

**Isaac****Robert Karmon**

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*Isaac is profound and consequential historical fiction.*

Robert Karmon's *Isaac* is a moving tale of a young Polish Jew trapped during the Holocaust, a person who joins anti-Nazi partisans out of necessity, only to be confronted again with virulent anti-Semitism.

In 1941, the Nazi *blitzkrieg* strikes Rovno, Poland. Isaac's father is a prosperous factory owner, but his family is looted of their possessions, marched into Sosenki Forest, executed, and dumped into a mass grave. Only Isaac escapes.

In shock and terrified, Isaac roams the forest. He is near starvation and dying of exposure when he encounters a partisan group. In the group is Pietka, a gentile boy from a neighboring village. Pietka urges Isaac to identify himself as "Sergei," a Russian. Many hard, brutal partisans are anti-Semitic, but Isaac keeps his secret and learns demolitions.

Isaac falls in love with Dacia, an older widowed nurse. Soviet agents bring supplies and assign missions. They too remain ignorant of Isaac's background, but they find his skill with dynamite and his ability to blow up Nazi supply trains admirable.

Kolpak, the Russian agent, proves a memorable character, as does Pietka. Dacia is the most nuanced character—written as strong-willed but kind, loving and independent, even among the partisans, who regard women as chattel.

With danger always present, the narrative remains tense, if it also relies heavily on exposition. Other than Isaac, Dacia, and Pietka, characters are less dimensional than they are role fillers, particularly the nearly indistinguishable cast of Nazis. The setting, rendered with its bitter cold, great gray forest, scarcity of food, and constant danger, makes for a believable atmosphere.

The novel's foundation is reality, drawing from the experiences of the real Isaac Gochman, whom the author met when Gochman was in his seventies, and so every page rings with hard truths.

*Isaac* is profound and consequential historical fiction, a novel worthy of inclusion in the Holocaust canon.

**GARY PRESLEY (November/December 2017)**

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