



The Second Winter

Craig Larsen

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WINNER – National Indie Excellence Award 2017 for Literary Fiction

BRONZE WINNER – Foreword INDIES 2016, War & Military

HONORABLE MENTION – San Francisco Book Festival 2017, General Fiction

“A great historical novel, a touching family saga, and a noir wartime thriller all rolled into one terrific narrative.” —Lee Child, *New York Times* best-selling author

Set in Denmark in the darkest days of World War II, *The Second Winter* is a cinematic novel that, in its vivid portrayal of a family struggling to survive the German occupation, captures a savage moment in history and exposes the violence and want inherent in a father's love.

It is 1941. In occupied Denmark, an uneasy relationship between the Danish government and the Germans allows the country to function under the protection of Hitler's army, while Danish resistance fighters wage a bloody, covert battle against the Nazis. Fredrik Gregersen, a brutish, tormented caretaker of a small farm in Jutland laboring to keep his son and daughter fed, profits from helping Jewish fugitives cross the border into Sweden. Meanwhile, in Copenhagen, Polina, a young refugee from Krakow, finds herself impressed into prostitution by Germans and Danes alike. When Fredrik steals a precious necklace from a helpless family of Jews, his own family's fate becomes intertwined with Polina's, triggering a ripple effect that will take decades and the fall of the Berlin Wall to culminate.

The Second Winter Details

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From Reader Review The Second Winter for online ebook

Sarah says

The Second Winter by Craig Larsen Many thanks to the author, who provided a complimentary copy of the book via the publisher. I wrote half of my senior thesis on women's relational bonds during the Holocaust, and this time period has always interested me. "The Second Winter" provides a different perspective, one with which I was mostly unfamiliar. Rather than focusing on concentration camp experiences or the lives of soldiers, Craig Larsen draws forth various ordinary characters whose lives slowly coalesce throughout the narrative, forming a compelling tapestry of fate and fortune. As such, this novel has a far-reaching scope, reminding me of Vasily Grossman's "Life and Fate". Each character's actions and decisions produce a ripple effect that inevitably has an influence on many others, demonstrating that in either peace or wartime, in occupied or freed territory, no one exists in a vacuum. Gritty realism characterizes "The Second Winter". Larsen pulls no punches, and this is not a happily-ever-after tale. Much of the story unfolds in Denmark during WWII, with forays into East and West Berlin a few decades thereafter, and the impact of German occupation and poverty features prominently throughout the storyline. Hardworking people who find themselves with no good prospects are forced into the territory of moral ambiguity, as Larsen adroitly emphasizes. Polina, the primary character, is a young Polish Jew forced into prostitution, and her interactions with both Germans and Danes imbue the tale with a unique viewpoint without being salacious. The commonplace routine of daily life belies the complexities of relationships and motives that make this a notable book worthy of a thoughtful read.

Ken Fredette says

This was a pretty compelling story stemming from WWII and how the Nazis treated their victims. How they forced Polina into prostitution while she was a minor.

The story takes place in Denmark when Fredrik and Oskar Gregersen as resistance fighters take a family of Jews to the coast and Fredrik steals some jewels and money from the fleeing Jews. It gets better when Oskar sells the jewels to a Nazi and fall for his mistress, Polina. Unbeknown to Oskar, he was followed. The resistance wanted to make sure everyone was punished that stoled the Jews jewelry and money.

A lot more happens but Oskar and Polina make a break for America. But Polina has second thoughts. The book ends with Oskar leaving a gallery in New York which was produced by the daughter of the Nazi that was killed for buying the jewels.

I like the story because of the reality of it, I would think that everything that happened for a purpose.

Lollita says

I received this book through giveaways. I'm not sure if I'd really consider this a war novel, really didn't have much focus on that aspect aside from Polinas plight of being half Jewish and Fredrick involvement in smuggling a couple Jews out of Denmark. This was a dark, tragic novel, the story line was interesting enough to keep me reading but I didn't really feel anything for the characters. I felt bad for Polina and Oskar,

would have liked to have known what happened to Polina and Amalia and Polina childhood friend, there was a lot of loose ends. As for the main character Fredrik, I just couldn't stand him, I hate him in fact. Everything he did was so selfish and usually cruel, even if he was part of the resistance he was not a good guy. If you like books with no real conclusion and dark unhappy people from bringing to end you'll probably enjoy this more than I did, which to say it wasn't a bad plot the story was engaging just not really what I usually enjoy reading.

