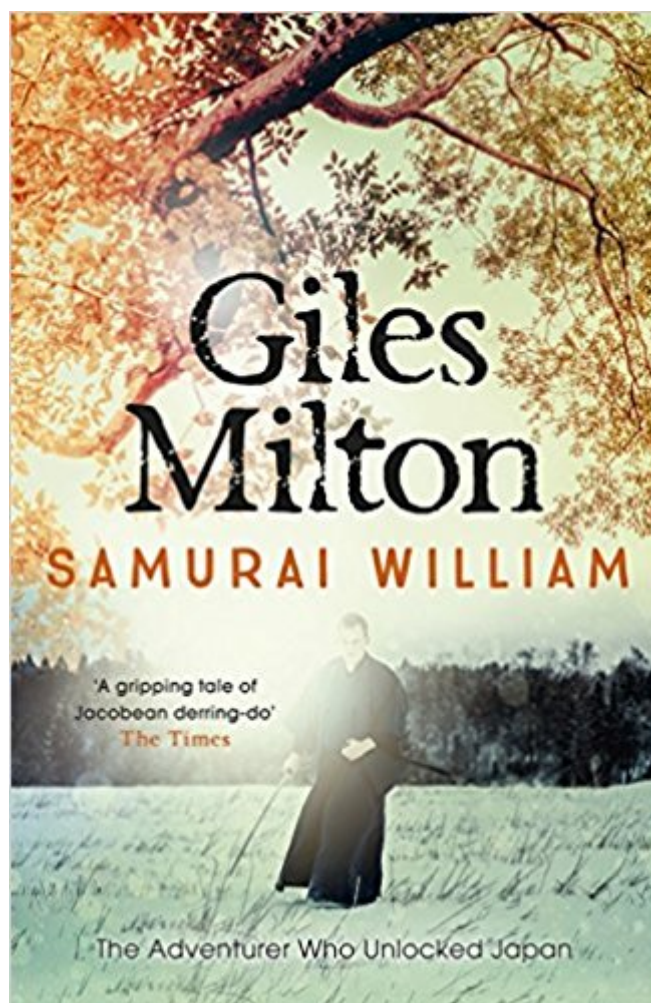


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Samurai William: The Adventurer Who Unlocked Japan



Synopsis

In 1611 an astonishing letter arrived at the East India Trading Company in London after a tortuous seven-year journey. Englishman William Adams was one of only twenty-four survivors of a fleet of ships bound for Asia, and he had washed up in the forbidden land of Japan. The traders were even more amazed to learn that, rather than be horrified by this strange country, Adams had fallen in love with the barbaric splendour of Japan - and decided to settle. He had forged a close friendship with the ruthless Shogun, taken a Japanese wife and sired a new, mixed-race family. Adams' letter fired up the London merchants to plan a new expedition to the Far East, with designs to trade with the Japanese and use Adams' contacts there to forge new commercial links. **SAMURAI WILLIAM** brilliantly illuminates a world whose horizons were rapidly expanding eastwards.

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Customer Reviews

Following the success of Nathaniel's Nutmeg, Milton focuses on the exploits of another undiscovered historical personage to center a more expansive story. The individual is William Adams, and the larger narrative is the developing trade relationship between Japan and Western Europe. Adams arrived in Japan in 1600 after a death-defying 20-month voyage. Over the next two decades, he embraced Japanese culture, learned the language and rose to prominence in the court of the reigning Shogun, Ieyasu. His prominence allowed the English to outmaneuver the Spanish, Portuguese and Dutch for access to Japanese markets. Much of Milton's story reflects the almost instinctive Western impulse to take enormous risks in search of riches. The narrative is energized by his accounts of shipwrecks, gruesome deaths from disease and the predations of cannibalistic

