

Boys on Boys on Film

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October 11, 2005

Embracing Love (Haru wo Daiteita)

Reviewer: Titania [[website](#)] [[email](#)]

Overall grade: A

Written by: Nitta Youka

Released by: Be Beautiful

Volumes: 10 (ongoing, still being published in Japan)

With this first volume of Embracing Love (Haru wo Daiteita in Japanese), Be Beautiful introduces one of the most popular Boys Love mangaka -- Nitta Youka -- and series to American readers. The series is now up to volume 10 in Japan, with no signs of ending any time soon.

Volume one introduces the two main characters, adult video (AV) actors Katou Youji and Iwaki Kyousuke. Katou is the younger of the two, and riding a rising star at the moment. Iwaki is older and well-established, but also feeling the heat of becoming an aging porn star (he's around 30). Polar opposites, spirited rivals, and definitely not friends, both yearn to make it in mainstream movies, and so jump at the chance to audition for a role in writer/director Sawa's gay-themed movie, Embracing Love. Much to their surprise, the "audition" turns out to be a one-on-one sex scene . . . with each other! Katou agrees immediately, leaving Iwaki's ego no room to do anything else but agree. Though it's Katou who takes the initiative, Iwaki ends up topping the younger man and thus earning the role . . . of the bottom (to Sawa's top).

Fast forward in time to post-filming. With the movie now a success, Sawa wants to make a weekly TV series out of it. Re-enter Katou, to take Sawa's role -- on screen and off. Katou boldly and persistently pursues Iwaki, who is convinced the younger man is doing it for the sake of publicity. Tensions build between the two as filming nears an end and rumours swell about their off-screen "relationship" (which Iwaki denies and Katou is smugly silent about). When Katou leaves the wrap party early, a confused Iwaki takes that as a sign his co-star has left his life for good. Which couldn't be further from the truth: loath to let Iwaki go, Katou's taken advantage of his popularity with Iwaki's landlord to move into the older man's apartment.

And so we have the rocky, yet very steamy beginning to one of BL manga's most beloved and enduring relationships. Definitely a case of opposites attract. Grumpy, up-tight Iwaki has a more subtle sex appeal than his bright, brash lover, and in this early volume, he seems more emotionally vulnerable, uncertain as he is about Katou's intentions. He really needn't worry, as Katou's about as straightforward as they come, but the path to true love is rarely smooth and this is just the first bump for the pair. As far as introductory stories go, this is an excellent one. By placing both men as competitors in the AV industry, Nitta has made the first sex scene reasonably plausible, and provides for fine reasons to toss the pair in bed as they're filming the TV series. Plus the storyline contains a good mix of drama and humour, with a healthy dose of eroticism.

There are two additional short stories included in the volume, as in the original. One concerns a young Iwaki look-alike, who has a mad crush on Katou. Unfortunately, he discovers the hard way that Katou wants Iwaki just the way he is, and isn't interested in a younger copy. The second is a one-off story with two high jumpers who get a bit more hands-on than your average competitors. . . .

Nitta's artwork is bold and crisp and her men are real men (albeit, long-legged and perfectly smooth). Her art style will evolve in future volumes, but is solid and distinctive even at this early stage. Pay attention to the clothes -- Nitta is very meticulous with her characters' wardrobes, drawing on fashion magazines for inspiration.



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Be Beautiful has released an excellent version of Embracing Love. Nitta's sex scenes are more graphic than in previously released English-language BL manga, and Be Beautiful has neither shied away from them nor edited them in any way. The opportunity was there to tone down Sawa's relationship with his younger nephew, but not taken. This is refreshing and quite welcome. Also welcome is that Katou calls Iwaki Iwaki-san consistently throughout the manga. The tone of their relationship would be off if Katou used the more familiar Iwaki (without an honorific).

Nitta's afterthoughts have also been included at the very end -- it's always interesting to see what's on the mangaka's mind, and I wish more companies would include these sidebars and columns.

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