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# Black Blizzard



## Synopsis

THE PREEMMINENT GEKIGA-KA'S FIRST GRAPHIC NOVEL FROM FIFTY YEARS AGO  
Created in the late 1950s, *Black Blizzard* is Yoshihiro Tatsumi's remarkable first full-length graphic novel and one of the first published examples of Gekiga. Tatsumi documented how his love for Mickey Spillane and hard-boiled crime novels led him to create this landmark genre of manga in his epic, critically acclaimed 2009 autobiography, *A Drifting Life*. With *Black Blizzard*, Tatsumi explores the dark underbelly of his working-class heroes that five decades later has made him one of the best-known Japanese cartoonists in North America. Susumu Yamaji, a twenty-four-year-old pianist, is arrested for murder and ends up handcuffed to a career criminal on the train that will take them to prison. An avalanche derails the train and the criminal takes the opportunity to escape, dragging a reluctant Susumu with him into the blizzard raging outside. They flee into the mountains to an abandoned ranger station, where they take shelter from the storm. As they sit around the fire they built, Susumu relates how love drove him to become a murderer. A cinematic adventure story, *Black Blizzard* uncovers an unlikely love story and an even unlikelier friendship.

## Book Information

Paperback: 144 pages

Publisher: Drawn and Quarterly; 1 Reprint edition (April 13, 2010)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1770460128

ISBN-13: 978-1770460126

Product Dimensions: 6.6 x 8.7 inches

Shipping Weight: 8.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars 10 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #671,407 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #111 in [Books > Comics & Graphic Novels > Publishers > Drawn and Quarterly](#) #385 in [Books > Comics & Graphic Novels > Manga > Mystery](#) #52240 in [Books > Teens](#)

## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Penned, paneled, and illustrated in just 20 days by one of the architects of the gekiga (dramatic pictures) movement in Japan, this is a prototypical work of visual pulp fiction. Two convicts escape a train wreck while handcuffed to each other. As they flee the authorities, it quickly becomes evident that one of them must sacrifice a hand in order for them to escape. Neither is willing; one man is a card shark, the other a pianist. The story and layout of the graphics are simple,

and the artwork is even crude at times. With a cinematic use of perspective, intensified via the characters and their circumstances, Tatsumi constructs a thrilling narrative with emotional depth. Originally published in 1956, when Tatsumi was only 21, *Black Blizzard* was one of his most innovative long-form stories. At the time, the story was forward thinking for comics and exhibited the ability of the visual narrative to act as a reading experience and a more sophisticated form of entertainment. The story was an achievement for Tatsumi and a cornerstone for the current genre of seinen manga. Any fan of Tatsumi, crime noir, or art house manga will want a copy of this.

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Gr 10 Up—Part of a line of classic reprints by a renowned manga creator, this early work evokes the visual and structural conventions of film noir. A depressed pianist, unable to remember if he murdered the father of the woman he loves, escapes from his prison train into a blizzard while chained to a career criminal. There are many strands of suspense: Is the protagonist a murderer? Will they escape the police? Will his companion chop off his hand in order to free them from their chains? It is difficult to accept the tension of each of these circumstances. The constant howling of the winter wind and the bleakness that the characters must navigate suitably instills a sense of hopelessness, and the criminal companion looks constantly ready to commit violence. However, this is also part of the difficulty, as the facial expressions are reduced to minor abstractions. The lack of expressive detail prevents a degree of engagement with the inner drama of the characters and instead reduces them to stock figures. The concluding expository coincidence doesn't help in this regard, and could leave readers feeling slightly cheated. Created in 1956, *Black Blizzard* is part of the Silver Age of American comics, and while its sense of storytelling and structure seems more cinematic than corresponding U.S. crime comics, the figure work may not be appreciated without historical perspective.

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I am quite familiar with Tatsumi's work, but this gem from the 50's is an entirely different, surprising animal. It's has more to do with noir fiction, as it does not portray the often bleak lives of working-class Japanese people during the 60's and 70's. The drawing style is also quite different: although quite good, it still had not reached maturity. A very well-told story with a surprising twist, worth every penny!

The story begins with a man playing the piano only to be arrested by a cop who has been looking

for him. He finds himself on a train handcuffed to another accused. The train derails and they escape with the police hot on their trail. This may not sound like the most original plot, but remember, it was originally printed in 1956, and at the time was quite cutting edge for comics in the 50s. Black Blizzard still holds up well over 50 years later! The art is simple, but the storytelling is strong. There are several twists and unexpected turns that held my interest. And the colored pages at the beginning was a nice change from the usual all black & white manga. If you are a fan of solid story telling, you'll enjoy Black Blizzard.

A wonderful read from a classic author of his art. Glad I was recommended this piece.

A quick story. More of an artifact from a great author's earlier career. Pretty simplistic but it is suspenseful.

I bought this book after reading it online for free if that says anything. Yoshihiro Tatsumi is one of my favorite authors and tells amazing stories.

For fans of classic manga, gekiga, Tezuka and manga in general, I recommend this book to you. Great story, great art and after reading Tatsumi's "A Drifting Life" it adds something to that masterful book as well. I held back one star because I am not a fan of the cover and paper. I think Drawn & Quarterly wanted it to look like an old book, the type they had back in those days, but it's a little flimsy and rough.

This gorgeously produced reprint of a 1956 pulp story by Japanese legend Tatsumi is a diverting enough 20-minute read, but doesn't contain a whole lot of depth. You learn why at the end of the book, where a brief interview with the author reveals that he wrote and illustrated it in three weeks when he was 21. Pretty impressive, but as a result the art and story definitely feel rushed. The story is a kind of hoary one that Tatsumi says was inspired by a story he read in a pulp fiction magazine. You know you're in for something minor when the author admits to being embarrassed by its republication some 50 years later. The story revolves around two criminals, who are being transported to jail in a train that derails, allowing them to escape. One is a young pianist convicted of murder, but uncertain of whether he actually did it, the other is an older man, convicted of murder for the second or third time and headed for a life sentence. Unfortunately, they are handcuffed together and there's a blizzard, so they have to survive the elements while evading the police dragnet.

Looming over them both is the issue of whether they will be able to eventually split up without someone losing a hand. It seems the pianist became involved with a girl from a circus, and encouraged her to pursue her musical dreams. However, her father discouraged her, and when he turns up dead, the pianist is arrested and convicted. The art telegraphs the groaner of a plot twist that is revealed at the end, and the whole thing ends up feeling kind of cheap. So, although the atmospheric elements of the storm are fairly evocative and cinematic, the story itself comes across as third-rate film noir. Due to the rapid production schedule, there's not much subtlety in the artwork. On the whole, if you're interested in graphic fiction, it's probably worth the very brief time it takes to read, but don't go out of your way to track it down.

In the interview contained in the back of this book he states that this work is something "I'd rather keep hidden from sight". But one has to wonder why! This is a great noir-style detective thriller about a prison break, ghostly similar to the one seen in the film "The Fugitive" with H. Ford. The comic opens with sixteen pages of color panels that sets up the story arch of the remaining book, namely a budding psychotic friendship between two convicted criminals (both murder) that discuss the events that led to their arrest and ultimately, to them being handcuffed to each other in a blizzard. The threat of either one's hand being cut off so that the other can escape is present and creates good tension. One character seems the low-life, the other the unfortunate victim of fate, but Tatsumi gives us more below the surface. This is a bit overpriced for a paperback, but looking at the overall quality (from the packaging to the touch-ups (this first released in 1956!)) I say it's a fine addition to my growing collection of underground Japanese comics. D&Q does it again. Recommended.

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