

Ghosts of the Past: The Search For a Lost WWII Art Collection Worth Killing For

Mark Downer

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In the charming historical thriller Ghosts of the Past, a man hunts for a rumored Nazi treasure—but he has competition.

Mark Downer's *Ghosts of the Past* is an exhilarating and labyrinthine thriller centered around a large hunt for hidden Nazi treasure.

Matt is a well-to-do executive. He leads something of a charmed life, with a beautiful home along Louisville's Elmwood Lane and lots and lots of money. However, his Uncle Max is living out his last days in the spring of 2001. While visiting Uncle Max, Matt learns about a plane that crashed in the Swiss Alps in 1945. Aboard were priceless treasures stolen from Europe by the Nazis. Uncle Max's story inspires Matt to undertake a quest for the loot.

Matt is accompanied by Courtney, a tall and brilliant art historian. Matt and Courtney make it to Switzerland, where they are thrust into the middle of a local murder investigation. Additional problems for the duo include Julio, a dangerous South American executive who wants the treasure just as badly as they do; and, in the shadows, members of the secretive ODESSA party, who are die-hard Nazis and want to recover the treasure, too.

This novel wastes no time; it is active from its first chapter, when Matt receives a call about his uncle. He and the story hurdle headlong into bare-knuckled intrigue. Characters are described in clear terms: Matt as an everyman who is likable despite his money; Courtney as a lovely genius—the stuff of dreams; and the villains, from master manipulator, spy novel-obsessed Julio to the ODESSA crew, keep the thrills and terror of danger high, proving throughout to be experts at intrigue and raw violence.

But because the story is in constant motion, and involves timeline shifts between 1945 and May of 2001, some of its finer points are muddled. Jumps between Louisville, Switzerland, Chicago, and Barbados occur, all involving a large cast of characters, and connections between these points are not always made in a straightforward manner.

Even as its plot points become many, the story remains engaging. Every chapter includes elements of action, adventure, or romance, and each introduced character ends up contributing to the story's progression in some way. The triumphant conclusion to the multiteam hunt for the downed plane is itself uplifting.

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BENJAMIN WELTON (January 24, 2021)

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