From the Village Voice:

Sixty Feet Under

Germany's first mainstream Hitler movie provides catharsis, if only for a German audience
By J. Hoberman Tuesday, Feb 8 2005

Downfall
Directed by Oliver Hirschbiegel
Newmarket
Opens February 18, Film Forum

More About

- Adolf Hitler
- Joseph Goebbels
- Traudl Junge
- Bruno Ganz
- Hans-Jurgen Syberberg

With Berlin in ruins and the Red Army advancing, Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels promised his colleagues that "in a hundred years' time they will be showing a fine color film of the terrible days we are living through" and asked if they wouldn't want to play a part in it. Downfall is that fine color movie—opening here 40 years ahead of Goebbels's schedule. Confined for two and a half hours almost entirely to the vast andustyführerbunker, Oliver Hirschbiegel's apocalyptic kammerspiel is notable as the first mainstream German, if not German-language, movie to represent Adolf Hitler—played with acrid grandeur by Swiss actor Bruno Ganz. (G.W. Pabst's 1955 The Last Ten Days, not to be confused with the 1973 Alec Guinness vehicle Hitler—The Last Ten Days, is Austrian; Hans-Jürgen Syberberg's
monumental Hitler, a Film From Germany and Alexander Sokurov's monumentally strange Moloch, a Russian-German co-production, are from Mars.) That novelty aside, Downfall holds few surprises. In essence, the script was written in 1947 when British intelligence officer Hugh Trevor-Roper published The Last Days of Hitler—a hugely successful book that, along with Albert Speer's Nuremberg testimony, served as the basis for all subsequent accounts of the Nazi götterdämmerung.

Downfall garners additional human interest, however, by taking its cues from the 2002 documentary Blind Spot: Hitler's Secretary, an extended interview with the princess of the bunker steno pool, Traudl Junge. The actual Junge is heard introducing Downfall. The movie dramatizes her audition for the job as Hitler's secretary and—as played by Alexandra Maria Lara—the movie's key observer, then jumps ahead to April 1945, as the führer prepares to celebrate his 56th birthday with Russian artillery pulverizing Berlin. (Ironically, these scenes were shot in the streets of St. Petersburg.)

Children defend the city, Himmler is trying to cut a deal with Eisenhower, and Hitler is irritable to the point of mania. His consort, the effervescent, if not hysterical, Eva Braun (Juliane Köhler), wants to party, but Hitler would rather see everyone dead. He rants, raves, and orders the impossible, babbling about lost oil fields, bragging how he openly confronted the Jews, and insulting his generals as "the scum of the German people." When not paranoid or delusional, he hands out cyanide pellets and, one hand twitching behind his back, discusses the best way to die.

Increasingly stooped and saggy, Ganz looks like a melting waxwork amid the bunker's moldy furnishings. He studied recordings of Hitler's voice and his harsh growl is evidently an uncanny reproduction. (That he also sounds like Klaus Kinski puts a new spin on Aguirre). The war is lost and nobody knows what to do. Wehrmacht engage in desperate carousing; one general blows up his family. Syberberg's magnum opus provides an exhaustive analysis of the Hitler cult. But Ganz's antics notwithstanding, Downfall's real subject is the suffering of the German people—as embodied mainly by a bewildered child soldier, a beleaguered if sanitized SS doctor, and an honest old general.

Other figures stand in for national character disorders. Goebbels (Ulrich Matthes) and his ice queen wife (Corinna Harfouch) are brainwashed zombies. "I won't let the children grow up in a world where there is no National Socialism," she declares before poisoning them all. Even though the starstruck Traudl recognizes Hitler is a meanie, she remains loyal. Everyone tells her to leave the bunker, but so long as her führer needs her, she can't. Traudl glimpses the marriage of Adi and Eva; as in Hitler—The Last Days, the officiating clerk reflexively asks for their Aryan identification papers.

