

LEGAL DRUG VOL 1

★★★★

CLAMP/Tokyopop/£6.99/Out now

Ancient secrets lurk in the shadows of modern-day Tokyo in this darkly addictive, supernatural tale.

FOR THE PAST few years, the Japanese artist group known as CLAMP has been crafting dark, gothic tales with supernatural overtones, most notably the hit series *xxxHOLiC*. This theme is also evident in *Legal Drug*, which the quartet created back in 2000 but is only now seeing a UK release. Set in the Tokyo, the series populates the shadows of Japan's busiest metropolis with creatures and demons.

The protagonist is Kazahaya Kudo, a gifted young man able to see visions when he touches people or items, a gift he is only just learning to control. After nearly dying in the snow (the hows and whys of which we don't yet know), he is rescued by telekinetic Rikuo Kudo. He wakes in the Green Drugstore in Tokyo to the offer of accommodation and a job working at the store. But the owner,

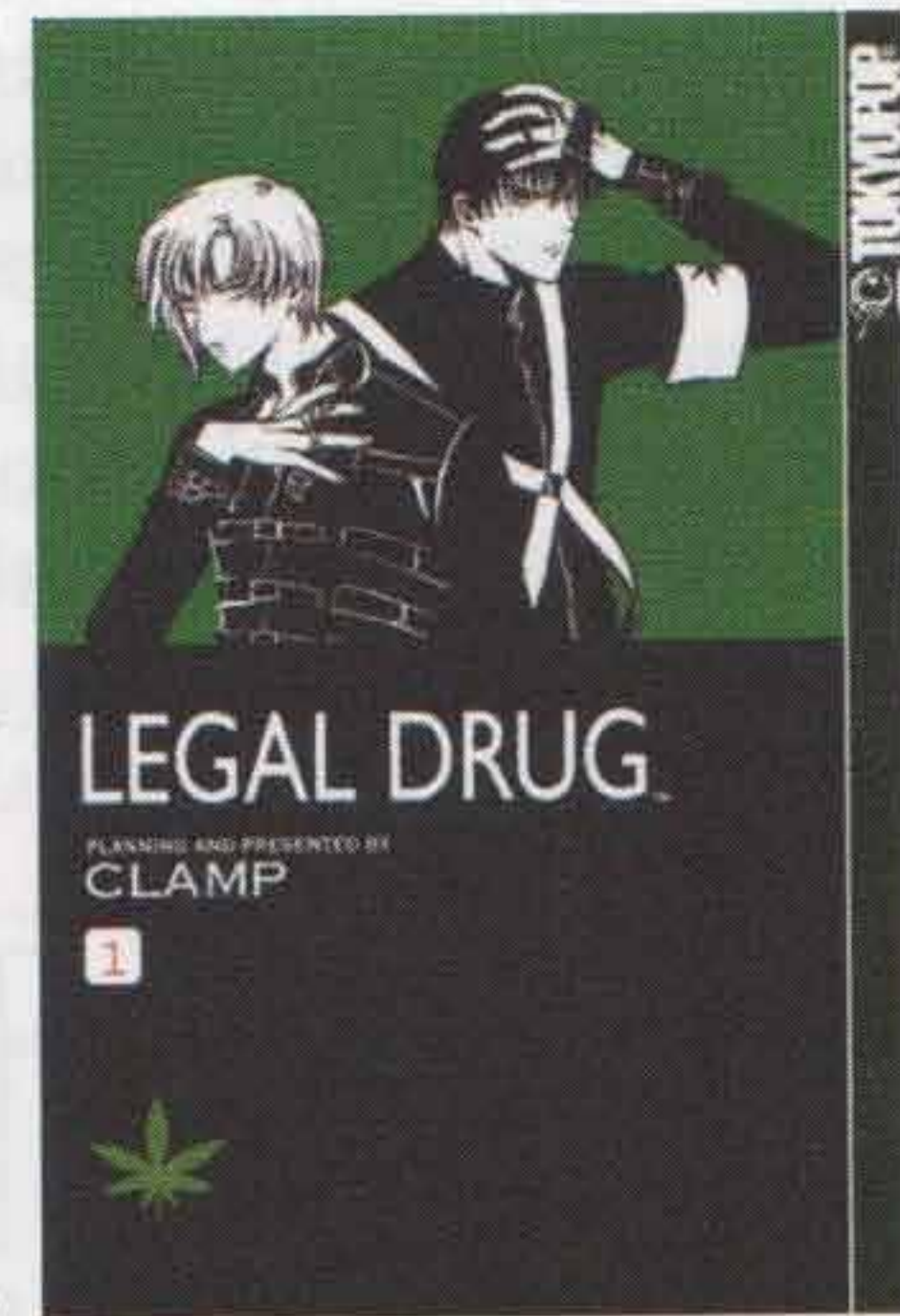


Kakei, has something else in mind for the duo, using their unique abilities in out-of-hours assignments that pit them against creatures, ghosts and ghouls from Japanese myth.

Kazahaya and Rikuo's relationship with one another is a key part of *Legal Drug*; each needs the other but theirs is very much a love-hate relationship and the interaction between them provides friction that moves the story along. There is also heavy subtext and several splash panels suggesting that their relationship is much deeper than it appears, giving the story an emotional twist. (An undertone of *shōnen-ai* – boy love – is in the comic, but it is not an overt one.)

Exquisitely drawn with an emphasis on stark, black and white art that really accentuates the tone, this series is destined for cult status. The characters are all very mysterious, with little personal background, and this is partly what makes the story interesting, as there are so many questions just waiting to be answered in future volumes.

Legal Drug is a darkly addictive tale and the first volume is enough to hook you and leave you wanting more. Regardless of whether you've read manga before, this is a beautifully crafted series to be savoured. An excellent read for hardened manga fans and newbies alike. **Lesley Smith**



DID YOU KNOW?

At the moment, *Legal Drug* is in limbo. Three volumes have been produced so far, but the story is only a fifth of the way through. While CLAMP has stated they intend to continue the series, it has not yet been restarted in Japan.