



The Samurai's Daughter

Sujata Massey

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A new crime-thriller full of suspense from Sujata Massey, the acclaimed author of *The Bride's Kimono* and *The Floating Girl*.

Antiques dealer Rei Shimura is in San Francisco visiting her parents and researching a personal project tracing the story of 100 years of Japanese decorative arts through her own family's experience. Her work is interrupted by the arrival of her boyfriend, lawyer Hugh Glendinning, who is involved in a class action lawsuit on behalf of aged Asian nationals forced to engage in slave labour for Japanese companies during World War II.

These two projects suddenly intertwine when one of Hugh's clients is murdered and Rei begins to uncover unsavoury facts about her own family's actions during the war. Rei unravels the truth, finds the killer, and at the same time learns about family ties and loyalty and the universal desire to avoid blame.

The Samurai's Daughter Details

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Author : Sujata Massey

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From Reader Review The Samurai's Daughter for online ebook

Lisa Barbour says

So far, this is my least favorite book in this series. I just didn't find it interesting and her behavior was bothersome.

Sarah says

A light, easy read. Very Japanese, made me miss it so much!

Paula Silvonen says

Viihdyin taas hyvin Rei Shimuran kanssa. Eivät nämä mitään suurta kirjallisuutta ole, ja tämä osa oli minusta sarjan huonommasta päästä, mutta jotakin hyvälle tuulelle tästä tuli. Dekkarijuoni oli ennalta arvattava ja samalla epäuskottava, mikä on saavutus sinänsä. Japani-kuvaus oli mielenkiintoista kuten aina. Kiva välipalakirja.

Sharon says

This book tells an interesting story about Japanese history, antiques, and what happens to a young Japanese American woman antiques dealer and her Scottish fiance lawyer when their business interests intersect and both past and present wrongdoing and corruption are revealed.

Doreen says

This instalment is the best one thus far.

Helena says

This mystery series by Sujata Massey is fast paced, informative and interesting enough that one anticipates sitting down to read another chapter or two. Perfect for a daily commuter's ride or waiting for appointments as well as pleasurable, relaxed reading.

I've traveled to Japan a few times for several week's stay each time but didn't know much about contemporary culture, and wish this series had been around back then. The main character, Rei Shimura, is believable, intelligent and interesting. This isn't a deep, complicated mystery, but it's a good, fast read with contemporary cultural insight sot both western and eastern cultures, and will keep your attention.

The only negative is the frequent mention of brand name products, sometimes sounding too much like commercial endorsements for my comfort.

Do authors insert brand names and products into their writing as a method for showcasing their own level of personal taste and discernment? In the Rei Shimura series, this frequent name dropping is a little much. Do authors receive benefits or payments for writing commercials into their novels?

Shomeret says

Some might consider Rei Shimura foolish in this book, but I thought her courageous and unselfish. This is the third book I have read in this series, and I am impressed by her behavior for the first time. I also liked the way this book dealt with various issues in Japanese history.

I am definitely going to want to read more Rei Shimura books.

Kerry & naomi says

The Samurai's Daughter is Sujata Massey's sixth Rei Shimura mystery. Throughout the series, Rei is a half-Japanese American citizen living in Tokyo, Japan, trying to support herself as an antiques dealer. Rei has an on-again-off-again relationship with a Scots lawyer, Hugh Glendinning, who had reappeared in Rei's life during the fifth novel, *The Bride's Kimono*. Rei, like various fictional characters, has an amazing capacity for stumbling onto crime scenes and then pursuing leads to satisfy her own curiosity.

The Plot

Rei returned with her parents at the end of *The Bride's Kimono* to the family home in San Francisco for a much-needed vacation over the holidays. During the month between the close of the last book and the opening of *The Samurai's Daughter*, Rei has started working on a history of the Shimura family, cataloging the items that had been passed down to her father as the oldest son. Hugh Glendinning arrives right before Christmas to get to know Rei's parents just when Rei and her father's relationship has become strained due to her poking around rattling skeletons and the addition of a houseguest, Manami, a Japanese exchange student in the pathology program of the university where Rei's father works as a psychiatrist.

