

# Astro Boy

***Astro Boy***, known in Japan by its original name ***Mighty Atom*** (Japanese: 鉄腕アトム Hepburn: *Tetsuwan Atomu*), is a Japanese manga series written and illustrated by Osamu Tezuka<sup>[2]</sup> it was serialized in *Weekly Shonen Magazine* from 1952 to 1968. The original 112 chapters were collected into 23 *tankōbon* volumes by Kodansha. The English volumes would not become available until 2002 when the rights were licensed by Dark Horse. The story follows the protagonist, Astro boy an android with human emotions who is created by Umataro Tenma after the death of his son, eventually Astro is sold to a robot circus run by Hamegg but, is saved from his servitude by Professor Ochanomizu. Astro becomes a surrogate son to Ochanomizu who creates a robotic family for Astro and helps him to live a normal life like an average human boy whilst accompanying him on many adventures.<sup>[3]</sup>

*Astro Boy* has been adapted into three anime series produced respectively by Mushi Production and Tezuka Productions, with a fourth series in development. The manga was originally produced for TV as *Astro Boy*, the first popular animated Japanese television series that embodied the aesthetic that later became familiar worldwide as *anime*.<sup>[4]</sup> After enjoying success abroad, *Astro Boy* was remade in the 1980s as *New Mighty Atom*, known as *Astroboy* in other countries, and again in 2003. In November 2007, he was named Japan's envoy for overseas safety.<sup>[5]</sup> An American computer-animated film based on the original manga series by Tezuka was released on October 23, 2009. In March 2015, a trailer was released announcing a new animated series. The success of the manga and anime series led it to becoming a major media franchise consisting of films including a major motion picture, a number of soundtracks and a library of Video Games. The series was also among the first to embrace mass merchandise including action figures, collectible figurines, food products, clothing, stamps and trading cards. The franchise has earned 3 billion dollars<sup>[6]</sup> making it one of the highest grossing anime media franchises

Astro Boy has become one of the most successful manga and anime franchises in the world. The combined 23 tankōbon volumes have sold over 100 million copies worldwide making it the tenth best-selling manga series of all time. The 1963 anime series was an astounding success it became a mainstream hit on television in both Japan and the United States. *Astro Boy* has been praised for its importance in developing the anime and manga industry. It has been featured on numerous greatest anime of all time lists and has partially inspired other authors in the creation of influential manga.

## Contents

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**Production**

English-language version

Astro Boy
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- *Astro Boy* (2003 anime series)
- *Astro Boy* (2009 Hong Kong/American CG animated film)

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# Plot

*Astro Boy* is a science fiction series set in a futuristic world where robots co-exist with humans. Its focus is on the adventures of the titular "Astro Boy" (sometimes called simply "Astro"): a powerful android created by the head of the Ministry of Science, Doctor Tenma (aka Dr. Astor Boyton II in the 1960 English dub). Dr. Tenma created Astro to replace his son Tobio ('Astor' in the 1960s English dub; 'Toby' in the 1980s English dub and the 2009 film), who died in a car accident (first ran away, then died as he fell off a building in the 2003 anime [which happened after Astro Boy's birth]; vaporized by the peacekeeper in the 2009 film). ~~Dr.~~ Tenma built and adopted Astro in Tobio's memory and treated Astro as lovingly as if he was the real Tobio. However, Dr. Tenma soon realized that the little android could not fill the void of his lost son, especially given that Astro could not grow older or express human aesthetics (in one set of panels in the manga, Astro is shown preferring the mechanical shapes of cubes over the organic shapes of flowers). In the original 1960 edition, Tenma rejected Astro and sold him to a cruel circus owner, Hamegg (the Great Cacciatore in the '60 English dub). In the 2009 film, Tenma rejected Astro part-time because he could not stop thinking about his original son, but later during the film, Tenma realized that Astro made credit to replace ~~Toby~~; as a result, Tenma decided that he would readopt Astro.

After some time, Professor Ochanomizu, the new head of the Ministry of Science (co-head of the Ministry of Science in the 2009 film), notices Astro Boy performing in the circus and convinces Hamegg to turn Astro over to him. (In a retcon the story becomes far more violent and complicated). He then takes Astro in as his own and treats him gently and warmly, becoming his legal guardian. He soon realizes that Astro has superior powers and skills, as well as the ability to experience human emotions.

