

Violent Search Thriller Over a 'Piece of Paper'

THE GEMINI CONTENDERS. By Robert Ludlum. Dial; 352 pp.; \$8.95.

Reviewed by
Alfred Coppel

ONE OF the most important elements in the construction of a thriller, my friend and mentor Darwin Teillet used to say, is "the piece of paper."

The POP is a portmanteau phrase for the microfilm, the treasure map, the plans for the invasion of Patagonia, the diamond necklace — in



ROBERT LUDLUM

other words, the thing that everyone in the story is after. In Helen MacInnes's "The Salzburg Connection" (a classic of the genre); it was that steel box the Nazis had sunk in an Alpine Lake. In "The Day of the Jackal" (an unusual form of thriller), it was the Jackal himself.

In "The Gemini Contenders," Robert Ludlum has come up with a unique "piece of paper." He begins his tale in 1939 with a sequence that is mysterious and (forgive the unintentional pun) cryptic.

A vault containing certain religious documents is removed from its resting place of 15 centuries in a monastery in Salonika. Monks of the Order of Xenope — a rugged and rather ruthless lot, as it turns out — have foreseen that war is coming and that their precious vault may well be taken by the Nazis. This can result in the exposure of the contents of the ancient documents and turn the Christian world up-

side down, perhaps even inciting religious war. A war that would certainly be to the advantage of any aggressive nation, since it would divide resistance.

THE BROTHERS of Xenope are not without resources, however, and the vault is placed on a secret train, which is then routed across Europe to the estate of an Italian nobleman-industrialist, Savarone Fontini-Cristi and secreted there — somewhere in the Italian Alps.

The Xenopian monks are not your ordinary run of Greek monks. They behave more like prototypical members of SMERSH or SPECTRE, leaving a trail of dead bodies behind the mysterious vault — including their own. To obliterate the trail, they kill and commit suicide with the willingness of religious fanatics.

But the rumor is abroad, and there are ruthless men in Germany, in England, and in Rome, who think they know the power of the ancient documents. The hunt begins with the massacre of Savarone Fontini-Cristi and all but one member of his family, his son Victor.

Victor is spirited away to Britain by some properly shady SIS characters on the assumption that he knows where his father secreted the vault. He does not. SIS is bloody annoyed, but can do nothing except enroll Victor in the effort against Occupied Europe — thus keeping him available in case he should somehow lead them to the hiding place.

Victor has a rough go in his activities, rough even for wartime. Not only has he the Nazis to contend with, but also the Brothers of Xenope (who want to be able to recover their property).

Victor marries an English girl, who bears him twin sons. The family survives the war. But the mystery of the train from Salonika haunts them and threatens to twist and destroy their lives. Victor's efforts to lay the ghost and free himself fail. The



JOY KENNEDY

Some Ingenious Ways How Not to Get a Man

THE NEUROTIC WOMAN'S GUIDE TO NON-FULFILLMENT. By Joy Kennedy. Viking; 198 pp.; \$8.95.

Reviewed by
Louise Montague

THE SUB-TITLE of this book is "How Not to Get a Man" and if ever there was a more complete text on the subject I have yet to see it. Having finished the book I am now on the horns of a devastating dilemma — whom should I loan the book to first!

There's my friend Millie who is definitely in dire need of help. She's a divorcee who has an uncanny knack of

ferreting out married men. Her current swain can only see her at 5:30 Sunday morning on his way to the tennis courts. He's promised to leave his wife "just the minute this tax thing is worked out." Millie is a master at the ultimate in suffering.

Then there is Josephine who rises to the challenge of straightening out men who, alas, will never be straight. And Laura who's complusively late, Nora who's neurotically neat and Rosa-of-the-Round-Heels. They and their neurotic devices are catalogued here along with dozens of other long suffering ladies who have devised any number of ingenious

ways to remain single.

IN SPITE of the broad humor, this is one of the best books on behavioral science that I have ever read. I know all these women — and men — and so will you. In fact you may be one. I know there are at least two incarnations of me in the book when I was single and not as smart and wonderful as I am now. The author, who by her own admission, has alienated men "in three languages, nine countries and five islands," is right on target.

Grab a copy at your nearest bookstore and I absolutely guarantee you'll find, as I did, that Joy Kennedy is pure delight.

family, now called Fontine, comes to America.

THIRTY YEARS slip by and the twins grow to manhood. One becomes a soldier, the other a "liberal" lawyer. Needless to say, they have also become enemies "in an America that is on an emotional binge of recriminations."

As Victor Fontine lies dying, an old monk helps him to reconstruct some of the information he has always had, but which was almost obliterated by the trauma of seeing his family slaughtered. The monk insists that the matter cannot

simply rest. He says that the vault must be found and the contents destroyed, because the Communists are now on even greater threat than the Nazis were. If the documents should surface now, they would destroy the delicate balance of the Christian world and give the Communists a kind of psychological doomsday weapon to use against the West.

Victor charges his sons to resume the search. But the twins cannot co-operate. The lawyer, Adrian, seeks the vault to advance the cause of "people's liberation." Andrew, the soldier and anti-

Communist, seeks it to preserve the Christian world.

The twins become contenders, and the hunt ends in violence high in the Italian Alps.

The conclusion is something no reviewer should reveal, since the story really builds up a tremendous suspense. Nor should the "piece of paper" be described in any detail. Though I cannot resist the urge to offer one bit of information: The documents are an eyewitness account of certain events in Roman Palestine during the reign of the emperor Augustus.