

other, sizing each other up like a gunfight. (*Laughter.*)"

EAST MEETS WEST

"American comic-book creators go to Japan, talk to Japanese artists, like a summit!"

As the American superhero mainstream becomes moribund, a swell of interest in all things manga and anime has begun to unfold. First, it seemed mainly that American comics creators were discovering, appreciating and being influenced by the Japanese material—but then that enthusiasm spread far and wide.

There is, of course, a parallel interest in all things American among the Japanese. Our comics and animation were, after all, the inspiration for much of what they have now made their own.

Yin and yang.

So what could be more fitting than a

coming together of the creators from both cultures? To this end, Tezuka Productions sponsored an informal summit of sorts, inviting Will and Ann Eisner, Richard and Wendy Pini, and Gaijin Studios' Stine Walsh and Brian Stelfreeze for a *tete-a-tete* in Tokyo.

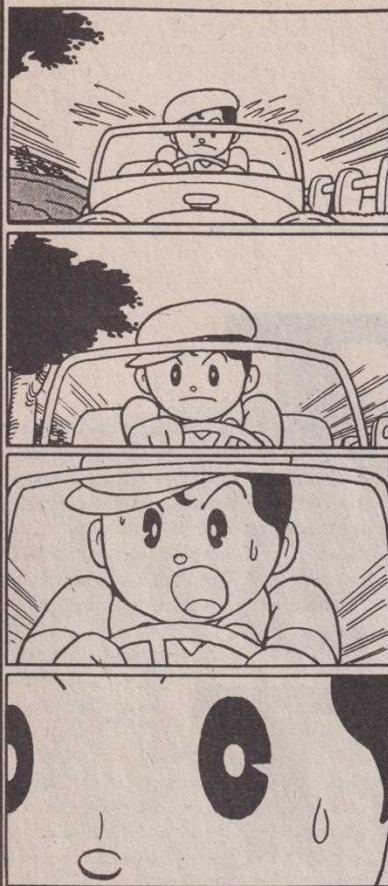
It's been said that Tezuka Productions is to Japan what Disney is to the U.S. Dr. Osamu Tezuka, founder of the "wide-eyed" look that has become the trademark of Japanimation, has passed on. But there are those in his corporation, such as president Takayuki Matsutani, who wish to fulfill his dream.

Dr. Tezuka believed that the image is a

universal concept. No language barriers, maybe some cultural differences, but he believed that images—comics, animation and the like—were the greatest way to unite the world. This symposium united, for a few days at least, some of the greatest Japanese creators and publishers with some of the cream of the American comics crop. These first steps were taken towards realizing Dr. Tezuka's dream.

And so we publish this interview, as another step toward the fulfillment of that dream, and to give all our readers the opportunity to accompany the lucky few who saw Japan in all her splendor, and met with some of the greatest creators on the other side of the globe . . .

"Osamu Tezuka is basically the father of ani-



Art this spread: Sample of sequential storytelling . . .

JULIA R. MATHER: You recently went to Japan, were taken over there as part of a delegation, is that right? How did that come about?

BRIAN STELFREEZE: Well, the whole thing, it's almost like one of those weird made-for-TV stories. There was a guy by the name of **Osamu Tezuka**, who's basically the father of animation in Japan; he's like the **Walt Disney** of Japan, you can go up to any kid and mention his name and it's magic.

His dream was that comic books were universal, that comic books spoke a language that transcended everything: Comics in Japan were just like comics in the United States were just like comics in Sweden were just like comics everywhere, so anyone could pick up any comic and read it. You know, you might not understand the language or the lettering, but as far as things happening from panel to panel you do understand that. His dream was basically to unify people through comics, through **manga!** It was a dream that he was never able to realize, but it was something that was very impor-

tant to him. When he died the company that he formed, Tezuka Productions, basically stayed true to that dream.

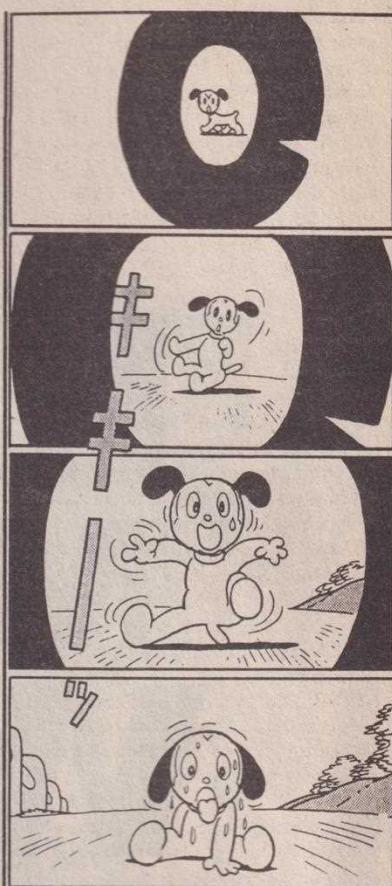
What happened with us, this was sort of a first step in realizing Tezuka's dream by getting a group of American comic-book creators, and just artists in general, to go over to Japan, talk to a group of Japanese comic book artists, the creative people over there. To just have an open forum, almost like a *summit!* This is the way we do things, this is the way *you* do things, let's talk about it. There was no real *goal* of the meeting, basically it was just let's do this and see what happens.

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT: That's hard to understand, because things usually are goal oriented, right?

BRIAN: Yeah . . . it was really odd because when we got over there we were kind of looking around thinking: What's the catch, what's going to happen? And they really put out a lot, sent us first class tickets and everything like that, so it cost a whole lot of money. The American group was Stine Walsh and I, Will Eisner and his wife, and Wendy and Richard Pini. We were just kind of looking at it like, you know: We're an odd group of people, why us? We really ended up finding that the value of the whole thing wasn't monetary, but they gained a lot from having us over there; and really we gained a lot from being over there.

JULIA: I can see there's an older generation, a middle generation, and you're of the younger generation: Was that something they had done deliberately? Or did they want someone who had done strips, someone who had done painting, someone who had done superheroes? Or did they just go to conventions and see who had really big crowds around them? (Laughter.)

BRIAN: Well, from talking to them through our translator, it was really neat because we discovered that Tezuka Productions basically figured with a few people they wanted as wide a representation of the American comic-book market



. . . by manga & anime master
Osamu Tezuka.

as possible. And it is quite different from their market. So, with me they scored big-time! I'm a popular comic book artist; I'm doing **BATMAN**, which is like the big thing in America — and at the same time I did some stuff for **X-MEN**, which is super popular, they know about that. I was a representative of modern, fast-track, mainstream comics.

And at the same time I do covers — a cover artist is a weird thing for them. That whole concept is totally alien to them. And I do painted covers, which is some-

"We were thinking, what's the catch? The value of the whole thing wasn't monetary."

mation in Japan. He's like the Walt Disney."

thing else that's totally alien. And at the same time I'm a black artist. So, basically, they scored big because with one illustrator they got a whole bunch. And the same thing with Will Eisner. I mean, Will Eisner has been in comic books virtually since the beginning, so he represents that entire generation. He's done every form of comics, everything! So, they scored pretty major.

JULIA: And he writes, too.

BRIAN: Yeah. He's a great guy. We really got to know him quite well on the trip. But, oddly enough, out of all of us that went there, Will Eisner is the closest thing to *their* comic-book market.

STINE WALSH: And the Eisners are very young-hearted, open to new things, and willing to share. They had a lot to say that was worth listening to, not just about comics but about everything.

JULIA: So, what do you think was their goal behind asking the Pinis?

STINE: She's a female independent.

BRIAN: Yeah, she's a female independent comic-book producer. That's something —

STINE: That's kind of rare. They wanted a cross section of what was comics in the United States, and she represents a totally different facet.

BRIAN: It's independent comics, it's self-publishing, it's a little bit of everything. And the female over there gets a totally different treatment.

STINE: They do totally different kinds of books that are completely geared towards the feminine audience.

BRIAN: Yeah, so it was good to have her there. With a handful of artists they got a little part of a large chunk of the American scene.

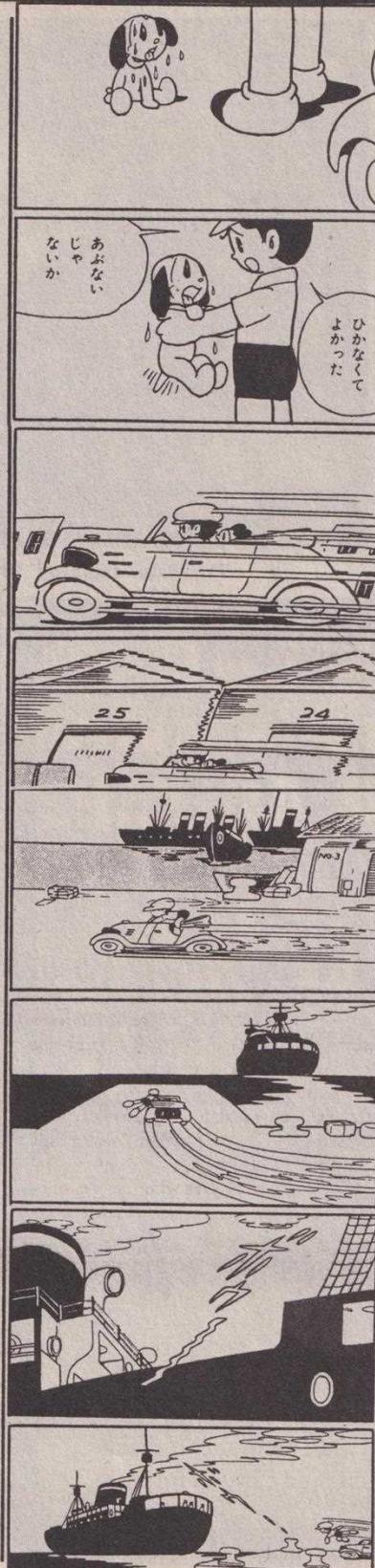
JULIA: What's strange is if you had gone to someone who is maybe a little bit outside but very knowledgeable, if you had gone to Maggie Thompson or someone like that and said you wanted a cross section of what is American comics, from an American point of view, the people who were chosen probably would not have been chosen.

BRIAN: No, not at all.

STINE: Well, it was pretty much on the shoulders of Fred Schodt, the translator. He translates a lot of Japanese books, and Fred talked to a lot of his friends. I think in some ways it was more of an American perspective, but the Americans who were involved are very influenced and involved in Japanese comics.

DAK: Were you familiar with Japanese comics and animation?

BRIAN: Yeah, I was very familiar with a lot of Japanese comics. But the odd thing,



something that's really strange, is with the American perception of Japanese comics, there's something a little bit different in that. What a lot of people really get a kick out of here in America are the Japanese comics that are sort of *like* American comics. Creators like Katsushiro Otomo and Masamune Shirow and even Kenichi Sonoda, these guys are really popular here for the manga that they produce, so I thought, "Wow, I'll get to meet those guys!"

But the people that were there were the *popular* Japanese comics producers, and the more I got into the culture the more and more I realized that I kind of thought I knew a lot about it but I really didn't. I really didn't know much about it at all, you know. And you have to really pay attention to the fact that *most* of their stuff that's popular *here* is not really that popular *there*. But it's the stuff that can be sold over here. The stuff that's popular over there, people over here wouldn't care for it that much.

JULIA: What sprang to mind while you were saying how comics are a universal medium: In theory, yes, that's true, because basically if you look at it from a blank perspective there are pictures that tell a story — as long as you're not blind you can get the story. But the cultural differences are so huge, what would anybody actually care to read? That's the big hiccup, I think, in Tezuka's plan.

BRIAN: Yeah.

JULIA: So, I guess this was to try and maybe transcend that a little?

BRIAN: Yeah, it was. Something that I noticed when I was over there is Japan is a very old country. Their civilization is one of the oldest in the world. They've been doing their thing for a long time. Because it's so rich, they hold it very dear, and most of their comic books serve to basically remind them of their culture, of the people, of everything that they do. Their comics are basically a mirror that's held up to their society.

In America, because we're pretty young as a country, we're pretty young as a civilization, we couldn't care less about our culture a lot of the time. Our fashions, we burn through them as fast as we can. Things are always constantly changing over here. The biggest thing about American comics is that it's actually escapism from the culture, you know. You actually read an American comic to get away from things, you're especially not reminded of what's going on.

There are a lot of Japanese comics about, you know, a boy spends a day fishing, or a comic book entirely devoted

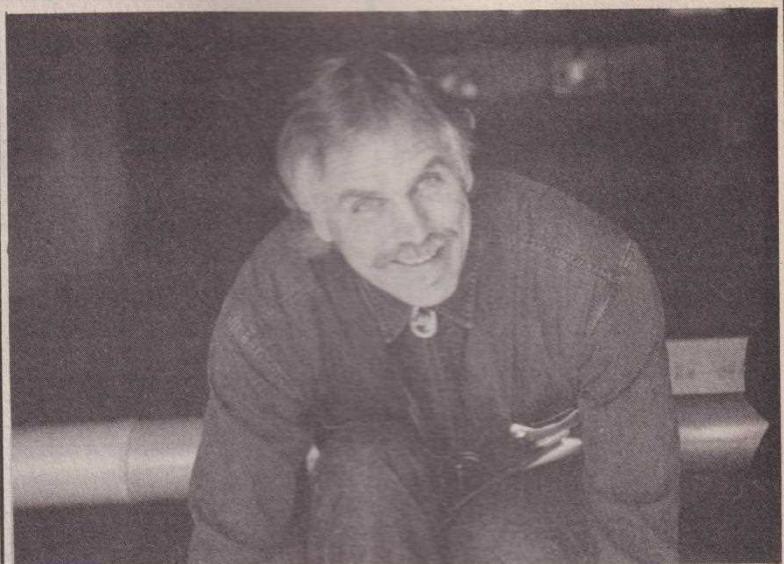
"Their comics are a mirror held up to their society."

to a basketball game, or to golfing, things like that. That's important stuff to the Japanese.

