



Make Mine Manga Library

An introduction to an art form

Manga, an international phenomenon.

Born and raised on the small island archipelago of Japan perhaps no Asian art form has captured the imagination more than this unique brand of Japanese entertainment other than the closely linked medium of anime that often serves to animate the pencilings, inks and brush strokes that fall within its borders.

Thus it is appropriate given its vast width, depth and unique identity that manga be respected as its own medium that in spite of technicalities is treated as more than just “comics from Japan” but as its own bonified art form and creative expression deserving of its own lists chronicling its very works.

This list however does not endeavour to rank manga in order of their quality or even importance. Instead this manga catalogue attempts to provide a mixture of titles that includes classics and a variety of different themes, genres and demographics all whilst trying to maintain a degree of accessibility for newcomers, both with and without any experience with western comics or sequential art.

The first part of the list then will include shonen, shojo, seinen, josei and kodomomuke works, however it will include a considerable focus on shonen and shonen adjacent work as it has become, especially in the west, a universal genre enjoyed by both men and women that holds much of the pop cultural power in the manga world, whilst serving as a popular entry point to the medium.

Please note that manga is traditionally drawn predominantly in black and white and read back to front by Western standards (right to left) and that all black and white images used therein are examples of what one will find upon opening an individual manga, either in its original form as part of a larger magazine or published in individual volumes known as tankobon. It is the publishing and technical elements of manga, alongside its stylistic conventions and the way in which they are conceptualised in unison that separate manga as its own art form different from western comics and emerging in between forms like the Korean Web toons of manhwa (Korean comics).

Part 1: Mainstream Manga- Shonen, Shojo, Seinen, Josei and Kodomomuke (1-39)

The first part of this list will catalogue mainstream manga that serves as a suitable example of the medium and its many sub genres. Broadly manga can be divided into several larger iconic meta genres famously classified, in contrast to

western comics, by their demographics. Thus there are several categorising terms that will be repeated with explanation as a reminder and learning tool. These categories include

*Kodomomuke: Manga aimed primarily at young children.

*Shonen: Manga aimed at teen boys known in their current form for having a broader appeal

*Shojo: Manga aimed at teen girls known for their romantic elements and conventions

Seinan: manga aimed at adults, particularly adults men Josei: Manga aimed at adult women

Broadly speaking mainstream manga follows a set of genre cliches and a broad art style format characterised by its large eyes, often wild and/or colourful hair, general exaggerated expressions and dramatic proportions, as all as hyper feminine and masculine elements comprising much of the mediums visual DNA, with “chibi” and kodomomuke styles often taking it in a more cartoon and comedic direction.

This list then, as outlined, will provide a catalogue of these popular manga and endeavour to serve as an adequate and knowledgeable guide to their contents.

1. Astro Boy

Author(s): Osamu Tezuka (♂)

Release: 1952

Length: 23 volumes

From Osamu Tezuka, the “godfather of manga” to many, Astro Boy is a seminal work in the establishment of the modern manga industry, often credited as one of its founding texts, following the exploits of a young android named “Astro” created in the image of its creators dead son, a robotic miracle that goes on to become Japan’s very own superhero, pioneering Kodomomuke and Shonen Manga as a medium in the process.

Astro boys influence then is one that cannot be overstated and is as important as it is wide reaching, influencing the likes of Dragon Ball, a series which in turn went on to help establish shonen manga and its central genre known as “battle manga”.

The series then is one of the best introductions to the medium and its fascination with the robotic as well as the earlier years of modern manga and an artful piece of Japanese literature.

2. Dragon Ball

Author(s): Akira Toriyama (♂)

Release: 1985

Number of volumes: 42 (16 for db + 26 for dbz)

A worldwide phenomenon and pivotal work in the establishment of shonen battle manga, a genre aimed at teen boys largely defined by over the top power fantasies concerning plucky underdogs obtaining power in combat via hard work and determination, Dragonball is a seminal work not only in manga but in general. The story follows Son Goku as he attempts to collect the seven wish granting Dragonball's whilst combating a variety of enemies. What starts as a whimsical martial art tale of adventure based firmly on the ancient Chinese myth of a journey to the west eventually evolves into an outright fight manga focusing on over the top battles and obscene displays of world-shattering power- an era compartmentalised as a sequel series outside of Japan under the title of Dragonball z.

Both dragon ball and dragon ball Z are great introduction to the manga industry, especially its East Asian based fantasy and battle sub genres, with the original series in particular offering the Asian fantasy elements and the latter serving in some ways as "the text" of shonen battle manga. The series is further bolstered by Toriyama's distinct and evocative art style which has gone on to be featured in numerous manga series, as well as the dragon quest game franchise.

3. Fruit Basket

Author(s): Natsuki Takaya (♀)

Release: 1998

Length: 23 volumes

A great introduction to the wider genre of "shojo manga", a sub medium aimed at teen girls usually concerned with romance and slice of life stories, fruit basket takes its name from a popular Japanese school game and follows the tale of Tohru Honda a high school student.

Unlike more grounded examples of the genre Fruit Basket ties in elements of magic, zodiacs and possession and tells an emotional story that may also scratch a fantasy itch whilst standing out as a hallmark exhibit of the shojo genre.

