

in the elegiac *Grave of the Fireflies* (1988) or the life-affirming *Only Yesterday* (1991).

Miyazaki was making "worry-free adventure stories" in animation while putting his deeper, troubled thoughts into the long *Nausicaä* manga, which had already diverged widely from the 1984 anime movie. And the world he had always believed in changing was, in a way that began to burn holes in what he drew: in *Nausicaä* he created fantasy empires that fell in fantasy wars, while in the real world he watched the Soviet Union collapse and Yugoslavia revert to barbaric strife and genocide as if nothing had been learned or gained in the entire century. For Miyazaki the animator, the fall of the old Communist order signified a liberating, but not comforting change.² The turn began with his film *Porco Rosso*; based on a light-hearted comic he had drawn of a (literally) pig-headed aviator who hunts pirates over the Depression-era Adriatic, Miyazaki shaded the 1992 anime version with glimpses of rising Fascism and ironic postcard views of the same Balkan coastline towns that history slated for destruction in our own time. Miyazaki told *Yom* magazine, "If I think about going back there again, I feel really dark, but I think I have to accept that. I think I have to see things on my own.... It's painful to go back to the world of *Nausicaä*, and I don't want to go back."

He did, though. 1997's *The Princess Mononoke* was his return journey to the themes of *Nausicaä*, the journey of a man no longer at ease, but with his eyes fully opened to a lifetime's experience. Miyazaki abandoned neither his abiding love of nature nor his observations on social justice—indeed, Miyazaki chose to set *Mononoke* in fifteenth-century Japan because class and sex roles had not yet rigidified. The film centers around an armed commune of outcasts who build primitive muskets in their own factory. What changed

was the resolution of the story, or rather, Miyazaki's realization that there can never be any. It is indeed his darkest film, presenting the struggle between man and nature with a shadow of primitive terror, an ancestral memory of man's first art: *Mononoke* conjures the violence and sympathetic magic, the fear and hunger and awe, that thrust spears into painted boars on cave walls.

But as one watches *Mononoke*, it is tremendously exciting to see how Miyazaki's craft has leapt forward—despite the phantasmagorical imagery, his disciplined staging and shots make the narrative seem real and immediate in a way *Nausicaä* never was. *Mononoke* became Miyazaki's first truly adult film—and his signal achievement in a lifetime of films that have charmed all ages. An astounding experience reminiscent of the finest human passion of the late Akira Kurosawa, *Mononoke* was one of the best motion pictures to have been made anywhere in the world during the 1990s. Earning \$133 million, it broke *E.T.*'s fifteen-year boxoffice record in Japan, and briefly became the top-grossing film in Japan of all time. It was deposed only by the international sensation *Titanic*—a film, it should be noted, that had ten times *Mononoke*'s budget behind it.

Thirty years after *Horus*, Ghibli achieved a different kind of revolution. *Mononoke* is a vast banner unfurled on the screen, one side green in the sun—the other moonlit, full of vicious colors and shadowy folds. Yet in the end, it all rolls to fit into a human hand. Clarity, Miyazaki explained to *Yom*, will be found in the appropriate scale. "There is a huge gap between generalities and particulars. But a human can often be satisfied with particulars. If we see...from the top of a mountain or from a plane, we feel it's hopeless, but if we go down, and there's fifty meters of nice

road, and the weather is fine and shiny, we feel we can go on.

"I drive a car and cause pollution everyone has to stop, I'll stop, but so, I'll continue to drive to the last ahead and raise the price of gas to 30 yen per liter..." Miyazaki laughs. "I'm shooting my mouth off just as a joke, please, aren't I?" Of course, as he pleases: the car Miyazaki drives is no Lexus or Acura, but a funny-looking little red motor scooter, a three-wheeled thing with a miniature rollbar to cradle his grey head at the highest speeds. Like his movies, he made that car himself, with his own two hands.

The Children of Miyazaki and Coca-Cola

Jean-Luc Goddard's minimalist science-fiction classic, *Alphaville*, became both the name of an '80s band and a sideways influence on *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, the anime that stormed the barricades of TV in Japan as *The Princess Mononoke* did the theaters. But when it comes to describing the company that made *Evangelion*, Studio Gainax—named after a slang term for something really big—it's Godard's *Masculine-Feminine* that comes to mind, with its price-less opening line: "This film could be called *The Children of Marx and Coca-Cola*." The people who make up Gainax are just like that—except that they are the children of Coca-Cola and Miyazaki.

The Gainax animators are from the first generation to grow up with anime as a pop-culture given; they were born in the years when Toei was first putting it on the screen and Tezuka was first putting it on TV—in short, Gainax is of the otaku generation, as they put it in their wincingly honest,

and sometimes truthful, 1991 *Spinal Tap*-like "autobiography," *Otaku no Video*. "Otaku" was a dirty word then in Japan. Gainax, however, suspected there was an otaku inside everyone just waiting to emerge—and *Otaku no Video* predicted (in a manner not unlike *Ed Wood's* Amazing Criswell) the otakuization of all Japan by 1999.

Gainax's *Neon Genesis Evangelion* would eventually become the national phenomenon to make the prediction come true. Gainax (their name even sounds like Gen-X) understood the culture of international post-modernism that draws everyday lessons from *Bewitched* and reserves the big, abstract issues for *Star Wars*. But what made Gainax special was their insistence that this was all, on some level, true and authentic. The '60s generation claimed that a ninja comic was a Cliff Notes for Marx. Gainax had no need to plead a higher authority; they saw nothing wrong with finding guidance just in the ninja comic itself. They had a special kind of self-knowledge sometimes accessible to those who grow up playing not with the world but with other people's models of the world, to those who contemplate not creation but artifice.³

Like Miyazaki and Takahata's political fables, Gainax's know-thyself anime ran on a partnership of two directors. The critical detail for Gainax is that the "moment of clarity"—as American otaku **Quentin Tarantino** would have it—for **Hiroiyuki Yamaga** (b. 1962) and **Hideaki Anno** (b. 1960), came at decidedly different speeds. For Yamaga, the perception came first, as a burst from deep space: illuminating with a brilliant, light-speed flash. Long years later, the shockwave arrived for Anno, cracking his private world apart.

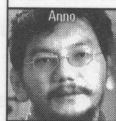
Yamaga presented as a fairly respectable, athletic young man with an inner passion for creative and financial

success in the film world, when he arrived at college in 1980—just like Kubo, the freshman protagonist of *Otaku no Video*, which Yamaga wrote under a pseudonym. The college he attended was no Todai or Gakushuin, but the arts university of Japan's heavy industrial center, Osaka. Walking through the quad one day early on in his student career, he found himself suddenly in the midst of a live-action battle between wild costumed students, one side dressed as ninja, the other in SWAT gear. "When that becomes a daily occurrence, what am I supposed to say?" Yamaga exclaimed to American fans in 1997 upon a visit to Silicon Valley's massive annual anime gathering, Fanime Con. Then, a tall, gangling, and mysterious upperclassman named Hideaki Anno introduced himself not with the customary hello but by confiding that he knew practically every line in *Space Battleship Yamato (Star Blazers)* by heart. "I think I forgot what was normal at that point," recalled Yamaga.

Soon he found himself making 8 mm *Power Rangers*-type superhero films with Anno and his friends, and, of course, anime—cutting up industrial plastic sheeting into cels to save money. The anime shorts were not so much narratives as collections of pop-culture rhyming-and-stealing, as frantic as a **Beastie Boys** track. In an Anno-Yamaga student production, cities got A-bombed just for effect while Playboy bunnies crossed light sabers with Darth Vader. Yamaga, who, when he arrived at college, had no intention of becoming an otaku, much less an anime-maker, became both by the time his group incorporated in 1984 as Studio Gainax.

It was the year of *Nausicaä*, and only three years later, Gainax would make an anime epic of their own—*Royal Space Force: The Wings of Honneamise*.⁴ The concept for the film, said Yamaga, came to

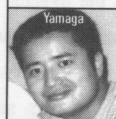
them, I thought maybe he happened to be ill and wasn't photogenic on that day." Miyazaki laughed, but said it was the truth. "I should've trusted my first instinct. I did such things many times. I always tried to overpower my feelings with my ideals. I stopped doing so. And this is a bit hard. Even now, I sometimes think that things would be easier if I had not changed..."



