

The Yen Conspiracy: Jack Lambert Asia Adventure Series

John Lewis

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This suspense novel, filled with all the elements of a successful thriller, is the story of a race-against-the-clock to stop a mad man from carrying out the ultimate revenge. Still bitter about the loss of his family and first love during the World War II bombing of Tokyo and Hiroshima, a Japanese businessman seeks revenge on America, the country he holds responsible for their deaths. His decades-old plan is to strike at and cripple America on multiple levels—including financial and electronic. He aligns himself with common foes from North Korea and the Chinese triads, and a top-level Washington insider. But when a family member discovers his nefarious plot in a series of old diaries, she asks another relative, a journalist, to help stop him without allowing their family to lose face.

This adventure spans two continents and multiple cities, from the highest levels of Washington, D.C., and Tokyo, to the back streets of Bangkok and Seoul. Authentic details of Asian culture are incorporated throughout the story and provide a good sense of place. This is the first of what appears to be a series featuring Asia-based journalist Jack Lambert. Author John Lewis, an Emmy Award-winning former journalist, has lived in Asia and North Korea. He currently lives and writes from Hawaii.

Unfortunately, there are several developmental flaws that distract from what is otherwise an interesting story. Character point-of-view often switches in the middle of the action, causing confusion and throwing the reader out of the main character's head.

Although the characters are not flat, they are predictable and clichéd. Examples include the slightly familiar womanizing, brow-beaten US president, the blatantly racist first lady, and the sadistic South Korean pedophile hit-man. Characters often act like cartoons, as when one character receives serious news: "Randy leaped to his feet in protest," Lewis writes. He says, "That's a pretty damned ambitious and diabolical plan there." In another scene, the protagonist realizes that he is in love, despite having had no relationship with his beloved in the previous three quarters of the book. Somehow the couple lives happily ever after.

Many techniques are necessary for the development of a good story. In fact, technique is what genre fiction is all about. Dialogue should be used as a vehicle to control dramatic pace by revealing character and backstory at specific intervals. Here, dialogue is used so sparingly that its only purpose seems to be to allow the characters to communicate with one another. The result is too much story narration, a trait that is acceptable in literature, but not in commercial fiction. Thriller and suspense fiction require a story to be told through dialogue and visual descriptions. These techniques allow the story to play in the reader's head, rather than simply on the page.

Despite these developmental flaws, the right ingredients have been assembled. Some readers may be able to look past these faults and simply enjoy the story.

ANGELA BLACK (July 1, 2010)

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