



The Extra

Kathryn Lasky

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Is the chance to serve as an extra for Hitler's favorite filmmaker a chance at life — or a detour on the path to inevitable extermination?

One ordinary afternoon, fifteen-year-old Lilo and her family are suddenly picked up by Hitler's police and imprisoned as part of the "Gypsy plague." Just when it seems certain that they will be headed to a labor camp, Lilo is chosen by filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl to work as a film extra. Life on the film set is a bizarre alternate reality. The surroundings are glamorous, but Lilo and the other extras are barely fed, closely guarded, and kept in a locked barn when not on the movie set. And the beautiful, charming Riefenstahl is always present, answering the slightest provocation with malice, flaunting the power to assign prisoners to life or death. Lilo takes matters into her own hands, effecting an escape and running for her life. In this chilling but ultimately uplifting novel, Kathryn Lasky imagines the lives of the Gypsies who worked as extras for the real Nazi filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl, giving readers a story of survival unlike any other.

The Extra Details

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From Reader Review The Extra for online ebook

Shelly says

Full Disclaimer, I was sent this by Walker books for an honest review.

15 year old Lilo is a gypsy girl, living in Vienna in the 1940's. When her and her family are rounded up by the Nazi's and sent to a camp.

Hilter's favorite movie director, Leni Riefensthal, visits the camp, looking for Gypsy extra's for a movie she is making.

This was a really interesting read, as it had the elements of real life to it. Leni Riefensthal, was a really person, she really did visit camps, to cast Gypsy extras for her movie Tiefland, in the 1940s while the war was on.

We can often forget, that the Nazi's didn't just go after the Jews, all non "Master Race" were attacked. Including Gypsies, Disabled, Gay, old, ect ect.

The visual and emotional description in this book, is compelling and very well written. one piece i feel shows this, is the description of a morning, about half way through the book.

" the moon and stars were gone, the sun not up yet, there was only a vast nothingness. As though god were yawning, a huge, abyssal yawn."

You see the story through the eyes of Leni, her character is very, matter of fact. No punches are pulled, from the more gruesome moments of her story. To her sometimes, absent moments. She sees and feels everything, but at times she cannot deal with what is happening. So she just goes through the motions. I really liked this aspect of the writing, as it felt very true to life.

A lot of accurate history has been put into this book, and I have to say. It was an unexpected, very enjoyable read. The ending was balanced just right as well.

Salima Bensalah says

While this story had potential and explored an important element of the past, the novel lacked emotional depth. The jilted scene cuts that passed across lengthy periods of time felt awkward and confusing. The novel may have been stronger if it focused more on the filming process and going into more depth behind the scenes, rather than trying to include undeveloped threaded details across a longer stretch of time.

lisa says

Bad writing, completely horrible dialogue. I was excited to read about gypsies in the holocaust, but it fell so so flat. This was unreadable.

kari says

I'm not quite sure what rating to give this. While I liked it, the writing did feel it was more at the Y end of the YA genre. Not that this was necessarily a bad thing, but some of the content is fairly adult for a younger reader. And so sad.

I kept almost putting this aside several times. I think the writing style simply didn't grab me. I think because it is written in third person, there is a bit of distance between the reader and the action, perhaps purposely done, but this didn't quite work for me. I wish there had been more connection with Lilo.

This tells the little-known story of European gypsies being used as extras in a movie made by Leni Reifenstahl, the favorite movie-maker for the Nazis. And all I can really say without spoiling the book is that evil has many faces, some of them quite beautiful.

I'd have liked for there to be a bit more story, for some resolution for Lilo and what she hopes for. I think just an epilogue one way or the other, would have been a better ending. However, it might have been too sad and perhaps the author didn't want to end on what might be such a sad note.

So, all in all, I think this is a very interesting subject matter, but perhaps I could have enjoyed the actual telling more, so I'll give it a three. Yeah, a three.

