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A novel based on Zen mythology, this story is told with humour and irony, in the tradition of realistic Zen mysticism. It is the tale of Ronin, a masterless 12th-century samurai knight, who slashes his way up from the gutter to a position of wealth, honour, and status.

The Ronin: A Novel Based on a Zen Myth Details

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From Reader Review The Ronin: A Novel Based on a Zen Myth for online ebook

Monty says

This delightful novel takes a Zen Tale and elaborates into a longer work. A Masterless Samurai (Ronin) selfishly moves through his universe like a human typhoon, causing death, destruction and great pain in his wake. The son of one of his victims vows to avenge his father's death, knowing that several young samurai have already been killed attempting to stop the savage renegade. After several years pass, the Ronin meets an elderly sage who is working diligently to dig a cave passageway through a mountain to benefit the people of his region. He does not stop his work, or even regard the possibility of his murder at the hands of the impetuous and bloodthirsty Ronin.

As in all Zen tales, there is a moment of illumination (or Satori) which falls upon the Ronin as he prepares to kill the tunneling sage. His life will change, and the story will take a different direction following the moment of Satori.

I consider this story to be a "Desert Island Book", one which can be read and enjoyed by most everyone in the same manner as "Siddhartha" by Herman Hesse. It is both simple and profound in its own way, and plotted very well by Jennings.

Katherine Lawrence says

This is a well-written tale. Its central character is a ronin, an unemployed warrior, who has mastered the outer strength. He is powerful, strong, skilled, experienced, angry and cruel. No one can defeat him in combat or bring him to justice. He is his own justice. He encounters someone who annoys him, he hurts with his sword. If they annoy him any more, he kills them, sometimes in one cut, at others, if he wants them to suffer, he cuts them so they die slowly.

Not exactly the main character most people want to read about. Some not-so-positive reviews of the book are written by readers who could not get through seeing the gore the ronin dispenses and simply give up. The man is beyond redemption. The author more than does his job in setting the ronin up.

Jennings' tale is, as stated in the title, based on a Zen Myth. The ronin is not mono-dimensional. The author by showing, at least at first, presents his crudeness as other see it. The ronin gets by through inspiring fear in others because the ronin can do so much damage. Yet isn't it because the ronin himself is afraid and by honing his skill with a sword he masters the very thing that causes him fear.

In a surreal scene, as far as the ronin is concerned, the tory pend as the ronin comes to a town where people do not show enough fear of him and one softly says the ronin is not as great as he thinks he is--after the ronin buys food, eats it, and then says he does not have any money. And thus begin a series of events where people do not cower before his blade, even though it means their own death or injury.

Matt says

It is always very difficult to pick a favorite. Can you pick a favorite child? Probably.

This is quite possibly my favorite book.

I've looked for an audiobook for years, but have never found one. (But that's no reason to dock any stars, this is easily a 6-star in my book)

This is based on an old zen tale, about a Samurai and his story through life. Amazing action and humor, but will also pull at your heart strings and make you stop and think.

I cannot even put into words how incredible this book is.

Do yourself a favor, and read it.

Then read it again.

Then read it once a year for the rest of your life and you will be happy.

Goran Powell says

A shocking tale of a masterless samurai set in 12th century Japan. William Dale Jennings recounts a Zen myth in the form of a novella that plots the rise and fall of a brutal Japanese swordsman.

The writing style is wonderfully colloquial. The depraved antics of the ronin are recounted in gory detail, while the story of a young boy's martial training at the hands of an old master is beautifully told.

The boy is determined to have his revenge on the ronin, but in true Zen style, nothing is as it seems and the plot takes several unexpected twists and turns before reaching a dramatic and unexpected climax.

The Ronin is unlike any book you have ever read. A rare treat.

Brian Turner says

A Zen myth, spanning many years as the titular Ronin and a young Daimyo find the calmness and solitude to temper their impetuosity.

The Ronin at the start is a whirlwind of desires and destruction. The Daimyo is the son of a woman who ran off with him after killing the boy's father.

There are a lot of good points raised in the manner of a fable, along with dry humour. The ending is completely unexpected and a good finish to a good book.

Daniel Polansky says

Brilliant, well written, strange, frightening, a minor masterpiece and I am utterly at a loss as to why I haven't heard this yet.

Amarta Adi says

kemampuan untuk memaksa atau bahkan untuk membunuh bukanlah kekuatan yang paling absolut, kemampuan untuk menghantui pikiran orang lainlah yang demikian.

Graham Houle says

A good book! It was short and interesting, I thought the story was very unique and filled with many asian/japanese anecdotes (as far as I could tell) and the characters were colorful.

But then the book ends so suddenly and fast! It really comes too such an abrupt ending and I was left searching for a lost page almost! Now most books when they do that it is a terrible ending or a lame ending and you are frustrated with the book or author or characters. But for me the abrupt ending went well with the book and I would recommend it to anyone.

