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Analysis of “Mars” Page 170

The Japanese Shojo manga “Mars”, written and illustrated by Fuyumi Soryo, depicts a romantic drama story about two teenage protagonists, one boy named Rei, and one girl named Kira. The central conflict regards the characters’ experience as a couple both trying to deal with their respective past traumas, and the unresolved conflicts that stem from them in the present whilst trying to maintain honesty and functionality in their relationship. They encounter different smaller conflicts all relating to the central one, one of which is the question of how the couple deals with Kira’s formerly separated stepfather and rapist moving back in with her and her mother. This occurs in the middle of the story after Rei has already learned about Kira’s traumatic rape experience and its affect on her mental health, and has already formed a significant detestation for this man. When Kira’s mother falls ill, she chooses to let the stepfather back into her life after he profusely apologizes, convinced he is her only option for maintaining a comfortable life with her failing health. Learning of this, Kira makes the difficult decision to remain in the home in which resides her former abuser instead of running away, choosing to stay with her mother, her only family. When Kira reluctantly shares this update with Rei, he becomes intensely wrought with emotions dominated by fury that she would put herself in what he feels is highly a dangerous situation, and decides in the moment that they have to break up. The climax

of this scene is depicted on page 170 in “Mars” volume 8, written in 1996, in which Rei’s decision and decisive reaction is presented.

The page is formatted in a manner that is composed of the reactions of both the various onlookers of the scene and the two protagonists involved in the argument. Text is present in the form of two dialogue circles around Rei’s distressed expression, the image that encompasses the most emotional intensity within the scene, and fills the panel that most significantly communicates the important point of progress in the story’s current conflict. The strong emotional intensity of this panel occurs due to several elements: the buildup of emotional intensity resulted from the juxtaposition and content of the former images, the contrasting visual characteristics of the overall presentation of Rei’s facial disposition, and, very significantly the accompaniment of text, which communicates Rei’s anger most directly.

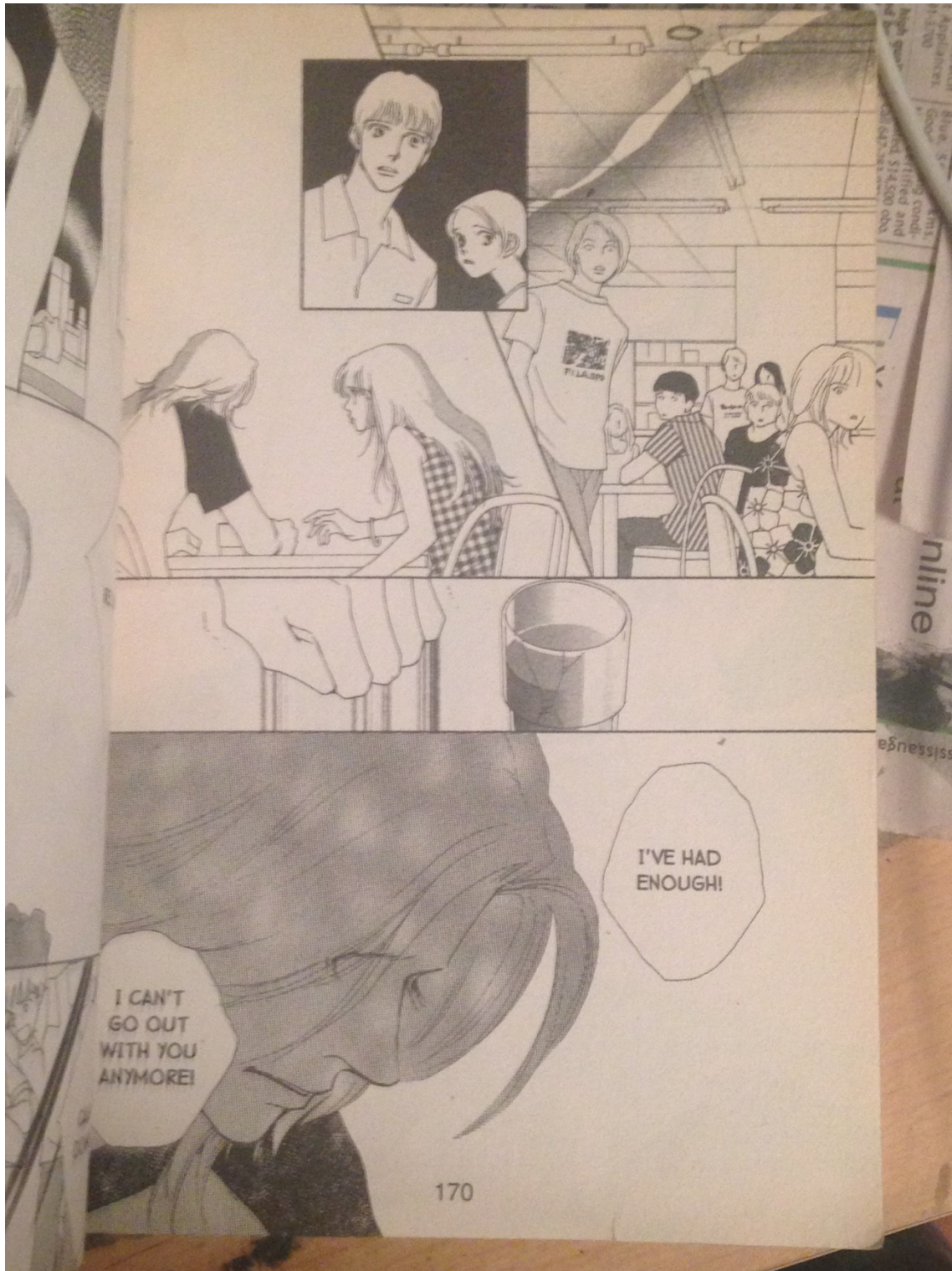
To explain, the images leading to Rei’s reaction support the ultimate purpose of depicting the intensity of his emotions by gradually increasing the drama and anticipation through their content and juxtaposition. The first panel within the narrative order of the page is a diagonal section presenting the onlookers in the school cafeteria. The role of them as mere onlookers, not significant characters of the story is evidenced by the lack of detail in their character designs, most notably the simplification of their eyes compared to the eyes of the main characters depicted within the rest of the graphic novel. With a screen tone shape similar to a lightning bolt placed just above the scene to imply the surprise in the consciousness of the onlookers suddenly interested and concerned with the loud argument occurring within the vicinity of the cafeteria, the aspect of drama buildup has begun. The next image the viewer is presented with occurs within a square panel in between in the diagonal split, holding the reaction of Kira and Rei’s two

