

Kris' War, By Carol Matas: Two Reviews

By Radoslav Entschev, and Vera Popova, German Language School, Sofia, Bulgaria

1. Have you read other books by this author?

No, I have not.

2. Why did you choose this book?

I am particularly interested in books and films concerning World War II. However, I do not like mere historical facts. It is much more interesting for me when the events are shown from the point of view of normal people, who have become the innocent victims of military fanaticism. That is literally what this novel does.

3. Would you like to read another book by this author? Why?

Yes, I would. In fact, this book is a sequel to another novel by the same author, *Lisa's War*, and I would like to read it as well.

4. Tell me something about the story.

As mentioned above the book is about the life of two boys during World War II. Their names are Jesper and Stefan and both of them live in Denmark. Jesper is in love with the sister of his best friend (Stefan) - Lisa. With the Nazi invasion of Copenhagen their lives change dramatically. They are no longer free to things they have taken for granted before and quite unsurprisingly the boys try to rebel against the German rule. Consequently, they join the Danish resistance. In the course of their action, they realize how serious everything is. As they see their friends being killed, and they themselves are betrayed and constantly on the edge, as they risk their lives and are almost caught by the Gestapo officers, they become conscious of the significance of their deeds.

Almost as an anticlimax comes the horrifying moment when Stefan and Lisa are informed about the Nazi intentions to transport all Jews eastwards. Since they are of Jewish background and understand the danger, they flee with their family to Sweden. Jesper, who has meanwhile adopted the code name Kris, remains in Copenhagen and does his utmost with the sole intension of resisting the Nazis' terror.

Jesper-Chris has always been good at literature and enjoys writing. That is why he starts writing for the underground press. Naturally, this activity is too risky and he has to avoid meeting his relatives. Kris meets his family on one occasion only. In fact, this is the first time they meet since he did not come from school one evening seven months ago. It is a touching scene, embodying all his feelings, which he has not even dared to acknowledge before. On the one hand, he wishes to abandon everything and to start living with his family again; on the other hand, he comprehends that his work might contribute to the end of this nightmare. His parents feel the same – they yearn for living with their son again but know that the resistance needs him even more desperately. Eventually he leaves, but as he puts it: "I felt that if I stayed another minute I wouldn't have the courage to leave again" (page 64).

While writing for the underground newspaper he falls in love with the girl he works with. He becomes increasingly obsessed, until he finally forgets Lisa completely. He lives only for that girl, Janicke, and even continues working for the press merely in order to spend more time with her.

One day, out of the blue, Stefan turns up. He is back to

Copenhagen because he has to help an important member of the resistance flee to Sweden. The two friends concentrate their joint efforts on the mission and succeed. Unexpectedly, Stefan decides to stay with Kris. As some time passes, Kris understands the reason for Stefan's reluctance to leave – he has fallen in love with Janicke, too. The difference is that the feeling is mutual. Stefan and Janicke spend the nights talking and laughing, while Kris falls into despair.

The situation changes dramatically again, as the three of them are betrayed. Some Gestapo men open fire at them, while they are making secret negotiations with other resistance representatives. Janicke is killed and although Kris and Stefan manage to escape, soon afterwards they are arrested. That is where Kris's narrative about the past ends. Then he says: "... a few minutes ago a guard came in and dropped a piece of paper and a pencil on the desk. I'm allowed one last letter, a farewell to my family. The guard laughed. He knows I can't write. They pulled all my fingernails out and my fingers are swollen and bleeding ...". Despite the hopelessness of the situation, Kris knows that the Germans will lose the war, he is sure that the moment will come, when the Gestapo building will crumble, and that gives him power to overcome the pain of the endless tortures he has to undergo. However, he is afraid of the death; he dreads the possibility that the officers will try the new finger-cracker on him, but he does not give up.

As everything becomes bleaker and bleaker, Kris and Stefan seem to be fortunate again. Instead of going to their daily torture, they are summoned by the head of the Copenhagen's Gestapo. He turns out to be their ex-classmate, who has fallen in love with the daughter of a senior SS-officer. He has been promoted for his loyalty to Nazism but is now as uncertain about his future as Kris and Stefan are. He suggests that three of them flee but the two friends are rather reluctant. Indeed, they believe that he is honest, because he is concerned about his life. They abhor him because he has betrayed his country but the real reason for their rejection is the fact that he is directly responsible for Jenicke's death.

Nevertheless, both of them are aware that his proposal is the only chance of breaking free. Hence, they change their mind and in a week's time meet him again to discuss his plan. As they talk, they hear an explosion, then a second one and see the wall falling over Frederick (that is his name). British airplanes have bombed the compound and helped to free all the prisoners.

The novel ends rather melodramatically – Kris and Lisa are engaged, Stefan and Lisa's best friend, too; Denmark is free, and all of them pray that their children won't have to go through the same horror as they did.

5. Favourite Quotation:

"The Nazis are getting desperate, and as they get more desperate they get meaner."

In my opinion, this sentence provides an explanation of all war crimes and it depicts the impetus of all inhumanities in war-time. It is generally true, not only for the Nazis, even not only at war. Desperate times require desperate measures. However, exactly this bleakness, this despair has caused some of the worst mistakes

in the world history. When the Germans knew that the war was lost, they did not cease torturing their prisoners-of-war; on the contrary, they got more cruel. Sure enough, this was true for the allied; the same is true for every war. It is a pity that cruelty does not solve the conflict, but even worsens it. Its victims remain the common people, no matter whether they are Jews, Germans or Bulgarians.

Radoslav Entschew:

Carol Matas's novel *Kris's War* tells the story of a young Danish boy, who becomes a resistance fighter in Denmark, after it is invaded by the German army during The Second World War. At the time the Germans conquer Denmark, Jesper is fourteen years old. His best friend Stefan and he are very angry at the situation, because their country has surrendered without a fight. They decide to fight on their own for the expulsion of the Nazis. Starting with innocent revenge actions, such as putting sugar in the gas tanks of German vehicles, they gradually become dangerous fighters for freedom, part of the Danish resistance.

Three years after the invasion of Denmark, the Germans try to round up all the Jews in the country and ship them to concentration camps. Stefan and his family, who are also Jews, are forced to escape to Sweden. Jesper, left alone with his family, decides to devote most of his time to the resistance actions. During one of them the Germans catch him and his associates and Jesper is sent to jail. This time he has luck, because other resistance members manage to set him and another three prisoners free, while they are driven to a Nazi execution park. From that day on Jesper has no other choice but to go underground, in order to protect his family. He works as a journalist for the underground resistance press. Everyday he is exposed to dozens of risks for his life, but never gives up and always manages to survive.

One day, while taking part in one of the serial resistance actions, Jesper, who's known now only by his code name Kris, gets to meet Stefan again. He can hardly believe his eyes, but is incredibly happy about it. They start working together again - Kris as journalist with the other two members of his newspaper crew and Stefan helping them. All their operations are successful, until one day some traitors warn the Germans and inform them about the next resistance action which is going to take place. While Kris and his associates are trying to escape from the trap, the girl from the crew is shot and dies. Kris and Stefan are really upset and hurt from the fact. They start caring less about their lives and get involved in very risky operations until they finally get caught. Now they are in prison. They are tortured brutally every day, but they endure stoically all the pain and never even think of uttering a word about the resistance.

At that time they have plenty of time to think about their lives and about the war. That's the place, where I chose my favorite quotes from.

