Potluck

Overthinking Women in Fantasy
An Intimate Perspective

Women in Anime
A Critque of the Medium.

In the Name of the Moon
A Mult-Article Retrospective of Sailor Moon

Potluck Playlist

Winter Wonderland Playlist

A soundtrack perfect for exploring the new year. As another year passes, we want to celebrate our past as well as our future to party into the New Year!

I love being a girl. The camaraderie that women seem to have with each other, even from such an early age, is something I hope isn't unique to me. The care and support I gave my friends growing up were always reciprocated. We always encouraged each other to follow our dreams, stood up for each other, and comforted one another. Everything that I am is because I had strong women around me who genuinely believed I could do anything I set my mind to.

I wanted to focus this specific issue of the magazine on Women in Media, and as a result, all the articles in the issue are written by all the women on staff, as I wanted to use this as an opportunity to uplift their voices and how the representation of women's media has affected them for better or for worse. While we have made great strides toward equality, the way women are portrayed in media runs parallel to how they are viewed in our everyday lives. While reading these articles, I hope you keep an open mind and think thoughtfully about the points we are trying to get across.

Girls Rule, Boys Drool!
Sam

Letter from the Editor
A Word to Women

Mia Paul
Staff Writer

The It may be more accurate to say that anime treats female characters with neglect rather than outright hatred. If you get past the overall oversexualization of female characters in anime the main argument for anime's "hatred of women" is the staggering lack of character development arcs.

Even for stories with girls as the primary characters, the characters often do not experience development and are acted upon instead of acting. The classic male main character will often if not always be the "blank slate", but there is a lot more nuance and development given to a male best friend or male cast member and their emotions, than the average female cast. On the opposite side of the spectrum these female characters are instead burdened with tropes in anime/manga such as your classic (tsun, kuu, dan, etc) and the majority of the writing will only reflect that type-casted character trope. All personality is derived from that alone (i.e. almost every high school RomCom ever).

Th oversexualization aspect comes into play as a problem when it's not mirrored for the male characters (i.e. one sided-fanservice) and is done in the context of assuming the audience of the work is all males. The only anime/manga that comes to mind here is Shokugeki no Soma where at least when people's clothes magically explode, it happens to everyone, including the male characters. The absolute worst

Reflecting on the roles of Women in Anime

form of sexualization of female characters comes when it is happening to a character who is doing nothing at all to present themselves that way, but has it forced on them by the camera. This reduces the female character, most often unnamed or barely focused on story-wise, to a literal sex-object or fetishizes them to the male-audience.

Even for anime most would consider the best of all time, most would have a hard time naming more than two female characters who have received proper character development outside of being a love-interest or an "evil for the sake of evil" villain.

While this may be the case I will say anime or manga in general isn't the problem. By far it is the highly popular and profitable genre of shounen anime and manga that is guilty of the aforementioned problems. The genre may literally mean "boy" and is geared towards male audiences of 12-18 but girls consume this media too and lacking well-developed female characters gives girls no good character traits or role models to become attached to. Worse than that it gives boys terrible ideas about women, and adds towards shaping their perception of women to see them only as 2D sexualized objects. But it doesn't have to be this way.

For example Kill La Kill is an anime that is easily known for its sexualized main heroine but the argument can be made that the main character is very three-dimensional and the women in that show are all very well developed. We see Ryuko's backstory and motivations, we see her change her

perspective on multiple occasions, reason with adversaries and grow as a person. Some older anime like Ghost in the Shell, Nana, andSkip Beat are all also anime with great and well developed female characters.

When the female character is not the protagonist it is noticeably difficult for the creator to flush them out. Try and wrack your brain for anime in the last decade that has 2-3 well-developed female supporting characters. The only one that comes to mind when doing so is One Piece. One Piece has given great development to its female characters and was smart enough to give each one a whole arc after they were already integrated into the story.

Some of the most terrible offenders of the aforementioned are: Shield Hero, Darling in the Franxx, Bunny Girl Senpai, Goblin Slayer, Fire Force, and nearly every isekai ever. And all of these anime mentioned have been some of the most popular airing anime among the Western fandom in recent

years.