best friends. The detail in their facial features implies their significance as reoccurring characters in the story, and the black background indicates the sense of hollowness and sudden fear they feel regarding the status of their friends' relationship. The drama is now further intensified as the reactions have begun to become more focused on characters significant to the plot. Finally, the next panel begins to show evidence of the couple's situation. While the viewer cannot yet see Rei's face, they see evidence of Kira's distressed and surprised expression. Moving one step closer to the final panel, the next one depicts Rei's hand next to a broken glass of juice, implied to have been cracked by it in possible distress and frustration, increasing the drama of the situation one last time before Rei's facial reaction is revealed.

When evidence of Rei's face is finally revealed to the viewer as the final narrative image on the page, it is noticeable to them that it possesses the role as the focal point of the page. This is due to its largeness in comparison with the content in the other images, and the contrast of the speckled, grey screen tone that covers Rei's head. This focus strongly indicates to the viewer the significance of his reaction and this panel to the story. However, the text plays the most important role in communicating the significant occurrence that takes place in relation to the conflict on this page. To explain, as aforementioned, although several significant visual elements have been put in place to indicate the dramatic intensity, and the importance of Rei's reaction, it would not be as clear what his most dominant emotion was without the presence of the text. The broken glass in the previous panel hints at his frustration, but the image of his face, does not directly indicate anger directed at Kira on its own; Rei's expression is looking downwards, and there is an indication of a slightly furrowed brow, but his expression is somewhat ambiguous, seeming to imply the possibility sadness with some hint of irritation. Essentially, it is not directly

depicting the anger which is the most significant emotion that is required to communicate the scene, and therefore, the text plays the most important role in communicating Rei's anger and the finality of his decision to break up. As a result, the image of Rei's face serves to instead indicate the extra, complex element of of his anger-dominant emotion; the image offers some indication that underneath the anger implied through his words, he is perhaps withholding some reluctance to make the decision he is making, alongside some subtler hints of sorrow. The image serves to illuminate the most important communication within the page, and offer some extra information about his emotions, rather than communicate the most important one directly, which the text effectively does.

All in all, on page 170 of "Mars" volume 8, Soryo has presented the climax of a crucial scene within her story in a manner that relies on text to communicate the important occurrence directly, while using the visual elements to enrich the event by implying and visually describing the complex subtleties of human emotions that are not as realistically, or as elegantly, implied through sole dialogue.



NOTE: The page is read from right to left, not left to right, as the original work was intended Japanese audiences, and the art has not been flipped for Anglophone audiences.