Terri says

The Extra by Kathryn Lasky is the tale of a young Sinti girl living in Vienna during World War II. At the beginning, she is still able to go to school and live in her house, though the Nazi government is keeping tracking of all Gypsy families. However, they soon change their minds which send Lilo and her parents to a series of internment camps. One of which is where Lilo and her mother find a temporary escape--being extras in a movie.

The director Leni Riefenstahl is creating a movie about a Spanish woman living in a small village. To add authenticity to the movie, Lilo and her mother, along with a handful of other Gypsy prisoners including Django, the one who can find out anything, are given the chance to be in the movie. Although the work is not difficult, they are all kept imprisoned within a farmer's barn and continue to be fed as little as possible. Though Lilo knows Leni is a vicious woman, she plays the part she is assigned and cooperates until she has her moment to escape. But there's no telling what will happen once she does.

This book, though the subject matter can be hard at times, is a realistic look into the lives of one of the groups that were brutalized for who they were during World War II. Through Lilo's eyes readers get a glimpse of the real-life Leni Riefenstahl and the privileges she had because of her connection to the Nazi government. This is a must-read for anyone who is interested in World War II and learning about the lives that were so deeply impacted during the war.

*Reviewer received the book for free through Goodreads First Reads

Connie says

I cannot believe I had never heard of the Gypsy Plague before. This book made me want to know even more about it, which I think is a true testament to how much I enjoyed it. Many thanks to the author and publisher for the free advanced copy I received through the Goodreads "first reads" program. I had not realized that the

book was in the YA genre until just after I'd won. I do not read a lot in that category, but I will rate and review as such.

I can say that this book impressed a lot upon me even in middle age and having already read some about the Holocaust, but it is definitely written for a bit of a younger audience. Having said that, I do think it was well-written and by the end I had a real connection with Lilo. It is a remarkable story overall.

Yael Itamar says

Edit 1/19/2015: Something I didn't realize at the time I wrote the review was that the term "gypsy" is considered a slur. Since I wasn't sure whether the terms "Roma" and "Romani" could also be used for Sinti, I opted to use the word "Gypsy" when I was referring to the Roma and Sinti collectively. (The book used the term "Gypsy" so I assumed it was okay. Then again, I don't think the author herself is Roma/Sinti, so maybe she wasn't aware of the correct terminology(?))

After several weeks of being on social justice tumblrs, I've decided that I should edit this review to make it less offensive. (From what I can gather, "Roma" can refer either to the specific Roma ethnicity, or to all of the different Romani groups (Roma, Sinti, Kale, etc) as a whole.)

I apologize for my ignorance on the matter.

This book tackles an underexplored perspective on the Holocaust--the lives of Romani who were forced to serve as extras in a movie produced by the Nazi regime. Despite all the hours I spent learning about Holocaust in Jewish school, all I really knew about Romani was that they were also discriminated against and sent to concentration camps, so I'm glad I finally got to learn about it from a different viewpoint. (Apparently, "Roma" isn't a catch-all term for gypsy—it only refers to a particular ethnicity/group of gypsies (the "stereotypical" nomadic ones). **see above** The protagonist of the story is Sinti (think middle class, craftspeople, more "assimilated"). I don't think I've ever heard of Sinti before, which probably indicates a serious flaw in my education.)

This book has a very strong "illusion vs reality" theme, as well as some themes that are sadly still relevant to modern times, like cultural appropriation and whitewashing. (Romani were chosen as extras because they're dark-skinned, and the movie is supposed to be set in Spain, while the main characters, even though they're also supposed to be Spanish, are played by pale-skinned Aryans.)

One element that stood out for me was the prose. It's very direct and minimalistic, which might not appeal to every reader, but I thought that it worked well. There were parts that felt almost like stream-of-consciousness, without being pretentious or overly trippy.

Gabi says

It was alright, again, I'm unsatisfied, but it was a good read for a car ride home.

Hannah says

SPOILER ALERTS AHEAD

To be honest I am not sure how I feel about this book and that's why I gave it three stars.

It wasn't a bad book, I've read worse. But at the same time it wasn't a good book.

