

## How To Feed a Dictator

[music: *Revolution* by *The Beatles*]

Hello and welcome to the *nomadamin* English podcast. I'm Amin Bahmani Yeganeh, an English teacher and the founder of *nomadamin*. Every episode, a fascinating subject is chosen to help you improve your English, and gain new perspectives on the world. I, the storyteller, will be using intermediate English with a **pinch** of higher-level language for you to learn. If you miss something, you can always skip back and listen again. Full transcripts are also offered at <http://nomadamin.com/podcast>.

[Introduction]

In today's episode, I'll be introducing the book *How to Feed a Dictator* by *Witold Szablowski*. We get into the **plot** and the main concepts, highlight a few **intriguing** quotations, touch upon reviews, and so much more.

[Author]

Let's start with the author, *Witold Szablowski*, an award-winning Polish journalist and writer, known for his **insightful** and investigative works. *Szablowski* has traveled the world, using his writing to **shed light** on complex and often **overlooked** social and political issues.

[Plot]

For *Szablowski*, the research for this book began with a simple, almost childlike question: “*What did Saddam Hussein eat after giving the order for tens of thousands of Kurds to be gassed? Didn't he have a stomach ache? And what was Pol Pot eating while almost two million Cambodians were dying of hunger?*” *How to Feed a Dictator* is a fascinating exploration of the relationship between food, power, and politics. Through a series of captivating real-life stories, interviews with a number of chefs who used to work for dictators, *Szablowski* uncovers the eating habits of these dictators. More importantly, these chefs were **pretty much** everywhere with their bosses, the dictators, so they could see their lives from a very close angle, and witness their stories like no one else did.

[Concepts]

Throughout the book, we encounter several **persuasive** concepts. One **of'em**, as *Szablowski* explores, is how food can be used as a tool for political control. He examines the ways in which dictators use the food supply to **exert** power over their citizens, using it as a weapon to reward or punish, to buy loyalty, or to silence the oppositions.

Also, *Szablowski* explores how dictators carefully **craft** their public image through **lavish feasts**, while their people suffer from hunger and **scarcity**. This contrast highlights the power imbalance in dictatorships.

### [Quotes]

Now, let's **dive into** a few **thought-provoking** quotations from the book. Szabłowski writes:

- *I think you can say that the chefs, usually they have amazing perspective. Like, they are very close, but at the same time, they are the guys who could possibly **poison** the dictator. So it's a **tricky** position. You are a mother and an enemy at the same time. So Saddam was not good for Iraqi people and for the world, but he had this **instinct** to treat his personnel well ... And the chef is mentioning the expensive gifts he has got from Saddam. Gold watches, and he had new clothes. But it was always a tricky position. It was always a dangerous job.*

[music: *The Times They Are A-Changin'* by Bob Dylan]

- *“Because once they’ve carried out their **putsch**, they’ll arrive with empty bellies, and as long as you have something good for them to eat, there’s a chance they won’t kill you”.*
- *“Just think what sorts of decisions you would make if you were hungry and in a terrible mood all the time.”*

### [Reviews]

This book has received high **praise** from both **critics** and readers. *The New York Times* calls it "a brilliant exploration of an overlooked aspect of political control," while *The Guardian* praises Szabłowski's writing as "**incisive** and **thought-provoking**, shedding light on the dark underbelly of dictatorship." Also, in the *Mail on Sunday* it is described as "fascinating... A **beguiling** mix of the dark and the comic, combining fancy cuisine with torture and **genocide**. Its tone is **reminiscent** of Armando Iannucci's recent movie *The Death of Stalin*, in which the **absurd** and the monstrous, the funny and the horrifying are **entwined**."

### [Other Books]

Let's move on to recommending other books by *Witold Szabłowski*. If you find *How to Feed a Dictator* exciting, you might also enjoy some of his other works. His book *Dancing Bears: True Stories of People Nostalgic for Life Under Tyranny* explores the lives of individuals who struggle to **adapt** after the fall of their dictatorial regimes. Another notable work by Szabłowski is *The Assassin from Apricot City: Reportage from Turkey*. In this book, Szabłowski shines a light on Turkey, exploring its political climate through personal stories.

### [Closing]

That's all for today's episode. [I] hope this introduction to *How to Feed a Dictator* by *Witold Szabłowski* has convinced you to grab a copy yourself and taste its **flavorful** stories. I also invite you to continue to **turn the page** with *nomadamin*

as you improve your English, and **tune in** for another exciting episode. Until then, bon appétit!



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## Words List

**a pinch of:** a small amount of something

**plot:** the main events of a play, novel, film, or similar work

**intriguing:** fascinating, interesting

**insightful:** perceptive, thoughtful

**to shed light (on something):** to help understand something

**overlooked:** not seen, noticed, or considered

**pretty much:** almost, nearly

**persuasive:** convincing

**of'em:** of them

**to exert:** to use something such as authority, power, influence

**to craft:** to make something in a skilled way

**lavish:** spending, giving, or using more than is necessary or reasonable

**feast:** a large meal

**scarcity:** shortage

**to dive into:** to start doing something energetically

**thought-provoking:** making you think a lot about a subject

**to poison:** to give someone a substance that kills them if they eat or drink it

**tricky:** difficult to deal with and needing careful attention or skill

**instinct:** the way people or animals naturally react or behave

**putsch:** an attempt to remove a government by force

**praise:** acclaim, admiration

**critic:** a person who judges artistic works

**incisive:** clear and direct

**beguiling:** charming, attractive, pleasing

**genocide:** the killing of a large number of people from a particular nation or group with the aim of destroying that nation or group.

**reminiscent:** making you remember a particular person or thing

**absurd:** wildly unreasonable, illogical

**entwined:** closely connected

**tyranny:** a cruel, harsh, and unfair government

**to adapt:** to adjust

**flavorful:** full of flavor

**to turn the page:** to continue to the next page in a book

**to tune in:** to listen to a radio program or watch a television program