

# AKIRA



# DRINK TANK

This issue is gonna be interesting. We're got the Mo Starkey cover, we've got Taral, we've got 52 Weeks Tackling Anime and then there's a wonderful piece from James! It's a packed issue!

So, Westercon. As I type this section, I'm at the Westercon 66 introductory meeting. I like Westercons, I'm the Fan GoH for WesterCon 67 (along with Cory Doctorow as Writer GoH, and the team from the PodCast Writing Excuses (including Mary Robinette Kowal, Brandon Sanderson, Howard Tayler and Dan Wells) will be there too!) and I've been to a bunch of them over the years. I have been concerned about the future of WesterCon. I am most concerned about what'll happen if there is no bid for a WesterCon. That worries me because there is no provision for what happens if there is a skipped WesterCon. I was in the bath and had an idea -

What if we got rid of the bylaws and replaced them with just one phrase - 'The LASFS Board of Directors may award a WesterCon at any time.'


To me, this solves a number of problems, and admittedly it raises a couple of more. The biggest problem that I now realise is that the LASFS Board of Directors include some of the group that most would like to see WesterCon go away. It would make it easy to do something as radical as completely redesigning a WesterCon. It would get rid of all of the restrictions like being forced to host a Business Meeting or hold it over the 4th of July weekend, or not combine it with a regular running convention instead of being a stand-alone. The LASFS Board of Directors could set various restriction, such as saying that before they award one a petitioning group a Westercon, they would have to do x, y, or z. I would have enjoy seeing what happens when someone comes to the Board with a plan, and they can set the bar as high, or as low as possible. In fact, it would allow them to award more than one, or none at all. They could literally say. "Hey, any convention, any event, any birthday party that wants to call itself a WesterCon, can call itself a WesterCon!" or they could say "You give us 50,000 dollars, you can host an event called a WesterCon." or anything else they wish. There would be no problem with skipping one, because it wouldn't require a full vote, it would just require a LASFS Board meeting.

Now, the problems are interesting. There's the fact that it does take all the voting out of the hands of the attendees. That could be a bad thing, but at the same time if there are no attendees because there is no WesterCon, it doesn't matter now, does it? There's also the matter that there would be no set state of expectations, and thus it could lead to an undefined mess of a con and that could easily turn off folks from attending since they wouldn't have a solid idea of what would be happening. Still, if someone would have a hot idea, like doing a Relaxicon where they get a resort/spa (which is what I'd love to see WesterCon do someday!) then they can

Still, it's a dangerous thing because the LASFS Board has not been particularly interested in WesterCon lately. That's probably not true, but they have pointedly wanted the memberships to do the heavy lifting and not send things to them to decide. The 2011 WesterCon fiasco could have been avoided if they'd been more active with the process.

Then again, I wouldn't be working on this con if it hadn't happened, so there's that!





**Letter Graded Mail  
sent to Garcia@Computerhistory.org  
by our Gentle Readers**

Dear Chris:

Hope Yosemite was a good time, and you're adjusting to the work week again. We had a day trip yesterday to Dundurn Castle in Hamilton, right at the western end of Lake Ontario. No pictures, we weren't in steampunk costume (too hot!), but still, a great day. I've got issues 320 and 321 of The Drink Tank, and let's move it.

***Ooh! I've heard of Dundurn Castle! If I had more time when we're out there for SFCOntario, I'd make it out there!***

320... Weir Science is just another of those movies where everyone seems to know the catch-phrases, and know what it's about, without having seen it. Nope, never saw this movie, either. Congrats to Jean and Christopher, the Right Rev. Garcia presiding.

***It was a great wedding and the cake was on one of the big Cake websites! I had such a wonderful time!***

SFCOntario confirmed that we will be your liaison with the con, but we have yet to get in touch with them to see exactly what they'd like us to do. There's still lots of time, and we will see what we can do for you to make your stay interesting. We'll be running a birthday party for Yvonne at the convention, so Saturday night should be interesting.

***Woohoo! I've got good handlers! And there's gonna be a birthday party! PAR-TAY!!!***

321... The latest Journey Planet does indeed look good, and I am sure I will have some comments for you soon. Have a great time at Chicon 7, and party like mad. Based on what I've heard, this could be a large Worldcon, one of the largest in some time. Training it in? Sounds like a great time. We've done Traincon before, but not for 51 hours!

***I had a great time doing layout on it. I think it was a little more on my mind to do a little lighter, more graphically interesting layout than normal because the content was a bit heavy. I'm looking forward to the Train ride more than anything!***

One thing to do in Toronto... check out the Bollywood aspect of the city. Toronto is the biggest consider of Bollywood films outside of India, mostly because we have a huge Indian population here. Movies have been premiered here, and there was been Bollywood celebration days here. One local fan is a huge fan, and has an amazing selection of saris to wear.

***I LOVE Bollywood, and I've got a friend of mine who is a Bollywood reporter who lives in Kingston who has said she's coming up, so it'll be a lot of fun!***

Yes, the Actual LP, accept no substitutes. Enjoy Clockwork Alchemy; seems even steampunk cons are having some attendance problems. Hope the novelty isn't wearing off. I promised photos to you... the best ones are the ones Yvonne took, and they are available on the photos of my FB page. Steam on Queen was a great, steampunky time, organizer Adam Smith was hoping for 1000 people from the iron gates of Campbell House, and with hand clickers, he figures he got almost 4300. And, as vendors, Yvonne and I did about \$600 in business in 6 hours. Coming up next month is another event at Campbell House, and it's part of a weekend gathering for the television show Murdoch Mysteries; it's not shown in the US, but is a great hit in Canada, the UK and Australia.

