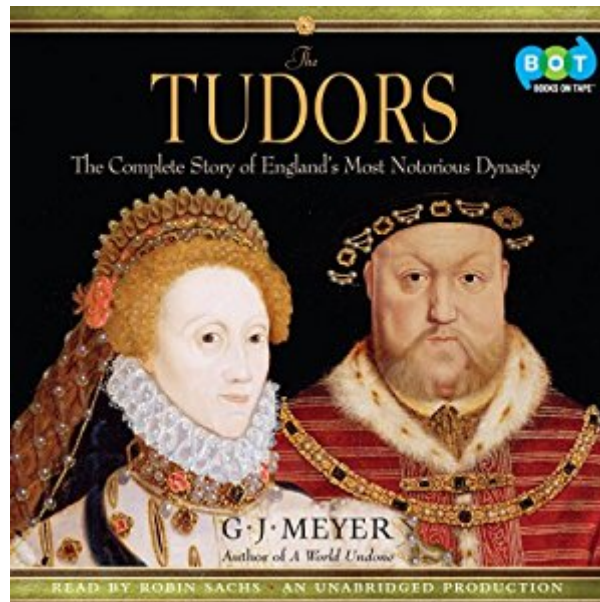


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The Tudors



Synopsis

For the first time in decades, here, in a single volume, is a fresh look at the fabled Tudor dynasty, comprising some of the most enigmatic figures ever to rule a country. Acclaimed historian G. J. Meyer reveals the flesh-and-bone reality in all its wild excess. In 1485, young Henry Tudor, whose claim to the throne was so weak as to be almost laughable, crossed the English Channel from France at the head of a ragtag little army and took the crown from the family that had ruled England for almost four hundred years. Half a century later his son, Henry VIII, desperate to rid himself of his first wife in order to marry a second, launched a reign of terror aimed at taking powers no previous monarch had even dreamed of possessing. In the process he plunged his kingdom into generations of division and disorder, creating a legacy of blood and betrayal that would blight the lives of his children and the destiny of his country. The boy king Edward VI, a fervent believer in reforming the English church, died before bringing to fruition his dream of a second English Reformation. Mary I, the disgraced daughter of Catherine of Aragon, tried and failed to reestablish the Catholic Church and produce an heir. And finally came Elizabeth I, who devoted her life to creating an image of herself as Gloriana the Virgin Queen but, behind that mask, sacrificed all chance of personal happiness in order to survive. The Tudors weaves together all the sinners and saints, the tragedies and triumphs, the high dreams and dark crimes, that reveal the Tudor era to be, in its enthralling, notorious truth, as momentous and as fascinating as the fictions audiences have come to love. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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Customer Reviews

I loved this book, but I think I may be dead center in the target audience: educated, interested in history but not a historian, and reading this book for leisure, not enlightenment. It reminds me very much of Thomas Carlyle's "History of the French Revolution." Meyer gets away from the dry facts and detailed historical analysis and tells us the history as a detailed story. That's exactly what I was looking for and Meyer does a great job. While much was left out in order to get down to a single volume, I certainly didn't miss any of it. After all, I was learning new info with nearly every page and the story flowed quite well. This a perfect book for someone who wants an accurate historical novel without any fiction mixed in to confuse the history. I think it's a mistake to expect much more from a book the author clearly meant for a general audience. He sticks to the big themes and necessarily leaves out stuff that really isn't important unless you are a serious student of history. For example, I don't care about the details of Henry VII's various victories while he consolidated power. The important plotline is that he got lucky, became king almost by accident, and turned out to be a great man. Twenty-five pages was enough to get a feel for the events of the day and set up the rest of the story. I can understand why some readers found the digression chapters a little off-putting. They broke up the story line and were, as you might expect, not always directly relevant to the story. I enjoyed them. They were like nice little breaks where Meyer got to inject more of his personal opinion about something in the general historical period. I read the book in sections and found the digressions amusing.

For generations, the century of England's Tudors has presented a complicated picture. According to this picture, Henry VIII and his daughter Elizabeth I rid the nation of a corrupt church and founded an age of enlightenment. Of course, Henry had a few marital issues, but the picture was largely positive. In recent decades that portrait has begun to crumble. G.J. Meyer puts in the final dagger and kicks it over the edge. The age of the Tudors begins when the short but bloody reign of Richard III meets its end on the battlefield. Henry Tudor, a man with a questionable claim (as if any claim could be legitimate) becomes Henry VII. His time on the throne is dedicated to amassing gold, and he turns out to be pretty good at it. When the crown passes to his son, England is forced down a path of change that lasted for centuries. Henry VIII was obsessed with his own succession. When he became convinced that his wife could give him no male heirs, he began a battle with the Catholic church to have the marriage annulled. This escalated until he broke completely with the church, founding his own religion and asserted his claim of supreme rulership. He created legalisms which allowed him to pillage the churches, kill his enemies, and steal their lands. He extracted money from

a population already teetering on the edge of abject poverty. He lavishly rewarded his friends and embarked on foolish military adventures. It would take the nation many generations to recover from the debt, and animosities born then have lingered to the present day. While most historical accounts elide the time between Henry and Elizabeth, there was significant turmoil in those dozen years.

...if you're a despot on the throne. G E Meyer's biography of the Tudor dynasty - all five rulers - shows why William Shakespeare got paid the big bucks to rewrite British history as he did with his plays about their immediate predecessors. The five Tudors - beginning with Henry VII and ending with Elizabeth - were an interesting group. Their slightly more than 100 year occupation of the British throne is examined closely by Meyer (no relation to me). He writes "popular" history - accessible to the average non-academic reader. And he does a good job at it, too. Following every chapter in this large book is a few-page section called "Background", where Meyer goes into detail on something he's covered in the previous chapter. He may write a small section about "John Calvin", for instance, when discussing the Reformation as developing on the Continent as opposed to how the Church of England evolved at the same time. I've never seen another historian do this in a book, and I heartily approve. One thing that he writes about in one of his "Background" sections is the English alphabet in the 16th century. Evidently, it had only 24 letters and one of them, the letter, "y", was actually pronounced as a "th" sound. SO, we have "ye olde tea shoppe" which should be pronounced "the" olde tea shop. Interesting fact, I think. If a writer of history is going to pursue a dynasty, he's best concentrating on one or two particular issues to link the generations. I'd say Meyer uses "religion" as his major theme here. And maybe the various personalities - spouses and advisers - who served each of the five Tudors, as his minor theme.

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