his shoulder, searching the tables anxiously for Elisabeth and not finding her there yet, checking my watch and realizing that I was perhaps a little early. I wasn't really listening to the m%oitre d' as he informed me that my host had arrived, and I was halfway across the marble floor when I saw I was being ushered to a quiet corner table where a squat, tough-looking man was already working on a very large lobster and a bottle of white Burgundy. Recognizing him immediately, I turned on my heel only to find my exit blocked by two more apes who looked as if they might have climbed in through the open window, off one of the many palm trees on the Promenade.

"Don't leave yet," one of them said quietly in thick, Leipzig-accented German. "The comrade-general wouldn't like it."

For a moment I stood my ground, wondering if I could risk making a run for the door. But the two men, cut from the same crude mold as the two golems I'd seen by the hotel entrance, were more than a match for me.

"That's right," added the other. "So you'd best sit down like a good boy and avoid making a scene."

"Gunther," said a voice behind me, also speaking German. "Bernhard Gunther. Come over here and sit down, you old fascist. Don't be afraid." He laughed. "I'm not going to shoot you. It's a public place." I suppose he assumed that German speakers were at a premium in the Hotel Ruhl and he probably wouldn't have been wrong. "What could possibly happen to you in here? Besides, the food is excellent and the wine more so."

I turned again and took another look at the man who remained seated and was still applying himself to the lobster with his cracker and a pick, like a plumber changing the washer on a tap. He was wearing a better suit than his men—a blue pinstripe, tailor-made—and a patterned silk tie that could only have been bought in France. A tie like that would have cost a week's wages in the GDR and probably earned you a lot of awkward questions at the local police station, as would the large gold watch that flashed on his wrist like a miniature lighthouse as he gouged at the flesh of the lobster, which was the same color as the more abundant flesh of his powerful hands. His hair was still dark on top but cut so short against the sides of his wrecking ball of a head it looked like a priest's black zucchetto. He'd put on some weight since last I'd seen him, and he hadn't even started on the new potatoes, the mayonnaise, the asparagus tips, the salade niçoise, sweet cucumber pickles, and a plate of dark chocolate arranged on the table in front of him. With his boxer's physique he reminded me strongly of Martin Bormann, Hitler's deputy chief of staff; he was certainly every bit as dangerous.

I sat down, poured myself a glass of white wine, and tossed my cigarette case onto the table in front of me.

"General Erich Mielke," I said. "What an unexpected pleasure."

"I'm sorry about bringing you here under false pretenses. But I knew you wouldn't have come if I'd said it was I who was buying dinner."

"Is she all right? Elisabeth? Just tell me that and then I'll listen to whatever you have to say, General."

"Yes, she's fine."

"I take it she's not actually here in Nice."

"No, she's not. I'm sorry about that. But you'll be glad to know that she was most reluctant to write that letter. I had to explain that the alternative would have been so much more painful, for you at least. So please don't hold that letter against her. She wrote it for the best of reasons." Mielke lifted an arm and snapped his fingers at the waiter. "Have something to eat. Have some wine. I drink very little myself but I'm told this is the best. Anything you like. I insist. The Ministry of State Security is paying. Only, please don't smoke. I hate the smell of cigarettes, especially when I'm eating."

"I'm not hungry, thanks."

"Of course you are. You're a Berliner. We don't have to be hungry to eat. The war taught us to eat when

there's food on the table."

"Well, there's plenty of food on this table. Are we expecting anyone else? The Red Army, perhaps?"

"I like to see lots of food when I'm eating, even if I don't eat any of it. It's not just a man's stomach that needs filling. It's his senses, too."

I picked up the bottle and inspected the label.

"Corton-Charlemagne. I approve. Nice to see that an old communist like you can still appreciate a few of the finer things in life, General. This wine must be the most expensive on the list."

"I do, and it most certainly is."

I drained the glass and poured myself another. It was excellent.

The waiter approached nervously, as if he'd already felt the edge of Mielke's tongue.

"We'll have two juicy steaks," said Mielke, speaking good French—the result, I imagined, of his two years spent in a French prison camp before and during the war. "No, better still, we'll have the Chateaubriand. And make it very bloody."

The waiter went away.

"Is it just steak you prefer that way?" I said. "Or everything else as well?"

"Still got that sense of humor, Gunther. It beats me how you've stayed alive for this long."

