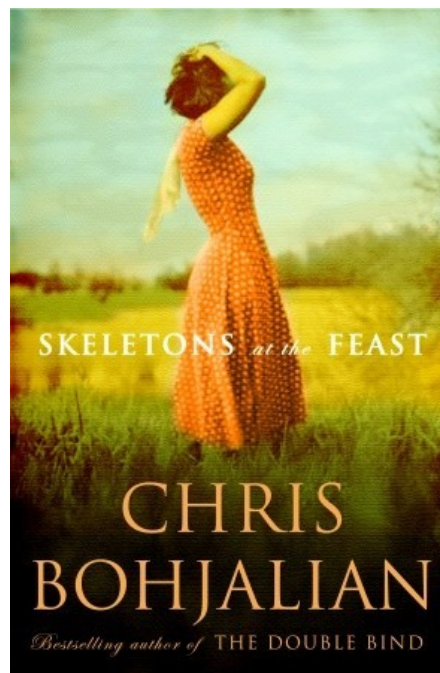




Skeletons at the Feast

Chris Bohjalian

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In January 1945, in the waning months of World War II, a small group of people begin the longest journey of their lives: an attempt to cross the remnants of the Third Reich, from Warsaw to the Rhine if necessary, to reach the British and American lines.

Among the group is eighteen-year-old Anna Emmerich, the daughter of Prussian aristocrats. There is her lover, Callum Finella, a twenty-year-old Scottish prisoner of war who was brought from the stalag to her family's farm as forced labor. And there is a twenty-six-year-old Wehrmacht corporal, who the pair know as Manfred—who is, in reality, Uri Singer, a Jew from Germany who managed to escape a train bound for Auschwitz.

As they work their way west, they encounter a countryside ravaged by war. Their flight will test both Anna's and Callum's love, as well as their friendship with Manfred—assuming any of them even survive.

Perhaps not since *The English Patient* has a novel so deftly captured both the power and poignancy of romance and the terror and tragedy of war. Skillfully portraying the flesh and blood of history, Chris Bohjalian has crafted a rich tapestry that puts a face on one of the twentieth century's greatest tragedies—while creating, perhaps, a masterpiece that will haunt readers for generations.

Skeletons at the Feast Details

Date : Published May 6th 2008 by Crown (first published 2008)

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Author : Chris Bohjalian

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From Reader Review Skeletons at the Feast for online ebook

Rebecca McNutt says

Skeletons at the Feast is a powerful story, original and beautiful yet deeply poignant all at once, as it's set smack-dab in the beginning of WWII.

Chrissie says

Every sentence is worth listening to. Every word.

Why read another book about the horror of World War II? Because it teaches us why life is worth living.

I would change nothing about this book. Nothing!

I listened to the audiobook, narrated by Mark Bramhall. The narration is slow, but it should be slow so you can think about every word, and ponder what those words mean, consider what we think ourselves. Would this happen, this way? Would I react similarly? Could he behave any differently?

You can see from the book description that this is about a small group of disparate refugees - a German gentile blond haired girl and her mother and brother of ten, an English prisoner of war and a Jew disguised as a German officer – crossing Germany from east to west in the final day of the war. Running from the Russians, the Germans and what fate has in store for them. Each character represents a different cultural / political stamp. Each carries their own baggage. Every action they take is molded by their history and where they come from. And yet each one is a person and that binds them / unites them. And that is why we readers can relate to this book, because we are all people like them.

If I say to you - remember *The Invisible Bridge*. That is a book about the war that everyone loves. Well this is better, by far. There isn't one unnecessary word in this book. Please read this book. I have no question in my mind whether it deserves five stars. Yes, it does, without a doubt. Beautiful prose, lots to think about, humor, realistic plot line, perfect beginning and ending. Never does it drag, not for one second. Please read this book. Or listen to it. Read it or listen to it soon. Choose it for your very next book! Please.

Barbara, you pushed me to read this book. I owe you big time. Thank you!

Marialyce says

It never ceases to amaze me that every time I read a book about the Nazi atrocities, I come away thinking how could they? It boggles one's mind to think about the cruelties, the inhumanity, and the vicious hatred extended to the Jews and other cultures by the Nazis.