3. Pauline Kael's comments on *Masculine-Feminine* in *The New Yorker* fit Gainax's conception of the otaku perfectly: "This community of

unbelievers has a style of life by which they recognize each other; it is made up of everything adults attack as the worst and shoddiest forms of...dehumanization. It is the variety of forms of 'Coca-Cola'—the synthetic life they were born to and which they love, and which they barely make human and more beautiful and more 'real' than the old just-barely-hanging-on adult culture. Membership is automatic and natural for the creatures from inner space...they have the beauty of youth which can endow pop with poetry, and they have their feeling for each other and all those shared products and responses by which they know each other."

Gainax's passion is, then, a French kiss-in-cheek, a tongue stuck out, but saying some lovely things. Hideaki Anno and Hiroiyuki Yamaga, both born when the Beatles were still a Chuck Berry cover band, are the Lennon and McCartney of Gainax. At least, Yamaga maintains that Anno *looks* like "the smart one," while personally disclaiming any resemblance to "the cute one." (But neither of the two are fans, particularly; Anno loves the sound of retro-SF themes and classical music, while Yamaga has a penchant for the '80s electronica of **Ryuichi Sakamoto** and '90s trance-Goa pioneer **DJ Tsuyoshi**, both of whom Yamaga picked to score his movies.) "If anybody's going to get shot, though, I would want it to be Anno," he says, laughing as he speaks of his comrade for many years. "Supposedly he made *Evangelion* for a target age of fourteen, but I think he really made it for people his own age—about thirty-five."



4. At Fanime Con, Yamaga described how they raised the money for the film. One might say that Gainax decided to walk into Jabba the Hutt's

palace with a thermal detonator. Freshly dropped-out of college, they entered the corporate headquarters of Bandai, the multibillion-dollar Japanese toy giant that produces half the anime in Japan, including titles familiar to Americans, such as *Sailor Moon*. Gainax presented Bandai with a ten-year business plan they had drawn up—not for *Gainax* to follow,

him in that most Gen-X of cathedrals, the coffeehouse. It was a product of otaku consciousness. "I thought how [anime] should reflect society and what it should represent, and to me it seemed it should be like a mirror in a coffeehouse—a double space, an illusion. We have a limited time here in our lives, but we feel that through television and film, we can understand a great deal more... In school, you may be taught that the world is round, but with your *own* eyes, you'll only be able to confirm, to directly experience, a very small part of that world, a very small part of what we're capable of *imagining*... We wanted to *create* a world, and we wanted to look at it from space."

Gainax made good on their ambition; under Yamaga's direction, an explosion of twenty-something creative energy gave *The Wings of Honneamise* the most sophisticated and cosmopolitan art direction of any anime film made before or since. In an achievement beyond even that seen in the movies of **Terry Gilliam** or **Ridley Scott**, the team crafted an imaginary alternate world in every fascinating detail, from the bongos to the jet planes. It was a kaleidoscopic mirror, for the setting of *Honneamise* contained every element of our modern lives: class, faith, science, war, and of course, television—but all with the jumbled look of no particular country, or many countries, in an international visual language.

Yamaga imagined an ordinary young man in his early twenties, named Shiro, for the protagonist of *Honneamise*. However, in a brilliant plot conceit, the director turned the clock of Shiro's parallel world back to a time when space travel was a dream few believed possible. Shiro always says he wants a simple life, but a childhood vision of flight flickers within him. Without the grades to get into aviator school, he falls in with a tiny, no-budget government program, whose mumbling commandant styles his bored young students the Royal Space Force, and

talks of one day sending the first man into orbit. For no better conscious reason than to impress a girl who seems to believe in him, Shiro astounds everyone by volunteering. The story begins from there, as Shiro begins his long journey to the rocket.

His ill-considered decision changes him from a man content to stare, into someone who, for the first time in his life, must take a good look around. Before he will ever get to leave the ground, the would-be astronaut has to explore his own fallen world and the inner space inside him. What begins for him as a sci-fi joke becomes shadowed by assassination, terrorism, social unrest, and war, as both he and his mission become public sacrifice pawns in the global power game. Yet the question of whether the first man *will* go into space is to be decided privately, as Shiro confronts his own capacity for violence and delusion in moments without a witness. Few motion pictures of any kind have so well used the make-believe of movies in such a powerful and sustained metaphor as *Honneamise*. As an anime, it remains in many ways unsurpassed.

Anno had been the special-effects genius on *Honneamise*, and unlike Yamaga, Hideaki Anno never had any doubts that he was either an otaku or an animator. On the cusp of adolescence, he withdrew from the realm of the senses into a world of watching anime and making 8 mm movies. Girls avoided him like the plague, and he avoided them—an *entente cordiale* of the kind portrayed in 1991's *Otaku no Video*. It was oddly appropriate that after *Otaku no Video* strobilit Anno and his friends like a string of firecrackers, Gainax fell silent in the smoke for the next four years as they struggled fruitlessly with an abortive plan to make a second motion picture.

The reason lay in large part with Anno himself, who never had any doubts because he never asked himself any questions. When he at last asked, with an anime called *Neon*

Genesis Evangelion, he was to change the face of anime once again, as Yamaga. *Honneamise* had years before—only the time, the public would respond to the seed Gainax had sown. And when Anno had to answer, it was a high school girl who got from him. One day in August of 1998, while visiting students to research his next show she came up to him, full of admiration, to say that she loved *Evangelion*, believed in pursuing one's dreams, and intended to grow up and one day make anime herself. He warned her: "You've got it all wrong. This is the only thing I can do.... I've managed to get this far because I gave up everything else."

By the time he was twenty-four, while still a student filmmaker, Anno was being mentored by Hayao Miyazaki, who gave him key work on *Nausicaä*—and hailed as a rising star. After *Honneamise*, he directed and cowrote for Gainax both the 1988 romantic space-war epic video series *Gunbuster* and the 1990 TV anime *Nadia*, a Jules Verne-like adventure set in a fantastic nineteenth century (and a concept originally developed for Miyazaki). Then it was all over, not from a lack of success—Anno's two directorial efforts had proven popular—but because he had broken quietly one day. For four long years he was unable to make anime anymore. It was when he realized that, in a world full of life, not making anime was for him the same as not living, that the shockwave hit. On October 4, 1995, he began at last to speak about it, with the premiere of a TV series four years in the waiting, *Neon Genesis Evangelion*—ancient Greek for New Beginning Gospel.

Evangelion takes place in 2015—fifteen years after the second-to-last Judgment. On September 13 in the year 2000, a massive explosion in Antarctica triggers a global catastrophe that leaves half the world dead. The official story is that the blast is caused by a giant meteor. The truth though, as they say, "is out there," and there

may be time to discover it as humanity makes its last stand in Tokyo-3, a super-tech fortress city under assault from the hideous, uncommunicative entities code-named the Angels.

Evangelion follows the course of this war and, most especially, the personal conflict between the three different generations at NERV: the fourteen-year-old "Children" who pilot the equally-monstrous biomechanical Evangelion Units against the Angels, their twenty-something commanding officers, and the Children's parents, scientists who know far too much and tell far too little. The 1995-96 *Eva* TV show was a phenomenon in Japan; ten million people tuned in for its final episode. The 1997 *Evangelion* movies, which presented a different version of the TV show's controversial ending, made about \$28 million, the merchandising well over \$200 million.⁵

Anno claims no spiritual beliefs but the animism of Shinto. In fact, many of *Evangelion's* religious elements—most particularly his use of the Kabbalah—come not through religion per se but the psychological theories of **C. G. Jung**, who considered the Kabbalah a valuable set of symbols with which to understand the human psyche. Thus, in *Eva*, the Angels' and Man's battle for their place in the scheme of creation becomes a dramatic and meticulously considered device that allowed Anno to stage spectacular fights and showcase fantastic technology, all in the service of his own personal lake of fire, a public burning every Wednesday at 7:30 p.m. nationwide.⁶

Today Japanese animation, in its search for the next *Eva*, populates its new series with the *Eva* look—the exotic technology called *mecha* in anime and a cast of sad tomatoes—without perhaps ever realizing what kind of commitment another *Evangelion* would require from its creators. Pretty faces and cool

devices drew *Evangelion's* initial audiences, but it was the unraveling of the strands of the life of a real human being that captured older Japanese audiences who would have never admitted to watching anime before—that brought in the outsiders. In a savage irony, many hardcore otaku—despite the anime's requisite portion of cute girls and hi-tech action—felt robbed by *Eva*, and wanted to know what kind of a show was ultimately about nothing more than a person's unresolved soul.

