

YOSHIHIRO TATSUMI  
**A DRIFTING LIFE**



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*Yoshihiro Tatsumi , Taro Nettleton (Translator)*

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## The epic autobiography of a manga master

Acclaimed for his visionary short-story collections *The Push Man and Other Stories*, *Abandon the Old in Tokyo*, and *Good-Bye*—originally created nearly forty years ago, but just as resonant now as ever—the legendary Japanese cartoonist Yoshihiro Tatsumi has come to be recognized in North America as a precursor of today's graphic novel movement. *A Drifting Life* is his monumental memoir eleven years in the making, beginning with his experiences as a child in Osaka, growing up as part of a country burdened by the shadows of World War II.

Spanning fifteen years from August 1945 to June 1960, Tatsumi's stand-in protagonist, Hiroshi, faces his father's financial burdens and his parents' failing marriage, his jealous brother's deteriorating health, and the innumerable pitfalls that await him in the competitive manga market of mid-twentieth-century Japan. He dreams of following in the considerable footsteps of his idol, the manga artist Osamu Tezuka (*Astro Boy*, *Apollo's Song*, *Ode to Kirihito*, *Buddha*)—with whom Tatsumi eventually became a peer and, at times, a stylistic rival. As with his short-story collection, *A Drifting Life* is designed by Adrian Tomine.

## A Drifting Life Details

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Author : Yoshihiro Tatsumi , Taro Nettleton (Translator)

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## From Reader Review A Drifting Life for online ebook

### Kristine Hansen says

A monster book, at times engrossing, at times a bit tedious. This is an unexpected work, though if a manga artist were to write an autobiography, how else to do it but in the format of manga. Hundreds of pages long, this is not a 'light' read on any level. Still, it was not only enjoyable but at times inspiring. To me as a writer, I came away with the desire to create and not give up, much like our main character who set out to do something different and to redefine an art form at a time when it's really coming into its own.

Highly recommended, not just for manga lovers, but for those who long to create and accomplish something new.

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### Eddie Watkins says

Masterful, but after speedily flipping through 1 5/16" of its 2 1/16" thickness boredom set in. And reading this in conjunction with Gaddis' JR (one of whose themes is how money crowds out all other subjects) did not help matters, for *A Drifting Life* is a *bildungsroman* but instead of focusing on the artist's emotional or psychic life it concerns itself almost entirely with how the artist constantly adapts to please the public and convert that public interest into money. This does not particularly interest me. Though there were elements of objective interest in its depictions of the ins and outs of the various publishing industries in post-War Japan, and there is a nice "time-line" effect with major historical and cultural events dropped into the narrative, and I was fascinated with how manga (a comic form that at the time seemed like nothing more than book length collections of Dubble Bubble comics) could have been so popular. The only *bildungs* part of the *roman* that I unconditionally liked was the sexual awakening part, which was slightly strange and was handled sharply, but unfortunately only occupied about 1/32".

A book for and about manga wonks.

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### Stewart Tame says

This was superb! The book is basically an autobiographical account of the rise of the Japanese manga industry in the 50's and 60's. It makes a nice companion volume to Fred Schodt's classic *Manga! Manga!* Full of observed detail and incident, this book is a must for anyone with an interest in the medium. Legendary creators such as Osamu Tezuka and Takao Saito are part of the story, naturally. There's an extensive section of footnotes at the back translating some of the text appearing in the background of some panels. That's right: someone thought this book wasn't long enough and added more pages. This is a hefty volume, almost as thick as it is wide, but it reads quickly. Highly recommended!

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### Bruce says

This update follows a read of two anthologies of the short stories that brought Tatsumi fame, and cements my view of this work and its author as not worth the time.

