

Anime Nostalgia

**RIP: REQUIEM IN PHONYBRIAN**  
Story and art: **Mitsukazu Mihara**  
Publisher: **Tokyopop**; 161 pages  
(ISBN: 1-598-16505-4)  
For ages 16+

# Touched by an angel

If you love Gothic Lolita fashion, this book may just be for you. Because other than interesting costumes there's not much of a story to savour here. In fact, it would not be remiss of me to say that the flimsy story is merely an excuse to showcase as many interesting Goth Lolita costumes as possible.



By Kitty Sensei

The story is appropriately gothic and dark (thus the more mature rating for this manga). Transylvanian Rose, an angel, witnesses a young man slitting his wrists and watches as his body is later buried in a graveyard. Although she knows that the souls of those who commit suicide cannot be "purified", Transylvanian Rose "rescues" his spirit anyway. In order to do so, she attaches one of her wings to the man's back, which traps both of them on Earth.

Transylvanian Rose's fellow angels do not understand why she has taken pity on the man. Besides, the man, whom she has named "Undertaker", is not even appreciative of her efforts; he tries to commit suicide

a few more times – all to no avail, of course.

As Undertaker mopes about his many botched attempts and why life is not worth living, Transylvanian Rose's patience (and the readers') runs thin. Fortunately, they later discover that he has a special ability to "purify" the souls of people who have committed suicide. Still, most of the time the Undertaker is too self-absorbed to care, though he occasionally does show a glimmer of compassion for some of the lost souls that the pair meet. How exactly he is able to do so is left unexplained, as are many other things in this manga.

Mihara's art is not bad, but she prefers to focus all her attention on drawing the characters' costumes, therefore the backgrounds are often very simple. Her favourite way to fill in the background? Screen-tones. It would be nice to see something unique in the background instead of the sky (which appears far too many times) and screen-tones of Gothic buildings. Being the fussy

person that I am when it comes to the art, I wasn't satisfied with its quality.

The manga has a very surreal feel due in part to the strange names of the characters and the uh, unique costumes (I admit I'm not a Goth Lolita fan) and also the characters' strange, overly-poetic way of speaking. Because the characters seem so distant and unreal, one finds it hard to relate to them, and thus, care for them. In fact, I find Undertaker (or Phonybrian, his real name) selfish and highly irritating. Later, we find out the real reason why the Undertaker committed suicide. I think it was supposed to be a gothic, romantic reason. But I found it silly and overly dramatic instead. *RIP* is not one of Mihara's best manga; *The Embalmer* series is a better effort.

The story is essentially that of the Undertaker's redemption (at least I think it is) and its saving grace is that there is some kind of satisfying ending for Undertaker. However, instead of being pleased and satisfied, I find myself relieved that the manga is finally over. (Rating: 2)



Mitsukazu Mihara

## A vampire's love story

**TSUKUYOMI: MOON PHASE Vol. 4**  
Story and art: **Keitaro Arima**  
Publisher: **Tokyopop**; 180 pages  
(ISBN: 1-595-32851-x)  
For ages 13+



By Cheeky Monkey

If you want to read more vampire themed manga, here's the latest volume of *Tsukuyomi: Moon Phase* (MP). MP is similar to light-hearted stories like *Chibi Vampire*; it is filled with cute characters and there's a hint of romance between the two main characters.

To bring you up to speed, MP starts with Kouhei Midou taking some photos of the Schwarz Quelle castle for a paranormal magazine he works for. Kouhei has a unique ability – ghosts appear in almost all the photos he takes! This makes him ideally suited to his job, but Kouhei wants to branch out to more "serious" stuff. Unfortunately, his weird talent is a big impediment.

While at the castle, he stumbles across Hazuki, a young vampire girl who has been trapped in the castle for years. Somehow Kouhei is able to break the *kekka* (barrier) that was imprisoning her. This enables Hazuki to regain some of her memories and formidable vampire powers. However, instead of showing her gratitude, the little brat now thinks that Kouhei is her slave!

Later, we find out that Kouhei is an "Ama vampire", a rare vampire slave that's immune to his master's control.

Many attempts have been made by Hazuki's so-called loyal servants, Elfriede and Count Kinkel, to bring her home. But with her reluctant slave's help, Hazuki is now able to thwart their efforts while pursuing her own quest to find her mother. She finds a cat that is the only link to her mother's whereabouts.

In Vol.4, Count Kinkel changes tactics; his goal is now to kill Kouhei because his Ama vampire blood counters any vampire influences that may affect Hazuki.

This time, he uses Kouhei's colleagues and grandfather to lure him into a trap. With no other alternative, Kouhei, Hazuki

and his colleague, Seiji, rush towards the trap. What they don't realize is that Count Kinkel has a hidden power that may pose a threat.

