

Cover art to the first *Drops of God* collection and *Marriage - The Drops of God Final Arc*
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Wine Redefined

Bestselling Japanese manga series *The Drops of God* has captured the imagination of wine lovers around the world.

TOSHIO MATSUBARA

THE first story in *The Drops of God* manga series was published in a weekly Japanese comic magazine in 2004. Since then, the series has become hugely popular not just in Japan but also overseas. Translated collections of the series have flown off bookshelves in China, Taiwan, South Korea, the United States and France, with total sales now exceeding ten million books worldwide.

The Drops of God has been

hailed not merely for its artistry but because it talks about wine in a new way and in an easy-to-understand manner. The comic books are so highly regarded in France that they are used as textbooks at wine schools. Co-writers Yuko Kibayashi and her younger brother Shin Kibayashi, who published the series under the pen name Tadashi Agi, have received numerous awards for the series, among them the Best of the Best in the prestigious Gourmand World Cookbook Awards and France's L'Ordre du Mérite agricole.

The Drops of God is a story about a quest by two competing characters for twelve excellent wines, called the "Twelve Apostles," and a thirteenth wine, the "Drops of God."

"At a wine party at my

brother's house, I tried a 1985 DRC Echézeaux for the first time," says Yuko. "The wine had an enormous impact on me and triggered the idea for the manga. "Superb wine comprises diverse elements including nature, people, culture, and time, and my experience of that wine allowed me to instantly realize the fact. My brother and I were totally enchanted by the wine."

The Kibayashi siblings sampled many different wines thereafter, searching for ideas, but were tormented. There are said to be about 5,000 taste descriptors for wine, terms such as "cassis" and "cedar," but the authors found the lexicon to be overly analytical and not sufficiently expressive to convey the true image of the wines they tasted.



Writers and wine connoisseurs Shin and Yuko Kibayashi
Photo: Yoshifusa Hashizume

“It’s impossible to communicate the artistry of a painting only by analyzing the paints,” says Shin. “It’s the same with wine. We felt we could pursue an entirely new way of expressing the essence of wine through manga. The title of the series, *The*

Drops of God, came to us instantly. Soon after that, we came up with the outline of a plot – the hunt for twelve ‘apostle wines.’”

The authors sample over 1,000 bottles of wine every year in their own pursuit of the very best wines. The stories they tell are therefore based on experience rather than a prior knowledge of any given wine.

“What we do is cast light upon the image of each wine,” says Shin. “We can create and develop that image only after we encounter a fabulous wine, and from that we can write a story. We couldn’t do it the other way around. The two of us taste the wines and talk about the images that emerge. That’s the essence of our creative process.”

The “Twelve Apostle” wines identified by the authors generated a remarkable response in the real world. One wine sold out almost the moment the story describing it was published, while the price of another shot up sharply. The identity of the ultimate wine to be announced at the end of the series, the “Drops of God,” is therefore no doubt being keenly anticipated.

“We are fully aware of that,” says Yuko. “We have been narrowing down the candidates with all our heart.”

Good wine has charms unique to its terroir. In Japan, there are a number

of grape varieties and wineries producing fine wine, notably in Yamanashi Prefecture. How do these wines hold up?

“We were asked by the Japanese government to select the Japanese wines to be served at the G7 Ise-Shima Summit,” says



Packaged like a fine wine, a French collection of the *Drops of God* manga series
Photo: Yoshifusa Hashizume

Shin. “It might have been difficult to do that in the past, but the standard of Japanese wines has rapidly improved over the last decade or so. The endeavors of Japan’s winemaking forefathers have paid off.”

Just like *The Drops of God*, Japanese wines could soon be the talk of the world. **U**



The Kibayashi siblings’ Gourmand World Cookbook Awards certificate hangs alongside their L’Ordre du Mérite agricole medal above empty bottles of vintage wine which the writers sampled in their research.
Photo: Yoshifusa Hashizume