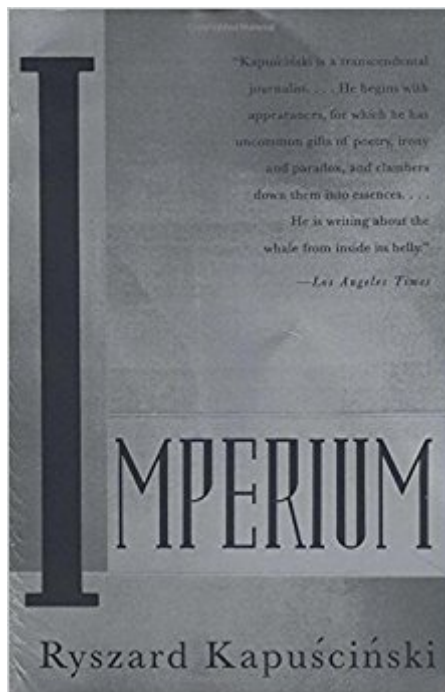


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Imperium



Synopsis

The Polish journalist whose *The Soccer War* and *The Emperor* are counted as classics of contemporary reportage now bears witness in *Imperium* to the disintegration of the Soviet Union. This magisterial book combines childhood memory with unblinking journalism, a radar for the truth with a keen appreciation of the absurd. *Imperium* begins with Ryszard Kapuscinski's account of the Soviet occupation of his town in eastern Poland in 1939. It culminates fifty years later, with a forty-thousand-mile journey that takes him from the haunted corridors of the Kremlin to the abandoned gulag of Kolyma, from a miners' strike in the arctic circle to a panic-stricken bus ride through the war-torn Caucasus. Out of passivity and paranoia, ethnic hatred and religious fanaticism that have riven two generations of Eastern Europeans, Kapuscinski has composed a symphony for a collapsing empire—a work that translates history into the hopes and sufferings of the human beings condemned to live it.

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Customer Reviews

Polish journalist Kapuscinski offers a travelogue account of the collapse of the Soviet system and the difficulties of creating genuine democracy from what has been left behind. Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Journalist and author of several critically acclaimed books, among them *The Soccer War* (LJ 4/15/91), Kapus'cin'ski here chronicles the life of the Soviet Union. He divides his book into three

sections: "First Encounters (1939-1967)

The Soviet Union devastated Russia. The author discusses the lesser-known but insidious forms of devastation. For example, they destroyed the family and national identities. The existence of millions of street children (ÃœbezprizornyÃœ) could be traced to the incompetence of Soviet central planning. But, intentional or not, this kind of destruction also helped the party leaders by weakening the resistance. Forced relocations by the Soviets accelerated outmarriage, resulting in millions who have uncertain national identities. The author refers to this new kind of individual as HOMO SOVIETICUS. As he sagely points out, these factors created societies where resolving conflict through arbitration was replaced with those that resolve conflict through naked force. The legacy of this kind of cold war imperialism is also still with us in former client states and proxy battlegrounds like the Middle East. I recommend the fine, sensitive portraits of ethnic groups on the periphery of the Soviet Union like Armenians and the people of Nagorno-Karabakh. Mr. Kapuscinski also fills the book with fascinating factual speculations that IÃ™ve never considered. Here are a few examples. * the huge amount of money the Soviets had to pay for barbed wire, * how desert culture and ecology in Uzbekistan was wrecked by Soviet planners, * the sureness of being able to calculate the number statues of Lenin that had to be raised, * a calculation of the number of people in the post-Soviet ruling class: 18 million people, * how much military might Russia lost when the Ukraine became independent. If youÃ™re interested in Russia or if you like history, you might enjoy this book. 3 stars

A gathering of essays and impressions over the years (starting with a flashback to his early childhood in Polish speaking, Nazi-invaded Belorussia) and featuring Kapuscinski's two years of wanderings around the imploding republics in the early 90s. Perhaps the most fascinating insights are derived from his conversations about the peak Stalin years, and the innumerable blind gaffes (and knowingly perpetrated acts of icy bureaucratic inhumanity) which buffeted every region from the Baltic States to the Caucasus to Baikal to deep Siberia. At times it reads like a nightmare, at times like a surreal document from the 15th century, at times like letters home from the front. Indispensable to an understanding of modern Russia.

A great, educational read. I downloaded it on my Kindle and loved the book. I ordered the hardbound copy for a gift for a friend, not realizing that it was written in Polish. It cost \$29.99. When it arrived, I discovered it is written in Polish, which I do not read. To return the book and get a refund,

the postage to Poland was \$22.25. that does not leave me much of a refund. If you want to read "Imperium", get the Kindle version or the paperback.

Fabulous read. Will read it time and again, I'm sure. Such a unique perspective.

The Soviet Empire remains a mystery but in this book, the Polish journalist and writer, Kapuscinski, attempts to get under the facade and reveal the inner terror, absurdity, incompetence, poverty, and cruelty of a political and economic system never meant to direct an empire. Often Kapuscinski put himself in very real danger to gather the stories that make up this book. A travel book like no other travel book. What a total disaster was the Soviet Empire in terms of murder of its own citizens and the destruction of creative human consciousness through fear, paranoia, imprisonment, and such incompetence it makes you cry. The destruction of the Ukrainian people by Stalin is tragic and senseless and millions of people were starved to death and forced into cannibalism. Unregulated free markets and wild-west capitalism has its downfalls and traps but communism as practiced by the Soviet Union is a terror that capitalism will never reach. There are multiple examples given of central planning which resulted in tragic endings for people and the environment. The most penetrating insight of the book, a point that is made repeatedly, is that the Soviet Union was a republic of slave states, of non-Russian ethnic minorities, who longed to be free of the giant monster state. Democracy does not mean sending representatives to Moscow to these oppressed people, it means breaking away and freedom from the Russian dominance and exploitation and heavy handed oppression of mind, body, spirit. The book jumps around a bit, but this is because it reflects Kapuscinski's multiple interactions and trips within the Soviet Union over a long period of time. Kapuscinski is a keen observer with highly discriminating ears in regard to picking just the story or detail that conveys many years of oppression and slavery and fear of imprisonment. For the Soviet Union was in many ways one big prison. In addition to the careful story collecting of ordinary poor people, the book also includes keen political analysis on the downfall of the Soviet Union as a power structure. There is one chapter on the destruction of the Aral Sea that is worth the price of the whole book. It is tragic and yet has all the total absurdity of the writings of Kafka or Orwell. I found it hard to stop reading the book even though it is twice as long as Kapuscinski's class "The Emperor" book on Ethiopia. This book is highly recommended.

Beautiful, sad commentary as the monstrous life of the USSR comes to an end. The non-Russians in the old "Imperium" are happy to be free, except that in most cases they find they have merely

traded one nightmare for another, that of rule by kleptocrats. The people pine for the lazy rule of the Soviet Union, when at least there was order in the streets.

great

Great book. A must if you want to understand the old Soviet Union. Kapuzsinski describes everything in the most exquisite way, entertaining and easy to read for everyone. I recommend this book to anyone who wants to know about Russia and their surrounding countries in historical and actual perspective.

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