

Review of "Life of a Mudder"

The manga drawn to represent the life of typical Mudders is a unique and potentially interesting idea. There are many aspects and possible stereotypes to the college students at Harvey Mudd College that can potentially be either reinforced or dispelled based on an insider's view of life there. There is also a lot to be stated about the mysterious science and technology students at the northern rim of the Claremont Colleges. Because of the college's relatively secluded position compared to the other colleges, it is only a matter of time before some brave individual decides to explore the mysteries of this isolated campus.

Compressing the mysteries of Harvey Mudd College into six pages is definitely a challenge to anyone hoping to approach the task. Although six pages is a little short, the author does try to make do with the space through the choosing of specific courses to focus on. The manga uses four panel sets through a majority of these pages, with the exception being the cover and the final page. This is similar to the style that can be found in *Azumanga Daioh*. Although the use of a four panel set seems appropriate for this type of manga, since there are topic jumps after every set, it makes the overall manga disconnected. It feels that the manga sets are connected to each other through the overarching umbrella of "engineering at Mudd" and not by any other theme. Because of this, there isn't a smooth flow between different sets. There is relatively good flow between the different panels, as long as the reader is fine that there may be several days/weeks jump between each panel.

One of the most obvious points that almost any reader will notice in each panel is the art style chosen. Putting aside the fact that the author may be slightly lacking in this ability, there are

other points to note. There are slight changes in the style within the work, such as in how characters are drawn, implying that the manga may have been drawn over a period of time. On the other hand, it may have been carefully selected from a larger range of works that spanned a longer time. Another comment about the characters is that much of them are drawn from either a distance or from behind, which saves the artist from having to draw the details of the human face. Due to the lack of detail in the characters, readers are able to associate with Mudders more easily.

Another aspect of the art style that should be noted is the lack of angles that scenes are drawn in. The author typically prefers to stay with a decided point of view throughout each set. This simplifies the need to constantly have to re-imagine each scene from a different angle and render it on paper, but it causes the panels in each set to be less dynamic. Emphasis is no longer on the individual characters but rather on the entire scene in most of the sets that have a panoramic view of the setting.

Although the different aspects to the style chosen by the author are consistent throughout the book, it doesn't seem to fit easily with any of the traditional genres of manga. There is no "cuteness" associated with shoujo in this manga, nor is there the action storyline commonly associated with shounen. The closest genre that can be associated with this manga is the educational genre, similar to that found in *Oishinbo*. From interpreting the text on the cover page, it can be assumed that the author had intended for the manga to be used to educate the public about life at Harvey Mudd College. A word of caution about the manga is that because it does not appeal to a wide audience considering the limited appeal that a topic such as "Life of a Mudder" may have, the manga may not see widespread readership. Of course, the lack of artistic ability will be another hindrance that will add to this unfortunate fact. However, the author attempts to make up for the lack in artistic ability through some amusing text. These texts

contribute to an underlying humor that pervades through most of the panels. This humor breaks slightly from a strictly educational manga, although it may be helpful in reinforcing the facts that are being imparted on the readers. Readers generally absorb information more significantly if they find the material enjoyable. The main criticism about the use of texts is that the author uses a significant amount of text, which breaks the flow of the panels. The large amount of reading necessary to finish the manga also shows that the author is incapable of describing everything he wants to impart on the readers through just art. If the texts were to be removed from the manga, the readers would have a difficult time understanding the direction of the story. This problem is slightly alleviated because the manga is an educational manga, but it would be significantly better if the artist's ability improved his artistic ability to the point that he is able to shift smoothly between expressing ideas in artwork as well as in text.

As I am a Mudd myself, I find that while the manga attempts to cover a broad range of the academic side of Mudd, there are several points that have been missed. The manga assumes that the much of the Mudd population are engineers, and thus contributes to the stereotype that all Mudders are engineers. This is not the case and could have been shown through the inclusion of some of the other majors on campus, such as computer science and chemistry. Perhaps the author had intended to write multiple chapters to this manga, each with a different major? Until that happens, readers will probably have to assume that the author is biased towards representing Mudd as being filled with engineering majors.

Overall, I consider the manga to be a fine initial attempt at depicting the Mudd life, but several aspects may be improved upon. The scope of the investigation is far too narrow for my tastes, and hopefully the author can also do continuation volumes on not just the academic life, but also the social life at Harvey Mudd College.