MM is shot in Toronto and on location through a lot of southern Ontario. There's some steampunk aspect to it, and some interesting anachronism. Also, great storylines and intriguing plots. We'll be given a tour of the sets in the east end of Toronto, and then be dressing in our steampunk fineries for the grand dinner on Saturday night. On Sunday, Murdoch author Maureen Jennings will give us a tour of downtown Toronto and the areas her original Murdoch novels were set.

***I can not wait for the record that Unwoman did to come out! I love LPs!***

I have a telephone job interview tomorrow and a second interview for a publishing job on Wednesday! Cross your fingers, hope for the best, and within days, I may be fully employed again. Hugs to Linda, and stay cool. Should hit about 100F here today, and that is not typical for a Toronto summer.

***Good luck, Lloyd!***

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

***And now... Eric Mayer!***

Chris,

Look, if Taral can contribute an article with nothing to say, how better to respond than with a Loc that says nothing? I mean, a fanwriter really should be able to make something out of nothing. See, already I'm up to three sentences. Four now. Frankly the whole Furry thing creeps me out. Did you know the classic composers were into fandom? Haven't you heard of Mozart's Fur Elise?

***If there was a pun jar, I would make you pay!***

I loved your review of Mr India. I have never heard of the movie or any of the actors/actresses involved but the whole film, as you describe it, sounded like something from another planet. I admit I actually looked it up to make sure you weren't pulling our legs.

***Linda and I watched it together once. She did not take to it. She was confused as to what was going on.***

So I also knew virtually nothing about Bollywood except it existed. Fascinating. I might like some of those movies. I love musicals. I've never met a musical I didn't like. I don't care how corny or how unlikely the song and dance sequences are. When Mary and I were in Rochester NY we used to go to every musical there was, from off-broadway touring shows to community players and they were all great.

***I am a HUGE musical fan, and I'm betting that I'll be writing a lot more about Musicals in the coming issues because... well, you'll hear more about that in the future!***

Anyway, have a good time with your upcoming schedule, which would kill me. Good luck with the Hugos!

Best,

Eric

***Thanks much, Eric! Looking very forward to the Hugo pre-party!***





Charles I  
sixpence



Elizabeth I  
two pence



Nabataea  
Rabbel II  
AR Drachm



Hadrian  
Denarius



Constans II &  
son Constantine IV  
Solidus, 654 - 658 AD



Aurelian  
Antoninianus



Septimius Severus  
Sestertius

# Cointer Intuitions by Taral Wayne

On the bus back from the coin show, I overheard two black people. It would have been hard not to. The guy was an imposingly large individual, who finished a cell phone conversation and practically leaned across me to speak to the lady on my other side. She was dressed in brightly coloured African clothes, and he was in typical “white guy” attire.

“Aijeeet-too zhee mee ablanc deshoo waw way,” it sounded like he said.

The African lady looked at him and said, “Whawt was dat?” in plainly recognizable English.

“Oh, I’m sorry,” he said, “Do you speak French? I’m from Africa also.”

How many times have you mentioned you were from New York or Ontario or Texas, and some ninny has asked if you know good ol’ Dingus Fudbuddy, blithly assuming that all New Yorkers or Ontarians or Texans must know each other? . And, similarly, Africa is actually a pretty big place.

Not fazed in the least, the lady said, “No, ah’m sorry. Dew you speak Bantu?”

He didn’t. He was from a part of Africa that had been part of the French and had forgotten there were other places in that vast continent. The guy kind of shriveled into himself a little then, and found someone to call on his cell phone.

The coin show was a success for me. I got some holders and plastic sheets for them that I was out of, and bought seven coins for a pretty modest amount, actually. One was a badly worn Elizabethan penny with a crack in it, that set me back \$15. Another was a sixpence of Charles I with an even worse crack that cost \$5. Those were the bargains, but the Severus sestertius, the Hadrian denarius and Aurelian antoninianus were quite reasonably priced. The sestertius, struck around the beginning of the 3rd century, was one of the last of its kind. By mid-century, there were no more of these big, heavy doorknobs being coined. The Aurelian coin was bronze also, but thinly coated in silver. Usually, handling has worn off the silver, but on this sample it was still largely intact, making it the most attractive Aurelian in my collection.

My haul also included a Nabataean silver drachm. I had two bronze pieces from this Arabian kingdom already, so the silver one set them off nicely. Nabataea was a small kingdom on the eastern edge of the Roman empire whose capital was the rock-cliff city of Petra – that “rose-red city half as old as time” made famous by John William Burgon’s second-rate, Victorian poem. Nabataea’s independence came to an end when the Roman emperor Trajan annexed it in 106 AD. The city continued to thrive for a time, but changing trade routes took their toll. By the Islamic Conquest, Petra had been abandoned.

But the real prize was a gold solidus. The emperor on the obverse was nobody, or so I thought – Constans II and his son Constantine IV. But it was in extremely nice shape, and priced far cheaper than another, similar solidus next to it. I worked the value out in my head, and – when I realized that, at \$350 it was not even \$100 more than the value of the gold in the coin – I knew I wanted it. With gold at \$1,550 an ounce, I knew there weren’t going to be many more opportunities like this. I will be paying for it over the next few months, though, so it was no painless decision.

