

MANGAVERSE!

November 2018

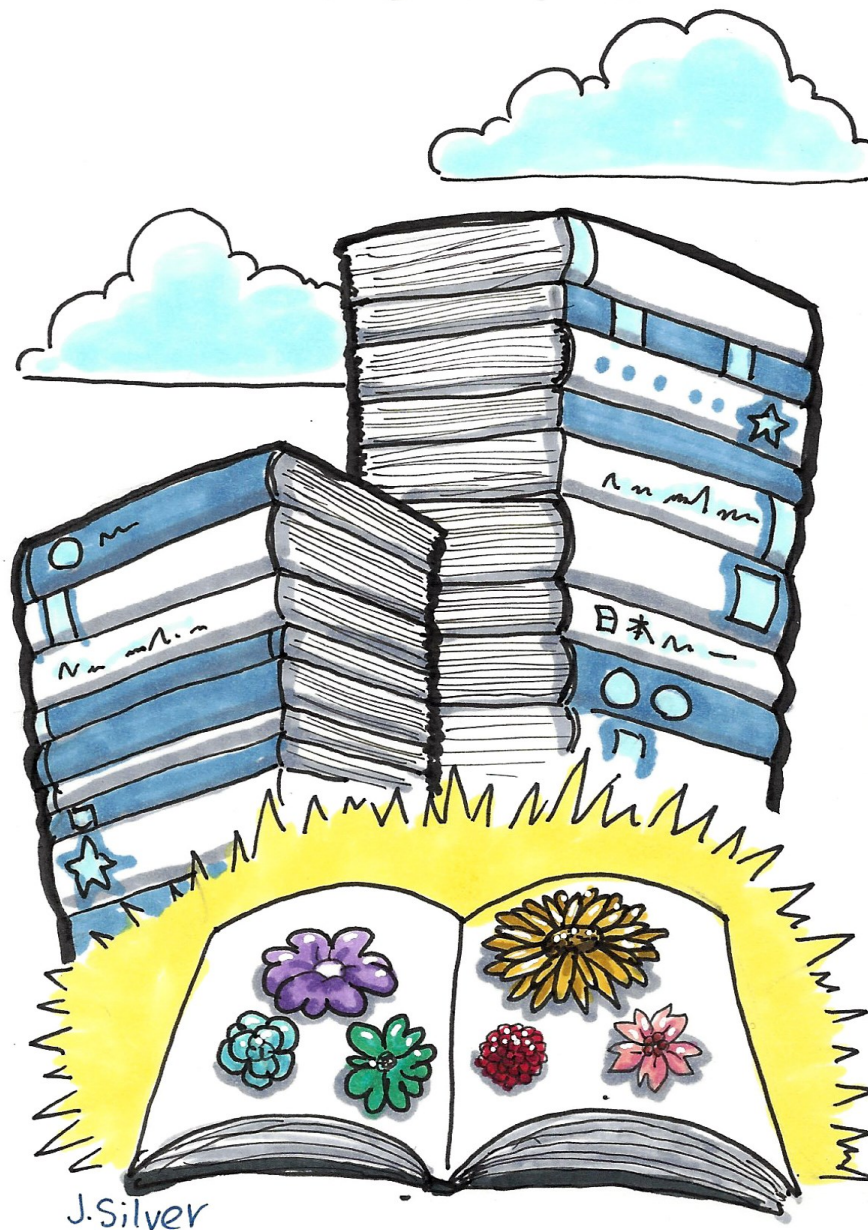


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From the Editor

Life is full of unexpected journeys. When I was asked to take on the responsibility of editing Mangaverse, I already had a comfortable space in anime fandom writing reviews at my own website (Season1Episode1 - <https://www.s1e1.com/>) and speaking at some local fandom conventions. When I was invited to become a 'zine editor, my immediate reaction was that perhaps I'd been mistaken for someone with actual talent. Once that feeling subsided, I got a better sense of the task ahead.

Taking something with a history and choosing to re-envision it from scratch is like setting off on a cross-country journey on foot with only bits and pieces of a map; your sense of direction can take you part of the way, but ultimately the lack of route markers can prove to be a distinct challenge. I hope that I've at least been able to reach a kind of destination.

I hope you enjoy reading what I've been able to put together here; I've tried to provide a bit of variety, but one can only do so much on one's own. If you're interested in contributing to future issues of Mangaverse, I am always on the lookout for anime, manga, and comic reviews (especially Western comics, which are not my forte as a consumer!). Artwork (fan-art and original) are welcome and desired as well. If you have a great idea for something else, feel free to pitch it! My (email) door is always open.

Thank you in advance, and enjoy!

