

THE SENTINELS

**A MATTER OF
IMPORTANCE**

A NOVEL

ALSO FROM GORDON ZUCKERMAN

Fortunes of War
Crude Deception

THE SENTINELS

**A MATTER OF
IMPORTANCE**

A NOVEL

**GORDON
ZUCKERMAN**



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AUTHOR'S NOTE

In chapter 6, Dr. Robin Cook's character presents a slideshow that is a synopsis of "Employ American: A Matter of Importance," a winning economic doctoral thesis. The student authors of this fictional thesis divided the fifty-year postwar economic history from 1960 to 2010 into four separate phases: Age of Economic Equilibrium, Age of Consumer Products, Age of Real Estate, and The Bubble Bursts. These four phases are detailed for the reader in a chart located in the Appendix.



LIST OF CHARACTERS

Mr. Aakil Chandakar—Owner of Chandakar, Inc., in Mumbai; a long-time friend and business partner to Jeff Mohr.

Madam Cecelia Chang Stone—Called Madam Chang; last living member of the original Six Sentinels; Chairman Emeritus of the Institute; Chairman of the Sentinel Trust; widow of Mike Stone; mother of Dr. Robin Cook and Ivan Stone.

Ivan Chang Stone—A member of the Sentinel Institute board of directors; son of Madam Chang; brother to Dr. Robin Cook.

Dr. Robin Chang Cook—Cochair, Sentinel Institute board of directors; Dean of the Sentinel Institute's International Economic Department; daughter of Madam Chang; sister of Ivan Stone; widow.

Terrance "Terry" Flynn—Director of the San Francisco branch of the FBI.

Charley Hutson—A member of the Sentinel Institute board of directors; served in the Persian Gulf with Jeff Mohr; works for U.S. Motors; boyfriend to Andi Taylor.

Jeff Mohr—A member of the Sentinel Institute board of directors; owner of Mohr Electronics; served in the Persian Gulf with Charley Hutson; husband to Meg.

Meg Mohr—Jeff's wife.

J.W. Porter—Chairman of the board of U.S. Motors; Charley Hutson's boss.

Claudia Demaureux Roth—A member of the Sentinel Institute board of directors; senior investment analyst at Lazarus & Co.

Mr. Tambour—A former Indian ambassador to China and the United States.

Dr. Andi Taylor—A practicing behavioral psychologist; Charley's girlfriend.

General Benjamin “Ben” T. Wells—A member of the Sentinel Institute board of directors; retired U.S. Army, three-star general; former student of Madam Chang; early graduate of the Sentinel Institute.

Larry Wilshire—A former military colleague to Charley Hutson and Jeff Mohr; an independent security contractor.

Nate White—A former FBI agent; founder and COO of White Security.

Sam “Mr. Sam” Walcott—Senior Director of the Sentinel Institute board of directors; U.S. Congressman, ranking member of the House Ways and Means Committee.

Cheng Yee—Owner of Yee, Inc., in China; friend and trusted business colleague to Jeff Mohr.

PROLOGUE

Monterey, California

June 11, 2010

“Ladies and gentlemen, we are locked in a new kind of war, a war of multinational corporate and sovereign nation manufacturing competition. If the United States is to survive economically, the global competitiveness of the American goods producer needs to be restored.”

With these opening statements, retired three-star general Benjamin T. Wells began his commencement address to the Sentinel Institute’s graduating doctoral studies class.

Just moments before, Madam Cecelia Chang Stone, the last living member of the original Six Sentinels and one of the founders of the Institute, had introduced the honored speaker.

The diminutive, gray-haired ninety-seven-year-old matriarch of the Sentinel Trust stood at the podium, sporting her well-known mischievous grin, with her posture perfectly erect and her emerald green eyes flashing with life.

“Ladies and gentlemen, as it has been my privilege to do for the last thirty-eight years, I have the honor of introducing this year’s commencement speaker. Recently, I had the opportunity to talk to my former student—Benjamin T. Wells—a good friend,

and an early graduate of the Sentinel Institute. This early pioneer of surgical aerial warfare is widely recognized for his ability to successfully adapt modern weapon technology to battleground tactical warfare. Over the years, his specially trained units have operated at the president's will all around our troubled world. Following Ben's retirement from the army after thirty years of service, he has spent the last year visiting his former officers, who in civilian life have scattered to the four corners of the world. As he traveled, people frequently asked, 'While we were busy protecting American interests abroad, how good a job have we been doing in taking care of business at home?'

"I invited Ben to address you today and share a few of his personal observations. Benjamin, if you please."

