Tournament of Shadows: The Great Game & the Race for Empire in Central Asia

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From the romantic conflicts of the Victorian Great Game to the war-torn history of the region in recent decades, *Tournament of Shadows* traces the struggle for control of Central Asia and Tibet from the 1830s to the present. The original Great Game, the clandestine struggle between Russia and Britain for mastery of Central Asia, has long been regarded as one of the greatest geopolitical conflicts in history. Many believed that control of the vast Eurasian heartland was the key to world dominion. The original Great Game ended with the Russian Revolution, but the geopolitical struggles in Central Asia continue to the present day. In this updated edition, the authors reflect on Central Asia's history since the end of the Russo-Afghan war, and particularly in the wake of 9/11.

Tournament of Shadows: The Great Game & the Race for Empire in Central Asia Details

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From Reader Review Tournament of Shadows: The Great Game & the Race for Empire in Central Asia for online ebook

Erik Graff says

I picked this book up as the latest bit of my personal journey to the East, with some particular concern for obtaining more knowledge about Afghanistan which, with India, Pakistan, Sikkim, Tibet and Bhutan, is one of the book's centre's of attention. Like most public-schooled kids in the States, I obtained a good grounding in the history of the West, of North America and of Europe, but very little about the rest of the world except as they concerned the Western powers. The eastern movement of my studies has been towards Asia, Africa and Oceania and them in the period before the Second World War.

What I'm really interested in obtaining are English language histories written and published overseas for foreign audiences. I recently read a German history of Latin America--a real revelation, quite different than the usual English-language studies.

Tatiana says

Perhaps it is my simplistic thinking, but when I picked up this book, I thought it would be the history of the Great Game in Central Asia. And when I think of Central Asia, I typical think of the Soviet "stans." For these authors, Central Asia encompasses everything from India to Mongolia, Tibet to Turkmenistan.

This book is too ambitious. It tries to tell the complete 200+ year history of the Great Game while evoking the intrigue and narrative panache of Kipling and Hopkirk. However, what took Peter Hopkirk nearly 400 pages to explain is briefly summarized in the first third (about 150 pages) in this book. The second third seems to be about India, and the final third about Tibet. Art, history, politics, geography, colonization, religion, and revolutions are all interwoven in a mish-mash that makes the narrative hard to follow.

I would only recommend this book for the true, Central Asia/Great Game aficionados out there.

Kathy says

It traces the history of Central Asia by following the lives of the European explorers. At once depressing, edifying and entertaining. Should be required reading for all politicians and State Dept. personnel.

J. says

The literature of The Great Game, maybe only twenty years back a fairly esoteric field, has now gone viral with what is being called 'Great Game Studies'. Like anything intriguing and underappreciated, it seems like it was better, back then, when only known in some circles.

The *Great Game* was the office slang used to refer to the several-hundred year contest for influence and regional control in Central Asia, as practiced mainly by the British Empire and Czarist Russia. And also as it

affected the broader arenas of the middle east, south asia and the far east, and the myriad sects, movements and militant causes in between. It interests contemporary readers because it dwells on the current preoccupations with political motive, intelligence, strategy and covert operations --- in what are still the world's most volatile areas.

Basically the Czar and the Queen (Victoria, at the start) both acceded to what was called the "forward policy" by their ministers in the regions seen as no-man's-land that buffered India's northern edges and Russia's southern extremities. Which provided cover for what was essentially backstage expansionist manoeuvering, posing as a thorough defense against hostile neighbors. Something along the lines of what would be styled as "preemptive" today. Thus the Caucasus, the 'stans', the Khanates of the wide swath known then as Turkistan -- became the real-life chessboard for the fixers, intel-personnel, cartographers, agents-provocateur, their proxies, and their pawns -- of both empires.

