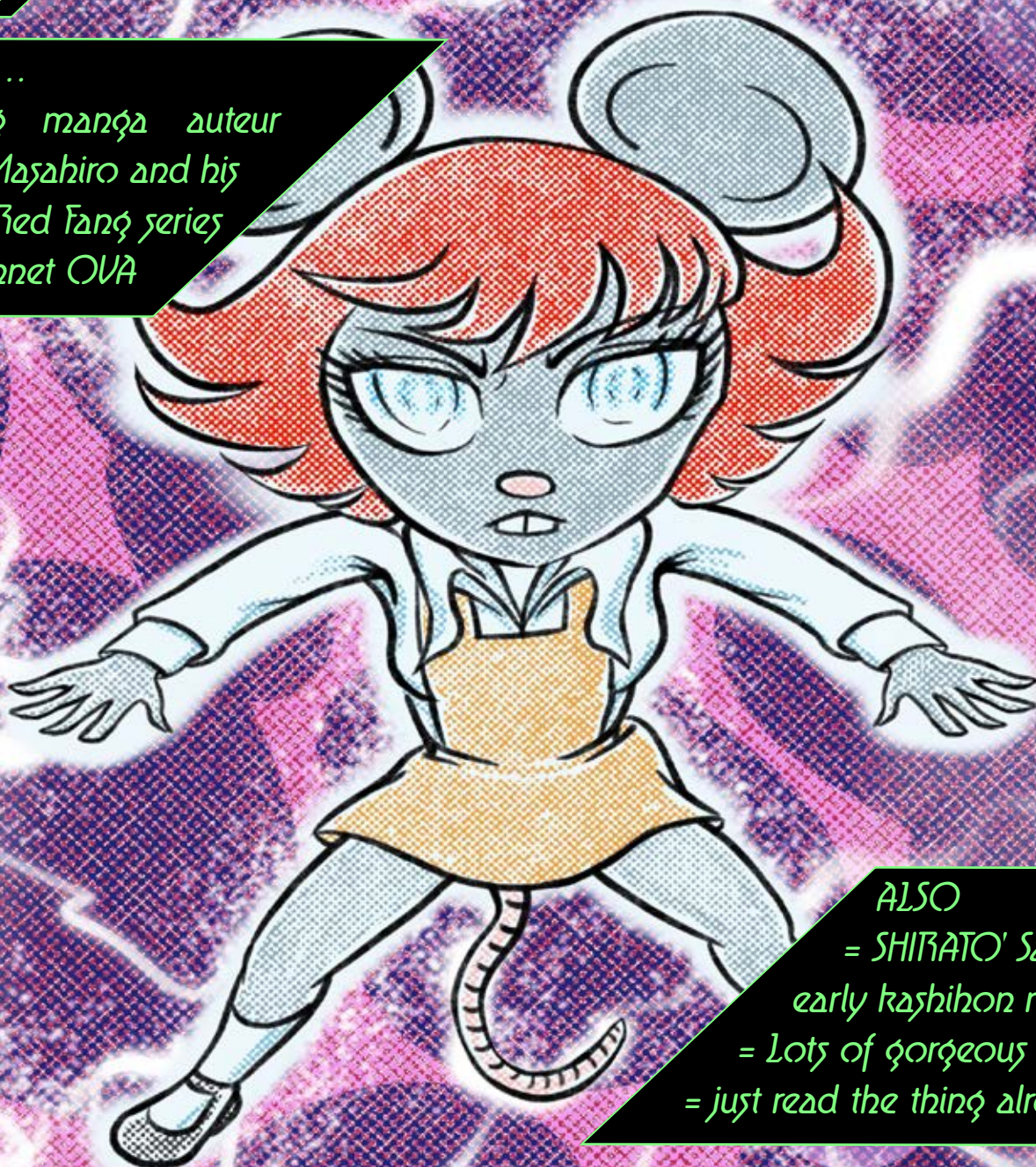


MANGAVERSE 5.1

02-2021

IN THIS ISH...

= Unsung manga auteur
SHIBATA Masahiro and his
majestic Red Fang series
= Blue Sonnet OVA



ALSO
= SHIBATA' Sanpei's
early kashihon manga 2
= Lots of gorgeous ART
= just read the thing already!

MANGAVERSE 5.1

02-2021



Cyborg Fists by Yushi Tabara

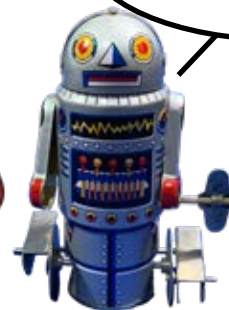
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ARACHNO-MAN
IS HERE!



GORGO
PREFER ORIGINAL,
KUMO-OTOKO* FROM
1948



Editor: Patrick Ijima-Washburn
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*LIT. SPIDER-MAN

WELCOME BACK to the VERSE!

Greetings, fellow travelers!

I hope that this new ish finds you well. I'm trying out InDesign for layout and we will see if it doesn't suck. If it does suck, it's probably not the software, but the idiot using it who is sucky.

In this ish you will find some insight into Japanese comics that you likely won't find anywhere else. Overviews of somewhat-forgotten, but still well-loved manga including the conclusion to the overview of **Shirato Sanpei's** early rental comic works and a new look into mostly unknown but groundbreaking in his own right creator **Shibata Masahiro**.

Jim Reddy is back with more fan reminisces, this time about otaku mecca, **Akihabara**. If you've been to Tokyo, you've probably stopped by Aki or Akiba as it is often called. Jim was a regular visitor and whenever I went to this part of town, I always asked him about where was what and what was where. We also have guest contributor **Dave Merrill**, an old friend of Jim's and mine and the most knowledgeable guy I know about forgotten anime, and he'll be telling us about the **Blue Sonnet** OVA (original video animation) based on the aforementioned Shibata's psychic girl series, **Akai Kiba** (Red Fang).

Editorial

So what's with all the retro, Pietro?

So you've picked up a brand-spanking new zine on manga and are excited to learn about the latest in the Japanese comics world only to discover lots of space spent on stuff that was forgotten before you were born.

What's the deal, Emma Peal? you probably ask yourself, but in a much less referential way. The deal is that modern manga has become very accessible with English (and other) translations and wiki entries popping up almost immediately after release here in Japan. After my move to Kumamoto from Tokyo, I've started to take a much deeper look at the cultural artifacts that will likely never get much exposure either overseas or in Japan. The truth is that, as much as I can and do enjoy newer stuff (hell, I did my last research paper on two of the most popular *shonen* manga that both ended in 2020), I think that a look back to really great, but now much less known works is a worthwhile endeavor.

But, what's the scoop, Alley Oop? and why didn't you say Betty Boop? The good news is that I probably won't be doing as deep a dive as I've done this and the last issue and I'll be writing more reviews on newer stuff that people are talking about lately. In fact, I've just started watching

We've got tons more art this ish with a bunch of young artists. **Yushi** from the 'hood and **Hina, Mizuki**, and **Ueda** from Yatsushiro. Any feedback on the art will be shared with the creators, so feel free to share your thoughts!

I'm still feeling out the format of this new iteration of the **Mangaverse** zine, but it looks like bi-monthly is a pretty realistic schedule for the time being. From April, I'll be teaching at 4 universities, 1 high school, and also handling a slew of online lessons – the business I've been in a tanuki's age – but my resolution is to put out at least 6 ishes this year. My other resolution, to not buy drinks in plastic bottles, is going well, so fingers are crossed and confidence is fair to middlin'.

So, I know that most people are happy to just enjoy a zine without getting in touch and letting creators know that their hard work is being enjoyed, but I plan on reaching out to more zines and telling them what an awesome job they are doing. If you do reach out to us or share about what we're doing here, we'll be very grateful, so just give it a think.

