

Interviews

Articles

Columns

Reviews

Culture Vultures

Gallery

Archives

Sang-Sun Park

Les Bijoux Comic Artist

by [Kat Avila](#)

Warning: This write-up may contain spoilers.

Les Bijoux (French for "the jewels") is a country made up of twelve "mines," or territories, governed by a ruling class of Habits who exploit the lowly Spars. From the Spars rises a cursed hero/heroine Lapis Lazuli, born of a female hunchback and a male dwarf. Lapis lifts a vengeful sword against the icy and ambitious Lord Diamond of Neige Mine. However, Lapis is foiled by his female personality Lazuli who manifests whenever Diamond is around:

"Lapis, who would
save everyone.
Lazuli, who would
save only one man."

The bejeweled but bloody world created by writer Eun-Ha Jo requires a fearless artist. This artist is Sang-Sun Park, who has the stomach to draw the cruelties of the Habits to each other and to the Spars. The nightmarish Les Bijoux is redeemed by the stunningly handsome guardians who support Lapis to reclaim the paradise of the Age of Gold.

At **San Diego Comic-Con International 2004**, with the assistance of translator Sophia Hong, I spoke with Sang-Sun Park at the **Korea Culture & Content Agency (KOCCA)** booth. *Les Bijoux* is a superb example of the formidable

talent nurtured in Japan and Korea where markets robustly support women comic artists.

Artist Sang-Sun Park was born and raised in Seoul, Korea. She has five older sisters and one younger brother. One sister works as a fashion designer. Asked about her fondest childhood memory, Park recalled a crush she had as a six-year-old on a guy who worked at a hair salon.

She attended Kook-Min University and majored in visual design, studying advertising, packaging, animation, and illustration. Her artistic influences include Slam Dunk's Takeiko Inoue. For her, drawing is easier than writing a story.

Park enjoys illustrating sci-fi and fantasy genres. She likes to draw Korean traditional historical fantasy and European medieval history.

She uses Corel Painter and Adobe Photoshop. But when she draws manhwa (Korean comics) she uses Zebra pens and Japanese-made I.C. paper. Only for more difficult effects does she employ a computer.

Titles she has worked on are ***Requiem of the Soul*** (1 vol.), ***Lost Wings*** (1 vol.), ***Les Bijoux*** (5 vols.), and ***Tarot Cafe*** (6 vols.). Her comics career began in 1997 when she won the top prize in a contest with ***Broken Toy***.

Broken Toy is about an android boy in love with his girl master. Being a human being, she naturally marries another human. Later, the android dies but is reborn into a new android body. He is purchased by an elderly widow whom he recognizes as his former master. It's a happy ending for both.

Requiem of the Soul was originally planned as 10 volumes, but was stopped after the first volume. It's a branch story of ***Tarot Cafe***, so one character appears in both titles. ***Lost Wings*** is a short-story collection. Park says ***Tarot Cafe*** contains her best work to date. It is almost finished in Korea

and will be released in the U.S. by **TOKYOPOP** next year.

Les Bijoux's deep storyline and exquisite artwork — featuring beautiful men, powerful women, and branded shapeshifters — make it a top-of-the-line introduction to sun-jung manhwa (similar to shoujo manga but covering a wider age range). Park's expressive abilities are at their best in full-page panels, such as Lapis Lazuli's personalities lying upside down from each other, naked against outstretched angel wings, bound and linked together by a single chain. Or the all-powerful Diamond kissing a defiant Lazuli, two side slices capturing his triumph as Lazuli's eyes go neutral, then acquiesce. Or the three-quarter panel of the temporarily defeated sorceress Esmeraud cradling Pieta-like her favorite slave after he has been horribly tortured.

It took 12 to 13 days for the artist to complete a 24-page story set of *Les Bijoux*, with little time to eat and sleep. Backgrounds were taken care of by an assistant. Park did all the inking herself, but shared toning duties with her assistant and would do the more difficult toning.

Lord Carnelian of Soleil Mine was the most challenging character to draw because of his very wavy hair which ran past his buttocks. Her favorite character? The fiendish and sexy Lord Pyrope of Sable Mine. Character names, alluding to precious and semi-precious stones, had some influence on Park's designs.

Park attended **Comic-Con 2004** with fellow comic artist Hyun You, creator of *Faeries' Landing*. They signed autographs at the **KOCCA** and **TOKYOPOP** booths and participated in a Saturday afternoon **TOKYOPOP** Q&A. On Sunday, the two met more fans at two Los Angeles-area bookstores.

It will be very exciting to see what more this artist can do in years to come.

End Notes

1. Names are rewritten Western style with family name last. On the cover of the English version of *Les Bijoux*, the names of the artist and writer are written Korean style with family name first.
2. Sun-jung manhwa are ladies' comics (B5 paper size), and so-nyun manhwa are guys' comics (B6 paper size). These terms include a wider age range than their Japanese counterparts shoujo manga (girls' comics) and shounen manga (boys' comics).
3. In Korea, comics are read the same way as Western comics, from left to right, with dialogue on a horizontal axis. Also, because a large percentage of Koreans have assimilated Western values through Christianity, there is a higher degree of censorship in manhwa than in manga.
4. If you love the artwork in *Les Bijoux*, you might want to look for the original Korean version because English-language publishers currently work from scanned copies, so the art suffers a little. You partially lose the illusion of depth the original toning provides, as well as the clarity of finely detailed panels.

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