

THE TATAMI GALAXY

A NOVEL

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Glossary

Aoi Matsuri: One of the three major festivals in Kyoto, held every year on May 15 (pandemic permitting).

Bakumatsu: The final years of the Edo period (1853–1868) during which Japan ended its isolationist foreign policy and transitioned from a feudal shogunate to a modern empire.

Binbogami: A Japanese god who brings misery and financial troubles to whoever or whatever it inhabits.

Bon: Also known as *Obon*, it is a period in late summer to remember one's ancestors, who are thought to visit their families' household altars in spirit form during this time. The holiday lasts for three days, and people traditionally spend the time with family.

Castella: A popular Japanese sponge cake first introduced by Portuguese merchants in the sixteenth century.

Chirimen-zansho: A Japanese condiment made of dried young sardines and Japanese peppercorn berries. Usually sprinkled on rice.

Dori: The Japanese word for “street.”

Enma: The king of hell and judge of dead souls in Japanese-Buddhist mythology.

Geta: A form of traditional Japanese footwear. They are usually made from wood and closely resemble flip-flops.

Gion Matsuri: Kyoto's largest and most representative annual festival, and arguably the most famous festival across Japan. Held during the month of July, the festival is famed for its elaborate float processions and nightly celebrations.

Gyudon: A Japanese beef bowl, composed of thinly sliced beef and green onions simmered in sweet soy sauce over rice.

Hentai: In Japanese, "hentai" often refers to someone or something that is perverted and/or abnormal. In English, "hentai" refers to a pornographic subgenre of anime and manga.

Izakaya: A Japanese-style pub that serves small dishes and plenty of alcohol.

Kamen Rider: Japan's beloved motorcycle-riding, grasshopper-esque cyborg superhero created by the manga artist Shōtarō Ishinomori.

Kamenoko Tawashi: A famous brand of Japanese scrub brush. Small and handleless, its bristles are made with stiff palm fibers. *Kamenoko* means "baby turtle," and its name is in reference to its unique shape.

Kanji: Chinese characters used for writing Japanese.

Karaage: Classic Japanese fried chicken. Thigh meat is coated in potato or wheat starch before being deep-fried until crisp.

Keroyon: A cute, cheerful frog character who debuted on Japanese TV in 1964 as the main character of *Kaeru no bouken* ("Frog's Adventure") and became a popular mascot in the late '60s and '70s.

Kibi dango: Sweet dumplings made of millet.

Kitsune: The Japanese word for "fox." In Japanese folklore, kitsune are known to be intelligent tricksters with supernatural powers.

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Mame mochi: A simple confection of rice cake with soybeans inside.

Maneki-neko: Beckoning cat figurines thought to attract luck (especially financial) and customers.

Mentaiko spaghetti: Spaghetti tossed with spicy cod roe sauce.

Miso katsu: Breaded meat cutlets topped with sweet miso sauce.

Momotaro: A classic Japanese folk tale in which an elderly couple discover a baby boy inside a giant peach. Bestowed upon them by the gods, the couple names him Momotarô (momo meaning “peach” and Tarô being a common name for firstborn sons in Japan).

Month with No Gods: During the tenth month of the year, the gods gather in Izumo, leaving mortals to endure *Kannazuki* (“a month with no gods”). Conversely, in Izumo, this period is called *Kamiarizuki* (“a month with gods”).

Naginata: A pole weapon with a curved blade on the end.

Nasu no Yoichi: A samurai who, in a famous passage in the classic Japanese novel *The Tale of the Heike*, shoots an enemy clan’s fan, mounted on top of a rocking boat, with one shot of his bow and arrow.

Nukazuke: Japanese rice bran pickles.

Nurarihyon: A mysterious and supremely powerful yokai with a gourd-shaped head and elderly appearance.

Ohitashi: A dish of vegetables steeped in savory broth.

Okuribi: Short for *Gozan no Okuribi*, a festival held at the end of Obon to bid farewell to the ancestral spirits as they travel back to the spirit world. Five bonfires are lit on mountains surrounding Kyoto.

Onigiri: Japanese rice balls.

Princess Kaguya: In the classic Japanese folktale *The Tale of*

the Bamboo Cutter, an elderly bamboo cutter is delighted to find a little girl inside a glowing bamboo stem because he and his wife had no children.

Ramune: A popular soft drink sold in glass bottles sealed with a marble.

Sengoku era: Also known as the “Warring States Period” (1467–1615); a turbulent time of social upheaval, political intrigue, and civil war in Japan.

Shichimi: A spice blend with seven ingredients, including chili pepper.

Shingon: Esoteric Buddhist teachings transmitted to Japan from China by the monk Kukai during the ninth century.

Shining Prince Genji: The nickname of the protagonist of Murasaki Shikibu’s *The Tale of Genji*, which is sometimes referred to as the world’s first novel.

Shinsengumi: Active during the Bakumatsu period, a special police force commissioned by the shogunate. They are brought up here in reference to the famous Ikedaya Incident, during which the shinsengumi cracked down on pro-emperor forces at the Ikedaya Inn. Later, a pachinko parlor was built on the site.

Shochu: A distilled liquor made from grains or vegetables such as rice and sweet potatoes.

Shosoin: An eighth-century storehouse located on the grounds of the Todai-ji temple in Nara. Famous for housing cultural artifacts of the distant past.

Shūji Terayama: One of the most influential and towering figures of post-WWII Japan’s avant-garde arts movement. His provocative, psychedelic 1971 film *Throw Away Your Books, Rally in the Streets*—an adaption of his eponymous

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play—follows a socioeconomically marginalized youth as he rages against the system.

Takeda of Kai: Takeda Shingen (see also: below). “Swift as the wind” (*fūrinkazan*) is a portion of the motto he borrowed from Sun Tzu and used on his war banner.

Takeda Shingen: Leader of the Takeda clan during the Sengoku period famed for his military and tactical expertise as well as his love of toilets.

Tanuki: A species of raccoon dog native to Japan. Tanuki are known in Japanese folklore as mischievous shape-shifters.

Tengu: A supernatural spirit in Japanese folklore. Often depicted as humanlike creatures with red faces and long noses, though some appear more birdlike. Geta associated with tengu can be thought of as single-toothed platform sandals.

Tokugawa shogunate: The military government active during the Edo period.

Urashima Taro: When Urashima Taro, the protagonist of the folktale that bears his name, rescues a turtle, he is rewarded with a trip to the underwater Dragon Palace. He enjoys some days there with the princess, Otohime, but when he returns to his village, it turns out decades and decades have passed and everyone he knows is gone.

Yakiniku: “Grilled meat” in Japanese.

Yakko-san: Origami folded in the shape of a man. A *yakko* was a servant to a samurai.

Yokai: A class of supernatural monsters, creatures, and spirits from Japanese folklore, some of which are believed to sometimes disguise themselves as humans.

Yukata: A light cotton kimono worn in summer.

Zashiki: A Japanese-style sitting room with tatami flooring.