

Cast Party 2018



Told by Ryusui Seiryoin, Hodaka, Agent Kunugi, and Tanya

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The BBB website

<http://thebbb.net/>

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Tanya

<http://thebbb.net/cast/tanya.html>

0. Cast Party 2018



Ryusui Seiryoin: Hello, everyone. I'm Ryusui Seiryoin, the chief editor of The BBB. Last year (2017) we held a real meet-up event "Cast Party 2017" in Tokyo to commemorate our 5th anniversary. Also, we published the e-book version of the event footage, although it is currently available only in Japanese. We received a lot of positive responses, and considered whether to hold a meet-up again this year (2018). However, we were worrying that a meet-up in Japan could entertain only Japanese readers. After considering various factors, we decided to record this "Cast Party 2018", the third of such event to be held, as a virtual event of some sort for the first time in two years. Like "Cast Party 2015" and "Cast Party 2016", we will upload this recording onto YouTube at a later date. Three participants are joining me here: Agent Kunugi as the chief proofreader, Tanya as the chief designer and the head of general affairs, and one more special guest who is attending this gathering for the first time. So, first, Mr. Kunugi, would you like to take this opportunity to introduce yourself?

Agent Kunugi: Hello, everyone. I'm Kunugi. A lot of things have happened to me this year so far. Well, same as usual, though. But, this year has been full of painful experiences. I hope to finish this year as soon as possible, get it over with, and move on to 2019.

Ryusui: Has this year been especially harder than usual? Or, do you have the same feeling every year?

Kunugi: You know, I always have a tough year, because I keep trying to aim high and achieve difficult goals. And, we know that everybody has to go through tough times, more or less. In the context, this year is not an exception, I think.

Tanya: Specifically, what have been giving you tough times?

Ryusui: I guess that it is his works at The BBB. [bitter smile] As a chief proofreader.

Tanya: Mr. Kunugi, is that right?

Kunugi: Well, yes. I have been proofreading this and that for The BBB. Still, I might have to admit that I cannot get a sense of actually achieving something.

Ryusui: Umm, do you mean that you have not been able to try something new as a proofreader? You always get the heavy workload done, really.

Kunugi: But I think everyone has tons of things to do as well. Aside from the workload, I aim at achieving a certain level of quality in proofreading. Although I try to reach it, I feel I cannot obtain the results that I envision. I might have set the goal too unattainably high.

Tanya: Do you get that particular feeling when you try to correct texts in terms of improving the quality of expressions during the proofreading?

Kunugi: When I feel “I have to find more natural, more appropriate expressions” and cannot come up with the ideal structures, I get stressed out.

Tanya: Do you feel the gap between different cultures?

Kunugi: Yes, I do. Even though I had lived overseas for decades since my childhood, I have not been able to fill the gap between Western cultures, which I know quite well, and Japanese culture, which the contents that I have to proofread are based on ...

Ryusui: Umm, sorry to interrupt. But we are still at the Self-introduction Section. [laughter] That topic should be discussed later, if needed. Tanya has yet to introduce herself. So, Tanya, you may want to do that now.

Tanya: Oh, sorry. [smirk] Hello, everyone. I'm Tanya, in charge of design and general affairs at The BBB. At first, as a dog person, I want to emphasize that 2018 is the year of dog in Chinese zodiac! This year my volunteer activities at an art museum, which I have been engaged in for several years, have become more active than ever. A few times a month, though. On those work days, I mingle with various kinds of people all day, from morning to evening. A group of elementary school kids, typical business people, those who practice at a museum as interns, teachers who have art classes at junior high schools and high schools, visually handicapped ones, aurally handicapped ones, people accompanied by service dogs, and so on. I help them do their works of developing pictures in a darkroom or talk with them while appreciating art exhibition together. The range of my activities has been expanding in that way. In addition, I keep playing “Pokémon Go”. Currently, my partner is Kunugi-dama!!

Kunugi: Oh, really? [laughter] That sounds familiar.

Ryusui: Is it a name of one type of Pokémon creatures?

Tanya: Yes. Usually, it is a green monster assuming a shape of a pine cone. But I got the golden version. I said, “Oh, hello, Mr. Kunugi!”, to the Pokémon and always walk with the Kunugi-dama.

Ryusui: I will use my favorite search engine to learn more about it later. Tanya has been involved in the volunteering activities at an art museum under another name. It was introduced this year in a women's magazine named “President Woman”.

Hodaka: Ah, I read the article. I remember it well.

Kunugi: I think I read it, too ... But ... I'm sorry. My memory is vague.

Tanya: I will send a copy of the article later.

Ryusui: We understand Tanya has done the volunteering activities energetically in addition to the works at The BBB. By the way, I think we have just heard someone's voice. Today, we have invited a special guest. Our readers should know him well as the author of "Japanese 100 Great Mountains" series. He's a mountaineering photographer. Mr. Hodaka!! [applause]



Hodaka: Hello, everyone. I'm Hodaka. I have been active in mountaineering and the field of photography for years. I climb at least one mountain or two every month. Since April 2017, I have been trying to complete conquering Japanese 100 Great Mountains. Specifically, I climb a mountain, write an article, and upload it onto the Internet with photographs. It is about to become my lifework. In fact, I have conquered about 30 of Japanese 100 Great Mountains in the past. But, I reset the previous records and restarted my quest of climbing them from scratch. Since the restart in 2017, I have climbed about 20 mountains to date.

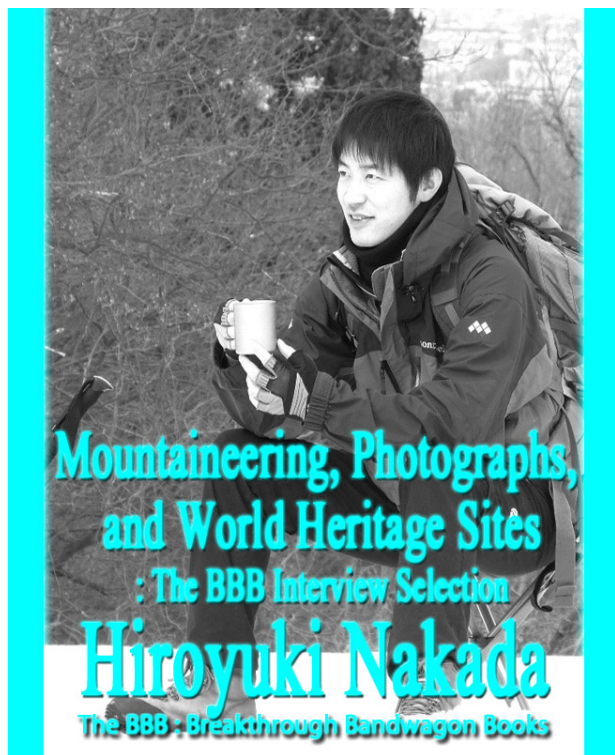
Tanya: 20 mountains, already? Wow! Great!

Ryusui: I have a reason why we are inviting Mr. Hodaka for this occasion. Actually, right after we held "Cast Party 2017" last year, Mr. Hodaka's "Japanese 100 Great Mountains Vol. 1" was published. He posted the articles on the Internet before that, to be more exact.

Hodaka: Yes, you're right.

Ryusui: In short, we have started publishing "Japanese 100 Great Mountains" series since the period between the last year's "Cast Party" and this year's. Within the year, we have released three eBook titles of the series. Generally speaking, The BBB has mainly published volumes from the ongoing existing series this year. In the end, Mr. Hodaka's "Japanese 100 Great Mountains" series is the only new content addition of the year. Mr. Hodaka's series has made a remarkable progress in getting recognized. As a free eBook title from The BBB, the work titled "King In the Mirror", which describes the life of Michael Jackson, is usually the most frequently downloaded work. Although this king of the hill is seldom beaten, the download number of "Japanese 100 Great Mountains Vol. 2" surpassed that of "King In the Mirror" during the period between June and September 2018. In short, Mr. Hodaka's work got the first place among 158 works

available on The BBB Web site. The achievement is convincing enough to make me decide to invite Mr. Hodaka as the special guest. In the past, we once published the interview with Mr. Hodaka under his real name (refer to the work titled “Mountaineering, Photographs, and The World Heritage Sites.”) In fact, the interview has been considered to be one of our very popular contents, and it is still being downloaded very frequently.



Hodaka: Considering the interview being held a few years ago, I am really happy that it is still being read by many.

Ryusui: As for the download number, the interview with Mr. Hodaka takes the fourth place among the Japanese works available from The BBB and the ninth place among the English works. There is no doubt that the popularity is high and stable. However, Mr. Hodaka’s works are all available for free. I do regret having to say that we cannot pay you anything for the achievement.

Hodaka: Oh, that’s okay. I enjoy creating my contents at my own will. It is I who should thank The BBB.

Ryusui: Mr. Hodaka’s contents are valuable, because they have brought in many readers to The BBB. We really appreciate it.

1. About the “Japanese 100 Great Mountains” series

Ryusui: Now that we are referring to Mr. Hodaka’s contents, let’s start the talk about the “Japanese 100 Great Mountains” series. By the way, my hometown (Nishinomiya City, Hyogo Prefecture) is located between the sea and mountains. When I was a small child, I belonged to a group like Cub Scouts, and went to the sea and mountains very often. I loved them both. But I did not participate in authentic mountaineering like Mr. Hodaka does, and might have not conquered any of Japanese 100 Great Mountains. Still, I really love mountains, and, by reading Mr. Hodaka’s “Japanese 100 Great Mountains”, while staying at home, I get the feeling as if I myself were climbing the mountains. I savor the “virtual climbing of Japanese 100 Great Mountains”.

