



The Last Train

Michael Pronko

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THE LAST TRAIN is the gripping new Tokyo-based mystery by multi-award-winning author Michael Pronko

Detective Hiroshi Shimizu investigates white collar crime in Tokyo. He's lost his girlfriend and still dreams of his time studying in America, but with a stable job, his own office and a half-empty apartment, he's settled in.

When an American businessman turns up dead, his mentor Takamatsu calls him out to the site of a grisly murder. A glimpse from a security camera video suggests the killer was a woman, but in Japan, that seems unlikely. Hiroshi quickly learns how close homicide and suicide can appear in a city full of high-speed trains just a step—or a push—away.

Takamatsu drags Hiroshi out to the hostess clubs and skyscraper offices of Tokyo in search of the killer. She's trying to escape Japan for a new life by playing a high-stakes game of insider information. To find her, Hiroshi goes deeper and deeper into Tokyo's intricate, ominous market for buying and selling the most expensive land in the world.

When Takamatsu inexplicably disappears, Hiroshi teams up with ex-sumo wrestler Sakaguchi. They scour Tokyo's sacred temples, corporate offices and industrial wastelands to find out where Takamatsu went, and why one woman would be driven to murder when she seems to have it all.

After years in America and lost in neat, clean spreadsheets, Hiroshi confronts the stark realities of the biggest city in the world, where inside information can travel in a flash from the top investment firms to the bottom of the working world, where street-level punks and teenage hostesses sell their souls for a small cut of highly lucrative land deals.

Hiroshi's determined to cut through Japan's ambiguities—and dangers—to find the murdering ex-hostess before she extracts her final revenge—which just might be him.

THE LAST TRAIN is the gripping new Tokyo-based mystery by multi-award-winning author Michael Pronko

The Last Train Details

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From Reader Review The Last Train for online ebook

Bandit says

It's kind of awesome and kind of daunting at the same time to be the first person to review a book. Pronko is my go to guy for all things Japanese. I've read 3 books of his nonfiction essays about Japan, so a majority of what I know about the country and its traditions comes from him. And now...more of the same, but in fictional form, a thrillingly fictional form. So it was easy to like and, of course, nice to see an author making such an easy transition from one genre to another. I do prefer my thrillers on the more mysterious side typically, but this was fun all the same, made more so by a striking different culture and well realized complex characters, including a terrific femme fatale of an antagonist, who in fact completely stole the limelight of the story. This book can be sort of described as a high speed chase across Tokyo, cops after criminals, heavily featuring (as the title suggests...and this is where that cultural difference plays into it) trains as oppose to the American standard of cars. Riding trains in Japan (crazy busy as they are) might not be the sort of thing you'd do recreationally, but in literary form this was indeed a fun ride and a great way to spend an afternoon. Recommended.

Karen says

Being a huge fan of Japanese crime fiction I admit to being particularly intrigued by THE LAST TRAIN. Set in Tokyo the viewpoint of this novel, written by an ex-pat American professor of American Literature at Meiji Gakuin University who has now lived in that city for twenty years, was a large part of this appeal.

Whatever elements there are that feed into THE LAST TRAIN, they have combined to create a fascinating police procedural / serial killer with a reason novel interwoven with aspects of Japanese tradition and culture. Things get underway pretty quickly, when we're introduced to a victim being led away from a bar district, absolutely hammered drunk, only to have him fall in front of an underground train. Obviously the first part of the investigation is to decide if this American man was an extreme form of suicide or a murder. Enter our detective hero - Detective Hiroshi Shimizu, a man who remembers fondly his time studying in America. Filled with regret over the loss of his foreign girlfriend, he is pulled into a murder investigation in a most unexpected manner. Shimizu is a white collar crime investigator - much more at home in the world of financial shenanigans and spreadsheets, it's via his mentor, Takamatsu that he finds himself included in a murder investigation that rapidly becomes a serial killer hunt. When his Takamatsu goes missing Shimizu teams up with ex-sumo wrestler Sakaguchi to track down that most unusual of things - a female serial killer.

The outsider's viewpoint really works well in the way that Tokyo life is observed and described. There's lots of little gems of information imparted as the action proceeds - from the food / the night life / the way that the nightclub and hostess world works, and there's great humour. It was impossible not to laugh out loud at sumo-sized thugs setting off overweight alarms in lifts, and an elderly man prepared to use machinery lathes as a lethal weapon if necessary.

