

I, Claudius

Robert Graves

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Considered an idiot because of his physical infirmities, Claudius survived the intrigues and poisonings of the reigns of Augustus, Tiberius, and the Mad Caligula to become emperor in 41 A.D. Historical novel set in 1st-century-AD Rome by Robert Graves, published in 1934. The book is written as an autobiographical memoir by Roman emperor Claudius. Physically weak, afflicted with stammering, and inclined to drool, Claudius is an embarrassment to his family and is shunted to the background of imperial affairs. The benefits of his seeming ineffectuality are twofold: he becomes a scholar and historian, and he is spared the worst cruelties inflicted on the imperial family by its own members during the reigns of Augustus, Tiberius, and Caligula. Palace intrigues and murders surround him. Claudius' informal narration serves to emphasize the banality of the imperial family's endless greed and lust. The story concludes with Claudius ascending to the imperial throne. A sequel, Claudius, the God and His Wife Messalina (1935), covers Claudius' years as Roman emperor.



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