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December 6, 2005

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Reviews: We Love Yaoi Comics

Posted on Thursday, January 06 @ 15:42:23 2005 by [Staff](#)

[bckat](#) writes "Three publishers - Be Beautiful, Digital Manga Publishing, and Kitty Media - released some of the more explicit of boy's love (BL)/yaoi comics into U.S. bookstores this past year. These erotic romances fight for scarce bookshelf space against popular titles like *Fruits Basket*, *Initial D*, and *King of Hell*. When the dust finally settles, where will the plastic-wrapped BL/yaoi finally end up?"

"Boy's love" and "yaoi" are both used to refer to "MALE x MALE" comics, a subgenre of Japanese shoujo manga (girls' comics) and Korean sun-jung manhwa (ladies' comics). The acronym "yaoi" - from the Japanese "yama nashi, ochi nashi, imi nashi" (no climax, no point, no meaning) - is used mostly in the West. BL/yaoi comics favor romantic over sexual relationships between fantasy males, except for the more hardcore.

BL/yaoi comics are not the same as gay comics since females are the primary creators and consumers; heterosexual mores are expressed, not homosexual. This is not to say that there aren't any gay BL/yaoi readers, in the West it is a sizeable group.

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Links of Interest

Be Beautiful, an imprint associated with CPM Manga, has released You Asagiri's *Golden Cain*, two vols. of Naduki Koujima's *Selfish Love*, and three vols. of Kazuma Kodaka's well-known *Kizuna - Bonds of Love*. While I own a *Kizuna* DVD, I never bought the original comic because I wasn't attracted by the artwork. But after reading the translations, I enjoy the comic more than the animation, partly because of the richer character and story development made possible when one can linger over a printed page. I've also come to a better understanding of the comic's endurance.

Kizuna has a nice combination of masculine coolness and feminine cuteness. The lead couple is Ranmaru Samejima, a promising kendo swordsman, and Kei Enjouji, the son of a yakuza bossman and his mistress. Kai Sagano, Kei's half-brother and only son of their father's wife, competes for his hero Ranmaru's affection to the dismay of both Kei and perhaps Kai's street-tough but lovingly protective bodyguard, Masa Araki.

Digital Manga Publishing's offerings are Maki Kazumi and Yukine Honami's *Desire*, Shinobu Gotoh and Shoko Takaku's *Passion*, and Satoru Kannagi and Hotaru Odagiri's *Only the Ring Finger Knows*(ORFK), whose title is that story's sweet punchline. DMP's graphic novels are larger than standard, come with a dust cover, and are \$3 cheaper than Be Beautiful's.

ORFK is probably the most memorable because it introduces a cute high school custom of wearing a ring or a paired ring on a certain finger to indicate single status, friendship, or commitment as a couple. Wataru Fujii and model upperclassman Yuichi Kazuki discover they wear the same ring. What will the other students think? Is that any reason for Yuichi to

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treat Wataru so badly? The mystery behind Yuichi's ring isn't explained away until the end of the book. ORFK is fairly tame since the lead pair never gets beyond kissing.

Kitty Media has released Yoshino Somei and Row Takakura's *Skyscrapers of Oz*. Though the storyline was so-so, the quality of the artwork was closer to what I would normally buy. Lead hunks Yoichi Onishi and Mari Kudoh will hire themselves out to do mundane things like walk someone's dog, yet the other half of their business is darker and dangerous. Miyuki, Mari's younger brother, is Yoichi's lover. Mari is the odd man out, but not for long.

Other BL/yaoi comics to be found in stores include Chi Hyong Lee/Yun Hee Lee and Kara's *Demon Diary*, Yoko Matsushita's *Descendants of Darkness: Yami No Matsuei* (VIZ), Sanami Matcho's *Fake* (TOKYOPOP) and *Until the Full Moon* (Broccoli Books), and Maki Murakami's *Gravitation* (TOKYOPOP). They're good beginner reads since they are well drawn and fairly inoffensive to BL/yaoi virgins.

The translation and marketing of hardcore BL/yaoi has been a major milestone for the BL/yaoi genre resulting in the entire range of books being represented in bookstores. The next landmark would be the publication of a domestic BL/yaoi comic artist by a mainstream publisher, if it ever happens. It is up to fans whether the sales growth of BL/yaoi will be sufficient to support future releases, or at least, a reduction in pricing.

[Ed Note: bckat touches on an important issue here, namely the high price of books from Be Beautiful. Be Beautiful does a very good job of translating and printing of thier books, and they have been a leader in this

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genre. However, they have stated that the high prices are a means of preventing younger readers from obtaining the books (1) . Having witnessed 15yr-olds whip out a \$100 bill to pay for thier manga, I doubt the effectiveness of such a policy. Additionally, it places BB in the potentially dangerous position of having their market share undercut by cheaper novels from competitor after they have gone through the work of growing that market.]

(1) CPM panel, otakon 2004.

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