# Chapter 1

# Welcome to Manga World

### In This Chapter

- Discovering the origins and history of manga
- Exploring the different types of manga
- Evaluating the differences between American comics and Japanese manga

Welcome to the wonderful world of manga. From its humble beginnings after World War II, manga has grown to become an international phenomenon in the entertainment industry. Prestigious Japanese publishing houses (including the top three: Kodansha, Shueisha, and Shogakukan) release hundreds of titles translated into a multitude of foreign languages worldwide to promote the multi-billion-dollar industry.

Whether you're new to manga or a professional artist looking to try something different, this book is a great place to get your feet wet. Throughout this book, I take you step by step through exercises in drawing all sorts of characters, backgrounds, and useful special effects. I also give tips and pointers, most of which are based on my own experience. Although I recommend that beginners go through this book in sequential order, I designed the subject matter to be flexible so that you can navigate freely from chapter to chapter, depending on your interest.

In this chapter, I explore the history of manga, the various popular manga genres, and what makes manga so successful.



## Tracing the Rise of Manga's Popularity

Humorous and satirical illustrations trace back to 12th century Japan. Although now understood to mean "comics originating from Japan," *manga* (pronounced MAHN-gah or MANG-ah) is literally translated as "whimsical pictorial." Katsushika Hokusai, a wood engraver and painter who lived from 1760 to 1849, coined the phrase in *Hokusai Manga,* one of his many publications. In a 15-volume series of sketches published in 1814, he covered various topics ranging from the informative to the comical aspects of the Edo period.

Despite the rapid growth and prosperity displayed in today's manga world, in truth, manga didn't see significant growth until World War II. Under the influence of the great manga artist Tezuka Osamu (1928–1989), manga began to gain not only national but also international recognition with works such as Astro Boy, Black Jack, Buddha, and many more. In the midst of a post-war economic struggle, Tezuka's manga adaptation of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* sold 400,000 copies to become the nation's top-seller.

During the 1960s, the generation that enjoyed reading manga as children grew up and brought their manga books and interests with them. People no longer viewed manga as something to be enjoyed only by children — it was now acceptable for adults too. American comics at the time primarily had a huge audience of young boys idolizing superheroes whose sole mission was to defeat crime, but the Japanese community developed its own audience of both male and female groups, ranging from children to adults.

From 1980 to 2000, manga saw not only an evolvement of genre and style, but also the introduction of sophisticated techniques specifically geared toward enhancing its looks and effects. Techniques like *screen tones* (a series of adhesive, stylized, design patterns used to suggest color) gave new sleek looks to the finished pages. Story lines became more complex and widespread to include more audience interests, such as science fiction (mostly for males), sports, politics, religion, sex, and romance (pulling in more female readers and artists). Thanks to professional computer graphics software, such as Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator, manga artists (referred to as *manga-ka*) throughout Japan can put in more detail and all sorts of cool effects in less time. Along with the growing market appeal, scores of new artists are coming up with original ideas of their own in hopes of making it big in Japan and worldwide. At the same time, the number of talented female artists has skyrocketed; many of these artists are housewives who saw the opportunity of launching their manga career in drawing manga catering to female readers. This manga is now referred to as shōjo (young girl) manga.

Today, many successful artists, such as Fujiko Fujio *(Doraemon),* Matsumoto Leiji *(Starblazers),* Toriyama Akira *(Dragon Ball),* Rumiko Takahashi *(Ranma ½),* Takehiko Inoue *(Slam Dunk),* and Masashi Kishimoto *(Naruto),* have followed in the footsteps of Tezuka to contribute to the lucrative and popular entertainment industry.

