



## Fires of London

*Janice Law*

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## **Fires of London** Janice Law

A killer takes refuge in the blacked-out streets of wartime London, upending the world of one of Britain's greatest painters in this chilling and captivating reimagining of the life of Francis Bacon

Francis Bacon walks the streets of World War II London, employed as a warden for the ARP to keep watch for activities that might tip off the Axis powers. Before the war, Bacon had travelled to Berlin and Paris picking up snatches of culture from a succession of middle-aged men charmed by his young face. Known for his flamboyant personal life and expensive taste, Bacon has returned home to live with his former nanny—who's also his biggest collector—in a cramped bohemian apartment. But one night, death intrudes on his after-hours paradise. When a young man is found dead in the park, his head smashed in, Bacon and the rest of London's demimonde realize that they have much more to fear than the faraway scream of war.

## **Fires of London Details**

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Author : Janice Law

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## From Reader Review Fires of London for online ebook

### Audra (Unabridged Chick) says

Thankfully, I don't mind when historical figures are wrangled into improbable fictions, and in this case, I loved watching Francis Bacon slum it and fight crime in World War II London.

Bacon, a crazy surrealist modernist painter who totally creepies me out (warning: painting is wicked disturbing!), is the narrator of this quick, dirty, exciting murder mystery set in the 1940s. An asthmatic, Bacon was unfit for service and instead worked for the Air Raid Precautions (ARP), doing rounds in London during the Blitz, ensuring blackout conditions were observed. Those dark nights, when his duties were completed, he would indulge in a quick pickup at a local park with an anonymous man. Living with his beloved nanny -- near blind, but sharp as a tack -- Bacon was kept in painting supplies thanks to his married lover, a local alderman, with whom he ran an illegal roulette parlor now and then for extra cash.

Naturally inclined toward trouble with a strong disinterest in police, Bacon nonetheless finds himself forced to work with a local cop when he continues to stumble upon murdered men in his neighborhood. With the Blitz killing many indiscriminately, the pointed murders provoke additional fear in Bacon and his circle of acquaintances.

I don't know much about Bacon other than having a passing awareness of his art, so I can't say whether Law's articulation of him is accurate or irreverent. I loved him -- he was wry and self-deprecating, quick and clever and kind of sketchy, bold and dirty and observant -- and he was a fascinating narrator for a World War II/London Blitz murder mystery. Through Bacon, Law's writing is pretty and poignant, artistic without feeling contrived. I had something like ten pages of bookmarks for a 179-page story -- I couldn't stop noting lines I loved, like this one, from about midway, when Bacon helps a crew of men dig rubble off someone after one of the nightly bombings.

*The dog dived toward the cavity newly opened in the mess of brick and timber before raising an eerie howl. Strange how effortlessly expressive animals are, while we hairless beasts must struggle over canvass and paints and the English language. (p73-74)*

For those who care, there's lots of implied gay sex but nothing overt; still, I felt deliciously seedy while reading. I raced through this one and would have loved it if it were twice or three times the length; hell, I'd love it if this became a series. I so liked Bacon, that rascal, dapper and damaged. Whether 'accurate' to the historical figure or not, Law's Bacon is a character I already miss.

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### Gavin Stephenson-Jackman says

Life in London during the Blitz was not easy, add a series of murders and you've got a perfect storm. Air Raid Warden Francis Bacon hears of the murder of an acquaintance in a park near his late evening off duty haunts. Questions arise that don't have adequate answers. Stumbling across a second body and a police detective who may or may not be involved in the murders. Twists and turns see Francis coerced into helping with the investigation and risking life and limb in some rather seedy locations in London and beyond. Overall a very interesting read.

## Jeri says

I had met a woman awhile ago who drove an ambulance in London during World War II. This book captured the era perfectly. Also captured perfectly is a very good mystery. Thank you Goodreads for sharing this book!

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## Jamie Bernthal says

Francis Bacon was one of the most powerful surrealist painters of the twentieth century and Janice Law imagines him on the track of a murderer in London's gay underworld during the Blitz.

