



The Dolomite Challenge

Tom Joyce

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This page-turning thriller covers a rarely seen side to history—cleaning up the mess left by war.

In *The Dolomite Challenge*, Tom Joyce's third novel about Vienna police inspector Karl Marbach, investigations merge with spy craft in a cat-and-mouse game that poses the question: What happens when the war is over? It's a story about seeking justice, and it highlights a rarely seen side of history.

Whenever a war ends, the world must address the mess left behind. Difficult questions arise: Who has jurisdiction, judicial and otherwise, over war criminals? What if a war criminal could be useful somehow? What about resolving any civilian impact? What happens to refugees? Joyce's book wrestles with all of these issues, and answers don't come easily.

At the end of World War II, when Marbach is asked to find hidden Nazi gold, it sends him on a treasure hunt with stakes infinitely higher than mere money. He must also uncover and destroy the Nazi escape route the gold is meant to fund. To do so, the police inspector must seek out some of the men who committed the most horrific wartime atrocities and stop their new nefarious plans. It will require his best investigative skills and a dangerous climb over the Dolomite mountains. He must do it all before the other nations seeking to capture his prey find them first. And they are right on his heels.

Joyce has a unique perspective, having taken ex-Nazis to Frankfurt for the de-Nazification process during his military service. He has a doctorate from Cornell University, and taught criminology and sociology to the FBI, police officers, and college students. He brings firsthand knowledge to this fascinating aspect of history.

The plot unfolds and clues emerge at a pace that keeps the pages turning; only a couple of chapters seem to drag. Characters are well rounded, with both positive and negative characteristics. Even Marbach is imperfect, sometimes skirting the law in ways big and small: "What he was doing amounted to improper use of the official Vienna police telephone. ... He was willing to risk a reprimand just to hear Pammy's voice."

The book could use some final proofing to clear up a few typos. Additional editing might have avoided one or two slightly awkward transitions. And the cover art doesn't communicate a historical feel.

Because the book presents an international perspective, America and its military choices are often viewed negatively, as seen in the concerns about the fate of one war criminal whom America might not punish: "If he is allowed to escape justice and go to America, he will be an asset for them in the making of atom bombs." It never criticizes soldiers, just policies.

Overall, the book offers a nice escape for lovers of historical, military, and spy or detective fiction. It's a light read that covers thought-provoking topics and provides a unique glimpse into history.

DIANE GARDNER (June 15, 2015)

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