



The Long Firm

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Harry Starks, club owner, racketeer and porn king, is trying to jump the queue into legitimacy. This swinging sixties novel reveals the seedier side of London where the low life met the high life in the city's dark underbelly.

The Long Firm Details

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Author : Jake Arnott

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From Reader Review The Long Firm for online ebook

Carol says

A rip-roaring ride through the terrifying gangster world of sixties London and beyond. Set at the time of The Krays, Jack the Hat, Lord Boothby and a parade of high-profile celebrities, and in seedy night clubs, porn shops, swanky flats and scary, deserted lock ups. Harry Starks is the chief racketeer and with a dangerously clever mind, his menace dominates a gripping tale. A real page turner!

Chris says

A friend lent me this book she'd picked up from a charity shop along with Arnott's second in the series, He Kills Coppers. The novel gives POV's of several characters who knew the main protagonist, Harry Stark, 60's London gang boss and psychotic leader of The torture gang. It's a great read and particularly resonates if you live in London and recall some of the seedier times and infamous news stories around the Kray twins and Richardson gang. Some of the passages of torture are hard to read but the depictions and story telling is tight and fast moving. The characters are well drawn out as each one recalls their relationship with Harry from his early years as heavy for a slum land lord to his jail time and loads in between. Highly recommended.

F.R. says

I'm writing a lot about London in the 1960s at the moment, and so to read both London and 1960s set THE LONG FIRM was an absolute treat. A treat which made me turn puce with envious thoughts, but a treat nonetheless. This is really a superb example of how to conjure up a period. Just through little details, catching the era and the idiom and taking the reader on a trip back in time as if we've been given our very own Tardis.

We have here the story of Harry Starks, London crime boss and contemporary of The Krays. It's a gangster piece, it has all the trappings of a dirty under the fingernails crime novel, but it's also – and probably above all else – a character study. And what a character! Charming, intense and ruthless, Arnott gives us an incredibly vivid and charismatic protagonist.

The decision to split it up into six sections, each narrated by a different person in contact with Starks, could have rebounded – giving more of a distancing effect than something which grabs the reader. But instead we get a novel with depth and heft. One that grips and repulses and tantalises all at the same time.

I've been meaning to read THE LONG FIRM since it came out, which I now see was nearly an incredible two decades ago. I don't know what I've been doing these last 20 years, but clearly I've been missing out.

Veronica Marie Lewis-Shaw says

This an amazing read. Jake Arnott takes the reader deep into the seedy underbelly of 60's London... "lairy"

blokes getting "aggro" in dark dives... Mad Harry, a gangster's gangster ("I'm not gay, I'm homosexual!") with a thing for the soft, young gay-boys out looking for danger, and trying to make a dishonest dollar honest... bent coppers dipping their greedy paws in for a share.

The Long Firm is a collection of five stories, with intertwining characters and new faces in each "chapter". Each chapter brings people and events to their inevitable conclusion, not predictably, but with a certainty and finality that makes one wonder if those poor souls lives were really about choices, or if their destinies were foretold long ago, and all they can do is let the "fates" do as they must, because... "our wills are not our own... we are shaped and ruled by forces we are barely capable of understanding, and virtually powerless, to change." Do we really have no control? Does society make us what we are, and when it sees the truth, turns a blind eye and deaf ear?

THE LONG FIRM was another recommendation from my dear friend, Paul D Brazill... and, I will say this once again...

You will not go wrong with one of Paul's recommendations! Thank you, Paul.

And... Thank you, Mr Arnott... for a superb story!

Matt Brady says

A peppy, stylish tour of the London underworld of the 60's and 70's, punctuated by sudden bursts of gruesome violence. This is the story of Harry Starks, an East End gangster, a charismatic, feared, and fearless man as told by five very different characters who encounter Harry at different stages of his career. Harry is an interesting man. He's a brutal thug, but charming and protective. He's perceptive, a natural born genius at psychology, but he employs these gifts to terrorise his victims. And he's openly gay, though the time period and his chosen profession are virulently homophobic. As Harry explains so succinctly; "I ain't ashamed of it," a platitude that seems to extend well beyond his sexual preference.

