

Current Trends in Manga

Manga is a type of graphic novel. The word manga is Japanese for comic. North America has chosen to adopt the term, manga, to refer to graphic novels that were imported from Japan. Manga are visually smaller from most North American graphic novels, more similar to an "Archie Digest" (Flint) in height but are much thicker. They are usually done in black and white and "even though the stories have been translated into English from their native Japanese, most of them retain their original orientation," (Flint) that is, reading from right to left. North American graphic novels traditionally have the same boxed panel format as comic strips you see in your local paper. However, a new trend in GN's, possibly because of the influence of manga, is that they are breaking away from this consistently sized boxed strip paneling. Manga's do not follow this boxed panel format, but instead use various shapes and sizes. One panel can be square, rectangular, round, or oval, and as small as a corner of the page or as large as the whole. The panels, like the pages, are also read right to left. This way of reading can often lead to problems for readers but most teens interested in manga seem to adapt quickly, and many of the teens I know refuse to read manga not done in the right to left format.

The artistic style most often associated with manga involves large eyes, flowing hair and often exaggerated facial reactions to events.

"But, ironically, those very features are the result of American influences. When manga artists in Japan began developing their unique style in the post-Second World War era, they based their drawings on the huge-eyed animals seen in Disney cartoons like Bambi. These were fused with traditional Japanese calligraphy art to create something different from both." (Flint)

This style of artistry has begun to influence North America and some publishing companies, Dark Horse in particular, are releasing manga-like graphic novels. These are referred to by a number of names to try to explain their relationship to manga; pseudo-manga and American-manga are the two most commonly used terms. These are not actual manga, since the term refers to Japanese comics alone.

Manga are almost always released as a series of books. It is not unusual for a manga series to have eighteen plus volumes, with a new one released in North America monthly, bi-monthly or yearly. Recently there was a debate on the GNLIB-L list serve about what was the longest manga series. The conclusion was that Golgo 13 might be the winner with 94 volumes.

The largest trend in manga currently is that it has attracted girls as readers. North American comics and graphic novels are usually aimed at boys twelve years of age and up into their early twenties. However in Japan there is a whole sub section with in manga that's primary audience are girls and women. These mangas are referred to as shojō manga, girl's comics. Boy's comics are called shōnen manga. Shojō has recently become highly popularized with teen girls and sometimes even teen boys in North America. Creating Manga was a mainly male dominated profession and shojō manga began in Japan as "syrupy, silly stories the male creators thought girls wanted to read." (Animerica Extra) Osamu Tezuka, regarded as "the God of Manga" because of his innovations in the field, created a shojō manga in 1954, which was vastly different than anything that had previously been released. Ribbon No Kishi (Princess Knight) had a "brave, dashing heroine and exciting action" (Animerica Extra) as well as "plenty of romance and adventure" (Animerica Extra) within its pages that teen girls loved. This new and innovative shojō manga inspired many teen girls to grow up to produce a whole new and innovative form of shojō manga. Modern shojō manga has a number of genres that it draws on including adventure, romance, mystery, teenage life, science fiction and fantasy. The girls and women portrayed in the Shojō Manga, specifically those aimed at teens, show women as intelligent and athletic. They rarely have a damsel-in-distress type of main character. They also are not shown in revealing outfits like many of the North American superhero graphic novels.

In response to the rise in shojō manga popularity, Viz, a manga publishing company, has just announced the launch of Shojō Beat magazine. "The publication will be a new monthly manga anthology inspired by the growing popularity of manga graphic novels with significant appeal to young female consumers." (2005 PRESS RELEASES http://www.viz.com/news/newsroom/2005/02_shojobeat.php) This magazine will be similar to Viz's Shōnen Jump, which is currently popular with teen boys. Viz has released

"new boys' titles, like Riichiro Inagaki and Yusuke Murata's football manga Eyeshield 21" (Wolk) to compliment their Shonen Jump publication. They plan on doing the same with Shojo Beat "which will offer an ongoing library of new shojo titles"(2005 PRESS RELEASES
http://www.viz.com/news/newsroom/2005/02_shojobeat.php)

References

Duffield, P. "Shojo Manga 101" Animerica Extra. Viz LLC, San Francisco Vol. 7 no. 7. pg 2-4. 2004

Flint, Denise. "Madness Manga" Telegram St. John's, Nfld.: Mar 9, 2005. p. B1

Wolk, Douglas "Spring Comics" Publishers Weekly New York: Mar 7, 2005. Vol. 252, Iss. 10, p. 39-40

"2005 Press Releases: Viz announces the launch of Shojo Beat magazine." www.viz.com February 8 2005.
Viz LLC. April 9th, 2005.

