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15 Years of the All-Woman Manga Studio **CLAMP**

by [Kat Avila](#)

Introduction

CLAMP, a popular four-woman manga studio, has been around for fifteen years creating popular and commercially successful manga such as *Chobits*, *Cardcaptor Sakura*, *X/1999*, and *Magic Knight Rayearth*. Among the top 15 selling graphic novels of 2004 in the U.S. are **CLAMP's** *Tsubasa* Vol. 1 and Vol. 2 (MacDonald, 24).

They crossed over from making *Captain Tsubasa* and *Saint Seiya* fan comics and joined mainstream publishing with cult classic *RG Veda* in 1989, achieving broader recognition with *Magic Knight Rayearth* in 1993. But for their debut as manga creators, these women would have become tea-serving office workers (Oshiguchi, 175).

According to Mokona Guu Center, **CLAMP** started off as a group of twelve. As professionals, they numbered seven, including Tamayo Akiyama (*Hyper Rune*, *Mouryou Kiden: Legend of the Nymph*), Leeza Sei, and Sei Nanao. Since 1992, their group has had four members.

The writer for **CLAMP** is Osaka-born Nanase Okawa. The remaining three artists were born in Kyoto. Mokona Apapa is the main artist; her highly recognizable style is classic **CLAMP**, identified by its dramatic tonal contrasts, white-paint speckled panels, and unusually tall and broad-shouldered stoic men and hyper-sexy women or hyper-

cute girls. Mick Nekoi's style is relaxed and the lines more sparing, as can be seen in **CLAMP** titles she has illustrated like *Suki* and *Shirahime-Syo*. Satsuki Igarashi is a supporting artist and designer.

CLAMP manga "display an unusual intensity uniquely appealing to hardcore fan or 'otaku' sensibilities," attributed to **CLAMP**'s beginnings as fan comics creators (Oshiguchi, 182). Their works span shoujo (girls'), shounen (boys'), and seinen (young men's) comics (Amano, 200). Whenever **CLAMP** is mentioned, generally the artwork style comes first to mind, then their boys' love pairings, followed by recognition of their great ability to create for diverse age and gender groups of comics fans.

Sprinkled through **CLAMP**'s later works are subtle and overt references to older titles. This is taken to exaggerated lengths in *Tsubasa*, which places Sakura and Syaoran of *Cardcaptor Sakura* in an alternative universe, and is a graphic novel to be enjoyed more by loyal fans who can appreciate the inside jokes.

One interesting storytelling strategy employed by Nanase Okawa is the use of a story within a story to open up the emotional center. In *Chobits*, it's the picture book series *A City With No People* that Hideki buys for his female humanoid computer Chi. In *Suki*, it's Tomoaki's picture book series of the same name that makes Hinata wonder "if the little bear will ever become friends with the bear with glasses." And in *Man of Many Faces*, Akechi-sensei frequently uses fables and allegories to counsel Ryusuke and Akira.

Tart-to-Tart

Carol Fox is a regular contributor to *Sequential Tart*, as well as a girls' manga editor at **TOKYOPOP**. She has worked on a number of **CLAMP** titles with **TOKYOPOP**. To celebrate **CLAMP**'s 15th anniversary, **TOKYOPOP** will be releasing the 12-volume **CLAMP** *no Kiseki: The Ultimate Collection* over two years starting spring 2005. Each

volume will focus on one or more titles and will include highlights, interviews, photos, artwork, and three collectible **CLAMP** character chess pieces.

Sequential Tart: ***TOKYOPOP** has translated and published in English the majority of **CLAMP**'s titles, plus the manga novel **CLAMP** School Paranormal Investigators. (Del Rey has published *Tsubasa* and *xxxHOLiC*, and Viz has published *X/1999*.) What is **TOKYOPOP**'s best selling **CLAMP** title?*

Carol Fox: *Chobits*, by far. Three of **TOKYOPOP**'s top five selling manga books of all time are in the *Chobits* series, and *Chobits* Vol. 1 is the highest selling **CLAMP** book of any released in the U.S. so far.

Then again, **TOKYOPOP** just released **CLAMP**'s *Legal Drug* this month, and sales on that one look very promising so far. And next year we're putting out *RG Veda*, which many consider the series that put **CLAMP** on the map.

