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???0 [Eien No Zero] Details

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Author : Naoki Hyakuta , ?? ??

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Richard Stuart says

This book is not so much a novel as it is a telling of war stories of Japanese Zero fighter pilots in WWII. It is also a very compelling characterization of a man, Kyuzo Miyabe, told by the survivors who knew him. And it is an indictment of the the IJN's top commanders as ignorant, arrogant, foolhardy, and monstrously cruel. Finally, the book discredits the notion that kamikaze pilots are akin to the fanatical suicide terrorists of today.

I loved this book because I learned so much from it, and yes, it also made me cry.

Dan says

The Eternal Zero by Naoki Hyakuta features old men reminiscing about their experiences as World War Two pilots—a topic that would usually not attract me to purchase and read any novel. But I happened across the estimable Lark Benobi's comments: *"Every once in a while a book comes along that is not what I would usually choose to read, and I end up being captivated by it. This is one."* Lark is correct: this is a surprisingly and unusually engrossing story of Kentaro and Keiko, two adult siblings' search for the character of Kyuzo Miyabe, their long-dead biological grandfather, known by the siblings only as a name. Their search occurs through their interviews with a series of his war-time comrades-in-arms, pilots of Japanese Zero fighter planes, *"a magnificent fighter"* and *"truly a heaven-sent warplane"*. The recollections of these very old men—presumably all in their late 70s or 80s—refracts the image, personality, and actions of their grandfather: coward, hero, or both?; patriot, recreant, or both? Miyabe's personality unfolds slowly through the interviews, perhaps too slowly for some readers, and ends with the siblings understanding better their biological grandfather, their beloved Grandpa who became their grandmother's second husband, themselves, and Japan's war-time military culture.

This is a 3.5 star read for me, due especially to the lengthy digressions about World War II aerial warfare and warplanes. I may reconsider my assessment of *The Eternal Zero* if after several months it remains vivid in my memory, as did J. G. Farrell's *The Singapore Grip* and J. G. Ballard's *Empire of the Sun*, both of which I also approached with great skepticism and both of which have remained with me many years after I read them.

Lark Benobi says

Every once in a while a book comes along that is not what I would usually choose to read, and I end up being captivated by it. This is one. The novel reads like oral history from a series of very old men looking back on their war experiences. Their personal stories interweave and repeat and support one another and they also allow the author to explore many points of view about the militarism of Japan, the wastefulness of war, and the nature of heroism.

There is so much detail here that is historically accurate and heartbreakingly. Author Hyakuta is apparently a nationalist who denies the rape of Nanking but the novel itself is complicated and nuanced. The prose is

workmanlike but totally works in context, given that most of the story is told by old men who were conscripted or volunteered for the military before completing high school. There is so much detail about the history of the aerial combat in the Pacific arena that I never thought about before, and yet found fascinating.

For example there is a conversation between a mechanic and a pilot where they mutually come to the realization that, even though the Zero is superior to any American plane at the time of their conversation, the industrial tools to make the Zero engines are all made in America, and so there will be no way to improve the design, and the planes themselves will be manufactured with increasingly worn manufacturing equipment.

And indeed by 1943 the US had developed a new plane to surpass the Zero, because of Japan's lack of access to new materials and equipment.

Also: Many of the men's remembrances praise the Zero for its ability to travel long distances over the Pacific, a huge advantage in the beginning of the war...but then they share stories of how this strength in the Zero led to overconfidence, and to increasingly long missions, where pilots regularly would run out of fuel and fall into the sea on the way back to base.

There are many details like this that allowed me to understand, better than before, the interconnectedness of culture, economics, geography, and the decisions of individual human beings, and how all these things worked together to determine the war's outcome.

In some cases the novel troubled me. In some cases I felt pulled in uncomfortable directions, or in need of doing research myself on what was being presented to me as fact (although the book is fiction, what is presented here is clearly meant to be taken as true). I've yet to research the claim made many times in the novel that the Japanese had meant to declare war before the Pearl Harbor attack but that a communications snafu led instead to the undeserved reputation that the Japanese had made a "sneak attack." But maybe because of these questions, more than in spite of them, I thought this novel was extraordinary.

