8 A Passion for Animation

In 1959, when Tezuka was 30, he married Etsuko Okada to whom his mother had introduced him.

"In order to create animations," he told Etsuko after their marriage, "I'm going to set up my own production company. I'm afraid it'll give you some headaches where time and money are concerned, but it's my dream." Ever since seeing his first Walt Disney films, Tezuka had felt drawn to animations. In the belief that he would one day create his own, he had produced a mammoth amount of comics and thus managed to save money. In 1963, he finally established Mushi Productions.

The first item chosen for production was Tetsuwan Atom ("Mighty Atom"). Animation consists of creating movement by slightly changing successive pictures, which took up a lot of manpower, time and, above all, money. Tezuka's beloved Walt Disney films used 12 drawings per second. In order to save time and money, Tezuka decided to try using only 8 drawings per second.

"At that time," Tezuka stated later, "Tetsuwan Atom used about 1,200 drawings for 24 minutes of film. If Walt Disney had made the same film, he would have used 17,000 drawings. That's why Disney animations have such a feeling of movement. In comparison, Tetsuwan Atom is practically motionless."

Somehow, despite the financial difficulties, Tetsuwan Atom was completed. It was shown from 1 January, 1963, the first long TV animation made in Japan. There, in live action on the screen, was the familiar figure of Atom. Throughout Japan, children were entranced. The animation consistently gained high ratings, with a maximum of 40.3% and an average of 25%. Other TV companies soon jumped on the bandwagon, and before long Japan was in the midst of an animation boom. From September, 1965, America's NBC showed Tetsuwan Atom in the USA under the title "Astro Boy." "We finally invaded the USA, where Disney was born," an excited Tezuka told his staff on his return from signing the contract in the USA.

Following Tetsuwan Atom, Mushi Productions put out a succession of hit animations, including Jungle Taitei, the first color animation produced in Japan, and Ribon no Kishi. Yet the more animations they made, the worse the financial situation became.

Even the black-and-white Tetsuwan Atom had only just managed to break even, with the help of royalties from character goods and the overseas contract. Jungle Taitei, which was in color, cost three times more to make. As the number of works increased, so did the staff. Together with production costs, manpower costs also mushroomed. In order to cover these costs, more work was accepted, which in turn increased the debt even more. Eventually, in 1973, Mushi Productions went bankrupt. Tezuka was landed with huge debts, which he had to settle from his home.

"The only thing I know how to do is create comics," he said to himself. "That's the only way I can repay these debts. But someday I'll make animations again, that's for sure." With that secret vow, Tezuka set about producing comics again. Black Jack, Hi no Tori ("Phoenix"), Buddha and other popular works appeared one after another, so that in about three years he was able to repay a lot of his debts. With money at his disposal again, Tezuka once more turned his hand to making animations.

Comprehension Check 8

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1. Animation needs a lot of pictures to create movement. ( )

2. Tetsuwan Atom created an animation boom in Japan. ( )

3. Hit animations brought Mushi Productions a large profit. ( )

4. Tezuka did not see any prospects of repaying his debts. ( )