Having paused to let his opening remarks sink in, the general continued his speech.

"Frustrated by what I was learning, I decided to call Madam Chang, whose opinion I respect and trust. She instantly grasped the source of my concern and suggested I read this year's winning doctoral thesis, 'Employ American: A Matter of Importance.'

"Well, Madam Chang, I've read this thesis," said General Ben as he turned and smiled at his mentor. "What I can't understand is how five admittedly brilliant doctoral candidates were able to identify the source of our economic problems and devise such an exciting solution. What have the rest of us been doing?"

"How, in an economy operating in a world experiencing a global industrial revolution, in an environment of accelerated wartime federal spending, can it be that one out of every five members of our civilian workforce is either out of work or can't

find suitable part-time employment, and one out of every seven U.S. citizens is receiving food stamps?

“I’ve always believed we live in a world known for its ability to discover new technologies, develop new consumer products, mobilize its vast financial markets, and create billions of dollars of new consumption demand. Why, in an economy that suffers from so much underemployment and a shrinking tax base, have we failed to discover an alternative solution to prevent the outsourcing of manufacturing employment to lower-cost foreign labor markets?

“How proud can we be when our returning veterans and our college graduates must compete with more than 25 million other Americans to find suitable employment?

“Have we ever stopped to calculate what the real cost of the lost manufacturing employment really is?

“Now that we have learned we can no longer rely on the expansion of consumer debt to finance the growth of discretionary spending, don’t we need to look back to other periods of economic prosperity for the clues we need to solve our current problems?

“We have been forced to rely on review and analysis by these five doctoral students of the ten years between 1960 and 1970 to learn that our economy grew at the compounded rate of 6.5 percent and created 12.2 million private employment jobs. Three new service-oriented jobs were required to support the creation of each new goods-producing job. During the same ten-year period, consumer debt remained relatively constant and public debt declined. Had we preserved the cost competitiveness of the American manufacturer, and preserved historical ratios of goods-producing to service jobs, today’s employment rolls would include fifteen million more manufacturing jobs.

“To this old soldier, history’s message is indelibly clear: We

need to learn how to restore those lost jobs without further burdening the consumers and the federal government's balance sheets with additional debt.

"The question I have been asking myself lately is, Why are our global problems of economic imperialism any less menacing than the problems of military imperialism that were threatening the world order in 1938? At that time, the United States found it necessary, in less than three years, to convert its peacetime industrial complex into a wartime arsenal, the size of which exceeded the combined military production of all of our enemies.

"How can we, as a nation, expect to solve our problems at home until we learn how to fully employ our people?"

A standing ovation erupted, interrupting his remarks. Pleased with the response, the "General's General" took a few sips of water, allowing the audience members to calm down and settle into their seats.

CHAPTER 1

TROUBLE

Three days after the graduation ceremony, at three o'clock in the morning, a giant explosion destroyed the Sentinel Institute's engineering research laboratory. The shaking of the buildings from the blast's concussion and the sound of glass windows shattering woke even the deepest sleepers in the nearby neighborhoods.

Emergency alarms, sirens, and horns that hadn't sounded since the days of civil defense drills added to the cacophony. West Coast military units were instantly put on alert. Squadrons of defense fighters were prepared for takeoff. Closer to home, residents rushed out onto their front lawns, looking up in an attempt to discover what had happened. Their thoughts were filled with questions. *Has some kind of a bomb been dropped? Has a gas main exploded? Has some kind of terrorist act just occurred?*

The first firefighting brigade arrived twenty minutes after the explosion. Despite the steady streams of water the firefighters trained on the building, the fire raged until the building and its contents were no longer salvageable. What the fire hadn't destroyed was ruined by water and flame retardant.

The first responders reported that debris from the three-story brick building could be observed three blocks away. Anybody

working on the lab's night-shift cleaning crew had been instantly killed. Flying bricks and other debris had pockmarked the sides of adjacent buildings.

The bombing of the engineering research laboratory quickly became front-page news. The destruction of such a large building was a newsworthy event. The press referred to the explosion as an act of terrorism and speculated about who might have been responsible and listed possible motives.

Members of the Sentinel Institute's board of directors were inundated with requests for interviews. The Institute's cochair, Robin Cook, was asked to appear on one of the leading Sunday morning talk shows.

The well-prepared host sidestepped the preliminary formalities and dove right to the key question, "Dr. Cook, what was so important about the experiments being conducted in the Institute's engineering laboratory that would provoke someone or some group to blow it up?"

