



Sirius

Jonathan Crown

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The remarkable story of a little dog who changed world history.

Berlin, 1938: Sirius, a dashing fox terrier, lives a charmed life with the German Jewish Liliencrons. But, with the rise of Nazism, the Liliencrons decide to leave Berlin for Hollywood.

Sirius takes his destiny into his own hands with the kind of melancholic mirth exclusive to his breed. He becomes a celebrated film star and circus performer, friend to Rita Hayworth and Cary Grant. But, when a magic trick goes wrong, Sirius ends up back in war-torn Berlin. Never one to despair, he finds himself in the Führer's headquarters as Adolf Hitler's lap dog... and an informant for the resistance.

Dictated to him by his dog Louis - Sirius's grandson - Jonathan Crown has at last made this inspiring story available to the non-canine population.

Sirius Details

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From Reader Review Sirius for online ebook

Karli says

This book is a must for dog-lovers. I have a few people who will receive this book as a gift, as I know they will be unable to resist Levi/Sirius/Hercules/Hansi....in all his roles, he is certainly the star that his second name implied. It is as light-hearted a romp as possible when the subject is a Jewish family in the toxic Germany of the Hitler era. But, as any true dog lover will tell you, the joy that a dog can bring his or her people is impossible to measure.

The novel is set from the early days of Hitler through the end of WWII and the setting goes primarily between Berlin and Hollywood. Those interested in the Hollywood of the 30's and 40's will appreciate the stars that people Sirius's life in Hollywood, and those interested in WWII Germany will likewise find the German villains who Sirius encounters fascinating and more human than the history books can portray. This perspective of those years through the eyes of an amazing dog who was privy to glamour, riches, poverty and war is one that the reader will remember.

Shari (colourmeread) says

I received an advance reader's copy of this book in exchange for an honest review.

I wanted to like this book, I was even sure I'd enjoy it. But when you're 30% in and you're tempted to give up because it has taken weeks to get to that point, something is off. Maybe my expectations were too high after reading a book like *The Art of Racing in the Rain*, but I simply couldn't get into *Sirius*. Here's why:

One of the reasons I wanted to read *Sirius* was because its central character is a dog. I'm always curious to see how an author shows the world through non-human eyes and while a bit of that was achieved in this book, it fell short of its full potential. I've read books with many non-human characters and I always find it fascinating when they share their beliefs and philosophies from the perspective of their species. That was one thing I didn't get from *Sirius*. Our little fox terrier felt like a human in a dog's body and while there can certainly be similarities between human and non-human thought, Crown overdid it in this book.

Another thing I didn't like about *Sirius* was how well everything worked out for him. Somehow, he was always at the right place with the right people, doing the right thing at the right time. There were small peaks of struggle from time to time but the dog is always well received by everyone. Nobody questions how he could be so smart or how he understands every human conversation and responds appropriately. I think that was one thing that irked me - nobody questioned it and simply accepted it as is. He was a dog and he was adorable, why question anything?

If *Sirius* was too perfect, the other characters were too flat. I sympathized with what they went through but none of them felt real enough for me to care about.

My experience with *Sirius* may have been more positive if I picked it up expecting an MG depiction of WWII through the eyes of a dog. There were moments when the book tried to be comedic and I can see children appreciating its humour. There were even nuggets of wisdom to pick up here and there. I enjoyed the latter 5-10% of the book but I don't think it was worth the struggle it took for me to get there. Other

readers may have a completely different experience. If the synopsis makes you curious enough to read it, do so. If you have other books that are more interesting, you won't miss much by bypassing this one.

Melanie says

Loved this book. What a great little dog. I really enjoyed the Hollywood scenes.

Kathleen says

I enjoyed this quick read about the life of Sirius, a little fox terrier who started his life in Germany and had many adventures (not unlike Forest Gump). I recommend this book to all dog lovers. 3 stars
Thanks to NetGalley and publishers for an ARC of this novel.

Cindy Burnett says

4.5 stars

Sirius (aka Hercules, Levi and Hansi) leads a very exciting life. This fox terrier starts out life as Levi, living in Berlin with a Jewish family in the 1930s. As tensions escalate in Germany during that time period especially for Jewish people, Levi, who is renamed Sirius by his owners to combat the anti-Semitism in Germany, escapes with his family to Los Angeles. Accompanying his owner Carl to work at one of the great Hollywood studios, Sirius gets “discovered” and is cast in a movie series about a dog names Hercules. Through a series of adventures, eventually Sirius ends up back in Nazi Germany and ultimately ends up becoming Hitler’s pet dog. Sirius is renamed Hansi by Hitler, and Sirius/Hansi uses his smarts to overcome a bad situation.

