

ANIME: A BRAVE NEW WORLD

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Landmark Anime

These titles represent recent classics in anime and act as touchstones for viewers in establishing excellence in style, technique, and story.

🌀 **Akira: Special Edition. color. 124 min. Pioneer: Geneon. 2001. DVD \$24.98.**

Set in a ravaged future Tokyo, this complex sf action tale highlights the dangerous consequences of using science to play God. Engaging the viewer on a mature and intelligent level, *Akira* triggered the realization in the United States that animation could be for adults.

🌀 **Ghost in the Shell. color. 125 min. Manga Entertainment. 1996. DVD \$19.98.**

Like *Akira*, this film astonished U.S. audiences with its smart take on international surveillance in a world where cyborgs are the norm and the difference between man and machine is dwindling. Less successful are the sequels, but the TV series, starting with *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex*, is much closer to the multilayered source manga, allowing in-depth character development and extended story arcs.

Incorporating frequent, nonsexual nudity, the theatrical release is recommended for mature older teens and adults, although the TV series is fine for adolescents and adults.

🌀 **Grave of the Fireflies: Special Collector's Edition. 2 vols. color. 159 min. Central Park Media. 2002. DVD ISBN 978-1-58664-202-0. \$29.98.**

By turns touching and heartbreaking, this 1988 anime classic follows two orphaned children struggling to survive in the aftermath of the World War II firebombing of Kobe. Concentrating on the effect of war on civilians, this is one of the few anime films set during the conflict. Despite its young protagonists, it is most suited to teen and adult audiences.

🌀 **Metropolis. color. 108 min. Sony Pictures. 2002. DVD ISBN 978-0-7678-8180-7. \$24.95.**

A utopian city is brought down by one displaced robot girl searching for her true place. Inspired by “the god of manga” Osamu Tezuka's work and Fritz Lang's famous 1929 film, legendary director Rintaro's gorgeous work uses the themes of class prejudice and humanity's responsibility to its own creations to highlight a common theme in anime. A harsh fable despite the cute character design, this title is great for teens and up.

🌀 **My Neighbor Totoro. color. 86 min. Walt Disney Home Entertainment. 2006. DVD ISBN 978-0-7888-3403-5. \$29.98.**

Two rambunctious girls move with their father to the country to be near their mother as she recuperates from a long illness. They meet various benevolent natural spirits, including Totoro, the keeper of the forest. This magical film from Hayao Miyazaki remains a favorite for children and adults.

🌀 **Samurai X: The Complete Collection. 5 vols. color. 510 min. ADV Films. 2006. DVD ISBN 978-1-4139-1320-0. \$99.98.**

Amidst civil war and increasingly fractious politics in Meiji-period Japan, assassin Rurouni Kenshin begins to regret his role and tries to find a way toward peace. A prequel to the favorite Rurouni Kenshin TV series, these OVAs are markedly more serious, with elegant, lethal fighting and relationships portrayed more through glances than words. This complete set is well worth the price, but the bloody and brutal violence makes this appropriate only for older teens and adults.

🌀 **Spirited Away. color. 125 min. Buena Vista. 2001. DVD ISBN 978-0-7888-4461-4. \$29.99.**

Another by Miyazaki, this 2003 Oscar winner for Best Animated Film and anime top seller is a favorite among fans. The story intertwines international myths and folklore with a coming-of-age tale.

🌀 **Tokyo Godfathers. color. 92 min. Sony Pictures. 2003. DVD ISBN 978-1-4049-4691-0. \$26.96.**

Three homeless misfits—a runaway 'tween girl, a drunken middle-aged failure, and a former drag queen—discover an abandoned baby in Tokyo one Christmas Eve and try to reunite her with her parents. This sweet, character-driven film is a marked departure for director Satoshi Kon (*Perfect Blue*, *Paprika*), best known for psychological thrillers. Although this anime is suitable for a wide range of ages, younger audiences may not quite understand the characters' hardships or drag queen Hana's gender identity.