If it sounds like today, it should; the tactical approaches are steeped in the murk of misdirection and deniability, the players are largely the same, several hundred years later; and the lands that now comprise Pakistan, Afghanistan, Kashmir and Tibet are at the heart of the story. For the reader, though, what manages to come across on the page are not just oblique allegiances, clever ruses, potentially disastrous disguises and pretexts ... but most of all the sheer romance of very dangerous situations in the most exotic locales in the world. Often in caravan armed with full chemical darkrooms, surveying instruments, and primitive telegraphic gear in later days.

Here at the start of 'Tournament Of Shadows' is an example of one William Moorcroft, born in Lancashire, that launches this account :

"*Moorcroft was still separated from the rest of his caravan as he proceeded during drenching rains in June through a patchwork of once independent hill-states, each with its own Hindu Rajah.... His first call was at the court of Rajah Sansar Chand in the Rajput kingdom of Kangra. The Rajah, then in his summer palace at Alampur, was known for his lavish hospitality. Rajah Sansar Chand was close to Moorcroft's age and a friendship developed. They talked at length about schemes for economic improvement.. They examined the Rajah's choice collection of colored drawings and played chess, while Moorcroft took time to record local alphabets for Calcutta's Asiatic Society... Small wonder that Moorcroft, being treated as a friend of kings, began to behave as if he were an envoy plenipotentiary.*

As he headed toward the Himalayas, far from the (East India) Company's scrutiny, Moorcroft by insensible degrees saw himself as a potential shaper as well as a chronicler of history... These folies de grandeur *were surely encouraged by the matchless scenery unwinding before him. Arriving at Sultanpur, the capital of the Kulu region... Moorcroft recruited more than a hundred additional bearers for the trek through Kulanthapitha, the valley's traditional name, meaning '<u>the end of the habitable world</u>". The terminus itself was Rohtang Pass, whose 13,300-foot height ... separated green hill country from Himalayan crags. Climbing zigzag past the gorges o f the River Of The Moon, the party reached a lofty saddle that opened out upon an enormous crescent of snow-peaked mountains. The caravan inched downward into the Lahul Valley, and the Buddhist Kingdom of Ladakh...*"

The overall history of great-games-playing starts with the incorporation of the British East India Company in the seventeenth century and progresses well into the first World War. Keen observers will quickly reach the conclusion that the Cold War and Gulf Wars to follow were certainly the later incarnations of the same basic confrontation. Which is the triangular interaction between the western superpowers, the aboriginal cultures, and the perceived specter of an eventual Eastern superpower.

I've got a couple issues with this history. One is the lack of a proper <u>Bibliography</u> --- footnotes alone don't tell at a glance what the real central sources were, and major influential predecessors -- like the author Peter Hopkirk's groundbreaking histories, or even primary-source Peter Fleming's memoirs -- are glossed. A fair

case could be made that Hopkirk pretty much *originated* the wide-scope great-games history in the late 20th century, and that 'Tournament' is a re-telling. Listing a trillion micro-sources buried in footnotes doesn't really properly credit the original movers. And to miss the oppurtunity to recommend the ur-texts on the subject ('Kim' 'Road To Oxiana' 'Mission To Tashkent' 'Seven Years In Tibet' et al) by providing a short, select bibliography --is a needless exclusion.

An unlikely issue, but of critical import in a great-games book is the subject of Maps. Not only large-scale area maps, but detail-maps, inserts, and campaign-maps become very important in a close reading of what is geographically foreign terrain to most readers. I kept wondering at the broadly uninformative set of maps in 'Tournament' and finally found what I think is the culprit. Other than the endpaper maps, all the maps in the book, says the verso of the title page, are "*copyright Mapquest*". And they are largely useless beyond illustrating isolated areas without context, or a single point in time.

Part of the allure of Greatgaming is in the atmosphere of the locations of the Silk Road and even the names themselves of the Old Orient.... The muslim-chinese outpost Khotan, remote Kashgar (*"at night, the great gongs of the chinese guardhouses sounded the hours and at nine o'clock the gates of the city were closed"...*), Simla the hilltop peyton-place of the pampered, summering british Raj, persian Herat, russian Tashkent, Samarkand, Bokhara, Khiva, Lhasa, the forbidden city of the Dalai Lama .... some now abandoned, buried under desert sands... Inadequate mapping definitely impoverishes the experience.

