

vol.49 #09
side characters

KÔZUCHI



Takanashi Tsumugi
IDOLiSH7
art by Elliot Lu



THIS WEEK'S FEATURED SERIES

ANIME RECOMMENDATION

SHIROBAKO



After making their first anime, the five members of Kaminoyama High School's animation club vow to create a mainstream anime together. Flash forward two years later, and two of them are working at Musashino Animation--Aoi Miyamori and Ema Yasuhara. Unfortunately for the other three, the path to their goal is a long winding road. And life isn't easy for Aoi and Ema either! Learn about what it takes to make an anime while following the huge cast of characters working towards their goals.



Fall 2014, P.A. Works
Directed by Tsutomu Mizushima



2016 - present
Written by Tomohito Oda

MANGA RECOMMENDATION

KOMI-SAN WA, COMYUSHOU DESU (KOMI CAN'T COMMUNICATE)



After one day at her new school, Shouko Komi is already considered the most popular student thanks to her beautiful looks and demeanor. There's just one problem: Komi cannot communicate with others. Meanwhile, Hitohito Tadano is your average highschool boy who tries to stay out of any trouble. After being involved in an accident with Komi, he learns about her problem and vows to help overcome it by reaching her goal of making 100 friends.



SIDE CHARACTERS ARE THE REAL OG

ZEE DEEN

3RD YEAR, ARCHITECTURE

STAFF WRITER

Do you ever stop and think: in your life, are you more a main character or a side character?

I personally love it when a manga puts spotlight on side characters to tell their stories. Shounen mangas do a great job of doing it, maybe because mangakas know that a wide cast allows for more storylines, backstory, and an overall richer story. You can love Naruto on his own, but the story would not be the same without Itachi's intense love for Sasuke, Jiraiya's hilarious antics, and the heartwarming bond between Nagato, Konan, and Yahiko. *Detective Conan*'s many, many chapters bring back adored side characters in a longitudinal telling of the story, showing that peoples' lives evolve gradually and over time, and for some reason, almost always over a mystery. And there is no better side arc in *InuYasha* than that of Sesshomaru and Rin, because in these chapters, we can see this cold-hearted demon develop compassion and selfless tendencies as he takes care of Rin, admittedly or not.



The only thing better than side characters being given the platform to tell their stories is when you realize that besides the main character, they are just as important, just as vital, to the overall story. Let's take, for example, Kaito in *Air Gear*. Throughout the main story, he's just this moody, chain-smoking asshole of an older brother to a character with three personalities. Almost three hundred chapters later, you realize not only is he their father, but he's also kind of the reason things in the manga became what they are. Oh, and you realize that his relationship with his baby mama is probably the precursor to main events in the entire story.

Shoujo mangas are not as good as shounen mangas in doing this. Many mangas fail the Bechdel test, which tests whether there exists a scene where two female characters talk about anything other than men. In many romance mangas, the main character's friends exist solely to talk about their love interests. Side characters are shallow and mostly underdeveloped, but this makes sense because many shoujo mangakas don't really know how long their manga will be serialized for, and they have to focus on the main story. Side characters regrettably play second fiddle to the main characters.

But as a shoujo manga gets more traction and the story kicks off, side characters can get more coverage – their personalities become more developed and they gain more depth. *Usotsuki Lily* is a manga that often breaks the fourth wall by talking about its manga development, and therefore, it's ability to develop more about the side characters. At some point, the main characters don't really have much they develop but the side characters do. The same goes for *W Juliet*. The main characters go through a lot of development early in the story, and when it seems like their capacity for growth remains stagnant, focus shifts to the side characters. In the end, it is these side characters' stories that become the ones we didn't know we wanted.



Honestly, side characters work to make the main storyline more refreshing. Main characters get boring, they eventually become stagnant and there's not a lot that can eventually happen without getting typical or repetitive. Side characters completely change our entire understanding and perception of manga and more often than not, we end up liking them way more than we do the main characters. It may be a stretch, but I think side characters, not main ones, truly make the story we end up loving.



THE WANDERER



ANDREW WING
4TH YEAR, MEDIA STUDIES

STAFF WRITER

Blood tastes like iron

Ping Pong the Animation is my favorite anime of all time. I love it for its characters: they are all incredible, well-crafted characters who show growth and development throughout the story. The show has some all-star side characters including Sakuma, the childhood friend, and Sanada, Kaio's second-in-command. The side character I want to look at is one who might be overlooked: Egami, the wanderer.

