

MANGA, MANGA

Emma by Kaoru Mori – romance between a once-destitute young woman making her way as a maid and the son of the household combined with lovely, detailed art, an easily accessible layout and melodramatic mystery give this *Upstairs Downstairs* meets Barbara Cartland loads of appeal, even for diehard fans of manga with more traditional subjects.

The Four Immigrants Manga: A Japanese Experience in San Francisco, 1904- 1942 by Henry (Yoshitaka) Kiyama – The author’s autobiographical account of the adventures, both comic and poignant, of four young Japanese men who arrive in San Francisco in 1904 takes place against a backdrop that includes everything from the Great San Francisco earthquake to World War I to the influenza epidemic. A unique picture window (almost literally) into a significant part of American history, this would make a talking point read in combination with Gene Luan Yang’s **American Born Chinese**.

Mars by Fuyumi Soryo – First brought to my attention by the review headline “**Oh Look, We’re in Love. Isn’t That Nice? *stab* *hang* *suicide***” in the perennially snarky review site/blog *Sleepisfortheweak.org*, this 15 volume modern-day melodrama has it all: twins, suicide, dark (really dark) secrets, good girl, bad boy, evil stalker and more. Weirdly good art and a dynamic page layout make the story jump and the girls still read and re-read it. Caveat: for 14+. The dark secrets include a sexually abusive stepfather, the perennial should/should I not sleep with him dilemma and, oh yes, smoking.

Gundam Wing *including Mobile Suit Gundam Wing Endless Waltz* and **Blind Target**. It’s the anime that’s the thing, the original series about 5 young boys from very different backgrounds, from Chinese ruling class to the brutal streets of an anarchistic space colony to the laboratory of a mad scientist, who become freedom fighters for peace in a universe at war. Their weapons are their amazing skills with Gundam mobile suits, enormous and enormously destructive and agile mechas (biped war machines controlled by a pilot). They’re all fifteen and they’re the most dangerous guys in the

known universe. What could be better? The few books available provide a little more information about the pilots' background as well as a post-war adventure. There are other Gundam series, but this is the one that is always a favorite and keeps coming back. And girls like it, too.

Dramacon by Sveltana Chmakova and **Miki Falls** by Mark Crilley.

These are together because they are both non-manga manga – not by Japanese author/artists, not read back to front, right to left. They are also two of the few series done that way that manga fanatics read and like. **Miki Falls** is a series about a young woman's involvement with a mysterious new boy at her school and is suitable for tweens; **Dramacon** is an inspired coming of age story that follows an aspiring young comic writer through her love and loss and eventual success as she travels to a different comicon (comics convention) each year. Good for ages 13+.

Vagabond by Takehiko Inoue is a sword epic based on the life of the legendary samurai Miyamota Musashi, known as a "sword saint" for the purity of his skills. The series has won numerous prizes and the art is incredible. However, it is definitely for older readers. But for those who have graduated from **Ruruoni Kenshin** and **Samurai Deeper Kyo**, it is well worth it.

And last but not least, **Death Note** written by Tsugumi Ohba and illustrated by Takeshi Obata has the distinction of having been banned in China for being subversive and glowingly reviewed in *Salon.com*. The story of a high school student who finds a death god's notebook, which gives him the power to kill anyone by writing his/her name in the notebook and envisioning their face, takes the concept of "Power corrupts" to the extreme. It is a dark and subversive tale, and suited for older readers, but it is a compulsive read, as the many, many fans have demonstrated.