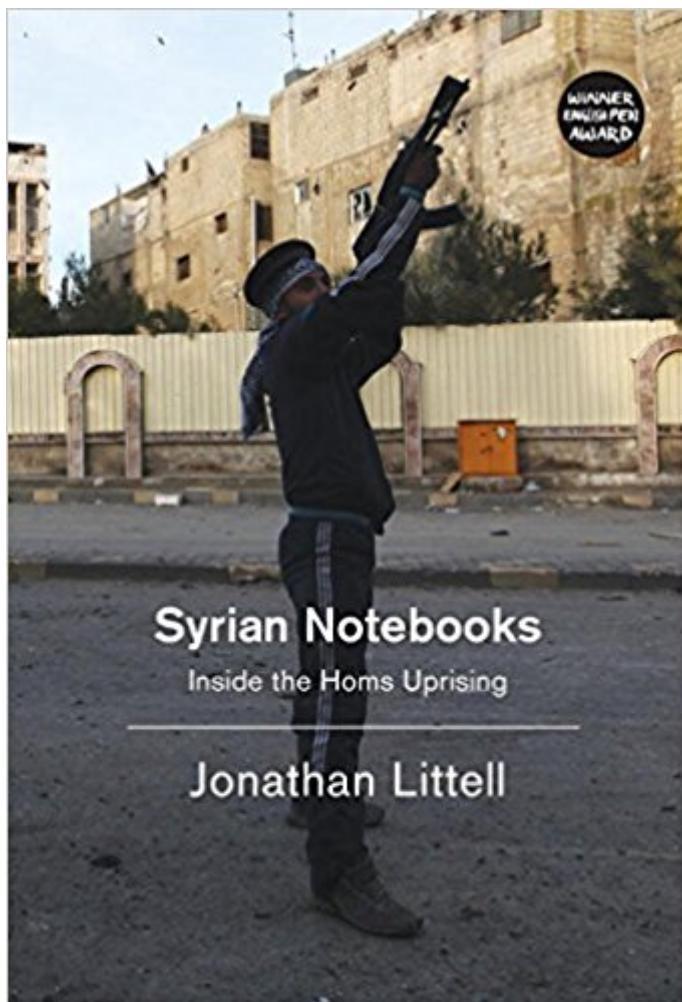


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# Syrian Notebooks: Inside The Homs Uprising



## Synopsis

A blistering firsthand account of the conflict in Homs by the internationally acclaimed author of *The Kindly Ones* —“We fight for our religion, for our women, for our land, and lastly to save our skin. As for them, they’re only fighting to save their skin.” In 2012, Jonathan Littell traveled to the heart of the Syrian uprising, smuggled in by the Free Syrian Army to the historic city of Homs. For three weeks, he watched as neighborhoods were bombed and innocent civilians murdered. His notes on what he saw on the ground speak directly of horrors that continue today in the ongoing civil war. Amid the chaos, Littell bears witness to the lives and the hopes of freedom fighters, of families caught within the conflict, as well as of the doctors who attempt to save both innocents and combatants who come under fire. As government forces encircle the city, Littell charts the first stirrings of the fundamentalist movement that would soon hijack the revolution. Littell’s notebooks were originally the raw material for the articles he wrote upon his return for the French daily *Le Monde*. Published nearly immediately afterward in France, *Syrian Notebooks* has come to form an incomparable close-up account of a war that still grips the Middle East —a classic of war reportage.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

—“Writing of this quality is rare, and Syrian Notebooks is a first-rate work of war reportage that may come to be seen as an indispensable piece of literature.”

—Flavorwire —“There are still some journalists, photographers and writers who were courageous enough to report from opposition areas and remember those early days of the

revolution. There was never any magic or mystery to the emergence of Isis. It was born from levels of grotesque suffering that would be hard to imagine had they not been witnessed at first hand by individuals such as Littell. Reading his account, the moral and intellectual bankruptcy of climbing into bed with Assad becomes clear.

