



# The Tudors: The Complete Story of England's Most Notorious Dynasty

By G.J. Meyer

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**NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER**

Acclaimed historian G. J. Meyer provides a fresh look at the fabled Tudor dynasty—and some of the most enigmatic figures ever to rule a country. In 1485, Henry Tudor, whose claim to the English throne was so weak as to be almost laughable, nevertheless sailed from France with a ragtag army to take the crown from the family that had ruled England for almost four centuries. Fifty years later, his son, Henry VIII, aimed to seize even greater powers—ultimately leaving behind a brutal legacy that would blight the lives of his children and the destiny of his country. Edward VI, a fervent believer in reforming the English church, died before realizing his dream. Mary I, the disgraced daughter of Catherine of Aragon, tried and failed to reestablish the Catholic Church and produce an heir, while Elizabeth I sacrificed all chance of personal happiness in order to survive.

*The Tudors* presents the sinners and saints, the tragedies and triumphs, the high dreams and dark crimes, of this enthralling era.

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### Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

**Amazon Exclusive: G.J. Meyer on *The Tudors***



*Why?*

That question is likely to be--and probably should be--sparked by the appearance of almost any new book about the Tudors. Does the world really need more words about the dynasty that produced King Henry VIII and Queen Elizabeth I? Those two are already the most written-about monarchs in English history, after all. They're the subjects of so many movies, novels and TV dramas that sometimes they seem to be not figures out of the past but living showbiz celebrities. Why should anyone want to read about them yet again?

I offer two answers.

First, though the number of books about the most famous Tudors is practically infinite, single volumes dealing with the entire dynasty and aimed at a general readership have always been rare. This is unfortunate, because it deprives a great story of its proper context. The legendary career of Henry VIII would have been impossible if not for the exploits--in some ways far more astonishing--of his father Henry VII, a penniless fugitive who came almost out of nowhere to seize the crown. And Elizabeth was only the third of Henry VIII's children to inherit his throne and struggle to deal with his blood-soaked legacy. She had a brother and sister, both of whom ruled before her and tried without success (in radically different ways) to undo what Henry had done. Her story comes fully to life only when illuminated by theirs. The Tudors ruled England for three generations--118 years in all--and not nearly enough has been done to deal with their five reigns as a continuum, a chain of causes and effects that cumulatively changed the course of English, European, and even world history, often in tragic ways.

Second, more than four centuries after the death of the last Tudor, there continues to be an immense gap between who the various members of the family actually were and what most people--including most people with some knowledge of English history--think they know about them. The real Henry VIII was both a greater and lesser man than the lusty Bluff King Hal of legend, the man who famously had six wives. Elizabeth was vastly more complicated, more pathetic and less noble than the glorious façade behind which she concealed herself. The now-obscure Henry VII, Edward VI, and Mary I were both more important as rulers and far more fascinating as human beings than is commonly understood.

The true shape of the Tudor story has been long obscured, even for leading historians, by religious controversy and differences of political ideology. It is only in the past couple of generations, as ancient

passions have cooled, that the story has come into clear focus, and too often it has done so only for the historians themselves. For the public at large, the truth has continued to be overwhelmed by old legends with too little basis in fact. My hope for *The Tudors*, as it goes to press, is that it will help to bring popular understanding of one of history's most deservedly famous dynasties into closer alignment with reality. --G.J. Meyer

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From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. Arguably the most famous rulers in world history, Tudor monarchs Henry VIII and his daughter Elizabeth I were, according to journalist and author Meyer (*A World Undone*), cold and ruthless egotists whose self-created myths have prevailed over reality in our historical memory of them. Henry VII, the first Tudor, was a competent ruler who filled the royal treasury with gold, avoided war, and shrewdly consolidated his power by stripping away the nobility's autonomy. By contrast, Henry VIII's determination to enforce his religious change on his people led to a reign of terror, and his squandering of his riches contributed to the monarchy's later collapse under Charles I. His children fared little better, from the fervently evangelical boy-king Edward VI to the fanatically Catholic Mary, England's first woman ruler, who burned 300 of her subjects for heresy. Elizabeth is portrayed as selfish to the point of childishness, aspiring only to preserve her life and her rule. History buffs will savor Meyer's cheeky, nuanced, and authoritative perspective on an entire dynasty, and his study brims with enriching background discussions, ranging from class structure and the medieval Catholic Church to the Tudor connection to Spanish royalty. 4-color inserts, 1 map. (Mar.)

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From [Booklist](#)

The Tudors were smart folks and inherently dramatic in personal demeanor and in the religious and political controversies they aroused. Meyer writes a popular but intelligent, discerning, and professionally responsible history of the family's century-long occupation of the English throne (the sixteenth century, that is). Novels and movies frequently present as their main character one of the two most famous Tudors, Henry VIII and Elizabeth I, but in this author's eyes, these depictions are generally mythologized versions. The Tudors, we see here, were a cruel lot, more so than is popularly realized. Torture and execution were certainly not unfamiliar "management" techniques for them. But as Meyer also avers, the true story of the five Tudor sovereigns is "much richer and more fascinating than the fantasy version." As he removes layers of false image, far more realistic portraits emerge: they were cold and efficient figures, far less glorious than Hollywood would have it. --Brad Hooper

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