

DISCOVERIES

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Zapotoczny, Walter S. Jr.
FOR THE FATHERLAND
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A German boy becomes a good Nazi of the most horrifying sort in this riveting historical novel.

To young Kurt Schultheiss, growing up in a chaotic Germany between the world wars, the Hitler Youth movement offers everything a growing boy wants. There are cool uniforms, camping trips, torchlight parades, rifle practice and ceremonial daggers. There is also intense camaraderie with his friends and lots of pretty blondes, including his girlfriend Anna, who tells him in no uncertain terms that he'd better become an SS officer if he wants to marry her. There's further the flattering conviction—constantly reinforced by Nazi propaganda—that his generation is in the vanguard of the effort to build a glorious new Germany under the heroic leadership of Adolph Hitler. In the midst of this idyllic life, Kurt scarcely registers the corruption being worked on him as he internalizes a Nazi worldview that sees life as a Darwinian racial struggle and the Jews as the unseen hand behind every evil. The lasting effects of his indoctrination surface during World War II, when Kurt joins an SS *Einsatzgruppen* death squad tasked with executing Jews and other undesirables in German-occupied Ukraine. Troubled and driven to drink by the cold-blooded slaughter of defenseless civilians, he steels himself with dehumanizing Nazi dogmas: “[Jewish] children had to be killed,” he reflects, or “they would grow up and take the place of their infectious parents.” Zapotoczny weaves in a wealth of historical background and period detail in rendering the deranged intellectual climate fostered by the Nazi dictatorship. This is not a story of coercion and terror, but the deep attraction ordinary Germans felt toward Hitler's regime and the subtle ways it fed and perverted the idealism of the young. The author's shrewd, empathetic character study shows how this ultimate evil took root in hearts and minds.

A compelling portrait of the human face of Nazism.

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