



Death Dealer: The Memoirs of the SS Kommandant at Auschwitz

Rudolf Höss , Steven Paskuly (Editor) , Andrew Pollinger (Translator)

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SS Kommandant Rudolph Höss (1900–1947) was history's greatest mass murderer, personally supervising the extermination of approximately two million people, mostly Jews, at the death camp in Auschwitz, Poland. *Death Dealer* is a new, unexpurgated translation of Höss's autobiography, written before, during, and after his trial. This edition includes rare photos, the minutes of the Wannsee Conference (where the Final Solution was decided and coordinated), original diagrams of the camps, a detailed chronology of important events at Auschwitz-Birkenau, Höss's final letters to his family, and a new foreword by Auschwitz survivor Primo Levi. *Death Dealer* stands as one of the most important—and chilling—documents of the Holocaust.

Death Dealer: The Memoirs of the SS Kommandant at Auschwitz Details

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Author : Rudolf Höss , Steven Paskuly (Editor) , Andrew Pollinger (Translator)

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Paola says

Haunting book - the memoirs that Höss, Auschwitz commander for two years, wrote while in jail awaiting execution. This Italian edition (for one in English see Death Dealer: The Memoirs Of The Ss Kommandant At Auschwitz) comes with a lucid preface by Primo Levi (himself an Auschwitz survivor) - Hoss sees himself simply as somebody who wants to do his job properly, or at least this is the justification he is putting out to the world. In his allucinated perspective, perfecting ways to "process" large numbers of inmates becomes almost an act of kindness to his prisoners: "Death would overcome [them] in the crowded cells just after the gas had been pumped in. A short cry, immediately muffled, and all was over" [my translation] - and Hoss is greatly conforsted by the success of gassing Russian prisoners, as he had worried about not being able to carry out the orders of the mass extermination of the Jews in the near future. He is simply a guy doing his job, and he cares about doing it properly. As compelling as it is horrifying.

Jenna says

Did I give this book five stars because I agree with what he did? With the persecution of Jews, homosexuals, gypsies, etc? With the slaughter of millions of lives?

Of course not.

The book deserves five stars because it gets you into the mind of a cruel man who can carry out cruel actions and still be able to play the martyr.

In this book, you will heard countless times how it wasn't Hoess's fault. How he was always striving for the best he could get his prisoners. How hard *he* was done by! He even goes as far as to suggest that the work his prisoners had to do day in and day out was good for them; it kept them psychologically sane. At times it even felt like he was trying to vilify the prisoners in the sonderkommando!

This book was truly horrific in content and at times I simply couldn't believe what I was reading. Was I supposed to just accept that the extermination of millions of people was just your typical job?

Hoess in clever in the way he builds up his story so that it flows into a "logical" way of thinking. But his little tricks won't work on any self-thinking human being. He can say as many times as he likes that being the commandant meant that he wasn't directly responsible for the disgusting conditions of prison life or the gassing of prisoners. He can blame Himmler all he likes for making the orders nothing but orders. He is not apologetic for what he did and the only thing he does regret is getting caught.

I recommend this book for anyone interested in WW2, in the running of a concentration camp or for those who want to understand what goes through the mind of evil. Hoess is a definite liar with his thoughts and feelings but at least he was honest with fact.

Niklas Pivic says

This book is, as Primo Levi says in the introduction, filled with lies and shirks, but never the less, it is an extremely important document of The Final Solution, the extermination machine, Auschwitz, Birkenau, the bureaucracy, the corruption and the insanity that existed in the top ranks and among the SS in Auschwitz.

While Höss details his life from growing up until the end, he intersperses the story with very important details on how Auschwitz grew, how the sub-camps worked, he also writes about his family, mass exterminations, day-to-day activities, hardships, etc.

Remember: Höss joined the nazi party and the SS voluntarily. And he is considered by many to be the most cruel commandant of Auschwitz.

