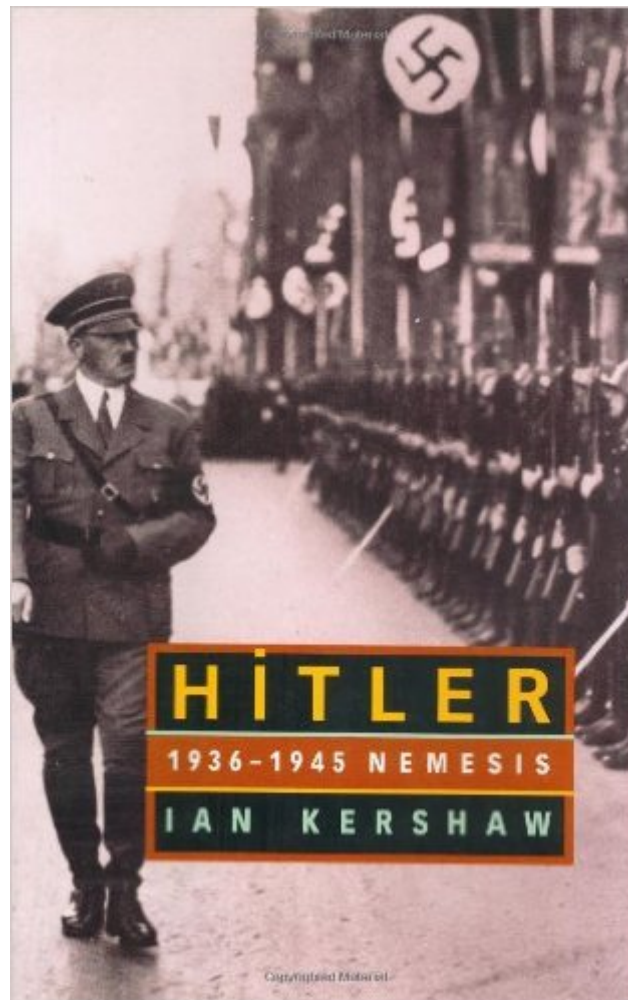


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Hitler: 1936-1945 Nemesis



Synopsis

The climax and conclusion of one of the definitive biographies of our time. In this riveting account, drawing on many previously untapped sources--including Joseph Goebbels's diaries, recently discovered in Moscow--and incorporating numerous contemporaneous accounts of Nazi Germany, Ian Kershaw reveals a leader fanatically, ruinously convinced that he alone has the genius to conduct a war while his henchmen maintain the totalitarian state created in his name. As *Nemesis* opens, Adolf Hitler has achieved absolute power within Germany and triumphed in his first challenge to the European powers. Idolized by large segments of the population and firmly supported by four pillars of the Nazi regime--the Party, the armed forces, the industrial cartels, and the civil service--Hitler is poised to subjugate Europe. Nine years later, his vaunted war machine destroyed, Allied forces sweeping across Germany, Hitler will end his life with a pistol shot to his head. Kershaw's Hitler will be the final word on the most demonic figure of the twentieth century.

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Customer Reviews

Not surprisingly, this is a splendid follow up to Ian Kershaw's biography of the younger Hitler to 1936. The author has not set out to provide a new thesis, still less a revisionist stance, but provides a meticulously researched account of Hitler's successes followed by his slide into total defeat. He has used recently available source material, especially Goebbels, and livens up his narrative by pertinent statements of ordinary Germans who lived through the second world war. Kershaw's

judgments are always sane. We learn that the British escape at Dunkirk was Hitler's military blunder, not some halfbaked attempt to encourage the peacemakers in London. The author is rightly suspicious that the Russians found and performed an autopsy on the Fuhrer's corpse. What comes across strongly in this book is Hitler's obsession with secrecy which probably explains why massacres and atrocities were rarely debated in Hitler's presence. At the end, Hitler was totally obsessed by treason and betrayal. Even Goebbels, it appears, tried to persuade him to make peace with Stalin. The index to the book is excellent and makes specific inquiries that much easier to track down. Some of the lesser known photographs appear to be stills from Die Deutsche Wochenschau. This volume is a thorough and up to date investigation of what made Hitler tick and how and why he ultimately failed to achieve his military goals.

