

KONSHUU

vol. 55 #3.5

Tony 2 (2ny?)



Hoshimiya Ichigo and Yabuki Joe

Aikatsu! and Ashita no Joe

Art By Max R.

GENSHIKEN: PARODY TO PARODIED

Managing Editor



TONY T.

2nd Year, Economics and Data Science

Hato really should have won.

Genshiken as a franchise seems to pride itself as being an accurate picture of the times that it was released. The 'first generation' present in the series' first run embodies this, with every character being some sort of stereotype of otaku as of the very early 2000s. Most prominent is almost certainly Madarame Harunobu, whose erratic nature and otaku-aligned idiosyncrasies become increasingly endearing when paired with his crippling lack of social tact. This is not to say that the entire cast, with several intentional exceptions, were not otaku, as the series paid specific attention to making all its protagonists believably otaku whilst still having identifiable character traits. What makes Genshiken notable out of the myriad series parodying otaku culture and behavior is that it actually had a narrative with all of its central characters learning to grow and change as individuals. The series made use of its college setting (as opposed to the innumerable amount of high school anime) with most of its 'first generation' cast finding suitable careers for their personalities and interests.

Genshiken Nidaime ostensibly exists to document the changes in otaku culture in the late 2000s and early 2010s from a largely male-dominated, moe-obsessed crowd, into a far more diverse set of interests with the rising influence of female anime fans and fujoshi culture. With this 'second generation' having a cast almost entirely of female characters, directly contrasting the 'first generation', this interpretation is blatant to the point where the characters practically say it themselves. Within Nidaime, though, comes the added baggage of the original series' existing continuity. Surprisingly, the series mostly executes this flawlessly with most of the original cast either having something notable to do, or existing in a manner which does not impede the new characters' dynamic. This is important as Nidaime's tone is drastically disparate from the original series' running gag of anime nerds being awkward, instead opting for a more psychological dissection of modern otaku culture.

As one of the few characters from the original series to still be narratively relevant in Nidaime, the aforementioned Madarame could easily leave worries that the second season exists to profit off of repeating already existent content with a fan-favorite character. Indeed, many stories about otaku tend to fall into self-indulgent fantasy, glorifying the culture. Instead, Madarame's arc of sticking to the past, brought upon by his physical and emotional proximity to his alma mater even after having graduated, is incredibly well done. It works both as a sort of coming of age narrative (in spite of the character having long

since come of age) as well as a metatextual critique of ardent old-school otaku not adapting to the times. As such, the first half of Nidaime perhaps lacks the humor of the original series, but makes up for it with an engaging narrative. Adding onto this is the new lead protagonist Hato Kenjiro's struggle with gender identity, which, for the most part, was handled with tact, especially when considering the perhaps limited understanding in Japan of such concerns when Nidaime was released.



The biggest issues with Nidaime only seem to truly appear in its latter half, after Madarame's arc concludes with him letting go of his bygone youth, and Hato coming to terms with their identity and passions. In a series so keen on illuminating the reality of being an overzealous passionate fan of otaku culture, Nidaime's second half almost invalidates most of the praise I have given to the series. Lacking the series' typical levels of high self awareness, the manga plunges into an arc about Madarame obtaining a harem and having to choose someone to date. Beyond violating the series' previous ideas of not portraying otaku in a self indulgent manner, this arc is almost offensive in its abandonment of the series' romances coming in far more organic manners. In addition, Nidaime's subtle and thoughtful portrayal of gender identity dynamics also goes by the wayside, with Hato's character writing becoming increasingly erratic and inconsistent. Nidaime, in its second half, places its once multi-faceted and realistic characters into cartoonish scenarios which would not be out of place in the content it attempts to satirize.

Ultimately, Nidaime is still a fairly well done series as it does the seemingly unlikely and makes a 'next generation' narrative worthwhile both for newer and existing fans. Its second half goes against the uniquely reflective and self-effacing nature of Genshiken and develops a narrative lacking those subtleties. While this is not enough to where I'd be able to deem the series terrible, this greatly stains Genshiken's fairly consistent writing in that the series' (second) conclusion is entrenched in a rather contrived and conceptually unsubstantial buildup.

HATHAWAY'S FLASH: A BREATH OF FRESH(ISH) AIR



TONY T.

2nd Year, Economics and Data Science

Stipulation to "fresh" as it is, after all, still another *Gundam* entry.

Managing Editor

A common criticism of Japanese animation is that it too often caters to adolescents. Narrative elements like *isekai*, power systems, high school settings, and more are generally cited as signs that Japanese anime studios care more about capitalizing on teenagers with disposable income in comparison to the adult demographic. This isn't without reason—it's a rather obvious explanation, but it simply comes down to pressures inherent to firms in capitalistic economic systems. To those seeking more mature content in their media, it may be disappointing, but it's inevitable. In particular, though, many fans of the *Mobile Suit Gundam* franchise, myself included, have felt this shift with modern entries.

Taking place in alternate universes, the likes of *SEED*, *00*, *AGE*, or *Iron Blooded Orphans* are not egregious in that they don't affect the main continuity of *Gundam*. They do, however, serve as clear indications of industry trends. More alarming, then, could be the existence of series like *Unicorn* or *Thunderbolt*, which have somewhat juvenile writing and take place in existing continuity. This can be seen as weakening the original *Gundam* universe as being a somewhat gritty depiction of realistic wars and political struggles. While I don't subscribe to the idea that a series must keep a singular tone throughout, and I also believe that some criticism of these newer entries boils down to fans wanting to be taken more seriously than they currently are, this is alarming. The Universal Century is interesting not just due to excellent writing, but also because past narrative threads constantly return to influence the world in distinct ways. Thus, the canonicity of lesser content can perhaps be understandably unsatisfactory in muddling up the universe with inane plot points.

Char's Counterattack, released in 1988, features one such side plot. The main narrative of humanity's continued existence on Earth is interwoven with a rather melodramatic teenage romance drama. Perhaps in line with my previous defense of this film, I personally don't believe it's terrible, but I will concede that it is misplaced in a film about militaristic conflict. 2021's *Hathaway's Flash*, then, manages to use that weak narrative as the impetus for a rather compelling one that truly fits the Universal Century.

I would like to note that the film's origins are particularly amusing to me. An adaptation of a novel written by series creator Tomino Yoshiyuki, *Hathaway's Flash* is itself complex, but also erupts from a lineage of television series, films, tie-in novels, and other media. Frankly, it's an utter clusterfuck. After directing *Zeta Gundam* and *Gundam ZZ*, sequels to the 1979 *Gundam*,

Tomino wrote a novel sequel called *High-Streamer*, adapted loosely into *Char's Counterattack*. Following that film, Tomino again released a novelization, though this time loosely adapting the film's already divergent storyline. He then followed up this second novel with a sequel, *Hathaway's Flash*, which is again being adapted as an animated film trilogy, the first of which released in 2021. In short, *Hathaway's Flash* is the first film in a trilogy adapting a novel which is a sequel to a previous novel which is based on a film. The film is, in turn, based on an even earlier novel, which is the sequel to several anime series, many of which have their own novelizations which I'm fairly (but not completely) sure are irrelevant to the *Gundam* anime canon. All of the entries in the abovementioned chain of releases are directed or written by the exact same individual. It's quite bizarre.

Hathaway's Flash itself is extremely refreshing in the current day landscape of modern anime. Supposedly intended for middle-aged audiences, *Hathaway's Flash* features an incredibly dark storyline with a literal terrorist as its protagonist. Its narrative, like all of *Gundam*, focuses on war, but the film seems to put special attention onto the injustices and violations of human rights during peaceful times which propel conflicts to arise. It has the sort of complex web of connections one might expect of a modern take on war, given how international understandings of the subject have changed, especially in the last few decades. As such, it is utterly impressive that the original novels concluded in 1990, as its content still feels incredibly relevant in 2022. As noted by Tomino, it's a story that has just as much value to younger people growing up in the new millennium as it had for its intended audience. Its characters fall outside tropes, realized in their individual ideologies. While not perfect, with several bothersome plot points, *Hathaway's Flash* may, in fact, benefit from being released decades after its source material, as it truly stands out compared to most recent Japanese anime. It may be interpretable to the same sort of adolescent mindset that has been accused of perpetuating *isekai*, power systems, and high school settings, but it certainly doesn't cater to them.

Though *Hathaway's Flash* uses a tad bit too much CGI for my liking, it makes up for it with rather interesting visuals, particularly in terms of theme-relevant settings. The focus of the film, injustice, is brilliantly depicted with the film's contrasting, yet equally detailed, portrayals of idyllic modern urban skyscrapers and the desolate impoverished areas they tower over. As a whole, *Hathaway's Flash* is a wonderfully constructed film that works both as a look into a somewhat modern socio-political landscape in addition to being a worthy entry in the illustrious Universal Century. Though it still features a lot of the often-criticized wooden dialogue that Tomino Yoshiyuki has become known for, the first film of the *Hathaway's Flash* trilogy stands out dramatically in comparison to most of the anime releases of this decade. It genuinely excites me for the future, even if I am aware of the novel's ending.

A POORLY EDITED SHORT RAMBLE ON RAKUGO SHINJUU



TONY T.