Postscript: Somewhere/ Anywhere

There isn't likely to be "another *Evangelion*." Nor is that particularly desirable. What *Eva* has led to is much better—its success has spawned an explosion of new anime shows in Japan on a level unseen since the early '80s; it's just like the exciting college days that encouraged Gainax to enter the industry in the first place. Some shows are taking chances and trying to move anime along. Others are simply providing anime with the diversity of demographics and themes that the medium so desperately needs to catch up with the success and respect manga already enjoys in Japan.

Gainax is not the **Beatles**; first of all, that was Ghibli's generation. In a 1998 interview with the author, Yamaga invoked the Fab Four not as history, but as myth, for he is well aware that to the Japanese—as well as to their American fans—he and Anno have themselves become myth as much as history. Yamaga accepts their fame with a cautionary wink: "The press is saying good things about us.... If they were insulting us or saying nasty things—yeah, then I would

but Bandai! In the stunned silence that followed, Gainax president Toshio Okada (who went to college just to join the science fiction club and today teaches at Takahata's alma mater) managed to fashion a movie budget with the help of a creative-minded young executive at Bandai, Shigeru Watanabe, who quickly became a fervent disciple of Gainax's vision. Watanabe remains the patron behind some of Japan's most progressive anime films—films that he and *Honneamise* took the blows to make possible. The thermal detonator bit proved no joke: the movie bombed. *Honneamise* was a classic example of the film too far ahead of its time that today everyone acknowledges as the work of genius. At least someone understood, though: Yamaga may have taken some paternal comfort from Miyazaki's praise of his film in an interview in *Kinema Jumbo* in 1995 (the year after *Honneamise* finally began to turn a profit). Miyazaki saw kindred spirits in the makers of Gainax's breakthrough film; their approach reminded him of his work with Takahata on the making of *Horus*. "*Honneamise* is the proof [that] it's still possible.... Those who made it were amateurs in terms of experience. In their mid-twenties, they made it by themselves, living and eating together, with no distinction between the work and their private lives."