Hodaka: I’m really delighted to hear such a comment. [slight smile]

Ryusui: Each episode is entertaining. I’m grateful for the work. On this occasion, I would like to inquire Mr. Kunugi and Tanya about their episodes regarding mountaineering or mountains. Mr. Kunugi, do you have any impressive memory about mountains?

Kunugi: Not only for mountains, but also for whatever I do, I have basically been an indoor type of human being. I am used to be engaged in various works at home. But in recent years, I occasionally feel the longing for outdoor activities in the ocean and mountains. In fact, I have even considered whether to just try them. Still, since I need considerable amount of time and money for the commitment, I have not been able to do that so easily.

Ryusui: In addition, we also need mobility. I mean, for example, in the episodes of “Japanese 100 Great Mountains”, Mr. Hodaka always reaches certain places in the middle of the process of mountaineering by car, correct?

Hodaka: You’re right. [laughter]

Ryusui: The three of us, except Mr. Hodaka, do not usually drive a car as a part of our daily lives. If you do not have a car, it would not be easy to go to any one of Japanese 100 Great Mountains.

Hodaka: If I don’t use a car, it would be difficult, definitely.

Kunugi: And I noticed something, when I read “Japanese 100 Great Mountains”. Mr. Hodaka actively speaks to people whom he meets in a mountain, correct? I felt his communication skills from what I read.

Hodaka: Surely, I speak to others naturally.

Kunugi: I think it is your strong point. It is one of the abilities I don’t have. I want to overcome the shortcoming, though. You know, I want to develop not only outdoor activities but also high level of communication skills. In the context, I am interested in mountaineering.

Ryusui: I know Mr. Hodaka has his communication skills by nature. On the other hand, Mr. Hodaka, you have spoken to others more aggressively than ever since the launch of “Japanese 100 Great Mountains”. In short, to look for interesting information.

Hodaka: That’s right. Even when I climb the mountain that I have already conquered in the past, I discover different aspects of the climbing every time. The impression changes, depending on the weather. Needless to say, I meet different climbers each time. Many of those who climb Japanese 100 Great Mountains are mountain lovers. Once they start talking about mountains, they never stop.

Ryusui: You exchange information with other climbers, right?

Hodaka: Yes. I sometimes decide to choose the mountain to climb next, based on the information I get from other climbers. My climbing style has been changing a lot since I started writing the series. In the past,

I climbed mountains, aiming only to conquer the summit. Recently, I tend to plan how to climb in advance. I carefully research what route I should choose. Even in case of an accident, I have come to be able to enjoy it.

Ryusui: I always write “unexpected drama” in the descriptions of the “Japanese 100 Great Mountains” series. I surely feel you attach an importance to accidental events. For example, you even change the mountain to climb, while taking into account the weather condition on the day. Unexpected events like that are the very things that interest me. Well then, Tanya, do you have anything to talk about regarding mountains?

Tanya: For mountains, I’m reminded that I went camping every summer from when I was a little kid to about the age of a junior high school student. By nature, I love outdoor activities so much. I shredded newspapers and rolled them up to make them look like squids. Then, I put firewood together and burned them with the kindling to build a campfire. I loved eating marshmallows beside a campfire. However, I had never got a chance to swim in the sea until I became an adult. The places where I used to swim were always rivers or lakes. So, I had the impression that a mountain was the place to swim. Typically, people swim in the sea, I think. And, one more thing. Each time I went camping, I had the event called “Kimo-dameshi” (meaning “a test of courage”, usually taking place in horror-story settings such as graveyards). In such cases, I had mysterious experiences very often. I won’t talk about it today. But if I have an opportunity, I will talk about them to people who love scary stories.

Hodaka: Oh, sounds awesome! I’m interested in it.

Ryusui: Speaking of which, Mr. Kunugi, is there a custom like “Kimo-dameshi” in countries such as the United States as well? In the first place, do you know what “Kimo-dameshi” is?

Kunugi: I know “Kimo-dameshi” itself. But, I wonder if there is a similar custom in Western countries ... I may happen to know the English word that is equivalent to Kimo-dameshi in Japanese.

Tanya: In fact, I went camping to a lodge, which appeared in the Hollywood version of the horror movie “Ring”. It was located in Oregon State.

Hodaka: Wow, did you?

Ryusui: I suspect that Mr. Kunugi doesn’t know the best-selling novel “Ring” by Mr. Koji Suzuki. It became a cultural phenomenon by selling millions of copies just in Japan.

Kunugi: I do happen to know that the work was remade into a movie in Hollywood.

Tanya: An eerie being is ... coming out from a TV screen ...

Hodaka: Did something happen in the lodge?

Tanya: While camping at a national park in Oregon State, I was watching the exact Hollywood version of Ring with my friends.

Hodaka: Oh? Did you dare to watch the movie, because you knew the correlation between the campsite and the movie?

Tanya: No, I didn’t know that. Just a pure coincidence. I was watching it with my friends. Everyone was saying, “Hey, the setting in this movie looks exactly like this place, doesn’t it?” [laughter] Later, I conducted a research and learned that the camp site was the actual filming location.

Hodaka: No kidding! [laughter]

Tanya: It was no more than just a coincidence, though. I mean, we did not meet an actual eerie being.

Ryusui: Although the movie was shot at the place, it was not exactly what we would refer to as a spiritual spot, was it?

Tanya: Well, if someone likes horror stories, I would like to tell them under the title “Tanya’s scary stories”.

Hodaka: I’m really looking forward to it.

Ryusui: I can admit that we might welcome such types of articles.

Kunugi: I feel that the work might sell better than “Towerld” series ... [bitter smile]

Ryusui: Hey, wait. That is not what I hope would be the case. [laughter]

Tanya: Anyway, in Mr. Hodaka’s “Japanese 100 Great Mountains”, we can check out many beautiful photographs. As Ryusui said earlier, I feel as if I myself were climbing the mountains. Might I say that I can sense the atmosphere of the summit? I want to see more and more sceneries of the mountains. Then, I get to learn the process from the start of the mountaineering to the summit and the process from the summit to the way home. I feel as if I myself experienced them, and I feel the thrill.

Hodaka: Oh, really. I’m glad to hear that. Thank you so much.

Ryusui: Mr. Hodaka gives me permission to use as many photographs from his blog as I like. His blog (<http://hodakaclimber.blog.fc2.com>) introduces more photographs than the aforementioned eBook series, “Japanese 100 Great Mountains”. So, I would like YOU, dear readers, to visit Mr. Hodaka’s blog.

Kunugi: I see. His blog surely sounds appealing. That’s the power of photographs, aided by the graphics.

Hodaka: The photographs I upload on my blog are just a small part of all that I have. I think I probably take 400 to 500 pictures for each mountain, at the end of the day.

Ryusui: I guess it would be hard for you to manage that many photos.

Hodaka: Not really. They are easily manageable. I make a list on an Excel document by putting the dates and mountain names there.

Tanya: I have a question to ask Mr. Hodaka. Do you have your own set of tools for mountaineering? I mean, the items you always bring to mountains.

Kunugi: For example, the bell to ward off bears?

Ryusui: Ah, I remember. The bell to ward off bears (refer to Episode 007: Mount Hotaka in “Japanese 100 Great Mountains Vol. 2”).



Tanya: Yeah, I mean such a thing. I would like you to give us the information, if you has something like that.

Hodaka: About the bell to ward off bears, I have almost encountered a bear twice in the past. But in fact, the bear-repelling bell doesn't seem to be very effective.

Tanya: What?! [laughter]

Kunugi: Doesn't seem to be very effective, you say? [laughter]

Hodaka: Bears seem to be getting used to the bell sound ...

Ryusui: That's not good! [laughter]

Hodaka: I heard that it wouldn't work too well.

Kunugi: When I read Mr. Hodaka's article, I thought, "Ah, we would definitely need the bell to ward off bears."

Hodaka: I feel safe with it, so it works as a lucky charm. But I often forget to carry it.

Ryusui: You introduced another method in the article. The method to surprise a bear by bursting an empty bread bag. Does that work?

Hodaka: We could surprise a bear by doing so. Momentary, though ...

Ryusui: Momentary? If so, you will be killed after that! [laughter]

Hodaka: I wish I could turn away a bear that way. Or, I could make a strange sound by denting an empty plastic bottle while walking. My own set of tool for mountaineering ...? Let me see ... Although it is commonplace, I carry a map ... and, umm ...

Ryusui: Do you use a compass?

Hodaka: Actually, I don't use it so often. In the past, I learned the way to know the direction by setting a compass onto a map. But I don't need to use the method, since mountain paths have recently been maintained so well. In addition, I can use a compass app in my smartphone.

Tanya: Ah, I see. We can use GPS in our smartphones, of course.

Ryusui: Can you use the GPS in your smartphone even at a summit?

Tanya: We can use GPS at the summit of Mount Fuji. (*We can also use a guide app for the routes in climbing Mount Fuji.)

Hodaka: We can use it at a summit in many cases. Conversely, it is sometimes out of service at the foot of a mountain, surprisingly.

Kunugi: Oh, I didn't know that.

Hodaka: Then, I have to carry a camera, needless to say.

Ryusui: For a snow mountain, you have to carry crampons, don't you?

Hodaka: Right. To put it this way, what I need to carry are a map and a camera.

Ryusui: When you stay in a mountain by using a tent, I guess you have many things to carry, including the tent itself.

