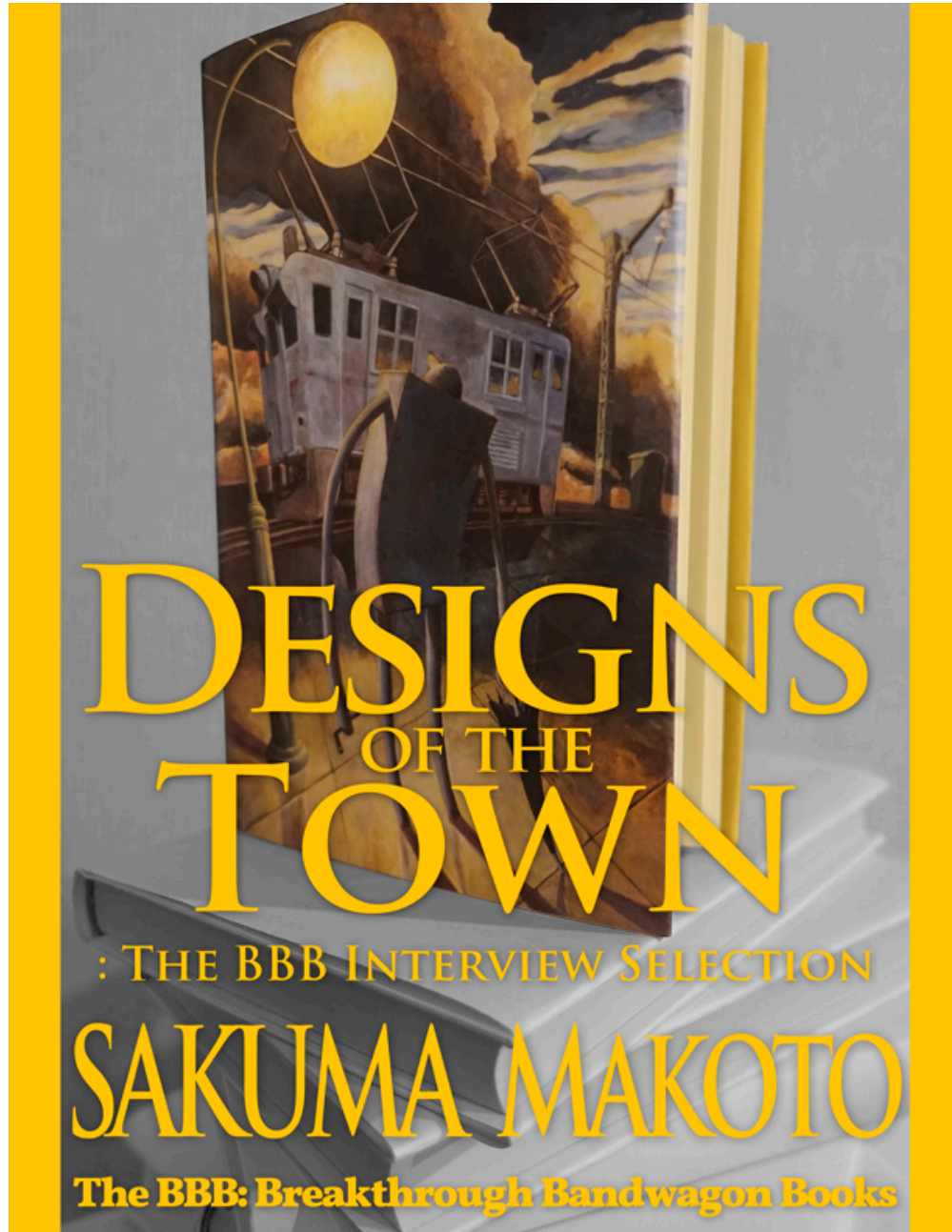


Designs of the Town



Originally told in Japanese by SAKUMA, Makoto

Interviewed by Ryosuke Akizuki and Ryusui Seiryoin

Cover Design by SAKUMA, Makoto

All the Illustrations by SAKUMA, Makoto

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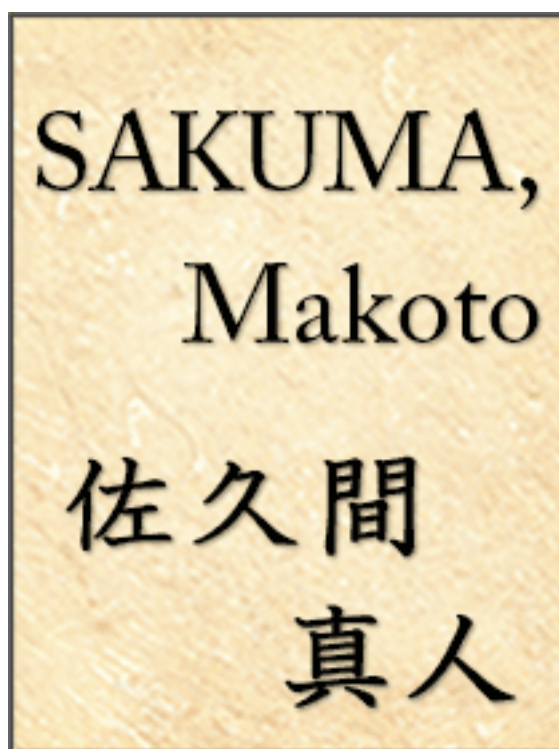
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The BBB website

<http://thebbb.net/>



SAKUMA, Makoto Author Page

<http://thebbb.net/cast/makoto-sakuma.html>

1. Painter SAKUMA, Makoto Meets The BBB

B (The chief editor of The BBB): Today, for the latest installment of “The BBB Interview Selection” series, we are inviting Mr. SAKUMA, Makoto, who draws the cover arts for “The Gifted” series. We’d like to discover the secret of his creation.

SAKUMA, Makoto: Thank you for the invitation.

B: Also, I asked Mr. Ryosuke Akizuki, the author of “The Gifted” series, to be the guest interviewer because Mr. Akizuki has known Mr. SAKUMA for years. So, it is not too much of a stretch to say that whether this interview goes well or not depends on Mr. Akizuki. (Laughter)

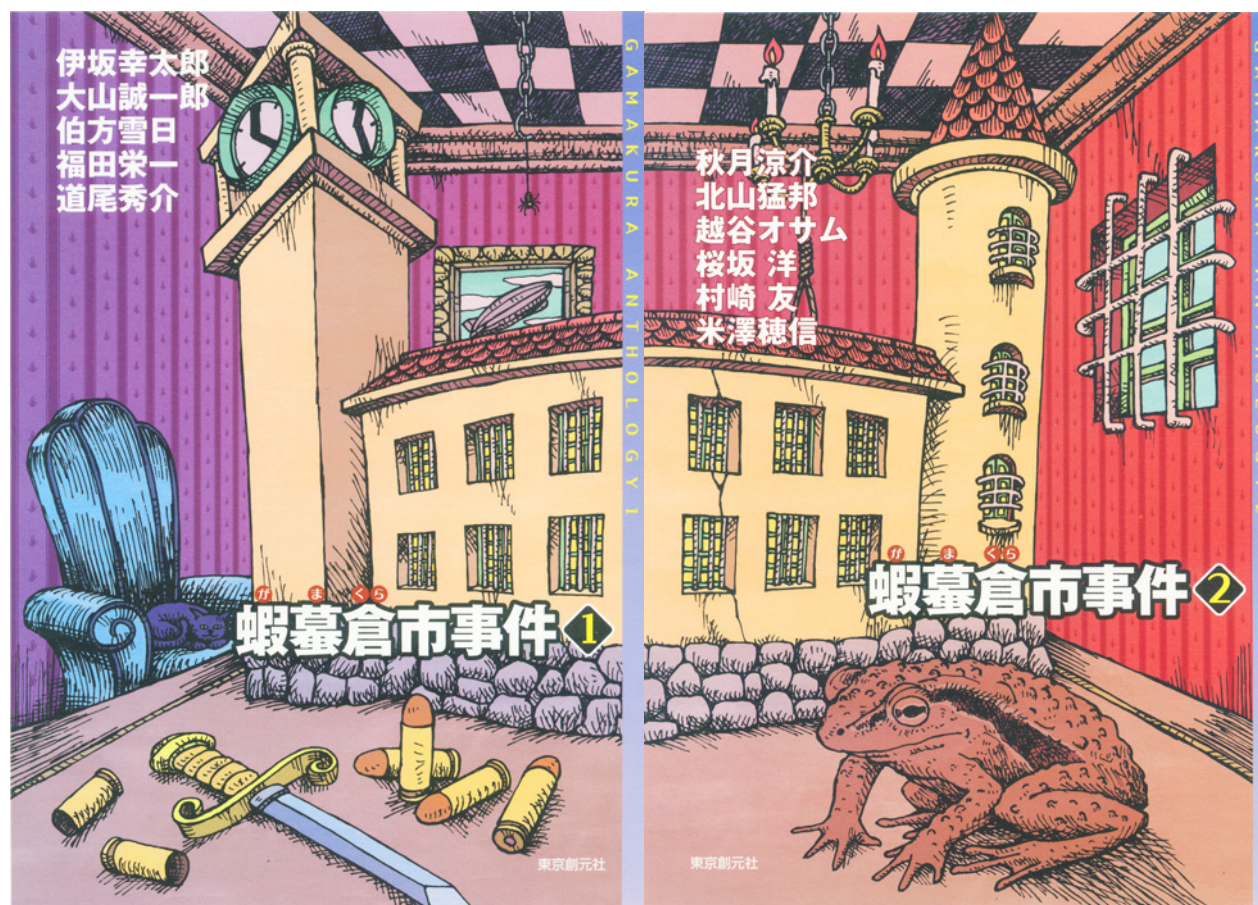
Ryosuke Akizuki: I feel the strong pressure. (Laughter) Please go easy on me.

B: If I remember correctly, the very beginning of the ongoing relationship between you two was another project in which Mr. SAKUMA and Mr. Akizuki worked together. Correct?

SAKUMA: Yes. Thanks to that, Mr. Akizuki later introduced The BBB to me.

B: How many years have passed since you two first met each other?

SAKUMA: It was when we were involved in an anthology titled “The Case Book In Gamakura City” (published from Tokyo Sogensha) (<http://www.tsogen.co.jp/gamakura/>).



Akizuki: Back then, I was living in Germany, and proofread my manuscripts there. I remember well that I brought the manuscript to a post office in Munich and let it send it to the publishing company in Japan. I was impressed by the fact that the manuscript was actually delivered properly, even to a foreign country.

B: Did you proofread it in Germany? That makes you sound like a world-class author who goes global by jet-setting across the nations and around the world. I now know that it was the beginning of the relationship. And then, Mr. Akizuki visited Mr. SAKUMA's solo exhibition which is annually held in Ginza, Tokyo, didn't he?

SAKUMA: Yes. He has kindly visited my exhibition every year since then.

B: When I visited it for the first time, it was Mr. Akizuki's third visit. Correct?

Akizuki: When we were working on "The Case Book In Gamakura City", Mr. SAKUMA sent me pictures to be used as the map in the book. They looked interesting to me.

SAKUMA: I remember I sent the pictures piece by piece for you to check.

B: "The Case Book In Gamakura City" was an anthology, in which multiple novelists created the single world together. The settings of the stories could not possibly be realized as one, synchronized world, but Mr. SAKUMA skillfully unified it into the single picture. I myself had known of Mr. SAKUMA as an artist for years, of course. Still, I began to notice the unique characteristics of Mr. SAKUMA as a drawer, to be called the "trick artist", after I started visiting his annual exhibitions with Mr. Akizuki. I have appreciated many of Mr. SAKUMA's works, which have enhanced my impression that he is a painter who draws pictures embedded with many visual tricks. Mr. Akizuki, in your case, were you moved by Mr. SAKUMA's works for the first time when you were involved in "Gamakura"?

Akizuki: Yes. After the party for Ayukawa Tetsuya Award (very famous literary prize for newcomer mystery writers in Japan), I was invited to a drinking party that was held by the authors of "Gamakura". At the gathering, I met Mr. SAKUMA for the first time.

SAKUMA: That reminds me. That gathering was held in October, 2010, when I handed the invitation of my exhibition to Mr. Akizuki. Since February 2011, he has continuously visited the annual exhibition, which is held in February every year.

B: Mr. SAKUMA, when you first met Mr. Akizuki, what impression did you have on him?

SAKUMA: I felt that he was a quiet person, unlike other literary authors ... (Laughter)

Akizuki: When I first met Mr. SAKUMA, I had the impression like, "Oh, he is a really good person."

B: When I first met Mr. SAKUMA, I was naturally influenced by the strong impression of the Ginza brand. He was looking like a celebrity, just because he was holding the personal exhibition in such a posh place like Ginza. (Laughter)

SAKUMA: At first, I happened to know a gallery in Ginza. Consequently, I have been getting the opportunity to hold my private exhibition.

B: Then, Mr. Akizuki introduced Mr. SAKUMA to me. Right after The BBB was launched, Mr. SAKUMA started participating in this project for The BBB as a cover artist for "The Gifted" series. As for the cover of "The Gifted Vol.1 - The Haunting Woman", it was a picture that was laden with visual tricks.

Akizuki: In the beginning, I heard from the chief editor that Mr. Kai Chamberlain, a Canadian cartoonist, was scheduled to draw the cover arts for "The Gifted" series. But Mr. Kai became busy and could no longer draw it. Then, the chief editor suddenly asked me, "Do you know a good artist?" (Laughter)

B: Ah, I remember that. In the first phase of The BBB, I thought I had to ask Kai to draw all the covers of The BBB works. Like Mr. SAKUMA draws all the cover arts for the mystery series from Ronsosha (a publication company) (http://ronso.co.jp/cate/overseas_mystery/), I thought I should have entrusted him with the task to draw everything for the series. But Kai became very busy with other works, and could not

draw the pictures for us anymore. Then, when I asked Mr. Akizuki about the issue, he recommended Mr. SAKUMA.

Akizuki: I thought, “The only painter I should recommend has got to be, none other than Mr. SAKUMA!” But, I had not received any response from him for a long time. (Laughter)

B: Between Mr. Akizuki and me, we were worried about the possibility that Mr. SAKUMA was getting mad as heck at something. (Laughter) I mean, after all, the e-mail that Mr. Akizuki sent him was too much of a bolt out of the blue.

SAKUMA: Oh, did you really think so? (Laughter)

Akizuki: I later learned that there was a confusion. He seemed to have thought that he had received the e-mail from an imposter of Ryosuke Akizuki. Then, Mr. SAKUMA confirmed the validity of my e-mail address by contacting the publisher named Tokyo Sogensha. In the end, I talked to him via telephone directly.

B: Mr. Akizuki, didn’t you toss a coin then, between making a call or not? If the coin showed the head, then you would call him.

Akizuki: I actually did so.

SAKUMA: It sounds like a junior high school boy student asking a girl out on a date. (Laughter)

Akizuki: I was thrilled a little. Since I saw the head facing up, I thought it was the destiny.

SAKUMA: In fact, I receive questionable e-mails from unknown sources occasionally, so I thought I should always confirm the source before making replies. The actual text in the e-mail went something like, “I’m Akizuki. Long time no see. Is this Mr. SAKUMA, Makoto’s e-mail address?” That’s all. It was fairly looking suspicious. Don’t you think so? (Laughter)

B: I see. If that was it, then it was definitely looking suspicious. (Laughter) Let’s get back to where we were. Mr. SAKUMA, do you remember when Mr. Akizuki requested you to draw the cover art for “The Gifted”?

SAKUMA: Yes, of course, I do remember. Since I had never experienced works for eBooks before, I was interested in how it would actually be like.

B: Ah, in fact, I had an impression that Mr. SAKUMA was quite interested in how the pictures would look on a screen from the start.

SAKUMA: That is correct. I have to provide readers strong impacts even when my pictures are viewed as pictures of really small sizes, such as thumbnails.

B: For digital contents, the ways the pictures are perceived differ, depending on the specifications of the displays, don’t they?

SAKUMA: The displayed colors look different, depending on the hardware. I think it can’t be helped, to a certain extent.

Akizuki: The colors are changed, when they are printed on paper. When displayed on screen, the ways in which colors appear depend on the specifications involving the colorations of the hardware.

2. Paperback Tastes for Readers Outside Japan

B: After that, Mr. SAKUMA actually started drawing the cover art for Vol.1. Mr. SAKUMA, what intention did you have for this cover art? I believe that this is embedded with an ambiguous optical illusion.



SAKUMA: It's like a spirit photograph or something of the sort. (Laughter)

B: That piece is, after all, the most impressive one so far.

