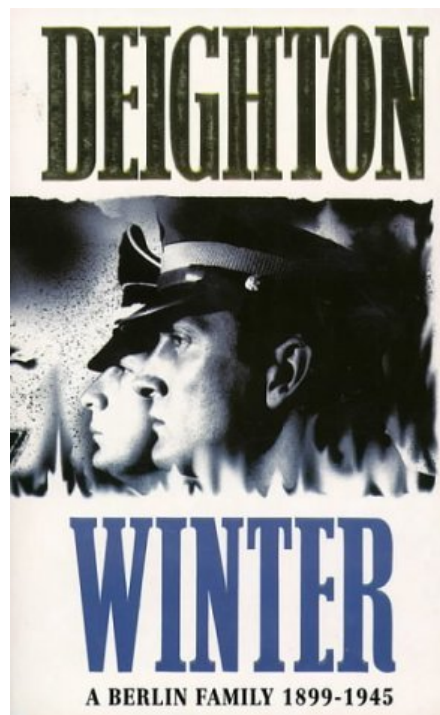




Winter: A Berlin Family, 1899-1945

Len Deighton

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Winter: A Berlin Family, 1899-1945 Len Deighton

Epic prelude to the classic spy trilogy, GAME, SET and MATCH, that follows the fortunes of a German dynasty during two world wars.

Winter takes us into a large and complex family drama, into the lives of two German brothers - both born close upon the turn of the century, both so caught up in the currents of history that their story is one with the story of their country, from the Kaiser's heyday through Hitler's rise and fall. A novel that rings powerfully true, a rich and remarkable portrait of Germany in the first half of the twentieth century.

In his portrait of a Berlin family during the turbulent years of the first half of the century, Len Deighton has created a compelling study of the rise of Nazi Germany.

With its meticulous research, rich detail and brilliantly drawn cast of characters, Winter is a superbly realized achievement.

Winter: A Berlin Family, 1899-1945 Details

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From Reader Review Winter: A Berlin Family, 1899-1945 for online ebook

Guilie says

This is probably one of the books that inspired me to write in the first place. It's an amazing story, so well told. The characters have stayed with me for fifteen years.

Elliott Bignell says

It has been 25 years since I last read Len Deighton, and my mother lent me this copy because she was interested in checking the historical veracity of the events. This being so, that's where I'll start, by saying that Deighton clearly does his homework, and knows both wartime history and Germany very well indeed. Although the characters are Berliner, parts of the story are based around the Bodensee, which I know very well, and here again Deighton never puts a foot wrong. Except that he describes it as gloomy - locals call it the German Riviera. (Or the Schwäbische Meer.) The munitions industries of which Deighton speaks are still alive and well, and to this day Zeppelins from Friedrichshafen can be seen plying the sky above the Lake. I have worked in one of the Dornier factory sites which I suspect was the employer of the British agent Samson, making the book almost an eerie read.

Also to be found around the Bodensee are a network of tunnels built by Jewish slave labour, memorials to the Jews that died in this dependent enterprise of Dachau and to those people who died in the mass upheavals following the war. One of Deighton's Winter brothers is a contributor to the policies that led to these crimes, and as someone married to a German that I met within sight of these tunnels, the events of this book present me with some conundrums. How did this culture, the West's then most advanced civilisation, turn its hand to organised murder on a scale perhaps unique in all of history? The answers are beyond the scope of a mere review, but I think that if you read "Winter" you will have a better idea of how it came to pass, if not "why".

We meet one of the Winter brothers in the immediate aftermath of the war, as he is asked to defend a high-ranking countryman at Nürnberg. We find that one of the brothers is himself at risk of a war crimes tribunal while the other is flying to Germany as part of the American team to prosecute one. Clearly, Deighton also knows his Sophocles! We do not know which brother is which, though, and it is a considerable way into the plot that one can first make a good guess.

From here, the book follows the two brothers from their birth at the dawn of the Century up to the end of the Second World War. The brothers are old enough that both take part in the first war from which the second manifestly grows as the book progresses. One goes to the trenches as a young infantry officer and sees service in a punishment battalion and then in the storm troops which served as the basis for the coming German-made revolution in modern warfare. The other brother takes to the air, flying Zeppelins over London in one of the books' most rivetting and atmospheric passages.

