

The Afghan File Affair

Arthur Kasper

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Kasper's considerable knowledge of the Cold War era makes this thriller informative.

It's the mid 1980s, and Nick Gamble, the protagonist of this serpentine story of intrigue and conspiracy, is an American journalist living in Italy. Unfortunately, he is unable to distance himself from the dangers of befriending a Palestinian double agent and engaging in a relationship with a CIA operative. *The Afghan File Affair*, by Arthur Kasper, is an account of Nick's efforts to help the Italian and American governments obtain film containing important information about active terrorist cells.

When Nick's friend Dr. Henri Todaro is murdered, the local police are ordered by the Italian government to bring Nick in. He is not to act as a journalist or report anything to the public, but is needed to find a roll of film that contains vital information about terrorist groups plotting against Israel and the United States. When his former girlfriend, Natalia, is kidnapped, Nick is motivated to help negotiate her release. Little does he know how extensive the political secrets spread, even to Italian drug cartels that use the local US Army base as a springboard to sell heroin in the States.

Kasper himself spent seven years in Italy during the Cold War era. He brings extensive knowledge to the narrative, weaving truth and fiction into what could have been a truly entertaining thriller. Unfortunately, only a few scenes actually elicit any suspense or excitement. Much of the story is filled with bits of history of the places that Nick visits, but they have no bearing on the plot. The book is also scattered with photographs that are unnecessary and distract from the flow of the narrative.

The attempts at suspense and thrill are poorly executed, such as when Nick learns of Natalia's kidnapping before the scene where the conspirators discuss their plans to kidnap her. In another example, the fate of one of Nick's contacts is given away by the caption of a picture that precedes the narrative by a page. Beyond that, superficial character development of Nick and the rest of the players makes it hard to know them, or how they may be thinking and feeling.

Nick briefly meets contact after contact, never knowing their true roles in the vast conspiracy, and little to nothing is revealed about the film. This causes the story to drag on with hardly any development. In addition, all these meetings run together without information about how much time has passed, or how long Natalia is held hostage.

The most egregious error is the lack of attention to important details, which severely undermines the credibility of the adventure and the history involved. The author clearly establishes the setting as mid 1980s; however, the Clinton administration is referenced twice.

Kasper clearly has considerable knowledge of Cold War era Italy, and his eagerness to share this with the world is made obvious with the information and pictures throughout the book. The story seems to be an afterthought, a means to share this knowledge. Anyone interested in the backdrop without the drudgery of a history book may find *The Afghan File Affair* an interesting read.

SHANNAN SPITZ (March 12, 2015)

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