All in all, as Levi writes, Höss' prejudice and idiocies stick out like "flies in milk", but viewed with a critical eye, this is a must read for anybody who wants more insight into the horrors of The Final Solution.

David Mackey says

A horrifying read that awakens our oftentimes apathetic hearts. Full review is on my blog.

Maja - says

People who, according to Rudolph Höss, were to blame for the horrors at Auschwitz:

1. Heinrich Himmler
2. The Auschwitz guards
3. The prisoners themselves

People who, according to Rudolph Höss, were NOT to blame for the horrors at Auschwitz:

1. Rudolph Höss

WARNING! - sarcasm (on my part) may occur in the following!

Rudolph Höss believed himself to be an SS saint - he did what was expected of him, he was steadfastly loyal and protected the Fatherland against all enemies, interior and exterior. He was not to blame for anything that went on at Auschwitz because the orders he gave were only those given to him by Himmler. And he could not possibly oversee all his guards at once to make sure that they carried out the orders correctly. Some of the guards were really just sadistic people who had no business being at a place like Auschwitz. But Höss was not to be blamed for their presence there either, those guards were assigned to him, he had no say in the matter. Additionally, the prisoners themselves were terrible towards one another, making their hellish conditions even worse with their sardonic back-stabbing and exploitations.

That is the defence of Rudolph Höss.

He uses an entire book to make himself a less guilty party in the murder of around 1.1 million people, who

never left Auschwitz. He uses any opportunity he can to stress his own good intentions, his own ignorance of some of the things that were going on and his own innocence. He was only doing as he was told because he was unable to anything else. He was indoctrinated, so to speak. It was only at the end of his own life that he experiences humanity and realised the error of his ways.

Oh please!

Written after his capture in 1946 and before his death sentence in 1947, this memoir offers and insight into the mind of the man that has been responsible for the most human deaths in history. Rudolph Höss, the kommander of Auschwitz. The Death Dealer.

While this book seems most of all as one big excuse - an apologia, even - Höss rutinely gives away his true feelings and opinions. As when he speaks about the different kinds of prisoners at Auschwitz.

- The Russian POV's were weak and barbarous, frequently resorting to cannibalism in order to save themselves
- The Gypsies were carefree and happy, except for when their tempers took over and they fought amongst themselves. They were, however, Höss' favourite prisoners
- The Jews had it easy because they had money and had no scruples with using this money to bribe the SS or each other. They were also quick to turn on each other and were the most cruel prisoners

I took the liberty of doing a psychopathy check for Rudolph Höss based on this book:

- ✓? Grandiose estimation of self
- ✓? Pathological lying
- ✓? Lack of remorse or guilt
- ✓? Shallow effect
- ✓? Callousness and lack of empathy
- ✓? Early behaviour problems
- ✓? Irresponsibility
- ✓? Failure to take acceptable responsibility for own actions
- ✓? Juvenile delinquency

Of course this is in no way enough to confirm that he was in fact a psychopath and I am no psychologist so I should not be making assumptions, but still. Those are a lot of checkmarks.

Höss was trained from an early age by his fanatically, Catholic father to become a priest. After some startling realisations about the Catholic Church he renounced his faith, became a soldier in WWI, went to prison for murder (something he never regretted doing or felt guilty about) and joined the Nazi party. With the Nazi he found a new system of belief, a new order to join a new way for him to plod along without having to make decisions for himself. His unfailing belief in Himmler (as a sort of Archbishop of nazism) and Hitler (representing the Pope) meant that he could lean back and deny responsibility for any of his actions. He was not meant to be a leader, in my opinion, he didn't have the strength or the intelligence for this. He should have been just one of the masses.

This book was horrible. Absolutely horrible. Because Höss recounts the death of millions with no feeling - the feelings he describe seem empty and contrived to me, something he feels he has to say, not something he actually felt. But it was also a necessary book to read. It is necessary to peek behind the curtain, to see the face of the persecutor, to know the personality of the twisted. Only then can we truly say that we understand what went on.