As it turns out, however, Constans II was not a “nobody.” Nor was his son, Constantine IV. To understand their place in history, you have to go back to Constans’ grandfather.

The emperor Heraclius snatched the weakened Eastern Roman empire back from the brink of death. Their mortal enemy, the Sassanid Persians, had taken Egypt and their eastern ports from the Empire, one by one, and were at the gates of Constantinople itself. Another push, and the Persians would have wiped the Romans

from the map. But the push failed. Heraclius pushed back, and not only retook all the lost territory, but defeated the Sassanids once and for all. Rome's ancient enemies were so sapped by centuries of on-and-off again warfare and a brutal, 20-year-long showdown, that when the upstart Arab Muslims attacked, it was Sassanid Persia that was wiped off the map.

Of course, in retrospect, that was perhaps questionable long-term planning on the part of the Romans ... but in 620 or 630 AD, who knew?

Heraclius left one other indelible mark on history. The empire had been Christian for over 300 years by then, and most of Western Europe had been lost to the barbarians in the 5th century. The vast majority of educated citizens of the remaining half of the Empire spoke Greek, not Latin. The emperor Heraclius finally abolished the use of Latin in the imperial court, and eliminated it from use in imperial documents, officially acknowledging what everyone knew. They still called themselves Romanoī, but it was common knowledge that they were just Greeks. It was as good a time as any to draw a line between the Roman and what we now call the Byzantine Empires.

Heraclius' son and heir was quickly marginalized, then murdered, by his step-mother and half-brother. Then the, too, were deposed. The real heir was Heraclius' grandson, Constans II.

The grandson picked up where his grandfather left off, and dealt the expansionist Arab Empire their first serious blows. In an attempt to bring the independently-minded Western Church to heel, he arrested the Pope in Rome and had him brought to Constantinople in chains – a partisan measure that inevitably widened the growing split between the Eastern and Western Christian churches. Constans then turned his attention to reconquering the west. His efforts were botched from the beginning by the same sort of arrogance as marked the empire's relations with the Western Church. He was the first Emperor to set foot in Italia in nearly two centuries, but the city fathers of Rome and Syracuse were appalled when Byzantine soldiers stripped public buildings and even churches of gold, silver, statuary and anything else of value, shipping it back to the imperial capital. Losing any local support he might have hoped for, the failure to bring the west back into the empire was a forgone conclusion. Constans II was assassinated in Sicily, and the empire passed into the hands of his son, Constantine IV.

Constantine was as much like his father as Constans had been like Heraclius. He rallied his troops and attacked the Arabs. It was an all-out war that brought the Muslim army to the gates of Constantinople. But despite numerical superiority and all the resources of the countryside, the Arabs simply could not batter down the walls of the imperial city. In the end, worn out by attacks with the greatest secret weapon of the age – Greek fire – the flu season and a dreary diet of olives, they retreated. The Byzantines drove a hard bargain, gaining back all the islands and the mainland of what is known as Turkey today. There was no serious threat from Islamic expansion for at least another 50 years. Even when the first Islamized Turks trickled into Asia Minor, the Byzantines held out for another 800 years, blocking the armies of Allah's road to Europe for the duration of the Middle Ages.

Constantine was very nearly the end of the Heraclian dynasty. Like his father and great-grandfather, he was a cruel, suspicious, bloodthirsty and hard-nosed master. None of them were popular for long, despite victories against the Empire's enemies. There was one more emperor in the dynasty, who ruled twice and wore a nose of gold, but that's another story. To the Heraclians overall, we in the New World and Western Europe owe the fabulous good luck that we are not taking part in the ongoing, painful Arab Spring.

The next Torex coin show is in October. I may skip it to prevent myself from dipping further into my meager savings. Also, the next show after that ought to move back downtown, so that my partner in collecting, Simon, will be able to pick me up by car on his way in, as well as drop me off on the way back. I'll be able to look forward to a pleasant afternoon talking with an old friend and browsing tabletops of tantalizing coins ... and not have to cope with buses, subways and arching legs. Just like "the old days."

Now, if only the price of the coins was just like "the old days!" Ha!





# 52 Weeks to Science Fiction Film Literacy - Akira

Japanese animation is not my thing. There is anime I enjoy, most notably the series Chobits and Tenchi Muto and the films Vampire Hunter D. I find the animation style, which tends towards hyper-stylization, to be flat and lacking in joy for the most part. Maybe it's just the fact that I don't get a lot of Japanese film, even though a few of my favorite films are things like Tampopo and The Seven Samurai. I just can't get into the style that Japanese animation (or as I will refer to it, Japanimation) tends towards. In a way, it is the Expressionist form of animation, which works for live action films for me, but not animation.

That said, there is a film that I have nothing but massive respect for, a Japanimation tour de force that failed in Japan, but made its way to the rest of the world and became one of the most recognizable animated films of all-time.

That film is Akira.

Let's start with a touch of history. Japan had a film industry as early as 1910, and there was a strong group of cartoonists working all over Japan who were brought in to create moving pictures. Almost all of the animations of the early period were either destroyed during the war, or never even made it that far. There were two very early animations found in 2007, and another completely unknown 3 second film, drawn directly on to celluloid, called Moving Picture. That one, where there is nothing known about its creator. There was a second wave in the 1930s, where Japan caught up with the Americans and Europeans in creating some of the best work at the time, including Chikara to Onna no Yo no Naka the first talking anime, which is sadly a Lost Film these days. There was animation during the war, including several significant ones commissioned by the military. China made its first animated film, Princess Iron Fan, which hugely influenced two decades of animation in Japan after it arrived in 1941. The 1950s and 60s saw a big rise in production, with the first cartoon that broke into the US with things like Speed Racer and Astroboy opening up the eyes of a lot of Americans. The one that really broke the US market was Starblazers, and then opened up more with the release of Robotech.

