



Old Flames

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Brilliantly evoking the intrigue of the Cold War and 1950s London, John Lawton's thrilling sequel to *Black Out* takes Inspector Troy deep into the rotten heart of MI6, the distant days of his childhood, and the dangerous arms of an old flame: Larissa Tosca, late of the U.S. Army, later still of the KGB.

It is April 1956, and an official visit to Britain by Soviet leaders Khrushchev and Bulganin is unexpectedly interrupted when a mutilated body is found under the hull of Khrushchev's ship in Portsmouth Harbor. Is the dead man a Royal Navy diver or the corpse of Arnold Cockerell, a furniture salesman with a mysterious source of income? As the mystery deepens, the inexplicable murders continue, leading Troy to an unforgettable discovery.

Old Flames Details

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Author : John Lawton

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From Reader Review Old Flames for online ebook

Daniel Tebb says

I really didn't get on with this book at all. I found it too slow going and could have done with being brutally edited. There was far too much description and just not enough plot. Underneath it all there was possibly a great thriller here but it just didn't grab me.

Jak60 says

The novel is set against the background of the Suez crisis simmering and the wider scenario of the British empire decadence. Old Flames is not a classic spy story: Freddy Troy is no spook, he's a copper who actually despises spooks. But his family, his story, his job bring him in frequent contact with the world of intelligence. So you will not find here the typical tradecraft stuff à la Deighton or McCarry, but rather a thick and complex plot made of police investigations crossing paths with politics and espionage. Lawton is pretty good at weaving a fabric of fragments of stories and many characters, all with depth, intensity and texture.

This is the third book by John Lawton I read and the first of the Troy series, and I can state he's a much more interesting character than the Wilderness of the homonymous series.

If I have to find a flaw in this book is that the plot is so complex that I got almost lost in it; then all the pieces fall nicely in place at then end, but the way Troy unravels the mystery is almost miraculous.

Kirsten says

Classic spy novel. Incredibly complex with wickedly clever word play. The plot is a delicious onion with layers that you try to anticipate the taste of, but cannot fully fathom.

Steven Z. says

The year is 1956 and the Cold War is in full bloom when Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev visits England in an attempt to show the “softer” side of the Russian regime three years following Stalin’s death. London is still recovering from the damage caused by German bombing from World War II and the Suez Crisis permeates the background of British politics. This is the setting of John Lawton’s novel, OLD FLAMES, the second iteration of his Inspector Frederick Troy of Scotland Yard Series. The novel opens with the escape of a female spy from Moscow, with the interesting name of “Major.” She disappears from the story until midway through the plot when she reemerges in a very powerful manner.

Lawton’s protagonist is called to return from a three-week vacation and report to his London office. It seems two members of the Special Branch have been killed in an automobile accident and Troy’s talents are needed to become part of the security detail for the upcoming visit of Marshal Nikolai Bulganin and Soviet First Secretary Nikita Khrushchev to London. Troy has been chosen in part because of his Russian language skills, and his spy craft. A number of fascinating characters appear throughout the novel. Historical figures

such as Prime Minister Anthony Eden, Winston Churchill, Gamal Abdul Nasser, President Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Cambridge Five, a number of other British officials, in addition to the aforementioned Russian leaders. Lawton creates a series of fictional characters who carry the plot; Rodyon Troy, Frederick Troy's brother who is the "shadow foreign minister" and member of the British Labour Party, Frederick's sisters Masha and Sasha, Nikolai Troisty, Frederick's uncle, Arnold Cockerell, furniture salesman or spy, Masha's husband, Lawrence, the owner of the Sunday Post, Angus Pakenham, an accountant who was a RAF war hero who lost his leg trying to escape from Colditz, Inspector Norman Cobb of the Special Branch, a man most cannot tolerate, most importantly, Larissa Dimitrovna Tosca, KGB, Fredrick's former lover, spouse, among many identities.

Lawton provides a view of recent Russian history through the perceptive eyes of Frederick Troy (Troy). Troy reminisces about his Russian roots as he traces the rise of Khrushchev's rise to power as rumors abound concerning a speech that may have denounced Stalin. Lawton's command of history is top drawer as is exemplified by his commentary concerning Eden's rise to 10 Downing Street, a position he trained for and was heir apparent for years until Churchill finally let loose of the reins.