Hugh, meanwhile, is working on a class action suit to sue Japanese conglomerates and gather depositions from witnesses who were forced into slave labor for Japanese companies during World War II or sent to brothels as "comfort women," or prostitutes, for Japanese soldiers. Rei accompanies Hugh to take one of the witnesses some food and a teakettle, a witness that later winds up dead, apparently from natural causes. Rei has other suspicions, especially when, after returning to Tokyo, another of Hugh's witnesses is attacked and goes into a coma.

Elements of Style

The Samurai's Daughter is Massey's most overtly political novel to date. Although Massey has dealt with the subtleties of racism and xenocentrism in Japanese culture in previous novels, *The Samurai's Daughter* is a clear indictment of the Japanese government for its failure to not only pay reparations for the enslavement of Korean, Filipino, and other Asian minorities as hard laborers for Japanese companies and empressing

women into prostitution, but also Japan's failure to acknowledge their responsibility for these atrocious human rights violations. As a capstone, Massey also brings in the Japanese government's denial that the Nanking massacre even happened.

If I had not lived in Japan myself and gone through experiences that parallel Rei's, such as counter-culture shock and counter-counter-culture shock, I might not have gotten as much out of this novel as I did. When I first went to Japan as an exchange student, I underwent culture shock but emerged from it with a love for Japan and all things Japanese, as well as a deepened sense of appreciation and patriotism for the United States, my home country. My initial culture shock was minuscule compared to the counter-culture shock of returning to the United States after a year away, an experience that made me in many respects very cynical about American society and idealistic about Japanese culture. Rei undergoes a similar experience in *The Bride's Kimono*, when she first returns to the United States after living in Japan for five years. I returned to Japan several years later; the second time, Japanese culture seemed much more transparent to me, and I was more aware of the problems in their society (and my own). And, as a result of seeing ugly American abroad syndrome writ large in the military population of Okinawa, I once again left Japan for the United States, a lot more enlightened about two cultures and about human beings, loving both cultures a little less, having viewed both of them more clearly.

During Rei's return to Japan and her delving into her family history, she learns things about her family that may have affected World War II and 20th century Japanese imperialism. (I would also argue that Japan practiced *political* imperialism for the first half of the 20th century; since then, Japan has practiced *economic* imperialism.) Because of Hugh's class action suit, the information she uncovers about her ancestors, and being able to see more clearly some of the (not necessarily innocuous) motivations behind Japanese culture, Rei loses some of her tendency to idealize Japan. Her very behavior, the short temper, striking at people closest to her, bound up with everything else, indicate that Rei is undergoing the frustrations of counter-counter-culture shock.

Nitpicks

Although I loved the story as it unfolded and even the mystery elements were not completely predictable, I have to wonder if Massey's editor even bothered to proofread the manuscript. I expect every book I pick up to have three typos; more than that annoys me. This novel had at least five typos: unclosed or unopened quotes, extra words that should have been deleted, misspellings, inappropriate word choice. Additionally, not all of the action in the novel flowed; it was rather jarring when a scene started in the kitchen and suddenly we're in the dining room with no idea how we got there. This happened more than once and could have been easily fixed by one-sentence transitions in several instances. I don't blame the author so much as I do the editor for failing to catch the mistakes—I've seen similar things slip past editors of experienced and frequently published authors, as though they assume the authors are no longer fallible.

Overall

I am quite pleased that Massey decided to infuse *The Samurai's Daughter* with a political viewpoint that works well mediated through Rei's counter- and counter-counter-culture shock. I am curious to know if other readers who have not lived in Japan picked up the same nuances as I did, and I hope that, after reading this review and the book, more readers who have not traveled abroad themselves will be attuned to the subtleties of moving in and out of different cultures.

Heather says

This mystery is one of a series which features a Japanese-American antiques dealer, Rei Shimura. I loved the concept, but the execution was a little rough. Rei took too many risks and found clues a little too easily.

The story starts in San Francisco where she is staying with her family and researching their own history. It follows her back to her beloved Japan where she continues her pursuit along with "assisting" her lawyer-boyfriend. He is looking for evidence in a class-action suit against big Japanese firms who employed slave labor during WWII.

Good research. I hope future books in the series might have a little more polish.

