



**BOOKS FROM TAIWAN**





## BOOKS FROM TAIWAN

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**Chairperson** | Homme Tsai

**Chief Executive Officer** | Jiun-Wei Lu

**Organizers** | Zoe Wang, Ssu-Yen Chang, Ming-Fang Cheng

**Address** | 5F., No. 158, Section 3, Minsheng East Road, Shongshan District, Taipei City, 105, Taiwan

**Website** | <http://en.taicca.tw/>

**Telephone** | +886-2-2745-8186

**Email** | [booksfromtaiwan@taicca.tw](mailto:booksfromtaiwan@taicca.tw)

### **Editorial Team of Books from Taiwan**

**Managing Director** | Gray Tan

**Editor-in-Chief** | Joshua Dyer

**Production Manager** | Agnes Hsiao

**Copyeditor** | Catrina Liu

**Editorial Consultants** | Aho Huang, Bobby Lin, Hsin-Wen Yeh, Jean Chen, Szu-Mi Huang, Tien-Yi Chao

**Cover Design** | FLICCA Studio

**Design and Layout** | Wei-Jie Hong

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# About Taiwan Creative Content Agency

With a diverse, open-minded culture, and freedom of speech, Taiwan encourages and inspires creators to develop innovative content. Taiwan also possesses an all-embracing culture, boasting a uniquely diverse history and a multicultural heritage, fostering a liberal, progressive, and stable society. As a global leader in the semiconductor industry, Taiwan has a mature, government-supported technological ecosystem that incubates innovative future content and allows local businesses to better connect with the globe. Balancing distinct cultural traditions and cutting-edge technology, Taiwan is ideal for innovators seeking to unleash their creativity.

Established in 2019 by the Ministry of Culture, the Taiwan Creative Content Agency (TAICCA) supports the development of Taiwan's creative content industry (CCI) such as film and television, future content, publishing, pop music, animation, gaming, performing arts, and visual arts by engaging in production, distribution, overseas market expansion, branding, talent cultivation, industrial research, and more. We promote innovative growth in the creative content economy.

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# About Books from Taiwan

Books from Taiwan is an initiative funded by TAICCA (Taiwan Creative Content Agency) to introduce a select list of Taiwan publishing titles, ranging from fiction, non-fiction, children's books, and comic books, to foreign publishers and readers alike.

You can find information about authors and books, along with who to contact in order to license translation rights, and the related resources about the Grant for the Publication of Taiwanese Works in Translation (GPT), sponsored by the Ministry of Culture of Taiwan.

**Grant for the  
Publication of  
Taiwanese Works in  
Translation (GPT)**

Ministry of Culture, Republic of  
China (Taiwan)

**G**PT is set up by The Ministry of Culture to encourage the publication of Taiwanese works in translation overseas, to raise the international visibility of Taiwanese cultural content, and to help Taiwan's publishing industry expand into non-Chinese international markets.

- Applicant Eligibility: Foreign publishing houses (legal entity) legally registered or incorporated in accordance with the laws and regulations of their respective countries.
- Conditions:
  1. The so-called Taiwanese works must meet the following requirements:
    - A. Use traditional characters;
    - B. Written by a natural person holding an R.O.C. identity card;
    - C. Has been assigned an ISBN in Taiwan.  
i.e., the author is a native of Taiwan, and the first 6 digits of the book's ISBN are 978-957-XXX-XXX-X, 978-986-XXX-XXX-X, or 978-626-XXX-XXX-X.
  2. Applications must include documents certifying that the copyright holder of the Taiwanese works consents to its translation and foreign publication (no restriction on its format).
  3. A translation sample of the Taiwanese work is required (no restriction on its format and length).
  4. The translated work must be published within two years, after the first day of the relevant application period.
- Grant Items:
  1. The maximum grant available for each project is NT\$600,000, which covers:
    - A. Licensing fees (going to the copyright holder of the Taiwanese works);
    - B. Translation fees;
    - C. Marketing and promotion fees (applicants for this funding must propose a specific marketing promotion plan and complete the implementation before submitting the grant project results; those whose plans include talks or book launching events attended by authors in person will be given priority for grants);
    - D. Book production-oriented fees;
    - E. Tax (20% of the total award amount);
    - F. Remittance-related handling fees.
  2. Priority consideration is given to books that have received the Golden Tripod Award, the Golden Comic Award, the Taiwan Literature Award, books on Taiwan's culture and history, or series of books.
- Application Period: Twice every year, from April 1 to April 30, and from October 1 to October 31. The MOC reserves the right to change the application periods, and will announce said changes separately.
- Announcement of successful applications: Winners will be announced within three months of the end of the application period.
- Application Method: Please visit the Ministry's official website ([https://grants.moc.gov.tw/Web\\_ENG/](https://grants.moc.gov.tw/Web_ENG/)), and use the online application system.

For full details, please visit: [https://grants.moc.gov.tw/Web\\_ENG/](https://grants.moc.gov.tw/Web_ENG/)

Or contact: [books@moc.gov.tw](mailto:books@moc.gov.tw)

# COMIC BOOKS

(From Right to Left)



**BOOKS FROM TAIWAN**

# THE BANANA SPROUT

芭蕉的芽



- **Publisher:** Gaea Books
- **Date:** 6/2022
- **Rights contact:**  
booksfromtaiwan@taicca.tw
- **Pages:** 188
- **Volume:** 1 (ongoing)

## \* 2023 Golden Comic Award

***Two students at Taiwan's most prestigious prep school confront the uncertainty of youth head on when they decide to start their own campus literary journal. But will their passion be enough to make them see past their differences, and carry on through the difficulties that lay ahead?***

It's 1930 and Yeh Hsing-chiao, a hard-working student with a gift for writing, has tested into Taihoku High School, a prestigious school which grants students an unmatched degree of autonomy. Upon moving into the dorms, Yeh discovers that his Japanese roommate, Nanjo Untaro, is a notorious campus eccentric who frequently cuts class. At first, the straight-laced Yeh is infuriated by his roommate's unorthodox behavior, but as they spend more time together, he discovers another side to Nanjo: he is a voracious reader who only skips class so he can pursue his passion for reading and self-study, even mastering German (Yeh's weakest subject) in the process.

One day while consulting with a teacher about his writing, Yeh learns that Nanjo's impulsive behavior is mostly a response to his uncertainty about the future. Upon reflection, Yeh realizes that he, too, often questions his direction in life. After a long discussion, the two roommates decide to undertake a plan that will help them find the answers they need: they will start their own campus literary journal.

But nothing about the endeavor is as easy as they imagined. In addition to the daunting tasks of magazine production and competition from the official journal of school, Yeh and Nanjo still don't know if they can find contributors and collaborators among their fellow students. Will the unlikely partners find enough like-minded classmates to make their journal a success? And what other difficulties will they face as they juggle work on the journal with the demanding coursework of Taiwan's most prestigious prep school?

Author/artist Zuo Hsuan conducted extensive research in order to accurately depict the campus, uniforms, and life circumstances of students at Taiwan's most prestigious high school under Japanese colonial rule. The delicate warmth of her linework animates this engaging tale of two young men with divergent personalities throwing caution to the wind to pursue their passions, and determine their own course in life.



## Zuo Hsuan 左萱

Zuo Hsuan is a well-regarded comic book artist and book cover illustrator. Her first published work, *Rites of Returning*, won the Bronze Award at the 2015 International Manga Awards in Japan. The book went on to sell foreign language rights for Japanese, French, Vietnamese, and Italian, and a television adaptation was released in 2021. Zuo Hsuan has represented Taiwan at the Angoulême International Comics Festival, the Frankfurt Book Fair, the Lucca Comics & Games, and the BDFIL Comics Festival.

# The Surprising Consistency of Youthful Anxieties Across Time

Written by Itzel Hsu (Originally published at Readmoo)

Translated by William Ceurvels

Yeh Hsing-chiao, the main character in *The Banana Sprout*, is attending school in a city far from home, but when the relatives he was staying with must leave town for work, Yeh is forced to move into the student dormitory halfway through the semester. Yeh's first official meeting with his roommate, the infamous oddball Untaro, makes for one of the most jaw-dropping scenes in the entire book: As Yeh passes by the dormitory he delights at the cool relief of a gentle, misting rain, but only seconds later, alerted by the dorm matron's litany of curses, he looks up just in time to see a curly-haired youth zipping back up his pants before candidly calling down: "My bad!" It is only then that Yeh comes to the belated realization that the gentle rain he'd delighted in was no rain at all....

Yet, once they become roommates, Yeh quickly realizes that Untaro is not just some profligate libertine – his Japanese roommate's room is filled with all kinds of books, both in Japanese and foreign languages. Indeed, he is such a voracious reader that even one of his teachers must confess to being less well-read. Untaro often skips class, but he spends most of his time immersed in independent study and has even mastered German, a language that remains elusive to Yeh.

Yeh's diligence and strict obedience stand in stark relief to Untaro's freewheeling personality. At first, Yeh's oddball roommate is little more than a constant source of annoyance to him, but through their daily interactions and insights from a teacher, he finally realizes that Untaro's impulsive behavior is a manifestation of the same uncertainty about the future that Yeh himself feels. After a heartfelt discussion, the two come to a conclusion: given that they both feel uncertain about the future, perhaps they can undertake some common cause to begin looking for the answers they seek. They decide to deploy their respective literary strengths in the making of a new, relatively open-minded literature journal that will offer a challenge to the strict conventionalism of the school journal *Soaring Wind*.

If the time period in which *The Banana Sprout* transpires was not clearly stated, one could be forgiven for mistaking it for a modern, Japanese high school bildungsroman. Many hallmarks of the Japanese coming-of-age tales are present: two young, likable friends with polar-opposite personalities combine forces in pursuit of some ambitious objective – their enthusiasm and drive can be inspiring, their antics both galling and hilarious, and at times the realizations they come to as they grow can cast the reader into a melancholic gloom. Yet, once we learn when and where this novel takes places, it is hard not to marvel at the author, Zuo Hsuan's talents; this charming and



poignant story is the product of the author's meticulous distillation of a vast amount of historical research. If not for Zuo Hsuan's elegant reconjuring, even the average Taiwanese reader would find it difficult to imagine what life must have been like in Taihoku High School during the 1930s.

Taihoku High School was the predecessor to what is now National Taiwan Normal University. During Japanese rule, the school was a seven-year, all-boys, elite academy consisting of a four-year middle school and a three-year college preparatory program. The four-year middle school (called the "Basic Program") accepted graduates of elementary schools, while the college preparatory program (called the "Advanced Program") consisted of students that had graduated from the Basic Program and were automatically matriculated, as well as middle school students from other schools who tested into the program. Because graduates of the Taihoku High School could directly enroll in the Japanese Imperial Universities (the predecessors of Tokyo University, Kyoto University, and National Taiwan University) without taking entrance exams, competition among prospective students was fierce - of the 160 students admitted to the Advanced Program every year, less than thirty were Taiwanese, with the rest consisting of Japanese students. Regardless of their nationality, any student seen wearing the Taihoku High School uniform would likely have been regarded in the much the same way as the bookstore proprietress in the graphic novel saw them - as future doctors and influential politicians in the making.

Interestingly, this academic "cream of the crop" was far from a bunch of nerdy bookworms - much like the banana leaves that wreathed their school crest, they were full of liveliness and exuberance. The lax campus regulations created the ultimate environment for students to engage in self-guided exploration. Not only were they allowed to pursue whatever academic interests and extracurricular activities they pleased, arming themselves with all the basic expertise any budding intellectual may need, they were also allowed the freedom to experience life unbound by restrictions. As such, some students affected a disheveled and slovenly appearance like Untaro, while others could be seen reveling in late night sessions of song and dance, beating on drums, locked arm-in-arm.... This bold and unrestrained campus culture likely blurred the ethnic lines between Japanese and Taiwanese. In an otherwise strictly regimented colonial society, this tiny campus became a rare oasis of freedom and liberalism.

The question is, will modern readers be able to relate to these youths of ninety years ago? In fact, this question did not even cross my mind while reading - I was carried off by the meticulous detail and clean precision of Zuo Hsuan's prose, and became immersed in the eccentricities and surprising twists of Yeh and Untaro's world. From a modern vantage, their mindset and behavior vary only slightly from that of today's highschoolers or college students. The uncertainty they feel towards themselves, their peers and their new environment is entirely relatable to modern audiences. Perhaps, as the story develops further, we will see conflicts of race, gender, and agency which are more specific to that period, but prior to that I assume readers will have just one wish: to see more of these youngsters who, like the banana sprouts of their insignia, embody limitless potential.



Chapter 2

Strange Bedfellows



\*Banyan Verdure: The official journal published by Taihoku High School's middle school.



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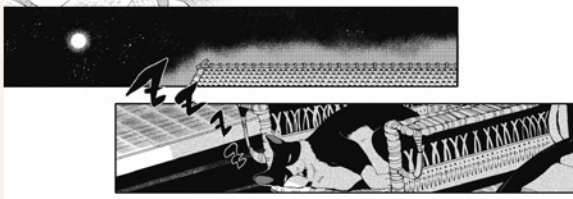
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# PLANT COLLECTORS' NOTEBOOK

## 採集人的野帳



- **Publisher:** Gaea Books
- **Date:** 2 / 2023
- **Rights contact:**  
booksfromtaiwan@taicca.tw
- **Pages:** 264 / 256 / 280
- **Volume:** 3 (ongoing)

***The unruly son of a famous apothecary accidentally burns down the family home, destroying the precious plant samples of visiting researchers. As punishment he is sent to work with the researchers in their herbarium, but will he turn out to be more hindrance than help?***

In early 20th century Taiwan, botanists from the local herbarium meet with a famous apothecary to share their latest discoveries. As they chat over drinks, Liang-Shan, the rebellious son of the host, accidentally ignites a fire, burning down part of the family shophouse and destroying valuable specimens collected by the botanists. In order to compensate the botanists for their loss, the apothecary sends Liang-Shan away to work in the herbarium.

Far from happy with the arrangement, Liang-Shan botches a string of tedious and laborious tasks. However, the researchers at the herbarium also discover he has an uncanny gift for identifying plant species, and is a quick study when it comes to collecting specimens and mounting them in wax. Over the course of his penance in the herbarium, will the cynical and impulsive Liang-Shan ultimately be more help or hindrance?

