



The Dark Side: Infamous Japanese Crimes and Criminals

By Mark Schreiber

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This is a collection of vivid accounts of the most notorious criminals and criminal acts to shake modern Japanese society. Read about sleazy samurai and subway sarin attacks and rub shoulders with anarchists, informers and femme fatales.

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The Dark Side: Infamous Japanese Crimes and Criminals By Mark Schreiber Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

The establishment of the Tokugawa shogunate in 1603 ended Japan's long era of civil wars and ushered in a time of relative domestic tranquility and order. Yet, as amply demonstrated by this lively tour of criminality in Japan from 1600 to the present, not even the best ordered of societies is free of crime. Through a series of deftly sketched vignettes, Schreiber, a Tokyo-based U.S. journalist with an eye for the bizarre, introduces us to a colorful cohort of murderers, rapists, arsonists, embezzlers, and criminal psychotics, many of whom wound up on the gallows or the executioner's chopping block. This is intellectual snack food salty, crunchy, and flavorful, rather than a full meal but the author adds just enough history and sociology to make the first half of this popular book more than mere entertainment. The second half, in which the author himself seems to have tired of his subject, is a slapdash assortment of briefly summarized crime stories that are best read in small doses. For larger public libraries. Steven I. Levine, Univ. of Montana, Missoula

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Review

"... a readable and informative introduction to the criminal underbelly of Japanese society." -- *Insight Japan*

"... although this is ostensibly a book about crime, it also serves as an altogether agreeable window into Japanese culture." -- *Salon.com*

"... gets to the core of hot-button issues without being too academic, too judgmental or too prurient." -- *Michael Pronko, TokyoQ*

"... intellectual snack food--salty, crunchy, and flavorful..." -- *Library Journal*

"... offers much insight into a side of Japan that journalistic cliches about a 'crime-free society' paper over." -- *Mark Schilling, The Japan Times*

"... quirky and informative and hard to put down." -- *Burritt Sabin, The East*

"An essential addition to the shelf of any true-life crime fan." -- *Timeout.com*

From the Publisher

An online interview with the author:

Could you tell us a little about your background?

"I'm a pedigreed U.S. Army brat--both parents were World War II veterans. Most of my childhood we moved from assignment to assignment, including about 4 years in Europe, and I was exposed to a lot of foreign cultures and languages. When I was 17, my father was transferred to Okinawa. Instead of remaining behind and matriculating at a U.S. college, I came along to the Far East and wound up making my home here for most of the past 36 years. It was always my dream to write, and I felt certain that Asia would provide me with plenty of topics and ideas. From early on my parents encouraged me to study Japanese and Chinese. More than anything else, it's knowledge of these languages that opened doors to my writing activities."

What motivated you to write this book?

"In 1996 I published a book on famous crimes in Japan after World War II, and it gradually dawned on me that Japan has preserved a treasure trove of true crime history going back to medieval times. Then I was hospitalized due to an accident in September 1997, and a very kind Japanese policeman I knew paid me an unexpected visit. He brought me some reading matter from police archives that got me focused on what I had already been thinking. The series, under the title 'Crime and Punishment in Old Japan,' began running in the Mainichi Daily News from July 1998."

Could you tell us a little about the contents of the book?

"It goes without saying that heads roll--literally in this case. Basically I cover the past 400 years, from the beginning of the Tokugawa Period (1603) to the end of the 20th century. The accounts are arranged chronological order. In addition to the 'infamous' crime stories about cops and robbers of yore, I devote a few chapters to the administration of the law--police, judges, penal system, even rudimentary forensic pathology--in feudal times. Japan's opening to the West and modernization after 1868 saw how this centuries-old ancient system moved to adopt Western law and penology. And oh yes, the book is extensively illustrated with woodblock prints and photographs, so readers get some occasionally shocking images to go with the text."

What do you see as the centerpiece of the book?

"How does anyone absorb 400 years of Japanese history in a couple hours of reading? It's a tall order. What I try to do is use crime stories as the springboard. It's a lot easier to absorb snippets of history--say, on Japanese relations with and attitudes toward foreigners, toward religion, toward social hierarchies, their morals, superstitions, sexual practices, and so on. Reading about the rise and fall of colorful and eccentric individuals is essentially a painless and enjoyable way to pick up some useful snippets of history and enjoy one's self in the process."

What did you yourself learn from writing the book?

"Above all, I gained an appreciation for the enthusiasm and delight that Japanese people feel toward their national history, and beyond that, their deep reverence for the printed word. Many of my sources were published not by historians or academics, but amateur history buffs who very tenaciously dug up these old stories in their spare time. Ultimately their enthusiasm proved contagious and I caught the bug. The Dark Side reflects a sentiment that we are all duty-bound to preserve our history; I've come to understand what a meaningful undertaking it can be."

What would you like readers to take away with them after reading this book?

"That Japanese believe in rewarding good and punishing evil, just like people elsewhere. It's one of the things that reaffirms our common humanity. Of course, they can enjoy reading about bad guys; but the book will also appeal to people with an interest in the law and the criminal justice system. It even touches on some of the sleazier aspects of Japanese society, such as the fetish for S&M style bondage that apparently has roots going back hundreds of years. The stories I present serve as a useful benchmark by which to compare Japan's history and culture with our own."

What people or books were influential in the writing of your book?

"Back in the 1950s, the late Robert van Gulik, a Dutch diplomat and scholar, wrote a series of 'Judge Dee' stories featuring characters spun off from his earlier translation of a traditional Chinese mystery novel. Up to

that point, Asian characters mostly figured in English books either as evil villains like Fu Manchu, or else as objects of racist satire or ridicule. Dr. van Gulik brought an Asian hero to life, in a way with which today's Western readers could empathize. He passed away in 1967, but most of his Judge Dee books remain in print, and continue to thrill new generations of readers. I can recommend them without reservation."

What are your plans for the future, in terms of new books or other projects?

"I'd like to try my hand at writing something about Asia for kids. When I was about eight years old, I read a children's story about five Chinese brothers, based on a famous traditional tale. This instilled in me a lifelong fascination for Asia. I'd like to do my part to wean kids away from TV and electronic games and steer them back to the printed word. I'd also like to try my hand at fiction."

Is there anything else the reader should know?

"A lot of fascinating knowledge about Asia, and the world in general, remains obscured due to linguistic and cultural bottlenecks. The process to revive this knowledge, from discovery to research, from compilation to translation, and finally to publication, might almost be described as a kind of modern-day archeology. Being able to open a window on mankind's past has been an exhilarating experience."

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Doris Williams:

Book is to be different per grade. Book for children right up until adult are different content. As it is known to us that book is very important for all of us. The book The Dark Side: Infamous Japanese Crimes and Criminals had been making you to know about other information and of course you can take more information. It is very advantages for you. The reserve The Dark Side: Infamous Japanese Crimes and Criminals is not only giving you far more new information but also for being your friend when you experience bored. You can spend your spend time to read your reserve. Try to make relationship with all the book The Dark Side: Infamous Japanese Crimes and Criminals. You never truly feel lose out for everything in case you read some books.

Mary Lee:

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Amanda Chatham:

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Faye Michaels:

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