

CONTEMPORARY COMMUNICATION, THE CULTURE OF MANGA

Christiana Constantopoulou

Professeure de Sociologie de la Communication

Université Panteion, Athènes - Grèce

Manga and Anime

The popularity of anime and manga has helped westerners gain a broader understanding of Japanese culture. Manga is a generic term for all graphic novels and comic books originally published in Japan. Manga is read either in serialized comic books, monthly magazines, or graphic novels. All formats are available in English translation, graphic novels, however, are the most common and can be found in both major bookstore chains and local comic shops. The graphic novels are usually presented in "manga-style," meaning a right-to-left format. The word Manga, when translated directly, means "whimsical drawings". Manga are typically 'comic books' as the West understands them; rather, they represent pieces of Japanese culture and history. The 'manga' style has an extensive history, beginning sometime in the 10th century; scrolls from that period depict animals as part of the 'upper class', behaving as a typical human would in similar situations. Such scrolls would go on to be known as the Chōjū giga or "The Animal Scrolls". Scrolls found later on in the 12th century would depict images of religion such as the Gaki Zoshi (Hungry Ghost Scrolls) and the Jigoku zoshi (Hell Scrolls). While both dealt with various aspects of religion, unlike "The Animal Scrolls", these provided a more instructive viewpoint, rather than a comedic style. Manga are more significant, culturally, than Western comic books (though many fill the same role). Originally, manga were printed in daily newspapers; in the Second World War, newsprint rationing caused a down-surge in manga popularity. In the post-war 1950s, they made a resurgence in the form of "picture card shows", which were a style of storytelling supplemented by the use of illustrations, and the highly popular "rental manga" that would allow their readers to rent these illustrated books for a period of time.

Manga, or Japanese comics, have appeared in translation in many different languages in different countries. France represents about 50% of the European manga market and in 2011 manga represented 40% of the comics being published in the country. In 2007, 70% of the comics sold in Germany were manga. In the United States, manga comprises a growing industry and France has a particularly strong and diverse manga market.

Many works published in France belong to genres not well represented outside Japan, such as to adult-oriented drama, or to experimental and *avant-garde* works. Since its introduction in the 1990s, *manga* publishing and *anime* broadcasting have become intertwined in France, where the most popular and exploited *shōnen*, *shōjo* and *seinen* TV series were imported in their paper version. Therefore, Japanese books ("manga") were naturally and readily accepted by a large juvenile public who was already familiar with the series and

received the *manga* as part of their own culture. A strong parallel backup was the emergence of Japanese video games, Nintendo/Sega, which were mostly based on *manga* and *anime* series. At the same time a controversy arose among some parents. In particular, the conservative association *Familles de France* started a media polemic about the undesirable contents, such as violence, portrayed in the Club Dorothée, a kids' TV show. By this time, a generational conflict had arisen between the young fans of "Japanimation" (in use until *anime* became mainstream) and the older *Japoniaiserie* (a pejorative pun for *Japonaiserie*, literally "Japanese stuff" and "*niaiserie*", "simpleton stuff") . Ségolène Royal even published a book, *Le Ras le bol des bébés zappeurs* in which manga are described as decadent dangerous and violent. She hasn't changed her position on that topic yet. The same adult content controversy was applied to *hentai* manga, including the notorious, "forbidden", *Shin Angel* by U-Jin, published by pioneers such as Samourai Editions or Katsumi Editions and later to magazines.

Manga and anime were mainstays in Japanese pop culture long before the art form made its way West. Indeed, the term manga dates to the late 18th century in Japan and it is the Japanese term for comics. The word was first used in 1798 to describe the picture book *Shiji no yukikai*. The term showed up again in 1814 as the title of Aikawa Minwa's *Manga Hyakujo* and *Hokusai Manga*, books that contained drawings by the artist Hokusai but this type of comics didn't begin to gain in popularity in the United States until the 1960s, when the popular Japanese anime series *Astro Boy* was imported to the U.S. Modern manga developed amid an explosion of artistic creativity during the U.S. occupation of Japan, from 1945–1952. During the occupation, U.S. troops introduced American comics and cartoons, such as Mickey Mouse, Betty Boop, and Bambi to Japan, inspiring Japanese artists to develop their own style of comics. Japanese cartoonist, Osamu Tezuka, known as the God of Manga and Godfather of Anime, invented the distinctive large eyes prominent in both manga and anime. His manga series, *Astro Boy*, went on to become the first Japanese television series to embody the aesthetic that became known worldwide as anime. The series was first broadcast in Japan in 1963.

Anime, pronounced "ani-may," refers to animation originating in Japan: *Astro Boy* became the first anime series to be broadcast outside Japan. In the 1970s and 80s, other adaptations of anime made waves in overseas markets. Two of those series, *Robotech* and *Star Blazers* introduced mature themes. *Star Blazers*, first broadcast in the U.S. in 1979, presciently dealt with many serious issues before they became global concerns, such as radiation poisoning, acid rain, and global warming. In the show's first season, humans were forced to move underground to avoid radiation. *Star Blazers* was also the first popular English-dubbed anime series with a storyline that demanded the episodes be shown in order. Through the decades in which anime has been created, there have been various types of genre which have been made; all have their own meaning when being made and have a representation on Japanese society; such as the anime *Howl's Moving Castle* made in 2004, which entitled many anti-war themes within it and by doing so made it more influential on the Japanese community. The growth of anime over the decades has been very important culturally for Japan because anime allows for a common ground to be explored. Anime have expanded in such a way in Japanese culture that they have been made into by products that sell toys, clothing lines, and even many have been turned into video games to allow for a broader market to be touched. They have thus reached a worldwide commercialization.

CONTEMPORARY “FAIRY TALES”

In order to render intelligible the surrounding world to people (and especially to children), a network of symbolic representations becomes necessary in any society; these representations constitute the dominant social “narration” (the mythology which expresses any society, in an emblematic way). Fantasy and imaginary structure the **unconscious**, and sustain the everyday behavior. For children and youth the manga and anime constitute nowadays an important narrative language; in other words, they correspond to their beloved “fairy tales” (as used to be Snow White or Cinderella in older societies).

Important analysts (such as Bruno Bettelheim) have explained the emotional and symbolic importance of fairy tales for children, including traditional tales considered too dark, such as those collected and published by the Brothers Grimm. Bettelheim suggested that if children were reared so that life was meaningful to them, they would not need special help (he was confronted with the problem of deducing what experiences in a child’s life are most suited to promote his ability to find meaning in his life; to endow life in general with more meaning; so he attempted to show how fairy stories represent in imaginative form what the process of healthy human development consists of, and how the tales make such development attractive for the child to engage in. This growth process begins with the resistance against the parents and fear of growing up, and ends when youth has truly found itself, achieved psychological independence and moral maturity, and no longer views the other sex as threatening or demonic, but is able to relate positively to it: in short, fairy tales make great and positive psychological contributions to the child’s inner growth).

Bettelheim¹ suggested that traditional fairy tales, with the *darkness of abandonment, death, witches, and injuries, allowed children to grapple with their fears in remote, symbolic terms*. If they could read and interpret these fairy tales in their own way, he believed, they would get a greater sense of meaning and purpose. Bettelheim thought that by engaging with these socially evolved stories, children would go through emotional growth that would better prepare them for their own futures. The fact is that nothing in children's literature, with rare exceptions, can be as enriching and satisfying as the “folk fairy tale”. For a story to enrich a child's life it must stimulate his imagination, help him to develop his intellect and to clarify his emotions, be attuned to his anxieties and aspirations, give full recognition to his difficulties, suggest solutions to problems that perturb him, promote confidence in self and future. The child needs education that subtly, by implication only, conveys to him/her the advantages of a “moral behavior” (not through abstract ethical concepts but through that which seems quite right and therefore has a meaning which can be found through fairy tales). In fairy tales, as in life, punishment is a limited deterrent to crime. The conviction that crime does not pay is much more effective as a deterrent and in fairy tales the “bad character” always loses out. The child identifies with the heroes of the stories although fairy tales underwent severe criticism with the new discoveries of psychoanalysis and child psychology.