Hodaka: And a headlight, too. I have to carry such gadgets.

Ryusui: By the way, Mr. Hodaka, about the 30 mountains of Japanese 100 Great Mountains you had climbed before the current series started, are they mainly located in the eastern part of Japan?

Hodaka: Yes, most of them are in eastern Japan. If I remember right, the farthest one from home I climbed was Mount Sobo in Kyushu Island. I climbed it just once.

Ryusui: Many of Japanese 100 Great Mountains are located in eastern Japan, aren't they? I literally mean the eastern half of Japan. So, I have been thinking that it would be difficult for those living in western Japan to conquer all of Japanese 100 Great Mountains.

Hodaka: Many people point it out very often. Actually, I was told so by a climber from Yamaguchi Prefecture, whom I met in a mountain (refer to Episode 003: Mount Amagi in "Japanese 100 Great Mountains Vol. 1").

Ryusui: Ah, he's the one whom you wrote about in the article, isn't he?

Hodaka: Right, the one who is a kendo fencer of the eighth grade. He told me that he was envious of me because I live in eastern Japan.

Ryusui: Still, that man had climbed about 96 of Japanese 100 Great Mountains until then, hadn't he?

Hodaka: Yes, he had. He said to me he was going to conquer all the mountains by the end of 2017. However, he seemed to have received a hurt on his legs. He told me that he would change the plan, and to complete the peak conquests in 2019. For the distribution of Japanese 100 Great Mountains, about 63 are located in eastern Japan in the region that includes Tokyo. Then, 9 in Hokkaido Island. 14 in the

north-eastern area, or Tohoku Region, of Honshu Island. 6 in the western half of Honshu Island. 2 in Shikoku Island. And 6 in Kyushu Island.

Ryusui: Living in western Japan might be a disadvantage in conquering Japanese 100 Great Mountains. I feel sympathy for mountaineers living in western Japan.

Hodaka: So do I. You know, many mountains are clustered in the central region of eastern Japan, or Kanto Region and Nagano Prefecture. I would like to speed up and climb as many of them as possible, in a short span of time.

Ryusui: But if you complete them first, I think you would have more trouble in climbing new mountains that are located farther away, as you near the final phase of the series.

Hodaka: That is the difficult part.

Ryusui: I'm worried about that part. Mr. Hodaka now climbs one mountain after another, at a rapid pace.

Hodaka: To date, it is easy to climb them, because I can go to many of them and back in a day.

Ryusui: Nine of the mountains are in Hokkaido Island, correct?

Hodaka: Yes, nine mountains. I wouldn't complete the conquest of them all in one expedition.

Kunugi: I too think you cannot just climb so many of them in one expedition. I guess, one mountain at a time, or two at the most. If someone completes nine mountains at a time, he is great enough to be worthy of being listed in the Guinness Book of Records.

Tanya: I don't know this too well, Mr. Hodaka, so let me ask you. Are many of Japanese 100 Great Mountains independent peaks, or parts of mountain ranges?

Hodaka: In Northern Alps and Southern Alps (both in Japan), many of them are parts of mountain ranges. So, I can traverse several of them at one time. In local areas, many of them may be independent peaks.

Tanya: Especially in Hokkaido Island, the mountains are located separately, spread out quite widely.

Ryusui: So, I don't understand how and in what order Mr. Hodaka may want to climb them ... I cannot imagine at all. Definitely, it must be tough for you just to visit the foot of a mountain.

Hodaka: For your reference, the northernmost mountain is Mount Rishiri in Rishiri Island, right next to Wakkanai, the northernmost city in Hokkaido and Japan.

Tanya: Ah, that's right. I know there is an island.

Kunugi: Is the mountain that is major enough to be on the list actually located in the island?

Hodaka: On the other hand, the southernmost mountain is in Yakushima Island. Its name is Mount Miyanouradake.

Tanya: So, you can climb it while appreciating Jomon Sugi (long-living, ancient cypress tree).

Hodaka: I think I should climb one of the two mountains as the 100th.

Ryusui: Oh, that's a good idea.

Kunugi: By the way, is Mount Fuji considered to be one of Japanese 100 Great Mountains?

Hodaka: Yes.

Ryusui: I have expected that Mr. Hodaka would choose Mount Fuji as the final target or the 50th. I mean, it is such an important point or a milestone.

Hodaka: Actually, I have climbed Mount Fuji very often. I wonder if I should introduce it as the 50th or the checkpoint like that.

Ryusui: I am hearing your plan of climbing the 100th mountain for the first time. Well, as for the 100th mountain, you will likely choose Rishiri Island or Yakushima Island. Or, you may want to leave one of the nearest mountains for the last.

Hodaka: That's an interesting idea ... [laughter]

Tanya: I guess visiting Yakushima would be a harder experience than Hokkaido. You know, there are many restrictions regarding transportation such as liners, meals, and accommodations.

Ryusui: You will choose whether you take the hardest one for the last or the easiest.

Hodaka: Of course, I would like the hardest one. It would give me a sense of achievement.

Kunugi: I guess so, too. As a reader, I would like the 100th mountain to be equivalent to the final evil grandmaster boss in a video game. If he chooses a mountain near Tokyo as the last target, I might be disappointed, as if I am finding out that the final boss of a game is turning out to be weaker than expected.

Ryusui: Mr. Hodaka, in the series to date, you have not visited a mountain in western Japan, have you?

Hodaka: No, I haven't.

Tanya: I remember you have yet to visit western Japan and Hokkaido.

Hodaka: Since many typhoons struck Japan a few months ago, I have not climbed as many mountains as I planned. Without the storms, I would have been able to climb more mountains. I was not favored with fine weather.

Ryusui: In winter, are Japanese 100 Great Mountains not closed to the climbers because of the snow?

Hodaka: I have not heard about it so often. Basically, it is the matter of self-responsibility. You know, climbing a mountain in winter requires a certain amount of skill.

Kunugi: I have the impression that climbing a mountain in winter is indeed dangerous.

Ryusui: But I have the impression that Mr. Hodaka climbs snowy mountains very often.

Hodaka: In fact, among the snowy mountains that I climbed, I intentionally chose those which were relatively easy to climb, and whose mountain trails were easily recognizable. I think I prefer climbing dangerous mountains in Northern Alps during summer.

Ryusui: In the series, Mr. Hodaka often writes, "This is relatively an easy mountain." I'm worried that, if you conquer easier mountains first, only harder ones will be left waiting on deck. The further the series continues, the harder the climbing might get. That kind of series progression may make them more interesting, of course. Still, I do worry that Mr. Hodaka might end up having really tough times in the latter half of his challenge.

Hodaka: I myself am not worried so much. As for the easy mountains I have climbed to date, they were easy because they are classified as easy for their having no dangerous spots in particular. I was exhausted from climbing each mountain, for they are still legitimate mountains.

Kunugi: I can imagine that you definitely have to muster your physical strength. It is beyond the imagination by the indoor-type people, including me.

Hodaka: When I bring a tent, the load that I have to carry gets quit heavy. It requires physical strength. Speaking of danger, climbing a mountain in Northern Alps (in Japan) gets really dangerous because there are courses that are more like cliffs. I think they are really perilous.

Tanya: I would like you to be careful, definitely.

Hodaka: When I go there, I notice that there are many who climb alone, regardless of gender.

Ryusui: While we look forward to the rest of “Japanese 100 Great Mountains” series, we worry about you because of the danger in mountains.

Hodaka: Safety first, of course.

Tanya: We want to witness Mr. Hodaka conquer all the mountains.

Kunugi: Please be sure to take care of yourself.

Hodaka: Considering my own climbing skills, I would like to adjust the schedules for when I climb which mountains. Last week, I climbed Mount Asama. Its volcanic alert level was lowered to Level 1 in August 2018, and that allowed us to climb to near the crater. The alert level was lowered for the first time in three years. So, despite its being a weekday, quite a lot of people were climbing.

Ryusui: We do not know such kind of information, for we do not quit search for it aggressively.

Hodaka: Conversely, Mount Kusatsu-Shirane erupted in January this year and, if I remember right, its alert level was raised to the higher degree again. I cannot predict when I will be able to climb which volcanoes.

Ryusui: In reality, volcanoes sometimes erupt massively. Like Mount Ontake in 2014. Not a few climbers died from the eruption.

Hodaka: This year, there were only a few days during which people could climb to the summit of Mount Ontake. I heard quit many people were climbing it.

Ryusui: Are there websites or anything, on which such information is posted? How do you gather information about mountains?

Hodaka: There is an SNS-like stuff that specializes in mountains. Beside that, I browse blogs of those who frequently climb mountains. By reading their blogs, I can easily use my imagination to think about through what routes I will climb the mountain. So, I often refer to their blogs.

Ryusui: When you meet other climbers in a mountain, do you talk about your “Japanese 100 Great Mountains” series? Or, do you tend to keep it secret?

Hodaka: I do not intentionally keep it secret. But there are so few climbers around me in my daily life and the series are not known widely. On the other hand, I positively talk about the series with other climbers whom I meet in a mountain.

Ryusui: Oh, that’s good. In addition, Mr. Hodaka uses Instagram, right? Among those involved with The BBB, no other person uses Instagram. The English version of “Japanese 100 Great Mountains” attracts attention, probably because of Instagram.

Hodaka: I think the influence of Instagram is quite huge. I started using it in the spring of 2018, and upload mountain photographs regularly. I had not used it at all before that. Many others upload photographs of not only mountains but also various kinds of topics. The quality of each photograph is quite high, so I never get tired of browsing them. I attach a hashtag to a photo, and it spreads throughout the world. I also post the link to The BBB on my Instagram page, and the users may have been visiting the site via the link.

