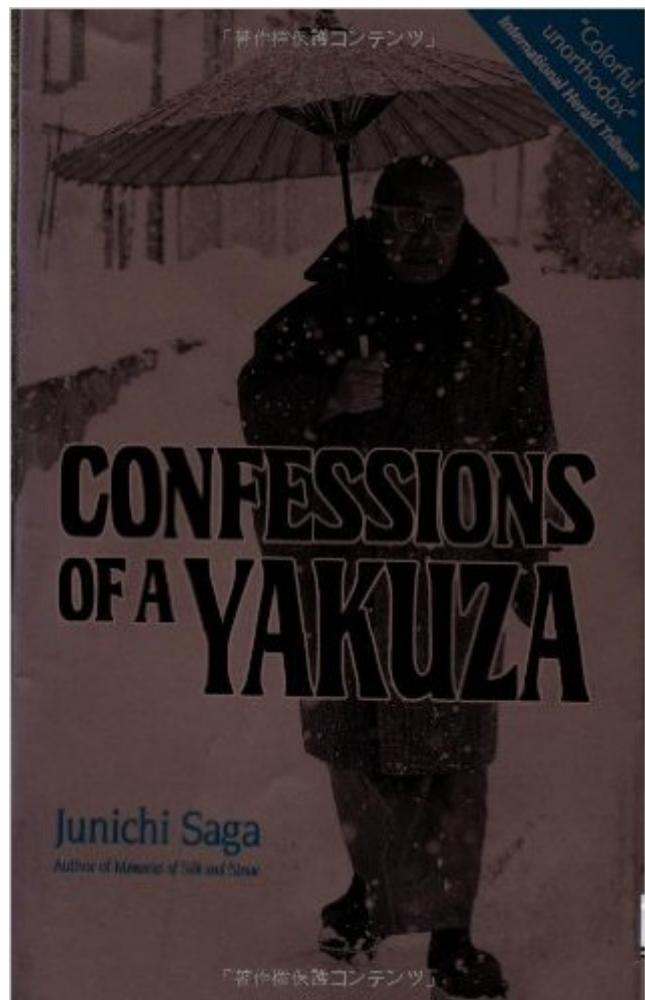


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Confessions Of A Yakuza: A Life In Japan's Underworld



Synopsis

This is the true story, as told to the doctor who looked after him just before he died, of the life of one of the last traditional yakuza in Japan. It wasn't a "good" life, in either sense of the word, but it was an adventurous one; and the tale he has to tell presents an honest and oddly attractive picture of an insider in that separate, unofficial world. In his low, hoarse voice, he describes the random events that led the son of a prosperous country shopkeeper to become a member, and ultimately the leader, of a gang organizing illegal dice games in Tokyo's liveliest entertainment area. He talks about his first police raid, and the brutal interrogation and imprisonment that followed it. He remembers his first love affair, and the girl he ran away with, and the weeks they spent wandering about the countryside together. Briefly, and matter-of-factly, he describes how he cut off the little finger of his left hand as a ritual gesture of apology. He explains how the games were run and the profits spent; why the ties between members of "the brotherhood" were so important; and how he came to kill a man who worked for him. What emerges is a contradictory personality: tough but not unsentimental; stubborn yet willing to take life more or less as it comes; impulsive but careful to observe the rules of the business he had joined. And in the end, when his tale is finished, you feel you would probably have liked him if you'd met him in person. Fortunately, Dr. Saga's record of his long conversations with him provides a wonderful substitute for that meeting.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Okay, Okay, so the reviews below probably have said it all for me rendering this opinion moot but

for the fact that I wanted to boost the star rating of this charming little book: A book that will have you wishing it was twice as long before you are half way through it. This is ostensibly the autobiography of a dying, retired yakuza boss as told to his attending physician. An interesting contrivance but not essential to the story at hand which is random, expertly told vignettes describing the life of a really extraordinary character whose life happens to revolve around the Japanese underworld. Extraordinary I say because this was a boy born into a family comprising the then nascent Japanese middle class: the future "sarariman," who nevertheless is so high spirited that he turns his back on what promises to be a life of relative ease (if only through dint of hardwork) for one of adventure. Extraordinary because the fellow is six feet tall in a world where the average man's height is 5' 4"; extraordinary because he is a fellow who is not afraid to buck the rules of a hidebound society, even those of the underground world which embraces him after he has left mainstream society; extraordinary because he has the kind of personality that causes his superiors to become devoted to him and his inferiors to buckle under to his rule when it is time for him to lead, and finally extraordinary because the fellow has the uncanny ability to recite events in a page turning manner. This Yakuza's confession is a look at Japan during its transition into the industrial age; a time when the country's view of itself as the land of the rising sun was just begining to take on the sinister overtones that led to the second world war.

This book is a "memoir" of sorts, a biographical tale of a retired yakuza as dictated to his doctor. This man is a "yakuza" in the word's original sense--a professional gambler, not the organized gangsters that the word is used to refer to today. The ex-yakuza in this story, as he tells his tale over the months, knows he is slowly dying. He starts to see the doctor, a general practitioner in a quiet suburban neighborhood, when he realizes that is body is really starting to fall apart. His doctor knows the man's in a bad way, but he replies with optimistic predictions when his patient asks things like, "I don't have much time left, do I?" Over several visits, the doctor realizes what a hard and amazing life the man has led. He asks to interview him for a book, and the yakuza agrees. The doctor then deals with a range of emotions: a desire even he doesn't understand to record the man's tale and tell it to the world, a sense of urgency due to his knowledge of the man's health, and an awareness of the need not to pester the old man with daily visits and long interviews. (This hesitance may arise from a healthy respect for the still-formidable old man.) Anyone looking for graphically violent and prurient tales about modern-day Japanese gangsters robbing banks and shooting at each other will be greatly disappointed--although there is some violence. The most fascinating aspect of this novel is its portrayal of how people interacted with each other so much

differently back then--ways we would consider cryptic today, hiding their emotions, putting up with insults, acting with almost subservient humility to save face for their companions or organization. Putting on a brave face when faced with amazing adversity.

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