

## The Third Man: The Brad Parker and Karen Richmond Series

**Geoffrey M. Cooper**

Maine Authors Publishing

(254pp)

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*A multigenerational story about an ongoing fight between good and evil forces, The Third Man is an exciting thriller.*

Investigators open up a Nazi eugenics cold case in Geoffrey M. Cooper's series installment *The Third Man*—a book that is part spy thriller, part scientific whodunit.

In 1944, Walter, a Nazi foreign intelligence officer, is tasked with going undercover in the US to study genetics. With this knowledge, Germany hopes to create a superhuman army to power a Fourth Reich. In an adventure that involves deception, homicide, and a submarine ride, Walter teams up with a deep-cover agent, Catherine, and the Ku Klux Klan to further his mission.

Flash forward to the present: Brad, a researcher at the Maine Translational Research Institute, and his partner Karen, a state police officer, are tasked with researching an unsolved case involving a postwar German spy ring that infiltrated the United States. In alternating sections, the novel focuses on Walter and Catherine from 1944 through the present day, showing that they are willing to do anything to get their hands on the latest genetic research, and Brad and Karen, who dig into the spy ring's muddled history to discover the truth.

The resultant plot is thick with twists; its mystery is as gripping as it is frightening in its realism. The sections that feature Walter and Catherine, not to mention their Nazi, neo-Nazi, and KKK collaborators, reveal a United States underbelly populated by subversive, racist, and violent groups. While the premise of their half-century undercover operation is sometimes over the top, the book is also blunt in its portrayals of a world full of the hate groups that make such dramatic developments seem possible.

The spies are rendered effective antiheroes: flawed, subject to failure, and evil in their intentions, they're also developed with depth. Walter's drive is admirable, even though his purposes are detestable. And the duo's hatred is balanced out by Brad and Karen, who are their ideal foils. The latter's relationship flourishes in the midst of hardship, and they have a penchant for returning the world to a good place. It's a wonderful juxtaposition of immorality with the incorruptible "good guys" willing to fight it.

This multigenerational story keeps moving thanks to straightforward prose, holding readers in thrall. Much exposition is introduced in the course of conversations, though the book's slower-moving explanations generate greater tension, delaying revelations well. There are some familiar tropes here, including remorseless murders with stilettos and blunt objects and emotionless Nazi sympathizers, but they enhance the drama well. And the end of the book leaves some room for reflection on the connections between the hate groups of old and those that still persist in the present.

In the exciting seventh series installment *The Third Man*, a scientist and a police officer work together to put an end to the Third Reich's remaining influences.

NICK GARDNER (April 3, 2024)

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