



The Gods of Heavenly Punishment

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In this evocative and thrilling epic novel, fifteen-year-old Yoshi Kobayashi, child of Japan's New Empire, daughter of an ardent expansionist and a mother with a haunting past, is on her way home on a March night when American bombers shower her city with napalm—an attack that leaves one hundred thousand dead within hours and half the city in ashen ruins. In the days that follow, Yoshi's old life will blur beyond recognition, leading her to a new world marked by destruction and shaped by those considered the enemy: Cam, a downed bomber pilot taken prisoner by the Imperial Japanese Army; Anton, a gifted architect who helped modernize Tokyo's prewar skyline but is now charged with destroying it; and Billy, an Occupation soldier who arrives in the blackened city with a dark secret of his own. Directly or indirectly, each will shape Yoshi's journey as she seeks safety, love, and redemption.

The Gods of Heavenly Punishment Details

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Author : Jennifer Cody Epstein

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From Reader Review The Gods of Heavenly Punishment for online ebook

Harvee says

About the book: A story of the war between the Japanese and the Americans in WWII, the atrocities of war on both sides, the innocent families and people affected both in the U.S. and in Japan. The fire bombing of the city of Tokyo in 1945 when innocent civilians were killed or maimed is, I believe, the reason for the title, The Gods of Heavenly Punishment.

My comments: I was confused while reading the book. I didn't know whether I should hate the Japanese for their war atrocities and killing downed American pilots during the war or hate the Americans for killing and maiming 100,000 innocent civilians in the later firebombing of Tokyo.

The book presents multiple points of view. We grow to detest a Japanese war criminal at the same time as we like his young daughter Yoshi and feel sorrow for his wife. We are dismayed at the execution of a young American pilot by Japanese troops in Manchuria and we feel pity for his wife. We are also appalled at the suffering and the death of civilians during the firebombing of Tokyo by American planes. At the end of the book, however, the various threads of the story are woven together and Yoshi makes a gesture of contrition to the wife of the American pilot killed during the war.

It is not an easy book to read. It is depressing in parts because the circumstances of war and the horrific effects on the people involved. Kudos to Jennifer Cody Epstein for tackling this subject and bringing all the elements together in a question of whether war justifies all actions. The book makes us think about the justification for killing innocents during war with its quote from one of the characters: "It's not murder! It's war."

SeaTreasure says

One of the best novels that I have read in a long time! Relating the tale of 3 families who's lives are interwoven and irrevocably changed by the bombing of Toyko during WWII. The author has shown the human side of war and how it effects both the losers and the victors, both paying a price way too high. A book that will touch you deeply as you turn the tear stained pages. Ms. Epstein has written a best seller!

Joanna says

A lush and eloquent portrait of humanity. This heartbreakin, sensual and suspenseful novel opened my eyes to some grim and also inspiring realities about the second World War. As with her previous novel, The Painter From Shanghai, Jennifer Cody Epstein has done extensive research and manages to convey details with a masterful touch. Read this book!

Bob James says

I had a chance to review this book on Fiction Addict (<http://fictionaddict.com/2013/05/28/t...>). You can get more great fiction recommendations there. Here is the review.

As I read **The Gods of Heavenly Punishment**, I felt as if I was slowly flipping through an album of snapshots showing an amazing period of history. We often think when looking at our friends' snapshots, "if only these pictures could tell me their story." In this case, Jennifer Cody Epstein had the characters step out of their pictures to tell their stories. These snapshots of history take us from pre-World War II peace to the horrors of war and then on to survivors seeking peace after the war.

The story revolves around three families whose lives interweave and connect in varied ways. We see a shy young man named Cam who stumbles into love, marries his girlfriend Lacy, and becomes a pilot; we watch a bright young Japanese girl, Yoshi, and her family as she grows up; we catch Billy, the young American boy who grew up in Japan, as he begins learning to use his new camera. As time goes on, Cam says goodbye to his wife and infant son to join the Army Air Force and participates in the raid on Tokyo as a member of Doolittle's Raiders. Yoshi's father, a builder, aids the Japanese army in Manchuria as the Japanese war machine builds its overwhelming army, while she stays at home dealing with her mother. Meanwhile, Billy's father helps the American military prepare for the devastating fire bombing of Tokyo, while Billy becomes an intelligence officer utilizing his knowledge of the Japanese language and culture. As the story winds down we discover how each of these characters has survived and overcome the hardships they dealt with during the war.

