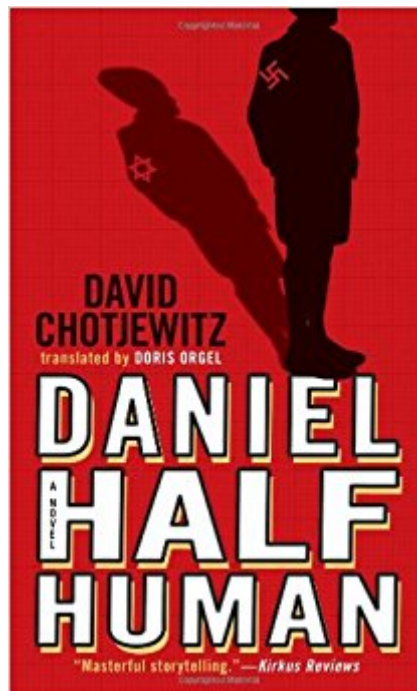




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Daniel Half Human: And The Good Nazi (Richard Jackson Books (Atheneum Hardcover))



Synopsis

In 1933, best friends Daniel and Armin admire Hitler, but as anti-Semitism buoys Hitler to power, Daniel learns he is half Jewish, threatening the friendship even as life in their beloved Hamburg, Germany, is becoming nightmarish. Also details Daniel and Armin's reunion in 1945 in interspersed chapters

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Grade 7 Up
In June 1945, a U.S. soldier working as an interpreter for the Royal British Army visits the ruins of his childhood neighborhood in Hamburg and reflects on the events that changed his life forever. In 1933, 13-year-old Daniel, the well-to-do son of a prominent lawyer, and his working-class best friend, Armin, are wildly enthusiastic about the Nazis' rise to power. Both boys are eager to join the Hitler Youth, despite their parents' opposition. Daniel is horrified when his parents reveal that his mother is Jewish. He is furious with her for being Jewish, with his father for marrying "that Jewess," and with himself for being someone considered only half human according to the Aryan doctrine. While Daniel's father insists his status as a decorated World War I hero will protect his family, his mother urges her husband to emigrate. Armin, torn between loyalty to his best friend and pressure from Nazi leadership to sever his ties with Daniel, does his best to warn him of approaching danger. The author skillfully alternates between the protagonist's brief, first-person descriptions of his return to Germany and lengthier, third-person narratives of his life before

Kristallnacht, the turning point that convinced his father to flee his homeland at last. The book's intense final scene is a fitting culmination to its exploration of the choice between official duty and loyalty to one's friends. Realizing the consequences of that choice makes a dramatic ending. Orgel's translation reads smoothly and movingly. An outstanding addition to the large body of World War II/Holocaust fiction. —â œGinny Gustin, Sonoma County Library System, Santa Rosa, CA
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Gr. 7-12. In Hamburg, Germany, in the 1930s, Daniel enjoys being part of the Hitler Youth until he discovers his mother is Jewish and he is thrown out of his elite school. He still has fun with his best friend, Armin, who falls in love with Daniel's Jewish cousin; but tension mounts, racism is rampant, and Armin begins to stay away, though he takes risks and warns his friend to hide. Daniel's return to Hamburg in 1945 as interpreter for the Allies frames the novel, which switches among the viewpoints of too many characters, including Daniel's parents, who fight about whether to leave the country. But the detailed history woven into the fiction (including the effect of Germany's defeat in World War I, Hitler's rise, and the violence of Kristallnacht) helps make this clearly translated novel an important title for the Holocaust curriculum, especially given the friendship drama that keeps raising ethical questions to the very last page. Hazel Rochman
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DANIEL HALF HUMAN AND THE GOOD NAZI by David Chotjewitz, translated by Doris Orgel, Simon & Schuster/Atheneum/Richard Jackson, October 2004, ISBN: 0-689-85747-0 "It's interesting: On the street you know right away who's Jewish. I don't mean the Orthodox with their hats and curled sideburns. I mean the ones in normal clothes. I recognize them by how they walk. The Jews always stay close to the building walls. Or near the gutter. Even though it isn't written anywhere that they should. And they always look down. As though they are looking for something on the ground. And there's always this embarrassed smile. As if they wanted to beg pardon for something. No Germans walk in that crept-inside-themselves way."--Daniel's cousin Miriam, writing a letter in 1935. Two young friends in Hamburg, Germany become blood brothers while spending a night in jail. They've been caught painting swastikas in the Communist sector of town in 1933, shortly before the rise of Adolf Hitler. Daniel, the son of a wealthy attorney, and Armin, a poor scholarship student, attend an elite high school together. Little do either know, as the pair are first dabbling in hatred and imagining belonging to the HJ (Hitler Youth), that Daniel's parents will soon reveal to him that his mother is actually Jewish. "Daniel looked at his father. 'Why did you do it?' he asked. 'Why did you