The author's command of Cold War jargon ie; the bomb is accurate as his description of Khrushchev's uncouth behavior and folksy peasant persona. The pompousness of British officials is unmistakable as Russian leaders are ferried around London. The accuracy is on further display with the description of the Russian First Secretary's speech at a state dinner bringing up standard complaints relating to 1919, 1930s appeasement, and facing Hitler by themselves. The British response is fairly even handed, but it will enrage the Soviet leader who storms out of the dinner setting a remarkable interchange between Khrushchev and Troy. After leaving the dinner Troy will comply with the First Secretary's request with an unofficial tour of London. They will visit the underground, a number of pubs, and many sites. It is a fascinating display of historical dialogue that is one of the most important components of the book as Lawton applies his expertise of artistic license and counter factual history. Lawton's portrayal of Khrushchev is rather sympathetic in light of his previous history dealing with collectivization under Stalin in the Ukraine and other crimes. The Russian leader will conclude that the British people are somewhat "boring."

Troy's own Russian background is explored in detail particularly the role of his father, a former Menshevik, who arrived in London in 1910 and purchased the Hertfordshire mansion, and left his family a significant amount of wealth after he died in 1943. A major question for the Troy family is what role their father played in Russia and was he loyal to his new country or did he spy against England during World War II.

Lawton conveys the plight of the British people in the post war years very accurately throughout the book. Repeated references to the German "blitz" in 1940 and the carnage to historical sites highlight the damage that remains in the mid-1950s in addition to the lack of food staples for the general population. The problems of English "workman" are described in detail and the political debate between Conservative and Labour Party members over their plight is an ongoing theme. As Lawton conveys his story his repeated references to film and literature are a wonderful addition.

There are a number of plot lines that swirl throughout the book that center on the role of Nikolai Troisty, Troy's father's younger brother who emigrated from Russia also in 1910 but though retired, was an expert on ships, planes, bombs, and rockets. In addition, a British frogman died while examining the Russian ship that conveyed Russian leaders to London – what was his identity, and was he a British spy? Where was Arnold Cockerell, who was either dead or just disappeared, or did Cockerell kill his auditor George Jessup? What role does MI6 play in the Cockerell fiasco? How do Russian spies and their actions influence events? Further, the appearance of Lois Teale or perhaps her name was M/SGT Larissa Tosca, or a Russian spy named Dimitrovna who knew Troy in Berlin in 1948 and how they renewed their relationship in 1956.

Lawton's command of history is mostly accurate as he presents Khrushchev's February 20, 1956 speech to the 20th Communist Party Congress, known as the "Destalinization" speech that denounced the former Soviet dictator. Lawton also discusses details of the developing Suez Crisis as it comes to a head. In general, the author has his facts straight, but his chronology of events is a bit off. President Eisenhower had suspicions about the Sevres Agreement between England, France, and Israel, but the CIA was not certain of its applicability until the Israelis invaded at the end of September. Eisenhower's conversation with Rodyon before the attack is not totally supported by the documentary evidence, but the gist, especially the actions of the US Treasury Department and the American manipulation of the Conservative Party that replaced Eden with Harold MacMillan in mid-December after the British and French withdraw from Suez is accurate.

Lawton has composed an intriguing novel that reflects his amazing storytelling ability. He tells a number of stories within the larger story and in the end, they come together in a fascinating and meaningful way. Troy is a somewhat broken man at the end of the novel, but Lawton has created a vacuum that will soon be filled. There are eight books in the Inspector Troy series with A LITTLE WHITE DEATH the next in chronological order which has now moved up on my books to read.

Christopher Williams says

Thought this was really good. I am liking this series. Lot of spies around here and the appearance of Larissa Tosca who we last saw in the 1940's I think. Very well constructed plot with lots of historical detail setting the time and place well and mixing in real events into a fictional story.

Bianca says

Een uiteenzetting aan saaie details waardoor je de draad kwijtraakt in het boek, met vlagen even een leuk of interessant stukje er tussen en dan met een goede ontknoping die je verrast maar waarbij ik het jammer vond zo veel saaie pagina's te hebben doorgeworsteld. Ik denk dat het boek in de oorspronkelijke taal beter is en ook meer aansluit bij het leven in Engeland, tenminste aan de Engelse karikaturen wordt meer dan recht gedaan. Maar omdat het me zo erg tegenviel na De celliste heb ik niet meer dan twee sterren over voor dit boek. Ik ben ook even klaar met de schrijver. De bibliotheek van ons heeft ook geen andere delen in deze serie van deze schrijver staan, dus klaar ermee! O ja, en dan las ik de hernieuwde uitgave van dit boek die en passant ook een nieuwe titel kreeg: koud vuur. De oude titel is beter te verklaren gezien het verhaal mijns inziens.

Kathleen says

Lawton's Chief Inspector Fred Troy of the Murder Squad is one of those tortured loners who feels he doesn't fit into any ready-made social class, political party, or group. His alienation persists even though his father, a Russian immigrant, did his best to install Troy as a card-carrying member of the British upper crust. That's a problem in post-WWII Britain, and Troy struggles with it every time he interacts with a family member, an old school friend, or a woman. Especially a woman.

