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December 16, 2003

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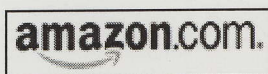
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Reviews: Buddha, Volume 1: Kapilavastu

Posted on Monday, December 15 @ 23:05:10 CST by [Staff](#)

While manga fans are usually familiar with the name of Osamu Tezuka, most are only aware of his work with Astro Boy. However, Tezuka was also well known for producing mature stories that dealt with issues of injustice, human rights and the environment. Into this category falls Buddha, an 8 volume epic that chronicles the life of Buddha and the struggle of living in ancient India. Check out why we think that this is definite must read for serious manga fans.



Buddha, Volume 1: Kapilavastu

By: Osamu Tezuka
Published by: Vertigo Inc.
Rating: !!! 1/2
© 2003 Tezuka Productions.

The Buddha's story is an eight volume manga masterpiece at about 400 pages per volume. Having been drawn from traditional Buddhist lore, two-thirds is true and the one third is pure fiction. In the first volume, *Kapilavastu*, Tezuka's life of Buddha story starts with the fictional tale of Chapra, a ambitious slave boy who decides to make a better life for himself. Spurning the caste system from which he was born, Chapra manages to elevate himself by saving a well known general from a gruesome death. In appreciation for saving his life, the general who believes Chapra to be a warrior orphan, adopts him as his own son. Life is everything Chapra believed it should be as he grows up under the tutelage of the general to become the region's favorite hero. But as fate would have it, Chapra's new life begins to unravel when his mother shows up, undeniable proof of his true heritage. The sham falls apart and Chapra and his mother pay the ultimate price for defying the caste system. The birth of Siddhartha (Buddha) is not for

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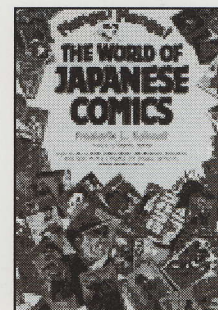
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several chapters into this story and almost serves as a respite to the drama surrounding Chapra and his struggles. This struggle illustrates the caste system and harsh living conditions of ancient India into which Siddhartha was born. In volume two, *The Four Encounters*, the story will focus more on Siddhartha's early life and will intertwine with stories of Tezuka's own characters, some we have met in volume one.

A proponent of human rights, Tezuka definitely had a problem with the caste system and pulled no punches when displaying its cruelties. This is not to say that the book has no humor. If Tezuka had a fault, it would be his propensity to lighten the mood during an otherwise intense scene. Every now and then, a bit character will directly address the reader to throw a bit of humor on the situation (for example; complaining that they don't have the money for color printing) or having the character so enraged that he takes his anger out on the comic frames, tearing them to pieces. Those who are familiar with Tezuka's work will notice that this book contains all of the innovative techniques he has developed to draw the eye and build dramatic tension.

The art style within the book is classic Tezuka. While he does not reuse any of the character designs from his other works such as Astro Boy or Phoenix, the style and feeling of the characters are familiar while still being fresh. One difference from his other works are the detailed backgrounds that appear throughout the story. So striking are these backgrounds, you would swear that they were done by intaglio engraving instead of just pen and ink.

The one criticism we have with this book is the complete lack of a foreword or afterword explaining who Tezuka was and perhaps a quick overview of his approach to the Buddha's story. In fact, this material was present in the paperback review copy we received and we even asked the publisher for this material to be expanded. It's surprising then that not even the paperback version of this information made it to hardcover. There is a brief bit of biographical information on Tezuka, printed on the obi wrapper that comes with the book. Typically, that wrapper is the first to go and we almost missed what little info there is. We believe that even one page of background information would greatly enhance the reader's experience.

We can not comment on the accuracy of the translation, having not seen the original work in Japanese. The translated dialog flows naturally and is engaging, with the only "speed bump" being some of the more slangy bits. The hard bound book is a delight to read and hold. Printed on heavy paper, Tezuka's images are reproduced with a clarity rarely seen. At just under 400 pages, the book is over an inch thick, leading to several nights worth of reading. The cover has a dramatic image of the



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Buddha and his father on the front and the back has a series of character images from the story. Included in the front of the book is a map showing the region to which these stories relate to.

What They Say:

From the preview copy:

"Legendary Osamu Tezuka's life of Buddha begins with the story of the slave boy Chapra. As the restive youth's fate unfolds, Siddhartha (Buddha) is born near the city of Kapilavastu. Tezuaka's genius brings the Buddha's India to steaming, vivid life. The first of an eight-volume epic, Kapilavastu is as humorous as it is breathtaking."

From the hard cover edition:

"All life is sacred....

Osamu Tezuka, the godfather of manga, brings ancient India to steaming, vivid life in this majestic biography of the Buddha. The "Blessed One" is born in this volume, the first.

The fates of Tezuka's original characters - the slave Chapra, the pariah Tatta, and many others - are deftly intertwined with traditional lore. As humorous as it is moving, *Buddha* is an epic masterpiece.

The Himalayas await you, and Kapilavastu.."

Tezuka wrote the Buddha Story in 1987, just a few years before his death. Volume one was released by Vertical in October, and volume two in November of 2003. Volumes three and four are currently scheduled to come out in April and June of 2004. The targeted audience of this book are readers of popular historical fiction and those wishing to learn more about Buddha's life, albeit in a fictional setting.

Parental Warning:

This is definitely written for a mature audience. There are quite a few moral and philosophical questions raised and young readers may not understand the violence and injustice portrayed in the book. Additionally, there is a fair amount of non-sexual nudity, mainly because clothing is a class identifier. The higher caste you were, the more clothing you wore.

Get a Copy for Yourself:

- Buddha, Vol. 1: Kapilavastu - Save \$7.50 when you order this from Amazon.com. Well worth it at this price.

- Buddha, Vol. 2: The Four Encounters - Save \$7.50 when you order this from Amazon.com.

Recommend Reading:

If you liked Buddha, then you may enjoy these other works from Osamu Tezuka as well.

- Metropolis - Tezuka's take on the classic Fritz Lang story about class struggle during the Industrial Revolution.
- Phoenix: A Tale of the Future - Another multi-volume story about hope, struggle, and the folly's of Man.

About Vertical Inc:

"Vertical, Inc., is a unique new publisher specializing in translating the best contemporary Japanese books. We select our popular novels, graphic novels, and quality nonfiction from a rich, variegated stock: Japan's huge and vibrant book market.

In fields like animation and video games, Japanese entertainment thrills people worldwide. The Japanese book world's offerings are equally entertaining. Until now, however, most Japanese books translated into English have been either literary classics or introductions to traditional culture meant for a limited circle of Japanophiles. Vertical publishes exciting titles that require no prior knowledge of Japanese culture and are not intended primarily to familiarize readers with it; we choose good reads with universal themes."

Rating System:

0 = Burn it!, 1/2 = Appalling, ! = Very bad, ! 1/2 = Bad, !! = Average, !! 1/2 = Good, !!! = Very good, !!! 1/2 = Excellent, !!! = A masterpiece!

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