



Shinju

By Laura Joh Rowland

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When beautiful, wealthy Yukiko and low-born artist Noriyoshi are found drowned together in a *shinju*, or ritual double suicide, everyone believes the culprit was forbidden love. Everyone but newly appointed *yoriki* Sano Ichiro.

Despite the official verdict and warnings from his superiors, the shogun's Most Honorable Investigator of Events, Situations, and People suspects the deaths weren't just a tragedy -- they were murder. Risking his family's good name and his own life, Sano will search for a killer across every level of society -- determined to find answers to a mystery no one wants solved. No one but Sano...

As subtle and beautiful as the culture it evokes, *Shinju* vividly re-creates a world of ornate tearooms and gaudy pleasure-palaces, cloistered mountaintop convents and deadly prisons.

Part love story, part mystery, *Shinju* is a tour that will dazzle and entertain all who enter its world.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Seventeenth-century Tokyo is the setting for Rowland's debut novel, a murder mystery starring the Senior Police Commander in the district of Edo. Sano Ichiro, a samurai whose academic background puts him at odds with most of his peers, discovers two bodies in the Sumida River, a man and woman bound together in what appears to have been a shinju, or "double love suicide." The man is a peasant, the woman the high-born daughter of an important official. Told by his superior to close the case without an investigation, Sano, suspecting murder, determines to investigate on his own. He orders an illegal autopsy and learns that the victims did not drown but cannot make his discovery known. Amidst many tribulations, he uncovers a trail of corruption and intrigue that ultimately leads him to suspect a member of a royal family. Replete with convincing details, the setting's time and place provide lively and diverting passages; the plot, however, twists only occasionally before its fairly predictable, politically rooted resolution. Rowland crafts a competent mystery her first time out, shows sure command of her background material and demonstrates that she is a writer of depth and potential.

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From School Library Journal

YA?Sano Ichiro suspects that a ritual love suicide (shinju) is in reality a double murder, but his boss inexplicably orders him to drop the investigation. As samurai, Sano must obey or dishonor his father. The quest for justice, however, impels him to risk all to uncover the truth. His course causes more deaths and reveals the depravity of a powerful family that plots to assassinate the shogun. Sano is an unlikely, headstrong hero whose talk and stumbling actions endanger others. His repeated weighing of the samurai code of loyalty and duty versus the pursuit of justice slows the plot occasionally, but not seriously. The descriptions of the lives of townspeople, samurai, the privileged class, and inhabitants of the "pleasure district" in 17th-century Edo (Tokyo) are brutal, but rich and sensual, especially the Tea Ceremony and New Year celebrations. YAs who liked James Clavell's *Shogun* will enjoy Rowland's novel of political intrigue.?Judy Sokoll, Fairfax County Public Library, VA

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From Library Journal

As a newly appointed yoriki (senior police commander), Sano Ichiro is expected to obey his superior's order to treat the deaths of an upper-class woman and a commoner as a shinju (ritual double suicide). Sano believes the two were murdered and doggedly continues to investigate, risking his job and his life. He gradually uncovers a plot against the shogun himself. The best part of this first novel is the splendid evocation of late 17th-century Edo. The descriptions of the stratified society, the details of everyday life, and the sights and sounds of the city that will later become Tokyo are vivid and compelling. Readers intrigued with unusual settings for their mysteries will enjoy this work. Others may not be able to ignore the paper-thin characterizations and the coincidence-strewn plot. The last paragraph leaves an opening for a sequel. Only large pop fiction collections need consider.

--Nancy Pearl, Washington Ctr. for the Book, Seattle

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