



Barefoot Gen, Volume One: A Cartoon Story of Hiroshima

Keiji Nakazawa , Art Spiegelman (Introduction) , Project Gen (Translator)

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This harrowing story of Hiroshima was one of the original Japanese manga series. New and unabridged, this is an all-new translation of the author's first-person experiences of Hiroshima and its aftermath, is a reminder of the suffering war brings to innocent people. Its emotions and experiences speak to children and adults everywhere. Volume one of this ten-part series details the events leading up to and immediately following the atomic bombing of Hiroshima.

Barefoot Gen, Volume One: A Cartoon Story of Hiroshima Details

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From Reader Review Barefoot Gen, Volume One: A Cartoon Story of Hiroshima for online ebook

Tom says

Let's be clear: WWII was awful, and the things that Japanese citizens went through were awful, and then having an atomic bomb dropped on them was also awful. Keiji Nakazawa has crafted a wonderful comic from a horrible series of events, making a dark part of history very accessible for people. This is a very important story and book.

My only issue was with the artwork, and it is on my end, not Nakazawa's. The drawings were clear and the pacing was great. I just had trouble getting into the art style itself (it's a very specific, popular style, but one I've just never found interesting on my own). The art, therefore, tended to draw me back out of the story, which subsequently made it harder to take seriously on the page.

But! That is a personal thing, and it could be very different for you (I am not subtracting any stars from my review because of that. It is what it is). I suggest you give this a shot, and see what you make of it. If nothing else, you should find the story arresting and a bit haunting. Especially near the end.

Anushree says

I am seriously becoming a fierce fan of Graphic Novels lately. This one was recommended by a generous GoodReads friend Pooja, and I will be ever so grateful to her for this. This is my introduction to the world of Japanese Manga and boy, am I blown away!

Keiji Nakazawa is a survivor of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima in Aug'45. Barefoot Gen is his alter ego. He says he imagined his alter ego standing atop a roof, barefoot, raising his voice loud and clear, over and against the destruction his dear city of 4, 00, 000 residents was subjected to.

The characters in Barefoot Gen have been inspired by the lives of the people in the life of Nakazawa and the ones around him.

Graphic novels bear this eerie ability to assist your imagination exactly to that level, where it sets in motion its own series. Nothing more (unlike movies) and nothing less either. Just the exact right amount.

The last 40 pages (and a few of them in between) had me literally howling. I clenched my fists and stretched my fingers and toes, as if it was here, in front of me, right now. I cannot even begin to imagine the amount of effort Nakazawa must have put in re-imagining the whole thing for us. My heart goes out to him and the lakhs of citizens of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, who had to suffer because a few people sitting at the top of a decision machinery could not decide whether to surrender or keep fighting. The war did end, but the lives impacted did not get their fair chance at survival.

I highly recommend this one, just as I recommend The Maus, both stories of a holocaust so horrible, that we can never afford to forget. NEVER.

Andre says

- 1) Deutsche Rezension
- 2) English Review

1) Deutsche Rezension

Dieser Manga war irgendwie enttäuschend für mich.

Ich war schon nicht sicher, ob die Einführung von Art Spiegelmann nötig war, ich meine, es ist klar, welche Art von Geschichte das ist, also warum das Thema angehen, dass viele in Deutschland Comics nur als etwas für Kinder sehen? Alle die diesen Band in die Hand nehmen, können aufgrund des Titels sehen worum es geht. Ich denke auch, dass die Einführung nicht hier drin sein sollte, schlicht deswegen weil es den Lesern die eigene Meinung aufzuzwingen scheint und ich bin bei Fiktion gegen so etwas.(view spoiler)

Nun, alles in allem hat dieser Manga bei mir nicht funktioniert. Ein Problem war das manche Szenen eher überdreht komisch waren und den Geschichtsfluss für mich gestört haben. Und für jedes Mal wo der Manga es schaffte den Militarismus und Gruppenzwang der Zeit einzufangen hat es Sachen wie die komischen clownhaften Gesichter von Gen und seinem Bruder oder Szenen wo ein 50-jähriger Lehrer es schafft Gen mit einem Schlag durch den Raum zu befördern. Nicht zu vergessen, dass ich bezweifle dass irgendjemand in der Situation von Gens Vater nicht sicherstellen würde, dass sein Sohn nicht Dinge sagt wie Gen hier in der Schule.

