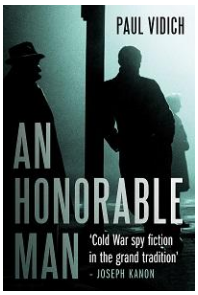

An Honorable Man by Paul Vidich

George Mueller is the only man that the CIA Director trusts with the task of unmasking the mole passing secrets to the Russians. 'Protocol' leaks are scuppering operations and agents in the field are getting captured or killed. No one escapes suspicion and everyone has secrets to hide, none more so than Mueller. Accepting this one last assignment puts him at the centre of a cat and mouse game with deadly consequences. It is 1953, the cold war is ramping up, McCarthy's Senate Committee is creating havoc with wild accusations of communist sympathies and has CIA in its sights. In Russia Stalin is dead and in Washington the FBI is watchful of illegal CIA operations on home turf. Enemies foreign and domestic are in play.

Vidich's first novel is an evocative and atmospheric spy thriller. Not a shoot 'em up page turner, this is set in the realistic territory carved out by Le Carré - the hunt for the double agent. An Honorable Man seethes with betrayal and double cross, mistrust and fear. The twisting plot unfolds in a no man's land of bluff, counter bluff, honey trap and sting as lines are obscured in the hunt for the traitorous mole. Vidich has a quick and easy style, simple prose that complements this dark complex tale. He creates a credible post war Washington D.C. backdrop and realistic impression of the CIA operatives of the time. The atmosphere of fear and suspicion that pervaded that world are vividly conveyed. George Mueller is well drawn as the jaded agent losing his sense of purpose and values, disheartened by the 'game' and hating the life of deceit and it's emptiness. Determined to leave Mueller is drawn deeper into murky waters. Can the arrival of Beth help Mueller get his life back? The opening scene of a dead drop in wintery Washington is deliberately reminiscent of classic spy fiction. As the back story in post war Europe slowly unfolds it gives a plausible meaning to the hunt for 'Protocol'.

This is spy fiction that should appeal to fans of Joseph Kanon and David Young's Stasi Child. A solid first novel, entertaining and thoughtful and a worthy addition to the genre. Vidich has woven real history into credible fiction that provides an insight into the CIA mindset of the time. An Honorable Man is not on a par with Le Carré but it is a better class of spy fiction, controlled, noirish and pleasurable. A great holiday read, recommended.

Paul Burke
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This was a slow moving spy thriller, not my usual read but fancied a change. An Honorable Man is the author's debut novel which is based on a true story - this itself would make a great historical non-fiction read, possibly more so than the novel itself. The plot is based around the 1950's cold war and agent George Mueller has been deemed the best man for the job of finding the mole by the CIA who are reeling from finding a double agent within their ranks.

I wanted to get behind the character of George more but this book didn't give too much away regarding his real personality - I am guessing that was the point with it being a spy thriller. I was hoping that this book would be a page turner that provided excitement with every page but unfortunately for me it felt quite mundane and as though the story was going through the motions with no real substance to the chain of events.

I am sorry to say that this book wasn't really for me and came across as a pretty average read.

Helen Appleby
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This first novel by Paul Vidich is set in the United States in the 1950s; a time when the cold war was being waged; McCarthy was in full flow with his investigations; the Soviets were in somewhat of a disarray in the immediate aftermath of Stalin's death and the consequent settling of old scores.

The CIA are certain that there is a mole in their midst because their agents are being terminated overseas and missions are being compromised. The CIA Director needs to identify and eliminate the spy otherwise the Agency will be dangerously compromised - much to the delight of the FBI.

George Mueller is an ideal man to try and route out the traitor. He has significant operational experience from his work in Europe in the latter stages of World War 2 which together with his Ivy League education provide him with the tools to complete the task. However, inevitably almost, suspicion falls on him during his investigations; some of that suspicion arising from secrets in his past life.

Vidich acknowledges that the nub of the plot is based on real life events that he came across in his early research for the novel. Although I only found this out after completing the book it helped to reinforce my view that this is a very credible spy novel . It is written in a way that made it an easy read. The pace was measured - very like the slower pace of life in the era in which it was set. It doesn't reach the heights of Le Carré but nonetheless I wouldn't hesitate to recommend it. There are some intriguing twists within the tale and an ending that was well concealed until the final chapter.

I liked Vidich's style and look forward to reading more of his work in the future.

