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When the powerful Lord Takeda's soldiers sweep across the countryside, killing and plundering, they spare the boy Taro's life and take him along with them. Taro becomes a servant in the household of the noble Lord Akiyama, where he meets Togan, a cook, who teaches Taro and makes his new life bearable. But when Togan is murdered, Taro's life takes a new direction: He will become a samurai, and redeem the family legacy that has been stolen from him.

The Samurai's Tale Details

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From Reader Review The Samurai's Tale for online ebook

Isaac says

Tragedies, death, destruction, honor. These are all traits of the book The Samurai's Tale by Eric Christian Haugaard.

The book starts with young Taro as he hides from Lord Akiyama's soldiers in an attempt to escape. The soldiers do find him, however, and bring him to Lord Akiyama. Akiyama decides to recruit him, and Taro meets Togan, a cook and wrestling fan, who teaches him to be a chef. One day Togan goes to see a wrestling match in a less friendly village and criticizes the wrestler. They get in a fight, and Togan dies.

Taro quickly rises throughout the ranks of Lord Akiyama's household and goes on to become a samurai and meet his love, Aki-hime. They exchange poems, and Taro meets her father, Lord Zakoji. They become friends, and he makes Taro a better person as well as samurai.

Another person who helps Taro is Yoshitoki. Taro does not hesitate to talk to Yoshitoki when he is with him and tells him all of his problems. Taro's biggest problem is his name. The name Taro is a peasant name, a slave name, and a name that Taro disapproves of. He goes to Lord Akiyama who gives him his old name that he had before he was captured by him. Taro's name becomes Murakami Harutomo.

All of these people contribute to Murakami's personality and make him a better person. This book is a great book and a challenging read. I rate this book a 4.5 out of 5 stars because of the writing style and the great plotline. The writing is great and really shows the effects that the feudal system can give. I recommend this book to middle school students because of the challenging vocabulary and conflicts. This book is really great and I wish that there could be a sequel to this historical fiction book.

Jenna Hart says

I thought that "The Samurai's Tale" was a good book. In the beginning, the main characters' parents were killed leaving him with nothing but a bamboo sword. This got me interested, wondering what was to come. Erik Christian Haugaard did a good job of adding suspense however and portraying the time period, but, he left me confused at some points. I think that in order to fully understand the book you must do some research. For example, when the author was talking about all the Lords, it got confusing who was who. So I had to research all the Lords and their roles in Feudal Japan. But, I think that if you do some research beforehand you will be able to understand the whole story.

I gave this book four stars because it kept me interested, had an interesting plot, and created suspense. Erik did a great job of keeping me interested by creating new conflicts in every chapter. Although it was confusing at the beginning, with a little research I was able to understand and enjoy the book. This book was an overall good book to read, and overall I would recommend it.

David says

This is pretty decent. I think I would have rather read actual accounts from the time period, but as a story this wasn't bad. I enjoyed it, at the very least.

Jonah says

The beginning of the book was really good. I really like that Taro was adopted by the people who killed his father and thought it would set up for an interesting story and later helped him encounter one of his earlier enemies. However, after he has to move away from the kitchen following Togan's death. He has to restart life and begins to work on his master's horses creating a long span of nothing interesting happening that stretched far too long. Even as the main conflict begins he works on the most boring jobs, checking provisions. Only after he wounds one of the biggest enemies to his clan, he barely becomes a samurai with his own sword. As a samurai he only helps in one part of the war with no action (again) as a commanding officer. When he works his way up to becoming one of his master's most trusted friends, things look up for a while and he begins to send love letters to a woman he has a crush on. I thought it built some suspense in waiting to see the replies but it wasn't extremely engaging. When everything seems to look well and his clan has taken over one of the most important castles, they get surrounded by the biggest clan and will soon be slaughtered. Taro is sent to go and look for help. After returning he goes and finds that the castle has been taken over and all his friends have been executed. Strangely he doesn't seem to even care that they have died. His servant notices him and takes him to the girl he loves who disguised herself as a boy. The story ends with them going to get a normal life at a village, but ends before we even learn anything.

Scott Hayden says

Japanese in style, not just setting. Haugaard exercises economy of words taking us through the life of a young boy, spared in war, half-adopted by the noble slayers of his family. He matures in desire, humility, and status into a trusted Samurai. I am astonished sometimes by the incredible restraint of court culture and the binding loyalty of vassals and warlords.