The Series

🌀 **Azumanga Daioh: Class Album. color. 6 vols. 650 min. ADV Films. 2005. DVD \$69.98.**

A young teacher attempts to instruct a child prodigy, a new girl, a wallflower, a loudmouth, a wild card, and a jock in this series that takes the roller-coaster emotions and insecurities that plague high school students and cranks the wackiness into high gear. A hilarious example of the sillier side of anime and a hit with teens.

🌀 **Cowboy Bebop Remix. 6 vols. ea. vol: color. 125 min. Bandai. 2005–06. DVD \$29.98.**

Bounty hunters Spike Siegel and Jet Black work the space around Mars from their ship, the *Bebop*. Living from prize to prize, they pick up the shady Faye Valentine and 'tween hacker tomboy Ed along the way, creating a kind of dysfunctional family. The resulting adventures are a mix of traditional noir and Old West showdowns sprinkled with bursts of snide humor, all set to a hot jazz score.

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☐ **Fruits Basket: Series Box Set. 4 vols. color. 532 min. FUNimation. 2004. DVD \$99.98.**

Cute, earnest, and sweet, Tohru discovers the Sohma family curse—when hugged by someone of the opposite sex, each member turns into an animal from the Chinese zodiac—and decides it's up to her to break it. This charming and gentle fantasy is a favorite among younger teens.

☐ **Fullmetal Alchemist. 13 vols. ea. vol: color. 105 min. FUNimation. 2005–07. DVD \$29.98.**

Alchemy has one rule: to create something, you must sacrifice something of equal value. Edward and Alphonse Elric, brothers and alchemists, try the unthinkable—to bring their mother back from the dead. But no one has ever figured out what balances a lost soul, and the consequences of breaking the rules are considerable. With plenty of humor, adventure, and action, this first-rate fantasy portrays a fascinating alternate world teeming with magic, conspiracies, and fearsome villains. This series continues to be popular with teens. The theatrical film sequel is equally worthy of collecting, though it doesn't stand completely on its own.

☐ **Inuyasha: Season 1+**

ea. vol: 675 min. VIZ Media. DVD \$99.98.

Kagome falls down a well at her family's shrine and lands in a magical, alternate feudal-era Japan where she's a prophesied heroine. Then there's Inuyasha, her reluctant half-human, half-dog-demon companion, bickering with her at every turn but nonetheless remaining a strong ally. Bouncing back and forth between modern Japan and the Warring States period, this long-running anime follows Kagome's complicated adventures. The combination of fantasy adventure and humor keeps it one of the most popular with teens and up.

☐ **Naruto: Uncut Box Set. Vol. 1+ ea. Vol: color. 325 min. VIZ Media. DVD \$49.98.**

Full of action, humor, suspense, and a good dose of heart, *Naruto* focuses on the coming of age of a trio of ninjas in training. The slapstick adds laughs, and the action is as cool as any ninja combat should be, but the real strengths of the series are its sustained character development and the sense of honor and duty that drives the ninja in their work. While the episodes shown on TV are edited for younger viewers, the collected DVD sets are unedited and are most appropriate for teens and up.

☐ **Neon Genesis Evangelion: Platinum Collection. 6 vols. 650 min. ADV Films. 2005. DVD \$89.98.**

Eva, as it is known by fans, is the mecha (or mechanical-oriented) series that twisted the “boy and his robot” tropes into a mystical, grim examination of humanity and psychology. Teen pilots are recruited to guide humanity's last hope against alien invasion, the giant robot *Evas*. A very personal creation for writer/director Hideaki Anno, the series is notable for its inventive design and its protagonists, who are a far cry from the usual brave, unflinching anime heroes. The title influenced a wide range of subsequent series, yet fans still debate the controversial ending. Given the violence and sensuality, especially at the end, this title is most appropriate for older teens and adults.

