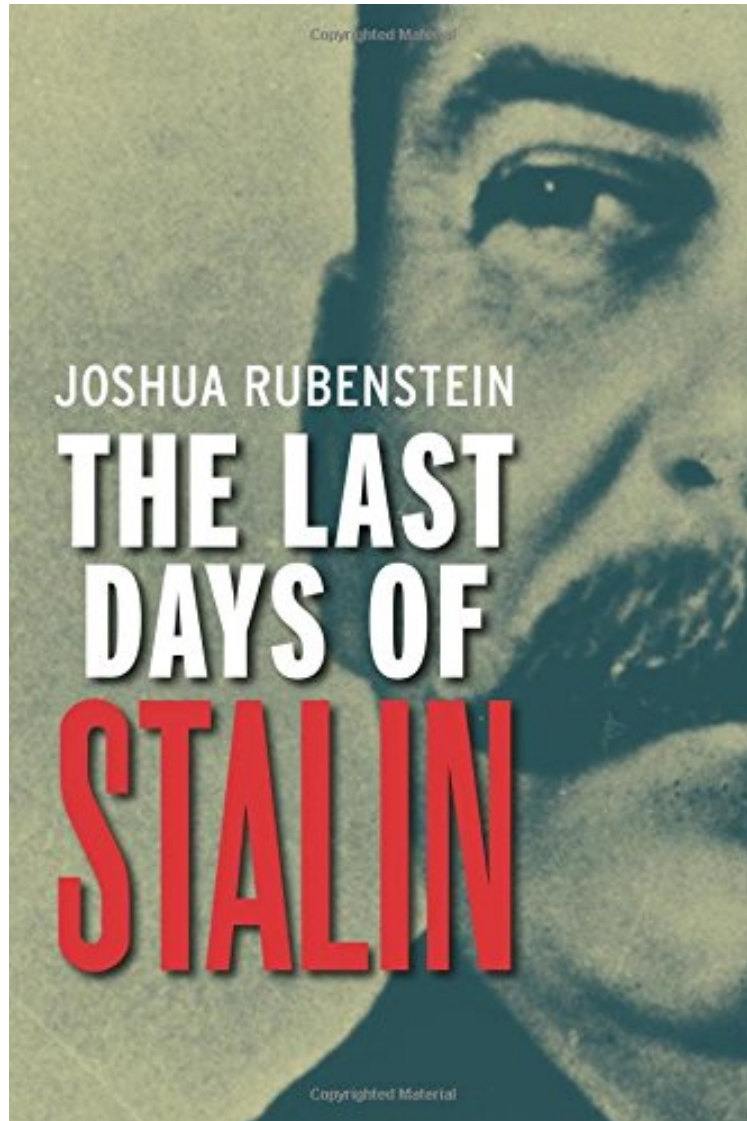


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The Last Days of Stalin

Joshua Rubenstein

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Joshua Rubenstein : The Last Days of Stalin before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Last Days of Stalin:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Final Days, Doctors' Plot, Death of Beria, Ascension of Khrushchev, Failed US Opportunity -- It's all here By Andy Orrock 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. John Foster Dulles, Eisenhower's Secretary of State, effectively gives his own remarks which walk back much of Eisenhower's (Rubenstein debates whether this was a bit of sabotage or a thoughtfully planned two-man act). As US Ambassador Charles Bohlen noted: "A great deal of thought and care [had] gone into preparation" of the Kremlin's response and they were now "tossing the ball back to the United States." Bohlen recommended that "US official comment continues to follow present line inaugurated by President's speech." Rubenstein ruefully notes that "The US failed to follow up with the kind of creative diplomacy that the moment required." And, in a theme that would repeat for the next 40+ years, he says that "Foster Dulles, in particular, worried that Kremlin peace-feelers constituted a calculated strategy to dilute the fear of Soviet aggression which was the basis of the Western alliance. For A. J. Liebling, Foster Dulles was facing 'a new terror': if the Kremlin relaxed pressure on the West, it would 'de-frighten Europeans.'" "With this missed opportunity, this dynamic remains frozen in time until Gorbachev dissolves the Soviet Union 38 years later. I can't finish without recommending one of my favorite books: Peter Carlson's *K Blows Top: A Cold War Comic Interlude, Starring Nikita Khrushchev, America's Most Unlikely Tourist*. Rubenstein covers Khrushchev's unlikely rise here. *K Blows Top* gives you the full Khrushchev. No writer could invent him. 15 of 17 people found the following review helpful. The opening chapter reads like a spy-thriller straight from Robert Ludlum. By Tony Meyer The opening chapter reads like a spy-thriller straight from Robert Ludlum. I could not put the book down. But is it all true? In my opinion yes; there are over twenty pages of extensive notes and sources. Quote: "Hundreds of agents patrolled the dacha grounds, with German shepherds ..., and there were double rows of barbed wire around the compound." Is the book historically significant? Probably not; but it's still a terrific read. "For security reasons, Stalin liked to sleep in different rooms, thinking it would confuse a would be assassin." Next to Mao Hitler, was there ever more of a mass murderer? This fine book reads quickly and will make a fine addition to one's bookshelf - i.e., for those of us morbidly interested in this man of evil. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. This book is a good reminder of all that. By H. George Parsons Fascinating story of Stalin's death and the aftermath and the struggle for power among those who remained. Those vying for power had to move so carefully to make sure they had the necessary support. Communism is a failed system that still holds sway over Russia today. Lessons that should have been learned from the days of Lenin and Stalin have not done much to change the power structure today. This book is a good reminder of all that.

A gripping account of the months before and after Stalin's death and how his demise reshaped the course of twentieth-century history 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 U.S. 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 twentieth 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

"A clear, sober and emotionally powerful narrative that brings to life the last years of Joseph Stalin's rule, showing vividly how the death of the tyrant changed Soviet and international politics and brought relief to millions of his existing and potential victims, and first and foremost the Soviet Jews." - Serhii Plokhyy, author of *The Gates of Europe: A History of Ukraine* "Based on a plethora of primary Soviet sources, Rubenstein has produced a persuasive and well-written account of the convoluted time that followed Stalin's death in March 1953. He discusses the complex succession politics in the Kremlin and provides much new information. Rubenstein also explores Eisenhower's and Dulles' disinterest in taking up Churchill's proposals to exploit the 'narrow window of opportunity' to embark on constructive negotiations with Moscow once Stalin had gone. This is an enlightening and important book." - Klaus Larres, author of *Churchill's Cold War: The Politics of Personal Diplomacy*