David Keay
****

Set in Washington D.C. in 1953, George Mueller is one of the original CIA recruits and he's had enough. His wartime marriage is long over and his small son lives in Austria with his ex wife. Professionally he is deeply involved with the ongoing CIA/FBI turf wars and the fearful hysteria whipped up by McCarthyism. Persuaded, against his better judgement, he agrees to delay his resignation and become part of a small group tasked with tracking down Protocol - a dangerous, apparently highly placed, double agent. Everyone is under suspicion, everyone is on "the list", including Mueller himself.

Having so strongly and clearly set the scene it was a shame that the book proved to be rather formulaic but, at the same time, a little muddled. Characters seemed to be introduced for a reason and then not developed or were merely forgotten. Early on we are introduced to the Council of four who will track down Protocol, yet one of them disappears from the story completely until appearing merely as a very brief aside near the end. The introduction of Beth, who has an affair with Mueller, initially seems staged for a purpose but then fizzles out in to a run of the mill love interest which contributes very little. However, the description of place and time, whether post war Vienna or paranoid, early 1950's Washington really worked. The

atmosphere created was very evocative indeed - if the book were a film it would be in black and white. Towards the end of the novel is an underground chase scene which was very reminiscent of the climax of The Third Man - lots of echoing footsteps and long shadows on the wall. I have a feeling that we haven't seen the last of this honourable man.

Sandra Rabiasz
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An Honorable Man is set in America during 1953. The Cold War is causing problems for the CIA and the FBI is getting in the way of their investigations. George Mueller is the man assigned to the job of routing out a double agent as his last assignment for the CIA. I was glad that this is a short book as I did not think it flowed well. It confused me at times with the story jumping in time between paragraphs with not always a reason to do so. It is a spy story but is definitely not in the thriller category, I would not recommend this book if that is what you are after nor did I think it is very memorable.

Sue Dawson
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It's 1953 in Washington DC, suspicion is rife as McCarthyism uncovers "treachery" everywhere. In the meantime, the Cold War rages, the CIA struggles for turf against the FBI, and people are dying as CIA assets are exposed and executed across the Soviet Union. The CIA has a double agent and George Mueller, a principled man dedicated to his country but burned out by his job, is tasked with uncovering him. Mueller's mission to discover the identity of the mole known as Protocol is dangerous, bringing him up against hostile Russian agents and forcing him to question the loyalty of everyone he knows. Plus as a man with secrets of his own his investigation threatens to implicate him. No-one is safe from suspicion.

Paul Vidich's debut novel is filled with all the tropes you would expect from a Cold War spy thriller and it is very readable. Unravelling the web of deceit that surrounds Protocol is interesting but it is trying to work out the motivations and history of Mueller that really keeps the reader going. His relationships with others demonstrate the toll that such a life takes - how can anyone keep going indefinitely when they must live dual lives - the real one and the lie you are forced to tell your loved ones to protect them? The story is loosely based on real events and a real double agent within the CIA and the secrets he kept that made him vulnerable to manipulation by

the Russians. Vidich well conveys the paranoia that swept the period – the fear of being accused, the fear of being associated within anybody who might be accused, the private vendettas dressed up as genuine accusations. The dark and dangerous atmosphere of the period seeps into the pages. This is an accomplished first novel, which holds much promise for the next.

Eleanor King
****

Once again my thanks to Nudge Readers for providing this book to read and impartially review.

Our hero has become disgruntled with the spy game playing with people's lives and wants out, but accepts with reluctance as a final job before moving to the peace and quiet of academia, the task of rooting out a Russian mole within the heart of the CIA.This book is based on a true story, and is set in Washington DC in 1953, with the cold war in full swing and the infamous Senator McCarthy seeing "COMMIES" under every rock.

Whilst admittedly not exactly a nail biting edge of you seat all action spy thriller full of various spectacular vehicular chases and rising body counts spread across all manner of exotic locations, as per the Bourne Trilogy books and films - though the same statement could be levelled at some of John Le Carré's books and he has not done too badly. Nevertheless this is an intelligent, very well written story; atmospheric, descriptive and evocative with a real sense of time and place and the characterisations terrific.

The first time author even finds time for a gentle love story in its 252 pages, and I for one would hope this is not the last we see of the enigmatic hero George Mueller. This is a book I personally very much enjoyed and recommend accordingly.

Gudasnu
****

This book is set in the height of the cold war and the era of McCarthyism. The CIA have a mole and agents are being killed and they must find the traitor soon before anyone else is killed. George Mueller has been picked to find the mole as he has the needed skills but can he do the most important job he's ever been given?