Shawn says

Every few years I find a novel that is truly astonishing. Of these rare finds, most are by authors that I have never heard of and many of the books are about subjects I had never explored through fiction. This was one of those books. *Eternal Zero* is the best book I have read in 2017. Originally written in Japanese, the English version was published in 2015. *Eternal Zero* by Naoki Hyakuta was amazing. It follows a clever storyline with a brother and sister researching their grandfather, Kyuzo Miyabe. Miyabe died a Kamikaze pilot near the end of the war. This book gives the reader some amazing insights into both the sensibilities of modern Japan and the motives and ambitions of the people who fought for Imperial Japan.

Many reviewers have thought that this book has whitewashed Japan's past in not connecting the characters to war crimes. Others have felt that this book is a simplistic anti-war novel. Actually, I believe the term anti-war book is overused. I would have a hard time identifying a book of general readership that is pro-war, but I am getting off track.

I have thought quite a bit about how I wanted to write this review but somehow I do not feel that I can do the novel justice. It is simply amazing.

The only thing that I could identify as a slight annoyance, and it is probably more an issue in the translation

rather than the work itself, is the language and phrases seemed Americanized. A few examples; study their heads off, riled up, doing his damnedest, hanging out. I cannot imagine Imperial Japanese service men speaking like cowpokes from Dodge. I hope that more work is done on translating the text and take heart when I think of how many years and translations have been done on the works of Tolstoy and Hugo.

This is a tremendous work and would recommend it to anyone interested in the Japan or the War in the Pacific.

Stephen Douglas Rowland says

Melodramatic, full of cliches, and not particularly well-written, it's still an entertaining novel, especially if you're interested in the Imperial Japanese Navy during the Pacific War.

Larry Olson says

A remarkable story of a Zero fighter pilot, his will to live and survive the perils of being a fighter pilot in World War II. The pilots grandchildren, by interviewing surviving service men who knew their grandfather begin to put the puzzle pieces of his life together. Some remembered him as one of the greatest pilots in the war and others branded him a coward. The power of the novel is the discovery of their truth and how his death as a kamikaze pilot ultimately brought life to those he left behind.

Kaz says

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Takumi Morimoto says

This is one of the book that I loved most in my life. This book is written by Japanese, but the purpose of the book relates all of the countries.

This book is the story about the Zero-Fighter during the WWII. It tells us about the brutality of war, throughout one Zero Fighter's experience during the war.

If you know Japanese and like history, this is the book that I recommend the most,because when you start reading, I'm sure that your eyes can not look away from the book.

Kasa Cotugno says

As adults, Kentaro and Keiko, brother and sister, discover that the beloved man they've called Grandpa all their lives was their grandmother's second husband, and that their biological grandfather, Kyozo Miyabe, died in the War of the Pacific in a kamikaze raid. That is the fictional framework on which Hyakuta has hung this extraordinary history telling the history from the Japanese point of view. The two are fortunate to come

into contact with men who knew their grandfather and learn about the war that shaped their destinies, that of their country, and the entire world. Their remembrances form an oral history, centered around Miyabe-san's complex personality and the role he played in all their lives. Most particularly, this is the most in-depth work I've read about the air war in the Pacific, the differences in ideologies between the combatants, and the materiel employed by each side. ("The battles may have taken place between aircraft carriers, but in the end it was humans fighting.") Deep in the book is a very apt analogy -- the war in Europe was more like a game of chess, involving the toppling of a king to gain dominance, whereas the Pacific war was like the game Go, involving the strategic positioning of dominance. There is so much addressed here, and from what I gather, Hyakuta was inspired to write this, his first book, at fifty years of age as a refutation of the claim that the al queda terrorists who flew into the Twin Towers are like kamikaze pilots. He points out the differing motivations and ideologies, in that the former attacked civilians whereas the latter were performing an act of war. This may be a bit simplistic, but it is startling to realize how little that distant war is understood by the current generation.

Siu-on Chan says

I would like to make a few points about this book (I read the Chinese translation by a Taiwanese publisher)

First, though 90% of the book reads okay to good, the ending sucks; it introduces a cheesy twist, which kills the mood of the entire book. It is the anti-thesis of the book.

Second, unlike what some Hong Kong reviewers claim, the book isn't anti-war. The author shows no remorse for the Japanese invasion. He expresses his regrets in two aspects: (1) Japanese failure to seize the opportunity to defeat the Americans when Japanese fighters were dominating; (2) Japanese refusal to surrender and bringing in more sacrifices when the loss was certain.

