

Book Review: Library of Forbidden Books
By Mario Escobar

Thanks to NetGalley and Thomas Nelson Fiction for this advance reader's copy, in exchange for an honest review. "Library of Forbidden Books" is scheduled for release on September 1, 2026.

I'm a huge fan of historical fiction, especially when it's well written. Unfortunately, Mario Escobar's latest, "Library of Forbidden Books," is not one of them.

The setting is Berlin, Germany in 1933. The Nazi regime is rising to power, casting a darkening shadow over the country. Helene Nathan (based on a real person) is one of the first female librarians at a prestigious Germany library. When the Nazi government begins its purge of literature, including compiling a list of forbidden books while orchestrating public book burnings, Helene and her colleagues at the library recognize the need to collect and hide the books scheduled for destruction.

It's an interesting premise based on actual events. The problem is the narrative reads too much like excerpts from an historic diary or journal, with little emphasis on character development. It's hard to understand what drives Helene and her colleagues to undertake such a dangerous project when we don't fully understand who she is.

Additionally, there are frequent large time gaps between chapters, ranging anywhere from six months to more than one year. That's where the narrative loses continuity. I would much rather the 'fiction' part of historical fiction be developed here to not only fill in the time gaps, but to provide a more specific sense of the characters, their relationships, and their respective motivations.

The book has some interesting and educational elements from a historic perspective, such as some of the ruthless actions taken by Nazi officials. But they only skim the surface.

“Library of Forbidden Books” is built on an interesting premise, but beyond that foundation the overall structure doesn’t stand tall. Two stars.