

Yaoi Press, Publisher of Original English-language Yaoi

by Kat Avila

Within the past two years Tokyopop, Be Beautiful, Digital Manga Publishing (DMP), and Kitty Media have translated and placed Asian *yaoi* or boy's love graphic novels into major chain bookstores. The target audience is generally females over 18, since many of the imported romances include sex scenes. Now we have Yaoi Press, based in the U.S., which is promoting original work, not simply reprinting titles from Japan or Korea as the other publishers do.

While similarly oriented domestic presses exist, Yaoi Press observes a high standard for art and stories, making its graphic novels closer to being competitive with reprints. As of the date of this interview with managing editor Yamila Abraham, Yaoi Press has released *Kingdom of Selfish Love*, *PINNED!*, and *Prisoner of the Immortal*, in that order.

Where did the idea for Yaoi Press come from?

I'd been writing and drawing yaoi two decades before I knew there was a word for it. I was compelled to create these stories about guys in love that didn't fit the mold of gay fiction. When I discovered *yaoi* and *shounen-ai* [trans.- boy's love] on the Internet in 1999, I had an epiphany. From there I worked on several small Internet projects. I used this time to network with English-speaking yaoi fans. In late 2004, I felt ready to dedicate myself to the genre professionally full time.

For those JADE Magazine readers who may not be acquainted with yaoi, how would you explain it?

There is a very specific definition for this term in the Japanese language, but it doesn't really make its meaning all that clear. I like to think that *yaoi* is a word that's been adopted into the English language. *Yaoi* is sequential art or cartoons drawn in a Japanese niche art style that depicts stories about guys in love with other guys. These stories are generally made to appeal to a female audience.

Is this the same definition of the word *yaoi* in Japanese? As I understand it, no; it's a little different. However, *yaoi* is the word most English-speaking fans associate with the type of work we publish.

You are expected to release a total of six titles this year. Will you be able to keep up this pace next year?

Next year I anticipate we'll actually be putting out more than one book a month. We have a large group of talented creators eager for work and a large-scale distribution deal in the pipeline. I've recently hired a second editor to assist me. I think in the early start of a business it's good to put all the profits right back into it. That means spending more money on promotion and on listing more titles.

The unusual setting for your second graphic novel PINNED! is the world of pro wrestling. PINNED! was illustrated by Studio Kosaru of Indonesia and written by you. Are you a pro wrestling fan? How long did you work on the suspenseful mystery/thriller script?

Yes, I'll admit to being a pro wrestling fan. I haven't watched the programs for about a year now, but there were times in the past when I was passionate about it. I saw *yaoi* in the wrestling shows. There were storylines that either overtly or covertly had romance between the male characters.

PINNED! had been brewing in my mind for a long time. I had a notepad full of ideas for the story as far back as 2003. When I started Yaoi Press and didn't have any other writers working

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for me yet, it was necessary to write at least two books myself. *PINNED!* was a story I debated over. I knew it would be something completely different for *yaoi* fans.

When Kosaru Studio presented me with the artist who ultimately worked on it, that cinched it. This artist was perfect for the story. I had to give it a chance. Now it looks like *PINNED!* will be an ongoing series.

How did the collaboration with Studio Kosaru of Indonesia come about?

I sought talent in Internet forums. I'm not sure which forum they found me on. It was fantastic luck that we connected. They're an exceptional studio, very fast and full of incredible talent. Six of their artists are working for me now.

Will Yaoi Press be selling related promotional merchandise such as T-shirts and mugs?

Our promotional items are going to be a little more daring than that. We're having an item modeled for us now that will debut at Yaoi-Con 2005. It's a pen topper in the shape of a beautiful *yaoi* character tipping back his head in ecstasy. Can you guess where the hole for the pen will be?

It's very exciting that Yaoi Press is seeking and supporting new yaoi artists and writers. What types of art and stories are you looking for?

Our most popular artists are the ones who most closely emulate the style in the Japanese *yaoi* books. That doesn't mean you can copy your favorite *yaoi* artist and work for us. We prefer artists with either a four-year degree in art or the equivalent in professional experience.

I stress the word *professional* because that generally does not mean someone who's only worked independently. We prefer people who've had significant experience working under an editor and meeting deadlines. We've taken newcomers who needed a lot of coaching in the past; but as the business has grown and more talent is being attracted to us, we are being more selective.

Finding good stories is an incredible challenge. I spend too much time coaching new writers. What I really need is for polished writers working in other genres to make the leap into *yaoi* and submit to me.

Yaoi Press will be at Yaoi-Con 2005, October 28-30, in San Francisco. Are you going to any other conventions?

We don't have any planned before Yaoi-Con. We will definitely be attending some after Yaoi-Con, but there are no final decisions on which ones yet.

Yaoi-Con is the big one for us. We will have four tables in the dealer's room. We'll have a large sculpture of a tentacle monster at our booth. We're also leading a panel where participants can help us brainstorm a story for a future Yaoi Press graphic novel.

I'll have five of my creators with me, two of which are flying all the way from Spain to attend.

Is there anything else you would like to add?

I'd like to mention my credentials for being an editor and a successful entrepreneur. I've run my own business from my home for eight years now. This successful home-based business has allowed me to fund Yaoi Press entirely with my own capital.

I have a bachelor's degree in English Language and Literature from Southern New Hampshire University. I have a second degree in Fiction Writing from the National Radio Institute. I completed a novel during a two-year fiction writing apprenticeship under the noted author Robert Begiebing.

I wrote and illustrated an online *yaoi* story called the *Consort of Davon* for two years. This had a regular following of over 500 *yaoi* fans.

Yaoi Press graphic novels are available at Amazon.com or at its web site <http://www.yaoipress.com>.

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