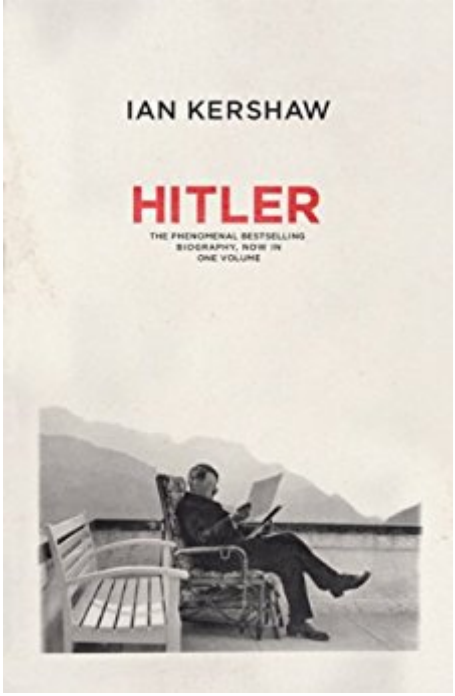
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Hitler



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Synopsis

Now at last in a single, abridged volume the definitive life.When the two volumes of Ian Kershaw's biography of Hitler, Hitler 1889-1936: Hubris and Hitler 1936-1945: Nemesis were published, they were immediately greeted around the world as the essential works on perhaps the most malign figure ever to hold power in modern Europe. In the face of considerable demand for such an edition, Kershaw has now created a single volume version. The result is a frightening, fascinating narrative of how a bitter provincial failure from an obscure corner of Austria rose to unparalleled power; how the half-baked, contemptible ideas of a vagrant former art student coalesced into an ideology that for twelve horrific years shaped the fate of millions; and how both in his determination to impose his will militarily and to fend off his many enemies he unleashed a genocidal Armageddon. No one individual can stand in as the scapegoat for the vast social, technological, economic and military forces that shape our societies but if ever there was one man whose ideas and personality shaped and cowed those forces, as well as embodying them, it was Hitler. This is his story and Kershaw tells it with unique authority, and with moral anger.

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Customer Reviews

I was told that this was the definitive biography of the terrifying German dictator. It is. It surpasses Joachim Fest's very thorough work. Kershaw places Hitler in context of the German turmoil of the early 20th century. It becomes plain that if Hitler was a self-made man, he did not do a very good job. He was insecure, plagued by inferiority complexes, with no intellectual ambition, obsessed with climbing the power ladder. He discovered his only gift, as a propagandist and speaker, during the turmoil and revolutionary times after Germany's defeat in the First World War; his rise to power was aided, abetted and financed by German industrialists and upper bourgeoisie, terrified by the Russian revolution and Bolshevism, discomfited by the stabilization of the Weimar Republic in the middle years of the 20s decade. The democratic Weimar Republic died at the hands of the upper crust, the Great Depression and Paul Hindenburg, paving the way for the doubtfully legal takeover of the Nazi regime. The German century started catastrophically and continued piling disaster upon disaster on the European continent until 1989. Hitler was an instrument and an engineer of the doomsday machine that ended the European pre-eminence in a heap of rubble and smoke.

Very compelling explanation of the rise of Hitler. Kershaw does an incredible job of explaining how Hitler was able to harness the public emotions of the post-WWI years to become the leader of a fringe political party that eventually was elected into office with mass public support. He also gives what is likely the best account of Hitler's early years and how he came to develop his "world view". This volume ends with the remilitarization of the Rhineland and shows the culmination of the dictatorial powers that the German public willingly gave to Hitler.

It is daunting to think that a 1000+-page book is the abridged version. Whew. And yet Prof. Kershaw does not get lost in the details, and neither does the reader. Unless you want the full 1000 pages, be prepared to skim some. (I chose this heavy volume because of Prof. Kershaw's impeccable reputation in Hitler scholarship and I'm glad that I did.)For me personally, so much of what I know about the Holocaust comes from sources that stress the long roots of anti-Semitism in Germany, yet Kershaw shows--and, more significantly in this setting, documents--how the plan for the Holocaust developed only over time, and how it included a great deal of improvisation, both by Hitler and by his lieutenants. In the early years, for example, Hitler's writings were no more anti-Semitic than was routine in Germany at the time. Then, the Jews became a convenient target for national anger and a focus of Hitler's rhetoric, but to say that the Holocaust as we see it "was always the intention" is not supported by the abundant documentation.