Mary Greiner says

This book reveals the dark side of helping Jews escape the Nazis. Since historical fiction focused on WW II is an interest of mine, I found this gritty novel to be a wonderful addition to the genre. I recommend it to those who like their fiction to be realistic.

Daisy Mae says

4.5 grisly war photographs out of 5

Won from GoodReads Giveaways!

War can make criminals of heroes, and heroes of criminals.

This was so intensely raw, and at the same time so incredibly well-woven, that I couldn't stop reading.

Larsen has created a bubble of a world in the farmlands of Denmark in 1941, where an estranged son of a wealthy family drowns himself day by day in his addictions and his inner self-loathing. Meanwhile, his two children try desperately to keep their hard-done-by family from starving or freezing to death, his son caught between his own responsibilities and playing accomplice to his father's dodgy means of making a living. Each event marks the Gregersen family in a profound way and, in turn, interlaces their lives with others' indefinitely.

This book is by no means a fairy tale. It is the unforgiving truth behind poverty, abuse, and war. A deep look at the grey areas of being on *the good side* or *the bad side*. And although it was painful to read at times, it was beautiful in its own way, and I loved seeing each thread of Larsen's cobweb of characters come together.

Paula Bardell-Hedley says

The Second Winter is a harrowing tale of survival in desperate circumstances. Set on a bleak farm in Jutland during the Second World War when Denmark was under Nazi occupation, the coarse, brutish, yet enigmatic father of two, Fredrik Gregersen, must supplement his income in order to feed his children and addictions. This he does by smuggling Jewish refugees into neutral Sweden.

In Poland, a beautiful Jewish girl is abducted and taken to Copenhagen where she is forced into prostitution. When Fredrik seizes a bag filled with precious jewels from a terrified family fleeing the Germans, he does not know it contains something that will indelibly link their fates. This is merely the beginning of a complex, bloody, decades-long series of events.

Born in 1963, the author, Craig Larsen is a single father currently residing in Northern California, having earlier lived in Europe and New York. His first novel, *Mania*, published in 2009, involved a serial killer terrorising the streets of Seattle, and was described by the popular British crime writer, Lee Child as “everything a great thriller should be.” His latest has already won the National Indie Excellence Award 2017 for Literary Fiction and was a Bronze Winner in the Foreword INDIES 2016, War & Military.

His story begins in East Berlin in 1969, before taking us back in time to Kraków in 1938 and then on to Denmark in 1941. We move seamlessly between times and countries following a thread that will eventually tie the various narratives together.

In his *Acknowledgements*, Larsen reveals that his story is a “metaphor” for what it means to be a father, and it is not a tale based on any particular country or person - although he admits that his vicious protagonist was formed to some extent from vaguely recalled anecdotes about his father's uncle, who was, apparently, “a brute and a member of the Danish resistance during World War II.”

The Second Winter is a stark, unpretentious retelling of one of Denmark's darkest periods in history, which is at times gruesome and unpleasant. It will undoubtedly appeal to readers of gritty noir wartime thrillers.

Many thanks to Other Press for gifting an advance review copy of this title.

Joseph Carano says

I won this one in a Goodreads giveaway. Make no mistake, this is a very dark book with some very dark unlikable characters. It is also a page turning novel with intricate characters and an original plot. Set in Denmark in the middle of the war, the author, Craig Larsen explores the squalor of a man trying to feed his family, and the horrors of the holocaust which changes many lives. Just a great book on so many levels.

Neal says

Dark at times, but well written

Carlos says

This book was raw, little too graphic but I was still pulled in by the setting, Denmark under the Germans during WW II, the realities of the Jewish families and their plights, this is what this book is about; Polina, the main character, a Polish Jewish girl who sees her family being dragged out by the Nazis and then tries to escape, she doesn't get far, she is forced to be a prostitute, another simultaneously interesting story happens to a different Jewish family that ends up correlating with our timeline and also Polina's. There is mystery, misery, and the strength of the human character. This is not a happy story.