2nd Year, Economics and Data Science

So I first wrote this article like around two years ago before I was a Konshuu writer lol

Managing Editor

As a non-artist, I view artistry as one of the most interesting professions out there. However, having been surrounded by art and artists my entire life, my lack of interaction in mediums of artistry as a creator has not been due to a lack of opportunity, but admittedly, from a lack of drive. Still, my usual contrarian stances do not preclude me from participating in the cultural appreciation for the all too common image of the starving artist. The cultural conception of the world's Vincent Van Goghs, Franz Kafkas, and Henry Dargers illuminate an at times pitiable lifestyle where all is sacrificed in the pursuit of creation or honing an art form. Yet, it is that dedicated, focused, drive towards the pure goal of expression that makes these figures cultural icons of admiration long after they pass.



Shouwa Genroku Rakugo Shinjuu fiddles with this type of narrative beautifully. Weaving a fine tapestry of a lineage of performers through almost an entire century, it examines the way in which artists attempt to find their voices, how they cope with setbacks, and ultimately, how they view their legacies. What complements this is the obscurity of the art the central characters practice. The narrative itself addresses the decreasing relevance that the performance art of rakugo experiences throughout its long spanning story. *Shouwa Genroku Rakugo Shinjuu* expertly shows the struggling artist from numerous angles, from a passionate ex-convict to a talented but rebellious man attempting to toy with a traditional art form. These

perspectives feed into an examination of the appeal of live theater and artistic performances themselves. This is all brought together with extremely emotional and skilled vocal performances that bring the characters to life as well as a stellar sense of aesthetics, which adeptly portrays the series' visual motifs beyond its literal narrative happenings.

The unique art of rakugo at its core is brilliantly portrayed with the in-universe performances themselves. Essentially, rakugo performances simply consist of a storyteller dramatically orating a story whilst kneeling in the middle of a stage. Multiple characters in *Shouwa Genroku Rakugo Shinjuu* will perform the same story, yet each time, the series skillfully uses voice acting and visuals to demonstrate just how unique each rendition is. The slow pace of the series, coupled with major time skips, allows for its characters to be shown honing their craft in immense detail while still allowing for the overall trend of the art's popularity to be evident. In that way, *Shouwa Genroku Rakugo Shinjuu* is excellent in showing off the unique art of rakugo from both an artist's perspective—toiling over how to improve individual performances—and from a viewer's perspective with how rakugo changes throughout the century that the series depicts



In short, *Shouwa Genroku Rakugo Shinjuu* fostered in me an even stronger appreciation for the universal concept of the struggling artist through an art form which I did not care for (nor even know of) prior. I believe the series excels in showing the trials and tribulations of artists to the general public, making it perhaps the best love letter one could give for such an obscure and unique performance style.

THE PROTO-EVANGELION

Managing Editor



TONY T.

2nd Year, Economics and Data Science

Irony comes with how I argue that *Nadia* merits discussion beyond its connection to *Evangelion*, yet my title mentions it in relation to *Evangelion*.

In today's climate of anime being released in seasonal batches, it sometimes feels as if nothing has staying power. A series may be discussed to death while it airs, but the moment a season ends, viewers often just abandon the series they spent months praising in favor of the new shiny toy. Obviously, this is a generalization. Certain shows remain relevant, though they are clearly exceptions.

One such anime is Anno Hideaki's seminal classic *Shinseiki Evangelion*. Being released in 1995, it may initially seem bizarre as to why the series is still actively discussed, but one needs only to look at its unparalleled impact on both Eastern and Western otaku culture to understand that *Shinseiki Evangelion*'s notoriety is extremely rare. Another simple reason would be its somewhat recent Netflix release, allowing international audiences easy access. Ignoring the quality of Netflix's release, *Evangelion* was, frankly, one of the best choices the platform could have chosen to represent Japanese animation. I hate the term 'timeless', but *Shinseiki Evangelion*'s themes and characterization are universal to an extent where that term is simply fitting. Yet, as *Evangelion* continues to be praised to death by everyone (including me), I believe another series has the same, if not more, qualities without the proportionate acclaim.

Released half a decade before *Shinseiki Evangelion*, Anno Hideaki's prior work, *Fushigi no Umi no Nadia*, is similarly ubiquitous in its appeal, characters, and narrative. A very, very, loose adaptation of Jules Verne's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, *Nadia* is in many ways a classic adventure story. In particular, its pacing and narrative structure is heavily reminiscent of Miyazaki Hayao's *Tenkuu no Shiro Laputa* and *Mirai Shounen Conan* in that it features its protagonists in an adventure spanning many different and unique locales with a rather upbeat tone, barring a darker finale. The series' vibrant coloring also harkens back to Fuji TV's World Masterpiece Theater adaptations of novels, fitting due to *Nadia*'s own (very slight) connection to classic literature. Beyond that, *Nadia* features rather detailed characterization. Director Anno Hideaki would become known for this in *Evangelion*, yet *Nadia* rather solidly expounds on its characters and makes many of them believable personalities. This, in turn, makes the main romantic dynamic between the titular *Nadia* and deuteragonist Jean all the more engaging. I wouldn't say *Nadia* reaches the complexity of character development that its later successor would reach, but the series' characterization perfectly fits

an adventure series to where it isn't distractingly prominent or missing altogether.

Calling *Evangelion* the predecessor to *Nadia* isn't just something I said for the sake of chronologically organizing Anno Hideaki's filmography, though. Many elements that *Evangelion* is notable for can be clearly seen, if not better utilized, in *Nadia*. Much has been said about *Evangelion* and its use of long, drawn out shots trapping the viewer in the same anguish as the characters. Yet, *Nadia* features the same technique, but used in perhaps more poignantly. One notable example could be in a scene wherein a character is trapped in a part of a submarine with his death imminent. Said character makes a brave speech before cutting off communications, only to scream out in anguish moments later, completely undoing the front he had just put on. The "camera" (anachronistic phrase, I know) then stays as the rest of the cast silently tries to decompress the innumerable thoughts that the events they have just witnessed likely lead to. The relative lack of complex movement is hugely beneficial, as it forces the audience in the same hugely uncomfortable position as the characters. Direction in a television anime akin to this is, again, something that Anno Hideaki is now renowned for, but I would argue it actually has more weight in *Nadia*.

Any discussion of *Nadia* would, however, be remiss to ignore the most controversial part of the series, the filler episodes between episodes 23 and 34. With the series being, in my view, nearly flawless from episodes 1-22 and 35-39, this is still a major portion of the series that cannot be overlooked. For the sake of brevity, because I'm nearing the maximum word count for this one-page article, I'll just say that personally, though those episodes are a drag and prevent *Nadia* from being uncontestedly a masterpiece, they ultimately matter very little. Frankly, though I don't recommend this on a first watch, they can be easily skipped. That doesn't make their inclusion better, but it does illustrate that they're just rather meaningless.

When even mainstream outlets are discussing *Evangelion* and the impacts of Anno Hideaki's famous depression leading into the series, it is at least somewhat disheartening that the source of his depression, the production of *Nadia*, is brushed aside as simply a part of *Evangelion*'s background. Though I rank *Evangelion* higher based on tightness and overall consistency, I view *Nadia*'s peaks as being more fulfilling. *Fushigi no Umi no Nadia* is very much one of the most impressive anime I've ever seen, being something of an era piece (as it is set in 1889) while also being as exciting as any modern action-adventure series. It is an absolute timeless classic, as much as it pains me to use both of those phrases, and arguably more interesting than even the goliath that succeeded it.

REALISM IN MEDIA (OR, AT LEAST)



TONY T.

2nd Year, Economics and Data Science

[insert some pretentious quote that says a lot about society or something]

Managing Editor

When it comes to author Asano Inio's works, *Oyasumi Punpun* is the exception, rather than the rule, in terms of my personal thoughts regarding it. First, though, I should preface this by saying that I consider Asano a brilliant artist due to his keen attention to detail. His artstyle is thus wholly unique, being extremely realistic while keeping a tinge of cartoonish flair. To sing his praises as I just have, though, is frankly unnecessary. With few exceptions, his work receives overwhelmingly great praise. Part of this likely has to do with how Asano's visual tendencies also translate to his storytelling. The majority of Asano Inio's works employ far greater attempts to adhere to sobering realities which stand in opposition to the majority of manga and otaku-gearred media, which are often fantastical works of semi-indulgence. With the majority of his work focusing on the idea that reality is far more grim than the candy-colored cartoons proliferating otaku culture, I could be tempted to say that Asano Inio is a valuable antithesis to indulgent media in the same way that one could perhaps refer to Anno Hideaki or Tomino Yoshiyuki.



However, my biggest issues with the majority of Asano Inio's works come with how they seemingly don't convey meaningful commentary or unique character arcs. While it is great to imply realistic ideas within narratives, I find that a good deal of Asano's non-*Punpun* work falls into the trap of replacing prop-

er structure and interesting themes with realism. Put simply, none of his work (again, sans *Punpun*) seems to have a point. Often, such as in *Subarashii Sekai, Nijigahara Holograph*, or *Solanin*, Asano Inio ends his works with characters in a state of hopelessness. Said hopelessness is either the result of societies being flawed in construction, or the inherent evil present in the individuals populating these manga's casts. Yet, while these series are far from terrible and are rather refreshing from the status quo, Asano Inio often seems unwilling or incapable to present a thematic message in accompaniment with the misery in his narratives. There is very little actually stated beyond the increasingly stale idea of the struggles of being an adult in contemporary society, a theme which a large amount of Western media already touches upon more meaningfully.



I have often heard fans of Asano Inio defend this under a justification that the lack of meaning in human existence is in of itself the meaning of the aforementioned works. This argument makes little sense to me, however, as the general structure of narrative across various cultures and in the history of human existence points towards the fact that narrative as a social vehicle has value in its ability to convey ideas. In my eyes, then, stories generally need structure and pacing, ebbs and flows, in order to be considered as such. That's what has given narrative such power over human existence. Obviously, narratives with relatable struggles can imply certain messages, but realism really only is a flourishing that makes a structured narrative more brilliant than it might have been prior. Stories all need a point. Thus, this defense of Asano Inio feels rather unimportant when discussing his works in the context of storytelling.