Contrasts are drawn between warlords who battle out of necessity and those overly-ambitious to expand their own power. Even then, contrasts are drawn between those who have some semblance of self-restraint, a code of honor, and those who will win and kill at all costs.

Though the main character is a warrior, he does not relish his first kill, nor ever want to participate in ritual beheading, even for the sake of honor. This sensitivity to life and death, even by a soldier, brings balance and hints of hope in the midst of tragedy.

Good book for middle schoolers or higher. Great window into medieval Japan.

Kailey (BooksforMKs) says

Taro's family are all killed by invading soldiers, but the captain saves young Taro alive to be a servant. Taro

vows to become a samurai, and regain the wealthy position his father once held. He begins as a lowly kitchen boy, but quickly is placed in higher positions of trust. He gains the respect of men in power and slowly rises in the ranks to follow his dream, but the shifting wars in Japan threaten to destroy everything he knows.

I wasn't surprised that there is a lot of violence in this book, since it was a bloody era in history. I thought it was handled well though, without being unnecessarily graphic. The writing treats the death and destruction of these 1570s Japanese wars with an admirable gravity and respect. Although it is unpleasant and sad to read about, knowing that this history truly happened, I think the level of violence is still appropriate for middle grade or YA readers.

Tons of people are beheaded, beginning with Taro's mother and brothers. Taro witnesses their murders as a young child, and carries that scar with him into his young adulthood, making him a much more compassionate person than most of the other samurai. He doesn't crave battle as some of the other soldiers do, because he has seen the crushing loss that follows violence.

This compassion is one of Taro's most attractive qualities as a main character, and he is also loyal and upright when others are sneaky and duplicitous. This makes him stand out from the crowd, and earns him respect from those in authority.

The writing style is very dry, which makes it a little difficult to get into the story at first, but by the middle I was fully invested in Taro's story and was cheering him on right to the end!

One of the good things about this book is how historically accurate the setting is, but it also creates complications because all these Japanese warlords have very similar sounding names, and often the sons are called by the same family name as the fathers, so it becomes difficult to keep track of the many characters and who is at war with whom.

I was often confused by various Japanese words and terms that were used. They are sometimes explained within the story's text, but other times just left there with no explanation. I could mostly figure out what was meant through the context, but I wish there were a glossary at the back.

It's as though the author is so familiar with Japanese culture and history that he expects his readers to have the same knowledge, so doesn't bother to explain or elaborate.

All in all a wonderful story and well worth the read!

Macky says

I thought this book was really good. One of the main reasons I liked it was because it was about samurai and what they really were like. The one of the reasons I didn't rate it 5 stars was because they said that ninja were samurai when in real life they were **not**. The other one was that he worked so hard to become a samurai and in the end, he lost what he had worked all his *life* for! That kind of stunk. But now about the good things.

I think the story was really good, how it followed him throughout his life. I think it was pretty good in 1st person, but it might have been better in 3rd. I was sad when Togan was murdered, but it wasn't really sad because we hadn't had much time to meet him. I loved the way he started out in one of the lower ranks, but worked his way up until he became a samurai. I found the book *slightly* confusing because of all the Japanese names, like Akiyama, and Takeda.

I think that it was a good book overall, just a few minor things that made me not give it 5 stars.

EasyB says

The Samurai's Tale Review

Every once in a while, you will be lucky enough to find a book that is exciting, complex, astute, and filled with tension. Erik Christian Haugaard's 'The Samurai's Tale' is exactly that.

The Samurai's Tale is a story set in medieval Japan. It tells the story of an orphaned son of a samurai, Taro, who as his family gets murdered, is spared and taken to be a slave in the household of Lord Takeda Shingen. He grows up there, slowly going from a cook to a stable-boy to a messenger as tensions between two warlords, Takeda Shingen and Oda Nobunaga rise. Meanwhile, Taro befriends many, including the friendly cook, Togan, who is murdered, Yoshitoki, a funny messenger who accompanies him, and Lord Akiyama Nobutomo, a brilliant military general. As Taro climbs up higher in the ranks, he realizes that his childhood dream, to become a Samurai, may come true and that he may fulfill the family legacy. During all this, Takeda Shingen's army begins to advance on Nobunaga's. Eventually, Taro finds himself amongst the ranks, ready to fight. Taro, as he is growing up, falls in love with a young maiden named Aki-Hime, daughter of Lord Zakoji. Eventually, all this gets tangled up in an epic novel, with too good of an ending.

