



# Claws of the Cat

*Susan Spann*

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When a samurai is brutally murdered in a Kyoto teahouse, master ninja Hiro Hattori has just three days to find the killer before the dead man's vengeful son kills both the beautiful geisha accused of the crime and Father Mateo, the Jesuit priest that Hiro has pledged his own life to protect. The investigation plunges Hiro and Father Mateo into the dangerous waters of Kyoto's floating world, where they quickly learn that everyone from an elusive teahouse owner to the dead man's dishonored brother has a motive to keep the samurai's death a mystery.

## Claws of the Cat Details

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Author : Susan Spann

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## From Reader Review *Claws of the Cat* for online ebook

**Maria João (A Biblioteca da João) says**

6,5 de 10\*

A cultura japonesa, em geral, e toda a filosofia em torno dos samurais é um tema que me fascina. Todo o código de honra, a organização e a ordem desta cultura, tão afastada da nossa, acabam por ser um tema rico para a literatura. Assim que li a sinopse de “O Pecado da Gueixa” fiquei com vontade de o ler. Afinal une história, passado e um crime. Tem todos os ingredientes para chamar a minha atenção.

Comentário completo em:

<http://abibliotecadajoao.blogspot.com...>

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**Carolien says**

This is a cleverly plotted mystery and I enjoyed meeting the cast of characters. The unusual setting adds a special layer to the story and I definitely improved my limited knowledge of Japanese culture. I look forward to trying more books in the series.

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**Lisa Lieberman says**

I've spent a good deal of time studying suicide, both as a scholar and as a counselor on a suicide hotline. The ritual suicide (seppuku) in this book moved me, and that's saying a great deal. Suicides in novels are so often gratuitous; in real life, too, they can be manipulative gestures, a final effort at self-expression made with an audience very much in mind. Here the act was fitting, its tragedy all the more powerful for being understated (I will say no more, to avoid ruining things for readers who have yet to encounter *Claws of the Cat*.)

Susan Spann has a remarkable ability to inhabit the world of geisha and samurai in sixteenth-century Japan. The presence of a Portuguese Jesuit missionary gives us Westerners an entrée into this closed society, and I like it that we are left, like Father Mateo, to infer the rules governing social interactions. A glossary of Japanese terms at the back of the book is useful in helping to decipher the more arcane references, but I was too caught up in the story to refer to it until I'd finished.

Disclosure: Susan and I were on a panel together last month at Bouchercon: "Cultural Immersion: Mysteries Steeped in Different Cultures." Her series sounded so intriguing, I couldn't wait to sample it and now I'm hooked.

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## **Stephanie says**

First in a new series. I really liked the setting- medieval Japan is not the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the phrase "cozy mystery", but there it is. A Portugese priest and his shinobi bodyguard investigate the murder of a samurai at a local teahouse, where one of the priest's recent converts is the main suspect.

The writing style is spare, but I had no trouble imagining the setting. Tantalizing hints of Hiro's past are dropped, but frustratingly not followed up on; I am guessing that more will be revealed in subsequent books, and I'll be watching for those.

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## **Heather Webb says**

Claws of the Cat is a page-turning whodunit packed with sharp details that take the reader on a journey through 16th century Japan. Spann weaves a tight plot with a cast of unique characters with a deft hand. I can't wait to see how the ninja detective, Hiro, reveals more of his dark past as the series unfolds!

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## **Judith Starkston says**

I love books that take me to a time and place I know little about and then make that setting utterly real to me. When the author also spins a mystery that won't let go of me, then I've found a great read: Susan Spann's Claws of the Cat. Spann takes us to Japan during the period of samurais and limited contact with the West. Her two "sleuths" are a most unlikely pair. Hiro, a shinobi assassin (think ninjas for the most part), is living undercover as the protector of Father Mateo, a Jesuit priest who has come to Japan to make converts.

Interestingly, in many ways Japan has converted Father Mateo. To the disgust of the only other Westerner we encounter, Father Mateo has "gone native." Hiro's honor, and hence his life, depend on keeping Mateo alive and well. He's been sent on this mission against his will originally, but these two are fast becoming a true partnership of intelligent, quirky friends in pursuit of justice.

