

June 1, 2025

WHY I FELL IN LOVE WITH

MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM

An introduction to the anti-colonial military robot
anime that has been on air since 1979



WHAT IS GUNDAM?

AND WHY IT MATTERS TO ME

Mobile Suit Gundam is an ongoing space opera anime franchise created by Yoshiyuki Tomino and animation studio Sunrise in 1979. The first season tells the story of a young boy named Amuro piloting a giant combat robot in a war between Earth's global government and a space-faring colonial principality. The destruction of the conflict killed half of all humans and left all the survivors irreparably scarred, most of all our main character.

In the four and a half decades since that season, *Gundam* has continued to animate engaging, heart-wrenching, anti-colonial war stories that parallel the Kaiju anti-nuclear message. Everyone always wants to nuke Godzilla, every *Gundam* war features someone destroying a space colony, and both stories show why these people are making a terrible mistake. Japan has cherished media that reminds us that peace requires understanding and respecting each other and that war is a hell that never leaves us better than we found it, and *Gundam* would not have persisted this long if not for that belief.

My father and I have kept up with new *Gundam* releases and gradually explored some of the older shows since 2016, but I still have much left to watch. With that said, I have enjoyed everything I have seen so far; the space battles are beautifully choreographed and animated, the characters are written with a rare and refreshing kind of emotional honesty, and the online community is passionate and welcoming.



Amuro & Haro, his handmade robot and (unofficial) series mascot

WOMEN IN GUNDAM

FANDOM AND REPRESENTATION

The first time I watched the three compilation movies that remaster the original 1979 season, two things stood out to me as odd for a show that I initially thought had appealed to the same male demographic as other old robot anime. The first thing is that only scene where nudity felt explicitly sexualized is when the camera ogles Char—the muscular primary antagonist—while he is showering, and the second thing is that the romance subplots are all love triangles where two men are fighting for the affection of one woman. When looking into this, I found was a quote from a related interview with Tomino in the June 1998 monthly issue of the Japanese magazine *Newtype* which explains that my initial assumption was all wrong.

“[Gundam] was a work that started with the support of junior and senior high school girls who first came to the dubbing studio, and it had nothing to do with the popularity of Gundam plastic models.”



This interested me, so, I looked into forum discussions with women who watched the show back in 1979, and learned that there was a surprisingly large *Gundam* fandom of women and girls making doujinshi (fan-manga) and fanzines long before boys thought it was interesting. The conclusion I reached is that the portrayal of the characters and their relationships was part of a much larger decision to borrow a specific style of fan-service and romantic melodrama from 70s shoujo anime and manga, and considering it is almost the only classic robot anime alive today, this must have been one of the most important ways it deviated from the norm.

MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM

the *WITCH* from *MERCURY*

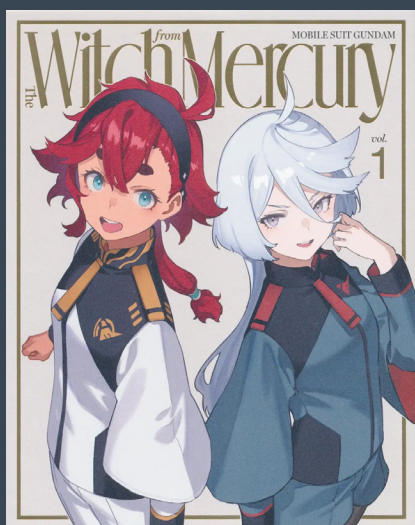


In recent years *Gundam* has finally started representing these long-time female fans on screen. *The Witch from Mercury* introduces their first female protagonist, and tells a story centered on an explicitly lesbian relationship. This was done

despite gay marriage being illegal in Japan and their parent company not supporting the decision, but considering their record-breaking 2023 Fiscal Year earnings after its release, it was clear that fans loved it, and that potential new audiences were just waiting for something like this.

The story is a space-age reinterpretation of William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, borrowing the colonial themes, the revenge story arc, and three characters: Prospero, Ariel and Caliban. *The Witch from Mercury* treats this literary foundation with the respect it deserves and expands on it in ways I never could have anticipated. If you are interested, begin with the prologue, read the short story called “Cradle

Planet” found on the official *Gundam* website, and then watch both seasons. With a runtime of 25 episodes in total, the series has the time to build compelling characters and fully flesh out its story while also



not dragging on for too long. A third season seems likely, although not yet confirmed.

GQUUUUUX

Mobile Suit Gundam

The next and latest entry is *Gquuuuuux*, with four episodes aired as of writing. The story branches off from the first few episodes of the original 1979 season, and it brings back more of the original characters than any other entry in decades. This is also *Gundam's* first partnership with Hideki Anno's studio Khara, which provides the series with the unique animation style of *Rebuild of Evangelion*.

The main character feels inspired by the highly ambitious and smart women of *Evangelion*, with the added baggage of *Eva's* tendency to objectify said women. All in all, I think it has a lot of potential to be a ton of fun.



