

Spymaster, spymaster, spin me a tale

Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

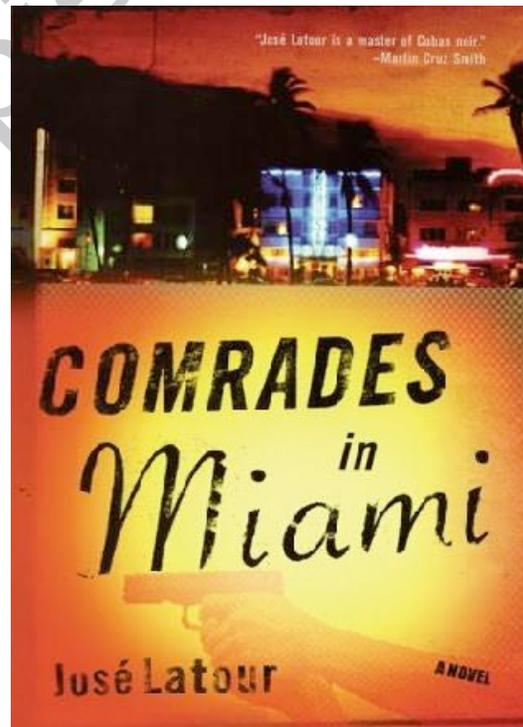
[Excerpt]

Move over, Bond: there's a new breed of spy in town, and they don't depend on good looks and gadgets to outwit their adversaries. When the former Soviet Union fell in 1989, it was widely assumed that spy fiction would fall with it. But to paraphrase Mark Twain, reports of its death have been widely exaggerated. Welcome to the world of post-Cold War espionage, where the plot might turn on financial terrorism, or the internal chaos in Russia after the collapse of Communism. Add to the mix religious fanatics in the Middle East and secrets that have lay hidden since the Second World War, and you have fertile ground for a new generation of spy thrillers. The genre, it seems, is alive and well, and the diversity of first-rate writing coming out these days proves that everything old can be new again.

**José Latour, *Comrades in Miami*
(McClelland & Stewart, 2008)**

Last reviewed in this column in June of 2007, Cuban ex-pat José Latour has served up a compelling tale of Havana-based spymaster Colonel Victoria Valiente. Highly intelligent and sexually charged, the Colonel has tired of life under Communist rule, and she wants out. Of course, as a member of the Cuban General Directorate of Intelligence she is the last person the Cubans want to see defect, and thus begins a taut cat-and-mouse game that offers chilling

insights into the island's controversial rule. Complicating matters (as always) the Miami field office of the FBI has its own agenda, and their plans do not dovetail with hers. Informed by the author's first-hand experience living in Cuba most of his life, *Comrades in Miami* is a fine, atmospheric account of the tension between individual aspirations and the heavy machinery of the State.



Although spy thrillers are often overworked, each of these tales is an exception to the general rule: informed by their authors' first-hand experiences and literary talent, they combine race-against-time and thrill-a-minute plots

with nuanced characters and a strong sense of place to provide the reader with compelling reads, with thoughtful insights on contemporary events thrown in for good measure.

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