"The French are a little more tolerant of these things than they are in what you laughingly call the Democratic Republic of Germany. Tell me, General, when is the communist government going to dissolve the people and elect another?"

"The people?" Mielke laughed, and breaking off from his lobster for a moment, placed a piece of chocolate into his mouth, almost as if it were a matter of indifference what he was eating just as long as it was something not easily obtained in the GDR. "They rarely know what's best for them. Nearly fourteen million Germans voted for Hitler in March 1932, making the Nazis the largest party in the Reichstag. Do you honestly believe they had a clue what was best for them? No, of course not. Nobody did. All the people care about is a regular pay packet, cigarettes, and beer."

"I expect that's why twenty thousand East German refugees were crossing into the Federal Republic every month—at least until you imposed your so-called special regime with its restricted zone and your protective strip. They were in search of better beer and cigarettes and perhaps the chance to complain a little without fear of the consequences."

"Who was it said that none are more hopelessly enslaved than those who believe they are free?"

"It was Goethe. And you misquote him. He said that none are more hopelessly enslaved than those who falsely believe they are free."

"In my book, they are one and the same."

"That would be the one book you've read, then."

"You're a romantic fool. I forget that about you, sometimes. Look, Gunther, most people's idea of freedom is to write something rude on a lavatory wall. My own belief is that the people are lazy and prefer to leave the business of government to the government. However, it's important that the people don't place too great a burden on those in charge of things. Hence, my presence here in France. Generally speaking I prefer to go hunting. But I often come here around this time of year to get away from my responsibilities. I like to play a little baccarat."

"That's a high-risk game. But then you always were a gambler."

"You want to know the really great thing about gambling here?" He grinned. "Most of the time, I lose. If there were still such decadent things as casinos in the GDR I'm afraid the croupiers would always make sure I won. Winning is only fun if you can lose. I used to go to the one in Baden-Baden but the last time I was there I was recognized and couldn't go again. So now I come to Nice. Or sometimes Le Touquet. But I prefer Nice. The weather is a little more reliable here than on the Atlantic coast."

"Somehow I don't believe that's all you're here for."

"You're right."

"So what the hell do you want?"

"You remember that business a few months back, with Somerset Maugham and our mutual friends Harold Hennig and Anne French. You almost managed to screw up a good operation there."

Mielke was referring to a Stasi plot to discredit Roger Hollis, the deputy director of MI5-the British domestic counterintelligence and security agency. The real plan had been to leave Hollis smelling of roses after the bogus Stasi plot was revealed.

"It was very good of you to tie up that loose end for us," said Mielke. "It was you who killed Hennig, wasn't it?"

I didn't answer but we both knew this was true; I'd shot Harold Hennig dead in the house Anne French had been renting in Villefranche and done my very best to frame her for it. Since then the French police had asked me all sorts of questions about her, but that was all I knew. As far as I was aware, Anne French remained safely back in England.

"Well, for the sake of argument, let's just say it was you," said Mielke. He finished the piece of chocolate he was eating, forked some pickled cucumber into his mouth, and then swallowed a mouthful of white Burgundy, all of which persuaded me that his taste buds were every bit as corrupt as his politics and morals. "The fact is that Hennig's days were numbered anyway. As are Anne's. The operation to discredit Hollis really only looks good if we try to eliminate her, too-as befits someone who betrayed us. And that's especially important now that the French are trying to have her extradited back here to face trial for Hennig's murder. Needless to say, that just can't be allowed to happen. Which is where you come in, Gunther."

"Me?" I shrugged. "Let me get this straight. You're asking me to kill Anne French?"

"Precisely. Except that I'm not asking. The fact is that you agreeing to kill Anne French is a condition of remaining alive yourself."

Two

October 1956

I estimated once that the Gestapo had employed less than fifty thousand officers to keep an eye on eighty million Germans, but from what I'd read and heard about the GDR, the Stasi employed at least twice that number-to say nothing of their civilian informants or spylets who, rumor had it, amounted to one in ten of the population-to keep an eye on just seventeen million Germans. As deputy head of the Stasi, Erich Mielke was one of the most powerful men in the GDR. And as might have been expected of such a man, he'd already anticipated all my objections to such a distasteful mission as the one he had described and was ready to argue them down with the brute force of one who is used to getting his way with people who are themselves authoritarian and assertive. I had the feeling that Mielke might have grabbed me by the throat or banged my head on the dinner table and, of course, violence was a vital part of his character; as a young communist cadre in Berlin he'd participated in the infamous murder of two uniformed policemen.



