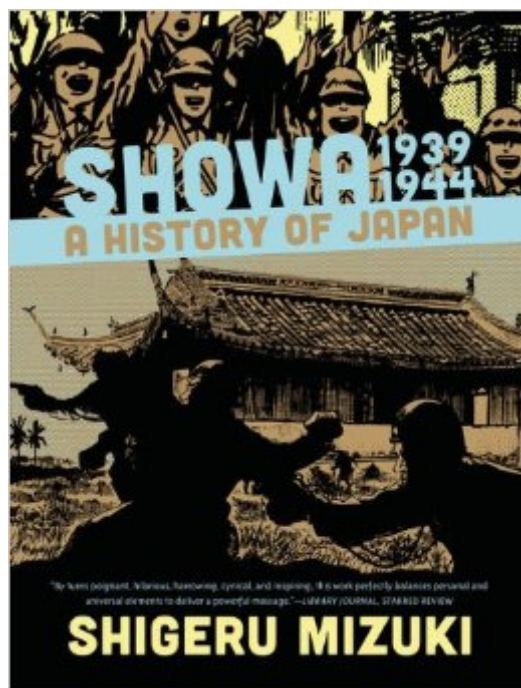


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Showa 1939-1944: A History Of Japan (Showa: A History Of Japan)



Synopsis

A master cartoonist and war vet details Japan's involvement in World War II "Showa 1939" "1944: A History of Japan" continues the award-winning author Shigeru Mizuki's autobiographical and historical account of Showa-era Japan. This volume covers the final moments of the lead-up to World War II and the first few years of the Pacific War, and is a chilling reminder of the harshness of life in Japan during this highly militarized epoch. Mizuki writes affectingly about the impact on the Japanese populace of world-changing moments, including the devastating Second Sino-Japanese War, the attack on Pearl Harbor, and the first half of the Pacific War. On a personal level, these years mark a dramatic transformation in Mizuki's life, too. His idyllic childhood in the countryside comes to a definitive end when he's drafted into the army and shipped off to the tiny island of Rabaul in Papua New Guinea. His life becomes a constant struggle for survival, not only against the constant Allied attacks but against the harsh discipline of the Japanese army officers. During his time in Rabaul, Mizuki comes to understand the misery and beauty of the island itself, a place that will permanently mark him and haunt him for the rest of his life."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

My eldest is going through junior high school in Japan and I was happy to hear she was studying aspects of the Second World War. As far as I can tell from her textbook (and I could well be missing something) those aspects are the Nazis and the Holocaust, and that's about it. To be fair, there was no room on the double-page spread covering the war to refer to any part Japan had to play in it, I

suppose talking about genocide in Germany is distressing enough for 12-year-olds without bringing up Japan's less than auspicious past in Nanking or its own mini-genocide inflicted on the Chinese by Unit 731. Much easier to start with the Nazis and Anne Frank and all that. The trouble is, I doubt it will develop into much more introspection, which would be fascinating, if not to my daughter, then at least to her old man. So I don't look to Japan's schools to learn much about the war. That's what comic books are for. I enjoyed the English translation of the first instalment of Shigeru Mizuki's Showa manga covering 1926-1939, so I just had to get the second (covering 1939-1944). You might quibble that a manga can only skirt the surface of such a momentous time, and yeah, it does at times feel like a school history textbook, jam-packed with just enough facts to tell the story of The Key Events of the war. The Bataan Death March receives little more than two frames (and an aside from Mizuki that as horrific as it was, the death toll was as much to do with the heat and general Japanese unpreparedness to deal with POWs as anything particularly evil. And "Comfort Women" sexual slavery receives just a fleeting reference, on one page. But don't get me wrong, Mizuki is no revisionist. He's relaying the war through his experiences.

Bottom line first: Showa; A History of Japan 1939-1944 picks up with author, artist Shigeru Mizuki's combination autobiography and history of Japan's Showa period. He is now an irresponsible youth with no faith in his future. His country has been at war for years and the effects of what he had called the "American Depression" and the needs of the Japanese Army has left his country a place where some enjoy the flapper years and most struggle to eat. Japan's war combines with the world's war and Mizuki and his childhood friends become soldiers. This volume lacks depth or analysis. History is a sequence of facts with the occasional personal comment. Where the first volume had seemed creative and a chance to get a Japanese view of history; Volume II has the feel of a middle school slide show; pre-PowerPoint. I will finish the Showa books by my recommendation for you to follow lacks enthusiasm. By making himself the stand in for the Japanese Everyman and by making himself a sad sack soldier the reader gets no sense of why the Japanese soldier was feared or formidable. Soldiers are routinely beaten and rarely the beneficiary of good food or quarters. We get no sense of how the average soldier felt about wartime jingoism, the Bushido code or their duty to the Emperor. The pages continue to contain dramatic and thought provoking images but the text becomes a flow of factoids. Mizuki's stated goal had been to give Japanese youth a more balanced picture of Japan's role in WWII. He makes it clear that Japanese militarism produced the fake policy that was the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere. He repeats that the reality was an intention for Japan to dominate subject territories but fails

to document why this dominance would have been worse than European colonialism.

Shigeru Mizuki's monumental manga memoir *Showa* continues in Volume Two, which covers the years 1939 to 1944. All four volumes together, a massive undertaking, span the entire reign of Emperor Hirohito from his enthronement in 1926 to his death in 1989. Mizuki lived through them all. These represent modern Japan's most pivotal years as the tiny island nation sought to compete directly with the world's superpowers. This era ended largely in tragedy for Japan and its people. Volume One begins with the Great Kanto Earthquake and tracks the gradual rise of Japanese imperialism and fascism that quickly followed the "roaring 20s" Taisho era. Mizuki cleverly added his own biography in parallel to the more general history. His childhood in Sakaiminato, along with the backstory of his father and grandfather, situate him within those very interesting times. By Volume One's end Japan has altered considerably and Hideki Tojo, who shouldered most of the blame for World War II's Pacific arena, enters the fray. Mizuki himself grows from boyhood to a wayward and irresponsible young adult who can't hold down a job and enjoys eating a little too much. His parents understandably worry about his prospects. Another familiar face, at least to Mizuki fans, Nezumi Otoko or "Rat Man," provides color commentary on both Japan's and Mizuki's history. The entire package presents an engaging, disturbing, beautifully ugly and sometimes humorous picture of the sudden rise and equally sudden fall of the Empire of Japan. Volume Two opens with Nezumi Otoko recapping some of Japan's earlier Meiji era history and its eventual desire to liberate and unify Asia in their own version of "manifest destiny."

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