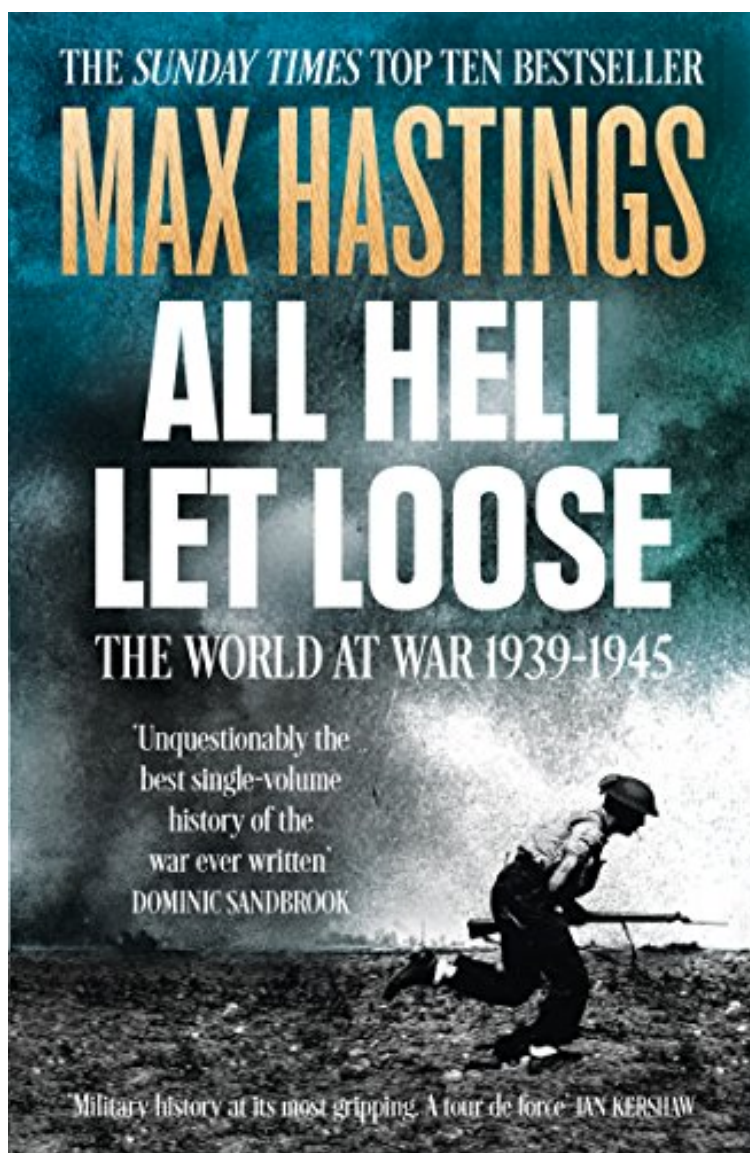


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All Hell Let Loose: The World at War 1939-1945



Par Max Hastings
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurRecommended for viewing on a tablet.From one of our finest historians, a magisterial account of the most terrible event in history World War II.The horror of World War II touched the lives of millions across the globe. Few could find the words to describe it, only that the carnage they experienced resembled all hell let loose.The eminent historian Max Hastings here encapsulates life through war for the ordinary people involved soldiers, sailors and airmen; British housewives and Indian peasants; SS killers and the citizens of Leningrad: Japanese suicide pilots and American carrier crews. This everymans story employs

top-down analysis and bottom-up testimony to reveal the meaning of this vast conflict and ultimately answer the question what was World War II like?. Extrait On the outbreak of war: France, Britain and its dominions were the only major nations to enter World War II as an act of principle, rather than because they sought territorial gains or were themselves attacked. Their claims upon the moral high ground were injured, however, by the fact that they declared support for embattled Poland without any intention of giving this meaningful military effect. On Stalins devils bargain with Hitler: If Stalin was not Hitlers co-belligerent, Moscows deal with Berlin made him the co-beneficiary of Nazi aggression. From 23 August 1939 onwards, the world saw Germany and the Soviet Union acting in concert, twin faces of totalitarianism. Because of the manner in which the global struggle ended in 1945, with Russia in the allied camp, some historians have accepted the post-war Soviet Unions classification of itself as a neutral power until 1941. This is mistaken.

