



DID YOU KNOW?

How STARLINK works

Most satellite internet services rely on a single geostationary satellite orbiting about 35,786 kilometers above Earth. This results in high latency – the time it takes for data to travel between the user and the satellite – often exceeding 600 milliseconds. Such delays make real-time activities like streaming, video calls, and online gaming difficult.

Starlink takes a different approach. It operates a constellation of thousands of satellites in low Earth orbit, around 550 kilometers above the surface. This much shorter distance dramatically reduces latency to around 20 milliseconds, enabling smoother, high-speed internet for demanding applications.

Starlink users connect via a flat, phased array antenna (about the



PHOTO: AFP

size of a pizza box) that tracks and communicates with the moving satellites overhead. These antennas send and receive data via radio signals, which are relayed through the satellite network and back to Earth, providing global coverage and making Starlink an effective solution for rural and remote areas.

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The Apothecary Diaries is the anime to put cookie-cutter female protagonists to sleep

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Barring a few exceptions like *Kara no Kyoukai*, *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure Part 6: Stone Ocean*, and *Kill la Kill*, action-packed anime with strong (or even decent) female leads are few and far between. More often than not, the ones we do get are flattened into tired tropes like the damsel in distress or the femme fatale, with little to no nuance or depth to speak of.

But Studio OLM and Toho's recent sensation, *The Apothecary Diaries*, wastes no time in blowing that trend out of the water with Maomao, the sassy, no-nonsense medicine expert who's just as brilliant as she is endearingly weird.

Set in a fictional imperial court inspired by ancient China, *The Apothecary Diaries* is a case-of-the-week mystery show that follows the life of Maomao, a young and blunt commoner trained in herbal medicine and obsessed with poisons. After being kidnapped and sold off as a maid in the lowest echelons of the grand palace – where much of the anime takes place – Maomao comes face-to-face with profound scheming, petty disputes, and power-plays among the court ladies, concubines, and high-ranking officials. Whether it's uncovering a slow-acting poison, diagnosing illnesses no one else can, or even deciphering political schemes, Maomao's carefully honed flair for deduction and scientific know-how keeps pulling her into a vast web of conundrums.

What makes this setup particularly fun is that Maomao doesn't actually want to be in the spotlight. She'd much rather stay in the background, quietly geeking out over poisons and rare diseases, but her sharp mind constantly gets her noticed despite her best efforts to steer clear of these affairs. In essence, however, that's exactly what makes her so lovable. Despite her complete lack of any semblance of social grace, Maomao competently tackles the challenges in a way that makes every mystery feel engaging rather than contrived.

Through these chance encounters and a string of



inopportune incidents, Maomao climbs up the ranks ever-so-slightly, eventually becoming a food taster and aide to the emperor's concubines. Her new set of responsibilities introduce her to Jinshi, her superior who is considered to be beautiful to the point that people question whether he's even real.

But beneath his polished exterior, he has an amusingly mischievous side. His playfully hostile interactions with Maomao are some of the best moments in the series, as he constantly tries to annoy her with his antics, only for her to ignore him completely or misinterpret his intentions. This also feels like a breath of fresh air as most anime heroines seem to end up falling head over heels for people in Jinshi's capacity.

Beyond the character-writing, all of *The Apothecary Diaries*' mysteries and whodunits about secret affairs and questions of lineage come back around to Maomao in surprising and exciting ways. There's a clear sense of purpose as each storyline weaves into the lives of the main

cast, deepening their character arcs through subtle, often hidden parallels that unfold over the course of the series.

And in terms of production value, the show is gorgeous. The animation is crisp, the intricate palace designs make the setting feel alive, and directorial choices to throw in a mix of chibi characters elevate the comedy aspects substantially. The character designs are also very well done, with Maomao's dishevelled look contrasting perfectly with the refined elegance of the court.

Whether you're into historical dramas or just love a good mystery with a healthy splash of comedy, *The Apothecary Diaries* delivers in spades. And even if you're not a fan of either of those, Maomao's disgusted expressions and bombastic side-eyes alone are worth the watch.

Ayaan immerses himself in dinosaur comics and poorly-written manga. Recommend your least favourite reads at ayaan.shams@gmail.com