Largely tracing his life from post-WWII middle school manga enthusiast to 25 year old struggling author, this roman-a-clef reads like a pointless and endless annotated bibliography of post-war Japanese cultural output with little window on the artist's thoughts, experiences, or actual maturation process. Primarily, we learn that Tatsumi's world was largely cloistered among men, and shaped heavily by the older brother with whom he shared a room, the boys with whom he palled and worked, and the Osakan publishing house staff who mentored him and effectively provided his apprenticeship. While there were women in his life -- his mother, a younger sister with a shy, beautiful classmate who crushed on him, a nude model, a flirtatious landlord -- they appear as rarities, primarily as objects, which is an attitude matched by those of the misogynist stories of his I read. He appears to have a terribly immature understanding of women as people, if in fact, he has any feeling or understanding of them at all.

Tatsumi presumably built his fame on the abandonment of the four-panel joke in favor of mature narratives whose visuals and urban grit departed from the fantasy animals and egg-eyed kiddie fare typical of the time to echo his rich, steady cinematic diet. Little of this conflict is depicted here, however, and the work lacks even the lurid details typical of a coming-of-age introspection. Could it be that the primary challenge of Tatsumi's formative years lay in being largely free of crises or cathartic moments? The author's body of work is said to be extensive, his output ranging from the 1950s to the present day at an average rate of 12 pages/day (!). Thus it is likely that the 400 pages of material selected from 1969 and 1970 could as much be reflective of the "Dirty Harry" era as any personal Tatsumi ethos. I hope readers who have had a different experience will share with me. Until then, what I've seen so far is plenty for my taste.

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### **Marisa says**

First of all, while this is by a legendary mangaka (manga artist), this is not a work of fast paced, action packed manga. If that's what you're looking for, I would not pick this massive volume up.

Rather, this is an artist's odyssey from a young kid obsessed with reading manga to a visionary artist and author striving to push the boundaries of his art form. It's a bit slow, some times even tedious or repetitive, but I honestly loved every second of it.

I was particularly drawn to Hiroshi's struggle between pushing manga forward and taking time to write the kinds of stories he's dreamed his whole life of creating.

All in all a really interesting memoir and my first 5 star read of the year!

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### **William Parham says**

First off, don't read this book expecting a fast paced, high energy read. This is a book about a man making manga and not a book of manga. That distinction needs to be kept in your mind at all times while reading this book. There are no wide-eyed, big titted manga babes in short skirts. There are no slick, suit wearing secret agents hiding in the bushes with silenced guns. There is a lot of crippling self doubt and talking about the way books were being published in the middle of the 20th century. And I do mean a lot. This book is mammoth, clocking in around 850 pages. (I suggest using it to press the water out of tofu when you get done reading it.)

A Drifting Life starts with the surrender of Japan in 1945 and proceeds to recount the tale of how Yoshihiro Tatsumi (in the book renamed Hiroshi Katsumi for unknown reasons) turned his all encompassing passion

for manga into a career that to a great extent redefined what manga could be. All told there are thousands of details and vignettes over a roughly 15 year span recounted in *A Drifting Life*. We get to follow along as Katsumi starts his first collective, the Children's Manga Association in the 7th grade, through the sometimes bitter rivalries between the different manga publishing houses, and into the creation of the darker and grittier form of manga called gekiga and the rise and fall of the Gekiga Workshop. Throughout all of this we are given little montages of historical trivia that help contextualize what is going on in the narrative.

The story at its core is a bildungsroman, but the even handed treatment of every scene makes few moments stand out as important enough to be an essential moment of a life. Even Hiroshi's awkward fumbblings toward sexual maturity get glossed over as quickly as a comment on where Hiroshi's buddies eat their meals. One can not say what were the moments that led to changing the face of modern manga. Everything comes across in a very "and then this happened" manner. Tatsumi writes with the voice of a school teacher explaining how Japan was changing in the post war years. The pace of the text is nearly glacial. Tatsumi's stand-in does indeed drift through life. Sometimes pulled along by the current and other times making decisions that usually end up with several panels of Hiroshi rubbing his head and worrying if he has made the right move.