Stupid but not unkind and typically wearing some sort of dirndl, Eva is the surrogate for a nation that loved, not wisely, but too well. "He's changed so much," she confides in Traudl. "He only talks about dogs and vegetarian meals." Eva confesses that she hates Hitler's pet Blondi and secretly kicks the dog under the table. In Blind Spot, Junge expressed the anger that Hitler's entourage felt when he drank the Kool-Aid and abandoned them. Downfall subsumes that rage in a general sense that Hitler always despised the German masses. This may be cathartic, but if so, only for a German audience. (Francis Ford Coppola, who released Syberberg's masterpiece, arrogantly retitled it Our Hitler; Downfall is more like Theirs.)
AP European History/Spencer
Film Background and Reviews: Der Untergang (The Downfall)
A current Japanese blockbuster concerns an imperial U-boat thwarting America's plan to drop a third atom bomb—this time on Tokyo. Downfall may be grimly self-important and inescapably trivializing. But we should be grateful that German cinema is more inclined to normalize the nation's history than rewrite it.

From the New York Times:

February 18, 2005
MOVIE REVIEW | 'DOWNFALL'
The Last Days of Hitler: Raving and Ravioli

By A. O. SCOTT

Correction Appended

According to "Downfall," one of the last meals Adolf Hitler ate before he killed himself in his Berlin bunker was ravioli. Cheese, of course, for as this painstaking (and sometimes painful) film reminds us, the Führer did not eat meat. Apparently, he enjoyed the ravioli, complimenting the cook who made it and cleaning his plate while his dinner companions, who included his secretary, Traudl Junge, and his lover, Eva Braun, were too preoccupied to do much more than pick at their food and smoke cigarettes.

Their distraction is understandable. The Soviet Army was a few blocks away, and the once-fearsome Nazi military machine had all but collapsed. Hitler's calm demeanor may have been a sign of his own increasingly demented state, as, at least in the movie's rendition of his last days, it came between bouts of raving paranoia and delusional schemes to revive his shattered armies to fight off the advancing Allied forces.

Directed by Oliver Hirschbiegel, "Downfall" shifts its gaze back and forth between the crumbling military situation on the ground in Berlin and the bizarre domestic situation in the bunker underneath it, combining high wartime drama with a sense of mundane detail that verges on the surreal. It is fascinating without being especially illuminating, and it holds your attention for its very long running time without delivering much dramatic or emotional satisfaction in the end.

At times the German movie, which is one of five finalists for the Academy Award for best foreign film, has the self-conscious intimacy of a behind-the-scenes celebrity portrait. More often, it has the starchy staginess of one of those made-for-cable historical dramas that give actors of reputation (usually British) the chance to put on vintage uniforms and impersonate figures of world-historical importance, either monstrous or heroic.

Bruno Ganz, the fine Swiss-born actor who, in the course of a long career, has tended more toward world-weariness than monstrosity, tackles the biggest monster of them all with appropriate sobriety and a touch of mischief. He does some scenery chewing, and while he looks, at 64, older than Hitler did at 56 (and also kindlier), he has clearly studied Hitler's vocal and physical mannerisms closely.

The challenge Mr. Ganz faces, which Mr. Hirschbiegel, working from a screenplay by Bernd Eichinger, does not quite allow him to meet, is to make Hitler a plausible character without quite humanizing him. To play Hitler is to walk into a paradox. Sixty years after the end of World War II, he continues to exert a powerful fascination: we still want to understand not just the historical background of German
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National Socialism, but also the psychological and temperamental forces that shaped its leader. At the same time, though, there is still a powerful taboo against making him seem too much like one of us. We want to get close, but not too close.

A few years ago, Menno Meyjes's "Max," a flawed but not dishonorable attempt to explore Hitler's earlier life as a failed artist in Vienna, was widely criticized (often by people who had not seen it) for giving him too much humanity. Curiosity carries with it a sense of moral risk, as if understanding Hitler might be the fateful first step toward liking him.

But of course, millions of Germans - most of them ordinary and, in their own minds, decent people - loved Hitler, and it is that fact that most urgently needs to be understood, and that most challenges our own complacency. Accordingly, the real subject of "Downfall," Mr. Ganz's intriguing, creepily charismatic performance notwithstanding, is not Hitler at all, but rather his followers: the officers, bureaucrats and loyal civilians who were with him at the end.

