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Yaoi-Con 2005

A Celebration Of Female Fantasies

by [Kat Avila](#)

WARNING: This is a report about a niche comics convention in San Francisco. Pretty boys, MALE x MALE love, gays and the straight women who love them are discussed. If any of this offends you, please DO NOT READ beyond this point.

INTRODUCTION

"GO OUT AND YAOI!!!" — Rob, master of ceremonies

I was in a state of delayed shock the Monday after the con, from sensory overload, probably not helped by the wild kingdom atmosphere at the Bishounen Auction on Saturday night. Girls, pumped up by the music, frenziedly screamed to the right and left of me for slave boys. It was so-o-o scary (sniff, sniff) ... but fun (grinning wickedly)!

Yaoi-Con 2005, a celebration of MALE x MALE female fantasies, commemorated a milestone fifth anniversary. The party was held Halloween weekend, October 28-30, in San Francisco, California. The Japanese guests of honor were Kazuma Kodaka (***Kizuna: Bonds of Love*** and ***Midaresomenishi***) and **Digital Manga Publishing (DMP)** sponsored special guest You Higuri (***Cantarella***, ***Gorgeous Carat***, and ***Seimaden***).

April Gutierrez, the public relations chair, commented, "I think the con went very well, both from my own perspective and from the feedback I've heard/seen from attendees. And, to judge by the number of new titles being brought over — and the breadth of the content — I am feeling very good about the future of yaoi as a viable manga genre in the U.S. And so long as there's fans and a market, **Yaoi-Con** will hopefully be there to promote and support the genre."

Wiggle, the webmaster for Boys on Boys on Film, said, "Most of all, I was impressed with the credibility that **Yaoi-Con** has with commercial companies these days. The industry panels were well-attended and given by the top people working at **Be Beautiful**, **DMP**, and **BLU**. The number of dealer's room booths from name-brand companies has increased significantly. I think it's great this commercial yaoi boom has grown to include **Yaoi-Con** as well!"

What is *yaoi*? Yaoi is a Japanese term that has come to have a broader meaning in

English. Yaoi is about fantasy relationships between males. Sometimes the relationships are only hinted at. The distinction between yaoi comics and gay comics is yaoi comics are created by *women* for *women*, though this boundary is being blurred by mixed-gender creative teams and crossover readers.



Nicole as Ritsu Sohma from Fruits Basket, the bishie Nicole won in a raffle, Krystal as Kisa, Jazmin as Kyou
photo by Nicole Nowlin

FANS

"Please don't CONJUGATE in the hallway." — Fan boy

The convention is a friendly intersection of straight female and gay male subcultures. Because it is open only to fans 18 years and older, the language is a bit rougher, the jokes are raunchier, and mostly anything goes except intolerance. There's a frontier mentality among the fans who know **Yaoi-Con** is flagging new territory.

"I'm the token yaoi boy." — Another fan boy

Fan attendance at the convention was probably 85% female and 15% male, about the same as the first **Yaoi-Con**. Not all the fan girls were straight nor were all the fan boys gay. I spoke with a wide range, from the woman soldier who couldn't make last year's con because her unit was in Iraq ... to the college student who pedaled for 13 hours to make it to the con (said he would take the bus back) ... to the graying mother who came alone but takes her daughters to other comics conventions.

Since I had not attended the previous two years, I had some catching up to do. In 2001, I made a doujinshi, even participated in the art show with two forgettable line drawings. In 2002, I met with a group of artists and a brave male volunteer for a nude sketch session (and we bought a costumed model at the Bishie Auction). I also got to meet fellow creators associated with that year's doujinshi anthology **Shonen Hump**. This year, I recognized a number of people, but to my surprise there were many first-time attendees judging from the show of hands at the opening ceremony.

PUBLISHERS

"The manga bus has come! The manga bus has come! New York, San Francisco" — Fan girl happily singing to herself on the elevator

At the present time, large commercial publishers such as **Be Beautiful Manga**, **DMP**, and newcomer **BLU** are releasing translated yaoi. To audience cheers of recognition, they made announcements at their respective panels about upcoming releases.