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From New York Times–bestselling author Philip Kerr, the much-anticipated return of Bernie Gunther, our compromised former Berlin bull and unwilling SS officer. With his cover blown, he is waiting for the next move in the cat-and-mouse game that, even a decade after Germany’s defeat, continues to shadow his life.

The French Riviera, 1956: The invitation to dinner was not unexpected, though neither was it welcome. Erich Mielke, deputy head of the East German Stasi, has turned up in Nice, and he’s not on holiday. An old and dangerous adversary, Mielke is calling in a debt. He intends that Bernie go to London and, with the vial of Thallium he now pushes across the table, poison a female agent they both have had dealings with.

But chance intervenes in the form of Friedrich Korsch, an old Kripo comrade now working for Stasi and probably there to make sure Bernie gets the job done. Bernie bolts for the German border. Traveling by night, holed up during the day, Bernie has plenty of down time to recall the last time Korsch and he worked together.

It was the summer of 1939: At Hitler’s mountaintop retreat in Obersalzberg, the body of a low-level bureaucrat has been found murdered. Bernie and Korsch are selected to run the case. They have one week to solve the murder—Hitler is due back then to celebrate his fiftieth birthday. Lucky Bernie: it’s his reward for being Kripo’s best homicide detective. He knows what a box he’s in: millions have been spent to secure Obersalzberg. It would be a disaster if Hitler were to discover a shocking murder had been committed on the terrace of his own home. But the mountaintop is home to an elite Nazi community. It would be an even bigger disaster for Bernie if one of them was the murderer.

1939 and 1956: two different eras, seventeen years apart. And yet, not really apart, as the stunning climax will show when the two converge explosively.

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The hotel restaurant was on the top floor in one of the corner cupolas. It was perhaps the best in Nice, designed by Charles Dalmas. Certainly it was the most expensive. I hadn't ever eaten there but I'd heard the food was excellent and I was looking forward to my dinner. The maître d' sidestepped his way across the beautiful Belle Epoque room, met me at the bookings lectern, and found my wife's name on the page. I was already glancing over his shoulder, searching the tables anxiously for Elisabeth and not finding her there yet, checking my watch and realizing that I was perhaps a little early. I wasn't really listening to the maître d' as he informed me that my host had arrived, and I was halfway across the marble floor when I saw I was being ushered to a quiet corner table where a squat, tough-looking man was already working on a very large lobster and a bottle of white Burgundy. Recognizing him immediately, I turned on my heel only to find my exit blocked by two more apes who looked as if they might have climbed in through the open window, off one of the many palm trees on the Promenade.

"Don't leave yet," one of them said quietly in thick, Leipzig-accented German. "The comrade-general wouldn't like it."

For a moment I stood my ground, wondering if I could risk making a run for the door. But the two men, cut from the same crude mold as the two golems I'd seen by the hotel entrance, were more than a match for me.

"That's right," added the other. "So you'd best sit down like a good boy and avoid making a scene."

"Gunther," said a voice behind me, also speaking German. "Bernhard Gunther. Come over here and sit down, you old fascist. Don't be afraid." He laughed. "I'm not going to shoot you. It's a public place." I suppose he assumed that German speakers were at a premium in the Hotel Ruhl and he probably wouldn't have been wrong. "What could possibly happen to you in here? Besides, the food is excellent and the wine more so."

I turned again and took another look at the man who remained seated and was still applying himself to the lobster with his cracker and a pick, like a plumber changing the washer on a tap. He was wearing a better suit than his men-a blue pinstripe, tailor-made-and a patterned silk tie that could only have been bought in France. A tie like that would have cost a week's wages in the GDR and probably earned you a lot of awkward questions at the local police station, as would the large gold watch that flashed on his wrist like a miniature lighthouse as he gouged at the flesh of the lobster, which was the same color as the more abundant flesh of his powerful hands. His hair was still dark on top but cut so short against the sides of his wrecking ball of a head it looked like a priest's black zucchetto. He'd put on some weight since last I'd seen him, and he hadn't even started on the new potatoes, the mayonnaise, the asparagus tips, the salade niçoise, sweet cucumber pickles, and a plate of dark chocolate arranged on the table in front of him. With his boxer's physique he reminded me strongly of Martin Bormann, Hitler's deputy chief of staff; he was certainly every bit as dangerous.

