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The Loki Project

Benjamin King
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For personal glory and to save his country from destruction, Maximilian Lamm, professor of physics in Nazi Germany, wants to build an atomic bomb. Contemptuous of Nazis and their fixation on absurd racial theories, he nevertheless joins the SS, commits murder and leaves behind a wife and child who provided the only spark of warmth to his icy heart, all of this in desperate pursuit of his goal.

His biggest obstacle is the shortsightedness of the Nazi leadership, who are ignorant of science and so blinded by obsession that they have banned atomic research as “Jewish physics.” Still, there are some who see potential in Lamm’s work. With their encouragement Lamm arranges a ruthless but not entirely unjust deceit-falsifying a birth record to give a rival the appearance of Jewish ancestry-and positions himself to lead a German version of the Manhattan Project. His team names the fruits of the project after mythical figures: Odin, Thor and Loki, the god of discord.

King, a professional soldier and military historian who has written two previous historical novels, tells his story in understated, almost history-textbook tones: “It took an incredibly long time for Lamm to draw the pistol, and pull the trigger, but the movement caught the obersturmbannfuhrer (lieutenant colonel) completely unaware.” Each page propels the story forward, and character and motive tend to be established quickly, in few sentences.

Fictional characters interact with historical figures like Heinrich Himmler and Reinhard Heydrich. Each one takes on a moral hue, either embracing or rejecting the true nature of the Third Reich and its Final Solution. Lamm, busy with his work, turns a blind eye. A young soldier fresh from the Eastern front struggles to distinguish between loyalty to his fellows and blind obedience to evil, and he joins the German Resistance.

Even as Lamm moves closer to his goal, the war goes badly for the Third Reich. Bombing raids shred Berlin, the Luftwaffe is helpless and defeat follows defeat. Forces gather in opposition to Lamm’s project, and not only among the Allies. The Resistance, largely destroyed after a failed attempt on Adolph Hitler’s life, has devoted its meager remaining resources to stopping Lamm in order to forestall an Allied retaliation that would surely follow Germany’s use of an atomic bomb.

The action comes to a climax on the wind-blasted landscape around an abandoned mine in Norway. The tale will continue in the author’s sequel, The Loki File.

RICH WERTZ (March / April 2000)

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