

# Berserk (manga)

Berserk (Japanese: ベルセルク, Hepburn: Beruseruku) is a Japanese manga series written and illustrated by Kentaro Miura. Set in a medieval Europe—inspired dark fantasy world, the story centers on the characters of Guts, a lone swordsman, and Griffith, the leader of a mercenary band called the "Band of the Hawk". The series follows Guts' journey seeking revenge on Griffith, who betrayed him and the rest of their comrades.

Miura premiered a prototype of *Berserk* in 1988. The series began the following year in <u>Hakusensha's seinen</u> manga magazine <u>Monthly Animal House</u>, which was replaced in 1992 by the semimonthly magazine <u>Young Animal</u>, where *Berserk* has continued its publication. Following Miura's death in May 2021, the final chapter that he worked on was published posthumously in September of the same year; the series resumed in June 2022, under supervision of Miura's fellow manga artist and childhood friend <u>Kouji Mori</u> and Miura's group of assistants and apprentices from Studio Gaga.

Berserk was adapted into a 25-episode anime television series by OLM, which covered the Golden Age story arc, and was broadcast from October 1997 to March 1998. The Golden Age arc was also adapted into a trilogy of theatrical anime films; the first two films premiered in 2012 and the third film premiered in 2013. A second 24-episode anime television series adaptation was broadcast for two seasons in 2016 and 2017.

By September 2023, the *Berserk* manga had over 60 million copies in circulation, including digital versions, making it one of the best-selling manga series of all time. It received the Award for Excellence at the sixth annual Tezuka Osamu Cultural Prize in 2002. *Berserk* has been widely acclaimed, particularly for its dark setting, storytelling, characters, and Miura's detailed artwork.

#### Berserk



First tankobon volume cover, featuring Guts

ベルセルク (Beruseruku)

Genre Dark fantasy<sup>[1][2]</sup>

Epic fantasy[3]

Sword and sorcery<sup>[4]</sup>

Manga

Written by Kentaro Miura (vol. 1–41)

Kouji Mori (vol. 42–)[a]

**Illustrated by** Kentaro Miura (vol. 1–41)

Studio Gaga (vol. 42–)[b]

Published by Hakusensha

English publisher

NA: Dark Horse Comics

Imprint Jets Comics

(former)

**Young Animal Comics** 

### **Plot**

Guts is born from the corpse of his hanged mother and raised by his abusive adoptive father, Gambino, a mercenary captain. After Gambino's death, Guts becomes a wandering warrior, and his unmatched combat skills eventually draw the attention of Griffith, leader of the mercenary Band of the Hawk. Griffith defeats Guts in battle and forces him to join the Hawks, where Guts learns of Griffith's ambition to rule his own kingdom and the mysterious Crimson Behelit he carries. The demonic warrior Nosferatu Zodd spares their lives upon seeing the Behelit, warning Guts that his bond with Griffith will lead to his doom. As Griffith gains favor with Midland's nobility and Princess Charlotte, Guts grows close to Casca, the Hawks' only female commander. When he overhears Griffith declare that he only considers those with their own dreams as equals.

(current) Magazine Monthly Animal House (1989-1992)Young Animal (1992-present) Original run August 25, 1989 – present **Volumes** 42 Anime television series • 1997–98 series 2016-17 series ■ The Golden Age Arc – Memorial Edition (2022)Anime film series

■ The Golden Age Arc (2012–13)

Guts resolves to leave the Hawks to find his own purpose. Griffith refuses unless Guts defeats him in single combat. Guts wins, but Griffith's subsequent despair leads to his arrest after he seduces Charlotte. Tortured and broken, Griffith loses the Behelit, and the Midland army massacres most of the Hawks in a brutal ambush. A mysterious figure known as the Skull Knight warns Guts of an impending Eclipse, prompting him to rejoin the survivors and rescue Griffith. During this time, Guts and Casca confess their feelings for one another.

The rescued Griffith is left a crippled shell of himself, but when his Behelit activates, it summons the Eclipse—a horrific merging of realms where four demonic beings known as the Godhand offer Griffith godhood in exchange for sacrificing his comrades. Branded as offerings, the Hawks are slaughtered by Apostles, humans like Zodd that have become demons in service to the Godhand, with only Guts and Casca surviving. Griffith, reborn as the demonic Femto, rapes Casca as Guts loses an eye and arm trying to save her. The Skull Knight rescues them, but Casca is left mentally shattered. Marked by the Brand of Sacrifice, Guts leaves Casca in the care of the blacksmith Godo, his adopted daughter Erica, and Rickert—the only Hawk untouched by the Eclipse—before arming himself with the sword Dragonslayer and a prosthetic from Rickert. He embarks on a vengeful war against Apostles while being haunted by the Demon Child, his and Casca's corrupted unborn son, twisted by Femto's violation.

Years later, Guts—now known as the Black Swordsman—wanders with the elf Puck. Captured by Farnese of the Holy Iron Chain Knights, he escapes after saving her and returns to Godo, only to find Casca missing. His search leads him to the ruined city of St. Albion, where the Godhand prepare a ritual to incarnate one of their own. Amidst refugees fleeing the Kushan Empire, Guts rescues Casca from the fanatical bishop Mozgus as the dead rise, forming a massive Brand of Sacrifice. Farnese, her bodyguard Serpico, and the thief Isidro join him, while an Apostle beneath the city consumes the Demon Child, using its essence to restore Griffith to physical form. After battling Griffith and Zodd at Godo's home, Griffith senses lingering traces of the Demon Child's emotions within him. Hoping to

find a safe haven for Casca, Guts resolves to travel to Elfhelm, the land of the elves, allowing Farnese, Serpico, and Isidro to accompany him—partly out of fear that his growing rage will endanger her. Meanwhile, Griffith reforms the Band of the Hawk with Zodd and other Apostles, waging war against the Kushan emperor Ganishka, a rogue Apostle.