☐ **Samurai 7: Complete Series. 7 vols. 600 min. FUNimation. 2007. DVD \$99.98.**

An sf reinterpretation of Akira Kurosawa's *The Seven Samurai* is an ambitious project, but this series succeeds as both homage to the original film and a way to draw young viewers into a now classic story. The village of Kanna needs to fight off a group of bandits bent on stealing its precious rice crop, so villagers go in search of samurai willing to aid their cause. Featuring thrilling action and a meticulously imagined steampunk environment, this series appeals to teens and adults alike.

☐ **Samurai Champloo: Complete Box Set. 7 vols. 650 min. Geneon. 2006. DVD \$199.98.**

In Tokugawa-era Japan, Jin is an unflappable, ruthless, and honor-bound samurai, while Mugen is untrained, reckless, and deadly. When they meet, they can't wait to fight to the death, but loudmouth waitress Fuu tricks both into agreeing to help her search for the “samurai who smells of sunflowers.” This show is most famous for its combination of anachronistic elements (a hip-hop soundtrack, fashion) with a classic samurai tale. The action is exhilarating, the humor sassy, and the trio's uneasy bonds lend just enough emotion to keep it all together. Some occasional cursing and sensual encounters make this title best for older teens and adults, though most is innuendo rather than anything explicit.

☐ **Twelve Kingdoms: Premium Box Set 1. 550 min.**

Twelve Kingdoms: Premium Box Set 2. 575 min. ea. vol: Anime Works. 2005. DVD \$99.95

Based on a series of novels, this epic is everything a fantasy fan could want. Youko desperately wants to fit in, but when she and two classmates are whisked away to another world and then abandoned, she's barely equipped to deal with surviving a strange new environment. Youko is, of course, destined to be a queen, and her journey from timid coward to fierce ruler is what makes the series shine. The drawback is that the series halted in the middle, leaving a number of arcs unresolved. Manga publisher Tokyopop is beginning to release the source novels, so at least there's hope of getting the end of the story. Entirely appropriate for young teens up to adults, though teens who love fantasy epics will embrace it most readily.

For the Otaku (or serious fans)

These shows, along with *FLCL* in the print article, are especially appealing to long-time fans of the format.

☐ **Genshiken: Premium Collection 300 min. Anime Works. 2006. DVD 3 discs. \$89.98.**

Kanji is an otaku – but he's a bit nervous about letting anyone know it. Then he discovers the Society for the Study of Modern Visual Culture, a club at his college devoted to anime, manga, and gaming fandom. The show covers all fannish behavior, from scrounging for the best manga to indulging in the latest erotic video game (which knocks the audience up to older teens and adults.) The creators mock and celebrate the community with affection.

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☐ **The Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya** 100 min. Bandai 2007. DVD 2 discs. \$29.98 each.

Acknowledging that it's time to grow up and get a life, Kyon has decided to give up on his obsession with aliens and ESP once he arrives in high school. Then he meets Haruhi, a cute girl who loves nothing more than aliens and ESP. Haruhi is domineering and more than a bit cracked, but it seems that her place in the universe is, in fact, attracting the attention of both aliens, time travelers, and ESPers, much to Kyon's confusion and puzzlement. Strong buzz and industry in-jokes have made this an anticipated fan favorite.

The New Kids

These series are all relatively new here in the U.S., but their first few installments show a lot of promise.

☐ **Kurau: Phantom Memory** 100 min. ADV Films. 2007-. DVD 3 discs. \$29.98 each.

During an accident at her father's lab, thirteen-year-old Kurau was changed forever when an alien chose her body for cohabitation. Now an expert agent, she can take on any perilous assignment, but only if she can keep her superhuman gifts a secret. A strong lead (who is not flaunting an hourglass figure) combines with action and a clever plot to make this a stand-out new title.

☐ **Le Chevalier D'Eon** 100 min. ADV Films. 2007-. DVD 4 discs. \$29.98 each.

Inspired by true events, Le Chevalier D'Eon combines espionage, alchemy, possession, ghosts, and revenge in a lush, historically detailed 18th century setting. The appeal is strongest for older teens and adults, given the horror elements and dense politics as well as period references. The elegant animation and slow build keep viewers on their toes in the best way.