Some of these are well known, like Eva Braun (Juliane Köhler), the architect Albert Speer (Heino Ferch) and Joseph Goebbels (Ulrich Matthes), who died, along with his wife, Magda (Corinna Harfouch), and their six children, in the bunker with their leader. Other people who figure in this story - which manages to be at once sprawling and claustrophobic - are lesser officers in the SS, and members of Hitler's bodyguard and household staff, including Traudl Junge (Alexandra Maria Lara).

Together, these characters form a shifting group portrait, and while Mr. Ganz's Hitler is obviously the central figure, he is frequently offstage. Even Eva Braun, who knows Hitler best, confesses that he is ultimately unknowable, and the filmmakers are less interested in exploring the absolute evil he represents than in surveying the behavior of his followers - cowardly, confused, cruel and occasionally brave - as their world collapses.

Apart from a brief prelude set in 1942, "Downfall" takes place at the moment the Nazi project shifted from murder to suicide. In the streets of Berlin, bombarded by Russian artillery, small children wield anti-tank guns, while death squads execute civilians for supposedly collaborating with the Red Army. Hitler, meanwhile, alternates between coolly plotting his own end and denouncing his most loyal lieutenants as traitors. Those around him try to choose among the available choices of flight, surrender or death and wonder at the limits of their own loyalty. The purest - which is to say the most pathological - expression of fidelity comes from Magda Goebbels, who in the film forces ampules of cyanide into the mouths of her sleeping children rather than subject them to the grim prospect of "a world without National Socialism."

The most disturbing aspect of "Downfall" - and the reason it has been attacked in Germany - is the way it allows the audience's sympathy to gravitate toward some of these characters. Next to the Goebbelses, and to Hitler, many of the others don't look too bad. In part, this is a result of the conventions of film narrative, which more often than not invite us to identify with someone on screen, even if nobody is especially admirable.

Thus, General Monke (André Hennicke) starts to look like a crusty, straight-talking old officer out of an American World War II picture, while the open, earnest features of Prof. Ernst-Günther Schenck (Christian Berkel) bespeak an uneasy conscience and a good heart, in spite of the SS lightning bolts on his collar. And Traudl Junge, who Ms. Lara plays with a winning combination of pluck and vulnerability, comes to resemble a Hollywood career girl in a 1940's melodrama.
"Downfall," which was based partly on a memoir Junge wrote with Melissa Müller (and also on the work of the German historian Joachim Fest), seems to accept her image of herself as a naïve young woman drawn to working for Hitler more by "curiosity" than by ideological zeal. As "Blind Spot," an unnerving documentary about Junge (who lived until 2002) makes plain, this curiosity did not extend to what her boss was actually doing. But while "Blind Spot," true to its title, allows you to intuit the layers of denial and selective memory that allowed Junge to live with herself, "Downfall" implicitly affirms her innocence, and extends it to the German people at large. When Goebbels and Hitler refuse to express compassion for their own civilians, and declare that the Germans have brought their fate upon themselves, the movie is sending its domestic audience the soothing message that ordinary Germans were above all the victims of Nazism.

Which is true up to a point, but some distinctions should be preserved. A note at the end reminds us of the 50 million dead in the war and the 6 million Jews slaughtered by the Nazis, and then notes the long lives enjoyed by some of the figures in the film, including Junge and Professor Schenck, whom the movie treats as a hero for becoming disillusioned with Hitler just before the Red Army showed up.

'Downfall'

Opens today in Manhattan.

Directed by Oliver Hirschbiegel; written (in German, with English subtitles) by Bernd Eichinger, based on the books "Inside Hitler's Bunker: The Last Days of the Third Reich" by Joachim Fest and "Until the Final Hour: Hitler's Last Secretary" by Traudl Junge and Melissa Müller; director of photography, Rainer Klausmann; edited by Hans Funck; music by Stephan Zacharias; production designer, Bernd Lepel; produced by Mr. Eichinger; released by Newmarket Films. At the Film Forum, 209 West Houston Street, South Village. Running time: 155 minutes. This film is not rated.