After the war, both brothers turn to law, but their careers and lives diverge dramatically. One becomes a lawyer for the Nazis and investigator for the Gestapo; one, married to a Jew, eventually takes his daughter and escapes to the USA. Both brothers are driven in their own ways by their relationship to their father; both are recognisably human and sympathetic. But one is the "Good German", and his legal flair provides the spurious legitimacy for the worst acts of the Nazis in their rise to and abuse of power. It is this tension which makes the book vibrate with historical resonance; out of banality comes evil. I will be following up by reading Arendt's report on Eichmann (see below) to develop this idea further, While the goodness of this

brother is a little artificial - doing evil to the many he still would not hurt a fly in the singular, and actively seeks to save personal acquaintances from the Shoah - the pattern is, I think, real. Bad things are not done by evil people, by and large. They are done by the banal out of conformity or out of weakness - of even for noble reasons. This striking and terrifying paradox is the central mystery of the Holocaust, and Deighton grasps it hard and thrashes you in the face with it.

The ending alone I found a little weak. It could hardly have ended well, but it did not end powerfully enough for my taste. Nevertheless, Deighton has produced a truly epic and enlightening account of this key climacteric of modern Western history.

Chrissie says

This book of historical fiction weaves political, military and historical facts related to the First and Second World War into a fictional story about two brothers - Peter, the older by three years, and Paul, the younger born in Vienna in 1900. Their father is German, their mother American. Through this family, of both German and American heritage, we come to see how Hitler came to power in Germany and how wars splinter and do not splinter family bonds.

The historical details are flawless. The research is thorough. **BUT** do you have to love a book, do you have to like a book, do you even have to think a book is OK simply because the facts are straight? Of course not! Now I am going to tell you why I didn't like this book.

I found the fictional characters unconvincing, implausible or drawn without depth. Paul (view spoiler). Of course, people do have both good and bad qualities and a parent can both love and hate an offspring, but the words and behavior of the characters just do not ring true. The characters are not credible to me. The character portrayal of women is sketchy, paper-thin. I neither identified with nor felt empathy for a single character.

The book begins at the end (1945) and then flips back to the beginning (1900). You learn right off the bat that one of the two brothers will come to support Hitler and the other will not. We are told that the two brothers will be on opposite sides in a hearing at Nuremburg, one fighting for the defense of a war criminal, the other prosecuting him. We are not told which brother stands on which side. This gives you a puzzle to solve. The problem is that you soon figure out who will stand on each side and then there is nothing, nothing, nothing left to think about.

In my view, this is a book primarily **about** men and it is written in a language that reflects more how **men talk to each other** than how women do. The dialogs are often crude and abrasive. The frequency with which women are described as sex objects is just one example. For the same reason much of the humor doesn't appeal to me.

Ironical humor is used in reference to how history is told by the victor. This observation is not new!

I disliked the simplicity by which cultural differences are drawn. Germans are seen as bad, Americans as smart, Austrians as sloppy, English as inconsequential and the paucity of the French in a book focusing on the two wars is perplexing. Bavarians are drawn as less strict and formal than their Prussians counterparts. Only this do I agree with.

Some authors add details, and I suck them up with glee. Not here. That which is detailed is of little importance. Fussy details about his and her clothes, makeup, complexions and food preferences bored me

stiff. Deighton is fixated on pink-faced men. The frequency with which this is pointed out became repetitive.

The ending is weak. I am not convinced that either Peter or Paul would do what they do. We are supposed to believe that (view spoiler). That this might be a feasible solution is scarcely believable, and even if we are told repeatedly that Peter would bend over backwards to (view spoiler), I do not find their behavior credible, even if conveniently (view spoiler). The ending is too neat, too simple, too sweet. (view spoiler) Neither do I appreciate that “Boy” is standing in the sidelines waiting / wanting (view spoiler). And tell me, is it in the least credible that a man would defend another (view spoiler)!?

I listened to an audiobook narrated by James Lailey. The narration fits the author’s lines, but since the lines irritated me, the narration further exacerbated my annoyance. When Lailey laughs, dramatizing the characters’ laughs, I was repulsed. I wanted him to zip up his mouth pronto. Ugh, disgusting. You cannot hear from the intonations who is speaking, or even if the person is male or female. Furthermore, I find it inexcusable that well known historical personages are all too often mispronounced. Ernst Röhm’s surname is incorrectly pronounced as “Rome”. Reinhard Heydrich’s surname is incorrectly pronounced as “Haydrich”. Both Eva Braum and Wilhelm Keitel are incorrectly pronounced too.

If you want history turned into a macho adventure story, this book might appeal to you more than it did to me. If I dislike a book, I think it is only fair to specify what annoyed me!

Are you looking for a multigenerational book of historical fiction about a German family? Read Buddenbrooks: The Decline of a Family instead. It is set before the First World War.