ST: *A translated excerpt from *Magic Knight Rayearth* was my first introduction to **CLAMP**'s work. (I watched reruns of the animated *Magic Knight Rayearth* when I was in Japan this past year.) *RG Veda* and *X* converted me into a **CLAMP** fan. How about you?*

CF: Well, let's see. My first encounter with **CLAMP** was when I helped edit the *Cardcaptors* cine-manga for **TOKYOPOP** a few years back. Though I used "encounter with **CLAMP**" a bit loosely, the cine-manga is based on the *Cardcaptors* cartoon, which was produced in the U.S. by Nelvana, and Nelvana had changed a number of things, including most of the characters' names. So the first time I met Yukito and Tomoyo, they were Julian and Madison. I actually had to adjust to the Japanese names when I started adapting the manga about a year later!

But what converted me to being a fan of the authors,

rather than just their individual series? It was gradual, but I think it probably happened somewhere between adapting *Suki* and *Tokyo Babylon* a year or so ago. Both are beautifully designed, and both contrast innocence and treachery in a way I've rarely seen, in comics or any art form. You grow to identify with both the good and the evil characters.

Still, I have to say that *Cardcaptor Sakura* remains my all-time favorite **CLAMP** title. Considering how many characters it has, it's amazing how well-developed and likeable they are, pretty much across the board. And can you not cheer for Sakura and Li?

ST: *In Animerica, Vol. 10, No. 12 (Jan. 2002), fans voted Sakura of Cardcaptor Sakura and Hikaru Shido of Magic Knight Rayearth among their top five favorite magical girls, no. 1 and no. 5 respectively. CLAMP has created a number of other memorable female characters. There's the resilient Miyuki in Miyuki-Chan in Wonderland, the naive, always-smiling Hina in Suki, and the mysterious witch Yuko in xxxHOLiC. Who else would you add to this list?*

CF: Definitely Hokuto from *Tokyo Babylon*. She's pretty much the embodiment of spunk, style, and confidence. The world needs more ladies like her.

ST: *CLAMP guys are just the sexiest. There are the fantasy guys with long flowing hair and bare chests like in RG Veda to the contemporary Dragons of Heaven and Dragons of Earth in X. My flavor of the month is Gingetsu in Clover in his shades and military uniform.*

CF: I'm more of a Kazuhiko gal, myself. Though what I'm REALLY a sucker for is guys who can pull off glasses AND an apron. Who's hotter, Yukito or Sakura's dad? I just can't decide. (Hmmm, maybe THAT'S why I like that series so much.)

ST: *While Mokona's artwork makes CLAMP manga distinctive, I believe it's Nanase's fearlessly original stories*

— with a sprinkle of weirdness — that have supported their longevity. *Clover and Miyuki-Chan in Wonderland* are pretty adventurous.

CF: Thematically, **CLAMP** seems very fascinated with morality — their characters are constantly wrestling with themselves over the right thing to do, something to which pretty much all of us can relate. And the fact that so many of their stories deal with magical or fantastic elements adds a whole other element to that. Characters are thrust into having magical powers and high stakes that they don't know how to handle, so there's often a great deal of dialogue about the ethical codes of magic, and whether characters hold to these morals or disregard them entirely really tells you about the type of character you're dealing with.

CLAMP books tend to champion assertiveness, bravery, and a firm grasp of reality, while eschewing cynicism. Remembering the value of one's innocence and the simple joys of life is a common thread that runs throughout their series, and something I don't think anyone of any age can remember too often.

As for the art, Mokona Apapa's style is really distinctive and probably what they're most famous for — no one can make a pair of eyes glitter like she can! But one of the things I like most about **CLAMP** is how they can switch between artists and styles for a completely different feel. Mick Nekoi's work on *Suki* and *Wish*, both of which have a much softer style, is some of my very favorite **CLAMP** art.

CLAMP Graphic Novels

Note: The **CLAMP** copyright dates refer to the publication of the initial tankoubon (comic book) or graphic novel. Some stories may have appeared much earlier in serial magazines. This is not an exhaustive list of **CLAMP's** works.