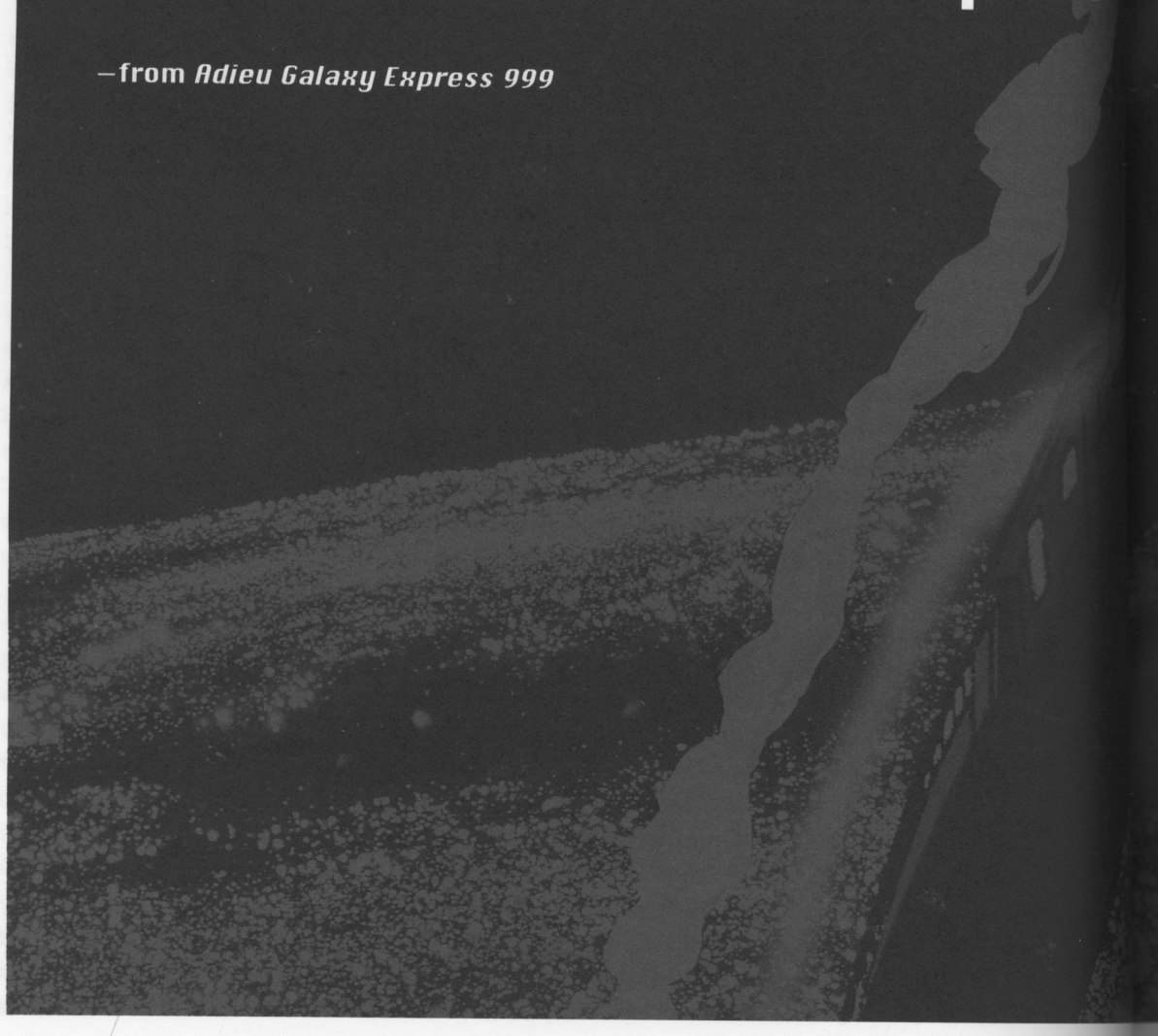


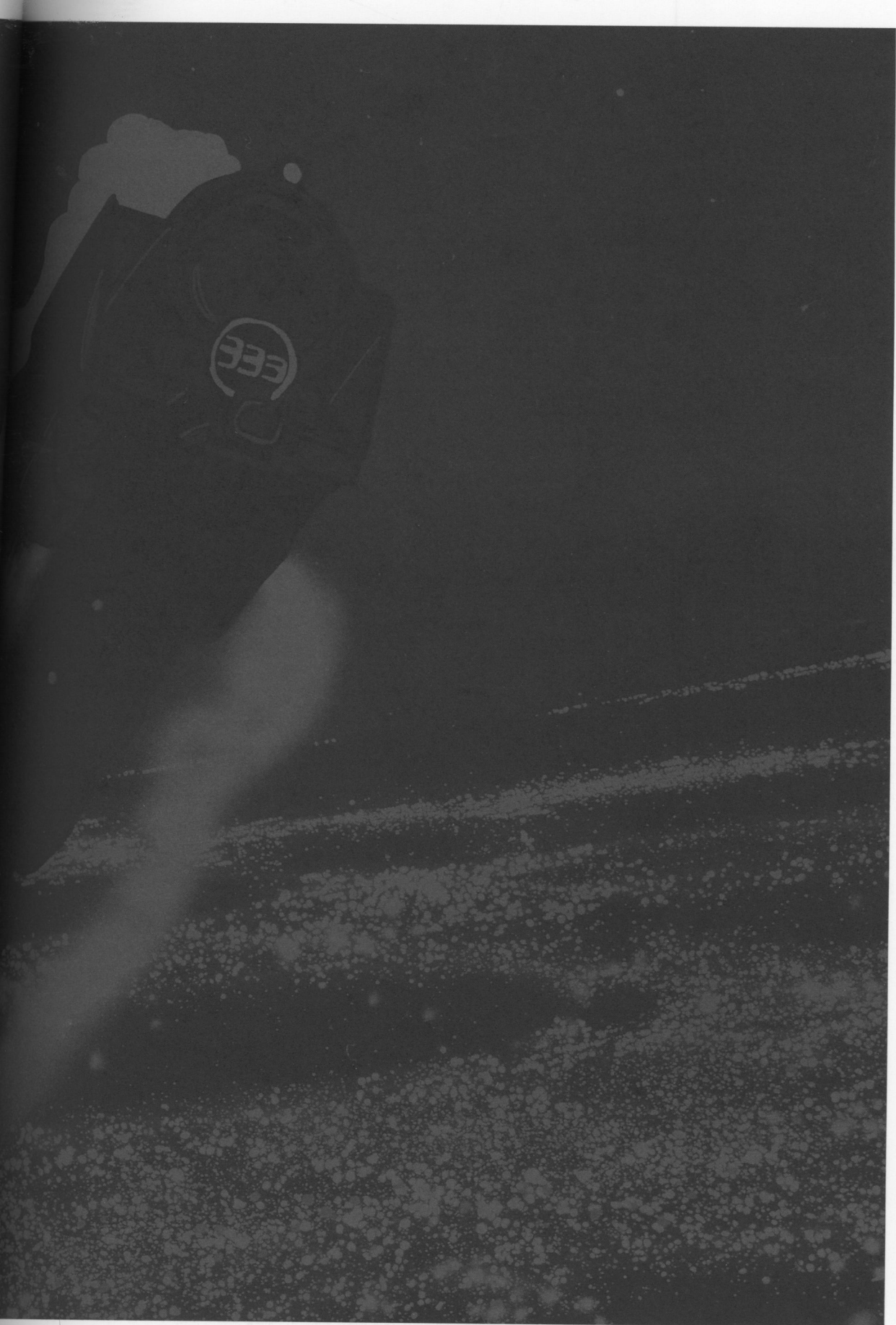
5. Although *Evangelion* has remained strictly on video for now in the United States, it has been a considerable success, which has made the persistent rumor that it might be picked up by MTV seem credible. When Houston's A.D.V. Films released the final episode here, their print ads, trading on *Eva's* renown in the American market, were mysterious and text-only, showing no anime images at all—the first U.S. anime ad to dare such an approach. Some elements of *Eva's* success needed no English translation, such as the visual design which Emmy-award winning CG programmer **Allen Hastings** (*Babylon 5*) has described as the most sophisticated of any anime TV series ever, or the attractive characters drawn by **Yoshiyuki Sadamoto**—most notably, the Zen beauty of Rei Ayanami, whose appeal as The Face in Japan during '96 to '97 proved portable when she appeared on a popular bootleg T-shirt worn by a character on NBC's *Veronica's Closet*.

Like the majority of anime, *Evangelion* was made with no audience in mind but the one in Japan. Nevertheless, to the Westerners who see it, it has a special resonance. *Eva's* use of Judeo-Christian symbolism, eschatology, and esoterica are exotic and fascinating decorations for the Japanese, but they are part of the actual cul-

**“It’s good to be young.
You can bet all of yourself
on the smallest of hopes.”**

*—from *Adieu Galaxy Express 999**





be motivated to go out and correct them. As I make my own living writing stories that aren't true.... Look at all the things they said about the Beatles. If you do, you'll probably find a lot of stuff that was made up as well.... Well, it would be great if we could be as successful as *them*... The main thing the industry has learned from *Evangelion* and *Mononoke*", says Yamaga drily, "is that there's a lot of money to be made in anime."

Currently, Yamaga is at work on his very long-awaited second film, *Blue Uru*, while *Honneamise* has been rediscovered by astounded audiences in Japan. So far, Gainax is famous only in their own country, while Ghibli is being hoisted up before America in the four-fingered, white-gloved, massive mouse hands of one of the largest, most famous, most successful, and most revered institutions in the world, America's giant robot: the Walt Disney Company.

Those same hands, even gloved, are not likely to touch Gainax. Perhaps it says something about them that it was **Manga Entertainment**—whose parent company **Islandlife's Chris Blackwell** brought ska and reggae to the world—which released *Honneamise* here, while *Evangelion* has

come to the U.S. through Houston's **A.D.V. Films**, whose producer once ran the local anime club—the club the guys from NASA, literally right across the street, attended. However long Gainax manages to fly low and fast under the American radar, they may also resist simple definitions like "fine family entertainment" and "an ecological message" that Ghibli now risks from the media here (as if *Mononoke* were *FernGully*). Not, in the most important sense, that it matters. Whether in a thousand theaters or direct-to-video, Ghibli and Gainax are both here now, and part of the machine. But as creators, they will always be a world away.

They say, "To live is to change," as Anno wrote in a letter introducing *Eva* to the public in the months before its television premiere. Miyazaki had used that phrase at the very ending of the *Nausicaä* manga, when his heroine rejects the very concept of a cleansed and at-peace soul that can still be called human. There is a hard wisdom to walk by there. "If I trust his words, I can live," Shinji says of his father, just this side of the apocalypse. The director of *The Princess Mononoke* had tasted ashes in his own mouth. "This is the end of everything. The

forest is dying," *Mononoke's* heroine says. "This is not the end. We are still alive," proclaims the voice of its hero.

Recently, Miyazaki and Anno took an extraordinary journey together, an air safari across the Sahara in a vintage plane, which retraced the path of aviation pioneer and author of *The Little Prince*, **Antoine de Saint-Exupéry**. Landing in the middle of that desert from whose winds Ghibli takes its name, the two posed for a picture on a dune, striking the statuary poses of bearded, bespectacled leaders of the revolution. Miyazaki, with the dignity of a grey suit, the shade of a sensible hat, points straight ahead. Anno, in a black pullover, his bare head covered with scraggly curls, raises his arm high in the air; after a moment you realize he's doing an *Ultraman* pose. Sorry—it's not "look upon my works, ye mighty, and despair," because anime is just in the hands and the imagination; there's nothing ever there to see but the man. And it's not like they're going to stick around waiting to be covered by the sand—father or son, they've got places to go still. Whatever place you want to put them, they'll leave that somewhere behind. They prefer anywhere.

PART TWO

PICTURES FROM THE DROWNING WORLD: SCREAMING LIFE, AMERICAN OTAKU

Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands. For now thou numberest my steps: dost thou not watch over my sin? (Job 14: 15-16)

welcome to the land of real guns in real faces (June 4, 1996 and Before)

I suppose the closest I ever came to being shot to death was in an anime store.

When I was a student, I was once warned not to take a course with a certain professor

because he was too "intense." He wrote a poem that began, *Don't be afraid of dying*, and ended with, *Lie down here, next to Empedocles. Be joined to the small grains of the brotherhood.* I have brothers in Houston: Jean and Hip of **Planet Anime**, the first

all-anime shop in the United States, which opened in early 1994. There had been places before, across the country, where you could get your goods, but these were all comic shops, bookstores, and Japanese boutiques. Planet Anime was the first to be founded on anime alone.

Location: no dismal strip mall or shit-pile brick block—of which Houston has plenty, believe me. Planet Anime is flanked by tobacconists, antiquaries, even a store selling that shiny revived Swedish Modern, the scratched knockoffs of which you sat on in the third grade. Right near the sprawling Texas Medical Center, PA's racks of *La Blue Girl* and *Night on the Galactic Railroad* are pawed by both trauma surgeons in green and gangbangers in various, all part of an interlocking economy. Naturally, I was most pleased to have such a shop in my town of residence, so I went to the flower stalls on Main and brought a pot of yellow chrysanthemums with me as I first stepped through Planet Anime's doors. That's how I made friends with Jean and Hip.

Those were good times for the city. The *Rockets* won the NBA championship two years in a row; it was the first time Houston had ever won *anything*. We all watched the playoffs in the store, drinking Shiner Bock. We were even watching when the game was interrupted by the coverage of O. J.'s skedaddle *en el Bronco*. I remember how pissed we were, wanting them to get back to the game, to trade reality for spectacle. But reality, if you'll recall, was poorly lit and hunkered down in that Brentwood driveway. We popped another bottle, sighed, and, I believe, may have actually put a tape off the shelves into the VCR. All in all, I couldn't have asked for a better anime club.