Third, if you are a pro-China, anti-war type, don't pick this up; you will be pissed off by the rightist view portrayed in the book.

Zoey says

Rating: 3.5

"When I closed my eyes I noticed the buzzing of cicadas. It was the first time I found their cries beautiful. And I thought that seven summers later, the cicadas' offspring would sing in just the same way. When I wondered what Japan would be like then, I was filled with great sorrow."

The Eternal Zero is a rather unique novel in which it compresses oral history in the form of a narrative as the main character, Kentaro, attempts to learn more about his long deceased grandfather who died as a kamikaze pilot in the Second World War. The novel offers a set of fresh perspectives about the war, specifically regarding the suicidal operations of the kamikaze pilots. Hyakuta picks apart the reality of the war situation—from the structural issues of the Imperial Navy to the psyche of the pilots.

That said, *The Eternal Zero* falls short in terms of artistic expression. As Kentaro and Keiko interviewed person to person in documenting historical information about Miyabe, their grandfather, the words embedded

a highly detailed, chronicled writing style which was tedious and uninspiring to read at times. Thus, I would recommend this book more to those who are interested in cold hard facts about the war. Less for leisure, recreational-seeking readers such as me.

Overall, I did still enjoy the book thoroughly and even cried a number of times. Seeing how small the lives of the pilots mattered to the Imperial Navy—easily discarded and constantly undervalued—broke my heart. The intestinal fortitude of Kyuzo Miyabe and the love he possessed for his wife and daughter, often portrayed as two sides of the same coin, stirred something in me. His tragic fate, in my opinion, seems to present the message that "War is cruelty and you cannot refine it."

Chin Joo says

I had earlier introduced readers to the movie based on this book. I finally got down to reading the Chinese translation of the book and it did not disappoint. Unsurprisingly, the book surpasses the movie in terms sensitivity and nuance. Readers, unlike movie audience, have the opportunity to pause and reflect. And reflect they must for not only is this book balanced and thought-provoking, it also challenges the common image of the Kamikaze pilots, one of youths brain-washed and while absolutely courageous, were never able to consider the futility of their mission.

The story is simple. A pair of siblings found out from their mother that she was the step daughter of their grandfather and the real grandfather died in the Second World War as a Kamikaze pilot. She wanted to learn more about him and asked her children to see if they could find any about him. They tried and in the process managed to interview a few of their grandfather's old comrades who encountered him at different theatres and had diverse views of him. While they all agreed that he was an exceptionally skillful pilot, they were less consistent when talking about his courage.

The story is written following a rough chronological order with the siblings coincidentally first meeting people who came across their grandfather in the early stage of the Pacific War and then progressively finding people who knew him in the later stage of the war. Parallel to this is the narrative which started with accusations of him being a coward ending up with him looking more like a good husband and father who refused to die, only because he wanted to go back to his family. Yet he volunteered himself as a Kamikaze pilot, a vocation without hope of survival, and died just days before Japan surrendered. Why did he do this? His reason would be used by the author to try and draw the readers into the wider motivations of the people who became Kamikaze pilots.

While it is easy for people to fall under the spell of some 'isms', the Kamikaze concept takes things into the extreme. You are given a mission that guarantees death with or without success. It is impossible for any sensible person to imagine agreeing to such a mission, yet they did, so for a long time after the war, when historians consider the state of mind of these pilots, they could only conclude that they have been brain-washed and therefore volunteered for such a fanatical vocation. This book did not try to dispute that, but takes the reader through the experience of those who volunteered and the mental and emotional struggle they had to go through especially if their names appeared on the charts in the morning.

Almost everyone in the book, whether relating their own experiences or the experiences of others said that they would not volunteer for such a stupid vocation. But in many instances, they had to make the choice openly at the parade square when everyone else was there. Few would dare to say no for fear of immediate reprisals. Intriguingly, many of those who were given the chance to indicate their choices in a close ballot

said yes. There appears to be a climate of fear that nothing was secret, their superiors would know their choice and the reprisals would be unendurable. However, it is certain death we are talking about, what could be worse?

