

**Introduction:** A new era commenced in the world of scanlations. The old scanlation groups are in tatters. Few have remained to fight the uphill battle against the vicious demons...a threat to the world order, the speed scanlation groups have appeared!

Branded by the righteous hate of the highly skilled, the speed scanlator only meet disgust on the wide fields of IRC. This phenomenon has taken over the world of scanlations and fansubbing. A cleavage between the two belief systems, or if you want to call them so ideologies, has been created and the gap between these two paths has yet to be closed.

After this very colourful introduction I will – much to my disappointment – not talk about ideologies, belief systems and cleavages (I will have to write about them on my exam). Instead I will focus this ...rant on the metamorphosis in the scanlation scene that is still ongoing; it does not look like the system will revert back in the future.

**History and Facts:** I used to be an avid hater of speed scanlations. I had a few heated discussions with other members of the community in the past, discussing why speed scanlations are stupid, why they are damaging the community overall, and so on. All these discussions were held subjectively and very few made an effort to not let their belief take over their argumentation.

Of course, one can hardly expect an objective discussion taking place on IRC, where most of the users are not only overestimating their IQ and language skills, but also their anonymity, easily falling into their usual behavioural pattern, meaning flaming and “trolling”.

With this text I first want to give a short overview over the not-so-recent discussion first, talk very briefly about the history second, and then finally address the Pros and Cons of speed scanlations. In my conclusion, I’ll state my personal opinion on the matter and try to weigh the Pros and Cons against each other to find a satisfying result. I will try and emulate this bulk of text as a scientific article on manga scanlations, despite knowing that it will not meet the criteria for one. I hope to give the discussion a new, more mature basis of debate. I’m not really sure where my motivation to write this text derives from, maybe because it helps me procrastinate from exam studies? Very likely!

I think the debate about speed scanlations sporadically emerged back in 2006, with its height being in the consecutive year. The discussion has been re-appeared several times in 2008, usually when a series started to get the “speed scanlation” treatment like *Saru Lock* or *Sekirei*. (*ed note: Oh, come now, do we need discussion on such plebeian titles?*)

Like a harbinger of doom, speed scanlations appeared first for *Naruto*. Not surprising, considering its widespread appeal outside of Japan. Even at the beginning of 2004, there were three groups scanlating *Naruto*, all of them now defunct. As I was not reading *Naruto* back then, I don’t know if one group did the magazine RAWs, while the others the tankobons, or if they all competed for the fastest release. I don’t know if critical opinions of these procedures were voiced, or if people thought of it as a healthy competition. Inform me in the comments!

The big buzz about speed scanlations probably started in the late summer 2007, peaking October 2007, when *Naruto* (I’m using *Naruto* as an example, because it is one of the more obvious series exposed to speed scans) chapter 376 was scanlated by thirteen different “groups”, including “one-man teams” (maybe there is a correlation with VIZ’s *Naruto* deal?!), but has now dropped to four groups in May/June 2008.

Similar to *Naruto* in October 2007 *Bleach* had eight groups scanlating one chapter, while at the start it had been two, and now it also back to around four releases per chapter. The development for other shounen manga has been similar. Meaning: usually two groups start to scanlate the manga, then a peak with many groups releasing their version of a chapter in fall 2007, followed a consolidation phase in late 2007/early 2008 (i.e. Mangashare's merge with Binktopia). As a result most shounen manga get around two to three different versions for each new chapter (*Naruto*, *Bleach*, *D. Gray-man*, *Claymore*, *Reborn!*, etc.).

There have been other factors, which contributed to the cancerous and fast-paced development of speed scanlations than just the rise of manga popularity. It is true that with the rise of manga popularity all over the world an increased the pool of potential helpers; alas, looking at the current situation, leechers instead of helpers seem to make up the majority. More and more people are able to use the internet with sufficient bandwidth and therefore gain the opportunity to get their hands on scanlations, compared to outdated methods like the black markets in their respective countries, where they sell scanlations on CDs! Also, more children in their teens are able to use the internet, causing the creation of a new wave of "weeaboism" and *Naruto* and *Naruto*-like series lovers, fuelling the already-raging fire for *Naruto* and other shounen/shoujo titles. (*ed note: And we ALL know they're all crap!*)

Aside from the new quantity of internet users and their average age, one should not forget the original characteristic of the internet: its rapid speed. The internet is fast flowing, quickly changing and *rarely long lasting*. This characteristic also allows popular manga to become exponentially *more* popular within a short amount of time. Due to word to mouth propaganda in real life, as well as in the virtual life, a manga series *can become known to people who fundamentally had nothing to do with manga*. One "manga fan" posts links to scanlations of *Naruto* on a board about rabbit breeding, gets some people interested, who then themselves might make further threads in other forums.

New scanning technologies and faster internet make RAWs available sooner and with better quality. *Mangahelpers* and *Ritual Scan Forge* (RSF) have given easy, free, and uncomplicated access to many RAWs, which in the past have been secret in monopolizing scanlation projects. *Mangahelpers* also plays an important role in the actual translation process, as it provides an independent source for translations for certain series. Most series, where the translations are not reserved and hence available for public use, have more than one speed scanlation group working on them, and are rarely joined by a quality scanlation group.

**Pros & Cons:** After I talked about some of the obvious factors to why speed scanlations exist as they do today, I want to point out some Pros and Cons of speed scanlation, starting with the latter. I, by no means, think this list is complete; however I do hope I mentioned the important points. Please feel free to provide input in the comments.

Group members of established and respected groups have said that one of the negative effects is that the quality of speed scans plainly sucks, to be blunt. It therefore soils and taints the work of the mangaka and thus shows no respect for the original work. However, speed scanlations never claim nor try to do quality releases. Furthermore, no matter how much effort you put into a scanlation, the mangaka will simply *not* care. It doesn't matter if your release is LQ or HQ; you have stolen property from the mangaka and it doesn't show your respect for his work. You lost that respect when you started to scanlate his work without any agreement or allowance to do so. To argue that you provide advertisement, creating higher chances for a potential license and/or increase his fanbase is being hypocritical. Believing this is for the greater good only soothes your guilty consciousness, similar to linking to English translated

manga on Amazon from a website where downloads for exactly the same manga are provided, available for free. (*ed note: But let's not argue about validity of scanlations here, ok-nyan?*)

A more valid argument might be that speed scanlations kill the established group or makes them drop the project (TEA-Scans, Kefi), which they have been working on for so long. Some say that the speed scanlation group don't have any effect on them, because the labour organization is clear: one or more speed groups are doing the low quality releases, while the HQ-group does the high quality (tankobon) releases. This conception is purely myth. Having a speed group release faster than you has an effect on your pride and motivation. Slower releases means less people come into your channel to download, say thank you, or simply stay and idle. You may wonder why do these groups even care about "attention" or "praise"; aren't they doing this of their own free will?

Partly yes and partly no. Scanlating manga so the only ones reading the chapter is your own group and a motley few defeats the purpose of spreading an author's work. Naturally, you want to get credit for your work to some extent; downloads or an occasional bit of recognition within the scene is some sort of payback for the hard work you've been putting in. This obviously doesn't mean that when a speed group or another group picks up your project and scanlates faster than you, your group will disband. Dissolution is the last step and until now, hasn't been happening just because of speed scanlating; however projects have been dropped as the result of it being scanlated by another quality group at a faster pace.

As you can see, this argument is not totally valid either. Groups don't just disband because of other groups taking their projects; they might shift their priorities over to other projects and pick up a new one. This can increase the variety of manga released and therefore would be a positive effect, while a negative side-effect might be that loyal readers who prefer the older group's version have to either a) wait longer b) stop reading the manga or c) be forced to read the speed scanlations. A minority might suffer for the good of the masses. (*ed note: And you can thank the masses for populist hogwash and horse spit!*)

Another negative of speed scanlation groups could be that these groups drain resources from the older groups. New members mostly want to join the group who releases the fastest. As a counter argument, one could say that those people, applying for positions in speed scanlation groups, don't possess the abilities to work in a HQ-group to begin with and therefore no resources are drained. Yet one should not forget that many of these old groups can train their new applicants and with time develop them into fine cleaners. Just the sheer amount of speed scanlation group causes a "brain drain", as some of these applicants might actually have the skills and time to do a good job on quality releases. Some of the applicants at speed scanlation groups might also find it easier to work there than for an established quality group. The quality criteria are more lenient and the pressure and group structure is not as strong. It's easier to please their readers than to please the quality readers.