☐ **Tsubasa: Reservoir Chronicle** 125 min. Funimation. 2007-. DVD 2 discs. \$29.98 each.

A princess, an archaeologist, a magician, a warrior, and a cute creature of indeterminate origin, all strangers, are thrown together on a quest to collect the fragments of the princess's memory. Tsubasa threads together a variety of CLAMP's familiar characters and tales into one world-hopping adventure, but it also stands alone as a compelling fantasy especially good for younger teens and teens.

☐ **Peach Girl** 125 min. Funimation. 2007-. DVD 3 discs. \$29.98 each.

If you have girls who are looking for the equivalent of the shojo manga melodramas they devour, this is the series for them. Momo has the opposite of the ideal look: with hair bleached by chlorine and tanned skin from swimming, she's ridiculed by her classmates. Her real problem is that just when she discovers the boy she likes might like her back, she becomes entangled with a notorious flirt and a conniving "best friend." The animation is not extraordinary, but as a series that appeals directly to its target audience, it can't be beat.

☐ **Noein** 157 min. Manga Video. 2006-. DVD 5 discs. \$29.98 each.

A typical school dramedy at first glance, Noein becomes a different trip when alien agents start popping out of the air. Sixth graders Haruka and Yum, dealing with homework and parental expectations, hold the key for a battle to ensure the stability of a parallel world. Noein contrasts the naivete and struggles of these young teens with the bitter weariness of the agents sent to track them down. The animation is first class, especially in the choice of colors, and is perfect for teens.

Style with substance

Anime contains some of the most inventive and breathtaking animation anywhere in the world, and these titles show off that aspect while backing it up with great storytelling.

☐ **Boogiepop Phantom DVD Thinpak Collection** 518 min. Right Stuf. 2006. DVD 5 discs. \$49.98.

Boogiepop mixes together a serial killer's legacy, a supernatural guardian, and a city-wide paranoia and twists it together into probably one of the most complicated but enthralling anime series. The mood is what makes it work – every new episode forces the viewer to leap around in the timeline, leaving characters and the viewers deliciously disoriented. While the animation is well-suited, the sound is what pushes this series into greatness -- you'll hear what I mean. The attention necessary to understand the plot and the moments of horror (creepy but not gory) make this for teens and up.

☐ **Gankutsuou: Count of Monte Cristo** 100 min. Geneon. 2005-2007. DVD 6 discs. \$29.98 each.

The Count of Monte Cristo is an epic tale of revenge, but in this reinvention, the focus is on the unwitting victim Albert rather than the Count's simmering hatred. The story has twists and turns even the devotees of the original Dumas cannot predict. The elaborate, almost psychedelic visuals, sci-fi and period all at once, are truly stunning, and with such a rich story to back it up, this melodrama is an ominous masterpiece.

☐ **Kino's Journey: The Complete Collection** 325 min. ADV Films. 2006. DVD 3 discs. \$39.98.

Kino has a simple rule, learned to avoid attachment: she will not stay in any new place for longer than three days. The townspeople she visits, though, all contend with archetypal dilemmas, from the town where the recitation of an epic poem haunts the citizens to a town where the censorship of books for everyone's protection has left only empty shelves. With a spare style and a meditative look at universal problems taken to an extreme, this series provokes discussion while it dazzles the eye.

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☐ **Paranoia Agent: Complete Collection 325 min. Geneon. 2005. DVD 4 discs. \$99.98.**

Tsukiko cooked up one of the most popular cute icons in Japan, the bright pink Maromi, but she cannot gain any confidence. Tsukiko's fame skyrockets when she becomes the first victim of L'il Slugger, a kid wielding golden bat, but no one's really sure whether he's an urban legend or a real threat. From Satoshi Kon, the Hitchcock of the anime world, this thrilling series examines urban mistrust, psychological damage, and the power of gossip with clever, surreal imagery.