SAKUMA: In addition, I was informed that the project involving The BBB was about having the customers outside Japan. So, I decided to add somewhat of Japanesque this and that. I had the intention of giving people outside Japan the opportunity to feel and taste the style, which is represented by ukiyo-e and such, in my artworks. Also, I wanted to draw the pictures that are reminiscent to the nostalgic movie posters.

Akizuki: I did feel such a taste. It looked completely different from the style of Mr. SAKUMA's works before that. It was very tasteful and I liked it.

B: In this cover, the kanji characters of Mr. Akizuki's name are arranged as if birds are flying.

SAKUMA: That's right. I drew them around the moon.

B: They are skillfully concealed to the level that some readers outside Japan might not have noticed they are letters. I was impressed. Since then, the kanji characters of Mr. Akizuki's name have been treated like a part of the picture for the covers of the English versions. We can regard it as an unofficial, unwritten, and hidden rule to function as a constraint to bolster the creativity, in a way.

SAKUMA: Yes. Mr. Akizuki's name consists of beautiful kanji characters. So, by drawing the kanji characters in the pictures, I am intending to convey the ambience to the readers.

B: As for the titles in English and Japanese versions, the font types differ from each other. Do you have any point that you are particular about?

SAKUMA: In the English versions, I intend to make them look relatively natural.

B: Like paperback novels in English?

SAKUMA: Yes. In the Japanese versions, I make them look like Japanese horror novels or comics in the old days, with English titles being added to them. I dare to make the letters appear to float above the surface a bit.

Akizuki: I felt that the texture of the lunar surface, including features such as the craters, was very realistically rendered. I asked Mr. SAKUMA about it, and he told me that he had photographed the real moon.

SAKUMA: I actually did. I superimposed the photograph of the moon on the painting.

Akizuki: I remember I was impressed with the efforts he had made.

B: We have heard such anecdotes of Mr. SAKUMA's creation at his annual solo exhibition every year. The episodes really interest us. So, today, I would like to share with the readers of this article as many such episodes as possible.

SAKUMA: About the cover for Vol.1, the time in the clock is related to the content of the storyline.

B: Oh, is it? I didn't notice it. Mr. SAKUMA's pictures are always exquisitely elaborated.

Akizuki: The person in the picture is holding a smartphone because this work is an eBook content.

B: Oh? Did you intend it?

SAKUMA: I did. Since it was my first work for an eBook, I had the character hold a stuff like a smartphone or a tablet.

B: I have just heard it for the first time. I didn't think it was a smartphone.

SAKUMA: The story takes place in a city, which is modeled after ... Germany?

Akizuki: This fictional place named City is based on Munich in our real world.

SAKUMA: So, I drew the payphone booth like those in Munich.

Akizuki: You just delve very deeply into the details for your artworks, don't you?

SAKUMA: I used this same clock tower for the cover of "The Gifted Vol.1-5 (Bind Up)" as well.

Akizuki: By the way, I described in the story that particular clock tower in Vol.4.

SAKUMA: Ah, yes, you did.

Akizuki: Before that, there hadn't been a part that properly described a historic district, which includes the clock tower.

B: Mr. SAKUMA, at which phase of your drawing process did you come up with the idea to embed a woman's face as a picture with an ambiguous optical illusion, in the cover of Vol.1?

SAKUMA: In the early phase, I was given Mr. Akizuki's request that I draw a classical cityscape. While thinking about how I could draw such a picture, I started reading the manuscript and found in the storyline a woman, who could be seen only through the video footage. You might be able to see her but actually cannot. I liked the feeling of the blurry borderline between the visibility and invisibility. The hidden woman is relatively recognizable in a small picture as a thumbnail. It is not easy to recognize her presence when you see it as an enlarged picture.

B: Have you ever drawn this type of picture with an ambiguous optical illusion for other works?

SAKUMA: I think I haven't.

B: I thought so, too. We have seen lots of Mr. SAKUMA's works before. But I don't remember seeing such hidden pictures.

SAKUMA: I'm sure I haven't drawn such things.

B: Mr. Akizuki was requesting Mr. SAKUMA for something about Vol.1. Specifically, what was that about?

Akizuki: I don't remember, really. (Laughter)

SAKUMA: Mr. Akizuki explained to me that it was about the setting that included a clock tower, an old city, and a new city.

Akizuki: I think I might have talked about what type of area it was. But if my memory is correct, I might have said I would leave everything to Mr. SAKUMA. I couldn't expect at all what type of picture would come out from him. When I first saw the cover art of Vol.1, I was pleasantly surprised. I felt it was quite tasteful. Rather, it was an unfamiliar taste to me.

B: Mr. SAKUMA, you dare not to draw the story characters for the cover arts of "The Gifted" series, do you? I mean, the main characters of the story.

SAKUMA: Well, you're right. I don't dare.

B: What intention do you have about that? Do you intend to leave it to the readers' imagination?

SAKUMA: That is exactly what I do. The characters who have beautiful appearances are described in the series. But I guess each reader imagines a different figure, respectively. When I sometimes draw such characters without enough consideration, some readers may end up making comments such as, "These characters do not look right." (Laughter) When I draw a picture that is based on the description of "beauty", some readers might think, "Oh, this character represents the beauty that the artist defines." That makes me feel awkward.

B: Surely, the standard of beauty differs from person to person.

SAKUMA: That is the main reason for my not drawing the characters on the cover. Probably, I think that each of the readers has the most ideal image of his or her own.

B: You mean each reader would have each version of Milo and Saya's faces.

SAKUMA: Since the people outside Japan read the series, I think even the races of the characters are imagined in different ways.

Akizuki: Actually, I don't describe their faces in detail too much.

B: We offer "The Gifted Vol.1" for free. Compared to other free works from The BBB, the work has been downloaded at a very good pace. That is especially the case for the English version. It is probably because Mr. SAKUMA drew the picture based on the style of paperback books. The work has been downloaded abroad much more than in Japan. It is a very rare case among The BBB works. Mr. Akizuki works as a mystery writer in Japan, and to be downloaded overseas even more often becomes such an astounding feat. The paperback-like cover design definitely has a lot to do with the frequency of the downloading. After all, it might be difficult to find paperback-like covers among other The BBB works. I mean, many other works have the tastes that are geared toward Japanese in general.

SAKUMA: Ah, yes, I have been having the same impression for a long time.

B: My understanding is that Mr. SAKUMA's strategy to promote the paperback style for the audiences outside Japan has worked well.

SAKUMA: When I was offered this work, I was told then that the project was mainly for the readers outside Japan. I have to say that the pressure was immense. (Laughter) I started worrying about how I could get the customers' attention in natural ways.

B: Was it for the first time for you to draw a picture for readers living outside Japan?

SAKUMA: That was absolutely my first-time experience.

B: I always feel that the power of drawings is really amazing. Every time I visit Mr. SAKUMA's annually held solo exhibition, I am firmly convinced, "These pictures will definitely move the people around the world!"

SAKUMA: Oh, umm, I'm grateful to hear that.

B: Still, no matter how great the artworks may be, they won't be easily known to the world outside Japan unless there is a good opportunity for introduction. If we do nothing, the people living outside Japan don't have a chance to know Mr. SAKUMA's diverse works. For that reason, I have been hoping that Mr. SAKUMA somehow makes use of The BBB. Then, this interview can be the best opportunity.

SAKUMA: I agree. That is what I am hoping for as well.

B: But, Mr. SAKUMA, you cannot go abroad because you're afraid of getting on an airplane, correct?

SAKUMA: I'm scared of it ... I can do anything but get on an airplane.

Akizuki: We might have to bind him to bring him overseas forcefully. (Laughter)

SAKUMA: You mean, will I be knocked unconscious, or something? (Laughter) I would like you to bring me there as one piece of luggage.

B: Mr. Akizuki, come to think of it, your next work "The Gifted Vol.7" is a story about an airplane, isn't it?

SAKUMA: What a terrifying story it is ... (Laughter)

B: Mr. SAKUMA might not be able to demonstrate the best ability in the next occasion. Due to the fear for airplanes, the quality of the cover for Vol.7 might suddenly dip mysteriously ...

SAKUMA: I like airplanes themselves, when I am watching and drawing them. But I'm afraid of getting on them. Probably, they are flying by coincidence, I guess ...

3. Things Concealed Behind the Colorful Picture

B: We have talked a lot about Vol. 1, so let's move on to "Vol.2 - The Return of the Dead Kitten". As for the cover art of Vol.2, I can say it is filled with many gimmicks. The gadgets described in the story are drawn in it ...

SAKUMA: I drew almost all of them.



B: I remember one thing very well. When I visited Mr. SAKUMA's solo exhibition with Mr. Akizuki, we were appreciating that very artwork, and noticed something. In the shelf, we saw a human-like object ...

SAKUMA: You got it right. The thing on the uppermost shelf is a chunk of meat ...

B: In the story, the meat and the human body switch places.

Akizuki: Sure.

SAKUMA: The meat is above, and the human body is below the cake, placed in the middle.

B: Mr. SAKUMA has been drawing cat pictures for years. You annually hold a solo exhibition featuring cats. Mr. Akizuki, did you decide to dare to deal with cats in Vol.2 because of Mr. SAKUMA's cat works.

Akizuki: In fact, there is a similar urban legend. But I thought I tried to describe the reverse case of that.
(Akizuki's Note: "This is a real and a practical problem, and folklore has come to the rescue with the amazingly long-lived and fluid legend of the late feline companion neatly wrapped for delivery elsewhere. Along the way it is lost or stolen." This is an excerpt from "The Dead Cat in the Package", included in "The Vanishing Hitchhiker", written by Jan Harold Brunvand.)

SAKUMA: Is it like "Pet Sematary" by Stephen King? Once it is buried, it will come back to life, or something like that ...

Akizuki: No, the kitten's body, which has been already dealt with, returns to the owner. Since Vol.1 was a story of a completely original urban legend, I based Vol.2 on an already-existing urban legend.

B: Did you think about Mr. SAKUMA with regard to the keyword "cat"?

Akizuki: I did. But more than that, I had an image in which someone opened a box and found a cat's corpse. I didn't expect this picture to be completed in this way. It was taking an unexpected direction. But, I had my faith in Mr. SAKUMA, who managed to incorporate all the gadgets into the artwork.

B: Surely, the gadgets found in Vol.2 are incorporated amazingly skillfully. Mr. SAKUMA, what inspired you the idea to draw the picture in this taste?

SAKUMA: As for the first idea, I thought of drawing something with many closed spaces because it was the story in which the objects in the closed space were switched. I had decided to choose a shelf and drew many drawers in its setting. I imagined that matters in the closed spaces were switched with each other, and linked to various different spaces.

B: Mr. Akizuki and I have talked about "The Gifted" series with Mr. SAKUMA after his solo exhibition every year. Around the time at which we released Vol.2, Mr. SAKUMA said, "In terms of the perspective of the design, we may have to make the title simpler." Mr. SAKUMA also mentioned it was difficult for him to put the long title on it, while conforming to the paperback style.

SAKUMA: That's right. When I made careful observations on the design of the books that are published outside Japan, I noticed that many of the titles were as simple as just one word.

Akizuki: The main title "The Gifted" is simple, though. However, there are also subtitles.

B: As for the works found outside Japan, the subtitle might not be seen frequently.

SAKUMA: I have the same impression on them.

Akizuki: I think the subtitles give the cover arts the style that are reminiscent to movie posters.

SAKUMA: Oh, I get it.

B: Mr. Akizuki, in terms of the comparison with Vol.1, what impression did you have as a whole, when you first saw the cover of Vol.2?

Akizuki: At first, I felt it was becoming more colorful. I mean, the coloring is beautiful. The tints and the shading are so splendid.

SAKUMA: Since I drew for Vol.1 a picture that was fairly darker than I had intended to, I thought of making the cover for Vol.2 more vividly expressive. Every time I draw pictures, I want to make a different approach on every single piece.

B: For Vol.2, the color of the shelves in the setting differ between the English version and the Japanese version. So, the first impressions that you get by taking a glance at each of them end up being different from each other by quite a bit.

SAKUMA: For Vol.1, in fact, the colors of the skies are different. The English version is a little bit leaning toward the ukiyo-e taste for the readers outside Japan. It comes with the chromatic gradation.

B: Oh, I see. You have put that much of intentions and considerations into your artworks. I wouldn't have been able to notice that, if you had not mentioned it to me. That information is really valuable.

Akizuki: I always look forward to hearing his accounts about how he draws the picture, every time he finishes one. I secretly inquire him about the issue via e-mails. (Laughter)

B: Why don't you share that with all of us, without making it end up just another private conversation via e-mails? (Laughter) So, what else did you hear about Vol.1 and Vol.2?

Akizuki: I heard that someone actually bought the picture because of what was drawn in it.

SAKUMA: Ah, yes. That's right. There is a shop named "Neko No Hikidashi", which literally means "Cat's Drawers" in English. It sells cat-related goods. Its owner once said to me, "This picture is so representative of 'Neko No Hikidashi'. So, I definitely would like to own it," at my solo exhibition. I made the explanation of the picture, he heard it, and he gasped, "What? Is it a corpse?" (Laughter)

B: Usually, a dead body is not welcomed. (Laughter)

SAKUMA: He was at a loss for a while, but he had finally decided to purchase it because there hardly were pictures that feature both cats and drawers available elsewhere.

B: About this picture, I didn't notice the human body drawn in it before Mr. Akizuki noticed it at the solo exhibition. For a long time, I had perceived it as a background. I thought it was a stuffing, or something like that.

Akizuki: But, when I observed it carefully, I noticed that it had arms and legs. (Laughter)

SAKUMA: I thought it should not stand out too much, so I drew it by using dark colors.

B: In the way, it was a hidden picture. It startled us.

Akizuki: Once I realized it, it surely made me shudder.

SAKUMA: Some readers might find it to be quite shocking, if they look at the picture after reading the story. In addition, in the cover of Vol.2, the Japanese letters are rendered bigger.

B: Speaking of which, the Japanese letters of Vol.1 are fairly small.

SAKUMA: In the early phase of the project, I heard that the premise was based on the English version being placed higher on the priority list. So, I thought the Japanese title might have to be prevented from standing out. However, I later thought that the Japanese titles might have to be rendered a bit larger for the readers who would read the novel in Japanese. In fact, the Japanese titles have been getting larger and larger since then ...

B: I see. By the way, the kanji characters of Ryosuke Akizuki, the author's name, have been getting bigger and bigger in the Japanese versions progressively, as the later volumes have come out.

Akizuki: How do you design and render the Japanese fonts?

SAKUMA: These are free fonts that are designed and made by Ankoku Kobo, a company which makes Web-design-related materials and games.

Akizuki: Are all sorts of font styles available?

SAKUMA: I think almost all the types of fonts we need in our daily lives are available. The same font style is used for another series in The BBB, isn't it?

B: It is the "Towerld" series, written by Doctor Deicide. I have been suspecting that they are the same font styles. Now I know that my guess is correct.

Akizuki: I haven't noticed that ...

SAKUMA: The "Towerld" series is quite inspiring. The covers of the series are really tasteful in the unique way, and I love them.

B: I'm glad Mr. SAKUMA always praises the covers for the "Towerld" series.

SAKUMA: The covers are truly excellent. They have the taste beyond description.

Akizuki: I agree that the covers have the unique style that conjures up the distinctive atmosphere.

4. The Pressure from the Mona Lisa

B: By the way, the translator of Vol.1 and Vol.2 was Mr. Eiji Mihagino. But for various reasons, I have taken over his role since “Vol.3 - The Skydiving Club”.

SAKUMA: The translator was changed when Vol.3 was released.

B: That’s right. I have translated the novels in the series since then, and I feel the stronger attachment to Vol.3 and the following volumes than to Vol.1 and Vol.2, which I was the editor of. I remember one thing very well. At the time, I daringly requested Mr. SAKUMA that he draw his own version of Mona Lisa for the cover of Vol.3. I persuaded him to accept the offer, by saying to him, “I know you have the gift to draw your Mona Lisa.”