Chris Madsen says

This book came to me by way of a Little Free Library in my neighborhood. We apparently have 11 of these, on the front lawns of people's homes, with free books to read and exchange. I've only visited three of them, but have already stumbled across new works I'd never have discovered in my library.

This one intrigued me because I'd never heard of it, yet the author is an award-winning writer. My sister enjoyed Japan when she visited, so I thought I'd take a chance on something totally unknown to me.

Sujata Massey is a good writer. I found her initial dialogue a little stilted, but thought maybe that was a cultural arrogance on my part, so I continued to read. I'm glad I did. This is a lively book, as much for the risks Rei (the protagonist) takes as for her insights into the differences of culture (sometimes dependent on location) and her struggles with Buddhism. I really enjoyed tagging along as Rei traveled from San Francisco to Tokyo and back, encountering dangers all around. I look forward to catching up on her earlier book, "The Bride's Kimono."

brianna says

A big ol' meh for this one. I did enjoy how, being "regular people" playing detective there were consequences for their believable fuckups. the writing was OK, but overall definitely not my favorite. the title still doesn't really make sense to me. And the inevitable "twist" was pretty much stupid as hell.

Christine says

This entry in Massey's Rei Shimura series is a bit uneven (with some inconsistent details, editing blunders, and heavy-handed plotting), but I kept on reading. I enjoy the details of each novel's settings (for *The Samurai's Daughter*, *San Francisco and Tokyo*) and the charm of Rei's adventures in antiques, romance, family drama, history--and murder.

Margie Swanson says

This is the 6th in a series by Sujata Massey featuring an American-Japanese woman who is an antique dealer who finds herself in several mysteries. Her Scottish fiance is lawyer working on a suit to give retribution to "comfort women" who were kidnapped by the Japanese army during WWII. The new and old beliefs in Japan come into conflict. Even though this was the 6th in a series I felt curious about what came before but it didn't detract from enjoying this story.

Kevin Simons says

This is not a good book. In fact, it is a lousy book. Somewhere hidden among the lazy lapses of fact, tin-eared dialogue, and ludicrous developments in the plot there may have once lain a decent story idea about unhinged Japanese nationalists up to no good in Northern California. No, really, there may have been a chance to write a decent story out of this. But this book is pitiful.

Our heroine, familiar to Sujata Massey's unfortunate readers, is the half-Japanese, half-American Rei Shimura. She's sexy! She's an expert in antiquities! She's engaged to a Scottish lawyer with big muscles and red hair! How can we not love her? Plus, she lives in Tokyo and was raised in San Francisco, so she has "cool" oozing out of every pore. She's just so ... so ... something. Love her!

Massey takes an idea with some potential – exploited Filipino "comfort workers" filing a class-action lawsuit against a Japanese Megacorp for its role in WWII war crimes – and wrestles it into comic stupidity. Shimura's fiancé lawyer, Hugh Glendinning, working as a consultant with Law Firm A, latches on to the case in an unlikely and never fully explained joint venture with Law Firm B. Glendinning interviews one former comfort worker. One. He interviews her twice but misplaces his "microcassette" (technology alert!) of one of the two interviews. He does not obtain an affidavit, and the witness dies. (Suspicious death alert!) This plot is humming along!) Yet the mere threat of a class action lawsuit is enough to bring Japanese Megacorp to the negotiating table. Sure.

Wait, what? This massive, rich, and powerful organization in Japan is going to negotiate with some knucklehead lawyers from the United States because they have (part of) an interview with one (italics, please) witness? And no affidavit? Apparently Sujata Massey doesn't understand that a class action lawsuit is one brought on behalf of more than one party (italics again, please). In real life, Megacorp's legal division would double over laughing, then head out for drinks. This is beyond ridiculous.

