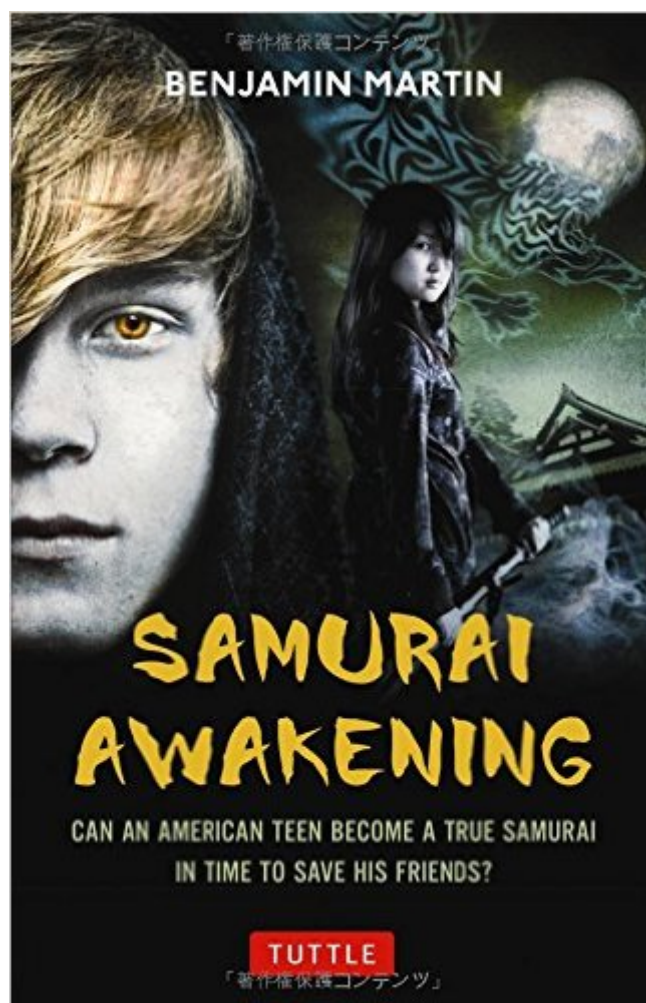


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Samurai Awakening: (Samurai Awakening Book 1)



Synopsis

****Winner of the 2013 SCBWI Crystal Kite Award****David Matthews is having a rough time. Being a teenager is bad enough, but when he picks up and moves to Japan for a year, with barely any knowledge of the language or social behaviors of Japanese teenagers, things go from bad to worse. Until one day, David attends a temple ceremony and finds himself possessed by a Japanese god. Suddenly, he can understand and speak Japanese. He has unbelievable new powers, including the ability to shift into a tiger, and a powerful sword he can materialize at will from its sheath in his body. But nothing comes for free, and these changes bring David face-to-face with the most terrifying creatures of Japanese legend: vengeful okami, demonic oni and terrifying ghostly yurei. Trained by his host family, famous sword-makers and the keepers of an ancient secret entrusted to their family by the first Emperor of Japan, David must fight desperately to save his host sister from a hoard of Japanese monsters. Evil has returned to Japan, and David must overcome his own insecurities if he is to save her and become a True Samurai: the protector of Japan.

Book Information

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Fantasy

Age Range: 12 - 18 years

Grade Level: 7 - 12

Customer Reviews

After reading Stormdancer, I was in the mood for other stories set in Japan, happily chancing upon this one while browsing. The title was definitely appealing although the cover doesn't do anything for me. Perhaps it will appeal to youngsters? The first surprise for me was that this book was not

