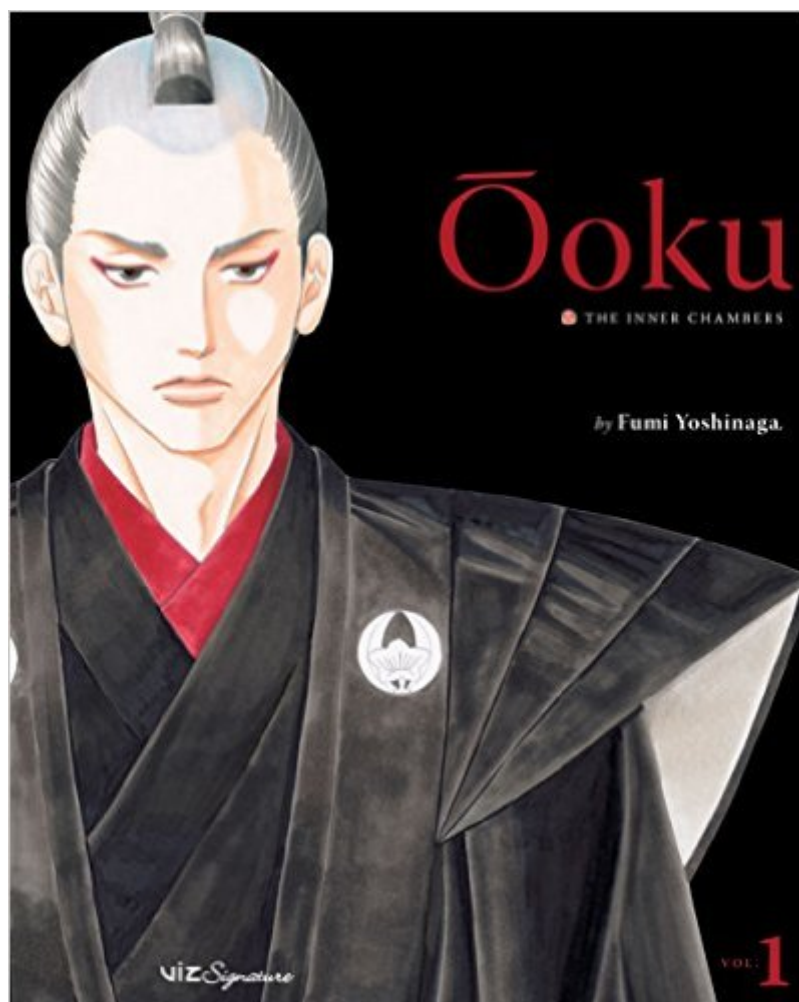


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Ōoku: The Inner Chambers, Vol. 1



Synopsis

R to L (Japanese Style). In Edo period Japan, a strange new disease called the Red Pox has begun to prey on the country's men. Within eighty years of the first outbreak, the male population has fallen by seventy-five percent. Women have taken on all the roles traditionally granted to men, even that of the Shogun. The men, precious providers of life, are carefully protected. And the most beautiful of the men are sent to serve in the Shogun's Inner Chamber...

Book Information

Paperback: 216 pages

Publisher: VIZ Media LLC (August 18, 2009)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1421527472

ISBN-13: 978-1421527475

Product Dimensions: 8.2 x 0.7 x 5.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 10.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars Â Â See all reviews Â (16 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

I came to like Fumi Yoshinaga's stories due to her excellent story-telling abilities and yaoi content. But her art is typically considered so-so by many readers. However, the art in this book came as an unexpected delight. Her artwork in this book REALLY improved as compared to all her earlier works I'm aware of (The Moon and the Sandals, Antique Bakery, Truly Kindly, Gerard and Jacques, etc). It is more refined, less "stylized", not sketchy at all, and most of her men look genuinely pretty and pleasing to an eye. Yet, it's still a distinct "Fumi Yoshinaga", just more carefully drawn and aesthetic. The quality of this English localization is absolutely gorgeous too. This is the first VIZ Signature manga I bought, and three (!) color inserts, well-designed cover with "semi-dust jacket", thick paper, careful lettering and inking... well, that was all very surprising, so much unlike DMP, Kitty, Go! Comi or Tokyopop, or any other US manga publisher I know of, and at a such reasonable price! Archaic English used throughout the book is somewhat annoying, at least at first. But give it a try, after the first 20 pages or so, I got used to it, and it didn't bother me that much. This is NOT YAOI, and really not even a BL/shounen-ai, though there are some mild BL scenes (e.g., one of the main male

