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Clarion Review ★★★☆☆ GENERAL FICTION

Company of Spies: Code Name: Jana

Margaret S. Emanuelson
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Company of Spies begins with the cataclysmic bombing of Pearl Harbor that quickly pushed the United States into World War II. Seemingly overnight the American citizenship radically changed the definition of the family infrastructure and the role of women in war and the workplace. Dr. Margaret S. Emanuelson explores these changes through the thoughts and actions of her main character Abby St. Giles. She writes "Brought up in a tradition of honor country duty she had been taught reverence for God the flag…to serve one's country was to serve God as a sacred trust and privilege…Abby shuddered to think of what was coming. The signs were there. Hegel was right. The pendulum was swinging…how far would the pendulum continue to swing before corruption deception and immorality were accepted as normal?"

Abby decides to serve her country by enlisting as an O.S.S. operative. After her training is complete she and her partner (and love interest) Biff travel all over the world on the trail of a vicious Nazi spy who will do anything to cover his tracks including possibly kidnapping Abby's best friend Suzanne.

Emanuelson's inspiration for *Company of Spies* comes from her personal experience as an O.S.S. veteran and a clinical and forensic psychologist. Her insight into the vagaries of humanity and knowledge of history is indisputable. Some sections of her novel work like a James Michener piece the conglomerate of philosophy historical fact poetic prose strong characterizations and action and intrigue. Unfortunately her pacing is uneven and there is too much exposition. There is nothing wrong with providing some backstory and a little exposition but it is irritating when dialogue is no more than a recap of events and does not enhance or move the story along. When the characters are not making such revelations they're pledging declarations of love. It is as if the author cannot write a conversation that is related to the action of the story and readers will quickly lose interest.

Anachronisms are other shortcomings that cannot be overlooked. Unless they're used intentionally as a vehicle to move a plot along or are specific to a writer's style they reduce the power and validity of the novel. For example in one scene Abby and her mother Miranda discuss the dangers young women face while traveling alone by train. Abby explains to her mother that a man named George Bush (yes the young George Herbert Walker Bush) helped her with her luggage. Miranda semi-jokingly replies "…but he could be a serial killer you know." The term "serial killer" wasn't coined until the 1970s in reference to the high profile killers Ted Bundy and David Berkowitz. A clinical and forensic psychologist should know this fact.

Company of Spies has a cliff-hanger ending and many unresolved plotlines which should guarantee a series of sequels. All the elements are there for a great read if Emanuelson would learn from her mistakes.

(August 21, 2009)

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