WITH: Bruno Ganz (Hitler), Alexandra Maria Lara (Traudl Junge), Corinna Harfouch (Magda Goebbels), Ulrich Matthes (Joseph Goebbels), Juliane Köhler (Éva Braun), Heino Ferch (Albert Speer), Christian Berkel (Prof. Ernst-Günther Schenck) and André Hennicke (General Monke).

Correction Tuesday, March 15, 2005

A film review on Feb. 18 about "Downfall," which looks at Hitler's final days, referred incorrectly to his diet. Although the movie portrays him as a vegetarian, he did eat at least some meat.

Background on Characters:

From the Attendant to the Ritterkreuzträger (highly decorated soldier), from the Chauffeur to the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. Who were those people who spent the last days with Hitler in the 'Fuehrerbunker'? And what happened to them? Some short information:

Axmann, Artur, born on February 18, 1913 in Hagen - died on October 24, 1996 in Berlin, since 1940 'Reichsjugendfuhrer' (Reich Youth Leader), attendant at the cremation of Hitler’s body, until 1949 in American war captivity.

Baur, Hans, born on June 19, 1897 in Ampfing, died on February 17, 1993 in Neuwiddersberg, Hitler’s Pilot, until May 1, 1945 in the bunker, until 1955 in Soviet war captivity.
Bormann, Martin, born on June 17, 1902 in Halberstadt, supposably died on May 2, 1945 in Berlin, Farmer, since 1933 ‘Reichsleiter’ (Reich Leader) of the NSDAP (National Socialist German Workers Party), since 1944 ‘Reichsminister’ without area of operations (‘Parteiminister’), until May 1, 1945 in the bunker, supposably suicide during his escape to avoid Soviet war captivity, firstly considered to be missing.

Braun, Eva, born February 6, 1912 in Munich. Met Hitler in 1928 while working as a receptionist. Attempted suicide twice.

Burgdorf, Wilhelm, born on February 14, 1895 in Fuerstenwalde, died on May 2, 1945 in Berlin, since 1944 Head of the Army Personnel Department and Chief Adjutant of the ‘Wehrmacht’ (Armed Forces), stayed in the bunker and shot himself dead (according other sources: missed).

Christian, Gerda, née Daranowski, born on December 13, 1913 in Berlin, since 1937 Hitler’s Secretary, until May 1, 1945 in the bunker, successful escape to West Germany.

Fegelein, Hermann, born on October 30, 1906 in Ansbach, died on April 29, 1945 in Berlin (executed), successful Show Jumper, Obersturmbannfuehrer of the Waffen-SS, since 1944 steady Deputy of the Reichsinnenminister (Minister of the Interior) in the Reich Chancellery, husband of the sister of Eva Braun.

Goebbels, Dr. Joseph, born on October 29, 1897 in Rheydt, died on May 1, 1945 in Berlin (suicide), 1921 conferral of a doctorate in German language and literature studies, University Bonn, since 1928 member of the Reichstag, 1931 marriage with Magda Quandt, since 1933 Reichsminister for Volksaufklaerung and Propaganda, according to Hitler’s political last will Reich Chancellor since April 30, 1945, in the evening of May 1, 1945 he at first shot his wife and then himself, in the garden of the Reich Chancellery.

Goebbels, Magda, née Behrendt, divorced Quandt, born on November 1, 1901 in Berlin, died on May 1, 1945 in Berlin (killed on demand), after re-marriage of her mother, she grows up in Belgium under the name: Friedlaender, 1921 marriage with the Entrepreneur Guenther Quandt, divorce 1929, one child with Quandt: Harald, 1931 marriage with Goebbels, six children: Helga, Hilde, Helmut, Holde, Hedda, Heide. Moves into the bunker together with her 6 children on April 22, 1945 - after Hitler had announced his suicide, she kills her children on May 1, 1945 in the bunker, soon afterwards she was shot down by her husband, according her wish.

