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Moscow 1812: Napoleon's Fatal March



Synopsis

Napoleon dominated nearly all of Europe by 1810, largely succeeding in his aim to reign over the civilized world. But Britain eluded him. To conquer the island nation, he needed Russia's Tsar Alexander's help. The Tsar refused, and Napoleon vowed to teach him a lesson by intimidation and force. The ensuing invasion of Russia, during the frigid winter of 1812, would mark the beginning of the end of Napoleon's empire. Although his army captured Moscow after a brutal march deep into hostile territory, it was a hollow victory for the demoralized troops. Napoleon's men were eventually turned back, and their defeat was a momentous turning point in world affairs. Dramatic, insightful, and enormously absorbing, *Moscow 1812* is a masterful work of history.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The first half of Zamoyski's book is truly top-quality narrative history, it is written lucidly, and it is packed with interesting facts and observations. A coherent picture emerges of all the many forces at work in that vast and terrible enterprise, the invasion of Russia. Zamoyski does an especially good job of explaining Napoleon's reasons for invading Russia, and I think adds new clarity to them. The author also has wonderful passages in which we see Napoleon's view and considerations at certain points and then those of various Russian commanders facing him. He does something similar with Tsar Alexander, an intelligent and ambitious man, but not a leader to assume command in battle. He does a deft job at giving the reader some appreciation of the massive, complex preparations necessary for the campaign, almost exhausting a reader's imagination of how one man could put all of it into motion. His other great strength is the description of the battles for Smolensk and Borodino:

these are remarkable passages. The second half of the book declines from that high level, in my view, not in the quality of the writing but in the subject matter. There is an awful lot of graphic detail of individual deaths and perils on the ghastly march out of Russia. Some of this is of course necessary to give readers a full appreciation of a situation where climate and the weather played greater roles in Napoleon's defeat than the Tsar's armies, but I think there is too much, becoming effectively padding. The trouble with those kinds of anecdotes is that they cloud the true sense of what is happening.

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