Be Beautiful confirmed they will be releasing a single collector's DVD with subtitled and dubbed versions of the first two **Kizuna** OVAs. Their current releases

of **Kizuna** are only subtitled. "We think we will not disappoint you with the English dub," publisher Masumi O'Donnell tried to reassure a somewhat skeptical audience.

DMP will be publishing You Higuri's **Gorgeous Carat Galaxy**, to be released after **BLU**'s release of the preceding manga series **Gorgeous Carat**. Into the U.S. market, they will be bringing out the first yaoi artbook, i.e., Youka Nitta's **Kiss of Fire**, and the first yaoi magazine, **Junk! Boy** by **Biblos**.

BLU (think Boy's Love Unlimited) plans on doing a release each month. **BLU** is not admittedly an imprint of **TOKYOPOP**, only distributed by **TOKYOPOP**, though **TOKYOPOP** editors have significant control over the line. During discussion of the older teen (OT) rating for Yun Kouga's **Loveless** to be released by **Tokyopop** and not **BLU**, it was interesting to learn that a mature (M) rating on a title will cut distribution in half, e.g., **Barnes & Noble** won't carry it, which is why titles are sometimes censored to obtain an OT rating to increase sales.

Notable trends are the blossoming of English-language yaoi web comics, online subscription sites, and small presses producing original yaoi, e.g., **Yaoi Press**. Yaoi games will soon be available in English; **Hirameki International Group** announced their 2006 release of the visually stunning RPG **Anima Mundi: Dark Alchemist**, a gothic horror visual novel with interactive play. And academic interest in yaoi was reflected by a survey distributed at the convention for researchers at the University of Mary Washington in Virginia.

KAZUMA KODAKA

Kazuma Kodaka's hand betrayed her initial nervousness during her drawing demonstration as she first drew Ranmaru Samejima from **Kizuna**. She had never drawn before in front of an audience.

She doesn't use standard, commercially produced paper but special orders it. Her assistants can't do anything until she's finished sketching. Some fall asleep until she's done (which drew a laugh from the audience).

Most artists don't like to be watched while they're drawing (another laugh from the audience), so the drawing process is pretty much learned on their own. Younger manga-ka use digital data and digital coloring; they're so used to using computers that it's difficult for them to do anything by hand. Kodaka-sensei draws by hand and isn't comfortable using computers.

She draws thick lines first using a G-pen. For thinner lines, such as for eyelashes, eyebrows, hair, she uses a maru pen (crow quill pen). Many shoujo manga-ka use thinner pens. Because ink doesn't adhere well to brand-new pens, she burns off the oil. While she's waiting for ink to dry, she goes back and forth to work on other sheets. For pencil lines that don't erase, she uses something almost like white



Characters from Descendants of Darkness (Yamino Matsuei)
photo by Nicole Nowlin

poster paint to cover them.

Her paper is not taped down so she can move it easily to a different angle. Beneath her drawing hand is a tissue to protect from smearing.

She is good friends with Sanami Matoh, the creator of **Fake**, who will be a guest at **FanimeCon** 2006. Since Matoh-sensei's work is mostly shoujo, Kodaka-sensei (who started off in shounen (boys') manga) learned shoujo (girls') manga techniques and how to use screentones while watching her.

When **Kizuna** was just a doujinshi, her current editor took it to the **Biblos** company president who didn't like it. Her editor told him, "You can fire me if it doesn't sell." Fortunately, **Kizuna** went on to become successful.

Her older brother voices Kei Enjoji in the **Kizuna** anime. The OVA offer came through the production company her brother works for. Her father bought her manga once. It was volume 1 of **Kizuna**. His brow furrowed more and more as he read it. He did collect all her manga, but didn't open another one after that.

Kodaka-sensei was surprised to have a fan base in other countries, especially Christian countries where homosexuality is a sin. She had thought yaoi was unique to Japan.

YOU HIGURI

At the opening ceremony, packed wall-to-wall with people, You Higuri said, "I'm glad I've been able to come back. Let's have fun again together this weekend." She was a returning guest of honor from **Yaoi-Con** 2001.

