



To Zenzi

Robert L. Shuster

New Issues Press (May 13, 2021)

Softcover \$18.00 (344pp)

978-1-936970-69-8

In Robert L. Shuster's gripping novel *To Zenzi*, eighty-four-year-old Tobias recounts his dark past as a member of the Hitler Youth, which he was pressured into joining when he was thirteen.

At first, Tobias believes he's fighting for a noble cause, but rumors keep swirling that the Germans are committing unthinkable atrocities against Jewish people. They are rumors so terrible he can't believe they could be true. As time goes on, though, he begins to wonder if he is fighting for the wrong side. For Tobias, life has been nothing but chaos and pain since the war began. One thing kept him going: Zenzi, a girl of Jewish descent with whom Tobias is desperately in love, and for whom he'd do anything.

Heart-wrenching and vibrant, *To Zenzi* is a masterful portrait of a war-torn world from the perspective of a teenager. It is a story of unending loss, but also of deep, tender, and enduring love. Tobias's world comes to life in glowing detail. His pain and loneliness are palpable, and his confusion over what he is fighting for, and the man whom he wants to become, is deep.

Though it is action-packed, the novel is not fast paced. It lingers over Tobias's memories. He describes each moment with precision and care, evoking the feeling that, for Tobias in his elder years, his memories—both horrific ones, and beautiful moments with Zenzi—are as fresh as if they happened yesterday.

To Zenzi is a moving portrait of what can be lost forever when one is forced to live through inconceivable circumstances. It delves into the psyches of both old and young Tobias, demonstrating how he was affected in real time as he experienced the traumas of war, as well as the many ways the war affected him later in life.

MOLLY SPRAYREGEN (March / April 2021)

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