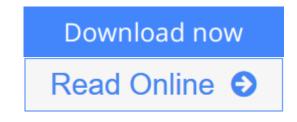
The Kindly Ones: A Novel



By Jonathan Littell



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"Simply astounding. . . . *The Kindly Ones* is unmistakably the work of a profoundly gifted writer." — *Time*

A literary prize-winner that has been an explosive bestseller all over the world, Jonathan Littell's *The Kindly Ones* has been called "a brilliant Holocaust novel… a world-class masterpiece of astonishing brutality, originality, and force," and "relentlessly fascinating, ambitious beyond scope," by Michael Korda (*Ike, With Wings Like Eagles*). Destined to join the pantheon of classic epics of war such as Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and Vasily Grossman's *Life and Fate, The Kindly Ones* offers a profound and gripping experience of the horrors of World War II and the Holocaust.

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The Kindly Ones: A Novel By Jonathan Littell Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Signature*Reviewed by* Jonathan SeguraWritten in French by an American, this was the hot book of Frankfurt in 2006 and won two of France's major literary awards. A couple of years and a reported million-dollar advance later, here it is in English. Is it worth the hype and money? In a word, no. Dr. Max Aue, the petulant narrator of this overlong exercise in piling-on, is a rising star in the SS. His career helped along by a slick SS benefactor, Aue watches the wholesale slaughter of Jews in the Ukraine, survives getting shot through the head in Stalingrad, researches and writes dozens of reports, tours Auschwitz and Birkenau, and finds himself in Hitler's bunker in the Reich's final days. He kills people, too, and is secretly gay-a catcher-and tormented by his love for his twin sister, Una, who now rebuffs his lusty advances. He also hates his mother and stepfather. As he claims, If you ever managed to make me cry, my tears would sear your face. But after nearly 1,000 pages, Herr Doktor Aue, for all his alleged coldness and self-hatred and self-indulgent ruminations, amounts to nothing more than a bloodless conduit for boasting the breadth of Littell's research (i.e., a nine-page digression on the history of Caucasian linguistics). The text itself is notable for its towering, imposing paragraphs that often run on for pages. Unfortunately, these paragraphs are loaded with dream sequences marked by various unpleasant bodily functions, a 14-page hallucination where a very Céline-like crackpot cameos as Dr. Sardine and dozens of numbing passages in which SS functionaries debate logistical aspects of the Jewish Question. Also, nary an anus goes by that isn't lovingly described (among the best is one surrounded by a pink halo, gaped open like a sea anemone between two white globes). Most crippling, however, is Aue's inability to narrate outside his one bulldozing, breathless register, and while it may work marvelously early on as he relates the troubles of trying to fit the maximum number of bodies into a pit, the monotone voice quickly loses its luster. In the final 200 or so pages, Berlin is burning, the Russians and Americans are making rapid advances, Hitler is nearly assassinated and SS brass are formulating their personal endgames. But, alas, this massive endeavor grinds to its conclusion on a pulp conceit: two German cops, against all odds, are in hot pursuit of Aue for a crime he may or may not have committed.Littell's strung together many tens of thousands of words, but many tens of thousands of words does not necessarily a novel make. As the French say, tant pis. Jonathan Segura is the deputy reviews editor of Publishers Weekly and the author of Occupational Hazards.

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From The New Yorker

Littell opens his Second World War novel, told through the recollections of a German officer named Max Aue, with a breakdown of how many Germans, Soviets, and Jews died, minute by minute, in the conflict. As Aue travels to Stalingrad, Auschwitz, and Hungary to report on morale and efficiency, long sections of bureaucratic analysis alternate with moments of mind-numbing sadism. Aue, a caricature of moral failure (he fantasizes at length about sodomizing his twin sister), encounters a cast of unintentionally comic characters, such as an obese and flatulent proponent of the Final Solution, who surrounds himself with Teutonic beauties. The Holocaust is recast as an extended bout of office politics, with German officials quarrelling over who is responsible for prisoners? hygiene. As the novel draws to a violent close, its story seems nearly as senseless as the horrors it depicts.

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From **Bookmarks Magazine**

Despite being hailed as a new *War and Peace* in its native France, *The Kindly Ones* did not fare as well further west, where critics decried it as "Holocaust porn." Unable to let go of any of his research, Littell strings together hundreds of pages of brutally graphic descriptions of the torture and murder of Jews,

interrupted only by Aue's grotesque sexual dalliances and frequent bouts of vomiting and diarrhea. A cliched plot, graceless prose, and an awkward translation round out the novel's flaws. By making Aue a monstrous psychopath, Littell completely destroys Aue's value in exploring the moral complexities of ordinary people under the Nazi regime. The only soul-searching readers will do is to understand why they picked up the book in the first place.Copyright 2009 Bookmarks Publishing LLC

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Benny Joiner:

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Tasha Page:

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