Guts' party liberates a village from trolls, encountering the witch Flora, her apprentice Schierke, and the elf Ivalera. Flora gifts Guts the Berserker Armor, enhancing his strength at the cost of his sanity. After Apostles kill Flora, the Moonlight Child—later revealed as the Demon Child in another form—briefly appears before vanishing. The Skull Knight confirms Elfhelm's potential to heal Casca but warns of the armor's dangers. Boarding Roderick's ship, they evade a Kushan attack, during which Guts briefly clashes with Ganishka. Griffith slays the emperor, merging the physical and astral worlds, then establishes Falconia as humanity's last refuge. During the voyage, the Moonlight Child reappears, and the group battles a sea monster and undead pirates as Farnese begins studying magic under Schierke.

Recruiting the <u>merrow</u> Isma, they reach Elfhelm, where the elven sage Danann restores Casca's mind while aiding Farnese and Schierke's training. The Skull Knight reveals the Berserker Armor's dark origins and his own history with the Godhand's Void. The Moonlight Child is exposed as the Demon Child, briefly usurping Griffith's body before Griffith reasserts control, abducts Casca, and destroys Elfhelm's spirit tree—scattering its inhabitants into the astral realm. As survivors flee aboard the Seahorse, Guts collapses in despair. In Falconia, Casca regains fragmented memories before being recaptured. Guts resists his inner darkness but falls unconscious as Kushan warriors—led by Silat, Daiba, and an unexpected ally, Rickert—board the ship.

Imprisoned by the Kushan, Guts learns from Daiba that Falconia's forces are advancing—Griffith's attack on Elfhelm was only the beginning of his conquest. Drafted into the Kushan resistance, Guts' party prepares for war. During a royal gathering, the Apostle Rakshas unleashes trolls upon the city. Silat rallies the defense while Farnese's magic drives Rakshas into retreat. The assassin flees to Guts' cell, where a despairing Guts welcomes death—until Silat intervenes, killing Rakshas. In the aftermath, Guts is led away from the city in a trance by Kushan <u>brahmins</u> under Daiba's orders with Isidro, Puck and Silat tailing them. Guts is then sealed away in an ancient tomb. Meanwhile, Schierke's astral projection scouts Falconia for Casca, her unconscious body concealing the endeavour.

### **Production**

### **Development**

While briefly working as an assistant to <u>George Morikawa</u> at 18, Miura had already planned some ideas for *Berserk*'s development, having a dark warrior with a gigantic sword illustrated in his portfolio who would be the first conception of Guts. [5][6] Miura submitted manuscripts to a <u>shōnen</u> manga magazine for about four years before working for <u>Hakusensha</u>; however, he felt that he was not capable enough for it and they were also not interested in publishing science fiction or fantasy

works. [7] In 1988, while working with <u>Buronson</u> on the manga <u>King of Wolves</u>, [8] Miura published a prototype of *Berserk* in Hakusensha's <u>Gekkan ComiComi</u>; [9][10] this 48-page prototype placed second at the seventh <u>ComiComi</u>'s Manga-School prize. [11]

Berserk was originally planned as a fantasy series for a *shōnen* audience, aligning with the magazine that published Miura's earlier award-winning work. He eventually submitted his work to a magazine that, at the time, "was on the verge of going under," and he was switched around between several editors before meeting his first editor. The serialization of *Berserk* began in Hakusensha's *Monthly Animal House* in 1989. Miura commented that he landed the serial as soon as he made his debut, so he never had the opportunity to receive much criticism from editors. At the outset of serialization, Miura had no extensive long-term plan for the manga's narrative scope. Instead, he aimed to develop a "dark hero" within a then-underrepresented fantasy genre, citing *Bastard!!* as one of the few comparable works at the time. As his first original serialization, Miura admitted uncertainty about the story's direction, prioritizing instead the development of an atypical hero.

### **Concept and influences**

Miura stated that the inspiration for the title was diffuse at the time of creation, and was not based on a fully developed concept of <u>berserkers</u> or the Berserker Armor (introduced much later in the story) from the outset. He chose the word for its enigmatic quality, feeling it would leave a strong impression. The title also tied into the imagery of Guts, partly inspired by <u>Mad Max</u>, which features a vengeful, rage-driven dark hero in a grim world. Miura felt "Berserk" would make a perfect title to represent his universe. [14]

To create the world of the series, Miura was influenced by the films *Hellraiser* (1987) and *The Name* of the Rose (1986), the art of M. C. Escher, and the Brothers Grimm's fairy tales. [12] Miura stated that Berserk's dark fantasy setting and medieval European aesthetic drew inspiration from the 1982 film Conan the Barbarian, the 1981 film Excalibur, and the Elric of Melniboné series, adding that his creature designs emphasized realism to ground the fantastical in tangible detail. [15][16][17][18] Miura stated that he did not see dark fantasy as a genre in itself, but rather as an equivalent of general fantasy. He commented that outside of Japan the big works of fantasy, like *The Lord of the Rings*, contain dark elements, and in Japan, the fantasy genre was popularized by video games like *Dragon* Quest, which were aimed at children, and therefore, expurgated the dark elements, but since he received the influence from novels before that of those games, Miura "naturally turned to dark fantasy." [16][17] Initially, Miura debated whether to pursue a strictly historical narrative or a fantasydriven one, ultimately opting for the latter to maximize creative freedom. He integrated anachronistic technology—such as Guts' arm cannon—and deliberately eschewed historical accuracy, compressing various eras into a cohesive yet anachronistic whole. He admitted this could confuse European readers, but he saw it as akin to Westerners stereotyping Japan with ninjas, expressing that his primary focus was creating manga for a Japanese audience, with no intent to appeal to international markets.[12]