I sat down, poured myself a glass of white wine, and tossed my cigarette case onto the table in front of me.

"General Erich Mielke," I said. "What an unexpected pleasure."

"I'm sorry about bringing you here under false pretenses. But I knew you wouldn't have come if I'd said it was I who was buying dinner."

"Is she all right? Elisabeth? Just tell me that and then I'll listen to whatever you have to say, General."

"Yes, she's fine."

"I take it she's not actually here in Nice."

"No, she's not. I'm sorry about that. But you'll be glad to know that she was most reluctant to write that letter. I had to explain that the alternative would have been so much more painful, for you at least. So please don't hold that letter against her. She wrote it for the best of reasons." Mielke lifted an arm and snapped his fingers at the waiter. "Have something to eat. Have some wine. I drink very little myself but I'm told this is the best. Anything you like. I insist. The Ministry of State Security is paying. Only, please don't smoke. I hate the smell of cigarettes, especially when I'm eating."

"I'm not hungry, thanks."

"Of course you are. You're a Berliner. We don't have to be hungry to eat. The war taught us to eat when there's food on the table."

"Well, there's plenty of food on this table. Are we expecting anyone else? The Red Army, perhaps?"

"I like to see lots of food when I'm eating, even if I don't eat any of it. It's not just a man's stomach that needs filling. It's his senses, too."

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"Corton-Charlemagne. I approve. Nice to see that an old communist like you can still appreciate a few of the finer things in life, General. This wine must be the most expensive on the list."

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"Still got that sense of humor, Gunther. It beats me how you've stayed alive for this long."

"The French are a little more tolerant of these things than they are in what you laughingly call the Democratic Republic of Germany. Tell me, General, when is the communist government going to dissolve the people and elect another?"

"The people?" Mielke laughed, and breaking off from his lobster for a moment, placed a piece of chocolate into his mouth, almost as if it were a matter of indifference what he was eating just as long as it was something not easily obtained in the GDR. "They rarely know what's best for them. Nearly fourteen million Germans voted for Hitler in March 1932, making the Nazis the largest party in the Reichstag. Do you honestly believe they had a clue what was best for them? No, of course not. Nobody did. All the people care about is a regular pay packet, cigarettes, and beer."

"I expect that's why twenty thousand East German refugees were crossing into the Federal Republic every month—at least until you imposed your so-called special regime with its restricted zone and your protective strip. They were in search of better beer and cigarettes and perhaps the chance to complain a little without fear of the consequences."

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"It was Goethe. And you misquote him. He said that none are more hopelessly enslaved than those who falsely believe they are free."

"In my book, they are one and the same."

"That would be the one book you've read, then."

"You're a romantic fool. I forget that about you, sometimes. Look, Gunther, most people's idea of freedom is to write something rude on a lavatory wall. My own belief is that the people are lazy and prefer to leave the business of government to the government. However, it's important that the people don't place too great a burden on those in charge of things. Hence, my presence here in France. Generally speaking I prefer to go hunting. But I often come here around this time of year to get away from my responsibilities. I like to play a little baccarat."

"That's a high-risk game. But then you always were a gambler."

"You want to know the really great thing about gambling here?" He grinned. "Most of the time, I lose. If there were still such decadent things as casinos in the GDR I'm afraid the croupiers would always make sure I won. Winning is only fun if you can lose. I used to go to the one in Baden-Baden but the last time I was there I was recognized and couldn't go again. So now I come to Nice. Or sometimes Le Touquet. But I prefer Nice. The weather is a little more reliable here than on the Atlantic coast."

"Somehow I don't believe that's all you're here for."

"You're right."

"So what the hell do you want?"

"You remember that business a few months back, with Somerset Maugham and our mutual friends Harold

Hennig and Anne French. You almost managed to screw up a good operation there."

Mielke was referring to a Stasi plot to discredit Roger Hollis, the deputy director of MI5-the British domestic counterintelligence and security agency. The real plan had been to leave Hollis smelling of roses after the bogus Stasi plot was revealed.