See you around the zine!

–Patrick Ijima-Washburn
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and reading several new series including **Jujutsu Kaisen** which has 14 volumes out in Japanese (so not that new) and 8 vols out in English. 'Nuff said, Drop Dead Fred?



Gamera by patokon

Wolf-girl vs. Psychic Cyborg in Shibata Masahiro's Red Fang



Covers of the Deluxe Red Fang series compilation

Komatsuzaki Ran is a typical high schooler except for the fact that when there's danger, her psychic powers inherited from an ancient, evil superpowered race transform her into a telekinetic dynamo (or ESPer in many Japanese manga/anime). Did I mention that she was raised by wolves?

SHIBATA Masahiro is a mangaka who has worked in both girls and boys comics, has produced zines, and worked on sexy games. Shibata, born in 1949, debuted with "Ocean Where White Roses Fall" in *Margaret Supplement* (*Bessatsu Margaret* or *BetsuMa* for short) in 1973. He was good friends with the late WADA Shinji, the creator of hit

a series called *Akai Kiba* (Red Fang) *part 7: Blue Sonnet* and the skill of the artist as well as the subject matter made me extremely curious.

I wondered to myself who or what Red Fang was and so I went to wikipedia for answers. I found that the Japanese entry contained a serviceable summary of each storyline, but I only had to read the first line about the first story to make a decision whether or not I would try to track the comics down. I saw that Red Fang Part 1 was called *Red Fang: Wolf-girl Ran* and that was all it took. Once I saw the word 'wolf-girl', whether Ran was a wolf, a werewolf, or whatever, I knew that I had to read this series.

Before finding the collected series or the individual books at used comic stores in Tokyo and Kumamoto, I bought the digital versions on Amazon Japan. (I currently have four versions of the first story and there are still two more out there that I don't have.) I was immediately pleased to learn from Part 1 that Ran was indeed raised by wolves and 'being raised by animals' is one of my favorite tropes of all time. Let's get into some summaries with tons of SPOILERS – be warned, but know that we won't likely see this comic released in English unless some diehard fans do a crowdfunded translation.



Covers of Red Fang series including Blue Sonnet Saga

girl's comic *Sukeban Deka*, and assisted on some of Wada's comics. Though virtually unknown to younger readers, he had several long-running series of which *Red Fang: Blue Sonnet* was the longest. He is known for bringing his love of SF to girl's comics following in the footsteps of HAGIO Moto and TAKEMIYA Keiko who had been adapting SF works and creating their own as well. [ed. I plan to touch on both of these writers in future ishes]

I had never heard of Shibata or Red Fang (I actually prefer *Crimson Fang*, but Red Fang seems to be the official translation) until my old friend Cap'n Dave (David Merrill whose guest article follows this one) posted an intriguing image on twitter of a silver-haired cyborg named Blue Sonnet. It was the opening splash of the first chapter of

Red Fang Part I: Wolf-girl Ran (first published in *Bessatsu Margaret*, Aug. 1975)

Note; Parts I to IV are all one chapter long V and VI take up a whole book, VII is a 17-volume series, and VIII is another short chapter.

After being raised by wolves in the Canadian wilderness until she was 5, Ran was eventually discovered, brought back to Japan, and raised by scientist Dr. Komatsuzaki and was enjoying the typical schoolgirl life when a new teacher Yoriki Saeko joins the school. We learn this teacher's father along with Ran's adopted father, was instrumental in creating Ran from the DNA of an ancient race of superhumans and that he was planning on creating an army of such superhumans for a secret organization. After Dr. Komatsuzaki betrayed the organization and secreted Ran

away, he faked her death and tried raising her as a normal girl. Yoriki recognizes the name of her adopted father and blames him for her own father's suicide. Yoriki is no slouch herself on the scientific front. She has instilled intelligence in her dog, Pascal and uses him to control all the wild dogs in the area. Several people are killed including Ran's father, and the killings are eventually blamed on Ran. In a final showdown with Yoriki, Pascal (who speaks) refuses to attack Ran saying that he is tired of being Yoriki's slave. Yoriki then shoots him for the betrayal. Ran becomes so angry at the violence that she transforms. Her hair stands on end and turns red (pre-DragonBall *saiyan*?) and she is imbued with telekinetic ability and superhuman strength. We already know that she takes off from P.E. class because of her super-athleticism she got from being raised in the wild that she doesn't want anyone to know about. Now she's even more super-powered thanks to that ancient DNA which when activated turns her into Red Fang (which I don't think she is ever actually called in the series). Ran stops the bullets Yoriki shoots at her and then stops Yoriki from getting away by lifting her car with her bare hands and tossing it to the ground. Yoriki lands near the dying Pascal who bites her in the throat killing her. The story ends with Ran going away and fading into mystery...

Until Part II that is.

Red Fang Part II: Bird Day Afternoon (first published in *Bessatsu Margaret*, July 1977)

Most of the characters who will continue to be a part of Ran's story are introduced in this one chapter tale. Ran is living peacefully, working in the cafeteria of a high school and making friends. One of her friends (love interest) is an aspiring rock musician (and hottie) nicknamed Bird and another is the much younger boy, Wataru. Her peaceful days are shattered with the arrival of beautiful transfer student Hannah Muhren. Hannah has been sent by the evil organization bent on world domination (because what else would they be bent on? I mean if you're gonna be bent on something, world domination is probably the absolute best thing, no?) known as TALON.

Hannah uses ESP to manipulate Wataru to hurt Ran, but Wataru ends up heavily injuring and dying. Ran gives a blood transfusion to Wataru which saves him but also gives him ESP. As Wataru can't control his powers, he ends up killing some of his classmates. Hannah says that she will return the captured Wataru in exchange for Ran giving herself up to Talon. Bird "swoops" in and rescues Wataru before getting shot and killed. Ran transforms into the Red Fang exacting a terrible fiery vengeance killing Hannah and the Talon agents. Ran and Wataru escape.

Red Fang Part III: Goodbye, Snow Rabbit (first published in *Deluxe Margaret*, Winter 1978)

Ran and Wataru escape to Nagano Prefecture where they meet Ivan, another psychic, who is secretly dating Masako. Talon finds them there and manipulates the town people against Ran and Ivan. Ran agrees to give herself up to Talon in order for Ivan and Wataru to be free, but finds out that Talon intends to capture Wataru anyway and use him as a guinea pig to create an army of psychic soldiers. Ran can do nothing as she is wearing a helmet that keeps her from using psychic powers. Wataru uses his own psychic teleportation ability to save Ran and they escape along with Masako and Wataru until they are found by some villagers including Masako's dad. The villagers shoot at Ivan, but Masako throws herself in the way of the bullets. Ivan lifts Masako in his arms and teleports to who knows where, never to be seen again.

Ran's rage toward the townsfolk causes her to turn into the Red Fang and instead of exacting another fiery vengeance, she enters their minds and shows them how pure the love was that Ivan and Masako had for each other and punishes them by letting them live with their shame for destroying something so beautiful.



An original psychic girl by contributor Hina

*Photo of a Shibata sketchbook found on an auction site
Notice that Ran (R) is in her non-transformed state.*



Red Fang Part IV: TALON, the Hawk Dancing in the Darkness (first published in *Bessatsu Margaret*, March 1978)

In this story, Ran and Wataru run up against Minga the Living Ghost, a psychic that can control people's minds and looks like she's straight out of a Matsumoto Leiji anime. Minga is using the Talon cyborg RX-606 to get close to Ran. RX-606 is actually Bird brought back to life as a cyborg. We meet Sag, the Talon Esper division head, an imposing one-eyed megalomaniac. While in his capture, Ran tries to get Bird to remember his past and break his programming.

As Wataru and other kids captured by Talon try to escape, Ran and Bird rush to help them. Suddenly, Ran changes into Red Fang and attacks Bird. She's being controlled by Minga. Wataru (and friend) find Minga and distract her so she loses control of Ran. They try to escape the secret base, but it is actually a tanker in the middle of the ocean. Minga is about to make another attempt to control Ran when Bird appears from behind her. He says the ship is about to blow up and asks Ran to forget him. Then he grabs Minga and they apparently die from the fall from a great height. Ran, Wataru, and friends huddle together and Ran, as Red Fang, teleports them 300kms away to land. Ran laments the loss of Bird as the story ends.

From Part V on, Ran's story moved publishers, from Shueisha's Margaret to Hakusensha's Hana to Yume (Flowers and Dreams). Instead of running from Talon, Ran, backed up by novelist and investigative journalist Kiryu Jin, takes Talon head on.

Red Fang Part V: Concrete Panic (first published in *Hana to Yume* #1-2, 1981)

The Azumi Cement Factory, a front for Talon, is destroyed in an explosion at the same time a group of wolves led by a mysterious girl has been spotted. Hospitalized from this explosion is a girl wrapped completely in bandages who miraculously survived and who we guess is Ran. At the same hospital is Shigeru, a boy in a vegetative state. Novelist and journalist Kiryu Jin learns about a conspiracy by Azumi Cement's father-daughter owners from Shigeru's sister Keiko. The siblings had demonstrated against the Group's wanton destruction of the mountains in the Chichibu area, and in retaliation, Azumi and his daughter shot their parents and Shigeru in cold blood (sadistically enjoying it, I might add) with hunting rifles and leaving the parents dead and Shigeru in a coma.

Kiryu thinks that Ran, a girl he knows was raised by wolves, might be responsible for the attacks on the Azumi factories, but it is in fact Shigeru's consciousness merged with the wild dogs who had lost their homes due to deforestation by the Azumi Group. In his psychic projection, he has long hair and so was thought to be a girl.

Keiko is having trouble paying for hospital bills and is being asked if she wants to pull the plug, but Shigeru contacts her through telepathy and asks her for just two more weeks of life. Kiryu agrees to pay the hospital bills, but one of Talon's psychics, Asano, figures out that Shigeru is responsible for the attacks. Him and Ran have a few run-ins and we can see that he is a dangerous foe. After another attack by Shigeru and the wolves, Asano captures Keiko and Azumi's daughter tortures Keiko for the location of her brother's unconscious body. She dies refusing to talk and Shigeru uses his last hour of life (the machines keeping him alive have been turned off and they only have one hour of backup electricity) to try to face Azumi and daughter who are at the Galaxy Tower Building, a huge skyscraper that is the headquarters for Azumi. Shigeru is dying so the wolves fade away and we see that it was only one physical wolf (named Dai) that was the loci for Shigeru's consciousness and the wolves' spirits. He rushes in to confront the father and daughter and sees his sister's tortured body. He is ready to attack, but Asano is waiting for him and rips him apart with his PK power.

In her anger, Ran becomes Red Fang. Asano tries to rip her apart psychically, but she's got that ancient cursed blood coursing through her veins and uses her own powers to turn his attack back on him. Shigeru/Dai in a last burst of power makes an explosion that threatens to topple the building. Ran then uses every ounce of power she has to hold the building together long enough for everyone inside to evacuate. Except the Azumis, who Ran keeps inside

letting them know that their last moments will be lived in fear. She then teleports to safety. On the last page, Kiryu watches Ran disappear into the city and, knowing that if he writes about what happened that Ran will never have a moment's peace, he tells his editor that he's going to write about something else.

Ran is kind of like TV's Hulk where she appears, tries to help people in trouble, gets angry and becomes another version of herself with different colored hair. Well, except for the fact that people die, that Ran is often the one who is instrumental in the antagonists' death, and that the reporter character is on her side. Okay, it is not that much like TV's Hulk. Forget I said anything.

Red Fang Part VI: A Dove Melody (first published in *Hana to Yume* #4-5, 1981)

Ran is a librarian's assistant at Ohsui, a private school, and she is bad at it. We see in a flashback scene that she has been sent to spy on things at the school. It seems that the Azumi Group had invested a great deal of money into the rebuilding of the school and Kiryu and his cop friend need Ran to figure out what Talon might be up to. Also, Kiryu's friend, another investigative reporter, was murdered in what looked like a suicide when investigating the school. Meanwhile, there is a load of tension between the cheer squad (macho cheerleading, BTW), the student's association, and the Shinsengumi gang led by former captain of the cheer squad, Serizawa. The student association is led by Miyoshi and Fuwa and somehow they have whipped the whole student body into a frenzy of hate towards the gang.

The Haibara sisters are also involved in the drama with elder sister Machi not being appreciated by her dad and hanging out with the toughs in the cheer squad, and Naru, the younger, cuter adopted daughter, a friend of Ran and all around sweetheart except when caught in the thrall of Miyoshi's rhetoric. Miyoshi calls out Serizawa for a mano a mano confrontation, but Serizawa is instead met by the whole student body who overpower him and kill him. Naru comes home with blood on her uniform, but she doesn't remember what happened.

Ran looks into the new building and language lab and discovers that the system designed for developing those all important listening skills is being used to brainwash the kids by Shijo, the English teacher and Talon agent. She also learns that Miyoshi and Fuwa are "doves", young agents of Talon with enhanced psychic abilities planted throughout schools all over the world. Talon's Dove Project seems to be a huge part of their plan to take over the world. When Miyoshi and Fuwa kidnap Naru to lure Ran into a trap,

they are met by the police and the whole student body who now know what they are all about.

Shijo plays the song "Snow Falls" over a loudspeaker as she escapes from the scene by boat. This was a 'Dove Melody' that triggers instant death in dove agents Miyoshi and Fuwa. Failure is not an option when you work for Talon. Ran, in her anger, transforms into Red Fang and psychically causes Shijo's boat to explode.

Now comes the most well-known part of the Red Fang saga. So well-known that even Google Translate translates Akai Kiba (Red Fang) to Blue Sonnet. Sonnet is an intriguing character. Downtrodden and abandoned, she is a perfect target for Talon's rhetoric of organizing the world under Talon's control to bring "peace and justice to everyone". You know, the kind of peace that the Third Reich was all about.



Poster of Ran (top right) and Sonnet (bottom left) from *Hana to Yume* 7

Red Fang VII: Blue Sonnet (first published in *Hana to Yume* #11, 1981 continuing to #18, 1986)

Part One

Sonnet Verge is a beautiful girl in horrible circumstances. She's hated by her Puerto Rican mother, possibly because she looks like the Russian father that abandoned them. She's reviled by the kids in the neighborhood after one of the kids' father raped Sonnet and his body was found soon after squashed into a 3-inch space between two buildings. Her mother has forced her into prostitution and when our story starts Sonnet finds a customer waiting for her when she gets home. Afterwards, the customer starts to choke Sonnet, and tells her that her mother used the money that Sonnet made to pay for him to kill Sonnet thus leaving her mother free to leave the slums of East Harlem and her past in order to be with her new man. Something snaps in Sonnet and we know that psychic fury is about to be unleashed. The most memorable scene of Cronenberg's *Scanners* is then reenacted (head go boom) and Sonnet chases after her mom with all the hate directed at her, "witch" "demon-child" "creepy", echoing in her head. She sees her mom getting on a bus out of town. She screams, "Don't go!" and flips the bus. While in mid-air, the bus explodes and Sonnet sees her mother dead on the ground. While still in shock, she is ushered into a black Mercedes by Talon goons and they drive off. We see the Talon agent thinking about how Sonnet's psychic power rivals even their greatest target, Komatsuzaki Ran.

