

Anime review: Spice and Wolf (狼と香辛料)

RMS — DANCED WITH THE PEANUT BUTTERFLIES [SIC]

Seasonally as always, let's take a look at an autumnal highlight: Caught between commerce and romance, two heroes explore the meanings of trust, the notion of home, and the transience of nature. What more can you ask for?



Setup

The scene is unusually set as a late medieval facsimile of Central Europe. Kraft Lawrence is a 25-year-old travelling merchant, who fortunately knows the order in which to visit towns, living off his gains from transporting goods between them. One day, he comes across the town of Pasloe, who celebrate their annual harvest festival.

But this year, something is different: Instead of thanking the harvest goddess who watches over their wheat, they yell out in anger about failing crops, not realizing that the modern technology which they employ (such as machinery and fertilizer), is wearing out the very ground.

Disappointed by their lack of faith, the deity called Holo takes material form in the form of a

humanoid wolf girl, and convinces Lawrence to take her with him on his travels, as they lead her further to the north, to her homeland of Yoitsu.

We, the viewers, accompany the unlikely couple along their journey, through the changing seasons, changing religions, and changing relationship between the two. The trade which Lawrence follows serves as impetus to many episodes, with the experience and abilities of his demigod tag-along as a great help.

So why should I care?

To boil it down to basics: Often critics of anime will tell you that none of the characters have any charisma, motivation, or expressiveness whatsoever. Whenever that happens, show →





them this show as a counterexample. Rarely will you ever see such likeable, true-to-life protagonists to root for.

And that is admittedly strange, given that one is a businessman in an economy strange to all of us, and the other is an over 600 year old goddess, to which most human endeavors seem peddling and pass by in the blink of an eye. But this contrast both amongst the characters and between them and the audience make you realize that most of the external happenings don't matter much when you look at the inner events: How commonalities and sharing your life with someone else might just bring you together, no matter the circumstances.

And just this romantic connection between

Lawrence and Holo is—at least in my humble opinion—what makes *Spice and Wolf* so great. Without wanting to seem dark here, I have not seen any relationship this well paced in fiction, reality, or even the recesses of my own mind. While elsewhere (*cough* *Shuffle!* *cough*), you might see rushed, incomprehensible jumps in familiarity, the pace here is exactly how it should be: glacial.

Audio and Visuals

If you have read earlier reviews of mine, you know I will liberally splurge out praise for modern art style, as employed in *Time of Eve* or even *Bakemonogatari*. However, even though the two seasons of *Spice and Wolf* have been pub-



lished in 2008-2009, they rely on the most traditional of drawing methods - and boy, does it show. Regard-

less of personal preference, you have to admire the work that went into the matte drawings as well as the character art. Also: Please don't be fooled by any cover art or promotional art you might find on the internet: fan service is kept to an absolute minimum.

On the auditory side of things, there is not much of regard to mention during the anime itself—most notable are in fact the opening and ending songs. While the show itself is supported by contemporary medievally inspired melodies, the two framing tunes are in both seasons chosen to be very recent. Don't be afraid, however: No one fell into the trap of using J-Pop. Instead, folk songs which might very well serve as a traveller's choice are performed with great gus-

to^[1]—and in some cases, using great amounts of English^[2].

So why is this published in the "Disappointment" edition?

Fatally, a third season has only been rumoured so far. As the romantic interactions between the heroes has only begun to reach its apex, this serves as a great deal of annoyance to the fan base.

Meanwhile, enjoy the first two seasons, if possible in glorious 1080p and original language version. However, as it has just recently licensed by Funimation, both seasons are now also available in an English dub. 

Links

[1] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OHxWHOSfs_w

[2] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vo_wVKQMSBc