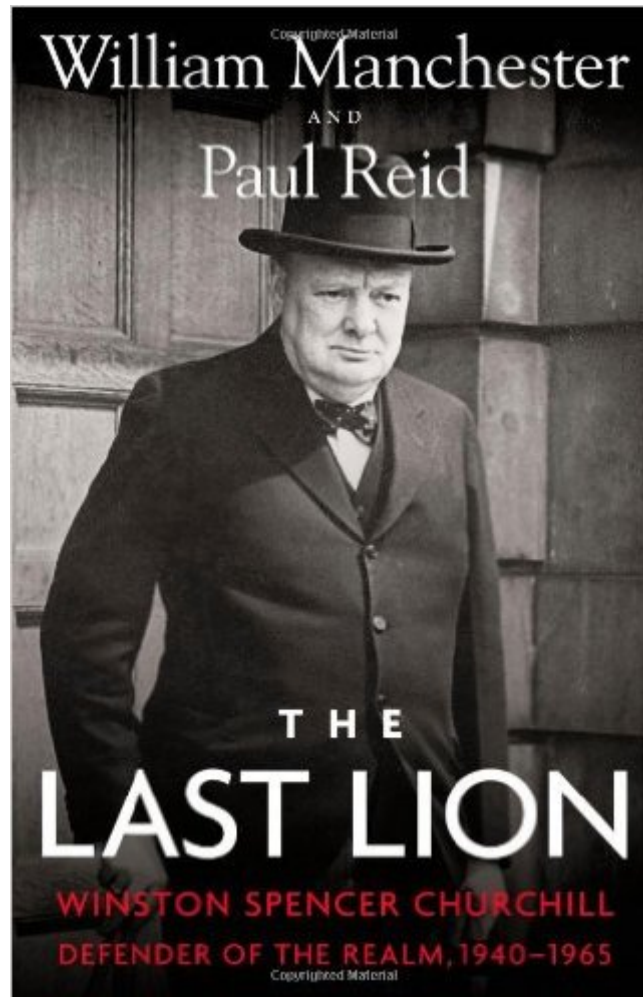


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The Last Lion: Winston Spencer Churchill: Defender Of The Realm, 1940-1965



Synopsis

Spanning the years of 1940-1965, THE LAST LION picks up shortly after Winston Churchill became Prime Minister-when his tiny island nation stood alone against the overwhelming might of Nazi Germany. The Churchill conjured up by William Manchester and Paul Reid is a man of indomitable courage, lightning fast intellect, and an irresistible will to action. THE LAST LION brilliantly recounts how Churchill organized his nation's military response and defense; compelled FDR into supporting America's beleaguered cousins, and personified the "never surrender" ethos that helped the Allies win the war, while at the same time adapting himself and his country to the inevitable shift of world power from the British Empire to the United States. More than twenty years in the making, THE LAST LION presents a revelatory and unparalleled portrait of this brilliant, flawed, and dynamic leader. This is popular history at its most stirring.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I have been nervously awaiting this book for years. My first encounter with Manchester came when volume one first came out. I was a child, and I went to visit my grandmother (who was in London during the Blitz); she held the book up to show me what she was reading. "The man." she said. "The great, great man."Years later, I read the first two volumes almost in one sitting - couldn't put them down - and have reread large parts of them over the years (every time I looked some piece up I'd find myself sitting down for an hour or two because I couldn't stop). I remember when *Finest Hour* reported that the trilogy would never be finished: it was like a punch in the stomach.I had my doubts about the ability of another author to write worthily of Manchester, and I was afraid this volume

wouldn't measure up. No need to worry: this is every bit as much a page-turner as the last two volumes. It's not QUITE Manchester - I thought I could feel a bit of a difference in style, somehow - and yet it IS extremely good, much better than I had expected. Like the first two volumes, we begin with a preamble ("The Lion Hunted") in which we are (re-)acquainted with the book's subject. There is a certain amount of repetition of material from the two earlier preambles, but much good new material as well. I've read thousands of pages on Churchill, but even I found some good new anecdotes and quotations here. After that we're hurled right into the middle of the most dramatic days of World War Two. The unexpected, catastrophic defeats; the incompetence and perfidy of the people in charge of France - it doesn't take much from a writer to make this an exciting story, and yet I don't think it has ever been told better than this. Really, just what I had hoped for from Manchester himself. If the later parts of the book don't quite keep the same level of excitement, neither do the events they recount. My only complaint is the ending: really, the book just stops. Read the end of volume II: I would have expected Manchester himself to end with a climactic summary, perhaps returning to his major insight from the start: the central significance of Churchill in history is that he was a product of the late nineteenth century who was able to bring the virtues of the era of his formative years to life again at a time when they were needed, and when the British people were not yet too far from them. Actually, I do have one other complaint, and it's with the publisher: the dust jacket doesn't match the first edition dust jackets of the first two volumes. Doesn't look as good on the shelf as I would have liked. All in all, this is a worthy final volume. Manchester himself would be proud, and there can be no doubt that this trilogy would be Churchill's favourite biography. Highly recommended, to fans of the first two volumes and newcomers alike.