Law paints Bacon as a likeable, cheeky, self-deprecating but startlingly intelligent and sincere young man, troubled by his sexuality but unlikely to renounce it. Bacon, who narrates, is an ARP warden in London. It's 1939. During a blackout, he walks into a dead body and promptly becomes the prime suspect for murder. A detective on his back has a suspiciously specific agenda, and with old friends, and old conquests, going missing, things start to get personal.

This short adventure-mystery-thriller culminates in a predictable but thrilling manner. While Bacon has been exploring the darkest parts of London and the darkest corners of the human soul, it all ends with a huge flash of light. If you know what I mean. This is London; this is the war.

An immaculately-researched and evocative novel, *Fires of London* had me turning e-pages like there was no tomorrow (and 'tomorrow' was far from certain for these characters). It does not surprise me one jot that its author is herself a painter: the artistic temperament, and the narrator's tendency to see everything in terms of which paint he would use to capture it, are authentic.

However, I will eat my hat if Janice Law is British. Slang such as 'copper' is over-used and often used jarringly. Very few natives of London in the 1930s and 1940s will have used this and only this word to refer to a police officer. Then, as now, and there, as the world over, language was more fluid, more dynamic. Slang is a tricky thing to get the hang of, and only the strongest writers can pull it off. Passages like this were genuinely distracting: 'Oh, there were all manner of deviants [...] and a good many pleasant chaps who wanted to buy me drinks and fondle my bum, so to speak.' Brian Sewell aside, I defy you to find anyone who has ever spoken like that!

Writing about corruption, networking, light and dark (on all levels), and secrets, though, Janice Law is in her element. I have a suspicion that Francis Bacon will be thrown into more exploits. And people will want to read all about them.

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## Otto Penzler says

Janice Law is an author of more than a dozen mystery novels, including the Edgar-nominated *The Big Pay-Off*. She also writes short stories (one was an Edgar-winner) for top magazines, including *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*. Her most recent novel, *Fires of London*, is based on the life of Francis Bacon, a British

painter during WWII. The story follows Bacon from his life before the war, when he was famous for his extravagance, to the reality of the outbreak of the war, when he is employed as a warden for the ARP. Instead of traveling abroad and attending parties, he moves in with his old nanny, a lovely, vivid character who is full of life. Disaster strikes when he is patrolling the dark and dangerous wartime streets one night. In the park he finds a man with his head smashed in, quickly realizing that a killer is on the loose. Mesmerizing and terrifying, *Fires of London* is a perfect balance of history, thriller, and mystery.

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### **Searight says**

The story in this book is excellent. It is a very interesting murder mystery set during the Blitz. However, I do not understand why the author decided to have the story revolve around Francis Bacon. I feel like it would have been a more believable tale if it had just been some guy. Part of the problem is that he seems so jaunty and I don't know that Mr. Bacon was. Maybe he was, but all I know is that his paintings don't seem like he was.

Overall, it is a good book and I do recommend it.

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### **Erin says**

Find this and other reviews at: <http://flashlightcommentary.blogspot...>

I think I might have liked Janice Law's *Fires of London* more if I had any sort of appreciation for Francis Bacon... that's Francis Bacon the artist, not the philosopher, who is a different person entirely, but that's beside the point. My sincere apologies for rambling friends, time to redirect back to my review.

Not knowing much about the man, I spent a lot of time looking up information on Bacon and his work while reading Law's fiction and in so doing learned two very valuable bits of information. First, while background reading will give you a better understanding of the spirit in which this story is written, it is an entirely unnecessary exercise. And second, I'm an uncultured heathen and have absolutely no business reflecting the merits figurative art be it visual or literary.

I know you're asking what the hell I am getting at, but I promise I have a point. I find most of Bacon's work odd and the rest of it downright creepy. The emotionally raw surrealist imagery doesn't work for me on the canvas so it should come as no surprise that I find it difficult to rouse much enthusiasm when I see it so perfectly recreated under Law's pen. It reads like one, but that isn't an insult. There is literary genius on every page of this period mystery, clearly evident in Law's ability to channel the same disturbing sensations that characterize Bacon's art through her manipulation of language and prose and even I, heathen that I am, can appreciate that.

