

Tokyo Babylon

The Complete Series

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Introduction

Tokyo Babylon is one of CLAMP's earlier works, and though it sets the stage for the team's apocalyptic **X/1999** series, it also stands on its own. **Tokyo Babylon** follows the adventures of Sumeragi Subaru, the head of Sumeragi clan and an *onmyoji*, or a master of spirits, more powerful than any other of his generation. Subaru, though only 16, manages to exorcise ghosts as much through talking to them as through magical means. At his side is his twin sister, Hokuto, who provides a hyper sense of humor to the proceedings and takes advantage of Subaru's giving nature by dressing him up in every elaborate outfit she can think of, much to Subaru's chagrin. Her brightness is mirrored in their caretaker and neighbor, the older but equally cheerful Sakurazuka Seishiro, a veterinarian and sorcerer with his own legendary pedigree. Seishiro is, in fact, the heir to the Sakurazuka clan, historically enemies of the Sumeragi clan, assassins by trade, and practitioners of the dark opposite of Subaru's magic.

This odd trio takes on case after case, and though Subaru does most of the work, Seishiro will step in to defend Subaru. On the surface, Seishiro appears to be everything the Sumeragi twins need -- a confidant, a friend, and a guardian -- but every once in a while he seems to display an alarmingly cold side. Could he be something different from what the Sumeragi assume?

The city of Tokyo is essentially a character within these tales, dominant both visually and in spirit. As Seishiro says early in Volume One, Tokyo is an example of the pinnacle of man's civilization, both its glories and its vices, and, "Where else on earth do so many people enjoy their descent into destruction?" The reference to Babylon in this series' title is no accident, and that doomed city and the clever foreshadowing within each volume indicates that despite the initial cheerful tone, this story will end a tragedy.

One note about content here: within the **Tokyo Babylon** series, there is essentially a romance going on between Subaru and Seishiro, though much of it is teasing rather than any serious declarations. Part of it is the sheer drama that Hokuto latches on to -- the star-crossed nature of the two descendants of warring clans falling in love is too delicious for her to resist. Part of it is also complicated by the fact that Seishiro does not apparently have all his cards on the table, so no one can quite tell how serious he is. This does mean, though, that there is a constant stream of jokes in which Seishiro discusses marriage, petulantly complains of not being attractive enough, and asks the befuddled Subaru if he finds him sexy. The fact that Seishiro is 25 and Subaru is 16 may well throw some readers.

Art

CLAMP's style is well known by now, and here in **Tokyo Babylon** they let fly with the *sakura*, or cherry tree, petals. One of the more remarkable aspects of this series are Hokuto's fanciful outfits for both herself and Subaru -- one gets the impression Subaru provides an excellent living doll for all of Hokuto's and

CLAMP's whims of design. The use of gray tones, repeated images, and careful layout are all as elegant as usual here, and symmetry is used especially well to draw visual connections between events and characters. The detailed renderings of Tokyo's buildings and locations add a fine authenticity to the background.

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Tokyo Babylon Volume 1

ISBN: 1591828716

By CLAMP

Tokyopop, 2004

In this volume, we are introduced to our cast of characters -- and though Hokuto is hit by the Exposition Fairy in a fairly obvious way, once we get all the explanations of who's who out of the way, the stories take off. Subaru deals deftly with a number of possessions, including a hilarious instance of an unlucky woman's suit being possessed by all of the ill will of shoppers who longed for but didn't purchase the garment. A slightly more serious confrontation comes when the ghost of a suicide threatens to destroy one of the observation decks on Tokyo Tower. Both Subaru and Seishiro arrive and their opposite ways of viewing the world, Subaru from innocence, Seishiro from a cynical practicality, are needed to persuade the ghost away from destruction. The volume ends on a spookier note. Subaru is haunted by a dream from childhood of a vaguely threatening encounter with an older boy by a cherry tree. At times, he feels there's a connection between this memory and Seishiro, and Seishiro himself seems to indicate a truth behind this dream when the three companions take a trip to Ueno Park to enjoy the spring blossoms.

One of the nicest aspects of Tokyopop's translation of this series is a helpful glossary at the back explaining key locations and untranslated words (such as food). **Tokyo Babylon** was written for an audience who knows Tokyo, and as most Western readers do not, the help is much appreciated. Equally helpful is the index to sound effects, as they are not translated on the page.

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Tokyo Babylon Volume 2

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By CLAMP

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The opening pages of volume 2 reaffirm that CLAMP are masters of dramatic layout, pulling out all of the cinematic stops they can to create drama with just a few lines of dialogue and powerful images. The sequence here follows an examination of both outsiders and dreamers, and focuses on the two Sumeragi twins. Subaru is called home to visit with his grandmother, and their conversations about the Sakurazuka clan and Subaru's reluctance to admit Seishiro as a friend nicely underscore Subaru's nagging doubts about his friend. Subaru's latest case, however, involves a childhood friend who's been asleep for 4 months with no sign of waking. In exploring this girl's mind, and assessing his own dreams and memories, Subaru discovers the power of dreams and memories to confuse reality as well as make it clearer. The final story shows Hokuto is not only an infectious personality but also a practiced fighter, a brave defender, and most of all, a good friend to have on your side. There is some mature content addressed in this volume, including rape and prostitution, but these issues are presented both subtly and with grace. As always, everything is implied, not explicit, which may be the best way to explain CLAMP's overall storytelling style in this

series.