Taro, the main character, is, unlike other characters we've read about, complex, and not one-dimensional. He is driven by love and ambition but is not a dreamy hero, as he both disobeys orders and gets angry at his authorities. All these combined amounts to a well-layered, interesting protagonist. Accompanied by many just-as-convoluted Ancillary characters, the personas in 'The Samurai's tale' are perfectly balanced.

One theme in this book is elatasadness (Experiencing happiness and sadness all at once), as Taro loses pretty much everyone who he ever cared for, yet he still is in love and has the courage to continue his life, even after experiencing so much sorrow. Another theme in 'The Samurai's Tale' is friendship. Many people befriend Taro, and without their friendship, he probably wouldn't have made it as far as he did. One example of this is that because he is friends with Lord Akiyama. Lord Akiyama does not send him to fight until far into the second half of the novel, which is probably why Taro did not die before he went on all of his adventures.

As you might have guessed, I thoroughly cherished every word of this novel. From its delicate characters to historically accurate timeline, 'The Samurai's Tale' is a novel that should be read by all. Every reader will enjoy different parts of the novel, whether it is the action packed fight scenes, the exquisite philosophy of Togan in the cookhouse, or the sense of both despair and joy at the end of the novel, this book has something for everyone.

In conclusion, 'The Samurai's Tale' is a book that should be read by people of all ages, because it has layered characters, an intriguing plotline, and complex themes. Younger readers will enjoy the simpler parts such as Taro's love letters as well as fight scenes while older readers will cherish the more complex parts; Taro's inner conflict of whether he is worthy of Aki-Hime, Togan's philosophy which actually foreshadows the continuation of the book, and more. Rating: 5/5 stars

Alex says

The ending was sad

Cassie says

You know a story is going to be boring when it starts out with "How should I begin my story?" The plot was slow, the characters were difficult to keep straight, and the conflict was unconvincing. Yes, there were a few good parts, but they were few and far between. The one good thing I have to say is the love story was cute. I just found it difficult to get into this book. I only read it because I had to for school.

Kashvi Lalgudi says

The Samurai's Tale follows the journey of a young boy named Taro, and how he eventually rises through the ranks and becomes a fully fledged samurai, under the Lord Takeda Shingen. I found Taro's saga to be deep and interesting, because even when he lost someone important to him, he met a new person, and when he made a friend, he would always apply that friend's lesson to every cruel battle or scenario he faced. Haugaard did an incredible job of setting the tone and time of the story, which takes place in 16th century Japan. Surprisingly, I did not like the story's happy ending, because although it made the story come full circle after Taro describes the battle preceding it, it dampened the mood of the book, and it seemed almost random and irrelevant to the plot. I still think it is a great book to read, and it draws a comparison with Game of Thrones because it describes the crazy lives, wives, and power between the feuding daimyos at that time.

Angelina says

This book is majorly underrated. I know people read it for school, so it's deemed: boring, but give it a chance! The Samurai's Tale begins slowly, though once the tension has built, it's like it spirals out of control and you lose yourself to the world of 'Taro'. You feel what he feels-love, loyalty, anguish- and see everything through a young samurai's eyes.

4.5 stars- if only because the slow start. Don't put this book down unless you've gotten to page 100 and still think it's boring.

Brady says

When reading a historical fiction novel, every aspect of the story is dependent on the way the author portrays the time period. This influences everything from character development to the plot. Throughout the book The Samurai's Tale, Erik Haugaard portrays a the period of transitioning power in feudal Japan as a time of ambition and loyalty.

This time period is primarily shown as a time of ambition, especially because it follows the journey of an

ambitious young servant who wishes to reclaim his lost honor and rise in the ranks. The character's ambition is a main factor in pushing the plot forward. For example, early in the book Taro says, "When I saw the sons of the lords and the Samurai, I desired nothing but to be their equal" (21). This foreshadows that his ambition will be a contributing factor to the plotline, and it also illustrates his ambition to rise above his lowly station. His ambition is eventually rewarded, as he is granted a new name by Lord Akiyama, marking him as a samurai. When he tells his friend and mentor, Yoshi, the man smiles and exclaims "That is a good name" (89). These kind words from his mentor figure cause Taro to feel immense amounts of pride. This shows that he did not only desire station and honor, but also admiration from his friends and acquaintances.