You will notice I use the American titles because hey, I'm American.

Starblazers, which was called Space Battleship Yamato in Japan, was the start of the Space Opera genre in Anime, which is cool because they do that really well. Science Fiction had always been a part of the genre, but in the 1960s, 70s and especially the 1980s, Science Fiction had taken a firm hold.

There were a lot of great anime films, and in 1984, the legendary animator Hayao Miyazaki, wrote and directed Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind and that caught a lot of attention around the world. I believe a subtitled version was released around the world in the 1985-87 timeframe, with it making a splash in France, and

the US got a terribly mangled version called Warriors of the Wind which I will not talk about. They finally did a real version with a great cast of voice actors. This really opened up the world video and theatrical market to Japanimation.

The success of Nausicaä led to a higher budget movement in the later 1980s. Angel's Egg was a big deal, and it made a fair amount of money. The Home Video revolution really helped anime more than anything. They could make bigger budget films and release them in theaters, and even if they didn't turn a profit in the theaters, they could make money on the video releases. Also, it allowed for the creation of porn anime, hentai, and I can remember the buzz created by Cream Lemon.

So, with the stage set, it was time for a big budget film to go, and science fiction was the way to go for it. Akira was one of the biggest and most expensive anime films ever made.

The story of Akira is kinda whacky. The film opens with a brief moment in 1988. There's a huge explosion in Tokyo. We're not given a clue as to why it happened at first, and then we are taken to a bike gang fight in 2019. There's The Capsules and The Clowns. Yes, that's right. There's a gang called The Clowns. The leader of the Capsules is Kaneda. Tetsuo is Kaneda's best friend, and after almost creaming a young esper, a kid with telepathy, with his motorcycle. An underground organization captures the kid, Takashi, while Tetsuo goes to the hospital. Members of the Government then discover that Tetsuo has psychic powers. That explosion in 1988 was caused by a kid named Akira who had similar powers. So, basically, Tetsuo become the next Akira and everything starts to go to hell.

It's something of a convoluted plot, as there's also a love story with a young woman named Kei, and other espers, and the big deal is Tetsuo trying to find Akira, or at least his remains. and there's the government angle and all of that. The fact is, a lot of it doesn't matter. The story is secondary to the giantess of the film itself. THE backgrounds are spectacular and the production values are so much better than almost any other anime of the time. It's a beautiful film, and there are some plot points that I really enjoy. Kaneda is the head of the Capsules, and has the best bike, and Tetsuo feels like he's been slighted the entire time in the gang, so he covets Kaneda's bike, and that leads to a showdown. That's a great storyline and I love how it shows the relationships and what those who acquire great power end up focusing on. It's very powerful, and very Japanese.

The problem with Akira is pretty simple: the last 30 minutes. At more than two hours, Akira is a long film, but the last 30 minutes. Slightly confusing, slightly stiff and not all that satisfying. The idea of Tetsuo becoming an all encompassing monster that has to be stopped, even if it is at the cost of all of NeoTokyo is powerful, but I'm not sure that it came across. At the same time, I've found myself interested in the way the film ends, with Tetsuo coming into his powers and basically starting his own universe. It's the best possible ending moment, because it basically says something that good science fiction has steered away from for decades. When one exhausts the power they have in the real world, they must create their own. This flies in the face of many theories of SF, it is, after all, an acknowledgement of the power of a being to create a universe, in essence that there is a God and we can know him. That's a tough, and spiritual, statement. It's exactly the kind of thing I'd expect from a writer like Arthur C. Clarke if he had grown up in the 1960s. I like it, but I also don't understand why the 25 minutes before that were required to get us to that point.

Still, it's an amazing feat. It did not do well in the Japanese box office, but it showed around the world. I remember while I was working at the first AnimeCon in San Jose (some say it was the first major Anime convention in North America), there were several room parties that were entirely centered around watching it. That was the first time I saw it, I think. It was a great thing as I was so familiar with Japanimation like Starblazers, Speedracer and Robotech that I was blown-away by what they had done.

The influence it had on the future of Japanese animation? That's a good question. It had a HUGE influence on the places that would now accept anime, which was a good thing, though costs were held down after that and while there have been some pretty impressive and costly production, Akira and a series of other under-performers made it harder to get high-concept animes financed. Studio Ghibli, Miyazaki's studio, would take anime in another direction, which things like Fist of the North Star, Vampire Hunter D and others went for big time adult fare, and especially on video.

SO, Akira was a significant step on the road towards what anime has become today. Try and show it to younger anime fans today and they just flat won't get it!





## Where it started by James Bacon

It wasn't manga, let alone anime. It was cartoons. They were just plain old cartoons. Battle of The Planets was a step beyond what I had been used to. The animation was clearer, the technology more sophisticated than I had seen in cartoons, a stylistic and aesthetic beauty that was new, and from the sky came The Phoenix. Mark, Jason, Princess, Tiny and Keyop.