Interestingly, even though it's an outsider viewpoint, it has an intrinsically Japanese feel to the novel - there's much to learn about the society, there's much to learn about the people, and there's much to admire in creating a female serial killer who is believable, and, more importantly sympathetic understandable.

Even with a little bit of heavy lifting towards the end dragging everything into line, THE LAST TRAIN is a

really good novel for fans of crime fiction in general, and Asian crime in particular.

<https://www.austcrimefiction.org/revi...>

Lynne says

This is a very good police procedural set in Tokyo in which the author excels in creating a vivid slice of Japanese life.

Hiroshi Shimizu is called upon to investigate the murder of an American businessman who appears to have been pushed to his death beneath a speeding train. He's captured on security camera, very drunk, with a beautiful Japanese woman. Hiroshi and partner Takamatsu are drawn in to the seedy world of hostess clubs in the search for the woman and the motive for the man's gruesome fate.

Author Michael Pronko is a professor of American Literature at Tokyo's Meiji Gakuin University and has lived in Japan for over twenty years. His writing is skilled and hugely knowledgeable on Japanese culture and customs. His descriptions really bring the book to life and make for fascinating reading. The characterisation is excellent; Hiroshi's failed relationship with Linda is perfectly portrayed and he comes across as both engaging and grounded. The plot is believable but, in my opinion, lacks a little in excitement. However, for anyone wanting a no-frills representation of life in modern Japan, Pronko is the go-to author.

Thanks to author Michael Pronko for a copy of this book in exchange for an honest review.

<https://barnseybooks.blogspot.co.uk/2...>

Joyce says

4 and 1 / 2 stars

Detective Hiroshi Shimizu is fluent in English and is a white collar crime specialist in part of the murder squad but Hiroshi has never investigated a crime per se. He is more familiar with spreadsheets and graphs. But he is very smart and determined and the other police officers like him. When his friend Lieutenant Takamatsu asks for his assistance on a puzzling case involving an English-speaker, Hiroshi reluctantly goes along.

American Steve Devaux is found dead in Tokyo. He was hit by a train, but video surveillance shows he was not alone when it happened. There was a woman with him. A woman committing a murder is almost unheard of in Japan.

After Lieutenant Takamatsu goes missing, Hiroshi takes on the assistance of another officer. Sakaguchi is an ex-sumo wrestler who teams up with Hiroshi after Takamatsu goes missing. Together Hiroshi and Sakaguchi investigate both Takamatsu's disappearance and Devaux' murder.

The crowding, the fast pace, the bright lights of Japan; all these are brilliantly illustrated in this book. The differences in culture between the Japanese and the Western mind are described in great detail. This novel is

both well written and plotted. It reminded me a great deal of the novels of Barry Lancet in its descriptiveness and pace. The characters were likeable and even humorous in places. The action was well-paced and built the suspense nicely.

I want to thank Netgalley and Raked Gravel Press for forwarding to me a copy of this great book to read.

Carlos says

We all know that everybody in Japan is from another galaxy. Different time frame and maybe They are in contact with aliens from what I know.

I stand in awe every time my brother Hector explain to me the different customs that He has to follow because He has been living in Japan for almost 20 years.

If You want to get a glimpse of modern Tokyo this is your book and in the meantime there's a murder, or two, or three to investigate and let Detective Hiroshi to be your guide. The trip that awaits You is worthwhile.

Jean Kolinofsky says

Unlike many mysteries, Michael Pronko opens his book with a murder being committed and the murderer is immediately revealed. I was not sure where he would take it from there but I was not disappointed. This first book in what I hope will be a long series introduces Hiroshi Shimizu. Investigating white collar crime, Hiroshi spends time in his cramped office reviewing numbers and working with the police in other countries. Now he has been called on to assist with the murder investigation because he is fluent in English and the victim was an American.

As Hiroshi tracks the murderer from bars to temples the city of Tokyo itself becomes a character. I have frequently traveled to Japan and as I read the sights and culture brought the story to life for me. Hiroshi develops from an insecure novice at the beginning to a more confident investigator, assisted by two former sumo wrestlers who are now on the murder squad. The action is steady from the opening to the final chase, which ends with an ironic twist. This is a book that I would highly recommend and look forward to the return of Hiroshi and his associates.

#GoodreadsGiveaway

Patrick Sherriff says

What ingredients do you need to cook up an engaging police procedural set in Tokyo? I'd say you ought to have a conflicted detective not sure what the hell he was doing. Perhaps he's reeling from a relationship gone sour, possibly on the verge of alcoholism, and wondering if he still could cut the mustard personally and professionally. You ought to have a victim that English-language readers could readily identify with, say an American businessman finding himself out of his depth in a strange foreign land. Throw in insights into life on the seedier side of Japan, say in the hostess bars and love hotels of Roppongi, and you'd have a pretty spicy dish. But what else would you need to set your creation apart from the rest?

