

A Moment of Togetherness

Written by George Goodwin

Since I'm graduating, it seems like I have saved the best for last: Maison Ikkoku. Anybody who knows anything about anime should be required to watch this series. It might run for 96 episodes, but I can only say that I wish that it ran for much, much longer.

To begin with, Maison Ikkoku is a romantic comedy by Rumiko Takahashi (creator of Urusei Yatsura, Ranma 1/2, Rumikworld, Mermaid's Forest, Mermaid's Scar and a host of other titles). This in itself should be enough to convince most people that it's worth their time to simply devote their lives to Maison Ikkoku, but if that isn't enough, then I might make the suggestion that it's also her BEST piece of anime. Unlike any of her other creations, she took Maison Ikkoku and developed it into something touching, while at the same time keeping it on a level of something quite realistic and tangible. Like Ranma, Maison Ikkoku is occasionally very funny, and its characters worth are worth taking the extra second to examine. Unlike Ranma, Maison Ikkoku doesn't have superpowers, flying machines or characters who can hit each other or a punching bag at nearly the speed of light. Instead Maison Ikkoku offers the touching story of a romance between the ronin (a student who was not successful getting into college the first time around,) Yuhsaku Godai, who eventually gets into college, and the manager of his apartment, Kyoko Otonashi.

However, the plot isn't quite as simple as all of that. While Godai loves Kyoko-San with all of his heart throughout the series, he comes to realize that there is more to loving a woman than simply chasing her. Enter the plot complications that help him reach his epiphony: the other tenants of his apartment, Yotsuya-San, Ichinose-San and Akemi-San. Ordinarily one would be able to deal with obnoxious neighbors by telling them that they should not be so loud or telling them to be a little more quiet, but Godai's are more than simply annoying neighbors. Their existence is to annoy, tease and make fun of him. Not only do they live for it, it always amuses them to see something else go wrong in Godai's life.

Yotsuya himself is a mysterious man known only as a pervert. He often breaks into Godai's room in order to watch Akemi-San in her underwear, though he could easily see her in the same manner simply by wandering the halls. In addition, he often steals Godai's food when Godai is absolutely dying of hunger. Though I can't imagine how he

knows when Godai is the hungriest, it might have something to do with his job--to annoy Godai. In addition, when he is speaking to Godai late at night, he often attempts to get him drunk and tempts him with more offers of alcohol. Needless to say, Yotsuya would rather have Godai around as a play toy than see him graduate from college. I would think that his profession is making wine, but then again, if it were, he would be drinking as much as he would be making.

Akemi is something of an enigma to both Godai and me. She, too, enjoys drinking into the wee hours of the morning with Yotsuya-San while in Godai's room. It seems, though, that she also thinks of Godai as something of a little brother, or at least a friend. At her best, Akemi can drink any man under the table. At her worst, she is a conniver who has the hots for Mitaka-Shun, Godai's main rival for Kyoko, and is unafraid to tell him so to his face. On the average, she's either making Godai's life or trying to help him out in her own enigmatic fashion.

Ichinose-San completes the terrible trio of residents within the apartment. She herself is a mother of one Kentaro-Kun and wife to a husband who barely manages to make himself seen. In many ways, she is the mother that each of us dreads: she is constantly embarrassing Kentaro with her drunken songs and dances while teasing Godai about how he's never going to make it as a man. As the plot develops a bit more, we discover her to also be the friend that each of us really needs. She becomes something of a confidante for Kyoko. However, at the same time, she manages to thwart Godai's every attempt to woo Kyoko.

Godai's main rival, Mitaka Shun, is a wealthy, crafty man with strange, gleaming teeth (quite possibly the closest thing in the entire series to a magical power). He is also a gentleman who was educated at an Ivy League University (which one is never explicitly stated) and an athlete as well. Since he is Kyoko's tennis coach, he associates with her on a regular basis and makes for Godai's ultimate rival. Not that any of this matters to Godai, of course...