Miriam Smith says

Considering the brutality of this emotional and often violent book the descriptive writing was beautiful and shows the author, Craig Larsen, to be a very talented writer. "The Second Winter" is a dark, raw and graphic story set during WW2 focusing between a Danish man, Fredrik (a brute of a drug user), who profits from assisting Jews cross the border to Sweden and Polina, a young Polish girl forced into prostitution. On one particular occasion Fredrik steals a necklace from a fleeing Jew and triggers a chain of events that bring the two storylines together and for me a very sentimental and tearful ending.

We are shown in this book just how despicable mankind can be during war and conflict and I imagine this will be a tough read for a lot of people - as it was for me at times - since the author highlights the true horrors often kept hidden. There's drug use, violence, prostitution and murder, a complex mix in the atrocities of war. However, at the heart of it is a fathers love and the want for his children - I think the author has captured this perfectly considering the storyline.

I really enjoyed this dark book, yes it was tough, but probably very true to life and I imagine the family recollections/research done must have been very hard going. It really makes you realise just how good our life is nowadays.

On an extra note this hardback book is beautifully printed with a gorgeous sleeve setting Polona's scene perfectly and showing just how much effort must have gone into publishing it.

Keith Currie says

Loose connections

German Democratic Republic, early 1980s, a visiting musician from the west visits relatives and comes away with a priceless piece of jewellery and photographs taken by her father during the war, including one of a beautiful young woman, partially undressed. Poland, early in the Second World War, a teenage girl, partly Jewish, is taken prisoner by German soldiers. Denmark, a German 'protectorate', a brutal father in a tumbledown cottage, earns some money by helping Jews escape to Sweden, but robs an escaping family of their jewellery and cash; in Denmark, too, a German officer, a war photographer, becomes fascinated with a young Polish prostitute.

This is a violent, gritty story, told in a simple unadorned style, but with a complex network of characters, who meet, interact, but never quite make the connections necessary to avoid death, suffering, tragedy or even to achieve mutual understanding. The Danish father, Fredrik, is a bullying brute and a thieving anti-Semite, but is also an effective opponent of German occupation, a ruined man with a kernel of honour.

Despite initial doubts, I found this an impressive novel, unafraid to depict humankind at its worst, but also to explore more positive facets as well. There is a Hardy-esque aspect in the narrative's refusal to exploit coincidence. There is also a resemblance to the early novels of Alan Furst, with its refusal to condone simple, implausible conclusions. War enables the worst in mankind, but also, occasionally, something better can break through.

Don Gorman says

(3 1/2). This is a very difficult book to categorize. Part historical fiction, mostly noir, part thriller, it crosses many lines and is really well written. We have several really strong and engaging characters, all scrambling for their lives in occupied World War II Denmark. The flash forwards to the present are a nice touch and make for a really interesting ending. Polina, Oskar and especially Fredrik will resonate with you and keep you turning pages. A very different and entertaining read.

Cindy Woods says

Raw

This book was difficult to like given the subject matter. It is not a book with an easy story nor pretty ending. It's an ugly, hard expose on the intersecting lives of several people in Germany, Denmark and United States during and after WWII. The heroes aren't heroic. It's unsettling to be faced with the facts of life in occupied Denmark where human life was cheap and where resistance workers secreted Jewish people out of the country for remunerations, not conscience. I realize great risk was taken to assist others is honorable, but what if the reasons for doing so were only desperate greed? It boggles the mind to contemplate these things. WWII stories usually include hope and struggle for freedom. This book paints a very different and thoroughly real picture of life and the destruction of humanity. I thank the author for realism here however difficult it is to read.

I recommend to readers if historical novels based on WWII era.

Annmbray says

Really LOVED this book. The depth of the characters, the intertwined stories and the picture of farm life during the Nazi occupation of Poland were a surprise to me. Most WWII books I read seem larger in scope, but this one was a very small story, but one that totally engaged me. Plus I absolutely ADORED the writing.

Aimee says

The Second Winter is a dark, grim and bleak tale of a Denmark farmer and his family coping with the German occupation during World War II. There is a second story of a West Berlin woman reclaiming her Nazi father's possessions from his sister in East Germany in the late 1960s. The novel also explains the interrelationships.

I am rating this novel as less than fair. I inferred the characters were to be drawn as mysterious and enigmatic, but they appeared inconsistent and erratic. The plot was very weak and the connection between the stories was flimsy at best.

I would not recommend this book.