☐ **Paradise Kiss 100 min. Geneon. 2006-2007. DVD 3 discs. \$29.98 each.**

Yukari is a model student, but not by nature or by choice. When the members of Paradise Kiss, a group of arts high school student fashion designers, ask her to be their model, she jumps at a chance to break free from expectations. The series has some elements of wish-fulfillment shojo (girls) titles, but the bittersweet resolutions and realistic relationships make more like a hefty teen novel than a fluffy series romance. The series showcases stylish animation and an excellent soundtrack, and with a bit of onscreen sex, it's aimed at older teen girls and women.

More Wacky, Less Real

For viewers who love the swooning, pratfalls, slapstick, and giant sweat drops, anime's humor is one of its selling points.

☐ **Full Metal Panic! The Complete Collection 600 min. ADV Films. 2005. DVD 7 discs. \$89.98.**

Sousuke is a 17 year old military agent sent to protect a key government secret: Kaname Chidori. The problem is, she's pretty much an ordinary high school girl, and Sousuke keeps crimping her style by scaling walls and blowing up her shoe locker in fear that it's a trap. Laugh out loud hi jinks and an affectionate if argumentative central relationship make this great comedy for teens.

☐ **His and Her Circumstances TV Series Collection 780 min. Right Stuf. 2006. DVD 5 discs. \$59.99.**

Yukino is the ideal high school girl – studious, cute, and kind. Of course, it's all an act – the real reason she's so driven is that she lives for everyone's admiration. When a new boy arrives at school who can beat her on every level and is actually a nice guy, will she be found out? This classic shojo school romance series is enormously popular as both a manga and an anime series, and the development of Yukino and Soichiro's developing romance is the thread that keeps the whole series working.

☐ **Negima! 100 min. FUNimation. 2006-2007. DVD 6 discs. \$29.98 each.**

10-year-old Negima, a brilliant student who's already achieved a Bachelors, is a homeroom teacher at a girls' middle school. Never mind that he's tiny, soft-spoken, intimidated by his own students, and not very successfully hiding that he's a wizard. As far as "harem" stories go, or titles that feature a hapless hero surrounded by a bevy of attractive girls, this one manages to be sweet, sassy, and engaging, and while panties are frequently in display and inappropriate clinches abound, the growing community of the classroom keeps the series focused.

☐ **Ranma 1/2 Season One Box Set 450 min. VIZ Video. 2007. DVD 4 discs. \$49.98.**

Ranma is cursed: every time he gets hit with cold water, he turns into a girl, and only a good dousing with hot water will transform him back into a guy. If this were the only joke, the series would get tired pretty fast, but throw in a skeptical fiancée, more curses, martial arts, a growing assortment of friends and rivals, and the recipe for a slapstick but heartfelt comedy is complete. The incidental flashes of nudity, frequently used to indicate Ranma's gender status, doesn't prevent this from being a teen favorite.

Less Wacky, More Real

For those viewers who'd rather avoid the frequent silliness of the above titles, check out these more realistic, but no less entertaining, titles.

☐ **Otogi Zoshi Premium Box Volumes 1-6 650 min. Anime Works. 2006. DVD 6 discs. \$129.95.**

A young noblewoman of the court of Heiankyo in medieval Japan must take on her brother's role as a samurai to save both her kingdom and her sibling. Sent after the powerful mythical object, the Magatama, to free her city from plague and corruption, she struggles as much with brazen opponents as with scheming politicians. An atmospheric historical drama, this series highlights an age not often seen in anime with majesty and depth.

☐ **Witch Hunter Robin Anime Legends Complete Collection 650 min. Bandai. 2006. DVD 5 discs. \$49.98.**

Robin is a craft user, also known as a witch, sent by a special branch of the Vatican to help the Japanese branch of the STN corporation hunt down renegade craft users. In this dark and complicated speculative thriller, Robin slowly comes to realize she has more in common with her prey than she's ever been told. Her superiors are not to be trusted, but what about her new colleagues? A beautifully animated, moody piece, great for fans of supernatural mysteries.