Astro then is shown fighting crime, evil, and injustice using his seven powers: 100K horsepower strength, jet flight, high intensity lights in his eyes, adjustable hearing, instant language translation, a retractable machine gun in his hips, and a high IQ capable of determining if a person is good or evil. Most of his enemies are robot-hating humans, robots gone berserk, or alien invaders. Almost every story includes a battle involving Astro and other robots. In one manga episode, Astro takes on the US Air Force, and stops it from bombing some innocent Vietnamese villagers (this was a time-travel episode, in which Astro went back from the 21st century to 1969).<sup>[7]</sup>

# Production

The *Astro Boy* series consists of several story lines. Frederik L. Schodt, who wrote the English adaptation of the series, said that, as Tezuka's art style advanced, Astro Boy "became more modern and cute" to appeal to his audience of boys in elementary school.<sup>[8]</sup> Schodt added that the page layouts used in *Astro Boy* episodes "became more creative."<sup>[8]</sup> When designing supporting characters, Tezuka sometimes created characters that were homages to Walt Disney, Max Fleischer, and other American animators. In several of the *Astro Boy* stories, the first few pages were in color.<sup>[8]</sup> Tezuka had a "Star System" of characters where characters from his other works played various roles in *Astro Boy*. Similarly, several characters in *Astro Boy* appear in his other works. Tezuka developed "a

type of dialog with his readers" since he developed so many stories during his lifetime.<sup>[9]</sup> Tezuka also had a habit of introducing nonsensical characters at random moments in order to lighten a scene which was becoming too serious; he sometimes felt trapped by the need to satisfy his young male audience's desire to see battling robots.<sup>[9]</sup>

*Astro Boy* was described by Schodt as an "analog," a world where man and advanced technology coexist. As a result, the plots of the *Astro Boy* stories often involve issues that stem from this idea. When *Astro Boy* was created in the 1950s and 1960s, Japan did not have the reputation for science and technology that it had gained by 2002. This made the "analog" nature of *Astro Boy* unique.<sup>[9]</sup>

The novels were originally published by Akita Shoten; 23 volumes of paper backs were printed. The stories do not appear in order by publication date, but in the order that Tezuka and the collection editors considered most appropriate. The collection begins with *The Birth of Astro Boy*, an episode that Tezuka wrote in 1975 to make the collection of stories easier to understand. The first *Astro Boy* story ever written, first published in April 1951, is in Volume 15. In addition, Tezuka often re-drew chapters that he had created earlier. Schodt explains that this is the reason some may appear "more modern" than others. For many of his older stories, Tezuka added introductory pages where he himself was portrayed as the narrator. The color pages were re-printed in black and white for the inexpensive paperback versions.<sup>[8]</sup>

## English-language version

The English-language version of *Astro Boy* is an adaptation of the Akita Shoten published works by Osamu Tezuka.<sup>[8]</sup> The artwork was flipped from the original Japanese version so the books could be read from left to right.<sup>[10]</sup> Frederik L. Schodt wrote the English-language version of *Astro Boy* and for most of the characters, he used the original Japanese names. Schodt believed that it was necessary to retain the Japanese names wherever possible, as the story was set in Japan. Schodt translated the nickname "Higeoyaji" to "Mr. Mustachio," and decided to use Astro Boy's English name. He explained that "Astro" is close to the Japanese name, "Atom", an English word. In addition, Schodt believed that using "Atom" in an American edition of the story would be "going too much against the history". Occasionally, names of Japanese characters had double meanings that were impossible to convey in the English-language translation. Schodt decided that keeping the sound of the names was important, especially when the names were famous. In those cases, Schodt tried to use the double meaning elsewhere in the translation. When dealing with minor foreign characters with humorous-sounding names, Schodt used equivalent English puns wherever it was possible.<sup>[9]</sup>

The editors of the English-language *Astro Boy* book did not remove content that could be perceived to be racially insensitive. They explained that in some cases people may be portrayed differently from how they actually were in 2002 (the year of publication of the English version). The editors said that some readers may feel that the portrayals contribute to racial discrimination and, while that was not Tezuka's intent, the issue needed to be explained as some readers may feel offended or insulted by the depictions. They felt that it would be inappropriate to revise the works, because Tezuka had died and there was no way to reverse what he created, and revising his works would violate his right as a creator. They also expressed the belief that editing or stopping publication of the work would "do little" to end racial and ethnic discrimination throughout the world.<sup>[11]</sup>