Seemingly, these complaints of mine are well addressed in Asano Inio's *Oyasumi Punpun*, which I consider one of my favorite manga of all time. A perfect representation of Asano's visual

LAST IN ASANO INIO'S WORKS)



and narrative styles, *Punpun* mixes realistic human struggles with bizarre side storylines of outlandish cults just as smoothly as it has a semi-anthropomorphic duck representing its titular protagonist in an otherwise realistic world. In a narrative showing the worst the world can offer, whether it be addiction, adultery, suicide, or a dozen other concepts of similar nature, *Punpun* also features a side character named Ass Hamburger. More importantly, though, *Punpun* feels meaningful beyond its somewhat surrealist depiction of an otherwise dour reality. There is a point to the suffering that the titular Onodera Punpun encounters in his life beyond the hackneyed "this story is depressing because life is depressing". In fact, while not terribly divergent from the conclusions of other Asano works, *Punpun* still manages to end with a somewhat uplifting message.

A part of this could be due to *Oyasumi Punpun's* extended length in comparison to, say, *Subarashii Sekai, Nijigahara Holograph*, or *Solanin*. It has the chance to elaborate on its ideas because the audience sees the progression of *Punpun's* life. As opposed to the majority of Asano Inio's previous works, which begin with their protagonists at their rock bottom, *Punpun* starts early in its protagonist's life. What ensues, then, feels truly tragic given how minor flaws in a young Onodera Punpun develop into greater and greater Achilles heels as he comes of age. That phrase, coming of age, actually describes the point of *Punpun* rather well. The series seems keen on depicting the maturation of an individual in a (somewhat) modern age, with all the trials and tribulations along the way. And yet, while the series is a downfall of sorts, it features a surprising amount of levity with its aforementioned juvenile comedic relief, coupled with a rather dark sense of humor to accompany its rather dark tones. This is not to say that *Punpun* is immaculate, as plenty of it is

extremely disturbing in its portrayal of certain subject matter. However, I wouldn't deem much of its narrative as being in poor taste, or trivial, as plot points feel like they flow into each other rather organically. All of this amounts to *Punpun* being a rather poignant work. All of its ideas actually form a rather cohesive understanding that its author attempts to convey.

If I were to pinpoint the message within *Punpun* that particularly resonated the most with me, it'd likely be its take on nostalgia. Rather than the rose-tinted understanding of nostalgia that listening to American millennials talk about *Pokémon Red* and *Blue* might entail, *Oyasumi Punpun* has a nuanced approach. Its characters confide in nostalgia as a simpler time, yet their escape back to their childhood conceptions of the world read more horrifying than sentimental. Both Onodera Punpun, and his childhood love interest, Tanaka Aiko, utilize nostalgia to cope with their dour realities. They find solace in each other as adults partially because the idea of each other they've built up is far more powerful than what each other actually has become. The realization that Aiko comes to, prior to and resulting in her suicide, is particularly valuable to this dynamic. *Punpun's* idea of nostalgia, like its other themes, then, all play into its core idea that living in the present is far more difficult in comparison to escape, whether figurative via nostalgia, or literal, by way of suicide. In this particular context, as well as every other context *Punpun* explores life in, it brilliantly imbues realism with purpose in spite of itself. It is perhaps the pinnacle of Asano Inio's style of writing, overcoming the flaws inherent to a narrative solely focused on being realistic, and delivering themes that are not only meaningful, but rarely seen in visual media.





THE BEST SLICE OF LIFE



TONY T.

2nd Year, Economics and Data Science

The UK version is fine, but never developed its setting or characters to the extent of the US version

Managing Editor

Beyond the obvious fact of fun characters and interactions in spite of being in a mundane, realistic world, the thing I look for the most in slice of life media is how they will make me familiar with a completely foreign location. *K-On!* notably filled the characters' schools with small, interesting details that made it lived in, such as the turtles throughout the location and the bust of the school's founder. Similarly, *Aria* fleshed out the city of Neo Venezia with strange and interesting small legends that made the setting feel lived in. Interestingly, both those series fleshed out their settings in the background of their ostensible goals of telling stories about characters growing and developing as individuals, whether it be as a group of friends (who happen to occasionally play music) or as tour guide gondoliers. However, whenever these shows are brought up, I hardly hear any mention of my favorite piece of media in the same genre, the 2005 US adaptation of *The Office*.

Of the media I've seen, *The Office* is one of the most effective in making an audience accustomed to the setting, as the majority of the series' episodes take place in the Scranton Dunder Mifflin offices. With the majority of the show's runtime spent in the cluttered building of desks, the office's intricate architecture and the location of its inhabitants is densely explored. Any viewer will likely be able to point out where Toby sits, or how the detached room, first inhabited by Jim upon his promotion to co-manager and then later occupied by Darryl, shifts other characters' desks around. This is likely also due to how, by nature of the show's illusion of reality through its mockumentary style, the details are generally kept as accurate as possible, meaning that characters are set specifically in one location, with their moves generally being announced as, at least, an episodic plot point.

The Office's attention to detail in its setting in this manner also helps show the progression (or, in certain cases, regression) of the characters' work lives. Unlike *K-On!* or *Aria*, the characters of *The Office* generally do not gain much joy from their professions and don't have the liberty to move around as they please. Most of the excitement in the series comes in spite of their workplace, not because of it. Thus, most of the setting changes happen non-arbitrarily; when the second office room is constructed specifically for Jim, it hints towards his progression in his career. Similarly, when Darryl moves into that room as his

first time in the proper office, it shows just how much success his ingenuity has brought him in the workplace. In a different way, Ryan's shift from the sides to directly in front of Michael's office, next to Dwight, is noted in-universe to be directly tied to his promotion from temp to salesman. Ryan's move above the Scranton hierarchy is conveyed through his leaving the office altogether, generally being shown with the backdrop of a skyscraper, hinting towards his higher station. Then, of course, when Ryan falls from his position, he is relegated to Pam's original, closed off, receptionist desk, before being sent to the very back of the office. These dynamics and more accompany *The Office*'s great character writing and in-character gags to elevate the series to be a masterpiece in the same aspects that make beloved anime like *K-On!* and *Aria*. It isn't that these changes are in themselves that interesting, but they are themselves part of what makes the setting endearing and memorable. *Aria* had its characters occasionally wander off into Neo-Venezia to give the feeling that within its world, wondrous mysteries could potentially lie behind any corner. Similarly, the dynamics of *The Office*'s Dunder Mifflin Scranton play around with its setting and manage to make a seemingly repetitive backdrop refreshing, and in due time, endearing.

Beyond this, there's a real sense of attachment that viewers develop towards many setpieces in the Dunder Mifflin Scranton office. For instance, the classic Jim Halpert-Pam Beesley dynamic makes the gap between his original desk and her receptionist corner a memorable point of focus, which the show's camerawork often focuses on to evoke a wide variety of emotions. Similarly, the picture of Dunder Mifflin which Pam paints in the season three episode "Business School" is often called upon, most famously as the final lingering shot in the finale, before fading to the building itself. The audience is conditioned to feel at unease when Ryan takes Jim's original desk in the season three premiere, as it completely shakes up their understanding of the setting. The absence of Jim at his usual position, and the presence of a different person at that same spot, turns the situation comedy formula established in thirty prior episodes upside down. Similarly, Pam's move to the desk cluster shared by Dwight and Jim around season 5 both figuratively and literally brings her closer to her love interest, figuratively matching her character arc of being more true to herself. Just as the majority of Japanese slice of life anime call attention to the sentimentality viewers develop towards their settings, *The Office* treats its setting in much of the same way. As such, the lack of attention slice of life fans have towards non-animated media is disappointing, due to the abundance of brilliantly written slice of life dynamics in series like *The Office*.

THE PRIMARY ISSUE I HAVE WITH THE PATLABOR FILMS



TONY T.

2nd Year, Economics and Data Science

Robots are dumb, characterization is better.

Managing Editor

Among the various franchises of Japanese animation that I'd consider myself a fan of, the *Patlabor* franchise is perhaps the only one where my opinions do not vary drastically. If asked, I could probably name and rank every entry based on my personal taste, but said rankings, with the exception of the third film, would mostly be comparative rather than definitive. A purposeful twist on the expectedly high-octane nature of most robot shows, *Patlabor* stands out by focusing not on world-ending catastrophes, but rather procedural cop antics. In a way, the majority of *Patlabor*, particularly the two OVA series and the television anime, falls well in line with what is now considered the slice of life genre. With its endearing cast of lovable fools in a down-to-earth setting where giant robots are an increasingly common utility, what comedy there is that isn't derived from the central cast's humorous interactions generally comes from their frivolous use of the titular *Patlabor* robots. What could have been an ill-fitting combination actually worked surprisingly well, as I highly value the majority of serialized *Patlabor*. At least some of the franchise's success was likely derived from director Oshii Mamoru, who also directed the original *Ghost in the Shell* and various parts of *Urusei Yatsura* (which... I have [some thoughts](#) about).