"It was very good of you to tie up that loose end for us," said Mielke. "It was you who killed Hennig, wasn't it?"

I didn't answer but we both knew this was true; I'd shot Harold Hennig dead in the house Anne French had been renting in Villefranche and done my very best to frame her for it. Since then the French police had asked me all sorts of questions about her, but that was all I knew. As far as I was aware, Anne French remained safely back in England.

"Well, for the sake of argument, let's just say it was you," said Mielke. He finished the piece of chocolate he was eating, forked some pickled cucumber into his mouth, and then swallowed a mouthful of white Burgundy, all of which persuaded me that his taste buds were every bit as corrupt as his politics and morals. "The fact is that Hennig's days were numbered anyway. As are Anne's. The operation to discredit Hollis really only looks good if we try to eliminate her, too-as befits someone who betrayed us. And that's especially important now that the French are trying to have her extradited back here to face trial for Hennig's murder. Needless to say, that just can't be allowed to happen. Which is where you come in, Gunther."

"Me?" I shrugged. "Let me get this straight. You're asking me to kill Anne French?"

"Precisely. Except that I'm not asking. The fact is that you agreeing to kill Anne French is a condition of remaining alive yourself."

Two

October 1956

I estimated once that the Gestapo had employed less than fifty thousand officers to keep an eye on eighty million Germans, but from what I'd read and heard about the GDR, the Stasi employed at least twice that number-to say nothing of their civilian informants or spylets who, rumor had it, amounted to one in ten of the population-to keep an eye on just seventeen million Germans. As deputy head of the Stasi, Erich Mielke was one of the most powerful men in the GDR. And as might have been expected of such a man, he'd already anticipated all my objections to such a distasteful mission as the one he had described and was ready to argue them down with the brute force of one who is used to getting his way with people who are themselves authoritarian and assertive. I had the feeling that Mielke might have grabbed me by the throat or banged my head on the dinner table and, of course, violence was a vital part of his character; as a young communist cadre in Berlin he'd participated in the infamous murder of two uniformed policemen.

Most helpful customer reviews

32 of 33 people found the following review helpful.

Another great Bernie Gunther book...

By Jill Meyer

Okay, first things first. New readers of British author Philip Kerr "Bernie Gunther" series can actually read any of last 9 books in any order they want. (The first three, based in Berlin pre-WW2, should be read first, however). Kerr places Kripo man Gunther in any setting, in any year. You may find a book with Bernie in

France in 1956, Cuba in 1951, Munich in 1948, etc. Bernie Gunther is, in general, a down-on-his luck ex-cop, ex SD-man, fleeing from his wartime activities and his post-war hideouts.

In Kerr's newest book, "Prussian Blue", Gunther is placed in 1956 (with flashbacks to the late 1930's) and he is on the run from GDR official Erich Mielke (Kerr often uses real people, mixed in with the fictional), who wants him to commit a murder for him. It's a rather convoluted murder and is associated with the previous novel, "The Other Side of Silence", in the series. (You don't need to have read "Other Side of Silence" to understand this book.) Now, Gunther is no fan of the GDR - the living standards aren't what Bernie is used to and today's Stasi official is often yesterday's Gestapo bully-boy. Bernie's trying to avoid both.

The book also sets Bernie in April 1939 when he is ordered by Reinhard Heydrich to investigate a possible murder at Hitler's retreat at Berchtesgarden. (Curiously, Philip Kerr writes about the use of Pervitin, which was a kind of meth developed by the German pharmaceutical firm Temmler, and widely distributed in Germany to ramp up energy of the military and industrial workers. It was the subject of a new work of non-fiction, "Blitzed", by Norman Ohler)

As the book continues, the two cases as well as some others, come together to make a complete story. As usual, Philip Kerr's plotting is meticulous and brings his readers to another excellent story. And we'll wait for next year's book in the series!

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

"Trying to be an honest cop in (1939) Germany is like trying to play croquet in no-man's land"

By doc peterson

If you have not read Philip Kerr's Bernie Gunther novels, you are in for a treat: a former Kripo Commissar (Berlin's version of Scotland Yard), Bernie Gunther is a reluctant anti-hero: an honest cop who is struggling to maintain his sense of dignity and honor in a time when the Nazis (and later, the Stasi) are in power, corrupting and undermining the very institutions (justice, the pursuit of truth) that mean so much to Gunther. While you can read any of the books in any order, I strongly recommend reading the first three (found here as a trilogy in a single volume *Berlin Noir: March Violets; The Pale Criminal; A German Requiem*).