A year later, Ran is working at a donut shop in Tokyo when Kiryu comes to see her. He tells her that they found micro transmitters embedded in Miyoshi and Fuwa's brains (from Part 6) that Japan's best scientists are unable to discover the purpose of. It may be what enhanced their psychic abilities and was likely what enabled the triggering of their deaths. We learn that Talon's scientific knowledge is far beyond anything anyone else is doing, things like being able to create a human made from ancient DNA (Ran's father's research which they lost when he left and want desperately to get back by capturing Ran) and creating organic cybernetic bodies. Ran decides to try to learn how to control her "other self", the Red Fang, in order to join the fight against Talon.

Ran has other troubles such as having to continue to give Wataru blood transfusions of her special blood so that he won't die. Unfortunately, the transfusions are becoming necessary more and more often. On top of this, at 20 she has just started to menstruate. Her friends Haibara Naru and Kishima Daisuke from Ohsui High School visit her and ask her to come back. They know she's an ESPer and know what went down at their school and they've got her back. Ran says that she has to help out a friend (Kiryu) and

Kishima suddenly loses it and tells Ran, "That guy's scum! In order to win a literary prize, he "sold" his girlfriend to the judges and then abandoned her!" Kishima, it seems, might just be Kiryu's son and his mother the abandoned girlfriend. Finally, Naru tells Ran about their new exchange student from America, Sonnet (!!!). In a previous scene, we see Sonnet in her new cyborg body testing her cyborg and psychic powers on a biker gang. Kiryu learns from a witness that Sonnet has special powers and Ran realizes that Sonnet's only reason for coming to Ohsui is to eliminate anyone who knows about the Dove Project.

Sonnet is making a splash at school, good at both study and athletics. One day she falls unconscious while playing tennis. Her "creator" and keeper, Dr. Melekes (called behind his back Mars Head because of his big bald head and bug eyes) is alerted and helis in to take care of her. The school nurse walks in on him fixing some electronics on her spine and Melekes forces Sonnet to hypnotically induce her to jump off the roof. This is the first taste we get of Sonnet's ambivalence and Melekes recognizes it too thus reminding her of Talon's whole spiel about cracking a few eggs to save the Earth.

Ran and Kiryu head to ESP researcher Prof. Onagara's creepy mansion to help her control her psychic powers. Living with Onagara is assistant Kataoka and granddaughter Yumi that has predictive powers. After Ran's Red Fang is awakened and she has done considerable damage to the mansion, she finds that the real source of Yumi's powers is her "mother" Yuri (Yumi is actually adopted) who hides inside the house and who telepathically talks to Yumi. Yuri's is a tragic story. Her father (who used to work with Talon) used her as a guinea pig and developed her psychic powers to a point where she was unable to control them and couldn't shut out all the voices from the outside. She attacks her father in a rage, burning his face and seeing what her anger had done she tries to kill herself by putting her whole head in the fireplace thus burning her face beyond recognition. She can't see nor hear, but her psychic powers allow her surroundings both near and far.

Talon's forces, under Melekes' rival Tsunaga arrive at Onagara's in order to kidnap Ran who . Sonnet kills Onagara in self-defence when Onagara brandishes a shotgun by causing it to explode, but hesitates when asked to kill Yumi and the assistant. Tsunaga's goons step in and machine gun them to death and take Ran, who Sonnet has zapped unconscious before her powers could awaken, and Kiryu who they want for questioning. A mysterious man later enters the burning mansion to save Yuri. He is incredibly strong, a cyborg, and is able to rescue Yuri and bring out the injured bodies of Yumi and Kataoka. They weren't dead, you see. Sonnet had stopped the bullets from

penetrating more than just under the skin. Who is this mysterious bike-riding rebel dude? Why it's Bird brought back from the dead and turned into Cyborg RX-606!

The second half of Part One is Bird, Wataru, and Yuri attempting to rescue Ran from Talon's laboratory where they plan to use Ran's eggs, now that she's ovulating, to make an army of psychic cyborgs. Here we have a no-holds-barred Blue Sonnet versus Red Fang match-up except, Ran herself is unconscious while a huge psychic energy being fights in her place. Sonnet's power seems to grow in intensity based on the power of what she's facing so it ends up being a pretty even match. Yuri reaches Ran's consciousness and gets her to fight for control of the Red Fang. In her mind we see the ancient race of beings overjoyed at the opportunity to destroy the human race, and trying to convince her to join them, but is stopped by a psychic projection (or memory) of Bird.

In the aftermath, the whole lab is swallowed up in an earthquake and Bird leaves Wataru and Yuri to take care of

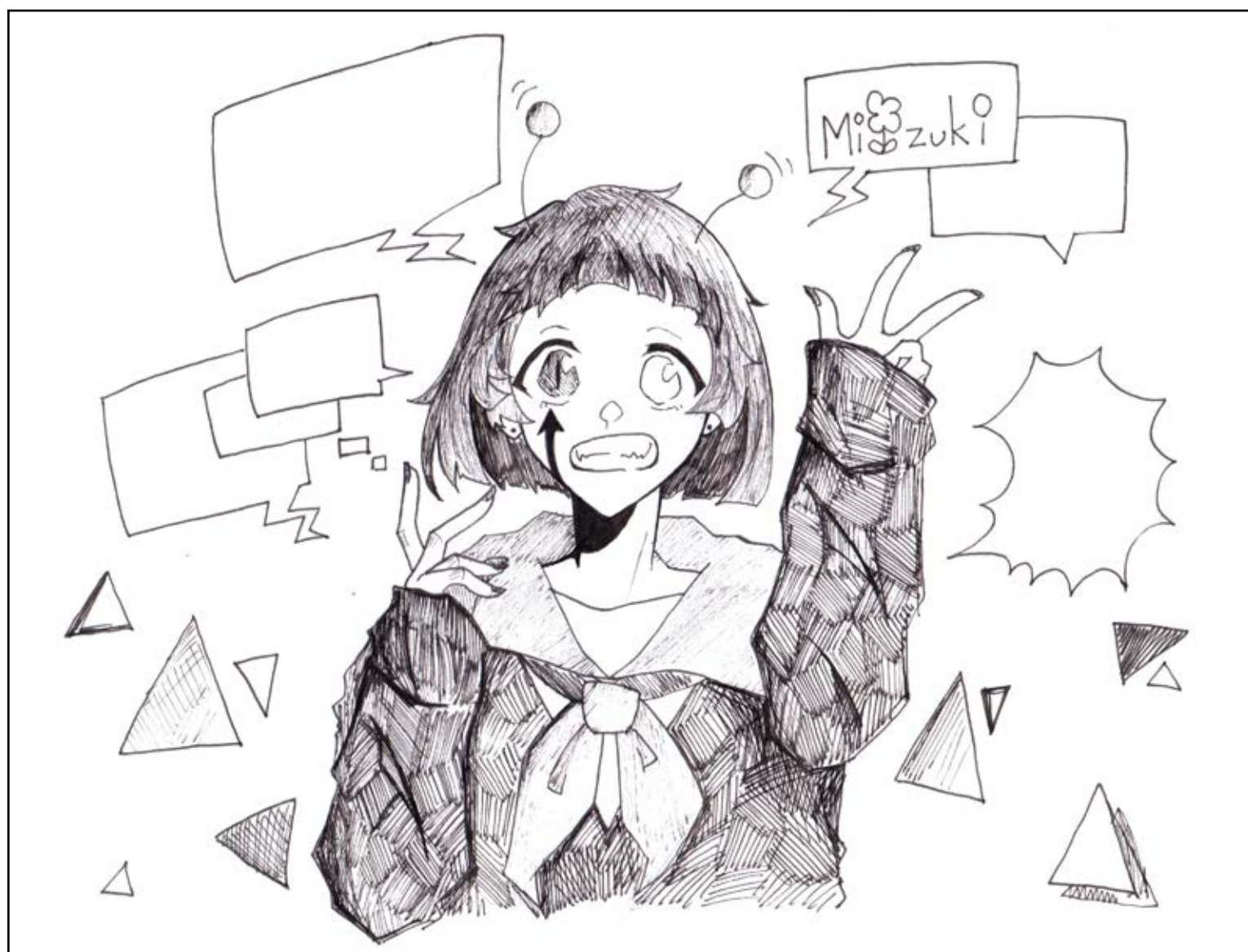
Ran and Kiryu while he jumps in a closing fissure to save the falling Sonnet. Bird and Sonnet, though ideological enemies, help each other escape from underground. Bird tries to convince her to leave Talon, but she tells herself that she has to do what she can to save the planet and that Talon's way is the best way. We know that she's not 100% convinced, but she has a ways to go. Ran awakes and happily learns that Bird is alive and well.