“Documents a pivotal moment in the conflict” Littell conveys his sense of horror in stark, fragmented prose. “An important document of Syria’s trial by fire.” “CounterPunch” “Syrian Notebooks is Littell’s raw, day-by-day account of his time shuttling between houses and conversing with members of the opposition deemed to be “terrorists” by the government and rarely given a voice in the West. The book is not a sugar-coated portrayal of the alternative offered by those leading the armed rebellion. Although he is certainly sympathetic, Littell does not suffer from Stockholm syndrome, nor does he simply romanticize men with guns, as was common among those who embedded with US troops in Iraq. “Littell’s burning anger animates his book.” “The National” “His writings capture a beleaguered but defiant resistant movement.” Syrian Notebooks are immediate and vivid he has an eye for small, heartbreaking details. “Littell’s writing is precise, forceful, and free of ego.” “Hilary Plum, Bookforum” “As a detailed testimony of a moment in history, Littell’s account retains power and relevance.” “Oldie”

Jonathan Littell was born in 1967 in New York and was brought up in France. His novel *The Kindly Ones*, originally published in France as *Les Bienveillantes*, became a bestseller and won the coveted Prix Goncourt and the Académie Française’s Prix de Littérature. Previously he worked for a humanitarian agency, Action contre la faim, in Bosnia, Chechnya, Afghanistan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. He lives in Spain.

Very honest and detailed sharing of experiences in this tragic war

good product good delivery

“Syrian Notebooks: Inside the Homs Uprising” by Jonathan Littell (April 2014), Verso (Publ.) an imprint by “New Left Books”, first published as “Carnet de Homs: 16 janvier - 2 février 2012” in French in late 2012 (or: “Book of Homs: 16 January - 2 February 2012”); translated into English by:

Charlotte Mandell (2015); 247 pages. In mid-January 2012, this American born, but raised in France, author traveled to Homs, Syria (a city located about 100 miles north of Damascus, the capital of Syria), to report on the anti-Pres. Bashar al-Assad uprising -- which Pres. Assad was attempting to crush through air strikes and ground military units that attempted to surround the city. The uprising and its violent suppression had already been going on for almost a year. The author was inside the city for almost 3 weeks and tried to witness the indiscriminate killing and wounding of many hapless city residents. Initially his notes became articles in "Le Monde" in mid-February 2012, and later the basis for this book. At the time I wrote this review, there was no "Look Inside" feature available. Hence, chapter topics are (the following unusual Arabic names are various "boroughs" within Homs): Maps (2 pages) Introduction to the Verso Edition (18 pages) Preliminary note (3 pages) Mon., Jan. 16, 2012: Tripoli, Lebanon (4 pages) Tues. Jan. 17: Tripoli - border - al-Qusayr (14 p.) Wed., Jan 18: Al-Qusayr: (12 p.) Thurs., Jan. 19: Al-Qusayr - Baba 'Amr (21 p.) Fri., Jan. 20: Baba 'Amr (16 p.) Sat., Jan. 21: Baba 'Amr (17 p.) Sun., Jan. 22: Baba 'Amr (14 p.) Mon., Jan. 23: Baba 'Amr (11 p.) Tues., Jan. 24: Baba 'Amr - al-Khalidiya - al-Bayada (14p.) Wed., Jan. 25: Al-Bayada - Safsafi - Bab as-Sha'a - Safsafi (17 p.) Thurs., Jan. 16 : Safasai - Karam al-Zaytun - Bab Tadmur (18 p.) Fri., Jan. 17: Safsafi - Bab Drib - Safsafi (0 p.) Sat., Jan. 28: Safsafi - Baba 'Ar - al-Khalidiya - al-Bayada (13 p.) Sun., Jan. 29: al-Bayada (14 p.) Mon., Jan. 30: al-Bayada - al-Khalidiya (6 p.) Tues., Jan. 31: al-Khalidiya - Baba 'Amr (4 p.) Wed., Feb. 1: Bab 'Amr (6 p.) Thurs., Feb. 2: Baba 'Amr - al-Qusayr - border - Beirut (7 p.) Epilogue (6 p.) Table of Ranks (1 p.) [no index] Due to the small size of the pages, not many words per page. Hence, the first 10% of this book through page 21 is, essentially, wordy introductory remarks. This book is written in a long "travelogue"-like style: With guidance from our smuggler, after driving a few bumpy kilometers, we drive past some farmers with calloused hands, past some sheep, drove into a large Homs neighborhood (not a small one, but a large one -- the smaller ones are less important -- because they are smaller), endless minibuses and little pickup trucks (coming and going from Lebanon), passed some tense militiamen guarding an intersection. Finally met up with some Free Syria fighters, walked through some shot-shelled homes, heard some gunfire in the distance -- made us nervous, had difficulty in finding food. No women visible, things settle down little by little, we leave, we arrive, naked electric wires bulging from the walls, huddled in a bombed-out building -- used a hunk of cement for a pillow, hoped I would awake in the morning. Riveting stuff, huh? Okay, a travelogue with a twist: [our smuggler driver] "keeps a grenade next to the steering wheel. If we run into a flying checkpoint, he won't stop" (p.32). Finally, after 30 pages we get into some "meat" as to the rebels thoughts: "As a Sunni, he feels discriminated against. The good [government] jobs are reserved for Alawites". The

