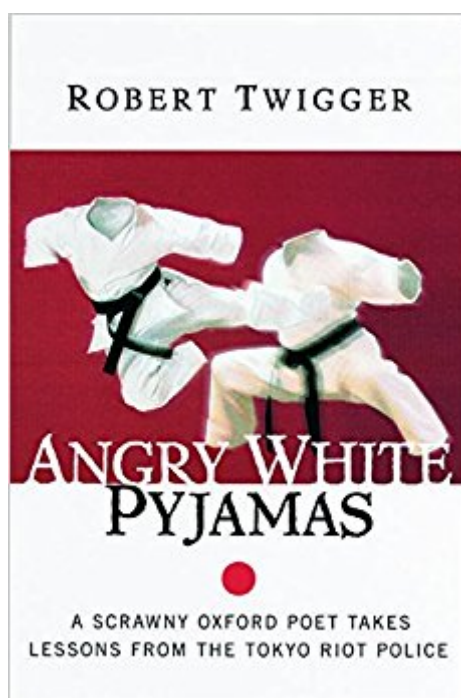


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# Angry White Pyjamas: A Scrawny Oxford Poet Takes Lessons From The Tokyo Riot Police



## Synopsis

Adrift in Tokyo, translating obscene rap lyrics for giggling Japanese high school girls,, "thirtynothing" Robert Twigger comes to a revelation about himself: He has never been fit nor brave. Guided by his roommates, Fat Frank and Chris, he sets out to cleanse his body and mind. Not knowing his fist from his elbow, the author is drawn into the world of Japanese martial arts, joining the Tokyo Riot Police on their yearlong, brutally demanding course of budo training, where any ascetic motivation soon comes up against bloodstained "white pyjamas" and fractured collarbones. In *Angry White Pyjamas*, Twigger blends, the ancient with the modern--the ultratraditionalism, ritual, and violence of the dojo (training academy) with the shopping malls, nightclubs, and scenes of everyday Tokyo life in the 1990s--to provide a brilliant, bizarre glimpse of life in contemporary Japan.

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## Customer Reviews

"His fine eye for eccentricities makes this an entertaining travelogue."-- "The Observer""A frantic, very funny, urban quest." -- Simon Garfield, "Mail on Sunday"

Robert Twigger, the author of *Angry White Pyjamas* and *Big Snake*, was born in 1964 and educated at Oxford, where he won the Newdigate Poetry Prize. In 1991 he went to Japan, studied traditional martial arts, and completed the course for the Tokyo riot police. In 1996 Twigger trained as a bullfighter in Spain, went looking for bona fide zombies in Haiti, and reported for the *Daily Telegraph* on chain gangs in Arizona. In 1997 he spent four months in Indonesia, attempting to capture the longest snake in the world. After many setbacks and adventures, his team succeeded in capturing a python twenty-six feet long -- almost certainly a world record for a snake currently in captivity. In addition to writing books, he is a regular contributor to *Esquire*, *Maxim*, the *Daily Telegraph*, and the *Financial Times*. He lives in London.

It is an interesting and humorous read about one person's experience in completing a rigorous training course in Aikido where you achieve a blackbelt with teaching credentials in one year's time. Anyone who is familiar with the artform can tell you that it takes a long time to learn and become proficient at it. Also while training you are sure to encounter challenges and difficulty in addition to eventually injuring yourself and learning to work with pain. Part of what the training is about is not only how to dish out the technique but also how to protect yourself by blending with it. Learning both is the only way to survive as landing incorrectly will eventually dissuade you from wanting to continue. Having been a student for several years (recently achieved 4th kyu) I can say that many people think they will pick this up easily and have calculated a certain timeline to black. They usually quit upon coming to the full realization that the art does not come easily to a prescribed path and one simply has to keep coming in order to get better. There are no specific katas to master but

attacks and defenses and each one requires time to polish. When done correctly, it is a very beautiful form and also very effective. I have heard conflicting views on the author's viewpoint from he is on his high horse looking down on the Japanese culture to my own view point of it is one man's experience. It is a good read and if you have any experience with Aikido you will recognize and remember your experience learning some of the techniques he names. I do know that his training is indeed rigorous and if my own training were styled like his I would have walked away. I can say that I understand their approach but, it is definitely not for everyone. Having said all of that I say again that it is a good read and do recommend it.