marry a Jewess?'Rheinhard stared at him. 'Why I did what?'That's why I'm half Jewish now,' Daniel said. 'Because you married a Jewess.'Rheinhard didn't answer. He gave David a look that hurt more than the smack in the face he gave him next."Desperately trying to keep his horrible secret from everyone including Armin, Daniel is furious when his cousin Miriam shows up to live with them after her father (Daniel's mother's brother) is taken into custody. And although his father's honored position as a decorated German W.W.I veteran allows Daniel's tenuous continuation at school, Daniel slowly is forced to internalize the position in which he has found himself:"I'm the lowest. That's how I felt. Someone you don't even greet. A nothing."And suddenly everything that I'd been keeping at a distance burst in on me: all the fear, all the shame, all the humiliation. I just stood there, on the sidewalk, in front of some store window as people walked by me. I stood in their way, got shoved, and a short man with a hat on said, 'Look out,' when it was he who should have looked out."And in that moment I knew hatred. I followed my erstwhile teammates with my eyes, and I hated every one of them. I imagined running up to the bunch, grabbing Klaus, spinning him around, letting him have it--in the face with my fist. Till the blood gushed out."But my hand didn't hurt him. Every blow I dealt him hurt him not at all, hurt only me. It hurt so much, I tried with all my might to obliterate this scene, erase it from my mind."It is ultimately Armin's attraction to Miriam that threatens the lives of Daniel's extended family, because Armin is a rising star in the HJ--which he's joined against his father's wishes--and Armin is being carefully watched."Dr. Knoppe raised his eyes and voice. 'The dishonorable, dirty Jew looks with envy on the noble Nordic-German people. And inside every Jew there dwells a diabolic need to drag the noble race down into the muck with him. No reasonable farmer would ever allow such interbreeding of cattle! But among humans, to our shame, it happens every day.' "An intimate perspective on the insanity faced by a young Jew during the rise of Hitler (1933-39), DANIEL HALF HUMAN AND THE GOOD NAZI also examines the dusky recesses of that long-term relationship between Daniel and Armin. What, for me, was a startling conclusion to the story will surely leave readers dwelling upon their own ideas of friendship.

Daniel and his best friend Armin, students at an exclusive high school, are excited when Hitler comes to power, even painting swastikas in a pro-communist neighborhood in Hamburg. When Daniel learns that his mother, who was raised Christian, had Jewish parents and is therefore a Jew under Nazi law, he is devastated. He too, is a half-Jew, and therefore half-human. He knows now that his dreams of joining the Hitler Youth are finished, and although he manages to keep his ancestry secret for a while, the truth eventually comes out. Daniel's best friend joins Hitler Youth although his socialist father forbids it. The situation comes to a head on the terrible night of

Kristallnacht. Part of this story takes place in 1945, with Daniel coming back to Germany and serving as an interpreter for the Royal British Army after the war. This novel is a riveting fictional account of a friendship between two boys changing under the ever-increasing restrictions of the anti-Jewish laws of the Nazi government. I liked the way that these are not "black and white" characters; for example, the young Nazi, Armin, falls in love with Daniel's visiting Jewish cousin, Miriam, although he knows it is forbidden. We see in this story how the life of non-Jews like Daniel's father falls apart as he loses everything from his very successful career because of being married to a Jew.

When I was going through this book, the above mentioned song by Kinky Friedman was the thing that recurringly kept coming to my mind, because "Daniel Half Human and the Good Nazi" would tell us the events that would precede the Holocaust, in which 6 million members of the European Jewry would eventually perish. (Of course, Kinky's song generated enough storm in its day, because most people took it to be insulting to the memory of the Holocaust victims.).I, for myself, as someone who for a few years lived in Jerusalem, had the chance to learn about the Jewish history and the atrocities on the Jews in Europe; visiting the Yad Vashem (Holocaust Memorial Museum) was both shocking and an eye opener; it showed what should never happen in this world. But I did not read many a book of fiction that described the years before the 2nd World War in Germany (Perhaps one such book that I read was "Father of a Murderer"). There are many books that give us graphic details of the Holocaust era atrocities, but there are not so many works of fiction that discuss the preceding years and the eventual spiraling of that era to the concentration camps and the "final solution". "Daniel Half human and the Good Nazi" concerns itself with 1933-1940, perhaps the most defining period for the 20th century history and politics. The irony of the book lies in the friendship of two teenagers, who are extremely devoted to the Nazi party and Hitler and both of whom aim to join the Hitler Youth. They even get arrested one night drawing Swastika in the city square. But then things suddenly change: Daniel finds out that his mother was the daughter of a couple who converted from Judaism, thus making her Jewish, and thereby making himself half Jewish, or half-human. And from that moment onwards, life for Daniel and his family members goes down in a spiral and destroys most of the things that Daniel had taken for granted for so long. It's a good read. And equally interesting is the sudden twist in the Epilogue of the book. Don't forget to read those few pages carefully.

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