



The Information Officer

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For the people of Malta in 1942, suffering daily bombing raids from the Luftwaffe, the British Army represent their only hope of defending their lone outpost in Nazi waters. And it is Max Chadwick's job to make certain the islanders keep thinking that.

The Information Officer Details

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Ted says

British Major Max Chadwick is an architect turned military PR flak facing numerous dilemmas on the island of Malta in the spring of 1942. The rapes and murders of several young Maltese women could further erode the fragile relationship between local islanders and the British who are defending Malta from an unrelenting aerial onslaught by German and Italian bombers. A small piece of evidence points to the possibility that the murderer is a British submariner, a sailor under the command of the husband of Chadwick's mistress. Chadwick feels a moral obligation to find the murderer but also understands the political problems that will ensue if the murderer truly turns out to be a British sailor and this fact becomes public knowledge.

As a full-scale invasion of the island by the Germans appears to be imminent, Major Chadwick has less than four days to solve the mystery and uncover the culprit or walk away from his investigation as per the wishes of his commanders. His search for the truth is complicated by the day-to-day carpet bombing of the island ("the most bombed patch of earth on the planet. Ever."), the involvement of meddling bureaucrats, fighter pilots, artillery gunners, their wives and lovers.

The Los Angeles Times likened *The Information Officer* to a revisited *Casablanca*. I agree. It is old-fashioned in all the right ways and the sense of place Mills instills throughout is spot on. It reminds me of the early works of Len Deighton and John le Carre along with the moral implications of action versus inaction ala Graham Greene. A great read.

Michelle says

Murder mystery set in Malta during WWII? Historical thriller?? Love story???

Here is my take. It was interesting enough and I wasn't bored, per se, because I think Mills writes well. However, I certainly was not enthralled. The murder mystery was actually my favorite part of the story, and I wish there had been more focus on it, rather than on the historical aspects of the war (i.e., the bombings and air raids and such). It might have been a more exciting had he focused on catching the killer. The ending did throw me for a loop, and I liked that. Again, though, there was not enough focus on the mystery and the chase.

What I didn't like? The "love story" (if you can even call it that). The gratuitous focus on sex with a married woman was too much for me. And in the end, she is conveniently removed from the picture so that her pregnancy doesn't spoil the protagonist's "real relationship" with his "true love." Give me a break! And what's worse is that his true love knew about his infidelity and it didn't seem to matter to her. I just don't like things to be wrapped up in such neat little packages. Nor do I find graphic depictions of sex at all necessary. For this reason alone I would have stopped reading. However, since it was an advanced readers copy that I won, I felt obligated to finish it.

So, while I like his style, I just didn't love the story enough to give it a better rating.

Michelle says

The opening of the book starts with a mystery encounter between two unnamed men in a bar implying some significant events occurring in Malta during WWII. The book then falls back to that time to reveal the story. Max Chadwick is the British information officer on the island, trying to keep up the morale and support of the locals while they are being heavily bombed by both the Germans and the Italians. To complicate matters, his friend, a British doctor, shows him a body of a "sherry queen" (dance hall girl) who has suspicious wounds and the insignia from an British officer's uniform gripped in her hand. At first torn about the discovery, he decides to dig into the mystery and finds that two other girls have died with potentially suspicious circumstances. He begins to wonder whom he can trust, and must also deal with the fallout from an affair with an officer's wife and a potential love interest with a local woman/news writer. There is also evidence of a possible German spy on the island. It is unclear if Max can put all of the pieces together before it is too late.

I do agree to a certain extent with the reviewers that commented on the author trying to cram multiple genre/story lines into one novel. At times, the romance/spy/murder mystery story lines get in each other's way. While intriguing at times, this was a much less cohesive novel than his book "The Savage Garden".

Judy says

The best thing about this novel is all the information it contains about Malta in the Second World War. It is quite atmospheric and certainly shows what the island went through during the period of aerial bombardment. Unfortunately, the crime plot doesn't live up to the setting. The characters aren't very convincing and the short chapters seen from the viewpoint of the killer are particularly weak.

Overall I found this an enjoyable, quick read, but won't be rushing to read other books by this author. Admittedly, I was probably expecting too much, as I'd seen reviews making comparisons to Casablanca and Graham Greene.

Lisa says

Psychological murder mystery involving a serial killer? Spy story? Love story? Historical novel? This novel tries to do it all, and does none of it well.

The murder of a local girl on Malta during World War II is made to look like a bombing death. For some reason, a military doctor does the post-mortem, as he has on two other deaths of local girls which he thinks were murders made to look like bombing deaths. He told the military authorities about it, but they did not investigate. For some reason, he tells his friend Major Max Chadwick, British Information Officer. Our hero decides to look into it himself.