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Holly says

This was a very disturbing and eye-opening account of the operations of Auschwitz-Birkenau from 3 select SS-Men. I bought it at the bookstore in Auschwitz and the vivid descriptions from the authors were made very real to me since I spent a whole day at both camps. It was different from accounts by Holocaust prisoners or survivors (ex. Anne Frank, Elie Wiesel) since it was coming from condemned officers who rarely showed emotion or sympathy. Rudolph Hoss wrote his autobiography in prison with the intentions of making himself look good to the world (or as good as one can in his situation) but his words still lack humanity. You might have to take breaks from this book, as it is very haunting and disturbing, but it is a very important read.

Julie says

(Because you can't give a Nazi 5 stars)

“Rudolph Hoss’s memoirs are perhaps the most important document attesting to the Holocaust, because they are the only candid, detailed, and essentially honest description of the plan of mass annihilation from a high-ranking SS officer intimately involved in the carrying out of Hitler’s and Himmler’s plan.” (from the book’s preface). I think that is a pretty accurate depiction of what this book is. Hoss was forthright in conveying his own personal history, his role in the Nazi machine, and his position as Kommandant of Auschwitz. His formative years during WWI, his 6 years in prison, and his early years in the SS all led up to the position he would be most notorious for.

I learned a lot about SS hierarchy, especially in regards to concentration camp administration. The pre-war and pre-final solution camps were mainly for political prisoners (ENEMIES OF THE STATE). They eventually evolved to become death factories, as Hoss reflected, “...who could imagine the horrible tasks that would be assigned to the concentration camps during the war.” When he was finally given the assignment to establish and build Auschwitz, he adamantly vented his frustration toward his subordinates. “A person can fight active opposition but is powerless against passive resistance.” He was definitely an if-you-want-something-done-right-you-have-to-do-it-yourself kind of guy.

The worst possible fate for a Jew at Auschwitz would be Sonderkommando, herding fellow Jews into gas chambers, removing the bodies, liberating them of their gold teeth and hair, and feeding the corpses into the furnaces. “It often happened that Jews from the Sonderkommando discovered close relatives among the bodies [dug up after being in mass graves] and even among those who went into the gas chambers.” Good Lord.

Hoss seemed remorseful when recalling the atrocities he witnessed, though he admitted he had to maintain a fiercely indifferent façade and portray himself as unaffected. He was responsible for developing Zyklon B, which would be the vehicle that allowed the Nazi’s to fulfill the Final Solution at such a rapid pace. And he stood by as millions were led into the gas chambers. His excuse follows the typical Nazi adage that they were just following orders. “Hoss was a man who needed something to believe in and, more importantly, someone to tell him what to do.” (from epilogue)

His own account, and especially his final letters to his family almost make him sympathetic. ALMOST. No doubt he was monstrous, but there is a sense of humanity beneath his Nazi uniform and ideology. His complicity in “spilling the beans” to prosecutors attests to that. “Hoss was one of the few who could, and also would give precise information about every aspect of the mass killings. In fact, he answered everything asked of him.” No doubt this is a historically significant book. It also offers supplementary material, like Hoss’s recollections of his colleagues (I didn’t read all of them, only major, recognizable players like Himmler) and Wannsee conference minutes. Overall it was a chilling, if necessary glimpse at life inside the Nazi regime and concentration camps.

Nora says

Along with many other reviewers on this site, I have mixed feelings about giving this book a 5-star rating. The stars here don't reflect the quality of the writing, or any valuation of the narrative arc of this astoundingly painful read, or any other sort of ordinary meaning of rating or review. However, students of authoritarianism (aren't we all, these days) ought to pick this one up, for a number of reasons.

