

Amanda James's manga, *Deal*, despite being a vaguely entertaining read, contains several flaws in both illustration and writing style. While the story does contain some appeal, the manga caters to a very select audience and the frequent usage of in-jokes detracts from the reading experience. In addition, because the dialogue is stilted in some areas and hard to follow in others, the plot seems to falter at points. The script used is almost illegible in certain parts and could have benefited from more editing, perhaps through Photoshop or a similar program. Another issue within the dialogue is the frequent appearance of profanity within the text, at times its usage is either unnecessary or out of character. In fact, some of the clumsiest sections of dialogue contain profanity. It gives one the feeling that the author is an immature schoolgirl scattering "bad words" throughout her work simply for kicks.

Regarding the pacing of the plot, it has a sort of stop-start momentum, seeming to speed ahead in some places and linger in others. There are certain portions, such as the flashback scenes, that could have been elaborated upon more and others, like the bar scenes, which could have been adequately conveyed with less panels. The art and the writing fit but not as well as should be expected from a work that was illustrated and written by the same person. It seems that James would have benefited from more constructive criticism during the process of creating her manga.

In regards to her art, James has a very haphazard drawing technique but it works for her. As the manga continues the pages become increasingly organized (barring a few

of the final pages). James is obviously new to the realm of drawing manga, h characters' designs are fairly similar from panel to panel but lack a certain kind of fluidity, that is, the characters' expressions do not yet seem "natural" for them. In addition, the artist's use of perspective and shadowing is very clumsy. In some panels the angles are crooked or the shadows that should be present are completely absent. One also notices a bit of laziness on James's part in that she resorts to the use of extreme close-ups or skimping on the background design a fair amount of times within the manga.

The manga, Deal, is only illustrated up until the second chapter despite being five chapters in total. However, the plot synopses for the subsequent chapters provide a resolution to the storyline. It is a bit rushed and the climax involves a plot twist that seems to come straight out of a soap opera. The tone of the story also changes abruptly, from the outrageously humorous to a more serious drama. James approaches her character development in an odd way, the two protagonists, Miyazake and Akira, are not put into the limelight until the very end and most of the plot is actually driven by secondary characters. Although at the story's conclusion, the readers are encouraged to believe that Miyazake and Akira formed a deep and meaningful relationship, there is very little interaction between them within the plot. In fact, their entire interaction can be summed up as: Miyazake tells Akira to do something. Akira says something sarcastic but follows orders. It is difficult for one to imagine where their supposedly deep connection could have formed.

The motivations of James's characters are a bit weak. Sei and Kim are supposed to be classmates who have been feuding since they first met and yet their situation is easily resolved with a few words and a kiss. James seems to expect her readers to believe

that sex can easily solve every problem. The protagonist, Miyazake, is supposed to be a formidable woman and yet she allows herself to be blackmailed by a bespectacled schoolteacher. This leads one to question how a character that tosses students out of windows for imagined insults could be so easily cowed. Akira's motivations are the most confusing of all. Although she is described to be a slacker early on in the story, she seems willing and obedient, following Miyazake's directions with little complaint. Other than her rumpled shirt and hairstyle, Akira does not act like a typical slacker or even show any indication of having personal desires.

Despite its flaws, Deal was an interesting manga to read. The work is obviously not intended to appeal to mainstream readers but with some editing and revisions, it could become a more compelling story for its intended audience.