4. One piece

Author(s): Eiichiro Oda (♂)

Release: 1997

Length: 103+ (ongoing)

Inspired by Dragonball and other shonen manga, one piece stands as one of the most popular of shonen series and one of the most popular manga of all time in Japan. Following the adventures of Luffy, a young man given elastic powers by a magical “devil fruit” who endeavours to become the “pirate king” and find the previous Kings treasure known only as “one piece”, eiichiro odas’ tale of piracy is a great introduction not only to shonen but manga in general and the quintessential “pirate manga”, an area often rarely explored in spite of Japanese fascination with western and western derived settings.

In spite of its intimidating length one piece is a title that’s earlier volumes can at least be enjoyed by anyone looking for a good adventure story, telling riveting tales consisting of a wide array of colourful and wacky personalities, be they friend or foe.

5. Sailor Moon

Author(s): Naoko Takeuchi (♀)

Release: 1991

Length: 18 volumes

A stalwart of the 90s alongside Dragon Ball Z, sometimes being framed as it’s female equivalent, Sailor Moon is an action manga targeted at young and teen girls that takes the sort of larger-than-life battle transformations usually associated with boys’ manga and adds a feminine twist.

Following Usagi Tsukino, a Japanese middle school student who is gifted a magical brooch that allows her to transform into the titular Sailor Moon and defend the earth from evil, this manga is a great introduction to an action manga that targets an audience often seen as the domain of shojo manga whilst exploring what is considered a classic of the 1990s both within and outside Japan.

6. Full Metal Alchemist

Author(s): Hiromu Arakawa (♀)

Release: 2001

Length: 27 volumes

A manga that manages to appeal to a mainstream shonen loving audience whilst defying some of the more cliché and sometimes mindless tropes of the genre, Full Metal Alchemist is regarded by some as one of the greatest mainstream mangas of the 21st century, based in a German inspired world partly governed by the laws of alchemy, a force portrayed as something between a more conventional magic system and science based upon the rule of equivalent exchange. Here we follow the adventures of Erik and Alphons Elric, two Alchemists in a search of a way to reclaim at least part of what was lost when they tried to violate this rule in an attempt to resurrect their deceased mother.

A pivotal text in the modern action genre, Full Metal is a great introduction to those who want a good entry point to manga with a more philosophical edge.

7. Death Note

Author(s): Tsugumi Ohba & Takeshi Obata (♂)

Release: 2003

Length: 12 volumes

A central example of a manga from "Shonen Jump Advance", a division created by the shonen jump magazine designed to appeal older teens and more adult readers, Death Note mixes shonen elements and accessibility with the more mature themes sometimes associated with adult focused manga by telling a story of intrigue and murder with horror elements. The result is a story following Light Yagami, a high school student who makes contact with the fabled death note, a notebook of the shinigami (Japanese death gods) that allows the user to kill anyone whose name is written down within it, whilst also determining their cause and time of death.

Death Note serves as a fantastic introduction to a more mature shonen based series with detailed art and tells a riveting narrative kept concise within a relatively small number of volumes, making it an ideal choice for those who want to read the entirety of a classic series without being forced to consume a large number of volumes.

8. Nichijou

Author(s): Keiichi Arawi (♂)

Release: 2006

Length: 10 volumes (original run), 11+ and ongoing with original and new run included

A contemporary yet classic example of the comedic genre known simply as “gag manga”, nichijou is set in a typical sub urban Japanese town featuring moments from the everyday lives of its residents as they alternate between the everyday and the bizarre. The series is known for its heart and surreal sense of humour, making it great for those wanting a taste of Japanese humour and the medium of gag manga

9. Slam Dunk

Author(s): Takehiro Inoue (♂)

Release: 1990

Length: 31 volumes

One of the classics of the popular genre of sports manga, slam dunk was responsible for much of the modern popularity of basketball in Japan, with the series cited as one of the reasons for growing Japanese youth participation in the sport in the 1990s and leading to the establishment of the Slam Dunk scholarship program offering academic sports scholarship university programs.

The series follows Hanamichi Sakuragi, a gang leader and high school delinquent who discovers his love for basketball and aims for competitive success in a tale that leverages the dramatic flair of manga as a medium whilst interfusing a degree of realism and knowledge of the sport. The result is one of the classic sport mangas and great read for anyone looking to delve into the genre, be it again or as a first timer.

10. Ghost In The Shell

Author(s): Masumune Shirow (♂)

Release: 1989

Length: One eleven chapter graphic novel volume (original story)

A classic of both the Japanese Cyberpunk genre and the medium of Seinan Manga, manga aimed at young adult males, Ghost in the shell chronicles the exploits of the anti cyber terrorist organisation Public Security Section led by protagonist Major Motoku Kusanagi in a futuristic Japan.

Adapted numerous times and with numerous sequels, the original manga is an excellent recommendation for those looking to explore more adult manga, Japanese Cyberpunk or branch out from shonen manga.

