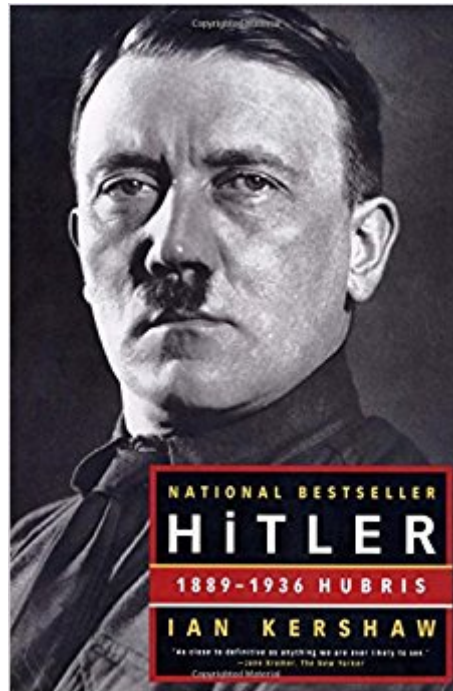




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# Hitler: 1889-1936 Hubris



## Synopsis

Hailed as the most compelling biography of the German dictator yet written, Ian Kershaw's *Hitler* brings us closer than ever before to the heart of its subject's immense darkness. From his illegitimate birth in a small Austrian village to his fiery death in a bunker under the Reich chancellery in Berlin, Adolf Hitler left a murky trail, strewn with contradictory tales and overgrown with self-created myths. One truth prevails: the sheer scale of the evils that he unleashed on the world has made him a demonic figure without equal in this century. Ian Kershaw's *Hitler* brings us closer than ever before to the character of the bizarre misfit in his thirty-year ascent from a Viennese shelter for the indigent to uncontested rule over the German nation that had tried and rejected democracy in the crippling aftermath of World War I. With extraordinary vividness, Kershaw recreates the settings that made Hitler's rise possible: the virulent anti-Semitism of prewar Vienna, the crucible of a war with immense casualties, the toxic nationalism that gripped Bavaria in the 1920s, the undermining of the Weimar Republic by extremists of the Right and the Left, the hysteria that accompanied Hitler's seizure of power in 1933 and then mounted in brutal attacks by his storm troopers on Jews and others condemned as enemies of the Aryan race. In an account drawing on many previously untapped sources, Hitler metamorphoses from an obscure fantasist, a "drummer" sounding an insistent beat of hatred in Munich beer halls, to the instigator of an infamous failed putsch and, ultimately, to the leadership of a ragtag alliance of right-wing parties fused into a movement that enthralled the German people. This volume, the first of two, ends with the promulgation of the infamous Nuremberg laws that pushed German Jews to the outer fringes of society, and with the march of the German army into the Rhineland, Hitler's initial move toward the abyss of war. Black-and-white photos throughout

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## Customer Reviews

Noted for his excellent structural explanation of the Third Reich's political culture in *The Hitler Myth*, eminent historian Ian Kershaw shifts approach in this innovative biography of the Nazi tyrant. The first of a two-volume study, *Hubris* is far from a simple rehearsal of "great man" history, impressively exploring the historical forces that transformed a shiftless Austrian daydreamer into a dictator with immense power. In his forthright introduction, Kershaw acknowledges that, as a committed social historian, he did not include biography in his original intellectual plans. However, his "growing preoccupation" with the structures of Nazi domination pushed him toward questions about Hitler's place and considerable authority within that system. He argues that the sources for Hitler's power must be sought not only in the dictator's actions but also (and more importantly) in the social circumstances of a nation that allowed him to overstep all institutional and moral barriers. In a comprehensive treatment of Hitler's life and times up through the remilitarization of the Rhineland in 1936, Kershaw draws from documents recently made available from Russian archives and benefits from a rigorous source criticism that has discredited many records formerly understood to be reliable. *Hubris* thus supplants Alan Bullock's classic *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny* as the definitive account of a man who, with characteristic smugness, indicated that it was a divinely inspired history that made him: "I go with the certainty of a sleep walker along a path laid out for me by Providence." Kershaw's penetrating analysis of how such a certain path could emerge from the dire circumstances of post World War I Germany is the abiding strength of *Hubris*. --James Highfill --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

We surely need books like Daniel Jonah Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners* that examine German society as a whole in an effort to understand how Hitler came to power and held it for so long. But we also need classic, political biographies that focus on the dictator himself. Kershaw's book, the first volume of a projected two-part biography, pays some attention to how ripe a demoralized Germany was for demagoguery after the Treaty of Versailles, but the author's focus is on Hitler and his political career?the decisions he made as he rose to power and those he made once he attained it. What distinguishes this effort is the extent of documentation as Kershaw, a professor of history at the University of Sheffield, exploits the full Goebbels diaries and texts of early Hitler speeches only recently made accessible. Also notable is the portrait Kershaw draws of Hitler

as surprisingly remote from the thuggery, greed and corruption of his followers, high and low, even as he actively encouraged the development of a cult of personality. Kershaw closes with an examination of Hitler's remilitarization of the Rhineland, a fait accompli made possible by the timidity and disarray of Germany's supine neighbors. Had the French marched, Hitler said later, "we would have had to withdraw... with our tails between our legs." By 1936, Kershaw writes, events had substantiated Hitler's hubris. A "nemesis" (subtitle of the next volume) would in reality not emerge before 1941. Kershaw's massive work (made somewhat too massive by some repetition) is valuable for the rigor with which it portrays Hitler not as some supernatural evil force ejected into history from beyond but as a thoroughly natural figure?evil, surely, but historically evil. Photos. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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."

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: 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 don'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 author's position. Bad stuff that does come up at Hitler's hand 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 Guderian'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 "shadow cabinet", ready to take over if the government in power falls, the NSDAP had every part of German society shadowed 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 Hitler'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 "logical" reason for invading the USSR rather than an ideological 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

Himmler's famous excuse - "Am I responsible for the excesses of my subordinates?" - and Hitler is almost in the clear, to accept this author's version. Bottom line 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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