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Comic-Con International 2006

Searching for Yoshihiro Tatsumi

by [Kat Avila](#)

I scored special guest Yoshihiro Tatsumi's autograph at **Comic-Con International** 2006. That made the San Diego convention worth the bother this year. The strange thing is I didn't think it would turn out to be such a big deal. Before the convention, I had e-mailed **Drawn & Quarterly** about Tatsumi's short story collection, **Abandon the Old in Tokyo**, second in a three-volume series, which would become first available at **Comic-Con**. This communication was executed more out of a sense of journalistic commitment, to understand the big manga picture, than as a fan.

But my respect for the "grandfather of alternative manga" grew as I watched him patiently drawing in autograph books for the handful of us at the **Drawn & Quarterly** booth. Time stopped for a few moments. It was if we were in this protective bubble, briefly shutting out the godzilla noise and confusion of the rest of **Comic-Con's** Exhibit Hall.

The next day, Saturday, I made sure not to miss the "Spotlight on Yoshihiro Tatsumi" panel. **Optic Nerve** comic artist Adrian Tomine was both the interviewer and translator. (Tomine was a special guest himself at **Comic-Con** 2004.)

Additionally a **Comic-Con** Inkpot Award recipient, Yoshihiro Tatsumi was born in 1935 in Osaka, 10 years prior to Japan's defeat in World War II. He was inspired to draw comics by **Astro Boy** creator Osamu Tezuka, who became a mentor and a good friend. Tatsumi and Tezuka had talked about coming together to **Comic-Con** a year or two before Tezuka

passed away. Tatsumi was sad they weren't able to be together at this year's convention.

Tatsumi related a story of when he was in seventh grade. Every day they had to sit through a morning address at school. There was this almost perfect kid to whom they never talked. One day this perfect student turned to Tatsumi and asked, "Did you see *Sazae-san*?" (Sazae-san is the name of Machiko Hasegawa's beloved housewife comic and anime character whose popularity remains strong.) That incident sparked Tatsumi's interest in the power of comics to move people.

Tatsumi is working on an 800-page autobiographical work about the development of his self-characterized "bleak story" *gekiga* style. He is almost done. A second project is a 200-page work that can't help but include his thoughts about death as he is in his 70s now, but he added that it is certainly not a religious work.

As intelligently and well run as Yoshiro Tatsumi's afternoon panel was, the evening "Spotlight on Yoshitaka Amano" presented by **BOOM! Studios** was not. Both the interviewer and translator sounded like non-native speakers of English. The questions were difficult to understand at times, and I was wishing for the English adaptation of the translated answers. Cellular phones were ringing. At the end of the panel, the audience rushed Amano at the front, making me recall a scene in Tatsumi's *Abandon the Old in Tokyo* where a pet monkey is set upon and killed by a gang of zoo monkeys after his well-intentioned but naive master drops him into their pen.

My disappointment with the Amano panel was followed by my bad luck at not being one of the fans whose names were pulled at the **Dark Horse Comics** booth for either Yoshitaka Amano's or Kazuo Koike's autograph signings. I had brought with me, for signature, writer Neil Gaiman and illustrator Yoshitaka Amano's *The Sandman: The Dream Hunters* and writer Kazuo Koike's *Crying Freeman* (art by Ryoichi Ikegami). I went back home, mission unfulfilled.

That made Yoshihiro Tatsumi's autograph and book all the more special. When I go to **Comic-Con International** next

year, I hope I can be surprised by another comic artist who reminds me why I continue to attend conventions. It's the discovery, feeling the excitement over an artist's work that resonates with my life, and turning into a kid again asking for the celebrity autograph.

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