As with the majority of successful anime properties airing on television, *Patlabor* also received several feature films. Excluding the third film, which is less so a *Patlabor* film and more a film that happens to take place in the same continuity, the *Patlabor* cinematic entries are just as lauded as the serialized series, if not more so. In spite of having far longer run times by nature of not being divided into 20ish minute chunks of television which accommodate the series' slice of life antics, the films succeed. At least part of this success is due to the two *Patlabor* films departing drastically in their tonality; rather than featuring a mix of engaging robot action and buddy-cop shenanigans, both *Patlabor* films take their narratives far more seriously. To say that this doesn't work would be a lie. As much as I'd like to be a contrarian, I have little disagreement with the majority of viewers who consider both films, but especially the second, in high regard. On 3x3 threads, for instance, said second film is a regular mainstay thanks to its heavy focus on realistic geopolitical military concerns.. It is an extremely well written and plotted piece of fiction that draws upon concerns not only of its time in 1993, but also starkly applicable to numerous instances of modern militaristic struggles.



In spite of the overwhelming praise that these films receive, which I don't disagree with, I do find that they miss the point of the *Patlabor* franchise. By excluding the more pedestrian comedy scenes, the films lose the character which makes *Patlabor* endearing. I wouldn't say that the *Patlabor* films are worthless - after all, they're wonderfully presented and extremely poignant films. But they don't embody the unique fun that the serialized *Patlabor* series has with its simple character interactions and overall tonal levity. The most extreme comparison that can be made would be between the films and the second OVA series, *The New Files*. Conflict in *The New Files* almost always boils down to rather silly gags about characters that embody some comedic character trait, with very few external threats outside of the main cast. As such, while *The New Files* may not be a universally profound social commentary like the films, it is rather compelling as it develops its cast interestingly. Of particular note is an episode where, without words, the series beautifully symbolizes the friendship between two characters whose routine generally would suggest otherwise. *The New Files* facilitates these interactions with its lowered stakes and limited focus on complex political drama. In my view, this is the soul of *Patlabor* which ultimately gets somewhat left behind in the feature films.

I should again stress that I greatly enjoy both of the *Patlabor* films to a large extent as they are both narratively satisfying and have great production values. Yet, given the high bar the franchise has always had in both of those aspects, I naturally drift to thinking about not what is present, but what isn't. Both films are great films by themselves, but as part of *Patlabor*, it's at least slightly disappointing that they do not emphasize what makes the franchise unique. Even without being a masterpiece commenting on military struggles far beyond any expected scope, *The New Files* better embodies the series' fundamental dichotomy: the contrast between down-to-earth interactions of goofy policemen and the dramatic stakes of a robot anime.

RUMINATING ON BAKUGAN BATTLE BRAWLERS



TONY T.

2nd Year, Economics and Data Science

I'm still really salty over all the money I wasted on Bakugan.

Managing Editor

I don't often discuss things I'm nostalgic about, or, at least not under the context with which I was nostalgic for them. Yes, I've [written](#) about *Yu-Gi-Oh! Duel Monsters GX*, a series I would, to put it lightly, profess to have nostalgic attachment to. Yet, I wrote about it via an understanding I developed far later than my initial experience with the series, viewing it in a completely different paradigm. However, *Bakugan Battle Brawlers* is a series which I cannot and do not wish to write about from any perspective other than my initial one. Having first encountered the series in elementary school, my memories of the later seasons are admittedly scattered, a fact I at least partially attribute to the overblown, world-spanning narratives of said later parts. Yet, the first season, *Bakugan Battle Brawlers*, stands out in my mind for one particular reason: the fourth cour twist wherein the central rival, Masquerade, was in reality a disguised member of the protagonists' team, Alice. It's perhaps the first thing anyone remembers from the series.



The twist of Alice being Masquerade simply works. It doesn't feel like something that was randomly decided in order for the series to have a shock twist. Rather, it feels organic due to clear foreshadowing. Namely, the titular *Bakugan Battle Brawlers* consisted of six members, including Alice, five of which represented five of the six elements present in the series' aggressively pushed marketing ploy power system. The sole exceptions being Alice, in that she never fought, and the dark attribute, which the previously mentioned Masquerade represented. Be-

yond that, Masquerade wore rather concealing clothing, and, as could be expected, wore a mask covering much of his facial features. Coupled with several other plot points that pointed at this, along with fairly good explanations after the fact, and it's not hard to see why this twist had the impact it did. Not only did it have the obvious shock value of a previously heroic character being revealed as a far more morally gray one, but the justification for it made sense as well. Alice being Masquerade filled in plot holes rather than opening them, as many twists of this nature tend to do.

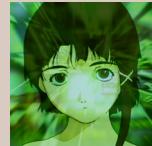
My particular reasoning as to why I remember this somewhat goes against the glowing praise I've showered the writing of *Bakugan Battle Brawlers* with thus far, though. Having been introduced midway through the first season, I had expected this to result in further character development. It simply writes itself. Alice had been portrayed as a reserved, somewhat quiet girl, directly contrasting her Masquerade personality, a cocky, somewhat brash antagonistic foil to protagonist Dan. Opposite odd-couple-esque dynamics are extremely common in media, and often are used to great effect. Even with limited knowledge of media and the patterns that lie within (I was five), this route seemed not only obvious, but exciting to me in conjunction to the aforementioned excitement that obviously overcame me with the twist itself. The remaining cour of *Bakugan Battle Brawlers* seemed to promise this, elaborating slightly on the uniquely intriguing dynamic, seemingly teasing further development later on.

Being at the mercy of the whims of television programming schedules, it took a while for me to view the second season, *New Vestroia*. As expected of a now-six year old, I spent months exciting myself, only to be completely disappointed when *New Vestroia* completely did away with the established three female protagonists in favor of introducing new characters. All of the interesting ways the series could have taken that dangling plot point basically became ignored. I could string together a point about hype culture ruining my enjoyment of the series, but in truth, I continued viewing the series until the original run finished. In fact, I remember still enjoying parts of it, particularly in how the characters grew into adults by the series' end. Perhaps, then, I might be able to make a more grand, all-encompassing statement regarding how this influenced the way I understood narratives and the function of characters within them. Yet, this would obviously be the product of revisionism—I was six, and more concerned with browsing random Internet forums than actually critically considering any media. In reality, I do not think I can imbue this with much more weight beyond it defining my understanding of being disappointed with media. Sticking in my head for almost 15 years at this point, *Bakugan Battle Brawlers* was undoubtedly an important series for me, albeit not one I'd readily praise as a masterpiece.



Credits: Getty Images

IT HAPPENED!

**TONY T.**

2nd Year, Economics and Data Science

An unbelievably close-in right-hand shot!

Managing Editor

The narrative offered by sports is distinct from what fictional media presents. Film, comics, and literature often stray away from presenting idealized narratives as suspension of disbelief often erodes easily. When something seems too good, when morals that are too obvious, narratives very easily become hard to accept. This is why amateur authors, such as those creating fanfiction, often have their works laughed off for having obvious Mary Sue protagonists, acting as power fantasies for their often downtrodden creators. It's why, if directed poorly, the original *Rocky* would be laughable for being so obviously that - a story made purely for cheap wish fulfillment. But it isn't. *Rocky* is a cultural icon, a classic film given numerous awards and considered a classic American mainstay. A big part of that could be the medium in which it presents its underdog narrative: the sport of professional boxing.

In a real sense, pugilism throughout the 20th century served allegorically to raise the statuses of the otherwise downtrodden. Frankly, most professional sports still hold that sort of cultural symbolism today. Utterly simple, the sport of boxing harkens back to an almost primitive understanding of the world. Before notions of society or culture, physical force was obviously a far more valued commodity than it rightfully should be, under the paradigm of civilized behavior. To extrapolate this concept to an utter extreme, then, would be to grant the most physically strong person in the world a figurative (or maybe literal, if one were to ask current-as-of-this-article's-first-draft heavyweight champion Tyson Fury) throne atop the world.



2020: Tyson Fury's walkout prior to regaining championship in second bout against Deontay Wilder.

This is obviously a very flawed and uncompassionate view of the world, but it somewhat outlines the intrigue of pugilism, itself a somewhat flawed and uncompassionate sport. The world champion, with this analogy, is in a similar place atop the world,

at least in any given weight class. Rather than seasons of play, like most other sports, boxing has thus created a unique "king of the hill" dynamic with contenders scrapping against one another to determine who will be given the chance to attempt toppling the reigning king.

I should clarify, though, that boxing is an incredibly violent sport, and I'm not trying to underplay that. While the potential room for bodily harm may give it some increased level of drama and intensity in a narrative sense, it is important to mention that plenty of people have died, and still die from pugilistic injuries annually. I don't attempt to ignore that fact, but I also think that the violence of prizefighting isn't something that necessarily needs to be glorified more than it already has been. Still, the beauty of boxing, in my eyes, remains its ability to be simultaneously a crude demonstration of human struggle at its most base form and a demonstration of on-the-fly thinking. In a sense, it could be likened to speed chess, only a wrong move results not just in a strategic disadvantage, but also physical damage. It is, then, a sort of melding between very physical and very cerebral conflict, which has historically allowed individuals to climb up societal rungs otherwise untraversable.



2013: Floyd Mayweather's Philly Shell, a tactically defensive stance, utilized against future pound for pound #1 boxer, Canelo Álvarez.