tribes who attacked ships stopping for provisions. He takes advantage of additional opportunities for gore when describing the dual nature of the Japanese society, highly cultured on the one hand, but barbaric and violent on the other. Milton also offers accounts of the sexual indulgences of the Europeans in Japan, often driven in equal parts by cupidity and concupiscence. In the end the efforts of the Europeans to open trade were futile because, as Milton notes, in 1620, after the death of Ieyasu, his heir closed Japan until the mid-19th century. Milton couches considerable scholarship in a vivacious and colorful narrative that will appeal to lovers of historical adventure. Illus. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In 1600, the dawn of the modern world, when overseas journeys were measured in months and even years, William Adams (1564-1620), an English mariner of humble origins, washed up on the shores of Japan with a band of his fellows. Through a combination of skill, native wit, guile, and good luck, Adams became the confidant of Tokugawa Ieyasu, the powerful warlord who founded modern Japan. Milton (*Nathaniel's Nutmeg*) places Adams at the center of this rollicking popular history of early European intercourse, in all the senses of that term, with a Japanese society in many respects far more cultured and civilized than Europe. This rowdy and riveting tale is peopled with a large and colorful cast of European merchant adventurers, rogues, and miscreants who sought fame and fortune in the service of the British East India Company and like enterprises. Milton is a gifted storyteller with an eye for the graphic, often gruesome, detail. This is the kind of page turner that will keep you up way past your bedtime. For all libraries. Steven I. Levine, Univ. of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

A very interesting book. I can't help but think that James Clavell based his novel, *Shogun*, on Williams. It's really a very revealing book about Japan when it was first visited by the English as well as by the other western civilizations. I would almost give it five stars, except I am at odds as to how to classify it. Is it a historical novel or a biography or maybe both? The research involved in order to write this book had to be extensive and for that it deserves six stars. It's a bit tedious to read because it goes back and forth between old English and modern and also in order to be accurate it takes place over a rather large span of time and covers a lot of events all over the world. In other words it is a complex book, but I don't know that it could have been written in any other way. I definitely recommend it, particularly to anyone interested in the historical novels. It's a wonderful

story about a little known era in an even less known land about an incredible character.

Great book about a very important person who probably had a hand in turning the course of Japanese history. Some here claim he is of historic detail, I most certainly disagree. If it were not for Adams masterful explanation of the Jesuit threat, the Shogun would not have expelled them, and Japan would have most likely become a Catholic Christian country with high birth rates and poverty levels like what's facing the Philippines today. Another fact is the Japanese culture was kept intact for another 250 years because of the closing of the country, again had it been open as before most likely would have become a Portuguese colony, bringing along all the ills of a Catholic colony.

When I was gathering material to complete my review on Mr. James Clavell's "Shogun" I saw a reference to this book and can't resist the temptation to bought it and read it. After finishing reading it I was amazed by how deeply Mr. Clavell has grasped this exotic environment in his novel. Mr. Milton has thoroughly researched the contemporary European sources to build this book. He took into account the diary & letters from William Adams (the historical character on which Clavell's book was based), Richard Cock, the chief English Factor at Hirado (Japan), Captain John Saris and other Dutch, Spanish and Portuguese sources. As other reviewers have pointed out, Japanese sources are omitted. This in my opinion, is not a great setback, because the author is telling the story of the hundred year relationship between Europeans and Japanese from the Europeans stand point of view, and he doesn't claim otherwise. The amazement and shock, that such a different culture generated on these seamen and merchants is shown in their own words. In one hand the higher cultural level, reflected in the cleanness, sophistication and demeanor of the Japanese, seduce them. In the other hand the harsh justices applied: deaths for minor and major faults, without appellation or mercy, appall them. The spicy language used by William Adams and his fellow merchants is shown, with minor standardization in order to render it intelligibly for modern readers, recreating their environment and mindset. The book is very entertaining and provides a colorful sight of that historical period and place. Enjoy this reading! Reviewed by Max Yofre.

I spend most of my reading time enjoying fiction but now and then I am popped out of my comfort zone by some tidbit of information that piques my curiosity. Such an event caused me to pick up "1493" by Charles Mann which was so fascinating that it left me wanting more. When I happened on "Nathaniel's Nutmeg" by Giles Milton I was hooked and not just on the history but on the writer too. "Samurai William" is another of Giles Milton's carefully researched histories that reads like a well

honed fictional adventure. It is a fascinating biography of a most remarkable historical character set in the 17th century Far East. European voyages of discovery were fueled by rumors of great riches and scrupulous competition for financial gain and power. Undertaken with only blind daring, these mostly ill advised adventures often lead to heart breaking failures, but once in a while, up pops a piece of luck. This telling, studded with sparkling characters, gives us a balance of amusing and terrifying discoveries, tragic failures and glittering successes. This is definitely history for the consummate fiction reader.

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