Firstly, it is very interesting and also important to study the ways that, in the weeks between his trial and execution, Hoess commits impressive feats of logical acrobatics in order to paint himself as a victim of fascistic circumstance. He reiterates his love of animals and of his own family, and his dreams of a escaping to a quiet farmsteading life as if those personal inner feelings absolve him of his chosen SS career path and its murderous daily reality. He frequently provides examples in order to demonstrate to posterity that he was capable of feeling emotions and that he did not personally think the Final Solution was necessary or good (even though he was principal executioner of this multifaceted genocide). Yet, his actions and indeed his words in this book prove otherwise. To give one memorable example, upon describing the first mass use of zyklon gas to murder approximately 800 women and children in a single room, he writes that he observed the gas's effect through a peephole and felt "uncomfortable" as the people inside panicked, suffered, and died. Although perhaps this self-characterization was intended to humanize him, for me it certainly has the opposite effect. This is just one example of many, where in an almost defensive tone Hoess seems to attempt to reiterate his humanity, and even his own victimhood, to fascinating effect.

Secondly, the first half or so of the book consists of Hoess discussing his childhood, family, and early life, including his first years in the military. What stuck out to me here was the fact that, although he later lost his faith and obviously joined the by-and-large antireligious National Socialist party, he was raised by a traditional Catholic family and as a youth he and his family had planned on his joining the priesthood. His faith in God and the Catholic Church was crushed forever when at a young age his confessor broke the seal of the confessional and told his father about some petty infraction he had confessed to during reconciliation. Due to this breach of the rules, Hoess lost respect for his entire religion and for the priesthood. This anecdote really stayed with me because, above every other value in the human heart, Hoess held aloft the concept of Order . "The rules," procedures, and the concept of duty held all sway for him, to a disturbingly inhumane degree. For this reason he could hate all priests and lose his faith forever due to a childhood resentment, yet was able to serve in many top NS positions where he diligently managed the systematic liquidation of millions, so long as the principles of order, rules, and duty were respected.

Gabriella | The Novel Nook says

It feels weird giving this book five stars, but it was such a fascinating and detailed look into Höss's mind, I have to rate it as such. I read this book slowly, as it was a heavy, difficult read, but I learned so much and recommend it to anyone interested in this subject matter.

Jon(athan) Nakapalau says

Rudolf Höss was a linchpin in the machinery that drove the gears of the Holocaust. As such his perspective (although biased) needs to be examined - to prevent such perspectives in the future.

Nocturnalux says

This is the the first person account of the Commandant of Auschwitz, Rudolf Höss, a man that in his own words was personally responsible for the death of two million people (at the very least). As such, I found it extremely difficult to review and yet, perhaps for that very reason, I felt compelled to put down my thoughts on this one. Perhaps the very act of making them public will help me process what was a jarring experience: this autobiography left me in a state of painful dismay and anger; states that I hope to tame, so to speak, via cogent discourse.

I had known of this account for quite a while but did not know it was an actual autobiography. Höss recounts his life from his early childhood, with his love for animals that never left him, the stern Catholic upbringing full of strict discipline and the priest who broke the confession seal and thus did much to destroy young Höss's faith; all the way to the death of his father, his fascination with the army that led him to join WWI still in his teens and how afterwards he found himself unable to join civilian life, how he was imprisoned for six years as a result of terrorist activities and eventually came to join the SS.

What follows is the strange mixture of detailed descriptions of the Nazi extermination machine, complete with extremely valuable and chilling step-by-step rundowns of how the prisoners were processed, selected, gassed, worked to death, cremated (complete with an appendix exclusively about the killing process), interspersed with a humdrum refrain of complaints (about the chunky red tape that hemmed him at every turn, about ignorant superiors and incompetent subalterns) along with Höss's reflections on human nature that gain expression in his obsession for cataloguing virtually everyone, be it prisoners or SS men.

Höss reveals a stunning ability of shrugging off responsibility. In one instance he will admit his guilt only to clutter up excuse after excuse, to the point it is implicit that the true victim of the Holocaust is none other than Rufolf Höss. This inability to fully shoulder person accountability is a constant and runs along several lines: his superiors, in particular Himmler, are repeatedly accused for the sorrowful state Auschwitz degenerated into. Höss blames Himmler for sending far too many people, for expanding the camp to the point it was not sustainable and for never heeding Höss's several pleas and suggestions. From the very start Auschwitz was a disaster and Höss, surprisingly, readily accepts this.