I didn't like it because I thought her descriptions of the Holocaust were either too sugar coated or there were none at all. The Holocaust is such a disgusting, horrific topic to write about, and I expected more from her writing, I mean come on! Use paragraphs!!! I couldn't tell whether or not the scene has changed or the time has changed. And *SPOILER ALERT* when she was hiding in Marta's house I thought she was there for a few months!! Not years!!! But the absolute worse was when she was in Ravensburg.

At start of the chapter and it was two years since her being found and she just got the medical surgery that she had been trying to avoid the whole time! And the details of how she felt and her experiences before weren't even stated!!

I can understand if she didn't want to get into detail about what exactly happened during the operation but she probably should have given some sort of back ground story, like I don't know told about her being selected for the surgery, and her feelings towards it. Because given by the way she had Lilo talk about it, it almost seemed like she didn't even think about it.

There were a couple of good plot twists along the way. And I like the fact there was a bit of romance, but it didn't cover up the main idea of the story. And a few more redeeming qualities, that made this story okay.

Shae McDaniel says

Sometimes when a book fails, it fails from not from what it did do but what it didn't.

*** Due to my vehement opposition to recent Goodreads policy changes, I will no longer be posting full reviews on this site. TO READ MY FULL REVIEW, GO TO: <http://www.shaelit.com/2013/10/review...>

Heather Johnson says

This started out with lack of emotion for me. It could have had depth. It had potential, but the story-telling was scattered. The emotion and tension of the book did not seem to build until around 200 pages and towards the closure of the story. Even then, it seemed lackluster and disappointing, which is sad, because this story has so much promise.

And the ending, if we must call it that, lacked resolution and seemed to end in the middle of the conclusion. I feel like I am missing at least another twenty pages to wrap this story nicely. Instead, the resolution is abrupt.

If this could have been told differently, if the scenes had been described differently... For example, the character deaths or disappearances were stated matter-a-fact that it seemed to lose its power through its story-telling. It was missing the emotion, the depth, the rawness of the moment, the reflection.

As I have stated over and over, many of elements of this book were lacking for me, and that is how I would

describe this entire read as a whole as well: lacking and disappointing.

I love the historical fiction roots and the author's note explaining its fact and fiction. I enjoyed what the author took liberty with, but this story could have been more thoughtfully approached rather than missing its cohesion, depth, and emotion.

Sally says

I love to read stories of survival against the odds, I have quite a link with the holocaust through my family history and was really interested in the concept of this book so moved it to the front of my reading pile when I found it.

WHAT A LET DOWN. It failed to weave a realistic and believable backdrop for the story (which ironically is REAL) and I found myself finding it very hard to care for many of the leading characters.

I forced myself to finish it, even though I found it a chore in the hope that there would be some reward for the reader in the plot development. No such luck.

What a shame. I wanted to love this book, but found it hard to give a damn. :(

Hannah says

It was interesting to read a fictional account of Gypsies during the Holocaust, especially those who were called to be extras on the set of Leni Riefenstahl's movie. I knew that forced sterilization happened in Nazi Germany, but hadn't yet read any literature besides this that dealt with that topic. Lasky's technique of bringing in other texts here was still interesting but felt more forced and lackluster than it did in *Ashes*, where the other snippets of text she used felt like they really wove together with the narrative and contributed to its depth. This book launched into the plot too quickly for me; I felt like I never really got attached to any of the characters, even though I did want to know what happened to them. It also felt like the plot got a bit unhinged as the movie filming ended; from there on out, the book felt more like an account of someone's life and less like a novel (a pretty depressing account, which is not surprising given the period).

Cayla says

Could have used another whole book just about the second half of her life - didn't love how rushed the end felt.

Sheryl says

This was a historical fiction book about the holocaust and how they dealt with the Gypsies. A famous German Actress and director used them as extras in the movie because they could pass as Spaniards, which the movie was about. It shows how they were treated and gives you a different look at the war where we usually only hear about the Jews. The actress actually died in 2003. I found it very interesting as well as disturbing.