A Few Suggested Shojo Titles to Check out:



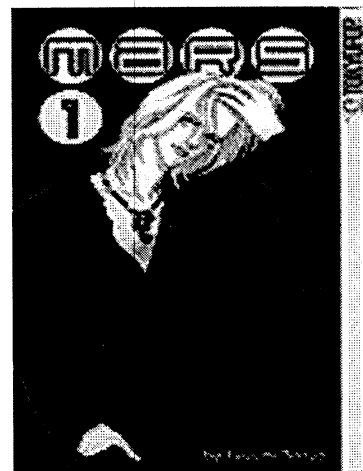
Kare Kano: His and Her Circumstances
Masami Tsuda, Toykopop

Yukino Miyazawa is the perfect student. She makes straight A's, she's pretty, athletic, kind and popular. But she is really deceiving everyone because all she really cares about is to win the praise and admiration of all. Now in high school, after years as the idol of her class, a threat emerges in Soichiro Arima. He achieves first place and topples Yukino from her place as the prefect student. Yukino tries to dethrone him but Soichiro discovers her secret of pretending to be perfect and blackmails her. In doing so they both discover that they don't need to hide behind the masks they have created. This series is about these two students trying to relax enough to be themselves and trying to find who those selves are. It is a coming of age story with all the ups and downs that go with it.

Mars

Fuyumi Soryo, Toykopop

Kira, a shy high school student, lives only for her art. Rei, an arrogant, rebellious and violent playboy, wears his delinquency like a badge of honor. They are exact opposites in every way, but when Rei rescues Kira from her art teacher's unwanted advances Kira sees a different side of Rei. Rei kisses a statue of Mars in the studio and Kira overcomes her fears and asks him to model for her. And, to everyone's surprise, Rei agrees. This series is about their relationship and the struggles they face in their attempts to stay together.



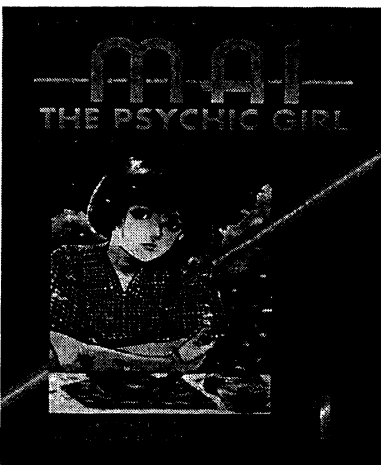
Boys Over Flowers
Yoko Kamio, Viz LLC



Tsukushi Makino has been accepted into the prestigious Eitoku academy. From a middle class background and poor compared to her classmates, a diploma from Eitoku would give her the freedom to become whatever she wants. Once at the school life changes dramatically for Tsukushi but when her only friend, Makiko, falls on Tsukasa Domyoji, the explosive leader of the F4, a group of the four most handsome and richest young men at the school, Tsukushi risks her position at the school to protect her friend. This series deals with a teens desire to fit in with her peers and the struggles she goes through in the process.

The Queen's Knight
Kim Kang Won

Yuna Lee's mother moves to Germany to pursue a music degree, and she's forced to stay with her father, a university professor, and her three older brothers, who are fiercely overprotective of her. During her summer vacation, she visits her mother in Germany, where she falls off a cliff and is rescued by Rieno, an 18-year-old knight living in the land of Phantasma. Rieno makes a deal with Yuna that because he has saved her life, she must marry him and become his queen. Indebted to him for saving her life, Yuna is torn between her normal world back home and life as Phantasma's Queen.



Mai the Psychic Girl
Kazuya Kudo and Ryoichi Ikegami

Mai Kuju is a 14-year-old girl, who would be ordinary except for one thing...that she can move objects with her mind. Mai doesn't think about the potential of her powers, instead uses them for amusement. Unfortunately the Wisdom Alliance, a powerful international organization that seeks to control the world, wants Mai and her powers. Now Mai and her father are on the run from a group that will use any means necessary to capture them. Mai has enemies everywhere and anyone close to her is in danger, how can she escape?