DAK: They even have BUSINESS COMICS.

BRIAN: Yeah, BUSINESS COMICS! This stuff is not fantasy oriented, you know. This stuff is really personal. There are some comics that *are* fantasy, but the really popular ones are the real subtle ones about the culture. But American comics, it's BATMAN! Here's a person that's totally *against* society. SUPER-MAN! Here's someone who can fly around and do all these amazing things.

DAK: But they like a lot of our movies, and our movies are culturally or aesthetically very similar, they're all big tough guys duking it out against the world. So, when they translate our comics do they go for those kind of comics at all? What is their appreciation of our comics, if any?



Translator/organizer Fred Schodt and his book.

FREDERIK L. SCHODT

Author, *Inside the Robot Kingdom*

AMERICA AND THE FOUR JAPANS



A concise guide to understanding how America's views of Japan have changed—and must continue to change for the sake of our economic and cultural future

BRIAN: That's kind of hard to say, especially with the younger generation. You have a younger generation of Japanese kids who are basically almost exactly like American kids, so you're going to have some standard things that are popular across the board, things like SPIDER-MAN and stuff like that. But something . . . I don't know, it's kind of weird, everything American is popular over there. There's a small group of Americans who enjoy Japanese comics, who enjoy the Japanese culture and really get into it, and you have the same thing over there, a larger group of Japanese who really love the American culture, they like a SPIDER-MAN comic book because it's an *American* thing, like an X-MEN comic book because it's an *American* thing.

JULIA: What did you find most enjoyable about the actual trip?

STINE: The food was good. (*Laughter.*) People were very very outgoing. It's not like when people visit here, if they're lost and they ask for directions people here get very irritated because they don't speak English. You don't see Americans very often stopping and being courteous to anybody from any other country: Learn English, get out of here. They're not like that. We had people walk up to us and say, "Are you all right? Do you know what area you're in? Let me show you how the subway works. Do you have the correct change?" A complete stranger on the street! "Are you sure you're not lost? Do you know how to get where you're staying?" Complete strangers would just go totally out of their way to be friendly and accommodating, having no idea why

"American comics is escapism from the culture."



Feasting, Japanese style: Tomoko Kanai, Ann Eisner, Stine Walsh, Brian Stelfreeze and Richard Pini.

you're even there, just because they know you're not Japanese. They were really amazing. It's almost frightening.

BRIAN: Something that was really fun, though, is English is taught as a second language in a lot of the schools over there, so when we were there — because we look *incredibly* American — what ends up happening is if we stop for just a second and look up on a railway sign to find out which train we have to go to, a Japanese person steps in, like, "I spent so many years learning English; here is a pair of Americans; I'm going to get in there and try out this English!" (Laughter.) They really get a kick out of trying to speak English, you can tell that they're just really excited that they're talking to an American. And they kind of know the language. So not speaking that much Japanese actually ended up being a benefit as far as meeting people.

DAK: Besides being culturally centered, are there other differences between Japanese and American comics, the Japanese comic-book industry as a whole compared to the American comic-book industry as a whole?

BRIAN: Something that's completely different over there from over here, their entire comic book industry is creator owned. There is no Japanese character like Superman where this artist and this writer work on it this month.

DAK: Yet — wasn't this a company-sponsored thing?

BRIAN: It was a company-sponsored thing, but Tezuka Productions, most of the comic-book work that they do is reprints of Tezuka's work. And there are a lot of other companies that in a sense went in with them on this, companies like Kodansha, which is the biggest comic-book producer over there.

But even a company like Kodansha, which is bigger than Marvel will ever be, they don't have characters. They will talk to Kenichi Sonoda and say produce this sort of book for us, and Kenichi Sonoda will come up with an idea, come up with characters, and produce it. And Kenichi Sonoda will own the characters, will own the concept. The company will just publish it and that's it; everything over there is creator owned.

And it's really weird, characters are so important. When I went over there people would say, "Oh, you created Batman!" I'm like, "No, I had nothing to do with that." Then they would ask, "Okay, what characters did you create?" It was a really important thing to them to talk about, "I created this character, I'm really proud of that." And, of course, I'm an American

"Their comic-book industry is creator-owned."

mainstream artist who really hasn't created hardly *any* characters. I'd say, "Well, CYCOPS, I had a lot to do with the creation of that, but I didn't create the characters." That was really strange to them. They were really surprised that I would be a popular comic-book artist and not have created a bunch of characters.

JULIA: And for the most part they either team up and write and draw, or swap back and forth, or write and draw their own material?

BRIAN: Most of them write and draw their own material. There are a few — very *very* few — a few writers that only write stuff, a few artists that only draw stuff.

DAK: Like Koike and Kojima?

BRIAN: Yeah.

JULIA: Back in COMICS INTERVIEW #52 Frank Miller interviewed Koike and Kojima — sort of a Stan Lee and Jack Kirby. They had done LONE WOLF AND CUB, and they actually say in their interview that their sales were about six to eight million copies on each set of LONE WOLF AND CUB. It was then at that time very popular.



Facing page: CYCOPS cover painting in the patented Stelfreeze style. "Japanese artists say that in American comics the artwork is far too detailed."

Above: Brian's simplified and highly-stylized design for the CYCOPS as they would appear in animation or manga form. East meets West, indeed.

BRIAN: What's really weird, the Pinis asked what's the total revenue that's made in Japanese comics. We were in a room with four or five of the top Japanese producers, and they kind of like . . . obviously, this was the first time they were given this question. They kind of like scratched their heads and whispered to each other, and the word "trillion" was used. (Laughter.) I was hoping it was going to be several million, but they jumped over billion and went into the trillion mark.

DAK: Is this in units or on currency?
BRIAN: Currency.

JULIA: Something to yen for.
(Laughter.)

DAK: Groan. Well, getting back to the basics of the trip and everything, what did you guys actually do?

Brian, photographing his own reflection in a huge chrome ball in Tokyo.

"The creator might lay out the pages, then get a

BRIAN: When we got there the first thing that we did is we had a meeting with Japanese comic book artists and creative people. That was neat because it was kind of a little banquet thing, sort of a dinner.

JULIA: You were in Tokyo, right?

BRIAN: Yeah, we were in Tokyo, and this was actually at the hotel, the first meeting was at the hotel. They were sitting on one side, you know — basically it was like two U.N. tables facing each other, the Japanese on one side and the

Americans on the other side. They were obviously just coming in and looking at stuff; looking across our table you could see their table and they had stacks of comic books from America. They were looking through them, thumbing through some of the stuff, reading some of it. And right next to each of our seats we had comic books of theirs, and we were looking through them. So we're all looking at the people over there while we're looking at their work, they're all doing the same thing — it's like we're sizing each other up, starting off almost like a gunfight. (*Laughter.*) But it ended up that we were all laughing and having a really great time.

DAK: What did they think of American comics?

BRIAN: Oh, what's really funny, the

Japanese artists say that in American comics the artwork is far too detailed, that it belongs in a museum not on comic-book pages. They're in awe of the *detail* that's in American comics. And they actually brought up some neat points. Something that really has changed my views on comic-book storytelling, they were basically saying that the artwork in American comics is so beautiful that you look at the artwork and often times it's difficult to pay attention to the story; you're too busy looking at the beautiful artwork.

Over there, they put enough artwork on the page to get the story across; that's it! You can't really pay attention to the artwork because you're too involved in the story. And they design their books to read very quickly. When we were on the trains looking at people reading Japanese comics, it's almost like watching a commercial for a speed reading course, they flip a page every ten seconds or so. If you take a look at what is the standard American comic, something like X-MEN, it's about \$1.75, it's something that's going to have about 22 or 24 pages.

JULIA: And about a half hour of reading, wouldn't you say?

BRIAN: Yeah.

JULIA: It depends how fast you read.

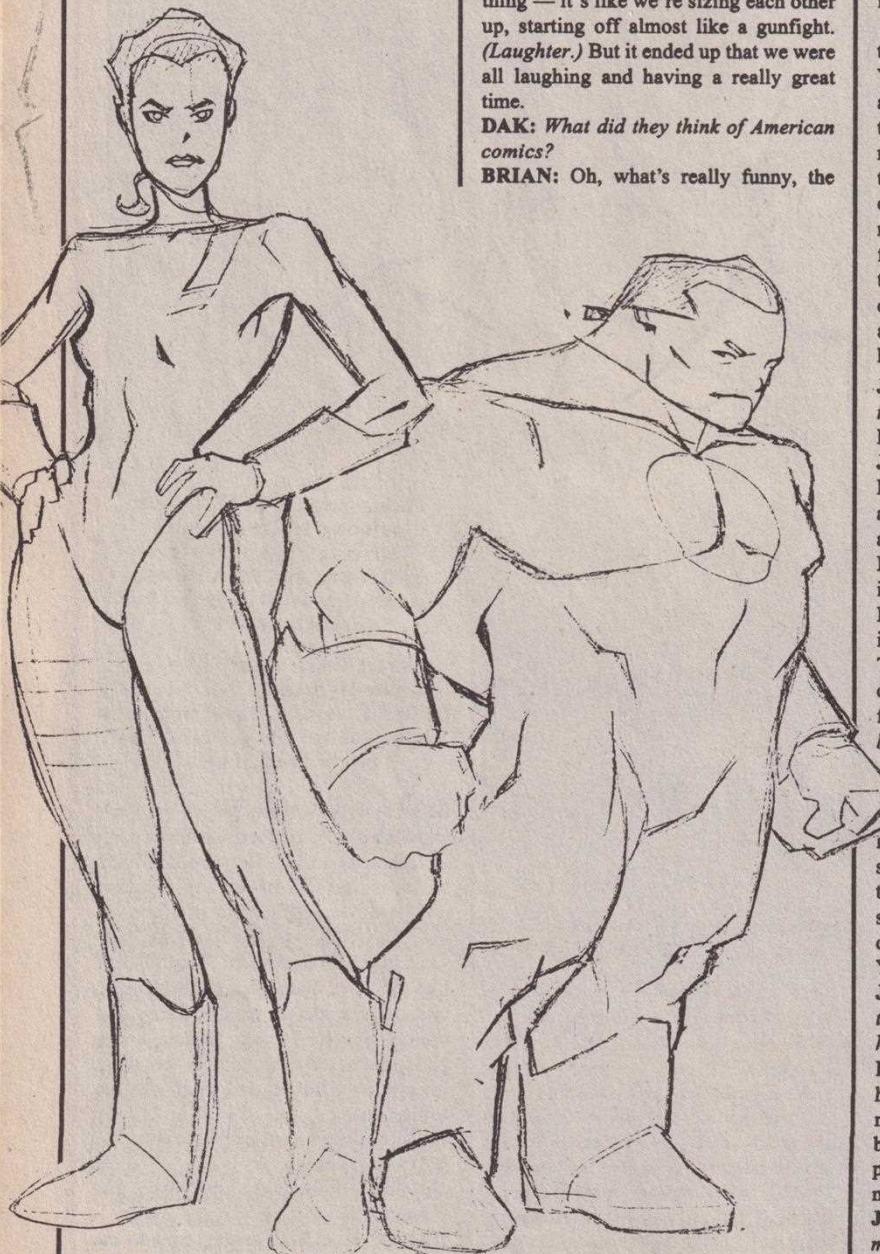
BRIAN: In Japan for about the same amount of cash, for \$1.75 or \$2.00, maybe as much as \$3.00, you get a phone book. It's something that's often more than an inch thick. And it's anthology stories. Imagine getting an issue of X-MEN, an issue of BATMAN, an issue of FANTASTIC FOUR, sort of ten different issues of comics in this one phone book. And the funny thing about it is when I say "phone book" I'm not kidding; it's the size of a phone book. And the quality of the paper is the same, you know. It's not something designed to be collected and put in a bag, it's basically something that's designed to be read and tossed away. Given that, you have a lot of stories in there for your \$3.00, but it doesn't take long to read the whole thing. You can just flip through it.

JULIA: But the thing is, they can keep that cost down because the volume is so high?

BRIAN: Yeah, because the volume is so high, and they don't have to spend that much — I mean, the printing is *amazing* because they have government subsidized printing. But the paper is incredibly cheap newsprint type paper.

JULIA: And they do a lot of reprint material, they keep a lot of stuff in print.

BRIAN: Yeah, they do, a lot of reprint material. What's really funny, imagine if



Stelfreeze simplifies Val and Tanaka of CYCOPS (see painting on preceding spread for comparison). These characters just beg to be animated!

team to come in. The creator finishes up."

you will an American comic-book artist gets a contract to do X-MEN, basically he's told he gets to do a year on X-MEN and then maybe we'll renew the contract next year. So, you've got a year, you produce a book a month and that's it and everything's cool. Over in Japan a Japanese comic-book artist will get a call to do a year of comics and that's a job that takes a month.

DAK: (Laughter.)

BRIAN: Yeah! He's told, basically, "We want one of your stories. Create a character for us." He creates a character, he goes back to his studio, his studio generally has a team of 20 other artists, and they produce 400 pages in one month!

DAK: There's a couple of interesting things about what you've been saying. One is even though they're creator owned, and consequently you might assume it's like a purist creator — writing and drawing his own stuff completely and totally — in fact these creators have studios that are filled with lots of people who are helping to produce this stuff?

BRIAN: Yeah.

JULIA: So actually it's like the character is created by the creator, he retains copyright on it, but he then allows whoever to actually draw it under his tutelage.

