

Imperiled

Helmut W. Horschler

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A thriller and mystery, this book contains memorable characters.

Helmut W. Horschler's thriller *Imperiled* focuses on honor as well as romantic relationships and how fear can tear them up. Shad Cooper has a dark secret he's been able to hide for decades. His deepening relationship with entrepreneur Ruth Marceda is suddenly endangered by a visit from retired LAPD detective Burt Draper, who has too many questions about Shad's past. If he can't get the legal noose off of his neck, the rest of his life will be ruined, including his romance with Ruth.

The dialogue resembles a soap-opera script: characters spend more time talking to each other (and themselves) than doing something to advance the story. *Imperiled* also contains overly wordy backstory passages. Each instance occurs in its logical position in terms of structure but suffers from unneeded verbiage. For example, the backstory on a peripheral character named Max runs for eight pages.

Draper is initially Shad's antagonist. Because he's a retired detective, several avenues of inquiry are available to him as a citizen. Other avenues are now unavailable to him directly, so he turns to friends in law enforcement and calls in favors to gather information. His meetings with Shad are mostly composed of Draper talking extensively about how he found Shad. This runs counter to real police interrogations, where the cop initially says as little as possible to get the suspect talking.

After Draper is confronted by Shad's legal team, he backs off and disappears from the novel without resolution. The retired LAPD detective is the cause of Shad's burgeoning anxiety; though he's mentioned later in the novel, Shad and Draper never meet in person after Draper's first meeting with Shad's lawyers. No apparent reason (illness, injury, death, etc.) for Draper's departure is revealed. In fact, the novel's ultimate resolution never appears at all.

The relationship between Shad and Ruth flows from the first page into deep character studies of both. This mode of third-person writing works very well with main character pairs, as Horschler ably demonstrates with Shad and Ruth. Particularly effective is Shad's sudden change of circumstances, from contentment to outright fear, much akin to having a rug pulled out from under him. Ruth is a character of strength, determination, intelligence, and compassion, all qualities that make her quite memorable.

Imperiled begins as a mystery (of the type John le Carré wrote) and contemporary novel, propelled by its main characters' romance. Readers who enjoy mysteries, thrillers, or contemporary novels may be interested in *Imperiled*.

J. G. STINSON (May 8, 2014)

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