11. Naruto

Author(s): Masashi Kishimoto

Release: 1997

Length: 72 volumes

A member of the fabled original “Big three” that dominated 00’s Shonen in the wake of Dragonball alongside One Piece and Bleach, Naruto is one of the most iconic shonen manga of all time, following the trials and tribulations the underdog and, at first, outcast Naruto Uzumaki as he endeavours to become the Hokage, the head ninja and leader of his village.

Touching upon themes of ninjutsu, Japanese mythology, war and friendship, Naruto is perhaps one of the biggest examples of the “Never give up” trope of shonen battle manga and known for its bombastic battles and large cast, serving as a great introduction to shonen manga alongside its peers.

12. Bleach

Author(s): Tite Kubo (♂)

Release: 2001

Length: 74 volumes

The third member of the original “Big three” of shonen manga alongside naruto and one piece, Bleach follows Ichigo Kurasaki, a Japanese Teenager who is able to see ghost as he becomes a Soul Reaper, soldiers who usher spirits from the world of the living to the soul society.

Known for its striking art, battles and dark themes Bleach is a compelling fantasy and shonen manga for those looking for an accessible shonen manga.

13. Demon Slayer

Author(s): Koyoharu Gotouge (♀)

Release: 2016

Length: 23 volumes

An almost overnight success that ended shortly after it began, demon Slayer was a phenomenon by a largely anonymous writer that took the world and Japan in particular by storm, becoming the 9th best selling manga of all time in a matter of years.

Known for its dark themes contrasted by its light sense of humour and striking visuals, demon Slayer is set in Taisho Era Japan and follows tanjiro Kamado as he becomes a Slayer of demons, humans turned immortal monstrosities, in the wake of a murderous attack on his family as he searches not only for a cure for its only survivor, his younger sister turned demon Nezuko, but its perpetrator, the original demon Muzan Kibutsuji.

The series manages to invoke shonen themes without indulging in all of the traditional tropes and is a good read for anyone interested in manga phenomenon that took Japan by storm.

14. Your Lie In April

Author(s): Naoshi Arakawa

Release: 2011

Length: 11 volumes

A shonen manga seemingly often eclipsed by its anime adaption and unconventionally focused on romance and music, Your Lie In April follows Pianist and musical prodigy Kosei Arima as he rediscovers his love of music after meeting Kaori Miyazono in what unravels as a tragic yet heartfelt story of young love, depression and the love of music.

Featuring a concise tear-jerking story your lie in april is an accessible masterpiece for those wanting a story about the pitfalls of life and the beauty of written sound.

15. Haikyuu!

Author(s): Haruichi Furudate (♂)

Release: 2012

Length: 45 volumes

One of the most influential modern and all time sport manga written clearly by a lover and player of the featured sport, Haikyuu! is largely responsible for the mainstreaming of sport manga and anime outside of the Japan and arguably the greatest volleyball manga of all time.

Following the path of Shoya Hinata, an uncharacteristically short player who compensates with incredible jumping ability, Haikyuu! is a relatively grounded story about following your dreams and succeeding in team sports, where rivals and opposing skills sets can readily amplify each other, with Hinata's incredible athleticism and potential as a spiker combining with the ace setting skills of rival Tobio Kageyama to create a surprisingly powerful setter-spiker combo.

A great and seminal work in the sport genre, Haikyuu shows you don't need much besides foundational story telling skills, experience and a true love for the sport in question to write a compelling sport manga.

16. Hajime No Ippo

Author(s): George Marikawa (♂)

Release: 1989

Length: 137+ volumes (ongoing)

One of the longest running sports manga ever comprised and the defining work of the combat sport sub genre, hajime no ippo follows the story of Ippo Hakomouchi, a relatively unassuming high school student who packs one hell of a punch, as he makes his way up the ranks with a style borrowing elements from all-time greats like Mike Tyson and the late Jack Dempsey.

Between dynamic action and artwork and a compelling plot with technical and historic elements of boxing well represented, Hajime no ippo is one of the greatest examples of its genre.

17. Tokyo Ghoul

Author(s): Sui Ishida (♂)

Release: 2011

Length: 14 volumes

A dark horror fantasy written and illustrated by Sui Ishida set in a world secretly populated by ghouls that feast upon human flesh. The story follows Kan Keneki, who after surviving an encounter with such beings becomes an anomaly described as a "half Ghoul" via way of the transplantation of his attackers organs in an effort to save his fading life. Thus foraged Keneki must learn to deal with his need to consume human flesh and attempt to fit into Ghoul society.

One of the best selling horror manga of modern times, Tokyo Ghoul stands as an example of an internationally mainstream work in a genre that often takes a back seat to shonen battle manga and other genres and is one of the best introductions to the darker side of the medium.

18. Attack On Titan

Author(s): Hajime Isayama (♂)

Release: 2009

Length: 34 volumes

A modern juggernaut much like the giant beasts that line its pages, Attack on Titan is based in a world inspired by German culture where humans have had to shield themselves behind giant walls to avoid gigantuar creatures called "Titans" that patrol the outside world and attempt to breach the walls protecting human society.

Our story thus follows Eren Yeager as he and his friends join the survey corps in order to fight off titan encroachment. Known for its dramatic sense of stakes, riveting twists, dark horrific themes,, attack on titan took the industry by storm and is a great choice for those looking for a modern mature shonen with an unsettling and raw aesthetic.

19. Inuyasha

Authors: Rumiko Takahashi (♀)

Release: 1996

Length: 56 volumes

Combining serious subject matter with a dose of comedic relief, Inuyasha follows Kogome Higurashi, a high school student in modern day Tokyo transported back in time to the sengoku period after falling into a well in her family's shrine and meeting the half demon inuyasha.

Praised for its fast paced action, interesting characters, creative use of fantasy and its authors trademark humour, inuyasha serves as a premium example yet quirky fantasy tale suitable for many different types of reader.

20. Battle Angel Alita

Author(s): Yukito Kishiro (♂)

Release: 1990

Length: 9 volumes

A classic of the Cyberpunk genre recently adapted into one of the first successful Hollywood translations of Japanese manga into live action under the name “Alita Battle Angel”, Battle Angel Alita follows the titular Alita (known as “Gally” in Japan), a female cyborg discovered in a junkyard and rebuilt by a cybernetic doctor, awakening to find herself suffering from Amnesia. Alita later find herself becoming a bounty hunter and uses the one thing she does remember, the martial art of Panzer Kunst, to combat crime and a host of other threats.

Filled with meticulous background art and a riveting narrative, Battle Angel Alita is a great introduction to both seinen, dystopian fiction and Cyberpunk, not to mention a world seen by some as a prophetic rendition of one of mankind’s possible futures.

21. Ao Haru Ride

Author(s): Io Sakisaka (♀)

Release: 2011

Length: 13 volumes

A tale of falling back in love with a former lover, Ao Haru Ride serves as a great modern example of Shoujo style romance manga, winning an award for its reception as one of the best mangas 2014.

The series follows 16 years old Futaba Yoshioka as she rekindles her romance Kou Tanaka who, following his mother’s death, has not only changed his surname (to “Mabuchi”) but his personality, having become cold and indifferent.

The result? A standout modern shoujo manga suitable for fans of romance fiction and slice of life elements.

22. Bakuman

Author(s): Tsugumi Ohba & Takeshi Obata (♂)

Release: 2008

Length: 20 volumes

The second series from the creative duo behind Death Note, Bakuman offers a story that gives readers a peek behind the curtains of the life of a manga creator working for the worldwide phenomenon of Shonen Jump magazine. Our story follows talented artist Moritaka Mashiro and writer Akito Tagaki as they attempt to make their way up the ranks of the manga world and get an anime adaption, all so Mashiro can fulfil a promise to love interest and aspiring voice actress Miho Azuki- that the two will cease their mutually agreed upon distance from each other once both accomplish their dreams, with Miho providing voice over for the adaption of the pairs anime adaption.

The result is very much a shonen about creating shonen manga and thus the series stands not only as a great if unorthodox example of its own genre, with plenty of character drama, but as an exploration of the very trials and tribulations faced by those wanting to pursue the path of a mangaka, both at jump and in general. Bakuman thus stands as a great introduction not only to many of the tropes often found in manga but the technical machinations of the medium itself.

23. Deadman Wonderland

Author(s): Jinsei Kataoka & Kazuma Kondou (♀ & ♂)

Release: 2007

Length: 13 volumes

Created by the now married creative team of Jinsei Kataoka and Kazuma Kondou,

Deadman Wonderland starts with a tragedy all too familiar to the small island nation of Japan, the occurrence of a seismic earthquake that ravages Tokyo and much Japanese mainland. Except here the famed capital is not only damaged but drowned, with three quarters of Tokyo now submerged in the waters of Pacific ocean.

It is here that we jump ten years into the future, following the life of survivor and middle school student Ganta Igarashi, who has no memories of the tragedy. After a school massacre that ends with the perpetrator engraving a mysterious red shard into his chest, Ganta is seen as a suspect and framed as the killer. He is thus sent to "Deadman Wonderland" a twisted prison and doubles as a theme park where he must survive a series of lethal trials as he endeavours to clear his name.

A strange and entertaining series, Deadman Wonderland offers a look into a thriller manga that tell dystopian narratives with life and death trials whilst serving as an example of a less mainstream yet popular shonen designed originally for shonen's alternative publication, shonen ace.

24. My Hero Academia

Authors: Kohei Horikoshi

Release: 2014

Length: 37+ volumes (ongoing)

Heralded as part of the 2nd “Big three” of shonen alongside black clover and attack on titan, My Hero Academia is the lovechild of a mangaka with a deep appreciation of western superhero comics, leading to a shonen manga uncharacteristically themed around said genre.

The resulting narrative follows Izuka Midoriya, an aspiring hero born “quirkless” in a world now populated with a large amount of individuals gifted with their very own superpowers nicknamed “quirks”, the stronger of which often leading their users to become superheroes under different agencies. Everything changes however when he meets his idol and number one hero All Might, who mentors him into the position of attending the prestigious UA high, that specialises in training super powered individuals to protect society at large from super villains and other threats.

