

A Song of Water, Earth, Fire and Air

FATIMA JAHAN ENA

It's been 15 years since *Avatar: The Last Airbender* made its debut on Nickelodeon. Co-created by Bryan Konietzko and Michael Dante DiMartino, *Avatar* has been critically acclaimed and has also amassed incredibly positive reviews from audiences of all ages.

One of the most distinctive achievements of *Avatar* would be its extraordinary character development. Considering the fact that its target audience was children, the show managed to deliver some of the most memorable character arcs in its short run of three seasons.

Aang, the protagonist, starts out as a 12-year-old boy burdened with the literal weight of the world on his shoulders. By the end of the series, he displays incredible levels of kindness, maturity, personal growth, and awesome power. Existing on the other side of the coin, the greatest arc definitely belongs to the once-banished prince of the Fire Nation, Zuko. Zuko had been abused and banished from his homeland by his father, the ruthless Fire Lord Ozai, and was sent on a seemingly futile quest to capture the Avatar, who had disappeared a hundred years ago. With the backdrop of a raging war, complicated relationships, and misguided adventures, Zuko sheds his past self as an angry prince desperate to please his wicked father and ultimately embraces a path

of kindness and self-respect. The wonderful character development of the show contributes to its uniqueness and sets it apart from its contemporaries.

Another distinguishing aspect of *Avatar* would be its way of handling complicated issues that we face in real life. From the very first episode, the brute imperialism of the Fire Nation is evident and looming. Apart from that, the progression of the story also tackles the loss of loved, the phasing out of misogynistic views, overcoming physical disabilities and prejudice, and familial abuse. It's still incredibly refreshing to see a show talk about these complex issues in a way that exercises sensitivity and respect.

Along similar lines, an underappreciated facet of the show would be its implementation of different real cultures into the narrative. The most prominent example of this would be the bending as each nation has a distinct style based on real forms of Chinese martial arts. Apart from this, the world-building of the show expertly navigated taking inspiration from real cultures without resorting to appropriation.

These are just a few examples as to why *Avatar* is so universally loved. There is no doubt that the core essence of the show will still retain its timelessness, so why not revisit it in celebration?



ILLUSTRATION: JUNAID IQBAL ISHMAM

The One Where We Don't Know What to Expect

IZMA ANWAR

As classic TV series *Friends* celebrates its 25th anniversary, the creators with its six megastars have reunited, confirming an unscripted one-off special that will be released with the official launch of the new streaming service HBO Max in May 2020.

The stars posted a goofy cast picture on Instagram with caption "It's happening...", leaving fans clinging onto the edge of their seats. After decades, *Friends* deals with issues that are relevant and relatable even today. Facing various circumstances, meeting new people, getting in and out of relationships, encountering obstacles and personal growth are all aspects of our lives that are satirised through the six characters, making them easy to fall in love with. However, having rewatched it in recent years, certain plots, situations and characters in the show come off as highly problematic, with their underlying tones of sexism, prejudice and a lack of diversity.

Although there is ambiguity surrounding the type of show we are going to get, here are a few things worth anticipating, and a few worth moving past.

THINGS TO LOOK FORWARD TO

Our favourite characters: The raw humour and chemistry between cast members



is probably what we are most excited about, the familiarity, like old times, a real treat.

Backstories: We hope to see well-established, strong backstories for each character in the time between where the show left off and where it would start

again, supporting a smooth transition and fully developed storylines.

Unexpected plot-twists: Fans are speculating stirring plot-twists such as Joey having an unexpected romantic partner, Rachel choosing to pursue her dreams instead of Ross, and an Ugly Naked Guy

face reveal, to name a few.

THINGS TO LEAVE BEHIND

Fragile masculinity and sexism: All ten seasons of the show were laced with sexist jokes, continuous objectification of women and instances of fragile masculinity. Ross's disapproval of the male nanny, the guys' poking fun at Joey's new purse are some examples that demonstrate the rigid, critique-worthy standards of "manliness".

Lack of diversity and inclusivity: In terms of casting, *Friends* severely lacked diversity. The only people of colour who appeared on the show were Julie and Charlie, two of Ross' love interests. Furthermore, many were displeased by the poor treatment of Susan and Carol, and Chandler's father, the former's relationship often mocked while the character of Charles Bing was vastly misrepresented.

Controversial content: Monica's relationship with Richard, Ross dating a student and a flawed understanding of both consent and cultural appropriation were all controversial matters that were disturbing and uncomfortable for viewers.

Izma Anwar has a talent for spraining her ankles. Send prayers at izmaanwar@gmail.com