5 A Budding Comic Artist

Tezuka had drawn as many as 2,000 pages of comics by the time the war ended. He had somehow found ways to continue creating and drawing behind the backs of his teachers and factory bosses throughout the war years. Confident that he could now draw comics just as he wished to, he decided to try and sell his comics to the newspapers. A girl who lived nearby introduced him to the Mainichi Newspaper Co. where she worked. There he was assigned to draw a four-cut comic for a newspaper for elementary-school children. The serial comic made its first appearance in January, 1946, under the title Ma-chan no Nikkicho ("Ma-chan's Diary").

Ma-chan no Nikkicho proved a hit. Tezuka's one-month contract was extended to three months, until the end of March. In April, another newspaper engaged him to write a four-cut comic strip, and his comic also began to appear in the Takarazuka Review magazine, Kageki. Thus was born the comic artist Osamu Tezuka, who became a best-selling artist half a year after his debut. He was only seventeen at the time.

"I want to draw more and more comics," thought Tezuka as he eagerly hunted for more work. Then a big chance came his way. He happened to meet the veteran Kansai comic writer, Shichima Sakai, with whom he jointly published a long-story comic book. Entitled Shintakarajima ("New Treasure Island"), the comic book was published in 1947. "Story by Shichima Sakai. Drawings by Osamu Tezuka," it announced. It was an adventure story consisting of Treasure Island, Tarzan, and Robinson Crusoe all rolled into one.

The very first scene, in which Pete, the young hero, speeds off in his car, took readers by surprise and instantly they were hooked. The secret lay in the revolutionary drawing technique. Until that time comics had been two-dimensional, structured so that objects appeared in the distance. This bothered Tezuka. He felt that something was missing. Taking a hint from the films of his childhood, he introduced close-ups into his comics and varied the angles from which scenes were viewed. In addition, he used several frames to depict an action which until then had been allotted just one frame. This gave a feeling of speed and power and heightened the psychological effects.

Shintakarajima was a smash hit and in no time at all 400,000 copies were sold, placing it high on the best-seller list. This was good publicity for Tezuka, who soon began to receive many requests for long comic stories. Turning for help to the 2,000 pages of comics he had drawn during the war, he proceeded to publish one long comic book after another.

In the process, he gradually became aware of his skills as a story-teller. In the past, the hero had always defeated the villains and everyone had lived happily ever after. But in the 1947 comic Chiteikoku no Kaijin ("The Monster of Chiteikoku"), man's egoism and ugliness were also characterized and the ending was not a happy one. A number of readers wrote to Tezuka saying that the story had brought tears to their eyes. It was thus Tezuka who gave rise to the story comic containing a literary or philosophical slant, and the popularity of this sort of comic spread throughout Japan.

Comprehension Check 5

本文の内容に合うものには○を、合わないものには×をつけなさい．

1. Tezuka became a best-selling artist when he was seventeen. ( )

2. Tezuka and Shichima Sakai published an adventure story comic book. ( )

3. Tezuka's revolutionary drawing technique attracted readers. ( )

4. Chiteikoku no Kaijin has a happy ending. ( )