A phenomenal biography in every way. Kershaw is a fantastic writer. I now have four of his volumes on my shelves.One of the most astonishing sections of this book is on page 427. After Hindenburg brought Hitler into the government as Chancellor, Erich von Ludendorff, another World War I legend, wrote to Hindenburg, "You have delivered up our holy German Fatherland to one of the greatest demagogues of all time. I solemnly prophesy that this accursed man will cast our Reich into the abyss and bring our nation to inconceivable misery. Future generations will damn you in your grave for what you have done.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•

Before you get this book, be aware that the author has a certain frame of reference/preferences that affects both the material included and the inferences/conclusions that he presents. The facts and events that are included are covered well. For example, I learned that Hitler (or his team) appears to have invented political barnstorming by aircraft. And the author spends an enormous amount of time on the details of how and by whom the Holocaust was authorized, if you are looking for a source on that. The book also contains many uncommon photos. But the author appears to have no interest in two factual areas and they are omitted ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œ military weaponry/strategy and the development and implementation of the totalitarian system in Germany. The (unique) frame of reference the author brings is an apparent requirement that every action by Hitler must have a known reason/cause. The rest of this review are examples of the above. You can stop reading here if you donÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t want any dreary details. The author would lead you to believe that we, or at least he, knows why Hitler did most everything. So for example, once becoming Chancellor in 1933, the author says that Hitler wanted to do nothing, just like he did in Vienna years earlier as a starving artist, and so he just watched movies, chatted with his friends, had long meals and teas, and so on. All the bad stuff was done by his staff, to summarize the authorÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s position. Bad stuff that does come up at HitlerÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s hand ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œ like Night of the Long Knives ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œ is made to appear almost a necessity to maintain order and forestall a disaster. No mention that it was at this pre-territorial-grabbing time that Hitler took GuderianÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s suggestion and created wholly self-sufficient mobile armored units over the strong objections of the Army. And there is no mention that while the party out of power in Britain has a ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“shadow cabinetÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•, ready to take over if the government in power falls, the NSDAP had every part of German society shadowed ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œ political institutions, educational institutions, churches, labor unions, etc. When Hitler took power, they almost instantly took control of every part of German society. And no mention that, based on his

WWI experience, Hitler demanded that Germany focus on building only offensive weapons. But also no mention of him stunning von Braun and his rocket scientists by telling them why their V-2 superweapon would not work, or telling the Army how to take Fort Eben-Emael when they were stumped. The point is, this is not the track record of an uninvolved, idle, tea-with-Hitler personality. Another example - the author claims with certainty that Hitler invaded the USSR because he wanted to force Britain to negotiate a peace treaty. I think the consensus is that the USSR invasion was a piece of HitlerÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Mein Kampf/Lebensraum core belief structure, and that having Britain cave in was just fluff tossed out by Ribbentrop that would have been a welcome side benefit to Hitler, but not a prime cause. The author gives Hitler a ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“logicalÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• reason for invading the USSR rather than an idealogical one. For the last two years of the war Hitler often gave illogical, impossible, and damaging orders to his Army, and sometimes to units that did not exist. The author in many cases finds rational and logical explanations for these. You have to decide which Hitler is the most plausible. To use the dumbest possible analogous idiom, the carrot that keeps any totalitarian state together is the belief in the god-like set of miracles that the leader of the state, and only the leader, has brought and will continue to bring. The stick is the terror, the almost incapacitating fear that any perceived inappropriate action on your part will be informed upon by your neighbor, workmate, patron at an event, or your own child, and you and maybe your family will be whisked off to the (German) gulag, possibly never to return. To read this book, few of these carrots, none of the sticks, nor the totalitarian state itself, existed under Hitler. Maybe the author felt it was too much material to include, but if so, it should have been explicitly stated. At the end of the book the author inserts a paragraph noting what a nasty evil guy Hitler was. But it seems out of place with the rest of the book, which describes a person who for the most part is making reasonable decisions with all the nasty stuff being done by his staff. Toss in HimmlerÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s famous excuse - ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Am I responsible for the excesses of my subordinates?ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• - and Hitler is almost in the clear, to accept this authorÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s version. Bottom line ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œ this is a worthwhile Hitler book to read if it is your fourth or so. But I would not recommend it as your first.

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