

SHOGUN, by James Clavell

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Shogun is a high spirited, intriguing, well-written novel about post-feudal Japan. Based on a true incident in Japanese history, Shogun, which translated means "Lord of Lords" is a tale of power and the chess-like maneuvers men use to obtain this title of wealth and honor.

The story takes place in the 1600's, a time when both Japan and Europe sought and conquered other civilizations for booty and power. Clavell does a superb job of explaining the thoughts, actions, and beliefs of this time period, through the actions of his characters.

The story has a myriad of characters weaving a web of intrigue to obtain the ultimate title of power; Shogun. The three most prevalent are: Blackthorne, a cunning and intelligent English navigator, searching for the vast riches of China and to destroy his Portuguese enemy. Lady Mariko, a Japanese noblewoman, who became Blackthorne's guide and mentor, and finally Lord Toranaga, Clavell's most complex character who controls the lives of Blackthorne, Mariko and others. Toranaga is also the actor, the general and the man seeking to become Shogun.

Mr. Clavell is a master storyteller fusing history with fantasy. He can keep one spellbound and wondering for all 802 pages, like Coleridge's Ancient Mariner whose tale captivated the groom and his party. Clavell tells more than a story; he dwells within the thoughts and actions of his characters. His knowledge and perception of the psyche and culture of Japan and Europe is admirable. Clavell shows clearly the confrontations and readjustments Blackthorne must go through to survive in this new and hostile world.

The book is exciting, entertaining and knowledgeable, but it is also very exhausting. It has 802 pages filled with plots and subplots, that can overwhelm the reader. If one is interested in Japanese history and culture or in a stirring adventure story, Shogun is recommendable for summer reading. It will be both entertaining and enlightening.