One might also argue that a lack of female writers is to blame for the degradation of the female character. While that may be partially true, there are still female authors who use these tropes as writing and plot crutches in lieu of actual development. Examples of these authors are, Shinobu Ohtaka the author of Magi: The Labyrinth of Magic, Jinsei Kataoka who wrote the manga Deadman Wonderland, and Miki Yoshikawa who wrote Yamada-kun and the Seven witches. A manga where the male MC switches bodies with

whoever he kisses, most often the female secondary protagonist and it is a classic harem romance high school setting.

So in the end what can I really say about anime hating women? No, anime doesn't really hate women. Rather, but it neglect its female characters by having them serve as little more than eye candy. The animation will often accentuate the worst aspects of the male gaze in storytelling and reduce the female characters on-screen time and dialogue to a mere panty-shot. After that why should or why would a viewer care or think of the female character at all beyond "panty-shot girl".

As I said earlier shounen anime and manga seems to be the biggest contributor to degradation of the female character and does seem to struggle with writing fleshed out female characters in general. So, really my final statement has gotta be:"Shounen anime kinda does hate female characters, so I'mma go back to reading my shoujo manga now."

Rain Omega
Staff Writer

Of all of it's merits, Sailor Moon is perhaps most noteworthy for it's depictions of female diversity. It has a nearly all-female cast, with noticeable differences in gender identities, sexual orientations, and general attributes. Each Senshi has their own back story, life goals, personality traits, and other distinctions that make them prominent and unique characters. Every fan has their favorite Senshi, and the fact that Naoko Takeuchi did such a good job representing her female characters makes Sailor Moon one of the greatest girl's stories ever told.

There are ten Sailor Senshi. Add Luna and Diana, the female villains, female side characters, the Sailor Starlights and their princess, Chibi Chibi, the Sailor Quartet, and Neo Queen Serenity, and you've got a cast that's made up almost entirely of women. And each of them are different.

There are characters like Ami, a scientific and technological genius, who directly defies gender stereotypes concerning skills. Then there's Makoto, whose personality is a dichotomy of masculine physicality and feminine interests. Haruka could be considered non-binary or genderfluid, as she displays masculine and feminine traits as they suit her, while Michiru is a cisgendered lesbian.

Each Senshi has their own hopes and dreams, feelings about themselves and each other, interests, strengths, and flaws. And while the art style doesn't do much

Sailor Moon and the Power of Female Diversity

to account for noticeable physical differences among the characters, their personalities are intensely distinguishable.

Even the non-Senshi characters, like the villains and civilians, have their own distinct personalities. Takeuchi did a good job of making sure that a lot of her villains had back stories and reasons behind their evil deeds, and even the ones who didn't have much character development usually had something about them that made them memorable, be it their style of dress, or their powers, etc. Side characters, like Naru or Usagi's mother, remained important because of their love and support of Usagi, even as they were kept in the dark about her true nature.

Overall, Sailor Moon is one of the most loving depictions of women available. Every character is developed with love and respect. When you engage in the series, you know who they are.

Follow Entertainment Stew
for more info

JQ
Staff Writer

Sailor Moon stands out for a lot of different reasons, and one of those reasons is because of its stalwart commitment to all things pink, shiny, and cute. Sailor Moon doesn't own a weapon, nor an outfit, nor a gadget that isn't covered in hearts, stars, sparkles, and precious stones. Out of costume, Usagi decks her hair out with cute clips, wears girlish clothing, and freaks out over things like jewelry, sales and weddings. She's the quintessential girly girl, the kind of heroine who might have a hard time being taken seriously in another series.

But Sailor Moon takes those cute clothes and heart shaped weapons, and she kicks ass with them. So often, girls are taught that things coded "female", i.e hearts, pink, jewelry, makeup, etc., are weak and superficial. They're taught that real heroines eschew their femininity, that doing so makes them more competent, more like their male counterparts. While that can be a completely acceptable route to take a female character down, it doesn't do much to obliterate the 'feminine equals weak' stereotype. But Sailor Moon draws power from femininity. And in harnessing that "girl power", Sailor Moon can unleash the real power needed to decimate her enemies.

