



TLC SHOWCASE

TIM FRANKS

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Introduction to *Days of Long Shadows*

Days of Long Shadows is a thriller where the protagonist, Jamie Seagrief, wears his working-class mindset on his sleeve as he strives to save the casualties of a nation where power is based on social division.

Chapter 1 opens with Jamie's abrasive nature on display as he is called to a headless torso recovered from a canal. But this extract is Chapter 2 and another side is revealed – a man who reveres nature and immerses himself in it as an antidote to the cruelties of the day. We learn more of the complexities of his life: a childhood on a deprived Manchester estate, a life as an army medic who was sent to the Ebola crisis, a marriage to a beautiful African doctor. So many contradictions and insecurities – and tragedies. But now he is back in Sheffield working for the police – A man in search of penance.

The interventions of TLC were crucial in securing publication. Though Ray Robinson was very encouraging, he also pointed out numerous developmental points in a detailed report. The resultant re-draft was much sharper, with everything written either from Jamie's POV – or Shona's (the female lead).

Days of Long Shadows is my second TLC review and with both novels, the help, advice and communication facilitated by TLC staff has been excellent. My first novel received a more critical report, but with high quality suggestions that would be central to any re-writer. Thus, when I received the report for *Days of Long Shadows* it was a real confidence boost because I knew the report would pull no punches if they were needed. After the report on *Days of Long Shadows*, TLC were very supportive and allowed me use positive quotes from my report in covering letters and, subsequently, on the book cover and publicity materials – All vital ingredients in making an agent or publisher approach reading your work in a positive frame of mind.

My thanks also, to Writing West Midlands for their support over a number of years and to my publisher – Crescent Swan, for taking a chance.

Extract from *Days of Long Shadows* by Tim Franks

Extract – Chapter 2 – It is complete at 1647 words

The central heating had reached lethargy point. Jamie's eyelids were already sliding into several second blinks and he knew a television-induced semi-coma was imminent if he surrendered. But he would never surrender. He hated this sluggishness and his answer was simple. He got off his arse.

Jamie gathered his clothes and equipment, like a priest with vestments and chalice. First, his coat. Berghaus; expensive, but it held him in a bubble of body heat even in the depths of winter. His rucksack contained a notebook, assorted pencils, micro-towels, maps, and two torches: head and hand. His phone's GPS provided the grid references for notes and sketches.

Once home, his edgeland chronicling would be written up in hard-covered journals on high quality paper. Text and illustrations were always pristine; two pens, black ink: one fountain, the other an artist's needlepoint.

'Like a Wainwright's Guide to dogging sites,' his sister had said when she'd seen it open on the kitchen table one morning.

Outside, he banged together ski-gloves, stamped mud-crusting boots and began to stride, inhaling life from the winter night.

He'd always done it. Gone out. The millions who spent their nights sofa-stretched and plasma-bathed were a mystery to him. For Jamie, television was an irritant, soon turned off in favour of books. He savoured maps and illustrations of flora and fauna, as if they were menus of landscapes he might be tempted to try.

Tonight, his walk took him deep into the pockets of hidden green; the spaces forgotten by all but day-time dog walkers and night-time drug-takers and drinkers of plastic-bottled cider. He needed to be tired. He knew that broken, drifting sleep held the danger of infection from the events of the day, so he relied on the dopamine of movement to wash the canal-side torso from his inner eye. He needed distraction; the collision of nature with urban, the green with the galvanised and grime-caked, where plants and animals refused to be disheartened by pyramids of fly-tipped rubbish, or bound by the antiseptic boundaries of parks and gardens.

Winter. Jamie didn't mind. He enjoyed the rotation of light and dark, of creation and decline. He'd hated that about Africa and the Tropics. The sameness of it all; hot and wet, or hot and dry; the almost equal day-nights, the air devoid of vigour. And the relentless colour.

But at night, he missed African skies; big, dark and star-clouded. This sky was narrow; cut short by tight-terraced roofs and diminished by streetlights bleeding into the night. Jamie turned into the blackness of a passage between gable ends, but his LED torch spread across a path and he strode out. Two garden walls enclosed a corridor of total shadow. Briefly, in the darkness, the torso flickered in his mind, but then, behind one of the walls, he heard a chain running, then clanking into stillness, then dragging again across the ground. With the chain came a snuffling and padding of paws. He waited for the inevitable bark.

'Quieten down Kaiser, it's only me,' Jamie hissed and the paws slowed. Jamie knew Kaiser well. In the daytime hours he was a gentle, lolloping presence in the shop that sat within one of the gable ends, but at night, when Mr Abdullah put him in the yard and gave the order, 'Kaiser, Guard,' Jamie was glad to have the wall between himself and the padding Rottweiler.

Soon the walls turned at right angles, stretching into a stark frontier between the street and the unruly thistle and scrub land beyond. A few metres on, close-packed silhouettes of hawthorn rose and enclosed a long-dismantled railway line. Beyond their skeletal arches was an open space, punctuated with clumping grass and low bushes. Shuffling into the shadow of shrubs, Jamie pulled a small square of carry-mat from his rucksack and knelt down, hoping the life of the night would wash his mind clear of the death of the day.

