

The Fifth Student

Geoffrey M. Cooper

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The Fifth Student is an exciting thriller in which the fate of an innocent student is threatened by an intricate cheating scheme.

In Geoffrey M. Cooper's thriller *The Fifth Student*, an academic scientist is swept up in a race to find the final member of a cheating group.

Brad balances his successful career as the director of the Maine Translational Research Institute with his respected professorship at nearby Maine State University. One of his students, Penny, is gifted to the degree that her intellect surpasses Brad's and his colleagues'. Out of respect, Brad recruits her, knowing that she'll be an asset to the lab.

But when a cheating scheme is discovered (five students achieve a perfect score on an exam known to be near impossible to pass), Penny is implicated too. Brad, believing that she is innocent, investigates. He calls on old contacts and his fiancée Karen, who is an FBI agent. When the other four students start dying, the suspense increases: Brad may have to save Penny in more ways than one.

In addition to the cheating scandal, the story concerns Brad's and Karen's difficult career decisions. Karen's new supervisor is keen to shunt her out of his domain; Brad is offered a promising position away from the university that would require him to delve into the shady side of academic science. Though Penny's academic career and life seem at stake, the couple still finds time to bond, reflecting on their shared past, romantic present, and uncertain future. But these various threads are handled well, and the book progresses at an engaging pace.

Stilted conversations impede the story in places, though. This is particularly true with the college police force's chief officer, whose dialogue is expository and runs too long. The prose itself is more accessible; it contains clear explanations of the scientific concepts involved, and it preferences nongory, off-page handling of the book's episodes of violence and death. And the veiled identity of the fifth student in the cheating scheme (the prologue suggests that this person is not Penny, infusing the story that follows with a continual sense of mystery) generates additional momentum throughout. Intrigue builds as the cheating scheme intersects with Brad's job offer; it all leads up to a tantalizing cliff-hanger ending in a remote location.

The Fifth Student is a thrilling series title in which the fate of an innocent student is threatened by an intricate cheating scheme.

JOHN M. MURRAY (June 23, 2023)

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