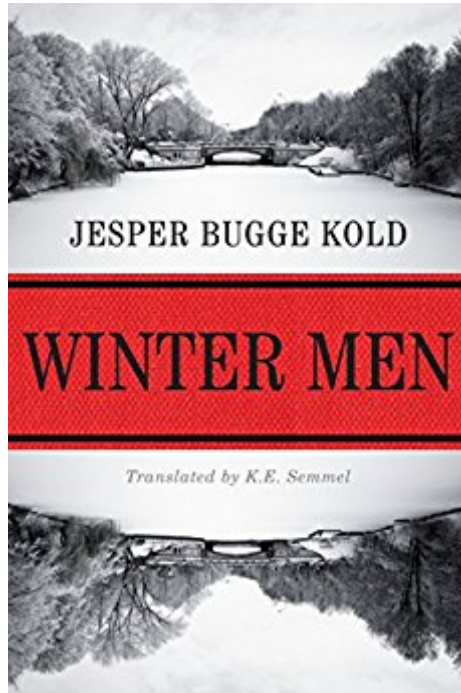


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# Winter Men



## Synopsis

As the dark specter of the Nazis settles over Germany, two wealthy and educated brothers are suddenly thrust into the rising tide of war. Karl, a former soldier and successful businessman, dutifully answers the call to defend his country, while contemplative academic Gerhard is coerced into informing for the Gestapo. Soon the brothers are serving in the SS, and as Hitler's hateful agenda brings about unspeakable atrocities, they find themselves with innocent blood on their hands. Following Germany's eventual defeat, Karl and Gerhard are haunted by their insurmountable guilt, and each seeks a way to escape from wounds that will never heal. They survived the war and its revelation of systematic horrors, but can they survive the unshakable knowledge of their own culpability?

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## Customer Reviews

The description for this book doesn't do the book justice. It is much, much more than the story of two brothers from Hamburg, Germany and their 'contributions' to the SS during WW II. It is a

haunting story of the effects of war which delves deeply into human psyches. Both Karl and Gerhard eventually end up working for the SS but the reader feels the pain of the manner in which they got there. And, the author holds one of the answers to Gerhard's question until nearly the last page. Yes, there are many, many battles included but also the wretched conditions of the Concentration Camps are covered. There is a flashback scene to the trench warfare of WW I which really caught my attention. The horrors of both wars are vividly described and one is able to smell the decay associated with them. This book is not for the faint of heart and I had to take multiple breaks while reading it. Even had to pop in an aspirin at about the 75% mark. The stench of battles, the rats, the lice, everything one might imagine in squalid conditions come to life on the pages. Both brothers are caught in making horrendous decisions and the guilt associated with those continue to wreak havoc upon them for the rest of their living days. The question of what makes a man evil continues to arise throughout this book. That begs the next question, if one is ordered to commit an atrocity, is that person evil? Good, evil, life, dying, the brutality of war including the deplorable conditions of soldiers on the front, Concentration Camps and life after war are just some of the main topics in this book. For me, this book spun my head around several times due to the complexity of the subject matter. The characters are well developed, the plot flows smoothly and it is a book which truly makes the reader think of war and its consequences. Most highly recommended. Please note that this is my KF selection for Feb.

Thoroughly researched believable characters and story line. An interesting point of view from a German perspective, men who believed themselves to be above Hitler's actions toward Jews but who found themselves involved in crimes against humanity. Main characters were like trees with thick attachments to family and finer attachments to neighbors, fellow service members and community. The depth of research and accuracy in the events leading up to the war were astounding and I congratulate the author for this effort.

The last day of the war in Europe was the day I finally persuaded my grandmother to let me walk to school barefoot, a mile of dust and rocks, mostly rocks. There was no school that day: V-E Day. Since then Nazi Germany has been a big interest of mine, so when BookBub and .com described this book in an offering, I jumped at it. It's a small sprawling imagination of WWII told largely from the points of view of Germans who did not approve of Hitler and his actions and his henchmen, but who gradually got drawn into the web of lies within deceit within mendacity within utter betrayal and how they lived with these changes in their world and in themselves. I was drawn

into the escape to Argentina of one of the brothers whose family owned a factory that clothed soldiers. He rejoiced that his factory would have work and he imagined he was going to do good things for the slave laborers, only to learn that his budget allowed no room for his humanitarian conceits. From time to time we catch up with his constant vigilance to stay a step ahead of Israeli agents and avoid the fate of Adolf Eichmann. Another brother takes a more direct route into the Gestapo. We follow his triumphs to just beyond Leningrad, when the German offensive collapsed. And then back to Germany, being severely wounded, falling in love with his nurse and impregnating her. By now his wife was righteously and coldly creating a life she emphatically shut him out of. On this soldier's long slog back, we meet a Soviet sniper who takes out a pair of Germans whom I had begun to care about. I considered it a triumph of writing that I realized that the sniper had this hapless German in his sights and patiently, ever so patiently, waited till the time was right--the target's position, his mastery of his weapon, his own position, his breathing--to press the trigger ever so gently. I didn't see the rationalizations that I heard in Germany when we lived there, 1971-74: we were only doing our duty, the Amis bombed this beautiful town, it was the Amis who attacked the Jews, Hitler built the Autobahn, butchers could slice meat within 5 gr. of the amount you ordered, and I can't remember many others. I admire the author's efforts to imagine the situations of people living in Nazi Germany with as little judgment as possible. That is a major accomplishment of his imagination, and to do so from the perspectives of a disparate group of characters. I could feel the pull of duty of one of the brothers to get back with his buddies on the front line, even though, as an Ami, I kept wishing for him to desert while he had the chance.

You know they existed--people who were caught up in Nazi Germany's insanity, but who were not true believers. This is the story of two such people; brothers. It is beautifully written, and gives a well-considered glimpse into that mindset, as well as a picture of the war from the German point of view. The only reason I did not give five stars is because I found the ending rather unsatisfying.

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