I tip my hat to Law's creativity and artistry - conceptually *Fires of London* is a remarkable read. I only wish I were able to savor its entertainment value in the same capacity, but try as I might I couldn't get into this one. I say again, the fault here is entirely my own so please, take my comments with a healthy degree of salt. Much to my dismay I was simply the wrong reader for this one.

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### **Debbie says**

The strength of this novel is the feel for London in the early days of the blitz and the underground world of the era's LGBTQ community. But the book's plot including any clear cut resolution or motivations for the murders left something to be desired.

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## Lena ♥ Ribka says

### 3, 4 stars.

There is one reason why I decided to read Janice Law.

There are actually 2 reasons, but I wouldn't have read it if not the reason number one. So, it is the only reason why I picked her book.

The second book in the *Francis Bacon's Mystery*, *The Prisoner of the Riviera* won the 26th Lambda Awards as a best gay mystery and I'm a big mystery fan. **A gay mystery fan.** And I wished the 26th Lammy to another book, the one that has a special place in my heart. It's why I'm going to read all finalists for the 26th Lambda Awards in the gay mystery category and share my opinion about these books.

Don't ask me, why I decided to google the name *Francis Bacon*, my general knowledge of surrealism is limited by Salvador Dalí. And I'm glad I did it. I'm not going to report you everything I found about this painter "*known for his bold, graphic and emotionally raw imagery.*" But you have to know that his painting in November 2013 has set a new world record price for an art auction at that time, after selling for \$142.4 million.

To discover that the MC in the *Francis Bacon's Mystery* is a real artist was a surprise that awakened my interest even more.

### **Thought it is not a biography novel, it is a mystery fiction.**

Janice Law is a very talented and powerful writer and her writing style belongs to the most sophisticated prose I've read but it's for sure not an everybody's taste.

**Her writing** could be hardly seen as straightforward, it is rather like a pattern of the most delicate word's lace. It's fascinating to follow it but it is exhausting at the same time.

**The mystery** was actually good written and there is absolutely no reason to question Janice Law's skills as a historical mystery's writer. She achieved a perfection in the creating of the atmosphere of WWII London during The Blitz.

### **So, why the rating?**

So, **my problem number one** was the MC.

I would have liked *Fires of London* probably much more if I could have found Francis Bacon as a protagonist more attractive and appealing. And I swear it is nothing to do with his REAL picture I had found by googling and that I had on my mind while reading it.

I tried very hard to forget it.

Francis Bacon as a narrator was Okay, smart, intelligent, careful and witty - the first person's POV was good written - but he didn't make my heart race.

Even when he was in a real danger.

**My problem number two** - the absence of sex scenes.

And here I have to ask your opinion:

**WHEN a mystery could be consider as a GAY MYSTERY?**

\* **Is it enough to take a gay person as a protagonist, write a normal mystery and put it in the category of a GAY MYSTERY?**

I thought, I can distinguish MM romance novels from a gay fiction in meantime. But I find it very complicated to define a gay mystery.

\* **How many gay sex is allowed to stamp a mystery as a gay mystery?** How to differ a gay mystery at all? When becomes a mystery a gay mystery?

\*And do the detailed sex scenes unnecessary to define a gay fiction?

\* Is it enough if an investigation takes place in homosexual milieu - BECAUSE a gay boy was murdered - to consider a mystery a gay mystery?

For me it is rather biographical mystery than a gay mystery. Francis Bacon was a gay artist. Of course he has gay friends, but also not only.

You can't reject to read a biography of some famous person only because he had/has other sexual preferences than you! It's absurd!

We can't consider every book where children appear as a children book.

The way we can't consider every book with a gay MC as a gay fiction.

I can excuse Joseph Hansen, his first novels were published in the early 70s. But the Fires of London was published 2012.

I have my big doubts that I can consider it as a **gay** mystery.

The first book in the series left a lot of questions open, it is why I don't think that the mystery would be much different in the second book.

But I'll read it, because I want to understand why it won the 26th Lammy as the best gay mystery.

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## **Andd Becker says**

This excellent book was obviously written by a highly accomplished author who has superb command of the language. She moves effortlessly through 1st person narrative and dialogue. Especially compelling are the vivid descriptions of the environment. Set in World War II blackout London, the book comes alive as the protagonist gropes with the realities of doing Air Raid Precautions rounds in a darkened world made darker by the loss of one tiny light source.