"But they'll shoot us anyway. When, I wonder, when? Why don't I mind so much? I think that's what they've turned me into. For a split second, in that alley, I saw that Stefan and I had lived on nothing but hate for months. We had turned ourselves into such balls of hate, that killing had become natural. I would have killed them all with my bare hands if they'd let me". (p. :)

These are some of Kris's conclusions, while being in a brown study of the whole situation. Thinking it over and over he sighs:

"I wonder if Stefan and I are turning into killers, no better than the Nazis." (p. :)

I chose these quotes, because they are like a confession of a warrior, who realizes what a bad and cruel thing the war is. I think war is something very unnecessary and can do only

harm to people's lives and souls. Reading these quotes I see the perfect evidence for my opinion and I wish everybody could think at least a bit like me. This would help living in a peaceful world, where all people are equal in terms of opportunities and problems are solved without violence.

But coming back to our story, Jesper and Stefan are in jail. After many painful days spent there, the two boys are in the office of the Nazi head - Frederik, who appears to be an old friend of Jesper from his childhood. Frederik used to be as a big brother to him at the time, but decides to go to study in Germany one autumn and both haven't seen or heard from each other since then. Now Frederik has returned to Denmark as one of the big bosses in charge of the German army in the country. He wishes to help his old friend and escape with him to Sweden. Suddenly though, while talking in his office, an incredible explosion rocks the entire room. The English appear to bomb the building. One of the walls falls in on Frederik and kills him. Kris and Stefan take their chance and run away. Tired and beaten to death they fall into the hands of a nice young woman, who is also part of the resistance, and she takes care of them. While recovering, the two boys make the decision to stay in Denmark, but never ever to kill again.

Years later, after the war has come to an end, Jesper is working full-time as a reporter for a newspaper. He's engaged to Stefan's younger sister Lisa, who will finish medical school very soon. Stefan himself is also in medical school and also engaged - he falls in love with Lisa's best friend Susanne. None of them talks about the war now, but they will never forget what they've been through and hope that their children will never have to face what they've faced.

Vera Popova



Carol Matas, by Billie Nodelman

Learning About the Holocaust Through Art: Two Web-Reviews

By Cassie Kuchta and Sevan Angacian, Cold Spring Harbor High School, New York

If you are looking to learn about the Holocaust through art, a website I highly recommend is: <http://art.holocaust-education.net> This website is extremely helpful and interesting. It includes a ton of great drawings made by some of the people who were persecuted during the Holocaust. For example, there are drawings by a famous artist, Charlotte Buresva, of the Terezin ghetto, and a of Yehuda Bacon, of Auschwitz Concentration Camp. Not only are these drawings clear, quick, and easy to access, but this website also provides a teacher's guide for using the website in the classroom, student activities and resources, and a way to interact with other people through the website and respond to the works of art you observe. This website is a great resource for those interested in art.

-Cassie K.

During the Holocaust and the persecution of various groups of people by the Germans, art was a means of mental

escape from reality and an entry to the outside world. The website "Learning About the Holocaust" at <http://art.holocaust-education.net> is dedicated to presenting to the public, the artwork of the ghettos and camps during the Holocaust. This website, which is a collaborative project between World ORT and Beit Lohamei Haghetat, is a wonderful display of artwork that makes research, as well as enjoyment, a simple and clear process. It is a very comprehensible layout, making the experience of the appreciating the artwork less complex and more focused on the art itself by offering teachers various lessons to use in the classroom. One can search for specific places, names, and words, or one may just browse. The actual pieces of art posted on the website are extremely expressive of the artists' experiences. However, some are also portraits of family members. This website is a superior resource for learning about some of the artwork that was created during the Holocaust.

-Sevan A.

Varian's War

By Sarah Golub, Cold Spring Harbor High School, New York

Last Saturday night was one of those lazy nights at home for me. I was not inclined to relocate from my comfortable position on the couch, so I had to compromise with my father; I agreed to watch the dreary-sounding and uninteresting (or so I had thought) movie with my parents, entitled **Varian's War**. Surprisingly enough, the movie turned out to be the true story of an incredible man who was responsible for saving thousands of renowned Jews during the Holocaust.

