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You Higuri at FanimeCon 2004

by [Kat Avila](#)

"No one could draw a really hot kind of guy."

— David Wise, explaining why You Higuri was sought for *The Almost Legendary Shannon* manga

Introduction

Several years ago, You Higuri's artwork on a *Yaoi-Con 2001* flyer caught my eye. It was a simple ink drawing of a pensive blond in a black turtleneck. I started unconsciously buying her manga — "Here's a beautiful cover" — only to discover later it was a Higuri title. (I usually buy manga for the comic drawing styles rather than for the text. Youka Nitta and Shiho Sugiura are other favorites.)

You Higuri (pronounced "yuu") has been associated with over 15 shoujo (girls') manga titles, which cross over into shounen-ai (boy's love) featuring relationships between fantasy males. Her beautiful men are compelling to look at, not so much for her smooth line control as for the poignancy of the melancholic longing in their eyes. The grand settings of her stories, especially in historical Europe, lend themselves to the drawing of extravagant costumes and backgrounds. She is comfortably able to incorporate drama, comedy, and action on the same page.

You Higuri has made two U.S. appearances, at *Yaoi-Con 2001* in San Francisco and *FanimeCon 2004* in San Jose, California. She will be at *Animagic* in Koblenz, Germany, July 23-25, 2004.

Announcements At *FanimeCon 2004*

There were two big announcements at *FanimeCon 2004*. The first was You Higuri's revelation at her Q&A panel and at a press session that she had signed a contract last year with **Central Park Media (CPM)** to bring forth the English version of *Cantarella* (Jp. *Kantarera*). A follow-up query to **CPM** about the release date remains unanswered.

Cantarella springboards from the Italian Renaissance figure, Cesare Borgia, son of Pope Alexander VI (Rodrigo Borgia). In the manga, the father promises his unborn child to the Devil in order to become pope. The presence of Cesare's best friend Chiaro, whose name means "light," can scare off demons. Chiaro and Cesare's sister Lucrezia are in love with each other; she is pregnant with Chiaro's child. Cesare is angered by their relationship as he, too, loves Chiaro. To date, up to volume 8 of *Cantarella* has been published in Japan.

The second announcement, admittedly a bit premature but made out of convenience, was You Higuri's collaboration with editor David Wise and writer Audry Taylor [sic]. The manga is *The Almost Legendary Shannon* (Jp. *Kagirinaku Densetsu Ni Chikai Joshikosei*, lit.trans. "almost legendary high school girl"). Perhaps to the disappointment of some, Taylor said, "Boy's love will be kept down to a dull roar." *Shannon* follows in the storytelling tradition of a woman taking on a man's role, e.g. *Princess Knight* (Jp. *Ribon no Kishi* lit. trans. "ribbon knight"), *The Rose of Versailles* (Jp. *Berusaiya no Bara*), and *Revolutionary Girl Utena* (Jp. *Shoujo Kakumei Utena*).

An American teenage girl on a field trip to England pulls out King Arthur's sword Excalibur from the stone in which it is sheathed. The Council of Chivalrous Knights (COCK) is angry that the sword hasn't been pulled out by one of their members; a bounty is placed on Shannon's head. Merlin must train the wielder of the sword as the future king of England; she doesn't want the sword, but it follows her

around. And in the shadows there is Mordred, the person responsible for the fall of Camelot; Shannon falls in love with this drop-dead gorgeous man she is destined to kill.

The idea for "Shannon" popped up two years ago. Wise and Taylor had been kicking around the idea of a high school girl who pulls Excalibur out of the stone. When Taylor showed Wise her 50-page script, he said, "It's not an American comic. It's a manga."

After unsuccessfully looking for an American artist who had the chops to regularly do a manga, they traveled to Japan last December and attended the winter **Comic Market (Comiket)** in Tokyo, then traveled south to Takarazuka City where You Higuri lives.

You Higuri agreed to the project both because it was unusual for someone from abroad to seek her out and because of Wise and Taylor's enthusiasm for the project. Higuri will start work on **Shannon** this fall, maybe producing it on a regular basis next year. Right now she is busy with **Cantarella**.

Shannon will be published first in Japan — hopefully by midpoint of next year, predicted Wise — and reprinted for U.S. distribution. A previous two-year stay in Japan, as well as her extensive reading about the King Arthur legend, will aid Taylor in writing the manga **Shannon**.