Für jede Szene wie den gutgemachten Abschied von Koji und seinem Vater (man weiß warum Koji zur Armee gehen will und warum sein Vater so sehr dagegen ist) oder dem Kamikaze Pilot der es nicht durchziehen will, kriegt man eine andere voller Predigen und erklärenden Mono- und Dialogen welche zu künstlich wirken (und in einigen Fällen nutzlos da die Bilder die Geschichte ehr erzählen) um zu was gut zu sein und nach einer Weile wurden sie nervig.

Versteht mich nicht falsch, Ich denke die Beispiele von Missbrauch, Gruppenzwang, Hass, Doppelmoral, Anschuldigungen und Gewalt (ebenso wie das recht selbstsüchtige und nervende Geweine von Gen und seinem Bruder) sind gut genug gehandhabt. Aber dennoch wirken einige Dinge fast komisch. Ich kann nur vermuten dass es sich um eine absichtliche Taktik handelt. Zumindest hoffe ich das.

Ich bin mir auch sicher, dass das ständige Weinen eine absichtliche Taktik ist, aber für mich ist es schlicht zu viel und verstärkt die Emotionen nicht sondern schwächt sie. Genauso wie die Menschen hier zu viele Dinge sagen die keiner je sagen würde, so weinen Gens Eltern (und andere) die ganze Zeit wegen allen möglichen Dingen und wenn sie dann plötzlich weinen sagt mir das nicht mehr viel.

Persönlich hätte ich es auch vorgezogen wenn die Menschen unmittelbar um Gen etwas weniger schwarz-weiß in dieser Geschichte gewesen wären(view spoiler).

Leider hilft der Zeichenstil auch nicht wenn es darum geht die Emotionen herüber zu bringen(view spoiler). Es kommt nicht zu oft vor, aber es geschieht oft genug um die Geschichte für mich zu stören.

Und leider, als die Bombe über der Stadt abgeworfen wird, bekommen wir ständig gesagt was wir sehen und bei mir funktioniert das nicht.(view spoiler) Genaugenommen blieb mir eine bestimmte Szene im Kopf welche das Problem welches ich mit dem Gebrauch der Bilder und Dialoge habe verkörpert.(view spoiler)

Weiterhin muss ich sagen, dass dieser Manga, wenn er auch die geschichtlichen Grundrisse richtig hat so gibt es doch viele Fehler bei den Details. Zum Beispiel:

Einstein war nie Teil des Manhattan Projekts.

Die Atombombe wurde nicht gebaut um Japan zu besiegen, sondern weil die Amerikaner befürchteten, die

Nazis könnten es zuerst schaffen. Und es ist zumindest diskutabel ob Japan zu besiegen wirklich der Grund für den Einsatz der zwei Bomben war (tatsächlich zeigt der Manga die Amerikaner noch in recht gutem Licht und tut so als ob die Japaner in diesen letzten Tagen alles aus purem Fanatismus taten, nicht auch aufgrund des Verhaltens der amerikanischen Truppen selber).

Ich denke der Manga schafft es gut die Selbstmorde der Zivilisten zu zeigen aber wenn auch ein bedeutender Teil der Okinawer im Kampf starb, so würde ich nicht sagen, dass fast die gesamte Bevölkerung getötet wurde.

Weder Churchill noch Stalin sind auf der Potsdamerkonferenz gezeigt und genaugenommen werden die Sowjets erst im nächsten Band erwähnt. Und selbst dann sind sie kaum darin (1-2 Bilder wenn's hoch kommt) und daher leicht vergessbar.

Ich weiß, dass viele Leute dieses Buch für seinen Realismus und Geschichte preisen, aber für mich funktioniert es nicht. All diese Elemente welche schlicht eigenartig und künstlich in meinen Augen sind, sind schlicht zu viele um sie zu ignorieren.