Unfortunately for Hiro, Mateo views his duties to his new flock as more important than his life. When a samurai is found brutally murdered and everyone identifies the killer as a young woman entertainer whom Father Mateo has converted to the "foreign religion" and whose innocence he insists on proving, things get very dicey indeed. Apparently the son of the victim has the perfect right to avenge his father's death by slaughtering the supposed killer, and once the priest stands up for the accused, the son decides Mateo's life should be forfeit also. Two days are all Hiro has to find the real killer and save Mateo—and he's not convinced it isn't the woman after all.

The politics of the Shogunate, family dynamics, religious beliefs, the role of women in Japan (and a renegade or two just to keep things especially intriguing), Zen meditation, the differing world views of East and West—this entertaining book will fool you with the range of ideas it covers. Spann's depth of knowledge about Japanese history and culture shines through with great authority and I enjoyed the insights she gave me. Don't you love getting a painless education while indulging in the best escape of all—a good book? Pick up this book for a read you won't be able to put down.

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## Weina says

I confess novels set in Asia, either in China, Japan, India, or Malaysia, attract my attention more than other settings, and I have a tendency to pause and read more about the authors who write them, especially if they are not Asian and were not born into the culture. So when I met Susan Spann a few years ago and heard she wrote Japanese mystery, I just couldn't forget her, for she was not Japanese, to begin with.

I was curious to see how she would approach Hiro, the detective who's a shinobi, commonly known as ninja, and if you are like me, you'll know the word ninja carries a dark undertone in Chinese, which Spann commented in the novel as well. Her shinobi is a limber assassin, skillful at his trade, loyal by his profession, and occasionally opinionated, like many common Japanese men described in familiar fictions. The description of the Japanese culture is controlled at the right amount, the seeds of suspicion and digging are delivered at a calculated timing, and the emotion, even at the most critical moment, never overflows from the well of story.

The bond between Hiro and his sidekick, Father Mateo, is endearing. I would compare them to Sherlock and Watson, except Watson does not share Father Mateo's occasional sincere but profound confusion of the Japanese culture. But in that way, Father Mateo comes alive.

A captivating mystery of a unique series!

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## Ronna says

This new mystery series is set in 16th century Japan and is full of interesting new words and the culture of the times. The heroes are an interesting pair. Father Mateo, a Jesuit Priest, and Hero, a master shinobi ( what we think of as a ninja), who is sworn to protect the Father.

When a samurai is murdered in a local Kyota teahouse, the lovely young "entertainer" calls upon the Father to prove her innocence. The murdered man's son is furious and wants immediate revenge --the death of the entertainer who was the only one in the room with the murdered man on the night of his death. He allows Father Mateo two days to prove her innocent and reveal another murderer. If finds no proof, then he threatens to kill both the Father and the girl.

This was a very interesting book. New words were defined in the glossary at the end of the book. The culture of the times makes the detecting much different than what we think of for a modern mystery, with social customs making direct questioning almost impossible. The coupling of a Portuguese Christian Priest with a Japanese shinobi makes for interesting interactions. Knowing very little about those times, I felt myself truly drawn into this well researched and intriguing mystery. Definitely plan to read the next book in this series---  
BLADE OF THE SAMURI.

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## Barbara ★ says

This was an enjoyable mystery and I liked the pairing of Hiro and Father Mateo though at times a tad bit religious for my taste. I would read the next book in the series to see if the religious vein continues.

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## Tammy Salyer says

Admittedly, it's been over a year since I read Susan Spann's debut novel, *Claws of the Cat*. The biggest side effect (I know of, at least) of being a reader and writer for a living is that the constant Victoria Falls of new stories, characters, plots, and worlds that submerge my brain tend to make them all jumble and slosh into sometimes indistinguishable tales.

Not so with *Claws of the Cat*.

Set in Kyoto, Japan in the fifteen hundreds, *Claws of the Cat* is a crime fiction mystery and the story of two men, a shinobi in disguise, and his ward, whom he is sworn to protect, a Portuguese-born Jesuit priest, both drawn into investigating the brutal murder of a samurai in a local teahouse. If the mystery remains unsolved, the price is the Jesuit's life.

