



## To Serve a King

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## **To Serve a King** Donna Russo Morin

From her earliest days, Genevieve Gravois has known one fact above all: Francis I, king of France, is her enemy. Raised by her embittered aunt after her parents' deaths, Genevieve has been schooled in things no woman should know - how to decipher codes, how to use a dagger and a bow, and how to kill. For Henry VIII has a destiny in mind for the young girl - as his most powerful and dangerous spy.

When the time is ripe, Genevieve enters the magnificent world of the French court. With grace to match her ambition, she becomes maid of honor to Anne de Pisseleau, King Francis's mistress. Yet neither the court - which teems with artistry and enlightenment as well as intrigue - nor Francis himself are at all what Genevieve expected. And with her mission, her life, and the fate of two kingdoms at stake, she will be forced to make deadly decisions about where her heart and her ultimate loyalties lie.

## **To Serve a King Details**

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## From Reader Review To Serve a King for online ebook

### Ashleigh Miller says

A fast(ish) pace historical fiction with a compelling heroine, great attention to detail, and a moving plot. Loved the character development. Page turner!

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### Mirella says

To Serve a King by Donna Russo Morin is a novel of 16th century France. The heroine, Genevieve Gravois, believes she is the sole survivor of a fire that killed both her parents. Her aunt and King Henry VIII of England both tell her the fire had been set by the King of France, Francois I, and from that moment on, a deep hatred for the French king takes root inside the young girl 19s soul. As she grows to womanhood, she swears fealty to King Henry, and in return, he educates and trains her to one day become his spy. Genevieve learns to cipher and decipher secret codes and learns to skilfully arm and defend her life with various weapons. Finally, Genevieve is sent to take her place in the court of her enemy, King Francois. There, she immerses herself into the highest levels of the French court, and begins her secret duties as a spy for the English king, sending him secret missives about politics and the actions of the French king. As her life becomes more and more immersed into the opulence and intrigues of the court nobility, Genevieve slowly comes to the realization that all is not as it seems 13 those who she believes are enemies are not always adversaries and her friends cannot always be trusted.

In the novel, To Serve A King, Donna Russo Morin brings to life the affluence and magnificence of the 16th century French court. Important persons of the era make appearances in the story; from Nostradamus and the infamous Diane de Poitiers, to Catherine de Medici and Anne d'Heilly, lending credibility and historical detail to the story. As the tale unfolds, the heroine progresses from a determined young woman obsessed at revenge, to one who begins to question her own values and beliefs as loyalties are tested and secrets revealed. Numerous interesting character interactions and intrigues hold the reader's interest throughout the story. The chapter endings are exquisite, and hook the reader to turn the page to read more.

This novel sweeps readers into a turbulent time and takes us into the court of King Francois of France who surrounded himself with the best art, music, and artists of the time. What I enjoyed is although the Tudors are part of the story, they, for once, are not the focus. I liked the author's portrayal of the King of France's portrayal, for even though he is the heroine's nemesis, he comes across as kind hearted, heroic, and magnanimous, which is how I believe he truly was viewed by his people.

Impeccably researched, and strewn with delightful descriptions of clothing, furniture, and the aromatic foods of the period, one cannot help but truly enjoy the experience that comes from reading this novel. The reader is drawn by the strength and determination of the affable heroine. From laughter and joy, to sadness and fear, the reader experiences a realm of emotions as the heroine outwits her adversaries and dodges danger as she learns the real truth about her past. For anyone who loves historical fiction with feisty heroines set in majestic surroundings, this make a very satisfying, enjoyable read. Like all of Donna Russo Morin 19s novels, this one is sure to entertain.

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### Liberty Blake says

This was a wonderful read. I could see this on the big screen. The costumes. The characters. The action. It cries out for a good director.

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### **Brooke says**

I just could not get into this, I don't know why considering it has everything that I like in Historical fiction. In a few months I might come back and finish this.