narrated in first-person. This is especially surprising to me as the book continued and there were a lot of scenes where I think diving into David's head would have given me more insight into him as well as cleared up confusion about what exactly was happening. The third-person narrative felt more formal to me and less engaging so I was ultimately pretty disappointed with that. The second surprise (because I didn't really read the synopsis) is that this book is about an American thirteen year old doing an exchange program in Japan (without speaking a word of Japanese-how did the organizers let that happen?) who is selected to be something incredible. There are so many things in that sentence! I really can't believe they let a thirteen-year old do a foreign exchange program without being able to speak the language; I think it's too young and quite frankly irresponsible. He was barely passing his classes. Next I was not sure what was so special about him that he was chosen-he has a good heart, true, as well as a strong work ethic but I don't know why someone in his host family couldn't have been selected. And I sometimes felt very protective of him and his host siblings (all thirteen). They were so young and I feel like I would have been more comfortable had they been a bit older (say, sixteen). But a third cool surprise was all of the mythology and history included. Martin has studied Japanese culture extensively according to his bio and Tuttle Publishing has been focused on Asia-set books so if you're looking for something for a young person to read that has accuracy, this might be good for them. I could definitely see it being a read for school. Overall: Decision to narrate in third person kept me very disengaged with the text as I crawled through it. Cover: I do not like those colors-I think he kind of looks like a zombie.

I got this book through vine and my 12 year old son immediately snatched it from me. He loves all things Japanese, and dove into the book enthusiastically. When he was done, he told me he loved it. I asked what he'd rate it, and he said four stars. His reasons--all the detail about Japan. The fact that the main character is a samurai and can turn into a tiger. I asked what he thought of the characters and the story--he said he "liked" them. So, I tried to read it. But I could not get past the fact that David goes to Japan as an exchange student for no apparent reason, with no knowledge of the language or culture, and is sent to a school where everything is taught in Japanese. Why does the host mom speak perfect English and the kids don't, when they know the kids have to take English in school? It all seemed a bit contrived and unrealistic. The voice is fairly dry as well, and I just could not connect with David and couldn't keep the other characters straight. And while some of the story moved at a good pace, much of it seemed jumpy and the characters' reactions often didn't make sense to me. I do read a lot of MG and YA books--a lot!--and I *can* see how this one would appeal to the younger end of the teen range. The concept is definitely unique and the book is filled

with cultural references which appealed to my son (but bogged the story down for me). Anyway, since this is a mix between my son's review and mine, I gave it a 3-star rating.

To what lengths should one go to keep a friend from being changed into a Japanese monster? David Matthews, age thirteen, lives in Phoenix, AZ, with his father and sister, but things are not going well and he agrees at the last minute to become an exchange student in Japan. His host family is the Matsumotos, parents Masao and Yukiko, siblings Rie and Takumi, and Grandpa, and they live in Nakano. However, David is unable to speak the language, so he has trouble communicating with his host family, is not accepted by the other students at school, and is generally as miserable as before. One day David joins the Matsumotos for a local Shinto shrine ceremony when an accident occurs and he is possessed by a Japanese spirit known as a Kami which enables him to speak and understand the Japanese language and gives him new, unexplainable powers. The two together become a "Jitsugen Samurai." The Matsumotos tell him that they are not only famous sword-makers but keepers of an ancient secret entrusted to their ancestors by the first Emperor of Japan. Now David must begin training with his host family and their neighbor Natsuki, who has been his most vocal critic at school, to prepare for his role in saving Japan from a new evil. Then Rie is captured by a host of Japanese monsters who are trying to turn her into a yurei in order to gain power. What can David do? Are any of their friends at school involved? And who will win the struggle? Youngsters who enjoy exciting adventures based on Japanese legends and folklore will undoubtedly like reading this book. The book moves rather slowly for a time, but the ending is certainly action-packed. The plot may be a little confusing now and then, especially in the beginning, with all the different beings from Japanese mythology--kami, okami, yurei, oni, obake, etc., but it all seems to work out as things progress. I did notice a lot of grammar mistakes, especially for an author who teaches English as a second language, such as "he was laying on one of the portable Japanese beds" and "Maybe we should peak in too." In addition to a few childish slang terms ("You'd better not suck" and "kick your butt"), David refers to someone as a "ba*t*rd," and the "h" word is found a couple of times, once as an interjection. Also, I would say that some of the violence is a little intense for the younger end of the target age group, eight and up, although the website calls it a YA or Young Adult novel, which is why I recommend it for ages thirteen and up. Otherwise, Samurai Awakening, intended to be the first of the "Jitsugen Samurai" series, is a relatively harmless juvenile fantasy story

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