But what bothers Höss so much in the entire situation is that the camp was a nightmare of logistics. Occasionally he will display glimpses of borderline concern for the prisoners but this was obviously not his main concern. The other party that has the brunt of Höss's fury, and thus alleviates his guilt, is his many

subordinates. Time and time again Höss impresses on the reader that the staff at Auschwitz was the very worst the German army had to offer, the civilian workers lacked discipline and overall no one had truly absorbed the work ethics that Höss held as so very dear.

Speaking of which, Höss claims to have invented the infamous 'Arbeit macht frei' motto and goes to some lengths to expound on it. Having been a prisoner himself, Höss was rescued from madness from the dullness and horror of prison life via the application of vigorous work, therefore he assumes that all prisoners would derive great advantages with the same method. He mentions, almost as aside, that this only applies in 'normal circumstances'.

This venture into prisoner psychology marks an important aspect to Höss's approach to life in general, namely, his probing of 'human nature' enforced through a series of categories in which everyone is neatly labelled. He began this cataloguing long before he even became involved in the Camps, having started in earnest as a young man in jail. Höss almost always divides people into groups and this allows him to speak with a self-assured authority on the several types of guards (the deliberately evil, who enjoy hurting the prisoners; the indifferent, whose actions were often equally as bad; the good-natured ones whose friendly ways actually could harm the prisoners even more, in the long run) as well on the several types of prisoners.

No type of prisoner goes unmentioned or escapes the insane scope of Höss's analysis. The homosexuals, said to be a 'vice', and something of an epidemic are further subdivided into the 'real homosexuals', those who turn to homosexuality as a means of survival: labor can rescue the second group, while the first one is beyond redemption. Specific tests are made to see if the 'cure' did succeed, including using females to approach the inmates and see if they acted 'like men' or not.

The Roma prisoners are described in sickly endearing terms as "my best-loved prisoners- if I may put it that way". Höss goes as far as to add, "I would have taken great interest in observing their customs and habits if I had not been aware of the impending horror, namely the Extermination Order (...).

This sets the entire tone for Höss's attitude toward what amounted to grand scale genocide on a scale never before seen: he admits that it was indeed quite a terrible thing to have happened but never does it seem to genuinely occur to him that it was not unavoidable. It is so stunning that one needs bring to mind Höss's own words:

"When in the summer of 1941, he [Himmler] himself gave me the order to prepare installations at Auschwitz where mass exterminations could take place, and personally to carry out these exterminations, I did not have the slightest idea of their scale of consequences. It was certainly an extraordinary and monstrous order. Nevertheless the reasons behind the extermination program seemed to me right. I did not reflect on it at the time: I had been given an order, and I had to carry it out."

The Nuremberg trials did not teach Höss a single thing, this is not the only passage where he tries to exculpate himself by saying he were merely following orders. Perhaps more than Eichmann, Höss is the very definition of the banality of evil, someone whose moral sense is so vague that it can be swayed, superseded and ultimately made null and void by the authorities that be.

Oddly enough, as amoral as Höss is, he hardly ever stops commenting on the prisoners 'beastly' behavior in contrast with the political prisoners whose conduct he found impressive, particularly the Communists who went to their death with head held high. Höss constantly criticizes his prisoners, as if driven by a compulsion.

On the subject of the Jews, Höss has plenty to say even if he takes quite some time to get there. To have an

idea of the level of mental gymnastics involved, Höss offers us this precious gem of distortion:

"I must emphasize here that I have never personally hated the Jews. It is true that I looked upon them as the enemies of our people. But just because of this I saw no difference between them and the other prisoners, and I treated them all the same way. I never drew any distinctions. In any event the emotion of hatred is foreign to my nature. But I know what hate is, and what it looks like. I have seen it and I have suffered it myself."

