

NEO 家

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PSYCHIC SCHOOL WARS / SERAPH OF THE END / ATTACK ON TITAN: WINGS OF FREEDOM / LORD MARKSMAN AND VANADIS / BLADE DANCE OF THE ELEMENTALERS + MORE!



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Editorial



WELCOME TO ISSUE 150 of NEO! This month there's been a backlash against our perennial cover girl, Motoko Kusanagi – or rather, Scarlett Johansson's upcoming portrayal of her in the live action adaptation of *Ghost in the Shell*. Possibly the most influential anime ever, *Ghost in the Shell* has similarly catapulted its Japanese heroine to centre stage. Johansson's casting has prompted cries of whitewashing from those who are sick of Hollywood taking parts for Asian characters and giving them to caucasians. But as usual, there's far more to the story than this. Whitewashing is a hot topic in the movie industry thanks to several recent incidents along similar lines: Marvel Studios removing all trace of Tibet from *Doctor Strange* (and casting Tilda Swinton as the Ancient One) in order to appease China, as well as Mindy Park, a Korean-American, being played by Mackenzie Davis, a white Canadian actress, in *The Martian*. (*The Martian* also had British actor Chiwetel Ejiofor playing Dr. Venkat Kapoor.) Let's not even start discussing *The Last Airbender* or even *Dragonball Evolution*.

Tempers are flared in the US and UK, as Asian actors are poorly represented on both television and in movies. Interestingly, so far, Dreamworks have given the character name as simply 'the Major' – perhaps trying to make her transformation from a dark-haired Japanese woman into a blonde-haired American one less obvious than it would be if they gave her her full name of Motoko Kusanagi? But hang on, isn't the character actually a robot, and so her shell could actually be of any nationality or appearance? That's one argument. Another one could be that anime very often depicts their characters as caucasian in appearance anyway (not so much in Kusanagi's case, though). This observation is often raised by western viewers who see anime through their own lens, projecting their perceptions of a default 'whiteness' onto characters who would be seen as unequivocally Japanese by a native audience. Speaking of the Japanese audience, they seem to be unruffled by the arguments about race, assuming that any Hollywood production would have cast a white actress for the lead anyway.

No matter your perspective, there's no denying the need for greater representation of Asian actors in Hollywood. And if you agree that Kusanagi's actress should be of Asian descent, you're not alone. As of writing, over 100,000 have signed a petition in protest of Johansson's casting.

But I want to know, what do you think? Email me at mail@neomag.co.uk with your thoughts.

GEMMA COX, EDITOR

FAVOURITES THIS ISSUE...



Furiously scrabbling at the controller, trying to conquer *One Piece Burning Blood*...



Squeezing our Funko POP Daenerys figure while watching *Game of Thrones*...



Binge-watching the entire *Outlaw: Gangster VIP Collection*...

MEET THE TEAM

TOM SMITH



"I'm bracing myself for MCM madness! BAND-MAID and Amatsuki will be hanging out at the JPU Records

booth for most of the weekend, and it's down to me to keep them from misbehaving or getting too distracted by the anime merch!"

JACOB BONIFACE



"I've been checking out the latest anime of the new season – *Bungo Stray Dogs* and *Kiznaiver* are both promising

series, but everyone should be watching the anime adaptation of my favourite hapless attorney – Phoenix Wright! Objection!"

JONATHAN CLEMENTS



"So the BFI South Bank will be screening *Ghost in the Shell: The New Movie* in June. But just to clarify, that's

the old new movie, not the new movie with Scarlett Johansson. We're going to have to do a lot of explanations this year..."

DAVID WEST



"This month I explored the underworld of the yakuza with the *Outlaw: Gangster VIP* series. Poor Goro never gets

the girl. Even though it's the same girl in every film. And I had fun trying *One Piece Burning Blood*. Button-mashing galore!"

NEXT MONTH

Parasyte will get under your skin next issue as Andrew Osmond takes a closer look at the manga, anime and live action movie franchise about sneaky aliens taking over the planet! We've also got previews of *Kabaneri of the Iron Fortress* and *Space Patrol Luluco* fresh from Japan, as well as reviews of the latest UK releases, plus cosplay, art tutorials, news and more!

NEO 151, OUT THURSDAY 9 JUNE



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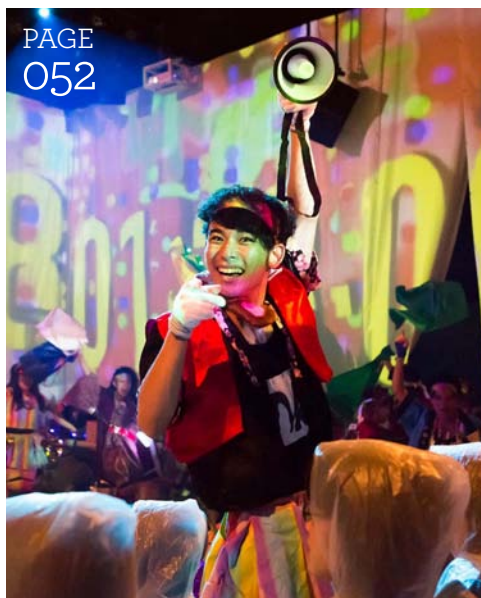
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Find out all about Luffy's latest adventures in One Piece Burning Blood! Turn to page 098 for some incredible tag team action and behind the scenes info.



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“Ghost in the Shell sells an image of Japan to the world, like Bond for Britain.”

MOTOKO KUSANAGI IS... 007

As *Ghost in the Shell: The New Movie* hits the UK, Andrew Osmond takes a look at the franchise, only to realise it's the James Bond of anime...

GHOST IN THE Shell is to anime what Bond is to live-action cinema. Look at what they have in common. They're sold on action, style and violence, with gun-toting pinups as their stars. They're demonstrably durable (five decades of Bond films, 20 years of *GITS* anime). That's despite their immersion in worlds that have changed massively. Bond began in the freeze of the Cold War; *Ghost in the Shell* started in the mid-1990s, before social media, before smartphones, when just ten per cent of the developed world used the net.

But instead of becoming period pieces, Bond and *GITS* have routinely updated, rebooted and refashioned themselves. *Ghost in the Shell* sells an image of Japan to the world, like Bond for Britain. Sean Connery's lecherous smirk and Motoko Kusanagi's masculine glower resonate as style statements and shared dreams. The *Matrix* films remixed Kusanagi as Trinity for the west, but today Kusanagi is ageless and Trinity's a museum piece.

Bond and *GITS* both know what their fans expect of their heroes. Sometimes it's the *same* things: jumping down tall buildings, exercising their licence to kill and blow things up. The characters can accrue emotional baggage, but not for too long. Periodically the slate's wiped clean and the characters are new again.

With Bond, new viewers can start almost anywhere. With *Ghost in the Shell*, you could theoretically begin with the 1995 film; or with the first part of *Stand Alone Complex*; or with the first instalments of *GITS Arise* (available in Britain as *Borders 1 and 2*). Of those, *Stand Alone Complex* is the safest bet. Some fans find the first *GITS* film, by Mamoru Oshii, cold and pretentious. Even more dislike *Arise*, both for its characters and storytelling. *Stand Alone Complex* gives the most balanced idea of what *GITS* offers. Just in its first few episodes, it

delivers an arty romantic tribute to the 1960s film *Breathless*, and an action fest about a runaway tank on a motorway.

BEGINNER'S GUIDE

"It is the near future," reads the first line of Masamune Shirow's *Ghost in the Shell* manga. The anime versions are all set around 2030, with no effort to push that back as the years go by. The future changes with each new *GITS*, but some constants apply:

1. By the time of *GITS*, many people have replaced some or all of their flesh and blood bodies with prosthetic bodies, called "shells." It's also standard practice for people to plug electronics into their brains, creating meat-machine hybrids called cyberbrains. These cyberbrains are the upgraded seats of the mind, consciousness and personality - what people call the soul, or ghost. In many other sci-fi works, this is a nightmare that turns people into 'inhuman' monsters. Think of the Cybermen in *Doctor Who* or the Borg in *Star Trek*. Not so in *GITS*...
2. While most artificial people choose to have humanoid bodies, it's not mandatory. For example, how would you like to be an armoured tank?
3. The new people are cyborgs; part organism, part machine. They benefit from immense powers, physical and mental. Their artificial bodies are massively strong, and can take huge damage while continuing to function. Memorably, in the first *GITS* film, Kusanagi loses multiple limbs fighting a tank, without blinking.
4. As for mental enhancements, a cyberbrain means having the internet in your head plus change. Telepathy - instant mind-to-mind communication with other cyberbrains - is now fact, as are face-to-face net conferences in virtual rooms.
5. Cyberbrains can be transferred from one body to another, sometimes for kinks. In the first episode of *Stand Alone Complex*, it's casually mentioned that a drunken government minister has fun "switching bodies" with a geisha - one of many opportunities for stings and skulduggery. It's also possible for gifted criminals to *hack* someone else's cyberbrain, distorting the victim's perceptions or rewriting their memories and personalities.

As such crimes increase, so professionals rise to deal with them. All versions of *Ghost in the Shell* feature a squad of cyber-enhanced agents. Motoko Kusanagi is their female leader, and nearly always the main character. The exception is the film *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence*, where Kusanagi's *absence* hangs over the film. (It's not known if the lead of the upcoming Hollywood film, played by Scarlett Johansson, will be called Kusanagi - see final spread.) ▶





▶ Kusanagi's six team members include Batou, a burly bruiser with an emotional relationship with Kusanagi, though the *nature* of this relationship changes in different versions, and Togusa, a handsome rookie detective with his own family life. There's also Ishikawa, the bearded information officer, and Saito, the sniper with a prosthetic eye. Then Paz, the elegant chain smoker and Borma, the bald explosives expert – although it's easy to forget one or both of these two, as they rarely take centre stage.

Kusanagi's superior is Aramaki, usually a white-haired man who looks like an austere professor. However, in *Ghost in the Shell: Arise*, a brown-haired Aramaki *tries* to persuade Kusanagi and her squad to work for him, without success. However, Aramaki and Kusanagi still work in parallel in *Arise*.

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

It's important to stress that each version of *GITS* – the original manga, the Oshii cinema films, *Stand Alone Complex* and *Arise* – takes place in its own separate universe. It's not so obvious with *Arise*, the newest version, which has younger versions of the characters and is sometimes called a “prequel,” but it's still its own world.

For example, *Arise*'s backstory contradicts what we learned about Kusanagi's past in *Stand Alone Complex*. In *SAC*, Kusanagi survived a plane crash as a child, and became a cyborg at the age of six. (This story, revealed midway through *SAC*'s second season, had huge consequences in the series climax.) In *Arise*, though, we learn Kusanagi's pregnant mother was killed, allegedly by a chemical accident; the brain of the unborn Kusanagi was saved and “born” into an artificial body.

The consequences of this change alone are far reaching. One of *SAC*'s key flashback images was of a newly-cyborged Kusanagi crushing a doll in her transformed hand, with all the trauma that implied. There's something similar in the 1995 *GITS* movie, where Kusanagi wonders if the real (organic) Kusanagi of the past is dead, replaced by a machine that *thinks* it was once human. (Like the

butterfly dreaming it was a man in the Chinese proverb...) But the *Arise* version of Kusanagi was *born* artificial, so those fears and issues are irrelevant.

Each version of *GITS* has its own focus. The films by Mamoru Oshii ask what lies beyond humanity, exemplified by the Puppet Master, a cyber-entity which doesn't need an organic brain to be born. *Stand Alone Complex* is more interested in human societies and the people who fight them. The series finds inspiration not in cool abstractions like the Puppet Master, but in fiery rebels like Che Guevara and Holden Caulfield (from *Catcher in the Rye*).

Arise is like the Bond film *Casino Royale*. It winds back the composed, professional *GITS* characters we know, replacing them with blunter, scrappier, more fallible versions. *Arise* is about their small beginnings – though some viewers may find the *Arise* characters *too* small. For example, the blogger Claire Napier, who writes extensively about *GITS* online, bemoans how *Arise* “girls” Kusanagi. Instead of a superwoman jumping down buildings, the *Arise* Kusanagi plays the role of defensive floozy, punching a Batou who quips obnoxiously about her boyfriend.

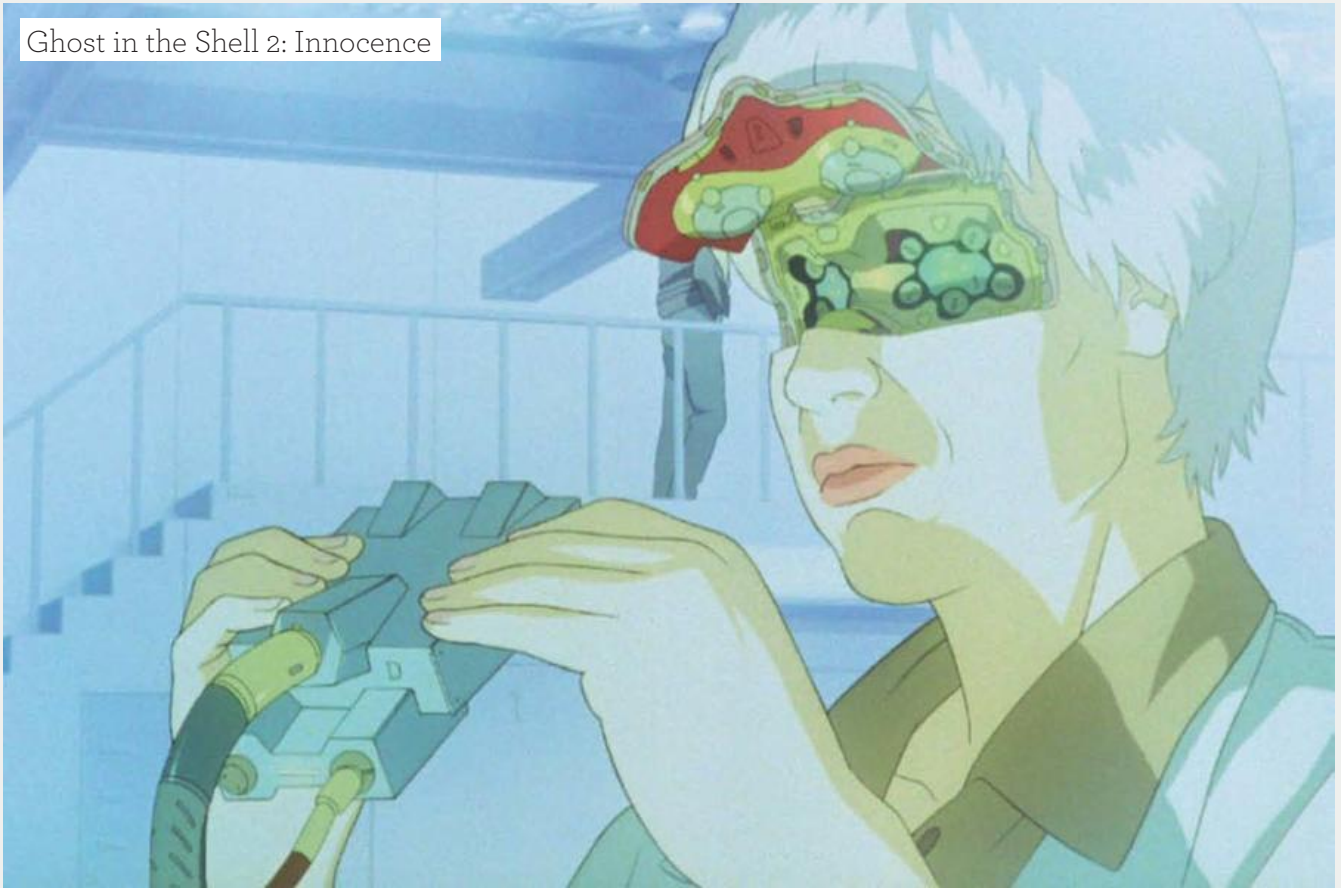
But there's none of that in *GITS: The New Movie*, which is also part of the *Arise* continuity. Like the Bond film *Skyfall*, it shows the main character as a full-fledged professional – but one still weighed down by her rebooted backstory. She's hunting for a super-hacker (again), but her investigation takes her back to the house where she was “born” and raised, to final reckonings with her past.

And what next? As of writing, both Bond and *GITS* are up in the air. Perhaps Production I.G will suspend its franchise until the Hollywood film is released. Alternatively, it may make more *GITS: Arise*, or skip sideways to the *Stand Alone Complex* version that's been dormant since 2006. Or is it time to reboot *Ghost in the Shell* again; a new shell, a ghost wiped clean? Maybe the next Kusanagi will have a “OO”...

Find out how Kusanagi stacks up against Bond, with Manga Entertainment's *Ghost in the Shell: The New Movie*, out now. ▶



Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence



KNOW YOUR GHOSTS

Take a closer look at the many incarnations of the Ghost in the Shell story, which has graced screens large and small for over 20 years.

GHOST IN THE SHELL

Consists of: Two cinema films, *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) and *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence* (2004). A reissue of the first film, with some controversially changed visuals, was released in 2008, confusingly named *Ghost in the Shell 2.0*.

Main creators: Mamoru Oshii (director), Kazunori Ito (who wrote the first film, though Oshii wrote the second), Kenji Kawai (composer).

See also: Oshii's films all share images and themes, but *Ghost in the Shell* feels particularly close to *Patlabor 2*, which Oshii had directed two years earlier. More recently, his CG-heavy fantasy film *Garm Wars: The Last Druid*, shot in Canada, has a heroine who looks very like Kusanagi, searching for a meaning to her artificial life.

Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence



Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex

GHOST IN THE SHELL: STAND ALONE COMPLEX

Consists of: Two TV seasons, broadcast between 2002 and 2005. Each season was 26 parts long; the second was subtitled *2nd Gig*. There was also a TV film sequel, *Solid State Society*, in 2006.

In addition, both TV seasons were compiled into OAV movies, though this involved considerable squeezing. The first season was abridged as *The Laughing Man* and the second as *Individual Eleven*.

Main creators: Kenji Kamiyama (director/series composition), and Yoko Kanno (music).

See also: Kamiyama went on to direct the cyborg action film *009 Re: Cyborg*, adapted from a 1960s manga. However, there are arguably more interesting echoes of SAC in Kamiyama's fantasy series *Moribito: Guardian of the Spirit* (which features a formidable warrior woman) and in his political-comedy-techno-thriller, *Eden of the East*.

GHOST IN THE SHELL: ARISE

Consists of: Four films, each just under an hour long, released to Japanese cinemas. These were then re-edited as a ten-part TV series subtitled *Alternative Architecture*. Eight of the TV episodes were based on the films; the remaining two episodes were a new story, called *Pyrophoric Cult*. The original films are available in Britain, but *Alternative Architecture* isn't yet.

Despite losing the "Arise" tag, *Ghost in the Shell: The New Movie* continues in the same continuity and features characters and story threads from the earlier *Arise* stories.

Main creators: Kazuchika Kise (Chief Director), Kazuya Nomura (director of *The New Movie*), Tow Ubukata (writer), Cornelius aka Keigo Oyamada (who worked on the music).

See also: *Arise's* writer Tow Ubukata wrote both the book and anime versions of *Mardock Scramble*, which feels like a cross between *GITS* and *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo*. As well as this, he's also worked on *Le Chevalier D'Eon* and *Heroic Age*, as well as doing the series composition for *Fafner of the Azure* and *Psycho-Pass 2*.



Ghost in the Shell: Arise



Scarlett Johansson channelling cyborg style in *Lucy*.

© Universal Pictures

THE HOLLYWOOD VERSION

Consists of: One forthcoming live-action DreamWorks film, which is reportedly shooting in New Zealand as of writing.

Main credits: Rupert Sanders (*Snow White and the Huntsman*) is directing from a script drafted by Jamie Moss (*Street Kings*), William Wheeler (*The Reluctant Fundamentalist*) and more recently by Jonathan Herman (*Straight Outta Compton*). Scarlett Johansson is in the lead role, though her character's name isn't confirmed as of writing, just her title: the Major. Danish actor Pilou Asbæk, best known for the acclaimed political TV drama *Borgen*, is confirmed as Batou. Japanese actor/director/hard-man megastar Takeshi Kitano has

been announced as Aramaki, with more than one pundit speculating he's been cast to offset the "whitewashing" outcry when Johansson was announced. The last time Kitano appeared in a Hollywood film, two decades ago, was also in a cyberpunk epic - the critically-mauled *Johnny Mnemonic*.

Michael Pitt (*Boardwalk Empire*) plays The Laughing Man, according to the *Hollywood Reporter*. As *GITS* fans know, The Laughing Man was the name of the adversary in the first season of *Stand Alone Complex*, suggesting the new film is at least loosely influenced by this version. A report in the trade paper *Variety* describes The Laughing Man as "the ultimate hacker, capable of such feats as hijacking multiple video streams simultaneously, taking over someone's cybernetic brain and editing his own images out of someone's cybernetic eyes." (Which is consistent with the Laughing Man from *SAC*, but this could still be a very different character.)

Planned Release Date: March 31, 2017, co-financed and distributed by Paramount.



Lucy

© Universal Pictures

“It seems the new Hollywood film will be at least loosely influenced by the Laughing Man season of *Stand Alone Complex*.”

ALL THE LATEST INFO! **MCM Comic Con News**

27-29 May

THE BIGGEST EVENT in NEO's calendar is coming up in May, and you can find out more about our activity at the event (and Anime Limited's too!) on the opposite page. The MCM London Comic Con is renowned for its epic guests, and this year there will be a host of them, including Amatsuki, BAND-MAID, Warwick Davis, Jeremy Shada, Kunal Nayyar, and loads more!

We contacted some of our favourite distributors to find out more about their planned activities. "MVM Entertainment has been busy acquiring new anime licenses which will be announced at MCM Comic Con," said Tony Allen. "Exciting new titles and an update on our Blu-ray plans, including some very nice collector's editions. As usual, the MVM stand will have early availability on not yet released titles and our famous "deal of the day" offers. Drop by to pick up our new colour catalogue hot off the press and now a staggering 12 pages!"

"This MCM London Comic Con make sure you head to the Manga UK and Animatsu booth for something very different," said a press rep. "For the first time ever, we will have our own stage on which we will host a number of exciting events including anime karaoke, themed competitions, Q&As and much more... As always, there will be a panel where Jerome Mazandarani and Andrew Hewson will announce all the latest brand new releases, as well as give fans a chance to have their questions answered. Time and date will be announced soon, so make sure you are following us on Twitter and Facebook for more info - @MangaUK and @AnimatsuEnt."

Meanwhile, the games companies were gearing up for some awesome surprises. "We're happy to bring *A.O.T. Wings of Freedom* (based on the worldwide anime hit *Attack on Titan*) to MCM London Comic Con this May," said Chin Soon Sun of Koei. "Fans will get to experience the world exclusive English version of the demo for the very first time at the show. We invite fans and cosplayers to visit our booth for photo opportunities at our 'Wings of Freedom' and 'Colossal Titan' walls. We also have the *Atelier Sophie* game demo available at the booth. Come try the exclusive demo and win many goodies from us!"

Bandai Namco are also planning to bring a host of games, including *God Eater*, *One Piece Burning Blood*, *Naruto Shippuden Ultimate Ninja Storm*, *PAC-MAN 256* and *Jojo's Bizarre Adventure: Eyes of Heaven*. "God Eater in particular we're very excited about having at the show," said Lee Kirton, PR and Marketing Director. "It's huge in Japan - and with the series making a big release in the west this year it makes perfect sense for it to receive a public debut at MCM in May."

Sarah Anderson of VIZ Media promises, "exclusive giveaways and early release titles, alongside our usual deals and special offers." Genki Gear are also taking part with the launch of the official T-shirt at www.genkigear.com, where it's priced £16.99. "We are really pleased to be doing the official MCM London T-shirt and loved the idea of doing a geeky super hero team that solve crimes through science. We have worked with one of our favourite artists Emily McGowan on the art for the design to get the look we really wanted," said the company.

For more information about the event, including travel, prices and advance ticket sales, plus new announcements, head to the site at www.mcmcomiccon.com/london.





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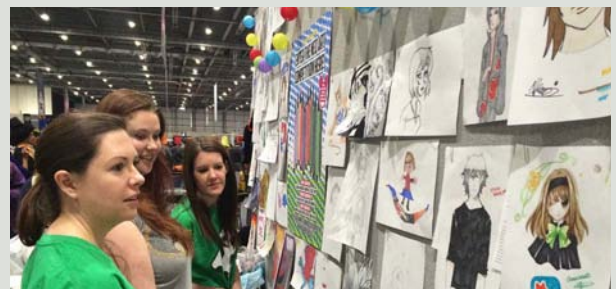


NEO at the MCM Expo Stand 321

One of your first stops at the London MCM Expo this May should be NEO's stand – easy to remember... 321! We're located in the Comic Village area of the South Hall. This year, we'll have some incredible cosplay signings, as well as our art competition, which will be running throughout the weekend and online. At our stand we'll have the best subscription deals we've ever had, including £8 for three issues and a free manga, £15 for six issues and a free manga and choice of prize from our stand, or £30 for 12 issues, a free anime, and a choice of prize!

NEO Art Competition

Taking place online and at the London MCM Comic Con is the NEO Art Competition. You can enter by either handing your artwork into the staff at the NEO stand at the event (with your name, email address and contact number on the back of the artwork), or by emailing it to mail@neomag.co.uk with the subject header 'NEO Art Comp May 16' along with your name, age and a contact number. We will only accept artwork sent between 10am Monday 23rd May - 5pm Tuesday 31st May. Prizes will be confirmed online via our social media pages before the competition opens, and winners will be announced on 3 June.



