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The Great Fire is the tale of Major Aldred Leith, a decorated war hero. The story begins in Asia in 1947 and encompasses two years, crosses several continents, and concludes in the remote island nation of New Zealand. Aldred is the son of a famous author, and has hopes of being an author himself; as the novel opens, he is exploring the war-ravaged lands of Asia for a book he is writing. His book will be the summation of his experiences and explorations of Asia, the land and its peoples, in the aftermath of World War II. At this point, Aldred has already spent a year traversing China for research and is now on his way to Japan, with plans to continue his work from the hills of Kure. Early on in the story, it becomes clear that Aldred has been affected both by the tragedies of war, and by what he remembers as a loveless childhood; his experiences have led him to harbor a deep cynicism for his fellow man.

This study guide includes the following sections: Plot Summary, Chapter Summaries & Analysis, Characters, Objects/Places, Themes, Style, Quotes, and Topics for Discussion.

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