Und ich denke ich weiß warum das so ist:

Ich bin zu dieser Geschichte nicht als einer gekommen der kaum etwas über dieses geschichtliche Ereignis weiß, ganz im Gegenteil. Daher weiß ich, dass was hier gezeigt wurde nicht mal die Hälfte der Schrecken sind die damals geschahen und daher gab es für mich praktisch keine Schocks. Und glaubt mir, ich habe Bericht gelesen und Interviews gehört die aus Hiroshima und Nagasaki sind und weit schlimmeres zeigten als was hier dargestellt wurde(view spoiler).

Das ist vermutlich der Grund weshalb all diese Probleme mit den Mono- und Dialogen, dem Zeichenstil und der Geschichte für mich so hervorstechen.

Ich kann diesem Buch ein ok geben aber das war es dann auch schon.

2) English Review

This manga was kind of disappointing for me.

I was already not sure whether the introduction by Art Spiegelmann was necessary, I mean it is clear what sort of story this is, so why address the topic that many in Germany see comics as something purely for children? Anybody picking this up in the first place can tell what it is simply by the title. Also I think the introduction should not be in this simply because it seems to force its opinion on the reader and I am personally against it in works of fictions.(view spoiler)

Now, all in all this manga did not work for me. One problem was that some of the scenes were rather overtly comical and that disturbed the reading flow for me. And for every time that the manga manages to catch the militarism and peer pressure of the time they have things like the weirdly clownish faces by Gen and his brother or scenes were even a 50 something teacher manages to punch Gen around the room with one swipe. Not to mention that I doubt anybody in the situation of Gen's father would not make sure that his sons don't say stuff like Gen in such a school like this here.

For every scene like the well handled farewell of Koji and his father (you know why Koji wants to join the army and also why his father is so much against it) or the Kamikaze pilot who didn't want to go through with it, you get another one full of preachy and expository mono- and dialogues that seem way too artificial (and in some cases useless as the artwork told the story anyway) to be any good and after a while they became really annoying.

Don't get me wrong, I think the examples of abuse, peer pressure, hatred, hypocrisy, accusations and violence (as well as the pretty self-centered actions and annoying crying of Gen and his brother) is handled well enough. But still some things look almost comical. I can only assume that this is a deliberate tactic to give readers a break. At least I hope so.

I am also sure that the constant crying is a deliberate tactic, but for me it is simply too much and so doesn't strengthen the emotions but cheapens them. Just like people say so many things here that people would never say, Gen's parents (and others) cry all the time for all sorts of things and so them crying suddenly is not saying much for me anymore.

Personally I also would have preferred if the people in Gen's immediate area would have been a bit less black and white in this story(view spoiler).

Sadly the artwork is not always helping either when it comes to conveying the emotions(view spoiler). It doesn't happen too often, but it happens often enough to disrupt the story for me.

And sadly especially when the bomb is dropped on the city we constantly get told what we see and for me that doesn't work.(view spoiler) In fact one particular scene stuck in my head because it embodied so well the problem I have with the usage of artwork and dialogue here.(view spoiler)

Furthermore, I must say that this manga, even when getting the basic history right, is lacking in many terms of historical details. For instance:

Einstein wasn't part of the Manhattan Project.

The Atomic-bomb wasn't developed for beating Japan, but because the Americans feared the Nazis might develop one first. And it is at least debatable whether beating Japan was really the reason the USA dropped those two bombs on them (in fact the manga portrays the Americans in a tad too favorable light and acts like the Japanese did everything in those last days simply out of pure fanaticism, not also due to the behavior of the American troops themselves).

I think the manga does well with showing the suicides of civilians but while a significant percentage of Okinawans got killed in the battle, I would not say that nearly the entire population was killed as the manga states.

Neither Churchill nor Stalin are depicted at the Potsdam conference and there is in fact no mentioning whatsoever of the Soviets until the next volume. And even then there are barely in it (1-2 panels at most) and therefore easily forgettable.

I know that tons of people praise this book for its realism and story, but for me it doesn't work. All those elements that are plain weird and scream artificial in my mind are just too many to ignore.

And I think I know why that is:

I did not come to this story knowing barely anything about the actual historical event, quite the contrary. So I know that what is presented here is not even half of the horror that happened back then and so there was practically no shock factor for me. And trust me I have read reports and heard interviews from Hiroshima and Nagasaki that are far worse than what is presented here(view spoiler).

