



Operation Wolfe Cub

H.C. Wells

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At first the mind recoils at the thought of the world's fate depending on Nazi Germany, but H. C. Wells's compelling thriller, *Operation Wolfe Cub: The Time to Tell: Book I* will make readers rethink their revulsion. This re-imagining tells of the 1944 journey of a baby boy named Randolph from Hitler's Germany to Devil's Gulch, Maine. The people accompanying the child know only that he is the product of mysterious circumstances created by a Dr. Wolfe—"Wolfe Cub"—and that he will travel by ship to America. He is prophesied to bring about an era of peace.

The book details Randolph's voyage to the United States, how he washes ashore in the tiny town of Devil's Gulch, and his adoption by Eddie and Chantain Coolidge. The Coolidges change Randolph's name to Doll to make it sound less German. The strange omens and portents that follow Doll to America increase in frequency as he becomes a toddler.

The strangeness begins with the US ship that brings Randolph to America. Although built in the 1940s, the design of the *Wehrwolf* resembles the space shuttle *Columbia*. Wells tells readers in footnotes that some believe the American shuttle copied German engineering. The author incorporates further space-age elements by having the hull constructed of a Nazi-created alloy called Victalen, reputed to be indestructible. For weaponry, the ship carries a Strong Ray Gun and a cannon with such powers of obliteration that physicists argue about whether it could exist. Wells incorporates these rumors and brings them together in a beautiful and believable vessel that is simultaneously threatening and awe-inspiring.

The events happening around Doll increase in portent. Doll washes ashore with an anklet, and Eddie grows obsessed with learning more about its symbolism. He discovers the emblem represents a cross, and he finds evidence of similar images in many cultures. With the building of a suspenseful atmosphere, Wells keeps readers guessing about whether Doll's true nature is good or evil.

While no other character is quite the nuanced enigma that Doll is, they are nonetheless well developed. Readers spend at least half the book on the *Wehrwolf*, getting to know the adults intimately. Doc Wycliffe adheres to protocol yet is able to joke around. The unnamed soldiers assigned to protect Randolph with their lives, US-1 and US-2, find themselves capable of great loyalty and sacrifice when the need arises. The characters of Eddie and Chantain are less internally consistent. Although Wells establishes from the outset that the Coolidges have a fractious marriage, the couple alternates between angry and loving as the plot requires, with insufficient context to warrant such rapid mood changes.

Modern readers may dislike how the novel seems to harp on the female gender and demonize Chantain. The most significant problem, however, is that all of the foreshadowing leads only to more foreshadowing; readers know just as much about Doll at the end as they did in the beginning. Even in a series, a book must successfully resolve something while it paves the way for a sequel, but *Operation Wolfe Cub* asks more questions than it answers.

JILL ALLEN (March 7, 2013)

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