I particularly love that Sailor Moon and the Senshi must call upon the power of stereotypically feminine emotions, like love and friendship, in order to gather the

Sailor Moon and Girl Power

strength to defeat said enemies. The Sailor Senshi often express their feelings openly, both in and out of battle, instead of bottling them up. Emotion isn't a hindrance to their crusade. It's a necessity. Their constant belief in themselves and each other are what saves the day every time.

In Sailor Moon's world, femininity is powerful. The Senshi display their femininity in different ways, based on their respective gender identities, but they all wear it proudly into battle and wield it as a weapon.

According to creator Naoko Takeuchi, only women can be Sailor Senshi. That means that an entire world relies on a group of super-powered space princesses with cute outfits to save the day.

They come through every time, and always with a sparkly accessory on hand.
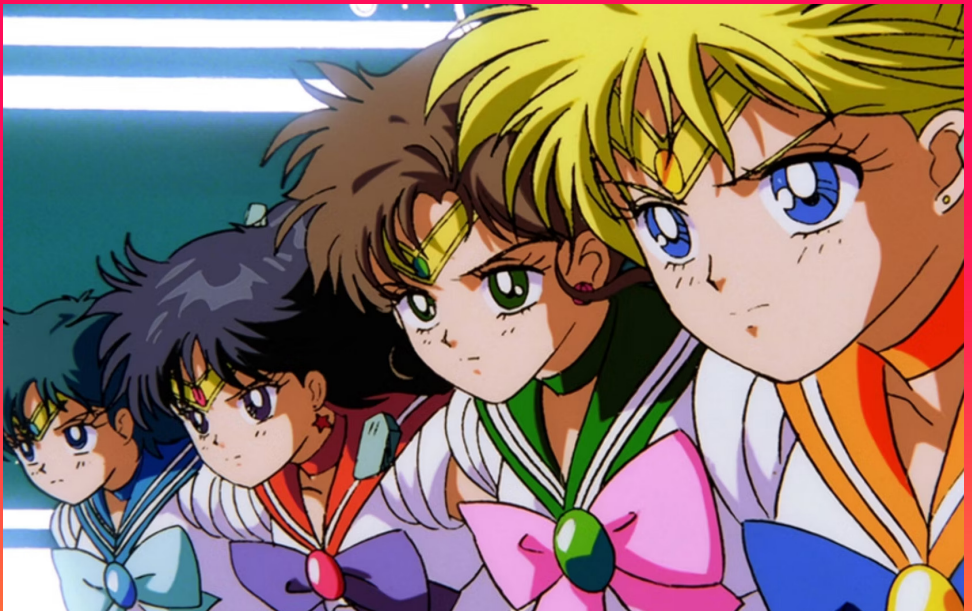
THE
WORLD OF VALA
WORLD BOOK

Follow Entertainment Stew
for more info

ENTERTAINMENT STEW

Rain Omega
Staff Writer

One of the main things that makes Sailor Moon such a great series is that it never subscribes to the "girls can't be friends with other girls" idea. The friendships cultivated between the girls of Sailor Moon are real, and wildly important. They're extremely loyal to each other, and they never let things like petty squabbles or love interests come between them when it really matters.

Seeing true friendships between women on screen is really important for girls of all ages, because they don't see it nearly enough. Women get bombarded from all sides with the notion that they should view other women as competition, as the enemy in nearly every endeavor, be it beauty, or careers, or love. There aren't as many messages promoting understanding and caring between women.

Sailor Moon has such a positive portrayal of female friendships because it doesn't cultivate fierce rivalries between it's characters. That's not to say that Usagi and her friends don't have their differences, as all real friends do, but it's commendable that they don't let those differences destroy their friendship.