Tanya: It could give us a new possibility of The BBB in the future, and a hint on what we can do next.

Hodaka: Once I upload a photograph onto my Instagram page, people give me their “likes” one after another.

Ryusui: We know that mountain photographs are Mr. Hodaka’s forte. As Mr. Kunugi was talking about indoor-types, I also do my work in my house every day. So, I don’t have anything photograph-worthy for Instagram in my daily life. I am involved in English-related activities all day. However, I do not think it would be a good idea to post photographs of random English texts. [laughter]

Kunugi: I think we should not make light of the power of pictures.

Ryusui: Mr. Hodaka proves it convincingly. Tanya uses her own Twitter account and many of her tweets come with pictures. For The BBB’s Facebook page, whether an article comes with or without a picture influences how many people react to it. Instagram specializes in pictures, correct?

Hodaka: Yes, that’s right.

Ryusui: By nature, eBooks might be incompatible with Instagram. However, the characteristics of Mr. Hodaka’s contents happen to contribute in creating the unlikely marriage between the text-based platform and the picture-based medium. In the download count ranking for The BBB eBooks, “Japanese 100 Great Mountains” took the first place. He proved it with the result. In that way, his contents are favorable for The BBB.

Hodaka: In Instagram, there is one foreigner that I am interested in. When I climbed a mountain in Niigata Prefecture the other day, he wrote a comment on my page. It appeared that he was climbing the same mountain on almost the same day. We told each other that we could have encountered there. After that, he uploaded photographs of Japanese 100 Great Mountains. I guess he is still climbing mountains. He seems to stay in and around eastern Japan. Someday I will contact him and I would be glad if we can climb mountains together.

Ryusui: We would like the person to read your “Japanese 100 great Mountains”. He can read it in English, I mean. Mr. Hodaka has not written an episode which mentions the encounter with a foreign climber in a mountain, right?

Hodaka: I have yet to meet a foreigner in a mountain, at least after the series started.

Ryusui: If you meet a foreigner, I think you would have definitely mentioned it. I’m really looking forward to reading an episode in which you meet a foreign climber.

Hodaka: I think I will be able to meet many foreign climbers at Mount Fuji, or at Kamikochi in Northern Alps.

Ryusui: At Mount Fuji, I am sure that there are many foreign climbers. So, do you think that you may want to avoid choosing Mount Fuji as the last target to conquer? Because, once you meet a foreign climber in the final episode, we cannot read the sequel to the episode. [laughter]

Hodaka: In fact, I originally planned to climb Mount Fuji this year. But I was not favored with fine weather.

Ryusui: I did not even know that there was such a thing as Mount Kita.

Kunugi: Mount Kita is the second-highest mountain in Japan, right? For some reason, I got the chance to discover it when I was a junior high school student in the United States.

Tanya: While Mount Fuji is way too famous, the second-tallest one is not all that widely known.

Hodaka: Only climbers might know the information.

Ryusui: By the way, Mr. Hodaka climbed Mount “Hotaka” in the series. That is not the origin of your name, is it?

Hodaka: The origin of my name is Mount Hotakadake in the Northern Alps. For your information, it is the third-highest mountain in Japan.

Ryusui: I understand Mount Hotakadake is really important to you. I’m interested in when Mr. Hodaka climbs it, along with Mount Fuji.

Kunugi: I think Mount Hotakadake is as important to Mr. Hodaka as Mount Fuji is. I can’t wait to read the episode.

Hodaka: The mountain that I have recently been interested in most is Mount Daisen. Actually, 2018 is the 1,300th year since the mountain was first opened to the public. So, I have heard that quite a lot of people climbed it this year. If possible, I want to climb it before the year 2018 ends.

Ryusui: In fact, I once used Mount Daisen as a scene for my novel. I went to the mountain for a field trip in junior high school. Come to think of it, that mountain is one of Japanese 100 Great Mountains.

Hodaka: Oh, really?!

Ryusui: I was from Hyogo Prefecture, not so far from the mountain.

Hodaka: Do you remember what it was like?

Ryusui: We went to Mount Daisen, but the mountaineering was canceled because of the heavy rain during our visit. I spent all my time in a retro game arcade room on the basement level of the hotel we stayed at. [laughter] So, I cannot quite claim that I conquered the mountain.

Tanya: It is located in Tottori Prefecture. How can we get there from eastern Japan?

Ryusui: The bullet train Shinkansen doesn’t run through Tottori and Shimane Prefectures. The accessibility is not so good. For the field trip in junior high school, we went there by bus from Hyogo Prefecture. Mr. Kunugi, can you tell the difference between Tottori and Shimane?

Kunugi: Of course I can! [laughter] Even when I was living overseas, I was the master of geography of Japan.

Tanya: I have just used the search engine in my smartphone. It seems that all you have to do is to go to Yonago Airport by airplane. You can use direct flights from Haneda Airport. By the way, I would like to ask Mr. Hodaka if it is hard to climb Japanese 100 Great Mountains for children or those lacking physical strength.

Hodaka: If the altitude of a mountain is relatively high and there are elements of danger, it would be hard for children. Actually, I hardly see children in a mountain. But I often see families in a mountain near Tokyo, whose peak altitude is lower than 2,000 meters.

Ryusui: But, in the series, I read an episode in which Mr. Hodaka encountered a large group of elementary school children.

Hodaka: They seemed to be coming to the place as a school excursion. [laughter]

Kunugi: Visiting Japanese 100 Great Mountains as a part of the school excursion? How gorgeous and deluxe does it get! [laughter]

Hodaka: I think it would be too tough for elementary school children, though.

Tanya: Do you meet a person who brings a dog?

Hodaka: In “Episode 19: Mount Nasu”, I met a person who brought a dog. You know, it was a gentle slope near a parking lot.

Ryusui: In the future, do you intend to climb mountains near Tokyo one after another?

Hodaka: Ah, no. If I have a good opportunity, I want to go to a distant mountain as well, regardless of its geographical location. I can go to many mountains near Tokyo and come back in a day. So, I might as well save them for the future. When it is difficult for me to go on an expedition, I want to write an article by climbing a nearby mountain. If I complete all the nearby mountains first and early ...

Ryusui: That will put you in a hard position! [laughter] You will be forced to climb many distant mountains later. By the way, you purchased a shop curtain with the list of Japanese 100 Great Mountains printed on it, and started the plan to put a pin badge representing each of Japanese 100 Great Mountains on the store curtain (refer to Episode 011: Mount Daibosatsu in “Japanese 100 Great Mountains Vol. 3”). Have you already gotten all the pin badges of the mountains you have climbed to date?



Hodaka: Although I have climbed about 20 mountains in the series, I have not bought five or six pin badges of them yet. You know, when I climb a mountain on a weekday, the shop in the mountain hut is often closed.

Ryusui: It does get tough when the shop is closed. I think it would be entertaining to the readers if Mr. Hodaka shows the shop curtain with the pin badges of the mountains you have already conquered at the end of each volume of the e-book series.

Hodaka: I have yet to buy all the pin badges, but it would be certainly interesting if I show them to the readers. I once found a shop curtain with all the pin badges of the mountains on someone's SNS account. It was overwhelming.

Tanya: I wonder if he had bought them through online shopping. [laughter]

Ryusui: Oh, no, no. If that were the case, then the value would have been diminished, I think. [laughter] If possible, he should buy the pin badge at each mountain. However, it means Mr. Hodaka has to buy the badge at all costs when he goes to a distant mountain. I mean, it must be difficult for you to visit the distant mountain repeatedly.

Hodaka: I know I can buy them online. But, of course, I want to buy them at the location.

Kunugi: I think I can understand your feeling. That's the way it should be.

Tanya: By the way, Mr. Hodaka, you bring a map to each mountain, I suppose. Do you write notes or something on it?

Hodaka: Usually, I don't in particular.

Tanya: Do you spread and read it?

Hodaka: I bring a paper map there just in case. But I often take a photograph of the map beforehand and look at it on my smartphone while mountaineering. When I take a rest in a mountain, I read the paper map carefully. Also, I read it thoroughly at night if I stay in a mountain. I do not spread it while climbing.

Tanya: I ask you the question because, if you happen to write something on the map, I would like to see the picture that shows you doing so. For example, the route you use for climbing.

Ryusui: Umm, but, Mr. Hodaka does not seem to write notes on it. We should not ask him to do this and that to end up altering his climbing style.

Hodaka: I hardly get lost in a mountain because many of Japanese 100 Great Mountains are well-maintained and civilized. You know, many people climb them. It is easy to find the route to the destination.

Ryusui: I wonder how many people have conquered all of Japanese 100 Great Mountains. They need to put much effort, of course. But in addition, they need to be favored with their circumstances and environment. For example, living in eastern Japan.

Hodaka: Also, it is important for them to have time.

Kunugi: I think they need to get the cooperation and understanding of their families and related people.

Hodaka: Of course, the climbers need physical strength.

Tanya: By when do you intend to complete the conquest?

Hodaka: I started it in 2017. I hope I will complete my quest in a decade. Vaguely speaking, within 10 years. My target or my aim is to climb 10 mountains each year. But some mountains are clustered in the Alps (in Japan), so I might conquer several at one time. As of now, in December 2018, I am posting the serialized article of the 19th mountain on The BBB's Facebook. In fact, I have already conquered the 20th, as of now. So, there are still 80 mountains left.

