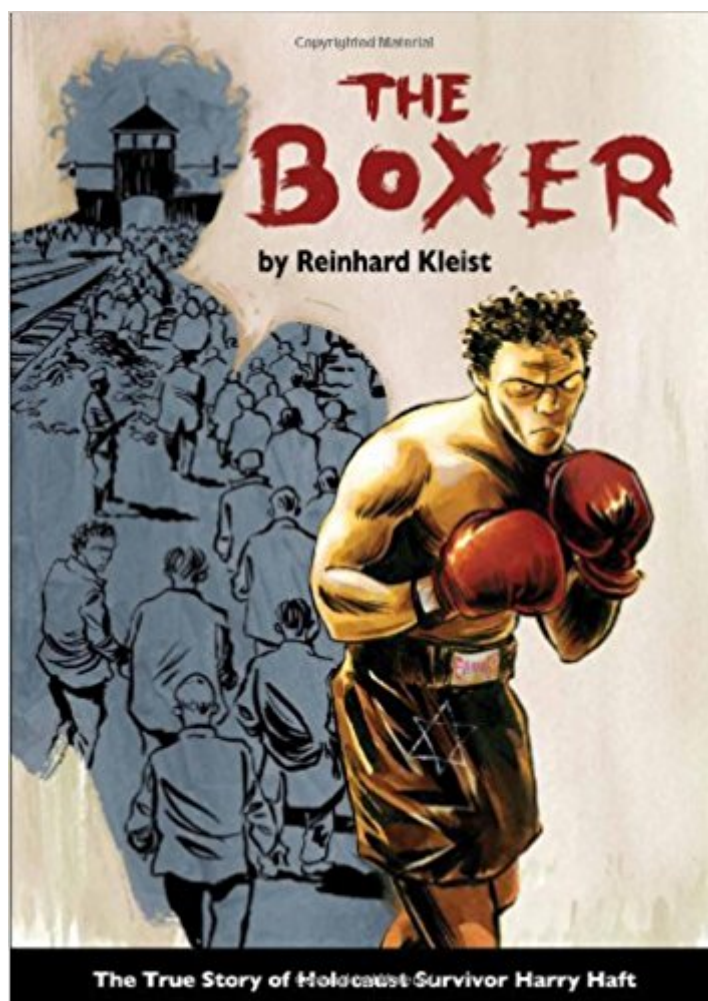


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# The Boxer: The True Story Of Holocaust Survivor Harry Haft



## Synopsis

Poland, 1941. Sixteen-year-old Harry Haft is sent to Auschwitz. When he is forced to fight against other inmates for the amusement of the SS officers, Haft shows extraordinary strength and courage, and a determination to survive. As the Soviet Army advances in April 1945, he makes a daring escape from the Nazis. After negotiating the turmoil of postwar Poland, Haft immigrates to the United States and establishes himself as a professional prizefighter, remaining undefeated until he faces heavyweight champion Rocky Marciano in 1949. In *The Boxer*, Reinhard Kleist reveals another side to the steely Harry Haft: a man struggling to escape the memories of the fiancée he left behind in Poland. This is a powerful and moving graphic novel about love and the will to survive.

## Book Information

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Age Range: 4 - 8 years

Grade Level: Preschool - 3

## Customer Reviews

The author of previous graphic biographies of Johnny Cash and Fidel Castro, Kleist recounts another true story of a turbulent life with this portrayal of Harry Haft, a Polish Jew who literally fought his way to survival in the Auschwitz concentration camp. Taking note of his strength and resilience, the guards enter him in boxing matches set up for the amusement of the SS officers. Haft defeats every opponent before escaping from a death march as the Soviet Red Army approaches. Immigrating to the U.S. after the war, he embarks on a professional boxing career, culminating in a

match with future heavyweight champion Rocky Marciano. While Haft's bouts in Auschwitz were driven by a desire to continue living, his American fights were motivated by hope of achieving fame so that the fiancée he lost in Poland would hear of his success. Kleist's expressive, inky brushwork powerfully conveys Haft's harrowing story. Although Haft might not be as famous as Kleist's previous subjects, his tale of survival by any means is equally enthralling. --Gordon Flagg

"Kleist's narrative is set in a perfect visual landscape. It's safe to say this is an early candidate for graphic novel of the year honors." (Publishers Weekly) "Kleist's expressive, inky brushwork powerfully conveys Haft's harrowing story." Although Haft might not be as famous as Kleist's previous subjects, his tale of survival by any means is equally enthralling. (Booklist) "A fast-paced work of graphic nonfiction offers an important lesson from a dark corner of history." (Shelf Awareness) "The characters are drawn with the energetic nimbleness so admired in Will Eisner's work. Sports fans and history readers, teen and up, will find this mesmerizing." (Library Journal (Starred Review))

Most people cannot appreciate the quality of modern graphic novels. Based on the real life experiences of Harry Haft, this graphic novel takes the reader through the Holocaust and subsequent life of Harry. Extremely powerful, unforgettable, and a must read. This is one of the most powerful graphic novels I've read and goes hand-in-hand with Robert Sharenow's The Berlin Boxing Club.

This is an excellent graphic novel overall. Well crafted and extremely interesting. However, I do believe that it is important to note that this book is NOT intended for audiences under the age of 10. It does depict cannibalism, crematoriums, and other horrors that the persecuted population faced in Germany under Nazi rule. The depictions to however seem authentic, and very eye catching, and really allow the reader to better grasp how terrible things were for this particular holocaust survivor.

Amazing and heartbreaking.

