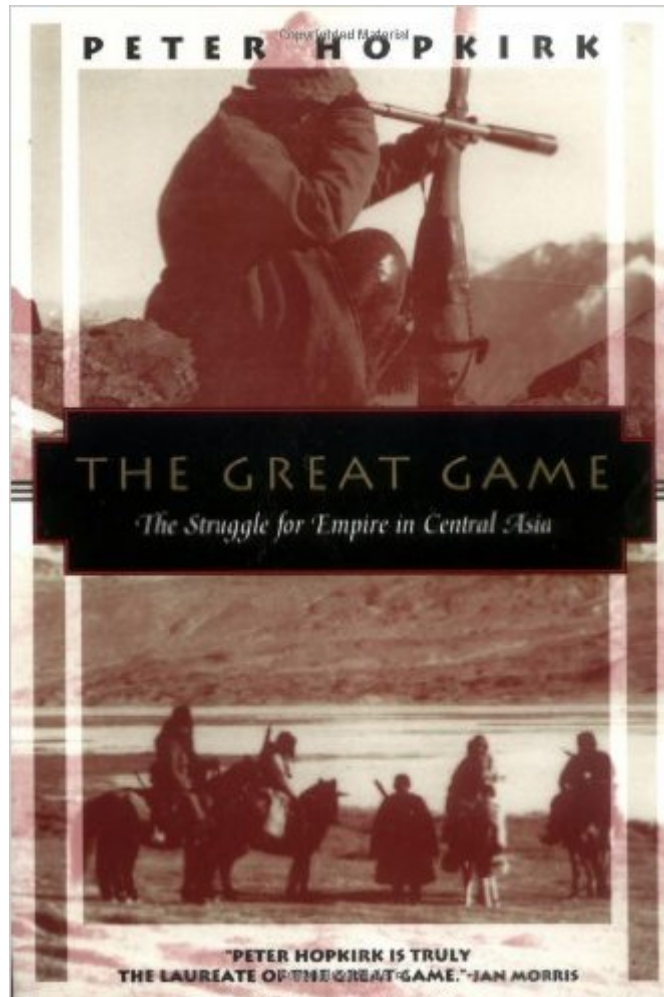


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The Great Game: The Struggle For Empire In Central Asia (Kodansha Globe)



Synopsis

THE GREATGAME: THE EPIC STORY BEHIND TODAY'S HEADLINES Peter Hopkirk's spellbinding account of the great imperial struggle for supremacy in Central Asia has been hailed as essential reading with that era's legacy playing itself out today. The Great Game between Victorian Britain and Tsarist Russia was fought across desolate terrain from the Caucasus to China, over the lonely passes of the Pamirs and Karakoram, in the blazing Kerman and Helmand deserts, and through the caravan towns of the old Silk Road-both powers scrambling to control access to the riches of India and the East. When play first began, the frontiers of Russia and British India lay 2000 miles apart; by the end, this distance had shrunk to twenty miles at some points. Now, in the vacuum left by the disintegration of the Soviet Union, there is once again talk of Russian soldiers "dipping their toes in the Indian Ocean." The Washington Post has said that "every story Peter Hopkirk touches is totally engrossing." In this gripping narrative he recounts a breathtaking tale of espionage and treachery through the actual experiences of its colorful characters. Based on meticulous scholarship and on-the-spot research, this is the history at the core of today's geopolitics.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Peter Hopkirk's book 'The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia' is a great historical

account and a very enjoyable book to read. It is very rare nowadays to find a book that holds your attention throughout, without finding one boring section, this is one of those books. In over 560 pages (paperback edition) Peter Hopkirk tells the amazing stories of a number of early British and Russian officers and men involved in the great imperial struggle for supremacy in Central Asia. I found myself reading late into the morning, at times I couldn't put the book down. Most of the time I had heard of the places and people involved but a lot of this story was new to me. The narrative read like a novel, gripping but informative, never boring and full of information, breathing life into history in a way that is hard to find now-a-days. This is a great book and I fully agree with the quote on the front cover of the book by Jan Morris "Peter Hopkirk is truly the laureate of the Great Game." If you ever wanted to learn something about this large and remote area then this is the book to start with. If you enjoy military history then this book has it, if you enjoy historical accounts of exploration then this book has it, if you just enjoy good history then this book has it all. The story of Britain and Russia carving out their Empires in India, Afghanistan and the surrounding areas is truly fascinating and I was amazed at the brave and resourceful men who carved their name in history during this period. Most people have heard of the Khyber Pass and places like Chitral however I had never heard of the Pamirs and Karakoram mountain ranges or of the Kerman and Helmund deserts nor of some of the fierce and warlike tribes that lived in these areas.

The Great Game, by Peter Hopkirk, is an amazing history of British and Russian imperialism clashing in the Middle East and Asia. Encompassing the time period from the late eighteenth century to the very beginning of the twentieth, the Great Game was much like an enormous game of chess, with Russia seeking to expand its borders and Britain to safeguard its interests in India. Hopkirk reveals both the national policy thoughts of the two nations and the daring moves of each's officers and agents in the regions in question, which include most of Central Asia, Afghanistan, India and the Caucasus. In many cases, the men Hopkirk describes were the first Westerners to set foot in such regions (for example, Bokhara, Khotan and Khokand). Hopkirk has done incredible research: his bibliography is an impressive 15 pages. And even though he has a wealth of material to cover, he makes sure that the whole presentation is interesting to the reader. He tells a complete story, but expands on issues and events that are both important and interesting. As a result, the exploits of men like Conolly, Stoddart and Burnes come into clear focus against a backdrop of intrigue and, often, duplicitousness, across a little over 500 pages. Not unexpectedly, Hopkirk's account tends to favor the British point of view slightly. Even so, he's quick to point out mistakes and torpedo unjustified accusations on both sides. I found this book an easy and quick read,

completing it in across about four days. While it progresses in roughly chronological sequence, it could easily be read piecemeal if the reader desired. The book kept my interest well, and didn't ever seem to wander aimlessly.

I came across the term Great Game first while reading Byron Farwell's "Armies of the Raj," and then later in Kipling's "Kim." It was in the appendix of Kim that I first read about Peter Hopkirk's "The Great Game." Hopkirk's account - though biased towards the British point of view - details the events in the Great Game with a flair and style that makes it extremely interesting to read. The voyages of the soldiers and civilians involved in the Great Game, the numerous instances of treachery and cruelty which were a norm with the rulers of the Central Asian khanates of the time, the two wars in Afghanistan that were catastrophic to the British, the two failed expeditions to Khiva that did tremendous damage to the prestige of the Russians, etc., are all described with meticulous details in this wonderful book of almost 550 pages. The term Great Game was first coined by Arthur Conolly, a captain in the British army, and is used to describe the epic standoff between Russia and Britain for the control of India and Central Asia in the nineteenth century. There were many players in this Great Game from both the sides - brave men who thought nothing of venturing into hostile territories hitherto unknown to westerners to gather valuable political and military information for their countries. Many - including Conolly - perished playing this dangerous game of intrigue and espionage. The British, wary of any move on part of the Russians that would bring them closer to India, did everything in their power to extend their influence over the Central Asian khanates of Khiva, Bokhara, Samarkand, Kashgar, and especially Afghanistan.

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