During the 1920's the imperial government of Japan commissioned numerous studies of the native plants of Taiwan, and funded the construction of the herbarium documented in this graphic novel. Located inside the Taipei Botanical Garden, the herbarium continues its work to this day, housing Taiwan's oldest and largest collection of botanical specimens. With assistance from researchers at the Taiwan Forestry Research Institute, author/artist Ejan made numerous visits to the herbarium to gather materials, enabling her to create this entertaining and informative account of the lives of historical persons associated with the herbarium.



## Ejan 英張

Independent comic artist Ejan's previous works include *Dark Forest Reading Club* and the comic book adaptation of the television series *Close Your Eyes Before It's Dark*, which won the Best New Talent at the 2018 Golden Comic Awards. The second volume of *Plant Collectors' Notebooks* was longlisted in the 2022 Golden Tripod Awards.

# Savoring the Inconspicuous

Written by Itzel Hsu (Originally published at Readmoo)

Translated by Joel Martinsen

Botany is an approachable subject for a popular science book. No irritating technological or economic issues, an academic background in math or physics isn't a prerequisite, and you don't need reference materials on hand to illuminate the unfamiliar science. Plants are our food, our neighbors, and our friends - and the most intimate of strangers. Perhaps the fact that audiences can easily find things of immediate relevance to their lives has led to a sustained output of translations of botany-related nature writing and popular science from publishers in Taiwan, as well as the attention local experts have received in recent years for books like *Isle of Healing* and *The Odyssey of Taiwan's Montane Plants* that combine nature writing and botany.

Arriving on this tide of interest in native plants is *Plant Collectors' Notebook*, a graphic novel featuring plant collectors during the Japanese colonial period. Although the name might suggest this is a non-fiction guide, botanical information is actually only a supporting character in a plot motivated by the collectors' troubled history, their social interactions, and their coming of age.

The book's three protagonists each carry wounds of their own, and as they work with their colleagues collecting plants and producing specimens, they gain new experiences of both plants and life.

The main protagonist Hsu Liang-Shan is the only son of the proprietor of an herbal pharmacy. Distraught over the death of his younger sister to a heart ailment, he no longer believes in the efficacy of plants as medicine. But when he starts work at the Taipei Herbarium, not only does he recognize the value of his storehouse of herbal knowledge and realize that plants are useful in far more ways than he ever imagined, he starts coming to terms with the loss of his sister as well.

Liang-Shan's supervisor, the botanical research assistant Matsuo Haku, is swift and decisive at work. As the story progresses, the reader discovers the link between his self-sacrifice on the job and the sense of inferiority and worthlessness stemming from his frail constitution. What he doesn't realize is that his enthusiasm for plants is a quiet inspiration to those around him.

Joining the Herbarium team shortly after Liang-Shan is Wu-Tsao, an orphan raised in a village of mountain bandits. Illiterate but dexterous, she hopes that botanical knowledge will help her face the nightmare of being abandoned as a child. And whether it's Liang-Shan helping her adapt to a new way of life, or Haku teaching her to read, she's constantly making new discoveries.

Concerning scientific nomenclature, Liang-Shan notes, "Whether or not a plant has been given a scientific name, its essential nature doesn't change. It still grows naturally through the passage of the seasons, and still flowers at the appropriate time!" However, when a plant encounters a collector



and is identified and named by a botanist, its fate may still be altered. When a collector searches for plants, they may also be searching for a place of their own within the sphere of botanical knowledge.

With a collector's day-to-day life revolving around plants, the graphic novel can't avoid explanatory dialogue, but author Ejan strategically confines single-purpose descriptive content to two-page spreads that simplify complex topics into plain text. Taken together with the plot and art, the reader can gain a bit of knowledge without feeling like reading is a chore.

Further reducing the burden on the reader, as well as ensuring consistency with historical and scientific facts, the author sought the assistance of botanists and historians in the outline phase. By the final draft, every branch and leaf of every plant in every panel was reviewed by experts - and possibly revised in response to feedback. In the chapter introducing Wu-Tsao, the bandits don't just rob travelers; they grow poppies and refine opium in a hidden encampment. A simple decision of what plants the bandits would use for their criminal activity had to take into account what plausible during the Japanese colonial period. This represents significant effort on the author's part, as well as time spent on verification by editors and botanical and historical advisors.

Ejan says, "The name of a collector doesn't go down in history like a botanist, but their work is the foundation for all further research." Her collaboration with botanists and historians is itself a veiled tribute to that unacknowledged work. Perhaps that is something *Plant Collectors' Notebook* has in common with readers: its protagonists silently support the work of botanical research - and plants silently support human life - in the same way that ordinary people like you and me contribute to the day-to-day operation of the world.





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Chapter 2: Skills





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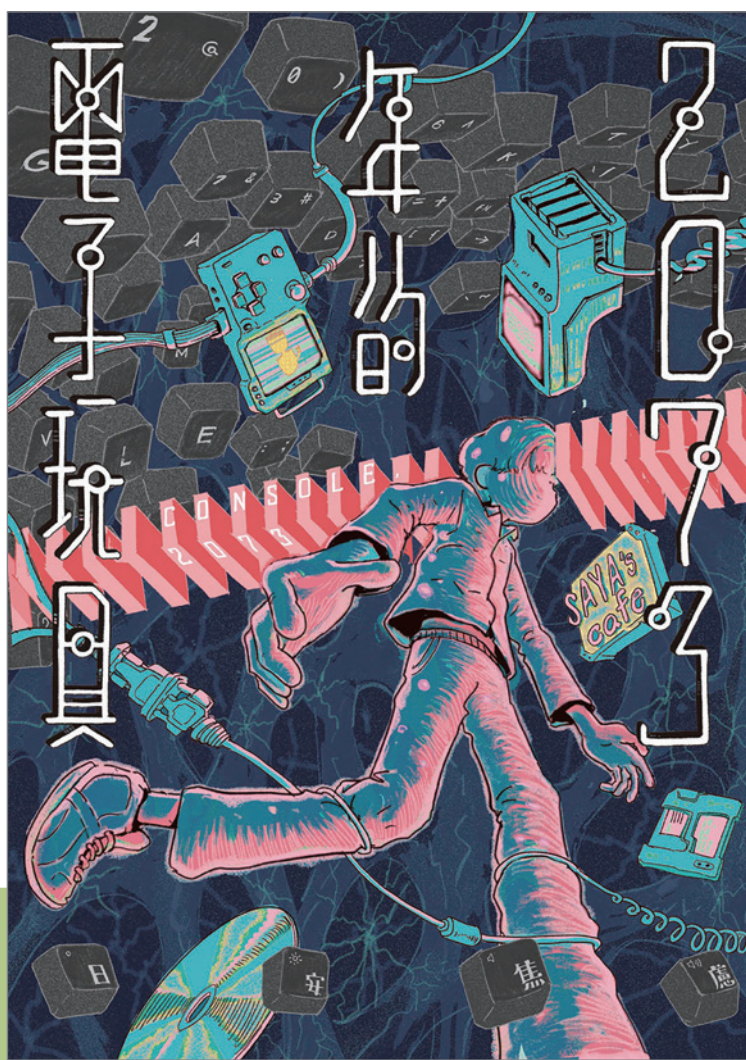
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# CONSOLE, 2073

2073 年的電子玩具



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- **Date:** 11/2022
- **Rights contact:**  
booksfromtaiwan@taicca.tw
- **Pages:** 268
- **Volume:** 1 (END)
- **Rights sold:**  
French (Kana), Italian (IF)

\* 2023 Golden Comic Award

***In a high-tech future, a game debugger uses forbidden technology to enter a virtual world and spend time with the object of his affections – a video game character who runs a cafe. As his visits become more frequent, the boundaries between reality and the game world blur, forcing the debugger to question the nature of love, consciousness, and reality.***

In 2073, the Dream Reality Engine is released, allowing gamers to fully enter the worlds of their favorite computer games in a dream-like state. However, due to safety concerns, the device is quickly banned. Years later, J, a game debugging specialist, stumbles across the banned device in an electronics flea market. Spurred by curiosity, he purchases it and enters the world of his favorite classic game, *Doomsday Library*.

As he works his way through the game levels, J finds he wants to spend more and more time with Saya, an in-game character who runs a coffee shop. Although Saya can only speak the stock phrases she is programmed with, in her presence, J finds a sense of peace and belonging. Over time, J's obsession with the game deepens until one day, Saya mysteriously breaks free from her programming and asks if he is from "the outside world". The game immediately shuts down, and afterwards, Saya disappears from the game. After the loss of Saya, the boundaries of J's reality blur. At the same time, he begins to suspect there is a deeper secret that lies hidden behind his jumbled experience of the game world, his dreams, and waking life.

Blurring the lines between reality and virtual reality, author/artist Ding Pao-Yen has delivered a compelling sci-fi love story that reveals its deeper truths one tantalizing layer at a time. The depth of J's longing will linger long after the story ends, even as readers are reassured by knowing they are not alone in their search for human warmth in a world dominated by technology.



## Ding Pao-Yen 日安焦慮 (丁柏晏)

A graduate of National Kaohsiung Normal University's Department of Fine Arts, Ding Pao-Yen works simultaneously in the fields of comic books and contemporary art. A lover of video games and sci-fi, he has been publishing his original comics and staging solo exhibitions since 2014. In 2019 he was a resident artist at the Angoulême International Comics Festival. His previous works include *Dinosaur Gallery*, *Maybe I Should Find a Job Trilogy*, *Road to Nowhere*, and *From the Dream Dimension*. *Road to Nowhere* has been published in French by MISMA.



# Ding Pao-Yen's Love Letter to Murakami Haruki

Written by Weng Chi-An (Originally published at Readmoo)

Translated by Roddy Flagg

Anyone who knows their zines and alternative manga in Taiwan will know the name Ding Pao-Yen. Ding Pao-Yen's rise over the last decade, powered by a distinctive artistic style and a little darkness in the details, has made him one of the most-watched figures in Taiwan comic book. He self-publishes, but also features in a number of recent local comic book anthologies. He doesn't just do comic books – he continues to produce illustrations and experiment with various forms of visual expression. His 2023 art book *From the Dream Dimension* documents his accomplishments during those wanderings between comic book and art.

*Console, 2073*, published in late 2022 by Slowork Publishing, was something followers of his work recognized as new. It wasn't just his first long-form piece – it was his first attempt at bringing his unique style to a mainstream audience after those years of self-publishing. His trademarks – harsh and explosive lines; anxiety and threats of violence lurking in the images – are still there, sometimes obviously, sometimes more subtly. But both narrative and composition have something more rarely seen from Ding Pao-Yen: a warmth, perhaps even a sweetness. Those two aspects could clash but in practice they balance each other, forming a fairy tale for modern times, a balm for every soul trapped between the real and the virtual.

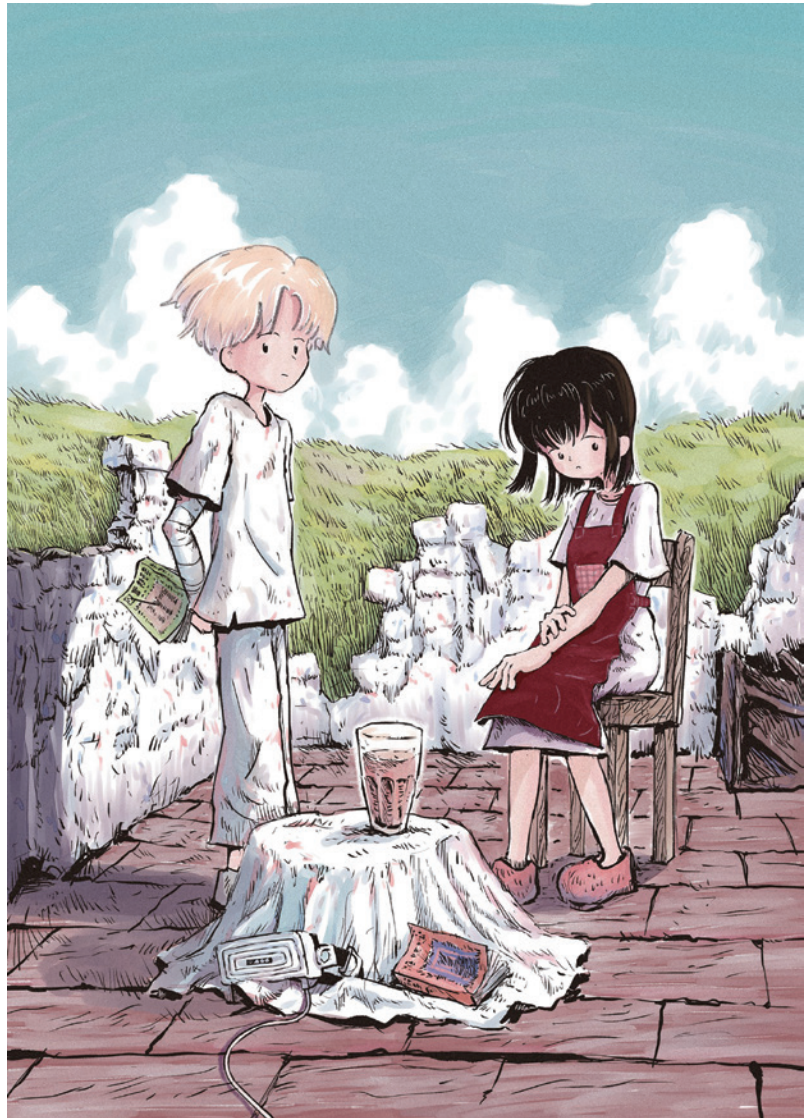
*Console, 2073* is a virtual romance. By the titular year, humanity has mastered the mechanics of dreaming, allowing the creation of a hybrid Dream Reality. This causes a sensation and is integrated into a best-selling games console. But by the time our protagonist, J, comes on the scene, Dream Reality has been banned for over a decade. But hardcore fans such as J, a professional bug-hunter for gaming studios, track down those games, get them up and running, and then plug themselves in. One day, J finds a Dream Reality game, *Doomsday Library*, at a second-hand market. In the process of debugging and playing the game, he falls for Saya, a cute in-game barista. With her, he finds a happiness and peace which escape him in the real world.

