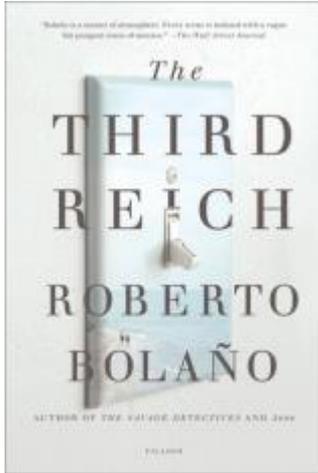


## The Third Reich

by Roberto Bolaño

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### About the Book

On vacation with his girlfriend, Ingeborg, the German war games champion Udo Berger returns to a small town on the Costa Brava where he spent the summers of his childhood. Soon they meet another vacationing German couple, Charly and Hanna, who introduce them to a band of locals—the Wolf, the Lamb, and El Quemado—and to the darker side of life in a resort town.

Late one night, Charly disappears without a trace, and Udo's well-ordered life is thrown into upheaval; while Ingeborg and Hanna return to their lives in Germany, he refuses to leave the hotel. Soon he and El Quemado are enmeshed in a round of Third Reich, Udo's favorite World War II strategy game, and Udo discovers that the game's consequences may be all too real.

Written in 1989 and found among Roberto Bolaño's papers after his death, *The Third Reich* is a stunning exploration of memory and violence. Reading this quick, visceral novel, we see a world-class writer coming into his own—and exploring for the first time the themes that would define his masterpieces *The Savage Detectives* and *2666*.

### Discussion Guide

1. What skills make Udo a highly successful gamer? Do these techniques enhance or hinder him in his career and relationships?
2. As Udo tells his story, how does his perception of himself change? How might the story have unfolded if it had been told from El Quemado's point of view instead?
3. If you were Ingeborg, would you have been sympathetic to Udo? Do they make a good couple? What are the differences between Udo's attraction for Ingeborg and his desire for Frau Else?
4. What role do the Wolf and the Lamb play in stoking Udo's imagination? What do they get from associating with Udo, and vice versa? What common objectives do the three men share?
5. Is Charly and Hanna's volatile relationship more stable than Udo and Ingeborg's? What were your theories about Charly's disappearance?
6. Is Frau Else being shrewd, coy, or just indecisive with Udo? Is he a worthy adversary for her husband?

7. Despite her low status, how does Clarita exert influence over men? Does she bring clarity (true to her name) to Udo's predicament?
8. What does Udo learn from El Quemado about the power of memory and the experience of being a victim? How is El Quemado able to outmaneuver Udo even though he is new to playing Third Reich?
9. What makes World War II a powerful metaphor for the lives of the characters, as the German Udo vacations in a country once ruled by Franco? What does it mean to Udo to revisit historic military campaigns from this particular war? What makes him more obsessed with Third Reich than with other games?
10. Why does Frau Else's husband try to protect Udo from El Quemado? What is his motivation for getting involved in the game? On some level, are his predictions about Nuremberg's consequences ("The trial may be the most important part of the game") proven to be true?
11. What do Udo's dreams say about his deepest fears? How is he affected by his childhood memories of Costa Brava?
12. Udo insists that Third Reich is all about strategy, not about the morality of real-life warriors. Is he being honest about himself when he makes these claims? Ultimately, why is Udo doomed in his contest against El Quemado?
13. How did Udo's final scene with El Quemado compare to your own ideas about the looming danger?
14. In the aftermath scene titled "Seeckt," Conrad is told that his circle is like "a ghostly General Staff, forever performing military exercises on game boards . . . shadows playing with shadows." How are the other characters affected by the ghosts of the sojourn in Costa Brava?
15. **The Third Reich** was written in 1989. How can we apply it to twenty-first-century power struggles around the world, and to the virtual battlefields of online gaming? What message does Udo have for us today?

#### Author Bio

Roberto Bolaño was born in Santiago, Chile, in 1953. He grew up in Chile and Mexico City, where he was a founder of the Infrarealist poetry movement. His first full-length novel, *THE SAVAGE DETECTIVES*, received the Herralde Prize and the Rómulo Gallegos Prize when it appeared in 1998. Roberto Bolaño died in Blanes, Spain, at the age of 50.

#### Critical Praise

"The most influential and admired novelist of his generation."

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