What makes the relationships between the Senshi great is that they're all incredibly varied, but they're all unified by their love and respect for each other. There are different levels of friendship between the girls. Minako and Rei are incredibly close, having bonded

# Sailor Moon and the Power of Female Friendship
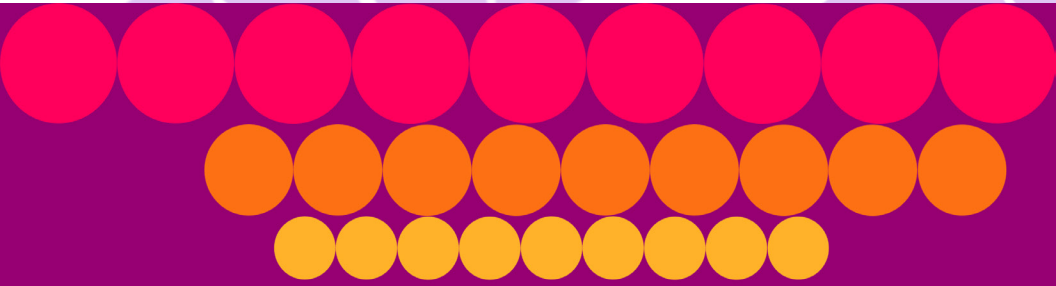
over their lifelong vow to protect Princess Serenity. Haruka and Michiru's friendship has evolved into a romance. Setsuna stays on the outskirts of the group as their watcher and protector. Usagi even has a group of friends, like Naru, who are entirely unaware of her identity as Sailor Moon. All of the girls have different relationships with each other, or with others outside of the group, and that's okay. What's important is that when they come together as a team, they know they can trust each other.

It's also worth mentioning that the Senshi really only have a handful of male friends, but that all of those male friends treat the girls with love, respect, and affection. More importantly, they support the Senshi (whether they know it or not), without attempting to come between the group or insert themselves into the role of "hero". Mamoru, in particular, recognizes that his love for Usagi is no more important than the Senshi's love for Usagi, and works together with them to support her.

Sailor Moon really cements itself into the hearts of it's fans by providing them with moving depictions of female friendships. I know I've seen my own friendships reflected in Usagi, Ami, Makoto, Rei, Minako, and the others, and I hope that a whole new generation of girls will watch the anime and see themselves and their friends too.
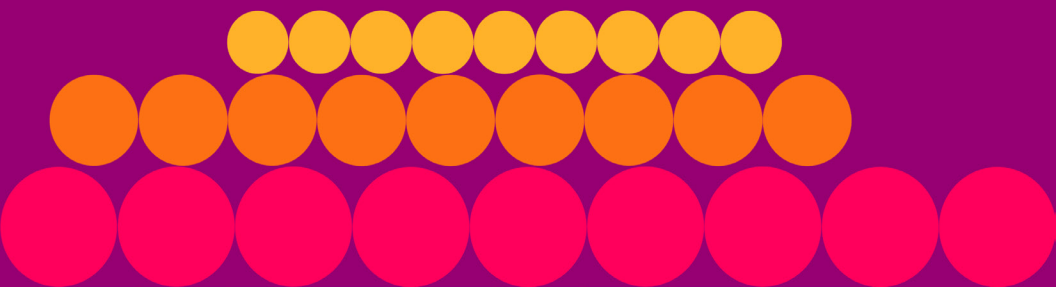
Rain Omega
Staff Writer

   As little girls, we were barely mundane. We were everything but human as children—obsessed with fantasy books and films that we sought after as our only forms of escapism from our limited lives in a patriarchal world. We indulged in the worldbuilding, in the magic, and in the culture of those worlds. So why is it that those worlds are simply not satisfying enough?

   Look, fantasy films are great. They're an under appreciated art form, but out of all the things that make me uncomfortable in these movies, are the women—or at least the way they're portrayed, that is. I can't say women make me uncomfortable in movies, as this is a women in film blog and not a Captain Marvel thread on Reddit. But the thing is, it is exhausting to go watch a fantasy movie all excited and ready to have your mind blown only to get the result of the male gaze thrown in your face as you sit through the entire movie wondering how you'd fight great evil in the same outfit Leeloo wears in Fifth Element. Because the issue is obviously not the women in the movies, but their characters. So let's dive in and take a look at movies who did our fellow ladies wrong—whether it's characterization or costume—and the ones who did it right.

