



# THE HORROR OF NAZI GERMANY

By Kristin Lewis

Children look out from behind a barbed-wire fence at Auschwitz, a Nazi concentration camp in southern Poland. From 1942 to 1944, Jews from all over German-occupied Europe were taken to the gas chambers at Auschwitz. At least 1 million prisoners died here. Ninety percent of them were Jewish.

## From 1933 to 1945, Adolf Hitler and his Nazi Party ruled Germany. It was one of the most terrifying and violent regimes the world has ever seen.

**Y**ou are about to perform a fictional drama that takes place during a real period of the past. This period is one of the most horrifying in history. For 12 years—from 1933 to 1945—Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party ruled Germany with total control. The Nazis believed that certain groups of people were “inferior.” And they believed that the inferior did not deserve to live.

After their defeat in World War I, many Germans felt humiliated and angry. The country’s economy was in tatters, and jobs were hard to come by. Hitler offered up a **scapegoat**: Jewish people.

Anti-Semitism, or hatred of Jewish people, had existed in Europe for centuries. Jewish people were often despised for being different—for having different beliefs and customs. Hitler fanned the flames of these old prejudices. In his speeches, he said Jewish people were to blame for all of Germany’s problems. He called them “vermin.”

In the 1930s, laws were passed requiring Jewish people to give up their jobs and their rights; Jewish children were no longer allowed to go to school. By the end of the decade, Jews were being forced from their homes. The ruthless secret police known as the Gestapo, along with a powerful military force called the SS, helped enforce anti-Jewish laws.

The Nazis’ ultimate plan was to rid Europe of all Jewish people. They referred to this plan as the “Final Solution,” and they carried it out with terrifying precision. They built death camps (also known as concentration camps) and used gas chambers to **systematically** murder Jewish men, women, and children, along with others they considered inferior, including the Roma (or Gypsies, as they were called), the mentally ill, and the disabled. Others were shot, or died in the camps of disease or starvation.

Many Germans embraced Hitler and joined the Nazis. Those who did not learned to keep their mouths shut. Speaking out against the Führer, as Hitler was known (*fürher* means *leader* in German), could get you arrested or killed.

Hitler wanted to control all of Europe. In 1939, he began invading other countries, triggering World War II. By the time Germany was defeated and the war ended, in 1945, 6 million Jewish people had been murdered—about two thirds of the Jewish population of Europe.

This **genocide** became known as the Holocaust. ●



Adolf  
Hitler

**HISTORICAL  
FICTION**  
a story set in  
the past

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**ADAPTATION BY THE EDITORS OF SCOPE**

## CHARACTERS

Circle the character you will play.

\*Starred characters are major roles.

\***NARRATORS 1 & 2** (N1, N2)

\***DEATH**

\***LIESEL MEMINGER**, a German girl

\***ROSA HUBERMANN**, Liesel's Mama

\***HANS HUBERMANN**, Liesel's Papa

**HERR HERMANN**, the mayor

**ILSA HERMANN**, the mayor's wife

**HISTORIAN**

**MAX**, a young Jewish man

**CAPTION READER**

AS YOU READ,  
THINK ABOUT:

What role does reading play in this story?

## Prologue

**N1:** This is the story of one girl caught up in the horror of Nazi Germany.

**N2:** It is a story of death.

**N1:** But it is also a story of life.

**N2:** We catch up with Liesel in 1939 in a small German town. Liesel's parents were killed for speaking out against Hitler's government.

**N1:** For the past two years, Liesel has been raised by her adoptive parents, Rosa and Hans, who love her deeply.

**N2:** Liesel couldn't read or write when she first came to live with them. Hans couldn't read very well either.

**N1:** So Liesel and Hans read together every day. Now, it is their favorite activity.

## Act One

### SCENE 1

**DEATH:** One small fact: You are going to die. Sorry to be such a spoiler, but no one lives forever. *(pause)* I guess I should introduce myself. Then again, you'll meet me soon enough. Not before your time, of course. I make it a policy to avoid the living. Except every once in a long while, I can't help myself. I get interested. And I don't know what it was about Liesel Meminger, but she caught my attention—and I cared.

