In 1944, Adolf Eichmann, the manager of the mass murder of Europe's Jews, considered an offer to trade 10,000 trucks for the lives of 1 million concentration camp inmates. Placing a pistol on his desk, he told a Jewish emissary that he knew "how glad some of your people would be to bump me off. But don't be too optimistic, Mr. Brand. It may be that times will change, it may be that we shall lose the war, but you won't catch me. ... I have made all arrangements against that eventuality."

Eichmann was bluffing. He didn't have the money, a safe house or forged papers. Nonetheless, he managed to escape two American POW camps, hide out in the mountains and then flee to Buenos Aires, Argentina, where he worked as Ricardo Klement, a foreman at a Mercedes-Benz plant. In "Hunting Eichmann: How a Band of Survivors and a Young Spy Agency Chased Down the World's Most Notorious Nazi," Neal Bascomb, a former international journalist, draws on interviews with operatives of Mossad, Israel's intelligence agency; crew members of El Al airlines; and an old memoir by Eichmann to provide a fast-paced and suspenseful account of the controversial 15 year manhunt -- and kidnapping -- that raised consciousness around the world about the Holocaust.

Outside of Israel, Bascomb reminds us, no one really wanted to find Eichmann. Fending off pressure from Jews in the United States to investigate reports from Simon Wiesenthal that the former SS officer was in South America, the CIA declared, "We are not in the business of apprehending war criminals." Konrad Adenauer, chancellor of West Germany, thought the time had come "to abandon the smelling out of Nazis. ... If we once start on that, nobody knows where it will end."

As the only heir of the 6 million Jews murdered by the Nazis, Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion proclaimed, Israel had a "supreme moral justification" to bring Eichmann to justice. Noting that Eichmann gave permission to "Jewish volunteers, including some Israelis," to take him out of the country, he expressed regret for any violation of Argentina's sovereignty but refused to return him. And he shrugged off demands from German politicians and newspaper editors that Eichmann be extradited and "tried by judges instead of by avengers."

Although he acknowledges that Israel's cover story was "dubious" and provides no in-depth discussion of the complicated legal issues involved, Bascomb (who is not Jewish) seems to agree with Ben-Gurion. And with Judge Moshe Landau, who on Dec. 15, 1961, sentenced Eichmann to death (the only time an Israeli court has ever imposed capital punishment) because he "acted out of an inner identification with the orders that he was given and out of a fierce will to achieve the criminal objective."

Bascomb wants to tell a simple story of good and evil. He emphasizes that Eichmann remained unrepentant, even when he portrayed himself in public as a "receiver of orders." Eichmann sent boxcars to Amsterdam, he told journalist Willem Sassen, "and most of the 140,000 Dutch Jews were directed for the gas chambers at Bergen-Belsen, Sobibor, and Auschwitz. ... It went beautifully."

Such a man does not deserve sympathy. But when the squad from Mossad finally stood over the "miserable runt," lying in a park near a gas chamber in Jerusalem, covered in blood and ashes, Bascomb concludes, "I only wished for a longer time, to hear him cry."

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on a bed in his pajamas, with goggles over his eyes, they became unsettled. "Was this the personification of evil?"
Mossad chief Isser Harel asked himself.

Eichmann was not, however, as devoid of pride as Harel thought. Nor was he, as per political philosopher Hannah
Arendt, the embodiment of "the banality of evil." As a coiled rope was placed over his head, Eichmann exclaimed
"Long live Germany. ... I die believing in God."

In an act of rough justice, the Israelis cremated him. Cast into the open sea, Bascomb writes, his ashes drifted toward
the shore "just as the sun slowly rose in the sky and Tel Aviv came back to life."

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