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Tokyo Babylon Volume 3

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While this series continues to focus on Subaru's caseload, clues are starting to mount pointing to that fact that Seishiro has another more threatening agenda. In this volume, CLAMP hints at the **X/1999** future as Subaru gets entangled with a group of teenage girls meddling in dark magic. Each is convinced that they are the powerful chosen ones, "destined to be part of the end of the world" (as the characters, including Subaru and Seishiro, in **X/1999** in fact are). These girls, bullied and neglected in their lives, escape using 900 numbers, the equivalent of chat rooms over the phone lines. They are discovered by the fact that they've been unleashing spells in calling phone numbers that end in 1999. Subaru is determined to find them and stop them before, due to attempting magic they don't understand, they unwittingly release demons on themselves - the balance must be maintained, and these amateurs have no idea the payment required for the spells they cast. Seishiro is more inclined to let them reap what they sow, though he's drawn in when their antics threaten his precious Subaru - his immense power is becoming more and more obvious. The concentration on how dissatisfied teens can get with being normal, and the longing for something to distinguish them, is told with sympathy without lessening the threat of losing perspective. Amusement is provided when Seishiro insists on getting his compatibility with Subaru read - of course, it's terrible, which puzzles Hokuto and hints at events to come. Story aside, this particular volume also features one of the silliest and bizarre of each volume's full-color pin-ups - Seishiro sporting giant bunny ears is quite hilarious.

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Tokyo Babylon Volume 4

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This volume is split into two tales. In the first, Subaru encounters a grief-stricken mother seeking revenge for her child's murder. Certain he can help her by summoning the spirit of her lost daughter, Subaru raises her ghost to allow them to speak through him. To Subaru's dismay, the child does not embrace her mother but instead screams in pain and pleads for vengeance. Stunned by the pain on both sides, Subaru struggles to figure out what is best, a lie or the truth. Miserable after the incident, Subaru seeks help from Seishiro and though he gives comfort, his logic once again shows just how different these two are. In the second half, Subaru infiltrates what appears to be a new cult attracting loners and outsiders at an alarming rate. One high school student, a victim of daily vicious taunting and physical attacks, tries to embrace the cult's ideals and makes a friend in Subaru. Though critical of the organization's hard line belief that victims bring out their own punishment by not believing in themselves forcefully enough, Subaru finds himself drawn to the certainty of the female leader. Seishiro circles the investigation with his own motives, and when Subaru starts a fight, it is Seishiro who finishes it with deadly force, revealing his true nature as the Sakurazukamori, an expert assassin. The final scene cements that their pairing is not accidental or benign, and Seishiro's bet with Subaru is not yet up. This particular volume also features a number of scenes that

show the concern the Sumeragis have for Subaru's welfare - their grandmother warns of the sakura wanting to sweep him away. Hokuto, showing herself to be quite the sharp cookie, goes so far as to threaten Seishiro with a knife if he ever hurts Subaru. The family connections are sweet and very real despite the threads of the fantastic inherent in these characters' lives.

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Tokyo Babylon Volume 5

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Events start hurtling toward violence and sadness with volume five. The first two shorter tales concentrate on how ignorance and being so wrapped up in your own world leaves you blind to other's troubles. Subaru meets a kind older man in his local park only to realize from their daily chats that though he loves his daughter and grandchildren, they view him only as a burden and obstacle to be gotten out of the way. Before Subaru can think of what to do to help, tragedy strikes and too late the gentleman's family realize how much they took for granted. In the second part, our trio has decided to take a night off, which means Hokuto has forced the other two to join her for a night of karaoke. In between epic love songs, Subaru escapes Hokuto's exuberance and Seishiro's advances by hiding in another karaoke box. Little does he know that its occupant is a regretful ghost waiting for just his kind of counsel. Among these vignettes, Hokuto has a frank chat with Seishiro, sharing her concern that Subaru, while powerful, is far too fragile to survive any kind of betrayal - this kind of foreshadowing signals tragedy on the horizon. The volume finishes off with Subaru befriending a young child plagued with a failing kidney while visiting the hospital. Though he tried to lend his support, Subaru cannot escape when the boy's mother decides to perform her own drastic cure for her son's ailment by providing him a new kidney via murder. In the melee, Seishiro is seriously wounded while protecting Subaru. Hokuto attempts to calm him as Seishiro is rushed to surgery, but Subaru's inconsolable screams show Hokuto Seishiro has become so dear to Subaru that even his twin cannot break through to him. Subaru's heartbreak makes this volume quite a heart-wrenching installment, and all of the foreshadowing from previous volumes covers the story in a romantic gloom difficult to escape.

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Tokyo Babylon Volume 6

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Tokyo Babylon Volume 7

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