

Am I Finally Too Old for Anime?

Written by Unknown

So last night I watched the first four episodes of Full Metal Alchemist, which by all rights I should have enjoyed. It was right up my alley: sensible magic, political intrigue, lots of hot shounen-styled action, solid animation... And yet, it just felt contrived.

The first two episodes basically introduces the two main characters by setting a juxtaposition: a brief intro of the Al and Ed, young and innocent at the age of 10 and 11, and then all mature and powerful at the age of 14 and 15. How did they get there? Let's have a convenient retelling from the point of view of Al, why don't we? Oh, the mystery! And to show how cool Ed is with his alchemy powers, *of course* he's not going to reveal their full extent until the end of the 2nd episode, when really, the problems could have been resolved much faster. But no, that is justified with "We want to save this kid spiritually". Instead we're treated to much eye-candy and swishy goodness. Oh. so. hawt. Yes, Ed's eyes are that uber-hawt type of golden (c.f. Battousai of Rurouni Kenshin), a perfect contrast to his youthful looks. And the whole "argh don't call me short" thing? Cute, but a waste of time. Such an act. Already we have the generic cute girl who represents innocence and what they once was and what they will work to save. And there may even be a tinge of Horatio Syndrome. And look! Mysterious characters that will undoubtedly pose a later challenge! How cute, they're named after the Seven Deadly Sins. Wait, that even conveniently tells us how many there will be in the future, so that we can count as each of them appear. And look a religious/political message at the conclusion of the second episode! How quaint. Seriously, I've seen it done better (c.f. Kino's Journey)

The next two episodes are like, the beginning of the retelling of What Happened to Make Us Jaded 15-year-olds. Hmm, Al keeps repeating this line about equivalent exchange and "that's what we believed was true", could it possibly have any bearing to revelations later on in the anime? Oh gosh, I wonder if human sacrifice and revival can possibly be a theme. And I wonder what could possibly be the answer to "what is the equivalent exchange to human resurrection?". And look, Al is a... ghost in a shell! ::gasp:: Wonder if our favorite theme of body/technology is going to appear. Also, all this stuff about a distant war, ambiguous sides, idyllic countryside (a very German setting, in fact), and promise of loads of political intrigue... hmm... I wonder if someone hasn't gotten over WWII yet. Oh, and check out their resolve at the young tender age of 12! They're already so capable and strong. Ender's Syndrome, anyone?

The thing is, this is a very solid anime. It's well constructed, it pays attention to detail (the plot setup in episode two was very nicely hinted at onscreen), and no doubt it is chock full of delicious and fun political intrigue, moral dilemmas, and hawt action of both the kung-fu kind and the magic kind. Undoubtedly a lot of fun. Also surprising and comforting for me was that when I went online to find episode summaries (I'm a spoiler whore, reading spoilers actually makes me want to watch a series more), I found a wonderful website that has detailed summaries and information, which is a rarity these days. (that's a separate rant). So... hot action, solid plot, even a sane fanbase. What's not to love? Why do I feel disappointed?

I think the reason in this case is that this anime is too well made. Its target audience is painfully obvious, and unfortunately I've slipped out of their range. I want anime that is more than solid entertainment, I want it to be pleasantly surprised. Am I too old for "normal" anime now? Has 4 years at the U of C inoculated me to simple enjoyment of shininess?

Honey and Clover was surprising because it was shoujo and yet something more. Now and Then, Here and There was surprising because it started off as a "boy + pendant girl" anime and did cool things with it. What happened to anime that just tried to tell a good story with solid characters and none of the in-your-face Themes?

And yet, despite all my whining, I find myself putting the next disc of Full Metal Alchemist on my Netflix queue. Escapism isn't all bad. :D