**N2:** Liesel sits on a couch, reading.

**ROSA** *(trailing behind Hans):* Where is it? Every other house on this street has one. If we don't find it, it's going to seem like we are trying to say something!

**HANS:** Calm down. The Nazi flag is in the basement.

**ROSA:** Good. Hang it, and then we must go.

**HANS** *(wearily):* I know.

**LIESEL:** Why don't you want to go, Papa?

**HANS:** I hate everything the Nazis stand for, but if we aren't at the parade tonight, it will look suspicious.

**N1:** Later, Rosa, Hans, and Liesel step out into the night. The streets are glowing with torchlight. Black-and-red Nazi flags flap in the breeze.

**N2:** The main street **teems** with people. There are Nazi uniforms everywhere. Everyone is massing in the town square, where a giant bonfire roars.

**N1:** The Mayor, Herr Hermann, steps up to a podium.

**HERR HERMANN:** For the past few days, this great nation has been celebrating our great Führer's birthday.

**N2:** The crowd cheers and shouts in approval.

**HERMANN:** Now we must purify from within. Education, film, literature, newspapers—these should express only the values of our great people. Anything that does not must be destroyed.

**N1:** People begin throwing books on the fire.

**LIESEL** *(gasping in horror):* No! Stop!

**HANS:** Shhh! Someone will hear you!

**N2:** Liesel watches in agony as hundreds of books crackle in the flames.

### SCENE 2

**N1:** Liesel sits in her room holding a charred book as though it were a priceless jewel.

**LIESEL** *(reading):* *The Invisible Man* by H.G. Wells.

**HANS** *(walking in):* What is that?

Did you—did you steal that?

**LIESEL:** Please don't be mad. I took it from the bonfire.

**HANS:** Were you seen?

**LIESEL:** No.

**HANS** *(with a tired smile):* All right. This will be our secret. But we must be careful. If we get caught with



Hans  
Hubermann



banned books, we will be arrested. So you'll have to read in the basement, out of sight.

### SCENE 3

**HISTORIAN:** Months pass. Germany is changing. Across the country, Jewish people are being rounded up and taken away.

**N2:** Late one night, there is a knock on the door.

**ROSA:** Who could that be at this hour?

**N1:** Hans opens the door to a **haggard** young man.

**MAX:** Hans Hubermann?

**HANS:** Yes?

**MAX:** I am Max Vandenburg.

**N2:** Max collapses. Hans quickly drags him inside.

**ROSA:** Close the door! Quick!

**LIESEL:** Who is that, Papa?

**HANS:** This boy's father saved my life long ago, in the war. I promised if I could ever help his family, I would.

**ROSA:** We must get him warm.

**HANS:** Liesel, you must promise not to tell anyone about our visitor. If you tell, they will take us away.

**N1:** Hans looks at Max.

**HANS:** I don't want to tell you what they will do to him.

**N2:** Later, in the basement, Liesel sits beside Max, who is asleep on a bed made of cardboard boxes. He looks ill.

**N1:** She sees a copy of *Mein Kampf* tucked in his jacket. She reaches for it when—

**MAX (awake):** You're a curious girl.

**LIESEL:** I didn't mean to—

**MAX:** It's all right.

**LIESEL:** Is this book good?

**MAX:** This is Hitler's memoir, and it is far from good. But it saved me, in a way. If I was stopped, nobody who saw me with this book would suspect I was a Jew.

**LIESEL:** What happened to your family?

**MAX:** The Nazis came to my street, banging



Ilsa shares her library with Liesel.

down doors and dragging us from our homes. My mother begged me to leave her and run.