-Jessi
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Anime Series Review – *Revue Starlight*

Jessi Silver

S1E1 Anime Reviews – <https://www.s1e1.com>

“Starlight” is the song and dance revue troupe loved throughout the world. Karen and Hikari make a promise with each other when they’re young that one day they’ll stand on that stage together. Time passes, and now the girls are 16 years old. Karen is very enthusiastic about the lessons she takes every day, holding her promise close to her heart. Hikari has transferred schools and is now away from Karen. But the cogs of fate turn, and the two are destined to meet again. The girls and other “Stage Girls” will compete in a mysterious audition process to gain acceptance into the revue. – [Anime News Network](#)

Streaming: [HIDIVE](#)

Episodes: 12

Source: Original

Review: *This review contains plot and thematic spoilers for the anime. Heavy spoilers are indicated; the section in question can be skipped.*

Do you believe in fate? That once our life is set in motion, its pre-determined pathway is truly an immovable arc of destiny? Anime is filled with stories of prophecies fulfilled and traditions unbroken; it’s a theme whose expression allows us to believe in the possibility and comfort of things greater than ourselves. There are also plenty of anime, however, that dare to suggest that we, as human beings, are more responsible for our lives than some of us may be comfortable fully accepting. I tend to like these stories better, because rather than simply implying that our poor state of being is solely the result of our own mistakes, it suggests that we might also have some power to alter the flow of the river and set ourselves on a better course, given the opportunity and support of course.

Revue Starlight is, in its simplest form, a story about a group of girls choosing not to accept an exclusionary story – a fate which does not encompass the happiness of them all. Instead, they attempt to re-write the stage-play of their existence and to re-interpret their story as one which allows room for successful fulfillment of their desires.

The story begins at Seisho Performing Arts Academy, where student Karen Aijo and her friends comprise a particularly talented group of students who held the

starring roles in the previous year's production of "Starlight." "Starlight" holds a special place in Karen's heart; she and childhood friend Hikari Kagura, after seeing the play performed, vowed that they would one day share the stage as stars in a future production. Karen is positive that their dream is about to become a reality when Hikari returns from London and transfers to Seisho; unfortunately, Hikari behaves coldly to her and seems to have her own very singular ambitions. Karen searches for her friend one evening and happens to find a mysterious elevator that plunges deep into depths below the academy. What she finds is that many of her classmates are embroiled in a series of secret and physically exhausting auditions for the title of "Top Star," Hikari among them. Against others' protests, Karen forces her way into these auditions to find a way for her's and Hikari's shared dream to become a reality.

The series appears to be the product of many influences. Takarazuka theater is an obvious one, with its similar stage and actor terminology and school training system. The general makeup of the cast, as well as their wardrobe styling seems to reference various popular idol series. My first gut reaction, however, was to compare the series to *Revolutionary Girl Utena*; while I wouldn't necessarily say that this anime has the depth or staying power of Ikuhara and Be-Papas' powerhouse shoujo series, the way much of the story plays out via duels, the visual eccentricity and sense of scale in many of the scenes, and the way the story provides a vehicle for young women to support one another and seize control of their destiny in the face of a strange (and vaguely threatening) male figurehead definitely feels inspired and somewhat informed by Anthy and Utena's story. Influences are one thing, though; the end product's incorporation of those influences and the way in which they're used to express something different is the more impressive aspect of the show.

Those who haven't actually seen the series may still be aware of it due to its surreal and lavishly-animated auditions, during which two (or more) of the characters engage in an all-out physical battle while expressing their emotions through song. I think it would be easy to be bombarded by the action grandiosity and miss the forest for the trees so-to-speak; though the theatrical numbers in this series are top-notch and definitely worthy of notice, what I found more powerful were both the moments of character drama and the ways in which the series addresses the central theme of overthrowing fate.

The series is built on the shoulders of its characters' relationships. Karen and Hikari's friendship is the beating heart of the story, the one which disrupts the

system put in place to declare a single victor in the fight for Top Star. There are also several other couplings between the characters, both platonic and (likely) romantic, which comprise the basis for many of the other duels depicted during the auditions (some of which occur concurrently with others). What impressed me about the series was that it was able to refrain from portraying these conflicts as petty or based on simplistic rivalries, instead wholeheartedly conveying the fact that most of the characters had generally positive feelings towards their competitors and were forced to weigh their own ambitions against the task of maintaining their treasured friendships. This does nothing to deplete the tension of the duels; instead it clearly raises the stakes. Since it's not entirely apparent whether the songs and sword-fights are actually happening or are instead some shared hallucination between the characters, I found the sense of suspense they generated to be impressive.

Heavy spoilers begin here.

Aside from central two characters, there are 7 others with relationships and roles of varying significance. I think the one I identified with the most was Nana Daiba (in Japanese name order *Daiba Nana* or “Banana” as her nickname goes). Nana is portrayed as a helper; she's supportive to a fault and always bakes banana-themed treats for her fellow stage-girls as they prepare for their performances. Her altruism is somewhat of an illusion, though; her contributions are all geared towards the end goal of fulfilling her wish as a future top star. What we discover roughly halfway through the series is that the characters have been caught in a time recursion of Nana's making; having won the title of Top Star, the wish she made was to go back and repeat the experience of her first-year performance in “Starlight.” In her mind, nothing can possibly top this performance – the feeling of preparing for the play, donning the costumes, and being on stage can never be replicated or surpassed unless all the conditions are exactly the same. Each time she wins the auditions (which she does as, per her wish, the outcomes are all predetermined), the cycle begins anew.