At the same time, the contemporary “imaginary” is full of “fears” due to the disequilibrium between technological potentials and the social abuse of them (habit which seems disastrous

¹ Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (Vintage, Paperback 1976)

for humanity). L.V. Thomas, in some exquisite analyses² had shown how these fears are reflected in Science-Fiction films, functioning as the contemporary “mythology”. It is more than “normal” to see this dimension included in “fairy tales” (for the contemporary youth). In the following pages, we try to analyze (in a quick way, as ought to be in a review) some significant aspects of the more popular “manga stories” world-wide³ (which might explain the big success of Japanese Culture, as part of the contemporary popular culture appreciated by young people all over the world).

Some “permanent” themes, seem thus to be: the seek for strength and power; gender and sex symbols as well as “otherness” (animals, monsters, robots, altered beings, dead persons etc.) in nowadays communicational “patterns” and “ethics”; the fear of technology going out of control; the transformations of “duration”; the destroying “instincts” (such as for instance the “death impulse”). By this kind of imaginary, creators focus on contemporary matters, expressing current thoughts for the present but also for the future where “human identity” will be defined through new elements (where the limits between organic and mechanic do not seem to be clear enough).

Top themes of the stories

Attempting a content analysis of these “popular stories” we have found the following categories of themes that seem to mostly occupy the contemporary attention (helped by the manga and anime cultural industry largely spread world-wide as explained here above).

In search of survival

Survival concerns the win on the time but also the occupation of the space. Because human beings are undoubtedly (and by nature) “perishable”, consolation can be given mostly by the imaginary. Beloved mythic symbolisms can “balance” mortality by winning perishability. To gain immortality is one of the most popular mythic subjects in any known culture, strong by its “force” (even imaginary) to doubt the given anthropological fixity of mortal humanity: this (universal) fantasy, is always accompanied by the destruction of other beings (given that one’s “survival” is mythically counterbalanced by other’s destruction⁴: the out of limits one’s survival is based on the destruction of the other’s life, a topic which remains as major ethical lesson in almost all “myths” –even or especially those destined to children⁵. So, this is a very “favorite” theme: fantasy of devouring, accompanied with a guilt feeling (as it is narrated in “Gyo” –a story of a killing fish, or nightmares about human beings and beasts as shown in *Ultra Gash Inferno*). Myths of total destruction due to the bad or uncontrolled use of technology or to ecological destruction (as in *Nausicaä* or *Appleseed*) are frequent. Stories of worlds full of blood and ruins (ex. *The Red Snake*, *the Bug Boy*) and stories based on the

² See for instance L.-V. Thomas *Civilisation et divagations*, Payot, Paris 1979, *Fantasmes au quotidien*, Méridiens, Paris 1984.

³ We have thus analyzed the stories of the 10 most popular manga of the last years and used themes of the most popular manga and anime ever known in the west (see appendixes I and II).

⁴ Harry Potter, is also a very famous story, which deals also with magic and the “cost” of eternal life sought by “Voldemort”!

⁵ Children are so invited to understand an issue, which the contemporary culture does not explain as it was explained into myths by other cultures in the world. L.-V. Thomas has written on this topic, a very interesting book *La mort africaine*, Payot, Paris 1982.

disappearance of wealth producing sources (ex. Parasyte) are among the most popular “narrations” of our world based on uncontrolled technological use, on uncontrolled use of chemical and other weapons and on disequilibrium among species (ignored by the “dominant” culture of progress but nevertheless terrifying social subconscious; because this “fear” due to the “destructions” of “nature” by technology and power is much more present in the domain of feelings than in the domain of rational descriptions of the western civilization). The description of a world where the cost of the human life gets lower and lower, where violence is dominant in reality, where privacy is lost is a rough reality, hidden by official representations; but manga reveal it in a very expressive way.

In this frame, the “magician” is a central character in tales: it is a being who can “realize” the “miraculous” (which exists beyond the human strength). Manga, are full of stories of magicians and sorcerers (ex. Sorcerer Hunters, Record of the Lodoss War, Negima) or of “magic situations” (ex. Those who hunt elves). In this category we frequently meet with heroes who can have “multiple lives” (ex. Seraphic Feather).

Relations with “otherness”

The sense of the “otherness” is determinant for the definition of “identity” (we are different from the “other” –the one whom we are not, but who always constitutes in an emblematic way what we lack, or the “dark side” of the self). Thus, our relations with animals constitute an archetypal imaginary reference: a very good example can be given by the creation “Pet shop of horrors” (as nightmare the limits among human beings and animals are confused: the bad relation between human and other live beings return to disturb the contemporary official cultural indifference). There are many ways to live with “difference”: peaceful, complementary, exploitation; and the aggressiveness is tied to the power.

In the analyzed stories, the limits between machine and human are difficult to discern (ex. Dolls); at the same time there’s lack of sensitivity as far as it concerns non-human life (ex. Elfen Lied). We also meet the dialectic of “wearing down” of humans in front of the machine (ex. Madara); personal computers (and robots) seem to play the role of “servant”, of “friend”, of “lover” (ex. The “persocom” in the Chobits): this also means the “other” fabricated on order of self (or in other words the imprint of the “autistic society”⁶). Relations with “supernatural” (ex. Angle Sanctuary), or imaginary creatures (ex. Mermaid Saga) are revealed, as well as the problems of “modification” (as in Full Metal Alchemist, for instance).

Relations with Power

A basic issue of the stories of the most popular manga and anime worldwide is dialectics around the power (an insane passion for power appears in different manga stories as a blind instinct of possession, where aggressiveness and egoism, violence and war are in the center of the myths of destruction – as for instant in the Red Snake, or in The Bug Boy): violence is tied with power and coexists with life: the reference to evil expresses a conflict with the rules

⁶ We refer here to the famous terms of Lucien Sfez who characterizes our society as “autistic” and the contemporary communication the same (see Lucien Sfez, *Critique de la Communication*, PUF, Paris 1988).

of society; evil dares to “desire” and search for the impossible, refusing to confine the world in the narrow frame where everything seems given in advance⁷.

The “morality”

A basic characteristic of most stories (which makes them different to the classical fairy tales where the “bad” is dominant as figure) is a kind of “innocence” of “evil” (in the sense that there’s no apparent “cause” of the “evil behavior”): innocent children may be converted in slaughtering weapons and seem unable to morally judge this “behavior” (Gunslinger Girl). So, this seems a problem (teachers seem very much embarrassed if there’s no epilogue with ethical result). We must analyze manga by trying to interpret this “neutrality” as far as it concerns the ethical meaning of a story: it could come to reveal the contemporary impotence of finding social ethic of some kind to the contemporary everyday life. In this sense, the stories could invite to a redefinition of the dominant concepts of criminality and revolution, which eventually is urgent to make.

The contemporary “technological” culture, under the mask of rationality repulse constantly existential fears and problems. This existential anxiety, which the dominant (official) discourses are incapable to express, seems nevertheless very important. Even if it is repulsed ideologically (as orientation out of the world of reality) it is not less important, apparently, and this seems a good reason to explain why this anxiety appears all the time in artistic creations.

