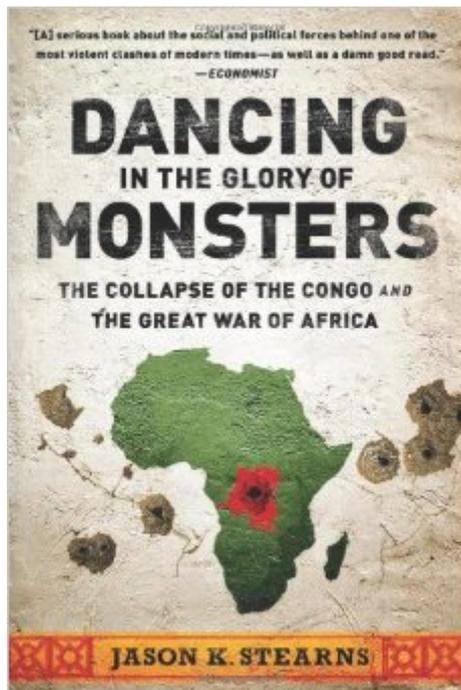


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Dancing In The Glory Of Monsters: The Collapse Of The Congo And The Great War Of Africa



Synopsis

A Best Book of the Year- The Economist & the Wall Street Journal
At the heart of Africa is the Congo, a country the size of Western Europe, bordering nine other nations, that since 1996 has been wracked by a brutal war in which millions have died. In *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters*, renowned political activist and researcher Jason K. Stearns has written a compelling and deeply-reported narrative of how Congo became a failed state that collapsed into a war of retaliatory massacres. Stearns brilliantly describes the key perpetrators, many of whom he met personally, and highlights the nature of the political system that brought these people to power, as well as the moral decisions with which the war confronted them. Now updated with a new introduction, *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters* tells the full story of Africa's Great War.

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Customer Reviews

*****"How do you cover a war that involves at least 20 different rebel groups and the armies of nine countries, yet does not seem to have a clear cause or objective?" Jason K. Stearns
The Congo, a vast country as big as Western Europe, wildly rich in natural resources, and valuable minerals as diamonds and uranium, having common borders with nine central African nations, has received little sustained media coverage, even during its political crisis striving for democracy, after independence, in 1960. I was on a consulting job in Zambia, and drove to Ndola to meet a friend who taught at the university of Lubumbashi, the park was so peaceful, and the visitors were friendly.

In two decades, after its economic collapse in 1996, the (Dem. Rep.) Congo was destroyed by an annihilating war, in which millions lost their life in a deliberate genocide. The brutal war has left hundreds of thousands of women gang-raped and left millions of war-Ã Â-related disabilities, and more than three millions were forced to flee their villages. Jason Stearns, who worked for the United Nations in Congo, tells the tragic story of chaos and suffering in, "Dancing in the Glory of Monsters," explaining the tragedy of the Great War of Africa, and the destruction of the Congo, where almost all state institutions of public services crumbled. The author describes the inhumane fights, "like layers of an onion, the Congo war contains wars within wars." "Dancing in the Glory of Monsters" is the best account so far: more serious than several recent macho-war-correspondent travelogues, and more lucid and accessible than its nearest competitor,..." wrote Adam Hochschild in the N Y Times.

How best to make sense of Congo's enduring crisis, a tale of daunting political complexity and extraordinary cruelty? Many writers have tried, for no other African country captivates the western literary imagination as much as Congo. This fascination long precedes Joseph Conrad, who indelibly described King Leopold's Congo Free State over a century ago. But faithful subjects do not good art make, and most western writing on Congo is unreadable or, at best, unbearable. The sheer complexity of Congo's dramatic history is one contributing factor behind all the dreadful writing. Many an author sacrifices compelling narrative for rigorous scholarship, resulting in a turgid swamp of acronyms for all the armed groups, the Security Council Resolutions and the doomed peace deals. Epic chronicles like Africa's World War (GÃ©rard Prunier) may be valuable to scholars but are so microscopically detailed as to be opaque to non-specialists. Adventure writing, the other main genre of Congo literature, is equally abundant and can carry a plot, but the stories glorify the exploits of the author and ignore the Congolese. "Watch me as I commune with gentle pygmies, wrestle crocodiles on the great Congo River, escape beheading by a throng of stoned child soldiers"-- setting the bar for unbearable reading. Common to both schools is the absence of Congolese voice; for both, Congo is a neutral, muted stage for the author's performance (scholarship, "survival"). Faced with such output, one thinks, the trampling of Congo just goes on and on. Jason Stearns shares this lament. A recognized scholar and field analyst with years of human rights reporting from the country's most remote zones of conflict, he tackles Congo's complexity head-on, unpeeling the onion of its myriad wars within wars.

Several thoughts come to mind when reflecting on Jason K. Stearns' epic *Dancing In The Glory of Monsters*, *The Collapse of the Congo and the Great War of Africa*, but "dancing" doesn't figure into

any of those thoughts, and monsters are writ large, center stage. And make no mistake; we're talking fiendishly horrific monsters, almost inhuman, as if drawn from a dictionary definition: "Anything horrible from...wickedness, cruelty or commission of extraordinary or horrible crimes; a vile creature..." So the reader should be advised, some of the stories are very disturbing. Indeed, Mr. Stearns paints a gut-wrenching portrait of a nation and region ravaged by colonial meddling, venal and brutish politician/military leaders, and centuries old ethnic strife all culminating in "many wars in one" beginning in 1996 in Congo (the former Zaire) and including active participation of neighbors Rwanda and Uganda just to name a couple. In terms of geography, Congo straddles the equator and is the size of Western Europe, or slightly less than one fourth the size of the United States. According to the CIA World Fact Book, the literacy rate is 67% and the mortality rate a surprisingly "high" 54 years for men, and 57 for women; given the slaughter since 1996, my guess would have been a much lower number. The Congo Wars were largely a by-product of the epic 1994 genocide in Rwanda where in the space of 100 days an estimated 800,000 Rwandans (primarily Tutsis and moderate Hutus) were killed. The killing was "organized by the elite but executed by people." Stearns says, "...between 175,000 and 210,000 people took part in the butchery, using machetes, nail-studded clubs, hoes, and axes." The killing was done in public and almost no one was untouched either as "a perpetrator, a victim or witness.

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