

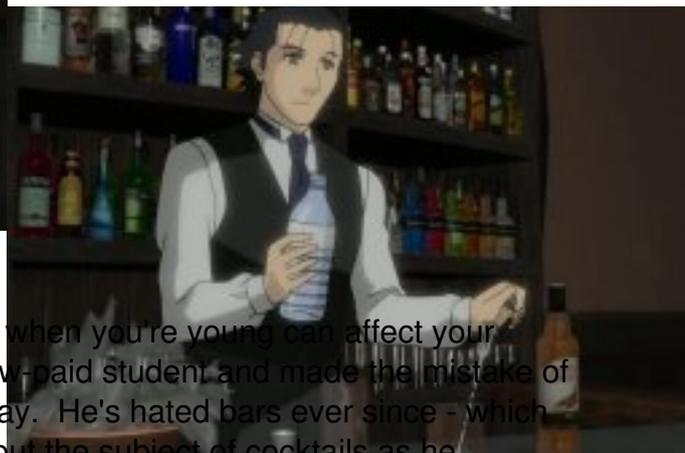


The Japanese do choose some strange subjects to base their series around. Up until now, the most unusual was probably **Yakitate Japan**, which revolved around baking the best bread possible.

Bartender in some ways beats that, by bringing us an encyclopedia of cocktails over the course of the series, although it has a normal side in its slice-of-life, laid-back feel. Appropriate enough for a cocktail bar, I suppose - but does it make for good viewing, or just provide good drinking?

1 - Bartender

Kamishima has been assigned the job of remodelling a hotel bar, but since he's no fan of bars or bartenders in the first place he's finding it hard going - it's difficult to do a good job of something you really don't care about, and his lack of progress is beginning to infuriate his bosses. Somehow, though, he finds himself drawn to the quiet and secluded bar Eden Hall, where bartender Ryu Sasakura - in some ways epitomising everything Kamishima hates about bars - shows an uncanny ability to see his inner thoughts...



Kamishima's story is one of how embarrassing moments when you're young can affect your entire life. He'd been to a cocktail bar when he was a low-paid student and made the mistake of ordering beer - and had also lost his wallet so couldn't pay. He's hated bars ever since - which makes it quite surprising that he's as knowledgeable about the subject of cocktails as he appears to be. One of life's little mysteries.

The series premise is that Ryu is a top-class bartender, whose cocktails are so good they've gained the tag of 'Glass of God' and who has an uncanny knack for figuring out what his customers' problems are - and solving them with an appropriate drink, of course. I can

hear the howls of protest from the "responsible drinking" crowd already. It's all presented in a very low-key, slice-of-life way, with characters stopping to explain themselves "to camera" every so often as their problems play out on the screen.

While I'd probably enjoy the cocktails, though, I can't say I enjoyed the show all that much. Breaking through peoples' issues with alcohol doesn't make particularly riveting viewing, and Ryu's ability to figure out anyone's problems from the look on their face seems almost too good to be true (although legend would have you believe it's the mark of any good barkeeper). The episode was okay in its own way, just not particularly interesting, and with the rest of the series apparently sticking more or less to the same formula that didn't leave me with any burning need to see any more of it - which means **Bartender** gets added to the "pass" pile. There are definitely more exciting occupations to base an anime series around...