## All Manga Is Not Created Equal: Looking At the Different Genres

Just *how* diverse is the manga world? Any major publisher has at least three types of manga magazines catering to different groups of people. Following is a list of the recognized types of manga being published in Japan:

- **Kodomo Manga:** Comics for little kids
- **Shōnen Manga:** Comics for teenage boys
- **Shōjo Manga:** Comics for teenage girls
- **Seinen Manga:** Comics for young adult males
- **Redisu Manga:** Comics for young adult females
- **Shōjo-ai Manga:** Romantic comics for teenage girls
- **Shōjo-ai Yuri Manga:** Romantic comics for lesbians
- **Shōnen-ai Manga:** Romantic comics for men
- **Shōnen-yaoi Manga:** Romantic comics for homosexual men
- **Seijin Manga:** Comics for adult males
- **Redikomi Manga:** Comics written by women for late teen to adult women, depicting more realistic, everyday accounts; literal translation: lady's comics
- **Dōjinshi Manga:** Comics written and illustrated by amateurs (usually circulated among a close group of other manga amateurs)
- **Yonkoma Manga:** Four-panel comics, usually published in newspapers
- **Gekiga Manga:** Comics focusing on serious topics; geared toward mature audiences
- **Ecchi Manga:** Comics focusing on heterosexual/lesbian erotic themes (softcore pornography) read by men
- **Hentai Manga:** Comics focusing on hardcore pornography

For those of you who are already seasoned manga fans, some of these genres may be unfamiliar to you because publishers have a tendency to simplify everything into either the boy (shōnen) manga or girl (shōjo) manga category, regardless of the specific subcontents. With the exception of the yonkoma, redisu, and redikomi manga genres, most of the genres are available in the United States. For the purpose of this book, I base my example characters mostly on the shōnen and shōjo manga genres.

This long list testifies to the immense and diverse popularity, interests, and tastes of Japanese manga readers. As time progresses, no doubt the genre will shift to include other topics.

Looking over this list, you may notice the number of comics that are geared toward the female audience. A large number of girls read comics in Japan, and a large number of publishers specialize in comics geared toward women readers only. (In comparison, the number of females who casually read American comics is, to say the least, small.)

# The Key Components of Manga

You find several key components in most popular manga. For example, weekly magazines are restricted to 16 pages. These titles are designed to quickly satisfy the reader's short attention span, because many readers are busy commuters who don't have time to sit down for hours to read through a long book. Those magazines are eventually compiled into books that can be collected as a multivolume series. Not all magazines have those crazy weekly deadlines. Some magazines release their titles on a biweekly or monthly schedule.

Most mainstream manga features certain archetypes. For example, you'll see the main lead character (who is often androgynous), a sidekick, a single attractive female character (who is either a lover or nurturer), and a wise old man (depending on whether the manga is action oriented). The villains usually have the charmingly evil leader accompanied by his strong henchman.

# Manga versus American Comics

When you pick up and open a manga book for the first time, you're no doubt confused. "Wait a minute," you say, "I'm looking at the end of this book?" Exactly. In Japan, you open and read manga (as well as all books in the country) from right to left and back to front. Reversed reading isn't the only difference between manga and American comics, though. In Table 1-1, I list some additional differences between the two.

**Table 1-1 First-Glance Differences between Manga and American Comics**

| *Manga* | *American Comics* |
|---|---|
| Most manga is printed in black and white (occasionally the first several pages are in color, depending on the success of the title). | Most comics are printed in full color. Comic book retailers often fail to receive black-and-white titles well. |
| All weekly manga magazines and compiled titles are printed on economical recycled paper. | More and more printers are now using recycled paper. However, until the recent past, elaborate variant issues used high-cost paper for covers and interiors (which attracted retailers and collectors). |