It was those after-hours habits that got me into trouble, though. It was June 4, 1996, two days after A-Kon. I had gone

back to Cali, but had flown out for the convention and a visit afterward to H-Town. (An omen of the drama to come: I thought I saw **Bushwick Bill** out of **Geto Boys** at Hobby Airport; it may have been him—there can't have been too many other black, one-eyed dwarfs at the baggage claim). That night, I hung out at Planet Anime until nine, then went to Japon's across the street and had some eel. An assistant was closing the store; Jean walked by and joined me at the table. Looking over at the store, he saw a red pickup parked outside. He said something was going on, and told me to wait there. I didn't; I followed him. It was later established that the time was 9:20 p.m.

As soon as I stepped through the door, I saw the case where **Skuld** dolls raised their mallets in euphoric command. I saw the rows of *El-Hazard* tapes, the models of the Zaku and the Yamato. I saw the assistant with two other guys; a third was out of my line of vision; they were covering the store. One of them pulled a gun on Jean and myself. It was held casually at bent arm: if Kenichi Sonoda were to ask, it might have been a Ruger, or maybe a Beretta. They all had guns. They told me to go in back, under the **Urushihara** poster with the maid outfit and clamps, and get face down on the floor.

When I was a child, I was scared by a book we had about the **Tutankhamen** exhibition. It was a thick British volume, full of photos from the opening of the tomb; in 1920s black-and-white, it looked deader than dead. But how childish indeed were those fears. The young king still lies there, his desiccated corpse now in a plain glass box; they removed all the important parts to a museum. He is remembered; he lives today. Not for his pemmican skin but for his immortal portion, the goods of a famous character. About his body were heaped the shiny figurines of those he worshipped; on the walls they were painted flat and bright.

ture of the West, most especially America, where fallen presidents have prayer breakfasts, citizens claim in polls to still believe in the God of Abraham, and many fear a millennial Armageddon—or seek to help it along with a little fertilizer and gasoline.



6. It is as much a metaphor for the real violence within the intricate depths of Anno, who speaks with a different aspect of his persona through every character—from his cowardly, desolate "son," Shinji, who motivated him to create *Eva* in the first place to the cryptic, dictatorial "father," Gendo, who the driven director was said to resemble as the series neared the wracking end of its production. "Your God is dead/And no one cares/If there is a Hell/I'll see you there," is the scream from **Nine Inch Nails'** song "Heresy" off *The Downward Spiral*, an album that Japanese social critic **Kenji Sato**, late of M.I.T. and *The New York Times Magazine*, compares to the feeling of *Eva* as the series approaches the whirlpool of its end.

Eva isn't really about the end of the world, but the personal apocalypse. Some American fans had already made this association independently, or saw in Anno's intimations of suicide not **John Lennon** but **Kurt Cobain**. Certainly neither **Nirvana** or **NIN** had any direct connection with *Evangelion* or the show's musical style, but it's natural that young fans tied into the U.S. music scene should associate the show that, for once, really meant it, with the songs that in the four years before *Eva*'s 1995 premiere made pop music mean something again. Anno also made *Eva* as a comment on the desolation of youth and culture in Japan, but American teens don't have giant robots to command in their rage. They have semiautomatic rifles. It is the emotion, too, of *Evangelion*, that needs no translation.



7. Lots of people say they never knew which of the animated shows they watched as kids were from Japan. But

I was clued in from the very beginning that *Speed Racer* was Japanese, because my parents remarked upon names like K. Fujita in the credits. I never saw any real Japanese in Iran. There *were* Chinese though, looking, with their Mao jackets and red-star caps, just like they do in *Ranma 1/2*. My sister and I had blond hair then, and this seemed *ling-ling* to them; in the supermarket aisles they would pinch our cheeks as if pulling taffy. Actually, my parents thought the people doing the English voices in *Speed Racer* were themselves Japanese, an impression brought on by the show's notoriously bizarre syntax ("A secret

Having all he needed for eternity, he was sealed within. I looked peaceful, lying there in my suit, hands composed behind my head. If the bullet came, it would be through those hands: a surprise, as I suppose death always seems. I thought about none of those things then; I thought of nothing at all. But it was an interesting discovery that I felt no fear. Looking down at the nap of a cheap synthetic carpet with strong tiny loops of nylon, I was looking up at a shroud. As God is my witness, I felt what I felt whenever I look out a window seat into clear blue sky, where there is no end to vision and no point to fix your eyes upon.

Nativity scene (Racer-X in Iran)

My first memories are of *Speed Racer* and soap operas dubbed in Farsi: *Days of Our Lives* and *Another World*, in which Rachel sounds about as stupid as she does in English. In 1967, when *Speed* premiered in Japan under the shag-a-delic name of *Mach Go Go Go* (*go* means five, baby), my father was building moon rockets on acid: white shirt, tie, and security clearance. James Bond was having the hair plucked from his chest to look Japanese in *You Only Live Twice* and kids both here and there in the '60s knew the U.S. would lead the way to a future sky spangled with fifty times fifty stars, filled with Pan-American scramjets, flying to a Ho-Jos high above the Earth.

My daddy would drop before a showing of *2001* and then drive back to Hermosa Beach in his Corvette more on than ever. Everyone knows LSD came in stronger

doses in those days; I used to ask him how he could steer. He replied, "You just push everything out into a tunnel so there's a path of clarity." He was twenty-seven, the same age I am now. At raves nowadays you taste vinegar, a weak acid: things have gone sour. We burn in place with a roof over our heads and the plug-in stars shine in seizure. In 1973, when I was three years old, the future was all over and done with. The last American had walked on the moon the year before; the odd-and-even days at the gas station had begun. Japan began its switch from the petro-dependent heavy industry that had been *SPECTRE*'s cover in the Bond movie to the electronics and fuel-efficient vehicles that would fulfill their dream of world domination.

As for my family—we moved to our only Mideast friend with any oil: the Iran of **Shah Reza Pahlavi**. I liked Iran, and I always tell people so, because, admit it, you haven't gotten the best impression in recent decades. It's not some no-account pile of sand, but one of the world's oldest civilizations, a land of prophets and poets: **Mani**, **Zoroaster**, **Omar Khayyám**. The Magi, who journeyed from the East to attend Jesus's birth? Yep, Iranian. And the food is great; any country whose major exports include pistachios and caviar can't be all that bad. I grew up eating caviar; an odd thing I remember is that it was peanut butter that was exotic in Iran. The gift of Jif was appreciated.

Speed Racer was on the Armed Forces Radio-Television Service, which had the predictably-pronounced acronym AFRTS. I sat on godawful German blood-red felt furniture and watched it on black-and-white TV; I didn't know TV could *be* in color until we returned to the United States. AFRTS featured things like the Rose Bowl on time delay, public service announcements on how to use a fire extinguisher, a remarkably optimistic version of Watergate

and Vietnam, and, of course, the muzical call to prayer. There was a children's store hosted by a probably not very high-ranking soldier called Uncle Peewee. But *Speed Racer* wasn't on Uncle Peewee—*Speed Racer* was *prime time*. Even then, it had mass expatriate appeal for my countrymen, and the whole family was glued to the set, drawn into its timeless whirlpools of rubber, asphalt, chimps, candy, and **Jackie O** bouffants.⁷

I walked by the American Embassy every day on the way to school and never saw the future. I didn't know Mehrabad International Airport, which we were then to build, was lining pockets full of graft, or that inflation would run out of control, or that the Shah would be Audi in just a few years. I don't know whether the current dictatorship is better than the one it replaced. I don't know if they still show *Speed Racer* in Iran. I like to think that they've used computer graphics to give him a fringe of beard and Trixie a head scarf, and that Rex now works for the *Komitè-yé Enghelab-é Eslami* (the religious secret police), and that Flash Marker became **Salman Rushdie**, and that Speed stands over his flaming wreck at the end saying "Burn in hell."

fast train/slow train (The National Anime Movie Boy Love Association)

I didn't see any more anime until I came back to the U.S. It was the death of an ancestor that brought me home. My mother's father was a patriarch worthy of **Coppola**, except that he just made concrete; he didn't put anyone into it. He came, a Serb, from Bosnia-Herzegovina; you've heard of the people and the place. They say I get my sturdy peasant features from him, but I wish I had received more of his

character. The company he started with his partners poured stone over and under the waters of the west, coalescing dams and aqueducts, highways and bridges. He cut life to his size. It was death he was larger than; I watched them lower him into the common estate, six feet down, but he was six foot seven.

