

The Great War for Civilisation, The Conquest of the Middle East
by Robert Fisk. 4th Estate 2005.

Whether you admire him or despise him, love him or loathe him, it is undeniable that Robert Fisk is a giant of journalism and a colossus of the reporting of the Middle East in the 20th century. At one and the same time a history, an autobiography, a polemic and a credo, The Great War for Civilisation is Fisk's monumental (the book is 1366 pages long) account of the major events in 20th and now 21st century history in the Middle East, with which he has been involved for over thirty years.

Fisk is an excellent writer and if the reader has the strength to hold such a heavy book s/he will find it as immensely readable, informative, engaging and (occasionally) infuriating as Fisk's shorter pieces in the Independent.

For those who reject his approach to Middle Eastern current affairs it is easy to stereotype Fisk as a perpetually angry apologist for the actions of various governments and terror groups, and an unrepentant anti-Western, anti-Israeli Arabist; The Great War for Civilisation makes that view untenable, for Fisk is complex, clear-sighted, compassionate and much more even-handed than his enemies might choose to accept.

The Great War for Civilisation is not a comfortable book to read, but it is essential reading for all who have a genuine interest in understanding the Middle East, and its ever-growing impact on the world, described by one of its greatest living observers.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh