

The Worst Ronin

AUTHOR

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ILLUSTRATOR

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Mid to Upper Secondary



SYNOPSIS

Being a samurai isn't easy. Sixteen-year-old Chihiro Ito knows that more than anyone. Her father is renowned among the samurai, but the only thing Chihiro is known for is spending way too much time on her phone obsessing over Tatsuo Nakano, Chihiro's idol and the first woman to be accepted into Kesi Academy, a prestigious samurai school.

So, when Chihiro's father is conscripted for service and the opportunity arises to work with Tatsuo in his stead, Chihiro jumps at the chance to prove that she's worthy of a spot at Kesi Academy and the samurai title. Their mission: kill the yamauba demon terrorising a village. With a legendary samurai like Tatsuo by her side, Chihiro is convinced victory is inevitable. But Tatsuo isn't at all like the hero Chihiro imagined. Foulmouthed, quick tempered and a terrible drunk, Tatsuo completely turned her back on the samurai way and is now a ronin working for hire as a means of escaping the grief that haunts her. Forced to work together, the two are thrust on a treacherous journey filled with epic battles and twisted conspiracies as they must put aside their differences to save the village and face the demons of the past.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Maggie Tokuda-Hall is the author of *Also an Octopus*, illustrated by Benji Davies; *The Mermaid, the Witch, and the Sea*; *Squad*, illustrated by Lisa Sterle; and *Love in the Library*, illustrated by Yas Imamura. She lives in Oakland, California, with her husband, children and objectively perfect dog.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Faith Schaffer is a designer and visual development artist for animation. Her art has been featured in *Disenchantment*, *Amphibia*, *The Owl House* and more.

STUDY NOTES

- The naginata (the long spear) that Tatsuo uses is primarily a weapon of defence, and despite her extreme proficiency in it, Tatsuo is unable to protect her best friend. Chihiro on the other hand uses a katana, which is a weapon of attack, and yet she ultimately chooses not to use it as intended in the last battle with Mirimoto's men. Why do you think each of these characters chose the weapon they hold, and what does it mean for them each to be mismatched?
- Reflect on Tatsuo's reluctance to become Chihiro's friend. Why was she so prickly and unfriendly to her? What insights does it offer into what Tatsuo's life has been like since she lost Hideo?
- Both Tatsuo and Chihiro have been motivated by revenge and use violent means to achieve it. What is the difference

between justice and revenge? Does justice for a violent act necessarily require violence in return?

- Share an instance in which the adults in your life—your parents as in Chihiro, or instructors as in Tatsuo—either underestimated you or did not believe in you. How did that make you feel, and how did it affect your actions that followed? What would you say to those adults if you knew they would listen to you, now?
- Both Tatsuo and Chihiro have accomplished heroic acts, as has Kazuo Mirimoto, but do you consider any of them heroes? Who are your heroes in real life, and how are they alike or different than these characters?