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Posted by MattBrady on 10-21-2003 02:34 PM:

VERTICAL REPRINTS OSAMU TEZUKA'S BUDDHA

Manga reprints made room for a newcomer this month. Along with the vampire hunters, the school girls, the racers, the fantasy characters, manga sections at bookstores and comic shops are now home to Prince Siddhartha by way of Osamu Tezuka, courtesy of a new translation by Vertical.

No, the publisher's name *isn't* familiar. Vertical is a relatively new publisher that's in its second year of translating and publishing Japanese pop fiction.

From Vertical's website:

"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.

"Read different. Read Vertical."

"Basically, we think there are really cool books in Japan that Americans would like - and we're trying to publish them," Vertical's Marketing Director, Micah Burch told Newsarama. "We generally bring over pop genre fiction - horror, sci fi, fantasy, and hardboiled crime. But, as we restrict ourselves only to good contemporary Japanese fiction, we also do historical novels, graphic novels, and feel good stories.

As both the explosion in manga's acceptance in the US market as well as translations of other Japanese properties, such as *The Ring* have shown, there is an audience in the West for Japanese fiction. But, as the broad spectrum of Japanese fiction brought to the US suggests, it's not all going to be a hit with the mass audience.

"The number one criterion we use for selecting texts is their viability in the U.S.," Burch said. "We try to put out books that we think Americans - and other westerners - would want to read, rather than what Japanese may want Americans and westerners to read. We're a commercial publisher out to break even - at least - so we're interested in works with broad appeal, in particular modern genre fiction."

Given that, it almost sounds contradictory for Vertical to be publishing Tezuka's **Buddha**, given that a) manga, while popular is still something of a niche market, that is, Oprah's not going to pick **Chobits** as her next Book Club selection; and b) between Viz, Dark Horse, and the monster that is TokyoPop, only a fool



would opt to jump into the manga market these days.

The respective mothers of Vertical's staff didn't raise no fools.

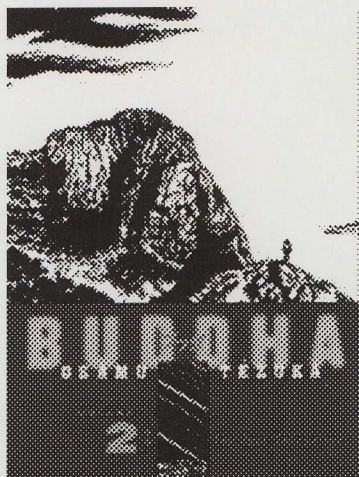
"Manga is extremely competitive, no doubt," Burch said. "And in truth we have no expectation of competing with the manga publishers. But, opposite from novels - where the classics are well served and pop is ignored, the manga published in the US has generally been pop - we think there are a few classics that are appropriate inclusions in our list of the best contemporary fiction from Japan."

And thus, Osamu Tezuka.

"Tezuka is a master," Burch said. "His works defy categorization as 'graphic novel' or novel, or history or philosophy or religion or anything else. His manga, and especially **Buddha**, are simply wondrous to read - no matter what you call them."

Burch's comments really aren't hyperbole.

Tezuka is revered in Japan much like Walt Disney is in the United States and much of the West for being a dreamer, and one who was able to bring his dreams to life. Over the course of his life, he created dozens upon dozens of classic works that are timeless in nature, from his most famous, **Astro Boy** (currently being reprinted by Dark Horse), to an adaptation of *Crime and Punishment* to his classics such as **Phoenix**, **Adolf**, **The Jungle Emperor**, and **Black Jack**. Tezuka's artistic style looks as if it is designed for children, but his stories carry messages for all readers, young and old.



With both Dark Horse and Viz having reprinted Tezuka's work previously, Burch can still marvel that an upstart company such as Vertical was able to secure the rights from Tezuka Productions, which control the rights to the master's creations.

"I'm sure it would've ended up at one of those others if we hadn't asked first!" Burch said. "I'm not sure why they didn't snatch it up - perhaps, without answering for them, I imagine it's because of the specialized way in which **Buddha** needs to be treated as a classic; as a serious work of art, complete with hardcovers and whatnot. Or maybe they felt busy enough with all of their other titles, including Tezuka ones that they just passed it over. At any rate, we've always been very excited about it and I think the fact that we are concentrating all of our manga energies, as it were, on this one title convinced Tezuka Productions that we would treat **Buddha** with the respect it deserves. The other publishers mentioned are capable of giving it the same treatment, perhaps they just decided not to."

