

The Works of Mitsuru Adachi: A Study

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Graphically Speaking

5/11/06

Of all the genres of manga, shounen is probably the most popular. As of 2003, Shonen Jump, the widest-circulated of the shounen magazines, was outselling Ribon (its shoujo equivalent) by more than 3 to 1¹. Yet for all its popularity, there is a surprising lack of variety in the genre. Many protagonists, especially in romantic storylines, share similar characteristics, and a lot of the plots and storylines are predictable. Often, the humor is formulaic and relies on a number of tired clichés. In the midst of all this is the mangaka Mitsuru Adachi, who has been writing sports/romance manga since the 1970s. One of the first and one of the best, Adachi's storytelling stands out for its elegant simplicity and subtle characterization, and as he writes his fourth baseball epic, Adachi remains on top of his game.

Adachi's stories almost invariably focus on high school sports; his protagonists grow up simultaneously on the field and off, engaging in their first romances as they strive for championships. Baseball is his favorite sport; he even owns a team, Vitamin A², so it is not surprising that his best-known and longest works (Touch and H2) are focused on baseball. Still, Adachi has tackled a wide variety of subjects, including swimming (Rough), boxing (Katsu!, Slow Step), and soccer (Jinbe). He also has some non-sports projects: Miyuki and Hiatari Ryoukou are pure romance (though the latter has sports in the background), and Niji Iro Togarashi is a fantasy tale. Adachi is best-known for his

¹ <http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/article.php?id=5198>

² <http://users.skynet.be/mangaguide/au14.html>

sports manga, however, and it is in that area that his skill as an author stands out the most, especially in comparison to a number of his contemporaries.

Adachi excels at two things in his portrayal of sports: showing the emotional connection between athletics and young men and showing the amount of work that goes into sports. Every one of his protagonists comes to love their chosen sport, and this joy is passed on to the reader. Nine, his first baseball manga, was all about enjoying the game; the team is shown defeating a national powerhouse in the Koshien³ because they're relaxed and having fun, while the powerhouse is too tightly strung to deal with adversity when it crops up. Sometimes, the love is there from the beginning; Hiro, the protagonist of H2, has been playing baseball for years, and would happily keep playing on sandlots the rest of his life were his arm not talented enough to take him pro (and, eventually, to the Major Leagues), and Keisuke in Rough has been a swimmer since he was a kid. Other times, the protagonist joins the sport because of a girl, but comes to love it for his own sake, a plot that is used in both Nine and Katsu!. In Nine, Niimi joins the team because he falls in love with the manager, then becomes an enthusiastic player as he catches her fever for the sport. The process takes longer in Katsu!, where Satoyama boxes first because of his love interest Mizutani, and then because he has the talent, but never fully commits himself mentally until the end. As he fights his rival in one last match in front of only a few people in a closed gym, he goes through all of his reasons to fight, and all of the people who want him to fight – the girl he loves, his rival, his father – but in the end decides to fight for himself. Finally, there is the case of Tatsuya from Touch, who is thrust into the position of fulfilling his brother's dreams of Koshien after Katsuya dies in an accident. A slacker all his life, never willing to commit any sort of consistent effort to

³ The national high school baseball tournament, named after the stadium it is played in.

anything, Tatsuya plays at first only because of his brother's legacy. As he grows up and moves past the point of simply filling a role, however, he begins to form his own connection, and eventually comes to love the sport as much as Katsuya did. In all of these cases, it is Adachi's love of sports – especially baseball – shining through the characters, and readers cannot help but connect with it.

Adachi also adds a serious dose of realism to his sports. Many other sports manga treat sports the same way as shounen fighting series treat martial arts: characters learn secret techniques or new moves to defeat each other. A good example of this is Rebound, a basketball manga in which the main character's jumping ability is treated as a technique, the "skywalk", which is effectively leveled up over the course of the manga. Adachi, on the other hand, focuses on the kind of constant repetition that is truly necessary to develop natural talent into something special. Touch is perhaps his best example of this; Katsuya, who appears to be the natural, is actually as good as he is because he has been working extraordinarily hard at pitching and conditioning his body since he was a young child (an early scene shows him practicing throwing baseballs for hours in the rain while Tatsuya sits inside eating a snack). Tatsuya, in his effort to fill his younger brother's shoes, attempts to do his daily workout, but is unable to keep at it for more than a day, and must eventually settle on doing only part of it. As it turns out, it is Tatsuya himself who was the "natural" of the two twins; Katsuya's great work ethic was born of a desire to keep up with his older brother, especially in the eyes of their neighbor Minami. Despite his superior natural talent, it still takes Tatsuya years to begin harnessing it. He begins his high school career like a young Randy Johnson, just as likely to walk or hit a batter as he is to strike him out (although hits are few and far between),