Egami's story begins in episode 3. He's the first opponent for Smile, the main character of the show, in the regionals tournament. At first, Egami is confident. He's a third-year; it's his last chance to break through to nationals, and he's up against a first-year. Unfortunately for him, reality is cruel, and he ends up getting skunked by Smile. As he loses the match, imagery of seagulls and the beach sweep onto the screen. Egami leaves the venue, defeated, and mutters to himself "Maybe I'll go to the beach."

From this point on, Egami wanders the world in search of himself while the rest of the characters progress through their own ping pong narratives. While Peco, Smile, and Kong are playing, training, and improving, Egami is journeying the world. In episode 5, he makes a brief appearance: Egami is shown working part time as a vendor on the beach. Egami remarks to himself: "I guess the sea doesn't agree with me either... Maybe I'll go to the mountains..." At this point in the show, he's a mysterious character whose sporadic presence doesn't add anything to the story. The enigmatic Egami makes another appearance in the Christmas scene from episode 6, where he is shown at the mountains, only to say "Maybe I'll go overseas..." Egami is shown returning from overseas in episode 9, with a tan. Having taken a journey around the world in search of himself, he seems to have failed, because he returns home as uncertain as ever. He remembers that it's been exactly 1 year since he got skunked by Smile, and decides to check out ping pong one last time.

Egami returns to the tournament in the finale, and is surprised to find that Smile, the man who defeated him and sent him on his journey all that time ago, is in the finals. He comes full



... 男女対抗日本代表のエグミ
where China dominates the world championships!
Egami sighting at the world championships

circle, and is shown watching the match, breaking into tears. He mutters to himself: "I'll be damned.. I like this sport. I left you and wandered the world, but I was looking for you this whole time." Egami, the sporadic appearer, the one who has never touched a ping pong ball since his defeat to Smile, came back only to realize his true love had been ping pong all along. And in the most amusing turn, in the final scene of the show, Egami is shown at the world championships in Germany wearing the Team Japan jersey. A beautiful moment out of a very pleasing finale episode.

In my opinion, Egami is a beautiful side character. He barely has any screen time, probably less than 2 minutes total, yet still has a complete character arc. The whole time, it's like he was speaking to a lover, repentant after straying. He's a play on the "you don't know what you have until you lost it" cliche, but with a "no one ever said you couldn't go back" twist on it. You basically never see Egami speaking to any of the other characters -- he's just monologuing to himself, yet his character fits right into the story. Whenever he appears, you wonder where he's going next, and when you see him fulfill himself at the end, you can't help but feel happy for him.

Ping Pong is an amazing show that brings all its characters' various threads gradually together over the course of eleven episodes, and Egami is no exception. In the same timeline as the rest of the characters, he embarks on a journey to find his center, only to realize that it was ping pong this whole time. "Please forgive me, let's start again."



RUN WITH CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

ABEER HOSSAIN

2ND YEAR, MECHANICAL ENGINEERING AND ASTROPHYSICS

STAFF WRITER

Too many things to do and too little time.



I went into the Fall 2018 season of anime expecting great things. I was excited for a third season of *Index*, possibly continuing the train wrecks that are *Fairy Tail* and *SAO*. Instead of the shows I knew about, I was surprised by the waifu-machine that is *Bunny Girl Senpai* and what is now one of my favorite anime of all time, *Run with the Wind*. The show really only has two main characters and 8-9 important side characters. It centers around a group of ten college students training to run the Hakone Ekiden, a multi-stage relay marathon in Japan. The anime begins with Haiji and Kakeru, the two driving forces of the anime. The writing in this show (based off a novel of the same name) is absolutely amazing, and it could have been handled horribly, possibly failing to portray the amazing character growth of each character, especially the two main ones. Thankfully, it succeeds at every possible factor. *Run With the Wind* is essentially a character drama. Yes, the training and the final marathon are important, but these events are just devices to flesh out the team. But let's move on from the main characters as this is the side characters issue after all (though I just spent two-hundred words not discussing that very topic).