J becomes obsessed with the game; his feelings for Saya intensify. The boundary between Dream Reality and reality seems to fade. Each world bleeds into the other until he can't be sure which is which. What is the point of the world? What role does Saya play? While finding the answers to those questions, J finds himself forced to make a choice: dream world or reality.

The roomier long-form format allows Ding Pao-Yen's superb storytelling skills to come into play, creating a charming tale of virtual-real confusion. There is more, though, to the piece: images and symbolism drawn from the work of Japanese author Murakami Haruki are to be found: in the artwork, in the plot, even in

the characters. *Console, 2073* is almost a love letter to Murakami, something only a loyal reader or follower could produce.

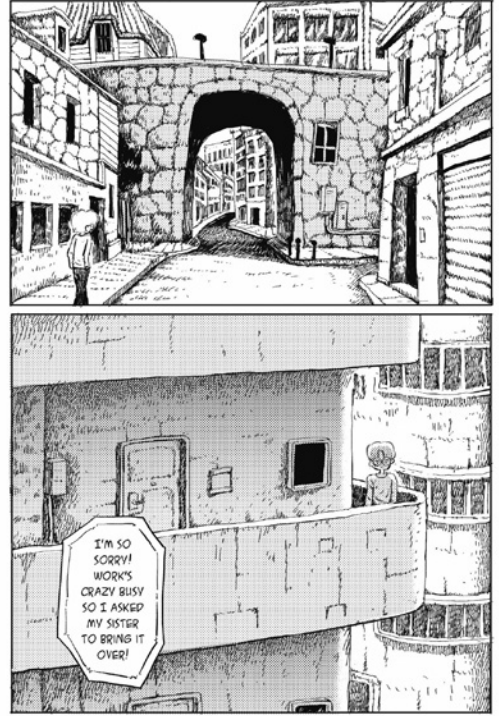
This is not just a simple quoting of references. Murakami's influence here is more profound. Ding Pao-Yen's visual grammar is a response to that surreal style of Murakami's, touching on something at the very core of the Japanese author's work: the darkness that hides below normality's surface, waiting to swallow us whole. *Console, 2073* doesn't just pay tribute to Murakami. It starts a conversation with him on what it means to be human.



This is mainstream sci-fi manga which manages to stay true to itself. It is also a work which reflects the author's thought processes over a long period of time and a dialogue of equals with a beloved author. More importantly, when we find reality difficult and virtuality empty, we can open *Console, 2073* and know that we are not alone. There are others, too, who wander confused.



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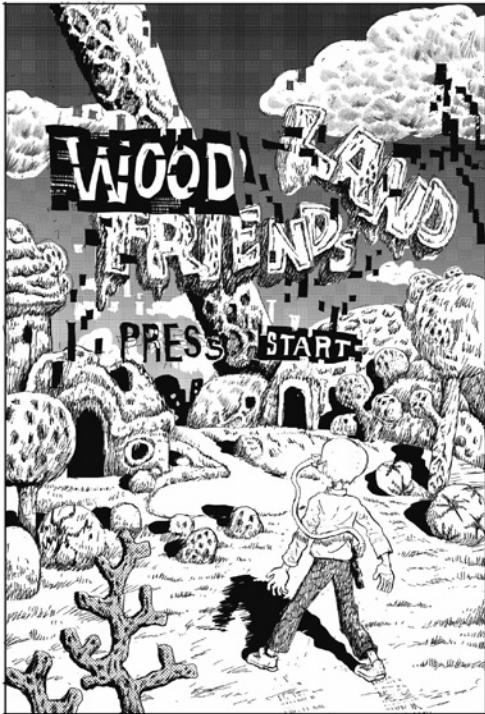
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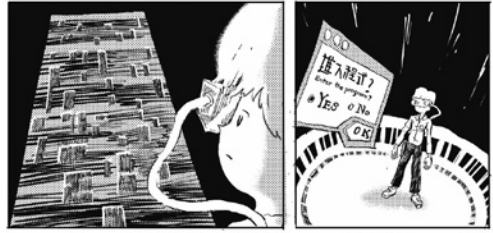
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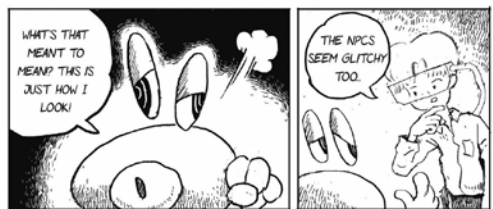
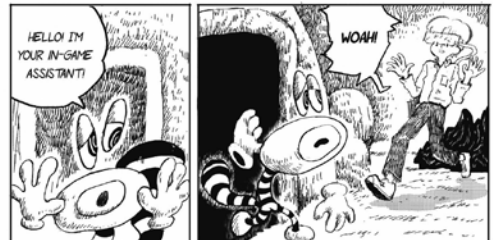
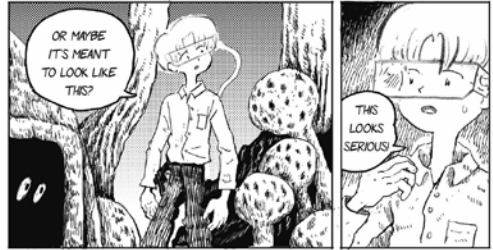
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# HELL PARADE

地獄遊行



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- **Volume:** 5 (END)



\* 2022 Golden Comic Award

*The world is threatened by horrific monsters entering through mysterious Hellgates – and humanity’s most powerful sorcerer is a disillusioned teenager with no interest in being a hero. What will it take for this young man to finally let go of his difficult past, and realize that even a world as dark as his own is still worth saving?*

In the distant future, werewolves, vampires, and sorcerers live openly in human society, and our current technologies have largely been replaced by magic. However, civilization’s dependence on magic comes at a cost, and the government must contract teams of specialists to deal with the disastrous consequences. Most prominent among these contractors is an organization of elite sorcerers known as the Sunset Squad.

Still in his teens but endowed with powerful magic, Eli is one of the youngest sorcerers to ever to join the Sunset Squad. However, most of the time this troubled youth can barely stir himself from his world-weary listlessness. Even the momentous task of saving the world elicits no more enthusiasm from him than that of a government bureaucrat considering his next pile of paperwork. And who can blame Eli when he already knows first-hand that his world is a dark place that may not be worth saving?

As the magical catastrophe worsens, Hellgates begin appearing with greater frequency, bringing horrific monsters and demonic energies into the world, and turning the far north into a region known as the Hellscape. National governments begin hiring mercenaries to defend their northern frontiers from the encroaching Hellscape, and Eli is eventually sent by the Sunset Squad to join the fight. How will his journey north, and his experiences on the frontlines of battle change him? What will it take for Eli to finally decide that even a cruel and unjust world might not be deserving of destruction?

Artist/writer Buke spent three years completing this sci-fi/fantasy epic. The richly conceived world and disillusioned anti-hero Eli immediately resonated with readers, earning *Hell Parade* the adoration of Taiwan’s comic book community, and making it a true contemporary classic of the medium.



## Buke 布克

Combining uniquely free-flowing line work, carefully plotted fantasy stories, and real-world social issues, Buke’s comics are always instantly recognizable and thought provoking. In 2020, she began releasing *Hell Parade* as an online serial on the Go Original Comics Base platform, and, later the same year, she published the first book in the now complete five volume series.

# Finding Peace in a World of Emptiness and Despair

Written by Weng Chi-An (Originally published at Readmoo)

Translated by Joshua Dyer

Sometimes you just open a comic for a quick glance, but in an instant, you know you're done for. It's not just a matter of sharply crafted characters, or the depth of the plot - you've stepped into an entirely new world.

Being "done for", naturally, is a good thing. You're going to lose yourself in this comic. You'll skip meals and lose sleep for it. You'll keep coming back for more, devouring each twist in the plot, and savoring every detail of the world laid out before you, like you did when you first read Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, or when you were desperately waiting for the final installment of Nagano Mamoru's *The Five Star Stories*. The main storylines of these works are unforgettable, of course, but it is the inconceivable act of creating the sense of an entire world that keeps us coming back for more, because our imagination is already off and running, envisioning all of the other stories this vast universe makes possible.

For this reader, Buke's *Hell Parade* is one of these wildly ambitious, and successful works of the imagination. I would say that its meticulously-wrought world stands among the greatest comic creations of Taiwan, except for the fact that I believe *Hell Parade* is on par even with the greatest manga from Japan, a nation renowned for numerous feats of astonishing world-building.

In the distant future of *Hell Parade*, the technologies and energy sources employed today have all been replaced by magic. Legendary creatures like elves and orcs live alongside humans, and sorcerers are employed by the government as a mercenary police force to deal with monsters that infiltrate society through mysterious hell-gates. The story revolves around two young sorcerers, Eli and his partner Sophy, the daughter of a wealthy family. Eli, whose origins are far more mysterious, has a take-it-or-leave attitude towards their low-paid government contracts. When a hell-gate on the northern border acts up, he is sent to the front lines, and Eli's past suddenly returns to haunt him, revealing a complex and sinister plot operating in the background.

The full five-volume series of *Hell Parade* is the product of three years of dedicated effort, yet none of its nearly thousand pages feels superfluous. In an era where the Taiwan comics world is clamoring for original IP, *Hell Parade* seethes with a multitude of distinct personalities, original in appearance as well as temperament. Whether sorcerers, vampires, werewolves, witches - or even passersby in the street - each leaves a distinct and memorable impression. Buke smoothly strings together scenes that draw out a wide range of moods and emotions, from the endearing, to the fantastically strange, to out-and-out tearjerkers - the effects owing in large part to Buke's ability to



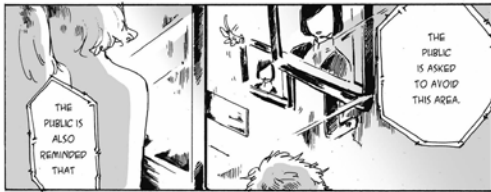
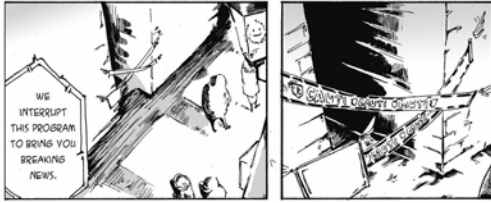
tell stories through her distinctively appealing line work. However, “telling stories” doesn’t really do justice to *Hell Parade*. The plot achieves its richness and complexity through a multitude of storylines which unfurl and intertwine with the intricacy of a finely wrought sculpture. The ability to juggle so many subplots is, of course, dependent on the complexity and scale of the universe Buke has created. The warp and weft of its many races, regions, cultures, and landscapes interlace to create something akin to the Bayeux Tapestry in its expansive vision of civilization and nature, a complex world that catalyzes the myriad interactions that constitute *Hell Parade*.

Character, setting, and plot nestle into one another like Russian dolls, a structuring device that avoids reliance on familiar clichés, and empowers Buke’s originality to shine from *Hell Parade* with a uniquely dazzling appeal. The deeper purpose behind the battles of men and monsters, the political intrigues, and the ties that bind the major characters are only revealed layer by layer, until the protagonist himself passes through the depths of doubt, and realizes that while his “awful and ordinary” world isn’t worth saving, neither is it deserving of destruction. But where do we find our peace in the midst of despair and emptiness? Of course, this question is directed toward the imagined world of *Hell Parade*, but it equally applies to our current reality.

There are no clear, simplistic answers in *Hell Parade*. Instead, it simply opens a space for deeper introspection. In the final chapters, even the nature of “Hell” itself is only explained in terms that will be mulled by readers for long after the book is finished.

The five volumes of *Hell Parade* are complete. Buke’s work is done. But the vast expanse of the imagined universe she has created is so suggestive of further stories, that her fans are condemned to eternally hope for sequels and spinoffs from this masterful world-weaver.





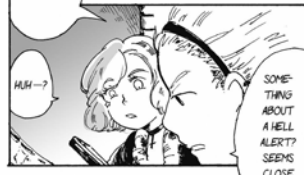
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# THE SHIMMERING SUMMONER

微光的召喚師



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Japanese (Kadokawa Japan)



***His spells may always go awry, but Robin is still a summoner with a big dream – defeating a Demonic Dragon! When a mysterious and troublesome young prince leads Robin straight to the doorstep of a Demonic Dragon’s castle, he has to decide, is it time to finally meet his destiny?***

Robin may be the worst summoner who has ever lived. Though his father is a great mage, Robin’s attempts at summoning always go awry, never quite delivering the object he is seeking. One day, during a magical duel, he accidentally summons a young prince. In order to at least maintain the appearance of doing the right thing, Robin decides to help the prince find his way back home.

During the night, the prince secretly leads Robin to a castle that holds the only Demonic Dragon in the world. It has always been Robin’s dream to defeat a Demonic Dragon and become a supernova-level hero, but why is the prince so interested in helping Robin fulfill his dream? And is Robin truly ready to cast off the shadow of his past failures and face the great challenge that lies ahead?

As the adventurers enter the castle and battle their way past various monsters, something even more mysterious happens... they fall in love! Combining elements of fantasy and boy’s love, fast-paced comic filled with memorable characters, resulting in a fresh twist on the conventional loser-turns-hero adventure story.



## Gene

A finalist for the Golden Comic Awards Best New Talent, Gene works in the genres of fantasy, boy’s love, and coming-of-age stories. A number of her comics have already appeared in foreign markets: *Wanted: Magic Girl!* (Korea), *Being With You to the End of the World* in (Japan), and *To Die Young?* (Japan and Vietnam).

# Heroic Adventures, “Boy’s Love”, and Cute Monsters?

Written by Weng Chi-An (Originally published at Readmoo)

Translated by Roddy Flagg

Take a team of intrepid adventurers, multiply by BL romance, add monsters both vicious and cute... it sounds like a formula for manga success. But what if that reliability brings its own risks. Perhaps the reader has just finished a similar work and will find the formula formulaic? Or maybe expectations continually ratchet up, meaning every story has to be bigger and better than the last?

Formulas for success are helpful, but come with their own problems. Particularly so now, when genres are constantly subverted and mashed-up and the “guaranteed bestseller” formula of last century is now little more than a distant legend. So how to move on? One route is disruptive innovation. *Frieren: Beyond Journey’s End*, for example, switches up the point of view, defying the reader’s “natural” expectations. Another option is to stick to what you know, but know it better. Rather than churn out another formulaic tale, identify the essence of the formula, the variables that attract readers, and put those back at the heart of the story.