Can you imagine stumbling over a ...? Did certain events happen coincidentally, or were they part of someone's sinister design? Was the ARP warden/asthmatic painter set up?

What starts as a detailed character sketch evolves into a mystery with plenty of action -- running, falling, searching, hiding.

Imagery abounds. There are the painter's litanies of colors he would use when painting portraits of specific

persons. There is the constant interplay of dark and light -- gradations of darkness; explosives lighting up the sky; smoke; fires. The author word-paints a picture of a city in flames.

Through it all, the main character remains surprisingly sane.

I received this book free through the goodreads FIRST READS program.

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### **Lucy Saint-smith says**

When I read Fires of London I hadn't really paid attention to the blurb, so I had no idea what I was reading, and I was pleasantly surprised. The book follows the artist Francis Bacon as he works as an ARP warden during WWII, hangs about in the Soho gay scene and solves crime.

Bacon, as the central character, is well and charismatically sketched and I was prompted to research him further after reading this, which is always a good thing. I also loved the character of his former nanny, who Bacon lived with for much of his life.

I didn't know anything about the gay scene in 1940s, so I found that setting really interesting. It is very tastefully done - obviously there is a significant amount of sex, but it is not graphic or overplayed. The descriptions of the Blitz were very good as well.

Overall, the one big flaw with this book is that it was far too short. I thought I was at the halfway mark, and was very surprised when I looked at my Kindle and saw I was at 90% of the way through the book. I felt that the plot could have used more detail and length.

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### **Bill says**

Exceptionally well written, FIRES OF LONDON vividly depicts Francis Bacon's underground life and forming artistic images during the London Blitz. A fine mystery, so visual it creates its own shooting script. This has all the potential of a best seller and a haunting film.

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### **Ami says**

*I received a copy of this book from NetGalley in return for honest opinion. I would like to thank all parties involved for the opportunity*

Unfortunately, this was one of the times where the fault was ALL my own. Maybe because the story was historical (I wasn't fond of historical, but was hoping that I could like the mystery), I was having difficulties to grasp some of the terms. I wasn't having chemistry with the writing style as well, which results in my not caring about the characters. Due to that, I couldn't really say how I feel about it. Which is why this title will remain unrated.

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### **Maxine says**

Set in London in 1939 just before the Blitz, artist Frances Bacon spends his nights as an air raid precaution (ARP) warden. It is his task to patrol a section of the city to ensure that all windows are blacked out so that no light shows and all street lamps are extinguished. On quiet nights, however, he is not averse to a little 'rough trade' in the park with willing older gents.

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But someone is taking advantage of the blackout to kill young gay men and Bacon has the misfortune to stumble (in one case, literally) over the bodies. Soon, he is the major... scratch that, the only suspect since the inspector in charge of the case may have reasons of his own not to investigate any further. In desperation to clear his name, Bacon goes on the run determined to solve the crimes himself.

I have to admit that I knew very little about the real Bacon outside of having seen a couple of his paintings which I found more than a little macabre. I have no idea how true to life the Frances Bacon of the story is but he makes an extremely likable protagonist with a wry sense of humour and just a touch of mischief about him. He lives with his old, blind, but always sharp, nanny while running an illegal roulette wheel with his married lover.

However, the real star of the book has to be the Blitz. Author Janice Law does a marvelous job of describing the first bombings of London: the complete impenetrable dark of the blackout so intense you couldn't see your hand in front of your face, the chaos, the noise of the planes, the explosions, the thunder of falling buildings, the screams of those who weren't able to make it to the shelters, and, of course, the all-consuming fear.

Fires of London is relatively short but packs quite a wallop in its less than 200 pages. Frances Bacon makes a unique and fascinating hero; the murderer, although fairly obvious, is interesting; but, more than anything, Ms Law's description of the Blitz makes Fires of London one very fine historical mystery.

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### **Joanne says**

Interesting mystery. The descriptions of war-time London during the blitz were realistic and scary. The window into the gay sub-culture was "interesting".

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