This is where we gain some insights into the psyche of the pilots - volunteering does not imply certain call-up. Volunteering puts you in the 'eligible' list, if you were lucky, you might not be called up. Not-volunteering volunteers you for certain transfer to the most hopeless theatres as an infantry soldier where conditions were the worst, which was equivalent to certain death plus a period of suffering before the end comes. And so they took their chances. Those who did not find their names in the list in the morning heaved a sigh of relief and lived for one more day. Those who did tried to psyche themselves up by convincing themselves that their sacrifice would not be in vain, mostly without success. The pilots interviewed talked about to the letters written by the pilots before their missions (now kept in the Chiran Peace Museum) which convey a sense of loss, helplessness, frustration, and love for their families. This helps to humanise the Kamikaze pilots who would then go on to the most inhuman missions. There is always a contradiction in considering the plight of these pilots. In this book they appeared to understand the hopelessness of their cause and the uselessness of their death, yet many would have been documented to fanatically throw their lives away for their emperor. How should one reconcile the two contradictory sides of the Kamikazes?

I always think that the Japanese culture is a very nuanced and multi-layered one. It is easy to misinterpret them (although sometimes I suspect misrepresenting them serves some political purpose) and so as a nation they look really unrepentant, with the constant visits to pay their respects to Class A war criminals in the Yasukuni Shrine and their irresponsible textbooks. Perhaps in trying to read their history, one should suspend our judgement for a while and then try and see if there are more shades than we know before we pass an overly simplistic judgement. The author himself displays some of this nuance in this book. As a one being called a right-winger, I was surprised that in the book he wrote (through one of the characters) that "A country that sends good people to their death like this might as well be destroyed."

This book serves the reader at different levels. One can take it as a simple historical fiction book, or a book that induces some reflection and contemplation, or even a book on the Pacific War from the Japanese perspective. Personally, I think the value of the latter should not be under-rated just because it is fiction. I believe that the author did his work in researching and interviewing when writing this book. I wish that it would be translated into English soon so that more readers can read it and make their own judgement.

s says

Awesome. Amazing.

This story is about soldiers of kamikaze attack in WW2. Written by the view of soldiers who all didn't have a choice to refuse. They all had to face their death. I was simply astonished by their "samurai" spirit. I hate the word "samurai spirit" but I believe they were the "real" Japanese men: bushi.

This is fiction but still this story itself is based on history. Good story to know WW2 in Japan.

Yui S says

Have this compelling Kamikaze story been translated yet? If not, it better be soon. This historical fiction about WWII warfront Japan explores to reveal the humane emotions of suicidal bombers through a touching

love story - my eyes got teary more than a few times, and I could not put the book down!

This fiction is also like a long research paper on one controversial topic often analysed but neither adequately backed by convincing facts nor delivered through much mainstream media. The author tackles to answer the question: did the Kamikaze young men wish to die? Did they really 'happily volunteer' as told later by the officials who lived? Many views are out there to answer those critical questions. Naoki Hyakuta's version is one that really speaks.

Saeko says

At the moment, this book is only available in Japanese, but I heard that it would be translated into English soon. As a peace-loving person, I'm very happy to hear that. Please read it when published.

This is a very beautiful anti-war novel, and also a courageous one, throwing doubts on controversial issues about WW2. The author, through describing a life of a Japanese zero fighter (and his love, emotional turmoil etc.), who wanted to go back home alive but had to give up his life as a suicidal kamikaze attacker, shows sinfulness of mass media (propaganda) and high-up officials as well as incompetence of the Japanese hierarchical bureaucratism at the time. As a result, lots of precious lives were thrown away in the war.

I felt "courageous" because talking about any view, if not self-tormenting, related to the WW2 had been regarded as taboo in Japan. Therefore, old people in Japan, who experienced the war, remained silent all the time. Yet, the author seems to have felt someone had to keep their records, from which we can learn a lot. So, after a considerably detailed research, he wrote the story.

Personally I feel this is the novel not only for the Japanese but also for the non-Japanese, especially Americans (because it also depicts preciousness of American soldiers' lives and sadness that those young people, regardless of their nationality, had to fight due to the situation at the time). When there's a war, people tend to condemn the other side, but all, both winners and losers, are victims. If we really want the peace, in my opinion, what we should do is to try to understand what brought the situation with a calm mind, to share the pain of the victims of either side, to resolve not to be fooled by propaganda and to pray for the eternal peace "together". I assume that's what the author aimed for.

By the way, this novel was turned into a movie last year. So, I'll put its trailer here:<http://youtu.be/gmMIWI5Z66I> . However 2 hours is not enough to represent all messages in the novel, so I would like you to read it when published. :)