SAKUMA: I was considering whether I should draw a really Mona-Lisa-like picture. (Laughter)

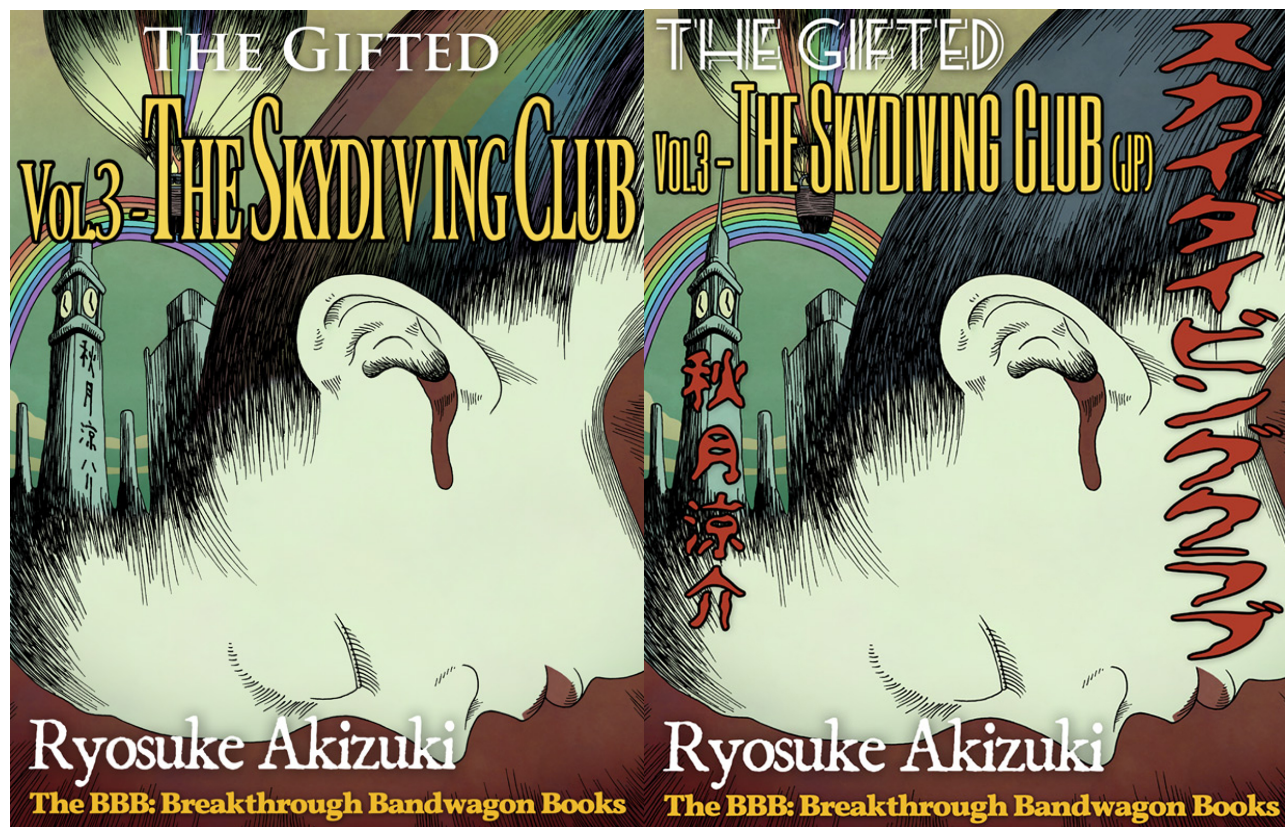
Akizuki: I remember Mr. SAKUMA often wrote in his e-mail to me, “I cannot stop going puru-puru.” (“Puru-puru” is an onomatopoeia that expresses “the trembling or shuddering”, usually out of fear, anger, or nervousness. In this case, Mr. SAKUMA was too nervous to stop shivering. It can be loosely translated as “t-t-t-tremble”).

B: Back then, “puru-puru” became a buzzword among the three of us. For example, when I pressed Mr. Akizuki for his manuscript, his reply would go like, “I’m going puru-puru.”

Akizuki: I even sent the chief editor an emoticon of puru-puru like the one shown below.

—φ((° Δ° ;))))

SAKUMA: Back then, I couldn’t decide what to draw.



B: One anecdote. In the first cover of the English version of Vol.3, the letters “TVI” in the title “THE SKYDIVING CLUB” (all capital letters) was completely fused, and looked like “M”. In short, the title

looked “SKYDMNG” and I asked him to redesign it. I always receive perfect artworks from Mr. SAKUMA, but that was the only case in which I asked him to modify it.

SAKUMA: I thought it would be wasteful if the title looked in a wrong, unintended way.

B: Mr. SAKUMA, what intention did you have about drawing that cover of Vol.3?

SAKUMA: In Vol.3, people’s dreams have great significance. I wanted to express the message with my picture. I wanted it to show that something terrible might happen even when someone was having a joyful dream. That was what I was imagining when I was drawing the piece. What I was especially conscious of was that eBooks didn’t come with obi, or wraparound (belly) bands. (Japanese publications usually come with obi.) So, I thought I could place an important factor at the bottom of the cover without worrying about the obi hiding the essential part of the picture, and I actually attempted to draw the picture.

B: If it comes with obi, the face of this woman is ...

SAKUMA: Bound to be “covered”, literally. Even so, only the ear shedding blood can still be seen. So, readers might take off the obi in that case.

B: Mr. Akizuki, what impression do you have on the cover of Vol.3?

Akizuki: When I first saw it, I felt, “Oh? What does this picture indicate?” Then, I realized, “Since the picture is drawn in her brain, it is a dream!” I was a bit startled. I didn’t know there was such a drawing technique. The area of the picture beyond the certain part is expressing a dream, and that really moved me.

SAKUMA: It was the description in her mind.

B: Mr. SAKUMA, you told us earlier that you dared not to draw the main characters. This woman is not Saya, is she?

Akizuki: I had a feeling that this woman might be Saya.

SAKUMA: I drew it vaguely on purpose. But ... let me say. In the story, many people were victimized in the past. So, the woman in the cover might be someone else among them.

B: Is the clock tower in the picture the same as that in the cover of Vol.1?

SAKUMA: Almost the same.

B: In the first place, is there only one clock tower in City?

Akizuki: I’m not sure ... Probably, there is only one.

B: You are not sure? Is that what you say? How vague can it be? (Laughter) Even the author doesn’t know it.

SAKUMA: I’m afraid of the vagueness of information leading to making wrong description, when drawing pictures. Sometimes the setting might be changed in the middle of the process.

Akizuki: The rainbow balloon and the rainbow in her hair are really beautiful. Don’t you think?

B: Oh, are you trying to divert the topic? (Laughter)

SAKUMA: In the Japanese version, her hair is painted in black, in fact.

Akizuki: Is it for Japanese readers?

SAKUMA: Yes. Additionally, in the Japanese version, red letters are placed on the hair.

B: Her hair is in black only in the Japanese version and it is rainbow-colored in the English version.

SAKUMA: I always try to make the English version flashier and more conspicuous. Also, I thought people would be interested in the story if blood was dripping from the ear of this woman.

B: In the storyline, there is no bloody ear, I suppose.

SAKUMA: But I thought things would be bloody for various reasons, after falling from high places.

B: I find the method to be very interesting. By the way, what are the obelisk-like objects on the right and left sides of the clock tower?

SAKUMA: They are something like chimneys. In fact, I drew them in the background of the cover for Vol.1.

B: From your point of view, Mr. SAKUMA, is it all right for you that they are chimneys?

SAKUMA: Chimney-like stuffs, to put it more correctly.

B: I thought there were quite a lot of them, for chimneys. In the cover of Vol.1, there are three chimneys. In Mr. SAKUMA's view of the world, the chimneys are important, I suppose. I wonder if the chimneys would convey the essential meaning in the story as well from now on ...

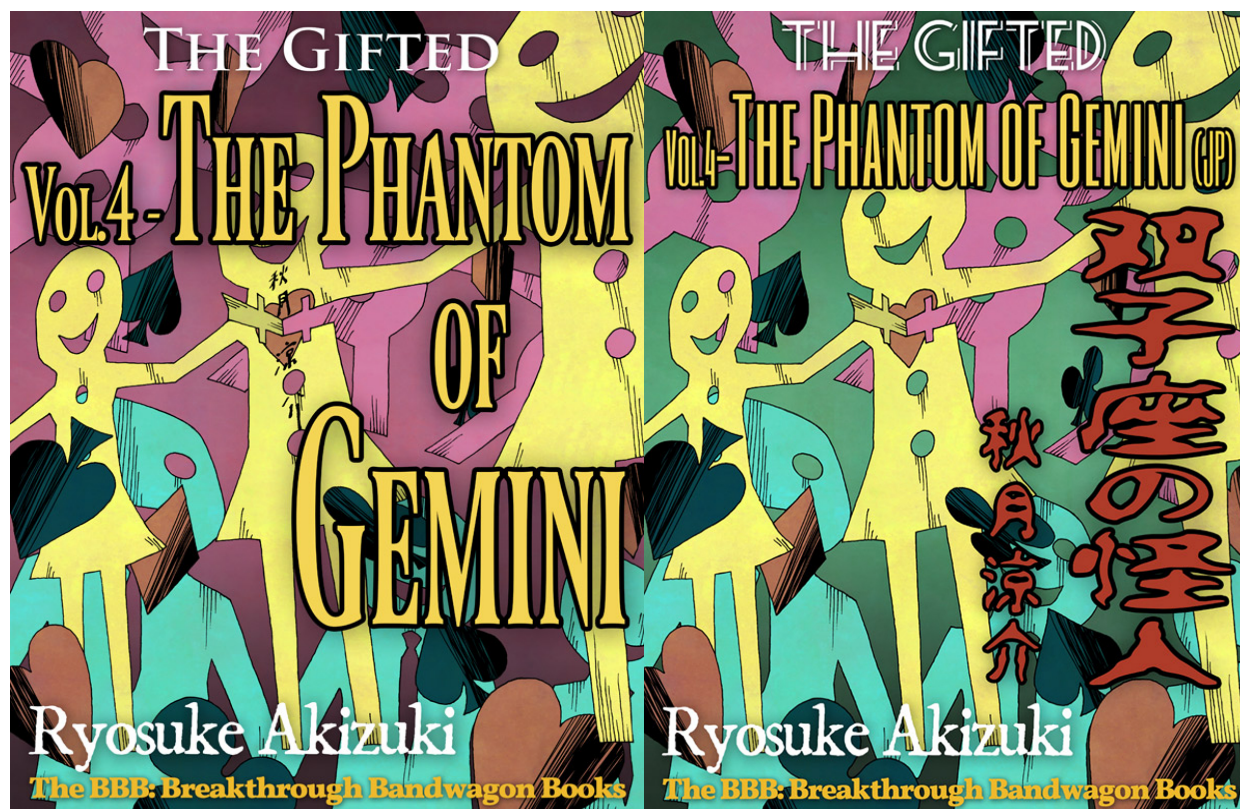
SAKUMA: In the cover of Vol.1, the woman was drawn with vertical lines, wasn't she? I connected them with the sky, without distinctively separating them from each other. As the connections between the different touches of the graphics, I drew the shadows with the vertical lines. I chose a chimney as a natural object representing the vertical line. They were created out of the design for the woman.

B: Anyway, we have always experienced pleasant surprises. Then, let's move on to Vol.4.

5. What Can Be Done As eBook Covers

Akizuki: The cover of “Vol.4 - The Phantom of Gemini” was really beyond my expectations. (Laughter)

B: I agree that the cover of Vol.4 is so out of this world. In another eBook from The BBB, titled “Cast Party 2015”, which records the discussion held by The BBB staffs, the chief proofreader Agent Kunugi said he was really astonished by this cover of Vol.4. It is the aesthetical direction of the artistic style that no one can possibly foresee in advance. Moreover, something is piercing Mr. Akizuki’s name. (Laughter)



Akizuki: At first, I wondered how that part could possibly be plausible. Since it is made of paper, it is folded into two pieces to assume a shape of a knife, correct?

SAKUMA: It is cut out into the shape of a knife, and is folded perpendicularly to keep it erect.

Akizuki: I gasped to myself, “Wow! Amazing!” I didn’t understand what it was until Mr. SAKUMA has just explained it to me.

SAKUMA: I received an e-mail from Mr. Akizuki about it, and he mentioned that he wanted to know the trick of that part.

B: So, Mr. Akizuki, don’t you think that it would be a good idea to share such information with me, instead of just making inquiries to Mr. SAKUMA privately?

Akizuki: Well, you are right ... I will do so next time ...

B: I think the idea cannot be easily come up with. Agent Kunugi was wondering, while saying, “Exactly, what is inside Mr. SAKUMA’s head?” According to Mr. SAKUMA’s explanation, you drew it with the imagination involving twins in your mind because the story features twins ...

SAKUMA: I was imagining a bunch of carbon-copied humans being lined up.

B: Usually, no one comes up with such a picture just from the theme involving twins.

Akizuki: Then, if it was based on the story, one of them would have to be fake, correct?

SAKUMA: So, I tried to make it express the atmosphere like failed photocopies. I hope readers living outside Japan would associate it with Japanese traditional origami (art of paper folding) and kirigami (art of paper cutting). I actually cut out the pattern from a sheet of paper, and tentatively made a sample for the cutout to confirm how it would look.

Akizuki: I am always impressed with the professionalism like this.

B: Is there any intention behind the striking difference in colors between the English and Japanese versions?

SAKUMA: In the English version, I colored the background in the reddish tone to make the yellow letters and the three yellow humanoid-shaped cutouts at the center conspicuous. In the Japanese version, conversely, I made the three pink ones conspicuous because they were getting inconspicuous in the setting of the English version. Then, I put the red letters on the yellow background. Since the first picture drawn for the series until this piece, the letters in the pictures has been drawn to show the gradual trend, you know ...

Akizuki: The letters have been getting even larger sequentially, as the cover of the series moves to the more recent volumes.

B: Clearly, the letters have become larger. Looking back, the letters of “Vol.1 - The Haunting Woman” were very small.

SAKUMA: Honestly, I had trouble when drawing the cover of Vol.2. The title was so long that it could not be put into the picture with larger font sizes.

B: Let me veer off the track a little. Since “The Gifted Vol.1” is a free downloadable work, both the English and Japanese versions have been downloaded quite often and positively received. Still, paid work Vol.2 is not downloaded so frequently. The similar trend is apparent in other author’s series as well. From the point of view of Mr. SAKUMA, what do you think is the reason that many of the readers have not advanced to Vol.2?

SAKUMA: Reasons, you ask ...?

B: Mr. Akizuki once told me. He thought that the ending of Vol.1 might have been too dark and depressing. Of course, we must consider the differences in many factors between the free and paid works. Even so, Vol.1 has been downloaded at a really good pace. Naturally, more people should at least try to advance to Vol.2 ... I always think that way.

SAKUMA: I wonder what causes the situation. Nowadays, readers can easily find as many free contents as they like. I think it is the primary reason. About the ending of “The Gifted Vol.1”, I didn’t feel the ending was too dark. In the story, the mystery is being solved with overwhelmingly logical methods. Even though it is the world in which anything can happen, the only solution turns out to be the beautifully rendered answer. I feel that the feature is terrifically interesting. Then, the very last scene is simply a rewarding-good-and-punishing-evil ending, correct? I mean, it’s like “Mito Komon” (one of the most popular period dramas, aired on TV in modern Japan) I sometimes think it might be similar to jidaigeki (samurai drama).

Akizuki: I didn’t have such a perspective. But it might be like “Hissatsu Shigotonin” (very popular jidaigeki in Japan).

SAKUMA: Yes, that’s what I want to mention.

Akizuki: Still, they don’t kill anyone in the end.

SAKUMA: They don't kill anyone, but punish criminals properly in ways they deserve.

Akizuki: Let me get back to Vol.4. The titles can be clearly read even in the thumbnail size.

B: Mr. SAKUMA has stuck to that point and he did it in Vol.4 with confidence.

SAKUMA: In the perspective of the nuance in the English language, I don't know what letters I should have emphasized. I valued the visual impact that they have. As for me, the word "Gemini" only could have worked properly as the title.

B: The Japanese letters of "The Phantom of Gemini" are drawn much bigger. Even though the Japanese letters of "The Skydiving Club" (Vol.3) are already big, they end up being enlarged even more.

SAKUMA: In addition, I have adopted the vertical writing in the Japanese version since Vol.3.

B: Ah, that's right. Is it because Japanese text is usually written vertically?