This is why the *Rocky* story is so powerful. It shows a man at the bottom of the societal ladder rise up to the top of the world, using only his natural gifts. Sure, it takes *Rocky* two films to achieve this goal, but the inclusion of boxing is important. Though boxing, dubbed "the sweet science" by admiring onlookers, is a complex sport worthy of being called an art in of itself, this sort of simplistic view, coupled with the ostensibly uncomplicated nature of the sport in a physical sense, allows for sports narratives with wide appeal. Yet, the hurdle that films like *Rocky* still face is the aforementioned struggle for validation. In spite of the praise *Rocky* receives as a classic film, it likely has less appeal in the modern day than it did in 1976. Audiences aren't stupid—those types of stories feel obvious and played out due to the countless permutations said narrative has taken. The

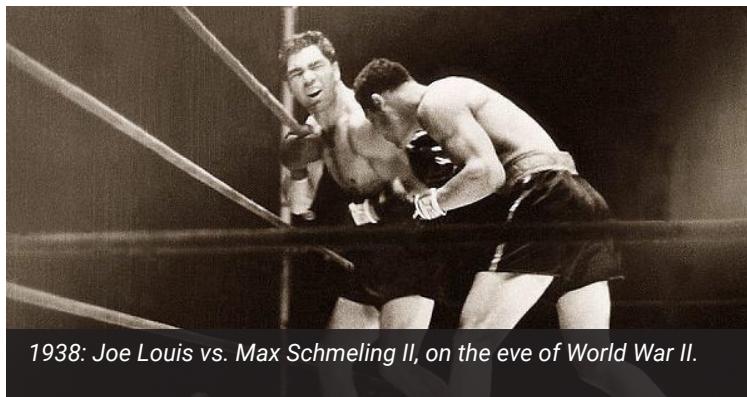
moral of hard work translating to success in life is not only done to death, but also lacking in the universality it may have once held. This is not to say that I dislike Rocky in any way, as it remains one of my favorite narratives. Yet, its themes seem more akin to a fairy tale (at least in the more modern, "Disney"-type understanding of fairy tales) with their blunt presentation and unsophisticated nature.

Sports stories, then, are analogous as real life fairy tales. They do not face the same issues as fictional media in terms of presenting narratives, as real events are inherently validated by the nature of their actual existence. It's why the cliché of labeling astounding accomplishments in sporting as inspirational exists. In my view, then, this is perhaps the core part of why sports have become so ubiquitous in an international context, why Michael Jordan or Lionel Messi have worldwide presences akin to those of religious leaders or heads of state. However, the majority of sports don't particularly appeal to me. The ultra competitive stories behind some of them are interesting, but the majority of sports feel somewhat arbitrary due to strict, complex rulebooks and varying human interpretations. Boxing is, however, objective. As previously mentioned, by being structured in a "king of the hill" manner, and with its focus on blunt force, it is easy to draw parallels between pugilism and life.



1965: Fighting Harada, stylistically a swarmer, against Éder Jofre.

Beyond those aspects, which are shared by most combat sports, boxing is also extremely old, with the modern version of the sport emerging in the late 1800s. Given this long history, pugilism has obviously influenced many aspects of world history and culture. The 1938 rematch between the then-reigning world heavyweight champion, American Joe Louis and German ex-champion Max Schmeling personified the tensions of the Second World War, with the American's victory bringing a sense of unity.



1938: Joe Louis vs. Max Schmeling II, on the eve of World War II.

Muhammad Ali's three reigns as heavyweight champion between 1964 and 1978 amplified his causes in racial justice and the antiwar movement. Mike Tyson's reign as champion brought him similar levels of worldwide fame. Thus, the title of lineal heavyweight boxing champion carries a large weight in that only 40-odd individuals have held said distinction, with a large number of them having lasting impacts that reached far beyond the realm of sporting.

In my view, the platonic example of pugilism framing brilliant, inspirational narratives with a lasting impact would be the career of "Big" George Foreman. Rising from a rough background to win the heavyweight championship, George Foreman would have already been a feel-good story with his initial run. To better characterize his first reign as champion, it is perhaps worth noting that Foreman was an unstoppable nightmare, having been undefeated at 40 wins, securing 37 of those wins by knocking out his victims. Snatching the crown in 1973 from Joe Frazier, who was undefeated and had previously given Muhammad Ali his first loss, Foreman very well may have been seen as one of the greatest of all time had he retired even at 24 years old.



1973: Joe Frazier vs. George Foreman I.

Further cementing this was a win over Ken Norton, the second man to ever defeat Ali, with both the Frazier and Norton wins happening within 2 rounds of scheduled 15 round fights. However, a subsequent loss to Muhammad Ali in *The Rumble in the Jungle*, perhaps the most significant sporting event in history massively damped public perception of Foreman.

Another loss, followed by a retirement in 1977, practically doomed Big George to being viewed as a hard, yet unskilled and wild, puncher of insignificant note, especially compared to contemporaries Ali and Frazier, whose trilogy represented polarities in American political beliefs.

With the linearity of boxing championships, the idea of multiple "true" boxing champions is generally a hard pill to swallow. Rare exceptions occur in legendary rivalries, such as Jake LaMotta and Sugar Ray Robinson, Manny Pacquiao and Juan Manuel Marquez, and the aforementioned Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier. Being part of nothing of the sort, Foreman's downfall is something that has been described by the man himself as being hopelessly devastating, falling from the position of king of the world to just another person within 8 rounds in Zaire. Foreman's early career had all the makings of a classic underdog story, yet he was not viewed as such due to the numerous other fighters with similar origins achieving far greater heights with the same heavyweight championship.

In 1989, a documentary featuring then-former heavyweight champions Muhammad Ali, Joe Frazier, George Foreman, Larry Holmes, and Ken Norton was released entitled *Champions For-*

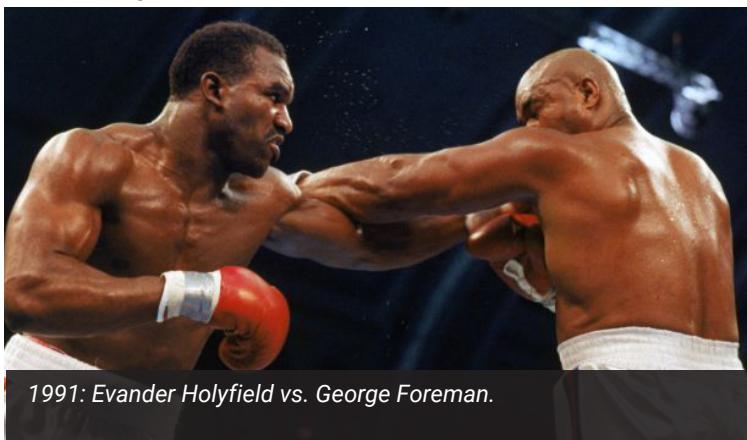


1974: Muhammad Ali's use of the "Rope a Dope" against George Foreman helped him regain the title.

ever was released. A look back at their careers, this documentary showed a glimpse into the relatively normal men behind the legends. At the time, though, Foreman perhaps seemed the worst off, losing much of his wealth and two years into what seemed like an ill-fated comeback. The media clowned on him for being delusional, and rightfully so, given how, at 38, Foreman started his comeback a year older than the oldest man to ever wear the crown—Jersey Joe Walcott, who won the title decades prior at the already ancient age of 37.

Boxing comebacks are extremely common, yet actual successes are infinitesimally uncommon, with all four of the other legendary former heavyweight champions in the documentary trying and failing to reclaim glory on several occasions. As such, Foreman's second career started off with him viewed at perhaps a lower station than even the one he had started life in. This was not helped by George's 300 pound physique, in excess of 100 pounds from his prime, and his slower, more methodical style. Contrasting the steroid-heavy physiques of 1990s heavyweights, Foreman's build was utterly rotund. Essentially, beyond a dismal economic situation, he also had the unenviable position of being seen as deluded.

Stringing together 24 wins into a 1991 challenge against undisputed heavyweight champion Evander Holyfield, Foreman's comeback ultimately seemed to go the way of most poorly thought out returns. His accomplishments in this stretch are perhaps more notable in hindsight, with wins over former champion Dwight Muhammad Qawi, a brutal knockout of former contender Gerry Cooney, and an amazing, close fight against Holyfield, who is generally considered historically as one of the greatest heavyweight champions. At 42, Foreman's close fight with Holyfield could have been seen as a fulfillment of a classic underdog story, putting up a valiant effort against a strong younger champion. Billed "The Battle of the Ages", it is my personal favorite boxing fight of all time, as a clash between generations, yet it was viewed at the time as a sort of last hurrah for the challenger.



1991: Evander Holyfield vs. George Foreman.

Following another loss in 1993 and nearing 46 years old, Foreman's chances of being a champion again seemed not just unlikely, but impossible. Most boxers hit their peak around their late twenties or early thirties, with those in their mid-thirties and beyond being considered old. Reflexes deteriorate, meaning that the core power and speed needed to be an effective pugilist dramatically diminish. As previously mentioned, the oldest ever heavyweight champion prior to the 1990s held that distinction at 37. A decade removed from his mid-thirties, Foreman's challenge of Holyfield conqueror Michael Moorer in late 1994 was widely viewed as unfair and a mockery. The accusations of boxing selling out and losing integrity that exist today were levied to a great extent against the bout, given Foreman's popularity as an entrepreneur and media personality.



1994: Michael Moorer vs. George Foreman.