One of the most popular series of recent years that follows in the footsteps of previous major shonen battle mangas in its themes of underdogs with a never give up attitude whilst offering a new spin by injecting DNA from western comic books, my hero academia serves as a great introduction to the current state of shonen manga

25. Nodami Cantabile

Authors: Tomoko Ninomiya (♀)

Release: 2001

Length: 25 volumes

An example of the often, at least in an international context, overlooked demographic genre of josei manga (manga for adult women) nodami Cantabile weaves a love story surrounding two musicians, the arrogant multilingual perfectionist aspiring conductor shinichi tanaki and the messy and eccentric Pianist Megumi Noda

Praised for its quirky sense of humour and subtle character development, Nodami Cantabile serves as a great introduction to josei manga whilst telling an engaging story of music and romance.

26. Doraemon

Author(s): Hiroshi Fujimoto & Motoo Abiko (♂)

Release: 1969

Length: 45 volumes

Written by a creative duo under the collective pen name Fujiko F. Fujio, Doreamon is a pivotal example of the demographic genre of Kodomomuke, manga made for young children, and a classic Japanese kid franchise that has branched out into multiple mediums.

The series channels the Japanese obsession with cute cartoon mascots, following the titular Doreamon, an earless and robotic cat that time travels back to the 22nd century to be a companion for the young boy Nobita, with the series following their exploits as Doreamon tries to improve the boy's life.

Doraemon serves not only as an example of a pivotal children's manga but as an introduction to a classic Japanese mascot who in 2008 was made the national "anime ambassador" by the Japanese foreign ministry.

27. Yugioh

Author(s): Kazuki Takahashi

Release: 1996

Volumes: 38

A worldwide phenomenon that inspired its very own highly successful collectible trading card game, yu gi oh began as a story centred yugi moto, a young boy who loves board, puzzle, card and tabletop games who often gets dragged into life and death situations. Given the mysterious and magical millennium puzzle by his grandfather, such situations allow yugi to transform into Yami Yugi (originally dark yugi) who punishes the antagonists in wicked ways as he plays often warped and twisted versions of the game involved in the particular chapter/story in question.

It wasn't until the the series switched its focus solely to the card game dueling more recognisable today however that it evolved into a modern pop cultural phenomenon.

It was this arguably separate series following in the footsteps of the original seven volumes , titled "Yugioh duel monsters" in its manga form in the west, that the author Takahashi took the previously featured trading card game created in the initial volumes, the titular "duel monsters", and turned yugioh into a household name that would change card games and manga forever, once again following yugi and his alter ego but this time as they battled to become "the king of duelists".

A gem of the later 90s , Yugioh offers a look into a major facet of a very particular era in Japanese pop culture, a time where more conventional shonens were rivalled and often surpassed by monster collecting adventure manga largely marketed towards children, such as digimon, pokemon and beyblade. With its reliance on Egyptian mythology and adult themes however, yugioh offers a bleaker and more twisted example compared to its contemporaries that those looking for something darker can enjoy.

28. Pokemon Adventures (Gen 1)

Author(s): Hidenori Kusaki & Mato (♂)

Release: 1997

Length: 64 volumes

There is little one needs to say about pokemon. The highest grossing, and one of the most iconic, entertainment franchises ever conceived has been a fixture of mainstream media since the “pokemania” that swept the world in the late 1990s and early 00’s following its humble beginning as a black and white handheld video game released on Nintendos original gameboy.

However, in spite of all its success, it the franchises chief manga adaption that finds itself often overshadowed by both the original games and other translations of the iconic mega franchises, namely the phenomenally popular anime adaption. This is in spite of it arguably being regarded as some of the best media to grace the franchise.

The reasons for this are of course many but perhaps the biggest is the strength of its foundations, with its separate universe and take on the general pokemon mythos combining elements from both the video game and anime universes to create its own unique rendition that also manages to add its own twists. The result is a portrayal that in many ways stays closer to the formative vision of the pokemon universe that not only the anime but games moved away from, with its more industrial and mechanical world leading pokemon creator satoshi taijiri to note its accuracy to his original vision of the pokemon world.

Pokemon Adventures has since spawned many interconnected sequel series designed to accompany each new entry in the video game franchise by often focusing on new characters in a new region, but perhaps it is the original series that coincided with the first generation of pokemon that servers as one of the best introductions to the world of pokemon manga and Kodomomuke, manga aimed at children.

29. Erased

Author(s): Kei Sanbe

Release: 2012

Length: 8 volumes

An enthralling murder mystery Erased tells the story of Satoru Fujinuma as he uses the ability of “revival”, a mysterious ability to rewind time to before a life threatening incident, in the wake of his mothers murder to travel from the year 2006 eighteen years into the past to catch a culprit who, during his high school years, kidnapped three of his high school friends, who appears to be the same man that would later murder his mother.

A short and digestible series, Erased offers a self-contained mystery accessible to both newcomers and veterans of the medium.

30. Akira

Author(s): Katsuhiro Otomo (♂)

Release: 1982

Length: 6 volumes

The manga that led to the seminal anime feature film, *Akira* is a seinen manga that stands as perhaps one of the most important mangas ever made with its dark Cyberpunk tale serving as a pivotal introduction for many outside of the East to Japanese entertainment, which was a niche quantity in the 80s and early 90s in the western hemisphere.