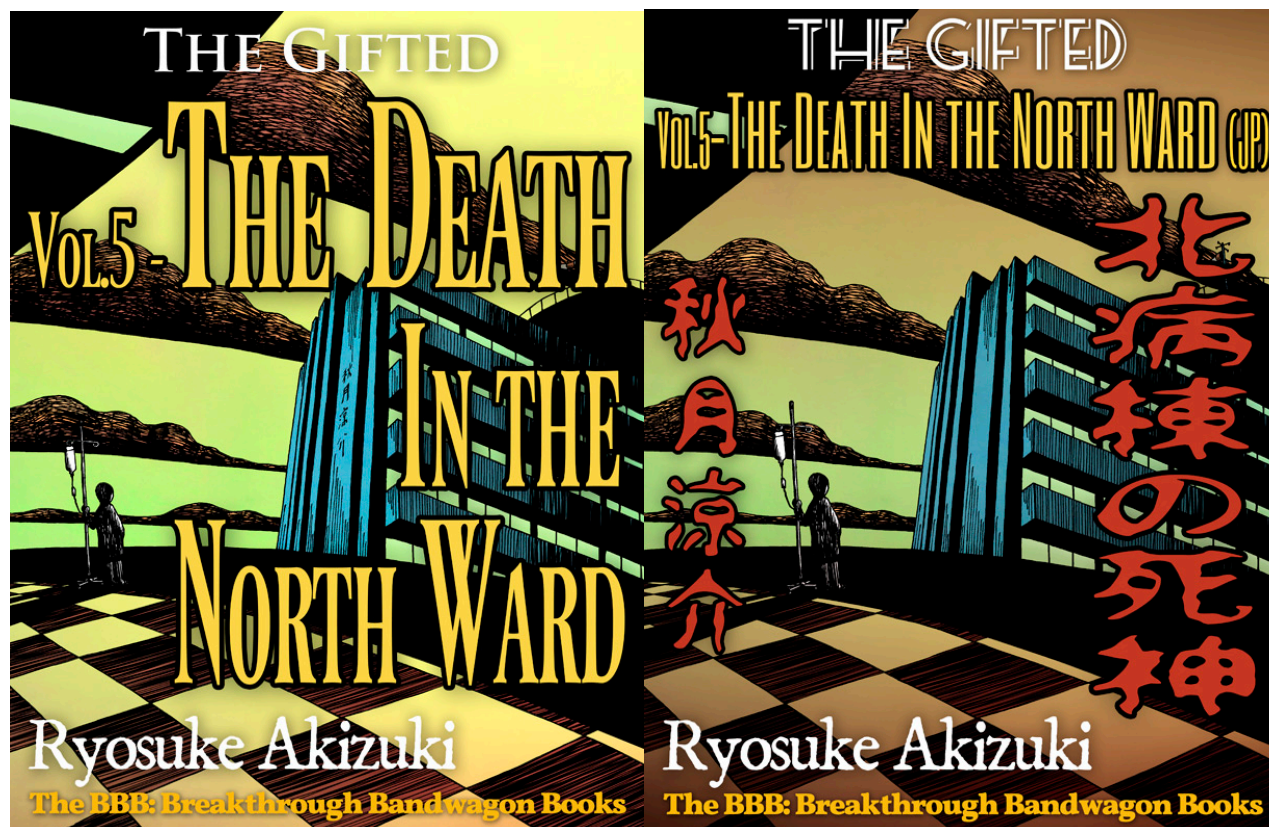
SAKUMA: Yes, that is correct. I thought that vertical writing is natural in Japanese. Moreover, if I adopt the vertical writing, I can use the broader space from top to bottom more freely. I do not have to worry about the title being hidden behind obi like a paper-based physical book.

Akizuki: I now understand. It is the type of cover that can be available only in the eBook format.

6. The Whole Pictures Seen Only Through Comparison

B: Next topic is “Vol.5 - The Death In the North Ward”. In the covers of the English and Japanese versions, the standing positions of the silhouetted figure differ subtly from each other. The checkered tiles in the front sides also differ. Then, the name of “Ryosuke Akizuki” are drawn in kanji characters on the wall of the hospital building. (Laughter)

Akizuki: Like the name of the chief hospital director? (Laughter)



SAKUMA: That’s right. While considering the fact that I put the Japanese title on the cover vertically, I thought it would be a good idea to move the child aside for the Japanese version. According to the new arrangement, I modified the tiles by adjusting its shadow.

B: I guess the readers would hardly notice the fact that the standing positions differ for each version. I mean, the readers outside Japan would more likely to see the English version only. Also, many of the Japanese readers would only see the Japanese version.

SAKUMA: Ah, I get your point.

B: I think this eBook would be the first case for the readers to compare thoroughly the covers of the English and Japanese versions.

SAKUMA: To be sure, at The BBB website and online bookstores, the covers of the English and Japanese version are usually not lined up side by side.

B: The font sizes for the titles of “Vol.4 - The Phantom of Gemini” and “Vol.5 - The Death In the North Ward” look almost the same. Are they of the same size?

SAKUMA: Yes. Almost the same.

B: On the cover, the size of Mr. Akizuki's name has already become really large, as the newer volumes become available, from the one to the next. It has finally reached up to this point. Someday, the name might occupy the whole cover.

SAKUMA: Like an election campaign poster for a politician? (Laughter)

Akizuki: Have you decided to implement on yourself a rule of constraint to use the larger letters on the titles for the newer volumes? (Laughter) About Vol.5, I didn't understand what the rooftop on the upper-left part of the picture was. I wondered what it was about.

B: This is a canopy top of an annex, or something like that, isn't it?

SAKUMA: Yes. The canopy top is seen as the dark, curved line. The character is standing at a curvy place like a passageway under the canopy top. About the building in the background, I drew the heliport to make it look like a hospital. I have been wondering how I could make it look like a hospital.

B: Surely, it might be difficult for a painter to express a hospital just by drawing a building and nothing else. By the way, in the cover of the Japanese version, the heliport is hidden.

Akizuki: I see an object that looks like an anemoscope. It is invisible in the English version.

B: The readers can see the whole picture only by comparing the covers of the English and Japanese versions. Such a structure is really elaborate and neatly done.

SAKUMA: Honestly, I later felt that the idea of Kirigami in the Vol.4 might be getting a bit far off from the story. So, I intended to bring the cover of Vol.5 back to the taste of Vol.1 a little.

Akizuki: This boy with an intravenous drip infusion apparatus gives me a sorrowful impression. (Laughter) It reminds me of "Mystery and Melancholy of a Street" by Giorgio de Chirico. Like a girl in the Chirico's picture, this boy looks desolate ... I like this taste.

B: I'm impressed by the account, in which a part of the picture is shifted in order to rearrange the positions of the letters. After all, it would not have been done, if the painter and the designer were different persons.

Akizuki: Are the sizes of the child also different?

SAKUMA: Well, it has to do with the natural law of perspective. The closer it is, the bigger it looks.

Akizuki: You mean, you changed its size?

SAKUMA: I changed the size and added the lacking part.

Akizuki: Wow! That's great.

B: Mr. SAKUMA, did you once tell me that the boy in the cover of Vol.5 was not cut-and-pasted, and it was drawn from scratch?

SAKUMA: Even though it was partially cut-and-pasted, I redrew the boy as a totally separate picture on a different piece.

B: Did you draw the boy on a different layer?

SAKUMA: At first, I thought I could draw the two different versions in the same layout. In the end, I separated the layer and drew the part that was lacking in the Japanese version.

Akizuki: Did you base the hospital on anything in real life?

SAKUMA: I made a large hospital near my house be the reference material ... (Laughter) Of course, I did not just exactly copy the hospital. But I used its hospital-like structure as a reference. It seems to have the features of a large hospital, including the heliport.

Akizuki: Do you have any attachment to these clouds?

B: I am getting the impression that they function as four dividing lines.

SAKUMA: I made the clouds dark and made the sky very bright. The intention is to make the picture generate the striped pattern of black and white, when it is reduced to a small thumbnail. I try to create the effect of getting the attention with the flickering pattern. I sent the chief editor the data for being checked on the monitor, not the data for being printed. So, I think he got a chance to see the pictures with very highly chromatic colors of vividness, and that cannot be printed properly.

B: You mean, are there such things as colors that cannot be printed?

SAKUMA: Yes, there are.

Akizuki: If the color gamut is different, it cannot be printed properly.

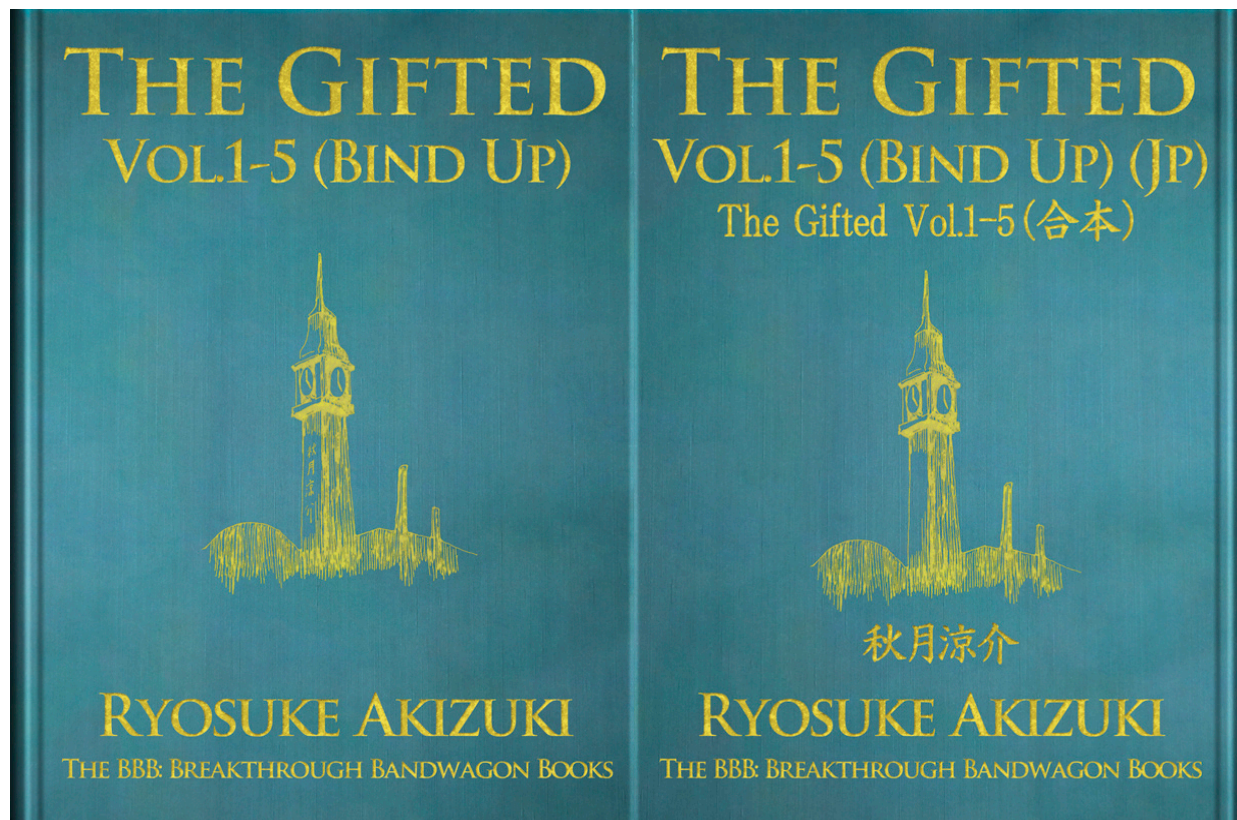
SAKUMA: On the monitor, it is reproduced with three colors: red, green, and blue (RGB). With the printer, it is reproduced with four colors: cyan, magenta, yellow, and black (CMYK). RGB can generate more dazzling colors. If you search through the Internet with the key words “RGB CMYK”, you can see the chart that compares the colors of each gamut.

[Reference] The following cover of “The Midnight Bus from Y Station” (written by Tomomi Aoki/published from Tokyo Sogensha) is a sample, in which I was aware of and used the vivid colors that can be reproduced with the CMYK color gamut. (SAKUMA)



7. The Place That Always Allows New Trials

B: Then, the next work is the bind-up version, which includes the novels of the series from Vol.1 to Vol.5 in one eBook. We published the bind-up version in 2016. This cover also features an excellent idea. Its Japanese version looks as if it is designed to be opened from left to right. In the English version, it is from right to left. It's like a book bound in cloth. I once asked Mr. SAKUMA about it in the past. Did you cover the actual book with cloth, or something else?



SAKUMA: I photographed the texture of a cloth and created the foundation with it. Then, I added the shadows and patterns by drawing them. The shadows were added to the cloth to make the cloth look three-dimensional as a physical book.

B: Then, I'm impressed again by your emotional attachment to chimneys. What happened in the past between you and chimneys? (Laughter) Did you have any PTSD about that?

SAKUMA: I happened to draw it at first on the cover of Vol.1, so I could do nothing but keep on drawing it.

B: We cannot find the chimneys in the stories, though ...

SAKUMA: I hope Mr. Akizuki describes chimneys in the stories someday ... (Laughter)

Akizuki: I will consider the option. (Laughter)

B: Then, we will talk about the latest work, "The Gifted Vol.6 - The Spirited Away Hotel".

Akizuki: This time the cover arts of the English and Japanese versions are completely different for the first time.



SAKUMA: What I thought I would draw at first was the structural composition, divided by the slanted line, or a wall, between the corridor and the room. It was the picture to look down from right above the person who is entering the room from the corridor. As for the distinction between the English and Japanese versions, I thought I would paint the room all black in one picture, and paint the corridor all black in the other. But if I had done so, then the presentation of the character would not be done thoroughly. So, I had decided to draw pictures that are viewed from two different angles: The character entering the room from the corridor to the far end is seen diagonally behind him from above, and the character coming into the room is seen diagonally in front of him from above. I placed the black part in each picture, because I thought it could make the letters stand out in the dark.

B: I understand Mr. SAKUMA always sticks to how he can make the letters stand out, in addition to drawing good pictures.

SAKUMA: Besides, it is the story in which people completely enter the space, which general public cannot see from outside. I thought I would draw the scene that is viewed from a normal person. So, I made the picture represent the room, either the inside or the outside of which cannot be seen at all. Then, by connecting them, both worlds can be completely existent.

Akizuki: The taste of Vol.6's cover is positioned between Vol.4 and Vol.5, isn't it? This mannequin-like figure reminds me of Chirico's works again. It gives me a disquieting impression.

SAKUMA: Yes. It is a mix of Vol.4, a symbolic picture, and Vol.5, the description of the story. This might be the illustration of the gift, the supernatural ability, described in the story.

Akizuki: When the English and Japanese versions are lined up side by side, it becomes an interesting composition because the walls of the rooms are angled to make a symmetrical pair. Then, the legs of the characters that are brought forward are stepping on the same place of the tiles ... Simply amazingly ...

SAKUMA: I had trouble drawing them in the same posture and on the same position of the tile. (Laughter)

Akizuki: I see. I was impressed with how the position of the character's arms would actually look from behind.

SAKUMA: The two pictures make the pair of its composition and perspective. While tampering with many possibilities, I made use of the black part of the cover to make the letters stand out.

Akizuki: I knew, Mr. SAKUMA, you are the one who can draw the three-dimensional scenery in the mind! Even a hinge is drawn. How meticulous it is! (Laughter) When we see the cover of the English version in the thumbnail, only the word "hotel" stands out. I find it to be interesting.

B: The name of Mr. Akizuki has gotten this enlarged, finally, to this extent ... I am filled with deep emotion.

Akizuki: Oh, chief editor! Are you filled with deep emotion about that point?! (Laughter)

B: The cover art of Vol.6 is very interesting. It is a new attempt at a different style again. I have asked Mr. SAKUMA to draw the covers for "The Gifted" series like this. Mr. SAKUMA, are you having the feeling that you can always try something new with this series? In that sense, it might be completely different from your other projects.

SAKUMA: Yes. I think I have that feeling.

Akizuki: Obviously, they have somewhat different tastes from Mr. SAKUMA's other works.

SAKUMA: At first, I tried to consider the method of making my own interpretation of art projects catered for people living outside Japan. Then, only the reduced-size thumbnails are reliable as references at online bookstores. I have been very conscious of how it can look when it is minified.

Akizuki: I now understand that you have aimed at making the works more visually conspicuous. What makes your project on "The Gifted" series different in the style from other projects of yours?

B: Readers can refer to the works Mr. SAKUMA has drawn in the past at the author's page of The BBB website. (Click the [Cast] tab, choose the cast by clicking the letter "S" (The initial of his last name, SAKUMA), and then click the nameplate bearing his name.) You can tell how the covers of "The Gifted" series quite differ from his other works, by making the comparison.

SAKUMA: I wondered if completely Japanesque pictures would be more interesting to the people living outside Japan. Or, would they be more interested in styles that are familiar to them? I have not come up with the right answer, yet. The trace of such a contemplation might have been expressed as the atmosphere of the works.

