

# Rising Sums

When Ioannis Mentzas and Hiroki Sakai launched Vertical Press in 2001, the publishers knew they faced a challenge in bringing mainstream Japanese authors to U.S. audiences. According to Mentzas, the company's editorial director, the general thinking was that American readers wouldn't be interested in the middle-of-the-road titles Vertical wanted to feature.

Neither Mentzas nor Sakai agreed. Their goal was simple: Take the most thrilling, gripping Japanese authors they can find and

bring them to readers in the U.S. Two years and 10 titles later, it seems they're on to something. Since the April release of Koji Suzuki's *Ring*, Vertical's initial title, the company's output has grown steadily. Now, Vertical is gearing up for 2004, with 20 new titles expected.

*Ring* proved to be a good first choice. A hit as a book and a movie (*Ringu*) in Japan, the story had

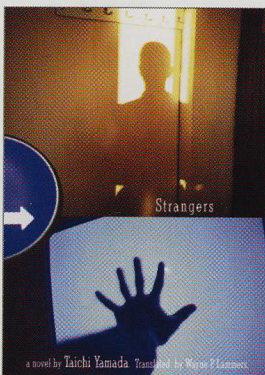
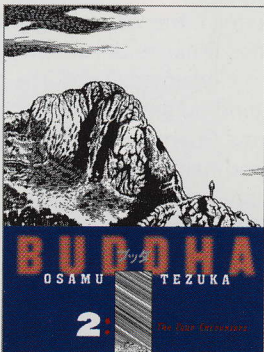
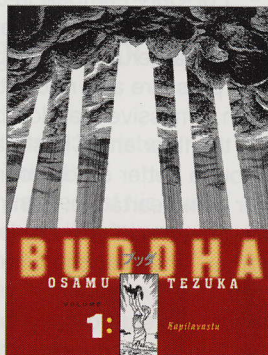
already reached American filmgoers as the creepy thriller *The Ring* in 2002. Vertical followed with three volumes in Kaoru

Kurimoto's hugely successful 100-volume *Guin Saga*, a fantasy classic that has sold more than 25 million copies in Japan; two volumes of the late Osamu Tezuka's eight-volume graphic novel *Buddha*; *Strangers*, an award-winning ghost story by screenwriter Taichi Yamada; and Kenzo Kitakata's hardboiled thriller *Ashes*.

"The number-one concern for choosing which authors to publish is their viability in the U.S.," Mentzas

says. That doesn't mean they have to have been superstars in Japan, although several on the Vertical roster are. The main thing, he says, is they have to be good.

"I'd like to think it's something [American readers] can't find elsewhere," Mentzas says. "This is for people who've read all the [Stephen] King, read all the [Dean] Koontz," he says, but want to read more of the same. "We're offering the best in these genres." —Todd Peterson



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to concentrate."

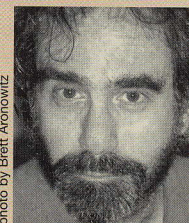


photo by Brett Anonowitz

## Richard Meltzer (Autumn Rhythm)

"At the moment, I'm writing much more than I'm reading. I take a peek at Edmond Jabès' *The Book of Resemblances* once in a while. Books I recommend include Kerouac's *Big*

*Sur* (one of the great books in the English language), Raymond Chandler's *The Long Goodbye*, Barney Nagler's *James Norris and the Decline of Boxing*. You can't beat Faulkner. *The Sound and the Fury*, *Light in August*, *Wild Palms*, and this really delightful one that probably nobody reads, *The Hamlet*."



photo by John Earle

## Jayne Ann Krentz (Truth or Dare)

"I'm reading Christine Feehan's *Shadow Game*. My nightstand is piled with research: G. William Domhoff's *The Scientific Study of Dreams* and Karen Halttunen's *Murder Most Foul:*

*The Killer and the American Gothic Imagination*. (Yes, I sleep very well, thank you. What makes you ask?) While writing, my reading is research-oriented, but I make exceptions for favorites: Robert Parker, Jennifer Crusie, Susan Elizabeth Phillips, and Elizabeth Lowell. After all, reading terrific popular fiction is like drinking red wine: very good for the heart."



photo by Henry Diltz

## Sam Kashner (When I Was Cool)

"Right now, I'm on a James Baldwin kick—rereading *The Fire Next Time* and *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone*. I've also got *Mr. S.* (which I love) by Frank Sinatra's valet. Whenever

someone asks me to recommend a book, I usually say *Lost Illusions* by Balzac or *A Sentimental Education* by Flaubert. Things haven't really changed that much for young people coming to the big city to make their fame and fortune."