Therefore, Foreman's tenth round knockout of heavyweight champion Michael Moorer on November 5, 1994 is the most cathartic climax in any form of media I have experienced. Even as someone born almost a decade after the event with limited context to properly understand this, the fight is an astounding show of human resilience. Fighting not only against the greatest fighter in the world, but against understandings of biology and physics, the win concludes a brilliant underdog narrative. As veteran boxing commentator Jim Lampley exclaims "It happened!" into his microphone as Moorer fails to answer to a ten count, the significance of his fight becomes utterly obvious. Certainly, it lived up to its billed name as "One for the Ages". Narratively, this event could be reductively described as a fairy tale happy ending coming to life. Beyond that, however, it is inspirational in that, more than 20 years after his shocking loss to Muhammad Ali on one of the grandest stages boxing has ever achieved, Foreman took redemption in the form of once again claiming the heavyweight throne as a changed man. Not lost on the viewing public was the fact that Foreman's trunks in the fight were the exact same ones he had worn in his aforementioned loss to Ali. This example of an event so shockingly unlikely so as to be thought of as impossible ultimately actually occurring is the fundamental part of why boxing appeals to me as someone with a distaste for sports. Yet, while Foreman's win is extremely impressive, it is but a drop in the bucket of wonderful narratives made possible due to boxing. Beyond that, this also serves as my favorite example of a narrative made fulfilling due to its long term scale, a fact inherent to its existence as an actual piece of history. Though, on the surface, it is brutally simple, pugilism has the unique ability to perpetuate wonderful narratives that stay engaging decades after the fact.



A NEW META

Managing Editor



TONY T.

2nd Year, Economics and Data Science

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Like most children of the new millennium, I was at one point heavily invested in the *Yu-Gi-Oh!* trading card game. Yet, [my love of Yu-Gi-Oh! Duel Monsters GX aside](#), the rest of the *Yu-Gi-Oh!* animated franchise always left me wanting more. Generally, *Yu-Gi-Oh!* series follow rather standard battle shounen plots, though eschewing physical brawls in favor of card games. This isn't necessarily bad—I enjoy GX greatly—but it is incredibly repetitive. Different entries may differ in tone and setting, yet never stray too far away from the series' norms. Even 5D's, often cited by its fans as one of the strongest entries, suffers from this. Another issue is that *Yu-Gi-Oh!* often seems like it wishes to tackle material more grimdark than it really has the capability to, something that especially applies to the aforementioned 5D's. Only GX really manages to evade some of these issues by being unique with a somewhat subversive narrative; the rest of the franchise feels more and more like a slog as time progresses.

While not a perfect analog, I feel the same sort of fatigue when I consider the card game. The initial premise of the game is great, and card effects allow more complexity than simply ramming 1.8k attack monsters into each other. Still, over time, power creep has infested the game to where effect texts are often a paragraph long, single turns can take over twenty minutes, and the game almost never moves past turn four. None of these are original complaints, but the sheer universality of these issues illustrate how stale the *Yu-Gi-Oh!* game has gotten. Having played the Asian OCG version rather than the international TCG variant, I can attest that the problems run beyond simple issues of poor card translations (though those exist too).

It seems as though the showrunners of *Yu-Gi-Oh! SEVENS* agree with me. The show is not only a breath of fresh air for *Yu-Gi-Oh!* anime series, but also directly addresses the stale nature of the game. *SEVENS'* world is introduced to be not unlike our own: their version of Duel Monsters has grown dull and is only played by adults. Mirroring real life product releases, *SEVENS* protagonist Oudou Yuga hacks the in-universe fictional equivalent of Konami (the publishers of the *Yu-Gi-Oh!* card game) and installs Rush Duels as an alternative, faster format. Though I actually find Rush Duels to be a rather uninteresting downgrade from the game's meta in the late GX/early 5D's era, the fact that the series directly addresses the boredom of modern *Yu-Gi-Oh!* is extremely gratifying. Moreover, the entire narrative focuses on this fact. Unlike most franchise protagonists, Oudou Yuga's primary goal has little to do with actually dueling. With his friend Kamijou "Luke" Tatsuhisa being the series' more prominent duelist, Yuga

spends much of *SEVENS'* narrative creating and improving various elements of the game itself. A notable example of this can be found in a major plot point later in the series with Yuga levying resources at his disposal to create a system allowing for others to create their own unique *Duel Monsters* rulesets. With *SEVENS*, it seems as though the franchise is trying to shift its focus, featuring numerous fun metatextual references that are genuinely meaningful for the franchise.

The change in pace also exists tonally. *Yu-Gi-Oh! SEVENS* strays from the franchise's predilection for battle shounen narratives, opting for a more jovial tone. Narrative arcs are, at longest, fifteen episodes, and the writing is far more light-hearted. Without going into specifics, it is genuinely hilarious at certain points. Characterization is less focused on maintaining a grimdark tone, instead focusing on character quirks and interactions. For instance, one particular antagonist's AI robot massage chair servant receives a character arc that is more complete than some series' protagonists. Strange choices like these result in *SEVENS'* main cast being genuinely entertaining as an ensemble. Beyond a great main cast with hilarious dynamics, the series features next to no filler, with almost every character from seemingly irrelevant "slice of life" episodes being relevant in some way or another. In this way, though this entry has less focus on world-ending stakes, *SEVENS* may in fact be one of the best written series within *Yu-Gi-Oh!*.

However, the welcome changes *Yu-Gi-Oh! SEVENS* has brought haven't exactly been met with open arms. With a terribly low (for the standards of the website) average score of 5.26 on MyAnimeList, there are many detractors of the series. With *Yu-Gi-Oh! Go Rush!!* starting in April, it seems as if *SEVENS* is wrapping up while still in double-digit episode numbers, a first for the franchise. Perhaps rightfully, it has been labeled a children's show with its simpler designs and less serious plot, but I'd argue that that very fact has made *SEVENS* more enjoyable than its predecessors. Others deem the series "not *Yu-Gi-Oh!*", and immediately reject it for that very reason. Having broken down why I view *Yu-Gi-Oh!* itself to be a flawed series in animation and in cardboard, I obviously don't deem that complaint as credible in of itself. Changes are always hard to adapt to, and I myself have disliked when series I enjoy make stark shifts. Still, I do find it ironic how *SEVENS* at least slightly pokes fun at its adult audience, with that same audience seemingly not cognizant of how much *SEVENS* has actually brought to the table in addressing interesting matters relevant to that same demographic. Though definitely imperfect, *Yu-Gi-Oh! SEVENS* was a surprisingly entertaining re-entry into *Yu-Gi-Oh!* for me. It cleverly represents the frustrations of the numerous former *Yu-Gi-Oh!* players who have since moved on, while, above all, being a comedy show about children playing fun card games.

YET ANOTHER PIECE ON BEAUTIFUL DREAMER



TONY T.

2nd Year, Economics and Data Science

Loop 3...

Managing Editor

Beautiful Dreamer, is, perhaps by construction, a film that can be consumed by a wide audience including even those who have no understanding of the *Urusei Yatsura* series it is connected to. The characters are unique, but simple enough to where attentive viewers can largely figure out their dynamics through the film itself. While stemming off of a particular episode's plot, its narrative has very little to do with the story of *Urusei Yatsura* writ large, if one were to consider the series as actually having a plot as a whole. Instead, *Beautiful Dreamer* is a film that has inherent mass appeal due to commenting on how human dreams, both in the literal and figurative sense, interact with the nature of reality. In its text, it juxtaposes sleeping dreams with individual dreams, as in goals or aspirations. This is not the most unique comparison, seeing as media quite often compares multiple distinct ideas denoted by the same phrase as a source for thematic focus. But with its absolutely beautiful production and interesting aesthetic in both art and animation, *Beautiful Dreamer* remains an interesting film without any context of *Urusei Yatsura*.

Having previously written "[Beautiful Dreamer: Is it Good or is it Bad?](#)" and "[Urusei Yatsura Doesn't Need a Remake](#)", it has come to mind that I haven't actually properly explained why *Beautiful Dreamer* is so notable. To do so, though, would warrant discussion of the series as a whole. Despite *Beautiful Dreamer* being a film that works fine enough on its own, as stated above, I believe its true brilliance comes with its placement within *Urusei Yatsura*. *Urusei Yatsura* is a series that, in theory, could last forever. Its structure is fairly iterable: introduce a new unique wacky character every ten or so episodes, and simply throw them into the ever-expanding cast. The interactions write themselves. The only way hypothetically the series could ever have ended in a meaningful way is for the characters to actually find their fulfillment.

In no better case can this be seen with the main duo, Lum Invader and Moroboshi Ataru. The crux of their romantic dynamic revolves around the fact that Lum is in love with Ataru, who rejects her advances in most instances in spite of being attracted to her. Adding a slew of misunderstandings, and their dynamic is practically self-perpetuating, so long as they don't act rationally in their own self interests. The film uses the setting of a dream to illustrate this well, with the characters all stuck within Lum's dream, and disappear into their own as they realize what they really want. This is shown in a later scene, where the film's main antagonist cycles through various scenarios that match what

said characters would likely want out of life. The other characters leave the dream, representative of the franchise, once they come to that realization. Just as *Urusei Yatsura* repeats character interactions and scenarios ad infinitum for hundreds of chapters and episodes, Lum's dream similarly loops through the same day over and over. Thus, the loop is only seemingly broken towards the end of the film when Ataru confesses his love to Lum, the one action that would actually end the cycle of repetition. Yet, just as every bit of progress within *Urusei Yatsura* is always walked back on, this action is similarly ineffective as Ataru falls back into the lull of rebuking Lum's attention, which is matched by the revelation that the characters are still in the dream. This haze of being stuck is further allegorical for all of human dreams and desire, as the film fairly blatantly exposes.