This is not the kind of book that I would normally choose to read, but I took a chance on it because it is from an era of history that I love: Japan and the time just before, during and after World War II. The characters truly come to life and I found myself entrenched in their lives as I read. Part of the reason is I felt that the story was historically accurate and dealt with the nitty-gritty aspects of their lives. As the firebombing of Tokyo was about to begin I wanted to yell at Yoshi to find a way to hide, hoping that she would survive the bombing to come. As Epstein told the horrific story of the firebombing, I could almost smell the smoke and feel the heat of the flames as they engulfed the city. She captured the essence of the Japanese spirit, as I understand it, in the immediate aftermath of the bombing as we saw not only the shock, but also the determination of the people to survive and overcome this cataclysm. This is just one example of how she brings her characters to life and draws the reader into the story.

Perhaps even more interesting to me was the subtlety of the symbolism throughout the book. The story is told in linguistic snap shots and photography plays an important part of the story line involving Billy; especially in his interactions with Yoshi. Another major symbol basically brings the story in a complete circle that connects Yoshi and Lacy as it appears throughout the book. As I think back on how Epstein put together these literary snapshots I can only marvel at how much of the story was told by what was not written. As a reader I was forced to use my imagination to fill in the blanks. Even still, there were times when I was left wanting more. Having read enough books where I said, "Enough already!" this was an interesting change.

I loved the book. I am looking forward to reading more books by Jennifer Cody Epstein in days to come.

Marg says

It is probably not a huge surprise to those of you who have followed my blog for some time to learn that as soon as I heard about this book I wanted to read it! A well-written book set against the backdrop of World War II. Yes, please! I had intended to read the author's debut novel after hearing many good things about it but I haven't yet done so.

I was, however, very pleasantly surprised to find that this book was so much more than just another war story. Jennifer Cody Epstein has written a lovely exploration of the lives of a group of characters that spans the years leading up to World War II, a couple of key events that don't necessarily get a lot of coverage now, and then touching base again after the war is over.

To read more head to

<http://www.theintrepidreader.com/2013...>

Erin says

Find the enhanced version of this and other reviews at: <http://flashlightcommentary.blogspot....>

Jennifer Cody Epstein's *The Gods of Heavenly Punishment* is unlike any WWII fiction I've ever picked up. In many ways it is a personal story, driven by individual experiences, but at the same time it is a war story, shaped by the contention of two nations vying to defeat one another.

As far as favorite character, it is a toss-up between Hana and Anton. Hana is glamorous, intelligent, but emotionally complex. From the beginning it is clear her story will be marred by tragedy, but I couldn't help being drawn to her, couldn't help hoping her story would have a happy ending. Then there is Anton. Other characters are affected by the war, directly or indirectly, but no one else suffers such emotional conflict and inner turmoil as the American architect whose legacy is built into the Tokyo skyline. Neither Hana nor Anton is what I would call admirable, but these flawed characters - the kind who aren't black and white, the kind who aren't easy to understand, the kind prone to very realistic failings - these are the kind that make great fiction.

But good characters are only the beginning. For instance, I really loved how Epstein applied the six degrees of separation concept in this piece. Her cast is divided by background and culture, but each member plays an important role and represents something different in Yoshi's journey. I've encountered the concept in fiction before, but rarely have I seen it done with such artistry and depth as I found here.

Before I close, I'd like to offer a word of caution to more sensitive readers. *The Gods of Heavenly Punishment* is a work of historic fiction and Epstein is one of those admirable writers who isn't intimidated by period appropriate terminology. Personally I admire Epstein's candor, but for those who are less inclined to appreciate her dedication to historical accuracy, consider yourself warned as this book utilizes language considered both inappropriate and offensive in the modern age.

The Gods of Heavenly Punishment tackles some heavy subject matter (infidelity, post-traumatic stress disorder, prejudice, war crimes, etc.), but in the end the book is a beautiful story about survival, hope, and

the courage it takes to pick up the pieces and forge ahead.

