

Heath's head on any given day must be a very interesting place indeed. His best ideas, he says, are those which come to him spontaneously. He then goes back and re-edits them. Interestingly, he describes his editor as a very important part of his writing process. 'I see the editor as a lot like a hairdresser. It's your job to grow your hair and style it daily but without your hairdresser, it is straggly and out of control.'

After such an amazing start to his writing career, one might ask 'Where to next?' It turns out there is a major American publisher interested in releasing the Agent Six books. This would elevate Jack Heath on to the world stage. If that proved successful, we could well see several more books in this series.

Jack talks about how gratified he is when he finds out about a young reader who doesn't like reading, but for whom the Agent Six books were the key. He expresses immense gratitude to the teachers, parents and librarians who put his books into the hands of these people.

He is currently working on a book not set in the world of Agent Six of Hearts. 'Agent Six does all sorts of exiting things, like breaking into top secret facilities but does so

from a high moral stand point. I'm interested in a character, by the name of Ashley Arthur, who does all that stuff but in the modern world. She's a thief. I'm interested in what would bring a person to that point. For Agent Six, there is a moral imperative, for Ashley, there would be a different reason. Not evil, but different.'

Jack explains he has 7 or 8 books ideas he would like to see develop. At least three of these do not have young adult protagonists. 'I would like to make the jump to adult fiction.'

There is a real sense of honour about Jack when he talks about being on the shelves in the company of writers he admires. He reels off the names and books of several prolific and well-respected authors who have written in numerous genres. It becomes obvious he is an avid reader of a wide variety of literature and is firmly ensconced in that world. Eventually, he would like to put a book in each section of the bookshop himself. 'By the time I'm done, I want to have written 100 good books.'

If Jack Heath continues to develop and mature as a writer he may well do that. It will be very interesting to watch and read what he produces, if he does.

## A Guide to **Manga & Anime** for those who want to know what all the fuss is about

David Murphy

Manga and Anime have bloomed in western culture in the last decade, much to the dismay of many parents, teachers and librarians. *Pokemon*, *Yu-Gi-Oh*, *Cowboy Bebop*, *Appleseed*, *The Guyver*, *One Piece*... what does it all mean, where did it come from and why do the kids go ga-ga over it? The simple answer is because it is an easily accessible, rich story telling technique that covers a broad range of genres.

**A Brief History** - Manga is a Japanese story telling form, which is translated as 'whimsical pictures'. Some of the first stories to emerge in Japan, which were referred to as Manga, were woodblock printings in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The Japanese art form, however, is much older. The story lines were often simple and reflected on life in Japanese society. As printing techniques became more common and increasingly sophisticated in Japan, so did the Manga style stories.

By the 1930s there was a blossoming of these Manga in Japan. Walt Disney studios were introducing their comics and cartoons to the world and Japan took notice. The simple line art and stories of Disney integrated well with the existing Manga style and so began to influence them. Several European illustrators also went to Japan to work in the industry. Unlike Western comic books the Japanese were interested in stories for adults and children alike.

Post World War II saw a large influx of American servicemen and businessmen into Japan. With them came large

amounts of American 'Comic Books'. One well-known Japanese expert on Manga, Kosei Ono, attributes much of his early understanding of English to reading comics given to him by American GI's.

The influx of American Comics influenced the way Manga looked. Many of the stories developed the simpler tone and more cinematic look of the Western comic. The big eyes and 'cutesy' look were very popular. Japanese illustrators began to draw their characters with simple and highly expressive facial features. Descriptive text was nearly non-existent in the frames and the drawings carried much of the characterisation. Again, Manga in this phase was as popular with the adults as with the children. There were many titles produced which ranged from teenage love stories, to action adventures, to adult dramas.