and he only truly begins to achieve his potential when he is forced to work under a taskmaster of a coach who puts the team through drills so exhausting they can barely eat at the end of the day. The kind of time needed to develop skills like these is portrayed accurately, no small task in a sport where most high school draft picks still need years of minor league seasoning before they have a chance to succeed in the Majors. While the “sports as martial arts” writing style may appeal to a broader (and younger) crowd, this attention to detail and realism will appeal to true sports fans, and especially those who have played themselves, and is no doubt one of the reasons for Adachi’s success.

Along with his successful portrayal of sports, Adachi truly shines in his ability to deftly portray incredibly complex relationships between characters, especially romantic ones. He does this in a way that is almost unique in shounen manga, using nuance and subtlety in place of the constant, agonizing self-doubt and comedic misunderstandings that characterize many other series. Where many other manga seem to measure relationships in milestones – confession, first date, first kiss, etcetera – Adachi creates deeply layered connections that are often only hinted at on the surface, which leads the reader to appreciate them more as they become more aware of all the undercurrents present between the characters. Unsurprisingly, his most effective relationships take place in his longest manga, Touch and H2.

Touch, Adachi’s most famous work, is also his best, at least for the first seven volumes. In them, he does an extraordinary job portraying the dynamic between the twin brothers Tatsuya and Katsuya and their childhood friend and love interest Minami. Tatsuya and Katsuya are incredibly close, as many twins are, and the older of the two (Tatsuya) has seemingly decided that there will be no competition between them to get in

the way of this, so he always steps aside for his younger brother. It is Katsuya who has the work ethic, Katsuya who is the star pitcher and model student. Tatsuya's natural talent goes to waste as he slacks off, giving nobody a reason to compare his younger brother to him in anything but a positive manner. Yet their mutual interest in Minami threatens to break this bond and draw the two brothers into conflict with each other, especially as Adachi masterfully lays hints that the one Minami is in love with is really Tatsuya, who may not be able to bring himself to step out of his brother's way this time around.

Two specific events illustrate this triangle, both of them involving Minami and Tatsuya. In the first (in volume four), Minami and Katsuya, who everyone assumes are going out since they are childhood friends and the stars of the school, win a "best couple" award, the prize for which is a set of school notebooks. Tatsuya, meanwhile, has just used his last notebook, and is harassing Minami about giving him another one, so she gives him one of the prize notebooks, which he promptly hands back to her. After a brief back and forth about whether or not he should take it, with him telling her that Katsuya will probably be saving his notebooks and never touching them, Tatsuya finally tells her "I don't want a notebook like that". Minami responds with "You're jealous, Tatchan!" at which point he turns around and slaps her. At the end of the day, he finds her alone in the clubhouse that the three of them have been sharing since childhood, and apologizes. Minami tells him not to worry about it, and that she should have been more sensitive of Katsuya's feelings on the subject. Tatsuya says that if that were the reason, he wouldn't have apologized, following it with "You saw something in me that is of no importance, Minami, so I lost my head..." and departing. Minami is confused for a minute, but as she

remembers her comment about his jealousy, a soft smile lights up her face. In one scene, Adachi manages to subtly hint at both Minami's true feelings and the inner conflict that Tatsuya is going through, as he begins to realize that his resolve not to fight Katsuya over anything may crumble in the face of his feelings for Minami.

The second critical scene happens a volume later. Tatsuya, harassed by Minami into choosing a sports club, has been tricked into joining the boxing club by his friend Harada, but surprisingly sticks with it. He asks Minami to come root for him, but when it turns out that his first match is on the same day as Katsuya's first game, he tells her to go root for Katsuya. She does, but she tells him to win his match. When the day is over – Katsuya won, Tatsuya lost – Minami finds Tatsuya sulking in his room, angry at himself for losing after she told him to win. She tries to apologize to him, but he tells her he'll feel even more pathetic if she does, so she asks what he wants her to do instead. Somewhat annoyed, he makes a throwaway comment about how if she was a nice girl, she'd just kiss him without saying a word... and she does. It's the first kiss for both of them, and Tatsuya is so distracted by the whole thing that he collapses the next day, having trained hard while not eating a thing. When Minami comes to check on him, and asks why, he tells her it's because of the kiss, and asks how she's been able to stay so calm. Her response: "Because it was you, Tatchan... you were the one, Tatchan, so I could eat breakfast and lunch just fine. You were the one, so I can keep it with me, unchanged forever." It is an extraordinarily touching scene, and seems to be the point at which Tatchan finally gives in and decides that he won't back down to his brother in pursuit of Minami.

