

Critique of Kathryn Strong's Project

The first chapter of *Bedded by a Bishonen* sets the tone for the hypothetical completed manga. It has the difficult job of not only immediately grasping the audience's attention, but also of introducing all of the characters, showing them interacting, identifying the protagonist, and setting up the initial tension between them that drives the story forward. This creates quite a challenge for the writer, particularly when presented in the form of manga, where words are sparse, meaning that most of this must be conveyed through images, rather than paragraphs of description. Taking that into account, this work was mostly successful, although there were a few things that could be improved to make it more effective.

Bedded by a Bishonen accomplishes what it sets out to do. While most shojo manga begin with the female protagonist introducing herself and her life to the readers, *Bedded by a Bishonen* does not follow this trope, instead opting to delve straight into the action. Given the shortness of the work, this seems to be a wise decision, as it instantly engages the reader. The information given in the traditional introduction is woven into the story, with words like "Sis" and "you have a boyfriend!" to explain the relationship between characters and their life situation. This saves the author many pages of exposition.

However, this decision can make it more difficult to identify the female protagonist, who the reader is expected to identify, because we are not immediately confronted with her smiling face and bright explanation, which signifies to the reader "pay attention to me! I'm the

important one!” Instead, our first image of our protagonist, Jessie, is actually of the back of her head. This can cause some initial confusion, and leave the reader feeling a bit unfocused, as he watches the conversation between the two girls. However, the second page makes the protagonist clear, when Ali disappears from the page and Jessie charges forward impulsively. Furthermore, this page introduces the thought bubble, a technique that the author uses in lieu of having the protagonist directly address the reader in order to reveal her inner thoughts and move along the plot. Because this thought bubble is used exclusively by Jessie, it further cements her role as the protagonist. Just as in most shojo manga, the only character who breaks the fourth wall and talks to the audience is the female protagonist, in *Bedded by a Bishonen*, the only character to whose thoughts the reader is given access is the female protagonist, enhancing the readers relationship to this character.

This relationship must be strong, because it must sustain itself through the relative inundation of characters that occurs in the first pages of this work. The first chapter of *Bedded by a Bishonen* is short. In seven pages the reader is introduced to four characters, all of who are extremely important to the story, and have complicated relationships with each other. These pages are also filled with action, the budding of a romance, and the reuniting of long-lost siblings. While occasionally the pacing seemed a little too fast in this work, with so much happening on every page, this seems forgivable because it serves as an effective hook, drawing in the audience and also setting up the situation for the rest of the story. A lot happens, but it is made obvious that what happens isn't the main point of the story. Instead, it is merely a method of creating the situation at the end of the chapter—handsome Monroe moving in to the house where beautiful Jessie is staying, giving them the opportunity to see where their mutual attraction will lead them.

While all of this seems fairly successful, there are a few shortcomings that made this manga harder to read and understand. While the drawing style is fairly standardized, and the characters are easy to identify, it is often difficult to read their expression well enough to get a good idea of what they are thinking. Because interiority is only offered on Jessie, this leaves the reader wondering what is going on in the other characters' heads. This is particularly the case with Monroe, who is often seen smiling while he is holding Jessie captive. Because of this, the reader is left to wonder if he is a perpetual criminal who is planning to hurt or kidnap Jessie, and that is why he is grinning, or if his smile is because he is enjoying teasing her, and the feel of her body next to his. Without hearing his thoughts it is difficult to identify the latter as the correct answer. Because Monroe is a second protagonist, second only to Jessie, it is also essential that he be likeable and that the reader relates to him, however, without clearer expressions, or access to his thoughts, which would work against the reader's identification with Jessie, this is difficult to guarantee. Ultimately, the writer chose to allow the reader to potentially be confused, in order to strengthen his bond with the protagonist, realizing that this bond will help to drive the entire work forward, and that confusion can be cleared up in later chapters.

Another potential weakness was the brevity of the piece. Because it was adapted from a novel (*Bedded by a Playboy*, by Heidi Rice), a lot must be cut in order to fit a whole chapter into seven pages of manga. In particular, much backstory is omitted, or merely hinted at. For instance, the letter Monroe is seen holding is of importance in the novel, but is largely ignored in the first chapter of the manga. While it may show up again in subsequent chapters, its appearance in the first few pages can be a bit perplexing because there is not space to explain it at that moment. Similarly, while the characters are introduced, there is not much time to explain their living situation, where they were, or what they were doing. While this does not hinder the

story-telling ability of the story, it does leave the reader with question, which will hopefully drive them further in the story.

Despite these shortcomings, chapter 1 of *Bedded by a Bishonen*, the shojo manga adaptation of *Bedded by a Playboy*, is successful at doing what it set out to do. It introduces characters, establishes relationships, initiates reader identification with the protagonist, and sets up the tension that will drive the rest of the manga forward, and it does so without lengthy exposition, instead opting to delve immediately into reader-gripping action. While clearer expressions and more pages would be helpful, their absence does not significantly hinder the making of meaning. Therefore, overall, *Bedded by a Bishonen*, should be considered a successful adaptation and first chapter to a manga.