In this historical fiction novel we meet a number of characters who embody courage and the will to live and move forward in a world of insanity and overall sadness. Beginning a journey, a small group of people rush away from the oncoming Russian armies and band together to try to find escape and solace in the Allied lines. The main character, Anna, is an eighteen year old daughter of Prussian aristocrats who falls in love

with a Scottish POW named Callum. He is sent to the farm of Anna's family as a POW to work on harvesting the crops. Because of his dedication to Anna's family she falls for him knowing that this love is forbidden. Into this comes Manfred, who is supposedly a Wehrmacht corporal and Anna finds herself drawn to him. Manfred holds a secret as well and together, with the backdrop of knowledge of the Nazi atrocities, they work their way west to possible safety and the ability to persevere in the face of the hopelessness of the war. The trio forms a bond that binds them together.

Mr Bohjalian has written a novel that has again explored how people can survive in the face of upmost death, destruction, and tragedy. He paints a portrait of people, young and old who survive, some because of having a pair of shoes or boots for their feet, and others because of a will to shoulder each day and take on whatever challenges they encounter with amazing fortitude and strength.

These stories are ever so important as they will always remind readers of how horrible, gruesome, and vile the Nazis were. We, who are the benefactors of this history, will never forget nor let the world forget what once happened to a world gone insane.

Virginia says

Bohjalian got me with this one, as he has in the two other books of his I've read. It took me about 1/4 of the way into it to get hooked, but I stayed up until 1 am last night reading it. His writing is really quite nice, possibly underrated. His storytelling is incredibly compelling.

There are several stories woven together in this book, the main being the plight of an aristocratic Prussian family forced to march west in the waning months of WWII. The horrors and atrocities of the war are on full display -- almost, but somehow not quite, unbearable to read about.

The storyline about Anna and her family's slog west was the more bearable narrative to me. They had an ostensible destination -- maybe not just one precise destination, but you knew they were heading west ... ahead of the Russian onslaught (if, at times, barely). Cecile's character's experience was so hard for me to stomach ... she never knew where she was going. She had no known destination -- so much despair (even though she was remarkable in the face of it).

Really good read, really good reminder.

Phyllis says

This is the fourth book by Chris Bohjalian that I have read and it is my favorite. It's WWII in Germany and The story follows a German family, a Jewish woman going from work camp to work camp, a Jewish man who jumps off a train and hides out as a German soldier, and a POW from Scotland living with the German family. It's nearing the end of the war and the Russians are advancing from the east and the British and Americans are advancing from the west and thousands of refugees are on the move. Chris Bohjalian first got the idea for this book from a German woman's diary. It is beautifully written, heartbreaking, horrifying at times and had an ending that I wasn't expecting. Very highly recommended.

Karen says

[image error]

Allison (The Allure of Books) says

I can handle reading a lot of fantasy violence and torture, because, no matter how connected to the characters I am-I know on some level as I'm reading that it did NOT happen. So, when I picked up Skeletons I knew that would be different, and I was right. Even the smallest acts of cruelty in this book twisted my guts because I know that what the Jews went through during the Holocaust is absolute reality. Just thinking about it makes me feel sick. So, in a way, this book was the opposite of fantasy-seeing how the various characters in their different situations dealt with the war is what connected me to them. There was a German family fleeing from the Russians and a Scottish POW traveling with them, a young Jewish woman in a work camp, and a Jewish man disguising himself (usually) as a German soldier. I feel like I went on a real journey with these characters and the end of the story was brilliant and heartbreaking, as a true war novel should be.

Jen says

Based on real diaries, this is a fascinating subject, but mishandled. Bohjalian seemed to be trying to hit readers over the head with the horrors of WWII.

Lucy says

Skeletons at the Feast took me to a dark place - the Holocaust. If there weren't so many great books written about this black mark of the world's history, I would ban myself from reading any books on this topic in the future. I hate that such a horrific occurrence is repeatedly used as bait for novelists.

Bohjalian is a good author, though, and does a good job developing his characters, giving them interesting conflict, all the while threading bits of real history into his story that he obtained through diligent research. I'll give him credit for all of the above.