Set in a post-apocalyptic “neo tokyo” ravaged by a mysterious explosion just three decades prior, *Akira* follows biker leader Shotaro Keneda, the revolutionary Kei and a squad of espers, alongside the military leader Colonel Shikishima as they aim to prevent the Kanedas childhood friend, the mentally disturbed Tatsuo Shima, from utilising his telekinesis to tear up the city and awaken the titular entity “Akira”.

Widely regarded as the pioneer of the Japanese Cyberpunk genre, *Akira*’s sense of style and exploration of political strife, loneliness and corruption make it an essential read for those looking to properly explore Cyberpunk in general.

31. Black Clover

Author(s): Yuki Tabata (♂)

Release: 2015

Length: 34+ (ongoing)

A modern shonen argued by many to be part of the modern “big three” of shonen Jump, *Black Clover* maintains the initially untalented underdog who never gives up theme of *Naruto* but swaps Ninja out for Eurofantasy inspired wizardry, following Astra as he endeavours to become the wizard king in spite of his inability to cast spells, his only assistance coming by way of his demon possessed tome and sword .

A suitable road for those interested in the current state of shonen and looking for a euro fantasy touch on the traditional shonen format.

32. One Punch Man

Author(s): "One" & Yusuke Murata (♂)

Release: 2012

Length: 27+ (ongoing)

Based on the original 2009 webcomic written under the alias "one" and illustrated into manga form by Yusuke Murata, one Punch Man is one of the most popular and famous examples of modern shonen and one of the most popular gag manga. The series incorporates elements of the superhero genre of western comics but largely serves as a parody of shonen battle manga, specifically the often mocked power scaling and the over the top feats and diminishing returns that come as a result, following the superhero Saitama who, as the title suggests, can defeat any foe with just a single punch, leaving him bored and unchallenged.

A highly popular gag manga that satirises traditional shonen manga, particularly battle manga, and its absurd power scaling, One Punch Man serves as a fantastic read for those looking to explore a deconstruction and parody of the most mainstream of manga.

33. Blue Exorcist

Author(s): Kazue Kato (♀)

Release: 2009

Length: 28+ (ongoing)

A dark fantasy shonen following the son of Satan, Rin Okumura as he endeavours to become an exorcist to fight back against his father by joining True Cross Academy, Blue Exorcist is an exciting and twisted battle manga that combines doses of the horrific with the light hearted by drawing on religious, particularly Christian, iconography and themes whilst incorporating elements of Eastern regions like Buddhism.

A recommended series for those looking for a darker shonen with horror themes, Blue Exorcism tells a riveting mythological narrative suitable for teens and adults.

34. Uzumaki Spirale

Authors: Junji Ito

Release: 1998

Length: 3 volumes

From the surrealist horror master Junji Ito, Uzumaki Spirale follows the story of Kurouzu cho, a fictional city under the infliction of a mysterious curse invoking Spirales.

Considered Ito's magnum opus by many, Spirale is an Eisner- nominated seinen manga that explores themes of Nihilism and the sort of twisted logic very much out of a hellish dream scape. Uzumaki is thus a good introduction to the work of Junji Ito and a surrealist take on Japanese horror and its unique elements.

35. Shaman King

Authors: Hiroyuki Takei (♂)

Release: 1998

Length: 35 volumes (32 originally plus 3 extra in Kondansha edition)

Based in a world inhabited by powerful Shamans able to manipulate and summon the spirits of the dead, Shaman King follows Yoh Asakura and his spirit companion, the feudal Samurai legend Amidimaru as they take part in the Shaman games to become the Shaman King.

A series that later received an expanded ending, Shaman King distinguishes itself through its unique art style that blends the manga aesthetic with influences from hip hop and street art whilst exploring different shamans from different cultures and the differing ways they commune with spirits, making it a must read for those looking for a different kind of shonen battle manga that balances more mundane tropes with the bizarre.

36. Yu Yu Hakusho

Author(s): Yoshihiro Togasji (♂)

Release: 1990

Length: 19 volumes

One of the most popular manga series of the mid 90s, Yu Yu Hakusho is a classic shonen manga centred around Yusuke Urameshi, a teen delinquent who perishes in a car accident whilst attempting to save a child's life, leading him to be tested by the son of the leader of the underworld who anoints him "underworld detective". What starts as a manga surrounding investigation soon transforms into a martial art manga, with its very own tournament arc, a staple of shonen battle manga.

Incorporating elements of Buddhism and the occult, Yu Yu Hakusho is a classic supernatural shonen manga with strong characters that can be appreciated by both veterans and newcomers.

37.. Spiderman J

Author(s): Yamanaka Akira (♂)

Release: 2004

Length: 2 volumes

A strange and unusual take on the famous Wall crawler from the industry of western comic books, Spiderman J serves as an interesting example of translating Spiderman to the medium of manga, specifically Kodomuke manga, in a way that doesn't simply try to retell the traditional story and characterisation in a japanese format. As a result the story does not follow a traditional Peter Parker, the down on his luck Queens native instead replaced by Sho Amano (however in English he is given the traditional Peter Parker name) nor does it follow many of the same other plot points, such as the radioactive/chemically augmented spider bite or death of Uncle Ben. Instead Spiderman J is based in its own unique universe in the year 200x, as the primary antagonist, Lord Beastius, tries to steal the fossil of the insect King.