In chapters devoted only to him, we learn about our killer. Abused by his father during childhood, he caused his father's death in an auto accident and has no emotional life. He teaches himself to show appropriate emotion at the appropriate time, and no one suspects that he is really a psychopath.

The killer, Max, and all of the other characters in this story are caricatures. Each of the men is a stereotypical British something and the women are little more than plot devices. Through most of the story, only Max and

the killer undergo any character development, and it is not enough to make the reader care about Max or the others, or to develop any real antipathy to the killer.

The dialogue is wooden. The “witty repartee” and bantering of most of the conversations is trite. There is a surfeit of gratuitous jargon.

Every few pages, my reaction was: “lame, lame, lame”! The only reason I finished this book was because it was an Early Reviewer book.

MisterLiberry Head says

From 1940 to '42, the minuscule island of Malta, located in a strategically vital spot of the Mediterranean Sea, played out a miniature version of the Battle of Britain. German and Italian air fleets flew a total of 3,000 bombing raids over Malta during a two-year period. Although a commander as brilliant as Field Marshal Erwin Rommel warned that “Without Malta the Axis will end by losing control of North Africa,” an invasion was never attempted. Instead, the Axis partners resolved to bomb, blockade and starve into submission Malta’s quarter of a million people (who were compressed into a total land area of less than 100 square miles). Vastly superior air power relentlessly attacked Malta’s ports, military sites and crowded cities, as well as Allied shipping lanes near the island. By the unsuccessful end of the campaign, Malta became one of the most intensively bombed areas during the whole of World War Two.

In the face of such carnage, how important are the possible serial murders of several Maltese “sherry queens” who entertain servicemen in low-end bars? What if the murders are connected in some way to a British officer? And, what if the British officer is an Axis spy or abetting one? The British Army’s youthful information officer (i.e., propagandist) Major Max Chadwick is forced to confront these questions and gingerly proceed with an unofficial investigation based on a tip from his best friend, an Army surgeon. Throughout, day and night, the bombs rain down.

In addition to the dramatic setting and dangerous wartime action in *THE INFORMATION OFFICER*, the characterizations as much as the murder mystery keep the pages turning. Max finds dubious merits in both military life and his assignment of using local newspapers and radio to buck up Maltese resolve in supporting the British. The policy with the Maltese-language press--including Max’s possible love interest, Lilian, a beautiful Maltese journalist--is to “allow them a voice, then tell them what to say” (p15). Ancillary characters in Max’s circle of British friends and colleagues, as well as Maltese taxi dancers, cops, farmers and mothers, are vividly depicted. I particularly liked the author’s device of opening and closing the novel with a restaurant scene set in London in 1951.

Sadly, *THE INFORMATION OFFICER* raises but never really answers that most persistent, bothersome question: “What was it about the English that allowed them to find so much humor in men dressing up as women, and vice versa?” (p87).

Betsy says

This was my first experience with an Advance Reader Copy of a book, and I’m happy to say it was a good one! I thoroughly enjoyed this book and I’m now looking forward to picking up some of the author’s other

works.

Thoughts on The Information Officer:

I'm not a WWII buff, and I don't go looking for books or movies set during the war, but this sounded like an interesting story because I knew nothing about Malta's role in WWII. While I realize liberties were taken with the accuracy of war-time life on Malta, I enjoyed the story. I felt the characters, for the most part, were very accessible. The main character, Max Chadwick, was a flawed, but realistic portrayal of a man in the service trying to survive the losses and wins during the conflict. He and the motley crew of other servicemen and women, spouses, and Malta natives painted an interesting picture for the reader. Setting the murder mystery aside for a moment, I enjoyed the story because of the interactions between Chadwick and his friends—their banter grounded the story for me. The love story took second place for me, although it was meant to play a bigger role than it did.

The murder mystery was interesting, if a bit surprising in the wrap-up. (I'm now curious if things like this did happen as they did in the book – i.e. if there is any historical basis to the motives outlined.) As the story picked up, I found myself looking for clues as to who the murderer was and I did not peg the guilty party, so the author fooled me there.

If I had to pick out the things I didn't care for:

- The story was slow in the beginning and felt rushed in the ending. (And I felt that our hero's romantic dilemma was handled a little too conveniently in the end.)
- I'll admit that at times some of the details about the different types of military planes was more than I needed to successfully get through the story. A military history buff might appreciate the details better than I did. But it didn't seem to throw the pace off too much for me.
- At times, the story seemed to jump around a bit too much.

Overall, I did enjoy the story. Slow to start, but enjoyable.