There are many good biographies out there, but a great one is rare. This is one of the great ones; William Manchester has taken the art of biography to a new level. Most biographies are merely "interesting," rarely making any effort to give the reader a sense of what it would have been like to be or know the subject. Manchester does just that. Rather than write a narrative story of Winston Churchill's life, he has chosen instead to give us a rich tapestry of Churchill's life as it was woven. Many biographers are simply idolizers of their subjects; this is not so with Manchester. He reserves no harsh judgment, just as he reserves no due praise; when he is reporting something negative that Winston did he says it was negative, and explains why. But *The Last Lion* is more than just a biography. In attempting to capture the essence of Churchill Manchester has written some of the best material about World War I and the appeasement crisis. It is rare that historical events can be made to feel like the present, but Manchester has done this. Both volumes of this work are well

worth your money, your time, and your attention. Indeed, the only bad part of Manchester's biography is that he will not be able to finish it. It is not known how much of the third volume he was able to put together before Alzheimer's made work impossible for him, but it can be hoped that whatever he was able to do will someday be published, no matter how unpolished it may be.

"The Last Lion: Visions of Glory, 1874-1932," is the first of William Manchester's projected three-volume biography of Winston Spencer Churchill. I found it a superbly crafted, supremely well researched account of the first 58 years of the life of the 20th century's greatest statesman. With wit and candor, Manchester chronicles Churchill from his earliest days as the neglected and troublesome first child of Lord Randolph Churchill and his American-born wife, Jennie, to his entry into the political "wilderness" over home rule in India in 1932. Manchester's portrait of his subject is balanced and objective; we see Churchill at his finest: a courageous (almost to the point of foolhardiness) army officer, and later a gifted Member of Parliament who became one of the youngest Cabinet ministers in British history. We also see him at his worst: a Cabinet minister with appalling political judgment at times, quick to meddle in other ministers' affairs while neglecting his own, and with an uncanny ability to alienate not only his political foes, but almost all his political allies as well. In addition to a wonderfully written chronology of Churchill's life, Manchester provides an overview of the times in which Churchill lived. I was fascinated by the author's account of Victorian England -- its culture, its mores, and its view of itself in the world. The sections which describe Churchill's times make highly entertaining and absorbing reading by themselves. "The Last Lion: Visions of Glory, 1874-1932," clearly shows why William Manchester is one of the pre-eminent biographers at work today. The book is written with obviously meticulous scholarship, insightful analysis, and crisp, sparkling prose; I have yet to find a better account of Churchill's life. Since the publication of "The Last Lion: Visions of Glory, 1874-1932" 30 years ago, several excellent books about Winston Churchill have been written, including "Warlord" by Carlo d'Este (2008) and "Winston's War" by Max Hastings (2011). As good as these works are (and they are very good indeed), William Manchester's "The Last Lion" remains the finest multi-volume biography of Churchill available today. It is a "must read" for anyone interested in the life of Winston Churchill; Highly recommended!

AFTERWORD: William Manchester died in 2004 before he could complete the third and final volume of his great triptych on the life of Winston Churchill. Manchester had apparently completed well over one-half of the manuscript for his final volume, which he had tentatively entitled "The Last Lion: Defender of the Realm 1940-1965." He had selected Paul Reid, an excellent writer and close friend, to carry on and complete his work after his death. In November

2012, this 1,200-page volume was published by Little, Brown and Company, the same publisher of the first two "Last Lion" volumes. As of this writing, "The Last Lion: Defender of the Realm 1940-1965" has garnered overwhelmingly positive professional and consumer reviews, much to the satisfaction of those of us who waited patiently for nearly three decades for its release.

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