   Oftentimes in these fantasy movies I see women as supporting characters, or as the audience meant for the monologues our male protagonist delivers at least ten times in the movies because the

The "Fantasy" of Women in Fantasy

female character—she's meant to look nice and add support. She's mystical and completely out of our male protagonists league, yet the average guy with questionable morals feels that he's what makes her who she is because he's the hero and therefore deserves this prize. This ideal woman is meek and needs care, but can easily commit triple homicide with the most complex weapon ever made, and she's tough and can make her own decisions, unless it's our main guy who suggests anything, then she'll bend to his will and follow him into battle or into the bedroom depending on our guy's mood at the moment.

In most films, we are what grounds our men—what brings them back from savagery. Watching Troy—the 2004 action movie based on the mythological telling of the Trojan War, I find that it is a lovely example of female characters being used to elevate the purpose or ego of their fellow male characters. For most of the movie, Achilles (Brad Pitt) is outrageously and inaccurately

straight to start, as we all know Achilles and Patroclus were not cousins but lovers. Achilles in this film, spends most of his screen time killing people or being naked, the women in this movie offer nothing but allure and comfort. Nothing else. Just the two traits women can have in most movies, and especially fantasy movies can be—seduction and support.

Seduction and support—the women in the 2006 movie Gods of Egypt (my villain origin story) with the most lines are 1. dead and used to motivate our protagonist and hero, or 2. a piece of meat used to give our second protagonist and hero a personality

and a piece of meat the villain can have sex with while she learns his weaknesses and secrets using the power of seduction. On the other hand, the men (white men playing Egyptian gods) are all incredibly problematic and (through horrifying CGI effects) fight each other over honor and an eye.

The male characters have absolutely zero depth, and somehow the women have much, much less. Besides from having one personality trait other than sexy, the costumes in this movie for the women are visually stunning, but as an ever-awaiting fan of good Egyptian mythology content, I remain waiting for an ancient Egyptian costume that isn't a bedazzled Victoria's secret bra to further elevate the fact that the creators want something else other than their characters highlighted throughout the movie.

To further the topic of horribly sexy costumes in this genre of films, let's talk about the difference between the costumes belonging to the Amazon warriors

in Justice League (Snyder's as much as Whedon's), and the costumes in Patty Jenkins' Wonder Woman. But before we look into how the costumes define the film, let's dissect the film itself.

Wonder Woman (2017) was the best thing I had ever seen at the ripe age of fourteen. I was young, insecure and easily seduced by powerful women. I had a lot of thoughts and opinions, I was very angry 24/7 and to be in a foreign country watching this movie where a goddess makes her own decisions, fights for what's right, has flaws and solid character

development that turns her into a compassionate being rather than a bitter hag—gave me a meth-like high and was the most beautiful and raw depiction of a mythical woman I had ever seen. It was so motivational I felt like I could climb mountains and mastiffs with no prior training.

To add to the masterpiece Patty Jenkins created, the Amazon costumes in Wonder Woman, I see outfits similar to ancient Roman/Greek outfits in movies. With tall, armored boots, chest plates, arm wraps and thick leather tunics to brace a spear or arrow—similar to

Andromeda's battle fit in Wrath of the Titans (2012). The detail goes deeper than the outfit, but into the detail of their hair. You see their hair braided, in ponytails, or just simply out of their face while fighting.

Unlike in Justice League (and many other films) where their hair is seductively let down in loose curls or maybe a half-up/half-down look that looks like a hairstyle straight out of a Miss America-pageant. In Justice League, very clearly differing from Wonder Woman, is the fact that their battle outfits are less like a traditional ancient Greek battle outfit and more like (as I mentioned before) a Victoria's secret bra covered in gold-spray painted leather and leather underpants. Michael Wilkinson, the costume designer of JL, woke up the morning he designed the Amazon costumes and chose violence.