The show could have had a 13-episode run, mostly consisting of the Hakone Ekiden itself. Instead, the goal that the team is working so hard for is at the very end of its 23 episode run with the last 6 episodes capturing the thoughts and emotions of each runner during their section of their race. Had the show failed to portray compelling characters earlier in its run, these episodes would have utterly destroyed any chance of it being hailed as a great show. If the viewers did not care for the remaining members of the team, seeing four weeks of episodes centered around them would throw their interest off a cliff. Again, that's far from the case with *Run With the Wind*. The side characters are incredibly fleshed out and relatable. Akihiro is a previous runner who lost all love for the sport. The twins Joujirou and Joutarou are two energetic, flamboyant characters who must have a concrete goal to strive for (initially to look cool and attract girls) or

else their attentions will divert anywhere else. Akane, more accurately known as Prince for his attractive features, is the one character least likely to run a grueling marathon as a frail, rabid manga reader who would nearly faint after a block of running. These are just a few of the "side" characters of the show and while I could write an entire multi-page essay on each character and their motivations and struggles, I'll leave that for you to discover.



Do you like running?

Needless to say, over its two season run, I came to care deeply about each and every character. The final Hakone Ekiden episodes had my hands clenched during each of their runtimes, especially during the last two episodes, worried that something, anything, could go wrong at any moment and ruin everything that these amazing people have worked so hard for. I can't possibly express just how incredible this achievement is. There are countless shows with any range of episodes and especially those with runs greater than 23 episodes that create nowhere near the levels of development that *Run With the Wind* does. Side characters are important to a story, but that's obvious. Side characters are simply those with less screen time but with nearly just as great an importance as main ones, and hardly any other show treats them with the respect that *Run With the Wind* does.

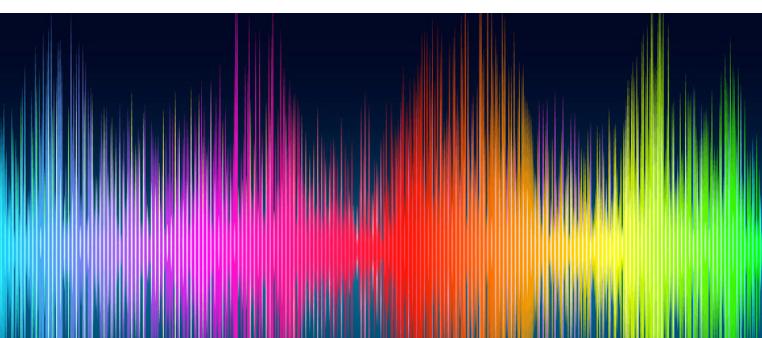
PRESS YOUR LIPS ON THIS ARTICLE! (JK, PLEASE DON'T ACTUALLY)

SHAMIN CHOWDHURY
3RD YEAR, PHYSICS AND MATH

STAFF WRITER

The bar just keeps getting higher, no matter how far up I go...

If you've heard enough music, you understand that the idea of repetitiveness can be both good and bad. You might play a song you like over and over if you like it, but you might also get sick of that song if it's played too many times. Even within a song itself, if the song repeats its melodies or lines too much, that can also be unpleasant. The same sort of principle applies to anime in the presentation of its characters or the construction of its narrative. Certain characters, often the main characters, might get shown more than others (i.e. they get a lot of screen time), but this can make a story dull. Story aside, this can be visually and aurally¹ boring when you're seeing and hearing the same characters over and over again. Of course, the show has to do something if it's not just presenting the main characters, so here, side characters help remedy this issue! Side characters, first off, can help make the show visually and aurally interesting. Unique character designs can complement or contrast with the main characters in intriguing ways, or the voice acting or background music related to those characters can add nice touches to the mix (As you can maybe tell, I'm only lightly touching on the



Music waves

visual and aural aspects related to side characters, but these are important as well, I promise! To illustrate, imagine if all the characters had similar designs or if they all sounded the same or had no unique character themes. In general, this would be unsatisfactory, so it's important that different characters have these audio-visual distinctions that we take for granted). With

respect to the narrative, they can offer desirable changes in the overall flow of the story. I will elaborate on this point by discussing Sacchan² from the anime *Gintama*.

Our female ninja's routine gag with main character Gin-san is that she loves him in a rather masochistic manner, stalking him and enjoying his harsh rejections. This encourages her to stalk him more, resulting in a never-ending positive feedback loop of some very hilarious moments in the series. For example, one scene involves Sacchan revealing herself hidden in Gin-san's television. Gin-san asks how he can turn off this stupid tv, and Sacchan responds saying he has to press his lips on "this button," as she points to her lips. Gin-san responds by having Sadaharu, their couch-sized dog, eat up the tv with Sacchan



Sacchan being creepy

inside. Sacchan isn't the only side character in the series, but if the series didn't have her and its other side characters in it³, we as an audience would miss out on amusing moments like these! This probably explains why I kind of feel like I didn't enjoy the recent seasons of *Gintama* as much as I enjoyed the original seasons. The recent seasons lack the purely comical episodes that the original seasons had, so I wasn't getting as much of the laughter as I perhaps wanted out of these seasons. Don't get the wrong idea, baka – I enjoyed these recent seasons very much. I just wanted more of the zany humor that these side characters help offer, you know.