One cannot, and should not, take the above lines seriously. Höss himself seems to challenge us as much when he affirms, glibly and with the usual self-assured sense of importance,

"As a fanatical National Socialist I was firmly convinced that our ideas would gradually be accepted and would prevail throughout the world(...). Jewish supremacy would thus be abolished. There was nothing new in anti-Semitism. It has always existed all over the world, but has only come into the limelight when the Jews have pushed themselves forward too much in their quest for power, and when their evil machinations have become too obvious for the general public to stomach."

The 'evil machinations' of the Jews join his chorus of complaints; at one point Höss seems genuinely upset over the influx of gold that Jewish prisoners brought into the Camp as the corruption that followed caused nothing short of chaos and undercut his ability to keep things under his control. Höss may, on times, claim not to feel any animosity toward the Jews but throughout this account the mask slips, keeps slipping, and finally slips away entirely as before his execution- at Auschwitz, no less- Höss extends an apology to those he killed, 'in particular the Poles', without doing as much as saying a word about the Jews.

But that is beyond the bounds of this review that will try to focus on Höss's words alone. Höss displays a disturbing fascination with the *Sonderkommando*, the group of Jews in charge of guiding their brethren to the gas chambers. They would help them undress, lull them with lies about the shower that awaited, weed out the troublesome ones that could not be calmed (these were taken by the SS and shot dead out of sight), then once they were killed it was up to this special contingent of Jewish prisoners to transport the bodies, shear and store the hair, remove gold teeth/fillings, and finally cremate them and transport the ashes.

Höss sees in this the ultimate proof that the Jews are traitors, traitors to their own race, no less, an implication that he never states but is all the more pressing for that. The way in which these Jews, that were themselves executed wholesale when a certain quota was reached, treat their own is something that the ever moralistic Höss finds absolutely disgusting. He mentions a man who, upon wheeling a dead body to the ovens, stopped momentarily upon realizing it was his own wife but then went on with his job as if utterly nonplussed.

That it was Höss himself, and the machinery to which he so thoughtfully obeyed, were directly responsible for bringing human beings to this point is not something that he seems to consider, at all.

Höss has moments of borderline lucidity when it seems that had he been reached at some point- long before he became entangled in the SS and soiled with the Camps- it might have been possible to make him see the error of his ways. Because Höss actually is aware of the effect of propaganda in utterly distorting the truth, he witnessed it firsthand in Dachau where Eicke, a foe to Höss, marshaled all the tools of brutality and skewed 'information' in order to instill an artificial hatred for the political enemy of the State. Höss himself is aware that this was nothing short of a systematic brutalization of the guards and up in order to stir up a deep hatred but shows a complete lack of awareness when it comes to how the very same methods were employed against the Jews.

It might very well be that since there is 'nothing new' about Anti-Semitism Höss just could not make the connection, the Jews were so hateful to him that it did not cross his mind that this stripe of hatred was every bit as artificial as any other that is based on prejudice: people need be taught to hate and Höss was a very apt pupil. Even as he nears the end of his account, even as Höss expresses in unequivocal terms that the extermination of the Jews was 'fundamentally wrong', he then adds so that it did nothing to serve the cause of Germany and only reinforced a sense of Jewish identity so that one is left to infer that the real problem with the Holocaust is that it backfired.

Höss's final words, the culmination of a series of badly cobbled excuses offered as if to wipe away the gassings, the cannibalism, the genocide, pain, horror, endless and unforgivable monstrosity, are given here:

"Unknowingly I was a cog in the wheel of the great extermination machine created by the Third Reich. The machine has been smashed to pieced to pieces, the engine is broken, and I, too, must now be destroyed.

The world demands it.

(...) Whenever use is made of what I have written, I beg that all those passages relating to my wife and family, and all my tender emotions and secret doubts, shall not be made public.

Let the public continue to regard me as a blood-thirsty beast, the cruel sadist, and the mass murderer; for the masses could never imagine the commandant of Auschwitz in any other light.

They could never understand that he, too, had a heart and that he was not evil."