In *Prussian Blue*, Gunther is tracked down by a former Kripo cop now working for the Stasi who demands that Gunther travel to London to murder a woman who the East German government sees as a threat. As Gunther attempts to avoid this, he flashes back to April, 1939 when he first met his colleague (who is now a Stasi agent), investigating a murder at Berchtesgarden (the "Eagle's Nest" - Hitler's favorite Bavarian retreat). The flashbacks and flash forwards are typical of Kerr's storytelling in the Gunther novels, and work well in constructing the story. And while the murder investigation in 1939 and the attempts at evasion in 1956 are engaging, it's the way in which Kerr writes Gunther that has kept me such a dedicated fan. As the Stasi agent remarks, "I admire you, Bernie. I also can't help but think there's a real danger you've always destined to be your own life's saboteur."

Gunther is a Berliner - blunt, a little "red" (having socialist tendencies is what puts him at odds with the Nazis), and with a biting and pointed sense of humor. Gunther's sarcasm, wit and dry sense of humor not only make him a very real feeling character, they are also elements that endear him to me. I love Berlin, and I have a soft spot for Berliners - Kerr's descriptions of both are spot on.

I loved the book - and I hope for more by Kerr. If you have not had the opportunity to be introduced to this writer or this series, I enthusiastically recommend them to you.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

Great Sense of Place; Bernie Gunther Action; Germany Under Two Systems



By James Ellsworth

In PRUSSIAN BLUE Philip Kerr offers a crackling crisp Bernie Gunther police procedural, again set in NAZI Germany. Kerr also challenges himself to structure a novel where key themes and key images keep recurring. This reinforces Bernie's world-weary nihilism and his suspicion that God and Reality are just playing with mankind, running a series of changes using the same chords. 1936 and 1956 finds Bernie and his battered idealism in similar places, first as the hunter and second as the hunted. As a favored 'outsider' police investigator for SS General Heydrich, Bernie is sent to ask rude questions of 'untouchable' people in obnoxious ways. Heydrich likes Bernie's tenacity and tolerates his outspokenness and blunt tactics. Twenty years later these same skills bring him unwanted attention from a Communist East German Stasi General who expects Bernie to carry out a political assassination IN LONDON. He is to deliver a brutal death by Thalium contamination. Only the prompt administration of the chemical compound Prussian Blue can stop the action of Thalium. Prussian Blue turns up as a code phrase and so on in the novel. Bernie realizes he must run for his life and that one brutal political system has only been replaced by another. In 1956 he is 'the Fox'; in 1936 he was 'the hounds' but the police process is still the same. Kerr writes both sides of this story equally well.

Kerr offers readers a sense of immersion in Adolf Hitler's idyllic retreat at Berchtesgaden in Bavaria. We are taken inside the construction process and the ruthless acquisition of land from local families to secure the site. Soon we learn of the myriad venal schemes key historical figures close to Hitler are using to generate money for themselves; running from extortion, to selling exemptions from military service, to promoting prostitution to distributing methamphetamine to keep construction workers working extra hours to make the project ready for Hitler's 50th birthday celebration.

Readers who enjoy the Bernie Gunther novels are in for a treat. Readers who are new to the series can wade right into this novel with no sense of having missed anything vital from the earlier novels.

See all 56 customer reviews...

# **PRUSSIAN BLUE (RANDOM HOUSE LARGE PRINT) BY PHILIP KERR PDF**

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## Review

### Praise for Philip Kerr

Kerr vividly captures the excruciating moral ambiguity of Bernie s position, driving home the point that cynicism is the only sane reaction for a man on the wrong side of history. "Booklist

"

### Praise for "The Other Side of Silence

"

The intricacies of the plot, partly based on Maugham s history as a British spy in charge of a team of secret agents, make this one of Kerr s best technical efforts. But it s the characterization of Maugham and the sound of his voice . . . that makes this novel memorable. "The New York Times Book Review

"

