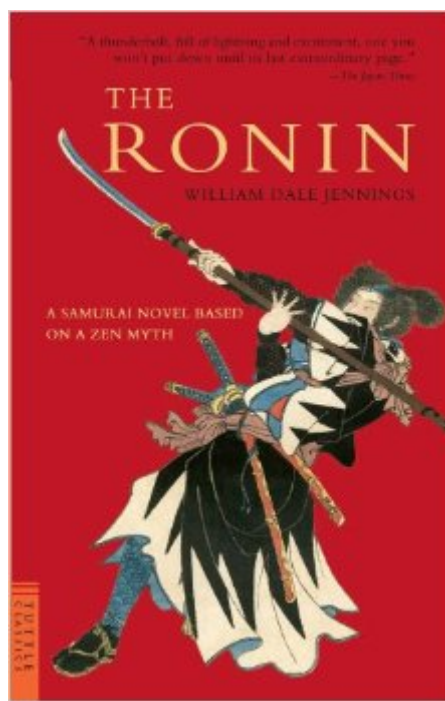


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The Ronin (Tuttle Classics)



Synopsis

"A thunderbolt, full of lightning and excitement, one you won't put down until its last extraordinary page." "The Japan Times" The violence of twelfth-century Japan explodes in this half-legendary, half-true story of a violent man who becomes a folk hero. A heartless savage, the Ronin, or "wandering samurai," slashes his way up from the gutter to wealth, honor and status. In spite of his crime and bloodthirsty cruelty, he bears the strange mark of destiny that the wise see and respect, even as he destroys them. Told with humor and irony, the tale ranges from the pleasantly colloquial to the brutally satiric, yet never relents in the Ronin's ruthless search for the truth. The storyteller hides nothing and speaks bluntly, yet this jewel-like tale shimmers with tantalizing riddles that will haunt the reader just as they haunted the Ronin. Sure to shock, confound and ultimately inspire readers, The Ronin is loosely based upon an ancient legend told to the author by the Zen Master Nyogen Senzaki.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The Ronin tells the story of a masterless samurai who lives a violent, debauched life until one day he is made aware of the enormity of his crimes. As a sort of penance, he decides to dig a tunnel

through a mountain which can only be crossed by a high and dangerous pass. The book is based on a Zen koan (a problem which cannot be solved by logic, on which practitioners of Zen meditate in order to find enlightenment). The Ronin is a fascinating book and many years later, I am still troubled by the tough questions that it posed, such as: are we only good because we have to be; is there justice in revenge; and can human beings ever really make up for the terrible things that they do? This was my favourite book when I was in high school and although now that I am older and can see that there are a lot of weaknesses in the book, I still say that it has the best ending of any book I have ever read and highly recommend it.

Starting with two stories from "Zen Flesh, Zen Bones," Jennings wrote a story which should delight fans of Kurosawa and Mifune. A joy throughout, "The Ronin" is a special delight at the end. This book is gutsy and robust, not for those who must smell only the flowers but not the fertilizer. I've read "The Ronin" perhaps 10 times and given away perhaps 20 copies--all to people who read and enjoyed it before I offered to let them keep it.

This was a pretty good story but please remember that it is based on a Zen myth and therefore the ending is typical of a Zen myth. One bad thing about this book is absolutely cannot decide what time period it takes place in. At many places it talks about things that make you think it is set in the late 12th century, like when it speaks of "the rout of the Minamoto". However later in the book it makes an allusion to a story concerning Ieyasu which mean it has to take place after the year 1600 at least. Also some things that it refers to were not around in the 12th century. Some of that is normal with English speaking authors writing stories of Japan as they are trying to appeal to the masses and therefore often talk about Noh theatre, or warriors carrying katana when these things were not around yet. But this book pushes it a little for the someone like me a hardcore Japanese history and culture buff. All in all though it is a good story and worth a read since it a short book.

How can you get a sense of zen enlightenment? If there is such[-ness] a [no-]thing[-ness] as VICARIOUS zen enlightenment, then this vicarious [-ly experienced] story is it. It's NOT the real-deal, of course, but to experience the REAL-DEAL you'll have to live your life on-the-edge [as in the razor's edge]. If you liked Bill Murray's movie THE RAZOR'S EDGE, which is arguably the best vicarious experience of zen, then you'll like THE RONIN. (also see the book/game PLAY GOD)

----Tomgpotter@gmail.com

From the moment I picked up this book, I couldn't put it down. The way it is written keeps you driving to the end. Every perplexing event leads you forcefully into yet another. The writing in my opinion is perfectly done to convey a very surreal atmosphere. The message of the book is unexplainable, but reading the book brings understanding that can only be vaguely told through words. Don't be fooled; this story is authentic. Jennings has done an impeccable job of putting this story (told to him by Nyogen Senzaki) to text in such a gripping way. It is also very "zen" in how we find the stories of several seemingly unrelated people come together in such an important way. Loved this book, highly recommend it to anyone, Zen practitioner or not.

I read this decades ago, and some scenes stuck with me so much that I hunted it down to read them again. On rereading, I now see things I missed before (like the inconsistent flow of years, depending on perspective); and overall, while it is (humanly) imperfect, I think it stands the test of time.

The biggest surprise of this book is that it has never been made into a movie. The author was a script writer who obviously had a deep understanding of Zen and human nature. He was black listed during the McCarthy era in Hollywood and seems to have written this book while he couldn't get work in Hollywood. This book is written in a spare, terse fashion that is almost like a screenplay. I first encountered this book in '69-70 when it was required reading for people taking the karate class from Dr. David Krieger at the University of Hawaii. David sensei is a unique person. He worked as a reporter in Japan, He was one of the few people to defeat the fabled Chuck Norris in an open tournament and is now the head of the Nuclear Peace foundation, have grown and learned so much that he has transcended violence and the martial arts. I have cherished this book for more than 40 years and require all of my senior karate students to read it. It is a classic heroes journey with a cocky young man rising to the heights and falling to the depths and then being pursued by a young man determined to avenge the death of his father and abduction of his mother. Although sparsely worded and short by most novel standards, there is depth of thought in the story that makes you spend lots of time pondering the nature of life, mankind, ambition, love, vengeance and most of all self delusion. The only complaint I have about this book is that I keep loaning it to people and never getting it back. That's understandable since it is the type of book you read and re-read.

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