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CLARION REVIEW ★★★☆☆ GENERAL FICTION

Soul Intent

Dennis Batchelder
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Years ago, Archibald Morgan made a deal with the devil: he helped Hermann Goering hide his memoirs and twenty-five million dollars in gold. Today that deal has come back to haunt both him and Flora, the Romany woman who helped him do it when she was just seventeen. In this latest installment in the Soul Identity series, Morgan learns that Goering's deposit is missing and he resolves to recover it.

Goering was a member of Soul Identity, a company that for nearly 2,600 years has tracked the return of a soul to the body in lifetime after lifetime, its "soul line." Soul Identity accepts deposits of money, lessons, and possessions into a "soul line collection" that can be accessed by the new incarnation of that soul. Thus, a person could give a future incarnation of themselves a leg up with assets and information.

Goering intended to provide his future self with the wealth and Nazi philosophy he'd amassed. Morgan, a Soul Identity employee, was convinced this commission held the key to his success. Even though he found it distasteful to deal with the Nazi, he believed that successfully completing the deposit would bring him a more powerful position at Soul Identity.

Morgan has asked security expert Scott Waverly to help him recover the gold and notes and restore them to Goering's soul line collection. Flora, who only helped Morgan in the old days so he would bring her grandmother to the US, is determined to prevent that. Just as she once did her best to subvert Morgan's mission because of her hatred for the Nazis, she's still determined to prevent a future Nazi from benefiting from gold looted from concentration camp prisoners.

This novel has a great premise, interwoven with a complex plot that makes for an exciting adventure tale, but it doesn't quite live up to its promise. It is peopled with somewhat flat characters whose actions are sometimes contrary to their motivation. Val, Scott's partner, is at first determined to help Flora recover the gold, whatever the cost, and helps to convince Scott. But later on she's the one who has to be convinced to go on with the mission, with no overriding reason for having changed her mind.

Batchelder's writing doesn't always stand up to the drama, as in this scene, where far more intense action seems called for than Flora's shaking her finger in the Nazi's face:

> *"We exterminated you vermin to purify our country. I made sure we benefited as much as possible."*
>
> *Madam Flora stared at the old SS officer with wide-open eyes. She shook her finger not six inches from his nose. "Your extermination left me fatherless…."*

When Batchelder's character development catches up to his plotting, this will be a series to reckon with. (October 30, 2009)

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