The movie begins as Varian Fry, a journalist from New York, was traveling in Europe in 1939. He was disgusted by what he saw: Nazis going through the streets and tormenting Jews everywhere- destroying their homes, their businesses, and their souls. Upon his return to the United States, Varian Fry insisted on starting a group known as the "Emergency Rescue Committee," in hopes of saving various intellectuals, artists, and musicians of Jewish descent who would be in danger of being captured and killed by Nazis in the Holocaust. Although Fry did not have any success at first with his idea, he eventually was able to convince his friends and neighbors to help support him, and even Eleanor Roosevelt herself was interested in this man's courageous efforts.

Fry left New York with an initial list of about two-hundred Jews whom he hoped to rescue, although after a period of thirteen months, he was able to save many more than that. The



film reveals how Varian Fry's plan was incredibly successful. He was able to guide hundreds of Jews on foot through the mountains separating France and Spain, and he provided everyone with the papers they needed to leave Europe. Although it was a difficult hike for many of the elderly refugees, it was their only chance of surviving.

In 1940, the French police searched Varian's house, and he knew that his secrets were no longer hidden from the Nazis. Although it was unfortunate that Fry could not rescue all of the Jews who came to him seeking aid, his mission was accomplished. By 1941, he had saved over two thousand of Europe's finest writers, scholars, and artists of the time. Some of the eminent Jews liberated from the Holocaust through the "Emergency Rescue Committee" included Max Ernst, Marc Chagall, Hannah Arendt, and Heinrich Mann.

What I had predicted to be a quiet evening with my family turned out to be a night of heroism, strength, and inspiration for me. Had I not seen this video, I would not have known about the tremendous efforts of this incredibly conscientious



human being. After learning about this story, I was motivated to learn more about the endeavors of Varian Fry. I have since learned that in 1945, Fry published a book entitled, *Surrender on Demand*, explaining the details about his experiences. In 1967 he received the Croix de Chevalier of the French Legion of Honor, one of France's highest civilian honors. Only a few months after this, Fry passed away, never having been remotely recognized by the U.S. government. Finally, in 1991, Varian Fry received his first official recognition from a United States agency, the United

States Holocaust Memorial Council. Also, In February 1996, Fry was acknowledged as "Righteous Among the Nations" by Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Heroes and Martyrs Remembrance Authority in Jerusalem. He then became the first American recipient of Israel's highest honor for rescuers during the Holocaust.

I strongly recommend this movie to anyone interested in learning more about the Holocaust and about the efforts that this individual went through in hopes of saving the lives of Jews all over Europe.

The Kindertransport: Saving Lives in Britain

Three reviews of *Into the Arms of Strangers*

Into The Arms of Strangers, a documentary that is narrated by actress Judi Dench, tells the story of the "kindertransport," a British rescue effort that saved 10,000 Jewish children from Nazi Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia in the late 1930s. The British government got permission to take only children to live with British families. These families opened their homes to desperate and frightened strangers. As a result, 10,000 innocent children survived the Holocaust. In this film, some of them tell their stories.

Many of these children left with instructions from their parents, and pleas from aunts and uncles, to find homes for cousins or for themselves. One young girl knocked on doors asking complete strangers if her parents could come and live with them. She felt enormous pressure to save her family. Other children wondered how their parents could send them away. They thought they must not love them and realized later just how much they did.

This is a moving, powerful and captivating documentary film. *Into The Arms of Strangers* was directed by Mark Harris and made with help from the National Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C. It includes archival photographs and films from the period. It won the Academy Award for Best Documentary

Feature in 2000. It is well worth watching and available in DVD and videocassette. For more information about the film and the history, visit the website at:

intothearmsofstrangers.com

*Lauren Iannucci,
Cold Spring Harbor
High School, New York*

Yes, your classes may be hard. Perhaps your parents are putting awful demands on you to achieve well. Is your coach being too hard on you on the field? Oh no, can you not afford that sweater you've had your eyes on and heart set on for the past month? Your boyfriend dumped you! You don't say.