Anime Limited at the MCM Expo

"Anime Limited will be back in a big way at MCM London Comic Con this month," a company rep told us. "We're going to have lots of news to share across the entire weekend through panels we'll be hosting as well as at our booth and online. You'll be able to pick up our newest releases including *Durarara!! x2 Shou*, *Psycho-Pass 2* and *Psychic School Wars* along with a wide range of our titles to date from the shop section of our booth. It's going to be a packed weekend for us so make sure to stop by as we have some very cool things planned that we can't tell you about just yet.

"And if that wasn't enough we're incredibly excited to see that MCM will bring the European Premiere of *Gundam The Origin III* at the event. Access to the screening is included in the price of admission to the event, but is on a first come first served basis for entry."

To send NEO a tip about an upcoming event, big or small, please email us at mail@neomag.co.uk with the subject header 'Events'.

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NEW EP AND MORE FROM THE GAZETTE

THE GAZETTE ARE reaching the conclusion of PROJECT:DARK AGE, an artistic venture involving 18 creative professionals spanning Japan's fashion, design, photography, sound, film and stage industries. Last year's album *DOGMA* was the first movement of the project, former UK #1 iTunes Metal EP *UGLY* was another, and now the final EP of the trilogy is a further, entitled *UNDYING* - mastered exclusively from iTunes in high definition audio.

They also have a massive world tour going on right now, already kicking off to a sold out crowd in Mexico. By the time this issue hits the shelves they'll be headbanging their way across America and

Canada. By June, the visual kei band will be Europe-bound, though a UK date is sadly lacking from their itinerary. They will, however, be performing at Le Zènith in Paris, a massive 6,000+ capacity indoor arena on 3 June. Tickets are available from weird-world.de, although all VIP packages have already sold out. Regular tickets are still available priced at €60.51. Other European dates include Cologne on 5 June, Munich on 8 June, Helsinki on 10 June and Russia on 12 June.

Additionally, the band's massive back catalogue from their days with King Records have just been unleashed digitally in all their glory from all your favourite (and not so favourite) digital services.



IDOL GROUP WILL HACK YOUR IPHONE

A BRAND NEW hip hop idol group has been making headlines with their quirky debut video that's optimised for viewing on an iPhone - though it can be watched on any device that has access to YouTube. Filmed vertically, in the shape of a phone screen, the music video sees the group's six members charmingly dance in and out of familiar apps, such as FaceTime, Twitter and LINE, as if your device has just been hacked by a playful bunch of pop idols.

The group is lyrical school (stylised in lowercase) and the song is *RUN and RUN*, their major debut, having just signed with King Records in Japan after being indie for six years. It's also their international debut too! The ladies join JPU Records for the UK release, with the video available now on the label's YouTube channel. The group's debut EP *RUN and RUN* is also out now for digital download and streaming, and features four songs, including a re-recording of their indie classic *brand new day*, and two instrumental tracks.



AMATSUKI

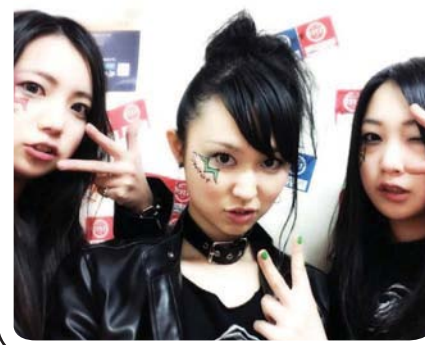
Last issue we announced that anime, vocaloid and J-pop singer Amatsuki would be making his UK debut at the end of May. It turns out that the hot new Japanese talent will also be releasing his music over here too! His first major label album *Hello, World!* and single *Niji No Mukoue* are out now digitally.

CUSTOMI Z

Voice acting rock squad Customi Z kicked off their music career with 108 date tour of Japan, and by the time they finished they'd landed a major record deal, got a song included in the anime *Knights of Sidonia*, and even got a job doing voices in the series too! Their self-titled album is out now digitally, along with single *COOLEST*, from the anime *Haven't You Heard? I'm Sakamoto*. Nab it now!

UPCOMING GIGS

DATE	BAND	LOCATION
17 May	girugamesh	London
20 May	coldrain	Bristol
21 May	coldrain	London
22 May	coldrain	Manchester
23 May	coldrain	Glasgow
24 May	coldrain	Nottingham
26 May	coldrain	Southampton
27 May	coldrain	Reading
27-29 May	BAND-MAID	London
27-29 May	Amatsuki	London
28 May	coldrain	Leeds
28 May	Melt-Banana	London
28 May	Pikacyu-Makoto	London
29 May	coldrain	Birmingham
30 May	coldrain	Hatfield
8 July	Kyary Pamyu Pamyu	London
24 Sep	SCANDAL	London
14 Nov	MUTANT MONSTER	Birmingham
15 Nov	MUTANT MONSTER	Cardiff
16 Nov	MUTANT MONSTER	Bristol
18 Nov	MUTANT MONSTER	London
19 Nov	MUTANT MONSTER	Brighton



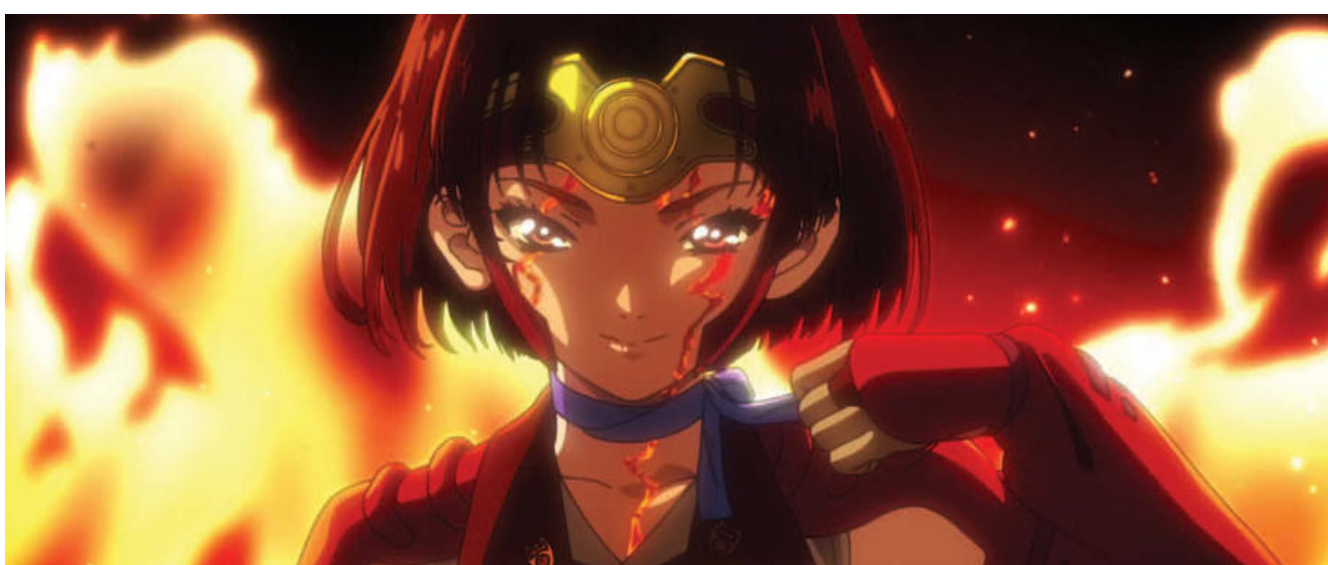
Coming up ATTACK ON TITAN: WINGS OF FREEDOM

RELEASE DATE: 26 August

DISTRIBUTOR: Koei Tecmo

Strap on your Omni-Directional Manoeuvr Gear and prepare to fight for the very future of mankind! The globe conquering smash hit *Attack on Titan* is coming to the PS4, PS3, PS Vita, Xbox One and PC later this year in Koei Tecmo's *Wings Of Freedom*. The game follows the plot of season one of the anime as Eren, Mikasa and the Survey Corps face the terrifying onslaught of the man-eating titans. Expect fast-paced, aerial anti-titan combat and grisly deaths galore!





Prime Directive

Jonathan Clements knows there's no such thing as a free launch

STARTING WITH THIS season's *Kabaneri of the Iron Fortress*, new shows from the highly-regarded NoitaminA late-night slot on Japanese television will only be streamed abroad on Amazon Prime. Some fans are angry because that closes the window that previously might have allowed them to see it for free from another supplier.

But it doesn't seem to bother the UK's anime companies. "Streaming from another large platform can only be a positive thing," comments Andrew Partridge of Anime Limited. "I heard naysayers flapping when Netflix came along, too. The truth of the matter is that the Amazons and Netflixes of this world are the terrestrial TV we never really had."

In the years before NEO, anime TV shows weren't on TV in the UK. Japanese cartoons were written off as glorified toy commercials or unsuitably violent, and fans sourced them from the video trade instead. In the last decade, anime has undergone a quiet revolution in streaming and simulcasts, but I don't think fandom likes to feel that it's being "handled", even though enclosing intellectual properties is the way that any broadcaster builds its brand. SKY TV initially sold itself as the place where you could watch *The Simpsons*. Sporting channels snatch exclusive access to Your Team versus Their Team. If you gave

me the mission of seizing the high ground in anime, NoitaminA would be the first thing I would go for, because it's come to be associated with quality. If you were previously the sole gatekeeper to NoitaminA, you would have had *Erased*, *Psycho Pass*, and *Terror in Resonance*, *Nodame Cantabile* and *Eden of the East*. But so what? You still wouldn't have had *Attack on Titan* or *Ghost in the Shell*.

Fans love the idea of getting their own, tailor-made anime-streaming "channel". But they hate it when they discover it Doesn't Have All The Things. So it's not just one monthly payment, it's two, it's three... When *Battery* starts running in July, you won't be able to preview it for free on Crunchyroll. But if you really want to see it, it will still be right there, if you pay the *annual* fee, on Amazon Prime. That's what's making a lot of fans twitch. When Funimation or Viewster subscriptions cost no more than a once-monthly Happy Meal, they feel negligible. But Prime's £79 a year doesn't feel like £7 a month, even though it is. (Or another £5.99 a month for Prime Video, if you prefer.)

Of course, down the line, these shows will continue to come out on disc anyway. Which is where the real cleverness lies, because if you've already paid for Amazon Prime, it's pretty obvious where you're going to buy your Blu-ray. They'll get to take your money twice. ■

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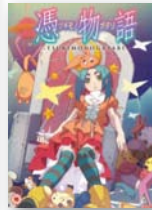
Luke Mitchell
Agents of Shield



Elizabeth Henstridge
Agents of Shield

*Kids Go Free: Children 12 and Under go free if accompanied by a paying adult. Max 2 free entries per adult, applies to General Entry. Excludes from this offer all day. Images used herein for publicity purposes only. Guests appearance(s) subject to work commitments.

UK release schedule



ANIME

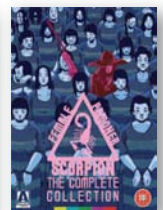
DATE	TITLE	DISTRIBUTOR
16/05	RWBY: Volume 3	Animatsu
16/05	Love Live! School Idol Project S1 Collection (Collectors')	MVM
16/05	Psycho-Pass 2 (Collector's Blu-ray / DVD)	Anime Limited
23/05	Seraph of the End	Universal
30/05	Tsukimonogatari (DVD / Blu-ray)	MVM
30/05	Psychic School Wars (Collector's Blu-ray / DVD)	Anime Limited
30/05	Kamisama Kiss 2 Collection (DVD / Blu-ray)	MVM
06/06	Blue Exorcist Complete (DVD / Blu-ray)	Manga
06/06	Yu-Gi-Oh Complete Season 5	Manga
10/06	When Marnie Was There	StudioCanal
13/06	Michiko & Hatchin Collection	MVM
20/06	Love Live! School Idol Project S2 Collection (Collectors')	MVM
27/06	Haibane Renmei Collection	MVM
11/07	Fate Stay Night Unlimited Bladeworks Part 2 (Blu-ray / DVD)	MVM
25/07	Monthly Girls Collection (Blu-ray + DVD)	MVM



MANGA

DATE	TITLE	DISTRIBUTOR
12/05	Planetes Omnibus 2	Dark Horse
12/05	Seven Deadly Sins 14	Kodansha
12/05	What Did You Eat Yesterday? 10	Vertical
19/05	Blanc et Noir: Takeshi Obata Illustrations	VIZ Media
19/05	Bleach 3-in-1 Edition 15	VIZ Media
19/05	Blue Exorcist 15	VIZ Media
19/05	Dragonball Full Color Freeza Arc 1	VIZ Media
19/05	Jojo's Bizarre Adventure Part 2 Battle Tendency 3	VIZ Media
19/05	My Hero Academia 4	VIZ Media
19/05	Naruto: Sakura's Story	VIZ Media
19/05	Nisekoi 15	VIZ Media
19/05	One Piece 78	VIZ Media

DATE	TITLE	DISTRIBUTOR
19/05	One-Punch Man 6	VIZ Media
19/05	World Trigger 10	VIZ Media
19/05	Yu-Gi-Oh! 3-in-1 Edition 06	VIZ Media
19/05	Cage of Eden 20	Kodansha
19/05	Devil Survivor 5	Kodansha
19/05	Forget Me Not 2	Kodansha
19/05	Noragami 14	Kodansha
19/05	Abandoned Sacred Beasts Vol. 1, The	Vertical
24/05	EVE: Valkyrie	Dark Horse
26/05	Oreimo: Kuroneko 5	Dark Horse
26/05	Real Account 2	Kodansha
26/05	Silent Voice 7	Kodansha
26/05	Tsubasa Omnibus 8	Kodansha
26/05	Devil's Line 1	Vertical
31/05	Blood-C: Demonic Moonlight 1	Dark Horse
31/05	Yamada-Kun & The Seven Witches 8	Kodansha
02/06	Persona Q: Shadow of the Labyrinth Side: P3 2	Kodansha
02/06	Maid-samal 2-in-1 Edition 4	VIZ Media
02/06	Kimi ni Todoke 24	VIZ Media
02/06	Oresama Teacher 20	VIZ Media
02/06	Ranma 1/2 2-in-1 Edition 14	VIZ Media
02/06	Requiem of the Rose King 4	VIZ Media
02/06	Terra Formars 12	VIZ Media
02/06	The Heiress and the Chauffeur 1	VIZ Media
02/06	Ultraman 4	VIZ Media
09/06	Kiss Him, Not Me 5	Kodansha
09/06	Say I Love You 14	Kodansha
30/06	Fate / Zero 2	Dark Horse
30/06	Inuyashiki 4	Kodansha



ASIAN FILM

DATE	TITLE	DISTRIBUTOR
16/05	Ritual	Terrorcotta
23/05	The Assassin	Studio Canal
23/05	Journey To The Shore	Eureka
30/05	Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story [Blu-ray]	Universal
30/05	The Human Condition Trilogy	Arrow
06/06	Parasyte The Movie: Part 2	Animatsu
13/06	Nikkatsu Diamond Guys Vol. 2	Arrow
13/06	Our Little Sister	Curzon Artificial Eye
27/06	Attack On Titan: The Movie	Animatsu
01/07	World Of Kanako	Metrodome
04/07	Mei Ren Yu (Mermaid)	Sony Pictures Home Entertainment
11/07	Love And Peace	Third Window
25/07	Attack On Titan II: End Of The World	Animatsu
25/07	Female Prisoner Scorpion: The Complete Collection	Arrow
12/09	A Scene At The Sea	Third Window
TBC	Four Moods	Eureka
TBC	Mountains May Depart	New Wave Films
TBC	Kids Return	Third Window
TBC	Creepy	Eureka



Ghost In The Shell

First Look At Scarlett Johansson As The Major

Masamune Shirow introduced the world to his cyberpunk heroine Motoko Kusanagi when *Ghost in the Shell* debuted in Japan in 1989. The 1995 movie by Mamoru Oshii is still considered one of the greatest accomplishments in animation history, so any attempt to make a live action version was bound to risk the ire of fans. Still, the upcoming production from DreamWorks and Paramount Pictures has already caused controversy by casting white actors in almost all of the key roles.

The cast includes Scarlett Johansson as the Major and Takeshi Kitano as Aramaki. Director Rupert Sanders previously helmed *Snow White And The Huntsman* and *GITS* is currently in production in New Zealand. The film isn't due for release until March 2017 so there is plenty of time for the 'whitewashing' controversy to die down, assuming fan reaction to any advance trailers is overwhelmingly positive. Otherwise, expect pitchforks and torches.



Romance Isn't Dead

Koei Tecmo has revealed that the latest iteration of their hugely popular strategy video game series, *Romance Of The Three Kingdoms XIII*, is coming to the UK for the PS4 and PC on 8 July. The game, based upon the venerable Chinese epic, sees players attempt to unify the fractious states of 2nd Century China through diplomacy, alliances and conquest!

The Scorpion Queen!

Following their excellent collections of crime films from the Nikkatsu vaults, Arrow Films has announced the release of *Female Prisoner Scorpion: The Complete Collection*. The box set containing all four of star Meiko Kaji's outings as the vengeful convict - *Female Prisoner #701 Scorpion*, *Jailhouse 41*, *Beast Stable* and *#701's Grudge Song* - is due on 25 July.



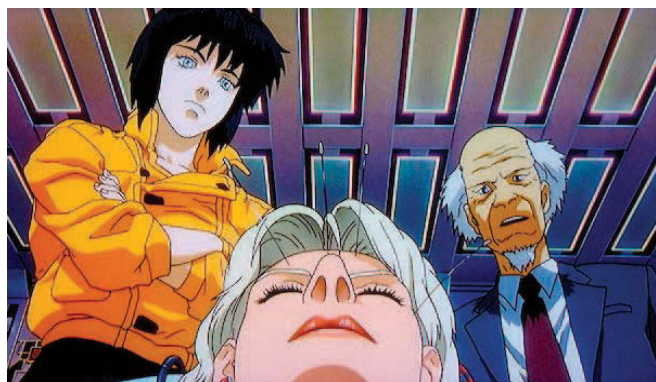
An (Sweet Bean)

A Tale As Tasty As Red Bean Paste

EUREKA HAS ACQUIRED the UK rights to *An (Sweet Bean)* by director Naomi Kawase, whose last film, *Still The Water*, came out here last year. The story is adapted from a novel by Durian Sukegawa.

Dorayaki (pancakes filled with a sweet red bean paste called 'an') are a Japanese favourite, but Sentaro (Masatoshi Nagase) has never liked the factory-produced paste he uses in the dorayaki he sells in his small shop. When the elderly Tokue (Kirin Kiki) answers Sentaro's ad looking for a shop assistant, he is less than impressed, particularly as she seems to have arthritis in her hands. But when he tries her delicious handmade red bean paste, he decides to take her on.

Kawase's movie was screened as part of the prestigious Un Certain Regard category at Cannes and played at last year's BFI London Film Festival. Eureka will release the film later this year. The distributor has also picked up Kiyoshi Kurosawa's *Creepy*, a dark thriller about a retired detective investigating the disappearance of a family.



BFI Anime Weekend

Three Days Of Exclusives And Previews!

EVERY TWO YEARS the BFI in London celebrates the best and brightest in anime with three days of movies on the big screen. This year, the BFI Anime Weekend runs 3 June through 6 June and opens with *Harmony*, the new film from Michael Arias and Takashi Nakamura. Arias, who made the brilliant *Tekkon Kinkreet*, will be in attendance for a Q&A after the movie. The story is set in the future where nanotechnology has created a perfect world - but there are some who feel that the tightly controlled society is less than utopian.

There's more sci-fi in *The Empire Of Corpses* by director Ryotaro Makihara and Wit Studio of *AOT* fame. Saturday's line up contains Mamoru Hosoda's *The Boy And The Beast*, and back-to-back cyberpunk goodness with Mamoru Oshii's 1995 classic *Ghost in the Shell*, followed by the latest incarnation of the franchise, *Ghost in the Shell: The New Movie* in which Major Kusanagi and her team in Section 9 try to track the source of the deadly Fire-Starter virus.

On Sunday, there's a preview screening of Studio Ghibli's *When Marnie Was There*, Mamoru Oshii's live action outing *Garm Wars: The Last Druid*, and finally the dystopian science fiction crime thrills of *Psycho-Pass: The Movie*. For more info, visit www.bfi.org.uk.



Guitar Heroes, Baby Metalers and Electronic Queens

Tom Smith gets the lowdown on the latest music releases in week 16 of Japan's official Oricon album chart!

LEGEND KYOSUKE HIMURO rocks his way to the top of the charts with *L'EPILOGUE*, a greatest hits compilation consisting of 36 tracks from his mighty career so far, including tracks from his time with Tomoyasu Hotei in group BOØWY, to his own solo material which led to him becoming one of Japan's best-selling artists. All songs have been remastered by Ted Jensen, and there are some new remixes included too.

But! One track we were really hoping to see included is absent; *Safe and Sound*, featuring guest vocals from My Chemical Romance's Gerard Way. The track was used as the new ending song

to Japan's *Final Fantasy VII Advent Children Complete* release, but not included outside of the country.

Former chart topper *COSMIC EXPLORER* – the fifth album from electronic girl group Perfume – moves to number four. The release is the trio's longest album to be in production and features seven singles, including 2013's lead single *Sweet Refrain* with its experimentations into dubstep. The album has been released physically in the UK through Wrasse Records, and is also available for digital download and streaming.

Another album currently dominating the charts in Japan as well as the UK is BABYMETAL's highly anticipated second record, released ahead of their sold out show at Wembley Arena recently (which also happened to set a sales record for the most merchandise sold in the 12,500 capacity venue – ever!). This was also the first album from Japan to make the top 40 of America's Billboard chart in 53 years, and the highest charting album ever from a Japanese artist in the Official Albums Chart UK too. Suffice to say, *METAL RESISTANCE* is out here on CD, vinyl and digital formats courtesy of earMUSIC.

The next highest ranking new entry, after Himuro, is *After the Rain*. The unit is made up of popular utaite (people who record cover songs on Japan's video sharing site Nico Nico Douga) Mafumafu and Soraru, the latter of which has also recently started producing vocaloid songs. MCM London Comic Con will have its first Japanese utaite Amatsuki performing this May! ■

JAPANESE CHARTS

NO.	ARTIST	TITLE
01	Kyosuke Himuro	L'EPILOGUE
02	After the Rain (Soraru x Mafumafu)	Kuro Crest Story
03	San Daime J Soul Brothers from EXILE TRIBE	THE JSB LEGACY
04	Perfume	COSMIC EXPLORER
05	Hideaki Tokunaga	ALL TIME BEST Presence
06	BABYMETAL	METAL RESISTANCE
07	Sukima Switch	POPMAN'S ANOTHER WORLD
08	Ayumikurikamaki Ayumikurikamaki ga yatte kuru! Kumaa! Kumaa! Kumaa!	
09	Ikimonogakari Chou Ikimonobakari: Tennen Kinen Members BEST Selection	
10	C&K	CK IT'S A JAM -BEST HIT UTA

ATTACK ON TITAN

Wings of Freedom



26/08/2016

 /koeigames  @koeitecmoeurope  koeitecmoeurope.com/attackontitan

 PS4  PS3  PS VITA  XBOX ONE  STEAM  Koei Tecmo Europe Ltd.  koei  Produced by Force

Based on the manga "Shingeki no Kyojin" by Hajime Isayama originally serialized in the monthly BESSATSU SHONEN magazine published by Kodansha Ltd.
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LUCY LIU

The award-winning actress first came to prominence playing the ferocious Ling Woo in TV comedy drama *Ally McBeal*, before embarking on a film career that has seen her play a wide range of characters, including a vampire, a madam, a snake, and an assassin. Often voted as one of the top 100 sexiest women in the world, Lucy Liu is certainly no dragon lady.



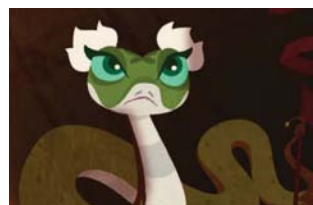
Charlie's Angels 1 & 2 (2000-2003)

Liu teams up with Cameron Diaz and Drew Barrymore to kick some criminal arse in this Hollywood blockbuster remake of the classic TV series from the '70s. Testosterone levels are high as the chicks with the lethal high kicks stretch, twist and flick their bodies whilst thrusting their best assets forward as they battle the bad guys. The trio capture their prey with their sex appeal before unleashing their mighty force – and there's not a hair out of place.



Kill Bill 1 & 2 (2003-2004)

Whilst preparing for Quentin Tarantino's homage to the martial arts and western movies of yesteryear, Liu's body endured an intensive workout as she learnt the skills needed to wield a deadly samurai sword, the chosen weapon of her villainous character O-Ren Ishii, whose backstory is played out as a lengthy anime sequence. Although O-Ren meets her bloody demise in *Part 1*, because the scenes are shown out of sequence, she also appears in *Part 2*!



Kung Fu Panda 1, 2 & 3 (2008-2016)

Liu is no stranger to animation; she voiced the character Madam Wu in *The Simpsons* episode *Goo Goo Gai Pan* and voiced herself in two episodes of *Futurama*. So lending her vocal skills to the supporting snake character Viper in the hugely successful *Kung Fu Panda* franchise was just another day at the office. As expected, her performance is top notch and delivered with much dexterity, making for a very convincing sexy slitherer.



Elementary (2012-present)

The mould to author Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's famous fictitious detective, Sherlock Holmes, is well and truly broken in this popular contemporary TV drama series adaptation that sees Liu playing a female alternative to Holmes' sidekick, Dr. Watson. The brilliant British crime fighter in this new inventive version, played by Jonny Lee Miller, is a recovering drug addict and former consultant to Scotland Yard who now assists the New York City Police Department.