At Higuri-sensei's drawing demonstration, she showed art from her most recent work **Crown**, drawn while taking a break from **Cantarella**.

She draws roughs in pencil, then gets an okay from editors to proceed, finishes up with inking and screentones. Higuri-sensei does the inking, but her assistants do the screentones and backgrounds. She uses 5 or 6 assistants, sometimes 10 are hired. These assistants are obtained from magazine advertisements or through recommendations from the publishing company.

She first drew Noir from **Gorgeous Carat** for her drawing demonstration. She uses a regular lead pencil for roughs with a bandage wrapped around it for cushioning. She cannot use computers, so she definitely prefers drawing by hand.

She reads yaoi, but doesn't read the hard-core stuff. Her advice to hopeful mangaka is keep one's passion alive and to develop one's stamina for drawing.

ARTISTS & ARTIST CIRCLES

There was **Bishonen Works**, **Juxtapose Fantasy**, **Kiriko Moth**, and **Minkland/Umbrella Studios**, as well as many other primarily female artists and art circles. I asked what the difference was between **Minkland** and **Umbrella**

Studios and was told **Minkland** is a fan community, while **Umbrella Studios** is a closed circle of 15 artists. I bought their gay super-spy fantasy ***Kit Fancy: Nemesis***, a collaboration between the two groups.

I spoke with Yayoi Neko about her yaoi Ameri-manga ***Incubus***. It took her only one month to do; **Bang! Entertainment/Antarctic Press** helped with the layout and editing. The cover is a watercolor painting of her main characters Lenniel and Judas. She has a second title coming out, ***Herc and Thor***, which is not yaoi.

I also had a nice chat with Shuji Karasawa of **Dickhead Comics**, who stressed his ***Hard Gay Comics***, issue 1, was for the gay community and was not yaoi. He got into gay comic publishing about three months ago, however he has been drawing for 20 years. Karasawa will have a web site up in the near future.

ART SHOW

It was a wonderful art show! I asked several artists about individual pieces I enjoyed.

Irene Flores, *Veril and Jun*

(<http://www.beanclamchowder.com/RANDOM/veriljun.jpg>): These are characters from ***Mark of the Succubus***, an OEL manga from **TOKYOPOP** drawn by me and written by Ashly Raiti. The characters aren't "together," but since I'm one of the series creators, I've taken a few liberties. Besides, our book has lots of bishies, how can I *not* fangirl over them?

This was also inked by hand and then colored in Photoshop. I love high contrast and swirly design elements, so I combined the two. I was originally going to leave the piece black and white, but working on the flesh tones (and Veril's hair) was really fun. My brother suggested the flat sepia background rather than the plain white one, and I'm glad he did, since it looks really good.

KIRIKO MOTH, *The Magician* (http://kiriko-moth.com/art_gallery/main/display.php?id=15&count=10): *The Magician* is the third piece of a series of tarot card illustrations. I'm going to attempt to illustrate a full deck, but we'll see if I actually make it through all 78 cards. This picture didn't have any initial solid inspiration beyond the basic idea of the standard magician card — a single male figure who symbolizes self-contained power and holds the mysteries of the tarot deck.

My initial scribbles for the picture were drawn in my tiny Moleskine sketchbook while sitting out in the shade drinking martinis at my favorite Thai fusion restaurant in San Francisco. O, how we must suffer for our art.

Several of the elements in *The Magician* are just that ... I wanted to draw a bird with a long flowy tail, and it happened to work in this picture. I wanted to draw a lot of circular elements, and they turned into the stars and the background design in this picture. My educational background mostly focused on graphic design, and I enjoy using designerly elements in my work.

RHPOTTER, *Water Dragon* (unavailable at site; but other blackwork at <http://home.earthlink.net/~hopeofdawn/illustrations/illustration/illustrations.html>): I've been working on pieces for the last couple years that are in what I call a "blackwork" style (for lack of a better name). It started out with some very abstract black and white doodles, using Illustrator. I really wasn't trying for anything in particular, just wasting time. But I liked the smooth curves and clean lines I achieved, and the pieces I showed seemed to be surprisingly popular with my friends. So I started doing less abstract pieces — *Water Dragon* will be my fifth — all fantasy oriented.

