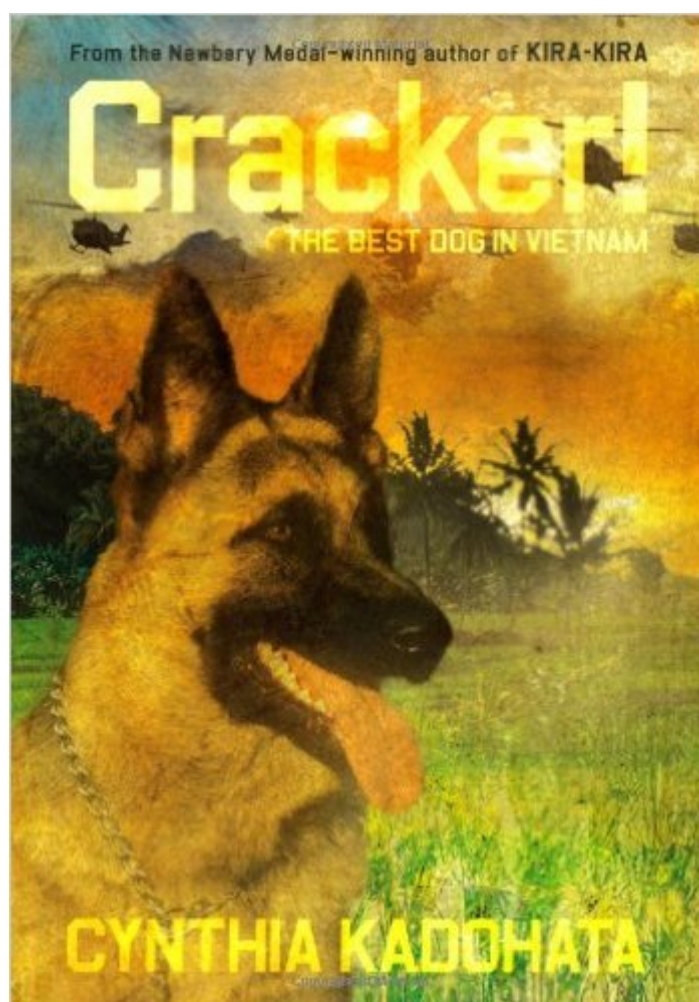


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# Cracker!: The Best Dog In Vietnam



## Synopsis

CRACKER IS ONE OF THE UNITED STATES ARMY'S MOST VALUABLE WEAPONS: a German shepherd trained to sniff out bombs, traps, and the enemy. The fate of entire platoons rests on her keen sense of smell. She's a Big Deal, and she likes it that way. Sometimes Cracker remembers when she was younger, and her previous owner would feed her hot dogs and let her sleep in his bed. That was nice, too. Rick Hanski is headed to Vietnam. There, he's going to whip the world and prove to his family and his sergeant -- and everyone else who didn't think he was cut out for war -- wrong. But sometimes Rick can't help but wonder that maybe everyone else is right. Maybe he should have just stayed at home and worked in his dad's hardware store. When Cracker is paired with Rick, she isn't so sure about this new owner. He's going to have to prove himself to her before she's going to prove herself to him. They need to be friends before they can be a team, and they have to be a team if they want to get home alive. Told in part through the uncanny point of view of a German shepherd, *Cracker!* is an action-packed glimpse into the Vietnam War as seen through the eyes of a dog and her handler. It's an utterly unique powerhouse of a book by the Newbery Medal-winning author of *Kira-Kira*.

## Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars Â Â See all reviews Â (151 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #414,688 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #206 in Â Books > Teens >

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## Customer Reviews

War dogs used in Vietnam were unsung heroes. Faced with intense training combined with dreadful working conditions and constant danger, they had few rewards and were often left behind to survive on their own. This incredible book, although fictional, is based on real accounts provided through interviews of Vietnam War dog handlers. Cracker, an amazingly intelligent German Shepherd, knows

more than 90 words and lives the life of royalty that she deserves. It is her birthright. She has lived with (and slept with) Willie since she was about six months old, but before she is two, her life changes traumatically. Willie's father has been laid off, and the family needs to move to an apartment --- one that doesn't allow dogs. There are few options, and, according to the shelter, Cracker probably will be put down. Unable to locate a new family or home, they come across an advertisement from the military: Uncle Sam is looking for a few good dogs. Cracker is to enlist and join the army. Cracker mourns for Willie, certain that his young master will rescue her as she is shipped to unfriendly locations, kenneled with lots of other dogs and then given to some strange man. Cracker is paired up with Rick Hanski --- who volunteered for duty in Vietnam at the young age of 17 --- to train for locating bombs, traps and the enemy. The lives of Cracker and Rick, along with those of thousands of soldiers, will depend on the success of their training and how well they are able to work together. Author Cynthia Kadohata carefully crafts her narrative with two alternating voices --- Rick's and Cracker's --- as she describes their bond, fears, concerns and conditions.

Some books the reader opens and drags through a few pages, still uninspired. "Grrr! For I am the all-powerful Cracker!" First sentence in "Cracker: The Best Dog in Vietnam" hooks older children. This German Shepherd is flipping a dead bird in the air, abandons it when she sees a live mouse! Then Willie calls her and she bounds home. It's an enticing beginning for children, 9-12, but also suitable to draw in adults who work with children and want to find good books for them or adults who have children and want to know what quality of books they are reading. This "Cracker" is a good one: It was nominated for the Louisiana Young Readers Choice in 2010 for Best Book in the grades 6-8 category, although I find it suitable for mature 4th and 5th grade readers. It's a simple story to start: Boy wants Dog, Boy finds Dog, Boy must give up Dog. Now what happens to dog placed in the local pound? It's Vietnam time and the army needs military dogs to sniff out hidden landmines, bombs, and Viet Cong. Some dogs are one-man (or -boy) dogs and resist any new owner. However, the young recruit just out of high school is special, though he is told he is not special by his counselor. His brilliant older sister is "a specialist"--Rick is described as a "generalist." It's a label he fights throughout his duty tour in Nam. He does become Cracker's "owner" by winning her respect. They become as one by the time they are sent to Vietnam, along with the other units in his squad. Rick wants Cracker to be "the best dog in Vietnam." You know in books like this that, if she doesn't become the best dog, then she will one of the best. I'll not spoil it for you. So, that's a short summary of the story, but it's not the story that sold me on this novel.

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