Godai's best friend, Sakamoto, is a troublesome fellow who manages to get Godai into more than one sticky situation, but also manages to help him out when he needs it the most. Godai is always doing things with Sakamoto because he knows that while Sakamoto might not be the most socially conscious fellow, at least he is an understanding friend. Sakamoto is possibly also one of the most just characters, though he doesn't always act like it. He is, to be sure, annoying at times, but when

things simply don't go the right way for Godai (such as when he was kicked out of the apartment), then that is when Sakamoto is at his best.

Nanao Kozue, Godai's girlfriend of sorts, adds spice to the plot. You see, Godai & Kozue worked together at a part-time job, and during that time, she fell for Godai. She ends up wanting to see him badly enough that she asked him out on a date to which he couldn't simply say, "No." Kyoko saw this, of course, and couldn't help but wonder at Godai's dedication for her. Kozue also helps Godai in a number of ways by helping him to grow a little and see that a woman is not simply an object to be grabbed or taken. In many ways Kozue is the element that helps Godai become a better gentleman.

To make matters worse, Godai has another fanatically loyal follower, Ibuki Yagami, who wants him more than anything else in the world. Yagami is a 16 year old who meets Godai when he is student teaching at her school and who at first does not realize that Godai is the man of her dreams. However, she realizes it quickly enough and begins pursuing him in every which way. She sleeps over at his apartment, she cooks for him, cleans for him and protests against her father when he doesn't hire Godai for a job. Yagami is also the driving force for Kyoko to return his advances--the first possible threat and real rival for Godai's affections.

To summarize Godai and Kyoko in a mere paragraph would be demeaning and I won't do it! (Though I'll try). Godai, as I mentioned before, is a struggling student who barely managed to make it into college and has fallen madly in love with the Kanrinrin-San (manager) of his apartment, Ikkoku-Kan. It was love at first sight for Godai, but then it was also disappointment at first try. Try a second or third time and what happens? Well, it turns out that Kyoko is a widow whose husband had died fewer than six months before she moved into Ikkoku-Kan, and she has absolutely no desire to remarry. To make matters worse for poor Godai, he had the rivalry of a rich tennis coach who was already considerably more mature than him for the affections of a woman whom it would seem would never return his affections. In addition to trying to prove his maturity to Kyoko, Godai is constantly being shown up by the loon squad (i.e. the terrible trio) that lives in the rooms right next to his. At times it seems that Godai is being constantly picked on by the loon squad and that there will be no end to his suffering, but at other times he manages to find help from his friend Sakamoto, who shows him that perhaps there is happiness in his future after all.

In a way, Maison Ikkoku is the most frustrating series in anime that can ever be watched, but it is also the most touching and delightful series that I can ever

recommend to anyone. I admire Rumiko Takahashi and hope someday to meet her because she is probably the closest thing to an idol that I will ever admit to wanting to see.

Maison Ikkoku has shown me much more than simply the brilliance of a single writer, however. I am not only singularly amazed by Takahashi's incredible development of plot, but by her animation as well. As the series manages to move forward, it also begins to change. Each of the characters grows bit by bit and the way the characters themselves are subtly changed--by episode 91 it is evident that the characters have matured along with the animators who drew them. In addition, I am also amazed by the other details that go into Takahashi-San's work--the leaves that drop from the trees, the wind that blows through the cherry blossoms, the shots through the fences of Kyoko playing tennis. All in all I would say that this series comes the most highly recommended of any series that I can possibly show to any of you, but you will have to watch it for yourselves to see what I mean.

Maison Ikkoku is available from Viz subtitled or dubbed and will most likely be finished sometime around the year 2008, so if you want to see the whole series before your kids do, go demand that Trish Ledoux spend all of her time translating Maison Ikkoku and nothing else.

If you wish to sign up on the Maison Ikkoku mailing list, then send a message to: tarigan@sfu.ca

The mailing list itself is at Maison Ikkoku (link has been lost to time) and the people there should surprise you with their storehouses of information about the series.

“Just promise me one thing. Please... Even if just for one day, live longer than I do. I don't think I can live alone anymore.”

-Kyoko to Yuhsaku, Maison Ikkoku