Ahh, a villain.

And it's the villain that marks Pronko's first crime novel as something both familiar and surprising. Familiar because every hard-boiled tale needs a femme fatale, but surprising because this one, Michiko, is not your typical ninja-esque slinky-sleeved assassin as seen on TV. No. She's a dutiful daughter, a respecter of the Japanese feminine ideal, but also independently minded, she's prepared to do whatever it takes to exact justice as she sees fit. To man up in a man's world. No small order in Japan.

As Pronko dishes up observations on life in Tokyo, we can't help but learn what spices flavour the city, how crime is as much a consequence of a rigid society's ills as any individual's, and delicious ironies are sprinkled throughout. I chuckled when some sumo-sized thugs trying to intimidate our hero set off the overweight buzzer on a typically tiny Tokyo lift. And you'd be a cold fish indeed not to feel sympathy for the villain.

Pronko spends a little too long tying up loose ends after the mystery is solved to my taste, but it's a small quibble to make of an accomplished first novel. And he has two more in the series being edited now. I'll definitely be tucking in to the full course. Highly recommended for lovers of crime thrillers or anyone with an interest in Japan.

I was lucky enough to interview the author, and he talked more about the experience of writing *The Last Train* at the link below. Enjoy!

<https://patricksherriff.com/2017/05/2...>

Elaine Tomasso says

I would like to thank Netgalley and Smith Publicity for an advance copy of *The Last Train*, a police procedural set in Tokyo.

When Steve Devaux is found under the wheels of an express train no one is sure if it is murder or suicide but they do know it will mean pressure. Lieutenant Takamatsu ropes in Hiroshi Shimizu, a white collar crime detective and fluent in English, to help with the investigation. The police are quickly aware that they are hunting a woman while the reader knows she is called Michiko Suzuki. The plot revolves around the hunt for Michiko and uncovering her motive.

This is a very interesting novel and I feel I learned more about Japanese culture from it than the several novels by Japanese authors I have read. It gives a great insight into the Japanese psyche and the many differences between it and western ways. Fascinating.

I am less sure about the plot. I thoroughly enjoyed the hunt for Michiko through Tokyo's underbelly and her clever, evasive tactics. You get a real sense of Hiroshi being out of his depth but determined to persevere. I must admit, however, that the financial aspects of the motive completely lost me and I still can't understand exactly what Michiko did and why she picked the victims she did but this is a minor quibble in a good read.

Hiroshi is a good protagonist. Although his white collar crime role is part of the homicide division he has never done field work and is an accountant at heart and by profession. He comes across as inexperienced and naïve in comparison with the cynicism of the other detectives. He is decent, hardworking, smart and persistent and his colleagues value him.

The Last Train is a good, interesting read.

Maria Beltrami says

Bel thriller molto giapponese, anche se scritto da un americano, che però in Giappone da anni vive e lavora, e di quel paese conosce vita morte e miracoli. In una Tokio da Blade Runner, come effettivamente è Tokio, uomini facoltosi legati all'ambiente della finanza si suicidano gettandosi sotto al treno. Niente di strano, in un paese che non ha, nei confronti del suicidio, le preclusioni che abbiamo noi occidentali, se non fosse che molti di questi suicidi sono proprio occidentali. Uno stralunato detective in prestito, utilizzato solo per la sua ottima conoscenza della lingua inglese, viene chiamato ad affiancare un giapponesissimo, anche nell'animo torbido e contorto, ispettore della omicidi. Tra colpi di scena, bugie, cose non dette, sostituzioni di persona, il thriller viaggia, proprio come un treno, sui binari di un'elaborata vendetta, verso una fine che forse è un suicidio e forse no, in un paese dove niente è dove sembra e dove una donna non può mai essere se stessa. Ringrazio Raked Gravel Press e Netgalley per avermi fornito una copia gratuita in cambio di una recensione onesta.

A beautiful very Japanese thriller, even if written by an American, who has been living and working in Japan for years, and who knows life, death and miracles of that country. In a Blade Runner's Tokyo, as Tokyo actually is, wealthy people linked to the financial environment commit suicide by throwing themselves under the train. Anything strange, in a country that doesn't have the foreclosures against suicide that we Westerners have, if it weren't that many of these suicides are just Westerners. A confused detective on loan, used only for his excellent knowledge of English language, is called to join a very Japanese, even in the fishy and twisted soul, Homicide inspector.

