

Kizuna #1by [Kat Avila](#)

Reviews may contain information that could be considered 'spoilers'. Readers should proceed at their own risk.

Studio**Be Beautiful**<http://bebeautifulmanga.com>**Credits**

Director: Rin Hiroo

English Director: Rin Hiroo

Distributor: Be Beautiful

Translator: Mariko Kumanoya

Grade: 8

I have two **Kizuna** DVD releases. The latest 2005 release is by **Be Beautiful**, who picked up the anime after **Culture Q Connection**'s contract expired. (The original Japanese DVD by **Daiei** came out in 1994.) It's very important to distinguish between the two U.S. releases since **Be Beautiful**'s is a better quality print, and the subtitles and the timing of the subtitles are much improved. A quick online check verified that several sites have confused the two releases and think they're one and the same.

Culture Q's release (copyright 2001) included two OVAs, but **Be Beautiful** released OVA #1 and OVA #2 separately. According to VP Masumi Homma O'Donnell, in early 2006, **Be Beautiful** will release a single collector's DVD with subtitled and *dubbed* versions of both OVAs; the DVD will also feature audio commentary by **Kizuna** creator Kazuma Kodaka and an interview with her. There is a third later OVA in existence, but it has not been released in the U.S. yet.

Kizuna OVA #1 loosely follows the events in vol. 1 of the related classic yaoi manga. Though not as informative as the manga, the anime has streamlined storytelling and powerful camera shots. Key moments are artistically highlighted by sketchbook-like stills. The anime was well directed, and Kazuma Kodaka was actively involved in its production.

Be Beautiful's OVA #1 DVD cover shows a satiated(?) Ranmaru Samejima looking over at Kei Enjyoji whose face meets Ranmaru's from the opposite direction (Kei is lying upside down on the page). Kei's left arm lovingly and possessively cradles Ranmaru's head.

A bed trembles with lovemaking. Ranmaru's passionate heavy breathing opens the video. Immediate fan service! A full shot establishes who is the top in this relationship, namely Kei: "Your fingers ... Your hair ... Your soul ... It's all mine!"

Next, the viewer sees en garde kendo swordsman Ranmaru in his brightest moment as he convincingly wins a national high school competition. The intercut scenes of delicate pink cherry blossoms falling outside foreshadow how short his reign will be.

There is a flashback to an evening hit-and-run targeting the ponytailed Kei because he is the eldest son (though illegitimate) of Takeshi Sagano, a powerful yakuza boss of the Kansai Shoryu Federation. Ranmaru makes a warrior's sacrifice (kendo is about training the spirit as much as it is the physical body), protecting his lover at great personal cost. A vivid red stream of Ran-chan's blood snakes across the raindrop-pocked asphalt toward scattered kendo equipment. This horrific incident cements Ran and Kei's relationship.

These three scenes are introductory only to the real action when Kai Sagano, Kei's half-brother, gets involved after literally saving Ran's butt from a horny old, four-eyed professor at a gay host club. Kai tries to get between his hated older brother Kei and his beloved Ranmaru whom he has admired since Ran's days as a kendo competitor. The slightly out-of-control Kai unfairly blames Kei for Ranmaru's permanent injuries.

Be Beautiful's subtitles may be better, but they didn't record honorific suffixes or try to capture their nuances. In Japanese, referring to Ran, Kei uses the cute, affectionate "Ran-chan" in private and the familiar "Ranmaru" in public; Ran's groupies use "Ran-chan" or "Ranmaru-kun;" Professor Fumio Sakada uses the formal endearment "Samejima-kun;" and Kai uses the standard formal "Samejima-san." In **Culture Q's** OVA, for example, "Ran-chan" might be translated as "Ran" and modified by "sweetie," or words to that effect, to evoke Kei's affection.

Background information is lost to the viewer who is unable to detect the use of the charming nonstandard Kansai dialect (Osaka area, south of Tokyo) by some characters, notably Kei and Kai. To my ears, Kansai-ben sounds drawled and folksy, real Southern-like, and adds another dimension to the anime.

Don't miss the amusing OVA epilogue that follows the lengthy Japanese-language credits (too bad the ending theme song is not translated). English-language credits follow the epilogue.

DVD extras are **BB** manga previews of Kazuma Kodaka's ***Kizuna: Bonds of Love***, Ayano Yamane's ***Finder Series***, You Asagiri's ***Golden Cain***, Naduki Koujima's ***Selfish Love***, and Youka Nitta's ***Embracing Love***. The brief previews are transitional B&W collages of representative panels with musical backgrounds.

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