However, part of me felt like Bohjalian decided this was going to be his one and only time to write about the Holocaust so he was going to put it all in one book. The details he gives about the atrocities committed by the German soldiers, the Russian soldiers and the desperate and destroyed left in their wake is so graphic, so skin-crawling brutal that it borders on gratuitous. Including as much as he does has the opposite effect from the one I imagine the author intended and his book almost becomes a WWII caricature. I'm not saying the things he describes didn't happen. No, he seems to have read enough journals and letters to give each horror story credibility, but to include them all -- in the same book, witnessed by the same characters in the space of about a year -- it made these disturbing acts of cruelty seem made-up. I feel it was a disservice to take someone's real life nightmare and diminish it by setting it alongside so many other nightmares so that they all seem somehow....less. Because that is what happens. The first description was like a punch in the stomach, the next a slap on the face and all the rest...swats on an already numb backside.

As much as I wanted to, I didn't dislike this book. Bojahlia creates a complicated story about the fallout from ignorance, naivety, and privilege found among the rural aristocrats of Poland and Germany near the end of the war. Not forced to witness the daily disappearance of Jews and other minorities, the Emmerlich family was living in relative peace and prosperity, along with their polite relationships with the POWs helping out on their beet farm, until the ugly consequences of their fuhrer's decisions found their way to the family's country manor, Kamenheim. Anna, The Emmerlich's teenage daughter, falls in love with Callum, a Scottish POW, and convinces her parents to allow him to remain with their family instead of sending him back to the prison camps. As Callum and the Emmerlichs flee the approaching Russian troops, the blinders of this family's eyes are removed and they finally see first hand the destruction throughout their land. Along their west-bound journey, they meet and become dependent upon Uri, a young, vigilante Jew posing as a German soldier in order to survive. There is an additional, completely separate story involving a French, Jewish girl named Cecile who is trying to keep herself and her friend, Jeanne, alive while prisoners in a concentration camp that does eventually intersect with Uri and the Emmerlichs but not soon enough to be satisfying

There are plenty of lessons to learn within the pages of this book, but I can't say that it is one I recommend. The author tries to write too many stories at once-- a romance, a look at Nazi sympathizers, stereotypes the Polish people had of Russians, allied prisoners of war, a coming of age story, the gore and sadism of war, Jewish resistance, Jewish survival and an unnecessary epilogue, to make this novel truly great.

Sandy says

this audio book has me running back to the car to take a drive... anywhere, anytime, just any opportunity to listen to more. It is a saga about a handful of people trying to get west from the ever encroaching Russians on the Eastern Front in Poland/Prussia at the end of WWII. You have the aristocratic Prussian family, sans menfolk, the Scottish POW who has worked for them as slave labor, the Jew disguised as a German Officer in order to escape arrest and inevitable death, and you have the women garment workers from the forced labor camp, being forced to trek west away from the terrifying stories of the Russian army, where, perhaps, maybe, they will be put to work again in another factory somewhere in a crumbling Germany. All of them swept up in a tide of thousands of refugees stumbling, starving, fighting, naive, wise, dying, & surviving as they struggle West. A powerful and gripping book and I am completely swept up in the harsh, difficult and brutal refugee reality. The conclusion of course, can only be, that everywhere, in every situation, war is such a shitty shitty thing... with victims from all walks of life, from all sides of the conflict, German, Jewish, Prussian, Allied...Union, Confederate, Palestinian, Afghani, Iraqi, Kurd, Hutu/Tutsi.....

Richard Derus says

Rating: 0.125* of five

GHASTLY. Made me so angry that I got out of my warm bed, got dressed, and drove to the next town to heave this drivel-fest into the local cathedral's charity bin, thus ensuring that only some Catholic would be subjected to it. Their happiness I don't care about protecting.

The finger-in-the-chest, accusatory "You ride your horse over the Jew" (paraphrase, not a quote) section made me so furiously angry that I scared the dog yelling at the book.

If you're a little slow on the uptake, I*do*not*recommend*this*book.