Gene’s *The Shimmering Summoner* takes the latter approach, and with great success.

The story’s protagonist, Robin, is a summoner. Magic runs in his family: his father is a skilled mage. Robin, though, is a magical weakling. He tries to conjure up warriors and monsters, but gets only random useless objects. But he is not the type to let a lack of ability stand in the way of ambition and still dreams of becoming a supernova-level summoner and defeating a Demonic Dragon. But with his skills lagging so far behind his hopes, Robin spends most of his time boasting of achievements yet to come, while sponging off Bao, his loyal childhood friend. Bao, by the way, is a boy who loves to wear dresses.

By a remarkable coincidence (or perhaps, given his failure rate, a statistical inevitability), Robin one day summons up Kai, a boy prince. Kai tricks Robin into visiting the Demonic Dragon’s castle and Robin, too proud to admit incompetence, fights the beast alongside Kai. It’s a one-sided fight, until Robin discovers his true powers. The dragon is defeated and Robin wins his supernova-level stripes. Victory reconciles Robin with his father and leads to a spark between him and Kai, who is now revealed to be no boy prince but a full-grown man prince.

Robin’s new status brings a steady flow of up-and-coming challengers. To escape, Robin teams up with Kai and Bao and the trio sets off on a quest. During their travels Kai’s secret and Bao’s past come to light, while romance blossoms between Robin and Kai. Ultimately, the three face their final challenge.





Gene's characterizations reacquaint the reader with the essence of heroic manga: growing, moving past self-doubt, and finding yourself. True heroes don't perform great feats, they self-affirm and self-accept. Those who accompany the heroes, meanwhile, lend more than skills with sword or staff. They provide friendship and support.

*The Shimmering Summoner* features rich world-building, vivid characters, a fun and flowing story, but not one ounce of filler. Visually, there is plenty of detail with no loss of pace, easy switching between action and internal drama, and a range of terrifying monsters and cute little creatures. All this creates the charm of *The Shimmering Summoner* - an impressive achievement made to appear easy.

Developing that ability has taken years. Gene is not professionally trained, but has built up over a decade of experience since she started producing self-published works in high school. She drew webtoons for Comico before beginning the hand-to-mouth existence of a young creative, publishing serials and entering competitions. In 2019, she took the Bronze Prize for manga in Japan's MCPO Awards. In 2020 she walked away from the Kyoto International Manga Anime Awards with the Grand Prize in both the manga and illustration categories.

Perhaps Gene too has been on her own adventure and the dazzling *The Shimmering Summoner* is, like those prizes were, steps on that journey? We're sure to be seeing more extraordinary tales from this supernova-level artist.

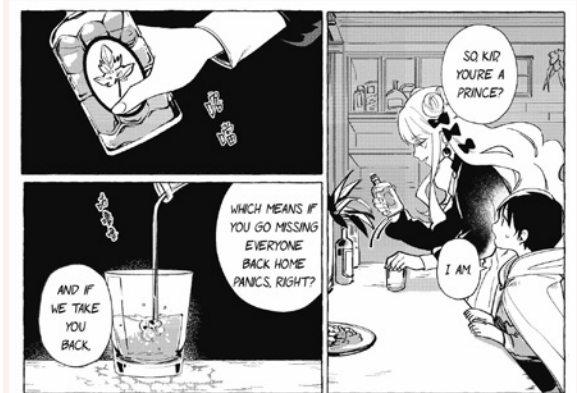


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AND ANYWAY BAO IS A BOY



IT'D BE A WASTE OF MY LOOKS IF I DIDN'T DRESS UP NOW AND THEN!

AFTER ALL, I'M SUPER-CUTE AND PRETTY.

I JUST DRESS LIKE A GIRL SOMETIMES. THAT'S ALL.

JUST DON'T GO FALLING IN LOVE WITH ME, OKAY?

6



DONT GET CONFUSED! WE'RE JUST OLD FRIENDS!

ME? AND THIS FIFTH-RATE SUMMONER? YOU NEED TO WATCH YOUR MOUTH, KID!

5



I'M NOT REALLY EQUIPPED FOR HOSTING ROYALTY.

DRINK THIS GLASS OF WARM MILK. IT'LL HELP YOU SLEEP.

WHAT AM I MEANT TO DO WITH A BABY PRINCE.

OKAY AS A SPECIAL TREAT YOU CAN SLEEP ON THE SOFA.



BAO IS KINDER THAN HE PRETENDS...



KAI!

8



CUTE.

ACTUALLY I THINK ROBIN IS CUTEST.

WHAT ARE YOU PRETTIEST TALKING IN TOWN ABOUT?

I'M NOT SURE BOYS LIKE BEING CALLED 'CUTE'...



IT'S LATE LETS GET SOME SLEEP

OKAY LETS GO.

DID YOU LOSE YOUR GLASSES?

OKAY



HONESTLY, ROBIN IS ALWAYS CAUSING TROUBLE...

OH WE SLEEP ON THE FLOOR.

WHERE'S MY BED?

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# HELENA AND MR. BIG BAD WOLF

海倫娜與大野狼先生



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(Norma), Catalan (Norma)



\* 2023 Golden Comic Award (Grand Prize)

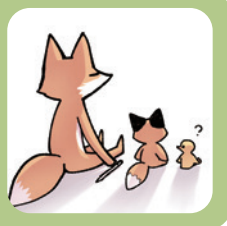
*As her little brother lies in a hospital bed on life support, an artistically talented orphan is given the opportunity to meet her idol, a graphic novelist and illustrator who always hides behind a wolf mask. After a rocky beginning, the pair embark on a collaborative journey that will become a source of healing for both.*

After losing their parents, Helena and her little brother Arthur are sent to live in an orphanage. When an accident sends Arthur into a coma just as he is being adopted into a new home, Helena is left with nothing to console her except the stories and drawings she invented to comfort Arthur after the loss of their parents.

Helena's spirits are lifted when she receives the opportunity to attend a book signing by her favorite graphic novelist, Mr. Big Bad Wolf. However, her idealized image of her idol is shattered when the masked Mr. Big Bad Wolf rudely rebuffs her questions about his creative process.

Nonetheless, through persistence and luck, Helena manages to thaw Mr. Big Bad Wolf's icy exterior, and enter into a relationship in which she is both disciple and friend to the disturbed author. But will she unravel the mystery behind Mr. Big Bad Wolf's need to hide behind a wolf mask? And will she ever achieve her own creative dreams?

Filled with the charm and danger of a classic fairy tale, this heartwarming story traces a unique friendship that catalyzes much-needed healing for both parties, helping each to resolve their creative blocks, and gifting readers with a healthy dose of wisdom for facing the difficult passages of life.



## 布里斯 BlISS

BlISS is the creator behind the comic book *Cynderia*, winner of gaming website Bahamut's 2015 Creative Contest funding prize. Under the pen name Buriburi, she draws the commercial comic strip *Magic Marriage*. She is adept at creating original stories that revolve around pairings of characters with conflicting personality types. *Helena and Mr. Big Bad Wolf* began as a self-publish comic serial that BlISS drew for her own amusement.

# Stories Within Stories and the People Behind Them

Written by Jean Chen (Originally published at Readmoo)

Translated by Sarah-Jayne Carver

I have loved Russian dolls ever since I was a child and how the process of nesting them inside one another is like an endless world that you can just keep extending again and again. I've always been fascinated by this kind of form, and at night if I ever had a dream within a dream, my senses all felt exceptionally real, so I'd wake up feeling satisfied up even if the dream within a dream had been scary or painful. There are a lot of films and novels where "the dreamer has a dream within a dream", but I hadn't expected to read a modern graphic novel from Taiwan that evoked a similar feeling.

Of course, *Helena and Mr. Big Bad Wolf* isn't a story about a dream within a dream or Russian doll, but it's fascinating to see how one story after another is woven into the narrative. Even though this is BliSS's first commercially published graphic novel, the overall narrative is comprehensive and mature with three-dimensional characters that are filled with emotional details. The highly skilled storytelling technique and smooth pacing of the frames help readers easily immerse themselves in the narrative which combines nuanced moments of both sadness and humor to stunning overall effect.

*Helena and Mr. Big Bad Wolf* begins with Helena, a seven-year-old girl living in an orphanage who loves to read picture books and has just won an invitation to a book signing by her favorite graphic novelist. The author is Mr. Big Bad Wolf, whose books are always solitary and brutal. He also refuses to face his readers, and reluctantly appears wearing a wolf head and bluntly declines to take any questions about it. In a room full of adults, Helena is the youngest person and fearlessly raises her hand to ask, "Why do you wear a wolf's head?"

Yes, why indeed? The story starts to unfold as young orphan Helena brings the reader along and opens the first Russian doll. One of them is a grown man and the other is a young girl, but both characters carry deep wounds inside them and the scars from their rough lives are buried in the stories they tell and, then they heal each other as the book progresses. Both of them have a deep desire to tell stories, for Mr. Big Bad Wolf it's *The Scientist and the Giant* and for Helena it's *Lara the Witch*, but why did they start? And who are they telling the stories to? And why tell them in that way?

I'll spare you the spoilers here, so maybe instead I'll talk about the story within the story. Helena, who has lost her parents, is living in an orphanage with her little brother Arthur and has loved telling him stories and reading picture books to him ever since she was small. She used to use stories to block out the sound of the adults arguing and there was a story that she read to him over and over again while she sat beside his hospital bed. That story was *The Scientist and the Giant* by Mr. Big Bad Wolf but Helena was still waiting for the end because Mr. Big Bad Wolf was going through a slump and couldn't draw the rest of the story.

In *The Scientist and the Giant*, a scientist comes across a lonely giant who lives underground, and the scientist tells him stories and shares what he's seen of the earth which brings light to the giant's world. It's almost as if hurt people have a special ability to sniff out wounds. As a wounded child, Helena may have smelt the same thing and ran towards Mr. Big Bad Wolf in a time of great sadness and depression. However, she doesn't understand what Mr. Big Bad Wolf calls a "slump", and on the tram the two of them have this conversation:

Helena: What is this slump you keep talking about?

Mr. Big Bad Wolf: ...It's a state that makes you feel powerless, afraid, or even repulsed by something you originally loved and thought was important.

Helena: That seems so scary.

Mr. Big Bad Wolf: It is.

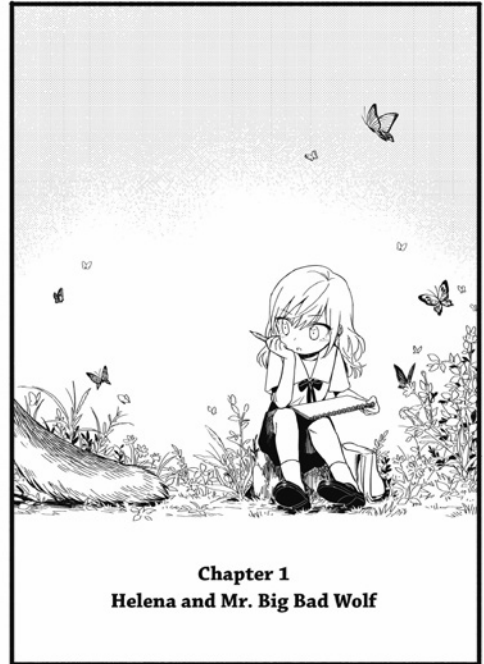
During their brief conversation, Helena seems to suddenly understand and continues: "Ah so that's what a slump is! It's when something that was obviously very important to you suddenly feels awful and you don't want to be anywhere near it..."

I particularly love moments like these in graphic novels where I'm silently struck by the characters and their lines, and how they clearly feel a strong sense of empathy for each other even though they've had completely different experiences. I mean, who among us hasn't had been through a slump? The story is about Mr. Big Bad Wolf's pain, but what I really felt was the person behind the drawings. In those painful, lonely moments, Mr. Big Bad Wolf had to rely on his creativity to get him through. However, creating the work itself was also painful as he desperately wanted to tell a good story but had no way of doing so, and in the process, it was like seeing the shadow of *Helena and Mr. Big Bad Wolf's* author grafting herself onto the story.

There are also some small things in *Helena and Mr. Big Bad Wolf* that I found particularly interesting and have brought me great pleasure as a reader. Firstly, all the characters have English names, but I was really intrigued by how the surnames were set up. Helena's surname is White, and Mr. Big Bad Wolf's is Blake, and while I know it isn't the same as Black, the pronunciation is similar! It seems like the author has deliberately used them to create a contrast between lightness and darkness. And after all, the author also called the doctor Rowan Brown and the teacher Melrose Green! (That might just be me overthinking it? XD)

Another detail I really liked was the "book within a book" concept. This story has two protagonists - Helena and Mr. Big Bad Wolf - one is an adult and one is a child, one is male and the other is female, and both of them love to draw and tell stories. In the graphic novel, their own books also appear throughout the story which lets us see their respective personalities and projections of their characters. When I finished reading the book, I couldn't help thinking, "I'd buy *Lara and the Witch* and *The Scientist and the Giant* if they were published!"

Overall, *Helena and Mr. Big Bad Wolf* is a well-structured, smoothly narrated, and moving story that conveys universal values which can be felt by readers of all nationalities. Comprised of only two volumes, it is light while still being deep, which should make it well-suited for foreign rights sales. Finally, I just want to add that I really enjoyed the little four-panel strip in the appendix in which BliSS gives Helena's friends at the orphanage their own little stories so that all the characters get a look in, which was very thoughtful of the author!