This has its good points, it is fairly short and is easy to read without too many confusing characters. The reader is quickly drawn in to the mind-set of the time when everyone was questioning who were the 'reds under the bed'. However I didn't feel any connection to Mueller and his life, with his marriage ended and no real friends. He came across as one of life's losers and not someone you would want to spend much time with.

He has a relationship with his Russian counterpart and this feels well written. They vacillate between sworn enemies and drinking buddies which is when we get more of an insight into who Mueller is. The romance in the book feels false and forced and I never got the feeling that he was really invested in her to any real extent.

As a first book though this is a good read, just don't think you are going to be reading the next John le Carré, the author has a long way to go to be in that league.

Morag Buchan
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This book pulled me in early, with its mystery and intrigue woven through beautifully descriptive language that perfectly sets the mood and tone for the story. I think this could have been added to by deeper exploration of or reference to the McCarthyism of the time, and impacts on the relatively new CIA which is skirted over towards the end of the book.

The plot is intelligent, but accessible (although I did occasionally have to go back and re-read parts to check my understanding) and exciting. The entire book is written in such a way that it was easy for me to feel I knew the main characters well and could imagine them easily in my mind's eye as I was reading. The pace is perfect; allowing me to indulge where I wanted to, particularly in characters, but moving along quickly enough to keep me engaged and eager to turn pages to solve the mystery and identify Protocol.

The main character, George, is robust and easy to like. I enjoyed reading the story as told through his eyes, and his interactions felt like my own because of how well the character was considered and written for. I enjoyed the breeze of a romance in the plot, and admired Beth's character as well.

I felt though that this story could have taken place anywhere in America, there was little anchoring it to Washington which I think is a shame. This, along with the lack of impact or McCarthyism, are my only real disappointments with the book. They didn't detract too much from my enjoyment of it, and I would recommend the read for fans of mystery and smart plots.

Katie Mclean
***

George Mueller is a spy in the twilight of a career, once devoted to the job to the detriment of his marriage, which is painfully dwindling into resentment and regrets. The CIA has been infiltrated by a mole and the Director instructs George to root them out. The path of the investigation leads Mueller to consider everyone as a suspect and unearth bitter memories long buried.

The author does a decent job of evoking the era of suspicion of 1950s Washington and represents the tension between government agencies with ease. George Mueller is a hard character to truly engage with given his persistent negative ebb. At times his depressive state threatens to overpower the pace of the investigation but it continues to trundle along throwing out titbits to maintain our interest. The characters have some colour to them but fail to truly evoke empathy or dislike, leaving the reader cold from the lack of engagement. The turning of a foreign agent to advance the search seems too perfect and complete that it almost jars the story. There's some recovery as the red herrings surface and suspicion points closer to home but the denouement lacks intensity and surprise.

Whilst in all this is a reasonable espionage tale, the inability to feel anything for Mueller proves too much, and is unlikely to make me return for more.

Marmaduke Gentle
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The cover accolades for 'An Honorable Man' promise the reader 'spy fiction in the grand tradition' and a novel comparable to le Carré's best. A tad overstated, perhaps, but I found this to be a very accomplished debut novel.

The novel is set in Washington, DC, circa 1953, at the height of the McCarthy era, and Vidich has done a terrific job of evoking all the tension and paranoia of the time. The central character is George Mueller, divorced father of a young son and a somewhat disillusioned CIA operative charged with uncovering the identity of

Protocol, a double agent at the heart of the Agency. We spend the novel inside Mueller's head, which adds to the feeling of claustrophobia so prevalent at the time.

The pace of the novel is slow and steady, and the reader who is looking for high-speed action may be disappointed. The tension simmers and the plot is punctuated by short bursts of action before settling back into Mueller's dark introspection. I suspect that this is what life is like for a spy – long periods of inactivity, waiting for something to happen or the right time to act, interspersed with sudden, tense and dangerous events, before relapsing back into quiet. Vidich handles all this with assurance – the characters are well drawn, the events are believable, and the setting and atmosphere are spot on.

All in all, this a great read (and I rarely pick up spy fiction) and I read it in one evening, itching to know how it would all play out. A great debut novel which I definitely recommend, not just for spy fiction afficionados, but for anyone who enjoys a well-written story and intriguing characters.

Katheryn Thomas
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This good old fashioned spy novel, set in the US during the Cold War, delivers a slow and steady paced read in which we not only experience the classic "traitor in our midst" story but also a look at the morality of the spy game through the inner workings of our protagonist. George Muller is a CIA agent ready to quit the business and move on but is tasked with finding one last traitorous double agent before his bosses will accept his final resignation.

