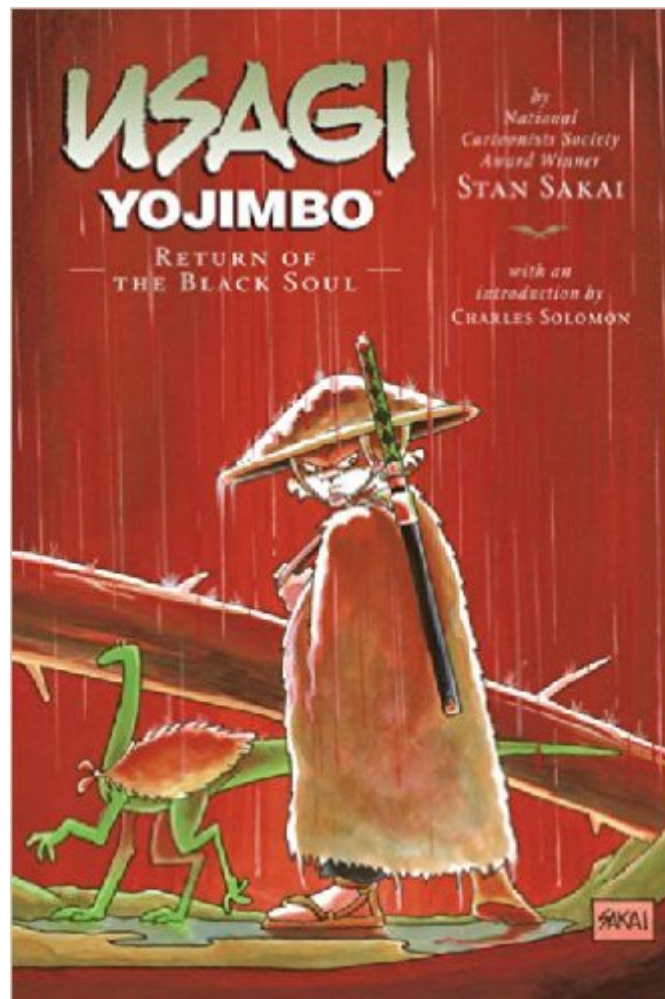


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Usagi Yojimbo Volume 24: Return Of The Black Soul (Usagi Yojimbo (Dark Horse))



Synopsis

For years, as Miyamoto Usagi has wandered the countryside, an unseen, malevolent entity has been tracing his steps. Thought dead since the events of Grasscutter, the demon Jei - the Black Soul - has been inhabiting the body of the swordswoman Inazuma, intent on destroying the evil he claims to see in Usagi! Meanwhile, Boss Bakuchi, shamed by his inability to avenge his son's death, doubles the bounty on the killer - Inazuma. The money brings out scores of bounty hunters, unaware that they are merely a flock of sparrows intent on bringing down an eagle. The hunt for Inazuma also draws Usagi, hunters Gen and Stray Dog, and a mysterious stranger named Isamu, each with his own motive. As the threat of the Black Soul reemerges, this epic storyline reveals at last the true origin of Jei!

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Usagi Yojimbo's arch-enemy Jei has always been an entertaining figure, something akin to a religious zealot with no apparent morals to call his own. I personally think Stan Sakai could not have possibly developed a better bad guy for Usagi than Jei, as while Jei is a tough figure to sympathize with, he somewhat represents the spirit of Usagi's flaws. Usagi has certainly killed a whole lot of dead, unavenged thugs, and he carries moral guilt of infidelity with Mariko. In his first story way back in Usagi, Jei attacks Usagi out of the blue claiming he's a sinner, and perhaps Usagi is. Much in that spirit, the story we're presented with has its own ambiguities. We have the moment where Jei came into being, yes, but his complete origin, no. We still have no idea why this "demon" acts the way he

is, and we really have no idea how he came into being (although, akin to Cervantes' cave in Don Quixote, we're given tantalizing hints surrounding the event). Sakai might fear revealing a bit too much about this enigma that hunts his protagonist, and that's fine. Anakin Skywalker and Boba Fett certainly weren't served by the overabundance of info gifted to us about their origins. Sometimes it's enough to just be a bad guy. As for the story itself, as all Sakai stories are, they are drawn well, with plenty of action, and plenty of tension. My favorites were Stray Dog's banter with Gen, as well as the cave scene mentioned above. Towards the end, Jei finds his new host body, which looks like the original Jei and somewhat returns the character to his roots. While it was fun to see Jei infest a character we knew and sympathized with, I could not help but think that "sharing" panel time with Inuzama diluted his character a bit.

For two decades now, fans have been enamored by Jei, the Black Soul, Usagi's mysterious and unspeakably evil chief antagonist. In Return of the Black Soul, creator Stan Sakai finally delivers a volume devoted entirely to Jei, exploring his mysterious past as well as laying essential groundwork for his future. It's an important story in many respects, but it doesn't really live up to its full potential. Before going further, I should make it clear that this is not a good introductory volume for a reader who is new to Usagi. Jei has some important history going back to Grasscutter (Usagi Yojimbo, Book 12), as well as two other worthwhile appearances in Usagi Yojimbo Book 6: Circles and Usagi Yojimbo, Book 3: The Wanderer's Road (all volumes that would provide excellent introductions to Usagi's world). In short, if you don't know who Jei is, you're not likely to fully understand or appreciate what happens in this volume. However, for those of you who do know Jei, you may still find this volume disappointing. It's a good story (all Usagi stories are good!), but it may not be the classic that you're expecting. One of the more noticeable problems at the start of this volume is the amount of confusion it creates.

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