

The Spymaster's Mistress

Pamela R. Winnick

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Set in the era of the Revolutionary War, this satisfying historical novel follows a spy as she experiences delicate moments of genuine love and forgiveness.

In Pamela R. Winnick's beguiling historical novel *The Spymaster's Mistress*, a rebel's entangling love for a British captain tests her convictions.

Rachel, who is Jewish, is sent to live with her British Loyalist aunt and uncle in Philadelphia. Her cousin Becky thinks that she's traitorous for being sympathetic to the revolutionaries. Her second cousin David serves as a major under Benedict Arnold.

Invoking the story of Judith and Holofernes, Alexander Hamilton asks Rachel to pose as a temptress to gain military secrets. But proving her commitment has unintended emotional consequences for Rachel. She feels conflicted, wanting both to honor her religion by not being duplicitous and to help the revolutionary cause, despite the danger of being hung. Still, Hamilton's political fervor enlivens their interactions; his role as an undercover liaison is a story highlight.

Through Rachel's and David's alternating views—one steeped in an interior, feminine world, the other focused on progressions on the battlefield—the experiences of Jewish people during the Revolutionary War are revealed, including their particular hopes and strains. In the background, Philadelphia (or “Little London”) teems with British soldiers. From a tavern to its homes and balls, the city is a tense stage for Rachel's uneasy agility at transitioning from one side to the next: she pretends to have a change of heart around Becky, even while contacting Hamilton in secret. And when she meets a shrewd captain, John André (head of the British Secret Service in America), he's drawn to her intelligence. Though his own war involvement troubles her, she notes his better qualities.

The details of how Rachel gains André's trust are entertaining, involving both luck and clever conversations in which setbacks are seen as advantages. Still as she feels pain over misleading her family, her struggles with loneliness are poignant. But the duo's interactions are compressed in such a way that their relationship develops most off-page. André is distant; momentum is lost. Elsewhere, a side plot about a mismatched love affair between David and one of the daughters of the Dutch upper class arises, but it is also handled in too swift a manner as well and reaches an abrupt conclusion.

When Rachel and David's stories converge, his growing interest in her leads to an anticipated twist. And later, Arnold and André's interactions increase the book's suspense, as do instances of treason. The book's conclusion is satisfying and hopeful.

In the romantic, intriguing historical novel *The Spymaster's Mistress*, a woman acts as a spy during revolutionary times.

KAREN RIGBY (January 25, 2023)

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