As much as we can see that this is harmful, it's also very understandable; who among us hasn't wanted to re-live some rose-colored past glory? Nana's desire plays to her self-perceived strength as “background support” – she's the “helper” who makes sure that all the gears are turning and that the show goes as planned. It's just that her hand in it is heavier than the other characters realize. In a strange juxtaposition, Nana's acts of repeatedly allowing her version of the “correct” fate

to play out are predicated on her ability to retain control and manipulate her world via the system as-is.

Hikari's arrival is the wrench that stops the cogs from turning, or perhaps it may be more accurate to say that her entrance is what finally causes the timeline to jump tracks and make forward progress again. 8 actors become 9, their roles in the play are shaken and redistributed, and fate is no longer so certain. Karen, who was not originally a powerhouse player, is driven to succeed by Hikari's presence, and now the group begins to question a system that gives all the glory to one while the others walk away with nothing.

Setting this story in the world of live theater was not just an aesthetic choice and relating it to the allegorical tale of lost friendship in "Starlight" was no offhand decision, in my opinion. Much of the series is spent lamenting the fact that the heroines in "Starlight" are never able to achieve the ultimate unity that they seek. The story is tragic and ends with the two characters being separated for all eternity. The ultimate end of the secret auditions will choose a Top Star, and as we learn later on the consequences for coming in second place are dire – the runner-up's love for the stage and performing upon it are stolen for good. Neither of these are fated to be stories with happy endings; the words in the storybook that Hikari has and the lines of the play that the girls perform are locked into that tragic form by tradition and the permanence of the written word.

Or are they?

Some of my favorite anime series (and my favorite characters) are those which question the need to rely on tradition and which refuse to accept the inevitability of fate. Karen Aijo is *Revue Starlight's* squeaky wheel, the person who holds her promise with Hikari in much higher regard than lines or stage direction or rules. She's convinced throughout the series that there must be a way for Hikari and herself to achieve stardom together, though the way to achieve that goal isn't apparent. A powerful example of Karen's stubbornness occurs within the last couple of episodes, when she takes the copy of the storybook on which "Starlight" is based and creates her own translation of the text. This montage might seem extraneous at first, perhaps a last ditch effort to glean some meaning in order to rescue her friend. However, I think it conveys something much more meaningful.

We think of literature, especially "classic" literature, as monumental and unchanging, but so much of a story's meaning can be based on the way one

person interprets it for themselves. Stories like *The Tale of Genji* with its complicated relationships and characters with ever-changing social ranks, or even something more familiar to Western audiences like *The Little Mermaid*, which was at one time a tragic allegory for the author's sexuality, can be given new meaning by people with new perspectives, insights, and yet, even agendas. Sometimes a story is re-made for the society that exists at that point in time. Sometimes a reminder of life's many tragic outcomes is less valuable than a story which rejects that tragedy for something that lifts up its participants. The value of a sad story versus a happy one is always up to the person doing the reading – personally, I believe that stories which present negative outcomes and emotions have as much purpose and power as light-hearted ones, but not everyone agrees. Sometimes it pays to question *if* and *why* a well-regarded, famous, or traditional story or play still has value; throwing up one's hands and saying "it's an important part of literary canon" (whose canon?) or "it's always been performed that way" is often a way of shirking responsibility when we are in the position to question the status-quo.

"Starlight," which at first seems allegorical for not only the opinion that women must forever compete with one-another, but also that relationships between women (and especially very close and/or romantic ones) are doomed to end in tragedy. Karen chooses to reject that by wholly rejecting all the arbitrary rules of their competitive stage system and choosing to re-write and refine the story that she and her friend love. I find that to be an incredibly powerful act of creation and rebirth.

Heavy spoilers end here.

My understanding is that this series' production had problems almost from the get-go, the product of an ambitious concept and the expectation of lavishly-animated and unique revue battles for all the characters. While I hate to sound as though I'm encouraging a production system that overlooks the health of its workers, it's also difficult for me not to admire the sheer force of will it took to bring this story to life. Smooth, expressive animation, unique story-boarding, convincing compositing... these aren't the sorts of things that I require when I'm watching anime. Though it's a visual medium I'm generally satisfied if the story itself is interesting. But there's just something exhilarating about full animation when it's put to good use. Along with the massive sense of scale present in many of the later scenes, including depictions of enormous towers and nearly-endless staircases, this series leaves an impression visually and emotionally.

My one minor criticism of the series is that, like so many other anime, its final episode doesn't allow enough time to resolve all the latent feelings that it generates. As much as I love a good climax, especially ones so emotionally powerful, I feel that huge, grandiose moments of catharsis are only enhanced when coupled with similar moments of reflection.