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### **Rick F. says**

What a ORIGINAL plot-so well written and researched- this is truly a splendid book!! brilliant- unique book- so very well written- a true original- very highly recommended. Character,plot and locations so finely drawn!  
A JAMES MASON COMMUNITY BOOK CLUB MUST READ

Rick Friedman  
Founder  
THE JAMES MASON COMMUNITY BOOK CLUB

Rick Friedman

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### **Dana says**

Hmmm...I am just not sure if this was a good book or not - it was kinda dumb and kinda entertaining at the same time. I think I have to give it 3+ stars as it did hold my interest - used some silly words like "wily and chiseled", but it was a cross between historical fiction and smutty romance, but didn't have a ton of smut...

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### **Amy Bruno says**

Author Donna Russo Morin brings intrigue to the court of King Francois I of France in her third historical novel, To Serve a King.

Young Genevieve's life changes when her parents are killed in a fire at the Field of the Cloth of Gold and King Henry VIII decides she is to be reborn as a spy, his own "beautiful weapon". Raised in seclusion, by a cold and callous woman she knows as her aunt, Genevieve is taught how to decipher messages, weaponry and languages. Also brainwashed into believing King Francois I killed her parents and that King Henry VIII is an all-powerful supreme being, she would do anything to avenge her family and please her benefactor, which means infiltrating the court of Francois I as a lady in waiting to Anne d'Heilly, the king's mistress.

But Francois I is not the monster she had been expecting. A learned man and patron of the arts, Francois is a true Renaissance king and the fact that he is also charming, generous and sincere is unarming to Genevieve. She had been bred to believe the worst of this man and here he was slowly becoming a father figure to her,

causing Genevieve to question her mission and torn between the two biggest forces in her life.

To Serve a King is a thoroughly enjoyable and engrossing read! I loved the quotes that began every chapter, the characters were well developed and the descriptions of Francois' opulent court were breathtaking. I loved reading about Francois I and now want to know more about him. A fast paced read with a clever and tenacious protagonist, I found it hard to put down! Any fan of historical mysteries will love this exciting read by Donna Russo Morin!

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### **Tessa says**

I did really enjoy this book, and I found the author's descriptive skills quite brilliant at points. The biggest let down was the ending. It felt rushed, like a deadline was fast approaching and she needed a quick, solve-all ending. I was especially unhappy with the character development of her future husband--for such an important role he fills at the end he is not mentioned much. It just all seemed too clean cut.

What was surprising as well was that I didn't feel her urgency as a spy very often. This I cannot account for, since the author seems to have kept that plot in the forefront. I just seemed to feel some essential emotion missing.

Otherwise the research for this novel was brilliant, and I appreciate the author's note at the end describing the historical events the novel was based off of. Overall a very charming novel.

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### **Christina (Confessions of a Book Addict) says**

As a child, Genevieve learned that her enemy is Francois, the King of France. She has been told that he is responsible for her parents' death and in turn, she make it her life's work to avenge their death. Her aunt raises her to be unconventional. She learns how to read and decipher codes, how to hunt and kill, and how to shoot an arrow expertly all while masking these talents with innocence, charm, and beauty. Henry VIII enlists her as a spy in the French Court and she becomes a maid of honor to the King's mistress. During her time at the French Court, she is put into many compromising situations and difficult circumstances; however, she must remember why she is there in the first place. Donna Russo Morin's To Serve a King is an exciting tale that transports readers to a world full of opulence, deception, and suspense. Fans of historical fiction will love living in this exciting world!

The heroine of the story, Genevieve, is before her time. She possesses the ability to shoot an arrow with the best of them and also exude charm like the other courtiers. Clearly, she is the perfect combination of feistiness and beauty. She is not just a pretty face at court and part of the fun is how, initially, many people underestimate her.

