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Posted on 04 September 2019 By Markus Zusak

This is a book to treasure, a new classic I absolutely loved it. Set in Germany in the years 1939-1943, *The Book Thief* tells the story of Liesel, narrated by Death who has in his possession the book she wrote about these years. So, in a way, they are both book thieves. Liesel steals randomly at first, and later methodically, but she's never greedy. Death pockets Liesel's notebook after she leaves it, forgotten in her grief, amongst the destruction that was once her street, her home, and carries it with him. Liesel is effectively an orphan. She never knew her father, her mother disappears after delivering her to her new foster parents, and her younger brother died on the train to Molching where the foster parents live. Death first encounters nine-year-old Liesel when her brother dies, and hangs around long enough to watch her steal her first book, *The Gravedigger's Handbook*, left lying in the snow by her brother's grave. Her foster parents, Hans and Rosa Herbermann, are poor Germans given a small allowance to take her in. Hans, a tall, quiet man with silver eyes, is a painter of houses etc and plays the accordion. He teaches Liesel how to read and write. Rosa is gruff and swears a lot but has a big heart, and does laundry for rich people in the town. Liesel becomes best friends with her neighbour Rudy, a boy with hair the colour of lemons who idolises the black Olympic champion sprinter Jesse Owens. One night a Jew turns up in their home. He's the son of a friend of Hans from the first world war, the man who taught him the accordion, whose widowed wife Hans promised to help if she ever needed it. Hans is a German who does not hate Jews, though he knows the risk he and his family

are taking, letting Max live in the basement Max and Liesel become close friends, and he writes an absolutely beautiful story for her, called *The Standover Man*, which damn near broke my heart It s the story of Max, growing up and coming to Liesel s home, and it s painted over white painted pages of *Mein Kampf*, which you can see through the paint. Whenever I read a book, I cannot help but read it in two ways the story itself, and how it s written They re not quite inseparable, but they definitely support each other With *The Book Thief*, Markus Zusak has shown he s a writer of genius, an artist of words, a poet, a literary marvel His writing is lyrical, haunting, poetic, profound Death is rendered vividly, a lonely, haunted being who is drawn to children, who has had a lot of time to contemplate human nature and wonder at it Liesel is very real, a child living a child s life of soccer in the street, stolen pleasures, sudden passions and a full heart while around her bombs drop, maimed veterans hang themselves, bereaved parents move like ghosts, Gestapo take children away and the dirty skeletons of Jews are paraded through the town. Many things save this book from being all out depressing It s never morbid, for a start A lively humour dances through the pages, and the richness of the descriptions as well as the richness of the characters hearts cannot fail to lift you up Also, it s great to read such a balanced story, where ordinary Germans even those who are blond and blue eyed are as much at risk of losing their lives, of being persecuted, as the Jews themselves. I can t go any further without talking about the writing itself From the very first title page, you know you re in for something very special indeed The only way to really show you what I mean is to select a few quotes and I wish I was better at keeping track of lines I love As he looked uncomfortably at the human shape before him, the young man s voice was scraped out and handed across the dark like it was all that remained of him p187 Imagine smiling after a slap in the face Then think of doing it twenty four hours a day That was the business of hiding a Jew p.239 The book was released gloriously from his hand It opened and flapped, the pages rattling as it covered ground in the air More abruptly than expected, it stopped and appeared to be sucked towards the water It clapped when it hit the surface and began to float downstream p.325 So many humans So many colours They

