

Olive Branch: A Novel

David Schulze

David Schulze Books

(376pp)

978-1-73703-788-0

Uncertainties lurk about the lines between friends and enemies in the gripping historical thriller Olive Branch.

In David Schulze's historical novel *Olive Branch*, a British soldier residing in France becomes embroiled in espionage.

In the early 1940s in German-occupied France, William kills an American man in an attempt to stop a Nazi soldier. He then decides to help the dead man's butler, Jacques, deliver a letter to New York City using the code words "Olive Branch." As William works to carry out this promise, he is forced into precarious situations, leaving him feeling discouraged. He has to rely on others to complete his arduous task.

Narrated by William as a letter to the friend who once saved his life, Nadine, the book is vivified by wartime images and the lurking uncertainties about the lines between friends and enemies. Moral and ethical questions abound, and the importance of interpersonal connections is emphasized. But William is an unsteady guide through such nuances. He has frequent outbursts of anger, and some are misdirected; he often expresses his need for privacy and his unwillingness to hand over information about himself and his mission, which jars with his fast disclosure of secrets to Nadine. Nadine herself works with a resistance group, although she is hesitant to break the rules.

People's relationships build at a moderate pace, allowing for emotional tension. Still, while William's bonds with Jacques and Nadine sometimes reveal his empathetic side, he is also inconsistent in his treatment of them. He is critical and unfeeling toward Jacques in the latter's capacity as a butler but also undertakes the mission on Jacques's behalf; this discrepancy is underexplained. And with Nadine, William is both salacious and suspicious. The book's anachronistic language is also disruptive, as with "Oh wow. Yeah. You saw me naked, didn't you? I only just figured that out. That's ... Well, that makes it weird now, doesn't it?" and "That was a sex joke, woman. Keep up."

Still, the prose is direct and accessible, and the plot is fluid and clear, making use of lengthy historical descriptions that flesh out the period well. As William makes his way through France, his interactions with Nazi soldiers and the prying eyes of strangers add tension. When new people are enlisted in the plot to get Jacques's letter to America, though, the story becomes less cohesive. Different points of view and fast changes in relationships distract from the action, and interrelational issues sometimes take precedence over the mission.

In the action-driven historical novel *Olive Branch*, a British man is enlisted to carry information across Nazi-occupied France toward America.

JENNIFER MAVEETY (January 21, 2025)

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