

MAX IS ON A MISSION. WELL, TWO MISSIONS.

One has been assigned by his British spymasters: Infiltrate the Funkhaus, the center of Nazi radio and propaganda.

The other they have forbidden: Find his parents.

Max Bretzfeld was willing to do anything to return to Germany, even become a British spy. Training complete and forged papers in hand, the radio wunderkind's missions have begun. But nothing is as he expected. His parents are missing. Nazi intelligence is watching him. And the lines between lies and truth are becoming more blurred each day.

Back in Berlin, Max will need every tool at his disposal, from his radio expertise and spy training to the help of Berg and Stein, the immortal creatures living on his shoulders. Even so, there's no guarantee he'll make it out of Berlin alive.

Max's most dangerous mission is about to begin in the thrilling conclusion of the World War II spy duology that began with *Max in the House of Spies*.



ADAM GIDWITZ is the bestselling author of Newbery Honor winner *The Inquisitor's Tale* and the *Tale Dark & Grimm* series, *Unicorn Rescue Society* series, and *Operation Kinderspion* series. Adam tells creepy, funny fairy tales live to kids on his podcast *Grimm, Grimmer, Grimmest*—and at schools around the world. He lives in Brooklyn with his wife, daughter, and dog, Lucy Goosey.

COVER ART © 2025 BY JAMES FIRNHABER
JACKET DESIGN BY ANNA BOOTH
PRINTED IN THE USA

DUTTON CHILDREN'S BOOKS
An imprint of Penguin Random House LLC,
NEW YORK

Penguin.com/kids

PJ OUR WAY®

www.pjourway.org



TOP SECRET

OPERATION KINDERSPION

MAX in the **LAND of LIES**

Adam Gidwitz

DUTTON CHILDREN'S BOOKS

TOP SECRET



DUTTON CHILDREN'S BOOKS
An imprint of Penguin Random House LLC
1745 Broadway, New York, NY 10019
penguinrandomhouse.com



Copyright © 2025 by Adam Gidwitz

Penguin Random House values and supports copyright. Copyright fuels creativity, encourages diverse voices, promotes free speech, and creates a vibrant culture. Thank you for buying an authorized edition of this book and for complying with copyright laws by not reproducing, scanning, or distributing any part of it in any form without permission. You are supporting writers and allowing Penguin Random House to continue to publish books for every reader. Please note that no part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner for the purpose of training artificial intelligence technologies or systems.

Dutton is a registered trademark of Penguin Random House LLC.

Edited by Julie Strauss-Gabel
Design by Anna Booth
Text set in Maxime Regular

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Names: Gidwitz, Adam, author.

Title: Max in the land of lies / Adam Gidwitz.

Description: New York: Dutton Books for Young Readers, 2025. | Series: Operation Kinderspion | Includes bibliographical references. | Audience term: Preteens | Audience: Ages 8–12. | Audience: Grades 4–6. | Summary: Young British spy Max Bretzfeld infiltrates Nazi Germany's propaganda hub while secretly searching for his missing parents.

Identifiers: LCCN 2025001683 (print) | LCCN 2025001684 (ebook) | ISBN 9780593112113 (hardcover) | ISBN 9780593112120 (ebook)

Subjects: CYAC: Spies—Fiction. | World War, 1939–1945—Fiction. | Berlin (Germany)—Fiction. | Missing persons—Fiction. | LCGFT: Spy fiction. | Historical fiction. | Novels.

Classification: LCC PZ7.G3588 Mc 2025 (print) | LCC PZ7.G3588 (ebook) | DDC [Fic]—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2025001683>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2025001684>

First published by Dutton Children's Books, 2025
First paperback edition published 2026

Manufactured in the United States of America
LSCC

ISBN 9780593112137
\$PrintCode

The authorized representative in the EU for product safety and compliance is
Penguin Random House Ireland, Morrison Chambers, 32 Nassau Street,
Dublin D02 YH68, Ireland, <https://eu-contact.penguin.ie>.

To understand the story that follows, you have to remember a few things. Including what happened in the previous volume, *Max in the House of Spies*:

Max, a brilliant Jewish boy, was sent away from home and from his parents to escape the Nazis. Living in England, he convinced British intelligence to train him as a spy so he could go back to Germany. Last we saw him, he was dropped into Germany by parachute, harnessed to Major Johnny Jameson—and Major Jameson died on impact with the ground.

So that's what you have to remember. But you also have to FORGET a few things. You have to forget everything you know about World War II, about Nazi Germany, and about the Holocaust. For example, you might know that starting in 1941, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union went to war with each other. You might know that in 1942, the Nazis began to systematically murder all the Jewish people living in Europe. And you might know that in 1945, Nazi Germany was defeated and Adolf Hitler killed himself.