The description of a world where the value of human life goes reduced (although science is trying to convince for the contrary⁸), where violence dominates and privacy is lost is very hard: nevertheless, it reveals a reality (the contemporary world reality) hidden by dominant representations but presented in the awful stories of manga.

The expression of worries (political and social) towards the uncontrolled world governance (by different economic interests against the “normal survival” of human beings is also a cry of protest (louder than scientific analysis and more comprehensible to popular audiences).

Western (globalized) culture avoids to communicate to youth the “dark side” of humans. Fairy tales communicate the serious difficulties of human existence such as death, age, separation, loneliness (which are very present in classic literature for children). Anime and manga favor the representations of “evil” causing violent feelings. An eventual “critique” would concern mainly the social organization in the contemporary society, and not the ways of representing it (either for children or adults).

Lévi-Strauss (one of the great theorists of the anthropological nature of history its relation to myth, and its role in constructing patterns of meaning designed to help any given society organize its relation to being and doing), thought that Japanese examples were very eloquent. And at the level of the discourse, Barth’s work (on the empire of signs) also enacts that infinite supplement of supernumerary signifiers, nudging the reader into his own supernumerary signifiers: Japan making an especially appropriate subject for an “inversion”, partly because it has so often played the role of Backwards World in the European imagination.

⁷ As it is very well explained in Georges Bataille’s *Literature and Evil*, initially edited by Gallimard, Paris 1957.

⁸ It is probably not necessary to insist on the level of ecological destructions, or on that of road accidents, of economic wars of any kind causing crisis, refugees, precariousness, unemployment, insecurity and death.

ANNEX: TITLES OF THE STORIES ANALYZED

Red Snake – The Bug Boy (1975)
Ultra Gash Inferno (1981-2001)
Akira (1982)
Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind (1983)
Mermaid Saga (1984)
Appleseed (1985)
Madara (1987)
Berserk (1989)
Parasyte (1990)
Angel Sanctuary (1994)
Pet shop of horrors (1995)
Sorcerer Hunters (1995)
Those who Hunt Elves (1995)
Hellsing (1997) --
Blame (1998)
Record of the Lodoss War (1998)
Angelic Layer (1999)
Ring (1999)
Seraphic Feather (2000)
Vulgar Ghost Daydream (2001)
Ghobits (2001)
Gyo (2002)
Riselmine (2002)
Full Metal Alchemist (2002)
Elfen Lied (2002)
Gunslinger Girl (2002)
Negima (2003)
Dark Water (2004)
Doll (2004)

APPENDIX I: THE “STORIES” OF THE 10 MOST POPULAR MANGA WORLDWIDE

Berserk



Plot Summary: Guts, the Black Swordsman, wanders around in a mediaeval world slaying demons as they are attracted to a demonic mark on his neck. To his help he has inhuman

strength gained from a harsh childhood lived with mercenaries, a gigantic sword, an iron prosthetic left hand and the elf Puck. In his search for vengeance on the one who gave him the mark, he meets many interesting persons and creatures, whom all is affected by him in one way or another.

Monster



Plot Summary: When a Doctor makes the highly controversial decision to save a boy's life over the mayor's, it leads to the loss of almost everything he holds dear. His fiancée, his career, his social standing. The only thing he keeps is his own feeling of self worth, knowing that he did the right thing in saving the boy, who came in first. Yet even that is threatened when he begins to learn that nothing is as it originally appeared. A trail of bloodshed pointing to the seemingly innocent child leaves him questioning even his beliefs. Whether, in the end, all lives are ever truly equal.

Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind



Plot Summary: A millennium has passed since "Seven Days of Fire," an apocalyptic war that almost wiped out human civilization. Since then, the earth is covered with an ever-growing "Sea of Corruption," a vast forest of fungi that secretes poisonous miasma and invasive spores, along with large and deadly insects inhabit within. In order to fight for more habitable lands unpolluted by the Sea of Corruption, the Kingdom of Torumekia has declared war against the Dorok Empire. Nausicaä, princess and heir of a small city-state named "Valley of the Wind" which pledged alliance with Torumekia, is now forced to join Torumekian to invade Dorok Empire. This war will change her life and the fate of human race forever.

Vinland Saga



Plot Summary: Thorfinn is son to one of the Viking's greatest warriors, but when his father is killed in battle by the mercenary leader Askeladd, he swears his intent to have revenge. Thorfinn joins Askeladd's group in order to challenge him to a duel, and ends up caught in the middle of a war for the crown of England.

Yokohama Kaidashi Kikou



Plot Summary: Set in a post-apocalyptic Japan of the near future where the sea level has risen and flooded much of the coastal areas and Mt. Fuji has erupted within living memory. The population has been considerably reduced and political and technological institutions have broken-down. Local communities have become nations and telephone and television no longer exist (although coffee vending machines and streetlights stubbornly continue to work). There are strange new animals and plants (like flying fish and glowing streetlight trees). The remaining people have adopted a slower-paced, simpler way of life and rely more on each other. Along with the human population are some intelligent, humanoid robots. One of the robots, a female named Alpha, runs a café by the same name in the country outside of what remains of Yokohama. With her trusty motorscooter and her camera she travels around the area making friends with the humans and robots, having new experiences and observing the passage of time.

20th Century Boys



Plot Summary: Kenji and his friends start to notice a series of odd occurrences related to their childhood. A mysterious cult-leader named "friend" is out to destroy the world, and it has something to do with Kenji's childhood memories.

Fullmetal Alchemist



Plot Summary: When two brothers, Edward and Alphonse Elric tried to revive their mother using Alchemy, something went drastically wrong. Edward lost his leg and his arm, and Alphonse lost his entire body. Now, a few years later, Edward becomes what's known as a "State Alchemist" or a Nationally recognized Alchemist. Along with Alphonse, who's spirit has been put into a metal suit of armor, and his Automail leg and arm, the two brothers set out to find a way to restore themselves.

Akira



Plot Summary: In the year 2038. A police state, scheming politicians, religious sects, revolutionaries and a secret scientific project all combine to produce an explosive mixture in Neo-Tokyo. The rival groups all have their eyes on one prize: control of Akira, a boy of such destructive psychic ability that he has been held in cryo-stasis for over 30 years. A coup is planned, but there is a wild card in play: the psychic Tetsuo, an impetuous young biker who releases Akira and so forces all of the groups to make their move.

Yotsuba&!



Plot Summary: The Koiwai family, little Yotsuba and her father, have just moved to a new town. As their new neighbors get to know them, it becomes obvious that Yotsuba is one very weird little girl...

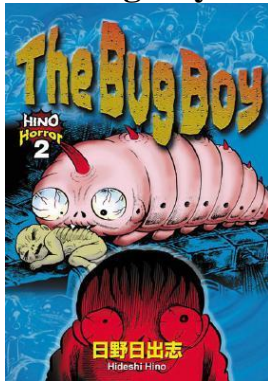
Vagabond



Plot Summary: Growing up in 17th century Sengoku era Japan, Shinmen Takezou is shunned by the local villagers as a devil child due to his wild and violent nature. Running away from home with a fellow boy at age 17, Takezou joins the Toyotomi army to fight the Tokugawa clan at the battle of Sekigahara. However, the Tokugawa win a crushing victory, leading to nearly three hundred years of Shogunate rule. Takezou and his friend manage to survive the battle, and afterwards swear to do great things with their lives. But after their paths separate, Takezou becomes a wanted criminal, and must change his name and his nature in order to escape an ignoble death. Based on the book "Musashi" by Eiji Yoshikawa, Vagabond is a fictional retelling of the life of Miyamoto Mushashi, often referred to as the "Sword Saint" - perhaps the most famous and successful of Japan's sword fighters.