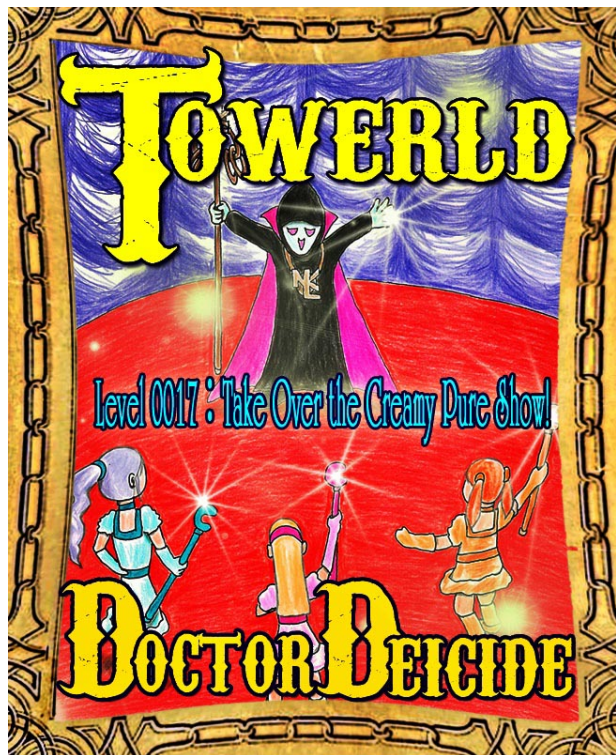
Kunugi: Which means that you are exactly one-fifth of the way.

Tanya: I'm happy that we can read the remainder of the series for more and more mountains!

Ryusui: Mr. Hodaka, thank you for giving us many valuable topics. Well then, let's move on to the latter half of this year's Cast Party. We are now talking about The BBB itself and its activities.

2. About the present and future of The BBB

Ryusui: “Japanese 100 Great Mountains” is a series which started in the past year. However, except that, we at The BBB have published only the latest installments of our existing series. Mr. Kunugi serves as the agent of the “Towerld” series. It would reach an important milestone of Level 0020 in 2019. I think it would not be easy for our reader to start reading a series that already has no less than 20 volumes. So, as our new challenge, we are now planning to publish “The Complete Guide to Towerld” as a free eBook title when publishing “Towerld Level 0020”. We can introduce the highlights of the story from Level 0001 to 0020, and the main characters of the series. In addition, by including Levels 0001-0003 (available for free) in the complete guide, I would like the eBook installment to be the one, with which our readers can understand the “Towerld” series very deeply.



Kunugi: I see. By including the first three free volumes and the highlights of all the 20 volumes, we can offer it as a free eBook. We can expect our readers to be interested in the series from that point on, I suppose.

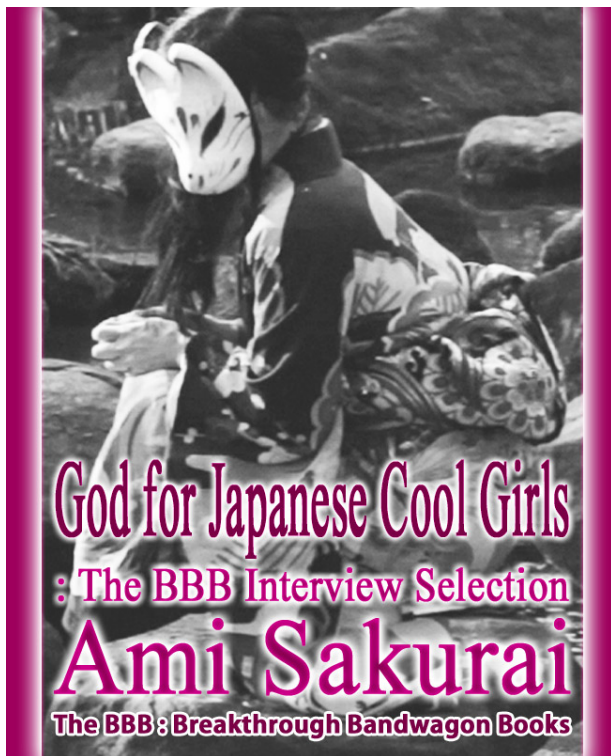
Ryusui: If it works well, I think we can also create the complete guide of Mr. Kyosuke Tsumiki’s “Urban Legend Detectives” series, when it will be concluded in “Case 6”, the next issue. And the complete guide of “The Gifted” series, when it will reach the milestone of Vol. 10. By the way, I have something to ask Mr. Hodaka today. I know you are very busy and have to climb mountains on your holidays. So, I guess it would be difficult for you to have time to read novels, I suppose.



Hodaka: By nature, I do not dislike reading books. So, I read books whenever I have time. But if I can read it only during the commuting to work, it would be difficult to read many books when I get busy.

Ryusui: I often hear that people in general cannot read books after starting to work for a company, even though they might have read many novels before they get out of school. Many of the main casts of The BBB are in middle age. Many of their readers are also in middle age. So, they might be too busy to read novels. How should we handle the issue? In other words, how can we deliver our works to the younger generations? The problem of The BBB is that if we hold a meet-up event, many of those related are just males in middle age. [bitter smile] Of course, we have Tanya, one of our female casts. The BBB has other females and younger casts, but those who can attend the event are limited. You know, many of the writers say, “I do not want to appear in front of the audience,” or “I do not want to show my face to the public.” In addition, for example, if I invite Ms. Ami Sakurai, I believe she would attend the Cast Party. But her view of the world and her character are so strong that whichever Cast Party she participates in will inevitably be painted in colors of “Ami Sakurai’s viewpoint”. This is the only reason why I am hesitant about inviting her. [laughter]

Hodaka: Wow, is her view of the world strong by that much? [laughter]



Kunugi: About the topic pertaining to the trend about people in general not reading novels after getting out of school. I doubt that young people these days read novels. I have this impression that young ones do not read novels or written texts anymore. Should I call it “the trend of getting away from written texts”? I have been thinking recently, if we try to offer novels to those who do not read novels, how can they sell well?

Ryusui: About the topic, I talked with Mr. Kenichi Sobu in a lecture at Waseda University (<https://youtu.be/CktsktMI7R0>) the other day (on November 3rd, 2018). After all, young people spare time for their Instagram, LINE, and Twitter. Pretty much everyone uses their time for such things. I was invited in 2017 by the high school I had graduated from and talked with students belonging to the literature club. They said they did not read many books, because they were busy with texting for LINE.

Kunugi: Oh dear, even at the literature club?

Ryusui: Well, some of the students would still read books, though. In the past, the rivals of novels used to be novels. But now, the rivals of novels are SNS or YouTube. The problem is that we do not quite know how to compete with them. As Mr. Kunugi mentioned, in a way, there surely is “the trend of shying away from written texts”. But at the same time, that may not quite necessarily be the case. I think the modern times can be symbolized as “the age in which people read the texts more than ever”. You know, everybody uses e-mails, Twitter, and so on. They can be classified as “texts”.

Kunugi: Oh, you’re right. Exactly, e-mails and Twitter messages consist of “texts”.

Ryusui: So, although “the trend away from novels” is right, strictly speaking, “the trend away from written texts” may not be correct. They do not exactly stay away from written texts. Rather, considering e-mails and SNS, young people would read and write texts much more than we did when we were young. However, those tools generally deal with short texts like Twitter, and many of the young ones tend to have trouble in reading a large amount of text like novels. In fact, I actually encountered someone describing his trouble, “I’m used to the moderate amount of texts in Twitter so much that I cannot read long texts like novels anymore. How can I deal with it?” They are real readers in modern times. Mr. Hodaka’s “Japanese 100 Great Mountains” can be welcomed by them, because it is capable of giving them the impression like, “This virtual climbing is fun to me!” On the other hand, the number of readers who want to read dignified

traditional novels like “Towerld” are decreasing compared to those in the past. I mean, I am speaking of readers who want to read novels very seriously.

Kunugi: I completely agree with you about it.

Ryusui: For example, in the past, when I got on a train, I saw many people reading pocket books. But nowadays, I have the impression that people are playing games or texting on LINE apps with their smartphones more than ever.

Kunugi: If I correct what I said earlier, I should have described the cultural phenomenon as “young people trending away from long texts”, not necessarily “trending away from written texts” in general. I think many of them tend to have trouble in reading long sentences. I even heard that they can read the text up to three lines. In short, the “attention span” of the young people in this age seems to have been shortened.

Ryusui: If so, how can they read novels? If they can read text only up to three lines. [laughter]

Kunugi: That’s the point. Novels are synonymous with long sentences. In that respect, I am afraid that our novels like “Towerld” do not meet the demand of the readers, especially of young people. The problem that people have with trouble in reading long sentences because of their short “attention span” is also being observed outside Japan. Actually ... it might be even worse in countries other than Japan.

Ryusui: I understand that. The current trends are generated from smartphones and SNS. It means that the cultural phenomenon is being observed worldwide. I mean, not only in Japan. If it is the current of the age, we cannot change it by ourselves. As people who offer novels, the only strategy that we now choose to apply is to offer attractive contents like Mr. Hodaka’s contents to invite readers to The BBB. We hope that it will bolster their interest in our novels.

Hodaka: I too feel young people tend to stay away from novels. But I think they still love reading comics. Actually, I see quite a large number of people reading comics in train. I also hear that comics still sell well.

Ryusui: In fact, the sales of eBook comics have already surpassed those of paper comics.