Overall, the early promise of 'Tournament' seems to dissipate; a slightly disinterested tone prevails throughout the book that only occasionally wakes up to it's own subject matter. Though rudimentary items are added (students of sig-int will warm to the information that Genghis Khan's mongol horsemen could transmit intelligence at the rate of 200 miles a day by covering stages on numerous fresh horses prewarned of the riders approach by a bugle blast).. and there's extra color added, as with the backstory of Professor Jowett, Master Of Balliol College at Oxford, mentor to three successive Viceroys Of India ("*I should like to govern the world through my pupils.*")... and, overall, the timeframe is expanded, all to good effect.
As history, this introductory pass on the events of the Great Game is probably a good one, though it sometimes trudges. As for a gripping & compelling read, well, everything else only gets better, and more convoluted. Which is a plus.

Huw Evans says

The borders of Pakistan and Afghanistan have always been a troubled zone. One hundred years ago three great powers at their zenith were competing for security of their empires. Referred to as the Great Game, information gathering was the key to trying to exert preferential influence in the area. By a mixture of bribery, corruption, infiltration and blackmail Russia, France and the UK tried to maintain the balance in their own favour. This is a fascinating, well researched read and one hundred years later we appear to have learned nothing. This bookj typifies the management cliche, "if you do what you have always done, you get what you have always got".

Elaine Nelson says

I'm vacillating whether to go with 2 or 3 stars -- parts of this book were fantastic, great narrative, crazy crazy characters in a vast story. Maybe that's the problem: the story was a little TOO vast, so there was no single

theme that seemed to hold it together, just a chronicle of one thing after another.

I will single out the maps as a particular irritation: the book has lots and lots of locations which are likely to be unfamiliar to the general reader, and the maps were just not good enough to keep track of where all the players were going; neither the inside cover map nor the smaller maps in the text had enough place names. There was much gnashing of teeth every time a place was mentioned, and I flipped to a map, and: nope, not there.

On the other hand, it was interesting to get a slightly different angle on the events in The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia, and to go a little farther forward in time. The combination of the two books gave me a much better understanding of the backstory of Great Game era empire messing around with Afghanistan (et al), which these days is a damn good thing to know.

Nick says

This is history from the outside; Europeans (including the Russians) and Americans behaving badly. Lots of the standard tale is here: the English being thrown into bug pits in Bukhara and hounded from Afghanistan (although the famous loss of all but one member of the expeditionary force is explained better here than elsewhere). There is astonishing hubris and mendacity here, as Aurel Stein loots Central Asia on behalf of Harvard. There are almost endless tales of astonishing, almost pointless suffering across the Tibetan mountains as explorer after explorer vies to reach Lhasa. There is the classic, if little-known tale of the English attack on Tibet by the extravagantly named Col. Francis Younghusband. The Empress Dowager of the Qing dynasty make has a cameo, as does Theodore Roosevelt, Afghan kings and Dalai Lamas, but this is mostly the history of vainglorious outsiders, adventurers, and military types, of Buddhists who may be Russian spies, of the original pundits, who undertook the first surveys of the area. The authors do have an eye for drama and wit: it is not easily forgotten that one of TR's advisers cautioned someone to remember that the President was so gripped by enthusiasms that he was really only six years old.

