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Love and Infamy: A Novel of Pearl Harbor
by Frank Deford
Viking. 514 pp.

In Japan, says Frank Deford in the postscript to his riveting sixth novel, the months leading up to the attack on Pearl Harbor were a time when, "looking back, no rational person could discern the difference between truth and fiction, let alone divine which was stranger."

It was a time when Japan and America, like fraternal twins, were irreconcilably opposed and unnervingly alike, when good people in both nations admired and loved much about the other, when ultra-zealous jingoists both here and there lusted for a war they felt would bring total control over the Pacific and when friendship drowned beneath an unstoppable flood of betrayal and ambition.

In a time so out of joint, it would seem that the problems of three little people like Cotton Drake, Kiyoshi Okuno and Miyuki Serikawa won't amount to a hill of beans. The son of Episcopal missionaries, Yale-educated Cotton was raised in Japan and grew to love its people and culture so deeply that he's told, "You seem more Japanese than American." Cotton's childhood best friend, Harvard-educated Kiyoshi, in turn, loves America, even as a boy admiring cowboys more than samurai. The daughter of one Japanese military hero and sister of another, Miyuki, Cotton and Kiyoshi's early playmate, is a *moga*, a "modern girl."

After working for a trans-Pacific shipping line, Cotton and Kiyoshi return to Japan, Cotton to become a missionary just north of Tokyo, Kiyoshi to honor Miyuki's brother's dying wish that he marry Miyuki. Soon, however, the crushing momentum of political events point the three friends toward disaster. That Deford develops this oft-told story from inside the Japanese viewpoint makes the novel particularly fresh and absorbing.

Ravenous militarists isolate Emperor Hirohito and pursue a dream of Japanese manifest destiny to bring all of Asia under their control. Even the noble naval hero Yamamoto, long an admirer of the West, must ignore his certainty that Japan cannot possibly defeat the United States and plot how to initiate war. He concludes that only a mission of astounding surprise that will devastate America's navy has any chance of success, knowing that even this advantage will be short-lived. Yamamoto recruits Kiyoshi to spy on the American fleet in Hawaii.

Meanwhile, Cotton stumbles onto a trail of rumor that leads to the favorite Tokyo prostitute of Gen. Yoichi Teshima. In the brothel, she has heard Teshima blast an admiral for wanting to go "seven thousand miles the wrong way from the oil." To learn

the sinister details, Cotton leaves his Tochiba church, where Miyuki teaches while her husband is away, and makes weekly visits to avail himself of the prostitute's talents. Through this unlikely tryst, the minister learns of the planned Pearl Harbor attack. Already suspecting her husband's espionage, and now falling deeply into requited love with Cotton, Miyuki laments Japan's military despotism: "This isn't what my father and my brother died for. This isn't our Japan anymore."

Cotton's greatest struggle, and the most spellbinding dimension of Deford's narrative, begins when Cotton tries to warn the American embassy in Tokyo. The novel's theme swells to nearly epic size: what happens when evil, ambitious men conspire to create international horror? For it seems such men control not only Japanese but U.S. policy.

America's Far East diplomatic corps was filled with men politically opposite yet morally identical to Japan's militarists, eager for a war that would break Japan's hold on China and render it impotent in the Pacific. Cotton's desperate efforts to warn of the imminent attack fail through a patchwork of ulteriority, arrogance and obtuseness exceeded only perhaps by the actual historical facts. If Japan attacks Hawaii, U.S. diplomats muse fondly in Tokyo, "There wouldn't be an isolationist left in the forty-eight." America would be galvanized for war. Told that averting the attack would save thousands of American lives, U.S. Political Attaché E. St. George Bowersox, confident that even Roosevelt wants war, sneers, "Sure, but I don't know those men."

Deford moves toward the climax of this saga of intrigue and duplicity with compelling tension, all the more difficult in a story whose historical outcome we already know. With personal and national loyalties fractured and at odds, Cotton and Miyuki slalom desperately through a colossal maze of callousness and stupidity, careening off powerful men fluent in the language of treachery and blinded by lust, while all the while thousands of young U.S. sailors lie sleeping in port as a Japanese war fleet moves steadily across a moon-silvered Pacific awaiting the cry, "Tora! Tora! Tora!"

After decades of eminence as a sportswriter, Deford makes this dramatic stylistic departure with expert command, creating fascinating characters both private and public, brilliantly evoking Japan and its people during this grim era when the best spirits of that nation and ours were overwhelmed by events.