Hodaka: I wonder if comics are welcomed because their text amount is not too excessive and their graphical images assist readers’ imagination.

Ryusui: Graphics do actually bring the impact, I think. It is the reason why novels are always less popular than comics, animations, and games. Novels are the only losers in this commercial and cultural warfare. Tanya, do you have any opinion about that?

Tanya: Recently, four-panel comics with very simple pictures as if they are drawn with just a single line are overwhelmingly popular on SNS like Twitter and Facebook. More importantly, many of them are drawn for pleasure by amateurs, not by professional comic artists. They just draw for the sport of it, and say things like, “Hey. Look at what we got.” It is a trend in which everyone can become a comic artist with SNS. Just by using casual ideas, we can offer such simple comics on the Web. Or, we might be able to offer four-panel comics consisting only of speech bubbles. It might end up looking like poetry. I think we might offer such serialized articles, in which each story concludes within four panels.

Kunugi: You mean, like Japanese traditional short poems such as *haiku* or *tanka*.

Tanya: Right, that’s what I mean. Or, like *shiritori* game (**Shiritori* is a word game played by saying a word that starts with the last syllable of the word that the previous person said.)

Hodaka: *Shiritori* could be fun. [laughter]

Ryusui: After all, should we end up giving up the challenges with long texts?

Kunugi: I think it would be okay for us to continue the challenges involving massive texts. While sticking to long texts, we might have to contemplate other strategies that employ short texts. For example, anything up to three lines, and no more.

Ryusui: It might be interesting, if we can successfully create a story like “momentary presentations”.

Hodaka: That reminds me of the comic which the chief editor mentioned in the lecture at Waseda University. It was created by Mr. Kai Chamberlain, a Canadian comic artist. I heard the comic got many good responses from overseas.

Ryusui: I felt that the power of comics is really something. As Mr. Hodaka said, I once created a four-panel comic series titled “Teriyaki Girls” with Kai Chamberlain. But creating a comic requires a lot of time. In Kai’s case, if I remember right, he spent at least 24 hours to draw each episode.

Tanya: The type of graphics that has recently been popular is not elaborately drawn like his. Instead, they are really simply drawn. They are almost drawn with just a single line. Instead, they upload such pictures with small panels one after another. Such trend has recently been popular.

Ryusui: Anyway, in this era, I guess everyone wants to enjoy each moment. I mean, just the momentary transience.

Tanya: If a story has three characters, and if we prepare illustration of only the three and use them in a four-panel comic, we could create it very fast at a very low cost.

Ryusui: Thank you for an interesting proposal. That reminds me that today I want to talk about the series of a shiba dog named Momo. While “Japanese 100 Great Mountains” is being warmly welcomed, last year we renewed “Momo Meets the World Heritage Sites” series and renamed it “Momo’s Journey In Japan”. As the fate of series works in general, when we accumulated the volumes of “Momo Meets the World Heritage Sites”, the download count of the latest volume was decreasing. However, after the makeover and the restart as “Momo’s Journey In Japan”, we achieved a v-shaped turnaround successfully. We even received favorable reviews at Amazon.com. In “Momo’s Journey In Japan”, Tanya came up with the idea, and attached maps and related information about each World Heritage Site in Japan. Foreign readers highly praised the complementary information as educationally instructive. I now refer to the episode, because we post onto Facebook each episode of “Momo’s Journey In Japan” every week. I notice the articles are some kind of “momentary presentations”. As the Facebook entries, each article of “Japanese 100 Great Mountains” is relatively longer than that of Momo. But in each article of Momo, we introduce a photograph with the shiba dog and each episode is written as texts up to within several lines. In the context of today’s discussion, Momo’s series might be considered the most modernistic work among our eBooks. In fact, Momo-related works have been widely welcomed and their download numbers are ranked among the top of our eBooks. So, we can concoct a method to entertain our readers by employing the “momentary presentations” like Momo’s. I’m not sure to what extent we can attract readers just with texts, though. If we use some drawings or photographs, we might be able to do various interesting things.



Kunugi: I see. Probably, the key words are “momentary presentations to offer the ephemeral entertainment” and whether it comes with graphics or not might be an essential factor. I think I am about to figure out a pattern for attaining a victory.

Ryusui: By the way, although I do not know who composes the music, in the recent installments of “Towerld” series, Agent Kunugi offers theme tunes for each volume as a bonus, correct? Anyone can listen to the music for free on The BBB web page that features the links for purchasing each volume of recent “Towerld” series. Some of them are large-scale tunes, which last for tens of minutes.

Hodaka: Musical tunes spanning tens of minutes available as a bonus! How generous ...

Ryusui: Personally speaking, I am really happy because I love those bonus music themselves. Still, I have yet to predict how many readers we can attract with the bonus tunes. I guess music lovers and novel lovers may not necessarily be the same.

Kunugi: They are different kinds of people, and we may end up attracting unexpected mix of readers that represent various types. However, the musical pieces that are offered to us are always very long. Do they not span twenty minutes to thirty minutes?

Hodaka: I think we need to pay attention and listen to them carefully.

Kunugi: Like what we talked earlier about the “trend away from long texts”, I hear the length of recent hit tunes are getting shorter than those in 80s and 90s. In the past, the length of many hit tunes were around four minutes. But recent hit tunes span three and a half minutes or below three minutes on average. It seems to reflect the short “attention span” of modern listeners, the trend in which they tend to keep away long texts and long tunes. People used to buy LP or SP records and listen to the music while sitting ritualistically in front of the audio system. However, after the appearance of Walkman, people started listening to music outdoors on the go. Then, in recent years, people download music from the Internet and listen to the same, short tune, endlessly and repeatedly, over and over. I guess people in modern times prefer shorter tunes to longer ones.

Tanya: Typical examples are represented by young and popular Japanese musicians, such as Boku no Lylic no Boyomi, Kenshi Yonezu, and Kyary Pamyu Pamyu. As a style of typical popular music, in the past, they went like section A, section B, section C, and so on. But these days, it goes like section A, section A prime, section A double prime, or something of the sort. That's how the repetition goes. In the 90s, a big-time musician named Tetsuya Komuro even offered a tune whose prelude lasted for three minutes.

Ryusui: Oh, that's the one which is disliked by others at a karaoke bar. [laughter]

Tanya: Yeah, such types of tunes don't exist anymore. Recent music starts with its supposed peak without a prelude. Then, it ends shortly.

Kunugi: Starts with the peak, you say?

Ryusui: But, if I remember right, I heard one of theme tunes for an animation movie "Your Name." has an interlude which continues for 5 to 6 minutes. Whoever tries to sing the tune at a karaoke bar will surely be guaranteed not to win the popularity vote.

Kunugi: But, if the interlude is very long to that extent, others in the karaoke booth can go to the bathroom, eh? [laughter]

Ryusui: I was an enthusiastic music lover in the past and bought many Japanese pop music CDs. However, since around a certain point of time, I mainly check out new tunes on YouTube and purchase just the favorites from iTunes Store and download tune by tune. I mean, I purchase each favorite tune, not an entire CD album. In the case of The BBB, unlike the current music industry, we do not offer many types of novels for our readers to choose them freely. Rather, we currently focus on just a few specific series. So, I might be able to say, as The BBB, we are selecting the direction that is different from the "momentary presentations".

Kunugi: I admit that following the current trend is one option. At the same time, we can also choose to go against the trend, in a manner that is similar to the so-called "contrarian strategy" in investment stock trading. I mean, the method in which you dare to go toward the opposite direction of the trend. Then, by the time the trend comes back to the era of long texts and long tunes, you will have many works and masterpieces stocked up, ready to be marketed. We can choose to apply such a strategy, instead of going with the flow and following the trend.

Ryusui: I agree with you that it is one method of doing business. Dr. MORI Hiroshi, the ace of The BBB, often writes about his opinion about making the decision of what to choose in his life. In countless opportunities, when he has to make up his mind, he selects the more minor of the two, or whatever is closer to filling the niche or farther away from the mainstream. By carrying out the style, he has established one and only characteristics of his creativity, and has eventually succeeded more than anyone else in the market.

Hodaka: I see he has succeeded with the method of "contrarian strategy".

Ryusui: Surely, once the "contrarian strategy" starts paying dividends and working well, you will hit the jackpot. Well, remember that we translate Japanese novels into English and publish them. Can we not say that we are already choosing the path of the "contrarian strategy" from the beginning. [laughter] As for the "Towerld" series, the author consistently takes a firm line of large-scale works. That is very much on the line of the "contrarian strategy". If the current of the time comes to this direction, it would become invincible.

Kunugi: Even if the trend may eventually move toward the direction in our favor, I think it may take 500 years. I doubt humankind will still exist by then. [laughter]

Ryusui: In order for us to have Mr. Hodaka keep "Japanese 100 Great Mountains" series, we have to continue the activity of The BBB. If the BBB disappears, Mr. Hodaka will lose the place to publish his works.

Hodaka: If so, I will be in trouble. [laughter]

Kunugi: We have to keep on encouraging each other, or something like that.

