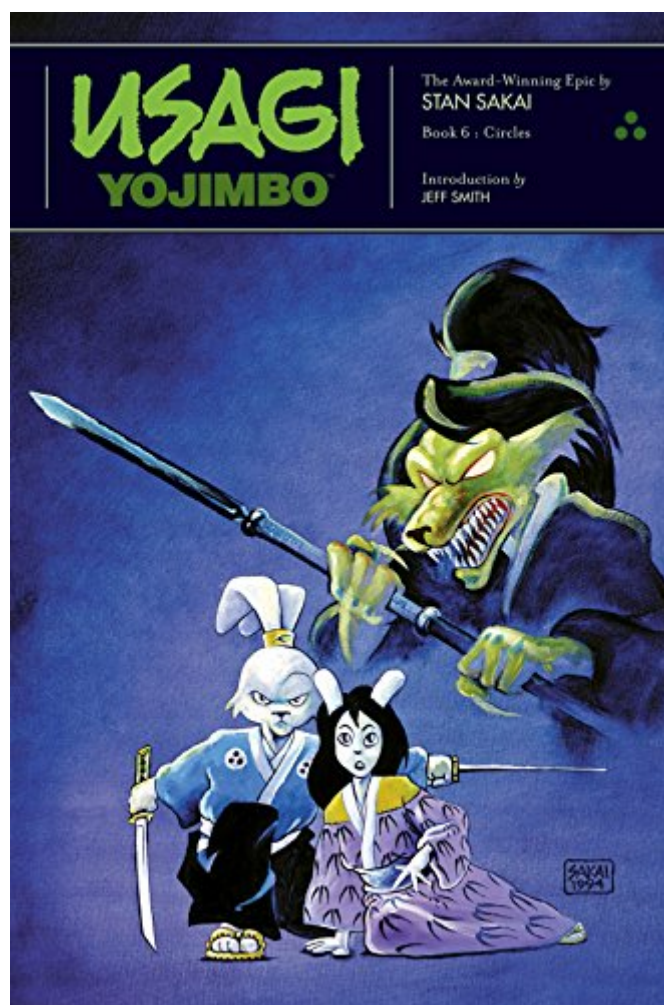


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Usagi Yojimbo: Book 6: Circles



Synopsis

Circles features the graphic-novel-length epic title story, in which Usagi returns to his native village only to find everything very different indeed. (The discovery that his mentor, whom he thought dead, is actually alive and kicking is only the first of the shocks that await him.) "Circles" is an epic adventure, a love story, and one of the most affecting Usagi stories ever. In addition to the 80-page "Circles," this volume includes "The Bridge," "The Duel," and the hard-to-find "The Tangled Skein" from *Critters* #38. Jam-packed with lethal sword battles alternating with humor, horror, suspense and slapstick, this beautifully crafted and exciting volume (with an introduction by Jeff Smith) is both an excellent starting point for new readers, and an absolute necessity for Usagi completists.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I think Usagi Book 3 represents an artistic milestone for Stan Sakai. It's where he really gets narrative as well as the character of Usagi. Usagi Yojimbo really begins to feel like the Usagi Yojimbo we all know and love. I think the next two books coast along at about that same level of quality (and there's nothing bad about that), but with Usagi Yojimbo Book 6 we have another one of these milestones: Sakai transcends simply being very good to being brilliant and turns out his first

masterpiece. The main feature in this volume is of course the long format story *Circles*, which serves as a finale to everything we've learned about Usagi up to this point and then sends him along into the future. In this story we become much closer to Usagi himself. He ceases to be the idealized, perfect hero and becomes a human being. One of us. The love triangle between Usagi, Mariko, and Kenichi is further explored and had this been a movie I would applaud the performances of the actors playing them - but this is a comic book and the 'actor' behind all of them is the pen of Stan Sakai, which turns in a stellar performance, not just with the even more gripping than usual samurai action, but in the quiet, subtle moments as well. Rounding out this volume are a few excellent short stories, including *The Bridge*, a pitch-perfect traditional Japanese ghost story.