keep triggering inside me They harass my memory I see them tall in their heaps, all mounted on top of each other There is air like plastic, a horizon like setting glue There are skies manufactured by people, punctured and leaking, and there are soft, coal coloured clouds, beating, like black hearts And then There is death Making his way through all of it On the surface unflappable, unwavering Below unnerved, untied, and undone p.331 After ten minutes or so, what was most prominent in the cellar was a kind of non movement Their bodies were welded together and only their feet changed position or pressure Stillness was shackled to their faces They watched each other and waited p.402 People and Jews and clouds all stopped They watched As he stood, Max looked first at the girl and then stared directly into the sky who was wide and blue and magnificent There were heavy beams planks of sun falling randomly, wonderfully, onto the road Clouds arched their backs to look behind as they started again to move on It s such a beautiful day, he said, and his voice was in many pieces A great day to die A great day to die, like this pp.543 4 Writing like this is not something just anyone can do it s true art Only a writer of Zusak s talent could make this story work, and could get away with such a proliferation of adjectives and adverbs, to write in such a way as to revitalise the language and use words to paint emotion and a vivid visual landscape in a way you d never before encountered This is a book about the power of words and language, and it is fitting that it is written in just such this way The way this book was written also makes me think of a musical, or an elaborate, flamboyant stage play It s in the title pages for each part, in Death s asides and manner of emphasizing little details or even speech, in the way Death narrates, giving us the ending at the beginning, giving little melodrammatic pronouncements that make you shiver It s probably the first book I ve read that makes me feel how I feel watching The Phantom of the Opera, if that helps explain it. And it made me cry. I hate it when this happens, I truly do It makes me feel wrong inside when everyone else loves a book that I find to be underwhelming I mean, what s wrong with me Did I not get it Obviously it must be a lack of intelligence or something because everyone seems to rate this 5 stars I was looking through my friend reviews hoping that someone would share my opinion at least a tiny bit and seeing 5 stars, 5 stars,

4.5 stars, 5 stars I can appreciate that Markus Zusak is a very talented writer, some of the phrases he uses are beautiful and highly quotable reminiscent of poetry than prose And the story idea A tale narrated by Death and set in Nazi Germany original and ominous But it was the story telling that never really worked for me This is one of those incredibly slow, subtle books that are told in a series of anecdotes and are meant to cleverly build up a bigger picture but the stories just didn't interest me. I could imagine I was reading a collection of short stories and not a full length novel about playground fights, developing friendships, WWI stories and death The book felt almost episodic in nature These stories are supposed to come together and form a novel that is all kinds of awesome, but it was so bland I also think that nearly 600 pages of subtlety can make you want to throw yourself off the nearest tall building anyone read To the Lighthouse and spend 99% of it just wishing they'd get to the effin lighthouse I'm giving this book 3 stars for the pretty words and the concept But other than that this book unfortunately won't stay with me I find it an easily forgettable novel I'm sorry Blog Facebook Twitter Instagram Youtube Store UPDATE AUG 26, 2016 This review has been here 8 years, has 18 pages of 854 comments and 764 likes There's no outrage for you to add in the comments section that hasn't already been addressed. If you want to talk about the book, or why you liked it, or anything else, feel free UPDATE FEB 17, 2014 I wrote this review 4 years ago on a foreign keyboard, so I'm well aware that I spelled Chekhov's name wrong I'm not going to fix it, so please don't drive my review further up in the rankings by commenting on the misspelling You're very dear, but I know his name is Anton and not Antonin On that same note, you don't need to add comments telling me that I didn't like the book because I don't know how to read and don't understand metaphors I actually have an M.A. in English Lit, so I do know how to read much better than you do, in fact Now quit bothering me before I go get my PhD and then really turn into a credential touting ass UPDATE JULY 10, 2013 To all jr high students who find themselves grossly offended by my review please remember that every time you leave a comment here, you push my review up even higher in the rankings Please save us both time and energy by not commenting Thnx This was the biggest piece of garbage I've

