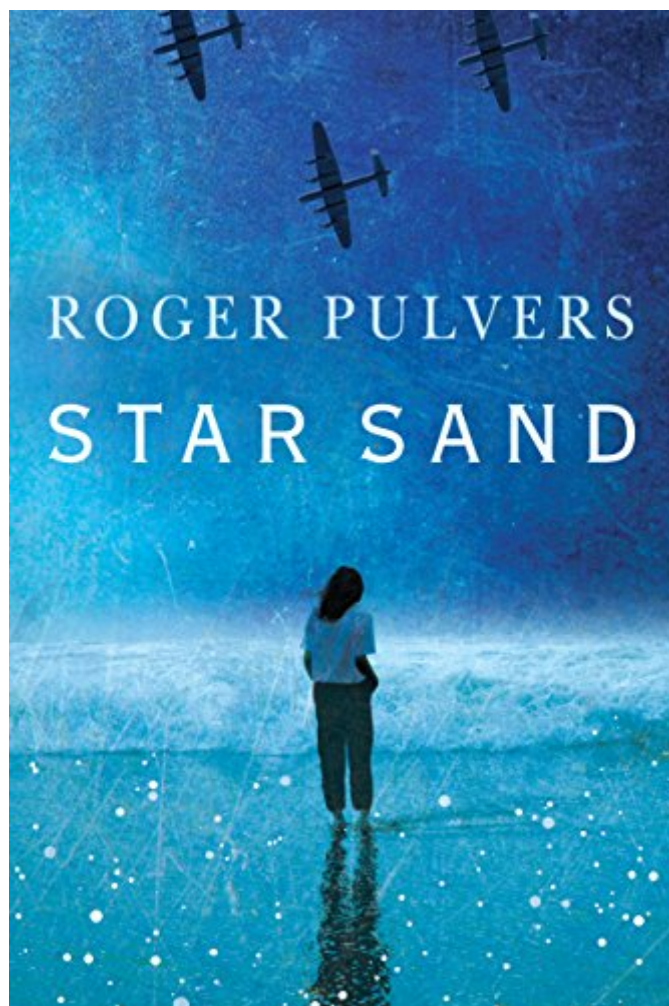


The book was found

Star Sand



Synopsis

In 1958, a diary is found in a cave on the small Japanese island of Hatoma. Alongside it are the remains of three people. The journal reveals the story of Hiromi, a sixteen-year-old girl who'd grown up in the United States before living in Japan in the midst of World War II. One day, while collecting star sand—tiny star-shaped fossils—Hiromi finds two army deserters hiding in the seaside cavern—one American, one Japanese. The soldiers don't speak the same language, but they've reached an agreement based on a shared hope: to cause no more harm and survive. Hiromi resolves to care for the men—feeding them and nursing their ailments—despite the risk that, if caught, she'll die alongside them as a traitor. But when a fourth person joins in on their secret, they must face a threat from within. The diary abruptly ends, leaving everyone's fate a mystery. Decades later, in 2011, a young female university student decides to finally determine who died in that cave and who lived. Her search will lead her to the lone survivor—and bring closure to a gripping tale of heroism at a time when committing to peace was the most dangerous act of all.

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Customer Reviews

I often grouse that Kindle First selections follow predictable patterns, but this one is as far off the beaten path as you can get. According to the description, it was written in Japanese and translated. The narrator is a young Japanese-American girl who has spent most of her life in the U.S. The daughter of a modern Japanese-American woman and a very traditional Japanese man, her family and her world have been torn apart by WWII. Now she's separated from both parents and brother and is surviving on a small, sparsely inhabited Japanese island. At 16, she's totally alone, living in an abandoned house. She's a survivor, although she's no longer sure what she's surviving for. In a cave by the beach, she finds an American soldier and a Japanese soldier - both deserters. They are men who have run away, not to avoid being killed, but because they can no longer kill others. Both face certain death if they are discovered and young Hiromi knows she would be killed for helping them. These three gentle loners (all shell-shocked by the war in different ways) form a deep bond. It's April of 1945 and everyone knows that the war will be over soon, but the "winner" hasn't yet been determined. Will Hiromi and Iwabuchi and Bob live long enough to find out? We see the war through the eyes of the Japanese who are motivated by a fierce nationalism and through the eyes of the American teen who's been given a uniform and a gun and sent to the other side of the world to kill or be killed. And we see the war through the eyes of Hiromi, who knows and loves both cultures and who has only distant memories of peace. It is not, paradoxically, an "anti-war" book. Iwabuchi sees that the policies of his government have made the war inevitable.

While the author writes in both English and Japanese, this book was originally written in Japanese and then translated into English, and it retains that feeling of "otherness" that leaves you constantly aware that you're reading a translation. This feeling made it a little hard to become fully immersed in the story. Also adding to this separation from the story by the reader, is that the first 80% of the book is supposed to be a diary from 1945, but it doesn't feel like a diary at all. This is explained in the remaining 20% of the novel which takes place in 2011, but it was distracting as a reader and constantly took me out of the story. I feel like I may have been able to stay in the story better if there had been a prologue from the 2011 portion of the story to get the reader primed for the not-reading-like-diary diary. That way I wouldn't have spent the entire diary portion going "this doesn't sound like a diary." This is a very fast read of less than 200 pages, that I read in a few short hours. The diary portion of the book tells the story of a young girl who meets 2 deserters from opposite sides of the war, struggling to survive together in a cave on a small island. Her life impacts theirs and theirs hers. The 2011 portion of the books solves the mystery of what happened after the diary suddenly ended. All in all, I enjoyed having read the book; it's a story I am glad to know. But

the telling of the story felt a bit flat. I didn't feel connected to the characters in the way I would have liked to. I didn't feel the pain, the struggle, and the fear that the characters were feeling. And I think that's a shame. In most situations where books have been turned into movies, the books are always so much better.

For me, this was a beautiful novella, flowing seamlessly over the timespan of the story. The chapters went together fluidly, just the right pace to make a perfect story. My one complaint is that it felt so very short. I worked an eight hour shift today and still read the whole thing in one day! I could not let it go! It begins April, 02, 1945 on Hatoma Isle in Japan. Umeno Hiromi is half Japanese, half American. Having followed her father back to Japan while her mother and brother stayed in Los Angeles, she feels even more torn apart by the war than others. In the first part we view the world through her diary. She is alone on the island, unsure where her father is or if he is alive. One day while collecting Star Sand from the beach she sees a man going toward the entrance of the cave with a gun pointed at his own head. This is to be her first meeting with two men that will be everything to her in this part of her life: Iwabuchi Takayasu, a Japanese deserter, and an American deserter named Bob. Both are weak and sick, though Bob more than Takayasu. Both are gentle spirits that are disgusted with the war. Hidden in a cave on Hatoma Isle, they rely on Takayasu's uncle and Hiromi to bring supplies and keep their secret. When Uncle is in danger of being taken prisoner on minor charges (keeping livestock he should have given up) he leaves the trio alone to fend for themselves-but not before throwing in one large complication. Iwabuchi Hajime is Takayasu's older brother and completely different from the gentle soul. He hates Takayasu and Hiromi for what he perceives as their crimes against Japan. In gentle Bob, he can only see the American enemy. The four cannot exist together and it ends explosively with three bodies and a diary in a cave.

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