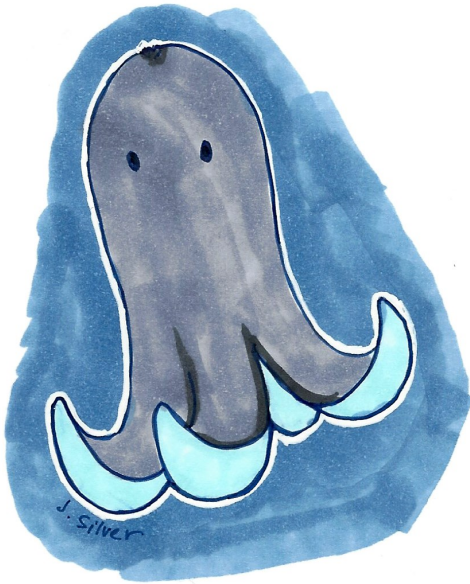
Speaking generally, I think the ultimate message this series has to share is that both theater and life aren't doomed to be static. It may feel as though a situation is plunging towards an inevitable conclusion – that our fate is truly unavoidable. This anime presents a full-on rejection of the systems that serve to hamper our relationships – the ones that keep us in endless competition with others for some ill-defined, amorphous “prize” that benefits the few and harms the many. Society pits us, women especially, against one-another in many facets of our lives. Rather than manipulating the system to survive or throwing one-another under the bus to gain a leg-up, sometimes the best answer to this conundrum is to reject the flawed system entirely and relieve it of its power.

I don't know that *Revue Starlight* is an anime series for the ages; I suspect that my connection to it is very personal and that may not translate to anything broader. Occasionally, though, I believe that we receive messages at coincidentally relevant times, and for me this series echoes a lot of my feelings about our society which often encloses us in boxes and pressures us to fulfill roles which don't quite fit. Rather than suffer throughout this dissonance, perhaps the better answer is to, when the option is available, aim to re-make society in a way that less focused on strict roles, titles, winners and losers. One which honors our diverse goals and supports the relationships that we have built with one-another. A new start, from position zero.

Pros: Lavish animation production throughout. Emphasizes character relationships. Thematically rich.

Cons: Could have used another episode for some falling action.

Grade: A



Manga Review: Nichijou: My Ordinary Life

(1) by Keiichi Arawa

Review by SKJAM!

SKJAM! Reviews – <http://www.skjam.com>

The ordinary lives that all of us lead every day might perhaps be a succession of miracles.

This is the story of four ordinary high school girls living their ordinary everyday lives. Yukko, cheerful but not very bright; Mio, who's of average intellect and has an artistic streak; the quiet and book-smart Mai; and Nano, who's a robot with a wind-up key in her back. They all have their little quirks, and strange things happen often, but it's all a part of ordinary life.

Nichijou ("Everyday") is a *shounen* (boy's) comedy manga that ran from 2006-2015, with an anime adaptation in 2011. There isn't much of a narrative arc; most of the stories depict short scenes from the lives of one or more characters' daily lives... strange as those events may be. There are some recurring themes, the most frequent of which is Nano's desire to blend in with humans, and her frustration with her inventor/ward, eight year old mad scientist Professor Shinonome, who refuses to remove the key in her back.

In this first volume, we are introduced to the main characters as they head to school in the morning (Nano doesn't quite make it.) Yukko tries to figure out why Mai is ignoring her. Nano has difficulties with new functions the Professor installed in her body. The pretentious Sasahara (drama club president) and hot-tempered Misato (kendo club member) try to decide what to do for the cultural festival.

There's a school assembly led by Principal Shinonome (who may or may not be related), known for his "dad jokes" and the intensely shy Ms. Sakurai. Yukko witnesses a wrestling match between the principal and a deer—and can never tell anyone. Yukko and Mai play rock-paper-scissors. Yukko and Mio build a card house (this is a silent chapter.) Yukko fails to study for finals, and the questions seem indecipherable.

Yukko tries to finish her lunch despite dropping a key ingredient. Nano and the Professor have cake. Ms. Sakurai tries to enforce school rules on Sasahara. Mio belatedly remembers she drew an embarrassing picture in her notebook when Yukko tries to borrow it. Mio gets a part-time job that sucks. Yukko finally did her homework on time, but didn't remember to bring it back to school. Nano suffers from over the top comedic reactions due to the Professor's latest modifications.

The short pieces are usually funny, though some of them rely on Japanese conventions of comedy that might be opaque to newer readers of manga. The lack of focus and chapters where nothing much happens might also make this less appealing to some readers. Also, there's some slapstick violence.

I especially like the card house chapter, which utilizes suspense and the previously established characterization to build to a silly conclusion.

The art in this first volume is less than stellar, and suffers greatly from "same face"—the artist improved greatly over the course of the series.

A word or two more about the anime: It does not present the sketches in the same order, allowing it to have a plot arc where Nano has to convince the Professor to let her attend school. It also has interspersed gags from the creator's other series *Helvetica Standard*, and in the second half of the season, the closing credits feature a different song each time.

I recommend this series for fans of sketch comedy and magical realism.