B: We at The BBB have published Mr. Kyosuke Tsumiki's "Urban Legend Detectives" series. I can say, "The Gifted" and "Urban Legend Detectives" are the two main pillars as the original mystery fictions from The BBB. Surprisingly enough, the download numbers of the works have shown striking contrasts with each other. For the Japanese versions, "Urban Legend Detectives" has been downloaded more than "The Gifted". But for the English versions, "The Gifted" has been downloaded more than "Urban Legend Detectives". I have been thinking that they are not caused by the qualities of the stories, but by the factor whether their covers are for Japanese or for English-speaking audiences.

SAKUMA: If so, by creating a cover which can give the massive impact to the people outside Japan, can we expect more people to advance to the paid Vol.2 and subsequent volumes?

B: Yes, that is the reason why I decided to request Mr. SAKUMA to draw his own Mona Lisa.

Akizuki: Oh, but, the Mona Lisa might be too high a hurdle. (Laughter)

B: Dr. MORI, Hiroshi, has often been said by the readers, “Dr. MORI does not seem to try to go all to exploit his full potential.” Actually, he is such an amazing genius who can make the masterpieces even with 50% or 60% of his full abilities. I think Mr. SAKUMA is similar to that.

SAKUMA: Oh, no, no, no way! It’s too overwhelming for me ...

B: So, the key is how to encourage Mr. SAKUMA to go all out.

SAKUMA: Umm, it’s difficult. I’m going puru-puru ...

B: Anyway, I’m glad that we got the chance to talk about “The Gifted” series to quite a bit of extent.

Akizuki: It has been very interesting for me today, because I have gotten the opportunity to hear many anecdotes for the first time.

8. Surprising Roots of Painter SAKUMA, Makoto

B: Then, about the latter half of this interview session, I would like Mr. SAKUMA to talk about his personal episodes in the past and the works which he has attachments to. Mr. SAKUMA, your family runs a pharmacy and you went to a pharmaceutical college. I remember you were considering whether you would become a pharmacist or a painter. In the end, you chose this path and eventually entered a university of fine arts.

SAKUMA: Naturally though, my parents, friends, and acquaintances said, “Why don’t you draw pictures while working as a pharmacist?” Even I myself was thinking so. I was so definitely sure that it would be the better option. However, once I entered the pharmaceutical college, I was clearly convinced that I could not just easily work as a pharmacist in my spare time. Up until that point, I had taught myself how to draw. I decided to go to a university of fine arts, in which I could substantially study the techniques, history, etc. More than anything else, in a university of fine arts, I could meet people who were involved in creative activities. I managed to get the opportunity to start the current job, while I was in the college/postgraduate programs.

B: Did you have any desire to become a pharmacist?

SAKUMA: Yes, if I was sure that I was capable of going for the double duty ... Now I think that I could give up on the path of becoming a pharmacist, because I just did not have the passion for it as much as I did for drawing pictures.

B: Was your contemplation of becoming a pharmacist affected by your family running the pharmacy?

SAKUMA: I think it had a lot to do with my thinking about the career choice. I had felt that I should have become a pharmacist since my childhood. Still, I somewhat noticed that to actually become a pharmacist would be very difficult. If I were an academic genius, then I might have been able to draw pictures while excelling academically in terms of getting good school grades. However, I was born to have to spend so much time on studying for academics and drawing pictures.

B: Judging from the overwhelming creativity of current Mr. SAKUMA, I cannot help but think it was good for you not to have become a pharmacist. We at The BBB have published the works of Mr. Takafumi Takada, who was originally a pharmacist and later became a novelist. So, I guess, even if Mr. SAKUMA had become a pharmacist, you would have become a painter eventually at one point of time in the past. Mr. SAKUMA, you once told me that the chemistry you had learned in the pharmaceutical college has been useful in your drawing pictures. Could you tell us again about it specifically?

SAKUMA: At the school, I got the chance to see so many objects, such as laboratory equipment, that could not usually be seen in daily life as just another person. Besides, when using paints or drawing materials, I sometimes incorporated chemical factors a little. For example, pigments are made from minerals and some of them are highly toxic chemicals. In addition, to a certain extent, I can understand the characteristics of solvents and materials to be used as foundations.

B: I am asking the question because I don’t know any painter who also had the chance at one point to exercise the option of becoming a pharmacist. Even though I have been appreciating arts and have many favorite painters, I don’t know anyone who would later become a painter after having become the candidate for a pharmacist. I think the readers living outside Japan would be interested in that aspect of your life story.

SAKUMA: In recent years, when I read mystery fictions to draw their covers, it is not too hard for me to comprehend the contents of the story, in terms of the poisons being used in the crimes, or something of the sort. I sometimes notice the incorrect knowledge of chemistry being used in the stories, while reading them. For example, wrong names of drugs and chemical substances. That sort of thing happens occasionally.

Akizuki: I’m sure Mr. SAKUMA is the only painter who can point out such errors in the text.

B: Mr. SAKUMA, you have drawn many covers for the Ronsosha mystery series. Have you read all the stories, for which you have drawn the covers?

SAKUMA: Basically, I read them all. But, when I really don't have time due to the tight schedule, I let the text-reading application software read the text data aloud while I draw the picture.

Akizuki: You mean, you receive the text data from the publishing company, correct?

SAKUMA: Yes. If I have the text data at hand, then I can let the software read it aloud. Beside that, the editor gives me the keywords of the storyline. So, while being conscious of the keywords and searching through the story, I read important parts over and over very carefully. Still, I actually manage to read almost all the stories for myself, without relying on the software.

B: I would like the readers to check Mr. SAKUMA's diverse works, which are lined up on The BBB website (<http://thebbb.net/cast/makoto-sakuma.html>). I am sure that the massive quantity, the high quality, and, more than anything else, the technical diversity of his pictures are going to astonish many readers.

SAKUMA: In the Ronsosha mystery series, multiple books are published in a month. So, I am aware of the feel to the entire atmosphere at bookstores, when the released books are lined up in the shelves.

B: One of the most impressive points that I notice at Mr. SAKUMA's annual solo exhibition is the diversity of his works for the Ronsosha mystery series. Most of the covers come with his wonderful artworks. As if that is not enough, a few of his works that incorporate all-or-nothing deals of strange ideas are simply impressive. Mr. SAKUMA's solo exhibition is truly exciting because we can experience such irregular and unique ideas. For example, among the works of this year's exhibition, I like a cover in which one red fingerprint is put on a crumpled piece of paper.



SAKUMA: For that piece, I took the rubbing of a finger on a clean slate of paper. At the same time, I also made a texture of a crumpled sheet of paper. By combining and composing them, I created the artwork for the cover.

Akizuki: Various techniques such as the one that incorporates air brush has been fully utilized. I would like to ask Mr. SAKUMA about it. I want to know how many techniques are available for drawing pictures.

B: As for the artworks for the Ronsosha mystery series, some of them are beyond the category of “painting” or “drawing”, aren’t they?

SAKUMA: Yes, some of them are made with composite photographs. It’s somewhat like special effects.



Akizuki: You even make an object sink in the water, or do something like that. How could you come up with such ideas?

SAKUMA: I was working on a cover for a grotesque story, in which a human body was stewed in a dye. I wanted to make a sickening cover. I had green hair float on the water and made a few bubbles. When something is stewed, scum floats on the surface, doesn’t it? I made such a stuff. I would like readers to say, “Oh, what a grotesque cover it is.” (Laughter)



Akizuki: I think it is a good trick if readers can understand what the cover is indicating, after reading the story.

SAKUMA: I once designed a character described in the story titled “Killer X”. When the “Killer X” series was designed for publication, the designer adopted a unique idea. (Mr. SAKUMA showing the picture in his hand.) Look at this book cover. The designer printed the life-size version of “Killer X” that I drew, made it actually stand on the stairs, and then photographed it. I mean, it was not a composite photograph, but a real photograph. At the time, I realized, “Oh, I haven’t come up with such a method!” Just like that, I have often learned from the people whom I work with.



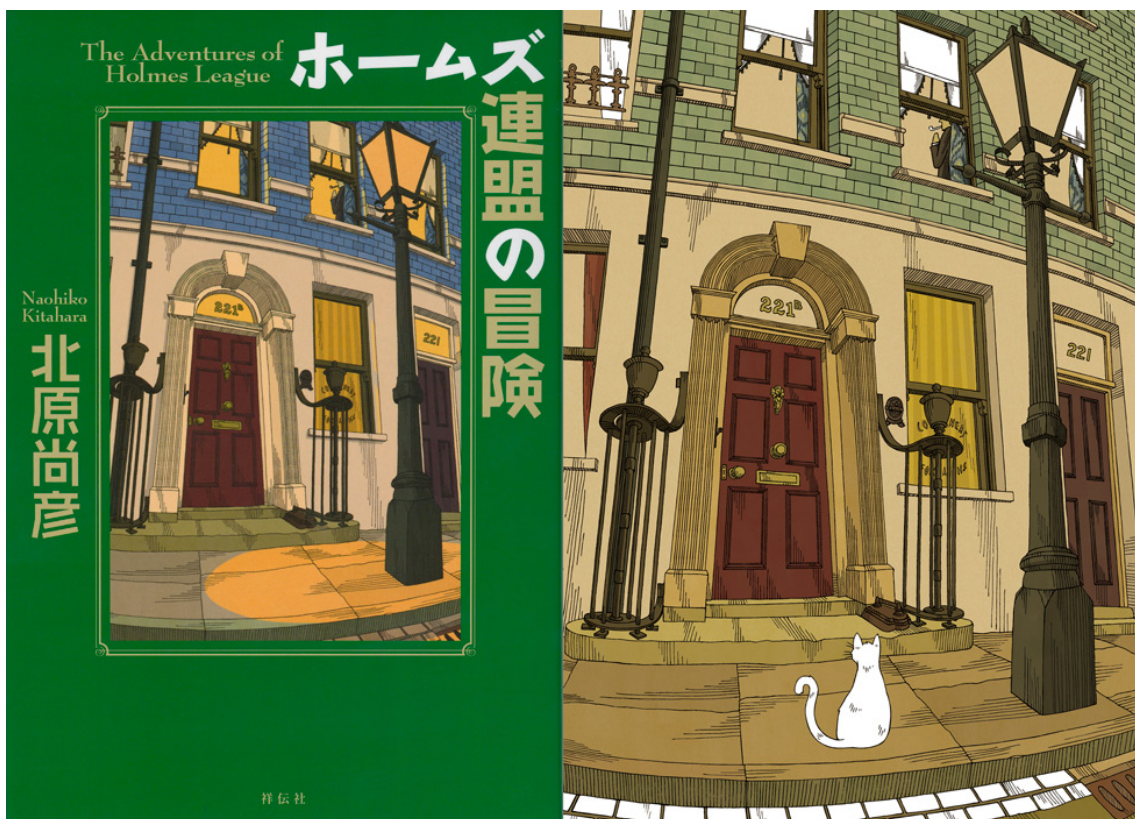
Akizuki: We have learned a lot from you, too.

B: Mr. SAKUMA, you usually offer a picture for a book cover and the designer finishes the overall design of the cover. Is that so?

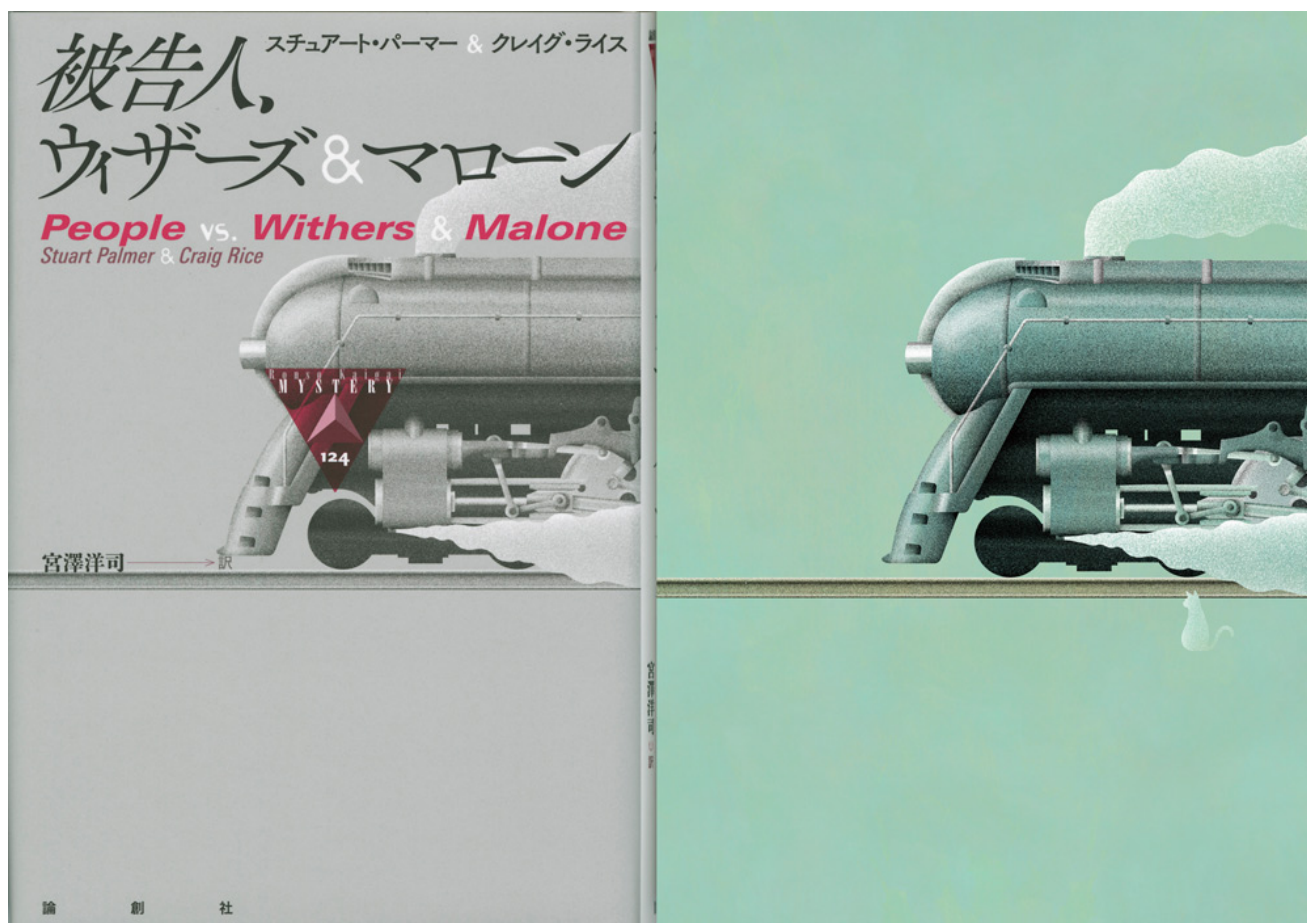
SAKUMA: That’s correct. I send a picture and ask the designer to apply the finishing touch to it to complete the design. To say that I design the letters for the book covers as well only at The BBB is not an utter overstatement.

B: At the annual exhibition, you display other versions of the pictures you have drawn for book covers. That’s quite a thrilling activity, might I say. For example, you newly added a cat on the picture for a certain cover, and succeeded in creating a completely different atmosphere.

[Reference] For the following covers of “The Casebook of Holmes League” and “The Adventures of Holmes League”, I drew “the composition in which someone is looking down on the street from the window” and “the composition in which someone is looking up at the window from the street”. The inside and outside of the building are making a pair. (SAKUMA)



SAKUMA: As for the Ronsosha mystery series, I'm asked to draw monochromatic pictures. I have to draw while using just one color. Even so, I imagine the picture in full gamut of colors, or think how fun it might be if I place a cat in the picture although it may not match the storyline. I later execute and realize such ideas I have come up with when drawing them. Once I imagine such things, I feel the urge for actually drawing and redrawing them.



Akizuki: I think I can understand the feeling. Like, “Oh, I have come up with the great idea!” I get the same kind of inspirations when writing novels.

B: The fact there are other versions of the book covers might be known only to the people who actually visit Mr. SAKUMA’s solo exhibitions. If you display some samples of the works in this eBook, the readers would be able to understand the notion quite easily. I’m sure some people would be interested in and actually visit your exhibition.

SAKUMA: By comparing them side by side, it would be easily understandable, to be sure.

[Reference] For the following pictures, I first drew the colored one (to the right), and then I cut out the part around the dog to offer it as the basic design for the book cover (to the left). (SAKUMA)



B: “The BBB Interview Selection” series has been steadily downloaded from places outside Japan. So, I hope some readers living outside Japan will visit the exhibition after reading this interview text. Mr. SAKUMA’s solo exhibition is held at the beginning of February every year and the place is always fixed to Ginza, Tokyo. You can visit the site as a part of the sightseeing in Tokyo. Then, I hope the exhibition will be held overseas, outside Japan, in the future ...