It gets worse. Ever inquisitive Rei Shimura, who is, after all, the protagonist, smells something rotten with the principal of Law Firm B, who is, after all, bossing around poor Hugh Glendinning. (And that has to hurt.) So Rei breaks into his hotel room, but (bad timing alert!) the lawyer catches her red-handed, right there in his room! Poor Hugh happens to be right there with the other lawyer (coincidence alert!), but he manfully defends "the woman I love" (awwww alert!) when his aggrieved partner in the ludicrous class action calls for a little law. Rei is jailed for burglary, and Hugh is reduced to bit player in the class action. Wait, they don't can him immediately? No! Because he's Hugh Glendinning! Sure. I would definitely want to partner with some guy I barely know whose fiancée is breaking into my hotel room. Totally. I would not fire that guy, no way. Especially because he can't speak Japanese, isn't a citizen or member of the bar in either Japan

or the United States, and isn't even an associate at Law Firm A. Gotta have him on my team. Indispensable player. Later, intrepid Rei unearths evidence that her suspicions were right all along (aha alert!) and that the scurrilous partner of Law Firm B has been taking bribes from Japanese Megacorp in exchange for soft-pedalling his mountain of evidence (the, uh, one dead witness's non-sworn statement) and agreeing to a lesser settlement! Less than his tidal wave, er, tsunami of evidence would otherwise wring out of evil Japanese Mega. Because Mega would totally – totally! – seek a settlement rather than double over laughing and head out for drinks.

And for this indiscretion ... the offending lawyer is removed from the case! Justice, via Rei the intrepid snooper Shimura! Wait, what? The partner of a law firm has been proven to have accepted bribes from the subject of a class action lawsuit and his only punishment is he's removed from the case? Recall that this class action is a joint venture between two law firms. Such a breach of professional ethics, and the law (italics, please!), would never stay secret and would be grounds for disbarment. There is no way in the world a lawyer would keep his job under these circumstances. But, you know, Sujata Massey's readers are so thick they would never think that deep, right? They're just here for a little story, a little flash, a little Japan, a little sex (Hugh Glendinning = dreamboat), and they leave their brains to sterner tasks, like Sudoku, or TeeVee. And that's how you win Agatha Christie awards for mystery writing. Of course.

It's all so sloppy it's embarrassing. In one section Massey writes, of Shimura's parents' home in an expensive part of San Francisco, that many of the middle-class families who once lived there had been forced out by "rising property taxes." Evidently neither Massey nor any of her editors at HarperCollins have ever heard of Proposition 13, the famous (italics, please! What's a guy gotta do around here to get a little rtf?) California law from 1978 that fixed property taxes at 1%. You know, the law that has hamstrung California's ability to raise funds? The regressive tax structure that has caused California's budget problems for decades now? That one? No? Carry on. We're not using our brains when we read your book. And neither are you.

We can forgive so many sins, we readers, but the sins here are so egregious that we draw a line. Now we say no more. Remember Elmore Leonard (good writer alert!) and his rules for writers? No? Neither does Massey, but here's one rule that's pretty handy: "Never use an adverb to modify the verb 'said' ... he admonished gravely. To use an adverb this way (or almost any way) is a mortal sin." "That's news to the kids at HarperCollins, Elmore," he noted sadly. Massey is an adverbial all-star, and the result is painful. One character "deftly" dunks a shrimp in a hotpot with his chopsticks. Wow, feel the mysterious Orient in all its deft glory! Wish I could travel the world like that! Rei is often walking "briskly" for no real reason. She's just brisk, okay? That's how she rolls: briskly. At one stage, facing no threats or barriers, she "resolutely" climbs a flight of stairs in her parents' house. Rei Shimura: resolute in the face of no obstacles! It's an onslaught of unnecessary adverbs, and it is awful.

You want passive voice? We've got it: "A sob broke from me." Wow, that is bad. This is how award-winning writers do it, really? "A sob broke from me"? How about, "I broke out crying" or "I burst into sobs" or "I sobbed" or "cried out loud"? No? Okay, "A sob broke from me" it is. You want bad dialogue? We've got it: "I've got to hunker down at work ..." Oh, Hugh Glendinning, you silver-tongued (and redhaired!) lawyer, you! I just love your hunkering down. People say that all the time! Hunker away! It's 1959, after all! You want a totally ridiculous climax to the, er, drama? We've got that, too: the killer corners Rei in Rei's parents' home, but becomes momentarily "confused" when Rei says she wouldn't want the killer to leave too many clues by spilling Rei's blood all over "the carpets and floor." (Think of the cleaning bill! Massey almost certainly means "rugs" instead of "carpets" there, too, but who cares? We all stopped using our brains for anything more complicated than making our lips move along with words a long, long time ago.) Rei takes advantage of the killer's confusion to charge past her and out the door to safety. Well, why not? "Don't make a mess with my blood!" "[I am the killer holding a sword and I am stunned into motionless confusion.]" [Rei

escapes. Yay! That means she lives to sleuth again! Sleuthing will be done by her!] As dopey ruses go it's better than "Look over there!" Waaay better. Just ask the editors of HarperCollins.