Greim, Ritter von, Robert, born on June 22, 1892 in Bayreuth, died on May 24, 1945 in Salzburg (suicide), lawyer, since 1943 Supreme Commander of the 6. Air Fleet (Munich Area), lands - togehter with Hanna Reitsch - on April 26, 1945 before the Brandenburger Tor, is announced Supreme Commander of the Airforce the same day, takes off again with Reitsch on April 29, 1945, suicide in American war captivity.

Guensche, Otto, born on September 24, 1917 in Jena, since 1944 Hitler’s Personal Adjutant, until May 1, 1945 in the bunker, since May 2, 1945 in Soviet war captivity, until 1956 imprisoned in the GDR, was guard in front of the door to Hitler’s private rooms, when Hitler shot himself.

Haase, Werner, born on August 2, 1900 in Koethen, died probably 1945 in Moscow, since 1935 Begleitarzt (concomitant doctor) in staff of the Reichskanzler (Reich Chancellor), 1945 Head of the
ward (Krankenstation) in the bunker, stayed in the bunker and was arrested there by the Red Army, was taken to Moscow for interrogations.

Hentschel, Johannes, Chief Engineer (Chefttechniker) in the bunker, responsible for the air ventilation, electricity etc., stayed in the bunker until arrival of the Red Army.

Hewel, Walther, born on January 2, 1904 in Koeln (Cologne), died on May 2, 1945 in Berlin, Colour Sergeant during the Hitler Putsch 1923 in Munich, since 1940 Steady Agent of the Reich Foreign Minister at the Reich Chancellor, until May 1, 1945 in the bunker, probably suicide during escape to avoid Soviet war captivity.

Hoegl, Peter, born on August 19, 1897 in Dingolfing, died on May 2, 1945 in Berlin, 1944 Kriminaldirektor (Chief Inspector) at the ‘Reichssicherheitsdienst’, until May 1, 1945 in the bunker, suicide during escape to avoid Soviet war captivity.

Kempka, Erich, born on September 16, 1910 in Oberhausen, died on January 24, 1975 in Freiburg, since 1936 Hitler’s permanent Chauffeur, until May 1, 1945 in the bunker, at first succeeded to escape, then from June 20, 1945 until 1947 under American arrest. Witness of the cremation of the married couple Hitler.

Krebs, Heinz, born on March 4, 1898 in Helmstedt, died on May 2, 1945 in Berlin (suicide), since April 1945 Head of the General Staff of the Army at the Reich Chancellor, took up peace negotiations with the USSR on May 1, 1945 - according to Goebbels instructions. Stayed in the bunker and shot himself in the conference room.

Linge, Heinz, born on March 23, 1913 in Bremen, died 1980 in Bremen, Bricklayer, since 1935 Hitler’s Attendant, until May 1, 1945 in the bunker, until 1955 in Soviet war captivity. Kept watch before the door to Hitler’s private rooms when Hitler shot himself.

Lorenz, Heinz, born on August 7, 1913 in Schwerin, since 1936 Hauptschriftfuehrer (Chief Recording Clerk) at the German News Agency, until April 29, 1945 in the bunker, then went to Munich, courier task, he brought a copy of Hitler’s last will out of the bunker, until 1947 in war captivity.

Manziarly, Constanze, born on April 14, 1920 in Innsbruck, died on May 2, 1945 in Berlin (probably suicide), Hitler’s (diet) cook, until May 1, 1945 in the bunker, probably suicide when escaping to avoid Soviet war captivity.

Misch, Rochus, Telephone Operator in the bunker, stayed there until May 1, 1945.

Mohnke, Wilhelm, born on March 15, 1911 in Luebeck, died on August 6, 2001 in Hamburg, Warehouse Clerk, since 1931 diverse military degrees and awards in the SS, on May 23, 1945 appointed Commandant of the troops in the governance district, coordinates the escape of the bunker inhabitants on May 1, 1945, was imprisoned on May 2, 1945 by the Soviets, 1955 released.

Morell, Dr. Theodor, born on June 22, 1886 in Muenzenberg, died May 26, 1948 in Tegernsee, since 1936 Medical Attendant of Hitler, banished from the bunker by Hitler because Hitler feared that he could give him drugs to get him out of Berlin.
Film Background and Reviews: Der Untergang (The Downfall)

Mueller, Heinrich, born on April 28, 1900 in Munich, missed, since 1939 Head of the Gestapo, lastly seen in the bunker on April 29, 1945, then lost.