It was phenomenal, it was the main cartoon on Saturday mornings on BBC's Swop Shop and got a slot in the afternoon on the BBC later. This of course was the Americanised Sconce Ninja team Gatchaman, cut down, with segments added, of 7-Zark-7 a robot who gave us loads of plot, and spoke to a woegous looking Mark, and then a segment of the Phoenix Flying through space.

That's right kids, Zoltar wasn't some sort of unusual Androgynous Transgendered Terrorist on Earth, rather an alien enemy on a far away planet, cause, well we couldn't handle the truth.

It was wonderfully odd. Massive mechanical creatures, something like I imagined would be in Godzilla movies, fighting and violence that was raw for the time, even though along with some Zoltar stuff, it was cut down heavily and of course, the jet set feel to the team G-Force, and the beautiful, elegant and charismatic Princess, making the suave Mark and the Bad Boy Jason look well, cool.

It was cracking good stuff. And so, without realising it, I was watching anime.

Even though it was Science Commando Gatchaman. Like how incredible a name is that. Unfortunately in the cold light of day the US butchering is a poor comparison to the strength of this 1972 105 episode Japanese anime series, and the chop job may not be up to today's standards.

Top Cow brought out a series of comics with Alex Ross at the helm in 2002, and eventually they were cancelled for lack of sales despite their brilliant artwork and that they were telling the proper violent, earth based original Japanese story. Maybe some things do not remain awesome.

I don't care, it was wonderful.

## The Video Store.

It didn't take long for video stores to flourish in Ireland in the eighties, especially once the Betamax vs VHS battle was over. Crikey, even writing VHS, feels old.

Anyhow, cartoons were a staple of video stores, and Disney had not caught on to releasing movies as much as they do now, and it was all rather new. We had a local shop in Phibsboro, which is now an Oxfam (thrift) shop. And it was here that such childhood favourites as 'Star Blazers' or was it 'Space Cruiser Yamato' the actual film was rented. Video stores would buy in unusual cartoons, well in the knowledge that with atrocious TV for kids, parents would continually rent them.

The image of the most powerful battleship ever constructed, powering up from a decimated earth, and lifting off straight into battle from a burnt crust that was once a sea bed, left an indelible mark on my mind. The white bearded captain, a bit like Captain Birds Eye, but with a huge anchor on his jacket commanding the young futuristically clad warriors, as they went off to fight the Gamillions, humanoid aliens.

The soundtrack was a rousing navy sea song, at the time, it was class.

*We're off to outer space  
were leaving mother earth  
to save the human race  
Our Star Blazers  
Searching for a different star  
heading off to Iskandar...*

I sorta wonder what it was in Japanese, but the dubbing was fine. Derek Wildstar with his scruffy point hair and Mark Venture, space pilots full of spunk.

Derek and Nova were the love interest and Mark and the strange cosmic space woman Trelana who told humanity about Iskander, the planet where salvation will be found, also had a thing. The flared uniforms with the huge arrow pointing at the wearer's stomach, a target for snipers, but regardless it was stunning and I loved it. Still no idea what anime was, or manga, but this was cool, and Dad knew so much about the Yamato that there was this back ground information that was all good. IQ9 the robot, lifting Nova's skirt when she was dressed as a nurse, ah such honest fun, of course she was a really a deck officer, possessing a senior position.



## Back to the Telly.

At some stage, and I cannot recall when, but it must have been in the mid eighties, I was into comics in a big way, but more to do with war, when Robotech somehow hit my radar. It may have been the early days of satellite, we had a load of satellite channels in Ireland or it could again have been through the ubiquitous video shop, but Robotech showed up. It caused a continual brain mix between this and Yamato, you know, a sea captain, a love interest between a female officer and a space jock, and on wards.

Yet, Lisa Hayes was to die for. I have to tell you, the girl that dresses as Lisa Hayes and wants taking out will get taken out I tell you. She was so prim and proper, such a superb officer, a brilliant first officer in battle. She was rigid, fair but a real leader. She ran the bridge, with Claudia Grant and Kim Young, Sammy Porter, and Vanessa Leeds sometimes referred to as The Bridge Bunnies offering a liveliness and humanity that Lisa lacked.

Pilot Rick Hunter was superb, his initial adoration for the singer Lynn Minmei and his skills as a fighter pilot, always relaxed and courting death in a carefree way. He is of course courageous, but as a character, to a boy, he was brilliant.

Captain Henry J. Gloval, was not as much as a Captain Birseye as Avatar, instead he seemed a bit of a Russian stoic type, and had a wonderful heavy moustache, his exaggerated collars and hat darkening his features, but he was so calm and collected and in charge of the massive space ship SDF-1 when they come under attack from the the massive Zentraedi, humanoid aliens, but to larger dimensions.

And jeez, poor Claudia Grant, the life and party on the bridge, losing Roy Fokker was a killer.

It was a mixture of the wonderful space ships, based on fighter jets, which could change into robots so as to fight the Zentradi, but also the depth of the characters and story telling.

It started to get complex when Rick, Lisa and Ben are taken prisoner, and under interrogation by Zentradi commanders, Breetai and Dolza, who demand that they are shown how 'this love' that is spoken of is demonstrated, and so, Lisa orders Rick to kiss her. Despite trying to remain astute and stoic, this is the beginning of a love triangle between Rick, Lisa and Lynn that adds a real dimension to the story.