## Characters

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- Mighty Atom / Astro Boy
- Dr. Umatarō Tenma / Dr. Boynton / Dr. Balthus, Astro's father and creator
- Professor Ochanomizu / Doctor Ochanomizu / DrPackidermus J. Elefun head of the Ministry of Science
- Astro's parents, created by Prof. Ochanomizu in order to make Astro more human-like
- Uran / Astro Girl / Zoran Astro's younger sister
- Cobalt / Jetto, Astro's younger brother (appears as older brother in the 1960s anime)
- Chi-Tan / Ti-Tan, Astro's baby brother
- Higeoyaji / Mustachio / Shunsaku Ban / MrPercival Pompous / Daddy Walrus / Albert Duncan / Wally Kisaragi, Astro's schoolteacher and/or neighbor in the original manga and color 1980 TV series; a private detective and surrogate uncle for Astro in the 1960s TV series
- Shibugaki and Tāmao / Dinny and Specs, two of Astro's friends
- Chief Nakamura / Chief McLaw
- Inspector Tawashi / Inspector Gumshoe

- Tobio Tenma / Astor Boynton III/ Tōby Boynton / Tōby Tenma, the little boy Astro was modeled after who dies in the first episode
- Atlas, one of many villains that Astro encountered in his adventures

## Media

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The cover for *Astro Boy* volume 1 and 2 compilation by Dark Horse Comics.

### Manga

The manga was originally published from 1951 to 1968, followed by a newspaper serialization (1967–1969) and two further series in 1972–1973 and 1980–1981.

The original *Mighty Atom* manga stories were later published in English-language versions by Dark Horse Comics in a translation by Frederik L. Schodt. They followed the television series by keeping the character name as "Astro Boy", the name most familiar to English-speaking audiences, instead of "Mighty Atom." Names of the other characters, such as Doctor Tenma and Professor Ochanomizu, are those of the original Japanese.

Astro Boy (along with some of his supporting characters) appear in a series of "edu-manga" that tell biographies of famous personalities such as Helen Keller, Albert Einstein and Mother Teresa. Astro Boy and his "sister" appear in prologues and epilogues for each story and learn about the famous person from Dr. Ochanomizu, who acts as narrator for each installment. These manga were published by Kodansha, Ltd. from 2000 to 2002 with English-language versions published by Digital Manga Publishing and seeing print from 2003 to 2005.

From 2003 to 2009, Naoki Urasawa wrote the series *Pluto*, with help from Takashi Nagasaki. It adapts *Astro Boy*'s "The Greatest Robot on Earth" (地上最大のロボット *Chijō saidai no robotto*) arc into a murder mystery.<sup>[12]</sup> In a 2004 manga of *Tetsuwan Atom* written by Akira Himekawa, the plot, as well as the character designs, loosely followed that of the 2003 anime series. The artwork is quite different from Tezuka's original. This version of the manga was published in English by Chuang Yi and distributed in Australia by Madman Entertainment<sup>[13]</sup>

### Unlicensed comics

In 1965, Gold Key published a one-shot comic book, licensed by NBC Enterprises, based on the US version of the *Astro Boy* TV show. This was done without any input from Osamu Tezuka, who considered the book an unauthorized or "pirate" edition and denounced the publication as "horribly drawn".<sup>[14]</sup>

Astro Boy also appears in the premium giveaway series, "March of Comics" (# 285) also published by Gold Key in 1966.

Editorial Mo.Pa.Sa., an Argentine company, published the comic book *Las Fantásticas Aventuras de Astroboy* in the 1970s.<sup>[15]</sup>

In 1987, the Chicago-based comics publisher Now Comics issued their own version of *Astro Boy*, with art done by Canadian artist Ken Steacy, and again done without Osamu Tezuka giving input. The series was cancelled in mid-1988.

## Anime

### 1963 Series

The *Astro Boy* animated television series premiered on Fuji TV on New Year's Day, 1963, and is the first popular animated Japanese television series that embodied the aesthetic that later became familiar worldwide as *anime*.<sup>[16]</sup> It lasted for four seasons, with a total of 193 episodes, the final episode presented on New Year's Eve 1966. At its height it was watched by 40% of the Japanese population who had access to a TV. Only the first two years (a total of 104 episodes) were dubbed in English and shown in the US. (The other 89 episodes were never made available in English.)

