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## SNAP JUDGMENTS

by Randy Lander

### BUDDHA VOLUME 1: KAPILAVASTU HC (Best of the Week!)

Highly Recommended (9/10)

It was Viz that first introduced me to Osamu Tezuka, when they sent along a review copy of *Phoenix*. I was blown away by the scope and imagination of it, but since then I have seen that Tezuka's work can be a bit hit and miss for me. His earlier work, in particular, is always well-done but all-too-often just doesn't have the same spark as his best work. I'm not sure when *Buddha* was created, but I would guess that it was later in his career, as the first volume is a masterpiece of imagination, history and legend, a thoroughly engrossing read that draws the reader into the setting of India in a time just before one of the world's great prophets was born.



Tezuka's story in this first volume doesn't really feature the man who will become Buddha all that strongly; in fact, it's mostly a story made up of Tezuka characters, all of whom bear some resemblance to the archetypes that he is fond of using. The child with great power, the older characters who seems more naive than the younger characters and of course the intelligent animals that

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remind the reader of Tezuka's Disney influence can all be found within these pages. Within these archetypes, however, he creates some fascinating character drama. The story of Chapra and his mother starts off as a tragedy, looks for a while like it might go in the hero's journey vein and then turns once more into a tragedy. And Tatta is a terrific example of the roguish scoundrel with redeeming qualities, such as his understanding of the animal kingdom and related paranormal power.

Though I haven't read enough of his work to make a blanket statement, it does seem that Tezuka is at his best when his story is more of the epic variety. *Buddha* is the tale of the man who would become Buddha, but it's also a story of warring kingdoms, a caste system being tested by changing times and the journey of a monk and two lower class boys as they try to become something more. Tezuka isn't telling a dry biography of a man here, he's setting the stage with the culture that gave rise to the man, and telling side stories at the same time. There's a lot happening in these pages, but unlike some of his earlier works such as *Lost World* or *Metropolis*, Tezuka never seems to lose his focus here, and so these happenings all tie together.

In general, the story is focused on Chapra, and even the role that his mother, the monk Naradatta and the strange young Tatta play is more or less a part of Chapra's story. He's a likable character, devoted to his mother and quick to befriend Tatta, but as the story goes on, we start to see a baser nature, as Chapra's noble goals of equality start to become more selfish goals. He also has a streak of pride and boastfulness that makes for a pretty entertaining story of his days in training to become a warrior. Throughout all this, however, despite any human flaws, Chapra is always a character that is easy to empathize with, and I found myself hoping that he would succeed, even though his goals seemed impossible.

Tezuka's imagination and storytelling ability is part of what earned him the title of "God of manga," but his artwork certainly played no small part. As I said earlier, I'm not sure when *Buddha* was originally created, but it is clearly later work, as Tezuka's artwork is as polished as I've seen it, easily as strong as the work he did on *Phoenix*. The cartoony characters are very expressive, and though the stylized look helps to dull the effect of some of the more horrific moments in the story, it certainly doesn't work against the serious tone. Tezuka's

sense of humor and action permeates the artwork as well, especially in the rakish behavior of Tatta. It's his attention to detail that is most impressive, most notable during the flight of the locust series but visible throughout as well.

I should note, in all fairness, that this is a review based on an advance proof, and that the last four chapters are covered in a text synopsis form. In addition, the copy I have is a softcover proof, rather than the deluxe hardcover format that Vertical is producing for the market. However, everything I have heard about those who have seen the hardcovers is that the production qualities are excellent (they're designed by Chip Kidd, which is always a good thing), and the contents of this advance proof indicate to me that this is a work of exceptionally high quality.

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Email Randy Lander comments about this review.

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