Naumann, Dr. Werner, born on June 16, 1909 in Guhrau, died on October 25, 1982, State Secretary in the Propaganda Department, still seen in the bunker on April 29, 1945, successful escape to West Germany, 1953 imprisoned for 4 months.

Rattenhuber, Johann, born on April 30, 1897 in Munich, died on June 30, 1957 in Munich, Head of the ‘Reichssicherheitsdienst’ (RSD), a unit for the private protection of Hitler, until May 1, 1945 in the bunker, until 1951 in Soviet war captivity.

Reitsch, Hanna, born on March 29, 1912 in Hirschberg, died on August 28, 1979 in Frankfurt am Main, Test Pilot, numerous flight records, on April 26, 1945 landing before the Brandenburger Tor together with Greim, on April 29, 1945 they took off again, short US-arrest.

Schaub, Julius Gregor, born on August 20, 1898 in Munich, died on December 27, 1967 in Munich, founder member of the SS, Hitler’s Personal Adjutant, until April 22, 1945 in the bunker, then courier task, went to Berchtesgarden, until 1949 in war captivity.

Schroeder, Christa, born on March 19, 1908 in Hannoversch Muenden, died on June 28, 1984 in Munich, since 1933 Hitler’s Secretary, until April 22, 1945 in the bunker.

Schwaegermann, Gunther, born on July 24, 1915 in Uelzen, since about 1940 Goebbels’ Personal Adjutant, until May 1, 1945 in the bunker, successful escape to West Germany, then until 1947 in American war captivity.

Speer, Albert, born on March 19, 1905 in Mannheim, died on September 1, 1981 in London, Architect, since 1937 Delegate for Construction in the Staff of the Fuhrer, since 1942 Reichsminister for Armament and Munitions, stated that he has had the intention to kill Hitler by leading-in of toxic gas into the bunker in April 1945 (declaration partly confirmed by bunker Engineer Johannes Hentschel, nevertheless doubtable), on April 23, 1945 for the last time in the bunker, 1946 sentenced to 20 years of arrest.

Stumpfegger, Dr. Ludwig, born on July 11, 1910 in Munich, died on May 2, 1945 in Berlin (suicide), since 1944 concomitant Doctor in the Section of the Reichskanzler, until May 1, 1945 in the bunker, suicide during escape.

Wolf, Johanna, born on June 1, 1900 in Munich, died on June 5, 1985 in Munich, since 1933 Hitler’s Secretary, until April 22, 1945 in the bunker.

Zander, Wilhelm, until April 29, 1945 in the bunker, brought copy of Hitler’s testament out of Berlin.
Sixty Feet Under is a Metroid-like platformer game. It features extensive map to explore, NPCs, a faction system, upgrades, weapons and items to collect. Here is a playable demo. Take control of the hero who fell into the underground. Explore, survive and find your way out. #platformer. Development Stage. Complete. PageDiscussionMetaView sourceView history. More Sixty Feet Under, a Pathfinder Roleplaying Game adventure written by Michael Sayre, with supporting articles by David N. Ross, Saif Ansari, Leo Glass, Ron Lundeen, Jacob W. Michaels, Patrick Renie, and Michael Sayre, was released on August 26, 2020. It is the second adventure in the Agents of Edgewatch Pathfinder Adventure Path. Sixty Feet Under by Michael Sayre (2). Guards of Absalom by David N. Ross (60). SFU119 â€” THE GEEKS â€” The Constantâ€”. Seoul, South Koreaâ€™s very own godfathers of hardcore are back! THE GEEKS have returned for their 20th anniversary with a brand new 7 song EP â€œThe Constantâ€œ, continuing with their classic straight edge hardcore sound and positive message. Pre-Orders are now up for limited vinyl. All copies come with digital downloads. Vinyl/Shirt package deals available. Limited vinyl available while supplies last. US/Worldwide Orders â€” limitedsfu.bigcartel.com. European orders go to â€” sfueurope.com.