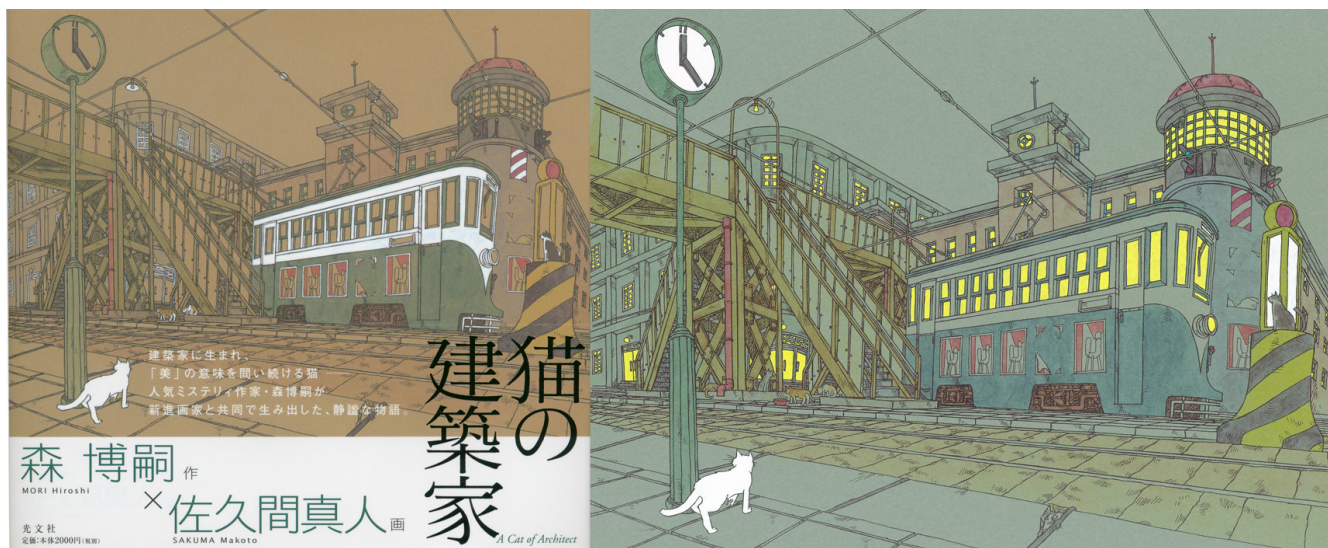
Akizuki: But, he cannot get on an airplane, can he? Will he take a ship? (Laughter)

SAKUMA: How many days will the trip take ...? (Laughter)

9. To Keep Drawing the Cats In That Town

Akizuki: Speaking of Mr. SAKUMA's solo exhibition, we have to mention the "Cats" series. We should talk about it.

B: As for Mr. SAKUMA's "Cats" series, I have a strong impression pertaining to "A Cat of Architect" series, which he co-authored with Dr. MORI, Hiroshi. The "Cats" series, which are displayed and sold at your exhibition, share the same worldview with "A Cat of Architect".



SAKUMA: Before Dr. MORI masterly created the world of "A Cat of Architect", I showed him pictures which I had displayed at my exhibition for years. Dr. MORI changed the order as he liked, and added the story, to create the picture book.

Akizuki: I guess many readers would not even know the anecdote.

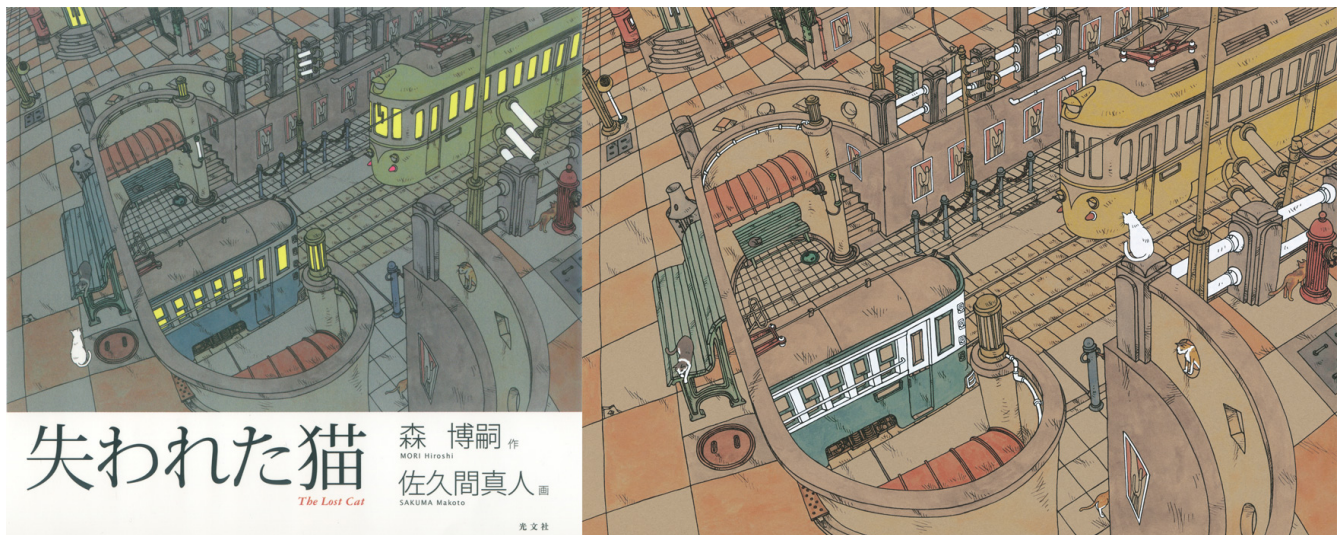
B: Those pictures were not drawn for the book. Instead, those original pictures had existed as independent art pieces.

SAKUMA: Yes. I asked Dr. MORI to rearrange their sequential order as he liked. After I adjusted the colors of the cats and other details, the picture book was completed. We needed nine more years until we published the second picture book of the series, titled "The Lost Cat". I had to spend almost the same amount of time on it as I needed for drawing the pictures for the first book. Some of the scenes are linked with each other. So, I have completed the minute details of the town to some extent, in my head.

Akizuki: Does the town have a name?

SAKUMA: Nothing in particular. "That Town", or something like that.

B: The year 2016, last year, was Dr. MORI's 20th anniversary as a novelist. He told me the other day that the best of his works during the first decade was "The Sky Crawlers" (English version is published, and is available at The BBB.), and one of the best works during the second decade of his career so far was "The Lost Cat". To that extent, the picture book has a special place in Dr. MORI as well.



Akizuki: Since I want to overlook the whole view of “That Town”, I would like to look at the map of the town.

B: Someday in the future, we would like Mr. SAKUMA to draw the map of “That Town”. I feel comfortable just by looking at the scenery, to the level that I wish I could live there if the world really existed. I want to live in the town forever. Mr. SAKUMA, how much of the specific imagery of the entire picture of “That Town” have you developed in your mind?

SAKUMA: One particular street corner has been completed in my head. A little far away from that, other sections have been developed. They are not perfectly connected with each other. There is a core picture, and other fringe areas around it are gradually developing.

Akizuki: I feel that there are a few towns, even though they have no name. They seem to be connected by trains or monorails.

SAKUMA: That is quite possible. Because tramcars in the same color run through each town, they should be connected with each other.

B: Do the stations have names?

SAKUMA: No. It is the world, which has few words and letters.

Akizuki: By the way, are there seven cats in total?

SAKUMA: Even though that is not necessarily the case, I always make sure that I draw seven cats in the direct mail notices for my solo exhibition.

Akizuki: Are they the same seven cats? Or, do those groups of seven cats consist of different groupings of multiple cats each time?

SAKUMA: Almost always, I draw the same seven types of cats. The regular seven cats are found somewhere in the direct mail messages.

Akizuki: White cat, black cat, gray cat, ...

SAKUMA: Calico cat, tuxedo cat, orange-and-white tabby cat, and tortoiseshell cat.

B: Then, the names of them are also ...

SAKUMA: No name.

Akizuki: Why don't you name them now?

SAKUMA: If they get their names, then they just go like One, Two, Three, Four, Five, Six, and Seven, or something like that. (Laughter)

B: To begin with, Mr. SAKUMA, where does your passion for cats come from?

SAKUMA: Cats live anywhere as they like in a town. I love such characteristics and have been drawing them since a long time ago. An art gallery named Beaux Arts Miu, which specializes in cats, once provided me with the first opportunity to start drawing the "Cats" series. At first, my pictures were centered around the theme of robots, and it gave me a chance to hold my solo exhibition featuring my pictures of robots and towns. At the time, I was asked by the owner, "Since this is an art gallery for cats, I would appreciate it if you draw a series featuring cats."

Akizuki: Oh, are you requested to do so?

B: Then, the art gallery Beaux Arts Miu influenced the birth of the series.

SAKUMA: That's right. Although I had drawn cats before that, there were not too many art pieces of cats. At the time, I had decided to start drawing the works featuring cat pictures more regularly. That is how the "Cats" series started.

Akizuki: Nothing in "That Town" has a name, does it?

SAKUMA: No ... no such thing.

Akizuki: Is there any human being in the town?

SAKUMA: It looks as if it is a town after the extinction of the human race ... Still, the lights are turned on at night. Foods are served to the cats. Perhaps, people are not present in the pictures at that very moment of time.

Akizuki: Then, there are rats and birds.

SAKUMA: Bugs, too.

Akizuki: A little far away from there, the cats are in the snow. There are things, such as mountains and hills.

SAKUMA: I imagine there are suburbs. In my mind, I have a vague town, don't I? When it was developed as "A Cat of Architect" and "The Lost Cat", I was shocked in a good way because they had already existed as well-organized stories. The sense of revelation went something like, "So, it is such a world!"

B: Was it as if Dr. MORI had already read your mind?

SAKUMA: Exactly, it was like that.

Akizuki: That symbolizes the greatness of Dr. MORI.

SAKUMA: That great Dr. MORI considers "The Lost Cat" to be one of the best works during the second decade of his career as a novelist. As a painter of the work, I am really honored and happy to hear that.

B: Dr. MORI published more than 100 works during his second decade. So, I too was really amazed that he selected the picture book "The Lost Cat" as one of his best books.

SAKUMA: Speaking of "The Lost Cat", there were few words in the book. Still, it is very vocal. He wrote it with the explicit meanings, and I could feel his bold messages. More than anything, the expressions of his statements are really strong.

Akizuki: Will the “Cats” series spread while the location of the story moves from the current places to different towns?

SAKUMA: It is being branched off and has been expanding. Then, this and that are connected with each other.

B: I feel that the series has got to be your lifework. As a part of my wish list, I would like the series to be submitted to Studio Ghibli, so that I get the chance to request the world-class maestro Mr. Hayao Miyazaki to make it into the movie. (Laughter) I won’t be surprised if such movies actually exist somewhere.

Akizuki: When drawing pictures, from what factors do you start to draw? Is it true that the reason why you keep creating new pictures of “That Town” is that you want to draw some new gadgets in it?

SAKUMA: For example, I have an urge to look up at a tramcar from a certain angle. Something like that.

B: We know Mr. SAKUMA’s pictures have their own unique angles of perception, as if we are looking at it from below with an oblique angle.

Akizuki: Is it “SAKUMA Angle”?

SAKUMA: The angle looks like those of cats’ viewpoints. Cats can be everywhere, such as high places and low places. So, my pictures are like viewpoints of cats. Then, we take photographs from various angles when visiting a town and have found a good scenery during our trips, don’t we? I think it is similar to that feeling. I draw a place, which comes to my mind from various angles. They are unified into one picture of the town. It goes something like that.

B: I’m convinced that the angles are the viewpoints of the cats. I did not know that.

Akizuki: Beside the angles, do you have your own method for choosing an object to draw?

SAKUMA: For example, I choose a building I have never drawn.

Akizuki: You sometimes draw a building whose stairs are outstanding.

B: I have an impression that Mr. SAKUMA loves to draw stairs.

SAKUMA: I surely do. Deliberately, I often choose buildings which are on top of each other. Unlike dogs, cats can swiftly climb up the stairs, right? They can climb onto the wall and move freely within a town. When drawing a town, I wonder what lies beyond that certain street corner. I’m drawing while considering that sort of thing. I myself want to know the answers to such self-imposed questions, rather than I just want to draw them.

Akizuki: Once you draw a street corner, you feel that there is something beyond it and want to draw it as well.

SAKUMA: That’s just what I feel. In another case, for example, when I come up with a nice shape of the design for a clock tower, I want to look at it from various angles around it. I might like to probe into the place where I cannot see but can still feel. Like, “What can I see over the corner?” Or, “I wonder what it looks like if I see it from this side.”

Akizuki: Do you have any special intention for your creating both daytime and nighttime versions of one picture?

SAKUMA: That is simply because I can create both types of colors technically. For example, I think whoever looks at a picture featuring many tramcars in the daytime would have the impression like, “Okay, it is a picture featuring tramcars, period.” But in case of the picture of the nighttime, whoever looks at it can feel the movement and the direction of the tramcars thanks to the headlights and tail lamps. Then, the lights

of the rooms can create the ambience of people's presence inside. There is a big difference between the daytime and nighttime versions, which makes the impression as if the town is truly active. The night-and-day contrast is what I want to create.

B: About the daytime and nighttime versions, I have the impression that Mr. SAKUMA is a painter in this modern era. I mean, the painters in the old days could not just easily change the colors of their pictures. But, in our era, for example, in the “Dragon Quest” series (also called “Dragon Warriors” series in many other countries outside Japan), the most popular role-playing game title in Japanese history, the daytime and nighttime in the game are expressed with the usage of different colors for the background. Just by shifting the colors, completely different sceneries can be realized. The advanced technology of computer graphics makes it possible. We know Mr. SAKUMA's favorite drawing techniques, because we have appreciated them at his exhibitions. However, the readers who know Mr. SAKUMA's works only from the book covers that he has drawn might not recognize the skills. So, if we show a few samples, that may help the readers understand them.

SAKUMA: Once I look at a scenery in the daytime, I want to see it in the nighttime and even the snow-covered version. It is like the desire to want to see what lies beyond the corner. I might create them because I wish to experience the current of time. Moreover, I just have fun with painting the windows, one by one.

Akizuki: I feel each painter has his or her own obsession like that.

SAKUMA: For example, I cannot stop when drawing electric wires.

10. The Future Projected By the Painter of Cats

B: Compared to the painters in the old days, I feel that Mr. SAKUMA creates so many different versions of his pictures, thanks to the advancement of computer graphics. At his exhibition, the different versions of the same base picture are displayed. They are very interesting because we can discover many new factors from them.

SAKUMA: Uh, but, when I drew pictures only by hand in the past, I created different versions, for example by making photocopies of the pictures with different sheets of paper in various colors. Back then, I could not do things like putting different, various types of cats in the picture, though. However, I had already tried the method of using sheets of paper of various colors.

Akizuki: I understand you have had the motivation to see the different versions. Then, you have added various techniques. Like, using air brush, or using photographs.

B: At this year's exhibition, as his new technique, we can see his drawing in Indian ink. In addition, parodies of legendary pictures in Japanese culture, such as *The Fiend With Twenty Faces* and *Tokiwa-sō* apartment building (once housed many prominent manga artists in Japan). I appreciate them while being astonished, “Wow, how extensive this painter's range of artistic style is?!” (Laughter)

Akizuki: I guess that he often tries to use different materials for painting. I'm interested in what tools he uses.

B: I have an impression on him that he can draw any types of pictures. When you look over his Works List on The BBB website, you can notice that his works show a wide variety of styles, such as those for covers of *jidaigeki* novels.



Akizuki: I had read Mr. Toichiro Kujira's novel titled "Meteor Abduction" in the past and was later shocked to learn that its cover was drawn by none other than Mr. SAKUMA. It was in a completely different style.

