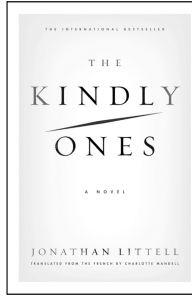


story begins at Iraq's National Museum in Baghdad in 2003, when it was being looted for gold and antiquities, then jumps five years to the story of Dana Landau, a reporter on a dangerous assignment in Iraq during the grisly events of the time. She is soon murdered for possessing an item she found sticking out of the sand, an old battered leather pouch decorated with an evil eye encasing a golden amulet, an orb decorated with gemstones forming the evil eye. Many political and religious factions in the U.S., Israel, and the Arab world are chasing after this relic from Mesopotamia, known as the Eye of Dawn, and anyone standing in their way is dispensable. The authors use Dana's sister, Natalie, a museum curator specializing in amulets and magic, to explain the significance of the evil eye and the hamsa or Hand of Fatima. Natalie and Jim D'Amato, an associate of Dana's, join in a deadly race against time to determine the importance of the ancient object that led to Dana's death. **MBA**

the narrative by which he explores Jack's lost and forgotten Jewish identity. These instances cause visceral reactions. A reader might then ask questions like, "What makes me Jewish?" "What is my Jewish identity?" "Do I have a choice in the matter?" *The J-Word* is a reminder that while we may act totally secular, there is something deeply ingrained in Jewish identity that connects us all. **EAZ**



**THE KINDLY ONES**

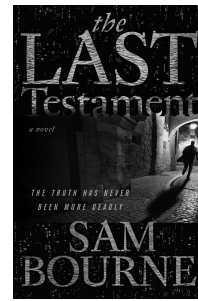
**Jonathan Littell; Charlotte Mandell, trans.**  
Harper, 2009. 983 pp. \$37.99  
ISBN: 978-0771051531

**T**here is nothing kindly about *The Kindly Ones*, by Jonathan Littell, and any comparisons to this novel and *War and Peace*, are certainly predicated more on the number of pages (983) than they are on content. Yes, this is a novel of war, but there is no peace to be found anywhere.

*The Kindly Ones* is not a novel for the faint of heart. It is the gruesome narrative of a Nazi, ostensibly patterned after Max Aue, but even more, it is the unbridled depiction of a highly educated yet evil man with a depraved mind. The back story is well known to those who might read this novel: the Holocaust—the systematic annihilation of the Jewish people. And it is these very systems that Littell's narrator analyzes in his own detached, disgustingly self-absorbed conversations—with himself and those around him. Littell offers no plot; no characters with whom one can identify; no scenes or settings that bring pleasure; and, no profound insights or explanations. What the reader is left with is narration—a painful, horrendous, pornographic, intense stream of vile, unconscionable invectives spewed by this shameless individual—a character sketch of a man without regret, one merely doing his job, "just a man" who cries over musical passages, but never sheds a tear as he watches the Jews killed as a "butcher slaughters a cow."

Questions of audience and purpose rise to the surface constantly when reading *The Kindly Ones*. For whom has Littell written this novel and why? There will be those for whom novels about the Nazi mentality validate their

beliefs: every Nazi was a murderer, plain and simple. And, there will be those who will be reminded of Elie Wiesel's contention that: "There is no such thing as a literature of the Holocaust, nor can there be. The very expression is a contradiction in terms" (qtd. in Rosenfeld 14). Certainly, there are any number of survivors who chance upon this novel and reject it because they do not need or want to hear the justifications and rationale for these heinous acts. Perhaps, then, Littell's intention is to challenge the limits of the reader's imagination and endurance. If that is the purpose, it succeeds. **MDE**



**THE LAST TESTAMENT: A NOVEL**

**Sam Bourne**  
HarperCollins, 2009. 439 pp. \$26.99  
ISBN: 978-8006-147086-8

**S**am Bourne, author of *The Righteous Men*, has written another thriller involving archaeology and international politics. In 2003, during the Iraq war, a teenager participating in the looting of the Baghdad Museum of Antiquities steals an ancient clay tablet from a vault. Several years later at a peace rally in Israel, the Israeli prime minister addresses a crowd. A man approaches him and appears to be reaching for a gun. The security detail kills him, but he only had a note that he wanted to give the prime minister in his hand. This accidental killing triggers a series of revenge killings that could derail negotiations leading to a peace agreement. The United States government asks Maggie Costello, a skilled negotiator who has retired from the stressful work, to come and save the peace talks. She agrees, in part to escape from an abusive relationship. As she follows the trail from West Bank settlements to Palestinian refugee camps, she discovers that these deaths are not random. There is a pattern. The two men were archaeologists and historians who knew about ancient secrets. Costello soon finds herself drawn into both high-stakes international politics and the trade in stolen antiquities, as well as biblical riddles and fundamentalist religion. There is enough action here to keep readers turning the pages. **BMB**



**THE J-WORD**

**Andrew Sanger**  
Snowbooks, 2009. 340 pp. \$14.95  
ISBN: 978-1-905005-95-6

**E**very so often one comes across a book, movie, TV show, museum exhibition or something of the sort that inspires introspection, even if it's just for a few moments. Andrew Sanger's novel *The J-Word* will probably have this effect on its readers. It's the story of eighty-year-old Jack Silver, an old Jewish grinch who takes unlimited pride in his Englishness over his Jewishness. His life changes dramatically when he moves to an assisted living facility in Golders Green, reluctantly takes watch over his precocious ten-year-old grandson, Danny, and tries to assist an elderly Jew being attacked by anti-Semites. He ends up being beaten himself, and his brutal beating sets Jack and Danny off on a hunt to find the assailants and deliver them to justice.

Their journey takes them on a fascinating ride through Jack's memories. Sanger's method of alternating voices provides an added layer to