I am not big on graphic novels, and I only read this after I read a bio on the boxer, written by Haft's son. I have to say that all involved in this project did an admirable job of conveying the horror and

brutality of Haft's ordeals in Europe (and in New York), counterbalanced by a solid depiction of the Jewish boxer's mettle and toughness that allowed him to survive in situations in which almost anyone else would have perished. A lot of the text accompanying the panels is lifted directly from the aforementioned bio, and the drawings themselves are reminiscent of vintage Frank Miller, a noir contrast of light and shadow that gives the work a feel that is expressionist without being over the top. The postscript about other "undesirables" forced to fight in concentration camps for the amusement of the Third Reich was illuminating, as well. Hopefully more books on this neglected subject will come to light in the future. The work done by the artist and writer here is unpleasant at times, but also unquestionably necessary.

World War 2 contained some of the most extraordinary stories in human history. The conflict encompassed so much of our planet and involved so many people that 70 years later it's still possible to still discover new and stunning stories about people from that time. One of those people is Hertzko "Harry" Haft, a Polish Jew, who at 16 was sent to Auschwitz in 1941. He was one of the few who survived and inexplicably during his time there got his start in a career that would make him famous in America after the war: boxing. During his time at Auschwitz, an SS officer noticed Haft's strength and toughness and made him take part in life or death boxing matches for the SS's entertainment. Haft was put in a makeshift ring and forced to fight up to 20 nearly dead fellow prisoners at a time who were then executed after being beaten; if Haft lost, he would be executed. Somehow Haft managed to survive these numerous trials and, in the closing stages of the war, during a retreat from the advancing Allied armies, he was able to break free of the death march and escape. He was picked up by some American GIs and, shortly after the war ended, was able to emigrate to America where he decided to become a professional boxer. His career would peak in 1949 when he fought Rocky Marciano, but threw the fight due to pressure from Marciano's mob connections who told him they'd kill him if he beat the future heavyweight champion. But underneath it all, what kept Haft going through everything was the love of his fiancée Leah whom he didn't see for years once the Nazis took him prisoner. The only thing he knew about her was that she'd left Europe and was probably in America. His prime motivation for becoming a famous boxer was in the hope that she'd see his picture in the paper and contact him so they could be reunited and married. And though they finally met many years later in Florida, long after both had married other people and started families of their own, the experience was bittersweet as he found her dying

of cancer. But they did meet again. Haft's incredible story was told to his son, Alan, decades after all of this happened in his book "Harry Haft: Auschwitz Survivor, Challenger of Rocky Marciano" which was adapted into this graphic novel by Reinhard Kleist. And it's a truly incredible story filled with so many shocking moments. When Haft makes a break for freedom from the death march, his companion is shot and killed and falls on him. The Nazis are luckily in a hurry to declare both dead and move on. When Haft picks himself up and moves on, he kills an SS officer bathing in a nearby river and takes his outfit. He's taken in by an elderly German couple believing he's a Nazi officer until they realise he's not and attempt to alert the Nazis - Haft has to kill them both to survive. The passages in Auschwitz are of course the bleakest. Kleist draws the book in black and white, using inks to great effect, like in the passages where Haft is shovelling corpses into the giant ovens. Those panels are so dark, both literally and figuratively, and so brutally depicted, it's hard to read. To think Haft was a kid forced to do these horrible things goes some way to understanding his desperate actions to escape the Nazis and his distant and troubled state of mind for the rest of his life. Like when he's boxing professionally in America, Kleist shows moments in the ring when Haft flashes back to Auschwitz and he's seeing emaciated Jewish prisoners coming at him instead of professional boxers. Those memories were a part of what drove him in his fights and what haunted him in his life. Haft's nightmarish experiences don't excuse the physical abuse and hair-trigger temper his family had to endure after he'd left boxing behind but it goes some way to understanding how he became the hard man he was. The Boxer is a difficult book to read but only because of the subject matter - it is written and drawn beautifully. Kleist doesn't shy away from the horrors of the concentration camp where skeletal prisoners would murder and eat fellow prisoners in the night to stave away the hunger pangs and the blase savagery with which the Nazis showed to the Jews. Kleist's writing is perfectly measured, knowing when to narrate events to the reader, how to let the dialogue in a scene tell you about the characters, and when to say nothing at all and let the pictures play out everything you need to know. The book is drawn in remarkably black and white inks and Kleist's ability to perfectly capture characters' facial expressions is uncanny. Kleist's strong narrative sense of how to build up an emotional scene is evident in Haft's final fight against Marciano as the panels flash from the present to the past: the fight in the present to the memories of the laughing SS officers, the German Shepherds savagely barking, the looming threat of death if he lost - it's an

extremely powerful moment. As is in the final scene between Haft and his son Alan, when Haft breaks down, gets out of the car and stands away from his son crying and smoking, cars driving by them on the highway showing how Haft is unable to move forward with his life compared to the rest of the world and the inability he had to be close to others. The Boxer is a book that will leave you emotionally drained by the end but is a work of art everyone who enjoys literature should read. Books that provoke strong reactions like this should never be missed, whether the subject matter is hard to see at times or not - it is written and drawn too well to deny. Reinhard Kleist has created a true masterpiece in The Boxer which is sure to be a future classic of the genre, up there with Maus as a celebrated and essential graphic novel about World War 2.

An amazing true story told with fantastic expressive illustrations, drawings and dialogue. At times you feel the emotions painful or otherwise and the physical pain Harry Haft experiences himself. With earlier and better training Haft probably would have become a top ranked boxer. Organised crime infiltrated boxing and Haft's claim of fight fixing is certainly possible, even if he would have lost to Rocky Marciano in a fair fight. Millions of Jews died and suffered in the Holocaust and this story tells us how one man suffered and managed to survive. Haft's story is also a very passionate love story. Would be a great Movie.

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