Soon afterward, Katsuya is hit by a car and killed, and the story becomes about Tatsuya's quest to fill his shoes and become a man worthy of Minami. While this is also portrayed extraordinarily well, nothing else quite matches up to the dynamic between the three of them when Katsuya was alive. The closest equivalent is found in H2, Adachi's longest work, and his best overall (as the dynamic lasts the entire 34-volume run rather than just the first seven volumes). H2 focuses on four characters: Hiro, the main protagonist, his childhood friend Hikari, his best friend and rival Hideo (who is going out with Hikari), and Haruka, the manager of the baseball club at Hiro's school. The similarity to Touch comes in the dynamic between Hiro, Hikari and Hideo, with Hiro being unwilling to step in and try to take a girl from his best friend (much like Tatsuya's desire not to get in Katsuya's way). The three ended up the way they are because Hiro grew up later than everyone else, introducing Hideo to Hikari back when he was still a little brat in 7th grade. When Hiro finally caught up, he fell in love with Hikari, but he couldn't say anything because she was already with Hideo. Adachi does an extraordinary job portraying the connection between the two of them, as well as Hiro's burgeoning feelings for Haruka, and it is an open question for most of the manga whether he'll move on and choose Haruka or whether he and Hikari will finally get together, despite the pain this would cause Hideo. Although the manga is full of scenes that tie the four together in a complex web of feelings, three in particular stand out – two for their subtlety and one which shows how well Adachi handles the dynamic even when he brings it out into the open.

The first scene perfectly illustrates Adachi's ability to make his character dynamics clear to the reader without spending much time on lengthy exposition. It takes

place during the fourth manga volume, on the Senkawa (Hiro's school) bench during an exhibition game with Meiwa (Hideo's school). Hikari, who is rooting for Hiro for that day because his squad must win to be allowed to form a real baseball team, is talking to Haruka about Hideo. Haruka mentions that Hikari is lucky to have found a boy who is both nice-looking and a nice person, commenting that "all the guys I thought were neat turned out to be jerks". Hikari, who has noticed Haruka's interest in Hiro, replies "I don't think you're off this time..." at which point we see a brief flashback that tells the story of Hiro and Hikari as they grew up, mostly in pictures. We see Hiro as a little brat who Hikari must take care of as if he was her little brother, see him introducing Hikari and Hideo, and going along on their early dates to help them get around each other's shyness. The flashback ends with Hikari being asked by a friend of hers to give a love letter to Hiro, which almost certainly takes place at the end of eighth grade. As she gives it to him, she realizes that he's grown up, and he's no longer the little brat she used to take care of. As if to confirm this, Hiro notes that they're finally the same height, and runs off, leaving Hikari to ponder the changes in her oldest friend. As we return to the bench, we see Haruka recall a comment that Hiro made to her once: "By the time I finally caught up in height and thought about getting a girlfriend, all the pretty ones were head over heels in love with others", the significance of which she suddenly realizes as she looks at Hikari. In seven pages, with very little dialogue, Adachi has done all of the following: given confirmation that Hideo and Hikari have a good relationship and that Haruka has a crush on Hiro, hinted at the unspoken feelings between Hiro and Hikari, and had Haruka realize Hiro's attachment to Hikari. It is a brilliantly understated, suggestive scene, and sets up the story perfectly.

The second critical scene takes place many volumes later (volume 22, to be precise). Both Hiro and Hideo's teams have made the Koshien, and are on pace to meet in the third round, when Hiro suffers a heartbreaking defeat, spraining his ankle badly during the game and then making a game-losing error because of it. This is especially significant because the game takes place on Hikari's birthday, and as long as he's been playing baseball, Hiro has never lost on her birthday. Neither of them is able to sleep that night, and Hikari finds Hiro down at the beach, sitting on a stone wall and thinking about the game. Finally, the walls come down, and Hiro admits to Hikari that his first crush was her, saying that he'd wanted to play Hideo at the Koshien, because he never got the chance in middle school. She assumes that he's talking about baseball, but he says no, he is talking about love. "Don't be silly, you were the one who introduced us," she replies. "In 7th grade," Hiro says. "My first crush was at the end of 8th". He ends his retrospective by saying "I just grew up a year and a half off from everyone else, that's all." Having finally let the feelings he's kept inside for so long out, Hiro breaks down in what is probably the most emotional scene in the entire manga. "I was doing so well... and it was your birthday... and Hideo was waiting... and I... I lost," he says, as a single tear finally escapes his eye.