"Old Flames" is the second Troy book I've read, and it really focuses on this sense of dislocation. The time is

1956, the Cold War, there's a visit by Khruschev, and Troy speaks fluent Russian. You could imagine Troy engaging in one of those interminable French philosophical discussions with Albert Camus. (Thankfully, he doesn't.)

I love that Lawton did all his research to fit his character into real historical events. (I love that I read this book, which includes Britain's invasion of Egypt in 1956 when Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal, at the same time the 2011 Tahrir Square liberation demonstrations were taking place) I love that Troy is ambiguous and vulnerable. Troy is so smart and nuanced that it's sometimes a challenge to follow his reasoning as he sorts out the spies and crooks around him. WAY more interesting than, say, James Bond.

About those women. One of my (male) friends says that men don't have left and right brains, only up and down brains. (This was in the context of yet another Republican family values Congressman biting the dust after searching for "friends with benefits" on the Internet.) Troy certainly fits this category. In 1950's Britain, despite his single, hetero status and a healthy income, Troy didn't have as much access to sex as single men have today. Casual sex was almost beyond his capabilities. Every sexually adventurous woman he meets pulls him into helpless attachment, at least for awhile. (I'm happy to report that he turned down a freaky drunk.)

Most male thriller writers are lousy at writing about women (e.g. Grisham, Clancy, Dan Brown), but Lawton does a much better job. If anything, he errs on the side of making each and every one of Troy's women a super-thoughtful and verbally adept intellectual, regardless of her background and class. In this way, Lawton enjoyably upends conventional wisdom. But sometimes the women seem like platforms for Lawton's philosophy. Don't worry, they're also gorgeous and super-sexy.

Enjoy Lawton! Understand that this will engage your intellect as well as generate your guilty pleasure response. I suggest reading "Blackout", the first Troy novel, first, and then progress to "Old Flames".

Monica says

Intricately well-plotted and often slow-paced detective/spy novel in the interesting Inspector Troy series. The six books involved--written out of chronological order--follow the policeman son of a wealthy Russian immigrant to Britain, from before World War 2 into the 1960s. This one takes place in 1956, involving a visit by Khrushchev to London, and spins off from there. It's important to have read the previous book in the series (Bluffing Mr. Churchill) to understand who many of the characters are, and even then a good chart may be necessary. Nevertheless, there's plenty of suspense and action, but the most appealing aspects of this series, to me, is the portrait Lawton paints of Britain, and Lawton's literary writing style, several cuts above the typical action novel. Well worth reading, but take your time.

Rob Kitchin says

Lawton is a skilled writer and storyteller. His prose is easy on the eye, evocative, and hooks the reader in early and tugs them along. As a cold war thriller/crime novel, Old Flames works well. The characterisation is good and there is a strong sense of place and history. Where I have a difficulty as a reader is in respect to plausibility. The historical detail, the kinds of relationships between individuals and agencies, the political

intrigue, and basics of the plot are all fine in this regard. Rather it is the many coincidences between characters that I find hard to buy. Every character is already known in some capacity to other characters, or has some tangible relationship to them. The coincidences continue all the way to the end of the novel, with even minor characters linked to Troy or others (for example, the bank at which one of the characters has an account just happens to be managed by a close school friend of Troy's who then provides him access, despite the fact that the character lives in a completely different town and there are hundreds of banks in the city). The story really didn't need this level of interweaving and coincidence, and in many ways it works best when Troy is in territory where there are no such relationships. It's not that I am against coincidence, but rather excessive coincidence. The story is also a little too long, padded out with some sidebars that could have been trimmed back. That said, I did enjoy *Old Flames* and will keep an eye out for other books by John Lawton.

James Murphy says

In John Lawton's "Old Flames," it's 1956 and England is dealing with the Cold War. Inspector Frederick Troy of Scotland Yard is also dealing with the Cold War as best he can. He's older, but not much wiser. He finds himself on a detail to escort First Secretary Nikita Khrushchev and Marshal Nikolay Bulganin of the Soviet Union during a state visit to England. Troy also soon finds himself involved in an investigation into the death of a Royal Navy diver. As if that weren't enough, the investigation leads Troy into a tangled web involving MI6 and money laundering. And to make matters even more interesting, Troy is reunited with an old flame from the war years. I found the book to be a fascinating read and well worth the time spent. If you enjoy thrillers set during the Cold War, check it out.

Darlene says

Spent a lot of time rereading my history from the cold war era to keep straight what was happening in the world. The first part of the book was so full of world events. That plus the England jargon really slowed me down. About half way, it became easier and I finished the book in a couple days. I'm ready for book #3.

Michael Shaoul says

Just too drawn out

I found this book to take much longer than necessary to set the plot in motion. The central characters are full despite the attempt to sprinkle them with a veneer of exotica. Can't see what all the fuss is about.

