

Break Out the Can of Whup-Ass

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Haruto Boy Trio

Why write a review on Hareluya Boy I and II? Because Haruto Umezawa's manga creations are two of the most hilarious things I've ever read, that's why. And it seems that very few people know about this fantabulous series, so I've taken it upon myself to educate the populace. (There's also an anime version, brand new and currently running in Japan, for those who are interested).

First serialized in Shonen Jump (a comic magazine focused on teenage boys) in the early 90's, Hareluya Boy II has had a relatively small, yet extremely loyal, following. Haruto Umezawa, the creator of the series, began the Hareluya Boy saga with a one-shot, one-book manga called Hareluya Boy I. The story was about Kami-sama's (god) delinquent son, Hibino, who was set to inherit heaven's throne. Unfortunately, Hibino-tenshi (angel) was more interested in drinking and having some fun with the pretty female angels (whose uniforms are nowhere near the billowing white robes that is more common to Christian versions of heaven). In fact, Hibino-tenshi's favorite activity is playing with bikini-clad angels and bathing in a hot tub while drinking expensive champagne. Hibino-tenshi

Understandably fed up with his son, Kami-sama expels a very naked Hibino from heaven to learn about love and peace (not to mention responsibility) on earth. Landing on earth, clad in nothing but his birthday suit and a defunct halo (peace-sign shaped, of course), Hibino is taken in by a nun, whom he saves from a group of delinquent students. Not that innate nobility or integrity had anything to do with the rescue; Hibino saved Sister Anne because she was cute. Figures.

Throughout this one-shot manga, Haruto-sama introduces several characters that he later also uses in Hareluya Boy II. There is the cute punk named Ichijyo (who has this awesome spiky hairdo that must have needed five cans of hair gel and spray to keep up), a short frustrated kid named Okamoto, and this one girl whose name I don't know since I cannot read any Chinese (and I can't find anyone who knows her Japanese name either . . .). Anyway, Hareluya Boy I is a story of growing up, and taking

responsibility, and even making the ultimate sacrifice in the name of friendship and love. Not that this manga gets cheesy or saccharine sweet. Most of the time, it's chock-full of gags and fights where the good guy always wins. Haruto Boy Trio

It's not until the second series -- Hareluya Boy II -- that Haruto-sama introduces the super cool "Pull stuff from the Back" trick that is Hibino's trademark. The story line is completely different -- readers shouldn't think that Hareluya Boy II is a sequel. The characters are the same (same names, same quirks) but the situation is distinctly different. In this series, Hibino is the class bully/loud mouth/tough guy who becomes best friends with Okamoto -- still a short and frustrated kid whose ambition is to go to France as an art student. They later meet up with Ichijyo, another classmate who plays in a band called "FireGuns" in his spare time. (The characters look a little older but otherwise they generally all look the same as in Hareluya Boy I. This alteration was probably due to a change in Haruto-sama's art style).

The manga (which is more than 20 books long by now) has a sort of "villain of the week" flavor to it. Usually, Hibino and his friends get into some sort of trouble while saving a person in distress. Unfortunately, after ten books, the plot starts to sound the same. Hibino, Okamoto and Ichijyo get into trouble because they are, after all, the heroes and have to save the day. They run into tough gangs of unscrupulous delinquents, which through some rough fighting (it's amazing how, no matter how many times any of the heroes get hit and no matter HOW hard, they never ever really bruise or even lose a tooth), the heroes prevail and strike fear into the hearts of evil-doers (hey, is that trademarked?). What I love about Boy II are the running gags between Ichijyo and Hibino, and how in the middle of a fight against the bad guys, these two start their own little yelling match, arguing over who can go first to beat up the bad guys (Okamoto is usually trying to calm both of them down).

Haruto-sama also is wonderful at creating these moments of hilarity in the middle of serious scenes -- in my favorite, Haruto-sama draws the arguing Ichijyo and Hibino as Godzilla and Mothra rampaging across Tokyo (you can see buildings toppling in the background, while breaths of flame shoot out of the super-deformed Ichijyo and Hibino). Then there is the hysterical stunt that Hibino does when threatened (or hungry, in one case). He can pull stuff out from the back of his jacket: baseball bats, his favorite weapon (a flat bottom frying pan (or two)), and even a wok and crabs have come out from god knows where. His friends are constantly amazed by what he pulls out (I guess his back is directly linked to hammerspace, where anime characters pull the random ten-ton mallets out of thin air) that he has been asked if he was Doraemon -- the blue robot cat that pulls out stuff from his magic pouch. But besides all the comic

antics, there are the serious messages of not doing drugs (one story line is about Ichijyo's shady past as part of a gang that dealt drugs and ran around bashing cars), as well as the not-so-subtle moral message that cheaters always lose and good guys always win (hey, its a shonen/boy's manga. What do you expect; discussions on the meaning of life?).

Another reason I love this manga is that it transcends language. (I can recognize the Chinese character for "Wah!" and the characters for the names, but that's about it . . .) You seriously do not need to know how to read Chinese (or the original Japanese it was translated from) to understand what's going on, and what the jokes are. It's the most amusing series to read, especially with the short little peacemaker, Okamoto, trying to stop the constant bickering between Ichijyo and Hibino. But even better is the underlying thread of loyalty and friendship that the three characters have for each other; it's a bond so tight that any of the three would sacrifice their well-being for the other two. Haruto Boy Trio

I have to admit that sometimes, the mind-set of these characters confuses me -- there is enough pumped up machismo and testosterone in this series to turn me into Schwarzenegger, since there are so many of the "Let him fight this out on his own even though he's getting the crap beat out of him " kinds of scenarios. I wonder why Hibino, in one scene, didn't stop to help Ichiyō, when Ichijyo -- after saving his backup guitarist and drummer from more random gang members -- was so badly hurt that he was barely able to stagger back to where they were performing (in front of a possible producer, no less!). I guess I'm not man enough to understand the reasoning behind that, but apparently, Hibino thought that to help the bruised Ichijyo would make Ichijyo lose face.

Other than trifling little points like that, I highly recommend this series. It's great fun to read, the art style fits the story line with its relatively realistic character designs (No big eyed androgynous figures in Hareluya Boy I or II. We got us some manly men in this here series). If you like comedy, fun and easy reading, this is the series for you. Heck, I think it's a series for everyone. Try it. It's good, and it's good for you. Trust me.

Random Note:

I've always wondered about the name Hareluya, until I remembered my two measly weeks of Intro to Japanese. The Japanese have this habit of appropriating English words when there is no Japanese equivalent. Remember that there is no difference for pronunciation of "r " and "l ", Hareluya can be seen as Haleluya (halelujah). Since the original story line was about angels and heaven . . . It only makes sense, don't you think?