WORDS BY SPENCER LLOYD PEET

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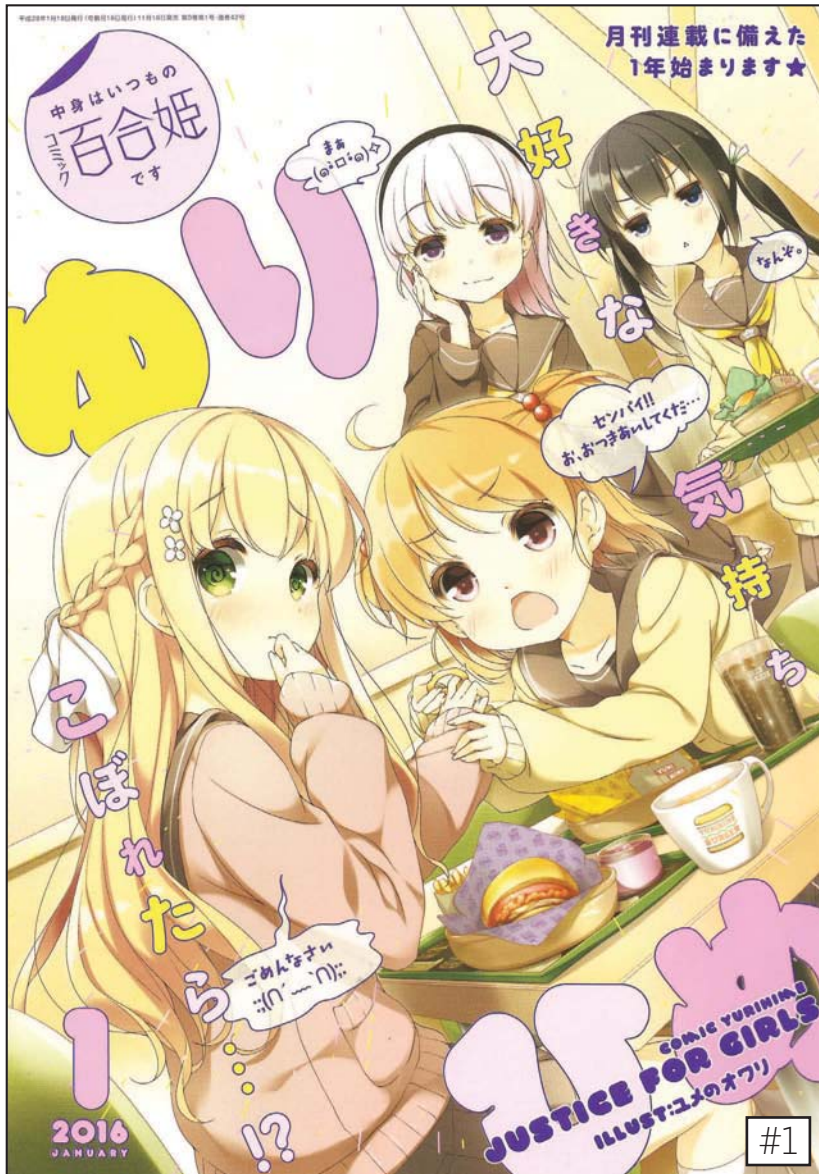
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SQUARE ENIX

YURIHIME

NEO doesn't wait for translation. Jonathan Clements looks at what's happening in the Japanese comics world right now...



ISSUE: #42
 DEBUT YEAR: 2005
 PAGE COUNT: c.600
 PUBLISHER: Ichijinsha
 PRICE: 824 yen (£4.75)
 CYCLE: Bimonthly

YURIHIME'S (1) TIME HAS come. It's taken 13 years, from its first incarnation as *Yuri Shimai* (*Lily Sisters*) in 2003, through its cancellation and rebranding as *Yurihime* (*Lily Princess*) in 2005, its move from quarterly publication, and then to bimonthly. This year, *Yurihime* finally goes monthly, reflecting that the editors have played a long, long game, but believe that they have finally grown an audience.

What kind of audience? Well, the word "lily" is associated in Japanese with girls who love girls, just as the word "rose" is associated with boys who love boys. Who wants to read a comic all about lesbians? Hands up? The magazine's own statistics claim that 70% of the readership is female, which means a third of the readers are boys peeking in at what the girls are getting up to. There was also a short-lived sister magazine, *Yurihime S*, which is supposedly aimed specifically at boys - I dread to think what that means. What about *Yurihime* - are we talking about a subtle appreciation of the female form, or schoolgirl crushes, or the full-on adoption of a lesbian lifestyle? Can we even say what a "lesbian lifestyle" is? Is it something to do with haircuts and power tools?

The girls on the cover look about eight years old, are playing with onion rings in a burger bar, and speak a patois so 21st century that their very speech balloons are riddled with emojis. Then again, this is a magazine published by Ichijinsha, the same publisher whose controversial *Waa! Boys in Skirts* was accused in these very pages (NEO 92) of being a cynical attempt to get an end-run around some issues in censorship. Is this more of the same?

The lead story is Yaoi Ozawa's *2DK G-pen Available for Viewing* (2), which derives its title from the abbreviations used by Japanese real estate ads - 2DK means "two bedrooms, dining area and kitchen." A G-pen, meanwhile, is a pen nib favoured by a manga artist. Dark-haired office lady Kazuki is looking for a place to live, but all the flat-shares in Tokyo are clogged with creeps, unnecessary commutes or noisy neighbours. But she is pursued by the blonde-haired San, a merry lesbian manga

LEGALITIES

Homosexuality in Japan is legal, although ages of consent are set on a prefectural basis, and some areas set the age of consent for same-sex relations higher than for the heteronormative equivalent. There are, however, some common cultural clichés, such as a prevailing assumption that women are "turned" gay by a traumatic experience with a man.





artist who keeps offering her a place to bunk down. "We can just be friends!" she trills. And so the flatmastery begins, with the usual wrangles over who gets which shelf in the fridge, and who gets the big room, and so on... For now, it's all platonic, and perhaps it will stay that way, like *Will & Grace* with two women - one is prim and uptight; one is messy and carefree... what an odd couple they make. Yes, it's hardly the most original of set-ups, but does it need to be?

Yurihime magazine is all about the emotion. I would call it chaste, except that sounds like an insult and it is not. Most of the characters develop Feelings for each other with a capital F, but the pay-off is merely in acknowledging that those feelings exist. Characters are validated simply by being noticed and accepted, and that is all rather sweet. The drama, however, can get very complicated, so much so that every ongoing series in *Yurihime* has a standardised plot-summary page to point who's who and what's happened. No three line catch-up crammed in the side of a panel here; keeping the readers up to speed with the love-polygons and vendettas of the average manga girls-school requires an extensive essay.

Take *Citrus* (3), for example, by Saburouta, an ongoing manga in the magazine that is already being translated into English. It looks to all intents and purposes like a harem show with the male drone surgically removed, as transfer student Yuzu arrives at a girls-school of sassy princesses,

and has to deal with a brash and unlikeable roommate. Friendships are formed and broken; feelings develop and are either confessed, or repressed or brushed aside. This is merely a world without boys... or is it? Is this one of the manga read by the 30% male readership?

I bet *The Last Waltz* (4) isn't, just on the basis of the opening image of Ako Katakura's manga, in which our heroine grimaces into a mirror as she tries to heft a boob into the right position in her bra. This is not an image designed as a titillation (sorry) to the male gaze - it is a gritty, knowing recognition of female logistics, in a manga that revolves around the student paper and gossip about a mild-mannered lady teacher's after-school activities. Katakura's schoolgirls are wired directly into the net - their iPhones seem permanently attached to their hands, keeping them permanently interacting, sparring and arguing, even when offstage. But how many of them know that the dark-haired schoolgirl Shinobu is arranging Sapphic trysts with her teacher at the wonderfully named love hotel, the Flying F**k? It's all very exciting, and even taught me a new term in Japanese: *ushichichi*, or "cow tits".

Meanwhile, the plot synopsis for Hibiki Aoto's *Prince Prince* (5) is giving me brain-ache. There's a boy disguised as a girl and a girl disguised as a boy, and they're involved in some sort of drama, but in this chapter they just go out for fizzy drinks and try on some dresses. But it's a proper date, and their

"This year, *Yurihime* finally goes monthly, reflecting that editors have played a long, long game, but believe that they have finally grown an audience."



▷ chaste kiss goodbye is accidentally witnessed by some cheering classmates. That's all very well, but it's going to cause all sorts of trauma later on in the love polygon, if any of the girls realise that the boy they like is really a girl, or the boys realise that the girl they like is really a boy, or... my head really does hurt now.

CURIOUS & CURIUSER

Yurihime specialises in one-shot stories, such as Doromaru Numachi's *Miss Kuwabara and the End of the World* (6), which wittily frames itself as the early stages of a sci-fi disaster movie, only to drastically change tack when the titular Miss Kuwabara's drama is revealed to be entirely personal. She will be leaving Tokyo soon, it is implied, because her parents are moving house. And that makes Ayame, her best friend and secret crush, more than just a person to whom she has to say goodbye. With all the hyperbole of teenage angst, *Kuwabara's world will end* unless she can tell Ayame her feelings. She does, and the world does not.

But it's the ongoing tales that offer the most scope for character development and fun. I particularly enjoyed *Hoax Trap NTR* (7) by Naoko Kodama, which has some fun with the old "childhood friends" *osana-najimi* romance clichés. Yuma is a brash, butch blonde (this is manga, blonde is merely a state of mind and should not be taken to reflect reality), who has always looked out for the timid, angelic Hotaru. But these childhood friends

THE THIRTY-PERCENTERS

A shocking statistic from Japan's past. In the early 1930s, 30% of all double-suicides were committed by pairs of women, unable to realise their feelings towards each other in the society of the time.



find a new development to their relationship when they start discovering boys, with the usually passive Hotaru suddenly pushing Yuma into some lesbian experimentation. The story unfolds in a fashion to rival *Queer as Folk*, with the girls merrily double-dating two unsuspecting boys, while sneaking off for secret trysts where it's just the two of them.

Hoax Trap NTR has its cake and eats it, too. There's a nice little teen romance on the surface, and an entirely different lesbian tale going on in the shadows. The boys seem entirely clueless, rolling their eyes indulgently and waiting outside the toilets while the girls are inside "fixing their make-up." But what's the hoax? Where's the trap? Is everybody going to live happily ever after? Or is someone going to get hurt when they pick one partner over another? Or... shippers assemble: are the two boys also having an off-screen romance with *each other*?

Probably the best-known title here is *Yuruyuri* (*Easy-going Lily/Yuri*), which began in the boy-focussed sister mag before transferring here on its cancellation. On the way, it made it to adaptation as a three-season anime series, seemingly on the high concept that it was basically *K-On* without music, with four perky girls in the vaguely-defined school "Amusement Club", occasionally clashing and/or developing emotional attachments to the princesses of the school council.

As if one *K-On* comparison was enough, then there's *Twelve-Minute Etude* (8) by Tsubaki Nakahara, set around the intrigues of a girl's



orchestra. This is tough to pull off in a comic, because you can't draw sound. You can certainly try, although Nakahara limits herself to close-ups of the girls with their instruments, with the occasional musical note flying out of the panel. That's okay, though, because Tsubaki's main interest is not in the sports-manga stylings of training in the performing arts, but rather the intense pressure and competition among the girls, every one of them a hive of buzzing hormones, ready to slap the clarinetist whose bum note costs them the trophy.

The subject of an incredibly garish double-page colour spread in the middle of the magazine is *The Moon is Beautiful* (9) by Hachi Ito, in which three cat-eared girls in kimonos lurk around a country farmhouse, bickering about who is going to cook breakfast, and complimenting each other on their hair. Why, I do not know. There is no catch-up page for this third chapter, so it's not clear to me whether their discussion of their allotment vegetable patch is intended as some sort of metaphor, or if they really are just talking about plants. But if I read it right, the three cat-girls of *The Moon is Beautiful* are living close to nature in every sense of the word. They cower from rainstorms, they grow and eat their own food; they live in a world that would be entirely alien to the iPhone texters of a Japanese high school. And yet, the world they live in is very much real. Apart from the cats' ears.

Despite the jailbait cover that would put off this reader in a heartbeat – seriously, I wouldn't

“There are hard-line stories in here that regard lesbianism as the ultimate goal of human society, alongside those that regard it as a passing teenage fad, a subversive secret or a loud and proud assertion of who someone really is.”

have touched this magazine with a barge pole unless I was being paid to – the contents of *Yurihime* are often sassy, occasionally smutty, and display a playful, thoughtful set of attitudes about same-sex relationships. There does truly seem to be something for everybody here, from the questioning, to the bi, to the merely curious, and even the entirely disinterested, who like the idea of looking in on a girls' world that hasn't got any time for boys. There are hard-line stories in here that regard lesbianism as the ultimate goal of human society, alongside those that regard it as a passing teenage fad, a subversive secret or a loud and proud assertion of who someone really is. In other words, the magazine does exactly what I would hope from a publication that sets itself a particular lens to view the world, and turns it in every possible direction to create an interesting and varied set of stories. I'd quibble with the cover line that proclaims “Justice for Girls” – this magazine has justice for all. ■

TAKARAZUKA TROUBLES

The crucible of lesbian fandom in Japan is the all-girl Takarazuka Revue. Who knew? Well, not the Revue itself, which has repeatedly expressed surprise that female fans attending an all-female musical show might fancy some of the female performers onstage who were not dressed as men. Apparently they only expected them to like the ones with fake moustaches. I am not making this up.

LOST VILLAGE

Next stop, utopia!

01



THIRTY YOUNG PEOPLE sign up for a journey away from society, to a village which promises a better way of life. Will it all end in tears?

Spirited Away

Most new anime series play it safe with audiences, making it clear what you, the viewer, will get from them. 'New' shows often aren't really new at all. They're based on established properties - manga, games, light novels - that already have a following. Other shows make it clear from their opening minutes what kind of anime they are - a sports series, a harem comedy, a mecha-war epic. But then occasionally there's a series like *Lost Village*.

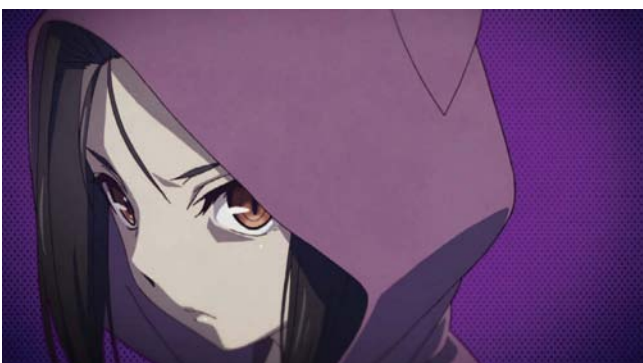
Here, the draw is that you don't know what you're getting; the whole first episode is a trip into the unknown. It begins with a coach on the freeway, speeding through the night. On board are 30

youngsters, males and females, adolescents and 20-somethings. They're strangers to each other, drawn together by an obscure website that promised them a new life, in a mythical Japanese village off the map. The passengers all have different reasons for signing up. Some have problems that they're running away from; others are spurning mainstream society. But now they're all together, a fresh-minded community beginning shiny and new. Well, that's the advert.

We'll have to see how it all pans out, though we'd be very surprised if it all goes well. The opening episode throws up many resonances with stories we've seen before, and not just Japanese ones. The scenario of strangers thrown together on a journey into the dark is universal; many horror stories start exactly this way. The first episode of *Lost Village* feels especially like the start of *Battle Royale*, which began with cheery youngsters on a coach trip into hell.

There are also many stories the world over of hidden villages, literal ghost towns that appear and vanish in the middle of nowhere. The script of *Lost Village* ties this into the centuries-old Japanese idea of "kamikakushi," ("hidden by spirits"), the notion that people can drop out of the conventional world into a realm of magic and spirits, away with the fairies. You can also translate "kamikakushi," as "spirited away," which was the name of Hayao Miyazaki's famous film exploring the legend.

But *Lost Village* also has strong echoes of the real world. Social drop-outs are a big issue in Japan, with many news-stories of "Neets" (Not in Education, Employment or Training) and the infamous "hikikomori," the people who literally seal themselves away from





02



03

“The whole draw of *Lost Village* is that you don’t know what you’re getting.”

Japanese society. The first episode of *Lost Village* may remind Japanese viewers of the news stories of people who meet online and go off somewhere remote to kill themselves, dropping out of life altogether. Satoshi Kon’s series *Paranoia Agent* had a macabre episode about a suicide club, as did *Puella Magi Madoka Magica*.

Other viewers may think of cults, even the dreaded Aum Shinrikyo, which launched a sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway in 1995. Notoriously, Aum’s teachings attracted many smart, confident young people, very like those we see in *Lost Village*.

Star Names

It’s nice to think *Lost Village* was made purely for its intriguing premise. However, it also has a very big-name writer on the credits, namely Mari Okada. Her past anime CV includes *Black Butler*, *Vampire Knight*, *Toradora!*, *A Lull in the Sea* and the *Lupin* spinoff *The Woman Called Fujiko Mine*. Recently Okada has moved into mecha, handling

the series composition for the new Gundam show, *Iron-Blooded Orphans*. However, it might be *Lost Village*’s director who gives more of a clue where this show is heading. Like Okada, Tsutomu Mizushima has worked on a wide range of anime, from *Genshiken* to *Girls Und Panzer*. However, he’s also kept viewers guessing in mystery series, slanting towards horror. His controversial show *Blood-C* was set in a mysterious village and angered many viewers, partly because of what it did to the established *Blood* vampire franchise. Another Mizushima series, called, er, *Another*, entered *Final Destination* territory with memorably icky freak accidents. After you watch it, you’ll never look at a brolly again without shuddering.

But we hope *Lost Village* will go to a new level of weirdness, something as befuddling as, say, *Higurashi*, which is still the benchmark in befuddling anime series about remote villages. After all, when *Lost Village*’s first episode has the characters singing merrily about an unlucky hippo (!), then you expect it to go to really odd places... ■

Trivia: CROWDFUNDING

The series raised a small portion (about \$30,000) of its budget through a crowdfunding campaign. Fan rewards included a real mystery bus tour with the cast and staff members!

01 While nearly all the travellers are meeting for the first time, Manbe (the man) and Piitan (the woman) are a couple eloping together. 02 Doll-like Girl: “Did you think maybe I’m off my rocker?” Tactless Boy: “Maybe just a bit.” 03 Runaway boy Mitsumune is the wide-eyed viewpoint character among the travellers, well, at least at the start of the series...



Unsung Heroes

Lost Village’s main animation studio is diomedea, which has worked on a massive number of anime but nearly always in a support role, providing in-between animation. One of the few previous anime on which diomedea was the main studio was the comedy *Squid Girl*, pictured here, directed by *Lost Village*’s Tsutomu Mizushima.

Lost Village’s background art is credited to two other studios, Studio Beam and Y.A.P. Ishigaki Productions. Like diomedea, they’re unsung heroes. Both outfits seem to specialise almost entirely in background art, which doesn’t get them much kudos from fans.

Together, though, Beam, Y.A.P. and diomedea have turned out an anime that’s actually interesting because it’s so unshowy. *Lost Village* could have been easily made in a wacky, manic style; instead, it has characters who move realistically rather than exaggeratedly, and lots of careful background detail. The style seems meant to persuade us that, despite the situation’s strangeness, this all might really happen...



MY HERO ACADEMIA

Superheroes, Shonen Jump style!



WELCOME TO A world where most people have superpowers, and one young lad has the terrible luck to be ordinary. Until one day...

Origin Story

We've seen many superhero anime in recent years, probably because of the success of two brightly costumed chaps called Tiger and Bunny. *My Hero Academia*, though, stands out in important ways. For one, it isn't being shown on late-night Japanese TV, but at five o'clock on Sunday evenings. Moreover, it's based on a manga that's running in *Weekly Shonen Jump* - which is the most popular manga magazine in the world - alongside *One Piece*, *Bleach* and *Hunter x Hunter*. That gives an idea of the tone of *My Hero Academia*, and its target audience.

In the original strip, writer Koriko Horikoshi envisages a world where superpowers have suddenly become commonplace. Within a few generations, about four-fifths of all humans have some special

ability, from the modest to the spectacular. It's not the first time the 'super is normal' idea has been done. Alan Moore envisaged a city of superheroes in the comic *Top 10*; so did Rob Williams and D'Israeli in *Ordinary*. But *My Hero Academia* is a *Shonen Jump* story, which means it centres on an earnest young boy who is trying to make his way in the hero world - though the boy in question starts without any powers.

Our hero is Izuku Midoriya, a perky middle-schooler who's such a geek for superheroes that he takes a notebook around with him in case he runs into a battle. (He's voiced in Japanese by 26-year-old Daiki Yamashita, a male actor famed for voicing another plucky schoolboy - Sakamichi, the hero of the cycling saga *Yowamushi Pedal*.) Izuku has grown up idolising the heroes he sees on TV, not in movies but on the daily news. He's especially obsessed with All Might, a golden-haired he-man who's officially the number one hero, with a booming Errol Flynn laugh and a catchphrase, "It's fine, because I'm here!".

Izuku is devastated to learn he has no powers (called "Quirks") of his own. Even so, he can't let go of his dream, that he could somehow be a hero *without* Quirks. Mocked by his superpowered classmates, Izuku seems pitifully deluded... until a chance meeting with All Might changes his life forever. We won't give away what happens, but miraculously Izuku gains powers beyond his wildest dreams (well, almost). Now he needs to learn how to use them.

In Your Bones

The anime version of *My Hero Academia* is by the Bones studio, with overblown, bounding cartoon battles that call back memories





Trivia: READING AHEAD

If you want a preview of what adventures Izuku will have down the line, the manga by Koriko Horikoshi is being published in English by VIZ Media.

01 Poor old Izuku, the only ordinary kid among his super powered classmates. 02 Red, white and blue... All Might isn't exactly coy about his American superhero heritage. 03 Were the Bones artists taking some notes from Studio Trigger's *Kill la Kill* here?



Parental Guidance

My Hero Academia is shown on Japanese TV at five o'clock on Sundays - the same prized timeslot as *Magi* a couple of years ago. It's another chance to see how much more an anime 'family' show can get away with, compared to a western one. In the first minutes, there's a gag involving a giant woman in a tight bodysuit, with crowds of male perverts running to take photos!

If that scene reminds you of certain hentai videos... Well, later in part one, poor Izuku is attacked by a slimy tentacle monster which seemingly wants to, er, force its way into him. Supposedly, it's trying to take over the boy's mind, but it looks very nasty! Tentacle issues aside, the scene is threatening and intense enough to probably rule out *My Hero Academia* on American kids' TV, at least without cuts and changes to make fan websites explode.

And we've not mentioned the audible four-letter English word that All Might says in part one...



“The anime’s overblown, bounding cartoon battles call back memories of Bones shows like *Soul Eater* and *Fullmetal Alchemist*.”

of other Bones shows like *Soul Eater* and both *Fullmetal Alchemists*. Many shots exaggerate the scale to make the characters look as massive as possible. Some of the heroes look highly American - one chap looks like a wooden-skinned Spider-Man, down to his acrobatic swinging, and All Might is more than a little like a certain caped crusader. At the same time, there's what feels like a distinctly Japanese tweak to the genre. We're told in passing that these heroes are professional salarymen, paid by the government (similar to how the *Tiger & Bunny* heroes were sponsored by corporations). Imagine the fan outrage if the mavericks and lone wolves of Marvel and DC went on the government payroll!

My Hero Academia is the kind of show that could go on for a very long time. There've been seven volumes released in Japan so far, and the publishers may hope a superhero saga will

milk the foreign markets (which is to say, us).

The pacing of the anime suggests it's under no pressure to cut things short. *My Hero Academia* is pacey enough, but it takes more than one episode to tell Izuku's 'origin,' get him in the thick of things and bring on the cast glimpsed in the title credits.

While he keeps to the expected *Jump* template, Izuku is a very likable lad. He's clearly an underdog, with none of the mouthy swagger of a Naruto or Luffy. His shattered reaction in the first episode when he's told he has no powers is funny and heart-breaking. It also makes the connection between the image of superheroes and the longings of children to be those heroes. *My Hero Academia* is a family-friendly superhero show, just when pundits are fretting that superheroes have got too violent and adult in the age of *Deadpool* and *Batman vs Superman*. Could an anime remind us that heroes don't have to be like that? ■

HEROES AND VILLAINS

Photographer Paul Sherriff presents his favourite cosplay photos!

Paul Sherriff

"I discovered cosplay around a year ago by accident; I spotted Batman, Spider-Man and a few other superheroes in my local town centre collecting for a charity event. I donated and asked if I could take a few photographs - I ended up staying with them for a few hours chatting and enjoying the afternoon!

"I love how the players are so dedicated to the hobby of cosplaying; the time, energy and cost they put into it is amazing. I have found cosplayers to be such a friendly albeit crazy bunch of people - they'd help anyone if asked, and the groups I know of raise a lot of money for charity.

"My hobby is photography; taking photography of people in particular, and I like to play around with Photoshop. Cosplay has given me the ideal way to combine the two. I like to try to create an image that complements the character rather than just take a photograph with a busy background. I always try to be polite to the player when taking the photograph and if possible try to find a little space to pose the player (they generally have the poses ready - I usually ask for eye contact as I think that is important in a portrait). I always ask about the character and the player, to enable me to produce the final image using texture and colour overlays in Photoshop, and to create a portrait of the cosplayer and character that is a true reflection of the person and the time he or she has put into the cosplay.