Aggressive Retsuko Isn't Just Adorable Sanrio Characters; It May be the Show of Our Times

J.C. Horvath

September 29, 2018

When one thinks of Hello Kitty and other Sanrio characters, the usual expectation is a simply drawn, cute character with wide appeal. Part of that wide appeal is that most of these characters are wholesome and vague; that is, we don't know a lot of the details of their world or the challenges they may face. *Aggressive Retsuko* (or just *Aggretsuko*) instantly provides something different: a character with anger. A woman with anger. The cuteness of Sanrio and Disney may have helped develop the expectation that many adults have of cartoons: that they are not built to tell relevant adult stories. Western cartoons made for adults typically feature exaggerated characters and situation built for laughs or political commentary, but aren't truly focused on the very real stresses of ordinary life. This is precisely the strength of the recent Netflix *Aggretsuko* series, and it may prove to be the perfect show to demonstrate what animation can do. At a time when the Me Too movement has successfully garnered attention, but left many wondering how to actually change power dynamics, we need media that realistically portrays women's stories. *Aggretsuko* will surprise you: it is cute but grounded; stressful but hopeful; funny but genuine. I believe it is the show of our times because of its diverse cast of characters and is best explored through them.

The red panda Retsuko was originally created by Sanrio employee "Yeti" in response to a company contest to design a new character on the theme of "salaryman," or office-worker. Yeti's inspiration: "I observed office workers who are at the center of Japan's corporate culture and I could hear their heartfelt screams." Shortly after her creation, animation studio Fanworks released a series of one-minute animations that fleshed out the basic character of Retsuko: a 25-year old single accountant who is put-upon and put-down by her awful co-workers. Retsuko is too timid to take up arms against her oppressors at work, so when the day is finally done, she hits the karaoke room and expresses her frustrations as screaming death metal. While this set-up is amusing enough to support one-minute shorts, the expanded Netflix show gives Retsuko's troubles a chance to be affecting.

Retsuko channels all of her rage into her karaoke release because she is incapable of processing or reacting to her stressors in real time. She is trapped by the concept of the ideal, quiet, and compliant “good girl,” so whenever she’s not screaming, she falls back into that persona, and worst of all she assumes the blame for the acts of her oppressors.

The most obvious antagonist is Hog Honcho Ton, the literal chauvinist pig that makes no bones about expecting the women in the office to fetch him tea. Ton overworks Retsuko because she “doesn’t look busy,” undervalues the work she does do, and assumes that because Retsuko is a young woman, she’ll either marry and leave the workplace entirely or abandon the company to seek greener pastures. Of course, the latter is almost a self-fulfilling prophecy, as the stress and lack of appreciation do cause Retsuko to seek escape.

Not all of the abuse at work is specifically gendered. One of Retsuko’s oppressors is her direct boss in the accounting department, the lady Komodo dragon Tsubone. Tsubone piles the work onto Retsuko, points out every mistake she makes, and tells Retsuko she isn’t taking work seriously, when no one else is handling Retsuko’s work load. Tsubone articulates the belief that by wearing down Retsuko with some variation on the idea of “tough love,” she’s making Retsuko a better, and perhaps even happier, worker. It’s worth pointing out that though it comes from a woman, this concept of superiors beating down young workers to shape them into being more effective is still a very old-world patriarchal idea. Both Ton and Tsubone reflect at one point that they had to face this kind of abuse, so it’s only right to pass it down to Retsuko.

Next is Komiya, a male meerkat also in the accounting department. He spends all of his efforts sucking up to Ton by agreeing with Ton’s own view that Ton is busy and overworked, and by trying to position himself to go on golfing excursions with Ton. While this everyday behavior is gross, it is his willingness to set-up Retsuko that makes him a true villain. When Retsuko does begin to contemplate leaving, he gathers evidence that Retsuko might quit and turns it over to Ton. Komiya wants so badly to rise in Ton’s esteem that he has no issue screwing over his female coworker.

Early in the show, Retsuko is tempted to leave when she gets an offer to set up a shop with her impulsive friend Puko, a cat that ignores the concepts of

responsible adult behavior that trap Retsuko, and yet always lands on her feet. Unfortunately, the concept of freedom that Puko represents comes with huge quantities of uncertainty, and in the first short story arc Retsuko comes to grasp that Puko's approach to adult life is not her own, a theme that continues throughout the show.

Retsuko is not without friends at work. Fenneko is a fellow woman at the office that worries about Retsuko. Fenneko avoids being overworked the same way Retsuko does because she broadcasts a "don't mess with me" attitude. By simply not seeking the pats on the head, Fenneko will never be thought of as the "good girl," and therefore less is demanded of her. At the same time, Fenneko's choice not to curry favor with her bosses may make her unlikely to ever rise in the corporate structure. Fenneko generally seems to be at peace with this, especially contrasted with Retsuko, who she sees working herself ragged. Fenneko tries to tell Retsuko she is going to burn out if she keeps trying to please everyone, but this just leads to Retsuko feeling judged.

