

5/12-18/2004

Five hundred
were murdered

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—Nelson DeMille

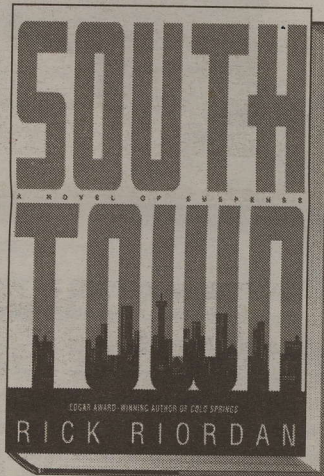
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& OPPORTUNITY

(your summer vacation!)

with a vengeance
(Kirkus Reviews)
phony, and Shamus
thor Rick Riordan.

wise-cracking, bone-
re is on the trail of
Tres discovers that
right thing can take
wrong side of town,
n SOUTHTOWN.



"Adrenaline-juiced"* suspense from
the author of *Trial by Ice and Fire*.

Agent Antonio Burns is assigned to protect the one man in the world who takes more risks than he does: his brother Roberto, the ex-con/addict who's baiting the FBI's trap for a cop-killing drug lord. Soon, both of them will be **CROSSING THE LINE**.



suspense with an
ops of detectives

Braut fishing in Japan: Takahashi unfair to Aristophanes!

SAYONARA, GANGSTERS
By Genichiro Takahashi
Translated by Michael Emmerich
Vertical, 311 pp.
\$19.95

TATTOO YOU

BY ED PARK

"Perhaps, when we are very old, people will write 'Brautigans,' just as we now write novels," wrote Lew Welch in the *San Francisco Chronicle and Examiner* back in 1968.

Haruki Murakami's work occasionally captures something of Richard Brautigan's melancholy whimsy (and penchant for mind-melting, hit-or-miss metaphors), but the late American writer seemed to be the only one who could convincingly write Brautigans. Until now: Genichiro Takahashi gets as close as I've seen with his newly translated 1982 debut, *Sayonara, Gangsters*, a thrillingly unhinged perpetual-motion machine full of absurd sex and violence, greased with the awesome confidence of a writer so committed to thumbing his nose at convention that he discovers caverns of wonder deep within said schnozz. (See hit-or-miss metaphors, above.) The text careens from serene (chapters as long as a line of dialogue) to silly (a climaxing woman shouts out the first line of *Finnegans Wake* instead of her lover's name) to spastic: from interpolated manga and a tattoo (hello, *Slaughterhouse-Five*) to dingbats and diagrams and a Dada-worthy typographical representation of an accident in a noisy iron factory. The least that can be said is that you never know what's coming next.

The book begins like a delirious cross between *Mumbo Jumbo* and *Les Vampires*, as John Smith Jr., the 69th U.S. president (and the seventh to take office that year alone), denounces the death-dealing, globe-spanning Gangsters, before succumbing to a piece of booby-trapped gum. This story line fades, as the narrator, a poetry teacher named "Say-



Illustration by Akemi Matsunae

Cats can read and humans can fly: Takahashi

onara, Gangsters" (Brautigan's most famous book, *Trout Fishing in America*, has a character named Trout Fishing in America), gives an intimate portrait of his laughable literary career and a strange, sad account of the loss of his daughter, whose death is announced by postcard prior to its occurrence. The poetry school where he teaches hosts an odd parade of students, from the quirky to the downright hallucinatory. This conceit gives Takahashi the freedom to spin out numerous tangents, dropping or developing them as the spirit moves him. Virgil pops by, except he's a refrigerator—good for a chuckle, but Takahashi gets even more mileage out of the bard-as-appliance as it recounts a bash at which the insults fly ("Where's Aristophanes? Your comedies suck, you hear that? S-U-C-K spells SUCK, and man do your comedies SUCK.").

In this chaotic evil world, cats can read, people morph into hallways or sprout wings, and explanations are as rare as the dodo. One of our hero's pupils is a description-defying whatsit known flatly as "Some Incomprehensible Thing." Puzzled as to its purpose, it ultimately welds itself to a chair, and readers may find the same thing happening once they crack open Takahashi's brisk, bizarre Brautigans.

Unlike you, this teenager got her fantasy novel published

THE PROPHECY OF THE STONES
By Flavia Bujor
Miramax Books/Hyperion, 386 pp.
\$16.95

crushing creativity, against the citizens of Fairytale, where individuality and imagination reign. À la Joan of Arc, the girls lead the charge. Among many adventures, they use the eponymous stones to commune with the people of one town the news that the time to rebel is nigh. In another, they escape the talons of fearsome raptors in an effort to find Oon-

STONE READING