For Her Fans

"Manga is a method of communication between the artist and readers," said You Higuri. She attends the summer and winter **Comikets** at Tokyo Big Sight to meet fans. (About 35,000 artist circles and 500,000 attendees are supported by 2,000 staff volunteers during the bi-annual **Comiket**'s three-day run.) For **FanimeCon**'s Charity Auction, Higuri donated four original color cover art pieces (two from her most popular **Seimaden** series and two from her **Gorgeous Carat** series).

About Her Fans

In an informal survey, fans were asked how they discovered You Higuri's work and what they liked best about it.

Fiore (nickname) of Singapore said, "I came across it in a rental bookstore — and picked up the manga *Seimaden* in Chinese. Ever since then I have been hunting for her comics." Her favorite title is *Cantarella*, followed by *Gorgeous Carat*. She prefers to read the original in Japanese as some details get lost in translation. Fiore basically likes You Higuri's artwork, plus an intriguing story. Local censorship prevented Fiore from obtaining a copy of *Gakuen Heaven*.

Cassie (nickname) discovered Higuri's work through Aestheticism.com's site. She has only read fan translations in English. Her favorite title is also *Cantarella*, and she thinks *Ludwig II* is great, too. "Higuri does not shy away from darker and more mature subject matter, but she can also draw comedy. Higuri is just so versatile." Cassie added, "It really is not fair to label Higuri as a shounen-ai or yaoi manga-ka. She is first and foremost a manga-ka in the tradition of Moto Hagio, who has a story to tell."

Drawing Process

You Higuri goes into town to sketch people. She doesn't use models. She enjoys drawing interesting costumes, but doesn't do backgrounds any longer as she has several assistants to do them. She likes fantasy and history, though the market supports contemporary titles more. A childhood interest in castles and princes prompted her to initially visit Europe.

She begins with a story. Sometimes she knows what the ending will be. Other times the ending emerges as she draws, but she knows the main story in general. She does rough sketches to position the characters and the dialogue bubbles.

The most important part of the character is the eyes. It's like

drawing a glass ball, she says. When coloring, she starts off with the lightest shade, then pinpoints where the irises are so the eyes don't come out cross-eyed. She uses a darker color to reinforce the irises.

Comic Art Influences

Japanese comic artist influences are Osamu Tezuka (***Astro Boy, Princess Knight***) and Hayao Miyazaki, as well as the Showa '24 generation of women comic artists (born around 1949) who created a golden age of shoujo manga in the 1970s. She also has been influenced by Western-style comics, such as French *bandes dessinées*.

Life In Takarazuka City

You Higuri resides in Takarazuka City, home of the all-female, five-troupe **Takarazuka Revue Company** (the romance theatre equivalent of the all-male Kabuki theatre). Just down the street from the **Takarazuka Grand Theater** where the company performs is the **Osamu Tezuka Manga Museum**.

Anime book author Gilles Poitras said at his and Fred Schodt's ***FanimeCon*** panel, "There is a huge creative energy that is woman-oriented in Japan." That being true, then Takarazuka City must be its G-spot.

Asked about the influence of the **Takarazuka Revue** on her work, and the relationship between the **Takarazuka** and shoujo manga, she said that the **Takarazuka** has had some influence and she did get some ideas from their productions. Regarding the **Takarazuka** and shoujo manga, she noted both mediums are directed toward women, are about women's dreams, and include "kakko ii otoko" (trans. "attractive men"), further defined as "iconic male characters who are the actualization of female desires."

Latest Titles

This year's published titles include ***Gakuen Heaven***,

Gorgeous Carat Galaxy, and volume 8 of ***Cantarella***. For ***Gakuen Heaven***, you can get the **Boy's Love Scramble!** simulation game, You Higuri/game producer Spray's manga, trading cards, phone cards, even a drama CD.

English-language fans would be happy to see You Higuri's work licensed in the U.S.; then we wouldn't have to work so hard on translating it.

End Notes

1. Native Japanese names are rewritten according to Western convention (family name) last.
2. Much of this information came from ***FanimeCon 2004*** panels and workshops: "You Higuri Q&A," a morning press session for the Japanese guests of honor, "Manga Techniques with You Higuri," "You Higuri & ***Shannon***," and an autograph session.
3. I use the term "boy's love" over "yaoi," especially when discussing high-caliber work. "Yaoi" has an association with poorly made doujinshi (fan- or self-published comics), though in the West it has become an umbrella term. Boy's love/yaoi is mostly created by female artists and writers for a female audience.

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