Thus ends Part One. The more I read the Red Fang saga, the more a fan I become. I now have several printings of the story as well as prints from two art collections hanging on my wall. I still have more to read and so my summary will continue next ish! Please stay tuned to Mangaverse for more on this fascinating, yet mostly unknown series.

—PIW

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Meanwhile, up next is Cap'n Dave's overview of the Blue Sonnet OVA.



Mizuki the Alien Psychic Girl by Mizuki

Red Fang: Blue Sonnet OVA

When the five part *Crimson Fang Blue Sonnet* original video series was released in 1989, American anime fans immediately thought of one thing - the margarine brand "Blue Bonnet." But even without any knowledge of Masahiro Shibata's original *Crimson Fang* manga, fans in the US immediately grasped familiar story beats, which include an evil organization bent on world conquest, innocent youngsters turned into fighting cyborgs, latent ESP powers awakened by stress or disaster, and the old standby, a Japanese high school where students secretly have amazing powers. *Blue Sonnet's* story was digestible even without English translation. The terrific theme song by GO! helped seal the deal, and even if the anime doesn't quite live up to the promise of the OP, we felt it was worth at least a watch in 1989, and still do today.

attacks, and will her humanity endure possession by the *Crimson Fang*? Will the romance of Lan and Bird – aka renegade Cyborg RX-606 – be allowed to flower, or end in tragedy?



Cover of the Crimson Fang: Blue Sonnet OVA Laser Disc

Turns out the new student at Tokyo's Osei High School is actually Sonnet, a super powerful ESPer girl rebuilt into a combat cyborg by Dr. Merikus under orders from the evil world-domination conspiracy Talon. Sonnet's at Osei to check up on Lan Komatsuzaki, whom Talon suspects is also a powerful ESPer. And they're correct; not only was Lan orphaned in a plane crash and raised by wolves and later by her father's friend Kiryu, but it turns out she's harboring the immense psychic power of the entity known as *Crimson Fang*. After a few arranged incidents Sonnet is convinced of Lan's power, but at the same time is confused by the friendship and warmth of normal human society. Will Sonnet's loyalty to world domination win over her long-suppressed humanity? Will Lan survive Talon's



Lan being examined by Talon doctors including Merikus



Bird caught by the tarantula tanks



Lan in her Red Fang transformation



Sonnet about to unleash some blue fury



Face off against Sonnet

Produced by several different studios including AIC, Mushi Production and Tatsunoko, the anime series is very much a product of the late 1980s. The original manga's story and characters are compressed severely, and we're left with generic OVA-style characters staring into computer monitors, Bubble-Era Tokyo scenery being smashed, and square-faced middle-aged men with glasses hollering orders in high-tech laboratories, instead of the knock-down, drag-out Sonnet vs Lan fight the OP promised. The sketchy, zip-a-tone energy of manga is difficult to translate to the TV screen, and particularly the emotional freeze-frames and expressionistic background effects of shoujo manga seem to suffer most. Blue Sonnet is no exception.

To American anime fans who weren't familiar with the manga, Blue Sonnet seemed almost pedestrian. It's no surprise the subtitled Central Park Media release failed to make much of an impact. The anime market of the early 1990s was still looking for the next Akira, and Blue Sonnet is definitely not that. But then again, what is? For all its faults, 30 years on we still have that kickin' theme song in our head, and that's proof Blue Sonnet still counts.

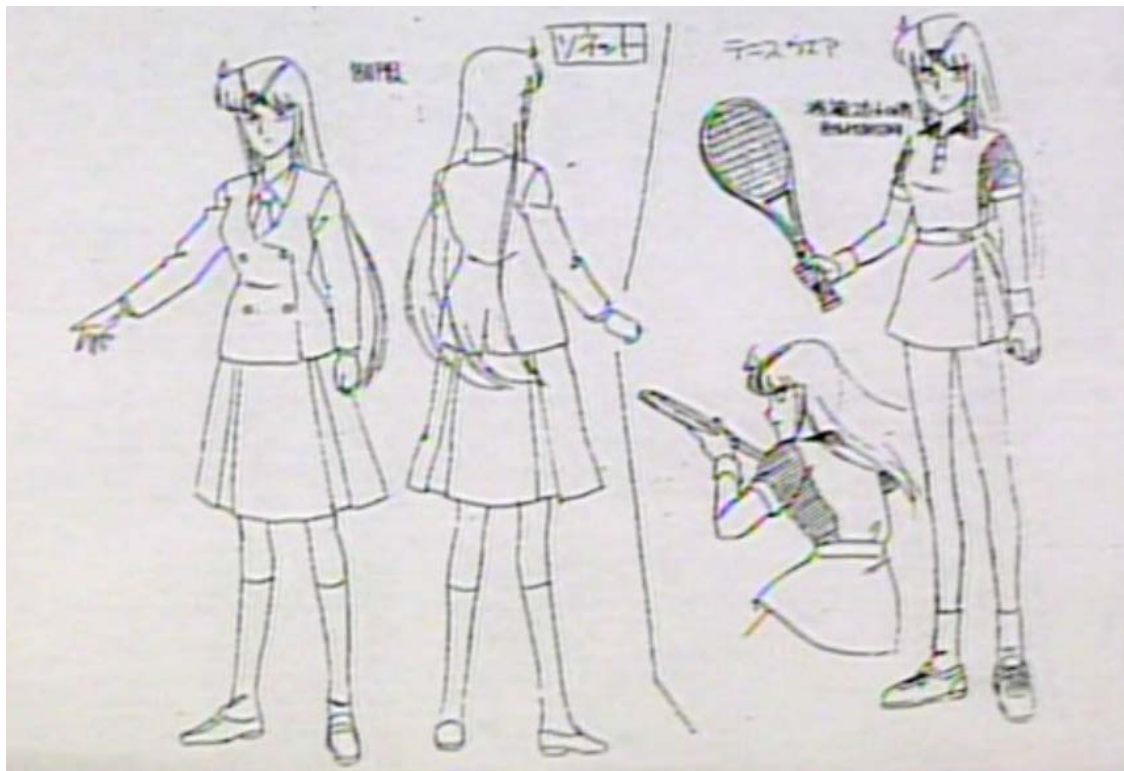
—Dave Merrill

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<https://www.misterkitty.org/>

<https://letsanime.blogspot.com/>

[Ed. We're grateful to have Cap'n Dave joining us aboard the good ship Mangaverse!]



Sonnet character guide

Note: As there is no official translation as yet, spelling of some character and place names are different than in the previous article.]

When I lived in Japan I spent a lot of time in Akihabara. Akihabara (秋葉原) or Akiba (秋葉) for short, is seen by many as the center of “otaku” culture in Japan, with “otaku” being defined as a die-hard fan of something. In Akiba you can find video games, game arcades, electronics, manga, doujinshi (self-published manga, novels, and fanzines), toys, figures, plastic model kits, anime products, and maid cafes.

