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Tendo, the daughter of a yakuza (mob) boss, grew up in 1970s and '80s Japan, living through the booms and busts of life on the wrong side of the law. Her first published work, Shoko uses unpracticed but appropriately blunt prose to memoir her exceedingly arduous life; readers will appreciate her restrained but powerful details, especially during some of the harsher scenes. From age 12 onwards, Shoko's life was enveloped in drug addiction, poverty, psychological and sexual abuse, miscarriage, attempted suicide and the deaths of many close family members, set against a backdrop of Japan's ultra-secretive yakuza society. Admiration and a detached style keep Tendo from exploring any resentment she might harbor toward her criminal father, which may prove off-putting for some, but feels entirely honest given the emotional trauma Tendo suffers, and is as revealing for what it includes as for what it doesn't. Emotionally complex and thoroughly heart-rending, this book is recommended for anyone searching for a more thorough and personal understanding of Japanese society, and its darker corners, than is offered by more popular Japanese imports (movies, comic books) featuring similar subject matter.

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