By itself, this would be a very touching scene, but Adachi is not finished. Haruka, who has gone out to look for Hiro, reaches the beach as the sun comes up only to see, from a distance, Haruka embracing Hiro. Her silhouette, as she realizes that the boy she loves still depends on another girl for comfort, is heartbreaking in an entirely different way. What makes this scene even more impressive is that it takes place two thirds of the way through the manga, serving only as a temporary climax that Adachi must wind down

from before he begins his final story arc. In this, he succeeds admirably, especially as he gives the reader subtle clues about the final direction the story will take.

The final scene which illustrates Adachi's skillful use of subtlety is actually the sum of two parts. Hikari's mother, who Hiro was extremely close to, dies of an illness, which is extraordinarily hard on Hiro and Hikari both. Soon after this occurs, Hiro is talking to her father, who suggests to Hiro that he marry a woman who will live a long time. In response, Hiro asks him if he regrets having married his wife, to which he says "not a bit". At the time, the scene appears to be exactly what it seems on the surface: a touching reminiscence about a woman both men loved very much. A volume later, however, while the baseball team is having a picnic, Haruka comes over to ask Hiro if he wants a slice of watermelon. As she goes to get it for him, Hiro says to her "Live a long time, all right?" Without the earlier scene, this would make no sense, and it is subtle enough that many readers may not pick up on it the first time through, but it gives a good hint – three volumes before the end – that the one Hiro will choose is not Hikari, but Haruka, which he does, finally bringing the story to a close.

Adachi, however, is not perfect. While he almost invariably does an extraordinary job portraying the relationship between the main male and female characters, the romantic rivals are more hit or miss. Adachi tends to make the protagonist's sports rival and romantic rival the same person, which certainly makes sense on one level, as there is no need to set up and coordinate separate conflicts with different characters.

Unfortunately, while his rivals always work in a sports sense – easy to do, since all he has to do is make them of comparable skill level – not all of them serve as effective romantic foils. Many shounen romances (Love Hina, for example) have main characters who fall

under the “perverted loser” stereotype, always getting caught in misunderstandings and with few redeemable characteristics other than being “nice guys”. In this case, constructing a romantic rival is easy; the rival must simply be better than the protagonist in one or more of a myriad of departments (looks, brains, ability to avoid stupid misunderstandings, etc). Adachi’s protagonists, stars that they are, are generally fairly admirable figures, with good looks, athletic talent and a sense of honor to go with it, so he cannot fall back on simply making the rival a significantly better person. Therefore, he must come up with a different hook to make the rival effective, and his success in this department is decidedly varied.

Unsurprisingly, one of the manga used above as an example of Adachi’s skill at creating nuanced character dynamics also contains his best rivalry. Hideo, in H2, is one of the most effective romantic foils in manga, precisely because he goes away from the usual stereotypes. As Hiro’s best friend, Hideo is portrayed in much the same way as he is: a good-looking, honorable, star whose heart is as big as his game. It is also made very clear from the start that he cares deeply for Hikari, and as he grows aware of the unstated feelings between her and Hiro, he starts to press the issue, wanting Hikari to choose once and for all between the two of them. Hideo is the rarest of rivals: one the reader can truly sympathize with. Despite the chemistry between Hiro and Hikari, chemistry that is unquestionably present throughout the manga, to root for the two of them to get together is to root for Hideo to suffer extreme emotional pain, and after seeing his character, it is difficult to wish that on him.

The other thing that makes Hideo so effective is that there is a genuine connection between him and Hikari as well. They have been dating for years, having hit it off when

Hiro introduced them back in 7th grade, and it has clearly been a good relationship for them both. The relationship is so good, in fact, that attempts by girls after Hideo or guys after Hikari to throw a wrench in it are generally laughed off, the two having long since moved past the casual jealousy phase. It is only when the connection between Hiro and Hikari begins to rise to the surface that there is any hint of conflict. Because of this, the reader feels that there is a genuine pull between the two characters; Hikari is torn between her love for Hideo (and her desire not to hurt him), and her love for a childhood friend who has become something more. The fact that the conflict arises as a natural result of the dynamic between the characters rather than being forced upon them makes it far more effective than it would be otherwise.