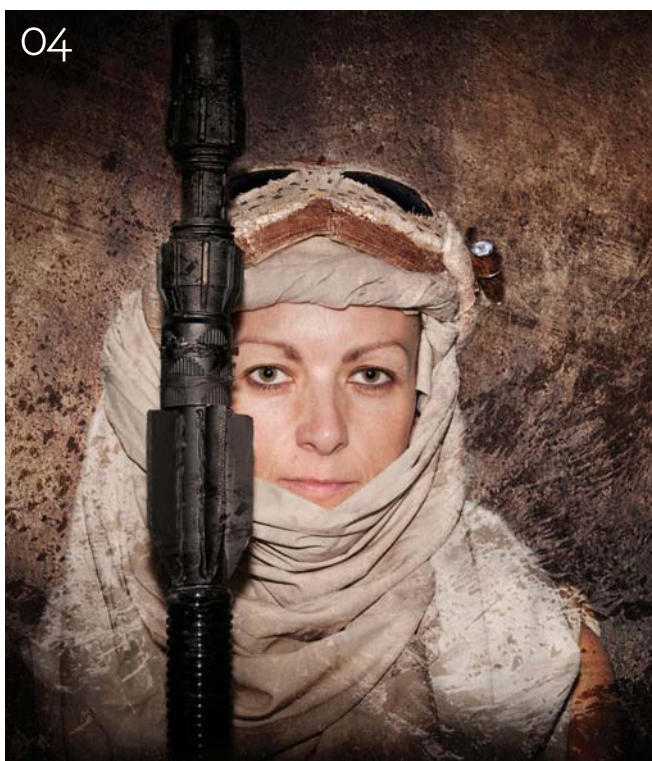
"I am based in the northwest of England and have been attending local events around Manchester, Liverpool, Bolton and Wigan. I am pleased to say that I have made lots of friends at these events and have found them to be great fun for all ages!"

URLs

- flic.kr/s/aHskb8kNVk
- facebook.com/Paul-Sherriff-Cosplay-Photographer-1699935780221318
- instagram.com/paul_cosplay_photographer/



01 Handsome Jack by Christina Astle Alvarez (also known as Nitric Acid Cosplay). Christina loves changing characters and improving on her costumes. 02 Cheshire Cat by Estelle Lawliet. I took this in Bolton; I like the colours and angle of this image. 03 Asylum Joker by David Starmer. I took this in Bolton - this shows I also do "straight" shots - and that black and white looks good in cosplay! 04 Rey by Andrea. Andrea is a big sci-fi and action film lover, and has been cosplaying for nearly three years! She loves the idea of becoming someone different, being able to escape, and becoming a big kid again. Some of her other characters are Harley Quinn and Laura Croft. 05 Mugetsu by Yandere Kevin.





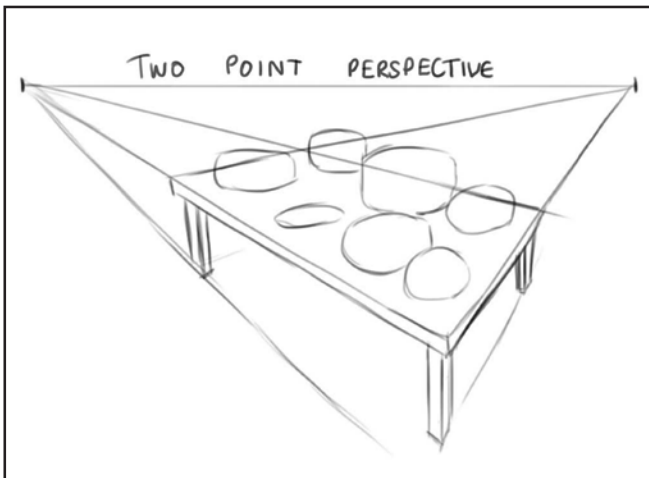
06 The Crow by Holly Haggerty. Holly is the daughter of Nikki, and loves playing dark characters such as The Crow. 07 Agents of Shield by Akbar Bond Ali, Jenny Allen and Jess Randall. 08 Red Hood by Tom Madem. Tom plays Batman, Red Hood and Captain America; he's a great cosplayer and always has time to stop and chat and pose for photographs! 09 Loki by James Brady. James loves to make children and every person smile seeing their favourite superheroes! 10 Ms Joker by Nikki Haggerty. Nikki also plays a great Joker as well as Mystique and Magneto! She is great to work with as she has the look and the poses just right. She loves the good friendship of the cosplay community, and her daughter also cosplays as The Crow! 11 Joker by Kieran Mcginn. This is one of my all-time favourites; Kieran is a great cosplayer and a wonderful Joker. It takes two hours for him to do the Joker makeup, and he loves the thrill of cosplay and the smiles he helps to make! 12 Iron Man by Charles Cartwright. Charles plays Iron Man, Batman and Hitman: Agent 47 to bring smiles to young and old!



Manga School with Ruth Keatch

PARTY TIME!

As it's the 150th issue of NEO, it's time for us all to have a massive party! Let's illustrate a beautiful table spread fit for a feast, and we can have our characters celebrate along with us in style!



STEP 1

Firstly, it's good to establish what sort of food and drink would be present at the scene you're illustrating. Japanese food, alcohol, cakes? Whatever it is you choose, always source good references just in case, especially if you want ideas of how to get some variety in. Google Images is your friend!

We've picked cakes as our food of choice. Let's start by selecting the perspective we want on the table and start to populate it with defining circles. Pay attention to what's in front of what, because this will make a difference when it comes to inking.



STEP 2

Now we want to put those sketching skills to good use. Start to fill in those circles with all the food you want present on the table. The circles are there to ensure that there is balance in the composition and also to establish what parts are in front of others.

Continue fleshing out all of the details as you go, and don't forget, if you get stuck or feel like the cakes are a little too similar, get a reference - it'll go a long way. Don't forget to try to vary your search terms to get a wide range of ideas. Try 'cake', but also 'celebration cake', or 'tiered cake', or similar!



ART TOOLS: CHAMELEON PENS

Chameleon Color Tones is an innovative marker system, where a single marker allows you to achieve multiple tones. Initially launching the highly acclaimed Deluxe Set, a pack of 20 markers allowing you to get over 100 tones, and the new palette of 30 new colours (50 in total) will leave artists with near endless possibilities. Visit www.chameleonpens.com for more information.



STEP 3

Once your sketch phase is complete, grab your inks to lineart. Remember to keep it looking natural and realistic. A table spread with this much food on it wouldn't be totally clean, would it? Where there seem to be empty areas of the composition try inking in crumbs, crumpled napkins, confetti, ribbons and so on.



Happy
150th issue
Neo
readers! ♡

STEP 4

Add colour as appropriate - I have chosen a limited palette with a focus on pinks, reds and browns, but it's entirely up to you, so pick your favourite and get going!

And now your characters have a party spread to really jump into the festivities with everyone at NEO! Happy 150th issue everyone - enjoy your celebrations! Just remember, if you draw the cake, you don't have to tidy up afterwards...

THANK YOU TO
ALL OUR READERS
ACROSS THE GLOBE
FOR YOUR AMAZING
SUPPORT FOR THE
PAST 150 ISSUES!
LET'S GO FOR AT
LEAST 150 MORE!

Our Man In Japan

NAVIGATING THE NOMIKAI: JAPAN'S AFTER PARTY

Adam Miller treats us to a night out, salaryman style, where the fun and frolics are definitely not optional.

MANY STILL THINK of Japan as a forward-thinking tech giant, dripping in neon lights and waited on by robot servants. But there's another side to the country, which is bound by archaic practices that seem oddly outdated from an outside perspective. One such practice is the hiring of fresh university graduates en-masse to join the ranks of companies both large and small. This is not only common but undoubtedly the norm, to such an extent that some companies will actively shun post-grads who decided to take time off to travel before starting work.

So when April rolls around, you can see literal bus loads of new recruits in their standard plain black suits, congregating outside of large railway hubs, before they are whisked away for a week or so of training and orientation. Learning company policies is obviously vital, but one of the biggest tests the fresh-faced employees must undertake is going to the first *nomikai*, or drinking party with their new company. These events are optional in the same way buying a Mother's Day gift is optional – technically you don't have to, but be ready for steely glares and awkward silences in the foreseeable future if you decide to drop out.

The *nomikai* is laden with rules, from keeping your *senpai's* glass topped up, to even sitting in an appropriate spot around the table and on the taxi ride to the restaurant... (The furthest seat from the door at the dinner table is the best spot, and behind the driver's seat is normally reserved for the VIP.) But even if you get through the party without making a mistake, you will no doubt be dragged to yet another party, the *nijikai* (second party), which can extend well into the early hours. Below are just some of the "treats" these parties may entail.



One for the road.



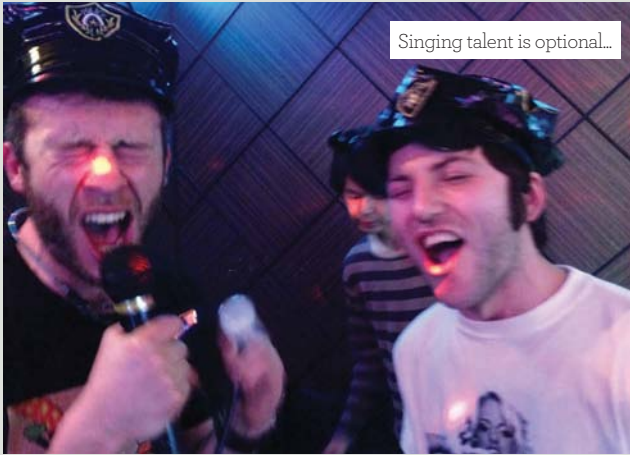
Beef broth ramen, or gyukotsu ramen.

MIDNIGHT NOODLES

The last thing you might want after 90 minutes of eating and drinking is another heavy meal and bottles of beer, but one of the most popular spots for rowdy business folk are ramen restaurants.

Ramen establishments can vary from posh eateries to wooden carts, but most are rundown restaurants with extractor fans literally dripping with blackened grease. The smell of bones bubbling away in a broth can be pretty overwhelming to the uninitiated, but if you can get past the grime, you'll be treated to an amazing meal.

Ramen normally marks the end of the night, much like a kebab or curry in the UK gives us the energy to stumble home, safe in the (falsely placed) knowledge that the food will somehow soak up the alcohol and save us from a hangover. The carbs from the noodles alone are enough to power you back to your bed.



KARAOKE

If you want to keep the party going, one of the best bets is karaoke, which is almost always in a private room, so everyone can let their hair down and go a little crazy. Some places have bars, other all-you-can-drink systems, some even encourage you to bring your own refreshments; but no matter what kind of room you end up in, voices will be lubricated with alcohol and the air will be heavy with cigarette smoke.

Making a good impression at karaoke is such a good idea that most people have several go-to songs that they pull out to get the room popping. The most important thing is to strike the right balance between being timid and a microphone hog; nobody wants to listen to the same person sing five songs in a row, but you will be expected to sing at least one tune, even if you are tone deaf!



PARTIES YOU MIGHT RATHER SAY NO TO

If you are a young gentlemen, it is possible that the more senior staff may drag you to an expensive establishment like *Kyaba-Kuri* (Talking Bar) or a Hostess Club, where scantily clad women come and sit with you in the hopes you'll buy them overpriced drinks. There is also Snack Pubs, where the owner, commonly referred to as Mama, will chat to you and maybe sing an enka song or two. These places are pricey but it can be damaging to your standing at work if you refuse to go.

A recent trend is *aisekiya izakaya*, which groups of women frequent in the hopes that a group of men will sit down with them and pay for their meal. The men pay a small hourly fee (£5 or so), as well

as for the women's meal in full, including their drinks. The izakaya try to sit similarly aged groups together, and some even take your details which can be requested by your dining mate at a later time, so you can arrange a less weird date. It is heralded as a new way for young people to meet, but is more commonly used as a cheaper option for drunk salary men to meet ladies.

Women are by and large exempt from these embarrassing nijikai, but Host Clubs are undeniably becoming more popular, where androgynous men with big hair and pointy shoes sweet talk ladies for a premium price. Oddly enough these establishments are popular with hostesses who have finished a hard day's night massaging the ego of dudes, and need a little (paid for) attention themselves.

BEING A POLITE PARTY ANIMAL

Nijikai are a great chance to get to know people much better – there are fewer social rules to navigate, so people often become more open and talkative. That being said, remember that these are your co-workers, so try not to get comatose or too rowdy! People might not talk about the time you started a fight with a vending machine, but they sure as anything won't forget it in a hurry either.



Artist Showcase

THE BEST IN WESTERN TALENT

Every issue, NEO will be featuring our favourite work from artists inspired by anime, manga and games



NAME: Mike 'Sarrus' Williams
AGE: 32
BASED IN: Colwyn Bay, North Wales
PROFESSION: Customer assistant
FAVOURITE PASTTIMES: Orchestral music, video games and art are in my veins!

ART HAS ALWAYS been a pivotal part of my life. My parents always tell me that I used to lie down on my front and spend hours on end drawing away... that passion never went away. Around the age of ten, I started gaining inspiration from music and video games, mainly copying art work from magazines and game instruction manuals. High school formed an extremely important part of my art, after I borrowed VHS copies of *Street Fighter II: The Animated Movie* and *Ghost in the Shell*. After that I got very serious about my art work and would spend most of my time in class drawing on pieces of paper I would keep in my shirt pocket. All I could think of was creating my own deep, rich world, and eastern animation had opened my eyes to a whole new outlook.

When I was 15, I started moving to a mixed media of traditional and digital work. I am completely self taught, gaining inspiration and knowledge from amazing people online, mainly Rob 'Robaato' Porter who greatly influenced my current style. Around 2012 I started submitting work to a group and website called Game-Art-HQ, which has been featured by many popular gaming websites worldwide. I even had my work published as the main image on the official UK PlayStation blog.

I mainly draw fan art from games and anime, but I do have a long-standing personal project that I want to get out there at some point, using my own original characters and story. You can check out my work at <http://sarrus.deviantart.com>, and random reblogs and art at sarrus.tumblr.com.

INSPIRATION

The main inspiration of my work has to be in video games, mainly *Final Fantasy* and *The Legend of Zelda* series. Masamune Shirow, Tetsuya Nomura and Rob 'Robaato' Porter have been massively influential in my drawings. Orchestral music inspires me, and of course my greatest inspiration has to come from my wife and children.



01 I've always been a fan of Cammy, so her new appearance had to be drawn. **02** Sarrus was my first ever original creation (although this is his fourth redesign) made up of many clichés, but by far one of my favourite creations. **03** There are so many fan pictures of the second *Kingdom Hearts* game. Having a love for the first in the series, I decided to take the time to draw a fitting tribute.

NEO Wants You!

If you are interested in submitting work to be featured in the NEO ARTIST SHOWCASE, please email mail@neomag.co.uk with 'ARTIST SHOWCASE' as your subject header, along with an internet link with examples of your work.

STUFF!

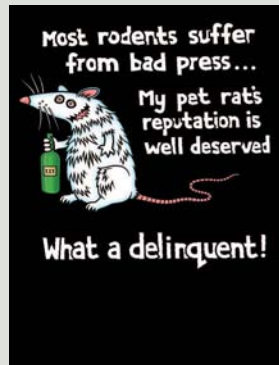
Check out NEO's pick of the coolest merchandise around this month

GENKI GEAR TEES

Hot off the presses from Genki Gear are two brand new Direct to Garment, limited edition designs: Bad Rat and Cat Morals. Both are available from www.genkigear.com for £16.99 on women's and unisex tees.

Also, launching at the London MCM Comic Con is the new Japan range! The first will be this awesome Fugu design, available on unisex and women's tees for just £10 - snap them up while you can.

(If you're heading to the MCM Comic Con in London this May, flick back to page 014 for some info on Genki's epic new T-shirt for the event!)



HANNARI TOFU X SANRIO CHARACTER STACKING PLUSH

Love Sanrio characters, but would prefer it if they were a bit squashier and stackable? Have we got just the thing for you! Check out this awesome collaboration between Hannari Tofu and Sanrio - all of your favourites like Gudetama, Hello Kitty, My Melody, PomPomPurin, Kirimi Chan and Keroppi, squashed into tofu-shaped blocks! These are only available in the UK via Tofu Cute at www.tofucute.com, and come in three sizes; mini mascot (£4.50), keychain (£6.50) and 18cm plush (£14.99).

DEATH NOTE RYUK PLUSH

When you think of *Death Note's* Ryuk, the last word that probably springs to mind is 'cuddly'! But, you'd be wrong, because this gorgeous official plush from www.TokyoToys.com is just that - plus darn adorable, too! The menacing features of the Shinigami have been perfectly translated to plush form, and could be yours for just £17! There are loads of other cool plushies for sale at TokyoToys, so check out their website for a massive range of cuddly new friends!



SWORD ART ONLINE II KIRITO ALO VERSION FIGMA FIGURE

We know there are loads of *Sword Art Online* fans, so we're sure we'll be able to find a great home for this cool figma figure of Kirito, in his Spriggan appearance in *ALfheim Online*!

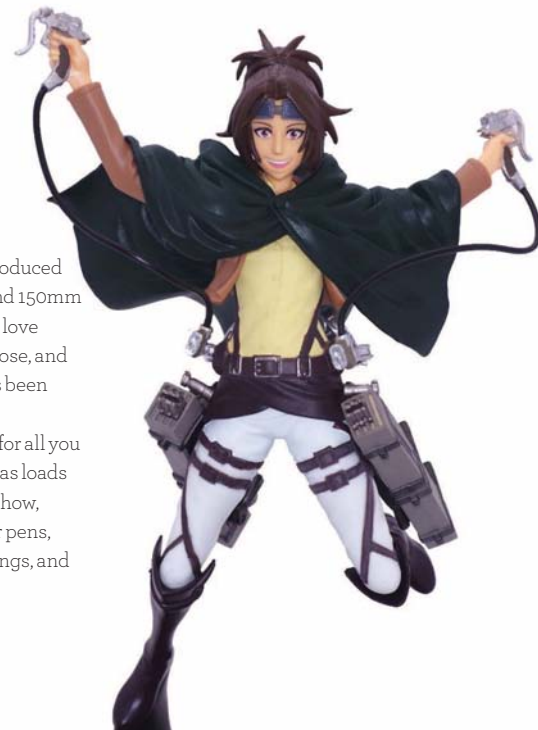
You can pose him however you like thanks to the flexible plastic parts, and it even comes with a host of accessories including Excalibur and some articulated wings! You can even change his facial expression, because three faces are included: a grinning face, a face with clenched teeth, and a surprised face. What more could you possibly ever wish for? Nab yours today from website www.middlerealm.com, the UK's official Good Smile Company retail partner - it's £54.99 and comes with free, tracked delivery.



ATTACK ON TITAN - HANGE ZOE FIGURE

Available for £19.99 from www.animUK.co.uk, this Hange model has been produced by Taito, and stands around 150mm tall, including a stand. We love this dynamic, mid-jump pose, and her gleeful expression has been captured perfectly!

If that wasn't enough for all you *AoT* fans, then AnimUK has loads of merchandise from the show, including T-shirts, marker pens, chibi plushies, bags, keyrings, and even hoodies!





eek!

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FACEBOOK

Scarlett Johansson as Motoko in GITS?

Mary Healy

I think Scarlett Johansson is a fantastic actress and no other comes to mind that would be as suitable to play Motoko as she would. Perhaps this may be the film that will break the curse of unwanted / horrendous western live action adaptations of anime.

Sarah Sej Pelham

I loved her in *Lucy* so I think she will do a great job. Problem with anime, like anything being copied, it's hard to beat the original as it's the "first" which you tend to appreciate more.

Jordan Thomas

Edge of Tomorrow was enjoyable, a good westernised adaptation. Though I would still totally take an anime adaptation of the brutal manga lol.

Kaii Elise Fairley

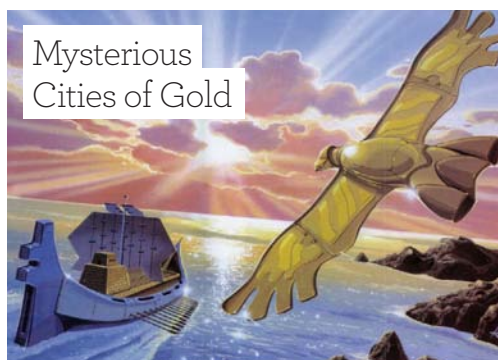
I like Johansson but I'm not sure how that will reflect, I am a massive fan of *GITS* and if Hollywood ruins it, they'll definitely know about it! Plus everyone knows *Cowboy Bebop* deserves a live action lol

Greig Spencer

I think it looks great! And Johansson is ace at whatever she puts her hands to! I'm deffo going to go to the cinemas to watch it #cantwait

LETTERS

This issue, we're talking about dreams of a spin-off from NEO, much love for Studio Ghibli, and a budding otaku's collection!



I Dream of Marnie

I liked very much your recent features *An Animated Resurrection* and *Anime-ting History*. For me, was very interesting to read about the memorable TV series *Mysterious Cities of Gold* in the first of them.

As a child I was a big fan of Toei Animation and Mushi Production movie tales and legends, but later I loved the works of Studio Ghibli, Mamoru Hosoda, Makoto Shinkai and Keiichi Hara. It's amazing that you try to put something about Studio Ghibli almost in every issue of NEO! It's true - many of your readers want to see more and more about Ghibli in the magazine or read about similar films or series.

I can't wait for the issue with your coverage of the nominated for Oscars beauty *When Marnie Was There* (after your great pages dedicated to the

masterpieces *The Wind Rises* and *The Tale of the Princess Kaguya*)...

Keep up the good work!

PANAIIOT

That day has finally arrived! We hope you enjoy it!

New Otaku Alert

I wanted to say that you're the best magazine in the world! I have only fairly recently got into anime and manga and reading your magazine has really helped my interest in it.

I loved your column on *Evangelion 3.33*. I have a large collection of anime DVDs, now, i.e. *Wolf Children*, all three *Evangelion* films, *Ghost in the Shell*, *Tekken*, etc. I just wanted to say thank you for the info, and also for being the best magazine in the universe. Keep up the good work, guys.

ADAMSMITH

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STAR PRIZE

This issue, our star letter writer bags themselves a copy of *Yakuza Apocalypse* from Manga Entertainment. Out now, this movie is available as a DVD (£12.99) or Blu-ray edition (£15.99).

Director Takashi Miike goes fully berserk in this tale of immortal vampiric yakuza bosses battling the shady Syndicate, which is led by a guy wearing a frog outfit. Yes, really. You can read our review on page 78!



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Another quality cold cut from



EST. 2003

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Planetes

Retro Anime

Hello and good day from the States! Been a fan of the magazine for several years now. Also, a fan of older anime from the '90s and '80s, with *Kimagure Orange Road* being my favourite followed closely by *Planetes*. I also read another British publication called *Retro Gamer* and I have to ask... what's the likelihood y'all would ever have a section, or sister publication, which would be dedicated solely to retro anime? There are *many* gems to be found (including the two I listed) that are out of print and / or can't be found

on legitimate streaming sites. Having coverage similar to how *Retro Gamer* covers old games but applied to anime would be fabulous to help those who are unaware that anime was once drawn using pencils and not mouses or tablets.

Thanks y'all for your time and effort!

GARY COOPER

We don't have plans for a spin-off mag, but we do have the vault section, which every other month focuses on an old anime title! Pick up NEO 151 for the next instalment!

READER ART

If you want to join in and contribute your envelope art, simply decorate an envelope, write your name and town of residence on the back and send it to: NEO Envelope Art, NEO, NEO Letters, Uncooked Media Ltd, PO Box 6337, Bournemouth, BH1 9EH. Please ensure you pay the correct postage. Please note that we are unable to return your envelope entries. Alternatively, email art to mail@neomag.co.uk.

ANNA LEGASPI, RUGBY



NIDAL SHAH, LONDON



ELLIE SMITH, MALTON





In The Limelight

Ken Ochiai talks to NEO's David West about transforming a martial arts champion into an actress, preserving a Japanese art form, and why sword fighting is like music in *Uzumasa Limelight*.

SEIICHI KAMIYAMA (SEIZO Fukumoto) dies for a living. He's a kirareyaku - an actor who specialises in being slain by the hero in chanbara (swordplay) movies. But he's now an old man and, in addition to the fact that it's getting tougher to take the big falls and bumps of his profession, actual swordsmanship is on the decline, replaced by CGI. Kamiyama is facing retirement when he meets Satsuki Iga (Chihiro Yamamoto), a young aspiring actress who wants to learn all about onscreen swordsmanship from the last master of the art.

Uzumasa Limelight, the new film from Ken Ochiai, is an homage both to Charlie Chaplin's *Limelight*, from 1952, and to the Jidai-geki (period films) of Japan. Ochiai wrote the part of Kamiyama for Seizo Fukumoto, who has died thousands of times onscreen since he entered the movie business in the late 1950s, but the real-life kirareyaku took some persuading.

"The funny thing is that one of the most difficult challenges during the making of this film was to convince Mr. Fukumoto to play the lead," says Ochiai. "He was so humble that he thought it would

"We had to shoot the entire film in 15 days, and needed to be very concise and precise about the moves and camera angles."

Ochiai

be better for someone more famous to play the lead. However, we knew that no one else could play Kamiyama since no one at his age could do the sword fighting as well as he could. The whole point of making this film was to pay tribute to unsung heroes in the Japanese Jidai-geki film industry."