Miura said that <u>Fist of the North Star</u>, by Buronson and <u>Tetsuo Hara</u>, was the work that had the greatest impact on his own work, helping as well to develop his art style. [7][19][20] Miura also mentioned <u>animator</u> and manga artist <u>Yoshikazu Yasuhiko</u> and manga artist <u>Fujihiko Hosono</u> as early influences to his art style. [19] *Violence Jack* by Go Nagai and *Guin Saga* by Kaoru Kurimoto inspired

the series' story and atmosphere,  $\underline{Ranpo}$  by Masatoshi Uchizaki served him as a reference for backgrounds, and Nagai's  $\underline{Devilman}$  and the films  $\underline{RoboCop}$  (1981) and  $\underline{Batman}$  (1989) inspired the designs.  $\underline{^{[19][20][17]}}$  Miura cited  $\underline{Katsuhiro}$  Otomo's  $\underline{Akira}$  as a foundational influence on his panel composition, having meticulously studied its framing and angles during his student years.  $\underline{^{[18]}}$  Miura said that his favorite manga series was  $\underline{Dororo}$  by Osamu Tezuka, and that he wanted to create a fantasy work that possessed dark, "muddy" and  $\underline{y\bar{o}kai}$ -like elements.  $\underline{^{[21]}}$  Miura mentioned that he learned the fundamentals of storytelling from George Lucas, the creator of the  $\underline{Star}$   $\underline{Wars}$  series, and named the 1977 original film as his favorite work.  $\underline{^{[22][23][24]}}$  Miura commented about the influence of  $\underline{sh\bar{o}jo}$  manga on the series, stating that it is about "expressing every feeling powerfully."  $\underline{^{[19][25]}}$  Particularly, he mentioned influence from  $\underline{Yumiko}$   $\underline{\bar{O}shima}$  and  $\underline{Moto}$  Hagio,  $\underline{^{[19][25][18]}}$  and that the anime adaptations of  $\underline{The}$   $\underline{Rose}$  of  $\underline{Versailles}$  and  $\underline{Aim}$  for  $\underline{the}$   $\underline{Ace!}$ , both directed by Osamu Dezaki, inspired him to read  $\underline{The}$   $\underline{Rose}$  of  $\underline{Versailles}$  manga and the works of  $\underline{Keiko}$  Takemiya, mainly  $\underline{Kaze}$  to  $\underline{Ki}$  no  $\underline{Uta}$ .

Some aspects of Guts (personality and design) were partially inspired by Miura's highschool friend and later fellow manga artist Kouji Mori, by Mad Max's Max Rockatansky, and by Rutger Hauer's performances in Flesh and Blood, Blade Runner, The Hitcher and The Blood of Heroes. [27][7][15][14] Miura also noted a visual resemblance between Guts and Connor MacLeod, the protagonist of Highlander (1986). [28] Guts' prosthetic hand was inspired by Dororo's Hyakkimaru, and Cobra's eponymous protagonist. [29] Kurt, the protagonist of *Pygmalio*, by Shinji Wada, and an illustration of a giant wielding a sword, featured in The Snow Queen (Guin Saga spin-off), inspired the size of Guts' sword, the Dragon Slaver, by mixing both characters' swords. [19][20] Miura commented that when drawing the Dragon Slayer, he wanted to emulate the effect of Kenshiro's or Raoh's (Fist of the North Star) fist "flying out from the page." but he felt that Guts' sword did not have the same feeling of weight as a fist. He wanted to convey an "extension of reality" feel to the sword, similar to the depiction of the Fist of the North Star's Hokuto Shinken martial art, and make it believable for the readers. [30] Miura stated that "Black Swordsman" Guts was the first thing he was set on, but he did not have any idea about what his backstory would be. He focused on the character development up until around the third or fourth volume and then he would think about what brought him to revenge.[7][19]

Some aspects of Griffith's personality were also inspired by Mori, though Miura noted that the inspirational roles of Guts and Griffith could often reverse. Their friendship dynamics also partially influenced the relationship between Guts and Griffith. The Band of the Hawk, meanwhile, was inspired by Miura's high-school friends. [19][31]

### **Frequency**

Berserk is known for its frequent and often extended hiatuses, [31] which date back to late 2006. [32] Following a pause, three consecutive chapters about Guts' childhood were published from June 8 to July 13, 2012; [33][34][35] the main storyline resumed eight months later on October 12, [36][37] and the series went on hiatus after a chapter published on December 28 of the same year. [38] Miura took a break to work on his six-chapter mini-series Giganto Maxia, [39] and Berserk was published intermittently from April 11 to September 26, 2014. [40][41][42][43] After a 10-month hiatus, the manga resumed on July 24, 2015, [44] and was published monthly until November 27 of the same year, [45] before entering hiatus. [46] It was published monthly from June 24 to September 23, 2016, before

entering another hiatus. [47][48][49] The manga resumed publication from March 24 to June 23, 2017, [50][51][52] and was then published on a monthly basis from December 22 of the same year to May 25, 2018. Four months later, another chapter was published on August 24, 2018, before entering an eight-month hiatus. [55][56] Two chapters were published on April 26[57][58] and August 23, 2019. Three chapters were published on April 24, [61] July 22, [62] and October 23, 2020, respectively. [63] The last chapter published in Miura's lifetime was released on January 22, 2021. [64]

### Miura's death and series resumption

On May 20, 2021, Hakusensha announced that Miura died at 54 due to an acute <u>aortic dissection</u> on May 6, leaving it undecided what would happen to the series.  $\frac{[65][66][67]}{[65][66][67]}$  The posthumous 364th chapter of *Berserk* was published in *Young Animal* on September 10 of the same year, which was Miura's last work, and members of Miura's Studio Gaga, which consisted of him and his group of assistants and apprentices,  $\frac{[68][b]}{[b]}$  worked to finish the manuscript of the chapter.  $\frac{[70]}{[70]}$  The magazine's issue was a memorial to Miura, featuring a special "Messages to Kentarou Miura" booklet and a poster of "famous scenes" from the manga.  $\frac{[71][72]}{[73]}$  In the same issue, Hakusensha stated that the future of the series remained uncertain and that the staff's priority would "always be placed on him—what he would think if he were still with us."  $\frac{[73][70]}{[70]}$  The afterword in the manga's 41st volume (released in December 2021) from *Young Animal*'s editorial staff stated that the future of the manga was still undecided.  $\frac{[74]}{[74]}$ 

