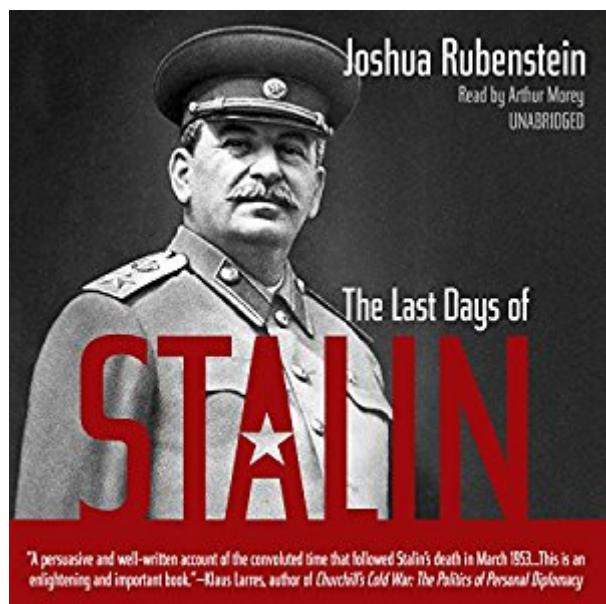


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The Last Days Of Stalin



Synopsis

A scholarly, absorbing narrative of Stalin's last days and the turbulent wake of his dictatorship. Joshua Rubenstein's riveting account takes us back to the second half of 1952, when no one could foresee an end to Joseph Stalin's murderous regime. He was poised to challenge the newly elected US president, Dwight Eisenhower, with armed force and was also broadening a vicious campaign against Soviet Jews. Stalin's sudden collapse and death in March 1953 was as dramatic and mysterious as his life. It is no overstatement to say that his passing marked a major turning point in the 20th century. The Last Days of Stalin is an engaging, briskly told account of the dictator's final active months, the vigil at his deathbed, and the unfolding of Soviet and international events in the months after his death. Rubenstein throws fresh light on the devious plotting of Beria, Malenkov, Khrushchev, and other "comrades-in-arms" who well understood the significance of the dictator's impending death; the witness-documented events of his death as compared to official published versions; Stalin's rumored plans to forcibly exile Soviet Jews; the responses of Eisenhower and Secretary of State Dulles to the Kremlin's conciliatory gestures after Stalin's death; and the momentous repercussions when Stalin's regime of terror was cut short.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

On May 1, 1953, an aide entered Joseph Stalin's bedroom in his dacha outside Moscow, and found Stalin, lying unconscious on the floor by his bed. He had suffered some sort of stroke or aneurysm. He died four days later, at the age of 74. He had ruled the Soviet Union since the death of Lenin, in 1924. Stalin's death set of months - and years - of uncertainty, both in the Soviet Union and other

world nations. In his book, "The Last Days of Stalin", Joshua Rubinstein looks at the last few years of Stalin's life and the years afterward, as the Soviet Union came to grips with the remnants of his rule. There has been a trend lately - welcome as far as I'm concerned - of authors taking short periods within a larger historical period and writing a book specifically about one event. That is what Joshua Rubinstein has done with his account of Stalin's last years, and it makes for fascinating reading. Joseph Stalin had been a tyrant - probably almost as bad as Adolf Hitler - but most of his vitriol had been aimed at home. Millions of people were murdered in purges and resettlement programs and Stalin was rightly feared by his people. He threw hundreds of thousands of Soviet soldiers' lives away in badly planned battles against Hitler in 1941, but was also cruel to those who served him in office. His "Officers Purge" in the late 1930's left him almost bereft of good military leadership in the coming war. But in the last year or so of his life, he was embroiled in the "Doctors' Plot", where he arrested his team of doctors - most of whom were Jewish - accusing them of trying to poison him and other officials. Rubinstein covers the "Doctors' Plot" and its repercussions in great detail. He also hones in on the various men who were in leadership positions under Stalin.

This gripping book from Joshua Rubenstein exemplifies the adage that historical narrative often outpaces novels in terms of inventive twists and turns. Rubenstein captures not only the death of Stalin, but some of the preceding and subsequent events that made the time so fraught with anxiety, tension and, at times, hope. One fascinating aspect: Rubenstein covers details of the fabricated "The Doctors' Plot," a final days anti-Semitic lashing out orchestrated by an increasingly erratic Stalin. When it came time to actually treat the leader during his final hours (and, wow, was after-stroke care archaic -- leeches as state-of-the-art), was it any surprise to know that the attending physicians were frightened to point of paralysis? Any care followed by Stalin's by now certain death could be grounds for a fate similar to their imprisoned colleagues. Rubenstein also covers the then shocking reversals coming out of the Kremlin after Stalin's death. The Secret Speech is a few years in the future, but even in the early days, Khrushchev and his fellow leaders rock the world with a couple of announcements that, hey, Joe might have got a few of these calls wrong. That brings up the book's second main narrative thread, no less intriguing: the post-Stalin debate taking place in Washington and whether Stalin's demise is opportunity for Washington and Moscow to move closer. Rubenstein makes clear it was the US' chance to advance the ball...and they blew it. As recounted by Rubenstein, Eisenhower gives a thoughtful, reflective speech on April 16, 1953. To the shock of the US, Pravda publishes the speech in its entirety.

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