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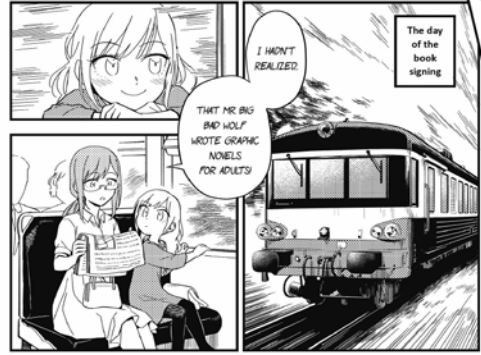
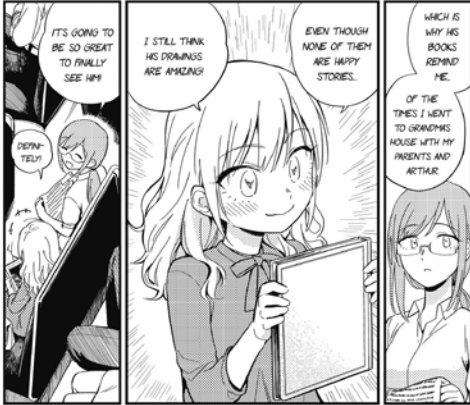
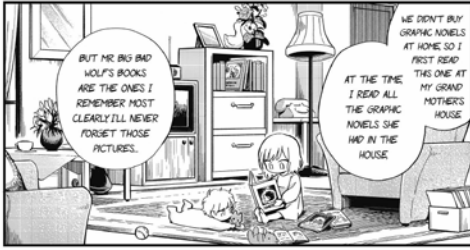
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# MY FORTY-NINE DAYS WITH THE CHENGHUANG

我與城隍的 49 天



- **Publisher:** Ever Glory
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- **Pages:** 176 / 176
- **Volume:** 2 (END)

***After an Underworld administrative error ends her life, youthful spinster Chen Chih-Yao is eventually allowed to return to the mortal realm. However, her once simple life is upended by the appearance of Chenghuang, an Underworld deity with a bone to pick. Exactly what kind of sparks will fly when this mismatched pair begins living under the same roof?***

Abandoned by her mother as a child, Chen Chih-Yao grew up in the countryside with her grandmother. Now, as a young woman, the local matchmaker persistently arranges dates for her, but Chen Chih-Yao refuses all suitors, preferring instead to lead a simple life with her grandmother. After a fatal car accident, Chen Chih-Yao arrives in the Underworld only to discover her life was taken prematurely due to an administrative error. But before she can return to the mortal realm, she offends Chenghuang, the Underworld deity who took the blame for her premature death.

Having finally returned to her former life, Chen Chih-Yao's hopes of resuming a normal existence are dashed when she discovers she now has the ability to see ghosts. Even worse, the disgraced Chenghuang has been temporarily exiled to the mortal realm, where he appears as a distant relative who will be staying with Chen Chih-Yao and her grandmother. In the face of all of these supernatural disturbances, will Chen Chih-Yao ever return to the familiar rhythms of her former life? Or, is this just what she needs to push her out of her comfort zone, face the hurts of the past, and finally start living to the fullest?

Best known for rom-com comics with themes of personal growth and healing, this is artist/writer Ebi's first foray into the realm of the supernatural. An opposites-attract love story colored by elements of fantasy and traditional folklore, *My Forty-Nine Days with the Chenghuang* ignites romantic fireworks from the odd-couple pairing of a headstrong mortal and a haughty deity.



## Ebi 蝦米

A creator of *shoujo* manga, Ebi got her start drawing simple four-panel comic strips. Her full-length comic books are mostly romantic comedies, illustrated in a style that is both cutesy and elegant. Her previous works include *Candy Girl Kaka*, *Half of a Good Day*, *Please Stay with Me*, *Autumn in Summer*, and *Nice to Meet You Again*.

# Who Knew the Netherworld's Bureaucracy Could Be This Adorable?

Written by Itzel Hsu (Originally published at Readmoo)

Translated by William Ceurvels

Ebi is a Taiwanese comic artist who specializes in romantic comedy and has also created a line of stickers on the social media app Line featuring her cutesy cartoon alter-ego. She is perhaps best known for her romantic comic trilogy centered around an old apartment complex called "Sunshine Manor". The cast of characters that inhabit the fictive world of Ebi's Sunshine Manor all seem to encounter adversity - a beautiful college girl strives to succeed in life but is harmed by her own boyfriend, an enthusiastic young girl is teased for being short and chubby, a male comic artist is haunted by introversion and solitude - but ultimately, under the steady hand of Ebi's prose, they all grow to find their own form of happiness.

By introducing elements of folk religion into the familiar romance trope of the "quarrelsome lovers", *My Forty-Nine Days with the Chenghuang* presents a breakthrough in Ebi's oeuvre. Scenes are set not just in the modern world, but also in the netherworld and in a past life of the protagonist, creating a much more complex and fantastical mise-en-scène than in Ebi's previous works.

The "Chenghuang" mentioned in the title is the Mandarin term for a god that protects over a city and, in this comic, refers to the male protagonist, Chang Liu-Sheng. In Taiwanese culture, Chenghuang temples serve as something like the city halls of the spirit-world, but due to the fact that Chenghuangs are in charge of punishing evil-doers, escorting the dead into the afterlife and exorcising demons, they often evince a stern and severe disposition. Subordinates that appear alongside the Chenghuang are often rendered with ferocious expressions meant to intimidate and deter evil ghosts and demons, and throughout Chenghuang Temples, aphorisms cautioning against evil-doing line the sides of doorways. Given the severe and solemn atmosphere that these temples evoke, it would be highly unlikely for the average person to associate them with romance. Yet, in a move that will surely surprise and inspire curiosity in her readers, Ebi has chosen a Chenghuang as the protagonist in her latest romance.

In many East Asian belief systems, the netherworld is thought to have an administrative system not unlike the bureaucratic organizations that govern the world of the living - the Chenghuang is just one small cog in the vast machinery of this system. Indeed, Chang Liu-Sheng, the Chenghuang depicted in *My Forty-Nine days with the Chenghuang*, is a fairly low-ranking official serving under the Grand Lord Chengchuang. (If we were to liken the Grand Lord Chenghuang to a city mayor, a Chenghuang would be more like a village ward.) Classical Chinese literature abounds with legends of the netherworld - Pu Song-ling's *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, for instance, satirized the corruption and injustice of Qing Dynasty bureaucracy with a collection of stories detailing the negligence of netherworld officials. Yet, compared with Pu's depiction of netherworld bureaucracy, Ebi's seems even truer to life: Teams led by different Chenghuangs compete and bicker and Old Lady Meng whose heady potion helps the departed forget the memories of their past life gets updated as a young stunner who seems



to be engaging in extracurricular activities with the Grand Lord Chenghuang. Against this backdrop, it is not such a surprise, then, that the female protagonist Chen Chih-Yao's love story begins with her mistaken entry into the netherworld.

Like many other tales of quarrelsome lovers, Chen Chih-Yao and Chang Liu-Sheng's relationship is born out of conflict: When Chih-Yao finds herself inexplicably cast into the netherworld and realizes her time among the living is not yet up, she gets in an argument with Liu-Sheng's subordinates "Heipai Wuchang"<sup>1</sup> who had mistakenly taken her in. Liu-Sheng is suspended after protecting his subordinates and, in a fit of anger, casts a spell on Chih-Yao that allows her to see ghosts in the world of the living. From a reader's perspective with the benefit of hindsight, Liu-Sheng seems almost like a schoolboy who picks on the girl he has a secret crush on – it might have all just been a ploy to get closer to Chih-Yao. When Liu-Sheng returns to the world of the living, he finds an excuse to become the Chen's houseguest and ensuing hauntings of the Chen's home become the kindling that fuels Chih-Yao and Liu-Sheng's budding romance.

Yet, is marriage truly the ultimate expression of a loving relationship? In the opening scene of the comic in which Chih-Yao's grandmother arranges a meeting for her with a prospective suitor, her total disinterest in marriage is already on full display. Knowing her grandmother is well-intentioned, she stops short of rejecting the whole arrangement outright and instead opts to scare away her potential suitor by arriving late, dirtying her clothes and deliberately making herself look less attractive. Halfway through the comic, we learn that Chih-Yao's parents got a divorce, a traumatic memory that sheds a deeper light on Chih-Yao's reluctance to participate in arranged meetings. In an interesting turn of events, as Chih-Yao's relationship with Liu-Sheng evolves, she begins arranging meetings with suitors for her grandmother and even lends support to her friend who is going through a crisis in his marriage. Perhaps, Chen Chih-Yao's indifference towards marriage is not entirely a product of deep-seeded fear, but rather a symptom of the importance she places on not acting in ways she'll later regret. That is, marriage is one way that people can be happy together, but it is not the ultimate goal.

Like many other love stories between the living and the dead, the conclusion to *My Forty-Nine Days with the Chenghuang* will inevitably leave readers feeling despondent. Ultimately, Liu-Sheng must return to his post as Chenghuang in the netherworld, just as Chih-Yao must eventually choke back Old Lady Meng's heady brew to wipe her mind clean of any memory of the great beyond. In the final scenes, Liu-Sheng's new outlook towards his past-life memories presages a possible change of fate: He had always remained in the netherworld serving as a Chenghuang due to his distaste for the brutality of the world of the living and his unwillingness to forget the kind deeds of benefactors in his past life, but what new life will await him now that he no longer despises the land of the living and prepares to drink Lady Meng's brew and reincarnate?

As for the novel's conclusion, most readers were quite satisfied with how Ebi chose to bring the story to a close. Whether or not the protagonists ultimately do forget each other, characters like Heipai Wuchang, who turned into cute little dogs, the ravishing Lady Meng prancing along with her parasol, and the stylish Chenghuangs who managed to pull off ancient ceremonial robes and modern tailored suits with the same panache, will certainly live on in the memory of readers. This vibrant cast of characters has injected our conventional understanding of the underworld with new color and perspective.

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1 Often rendered in English as "the black and white ghosts of impermanence", Heipai Wuchang are two deities in Chinese folk religion that guide the deceased into the netherworld.



2



1



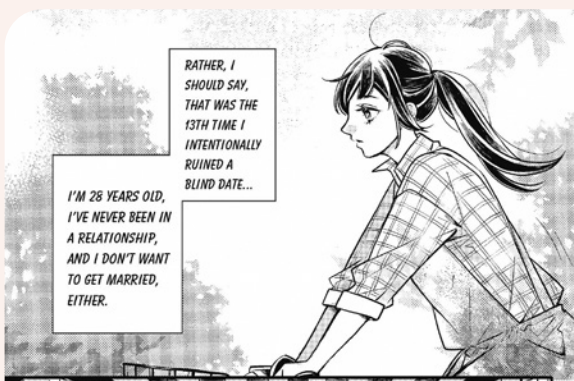
4



3







RATHER, I SHOULD SAY, THAT WAS THE 13TH TIME I INTENTIONALLY RUINED A BLIND DATE...

I'M 28 YEARS OLD, I'VE NEVER BEEN IN A RELATIONSHIP, AND I DON'T WANT TO GET MARRIED, EITHER.



I'M GOOD! WE STILL HAVE PLENTY AT HOME.

YAO! NEED ANY FRUIT TODAY?



I'LL BE ON MY WAY NOW!

I THOUGHT A-HAO WAS SETTING YOU UP WITH A DATE TODAY? HOW DID IT GO?

OH HEY!

I WASN'T A MATCH FOR HIM. HEH HEH.

6



ALRIGHT! ALRIGHT! ALRITE! I'LL LEAVE THESE RADISHES FOR YOU AND LET'S CALL IT A DAY!

I'VE SET UP SO MANY DATES FOR YOU AND NOT A SINGLE ONE HAS WORKED OUT! THINK OF WHAT THIS DOES TO MY REPUTATION AS A GOLDEN MATCHMAKER!

ARGHH! I CAN'T DO THIS ANYMORE.

IF NOT FOR YOUR GRANDMA, I WOULDN'T INTRODUCE YOU TO ANYONE!



I'M HEADING OUT!

COME BACK HERE RIGHT AWAY!

CHEN CHIH-YAO, I'M NOT DONE YET!



I THINK THAT WAS THE 13TH TIME I'VE RUINED A BLIND DATE.

5



GRANDMA?

GRANDMA!

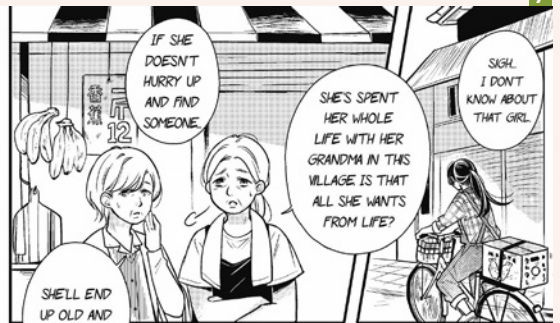
WHERE DID SHE GO? SHE DIDN'T EVEN TELL ME WHERE SHE'S GOING.



CHEN CHIH-YAO!

ARE YOU HERE?!

8



SHE'LL END UP OLD AND ALL ALONE.

IF SHE DOESN'T HURRY UP AND FIND SOMEONE.

SHE'S SPENT HER WHOLE LIFE WITH HER GRANDMA IN THIS VILLAGE IS THAT ALL SHE WANTS FROM LIFE?

SIGH. I DON'T KNOW ABOUT THAT GIRL.



I'M BACK—



GRANDMA, I'M BACK!

7

5

# ISLAND RHAPSODY: LISTEN TO THE VOICE OF TAIWAN

島嶼狂想曲：聽台灣在唱歌



- Publisher: Gaea Books
- Date: 8/2022
- Rights contact: booksfromtaiwan@taicca.tw
- Pages: 192 / 208
- Volume: 2 (END)



\* 2023 Golden Comic Award (Best Editor)

***Ten classic songs from Taiwan, adapted into ten different comics, each unique in style and approach. Nostalgia and meaning intermingle in these varied visions of Taiwan, from hard-edged realism, to satire, to flights of fancy.***

What appears in your mind when you hear your favorite classic song? Does it elicit memories from the past? Or, does it give you that wistful sense of how much things have changed over the years? Bringing together comics and music, *Island Rhapsody* began with a list of ten popular songs from the 1950s to 2000s selected by singer, songwriter, and composer Chen Ming-Chang. Next, ten comic book artists set to work creating stories inspired by the songs of this classic playlist.

Some stories are based on childhood interactions with family and friends, with the song acting as a gateway to the memories of bygone times. In other stories, the main character hears the song, and, touched by the lyrics and melody, comes to a new understanding of their life situation. In some cases, the songs are the basis for constructing imaginary worlds in which the characters undertake new adventures.

All of the songs in the book are available for listening online. In addition to the comics, the book also contains a listening guide written by music critic Hung Fang-Yi to enhance the reading and listening experience.



