

Angel Sanctuary Manga Review

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Corrupted angels, incestuous lovers, and cross-dressing demons: beings from the Three Worlds are forced to confront each other in Kaori Yuki's tragic love story -- Angel Sanctuary. Set in the summer of 1999, the story belongs in the pre-apocalypse genre, which foreshadows an imminent finale of death and destruction. However, what makes Angel Sanctuary unique is that it focuses not on the End of the World, but rather, the persecuted love between Setsuna Mudou and his sister, Sarah. Using their point of view, Kaori Yuki tells a gothic tale which desire blurs the line between Good and Evil, Love and Hate.

Angel Sanctuary is fascinating, but complex. The combination of the Western notion of angels and the Eastern notion of reincarnation is easy to get used to. But the confusing part of the story is that it has many characters (imagine all the angels from the Dionysian Order, humans, and demons from the Underworld all interacting with each other), some with many past lives. The story begins with a vague allusion to Milton's Paradise Lost. The conflict starts when Alexiel, an angel, leads the demons to rebel against the angels of Heaven commanded by her identical twin brother, Raziel. In their final battle, Alexiel falls prey to the enemy angels. But with her final power, she seals her brother Raziel beneath the cold earth, and banishes him from the Heavens. As punishment, her spirit is condemned to continually be reborn in the human world, where, in every life, she is fated to die a bloody and tragic death.

In the main story, Alexiel has been reincarnated as Setsuna Mudou, a young boy living in Tokyo. 'Mudou' can be loosely translated as 'without moral principles.' Such a name is fitting for Setsuna, a delinquent struggling with a hidden desire for his younger sister, Sarah. To make his problems worse, two demons from the Underworld, boyish Kurai and her cross-dressing cousin Arakuny, shows up one day and tells Setsuna that he is the reincarnation of a powerful angel, Alexiel. Their goal is to call out Alexiel, destroy the Heavens and the human world, and create a new kingdom in which there will be no more war, no more corruption, and no more oppression by angels. At first Setsuna can't care less about their absurd story. But he is forced to confront his past life when Alexiel's twin brother Raziel is released from his seal, and attempts to kill Sarah out of jealousy and revenge.

Kaori Yuki's *Angel Sanctuary* is an intricate tale of human relationships, for angels, demons, and humans are all beings of emotions. Although the plot foreshadows an approaching apocalypse, the story is about the forbidden love between Setsuna and Sarah. Using their love as a medium, Kaori Yuki brings out the personalities and inner struggles of their friends and foes. As the characters reveal their pasts, the line between Good and Evil, Love and Hate becomes blurred by the pains and desires of the different individuals. Ironically, Alexiel rebelled against the Heavens because she wants to create a better world without the tyranny of corrupt angels. As the demon Kurai once put it, "Beyond that angelic appearance, the angles are worse than the demons!" This irony of Love and Hate can be seen through Raziel, the antagonist who wants to destroy Alexiel and murder Sarah. A narcissist, Raziel loves his sister Alexiel because she is an exact replica of him. But when she rejects his love, his passion turns to hatred. Because Setsuna looks exactly like Alexiel, Raziel is furious when Sarah tells him that Setsuna loves only her, and his jealousy eventually causes Sarah to sacrifice herself for Setsuna.

In contrast to Raziel's self-love is self-sacrifice. Kira, Setsuna's delinquent sempai and best friend, is actually a guardian angel who has accompanied him in every reincarnation and witnessed his every tragic death. Kira not only loves Alexiel, but also loves Setsuna, and he expresses his love by protecting him. According to Alexiel's punishment, Setsuna is also destined to die a horrible death. But Kira, by shedding a tear for Setsuna in his former life, unknowingly breaks the cycle of condemned lives. When Setsuna kills a person, Kira takes the blame so that Setsuna may elope with Sarah and escape from his supposed death.

In Kaori Yuki's *Angel Sanctuary*, the dark and gothic story is depicted with delicate and detailed drawings. Her unruly aesthetic style has always been extremely appropriate for stories that are full of blood, pain, and tragedies. However, *Angel Sanctuary* is different from *Count Cain*, Kaori Yuki's other popular manga series. Although both stories depict the distorted side of human nature, *Angel Sanctuary* is in many ways a philosophical attempt to portray human life. Despite the sufferings of Setsuna, Kaori Yuki offers a hint of hope by posing the question: Would he rather be an angel or a human? Kurai the demon decides to help Setsuna and Sarah because she realizes that Alexiel wants to be a human. Kira, Alexiel's guardian angel, cannot tell which one he loves more, the angel Alexiel or the human Setsuna. The question is yet to be resolved, for the manga series is still continuing. Overall, I enjoyed reading the manga. The long dialogs and the complex story are interesting, not to mention very moving. They will certainly leave you with something to think about in order to escape the destruction. Now, though, they've officially stolen military secrets, and the crew find themselves caught in a renewed war between the Federation and Zeon.