| *Manga* | *American Comics* |
|---|---|
| Manga is first published in thick weekly or monthly magazines before finally being compiled into a single series of issues. | American publishers publish titles as stand-alone issues. Depending on the sales, the publisher may opt to compile the single issues to form a "graphic novel." |
| Most competitive publishers release manga magazines on a weekly basis — deadlines are never, never, *neeeeeeever* missed. Publishers would never want to upset their 1 million plus regular weekly readers. | American publishers try to release titles on a monthly basis. Occasionally, some titles miss deadlines, upsetting retailers and readers who must order them through distribution catalogues. Best titles average 40,000 to 50,000 copies in monthly sales. |
| Manga and manga magazines can be bought at newsstands, bookstores, candy shops, gift shops, train stations, and almost anywhere else. If you miss out on those weekly issues, the compiled series (usually 180 pages) appears on your local bookstore shelf, and you can easily order it if you don't see it. | If you want to find your favorite title selection and it isn't a superhero title, you have to visit your "local" comic book store where they *might* have it. If they don't, good luck getting the store to re-order the issue listed in last month's distribution catalogue. Time to test your luck on eBay. |

Besides these at-a-glance differences (like physical look and accessibility), do these two forms of comics have other *big* differences? You may be thinking, comics are comics, right? Not really. Both forms share a sequential format and have a story to tell. However, if you examine not only the national but also the international impact, you definitely find differences.

In the following sections, I compare American comics' and manga's demography and distribution.

## Broader readership than American comics

Popular mainstream American comics have traditionally been geared toward children (mostly teenage boys) and collectors. Mention you're a comic book artist at any social gathering and you're guaranteed to get a weird look (especially from the women) that says, "Excuse me, how *old* are you?" Chances are good that the general public doesn't take your job seriously. Although the genre has expanded (thanks to the independent and manga publishers), comics in America are still dominated by Marvel, DC, and Image Comics,

which still rely upon their superhero titles to survive. At major comic book conventions, these top three publishers usually take center stage among the smaller independent publishers. Smaller publishers put up a good fight to present the readers with their own original, independent titles, but many of them usually last no longer than a few seasons due to either poor management or the harsh market.

In contrast, manga has a wider genre and audience. Being a comic book artist, or *manga-ka,* in Japan is no laughing matter! If you ever visit Japan, you see manga pretty much everywhere you go. For example, if you're riding the subway to work, you commonly see a lot of people (a diverse range in age, sex, and occupation) engrossed in reading their favorite title in the latest manga magazine. From waiting rooms at doctors' offices to small cafés, you're guaranteed to see a stack of these manga magazines. Picture a high school student on his way to school reading the latest *Shōnen Jump* while a businessman next to him in his 40s is totally engrossed in the latest *Business Jump* magazine.

## Availability differences

As I mention in Table 1-1, major differences between American comics and manga are the distribution and availability. Currently, you can find American comics mostly in comic book stores. Depending on where you live, you may have to drive miles and miles before finally getting to your "local" comic book store to buy your favorite book. Then, depending on how large that store is, the selection or choices you see may be very disappointingly limited. Sure, you may see comic titles in the form of graphic novels at major bookstores, but they usually consist of mainstream superhero comics. The space they occupy may be only a shelf or two.

In contrast, the Japanese market for manga grosses a whopping $4.7 billion a year. For those of you manga fans thinking that the manga market is huge in America, it amounts only to a $100 million industry. While manga artists and their teams of skilled assistants (ranging from 5 to 15 artists per title) constantly struggle to meet weekly deadlines, the publishers are using their much larger budgets to promote to a large, diverse audience. Unlike American comics, you rarely see manga published in book format without first being serialized in chapters or segments in weekly or monthly manga magazines. Among the many magazines, some claim 1 million readers *per week.*

But that's not the end. After a certain number of publications, the works of manga artists are compiled and sold at bookstores nationwide. Seeing up to ⅓ of any bookstore's sections devoted to manga titles isn't unusual (compared to maybe a shelf or two in bookstores in the United States). In addition, larger distributors, such as Broccoli International, have contributed to the increased sales of manga and *animé* (Japanese animation) products in the United States.

## The guts and glory: Differences in workload and credit for artists

Many comic book artists and manga-ka go into the market for the love of the sequential art rather than for the money. However, the two have different processes by which they execute their work, and they're glorified in different ways.