Vidich's first novel finds us in familiar territory yet doesn't feel like a repetition of what has come before as he aims to put his own unique twist on the story. His characters are well written and although the pacing is rather slow in the first half, the second half of the novel was in page-turning territory. If you are looking for an action packed read, look elsewhere however if you are looking for an easy and enjoyable read with a slower pace this will be a welcome addition. It will be interesting to follow Vidich to see how he develops his style in future novels.

Rhia Docherty
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For anyone who enjoys classic Cold War spy stories this is a must. It is very readable but in the same style as John Le Carré.

The book harks back to an era where spies relied on their wits and relationships between different countries whilst strained could still be very civil.

The novel is a refreshing read and does succeed in transporting you to an era where spies were very much gentlemen and honour and trust existed. for those who enjoy the fast pace of modern spy stories full of gadgets and technology this is not for you, however if you enjoy original bond then you will enjoy this.

Jayne Townsend
****

An Honorable Man is a tightly constructed story written in a similar vein and style to le Carré or Len Deighton - both authors I greatly enjoy. It brilliantly conveys the claustrophobia and paranoia that necessarily came with being a spy in the 50's.

James Mueller is an agent with the CIA detailed to discover the mole within the department. At the same time he is disillusioned with life as a spy and is looking to get out leading to many scenes of self-inspection.

The understated pace of the book brilliantly builds the tension without resorting to unnecessary or gratuitous action scenes. Everything is played with a sense of film noir. You can almost imagine the black and white film playing

I'll definitely be looking for more books by Paul Vidich.

Andrew Pellow
****

The story is set in Washington DC in 1953; Stalin has just died, the Cold War and McCarthyism are heating up. George Meuller is a CIA agent is burned out and wants out but is persuaded to do one, possibly last, job - find a double agent, given the code name Protocol, who is costing the lives of CIA agents.

I was looking forward to reading this book; it seemed to have potential but in the end I felt that it did not fulfil that potential and I was disappointed for a number of reasons.

This is a first novel; Paul Vidich has previously written short stories. I feel that, essentially, this is a short story that has been padded out to become a novel. The book is a decent length, some 250 pages but the plot is very thin and the identity of Protocol is not hard to work out. What it substitutes for plot is lengthy physical descriptions of, often incidental, characters. The descriptions are good and help to set the mood but they are no substitute for plot and they slow down the action. I did not feel any tension mounting and found the end rather disappointing. George Mueller is an interesting character but I wanted to know more about him and his past.

There is something I find very strange. When I read for the second time the 'love interest' Beth, being referred to by her brother as 'In her is the end of breeding', I had no idea what was meant. It was only when I read the acknowledgements (how many people read these?) that I came across the following – 'Several characters in the novel quote lines of poetry or prose' and this is apparently a quote from Ezra Pound. I must have missed the others! My question is why the quotes? What does this add to the book, especially when there are no quotation marks or attributions in the text?

Small irritations include the confusion of 'aggravate' and 'irritate' and the use of the word 'paparazzi' – a term not used in the 1950s.

Judith H.
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With only John Le Carré and Ian Fleming's novels to judge by, An Honourable Man features a mostly unknown period to me which made it particularly interesting. The main character Mueller, takes on an assignment when he had hoped to be giving up his spying activities. He and his colleagues were probably typical of the Cold War years ,as there were Russian counterparts. Attention had to be paid to detail to work out, or try to, exactly who was working on which side - East or West. Though much seems improbable at first, similar situations no doubt exist today involving even more countries. It kept interest going too with a human side throughout and though not a genre of my choice normally I had to reach its conclusion.

Cadizzy
***

A clever spy thriller in the tradition of Le Carré. Vidich has created an interesting character in Mueller, giving the man doubts and feeling close to burn out in his role as a spy for the CIA. Paranoia has crept into the CIA with the assassination of agents and Mueller must search out the spy named "Protocol".

Vidich uses the weather to create atmosphere: "dense fog hung"... the mist covered the lake"... a boisterous grey..." there is little lightheartedness despite the parties held by his colleague's sister. The reader is drawn into the characters lives and the relationships between them in a slow steady build up. Mueller is placed in a position where suspicion about his own trust is questioned. The search for a double agent is set in a background where the Cold War created its own fear on both sides and Vidich understands this period of history.

The novel is enjoyable and leaves room for Vidich to write another thriller using his main character. I felt it would make a good 2 hour thriller drama for TV.

Bev Allport
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