It's well paced and easy to read. Hints of James Ellroy, but not quite as grim and depraved. The five different characters' stories are used well to not only tell the story of Harry Starks, but to also tell stories Harry isn't aware of, like a second secret history behind this secret history of Swinging London, a world of dirty little secrets and discrete back alley business.

Though he is the main character, Harry always remains always at arm's length, viewed through the eyes of other characters, and I think that's a smart choice. He retains a sense of mystery throughout, allowing Arnott to constantly surprise the reader with a new facet of Harry's personality. It also removes any of the excuses and self justifications Harry might have for some of his more despicable acts - though I suspect Harry himself would offer none. "I ain't ashamed of it."

Chaundra says

This was the second book on the list for the "law and literature" weekend, and after Above Suspicion I didn't have high hopes. Fortunately, this turned out to be the much better of the two. Set in 1960s London it tells the tale of a crime boss, but rather than the usual third person or even first person narrative, it changes

perspective to a variety of minor characters, who in and of themselves are rather interesting. Not only was Mr. Arnott successful in creating such vibrant and funky characters, each complete with their own style, by utilising this technique he gives us a much more faceted picture of the main character than what might be otherwise possible. I was utterly fascinated from beginning to end and am very much looking forward to discussing this with the author.

Jayne Charles says

What a great book this was. Intelligently written without compromising on entertainment, it focuses on a London gangster from the viewpoints of five of his acquaintances. All in all it's an action-packed whirl through the seedier side of the swinging sixties, a world of rent-boys, strippers, bent coppers and seriously dangerous Maltesers. And every fifty pages or so someone gets tied to a chair. My first thought on reading the title was to joke 'the long firm what?', and judging by some of the subject matter I wasn't too far wide of the mark... Nothing to do with the writing, but my copy had a superbly designed cover, and also featured a picture of the author looking exactly as though he's just spotted someone keying his car. Brilliant.

Bucletina says

La capacidad de este autor para desarrollar cinco puntos de vista completamente diferentes, con cinco estilos narrativos completamente diferentes, es digna de admiración. Sin contar por supuesto al protagonista, mezcla de bestia con genio, que termina generando una sensación ambivalente en el lector. Hiper recomendable.

Al says

I read Jake Arnott's later book, "He Kills Coppers" a few years back and had a hard time getting into it. So, I delayed reading "The Long Firm," to my regret--this is a tour de force of crime writing. Arnott masters the points of view of several different characters, all surrounding an early 1960's crime boss. That the crime boss also is gay adds one of many twists that keep delivering reader interest in this great book. I wish Arnott's later books would have gotten U.S. publication. Highly recommended.

Jake says

I joined GoodReads in large part to get quality recommendations on books. This one, plucked off a fantastic "Best Noir" list, was one of the best I've received. I hate using the "It's like this-popular-movie crossed with this-popular-movie" formula, but this really is like *GoodFellas* crossed with *The Long Good Friday* set in London's swinging 60s. A thrilling read from start to finish. Great characters, great dialogue, great setting...just plain great writing. Jake Arnott published this in 1999, I wish he had a more voluminous body of work.

Godzilla says

Several different stories interwoven around one main character, and the different interactions with him.

The book doesn't shy away from difficult topics, but certainly owes a big nod towards the 60s gangsters like the Krays and Richardsons, many of whom are name checked along the way.

It deals with both insiders and outsiders of the criminal life and how their touching upon that world affects them.

The era is painted vividly, with lots of little news details to evoke a sense of time and place.

You're transported on a journey of development and understanding alongside the characters involved.

There are some genuinely unsettling moments which keeps the book away from picking an easy path through the issues.

