

GENGHIS KHAN - SUMMARY

A high born Chinese prisoner is brought before the great GENGHIS KHAN, the powerful Mongolian ruler who has conquered China. The Khan is an illiterate but brilliant man in his fifties, the quintessence of violent energy. The prisoner, a poised young scientist and philosopher named YELIU CHUTSAI, is the quintessence of civilized culture. Intrigued by Yeliu's intelligence and calm honesty, the Khan takes the young savant into his service.

Through Yeliu's fascinated eyes, we begin to know the barbarian conqueror. We see his devotion to his four sons, and especially to his oldest son JUJI, his pride and joy. At first Juji seems very much like his father, a magnificent horseman and archer, and absolutely ruthless. But when Yeliu has the temerity to protest the cold-blooded execution of tens of thousands of Chinese prisoners, and the Khan, in nonchalant defense of his extermination policy, turns to Juji for support, Juji hesitates before he agrees with his father.

Yeliu accompanies the Mongolians back to their homeland, where, at a great victory celebration, he meets the Khan's first and principal wife, the aging BORTEI, and his beautiful young favorite wife, KULAN. As the drunken Khan and Juji join the riding, archery and wrestling competitions,



Yeliu becomes aware of the ambivalent hostility in the Khan's fierce love for his son. And when Juji asks Yeliu to entertain his "step-mother" Kulan with demonstrations of Chinese arts and sciences, Yeliu sees that Juji is himself attracted to the refinements of civilization. He also gathers that Juji and Kulan are in love.

Though Genghis seems either blind or indifferent to this affair, he does accuse Juji of growing soft, of loving luxury, of showing pity. He dispatches Juji on a terrible mission -to exterminate a nomadic people known as the Merkits. From Bortei, who is Juji's mother, Yeliu learns the significance of this assignment. Not only is Kulan a Merkit, but Juji himself may be a Merkit ! Bortei had been captured by the Merkits, when she was a young bride, and raped. Although Genghis has always treated Juji ad his own first-born son, there is a cloud over Juji's paternity which can never be dissipated.

Though it sickens him, Juji obeys his father's command, systematically murdering the Merkit people, men, women and children. He spares only one man, Kulan's brother, a marvelous archer. But Genghis wants no exceptions. He orders the man killed, and by Juji personally. Juji asks if his father would like him to kill Kulan as well. Angrily, Genghis says no.



A crisis has occurred, meanwhile, in the relations between Eastern Asia, ruled by Genghis, and Western Asia, ruled by a Persian emperor named SHAH MOHAMMED. A trade dispute having grown into a matter of "honor", Genghis decides on war. In a masterful deployment of his forces over fantastically high mountains, Genghis administers a series of stunning blows to the enemy, and overwhelms Samarkand, the Shah's capital. But the Shah himself escapes. Genghis has him pursued like a hunted animal across his entire realm, the Shah dying, finally, a broken man, on a lonely Caspian island.

Juji and his brothers have fought well in the war, but they now quarrel among themselves about the realms they expect to inherit. Genghis is sorely troubled. It seems to him that the enormous empire he is creating, the most extensive in history, will not last very long. He sees, moreover, that Juji and his brothers are increasingly attracted by the luxurious customs of the people they have conquered. When he finds Juji introducing Kulan to the beauty and mystery of Persian poetry, he is furious. We feel, once again, that it is not the implication of infidelity that angers him but the evidence of softness.

The truth is that Juji has been infected by civilization. Under Yeliu Chutsai's influence, he has been corrupted not only by the luxuries of civilization but by its moral values.



His moment of hesitation when Yeliu first protested the massacre of the Chinese prisoners, the revulsion he felt while exterminating the Merkits, have almost grown into an ethical point of view.

Under Yeliu's influence, a conscience has begun to germinate within Genghis as well. He is growing older, and ever more preoccupied with death. For a while he explores the hopes of immortality offered by various religions. But he can not bring himself to believe in them. No more than he can really face the possibility that his policy of extermination has been a monstrously evil crime. To do so would be to risk his sanity.

The more Genghis broods about it, the more strongly he feels that his only real hope of survival lies in Juji. Only through Juji can he complete his conquest of the world, only through Juji can his empire endure, only through Juji can he go on living after death.

At this point a revolt takes place among his newly conquered subjects, a revolt to which Genghis has only one answer, the old one: extermination. His other sons proceed to carry out this bloody order, but Juji retires to his own domain, pleading illness. Although Genghis does not believe this excuse, he fears to expose it as a lie. To do so would be to force Juji to admit that he simply cannot stomach the



bloodshed anymore. This would not only sharpen the question of conscience for Genghis himself, it would rupture his relationship with Juji, destroy his dream of immortality once and for all !

Renewed invitations for Juji to join him having failed, Genghis sends the one person who may be able to persuade Juji to come -- Kulan. We understand now that far from having been indifferent to the love between Juji and Kulan, Genghis has burned with jealousy. But Juji has been far more important to him than Kulan. Juji, after all, is his first-born son, his heir, his successor. Kulan is only his most beloved wife. Juji can have her.

Juji understands the meaning of this "gift" full well, but he still will not bow to his father's will. And by now, indeed, his imaginary illness has become real, for he is beginning to suffer from the full horror of the mass murders he has committed. In a final sacrifice of pride, Genghis withdraws his demand that Juji come to him, and instead goes to Juji. But Juji, now mad with guilt, kills Kulan and presents her corpse to his father. "Here", he says, "here is the last Merkit on earth."

"The last but one", decides Genghis stonily. He hands Juji the knife with which to kill himself. Juji stares at Genghis murderously, but it is into his own breast that he plunges the knife.



Genghis returns to Mongolia a broken old man, despite his fabulous victories. He divides his empire among his remaining sons and grandsons, and embarks on one last campaign, against a rebellious China again. But his own death is approaching. Rage as he will, it is the one enemy Genghis cannot defeat. He no longer believes he will live on through his children. He has no religious faith. He has acquired Juji's agonized sense of guilt about the massacres he has perpetrated. He has conquered civilization only to be conquered himself by civilization.

His only hope of immortality now is fame, the memory of future generations. "Fame for what ?" asks Yeliu. "For the good you have done, or the evil ?"

"For the truth", replies Genghis. "I want to be remembered. Even for the truth..."

THE END