

Tampa Gold

JL Collins

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Reviewed by Sheri Hoyte for Reader Views (05/2025)

5* Politics Hijacks a Private Mission

Tampa Gold, the third entry in JL Collins' "Love of a Lifetime" series, picks up the thread left by *Ghost of Timor*—and takes it somewhere sharper, stranger, and more politically charged.

Christian Holland is now back in Australia and looking for a discreet way to move 25 kilograms of gold out of Perth. He finds passage aboard the Norwegian cargo ship *MV Tampa*—just before it becomes the center of the real-life 2001 "Tampa Affair." The ship rescues hundreds of asylum seekers near Christmas Island, triggering a crisis that captures global attention and reshapes national policy. As Christian gets pulled deeper into the chaos—navigating media spin, government maneuvering, and a magnetic, inscrutable woman named Anna—his quiet mission becomes tangled with far larger forces.

Tampa Gold isn't easy to label. While the erotic content is front and center, the novel reads more like a layered political and psychological drama—satirical, ambiguous, and personal. It's not a traditional thriller, but the stakes feel high in quieter, more complex ways. The story folds layers of satire, emotional ambiguity, and real-world history into something that feels personal and larger than life.

The erotic elements carry a colder emotional tone in *Tampa Gold*. Anna is calculated and elusive, and her dynamic with Christian plays more like a psychological standoff than a romance. By contrast, Alison reappears with a quieter, more reflective presence. One of the more unexpected moments—her impulsive sprint through the streets, completely naked—feels both surreal and sincere, like a flash of emotional truth breaking through the controlled facades the characters so often maintain. The relationships here are less about connection and more about power, memory, and deflection.

This novel is not an easy read. The plot withholds. The structure meanders. Some sections may leave readers wondering what just happened—and whether they were even meant to understand it. *Tampa Gold* blends political satire, internal narration, and procedural detail in ways that are intentionally disorienting. The nonlinear arc and Christian's often cryptic inner commentary make it feel like the reader is navigating from inside the fog. But that's part of the point. The novel doesn't chase clarity; it's more interested in the spaces between truth and narrative, decision and consequence.

Politics shapes every turn in the story. Collins writes with clear familiarity about the machinery of government—how quickly it adapts, how publicly it deflects, and how often it turns real

people into tools or symbols. This isn't historical fiction in the traditional sense, but fiction embedded in history—part speculation, part critique, all wrapped in an insider's tone that knows how things really work.

Tampa Gold is layered and deliberately unsettling. At just over 150 pages, it delivers a sharp mix of political tension, dark introspection, and uneasy alliances. It doesn't hand the reader a clean takeaway—but it leaves an impression, and that's exactly the point.