



ANIME REVIEW

AN ANIME TO GET TANGLED IN

FATIMAH AKHTAR

Only on rare occasions have I ever gone into an anime without knowing a single thing about the story. Going into *Assassination Classroom* was one of those rare occasions.

From the opening scene the show puts forward its unique premise. There was a classroom where as soon as a yellow, round-headed octopus-like-monster enters – the apparent teacher – the students began to shoot at him. And I was hooked.

Assassination Classroom is a comedy at its heart with one of the strangest premises I've seen in anime (and I watch plenty of anime). The story is about the classroom 3-E, which happens to be a classroom full of assassins. But not in a cool way where they're trained to be assassins, but even better: they're just everyday children who are given the responsibility of killing a monster who destroyed half the moon and is planning to destroy the earth – the monster who also happens to be their teacher. And a great teacher at that.

The anime was adapted from the manga of the same name, and the artwork remains true to its roots. The animation is also smooth and executed beautifully; props to Studio Lerche. The soundtrack is great in capitalising both the light and heavy moments. Although it's the former that reigns in the anime.

If there was any flaw to pick on it's that the ensemble cast doesn't always work. Making all the students in the classroom part of the main plot results in a lot of characters, some with far greater potential than others. Luckily, it doesn't stick out as the protagonist of the show. The teacher himself is the strength of the series along with its core. The teacher named Koro-Sensei, despite being the possible destroyer of the planet itself looks out for his students and trains them to become better assassins, students and people. The assassin training is never really taken seriously, but rather the tropes are more often deconstructed with each episode. The anime goes on like a slice of life without feeling like there's any real immediate danger that the protagonists have to worry about.

The show has a lot of heart to it along with its humour. It's pretty heavily character-focused with one of the students of the class often taking central role in episodes, and having both their characters and back story explored. Dynamics between characters are also explored, and new characters that come into the show add to its charm.

Ultimately the show sucks you into its classroom with its own set of lessons to teach its viewers most of which are drenched in humour, mind you. *Assassination Classroom* with its ongoing second season has a lot of potential and expectation to live up to, and here's to hoping that it will.

THE NIGHT MANAGER

Great style, little substance

MITHI CHOWDHURY

When I saw the trailers of *The Night Manager*, I was beyond thrilled. For starters, Hugh Laurie and Tom Hiddleston make the most uniquely scintillating duo that my mind could conjure.

Over the next 6 hours, the miniseries (based on John le Carré's 1993 novel) unfolded, revealing enough plot twists to be mistaken for a James Bond movie. Jonathan Pine (Tom Hiddleston) plays a hotel night manager and a fledgling spy who is on a mission to bring down an illegal arms dealer, Richard Roper (Hugh Laurie). He infiltrates Roper's inner circle - under the command of British Intelligence Operative, Angela Burr (Olivia Colman) - and also falls in love with his fiancé Jed (Elizabeth Debicki).

The cast dazzles bright. Hiddleston is the classic debonair heartthrob whereas Laurie is dark and despicable. The set, the fashion, the cinematography - everything is exquisite. Yes, *The Night Manager* has all the makings of an unforgettable TV series. Yet, by the end of the final episode, I was left feeling unsatisfied. I realised that it was because the series never delivered the sheer brilliance it promised.

Hiddleston is believable as the broken-hearted man seeking retribution for a lost lover. However, we don't get any insight into who he really is or how he came to be. There is rarely an origin story, and when there is, it isn't believable. Roper is never more than a seemingly menacing monster and Jed remains a damsel in distress throughout. Colman's Angela Burr has tenacity. Her character comes closest to offering the audience an individual who is more than just a vision of good fighting evil.

While the plot isn't bad, it rarely confuses you. It's complicated enough to warrant your attention, but an espionage story where it's possible to judge all the characters at face value is one that sacrifices its most effective tool that is duplicity. Since I haven't read the book, I don't know whether the plot stays completely true to the narrative. But so far, I can't figure out how such an impressive cast delivered such stagnant performances. On the positive side, director Susanne Bier did an impressive job bringing the novel to life. Cinematographer Michael Snyman created the perfect concoction of dark glamour and grandeur visually, which I would say brought the show on the same league as *Houses of Cards*. Victor Reyes created a score that is haunting.

While *The Night Manager* is definitely beautiful and entertaining, it doesn't blow you away. Maybe the problem lies in what we consider to be "good" television with series such as *House of Cards*, *Breaking Bad* and *Narcos* having raised the bar too high. In this era, visual eye candy is just not going to cut it.

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