

Man of the Sun

Mike Render

iUniverse (Jan 12, 2015)

Softcover \$13.95 (190pp)

978-1-4917-5305-7

An American airman and a young Jewish boy flee from the Nazis as Allied forces prepare to invade at Normandy in this richly detailed adventure.

Mike Render's *Man of the Sun* is a briskly paced novel that pits a heroic American airman against a host of trials and dangers. It fits snugly into perhaps the most pivotal event of the past century—the Allied invasion of Nazi-occupied France.

Mike Render weaves his narrative into its wartime setting with an eye toward authenticity and historical detail. On a mission over Cologne, Germany, in the spring of 1944, Lt. Roy Stevens's P-51 Mustang is shot down. The airman parachutes to safety and is captured, but while in transit to an interrogation camp, a chance encounter results in an opportunity to help a German doctor fulfill a promise to save a young Jewish boy, Sam, from internment—and worse. Roy and Sam flee through Germany and across the border into Vichy France, where they are helped by French Resistance fighters. Their destination is the Atlantic coast, where 160,000 Allied troops will storm the beaches. But Roy's journey is a hazardous one. He is being pursued by a desperate, ruthless Waffen-SS Colonel and two truckloads of his men.

In Operation Overlord, the actual invasion plan, the Allies wanted the Germans to think that the initial invasion at Normandy was a diversion that would be followed by a larger invasion to the north. Render's Allied generals put Roy and Sam on an escape route that will likewise trick the German defenders. Render goes so far as to bring a daring and flamboyant American General, George S. Patton, an architect of the invasion, into the story to help plan and support the effort to get Roy and Sam to safety.

Render shows a knack for description, especially of aerial warfare, and for sequencing action and ratcheting suspense. This results in a tight, gripping plot in which his main characters are never out of danger until the end.

But while his emphasis on action stresses the patriotism, values, and goodness or evil of characters, Render sacrifices their emotional depth and relationships. When a German soldier rips up a letter from Roy's fiancée in front of his face, Roy, "helpless to stop him ... just shook his head and put his head down, then watched as the pieces of the letter floated to the ground." The cinematic description simply conveys Roy's emotional state, but the reliance on gestures and facial expressions limits Roy's inner world; overall, this results in a rather dimensionless character, thus limiting the dramatic impact of the action. And the above quote, typical of Render's prose, suggests that while the writing is correct and accurate, an edit for language economy would at times increase fluency and clarity.

Mike Render is a retired aerospace engineering manager. His first novel is dedicated to two uncles-in-law who served the Allied cause in Europe. His focus on history and action will attract those who are interested in history and the military. His emphasis on ideals and heroism make this novel a natural choice for young adults.

JOE TAYLOR (April 14, 2015)

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