**DEATH:** When I finally caught up to Max's soul, it was that moment that haunted him most.

**N2:** Max's eyes fill with tears.

**LIESEL:** It's OK. I cried a lot when I first came here too.

**N1:** Max wipes his eyes.

**LIESEL:** I am sorry you can't have a real bed. Papa says it would look suspicious if anyone saw it.

**MAX:** Do not apologize. I am putting you all in danger.

**N2:** Upstairs, Rosa and Hans speak quietly.

**ROSA:** What are we going to feed him? We barely have enough for ourselves.

**HANS:** We will make do. We must.

**ROSA:** But what if we are caught?

**HANS:** Max will have to stay in the basement.

**ROSA:** If even one neighbor suspects . . .



*Mein Kampf* ("My Struggle") was a **manifesto that outlined Hitler's extreme racist views about Jewish people and his plans for the future of Germany. Owning it was a way to prove loyalty to Hitler. By the end of World War II, more than a million copies had been sold.**

## Act Two

### SCENE 1

**HISTORIAN:** Many Germans have embraced Hitler and the Nazi party. But for Germans like Hans who refuse to join the party, life becomes more dangerous by the day. They are viewed with mistrust and suspicion.

**N1:** Rosa does laundry to earn money for the family. Liesel helps with deliveries.

**N2:** Liesel rings the bell at a mansion. She glances around nervously.

**N1:** A familiar-looking woman answers the

door. It is Ilsa, the mayor's wife.

**LIESEL:** Here is your laundry.

**N2:** Ilsa takes the bag and gives her a handful of coins. Liesel carefully counts it.

**ILSA:** Tell your mama thank you.

**LIESEL:** Yes, Frau Hermann.

**ILSA:** Call me Ilsa. So . . . I saw you.

**LIESEL:** What?

**ILSA:** At the bonfire. It's OK. I like books too. Why don't you come in?

**N1:** Ilsa leads a very nervous Liesel to a bright room filled with books. Liesel is awestruck.

**ILSA:** These books belonged to my son. He died . . . long ago. Please, have a look around.

**LIESEL** (reading a title): *The Dream Carrier*. May I read it?

**ILSA:** Of course. You can come here whenever you want. It just has to be our secret. No one can know the mayor's wife has banned books.

**N2:** Liesel visits Ilsa every chance she gets. She reads book after book, letting the words carry her away.

## SCENE 2

**HISTORIAN:** Hitler's armies sweep across Europe, conquering one nation after another. France, Belgium, Austria, Poland—all have fallen. Britain, the U.S., and Russia have joined together to fight back.

**DEATH:** The only truth I know is that I am haunted by humans.

**N1:** Down in the basement, Max has lost track of time. His world has become a tiny windowless room.

**MAX:** Liesel, could you describe the day for me?

**LIESEL:** It's cloudy.

**MAX:** No, no. Make the words yours. If your eyes could speak, what would they say?

**LIESEL:** Um . . . It's a pale day.

**MAX:** Pale, good. What else?

**LIESEL:** Everything is stuck behind a cloud.

**MAX:** And the sun?

**LIESEL:** A silver oyster.

**N2:** Max smiles.

**MAX** (softly): I can see that.

Max  
Vandenburg



Nazis raided libraries and bookstores across Germany, confiscating any book they thought represented an opposition to Nazi views or that had a Jewish author. Thousands of books were burned, including works by Albert Einstein, Jack London (above), and H.G. Wells (below).



**N1:** Suddenly, Max loses consciousness.

**LIESEL:** Max? (louder) Max!

**N2:** Rosa runs in and sees Max.

**LIESEL:** Is—is he going to die?

**ROSA:** I'll have none of that talk! I haven't starved us this past year so that he could die.

**LIESEL:** I've got an idea.

**N1:** Liesel runs to Ilsa's house, crawls through a window, grabs a book, and races home.

**LIESEL:** Max, I didn't steal it. I only borrowed it. And when we finish this one, I'll get another. And another. I won't stop reading until you are better.