He focused on a series of mounds. Rabbit country; worn grass patched with sandy soil where warrens could run, dry and cosy. Sand beef, that's what his grandad used to call rabbits. It was only later, when Jamie read about their habitat, that he understood why. After a few minutes, he saw the tails, white, bobbing exclamation marks in the dark, casually upright as heads went down to graze. Jamie smiled to himself. He was downwind and still. No cause for concern. Almost by touch, in the darkness he began to write scruffy notes. Look and write, look and write, that was his routine. Then, the day invaded the night and the bobbing white shapes resembled an earlier shape; a shape that Jamie had imagined bobbing in dark water. Any amusing cuteness was lost as Jamie looked into his mind's eye. Then, movement pulled him back into real-world focus as the white tails disappeared, directed down as all heads went up, sniffing the

predatory air. Jamie's eyes were well-adjusted to the dark now. Two, three seconds and fast-bobbing white scattered in diverse curves, all arcing towards the sandy rise. One, by one each tail blinked out as various entrances of the warren were reached. For a few moments, all was still. Jamie scanned the sky for the hovering ghost of a barn owl, but then movement in his peripheral vision made him turn and he saw the fox; its light-trotting, white-socked feet moving towards the rabbits' colony. Against the pale jaw fur, he could see the fox's tongue casually bouncing and, even in the dark, its eyes glinted with a hunger-born alertness. Reaching the first hole, the fox began to dig, sand flying backwards between his hind legs. Jamie watched. It was natural – the food chain in action. 'It'll only come back tomorrow and dig out the young while the adults are away,' went through his mind. 'Not my part to intervene.'

Then he was up, running, clapping his hands and the fox was wheeling away, scampering back into the night.

Jamie reckoned it would take at least an hour of total stillness before the life of the edgeland would return. He rolled up his carry-mat, re-packed his rucksack and began walking. Tapping the index finger of his right hand on the back of his left, he tried to occupy his mind, but when he reached the track and its arch of trees, the world went darker. The torso could not be resisted now. In his mind a young woman re-humanised, slim and bleach-blonde, moving through her last moments on Earth. Not just images, her thoughts were with him too. Jamie walked on, torch-led and steady, but in his mind he was racing, pursued by footsteps and muffled voices bellowing above the sound of his own heart-pumped blood drumming in his ears. His feet moved automatically across the ground. Now Jamie was conscious only of his inner world and it was filled with the sound of predators; pursuing shouts, taunts, threats, breathing and feet closing the distance between hope and terror.

At the edge of the bramble scrub, the garden walls formed a corridor where shadow and fear became solid. Jamie stopped. But closing on his back, he felt them. He stood. He paced. He looked into the blackness. Breathing deep; deep and again, he focused on the distant gap between the gable ends and its promise of light. Holding his breath at the base of his lungs, he stepped into the darkness. Thought-borne pursuers closed in, their breath tangible, heavy with a butcher's casual disdain for the dismemberment of flesh.

Then a chain rattled and pulled him into the outer, conscious world.

'Quiet Kaiser, quiet,' Jamie whispered, but the dog's bark intensified, as it sensed his panic. The chain rattled, louder and faster and, as Jamie moved forward, the thud of paws moved along the wall, as if the enraged dog was following the track of his fear.

Jamie held himself to his steady walk then, a few paces from the wall end, in sight of the light beyond the gable ends, a thunderous impact sounded. Disorientated, almost vomiting, an age of seconds was broken by a second impact. It shook him back into coherence. With full force, the Rottweiler was hurling himself against a wooden gate. Now, finally running, Jamie sprinted the ten or twelve strides that pulled him into the safety of the streetlights where, hands on knees, he gasped.

Suddenly self-conscious, he looked around. No one near. Trying to walk naturally, Jamie sucked in air. He could feel the throb of his carotid arteries and the tightness eased at the back of his tongue as the impulse to be sick abated. Stride by steady stride, oxygen began to win its battle. By the end of the street his breathing was normal and stability returned to his legs.

‘Free and clear,’ he whispered to himself on his front step, but then his fingers panicked, fumbling keys as the compulsion to look behind pulled at his shoulders.

Inside, leaning against the front door, he closed his eyes and became aware of his own back. Inside his expensive, climate-controlled coat he could feel sweat.

Folding, filing, tidying, he replaced all his ritual equipment, then made a cup of tea. He would clean his teeth and shower in the morning. Still in shirt and jeans, he lay on the bed and turned on the news. He wasn’t interested in the world, but he needed speech-based radio, other people’s words to fill his mind. He didn’t want thoughts. No thoughts. He wanted sleep. He wanted his eyes to close without seeing the bloated torso, without imagining what went before. The radio droned on and he droned too; droned out his mantra.

‘Tomorrow I’ll phone Baggage. Tomorrow I’ll phone Baggage,’ tapping the index finger of his right hand on the back of left, syllable by syllable until the several second blinks came and lengthened.

About the Writer

Tim spent his career as a teacher in the Black Country and became an accidental author when learning about the teaching of reading. Writing fiction and non-fiction texts was compulsory during this training and when the tutor reading his work remarked, 'These are really rather good.' he liked the feeling and finally realised he was allowed to write stories as well as read them. Back in school, he wrote to OUP praising their Junior Histories series, but explaining how they could be improved. This led to an interview and a contract to write the teacher materials for a branch of the bestselling Oxford Reading Tree. Thereafter, he was contracted to write a world history series and a textbook on Ancient Greece. Following promotions, arrival of a family and the departure of his editor at OUP, writing opportunities diminished, though he always wrote some fiction – often for pupils, though he did have a short story broadcast on Radio 4. Eventually stepping away from the demands of being a headteacher, he embarked on his first novel, with *Days of Long Shadows* becoming his second completed crime thriller. In addition he was commissioned to contribute to an anthology by Writing West Midlands and won a flash fiction competition that saw his work published alongside Kit de Waal.



Currently, he is working on a manuscript set in 1940 in Blitz-torn London and has recently finished a YA/Middle Grade novel of 80k words that he has begun submitting.