That is not to say that the story is boring. The reader gets an in depth education in the world of mid-century manga publication, and a whose who of manga artists and writers trod the boards over the course of the book. If you know a lot about Japanese comics you will learn quite a bit more about the people and books that helped build the revolution in manga that occurred during the 1950's. History buffs should also get a thrill out of this. The reader is given a lot of insight into how it felt to be Japanese during post war reconstruction. Even if you don't care about manga and history, the story of a man in the process of becoming is still powerful. Taking a peak into the life of this quiet, awkward genius is a very rewarding experience. The moments when Hiroshi makes a creative breakthrough are universal in their appeal. Everyone can relate to these moments in which there is a clarity of purpose and everything seems to be leading somewhere.

The major problem with this book is that those universal moments of clarity don't really lead us anywhere. At least within the confines of the book. We, as readers, have to know how the story ends. We are expected to understand that Tatsumi-san stands as one of the all-time greats of the genre. We are expected to know that he finally goes on to create the type of books that he struggles throughout *A Drifting Life* to write. If we don't know these things, we are left with a book that reads slightly like a text book and slightly like the story of a boring everyman that just can't seem to get it together enough to make that big break happen. The fact that most readers in the english speaking world have gotten little opportunity to read the works of Yoshihiro Tatsumi is much of the issue. Thankfully Drawn & Quarterly, the publisher of this translation have released three volumes of Tatsumi's short story work. Hopefully between those editions and the publication of *A Drifting Life*, Yoshiro Tatsumi will be as well known in the west as Osamu Tezuka (Tatsumi's hero and literary forefather) or Takao Saito (his friend and literary contemporary).

Even though the book is gargantuan it is a quick read. The text is not overly complex and the artwork is clean and clear. There are a few moments that the panel layout looks a bit off because of the way that Drawn & Quarterly have rearranged the book to read left to right instead of right to left in the Japanese style, but these pages are not distractingly off. There is an appendix in the rear of the book that gives some additional translations of Japanese words in the panels. This is handy, but the size of the book does make it a tad awkward to flip back and forth. Footnotes and annotations would have been a great addition to the book, but probably would have put the page count into the unbindable range. Google and Wikipedia are your friends if the names don't ring enough bells for you.

I can't safely recommend this book to everyone, but to those that enjoy memoir or are interested in the history of manga or Japan in the post-war period, I can't think of a more enjoyable way to learn a little.

Now excuse me, I have some tofu to press...

## Sam Quixote says

The book starts in 1948 where the author is 13 years old and embarking on single panels of manga and sending it into magazines, and finishes in 1960 when the author is 25 and a successful author of manga and a new style he created, "gekiga". The book is autobiographical, taking in details of Tatsumi's (renamed Katsumi Hiroshi in the book) home life, his ill brother, his philandering father, his dedicated mother, and moving him through high school becoming progressively interested and committed to manga, until he becomes a full time manga artist and writer. The cultural and political history of Japan is documented as well but the main focus is on the development of manga in this postwar era and how it developed over these years.

This is the best book I've read all year, comic books or otherwise, for so many reasons. The story is so well written and drawn throughout. We see Tatsumi's self doubt and determination to become a strong artist throughout and his admiration of artists he met when he started, particularly the superb Tezuka Osamu, but you can't help but notice Tatsumi today has surpassed Tezuka in skill to a whole new level. He writes ironically about attempting long works (48 pages! he gasps) all the while the reader is holding in their hands an 834 page book.

And its not at all a struggle to read through all 834 pages. The story is so compelling that by the end I could genuinely read another 800 pages. The story of the manga artists is well told with its highs, betrayals, sense of adventure, creation, and originality all done by guys in their early 20s.

Tatsumi does seem to "drift" into manga. While he wanted to become an artist in high school he quickly becomes a known name and ends up moving from Osaka to Tokyo and then becoming a contributing artist to half a dozen magazines, producing books, editing short story collections, editing magazines, and then starting the "gekiga" movement singlehandedly - he's only 25 years old by the end of the book!

Its such a great comic book and deserves to be up there alongside "Maus" and "Watchmen" as one of the masterpieces of the genre. It's certainly Tatsumi's masterpiece. I also recommend getting the recently republished "Black Blizzard", one of Tatsumi's best loved books, and one of his works he writes about creating in "A Drifting Life" so its good to read alongside this book. Even if you're not a comic book fan this is a great book and one of the highlights of 2009 publishing.

A virtuoso piece, a career best, a true masterpiece from one of the best comic book writer/artists that ever lived, I can't recommend this highly enough.

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## Nnedi says

currently about 100 pages in...gah, boring. hopefully it gets better. i mean, he never goes in to what DRIVES him to draw. as a kid, was he really ONLY about drawing? ugh, what a childhood. he just talks about how he slowly got published- blah.

i'll give it another 100 pages in a few days but he better amp it up a bit.

Some Wks Later:

I give up. This graphic novel is boring me to DEATH. I hate to be harsh but...I mean, he never delves into his personal life. It's just about his focus on his art. What artist has such a one track mind? Where do his ideas COME from if all he thinks about 24/7 is getting published and who he admires and how his brother has issues (which he never really goes into)? It's very distant and impersonal. This is the first graphic novel I've ever been bored by. I guess there's a first time for everything. It's a shame because this book was so nice and thick and I love thick books... and there are so few huge graphic novels this size. Sigh.

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### **Alex Robinson says**

I really wanted to like this book but was somewhat disappointed. I think part of it was that there was a lot of discussion about Japanese comics which went over my head so if you're more familiar with the artists he's talking about you may find it more compelling than I did.

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### **J says**

I expected more from this, having been a huge fan of the author's collections of shorter pieces like "Abandon the Old in Tokyo." Here, each chapter is about the length of those shorter stories but the narrative often lacks any kind of energy.

Ach, will the hero publish with this manga house or that one? Well, a couple chapters of these kinds of dilemmas go a long way, but Tatsumi spends more than the necessary time in his 800ish pages putting his thinly veiled autobiographical stand-in through this scenario. That can be exciting to live and a compelling formative experience but nothing really seems to grow out of that. By the 700 page range, the hero, Katsumi (verrrry thinly veiled), is still having these same struggles and it's rather dull to hear about them yet again.

Worse still, in a gigantic tome dealing with manga history from one of those history makers, I wanted to see a lot more of the samples of the kind of manga being put out, both by the hero and his contemporaries. How are we supposed to sincerely get a sense of how Tatsumi's groundbreaking work broke ground if we can't see lots of it and how it changed and what it was up against? We see a lot of covers and some small samples, but it all feels so cursory.

We follow the hero from teenage years to middle-age and he's a decent enough sort, his physicality a mirror of Tatsumi's sad sack protagonists in his other manga titles. His friends are a lively crew and save for his manga wring brother his family are nearly non-entities. There's some good stuff with his ne'er do well father but unfortunately (for me) not enough. This is a manga history primarily, not an autobiography per se, so rascalion parents who aren't big manga names get the short end of the inkbrush, so to speak.

The stories are neatly paced and devoid of the slapsticky elements most people associate with manga, perhaps Tatsumi's most lasting contribution to Japanese comics. The concerns are everyday ones, which is where the author's strength really lies despite his dreams of crafting an epic. This certainly isn't it, though it does possess the physical heft of an epic.

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### **Tosh says**

Tatsumi is a poetic genius when he's writing about the every-day man in Osaka (or is it Tokyo?) dealing

with their various sexual fantasies, etc. But here we have a massive book regarding the history of post-war manga - and for me it's a fascinating history. For other people it may be not that interesting.

Since I am a publisher, I am always obsessed by publishing trends in the past. And this book is heaven sent to me, because I am very much interested in Japanese pop culture of the post-war years. And what you are getting is not water-down information, but detailed opinions and inside history in how manga changed over the years. Also a time-line of sorts dealing with Japanese films or pop stars that made a huge impression in those years.

So in a sense, this is a very unique volume, and I am thankful to read and see it.

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## **Peter Derk says**

Holy lord, that bastard was long. I mean long. I mean like [Apatow joke] long.

This epic graphic novel follows the life of Yoshihiro Tatsumi, from a young manga fan to a writer to, apparently, a manga master.

I don't know much about manga, so don't take my ignorance here as a slam on ol' Yoshi.

The best parts were the stories from his personal life, and the small details about living in post WWII Japan were interesting. For example, it was years after the war before Japanese citizens were allowed to drink Coca-Cola. It was all saved for the occupiers, I guess. Ah, freedom.

On the flipside, most chapters start with little historical bits that don't really mean a lot to me, what was going on culturally, especially pop-culturally, in Japan at the time. The big movies, the big songs, and so on.

Here is where the review borders on culturally insensitive. Brace yourselves.

I had a hell of a time connecting to these parts because they all read like this to me:

[Japanese name] came out with [bizarre magazine name] which revolutionized manga with its [Japanese word] style.

I shit you not, there must be a couple hundred different Japanese names in this book, and being only a seven-year student of Japanese, wink, I had a hell of a time keeping them straight, and eventually I just skipped them over if I had a sense that the characters weren't sticking around long.

On the plus, this almost seems like a book made for Western audiences, by which I mean the boys look like boys, the girls look like girls, and the characters look different from each other. It's super not okay to say that all people of a certain type look the same, but I think it's okay to say something like, "All the men Frank Quitely DRAWS look the same," and it's honestly a problem I have with a lot of Japanese comics. But this one, between its differentiated characters (Flop of Hair in Front Guy, Beret Man, Glasses Dude) left-to-right style, and fairly consistent layout is a breezy read for most comic folks.

The art is tidy and well-expressed, and there's a definite impressive quality to the simplicity of the drawings that is worth a looksie. Outside of that, I can't honestly think of much reason to read this unless you're a fan of the man or really interested in the history of manga, but a history ending thirty years ago.

## Andrew says

First thing's first: this is not a review. In fact, do not trust my critical opinion on this book at all. I'm in love with it, and I have been since first laying my hands on the original Japanese manuscript and the Microsoft Word translation document back in May 2008. If you want my opinion, anyone with even a passing interest in *graphica* and/or *manga* and *gekiga* should pick this brick of a book up. It's epic, sweeping, and an absolute joy to get caught up in.

But again, might be best to make up your own minds on this particular piece, as I have had more of myself invested in this project than in any other book I've worked on to date.

Back in May 2008, as part of my Masters Degree in Publishing, I embarked on an internship with Drawn & Quarterly in Montréal. It was to be a three-month stint, after which I'd come home, write up my thesis, and hang up my educational spurs (until I finally decide to torment myself further by tackling a PhD... one of these days).

My second week at work for Drawn & Quarterly, I was handed two rather obscene stacks of paper. The first was 820 pages of photocopies—the original Japanese-language version of the 48-chapter epic (then tentatively titled *A Drifting Life in Gekiga*), and the second was the printed page-by-page translation, written out to minimal effect in Word. I was given three tasks: the first was to read through the story with the translation in hand, to make sure it read well and was compelling; the second was to catch any and all parts that, editorially speaking, made little sense (including basic grammatical problems and structural issues and matching each section of the translation with each panel in the text—something that the translator neglected to do); and the final part of this multi-stage reading was to catch the inconsistencies between Japanese and English structures—namely, seeing which panels had to be flipped, to ensure that the speech bubbles work properly in each scene to read the dialogue and action from left to right and not right to left, as is how Japanese books are read.