Ryusui: To do so, I think it would be good for us to have a discussion like this and tune in to the exact direction we are heading for. Now, let me talk about other works from The BBB. As for Mr. Kyosuke Tsumiki's "Urban Legend Detectives" series, the "Seven Wonders at School" trilogy, the fifth case of the series, has been concluded over the last year. As soon as the trilogy was concluded, all the previously released existing volumes of the series were downloaded simultaneously. So, I realized once again that series works could hit the jackpot if they have a good opportunity. As for "Towerld" and "The Gifted", at this point, we cannot predict when they will be concluded. On the other hand, in the case of "Urban Legend Detectives" series, Mr. Tsumiki declares that the series will be concluded with six cases in total. For one thing, readers were aroused because the series had reached the fifth case out of the total of six cases. And for another thing, the fifth case consists of the three parts, and the conclusion of the trilogy could get the readers excited. Since there is no apparent final goal in "The Gifted" series, I have told Mr. Akizuki that he should think about the "final boss" of the series like Mr. Tsumiki does. As a result, in "The Gifted Vol. 8" to be published in May or July 2019, the final boss of the series will finally appear.

Hodaka: Wow! The final boss will appear?! That sounds exciting!

Ryusui: Although there used to be no apparent final goal in "The Gifted" series, once the final boss appears, the tension of the entire series has been amplified suddenly. We might be able to call it "the Final Boss Effect". That reminds me of the primacy effect and the end effect discussed in the field of psychology. You know, if you are given the time limit, the beginning and the ending of the period within the restriction will definitely benefit from the boost of excitement. I think this technique can be applied to "Towerld" and other works we have.

Kunugi: Whether it is the final boss or the ending of the story, I am certain that it would become necessary. For example, as for American comics like Marvel's and DC's, which have recently been made into movies very frequently, I have been dissatisfied, for quite a long time, with the fact that they basically have no such concept of endings. On the other hand, for example, in the case of "The Fist of North Star", one of the Japanese legendary comics, it has a clear ending, in which a character named Kaioh is defeated. But American comics do not have the endings. As one of the readers, I just got sick and tired of reading them. I eventually stopped purchasing them. So, I personally think "Towerld" series requires its ending.

Ryusui: But, in the case of "Towerld", powerful enemies such as the drug lord and the Twisted Tyrant appear periodically, and the "series within series" like "Seven Wonders at School" trilogy has already been completed several times. In addition to that, Dr. MORI Hiroshi's works have been constantly downloaded at a very good pace. We published his "The Sky Crawlers" series with three separate volumes each year, so the series has been concluded once ever year. I feel this system might be the reason of the success of "The Sky Crawlers" series.



Kunugi: As for “Towerld”, in my opinion, the tower-shaped world is so gigantic that it might be making the outlook of its world vague. You know, this is my opinion from the objective point of view as an agent.

Ryusui: One thing I can surely say about “Towerld” and “The Gifted” is that we do not know when the series will end and have yet to image the projected volume of the whole series. I think the strength of “Japanese 100 Great Mountains” is that we know the number of the mountains to be introduced are 100 in total. Although the scale is huge, we are sure that it will never exceed 100.

Hodaka: I see. Exactly, you’re right.

Tanya: We always have the sense of security if we know the projected volume of the series beforehand. We do not feel as if we are being left behind or getting lost.

Ryusui: Likewise, we can say the same thing for Momo’s series, in which the shiba dog visits World Heritage Sites. Even though the number of World Heritage Sites is increasing every year, we always know the exact number. In short, there is a scheduled ending in the future.

Kunugi: About the “Towerld” series, we may not want to choose to employ an eccentric strategy just for the sake of hastening to boost its sales immediately.

Ryusui: Actually, there are cases in which certain series becomes popular after it ends and is concluded.

Tanya: I would like to see the “Towerld” series becoming The BBB’s answer to the Guin Saga series. It is my personal opinion.

Ryusui: I like that. That is a good analogy.

Tanya: I mean, if we show to the readers how long, long, and way long the novel series continues, it could become the strength. By the way, Mr. Kunugi and Mr. Hodaka, do you two know what the late Ms. Kaoru Kurimoto’s “Guin Saga” series is?

Kunugi: If I remember right, she died about 10 years ago, didn’t she?

Ryusui: Since Guin Saga is the series that consists of more than 100 volumes, readers usually might be hesitant to start reading from now. Still, the first volume of the series has been read by many for a long time, from generation to generation. I remember that the Volume 1 alone sold millions of copies.

Kunugi: My acquaintance, who is Japanese, read the entire series. He told me, “The story might be getting too long, even though it is still entertaining.”

Tanya: That exaggerated length is what makes the Guin Saga series so appealing.

Ryusui: As a way of applying the contrarian method, I think to stick to the Towerld series to attain the goal is viable.

Tanya: So, I would like the series to be truly magnificent as the heroic saga, The BBB version of the Guin Saga series.

Kunugi: Or, we might just aim to be the Perry Rhodan series and get multiple authors be involved with the grand project. Wait. To whom shall I tell my opinion?

Ryusui: Why don't you send an e-mail to Doctor Deicide?

Kunugi: Well, there is a problem. Whenever I send him e-mail messages, I do not receive a reply message from Doctor Deicide. I have even been doubting whether Doctor Deicide exists in reality or not.

Ryusui: Even so, once the goal to aim at The BBB version of Guin Saga is set, I feel that the overall impression of the series has been solidified suddenly and drastically. We have to make sure to send the message to those who do not know Guin Saga.

Hodaka: I have not known anything about it. Have more than 100 volumes of the novel series been published?

Tanya: I remember that more than 130 volumes have been published. In addition, 22 volumes of the side stories have also been published.

Hodaka: Has the novel series not been concluded yet?

Ryusui: In the middle of the series, the author passed away. The late Ms. Kaoru Kurimoto was one of the authors whom I personally respected, so I am really sorry she died before concluding her lifework.

Hodaka: More than 150 volumes of the novel series ... It is too overwhelming for me just to imagine.

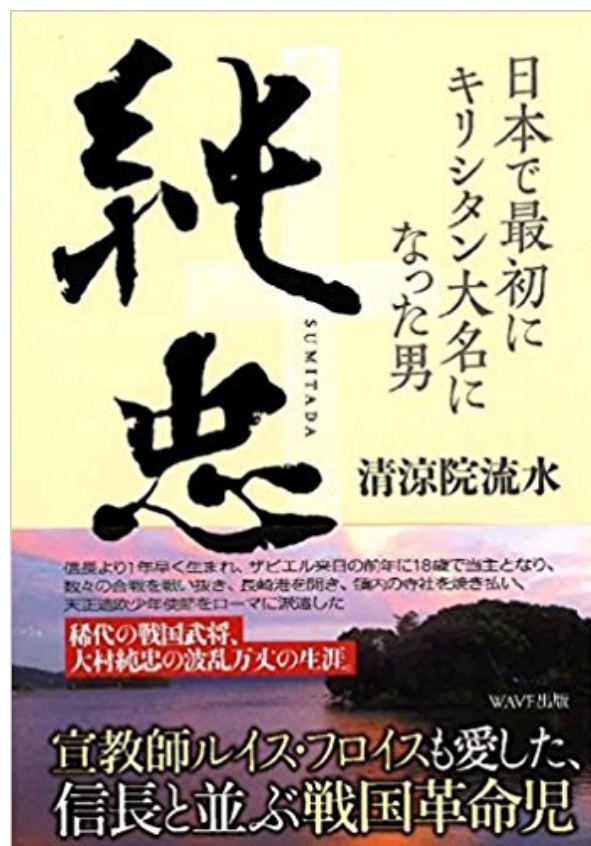
Ryusui: Then, let me talk about The BBB as a whole. In fact, we have already reached the limit of the workload under the current system. The problem lies in how we can deal with this situation. It would be ideal if we could gradually expand our activities. But honestly, the current sales are not plentiful enough for us to employ more staff. In other words, the problem is about what we can do under the current system. It is the most important issue to tackle as of late. As we have not been able to try anything that is so challenging and new except for “Japanese 100 Great Mountains” over the past year, we have only recently been able to do just the same, old things.

Kunugi: Judging from the discussion that we had earlier today, I wonder if we need contents with graphics that can bolster the ephemeral entertainment.

Ryusui: As we contemplate the essential part of the problem realistically speaking, it just comes down to who does what.

Kunugi: In other words, do we have to ask a new addition to the project to do something new? Or, shall we, the current Casts, attempt to do what we can do?

Ryusui: Actually, Mr. Kunugi and I have recently been involved with one new project during the free time that we manage to make outside the usual works that are related to the main projects of The BBB. It is the English version of “SUMITADA”, which is a historical novel I finished writing and released in 2018. It features Sumitada Ohmura, the first Christian warlord in the Japanese history. We are planning to publish the English version of “SUMITADA” irregularly in six volumes in total. We will have the Vol. 1 available for free and I will write a new essay about Sumitada as the postscript attached to the ending of Vol. 6. I think this project will be one of the centerpieces of The BBB’s activities in 2019.



Kunugi: Just by adding one project, we will inevitably have harder times trying to manage time.

Ryusui: Right. That is the reason why we cannot add a new project without much deliberation. Since we do our projects with limited staff and time, we need well-planned strategies. We do not have enough manpower and time to try this and that thoughtlessly. In fact, if we want to inject temporal enthusiasm into The BBB, it would not be difficult. I mean, if we ask our readers to contribute their manuscripts for the potential publication from The BBB, there would be a surge of enthusiasm to a certain extent. In reality, we have often received unsolicited manuscripts from outsiders in the past. However, we would have to spend a great amount of time just to respond to and serve each contributor. I doubt it is worth spending our time and put that much of efforts. So, I have not yet come up with the decision to do something about it.

Kunugi: If we ask our readers to contribute their manuscripts, another problem will arise. Who will be responsible for checking and selecting them?

Ryusui: Even if we decide to choose them with the help of the readers’ votes, we have to prepare the new system that is designed for the purpose.

