

The Sentinels: Fortunes of War

Gordon Zuckerman

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Reviewed by Ron Standerfer for Reader Views (6/09)

In 1932 the once powerful German nation was on the verge of economic and social collapse. That's when an elite group of wealthy and well-placed industrialists decided it was time to act. Their plan was simple: choose a potential leader for the nation who was sympathetic to the notion of rearmament, and provide him with sufficient financial support to ensure a successful rise to power. If they succeeded, their profits during the rearmament would be enormous. The potential leader they decided to back was Adolf Hitler, then the rising star of the National Socialist German Workers Party.

But what if Germany lost the war and the industrialists managed to smuggle their profits out of the country before it fell? A group of young doctoral candidates at the University of California at Berkeley in the late 1930s theorized that such funds would ultimately find their way to another conflict elsewhere in the world. The intriguing premise of Gordon Zuckerman's fascinating and extremely well-written book "The Sentinels: Fortunes of War," is that these doctoral candidates, now well-established members of the international banking community, conduct a clandestine and complicated operation to prevent hundreds of millions of dollars of war profits from leaving the collapsing Third Reich.

"The Sentinels: Fortunes of War" passes my personal litmus test of "interesting characters and interesting plot" with flying colors. The group of doctoral candidates who developed what they called "The Power Cycle" consists of Jacques Roth, heir to the Roth banking empire, and former captain of France's national soccer team; Cecelia Chang, daughter of an influential Hong Kong trading family; Tony Garibaldi of the Garibaldi wine family; Ian Meyer, scion of the founding family of one of London's most respected auction houses; Mike Stone whose father is the chairman of a large New York City bank; and last but not least, my favorite character, the icily beautiful Miss Claudine Demauraux, daughter of Henri Demauraux, the well-regarded chairman of the Swiss bank of the same name. Taken together, the group presents a rich potpourri of wealth, glamour, privilege and intelligence.

The plot of "The Sentinels: Fortunes of War" begins in a slow, orderly fashion introducing the main characters one by one. In 1938, The Power Theory is just that, a theory. But by early 1945, it becomes obvious that it is about to become a reality in Nazi Germany. That's when the group decides to reunite and execute a plan to prevent war profits leaving the country. How did they do it? Well, that's a little difficult to explain unless you are an expert in international banking and financing. Fortunately for the reader, the author is a graduate of Harvard Business School who has studied these studies extensively, and he explains them well. Meanwhile, there is enough political intrigue, romance and rough and tumble action, scattered across Europe and America, to satisfy the most jaded reader of international thrillers.

According to the book's back cover, "The Sentinels: Fortunes of War" by Gordon Zuckerman is the first in a series that follows the Six Sentinels as they continue to alter the course of history. I look forward to reading the next book in the series.