From Champion To Star

Where Fukumoto is a cinema veteran, his co-star was a complete neophyte to filmmaking, but she was a multiple medal winner at the World Junior Wushu Championship. "We looked through all of the agencies and management companies and asked all the casting directors in Japan, but we could not find 'Satsuki,'" says the director. "Then one night the producer saw a YouTube clip of a girl who is the reigning world Chinese martial arts champion. We found out that her name is Chihiro Yamamoto. She was fresh, passionate, and pretty and most importantly, her performance of the Chinese martial arts with swords and sticks was breathtakingly beautiful. Even though this would be her debut in acting, everyone on the team agreed to go with her."

From Wu Shu champion to movie star!



Ochiai and his choreographer Mitsuhiro Seike worked with Yamamoto to help her get to grips with Japanese swordsmanship.

"Being a world champion means someone who is disciplined and hardworking and Chihiro was no exception," says Ochiai. "She practiced with the team of experienced Jidai-geki actors in Kyoto every day and everyone on the team was impressed by how determined she was to learn and how quickly she acquired the skills of sword fighting.

"Though her background in Chinese martial arts helped her tremendously, the sword fighting in Chinese martial arts and Japanese sword fighting are very different. For example, Chinese martial arts generally makes circular moves to fight against multiple opponents, but Japanese sword fighting makes straight line moves to fight one-on-one. She was already very good at spinning moves and the spear which is very difficult to learn, but she needed to learn skills to attack from the front."

Ochiai and Seike knew their action scenes had to measure up to the classics of the chanbara genre. "The process of creating sword choreography is very much like writing music or composing music. We talk about the overall story of the scenes, the important story beats of the characters, and the desired length of the fight," explains Ochiai. "We had to shoot the entire film in 15 days, and needed to be very concise and precise about the moves and camera angles, but since Mr. Seike was used to TV shows and their very tight schedules, it was not hard for him and his team to come up with amazing choreography with a very short amount of prep

THE NEXT GENERATION

Fancy learning swordplay? Head over to Kyoto! "Mr. Seike, Mr. Fukumoto, and their team have a weekly lesson of the art of sword fighting for aspiring actors and actresses," says Ochiai. "There are definitely more commercially successful Jidai-geki films in the past five years and I hope the trend continues."

time. The fact we had Kyoto's best sword fighting actors helped tremendously. They memorized very difficult choreography with just one quick rehearsal on the spot."

Duels And Drama

However, for the two leads, the hardest part of the production was not the duelling but the drama. "For Mr. Fukumoto and Chihiro, the fight sequence was a lot easier and more fun than the heavy drama scenes. They got very nervous and became a lot stiffer," says Ochiai.

The director did everything he could to create a comfortable atmosphere on set, and the hours of sword practice they did together had helped the two stars to form a teacher-pupil relationship like the one they portray in the story. "Satsuki's first



If the Zatoichi movies have taught us anything, it's never underestimate an old man with a sword.



Kamiyama corrects Satsuki's form. If you're going to whack someone with a sword, do it properly.

▶ debut scene though, that was by far the most difficult scene to translate from the script to real life," says Ochiai. "The scene was an homage to the scene in Chaplin's *Limelight* where Chaplin scolds Claire Bloom. We were aiming sky high. We spent the morning trying to bring the highest level of emotional intensity, but Chihiro was not having it.

"We tried different kinds of acting methods, like substituting the situation or bringing back sense memories, but ultimately decided to shoot it later. Therefore, the scene really became the real life situation where Chihiro had to do take after take. Poor Chihiro, she became so pressured and nervous, just like Satsuki in the scene. After numerous takes, the final push to Chihiro's performance was me telling her that everyone in the cast and crew believed in her. She became really emotional and told me that she wanted to live up

"One of the most difficult challenges during the making of this film was to convince Mr. Fukumoto to play the lead."

to their expectations. The outcome of the whole process was beautiful and I will never forget how happy she looked after the last take."

The Clown Prince

Ochiai was introduced to Chaplin's *Limelight* - the story of a washed-up clown who helps a young dancer (Claire Bloom) launch her career - while at film school in California. "I had only watched clips of Chaplin's early works before then, but I was truly fascinated and inspired by his work after watching *The Immigrant*," he says. "Then I went on to watch *The Kid*, *Gold Rush*, *City Lights*, *Modern Times*, *The Great Dictator*, and so on. It truly was an eye opening experience for me because back then I was struggling to learn English, but Chaplin was able to entertain audiences around the world without words. The combination of sorrow and joy in Chaplin's eyes mesmerized me. *Limelight* became one of my favourite films so you can imagine how happy I was when Ko Mori, the producer of *Uzumasa Limelight*, gave me an opportunity to direct."

Uzumasa Limelight is a love letter to a genre that peaked in the 1950s and 1960s, but Ochiai doesn't believe the Jidai-geki and chanbara are finished yet. "Trends come and go every generation," he says. "I believe samurais or ninjas will come back in a new form sooner or later. The most important thing is not really to try to become the trend of a generation but to avoid being lost. We need to nurture and preserve the art of chanbara for future generations."

Celebrate the art of fighting and dying for the camera in *Uzumasa Limelight*, out now from Third Window Films. ■



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Bunny girl;
underground
idol style.



Tom Smith speaks to J-pop mastermind Toco Nikaido about her high-energy, multi-coloured extravaganza, which is coming to the UK this June...

GO BERSERK FOR JAPANESE IDOL CULTURE!

"ONCE THE SHOW is over, and it's back to ordinary life for the audience, the impact of what they just witnessed seems to hit. Some begin to cry, some have a sudden sense of awareness like 'I have seaweed stuck to my face...', while others seem quite confused."

Toco Nikaido is an artist like no other. The former underground idol has taken experiences from Tokyo's otaku scene and turned them into a 50-minute art explosion that's so frenzied, energetic and messy, that the audience is issued with water-proof ponchos and earplugs upon entry - and it's advised to wear both. Entitled *Miss Revolutionary Idol Berserker*, the show has travelled the globe with its colourful, lycra-clad ensemble. The next stop will be a 20 show stint at Europe's largest multi-arts venue; The Barbican in London. Beginning on 22 June, the show promises to be a bombardment of J-pop mayhem.

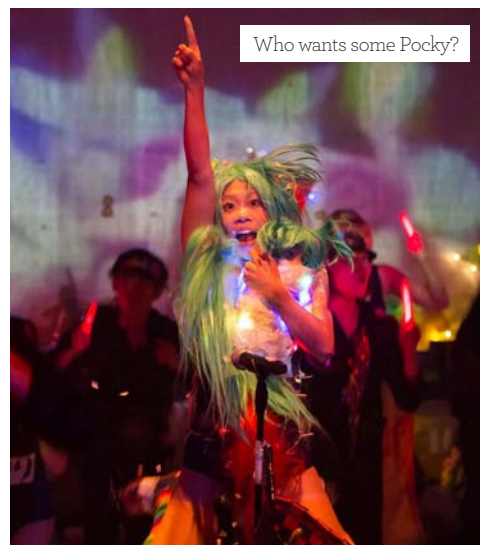
"Ever since my experience as an underground idol, I've been experimenting with turning otaku culture into art," explains Nikaido. "I

use pop idol songs, anime songs, otaku culture and subcultural icons to represent the contemporary Japanese landscape.

"I strongly believe that people are not impressed by things that do not surprise them. So I use the uniquely eclectic aspects of Japanese 'Galapagos' culture - the very niche and wide array of fetishes that Japanese otaku tend to have. Consequently, I am able to bring about my chaotic vision by expressing all of these mainstream and subcultural phenomena through the bodies of young people living in Japan today. Through a strong sense of unison and the sheer volume of people and props onstage, I believe that the performance is able to reach many people's hearts."

IDOL FAILURE

Nikaido tells us that the concept for the show came about from her own failure as an idol. As a teen she had managed to become one of Japan's



early internet celebrities (although she modestly states she didn't have any particular talents and felt like "a fish in a sea of disposable pop idols"). At around the same time Japan's idol scene was undergoing a renaissance, with loads of underground shows popping up all over Tokyo as a consequence.

"I started attending these shows, and I was shocked," she states. "Not shocked at the poor quality of the nameless idols on stage, but rather the fanatical otaku crowds that attended. That's when I thought that perhaps the "culture" I was looking for was actually in the audience. If the audience is more alive and energetic than the performer onstage, then perhaps that's what we all should really be watching. So thanks in part to my failure as a pop idol, I was able to come up with this idea of putting the culture of the audience on display; the audience is the main character. That's why the otagei dancing we do in the show is not directed at a pop idol standing on stage, but rather towards the audience."

Otagei refers to a type of dancing and cheering performed by wota, fans of idols, and often involves an assortment of synchronised jumping, arm waving and chants directed at the person or group on stage. The general concept is thought to have origins from the oendan, organised cheering squads found at sporting events in Japan, but since the idol renaissance, led by Hello! Project and AKB48, this unique act of cheering has found its way into the idol scene, led entirely by fans. We saw it first hand when we visited Dear Stage in Akihabara, the live-house-turned-maid-café where Dempagumi began. The audience were almost as entertaining to watch as the actual talent on stage, and just as energetic!

"Normally we have around 30 performers, who are militaristic in their movements (and otagei!) and who can convey a wealth of information at maximum speed. The performance itself is roughly 50 minutes long with the actors dancing non-stop to create this chaotic atmosphere. Tons of water is thrown about, so the audience has to

"Ever since my experience as an underground idol, I've been experimenting with turning otaku culture into art." Nikaido

wear raincoats. There is confetti and loads of props are used in place of a static set. We also use glow sticks to light this world. Actors clad in rainbow-colored seifuku (school uniforms) transform into sukuuru mizugi (erotic school-issued swimsuits), which represent our maximum entertainment mode - and this costume change happens faster than your mind can process."

Nikaido is not only excited about bringing the extravaganza to London, but also to have such a prestigious venue host the madness.

"The fact that we're being permitted to perform at the Barbican Centre is unbelievable and legendary. It's the same theatre complex where Benedict Cumberbatch played *Hamlet* and where famous Japanese kabuki troops have performed in the past. It's really just so unbelievable. Also, London will be the last stop on our tour, with 20 performances to boot! Let's just say we're going to burn a shit ton of calories. Are you ready to have your hearts stolen? The Japanese youth are genki and this is the first show of its kind in Japan and the rest of the world - a happy, miraculous, hysterical, participatory piece of world-class entertainment. Yoroshiku onegaishimasu!"

Miss Revolutionary Idol Berserker takes place at The Barbican Centre in London between 22 June to 2 July. Performances take place daily at 6:30pm and 9:30pm and can be booked in advance from liftfestival.com or by calling 020 7968 6808. The show is one of many programmed by LIFT, a biennial festival that brings new forms of theatre and performance art from around the world to London. ■



Ghibli's Final Curtain?

As Studio Ghibli brings down the curtain on feature film production – at least for the time being – NEO's David West talks to Hiromasa Yonebayashi about the appeal of English novels, translating emotions into actions, and the inescapable influence of Hayao Miyazaki in *When Marnie Was There*.

WHEN MARNIE WAS There is a film of firsts and lasts. It is the first film from Studio Ghibli made without the direct involvement of either Hayao Miyazaki or Isao Takahata, the two directors whose works have built Studio Ghibli into a global cultural phenomenon. However, it might also be the last new feature length movie from the acclaimed animation house, which, in the wake of the announcement that both Miyazaki and Takahata have retired from directing, is taking a hiatus from feature film production. To continue with the numerical theme, *When Marnie Was There* is the second directorial outing from Hiromasa Yonebayashi and the third Studio Ghibli movie to be adapted from a novel by an English author.

The English Connection

The director, who was born in 1973, studied Business Design at the Kanazawa College of Art and worked part-time during his education by

“Miyazaki-sensei likes English children's classics and he reads a lot. [...] Like *Arrietty*, I was given *When Marnie Was There* by Miyazaki-sensei.”
Yonebayashi

drawing caricatures and doing animation for TV commercials. He joined Studio Ghibli in 1996 where, in addition to working in the animation department on several feature films, he directed some short films for the Studio Ghibli Museum, located in Mitaka.

His debut as a feature film director was *Arrietty* in 2010, which was based upon *The Borrowers* by English writer Mary Norton. Prior to that, Miyazaki himself had adapted Diana Wynne Jones' *Howl's Moving Castle*. Now Yonebayashi completes the hat trick of films inspired by the work of English writers with Joan G. Robinson's children's story, *When Marnie Was There*.

What exactly is it that a Japanese animation studio finds so appealing in the work of English novelists? “Miyazaki-sensei likes English children's classics and he reads a lot,” says Yonebayashi. “I think the central theme is very deep and it's entertaining to read, and also because it is children's literature, the ending is always happy,



it's not disastrous. I think that's what Miyazaki likes about the story. Like *Arrietty*, I was given *When Marnie Was There* by Miyazaki-sensei."

From Norfolk To Hokkaido

Robinson's original tale concerns the friendship between two girls - Anna and Marnie - who meet when Anna is sent to Norfolk to stay with Mr and Mrs Pegg. Yonebayashi's film transposes the setting from the English east coast to Hokkaido, the northernmost of Japan's main islands.

Given that Studio Ghibli has used western / European settings in the past for *Kiki's Delivery Service*, it seems strange to move Anna and Marnie from Norfolk to Japan. "With *Kiki's Delivery Service*, the story goes that the girl actually flies to somewhere unknown. For us, Europe is an unknown place so it fits that story," says Yonebayashi, "but with *Arrietty* and *When Marnie Was There* we targeted the Japanese audience so it would be easier for the audience to relate to if the protagonist is Japanese and the setting is in Japan.

"With *When Marnie Was There*, when I saw the original illustrations in the novel, that gave me a strong impression of Marnie with her blonde hair and blue eyes, so I left her as she was. And I also

CHAMP

When Marnie Was There opened in Japan in July 2014 and was the top grossing domestic film of the year with an admission total of 7.65 million tickets and a box office total of 9.25 billion Japanese yen. For comparison, Miyazaki's last feature, World War II epic *The Wind Rises*, took over 11.6 billion yen the year before.

think that the merging together of something from a foreign country with Japan created a very interesting result."

True Blue

Yonebayashi's film freely merges together disparate elements - Marnie's house in Hokkaido is western in design (not a shoji door anywhere in sight), there's a European style grain silo, and the blonde haired, blue-eyed Marnie and her parents are very clearly European, not Japanese. Anna, [▶](#)





▶ meanwhile, is given a Japanese last name in the movie but, like Marnie, her eyes are blue.

The youngster is intensely self-conscious about her blue eyes, which both mark her as an outsider amongst her Japanese peers, and remind her that she does not know the identity of her biological parents. “Actually blue eyes are the connection, not the symbol of being an outsider,” says Yonebayashi. “Anna had a problem connecting with people but through her connection with Marnie she actually realises that is loved by the people around her, so this is a film about realisation.”

At the outset of the story, Anna is consumed by insecurity and self-loathing, something that drives her to push everyone away from classmates to her foster parents. Where Marnie

SHORTS

Before tackling feature films, Yonebayashi honed his animation skills working on some of the original short films commissioned for the Ghibli Museum in Mitaka. He was the Directing Animator for *Mei And The Baby Cat Bus* and was Supervising Animator on *Imaginary Flying Machines*, both directed by Hayao Miyazaki from 2002. In addition, Yonebayashi created the storyboards for and directed 2008’s *Evolution*, a short film documenting one of the Ghibli Museum’s attractions, the *Films Go Round* display.

is classically feminine with her long hair and dresses, Anna is a tomboy with short hair and a surprisingly possessive attitude to her friend that hints at an attraction between the two, although Yonebayashi plays down that angle.

“The protagonists are two girls but I portrayed Anna as an androgynous character, rather than as a girly-girl, because I wanted to depict the way she was growing from childhood to adulthood and in the transitional, impressionable period of her life,” says the director. “Through her interaction with Marnie, she opens her heart and is released from herself, but in order to get there, it helps that she begins sensing and feeling things, like the coldness of the water or the wind, or the taste of the food when she eats – all of those things help her to heal her soul. When she is with Marnie, she is physically close to her so she can feel her warmth, inhale the smell of her and all of those things are important in the film.”

Action And Art

One of the challenges that Yonebayashi faced in adapting Robinsons’ tale into a film is that the book is largely driven by dialogue. “As an animator, I didn’t want to finish up with a film full of monologues,” he says. “I wanted action, I wanted to draw action, that’s why I made Anna a girl who loves to draw. That way I can express her feelings through her posture and movement when she’s drawing, but the dialogue was very important so much of the original was incorporated in to the screenplay.”

It’s tempting to see Anna’s interest in art as a reflection of Yonebayashi himself – he ▶



May the tiny kitten of joy



vomit forth happiness upon you

PIZZA

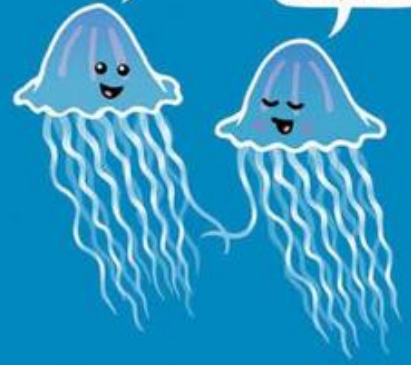


Hi there!

is your friend!

Je t'adore..

Aww,shucks!



Due to their soft nature jellyfish are the most romantic of all sea creatures



send in the bees!



Have a nice cup of tea!

Coffee is evil



TASTY TASTY EVIL



Wombat loves Narwhal

These cats are confused by your petty moralities

I'll poop wherever I see fit!



When I'm sick in your room, it means that I love you!

Why can't I have two breakfasts?



Do not question cat-kind, PUNY HUMAN!



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▶ started at Studio Ghibli working as an in-between animator on *Princess Mononoke* and *My Neighbours The Yamadas*, then moved up to key animator on *Spirited Away*, *Howl's Moving Castle* and *Ponyo*. However, he says he didn't choose to make Anna an artist just because that's the medium in which he is most comfortable expressing himself. Rather, he wanted to use art as a way to forge a connection between Anna and the character of Hisako, an older woman who loves to paint.

"She is not a reflection of myself," he says of Anna. "I know that the pictures we draw express our state of mind from my own experience but also there is the old lady, Hisako, who is an artist. She reveals the secret of Marnie, but I thought if we could create a teacher and pupil relationship between Hisako and Anna by having them drawing at the same time that would be interesting and the audience could imagine how their relationship continues after the film."

Back In The Fold

As mentioned, *When Marnie Was There* is the first Studio Ghibli movie without Hayao Miyazaki's direct involvement, but it still has that unmistakable Ghibli aesthetic style. That's not too much of a surprise given that Yonebayashi learned his craft working for Miyazaki. "I think it is impossible to free myself from Miyazaki-sensei because I've been involved with his films for so many years, and whether I like it or not I have Miyazaki-sensei in my work, so his influence always comes out," he says. "With *When Marnie*

"I think it is impossible to free myself from Miyazaki-sensei because I've been involved with his films for so many years, and whether I like it or not I have Miyazaki-sensei in my work, so his influence always comes out."

Yonebayashi

Was There, we brought in some staff from outside of Studio Ghibli, so I think there is a good mixture of the Studio Ghibli style and something different."

To make his vision for *When Marnie Was There* a reality, Yonebayashi needed people with a very specific set of skills. Two of the key creators on the project were Masashi Ando, who co-wrote the screenplay with Yonebayashi and Keiko Niwa as well as serving as supervising animator, and production designer Yohei Taneda. Ando worked on Ghibli classics including *Pom Poko* and *Princess Mononoke*, as well as classic films made outside of Ghibli like Satoshi Kon's *Paprika* and Hiroyuki Okiura's *A Letter To Momo*. Taneda, on the other hand, is known for his work in live action cinema. He's worked on the likes of *Kill Bill* and *The Hateful Eight* for Quentin Tarantino, *Man Of Tai Chi* with Keanu Reeves, and *Air Doll* with Hirokazu Kore'eda.

"This film needed to have a realistic style," says the filmmaker. "Marnie is sort of a fantastic being and not part of the real world, but when Marnie is not around this film has to be very, very realistic. That's why I asked Ando who can draw very realistic movements, and also I picked Yohei Taneda as the production designer who has extensive experience in live action films."

That combination of talents means that Yonebayashi's creation has all of the attention to detail and almost tactile locations that are so intrinsic to the Ghibli style. You can get lost in Anna and Marnie's world from 10 June, when *When Marnie Was There* will open in cinemas from Studio Canal. ■



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LORD MARKSMAN AND VANADIS

From Satelight, the studio behind hit series *Fairy Tail*, comes this awesome new fantasy adventure, released in the UK by Anime Limited. We follow Count Tigrevurmud Vorn, a nobleman captured on the battlefield by the War Maiden Eleonora Viltaria. Turns out his archery skills weren't enough to save his skin, but the War Maiden is so impressed she agrees to form an unlikely alliance with him. Expect action, and plenty of twists and turns!





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FROM SOFTWARE

CHIBI STREET STYLE

Pastel Dreams and Starry Eyes

It's time for a fashion quest: we're hunting for winged unicorns and pastel stars as we check out a fashion scene full of sweet, sugary (and sometimes bitter) goodness!

Leeann Hamilton (The Cool Bean) once again illustrates style observations by Laura Watton (PinkAppleJam).



FAIRY KEI

Fairy Kei is a fluffy and light look that utilises every pastel shade available, with flashes of dark purple and navy – but never, ever any black. (This style also goes by the name of Pastel Kei, which has more pastel palettes and less cartoon prints.) Multi-layered petticoats, short frilly A-line skirts, wigs, cosy hoodies and legwarmers are wardrobe staples. You may recognise western characters such as Rainbow Brite, first-gen *My Little Pony* and *Care Bear* characters on T-shirts, even plushies sewn onto dresses. Layering tulle and chiffon is a big thing, as well as using polka-dot patterns. Fairy Kei brands from around the world include DIY boutique Spank!, Milklim, Chocomint, Listen Flavor and Swimmer (many are also known in the Sweet Lolita communities because of a mutual love of sweets, ice-creams and so on).

GENDERLESS KEI

To rock the Genderless aesthetic, it does not matter how you identify. Dyed hair, cool clothes, glittering eye makeup and decals, nail polish and cute accessories can be worn by all. Though the Genderless Kei name applies to both men and women, Genderless boys have received much attention; the look became popular after a number of models appeared on the runway for Tokyo Girls Collection 2015 A/W fashion show. Some guys pictured on fashion blogs can fit into an “extremely kawaii (cute) boy” category, though we are aware labels will not define. It embodies a sweet yet fierce move towards a virtual, post-gender fashion world.





PASTEL GOTH / CREEPYCUTE

Making gothic cute each day, a bit at a time, Pastel Goth is an eye-catching derivative of the well-known gothic look. By adding a sweet coat of polish to a sick silhouette of pure black or wearing dark sweaters with a sarcastic message written in a sweet typeface, these fashion followers subvert that well-known trend. Add in platform rockabilly creepers, a lavender or mint wig, pastel coloured tights, plastic crucifixes and cropped shorts, and you're on your way to the depths of the cutest hell you've ever seen.

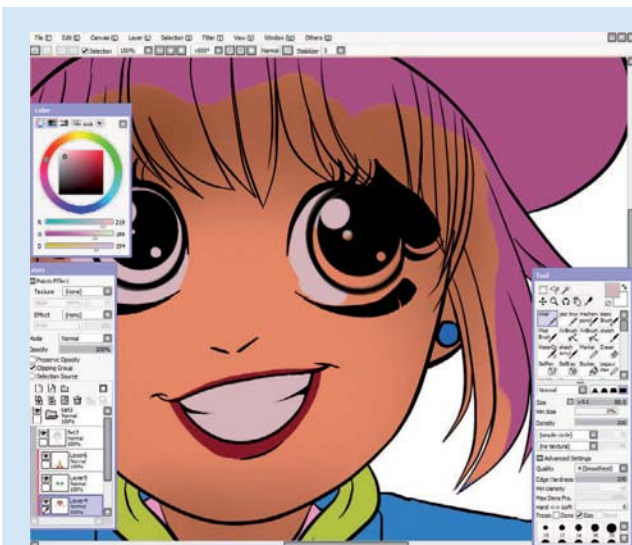
There are elements in many Pastel Goth outfits that riff from Sweet Lolita as well as Gothic Lolita, mixed with a casual western twist. There's some cuteness in that dark heart after all – or maybe that sweet heart is just feeling pretty black. Take a look at Killstar, Iron Fist and CuteCanKill brands online.



POP OTAKU KEI

Pop Otaku Kei is an anime-version of Pop Kei – extremely similar to Pastel Kei but with brighter, saturated colours thrown in. '80s girls' cartoons feature in Pop Otaku Kei big time, as well as '90s cartoon character designs from around the globe. "Kawaii Anarchy" Tokyo boutique 6%DOKIDOKI was one of the first on the scene, as well as Galaxxy – you cannot avoid their amazing paint box palette explosion.

It's a bit more in-your-face but no less fun than some of the other looks here. If you want to take part, be on the lookout for massive graphical patterns as well as character T-shirts that will bring back memories of your favourite games on Windows '95 – cute punk with a retro anime twist.



WHERE NEXT?

Cute *and* cool, the looks denoted in this month's piece can be happily replicated by mixing vintage pieces, imported brands and high street finds for your old-new look! Incorporate as many elements as you want into your everyday outfits, whether that's channelling your favourite look through your colour scheme, the odd standout piece, or by going the whole hog and replicating the style wholesale

Do you design characters as well as co-ordinate outfits? Send NEO your pictures – we're always happy to hear from you and see your universe. Find us on Twitter or Facebook, or email us at mail@neomag.co.uk. We want to know what your adventures in Japanese fashion have been, and we'd love to see your style, whether it's a photo of your outfit, or a drawing you've done of a style that captured your imagination.

