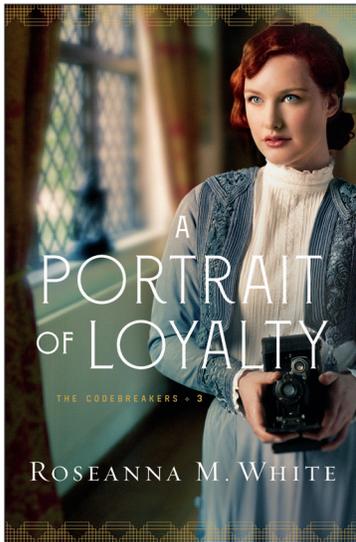




QUESTIONS & ANSWERS WITH ROSEANNA M. WHITE



A Portrait of Loyalty

THE CODEBREAKERS #3

by Roseanna M. White

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Media Contacts

FICTION PUBLICIST: **Amy Green**

952-829-2596

agreen@bethanyhouse.com

CANADIAN MEDIA: **Ellen Graf-Martin**

519-342-3703

ellen@grafmartin.com

Please send tear sheets to:

Amy Green

Bethany House Publishers

11400 Hampshire Ave. S. #200

Bloomington, MN 55438

1. What new aspects of the codebreaking division in the first world war are featured in this novel?

As I researched the history of England's Room 40 (the codebreaking division of Naval Intelligence), I was intrigued by a single line that mentioned how a faked photograph hurried along the end of the war. This sent me down a happy rabbit hole of how people doctored images in the days before Photoshop (literally cutting and pasting—go figure!), and I knew I wanted to create a fictional character to fill the role of this Admiralty photographer. So, in *A Portrait of Loyalty*, we look at this very technical, physical side of the intelligence game and the role it played in the war—leaking false information to the enemy, running an image archive, and developing the mountain of film that would have been coming in from agents around the world. And we do it from the perspective of a young woman who at heart is an artist and who has to answer the questions of whether this is a noble use for her art.

2. A lot of big historical events gripped the world in the closing days of the war. Which ones play into *A Portrait of Loyalty*?

As always, there are far more interesting events than I can ever hope to squeeze into the pages of a single novel! A few that I did manage to include were the largest aerial raid of the war (historians refer to it as the first true blitz), the Spanish flu pandemic reaching London, the mutiny in the German forces, and of course, the end of the war.

3. Why did you choose a Russian hero, and what did you most enjoy about writing him and the Bolshevik antagonists?

Another story that gripped my imagination as I researched for the series was that of the head of Russia's cryptography division. He had to flee for his life in the wake of the October Revolution, and he ended up in England, working for Room 40. I wanted to explore his story through a fictional lens, asking myself what it would have been like to leave everything you ever knew, run for your life, and end up as just one of many workers in a familiar setting that you used to be in charge of. I created the fictional Zivon Marin to fill the same role but not be bound by the real figure's actual life, and it was so much fun! He has a view on revolution and war that the English couldn't, as well as the skills to rival any of the codebreakers of Room 40.

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I also took the opportunity to show the opposite perspective of the Russian Revolution through the eyes of my antagonists. I think we in Western society tend to look at the start of communism as the advent of something evil—and there’s a lot about it that deserves its reputation!—but many of the early proponents just wanted food to feed their children and a chance at a stable life. It’s hard to fault that. I could only scratch the surface of this complex culture, but I hope I at least did justice to this slice of it.

4. What do you hope readers ponder and take away from the story?

It would be easy to say that the theme of this book is forgiveness . . . but my hero isn’t just dealing with how to forgive a particular person who hurt him. He’s wrestling with bitterness toward the political forces that destroyed his life and killed someone dear to him. How can he ever hope to crave mercy for their souls if he seeks justice for the wrongs done to him? It’s a question he struggles with throughout the story, and it’s one I hope we all really pause to consider. *We know* we need to forgive the friend or neighbor or family member who hurt us. But how do we extend the same to an entire political party? A social movement? A people group? This is a hard question, but a timely one.

5. What part of the writing was the most fun?

I really loved exploring the questions about the purpose of art, the different stories the same truth can tell, and how we can find beauty even in a broken world. But I think the most fun part came in incorporating a Russian fairy tale into the story. Their folktales are bizarre to my mind, but as I read “The Snake Princess,” I saw some shiver-inducing parallels to socialism, though this story predates its advent by centuries. I couldn’t resist using it in the book!