APPENDIX: THE STORIES OF THE ANALYZED MANGA

The Bug Boy



Rejection and revenge when a victimized schoolboy is transformed into a huge poisonous bug.

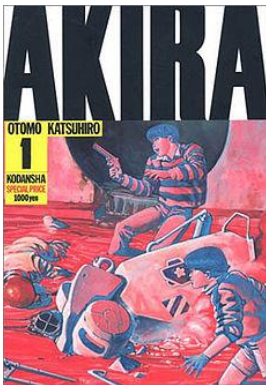
In *The Bug Boy*, loner Sanpei Hiromoto is hated by everyone. His problem is he is distracted by his bugs. He loves bugs of all shapes and sizes. Snakes too. Sanpei can't get enough of those slimy, slithery creatures. His grades at school are consistently Fs. He is feared by all the girls in the school. He is hated by the boys. Every night Hideshi Hino's *Bug Boy* is beaten up on his way back from school. His family bully him because of his grades, his brother and sister are straight A students – like every good Japanese child. Sanpei is alone at school and alone at home. He has no-one to talk to, no-one to share his life with, apart from his bugs, and the veritable zoo of cats, dogs, rats and assorted creepy crawlies he has secreted down at his secret hide-away at the local tip. Then one day he is bitten by a terrible red bug and a hideous transformation begins ... Rather than going into the 'spoiler' territory of the gruesome depictions of the story's detail, you already know the Hino patented subject matter from the review of the first volume, this review will attempt to concentrate on the thematic landscape of this nasty piece of work.

Ultra-Gash Inferno



ULTRA-GASH INFERNO is a collection of graphic art by Suehiro Maruo in the Japanese "erotic-grotesque" (ero-guro) style of manga, a unique fusion of sex and violence unlike anything seen in Western comics. With influences ranging from 19th century atrocity prints to the Sex Pistols, and obsessions with horror, scatology and human freaks, Maruo has taken this sado-erotic art ULTRA-GASH INFERNO is a collection of graphic art by Suehiro Maruo in the Japanese "erotic-grotesque" (ero-guro) style of manga, a unique fusion of sex and violence unlike anything seen in Western comics. With influences ranging from 19th century atrocity prints to the Sex Pistols, and obsessions with horror, scatology and human freaks, Maruo has taken this sado-erotic art form to its ultimate extreme. ULTRA-GASH INFERNO is the ultimate compendium of Suehiro Maruo's most shocking and graphically precise work, containing nine psycho-nightmares never before translated and published in English. With a translation by James Havoc and Takako Shinkado, and an introduction by Romain Slocombe

Akira



Japanese cover of *Akira* Volume 1

Akira (often stylized as **AKIRA**) is a Japanese manga series written and illustrated by Katsuhiro Otomo. Set in a post-apocalyptic Neo-Tokyo, the work uses conventions of the cyberpunk genre to detail a saga of turmoil.^[2] Initially serialized in the pages of *Young Magazine* from 1982 until 1990, the work was collected into six volumes by its publisher Kodansha.^[3] The work was first published in an English-language version by the Marvel Comics imprint Epic Comics, one of the first manga works to be translated in its entirety.^[4] Otomo's art is considered outstanding, and a breakthrough for both Otomo and the manga form.^[2] Throughout the breadth of the work, Otomo explores themes of social isolation, corruption, and power.

An animated film adaptation (anime) was released in 1988 which shortened the plot considerably, but retained much of the main character and plot structures from the manga as well as many original scenes and settings.^[5] The manga takes place in a longer time frame than the film, and involves a much wider array of characters and subplots. Otomo's *Akira*

anime marked his transition from a career primarily in manga, to one almost exclusively in anime.

Akira was instrumental in an upsurge of manga popularity outside Japan, especially as Epic Comics' edition was colorized and coincided with the release of the film. It has won several awards, including the Kodansha Manga and Harvey Awards, and is named as being an important title in the French manga explosion

Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind



The film tells the story of Nausicaä (Shimamoto), a young princess of the Valley of the Wind who gets involved in a struggle with Tolmekia, a kingdom that tries to use an ancient weapon to eradicate a jungle of mutant giant insects. Nausicaä must stop the Tolmekians from enraging these creatures.

Mermaid Saga



According to an ancient Japanese legend, mermaid flesh may grant immortality if eaten. However, there is a much greater chance that consumption will lead to death or transformation into a damned creature known as a Lost Soul (or Deformed Ones in the English dub). Mermaid Saga tells the tale of Yuta, an immortal who has been alive for five hundred years. Throughout the series, he wanders across Japan searching for a cure and meets others whose lives have also been ruined by mermaid flesh.

Appleseed (manga)



Cover of *Appleseed* Volume 1

Appleseed takes place in the 22nd Century, after the non-nuclear Third World War decimates the Earth. While states like Great Britain, USA and China have difficulty maintaining order and power, international organizations like the "Sacred Republic of Munma" and "Poseidon" have been established in the aftermath. The main characters are Deunan Knute and Briareos Hecatonchires, former SWAT members of the LAPD. They are found in the desolated city and invited to join the prestigious ESWAT (Extra Special Weapons And Tactics) organization in the utopian city of Olympus, the new world's most powerful state. Roughly one half of Olympus's population are bionically augmented. The series follows Deunan and Briareos as they protect their new home from both foreign and domestic threats to its security.

Madara Uchiha



Before the era of ninja villages, Madara and his younger brother, Izuna, were considered the most gifted members of the Uchiha clan. Over the years, the Uchiha had constantly fought with the equally powerful Senju clan and as such, Madara had an undying rivalry with Hashirama Senju, the leader of the Senju clan. To bring an end to the constant fighting, Hashirama approached the Uchiha with an offer of peace. Although Madara never wanted peace with the Senju, the rest of the Uchiha wished to end the fighting, and Madara had no choice but to accept. The Senju, the Uchiha, and all the clans they had conquered came together to form the village of Konohagakure.

Some time later, the villagers of Konoha selected Hashirama as the village's first Hokage much to Madara's dismay. Madara feared that Hashirama would oppress the Uchiha, and tried to rally support for challenging his leadership. Rather than help him, the Uchiha turned their backs on him, believing he only desired to rekindle the flames of war.

Soon after being rejected the position of Hokage and being abandoned by his clan, Madara left the village, and sought out Nine-Tails. He later returned in order to challenge Hashirama

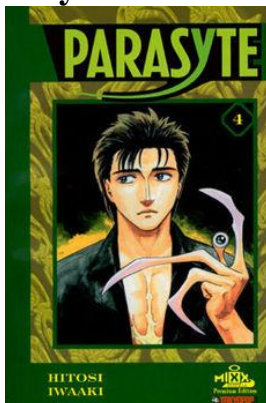
in battle. They fought at the site that would someday be called the Valley of the End, where Madara was defeated, despite having Nine-Tails at his side. Control of Nine-Tails was ultimately taken from him and Madara died.