In this way, I believe that *Beautiful Dreamer* is rather clever in expressing its creator's frustrations with the series. Penned not by series creator Takahashi Rumiko, but by then-series director Oshii Mamoru, *Beautiful Dreamer*'s parallels with shortcomings of its source material itself are rather relevant to its appeal to viewers of both it and the television series. With Oshii stepping down from the chair of series director of the television anime soon after the February 1984 release date of the film, it probably isn't that controversial of a reading to consider the second film as Oshii's final farewell. With the film's experimental nature matching Oshii's later output, such as *Angel's Egg* and the original *Ghost in the Shell*, and numerous tensions between Oshii and Takahashi, there's an attitude, perhaps anger, within the film's DNA. This isn't to say that the interpretation of the film I've illustrated above is necessarily the exact intentions of its creator. But, it is the viewpoint that makes it one of the most memorable films I've ever seen, and definitely amongst my favorite animated features. *Beautiful Dreamer* may not be as complex or deep as other Oshii works, but to me, it illustrates an artist's growing discomfort with sticking to the same formula, and its further implications on the nature of human action. Given this, while the film is perfectly enjoyable as a standalone work, its true beauty comes not as *Beautiful Dreamer*, but as *Urusei Yatsura Movie 2: Beautiful Dreamer*.

THIS ARTICLE IS ABOUT SILLY ROBOTS POKING POOP.



TONY T.

2nd Year, Economics and Data Science

Where is the five hour in-depth analysis on the ramifications of poking pink shit?

Managing Editor

Toriyama Akira is an author who will almost always be remembered so long as Japanese animation remains a medium of entertainment. Most likely, international fans of his work know him for writing and illustrating *Dragon Ball*, and then subsequently creating character designs for both the *Dragon Quest* and *Chrono Trigger* series. I don't dispute *Dragon Ball* to be his magnum opus—it's literally my favorite anime, even after having seen well past two thousand titles. Seldom mentioned, at least in English-speaking circles, though, is his prior work, *Dr. Slump*, which in my view is of equal if not higher importance to the medium. Indeed, though I'm still inclined to prefer Toriyama's second work to grant him national fame, *Dr. Slump* is an incredibly well written manga with endearing characters and fun gags.

Well, actually, that's not exactly true. For a series that had major influences on how manga and otaku-adjacent comedies have written, *Dr. Slump* is a rather crude work. Most of its gags rely on literal toilet humor, with one of its most iconic running jokes having main protagonist Norimaki Arale, an android, poking a cartoonish pink blob of feces with a presumably wooden stick. You get the point—*Dr. Slump* is really low-brow. There's something charming about its gags, though. Not many of them are what I'd consider to be gut-busting, as the setups are rather rudimentary, matching Toriyama's juvenile sense of humor. *Dr. Slump* features some fourth-wall breaks, but most of them simply exist for self-deprecative comedy, with Toriyama laughing at himself for writing media that is, in his view, not substantive. This doesn't automatically make it good, but it does simply highlight the fact that *Dr. Slump*, as bizarre and utterly stupid as it is, is a work that only Toriyama Akira could create. That's something that I believe extends to all of his work—even if *Dragon Ball* is the most copied narrative in Japanese manga, it still feels unique to its author due to his penchant for on-the-fly unplanned writing and absurdity.

That comparison to *Dragon Ball* isn't just here for the sake of contextualizing *Dr. Slump* in a more universally-understood manner though. As I've mentioned in previous articles on this matter, what makes *Dragon Ball* stand out to me is not its high-octane action, but rather its adherence to linear chronology. Yes, the fighting is great, but what's more entertaining to me is seeing characters like Son Goku and Bulma grow and age as they move through numerous stages of life. It's why I enjoy the non-canonical *Dragon Ball GT*, which goes the furthest a series can go with that

concept, showing a far-off future, where, though not physically present, Son Goku's actions during his life have cemented such a legacy so as to establish his figurative presence in the hearts of all Earthlings. I recognize that this could be an unorthodox reading of the series, but it's something that I believe Toriyama is most adept at in *Dragon Ball*, as his timeskips are extremely efficient at skipping less eventful parts of the characters' lives, whilst still retaining some fluff.

After reading the entirety of *Dr. Slump*, it became apparent that, whilst my reading of *Dragon Ball* may not be the one everyone sees, the elements which comprise it are staples of Toriyama's work. In spite of being a simple comedy manga, *Dr. Slump* seems to keep continuity with a large amount of its gags. Obviously, certain chapters end in ways that would be impossible to follow up on, but many more seem to actually remain in-universe. One notable example would be deuteragonist and titular "Dr. Slump", Norimaki Senbei, and his crush on his robot daughter/sister/creation Norimaki Arale's high school teacher, Yamabuki Midori. This running gag culminates in a chapter where Senbei deliberates on how to propose to her, with the punchline being her instant agreement at the end of said chapter. In spirit with the continuity he'd later show in *Dragon Ball*, Toriyama simply keeps this as canon, retires the running gag about Senbei's crush, and introduces gags about Senbei and Midori's married life with children. This doesn't seem like much in the context of other media that do the same, but lest I remind you, this is a manga wherein jokes about urine and excrement are not just common, but incessant. As idiotic as it may be, *Dr. Slump* actually has narrative arcs. This even extends to a small multi-chapter arc towards the end of the manga, where a few characters go to the future and see how they have progressed far into the future. It is genuinely heartwarming to witness the main cast of *Dr. Slump* growing and evolving as they continuously get characterized by gags that just get added to the canon of their universe.

If *Dragon Ball*'s long narrative is punctuated by dramatic character moments erupting from action-story climaxes, then *Dr. Slump* does the exact same, but with toilet humor. The writing isn't at all graceful, but it is entertaining, and highlights to me the qualities which make Toriyama one of my favorite creative minds, as strange as that is to say. His name will almost always call *Dragon Ball* to mind first, but *Dr. Slump* may in fact demonstrate his passions better with wild, American pop culture riffs, and crude stories about robots doing disgusting things. In spite of being a gag series where the gags aren't even that amazing, *Dr. Slump* joins its younger sibling as one of my favorite manga. Now, if only the animated adaptation were fully subtitled in English...

THE BACKSTREET BOYS ANIME



TONY T.

2nd Year, Economics and Data Science

Hanada Ichiro is kind of like a more offensive Japanese version of Calvin from the eponymous *Calvin and Hobbes*.

Managing Editor

My first impression of *Hanada Shounen-shi* came while playing AnimeMusicQuiz, a game(?) where players guess the name of a Japanese anime after hearing a snippet of its opening song. The series that appear can be toggled to be only from the participants' anime lists. Having a friend who has memorized a ridiculous amount of obscure music from the 1970s and 1980s, I wasn't particularly surprised when I heard a song I didn't recognize. What did surprise me was the fact that said song was from a distinctly recognizable Western boy-band. Though I don't have any interest in boy-bands or much Western music in general, *Hanada Shounen-shi* having The Backstreet Boys' "The One" as its opening was surprising enough to where I began watching the series soon after. Sporting only thirteen thousand users on MyAnimeList, the anime's obscurity somewhat baffles me. Further confounding the series' lack of recognition is its average score of 8.00, which is fairly high for the website. *Hanada Shounen-shi*, is, in numerous ways, an extremely pleasant surprise that I am more than happy to have seen.

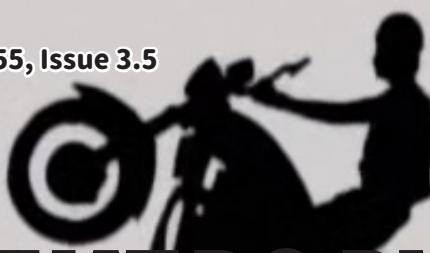
Set in rural Japan, presumably before or around its manga's release in the early 1990s, *Hanada Shounen-shi* is an incredibly human story that, without relying heavily on clichés, managed to emotionally sway me. To explain the series in a diminutive, simple way, it was reminiscent of *Natsume Yuujinchou* and *Mushishi* for me in that it involved an individual running around helping others with vague, spiritual matters. Having heavily enjoyed both of those series, what made *Hanada Shounen-shi* stand out was its protagonist, Hanada Ichiro, who is a complete brat who only obtains his ability to see ghosts following a truck accident. Lacking hair as a result of the surgery he underwent post-crash, Hanada's assistance with various deceased spirits generally have less to do with any overt sense of duty and more with the nuisance imposed on him. Yet, Hanada is a sympathetic protagonist despite his exasperating hyperactivity due to his inherent morality, even if he'd never admit it. He is incredibly annoying, but he is also, afterall, a child. As such, the lengths at which Hanada reaches to help out deceased spirits not only cements his charm, but also makes his unquitting nature admirable.

Hanada Shounen-shi's episodes are somewhat disparate in that they don't all build to any grand larger narrative. However, many of the stand alone episodes still remain relevant. One notable instance is an early two-parter wherein one of Hanada's friends, often acting as a shoulder angel, is worried about his single mother, who is considering remarriage. The primary emotional

ramifications are dealt with within the episodes in a fulfilling arc implicating the ghost of the friend's deceased father. Beyond that, though, it also influences the overall dynamic that Hanada has with that friend later on, with said friend's new step-sister joining as another of Hanada's often-ignored shoulder angels. While Hanada largely remains his bratty self throughout all 25 episodes, even he feels slightly different by the finale. *Hanada Shounen-shi* focuses mostly on slice-of-life bits mixed in with his escapades helping ghosts with finding fulfillment, but both elements characterize the main cast in ways that are extremely satisfying.