Patricia says

The horrendous atrocities of war and the delicate strength of the human spirit are all wrapped up in this novel about the firebombing of Tokyo during World War II. **THE GODS OF HEAVENLY PUNISHMENT** is a work of art and beauty and I will read it again to ease the tensions which continue to cross my mind and disrupt my awareness.

“I dare you to read this and not be swept up. **THE GODS OF HEAVENLY PUNISHMENT** is shocking and delicate in equal measure.” Debra Dean, author, of **THE MADONNAS Of LENINGRAD** (on the book jacket)

This is the story of Yoshi and how war and a host of people will direct her experience of war and lead to her survival. She is the daughter of a Japanese builder who has worked with an Architect to change the skyline of Tokyo (Yep! Frank Lloyd Wright's Imperial Hotel is part of the story) and her mother who is the granddaughter of a Samurai Warrior who has a troubled past; she speaks many languages fluently. It is the story of the architect who builds the new vision, then works on its destruction and how he knows Yoshi. It is the story of Cam a fighter pilot who has wanted to fly an airplane his whole life; he is one of the downed pilots after an initial bombing raid. On this list of Yoshi's journey, I must include Billy who was born in Japan and returns as an occupation soldier for the rebuilding process.

I do not read the book covers or the promo pages that come with the tour book I agree to review. I find that those words often color the read for me and I think they often tell far too much of the story line and cancel my minds ability to imagine and discover. I quite often read each book twice, as I did for **THE GODS OF HEAVENLY PUNISHMENT**. The second read looks through eyes of what research the author acknowledges and the personal notes on hopes and expectations for the book and thanks to the editors and publishers. This novel was extensively researched and then rendered with a divine stroke of the pen to give the reader a crystal understanding faceted with elegance and grace. The book jacket uses the word meditation to describe this story telling and I would have to agree.

All the shocking horror of war and that experience is right there and in one page you know it, and by the next page the reader is moving on and integrating the disgust and shock into the child's growth and understanding. How could we ever have another war? This story does not leave the mind; it stays put.
more of the review on Patricia's Wisdom

Heather Fineisen says

Sometimes characters stick with you and that is the case with those in this Novel. A bit predictable in some areas, but offers a fresh perspective on prewar Japan through architecture and airmen. Americans in Japan and Japanese in America before and after war. "A guy should learn something, he'd written to Lacy, about a place he's about to bomb." I agree.

Provided by publisher.

Val says

This book has a unique perspective on WWII - it follows both Japanese characters and American, and spans decades and 3 countries. Not all the characters are likable, in fact, most are not, but the story it tells remains gripping and true. It is a worthy addition to anyone interested in this time period.

Deborah says

Chilling, absorbing, unique, humorous and heart-breaking. All those adjectives come to mind when I think to describe Jennifer Cody Epstein's book "The God's of Punishment." It's part historical account churned with love stories and family dysfunction. It's character-driven in the most powerful of ways. This is a book I will remember among the many this year.

I have read several accounts of the war between America and Japan, but none so specifically personal as this one. The characters are captivating as immediate relationships with the reader are cultivated. The impact of their stories is both devastating in parts and heart-tugging. I found each of them immensely engaging; some endearing, and some stone cold hateful. The humorous moments take one by surprise in several instances. Either way, it was as if I couldn't tear my eyes away from them.

This is a novel told in sections from the perspectives of the different nationalities/countries and characters, which gives it an even more significant impact. Because of the way Epstein chose to structure her story, I was sympathetic to both sides, as well as to the neutral view. War in all it's human drama was staggering in her hands, sometimes brutal and sometimes drawing out the best in people with love.

"The Gods of Punishment" is a show-stopper of a book. You won't be able to put it down once you start reading. It halted my life for hours.

I recommend this book to everyone without reservation. It's a very adult book in the sense that it's written with intelligence and aplomb. You can't help but be taken in by its significance and engaging quality. I loved it!

