



At left, Jackson in hot water in 2006. Above, Ishikawa Goemon and his son in boiling oil in 1594. Jackson was refreshed. Goemon and the boy died.

Boiled in Oil

**Jackson Sellers Email
to Yu-Yu Jiteki Friends
May 2006**

Masataka Usami wrote:

The picture of you in a miso-bowl bathtub was fun. The comment from Terry Sutherland was also funny. I hate to say it, but it reminded me of Ishikawa Goemon, who was the chief of a band of robbers in the late 1500s and was boiled to death.

Dear Masa:

When I was sitting in that ceramic hot tub at a Gunma Prefecture mountain spa, I also thought about Goemon, the famous thief who was boiled in oil along with his young son more than 400 years ago. Why not? Goemon was born in a village not too far from where I was soaking, a village I had visited several years ago, and only a week before this tub soak, I had strolled along the blossomed banks of Kyoto's Kamo River, where his gruesome execution took place in 1594. Also, the iron-rich water at Kishigon *ryokan* looked like it could be oil, and I had just finished reading a horrifying account of the deaths of Ishikawa Goemon and his 10-year-old son Goichi. Punishments were brutal in those times, most especially if one had offended and/or threatened Hideyoshi, Japan's ruthless dictator. On the Internet, I found the image that shows Goemon holding his son out of the boiling oil, but mostly I found that the name "Goemon" was associated nowadays with

Japanese computer games.

The account I read was in a book I purchased early in my trip. I had noticed a *Japan Times* book review by Donald Richie. My goodness, Richie is still alive and still writing about things Japanese. I considered him an old man when I was working for Tokyo's *Asahi Evening News* forty-five years ago. Anyway, the recently published book was *Lighting in the Void: The Authentic History of Miyamoto Musashi* by John Carroll. In my home workshop is a fat novel called *Musashi*, written in the 1930s by Yoshikawa Eiji and translated decades later. There are something like 150 million copies of *Musashi* in print around the world, mostly in Japan, where, thanks to Yoshikawa's highly popular novel, Miyamoto Musashi is a national hero of the early 17th century, a swordsman never defeated, the embodiment of modesty, resourcefulness, courage, perseverance and simplicity. Author John Carroll offers a different view. *Musashi*, he writes, was a "stinking wretch" who boasted he never took a bath, a woman-hater who preferred boys, a swordsman with an "inelegant, meat-chopping style" who believed that "nothing can beat the look on a man's face when he sees his cock and balls go flying into space." I had to have the book, so I bought it and read it. Carroll can't write, but he doesn't know it, so he writes and writes and gets his first novel published. Nothing wrong with that, more power to him. But the book must be called fiction, even if "authentic," because there are not a lot of 400-year-old supporting documents on either *Musashi* or *Goemon*, and certainly none were referenced in the volume. So I don't know how accurate the boiled-in-oil account was. All I know is it made the hairs on the back of my neck stand up. Carroll succeeded in doing that, even if he can't write.

Jackson