BRIAN: Yeah, basically. As far as the creator is concerned, we're talking about someone who might lay out the pages then get a team to come in, one guy does backgrounds, one guy does the left hand, one guy does this thing. Then the creator comes in and finishes up everything and makes sure that everything is just right to his specifications. And there's another person, you know, who does the lettering, everything like that.

DAK: So, in some ways it's even more assembly line than here, and in other ways it's like the Old Masters system.

BRIAN: Yeah, it is. It's a little bit like us but then a little bit not like us. But the creator is whoever he wants to be, you know. If the creator wants to hire a warehouse full of art students to help him, that's great. But if the creator is just a person on his own, there are people like that, one guy coming up with his own ideas and drawing the stories, doing everything himself. The company isn't concerned with who the creator is, the company is concerned with doing the project. So, you have some people over there that when they get a job to do a year of comics, that job is a month's worth of work for them. They'll produce the next year of X-MEN, but they will produce it next month, and it'll be however many hun-



Brian's vision of Ragoczy, CYCOPS' adversary, as he might appear in manga, anime — or a high-style U.S. animation series like BATMAN.

dreds of pages, then that comic will be serialized one month at a time.

DAK: Sometimes in our less forgiving moods, when our European friends aren't actually on hand, we laugh at the fact that they stir themselves to produce entire 20- or 30-page stories once a year. (Laughter.) From our point of view it's like: What are they doing the rest of the time? We Americans tend to think of ourselves as the guys who really produce comics. But from what you're saying, what must the Japanese think of the

European method where people sometimes produce a page or two a month?

BRIAN: Yeah. They really put it out, you know. And the neat thing is that's got to be tough on the publisher, because basically they have a whole month to really nag this guy to get his pages in. (Laughter.) But you're expecting somewhere in the neighborhood of 20 pages a day from this guy. With American comic-book publishers you have less pressure on you but they get to bug you for the whole year. (Laughter.)

DAK: So we're actually in between the

“Comics are completely mainstream in Ja-

European and Japanese methods.

BRIAN: It's a little bit of both. And the artists, or creators — it's kind of funny saying “artist” — it's almost sort of a bragging right. To them I'm, like, a lowly American artist who produces two or three pages a week, so they laugh at me and point their fingers and say, “Haw, two pages a week, I do 400 pages a month!” Then someone else will say, “Haw, 400, I do 600 pages a month!” At first I was thinking, “Wow, one guy, that many pages a month? He must be cookin’!” (Laughter.)

JULIA: But here it's somewhat frowned upon, people will say, “Haw, he had an assistant on that strip.” From our perspective looking at this Japanese product it's, “That isn't really his work, he has 20 people doing it all for him.” It's frowned upon here in some circles, sort of passing off your assistants' work as your own under your name.

BRIAN: Yeah.

JULIA: But they don't have that stigma.

BRIAN: Right. It's really strange. People are under the impression that, like, Leonardo Da Vinci did every brush stroke on the wall; it's a rude awakening when they find out his assistants did a lot of “The Last Supper.” But really, the Japanese, they are efficient; they are really super efficient at getting the job done.

DAK: I remember right after you came back from Japan hearing the two of you saying how the comic-book publishers do market studies and attempt to expand the market, that they will invest in things even though they may not make any money from it.



STINE: Well, there was a comment made when we left the publishers meeting, Will Eisner wondered what they were after, did they just want a piece of our pie. Our translator, Fred Schodt, said, “No, they could have your pie.” (Laughter.) They had already looked into completely buying out Marvel Comics and they had decided not to do it because it was not a big enough market.

BRIAN: The meeting that we had, the big comic book publishers were all at this meeting. They were all interested in what these American artists and creators had to say about comics. They often do that, they have a get together once every couple of months.

JULIA: The shared wisdom thing?

BRIAN: Yeah. The big Japanese comic-book producers get together and they talk about comics. Imagine Marvel, DC, Dark Horse and Image getting together once every couple of months to basically say,

“What's wrong with the comic-book industry and what can we do about it?” Not only that but then that group deciding on things, like one person saying there aren't enough comics being produced for kids the age of four and then the group deciding Marvel needs to start producing comics for kids the age of four, then Marvel saying okay — even though they'll lose money on that — saying okay because it will help the comicbook industry.

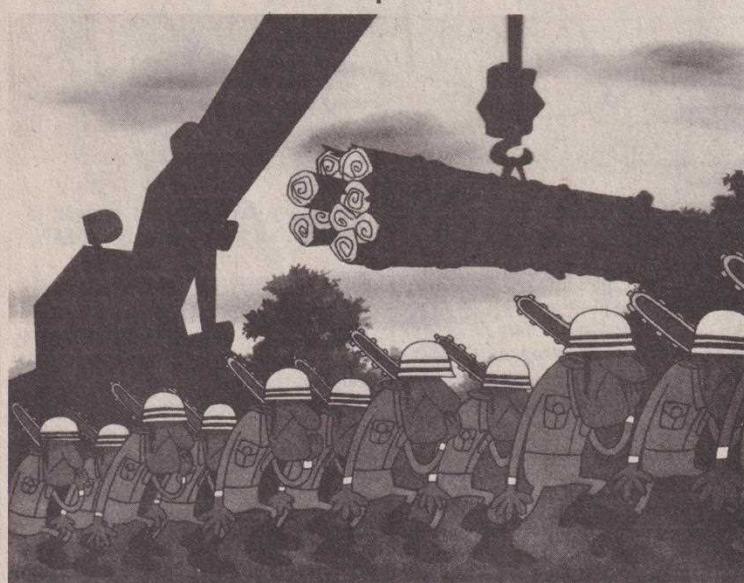
DAK: The purpose of that is to develop a market for comics?

STINE: They can afford to do that because comics are completely mainstream in Japan — there are comics for everyone.

BRIAN: What's really funny, we look at the American comic-book market, and the Japanese comic-book market basically was the American comic-book market like 40 years ago. The market was exactly the same, you know, comics were mostly sold to kids that were from the age of eight to sixteen, that was their comic-book market. Really, a couple of the translators were saying that a number of years ago if you were reading a comic you had that same sort of stigma of people going, “You're an adult and you're reading a comic?”

But what happened — and I think it needs to happen here but so far no one's really made a move on it — the comic-book producers a number of years ago in Japan got together and decided to actively change the image of comics, and they did. They came up with a plan and they executed that plan, and that took maybe ten years to come to fruition, but they actually did it.

Now, comics are considered like books in Japan, anyone can pick up a comic and they're not laughed at. You could walk up to just about any kid and ask to see their comic book, they'll reach into their book bag and pull out their comic book. You can walk up to almost any businessman



pan — there are comics for everyone!"

and ask what was the last comic book he read, and he'll tell you what the last comic book was that he read. *Everyone* reads comics. The comic-book industry got together and carved that opinion of comics.

JULIA: *That's a pretty tall order, to sit down and say we're going to change the way the whole nation perceives us.*

STINE: Yeah.

BRIAN: Yeah, but it's possible, it's possible. But the thing about it is you have to really do your demographics, and you have to really think about what message you're getting across. And now, for instance — they set that in motion a number of years ago and it's something that's still working for them today. Now you have people saying women are treated really bad in comics, so all the Japanese comic-book producers — when it comes time for that meeting, someone will say, "People are saying women are really treated bad in comics. What are we going to do about this?" Everyone will gear down on women being treated badly in comics so that they don't upset women and stop women from reading comics, because that will set up that same thing they worked to change.

JULIA: *So, everything about comics is marketing strategy?*

BRIAN: Yeah. All the publishers will decide in general women are being treated bad, so they will all back up a little bit. It's not one company saying they won't treat women bad.

DAK: *But how does that translate from our point of view, from the Western individual point of view, with creator-owned characters? Here are companies that don't actually own the characters deciding women will henceforward be treated thusly, how does that translate back up the chain to the creators who are actually doing the books?*

BRIAN: They call the shots. They don't tell the creators what to do, but basically they say —

JULIA: *The strategy this month is back off on women being abused?*

BRIAN: Yeah. And it's not like this month, it's like next year, you know. They will basically say they want you to do this job, create a character within these parameters. And the creators agree, "Good, I'll just do that." It's not like, "In your book we don't want you to do this anymore." It's, "When you do this thing for us, this is what we want." And the creators have no problem with that.

JULIA: *There's no deciding I want to do what I want to do with my character, you won't tell me what to do or I'll go to another publisher — all the publishers*



STOP THE PRESS! The incredible anime masterpiece described on the last pages of this interview is available here! Above and opposite, scenes from Dr. Tezuka's *LEGEND OF THE FOREST*. Told without dialogue, it's a strong environmental statement, a history of animation, and more.

Available from Central Park Media or The Right Stuf International.

are going to say the same thing to him because it's the general publishing decision of the year.

BRIAN: And in general the creator is being asked for a job. Like right now if

Marvel asked me to do a *WOLVERINE* mini-series, I can't do a *WOLVERINE* mini-series and put Batman in there and say my creative artistic integrity forces me to put Batman in this *WOLVERINE*

"I think it's a cool system because it's unified."

comic and Marvel can't change that. (*Laughter.*) I can't do that. So they are not stepping on creators' toes; they are basically saying to the creators, "We want you to do a job for us; we want the job to fall within these parameters." The creator can decide to do the job or not do the job.

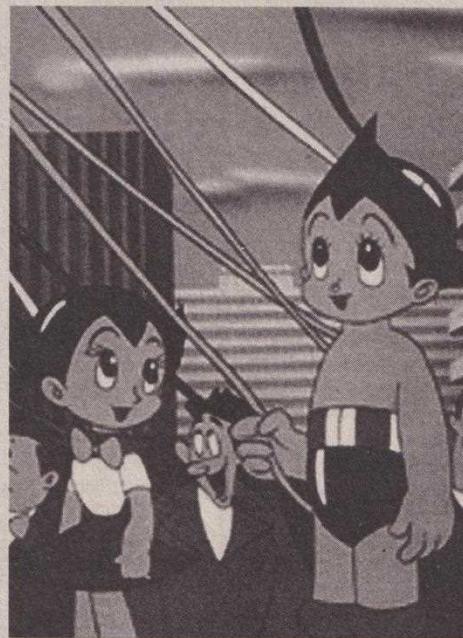
JULIA: Like when you do a cover, you look at the script as the parameters for this cover. You're not going to put pink Martians on it if the actual story is about green ants?

BRIAN: Yeah, yeah. And I think it's a really cool system, especially because it's a unified system. In America you have to trip over a comic. If you're a kid growing up in America, you have to go out of your way, you have to be in that dank corner of the Seven-Eleven, you have to walk down the book aisle of the grocery store — and what's a kid doing walking down the book aisle of the grocery store? You really have to go out of your way to get to a comic, you know. To get to a comic-book shop, that requires a special trip all on its own.

JULIA: Yeah.

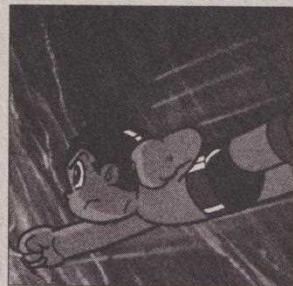
BRIAN: But with the Japanese, they have got it set up to where you can't miss comics. And I don't mean you can't miss comic books, you can't miss comics. In, say, a magazine like COSMOPOLITAN or VOGUE there might be a comic panel-to-panel page sequence on how to apply your makeup or how to give yourself a breast examination or how to do whatever. But it's done panel-to-panel comic-book style. And the neat thing is most of the comic-book producers — this is what makes the whole house of cards really fit into place — most of the big comic-book producers are actually the big magazine producers. Take Time-Warner Communications. Time-Warner owns DC Comics, but the only place that they produce comics is DC Comics. If Time-Warner were to go to some of the other magazines that they produce — and they produce a lot of magazines — and put comic-book inserts in them, what ends up happening is your primary source of getting information becomes comic books, becomes a comic-book format, so now when you see an actual comic book with a story in it you're not looking at it thinking it's for kids, because you just made your cake from a comic-book panel-to-panel sequential progression.

JULIA: Right. Or, say they produce GOOD HOUSEKEEPING, say they have comic book panels showing you: Whisk in three eggs, squeeze in two lemons. I have some Japanese cookbooks and they actually have that. It's all done with panels.



Earlier classic Osamu Tezuka animation that shaped the face of all Japanimation that followed: ASTRO BOY.

BRIAN: So then when you find a story done in a comic-book panel-to-panel sequential progression, you realize it's just like when you baked the cake. You already understand the format; you already understand word balloons and stuff like that. You have no problem reading the story and it's not something specifically for kids anymore; it's something that's for everyone. And everything is in position for the Americans to do it, but the Americans aren't doing it.



JULIA: Well, one of the things that has happened here is the American perception of comic books has changed a little bit, I think — you know, you would pick up a comic book when maybe you should have been doing your homework, and your mother would call your comic books pieces of trash, that's the way it used to be. Not now. I recently gave a lecture at one of the schools, my tag line was: If you can get your child off his

video games, get him reading a comic book, he's reading. The electronic toys have become the baddies now, and comic books, because they actually require reading, exercising reading skills, are now good things. And that's something that I think will make comic books more respectable in the eyes of the people that are trying to give an education.

DAK: But that pertains to your trip, Japan faces exactly all those things — in fact, aren't they purveying all of these electronic games? And yet, their comic-book industry isn't dwindling, doesn't seem to be in crisis. How are they gearing for preserving the comic-book market, or enlarging it, in the face of all the same temptations we face over here.

BRIAN: It works out perfect for them because . . . the cheapest place to buy Japanese electronics is here in America.

DAK: Really?

BRIAN: Yeah. (*Laughter.*)

DAK: Not there?