Crown’s style of writing is clever and witty, and I thoroughly enjoyed reading this story. The storyline is so imaginative and quirky, and Crown creates a highly entertaining, inventive tale. Sirius makes his way through history leaving his paw print wherever he goes. The author’s depictions of 1930s Berlin and Hollywood are fascinating and well-researched. The inclusion of so many historical characters - Nazis, Nobel winning scientists and famous Hollywood movie stars - really adds to the book.

I highly recommend this novel especially for animal lovers but really for anyone who loves a clever tale. Thanks to NetGalley and Scribner for the chance to read this advance copy in exchange for an honest review.

Heather says

This story is just so cute I want to rub it's little belly. World War II through a dog's eyes. What a unique and quirky idea. It could have gone really wrong in the hands of a different writer, but Crown managed to tell this tale in a very engaging and interesting manner. It would have been very easy to make this saccharin sweet and downright ridiculous, but Crown made it really charming and even fun.

This is a historical fiction novel with a strong emphasis on "fiction". There's a lot of suspension of disbelief, but if you can get past that, I think you'll really enjoy Sirius' story. Highly recommended to any dog loving historical fiction fan.

****I received this copy via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review****

Mareli Thalwitzer says

This review was first published on: <http://marelithalkink.blogspot.com/20...>

What an absolute delightful book. Levi is a fox terrier and the last survivor of the Third Reich (a bit different from the one you know), the much-loved family pet for the German Jewish Liliencrons and the ever faithful companion to a tree. When all those bearing a Jewish name were threatened in 1938, the family changed Levi's name to Sirius. This sparks the beginning of a destiny written in the stars.

One night, Nazi troops storm Berlin and begin to search houses. Sirius alerts the family, and they manage to flee to Hollywood. In his new home, Carl Liliencron becomes a chauffeur and Sirius befriends everyone from Humphrey Bogart and Cary Grant to Rita Hayworth and Jack Warner.

He is renamed Hercules and becomes the biggest canine movie star in unrecorded history. Professor Liliencron renames himself as well and the family lives as comfortable as those who escaped and survived the war possibly could.

The greatest canine Star is soon picked up by the Greatest Show on Earth and Sirius travels with the circus where he becomes an even bigger spectacle to behold. But as circus tricks do tend to go wrong every now and then, Levi/Sirius/Hercules soon finds himself back in Berlin where lo and behold, he is renamed once again.

Little does Sirius know that he'll soon have to perform his most difficult acting role yet, when through a series of exceptional events as World War II unfolds, he winds up at the right hand of Hitler himself. Can Sirius overcome his greatest fear (Führer) and help the German resistance and reunite with his family and his beloved tree? After all, destiny is written in the stars.

Sirius is one of those wonderful books you read with a constant smile stuck on your face. This is a must read for all animal lovers and it will definitely make it into a few Christmas stockings this year. Jonathan Crown's writing style is witty and he gives a clever, compassionate and great voice to one of the smallest heroes of WWII. It might be fictional, but I prefer to believe in heroes like Sirius. This story was dictated to Jonathan Crown by his own dog, Louis, who just so happen to be the grandson of the one and only Sirius. Louis told his family history to Mr Crown who simply just recorded it. If it was Louis' story, I might have had a few doubts, but seeing that it is a story told by his grandfather - it has to be the truth. Did your grandparents ever told you a tall tale? Of course not.

Sam says

This is the cutest story ever, despite the events covered during Sirius' travels. We begin with Sirius as Levi,

beloved pet to a Jewish family in Berlin in the lead up to the Second World War before they change his name to something more suitable for the political climate of the time. As Sirius we follow the little terrier and his family to America where he becomes the famous Hercules, movie star and beloved lovvie of Hollywood before he finds himself back on German soil and in the midst of the Nazi leadership, where he becomes Hansi. The perspective of this story makes this all the more enjoyable and avoids being overtaken by the War itself and the terrors it holds, instead we are able to focus on one family and their dog and how the littlest things, people and characters can make a big big difference, no matter what the circumstances.

Kirsti says

A cute story with all the major events of this time period covered by Sirius in his own doggy way. It was written in a uniquely simple way that made me engage with the story straight away. I enjoyed every second of Sirius' tale, and hoped especially for a happy ending. It was different reading about these events from this unique stand point. I highly recommend trying this book as it is the author's first, and definitely worth a go! Four stars!

