

A powerful biography of Spain's great king, Juan Carlos. How did a playful, moody young prince, educated to sustain Franco's dictatorship, mature into the skilful, calm and brave king who defended Spain's infant democracy from siege and then nurtured it into health? It's a fascinating story, given definitively here in this gripping portrait. There are two central mysteries in the life of Juan Carlos, one personal, the other political. How to explain the apparent serenity with which he accepted that his father had surrendered him, to all intents and purposes, into the safekeeping of the Franco regime? In any normal family, this would have been considered a kind of cruelty or, at the very least, baleful negligence. But a royal family can never be normal, and the decision to send the young Juan Carlos away from Spain was governed by a certain superior dynastic logic. The second mystery lies in how a prince raised in a family with the strictest authoritarian traditions, obliged to conform to the Francoist norms during his youth and early manhood, and educated to be a cornerstone of the plans for the reinforcement of the dictatorship, sided, when he had to, so emphatically and courageously with democratic principles. Paul Preston -- who has thrown more light onto the sometimes inspiring, often shameful, always eventful history of Spain in the twentieth century than any other living commentator -- has set out to address these mysteries and in so doing written perhaps the definitive biography of King Juan Carlos. He tackles the king's turbulent relationship with his father, his cloistered education and his resistance to it, his bravery in opposing the attempt to overthrow the infant democracy a few years after Franco's death, and his immense hard work in consolidating parliamentary democracy in Spain. The resultant biography is both rigorous and riveting, its vibrant prose doing justice to its vibrant subject. It is a book fit for a king.

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