BRIAN: Yeah, not there, here. This is great for the comic-book producers. I have a choice, as a Japanese kid, where I can spend \$100 on a Nintendo game, then \$50 or \$60 for cartridges, actually even more than that — or I can spend \$1.75 to \$3.00 on a comic book. What do you think I'm going to go for, you know? I'm going to go for the comic book all of the time. Every other form of entertainment is much more expensive than a comic book;

"Buying a comic is cheaper than food. It's really taught

every other form of entertainment is at least a thousand times more expensive than a comic book.

DAK: Is that also true of video tapes and rentals?

BRIAN: Video tapes, rentals, everything. To go to a movie, it was like \$20 for us to go see a movie in a theater.

STINE: And there was almost nobody in the theater.

BRIAN: Yeah. I can go to that movie for \$20 or I can buy that comic for \$3.00, so naturally I'm going to buy that comic if I want to be entertained real cheaply, you know. Buying a comic is cheaper than buying an apple, it's cheaper than buying food, so it's like the comic-book market is absolutely preserved.

DAK: So, what did this do to your American perception of our comics being on top-quality paper and so on? For years it was like "our comics are crap, if only we had ultra high production values and super great paper and so on in the European mode then our comics would be respectable." Isn't this all the opposite?

BRIAN: It's really taught me something about comics. I think the American market and maybe the European market — with the Europeans, they produce really high end cars and everything that's really super expensive with maybe the best materials — we're doing that, but we're



Above: LUPIN III by the mysterious, mirthful "Monkey Punch" (Hayao Miyazaki) — also known for TOTORO and, of course, NAUSICAA.

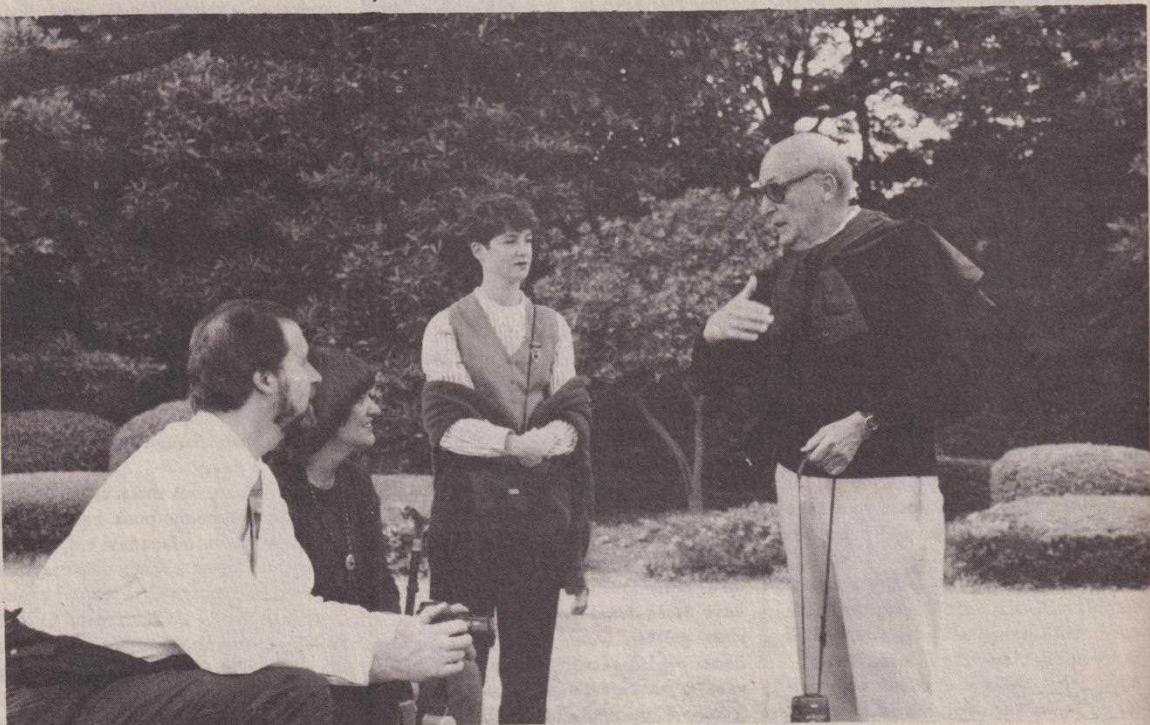
doing that with comic books. In actuality, when you think about it, what is a comic book? A comic book is just a story, you know. I think we could just go back to producing comics like, for instance, the first ACTION COMICS, which is worth so much money now. That comic book was produced with some of the *cheapest* paper in the world! It's worth a lot because somebody decided to hold onto it; the comic-book collectors' market is accidental. It just so happened that someone kept that cheap comic book, you know. Now, the first thing about collecting anything is if someone says it's a collectible chances are it's not. (Laughter.)

DAK: Yeah.

BRIAN: I think producing comics on really high-quality acid-free paper with

gold foil stamping and whatever, it's not necessary, you know. If you're just interested in getting a story across you could print it on toilet paper, the story's there and you could read it once. (Laughter.) I think that that's really a smart way to produce comics. If the main thing is the story that's being produced, that's it and it should be able to be done incredibly cheap. The first American comic-book producer that says he's going to produce the best work on the cheapest paper that he can lay his hands on, bring the price down to \$1.00 or whatever so then anybody can buy this, it might take awhile before he starts making money, but when he does he's going to be rolling in it.

Keep the quality in the work but make it something that anyone can buy, that's what the Japanese comics are. There isn't a collectors market over there. The cool thing about the collectors market is after these books have been published, after these phone books have been published, it's just trash, just tons and tons of paper. But you can write in to all of the comic-book companies and if they get a lot of letters for a particular story then they will reprint that story, collect them all from a year in one book that's really nice and thick and on nicer paper with a nice cover, maybe even some gold foil stamping or whatever. But that's only if there's a great particular demand for that particular



Richard & Wendy Pini, Stine Walsh, and the legendary Will Eisner talk comics in Tokyo.

me something. That's a smart way to produce comics!"

story. Otherwise, you get it and you read it and you toss it away.

DAK: What about the animation industry over there, are they tied in with the comic-book industry at all?

BRIAN: Yeah, they are. Not directly tied in with the comic-book industry, but some of the characters that are being produced as comic books, if they gain massive popularity they get produced as animation.

DAK: Were any of the animation people at these meetings?

BRIAN: Well, Tezuka Productions does a lot of animation, that's the company that set the whole thing up. We didn't really get a chance to deal with much of the animation end of things, but there is a lot of crossover. A lot of the comic-book creators are called upon to create stuff for animation.

JULIA: I know they produce some of the American comic books, they import them directly in English and also they produce them over there translated. But do they license any of the American stuff for Japanese animation?

BRIAN: Yeah, SPIDER-MAN.

JULIA: They have their own animated SPIDER-MAN?

BRIAN: Not animated, but SPIDER-MAN is produced as a Japanese comic drawn by Japanese artists. That's kind of weird to see, SPIDER-MAN in the Japanese comic-book style, real simple straightforward stuff.

DAK: After you guys had all these meetings did they make any offers to pick stuff up? Like to license ELFQUEST or something?

BRIAN: Not that I know of.

DAK: When you left they didn't say things like, "Brian, even though we don't do painted covers, do us a painted cover." (Laughter.)

STINE: They were interested in having Will Eisner do something.

BRIAN: Yeah, they were. But again, they're really interested in producing new stuff specifically for the Japanese market. A person like me, I couldn't work in that market because the stuff that I do is: *Haw, leave your culture behind and go on a trip with me!* So that's really different stuff for them.

JULIA: I guess they appeal to a larger mass audience. Most 45-year-old housewives would not be interested in SPIDER-MAN. (Laughter.) Most 55-year-old businessmen would not be interested in SANDMAN.

BRIAN: Yeah.

JULIA: The market caters to the people who are already reading comics instead



BUBBLEGUM CRISIS, designed by Kenichi Sonoda of GAIL FORCE and GUNSMITH CATS. RIDING BEAN is also one of Brian's favorites.

of trying to break that barrier down a little bit.

BRIAN: But the stuff that Will Eisner does, I believe Kodansha basically wanted Will Eisner to produce some stories for them, Japanese-style Will Eisner stories.

JULIA: A lot of the stuff that he does is very similar to that, with general population themes — THE TENEMENT and things like that.

BRIAN: Yeah.

DAK: Well, after you had your first, like, Gunfight at the OK Corral — (Laughter.) Then what happened? How long were you there?

BRIAN: The whole thing took four or five days — their plan for us took about four or five days. The first few days were basically meeting with artists, meeting with publishers, then going over to a comic-book company — it was kind of neat because it was like step-by-step taking us through the entire production of a Japanese comic.

STINE: Publishing.

BRIAN: Yeah. So, it was like the first few days were spent doing that, then the last days that we were there — since they're so proud of their culture — we went to a couple of, basically, tourist spots, just

“The Japanese market — I couldn’t work in it.”

gardens and places.

STINE: They fit that in between meetings and things, they took us to the more traditional things like the gardens.

BRIAN: We got to ride on the Shinkansen.

STINE: Yeah, they took us on the bullet train. They squeezed so many things in that you’d have to sit down and look at notes to remember it all.

BRIAN: And one of our last days there we went to the Tezuka Museum.

STINE: Tells his life story.

BRIAN: Yeah, and shows his characters, and it has a couple of really neat things for kids to play around with. And from there we went back and had a final dinner. The Eisners and the Pinis took off, and Stine and I — because we’d never been to Japan before — decided to spend an extra week there just kind of hanging out seeing things.

JULIA: What did you do there for your extra week?

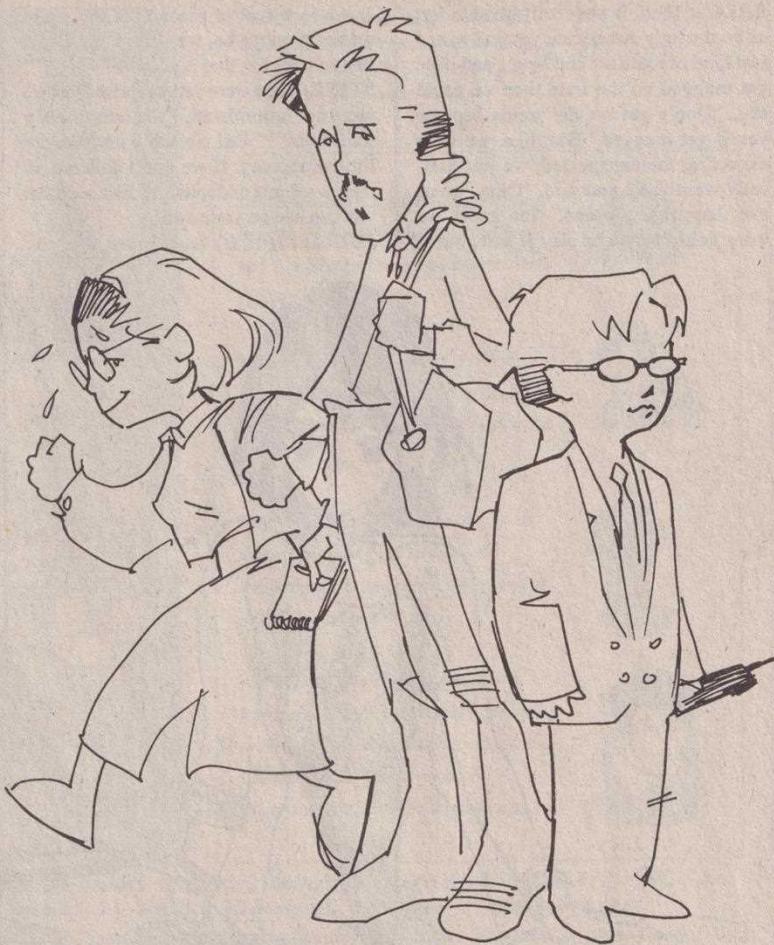
STINE: Well, Brian and I, we were ready for a little adventure. They were kind of upset about us shopping without a translator, but we were like, “Let’s hit the streets, let’s walk around, let’s see how many different areas of Tokyo we can get to.” So that’s what we would spend our days doing. We went to the Metropolitan Museum. Or we just would find a park or something that would be interesting, find out how to get there and then get there on our own, which was kind of like our objective. You know, find a way to eat and everything and then come back to our hotel — which they were very shocked about.

But we would just pick a certain thing, like Brian wanted to go to one area of Tokyo that’s nothing but electronics stores, so we did that. We spent one day going to nothing but book stores, buying books for friends and just seeing what their book stores were like. We spent one day just going to art supply stores, checking out everything that they had, seeing what we could get there that we couldn’t get in the States. Just certain things that we were specifically interested in.

DAK: What about, from your perspective as somebody who is interested in painting — not just in comics — were you able to assimilate anything?

STINE: Yeah, actually, and I’ve already done several paintings from things that we photographed there, the gardens and things like that, you know. You’d have no idea of what it *really* looks like unless you went there.

DAK: What about their cultural take on some of this stuff?



A Stelfreeze quick sketch of animated associates, translator Tomoko Kanai, author/coordinateor Fred Schodt and Tezuka director Yoshihiro Shimizu.

“If Japan is a scarier place than the world makes it out to be, we’ll find out.”

STINE: That’s strange, it’s hard to get a really good feel for it because there’s a certain distance there. You know it’s there; they’re very friendly, but it’s just like to a certain level. It’s very hard to pick up. There are things that are often misunderstood by very many Americans when they go over there, because they’re constantly giving you gifts and showering you with things, but that’s just their culture, it’s not anything to do with —

JULIA: It is fairly superficial?

BRIAN: Yeah.