On June 7, 2022, Hakusensha and <u>Kouji Mori</u> announced that the series would continue publication, using plans and thoughts that were relayed to Mori by Miura himself, as well as <u>memorandums</u> and character designs that Miura left behind. [75] Mori related how he had visited Miura nearly 30 years ago when the latter was drawing "the Eclipse" event of *Berserk* and how his friend completed the storyline for the manga up to its last chapter that week. Mori explained that the story for *Berserk* had since gone on "exactly as we discussed at the time, with almost no changes." As the only person who knows the ending Miura intended, Mori agreed to continue the series and promised, "I will only write the episodes that Miura talked to me about. I will not flesh it out. I will not write episodes that I don't remember clearly. I will only write the lines and stories that Miura described to me." [75]

In a 2023 interview, on the occasion of the 42nd volume release, Mori commented that Miura "was a manga genius bursting with talent," and that "[h]e had an eagerness to see things through to the end as well as an outstanding ability to paint, conceive stories and employ narrative devices effectively." For this reason, Mori initially concluded that it would be impossible to keep the series going without Miura, but he changed his mind after meeting with the members of Studio Gaga, who had worked under Miura, to perfect the unfinished last *Berserk* chapter that Miura had worked on. Mori recalled thinking, "The thought that Miura would be mad at me doing nothing motivated me to reach a decision." About his taking over from Miura in connection with the series, Mori stated that he still had mixed feelings, "It may be unforgivable for me to do it, now that Miura is no longer here," reiterating as well, "I will never add my own twist. I will simply remember and convey what Miura told me." [76]

*Berserk* has continued with the credits appearing as "original work by Kentaro Miura, art by Studio Gaga, supervised by Kouji Mori". [75][68][77] The "Fantasia Arc/Elf Island Chapter" finished with chapters released from June 24, 2022, [68][78] to May 26, 2023; [79] a new story arc started on September 22 of the same year. [79]

### **Themes**

Berserk explores a wide range of themes and topics. Free will, destiny, and causality are discussed within the series. [80][81][82] Human resilience is a recurring theme, with many characters coming from traumatic backgrounds, constantly struggling against an unjust world. [82][83] Guts struggles with destiny itself and is constantly resisting the pull of predetermination. [80] Griffith also embodies this idea of resilience, by chasing his dream of ruling his own kingdom, despite his lowborn origins, as well as free will, by his own decision to sacrifice the Band of the Hawk in order to achieve his dream. [82]

The series also explores <u>human nature</u> and <u>morality</u>, as characters struggle between becoming good human beings or falling into madness and evil. [84][83] Guts, at the beginning of the story, is presented as an <u>antihero</u> who does not care about killing and is indifferent to people who aid him. Guts does not act in accordance with definitions of <u>right and wrong</u>, he operates within a gray area. Initially he does not attempt to be heroic or protect the innocent, though his self-motivated actions sometimes do so incidentally. [85][86] However, as the story progresses, it is shown that he is in fact a person who is deeply conflicted internally. [87][88] His tragic and traumatic past, unfolded in the Golden Age arc, shows Guts as a more complex character. [89][85][83] Anne Lauenroth of <u>Anime News Network</u> wrote that Griffith is "not evil at all," but "arrogant and brutally realistic about human nature." The suppression of his own human nature would initiate his demise as the Hawk and the rise of Femto. [82]

Friendship, comradery and human relations are other explored themes. [80][17] As a child, Guts tried to build some level of friendship with his mercenary group, [90] but due to his traumatic experience with them, he lost trust in people. [91][92][93] However, through the time he was with Griffith and the rest of the Band of the Hawk, Guts formed bonds, friendships, animosities and co-dependencies, maturing as well as individual. [83][82][94][81] Miura stated that he based the Band of the Hawk on his own high school friend relationship experience. [17][31] Specifically, he mentioned that his friendship with later fellow manga artist Kouji Mori partially inspired the relationship between Guts and Griffith. [7] Jacob Chapman of Anime News Network wrote that through their friendship, Guts' ambitions were elevated and Griffith's were lowered, allowing both of them to consider a new future for the first time, one where they fight side by side as equals and die on the battlefield, but they reject this future out of their own personal fears, as Guts did not think he was "good enough" for a happy future and Griffith was terrified of his lofty dream crumbling into something more mundane. [95] Miura also said that the conflict between Guts and Griffith speaks about their change after having built their personalities. [17]

The Golden Age arc has been compared to a <u>Greek tragedy</u>. [96][97] According to Lauenroth, Griffith's <u>hamartia</u> lies in how he <u>compartmentalizes</u> his feelings of guilt and shame that would get in the way of his dream and how he deals to repress them. His inner dialogue in his second duel with Guts, "If I can't have him, I don't care," marks the Golden Age arc <u>peripeteia</u>. [82] When Guts comes running to rescue him during the Eclipse, Griffith reaches his moment of <u>anagnorisis</u> with his thought, "You're the only one... who made me forget my dream." [82]

<u>Betrayal</u> and <u>revenge</u> are major themes in the series. Guts suffered his first betrayal when Gambino sold Guts' body to another soldier for a few coins. He would eventually take revenge against the soldier, killing him on the battlefield, and he later would kill Gambino as well. [83][91] Guts is in a quest

for revenge after his comrades were betrayed by Griffith and sacrificed by the God Hand. [83] This desire for vengeance has been his main reason of survival. [98][86]