Over fifty years ago, children who are our age and very many who are younger than we had somewhat more on their minds. They were innocent and naive for the most part, untouched by the world and sheltered in their Jewish-German communities. They were carefree children. They ice-skated, played sports, had birthday parties, went shopping, had family dinners, nothing too different from what we are currently accustomed to. They never could have imagined midway through their cartwheels and while reading the torah at the synagogue, that their childhood would be rudely disconnected, abruptly cut off. But it was.

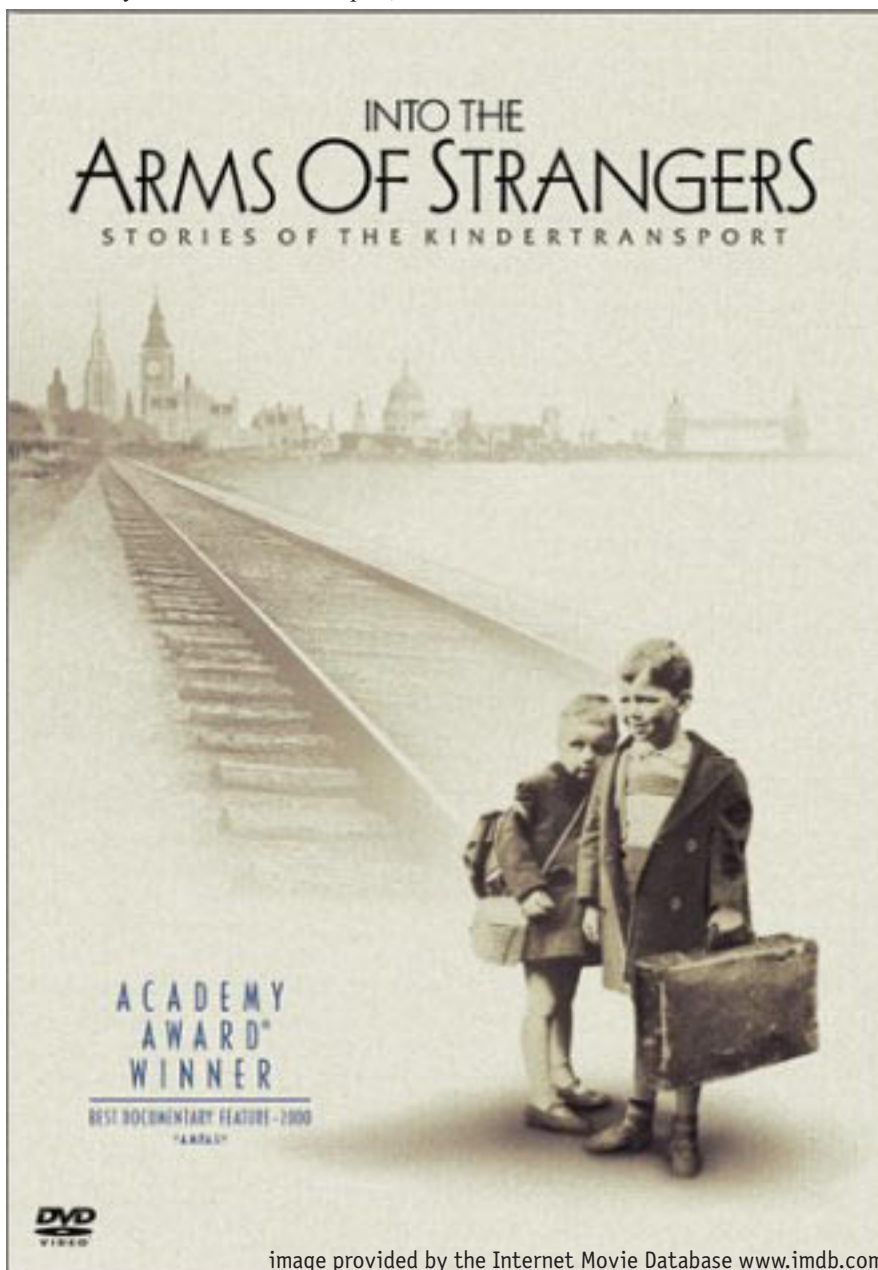


image provided by the Internet Movie Database www.imdb.com

Before this year, our country, while a world power, was naïve and innocent. On September 11th though, our country's naïve childhood was cut off. We were shocked to see that things too horrible to be imaginable could occur so close to home. And midway through our games, we realized that we could not depend on everything or maybe not even anything to be safe and carefree.