ever read after *The Kite Runner* Just as with *The Kite Runner*, I'm somewhat shocked that this book is a bestseller and has been given awards, chewed up and swallowed by the literary masses and regarded as greatness Riiiiight The whole thing can be summed up as the story of a girl who sometimes steals books coming of age during the Holocaust Throw in the snarky narration by Death nifty trick except that it doesn't work, a few half-assed drawings of birdies and swastikas, senseless and often laughable prose that sounds like it was pulled from the poetry journal of a self-important 15-year-old, and a cast of characters that throughout are like watching cardboard cutouts walking around VERY SLOWLY, and that's the novel Here are some humble observations First, chances are that you, Mr Zusak, are not Antonin Chekhov You are, therefore, incapable of properly describing the weather for use as a literary device, and you end up sounding like an asshole Don't believe me I like a chocolate colored sky Dark, dark chocolate Really Do you, now The sky was dripping Like a tap that a child has tried it's hardest to turn off but hasn't quite managed Really Wow Next you'll tell me that the rain was like a shower I'm moved Oh, how the clouds stumbled in and assembled stupidly in the sky Great obese clouds Yes Stupid, obese clouds They need an education and a healthy diet Next, chances are that you, Mr Zusak, are not William Styron or any one of the other small handful of authors that can get away with Holocaust fiction They've done their research, had some inkling of writing ability, and were able to tell fascinating stories You invented a fake town in Germany probably so you didn't have to do any research and told a long-winded and poorly written story, and in 500 pages you couldn't even make it to 1945, so you sloppily dropped off and wrapped it up in 1943 What's the point of writing historical fiction if you can't even stay within the basic confines of that historical event For me, this does nothing than trivialize the mass murder of over 6 million people Maybe that's why a 30-year-old Australian shouldn't write about the Holocaust But that's just me Moving on But what really makes this book expensive toilet paper is the bad writing which is to be found not just in bizarre descriptions of the weather, but really on every page Some personal favorites The breakfast colored sun Somewhere inside her were the souls of words The oldened young man WTF He crawled to a disfigured figure

Her words were motionless It smelled like friendship Remind me to sniff my friends next time I see them A multitude of words and sentences were at her fingertips HUH Pinecones littered the ground like cookies Sigh All of this is quite funny coming from a book where the main character supposedly learns the importance of words Further, I love that the protagonist comes to the conclusion that Hitler would be nothing without words Really REALLY Would Hitler be nothing without WORDS What about self loathing, misplaced blame and hatred, an ideology, xenophobia, charisma, an army, and a pride injured nation willing to listen Don t those count for something The shit storm comes to an end when a bomb lands on our fictional town, wiping out everyone save for the sometimes book thief main character Of course Because weak writers who don t know how to end their story just kill everyone off for a clean break and some nice emotional manipulation Written for maximum tear jerking effect, our main character spews out some great lines when she sees the death and destruction around her To her dead mother, God damn it, you were so beautiful To her dead best friend as she shakes him, Wake up I love you Wake up Didn t I see the same thing in that movie My Girl Then she profoundly notes that her dead father was a man with silver eyes, not dead ones And this kind of angsty adolescent prose just never ended It went on and on to form the one long ass, senseless, disjointed story But that s ok Take it all the junk, give it a quirky narrator, an obscure and mysterious title, throw in a Jew on the run from Nazis who likes to draw silly pictures of birds and swastikas, and market it all as Holocaust lit Ahh, the packaging of bullshit makes for such a sweet best seller Swallow it down, America Put it on the shelf next to The Kite Runner You love this You live for this SUCKED. I put off reading this book for the library book club Here are my three reasons for doing so 1 It s a Young Adult Book I am an Adult It can t be that good if it s written for young people.2 It s about the Holocaust, and I think we ve all heard enough about that The author will probably even focus on colors among the grays, as in Schindler s List 3 I have WAY too many other books to read.After avoiding the book for as long as possible, I sat down, hoping to enjoy it enough to gain some clever comments for the book group.Turns out, most of my concerns were right But one other thing was also true THIS