What to make of this? Is it an attempt at reserve psychology, trying to get his work published posthumously? Is Höss truly repented and as he faces his certain death by hanging, fumbling for some justification in order to convince himself, us, both?

It is, ultimately, impossible to tell. I am inclined to think that Höss, to the very last, is angling for redemption but not because he genuinely feels any bit of regret but because he feels himself wronged.

This is, without a doubt, a very relevant work for anyone interested in understanding the Nazi mindset and perhaps more importantly, in making sure such mindset never gains traction ever again. Unfortunately, the ones for whom this should be mandatory reading are precisely the ones who will either avoid it or actually believe the final quotation, namely, Holocaust deniers.

Reading this book was, for me, a way of fighting the surge of Holocaust deniers that seems to be swelling a bit all over. We must never, ever, forget that Rudolf Höss was not just a freak of nature, an isolated aberration, and Auschwitz is not just history: Hösses still abound in this world and Auschwitz is right around the corner if we don't do all in our power to keep it from creeping up from the very depths of the slime of the horrors that only humanity can bring about and only humanity can keep at bay.

Alan Mauldin says

This alleged human is scary. In writing his memoirs he revealed a lack of awareness, emotion and responsibility that is breathtaking. The SS guards he was assigned, the poor medical care, lack of supplies and indifferent higher officers all caused the brutal and deadly conditions at Auschwitz. He struggled mightily to rectify the situation, but could not manage due to everyone conspiring against him. There was nothing he could do to stop the sadistic guards from encouraging the mistreatment of prisoners or killing them.

But then he admits the Kommandant who followed him fixed the problem of prisoner beatings in no time. The worst is his reaction to his role in killing perhaps three million or more people. It was an order like any other. He was just the instrument fate put in place to carry it out.

He is almost moved when a mother, one of the few he witnessed killed who knew her fate ahead of time, calmed her children and told them everything would be fine, but whispered in his ear as she passed: How can you kill all these beautiful children?

He never answers that question, as he rattles off his account of unimaginable horror in an almost trivial manner. He discusses how his lot was terrible, what with no one he can depend on to properly assist him, with directives to supply so many prisoners to work as slaves building weapons for the Nazi arms manufacturers and the never-ending supply of trains bringing Jews that he has to routinely gas to death and then burn. That he doesn't seem to realize the enormity of what he's done -- and why it should be considered so horrible -- is the most frightening aspect of it all.

Mr Norton says

The Greek philosopher Socrates used to win his arguments not by attacking his adversaries but by instead asking them open, seemingly innocent questions. In their confident answering of such intellectual trojan horses, his sophist opponents would have the frailties of their logic exposed. I'm not sure if the British captors of Rudolf Hoess were aware of the socratic technique when they forced him to write his autobiography but, in getting Hoess to write this horrible, self-aggrandising book, similar results are achieved.

Predictably, 'Commandant of Auschwitz' is dripping with denial. Hoess even has the audacity to claim that all he ever wanted to do was to live the life of a farmer with his wife and children (the romantic Nazi ideal), but that the lure of being a soldier again after the first world war was too much. When urged by old comrades to return, he found he just could not say no to joining the SS. Chance, sliding doors and it-could-happen-to-anyone is Hoess's first insult to the reader's intelligence.

Most of his rationalisations, however, are suggested indirectly. Hoess attempts to manipulate the reader through describing the most excruciating banalities about the difficulties of running a concentration camp. It is within the very ordinariness of the detail offered that the reader is lured into unwittingly normalising Hoess. He bemoans, for instance, the difficulties of procuring barbed wire in a war as if he were a housewife during the blitz worrying about rations. The quality of guard allotted to him is another of his gripes. His own 'goodwill and all the best intentions were doomed to be dashed to pieces against the human inadequacy and sheer stupidity of most the officers and men posted to [him].' Hoess himself, he claims, wanted 'to obtain the willing cooperation of the prisoners.' The brutality of the camp being due to circumstances beyond his control is the tacit but clear implication.