Usagi Yojimbo is the kind of quality work that transcends time, genres, demographics, and even age groups. It crafts a delicate and beautiful balance between honor and savagery, cute innocence and dark brutality, simple heart-warming stories and multi-part epics that shape a dense continuity. Whether or not you've ever been a fan of feudal Japanese culture, furry anthro characters, or independent, non-superhero comics, *Usagi Yojimbo* is a comic that can't help but impress even the harshest critic. Prior to this volume, Usagi was a fantastic character. Yet, as a seemingly flawless samurai both in spirit and in combat, I always found him a bit hard to relate to. Usagi always did what was right, and he always won. This is perhaps exhibited best in "*The Bridge*," the first story in this volume. It's my absolute favorite of the early Usagi stories in which he faces an impossible antagonist and not only wins, but wins with great dignity. However, the four part "*Circles*" storyline, which begins part way into this volume, blows all of this out of the water. It begins with Usagi, whose premise has always been centered on his warrior's pilgrimage, deciding to finally go home. In attempting to do so, so much of what we've known of Usagi and his back story begins to shatter. From the return of his long lost sensei to a jaw dropping reunion with Mariko and, most importantly, a ground shaking revelation that has its roots in a mistake Usagi made years earlier, it becomes clear that Usagi will never be the same again. Once this volume concludes, he is a far different, more flawed, and far more human protagonist -- the kind of character you can root for while profoundly empathizing with him at the same time. In "*Circles*," the character of Miyamoto Usagi finally finds his soul. Additionally, the introduction of Jotaro and the profoundly disturbing return of Jei add to an already thoroughly compelling story while building upon the *Usagi Yojimbo* universe at the same time. These are two of Sakai's greatest characters, and those qualities shine brightly even in this early adventure. While *Usagi Yojimbo* is a title that continually gets stronger through the years, "*Circles*" is perhaps the earliest adventure that I return to on a regular basis, still absolutely holding

its own in comparison to all the amazing stories and developments that came after.

Stan Sakai is a genius.

I haven't yet come to the concluding Usagi Yojimbo book in the Fantagraphics series, but I can say without a doubt that Book 6: Circles is the best yet. UY starts off slowly in the beginning books; I was almost about to abandon the series altogether because it just didn't grip my attention. Reluctantly, I trudged on in hopes that later books will instill in me the the wonder of Stan Sakai's fictional historical account of the ronin rabbit. I'm glad I stuck with it. This book presents the most psychologically and emotionally deep plot yet, and leaves readers with a great ending. The drawings are evident that Sakai improves his talent over the years, and the dialogue can be very quotable for some. I strongly recommend UY to any graphic novel fan, and urge beginners to "trudge," as I have, through the initial stories so that they can come to appreciate the maturity and excellence of later samurai tales.

After the mixed bag of volume five, "Usagi Yojimbo," Stan Sakai's comic series about a wandering samurai rabbit in feudal Japan, is back in top form with its sixth volume, "Circles." Sakai's artwork has reached its maturity here; Usagi and his companions are full of expression. Most striking is the leap in page layout; Sakai now uses thoughtful arrangements of text, illustrations, and panels to enhance the effect of his story. The offerings in this book include some strong one-off tales, but almost half the volume is devoted to the title story, which sees Usagi returning to his hometown. His intention is to leave the wandering life, but what he finds in his old village surprises him. The interplay of emotions in this story would have been easy to ham up, but Sakai handles everything with tremendous delicacy, demonstrating his growth not only as an illustrator but as a writer. That he handles both of these tasks by himself can only be considered a great achievement. A title like "Circles" urges us to reflect on how far the series has come since its beginning, and I for one conclude that its growth has all been for the better. This volume feels like a culmination; it takes all of Sakai's artistry and puts it into the service of a story that genuinely advances characters and situations readers have come to care about. There are a few can't-miss volumes of Usagi. This is one of them.~

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