BOOK ROCKS. The first thing any review will say about this book is that it is narrated by death So, I might as well get it out of the way Death, the Hooded One, the Angel of the Night, narrates He is very busy during the war years, as you might expect Some people claim this is a mere gimmick, and that the story is strong enough as it is I agree that this is a strong story it moves like a sailboat on a brisk day but I think the choice to tell it through Death was a good one Death foreshadows constantly, so we know a bit about which of the characters will die Instead of ruining the shock value, this heightened my anticipation and dread And isn't that how people feel during war They know some of them are bound to die They know they will lose loved ones It's one long, hellish wait to see how it will turn out It's also an unusual take on the Holocaust because it focuses on Liesel, an orphaned German girl living in Hitler's birthplace Liesel The Book Thief and the other characters in this book are rich, interesting, and wily I say wily because at points in the book you hate them, but they change, and you grow to love them For instance, Liesel's adopted mother is a foul mouthed, abusive, sharp woman SPOILER When Liesel's adopted father is shipped off to war, however, Liesel creeps through the house to see Rosa sleeping with her husband's accordion strapped around her waist Rosa's changes prove one of the greatest reasons to read good literature to get insight into the type of people we don't usually give a second chance. Video review can be found here I give this 5 stars, BUT there is a disclaimer If you want a fast read, this book is not for you If you only like happy endings this book is not for you If you don't like experimental fiction, this book is not for you If you love to read and if you love to care about the characters you read about and if you love to eat words like they're ice cream and if you love to have your heart broken and mended on the same page, this book is for you This story is narrated by Death during World War II, and it is the story of a young German girl who comes of age during one of the most horrific times in recent history Death has a personality If something bad is about to happen, Death warns you ahead of time My favorite part is when he stomps on a framed picture of Hitler on his way to retrieve a thousand souls from a bomb raid Death is trying to understand the human race as much as the humans are When his job becomes unbearable, he watches