- *Angelic Layer*, 5 vols., (c) 1999, pub. Kadokawa Shoten; English (c) 2003 **TOKYOPOP**
- *Cardcaptor Sakura (Cadokyaputa Sakura)*, 6 vols., (c) 1996, pub. Kodansha; English (c) 2000 Mixx **TOKYOPOP**)
- *Cardcaptor Sakura: Master of the Clow* (Cadokyaputa Sakura), 6 vols., (c) 1998, pub. Kodansha; English (c) 2004 **TOKYOPOP**
- *Cardcaptors* (cine-manga), 10 vols., (c) 1998 **CLAMP**, Kodansha Ltd., NEP21; English (c) 2002 Mixx (**TOKYOPOP**)
- *Chobits*, 8 vols., (c) 2001, pub. Kodansha ; English (c) 2003 **TOKYOPOP**
- **CLAMP** *School Defenders: Duklyon (Gakuen Tokkei Dukarion)*, 2 vols., (c) 2001, pub. Kadokawa Shoten; English (c) 2003 **TOKYOPOP**
- **CLAMP** *School Detectives (CLAMP Gakuen Tanteidan)*, 3 vols., (c) 1992, pub. Kadokawa Shoten; English (c) 2003 **TOKYOPOP**
- *Clover*, 4 vols., (c) 1997, pub. Kodansha; English (c) 2001 Mixx (**TOKYOPOP**)
- *Legal Drug*, 4 vols., (c) 2001, pub. Kadokawa Shoten; English (c) 2004 **TOKYOPOP**
- *Legend of Chun Hyang (Shin Shunkaden)*, 1 vol., (c) 1996, pub. Hakusensha; English (c) 2004 **TOKYOPOP**
- *Magic Knight Rayearth I (Mahou Kishi Ray Earth)*, 3 vols., (c) 1993, pub. Kodansha; English (c) 1998 Mixx (**TOKYOPOP**)
- *Magic Knight Rayearth II*, 3 vols., (c) 1995, pub. Kodansha; English (c) 2000 Mixx Entertainment (**TOKYOPOP**)
- *Many of Many Faces (20 Mensou ni Onegai!)*, 2 vols., (c) 2001, pub. Kadokawa Shoten; English (c) 2003 by Mixx Entertainment (**TOKYOPOP**)
- *Miyuki-chan in Wonderland (Fushigi no Kuni no Miyuki-chan)*; 1 vol., (c) 2001, pub. Kadokawa Shoten; English (c) 2003 **TOKYOPOP**
- *The One I Love (Watashi no Suki na Hito)*, 1 vol., (c) 1995, pub. Kadokawa Shoten; English (c) 2004

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- *Rex: A Dinosaur Story (Rex: Kyouryuu Monogatari)*, 1 vol., (c) 1993, pub. Kadokawa Shoten
- *RG Veda (Seiden)*, 10 vols., (c) 1989, pub. Shinshokan; to be published by **TOKYOPOP**
- Shirahime-Syo (Shirahime Shou), 1 vol., (c) 2001, pub. Kadokawa Shoten; English (c) 2003 **TOKYOPOP**
- *Suki (Suki. Dakara Suki)*, 3 vols., (c) 1999, pub. Kadokawa Shoten; English (c) 2004 **TOKYOPOP**
- *Tokyo Babylon*, 7 vols., (c) 1991, pub. Shinshokan; English (c) 2004 **TOKYOPOP**
- *Tsubasa: Reservoir Chronicle*, 3 vols., (c) 2004, pub. Kodansha; English (c) 2004 Del Rey
- *Wish*, 4 vols., (c) 1997, pub. Kadokawa Shoten; English (c) 2002 Mixx Entertainment
- *X/1999 (X)*, 10 vols., (c) 1996, pub. Kadokawa Shoten; English (c) 1996 Viz Communications
- *xxxHOLiC*, 3 vols., (c) 2004, pub. Kodansha; English (c) 2004 Del Rey
- *Mystery novel illustrated by **CLAMP**. Story by Tomiyuki Matsumoto. **CLAMP School Paranormal Investigators**, 3 vols., (c) 1998 1999 Tomiyuki Matsumoto, **CLAMP**, pub. Kadokawa Shoten; English (c) 2004 **TOKYOPOP**

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Okawa, Nanase. Interview by Takashi Oshiguchi. In *Anime Interviews: The First Five Years of Animerica, Anime & Manga Monthly (1992-97)*, ed. Trish Ledoux, 172-183. San Francisco: Cadence Books, 1997.

LINKS TO VISIT

[CLAMP](#) — official web site

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