



Under the Blood-Red Sun

By Graham Salisbury

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World War II seems far away from Tomi and his friends, who are too busy playing ball on their eighth-grade team, the Rats.

But then Pearl Harbor is attacked by the Japanese, and the United States declares war on Japan. Japanese men are rounded up, and Tomi's father and grandfather are arrested. It's a terrifying time to be Japanese in America. But one thing doesn't change: the loyalty of Tomi's buddies, the Rats.

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Under the Blood-Red Sun By Graham Salisbury Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Salisbury (Blue Skin of the Sea) again invokes a Hawaiian setting for this novel, which chronicles the trials of a Japanese American boy and his immigrant family in 1941. Tomi's fisherman father and housekeeper mother work hard to support Tomi, his younger sister and grandfather in their cramped servants' house. While he embraces everything about being American, including a passion for baseball, Tomi struggles to find some middle ground between his modern life and the nationalism and traditional values his parents and Grandpa try to impart. But as WWII intensifies and Pearl Harbor is bombed, Tomi's family faces racism, violence and hardship at every turn. Tomi's father and grandfather are taken away and incarcerated, leaving Tomi to worry if he can perform honorably as man of the house. Salisbury skillfully describes Tomi's emotional highs and lows, and has a particular knack for realistically portraying the camaraderie and dialogue between boyhood chums. The slow-evolving plot drags in a few spots (especially the play-by-play descriptions of baseball games), but readers are rewarded with steadily building dramatic tension in the novel's second half and a satisfyingly open-ended finale. Ages 10-up.

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From School Library Journal

Grade 5-8-September, 1941 is a time of increasing confusion for Tomi Nakaji, 13, who lives on the island of Oahu. As if his gruff, stroke-slowed grandfather, who insists on waving his Japanese flag around the yard, isn't enough, he has to contend with Keet Wilson, the bully next door. From a treetop, Tomi and his haole (white) best friend, Billy, witness in disbelief the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Tomi finds the horrors personalized as his father, a poor fisherman, and later his grandfather are arrested and his father's fishing partner is killed. Tomi assumes responsibility for the family honor and katama, or samurai sword.

Racial/ethnic tension is subtly portrayed throughout the novel, but escalates following the Japanese attack-Tomi's mother loses her job as a housekeeper and Billy "disappears" for awhile, though he returns as a loyal and helpful friend. Tomi faces his fears and becomes assertive enough to stand up to Keet without besmirching his family's honor and risks his life to see his imprisoned father. Character development of major figures is good, the setting is warmly realized, and the pace of the story moves gently though inexorably forward. While it may be a bit more aimed than pitched, the ending leaves readers confident that the Nakajis will survive.

Joel Shoemaker, Southeast Jr. High School, Iowa City, IA

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From [Booklist](#)

Gr. 5-9. Salisbury captures the dilemma of the Japanese who lived in Hawaii during World War II through the narrator, Tomi, born in Hawaii, and his Japanese parents, who had escaped the poverty of Japan, only to find themselves enmeshed in a war they are unprepared to fight. As tensions between Japan and the U.S. mount, eighth-grader Tomi finds himself more and more the target of his classmates' and neighbors' suspicions. Well aware of the increasing tension between native islanders and Japanese immigrants, Tomi desperately tries to tone down his grandfather's displays of nationalistic and family pride, a job the boy finds distasteful (he, too, loves the stories of his ancestors), yet horrifyingly necessary. Neither his grandfather nor the rest of the family can ignore the seriousness of the situation after the Japanese bomb Pearl Harbor. On a baseball field when the first planes fly over, Tomi and his best friend, Billy, climb a nearby tree to escape the strafing and to see what is happening. Salisbury spares few details--the fear, the horror, the sounds, the smells all envelop the reader as they do the characters. And so do the grief and shame. The Japanese embarrassment is palatable, and, of course, life is never the same again. Tomi's father is eventually deported

to a U.S. prison camp; his mother loses her job; and his little sister is so traumatized that she refuses to leave the house. The action-packed novel focuses on the Japanese American perspective during World War II; yet, there are few real villains here. The author subtly reveals the natural suspicions of the Americans and the equally natural bewilderment of the Japanese immigrants when they suddenly become the personification of the enemy. It is a tribute to the writer's craft that, though there are no easy answers in the story, there is empathy for both cultures. For an equally impressive view of the Japanese American experience during the war, see Stanley, below. *Frances Bradburn*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Lavonne Ouellette:

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