Actually the name Akihabara is a shortening of the the name Akibagahara (秋葉が原). Akihabara is also known as Akihabara Electric Town ((秋葉原電気街 Akihabara Denki Gai). It's easier just to say Akiba. Akiba is located in the Chiyoda Ward of Tokyo, about a seventeen minute train ride from Shinjuku station and a three minute train ride from Ueno station.

Akiba has gone through various transformations over the years. Akihabara train station opened in 1890 as a freight transport station. It was opened for public transport in the 1920s. After WWII it became known for a black market for radio and electronic parts. As Japan began rebuilding, the area surrounding the station became the place to go for household electronic goods. Families in Tokyo and neighboring prefectures would shop there for televisions, refrigerators and washing machines. By the 90s families could just shop at large household electronic shops that were popping up closer to the suburbs. In the mid 90s all kinds of PC shops started springing up. The clientele

started changing. Instead of families, electronic enthusiasts and computer nerds started shopping there. By the early 2000s more and more anime and toy shops started springing up. The clientele had changed from families to mostly various kinds of otaku.

I started visiting Akihabara in the late 90s to buy video games. I was really into Playstation and Nintendo 64 games at the time. Although my Japanese was more limited back then I was able to play some games with no problems. I finished the Japanese version of Legend of Zelda: The Ocarina of Time using a Japanese guidebook. I also tried playing Final Fantasy VII in Japanese. A few years earlier I had managed to finish the Japanese version of Dragon Quest 5 for Super Nintendo. FF VII proved much more difficult. Eventually the game was released in the U.S. and U.S. video games magazines started writing walk-throughs. I was buying Electronic Gaming Monthly regularly from Tower Records in Shibuya. It



was then that I discovered that I had made some mistakes and had missed out on unlocking some things. I was totally lost and gave up.

Since the Playstation was region locked I couldn't play the U.S version on my Japanese system. By this time some import video game shops had opened up in Akiba. I broke down and spent the extra money for U.S versions of the Playstation and FF VII. I was finally able to finish the game. When the PS2 came out I bought one of those and when the PS3 came out I bought that

as well.

I also got into retro gaming. Even now there are lots of retro video game shops in Akiba selling old systems and tons of used games. I wound up getting a PC Engine and a Sega Saturn. It came to the point where I had way more games than time to finish them. I started playing less and less. My interests turned into other things including collecting toys and figures.

A new addiction had formed. I was buying Hobby Japan every month. The magazine features the latest plastic models, toys, and figures. The back pages are filled with photo lists of all the latest new releases. I would pour through each issue and bookmark the pages with stuff that I wanted, then I visited various toy shops in Akiba with my list. I never bought everything that I bookmarked but I still bought too much. The thing with Akiba and collecting is that there's always something new to look for. New games, new toys, the latest

hot figure.

Eventually I also lost interest in collecting toys. It was becoming more of a chore than a hobby. Plus I was running out of space. Even though I stopped collecting, I still visited Akiba once in a while though. More for window shopping and the atmosphere. I would check out the new stuff, snap pictures of displays, and eat lunch. The station is much bigger than in the 90s, there are tons of new restaurants in the area, a flea market is held regularly, and there's even a German beer festival held (I love beer) once in a while. These days many different kinds of people visit Akiba. Families playing Pokemon Go, couples on dates, and lots of tourists from abroad. The transformation continues.

–Jim Reddy

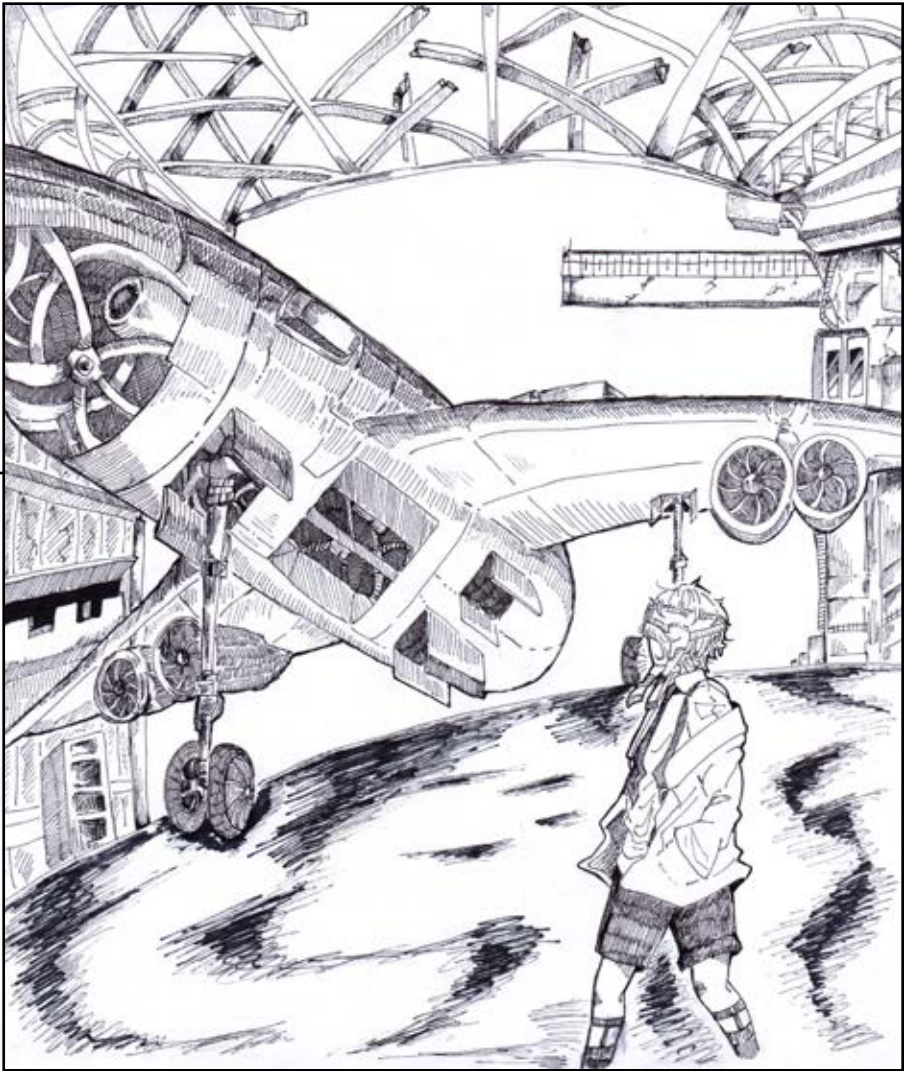
TW, IG: @jimreddy

<https://welearnbywriting.blogspot.com/>



Akiba at night

Hangar by Ueda



Magical Girl by Hina



Magical Girl design
sketch by Hina

Welcome back, y'all. Pat Rat here again with the second part of the overview of **SHIRATO Sanpei's** early kashihon manga. Just a quick reminder that most of the big names of the '60s and '70s in the manga world started in kamishibai (paper theater, stories in pictures brought to life by a narrator) post WWII, then moved to *kashihon* (comics made specifically for the rental market) in the mid to late '50s, and then many hit the big time creating series for weekly and monthly comic magazines in the '60s and '70s.

Shirato had already tried his hand at both ninja stories and stories with social commentary before he helped start the hit magazine **Monthly Garo** (1964 ~ 2002) which many consider the voice of the Japanese 60's anti-establishment movement and his Magnum Opus, the ninja classic **Kamui-den** 『カムイ伝』 (Legend of Kamui, 1964~) which is still being produced. What set the stage for Shirato to become the premier ninja manga creator was his kashihon work including the volumes discussed last time which were mostly contained in a single book.



