

Azoumanga Daizou Critique

Azoumanga Daizou is a manga parody of Kiyohiko Azuma's *Azumanga Diaoh* based on the author's personal life as well as her friends and their day-to-day experiences in an American college. The premise is essentially the same; each four-panel strip depicts a random, independent event in a group of friends' lives. Since there is no overarching plot or storyline to connect the panels to each other, the driving force behind the manga are the characters' relationships to one another. Although the original *Azumanga Diaoh* effectively employs this story-telling technique, *Azoumanga Daizou* falls short in comparison.

Because the manga emphasizes the relationships between the individual characters and relies on their personal interactions to characterize them, the audience is not given much information regarding their background or histories. From the first page, the reader is thrown into their world, without introduction. This is not a problem in and of, itself, for *Azumanga Diaoh* takes the same approach and is successful in doing so. It may be attributable to the fact that *Azoumanga Diazou* is significantly shorter in length, but, at least from the few strips that are available to the reader, the characters are not defined enough to carry their own story through a whole volume of manga. Rather than engaging the reader and invoking a desire to continue reading for volumes on end, the strips are instead more fitting to a stand-alone format and only briefly provide the reader

with entertainment. In short, due to the lack of overarching plot, the manga is intended to be character-driven, but the characters are not strong enough to drive the manga anywhere. It ends up simply being directionless; leaving the reader to wonder exactly where is this manga going.

The entertainment level the characters provide in the outlandish way they interact with each other is something of value and worthy of note. However, although anyone can appreciate the interactions and dialogue for what they are, there is a sense of there being something more that the reader is missing out on if they are not themselves well-acquainted with the author or her friends. This may be because of the fact that the manga is based on the author and her friends, the absence of a plot or formal introduction to the characters, or simply the manga's lack of length, and therefore limited ability to expand on the characters. CLAMP's *Tsubasa: Reservoir Chronicle* has been criticized for the same issue. Although reader's may enjoy the series as a new series with its own story and its own characters, there is a feeling that if one is unfamiliar with CLAMP's previous works, something is missing, a feeling that is not unlike being on the unwitting end of an inside joke.

Since the characters are based on the author, herself, and her real-world friends, one would expect them to be multi-dimensional, as actual people are. However, perhaps it is due to the fact that the characters have to be simplified somewhat in order to create a fictional story and their nuances get lost in translation from the real world to the manga world, the characters can easily be tokenized or fit into a certain archetype and summed up with a few descriptor words. Diana is small, energetic, and somehow does well in school despite being lazy; Michael is non-reactive, quiet, and has a problem saying no;

Dylan is loud, controversial, and has an affinity for taking off his clothes; Perry is studious, critical, and somehow always ends up on the receiving end of Diana's antics; Jamie is pretty, spoiled, and rather clueless. The care-free jokester, the nice guy, the aggressive shallow one, the serious butt of all jokes, and the innocent cute one—these are all familiar tropes for character design.

All in all, *Azoumanga Daizou* is successful in its own right for being as short as it is and given the amateurish nature of its author's skills. The problem of the entire manga being a kind of inside joke that is lost on the readers who are outside of the author's circle of friends may be irresolvable, but in regards to the issues of not-so-strong characters and lack of depth in characterization (in addition to poor artistic quality), more time and an expansion of the length and number of individual strips may be enough to reduce them.