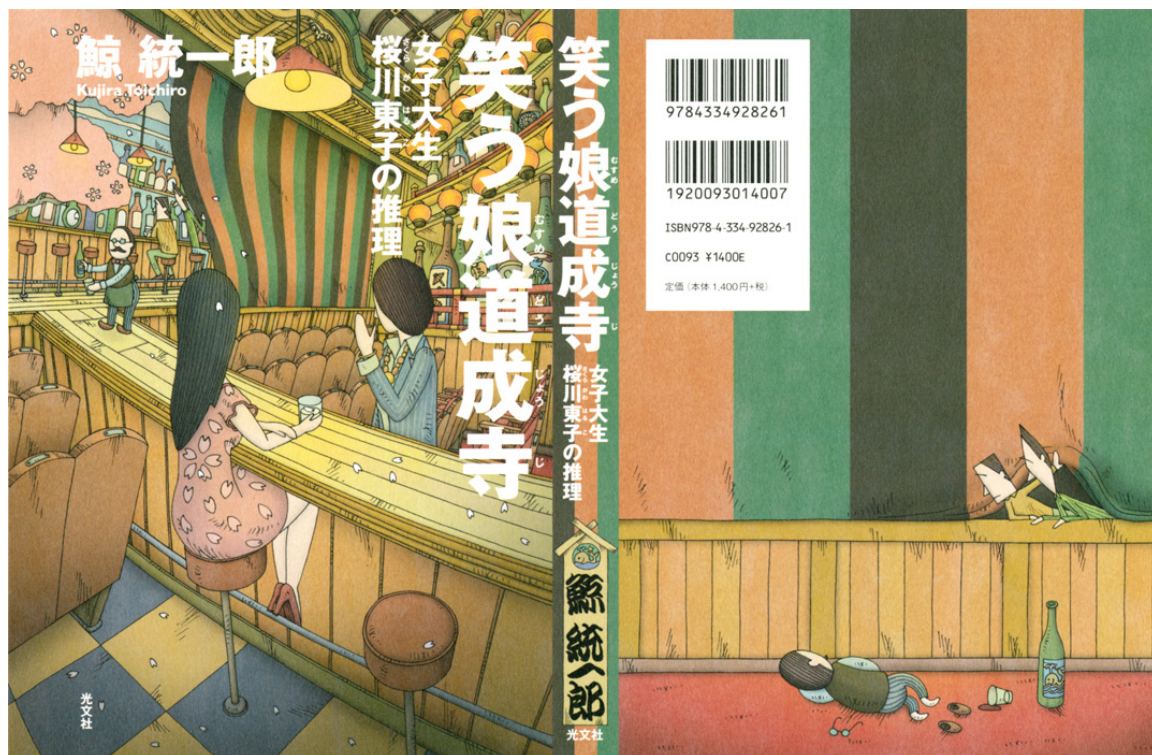


B: He possesses the diverse world of aesthetics created with the versatility of his multifaceted talent, which cannot be measured just by the covers for “The Gifted” series.

Akizuki: Quite often, I find myself being amazed, while commenting, “Wow, this is also the book, the cover of which is drawn by Mr. SAKUMA.”

B: In recent years, personally, I love the touches that are expressed on the covers for Mr. Toichiro Kujira’s “Drunks” series.

SAKUMA: You mean, the “Haruko Sakuragawa” series, its official name. It is drawn in a style like the illustrations in the good old days. Come to think of it, I might have drawn drunks more than cats.
(Laughter)





[Reference] As you can see in the following sample, the lower side of the cover is hidden by the obi (wraparound (belly) band). The obi ends up hiding the label of a beer bottle, which is incorporated into the cover design. A middle-aged drunk on the back cover also end up being hidden.

(SAKUMA)



Akizuki: Mr. SAKUMA, you draw large-sized, oil-painting-like pictures like the cover of “Meteor Abduction”. Do you still draw pictures in that style?

SAKUMA: Yes. I still draw in that style, when it is needed. When I draw something as my hobby, I draw with that type of paints.

B: Although you keep drawing pictures for book covers, you still manage to draw something for a hobby. I am amazed by how much you do as a painter.

Akizuki: What do you use when drawing that type of picture?

SAKUMA: Acrylic paints. They are types of paints known as gouache. They are like oil paints that can be drawn with water. They can generate distinctive colors, get dry quickly with less time, and therefore allow me to advance to the next phase of the work more effectively without wasting time.



[Reference] Jules Verne’s “Deux ans de vacances” (“Two Years’ Vacation” in English) is widely known in Japan under the title “Jyugo Shonen Hyoryuki” (literally meaning “Castaway Story of Fifteen Boys”). Japanese readers (especially children) who read it for the first time are thrilled while reading because they cannot judge from the title if the characters would return home safely. (SAKUMA)

B: Today we have gotten the opportunity to talk about various episodes with Mr. SAKUMA. To conclude this interview session, I would like Mr. SAKUMA to tell us about his visions of future activities and his mindset for the activities outside Japan. I want to know if he has the things to do across the nations around the world.

SAKUMA: Since I have been drawing book covers for many mystery fictions translated from other languages into Japanese, I would like to draw the pictures that can satisfy the original authors living outside Japan. It is my desire rather than my aim. After the original authors take a look at my pictures for their respective Japanese versions, I would like them to be impressed with and like my artworks.



B: Mr. SAKUMA has already drawn numerous works of foreign authors for translated books of the Ronsosha mystery series.

SAKUMA: I also do that for Tokyo Sogensha. Not a few of the original authors have already been deceased, though.

[Reference] The following covers are those of “The Complete Stories of Nick Velvet” series (written by Edward D. Hoch/published from Sogen Suiri Bunko). I drew in them all of the “worthless items” stolen in each episode. (SAKUMA)



B: In the way, Mr. SAKUMA has already been connected with cultures outside Japan. Still, translated works are often published decades after the original versions are written, though.

SAKUMA: Yes. So, I think it might be difficult for many of them to see my works by themselves. However, I'm sure there also are lots of avid mystery fans in many countries. I would like to create cover arts that are, at least, not despised by them for their themes being way off the mark, when they see the Japanese versions. I mean, translated works sometimes come with covers that have nothing to do with the contents of the stories. Then, I would be interested in drawing pictures for the books published outside Japan, if I am given such opportunities.

B: Once Mr. SAKUMA is known throughout the world outside Japan as well, I am sure that you will get many offers to draw pictures. As of now, you are not yet quite world-famous. These days, you can do your job globally through e-mails.

SAKUMA: That will be nice.

B: I always think painters have the distinctive edge because their activities can easily travel beyond borders with the power of graphics. In case of written fictions and stories, no matter how hard we try to translate faithfully, the language barrier wouldn't vanish completely. Pictures can deliver the messages with the optical perceptions and the visual impacts. In fact, Japanese comics, animations, and games have been widely and enthusiastically welcomed worldwide. Japanese novels have not yet established such achievement, though. Mr. Akizuki, do you have anything to say about what to expect regarding Mr. SAKUMA's works?

Akizuki: I want to see another world, which has completely different atmosphere from the “Cats” series. I don’t necessarily mean I request the “Dogs” series, or anything like that. I want a series which is not restricted by that particular view of the world.

B: Surely, the current art gallery, which he uses, is free from the “cat required” rule. The expression “cat required” is funny, though.

Akizuki: The trains that Mr. SAKUMA is good at drawing feature their curvy bodies. In addition to that, for example, I would like to appreciate the new series, in which trains with sharper and edgier bodies can be seen. I would like to witness the world that I have never seen before.

B: Personally, I would like Mr. SAKUMA to draw “City”, the fictional setting in “The Gifted” series.

Akizuki: The cover arts for “The Gifted” series are already unique among his works. Additionally, I want to see completely new sides of his style.

B: I agree that it is what fans expect the creators to do. In this respect, I would like Mr. Akizuki to show me the different facets of his creative inventories. Fans tend to want the creators’ new aspects. Come to think of it, Mr. Akizuki is currently in the first slump of his career as a novelist ...

Akizuki: Oh, do you mention that now, in this timing? Oops, I made a mistake by digging a hole ...

SAKUMA: Really? Is that so?

B: When we visited Mr. SAKUMA’s solo exhibition in February 2016, Mr. Akizuki had already started writing “The Gifted Vol.7”. More than one year has passed since then. As of now, in February 2017, he hasn’t made any progress at all. It is an unusual occurrence for him.

Akizuki: Umm ... It’s not good ...

SAKUMA: But I myself don’t have any confidence to draw a cover when I read Mr. Akizuki’s manuscript every time.

B: I think you are a little too modest. Anyway, Mr. Akizuki’s slump this time is serious ...

SAKUMA: What if the chief editor gets harder on him ...?

Akizuki: Might I be able to write, while going puru-puru? (Laughter)

B: The other day, I heard from him about the points at which his writing is stuck in mud. But I don’t think it is so significant. He might be getting into the dead end of his thinking.

SAKUMA: The chief editor is a novelist as well. So, you are in a unique position. Also, you work as a translator, of course. You might recognize a problem which typical editors cannot even notice. By the way, I’m always impressed with the promptness of e-mail replies from you two.

B: In 2016, I was so glad to meet Mr. SAKUMA in Nagoya (the third-largest city in Japan). When I visited Nagoya to go to a concert, Mr. SAKUMA’s solo exhibition was coincidentally held there at the time. That timing was divine.

SAKUMA: The timing was just simultaneous.

B: I always believe Mr. SAKUMA’s pictures would be welcomed by the world outside Japan. First, Mr. SAKUMA’s pictures would be appreciated worldwide, and then I envision that the popularity becomes the launching pad for boosting the sales of “The Gifted” and The BBB. It is my grand plan. (Laughter) In reality, the readers see the cover arts first before they read the stories themselves.

SAKUMA: Honestly, that is a lot of pressure. My pictures will be looked at by the readers before they read the actual contents of the stories, which the authors have taken much time to write. I always feel sorry about that. No matter what I draw, the readers see them before they read the sentences of the stories. There are those who choose what books to buy, based on their preferences for the cover arts. Or, the pictures sometimes give the readers certain impressions of the contents. Before the stories, which the authors have taken time to write, the pictures, which completely different persons have drawn, will be seen first. I really feel the responsibility for that.

Akizuki: I think Mr. SAKUMA is great because he deals with such responsibility.

SAKUMA: Since I have seen authors making lots of efforts to create their works, I have been worried about the quality of my pictures. How do you two think about the covers of your own works?

B: Mr. SAKUMA's works score perfect, 100 out of 100. No author would be dissatisfied at all. The covers for "The Gifted" series are also truly wonderful each time. I have never had any dissatisfaction with them.

SAKUMA: I'm really honored to hear that.

B: I know that Mr. Akizuki always puts the cover of "The Gifted" series on the screen of his smartphone.

SAKUMA: That is what really makes me happy.

B: Mr. SAKUMA, do you have any messages for the readers and the people who appreciate your drawings, not only for Japanese, but also for people living outside Japan? If you send out the messages here, they will actually reach the readers outside Japan as well.

SAKUMA: First, about book covers, I would like them to look at the pictures again after they have completed reading the stories. Then, I would like to know how the pictures look to each of them, while comparing the pictures with their own experiences in the past. For example, someone might feel, "It is similar to the hospital that I know." I would like the readers to look at the pictures freely as they like. I feel that this is especially the case for people, who have different cultures from Japanese. I guess the pictures might look to them as unexpectedly different things. In that way, I would like them to perceive that particular aspect of the artworks freely, and then enjoy the experience.

B: Do you have any special feeling for the people who live outside Japan and appreciate your pictures?

SAKUMA: How do the artworks look to them? I really want to know that.

B: Ah, I see. There is a chance that they might have unique impressions of the artworks, completely different from what many Japanese feel.

SAKUMA: Even among just Japanese people, the range of interpretations is broad and it spans a wide variety of styles. But especially among the people outside Japan, there is a possibility that my pictures end up looking like completely different things.

B: Surely, I think so, too.

SAKUMA: For example, about the streets having a clock tower. Japanese drawers including me draw it while dreaming of a different culture. However, in some other countries, there are people who were born, are raised, and live in places that have clock towers as daily sceneries. I want to know what impressions they may get from my pictures. For example, Tokyo Sogensha has published the "Nick Velvet" series (written by Edward D. Hoch), and there is a story titled "The Theft of the Firefighter's Hat". I drew the hat for the story in the book. At the time, I was worried if the hat I drew had the correct shape. I mean, the shape could be different, based on where or when the story takes place. There is usually a large gap between the thing someone knows in the daily life and the item someone finds in a reference material.



B: So, we really need feedbacks from the readers outside Japan. Mr. SAKUMA, do you have any request for “The Gifted” series in the upcoming future? This series is grand in conception, so I would like Mr. Akizuki to keep writing for about 60 more years from now on.

Akizuki: Oh, hey, wait ... I don’t have such grand story ideas for the series lasting for that much, though.
(Laughter)

SAKUMA: In “The Gifted” series, anything can happen. But, in all actuality, the mysteries are always solved in really logical ways. I love that aspect.

Akizuki: That is what I’m not good at.

B: Oh dear!

SAKUMA: I love that taste. The gifted characters seem to do everything beyond limits. But, I get the thrills from the way they find and deal with the limits and the rules of the gifts.

B: Personally, I would like the characters of “The Gifted” to age with time. In the series, only one month passes during each episode. However, for us, we spend one year to create each episode. The age gap between them and us is steadily increasing ... As things go this way, although the ages of the characters may not have changed by all that much, only Mr. Akizuki is getting older and older. That is also the case for Mr. SAKUMA and me as well. I want to see their future. Then, let us move on to the ending of this interview session. Could you two give the readers any comments or statements?

Akizuki: At first, I will do my best to complete “The Gifted Vol.7”. I think I might be able to solve the current problem of falling into the slump.

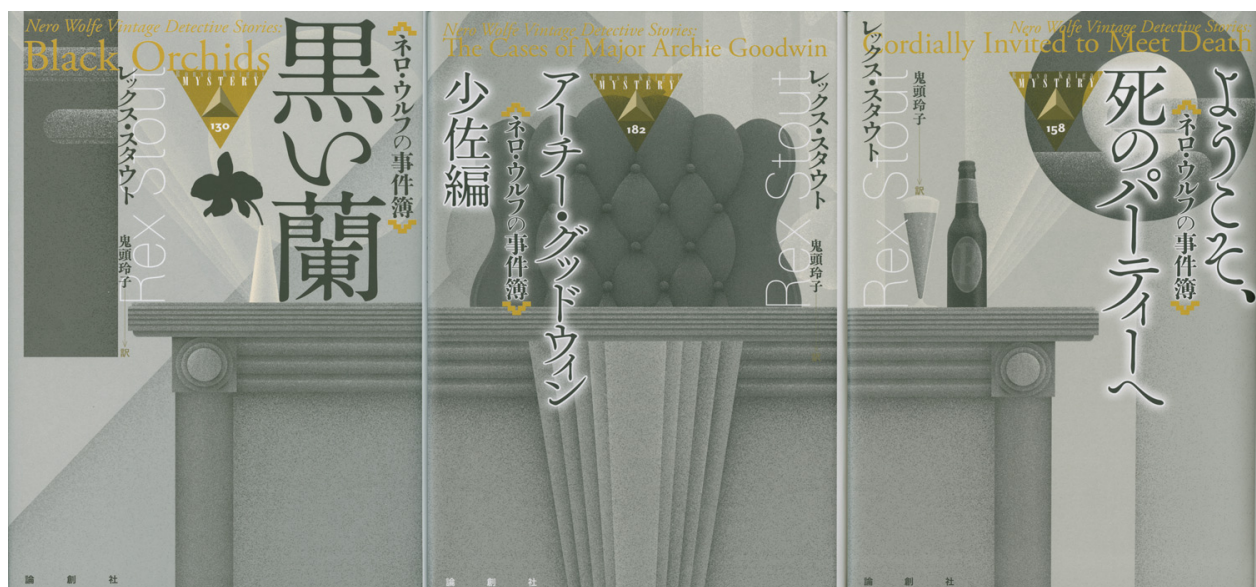
SAKUMA: I want to search for the ways to make the pictures look better as thumbnails of eBooks. Many of the readers end up seeing the small thumbnails only. It would be interesting if I could make use of the gap of perception between a small thumbnail and a large picture.

B: Mr. SAKUMA, Mr. Akizuki, thank you so much for having such a wonderful talk session today. I hope Mr. Akizuki will complete Vol.7 in the very near future and Mr. SAKUMA will draw a new great cover art for it.

Akizuki: Um, I'm going puru-puru ... I'll do my best. Thank you so much.