Beyond that, the series' aesthetics are not exactly stunning, as it released in the awkward early-2000s period during the industry-wide switch to digital animation, resulting in less appealing art compared to cel, and the unfortunate fate of being forever stuck in 480p. Still, though I don't exactly revere Madhouse like many seem to, their work on *Hanada Shounen-shi* is competent in evoking the appropriate small-town, rural feel. The animation is also fairly smooth regardless of lower fidelity. Aesthetic considerations aside, what really makes *Hanada Shounen-shi* a worthwhile audiovisual piece of media is direction. Featuring many gags focusing on Hanada's lack of intelligence and general oafishness, most scenes are paced and framed in ways that give the punchlines the maximum effect that could have. This results in *Hanada Shounen-shi* not only being a well written work, but also being quite often a hilarious comedy. Frankly, one of the very few things I dislike about the series is, ironically, its opening. I don't hate "The One" as a song, but it feels out of place in a series focusing on a child's misadventures with both the spirits of the departed and his incomplete homework. Altogether, *Hanada Shounen-shi* is one of the best anime I've seen in the last few years, and I'm almost certain that almost anyone can enjoy it regardless of demographic or sensibilities.



WHAT DO BLONDE DYE AND MOTORCYCLES MEAN?



TONY T.

2nd Year, Economics and Data Science

Honestly, I still can't believe my writing is here.
I still implore everyone to give *GTO* a try.

Managing Editor

Seeing as this is my fiftieth *Konshuu* article (at least, under this name), I feel as though it'd be thematically appropriate to return to the [very first topic](#) I ever discussed here in more detail. Though not at all the most conceptually complex piece of media I've ever seen, *Great Teacher Onizuka* interests me in a manner beyond the surface level gags it features. This isn't in reference to much of what *GTO* contains within its pages, but rather the context surrounding it. I will largely avoid mentions of the anime series—if I did, this article would likely turn into a breakdown as to why it disappoints as an adaptation similar to [my article](#) on *Kaguya-sama*, though perhaps less vitriolic. Before I explain why *Onizuka* is a somewhat profound series to me, though, I must first discuss the rise and fall of Japan's economy in the late twentieth century.

As I mentioned briefly in an [earlier article](#), Japan's economy was hitting a peak in the late 1980s, due to a variety of factors. Following the Second World War was the subsequent period of international tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union. With the United States' heightened influence, Japanese society went through a renaissance with economic reforms and a return to democracy under a new constitution. One obvious sign of Japan's rise as the second largest economy in the world can be seen in the Nikkei 225 which hit a peak in 1989. One part of this, however, had to do with the Japanese central bank's hesitation to increase monetary policy restrictions after America itself experienced a stock market crash in 1987. Thus, whilst entering the last decade of the millennium, Japan's economy was ostensibly soaring, yet in reality it was merely in a period of inflation bolstered by overspeculation. With the economic bubble bursting in 1991, Japan in the following decade would enter a period of time known as "The Lost Decade".

Now, why is any of this context relevant to a funny comic strip wherein an unlicensed teacher performs borderline definitely illegal actions to get his kids to stay in school? In my view, what makes the titular *Onizuka* special is not his lack of deference to authority, or his far more humble origins compared to his coworkers. Rather, those are symptoms of the core ability of *Onizuka*: his devil-may-care attitude. Debuting in the 1990 delinquent manga *Shonan Junai Gumi*, *Onizuka Eikichi* resembles the type of personality that would be prevalent in a cultural climate perpetuated by the swelling of the Japa-

nese economy. His characterization is the sort of optimistic, reckless naivete that Americans might have felt prior to, say, the Great Recession in late 2007. The concept of the type of youthful rebellion core to delinquent manga is itself, to an extent, somewhat rooted in that era. As such, while it isn't exactly wrong, I always slightly wince when people describe *Onizuka* as a character whose sole characterization is being a badass. He, in fact, displays a level of oafishness not unlike father characters in American sitcoms. What makes *Onizuka* interesting is his willpower derived from being conceived (as a character) in an era wherein societal pressures were lesser.

By the 1996 serialization of *Onizuka*, though, Japan was well into the Lost Decade. As such, *Onizuka*'s mentality clashes with his students, who, by nature of being around a decade younger than him, have far more cynical views of the world. What makes *GTO* great, then, is the uplifting nature of *Onizuka*'s interactions displaying this contrast. This isn't to say that this era difference is the only thing that makes *Onizuka* a unique character that one would not expect to see as an educator. After all, an equal part of his distinct "teaching" style erupts from his difference in socioeconomic background, as a former gangster. This forms perhaps the most major component to the series' comedy—*Onizuka*'s lack of professionalism in contrast to extremely rigid structures found in Asian education, particularly private education at that. Still, even that central dynamic can, in part, be traced to this change in times. To put it in the simplest of terms, *Onizuka* thinks little of what will go bad, whereas his boss, coworkers, and students only think in pessimism. In teaching them his viewpoint, *Onizuka Eikichi* lives up to the title of Great Teacher *Onizuka*.

Is this perspective absolutely intentional within the manga, filled mostly with jokes about perversion and idiocy? I'm not quite sure. Yet, if this isn't an element relevant to the text, it at the very least is an aspect relevant to the reason why *GTO* is looked back upon fondly by many who consume it. For readers in the twenty-first century, the series doesn't even need this context to feel like a relic of the past—simply reading it now, after more than two decades since its release, will allow it to feel that way. Even in spite of that, though, *Onizuka*'s behavior—the catalyst for much of *Great Teacher Onizuka*'s narrative, humor, and drama, is itself a product of a bygone era within the context of the manga. That's what truly makes him feel special as a character, and it's why the series is still beloved by many, including me, to this day. While featuring some rather uncouth (or frankly, offensive) content and some other flaws, I still believe that there's a lot that makes *Onizuka* special.

Introducing...

THE 2 CENT CORNER

How would you describe your writing/video style?



Tony T.

"I'd like to think of my style as being direct. I think I generally have a firm understanding of what I'm talking about, and since all of my articles are opinion pieces, it's simply a task of articulating my thoughts in a logical manner. In doing this, I try to present minutia and summary briefly, while spending most of my time expressing my actual thoughts."



Max R.

Has almost half of Tony's days watched on MAL

"I would describe my writing style as spontaneous as it kind of just erupts in stream of consciousness fashion. [...] I also have the habit of frequently using semicolons in conjunction with the overuse of adjectives which makes my writing feel unnecessarily flowery on occasion [...] Regarding actual content, I've been trying to go out of my way to cover works that I feel deserve more of the limelight as well as pieces just that I may have something to say on."



Nicholas Wonosaputra

Former prez, former friter, current verbal sparring partner

"My command over my own native language is underwhelming, but I can only hope that I am able to at least open up new avenues of discourse about overlooked facets of pieces of media that I find so close to my heart."



Angel Mendez

Some dude who strolled in

"My video production style is like hyping the hell out of an anime and basically making a promo for it minus the pay and sponsorship."



Mitchell Madayag

Rented out the East Asian Library's entire selection of otaku-related media

"To be honest, I'm not too conscious of my own writing style, but I at least try to formulate my opinions behind a well understanding of the material. I prefer only writing about topics and series I passionately enjoy, but I'm not afraid to discuss criticisms when the time calls."



Blake Morrison

English major, math god

"I usually write about a series I overall liked and found interesting (mostly negative articles are less appealing to me) and try to think of the best way to sell the premise of that series to an uninitiated reader before delving into the specifics of my commendations and criticisms. The idea is to convince my readers to watch and read as much good stuff as possible."

What are your thoughts on the Tony issue?

"I have made a critical error in my decision making and judgement."

"The Tony issue [...] allows for Tony to actually make use of all his extra writings that may not necessarily fit within a given issue's theme. [The Tony issue] forced me to explore using color as I have nearly zero experience with it, having mostly only drawn in black and white; I'm a newbie to drawing and art in general, having basically only drawn stick figures prior to 2020, but I've been gradually trying to learn. [...] I wouldn't be opposed to more [Tony issues] in the future."

"I might just like it as much as my favorite anime. So according to Tony's MAL scores.... it's a 2/10!"

"Cancel the Tony issue."

"Oh god, I have to do the layout for this shit?"

"The Tony issue isn't just an issue, it's a statement, and it's a statement I take no issue with. It's a statement of one man's unbound consumption and consideration of anime and manga, a testament to zoomers as being the highest level of human evolution yet."

VOLUME 55, ISSUE 3.5

MARCH 25, 2022

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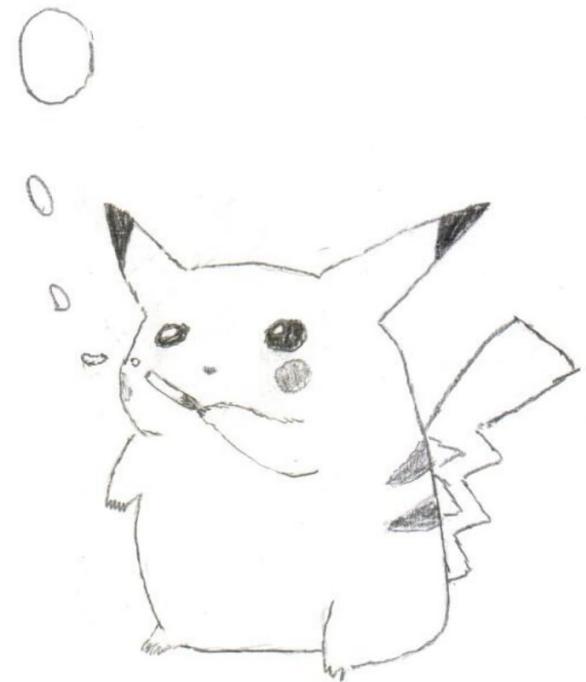
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j.mp/konsub

Pikachu with a blunt

Pokémon

Art By Tony T.