Water Dragon came about because of a single image in my head that I wanted to try and achieve — basically that of a man standing in a waterfall, head bowed, but also part of the waterfall, or the waterfall being part of him. The dragon part of the piece coming from the idea that rivers are also dragons in many areas of Asian mythology. So I tried to play with the basic black and white shapes to give impressions of a man and a waterfall without outlining either of them too much, and then in the color version, to layer color to help merge the two together into falling blues and greens. The black and white shapes and basic layout were all done in Illustrator, then I exported the piece over to Photoshop to do the gradient layers and other color work on it. I'm still not a hundred-percent certain it's finished. I may do some minor tweaks in the future, but for the moment I'm happy with it.

NURIKO WINDCHASER, *Phoenix Boy* (unavailable at site; other artwork at <http://nuriko-chan.deviantart.com/>): *The Phoenix Boy* is a bit unique in that usually I don't draw male nudes. I have a hard time with them and had to rely heavily on advice from some friends, especially Kiriko Moth, on how to get the genitalia looking as graceful as the rest of him. Because after I'd finished his torso, I'd decided that I liked the clean lines of his belly and hips so much that I wasn't willing to cover them up with a loincloth or feathers or anything of the sort, which is what I usually do ...

As for the coloring, I used Copic markers and Prismacolor pencils. The interesting mottled pink/purple of the background was actually a completely happy accident. My purple marker didn't quite like the thicker, smoother manga stock that I had drawn it on and ended up streaking. Rather than go over it again and risk making it too dark and possibly STILL having it streak, I went over it again in a pink that I actually rarely use because it's so bright. But combined with the existing darker purple, it not only lightened the entire thing up, but it also gave it this really dynamic almost patchwork look that I thought gave it a bit of an illusion of flames without going the traditional red-orange way, which I'd rejected early on for making the picture too tonal.

BISHOUNEN AUCTION

"Take your pants off for your country!" — Fan girl to the buff U.S. Marine on stage.

The Bishounen Auction started off with a preview parade of the bishie to be auctioned and a reading of the bishie's bill of rights. Isis and Saya were the

mistresses of ceremonies; at the end of the auction, in a surprise announcement, Mistress Saya was put on the auction block, and the closing bid was a jaw-dropping \$125,000! Later, I was told that **Yaoi-Con** staffers had put up the money to support their convention, but then I heard it was all a joke.

The first to be put up for auction was a Japanese indie band who played for the crowd; final offer for the trio was \$410. The second bishie was limber and acrobatic and did a stirring dance of seduction; final offer \$400. And so the bidding went on. Goth Kitty revealed he was wearing Hello Kitty underwear. The loudest, most excited shrieks from the crowd greeted Sephiroth from **Final Fantasy VII**, with his long silver hair and one of the longest sword blades I've ever seen. But the next guy, a blond god who belted out Elvis Presley's *Heartbreak Hotel*, garnered the highest bid of the night for a bishie, a whopping \$1300! After that, everything became a blur.

There were fan girls (and fan boys) running up on stage to stuff bills down the underwear of their favorite bishie. Bishounen molestation, dogpiles, and lots of seducing, stripping, and kissing. Like the **Capcom** moderator said at the preceding Cosplay Contest, "It's so good to be over 17 years old!"

FINAL COMMENTS

I snuck out during the closing ceremony to catch my plane, happy to have autographed posters of Kazuma Kodaka's samurai manga **Midaresomenishi** (to be released by **Be Beautiful**) and You Higuri's **Gorgeous Carat Galaxy** (to be released by **DMP**).

Save up your wildest fantasies for **Yaoi-Con** 2006 when Youka Nitta (**Embracing Love**) will be a returning guest of honor! The convention's ultimate goal is to have a **Yaoi-Con** that is the size of San Francisco. With the dramatic increases in attendance this convention has recorded since 2003, that dream may not be as impossible as it seems.



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