

This past August, Central Park Media launched a brand new imprint for manga translated into English, called "Be Beautiful." The BB line focuses on yaoi manga designed to appeal to adult women. The first two titles released by Be Beautiful are considered classics of yaoi manga - not the earliest, by any stretch, but both titles and authors are extremely well-known to any yaoi fan, and to many who are not.

So, why am I, one of the country's leading experts in yuri manga and anime reviewing Be Beautiful's first two manga for you? I'm not really sure. LOL But, I suppose I had better begin from the beginning.

Yaoi is a term that is largely out of fashion in Japan, but is still used here in the west to denote stories of male homosexual relationships, usually written by women, for women. (Many shounen, or boys' series, have ample yaoi fodder, however.) Yuri is a term that is used for stories of female homosexual relationships. Yuri can be written by men or women for a male or female audience, again depending on the manga or anime series. Like ALC Publishing, which publishes yuri manga in English, Be Beautiful's mission is to bring popular adult-oriented yaoi manga to an English-speaking audience. (See [Resources](#) below for more information and history and events related to Yuri and Yaoi.)

Which brings me to *Kizuna: Bonds of Love*. As I mentioned, this is an extremely well-known series, by Kazuma Kodaka. The first volume began as a collection of doujinshi (small press or self-published manga.) *Kizuna* is not a believable story, but it is pretty fun. Kei, the bastard child of a yakuza boss, falls in love with and seduces Ranmaru, star kendo competitor. Kei's half brother Kai (who, alarmingly, looks awfully like Trunks from *Dragonball Z!*) is not only a powerful yakuza, but he also falls in love with Ranmaru, and is the reason Ran can no longer compete in kendo. (Kai's vengeance against his older half-brother backfired - Ran was the one injured.)

The three men dance a gavotte around one another, Kai competing with his half-brother Kei, for Ran's love, while Ran tries to stave off both Kai and the pervy professor for whom he works. Ultimately, Kei and Ran stay together and Kai is sent packing, only to find true love in the arms of one of his father's yakuza. ...It sounds awfully silly when I say it that way, doesn't it? LOL

Golden Cain was, for me, the more enjoyable of the two even though, ironically, it's basically the same, exact plot. Cain is a hunky foreign pop idol who falls in love with young talented student Shun. But Shun is emotionally crippled because his older brother, Keiichi, was involved in a terrible accident for which Shun blames himself. Shun realizes that Cain is the man his brother loved, and that he has taken Cain's love away from his brother, and the whole story gets caught up in that same basic three-way gavotte as *Kizuna*. [Editor's note: I found some of the beautiful-mysterious-foreign-pop-idol-seduces-obsessed-innocent plot elements of *Golden Cain* similar to the shoujo title [Sensual Phrase](#); in both, the idol even enrolls at his love interest's school.]

Kizuna: Bonds of Love

Writer/Artist: Kazuma Kodaka

Golden Cain

Writer/Artist: You Asagiri

Publisher: Be Beautiful

Guest review by: [Erica Friedman](#)



[Kizuna - Bonds Of Love](#)

Kazuma Kodaka

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Shun's protestations quickly become wearisome as he is completely possessed, body and mind, by Cain. And when we learn that his brother is not only alive, but has been faking amnesia for a year, it all becomes extremely goofy for a moment. But in the end, Shun and Cain get to live happily ever after, just as they should.

Both releases have many things in common. The art style is distinctly 1990's and follows all the usual conventions of *yaoi* manga - tall, angular "top" (*seme*), shorter, rounder-faced "bottom" (*uke*). Also typical of *yaoi* manga, the characters aren't "really" gay - they just fall in love with and have enormous amounts of sex with, each other. [Editor's note: Both manga contain nudity and explicit portrayals of sex; Be Beautiful recommends its titles for a mature audience.] The passion in both volumes is intense and overwhelming, to the point of obsession. The ages of the characters have clearly been changed from high school to college to accommodate western decency standards. Both titles have brothers who are in love with the same man and include non-consensual sex. As a lesbian who usually reads *yuri*, I found them both very similar to an all-*yuri* manga magazine that ran in the mid-to-late 1990's. The art, the storylines, the "I'm not gay, I'm just in love with you" characterization, were extremely reminiscent of the stories that ran in *Mist* magazine. Only, where *Mist* stories ran for 40 pages, these were 200 - which basically made them seem that much more melodramatic and silly. And both volumes have been well produced by Be Beautiful. The text is clear, the translations decent, although not stellar. Sound effects were left in Japanese, and translated only where there appeared to be room in a panel. Honorifics were completely removed from both stories - something that I don't personally like. I much prefer to read translations that leave the honorifics, and the relationships they denote, intact.

But the \$64,000 question is - did I think they were sexy? That is, after all, the test of an "adult" story. Well, I'm split. *Kizuna*...not so much. I found the art very inconsistent and distracting, and the whole *Yakuza* plot hard to get past. But yes, *Golden Cain* was very sexy, dare I say it...even, hot. Cain's love for Shun was downright steamy, not least in part because of the whole "foreign" card. I don't know about Shun, but I quite enjoy being seduced in a foreign language. LOL On the other hand, since my taste runs to the ridiculous, I actually enjoyed *Kizuna* quite a lot and look forward to more improbable plot complications from that series.

Overall, these two books were strong first releases for Be Beautiful. Each retails for a SRP of \$15.99. Fans who already love *yaoi* will definitely love them - and many old school *yaoi* fans will be pleased to have two classics to add to their collections. Whether these two titles can attract new fans remains to be seen, but I'm betting they will.

★ SCORE ★

Kizuna: Bonds of Love



Golden Cain



★ images ★