STINE: Well, I don’t know if you could — I mean, it could look that way from our view, but for them that’s the way you do things; it’s not about whether they mean it sincerely or not, it’s polite. It’s necessary for them, you know.

BRIAN: That’s one of the reasons why we spent a couple of extra days, is because we knew that we were being wined and dined and shown the *best* of Japan.

STINE: Yeah, so it was nice to just go to the park and see bums. (Laughter.) Hey, they’ve got ‘em, too.

"I read Kenichi Sonoda's GUNSMITH CATS,"

BRIAN: Yeah. It was really good to sort of *be* the ugly American, you know, and just kind of roam around Japan, and if we got mugged on the train then we could say, "Don't get on the trains because you'll get mugged." But, like, we were expecting the unexpected; we just basically went there and said, "Okay, whatever happens, happens." You know, we were going to *try* to play it safe, but if

Japan is a scarier place than the world makes it out to be, we'll find out. But it just so happens that it *wasn't*.

STINE: They were very surprised that we were not intimidated, "You don't need a translator?" "Well, no, we'll just take our little dictionary. If we don't understand, then we don't understand." Just see what you can see on your own.

JULIA: Right, it's much more fun.

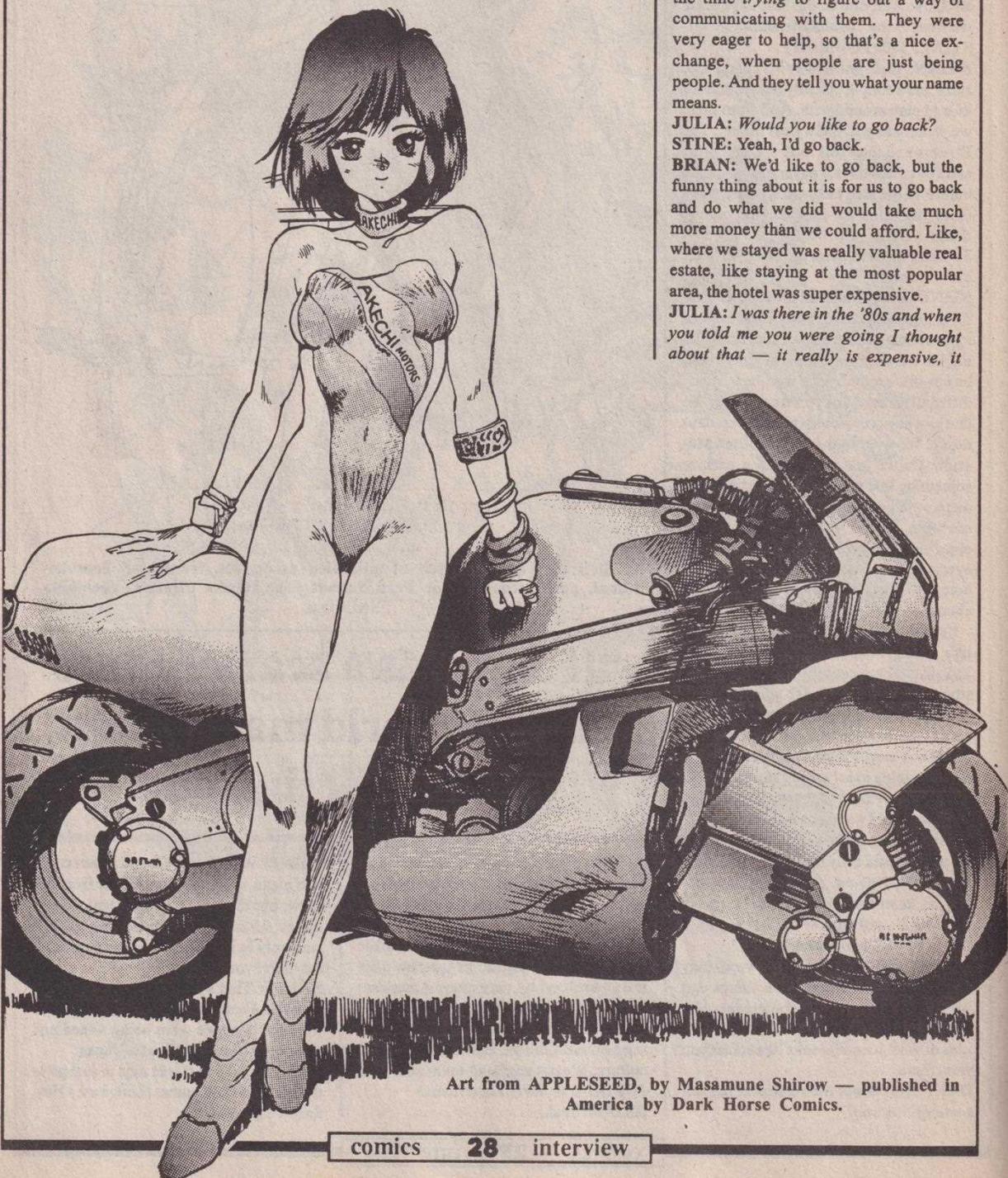
STINE: We went to a store that was nothing but very traditional art supplies, that was *really* fascinating. I had my hanko made there, and these people spoke no English whatsoever. That's a stamp of my name in Japanese like they use for signatures. They figured out everything! It took a little while but it was *fun!* It was a great interchange because they were so pleased that I would want to do this, spend the time *trying* to figure out a way of communicating with them. They were very eager to help, so that's a nice exchange, when people are just being people. And they tell you what your name means.

JULIA: Would you like to go back?

STINE: Yeah, I'd go back.

BRIAN: We'd like to go back, but the funny thing about it is for us to go back and do what we did would take much more money than we could afford. Like, where we stayed was really valuable real estate, like staying at the most popular area, the hotel was super expensive.

JULIA: I was there in the '80s and when you told me you were going I thought about that — it really is expensive, it



and Masamune Shirow's APPLESEED"

SHOTARO ISHINOMORI

JAPAN INC.

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY PETER DULS



INTRODUCTION TO JAPANESE ECONOMICS

American translation of Japanese business comics mentioned earlier in interview. From JAPAN INC., An Introduction to Japanese Economics, by Shotaro Ishinomori, translated by Betsy Scheiner.

really is.

STINE: But they wouldn't let us spend any money, it was really frustrating. If we wanted to treat them to dinner, no, that was *not* going to happen.

BRIAN: They would get pretty upset about that.

STINE: We did spend a day with Takyuki Matsutani and his daughter, which is kind of unusual. Brian and I were invited to go to a barbecue, a company barbecue, and we met his daughter.

JULIA: *That's quite an honor.*

STINE: Yes, and that was fun. She didn't speak any English but we had a great time just doing simple things like going out in the field picking flowers, just being people.

BRIAN: It just so happened that we were there, the whole meeting was right before this national holiday, like a day off for everyone. We just went out to this park, and it wasn't formal at all. Matsutani, the president of Tezuka Productions, who is *normally* a suit-and-tie guy, he shows up and he's got on a jacket and a comfortable pair of pants. And we were just kind of hanging out with him, you know!

STINE: Yeah. He was enjoying the day with his child, so that was a totally different aspect of his personality.

BRIAN: But it was really neat. And even doing stuff like that helps you. I could not get a grasp of, like, why are these comics about fishing so important to the Japanese. But then when we went to the park, you know, there's, like, this little creek that *surely* had no fish in it, but people were out there with their fishing poles.

STINE: We went to the largest lake in Japan and there were people fishing all over the place.

BRIAN: And the neat thing about it is catching fish has *nothing* to do with what they're doing, it was just really fun for them to go out and throw a line in the water — and we don't even know if there were hooks on the lines! (*Laughter.*) It was just the *act* of fishing, you know; just sitting there talking with your friends, stuff like that, *that* was massively important.

STINE: And there were all kinds of signs with little pictograms about where to go, everywhere you went there were little visuals about what was the best way to do

IN WHICH we see how international trade friction grates on the affairs of the Toyosan Automobile Corporation and its affiliate, the Mitsutomo Company:

U.S. automobile interests force Japanese companies to restrict the export of cars, and Toyosan's president decides to move production to the U.S.;



Mitsutomo's wily Tsugawa is called upon to eradicate union opposition to the move and facilitate the takeover of a plant in the U.S.;



Toyosan's union leader Sato discovers that his personal predilections and political ambitions prevent the pursuit of union interests;



and Mitsutomo's kind-hearted Kudo learns much about earlier trade-friction crises, but is unable to save the Japanese subcontractors who have been manufacturing parts for Toyosan cars.



things. Where you couldn't go, they weren't signs like we would have: DO NOT ENTER — they were little pictograms!

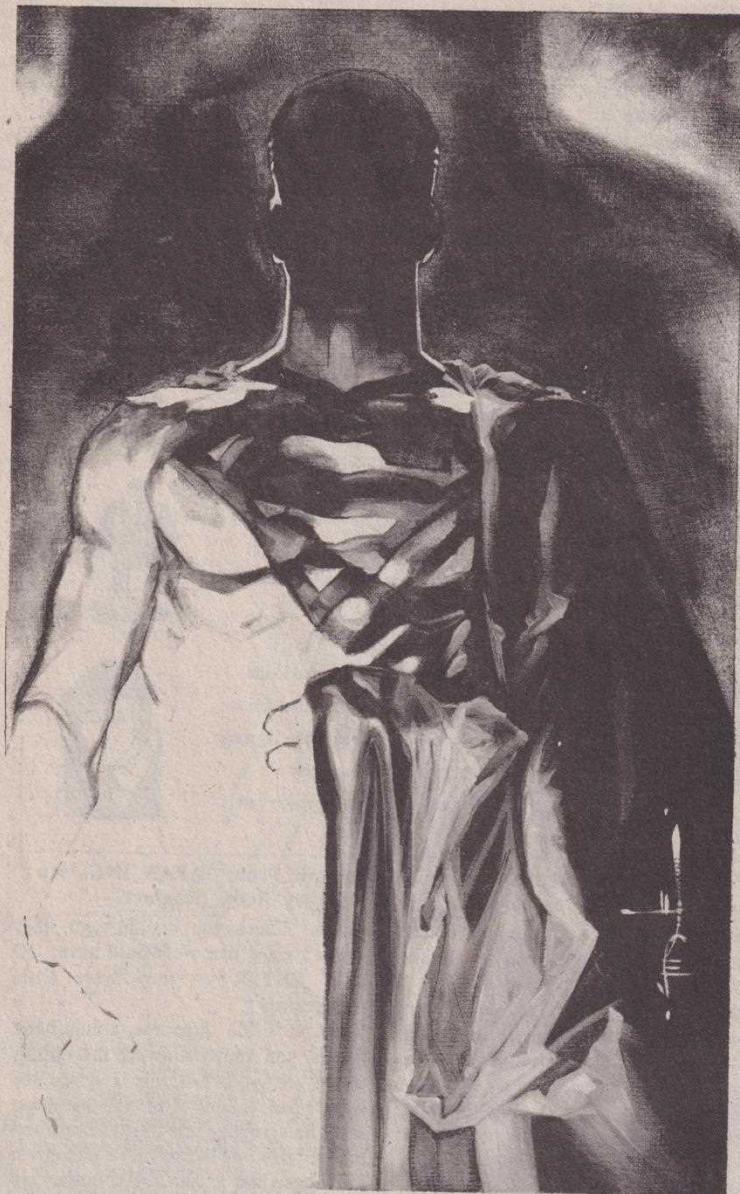
BRIAN: Little Japanese comic-book panels, you know, showing that this is where you go to fish, this is where you want to park your car, stuff like that. Even in the hotel room; there was this Japanese tub set-up *but* we had this little pictogram showing us how to take a bath, so we were able to figure that out. It was a pretty cool trip.

DAK: *Do you read any Japanese comics on a regular basis?*

BRIAN: Yeah, I read Kenichi Sonoda's GUNSMITH CATS, and I also read Masamune Shirow's APPLESEED. That's really good stuff. It's kind of funny, but I think that's sort of an occasion where basically some Japanese guys are doing some American comics, but they're doing it the *right* way, really well illustrated but at the same time . . . really, just well put-together books.

DAK: *Did you discover anything while you were there? I guess you wouldn't because it's all in Japanese.*

“Manga is something borrowed from us,



Stunning oil painting by Stine Walsh for the cover of COMICS INTERVIEW SUPER SPECIAL: SUPERMAN.
DAK owns and admires the original.

“We could learn from their unity. What’s going on with American comics is absolute disregard for unity.”

BRIAN: Yeah. I didn’t, like, *find* any brand new gems, you know. There was a lot of stuff that I had seen already, that I already knew a little bit about. I guess the biggest thing, being over there, was finding a bunch of really neat books. We went to a book store and it was really *amazing!* I guess because they’re on an island they can’t build things out, they build them up, and there was this book store that had five or six floors to it, and each floor was the size of an American book store.

We kind of walked into this book store looking for the art books, they said they were upstairs. We went to the next floor and looked around. There were great books there but we were looking for the art books, they said they were upstairs. When we finally got to the section on the art books, it was *huge* — Japanese art books, French art books, American art books, a little bit of everything. I even picked up a couple of Japanese books, like *FIGURE DRAWING FOR ALL IT’S WORTH* by Andrew Loomis. (*Laughter.*) It was something that was just so odd, all of these books that were *originally* in different languages that had been translated into Japanese; it was *great!* It was the biggest supply of art books that Stine and I had ever come across, we spent probably about \$1,000 on books.

STINE: Books on Japanese Impressionists, things that you never knew about.

BRIAN: I didn’t know there was such a thing as Japanese Impressionist artists during the time of the Impressionists, you know.