"The Sentinel Institute was conducting experiments to prove the capability of a new chemical process that would make it possible to burn coal on a cost-competitive basis and would comply with recently adopted EPA clean air standards."

"Even so, why might the successful completion of those experiments encourage such a violent act?"

"The development of a lower-cost, environmentally compatible energy source represents a critical component required to reduce American manufacturing costs. At the same time, if we are able to replace higher-priced imported petroleum products with lower-cost clean burned coal, we could materially reduce our dependence on foreign oil, reduce a negative balance of payments, and provide employment for a lot of Americans!"

"Dr. Cook, for the benefit of our audience, please explain why

the Institute insists that this program of such national importance must be completed within twelve months?”

“Now that we have succeeded in calculating the annual cost to the government of losing one manufacturing job at \$80,000, we need to complete our work in time to prevent another wave of major U.S. manufacturers from accepting pending offers from the Chinese government and other lower-cost labor markets. Unless we can demonstrate why it is in the best interests of industrialists to manufacture their products in the United States, how can we expect to stop the continued outsourcing of employment? Any further erosion of manufacturing labor could add an additional economic burden to our wounded economy.”

Experienced and usually prepared for bold answers from his guests, the host was momentarily surprised by the boldness of the petite, polite woman, conservatively dressed in a high-collared jade green Mandarin dress, with only a hint of makeup needed to accent the uniqueness of her soft Eurasian beauty and her emerald green eyes.

If the compelling nature of her argument had not succeeded in convincing the audience, the self-confident demeanor of the regally composed woman sitting patiently in the glare of the TV lights would have been more than sufficient to accomplish her mission.



CHAPTER 2

CHARLEY HUTSON

Charley Hutson had been courting Andi for several weeks before he invited her to join him in his wharf-side penthouse apartment. Stretched out on the floor in front of the fireplace, Charley and Andi sipped fifteen-year-old single-malt Scotch, served neat, while listening to Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* and watching the lights of Detroit and the boats on Lake St. Claire paint their cosmic images on the twelve-foot-high ceiling. The flickering flames in the fireplace made it appear as if angels were dancing through the heavens.

Suddenly a ringing cell phone disturbed Charley's artfully contrived moment. Annoyed, he glanced at the display—he regretfully disengaged himself from the warm embrace of promising possibilities with Andi and hit the answer button on his phone.

He was greeted by the raspy voice of "J.W." Porter, his boss and the chairman of the board of U.S. Motors. "You might want to turn on the news. Something important has happened that may interest you. Can you be at the office by 9:30 tomorrow morning? There are some people who are very anxious to talk to you."

The line went dead before Charley could reply.

Preoccupied with his thoughts, Charley crossed the room and turned on the big-screen TV. "Early this evening, William

‘Wild Bill’ Reedy, the flamboyant and charismatic president of U.S. Motors, unexpectedly resigned during a regularly scheduled board of directors meeting. A reliable source has informed us that a disagreement erupted between President Reedy and company chairman J.W. Porter about the planned installation of a new manufacturing facility in China.”

Painfully aware of Charley’s preoccupation with the eleven o’clock news, Andi stood up and began gathering her previously discarded clothing, saying, “Charley, who would have thought you would abandon a partially clothed woman to watch television? Do you mind telling me what just happened?”

“Sorry, the president of U.S. Motors just resigned. I bet the purpose of our meeting tomorrow is to come up with a way for U.S. Motors to keep its car production onshore and replicate the manufacturing costs offered by the Chinese government. I’m confused that the chairman would call me; I’m not even a member of the executive management committee.”

“Maybe they need someone who is used to thinking outside the box, someone who can raise important questions and suggest possible alternatives. You certainly appear to be one of those people!”

Andi picked up their cocktail glasses and crossed the room to the bar. She sat on one of the bar stools and patted the one next to her, indicating that Charley should join her.

Still preoccupied, Charley said, “Why would they believe I can solve the same problem in a matter of months?”

Realizing he had been thinking out loud, he paused, “Surely you can’t be interested in listening to me talk about work.”

“Come on, Charley. Where does it say that because a woman is attractive and a former jock she doesn’t have a brain? If, during our last few dates, you hadn’t been so intent on impressing me and satisfying your own ego, you might have paid more attention.

“Had you done so, you might’ve learned I received my doctoral

degree in behavioral psychology from the University of Chicago. For the last ten years I have been a practicing behavioral psychologist trying to understand why 40 percent of the turnover of management is the result of faulty hiring.

“They tell me I’m a pretty good listener and ask good questions. Now, why don’t you pour me another drink and sit down and tell Dr. Taylor all about your problems at U.S. Motors.”