The book that put him over the top was **Ninja Bugeicho Kagamaru-den** 『忍者武芸帳 影丸伝』 (Ninja Martial Arts Scroll: Legend of Kagamaru, 17 volumes released from 1959 to 1962), the story of Yuki Jutaro, son of the lord of Fushikage Castle which had been usurped by the Mogami clan, his quest for revenge, and the ninja masters Kagamaru and Mufuu Doujin that help him. In true Shirato fashion, the themes

of peasant uprising against Oda Nobunaga and army are prevalent with the peasants enacting a 'proletariat' rebellion against the samurai in a semi-Marxist allegory. As I only own the first volume, I'm going to depend on (with the author's permission) **Nicholas Thiesen's** excellent overview on his What is Manga? blog (<https://whatismanga.wordpress.com/2013/01/08/3b-shirato-sanpei-ninja-bugeicho-pt-1/>).

Above: The cover to Ninja Bugeicho vol. 5



Here we see Jutaro (dear first born) at top left, Shuzen (leader victor) top right, Kagamaru (shadowed one) bottom right, Mufuu Doujin (windless (peaceful) monk) bottom left. Jutaro's love interest and Kagamaru's sister Akemi (bright beauty) is right above Mufuu Doujin and Shuzen's sister Hotarubi (firefly fire)

While Jutaro is the young protagonist that many young readers might identify with, it is the charismatic and enigmatic Kagamaru who is the hero of the tale. Kagamaru and his master, the learned Mufuu Doujin are of an illegitimate line of ninja that are sympathetic to those who fight against Oda who is bulldozing a path of destruction throughout the country in the name of unifying Japan. Jutaro meets Kagamaru when he attempts to kill Shuzen, the usurper of his father's castle. Kagamaru takes pity on Jutaro's plight and saves his life after Shuzen's sister Hotarubi cuts off his arm right at the end of the first volume. In the second part of his look at Ninja Bugeicho, Thiesen mentions that "the ninja of Shirato's manga are liminal figures, neither properly warrior nor peasant, meaning they are free, more or less, to side with whomever they choose". An interesting facet of this series is that the female characters, though still subjected to the societal limits forced upon them, are some of the most accomplished fighters. Thiesen notes that Shirato liked to

play off expectations of readers by having Jutaro work hard to master a special sword technique only to have his arm cut off “by a girl.”

While I can’t speak of the whole story, I can say that the visuals are fantastic. It’s well known that both Shirato and Eisner Hall of Famer **Kojima Goseki** of **Lone Wolf and Cub** fame worked closely together on many projects including **Kamui-den** and **Kamui Gaiden** and Shirato’s layouts and dynamic pen strokes are of a similar high level. I would say that when it comes to action though, Shirato even outshines Kojima – even at this early stage in his career. Shirato’s use of animals as allegory is one of my favorite things about his works and how he connects his characters to the harsh natural environments that they must survive in.

Another note about Kojima and Shirato, though wikipedia mentions that Kojima acted as Shirato’s assistant, Shirato maintains that the members of his Akame (Red Eye) Production company that produce and promote his books, are a loose collection of independent creators that make their own stuff as well as contribute to Shirato’s projects. This is obviously an extension of Shirato’s railing against traditional hierarchical systems such as those that also exist in manga.

This series made a huge splash and was a best-selling title for kashihonya (rental shops). It wasn’t long before every other mangaka had tried his hand at ninja comics thus creating a whole industry almost overnight. There was more than one “ninja boom” throughout Japanese entertainment history, but at a time when not everyone had a TV and buying comics were expensive, this particular boom laid the foundation for every ninja comic to come after it and influenced film and TV as well. It isn’t difficult to tie Shirato’s ninja stories to the US comics that appeared and help fuel the US ninja boom of the ‘80s.

The final section of this article will deal with the story **Menashi** 『目無し』(No-eye) serialized in the kashihon series **Ninpo Hitsuwa** #8 ~ #11 『忍法必話』 (June to Sept. 1964, Essential Ninpo Stories) which was recently released in a beautiful volume by Heibonsha that collects several short Shirato classics, **Short Stories Curated by Shirato Sanpei** 『白土三平 自選短編集』(2020).



I’d been looking at pictures of art online and was planning on getting the story someday (some far day in the future when I had time and extra cash), so I was very excited to get the whole story collected in one collection (along with several other great shorts) rather than having to buy several expensive volumes online. Menashi is the story of a girl who refused to let the rules of antiquated society grind her underfoot.

The title page of each chapter of this story has the same opening text: “In the shinobi (shadow) world, there are no nyonin (female ninjas). Whether for a sociological or physical reason, it was known to be impossible for a woman to become a ninja. Only *kunoichi* were known to exist.” I used to think kunoichi simply meant “female ninja”, but in this story, kunoichi have their own set of skills separate from other ninja and do not have the more powerful ninja skills.



Sugaru saying goodbye to her little sister

The story opens in Iga Province (known as one of the major ninja areas) with Sugaru, a kunoichi, heading off on a mission with the men of her ninja village and saying goodbye to her younger sister. The worried look on the younger sister’s face gives us the impression that things will not go well. A castle tower. A woman in fine kimono running. The red kimono embroidered with cherry blossoms tossed away. A weighted rope tossed over a castle wall and a woman with a bandaged face wearing only an under kimono is seen hurriedly climbing down the wall and escaping on foot. “It’s a woman!!” The mounted guards yell. “Don’t let her get away!” Hounds are released and the woman says to herself, “Must hurry!” She trips and falls. Thinking she’s done for, she sees Heimarū, one of the upper class of ninja (there are jo-nin and ge-nin, upper and lower; those who give orders and those who take them) and leader of the mission. He’s all business. “Did you get the secret document?” Her shaking hand passes it to him

and he is pleased. The closing dogs in the distance give him pause. He stabs Sugaru. "Why? I did my duty!" He replies, "To die is also your duty." The old man Ogi (her grandfather) protests, but Heimarū tells him that "a one-eyed kunoichi has no use anyway." Sugaru's body is then left to distract the dogs while the men make their escape.

Little sis awakes from a dream and she knows what has happened. She tells Ogi that she will not become a kunoichi, no matter what. He tells her that it is the destiny of any beautiful girls born in the village. She laments how kunoichi are treated like tools and then tossed aside and tries to blind herself with sewing scissors. Ogi knocks the scissors from her hand using his needles and then stops her from pouring boiling water over her face by pulling her away with a whip. Time passes and Ogi comes back from a mission missing a leg. He tries to prove himself worthy, but seems to no longer be able to perform simple balance or dart-throwing skills. He is basically going to be left on his own as most ge-nin are. Much like kunoichi, once they are no longer useful, they must still fend for themselves as no one will help them. Sugaru's little sis (she's not named in the story) says that she'll take care of Ogi and they leave to live in the mountains. As she is family, this is allowed. Her secret smile says that perhaps she knew that something like this would happen. In the mountains we see her fishing for the two, but when set upon by a poisonous snake, Ogi jumps into action and rescues her, bringing her up to a high tree branch. Ogi is not as helpless as he seemed...



Grandfather Ogi a bit more sly than he let on

About the time that little sis has grown into a beautiful young woman (and thus will be expected to fulfill her duty as a kunoichi) a story has spread in the village that both Ogi and the girl have died. About the same time, a hinin (an outcast, literally a non-person) boy, unwashed and smelly comes to the village selling eggs stolen from birds nests and fish from dark caves that have only whites for eyes (another menashi, no-eye). We see that the boy has incredible skills

and uses needles just like Ogi to catch fish. In the final chapter, we see Heimarū walking along the village road when he smells something, "A woman!" The boy emerges behind a bush holding a bloody hand to his nose. "Oh, only a nosebleed." Later when the boy is washing himself in the river, Heimarū catches him. "I knew it. You are Sugaru's little sister," he says and brings her back to the village. Now given the name Sugaru, she is trained as a kunoichi and admonished by one of the older ladies of the village to accept her fate.