Now, you may be saying to yourself, *But I don't know a thing about fifteenth-century Japan*. The beauty of Susan's storytelling is her talent for drawing readers into this rich and culturally intriguing world with delicacy and subtlety, and her stripped-down, dry-witted style is the perfect complement to her equally sharp-as-a-tack and canny main characters, Hiro Hattori and Father Matteo. When you've finished reading *Claws of the Cat*, you will feel as if you've taken a minivacation, both in time and place, to old-world Kyoto, sipped tea in the local teahouses of the Pontocho District, felt mud from the streets squishing beneath your getas, barely dodged the lethal swipe of neko-tes wielded by an adept and dangerous kunoichi, and plotted conspiratorially over cups of sake against the shogunate with other rulerless, wild ronin. In short, this is a whodunnit mystery that will paint your imagination vivid, rare, and intoxicating colors. Don't miss it! And most exciting of all, the follow-up novel, *Blade of the Samurai*, is coming soon.

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## Anashi Sterling says

I won this book through the First Reads Giveaway.

I was hesitant to read this book at first because I am very fond of all things Japanese and as such, I tend to be very critical of things that are poorly researched or don't live up to my expectations of the culture.

This book was very well researched but sometimes I felt that the author was a little overly descriptive for no other reason than to prove that the research had been done.

That being said I did like the story line and found the mystery intriguing. While the book kept me entertained while reading it there was a certain lack of action that didn't have me itching to get back to it while I wasn't reading.

I was hoping to see more of the kitten in the book. It seemed important enough to merit it's own introduction but played a non-existent part in the book which would have been fascinating to see. Also, I love kittens...

The characters in the book are nicely written but I wanted to see more of them. I wanted to really get to know these characters and would have loved to see the author develop them.

All of those aside, it was a very enjoyable read and it's a nice change of pace for an author to try something new.

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## **Dan Schwent says**

When a retired samurai is found murdered in a tea house, his son demands his honor be satisfied and he is bent on killing the tea house girl his father was found with. Jesuit priest Matteo stands up for Sayuri and buys her an additional three days of life while Hiro, his shinobi bodyguard, tracks down the real killer. But if Hiro can't, Matteo will be executed along with her...

Claws of the Cat is a historical mystery set in 16th century Japan. I don't remember where I first heard of it but a mystery starring a Jesuit priest and a ninja detective was hard to pass up.

Spann clearly researched the 16th century Japan setting but at no point did I feel like the book suffered from research-itis. There were no infodumps and the introduction to the period customs and culture was fairly painless. The setting was integral to the plot, what with honor, inheritance, and etiquette playing big parts.

Hiro and Matteo were an interesting pair, the Jesuit priest and the shinobi pretending to be a ronin. I thought Hiro would take center stage but they shared the top spot for the most part. Hiro handled all of the sneaking around but Matteo played his parts well.

One thing I really liked is that Spann didn't write Hiro as an unstoppable death machine. He relied on stealth and subterfuge but I got the idea he could handle things if they turned physical. Another thing I liked is that Father Matteo tried to live as a Japanese person rather than surround himself with Western trappings.

The suspects were a diverse mix and I am embarrassed to admit I didn't guess the killer until it was too late. Hideyoshi's family was an interesting bunch, as was the crew at the tea house. Once everything was laid out, I have to say I was very impressed with Susan Spann's debut.

I had a few gripes but they were minor. With all the talk about arquebuses, I was hoping someone would get shot at some point. Also, I wouldn't have minded Hiro getting into a scrape at some time during the proceedings. All in all, I don't have any real complaints, though.

The next book in the series is due out in a couple weeks and I'll have to pick it up. Four out of five stars.

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## **Debbie says**

Claws of the Cat was received as a Goodreads First Reads giveaway.

It is very rare for me to find a mystery worthy of 5 stars anymore; too many of them follow a cookie cutter pattern. So I was delighted to find that Susan Spann has broken the mold with Claws of the Cat and written an intriguing and fascinating mystery. Spann's writing paints such a wonderful picture of Kyoto, Japan in the 16th century that the reader feels like they are there. Her characters are real and believable and the interaction between Hiro and Father Mateo has the making of a "beautiful friendship." The mystery is intriguing and the action starts with the first page and doesn't let up until the end. I look forward to future books in this series and am very happy to have discovered this wonderful new author. I highly recommend this book to not only mystery lovers but anyone curious about Japanese culture.