5+ stars Deborah/TheBookishDame

Linda Bridges says

This book about Japan during World War II is beautifully researched and authentic. It weaves the stories of Billy Reynolds, Yoshi Kobayashi, and Cam Richards around the bombing of Tokyo. Raised in Japan until things heated up between the Japanese and the U.S., Billy ended up going back to the U.S. with his parents and eventually returned to Japan as an occupation soldier. Cam Reynolds, a pilot who crash-landed after bombing Tokyo, became a Japanese prisoner-of-war. Yoshi was the daughter of a government official in Japan and his wife who had received an eclectic education in London as a child. Fluent in several languages and faced with the betrayals in her parents' marriage, Yoshi comes of age when Japan is losing the war and has to face the destruction of life as she knew it. They each face their own dilemmas and questions as the war changes each of their lives.

I enjoyed the book. The author seems very familiar with not only the history of the period but also the Japanese culture. Interspersed are authentic pictures and Japanese phrases. The characters were very authentic. This is an interesting story told from the points of view of three young people whose lives would never be the same.

Connie says

An unexpected treat. I had not heard or read about this book, just picked it up from the new book shelf in the library. It is a beautifully told story of the impact of WWII on two families - one Japanese and one American. Honest without being gruesome and caring without cheap emotionalism.

Jeanette "Astute Crabbist" says

There's a lot going on in this novel, but it's not as hard to follow as it may seem at the start. It traces the lives of several American and Japanese people before, during, and after World War II. Some of them are friends, suddenly cast into enemy positions because their countries are at war.

The firebombing of Tokyo is central to the story simply because it's the definitive separation between "before" and "after," but the novel is multi-layered. There's not a great deal of space given to the firebombing itself and its effects on the city as a whole directly following the event. Rather than a recitation of horror and devastation, the focus is more on how the girl Yoshi's life was altered.

The most moving example for me of the struggles of conscience when war makes enemies of friends is shown in the character of Anton Reynolds. He's an American architect who spent many years living in Tokyo, designing its beautiful buildings. Back home in America as the war drags on, his knowledge of Japanese architecture puts him in the position of assuring the success of the firebombing of Tokyo. He tells himself again and again, "It's not murder. It's war." But how can he convince himself of that as he helps to destroy the city he loved and its citizens who were his friends?

Aside from some anachronistic language (e.g. "man up") and a few weirdly sordid sex scenes, this is a well-written and believable blend of fact and fiction. Highly recommended for fans of the genre.

o says

Wow. This was just... delicious. I love reading historical novels about 20th century Japan, and the mix of romance, intrigue, and war-time happenings found in this book was equal parts intriguing and addicting. Gorgeous writing, interesting characters, a satisfying ending - in summary, a fantastic read!

Lisa says

Epstein has crafted a novel that moves back and forth between multiple third-person narratives. Throughout, she keeps the book moving forward in time as she shifts settings, from 1935 Hamburg, New York to 1962 Los Angeles and gradually begins to intertwine her characters.

I suppose the novel could be called "sweeping" moving as it does through time and back and forth across the Pacific. Curiously, I never felt like I was being swept up in a massive story; Epstein makes the novel very much the intimate stories of the people caught up in the war between Japan and the United States. Without casting judgment, Epstein uses her characters along with many real-life characters to explore the atrocities of war. Having just read *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, I was surprised to find myself back in Manchuria during the Japanese occupation but it also made me not ready to read about the torture of soldiers, a direction I was certain, at one point, the book was headed in. Instead, Epstein gives the reader only what is necessary at that point then moves on, only to smack me down later with the horror of the firebombing of Tokyo.

"Yoshi's last sight of her was like something she'd seen once in an old painting in a temple; something their teacher had called a "Hell Scroll." Entitled *The Gods of Heavenly Punishment*, it showed a huge fiery demon consuming tiny people limb by limb, surrounded by more flames and staggering, fire-limned figures."

The Gods of Heavenly Punishment is just the kind of historical fiction book I love - a new look at a time in history you might have thought had already been covered from every angle with an interesting blend of characters and a solid foundation in the facts. In war, there are no happy endings, but *The Gods of Heavenly Punishment* leaves the reader satisfied, having felt a wide range of emotions throughout.

I highly recommend it. If I had that extra half star to give, I would.

