

Reviews Made for MyAnimeList (Revised)

Vagabond – Manga Review

It is very rarely you find a piece of art like this where every aspect is done at such a high level that there is not much needed to be said. In terms of manga, I have only seen a few other series that do it to the same level as Vagabond and even then, I believe Vagabond stands at the top. Takehiko Inoue is a master at work, his art is second to none, his character writing is matched by few, and his storytelling is wonderful.

The only flaw you could give is that the series does not have a definitive end and there has not been a single chapter released in the past eight years, but even then, it is not too large a flaw. Anyone who has read Vagabond knows that where we left off is quite satisfactory, of course I would love for Inoue to come back and finish the series but I do not think it is absolutely necessary there is also the final exhibition chapter he published which shows the end of Musashi's journey. Where the characters have been left off, especially our main characters Musashi and Kojiro for which we have seen plenty of content for, we can be happy where the manga has left their stories.

To go back to the art, you see why this series as a manga is so vital because of the visual storytelling that Inoue does. Since having originally written this review, I have read the book on which this manga is based off of, Eiji Yoshikawa's "Musashi" a fictional telling of the real-life swordsman, Musashi Miyamoto. The book is wonderful, written as a grand romantic adventure, showing the journey from when Musashi first becomes a swordsman to his famous duel with Sasaki Kojiro. The book is an epic journey of discovery and adventure, but it is a product of its time. The novel was originally written in the 1930s, and in some ways that is very evident. The book has an interesting style of telling the story, where they will switch the POV character within a single paragraph, sometimes making it confusing. The book is more about the adventure and the grandness of being a samurai, and while there are very introspective, philosophical, and well written characters and plots, it does not quite compare to the manga.

Inoue takes Yoshikawa's story, and decides to focus more upon the characters and themes, and the development of those aspects of the story. The plot and character development follow the same blueprint, but Inoue takes certain aspects of the original story and changes them as he sees fit, for example, the highly acclaimed "farm-arc." This story arc is as stated, it takes place on a farm, and has the most fulfilling character develop in the entire series. The original novel does have an arc on a farm, but it is almost an afterthought, just a place for Musashi to rest and train, but in the manga, he goes there to find meaning, the meaning of his life, the meaning of strength, not perceived strength, but true strength, which could be seen as the overarching theme of the entire story.

I do not wish to go into extensive details about this arc, especially it is the last one to have been completed, but I will say, that it may one, if not the greatest story arc I have read in a piece of fiction, almost like the whole series was building up towards it, and just because this is the arc I am highlighting, I promise that the entire series is worth it, and for those of you who really want to see the end after reading it, the book isn't too bad, in fact it is really good, it is just different, and doesn't quite match up to the adaptation.