One has to wonder if the appearance of the new impatient leecher is a result of the speed scanlations or if it's the other way around. While we should not exchange cause and effect here, since the impatient and anonymous leechers have existed for a long time, back then they had no choice but to wait for the release, or had step up from the shadows and start their own group. Recently with the rise in internet users and decline of their average age, more of them have swarmed the scene, most of them being even more impatient and demanding for faster releases. The response was speed scanlations. What does that have to do with Pros and Cons you might ask?

I think the speed scanlation will *never* satiate the impatient leecher. These impatient leechers had no choice but to wait in the past, but now can act up all they want, as some group will definitely release their manga, no matter how they behave. This, however, does not have any negative effects for the established groups, as most of them will just kickban any annoying person or simply ignore them.

But the most discussed and heated point would be so called “project-theft”. Project-theft was widely considered as a lack of etiquette, a sign of no respect towards the group doing the project in the past. By now, project-theft has become an everyday appearance. *Sekirei* and recently *Saru Lock* are probably one of the best known cases but I can at least name a few dozen others that have been getting low quality treatment under the argumentation that the past group was too slow, even when they were releasing chapters at a consistent rate and proofed to be a reliable scanlation team in the past (*Fairy Tail, Reborn!*). Often these speed groups don’t even ask for joints (by now a joint with HQ-groups is unlikely as the fronts have become entrenched and some HQ-groups take a certain pride in not working with speed scanlation groups), but even when they did most of them don’t have the required skills to meet up with the HQ-groups’ standards.

This loss of etiquette is going hand in hand with the change of the scanlation mentality. The original purpose for scanlation was to bring Japanese manga to the world, to show off their unique art and story-telling. Manga at the time was unknown and unlicensed; if one was licensed it would be dropped by the group to support the local industry. Today most of the new groups and also several of the established ones do scanlate licensed material (here meaning licensed in the US) and refuse to stop even when the licensed version makes it to print. This recent development certainly doesn’t have a positive effect on manga sale figures, yet there are still people who claim otherwise. The old groups accuse these newly founded ones (not only speed scanlations) to have no working morals, damaging the very own industry they had hoped to create and causing backlashes in the market.

After I discussed the validity of the Con arguments, one has to see the positive result of speed scanlation too. Even if it comes with a setback on quality, speedy releases for the masses are not “bad” per se. I have to admit, I never cared much about the quality of a release for series like *Naruto*. I’m fine with some hardly levelled RAW, white squares as bubbles, typeset with an ugly pixel font (*ed note: I’m not! Quality or death!*). As speed is the only criteria to differentiate between the LQ releases, I’ll go with the quickest available. I used to stay faithful for the main group’s release, but lately have given up on that (i.e. *Vinland Saga*). (*ed note: But Vinland is addictive, classy rawk.*)

With speed groups doing all the shounen manga, the established groups have more time and resources to spend on unknown and unlicensed projects. Therefore speed groups disburden the HQ-groups, thus creating greater diversity in manga being released, which is then good for the readers. One could also see the other way around. As the HQ-groups tend *not to work* on licensed material, the speed scanlation groups take over. In the end both clearly are positive effects for the community, albeit not for the industry, which is an entirely different matter.