Between twists and turns, lies, unspoken things, impersonations, the thriller travels, just like a train, on the tracks of an elaborate revenge, towards an end that is perhaps a suicide and maybe not, in a country where nothing is where it seems and where a woman can never be herself.

I thank Raked Gravel Press and Netgalley for providing me with a free copy in return for an honest review.

Bella says

Set in Tokyo, this exotic crime thriller is a lightning-fast chase to the finish line that you won't soon forget.

Mystery novels are known for far-flung locations, but Tokyo isn't often on the map. With *The Last Train*, Michael Pronko takes his adopted hometown and uses it as the setting for this unconventional take on the whodunit, which turns the genre on its ear and focuses not on the who, but the lightning-fast chase to the finish line.

Check out the rest of my review at BestThrillers.com.

Richard says

What a unique story we are treated to in *The Last Train*. Great title incidentally and beautifully told with passion and pathos.

We quickly learn who is the murderer but we don't get the why they kill other than an implied motive of financial gain.

The homicide department desperately needs the services of an English speaker as the case involves foreigners and Hiroshi fits the bill. He has not been out much in recent weeks moping about in his special office all by himself, pleaded not to mix after his relationship breakdown. So the move into a more active role may help him plus he has good accounting skills and this case seems to involve large investments. He is a very considered operator and the rest of the team quickly warm to him. His boss Takamatsu is a less open policeman with a whiff of corruption and irregularities in a previous case and their differences make for a good partnership. They socialise a great deal too, even before Hiroshi joined the murder squad and being Japan this involves wild nights on the town, too much alcohol and fuzzy recollections.

So the murderer. We follow their story in parallel with the investigation which is a good old fashioned police procedural but set in Tokyo.

This approach of the police being many steps behind the allusive assailant, coupled with the rich culture and Japanese life becoming so real, rising from each page ensures the novel is interesting and full of action and mystery.

We wonder how the killer acts with such little respect for life until their backstory is slowly shared.

We move from one of judgement to understanding and empathy as revenge seems to be the motive and a metering out of a different but deserved justice.

After Scandinavian Noir we seem to be able to access more stories which could be seen as a new trend and rediscovered writings forming Oriental Noir. I have read a number of novels now set in Japan. In *The Last Train* I gain a new author and fresh excitement into this alien world to me.

I love the culture here set around the world of clubs and nightspots where hostesses are the professional escorts and a rich tapestry of sex and intrigue abounds. A night out for the two detectives appears little different to the case they must pursue visiting clubs where no one is keen to assist the police.

The action and thrilling set pieces are brilliant transcribed into words that have energy and pace so the book rattled along like the many train journeys around the city.

I was left every time I picked up the story with fresh nuances and a desire to read on and solve the mystery of the case - not who did it but why.

A riveting read opening up a fresh vista of a foreign world. I loved the space for reflection, Chinese proverbs and personal growth through meditation and martial arts. I feel I have walked those streets, ate the simple meals and cowered as an express thundered through the station.

Cathy says

When I interviewed Michael on my blog last year, he described *The Last Train* as 'more whodunit than whodunit' and having now read the book I can certainly understand why he said that. Much of the excitement of the book comes from following detective Hiroshi Shimizu in his attempts to identify and track down the mysterious woman who committed the murder. The trail leads Hiroshi from the flashy malls and smart high-rise buildings to the decidedly seedier world of hostess clubs and bars. As the author explains, "...in the novel, I wanted to look beneath the surface. The giant skyscrapers and constant construction are amazing, but there's a lot going on behind the go-go big-city bright-lights, and a lot of it not so good."

As the investigation progresses, Hiroshi begins to understand the threat he faces from vested interests who may be involved in the shady dealings he starts to uncover. He also starts to realise just what a clever and ruthless opponent he is up against and to get an inkling of the motivation that drives her. When the full facts are revealed you may find yourself questioning where true justice lies.

What really sets *The Last Train* apart from other run-of-the-mill crime thrillers for me was its Tokyo setting. I loved learning all about Japanese culture and customs. Take this scene in which Hiroshi and his boss, Takamatsu, drink sake together in the traditional manner.