Fashion is for you – wear it, draw it, design it, love it!



PSYCHIC SCHOOL WARS

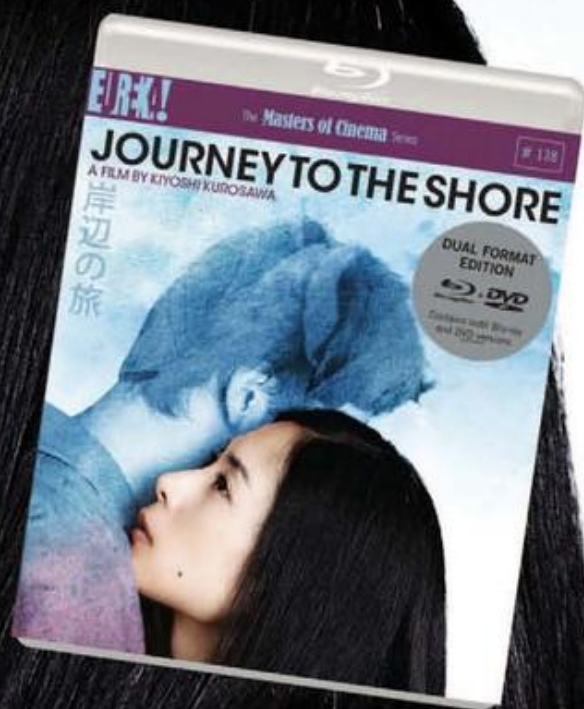
Its world premiere was at Scotland Loves Anime in 2012, and now *Psychic School Wars* has finally made its way to general release in the UK. It tells novelist Taku Mayumura's much-adapted tale of psychic fascists taking control of a Japanese school, and was directed by Ryosuke Nakamura for Sunrise. Beautifully animated and decidedly detailed, the movie is out 30 May from Anime Limited.

JOURNEY TO THE SHORE

A FILM BY KIYOSHI KUROSAWA

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MANGA EXTRACT

A BRUSH WITH MAGIC

by Sonia Leong

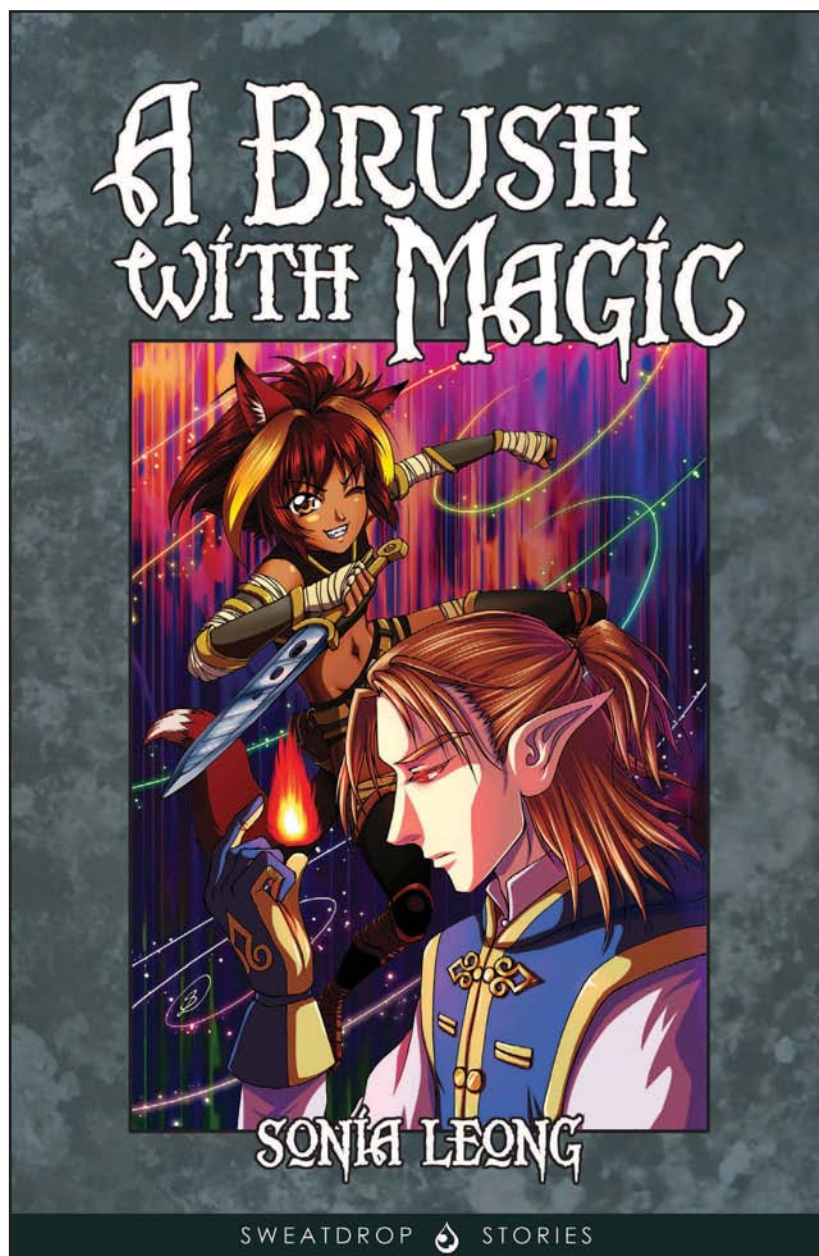
THIS ISSUE WE have an extract from *A Brush With Magic*, by Sonia Leong. "A cute, but deadly vixen warrior rescues an Elven student mage with no sense of self-preservation," she tells us, of the story. "After discovering that their meeting was no coincidence, they decide to stick together and take on the challenges of their world; chasing bounties, researching magic, donning disguises, meeting the parents and fighting gods!

"I was so sick of the usual sci-fi / fantasy setup of young, male, warrior protagonist and sweet, fragile, female, mystical starchild. I know plenty of people who love kickass female characters, and most of my friends often play female warrior characters in videogames too, myself included. So why not make the lead a physically powerful female, and the male co-star the more fragile magic-caster?"

"*A Brush With Magic* is the first book of the *Chronicles Of Ciel* series of illustrated fantasy light novels being published with Sweatdrop Studio's light novel imprint, Sweatdrop Stories. It is a huge departure from the rest of my work, which mostly consists of full sequential comic pages or tutorial / how-to-draw titles, but it has felt so right. I've had so many adventures for them in my head, that it would have been impossible for me to draw it as a manga alongside my full time work, and I love the light novel format, being a fan of traditional fantasy novels and illustration."

We asked Sonia to tell us more about the web service Patreon, a new way that consumers can support the creators of their favourite content, and where you can find Sonia at www.patreon.com/sonialeong. "Patreon is a subscription service where you can be a modern patron of the arts! Support a creator from as little as \$1 a month or per piece of special work uploaded (you get to set your limits). I don't have a huge amount of subscribers, but I am hugely grateful to all of them! I upload exclusive sketches, hi-res versions of my artwork before anyone else gets to see them, some art is personally dedicated or tailored to requests and I also sometimes send out physical goodies like prints and greeting cards as a thank you."

Find Sonia online at fyredrake.net, and also at sweatdrop.com/shop, where you can find many of her Sweatdrop titles including *Once Upon A Time*, *Love Stuffing* and *Aya Takeo*. "In particular, check out *The Colours Of Magic*," Sonia tells us, "as that is a full-colour A4 sized artbook containing lots of sketches, colour illustrations, bonus art and extra scenes from *A Brush With Magic*!"



BOOK I OF
A BRUSH WITH MAGIC
THE CHRONICLES
OF CIEL
BY SONIA LEONG



Ruashtir'ogan (Roa). A demure vulpine warrior with a penchant for singing, more so when drunk.



Silas J'Hernier. A young Elven mage with remarkable powers, but too polite for his own good.

THE STORY SO FAR...

Ciel, the Goddess of Light, created a world where the air is infused with colourful threads of magic. But where light exists, so does shadow; Terra, the Goddess of

Darkness, reigns over death and destruction.

Our tale began with a chance encounter between a fiery little warrior and a well-spoken mage. Thrown headlong into a kidnap-and-rescue operation, they soon discovered that appearances can be deceiving and their partnership was anything but a coincidence.

After several months of travelling together, the pair receive a distress call from a childhood friend, who also happens to be a future Empress...

~PART TWO~
A SUMMON OF ALL PARTS





Silas was running as fast as he could, but any advantage his long legs gave him was cancelled out by his equally long outer robes and unfortunate clumsiness. The forests of Châtaignon should have been comfortable home territory, but its dense shrubs were proving terribly inconvenient.

He was barely managing to keep up with the bushy red tail in front of him, elegantly stretched out in a display of speed and balance. Except when it whipped from side-to-side in anger. And he knew she was angry.

'This is all your fault!' Rua shouted at him from over her shoulder.

'Now, now, there is no need to play the blame game!' he retorted, ducking under a branch.

A roar sounded from behind them, reminding them why they were running. No less than three rows of sharp teeth snapped at Silas's heels, forcing him to put on a burst of speed to draw level with Rua.

'Jump to your right!' she warned him.

Rather than risk looking back at the monster to keep track of its movements, he kept his eyes peeled on the route ahead to avoid tripping over anything. He trusted that Rua's keen senses meant she was able to do both and promptly obeyed.

She jumped to her left at the same time, just as a sizzling jet of bile landed where they had been, moments before. They came back together and continued to run, grateful for a little more breathing room as the beast had slowed down to take aim.



'You just had to try the fancy, new spell, didn't you?' Rua needed. 'If you'd just stuck to the Sneak scroll you'd picked up from Weissdam—'

'Forgive me, Rua,' Silas interrupted, defensively. 'But I must insist that my execution of the scroll of Invisibility was flawless!'

'Fat load of good that does if a bloody manicore has such good hearing!'

'And how, may I ask, was I supposed to know that? You are the one who has travelled the world and—'

'Now who's blaming who?'

Another roar interfered with their bickering and they concentrated on saving their breath for running a little longer.

Silas searched his memory for anything useful he could recall about manicores.

'I wish I had paid more attention in my Advanced Enchantments supervision,' he complained to himself. 'All I remember at the time was being shocked by how expensive it was to buy manicore teeth...'

'Wait, what was that last bit?' Rua asked.

'Um, manicore teeth are... really expensive?'

'Why didn't you say so?'

Suddenly, the Vulpine was no longer at his side.

He whipped his head around, searching for her.

She was running straight at the manicore, its grotesque mouth drooling and snapping in hungry anticipation at this potential meal.

Was she mad?

No, she was just being Rua.

He groaned to himself. He should have known that she would kill anything that moved if it involved bad guys, rare treasures and big rewards.

He did the only thing he could.

He turned around and ran at the manicore as well.

He stopped several yards short to find her facing off with the monster, assessing it for any openings and dodging each time it lunged for her with its triple set of teeth. Its mane bristled with frustration.

He saw the tail uncurl, its sharp tip raised high.

Poison tail, he thought in a panic. *I cannot let that get her.*

His silver eyes glowed softly so he could see threads of Spirit around him.

'*Aperitque portam ad spiritum...*'

I open the gate to spirit...

The Spirit threads pulled his grimoire from its usual side-satchel position. It levitated in front of him, the pages flicking to a number he had in his mind.

He spread his arms out and as if a pane of coloured glass was placed in front of his eyes, he switched his elemental vision into another spectrum. His eyes flashed green as he spun the now-visible threads of Air to concentrate at his fingertips.

'*Aer, ego praecipio robis.*'

Air, I command you.

Referencing his grimoire, his fingertips left wispy smoke tendrils as he drew four circles in the corners of a square grid, then filled in the circles with spiral patterns.

'*Caelum ventis!*'

Chain of wind!

He pictured in his mind exactly where the gusts of wind should be positioned to hold the creature immobile, then grabbed the floating symbol and threw it like a discus at the manicore. The spell struck and unfolded over its body, settling exactly as Silas had envisioned.

It roared and struggled against the wind binding its legs and stinging tail.

Rua looked over to Silas with an appreciative grin.

She dodged its snapping jaws, then somersaulted up onto its back. Raising her dagger high, she plunged it deep into the back of its head, stabbing through its mane and piercing the brain.

It died instantly, shuddering to a standstill within its wind chains.

Silas breathed a sigh of relief and he motioned for the wind to gradually disperse, spreading the monster's legs out slowly to avoid making it tip over.

Rua looked like she was enjoying the ride. As it touched down, she delicately hopped off the manicore's back and scampered up to Silas.

She looked like butter wouldn't melt in her mouth; hardly like she had just slain an enormous monster.

He lifted the spectrum of Air from his eyes before lifting Spirit, watching her expression closely. He liked seeing her face light up when his eyes changed colour. And if a little gesture like that brought such pleasure, he didn't mind indulging her.

'So, do we just pull its teeth out and bring it to a merchant?' Rua asked.

'It has to be a merchant who deals in magical goods,' he suggested. 'They would know its true value and we could get the best price.'

She looked at the manicore with narrow eyes, calculating its worth.

'Anything else worth scavenging?'

Silas had a sinking feeling about this. He had to stop her now.

'Only if you are willing to carry it around! My Magus inbox is already getting full from the bits and pieces you – I mean, we – have picked up in the past few months. Certainly nothing is as valuable as the teeth.'

She sighed in disappointment.

'Aw, really? Well, we'd better get stuck in.'

It took a while to get the hundred-odd teeth out. Thankfully, the rows of teeth were not embedded too strongly as they were designed to drop off as they reached the edge from wear and tear, to be replaced by the inner rows. Rua developed an efficient technique of levering them out with the point of her dagger. Silas rubbed off the bits of gristle on the dirt and grass as best he could. Soon they had a little pile of manicore ivory in front of them.

'I hope there's a spare purse left in your inbox,' she said. 'Or we're gonna just have to pile them up in the corner.'

Shifting his vision just a touch into the Spirit spectrum, Silas willed a thin thread of the white element through his index finger, making it glow. He drew a square, roughly a foot long and high, then pushed the Spirit portal open.

He peered inside, frowning at the assortment of collectibles they had amassed. Before he met Rua, he had wondered whether two cubic yards was a little too big. Now it was full to almost bursting.

By the grace of Ciel, let us find a merchant soon to offload all of this, he prayed, his sense of tidiness and order crying out for a solution to the mess.

Shifting the pile of Rua's weaponry against the wall of his inbox, he rummaged about. He was sure there was a purse around here.

'Was there anything else you wanted?' he asked.

She shook her head.

The empty coin bag was underneath several items. He tried to pull it out, then realised what was making it difficult: a filled water canteen.

It struck him that Rua could be thirsty. He plucked it out and handed it to her.

She blinked her golden eyes in surprise, then gave him a grateful smile. He bowed his head.

Although he was brought up in Vertciellen tradition to protect women, Rua was a fearsome warrior, far more physically adept than Silas could ever be. A warrior so unassailable, even death could not stop her. But she was not immune to pain or heartache. He was ever mindful of the sacrifices she had made and what she was willing to put herself through for others.

What she had put herself through for him.



On that fateful night when he had revealed that he was the Weaver and she had revealed that she was the Dagger, he had decided there and then; he would be her rock, her sheath and her peace.

Happy that he could help with something as simple as making sure she had enough to drink, he turned back to his inbox and pulled out the coin bag.

That was when he noticed the folded letter with his name written on it in elegant, flowing script. The hand was familiar.

'Arafel?' he guessed.

He grabbed the letter and the instant he touched it, he felt the Spirit seal on the fold of the paper dissipate. The resulting swirls and eddies he could see in that split-second were like a signature to his superior elemental sight. No doubt about it, this was from Arafel.

Why would she seal a letter she had sent to his personal inbox?

This must be serious.

He gave the coin bag to Rua, who was just setting down the water canteen. She looked at him curiously as he unfolded the letter and began reading.

'Who's Arafel?' she queried.

'An old friend of mine,' he replied. 'She is also a student at the Lyceum Arcanus.'

'Oh! It's so nice that you have friends who write to you. I thought you had trouble getting on with the other mages.'

He hesitated, unsure of how much more he should say.

Rua picked up his uncask and stayed silent.

He looked at her.

She seemed worried. But could he detect a sting of hurt?

He opened up immediately.

'I do. But she is not like the other mages. She is Arafel Crescentia Eltares von und zu Anistarchus, Crown Princess of Drachenheim, first in line to the Imperial Throne of the Palatinate.'

'WHAT? By Ciel, you have friends in high places!'

He flustered.

'That is not why I consider her a friend. She... knew me from before.'

Rua frowned, searching his face. Then she understood.

'Drachenheim,' she said. 'That was where it happened.'

Silas nodded sadly, looking away.

'Yes. She and I were childhood friends when I was stationed there with my family. She was far from the line of succession then. Until... her entire family was assassinated.'

'You saved her.'

'Yes.'

'And did she change?' Rua's voice went dark.

'Never,' he said fiercely, shooting her a protective glare.

There was a slight pause before she grinned.

'Good. I like her already.'

Silas was taken aback for second. But he felt glad at Rua's declaration. Arafel was one of the very few people in the world he trusted because she refused to treat him any differently. Despite his phenomenal powers; he would always be just Silas, nothing more. He hoped that Rua would get on with her.

'I am sure she would like you too,' he said with a smile, which quickly faded. 'But I fear the worst with this letter, something does not seem right.'

'What does it say?' Rua asked.

My Dear Dammkopf/ Si,

I hope that you are well. I apologise if I have worried you by sealing my letter to you as such, but I cannot impress upon you enough the urgency and the ever-increasing danger of the situation. There have been very strange happenings at the Lyceum, for several months now. Many are laughing it off as rumour and circumstance, but I know better.

I can recognise the signs.

Strangely coloured lights have been seen throughout the halls in the night. Not those of our familiar and beloved fire elements, but darker. Colder. Livestock have gone missing from the surrounding fields.

Where carcasses have been found, they had been bled out. The smell of sulphur lingers in the corridors, nowhere near the Alchemical laboratories. In recent weeks, several first-years have been collapsing during lectures for no apparent reason, pale and wan, as if their vigour had been sapped from them. What finally prompted me to write to you is that during my volunteer shifts at the library, I discovered certain books had been removed from the restricted section, only accessible to faculty staff and PhDs. Dangerous books. And no official records show that they had been taken out.

In short, I strongly suspect that someone is dabbling in demonology.

Someone very high up.

Please return to me as soon as you can. I cannot trust anyone here.

Yours as always,

Arafel

Read the rest in *A Brush With Magic* from Sweatdrop Studios!

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084	Outlaw: Gangster VIP Collection	★★★★★



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Ghost in the Shell The New Movie

ScarJo not included



Available: Now
Label: Manga Entertainment
Certificate: TBC
Discs: 1
Retail Price: £24.99 (Blu-ray) /
£19.99 (DVD)
Running Time: 100 mins

CYBORG AGENT, HACKER and warrior Motoko Kusanagi, leader of her own six-man fighting unit, has burnished her name through her past operations. With government funding, Kusanagi's team takes on a hostage crisis. They're apparently successful... but it's a smokescreen for the murder of the Prime Minister. Now the unit has a tangled case to break, which involves their virus-happy adversary known as Fire Starter, as well as Kusanagi's former comrades at Unit 501.

Manga Entertainment must be giving fervent thanks for lucky timing. The release of *Ghost in the Shell: The New Movie* comes as the *GITS* franchise spikes in the news and launches fresh flamewars, thanks to the first photo of Scarlett Johansson from next year's film and the return of *that* controversy. Angry about whitewashing? Screw Hollywood, here's an all-Japanese Kusanagi!

More cynically, this release may benefit from a sneakily misleading name. Many buyers may reasonably assume that *The New Movie* is a reboot of the franchise (rebooted twice already), or some

“The release of *Ghost in the Shell: The New Movie* comes as the *GITS* franchise launches fresh flamewars, thanks to the first photo of Scarlett Johansson from next year's film.”

EXTRAS

Blu-ray will include 'Part 2' of the 'Inside the World of Ghost in the Shell' film, plus 'Arise Explained in 25 Minutes' and '25 Years Reviewed in 25 Minutes.'

kind of companion to the first film from 1995. Or, as Jonathan Clements pointed out in NEO 147, the title may be a ploy for next year, when buyers could confuse it with the Johansson film.

Actually, *The New Movie* should be called *Ghost in the Shell Arise: The Movie*, as that's what it is. It follows on from the earlier *Arises* (available from Manga), with the same designs, voice-cast and writer (Tow Ubukata). Kazuya Nomura is credited as "Director," replacing Kazuchika Kise from the earlier *Arise* episodes. That might have been interesting. Nomura has few director credits, but he helmed the eccentric but likable *Robotics; Notes* and the intriguing new spy show *Joker Game*, both by the *GITS* studio, Production I.G.

However Kise, who redesigned the characters for the *Arise* reboot, is credited as "General Director" on the new film, which feels very similar to the previous episodes. It's handsome without being especially well-presented; its gratuitously tangled story feels like an assemblage of parts that fans will recognise, but without much interesting storytelling. In short, it's disappointing.

Given the moniker, it feels especially mean that *The New Movie* assumes you've seen the past *Arise* episodes. A big part of the plot deals with Kusanagi's old employers, Unit 501, and several of her old acquaintances return. If you've seen (and remember) the first *Arise* episode, then you'll be okay, but otherwise you'll *really* be lost by some developments. It's especially silly as all the info could have been dropped into the script in a few lines.



@icaruskarin
 @NEO_Magazine @MangaUK So wishing to watch it but I can't without seeing the two extra episodes of *GITS: Arise Architecture* :(


Assuming that you *have* seen *Arise*, then one of the film's virtues – to a point – is that it rounds off previous episodes. We see Kusanagi, Batou, Togusa and the others operating slickly as a team, with a high level of professional trust, even if Kusanagi deliberately purges the personal, referring to her men as “parts.” The sniper Saito is still kill-happy, while Togusa has a newbie complex. Kusanagi still refuses to work for Aramaki, her commander in other versions of *GITS*, yet the not-so-old man is shown taking satisfaction, even pride, in her achievements. Meanwhile Kusanagi must confront her old comrades at 501, in what becomes a final reckoning.

That much is clear. The bad news is that much of the rest of the film is terribly confusing, even on repeat viewing. The multiple factions and double-crosses are murder to follow; even if they *do* make sense, the level of pointless convolusion swamps interesting ideas. There are references to post-traumatic disorder, with the eerie image of suicidal soldiers leaving their last words to an anonymous clerk. There's also the suggestion that *GITS'* cyber-world is subject to the bugbears of today's tech; incompatibility (“computer says no upgrade”) and obsolescence. When it's your computer that's obsolete, it's annoying. When it's your prosthetic body that's obsolete, it's death. These are good ideas, but the film doesn't develop them beyond a

few interesting scenes. The final story revelations are terribly half-baked, not to mention old-hat. It's hard to make sense, even retrospectively, of the actions of Kusanagi's adversary, whose *modus operandi* feels like a story cheat (like using identical twins in a whodunit). And through *The New Movie*, plotlines and characters spring up gracefully to move things along; several of these elements feel recycled from earlier versions of *GITS*.

The action sequences are adequate but often rather standard *GITS* fare, and it's occasionally hard to read the action. The last big battle, though, is an honourable exception; it's *very* enjoyable and satisfying, with gratifying levels of fire and firepower. At such moments, you feel the *Arise* characters truly rise; for all this film's disappointments, it would be sad if they had no more adventures before the next reboot. *The New Movie* ends with a cheeky reprise of a famed *GITS* moment which feels deservedly earned by the now seasoned heroes – though not by the disappointing film.

VERDICT: Despite some decent ideas and character development, this film is disappointing, let down by a frustratingly convoluted, second-hand story.

ANDREW OSMOND

ANIME ★★★★★

INTRODUCING

→ In this film, Kusanagi must have a final reckoning with an old acquaintance.



MOTOKO KUSANAGI

Arguably the most famous heroine in all anime, the cyborg Kusanagi hardly needs an introduction. Specifically this is the *Arise* version of Kusanagi, who's younger than the others and has never experienced life in a flesh-and-blood body.



LIEUTENANT COLONEL KURUTSU

Kurutsu is the head of Unit 501, a secret military division, and she's Kusanagi's former superior; their relationship is explored further in this film. Kurutsu was in the previous *Arise* stories, but doesn't appear in other versions of *GITS*.

IF YOU LIKE THIS...

This film follows on from the earlier *Ghost in the Shell: Arise*. If you want to see alternative takes on *GITS*, try the *Stand Alone Complex* TV version or the original 1995 film. *Psycho-Pass* is a gruesome sci-fi by the same studio.





Seraph Of The End Series 1

It's the beginning of the end for vampires



Available: 23 May
Label: Universal
Certificate: 15
Discs: 2
Retail Price: £49.99 (DVD) / £59.99 (Blu-ray)
Running Time: 288 mins
Episodes: 12

IN THE AFTERMATH of a virus that wipes out most of the human population, vampires emerge to seize control of the survivors. Raised as livestock to provide a steady supply of food for the bloodsuckers, Yuichiro escaped the vampires' subterranean city as a child, but all his friends died in the process.

Now Yuichiro is a member of the Japanese Imperial Demon Army and is desperate to join the Moon Demon Squad, an elite Vampire Extermination Unit. But what he doesn't realise is that his closest childhood friend, Mika, didn't die during their escape attempt and has now become a vampire himself.

Seraph Of The End comes from Wit Studio, the company behind *Attack on Titan*, so expectations for the series are sky high. It's easy to see why Wit Studio chose *Seraph*, as it boasts many similarities with *AOT*. There's the angry young hero with a secret power, humanity teetering on the brink of eradication, and even walled enclaves.