Sandie says

Author Jonathan Crown has utilized the 'shotgun' approach by incorporating a variety of subjects in his book SIRIUS. Written from the perspective of a cute little dog with extraordinary intelligence, subjects include WWII with the likes of Adolph Hitler prominently featured, the exile of Jews, circus life, and the Hollywood scene circa the 1940's with a plethora luminaries of the era from Peter Lorre, Rita Hayworth, John Wayne, Humphrey Bogart, and Billy Wilder to Marlene Dietrich and Jack Warner liberally peppering the narrative.

Sirius, the dog of the title, goes through many incarnations as this tale of dubious events progresses, and while the tone of the narrative is light and often amusing it is also discerning and astute in its observation the more serious subjects it addresses.

Readers are sure to become captivated by this little dog whose exploits put the likes of Lassie and Rin-Tin-Tin to shame.

Adrian says

I got a copy free from Good Reads, but it was well worth the read. The story is told as if by the eponymous dog, so written in a simple, but engaging, style.

While implausibly involved in many of the key events of 20th century history (including being adopted by Hitler) this seems allowable for a talking dog!

Carolyn Crocker says

Fable? Fairy tale for grownups? This dog's-eye-view of Nazi Germany and golden age of Hollywood makes light of and sheds light on the tragedy of the 20th century, in a wry comingling of historical fact and buoyant fantasy.

“And this man, of all people, who declares everything visible to the naked eye to be inconsequential, has a wife whose beauty cannot fail to be seen at the very first glance. Isn't that strange?” p. 3

USOM says

Sirius was delightfully witty, entertaining, and touching. Sirius captivated my heart with his loyalty, courage, and childlike wisdom. The book revolves around his perspective and the family he belongs to as they flee from their home and find new careers and lives in California. Their story is a series of fast paced adventure full of coincidences and unusual circumstances. The book balances a portrayal of the Nazi regime with elements of humor and sarcasm in a charming way.

When their worlds change, including the world of Sirius, their names change to represent their change in roles. From Levi, to Sirius, to Hercules, to Hansi he embarks on an adventure that asks him who he truly is and where his home is. Sirius and his family remain loyal throughout their lives and journey to find a home that requires the power of dedication and the flexibility to adapt to new circumstances.

full review: <https://utopia-state-of-mind.com/?p=390>

Disclaimer: I received a free copy of this book in exchange for an honest review from Netgalley.

Carol Kean says

“To study history means submitting to chaos and nevertheless retaining faith in order and meaning.” -- Hermann Hesse

Well, that's easier said than done. In historical fiction, more so than the classroom, we find the lessons we must learn and commit to memory, however hard it is to reconcile with any kind of faith in humanity. Toss in a little magic realism, and what harm is done? None, in “Sirius: A Novel About the Little Dog Who Almost Changed History” by Jonathan Crown.

On the heels of “The Perfect Horse” by Elizabeth Letts, a marvelous nonfiction account of priceless horses rescued in the closing days of World War II, I was sorely in need of some feel-good reading. “With charisma, heart, and delightfully spry prose,” the synopsis promises, “Sirius is an enchanting fairy tale about love and humanity and a roving exploration of a momentous historical moment.”

It's also heart-rending, at times, and unsparing in its honesty. A fox terrier in 1938 Berlin loses his home, his

familiar neighborhood where people greet him by name, and even his name. Levi's Jewish owners, the Liliencrons, rename him Sirius, after the "Big Dog" constellation, to protect him. Levi is flattered. "But at the same time he feels the responsibility weighing down on both himself and the star – of being a glimmer of light in the darkness. Dogs called Rusty have an easier time of it."

The humor and insight of this preternatural terrier show up in line after line. Make me laugh, and you'll rise to the top of my list of favorite writers. Like the stereotype of Blacks dancing better than whites, Jews seem to have mastered wit and humor like no other marginalized people in literary history. I'm officially smitten with Jonathan Crown, just as I've been with Robert Silverberg ("The Dybbuk of Mazel Tov IV," a 1972 short story, is a classic example of what I might label as Jewish humor).

"Jonathan Crown" is a pseudonym. Born in Berlin in 1953, journalist Christian Jämmerling dedicates the book "For my family, who lived in Berlin during that period." I've no doubt that the most wrenching scenes in this story come straight from real life, from first-hand accounts of people who were there, who experienced the worst fates we can imagine.

