

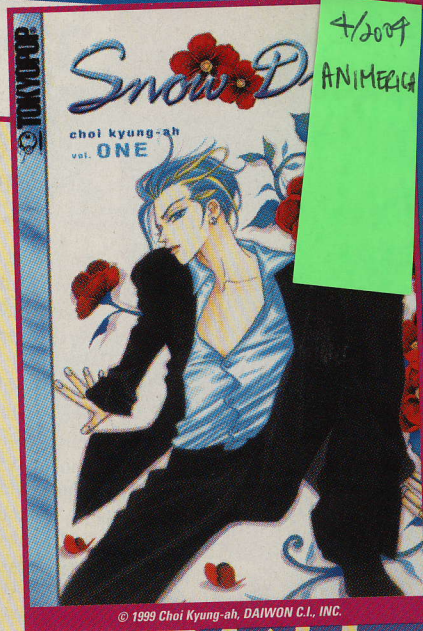
新 REVISIONS OF NEW & CURRENT MANGA 新漫画

MANGA BROWSER

SNOW DROP

VOLUME 1

STORY AND ART BY CHOI KYUNG-AH



Lately, a few American manga publishers are dipping their toes into the choppy waters of *manwha*, or Korean comics. Korea's comic-book industry is smaller than Japan's but richly varied: it produces long-running children's comics, wacky comedy series, beautifully drawn historical fiction, elegant slice-of-life stories. It also produces comics that are indistinguishable from Japanese manga except that the art isn't as polished. *Snow Drop* is one of the latter type.

Snow Drop follows the formulae and the visual style of manga for teenage girls. The heroine, So-Na, is a wealthy, beautiful teenager who spends her afternoons working at the Snow Drop Nursery, where she tends the plants with loving care. As the story opens, she already has a boyfriend, so her life requires only one element for *shôjo*-manga completion: a love-hate relationship with a beautiful, irritating bad-boy hero. Fortunately, one shows up right on schedule: Hae-Gi, who acts surly and insults So-Na's flowers, and thus must be her true love. To So-Na's credit, she gives as good as she gets, and soon she and Hae-Gi are locked in a sexually charged rivalry. Both So-Na and Hae-Gi are named after flowers, and they're linked in some mysterious way by a book written by So-Na's mother, in which the heroine gives her children flower names.

The running imagery of flowers and gardens (each chapter, for example, is named after a flower and its traditional meaning) clashes with the book's preoccupation with cutting-edge urban culture. So-Na and her classmates throw parties at trendy clubs and dress in stylish clubwear, as displayed to maximum effect in full-length splash panels: skintight pants, clingy shirts, animal-print fabrics, ski goggles. So-Na wears a different wig every day, and Hae-Gi works after school as a magazine model. Artist Choi Kyung-ah is a little wobbly with anatomical drawing—her figures are often stiff, and sometimes the characters' heads are too small for their bodies—but she draws fabulous fashion.

By the end of the first volume, *Snow Drop* is moving in several directions: there's the fairy-tale world of the Snow Drop Nursery and the mysterious book, the glossy contemporary realm of nightclubs and petty teenage rivalries, and, from time to time, attempts at gritty real-life problems as Hae-Gi struggles in school and encounters the dark side of modeling (not that we see him either study or model very often; usually, the characters seem free to wander around having dramatic confrontations all day). There's also a comic-romance subplot, as So-Na's sometime boyfriend develops an unlikely new love interest. Do the frequent shifts in tone indicate the characters' layered lives, or simply the comic's short attention span? By the end of Volume 1, it's still hard to tell. *Snow Drop* seems to be struggling against the conventions of manga, trying to tell a slightly different type of story without doing anything radically original. The result is sometimes interesting, always stylish, but often uneven. And the art needs work.

SHAENON K. GARRITY

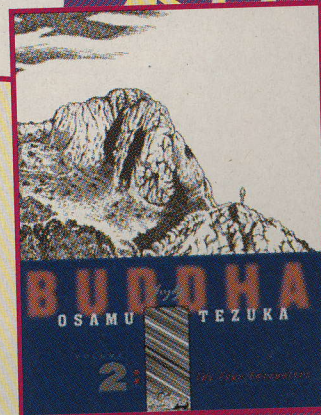
TOKYOPOP • b&w, 187 pages • Left-to-Right • US\$9.99 • Rating: 16+

BUDDHA

VOL. 1: KAPILAVASTU

VOL. 2: THE FOUR ENCOUNTERS

STORY AND ART BY OSAMU TEZUKA



Vertical, Inc. is a new publisher that specializes in Japanese novels. Its first manga is *Buddha*, Osamu Tezuka's retelling of the story of the historical Buddha. The first two of a planned eight volumes have recently been released. Tezuka spent over 10 years creating this manga, which was serialized from September 1972 to December 1983 in *KIBO-NO-TOMO* magazine (which in the intervening years went through name changes to *SHONEN WORLD* and *COMIC TOM*). *Buddha* is very similar to Tezuka's *Phoenix* series in its exploration of life and death.

The story is about the young prince Siddhartha living in Northern India in the 6th Century B.C. The prince marries at 16 and has a son, but at the age of 29 suddenly abandons his family and all his possessions. Siddhartha lives as a wandering monk for six years before finding enlightenment under a tree. From then on, he becomes "The Buddha," spending the rest of his life teaching along the Ganges river. To this legend, Tezuka has added his own cast of characters with their own stories, each reflecting on the themes of Buddhism, and the birth and death cycle of life.

The Buddha is barely present in the first volume, only having just been born. Instead Tezuka sets the stage by introducing the oppressive nature of India's ancient caste system through the characters of Chapra the slave, and Tatta the pariah. Chapra tries to fight the system to make a better life for him and his mother. He meets up with Tatta, a young thief with the ability to possess the bodies of animals. The second volume centers on the young prince Siddhartha and his life leading up to his decision to become a monk.

If reading a manga about an ancient spiritual leader sounds dry, in reality, *Buddha* comes across more as an adventure story with spiritual elements and morals rather than a religious work. This is likely because it was serialized in a boy's magazine rather than an adult manga magazine. The result is a fun read that makes you think.

Buddha is Osamu Tezuka at his best. His stories have a relentless quality that jumps rapidly from serious to lighthearted while driving the plot in unexpected directions. Vertical, Inc. has bound the manga in a beautiful hardcover edition. I do wish that the company had included some supplementary material, perhaps on historical Buddhism to let the reader know how much of the story is Tezuka's invention, but that's just a minor quibble for a great book.

JAMES BOREN

Vertical, Inc. • b&w, 400 pages • Left-to-Right, Translated FX, hardcover • US\$24.95 • Rating: None



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