It will come as no surprise to learn that Hoess is no writer. Ironically however, once he gets to the minutiae of the mass murdering of prisoners his turgid, matter-of-fact style becomes a blow for the truth and hoists him by his own petard. His unapologetic and banal detailing of events unwittingly makes for a crucial

historical primary source. The passages concerned disturb all the more for the lack of awareness in their teller, but they should be required reading for all holocaust deniers.

This is an odious book and a difficult read but is nevertheless a compelling read: the holocaust should be understood fully, and hearing it from a Nazi is part of such a process. In his lies, myriad defences and inadequate acknowledgements, Hoess illustrates not just the evils of Nazism with which we are already familiar but also, its mean-spiritedness and poverty of imagination. Recommended.

Leah Hess says

Commandant of Auschwitz is a true account from the Auschwitz Commandant's perception of all the events taking place in Auschwitz and other concentration camps.

I've had this book, which consists of only 235 pages, on my bookshelf for a while now. It should, theoretically, be a quick, easy read. But it isn't. My stomach was churning with every page. The accounts of what happened sickened me. I applaud Hoess for his honest recollection while in prison waiting to be murdered for the events in Auschwitz. Not one group in the camp goes unexamined by Hoess, including Jehovah's Witnesses, Jews, women, and homosexuals.

A particularly disturbing excerpt from the book reads:

" By will of the Reichsführer SS, Auschwitz became the greatest human extermination center of all time. When in the summer of 1941 he himself gave me the order to prepare installations at Auschwitz where mass exterminations could take place, and personally to carry out these exterminations, I did not have the slightest idea of their scale or consequences. It was certainly an extraordinary and monstrous order. Nevertheless the reasons behind the extermination program seemed to me right. I did not reflect on it at the time: I had been given an order, and I had to carry it out. Whether this mass extermination of the Jews was necessary or not was something on which I could not allow myself to form an opinion, for I lacked the necessary breadth of view."

Hoess continues to describe, in great detail, the look, function, and activity taking place in gas chambers. He estimates numbers killed (which never made it to the millions, because Hoess believed there was no way there had been millions murdered).

This novel is an incredible first-person account of Auschwitz. I recommend it to anyone interested in the events of World War II in Germany.

Lisa says

I don't know why I continually feel compelled to read books about the Holocaust. But I do. When we visited Auschwitz a few years ago, our guide practically spat out the name of Rudolf Hoss every time she had to say it. We saw the house he lived in. The place where he was executed. And somehow I felt the need to be a witness to his words.

It is, of course, a chilling read. The 'banality of evil' is on full display. And most disturbing of all, to me, is the fact that even today, seventy five years later, one only has to turn on the nightly news to see all the 'little

men and women with their little hatreds' still on full display, every single day, in every corner of the world. And maybe that is reason enough to continue to read these books.

"It is easy for the formulators of policy - be they dictators, presidents, or kings - to issue orders when others must do the killing. They do not have to wade through the blood nor listen to the screams nor watch the victims in the dance of death. It is ordinary men and women who are ordered to carry out these horrors. These are the people who should have weighed these orders; it is here that the lesson of history lies. Without the SS there could have been no concentration camps. Without the soldier there could have been no war. It is not only Germany that bears the heavy burden, but the rest of the world also. For it is well-documented that the Allies and the Christian churches, especially Rome, did not speak out strongly enough to stop the horrors, nor did the Allies take the proper action to halt the trains that led to Auschwitz. By examining these little men and women and their little hatreds, we can learn from this history. Because of the highly organized mass media of today and the orchestrated propaganda spewing forth, be it from the West or the East, it will be the little men and women with their little hatreds who may once again be a tidal wave of destruction that will sweep humanity into another age of horror.

The words of George Santayana cannot be repeated often enough, for each new generation seems to find new ways to make the same mistakes. It is the hope of the present that they relearn and carry the burden of history: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." - Steven J. Paskuly - Editor
