

Yotsuba&!

ByteNoise

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To be honest, I didn't really enjoy Kiyohiko Azuma's previous manga, Azumanga Daioh. Maybe the humour just didn't translate well, but I didn't "get it." Just about the only thing I liked about it was all the cute things in it, from cats and stuffed animals to one of the main characters, Chiyo-Chan. When I heard about a manga from the same artist that starred someone who looked even cuter, but was naive and hyperactive instead of a genius, I decided to have a look. Yotsuba&! certainly didn't disappoint me.

If you're trying to convince someone that not all graphic novels are testosterone-fuelled tales of spandex-clad heroes, then you've found the perfect example to prove your point. If, on the other hand, tales of mythical proportions are your thing, then you'll probably be sorely disappointed with this down-to-earth tale of a young girl exploring the world around her. (The only superhero in the whole first volume is Boxer-Man, who has the special power to not be able to tell which way is up and which way is down, but I'm not counting him as a real superhero because he's simply Yotsuba's father wearing boxer shorts over his head. This should give you some idea of how serious this manga is.)

Yotsuba&! is about a hyperactive young girl named Yotsuba, who is naive about absolutely everything and frequently gets the wrong end of the stick. She's curious about all the day to day

things she sees, and is possibly the cutest character I've ever seen, from her wide-eyed, open-mouthed facial expressions to her sense of adventure and her constant quest for ice cream.

The manga itself is very easy to read. There's seldom even a hint of a plot, but this can be a good thing: if you need to unwind after a hard day, then reading a chapter or two of Yotsuba&! is perfect.

"She can find happiness in anything... Nothing in this world can get her down. Nothing." - Koiwai, Yotsuba's father.

Each chapter is about Yotsuba exploring the world around her, and having lots of fun, themed to a particular topic. In the chapter on shopping, for example, she gets excited about escalators and crawls into a filing cabinet that's for sale in a shop, whereas in the first chapter, the theme is moving house and she ends up getting chased by her helpful neighbours because her father told her not to run off with strangers. These are not tales of epic proportions, but rather everyday situations shown in a charming, enthusiastic light.

The best you can hope for is that, after reading this manga, you'll start seeing the world around you in a naive, exciting light as well, if only for just a glimpse. Yotsuba reminds the reader that the world, and everything in it, can be an amazing place. You just have to remember to see it that way.

"Enjoy everything." - Message between chapters.