## Produced by GoodTrip Creative 好旅文創

The guiding mantra of GoodTrip Creative is “Seeing the world. Seen by the world.” Focused on high-quality audiovisual products suited to worldwide media trends, the company’s productions have been distributed in a variety of overseas markets, and garnered numerous awards. Their work includes science documentary series *VR 101*, the children’s theatrical production of *My Little Boy A-Nee-Gu*, made-for-TV movie *The Plastic Bag*, and television show *Listen! Taiwan Is Singing*. In recent years, GoodTrip has increasingly worked in story development, original comics, and video production in order to offer a multi-media approach to their subjects.

# A Groundbreaking Comic Collection Adapted from Music That Melds the Old with the New

Written by Itzel Hsu (Originally published at Readmoo)

Translated by Jacqueline Leung

Comics may be sequences of still images, but this has not stopped artists from using the form to make titles about music, for which there is already a considerable list - like the widely popular Japanese manga *Nodame Cantabile* on classical music; *NANA*, about a rock band; and *BLUE GIANT*, whose protagonist is a jazz musician. Taiwan has also been releasing comics about music in recent years, including *DEMO* and *BLA BLA SONG*. Among them, *Island Rhapsody* has to be one of the most intricately conceived titles. Different from the works mentioned, it is a two-volume collection of short comics by ten artists, each working with a different style. The short pieces do not have multiple growth arcs for its main characters or complicated plot twists, nor do they divulge knowledge about music and its instruments. They are inspired by songs, but rather than being mere visual adaptations, they get to the heart of the tracks, reaching through the cracks of time and space to explore different narratives.

*Island Rhapsody* is configured after the travel program *Listen! Taiwan Is Singing* hosted by popular musician Chen Ming-Chang, who likes to travel and sing. In the show, Chen went around Taiwan to experience its regional cultures, and together with his friends, he would play his signature yueqin or guitar while they sang famous tunes from the places they visited. Ten of those songs were later selected for this collection. Each short comic comes with a QR code that links to the actual track, as well as printed lyrics and an introductory text and commentary by music critic Hung Fang-Yi.

Appreciators of the collection may worry about its specificity to Taiwan, that despite all these materials providing context, other readers may still find this to be a barrier. Or, alternatively, that readers may not be able to accept this sort of "adaptation" or "translation" because of their musical taste. But even if one skips all the commentary and goes straight to the comics, one can still get pleasure out of it.

The first volume starts with "If I Open My Heart's Door" by Sen, told through the eyes of a female protagonist as she revisits the streets and her old home in her hometown. Like a metaphorical door to the heart, the story draws readers into its imaginary world. In a somewhat similar vein, the second volume finishes with GGDOG's "Salt Ponds - The Home of the Black-faced Spoonbills", which has the protagonist waking up in the summer heat of his room at the end. Although the "salt zone" of his dreams is reduced to a small, mundane complaint of daily life, there is a sense of lingering

aftertaste savored by both the protagonist and the readers. Inexplicably, as if in a reverie, the beginning and the end of the collection connect despite showing vastly different artistic portrayals.

Four of the ten comics are influenced by science fiction, while the other six take place in real life. As the stories intermingle, reality and fantasy become indistinguishable. If one were to insist upon a central theme, each story features a main character exploring their sense of belonging, whether permanent or temporary, to the places they reside as well as their careers and lives, which leads them to action or contemplation.

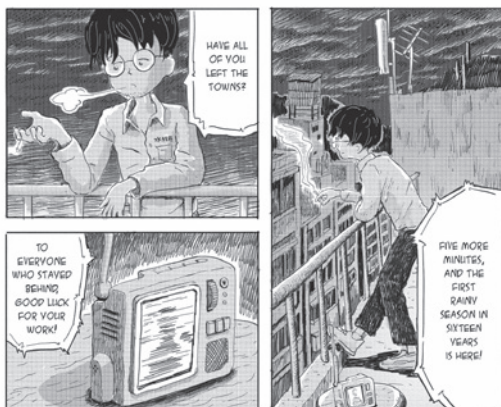
Each of the stories exhibits the unique visual languages of their artists. Ding Pao-Yen uses short, urgent strokes and gray tones to portray a desolate city besieged by rain, while Tseng Yao-Ching adapts the regional festivity of the song "Miss So-Lan Wants to Get Married" into a modern-day vignette on the subtleties of human relationships. ROCKAT sets his story in the year 2040, when the traditional Lukang becomes a famous tourist spot under a Chinese Federation. Zuo Hsuan's story of a young Foley artist trying to find meaning in his career is heartwarming and inspiring, while Lo Ning depicts scenes from the countryside and opera performances in the rain to express the nostalgia of visiting one's hometown. Cao Chian visualizes the physical and psychological struggles suffered by Beitou hostesses with thick, dark lines, while Peter Mann's comic about the strife of women pursuing success is told as a lighthearted tale of parents and children working together. Mu Ke Ke narrates the meeting and separation of childhood friends, showing how loneliness comes to all regardless of age.

In an interview, Alan Lee, editor-in-chief of the comics department of Gaea Books, said, "It would be too boring if these comics were complete adaptations of the lyrics, readers can just listen to the songs. The artists should also get to show their creativity, they're not here to only illustrate the lyrics." With this direction, the artists commissioned for this project only had to consider the number of spreads they were given and were otherwise given the freedom to work on their comics. Judging from their striking contributions, this approach has allowed them to come up with different narratives as well as ways to enliven the reading and listening experience - appreciators of the collection may come across pleasant surprises as they go through the songs and the comics.



## Comic by Ding Pao-Yen 日安焦慮 (丁柏晏)

A graduate of National Kaohsiung Normal University's Department of Fine Arts, Morning Anxiety works simultaneously in the fields of comic books and contemporary art. A lover of video games and sci-fi, he has been publishing his original comics and staging solo exhibitions since 2014. In 2019 he was a resident artist at the Angoulême International Comics Festival. His previous works include *Dinosaur Gallery*, *Maybe I Should Find a Job Trilogy*, *Road to Nowhere*, and *From the Dream Dimension*. *Road to Nowhere* has been published in French by MISMA.



## Comic by ROCKAT 搖滾貓

A graduate of National Taiwan University of Arts, ROCKAT is a professional comic book artist and illustrator, and 2016 recipient of Japan's International Manga Award. His best-known work is the comic book series *Nameless Song*. In 2014 he illustrated the political satire board game *Wonderful Island*.







## Comic by Sen 森森

Comic creator Sen graduated with a degree in set design from Taipei National University of the Arts, and now works in comics, illustration, and graphic design. He has published a collection of short works entitled *Everyday Youth* and the independent comics *Insomnia Diary*, and *Black Cat*.



## Comic by Tseng Yao-Ching 曾耀慶

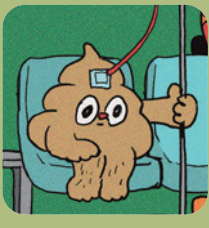
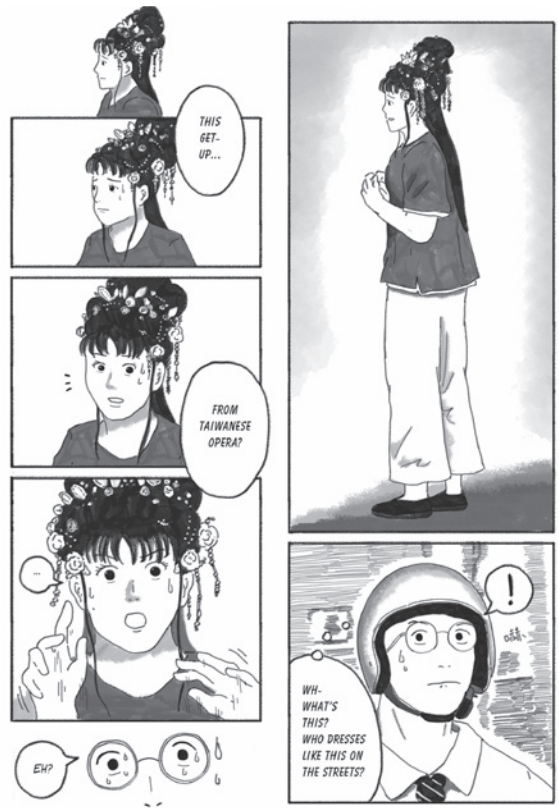
Tseng Yao-Ching is a graphic novelist and illustrator who works with unconventional combinations of materials, such as Chinese calligraphy ink and poster paint on cotton paper. In 2013 he was nominated for the 2013 Golden Comic Award for Best New Artist, and was invited to represent Taiwan at the 2018 Angoulême International Comics Festival. *Lunatic is the Night*, his comic book collaboration with four other artists, won the Golden Comic Award in 2020.





## Comic by Lo Ning 羅寧

Hsinchu native Lo Ning is a freelance illustrator and designer who has recently begun experimenting with digital formats. She currently resides in Taipei.



## Comic by Peter Mann

Born in Germany but Taiwanese through and through, Peter Mann worked in animation until, by a roundabout path, he became a comic book artist and illustrator. Much of his illustration work is connected to music, including visual design for music festivals and album cover design.





## Comic by Zuo Hsuan 左萱

Zuo Hsuan is a well-regarded comic book artist and book cover illustrator. Her first published work, *Rites of Returning*, won the Bronze Award at the 2015 International Manga Awards in Japan. The book went on to sell foreign language rights for Japanese, French, Vietnamese, and Italian, and a television adaptation was released in 2021. Zuo Hsuan has represented Taiwan at the Angoulême International Comics Festival, the Frankfurt Book Fair, the Lucca Comics & Games, and the BDFIL Comics Festival.



## Comic by Cao Chian 草千

A lover of comics and metal music, Cao Chian creates personal narratives around themes of growth, and draws in a style that fuses American and Asian comic book art. She is currently studying comic books and printmaking at Art Institute of Chicago.







## Comic by Mu Ke Ke 木可柯

Young comic artist Mu Ke Ke has received numerous awards, including a special jury prize awarded by comic website CCC, and a silver prize at the ACG Awards run by gaming website Bahamut. She has represented Taiwan as artist-in-residence at the San Diego Comic-Con and the Angoulême International Comics Festival.



## Comic by GGDOG

Making his living primarily through comics and illustration, GGDOG has developed a realistic style with manga influences that expresses his personal take on reality.







## BOOKS FROM TAIWAN

<http://booksfromtaiwan.tw/>

# TENDER IS THE NIGHT

直到夜色溫柔



- **Publisher:** Faces
- **Date:** 1/2023
- **Rights contact:**  
booksfromtaiwan@taicca.tw
- **Pages:** 256
- **Volume:** 1 (END)

***These nine short comics about sexuality outside the confines of conventional dating and marriage reveal the challenges and possibilities presented by newly emergent views of the body, sex, love, and gender identity.***

Although we live in a time when our understanding of human sexuality is rapidly evolving, it remains a taboo subject for many. Dispensing with conventional notions of sex, love, sensuality, and beauty, this collection of nine short comics reveals the naked truth of the diversity of sexual expression in contemporary society.

Within the pages of *Tender is the Night*, readers will become observers to a wide range of uniquely modern sexual experiences: a man whose online hook-ups never come to fruition, a lesbian who arranges an encounter with her lover's mistress, the unusual sex life of a neurotic woman and her deaf boyfriend, a gay man with dwarfism who gets a lesson in the art of the blowjob, a lesbian who wants to see her partner make love to a man, the decades long affair that becomes a source of inner strength for both parties, an overweight woman who can't escape her own self-loathing, a gay man tries his first three-way, and two trans women negotiate the sometimes awkward complexities of gender preference and attraction. As flesh contacts flesh in myriad ways, what is revealed are the hopes and fears that people of all genders project onto their bodies and intimate relationships.

Comic artist Huihui, known for her sensitive depictions of human affection and sexuality, and renowned playwright Chien Li-Ying collaborated to adapt Chien's script, which would be nearly impossible to stage with live actors, to the comic book medium. Upon publication, the book became a focal point of discussions on changing sexual mores in contemporary Taiwan.



© Chen Pei-Yun

## Story by Chien Li-Ying 簡莉穎

Playwright Chien Li-Ying is Director of Content at DaMou Entertainment, a film and television production company, and a former adjunct lecturer in the School of Theater Arts at Taipei National University of the Arts. As a playwright and director she has staged over thirty theatrical productions. In 2011 she was selected as one of the New Power Players by performing arts magazine PAR. The following year, the same magazine named her Person of the Year in the performing arts category. Her collected theatrical works have been published in three volumes: *Springtime Listlessness*, *Observations of a Transvestite*, and *Possible Recollections of the Traitor Mamet*. She is also the scriptwriter of 2022 Netflix TV series *Wave Maker*.



## Comic by Huihui 廢廢子

Huihui is a graduate of the Department of Fine Arts at National Taiwan Normal University and the Experimental Animation Program at CalArts. Her first graphic novel, *Blowing-Up Adventure of Me!*, grew out of her graduation project and was hugely popular when serialized online. She has staged multiple solo exhibitions of her work in Taipei, and was a featured artist in the Taiwan Pavilion at the Angoulême International Comics Festival.

# In Their Lonesomeness, a Common Thread

Written by Jean Chen (Originally published at Readmoo)

Translated by William Ceurvels

*Tender Is the Night* is a collaboration between comic artist Huihui and playwright Chien Li-Ying. The text version of this work, which was originally a submission to a call for scripts, also appears in *Observations of a Transvestite*, a collection of Chien Li-Ying's plays. In the epilogue to that work, Chien wrote, "Sexuality is the greatest window into an individual's behavior, the subtleties of interaction, the unfathomable depths, the shame, joy, and quotidian life all find abundant expression within sexuality. This subject has always fascinated me, and I've always wanted to write a play that could bring life to various forms of human sexuality, which is why I've included the work in this collection."

I have always admired Chien Li-Ying's plays and still remember the profound impact *Observations of a Transvestite* had on me the first time I saw it. Later on, after reading *Tender Is the Night*, I remember thinking how wonderful it would be to see the play staged. Of course, in reality this would be impossible. Why? Because the play depicts nine sexual encounters playing out in nine different rooms. At least for now, a racy performance including nudity and sexual acts would probably not be allowed on Taiwan's stages.

Then the graphic novel version of *Tender Is the Night* was published.