author spies on the "public hospital in al-Qusayr, near the cemetery, is occupied by the security forces. There are snipers on the roof." The author visits a "clandestine medical unit set up inside a house...The doctor who had been in charge...was killed in Rastan two months ago." TWO MONTHS AGO?!? A lot of the author's reporting seems to be of events he heard about, rather than actually witnessed -- besides driving around the city. "People die here of basic wounds, of hemorrhages .... Wounds are mostly to the upper regions.... Also people released from prison: tortured, bones broken."The author wrote: "4:00 pm. An old man dies of old age and will be buried quickly." HOLD THE PRESSES ! CALL "Le Mond" NEWSPAPER FOR AN EXCLUSIVE REPORT FROM THE WAR ZONE !!Then we are told the story of a rebel killed LAST August -- six months BEFORE the author entered the war zone. (The author's got to fill his small pages somehow.)One rebel yells: "Bashar, we don't know who you are, Muslim or Jew!" The author failed to inquire as to what was the relevance of the "Jew" reference -- why didn't the rebel call Bashar a "Hindu" instead? Just so much "why" is missing in this drawn-out travelogue.We're over 40% into this book and the author has yet to actually report on a battle scene that he witnessed. We really don't get much analysis as to who these rebels are, and what they are fighting for. The author doesn't meet many rebels, so it's difficult for him to analyze the who, what, where & why of the rebel's agenda(s) -- we simply aren't informed of this, because, well, the author isn't informed about these matters.Sometimes the author acknowledges that some of the rebels' claims are questionable: "This woman's story turned out to be completely incoherent" (p. 69). The author spent a fair amount of time trying to verify war-atrocity stories, but couldn't find (m)any to confirm.The author had several problems in trying to report on the carnage going on in Homs. Although he wanted to report on Pres. Assads' attacks upon the city. he had difficulty in entering the core of the city because some of the rebels didn't trust him (they thought he might actually be a spy for Assad), and some of the rebels wanted to control the media going out of the city: they wanted to make sure that the visiting reporters were giving the rebel's story (semi-propaganda). Hence, even though the author was finally allowed to enter the city's core, he still didn't have free reign to casually travel throughout the core: he still had to worry about being attacked by Assad's military, and the author also had to go through various rebel checkpoints. As he had to move about carefully, and as the city was large, he couldn't readily get to the scene of some alleged atrocity. Hence, for the three weeks he was in Homs and its outskirts, he wasn't able to personally vouch for (m)any atrocities. Just in the wrong place at the wrong time in not being able to cover some attack. This book is just not a great exposé of Assad's military abuses of the civilians within Homs. The author chases after a lot of war-crime innuendo, but can't verify much -- although he is to be admired for having attempted to do so.Yes, as noted in its title, this book is the author's

"notebook" -- the comments he jotted down as he observed. His jotted observations for newspaper articles -- but not really substance for a book. A notebook does not a book make. You really don't want to pay too much for information like: "The mud sticks to our boots" --really riveting expose journalism here folks. Oh, but wait! -- "The man leaves us and veers left, we continue straight ahead, moving away from the railroad" -- and, I suppose, away from the bistro, away from the dental office, away from the.... (who cares?). I really wish I hadn't paid initial full-price for this book. A brave author who couldn't find a (substantial) story. But I don't want to leave this review as a total bummer, I like to leave some upbeat, rainbow of hope that I got from this book: here: "The sun shines on the puddles" (p. 61).

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