Kunugi: We might be able to check four-panel comics or simple graphics drawn with a single line more easily than novels.

Ryusui: Well, but, we are not exactly a group that is dedicated to publishing comics more actively than we would do for novels. You know, the authors that belong to The BBB are not comic artists.

Tanya: In my personal opinion, the illustration of Mr. Polka D, who draws the covers of “Towerld”, is suitable for four-panel comics. The illustration looks adorable and would match comics to be enjoyed ephemerally, I think.

Ryusui: Speaking of which, it would be best if I could ask Mr. Polka D to draw the comic version of “Towerld”. But, like Kai Chamberlain has to spend at least 24 hours to draw each episode of the four-panel comics, drawing comics requires a huge amount of time. If we post it panel by panel as “momentary presentations to offer the ephemeral entertainment”, we might be able to do that.

Tanya: If we ask an artist to draw one illustration of each character, we might be able to use them over and over again like I do in the Momo’s series.

Ryusui: Come to think of it, Mr. Hodaka, you once offered us a movie for an article of “Japanese 100 Great Mountains”, right? Although we cannot put a movie in an eBook, we posted it in an article for Facebook. Do you remember?

Hodaka: Of course. How can I forget it?

Ryusui: I would like you to offer movies for your articles in the future as well. Honestly, I am not worried about “Japanese 100 Great Mountains”, because it has already succeeded in gathering attention and the fan base. But mountain lovers and novel lovers are different kinds of people. As The BBB, we have yet to connect them well with each other.

Hodaka: Surely, not all the mountain lovers read novels. I also think what you are thinking.

Ryusui: By the way, what I want to ask you all is a question about this Cast Party event. Last year we held a meet-up event in Japan to commemorate our 5th anniversary. I think it was successful to a certain extent. Conducting an actual event to inject the enthusiasm into The BBB is not a bad thing. However, as of now, it works only for Japanese readers. The original purpose of The BBB is to deliver the cultural contents to readers in the English-speaking regions around the world. About this virtual event, there is no problem because we publish eBooks in both English and Japanese, and the recorded footage will also be released in English. I have been thinking about what we should do for quite a long time. I mean, should we first focus on entertaining Japanese readers and aim at spreading the domestic enthusiasm overseas? Or, should we give top priority to entertaining the English-speaking population around the world and aiming to gain support from people outside Japan? I would like to attach importance to foreign readers, of course. But it is true that Japanese readers are the majority, at least as of now. After all, almost all The BBB Casts are Japanese, and that should not surprise us.

Kunugi: I think holding a meet-up event is not a bad idea at all. However, it might be a problem, if it is limited to a certain locale and cannot entertain readers globally. On the other hand, if we publish this virtual event as a free eBook, it will be good because it can reach the readers throughout the world.

Ryusui: You’re right. About this Cast Party, the recorded footage can be listened to by anyone and the text will also be available for free.

Hodaka: Considering the Tokyo Olympic Games to be held in 2020, Japan will be paid attention to more than ever, right? If The BBB has contents or the system for the potential visitors, it will be able to put enthusiasm into them when they come to Japan for the Olympic Games.

Kunugi: Tokyo Olympic Games ... It is coming to Tokyo, sooner than I realize.

Tanya: Why don't we run a campaign like "The BBB 2020". For example, we might publish a short story that is related to the theme around the number of 2020.

Ryusui: "Towerld" will reach Level 0020 at the end of next year. Talk about the best possible timing, at the right time.

Tanya: For example, Mr. Hodaka might be able to climb a mountain whose altitude is 2,020 meters.

Hodaka: I wonder if there is any mountain with that particular altitude among Japanese 100 Great Mountains ... [laughter]

Ryusui: Mr. Hodaka will reach the 20th mountain at the beginning of next year.

Tanya: For example, Mr. Akizuki might be able to eat lunch whose price is 2,020 yen in his gourmet report "The Sifted" series.



Hodaka: Sticking to the theme involving a certain number might be fun, I think.

Ryusui: Actually, Mr. Hodaka chose Mount Kumotori as the first mountain of his challenge, because he started in 2017 and the altitude of the mountain is 2,017 meters as well.

Kunugi: We might be able to take some actions for the year of 2020, while making the number 2,020 as the key. It can be one of our strategies. By the way, about Dr. MORI's "The Sky Crawlers" series. I wonder if many of foreign readers have learned of the work from the animation movie of the same title.

Ryusui: I think many have gotten the chance to know of it, because of the animation movie.

Hodaka: Might I say that the influence of Japanese animation in general is so substantial?

Tanya: By the way, how has the development of the audio book of "Towerld" coming along?

Ryusui: Ah, yes. I want to ask about it today. Mr. Kunugi, it appears that you are taking quite a bit of time for editing the audio book of the Level 0002. Are you sticking to the hard work of removing the noise?

Kunugi: Yes. I cannot help but feel uneasy about the noise issue. If I didn't have to take care of the noise, it would not have taken this much time.

Ryusui: I do not mind the noise at all.

Hodaka: Me neither.

Tanya: But some readers might be disturbed by that. I understand Mr. Kunugi's obsession.

Ryusui: Since it is just a free track for entertaining our readers, no one really cares about the noise.

Tanya: If you give me the recorded data, I will upload it onto YouTube with pictures.

Ryusui: A female major character will appear in Level 0002. I am told that a female voice is used in the audio book. I'm sure it would be much more appealing than Level 0001 in many ways. If the audio books of Level 0002 and 0003 are released, we expect "Towerld" to be welcomed by more and more readers.

Kunugi: In that case, I agree that I should prioritize the editing of the audio book to the greater extent.

Ryusui: Alright, then, the ending of this year's "Cast Party 2018" is drawing near. At the final part of this session, we ask everyone here to talk about each one's plan or the resolution for the year 2019. First, let me speak. Since we at The BBB have not quite been able to do anything new in particular in 2018 except for "Japanese 100 Great Mountains", I want to try at least one new challenge or two in 2019. Above all, my biggest goal is to start publishing the English version of "SUMITADA" series. In addition, the complete guide of "Towerld", when we will publish it with Level 0020 of the series, will be one of our new challenges.

Tanya: Beside the existing Momo's series, I too want to try something new. It might be a horror story.

Ryusui: You mean, the "Kimodameshi" story you mentioned earlier?

Tanya: For example, the title would be "Tanya's scary stories that actually happened".

Kunugi: Or, "Kimodameshi within three lines"? It might be difficult to write, though.

Hodaka: I think many people would be interested in scary stories. I myself want to listen to them.

Tanya: If they are the stories that actually occurred, it might be much better.

Ryusui: Mr. Kunugi, what is your plan for the year 2019?

Kunugi: In addition to the editing work of the audio book, I will send e-mail to ask Doctor Deicide to submit new volumes of works periodically and consistently. Also, I hope I will be able to submit short music tunes more frequently than ever.

Ryusui: I would like you to proofread "SUMITADA" as well.

Kunugi: I myself think "SUMITADA" is extremely important. Our chief editor has translated Dr. MORI Hiroshi's "The Sky Crawlers" series and I have proofread them. On the other hand, Chief Editor Seiryoin, the author of "SUMITADA", translates it into English by himself. So, it would not be just another translation. Instead, it is an important step for becoming a bilingual novelist. Is it for the first time in years that you yourself write both English and Japanese texts since "King In the Mirror"? As for my feeling I got from proofreading the English texts of "SUMITADA", I feel that the quality and the clarity of the translated English texts are at higher levels than those in the documents written by other authors and translated by Chief Editor Seiryoin in the past. It might be the case because you wrote the original Japanese texts while imagining English expressions from the start.

Ryusui: I am so honored to hear that. I appreciate it.

Kunugi: Of course, the fact that Dr. MORI Hiroshi's "The Sky Crawlers" series is the most important contents will not change as for now. Still, as a significant progress of Chief Editor Seiryoin as a bilingual novelist, the importance of "SUMITADA" deserves special mention, I think.

Ryusui: Thank you, our dear chief proofreader. Then, finally, we would like to ask Mr. Hodaka, this year's special guest, about his plan for the year 2019.

Hodaka: At first, I will plan to climb mountains regularly and continue writing the articles, if possible, without a break. In addition, I have recently purchased a wearable camera and used it for the first time in the 19th mountain. I successfully took many impressive pictures and movies that I wouldn't have been able to do just with the camera I previously owned. I would be glad if you look forward to appreciating the pictures.

Ryusui: Oh, I want to look at them as soon as possible.

Tanya: I want to watch the movie footage that features you in the midst of your climbing process!

Hodaka: Beside that, when I stay at a mountain hut on the night or the night before, the starry sky above me is really overwhelming. But they cannot easily be captured clearly in photographs. So, I want to attach greater importance to taking photographs of stars from now on.

Ryusui: Although I guess there usually are other climbers, I want to watch a 360-degree movie of the panoramic view from a summit.

Hodaka: In fact, I have just taken it the other day. I hope I will be able to put a strong emphasis on such a point.

Ryusui: Alright. I think it is time to wrap it up. Dear our readers, please keep your eye on our activities in 2019. And I would like to thank everyone here. Thank you all for attending the session today!

Hodaka, Kunugi, and Tanya: Thank you so much!!

This Cast Party 2018 was exclusively held at the end of 2018 as one of the made-in-Japan contents belonging to The BBB: Breakthrough Bandwagon Books.

“Cast Party” series at The BBB



Cast Party 2015

<https://thebbb.net/ebooks/cast-party-2015.html>



Cast Party 2016

<https://thebbb.net/ebooks/cast-party-2016.html>