Speed groups’ are practically immune to Cease & Desist letters by publishers. They often don’t possess a set structure or a leader; sometimes they only consist of one person and are therefore a) hard to track and to “hunt” down and b) can always be replaced, which makes sending these letters totally useless, as they would just reappear under a different name the next day. With their flexibility and mobility they can ensure that the scanlation scene will

exist, even if not like it used to be, in the future. (*ed note: Postive or negative, we leave for you to pick your poison!*)

**Conclusion:** There are valid arguments for and against speed scanlations, and with the recent consolidation phase, it seems that the phenomenon has been on halt and is not as apparent as before. Speed scanlation groups themselves have been reorganizing their structure and picked up other works, although still stealing manga occasionally. The phase of many one-man-groups doing releases for shounen appears to be over, and instead a new phase has been occurring: community-building.

The newer groups try to establish and create a community within the manga scene to share their scanlations, as well as talk about their hobby. They try and imitate *Mangahelpers*; they also happen scanlate their own series too (*Mangashare & Franky-House*). They use these scanlations as a way of promoting their community while using their community as a way to promote their series...a clever method of acquiring new recruits to keep up their speedy releases. Sometimes they use their releases to force people to register and then bolster their community in the short run.

My personal critique of these new groups would be that they sometimes make it unnecessarily hard for the user to download their releases such as uploading them on terrible file sharing sites, forcing you to register, or no user friendly layouts. This policy contradicts their original goal to bring manga to the public as fast as possible, “fast” including making it easy and simple; both luxuries which are not provided in many cases.

The established groups either have an easy to use IRC channel (!list and triggers or links in the topic), while also providing DDL links. I agree that an IRC-only release is not something that makes downloading uncomplicated or faster, however most of the HQ-groups never intended to do that. For their quality releases they demand certain cooperation by the leecher and if it's only forcing him to join the IRC channel. In contrast, speed scanlation groups try to get praise and attention, which stands in no connection to the actual quality. They, however, often get more praise and attention as many HQ-groups, simply because they decide to only pick up popular series. The HQ-groups themselves don't care much about praise anymore compared to the new blood.

Another reason why I dislike the speed scanlations is that if you don't download their releases within a particular time frame most of the links don't work anymore. This means you have to click through ad-heavy sites with an ugly layout to get some direct download link if you want them, since Lurk doesn't update as fast as they release. Note: this is not meant as a critique towards Lurk! Alternative links are often available, but only Rapidshare (which I despise) and Megaupload seem to store them long enough (there's also Mediafire), while providing decent speed and page layouts.

What has been annoying me lately is their different ways of formatting their release names. I know this isn't very important to many of you and neither is it important for speed or quality, but it's a bother to rename tons of the releases so that it's lined up correctly in my MangaMeeyaCE and does not first show chapter xx and then chapter xx+2. (*ed note: Don't sweat the small stuff! Burn the big stuff!*)

Overall, one can conclude that even if speed scanlations initiate heated debates, their actual negative effects on the scene might not be as bad as one might believe. Most of the negative effects about quality and resource draining are overestimated and the demise of quality

scanlation doesn't seem near, and even then, the speed scanlation is just one of many factors to cause its downfall. The ongoing project-theft and the lack of etiquette is still an issue that remains thorny. It seems that many people have forgotten about morals and manners, but also respect towards each others work. Many speed scanlation groups lack scruples and boastfully scanlate licensed material, which in the long run only will have negative effects on the situation of manga in the whole world. Denying this fact is like saying years of chain-smoking won't have any effect on your health. I really do hope that the newly founded groups find their place in the scanlation world and maybe even develop into HQ-groups, so we can get some more quality releases of not-so popular manga, like *Agharta*, *Freesia*, and *Leviathan*. SOMEONE PICK UP THE LAST ONE, PLEASE!

About yal: yal has translated *XS* for Manga Underground, *King of Thorns* for Strays, and currently is translating *Karasuma Kyouko* for Nibo. He studies political science and loves politics even more than manga. His favourite series include: *Eden*, *Berserk*, *Astral Project*, *Old Boy*, and many, many, many more. Currently doubts that anybody will read this whole thing.

About the editor: Is a fey enigma involved within the scanlation scene in a number of ways. Frolics in amore, ambiguity, antagonism, and the absurd. Favourite activities include: flirting with feisty friends, fever fantasies, fighting the True Enemy, and having fun. Currently draws yaoi and shota 4-koma of *Tegami Bachi* inside random books.