

# Zetsu Ai

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*Blood, Tears and Angst by Minami Ozaki, Dojinshi-ka Extraordinaire*

For doujinshi\* fans in Japan, any Minami Ozaki (note: all names are written with last name first, given name second) work epitomizes yaoi\*\* goodness and is sure to have a story line filled with angst, teenage lust and beautiful boys. ZetsuAi 1989 is definitely Minami in her top form. The story centers around a beautiful idol singer named Nanjo Koji and his obsession, the equally beautiful budding soccer player, Izumi Takuto.

This story arc is a twisting labyrinth of love, hate, sexual obsession and ambiguity. Koji is the embodiment of the jaded rock star, listlessly going through the motions of his life and career. His music is the only thing that anchors him to the present because it is "something for him to do." Koji cares for nothing... except the memory of one girl from his past. This girl had intrigued him with her passion and her determination, provoking Koji with the burning anger within her eyes. If this girl, this "Izumi", could express such depth of emotion for a mere game of soccer, how much deeper would her feelings run if they were directed at a person? Hate or love would be equally strong, and Koji is fascinated with the idea of being the focus of such intensity. For him, Izumi is alive. Izumi can feel. Izumi, with her strength and impassioned depth, is everything that he has ever wanted. So, Koji could do nothing but fall helplessly in love.

For ten years, Koji keeps the memory of this girl alive through his music. Every song is dedicated to this girl who had impressed him so greatly, who had left such a mark on his young psyche. But his own inertia, his typical indifference is slowly wearing away that initial fascination. Already, at the young age of 17, Koji's reputation has been set as the Don Juan of the J-Pop\*\*\* world. But he has long since tired of the mindless adoration of thousands of faceless fans, he was sick of the constant chase by the paparazzi, and he hated the pressure to be the sex symbol for thousands of screaming young girls.

But one day, everything changed when he woke up in a stranger's bed and saw a Koji & Izumi young man sleeping next to him. Of course, Koji was naturally upset. After all, he only bedded women. He had no sexual or emotional interest in men. So what was

he doing in bed with this stranger? Little did he know that the answer would turn his world upside down.

The stranger, Takuto, had apparently rescued the inebriated, passed out Koji. He had found Koji on a street corner, and, in a fit of kindness, had taken this stranger home. But the good Samaritan was more than happy to tell Koji what he thought of Koji's actions. Abandoning Koji to brood over his harsh--yet painfully true--words, Takuto also revives the memory that Koji was trying not to forget; "I am becoming enchanted by him."

Koji then realizes over the course of his stay with Takuto that the "Izumi" of his youth that he had fallen in love with so many years ago is actually Takuto. It was a case of mistaken identity, for Izumi Takuto had a younger sister, who also played soccer and bore a striking resemblance to her older brother. It was, of course, a great shock to Koji's machismo that, all this time, he had been so attracted to a man. But the prior attachment was too strong for the small question of "gender" to matter. Takuto Izumi was still everything Koji ever wanted, and what Koji wanted, Koji would get. No matter what.

But his thoughtless actions to try to win over Izumi only drove him away. You see, IzumiIzumi has had a long time to perfect the art of keeping any kind of emotional attachment at bay. He only cared for his siblings and his soccer game; nothing else mattered. There seemed to be no room for Koji in Izumi's life. But Koji, never one to take no for an answer, delved deeper into Izumi's life and past. He found out that Izumi's past was riddled with murder, death and blood; Izumi's mother had killed her husband, and had wounded Izumi in the process. He still carries a scar over his left hip from the knife that his mother wielded against his father, and an unhealed wound in his psyche. It was no wonder that Izumi refuses any kind of emotional tie beyond that for his siblings.

As the story unfolds, the reader is drawn deeper into the tangled web woven by these two characters. Though Izumi insists that he needs no-one and nothing beyond his family and his game, he cannot deny the tie between himself and Koji. Though Izumi despises Koji's thoughtless, aimless life, and feels nothing but scorn for his decadent lifestyle, neither can he fully reject Koji, because he sees that Koji's feelings for him are true.

Though it's hard for the reader to fully accept either Koji's method of winning Izumi nor Izumi's stubborn coldness, it's also very difficult to not care about either characters. Ozaki writes a very affecting story line about two very lonely, and perfectly matched, people. The dance of parry/thrust/advance/retreat between the two characters involves the reader so much that one can't help but hope they will eventually get together. Moments of high drama are punctuated by periods of comedy, allowing the reader to catch their collective breath. Ozaki is a master at keeping the tension--both sexual and emotional--to a high pitch, but it rarely topples into melodramatic posturing.

Ozaki's simple art style also ensures that the story line is the center of attention. Her layouts make the most out of every scene, and the simple lines do not crowd the pages. She makes use of shoujo-manga (girl comics) style art, with the character designs ranging from super cute girls to beautiful, androgynous men. It's not hard to see why Ozaki is so popular in the Dojinshi circle and the commercial world of manga.

I highly recommend this series, but it really is not for the faint of heart. This is definitely not a kid's comic, for there are some fairly graphic scenes of attempted rape, along with the adult content of male/male relationships. But for those who adore plot over fussily perfect art, this is a series to get.

For more info on ZetsuAi 1989 and its sequel Bronze After 1989, check the Anime Turnpike (<http://www.anipike.com>) under the Anime/Manga Series Pages (T-Z). You should also see if you can find a copy of a dojinshi spin-off of the ZetsuAi/Bronze series. (Ask Monica about her copy. Though the characters names and situations have changed, it's still Izumi and Koji. It's actually a pretty good dojinshi).

#### *NOTES:*

*\*Dojinshi are fan made manga, i.e. it's not published by commercial publishing companies. The artist/writer pays for production cost out of their own pocket, and hope to sell enough at dojinshi conventions to help defray costs. Once in a while, a dojinshi-ka gets picked up by a real publisher and they become manga-ka, which is what happened with Minami-san. Another well known manga-ka group is CLAMP (creators of X, RG VEDA, and Magic Knight Rayearth). They still make dojinshi once in a while...*

*\*\*Yaoi -- shortened version of "Yama-nashi, Ochi nashi, Imi-nashi" (no climax, no punch line, no meaning) It refers to manga (or anime) genre that revolves around guy/guy relationships. Check out my other article for further enlightenment.*

*\*\*\*J-Pop- Japanese pop music*

*FYI: For English translation of ZetsuAi 1989, click [HERE](#).*

*Note: The above graphics are property of Minami Ozaki*