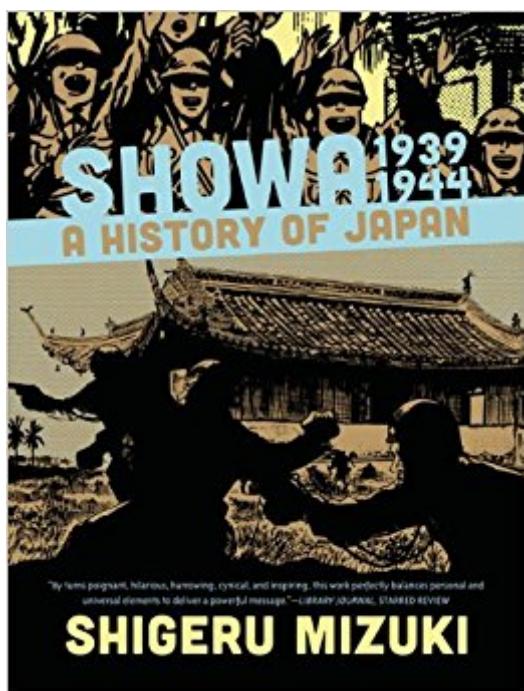


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Showa 1939-1944: A History Of Japan (Showa: A History Of Japan)



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

Gr 9 Up • Renowned manga artist Mizuki's autobiographical graphic novel series continues where *Showa: A History of Japan, 1926-1939* (Drawn & Quarterly, 2013) left off, with Japan on the brink of World War II. The narrative recounts the war years, shifting between pivotal events in the Pacific theater and the author's personal anecdotes. Though this volume is slightly

less whimsical than the first, there is quite a bit of humor as Mizuki balances serious scenes of battle and politics with cartoonish depictions of his antics bumbling through a newspaper delivery route, trade school, and service in Japan's army. The work is often critical of Japan's wartime actions. However, certain controversial issues such as the Bataan death march and the role of "comfort women" receive less attention than a Western author might give them, providing an opportunity for valuable discussion about bias and perspective. This account puts a very human face on a complicated time in history. Readers can easily jump into this installment without having read its predecessor, and military buffs will be especially riveted by the detailed account of naval battles. Those less interested in a play-by-play of warfare may find themselves skimming at times but will surely keep reading to see how Mizuki survives— and will be eager for the next volume, as this one ends on a cliff-hanger. Recommended where the first title has an audience. —Allison Tran, Mission Viejo Library, CA

In [Showa], legendary manga artist Mizuki draws an exaggerated, hyper-cartoony version of himself amid some of the grimmest realities of 20th Century Japan, and lets that tension work a sly, revelatory magic. —Shigeru Mizuki's Showa 1939–1944: A History of Japan [is] an unflinching history of the harsh realities of the war year's in Japan by a Japanese veteran. — Publishers Weekly Spring 2014 Top Ten —“Passionate and meticulously researched (with copious explanatory footnotes and endnotes) Showa is an astounding and sweeping epic, and a must-read. It offers an indelible and engaging combination of human storyline, riveting life-and-death plot twists, historical education and passionately conveyed moral messaging on the horrors of war.” —Popmatters

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. He has undisguised contempt for the architects of war and has no time for jingoism. He's just trying to explain what happened, point to where it all went wrong, and get the hell out of the firing line. Pulp the textbooks and replace them with Mizuki's manga. We might all learn something then.

To be clear, I really like Patrick Sherriff's review of this book, so you should go read that. This is an outstanding comic (the second out of four 500+ page volumes). It combines a very strong survey history (absolutely everything with politics and the military, as well as a bit of culture) of the time with the personal stories of the author's youth before and during the war. The art is fantastic. Mr. Mizuki utilizes different styles for political/war scenes than for his personal stories. Additionally, he does a wonderful job drawing Japanese streets and the interiors of homes and businesses. It is a great view into the time period. Mr. Mizuki's historical survey details all of the major battles between Japan and the United States, with a deep dive into Guadalcanal and the Solomon Islands (there is much less here on the inland battles in Asia). Shigeru was 20 when he was sent to the South Pacific as a soldier in the Japanese Army. He does an excellent job detailing the abuse he received from senior enlisted personnel, as well as both the boredom and terror of war. Like almost all soldiers throughout history, he had the universal experience of terrible food, rough climate (too hot or too cold; too hot in this case), and terrible sleeping conditions (days with little sleep; sleeping on the ground). Amazingly, Mr. Mizuki is able to view the overall Pacific War with a seemingly neutral view - to borrow a term from Dragnet, just the facts. The history is very well done. His personal narrative and ability to poke fun at himself makes this a classic.

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. For example most of the world knows that the women of Japan's subject nations could be forced to provide "comfort girls" sexual slaves for the soldiers, but this is not made explicit in this volume. Mistreatment of soldiers taken prisoner is shrugged off as a lack of planning to deal with their numbers and a general lack of supplies for everyone. Perhaps so, and just as likely a whitewash. Mizuki's brothers precede him into military service. They will emerge briefly. One we are told will become a war criminal, but the specifics of his crime are cloudy. As a soldier, Mizuki's service seems to be limited to being on the receiving end of beatings, the occasional favor that might have kept him away from the war and fleeting mention of friends from his home village. None of this is constructed to tell a story or to explain history. When some of his friends die we are told they were good people but we have too little about them to share his loss. Showa 1933-1944 may serve as an add-on book for a serious student of WWII but it is too episodic and shallow to be more than a sampling of Japan's WWII. I agree that the format of a Graphic Novel is a limiting factor. I also agree the artwork remain at a high caliber. Showa Vol II could have been better.

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