Tony says

Arnott, Jake. THE LONG FIRM. (1999). *****. This is one terrific crime novel. It centers around Harry Starks. Harry, a Londoner, is a club owner, a racketeer, porn king, homosexual, sociology graduate from prison studies, and a keen Judy Garland fan. Harry believes that there is a business like showbusiness. It's the business Harry is in. He wants his club to be a major attraction featuring big stars, but never manages it. He is forced to book secondary talent or talent from the past. His biggest coup is the has-been Johnny Ray, who is by that time mostly deaf and dying of alcoholism. Harry performs menace in the lower depths of London's West End and manages to keep his side businesses – all of them on the shady side – running and profitable. Set in the sixties, the author has managed to recapture the feel and thinking of the times to a remarkable degree. You literally will not be able to put this one down. Who Harry is is cleverly brought out in a series of his relationships with four different people, all of whom get dragged down to the same level. Harry seems to have the ability to spot weaknesses in people and have them join up with him in one or another of his schemes. This was the author's first novel, and, apparently, was optioned by the BBC for presentation as a series on their programs. If it was, I'd like to find a copy and watch it. I blurbed his second novel earlier this quarter and vowed to find a copy of this one. Oh...What's a 'long firm'? It's one of the scams Harry uses to make part of his living. You set up a dummy company and start buying goods from suppliers and paying for them on time. When you have established credit, you keep ordering but stop paying. At some point in time, when you have a warehouse full of goods, you have a one-day, everything must go sale. Then you disappear. The profit on most of the goods is 100%. Not bad for a few days work. Highly recommended.

Anthony Simons says

Shocking and gripping; Jake Arnott presents us with a different point of view with every episode, all focussed on the violent gangster Harry Stark.

Arnott makes the whole tale more believable through the introduction of historical personalities; with whom

the main characters are associated. The atmosphere generated through this and the use of other historical, political, social and geographical periphery, is one that belongs in the 1960's, where most of the book is set. This might not be the decade that some remember, however; this is a violent, dark and cynical presentation - probably closer to the reality than nostalgia allows one to permit.

Wwmrsweasleydo says

I really enjoyed this. It's written creatively, intelligently and with great understanding of humans in general and the social history of 'sixties London in particular.

Each of the five parts is told in first person by a different character and between them they tell the story of the gangster Harry Sparks. He's a fascinating character, made all the more interesting because we never get to hear his own internal monologue and so, ultimately, his character and motivation retain some mystery.

He is violent and he doesn't even have the excuse of sadism. He tortures because it makes good business sense. However, while fearing him through the narrator characters, the reader also feels some affection for him. Well, I did anyway. I found myself hoping that he would get away with some pretty heinous things.

He is many things: intelligent, Jewish, gay, the son of a communist, starstruck, bipolar, ruthless and yet also a defender of his own moral code. What he forgives and what he will not forgive keep being surprises.

I've given it four stars, but it's probably more like four and a half. The first four sections are closer to four and three quarters, but I enjoyed the last section a bit less. That's partly my own fault for not being able to follow academic theory any more.

Each narrator's thoughts are written in a very different style which reflects their own way of thinking. That was done really well and may well have been my favourite thing about the book. Each one have made a very good individual novella. Together they created a really powerful experience.

Arnott blends fictional people, places and events, with real ones. One of the narrators is actually a real person (though he never gives his surname, he does give his nickname). It all felt very real.

It's a dark and twisty book with shadows and glorious moments of action. I completely lost myself in it and kept thinking about it and rushing to pick it up and read more of it.

David Manns says

A tough, efficient, well written crime novel set in London during the 60's. Harry Starks is a contemporary of The Krays and runs his own firm with a rod of iron. Arnott paints a complex character, plagued by black moods yet matter-of-fact about his homosexuality. The prose is economical and keeps the story moving along at a good pace.

The rise and fall of Starks is told in five episodes, from the point of view of five different people who encounter Harry, either as friend, lover, employee or all three. Arnott brings to life the seedier side of 'Swinging London' and Starks's calculated brutality is described simply as his way of being in control. We

are invited to make our own moral judgements.

A good read.