I was given a load of Robotech on video as a loan at one stage. I think they were copies, as it was when copying NTSC to PAL was hugely popular and the only way to see many programmes, and I thought the series watched properly was mind blowing. Of course, rather like Battle of the Planets, Robotech was an Americanised version of a number of Japanese series put together, but in fairness, done well.

Then there was Star Fleet, or X-Bomber in the US. This was a Japanese marionette based programme, which possessed many of the elements that I would identify in anime and manga, but well, was models and marionettes (OK CHRIS, it was Tokusatu) . The great Brian May and Eddie Van Halen were involved with covering a version of the programme's soundtrack.

I remember thinking that commander Conner, of the Earth defense force forward strategic Pluto base, in a black beret, green fatigue jacket, dark aviator sunglasses and untidy hair, looked much more like a local terrorist than a commander of a base.

Anyhow, it was 1982, and Star Wars was just about to be shown on television in the UK and the day before, this was on telly. It was a heady time I tell you.

It was 2999, and a group of aliens, led by Commander Makara, quite attractive, except for the symbiotic face over her right eye that was a direct link to the 'Master' with termite like creatures for a space crew, and Captain Orion who looked really odd and had a snake head over one eye sweep into our solar system, and in a pretty sinister but very cool space ship, aim to destroy the Earth, unless the EDF hand over F-Zero-One.



Model - Kitty Honey

OK, I admit I was fairly confused, and quite rightly, as no one seemed to know what the F-Zero-one element was. But Earth had a new untested secret weapon, The X-Bomber commanded by Doctor Benn. This well armed space ship, also had another sector weapon, DAI-X. Dai-X were three space ships which attached to X-Bomber, and could detach and fight in space and on land, but with the right instruction, could form together to create a massive fighting robot.

Shiro Hagen, the mildly irreverent Barry Hercules and John Lee were the pilots, while robot PPA, Lamia and her guardian Kirara were with Doctor Benn on the flight deck.

It was like Thunderbirds, but with some serious violence.

It was brilliant. BIG DAI-X.

Sounds rude now.

There were other videos from the video shop, anime. there was one with a Tank Police unit, which wasn't Dominion Tank Police, I think, or at least I cannot remember, a pair of Cat Girl Sex Dolls, who were criminals, and that would surely have had an impact, although I don't know, I may have been two fascinated with the real girls driving the tanks, but before I realised, or knew, I was enjoying anime, but all of this had been the phase of my childhood life when it was 'just cartoons'.



## One Day, Akira happened.

It just happened. It was when I had started to hang out in Phantasia, my local comic shop in Dublin, that sold second hand reads, and started to get into comics in a more serious way, well, into science fictional comics in a more serious way, and was meeting SF fans, I was 15 or thereabouts and so hanging out in a cool comic shop, something I still love to do to this day (though now with a beer, thanks Anna in Exclusive, Santa Clara) and Akira was made known to me.

It was when Marvel were releasing the Epic series of the comic. That began in 1990, and it was well known that this would be a legendary amount of comics, it was far too expensive for me, nearly a graphic novel price for a single comic, but I must admit, I loved the colouring. I knew no better, and have more recently been scoffed at for this, as the colouring is considered by some to be poor, but I do not know, I thought it was solid, a water colour feel, that was just right, but of course it was Otomo's hardware, be it ships, vehicles or bikes, that just looked so stunning.

I had read some, but I definitely saw the movie before I had read the comics to the end, which may have been an error on my part, in a sense, but then again, knowing no different, I was pretty damn impressed.

Anyhow, Marvel under Epic were releasing these 38 comics, and occasionally collecting them, but these vol-

umes, if I remember correctly, at the time were one of the most expensive comics on the market, and graphic novels, were just not that common a product. Sandman was shortly about to hit, and graphic novels, collected editions, trade editions, whatever, were just not that common.

But they looked damn fine.

Eventually, Titan books and Dark Horse comics released some phone book versions, but it really wasn't until 2000, some seventeen years after its first appearance in Young Magazine in Japan in December 1982, and these six black and white phone book editions were a new translation of the comic, the best.

In between there was obviously the movie.

Around 1991 the movie was becoming a cult favourite, it was known for a number of years, being released

in Japan in 1988, my alignment with comic and SF fans in Dublin seemed to correspond with Akira getting its dubbed English release. I am pretty sure I either saw it at James Mason's when he lived at home, or at an Octocon. The national SF convention, which says a lot for watching movies at conventions.

It was awesome.

The music, that strange water bamboo xylophone sound, the chanting, the music rising with the action, and the motorbikes, the horns, and the reckless riding, and suddenly it's a smashed windscreen and then a grenade. The violence just escalates wonderfully. The scene as a bike smashes into a calm restaurant and then the clown faces and the fight, bones crunching in slow motion as riders are felled, the sparks flying from metal on the street...

And that bike, Twin ceramic rotor drives on each wheel and computer controlled anti lock brakes 200 horses at 12,000 rpm and the wonderful realisation, that Kaneda is a punk as he says to Tetsuo, 'If you want it so bad, then steal one yourself.' He and his violent running tribe, Bōsōzoku, with their pills on the back of their leathers, set apart from the other kids at school, as they live a nightly alter ego of violence and civil disobedience.

That bike, is iconic. The beauty of it, the hidden power surging out from its rims, and the skill with which Kaneda can lift it, throw it around the streets and daringly rip it towards the clown face is all stunningly brilliant, the styling alone, is and was so far ahead, that we haven't gotten there, nothing has managed to match it. Its true science fiction.