Now, there are many sword-wielding women out there in fantasy-action films. Some are done extraordinarily right and

some are done horrifyingly wrong. Another example of a Strong Female Character who fights in full armor is Eowyn (portrayed by Miranda Otto) in the Lord of the Rings-saga. Although there are not many women in Tolkien's series, the women in them are all strong in their own way and know how to use a sword when they need to. The movies did a pretty satisfactory job at portraying them, and I was more than pleased to see Eowyn's full-armor outfit while delivering the iconic line of, "I am no man!" while battling orcs.

In The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey—one of my most treasured films, there aren't really that many women portrayed, but when Evangeline Lily's character Tauriel was introduced, she was received with outrage. Now at the young age of twelve with bountiful amounts of internalized misogyny, I thought, "She's not in the book, why is she here? Get her out now!" It wasn't until now that I am older and much more woke that I realized that—though borderline desperate—the inclusion of another woman who makes her own decisions and fights in outfits made for fighting was the right thing to do.

The creative team behind The Hobbit-franchise saw the lack of female presence. And instead of creating another whimsical elf, they made the warrior I always wished to be as a little girl when I would self insert myself into the plot of The Hobbit when daydreaming. Hating on her character as a kid made me feel good sometimes, but now, watching her live out my dream as a warrior elf makes me feel even better.

The male gaze is more influential than one thinks when watching

movies for the first time, but if it wasn't already obvious, take a look at Harley Quinn's costume in Suicide Squad (2016, dir. David Ayer), and then her costume in Birds of Prey(2020, dir. Cathy Yan).

In Suicide Squad, she looks like she's about to star in a Harley Quinn inspired porno, and in Birds of Prey, it looks like something she picked to express herself with. There's nothing wrong with wearing bralettes or leather thongs to battle, but the point is that it just looks so forced and the point is for that character to choose this look and the comfort, protection that comes with it. It never crossed my mind to wear when thinking about what I'd wear to battle being a crop top.

Movies based on comics can often be a very difficult thing to accomplish, especially with the choices made when it comes to the artistic liberties one can take. As I mentioned before, the Amazons were portrayed beautifully and poorly in two different situations, as was Harley Quinn... Suicide Squad and Justice League were

both, funnily enough, directed by men.

But a specific comic-to-screen character I would like to praise is our dear Wanda Maximoff, from the breakthrough TV sitcom WandaVision.

The show was truly a masterpiece in itself. From the way it played the entire audience multiple times with its vague and misleading format that allowed the plot to fall perfectly into place whenever the creators wanted, to Vision's characterization, and Wanda's intricate history and portrayal of someone in grief, was stunning to say the least. But if there's one thing that made me jump out of my

seat, it was Wanda's Scarlet Witch costume.

Designed by Mayes C. Rubeo, a Mexican costume designer (also known for Avatar (2009), Thor: Ragnarok (2017), and Jojo Rabbit (2020)), Wanda's new costume shines and glows with innovation. Playing along the lines of the original costume—which was iconic but in a nutshell, a red swimsuit—the new costume gave Wanda pants, and a high-neck top that shows no cleavage, and looks both practical and cool enough for a female superhero. From the past costume, the only things left are two pieces; her tiara and her cape, which adds flair. The fact that there isn't a corset is good enough for me.

As I said at the beginning of this article; us girls are barely mundane. We all went through phases where we learned about self expression that defines our young adult to even adult lives, and most of those characters that we had to look up to where in one way, shape, or form, eye candy. Those women were our heroines, but to the men creating them—they were entertainment. As young girls, we wanted to witness the strength we'd eventually grow into, not a poorly angled shot of our ass. But that's because these fantasy films weren't made for anyone else but for men to indulge in. It was convenient for them to stuff in a man wielding a sword paired with a pretty young woman to elevate him. That's all it ever really was.

So for the young girls that had their pirate phase, fairy phase, mermaid phase that wanted more than anything to have something more profound too watch in movies, this is for you. We aren't men's fantasies—we are extraordinary women, and we must take back the narrative by the throat.