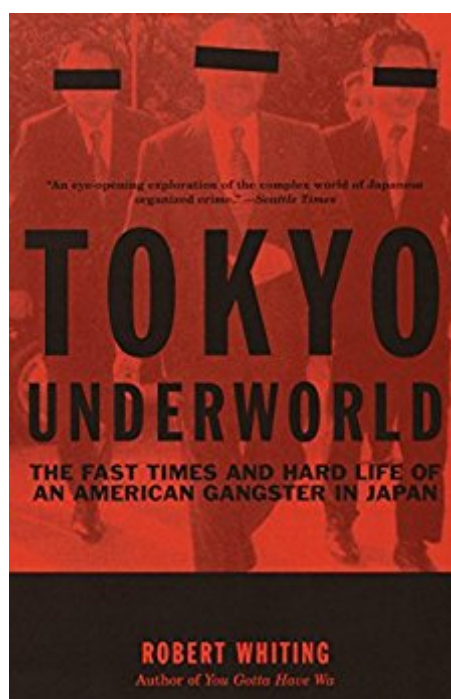


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Tokyo Underworld: The Fast Times And Hard Life Of An American Gangster In Japan (Vintage Departures)



Synopsis

A riveting account of the role of Americans in the evolution of the Tokyo underworld in the years since 1945. In the ashes of postwar Japan lay a gold mine for certain opportunistic, expatriate Americans. Addicted to the volatile energy of Tokyo's freewheeling underworld, they formed ever-shifting but ever-profitable alliances with warring Japanese and Korean gangsters. At the center of this world was Nick Zappetti, an ex-marine from New York City who arrived in Tokyo in 1945, and whose restaurant soon became the rage throughout the city and the chief watering hole for celebrities, diplomats, sports figures, and mobsters. Tokyo Underworld chronicles the half-century rise and fall of the fortunes of Zappetti and his comrades, drawing parallels to the great shift of wealth from America to Japan in the late 1980s and the changes in Japanese society and U.S.-Japan relations that resulted. In doing so, Whiting exposes Japan's extraordinary "underground empire": a web of powerful alliances among crime bosses, corporate chairmen, leading politicians, and public figures. It is an amazing story told with a galvanizing blend of history and reportage. From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

Nick Zappetti sounds like a proper name for a Mafia boss. What is unusual about this particular capo is his territory-the Roppongi district of Tokyo-as well as the time of his ascendancy-the fall of 1945, in occupied Japan. Tokyo Underworld is a half-century survey of the dark side of the Japanese economic miracle, the criminal empire born of the corruption which riddled the Marshall Plan. Part postwar history and part gangster movie, Tokyo Underworld is unfurled by its author with a melodramatic flourish:It is an alternate, separate layer of reality, a shadowy universe of characters-gangsters, corrupt entrepreneurs, courtesans, seedy sports promoters, streetwise opportunists, intelligence agents, political fixers, and financial manipulators-who have perhaps done as much in their own right to influence U.S.-Japan affairs as their more refined and respected peers. Significantly, it has not always been easy to distinguish the latter from the former. Drawing on police and press reports as well as personal interviews (Zappetti himself was interviewed extensively for this book between 1989 and his death in 1992 at age seventy-one), Robert Whiting, one of the few western journalists to live and write regularly in Japan, depicts an awesome cancer of corruption metastasizing behind the rigid veneer of Japanese society.

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