Tim says

A stunning tour de force by Deighton, linking as a pre history of some of the characters of his earlier Game, Set, and Match. Incorporating factual history with his own fictional world I often refer to it when rereading the earlier series and the later continuations. His favourite subject of Airships take a starring role together with references to the beginnings of the film industry in America, the film world being another favourite.

John says

If you want a long saga that would do well on tv this is it. After 400 pages the characters are still flat and without emotional depth. Deighton just isn't up to the level of LeCarre. Now with all that said, Deighton is good at bringing little known historical elements into his story. One gets a day to day picture of life in war torn Berlin, both WWI and WWII. Little things like street travel, herb tea, subway tunnels. For Deighton lovers there are characters introduced here that will play out in later novels. I haven't given up on Len yet. Gonna try Ipress File soon. but his days are numbered.

kagami says

This is one of the best books I've ever read. I'm shattered.
Why do I like it so much? Hmm, where to begin....

The historical scope. The sheer breadth of it is staggering. The book encompasses the time from the

beginning of the 20th century and up until 1945, just after the end of World War II, so it spans over nearly half a century. It tells Germany's history of that period through the lives of one family, the Winters. We experience the early 1900s, buzzing with excitement over bold new inventions and miraculous flying machines, with all the luxuries, and the newly emerging art, and the servants and the extravagant balls. We are then thrown in the midst of bloody, flea-infested, brutal, stinking trench war that changes everything and everyone lucky enough to emerge from it alive. We see the dark years that follow, with the hunger and the plundering, and the gangs of ex-soldiers criss-crossing the country. The hurt German pride, the sense of injustice, the hatred towards the victorious powers and the desire to show them how great Germany really is, the secret rearmament and preparation for war... We begin to understand how and why the Nazi party emerged, and we see the ensuing nightmare unfold, little by little, from several different angles. The months immediately after the end of WW2 in Berlin are especially haunting.

The characters. They are alive, realistically portrayed people of different backgrounds, each one with his or her own stark individuality. We see them develop from small children, through youngsters, into adults, and sometimes into their old age, changing and evolving all the time. They are all shaped by their surroundings and they respond differently, and very convincingly, to the overarching historical events. We know some of the names from the Bernard Samson series, and that makes reading "Winter" even more interesting. Those are the predecessors, or sometimes the young versions, of the characters we see later in Berlin and London.

The story. It is terribly exciting. The complex relationships and the realistic interactions between the characters make this book an irresistible page-turner. An absolute masterpiece!

Hondo Murray says

One of the BEST books I've EVER read! I was impressed with how you're drawn into Germany's history, from the turn of the century thru WWI up until the end of WWII. He not only TELLS you about dates and situations but makes you feel like you're RIGHT THERE in the MIDDLE of it all...He knows how to bring history to life in a way that books and documentaries can't (trust me, I've read and seen a lot of them); by involving you in the lives of two brothers who are struggling to decide who they are. GO GET IT NOW!

Jim says

Len Deighton's Winter: A Novel of a Berlin Family is the backstory for the author's Bernard Samson spy novels. It goes back to the very beginning of the 10th century and ends in the weeks after VE day in Europe. It covers the tale of two brothers, Peter and Paul Winter, son of a German industrialist and his American wife. Peter ends up in the United States, while Pauli moves up in the Gestapo as a legal genius for the Nazis.

Deighton plants some of the characters who are to appear in the Samson spy novels, though there is a tight focus on the Winter family.

The novel is well done and makes for a good read that brings together Germany's first 50 years or so in the last century.

Bettie? says

Spike Jones - Der Fuehrer's Face

Description: *Winter takes us into a large and complex family drama, into the lives of two German brothers - both born close upon the turn of the century, both so caught up in the currents of history that their story is one with the story of their country, from the Kaiser's heyday through Hitler's rise and fall. A novel that rings powerfully true, a rich and remarkable portrait of Germany in the first half of the twentieth century.*

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Opening: **1899 'A Whole New Century': Everyone saw the imperious man standing under the lamppost in Vienna's Ringstrasse, and yet no one looked directly at him.**

When was the term Nazi first coined:

An older use of Nazi for national-sozial is attested in German from 1903, but EWdS does not think it contributed to the word as applied to Hitler and his followers. The NSDAP for a time attempted to adopt the Nazi designation as what the Germans call a "despite-word," but they gave this up, and the NSDAP is said to have generally avoided the term. Before 1930, party members had been called in English National Socialists, which dates from 1923. The use of Nazi Germany, Nazi regime, etc., was popularized by German exiles abroad. From them, it spread into other languages, and eventually was brought back to Germany, after the war. In the USSR, the terms national socialist and Nazi were said to have been forbidden after 1932, presumably to avoid any taint to the good word socialist. Soviet literature refers to fascists. (source: <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?t...>)

Ordered:

Berlin Game

Mexico Set

London Match

4* Winter

3* Ipcress File

3* SS-GB

3* XPD

Jean says

This is my first experience reading a book by Len Deighton, but it will not be my last. I noted that when this book was published in 1987 it was a national bestseller. The book opens with a German defense attorney interviewing a client just prior to the Nuremberg trials. After the prologue the book switches to 1899 Berlin and follows a Germany family particularly the two boys up to the end of World War II.