Berserk



Guts is a wandering mercenary who is taken in one day by the "Band of the Hawk" under its leader Griffith and becomes his right-hand while making a name as their group's renowned raid leader. After encountering a monstrous man known as Nosferatu Zodd who spares them out of the destiny they are to fulfill, due to seeing the Crimson Behelit in Griffith's possession; a trinket in the shape of a face that rearranges itself upon activation, creating an interstice between the Human and Astral realms and summoning demi-gods known as the God Hand to grant a wish to the one chosen by the Behelit, in return for a sacrifice of a loved one, or in the Crimson Behelit's case, a mass sacrifice to become a new member of the God Hand. Years after beginning his journey, joined by the elf Puck whose company he eventually accepts, Guts is later reunited with Casca as she is about to be burned as a witch in the city of St. Albion. There, encountering Farnese of the Holy See Church's Holy Iron Chain Knights, Guts finds himself going through a nightmarish ordeal that ends in Griffith's physical form restored. As Guts takes Casca to the Elven realm of Elfhelm for sanctuary with the help of his new companions, Griffith creates a second Band of the Hawk with Zodd and other Apostles among its ranks to battle the invading Kushan army. The war between Griffith and the Kushan emperor, a rogue apostle, climaxes with the emperor's destruction and the overlapping of the mortal realm and the supernatural. No longer challenged by demon or man, Griffith establishes his rule over Midland with the endorsement of the Pope and Princess Charlotte, creating the city of Falconia to provide the Midlanders with refuge from the ever-increasing attacks of mythical beasts.

Parasyte



Parasyte centers on a 17-year-old male named Shinichi Izumi, who lives with his mother and father in a quiet neighborhood in Tokyo. One night, worm-like creatures called Parasites appear on Earth, taking over the brains of human hosts by entering through their ears or noses. One Parasite attempts to crawl into Shinichi's ear while he sleeps, but fails as Shinichi is wearing headphones, and enters his body by burrowing into his arm instead. In the Japanese version, it takes over his right hand and is named Migi after the Japanese word for 'right'. Because Shinichi was able to prevent Migi from travelling further up into his brain, both beings retain their separate intellect and personality. As the duo encounter other Parasites, they capitalize on their strange situation and gradually form a strong bond, working together to survive. This gives them an edge in battling other Parasites who frequently attack the pair upon realization that Shinichi's human brain is still intact. Shinichi feels compelled to fight other Parasites, who devour humans as food, while enlisting Migi's help.

Angel Sanctuary



Beginning in late twentieth-century Japan, *Angel Sanctuary* focuses on Setsuna Mudo, a 16-year-old troubled high-school student who is in love with his 15-year-old sister Sara. While struggling with his incestuous feelings for his sister, he learns that he is the reincarnation of Organic Angel Alexiel, who led a rebellion against her fellow angels after witnessing their slaughter of the Evils, a group of demons, after God's disappearance. At the conclusion of the revolt, she sealed away her younger twin brother, Inorganic Angel Rosiel, within the Earth, emotionally unable to fulfill his request to be killed before he became insane and destructive. Captured and branded a fallen angel, Alexiel is punished by having her body frozen and her soul endlessly reincarnated as a human whose life is full of misery.

Assisted by Lucifer, ruler of the demons who loves Alexiel, Rosiel unseals the Tower of Etenamenki, where God rests, with Alexiel's body. Intent on restoring the Earth, Setsuna follows him, with Kurai and the archangels of fire and earth; along the way, he aids an injured Katan, who hopes to save Rosiel before he loses his free will to do so. At the tower, Rosiel kills Katan, only to realize that he had killed the one he loved and tried to protect from himself; he then goes into a state of destructive despair. Awakening in her own body with Setsuna's help, Alexiel reveals to him that she had always loved him: because he had been born the opposite of his healthy sister, she bargained with God to save his life in exchange for her imprisonment, from which she later escaped with Lucifer, and an agreement to never show him any compassion. She then kills him, and absorbs him into her womb so that they will never be apart again. Before dying, Rosiel passes along his power to Setsuna.

. Because God draws power through Adam Kadamon, the archangels and Kurai seal her up, while Setsuna confronts God and encounters Sara and Lucifer there. Sara overcomes her possession to cast out Sandolphon, and Setsuna defeats God with Lucifer's help. Time returns to normal on Earth, where Setsuna and Sara joyfully reunite at last.

Pet Shop of Horrors



"Count D" is the mysterious caretaker of a pet shop in Los Angeles Chinatown. Each of D's rare pets, which all have strangely humanoid appearances, comes with a contract with three major points. These points differ for each animal sold (although each animal's contract includes not showing it to anyone), and breaking this contract usually results in dire (and sometimes disturbing) consequences for the buyer, for which the pet shop claims no liability.

Individual chapters of *Pet Shop of Horrors* are often based on these consequences, and are each written as a stand-alone story, usually introducing one or more new characters in each chapter. With the exception of the main characters and their families, it is rare for a character to carry over to a later chapter, providing the series with a very episodic nature. The detective Leon Orcot is used to tie the chapters together into an ongoing plot, usually in the form of a subplot within each chapter. Initially he suspects D of malicious criminal activity and using the pet shop as a front for drug trafficking. As the series progresses, he learns more about the pet shop and D himself, entering into a strange friendship of sorts with D as he works to uncover the truth.

Sorcerer Hunters



Sorcerer Hunters is set on the Spooner Continent, where the populace is divided into two groups: the ordinary people, called the Parsoners, and the magic users, the Sorcerers. Marked by the triangles on their foreheads, many Sorcerers dominate, exploit, torment, murder, and enslave the Parsoners of the Spooner Continent.

The Sorcerer Hunters are a group of warriors who protect humans from the Sorcerers. They are under the command of a holy woman who goes by the name of "Big Mama", the head of the popular Stella Church, who seeks to protect Parsoners from the gifted Sorcerers who have chosen to abuse their powers.

The plot focuses on the adventures of a small family group of Sorcerer Hunters, including the Glace Brothers (Carrot and his younger brother Marron), their childhood friends, the Misu Sisters (Tira and her older sister Chocolate), and Gateau Mocha.

Those Who Hunt Elves

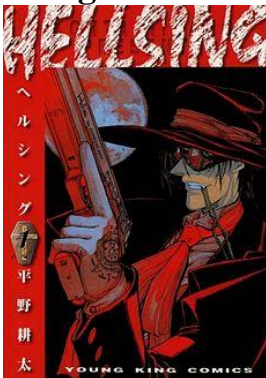


Elf Hunters seek five spell fragments that have been placed on the skin of elves, similar to tattoos, throughout the magical world they have been transported to. When they find them, they will be able to return to Japan.

The Elf Hunters travel by means of a Type 74 tank, which has been transported to the magical world with them.

The reaction of various elves as the team attempts to strip them naked is a primary basis for much of the show's humor, and are more ridiculous than risqué. The series is also known for breaking the fourth wall, mostly from Junpei.

Hellsing



Hellsing is named after and centered around the Royal Order of Protestant Knights, originally led by Abraham Van Helsing. The mission of Hellsing is to search for and destroy the undead and other supernatural forces of evil that threaten the queen and the country. This organization is currently led by Sir Integra Fairbrook Wingates Hellsing, who inherited the leadership of Hellsing as a child after the death of her father. She witnessed his death which turned her from a once innocent and shy little girl to a tough and deadly force. She is protected by the faithful Hellsing family butler and former Hellsing "trashman" Walter C. Dornez, a deadly foe in his own right, and Alucard, the original and most powerful vampire that swore loyalty to the Hellsing family after being defeated by Van Helsing one hundred years before the story takes place. These formidable guardians are joined early on in the storyline by former police officer Seras Victoria, whom Alucard turned into a vampire.

As the scale and frequency of incidents involving the undead escalate in England and all around the world, Sir Integra discovers that the remnants of a neo-Nazi group called Millennium still exist and are intent on reviving the Third Reich by creating a battalion of vampires. Millennium, Hellsing, and the Vatican section XIII Iscariot clash in an apocalyptic three-sided war in London, and Millennium reveals its true objective: to destroy the vampire lord Alucard, ending a feud begun during World War II.