The slow cars of the Bay Area Rapid Transit ran through the San Francisco environs, where we settled after the funeral. BART seemed futuristic to an eleven-year-old, but it was, again, a '70s kind of future, one going nowhere at fifty-five miles an hour. I was into role-playing then, and San Francisco was certainly a good place for it. That the Bay Area became the sacred, flaming heart of Japanese animation in America should be no surprise to anyone.

February 13, 1982—the night before St. Valentine's, when love gets written down in secret. I am at a gaming convention held at the castle-shaped Dunfey Hotel in San Mateo, its Rankin-Bass ambiance just perfect for a boy whose voice is yet to break. *On the second floor is a small, narrow chamber. You see humanoid figures seated in rows before a dimly-glowing altar, from which a strange tongue emanates. A spark leaps from its clear face; you fail your saving throw.* On the TV set in the room, there it is: an episode of *Space Pirate Captain Harlock*.

You can see him in English in *Galaxy Express 999* and *Adieu Galaxy Express 999* and many other movies and shows. He was never famous here, like Speed, but Harlock is the great heroic figure of anime, walking with his shadow flag, fighting both alien invaders and the government of a decadent future Earth that has turned its back on space. Uncle Joyce compared him to Ragnar Danneskjöld, the freebooter of *Atlas Shrugged*. "Uncle Joyce" was the red-bearded ogre you see before the altar, beckoning you forward.

He and his wife were fixtures at gaming and SF conventions all over the Bay Area, where they would bring a stack of Betas and put on an anime medicine show. Heap big medicine. That night he was showing Harlock in the original Japanese: episodes once subtitled for broadcast in Hawaii, that hapa-paradise for otaku where you could grow up watching all the *Ultraman* you wanted. Joyce was a gentle Hell's Angel, a good-natured creature who invited me up to his castle, perched high on a hill in South San Francisco. I entered freely and of my own will a rickety and rotting Victorian, a redolent sepulcher inside, piled high with hoarded anime tapes and anime books and anime LPs. Like the leader of Iran's medieval cult of assassins, I had been drugged by the Old Man of the Mountain and given a vision of paradise in need of Mop 'n' Glo.

Such was the way for a lad: this was the graffiti of otaku generation 1982, an age of culture clubs doing the *kaiju* thing on MTV and bands named for *Barbarella* bad guys featuring men proudly wearing lip gloss and mousse. There was no Japanese animation section in Blockbuster; there was no Blockbuster. Uncle Joyce directed me to a scattered underground group, the first formal American anime fan club in existence; perhaps four hundred people belonged to it in all. Local meetings were held in the back of public libraries and, curiously, banks, and always seemed to be run by middle-aged men with my-side-lost-the-war mustaches and pocket protectors bearing the names of pre-consolidation aerospace firms. A strange double exposure would hit me as I beheld them, remembering my father's two childhood warnings: be wary in public bathrooms and never become an engineer.

Fortunately, I met two teens there, named Bruce Bailey and Brian Fountain, who ran a little refuge for their fellow run-

meeting is about to take place, secretly!) and frequent exclamations of "Ohhhhhhh." But, no, they were Americans, led by Peter Fernandez, the voice of Speed and the English scriptwriter. Fernandez is on record expressing pride that *Speed Racer* was a show in which no one ever got killed. Perhaps he was thinking of a different program; that fellow whose car jumps the railing and explodes into a million pieces even before the opening credits end certainly doesn't look well.



8. In those '80s days of manga such as *Banana Fish* and *Pineapple Army*, young Japanese wanted to spend time in New York City, for then

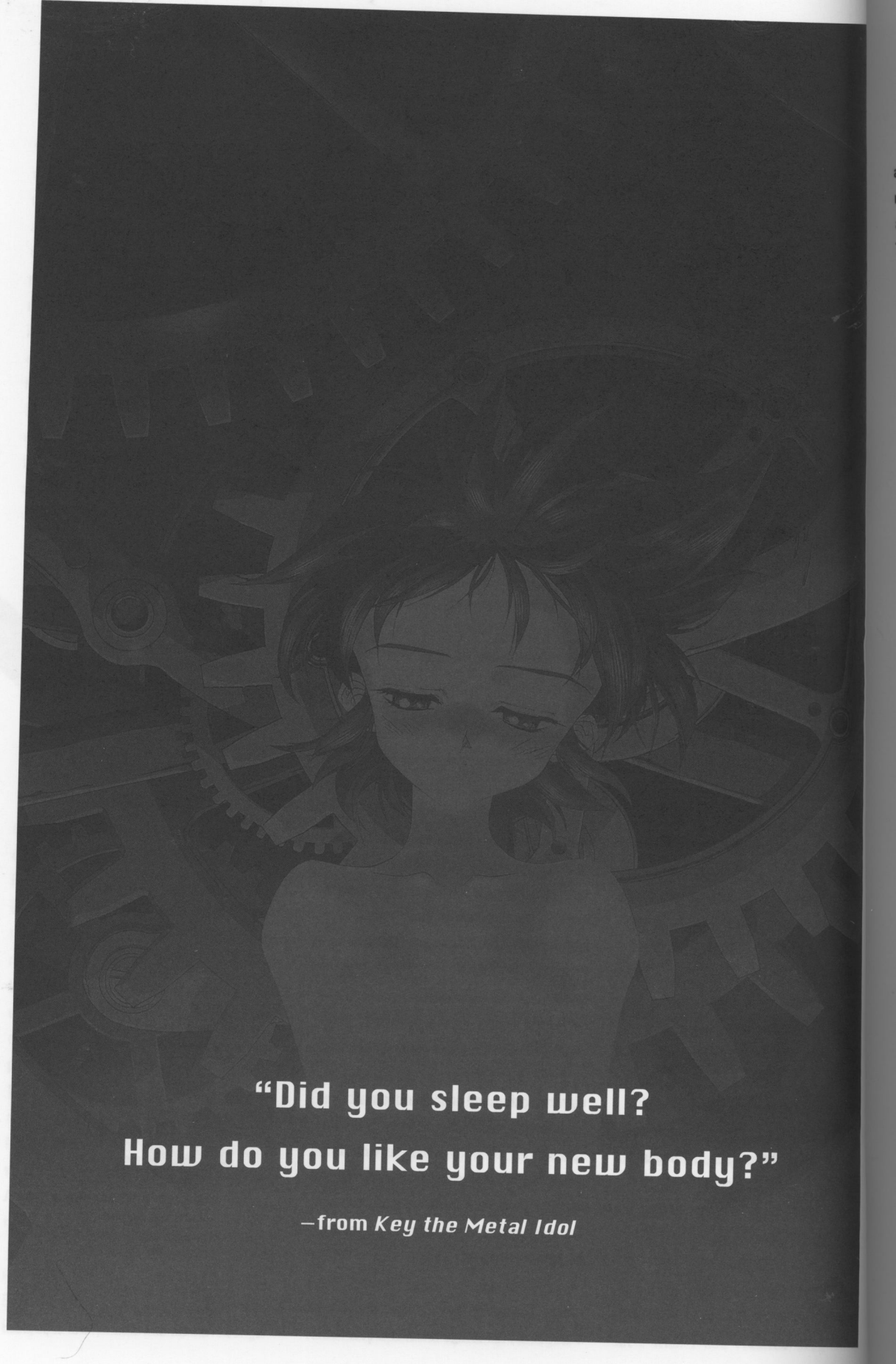
it was the high tide of the city's reputation as an exciting land of violent death. For them, to escape from NYC alive meant you had truly *lived*. A little strange, then, that we were running around Miramonte High School with Japanese play guns, called airsoft guns. These weren't like those pink and green paintball guns; airsofts fired 6 mm plastic pellets but looked *exactly* like the real brand name—be it Uzi, HK, or Smith & Wesson. Strangely, no one ever fussed; today, a school would call the cops faster than you can say "CNN Special Report."