The work, which will run in eight hardcover volumes, was originally serialized and released in the '70s. Like other manga epics, it had a long run in its original format - ten years. "In the late '80s Tezuka collected the work and, with substantial revisions, published it in Japan in book form. It is this version on which we've based our **Buddha**. We purchased our translation in incomplete form from a translator and substantially revised and completed it ourselves.

"**Buddha** appeared in Tezuka's later period when he was already at the height of his powers, unlike **Phoenix**, which he started when he was still not established. He had already developed his keen humanism and this was the apex of that line of his work."

And of course, as the title suggests, the story is an account of the life of Siddhartha, the young Indian nobleman who, through compassion, would seek and find enlightenment, and become the man, but more than a man, known as the Buddha.

Like Hesse's *Siddhartha*, Tezuka's **Buddha** is fictionalized, with characters and events added by Tezuka to move the story along. "Some characters are Tezuka creations, some are really from the Buddhist lore but

serve different roles, and some characters and events - the majority - are faithful to at least some version of the Buddhist teachings," Burch said. "It's kinda like Herman Hesse with more pictures and a lot more laughs."

Burch isn't telling tales. The first two volumes, while telling Siddhartha's story almost in passing, focus on the caste system of India that the young prince was born into, with Tezuka intent on showing its inherent injustice, and thus, establishing the world in which Siddhartha would experience. But, as Burch said, that's not to say that the story doesn't have Tezuka trademarks. Volume 1 largely follows the slave child Chapra, his friend Tatta, and the young monk Naradatta. By telling the story of the three, Tezuka sets the stage in the reader's mind that *something* in the world Siddhartha was born into had to change, as violence only beget more violence and those who were oppressed by virtue of low birth would be oppressed for generations and generations.

But while he was a passionate believer in peaceful causes, and could be argued to have been a literal pacifist, Tezuka was not a Buddhist, and did not intend for his story to serve as Buddhist propaganda - but there is a message inside, and it's one that, according to Burch, still benefits from a good reading.

"Tezuka's taken considerable poetic license with Buddhist lore and I'm sure not everything in **Buddha** intended to be funny and playful will be seen that way," Burch said. "Like much of Tezuka's work, especially his later work, however, there is a strong humanist element. The combination of Westerners' fascination with Eastern religions and philosophy, the simple quality and beauty of the Tezuka's artwork, the growing popularity of manga, and the necessity of propagating Tezuka's - and the Buddha's - message, that all life is sacred, all combined with Vertical management's love of this work to make it a necessity that we publish it. Let's not forget that it's just a fun comic to read, as well. There's action, humor, and suspense in plentiful supply as well."

Right. The price.

Each of the eight volumes of Vertical's **Buddha** will run \$24.95 retail (barring any supply-side price increases over the next couple of years which would force Vertical to raise their prices). Yeah - that's two and a half times the price of a Tokyopop manga volume.

"As I mentioned earlier, we're not really trying to be like TokyoPop," Burch said. "**Buddha** is unique in that the magnitude of the author, the quality of the artwork, and the import of the story itself - packaged with Chip Kidd design [which is why the book's cover has a ring of familiarity to it] - makes **Buddha** as much an item to have on your most prominent book shelf as it is something to quickly read and savor."

Or, to think of it another way, eight volumes of **Buddha** at \$25 each comes to \$200 for the full story. As Burch likes to see it: "The story alone is worth \$200. We're throwing in the artwork and the handsome presentation, et al, for free!"

Ideally, Burch doesn't foresee any problem moving copies of the books. "I like to think that **Buddha** will appeal to the typical manga fans - which it should thanks to the name Osamu Tezuka - as well to the Buddhist, philosopher, historian - and, though there's some language and National Geographic style nudity - it is also a story with a lesson, though there's absolutely no proselytizing, suitable for youngsters."

Buddha Vol. 1: Kapilavastu is currently in bookstores, while **Volume 2: The Four Encounters** will be in stores in early November. Volumes three and four should come out in April and June of 2004, and the remaining four are slated to be released two each (book) season - of which there are two a year, so two more in 2004 and the final two volumes in the first half of 2005.

And after that, or heck, even during that, don't necessarily look for more manga from Vertical, but don't count it out either. "We don't have any concrete plans to publish other manga," Burch said. "But I'd never say never."



Posted by *Zadillo* on 10-21-2003 03:14 PM:

This looks pretty cool..... I'd never heard of this among lists of Tezuka's work, so I'm definitely interested in checking it out. I love the cover designs too..... very striking.

-Zadillo

Posted by *gon* on 10-21-2003 03:38 PM:

Count me in... everything I've read by Tezuka this far (Adolf, Astro Boy, Phoenix) have been exceptional. 25 bucks? Cheap.

By the way, does anyone here know how the story about Disney's plagiarism of The Jungle Emperor (a.k.a. The Lion King) ended?