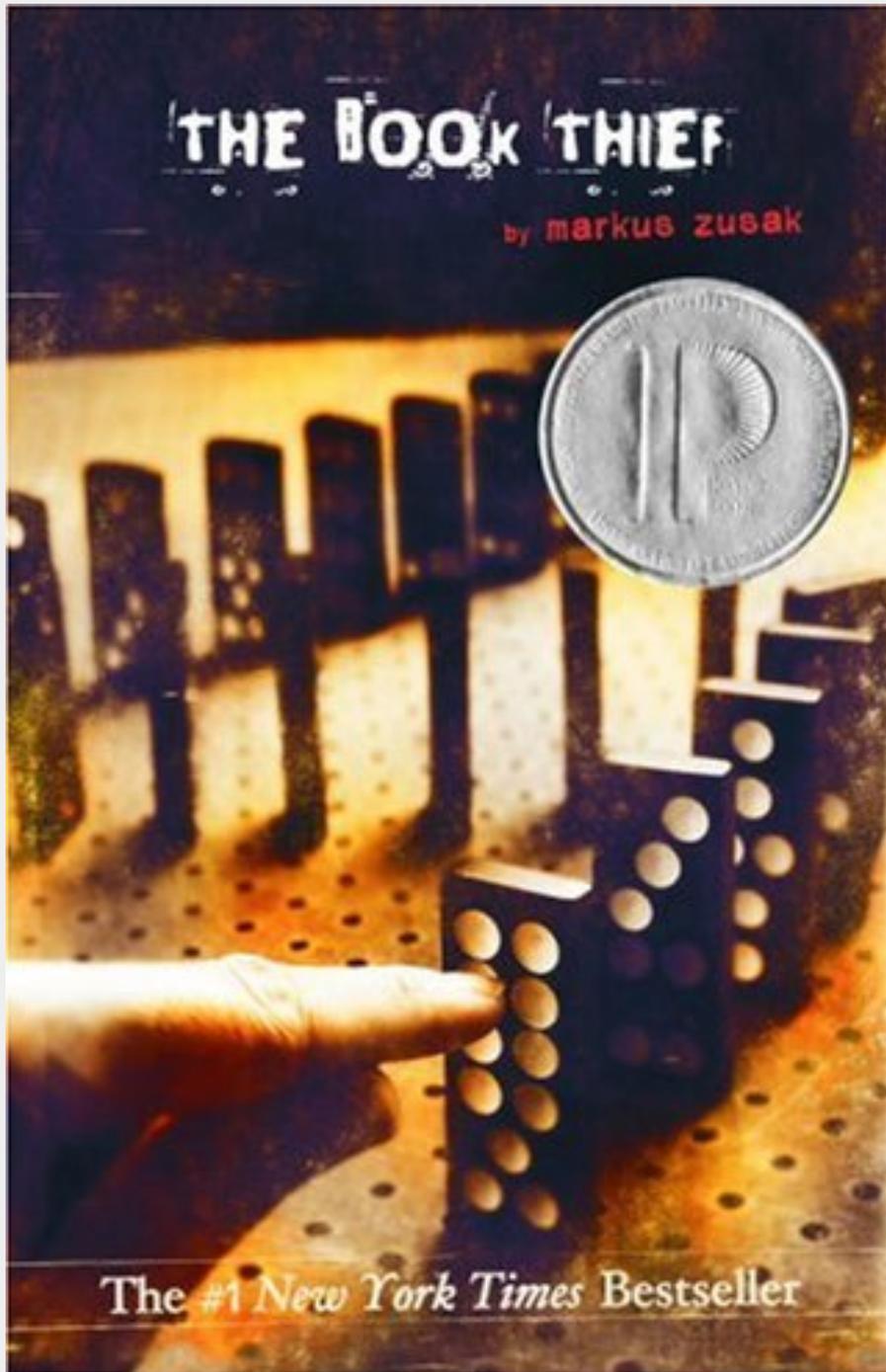
the color of the sky as he gathers the souls and carries them away The descriptions of the sky are like nothing I ve ever read A few quotes In years to come, he would be a giver of bread, not a stealer proof again of the contradictory human being So much good, so much evil Just add water p.164The town that afternoon was covered in a yellow mist, which stroked the rooftops as if they were pets and filled up the streets like a bath p.247He was a black suit than a man His face was a mustache p.413He does something to me, that boy Every time It s his only detriment he steps on my heart He makes me cry p.531There was once a strange, small man He decided three important details about his life 1 He would part his hair from the opposite side to everyone else 2 He would make himself a small, strange mustache 3 He would one day rule the world Yes, the Fuhrer decided that he would rule the world with words p.445 It Is Nazi Germany The Country Is Holding Its Breath Death Has Never Been Busier, And Will Be Busier StillBy Her Brother S Graveside, Liesel S Life Is Changed When She Picks Up A Single Object, Partially Hidden In The Snow It Is The Gravedigger S Handbook, Left Behind There By Accident, And It Is Her First Act Of Book Thievery So Begins A Love Affair With Books And Words, As Liesel, With The Help Of Her Accordion Playing Foster Father, Learns To Read Soon She Is Stealing Books From Nazi Book Burnings, The Mayor S Wife S Library, Wherever There Are Books To Be FoundBut These Are Dangerous Times When Liesel S Foster Family Hides A Jew In Their Basement, Liesel S World Is Both Opened Up, And Closed DownIn Superbly Crafted Writing That Burns With Intensity, Award Winning Author Markus Zusak Has Given Us One Of The Most Enduring Stories Of Our Time I feel like I was just given a history lesson but in the most emotionally damaging way possible. When death captures me, the boy vowed, he will feel my fist on his face Personally, I quite like that Such stupid gallantry.Yes.I like that a lot.A few days ago, when I was starting The Book Thief, my mother stopped by and saw the book on my coffee table Having just read it herself and knowing me better than anyone else in the world, I might add , she was determined to save me from myself She did her very best to convince me not to read it She described in detail the three day long headache all the crying had caused her and the heartache she now has to live with, but I m nothing if not