Like Eren and his deep-seated hatred for titans in *AOT*, Yuichiro wants nothing more than the chance to kill vampires. He's not the most likeable hero as he is CONSTANTLY SHOUTING and obnoxious, so he's cut from a very familiar shonen hero cloth.

Family is a major theme – as the virus mainly killed people over the age of 13, it left a lot of orphans in search of substitute families. This leads to some fairly heavy-handed dialogue about the importance of trusting your family and belonging to a group, rather than being a loner. The world building in the series is not terribly

detailed. There's very little information about the vampires – where they came from, how they run their society, or what abilities they possess (if they're not allergic to sunlight, why live underground?).

The script, by Hiroshi Seko, can be guilty of spoon feeding information to the viewer and, combined with Daisuke Toku's unimaginative direction, struggles to maintain tension due to poor pacing. The series' biggest weakness and where it really can't measure up to *AOT* is in the action scenes. The constant spouting of unwieldy and expository dialogue sucks the momentum out of the battles – characters literally stop mid-fight to have long arguments, usually when Yuichiro is disobeying orders, while the vampires just stand there and do nothing – and the very heavy use of still frames only exacerbates the problem. Compared to the thrilling aerial action of *AOT*, *Seraph* falls flat on its face.

The screenplay jumps around, starting as a post-apocalyptic survival series, then moving into high school high jinks with Yuichiro in full moody teen mode, before becoming a supernatural melodrama. It would flow more smoothly if ideas were followed through, instead of being stuck in to provide plot devices.

VERDICT: With its angry teen protagonist, magical weapons and a dear friend-turned-foe, *Seraph Of The End* ticks plenty of the classic shonen action series boxes, but director Toku and writer Seko drop the ball when it comes to kicking butt and taking names. There's too much excess chatter and not nearly enough vampire slaying. Someone get Buffy out of retirement.

DAVID WEST

EXTRAS

A collection of comedy skits, a 134-page book, poster, trading cards and four prints.

ANIME ★★★★★



Ritual

If you go down to the woods today...



Available: 16 May
Label: Terrorcotta
Certificate: 15
Discs: 1
Retail Price: £9.99
Running Time: 89 mins

JOKO ANWAR'S LOW-BUDGET survival horror begins as an unnamed man drags himself from a shallow grave, deep in the heart of the Indonesian rainforest.

With no memory of who he is or how he got there, he becomes embroiled in a deadly game of cat and mouse with an unseen pursuer, who is deathly intent on preventing him from reuniting with his missing family, or, it would seem, even leaving the forest alive at all.

A hugely enjoyable watch, *Ritual's* blend of old-school, practical special effects and twist-filled plot elevate the film beyond its limited production values. More thriller than horror, much of its appeal comes from a riveting central performance by Rio Dewanto, whose charismatic screen time is particularly impressive given that he rarely has the chance to share it with anyone else.

While the first hour or so plays out much as you would expect within the genre, it's with the revelation that kicks off the film's final third that *Ritual* becomes truly compulsive viewing. It builds to a conclusion that provokes as many questions as it answers, but which nonetheless keeps you guessing (and reeling) until the final credits roll.

Ritual's particular brand of gruesome violence will not be to everybody's tastes and certainly isn't for the squeamish. There are plenty of nasty scenes throughout that will have you hiding behind your pillow. However, it isn't so much the moments of outright violence as Anwar's deft direction that create the film's underlying suspense. Get past the gore, and there's a thoroughly entertaining thriller waiting to be seen.

VERDICT: Worth watching for the final third alone, *Ritual* is a great addition to any Asian horror fan's collection.

ADRIENNE LAW

EXTRAS

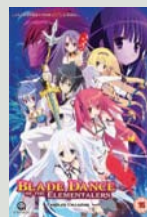
English language dialogue. Extras not confirmed.

FILM ★★★★★



Blade Dance of the Elementalers

Dance magic, dance!



Available: Now
Label: Animatsu
Certificate: 15
Discs: 3 (DVD) / 2 (Blu-Ray)
Retail Price: 29.99 (DVD) / 39.99 (Blu-Ray)
Running Time: 300 mins
Episodes: 12

AS EVERYONE KNOWS (everyone who's ever seen a fantasy harem series before, anyway) if you're a young man strolling through the forest on his way to magical fame and fortune, there is a 99.9% chance that you'll stumble across a naked girl having a wash. Not wishing to buck this trend is Kamito, the newest student at the hitherto all-girls school Areishia Spirit Academy, where the daughters of noble families learn to wield elemental spirit weapons in hopes of winning the titular Blade Dance. Though it might sound harmless, the Blade Dance is actually a no-holds-barred magical tournament to appease the most powerful spirits in the land.

Compounding one blunder with another, Kamito also bonds with a sword spirit from under the nose of Claire Rouge – the aforementioned bathing young lady – whose temperament is as fiery as her elemental weaponry; and in a slight stretch of logic, Kamito must now serve as *Claire's* contracted spirit (which basically just means that she gets to boss him around).

While *Blade Dance of the Elementalers* has all the basic staples of a fun and interesting series: action, magic, mysterious backstories, a whole host of spiritual mascots and demonic entities; unfortunately the series' short run is so weighed down with nigh-constant fanservice that it doesn't take enough time to make any of the characters engaging or likable, and most viewers will probably find that the first couple of episodes are more than enough for the two lead characters' bickering to put them off.

VERDICT: *Blade Dance of the Elementalers* has all the makings of a fun and frenetic series, but it gets hampered by a lack of substance from the outset.

JACOB BONIFACE

EXTRAS

None confirmed. Episodes are available in Japanese with subtitles.

AMIME ★★★★★



Yakuza Apocalypse

Of Vampires and Frogs



Available: Now
 Label: Manga Entertainment
 Certificate: 18
 Discs: 1
 Retail Price: £12.99 (DVD) / £15.99 (Blu-ray)
 Running Time: 115 mins

A YAKUZA BOSS is attacked by a rival gang – again, again and again – but he just won't die. Even when he's stabbed, shot and beaten, crime kingpin Kamiura (Lily Franky) still slaughters his attackers. Unknown to his loyal henchman Kageyama (Hayato Ichihara), Kamiura is a vampire and immortal. That is until assassins from the Syndicate, including a lethal martial artist (Yayan Ruhian), arrive to finish Kamiura off. Before he kicks the bucket, the yakuza boss transfers his vampire powers to Kageyama, meaning the henchman has to deal with his own bloodthirstiness as he pursues the mysterious Syndicate – led by an unstoppable man in a fuzzy frog outfit.

Despite this bizarre premise, director Takashi Miike impresses on the technical front. There is moody low-key lighting, which gives a film noir feel to the proceedings, as well as impressive computer and prosthetic effects. This puts it in the same vein as Miike's other recent bloody extravaganzas, like *Lesson of Evil* and *13 Assassins*. While it isn't perfect, he is still making more than one film a year, and packs a lot into this weird and wonderful tale.

The slick production values can give the wrong impression about the film – often it feels like a dark yakuza thriller, like 2001's *Agitator*, not least because of the straight-faced acting. After the appearance of a high-pitched kappa demon, and a group of knitting-obsessed civilians harvested for their blood (by Denden in the role of a shady chef), there's clearly more than meets the eye. In fact, you have to take the whole film with your tongue firmly in cheek or you'll just get frustrated.

The only problem is the length – almost two hours – and this is probably because of the mammoth task that Miike has undertaken, aided and abetted by scriptwriter Yoshitaka Yamaguchi. The usual conventions of yakuza thrillers, vampire horrors and martial arts films are all ripe for spoof. The gangland rise-and-fall tale is parodied by way of the vampire film; the *Twilight* films, other vampire tales and big boss figures, are satirised through the mysterious Syndicate; and every climactic brawl in film history is lampooned through a hilarious final fist-fight.

However, these points still don't fully explain why brains melt, why milk is being used to grow people, nor the revelations of the frog character. But hey, it's Miike. Nonetheless, for every scene or joke that doesn't work, there are other funnier ones. Ruhian's martial-artist-disguised-as-an-otaku steals every scene, as does the mysterious Syndicate frog boss (especially when he unleashes his terrifying stare!). The explanation of the consequences of gangsters turning into vampires, complete with chalkboard diagrams, is amusing too – especially because of Denden's deadpan delivery.

This may not be Miike's finest hour, but it's definitely one for diehard fans, especially those who appreciate his bizarre sense of humour. If you've seen *Deadly Outlaw Rekka* and wondered what that would be like with vampires and a sinister frog – you're in luck.

VERDICT: Not lacking in Miike's usual craziness, the blood, vampires, frogs and plenty of fights will keep anyone's attention. The nonsense is part of the fun, and Miike revels in spinning various genres on their head.
 JONATHAN WROOT

EXTRAS

Japanese and English language dialogue with subtitles – and only the trailer as a bonus.

FILM ★★★★★



Nine Demons

Burn, baby, burn! Disco kung fu inferno!



Available: Now
 Label: Terracotta
 Certificate: 12
 Discs: 1
 Retail Price: £12.99
 Running Time: 97 mins

CHANG CHEH IS one of the most influential directors in Hong Kong martial arts cinema, the man behind a string of classic films from Shaw Brothers including *The One-Armed Swordsman*, *Golden Swallow*, and *Vengeance*.

Nine Demons comes from late in his career, after he left Shaw Brothers and set up shop in Taiwan. The story involves Zuo Qi (Chiang Sheng) making a deal with the Demon King in order to gain the power to save his buddy Gan Yun (Lu Feng). But power comes at a price – the nine demons that inhabit Qi’s body need human blood to survive.

It’s a Faustian premise, but Chang’s film can only really be enjoyed when taken as high camp. Along with his demonic abilities, Qi gains gold eyeshadow, purple tights, a crown and a cape. So he’s not just super tough, he’s also infernally fabulous. The demons either appear as floating skulls or as eight giggling kids and one woman accompanied by garish disco lights.

Nine Demons was originally released in Taiwan in 1983. That same year saw Jackie Chan’s *Project A* and Tsui Hark’s *Zu Warriors From The Magic Mountain*. Chang’s film can’t compete with the action of the first, or the special effects of the latter. The special effects here look very cheap and the wirework is obvious, although at least Chiang Sheng is a solid acrobat and martial artist in his many fight scenes.

VERDICT: With dodgy fashion choices, flying skulls and disco lights, *Nine Demons* is not vintage Chang Cheh.

DAVID WEST

EXTRAS

Mandarin dialogue with English subtitles. Extras are three trailers, a stills gallery, a short interview with stuntman Yu Tai Ping, and the original (and fantastically cheesy) English dub version of the film.

FILM ★★★★★



Psycho-Pass 2

Collector’s Edition

Cloudy with a chance of justice



Available: 16 May
 Label: Anime Ltd
 Certificate: 15
 Discs: 2
 Retail Price: £18.99
 Running Time: 275 mins

AFTER DISCOVERING the true, nightmarish nature of the Sibyl System – a ubiquitous law enforcement enterprise to manage crime – Inspector Akane Tsunemori of the Public Safety Bureau’s Criminal Investigation Division opted for legal order in the face of chaos, putting her faith in humanity first and foremost. But a bombing in broad daylight leads Akane and team to a pervasive question that will dominate their latest investigation – WC...?

Though a student in the first series, Mika Shimotsuki is now a CID inspector, with something lost in the change-over of writers from one series to the other. She’s the detective show cliché, sticking rigidly to the book, and her belief system is unequivocally challenged by the show’s events. While Mika represents the immovable law, Akane is its purity. Both are tested when antagonist Kirito Kamui, who’s framed godlike and charismatic, targets Sybil, turning justice in on itself.

As the spiritual successor to *Ghost in the Shell*, *Psycho-Pass* is immersed in the same cyberpunk style and sensibility of the early '90s and the hard sci-fi literature of Asimov and Dick. This time around, director Naoyoshi Shiotani joins forces with Kiyotaka Suzuki and Production I.G teams up with Tatsunoko Production, for a style which tempers the techno-noir with action movie tropes. The narrative and tonal departure from the first series makes *Psycho-Pass 2* a complex character study of Akane, whose inner conflict is mirrored in her struggle to uphold the law, however imperfect and however naively she goes about it. But the conclusion is profoundly unsatisfying and the zippy pacing means it was rushed from the start.

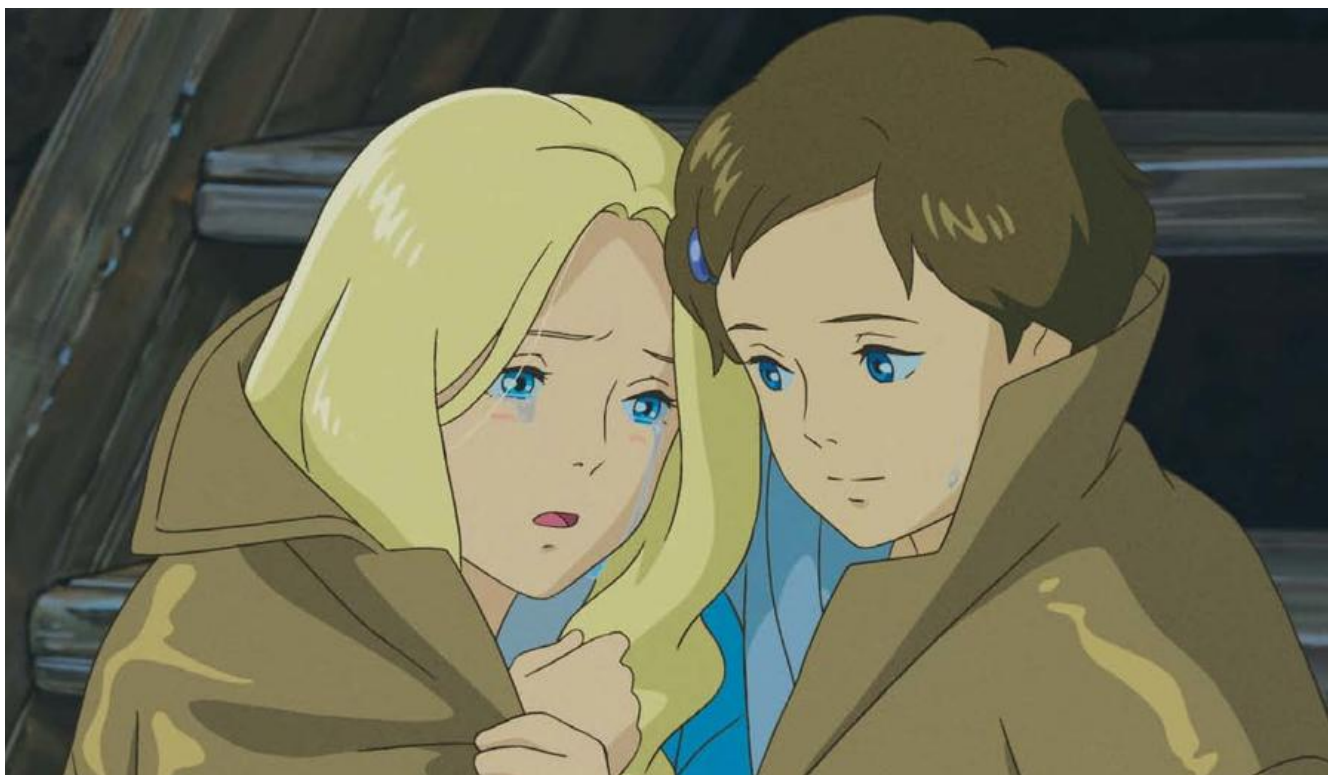
VERDICT: A different animal from its predecessor, this existential cyberpunk story succeeds in as many ways as it aggravates.

DOMINIC CUTHBERT

EXTRAS

A 56-page art book; commentaries for episodes four and eight; video commentary for episode ten; trailers and clean opening and closings.

ANIME ★★★★★



When Marnie Was There

A classic tale gets lost in translation



Available: 10 June

Label: STUDIOCANAL

Certificate: U

Format: Theatrical

Episodes: 103 mins

WELL, HERE IT IS – quite possibly the last feature film to emerge from the famed Studio Ghibli, the animation house that has consistently set the benchmark for traditional hand drawn animation over the last 30 years.

When Marnie Was There is adapted from a novel by Joan G. Robinson and directed by Hiromasa Yonebayashi, who made the excellent *Arrietty* six years ago. The story revolves around Anna Sasaki, who is sent to stay with her foster parents' relatives in a seaside town in Hokkaido. The hope is that the sea air will help ease Anna's asthma, but the youngster has much more profound problems. She is consumed with self-hatred and isolates herself from everyone who tries to get close, until she meets Marnie who lives in a house across the marshes. While a friendship quickly blossoms between the two girls, Marnie has a habit of disappearing and sometimes the house where she lives is full of people and light, but other times it appears empty and dilapidated.

Yonebayashi's film bears the trademarks of a Ghibli movie, with a female protagonist and exquisite animation, but it's definitely a misstep from the director after *Arrietty*, almost entirely due to a very poor screenplay. Anna is the least likeable heroine in Ghibli's illustrious history, so totally consumed by self-loathing that she is rude to everyone and hardly sympathetic. That would be forgivable if the script found a convincing way to show her opening up when she befriends Marnie, but instead they just seem to be instant best pals from the moment they meet.

The decision to transpose the story from its original English setting to Japan feels very forced. There's no explanation for why Marnie and

her English parents live in Japan in a western house. A grain silo provides an important plot point in the story, but why is there a European stone grain silo in the middle of Hokkaido? (Imagine a rice paddy in Norfolk). Whilst there is an element of magic at work in the film, that can't explain away the incongruity of the European architecture in rural Japan. The other main flaw in the screenplay is the clumsy attempt to set up an emotional denouement, which involves a large dump of exposition that comes far too late in the story to have any meaningful impact. It feels like a last ditch attempt to wring out some tears, instead of providing any cathartic release.

The film feels aimed primarily at children – not so much as *Ponyo* which was obviously intended for the very young, but for pre- and early adolescent viewers. There are, however, some elements that feel more adult. Foremost amongst these is the latent attraction between Anna, who is very much a tomboy, and the traditionally feminine Marnie. When Anna watches Marnie dance with a boy at a party, she is flushed with jealousy. Her possessive attitude towards her friend can be read as the product of Anna's own insecurity, but it's easy to interpret it as infatuation.

VERDICT: *When Marnie Was There* isn't quite the magnificent final performance from Studio Ghibli that fans might be hoping for. There are moments of elegance and imagination, but the clumsy structure and awkward overtones in the screenplay are disappointing. Yonebayashi showed great promise with *Arrietty*. Wherever he goes next, if he leaves Ghibli, hopefully he can recover that winning form.
DAVID WEST

EXTRAS

Japanese dialogue with English subtitles. Theatrical release.

ANIME ★★★★★



Psychic School Wars

Extra-curricular ESP!



Available: 30 May
Label: Anime Limited
Certificate: 15
Discs: 1 (DVD) / 2 (Blu-ray)
Retail Price: £19.99 (DVD) / £34.99 (Blu-ray)
Running Time: 106 mins

IF THE TITLE makes you think that *Psychic School Wars* is going to be about, well, a war between psychics at school, you'll be in for one hell of a surprise. While the plot does revolve around a quartet of middle-schoolers who have varying degrees of psychic abilities - and the issues that arise when these abilities are brought out into the open - the story doesn't really dwell all that much on its supernatural elements, and there's certainly no blisteringly-paced action scenes to be had. However, although the title is something of a misnomer, the movie is actually a very engaging story about the four primary characters. Although a lot of the elements of the plot will be familiar from other films and series over the years, the movie's slow pace allows it to come at these tropes from a fresh angle, and the characters have so much charm that it's tough not to find their arcs affecting in some way.

But where this movie really comes to life is in its outstanding animation and art - particularly the former. While the story is interesting enough - if a little bewildering at times - what will definitely captivate viewers of every type is the gorgeous artistic style and the perfectly flowing animation. *Psychic School Wars* has been brought to life by Sunrise studios, the company behind such visually-acclaimed series as *Cowboy Bebop* and *Code Geass*, and in terms of artistic flair, this movie could definitely stand proudly beside them. It's definitely a somewhat weird watch, but *Psychic School Wars* will definitely have something to appeal to almost any viewer.

VERDICT: The *story* might not be for everyone, but if you sit back, relax, and watch the stunning world of *Psychic School Wars* go by, you'll be glad you did.

JACOB BONIFACE

EXTRAS

The Blu-ray collectors' edition has a 40-page booklet containing character and setting info, concept art, and an epilogue to the film. The movie is available dubbed in English, or in Japanese with a choice of English or French subtitles.

ANIME ★★★★★



Familiar of Zero F Series 4 Collection

A Fairytale Finale



Available: Now
Label: MVM
Certificate: 15
Discs: 2
Retail Price: £22.99
Running Time: 288 mins

ONCE LAMPOONED FOR her lack of magical prowess, titular tsundere Louise found solace in the company of her dunderheaded familiar - Saito Hiraga. Plucked from his banal high school existence in modern day Japan, Saito has since outstripped his fish out of water shtick and become an integral player on the continent of Halkeginia. In this fourth and final series, Saito is graced with lordship and a mansion, and his caustic relationship with Louise flourishes into something sincere and sweet.

The ecchi here is largely cast aside in favour of a fairytale finale. It sees Saito and Louise sent off in tear-jerking style, but at the cost of furthering his mismatched harem: the bookish, bespectacled Tabitha; Henrietta, the princess of Tristain, and the half-elf Tiffania Westwood, a newly discovered Void user. In a twist of fate she winds up summoning Saito as her familiar, despite his runic ties to Louise. But this three-way bond makes him all kinds of powerful - convenient, as an ancient dragon readies its attack.

The bright, plucky visuals suffer from rough character models with the return of series one director Yoshiaki Iwasaki, but it also coincides with the show's best episodes in the collection closers.

As with the previous instalments, the allusions to terrorism, religious extremism and racism bubble in the background, creating a tangible link to an otherwise forgettable patchwork of fantasy tropes and European history. Though it's hardly the obvious topic for a harem comedy, this is the stronger dimension that *Familiar of Zero* has always hinted to. In a series besmirched by boob envy, panty flashes and a repeating punch line, it's a genuine surprise that it should end on a mature and moving note.

VERDICT: Despite its bombardment of boob jokes, this harem comedy comes good with a sweet and satisfying ending.

DOMINIC CUTHBERT

EXTRAS

Trailers and cleaning opening / closing animation.

ANIME ★★★★★



Lord Marksman and Vanadis

Bullseye!



Available: Now

Label: Anime Limited

Certificate: 15

Discs: 2

Retail Price: £24.99 (DVD) / £59.99 (Blu-Ray collectors' edition)

Running Time: 312 mins

Episodes: 13

BRUNISH COUNT TIGREVURMUND Vorn (or Tigre for short) is almost certainly the world's greatest archer – able to pierce a fleeing assassin's foot at three hundred meters, there's not a warrior alive who can match his skill with the bow. Unfortunately, even the world's greatest archer isn't much of a match for a magic-wielding swordswoman who controls the power of the winds! During the aftermath of a catastrophic battle, Tigre is captured by just such a woman, the indefatigable Eleonora Viltaria – a War Maiden from the neighbouring country of Zhcted.

Though the circumstances might be dire for some, Tigre's skill impresses Eleonora (to say the least) and when Tigre's homeland falls under attack from a rival Brunish faction, Eleonora lends him her help, her army, and of course, the power of her magic sword, able to wipe out even rampaging dragons with a single attack.

If you prefer your fantasy battle series to focus more on the bigger picture – the intrigues and the tactics of the battles themselves – rather than one-on-one duels, then *Lord Marksman and Vanadis* might just be the series for you. Although it has a fairly short run, the series manages to cram a lot of action, story, and sprawling battles into its 13 episodes. However, there are also a lot of scenes which seem to be devoted to fanservice rather than furthering the plot or developing the characters, which can lend the show a slightly jarring pace at times, making it difficult to want to watch several episodes in one sitting.

As mentioned, the character development tends to take a backseat throughout the series, and while there are some well-written scenes, and the relationships between the leads have developed greatly by the

final few episodes, it still feels a little like the show doesn't live up to its full potential in exploring the dynamics between the admirably diverse cast of characters.

However, when the series finds its feet, it's definitely a great example of the genre. What starts out as a simple adventure story quickly becomes something more as various factions enter the field, each with their own machinations and power plays – which provide a nice balance with the fantasy violence that quickly ensues.

In fact, *Lord Marksman* has a little of something for everyone who enjoys fantasy fare – magic, intrigue, dragons, swordplay, and a light splattering of gore (those arrows aren't just for show, you know). The art style and animation lend themselves well to the story as well, and though the series occasionally cuts corners in this department; for example by representing the battle scenes with tactical representation of stylised chess pieces moving around a map, it actually ends up being an elegant way of showing the viewer exactly what's taking place – and once it rejoins the action, the series more than makes up for it with its smooth and detailed animation.

Though it has its flaws, *Lord Marksman and Vanadis* makes up for them with slick action, likable characters and an interesting story that doesn't outstay its welcome. If you've got a hankering for a fantasy tale with a twist or two, then this one should hit the mark.

VERDICT: It's not perfect, but a few hours in the company of this keen-eyed count and his companions would be well-spent.

JACOB BONIFACE

EXTRAS

Episode commentaries, promos and trailers, textless opening and closing sequences, chibi shorts, and the Blu-ray Collectors' Edition comes with a 40-page art book. The episodes are available in Japanese with subtitles or dubbed in English.