Before the Holocaust was at its worst, Jewish parents were given the opportunity to send their children to England. England generously offered to take these children into their families. This kindertransport sounds like a relief; the children's lives would be saved. In the process of saving their lives though, bonds were broken, and children were forced to become mature and independent at very young ages.

Some of the children were lucky. They lived with families who were affectionate and wealthy. Unable to fully understand the reality behind their harsh lives and lost days of innocence these "foster" children sought affection. Some families were lucky to take in children, for they might not have had an opportunity otherwise. Families came to love the children who lived with them. Sometimes, language barriers were inevitably a problem. Other children were seen as playmates to their "brothers and sisters."

It is hard to evaluate something like the Kindertransport. Ultimately, it was amazing. It saved the lives of many children who would have been doomed because of their religion in their own countries. The kindertransport gave these children opportunities for futures, opportunities to live out their lives at a time when countries other than Britain refused to take in children to save. While the kindertransport saved lives, it separated families and in many cases ruined hopes when many kindertransport children, after the war, found out that their parents had died.

Alex Pryor, Cold Spring Harbor High School, New York

According to Corraine Allard's father, "This mad man Hitler can't possibly last." Yet, much to his surprise, and many others, he did last for several years. During this time, many Jews were placed in concentration camps and were persecuted. Into the Arms of Strangers depicts the life the children affected by Hitler's actions. The earliest

signs of Hitler's power to the children were red balloons given out on the streets that proudly presented a swastika inside a white circle.

Jack Helman noticed something was not right when he was on his way back from school one day and was thrown into a glass window simply because of his religion. These small problems swiftly evolved into larger ones; many families knew they had to flee. Most tried to get visas into other countries, but it typically took years to get all the papers in order to make the move. By this time, they knew it would be too late. So, many families resorted to Kindercare. This was a program that was started and executed by Britain.

Kindertransport was for children only because Britain did not want the burden of creating jobs for the parents. Once the children had gained the clearance needed to live in Britain, they climbed onto railroad cars and left behind their family, friends, and life. They carried with them the enormous task of finding work for their parents so that one day, they could come to safety, too. When the children arrived in Britain, they were placed in special orphanages set up for them. They were given food and a place to sleep, which was a comfort in itself. Each group stayed about a week in this place. British families adopted many of the children; those that were left traveled to another home.

Most of the Kindertransport children did not at first like the families they were placed with because they were not their own parents, but they learned to get along. They also learned English and their customs quickly. Once they had built up a greater vocabulary in English, many children set out to find work for their parents. Some children sought out relatives that lived in Britain. All the while, they tried to keep in touch with their families back home.

Those children not lucky enough to make it out through Kindertransport were forced into concentration camps along with the rest of their families. Those parents of "kinder," who did survive the Holocaust, were sometimes lucky enough to meet up with their long lost children again after the war. Hitler and the Nazis split up so many families and instilled so much pain in the lives of those deeply impacted by his rampage.