You may think that Hazuki, being a pure-blooded vampire, ought to be at least several hundred years old. But to my great astonishment she is exactly how she looks: Barely 13 and already in possession of formidable powers! She may be bratty and bossy around Kouhei, but if anybody dares to harm her slave, there will be hell to pay.

Kouhei on the other hand is a far more interesting character. Before he was bitten by Hazuki, he was already unreciprocative to spiritual power, which explains why he is a natural Ama Vampire. This fact may frustrate Hazuki every single time but drinking his blood has its benefits.

As for the mysterious cat who shows up from time to time, it's not clear what it is. It seems as if the mangaka is undecided about the cat's identity. Is the cat Hazuki's guardian (perhaps her mother?) trapped in a cat's body?

The side characters support Kouhei during battles and their role is pretty small. Seiji, a supposed spiritual medium, does not show much power when exorcising enemies. Hiromi, Kouhei's ex-classmate, does not have any significant role other than being his current colleague. In this case, the mangaka needs to work on developing the characters more.

MP's plot is pretty simple and direct, making it passable for light reading. The one thing that saves it is the mystery surrounding Hazuki's past and powers. Surprisingly holy water is left out of the picture. The author also neglects to explain the significance of the real-life pictures of places shown after each chapter, leaving the reader to guess.

The mangaka, Keitaro Arima, has been a contributor for the *Evangelion* anthologies. (Rating: 3)

## A bad day at school

**THE DRIFTING CLASSROOM Vol.1**  
Story and art: **Kazuo Umezu**  
Publisher: **VIZ Media**, 194 pages  
(ISBN: 1-421-50722-6)  
For ages 16+



By Christina Koh

IT is every kid's dream: Your school disappears without a trace one day. But what happens if you're one of the unlucky souls trapped inside?

Sho Takamatsu is one harassed boy. Like any six-grader, he loves his mother but gets angry and resentful when she constantly nags him about putting away his toys and "growing up". After a particularly vicious argument, he runs off to school and makes it to class just in time.

That is, of course, the last time they see each other.

The mangaka seems to take a particularly malicious glee in transporting an entire school to some alien place and letting us shift uncomfortably as several hundred students and their teachers slowly crack.

The teachers try to maintain control, but what do you do if you're outnumbered? How do you keep a mob of panic-stricken children in check? Where do they go for food? Why can't they leave?

And where are they? Sho starts out as a spoilt brat who swiftly gains sympathy as he runs around, tormented with guilt over his mother. In fact, the story begins with a letter to her from an apparently older and wiser Sho, leaving one to wonder if he ever actually makes it home...

A glance through the pages might put some readers off at first. With its 70s-style art,

there's a penchant for awkward layouts, gaping mouths and funny-looking hairstyles. But reading from page one is like watching road accidents unfold one after another; it's hard to peel your eyes away.

*The Drifting Classroom* comes from Kazuo Umezu, one of Japan's masters of horror. It's a classic accessible to English-reading fans with a love for tense, psychological scares.

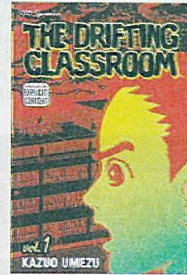
Like the master storyteller he is, Umezu relies at first on the casual little things to creep you out. Like the little kid on a tricycle whose face you can't see, or the lies adults tell the kids to keep them in line, or the sense of growing hysteria drawn into every frightened face.

When the shocks come, their source is hardly supernatural. Blood spills with a harsh ring of truth: when you back humanity against the wall, expect fireworks born out of desperation.

At 194 pages, the story ends on a cliffhanger all too soon, which might be a turn-off for those already daunted by the price.

But those who read on (the next volume comes out this month) will find a tale of children in their search for redemption, becoming fully realised human beings in a world gone mad.

The book comes with an interesting bibliography of the author's selected work, complete with art samples, from 1955 all the way to 1995. (Rating: 4)



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### Top 10 Manga

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|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| For week ending Oct 1, 2006:  | Vol.5                            |
| 1. <i>Negima</i> Vol.11       | 8. <i>Tail of the Moon</i> Vol.1 |
| 2. <i>Cantarella</i> Vol.4    | 9. <i>Nana</i> Vol.2             |
| 3. <i>School Rumble</i> Vol.3 | 10. <i>Hot Gimmick</i> Vol.12    |
| 4. <i>Naruto</i> Vol.11       |                                  |
| 5. <i>Death Note</i> Vol.7    |                                  |
| 6. <i>Bus Gamer</i> 1999-2001 |                                  |
| 7. <i>Pieces of a Spiral</i>  |                                  |
- Weekly list compiled by Kinokuniya Bookstores Suria KLCC, Kuala Lumpur.