

The Reading Guide

Reading Group Questions

1. Over the period in which Crane knew Kitten intimately and when he went looking for her after the horrors in Toungoo, she seems to have many different personas. What do you think these are and why does she feel the need to be different things to different people?
2. What do you make of the character of Elsa and her contradictions – helping Laura to settle in and find her feet, tending to Crane's injuries after his attack versus her later callousness towards Crane and Nelson. What are her motivations? Do you think she is just out for herself?
3. In the chaos that is Indo-China and Burma, everyone seems to be double-crossing everybody else. Why do you think there is such lawlessness and abandonment of former loyalties and friendships, even to the extent of actions that could lead to the death?
4. How naïve do you think Laura McGill is? Do you think she would have known what Walter was really up to? Do you think Diana knew? And do you think that she would have had any kind of relationship with Lee Crane if they had met under other circumstances?
5. Robert Ryan gives very vivid descriptions of the locations within the novel – yet the characters in the book do not seem to react to them in the same way as the reader. Have the horrors of war really become that normal to the characters? Why are they so desensitised do you think? And what makes these descriptions so powerful?
6. The Myra Belle – what do you think about the personality of the plane within the book? How do you think the novel would have worked if she wasn't as big a factor? What do you think about Crane's emotions for something that is a machine?

Further Reading

The Flying Tiger: The True Story of General Claire Chennault and the U.S. 14th Air Force in China by Jack Samson

Escape from Hell: An AVG Flying Tiger's Journey by Lewis S Bishop & Sheila Irwin-Bishop

The Last Flying Tiger by David E Fisher

Flying Tigers by Daniel Ford

Into the Teeth of the Tiger by Donald Lopez

Sharks over China by Carl Molesworth

The Lady and the Tigers by Olga Greenlaw

The Reading Guide

About the Book

1948: Indo China

Lee Crane is an American pilot flying demobbed air transports – C47 Dakotas – across South-East Asia for the highest bidder. He'll fly anywhere, transport anything if the money is right and he'll ask no questions. But his experiences during World War Two still haunt him, and when he meets a woman from the past, memories of a time when his innocence was shattered threaten to ground him.

1941: Burma

Crane is a young and carefree pilot. He's flying P-40 Tomahawk fighter planes for the notorious Flying Tigers, the American volunteers who are helping the allies defend against the Japanese. He's one of the best pilots in the air. But when he falls for a beautiful Anglo-Indian girl, she has a devastating effect on him. As the war ignites across the region, Crane is separated from her by the lightning Japanese advance into Burma. The Imperial Army creates chaos in Indo-China, killing indiscriminately, and all around him people are looting and lining their pockets while Crane desperately needs to return to find his lover, no matter what the cost.

An Interview with the Author

Was your childhood ambition always to be a writer? If not, what inspired you to start writing?

I am not sure about childhood, but certainly in my early teens when I went through first a Mickey Spillane phase and then a Raymond Chandler/ Ross MacDonald period. Then there was a John Gardner/Len Deighton phase. I wrote a short story when I was fourteen in a nightmare collage of the above. It was confiscated by the RE teacher as 'violent filth', which I was quite proud of at the time.

How long have you been writing?

I wrote when I was 14-16 then stopped again until my early thirties, when I began writing journalism.

The Reading Guide

What do you enjoy most about writing?

The process of telling stories.

Which writers do you admire?

This weeks selection (it changes, of course) include Len Deighton, Ian McEwan, Graham Greene, Paul Auster, early Gavin Lyall, Michael Dibdin, Jonathan Raban, mid-period James Lee Burke, Richard Price, Richard Ford, George V Higgins, Anthony Lane.

Which authors have influenced you the most and why?

Many of the above, but the flying stuff really comes from Deighton and Lyall and in journalism Nik Cohn and Tom Wolfe (I still have all those early collections).

What was the last good book you read?

Shadow of the Silk Road by Colin Thubron – old style, classic travel writing with lovely prose and a very humane approach to travel. The exact opposite of those travel books where people take kitchen appliances with them on their travels. I also loved *Rubicon* by Tom Hollander about Rome – I don't feel the need to read *Imperium* now. In thrillers, I thought *Lifeless* by Mark Billingham was a cop writer at the top of his game, I liked the spooky arctic setting for *The Trudeau Vector* by Juris Jurjevics and (I'm very slow here, I know), I just discovered a great book by Lionel Davidson called *Kolminsky Heights*. However, top of the list is *The Last Supper* by Charles McCarry. That and his Old Boys make a perfect combo. They are international spy thrillers, but, like early Le Carre, they just read as if they are written by a man who has been there. And he has.

To what extent has your life experience influenced your writing?

I think being a travel writer certainly fed through because I found a lot of the locations for the earlier books while on assignment. My unhealthy large collection of Commando comics (now disposed of) probably had a detrimental effect however.

Do you always know how your books will end before you start writing?

Usually, although it has changed once or twice during the process of writing and editing. In some cases, and AFTER SUNRISE comes into this category, it is the ending (actually the mismatched dogfight, slightly before the last chapter) that makes me want to write the book. It sort of pulls you through. In the next book, DYING DAY, there was a twist I wanted to try and pull off to make the reader go: 'blimey, I didn't see that coming', and, again, that's a powerful engine.

The Reading Guide

What inspired THE LAST SUNRISE?

Two things. The idea that the British were running a black market currency scam under the noses of the Americans in China in WW2 and that it netted a king's ransom and the men who flew the supply routes over the Himalayas. Plus a remarkable woman called Lorna McAlister who had experienced things and told me her story.

How is this novel different from the previous one?

I think AFTER MIDNIGHT was a smaller, more intimate story, about people picking up the pieces left by WW2. This one has a similar arc, but the stage is much larger, from Burma to China and India.

What kind of audience is THE LAST SUNRISE aimed at?

Anyone who likes a good adventure story with a few twists and turns along the way. It is really a heist novel (pot of gold) with a love story (although the hero isn't sure whether he loves a real woman or the memory of another, lost one).