Readers who love hard-boiled heroes fell for Bernie Gunther back when he was a Berlin cop talking tough to Nazi thugs ("March Violets," 1989), and we loved him just as much when he was forced to become an SS soldier on the Eastern Front ("Field Gray," 2011). And yet, those whose own dark core runs deep may well love the postwar Bernie most of all, the Bernie whose cynicism has slowly morphed into black despair, like whiskey gradually eating its way through a defenseless liver. . . . "The Other Side of Silence" is one of the best in a sterling series. "Booklist "(starred review)

Kerr carefully develops his plot, sense of place, and characterizations, enabling readers to imagine what it must have been like to have lived in a postwar morass of political and moral ambiguity. This is more than a crime or espionage novel; it s a marvelous, hard-boiled political read. "Library Journal" (starred review)

Intricate enough to satisfy puzzle-minded readers . . . right out of the Agatha Christie playbook. "The Washington Post

"

Blackmail, murder, deception, sexual shenanigans of every sort, and an undercurrent of black humor pervade Philip Kerr s 11th novel featuring the unsinkable German detective Bernie Gunther. " ""Pittsburg Post Gazette""

## About the Author

Philip Kerr is the author of eleven previous Gunther novels. In order of publication, Field Gray, Prague Fatale, A Man Without Breath, The Lady from Zagreb, and The Other Side of Silence were all New York Times bestsellers and Field Gray and The Lady from Zagreb were finalists for the Edgar. Kerr has also won several Shamus awards and the British Crime Writers' Association Ellis Peters Award for Historical Crime Fiction. As P.B. Kerr, he is the author of the much-loved young adult fantasy series Children of the Lamp.

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one

October 1956

It was the end of the season and most of the hotels on the Riviera, including the Grand Hotel Cap Ferrat, where I worked, were already closed for the winter. Not that winter meant much in that part of the world. Not like in Berlin, where winter is more a rite of passage than a season: you're not a true Berliner until you've survived the bitter experience of an interminable Prussian winter; that famous dancing bear you see on the city's coat of arms is just trying to keep himself warm.

The Hotel Ruhl was normally one of the last hotels in Nice to close because it had a casino and people like to gamble whatever the weather. Maybe they should have opened a casino in the nearby Hotel Negresco-which the Ruhl resembled, except that the Negresco was closed and looked as if it might stay that way the following year. Some said they were going to turn it into apartments but the Negresco concierge-who was an acquaintance of mine, and a fearful snob-said the place had been sold to the daughter of a Breton butcher, and he wasn't usually wrong about these things. He was off to Bern for the winter and probably wouldn't be back. I was going to miss him but as I parked my car and crossed the Promenade des Anglais to the Hotel Ruhl I really wasn't thinking about that. Perhaps it was the cold night air and the barman's surplus ice cubes in the gutter but instead I was thinking about Germany. Or perhaps it was the sight of the two crew-cut golems standing outside the hotel's grand Mediterranean entrance, eating ice cream cones and wearing thick East German suits of the kind that are mass-produced like tractor parts and shovels. Just seeing those two thugs ought to have put me on my guard but I had something important on my mind; I was looking forward to meeting my wife, Elisabeth, who, out of the blue, had sent me a letter inviting me to dinner. We were separated, and she was living back in Berlin, but Elisabeth's handwritten letter-she had beautiful Sütterlin handwriting (banned by the Nazis)-spoke of her having come into a bit of money, which just might have explained how she could afford to be back on the Riviera and staying at the Ruhl, which is almost as expensive as the Angleterre or the Westminster. Either way I was looking forward to seeing her again with the blind faith of one who hoped reconciliation was on the cards. I'd already planned the short but graceful speech of forgiveness I was going to make. How much I missed her and thought we could still make a go of it-that kind of thing. Of course, a part of me was also braced for the possibility she might be there to tell me she'd met someone else and wanted a divorce. Still, it seemed like a lot of trouble to go to-it wasn't easy to travel from Berlin these days.

The hotel restaurant was on the top floor in one of the corner cupolas. It was perhaps the best in Nice, designed by Charles Dalmas. Certainly it was the most expensive. I hadn't ever eaten there but I'd heard the food was excellent and I was looking forward to my dinner. The maître d' sidestepped his way across the beautiful Belle Epoque room, met me at the bookings lectern, and found my wife's name on the page. I was already glancing over his shoulder, searching the tables anxiously for Elisabeth and not finding her there yet, checking my watch and realizing that I was perhaps a little early. I wasn't really listening to the maître d' as he informed me that my host had arrived, and I was halfway across the marble floor when I saw I was being ushered to a quiet corner table where a squat, tough-looking man was already working on a very large lobster and a bottle of white Burgundy. Recognizing him immediately, I turned on my heel only to find my exit blocked by two more apes who looked as if they might have climbed in through the open window, off one of the many palm trees on the Promenade.