Steve says

Low 3. The authors describe the 'Great Game' as the 'Victorian prologue to the Cold War'. British imperialism regarded Russian expansion into Central Asia as a real threat to the 'jewel in the crown': the Indian subcontinent. The first central character to emerge in this history was William Moorcroft who had arrived in India in 1808, abandoning his successful veterinary practice in London (he had been the first Englishman to qualify as a veterinarian and helped establish the first veterinary college). Ostensibly charged with improving the blood stock of the horses of the East India Company's cavalry, he would flout his narrowly defined duties to march his own private army into Central Asia, parleying with princes and kings, and leading the way for subsequent intrepid explorers at the margin of Empire. Taking advantage of a communications delay with his employers, Moorcroft's sense of adventure led him to lead a small party, disguised as a pilgrim, into the Tibetan plateau. Tibet had been closed to foreigners since the 1790s, having previously been the subject of British interest. This had profited from the rivalry between the Dalai Lama and the second most important spiritual leader, the Panchen Lama, who had requested such a visit to seal a treaty of amity and commerce. Warren Hastings had entrusted this mission in 1774 to George Bogle, commanded to secure trading links and determine whether, as rumoured, Tibet housed hordes of gold and silver. Among the gifts Bogle returned with were strips of Russian leather stamped with the Tsar's insignia, while the deaths of both the Panchen Lama and Bogle, who had taken a Tibetan wife, derailed this productive relationship, before, with pressure from China, Tibet sealed its borders. On its return Moorcroft's

party would be captured by Gurkha warriors until a smuggled letter to Calcutta led to an appeal from the Governor General to the rajah of Nepal securing their release. The authors reveal that these warrior gendarmes of the Nepalese rajah made the frontier regions so dangerous that the British declared war on Nepal in 1814 and only after having three expeditionary forces repulsed would the firepower of British artillery secure victory, gaining the Himalayan foothills and the site of Simla, the future summer capital of the Raj. Criticised for abandoning his duties and for his unauthorised exploits, Moorcroft's thirst for adventure would still imbibe his desire to obtain horses from Central Asia. After seven tireless years of petitioning, Moorcroft gained official sanction for a mission to the provinces to the north-west of India. He would use his surgical expertise to open the road to fostering relations with these frontier peoples, encountering individuals who would have impact on the future political map of this region. Ranjit Singh, the Lion of Lahore, had forged a Sikh kingdom whose might was only rivalled by the Raj, and secured a treaty with the latter giving him a free hand in return for recognising British sovereignty of the provinces further south. Moorcroft would endanger this fragile understanding, by calling for British protection of provinces held under Sikh control so as to secure a trading corridor through Central Asia to China, for which he was thoroughly reprimanded. Moorcroft proceeded to Afghanistan, becoming the first Englishman to travel through the Khyber Pass, to find the country embroiled in yet another civil war from which Dost Mohammed Khan would emerge as ruler. Moorcroft would die in 1825 still pursuing the fabled horses of Turkmenestan, and convinced that Russian interests in the region signified a real threat. During the 1830s the Russian presence in the region caused far greater concern, with nobody more alert to the danger than Melbourne's brother-in-law and Foreign Secretary, Lord Palmerston. Prone to patriotic hyperbole and eager for crusades, Palmerston was convinced a weak, corrupt, Persian throne already was subject to Russian influence, as was Dost Mohammed in Kabul. Here lay the genesis of the First Afghan War of 1839-42. The plan envisioned was to oust the Afghan ruler with Ranjit Singh's Sikhs doing most of the fighting. Yet, the war would cost 20,000 lives due to military blunder and complacency. The speed with which the British force reached and occupied Kabul, installing their puppet ruler with his enormous entourage of servants and concubines, blinded them to the seething unrest which surrounded them, believing local tribes would be bribed into submission. Moreover, they surrendered the impressive citadel to their puppet ruler, garrisoning the troops on a low plain overlooked by surrounding hillsides. The scapegoat for this fiasco would be the British Resident in Kabul, Alexander Burnes. Kinsman of poet Robert Burns and outstanding linguist, Burnes gained invaluable insights together with lasting respect for the frontier people of the North Western regions during his travels in the 1830s. As such, he frequently raised concerns at plans to oust Dost Mohammed in dispatches to the powers that be, which not only were blithely ignored, but also had their content edited or tampered with. As the British occupation lingered into the winter of 1841, native resentment grew, and Burnes would be its first victim, hacked to pieces by rioters, while the ensuing riot was not quelled by the military force. Emboldened by such inactivity, and led by Dost Mohammed's eldest son, the rebels utilised their unmatched sharp-shooters to decimate the ranks of their occupiers. Eventually, the British accepted Afghan terms for a withdrawal from Kabul as the year drew to a close, but succumbing to the harsh weather and withering Afghan fire, only one British survivor, Dr William Brydon, immortalised in the famous Victorian painting by Lady Butler, would emerge from the over 14,000 soldiers, wives, and camp followers who started the march. Though an 'Army of Retribution' would force through the Khyber Pass and retake Kabul in 1842, the scale and manner of the previous defeat led to calls for investigations into who should be blamed for such an ignominious event, especially when Palmerstone became Prime Minister in 1861. Yet, the latter would never face official questions on his role, regarding it as a matter to never apologise for or explain. Two far-reaching events on the world stage would now influence the course of the 'Great Game'. For the Russians, the costly Crimean War eventually led to the new Tsar, Alexander II, suing for peace, which confirmed Turkish independence at the Treaty of Paris in 1856, together with the demilitarisation of the ports of the Black Sea. The Tsar's recognition of defeat was influenced by the opinion of one of his combat veteran officers, Dmitrii Miliutin, who he named his Minister of War in 1860. A visionary, Miliutin iniated a ten-year programme to correct those weaknesses the Crimean war had unveiled. Such steps included the building of over 35,000 miles of railway, the emancipation of the serfs, leading to great reform of the citizen army, and diverting attention to the possibilities of conquest in Central Asia. Thus, Russian territorial ambitions would lead to the subjugation of Asiatic tribes throughout Turkmenestan in the 1860s, which Dostoyevsky in