Though Stalin feared Hitler and expected eventually to have to fight him, in 1939 he made a historic decision to acquiesce in German aggression, in return for Nazi support for Moscows own programme of territorial aggrandisement. Whatever excuses the Soviet leader later offered, and although his armies never fought in partnership with the Wehrmacht, the Nazi-Soviet Pact established a collaboration which persisted until Hitler revealed his true purposes in Operation Barbarossa. On the Battle of Britain: The latter months of 1940 were decisive in determining the course of the war: the Nazis, stunned by the scale of their triumphs, allowed themselves to suffer a loss of momentum. By launching an air assault on Britain, Hitler adopted the worst possible strategic compromise. As master of the continent, he believed a modest further display of force would suffice to precipitate its surrender. Yet if, instead, he had left Churchills people to stew in their island, the prime minister would have faced great difficulties in sustaining national morale and a charade of strategic purpose. A small German contingent dispatched to support the Italian attack on Egypt that autumn would probably have sufficed to expel Britain from the Middle East; Malta could easily have been taken. Such humiliations would have dealt heavy blows to the credibility of Churchills policy of fighting on. As it was, however, the Luftwaffes clumsy offensive posed the one challenge which Britain was well-placed to repel. The British army and people were not obliged to confront the Wehrmacht on their beaches and in their fields- a clash which would probably have ended ignominiously. The prime minister merely required their acquiescence, while the country was defended by a few hundred RAF pilots and- more importantly though less conspicuously- by the formidable might of the Royal Navys ships at sea. The prime ministers exalting leadership secured public support for his defiance of the logic of Hitlerian triumph, even when cities began to burn and civilians to die. On Frances role in the war: Even allowing for the significant role of French troops in the final campaigns in north-west Europe, the statistical fact remains that Vichys armies and domestic security forces made a more numerous contribution to Axis interests than those Frenchmen who later joined the Gaullists, other Resistance groups or Eisenhowers armies provided to the allied cause. Most French people persuaded themselves in 1940 that the Petain regime constituted a lawful government; however uncomfortably, they indulged its rule until the eve of liberation. Once defeat in 1940 had denied the French a heroic role in the struggle against Nazism, many remained confused for the remainder of the war about the least ignoble part their nation might play. On Britains war with Rommel in the desert: the war in North African engaged only a handful of British and imperial divisions, while most of Churchills army stayed at home. This was partly to provide security against invasion, partly for lack of weapons and equipment, partly owing to shortage of shipping to move and supply troops overseas. The clashes between desert armies were little more significant in determining the outcome of the global conflict than the tournaments between bands of French and English knights which provided entreactes during the Hundred Years War. But the North African contest caught the imagination of the western world, and achieved immense symbolic significance in the minds of the British people. It became what will surely prove to have been historys last campaign fought overseas between European powers attempting to advance European objectives. On the 1941 invasion of Russia: It did not occur to Hitler, after his victories in the West, that it might be more difficult to overcome a brutalized society, inured to suffering, than democracies such as France and Britain, in which moderation and respect for human life were deemed virtues. On the allied relationship: The Grand Alliance, the phrase with which Churchill ennobled the wartime relationship of Britain, the United States and Soviet Union, was always a grand charade; it was a necessary fiction to pretend that the three powers fought the war as a shared enterprise directed towards common purposes. In Britain and America, confidence that our parents and grandparents were fighting the good war is so deeply ingrained that we often forget that people in many countries adopted more equivocal attitudes; colonial subjects, and above all Indias four hundred millions, saw little merit in the defeat of the Axis if they

continued to endure British suzerainty. Many Frenchmen fought vigorously against the allies. In Yugoslavia, rival factions were far more strongly committed to waging civil war against each other than to advancing the interests of either the allies or the Axis. Large numbers of Stalin's subjects embraced the opportunity offered by German occupation to take up arms against a hated Moscow regime. None of this implies doubt that the allied cause deserved to triumph, but should emphasise the fact that Churchill and Roosevelt did not have all the best tunes. On the Soviet war effort: It was probably true that only Russians could have borne and achieved what they did in the face of the 1941 catastrophe; it was less plausible to attribute this to the nobility of communist society. Until Barbarossa, Stalin sought to make common cause with Hitler, albeit to attain different objectives. Even when Russia became joined with the democracies to achieve the defeat of Nazism, Stalin pursued his quest for a Soviet empire, domination and oppression of hundreds of millions of people, with absolute single-mindedness and ultimate success. Whatever the merits of the Russian people's struggle to expel the invaders from their country, Stalin's war aims were as selfish and inimical to human liberty as those of Hitler. Soviet conduct could be deemed less barbaric than that of the Nazis only because it embraced no single enormity to match the Holocaust. Nonetheless, the Western allies were obliged to declare their gratitude, because Russia's suffering and sacrifice saved the lives of hundreds of thousands of young British and American soldiers. Even if no exalted assertion of principle—instead, only a breach between rival monsters—caused Russia to become the principal battleground of the war, it was there that the Third Reich encountered the forces that would contrive its nemesis. On the confusion of loyalties around the world: The leaders of the Grand Alliance depicted the war as a struggle for freedom against oppression, good against evil. In the 21st Century, few informed people even in former colonial societies doubt the merit of the allied cause, the advantage that accrued to mankind from defeat of the Axis. But it seems essential to recognise that in many societies contemporary loyalties were confused and equivocal. Millions of people around the world who had no love for the regimes of Hitler, Mussolini or Hirohito felt little greater enthusiasm for allied powers whose vision of liberty vanished, it seemed to their colonial subjects, at their own front doors. On British wartime rule of India: Britain's wartime treatment of its subject races remained humane by German or Japanese standards; there were no arbitrary executions or massacres. But it was among the ugliest aspects of British conduct of the war, that in order to hold India, it was necessary not merely to repulse external invaders, but also to administer the country under emergency powers, as an occupied nation rather than as a willing co-belligerent. Some of the repressive measures adopted in India were similar in kind, if not in scale, to those used by the Axis in its own subject societies. On the revelation that the German economy was too weak to overcome Russia: