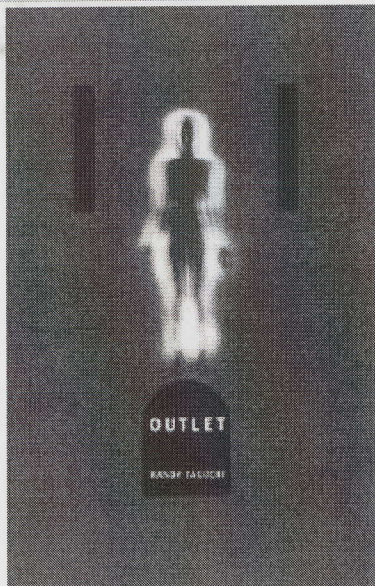


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Outlet by Randy Taguchi

Vertical Trade: ISBN 1932234047 PubDate: 10/01/03

Review by Ernest Lilley

272 pgs. List price \$ 16

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Shamanism and magical realism collide with life in contemporary Japan, or any part of the global corporate community in this bestselling first novel by Japanese internet columnist Randy Taguchi in its first English translation.

Yuki is a thirty something Japanese woman, a freelance financial writer who is fascinated by the rise and fall of stocks and fortunes, watching their ebbs and flows, the cause and effect of events and valuations. She is intensely rational, subjecting the world to analytical scrutiny, and keeps her emotions locked away, where they can't do her any harm. Her one vice is lust.

Sudden and uncontrollably she couples with the men that pass through her world, giving herself over to total sexual abandon. It's worth noting that though sex figures prominently into the story, and though Yuki is someone that men keep coming back for more of, the sex isn't as much erotic as it is

spiritual.

When her brother is discovered rotting on the kitchen floor in his apartment, and Yuki goes home to help her family with the funeral, something insider her is unlocked, and suddenly she not only sees dead people, but more importantly, she smells death on the living.

Yuki goes back to her past, first to the funeral and her abusive father, then to the psychology professor she had an affair with ten years before, trying to understand what is happening to her, and why her brother gave up on life. As the book progresses, her contact with reality becomes more and more tenuous, and her connection to something beyond this reality, whether madness, the spiritual universe, or both, becomes more and more overwhelming.

The translation, by Glynne Walley, works well, and **Outlet** provides a compelling narrative. The world in the story feels more like an urban everycity than not. Largely, that's due to the pervasive globalism that Yuki has immersed herself in to hide from her emotions and her spirituality. Some of the Japanese culture slips through: tightly knit neighborhoods, love hotels, rice paddies along the road to the home Yuki grew up in.

In many ways this book reminded me of **Coyote Cowgirl**, by Kin Antieau ([review](#)), where a young woman in the American Southwest finds her spiritual gifts with the help of a crystal skull, and connects with the people around her through food. Though Yuki and Jeanne, Kim's character, are very different people, and their quests lead them through different landscapes, they both lead to a reexamination of spirituality in modern life, and are both though provoking narratives. Interestingly, though I'd rather not give it away, they both have the same spiritual guide. For all they have in common, the two books have completely different tones. **Coyote Cowgirl** is liberally laced with humor, while **Outlet**, seen through Yuki's eyes, conveys her karmic state: intent, serious, and more than a little scared. **Outlet** focuses on the difficulty of the spiritual journey from 21st century drone to spiritually awareness.

Outlet is the first of three books, though it reads perfectly well as a standalone. Originally published in Japanese in 2000, it is followed by *Antenna* and *Mosaic*.

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