"The Samurai's Daughter," by Sujata Massey. Avoid it today.

Corinne Morier says

The Samurai's Daughter (Suspense) (2/5 stars) DNF

Rei Shimura, in the process of chronicling her family history, discovers that her boyfriend's colleagues are involved in a cover-up involving murder and smuggling.

I really don't know how to describe this one. It's so convoluted and confusing. You know how, in Game of Thrones, it's hard to keep track of which character is who and who's involved with what? It's like this, essentially.

The Good Parts

Accuracy, for the most part. I'm not a suspense person, but the fact this was set in San Francisco (my hometown) and also featured Japan was a huge selling point for me and I decided to give it a try.

The characters: Most of the characters, including Hugh, Manami, and Eric, are unique and interesting enough to care about what's happening to them.

The romance: The romance between Hugh and Rei was believable for the most part (though I also think there were some irritating bits about it). I wasn't fangirling about them and squeeing when they kissed or when Hugh (spoiler) proposed to Rei, but unlike my previous DNF, the relationship didn't piss me off, at least, and both of our romantic leads treated each other with respect and have a believable romantic arc (again, for the most part--see my notes down below)

The Bad Parts

The pacing. Oh my god the pacing. This book is marked on the front as "a novel of suspense" but that's just hurting it so bad because there was no suspense to be found anywhere. The first four chapters have zero plot whatsoever. The only plot before chapter five is the drama (nonexistent) between Rei and Hugh. They apparently broke up multiple times in the past, but then when they get back together in chapter two, it's like "We had multiple breakups? Don't be silly! We get along like giggling high school kids!" Even though when Hugh proposes, Rei's like "This is the fourth time you've asked me to marry you." They apparently had a lot of disagreements in the past, but we're not allowed to see what those disagreements were and they act so much in love that the "we've broken up multiple times in the past" bit made approximately zero sense as to why it had to be a thing; they could have just been like "Yeah, LDR isn't really something we could handle, so since I want to live in Japan and you're moving back to Scotland, let's just have a good old fashioned platonic relationship." At least that way it would have pissed me off less. The author kept trying to stir up unnecessary drama between them, I guess to try and build believability for their past fights, but it just felt like I was reading a soap drama of some sort rather than a deep, complex relationship. It's also worth noting that the barcode on the back has a label that says "Mystery," but the "suspense" bit on the front is like

"Which genre are you? Make a decision!" Personally, I would have classified this as a mystery book and dropped any bit of trying to sell it as a "suspenseful" story, because it's really not.

The mystery

While an interesting premise, the mystery in this book is just way too convoluted and is too hard to follow. Early on the book, someone breaks into Rei's parents' house, and that's also right about the time that Manami, a postdoctorate student renting a bedroom in the house, starts acting very suspicious. Which is like "Oh, maybe Manami is involved in this somehow!" But rather than making her a proper red herring, only about one page later, she gets cleared of literally all suspicion. Later on in the book, she goes missing and Rei tracks her down, and though I will admit I DNFed it and therefore didn't see what eventually happened with her, I can pretty much guess that nothing did actually happen and the author just stuck her in there to contrast between traditional Japanese values and the American lifestyle of Rei's parents (which was already pretty much covered by Rei herself)

Rei

I wasn't the hugest fan of her. She definitely had more agency than Bella Swan and I would rate her as only slightly less intelligent than Hermione Granger, and she definitely had agency, but I just couldn't bring myself to like her. She was just too different from me. She was into traditional things, like using actual fish bonito to make miso soup (which, is also worth mentioning, later on in the book, she's worried about finding a "true vegetarian soup" even though udon noodle soup is made with bonito and soy sauce, no chicken or pork or anything. She complains that she has to go to a specific pub to get vegetarian noodles but if she eats fish, why does it have to be that specific pub that is the only one in the entire city that serves a "true vegetarian soup"?) and worried about following traditional Buddhist morals (like when she lies, she's like "Will I still get to go to Buddhist heaven?")