Then there's Haida, a male hyena that frequently spends breaks with Fenneko and Retsuko. Haida obviously cares for Retsuko, and enjoys it when she shows her frustrations and fights back a little. He tries to encourage that side of Retsuko, but doesn't always know how to help Retsuko escape her "good girl" trap, and sometimes his comments, like Fenneko's, make Retsuko feel more trapped. Haida, like Retsuko herself, has to both become more comfortable with expressing himself, as well as realize that he doesn't always understand what she is going through, if he's ever going to change his relationship with Retsuko.

Occasionally, Retsuko comes across two women at the company that have an air of success and grace: Washimi the secretary bird (this describes both her species and her position) and Gori the gorilla in marketing. They strut through the halls in their smart dresses and high heels, shining. But as soon as we see these characters turn a corner, they reveal that they are not magical; they have weaknesses and can even be quite silly. They just don't let that show at the office.

The real turn in the show begins when Retsuko, still clueless as to how to make her life less stressful, ponders a new escape: marriage to a man wealthy enough to let her quit her job. The one-income household is still considered ideal in Japan, though younger generations are questioning it (Haida specifically states he

thinks both partners working sets a good example). Retsuko turns to yoga to try to improve her body, thinking that will be necessary to attract a man, and lucks out when the insightful instructor puts her in a class with Washimi and Gori.

Retsuko still keeps her troubles to herself, denying invitations to go out with Gori and Washimi in favor of her death metal karaoke sanctuary. Haida mourns that he doesn't know how to help Retsuko, and Fenneko sleuths out what Retsuko is doing for herself because "Retsuko wasn't going to tell us." The expectations put on Retsuko to be a "good girl" have penetrated so far that Retsuko cannot bring herself to show anyone who she really is. Finally, trapped by Gori and Washimi, she lets out her great death metal cry, and the door opens.

One of the things I truly appreciate about this show is that the big change doesn't actually change Retsuko's circumstances. She still doesn't know how to improve her work situation, and the tactics she attempts through the rest of the show have mixed results. She's still clueless about who she would like as a romantic partner, and her adventures in that realm also demonstrate how much work she still has to do in determining how she will respond to the way she is treated. The big difference is that in the second half of the show, she is talking to people. She continues to meet with Washimi and Gori and seeks their advice. She opens up more with Fenneko and Haida and shows more of herself.

In addition, Retsuko gives Tsunoda another chance, much to my personal delight. When we first meet Tsunoda, a bouncy young gazelle woman, it is through the eyes of Fenneko. Fenneko describes how carefully Tsunoda crafts her social media presence, alternating between selfies, pictures of chichi food, and the "accidental" thigh pic she posts on a regular schedule. The implication is clear: Tsunoda is fake, carefully curating a cute and pleasing image to influence men. At work, Fenneko sucks up to Ton as badly as Komiya, complimenting his golf swing and telling him how great he is. Fenneko can't stand Tsunoda, and Retsuko agrees she isn't real fond of her, either. The show could easily have left her as a minor annoying character, one of the many that makes Retsuko's work life a little more stressful.

Instead, after talking with Washimi and Gori, Retsuko starts to watch Tsunoda work. While Tsunoda's behavior around Ton still comes off as somewhat shameless, it's also effective. When Retsuko asks her about her tactics, Tsunoda is

blunt: her persona is a performance, and one she has crafted because it makes her life easier. Tsunoda is taking advantage of idiots like Ton who are happy to be told how great they are. Tsunoda is also aware of how she is perceived, and while she knows her act can upset others around her, especially women like Fenneko, at this point it's what she has found to be the most effective way to deal.

The magic of *Aggretsuko*, and the reason I feel that it is the show of our times, is that it presents complicated, real life problems without easy solutions, and that it embraces many different women who choose how to deal with those problems in different ways. The show is not judgmental towards the oppressed, it shows abusers for what they are, and while we may as the audience want Retsuko and her friends to become more capable and powerful, we understand why the struggle is hard, and the road long. And there's nothing wrong with that, especially since Season 2 has already been announced.





Aniblog Feature – Crow’s World of Anime!

www.crowsworldofanime.com

Does anime criticism always have to be, well, so critical? As a blogger, anime fan, frequent convention panelist, and yes, a self-described critic, that’s a question that I often ask myself. I think that writing about anime or any other medium is often a balance of positive and negative opinions, and how we choose to strike that balance is part of how we define ourselves, our presence, and our voice. I find that, while it’s tempting to spend a lot of time picking apart anime that I don’t like (and I certainly do that when I feel like I can justify it or I have something I think is important to say), it’s often much more fulfilling to speak highly of the anime I *do* like. When something is wonderful the impulse to share it with others is sometimes one of the best ways to form connections with like-minded fans.

My Twitter account primarily exists for the purpose of following and interacting with other folks in the anime fandom and related areas, and as it usually happens when I start talking about anime on my account, other bloggers tend to find those tweets (and vice-versa). As someone who doesn’t always feel confident about her own writing, when someone chooses to follow me online and listen to the things that I talk about, it fills me with the warm fuzzies. Some months ago I was followed by “The Crow” of “Crow’s World of Anime!” a blog like many others dedicated to writing about anime, both current and past.