Posted by *RobSchamberger* on 10-21-2003 03:38 PM:

I'm picking mine up shortly. I've been interested to see Tezuka's later works, and this seems to really fit in with my own sensibilities.

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Posted by *Zadillo* on 10-21-2003 04:43 PM:

quote:

Originally posted by gon

Count me in... everything I've read by Tezuka this far (Adolf, Astro Boy, Phoenix) have been exceptional. 25 bucks? Cheap.

By the way, does anyone here know how the story about Disney's plagiarism of The Jungle Emperor (a.k.a. The Lion King) ended?

Not sure what you mean about how it "ended"..... as far as I know, Disney is still denying any connection, and I don't think Tezuka's estate (or whoever owns the rights to Kimba the White Lion) has ever actually sued them or made an issue out of it. There are of course all sorts of rumors and speculation about the matter (including that the Lion King had started out as an official remake of Kimba the White Lion, and then for some reason that fell apart). Of course, Disney only makes themselves look worse by the nature of their denial (i.e. to the point that they seem to claim they weren't even aware of it's existence, which is pretty bizarre since surely they must know of Tezuka's work, especially since Kimba the White Lion was actually popular in the US). It also does seem to be a continuing slap in the face to Tezuka, considering that he seemed to have a fair amount of admiration for Disney's animation.

I don't think there will ever be an official "end" in the sense that Disney will not ever just come out and say "OK, we admit it, this story at least borrowed some elements from Tezuka's work", because they probably don't want to open up the can of worms that would involve. The only thing that would probably really spur anything on would be for Tezuka's estate (and/or the current copyright owners) to make a legal issue out of

all of this, which I have a feeling they aren't going to do.

-Zadillo

Posted by Jamie S. Rich on 10-21-2003 05:15 PM:



Can't wait to find these. Ian Shaughnessy told me about them, and he says the production on the books is fierce!

Jamie S. Rich
editorial egomaniac
Oni Press

<http://www.onipress.com>
<http://www.confessions123.com>

Posted by nenad on 10-21-2003 06:00 PM:

I will get this. We need more of the literary publishers publishing literary graphic novels. I highly recommend another recent literary manga publisher: Ponent Mon (see <http://www.ponentmon.com>) Anyway, I hope all these literary publishers succeed as I'd hate to see the only choices (at least in manga) being dreck published by Tokiopop. And both of these "Buddha" books are hardcovers.

nenad

Posted by gon on 10-21-2003 06:24 PM:

Oh, thank you.
I read something about the whole mess in Animerica (I think) years ago, and wondered whether there had been some official statements, either from Tezuka's estate or Disney, apart from denials from the latter (Shame on you, Disney!). I can't help but wonder about what Tezuka had to say had he been alive when Disney released The Lion King.

I wish someone releases the manga and/or the animated series (in DVD) in the USA so people can see what Disney did...

I'd love to see the promotional campaign. "Before The Lion King, there was Kimba..."

Posted by Zadillo on 10-21-2003 06:28 PM:

quote:

Originally posted by gon

Oh, thank you.

I read something about the whole mess in Animerica (I think) years ago, and wondered whether there had been some official statements, either from Tezuka's estate or Disney (apart from denials from the latter. Shame on you, Disney!). I can't help but wonder about what Tezuka had to say had he been alive when Disney released The Lion King.

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As far as I know his estate hasn't said anything about it (someone correct me if this is wrong). He died in 1989, and the Lion King came out in 1994.

Kimba the White Lion is in fact available on video at least, and many adults certainly remember it from when they were kids (it was a fairly popular show to my understanding), so it's not like no-one had ever heard of Kimba before. Kimba the White Lion was one of three Tezuka shows that NBC had aired (the others being AstroBoy and Princess Knight).

Right Stuf International (<http://www.rightstuf.com>) also released a 4-volume boxset on DVD (also available as individual volumes), so it is available in a more modern format as well.

-Zadillo

Posted by Michael C Lorah on 10-21-2003 08:39 PM:

This looks very cool. I'll have to look for it.

Off hand, anybody know about how many pages each book is? \$25 isn't a bad price at all if the page count is right.

Posted by MattBrady on 10-21-2003 08:45 PM:

400 ish.

MattB

Posted by Michael C Lorah on 10-21-2003 10:41 PM:

400 is a deal

Thanks, Matt.

Posted by gon on 10-22-2003 03:52 PM:

Zadillo: thanks again for all the info. I'll browse that link.

PS. Yeah, I knew Tezuka was dead before The Lion King release. I just formulated it badly. You posted your response before I could edit. Thanks again.

All times are GMT. The time now is 10:09 PM.

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