Then the people, the characters, starting in the bar, but Kaneda and Tetsuo, who are great friends despite the sometimes harsh treatment that Tetsuo receives,

Of course, Tetsuo yearns for the power and prestige that Kaneda has, and this is symbolised in his adoration for the bike.

The movie itself was full of the unusual, I had a good understanding of psychic powers, what with a considerable amount of Judge Anderson, of the PSI Division under my belt, and the futuristic setting, although it felt wonderfully realised, especially the Bladerunneresque feeling to the advertisements and city, and the post world war destruction, all sat very well, while the involvement of the government, the military and of course underground black budgeted type science activity all fed my general hatred of authority.

That power can consume one, and the desire for power can consume one absolutely, to one's own destruction, is obviously a clear message here, and in many ways Tetsuo is a metaphor for the various people seeking a power, which they just shouldn't have. Only the espers seem to truly understand this, and so I did enjoy the ending.

As always, I was rather taken with the female lead, Kei, a terrorist revolutionary, who Kaneda encounters, and who captures Kaneda's attention, as she did mine, despite her membership in an anti-government group. Their interaction throughout the movie was really good, and I felt that she demonstrated the naivete, immaturity and realness of Kaneda. She brought it out, and one could see it in his facial expression, subtle and not so subtle.

There was no shortage of action, it had its own level of complexity, and I loved it.



## Akira Stuff.

Akira was and is still huge. It was soon available, along with quite a few other anime favourites through a UK company simply called MANGA in the early nineties. Of course, anime and manga exploded as the nineties went by, and I still enjoyed the occasional comic or movie, but I could never call myself a true anime fan like those who would gather at conventions.

I was lucky that I had a few bob in my pocket as I walked around with Stef on a free work trip at San Diego Comic Con, and there, not far in on the northern end of the vast dealers' hall, was a man selling animation cells. Now, I don't know much about these things, but I knew that a cell was the original artwork of any cartoon, but perhaps not exactly by the hand of the master artist, yet close enough, and as I saw a tub full of cells from Akira, I stopped in my tracks. I knew that I would like but there was not exactly a great selection. Well, there were dozens of cells, but none that were good, and then I found as decent a one as I reckoned I could find, and I took it. Was it \$60?

Later, we saw the Bandai die-cast bike with Kaneda sitting on it at a stand. Was it a Bandai stand? And both Stef and myself struggled to get our money out of our wallets quick enough, we were both so eager, as it looked so good, and we had heard and seen good things from Bandai, so were sure that this was top quality stuff.

Stef, who is an Akira fan, would later buy the Todd MacFarlane toys, of Tetsuo with his arm exploding into the ground, Akira on the throne, and of course Kaneda standing with the bike. I asked him this morning, when he last watched it, about 10 years ago. I just did.

I haven't gotten around to buying The Akira Club Book, nor will I be spending millions of yen and years building a bike. But I have bought other odd items, such as the Akira animation archives, but I didn't pick up the Continuity of Akira, which are a reproduction of the story board from the movie.

## All these things come around it seems.

The last decade, along with the Battle of the Planets comics, saw a considerable resurgence in Robotech items available, with Harmony Gold who own the brand occasionally pushing out in a big way, especially with the advent of DVDs.

I started seeing DVDs for Robotech in about 2004 but they were in America, and wouldn't work in the UK, but then I came across the whole series, in about 12 DVDs in a second hand anime shop in Croydon. It was about then that Robotech was re-released as a series of comics by Wildstorm, as opposed to the Comico ones from the 90s or the Antarctic Press ones. I then found that the remastered versions of the DVDs were released in a UK acceptable version, bided my time and picked them up. It's over 80 episodes of brilliance, and the remastered version is pretty sharp.

Space Battleship Yamato was filmed as a live action movie, and I must say it was one of the most honest representations of a cartoon or comic or I have seen. I really enjoyed it, the graphics were spot on, and none of the CGI aliens felt shite. Susumo Kodai, who is the Japanese version of Wildstar, was perfect and his love interest was not a nurse, but Yuki Mori, Black Tiger Squadron ace pilot played by the stunning Meisa Kuroki, stole the show.



There were some superb elements, like the fighter ship Kodai flew, his analyzer, a small computer, who is his only friend, the battleship itself, the honesty to the original and generally it was bloody good. The music really helped to make the film, as did what I thought was great acting.

I now see that Space Battleship Yamato 2199 is going to be re-released as an anime series, and The Bandai channel have a ten minute preview available to watch, which I did and it too was pretty honest to the original, but looked stunning.

I'm not an anime or Manga fan, am I.

Without doubt, I was stunned by Zipang. This is a manga series from the late nineties that more recently was turned into a 26 episode anime series. Basically an Aegis class missile destroyer of the modern Japanese Navy, Mirai is transported in a strange freak weather event back to the Second World War. The ship, about the size of a Battle Cruiser of the day, has an incredible ability to track hostile elements, and of course destroy them, with a level of accuracy that was beyond anything in the Second World War.

The story sees the crew faced with an incredible amount of stress. Immediately the Mirai is in the midst of the Japanese Imperial Navy Battlefleet, but evades them, and soon have to come to terms with the fact that they are back at the time of the Battle of Midway island.

## Should they intervene?

Will changing history change home, what right have they to interfere, and should they save the thousands of fellow countrymen's lives in the impending attack? It's bloody thoughtful.