Also, Russo Morin brings the time period to life through her her descriptions, which I thoroughly enjoyed. Whether she was describing a fancy dress, a specific setting, or the furniture in a particular room, it was extremely vivid.

I am mostly familiar with stories involving the Tudors, so I was pleasantly surprised to learn more about the French Court. Russo Morin recreates the French Court, which is just as fascinating as the Tudor Court. I

really liked how she incorporated many famous figures into the plot, such as Nostradamus, which made it even more historically accurate. Being familiar with Tudor history and lately, a bit bored by many books focusing on Henry VIII, To Serve a King was an interesting and a welcomed change.

Fans of historical fiction will love To Serve a King, because it has historical settings that truly come to life, it has a nest of intrigue, exciting romance and a lot of suspense. Donna Russo Morin is a "new-to-me" author and I plan on checking out her other novels--The Courtier's Secret, which also takes place in France and The Secret of the Glass, which takes place in 17th century Venice. Yes, please! There's nothing like curling up with a fascinating historical fiction when it's cold outside. It's the perfect escape!

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### **Lizzie says**

Just released in bookstores everywhere as of January 25th 2011 in paperback this one is meant for the intrigue lovers. "To Serve a King" delves into the notably renaissance inspired court of King Francis I of France. His court was overflowing with spies, beautiful women, men, and artists. I love the French court and this novel covers many of the aspects I so dearly enjoy reading. I really was fascinated with Donna's previous novel "The Secret of the Glass" but I found this novel distinctly different from her previous release. I much enjoyed the change of pace and bravo Donna for adding twists that this must know it all reader never saw coming.

Genevieve Gravois tragically lost her parents in a fire at the glorious once in a millennium meeting of two of history's most monumental kings of Europe. King Henry VIII of England and King Francois I of France meet in the event known as "the field of cloth and gold" it was meant to strengthen the friendship between the two kings following the Anglo-French treaty of 1514. Left parentless under abnormal circumstances Genevieve is taken in by her aunt who from what I summarized was one of King Henry's spies. Henry's brilliant plans for the two year old orphaned child was for her to become his stealthiest and deadliest spy he ever deployed against his longtime friend enemy the King of France Francois I.

When the timing was perfect Genevieve was sent to the French court leaving behind an emotionally frigid aunt on her death bed. The French court was where her duties lie and Genevieve found ease in infiltrating Francois' most beloved courtier's lives. Being sent to court under the pretense that her grandmother paid for her a position at court, Genevieve became lady in waiting to the stunning king's mistress the Duchess Anne de Pisseleau. In France it was customary for the mistress to be the leading lady at court that was nothing new. The mistresses were the ones with all the real power and they possessed more pull than even the queen. Genevieve never expected to become a real part of the elite royal click. No matter what she had a mission to serve her true king and nothing not even the people she grew to love would stand in the way of her duty.

Heart and mind torn asunder Genevieve was torn between two worlds. Turn her back on Henry or love the man she was brought up to despise, she had to make her bed and lie in it. There was only one choice; she had to decide if she was French or English and there would be no going back.

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### **Becky says**

I think my fatal mistake was reading the synopsis and assuming this would be a bit like Grave Mercy. It's not.

On the plus side, it's obvious that the author did a lot of research and this is reflected in the text. This is a treat when it comes to descriptions of the tents at the Field of the Cloth of Gold, or the everyday amusements of the French court. On the other hand, the story seemed unfocused and lacking in suspense or drama, few of the characters were compelling, and the writing rarely escaped purple prose territory.

Beginning with the writing, the author often seems to get carried away with descriptions. She's definitely more of a teller than a shower. There's little moderation in the use of adjectives, similes, alliteration, fancy turns of phrase and elaborate synonyms. This at times makes the book exhausting to read. "Aperture" always seems preferred over "entrance"; it's not "drinking" but "imbibing", and so on. And sometimes phrases don't quite make sense, for example when two people are noted as being "confounded in their apprehension".