So that is probably why all these problems with the mono- and dialogues, the artwork and story stick out for me so much.

I can give this book and ok, but that is really all.

Will Lanham says

Barefoot Gen is a graphic novel that tells the events of the bombing of Hiroshima. The story is very, very graphic and tells the events in a very emotional story. I'm surprised how deep this story goes on explain the tragedy of the aftermath of Little Boy.

Louise says

Life in Hiroshima in the weeks leading up to the atomic bomb is depicted by cartoonist, Keiji Nakazawa. He created the 6 year old Gen as his alter ego to show the experience. The book climaxes with the bomb where Gen's family experience follows that of the Nakazawa family as the author writes in his forwarding note.

The portrait shows a hard life in cruel situation. Hunger is the dominant theme. There is great conformity as people parrot their support for the emperor and the honor of dying for him. As an objector to the war, Gen's father is branded a traitor and life for the family is even more miserable.

There are scenes depicting the trials of everyday life, the attempt to fish, grow wheat, catch locusts, rid oneself of lice and make and sell clogs. At school, love for the emperor is taught.

Nakazawa shows how life was no better outside of Hiroshima, in the countryside or in the military itself. The portrait of the indoctrination of the kamikaze pilots is chilling.

This is a powerful book.

James says

My 6th grade teacher, Ms. Greenwood, had the Barefoot Gen series on a shelf in our classroom. I read all of these there. I now realize what a profoundly anti-war statement it was, leaving these books within the grasp of 12-year-olds--these are graphic novels about the bombing of Hiroshima, from the perspective of a young civilian boy who loses almost his entire family.

The books juxtapose cartoons and the trivialities of youth with the singularly gruesome, nightmarish truths of using nuclear weapons on a heavily populated, largely civilian city. All in cartoon, you witness people's flesh melting off like batter; bloated bodies floating in a waterway, bursting; Gen helping to care for an artist who has barely survived, which involves replacing his bandages and cleaning his maggot infested wounds.

This book shows you some fucked up stuff. Reading it at that age goes a long way to molding your opinion of nuclear weapons and exposes the idiocy of trying to justify their use under any circumstances or in any context.

Bruce says

(Detail from a panel of volume two, this is from p. 6 of Barefoot Gen - The Day After)

It's taken me a while since I finished the tenth and final volume of the Barefoot Gen series to write up a thorough review. It's hard to say why, exactly, (the cause could simply be laziness) though I suspect the power of the subject matter has as much to do with it as anything else. Keiji Nakazawa, Gen's author, was a 7 year old child living in Hiroshima when the first atomic weapon obliterated the city and nearly everyone in

it. Barefoot Gen is his retelling of his own harrowing experiences living through atomic hell and its aftermath.

This towering work, which took Nakazawa about 20 years to complete, has been called the Manga Maus, and in fact, this edition comes with a forward/testimonial written by Art Spiegelman himself. There are, however, a few key differences between the two. While both are autobiographical, Spiegelman pivots his narrative around his relationship to his father the Holocaust survivor. His work is literally as retold to him. Gen, on the other hand, is a lightly-fictionalized tale that puts us (with young Gen Nakaoka) directly behind the eyes of an A-bomb survivor in Japan from 1945 through 1953. Where Spiegelman relieves tension by releasing readers into the present day and uses visual metaphor (dogs, cats, mice) as a distancing technique, Nakazawa delivers an unrelenting, first person narrative in more or less realistic fashion.

And (save for a 91-page digressive short story about baseball fandom at the start of Volume 8, which is a bit of a head-scratcher), it is unrelenting. I can't count how many times in reading this 2000+ page opus I found myself blurting, "But wait, it gets EVEN WORSE," as every social and biological consequence of militarism and nuclear fallout one could possibly imagine inexorably paid out. You want fascist oppression? Ritual suicide? Done. Heat shockwave melting the skin off those exposed? Right there. Watch helplessly as family members are crushed and burned to death in collapsed buildings and torched ruins. Suffer through the drownings of burn victims, maggot infestations at the height of summer, social ostracism, street beatings, revenge killings, malnutrition, starvation, descent into anarchy, gang violence, alcoholism and drug abuse, opportunistic politicians, inner organ fatigue, hemorrhaging, leukemia and other forms of cancer, espionage and predatory bureaucracy, loved ones dying mysteriously like clockwork all around you... oh, yes, and sometimes people lose their hair.

