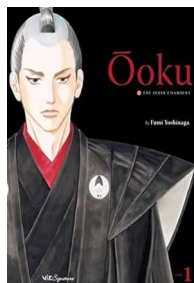




**Lambda Sci-Fi**  
DC Area Gaylaxians



*Ooku: The Inner Chambers (Volume 1)*

By Fumi Yoshinaga

*Discussed June 2010*

## Characters

- Mizuno (the newest member of the Ooku)
- O-Nobu (Mizuno's childhood friend)
- Shogun Ietsugu (the sickly child Shogun)
- Shogun Yoshimune (the newest Shogun upon the death of Ietsugu)
- Sir Fujinami (Senior Chamberlain of the Ooku)
- Sugishita (Mizuno's friend in the Ooku)
- Sir Murase (Chief Scribe)

## Discussion Questions

1. Did you enjoy the book? Why or not why?
2. *Ooku: The Inner Chambers* is an alternate history where most of Japan's men have died in a mysterious plague. When the main story begins, 80 years have passed since the initial plague. Do you find the changes in 18th century Japanese society convincing?
3. The prelude to *Ooku: The Inner Chambers* features a scene which may or may not have fantastical elements connected to it, with the unleashing of the plague that kills off most of Japan's men. Did you see this as genre or not? Do you think Yoshinaga should or should not have included this?
4. Mizuno is set up early on to be the main character for all of *Ooku: The Inner Chambers*. Why do you think Yoshinaga concluded his story so quickly? Did the change surprise you?
5. Shogun Yoshimune is shown from the moment she arrives to be ruthless, conniving, and intelligent. Do you find her to be a compelling character? If the genders in this book changed would you feel any differently about her?

6. Sex shows up in several different forms throughout *Ooku: The Inner Chambers*. Some of these moments include:
- Mizuno's offering of his sperm for the taking.
  - Men's role in general as breeding studs.
  - The attempted rape during Mizuno's first night.
  - References to numerous consensual same-sex trysts within the Ooku once its members are away from women for the rest of their lives.
  - The tradition of executing whomever takes the Shogun's maidenhood.
  - Yoshimune's casual selecting and bedding of men, with no warning, in the Ooku.

Did any of these stand out for you in a positive or negative way? If the genders were reversed would you still feel the same way? Why or why not?

7. Chapter 4 features our first glimpse of the outside world, with the arrival of Westerners to the court. What did you think of this meeting? Do you think the rest of the world would have been so in the dark on Japan's problems?
8. *Ooku: The Inner Chambers* (Volumes 1 and 2) was one of two winners of the James Tiptree Jr. Award, which is given to genre works that expand or explore the understanding of gender. Do you think this qualifies? Why or not why?
9. Opening chapters of manga are often much longer and serve as a pilot to get the story picked up for additional installments. Do you think the initial chapter (Mizuno's arrival at the Ooku leading all the way up to the death of the child Shogun) could stand on its own as a short story?
10. Translator Akemi Wegmuller chose to use a slightly more archaic speech pattern when translating Yoshinaga's writing to indicate the more formalized words she had chosen. Did you like, dislike, or not notice the thees and thous?
11. When manga was originally translated into English, publishers would "mirror" or flip the pages so they would read left-to-right, but in the process would result in art that was usually not to the liking of the artist. Had you read a right-to-left manga before? Would you have preferred it be mirrored or not?