But no one knew any of that in the fall of 1940, when we resume our story.

What they knew was that Germany was winning the war, their economy was booming, and their experiment with Nazism was going very, very well indeed . . .

CHAPTER

One

“You’re just going to *leave* him there?”

Max walked away from the body of Major Johnny Jameson. The muscular paratrooper with a hero’s mustache lay staring at the sky, black blood pooling beneath his head.

“Max!” said Stein, the dybbuk who’d been sitting on Max’s left shoulder for over a year now. Stein had the affect of a vaudeville comedian and a hint of Yiddish in his speech. “Max, shouldn’t you *do something* with the dead guy? Wrap him in his parachute and bury him or something?”

Max ignored Stein. There were lights along the edge of the field. Max headed that way.

“I don’t want to be here!” moaned Berg, the kobold who’d been sitting on Max’s right shoulder for over a year now. Berg spoke with an antique German accent and had the mopey demeanor of some Bavarian philosophy student. “We got on your shoulders in the first place to get *away* from Germany! Now we’re *back*?!”

Max would have told his immortal hitchhikers to keep

quiet—since he was a spy who had just parachuted out of a British bomber into Nazi Germany, and he was *really* hoping to avoid attracting attention—but that was unnecessary, because he seemed to be the only human who could hear or see Stein and Berg.

At the moment, though, he wished he could neither hear nor see them.

He needed to *focus*.

He was on a mission.

Well, two missions.

Mission One: infiltrate the Funkhaus, the center of Nazi radio and propaganda. This was the mission his British spymasters knew about. It was why they'd sent him.

Mission Two: find his parents. Mission Two was forbidden. Max's spymaster and adopted uncle, Lieutenant Commander Ewen Montagu, had made him promise *not* to go looking for his parents. Max had promised. He had lied.

Two missions. One twelve-year-old Jewish boy in Nazi Germany. *What's the worst that could happen?* Max asked himself. That was a joke. He knew what could happen. What probably *would* happen.

Just focus. Take it one piece at a time. Like assembling a watch. That's what his papa would have told him.

First piece: Get to my apartment building. Without getting caught.

The lights at the edge of the field turned out to be a couple of houses. Good.

Max figured where there were houses, there had to be a road.

He was right. The road was long and thin and newly paved.

Max looked left and right. “Which way to Berlin?” he murmured.

Stein pointed down the road. “Berlin is that way.”

“You’re sure?” Max asked.

“Let me think . . .” said Stein. “I’ve lived in Germany since the Sixth Day of Creation, and while the pavement is new, this road has been here since at least 1640—”

“And it was an oxcart path since the 1300s,” Berg put in.

“—so, yeah. I’m *pretty* sure,” Stein concluded. “Any other dumb questions?”

CHAPTER

Two

As Max made his way down the paved country lane, Berg said to Stein, "I can't believe Max just left that dead man in the field."

"Yeah," agreed Stein, studying the side of Max's face in the moonlight. "And he doesn't even seem upset about it!"

This was not true. Max was very, very upset about the death of Major Johnny Jameson.

But he couldn't afford to think about it.

Back in Tring Park, Uncle Ewen had said: *You have to have a strange relationship with truth to live a fiction, Max. You have to believe the fiction you're living, and your mind needs to be totally and utterly free from the truth. Except. You cannot lose the truth. You must keep it buried, in a box under the stairs in the cellar of your brain. You might even struggle to find it some days. But if it's tossed out, if it's lost . . . then so are you.*

Max had shut Major Jameson in a box, carried the box down into the cellar of his brain, and shoved it into a dark hiding place under the stairs.

He just hoped the body's smell wouldn't haunt his dreams.

Hours later, Max was walking down the broad boulevard known as Friedrichstrasse. It was two in the morning, according to the clock on top of the newsstand. Max should have been tired. He'd walked through the countryside, then through the wealthy suburbs of Charlottenburg.

But he was in Berlin now, for the first time in more than a year.

His town. His dangerous, thrilling town. The streets were empty. The five-, six-, seven-story buildings were lit from below by yellow streetlamps. Silent. Waiting. In just a couple of hours the city would explode again into raucous life.

Flush with adrenaline and sleep deprivation and the recent trauma of being attached to a dead man, Max didn't care that he was a Jew in a nation of Nazis. He was back in the city of his birth, where he'd spent every minute of his life before leaving for England. He knew the streets, the alleys, the signs, the crosswalks, the buildings. He knew it all.

And the two police officers strolling down Friedrichstrasse. They looked like any Grüne Polizei in Berlin, wearing long green trench coats and military helmets.

Except these two cops were heading directly for Max.

"Oh no," said Stein.

"They're coming for you," said Berg.

