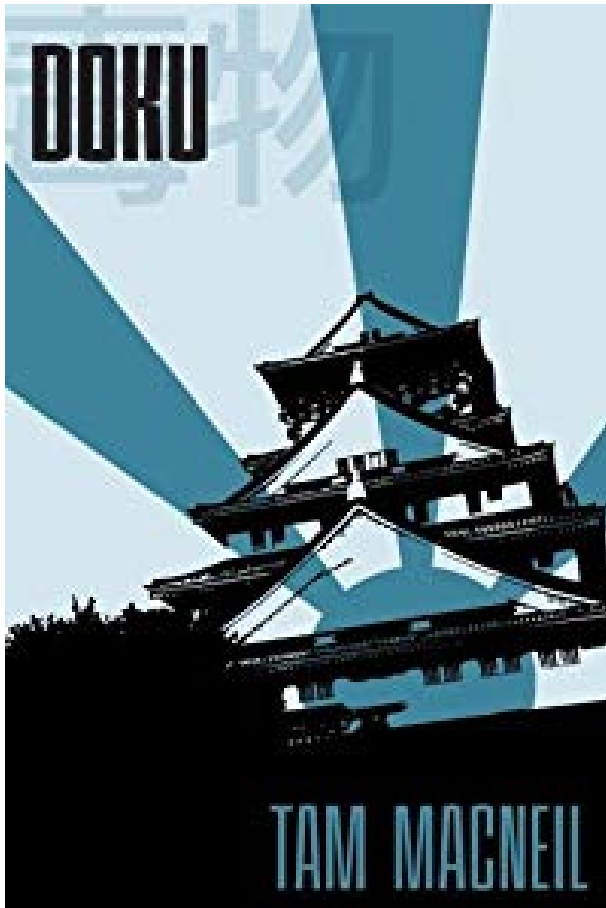


Doku



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Jao is the new Kazematsuri, the head of the Good Men assassins, though not many people know it yet.

With the Empress Iyuko visiting Okatsu, things are hectic at the Hiroti household. Masahiro wants very much to bring his Kikuta-ware pottery to her notice, but how to do it? Throw a party, of course! He is delighted when the Empress's confidant, Higake no Doshu, arrives and asks Jao for a game of Shogi. It's all very civilized. But, wherever the Empress goes, plots and scheming follow. When Jao and Masahiro are deftly poisoned at their own party, Jao is blackmailed into helping a would-be assassin, bent on killing a member of the Empress's retinue and pinning the blame on the Daimyo. Jao hates politics, but he knows about poisons, and killing. And when Jao crumbles under the onslaught of the poison, it is Masahiro who takes matters into his own elegant hands.