There are some sentences which just made me laugh:

"Beside him, a slight man brandished a satisfied sneer as he scissored his short legs, hurrying to keep up."

"Henry rubbed at his midsection, a replete resounding belch coaxed forth from the embroidered brocade-covered protuberance."

"Smudgy gray dawn light hovered through the open curtains of the window, throwing their faces into shadowy masks of surreal specters."

Meanwhile the story randomly jumps forward in time and perspective with little cohesion, and copious amounts of text are devoted to characters and events which have no relevance to the plot. It was also frustrating that Genevieve's spying and deadly skills didn't actually have much to do with most of the book despite forming the main premise. You'd think espionage in the court of a man you despise would be quite thrilling and provide reams and reams of potentially exciting plot developments, and yet Genevieve just feels like a small addendum to a slice of life historical novel. And despite the fact Genevieve seems curiously inept at performing the job she's been trained to do since she was two years old, and she really ought to be scrutinised more closely (view spoiler), she's never credibly threatened with discovery and any conflicts she has, such as with Jecelyn, are magically resolved. The narration seems to suck any suspense out of the few exciting developments in the plot.

And... (sigh), I hate to bring this up, but Genevieve doesn't have much agency at all and she does have a lot of hallmarks of a Mary Sue. Platinum curls and *violet* eyes; the only person who genuinely seems to dislike her is just jealous because of Genevieve's unique looks; she's apparently better at archery than even a Scottish guard, and she manages to kill an enormous boar or something with one shot (view spoiler); she manages to fool everyone into thinking she's the perfect courtier despite being awkward and anxious; and she easily gains the favour of several men, including (view spoiler); and despite being trained to kill people, (view spoiler).

This on top of the fact that the main romance (and the man it was with) felt poorly developed (view spoiler). The ending, also, was rushed and poorly explained; I turned the page and thought, "What, that's it?!"

In the end, if you're looking for an exciting female-led historical spy novel like *Grave Mercy*, don't look here. If you are interested in the French court and French politics at the time of this book, this may be the book for you.

## Erin says

In the “Century of Giants,” Henry VIII of England, Holy Roman Emperor Charles V of Spain, and King Francois of France engaged in a game of treachery, using all who stood to serve them in their “struggle for power and glory at all levels.” The least of their pawns was little Genevieve de Hainaut Gravois, an infant orphaned by an act perfidious politics. Sent to the care of her French aunt, Madame de Montlhery by King Henry VIII of England, she was taught the arts of espionage and warfare to the purpose of bringing down the house of d’Orleans and ensuring a permanent division between France and Spain.

From a young age, Genevieve had a deep seated hatred for King François planted and nurtured. Told that Francois was the cause of her parents’ deaths, she never questioned her allegiance to Henry of England nor the long paternal letters of support and love she received from her Sire. With a life’s mission in her mind and the love of a benevolent king in her heart, she learned to shoot arrows with accuracy, to bring down the largest of animals in a hunt, and learned how to be a courtier in order to be placed right in the heart of her enemy’s court. Coming of age, Genevieve’s efforts come to fruition as she is taken into the service of Anne de Pisseleu d’Heilly, Duchess d’Etampes, King Francois’ mistress and advisor.

But, much to Genevieve’s dismay, King Francois’ court and the king himself do not match the stories she had been told all her life. Unsure which is reality, Genevieve must make a choice that has the potential of changing the European political landscape for generations to come.

In *To Serve a King*, Donna Russo Morin paints a very vivid portrait of the royal struggles that plagued Europe during the times of Henry VIII and Francois I. While Genevieve is a fictional character, she fits right in with the historical players in this saga and depicts clearly how the giants of Europe fought their game of crowns, enveloping even the least of their subjects into the struggle. Well written and intriguing, Morin proves that she is a contender in the wildly popular historical fiction genre.