T.K Trian says

This is one of those rare gems nobody has ever heard of but which can change a person's life. To me that was the case when my summer job in a book store was over and I chose to treat myself to a book. I had a bit of a samurai-thing back then so the cover and blurb were enough to make me buy this one and ever since I first opened it in the bus, I was hooked by the satirical prose which always made me feel just a little bit stupid (because I saw in myself so many of the things the author was making fun of). Gory? Yes. Harsh? That too. But also fun and very, very insightful. If I had to take one book to a deserted island, this would be it.

-T.Trian

Nick says

Some people will love this book, but not everyone. I found myself liking parts of it very much, but not liking other parts at all. For example, there is a female character whose personality and development I just found hard to believe, even though the developing personality of the central ronin character was interesting even when he was more of a monster than anything.

The writing was mostly very good, although I found the resolution to be a tad annoying. Among other things, a time estimate to carefully considered and explained to the reader shouldn't be off by YEARS in the final measure. Maybe that's just me...

The information about Japanese culture was mostly fascinating, although parts of it seemed like modern takes on classic ideas. In one case, a nobleman selects bodyguards for his wife from a group of women in training with the naganata. That's great, but from historical sources, women using naganatas didn't develop until centuries after the rest of this story takes place. That was weird and a bit sloppy on the part of the author.

Still, it's not a bad book, if you're used to samurai-movie violence at its grimmest.

Abraham says

The best book I own. Sometimes I wish it were the only book I owned. The prose is quick, zen and enticing. It reads like a movie and leaves you wanting.

J. Watson (aka umberto) says

In the table of contents of this English-written novel, there are altogether 27 chapters in which we would find no chapter number inside; instead each starting with a seemingly Japanese-style, sword-related drawing followed by a phrase. For instance, presumably Chapter 1 A great rustling behind him., 2 Watching from the shadows., 3 The honor of being chosen., etc. (p. 13, 19, 25) so I could not help finding such a chapter style mysteriously exciting and I enjoyed reading since the beginning. However, I could keep reading it about two-thirds then my focus started to wane due to its obscure characters, plot, climax, etc. In short, it is like being in a surreal myth till I wondered if the author's writing style is a kind of Zen myth uniquely presented to his readers in this genre.

Therefore, I think these three-part extracts taken from the last episode, that is, Chapter 27 And become what I am. . would help to illustrate my point:

Every evening of the next two years, the young Daimyo entered the Tunnel with a bundle of wood, built the fire, laid aside his clothes and greeted the Enemy with the six syllables of hate: "Still digging up your dead?" Then the two worked steadily through the night.

There was talk at first, then only some. Then none. Very little can be said with words.

It was the fourth month of the thirteenth year with Spring still timid on the slopes. The big man looked over at his young executioner and said, "Tomorrow morning at the Hour of the Ram."

"Tomorrow morning what?"

"It will be done."

"Maybe. There has been a change in the sound of the rock." (pp. 155-156)

...

The big man looked at him: "I'm not forcing you to do anything." The young Daimyo burst out, "But you know I must! You know I will!"

The big man went to him, took him by his arms and laid his cheek upon the young head. He spoke soothingly: "I know and I'm glad you can't forgive. It becomes you and gives meaning to your dream of goodness."

The young man pulled away: "Damn you, don't say this holy trash! You can't woo me from my Vow!"

"I wouldn't want to." (p. 157)

...

The Ronin walked to the fire: "No, let's have the duel and get it over."

The young voice was loud with anger: "I can't finish this alone! It's not my work!"

"It's anyone's. Let them," and he began to walk away. "Bring the swords and let's get out of here. It might cave in."

The young Daimyo didn't move: "But you can't just leave it like this! Come back here and I'll help. Time's cheap."

The big figure was striding naked toward the other light: "Not mine! No more! Not me!"

The young man screamed after him: “But you can’t leave a thing like this undone! It’s wrong not to finish what you start!”

And the big voice echoed from a vast distance in the dark, “The hell with it!” (pp. 158-159)

Melissa Namba says

OK so aside from all the rape, and the rape, and the raping of the rapist, and a little more rape, and a large dose of vengeance, I felt like this book has to be given some credit for the Karate Kid. There is a definite Mr Miyagi character in the book and a strong candidate for Daniel-san. I felt like a lot of the fleshed out scenes were gratuitous and unnecessary and were probably not part of the original Japanese folklore. So in some ways, I am going to say Jennings might have been a perv. However, the core of the story is great and there are some lessons to be learned. Wax on, Wax off.

JFKW says

If you like to read genre stuff by now-dead authors with the ability and desire to describe balls (as in testicles) a number of different, yet equally erotic, ways, you'll love this one. I, however, only moderately enjoy such flashy strokes of the pen.

Steven says

You can't step in the same river twice, and you can't get revenge on that evil Ronin because now he's all cool and shit.