1 Aurally means related to sound. It's not a common word, but it flows well here.

2 I didn't choose Sacchan for any particular reason other than that I recently saw a funny compilation of her scenes in the anime.

3 Actually, considering *Gintama*'s long running pattern, Sacchan technically counts as more of a main character in some respects. Perhaps she would more precisely be called an "often recurring side character."

STAFF PICKS

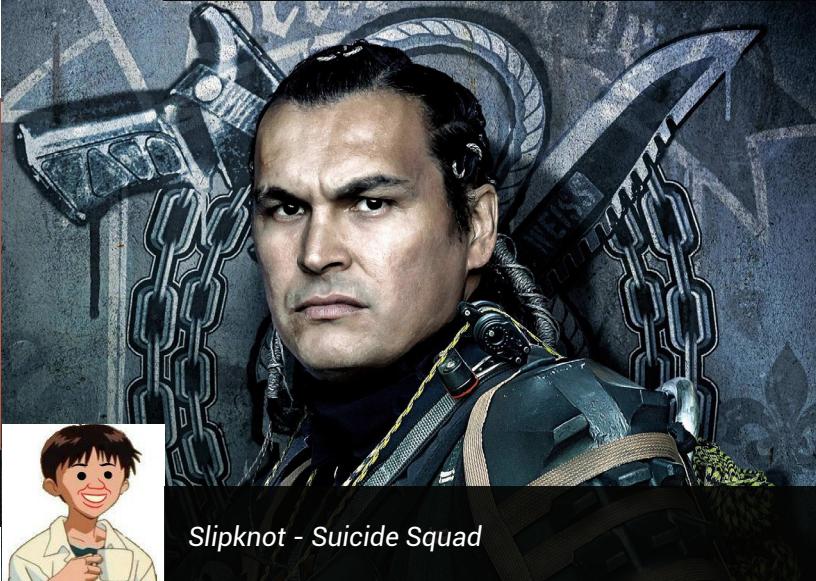
FAVORITE SIDE CHARACTERS



Natsuki Nagakawa - *Hibike! Euphonium*



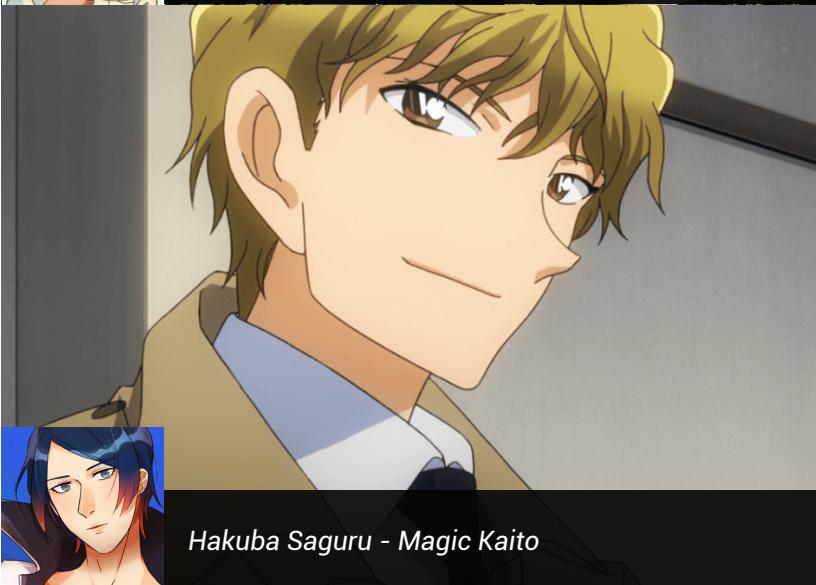
Shorter Wong - *Banana Fish*



Slipknot - *Suicide Squad*



Gobta - *Tensei Shitara Slime Datta Ken*



Hakuba Saguru - *Magic Kaito*



Youhei Sunohara - *Clannad*

VOLUME XLIX, ISSUE 9 — APRIL 11, 2019



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