his final writings would defend as Russia's right to accrue land and markets. For the British, the brutality unleashed by the Indian Mutiny of 1856 led to the ending of the Company's rule of India and the rise of the Raj. With regard to policy, opinion was divided between two camps - Sir Henry Rawlinson was a soldier and scholar who had fought with distinction in the First Afghan War, and travelled extensively throughout Persia deciphering cuneiform script, becoming president of the Royal Geographical Society. He would argue that Russia's hostile expansionism would lead to designs on India and that the Mutiny had revealed weaknesses in the Raj whereby native rulers could succumb to foreign machinations. Moreover, Afghanistan had now become essential to the securing of British interests as a buffer-state. The opposing theory was espoused by Sir John Lawrence, or 'Plain John', whose understanding of the native peoples of India, especially the Sikhs of the Punjab, enabled him to maintain order within the latter province during the Mutiny, but also to plead for amnesty for the defeated rebels upon victory. In his opinion the security of the Raj lay in the quality of British rule and the contentment of it's native subjects, not in acquiring more territory. Indeed, Russian occupation of Afghanistan, to his mind, would embroil their rival in a costly native insurrection. Unfortunately, those who would influence policy in the 1870s adhered to the former viewpoint, especially the lover of imperial pomp and ceremony that was the Viceroy of India, Lord Lytton. Seeking redress for the Emir of Afghanistan's refusal to countenance a British presence in his country, Lytton urged Disraeli's cabinet to issue a declaration of war, and when this proved too slow to appear, had an army march through the Khyber Pass in October 1878. The subsequent murder of the British resident would precipitate the Second Afghan War, ending in ignoble stalemate, and dividing domestic opinion to such an extent that disastrous losses led to Disraeli's dramatic defeat in the 1880 election. One of the greatest threats to the Raj would come from Queen Victoria's favourite maharajah, Duleep Singh. Heir of the Lion of Lahore, whose death in 1839 had spawned years of instability in the struggle for succession, Duleep was his youngest son, though rumours circulated that he was illegitimate. His ambitious mother had in her desire to gain support for his succession waged two wars against the British, which ultimately led to defeat and the annexation of the Sikh state - as well as the acquisition for the Queen of the 'Koh-i-Noor' diamond. The young Maharajah came under British tutelage and renounced his religion, adopting the Christian faith, before sailing to England and enchanting Victoria. Suffering a mid-life crisis, Duleep Singh's frustration and resentment grew and he turned again to his native religion. Thus, when he sailed in 1886 to visit Calcutta, intelligence reports maintained the existence of a secret plot in league with the Russsians for the Maharajah to incite rebellion across the Punjab and Central Asia. Detained at Aden, the enraged maharajah refused to return to England without a fair hearing and embarked for Paris, and so disaffected had he become that he offered his services to the Russians. Fortunately, the Tsar, Alexander III was reluctant to unleash such bloodshed and his offer remained unaccepted, and he eventually sought and was granted Victoria's pardon. What eventually would spark military action would be the crisis created by the influence of a Buddhist monk and Russian subject, Agvan Dorzhiev. The latter's campaign for Tibetan nationhood, freeing them from both Chinese suzerainty and British designs, was also part of this Mongolian's project to create a pan-Buddhist federation across Central Asia supported by Russia - he would die in Stalin's gulags. Thus, his audiences with Tsar Nicholas II at the turn of the twentieth century greatly troubled the Viceroy of India, Lord Curzon, especially given the instability in Peking with the Boxer rebellion, and Russia's penetration into both Mongolia and Manchuria. Enter centre-stage Francis Edward Younghusband, the frontiersman's frontiersman as described by the authors. Born to a military officer in an Indian hill town, Younghusband had extensively travelled across Afghanistan, China, and the Gobi desert. Charged with crossing the border into Tibet accompanied by a military escort in November 1903, Younghusband used the full force of his military advantage to quell dissent and march to Lhasa. Having just disentangled itself from the disastrous quagmire that was the Boer War, and facing an arms escalation against both Germany and Russia, the Balfour government quickly regarded this Tibetan adventure as a cause for concern. Moreover, Curzon's regal attitude lost support, with Balfour complaining that Curzon acted as if India were an independent country and an unfriendly one at that. Younghusband became the scapegoat, finding his peace terms with Tibet, gaining far more than his superiors had thought possible, were watered down and he was mired in dishonour and controversy which effectively ended his public career - he would head the Royal Geographical Society and promote the first British expeditions to conquer Everest. Curzon, who had been regarded as the man of the moment with a golden future, was excluded from politics, serving only as Foreign Secretary after World War I, before being passed

