



The Trumpets of Jericho: A Novel

J. Michael Dolan

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This is a significant book that resurrects a painful past and makes pertinent a little-known but crucial act of rebellion at Auschwitz.

The Trumpets of Jericho by J. Michael Dolan is a complex historical novel that examines the revolt at Auschwitz in October 1944. Spearheaded by a group of women in the munitions factory and orchestrated by multiple other inmates, the attempt to blow up the concentration camp's crematoria highlights the strength of Jewish resistance under near-impossible circumstances.

The account of the revolt is compelling as it encountered multiple failed attempts, circumstantial mishaps, and lukewarm support from the underground. These episodes heighten the drama and intensity of the plot. The author details with the skill of an archivist the building threat of endemic German anti-Semitism, the systematic ghettoizing of the Jews, and the clinical, even bland, technological attention that went into building the camp and operating it on a daily basis.

The cold-bloodedness of the Nazi bureaucracy comes across as most chilling as its supernumeraries conducted genocide on a wide scale yet also went to every effort to hide the evidence should they be caught.

The novel employs multiple points of view and reads as a sweeping epic that never falters in conveying the thoughts of so many characters. For example, one Nazi official, Otto Möll, demonstrates his ingeniousness at building fire pits capable of fueling themselves with human fat, yet he is perplexed that the rest of the world has done nothing to stop the death camps. He also shows bursts of evil anger, such as when on a whim he snatches an infant by the ankle from its mother's arms and tosses it into the fire pit and when he shoots an old woman in the nose after asking her if she likes the smell of roses. He is an abomination, yet because he is most deftly drawn by the author, he attains a perverse greatness as consummate literary villain.

The Trumpets of Jericho is a tough read in the sense that the violence provokes a psychic numbing, a pervasive desensitization, and a wish to look away and refuse to confront the past. Yet it is a valuable contribution to historical novels in general and specifically to important accounts that render the horrors of the Holocaust viscerally.

The novel also benefits from the author's research and knowledge of the atrocities. He says it is the only book in English that recounts this noble act of resistance. For that alone, it ranks as a significant book that resurrects a painful past, makes pertinent a little-known but crucial act of rebellion, and further ensures that what happened will never be lost.

PHILIP J. KOWALSKI (August 28, 2017)

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