"Don't leave yet," one of them said quietly in thick, Leipzig-accented German. "The comrade-general wouldn't like it."

For a moment I stood my ground, wondering if I could risk making a run for the door. But the two men, cut from the same crude mold as the two golems I'd seen by the hotel entrance, were more than a match for me.

"That's right," added the other. "So you'd best sit down like a good boy and avoid making a scene."

"Gunther," said a voice behind me, also speaking German. "Bernhard Gunther. Come over here and sit down, you old fascist. Don't be afraid." He laughed. "I'm not going to shoot you. It's a public place." I suppose he assumed that German speakers were at a premium in the Hotel Ruhl and he probably wouldn't have been wrong. "What could possibly happen to you in here? Besides, the food is excellent and the wine more so."

I turned again and took another look at the man who remained seated and was still applying himself to the lobster with his cracker and a pick, like a plumber changing the washer on a tap. He was wearing a better suit than his men—a blue pinstripe, tailor-made—and a patterned silk tie that could only have been bought in France. A tie like that would have cost a week's wages in the GDR and probably earned you a lot of awkward questions at the local police station, as would the large gold watch that flashed on his wrist like a miniature lighthouse as he gouged at the flesh of the lobster, which was the same color as the more abundant flesh of his powerful hands. His hair was still dark on top but cut so short against the sides of his wrecking ball of a head it looked like a priest's black zucchetto. He'd put on some weight since last I'd seen him, and he hadn't even started on the new potatoes, the mayonnaise, the asparagus tips, the *salade niçoise*, sweet cucumber pickles, and a plate of dark chocolate arranged on the table in front of him. With his boxer's physique he reminded me strongly of Martin Bormann, Hitler's deputy chief of staff; he was certainly every bit as dangerous.

I sat down, poured myself a glass of white wine, and tossed my cigarette case onto the table in front of me.

"General Erich Mielke," I said. "What an unexpected pleasure."

"I'm sorry about bringing you here under false pretenses. But I knew you wouldn't have come if I'd said it was I who was buying dinner."

"Is she all right? Elisabeth? Just tell me that and then I'll listen to whatever you have to say, General."

"Yes, she's fine."

"I take it she's not actually here in Nice."

"No, she's not. I'm sorry about that. But you'll be glad to know that she was most reluctant to write that letter. I had to explain that the alternative would have been so much more painful, for you at least. So please don't hold that letter against her. She wrote it for the best of reasons." Mielke lifted an arm and snapped his fingers at the waiter. "Have something to eat. Have some wine. I drink very little myself but I'm told this is the best. Anything you like. I insist. The Ministry of State Security is paying. Only, please don't smoke. I hate the smell of cigarettes, especially when I'm eating."

"I'm not hungry, thanks."

"Of course you are. You're a Berliner. We don't have to be hungry to eat. The war taught us to eat when there's food on the table."

"Well, there's plenty of food on this table. Are we expecting anyone else? The Red Army, perhaps?"

"I like to see lots of food when I'm eating, even if I don't eat any of it. It's not just a man's stomach that needs filling. It's his senses, too."

I picked up the bottle and inspected the label.

"Corton-Charlemagne. I approve. Nice to see that an old communist like you can still appreciate a few of the finer things in life, General. This wine must be the most expensive on the list."

"I do, and it most certainly is."

I drained the glass and poured myself another. It was excellent.

The waiter approached nervously, as if he'd already felt the edge of Mielke's tongue.

"We'll have two juicy steaks," said Mielke, speaking good French—the result, I imagined, of his two years spent in a French prison camp before and during the war. "No, better still, we'll have the Chateaubriand. And make it very bloody."

The waiter went away.

"Is it just steak you prefer that way?" I said. "Or everything else as well?"

"Still got that sense of humor, Gunther. It beats me how you've stayed alive for this long."

"The French are a little more tolerant of these things than they are in what you laughingly call the Democratic Republic of Germany. Tell me, General, when is the communist government going to dissolve the people and elect another?"

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