

# THE 47 RONIN: A GRAPHIC NOVEL BY SEAN MICHAEL WILSON



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A graphic novel version of the most dramatic example of bushido—the samurai code—in Japanese history.

In the eighteenth century, forty-seven samurai avenged the death of their master in a plot that would take over two years to complete. After succeeding in their mission, the masterless samurai—known as ronin—all committed ritual suicide. The story, which is a national legend, remains the most potent example of Japan's deeply rooted cultural imperative of honor, persistence, loyalty, and sacrifice.

The historical event has inspired many writers and artists over the years and numerous fictionalized versions and adaptations have emerged. In *The 47 Ronin*, Sean Michael Wilson has created a historically factual portrait, enhanced by evocative and often lyrical drawings by Akiko Shimojima. While there are other depictions of the story in manga form, this version stands out as being the most accurate and most compelling. Wilson and Shimojima have made the characters nuanced and relatable.

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## Most helpful customer reviews

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful.

An interesting and informative graphic novel about the legendary Japanese tale of "The 47 Ronin."

By Joseph J. Truncale

I read the Japanese story about the legendary 47 Ronin (Masterless Samurai) many years ago but thought reading this graphic novel about this historical tale would be interesting to explore once again. I was not disappointed. The story is a familiar one and anyone who has read anything about Japanese history has heard this tale about how 47 Samurai avenge the death of their master, Lord Asano.

After Lord Asano had to commit seppuku (Ritual Japanese Suicide), because he struck (but did not kill) an evil, ignorant and impolite official named Lord Kira, in another Lord's castle, his Samurai decided upon revenge but they devised a secret plan so that no one would be suspicious of their true goal and objective. Each Ronin (A Masterless Samurai) completely changed their personality, some becoming drunks, some pretending to be peasants and others pretending to be garden workers. Some of these Ronin were even able to work on the grounds and inside the castle where Lord Kira lived.

Finally after two years the 47 Samurai put their plan into action and were able to avenge the death of their master. In the end to show they were indeed men of honor and followed the code of Bushido (Way of the

warrior), all 47 Samurai committed seppuku. Even if you have already read the original book this graphic novel version really makes the story come alive. If you like graphic novels and Japanese Bushido (Way of the warrior) tales, you should check out this book.

Rating: 4 Stars. Joseph J. Truncale (Author: The Samurai Heart: An old warrior's poetic tribute)

16 of 18 people found the following review helpful.

Awesome!

By Ronin

This is a masterpiece of warrior philosophy. It is not a casual read and nor is it a story that will provide entertainment value. This is essential reading for martial artists and practitioners of eastern medicine as one of the fundamental lessons involves the cultivation of Qi. The "Demon" in this case refers to the Tengu, which are legendary throughout Japan.

The Tengu is many things and comes in many forms. It is known as a mischievous and malevolent spirit that brought terror to the Japanese. The ninja made use of these legends and often impersonated Tengu to strike fear. But the Tengu is also a respected and revered symbol and is associated with Shugendo, or the Way of the Aesthetic. In this role the Tengu can be a teacher, and a protector of Buddhism who punished evil-doers.

Practitioners of Shugendo often live alone in the mountains and are known as Yamabushi (Shinto), meaning "Mountain (Yama) Warrior (Bushi) Aesthetic" in the deeper sense. They view nature as possessing powerful Qi; in the mountains, rocks, and streams. In the wilderness they train and cultivate their energy. Their ancient roots come from China and the Taoist traditions, which is very evident in this book:

"The Demon said, 'The Way cannot be seen or heard. What can be seen or heard are just traces of the Way.'

The Tengu, the Yamabushi, and the ninja are all connected. Togakushi is a small village high in the Japanese alps that claims a ninja heritage that is 900-years old. There are 3 shinto shrines in the valley, and countless sacred spots throughout the mountains, which have many small waterfalls and streams. The Tengu of Togakushi takes the form of a raven. Tengu are also common in many other ninja villages like Yagyuzato.

What's incredible about this book is its really the only one on this subject in english. While sitting high on a precipice in the mountains above Togakushi, I watched a raven high above tuck its wings into a steep dive and it sounded like a katana slicing the air as it passed 15-feet away before continuing another 1000-feet down and leveling off just over the tree line. It was an odd display and there was something really powerful about it. That spirit is alive in this book, and it sheds light on where these ideas originated.

The Tengu are also high techers, but only to the select few. They often took a keen interest in people who retreated to the mountains for extended training. Morihei Ueshiba, the Aikido founder learned some of his martial arts from a Tengu in the 1920's. Sword master Yagyū Muneyoshi had an epic sword duel with a Tengu during a violent lightning storm in the mountains above the village. There is rock there where supposedly his sword cut through the stone after the Tengu dodged him that is now known as Itto Seki, or "one sword stroke rock".

This book deals a lot with the movement of a warrior, but perhaps a more powerful message relates to the Shugendo concepts or more specifically the cultivation of Qi. This was fundamental to the ancient Taoist masters who created powerful martial arts such as the highly advanced Ba Gua Zhang. Chozanshi is clearly advocating that we work endlessly to cultivate Qi, and through this process both our lives and our practices will excel.



This book is a rare treat. It offers some very advanced material, and I highly recommend it to anyone who is a serious practitioner of the arts. Be prepared to study.

23 of 29 people found the following review helpful.

Deep and cryptic

By wiredweird

The Demon's Sermon comes from Japan's 17th century. Author Niwa Jurozaemon Tadaaki (writing as Issao Chozanshi) created this work on martial arts, despite a claim after the Sermon that "I am not a swordsman, so how could I teach swordsmanship?" If that is truly the author speaking, then what else in these essays should be discounted as suspect in their accuracy? And, if it's self-deprecating fiction, then what other points in these essays should also be discounted as fiction? This, I think, is the least of the paradoxes within this text.

The text carries a Taoist tone, with many allusions to Taoist classics. Educated Japanese in many centuries referred often to the Chinese canon. Chozanshi's work, however, stands out for building up Chinese concepts in terms of Chinese classics, building them on a base of Japanese martial arts, folk culture, and religion. This sermon on martial arts in fact says very little about those arts - instead, it cultivates the mind, spirit, and human energy of the martial artist. The third essay in this set scarcely addresses martial arts at all. Instead, the amusing parable follows an exchange between cats on the conquest of an uncommonly fierce rat. If just a word here and there were changed, the fable would have sounded like an actual part of the Chuang Tzu.

Wilson's translation is modern and fluent. His preface and footnotes clarify many cultural referents that could otherwise have been obscure, especially regarding the demon speaker himself. Despite skilled translation, the Way of Chozanshi's text remains obscure - as if to remind a reader of any century that the Way that can be spoken is not the eternal Way.

-- wiredweird

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