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## Janet says

I was fortunate enough to read this amazing jewel of historical fiction before it went off to the publishers. Ms. Spann's descriptions of 16th century Japan are as clean as a well-swept bamboo floor and as delicate as a cherry blossom-scented breeze.

Hiro, the uh..hero-- of the story is a completely new type of character. A Ninja detective... I mean...Do I need to say more?

The relationship between Hiro and his charge, the Spanish Catholic priest, Father Mateo steals the show. And this in a novel which features katana swords, geishas and murder by claw.

Do not miss the debut on July 16, 2013! Trust me-- pre-order now or mark your calendars.

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## Julianne Douglas says

How much do you know about sixteenth century history outside the borders of Europe? If you're like me, surprisingly (and embarrassingly) little. As a remedy, I recommend a just-published historical mystery that opens up the exotic, fascinating world of sixteenth century Japan.

Susan Spann's debut mystery novel *CLAWS OF THE CAT* (Minotaur/St. Martin's Press) whisks the reader away to the land of ninjas, teahouses, samurai and missionaries. Writing with the spare beauty of an oriental flower arrangement, Spann spins an enthralling tale of murder, jealousy, love and honor whose drama is heightened by the ominous pressure of the imposed time constraint. The well-constructed plot cleverly seeds clues and false leads throughout the narrative, keeping the reader engaged, actively analyzing evidence, and racing to solve the mystery in time to save selfless Father Mateo. The ending, although not entirely unanticipated, culminates in an emotionally powerful scene that opposes the Asian notion of honor with that of Western justice.

Beyond its well-wrought plot, *CLAWS* eclipses the average murder mystery in two other areas: the vibrancy of its historical setting and the depth its characterization. Spann, an attorney with a degree in Asian studies, recreates in vivid and precise detail locales and customs specific to medieval Japan. The reader finds herself stepping through gliding rice-paper doors in a typical Japanese house, strolling paths of raked gravel on the grounds of Buddhist temples, and shouldering crowds on the congested streets of the mercantile quarter. She listens to the song of geishas while drinking ritually prepared tea, quakes in a pit of white sand before the magistrate's desk, and mourns at the funeral of a samurai nobleman. Spann never clogs the narrative with long passages of description or explanation but weaves succinct and evocative sensory and cultural details directly into the unfolding action. The fact that Father Mateo (a Portuguese foreigner who has only been in Japan a matter of months) often needs help understanding Japanese traditions requires native Hiro, the viewpoint character, to notice and elucidate things that he normally would hardly find worthy of mention--all to the great benefit of the reader.



Spann reveals just enough of her characters' back history to explain the present action, but never more. The sense that each character has a complicated and intriguing story of his or her own permeates every scene. For example, the reader knows Hiro is a samurai masquerading as a ninja, but doesn't know how Hiro came by such training or why, and by whom, he has been assigned to protect the priest. Likewise, the reader knows nothing of Father Mateo's past in Portugal nor what motivated him to become a missionary in Japan. Even minor characters, such as Ginjiro, the sake-sodden monk, and Luis, the Portuguese merchant who lives at the rectory, promise to tell captivating tales, if given the chance. The reader is on a quest not only to solve the murder but to piece together the mosaic of these hidden lives and histories. Spann's unique characters inspire compassion in their flawed particularity--I even sympathized with the murderer, despite the evil deed! This satisfying novel is as much--if not more--about the relationship of the characters to each other and to their pasts as it is about discovering who committed the crime. Spann dispenses her revelations at times and in doses that leave the reader panting for more.

I urge readers who normally would not reach for a mystery (and I include myself among them!) to give *CLAWS OF THE CAT* a try. As one of Susan's critique partners, I can assure you she is thoroughly knowledgeable and immensely passionate about Japanese culture and history. And if you enjoy *CLAWS*, you're in for a long, delightful ride--Susan has many more stories to tell about the world and characters she introduces in this remarkable debut novel.

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