What's so remarkable about all this is how sanguinely the horror is packaged. Nakazawa's refusal or incapacity to photorealistically portray keloid scarring, broken and ruptured limbs, human and animal waste, and similarly squeamish-shrinking content may undercut some of its visual power and coherence, but it does make this unbelievable story more palatable. As grounded as this series is in historic reality, it would be tragic to turn readers away or allow them to dismiss the material as fantasy. It is perhaps foremost the eyewitness credibility of the content that lends it such importance. On top of that, young Gen Nakaoka is an overwhelmingly positive protagonist. His steadfast refusal never to give up, his consistent moral honesty, and his trickster-like resilience in a mad, mad world motivate perseverance in readers as much as in his fictional friends and family.

In this way, Nakazawa also appears to be targeting a younger audience than Spiegelman. In fact, his dialogue can lack sophistication, even be on-the-nose or preachy. Take the following example from page 100 of the first volume:

"Dear, I guess we have no choice but to cooperate with the war effort, no matter how wrong we think it is. }Sob...{ I can't stand it anymore! Being bullied like this and called a traitor..."

"It's despicable... the way the authorities use their power to force people to go to war! They're deceiving everyone, turning people into human bullets..."

That reads to me a bit like classic dubbed chopsocky deadpan: "You and your clan of thieving warlords will now pay for the death of my brother. I will not rest until I have tasted my revenge."

Another typical selection appears at p. 130:

"Mr. Kishi, please don't be too hard on the boys. They aren't getting enough to eat."

“You musn’t indulge them, Miss Osato. No matter how tough it is on them, we’ve got to raise them to be strong children for the Empire.”

Now where is that Darth Vader sound effect when you need it?

Yet if this is a work written at something of a fourth-grade reading level, it is no less gripping or significant. In fact, I was moved to let my fourth-grade daughter read it on the strength of one of the prefaces, which mentioned that the series is introduced to Japanese schoolchildren at that age. (She devoured it, loved it, and was willing to talk about it with me.) Moreover, reading this work allowed me to understand more immediately the impact of historic events I had otherwise taken for granted. For example, the onset of the Korean War takes on a chilling aspect in the context of exposed Japanese civilians less than 5 years after the devastation of Hiroshima/Nagasaki/Tokyo. Nakazawa conveys this information through the chain link of a US military installation, thereby shrewdly juxtaposing power and powerlessness.

This series is a great read, a must read. It is a terrifying, towering contribution to literature that stands as a warning to humanity of the consequences of aggression, the excesses of brutality, and the painful hubris born of arrogance, ignorance, and intolerance. I have read it. My daughter has read it. My son ~~will read it in a couple of years~~ has read it. I’m so happy we have this in our library.

Thumbnail synopsis of each book in the series:

* BG1 – chronicles a 7 year old boy’s struggles in Hiroshima, Japan, enduring the hardships of war under Japan’s militaristic regime in 1945 as an Allied invasion looms ever nearer. But the US drops an atomic bomb instead... and immediate hell erupts.

* BG2 – “The Day After” (second only to BG7 in narrative brutality; reading these books especially will build character)

* BG3 - Gen plays nursemaid to a dying artist shunned by his own family

* BG4 - Gen, Tomoko, and Ryuta take refuge with “friends” in Eba; Gen returns to school

* BG5 - Ryuta takes on the yakuza as Gen learns his ABCCs

* BG6 - Gen intervenes in a few suicide attempts and earns money stripping the city’s remains

* BG7 - USGHQ arrests Gen for distributing a first-hand account of the bomb... and worse things happen

* BG8 – Gen learns the difference between alcohol and Philopon

* BG9 – urban renewal takes Gen’s improvised house and Gen finds an art teacher

* BG10 – Gen finds work as a sign painter and falls in love

{As of this revision, my daughter has published her own website with friends. Her short, trenchant review of the Gen series can be found here. ...I'm so proud!}