Huihui's previous graphic novel series *Blowing-Up Adventure of Me* had a dedicated readership in the independent comic market. The novel follows the protagonist as she honestly confronts her own sexual timidity - in Huihui's pictorial world, the desire and longing for intimate encounters find both gentle and ardent embodiment. With *Tender Is the Night*, Huihui brings Chien Li-Ying's script to life, providing a visual representation not just of the script's many stage changes, but also the deeper desires, and subtle expressions of alienation underlying the physical act of sex.

The nine short graphic novels that unfold in the nine different rooms of *Tender Is the Night* might all find a common thread in the book's catchline: "Can you treat me like you would a normal person?" What seem like the stories of strangers are ultimately our own: even if the sexual experiences and body types of the characters differ from the reader's, there is no sense of "other" in these 9 stories, they are narratives in which we can all find common ground. After all, who hasn't felt the solitude, loneliness, self-abasement, masochism and longing for bodily warmth and connection experienced by the comics' characters?



Huihui renders act upon act of sexual romance with a gentle touch, deftly attending to the minute details of every scene and carving out the fine grains of each character's semblance and personality. Their acts of mutual longing and rejection form an exquisite engenderment of the human interactions as well as the relationships between people and sexuality captured in the original script. With scenes of lovemaking and nudity appearing every few pages, *Tender Is the Night* is clearly an x-rated graphic novel, but Huihui isn't so much interested in arousing readers' sexual desires and bodily urges as she is in stirring those deeper and more profound levels of the psyche - whether you're a hot-blooded lover or a cold and distant recluse, as long as you're human, chances are that deep inside you, too, wish to be loved.

What makes *Tender Is the Night* so enthralling is its authenticity: the sexual acts themselves and the humanity that unfolds around them all evince a sense of honesty and sincerity. There is an austere and unvarnished quality to Huihui's storytelling, so much so that it almost seems to derive from the perspective of an indifferent bystander. Three of the nine stories involve encounters between a couple and a third person - yet, the outsiders' perspectives often highlight the simultaneous complexity and purity of the couples' love. In "Chapstick", Huihui has her slightly homely female protagonist ask a man who is trying to flee from her: "Is there something wrong with me?" This blunt outburst is no doubt a symptom of her continual frustration with the judging eyes of her peers.

In the postscript, Huihui asks her readers to reflect on which of the chapters had the deepest impact on them.

For me, it was "The Turning of the Seasons".

In this tale of an elderly love affair, Huihui uses an identical framing for the male and female protagonist in each slide; only the background changes to reflect their peripatetic journey through a shifting series of hotel rooms. The rooms feature the standard trappings of most cheap hotels - the sprawling double bed with bedside tables on either side and the obligatory framed prints of famous western paintings. As time passes and conversations and scenery shift, so to do the selection of paintings on display. In the very last room, the painting hanging on the wall is Gustav Klimt's famed "The Kiss".

"The Turning of the Seasons" is short in length and, tucked as it is in the very center of the book, serves as an ellipsis that aptly separates the chapters that come before and after it. Yet, this fleeting vignette focuses on a much more profound kind of relationship. In the love and companionship of the elderly, each is witness to the most unsightly aspects of their partner, to the atrophy and wasting of their physical bodies. As such, they cling not to each other's corporeal flesh but to the heart and soul nestled within. As they conclude their lover's hotel rendezvous and return to their families, we see that it is these brief escapes which give them the courage to once again face reality.



2

4



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11



10



8



7





**BOOKS FROM TAIWAN**



# COMIC BOOKS

(From Right to Left)

Please turn to the back to enjoy the last comic books which are read from left to right.



062

5



063

6

7



064

8



065



その羽ばたきゆえか  
 (Are they beautiful because they flutter their wings?)



はたまた、霧の間に浮かぶ影ゆえか  
 (Or is it because of the misty shadows I'm facing?)



1

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collection, while Aramura wants to take photos of the butterflies with his camera. Both characters have the rare *Papilio maraho* butterfly as their ultimate goal, despite their different motivations. They come across a mysterious girl who cannot speak but keeps a large collection of endangered butterflies among trees. In this dreamlike wilderness, the trio encounter phantoms from their past in the scintillating light and darkness of the present. Their entanglement in a series of pursuits and complications arising from the butterflies becomes what is ultimately an allegory of the White Terror in Taiwan.

KUCHiXO uses a highly imagistic approach for this book, which is rife with symbols and signs. The story is drawn in color pencil with a childlike sketching style to resemble illustrations for fairytale books. Changes in the color tone convey alterations in time and space, while colorful silhouettes depict the flight of the mysterious butterflies. It may seem like *Sleeping Brain* was made with a sense of freehand nonchalance, but every aspect of the book is meticulously designed, from its colors and illustrations to its storyboard and shading, and all of these aspects deserve attention and study. With how the story progresses, *Sleeping Brains* may read like a fantastical fairytale of an incredible journey in search of butterflies, but it is in fact an unflinching contemplation on Taiwan's history. The characters and the butterflies are symbols of us living on this island with our complicated past, our embroiled present, and our unpredictable future.

*Sleeping Brain* may not be the easiest read with layers of symbolism that call for associative thought and interpretation. However, the book's refusal to offer that unthinking "thrill" of commercial comics is what gives readers room to feel the story emotionally and reflect on it from an analytical point of view. These qualities are what make *Sleeping Brain* so impressive as it demonstrates what comics can achieve as works of art.

# White Terror Told through a Fairytale Journey in Search of Butterflies

By Weng Chi-An (Originally published at Readmoo)

Translated by Jacqueline Leung

Comics as “the ninth art” in Francophone culture is a discourse repopularized by *BD Louvre*, a 2003 exhibition of comics at the Louvre Museum in Paris. The concept was subsequently introduced to Taiwan by Dala Publishing Company and became prevalent in discussions about Taiwan comics. The “ninth art” status is mostly mentioned to elevate Taiwan comics, which has long been awarded little respect, as epitomized by the controversy of *The Legacy of Chen Uen: Art, Life and Philosophy* exhibition in 2018. All ostensible reasoning aside, the challenge of whether Chen Uen’s work deserves to be exhibited beside the “national treasures” of the National Palace Museum is a poor veil for the prejudice that disregards comics as great works of art.

Still, to use this saying as a sort of polite comeback diminishes its full implications. To define comics as an art form is to admit it to the “palace of art” where they can be collected, displayed, and appreciated. More importantly, it liberates the creative freedom that comics can offer to its artists. Like other art disciplines, comics is a form that comes with infinite possibility and does not need to be limited by the genre tropes or the graphic and language conventions of commercial comics. Artists should be given creative license to explore and discover, and rather than gratify the reader, they should center their artistry and confront the reader’s expectations on an intellectual and emotional level - like graphic novels, which have become prominent in Taiwan these several years. While there are different definitions as to what a graphic novel is, the general consensus is that it is not strictly commercial and is a form that expands visual storytelling. For this reason, graphic novels are also seen as an avenue for Taiwan comics, once deeply influenced by Japanese manga, to assert itself.

*Sleeping Brain*, published by Tōkhiu Books, is one of the most compelling new Taiwan comic and graphic novel titles that exhibits the qualities of “art”. Tōkhiu Books was founded by renowned Taiwan comic critic Wu Ping-Lu, who studied comic art and publishing in France and Belgium and is also an advocate for graphic novels in Taiwan. The release of *Sleeping Brain* was one she spared no expenses for. The design of the book, the selection of paper and printing - they were all of the highest quality. The book is like a fine art catalog, exquisite to touch and showing complete disregard to market practice or people’s expectations of how comics are to be published.

*Sleeping Brain* is also unique for its story and storytelling. Gong Wei-Hua, a second-generation immigrant entomologist from China, and Aramura Kiichi, a freelance Japanese photographer, venture into Taiwan’s woodlands in search of butterflies. They meet in a chance encounter deep in the mountains of Yilan. Gong wants to catch butterflies and turn them into specimens for his

***An ethnically Chinese entomologist enters a forest deep in the mountains of Taiwan, searching for the unique Dream Butterfly. After joining up with a Japanese photographer and a mute girl, a series of bizarre events begins to unfold, hinting at a mysterious secret hidden within the forest.***

The goal of entomologist Gong Wei-Hua, a second-generation Chinese living in Taiwan, is to bring a specimen of Taiwan's rare Dream Butterfly back to his "motherland" China. After entering the Taiping Mountains he meets an amateur photographer from Japan, Aramura Kiichi, who loves to photograph butterflies. On the basis of their common interests, the two continue their quests together.

Soon, they encounter a mysterious mute girl who maintains a living menagerie of rare butterflies deep in the forest. Overcome with excitement, Gong Wei-Hua suggests that she join their search as well, unaware of the significance of this simple act. For as soon as the girl joins them, the atmosphere in the forest changes, and a series of bizarre events begins to unfold: through his camera, Aramura Kiichi can see armed Japanese soldiers in the forest; and explosions, like the sound of crashing planes, can be heard in the distance. What is the connection between the mute girl and these strange events? Why was she living alone in the forest? And what other secrets does this forest hide?

This highly-crafted graphic novel uses the forest setting, and the varied backgrounds and motivations of its three protagonists, to construct a magic-realist fable of Taiwan, conjuring the history of the island's frequently contested status, the lingering shadow of the White Terror, and the ethnic identities of its inhabitants, ultimately leading readers into a dream-like space that will spark the imagination and invite a wealth of interpretations.



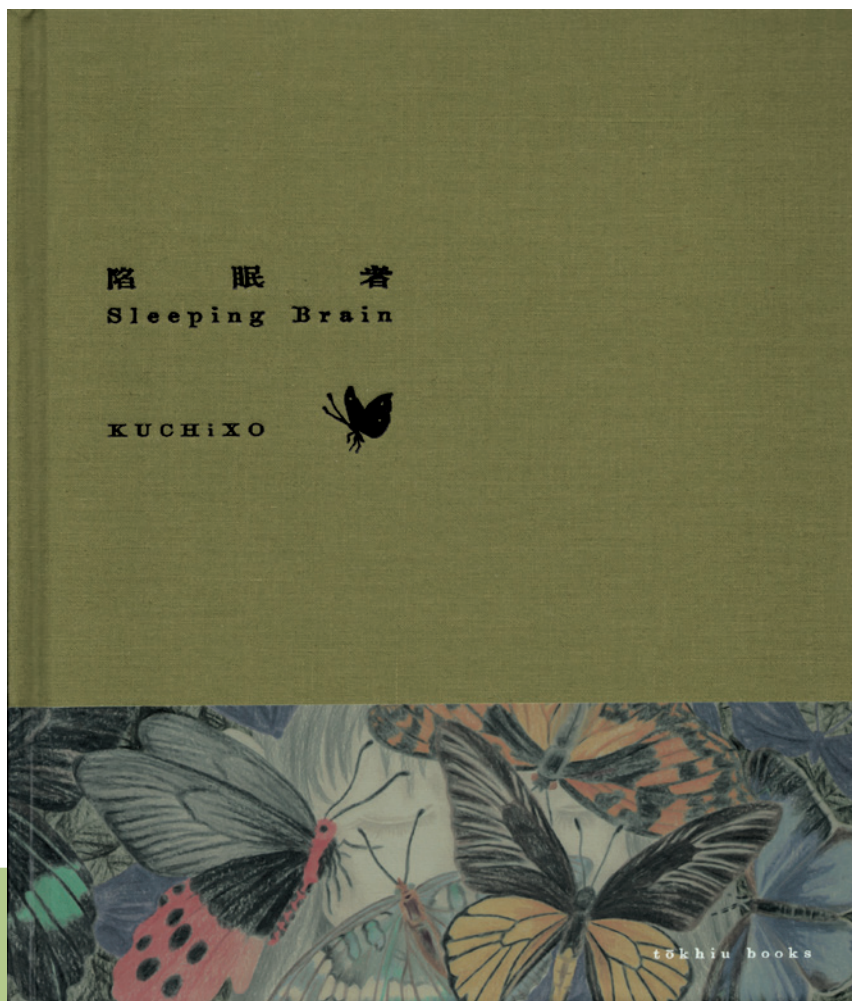
## KUCHIXO

Comic book writer/artist KUCHIXO has self-published the graphic novels *The Golden Room* and *Do You Realize??* in addition to a number of shorter works.



# SLEEPING BRAIN

陷眠者



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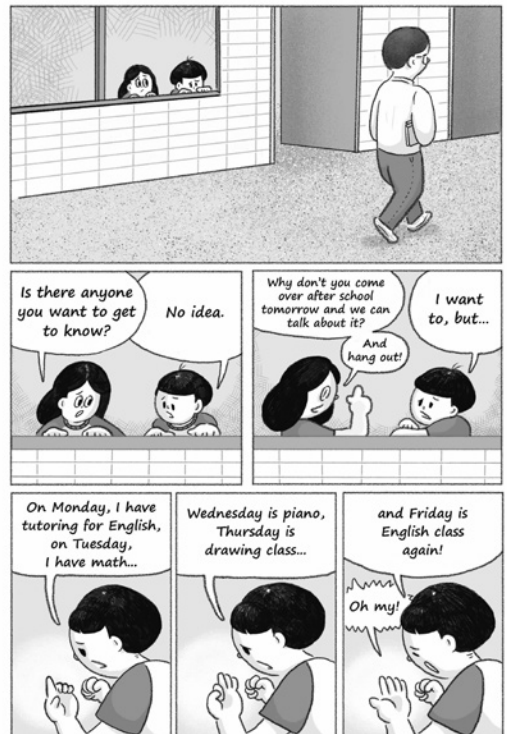
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It's no easy feat to tell a story through the eyes of a child; how do kids communicate? How do they interact? Why does an annoying classmate suddenly become less annoying once you get to know their backstory? Pam Pam even draws from her personal experience of being invited to a friend's house as a kid, and being asked to take out the trash.... In a setting that is at once grounded in reality, yet absurd, Angel gets to know her classmates, relatives, and mother in a new light, armed with her art class textbook.



*Open Eyes, Open Mind!* is Pam Pam's fifth commercially-published work. From *My Friend, Cancer* to *A Trip to the Asylum* to *Super Supermarket*, behind the cute, round characters Pam Pam creates is always sharp social commentary. In *My Friend, Cancer*, she uses the experience of taking care of her mom who has cancer to explore the conflicted disposition that comes with being an eldest daughter. *A Trip to the Asylum* is set in a mental hospital, but asks us to think about who in the "real world" may be mad.