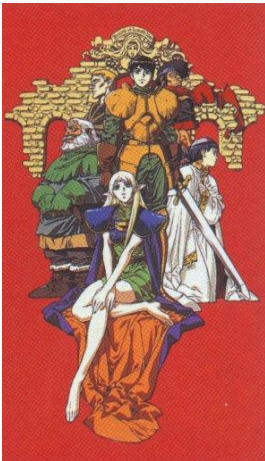
Blame!



Killy, a silent loner possessing an incredibly powerful weapon known as a Gravitational Beam Emitter, wanders a vast technological world known as "The City". He is searching for Net Terminal Genes, a (possibly) extinct genetic marker that allows humans to access the "Netsphere", a sort of computerized control network for The City. The City is an endless vertical space of artificially-constructed walls, stairways and caverns, separated into massive "floors" by nearly-impenetrable barriers known as "Megastructure". The City is inhabited by scattered human and transhuman tribes as well as hostile cyborgs known as **Silicon Creatures**. The Net Terminal Genes appear to be the key to halting the unhindered, chaotic expansion of the Megastructure, as well as a way of stopping the murderous horde known as the **Safeguard** from destroying all humanity.

Along the way, Killy meets and joins forces with a resourceful engineer named **Cibo** and several groups such as a tribe of human warriors called the **Electro-Fishers**. Cibo and Killy are often pursued by the Safeguard, who view any human without Net Terminal Genes as a threat to be extinguished on sight. Because of the size and nature of The City and the violent lives led by its inhabitants, there are virtually no recurring characters and any alliances made are short-lived.

Record of Lodoss War



In an extraordinary fantasy world of knights, dragons, wizards, and elves there was once a harsh battle between the goddesses of creation and destruction. The aftermath gave rise to an island known as Lodoss - the accursed island. Though the war between the goddesses has long been over, the constant power struggle between kingdoms rages on in Lodoss, mostly between the city of Valis and the dark and evil island of Marmo. The *Record of Lodoss War* OVA follows the adventures of Parn, a brash young boy who wants to follow in his father's footsteps of becoming a great knight and hero. When Lodoss once again becomes plagued by an unknown dark force, Parn puts on his father's old armor and sets off on his own to find his destiny. Along the way, he picks up a party of typical D&D comrades, including the wise wizard Slayn, tough-talking dwarf Ghim, sassy female elf Deedlit, kind-hearted cleric Etoh,

and comical thief Woodchuck. After meeting his idle Kashue, the king of the city of Flame, Parn and his team get involved in a mess of fighting monsters and dragons, saving princesses, and even the legendary War of Heroes fought between Fahn, the king of Valis, and Beld, the king of Marmo. At first, it seemed that Beld was the winner, but a mysterious force suddenly struck and killed him right after he killed Fahn. Parn and company later discover the true enemy behind all the war and destruction that occur in Lodoss (and death of Beld) - Karla, the Gray Witch, who exists by using the bodies of other people and manipulates kings and knights alike in order to carry on her belief that good and evil must be kept in balance, and as long as power does not gather in one place, but remains scattered, it is all the better for Lodoss. After the tragic defeat of the knight of Marmo, Ashram, and his dark elf lover Pirotess, Parn and his companions meet strong-headed mercenary Shiris and her cursed but gentle friend Orsen before the final evil strikes. Towards the end of the series, Parn plays the role of a true hero when he must rescue Deedlit from the clutches of the wicked Marmo sorcerer Wagnard, who wants to use her elf's power of eternal life in order to resurrect Kardis, the goddess of destruction!

Angelic Layer



The primary protagonist of *Angelic Layer* is Misaki Suzuhara, a seventh grader who just moved to Tokyo to live with her aunt, Shouko Asami. After arriving in the city, she watches the battle doll Athena on a big screen television outside of Tokyo Station and becomes interested in learning about Angelic Layer, a highly popular game in which players (called Deus) buy and custom-design dolls known as Angels. Angels can move by mental control when on a field called the "layer." Layers are very expensive; most users rent them by the hour in establishments resembling cybercafes.

An eccentric man wearing a white lab coat and glasses, calling himself "Icchan" encourages Misaki to purchase and create her own angel. She names the angel Hikaru, after Hikaru Shidō from Clamp's *Magic Knight Rayearth* (a manga in *Angelic Layer's* world), which she was reading on the train to Tokyo. She wants the angel to be "a short girl, but strong and happy" like Hikaru and herself. In the anime, Misaki names her Hikaru after her favorite doll from her childhood. Even though she's clueless about the game, Misaki soon competes in tournaments and is assisted and watched carefully by Icchan. Later, Icchan's identity is revealed as Ichiro Mihara, the co-creator of Angelic Layer. Misaki also begins studying at the Eriol Academy, an educational institution which includes grades from kindergarten through high school. There she becomes friends with Hatoko Kobayashi, a very intelligent and mature kindergarten girl who is a famous Deus and an Angelic Layer expert. Her incredibly fast angel Suzuka is a favourite contender in tournaments. Misaki also befriends Hatoko's older brother Kōtarō and his friend Tamayo Kizaki, a girl fascinated by martial arts. Both turn out to be Misaki's classmates.

The manga series is set a few years before *Chobits*, a Clamp work in the same universe as *Angelic Layer*. In the manga, Icchan plays an important role in the *Chobits* storyline, but this connection was reduced to a single scene in the anime; the *Chobits* anime was also made by a different company. Likewise, in the *Chobits* anime, Icchan has a brief cameo but is not mentioned by name for the same reason. Kaede's younger brother Minoru is also a *Chobits* character.

Ring



Two teenagers, Masami (Hitomi Satō) and Tomoko (Yūko Takeuchi), talk about a videotape recorded by a boy in Izu which is fabled to bear a curse that kills the viewer seven days after watching. Tomoko reveals that a week ago, she and three of her friends watched a weird tape and received a call after watching. Tomoko is killed by an unseen force as Masami watches, horrified. Days later, Reiko, a reporter investigating the popularity of the video curse, discovers that her niece Tomoko, and her three other friends, mysteriously died at the same time, on the same night, with their faces twisted in fear. Reiko enlists the help of her ex-husband, Ryūji Takayama. Reiko and Ryūji sail for Ōshima and discover the history of the great psychic Shizuko Yamamura, who was accused of faking supernatural powers; and thus committed suicide. With only a day left, Reiko and Ryūji discover that the videotape was made by Shizuko's lost daughter, Sadako Yamamura, whose supernatural powers surpassed even those of her mother. The two go back to Izu with the assumption that Sadako is dead and her vengeful spirit (*Onryō*) killed the teenagers. They uncover a well underneath the cabin and through a vision see the circumstances of Sadako's murder by her father. They try to find Sadako's body in an attempt to appease her spirit. Minutes before her seven days are up, Reiko finds Sadako's corpse, and they believe that the curse is broken. Desperate to save her son, Reiko realizes that copying the tape and showing it to someone else saved her. With a VCR and Ryūji's copy of the tape, Reiko travels with her son to see her father in an attempt to save him, realizing that this is a never-ending cycle: The tape must always be copied and passed on to ensure the survival of the viewers.

Seraphic Feather



Sunao (male) and Kei (female), two good friends while they were children, are suddenly separated when he moves to a lunar city construction. A few years later, Kei has become an U.N. Investigator and she travels to the same base, without knowing anything about Sunao. But this is not just about them. Rich enterprises and dark men will want to own the new businesses that living in the moon will have, and soon Sunao and Kei will found troubles with them.

Ghost Talker's Daydream



Ghost Talker's Daydream, known in Japan as *Vulgar Ghost Daydream*. The English version released by Geneon changed the title to *Ghost Talker's Daydream*, which is not a direct translation of the formal manga title.