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Saleh MoonWalker says

Onvan : Skeletons at the Feast - Nevisande : Chris Bohjalian - ISBN : 307394956 - ISBN13 : 9780307394958 - Dar 372 Safhe - Saal e Chap : 2008

Branwen Sedai *of the White Ajah* says

"You forget pain. We all do. We tell ourselves that we remember the specifics, but its all just a lot of pictures and words in our heads. No sensations. I think we actually remember life's humiliations better. The degradations. The cruelties. But the pain? We seem to forget what pain actually feels like. It's like a cloud after the sky has cleared."

In 1945, as World War II is in its dying throes, a group of people cross Germany fleeing the incoming Russians in an attempt to reach safety in the British and American lines. Among them is German Anna and her Scottish lover, Callum, along with Uri who is secretly a Jew who escaped an Auschwitz bound train. As they travel, the bond between the three deepens to unexpected levels as they battle the terror and cruelty of a war strewn country.

Hot damn, was this a beautiful yet heartbreaking book. On one hand, witnessing the relationship between Anna and Callum was and the friendship between the three companions was intensely satisfying and wonderful. On the other hand, this story also brutally details the fear and horror of what it meant to live through that time period. I felt as if my heart was on this crazy roller coaster of emotions! It was a heart pounding book, even in it's quiet moments. It brings such a human aspect of the war, to see these people struggle and survive against all odds.

All in all, a wonderful and very enjoyable book!

Crystal Craig says

Skeletons at the Feast was my second Chris Bohjalian novel. I enjoyed it far more than I did *The Night Strangers*, which was the first book I read written by him. The novel was one of the four group reads voted in for the month of April in my book club, Sweeter Reads. Yes, I know, I'm a little ahead of the game, but I'm going to be away the latter part of March; I'll be at the farm while our animals give birth. It's a very busy time, and I may not be able to get much reading done.

The main thing that drew me to the book was the title. It's just one of those titles that scream in your face. So, what did I think? While, other than the slightly slow start, it was a great book. I sure wasn't disappointed. It's the sort of book that opens a person's eyes wide to the horrors of war.

My favorite characters were Mutti and Theo. I admired Mutti for her strength and Theo for his bravery. He was such an innocent little boy with such a love for animals. It was heart-breaking when he had to leave his favorite horse behind.

The only problem I had with the novel was it's odd structure in the first fifty pages or so... hence the slow start. It seemed to lack punctuation so the sentences went on forever, which made it hard to read.

I'd recommend this book to anyone who enjoys historical fiction. I gave it a solid four stars.

Dem says

There have been many books focusing on the Holocaust and World War Two, and Chris Bohjalian sets himself quite a task when he set out to write the story (based in part by a personal diary) set in the waning months of World War two.

But this story is told in a different manner to many of the fictionalised books out there as the author takes on the difficult task of telling this story from many points of view.

A Prussian family, a Scottish POW assigned to work on their farm, and a Jew disguised as a Third Reich soldier attempt to escape and try to stay well ahead of the fast-approaching Soviet army. Tales of atrocities to which the Soviet army has subjected their prisoners is enough to force the group on their way west through a countryside ravaged by war.

The novel also tells the story of Cecile a Jewish woman captured in her homeland of France and sent to a forced labour camp.

I have read quite a few books on the second world war and on the Holocaust and they always shock and sadden me and make me question how human beings can inflict such pain and horrors on each other in the name of war and while this is a difficult book to read as the author does not spare us any of the horrors, it is an good historical novel.

The plot for this Novel is haunting and quite a page turner, this is really a character driven novel and the characters are so engaging that they will stay with you long after you put down the novel. An emotional book that will shock and sadden even the most hardened reader.

While this is a story of love in the time of war the horrors of war far outweigh the love story.

This is only the second novel I have read by Chris Bohjalian and I will be adding more books by this author to my list.

Quote "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that"

Quote by Martin Luther King, Jr.

?Karen says

This was hard to put down even during the very graphic scenes of death and violence. I fell in love with all the characters and how they dealt with their predicaments. There was an interesting perspective given on the

whys and wherefores of the Russian army's treatment of the Germans--that the Germans simply had asked for it. Not to over-simplify things, but, yes, the Russians were barbarians, but so were the Germans. Then the English were accused of the same when they bombed the crap out of Dresden. And so you fight barbarism with barbarism. But is that the best way? It makes me wonder, and a book that makes me stop and think, or stop and cry a couple times--and Skeletons did--deserves 5 stars.