STINE: Right. And good how-to art books, not quite enough to really understand but they were really well done. They’re hard to find here, you don’t find books that tell you about techniques.

BRIAN: Yeah, and that was a whole lot of fun. And it was kind of nice because Tezuka Productions and a lot of the other comic-book companies, they *gave* us a lot of their comic books, so we’ve got a *bunch*. We went there with two weeks worth of luggage and came back with a truck full of stuff. And of course we got stopped at the airport because some of their art supplies aren’t allowed on planes.

STINE: We had something that was flammable or combustible that we couldn’t get here.

JULIA: *And they took it away?*

STINE: Yeah. We didn’t realize; it took us a while to figure it out. She didn’t speak enough English —

BRIAN: Of course I was saying, “Oh, you’re going to put it somewhere else,

but it's something totally different."

how do I get it when I get to America?" She's like, "No no, you can't take this."

STINE: Finally we realized —

BRIAN: "Oh, you're confiscating it. I'm losing this, that's what's happening." (Laughter.)

DAK: Getting back to the Japanese comic-book industry, they really only have disposable comic books? You talked about how they don't collect them.

BRIAN: Yeah, as far as Japanese comics are concerned, there isn't a collectors' market.

STINE: They can't collect. There's no room to store a collection.

DAK: They just throw them away?

BRIAN: They recycle them.

STINE: There are bins at the subway stations that are just for comic books, and people come along sometimes and scrounge through those.

BRIAN: Which is really kind of nice. It would seem like, you know, a comic-book publisher is really cutting off his arm doing something like this, but they have these huge bins and after you finish reading your comic book you put it in this bin. The next person who comes along might then take that comic book and read it. But there isn't really a collectors market over there.

STINE: Only very special things.

BRIAN: Yeah. There are books that are specifically produced because if you are a big fan of this series you can get it all collected in this one book. But chances are your house is really small, you only have so much room so you can't afford to have a collection of comics. There are a bunch of guys that work with us at Gaijin Studio that have tons and tons of comics. They have no place to put them — imagine buying a telephone book every week. Pretty soon you are going to have a bunch of paper that you can't do anything with. Something that's really cool is even with this thing, even with no collectors market, even with books being tossed away and recycled, SHONEN JUMP still sells, like, four million copies a week.

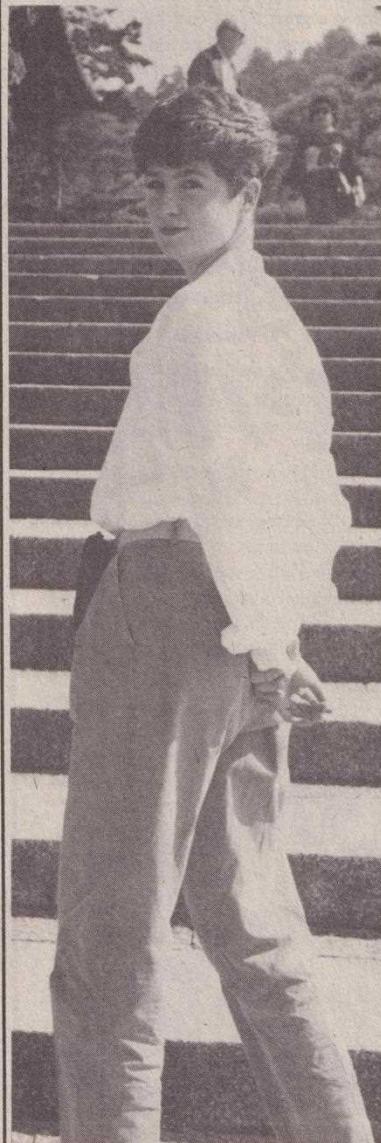
STINE: What was the one book they told us sells six million?

BRIAN: SHONEN JUMP, it sells four to six million, and they produce it every week. But their comic books are designed to be zoomed through, then you buy the next one — or you might not have to buy it because you might find it in the bin when you're walking through the subway. It's a pretty neat market; it's different from ours.

And manga is something that's a little bit difficult for an American to get used

to. We're used to the level of detail that goes into an American comic. We have to have a lot of stuff; we have to have big Cadillacs, you know. An American comic has a lot of fluff and a lot of stuff to it. A Japanese comic is really stripped down; it's really efficient, just what you need and no more. In some ways I really like that. I'm an American comic-book producer and I'm not going to cut back on the amount of detail I'm putting in stuff, I'm not going to simplify things that much, because I think it's art, you know. As an artist I'm still going to try to show off as much as I can. But Japanese manga is something, you know, that's borrowed

Gaijin Studio's Stine Walsh gets to be a real gaijin in Japan.



from us, but it's something that's totally different. They've taken something American and they've done something different with it, and it's something that I really appreciate.

And maybe we could learn a little bit from their unity, from what they've done, especially considering right now is a very very hard time for American comics. What's going on even more so with American comics is a complete absolute disregard for unity. People are trying very hard to cut each other's throats. That alone is destroying a large percentage of the American comic book market. But take a look at Japan — there is a fantastic unity, and within that unity they are making trillions of dollars.

JULIA: Well, Marvel is kind of going for its own unity thing. It's just decided that various other companies should just belong to it. (Laughter.) Maybe Marvel will just eventually become the American comic-book market — when they've bought everything else, then they won't have anyone left to fight so there will be a unity.

BRIAN: Also, what's funny about the American comic book market, is that DC Comics is actually part of this massive corporation of Time-Warner Communications. There's a lot of stuff happening in the comic-book industry and Marvel is really buzzing around and doing stuff, but everyone kind of thinks: Be careful, we don't want to wake up DC someday. (Laughter.) That sleeping giant might wake up and crush Marvel like a bug. But there's a lot of stuff happening, and the pie is so small that people are getting pissed off with only having a little tiny slice of it. The best thing to do is to not try to grab a bigger slice of the pie —

JULIA: Make the pie bigger!

BRIAN: Yeah, or make more pies. The Japanese have done that. If I were Marvel or DC, I probably wouldn't decide to make the comic book industry larger, take it on the chin and lose a lot of money making the comic book industry larger. Everyone else would wait for you to make it bigger and then jump in on it, sort of prey on it, while you spent the money, you know. It takes an incredible amount of trust.

JULIA: Japan, as we know it today, grew out of the devastation they had after the Second World War. They suffered an annihilation that's pretty hard to even imagine. At that point they had to pool their resources to have anything at all; it changed the culture. They had to rebuild their whole entire nation, the only way that they could do it was in

“We met Monkey Punch. The anima-

unity. The United States has not had that, it has grown always out of individual strength. That's a major cultural difference.

BRIAN: With what you were saying about the Japanese culture, everything unified the culture, every massive devastation that has taken place has gotten them to get together a little bit more. So now they always get together and do things. They do things as a team always. That's the greatest thing, and now they are in this position where not only is it . . . you will have a lot of times two Japanese companies teaming up to do something over here in the United States, you will have three or four massive corporations deciding to take down this massive corporation over in the United States or over in France or wherever. Together we can do this.

As Americans, you know, we're kind of independent and damn it, if I can't do it, it simply won't be done. And Americans to a large extent are sort of satisfied: Okay, it can't be done, I'll just be happy with what

I've got. And if my little tiny piece of the pie gets smaller I'll fight for awhile, then pretty soon I'll give up and be happy with an even smaller piece of the pie. If a couple of companies were to do the unspeakable and get together, massive things can happen, but as Americans that's not what we do.

JULIA: Except Image —

BRIAN: Yeah.

JULIA: These creators got together, pooled their creative resources, and out of that has come —

DAK: But it's that strange American way of getting together — yet still being individuals. (Laughter.)

BRIAN: When that started, at the time I knew Jim Lee, I didn't really know any of the other guys, but I was going, "Wow, this is a great thing, they're gonna show the big boys, they're gonna stick it to the big boys!" And for about six months they did, they stuck it to the big boys, they really flipped the comic-book industry upside down and really slammed it to

everyone. After that six month period all of the Image guys, you know — with exceptions, I'm not going to say who — they just basically decided to go ahead and do it like the big boys do. They turned to doing business the same way that the big boys do business, all of the atrocities that forced them to leave Marvel they are now doing to their little guys. That's the American Dream at work, you know. It's really kind of neat the way that worked out.

DAK: Back to manga what about some of the creative people you met, what were they like? Were you able to socialize with them very much?

STINE: We met a bunch of artists.

BRIAN: There's one guy that we met, we only got a chance to talk to him for a little while, and he deals primarily with animation. The animation that he does is LUPIN III.

STINE: Which we had seen before.

DAK: And his name is?

BRIAN: I don't know what his real name is; everyone called him Monkey Punch.

STINE: He's really funny.

BRIAN: Even in Japan they call him Monkey Punch, which is kind of weird to hear, Japanese guys nailing down a sentence in Japanese and all of a sudden you hear "Monkey Punch." But he was like . . . I guess in a lot of ways like American creators. When you look at LUPIN III it's fantastic, the movement, the comedy; everything about it is just really amazing. But then when you actually talk to Monkey Punch, the guy who created the whole thing, you see it! He is Lupin! He's got that funny sense of humor, he's got that sort of wacky thing. He didn't know a whole lot of English, but the English that he did know just really floored me. We talked through the translator for awhile, then right when he was leaving he turned and sort of screamed across the room to me, "Catch You Later, Man!" (Laughter.) It was the funniest thing.

JULIA: That's so Lupin.

BRIAN: Yeah. That was like his little bit of English that he knew, that he was going to try out. And it was great and it was hilarious, and I showed him how to do the sort of "hang loose" thumb and pinky California sign, so that was sort of a little bit more to his English that I added on. But he was a great guy. And there were a lot of the other Japanese artists that were just fun people to hang out with. I mean, they were American comic-book artists; they were Japanese, they spoke Japanese, they lived in Japan, but in a sense you really see what Tezuka was talking about —



CANDY CANDY, girls' book by Keiko Nagita and Yumiko Igarashi

tion that he does is LUPIN III?"



Wendy Pini, empress of ELFQUEST, and Yumiko Igarashi, creator of CANDY CANDY, with Japanese schoolgirls.

JULIA: Being a comic-book artist is a universal personality type.

BRIAN: Yeah! And it was kind of funny because, you know, I wear this Jamaican hat just about everywhere I go, and when I got there everyone kept commenting about I'm just like Tezuka because Tezuka wore one of those French berets everywhere that he went. They kind of thought, "Ah, you're just like Tezuka because Tezuka wore a hat. You must be bald." (Laughter.) I took off the hat and they were stunned that there was hair under it.

But all of these Japanese artists had their little weird quirks, sort of little odd things about them. There were two guys that were late for the meeting; they came into the meeting saying that they were late for the meeting because they were playing golf. To be a member of a country club over in Japan is really expensive, like unless you're a millionaire you're not going to do it, so to say you were playing golf is like saying "I'm a millionaire" but not being quite as arrogant as that. So they came into the meeting late, probably on purpose, saying, "Oh, we were busy playing golf." (Laughter.) And it's just like an American comic-book artist to pull a stunt like that, you know. They were, they just had that, it was easy to pick them out as comic-book artists.

STINE: The same with Yumiko Igarashi, who does CANDY CANDY, a big seller in *shojo manga*, Japanese girls' comics. She was just outrageous.

BRIAN: Yeah. She went to a park with us and she's, like, super famous as a comic-book artist, but at the same time it's like an American comic-book artist — like Jim Lee is mega famous and if he goes to a convention he just gets swamped, and like when I go to a convention I get swamped, but if we go to the McDonald's right next to the convention center no one knows or cares about us. So we were in this park, just kind of hanging out, and she's there and she's laughing and having a good time, and our translator said to a

group of Japanese schoolgirls — they were really amazed that Americans were at the park — he said to them, "This woman is the creator of CANDY CANDY." All of these girls started going nuts, like, "Oh, man, not only are we seeing Americans, we're seeing Yumiko Igarashi, the creator of CANDY CANDY!"

STINE: And then he told them that Wendy Pini was like Yumiko Igarashi in the United States and they totally freaked out again.

BRIAN: Yeah.

STINE: Then he said Will Eisner was like Tezuka and they were overwhelmed.

BRIAN: Yeah, and so they all wanted to have their picture taken with Will Eisner.

"LUPIN III is fantastic, the movement, the comedy, everything. The guy who created it — he is Lupin!"

“Japanese artists were just *fun* to hang out with.”