## 1980 Series

A second full color remake of the original stories was produced by Tezuka Productions. The series premiered on NTV, October 1, 1980. A total of 52 episodes were produced and aired. The series was directed by Ishiguro Noboru. The series was released on a 7 disc compilation set by Manga Entertainment on November 22, 2005. A further "Greatest Astro Boy Adventures" DVD was released on July 18, 2006.

## Reboot series

In March 2015, a trailer was released announcing a new Astro Boy animated series under the production title "Astro Boy Reboot." The series will be produced by Caribara Productions and Shibuya Productions, alongside Tezuka Productions.<sup>[17]</sup>

## Films

In 1962, MBS released a live-action movie, a compilation film made up of episodes from the 1959–60 live-action TV series that came before the 1960s animated television series and, which loosely followed the manga. The opening sequence (approximately one minute) is animated, and the rest is live action. The movie was of 75 minute in duration.

Tezuka met Walt Disney at the 1964 World's Fair, at which time Disney said he hoped to "make something just like" Tezuka's *Astro Boy*.<sup>[18]</sup> A Japanese IMAX featurette was made in 2005, based on the 2003–2004 anime, titled "Astro Boy vs IGZA", but has only been shown in Japan.



Astro Boy in the 2009 CGI film

A computer-animated feature film version was released in October 2009 from Imagi Animation Studios.<sup>[19][20][21]</sup> The English dub features the voices of Freddie Highmore as Astro Boy and Nicolas Cage as Dr. Tenma. IDW Publishing released a comic book adaptation of the movie to coincide with the film's release in Oct. 2009; both as a four-part mini-series and as a graphic novel.

As of July 2017, a live-action film is in production with New Line Cinema

## Video games

Konami developed and published their Mighty Atom video game for the Nintendo Family Computer System in 1988. It is known for its extreme difficulty level attributed to a one-hitdeath rule.

Banpresto published the Zamuse developed release of their Mighty Atom for the Super Famicom system in 1994. Like its Konami developed cousin, this title follows events in the Manga series.

Sega published a pair of games based on Astro Boy. Astro Boy: Omega Factor for the Game Boy Advance drew from various elements from the series, while Astro Boy for the PS2 was loosely based on the 2003 anime with a slightly darker plot.

*Astro Boy: The Video Game* is a video game based on the Astro Boy animated feature film from Imagi Animation Studios. It was originally released on October 8, 2009 from D3Publisher.<sup>[22][23]</sup> for Nintendo's Wii and DS, and Sony Computer Entertainment's PS2 and PSP (the only version released in Japan). It features the voices of Kristen Bell and Freddie Highmore.<sup>[22]</sup>

# Reception

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The manga has sold approximately 100 million copies.<sup>[24]</sup>

*Astro Boy* became Tezuka's most famous work. Frederik L. Schodt, author of the English-language version of *Astro Boy*, said it had "extraordinary longevity and appeal across cultures."<sup>[9]</sup> Schodt said that many of the stories are "sometimes" of "uneven quality." Schodt said that as the time becomes closer to "a true age of robots," *Astro Boy* assumes more meaning.<sup>[9]</sup> Jeff Yang of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, in discussing Schodt's *The Astro Boy Essays*, said "while kids came for Astro's atomic action – just about every installment included Astro harrowing a fellow robot who'd fallen from digital grace with his fission-powered fists – they stayed for the textured, surprisingly complex stories."<sup>[25]</sup>

Astro ranked 43rd on *Empire* magazine's list of The 50 Greatest Comic Book Characters.<sup>[26]</sup>

The 1960s anime was named the 86th best animated series by VGN, calling it the first popular anime television series.<sup>[27]</sup>

The 1980s anime was extremely popular in Australia, Canada, and many parts of Asia, with two different English dubs. The dub shown in Australia (and to a lesser extent in the USA) was coordinated by Tezuka Productions and NTV and produced in the USA. Another dub was produced in Canada solely for broadcast there.<sup>[28][29]</sup>

While the 2003 anime did poorly in North America, having received poor distribution and having been heavily edited, including the removal of its orchestrated soundtrack and much of Astro's childlike innocence, it was better received in the UK on the BBC, where it ran in syndication for almost three years as well as other parts of the world such as Dubai based MBC 3.

On April 7, 2003, the city of Niiza, Saitama registered the Astro Boy character as a resident to coincide with his birthdate in the manga.<sup>[30][31]</sup>

## See also

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- List of Osamu Tezuka manga
- List of Osamu Tezuka anime
- Osamu Tezuka's Star System

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