

The Fantastic World of X/1999

Written by Stephanie Lau

With the end of the century coming it is no wonder that the entertainment industry would take advantage of this opportunity to play with our minds. Though the apocalypse theme is an interesting one to play around, it can be worn out like any other. So why is CLAMP's apocalyptic X one of the most popular running mangas out there? What intrigued Animerica to translate and run it in their magazine (titled X/1999 in the US)? Of course, the fact that X feeds readers' lust for angst, destiny and doomed love is a strong reason, but also, it makes us, the readers, think, "What if some of this is really going to happen? How much of this might actually come true?"

The art of X is enough to make readers stop and look through one of the tankoubans. The art quality and layout of X is what fans have come to expect from CLAMP. Although the art may draw readers in, the plot will keep them there to stay until the final battle, and maybe more. To make this idea interesting many of the characters aren't just "ordinary" people with super powers, but in addition, have roots in the underground occult world of Japan. The unexpected twists in the plot is masterly crafted by the queens of the strange, beautiful and downright weird (Miyuki-Chan in Wonderland? Mokona from MKR?). However, like most shoujo manga, it takes a few tankoubans to get to the action of the plot.

The story of X starts out just as most would expect.....The end of the world is coming and the one person that can save (or destroy) it doesn't give a damn. Though the story may start out predictable, it certainly isn't by the time all the characters are introduced. Kamui Shirou, the reluctant hero, is faced with the fact that he must make a choice between two drastically different destinies: to either fight with the Dragons of Heaven and save humanity, or join with the Dragons of Earth and destroy humanity (in order for the earth to be "reborn".) Unswayed by the pleas of the "dreaming princess" Hinoto, the adviser to the Dragons of Heaven, Kamui retorts that he has only two things that he wants to protect: his childhood friends Fuuma and Kotori Monou. Things go differently than planned when Fuuma and Kotori's father is murdered for a holy sword that Kamui must wield in the holy war.

Hinoto and the Dragons of Heaven aren't the only ones that are after Kamui. Kanoe, gifted with the power to see the future through Hinoto's dreams, and adviser to the Dragons of Earth, is also doing everything she can to reach out to Kamui. But things

aren't as easy as they seem when it looks like Kamui is closer to becoming a Dragon of Heaven. To complicate things, a second holy sword rips into existence. The event throws Fuuma into trance-like stages in which he harms or scares Kamui. Little by little, clues are given to the sad destiny of Fuuma. Already on the edge of despair, Kamui is forced to face Fuuma who holds Kamui's last link to sanity and whose fate is inevitably tied to Kamui's decision.

X is not only a possible final chapter in the existence of humans; it is also the continuation of Tokyo Babylon. As an added treat, the CLAMP Campus Detectives show up in X 8 and on. For those that enjoyed the ending of Tokyo Babylon better than the series itself, X is a must have. It not only carries the angst and pain of the last two tankoubans of TB but also will offer a final chapter to the story between Subaru and Seishirou.

Though the story line seems pretty set by X 10 , we must remember that this is CLAMP. In a interview before the release of the X movie, the authors of X stated that in the near future there may be a few switches from Dragon of Heaven to Dragon of Earth and vice versa. Remember these are the manga artists that will cut down a favorite character mercilessly for the sake of the story. The complicated plot, beautiful characters and the ability to make even decapitated bodies and blood look gorgeous...A story of this magnitude can only be from the one and only CLAMP.