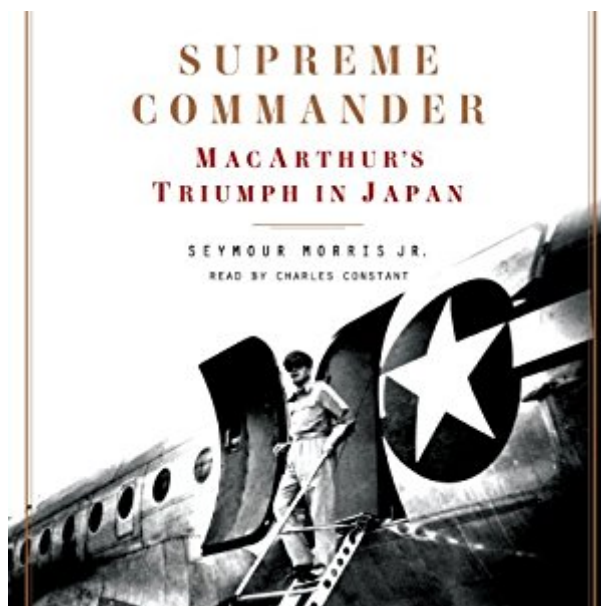


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Supreme Commander: MacArthur's Triumph In Japan



Synopsis

Seymour Morris, Jr., combines political history, military biography, and business management to tell the story of General Douglas MacArthur's tremendous success in rebuilding Japan after World War II in *Supreme Commander*, a lively, in-depth work of biographical history complementary to *The Generals*, *The Storm of War*, and *Truman*. He is the most-decorated general in American history - and the only five-star general to receive the Medal of Honor. Yet Douglas MacArthur's greatest victory was not in war but in peace. As the uniquely titled Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, he was charged with transforming a defeated, militarist empire into a beacon of peace and democracy - "the greatest gamble ever attempted", he called it. A career military man, MacArthur had no experience in politics, diplomacy, or economics. A vain, reclusive, and self-centered man, his many enemies in Washington thought he was a flaming peacock, and few, including President Harry Truman's closest advisors, gave him a chance of succeeding. Yet MacArthur did so brilliantly, defying timetables and expectations. *Supreme Commander* tells for the first time, the story of how MacArthur's leadership achieved a nation-building success that had never been attempted before - and never replicated since. Seymour Morris, Jr., reveals this flawed man at his best who treated a defeated enemy with respect; who made informed and thoughtful decisions yet could be brash and stubborn when necessary, and who led the Occupation with intelligence, class, and compassion. Morris analyzes MacArthur's key tactical choices, explaining how each contributed to his accomplishment, and paints a detailed picture of a true patriot - a man of conviction who proved to be an outstanding and effective leader in the most extraordinary circumstances.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

What a Story! I saw the New York Times review and ordered the book. I was not disappointed. If you enjoy history—especially American history, then I'm sure you have noticed that every now and then there are glaring gaps in coverage. One of these gaps has to be what transpired in the Far East after Japan surrendered. We all know about Douglas MacArthur's feats as a general (and his inglorious termination in Korea), but very few of us know about his greatest triumph: his five-year military occupation of Japan. I couldn't put this book down, it is so engagingly written. Parts of it move like a thriller, especially the two chapters on Japanese biological weapons of mass destruction. My favorite chapter was the one on women's rights -- a real surprise. Who would have thought that this macho general instituted rights for women in Japan even more advanced than what women have in America today? Or that his vigorous efforts to provide emergency food and medical aid saved the lives of 12 million Japanese people? Renowned 1950s journalist John Gunther, writing at a time when most Americans were focused on Europe, called MacArthur's achievement in Japan "one of the worse-reported stories in history." Now finally that story is told, and told well. Most history books are a cut and paste rehash. This book is not. It is new. Read this book and think of our occupation of Iraq -- and weep. Where is a Douglas MacArthur when we need him most?

A fabulously interesting and well-written book! Morris accomplishes the extraordinary: his book is at once scholarly (with 298 footnotes and close to 300 works cited) and exceptionally readable. Morris succeeded in completely altering my impression of MacArthur which had been formed largely indirectly from brief sections in historical books in which he was an incidental player. I had concluded that MacArthur was a very smart and capable general but one-dimensional in character, being vain, egocentric and self aggrandizing. All this is true, but what Morris demonstrates is that MacArthur was a much more complex man who was capable of understanding others, to the point of empathizing with the very people he had been at war with and whom much of the American public at the time viewed in racist terms. That MacArthur could understand the Japanese psyche to the point that in five short years he could change the nation and its culture from that of a feudal empire to a modern, functioning democracy with rights never before known to citizens of Japan is astounding, and Morris illuminates how this feat was accomplished with extraordinary insight. This book is essentially a case study of American leadership at its best (Harvard Business School professor of leadership, Gautam Mukunda, who is quoted on the back of the dust jacket, calls it "a fascinating study of the greatest success of Douglas MacArthur"). Morris explains

MacArthur's complicated reporting relationships at different times, his eleven objectives, and how he accomplished them all. While this sounds like heavy reading; it is not. The book, broken down into specific topics, peaks the reader's curiosity and captures his interest by confronting the conflicts and suspense of the messy reality faced by MacArthur, the resolution of which reads with the excitement of a novel. You keep turning the pages, waiting to see what comes next . . . What MacArthur achieved in Japan was a stroke of genius, long forgotten today. Morris draws fascinating parallels with our troubled occupation of Iraq – though he is careful to say "we should not be so facile," the broad lessons remain clear. Santayana's words, "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it," were never more true. For that reason alone, this book is worth reading.

For students of history and for those who just like to savor a good story, I strongly recommend "Supreme Commander." The Sunday NY Times Book Review (which reviews less than 1% of books published in the US each year) selected Supreme Commander for review and concluded: the "story [author Seymour Morris tells] is a fascinating one." The fascinating vignettes begin with chapter 1's first sentence and continue throughout the lively, impressively-researched 300 pages. We learn immediately that a few days after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, President Truman, in selecting MacArthur to lead the occupying and rebuilding of Japan, had bestowed czar-like powers on a man he had never met, had never talked to, and had (according to his diaries) disdained as a "prima donna" and "bunco man". The author proceeds to recount MacArthur's extraordinary accomplishment in transforming our former enemy and feudal, militaristic, male-dominated nation into a democratic, free-market, gender-egalitarian, pacifist society that now ranks as the world's third largest economy and one of our closest allies. MacArthur managed to complete his mission to resurrect Japan in less than six years, which compares with the 10-year long military occupation of West Germany -- where few remember that the name of the American general who presided over much of that effort was Lucius Clay. The author covers MacArthur's long military service (including defeats as well as successes) preceding his tenure in Japan as peace-maker and nation-builder. He also recounts his career subsequent to Japan, including the Yalu River debacle during the Korean War, his dismissal by Truman, and his post-military activities. So many enigmas and contradictions riddle MacArthur's life that the author ends his book with a fascinating chapter: "A Man Deeply Flawed: How Did He Do It?" "Supreme Commander" is worth buying for that chapter alone, but for several hours of pleasure, be sure to read the whole book.

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