over for selection to campaign for Prime Minister and dying in 1925. This marks the end of the authors' treatment of this period of imperial rivalry and the book descends into less focused territory, making it far too ambitious in scope, and resulting in a loss of interest on the part of this reader.

Trevor says

This book is why many people hate reading history. It is an unnecessarily long recitation of facts without any coherent narrative. The only reason this book gets two stars instead of one is that it covers a subject that I think is under-served in most history texts. For at least being full of information I did not previously know, even if the vast majority of that information is meaningless, it gets +1.

Tim P says

A narrative style history of "The Great Game"...this thing is about a million pages long, but brings historical figures to life in a way that makes you feel as if you are with them for every furrowed brow, every political chess move, every agonizing decision about the fate of peoples and foreign policy. Provides an excellent framework for understanding the current war in Afghanistan as well as the economic Wild West that is Central Asia.

Highly recommend, although my buddy Carlos swears "The Great Game" is better.

Margaret says

A history of Russia and the UK jostling for who gets to control central Asia up to roughly the Second World War. Some real characters on both sides, plus a lot of pointless violence, loss of life and misery all to control the vast riches of...the mountains of Afghanistan? The snowy mountains of Tibet? Seems almost like the whole history was one big dick-measuring competition. And reading about the individuals involved makes that interpretation sound even more on the money. Some of these guys were totally obsessed crackpots who thought nothing of losing half their party of guides and cooks and porters so that they could be the "first" to cross that; desert or enter Lhasa or whatever. Testosterone poisoning, as my old chemistry teacher used to say.
Also, the writing was weird--the authors can tell a good yarn (and they had some great material to work with!) but a lot of the phrases just didn't make sense.

Dirk says

I can't get my hand on enough about this era but despite being a more accomplished wordsmith KEM never quite manages to conjure up the brand of gas lit magic Peter Hopkirk brought to the same subject.