Sure, even then, some suburban kid (city school violence, then as now, wore a collective face, and of a color poor for ratings) might pull a Jeremy out of their Jansport. You especially wanted to watch out for those who wore double straps, and of course they'd always find a copy of *The Bachman Books* in his locker. But while we did in fact have a murder in my class, it was by knife. Now that I think about it, that's very Japanese. It was a fairly famous murder, one written up in *Rolling Stone* and made into a TV movie starring *Tori Spelling*. A girl stabbed another for reasons of popularity, just like in *Heathers*. Our junior prom theme, by the way, was "In The Air Tonight", a slow dance number about death and deceit. Anyway, don't bother looking for airsoft guns here today; they were outlawed for safety reasons. Fortunately, it is still legal to buy the real ones.



9. From an industry standpoint, *Robotech* can be viewed as simply a failed scheme to market its accompanying Matchbox robot toys.

The commercials, often coming after some particularly dramatic moment, showed a crude animation of the characters blasting their way towards you with the musical slogan "Robotech to the Rescue;" it made anyone over ten feel like a fucking fool for watching. *Robotech* was written for a teen audience, but its major marketing was towards children, and in most American cities it literally aired at preschool



**“Did you sleep well?
How do you like your new body?”**

—from Key the Metal Idol

aways from that scene. They would show me copies of Japan's *Animage* magazine and play *Agnostic Front's Victim in Pain*. Through them I began to understand that this was a vital, golden age for anime, that things were *happening* over in Japan. It was they who introduced me to shows like *Lupin III*, *Dirty Pair* and *Fist of the North Star*, which we watched with many a "huh-huh-huh." They showed me that anime wasn't just an all-male world; there was heterosexuality and lesbianism as well in an anime called *Pop Chaser*. Years later, I would find out that *Evangelion's* Hideaki Anno worked on it, although he has written that he only did the explosions. Which explosions, he didn't specify.

It all made quite an impression at fourteen; *epiphany* would be the right dirty word. Imagination got the best of me once again. Even as I rode BART, delays from station to station and the days of my youth unwound at six-hour speed; I was a starchild, looking through glass at strange colors in a blur. The future was bright and garish: anime was my bullet train.

the '80s, it was assumed that the future belonged to Japan, that the Japanese would buy everything worth owning and make everything worth having. Perhaps someone should have remembered the '70s, when it was the Arabs with their oil who were going to rule the world. But then, those who fail to learn history are doomed to be employed.

In America, despite the fear that our cars were never going to start again, times were good.⁹ Eschewing the ruinous tax-and-spend policies of the Democrats, Reagan borrowed and spent, taking out a \$2 trillion student loan for us all. As with most loans of that type, we had a lot of fun with the money but didn't learn very much from the experience. The national debt was a worry for future generations. You might call it a tax on the unborn—fitting for a president who believed that they are people, too. Flush with cash, we coveted exotic imports like *Nastassja Kinski*—my first video girl ai—and the Porsche 928. A friend of mine's dad had one, and yes, we ganked it whenever we could, just like Tom Cruise in *Risky Business* (the first film I ever recorded off that open-admission sex-ed class of my generation, cable). President Reagan's own son, Ron Jr., satirized the movie when he hosted

Saturday Night Live. We all understood who our father *really* was; as *George Lucas* wrote in *The Empire Strikes Back* in the year Reagan took forty-four states: search your feelings, you know it to be true.

And we asked him for war toys. This was the age of *Voltron* and *Transformers*, and in an act of voodoo origami, the

hours; San Francisco, where it showed in the afternoon, was a notable exception.

Robotech also remains controversial from a creative standpoint, for far greater liberties were taken with its original material than would be considered acceptable today. The show's chief developer, *Carl Macek*, edited together eighty-five episodes from three separate series with plots that were unconnected in the original Japanese. Further, *Robotech's* voice-acting, narration, and music often left something to be desired. Yet on balance, I believe *David Chute* of the *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner* was correct when he called it in 1985 "the best new entertainment series on TV." Incidentally, a large part of the reason for *Robotech's* failure was Reagan's Treasury Secretary *James Baker's* idea that our trade deficit with Japan could be wiped out simply by making the dollar weaker against the yen. It didn't work, but the sudden currency plunge wrecked the international deals holding the *Robotech* production together. Although I am almost certain this is mere coincidence, *James Baker* later became secretary of state under Bush during the Gulf War.



10. I also bought a copy of *Giyūgun's Itsumi Sensation* (very mid-'80s in style, with its instant lovers still edged with that *Toshihiro Hirano* baby

fat) at *Animate* in Ikebukuro, and chucked it over the wall of the Canadian Embassy in a brown paper bag. Looking back, I'm not exactly sure why I did that. In Tehran, my mother always told me that if I was ever in trouble abroad, it was best to go to the Canadians for help. You may remember how they later smuggled some of our people out of Iran when things got bad. Their embassy in Tokyo was near my hotel, so it gave me a good feeling; perhaps I wanted it to be mutual. It might have been some kind of political gesture; all the Canadians I know love porno manga, but their government gives them a hard time over it. Commodity fetishism flies like a red rocket, as someone would say in an *Appleseed* postscript. Perhaps socialism *can* work as *Masamune Shirow* envisioned it in *Appleseed*: people first, biotech lingerie, and the best life for all. Those who complain that ex-radical *Mamoru Oshii* somehow added fan service when he directed *Shirow's Ghost in the Shell* have apparently never read the original manga. In fact the old pol made *Shirow's Kusanagi* as sexy as denatured alcohol—see my comments regarding the Planet Anime robbery below. The way I figure it, my action *had* to have been some kind of political gesture; as *Oshii* himself pointed out in his *Patlabor* OAV, *The Seven Days of Fire*, the problem with the Left is that it's always fighting with itself.

What am I dreaming of? (Ron and Yas's Amerasian Blues)

For Japan had become both my today and tomorrow. I had discovered the purest rock form of anime in the intersection of the immortal god-king of my generation, *Ronald Reagan*, and the one Japanese prime minister people tend to remember, *Yasuhiro Nakasone* (imagine a country where every president is *Gerald Ford*). In

Defense Department folded two thousand thousand thousand dollar bills into toilet seats and Trident submarines. Yet there was indeed more than meets the eye in *Robotech*, the epic tomorrow that Japan gave American TV in 1985. Its saga of soldier teens—who sometimes flew *Top Gun* pseudo-F-14s that transformed into big robots in a war against authoritarian aliens—would have seemed a product of its times, if the script hadn't been so subversive. Its characters constantly questioned the necessity of the war, which was often portrayed as driven more by ignorance and politics than the actual security interests of Earth. And, in the age in which the TV special *The Day After* challenged the official position that nuclear war was "winnable," *Robotech* portrayed the situation Richard Rhodes would later describe in *Dark Sun: The Making of the Hydrogen Bomb*: how honorable military virtues—duty and bravery—are mocked by the hideous machinery of technocratic, push-button mass destruction.

A haunting scene in *Robotech* has a soldier throwing his arms around a little girl, trying ineffectually to protect her as a fireball swallows them and their city. Compare to *G.I. Joe*, a contemporaneous American cartoon *d'combat* in which characters always ejected safely from their burning planes. *G.I. Joe* was known for tacking on a little safety lesson at the end of each episode, to qualify as an "educational show." The lesson's refrain was "Knowing is half the battle." *Robotech* let you spell out the lesson for yourself; its portrayal of battle was knowing. Some of the friends with whom I watched the show joined up after high school. One who was in the Marines during the Gulf War asked me if I thought it wasn't a "bullshit war, like in *Robotech*."⁹ Indeed, hardcore as *Robotech* was in its depiction of megadeaths, its focus was on the life of the common soldier; it

insisted that living was more interesting than killing. The cast often seemed too busy drinking, miscegenating, and cross-dressing to fight; *Robotech* had strong elements of soap opera.

