

Trying out manga as a book reader

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Months and months of nagging on the part of my friends finally got to me. I, a lifelong reader, finally made the decision to try out manga for the first time. Before I recount the tale of my first manga reading, however, I'd like to fill you in on some of my reading habits to better set the scene for the transition.

When it comes to books, I mainly gravitate towards the world of fiction. There is nothing as relaxing yet exhilarating as diving headfirst into a world unlike ours. Or even better, worlds with only subtle differences with reality. Recently, Haruki Murakami novels had started to fit that bill. That is why when I ventured into manga I was subconsciously expecting things to be just a little out of the ordinary. In this regard, it's a good thing I started with *Oyasumi Punpun*.

The thing that stuck out immediately was how strange this new world was. Set in an almost-realistic black and white representation of Japan, the characters were cute in a cartoonish sort of way. Only the ones that looked like people, of

course.

My friends had recommended a manga where, for some reason, the main character looked like a duck. Actually, duck doesn't do justice to him. He's just a white misshapen thing with dots for eyes and sticks for arms and legs. The creator had drawn Punpun and his immediate family as caricatures, probably so that the reader could relate to him. Of course, I'm only speculating. It might be that the creator just got tired of drawing so many detailed characters and wanted an easy out. We'll never know.

While I was engaged in all this speculation, I'd only read half of the first page. First I thought that was because I had been too busy observing the art, but that can't have taken so much time. That's when I realised that the text was confusing me. Not through complexity or volume, because both of those I'd gotten used to through years of book reading. The problem was that the words didn't follow a normal sequence. In some manga sites, the panels and story read from right to left, in others the order was inverted. This played havoc on my left-to-right

reading eyes, as the only way they wanted to go was the "right" way. That wasn't the end of my troubles. Because manga has different-sized panels, sometimes they make it hard to keep track of what the correct sequence of text is. There were times when I've had to start from the left, work over to the right, then go down along the right spine until suddenly the text moves to the left again, and so I follow. Compared to this, even class lectures are easy to follow.

In case you couldn't already tell, this was exhausting. Every few pages I'd have to re-read a page because I completely messed up the order the first time around. The only time I'd re-read a page in books would be if I was really fond of it. My mind keeps going back to such easy times, and I cry just a little bit.

Once I'm finally used to the strange twist and turns the panels take, I find myself immersed in the stories. While fully engrossed, I realise that manga does some things better than books ever could. Sometimes you want to stare at a frame forever simply because it's so beautiful. It also helps if you're partial to black-and-white art, as I am.

Plus, there are times when you notice cool details in the background if you pay a little attention. Little details like these really add to the immersion and depth of the world. This is something books can't emulate to the same extent, because whatever is written in a book is the centre of attention while you're reading it. The fact that manga provides more content if you pay more attention was a striking revelation, and I was smiling because of it.

One of the best parts of the manga was how it could flirt with the fine line between serious and care-free. One moment the character was going through some serious childhood trauma, while a few chapters later he was getting divine advice. And that's beautiful.

Overall, this initial foray into the world of manga was equal parts strange and rewarding. Once I got used to the new format, the story started to read like a book would, and I can give no higher praise than that.

With a heart of ash and a PC of potato, Wasique Hasan could use some help. Send help: facebook.com/hasique.wasan