There were two things that struck me as interesting and unique about Crow’s blog, though; the first was that he seemed dedicated to not only posting his own thoughts on a regular schedule, but also featuring and uplifting posts from other bloggers on a weekly basis as well. Crow maintains a list of other anime blogs that he checks on a weekly basis (you can find that list here: <https://www.crowsworldofanime.com/posts/what-sites-do-i-read-for-other-posts-to-crow-about/>) and on Sundays he links to some of those blog posts in a feature called “Other Posts to Crow About” (find the archives here: <https://www.crowsworldofanime.com/posts/category/other-posts-to-crow-about/>). This strikes me as a lot of work, but also speaks to a commitment to interacting with, raising-up, and providing kudos to the great writing coming out of the anime community on a regular basis. I’ve even found some other great

blogs to follow from reading this feature, which speaks directly to the value of this community service.

Beyond that, though (and the broader reason why I wanted to provide him with a featured spot in this issue), Crow has a stated commitment to positive discourse in the anime fandom community. In his essay, “Using an Anime Site to Take a Stand,” (found here: <https://www.crowsworldofanime.com/posts/using-an-anime-site-to-take-a-stand/>) Crow outlines some personal experiences (some of them unfortunately toxic) that contributed to his current outlook and approach to anime fandom. What struck a chord with me was Crow’s description of the allure of toxicity – the “high” that comes from letting loose and tearing apart something we dislike. While I definitely feel that it’s my duty to criticize aspects of anime that fall flat (especially things like poor representation, sexism, racism, or other things which genuinely harm others and could have been prevented with a little bit more sensitivity or knowledge), I also know how easy it can be to adopt an attitude that fans of certain series “must be awful” or “stupid” (guilty as charged, and I was rightly taken to task for that many years ago). Differing opinions aside, ad-hominem attacks (whether in a review or in a comments section) rarely accomplish anything but the spread of toxic fandom attitudes, and Crow does a good job of outlining the harm of adopting cynicism and confrontation as a writing philosophy.

While Crow and I don’t have a lot of overlap in the series that we write about (though we both loved *Planet With* – if the unusual blend of psychological mecha anime with a positive outlook on humanity sounds appealing you owe it to yourself to check it out right away!), we do seem to agree that the anime fandom is one worth nurturing through contributing positivity, thoughtfulness, and reasoned discourse. While there will always be fans who feel compelled to express their own fandom through the denigration of others’, when writers like Crow make a concerted effort to take a stand for civility and kindness, it only helps to improve the fandom that we share and love.

Just For Fun – Cozy anime for a Cold Day Inside

Jessi Silver

Though the Winter holidays are still a ways off, the snow has already been falling here in Minnesota. It makes me want to curl up under a blanket with a cup of tea and some good anime to watch. Obviously as the icy wind whistles outside, not just any anime will do. This time of the year calls for the type of anime that prompts warm feelings in viewers. Here are a few of my favorite anime that I like to watch when I need that “cozy” feeling.

Natsume's Book of Friends

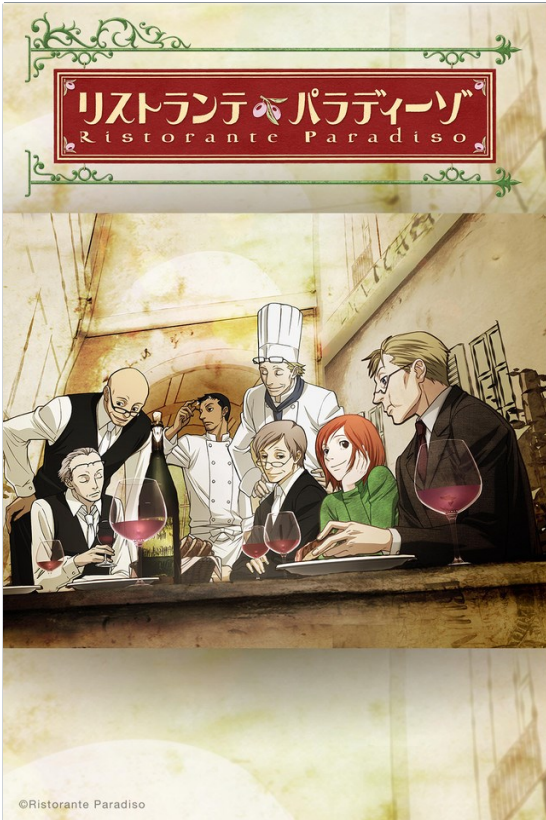


Takashi Natsume can see yokai, a kind of Japanese spirit, a skill that has always caused him strife and driven others from him. When he's adopted by some of his distant relatives, he begins to learn more about his grandmother, who also had this supernatural ability. Reiko Natsume kept a “book of friends,” a list of names of the yokai she defeated. Takashi, with the help of the cat-shaped spirit Nyanko-Sensei, returns the names of the yokai to their owners and begins to learn more about his family's history.