A bizarre take on the character, Spiderman J offers a look into a unique attempt to translate a western comics icon into manga form without simply recreating or modifying what came before.

38. Star Wars High Republic: Edge of Balance

Author(s): Shima Shinya, Justin Ireland & Mizuki Sakakibara (♀, ♂ & ♀)

Release: 2021

Length: 2+ volumes (ongoing)

Based in time of the high Republic, a golden era for the Jedi set centuries before both the prequels and original trilogies, Edge of Balance follows Lilly Tora-Ashi, a young Jedi Knight, as she is designated the task of relocating displaced civilians to newly inhabited outer rim world of Banchii, the site of a new Jedi temple, where she will face hidden dangers.

Part of a multimedia project focusing on this new period as part of Disney's new Canon, Star Wars the high Republic: Edge of Balance serves both as a gateway into Star Wars for manga fans and a gateway for manga for Star Wars fans whilst serving as an example of translating one of the west's greatest mainstream Sci fi franchises into the medium.

39. Manga Shakespeare: Hamlet

Author(s): Richard Appiganesi & Emma Viecelli (♂ & ♀)

Release: 2007

Length: 1 volume

Based on one of the most famous pieces of English literature from one of the seminal playwrights to grace recorded history, Manga Shakespeare Hamlet is one of several of Self Made Hero's series of Shakespearian adaptations into the manga medium. Based in a divided future Denmark in a world divided by a great earthquake, with challenges from all States coming from within the world of elsinore, we follow the titular Hamlet in the wake of his father's death as he is plunged into a world of suspicion and misgivings when the ghost of his sire manifests before him.

A great way to introduce the famous bard's plays to a younger audience, Manga Shakespeare combines the art of LICA guest Emma Viechelli with Appiganesi's channeling of Shakespeare to tell a fantastical story of murder and intrigue.

Part 2. Gekiga (40-50):

Known for its more alternative artstyles, themes and mainstream defying conventions Gekiga, literally "moving pictures", refers to the alternative manga scene born out of the 1960s and 1970s,

Whilst technically a term that can encompass some of the demographic genres of mainstream manga, such as josei and seinen, gekiga is often used, as it is here, to refer to its own sub-medium distinct from more mainstream manga.

Manga commonly defined as gekiga are thus less tied down to the traditional manga aesthetic and often embody the phrase “Japanese comics” in ways absent from mainstream manga publications, being closer in style to many western comics, particularly sub forms more associated with traditional notions of high art and the term “graphic novel”, finding itself influenced by the French New Wave and noir novels

As a result gekiga are often identifiable by the use of sharp angles, dark hatching and gritty lines, sometimes leading to a more sketched or western aesthetic and general mature, realist, overtly political themes, albeit Japanese elements may still be somewhat present in its themes and art.

This last section will attempt to provide 10 gekiga manga that fit into the term stylistically. Some may view such a decision as a testament to the importance of quality of the work that makes up this genre, but make no mistake, gekiga has produced high quality works that stand amidst the best graphic novels and sequential art ever produced, it's only due to its perceived relative inaccessibility compared to its mainstream counterpart and the fact that it is not generally what is first envisaged by the invocation of the term “manga” that it has been relegated to a select number of titles, consigned towards the bottom of this list.

In addition Perhaps such a predicament is fitting. After all gekiga has always stood outside of mass produced mainstream works, often shining light on the cracks and unlit corners of Japanese society and asking pertinent philosophical questions. It is this at least slight marginalisation that gives gekiga its edge and is part of what makes it special.

40. Lone Wolf and Cub

Author(s): Kazuo Kaito & Goseki Kojima

Release: 1970

Length: 28 Volumes

One of the most highly regarded manga of all time and arguably the greatest known gekigan series, classed as a veritable “epic”, Lone Wolf and Cub follows the tale of the 18th century samurai Ogami Otto, the shogun's executioner, as he is framed as a traitor and forced into the life of an assassin, treading a path of a revenge with his three year old son Daigoro, who is left motherless after the murder of Ogami's wife Azumi.

Praised for its historical elements, artwork and depiction of the violence of Tokugawa Japan, Lone Wolf and Cub is an essential gekigan classic.

42. Gol Go 13

Author(s): Taiko Saito

Release: 1968

Length: 208 volumes

The second best selling manga in history and the number 1 selling seinen series, Golgo 13 follows the titular assassin who goes most commonly by the alias Duke Togo, whose real name is still yet unknown, as he engages in hits largely with the aid of his trusty scoped and customised m16 rifle.

The result is an incredibly long-lasting series, the longest running of all time, that's worth at least sampling as someone branching out into gekigan series or a fan of the likes of James Bond, John Wick and similar heroes, with its meticulously realised, grounded and dark stories lending it an entertaining yet sophisticated edge.

