

Realism -- Sidekicks

Yotsuba&!

By Kyohiko Azuma
ISBN: 1-4139-0317-7
Tokyopop, 2005

If you've been wondering where to find a manga title that really is for all ages, then look no further. This hilarious and madcap series from Kyohiko Azuma, creator of Azumanga Diaoh, is exactly what you want. Yotsuba&! (the title of which is the best and most accurate translation of the title language in Japanese) follows the adventures of Yotsuba, an energetic and curious little girl who's just moving to the city with her father. She's a bit, well, weird, never having seen a swing before and determined to find out about everything in her new neighborhood. She quickly meets (and puzzles) the three Ayase sisters who live next door. Yotsuba is especially good at finding adventure in the most ordinary tasks – she goes to the bathroom one morning only to find that the lock is broken. The only way out is through the window (but of course!), and in her pajamas and slippers she roams the streets discovering the use of doorbells, to the bemusement of her neighbors. She only remembers to go home once someone questions her attire. The whole book works gently and comically, featuring all manner of amusing slapstick and always from the point of view of the irrepressible Yotsuba. Her kind but often spacey dad, Koiwai, is patient and maintains a “go with the flow” attitude, making a good support for the rambunctious girl, and her new neighbors help her adjust to the daily wonders of her new home and friends. I haven't laughed out loud so much as anything in a long time, and the comic timing and articulate simplified expressions common in manga art make the whole ride through Yotsuba's life one not to be missed. As her father says, she can find happiness in anything. We all need to be reminded, sometimes, that standing in a rainstorm can be the best.

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Age of Reptiles

ISBN: 1569711992
By Ricardo Delgado
Dark Horse 1997
Age Level: 7 and up

No talking T-Rexes here, thankfully -- Ricardo Delgado, with a keen eye and detailed research has created a wordless and beautiful book all about the lives of the dinosaurs. Impressive for it's sense of space and time, this series manages to give we mammals a sense of that alien world so long lost, vibrant, dangerous, and closer to home than we might want to believe.

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WJHC: On the Air!

ISBN: 0974423505
By Jane Smith Fisher
Art by Kirsten Petersen, Phil Avelli Jr., and Adam Dekraker

Wilson Place Comics 2003
Age Level: 9 and up

Jane Smith Fisher is a woman with a mission. Her object: a really good comic for all ages. I'm full of admiration for Fisher, who spent the last six years finding creative ways to put her comics in readers' hands. Now you can pick up **WJHC** the book, a fast-paced, snappy teen comedy with endearing characters and a clever voice. Janey Wells is a never-say-die kind of girl, and she's determined to get a student-run radio station up and running at Jackson Hill High. With some help from best friend Ciel, arch-nemesis Tara (who's got the bucks), and cool-cat DJ The Skate, Janey will stop at nothing to save her school from piped-in muzak (I love the Skate. I love that his name is the Skate. He's the bomb.). Kirsten Petersen's lively art conveys a lot of character with an economy of line, and it's a good match for Fisher's sweet and funny writing. **WJHC** is a worthy addition to the small but growing field of comics with tween appeal, from the classic [Archie](#) to [Go Girl!](#) and [Alison Dare](#).

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Amelia Rules! The Whole World's Crazy

ISBN: 0743475038

by Jimmy Gownley

I Books 2003

Age Level: 7 and up

OK, let's get all the **PEANUTS** comparisons out of the way. **Amelia Rules!**, a deceptively simple, good-humored look at the lives of elementary school aged Amelia and her friends, certainly does bring to mind Charles Schulz's legendary stories. The artistic style, the adolescent point of view, and the examination of every day life mirror the days of Charlie Brown without being an irritating knock-off. Aside from all those ancestral ties, shall we say, **Amelia Rules!** is most importantly a great comic for kids, filled by turns with hilarious adventures and difficult lessons that all kids must go through as they grow up. I was certainly laughing out loud as Amelia discovers, on her first day at her new school, that she has unwittingly entered the social sphere as a nerd by association. I was also shaking off the wince of remembering just how important such an association, or lack thereof, can be. Underneath her joking exterior, though, Amelia has a fair number of burdens on her shoulders. Amelia's dealing with her parents' recent divorce, starting a new school, crushing on the oblivious boy next door, and battling with her wildly coiffed arch-nemesis, Rhonda. Her friends, from a not-so-closeted superhero wannabe to the silent but sweet Pajamaman, are quick to play -- and tease. Her family, from her distracted mom to her wise and worldly aunt, is fractured in a realistic but never grim way. In the end, **Amelia Rules!** is probably one of the most straightforward and endearing pictures of childhood in comics right now -- no small feat, especially in a market that seems to have lost its original young audience. Great for kids, and adults, this title is definitely a must for libraries.