stubborn I guess I never learned to listen to my mother I'm pretty sure her parting sentence was Don't come crying to me And I didn't I huddled in a corner and cried inconsolably instead Death himself narrates the story about a little girl named Liesel growing up with her foster parents in Nazi Germany At the beginning, I felt somewhat intimidated by the idea of Death as a narrator I assumed that his voice would be dark and thunderous, but for the most part, he was a ray of light illuminating earth's saddest time Incredibly insightful observations and occasional dry humor are only some of the things no one but Death could have brought into this story Besides, we hear people calling God's name every day for many reasons, but when Death calls to Him in despair and even those calls fall on deaf ears, no one can fail to understand the gravity of the situation. I do not carry a sickle or a scythe. I only wear a hooded black robe when it's cold. And I don't have those skull-like facial features you seem to enjoy pinning on me from a distance You want to know what I truly look like I'll help you out Find yourself a mirror while I continue. The Book Thief is not one of those books you read compulsively, desperate to find out what's on the next page No It is, in fact, better to read it slowly, in small doses, in a way that allows you to savor every word and absorb the power and the magic it contains All the while, you know what's going to happen Death has no patience for mysteries However, anticipation of the inevitable makes it even worse My whole body was tingling with fear because I knew what was coming and I knew that it was only a matter of time. Zusak found a way to give a fresh approach to a much-told story He offered a glimpse at the other side of the coin Really, should we feel sorry for the people hiding in a basement in Munich suburbs Sure, bombs are falling on their heads, but most of them are members of the Nazi Party, willingly or reluctantly Some of them truly think that Jews are no better than rats Some, on the other hand, are hiding a Jew in their own basement Some are just innocent children But the important question is, are we any better at all if we don't feel compassion and sorrow Death does a great job of asking all these questions in a calm, unobtrusive way. I'm not pretentious enough to believe that my clumsy words can ever do this book justice I won't even try Time will speak for it, as I'm pretty sure it will survive for decades and generations to come The Book

Thief and Markus Zusak should find their place in every school textbook all over the world Seven thousand stars could never be enough for this book EDIT A few words from the man himself Just to clarify Yes, I did cry.I ve read a lot of positive and negative reviews for this book I can see why people wouldn't like it I really can Perhaps because I took a lot out of it personally, I found I enjoyed it a lot.Quick test to see if you'll like this book 1 Did you like Anne of Green Gables 2 Can you cope with an off beat, melancholy, caustic, dead pan, self righteous narrator 3 Do you like words Questions 4 8 were all about what kind of underwear you're wearing so don't worry about them.So, let's all gather around for story time with Mistress Kat.Two incidents set me off lately.1 My neighbour came to me and complained about the Islanders for those not Australian the Tongan, Fiji, Papua New Guinea and New Zealand populations of Australia causing trouble and otherwise defiling our great and beautiful nation.2 I was tooling around on Facebook when I noticed one of my friends one of those friends you've never met except in an internet community hosting a link to a video of a speech from a man addressing the American people I wouldn't go so far as to say that he is reminiscent of a neo Hitler but let's just say that the comparison would not be wholly unearned Her comments on the video were that everything he'd said was right, it was time that people sat up and listened for the sake of their country and that it's about time somebody did something Fuck me, I've heard this phrase so many times What is it exactly that they're referring to Do they actually know I've yet to hear them pronounce what this something is or what it looks like Is there some plan that I'm not aware of that they're referring to Does it involve chipmunks, honey and tequila To my neighbour, I simply mumbled that I had to leave and got in my car I was offended on behalf of my friends so I blew him off and I haven't really spoken to him since To my Facebook friend, I resisted the urge to make any comments I debated about starting a fight that would, in all likelihood, spill over to our community In the end I ignored her and I haven't spoken to her since.The Book Thief is not your typical WWII story It doesn't even ask you to sympathize with the Jews Their plight is background to the story and their struggles and pains are rarely shown except through the pitiful beautiful character of Max This story actually