This is a continual central theme, fighting against the inner nationalism, when they know that Japan is ruled by a totalitarian government. We follow two main characters, although become familiar with many on board the Mirai, Kodomatsu Yosuke, first officer of the Mirai, who idealistically believes in the Japanese Maritime Self Defence Force and the non-aggressive life saving stance it takes, and Kusaka Takumi, a Lt. Commander who wants to create a new future Japan, one which sees an undefeated Japan, but which throws off the yoke of militarism and imperialism yet is strong, a new country, he titles Zipang.

The difficulties that the naval men of the time face, commanders on all sides, the chance to change history or worse to somehow court change only to face destruction, and the knowledge that the power to change a whole war floats in one ship, all makes a fascinating story.

## DDG Mirai

Guided Missile destroyer Mirai weighing in loaded at nearly 10,000 tons, 561 feet long and with a beam of 69 feet, is a longer version of the Japanese Kongo Class destroyer, with the fictional addition of a variable wing propeller plane and helicopter. Mirai pre dated the Atago class, which was nearly as long and had a hanger, but of course the fictional ship could not be based on this.

The Kongo class, are based on the American Aerialy Burke class of Aegis missile destroyer, and it is this Aegis computerised multi functioning targeting system which sets the ship apart and places it firmly into the twenty first century.

Ships have increased in size, and despite being called a destroyer, to a naval man in the forties, it would have looked the size of a small Heavy Cruiser. The Aoba class Heavy Cruiser built in 1927 was 8,900 tons full load 607 feet long with a beam of 52 feet. A comparable size of vessel except for an important element.

The firepower of the Mirai is phenomenal.

This is able demonstrated in two episodes. In 1 vs 40, we see bomber and torpedo squadrons of the USS Wasp determined to attack the Mirai, and with the Aegis system, the 5 inch Oto-Breda automatic gun, wipes them out easily, from the computerised control room the gunnery officer simply pulls a trigger. Sea to air missiles catching any planes that the gun missed. Then the Wasp herself is targeted in the next episode as the bridge officers decide that the damage from a Harpoon Sea to Sea Missile is too easily recoverable from, given their knowledge of the robustness and ability to repair from the history of the USS York Town, and so a single Tomahawk antiship cruise missile, with a range of over 200 miles is fired, and utterly destroys the USS Wasp.

The range of missiles, sea to sea, sea to air, anti-submarine outweighs the weapons that the most advanced ships at the time possessed, let alone the six 8 inch main armament guns of the comparably sized Aoba class of the time.

## Still not a hardcore fan.

I love cons, obviously, but just don't have as much time for anime. Of course the cross over with comics is obvious, and in the UK most comic cons have an anime element, but I haven't gone specifically to any anime and manga cons. Not that I wouldn't like to, but there is only so much time.

Takuya Kimura, who played Kodai in Space Battleship Yamato, also voiced Howl in Howl's moving castle, and so with an easy move, we go to Studio Ghibli and one of my favourites, Porco Rosso. Set in that very romantic interwar period, down in the Adriatic, we find a World War I ace who has had a divine spell of sorts placed upon him, and has the appearance of a pig, earning money as a bounty hunter, shooting down sky pirates. The story is beautiful, as we follow Porco as he tries to get his aircraft first improved and then rebuilt, his love for the widow of his wingman Berlini, and the wonderful character of Fio, a young mechanic and designer. International themes permeate through into the story, a flashy American who will come to the aid of the pirates, called Curtis and the actions of the fascist Italian government add an historical element to the intrigue.

I love that era, the interwar years, so much potential and so much unknown. Reminded me of Tales of the Golden Monkey, with Jake the one eyed dog, and Cutter's Goose. All good stuff.

Of course, Howl's Moving Castle itself is a wonderful adaptation of a wonderful book, and I recently saw a live action adaptation in Southwark Playhouse, which was not too bad at all, but this is indeed another anime, along with Steamboy, that I really enjoyed.

There is no shortage of anime and manga and as I come to realise that I do not have enough time to write about them all. I wonder about Skycrawlers, Luftwaffe 1946, Ghost in the Shell, Who Fighter all of which I have seen, or read, but even now, there is that elusive manga and anime that I yearn for.

Konpeki no Kantai, Deep Blue Fleet, well about a fictional battlefleet, The Cockpit, a series of shorts based on Leiji Matsumoto's Battlefield manga, both of which I would like to see. Pumpkin Scissors, based on a fictional war, or rather the aftermath of the ceasefire. Then there is the Kerberos Panzer Corps Saga manga KenRoh Densetsu by Mamoru Oshii, which is the basis for the The Red Spectacles released in 1987 and Stray Dog: Kerberos Panzer Cops released in 1991, both live action, and Jin-Roh! The Wolf Brigade anime released in 1999.

There is the unusual sounding First Squad, set during Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union where a group of specially powered teenagers fight against the a group of Nazis which includes an SS Officer who is intent on raising the dead.

I saw a strange toy once, half human girl, half Second World War fighter plane and so that was my introduction to Strike Witches, where, well, part of the character is indeed a plane, although they seem to be in their underpants, but I have yet to see it. I haven't had a chance to watch Mobile Suit Gundam or the more recent Ghost in the Shell, Last Exile,

And I am sure there are more war or alternative history and science fictional manga and anime that I have not seen. If anyone has any recommendations, do let us know.

Image at Right - Honey Bunny (<http://honeybunny0.deviantart.com/>)