43. A drifting life

Author(s): Yoshihiro Tatsumi

Release: 2008

Length: 2 volumes

An autobiography, A Drifting Life chronicles the life of the legendary Japanese cartoonist Yoshihiro Tatsumi, from his childhood set against a post war 1945 Osaka still burdened by the shadow of Japan's defeat to 1960, in which his stand in protagonist Hiroshi wrestles with his parents' financial woes and failing marriage, alongside his brother's deteriorating health as he struggles to compete in the competitive manga market of mid 20th century Japan.

A winner of Tezuka Osamu Cultural prize and two Eisner awards, A Drifting Life not only serves as a front row and behind the scenes introduction to Tatsumi's exceptional talents and career but as a fine piece of sequential art and narrative crafting in its own right.

44. Red Colored Elergy

Author(s): Seiichi Hayashi

Release: 1970

Length: One volume

Described by some as a snapshot into the the minds of popular creators working outside of the popular bubble in the 1960's and 1970's, Red Coloured Elegy follows Ichiro and Sachiko, two young artists who fall in and out of love, jealous of each other's interests and unchallenged by their careers.

A cornerstone of the underground scene of the 60s, Red Coloured Elegy combines elements of thar very scene with influences from the French new wave to create a portrait of a culturally vibrant era yet turbulent period of Japanese history.

45. Summit of the gods

Author(s): Yumemakura Baku & Jiro Tanaguchi

Release: 2000

Length: 5 volumes

Based on the 1998 novel by Yumemakura Baku, Summit of the gods follows the photographer Fukamachi as he discovers a camera supposedly owned George Mallore, a British Mountaineer who went missing in the 1924 expedition of Mount Everest, who decides to go mountaineering adventure with his friend and fellow traveler Habu Joji.

Known for its compelling story and visuals that some have described as putting you right up there in the mountains within, Summit of the gods chronicles an attempt to climb the world's highest peak and ask why someone would be willing to risk it all for a journey filled with great physical and psychological suffering.

46. Showa a history of Japan (1926-1939)

Author(s): Shigeru Mizuki

Release: 1994

Length: 8 volumes

The first in Shigeru Mizuki's historical epic chronicling the history of 20th century Japan, Showa a history of Japan's initial run deals with the lead up to world war 2 and Japan's militarisation amidst the backdrop of the economic hardships caused by the great depression, painting a historical image that is both intricate and personal, the author having been a small child during the period. Intriguing and thoughtful, Showa a history of Japan uses Mizuki's photo realist style to offer a compelling introduction to a turbulent and terrifying period in Japan's history to people of differing ages and experience, making it a must read for those looking to further their knowledge of 20th century Japan.

47. Slum Wolf

Author(s): Tadao Tsuge (♂)

Release: 2018 (collects short stories from the late 1960's to early 1970's)

Length: One volume

A collection of short stories from one of the pioneers of the alt manga scene, Slum Wolf sheds a light on outcasts who have slipped through the cracks of Japanese society, focusing on gangsters, punks and vagrants removed from the usual order of society, with tales of a legendary aged brawler, pimps, an unravelling business man and other have nots and could have beens.

A great introduction to a manga legend that collects stories previously unavailable in English, Slum Wolf provides a genuinely upsetting read focused on the darker sides of Japanese society, with fittingly gritty art and storytelling.

48 Phoenix

Author(s): Osamu Tezuka

Release: 1954

Length: 12 volumes

Viewed as an unfinished masterpiece from Tezuka's later period delving into the alternative scene, Phoenix is comprised of twelve volumes each focusing on a different era and self-contained story, all linked by the titular mythical bird, a guardian of the universal life force. In volume 1 we begin in 270 AD with the ambitions of the Queen Himiko and are introduced with precise period detail to the foundational period of Japanese civilisation.

An essential read for both gekigan and Tezuka enthusiasts, Phoenix manages to tell compelling stories whilst asking questions about the nature of human existence.

49. Onwards Towards Our Noble Deaths

Author(s): Shigeru Mizuki

Release: 1973

Length: 1 volume

A critically acclaimed one shot from the legendary Shigeru Mizuki, Onwards Towards Our Noble Deaths chronicles the authors experiences serving in the New Guinea Campaign during World War 2, the title named after the events of the final weeks of his infantry service, where the soldiers were instructed to die for their nation to avoid the honour of survival.

Praised for its depiction of normal men trapped in a horrible situation, death staring them down from all directions, certain execution awaiting them if they return alive. A great introduction not only to Mizuki's work but his and his fellow soldiers experiences serving their country during the second World War, Onwards Towards Our Noble Deaths stands as a emotionally charged example of the gekigan genre.

50. Good-Bye

Author(s): Yoshihiro Tatsumi

Release: 2008 (stories from 1971-1972)

Length: 1 volume

A collection of short stories and an Eisner award winning example of the medium, Yoshihiro Tatsumi's master work weaves a tapestry of emotional and tragic stories, culminating in the titular tale "good-bye", which follows the Japanese prostitute Mariko as she serves American forces during the chaos of the second World War.

Described by critics as both dark and disturbing but worth the admission, good-byes utilitarian art lending to its uncompromisingly poignant and political portrayals of human life. A great introduction not only to Tatsumi and Gekigan but a testament to manga as an art form all its own.

Compiled by Finlay Miles



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