



The Way of the Traitor

Laura Joh Rowland

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The year is 1690. The place is Nagasaki, Japan. But the motives for murder are the same as they always have been and always will be: lust, greed, and political expedience. When the disfigured body of a prominent Dutch trader is found washed ashore, there are few leads and too many enemies. Sano Ichiro is dispatched to find the killer. But as Sano gets drawn more deeply into the intrigue and deceit that surround the dead Westerner's activities, he finds that nothing is as it seems, and no one can be trusted.

The Way of the Traitor Details

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From Reader Review The Way of the Traitor for online ebook

Gilda says

4.5 stars

Sandy says

Could not finish. 50 pages in and did not grab me despite my love of all things Japanese.

Erin says

Again, my love for Japan and history help me finish a Sano book, despite the *excessively* annoying villains. I have little patience for politicking in life and less in what is supposed to be entertaining. We get it—Yanagisawa is all evil and Sano is all good. A little culture-blind to his own culture and a lot stubborn, but good.

I agree with other reviewers who question why the author includes sporadic Japanese phrases, only to immediately translate them, immediately knocking the reader out of the story.

I also agree that Sano seems less devoted to bushido than he is just stubborn; he should understand Hideki's position better, and he should have some allies and political skill of his own.

Hopefully the next books will be less irritating and more about the mystery than about mustache-twirling cardboard villains.

Amy says

2.5 stars.

What I liked:

- 1) The setting--Nagasaki in the 1600s, at a time when Japan was beginning to have trade relations with the Western world. This allowed for the exploration of some interesting tension between the Japanese and the Dutch traders, and Laura Joh Rowland did a great job of highlighting and explaining these tensions.
- 2) Hirata's refusal to allow Sano to sideline him for his protection.

What I didn't like:

- 1) Sano's stupidity and naiveté! This man just bumbled from one self-made crisis to another. A man this clumsy in his investigations has no business being the Shogun's chief investigator!

2) The repetitiveness of the writing. From Sano's repetitive naval gazing, to the constant re-outlining of who the bad guys could be and what their motivation(s) might have been, I really did not feel like this novel was going anywhere most of the time.

3) Again, the device of someone always being out to get Sano. I get that we need roadblocks in order to keep the story tense, but crimony! Enough with the dastardly villain trying to take out personal revenge on Sano!

Alcornell says

Less "feudal Japan smut" than in previous 2 books. I liked it...in this book Hirata and Sano become bound together by honor, loyalty, respect and friendship. (no spoiler here--this novel forwards the larger arc of the series--we all knew Hirata was struggling for Sano's acknowledgement for good reason.) So now we know Hirata is with us for a while at least, and probably for the long run.

We also got to enjoy Chamberlain Yanagisawa being thwarted once again...we knew it was going to happen, but how?

Nagasaki's history with foreigners in general and with the Dutch specifically was very interesting, as it unfolded in this story. If you have been to Nagasaki you will appreciate the descriptions of the landscape/topography and its relationship to the sea (think of Madame Butterfly), Chinese temples and presence of the Chinese, references to the history of the Catholic church in Japan, the cosmopolitan mix of cultures, unlike other cities in Japan.

The Nagasaki jail of this story was significant -- "jail" has become the scene for a frightening and bizarre mix of truth-telling and depravity in these stories--a little like the connection between love and death played out in the sex scenes (speaking of the whole series so far); as I read the story I remembered the Nagasaki jail was ground zero of the Atom Bomb attack in WWII--a most painful legacy (indirectly) of Japanese foreign relations as instituted by the Tokugawa Shogunate. Was the jail that was incinerated in WWII built on the same site as the jail in the novel?

I am enjoying this series very much. Rowland knows how to spin a yarn. I can't wait to start #4, The Concubine's Tattoo.

Useresu says

Sano has not changed much since the last two books - driven by Bushido, making questionable choices, which with a mix of luck and stubbornness throw him in every other direction. However pace of this story is different - Sano is very slowly digging himself a grave, only to be kicked hard into it at the last moment. I'm not sure if I liked it as much as the previous books, maybe that slow pace goes on for too long at first and the conclusion hits too hard then. But a promise of new Sano in next stories leaves me wanting more :)

Mary JL says

This is a mystery set in Japan in 1690. There are several in the series--this is the second one I have read.

(((((

Mililani says

John says

I would definitely recommend this book to anyone who has read the previous ones. I am less likely to recommend this book on its own since it builds so much upon the events of Bundori.

Aidan says

I enjoyed Bundori, the second book in the series, but found it to lack some of the tension that had made Shinju, the first outing for samurai detective Sano Ichiro, such a page-turning read.

Here Rowland is at her best, creating a real sense of peril - not only for Sano but potentially for all of Japan as his investigation into the murder of a Dutch merchant may not only ruin his career and destroy his honor, but it could also result in war.

As with previous entries in the series, Rowland does a fine job of evoking feudal Japan and, in particular, discussing Japan's isolationism during this period. I do appreciate that Rowland does not just graft a Japanese setting onto a typical murder mystery plot but rather seems to find her mysteries from ideas and customs unique to the Japan of this period.

Sano remains an interesting character - conflicted between his desire to adhere to the tenets of Bushido which demands loyalty to his master and his feelings of disgust at the corruption of those in power. Here we get to see him placed in positions of enormous difficulty as he begins the story exiled to Nagasaki in the Shogun's absence and unable to freely talk to the key witnesses both because of language barriers and the restrictions against free association with foreigners.

These challenges make for an interesting story as we are not only left wondering what Sano's investigation will turn up but also how Sano will manage to find out anything at all. The result is a fascinating case that comes together nicely with a very neat solution (albeit one that probably won't come as a shock to readers).

Of the Sano mysteries I have read so far (the first three plus Red Chrysanthemum) this is the one I have enjoyed most and it certainly left me eager to devour the next in this series.

Anita says

This book takes isolationism and government corruption to a greater level.

Why are some people naturally interspective and loyal?

Mirjam says

what do you know...usually I love these, but this one was a bit hamhanded.

Rebecca says

It's fun to read historical fiction set in places you only know a little about, and the author does seem to have done her research. However, the mystery is I suppose competent enough, but more workmanlike than

anything else, and the characters are acceptable but uninspired.

The setting here is engrossing. Tokugawa Japan balanced on a knife's edge, trying to protect itself from European guns and ideas by being rabidly isolationist. This balancing act is the core of the book, as Sano tries to solve a mystery when the Dutch are convinced that the Japanese are responsible and the Japanese very much want a foreigner to be responsible.

Unfortunately, while the characterization and pacing are there, and aren't terrible, they're also kind of clumsy. We have awkward flashbacks that reveal various possible motives. We have two or three scenes where a key character's identity is kept from us artificially. We have a pretty much unneeded prologue. And we have a protagonist and a supporting character who repeat their paper-thin motivations to us again and again and again. It doesn't make the motivations any less boneheaded. Sano's insistence on refusing his second-in-command's help comes across as just stubbornness instead of nobility--he's being an idiot, especially within the Bushido code. He has a big epiphany and they totally kiss and make up, with less kissing. Maybe there should have been kissing.

Look, the book works ok. It's not terribly flawed. It's fine, it's just kinda lackluster. I wouldn't warn people away, but I probably also will skip the rest of the series.

Michael Pritchett says

Not as strong as previous entries in the series.

Marilyn F says

Well and intricately researched and told, maybe a bit much of trying to make the reader think oh my, how will he get out of this now? Also some good internal dialogue, all in all believably realistic if a bit of a tall tale now and then.
