



## THE HISTORICAL FICTION COMPANY



Baker Street Irregular follows British intelligence officer Bill Hoffman as he pursues a former SS officer and fights to clear his name in post-World War II Berlin. It blends the detective noir genre with a historical setting to produce an engaging and entertaining adventure. It will appeal to fans of mystery stories and of the time period and is an excellent literary debut.

Most stories prioritize either their plot or their characters, while some highlight their tone or the language that forms them. Baker Street Irregular is plot-driven, which is standard for its genre. The plot is this novel's strongest feature. It is exciting and leaves the reader interested both in what happens next and how Bill will escape from circumstances that would break any of us and how he will plan his next step. The plot beats organically grow on what came before and do not read as a series of unrelated events. This is a sign of good writing and of a well developed storyline.

Descriptive text is another of Mr. Fisher's strengths. Some sections are smoother than others, but this is common in new writers and Mr. Fisher will grow over time. This sample, from the book's opening pages, establishes Berlin as its own "character" and sets the novel's noir ambience:

***He had to assume they would soon have plenty of evidence in their hands. Eyewitnesses would place him at the murder scene. Perhaps he even left some clothing behind. He couldn't recall for sure. The inexplicably absent concierge certainly knew he was a frequent visitor. What would they think? They knew his father was German, of course. No doubt they also had everyone's dirty secrets in a big manila file.***

***He used his finger to carefully tamp down the tobacco and relit. It was certainly feasible that a man with Bill's background might be persuaded to flip. But to murder a fellow agent?***

The novel is a plot-driven thriller, not a character study. We are told all that we need to know about Bill Hoffman for the story to work. He is often cynical and appears to never be in control of his life or events around him. This is true of many people during total war, but Bill's frustration over this lack of control often becomes his defining character trait. The novel rarely explores the underlying cause or meaning of this trait, leaving it to be inferred or, more likely, Mr. Fisher was uninterested in giving it further attention. Readers interested in ambitious psychological portraits may leave disappointed, as this is not that type of novel. The characters grow in their depth and complexity as the story unfolds and, importantly, each possesses their own voice. The following demonstrates one of the best character moments, as it shows another side to Bill, one tinged with nostalgia:

***This place reminded Bill of the library from his time at Cambridge. There wasn't much he enjoyed about university, but the library was one of them. He'd spend hour after hour in there,***

***reading as much as possible. Some days it would be Voltaire and Satre, in French, of course. Other days it might be Shakespeare, Twain or Poe. Bill had loved to read once upon a time. He had even set up a proper library in the house, although, he admitted to himself, it had been mainly to sit among the great works and enjoy a whisky and his pipe.***

For this reader, the section where Bill and his allies are captured by their Nazi antagonists was the most interesting segment. Our heroes are pushed past their limits and we are given some of the most insightful character moments for all the major players. This exchange tells us who Bill and Barbie (one of the main Nazis) are:

***“Take this,” Barbie said as he handed the SS child the scalpel, keeping his eyes locked on Bill’s. “Go with the other guards up to that spy bitch. Do whatever you like with her, then cut her throat and let her bleed out.”***

***The child nodded and turned to leave.***

***“Wait!” Bill shouted. He had never felt so ashamed in his whole life. They had broken him. He just could not let Violette be punished, raped, and killed for the sake of his pride. They would find out what they wanted to know anyway, so why let them kill Violette?”***

Given its setting amidst the largest event in modern history, a reader may expect the novel to contain a political theme or commentary. World War II and Cold War politics are mentioned but are primarily a backdrop to the thriller plot. When they appear they are discussed in traditional pro-Western democracy terms. The West, though hypocritical and flawed, is shown to be overwhelmingly superior to both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union in any moral category. The book says that Bill is largely uninterested in politics but he does comment on it throughout the text. Most interestingly, he rejects American claims to moral superiority due to Jim Crow segregation. Said another way, the politics will be at home with contemporary readers in English speaking countries and are not meant to draw attention from the plot.

The plot is told through a nonlinear narrative. It is designed well but, as is always the case with such techniques, the reader is asked to keep track of when chapters take place. The chapters are marked and will not confuse anyone paying attention. The book does contain some typos and minor historical inaccuracies, including this one, which amused this American reviewer:

***Bill pulled out eight ten-dollar bills and handed them to Albie, who looked down in his hand at the green-hued President Hamiltons, smiled and headed back towards the Gate.***

Alexander Hamilton served as Secretary of the Treasury and not as President of the United States.

In conclusion, this is a very well written and entertaining thriller and mystery set in one of the most interesting periods of modern history. Its plot and descriptive prose are its biggest strengths, and it is recommended for anyone fond of the noir genre or the World War II era.

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“Baker Street Irregular” by Craig W. Fisher receives 4.5 stars from The Historical Fiction Company