If you work for either Marvel or DC Comics, chances are you're under a "work for hire" clause. This clause basically means that you don't own the rights to the artwork, characters, or story. Depending on the terms of your contract, you may own the actual artwork itself (which is why you see artists at conventions displaying the original pages for sale), but you technically don't have permission to reproduce the work or claim the characters you draw as your own creation. After you're paid a page rate depending upon your specialization, the publisher owes you nothing more. Many freelance illustrators (myself included) cringe at the thought of losing the rights to the work they spend so many hours to complete. But these jobs give artists better chances to get additional work from other publishers. Here I list some of the main specialized jobs that complete a comic book in America:

- **Penciler:** This artist lays down the frames and images based upon the script he receives from the writer. Usually, the penciler gets paid the most because his responsibility takes the most time and usually dictates the overall look of the book.
- **Writer:** The writer is responsible for writing the story of the comic book. She makes sure that the story not only flows well from page to page (without cramming too many frames into one page), but also ends within 22 pages, which is the usual comic book page count. Many successful comic book writers have gone on to write their own novels.
- **Inker:** The inker goes over the pencils and enhances or "interprets" the quality of the line work before sending the illustrations to the colorist. Traditionally, pencil drawings were more difficult to reproduce, so the inkers were in charge of making sure that the lines were clear. However, thanks to rapid scanners being pumped out at increasingly more affordable prices, more and more comic book projects are foregoing the inking process and moving straight to color.
- **Colorist:** Traditionally, colorists colored the pages by hand. However, again, thanks to powerful technology, colorists all (and I do mean *all*) use graphics software such as Photoshop and Painter to pump out pages at a faster pace while inventing new special effects.
- **Letterer:** In the past, lettering was a craft that required the special skill of making sure that words were legible and easy to read. The process took care but also cost time and money. Thanks to computers, almost all comic book lettering is now done digitally. Only a few titles still use a specialist to handle such a task.

In the manga world, a manga-ka is expected to do the creating, writing, penciling, and inking (even though he relies on his assistants to help him make the tight deadlines). Coloring isn't a huge factor in the equation because most manga is published in black and white. Although an increasing number of artists work with writers (especially with publishers with monthly or bimonthly deadlines), most published manga stories are each created and illustrated by one person. The publisher types in the lettering inside of the balloons (with the exception of editorial yonkoma manga, which is hand-lettered by the artist to match the simplicity of the art style).

Although the publisher retains the rights to publish the work exclusively, the manga-ka retains the rights to the creation and also receives royalties and overseas exposure. As I mention earlier in this chapter, the publishers also compile the artist's work after a number of magazine appearances. The compilation is in graphic novel form and distributed nationwide. In the end, the manga-ka is forever credited exclusively with his work, as opposed to the American comic book artist who may draw a Marvel comic book character for her entire career, but never get an iota of credit for its design or creation.

## "Making It" in the Manga World

So how does a Japanese aspiring artist "make it" in the professional manga industry? Typically, an artist starts as an apprentice to a manga professional (referred to as teacher, or *sensei*). After honing his craft under the sensei's wings, the fledgling builds his own works and submits them to the sensei's publisher.

Most manga-ka (such as Rumiko Takahashi) who made it were assistants at some point in their career. Interestingly enough, you can actually tell who studied under a specific manga-ka by the similarity in style.

Becoming an apprentice isn't the only way of getting into the business in Japan. Some aspiring artists use the direct approach of bringing in and dropping off their work to the publisher — an approach known as *genkō mochikomi*. Artists can also submit their works to a competition sponsored by publishers and judged by a selected group of famous manga-ka. These competitions tend to be more competitive, because judges must choose a winner out of the thousands of works submitted. This competition's winner, however, shines above others as the "chosen one" and receives more publicity.

In Chapter 21, I talk about different methods of shopping your portfolio, exposing your work to the public at conventions, and establishing a working network with professional artists. Entering competitions and working with other artists are great ways of opening up opportunities and breaking in, but they don't substitute for the importance of networking at professional gatherings.