The protagonist is the virgin albino woman Saiki Misaki holding down three jobs, neither of which she finds herself particularly happy with, one as a dominatrix in a BDSM club and writer of a column for a porno magazine and the other as a civil servant in the employ of *The Livelihood Preservation Group* as a *necromancer* able to perceive and to communicate with ghosts, sometimes allowing them to speak through her with the living. Her government job usually entails exorcism. Misaki considers her shamanic civil service position even more tawdry and less respectable than her sex work. Fan service, nudity and sexual themes are all integral to motivation and backstory, along with insight into Japanese suicide culture and sexual dysfunction with sexual and physical abuse, such carnal troubles of the soul from which even death may guarantee no release.

The Japanese title translates as **teizoku** = *vulgar* + **rei** = *ghost*. However, there is a pun on the word **rei**, which can also refer to a *companion*. In other words, it can be said either *Vulgar Ghost* or *Vulgar Companion*, for Misaki Saiki is indeed a vulgar companion in contending with vulgar apparitions.

Chobits



The series centers on the life of Hideki Motosuwa, a held-back student attempting to qualify for university by studying at Seki prep school in Tokyo. Besides a girlfriend, he dreams of having a *persocom* an android used as a personal computer, which is expensive. On his way home one evening, he stumbles across a persocom in the form of a beautiful girl with floor-length hair lying against a pile of trash bags, and he carries her home, not noticing that a disk fell on the ground. Upon turning her on, she instantly regards Hideki with adoration. The only word the persocom seems capable of saying is "chi" -thus he names her that. Hideki assumes that there must be something wrong with her, and so the following morning he has his neighbor Hiromu Shinbo analyze her with his mobile persocom Sumomo. After Sumomo crashes during the attempt they conclude that she must be custom-built. A major part of the plot involves Hideki attempting to teach Chi words, concepts, and appropriate behaviours, in between his crammed schedule of school and work. At the same time, Chi seems to be developing feelings for Hideki, at an emotional depth she is not supposed to possess, and Hideki struggles with his feelings for her. The need to figure out more about Chi and her mysterious functions and past becomes a pull for the characters in the series. Hideki's feelings intensify for Chi regardless of her being a persocom and despite his friends' painful experiences involving other persocom. Chi becomes aware of her purpose through a picture book series called *A City with No People* which she finds in a bookstore. The books speak about many different things involving human and persocom relationships: persocoms and their convenience as friends and lovers, how there are things that they cannot do and questioning whether a relationship between a persocom and a human is really one-sided. It also speaks about the Chobits series; that they are different from other persocoms, and what they are incapable of doing unlike other persocoms. These picture books awaken Chi's other self, her sibling Freya who is aware of their past and helps Chi realize what she must do when she decides who her "person just for me" is. Together, Chi and Hideki explore the relationship between human beings and persocoms, as well as their friends' and their own.

Gyo



North American cover of Gyo, volume 1 by Viz Media

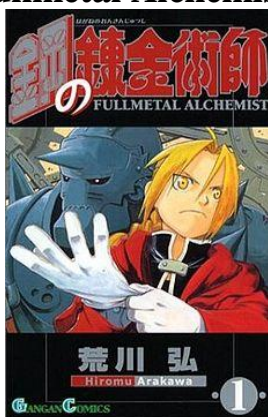
Gyo opens with Tadashi, a young man, and his girlfriend Kaori, as they enjoy their scuba-diving vacation in Okinawa. Encountering an odd fish with legs, Kaori, who has a hypersensitive sense of smell, becomes irritated by its smell and begs Tadashi to get rid of it. He seals it in a bag, but it manages to escape. The next day, large amounts of marine life with legs invade Okinawa. Tadashi and Kaori manage to return to Tokyo, although Kaori becomes irritated and paranoid, claiming to smell the fish. They both encounter the bagged fish they originally encased and present it to his uncle, Doctor Koyanagi. Koyanagi reveals that the creature is the result of the Japanese Army's World War II research into a virus that causes its host to produce a deadly and repulsive stench, in a desperate effort to turn the tide of the war. His father developed a "walking machine", which pumps the virus into a host and causes the host to release the gas which powers the machine's movement; walking machines were built to carry the hosts farther, allowing them to reach and sicken enemy troops. However, during the war, enemy aircraft sunk the ship carrying the prototypes for the walking machines. Soon, Kaori and Tadashi discover that hordes of marine life with legs are invading Tokyo, having previously invaded the Kantō region. Infected by the gas, Kaori becomes depressed by her appearance and attempts to kill herself several times. Tadashi takes her to Koyanagi in an effort to save her but collapses in the process. Awakening one month later, he discovers that Koyanagi has placed her in a walking machine. She manages to escape, mortally wounding Koyanagi in the process. Searching for her, Tadashi notices the citizens have become infected. When she attempts to remove the walking machine from Kaori, Koyanagi appears with a modified walking machine that allows him to fly. Kaori notices Tadashi and Ms. Yoshiyama together and attempts to attack her. During the uproar, Koyanagi manages to capture Ms. Yoshiyama and fly away. Large groups of walking machines attack Kaori, and Tadashi becomes lost in his attempt to save her. He continues to search for her and notices the circus attack Koyanagi and Ms. Yoshiyama in the air. Tadashi encounters a group of college students, who explain that the virus has been replicating the walking machine. He joins the students in their research to defeat the virus and save humanity. As they walk together, he encounters Kaori's remains and remarks that she is free from the smell.

Rizelmine



The storyline of *Rizelmine* centers on Tomonori Iwaki, a 15-year-old student who likes older women, including high school girls, college girls, and even female instructors. Having just discovered that his teacher (upon whom he has nursed a massive crush) is engaged to be married, he comes home to find, much to his dismay, that he has been forced by "Power Of The State" to marry a 12-year-old girl named Rizel, who is the government's first creation in its experiments to genetically engineer a human. Rizel's tears contain the same make up as nitroglycerin and as such are explosives which creates a need for constant repair in their house. A running gag is that at the end of each episode, Tomonori calls Rizel an idiot, causing her to cry and thus cause an explosion. Rizel, with the help of her Papas, tries as hard as she can to win Tomonori's love. However, Tomonori is still in love with his teacher. Other characters creating an ever-tangled love web are Ryunosuke Hououin, who is in love with Rizel, and Kyoko Yachigusa, who is in love with Tomonori. Both try their best to prevent Rizel and Tomonori from getting close to each other. Later on Tomonori finds out that Rizel is the older woman he fell in love with when he was young but she was unable to grow after they met because she fell for him too, and she needed more than just the love from her "papas". When he learns this, Tomonori realizes that Rizel is his older woman.

Fullmetal Alchemist



Edward and Alphonse Elric live in the rural town of Resembool with their mother Trisha and their father Van Hohenheim, the latter having left home for an unknown reason. When Trisha dies of the plague, the brothers perform the forbidden alchemic technique of human transmutation in an attempt to resurrect her. Consequently, the transmutation backfires and in law with equivalent exchange, Edward's left leg and Alphonse's entire body are destroyed. Edward sacrifices his right arm to rescue Alphonse's soul, binding it to a suit of armour with a blood seal. Edward is invited by Roy Mustang to become a State Alchemist to research a way

to restore Alphonse's body. Edward succeeds, becoming the Fullmetal Alchemist, the title based on his prosthetic automail limbs.

Three years on, the Elrics search for the mythical Philosopher's Stone to achieve their goals. Visiting Izumi, the Elrics learn she committed human transmutation on her stillborn child.

As the story progresses, the protagonists encounter the Homunculi repeatedly. Lust is killed by Mustang; Gluttony is captured by Mustang and Ling, but he ends up swallowing Edward, Ling, and Envy into his void-like stomach. Gluttony takes Alphonse to meet Father, but when the others escape from Gluttony's stomach, Father turns Ling into a homunculus, namely the new incarnation of Greed. The Elrics are released to continue their quest as long as they don't oppose Father.