Kent Babin says

Inspector Troy is back, although not so insufferable this time. Perhaps that's because the book takes place 15 years after the first one. He's an older, more mature version of his indestructible self. The story is sufficiently convoluted to make you wonder what's going on for the first quarter. Plot line after plot line starts with no apparent connection to anything else. Then, magically, everything comes together in a way that makes you

wonder if all the preamble was worth it.

What I liked

You really get a sense of post-war England and the minor characters that populate it. Everything from the accents to the food was re-created with great care.

Once you figure out what Troy is supposed to be doing, things move quickly. The book was hard to put down for the last sixty percent or so.

Lawton does a great job incorporating his characters into historical events. The thought of Khrushchev wanting to sneak out of his hotel for a night visiting real Londoners is quite funny.

What I didn't like

The first quarter of the book was heavy on prose. Whether it was descriptions of the country estate or the introspective thoughts of Troy, I found myself struggling to pay attention to every word.

There were, perhaps, too many subplots. They were integrated well, but I do wonder if they added value to the story overall.

Recommendation

On the whole, I enjoyed Old Flames more than Blackout. The plot was better, if only because it wasn't your standard murder mystery. There were all sorts of political and intelligence implications. If you're a fan of those things, go for it. Otherwise, I'd aim for something lighter.

Forthbridge says

I think this is a superior thriller set in a most interesting time. At its best it is intriguing and portrays an atmosphere of 1950s British austerity as well as a black and white photo of a greasy spoon in Wolverhampton. It is a shame that an editor was not willing or able to cut out swathes of over-written description. Less would have been more.

Christian, Kelanth, Scala says

L'ombra scura, in originale "Old Flames", è un romanzo edito nel 1996 di spionaggio di John Lawton che è un autore di romanzi storici e di spionaggio ambientati principalmente in Inghilterra durante la seconda guerra mondiale e la guerra fredda. Il personaggio principale di questo filone è Frederick Troy: il più giovane figlio di un padre immigrato russo che è diventato un editore molto ricco di giornali e in seguito baronetto. Sfidando le aspettative di classe e della famiglia, l'indipendente Troy si arruola a Scotland Yard, diventando un investigatore della squadra omicidi.

I diritti di questo personaggio sono stati acquistati da Columbia Pictures. Ma per ora non sono stati fatti film in merito.

La trama di questo romanzo è presto scritta: siamo ad aprile del 1956 al culmine della guerra fredda: Chruscev e Bulganin, leader dell'Unione Sovietica, sono in Gran Bretagna in visita ufficiale. L'ispettore capo

di Scotland Yard, Troy, figlio di un emigrato russo molto ricco, è assegnato per essere la guardia del corpo di Khrushchev e per spiarlo. Dopo poco, un subacqueo della Royal Navy viene trovato morto e mutilato a Portsmouth Harbor. Cosa stava facendo sotto lo scafo della nave di Krusciov, e che lo ha mandato lì? È il cadavere che di Arnold Cockerell, un venditore di mobili con una misteriosa fonte di reddito. Troy si imbarca in una ricerca che lo porta nel cuore marcio del MI6, ai giorni lontani della sua infanzia e nelle pericolose braccia di una vecchia fiamma, Larissa Tosca, ex spia del KGB di Krusciov. Così il mistero di Cockerell si infittisce: è lui stesso una spia o è una falsa pista? Si tratta forse di un doppio agente?

Il secondo romanzo di John Lawton è splendido, peccato che i diritti in Italia di quest'autore siano stati comperati da questa piccola casa editrice che ne ha pubblicati solo due sui sette scritti dall'autore. Questo thriller ambientato in tempo di guerra annovera quest'esordiente tra i più grandi scrittori di crime della nostra epoca. Attraverso l'ispettore Troy, l'autore evoca brillantemente gli intrighi della guerra fredda e la vita di Londra negli anni cinquanta. Il libro è un'emozionante avventura di intrighi e suspense.

La storia prende davvero e la tensione comincia a montare dopo le prime fasi di riscaldamento del libro e si finisce per godere la storia. E ci sono alcuni grandi colpi di scena verso la fine. La sofisticata prosa di Lawton cattura efficacemente un'epoca travagliata: popolata da adulti imperfetti che lottano per conoscere e agire sulla verità in un momento di agitazione morale, questo romanzo è indimenticabile. Il libro di Lawton poi è infarcito di riferimenti letterari, musica e film.

Appassionati di thriller, romanzi di spionaggio e letteratura inglese, questo romanzo è per voi. Si legge facilmente e asi fa divorare, ripeto è davvero un peccato che non sono stati più tradotti altri libri qui in Italia di questo bravo autore.