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## Jenny Q says

4.5 Stars. Genevieve arrives at the court of Francois I with only one purpose: to destroy him. Embittered against him from an early age, and encouraged by her protector, King Henry VIII, Genevieve has been schooled in the art of espionage with that purpose in mind. But her training had one big drawback: it was carried out in relative isolation, and Genevieve's first problem upon arriving at court is her struggle to adapt to the social interaction of a courtier's life. But she soon catches on and settles into her new role as lady-in-waiting, and her new role as Henry's spy in an enemy court.

At first it is very easy to carry out her duty, faithfully passing along any information she believes may be of value to Henry. She worships him with the pitiable steadfastness of a girl starved for affection, clinging to the smallest notice from him. Helping her along is her ability to quickly discern the dark undercurrents moving beneath the glittering, enlightened elegance of the the French court. As a lady-in-waiting to the king's mistress and closest confidant, the duchess d'Etampes, she is witness to the battle of wills between the duchess and the king's most trusted advisor, the constable Montmorency; and to the rivalry between the duchess and the Dauphin's mistress, Diane de Poitiers. If that isn't enough, throw in two jealous, jilted wives--Queen Eleanor and the Dauphine, Catherine de Medici--and you've got one seething hotbed of power struggles, paranoia, and intrigue.

As the weeks go by, Genevieve's mission becomes more difficult. She begins to form attachments at court, and she begins to see Francois in a new light. She starts to question her beliefs, and Henry's motives. But

she's got another problem. She's become a bit careless, and the king's constable becomes convinced there's a spy in the king's court. When his investigation hits too close to home, Genevieve is forced to take drastic measures to protect herself, measures that have tragic consequences. At this point the story becomes very suspenseful. As the net tightens around Genevieve, Henry asks her to carry out her final task, and the story races along to a very surprising ending that really bumped the book up a notch in my estimation. I'd picked up a couple of little clues along the way, but I was not at all prepared for what actually went down. It's not often that an author can do that to me!

Ms. Morin writes with a natural, easy style and I really enjoyed reading about Francois I. It was very refreshing to get a view of Henry VIII from a rival's point of view, and Ms. Morin is a born storyteller. Filled with sparkling period detail, realistic, compelling characters, romance, suspense, and a few surprises, *To Serve a King* has everything I like in a book! (And a great author's note that prompted me to want to learn much more about the historical figures central to this story.) I look forward to reading her other novels.

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### **Mercedes Rochelle says**

It's always a happy day when an impulse purchase pays off. I was a stranger to Donna Russo Morin, but I don't see many novels taking place in Francis I's court, so I was intrigued. This was a fascinating tale about a girl whose whole life was based on a lie, and who anguished over her mission in the face of too many contradictions. It was King Henry VIII himself who orchestrated this travesty, giving orders for Genevieve to be raised and trained to kill his rival King Francis when the need arose. She was placed in the household of the king's mistress Anne de Pisseleu, and despite her best intentions to remain aloof while spying on the king, Genevieve was caught up by the kindness of those around her—including Francis. Her master, Henry VIII, was a shadowy figure to her, but he represented kindness, generosity, and above all, revenge for her parents' death.

Our heroine was close enough to events to give us a lively glimpse of the French court in all its finery—and its politics. Most of the story takes place in the later years of Francis's life, when the burden of government has taken its toll; the elderly king is wiser and more sympathetic now, and even a little frail. Genevieve has to try harder and harder to remind herself that he is the villain she was taught to believe. All the characters in the novel were historical—with the exception of Genevieve, her lover, and, I assume, the other ladies-in-waiting. I really got a sense that I was there at court, and the story took enough twists and turns to keep me interested all the way to the end. It was a very enjoyable read.

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### **Rio (Lynne) says**

I don't think I've ever abandoned a book so soon.....25 pages in and this is just ridiculous from the plot to the characterizations. Maybe it gets better, but this isn't for me. I don't mind fluff, but I have to find it believable.

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