(*Laughter.*) It was a whole lot of fun, hanging out and being comic-book artists in Japan — being *artists* in Japan just in general. It's kind of really funny because, like, at the same time I was in Japan and I was *learning* all of this stuff about Japanese comics and Japanese comic art and Japanese comic artists, I was learning about American comics. Every time that I've ever seen Will Eisner at a convention he's had a ton of people around him getting his autograph and talking to him, and this was the first time that I was able to seriously sit back and talk to Will Eisner about comics. Stine and I and Will Eisner and his wife just talking about the old days of American comics, here I was in Japan getting to meet one of the greatest American comic-book artists, *learning*

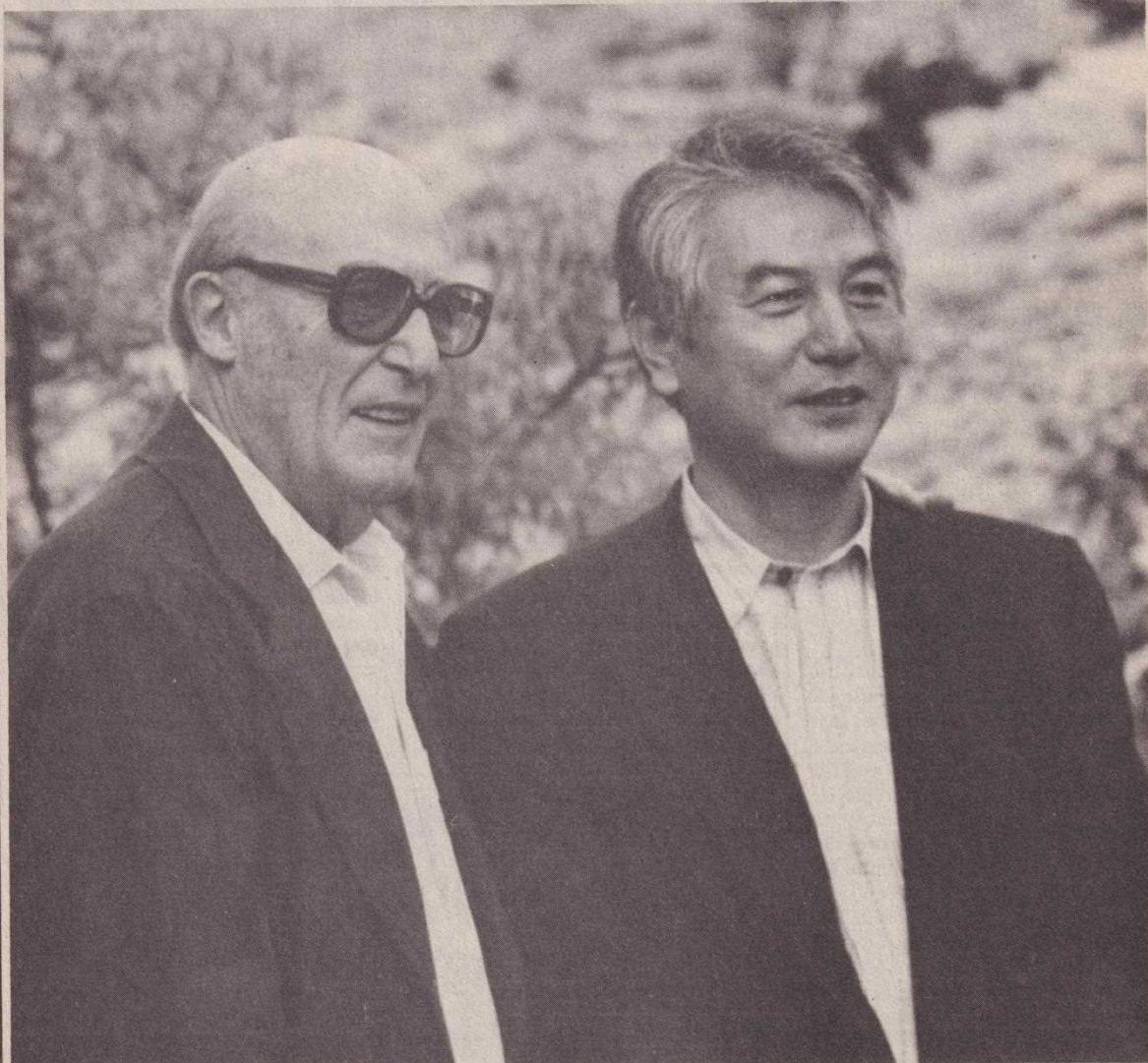
about American comics, learning about the history of American comics. It was a total education but it was kind of funny that I had to go to Japan in order to get this.

DAK: *What else did you have to go to Japan to get?*

BRIAN: Actually, this is kind of funny. I'd heard about *fugu*, the Japanese poisonous blowfish and you have to have a chef with skilled hands to prepare the *fugu* because if it's prepared the wrong way it could kill you. I just had this thought that I should say to Matsutani, the president of Tezuka Productions, that we're going to have to go out one night and have some *fugu*. The translator just looked at me, she gave me this “Are you sure you want me to say this to him?” look. I was kind of like,

“Well, yeah, it seems like a thing to say.” (*Laughter.*) So she said that to him, and he just looked at me.

Immediately he said he loved *fugu*, started talking about how great *fugu* is, and asked me if I'd ever had it. And I had to say no, so he first said we were just not going to be there long enough to have *fugu*, but then he found out that we were going to be staying an extra week, and actually *fugu* was going to come in season within the time of that extra week. He was like, “Oh, we're definitely going to have to have *fugu*!” I was like: Oh, man, I've shoved my foot down my throat now. (*Laughter.*) So one of the last days we were there he took us to this *fugu* restaurant. They have a chef with these skilled hands to be able to prepare and serve *fugu*.



American comics *auteur* and living legend Will Eisner with Takayuki Matsutani, president of Tezuka Productions.

"ANPANMAN probably meant as much to us as it

It was an experience!

STINE: It was good.

BRIAN: Just really something amazing.

JULIA: So, you liked the fugu?

BRIAN: Yeah, yeah! The fugu was fantastic.

DAK: Isn't there, though, a limit on how much of it you can eat?

BRIAN: Yeah, but the fugu is the fish; the poisonous part is the liver. The reason why fugu has a limited season is because that's the only time where the liver isn't poisonous enough to kill you, but it's still poisonous enough to kill you if you eat too much of it. So, like, we're getting this education on fugu, the guy is preparing it, so he whips out the liver and says, "This is the poisonous part of the fugu." Then he cuts it up and puts it in a bowl, puts it on the table, and I'm like, "Okay... What?" He's like, "Well, you can eat it." He looks at everyone and tells everyone that they can have this much, and he looks over at Stine, who is the smallest person at the table, and he says, "You can have two pieces. And that's it; you can't have any more." So, it's really weird sitting there thinking, "Man, I hope this guy knows what he's talking about." (Laughter.) If

he doesn't, you know, we're not going to make it home. But it was great. And of course as soon as you eat it you realize you're eating poison. You can feel it burning your lips.

STINE: Not burning, sort of a tickle.

BRIAN: A tingling almost like drinking something carbonated. And everyone was just really laughing and having a great time, and they prepared fugu all of the different ways you can prepare it; we're eating it fried, eating it steamed, eating it sushi style —

STINE: Grilled, soup —

BRIAN: Yeah. So, we ate the fugu liver and everyone went from hopping around and being excited to being like totally zen and calm. (Laughter.) I don't know if it was fear or if our bodies needed us to stay calm to fight off the toxins.

STINE: They told us about an opera singer who died because he loved fugu too much, he ate too much and it killed him.

DAK: Did you like it?

STINE: Yeah, it's very good. But you have several courses, they bring you soup first, with fugu in it. They bring you all these different things with fugu in it.

JULIA: Does it taste different depending

on how it's prepared?

STINE: Yeah, very different. They bring out the pieces that they're going to grill — well, first they kill it in front of you and cut it up in front of you; you watch them do that. When they grill the pieces that are on the bone they bring it out and sprinkle pepper on it so that you can see it, and the flesh moves from the spice!

BRIAN: It is pretty politically incorrect, but man it tasted good. (Laughter.)

DAK: Eating raw —

STINE: Parts of it were raw. It was really cool.

JULIA: When it starts moving about, it's raw.

BRIAN: Not only raw, it was live.

STINE: They did that before they went and grilled it, so it was that fresh is what they were showing you. They had some prepared sushi style, so they waited until we had arrived to kill them.

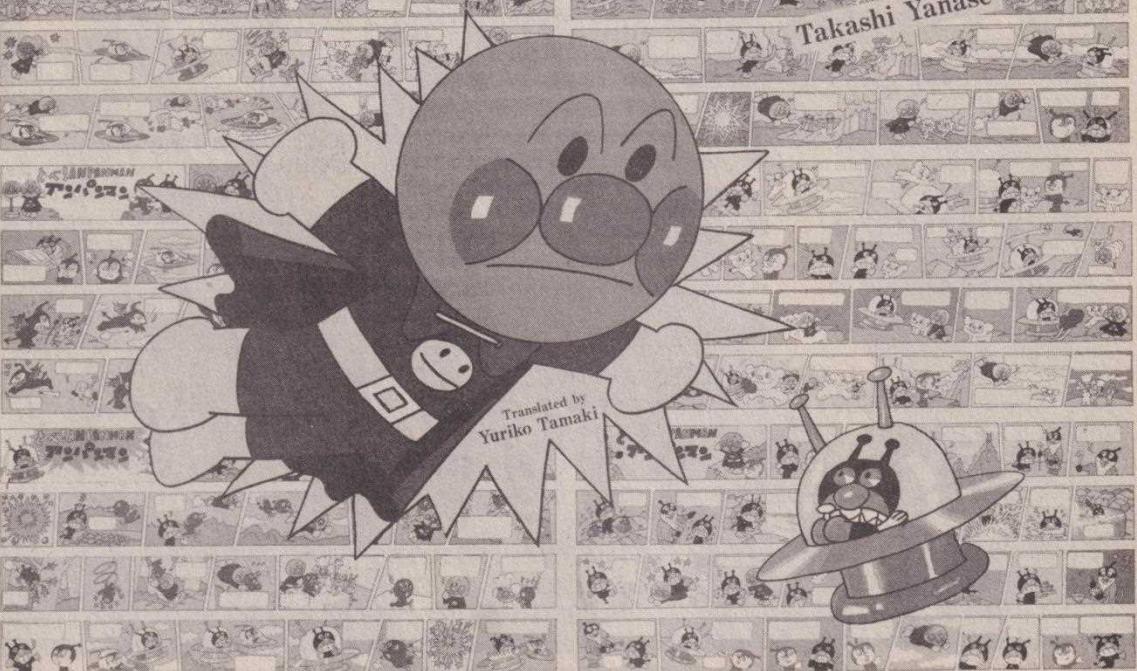
BRIAN: Yeah. When you prepare it sushi style it has to air out awhile, it has to sit like 30 minutes or something before you can eat it.

JULIA: Makes you wonder, actually, how many people died finding all this out.

ANPANMAN 2

Takashi Yanase

Translated by
Yuriko Tamaki



Cover of ANPANMAN, the fairy-tale hero of the bread world. Opposite: creator Takashi Yanase's inscription.

does to most COMICS INTERVIEW readers."

BRIAN: Oh, yeah, there were a bunch of people that blazed that trail before us.

STINE: Brian, what's the name of the artist from ANPANMAN?

BRIAN: Hm?

STINE: He was really sweet.

BRIAN: Oh, yeah, he was pretty cool, Takashi Yanase.

STINE: He gave me his tie —

DAK: What's ANPANMAN?

STINE: Anpan is a pastry, like a bean pastry — he has several characters that were designed around food, his books are for little little little kids. But he's well marketed, he's got everything. He gave us aprons. (*Laughter.*) He had on a tie and I said it was really cute, so he immediately took it off and said I had to have it. And he gave us tons of books. They all joked when he came in about how wealthy he is.

JULIA: Something like the Pillsbury Doughboy?

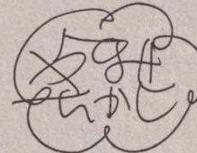
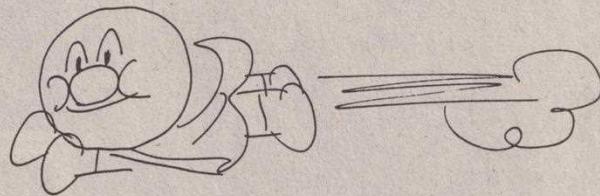
STINE: Yeah.

BRIAN: It's really neat because it's a super popular character. I mean, we met the guy and ANPANMAN probably meant as much to us as it does to most COMICS INTERVIEW readers, like: Yeah, ANPANMAN, well whatever. But Stine and the guy really hit it off, you know, and they kind of went off, talking with the translators. Then Stine comes back and says, "He gave me his tie!" I was like, "Oh, that's pretty cool." Then the next day we were walking around and we would see busses with this big Anpanman on the side, it was really a big deal. It was kind of like meeting Walt Disney but you never heard of him or Mickey Mouse, so he gives you his tie with his creation on it, then the next day you find out about the Magic Kingdom and go, "Oh, that's who I met." (*Laughter.*) You don't realize how famous the guy is until the next day.

But he was a great guy — and he was a really funny guy, you know. That's something that was deceptive about meeting all of these comic-book artists, because they're just like American comic-book artists, but most of the American comic-book artists that I know are not rich; they may just be able to pay the rent from month to month. But just about everyone that was at this meeting were multi-millionaires, you know; they were like super super mega famous guys and girls who were making more money than I could possibly ever count. But they were all really cool, you know. They weren't super arrogant or anything like that, they were just really relaxed, really laid back people, and just really fun.

STINE: There was a woman artist who

To Mr. Brian Stelbreeze



T. Yanase

1994. 10. 24

had been published since she was twelve or something. She's really famous, a really famous lady.

BRIAN: Yeah, they said she'd been doing comics for like 25 years, and I thought, "Man, she must be a lot older than how she looks." Of course, we all think she must be in her 40s or 50s, then she says, "That doesn't mean that I'm really old, that means that I started when I was really young." (*Laughter.*)

STINE: We saw videos with her picture on it. It was strange, we met all these people and then when we would go out we'd see all these marketing things.

BRIAN: That's when we realized just how famous these people were, you know. And it was really neat, like just three days ago I was talking with this woman on an equal basis and now I'm in an art supply store, looking at the comics section of this art supply store, and she's got zip-a-tone patterned after what she does. She's got comic-book paper that you can buy. She's mega mega famous, you know, just as a

comic-book artist, and I'm thinking, "Oh, man, I thought she was just a regular human." (*Laughter.*) But she was; they're all just regular people. You wouldn't know to meet them that they're all as famous as they actually are, from the way that they carry themselves, from the way that they dealt with everyone. And what's really fun is not only were they not major walking egos, we were, like, the best dressed people in the place. They were all —

STINE: Oh, no, some of them were pretty suave, had their ascots and nice blazers.