And as Shirley Conran said in that other great romantic saga of the times, *Lace II*, "Which one of you bitches is my mother?" Who indeed? For me, at least, that hot milk had to taste of Prime Minister Nakasone. Whatever the wishes of Ron Reagan Sr., G.I., I was no son raised to battle but a love child, Baby, a wandering half-caste. Love? Tokyo seemed the most romantic city in the world to me, *the* place to be young and alive in the '80s, as Paris might have been to Americans in the '20s. How did I know? From anime—the today Japan gave me in *Noboru Ishiguro's Megazone 23*. It had much of the same staff and much of the same look as *Robotech*, but was set against a backdrop of Tokyo, 1985. Its locations were all based on real life, its cast the free-living teenagers—bikers, dancers, musicians, filmmakers—who had opted out of the cram-school-towards-corporation stereotype. And yes, in the story, a shadow of war hung above them. *Megazone* reflected images and dreams enough to serve as a mirror. But compared to my American suburbia, their reality—speeding down Meiji-Dori Avenue, riding double down Omotesando, cruising the circle of Yoyogi Park—seemed more like looking into a stream and seeing a stone, while the water rushed right over me.

Tokyo was the city; and when I ventured to the underage paradise of San Francisco's Hard Rock on Van Ness or even the Get-laid-ium on Kearny, it was images of Shibuya and Harajuku that flashed in my mind. When I went to Japan at last after high school, I visited every place I had seen in the anime.¹⁰ But until then I mapped it onto my own days. Sure, slacker brother, I too followed **Molly Ringwald** and **Andrew**

McCarthy through *Pretty in Pink*, but the truth Yui Takanaka and Shogo Yahagi from *Megazone* meant as much, or more. The night of the junior prom, you see, she and I played O.M.D.'s "If You Leave" in the car. We listened to *Megazone's* Kumi Miyasaka singing about pretending you're not sentimental. I didn't fully understand the words, but it was in that time, after all, when we were in the confusion of tongues. And at the dance, I remember that the only song that got anyone moving was **James Brown's** "Living In America" from *Rocky IV*, a movie all about a showdown between the U.S.S.R. and the U.S.A. But if you have a mouth for war, I believe you have a mouth for love. She drove me there, although I was old enough to learn.

The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night (Even in His Youth)

Pomona College loved anime—and why not? The year I entered, it was *Rolling Stone's* Hot Liberal Arts School. But I preferred to think of it then as the best school you could go to and still maintain a tan. Just look at my student I.D. and you'll use a big word: *Duuuuuuuuude*. My head had gone south; my feet, they pointed north, under the sun. On the lawn to my west was a garage-kit apartheid-protest shantytown. In the desert to my east, the student contractors searched in vain for that stand of Joshua trees on the **U2** album cover. I'd lay out, body on the bare white concrete, the quartz baking every side a strictly temporary brown. When I arose, there was a

sweat angel. No matter how dark I got, I always felt too pale. I cut a tragic figure: tanorexic. It was 1988—again, in the year of election, like the band said in “Desire.”

If it was supposed to be the time for going somewhere new, then Hiroyuki Yamaga’s *The Wings of Honneamise* and Katsuhiro Otomo’s *Akira* were the vehicles for it.¹¹ They seemed the youthful moment in the history of Japanese animated film. I never started an anime club at Pomona, as I never did in high school. In part because I still walked funny from those early club experiences, but mainly because I truly believed anime was for everyone. Viewed one way, it’s just TV shows, video, and movies; so why should you need a secret handshake to see them, any more than you do to watch *The Blues Brothers* or *Northern Exposure*? I would simply have showings of the anime on campus, as if it was extraordinary film and television.

Honneamise was a declaration of independence, a statement of industry and purpose; *Akira* a revolutionary manifesto with a terrifying unmatched visual power. They were the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, a visible hand guiding anime to the future of possibility. Their strength was my resolve, and I felt supremely confident that these two films would reach out and bring a student audience together. I was right about them; how little did I know I was wrong about me.

The shadow couldn’t be seen from the outside, the way I saw that *Honneamise* was haunted by the ghost contrail of the *Challenger* or that *Akira* was a bloody prescience of Tiananmen Square or that Japan’s 1980s bubble economy was iridescent and acetate-thin. I saw those things, because that’s the kind of thing I see. But this shadow was personal, not political: something had happened that I didn’t understand and couldn’t escape from.¹² The anime showings were always

a triumph, and I would repeat them again and again. But as those days went on, I began to feel strange, as if the full house was empty, and I would remain after it was, and I didn’t know why.

As with DVDs, I would start to view scenes from a private angle. The crowd would cheer *Honneamise*’s space shot as it curved into the sky, but I would see it as the view through the eyes of a supine man, perhaps one of those dying on the field. From this vantage, the earth is not flat but a bowl, and you lie at its bottom. For you, the world is curved, but the wrong way, and the sun at the peak of the column is rising, a white memorial, leaving you behind. And so my classmates would breathe the dark in and out in rhythm with the excitement of *Akira*, but I fixed upon a moment in which a street rally preached not a new world, but an imminent end to it. The chanting priests burned television sets. One was still plugged in, showing a commercial seen in close-up for half a second before it cracked and boomed on the pyre. Before the screen went black, matching the color of the column of smoke, the color that fell upon me. Like **Art Alexakis** out of **Everclear** says, it can come from out of nowhere; as he knows perfectly well, it never, ever does.

In class, I painted the scene as a triptych with the rally itself on the screen: panel one, burn; panel two, burn; panel three, explode. I finished it late one night, stumbled out of the studio and back to the dorm, arms wide and not steady, my face west, north, east, south. I couldn’t see where I was going; think about it—when you can find someplace blind, you know you really aren’t going to go anywhere new. I couldn’t hear what was coming; only my Walkman, spattered with fresh acrylic crimson. It was playing a song from 1967, an odd number that didn’t fit in at all with my view of that year, but I



11. The screening room for *Honneamise* was the Goldfish Bowl, a chamber of Walker Hall so named for its glass walls on all sides. They

slid open, and as you might expect, every once in a while someone would turn it into an impromptu auto showroom. I believe I remember **No Doubt** playing on the lawn outside one time; ska was never out at the Claremont Colleges. I hate to drop the cliché—but I liked them better before they got big. The screening room for *Akira* was the basement of Oldenburg Hall, the language students’ dorm: the idea was that by sleeping and eating together in one place, the experience would simulate the “total immersion” said to be so useful in learning a foreign tongue. “Maximum security” might have been a better term; Oldenburg is a square, blocky, *Führerbunker* of a structure. If the outside is fortresslike, the interior seems just as likely to foil invaders, for the ‘Borg (yes, they say our Paramount alumni named *them* for it) is full of mysterious half-floors that seem to drop you off at right angles to known space: imagine a building composed entirely of mezzanines. And no one has ever explained why Oldenburg has separate men’s and women’s *laundry rooms*. I think it actually has something to do with anti-fetish reformers from the Japanese section—while Americans invented the panty raid, Japan made it work as a mail-order business.



12. November 8, as the East Coast returns began to come in over AM, I was in an upstairs room with a friend’s Amiga 2000 laying down sub-

titles on *The Wings of Honneamise*. We went down to get monster cables and there was Dukakis conceding. He was larger than life, thanks to the forty-inch Mitsubishi. The friend wishes to remain anonymous to this day; I will say that he was the guy who introduced me at a very underage to drinking **Laphroaig** (“the Frog”) with an apple slice and water chaser, to **Steve Albini**’s old group, **Big Black** (“**Power When You Need It**”), and to Canada’s great hardcore band, **Dayglo Abortions**. It was another friend, **Mike Ebert**, who introduced me to *Honneamise*.

A tall and good-looking artist, he was one of the principal founders of *Animag*, America’s first stab at a slick anime magazine, of which, between 1987 and 1992, fifteen intermittent issues were produced. Both *Animerica*’s **Trish Ledoux** and **Julie Davis** were *Animag* editors for much of its run; my own involvement in the magazine was very small, and limited to its first issues, but it gave me the opportunity, when I went to Japan at sixteen, to go as Jimmy Olsen. Looking back, it seems fair for a number of rea-