ANIME ★★★★★

Maga-Tsuki Volume 1



Available: Now
Label: Kodansha
Retail Price: £8.99
Author: Hoshino Taguchi

IF YOU MISSED *Oh! My Goddess* the first time around, you might be interested to know that *Maga-Tsuki* tells almost exactly the same story. Okay, that's a little bit harsh, because *Maga-Tsuki* cleverly throws *Oh! My Goddess*' premise on its head – instead of our shiftless male protagonist (in this case, named Yasuke) wishing for a goddess and having one magically appear, this time he's 'cursed' with one when he breaks a sacred mirror – and his punishment is to make her happy. Totally different.

Throw in a childhood crush – Akari – to whom Yasuke was just about to confess his feelings, a spiteful older sister who is the shrine maiden, and another quirk (Yasuke will die if he is separated from his new goddess chum) and you have a fairly standard set-up for some slightly risqué slapstick comedy. It's cute, it's a bit wacky, and overall, it's harmless fun.

VERDICT: A familiar set-up leads to some classic slapstick manga fun. Don't expect anything you haven't seen before...

FAYE CROSS

MANGA ★★★★★

Real Account Volume 1



Available: Now
Label: Kodansha
Retail Price: £8.99
Author: Okushou / Shizumu Watanabe

THOUGHT IT WAS impossible for there to be another manga about players being sucked into a virtual world when an online game goes bad? You were wrong!

In real life, Ataru Kashiwagi is a bit of a loner, an orphan who is ashamed of the poverty he lives in. But on *Real Account*, he has over a thousand followers – 'friends', as he calls them. How helpful will they really be when he and all the other users get sucked into the game by a shady, murderous hacker?

The new rules of this game are simple – die in the game, die in real life. With everyone at home, watching you, live. But there's a twist – if you die, so do your followers. And, you can only return to the real world if you beat all the levels of the game.

Although it initially seems like another instalment in an already-crowded genre, *Real Account*'s social media theme raises questions of the nature of human relationships in a virtual world.

VERDICT: Engrossing and thought-provoking, this is not just another 'player trapped in a game' manga!

FAYE CROSS

MANGA ★★★★★



Star Fox Zero

A Thrilling But Flawed Shooter



Available: Now
Console: Wii U
Certificate: 7
Retail Price: £39.99
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: NintendoEPD / PlatinumGames

STAR FOX ZERO is a solid re-envisioning of the N64's on-rails shooter *Lylat Wars*, featuring missions, enemies and locales very similar to those found in the 1997 classic. Though it's not technically a remake – this having already been done on the 3DS just a few years back – after playing through the five hour campaign, we were left feeling we'd rather Nintendo had experimented more with the story than the controls.

Steering Fox around in his Arwing using the left stick is easy enough, and although the motion-controlled target reticule needs occasional recalibration, the level of accuracy it allows is worth it. The main problem we had during our initial run through of the story mode, however, was being forced to divide our attention between the TV and the GamePad screen, which provides a cockpit view for precision aiming. In slower paced games, switching screens isn't an issue; *Star Fox Zero*, however, has you constantly moving forward at quite a lick, and we frequently found ourselves colliding with scenery or enemies that we hadn't spotted because we were looking away from the TV. With practice, we did get more used to this setup, but by then, we'd already seen off the final boss quite a while before.

Fortunately, *Star Fox Zero* does offer excellent replayability for those willing to stick at it. Many missions have alternate paths that unlock routes to new levels, completionists can hunt down the five hidden medals in each stage, whilst there's a definite 'one more go' factor for high score hunters.

On the whole, *Star Fox* is a good game if you're happy to put up with the steep difficulty curve. Fox McCloud and his team have never looked or sounded better, and the missions are creative and varied. We just can't shake the feeling we'd have preferred it with a more traditional setup.

VERDICT: A welcome return for Fox and co., *Star Fox Zero* is a fun experience – but only if you're happy to put in the time.

MICHAEL DODSON

GAME ★★★★★



Outlaw: Heartless

Outlaw: Gangster VIP Collection

You wouldn't like him when he's angry



Available: Now
 Label: Arrow
 Certificate: 15
 Discs: 3 (Blu-rays or DVDs)
 Retail Price: £49.99
 Running Time: 540 mins

THESE SIX FILMS from Nikkatsu Studios were originally released in a two-year span from 1968 to 1969 with three directors – Toshio Masuda, Keiichi Ozawa, Mio Ezaki – contributing to the series. Tetsuya Watari plays Goro Fujikawa, a yakuza trying to go straight but unable to walk away from his ties to the underworld. They were based on the writings of Goro Fujita, an ex-yakuza himself, and brought a new sense of realism to the gangster film in Japanese cinema.

That's not to suggest they play out like a docu-drama. The *Outlaw: Gangster* series are macho melodramas at heart, but they depict the world of organised crime as one populated by greedy, ruthless villains, rather than the noble heroes with their codes of honour of the earlier ninkyo-eiga genre.

The prologue to *Outlaw: Gangster VIP*, shot in beautiful black and white, shows Goro as a child in the harsh environment of Japan after World War II. Born into crushing poverty, Goro watches his sister and mother die young and, left to fend for himself, he chooses the only path in life open to him – that of the yakuza. However, because of his love for his

“The fight scenes in all six films are brilliant. There are no stunt doubles and Watari and his co-stars literally throw themselves into the action.”

EXTRAS

Japanese dialogue with English subtitles. Also, a 40-page booklet with essays about the series. Extras are trailers and galleries for all six movies, plus audio commentary by Jasper Sharp on *Outlaw: Gangster VIP*, and *An Outlaw's Odyssey*, a 38-minute featurette about the films.

sister and mother, unlike the typically misogynistic mobsters, he treats women with respect. Actress Chieko Matsubara plays Goro's love interest in all six films but whilst she always plays an honest, slightly naïve woman who falls for the handsome wanderer, she actually portrays six different characters over the course of the series.

She's not the only actor to make multiple appearances in different guises. Kunie Tanaka plays a yakuza in *Outlaw: Gangster VIP2*, then a doctor in *Black Dagger*, and several members of the supporting cast pop up with familiar faces but new names.

That's very much a reflection of the studio production system behind the films. Watari and Matsubara were both contract players at Nikkatsu and had already been paired together in Seijun Suzuki's *Tokyo Drifter* in 1966, so there was an established onscreen chemistry between the two. Where Watari carries the drama and action, Matsubara provides the pathos and unfulfilled romance. In *Outlaw: Gangster VIP* she's given little depth, but she plays a much more confident and assertive woman in *Outlaw: Kill*. While Matsubara's characters are always girls from good families, *Goro: The Assassin* addresses the plight of women in the underworld. Firstly, Goro tries to save the wife of a dead yakuza from working in a brothel, and at the same time a young gangster tries to keep his girlfriend being forced into prostitution by his boss.



Outlaw: Gangster VIP 2



FAMILIAR FACES

Over his lengthy career, Kunie Tanaka has been a staple of Japanese yakuza movies. Alongside his two appearances in the *Outlaw: Gangster VIP* films he was a recurring character in the *Battles Without Honour And Humanity* series. He is also the basis for the character of Kizaru in Eiichiro Oda's manga *One Piece*.

Oda has a proclivity for modelling his characters on famous faces. In addition to Kizaru/Tanaka, the character of Fujitora is a spitting image of *Zatoichi* star Shintaro Katsu, complete with his cane sword, while Akainu, the admiral of the Marines, is modelled on Bunta Sugawara, another veteran of the *Battles Without Honour...* movies.

Sugawara passed away in 2014 but in addition to his live action work he did some anime voice acting, lending his talents to two Studio Ghibli productions – *Spirited Away* and *Tales From Earthsea*, and Mamoru Hosoda's *Wolf Children*. Chieko Matsubara, the leading lady of *Outlaw: Gangster VIP*, started her career as a teenager in 1961 and is still acting today, with more than 100 movies to her credit. She made several films for Seijun Suzuki – *Kanto Wanderer*, *Tokyo Drifter*, and *The Flowers And The Angry Waves*, and appears in Takeshi Kitano's *Dolls* from 2002.



There is definitely a formula at work in the films, although much like the *Zatoichi* series, each *Outlaw* story puts its own spin on Goro's adventures. There are certain staples – Goro arrives in a town or city where one aggressive yakuza clan plots to wipe out their smaller rival; Goro is friends with a member of the smaller clan; there's a young apprentice gangster who looks up to Goro but ignores his advice to quit the crime business and go straight; and lastly the evil yakuza clan will eventually push Goro too far and thus send him into a killing frenzy.

The fight scenes in all six films are brilliant. There are no stunt doubles and Watari and his co-stars literally throw themselves into the action, crashing through doors and diving over tables as they hack and slash at each other. There's none of the poise and deadly grace of the chanbara films of Kurosawa, Koyabashi and their contemporaries. Goro's fights are chaotic affairs.

The final showdowns are always a highlight, particularly the superb fight in the paint warehouse in *Outlaw: Heartless*, which leaves Goro looking like a walking Jackson Pollock painting. Often the fights are juxtaposed against another scene to show how the yakuza inhabit their own world parallel to normal society. In the first film, a nightclub singer croons while chaos erupts backstage. In *Outlaw: Gangster VIP 2* the bloody finale is intercut with students playing volleyball, while in *Outlaw: Kill*, a desperate battle is fought under a nightclub where people

dance oblivious to the carnage beneath their feet. In *Outlaw: Goro The Assassin*, director Keiichi Ozawa shoots much of the climactic showdown from above and afar to demonstrate how the yakuza's conflict is inconsequential in the grand scheme of life.

Like the *Zatoichi* films or Kurosawa's *Yojimbo*, each film invariably ends with Goro the lone survivor, walking away from the camera, framed against the landscape – the killer isolated by his own violent nature. Watari is terrific in the role, projecting confidence and charisma. What makes Goro a tragic hero is that he longs to quit, find a job, a wife and settle down. But the underworld won't let him go. Just as Shintaro Katsu's *Zatoichi* always gives a speech in every movie about how the yakuza must live separately from decent folk, Goro always talks about being trapped. "I live like this because I'm a fool," he says in *Outlaw: Heartless*, a sentiment echoed in *Outlaw: Kill* – "I can't remember how many times I wanted to quit." In *Goro: The Assassin* he actually manages to find a job working in a hotel, but it's only a matter of time before he gets dragged into yet another yakuza conflict and the knives come out.

VERDICT: With their indomitable hero, love struck heroines, despicable villains, and thrilling fight scenes, these films are unbeatable for sheer entertainment.
DAVID WEST

FILMS ★★★★★

IF YOU LIKE THIS...

For more classic gangster movies from the Nikkatsu vaults, see the *Battles Without Honour And Humanity* series, Seijun Suzuki's *Youth Of The Beast* and *Tokyo Drifter*, or *Nikkatsu Diamond Guys Vol.1*.





Tokyo Drifter

Suzuki turns the underworld upside-down

WHEN HIS BOSS Kurata (Ryuji Kita) dissolves his yakuza clan so he can become a legitimate businessman, Tetsu (Tetsuya Watari) decides to walk the straight and narrow too.

Unfortunately, the head of the Otsuka clan wants Tetsu out of the picture entirely so he can take over Kurata's property and make a move on Tetsu's girl, nightclub singer Chiharu (Chieko Matsubara). Tetsu leaves town, to become the drifter of the title, but wherever he goes, trouble is hot on his heels.

Tokyo Drifter was one of the final films that Seijun Suzuki made for Nikkatsu Studios before he was fired in 1967 with executives claiming his work was just too weird. Forced to make genre movies with highly formulaic scripts about noble yakuza and their codes of honour, Suzuki was determined to make his films as distinctive and interesting as possible.

So while *Tokyo Drifter* has a bog standard plot about a yakuza trying and failing to go straight,

Nikkatsu

Nikkatsu is the oldest film studio in Japan, formed in 1912 through the merger of four smaller companies originally under the name Nippon Katsudo Shashin Corporation. Nikkatsu has fostered the talent of stars like Akira Kobayashi, Meiko Kaji, and Joe Shishido and directors like Shohei Imamura and Seijun Suzuki.

Despite the fact that Suzuki was ignominiously fired from the studio, Nikkatsu's website proudly touts Suzuki's *Branded To Kill* as one of their finest achievements. In the 1970s Nikkatsu survived the decline of cinema attendance by introducing the infamous Roman Porno genre, ushering in a flood of lurid sex and violence.

the film is a trippy, pop art collage that plays merry havoc with the conventions of the ninkyo-eiga genre. Tetsu has his own theme song and while it might be common for a film to identify its hero with a musical motif, Tetsu actually sings his theme song in time with the score on the soundtrack, which apparently he can hear.

There's a barroom brawl straight out of a Western while the shootouts and duels are staged against expressionistic backdrops. Suzuki, working with his director of photography, Shigeyoshi Mine, and production designer Takeo Kimura, gleefully experiments with the visual style of the story. The nightclub where Chiharu sings is a minimalist landscape where the colour of the walls and furnishings change to suit the mood. The lighting is naturalistic one moment, then overtly theatrical the next. It's a delightful, trippy subversion of everything you expect from a yakuza drama.

DAVID WEST

NEO'S TOP 5 YAKUZA MOVIES



SONATINE



BRANDED TO KILL



YOUTH OF THE BEAST



OUTRAGE



BATTLES WITHOUT HONOUR AND HUMANITY



Reader review Spirited Away

Terry Miller puts forward some controversial opinions on Miyazaki's classic movie

IF YOU HAVEN'T already seen this magical movie, I have to question why you're even reading NEO magazine. Drop it right now and go and watch this film! *Spirited Away* kick started the anime craze in the west, as the director, Hayao Miyazaki, won the Oscar for Best Animated Feature for it. Suddenly people who had never heard of anime were watching it, and agreeing that it was actually pretty neat!

But, here's a secret new fans might not know – just like Leonardo DiCaprio won his Oscar for *The Revenant* rather than his other sterling work, it seems like Miyazaki was given the Oscar for *Spirited Away* in light of his previous achievements, rather than for his work on that movie alone. Just look at the evidence: *Spirited Away* was preceded by *Princess Mononoke*, which is arguably the more interesting and complex movie.

I have to hand it to *Spirited Away* – its beautiful, glossy animation, the weird, super-Japanese quirky characters, and the theme of passing from childhood to adulthood make it one of the must-see movies of all time – animated or not. But in my opinion, Miyazaki's career peaked there, and his movies before this time are all gems. After... not so much.



PRINCESS MONONOKE

If you thought *Game of Thrones* invented giant wolves, you're wrong, because Hayao Miyazaki has been featuring them in his fantasy tales since at least 1997.

Princess Mononoke is arguably Miyazaki's most accomplished movie – although arguments could be made for pretty much any film in his repertoire to be given this moniker. Set during Japan's Muromachi period, it fuses elements of that historical era with plenty of fantasy, envisioning a conflict between the gods of nature against mankind, who is constantly encroaching on the wilderness. This environmental streak would appear time and time again in Miyazaki's work, but perhaps never as strongly realised as it is here.

The movie was released in Japan in 1997 and made its way to the US in 1999, where its popularity on home video helped cement Studio Ghibli's reputation overseas. Its American release wasn't always smooth sailing, however, as Harvey Weinstein, chairman of Miramax (which had purchased the North American distribution rights) demanded cuts be made to the film in order to accommodate the US audiences. In response, producer Toshio Suzuki famously sent Weinstein a katana with the message, "no cuts".

The movie was adapted into English by Neil Gaiman and had an all-star cast for the dub, financed by Disney's deep pockets. The actors included Billy Bob Thornton (Jigo), Billy Crudup (Ashitaka), Claire Danes (San), John DiMaggio (Gonza), Minnie Driver (Lady Eboshi), Gillian Anderson (Moro) and Jada Pinkett Smith (Toki).



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WIN! AKIRA KUROSAWA'S RAN PRIZE BUNDLE

IN ORDER TO celebrate the upcoming release of *Ran* in all its fully restored, 4k glory, we have five prize bundles to give away from distributor STUDIOCANAL.

Based on Shakespeare's *King Lear*, the release of *Ran* not only coincides with the 400th anniversary of the Bard's death, but also marks 30 years since the original release of the movie in the UK. The story follows Hidetora Ichimonji, an aging warlord who decides to split his empire amongst his three sons, Taro, Jiro and Saburo. Saburo worries that this will cause treachery within the ranks and is banished, leaving the two other sons to their bloody struggle.

The movie is available to own now on EST, Blu-ray and DVD, and has been meticulously restored by hand, image by image – fitting treatment for one of the masterpieces of Japanese cinema, directed by one of the greatest cinematic auteurs the world has ever seen, Akira Kurosawa. STUDIOCANAL are celebrating by offering five lucky readers a Blu-ray edition of *Ran*, along with a poster for its new cinema release, as well as two Studio Ghibli titles on Blu-ray – *Spirited Away* and *Grave of the Fireflies*.

If you want to win yourself an epic *Ran* bundle, all you have to do to enter our draw is answer the following question correctly:

Who directed *Ran*?

- A) Hayao Miyazaki
- B) Akira Kurosawa
- C) John Woo

The easiest way to enter this, and all of our other exciting giveaways, is to head over to NEO's competition section on our website, at <http://www.neomag.co.uk/sec/competitions>. There you can find this along with any other contests we're currently running. Alternatively, you can enter by sending the correct answer on the back of a postcard, along with your address, to the Uncooked Media editorial address printed on page O47. Please address it to: NEO 150 Ran competition

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One Piece Burning Blood

NEO's David West talks to Bandai Namco Entertainment producer Koji Nakajima and game director Hiroyuki Kaneko about Devil Fruits, tag teams and capturing the spirit of the manga in their smash-tastic fighting game.

One Piece Burning Blood



The Surgeon of Death is ready to operate!

ONE PIECE IS a cultural juggernaut. Eiichiro Oda's nautical tale of one rubbery lad's quest to become king of the pirates is the most successful manga series of all time, and the most recent video game based on the series, *Pirate Warriors 3*, sold over one million copies worldwide.

But where the *Pirate Warriors* games use a one-versus-one-thousand format, *One Piece Burning Blood* updates the classic fighting game format with a three-versus-three tag concept. It's safe to assume that Bandai Namco Entertainment producer Koji Nakajima is more than a casual fan of the franchise – in London to discuss the new game, he's in full cosplay as Bepo.

"I believe that being true to the visual style of the series is the most important part in bringing the *One Piece* franchise into this game," says Nakajima-san. "I tried to keep the imagery as easy to recognise as possible. If Luffy is on screen, everyone can easily tell that it's Luffy, but still I wanted there to be some part of the graphics that is unique to the games. Something that's not exactly the same as the anime Luffy, not exactly the same as the manga Luffy, but something original to the game. I really wanted to make sure the expressions of the characters and their Devil Fruit abilities looked true to the *One Piece* universe. That's what I wanted to reproduce in the game."

Balance Of Power

Game director Hiroyuki Kaneko had already brought Luffy to life in the *Shonen Jump* beat 'em up *J-Stars Victory VS+*, so he's well versed in creating action-packed manga-inspired mayhem. The three-versus-three tag concept allowed the creative team to make sure that the gameplay could accommodate characters of varying power

THE SOUND OF BURNING BLOOD

"For me there are two aspects that are important," says Kaneko-san. "One is the facial expressions. I tried to analyse the TV series' animation to reproduce that in the game, and the second one is sound effects. Most of the voice actors have been working on *One Piece* for a long time, they're very professional, so as long as we accurately describe what we want, it's easily done. As for the sound effects, we always try to imitate what the anime sounds like. We have a really good sound design company who always provide perfect sound effects for us."

"For the music, we tried to represent how it sounds in the anime," adds Nakajima-san, "because that's how people know *One Piece*."

levels, from Usopp and Tony Tony Chopper to nigh-unstoppable foes like Whitebeard and Crocodile.

"Even though we have received a lot of feedback from fans that they would like to have a *One Piece* fighting game, we didn't really hear anything that specific like, 'Hey, we need a three-versus-three fighting system'. Rather, it's our own concept," says Kaneko-san. "When it comes to one-versus-one there can be huge gaps between the characters because some characters have no powers where others have Haki and Devil Fruits powers. So in order to balance the play, you have two more characters available and can switch between characters based on your opponent. We can have a larger character roster with three versus three, and of course, you can create your own dream team and work out what is the best selection of characters to find your own strategies."

So far, 34 playable characters have been announced, and there are two different incarnations of Luffy – one prior to his training with Rayleigh, the other after his training. The game really feels like watching the anime as the





It will take more than a bop in the breadbasket to stop Crocodile!

characters display their personalities alongside their fighting techniques in combat.

“There are some secret elements you can find when you play the game,” says Nakajima-san, “For instance, Bartolomeo is a character who always provokes his opponents but when he actually faced Luffy in the series somehow he started respecting Luffy. Usually Bartolomeo would fall asleep during fights to provoke his opponents, but when facing Luffy he used different moves, so there are several aspects in the game that exactly follow the original comics.”

Devil Fruits, Dames And Dinosaurs

In the anime, Sanji is a notorious for being smitten by every attractive woman he meets, a trait carried over into the game. While he is famous for his fantastic kicking skills, if Sanji faces a female opponent, instead of attacking he blows kisses at them, love hearts in his eyes.

“This is what the team decided to be faithful to the original comics,” says Kaneko-san. “Sanji never actually kicks any of the female characters, so let’s make him a crazy guy blowing kisses to the female characters. But this couldn’t be done in a one-versus-one fighting game because if you choose Sanji and your opponent chooses a female character, you’ve already lost, but since this is three-versus-three fighting game, we could still implement this funny system into the game.”

Some characters with Devil Fruits or Haki abilities can fight in different forms – for example Franky can switch to his colossal Shogun form and X Drake can unleash the ferocious power of a dinosaur in his Zoan form. While it’s pretty clear to see the appeal of characters with strong powers like Whitebeard, Franky and Luffy,


“I really wanted to make sure the expressions of the characters and their Devil Fruit abilities looked true to the *One Piece* universe. That’s what I wanted to reproduce in the game.”
Nakajima-san

some characters can play a vital role in forging a successful team due to the way they interact with their tag teammates.

“Tony Tony Chopper may not be as strong as Whitebeard, but he has a very special skill,” says Kaneko-san. “He can recover the health of your friends which you are not currently using, so if you use that skill effectively Tony Tony Chopper is a super strong character. Even though he is not physically strong there is always a way that a character can be the best one to use. For Sanji, he is pretty much useless when he faces women, but if he has a female character as a teammate, he will be super powerful.”

Luffy Goes To War

One Piece Burning Blood features three different play modes – Paramount War Mode, Versus Mode and Online Versus Mode. The Paramount War Mode features scenes from the Marineford story arc and can be played using four different characters – Ace, Whitebeard, Sakazuki Akainu, and Luffy.

“The reason we focus on the Marineford arc in Paramount War Mode is quite simple – because this is a fighting game we wanted a storyline where a lot of characters with Devil Fruits abilities and Haki skills gather together,” says Nakajima-san. “The Marineford episodes were the best instance where all the strongest characters came together and another reason we chose Marineford is there are several different angles, different viewpoints from each character. Usually in *One Piece*, Luffy is the main character who has adventures, but when it comes to Marineford, Luffy sometimes faces Whitebeard, and Whitebeard fights with the Marines, and the Marines fight with Blackbeard, and Blackbeard 

One Piece Burning Blood



Dude, you're on fire! Don't worry, I'll punch the flames out! Really, it's no trouble at all.

► sometimes fights the Straw Hats crew. Because there are different points of view in that episode we thought that would be the best storyline to use.”

At the demo, both Kaneko-san and Nakajima-san tried to defeat Blackbeard in one of the Paramount War Mode's boss battles, but they were keen to point out that there are ways to advance your character if you're having trouble with a particularly difficult boss battle.

“In Paramount War Mode there is a very unique feature only within this game mode,” says Kaneko-san. “You can grow your character, you can increase some parameters of the characters, so even though you might be defeated several times you can level up your characters and make them stronger. Even if you're not very good at fighting games, eventually you'll have the chance to beat up the boss characters. This is only available in the Paramount War Mode because if you could play with a super strong character in Online Versus Mode that wouldn't really be fair. There are some tutorials and a training mode, so even though some of the enemies are very strong, you can practice how to defeat them on your own.”

“The things you can actually change or grow are pretty much only the parameters, toughness, attacks, defence, those kinds of things,” says



Move over, Thor, there's a new Thunder God in town!

“I believe that being true to the visual style of the series is the most important part in bringing the *One Piece* franchise into this game.”
Nakajima-san

Nakajima-san. “If you are able to unlock certain moves within this game mode that will harm some part of the fighting game because usually in fighting games you should be able to play any kind of combo or any moves that your character has, you should be able to fully enjoy the game from the beginning. That's part of the reason we decided to only allow players to grow the characters' parameters.”

The Forbidden Fruit

Working with iconic characters and locations – the settings include Skypeia, Marineford, Drum Island and Fishman Island – the game team stayed as true as possible to the original vision of *One Piece* creator Eiichiro Oda. “We don't have direct contact with Oda-sensei but we work very closely with Toei Animation and Shueisha, the master licensors of *One Piece*,” says Kaneko-san. “Every time we create assets, we send everything to them for approval. They give us a feedback, we revise it and make everything more *One Piece*-like, so that's how we work.”

Finally, NEO asked the most important question of all – if you could have any Devil Fruits power, what would you want? “I would like the Gum-Gum Devil Fruit, like Luffy, so I can grow bigger and be stretchable,” says Kaneko-san, while Nakajima-san is more mischievous – “I would like the Devil Fruit that makes you invisible, the Suke Suke No Mi Devil Fruit,” he says. “I'm not sure what I would like to do once I've had the Devil Fruit – I'll leave that to your imagination!”

Unleash the power of the Devil Fruits for yourself when *One Piece Burning Blood* arrives in June for the PS4, PS Vita, Xbox One, and PC from Bandai Namco Entertainment. ■

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