BRIAN: Yeah, they were looking pretty good, but they didn't have on Armani suits or anything like that, and they didn't, like, land in the helicopter and —

STINE: They had more character than that; they were very interesting people. They didn't wear suits all the same color; a lot of them wore ascots, though. And big glasses. They looked more like movie stars in their colorful clothes and sunglasses.

**"It was kind of like meeting
Walt Disney but you never
heard of him or Mickey
Mouse."**

"It's changed looking at Japanese comics and at Japanese animation for me."

BRIAN: They were fun folks to deal with, you know. And it's *changed* looking at Japanese comics and at Japanese animation for me, I've got a little bit more of an angle on the culture.

STINE: We did see one of Tezuka's works, an animation that he did not finish.

BRIAN: The last thing that he was working on, which is something . . . anyone who is interested in animation, this would be the *most* interesting thing to watch. Tezuka was really *obsessed* with animation, *all* forms of animation. All the stuff that Disney did, all of the stuff even from Bill Hanna and Joe Barbera, everything from Winsor McCay to Max Fleischer to Chuck Jones to YELLOW SUBMARINE to computer animation, everything, he was just really into it. And the last thing that he was working on was like an absolute complete homage to animation. It was the story of this little squirrel living in the forest, but *all* the things that happened, it was basically the *history* of animation! It started off with basic, real staccato — the spinning wheel you look through it and —

DAK: Zoetrope.

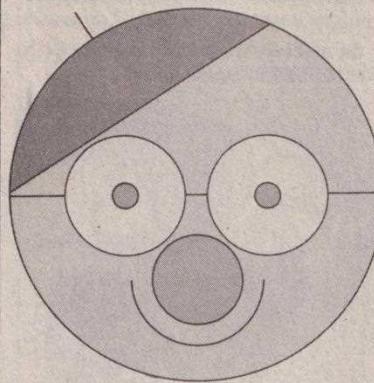
BRIAN: Yeah, well, it started off even before that; it started off with really just stick figure animation. And the animation was a particular story of this squirrel and this lumberjack who is cutting down the forest — so there's, like, *all* these messages going on.

STINE: Political, social, environmental, historical, it's thrilling.

BRIAN: What he did, he used the different phases of animation, it was one continuous story but he *bent* the animation to *look like* the animation that pioneered that form. There was one part of the story that sort of looked like GERTIE THE DINOSAUR, it had that sort of Winsor McCay look to it. And then there was another part of the story that had that STEAMBOAT WILLIE sort of look to it, early Walt Disney. There was another part of the story that sort of had a Ralph Bakshi look to it. He was really *bending* the animation to mimic all these different forms. The story basically starts at the first thing of animation that had ever been done, makes its way to cutting edge animation that's being done today — parts of it were going to be computer animated.

JULIA: Is there no way they could finish it?

BRIAN: I don't know, maybe they are,



Above and below: by his beret shall ye know him.

because Tezuka was so involved in this, and Tezuka did so much to it — it looked like there were three acts in the story, and the first two acts are done, the third act is the unfinished act. Some of the computer animation was done and there's some other parts of it. But the animation is really amazing. There's even a part in it of like the *limited* animation from Hanna-Barbera, where basically they just decided not to put in as many frames per second. And what's really funny is in that part of the story you've got one character that's *fully* animated, then you've got the other parts of the story in limited animation. It's really weird because when you're watching you don't notice that this animation is so much different from the



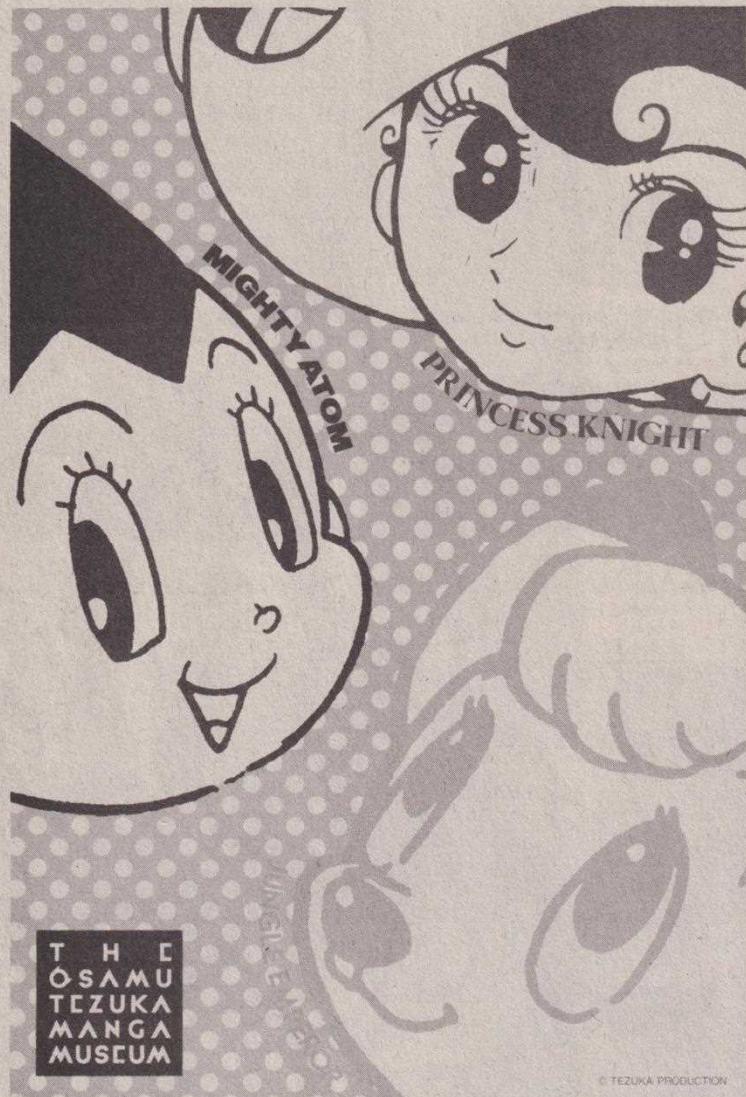
THE ANIMATION FILMOGRAPHY OF OSAMU TEZUKA



"If you're studying Japanese animation or

Disney animation, but when you're able to see it side by side, these characters sort of flow and move while these characters have a sharp staccato sort of step-step

A couple of key characters created by the doctor, from the cover of THE OSAMU TEZUKA MANGA MUSEUM notebook.



movement. It's really interesting.

This film alone is just the biggest education on animation that anyone could hope to get. It was the last thing Tezuka was

working on and even in an incomplete form it is amazing. We went to Tezuka Productions and saw it on video. It's really amazing sitting there and realizing this guy Tezuka was *real serious* about animation.

STINE: And we couldn't have seen it if Matsutani's daughter hadn't figured out the VCR.

BRIAN: Yeah.

STINE: Just like here in the States, the parents sit down and they mess with the VCR and they can't get it, the little girl knows just what to do. (*Laughter.*)

BRIAN: We were at Tezuka Productions and it was really kind of bad because the Pinis and the Eisners had already left. Matsutani asked if we'd like to go by Tezuka Productions, so none of this was set up ahead of time. While we were there Matsutani said this was something neat we could see if we wanted to, so we went into the room to show the video — it's like all these wires going everywhere, no one could figure it out. Matsutani was kind of behind the VCR, looking at it, going in front and pushing buttons, changing from one monitor to the other monitor, nothing. Then his daughter got up, did this, did this, did this, and it came on.

JULIA: How old is she?

STINE: I think she was eight.

JULIA: Eight? (*Laughter.*)

STINE: She struggled a bit with it, too, I have to say. I think they really kind of got it going together.

BRIAN: Yeah, but it was pretty funny.

STINE: We all joked about that, yeah. It's the same kind of generation gap that happens here with technology. And we really should say that *all* of the artists that we met, famous, but each one of them has an amazingly high regard for Tezuka. They are *all* heavily heavily influenced by Dr. Tezuka. He's it. They all sat there and talked about Dr. Tezuka and his ideas. So, Japanese comics truly stemmed from a lot of his thinking, his theory, and they all really really respected it.

BRIAN: If you're studying Japanese animation or if you're studying Japanese comics, you *have* to start with Tezuka. He is the father of Japanese animation, he is the father of Japanese comics. If you take a look at — you know how Japanese comics all have that face with the big eyes and little tiny mouth, that Speed Racer face; that's kind of a weird thing for us Americans to get used to. Dr. Tezuka created that look and that look is now tradition. Any time a Japanese artist does that face, he is honoring Dr. Tezuka. That's why a lot of Japanese animation looks alike to Americans, that's why a lot

"We did see one of Tezuka's works, an animation he did not finish. The last thing he worked on."

comics, you *have* to start with Tezuka."

of the Japanese comics look alike to Americans, because all of the artists are in their own way paying respect to Dr. Tezuka.

STINE: We went and saw his office. Wendy Pini gave him some of her work many years ago, he had it hanging up in his office.

BRIAN: We went to Tezuka Productions and we're hanging out, looking at where they do the animation and where they do this and where all this stuff is kept, and then Matsutani stops and says, "Would you like to see Dr. Tezuka's studio?" We go up to this studio and it's like a shrine to Dr. Tezuka, everything is left exactly like it was the last day he was in there working. There is still mail that was sent to him, laying unopened on his desk. Matsutani, who is this classic Japanese businessman, he's teary-eyed. He starts telling us about how Tezuka's wife would come in and clean up and organize the studio for Tezuka every couple of weeks or so, and she still does it. She still comes to the studio and keeps everything in order, but everything is exactly as it was left.

And there's all this artwork on the walls, there's Wendy Pini's drawing, and there's one of the actual cels from GERTIE THE DINOSAUR. It's really neat to see all of this stuff and to know that this is the guy, he started all of it, he is why Japanese comics and Japanese animation exist. And he was an actual medical doctor.

DAK: I was wondering about that.

BRIAN: Yeah, and not an honorary degree. He had studied and practiced a general M.D.

STINE: And he had a massive fascination with insects.

BRIAN: Yeah.

STINE: He drew all of the time growing up, and he drew all the way through medical school. In the museum they have all of his bug collection and a lot of his early drawings, bugs and plants and things like that. Really minute details; he studied little tiny things.

BRIAN: All of this stuff was in his studio, we saw original pages of Dr. Tezuka's original ASTRO BOY stuff, and original cels and stuff like that, stuff that belongs in the museum. But he produced such a wealth of work that there could be several museums. A lot of his early animation, he sat down and did it one frame at a time.

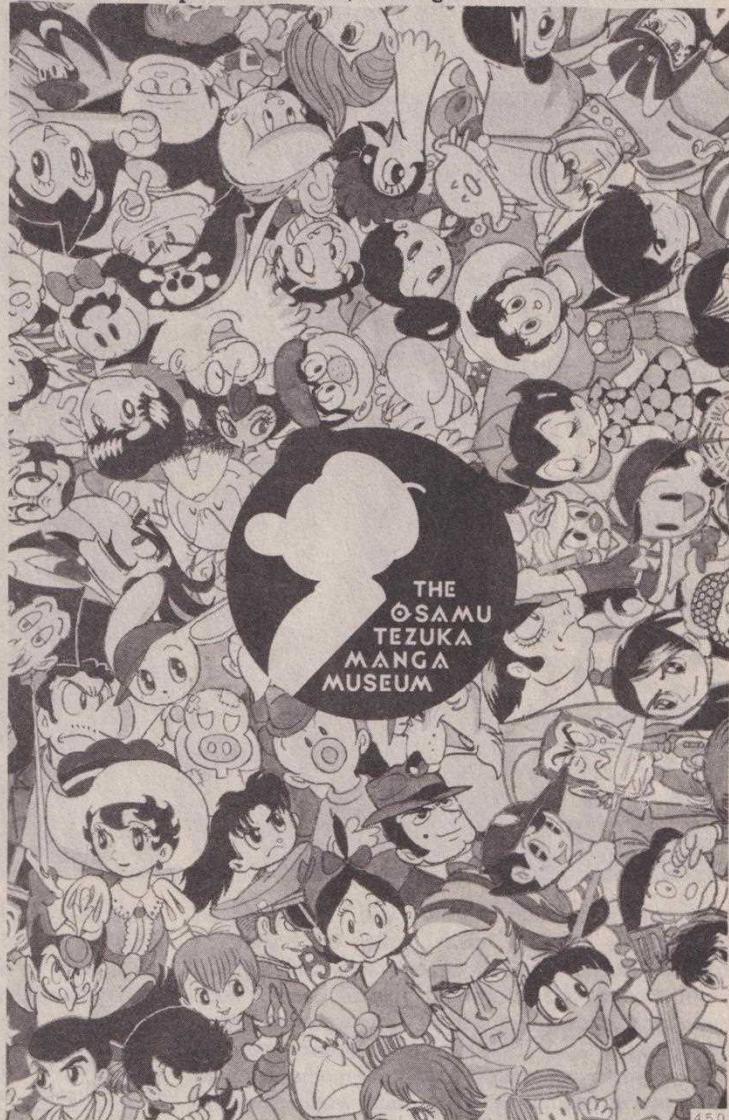
STINE: And he really had a love for children. The whole museum is designed *really* for kids, there's rides and there's computer things. But it's all done in an extremely educational fashion. He was really big on using comics and animation

to teach about life, the world, community.

BRIAN: There's a lot of interactive stuff where kids can go in and design their own animation, it's really a neat thing. You

can go there as a kid and learn how to do animation from beginning to end. It was a whole lot of fun being there. Everything about Japan was a whole lot of fun. □

More of the many characters he created. Note stylized silhouette of Tezuka in profile in center, wearing his trademark beret.



"This film alone is just the biggest education on animation that anyone could hope to get."