

INTRODUCTION

North American superheroes blast evil with powers born from radiation, mutation, training, or magic, flying through the cityscape in their colorful costumes and protecting their secret identities. Meanwhile, on the other side of the world, their Japanese counterparts uncover ancient martial arts, pilot giant robots, and train cute little monsters, while worrying about exams and catching the attention of the overachieving popular girl or guy.

Mecha & Manga extends the possibilities of the main *Mutants & Masterminds* rules toward the far shores of Japan's *manga*, where nobody sees anything wrong with angsty teenagers piloting humanoid machines of mass destruction, where being an exorcist is a full-time and respected job, and where school girls routinely save the world from unimaginable evils.

WHAT IS MANGA?

In Japan, comics are called *manga* (with their Korean and Chinese versions called *manwha*), literally meaning "playful images."

Evolving from Buddhist paintings through the crucible of Japanese history and culture, manga expanded to target all sorts of audiences, rather than limit itself to a narrow demographic and a few thematic genres. The first step that the art and industry of Japanese comics took toward their current form was the work of Osamu Tezuka who, inspired by Disney's visual style, created works such as *Tetsuwan Atom* (aka *Astro Boy*), capturing the hearts of the public and opening the door for a new generation of *mangaka*, the artists and creators.

While equal in basic principles to Western comics, manga developed their own visual language and methods for telling stories. The difference in style goes beyond the big googly eyes (which Western artists begin to copy today), the diminutive mouths, and the almost non-existent noses. Manga artists make different uses of graphic elements such as panels, dialogue balloons, sound effects, and the omnipresent speed lines, not to mention cultural expressions such as the bleeding nose and the big sweat drop on the back of characters' heads.

MANGA AND ANIME

The success of manga in popular culture inevitably led to the adaptation of their stories to the realm of moving pictures, with *Tetsuwan Atom* once more paving the way for other animators. In its animated form, manga is called "anime," a word borrowed from the West. Anime developed its own language based on the groundwork laid out by manga artists, but soon enough, it found its own voice. Nowadays, the Japanese industry provides all sorts of animated works, from miniseries to full-length movies that push the boundaries of animation technology.

THE GENRE THAT ISN'T

Manga and anime are not genres in the common sense of the word; they are better described as media or artistic styles (although debate still rages about this). Manga can be used to tell stories in virtually all genres of narrative, from serious psychological drama to light comedies, although the most widely distributed titles fall within the fantastic genres such as fantasy, science fiction, and horror, with spandex-wearing superheroes practically unknown, even if plenty of equivalents abound on the shelves of specialized stores.

Manga creators produce stories aimed at everyone—children, bored housewives, company executives, everyone can find a title that will interest them. Because manga and anime cross the axes of multiple genres and have a wide demographic spectrum, the types of stories that they can tell are virtually infinite. For example, the theme of space exploration can be treated as a children's playful farce in a show like *Wandaba Style* or as a serious extrapolation of the social and psychological impact of the space race, as in the *Planetes* manga and anime series. The all-time favorite genre of sword and sorcery can be comedic, as in *Slayers*, classically epic, as in *Record of Lodoss Wars*, or even dreadfully gritty and horrific, as in *Berserk*.

THE DIFFERENCE

Boiled down to their most basic description, manga and Western comics are essentially the same. However, manga displays a unique attitude, a bold desire to explore the boundaries of genre and style for a wider audience at the same time that it caters to the base common denominator, without such explorations relegated to obscure corners away from the mainstream. Or, perhaps, the difference is simply that manga is produced by an exotic and distant culture, and their narrators provide their inimitable contributions to all the genres they touch.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Like *Mutants & Masterminds*, *Mecha & Manga* is organized into chapters covering the major aspects of the game, but this time giving it the manga treatment, exploring old and new options and how to use them to play an anime-themed series. The breakdown of the book is as follows.

- **Chapter 1** explores the different worlds of manga and how you can assemble different elements to create your own manga setting.
- **Chapter 2** deals with character options such as skills, feats, powers, and drawbacks that are common in manga, from those that already exist in *Mutants & Masterminds* to completely new ones.
- **Chapter 3** describes one of the main staples of manga and anime: mecha. This includes power armor, giant robots, and the different ways in which they can appear in a *Mecha & Manga* series.
- **Chapter 4** takes a closer look at martial arts, from the mundane styles of after-school clubs to world-shattering techniques, as well as how to use feats and powers to simulate them.
- **Chapter 5** describes pets, creatures that manga heroes can call upon to do their fighting for them or supplement their own powers and abilities.
- **Chapter 6** has loads of advice on how to run a manga-inspired series. Themes, concepts, clichés, and alternate genre-specific systems are the ingredients that both Gamemaster and players can use to create their own manga adventures.
- **Chapter 7** provides several story seeds that you can use to launch a *Mecha & Manga* series, as well as *Shards: Unsung Destiny*, a complete manga setting ready for use.