Immersed in the point of view of a dog, readers might scoff at the cognitive genius of this furry, four-legged creature, but to write off this book as unrealistic is to miss out on a truly fantastic story. As if by magic, Sirius shifts from his native German to understanding words spoken in English. He even learns how to spell and to use the piano to convey what he's learned via espionage (our magical dog cannot speak human). Any reviewer who'd fault the book for such "plot holes" is missing the boat. And this is one ride you don't want to miss.

Carl Liliencron is a professor who studies microscopic plankton. "Anything bigger than ten thousandths of an inch is of no interest to me," he's fond of saying. He studies living things which are 3.5 billion years old, and they're rarely mentioned in the newspapers. He doesn't care to read about politics, Hitler, and the future: these things are "all too big."

But then Nazi troops storm Berlin. After a harrowing escape, the "Jewish dog" and his family flee to California. Liliencron can't believe the magnificent villas, the view of a landscape reminiscent of the Scottish Highlands: "Now it's finally clear where the sun is when it's absent in Berlin--in Hollywood." This new life "often plunges him into existential-philosophical moods." The dog adjusts well, while the professor wonders if they're caught in Einstein's curvature of space-time.

Liliencron becomes a chauffeur, while Sirius befriends everyone from Humphrey Bogart and Cary Grant to Rita Hayworth and Jack Warner. Renamed Hercules, he becomes a canine movie star. A series of events, each seemingly the worst thing that could have happened, turn out to be blessings in disguise, reminding me that the Japanese word for crisis can also mean opportunity.

It also reminds me of a Hebrew expression, "Gam zu l'tovah," or "Even this is for the best," as Lenore Skenazy relates, along with the parable of Rabbi Akiva camping in the woods with his donkey, rooster and candle. While it's "insulting to say that all bad things are really for the best," Skenazy concludes, "...taking action, sometimes out of sheer misery, can change life for the better." (www.creators.com, September 15, 2016). The story of Sirius illustrates this wisdom in scene after seemingly hopeless scene. Levi, renamed for the Big Dog constellation, "transformed himself into a star, Sirius, and saved his family's life. Only he who transforms himself survives."

"Humans have been around for 160,000 years," murmurs Liliencron. "And yet it only took Hitler five to

destroy humanity.”

As World War II unfolds, Levi-Sirius-Hercules accidentally ends up in Berlin again, gets renamed again, and becomes the favorite dog of Hitler himself. How can a mere dog help the German resistance, depose the Führer, and find his family?

An omniscient narrator commands the point of view. Early in the Liliencron family’s assorted adventures, a movie mogul reminds an actor “I made you.” We also get the narrator’s interpretation: “The words sound as though God is speaking to one of his creatures, moved by the memory of the day when it learned to walk upright and become a human being. And that’s exactly how it is. In Hollywood, Jack Warner is God.”

But Warner has his good side: “Good old Jack Warner. He helps countless Jews to escape from Germany, he pulls strings in the White House, he takes the new arrivals under his wing and directs their journey from suffering to happiness, called destiny. He is a one-man dream factory.”

So many real-life people are named in this book, I had to learn more about them. Jacob (Jack) Warner was born in 1892 to a Polish Jewish immigrant family in Ontario. Reputedly crude and difficult, the real Warner sounds worse than Crown’s version. Warner made, or saved, the careers of numerous celebrities from Errol Flynn to Joan Crawford. He also accused some of his staff of being Communists, ruining their careers. Warner ousted his brothers from the family business that they had founded together and severed ties with his son. His brothers never spoke to him again. (www.haaretz.com)

Dr. Joseph Goebbels, Minister for Propaganda, is another real-life character who appears in this story. “The German people,” he says, “have to defend their most holy assets: their families, their women and children, their beautiful and pristine landscape, their towns and villages, the two-thousand-year legacy of their culture, and everything that makes life worth living.” It’s impossible to fathom how he reconciled this “holy” obligation with the imperative of torturing and murdering millions of other lives. A little bit of xenophobia is part of human evolution, but taking it to the extreme of exterminating others is beyond comprehension. This is one of many facets of a story rich with food for thought.

Here’s another: in desperation, the Germany Army plots fantastical ideas for a new wonder weapon. “The prototype of a UFO, built in the Skoda factories, turned out to be a failure. So now there was a new plan: Why not fire dogs into the enemy lines?” Just inject them with a neurotoxin “which would be released on impact and destroy everything in their vicinity.”