Carol says

A heartbreaking story of the holocaust told from the perspective of a kind German family fleeing the Russians with their Scottish POW Callum whom their daughter Anna loves. I soon found myself adoring young Theo and the strength of his mother "Mutti" as well as the disguised Jewish man Uri who helps them in their struggle to survive.

As in other books of the holocaust that I have read, the plight of the Jewish people is horrific and often graphic in Bohjalian's novel, but I enjoyed the book especially the little surprise at the end!

Ram says

A Jew, a Scot and a German girl walk into the east part of Germany during the last weeks of WW2. No this is not the beginning of a joke, this is the plot of the book.

The three main characters of the book, a German Jew pretending to be Aryan, a German teenager running from the advancing Russian army and her Scottish POW lover find themselves all advancing west through the crumbling third Reich in an effort to reach the area that will be occupied by the western armies (and not the Russians).

During this journey we are exposed to the ugly side of the war, both by the invading Russians (mostly as revenge for what the Germans did in Russia) and by the Germans....mainly what they did to the Jews in the camps and during the death march.

We are acquainted with Uri Singer, a German Jew, and how he managed to survive the war impersonating Nazi soldiers that he killed.

We follow Anna, an ethnic German from around Warsaw and her lover , Cullum a POW who worked at her parents farm as a forced laborer.

The story is interesting and realistic. Makes you think a bit about morals and who to identify with.

A nice read.

Davney Stahley says

One of the few WWII books I've read that is told from the German viewpoint. The brutality is frightening even after all these years. I remember my German Oma had nothing but bad to say about Adolph Hitler. She still had family in Germany in the 50s and they didn't have anything good to say about him. I also had a friend in WI who was in her 70s and had been a Hitler youth. It was interesting to talk with her about how they never questioned and how the whole "Jewish situation" was not believed by so many for so long. Denial. I grimace at some of the descriptions, but I am reading this book with interest.

Finished late last night again. Mutti (the mother) is an interesting character. She believed in the Fuhrer, even had a crush on him, and Bohjalian's descriptions of her disillusionment and heartbreak as she learns the truths are real. To believe so trustingly in your government and leader and learn the horrific truth must have been devastating and horrible for the many good German people. Uri is a complex character, strong, conflicted, yet focused. I loved Theo and could just see his little earnest trusting face, becoming more confused and yet knowing as the family traveled further west.

Excellent read!

Emilie says

Blech. I have heard such good things about Chris Bohjalian, but I must say I was deeply disappointed. This book was based loosely on an actual journal kept by a German woman who fled the Russians as they swept into Germany at the end of World War II. The plot had such great potential! So many issues though.

1. The character development was stale. The characters didn't change over the course of the novel, even in the face of life-changing circumstances (loss of loved ones; leaving one's home behind never to see it again; a difficult, dangerous journey over several months, political upheaval...). These are all things that change a person, but somehow the characters here seemed to arrive at the end of the novel in exactly the same way that they started. Why did we not see more evidence of the guilt that Anna and Mutti **MUST** have been feeling? Why was there less exploration of Uri's search for his family and the way that changed him? What about Callum, didn't HE feel guilty? He did basically desert his unit, and he did manage to escape actually having to engage in conflict.
2. Unnecessarily graphic violence much? I think we all get that the Holocaust was a terrible time in history-people endured horrible, horrible things. Do we have to hear the intricate details of brains being spilled out or inhuman brutality? The details were a little over the top and didn't seem to add to the story enough to make them useful.
3. Weird sex scenes. So they've been marching for months, Anna is exhausted beyond words. She finally gets to sleep in a bed with blankets for the first time in recent memory. You could almost feel how warm and comforted she felt. Then Callum wakes her up in the middle of the night so they can see the Northern Lights, when they (naturally!) have sex. Outside in the frigid cold. When she is recovering from pneumonia or whatever it was she had. When he is an enemy soldier that could be shot if caught out in the open. Sounds plausible to me! And comfortable.

Don't bother with this one. I hear Bohjalian's other books are good. Hopefully they are better than this one.