The Japanese mistakes

Yet again, we've got a book set in Japan that has mistakes. 95%-ish of the Japanese stuff in this book is pretty accurate, but there were still things that made zero sense. Along with more than a few SPaG typos (like quotation marks where there shouldn't be, or a single quotation mark instead of a double one), there were still some errors.

Like when Manami wishes Hugh a good trip and says "Ii tabi wo," even though in this case, it would be "Yoi tabi wo." Or when Rei sees a guy with "curly hair and pockmarked skin from acne or chickenpox" and immediately assumes he's a yakuza because of his "curly hair and pockmarked skin." Normal curly hair is not a mark of the yakuza, so I don't know where she's getting her information. Then I looked it up and she was talking about panchipa-ma, or "punch perm," a style of perm that gangsters use. Though since that could easily be confused with just normal curly hair born through genetics, why didn't she actually specify that it was permed rather than just curly? And the pockmarked skin makes no sense--there's nothing in Japanese culture that says pockmarked skin is the mark of a yakuza. Especially since she assumes it's from acne or chickenpox, two things that people don't wish to have and that non-yakuza people can get, too.

As I read, I kept finding little mistakes just like these, not enough to make me stop reading on their own, but each one made me a little more wary of the next. By the time I hit chapter eighteen, I was like "Okay, I've found like, ten-ish mistakes in this book. If I find one more, I'm just calling it a DNF."

I managed to read another ten-ish chapters after that without finding a mistake, until Rei walks into a hotel

room where our potential antagonist has been staying and notes that he's put a 100-yen coin on the pillow, the customary way to tip maids in Japan.

No. Japan is a no-tipping country. Even in high-end hotels when you tip, you put the money in an envelope and leave the envelope in the room, not just all on its own. And 100 yen is way too small of a tip for anyone (100 yen is approximately \$1 USD) Even in America, where tipping is expected, that tip would get you laughed out the door. This is something that you would know, not if you had studied Japanese for years and years like me or would only know if you'd lived for a long time in Japan, but rather if you had any sort of interest about Japan and done any sort of research as to how to visit as a tourist. Hell, even sites like Buzzfeed have mentioned how Japan is a no-tipping country, and it's not a far leap to Google "should I tip in Japan?" to find out about the rare occasions when you should offer a "kokorozuke" when staying at a high-end ryokan, presented in an envelope to the staff when you first check in to say "thank you in advance for letting me stay here" and maybe to reimburse them just in case you have small children that will kick a hole in a paper screen or something.

It was at that point that I was just like "I'm done. DNF."

Summary

An interesting premise, but the pacing needed work, I couldn't connect to the protagonist, I couldn't keep track of the facts of the case (the first 4-5 chapters were incredibly slow, but then after that it was like each new chapter was like "Here's 100 different new facts about this and 5 new people you need to remember!" and I wish the author had started the story right at the mystery being unveiled, which would have given her extra leeway at the end to allow the reader to breathe a bit more.), and the Japanese errors eventually wore me down to the point when I was just like "I can't do this anymore." If you want a book with a similar premise and plot but that is easier to follow with no mistakes and a likeable protagonist, I'd recommend the Sano Ichiro series of novels by Laura Joh Rowland instead.

P.S. In this review, I mentioned a lot of missing backstory, etc. This book committed one of my least favorite pet peeves; being part of a series but not saying so on the cover that it was "#6." I picked this one up randomly when I was browsing at the library and had every reason to believe it was a standalone. I can only assume that the missing backstory of Rei and Hugh's relationship, etc. is covered in previous books in this series, but I did rate it and will rate it as a standalone because by all appearances, it acts as a standalone novel by its presentation. In addition, it not saying it's a part of a series is another no-no in my book, because you will inevitably have readers like me who will pick it up without knowing anything about it previously and will therefore judge it as a standalone. Compared to if it had said "The Rei Shimura Series #6" somewhere on the cover, I would have judged it very differently in terms of missing backstory, etc.
