

Toad Goes Through the Gates Critique

The first two chapters of *Toad Goes Through the Gates* sets the tone for the hypothetically complete manga. The author's note fulfilled the job of introducing the work as a diary-like project, while pointing out to the reader that the project will cover the good and the bad experiences of the protagonist. Additionally, for the manga reading enthusiast, the author also credits other works that follow similar structure to this project; consequently, giving the reader an idea of how the story's narrative will develop later. By presenting the project in the manga format, the author is faced with the challenge of being able to capture the most meaning through images and sparse words. With that in mind, the author was mostly successful, although there were a few parts in the story that could have improved to make it more effective.

Toad Goes Through the Gates does what the title says it will do; it is the autobiography of a student and their experience in college. While it's biggest influencer, *Azumanga Daioh*, does not exactly follow the life of one specific character, some of the story-telling elements found in the omnibus are present in the author's work. These include gags, slice-of-life moments, situations that only happen in fiction, etc. These story-telling elements, along with the autobiographical aspect of the story, allow the reader to remove themselves and understand that this work is the unique experience of a college student. Furthermore, the work paints a holistic picture of who the author is from what he has decided to share. This helps the reader focus on the protagonist beyond the author's note.

While this might seem successful, there are a few shortcomings that made the manga hard to read and understand. The decision to give most of the exposition to the protagonist can make it difficult for the reader to understand the other characters in the story. The repeated use in specific characters point out that they seem to be relevant to the author's experience in the

narrative, but the reader can do nothing but assume their importance. Furthermore, the reader can become confused throughout the story in having to remember characters by face rather than by name. This can pose the problem of the author having to then provide pages of exposition if he wishes to elaborate on these characters and their relevance to the story in future volumes.

Additionally, while the artwork is basic, and the characters easy to distinguish, it is often difficult to read the characters' expressions to get a clear picture of what they are thinking without having to read the text provided. Most of the interiority provided is towards the protagonist, but a lot of it also relies on text. Thus, the wordiness might not be too appealing to the reader in terms of effectively understanding emotion in the absence of words. In relation to the reoccurring characters in the story, not being to directly hear the thoughts makes the relationship between the protagonist and these other characters vague. Which gives off the impression that the characters are artificial even if they are to have importance in the author's life.

Despite these shortcomings, *Toad Goes Through the Gates*, successfully accomplishes what it set out to do. It introduces the protagonist and allows the reader to vicariously relive the author's experience through a cute character. Although additional exposition and more attention to expressions would be helpful, their absence do not interfere with the reader's ability to enjoy the work and make meaning of it. Therefore, overall, *Toad Goes Through the Gates*, should be regarded as an authentic manga that voices the experience of the author in his first two years of college.