When the men are returning from a mission in which Sugaru has performed admirably, they are once again chased by dogs. Without hesitation, all the men tie Sugaru down and leave her to be a decoy. Sugaru laments the cruelty of the situation before they gag her as well. In a few later panels we see that the dogs did not fare well against her. Just when the men are sure they've thrown the dogs off their scent, Sugaru shows up along the trail and uses Ogi's ninjutsu techniques to kill every last man in the party. She says, "In order not to become a kunoichi, I had to become a ninja. I will live on." The closing narration mentions how Ogi would have been proud of her and "though this is the end of this story and we aren't likely to hear of her again, it is only the beginning for Iga Nyo-nin (female ninja) Sugaru."

So though no reader would be fooled by the smelly outcast, especially anyone familiar with Shirato's other ninja stories, we are surprised that our protagonist got caught and forced to be a kunoichi. We think to ourselves, this is one of those stories about inescapable oppressive duty that Shirato's stories often rail about yet after Sugaru gets thrown away much like her sister and grandfather and miraculously appears unharmed, we realize that this is something that she and Ogi had been planning for years.

I hope you enjoyed the overview of Shirato and many of his kashihon works. Next time in this space, Mizuki Shigeru and his yokai.

– PatRat



Oops, But I'm Okay by Yushi

Welcome to our new feature, where we ask Japanese Fantasy and Science Fiction fans and people involved with the creation, the sales, or the discussion of such works, about which books they feel represent the best of Japanese genre fiction.

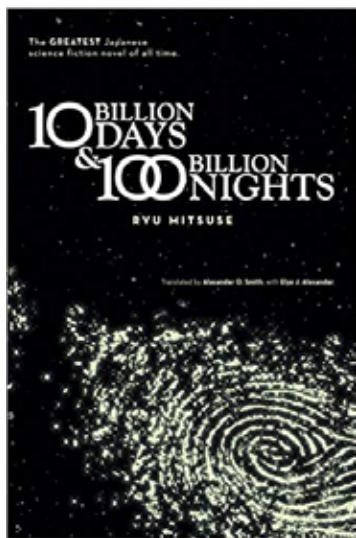
Ten Billion Days and One Hundred Billion Nights

(百億の昼と千億の夜) by MITSUSE Ryu

English version translated by Alexander O. Smith

Published 1967, revised in 1973, English version published in 2011

Publisher: Hayakawa Shobo, English version: Haikasoru / VIZ Media



This ish's book is introduced by Mr. MISE Hiroyasu (@sfdaisakusen).

Mise works at Tsutaya, a major book chain in Japan, where he single-handedly tripled readership of Science Fiction in Kumamoto through his free zines that were displayed near the SF section of the Tsutaya downtown. He reads several hundred books a year and watches a ton of films as well and has keen insight as to what kind of book to introduce to new and die-hard SF fans. I finally met him

*after a year of collecting his zines at the Kumamoto SF Book Club where we talked about Heinlein's *The Door into Summer* (recently made into a Japanese film) and then again at the Kumamoto "Biblio Battle" where people introduce books and the audience decides which books they want to read the most. Mise and I have chosen the same book to introduce twice so far, and that's why I always bring a backup! I'll now leave it to Mr. Mise.*

Hello, N3F members! I'm Mise, SF fan and captain of the Japan Science Fiction Book Club. Today, I'd like to introduce you to a Japanese classic, **Ten Billion Days and One-hundred Billion Nights** by Mitsuse Ryu. This work by Japan's leading SF author explores the theme of god and gods and is a magnificent science fiction epic that depicts the formation and destruction of the world through the viewpoint of various characters such as Plato, Siddhartha, Jesus, and King Ashura.

I can also recommend the manga adaptation by HAGIO Moto, groundbreaking comics artist who introduced

many classic SF writers to Japanese readers through her adaptations. An LP was released with music inspired by this grand tale. Mitsuse also created the popular series *Andromeda Stories* with legendary mangaka TAKEMIYA Keiko, though I don't know if either of those has been released in English.

About the Author

Born in Tokyo in 1928, Mitsuse Ryu, pen name of Chiba Kimio, later Iizuka Kimio, debuted with "Sunny Sea 1979" in 1962. His work often combines Eastern philosophy and hard science fiction and he made Japanese SF history when his short story "The Sunset, 2217 A.D." was included in the Frederik Pohl edited *Best Science Fiction* for 1972. With artist TAKEMIYA Keiko, he created the manga *Andromeda Stories* and HAGIO Moto adapted the novel introduced here into manga form. He died in 1999.

From the Amazon description:

"Plato, Buddha, Christ--what brings these men to the far future to witness the end of the world?"

Ten billion days—that is how long it will take the philosopher Plato to determine the true systems of the world. One hundred billion nights—that is how far into the future Jesus of Nazareth, Siddhartha, and the demigod Asura will travel to witness the end of all worlds. Named the greatest Japanese science fiction novel of all time, *Ten Billion Days and One Hundred Billion Nights* is an epic eons in the making. Originally published in 1967, the novel was revised by the author in later years and republished in 1973."



Japanese book cover gallery

We hope to introduce more Japanese F&SF here in the future so STAR TUNED to Mangaverse!

Help Gorgo, the robot manga snob get through the maze to find the object of his desire!



Knowing or guessing facts about obscure objects and feeling superior to others is what makes trivia fun! Gorgo is all about fun! You must have fun or Gorgo will make you have fun! Too much fun makes Gorgo's pupils dilate! *Whee!*

Fleshy beings must attempt to answer the following questions correctly or Gorgo will go all Nic Cage on you and not the affable Raising Arizona one!

1. This circular piece of cardboards is:
 - a. A membership card to the Aviator's Club
 - b. A coaster for teeny-tiny drinks
 - c. A **menko**, sometimes known as **pacchin** (or **ucchokoshi** in Kumamoto dialect) used in a game like marbles where you slam the menko onto the ground trying to flip over some other kid's menko. The victor keeps both menko. The loser regrets their life choices.
 - d. It's obviously c, you fool.
2. The comic character featured was created by:
 - a. Stan Lee as are all comic characters ever created anywhere anyhow anyhow
 - b. Miyazaki Hayao for his little known series, **Bug-eyed Billy the Kamikaze King**
 - c. Matsumoto Leiji, of **Space Battleship Yamato** fame, for his Southern Cross comic series from 1963, said to be a precursor of his later **Battlefield Manga Series**. See that long-ass number at the bottom? It's so long, it must be important, right? No, fool! It has no meaning whatsoever! Like Gorgo's empty mechanical existence. It was filler, just like the rock, paper, scissors icon.
 - d. See d above in 1.

See? Wasn't that fun? And don't forget educational! Please write to your congressfolk about how Mangaverse is a wholesome, fun, *educational* periodical with intrinsic social value! 19

Outro

I hope you had as much fun reading this as we had putting it together! Here's one last piece by regular collaborator and next-to-next-door-neighbor, TABARA Yushi. A real good guy who never complains when asked to provide some artwork to spice up a zine or two.

This is the end of the Japanese school year and I've finished most of my related duties for 20-21, but now I've got to prepare 21-22 and I'll be teaching Manga History

for the first time so you KNOW I'm gonna try way too hard. What this means for you, faithful reader, is that the next ish might be a little lighter, but who knows...

If you want to hear something cool while you're waiting, check out The Law of Equivalent Exchange, a podcast dedicated to in-depth discussion of the Full Metal Alchemist manga available on Apple, Audible, Google podcast services.

That's it for now! See you in the funny papers!

—PIW