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Amy Unbounded: Belondweg Blossoming

ISBN: 0971790000

By Rachel Hartman

Age Level: 9 and up
Pug House Press 2002

When you first meet Amy, she's escaping from her chores with her best friend, preparing for her 10th birthday, fiddling around with toads, and making statues speak to unsuspecting church-goers. Such rambunctious behavior might, in our idea of medieval town, require quite the scolding, but for Amy and her parents in Goredd, it's a typical day. Not too far from ours, right? Rachel Hartman's charming tale of Amy's tenth year is full of everything you could wish for: best friends, loyal family, a dragon masquerading as a human to study the national myth. On top of that, we get everyday adventures like a first crush to the more unusual fare of a last-minute rescue (I certainly said, "Whew!" a few times!). There are also some wonderfully poignant moments that many of us would rather not feel, but make the story ring true, including separating from friends and realizing the world isn't quite as equal as we would like it to be. It's a crime that we all can't run out and read all of Amy's adventures -- these and earlier stories were originally published as a mini-comic with the author's xerox machine. How happy for us, though, that she was able to publish this great first adventure -- I can only beg for more!

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Comic Adventures of Boots

ISBN: 0374314551
By Satoshi Kitamura
Farrar Straus Giroux 2002
Age Level: 5 and up

Boots is your everyday cat, and like all cats, he gets up to far more adventures than most humans would notice. I've always thought myself that cats had secret and brilliant plans, and while Boots isn't always so brilliant, he's certainly amusing to watch. From his encounters with a duck to a masterful plan to get the best place to sleep on the wall in the backyard, Boots does his best to master his feline world and entertain himself and all his friends (and, while he's at it, us.)

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Little Buggy

ISBN: 0152163395
By Kevin O'Malley
Gulliver Books, Harcourt, 2002
Age Level: All Ages

All of us want to try things before we might be quite ready. It makes us try things, and sometimes, the best times, we discover we can do what we thought we couldn't. Little Buggy is a ladybug who is desperate to fly. No matter how many spills he takes, how many mud puddles in the face, he's insisting on keeping going, despite the commentary from his audience of cynical slugs. Flying is something we'd all love to do,

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Days Like This

ISBN: 1929998481

by J. Torres

Art by Scott Chantler

Oni Press 2003

Age Level: 9 and up

Days Like This is a wonderful new feel-good journey through the 1960s music industry that produced some of greatest pop music America knows. Groups were often formed out of some of the strangest circumstances. In this case, Anna Solomon, ex-wife of a record producer, is determined to take on her ex's business and beat him at his own game, but first she's got to find some talent. Enter three high school girls performing at the her daughter's high school show, and Anna knows she's got her new band. If only lead singer Tina's father would let them perform. Tackling head on the minefields of family loyalties, first time writing and recording staff, and her own doubts, Anna is determined to make Tina and the Tiaras stars.

Everything in this title is, pardon the bad pun, perfectly on key-- the dialog is easy and perfectly pitched, and the clean flow of Scott Chantler's artwork wraps it all together in an energetic package. The only let-down is that you can't hear the music.

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You Can't Take a Balloon Into the Metropolitian Museum

ISBN: 0803723016

By Jacqueline Preiss Weitzman and Robin Preiss Glasser

Dial Books for Young Readers, 1998

Age Level: All Ages

This book is all about the pictures -- both the famous and brilliant pieces of artwork from the Metropolitan Museum in New York City to the scenery of the Big Apple itself. A wordless story unfolds as a girl and her