Religion has been also touched in the series, mainly through the characters of Mozgus and Farnese. Miura stated that he created Mozgus based on the concept of rigid personality to create a religious fanatic character with no flexibility. Farnese is presented as the figurehead of the Holy Iron Chain Knights, inquisitors tasked with burning heretics and witches at the stake. [99] After her encounter with Guts, she finds it increasingly difficult to resolve her faith with the atrocities she became party to, as Guts, inversely, takes action against something he disagrees with. Guts denounces the very idea of prayer, claiming that the act of clasping hands only prevents people from fighting for their lives. Farnese eventually begins to reject her faith and the rigidity of her beliefs after finding out the truth about Mozgus. After the battle between Guts and Mozgus, Farnese decides to follow Guts, to find a new purpose in her life, away from her social position and the church. [100]

### Media

#### Manga

Written and illustrated by Kentaro Miura, Berserk debuted in Hakusensha's Monthly Animal House on August 25, 1989. [c] Hakusensha published the first tankōbon volume of Berserk under its Jets Comics imprint on November 26, 1990. [104] In 1992, Monthly Animal House was replaced by Young Animal, [101][105] where the series resumed publication in October of that same year. [106] Miura continued the series' irregular publication in the semimonthly magazine until his death in May 2021; the series resumed in June 2022, under supervision of Miura's fellow manga artist and childhood friend Kouji Mori, with illustrations by Miura's group of assistants and apprentices from Studio Gaga. [68] In June 2016, Hakusensha's Jets Comics imprint was rebranded as Young Animal Comics, and the first thirty-seven volumes of Berserk were re-published with new cover arts. [107] The posthumous 41st volume came in both regular and special editions; the latter included special canvas art drawn by Miura and a drama CD. [108][109][110] The 42nd volume was released on September 29, 2023. [111][112]

In North America, <u>Dark Horse Comics</u>, in conjunction with <u>Digital Manga Publishing</u>, announced the license of the manga in 2003. The first volume was published on October 22, 2003. As of November 2, 2022, 41 volumes have been published. In September 2018, Dark Horse Comics announced a deluxe edition of *Berserk*, featuring hard covers and larger prints, with the first volume (collecting original volumes 1–3) released on February 27, 2019. In 14th and latest volume (collecting original volumes 40, 41, and *Berserk Official Guidebook*) was released on November 22, 2023.

#### **Anime**

#### First series (1997-1998)

Berserk was adapted into a 25-episode anime television series, produced by Nippon Television and VAP, animated by Oriental Light and Magic, and directed by Naohito Takahashi. The first episode begins with the Black Swordsman arc and shifts into the Golden Age arc thereafter. It was broadcast in Japan on Nippon TV from October 8, 1997, to April 1, 1998.

#### Film series (2012–2013)

The Berserk's Golden Age arc was adapted into a trilogy of theatrical anime films by Studio  $4^{\circ}C$ . [122][123][124] The first film, The Egg of the King, premiered in Japan on February 4, 2012. [125] The second film, The Battle for Doldrey, premiered in Japan on June 23, 2012. [126] The third film, The Advent, premiered in Japan on February 1, 2013. [127] A remastered television broadcast edition, labeled as "Memorial Edition", aired from October 2 to December 25, 2022. [128][129][130]

#### Second series (2016-2017)

A second anime television series adaptation of *Berserk* was produced by <u>Liden Films</u> and animated by <u>GEMBA</u> and <u>Millepensee</u>. The series 12-episode first season covered the manga's Conviction arc. It was broadcast on <u>Wowow</u> and <u>MBS's Animeism</u> anime <u>programming block</u> from July 1 to September 16, 2016. A 12-episode second season, which covered the first half of the manga's Falcon of the Millennium Empire arc, was broadcast from April 7 to June 23, 2017.  $\frac{[135][136]}{[135][136]}$ 

### Video games

Two video games based on *Berserk* have been developed by Yuke's. The first game, *Sword of the Berserk: Guts' Rage* (ベルセルク 千年帝国の鷹篇 喪失花の章, *Beruseruku Sennen Teikoku No Taka Hen Wasurebana no Shō*; "Berserk—Millennium Falcon Arc: Chapter of the Lost Flowers"), was released for the <u>Dreamcast</u> in Japan by <u>ASCII Corporation</u> in late 1999. [137] It was localized in western regions early the following year by Eidos Interactive. [138]

The second game, Berserk: Millennium Falcon Hen Seima Senki no Shō (ベルセルク 千年帝国の鷹篇 聖魔戦記の章, Beruseruku Sennen Teikoku No Taka Hen Seima Senki no Shō; Berserk Millennium Falcon Arc: Chapter of the Record of the Holy Demon War), was published by Sammy Corporation exclusively in Japan on the PlayStation 2 in 2004. [139]

A *Berserk*-themed spin-off of <u>Omega Force</u>'s <u>Dynasty Warriors</u> series, titled *Berserk and the Band of the Hawk* (ベルセルク無双, <u>Berserk Musou</u>) was released on October 27, 2016, in Japan, [140] and later in the U.S. on February 21, 2017, for <u>PlayStation 4</u>, PlayStation Vita and PC via Steam. [141]

In a collaborative event with <u>Dragon's Dogma</u>, the weapons and armor sets from the <u>Berserk: The Golden Age Arc</u> films were added to the game, and <u>Shin Megami Tensei: Liberation Dx2</u> made characters as they appeared in the 2016 TV series adaptation of <u>Berserk</u> playable. In <u>December 2021</u>, the <u>MMORPG Lineage W</u> announced a collaboration with <u>Berserk</u>, including the ability to play as Guts. In <u>April 2025</u>, Blizzard Entertainment announced a crossover event

#### **Novel**

A spin-off novel, titled *Berserk: The Flame Dragon Knight* (ベルセルク 炎竜の騎士, *Beruseruku Enryū no Kishi*), written by <u>Makoto Fukami</u> with illustrations by Kentaro Miura, was released on June 23, 2017. [148] It is focused on the past of the new Band of the Hawk's apostle Grunbeld. [149][150] In North America, the novel was published in English by Dark Horse on April 17, 2019. [151]

#### Other media

Five *Berserk* art books and one guidebook have been released by Hakusensha:

- Berserk: Illustrations File, also known as Kentaro Miura Berserk Illustration Book (三浦建太郎画集 ベルセルク, Miura Kentarō Gashū Beruseruku), released on February 26, 1997. [152]
- Berserk: Kenpū Denki—Kanzen Kaiseki-sho (ベルセルク 剣風伝奇完全解析書, Beruseruku Kenpū Denki Kanzen Kaiseki-sho; "Berserk: Sword-Wind Chronicle—Complete Analysis Report"), an art book about the 1997 anime, released on December 9, 1998. [153]
- Berserk: War Cry—Postcard Collection (ベルセルク ポストカードブック WAR CRY (雄叫び), Beruseruku Posutokādo Bukku Uō Kurai (Otakebi)), released on August 20, 1998. [154]
- Berserk: Visual & Story File (ベルセルク ビジュアル&ストーリーFILE, Beruseruku Bijuaru ando Sutōrī Fairu), art book about the video game Sword of the Berserk: Guts' Rage, released on December 22, 1999. [155]
- *Berserk Official Guidebook* (ベルセルク オフィシャルガイドブック, *Beruseruku Ofisharu Gaidobukku*), was released by Hakusensha on September 23, 2016.<sup>[156]</sup> It was published in North America by Dark Horse on September 19, 2018.<sup>[157]</sup>
- *The Artwork of Berserk* was released for the 2021 *Large Berserk Exhibition*;<sup>[158]</sup> it was sold exclusively during the event, but it was later announced that it would be available for purchase after the event.<sup>[159]</sup>

A trading card game was released by <u>Konami</u> in Japan in 2003 and 2004. [160][161] Berserk has spurred a line of statues and <u>action figures</u> produced by Art of War, Prime 1 Studio and First 4 Figures. [162][163][164] Various <u>figma</u> figures by Max Factory based on the characters have been released, including Guts (Black Swordsman version, [165] Band of the Hawk version and Berserker Armor version), Griffith and Femto, and Femto, Casca, 170 and the Godhand. Berserk inspired two pachinko machines that feature original CG animation. [172][173]

With the publication of the 40th volume of the manga on September 18, 2018, a promotional video, featuring actor Shigeru Matsuzaki portraying Guts, was streamed. [174][175]

"Large *Berserk* Exhibition" (大ベルセルク展, *Dai Beruseruku-ten*), a special event to celebrate the 30th anniversary of *Berserk*, was announced in October 2020. It was originally scheduled to be held at <u>Ikebukuro Sunshine City</u>'s Exhibition Hall A in <u>Tokyo</u> from January 30 to February 15, 2021. [176][177] However, due to <u>COVID-19 pandemic</u> concerns, the event was postponed. [178] The event was rebranded as "Large *Berserk* Exhibition: Kentaro Miura's 32 Years of Artistry" (大ベルセルク展~三浦建太郎 画業32年の軌跡~, *Dai Beruseruku-ten ~ Miura Kentarō Gagyō 32-nen no Kiseki*~), and was held at the same location from September 10–23, 2021. [179][180][181] The exhibition was held in Osaka from December 11, 2021, to January 30, 2022. [182]

A drama CD, featuring the return of the 2016 anime's cast, portraying the "Awakening" chapter of the manga, was published with the special edition of the 41st volume of the manga on December 24, 2021. [183][108]

Online animation group Studio Eclypse announced in October 2023 that it had begun pre-production of a <u>fan</u> animation titled *Berserk: The Black Swordsman*. The project was slated to premiere in 2025; however, in September 2024, Hakusensha posted a statement indicating that the copyright holder, Kentaro Miura and Studio Gaga, did not authorize its production, and that the videos in the project—including a comparison video between the cuts from Studio Eclypse's trailer and the panels from the original *Berserk* manga—were used without permission. [185]

# Reception

The 1988 prototype chapter of *Berserk* placed second at the seventh *ComiComi*'s Manga-School prize. [186][11] The manga was a finalist for the second, third, fourth, and fifth installments of the Tezuka Osamu Cultural Prize in 1998, [187] 1999, [188] 2000, [189] and 2001, [190] respectively. In 2002, *Berserk* earned Miura the Award for Excellence at the sixth installment of the Tezuka Osamu Cultural Prize, being awarded along with Takehiko Inoue, who won the Grand Prize for *Vagabond*. [191][11][21] *Berserk* was one of the Manga Division's Jury Recommended Works at the fifth and sixth installments of the Japan Media Arts Festival Awards in 2001 and 2002, respectively. [192][193] *Berserk: Birth of the Black Swordsman*, a 15-second video commercial for the 2016 anime television series adaptation, was one of the Entertainment Division's Jury Recommended Works at the 20th installment of the Japan Media Arts Festival Awards in 2017. [194][195]

In 2016, *Berserk* ranked 38th on the 17th "Book of the Year" list by <u>Da Vinci</u> magazine; [196] it ranked 44th on the 22nd list in 2022. [197] On <u>TV Asahi</u>'s Manga Sōsenkyo 2021 poll, in which 150,000 people voted for their top 100 manga series, *Berserk* ranked 91st. [198][199]

In 2007, the manga received the prize of best *seinen* manga at the <u>Japan Expo Awards</u>. [200] Berserk won the French AnimeLand's Anime & Manga Grand Prix for Best Classic Seinen in 2008, 2009 and 2013. [201][202][203] It won the Spanish <u>Manga Barcelona</u> award for the seinen category in 2013 and 2021. [204][205] The North American fourteenth volume of <u>Dark Horse Comics</u>'s deluxe edition was nominated for the Harvey Awards in the Best Manga category in 2024. [206]

#### **Sales**

Volumes 33–41 of *Berserk* debuted in the top six on <u>Oricon</u> weekly manga chart from 2008 to 2021; [e] volumes 34 and 40 debuted first in 2009 and 2018, respectively. [208][214] By July 2015, the manga had over 27 million copies in circulation in Japan and 8 million overseas; [216] over 40 million copies in circulation by January 2016; [217] over 50 million copies in circulation (including digital versions) by May 2021; [218] over 55 million copies in circulation (including digital versions) by October 2022; [219] and over 60 million copies in circulation (including digital versions) by September 2023. [220]