The book is well written, and the family's life is woven in the history of the times. The meticulous research is apparent in the story. The ending was a surprise to me. If you enjoy an exceptional historical novel

particularly about the rise of the Nazi regime, this book is for you.

I read this as a paperback. It is 536 pages published by Ballantine Books in 1987.

WarpDrive says

Magnificent. It highlights beautifully the moral complexity of the choices that Germans have to confront during this critical period of European history. Highly recommended to anybody interested in this tragic and fascinating period.

Randall says

If you don't like this then you don't like historical fiction. This book is a prequel to the extensive trio of trilogies Len Deighton wrote starting with Mexico Game, going through Hook, and then Faith. The latter trilogies are cold war spy thrillers that are complicated (is that spy a double or a triple agent?) while Winter is more classic historical fiction which provides the background for the characters in the cold war trilogies. Winter tracks the post-WWI German family, establishes the forces that bear upon them and then watches the characters politics and fates evolve. Excellent.

Ed says

I really enjoyed this book. I've seen other reviews that say this book is about a family living through World War II and to say that really short changes this magnificent novel. It's the story of a family from 1899 to 1945, as the title says. It focuses on the lives of two brothers, the youngest is born on New Year's Day of 1900. Through this family we witness the rise of Germany as a world power, it's defeat in WWI, the recovery of the country and the rise to power of the Nazis afterward to the eventual downfall of the regime and the ultimate ruin of the country.

It's one of those novels that leaves you a little down when you finish because you don't want it to end.

Bill Gawne says

I got this book because I wanted a novel that took an in-depth look at Germany during the Weimar Republic. It most certainly delivered. Unlike most readers of this book, I haven't read any of Len Deighton's other work, so I can't (yet) fit it into the overall story arc. But as a stand alone historical novel, it's excellent.

It is also really, really depressing. But how could a story about two brothers in Germany during the first four decades of the 20th century not be? Deighton shows us, in no uncertain terms, how Germany descended into chaos after the end of WW I. The sheer brutality of things in 1919, with various Friekorps armed gangs fighting in the streets of Berlin, is enough to make any thoughtful person realize the wisdom of the Marshall Plan which followed WW II and prevented a repetition of the awful horror.

There is a widely held opinion that the Nazis represented the "banality of evil." Deighton certainly illustrates that with his sharply drawn characters. But he also shows us people with basically good intentions going down the road to hell. I thought, as the novel progressed, that he made a good argument for widespread, undiagnosed PTSD on the part of many survivors of the first World War. He never came right out and said that, but his illustration of the behaviors of the war veterans suggested that he understands how the horrors of war change good people forever.

It's a good story. It's a sad story. It's a story to be read if you want to understand what happened in that time and place.

Simon Mcleish says

Originally published on my blog here in July 2004.

After the phenomenal success of the first trilogy of Bernard Samson novels, Deighton wrote Winter as a sort of prequel. "Sort of" because it doesn't actually involve many of the characters from the trilogy - being mainly about their parents and grand parents during the first half of the twentieth century - and has a very different focus - it is really about the rise of Hitler. This is Deighton's attempt to explain just why so many Germans came to support the Nazis.

The plot is more a family saga than a thriller; two brothers, who grow up close but are divided later when one is caught up by the Nazi bandwagon while the other marries a Jew and plays the piano for Brecht and Weill. While Deighton really has nothing new to say about the early days of National Socialism, which must be one of the most closely studied parts of twentieth century political history, the story of the Winter brothers illuminates the history and makes it personal; they are exactly the sort of well drawn, well placed fictional characters which are a part of many good historical novels. And that is really what Winter is - an excellent historical novel, not a thriller. It's closest companion in Deighton's work is the alternative history SS-GB, but it is also like his Second World War novels Bomber and Goodbye Mickey Mouse in that its purpose is to put well realised imaginary characters in immaculately researched historical settings. Of all these four novels, Winter is the most successful, the Winter brothers being two of the best written characters in all of Deighton's output. Winter is by a large margin Deighton's longest novel, but it is definitely worth the read.