Reading Pam Pam's graphic novels often makes me think of the lyrics of "Deserts Chang": "the deepest words must be said plainly", "painful wounds must be touched gently". Pam Pam interrogates Taiwan's class dynamics, and the educational and familial structures of urban and rural areas, through the lens of a primary student's homework assignment. What choices can parents make given their different social standings and the class gap between urban and rural areas? And how will their children interact with the world?

I particularly like how the story ends: We tag alongside Angel on her journey of getting to know someone, including her close friends, unfamiliar classmates, her cousin who lives in the countryside, and seemingly enviable classmates from other families. But in the end, Angel decides to get to know her own mother. This is an exceptional twist, and Pam Pam handles it deftly. Angel gets to really know her mother, and the dreams she had before she became a mother. Why does she sign Angel up for so many tutoring classes, packing her day-to-day life with activities?

Pam Pam has ingeniously turned the case studies of a sociological report into a 190-page graphic novel that looks beautiful, has a clear theme, and is well-paced. She captures the same ideas explored in *Struggling to Raise Children* without losing the allure of a graphic novel; perhaps this is her version of a "reader's report". I recommend readers peruse *Struggling to Raise Children* and *Open Eyes, Open Mind!* together, which is bound to result in a compelling, intriguing reading experience.



# From a Field Report to a Primary Student's Homework

Written by Jean Chen (Originally published at Readmoo)

Translated by May Huang

I recall loathing summer homework as a kid, especially the daily journal. Who could remember what the weather was like for the past 59 days? The worst part was sitting at my desk, reliving the summer in my head; after all, what did I do that was possibly worth writing about in my journal?

The protagonist of *Open Eyes, Open Mind!* is not like me at all. When her new art teacher assigns the students to “get to know someone”, she is somewhat bemused, but is named “Angel” after all, so begins to work on this task right away. She comes home and asks for help from her mother, who is a senior strategist at work and has written countless business proposals. Her advice? “Make it up.”

Because her mom won't come to the rescue, Angel turns (virtually) to her dad, who often works abroad. Over video, her dad is pleased to help, and offers his advice: “It's best to find someone who's interesting and has a strong sense of style. That would make your assignment easier! Your dad, for example, is a perfect choice. What do you think? Wanna get to know your dad?”

At this point, Angel begins to feel frustrated; what does it mean to “get to know someone”? Meeting their parents? Knowing their interests? A student who wears glasses raises their hand and asks: “Can you get to know someone you already know?” It is through this question that author Pam Pam Liu reveals the purpose of the art teacher's assignment: “Everyone has many different sides. Through this experience you'll get to know someone you already knew even better, and you might even learn something new!”

Pam Pam's graphic novel is based on the sociological text *Struggling to Raise Children: Globalization, Parental Anxiety and Unequal Childhoods* by Distinguished Professor Lan Pei-Chia of Department of Sociology at National Taiwan University. Professor Lan visited nearly 60 households to conduct field interviews and observed different teaching environments to analyze the differences between the middle class and the working class, ultimately drawing certain conclusions about Taiwan's educational models. The result was an important field report on the state of education in contemporary Taiwan.

But perhaps *Open Eyes, Open Mind!* is not so much an adaptation, but a continuation of Professor Lan's work. Breaking away from the structure of a sociological text, Pam Pam has decided to adopt a different perspective in her graphic novel, that of a child. Through the “get to know someone” homework assignment, our protagonist explores the lives of relatives and friends, revealing the different family structures and parenting styles around her.



***If you could really “get to know someone”, whom would you choose? Taking a real world case study as inspiration, this graphic novel follows an innocently curious fifth grader as she attempts to understand what’s really going on in the minds of the people around her.***

Everyday life for fifth-grader Angel revolves around classes, classes, and more classes. In addition to regular schooling and endless piles of homework, she also attends after-school cram courses, art classes, and even piano lessons. As if that weren't enough, she just received a vexing new assignment in art class. The teacher instructed the class to “get to know someone” as part of their semester project. But what does it mean to really know someone?

Having no idea where to begin, Angel turns to her mother, whose answer is, “Don't take it so seriously. Just make it up!” Having no other options, Angel begins observing the people closest to her: her friend at school, her cousins from the countryside (a difficult older boy, and a clingy girl), the talkative girl in her art class, and the competent and confident daughter of her mother's coworker who attends an international school, among others.

Angel looks up to all of these people in one way or another, but as she “gets to know them”, she realizes that each of them also has their own private troubles. With the end of the semester rapidly approaching, Angel has to hurry up and choose someone to be the subject of her project. But whom should she choose?

Taking her inspiration from a real world case study described in the work of sociologist Lan Pei-Chia, artist/writer Pam Pam Liu approaches parent-child relationships from a perspective of childlike innocence, depicting the family dynamics of each child in the story with gentle humor and an eye for life-like detail. The graphic novel's swift pacing and light touch nonetheless reveals startling depths. As she delves past the surface appearance of family life, Angel not only discovers the private conflicts and doubts of those around her, she also matures in the process, leading to a surprising and heartwarming conclusion that will resonate with readers long after the story ends.



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## Inspired by Lan Pei-Chia 藍佩嘉

Lan Pei-Chia is Distinguished Professor of Sociology at National Taiwan University where she serves as director of the Global Asia Research Center. Her research interests include gender, family, international migration, and social inequality. Her first book *Global Cinderellas: Migrant Domesticity and Newly Rich Employers in Taiwan* and its Chinese language adaptation received numerous awards, including the Distinguished Book Award from the American Sociological Society and the Taipei Book Fair Award. Her second book, *Raising Global Families: Parenting, Immigration, and Class in Taiwan and the US*, compares the parenting practices of Taiwanese immigrant parents in the US with their counterparts in Taiwan, demonstrating the variety of parenting strategies used to cope with the challenges of immigration and globalization.

# OPEN EYES, OPEN MIND!

## 小乖的人類觀察日誌



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## Comic & Story by Pam Pam Liu

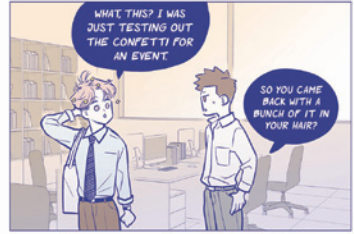
Illustrator and graphic novelist Pam Pam Liu is also a talented animator and musician. Her work spans the range from darkly absurdist fantasies to true-life stories like her highly acclaimed *Good Friend Cancer*. Her other graphic novels include *A Trip to the Asylum* and *When My Brother Was a Kid*. In 2018, she spent one year as artist-in-residence at La Maison des Auteurs in Angoulême, France.



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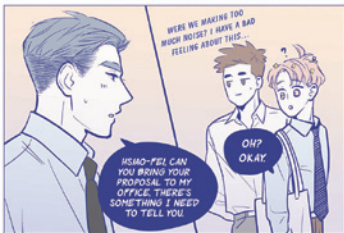
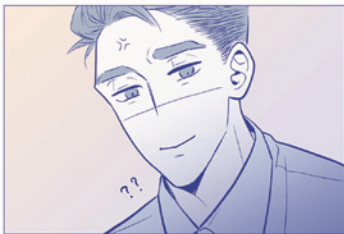
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EP09 Tung-yun Gets Jealous



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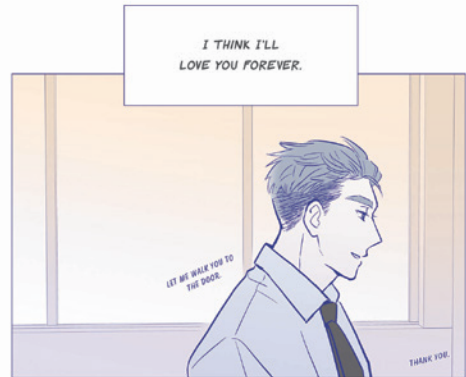
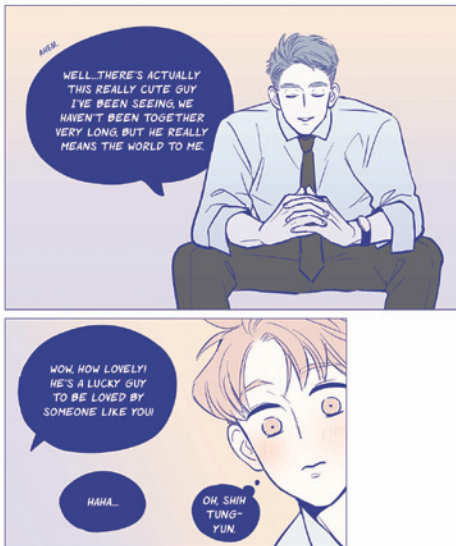
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EP08 End





The change in format, however, doesn't diminish the appeal of *Day Off*. If anything, the book-length format further develops the potential of the original characters and setting, and gives Dailygreens a larger canvas on which to showcase her talent for visual storytelling. The interactions of the main characters unfold in an unhurried manner, revealing the full emotional spectrum of their relationship, and the strength and comfort each finds in the other. Those who've experienced love will find themselves reliving their own past loves, or possibly wishing that they could. The workplace setting adds an element of interest, and, for many readers, wish fulfillment. Through its tight arrangement of narrative elements, *Day Off* envisions the unattainable ideal of pure love in the real world, all within the framework of BL comic books. This is what makes it such an excellent introduction to the genre. Lacking in steamy artwork, the book may come across as somewhat chaste to hardcore fans of the genre. But for general readers, *Day Off's* refreshingly unsensational approach will evoke the sweetness of past relationships, and reaffirm their faith in the possibility of love.

Huang Szu-Mi once said in an interview that the process of creating a comic book is like assembling a team of heroes to defeat an evil tyrant; the editor plays the supporting role of the wizard while the comic book artist is the courageous warrior, always fighting at the front lines. Indeed, Dailygreens has shown great courage and strength. In this dark era where all traces of pure love seem to be gradually fading away, she has sought out the light on behalf of all those who still believe in love. In a separate interview, Dailygreens stated, "That's just how I am. I hope that there still people in this world with the gentleness of Hsiao-Fei, or bosses who are as kind as (his lover) the department head."

Don't we all.

# Seeking the Light for Those Who Still Believe in Love

Written by Weng Chi-An (Originally published at Readmoo)

Translated by Joshua Dyer

According to the definition in researcher Mizoguchi Akiko's book *On the Evolution of BL*, the boy's love genre (BL) is made up of "all kinds of stories that develop from the love relationships between two men, yet the creators and readers are mostly heterosexual women". She further states that the love affairs between men found in the plots of BL stories provide readers a temporary escape from the shackles of reality by creating an artificial world where love and sex can be pursued freely. By representing a utopia where gender diversity is respected to a greater degree than in our present world, BL works become more than entertainment - they present a subtle challenge to contemporary society, or even a push towards reform.

With their massive market and loyal fan base, BL comic books are a consistent mainstay of comic book publishing. With minimal exaggeration it could be said that BL comic books are a touchstone of the health of the entire comics industry. When BL sales are strong, the industry has a stable core, and can weather any storm or challenge. However, to those who have never read the genre, particularly male readers, the appeal of BL can be difficult to comprehend. One has to spend some time getting acquainted with the genre to understand its irresistible charms. Among the best introductions to the genre is *Day Off*, the new comic from artist Dailygreens and publisher Rusuban Studio, and winner of the 2022 Golden Comic Award's Best Editor category.

Set against the backdrop of office life at a large enterprise, the story follows the evolving relationship between the head of the planning department and his attractive subordinate. Their devoted exchanges of affection emanate a healing warmth and sincerity, but their relationship is far from perfect. As with all couples, there are episodes of jealousy and self-doubt, as well as the difficulties of keeping their relationship secret from coworkers, and, of course, the discomfiting gaze cast upon them by society. But through all of these setbacks, their relationship grows stronger. The strength of their bond, and the support of some family members, give them the energy to face the challenges, and fills them with hope for the future.

*Day Off* began as a web comic strip consisting of quickly-resolved independent episodes (which now constitute the first three chapters of the comic book). The elegantly composed swathes of color and distinctively warm palette of these short narratives set a tastefully breezy and comforting tone that kept readers coming back for more. It also attracted the attention of Huang Szu-Mi, BL author and Editor-in-Chief of Rusuban Studio, an established publisher of BL fiction and comics. At Huang's suggestion, Dailygreens began working with Rusuban to adapt *Day Off* into a full-length comic book.

**\* 2022 Golden Comic Award (Best Editor)**

***A kind-hearted department head falls for his adorable subordinate, kicking off a gay office romance that rings true to the minutia of intimate relationships, from the everyday joys to the inevitable misunderstandings.***

Even-keeled and even-tempered, Shih Tung-Yun is the head of the planning department at his father's company. He is also the apple of the eye of his newly arrived subordinate, the energetic and thoughtful Hua Hsiao-Fei. Though both men do their best to hide it from their colleagues, they are, in fact, in the early stages of a relationship. Their workdays are marked by stolen expressions of affection and secret gifts (and the occasional fit of jealousy). After hours they enjoy spending time together, and indulge in the sweetness of their budding romance.

While the young couple clearly cherishes their partnership, there is still the critical hurdle of their respective families to overcome. After seeing a picture of Shih, Hua's mother is a bit too eager to meet her son's handsome new boyfriend. On the other hand, when Shih's half-brother, who also works at their father's company, discovers that Shih is in a relationship with a subordinate, the path to family acceptance suddenly becomes far more complex.

This wholesome and heartwarming white-collar love story is assembled from comic-strip-style episodes illustrated with clean lines and a soft palette, lending the work a light and pacey feel. The appealingly distinct main characters, along with the depth and humor of their dialogues, capture the patience, affection, kindness, and understanding we all long for in relationships, providing a reassuring dose of steadfast commitment for readers feeling disillusioned by a world of fast food romance.



## Dailygreens 每日青菜

A native of Taichung and a resident of Taipei, comic book artist Dailygreens loves consuming leafy greens almost as much as she loves drawing. She is particularly enamored with creating images of the simple joys of daily life. The heartwarming BL comic book *Day Off* is her first full-length work. Rights for *Day Off* have already been sold in nine international markets.

# DAY OFF



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- **Rights sold:** Japanese (Two Virgins), Korean (AK Communications), Vietnamese (Amak), English, German, Russian (Aloha Comics), Portuguese (Grupo Leya), Thai (Gemini), French (Komogi)





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