Max stopped. He did not run, though he wanted to.

He forced himself to stand there, watching the cops approach.

And he threw his mind back to England.

Specifically, to a kangaroo.

Specifically, specifically, to Kathy Kangaroo.

Specifically, specifically, specifically, back to what Jean Leslie had said after he'd been attacked by Kathy Kangaroo: *No matter what someone is doing to you, no matter how strange or scary it is, stay calm. If you stay calm, you can think.*

Max tried to slow his racing heartbeat as the two cops got closer.

One was older, with a small, curly mustache and a belly so big it seemed to be leading him down the street. The other cop was lean, and young. Young enough that he probably should have been in the army. But he wasn't. Which worried Max.

Max glanced to his right. There was a garbage-strewn alley with a door at the end. *Think*, Max told himself. *Stay calm and think.*

The door would be locked.

There was a trashcan in the alley, which looked to be full.

Beer bottles were strewn across the alley's cobblestones.

Hmm, thought Max.

And then he thought, *Perfect.*

He started speaking very quickly to Stein and Berg. (Just as no one else could hear Stein and Berg, no one could hear or see that Max was talking to them. Max didn't understand it—it was metaphysical or something. But he was used to it now.)

"I need one of you to go to the alley . . ." he began.

"Oh, no, we're not helping you ever again!" Berg said, waving his hands. "The last time we helped you, you brought us back to this Nazi-infested hellhole!"

Max ignored him. ". . . find a beer bottle that still has some beer in it, pour it in your mouth . . ."

"Ew! No! Are you listening to me, Max?" continued Berg.

"And then you're going to spit it . . ."

Suddenly, Berg stopped objecting.

Max finished explaining his idea. Stein laughed. Berg was smirking.

"Okay, never mind," Berg announced. "This is my kind of plan." And he slipped off Max's shoulder and disappeared.

Just in time, because the Grüne Polizei, or Green Cops, were now just a few feet from Max. The older one with the curly mustache stopped. The younger one didn't.

He was smiling. It was not a friendly smile. He walked until he was just a few inches from Max. Uncomfortably close. Max had to look up as the young Green Cop looked down into Max's face. "Where do you think you're going?" The young cop's breath smelled of alcohol, and his teeth were stained brown, like he fell asleep with a bottle of schnapps glued to his lips.

Max swallowed. "I'm going to my uncle's." This was the story that Lieutenant Charles Chumley and Uncle Ewen had drilled into him before he'd left England.

The young cop's eyes narrowed. Slowly. "You're going to your uncle's at two in the morning?"

Max did not have an answer for that. Johnny Jameson was supposed to have helped Max hide somewhere until sunrise. The plan hadn't been for Max to be walking alone through the streets of Berlin in the middle of the night. But before Max could think of an explanation for why he was going to his uncle's at two a.m., the older cop said, "What happened to your chin?"

Max touched his chin. He could feel dried blood, and now that he was touching it, he realized it hurt. He thought back to when the navigator had kicked them out of the bomber. He hadn't remembered slamming his chin against the bomb bay door until just now. He thought back to Major Johnny Jameson, with his head cracked open, in a field. Max wondered when someone would find his body.

And when the authorities would come.

And when they would see that Major Johnny Jameson was wearing a double harness.

And when they would start to wonder where the other parachuter was.

"Kid?" said the older cop with the little mustache. "Hello?"

"I'm going to my uncle's because my father's been drinking," Max improvised.

Suddenly, the young cop's hands were on Max's jacket, grabbing his lapels. "So? What's wrong with a little drink?"

Max murmured, "My dad gets kinda rough when he drinks."

The young cop jerked Max closer to him. Right into the

cloud of his boozy breath. “*And . . . ?* If your father wants to smack you around, that’s his right!” He thrust Max away, making Max’s head snap forward.

The older cop spoke to Max: “Who is your uncle?”

Max rubbed the back of his neck. “Pastor Andreas Maas.”

“Where does he live?”

“Kreuzberg.”

The young cop snapped, “Let’s see your papers.”

Max hesitated.

Every German had to carry their papers with them at all times. To prove who they were. To prove that they weren’t enemy agents.

Or Jews.

Max, of course, was both.

“You do have papers, don’t you?” the young cop demanded.

“No . . .” said Max slowly.

The young cop eagerly began fumbling to unclasp the leather pouch on his belt where he kept his handcuffs. Until the older one said, “Of course he doesn’t have papers, Dieter. How old are you, kid? Ten?”

“Twelve,” said Max.

Every German aged fifteen and above had to carry their papers. Kids didn’t have papers. Except Jewish kids. Which Max was pretending he wasn’t.

Suddenly, there was a clatter of bottles from the alleyway. The older cop looked over his shoulder.