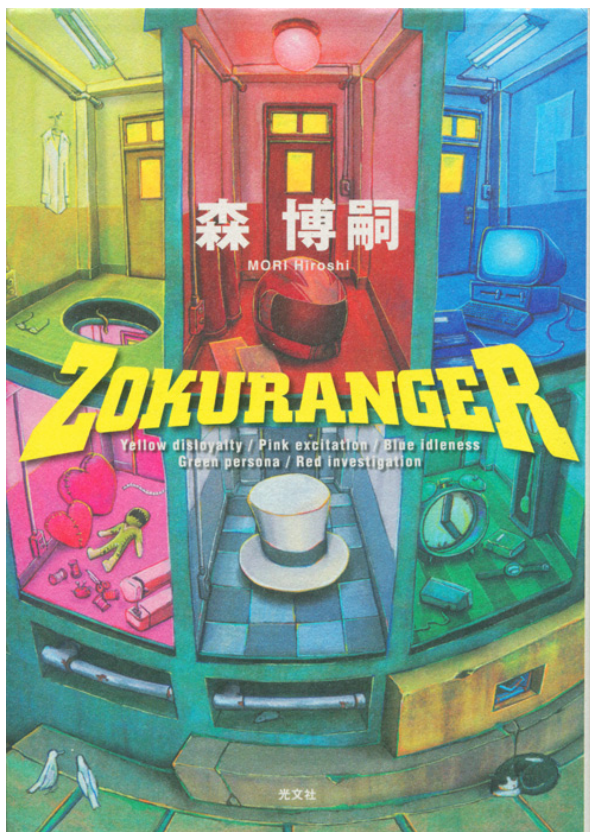
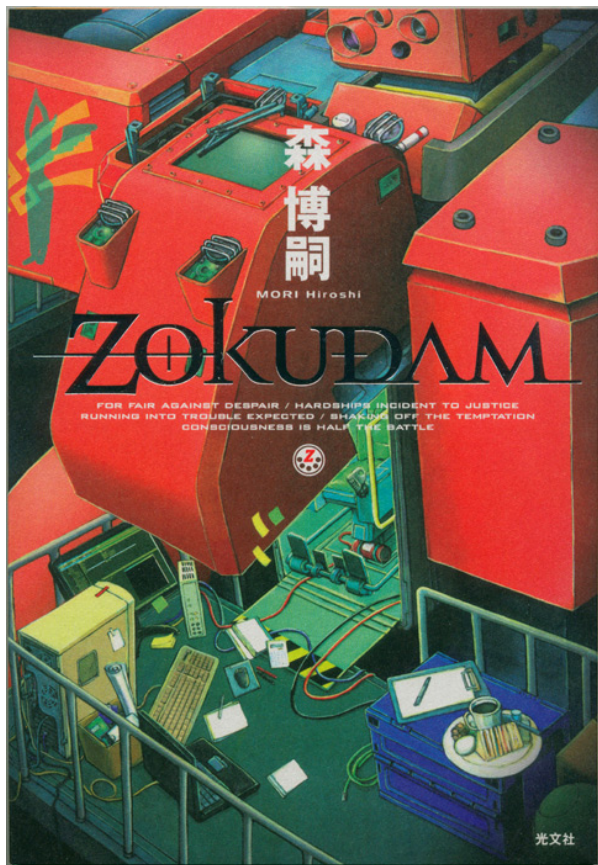
SAKUMA: Thank you very much. I appreciate it.

[Reference] The following covers belong to the “Nero Wolfe” series (written by Rex Stout/published from Ronsosha). The three pieces of works comprise the Wolfe’s desk, which becomes visible by lining the covers, side by side. (SAKUMA)



(This interview was recorded in Ginza, Tokyo, on February 11th, 2017.)

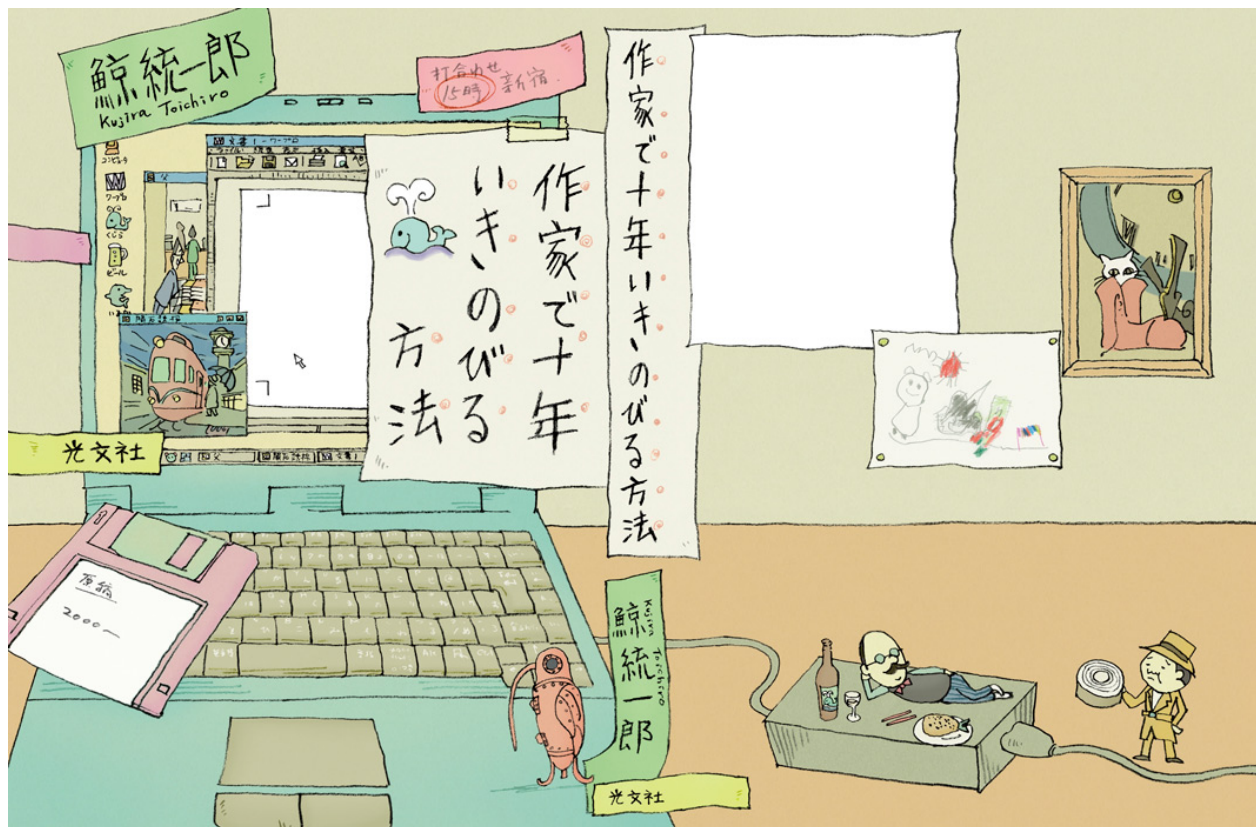
The Digital Gallery of SAKUMA, Makoto



[Reference] The following covers are those of “Kochira Keishicho Bijyutsu Hanzai Sousahan (This is the Police Investigation Team for Art Crimes)” (written by Yoshinobu Kadoi/published from Kobunsha). The front and back covers of the book jacket are drawn with the pen and then painted with colors. The pictures on the front and back covers underneath the book jacket are the unfinished version of those on the book jacket, represented in the rough sketch and the draft phase of the entire process. (SAKUMA)



[Reference] The following is the cover of “How to Survive for a Decade As a Novelist” (written by Toichiro Kujira/published from Kobunsha) was all drawn by hand except for its barcode. (SAKUMA)



List of Reference Sources

This is the list of the works (in the order of appearance) whose book cover arts are mentioned in this article.

- Kotaro Isaka, Seiichiro Oyama, Yukihi Hakata, Eiichi Fukuda, Shusuke Michio “The Case Book in Gamakura City 1” (Tokyo Sogensha)
 - Ryosuke Akizuki, Takekuni Kitayama, Osamu Koshigaya, Hiroshi Sakurazaka, Yu Murasaki, Honobu Yonezawa “The Case Book in Gamakura City 2” (Tokyo Sogensha)
 - Ryosuke Akizuki “The Gifted Vol.1 - The Haunting Woman” (The BBB: Breakthrough Bandwagon Books)
 - Ryosuke Akizuki “The Gifted Vol.2 - The Return of the Dead Kitten” (The BBB: Breakthrough Bandwagon Books)
 - Ryosuke Akizuki “The Gifted Vol.3 - The Skydiving Club” (The BBB: Breakthrough Bandwagon Books)
 - Ryosuke Akizuki “The Gifted Vol.4 - The Phantom of Gemini” (The BBB: Breakthrough Bandwagon Books)
 - Ryosuke Akizuki “The Gifted Vol.5 - The Death In the North Ward” (The BBB: Breakthrough Bandwagon Books)
 - Tomomi Aoki “The Midnight Bus from Y Station” (Tokyo Sogensha)
 - Ryosuke Akizuki “The Gifted Vol.1-5 (Bind Up)” (The BBB: Breakthrough Bandwagon Books)
 - Ryosuke Akizuki “The Gifted Vol.6 - The Spirited Away Hotel” (The BBB: Breakthrough Bandwagon Books)
 - S. A. Steeman “LE DOIGT VOLE” (Ronsosha)
 - J. S. Fletcher “The Middle Temple Murder” (Ronsosha)
 - Stanley Hyland “Green Grow the Tresses-O” (Ronsosha)
 - The Queen Brothers “Killer X” (Kobunsha Kappa Novels)
 - Naohiko Kitahara “The Casebook of Holmes League” (Shodensha)
 - Naohiko Kitahara “The Adventures of Holmes League” (Shodensha)
 - Stuart Palmer & Craig Rice “People vs. Withers & Malone” (Ronsosha)
 - William Link “The Columbo Collection” (Ronsosha)
 - MORI, Hiroshi / SAKUMA, Makoto “A Cat of Architect” (Kobunsha)
 - MORI, Hiroshi / SAKUMA, Makoto “The Lost Cat” (Kobunsha)
 - Yaichiro Kawada “Coroner in Edo: Infemmeno” (Shodensha Bunko)
 - Toichiro Kujira “Meteor Abduction: The Labyrinth of Kenji Miyazawa” (Kobunsha Kappa Novels / Kobunsha Bunko)
 - Toichiro Kujira “Merry Musume Dojyoji” (Kobunsha)
 - Toichiro Kujira “The Beauty of the Opera” (Kobunsha)
-

- James R. Lewis “The Dream Encyclopedia” (Sairyusha)
 - Jules Verne “Deux ans de vacances” (Kadokawa Bunko)
 - Toichiro Kujira “The Truth of Taro Urashima” (Kobunsha Bunko)
 - MORI, Hiroshi “ZOKU” (Kobunsha)
 - Edward D. Hoch “The Complete Stories of Nick Velvet Vol.1” (Sogen Suiri Bunko)
 - Edward D. Hoch “The Complete Stories of Nick Velvet Vol.2” (Sogen Suiri Bunko)
 - Edward D. Hoch “The Complete Stories of Nick Velvet Vol.3” (Sogen Suiri Bunko)
 - Edward D. Hoch “The Complete Stories of Nick Velvet Vol.4” (Sogen Suiri Bunko)
 - Rex Stout “Nero Wolfe Vintage Detective Stories: Black Orchids” (Ronsosha)
 - Rex Stout “Nero Wolfe Vintage Detective Stories: The Cases of Major Archie Goodwin” (Ronsosha)
 - Rex Stout “Nero Wolfe Vintage Detective Stories: Cordially Invited to Meet Death” (Ronsosha)
 - MORI, Hiroshi “ZOKUDAM” (Kobunsha)
 - MORI, Hiroshi “ZOKURANGER” (Kobunsha)
 - Yoshinobu Kadoi “This is the Police Investigation Team for Art Crimes” (Kobunsha)
 - Toichiro Kujira “How to Survive for a Decade As a Novelist” (Kobunsha)
-

List of Links to the Related Publishers

We introduce the publishing companies, which have given us the permission to use the book covers for this interview session. It is listed in order of their appearances in this interview.

Tokyo Sogensha (<http://www.tsogen.co.jp/np/index.html>)

Ronso-sha (<http://ronso.co.jp/>)

Kobunsha (<http://www.kobunsha.com/>)

Shodensha (<http://www.shodensha.co.jp/>)

Sairyusha (<http://www.sairyusha.co.jp/>)

Kadokawa Shoten (<http://shoten.kadokawa.co.jp/>)

We would like to take this opportunity to show the appreciation to those who have cooperated with us this time.

SAKUMA, Makoto Related Works List at The BBB



The Gifted Vol.1 – The Haunting Woman

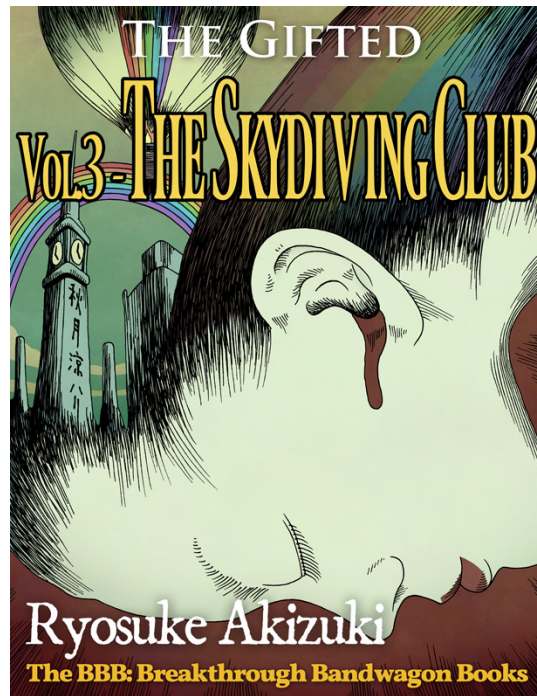
<http://thebbb.net/ebooks/the-gifted-vol1.html>



The Gifted Vol.2 – The Return of the Dead Kitten

<http://thebbb.net/ebooks/the-gifted-vol2.html>

SAKUMA, Makoto Related Works List at The BBB



The Gifted Vol.3 – The Skydiving Club

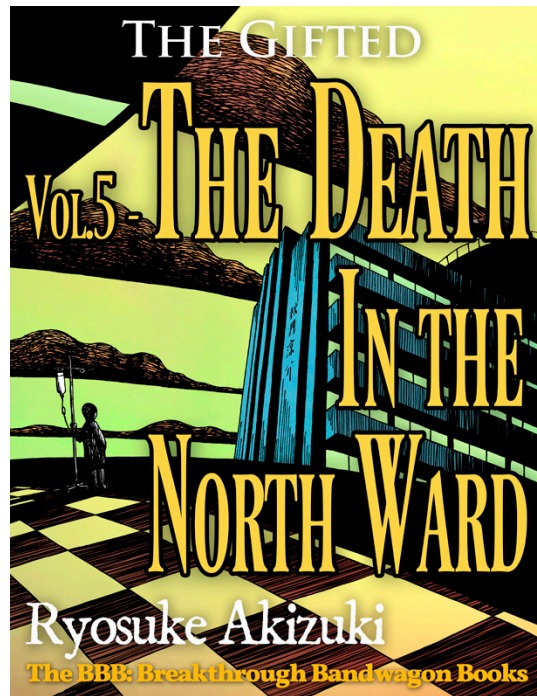
<http://thebbb.net/ebooks/the-gifted-vol3.html>



The Gifted Vol.4 – The Phantom of Gemini

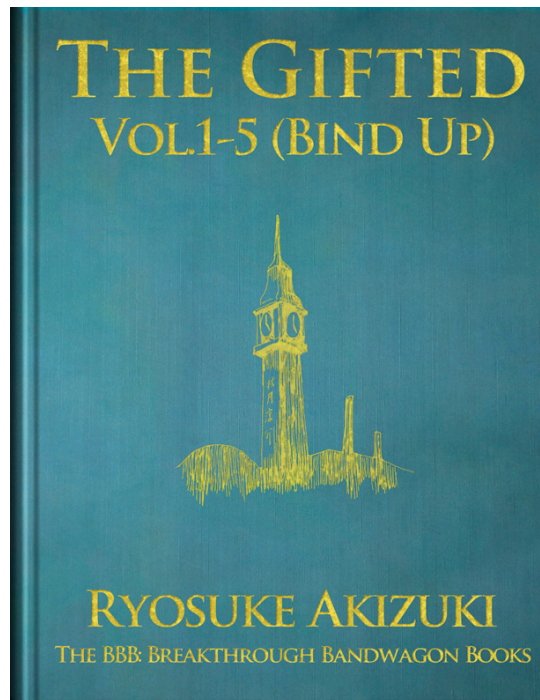
<http://thebbb.net/ebooks/the-gifted-vol4.html>

SAKUMA, Makoto Related Works List at The BBB



The Gifted Vol.5 – The Death In the North Ward

<http://thebbb.net/ebooks/the-gifted-vol5.html>



The Gifted Vol.1-5 (Bind Up)

<http://thebbb.net/ebooks/the-gifted-vol1-5.html>

SAKUMA, Makoto Related Works List at The BBB



The Gifted Vol.6 – The Spirited Away Hotel

<http://thebbb.net/ebooks/the-gifted-vol6.html>