Upon completion of this work, the documents cycled between us in Montréal, the translator in Japan, the editor-in-chief of the project in Los Angeles, and eventually myself back in Vancouver. Interspersed with all the other work I was doing at Drawn & Quarterly, *A Drifting Life* always came back to me at another stage of its progress. It wasn't long before I realized two things: I had my thesis topic buried in the construction of this book, and I would see it to the end, no matter what. And that's exactly what I did.

I left Montréal late that August, a changed man in many ways, with *A Drifting Life* in tow. The next three weeks were a caffeine-fuelled haze as I input the English-language text into each and every speech bubble across more than 800 pages, simultaneously noting the items needed for an appendix (things that couldn't be translated because they were a part of the artwork). Once that was finished, I immediately followed up one marathon with another and got to work on my thesis—a paper documenting the history of comics and *manga*, the correlations between the two, and the production of *A Drifting Life* from start to glorious finish.

From the fall, through the winter and into the early stages of the following spring, I finished my work on the book, giving the project and its appendix a round of final proofs, and completed work on my thesis, which was accepted in December 2008, bringing my whirlwind Masters Degree in Publishing to a dramatic close. Around February or March 2009, I received a package in the mail from Drawn & Quarterly. My heart practically stopped as I pulled out a copy of the book, which was then and is today the most beautiful book in my collection. Even with everything I've had my hand in since, in a lot of ways my work on *A Drifting Life* has come to represent a very precise period in my life—a period of great change, a tremendous amount of

growing up, and a time when I discovered what I was truly capable of (and how many hours it was possible for me to go without sleep).

In May of 2009, I was able to bring the work full circle, when I flew out to Toronto to meet the man himself, Yoshihiro Tatsumi, and the editor-in-chief of the project, Adrian Tomine. The signed copy of the book (with an original illustration no less) that sits on my shelf at home is the one item I would race to grab if my apartment were on fire. There's little in terms of material objects I treasure more, and there's nothing I've worked on that has as much of myself poured into it, save for my own writing projects.

Yet with all this, I had not read the book. Let me clarify: I read it more than a dozen times while working on it, and subsequently writing about it, but I had not once read the finished product for enjoyment.

I corrected this three days ago, sitting in a Second Cup on Jasper Avenue in downtown Edmonton with a gingerbread latte in one hand and the book in the other as I waited the four or five hours I had before my flight home for Christmas.

As I read the book, seemingly for the first time as a reader and not a student/editor/production grunt, I was struck by how much I was still in love with the story. Chronicling the author's youth and introduction into the manga scene in 1940s post-war Japan, there is a lot of *A Drifting Life* that I feel a kinship with—namely the struggle one has with their artistic desires in a world that will forever value practicality and production first and foremost. But what I was happiest about, reading it again, in some ways for the first time, was that I was able to detach from it—to enjoy it for what it was, without my interaction with the book being at the forefront of my brain. I wasn't looking for mistakes, or areas where I could have done a better job; rather I was losing myself to the narrative without having to force myself to do so.

What I did feel, reading it in that extended coffee shop sitting, was a strong sense of reflection. In many ways, *A Drifting Life* is representative of the many turns my life has taken in recent months and years. I was able to live, albeit for a short time, a dream I had had since elementary school: working with comics. As someone with strong visual and narrative ideals, the form has the ability to represent the best of both worlds. I was certainly changed by the experience—and the location—which fostered so much personal growth and a divergence from the safety I had come to surround myself with.

After completing my degree, I hit a wall. I couldn't find work in publishing if my life depended on it. Sure I was able to get freelance editorial gigs here and there, but something stable and dependable with a 9-5 schedule? Ha!