Alphonse, whose armor is all but destroyed during the final battle against Father, sacrifices his soul to retrieve Edward's right arm, who in turn destroys Father's Stone, sending him back to the ethereal Gate of Truth. Edward sacrifices his ability to perform alchemy to retrieve Alphonse's body and soul. Hohenheim visits Trisha's grave where he dies with a smile. Several months later, Edward and Alphonse return home where they are reunited with Winry, though they both leave home two years later to explore the world.

Elfen Lied



It is said that species are constantly changing and evolving. Humans are no different. *Elfen Lied* tells the story of the Diclonius, a mutated species of human that possess invisible telekinetic arms called Vectors that basically give them telekinetic abilities, as well as a pair of short horns.

Our story starts with Lucy, a Diclonius who was held against her will and experimented upon by the government. Murderous and vengeful from an eternity in confinement and torment, Lucy escapes her prison only to receive a head injury that causes a second, child-like personality to emerge. The injured Lucy, brain-damaged and only able to say "Nyu", stumbles upon two humans, Kouta and his cousin Yuka. The two resolve to assist this injured girl, unaware of her hidden murderous personality or the world changing events they will soon find themselves tangled in.

Gunslinger Girl



Set in Italy, *Gunslinger Girl* follows the exploits of the Social Welfare Agency (often referred to as simply "the Agency"), ostensibly a charitable institution sponsored by the Italian government. While the Agency professes to aid the rehabilitation of the physically injured, it is actually a military organization specializing in counter-intelligence and counter-terrorism. It is composed of two independent branches: Public Safety, its surveillance and intelligence-gathering division, and Special Ops, the anti-terrorist division. Special Ops is itself divided into Sections 1 and 2, the latter of which employs young girls who have experienced traumatic and near-death experiences fitted with cybernetic implants as agents. The implants, which consist of synthesized muscles and carbon fiber frames, result in heightened strength and reflexes as well as high resilience to damage and pain. Each girl is paired with an adult male trainer, or "handler", and together they are referred to as a *fratello* — Italian for "sibling". The handler is responsible for the training, welfare and field performance of his charge, and is free to use whatever methods he considers suitable. While these methods vary according to the handler, a common part of each girl's regimen is brainwashing called "conditioning", which produces a deadly assassin with unquestioning loyalty to her handler but, if used excessively, also limits her life span.

Each *fratello* exhibits a unique dynamic. Most of the handlers have police or military backgrounds and were recruited directly into Section 2. Most also chose their own cyborgs from a list of candidates, though some appear to have been assigned a cyborg. The Social Welfare Agency primarily concerns itself with dealing with the Padania Republic Faction (PRF or RF), an organization seeking an independent Northern Italy through acts of terrorism and bribery

Negima



Mahou Sensei Negima!

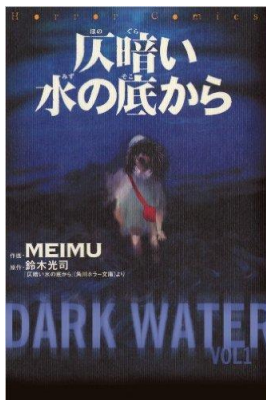
While looking for clues about his missing father Nagi, Negi Springfield becomes the English and homeroom teacher for Mahora Academy Class 2A (later 3A). Negi soon becomes acquainted with most of his new students including his room mates Asuna Kagurazaka and

Konoka Konoe. Negi faces his first real challenge in his student Evangeline A.K. McDowell who is an immortal vampiress and one of his father's enemies. To help Negi confront Eva, Asuna agrees to become his temporary partner by performing a "Pactio", a kind of magical contract sealed with a kiss. During Mahora's cultural festival, Negi manages to partake in simultaneous events thanks to his student Chao Lingshen's latest invention, the time machine *Casseopeia*. One of these events is the "Mahora Martial Arts Tournament" where he confronts a series of increasingly stronger enemies including a former member of "Ala Rubra", a legendary brigade led by his father. After the tournament, Negi takes part in more activities at the festival until Chao she reveals herself as a time-traveler who claims she must change the present to avert a great catastrophe in the future. Despite that, Negi and his allies confront Chao and stop her. After giving, Chao bids farewell before returning to her own time.

After the festival, Negi decides to go to the Mundus Magicus (Magic World) to look for his father, Negi decides to train in order to become stronger and specializes in Dark Magic, like Evangeline. Meanwhile, Negi's lost companions start to learn the ropes of their new environment

Waking up 30 years after the estimated time, Asuna finds that Negi's plan was a success and that Negi and all her classmates had happy and bountiful lives, but had long since died, all except for the immortal Evangeline, and Chao who exists in this time and has since invented a device to jump between realities. These two appear before Asuna to take her back to the present so she can live out her days with Negi.

Dark Water



Yoshimi Matsubara, in the midst of a divorce, moves to a run-down apartment with her daughter, Ikuko. She enrolls her daughter in a nearby kindergarten and in order to win custody of her daughter, starts working as a proofreader, a job she held years ago before she was married. The ceiling of the apartment has a leak, which worsens on a daily basis. Matsubara complains to the janitor of the apartment, an old man, but the janitor does nothing to fix the leak. She then tries to go to the floor just above her apartment to find out the root of the leak, and discovers that the apartment is locked. Strange events then happen repeatedly: a red bag with a bunny on the front reappears no matter how often Yoshimi tries to dispose of it. Hair is found in tap water. Yoshimi gets glimpses of a mysterious long-haired girl who is of similar age to her daughter. Yoshimi discovers that the upstairs apartment, the source of the leak, was formerly the home of a girl named Mitsuko Kawai who was of similar age to her daughter. She had attended the same kindergarten Ikuko now attends. Mitsuko was abandoned by her mother and vanished more than a year ago.

Yoshimi finds her missing daughter one day in the apartment upstairs, which has walls pouring with water with the entire apartment flooded ankle-deep. Convinced something eerie is happening, she decides to move, but her lawyer convinces her that her eyes may be playing

tricks on her and that moving now would weaken her position greatly in her divorce. Meanwhile, Ikuko, left alone in the apartment, attempts to turn off the bath tap, which has started to spurt filthy water. Mitsuko's spirit emerges from the flooded bathtub and attempts to drown her. Yoshimi finds Ikuko unconscious on the bathroom floor. Intending to escape, she rushes into the elevator, fleeing apparently from the apparition of Mitsuko. But as the elevator door closes she sees that the figure pursuing her is in fact her own daughter – with short hair – and realizes she is carrying Mitsuko, who, gripping her neck, claims Yoshimi as mother in a torrent of water. Yoshimi realizes that Mitsuko won't let her go and with Ikuko looking on in tears, Yoshimi sacrifices herself by staying on in the elevator to appease Mitsuko's spirit and pretending to be Mitsuko's mother. The elevator ascends and Ikuko follows, but when the doors open, a flood of murky brown water rushes out and nobody emerges.

Dolls



“**Dolls**” is a collection of short manga stories by Yumiko Kawahara. In the US, it is published by VIZ Media. It was serialized in *Nemurenu*. The stories revolve around some special dolls, the *Plant Dolls*, and the people who buy them. The dolls choose their owners, and desperately need their owners' love; they often reflect their owners' personalities for better or worse. Each story is independent of each other, though there may be references to knowledge learned in previous stories. Some stories have a fairy-tale like quality: they are eerie fables meant to warn against certain actions. There are several non-Plant-Doll related stories included in the Viz-released volumes as well.



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