‘The master pulled back a brown curtain over a glass-sided refrigerator filled with sake bottles. He pulled out two small chilled glasses from the top shelf and set these on the upper counter inside small, square, cedar wood boxes. The master shuffled the dozen or so bottles inside the fridge until he found the ones he wanted. Carrying these to the counter, he hoisted the large bottle of cold sake and, cradling it in the crook of his arm, poured out the clear, clean liquid. The sake flowed gently over the top of the lip of the glass into the box, arousing the aroma of cedar and fresh rice. He poured out sake from a different bottle for Hiroshi and placed both bottles on the counter so that each displayed the artful calligraphy of their labels.

They bowed down like penitents to take the first sip without spilling. Then they plucked up the small, thumb-sized glasses for a silent toast before downing the second gulp. Finally, they poured the spill-over from the cedar box into the glass, took another sip, and set their half-full glasses back inside the wet cedar boxes.’

The book cleverly brings to life the intriguing juxtaposition of ancient and modern that exists in Japan. So you have temples and prayer rituals, the elaborate customs for greeting and for drinking tea. But at the same time you have the modern malls full of shops selling up-to-the-minute designer goods and the latest technology, and the packed subways and neon-lit sidewalks of Roppongi.

‘People streamed out of subway exits, slid out of taxis, and stepped off bus after bus. Hordes of office workers in dull gray pants and dark skirts blocked corners, shouting directions into their cell phones to those yet to arrive. Fashion-conscious hipsters, mini-skirted amateurs, and yakuza wannabes walked to their favourite places to play, eat, drink, or work.’

The work culture with its emphasis on drinking with colleagues after work, to my eyes at least, seems particularly alien and the position of women quite regressive with real antipathy in some quarters towards women whose behaviour is considered ‘un-Japanese’.

I really enjoyed *The Last Train* for both its compelling storyline and its use of Tokyo as a location. Luckily for me – and I suspect, other readers – the author is working on two further books in the series: *Japan Hand*, which explores the relationship between Japan and the American military bases; and *Thai Girl in Tokyo*, which has two great female characters navigating the dangers of Shibuya’s underground nightlife. Both books are due for publication in 2018.

Bill Jr. says

Thrilling, enthralling mystery

The Last Train is a sensational mystery that reveals an underside of Tokyo few people see. A suspenseful

page turner, *The Last Train* is filled with rich, complex characters. As the mystery unfolds, you feel like you're walking in Detective Hiroshi Shimizu's shoes, as he works to unravel not just the who, but why of the murders he's investigating.

The Last Train captures Tokyo life with crisp prose: "Out of the underpass, toward the station, people walked briskly in one homeward-bound herd."

The Last Train is an exciting, labyrinthine thriller.

Paul Franco says

Hiroshi is a forensic accountant for the Tokyo police, who gets more than he bargains for when he helps out an old friend on an investigation. Did that American throw himself in front of the train, or was he pushed? Well plotted, with good flashbacks showing the villain's motivation. The protagonist is also fleshed out well, with lots of light humorous touches because he doesn't take himself too seriously. His new assistant and the sumo cops add to the small bites of hilarity, although some of that was lost in the scene that shows the Tokyo police find it perfectly okay to rough up a suspect; at least they put the shoulder back where they found it. Michael Pronko is one of my fave non-fic writers; his essays on Japan are simply amazing. So it was a bit of a surprise to find that, in comparison to the smooth syntax of his non-fiction writings, this feels almost stilted, not nearly as graceful. It did get better as it went on, but early there was an overabundance of "He said." Since most conversations are between two men, it's useless, in addition to being boring. He did use "gurgled" once, which made me grin.

And the ending left me unsatisfied. The last death, be it suicide or not, doesn't sit well with me as a fitting closeout for that character, especially after the reveal of the DVD, but maybe it's a cultural thing. Other than that, it's a good fun story with great characters that I did enjoy more as it went on.

3.5 pushed up to 4/5

Mehreen Ahmed says

The Last Train by Michael Pronko will keep the readers on edge. A gripping thriller, it is full of suspense that will hit several emotions at once, nervousness, excitement, fear, hope and glee, as the genre is meant to be. However, what sets it apart is its linguistic eloquence. Yet, it is not another cheap thrill full of clichéd rhetoric, but a sophisticated Le Carre type. Set in Japan, it is a detective story in element. Tokyo lights up to nightclubs full of pizzazz. Murder takes place in its shadow. A story unfolding almost mysteriously, as night taxis pick up passengers and drop them at shadowy gates. Unnamed characters referred to as 'she' and 'he' are not fully identified until chapter 3. Which is also when readers find out about their real names and their jobs of tracking down investment scammers. Elusive murderers at large hatch devious plots. A potent package of Japan's extraordinary ambiguities unveil.
