

## Clover

### The Complete Series

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### Introduction

**Clover** is, in my humble opinion, the jewel of CLAMP's shorter works. At only four volumes, it packs an amazing visual and narrative punch. Though known for their longer works, like **Card Captor Sakura** and **X/1999**, **Clover** exemplifies their trademarks of stunning visuals, complex and fragmented storylines, conflicts of honor and desire, and, quite simply, expert manipulation of the heart.

**Clover** also crosses the boundaries of girls or boys comics, the two audiences CLAMP commonly writes for, by packing a wrenching examination of love into an action-packed drama full of genetic experimentation and explosive battles. As is common in the best Japanese work, **Clover** explores all of the usual questions around genetic engineering people as weapons or slaves -- there's a reason *Blade Runner* remains one of the most recognized Western films in Japan. At the same time, **Clover**'s focus on the people involved, and not their genetic make-up, makes the story a uniquely human story at its core. Unlike some of their grander stories, like **X/1999**, **Clover** does not feature some apocalyptic reason behind everyone's actions -- instead, each character is acting entirely for his own reasons within the confines of a web of governmental threats and personal rules.

**Clover**, as a series, works a bit differently. The first two volumes are essentially one story divided into two parts. The third and fourth volumes are background stories designed to fill in blanks. While I certainly couldn't *not* read them once I'd started the series, they are not sequential parts per se. As with many of CLAMP's works, **Clover** is not really resolved by the end. I distinctly remember finishing the fourth volume and exclaiming at my roommate, "But that doesn't explain anything!" Relationships, plot arcs, reasons -- it's all left up to you to ponder. Like the best stories, that means it lingers in your head long after you've turned the last page.

One comment about content -- **Clover** is perhaps most suited to older teens, though it's not out of place in a teen collection. There is some fairly strong sexual innuendo, laced with intimations of violence, between hero and enemy. The romances are steamy, but never truly explicit, and as with any great tension, any actual sex is "in between the panels," or "offscreen." The strength of emotion is the key to the series rather than any physical expressions, but there is some implied hanky panky, especially in volume 3. On a slightly different note, there is an undefined relationship between a teenaged boy and an older man -- they are the subject of jibes about being lovers, but they are closemouthed about the actual nature of their relationship and in general the jokes seem to hold no truth.

### Art

Every page of **Clover** is a work of art, and for every moment portrayed there are numerous left out, left up to the reader's imagination. In this series, CLAMP took their traditional flowers, elaborate clothing, and technological gadgets to a whole new level. They play with their usual sharp line artwork, blurring images, and using sharp contrast to dramatic effect. The layout is precise and repetitive, making the images alone a kind of melody, with repeated chorus and new verses. The words, too, are more poetry than prose, and are

as purposefully placed as the images.

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**Clover: Volume 1**

ISBN: 1892213664

By CLAMP

Tokyopop, 2001

Kazuhiko, an embittered ex-military man turned P.I., is yanked out of retirement to perform an apparently simple task: transport a young lady to where she wants to go. The girl, the enigmatic but vulnerable Sue, though seemingly innocent herself, draws all possible enemies out of the woodwork. Kazuhiko attempts, with the help of his friends, to navigate his way with Sue through a deadly minefield of traps and betrayals. Sue, having lived in total isolation until Kazuhiko arrived, seeps under his skin and begins to uncover his tenderness and broken heart. As the story progresses, we are given glimpses of the people in Kazuhiko's life: the stoic Commander Gingetsu, Kazuhiko's boss and friend; Ran, the endearing technological prodigy who lives with Gingetsu under mysterious circumstances; and finally the memory of Ora, Kazuhiko's tragic lost love. All the separate strands of these lives at first appear unconnected -- as the series continues, connections are revealed to be a lot more important than originally presented. The dramatic contrast between the quiet moments of synergy and lethal action makes this story so compelling that I, for one, had to immediately track down the next volumes.

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**Clover: Volume 2**

ISBN: 189221394X

By CLAMP

Tokyopop, 2001

As Kazuhiko and Sue continue their journey, their pursuers step up their attacks. With the aid of Gingetsu and Ran, they launch themselves toward Fairy Park, a destination which confuses Kazuhiko as much as his companion's strange mission. Within this volume, the definition of a **Clover** is finally revealed, as is the reason for Sue's isolation. Sue's background triggers all sorts of revelations for all involved, but no one is given any time to truly process Sue's presence as both the calculating government officials and the Azaien army are hounding them all. All they can do is deliver Sue to her fate, hoping that it is a fate she's chosen. Too late, Kazuhiko realizes her true reason for escape was the journey, not the destination, and all he can do is watch the world collapse around him. This volume is one of those stories that makes you want to stop and admire it's set up but forces you to keep speeding through just to get to the climactic finish. Then, you heave a sigh and go back, savoring the storytelling mechanism at work. The climax of the story is melodramatic, in the best possible way, and while wrapping up the main plot this volume leaves plenty of questions to be pondered in volumes 3 and 4.

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**Clover: Volume 3**

ISBN: 1892213958

By CLAMP  
Tokyopop, 2001

This volume jumps back a year from the first two, bringing us the story of Ora, Kazuhiko, and Sue. The connection to music present throughout the series is really brought forward as Sue and Ora bond over their common love of singing. Ora's fate, one of the major triggers for the main tale of the first two volumes, is finally uncovered, though it may take a few readings to allow all the details to sink in. The government, certainly not flatteringly portrayed in the first volumes, is revealed as a ruthless organization which never ceases to claim control over its human toys. Even here, though, the government's representatives are given that extra bit of humanity, and reason, that keeps them from absolute coldness. As with all of the volumes, the simple presentation and format seems to indicate a simple story, but the depth hit with those few notes make it an accomplished tale.

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**Clover: Volume 4**  
ISBN: 1892213966  
By CLAMP  
Tokyopop, 2001

For those awaiting some sort of explanation, **Clover's** final volume tells the story of Ran and Gingetsu. Ran's presence in Gingetsu's life is an oddity throughout the first 3 volumes, making Gingetsu the butt of lewd jokes and confusing his friends who know Gingetsu as a solemn, almost wordless soul. Ran's history, however, like all of the Clovers', is a heartbreaking one. Gingetsu is his unexpected source of kindness, safety, and the only home he's ever known. This arrangement, however, doesn't come without a dear price for both protector and ward. As with the whole series, so much is said between the panels, and in the silence. These characters are all pinned down by their own situations, and the instances of affection and protection are so rare that each can't help but grab on to them. Although this volume is the last, the potential storylines are numerous, and in some ways, the fact that CLAMP doesn't wrap everything up neatly in the end makes the series all the more satisfying and unique.

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