Most simply put, this, the second of two superb books by British historian Ian Kershaw on Hitler's life and times, quite successfully draws the reader closer to an understanding of this historically enigmatic and often bizarre human being who so changed the world of the 20th century. Although there are a myriad of such books that have appeared in the half-century since Hitler's demise in the dust and rubble of Berlin, this particular effort, which draws from hundreds of secondary sources, many of which have never before been cited, paints an authentic and masterful portrait of Hitler as an individual. This is an absolutely singular historical work; and it will almost come to occupy a central place on the shelves of serious World War Two historians. Most fascinating for me is the way in which Kershaw grows an incredibly fertile appreciation for Hitler's personal characteristics into a sophisticated appreciation for what unfolded historically. A good example is his fetish for secrecy, which left both Hitler himself and those around him incredibly poorly informed of many of the details of what their policies were doing to the society around them. Author Ian Kershaw takes a quite different and novel approach, and it is one I enjoyed. Here, by carefully locating and fixing the individual in the context and welter of his times, it yields a much more enlightening approach toward painting a meaningful comprehensive picture of how this criminally twisted psychopath became such a fatefully placed politician and leader of post-World War One Germany. Thus, in Volume One we saw the boy grow and change in whatever fashion into a man, tracing the rise of this troubled malcontent from the anonymity of Viennese shelters to a fiery and meteoric rise into politics, culminating in his ascent to rule Germany. Kershaw memorably recreates the social, economic, and political circumstances that bent and twisted Hitler so fatefully for the history of the world. In this volume, Kershaw concentrates masterfully on how this single human being then fatefully pushes Nazi Germany, Europe, and the rest of the world into the most horrific bloodbath in modern

history. Hitler was, in Kershaw's estimation, a man most representative of his times, reflecting a widespread disaffection with democratic politics, steeped in the virulent anti-Semitism of his Viennese environment, twisted and experienced in the cruelties and absurdities of the First World War, thrust by circumstance and disposition into the sectarian, dyspeptic, and rough & tumble politics of the 1920s, and rising by finding himself the most unlikely of politicians with an unusual ability to orate and emote. It is also interesting to discover that Hitler had an unusually acute (though uneven) intellect, is rumored to have possessed a 'photographic memory', and was said to have an amazing ability to discuss and quote facts and figures and then subsequently casually weave them into a conversation that witnesses found spellbinding and convincing. He was also unquestionably quite charismatic and charming. Kershaw argues masterfully that it is impossible to understand 'why' Hitler without understanding this extremely toxic and strange combination of social, economic, and cultural factors that characterized Germany. Thus, as Hitler begins his ineluctable rise to power, we better appreciate how and why such a seemingly unlikely cast of characters as the Nazis succeeded so wildly beyond what one would expect to be possible in a sane and sophisticated modern industrial state. This is fascinating stuff, as is his treatment of the concomitant rise of the slugs, thugs, and under-life accompanying him into the corridors of power and influence. Here is the world's greatest single collection of otherwise underachieving bullies, fanatics, pseudo-intellectuals, and fellow travelers, who clashed into an uneasy coalescence that formed the nucleus of the single greatest force for collective evil seen in the modern world. Finally, one's mind reels at the scene at the book's conclusion, as the fabulous evil empire created by the Nazis had been reduced by Soviet artillery and Allied bombing into dust and rubble, and Hitler becomes an almost comically eccentric figure, reduced by his own devices to settling for a self-inflicted gunshot to the brain rather than the worldwide domination he had struggled toward.