Amanda Grieco, Cold Spring Harbor High School, New York

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Website

By Alex Pryor, Cold Spring Harbor High School, New York

This site is like a Holocaust encyclopedia. I explored the website: www.ushmm.org, which is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The site seems very fast. On the main screen there are 11 links. It is split up into "museum," "support," "visit," and "museum shop" vertically down the screen. At the top of the page there are links for "What's New?" and "Art and Writing Contest". This link for the contests actually changed to a link for chamber music during my visit to the site. I suspect that it was updated while I was viewing it. The page seems to be very up to date. The "What's New" link takes you to its upcoming events in the museum's calendar. The other five links, spread horizontally across the screen, are "education," "research," "history," "remembrance," and "conscience". There is also a search bar at the bottom of the page. The search must entail links because I typed in about ten words, and for each search at least twenty links showed up. I did not look up words typically associated with the Holocaust either. It seems to search through many

documents to see if the word that you typed is included in any of them. I chose the words that I thought of to research from the site. I looked up doll, violin, harmonica, harp, corn, potato, rocking chair, Irish and party. If I had to write a report about any of these topics relating them to the Holocaust this site would have been an excellent resource. The page is formatted in a very organized fashion. The links for "museum," "education," "research," "history" and "remembrance" are subdivided into more categories. When you run your mouse past each link, the subtopics appear. It is easy to navigate using the website because the links are so specifically classified. I do think that this website would be an asset to any student who is interested in studying the Holocaust. I once visited this museum for a very short period of time. By viewing this website I realized that I missed out on a lot during my stay at the museum. I believe that this website does an incredible job of portraying such an awful time period.

Uprising

By Rachel Tydings, Cold Spring Harbor High School, New York, USA

Uprising, a film which aired on NBC on November 4th and 5th 2001, is one of the latest mini series to focus on the Holocaust. *Uprising* is the heroic story of Jewish resistance fighters in the Warsaw Ghetto battling the Nazis for their lives during WWII. Mordecai Anielwicz was the head resistance fighter for the Zydowska Oranizacja Bojowa (ZOB) for the Jewish Fighting Organization. Mordecai, played by Hank Azaria, and Yitzhak Zukerman, played by David Shimmer, started the resistance organization in 1942. After hearing reports of mass murder in the extermination camp Treblinka where many of the Jewish people from the ghetto had been deported, Mordecai and Yitzhak gathered young Jewish people from the ghetto to join this resistance group.

One of these young people was especially important because of her physical appearance. This girl, Tosia Altman, played by Leelee Sobieski, had blond hair - an exception from the normal stereotypical Jewish features. These three actors exemplified typical resistance acts: collecting weapons, planning attacks, killing Nazis, and, most importantly, protecting other Jews in the ghetto. Through the movie, we see the actors carrying out these responsibilities and showing the hardships of daily ghetto life. Unfortunately, these efforts were not enough to save the majority of Jewish citizens.

At the movie, almost all of the Jews die. By luck, Ytzhak, Tosia, and a few of the other resistance fighters escape through the sewers to the safe haven of the forest. But, most Jews were not as lucky. By the last of liquidation, 56,000 Jews were captured by the Nazis. Seven thousand were shot, and those who survived the shooting were then deported to Treblinka and other extermination camps.

Uprising has many powerful scenes, but one in particular

stands out in my mind. The most moving scene depicted the relationship between the Jewish orphans and their Polish guardian, Janusz Korczak. When the Nazis came to deport the children to Treblinka, Korczak decided that he could not abandon his children. He boarded the trains with his orphans and went with them to Treblinka, ultimately traveling to his death. I found this scene so powerful because

it showed a person who cared so deeply about his Jewish children that he would even put his own life in jeopardy. When I think of *Uprising*, this scene is always the first to come to my mind.

Watching the movie, I found many scenes to be painful. It was very hard to see the ways in which the Nazis treated the Jewish people. Many scenes involved gruesome deaths or destructive explosive attacks by the Nazis. After watching the movie, I feel that I have learned a lot about this important event of the Holocaust, the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. I was very impressed by the acting in this movie. I think that Donald Sutherland was one of the actors who portrayed his characters the best. He played Adam Czerniakow, the leader of the Jewish Council who oversaw the ghetto (Czerniakow was actually appointed by the Nazis). Czerniakow refuses to support the resistance, a guilt-ridden decision which ultimately leads to his suicide. Sutherland's acting helped me to understand the complicated relationships the Nazis and Jewish Council members shared.