As a newly minted ShoDan in Shiho Karano Karate, I have to be skilled in knowledge as well as technique. To that end, I've been reading a number of books about the martial arts. One part of that genre are the autobiographical accounts of Budo practitioners. I want to gain deeper insight through what others have experienced, learned, and how they changed as a result of martial arts training. "Angry White Pyjamas" is one such tale, written by a Brit who studied Aikido in Japan during the 90s. Robert Twigger, a disaffected thirtysomething teaching English to Tokyo high school girls, decides that he is incomplete as a man without some sort of physical challenge. Martial arts training appears to fit the bill, so he and his two expiate roommates enroll in a local aikido dojo. While taking regular classes, Mr. Twigger is drawn to the dojo's toughest mode of aikido instruction: an intense yearlong course normally taken by Japanese Kidotai (riot police) as a job requirement. Despite his initial misgivings and warnings from others about the course's difficulty, he goes for it and resolves to finish no matter what. "Angry White Pyjamas" chronicles Mr. Twigger's struggle to prove himself by successfully completing the Kidotai Aikido course. Mr. Twigger makes many observations about his life and Japanese culture both in and out of the dojo, so there's lots of exposition compared to, say, "Moving Zen" by C.W. Nicol. Also unlike Sensei Nicol, Mr. Twigger is not wholeheartedly enraptured by Japanese culture. He has a more postmodern viewpoint, so his anecdotes are not filtered through rose-colored glasses. But humor leavens much of his story, and there's no disrespect or Western condescension. As one who was stationed in mainland Japan from '88 to '90, I enjoyed the reminders his recollections provoked (funky food, navigating the extensive train system, hanging out in Roppongi, etc.). Mr. Twigger also makes the other folks he encounters come alive through his writing; his slacker roommates Fat Frank and Chris are particularly priceless. But the most interesting aspect of "Angry White Pyjamas" is Mr. Twigger's search for validation as a male through overcoming adversity. He reminded me of an "Iron John" or "Wild at Heart" kind of guy, looking for affirmation of his masculinity via completion of the brutal riot police course. As a

former Marine and current martial artist, I identified and sympathized with his quest. The course was a rite of passage for Mr. Twigger, and I rooted for him every step of the way. Many times he came close to quitting due to constant pain, injuries, fatigue, interpersonal conflicts, and his own perceived ineptitude with aikido. But despite these hardships he didn't give up, and for that I commend and respect him. I read "Angry White Pyjamas" in conjunction with "Iron and Silk" by Mark Salzman and "Moving Zen" by C.W. Nicol to get multiple perspectives on martial arts training. It's interesting to compare and contrast Mr. Twigger's 90s presuppositions and experiences with those of Mr. Salzman's in the 80s and Sensei Nicol's in the early 60s. Each book is a fascinating snapshot of a particular era, culture, and martial art style (Aikido, Wushu, and Karate). But despite their different philosophies, motivations, and levels of immersion, all of these men achieved personal growth and maturation through practicing the martial arts in a persevering fashion. I found that to be inspiring, and so I recommend all three books.

Angry White Pyjamas is an interesting book on Aikido. I enjoyed reading it and found many descriptions of the Sensus program fascinating. Alternatively, the Art of Peace (Aikido) was represented in a way that wasn't familiar and predictable for me. This challenged my thinking about this martial art and pushed me to consider a wider range of what it means for different people to study Aikido.

I live in Japan, have studied the language for several years and am asked often by visitors what books I'd recommend to them to get acquainted with the country. Angry White Pyjamas is one of the top recommendations I'll make from now on. It is fun, and in a usually unbiased way portrays Japanese society as it is: bizarre and surprising to the westerner. The author gets most of his rather low-key comments on the observed right, too. One of the big screw-ups are his comments on Japanese food to which he attributes no value. The food he experienced was probably influenced by two factors: his low income (never good in the world's most expensive country) and life in the dojo which apparently didn't avail him to anything better than the worst there is. The description of the Yoshinkan course is satisfying for someone with an interest in martial arts but no deep expertise in it. It is more about life in that particular dojo, rather than about Aikido itself, e.g. the technical aspects of it.

This appears to be a sort of "must-read" for aikidoka. It's entertaining. It's nice to hear about people's personal experiences. Twigger is certainly a good storyteller. His opinions on things didn't always

mesh with mine, and the experiences he had won't match most people's experience of aikido (or Japan, for that matter) but it takes all kinds and was worth the read.

The book is well written with abundant insights into the practice of Aikido.

Every Thing Falling Hard A Judo Story should have been and more. This was very much from the perspective of an inductee into a brutal branch of Aikido. It was well written and kept me completely engaged.

Le livre est arrivé d'avance, c'était bien, mais il est en assez mauvais état. Tranché et la couverture est toute pliée.

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