This is the second and concluding volume of Ian Kershaw's biography of Hitler. It takes up the story in 1936 when Hitler started a policy of rearmament followed by territorial expansion. The major problem in reading this book is nothing to do with the author who writes with considerable skill. It has nothing to do with the material in the book that includes updated material and a perspective, which is more in line with reality than earlier books. The problem is that Hitler was such a boring self centered and self-pitying person. After 1943 when Germany started to suffer defeat after defeat he withdrew from most social intercourse with other people. He suffered paranoid delusions that he was being continually betrayed and would eat by himself and bore anyone senseless about what a raw deal he was getting. By this time Hitler spent most of his time directing the German military. He

was not involved as was Stalin with day to day control of his part or directing industrial production. The others dealt with in the book are generally military commanders. Most of them have the moral depth of a dried out puddle and their main complaint with Hitler was that he seemed a bit common and low class. Early biographies of Hitler were influenced by the memoirs of German Generals. In addition early histories of Nazism were influenced by the times. After Hitler had gone the west faced a far more serious opponent in Joseph Stalin. There was an urgent need to incorporate West Germany into European Defence. It thus became convenient to shelve off responsibilities for what had happened in the war to Hitler and the SS. Books written by German Generals had the aim of white washing their reputations and placing the blame on Hitler for the defeat of Germany and its racist policies. These memoirs led to earlier histories of Germany absolving Germans for crimes of the time. More recent books such as Hitler's Willing Executioners have sought to show that the crimes of the regime were broadly embraced. That every little village in Germany was willing to put up signs insulting Jews and to force them out. Kershaw's book spares no punches and shows how the German military totally embraced Hitler's plans for the destruction of Russia reducing it to a rural appendage of Germany. Since the war has become more distant the phenomena of revisionism has come into being. That is suggestions that the genocide of the Jews did not take place and that Hitler had a limited role in it. Kershaw's tries to rebuff these theories and discusses the Holocaust in the light of these allegations. The book clearly shows that the destruction of the Jews was Hitler's responsibility. It does however suggest that the policy was arrived at in a different way than normally was thought to be the case. That is that rather than they're being a specific order at a certain point that the Jews be eliminated the policy evolved. The background to the policy was Hitler who never seemed to make a speech that did not centre on racial hatred. He continually spoke out against "Jewish Bolshevism" portraying communism as the work of Jews. The killing of Jews in a systematic way seems to have started on the Eastern Front and grew out of the killing of Communist Officials. The police units who had the responsibility of killing communists started to routinely kill Jews at the same time. This led in turn to the establishment of the extermination camps. Kershaw shows that the decision clearly would have been referred to Hitler. The way that he does this is to show how all other decisions involving the execution of significant numbers of people were referred to Hitler. Hitler made decisions about the continuation and ceasing of the euthanasia programs for instance. At the same time Hitler was eager for such decisions to be verbal ones rather than written decrees to avoid the repercussions of such decisions. One is continually struck by the degree to which there was sympathy for Hitler's program in every part of German society. Racism was deeply part of German life and there was never any trouble getting Germans out to beat up some innocent Jewish

people or to break their shop windows and to steal from them. Courts, police, the army and all other instruments of government embraced the Nazis with excitement and passion. There was never a moments hesitation or sympathy for the Jews, Poles Russians or any of the victims of the regime. With regard to the military history of the period he demonstrates that the German Army were generally supportive of Hitler and his strategy up to 1944. This support not only included his strategy by the means by which it was to be achieved. Prior to the invasion of Russia Hitler had decided to destroy Russia as an entity. He wanted to kill all members of the communist party and to reduce Russia to a nation of peasants. He aimed at not only shooting all communist officials but he wanted to destroy the major cities of Leningrad and Moscow. The higher ranks of the German Army were totally behind this policy as shown by another recent book Hitler's War in the East by Muller and Uebershar. They lectured to their soldiers on the need to kill Russian officials and that the war was one of extermination. Hitler's Generals and large numbers of Germans were believers in a racist nationalism. As a book this two-volume study is no doubt the definitive biography of Hitler and has incorporated recent developments. It is however not a pleasant read.

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