GUNDAM ON MARS

THE DARKEST TIMELINE

MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM



IRON-BLOODED ORPHANS

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If you would like to start with a recent standalone series, but you want something with a more serious tone than *The Witch from Mercury*, then I recommend *Iron-Blooded Orphans*. This was the first *Gundam* series I watched, and is one of the most unique stories in the franchise. The main characters are a group of child soldiers from Mars who launch a coup against the private security company they were forced to work for. The story follows this large cast of surprisingly memorable characters fighting for a peaceful future together.

“You’ll take me there, right? What should I do next? Who should I kill next? What should I destroy next? If I can reach your goal, I’ll do anything.”

— Mikazuki to Orga, episode 22

Iron-Blooded Orphans uses this context to tackle some of the most difficult topics of any *Gundam* series, including slavery, systemic poverty, and extreme governmental corruption. With a total longer runtime of 50 episodes split between two seasons, it has the time needed to tell a fully-fleshed out story that spans the immense gap between Mars and Earth. It isn’t a prototypical *Gundam* story, but the serious politics, original story, and incredible 2d animation make for what I found to be a compelling watch.



GUNDAM IN REAL LIFE

THE SERIES STEPS OFF-SCREEN



Since the grimmer story and shoujo anime undertones didn't attract the audience of young boys that robot anime marketing teams were used to, the industry's standard die cast metal toy models sold horribly, and didn't cover the costs to finish the



My little *Gunpla* of Haro



season as planned. A few months after a rushed finale, Bandai Namco purchased a license to make *Gunpla*, a *Gundam*-themed variant of the company's existing line of plastic model kits.

“Coming in three different colors, and requiring gluing and painting to complete the model, Bandai’s Gundam model kits were like no other toy on the market”

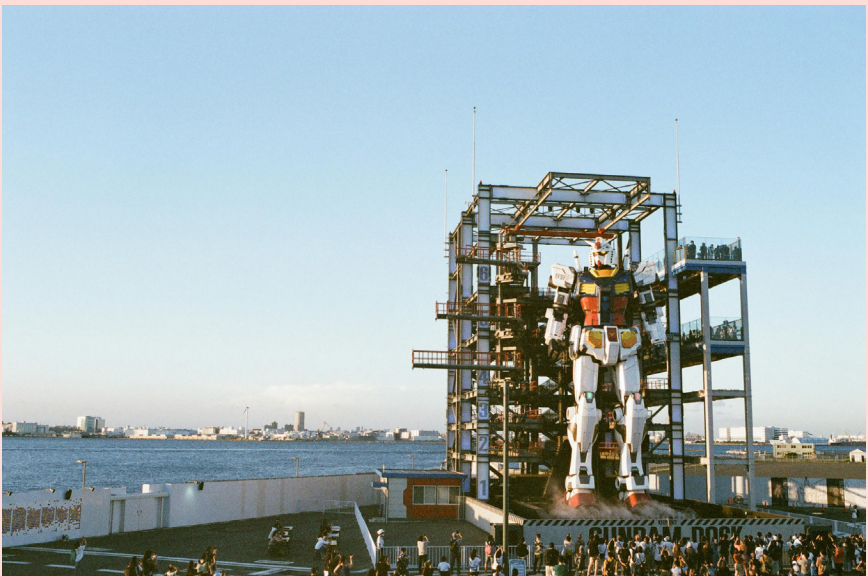
— Gizmodo’s article “A History Of *Gundam*”

Gunpla sold like hotcakes and brought attention to the reruns and movie compilations, which provided Sunrise with the funds to continue the series. Only that first season would be here today without it.

GUNDAM STATUES IN JAPAN

Japan is much more obsessed with *Gundam* than I am, and they have built many statues over the years to show it. These are the two most recent ones.

The most well known statue was at *Gundam Factory* Yokohama. It was the only one capable of realistic movement, thanks to a control arm on the back. It had a troubled start due to COVID-19 lockdowns interrupting installation, and it was only maintained for about four years because the design's lifespan was limited by the proximity to salt water and the damage its movement was causing to the pier.



The longer lasting Life-Sized Unicorn *Gundam* Statue can be found at Diver City Tokyo Plaza. The statue has been up since 2019, and was a upgrade/replacement to a previous statue at the same location that had been around even longer. The range of movement is limited to small adjustments of posture, but when paired with a special mode where armor plates shift around to show a spooky red glow, it still feels plenty terrifying.

I was able to visit it when I was on a family vacation to Japan and it was an incredible sight to behold, looming over the adjacent shopping center.



CHAR CLONES

GUNDAM'S BEST TROPE

Char Aznable is *Gundam*'s first antagonist *Gundam* pilot and easily the most charismatic characters in the first season. The writers and designers of *Gundam* have just as much of an appreciation for the character as the audience, and every subsequent *Gundam* season that wasn't able to feature Char himself was given a character to honor his memory with a cool mask, a unique mech and a mysterious vibe. This is a selection of some of my favorite.



Char Aznable



Mcgillis Fareed (Iron Blooded Orphans)



Older Char (Zeta *Gundam*)

(The original)



Zechs Marquise (Wing)



Lady Prospera (*The Witch from Mercury*)

BY LEAF ERIKSEN

