

Über Alles: A Novel of Love, Loyalty, and Political Intrigue In World War II

Robert Arthur Neff

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This moving and riveting historical narrative is entertaining and readable, and is bound to appeal to anyone who appreciates a great story.

Robert Arthur Neff's *Über Alles* is a fully absorbing blend of history and fiction, an epic-length narrative in which stories intertwine and the encroaching depravity of Nazism looms above everything.

A dense, intricate plot centers on Dieter, a half-Jewish pianist, and Sofie, a singer and music student. Sofie is the daughter of a Nazi general; her mother is a spy and a key figure in Poland's anti-Nazi underground movement. The two young people meet and fall in love, but circumstances intervene. Dieter is sent to Theresienstadt, the infamous "artist's concentration camp" where musicians, homosexuals, and other "aberrant figures" are housed.

The rest, as they say, is history, but this history skips back and forth in time. Enigmatically, everything is not as it appears to be on the surface. Real historical figures, from Hermann Göring to Django Reinhardt, are included; the novel opens with Sofie's father imploring Göring to forward Dieter's Theresienstadt memoir to London. How this factors into the rest of the story is only one of the tale's labyrinthine mysteries.

Compelling in its balance of horror and joy, the book is a testament to the life-affirming power and beauty of music, and to the hope that art and romantic love can bring to seemingly hopeless situations. A low-lit jazz cabaret scene is vividly evoked, in all its smoky bustle, glamor, and energy. Other descriptions sometimes have an element of Hollywood farce—there are femmes fatales and lurid sex galore—and dialogue is occasionally a little melodramatic, though such conversations add to the cinematic element of the book, more often than not.

The novel also serves as a chronicle of military tactics and espionage procedures, and World War II buffs and history scholars will appreciate the meticulous sense of detail and the book's encyclopedic insights into the times it describes. The book contains a useful appendix that helps to clarify the roles certain figures played in the history of mid-twentieth century politics, art, and music. Even without these explanatory notes, however, the book's plot devices wrap up beautifully, and by the end of the novel, everything has been revealed.

Über Alles is a moving and riveting narrative that's entertaining and readable, and it's bound to appeal to anyone who appreciates a great story.

LISA A. FLOWERS (January 3, 2017)

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