This facet of history may not be well known: a law forbidding Jews from keeping pets. “They are instructed to immediately put their dogs or cats to sleep. Germans are forbidden from keeping Jewish pets.” Jewish cats and dogs? Rational, educated Germans managed to believe this stuff? It staggers the imagination.

This is “the kind of thing that usually gets forgotten,” Crown narrates, but in World War II Germany, “the birds are being looked after... The soldiers on the front receive guidelines on the construction of nesting boxes and feeders. Tons of hemp seed and sunflower seeds are transported to the front, as winter sustenance for the birds.”

Yes, the Nazis cared about small, vulnerable creatures. Cognitive dissonance, anyone? The infamous Third Reich commanded a Department for Bird Protection (and Forest and Nature Conservation). It’s forgotten details like these that keep me returning to that most brutal and horror-laden genre, historical fiction.

“We Germans are a people of the forests,” Goering wrote. “Unlike the Jews. They are a people of the desert.”

Well, now this is beginning to sound familiar. “A bird singing in the forest is the most beautiful German song in existence.”

Not so incredibly, then, Walt Disney’s “Snow White” is one of Hitler’s favorites. (For real.) The evil dictator “likes to unwind by watching Hollywood movies.” And college basketball, I’ve read elsewhere. It’s unsettling to see a human side to the world’s most notoriously evil dictator. Hitler had a dog who loved him. More than one dog, in fact.

For a long time, I couldn’t reconcile this gentler, more humane side of the Nazis with their unthinkable horrific torture and mass murder of fellow human beings. Then it dawned on me that vegans will forego dairy products and eggs (potential lives), while allowing millions of human fetuses to be scalded, dismembered, and vacuumed from their mothers’ bodies. I’m not denouncing anyone’s ethics and morality, legal rights and politics, here; just pointing out that people, as a whole, do in fact hold conflicting ideals simultaneously. I’m not defending Germans, Hitler, or Nazis, either, when I marvel at their capacity to display a better side, even a kinder and gentler side.

Help! My brain hurts!

In no way have I come close to summarizing the plot twists, surprises and delights in this novel. No spoilers here. We all know Germany loses. It’s safe to say that one of the most memorable scenes is that of a Hausfrau with her broom, sweeping away the aftermath of war from the streets of Berlin. The woman has gone mad, of course, but this small scene illustrates so much of what I love about the German people as I knew them, all third-generation Americans, all thoroughly “German” in their ways. I grew up with cuckoo clocks, braided blondes in St. Pauli girl dresses, sauerkraut, bratwurst, hard work, thrift and industry, a dad who sometimes yodeled on his tractor, and a certain pride in a heritage that novelist Frank Norris called “a foul stream of hereditary evil.”

As the Hebrew phrase "Gam zu l'tovah" expresses Jewish wisdom, this novel shines a light on the darkest chapter in human history. Crown's tragicomic approach to themes of exile, flight, expulsion, and homelessness make a profound and lasting impression.

First released in Germany, the novel received overwhelmingly positive feedback. Jamie Searle Romanelli translated it into English. I look forward to more from this writer.

Jessica McCann says

SIRIUS is an easy-to-read, whimsical book about a smart little Jewish doggie who experiences all kinds of adventure while trying to make sense of the world around him during WWII. He escapes Nazi Germany with his Jewish family and lives a celebrated life in Hollywood, until unforeseen circumstances land him back in Berlin alone and at the foot of the Fuhrer.

The book’s writing style is uncomplicated, yet unique. Because I haven’t read many translated works, I’m not sure if the “uniqueness” I experienced was due to the translation from German or to a literary style common in that country. The scenes and chapters play out in short bursts (as short as one or two paragraphs in many cases) and jump frequently from one POV to another, which made it a speedy read. (Some sentences struck me as odd and I had to re-read them. This most likely was due to the translation; for example, the

word “giggle” is used in several places where I believe “chuckled” or “smirked” might have been more fitting word choices in the context.)

The writing style is not flowery or literary, yet the story does get mildly philosophical at times. SIRIUS also has many brief passages that paint vivid pictures of the time and place, which I enjoyed quite a bit. Here’s just one example of the latter:

“Berlin, the city of gray, stumbles toward summer like a prisoner finally released from his sad cell, praising God that he is able to see the blue sky again after so long. Hungry for sunshine. Greedy for exercise. Gasping for fresh air. Thirsty for beer.”

While the book definitely touched upon some of the ugliest parts of Hitler’s directives, it was never overly graphic or dark. If you enjoy light-hearted historical fiction and novels that include a dog’s perspective, you will enjoy SIRIUS.