Jill Meyer says

It takes a special writer to produce an "epic" novel. "Epic" and "sweeping" imply a great breadth of a story line in terms of both time and characters. Jennifer Cody Epstein deserves kudos for her new novel, "*The Gods of the Heavenly Punishment*", which takes the reader from Tokyo 1935 to Los Angeles 1962, with characters who are as different as Japanese and Americans can be in that era. The unifying point of the novel is a green ring that survives both love and war and brings those two "different" peoples together.

Jennifer Epstein concentrates on relationships in her story. Oh, yes, there are large events like the 1945 fire bombing of Tokyo that destroyed most of the city, and, earlier, the Doolittle raid in 1942. That raid, flown by brave US army airmen, struck the first blow after Pearl Harbor on the Japanese home island. Many of the planes didn't have enough fuel to return safely to the ships they had taken off from and crashed into

Japanese-controlled mainland China. Their crews, the ones who survived the crashes, were often captured, tortured, and sometimes put to death by their Japanese captors. But Epstein looks at the relationships in both the American and Japanese home fronts and how the Doolittle raid and the fire bombing and the fighting devastated lives in both places.

But if Epstein examines war, she also looks at the peacetime which preceded and succeeded the war. The prewar years in both countries was a time when the protagonists met and, sometimes, fell in love. Some fell in lust, and some just fell into relationships that differed from any they had experienced before. The post war period, too, produced changes in character's lives; losses and uncertainties were acknowledged and somehow made right.

Epstein's main characters, Yoshi, Bill, Lacy, lived and experienced the horrors of WW2 in different lands. They all lost loved ones, as did millions of people world wide. But the history, and the promise, of a small green ring brought them all together. This is quite a story. I think most readers will be quite affected by it. I know I was.

Jennifer says

I've said it before and I'll say it again: Learning new things is my favorite part about reading. This book opened my eyes to the events in Japan both before and after WWII. The Gods of Heavenly Punishment is told from the point of view of a young Japanese girl, certainly like nothing I've read before.

The characters lives are interconnected in interesting, yet plausible, ways. The men and women that people this story are convincing and genuine. Days after reading this I can't stop thinking of them.

This book offers an unflinching look at the horrors of war. You'll find yourself holding your breath during the firebombing of Tokyo. Cody Epstein doesn't focus on the atrocities as much as on the relationships between people devastated by the events.

Ambitious and breathtaking, The Gods of Heavenly Punishment is not to be missed.

Deon Stonehouse says

The Gods of Heavenly Punishment by Jennifer Cody Epstein 9780393071573

Three lives are tragically linked in this beautifully written, haunting story of wartime Japan. Cam Richards adores his wife Lacy, he has everything to live for when he climbs into the cockpit of his plane and heads toward Tokyo on a daredevil fire bombing raid that will decimate the city. Yoshi's Mom was multi-lingual, western educated and drop dead gorgeous, and her Dad was a very traditional Japanese man with a successful business as a building contractor. It was not an auspicious union. Yoshi is in Tokyo when those planes reach their target. Billy's Dad Anton is a gifted architect; they lived in Japan for years before the war. As WWII heats up, Anton will help the Pentagon destroy the landscape he helped create. Billy is an occupation soldier back in Japan with his camera and his secret. These characters feel real, their story both tragic and hopeful.

Hillary says

With the drama and sweep of THE ENGLISH PATIENT and a rich, painterly sensibility all her own, Jennifer Cody Epstein has created an indelible portrait of the war in the Pacific, seen through the eyes of six characters whose stories will haunt you long after the final brush stroke.

Melinda says

I had great expectations for this book. There are not that many books, at least not that many that I've come across that tell of World War II from the Japanese perspective. And the book starts out strong, giving us a tableau of the world from which Yoshi hails. However, it is right after this first chapter that the book starts to fall off the rails for me. We meet Cam and Lacy, a young couple from New York, who don't really seem to have anything to do with Yoshi. Then, BOOM!, we're in World War II and hopping between Japan, Manchuria and the United States. Each chapter is about a different character and, because of this, Yoshi ceases to be the main character and just becomes one in a sea of characters.

It is too bad because Epstein's writing is quite beautiful and she has a knack for creating place and character. I did feel that the book ended strong and if she had focused the book on Billy and Yoshi--which is how she began it--this would have been a far more successful book.