It is when Adachi moves away from having a previous connection between the female protagonist and the rival that he struggles. While Hideo is his best example, Katsuya in Touch, and to a lesser extent Nakanishi in Rough, are both effective because there is a legitimate reason for the girl to care for the rival. Without this connection, there is generally no reason to believe that the rival has any chance at all. Again, Adachi's protagonists are generally genuinely admirable and attractive people, and the dynamics he builds up between the main characters are so solid that it is nearly impossible for an outsider to convincingly come between them. While following the main relationship is always an enjoyable experience, ineffective rivals bog the story down, irritate the reader and generally make the whole manga less effective. Of all Adachi's manga, Katsu! is by far the worst offender in this department.

Ironically, Misaki, the rival in Katsu!, is perhaps Adachi's most effective sports rival. Satoyama⁴, the protagonist, originally believes himself to be the real son of his father, the boxer "Rabbit" Sakaguchi. In the last fight of his father's professional career, he fought a prodigy named Ryusuke Akamatsu. Overmatched, he landed a lucky punch that caused Akamatsu to fall and hit his head on the edge of the ring. Shortly afterward, he died of a brain hemorrhage. Rabbit felt terrible about this, and grew close to Akamatsu's family, eventually marrying the dead man's fiancé, who was pregnant at the time of the fight. This boy grows up to be Satoyama, and only finds out as a teenager that his real father was Akamatsu. Misaki, a boxing enthusiast since he was a child, had Akamatsu as his idol, and patterned his style after the man. He fights lefty, the way a mirror image of Akamatsu would fight, and so to surpass him Satoyama must defeat the reflection of the legendary father he never knew he had. Misaki also possesses the most talent of perhaps any character in any manga by Adachi, as he threw 158km/hr (about 99mph) during his high school baseball career.

In love, however, Misaki is far less effective. He tries to win over Satoyama's love interest, Mizutani, through a strategy of persistent annoyance. He makes references to her on television, shows up at her house uninvited to help out, appears out of nowhere to ask her on dates, and generally makes a colossal nuisance of himself. He draws little umbrellas with his name and Mizutani's under them all over the boxing gym at which she spends much of her time. Once, he even shows up on a date between Satoyama and Mizutani and switches tickets around so he and Mizutani sit next to each other and Satoyama is left off by himself, a juvenile stunt that is totally in opposition to his "genius" reputation and appearance in the arena of sports. What makes it especially

⁴ Satoyama's first name is Katsuki, but so is Mizutani's (thus the name "Katsu!").

infuriating is that she never shows any interest in him whatsoever. She gives him cursory thanks when he does things for her, but in general she is extremely dismissive and never gives the slightest hint that she has interest in anyone but Satoyama. The conflict that is supposed to arise never does, so the reader is left with a contrived plot that goes on far longer than it has a right to; a large portion of the last few volumes will in all likelihood be spent wondering when he'll get the message and give up. Mizutani herself says it best, in the final fight between Misaki and Satoyama: "However much praise the world heaps on you, however much I see of your true greatness, I still think Satoyama is better." If only Misaki had paid attention to this message earlier, Katsu! would have been far less flawed.

Although Adachi avoids many of the usual shounen clichés, such as techniques and "loser" protagonists, he still has his own set of clichés, as it is impossible to create the amount of material he has and avoid developing a few habits. Like his rivals, these are hit and miss. Some, like his tendency to mock himself, are amusing, and some, like his penchant for having the rival get injured so that the female protagonist must take care of him, provoke eye-rolling and groans of "not again". There are also harmless quirks, like his tendency to have a dog named "Punch" in every single one of his manga, and his penchant for puns.

Adachi will periodically throw shameless advertising for his own series in, often referencing the print collections of the series he is currently working on. This would be irritating, except that his characters have even less patience with it than readers would, and invariably respond to signs advertising his work or the attention-getting antics of Adachi's own avatar (he frequently draws himself into the story, often with a giant pen,

usually being chased around by editors) by either professing never to have heard of him or by dismissing him as a terrible hack. In one particularly amusing sequence in H2, all of his characters end up with tickets to a Mitsuru Adachi exhibition... and then roundly decry it as terrible. Hikari, in fact, doesn't even bother to go, having already heard from everyone else what a disaster it was. The only people who give the exhibition a positive review, unsurprisingly, are a group of Adachi-clones, but as usual, nobody pays any attention to them whatsoever.