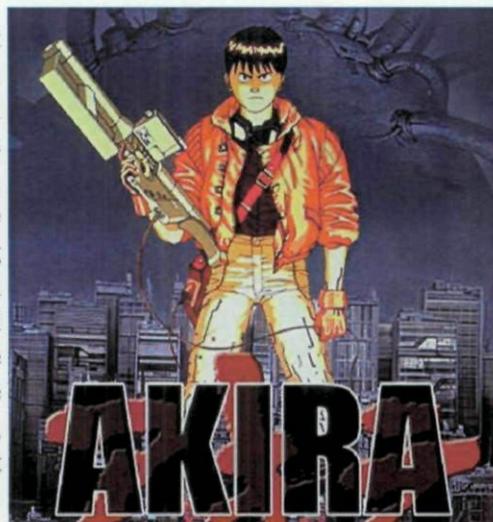
**Anime** - Since then Manga also began to merge with the new technology of film and television. One of the most



popular of these early television Manga was *Astro Boy*. It started as a Manga in 1951 about a robot with amazing powers who flew around doing good deeds. It was turned into a black & white animation and was broadcast on Japanese television in the early 1960s. This Japanese Pinocchio became an instant hit. So much so, they began to export him to America and Europe. This style of animated Manga saw a number of other very popular series developed and broadcast on Japanese and Western television. The term animation was later shortened to Anime.

Like Manga, the Anime genre was not limited to cartoons for children. Indeed, it is probably as inappropriate to refer to it as a genre as it would be to refer to the term 'novel' as a genre. It is a medium that covers a huge range of topics and styles. As a general rule, however, Anime stuck to many of the conventions developed by Manga. One of the reasons Manga translated so easily to Anime was the cinematic nature of Manga. Each strip was, in essence, a storyboard.

Anime and Manga continued to develop into mainstream markets in Japan but remained firmly alternative in the west. This began to change in the late 1980s. One of the main vehicles of change was a story by the name of Akira. This was an extremely popular Manga about a group of disaffected youth in NeoTokyo. This post apocalyptic vision of the future employed themes borrowed from Cyber punk, the Old Testament and the Shinto religion. This appealed directly to the Japanese youth of the 1980s. It was so popular it was turned into a full-length Anime using state of the art animation techniques. Whilst Manga was popular in English speaking graphic novel markets, after translation, it was Anime that exploded into the alternative scene in England, America and Australia. Subsequently, the question started to be asked in video stores in the English-speaking world, 'I've seen Akira. It's great! What else have you got?' Seeing the writing on the wall, mainstream importers and broadcasters began to look for other Anime that might appeal to a broader western market.



Some of the more popular Japanese Anime were easy enough to translate and launch into the Western market. Many of the movies by Studio Ghibli were immediate hits when released in the West. Movies like *My Neighbour Totoro*, *Kiki's Delivery Service*, *Princess Mononoke*, *Spirited Away* and *Howl's Moving Castle*. The studio's founder and driving force, Hayao Miyazaki, is often described as the Walt Disney of the east. Many of his movies have won awards in Japan, Europe

and America. What is interesting about studio Ghibli is that it is willing to draw its inspiration from Manga and Western literature alike. *Howl's Moving Castle*, is of course based on the Diana Wynne Jones book of the same name. They have recently released a movie called *Tales From Earthsea* which is based on the *Earthsea Trilogy* by Ursula Le Guin.



Typical of the Anime and Manga phenomenon, many of the characters and stories could not be contained by those two mediums. With the advent of computer games, and hand held gaming systems came an opportunity to cross-pollinate.



There now exist many computer games that started life as an Anime or Manga and vice-versa. The names of many of these are now part of mainstream language. *Pokemon* and *Yu-Gi-Oh* are very popular computer games as well as being a best selling Manga and high rating Anime series on Saturday morning cartoons. Not content with these mediums, they have also launched trading card games, action figures and plush toys.

So, what is Manga and Anime? It is a medium. It is a literary style. It is a fashion. It is a cultural force. It is not something that is going to go away but is more than likely to become ever more popular. The internet will, in all likelihood, increase the rate of cross pollination which has been going on now for 80 years. What comes next? Who knows? It will be interesting to find out.

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