Nancy says

This graphic novel has been around a long time, but for some reason I only picked it up a couple of weeks ago. It is a chronicle of a child's life just before the bombing of Hiroshima. Soon after I picked up Barefoot Gen, the 9.0 earthquake and massive tsunami hit Japan, and one of the nuclear power plants was damaged and began to vent radioactivity. Japan relies on nuclear power for a major chunk of its electric power. Nuclear power plays a major role partly because fossil energy sources are scarce in Japan and also are carbon dioxide emitters. Reading Nakazawa's Barefoot Gen during the current catastrophe underscored Japan's love-hate relationship with nuclear power. No country's consciousness could be unchanged by the brutality of WWII (both by Japan and to Japan.) But being the first victims of nuclear war had a profound impact on the Japanese identity.

Barefoot Gen is a graphic illustration of daily life toward the end of the war. By then, most people were poor, hungry, and suffering the loss of family members. Some, like Gen's father, were becoming more vocal in opposition to war, and the lives of such people were made even more difficult by accusations of cowardice and treachery against the Emperor. There were acts of love, kindness, and nobility in the midst of privation, but significantly, never from the authorities. Gen and his siblings were subject to a hundred small cruelties by other kids, and also by teachers and authority figures. The kids were cruel in their retaliations as well. These small cruelties became as nothing when the bombs were dropped.

There must be a hundred scholarly tomes on Japanese identity, the World War, and the nuclear age. Egads, such heavy going. Barefoot Gen has been criticized as too simplistic and crudely drawn, but it conveys so much, so effortlessly. To me, it seemed to raise the questions: is the Emperor truly divine? Can the Government be trusted? Is anything ever going to be the same?

Vivek Tejuja says

Never a good time to read about Hiroshima and Nagasaki and yet something draws me to picking up more books about that time and what happened to them during WWII. I don't know what it is – maybe just some fascination or dread even (which I will never admit) – the fact that we know how it ended and yet we want to know more about it – the horror of it all, but more than that it is the human stories that come out of it, with every new read on the bombings. Yes, that's why for sure. And this time in the form of a graphic novel.

“Barefoot Gen” is a series consisting of 10 books. The story begins in Hiroshima during the final months of the World War II. Six-year-old Gen Nakaoka and his family live in poverty and struggle to make ends meet. Gen's father Daikichi is critical of the war. He hates the idea of it. And then in all of this, his brother Koji joins the Navy and on August 6th, the atomic bomb is dropped on Hiroshima, killing Gen's father and his siblings. His mother and he escape and “Barefoot Gen” is the story of that survival, as they witness the horror of war and the bombing.

The book is autobiographical in nature and though you think it is only but a comic, it manages to wrench your heart. The perspective of war from the eyes of a six-year-old and the maturity as well of it will leave you speechless.

Books such as “Barefoot Gen” will always be so relevant (sadly so) – given the atrocities of war and the common folk who are always in the eye of the storm. For most part of reading the book, I just didn't know

how to react. There was a lot of sadness and love and more than anything else, a lot of anger at a chosen few who decide to do what they do, when all that the majority wants is peace and the chance to be alive and thrive. A read not to be missed out on for sure. Can't wait to read the other nine parts.

[illegible]

Mohamed El-Mahallawy says

Veronika KaoruSaionji says

Ahmed Elsayy says

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Guguk says

Komik ini terasa mengenaskan sekaligus menggugah karena dengan jujur dan berani mengakui, betapa suatu 'negara' (atau kelompok tertentu, entah karena punya duit atau kekuasaan lainnya) dapat menipu dan mencuci otak orang-orangnya sendiri agar bersemangat dalam kebodohan.

Itu saja... (untuk jilid 1 dulu ^^)

Rebecca McNutt says

If there's one graphic novel that I'd recommend to anyone, even if they hate the manga style with a passion, it would be *Barefoot Gen*. Also a shocking if not completely horrific and graphic film, this is the story of a young boy caught in the chaos of WWII's Hiroshima, the disaster that leaves him struggling to survive when the people around him are destroyed in an instant. He's resilient, but the terror awaiting him and his family makes for a powerful cautionary tale for any reader. This is only Volume 1 but it's an evocative and frightening story throughout, sharing the legacy of Hiroshima for many years to come.