Despite the prevalent ambition at this time, many characters also displayed significant amounts of loyalty. This was especially true for their immediate superiors, who they owed loyalty to directly, rather than higher powers who only retained loyalty through the commutative property. At this time period, "trying to revolt (was) the most serious offence" (119) that one could commit. This shows a general expectancy of loyalty from all beneath oneself. The surrounding text also provides information that upon becoming disloyal, the offender usually lost all honor, to the point where they would commit seppuku (a ritual suicide) to restore even a scrap. Though these expectations of loyalty were clearly demanding, they did not chafe at the common man, or the one that loyalty was expected from. Rather, it provided a sense of purpose and honor. Proof of this lies in the section of text where, upon being given an errand by his superior, the main character remarked that "we felt immensely important setting out" (73).

Overall, the author characterizes the inhabitants of his novel with the traits of ambition and loyalty. This helps the story continue by providing motives for characters, allowing for the plot to fully develop, and allows for full exploration of the values of the time period. I found this to be a great book, because it successfully explores the time period in such depth while still maintaining the plot and character development necessary to maintain reader interest. I would recommend this book to any audience that is interested in either historical fiction or stories of samurai, but if you aren't willing to read a novel with minimal action, I would suggest diverting your attention.

Sarah says

The Samurai's tale is the account of the beginning of the unification of Japan from the perspective of Taro, a young peasant who rises through the ranks of medieval Japan's feudal system. Taro is orphaned when his Samurai father is defeated and his family is slaughtered by the warlord of the Takeda clan in Kai. His life is spared and he is raised by a couple different father figures, under the Takeda rule, as he works different jobs growing up. Taro becomes a peasant kitchen boy, stable boy, messenger, food guard, samurai, and ninja: all various stations from which to experience feudal Japan. The story is wrought with irony: Taro loses his father, but gains four; falls and rises in station and falls again; and finds contentment in a time of unrest (Those who know Japanese history will realize that peace will not come until Lord Tokugawa Ieyasu unifies all of Japan under one leadership which is foreshadowed in the last paragraph). At the end, when Lord Takeda Shingen passes, his territories are invaded by the Oda clan ushering in the first of the three stages of Japan's unification. Loyalty, loss, and manhood are main themes.

David M. says

They will kill us, your sister whispers as the soldiers approach. Imagine soldiers find you hiding and take

you outside to show you the sight of your mother and your two brothers lying on the ground lifelessly. The gore will make you tear up.

Samurai's Tale, one of the finest books I have read. Samurai's tale leaves that suspicion while you're reading which makes you not want to put the book down. It talks about Taro who is hiding from soldiers and when he gets caught he luckily gets "adopted" by a lord, Lord Akiyama. The book takes place in Japan. In the beginning of the book, his boss is a chef that serves servants and peasants in Lord Akiyama's Mansion. As time passes Taro receives new perks and ranks, like a new name and a new rank or level. After a while, Taro (Who changes his name to Murakami Harutomo) stumbles upon another challenge. The great war of becoming ruler of Japan. Taro's great leader is called Takeda Shingen, Shingen eventually dies, and his son Takeda Katsuyori becomes the 'great' leader. Once Katsuyori inherits his father's position the whole army falls apart and his army is shredded to pieces. In one of the battles, Katsuyori won the battle of Takatenjin Castle which was a great victory but he was filled with joy and pride which made him try to recapture Nagashino Castle (A castle that they lost) and ends up having his army slaughtered one by one.

I liked this book due to all the suspicion that the book brought to the reader. This book really teaches the reader about patience and not pushing things too far. Like when Katsuyori was filled with pride that he tried to recapture Nagashino and ends up having his army slaughtered. It also shows that if Taro kept on asking Lord Akiyama for a new rank and kept on agitating Lord Akiyama then it will not turn out well. I liked how they explained everything in detail and explaining what something is by showing it not telling it. Their word choice was worthy and deserved a few "wows" or "I don't know that word" I recommend this book to people who like historical fiction with a twist, and a lot of questions flowing through your head like "I wonder who it may be," something like that. This book was a marvelous book that I enjoyed immensely and hope to find a book as good or even better than this one.