characters is kissing another young man, there's an attempted man/man rape scene, and implied male same-sex relationship between some of the Inner Chambers' inhabitants (though nothing is shown on that)). Surprisingly, no lesbian pairings are shown or even implied, which I find somewhat unrealistic: with the population being 75% female, I think such relationships are to be expected. I hope it might be shown in further volumes. There are also a few very non-explicit heterosexual implied-sex scenes between a female shogun and her harem men. The book got its mature / 18+ ratings not because of "sexual situations" as the publisher claims, but probably because of its mature themes that would appeal to more grown-up audiences. It's NOT a sword-battling fantasy / adventure full of dragons, angels or world saviors (though there are some interesting sword fights between samurai shown), but a thought-provoking, groundbreaking and possibly quite philosophical work. All traditional Japanese shogunate era (or just traditional overall) female/male roles are reversed in the story. Because males are so rare (see product description above, most died off because of a mysterious epidemic), they are treated as frail and beautiful "flowers", to be guarded and protected by strong and stern women. However, women are still truly feminine in the book, just a lot of societal stereotypes of how women *should* behave were removed: women are often warriors, or skillful and wise politicians in that alternative-history Edo Japan, but still loving and respectful towards their husbands, eager to bear and have children. While reading this book, I was amazed how realistic it all felt: that's how Edo Japan could have possibly been if such male/female imbalance had indeed happened. The character of the female shogun is interesting and intriguing. Just as a wise male shogun with samurai spirit and principles would behave, she doesn't like any excesses, doesn't care about appearances, yet quite "lustful" and eager to have "surprise" and rough sex with her male concubines. As any wise and highly principled ruler (i.e., unattainable ideal of that era), she does not go for young and good-looking (they are too expensive to up-keep, male concubines just love dressing up in all those bright "peacock" colors and expensive silks...and our shogun cares a lot about saving state money), besides, she's "virile" and "potent" enough to have a "quickie" with not-so-good-looking and older males ("a man is a man" philosophy, just the reverse of "any female would do" stereotype common for the image of a truly "virile" man...) Of course, when men are doing that type of thing in this book, it's often done for money or connections, and they're often viewed as "shameful" or "whores" by others / themselves...do you see any similarities? Yep, the true history, just with gender roles reversed...I'm very looking forward to Ooku: The Inner Chambers, Volume 2, scheduled to appear in December this year. Four volumes have been already published in Japan, and it seems that the series is still on-going. This is the book that could have been written and fully appreciated / understood only in the 21st century, after all the gender equality

achievements and reconsideration of women's role in society. The story is most likely to appeal to mature female readers, though my hope is that some male readers read and like it too. It's unique and so beyond regular manga fare. Probably, a book of the year for me, and highly recommended!

I love Fumi Yoshinaga's work and she always surprises me. I did not like the first manga of her that I read, Gerard & Jacques, for that reason I stayed a long time away from her works. Antique Bakery was so praised that I forced myself to read it and fell in love. After I got Flower of Life and I was fully convinced that she was one of the top manga-kas of her generation. I was very eager to read Ooku, and every nomination this work received increased my curiosity. I was very happy when VIZ announced this title. Ooku impressed me with the mature, beautiful and neat art style. The story was really interesting, mixing history and gender discussions, the main character, Mizuno, is kind and ambitious, although a little naïve, and I felt very interest to know if he would succeed in his career at the inner chamber. For that who do not know, the inner chamber is the shogun seraglio, in a Japan where most of the man, specially the young, died in reason of a strange disease, the red pox. Women took the power and men are an expensive delicacy and necessary source of seed. Mizuno used to bed with women who wanted child for free. Only the most powerful and rich families can afford a husband, and only the shogun can have so many. I don't know if Yoshinaga will mix real Japanese history in her series, like the contact with other countries. Does the disease affected other places or is a Japanese plague? I can hardly wait for the next volume. Ah, one problem for me, VIZ was very careful and the text is almost in archaic English. It's difficult for a foreigner - I'm Brazilian - to read it as fast as if it was in current English, but this choice give to Ooku a more elegant face. Really nice peace of work.

Bottom Line First: Fumi Yoshinaga's Ooku, the first installment of a Magna series is an interesting variation; a Japanese Samurai era, post-apocalyptic world where most, but not all of the male population has died off. It is beautiful to look at but the characters are stiff and the dialogue too formal. The emphasis is on the manners and styles of court life but no one ever seems to unbend. The response of the Japanese Empire to the sudden loss of males for leadership position creates some interesting role reversals as men are now mostly bought and sold for procreation and have taken over many female roles without completely losing their male characteristic. Yoshinaga deserves credit for creating a believable world and leaving the reader to grasp the philosophical implications of what could have been a hectoring tone on the unfair roles of women in modern times. I respect her artistry. I do not care about these characters. I do not plan to get more books in

this series. If you want to know who we are, We are gentlemen of Japan: On many a vase and jar
"On many a screen and fan, We figure in lively paint: Our attitude's queer and quaint
"You're wrong if you think it ain't Ooooh! From The Mikado, Gilbert and Sullivan Each page in
Ooku contains one or more beautiful, finely detailed images of courtly life in the Japanese feudalistic
times. As is common in Japanese manga, smaller cartoonish drawings are used to denote characters
over reacting or being childish. Usually this convention is just part of the experience for these books,
but I found the convention jarring and disruptive of the aesthetic experience. This was the more
unfortunate the characters were never that interesting. Yunoshin is quickly established as our hero.
Handsome, noble in heart, a skilled swordsman and kindly about sharing his bed with women who
had neither the looks nor the money to otherwise have a chance at child bearing. His goal is to
become one of the Men of the Inner Chamber (the Ooku) of Edo castle, the center of Japanese
government. Once there he will be at the bottom of a pecking order and exposed to the usual
jealousies, hazing and the rest. He will of course catch the eye of the new and not bound by
traditions, Shogun/Empress. And so it goes. There is much intelligence applied to this world tilted
against male dominance and yet not free of it. There are some sly insinuations about what is wrong
or unfair in our world regarding male and female roles. There is much about this beautiful book that
bespeaks a talented writer. The whole is not greater than the parts. Characters are too remote and
conversation was too stylized. I never developed any interest in these people. Authentic or not, I
enjoyed looking but not reading.

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