Peter says

Investigation

Mark Mills' books always provide a captivating murder mystery with surprises and intrigue weaved throughout a good plot. The Information Officer is based on Malta during the Second World War and the central character is the information officer, Max Chadwick. Max's job is to maintain the flow of information to the Islanders as they defend against German military action. With an invasion imminent, the murders of local women cause alarm and concern that one of their own is responsible. Max has evidence that it is a British officer and he must find and stop him before it results in drastic consequences.

The historical detail of that period in Malta is very well researched and adds extremely well to the story. It possibly could have been better integrated into the plot so it could have been revealed gradually.

Reading Mark Mills is always an enjoyable experience and he manages to maintain a good pace which is very important for a murder mystery. His characters are easy to understand and create a sense of tension where you know one of them is a murderer.

PDXReader says

I can see why The Information Officer would get such mixed reviews. Like Mills' other novels, it's more about conveying a time, place, atmosphere and characters than about the mystery taking place against this backdrop. From a historical fiction standpoint, the book is top-notch. It's very detailed, and Mills' characters are more real, more in-depth than almost any other author I can think of. The problem is that the backdrop usurps the plot, so at times it drags. Mills gets so wrapped up in painting a complete picture that the book's mystery all but disappears. So, I would highly recommend the novel for lovers of really great writing, but I would not recommend it for those looking for a snappy, page-turning mystery.

Plum-crazy says

A reasonable read but to be fair WW2 isn't the subject matter I'd normally choose & I did prefer it to "*The Savage Garden*".

The opening chapter drew me in straightaway & I thought I was in for a gripping read but the potential thrills didn't continue throughout. The ending brought things to a satisfactory conclusion but it too was missing the excitement that the opening had hinted at. For me there was a little too much military description but that's just my taste & there's no doubting it did a great job at setting the scene....& I quite fancy visiting Malta now!

Alissa says

I normally really enjoy fiction about World War II, and was intrigued by the book's description, since I knew little of Malta or its part in the war. However, I this book didn't excite me and while I kept reading in part to see how the murder mystery was resolved, I agree with another Goodreads Reader who pointed out that this book tried to be too much - historical fiction about Malta's role, a love story, and a murder mystery. The mystery parts were the best for me, and the continued descriptions of the bombing raids, while interesting at first bored me by the fifth or sixth one. Also, while I liked the switch in perspective from Max to the killer, I didn't like it when the detective was brought in towards the end, although I found him to be a more compelling character than any of the army officers.

I'm surprised this got such a great review from Library Journal.

Daniel Winter says

I enjoyed the vibrant picture of war-torn Malta Mill paints, but worked out the 'baddie' way before I was supposed to! Pretty good read though.

Jim Leffert says

During World War II, the island of Malta, located about midway between Sicily and the north coast of Africa, was a key strategic location. The Germans subjected the island, which was a British colony, to a campaign of massive, unrelenting aerial bombardment, designed to isolate the island and wear down its defenses.

This mystery novel nicely captures the atmosphere and feeling of what it was like to be there. The protagonist, Max Chadwick, is a British officer whose task it is to disseminate optimistically-slanted news reports to the British and indigenous Maltese communities. He has to work hard at his job, since optimistic news is in short supply. Chadwick learns that three young Maltese women have been killed, probably by a British officer. When Chadwick's superiors turn a blind eye to the killings, the information officer resolves to investigate.

The historical part is fascinating, even though it is yoked to an overheated plot involving a psychopathic killer who is also an undercover German agent and Chadwick's melodramatic romantic complications. To the author's credit, I couldn't tell who did it until the very end.

Tony says

Mills, Mark. THE INFORMATION OFFICER. (2009). ****. This is the first of Mr. Mills' books that I have read, but I will certainly look up his others. It is a murder mystery and spy thriller set on the island of Malta during the early days of WW II. A young British officer, Max Chadwick, has been brought over to Malta to take over the post as resident (read propoganda) officer for the island forces and resident British troops. He has a big job helping to preserve morale after the incessant raids by the German and Italian airforces. The island is small, but strategically vital, and is under constant threat of invasion by Axis forces. Max suddenly realizes that there is also a sex-killer on the loose, murdering local Maltese girls. Initial circumstantial evidence points to a fellow British officer, who is also, quite likely, the husband of the woman Max is having an affair with. As Max is drawn further into the case, it turns out that the murderer could also be a German agent with his own agenda. This possibility causes the British high command to want to hush things up until the real murderer is found. I found the book to be extremely well written, supplying background about an area of the war that I knew nothing about, and also providing a quick snapshot of the courage and patriotism of the Maltese during their besiegement. Good characterization, excellent pacing, and a good historical setting make this an excellent read. Recommended.

Marybeth says

This book tries to accomplish way too much in one story. The result is a choppy mess. I didn't care about any of the characters nor did I care much about solving the supposed mystery. Overall - a flop.
