



HALFWAY THROUGH BANANA FISH

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A show often mentioned alongside *Given*, because of the kindred tropes they share, is *Banana Fish*. Over the first semester, my close friend from Poland kept having me promise that once I flew back there for the Christmas break, we would have a sleepover at her place and watch all 24 episodes in one night. Sadly we failed, and only got through 12 of them. We decided that when I come back to Nijmegen, we'll watch one episode every two weeks until June, after which we will meet up again in Poland for the finale. On the more blissful side, though, I get to write yet another "halfway through" review. So let's get started! This is a review about *Banana Fish* - a manga-based anime about a mafia war.

SYNOPSIS

Aslan Jade Callenreese, known as Ash, is bright and confident. He had a harsh upbringing, which started with his mom leaving him at a very young age to get away from her husband and continue her life with another man. His dad wasn't a good parent figure, he scarcely provided emotional support to his son. The only person in Ash's household who he could rely on was Griffin, his older brother, who had to leave Ash when he was called to serve in the army in Iraq.

All those struggles resulted in Ash running away from his home just when he was 8. Being a homeless, penurious child, he was captured and raised by the godfather of one of the biggest mafias in America, Dino. He spent years as a sex slave, until the age of 17 when he managed to escape Dino's grasp, and became a boss of his own small gang.

As he starts uniting more gangs under him, Ash begins the investigation of the mysterious 'Banana Fish' - the only two words his severely mentally handicapped brother - Griffin, managed to mutter under his breath since his return from Iraq.

Eiji Okumura is an innocent, naive, yet perceptive character. He was a promising athlete in a Japanese high school. Pole vaulting was his biggest hobby as it kept him happy and fulfilled until he experienced an acute injury.

Being forced to retire from his life's passion caused Eiji to fall into depression.

His parents, concerned for their son, agreed to send him to New York with a family friend - a photojournalist documenting street gangs in the United States.

The two characters - Ash and Eiji - meet in an underground bar for an interview, where Eiji, with child-like curiosity, starts asking Ash about his gun and pleading with him to let him touch it. Ash agrees as the two engage in a cute conversation, resembling something very far from an actual interview.

Their exchange is suddenly cut short as Dino's men storm the bar, capturing Eiji and kidnapping him on their motorcycles, trying to lure Ash.





REVIEW

Banana Fish is an anime that doesn't waste any time. It tries to keep you at the edge of your seat at all times, and it succeeds at it.

The action never stops; as soon as one subplot gets resolved, an even more stressful and exciting subplot gets thrown at you.

I was worried that with the constant action and so little room for small interactions, I would end up detached from the characters, but I couldn't be further from the truth.

I find myself very engaged in even the side characters' stories, and all scenes with Ash and Eiji have me staring at the monitor with my mouth wide open.

It comes naturally to sympathize with the main characters - with their cuteness and charisma we're very quick to start cheering for them and cursing at each of their failures. (which there are quite a lot of!)

The protagonists are dichotomies of each other that should never get as close to each other as they did.

Ash - the blonde gang leader, a vicious and ruthless murderer, driven by revenge and trauma and drenched in the cruelest aspects of Earth; and Eiji

- dark-haired, quiet, lenient, having lived a perfect youth, full of compassion and hope.

Banana Fish has an overarching plot that can be broken down into a few arcs, each of them interconnected and coherent.

The anime shifts between them harmoniously - just as harmoniously as the characters grow with each arc.

The emotional change in both Ash and Eiji is apparent - we get to understand the ugly aspects of both of them as the beautiful aspects of theirs begin to excel and shine.

The studio behind Banana Fish is known for spectacular art and music design, and Banana Fish isn't an outlier.

The show's dark plot lies in yet another juxtaposition with its bright and happy colors, all of which is beautifully rounded off with very distinct and fitting music.

Banana Fish is an anime that isn't afraid to take risks and touch upon heavy subjects brazenly.

As opposed to countless other anime, Banana Fish doesn't try to sugarcoat those subjects and wants to show all faults as they are.



I can't wait to see how the plot, and especially how Ash and Eiji will develop, and I'm positive I won't be disappointed.

Banana Fish is an awe-inspiring show everyone should at least try to get into.