focuses on the bad guys Zusak assumes that you know about the struggle and the plight of the Jews He assumes that you feel for them, that you are horrified on their behalf and so he doesn't spend much time eliciting an emotion that you are expected to have. Instead it focuses on the BAD guys You get to know and live the lives of a small and poor town in Germany The thing is, though, that these aren't really the bad guys Zusak, probably rightly, assumes that we'd never be able to really empathize and enjoy reading a book about characters truly bad They're not really bad After all, they may be Germans and they may have escaped persecution and death, but they're still poor They're the tiny fraction of the German population who sympathizes with the Jews They harbour a Jewish man in their home and come to love him The thing is though that for most of the novel, they're not the good guys either They don't speak up for the Jewish people, they don't try to change popular opinion, they don't stand for what's right They quietly try to get by without causing waves and without risking much of themselves. So you can see how I would sympathize How could I think that I'm one of the good guys when I don't stand up for people either Shouldn't I have challenged my neighbour and asked how he knew that the Islanders were to blame for all the crime Shouldn't I have asked him how many Islanders he knew How he could make such assumptions about people Shouldn't I have challenged my facebook friend Shouldn't I have asked her why she's spreading propaganda Couldn't I have probed her to think critically about this man's claims, about facts and ethics No I didn't want to cause problems and I didn't want to make waves. The narrator of *The Book Thief* makes a claim that Hitler's took over a country and started a war not with guns or weapons but with words I've read others consider this claim to be stupid and ridiculous but I actually agree with him When I was a child I asked my Great Aunt Nell why she insisted on engaging me in long and tedious hypothetical debates about morality, human nature, ethics and theology Her response was always the same if you don't fill a child's head with all the right stuff, someone will come along and fill it with all the wrong stuff It's kind of like those corny motivational quotes that the teachers post in their rooms Those who stand for nothing fall for anything. Well, I agree When you don't educate people, when you don't teach them to think

critically, with full understanding and proper knowledge, then other people come along and whisper in their ear and fill their heads up with mindless rot Hitler told the German people how to think He told them who was Wrong Why they were Wrong How to fix the Wrong What was Right Then he did the most powerful thing a person could do he told them a story When you tell a whole nation a story about the future a gloriously bright future with Plenty and Joy a future in which they are redeemed and have conquered their enemies a future in which they are happy and Everything Is As It Should Be and if you tell that story well enough, then you can conquer a country and wage a war without ever firing a single bullet Coincidentally when you don't speak up, when you don't proclaim the truth, when you're too afraid to replace ignorance with knowledge then you're no better than an accomplice to a crime I can't imagine how my friends would feel if they'd known that I stood by and allowed them and their family and children to be slandered like that Pretty appalled, I imagine and rightfully so. And now we come to the big reason why I think a lot of people didn't like this book the narrator. The Hunger Games did a similar thing to The Book Thief It sought to instill in its readers a sense of proper shame However, as opposed to The Book Thief, you didn't feel judged After all, for the Sins that The Hunger Games was preaching of, we're all guilty and in our combined guilt there seems to be a lessening of accountability Perhaps there's a sense that we're all going down together When we're damned, at least we'll have good company, right The Book Thief, however, singles you out as solely responsible It strips you naked and looks down on you as it asks you to account of yourself Not even the narrator can sympathize with you because he is the only one left blameless and innocent, looking upon us with a reserved kind of pity and bewilderment Maybe I'm a glutton for punishment I don't mind being stripped down I don't mind being reprimanded and so I loved this book I loved this book for inspiring me to be even outlandishly outspoken and persistently and doggedly forthcoming on my opinions of these issues I loved this book because I loved the narrator I loved this book because I loved the story I loved this book because I now have the PERFECT excuse to start a helluva lot of fights For some reason, that thought makes me very happy.



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