*Berserk* received an Excellence Award of Hakusensha's Denshi Shoseki Taishō (<u>E-Book</u> Award) in 2015, which went to the publisher's best-selling digital manga from July 1, 2014, to June 30, 2015; [221] it won the same award in its 2021 edition, which went for the publisher's best-selling digital manga from January 1 to December 31, 2021. [222]

In March 2017, Michael Gombos, Dark Horse Comics' director of international publishing and licensing, reported that *Berserk* was their best-selling product of all time (not just among manga), dethroning *Lone Wolf and Cub*, [223] and it had over 2 million copies sold in North America by September 2018. Following Miura's death announcement in May 2021, it was reported that the first eight volumes of Dark Horse's deluxe edition of *Berserk* ranked on Amazon's top 100 overall best-selling books list. According to *ICv2*, *Berserk* was the fourth best-selling manga franchise for Q4 2021 (September–December) in the United States, and it was also the tenth "most efficient manga franchise" for retailer bookshelves, based on the website's calculations of which manga franchises had the highest sales per volume. The first volume of Dark Horse's deluxe edition was one of the highest-selling manga volumes of 2022; [226] it was also one of the highest-selling manga volumes of 2023.

### **Critical reception**

Berserk has received widespread critical acclaim. Reviewing the first volume, Michael Aronson of Manga Life described the series as a striking fusion of medieval barbarism, sorcery, and futuristic technology, blending ghouls, firearms, and gore. He noted that its "beautifully rendered" action and extreme violence would satisfy genre enthusiasts. [228] Publishers Weekly called it a relentless mix of brutal violence and exhilarating action, merging pure fantasy with graphic horror. [229] Grant Goodman of Pop Culture Shock regarded Berserk as a redefinition of fantasy manga storytelling, praising its intricate blend of medieval warfare, magic, and horror. [86] Greg McElhatton of Read About Comics found the series compelling yet difficult to pinpoint, citing its characters, monstrous designs, and cryptic backstory elements as key strengths. [230] Daniel Briscoe of The Fandom Post called the third volume a tragic narrative of hatred and lost innocence, commending Miura's ability to balance emotional depth with visceral brutality. [90]

Satyajit Chetri of <u>Rolling Stone</u> observed that by the fifth volume, <u>Berserk</u> evolved into a poignant exploration of humanity, friendship, and ambition, shifting focus from violence to character-driven choices. [231] Eduardo M. Chavez of <u>AnimeOnDVD</u> noted that even after many volumes, <u>Berserk</u> retained its shocking intensity and uniqueness. [97] Scott Campbell of <u>Active Anime</u> described the twenty-first volume as both horrifying and captivating, emphasizing its unparalleled narrative and artistic execution. [232] Zac Bertschy of <u>SciFi.com</u> praised the series for its disturbing yet deeply affecting storytelling, recommending it to mature audiences. [233]

In <u>Manga: The Complete Guide</u>, <u>Jason Thompson</u> awarded <u>Berserk</u> four stars, likening it to a blood-soaked <u>sword-and-sorcery</u> epic infused with elements of <u>Clive Barker's Hellraiser</u>. He highlighted its meticulously detailed medieval setting, where fantasy elements emerge with gradual, unsettling horror. Thompson, in a separate review, noted that despite its brutality, the protagonist's remorse lent the story moral weight absent in similar works. For <u>Anime News Network</u> (ANN), he acknowledged the series' shift toward a more conventional fantasy <u>RPG</u> structure, but praised Miura's expansive storytelling and richly developed characters.

Matt Fagaly of <u>Crunchyroll</u> analyzed the Lost Children arc (volumes 14–16) for its subversion of  $\underline{sh\bar{o}nen}$  and  $\underline{sh\bar{o}jo}$  tropes, resulting in a uniquely profound narrative. [235] Carl Kimlinger of <u>ANN</u> compared the thirty-fifth volume's adventure tone to <u>Robert E. Howard</u>'s works, noting a slight decline in intensity but still maintaining its appeal. [236] Brittany Vincent of <u>Otaku USA</u> declared <u>Berserk</u> one of the most distinctive Western-style fantasies ever created. [93] Eric Frederiksen of <u>Syfy Wire</u> called it one of manga's darkest yet most emotionally rewarding works. [80] Peter Fobian of <u>Crunchyroll</u> reflected on its deeply personal and artistically transformative journey over three decades. [237]

In 2025, in reference to <u>Texas Senate Bill 20</u>, which creates new criminal offenses for those who possess, promote, or view visual material deemed <u>obscene</u>, which is said to depict a child, whether it is an actual person, animated or cartoon depiction, or an image of someone created through <u>computer software</u> or <u>artificial intelligence</u>, Vanessa Esguerra of <u>The Mary Sue</u> argued that possession of manga like *Berserk* could be deemed illegal under the law, due to various parts of each of this manga, and asserted that owning copies of the manga, which fell under the Texas law's provisions, might put "people behind the slammer." [238]

#### **Artwork**

Critics consistently praised Miura's artwork in *Berserk*. Bertschy emphasized how the series' visual execution stood out, particularly noting the masterful cross-hatching techniques and obsessive attention to atmospheric detail. He found the art style reminiscent of 1950s horror comics from EC Comics, perfectly matching the narrative's grim tone, and hailed Miura as both a skilled artist and storyteller. Thompson focused on Miura's precise depictions of medieval architecture and weaponry, while acknowledging occasional stylistic inconsistencies in human figures. McElhatton admitted initial reservations about the art but praised its uniquely disturbing portrayal of supernatural elements. Publishers Weekly identified a distinctive 1980s aesthetic characterized by economical dialogue, dynamic action sequences, and effective use of shadow.