Uprising was one of the most powerful miniseries I have seen. Although some parts of the movie were difficult to watch, I would highly recommend this film. Not only did the film expose an important event in history, it also featured wonderful acting and beautiful music.

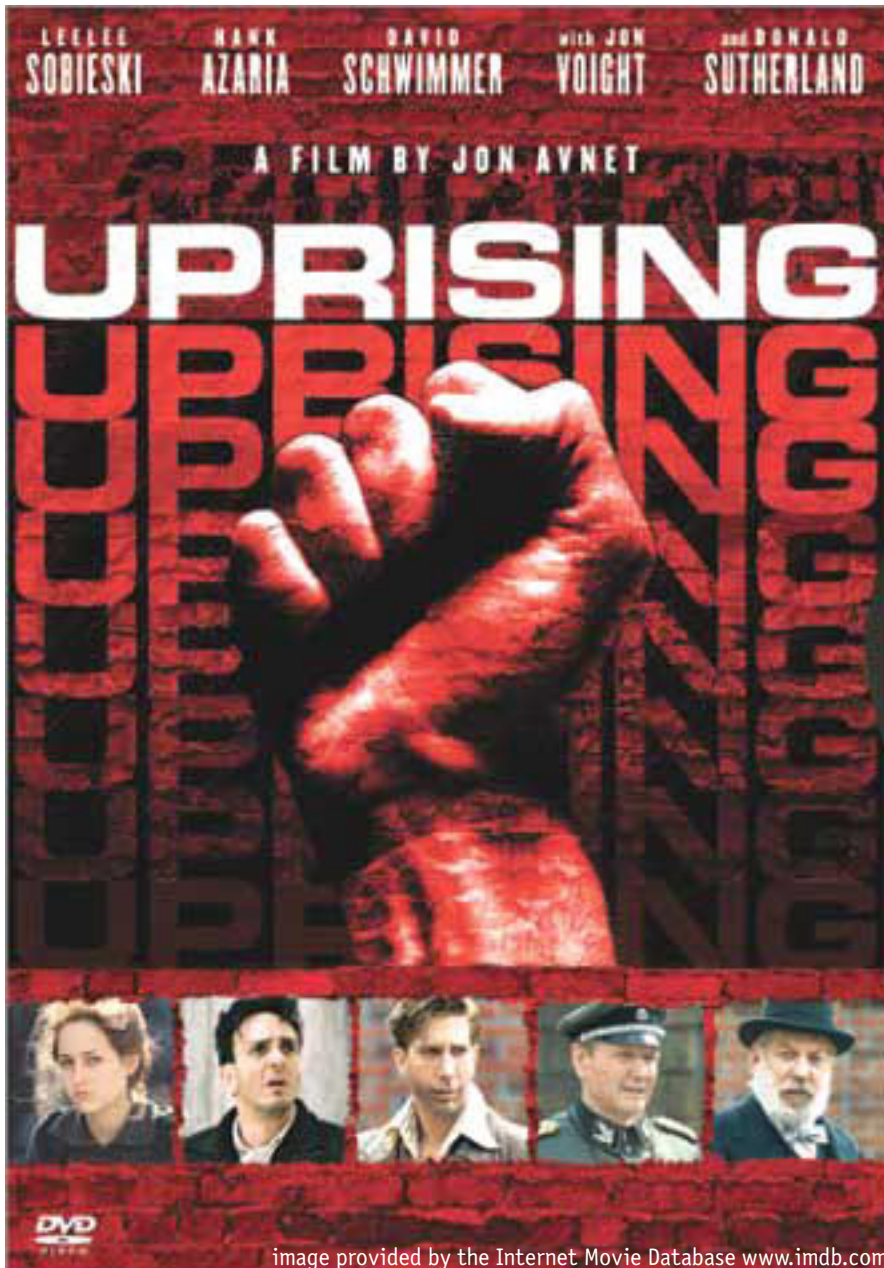


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