While this series features its share of emotional intensity and moderate peril for its protagonist, it's also an anime that, above all else, shows that Takashi's kindness and warmth are often preferable to the weaponized exorcisms that his antagonists use to battle yokai. This is also a series that, like many Japanese anime, makes atmospheric use of the passing seasons. The sultry heat of Summer, the colors of autumn, and yes, even the softly-falling snow of winter, feature heavily as supplementary mood imagery throughout the show's six seasons (and likely its upcoming feature film as well).

The entire series is available to watch at [Crunchyroll.com](https://www.crunchyroll.com). The first four seasons were released on DVD by NISA

Ristorante Paradiso



20-something Nicoletta travels to Rome to confront her absentee mother, who left her behind to marry a man. When she arrives that the restaurant her mother co-owns with her husband, Nicoletta is taken by surprise; the restaurant is staffed almost entirely by attractive middle-aged men in glasses, which is apparently one of her mother's peculiar preferences. Nicoletta's angry confrontation quickly morphs into a cooking internship opportunity, and eventually she finds herself falling for Claudio, one of the waiters and recently-divorced.

May-December romance aside (though, even as someone uninterested in those sorts of things in real-life I was thoroughly convinced by this exam-

ple), this series based on the manga of the same title by quirky author Natsume Ono, is the definition of atmospheric warmth. Not only does delicious food and wine feature heavily in the show, it also portrays gentle and humanizing character relationships with good humor and a palatable dose of drama. If you're in the mood for a romantic dinner over flickering candlelight (or just a quiet night in alone), this is the perfect helping of wit, warmth, and grown-up sensibilities.

The series is available to watch at Crunchyroll.com and for DVD purchase from publisher Lucky Penny.

Flying Witch



Makoto Kowata is a 15-year-old recently-graduated witch who moves to Aomori Prefecture to live with her relatives and finish her high school education. While there she hones her magical skills and interacts with the many magical aspects of her adoptive home. She even inspires her young cousin, Chinatsu, to become interested in natural magic and following in Makoto's magical footsteps.

Fans may complain about anime series that "don't have a plot," but those are rarely as inherently charming as *Flying Witch*. While the show is decidedly light on story elements or conflict, it has a singular handle on its portrayal of natural magic and the inherent humor of a world in

which magical spells are possible (and even useful!... sometimes). Aomori's semi-rural setting is almost a character itself, providing a backdrop that feels as though it could be populated by friendly spirits and magical creatures alike. And little Chinatsu steals every scene with her child-like reactions and sense of humor.

The series is available streaming on Crunchyroll.com and Hidive.com. The series is available on disc from publisher Sentai Filmworks.

Girls' Last Tour



Years of war have brought society to its twilight years. To escape the deadly conflict, Chito and Yuuri, along with their all-terrain vehicle, are sent away to wander the desolate world and find some way to survive. They travel through the broken-down landscape in search of fuel and food, and through doing so rediscover the wonder of some of the things humanity has since lost.

It may seem odd to label a post-apocalyptic tale as “comforting,” but *Girls' Last Tour* is an anime series of many odd contradictions. While the atmosphere of the series is at times melancholy, it is also defined by its main characters' adventures in rediscovery and their behavior, which mirrors that of almost any other teenage friends – past, present, or future. There is also an element of quiet that permeates the series; without other characters around the echoes of the characters' voices between vacant buildings and the crunch of their boots in the constantly-falling snow are striking. This may not be comfort food for everyone, but for those who can handle some bitter with their sweet I recommend it highly.

The series is available streaming on Amazon Prime and Hidive.com. The series will be available on disc from publisher Sentai Filmworks in January 2019.

Laid-Back Camp



Nadeshiko has little experience out in the wilderness, so when a trip to see Mount Fuji takes a turn due to weather, she doesn't know what to do. Luckily she meets Rin, a girl her age who's an experienced camper. Though Rin is a bit of a loner, she and Nadeshiko strike up a friendship that inspires Nadeshiko to join their school's outdoors club. While both girls enjoy camping in their own way, through their relationship they both learn to appreciate the experience of roughing-it outdoors.

Laid-Back Camp is the quintessential relaxation anime; set against the backdrop of Mount Fuji and the colorful autumn leaves, the characters do nothing more but enjoy each-other's company,

learn about camping gear, cook great food over a campfire, and sleep in tents and sleeping bags. There's really not that much too it, but what's there is chicken soup for the soul aimed with pin-point accuracy. As someone who's apprehensive about going outside most of the time, this series' portrayal of cool-weather camping even started to wear down my resolve.

The entire series is available to watch at [Crunchyroll.com](https://www.crunchyroll.com).

As fans with different tastes, what's comforting for one of us might lack that special warmth for someone else. I encourage you to think about the anime that brings you joy and to enjoy it as you watch the snowflakes accumulate (or, if you live in a warmer climate, as you get the opportunity for a nice quiet day to yourself).

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Aniblog Feature: Crow's World of Anime - Jessi Silver

Just for Fun: Cozy Anime - Jessi Silver