Campbell described the artwork's unprecedented level of detail, comparing its visual impact only to <u>Claymore</u> while maintaining <u>Berserk</u>'s singular artistic identity. [232] In his review of volume 27, Campbell further emphasized how the series redefined standards for artistic detail in manga. [239] Yegulalp observed significant artistic evolution, noting that while early volumes appeared unpolished, the artwork achieved remarkable consistency and sophistication by volume eight. [240] Brienza noted Miura's unusual practice of working without assistants despite the series' technical demands. [241][f] In her review for <u>Graphic Novel Reporter</u>, Brienza characterized the artwork as an exquisite <u>eroticgrotesque</u> fusion of <u>Dungeons & Dragons</u>-style <u>high fantasy</u>, noting its broad appeal across genders. [244]

Santos highlighted Miura's sophisticated manipulation of light and shadow to create immersive environments, contrasting this with other artists' tendency to neglect background details. [245] Kimlinger ranked the artwork among manga's most technically accomplished, particularly praising its emotional expressiveness, creature designs, and visceral combat sequences. [246] Chetri compared the surreal visuals to works by M. C. Escher, identifying influences from *Hellraiser* and H. P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos. [231] Penilhas emphasized the artwork's consistent quality and powerful emotional conveyance throughout the series. [247] Traub drew parallels between Miura's apocalyptic tableaus and Hieronymus Bosch's paintings, noting the instantly recognizable quality of key visual motifs. [248]

## Legacy

*Berserk* is regarded as one of the most influential <u>dark fantasy</u> works. [249][250][251][252] Peter Fobian, in an essay of the legacy and impact of *Berserk*, called it a "monolith not only for anime and manga, but also fantasy literature, video games, you name it", comparing its level of influence to <u>Blade Runner</u>, further adding, "it's difficult to imagine what the world might look like without it, and the generations of creators the series inspired." [237]

According to writer and editor Kazushi Shimada, series like *Fullmetal Alchemist*, *Attack on Titan*, *Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba* or *Jujutsu Kaisen* would not have existed if not for *Berserk*. [253] Some dark fantasy manga authors who have declared influence from *Berserk* include Hajime Isayama (*Attack on Titan*), [254] Kazue Kato (*Blue Exorcist*), [255] and Yana Toboso (*Black Butler*). [256] Other authors influenced by *Berserk* include Makoto Yukimura (*Vinland Saga*), [257] Yūki Tabata (*Black Clover*), [258] and Ryōgo Narita (*Baccano!* and *Durarara!!*). [259] Adi Shankar, producer of the *Castlevania* animated series, said in an interview that he would like to adapt *Berserk*, calling the "hyper-detailed beauty" of Miura's artwork a "true masterpiece", [260] while Adam Deats, *Castlevania* assistant director, stated that the show was inspired by *Berserk*. [248]

Critics like Gene Park of <u>The Washington Post</u> and Ramsey Isler of <u>IGN</u> stated that <u>Berserk</u> started a visual trend of characters wielding giant swords that spread to Cloud Strife from <u>Final Fantasy VII</u>, Dante from <u>Devil May Cry</u>, and Ichigo Kurosaki from <u>Bleach</u>. [250][261]

Berserk has also inspired a number of video games, including the <u>Dynasty Warriors</u> series, [262][263] the <u>Final Fantasy</u> series (considerably Final Fantasy VII and <u>XIV</u>), [262][264] the <u>Dark Souls</u> series, [263] <u>Bloodborne</u>, [251] <u>Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice</u>, [265] <u>Elden Ring</u>, [266][267] and <u>Capcom's Devil May Cry</u> and <u>Dragon's Dogma series</u>. [268][142][269]

Finnish heavy metal band Battle Beast have written songs about *Berserk*, including several on their 2013 self-titled album. [270][271] When guitarist Anton Kabanen left Battle Beast in 2015, he formed Beast in Black and continues to write songs about the series. [272] The deathcore band Brand of Sacrifice released the album *God Hand* in 2019. Both the band and album are hugely inspired by *Berserk*. [273] In 2021, deathcore band Slaughter to Prevail released a music video for their song "Zavali Ebalo", which featured scenes from the *Berserk* 1997 anime series. [274]

### See also

- Speculative fiction/Horror portal
- Speculative fiction portal

### **Notes**

- a. Following Miura's death in May 2021, Mori took on the role of "supervisor" of the manga.
- b. Consisting of Miura's former assistants: Yoshimitsu Kurosaki, Akio Miyaji, Nobuhiro Hirai, Naohide Nagashima, Hideaki Sugimoto and Shigeru Kinoshita. [69]
- c. It debuted in the magazine's October 1989 issue,  $\frac{[101]}{}$  released on August 25 of that same year.  $\frac{[102][103]}{}$
- d. Berserk aired on Nippon TV on Tuesday midnight, effectively Wednesday at 1:45 a.m. JST.[121]
- e. Ranking of each volume:
  - **33rd volume (2008):** 3rd<sup>[207]</sup>
  - **34th volume (2009):** 1st<sup>[208]</sup>
  - 35th volume (2010): 4th<sup>[209]</sup>
  - 36th volume (2011): 3rd<sup>[210]</sup>
  - 37th volume (2012): 2nd<sup>[211]</sup>
  - 38th volume (2016): 3rd<sup>[212]</sup>
  - 39th volume (2017): 2nd<sup>[213]</sup>
  - 40th volume (2018): 1st<sup>[214]</sup>
  - 41st volume (2021): 6th<sup>[215]</sup>
- f. Despite Brieza's comment, Miura had assistants who helped him on Berserk. [242][243]

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### **External links**

- Berserk official website at Young Animal (http://www.younganimal.com/berserk/) (in Japanese)
- "Large Berserk Exhibition: Kentaro Miura's 32 Years of Artistry" event official website (https://www.dai-berserk-ten.com) (in Japanese)

 Berserk (https://www.animenewsnetwork.com/encyclopedia/manga.php?id=2298) (manga) at Anime News Network's encyclopedia

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