



The Eighth Wonder of the World

Leslie Epstein

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A magnificent new novel that strikingly reimagines Fascist Italy.

When Benito Mussolini announces a worldwide competition for a monument to celebrate his victory over Ethiopia, the winning design is an almost unimaginable mile-high tower, La Vittoria, created by the famed American architect, Amos Prince. In his struggle to bring this modern Babel to completion in the face of every conceivable obstacle—including Mussolini's wavering support and loss of power, and the vicissitudes of a world war—Prince will lose his family, his native country, and perhaps even his mind.

Interwoven with the story of Amos Prince is that of Maximilian Shabilian, a recent graduate of Yale who journeys to Rome to attach himself to the world's greatest architect. As World War II progresses, Max becomes inextricably bound up with the building of the tower and with Prince's family, above all with his beautiful and mysterious daughter Aria. In the end he must choose between his devotion to his mentor and his loyalty to his fellow Jews, who are increasingly threatened by the Fascist regime in Italy. Remembering who built the pyramids in Egypt and the Arch of Titus in Rome, Max decides to use La Vittoria to protect his people. In a moment of terrible, tragic irony, the very plan that was designed to save the Jews ends up delivering them to their unspeakable fate.

In 2005 the aged Shabilian makes a fearful journey back to Italy. This epic novel, then, spans millennia, from Solomon and Sheba 3,500 years ago to Mussolini, the Caesar of the Twentieth Century—a dictator who is half a posturing clown and half the menacing tyrant who, with magnetic force, determines the fate of nations. Finally, in its remarkable concluding chapter, Maximilian confronts the present ruler of Italy, Berlusconi, whose grip on Italian life may be far more powerful than that of any of the Caesars who came before him.

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