Phrodrick says

Bottom Line First
Like others I came to Meyers and Brysac's Tournament of Shadows in an effort to learn about what is still referred to as the Great Game. Tournament is mostly about British efforts to colonize the farther reaches of the Indian Sub-Continent. There are lessor amounts about the Russians, American, German and Chinese involvements in these same remote lands. The result includes a number of profiles of mostly British explorers, adventurer's political and military men. The results is either imbalanced or incomplete or mostly the Great Game was one England was playing with the native populations and occasionally with or against other, non-Indian Frontier nations. I liked Tournament if Shadows. I am not certain that it is that helpful to those seeking to understand why and how the United States is, over 150 years later the inheritors of the Geo-political mess that is Afghanistan, Pakistan, Tibet and the peoples that The British Raj called the Northwest Territories.

Formally the British Raj (Rule) begins in 1858, but extends, like this book back to the period after the fall of Napoleon. By definition the Great Game was the political, diplomatic and military maneuvering between England and Russia over dominance in the areas between India and whatever borders the Russian Empire achieved in any given year across this period. In fact the Russian Empire was growing by a combination of military expeditions and executive Imperial Decree, but much of this land was uninhabited or loosely held by widely scatted tribal peoples.

Exactly what the Russian Court desired to wrest from under British influence in the Greater Indian Sub-Continent is not made clear. For much of this book, British fears from the Russians seem imaginary.

The two powers did reduce the distance between their common borders from many hundreds of miles to as little as 50 , in some places. Both powers attempted to place countries like Tibet and Mongolia into their respective spheres of influence, but this still indirect confrontation is not a palpable feature of Meyer and Brysac's narrative until late in the book. By this time China would begin to reassert its historic control of these countries and the Communist Revolution would make the Great Game more complex.

Going only by Tournament of Shadows, the Great Game was mostly about how the Raj, explored, studied and occasionally fought for control over the many peoples in this part of Asia. This telling of the Great Game is mostly about the hazards taken by British Explorers and the use of local peoples to further English Imperial Designs at the expense of local populations, cultures, and cultural heritage.

As a discussion of grand strategy Tournament of Shadows Fails. It does not make clear the reasons for America's continuing involvement in this region and perhaps this was never an intention. There is little discussion of what the local interests or the history of relationships between various local populations, or followers of the equally diverse religious followers.

What Tournament of Shadows does best is to provide a number of short biographies of the individuals who were seeking to map out the "white ", blank areas on the map. Expeditions well-funded and barely funded would slowly and at great risk moved toward what was thought of as the roof of the world. Highly trained intellects and possible frauds had as a common goal reaching the capitals of Mongolia and Tibet. Religious and scientific minds wanted to know.

For these people the Great Game was part of the psychology they had to address if they were to gain imperial, Russian or British support and then had to play against the religious and national politics of peoples who had little understanding, or need to know what interested these mostly European interlopers. Eventually locals would become aware that explorers, actin in the name of science were removing national treasure and that a good argument for these thefts was the inability or lack of national passion that would have motivated these same peoples to appreciate these artifacts and documents. Part of what Tournament of Shadows documents, if unintentionally is the assumption by otherwise romanticized or discounted people into the respected and proper managers of their national heritage.

Mark Singer says

An excellent companion to Peter Hopkirk's The Great Game (which I also own), Tournament of Shadows continues the story of British, Russian, and later American ambitions in Central Asia up through the Cold War.

Iñaki Tofiño says

573 pages to tell me that "the Great Game really was a game , with scores but no substantive prizes"? Get out of here!
But yes indeed, that is the conclusion of the book, a well researched study on the European (mostly British and Russian) explorations/colonization/imperial maneuvers in Central Asia. I have learned quite a bit about explorers to Afghanistan and Tibet during the XVIII-XX centuries, but the interesting part, the study of why this region is pivotal to modern geopolitical issues is missing. The British could not control it, neither could the Soviets and now cannot the Americans...
Somebody, please, summarize this book and continue where it finishes.