On a more serious note, one cliché Adachi does use to great effect is “death of a character”. Three of his best series – Touch, H2, and his latest, Cross Game (all baseball, interestingly) – have a major character die, although all of the series are affected in different ways. Touch is by far the most dramatic; Katsuya's death shifts the entire tone of the series from the Tatsuya/Minami/Katsuya triangle toward Tatsuya's struggle to grow up, fill his brother's shoes and fulfill Minami's dream, and become worth of Minami himself. Although this shift lowers the quality of the series, it is more a result of the loss of the incredible dynamic between the three than a reflection on how the death was written; Adachi does a masterful job portraying the devastating effects of Katsuya's loss on the entire cast, Tatsuya especially. In H2, the death of Hikari's mother serves two purposes: one, it fires Hiro up even more, as he tries to win for the woman who was like a second mother to him, and two, it brings out a vulnerability in Hikari that had been hidden throughout most of the series. Both of these serve their purpose in bringing the series to an effective, emotional climax. Finally, the death in Cross Game is the setup for what looks to be an extremely enjoyable series. Koh, the protagonist, is best friends with Wakaba, the daughter of family friends (who run a batting cage). Born on the same day,

they seem destined to grow up as sweethearts, but Wakaba dies in a swimming accident at the age of 11. Koh, who despite impressive natural talent never showed much of an interest in baseball, takes up the sport in memory of Wakaba. Aoba, Wakaba's tomboy of a sister, who was jealous of Koh for getting more attention from Wakaba than she did as a child, looks as if she will eventually overcome her dislike for him as he excels at her favorite sport (the fact that he's a pretty nice guy will probably help). As in Touch, the death serves as a catalyst for the growth and development of the rest of the cast, although it comes even earlier here. In general, Adachi does an extremely good job every time he uses this plot device, treating it with the seriousness it deserves while using it to move the story forward.

Unfortunately, Adachi also tends to rely on "injury" as a plot device. While this is effective in regard to the male protagonist – pretty much all of Hiro's losses in H2 are a result of him getting injured during the game – it is much more frustrating when Adachi uses it as a contrived excuse for the female protagonist to have to spend time taking care of the rival. This takes place multiple times, including Katsu! and the latter part of Touch, but it is most irritating in Rough, where it takes up the majority of the last two volumes. Injury also often serves as an excuse for the protagonist's victory to feel hollow; in Katsu!, nobody takes Satoyama seriously as a champion because Misaki is injured at the time, and even when Satoyama beats him later in a practice match, the media still believes that Misaki let him win (until Misaki tells them otherwise). While it is understandable to want to put off real confrontation between the rivals until the end, the injury plot device feels forced and inauthentic.

In Rough, the rivalry is between the protagonist, Keisuke, a star swimmer, and Nakanishi (the current Japanese record holder in the 100 freestyle), a child friend of Ami, the main love interest. Near the end of the tenth (of twelve) volumes, Nakanishi runs his car into a wall trying to avoid a kid on a tricycle, and suffers what threatens to be a career-ending injury. While this is meant to set up a dramatic comeback and a series-ending climactic race between the two, it feels extremely contrived, especially when Nakanishi sets a new Japanese record in his first preliminary heat since returning to action. The injury completely kills the dramatic build-up that had occurred in the preceding ten volumes, forcing Adachi to rebuild it all over again in the last two. Finally, the dynamic between Ami and Keisuke is the driving force behind the series, but it is suddenly suspended almost entirely as Ami is forced to help take care of Nakanishi, further weakening the manga just when it should be building up to its conclusion. All in all, Adachi handles the situation much less deftly than he does character death, and it almost ruins an otherwise excellent story.

Despite these flaws, Mitsuru Adachi remains one of the best authors of shounen manga even today. His skill as a storyteller has only grown since the 1970s, and Cross Game looks to join his other baseball manga as one of his best works to date. While he may slip up here and there with a contrived plot device or an irritating rival, there are always enough enjoyable characteristics in his manga to make them worth reading regardless. Also, despite the fact that none of his stories (except Miyuki) move beyond the high school setting, his subtle character dynamics cause them to remain appealing to older readers. People who have moved beyond the age when they find nosebleeding in the presence of exposed female flesh and an inability to converse with females amusing

may still find something to appreciate in the romantic undercurrents of an Adachi story, and his skill in portraying sports may cause readers to recall their own high school days as athletes. In the world of Mitsuru Adachi, the drama of youth remains eternal.

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