For two years I applied, interviewed, and got nowhere. Maybe I didn't know the right people, maybe I just lived in the wrong location, or maybe I just wasn't good enough. Either way, the literary fish weren't biting. But late last year, I had an opportunity I never thought would come—an offer from a filmmaker friend to write a spec script on an idea he had brewing for some time. I took the chance and tackled the project. Over several months, from the end of 2009 to the middle of 2010, I wrote like a mad fool. In between editorial contracts and job applications, I wrote the script, and really fell hard into short story writing. I began submitting my writing work after completing and selling the script, and eventually, in the middle of this year, gained traction—finally getting a story published. Since then, my world has taken off, albeit in an unexpected direction.

A bite, from a small literary publisher in Edmonton, Alberta called NeWest Press. In August, I picked up my life and moved one province to the east to begin work as the production and marketing coordinator for NeWest, finally giving myself not only the stability I was craving, but also the opportunity to expand upon my writing and freelance editorial work. Since moving, I've had the opportunity to get to know many authors and to increase my presence in the publishing community, which I had sought to become a greater part of for several years. I've seen several books through at various stages of their production, and I've had a chance to

dip my toes into marketing in a way that I had not ever had reason to before. I've even had the tremendous opportunity of dealing with publishing on a national stage as one of our books has been thrust into the limelight as a 2011 CBC Canada Reads finalist.

All of this has given me such a push, a feeling of momentum that I had been missing for so long. Since beginning this job, my freelance work has picked up, the film has gone into pre-production, and I've begun posting my short fiction and book reviews online, to increasing exposure. I've stepped out of my shell, my comfort zone, in ways I had never expected, and in the process have met people from around the industry—and around the world—that have changed me in incredible ways.

To look at myself only two years ago and to look at myself now is to look at two completely different individuals. But to trace the path from one to the next is to start in the simplest of places—with one hell of a thick book and a level of devotion I never knew was in me.

A Drifting Life was the starter pistol in a new chapter. I stumbled for the first few metres, but eventually I found my footing and only now the race has begun. As I've reached this point in my life and met several long-term goals, I can look back on this stretch of time and the growth included—both good and bad experiences alike—and see how much I've changed for the better, how much stronger and more experienced I have become, and most importantly, that I have absolutely no idea what's next.

I've been adrift for long enough. And like Hiroshi, the protagonist of the book at the heart of all this, my focus—my passion—is what it has always been. Only now I know that I'm capable of achieving it.

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### **Janice says**

The 800 or so pages of this book are initially a little daunting, but I was hooked on this book from the very beginning. It's a kind of 'portrait of the artist as a young man.' But it's also the story of the development of manga publishing in Japan as well as of Japan itself and the morale of the Japanese in the post-war period. It's interesting to see Hiroshi's (Tatsumi writes about himself in the third person, giving his character the name Hiroshi) growth from 7th grader sending postcard manga into manga contests to an increasingly confident artist courted by different manga publishers. Tatsumi portrays Hiroshi's struggle to push the limits of manga storytelling (in the process he creates longer graphic narratives for which he coins the term "gekiga") as well as the politicking done by both artists and publishers. Of the relationships that he depicts, that between Hiroshi and his older brother Okimasa is the most complex: Okimasa is a fellow manga fan, a mentor, a rival, and a colleague, as well as a brother. (Hiroshi surpasses Okimasa in the world of manga, despite Okimasa's early promise as an artist, in part because of the older boy's debilitating pleurisy.) But Tatsumi also portrays, quite touchingly, Tatsumi's relationships with "sensei" such as Osama Tezuka, whom he reveres. He also shows Hiroshi's earliest awkward encounters with young women. Though I don't really know anything about manga, I was surprised by how thoroughly I enjoyed this book. Maybe that's because it's about manga but also just about someone growing up and figuring out his way in, to use a cliché, an increasingly complex world.

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### **Mavis Ros says**

*"In high school, working on manga was fun, but now that it was a way to make a living, it felt different somehow."*

For a massive comic, it turns out to be such an influential read coming from a legendary Japanese manga artist. So not only do we experience the ups and downs of a struggling artist, but the culture and history of Japan throughout. It's that fascinating especially for artists like me to get into.

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