**N2:** Months go by. Liesel reads to Max every day until finally he recovers from his illness.

**N1:** Liesel and Max form a deep friendship.

## Act Three SCENE 1

**HISTORIAN:** Germany is beginning to lose the war, though German newspapers report the opposite. Every day they announce another military victory.

**DEATH:** And across Europe, the killing of Jews continued. It was a busy time for me.

**N2:** Max stands in the Hubermanns' doorway.

**LIESEL:** I don't want you to go.

**MAX:** I have to.

**LIESEL:** Why?

**HANS:** It's my fault. An officer was hauling a man away, screaming that he was a Jew. I tried to save him, and a Gestapo officer took down my name.

**ROSA:** It's only a matter of time before the Gestapo come here to question us.

**HANS:** And they would find Max.

**LIESEL:** But I can't lose you, Max!

**MAX:** I am not lost to you, Liesel. You will always be able to find me in your words.

**N1:** He pulls out *Mein Kampf*.

**LIESEL:** Why are you giving me this?

**MAX:** Open it.



**LIESEL:** You have painted the pages white.



**MAX:** Words are life, Liesel. And now those blank pages are for you to fill.

**N2:** Max slips out into the darkness.

## SCENE 2

**N1:** As the weeks go by, Liesel continues to write in the book Max gave her. She writes and writes, pouring out her story.

**N2:** One night, she writes in the basement.

**N1:** Far above, British planes speed toward Liesel's town.

**DEATH:** No one had intended to destroy her street that night. Someone misread a map.

**N2:** The bombs start to fall. One bomb lands on Liesel's house, which explodes in flames.

**DEATH:** Rosa I caught mid-snore. I felt her regret for not sharing more of her big heart.

**N1:** Debris flies everywhere. The house collapses.

**DEATH:** As for Hans, his soul was lighter than a child's. I heard his final thought: "Liesel."

**N2:** People rush to Liesel's street, looking for survivors.

**DEATH:** And Liesel . . .

**N1:** Someone helps Liesel out from the wreckage.

**N2:** She looks around in shock. Everything is destroyed. Everyone is dead.

**DEATH:** I almost took her, even though it was not her time. I almost broke all the rules to take her away from the pain and the loss, but then . . .

**N1:** Liesel's eyes fall upon her journal, sitting in the rubble. She grabs it, clutching it closely.

**N2:** Then, at the end of the street, Liesel sees a familiar figure stumbling through the smoke.

**LIESEL:** Ilsa!

**N1:** They run to each other and embrace.

## SCENE 3

**HISTORIAN:** In 1945, Allied forces roll into Germany and the war comes to an end. Survivors in the concentration

### WRITING CONTEST

Why were words so important to Liesel and Max? What big idea about words does this story convey? Use text evidence to support your answer. Send your response to **THE BOOK THIEF CONTEST**. Five winners will each receive *The Book Thief* novel and Blu-ray.

**GET THIS ACTIVITY ONLINE**

Liesel is rescued from the wreckage of her street. Below: A British bomber in World War II.



camps are **liberated**.

**N2:** Liesel, now a young woman, works in a tailor shop.

**N1:** She pauses from her work to look out the window. But she isn't looking at the bombed-out buildings. She is searching the faces of those who pass by, looking for one in particular.

**N2:** She sighs and goes back to her work. The door opens and a man walks in.

**MAX:** Hello, Liesel.

**LIESEL** (*with a mix of joy and disbelief*): You survived!

**N1:** She throws her arms around him.

**N2:** They stand holding each other for a long time, without saying a word. At last, Liesel lets go.

**LIESEL:** I have something to show you.

**N1:** She pulls out the journal, every page now filled, and opens it to the last page.

**MAX** (*reading*): "For Max, who taught me to see."

## Epilogue

**DEATH:** I wanted to tell the book thief many things about beauty and brutality. But what could I tell her that she didn't already know? I wanted to tell her she made me wonder what it was to live. But in the end, when her time came, after she had her children and her grandchildren and had lived a long and full life—after all of that, there were no words. Only peace. ●