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☐ **Ergo Proxy 100 min. Geneon. 2006-. DVD 6 discs. \$29.98 each.**

In the utopian city of Rondo, everyone has an artificially created Entourage, a kind of robotic companion, and order is maintained at all costs. Cracks start appearing in the city's paradise when a number of Entourages suddenly go renegade and attack their masters. Agent Real is assigned to uncover the inspiration for the attacks, but she soon discovers it's far more threatening than a programming malfunction. The moments of action are thrilling, but the investigation and societal critique add layers.

☐ **Noir: The Complete Collection 510 min. ADV Films. 2006. DVD 5 discs. \$89.98.**

When two assassins, a deadly young woman and an amnesiac schoolgirl, discover the secrets of their pasts can be answered in each others' memories, they reach a professional agreement. Together they will find the truth, but when they have found all their is to find, the shared information will become a liability, and they will become each other's target. Known for the balletic action sequences and evocative soundtrack, this labyrinthine mystery is worth the slow pace, and appealing to older teens and adults.

☐ **Wolf's Rain Anime Legends Complete Collection 450 min. Bandai. 2006. DVD 4 discs. \$39.98.**

From the creators behind Cowboy Bebop comes this post-apocalyptic vision: in a world all but destroyed by impersonal, technologically advanced wars, mankind's salvation is rumored to lie with an extinct species: wolves. The wolves are not gone, however -- they've just developed a kind of human glamor that allows them to hide in plain sight. The wolves are on the hunt for Paradise, as legend says they must, even if it may be too late for either humanity or the wolves. The series takes in intriguing premise and runs with it.

☐ **Saikano Complete Collection 350 min. VIZ Video. 2005. DVD 2 discs. \$79.98.**

Shuji and Chise are taking the tentative first steps toward dating when Shuji discovers his new girlfriend has a terrifying side -- she is Japan's last defense in an murky ongoing war, a schoolgirl turned into a walking weapon. What could be a traditional romance is complicated by the range of emotions the pair goes through as the world around them crumbles as Chise's missions slowly kill her humanity. Guilt, peer pressure, lust, horror, loyalty, patriotism, and love all jumble together. Aimed at older teen guys and men, Chise is a bit submissive for a deadly weapon, but the emotions are honest and compelling.

For the younger crowd

While a lot of viewers think of animation as only for kids, a lot of anime is not -- but these titles are wonderful for younger viewers, from kids to 'tweens.

☐ **Princess Tutu 125 min. ADV Films. 2005-2007. DVD 6 discs. \$29.98each.**

In a topsy-turvy fairy tale world overseen by the storyteller Drosselmeyer (familiar to Nutcracker fans), a ballet student named Duck tries to dance her best while puzzling through a mystery surrounding her classmate, Mythos. What no one really knows is that Duck is, in fact, a duck, who transforms into a girl, and who can also transform into Princess Tutu, a magical heroine who saves troubled folks with the power of dance. Full of references to classical dance, from ballet story lines to a score of some of the most memorable ballet music, this series will satisfy any viewers need for a lush and imaginative fairy tale.

☐ **Kaleido Star Amazing Collection 650 min. ADV Films. 2005. DVD 5 discs. \$49.98.**

Kaleido Stage is a Cirque-du-Soleil style circus, built with elaborate stories, costumes and sets that highlight the feats of each performer. Every circus hopeful dreams of performing with Kaleido Stage's expert team, but can new tumbler Sora survive her own doubts, internal politics, and the skepticism of the star of the show? This series is all about hard work, determination, and teamwork. The circus scenes are exhilarating, and the themes of friendship and ambition are universal.

☐ **Prince of Tennis Season Box Sets 300 min. VIZ Media. 2007. DVD 3 discs. \$39.98.**

For a show that is all about tennis, it's gained a whole lot of fans. Guys get into it for the matches and competition, as twelve-year-old tennis prodigy Ryoma proceeds to wipe the floor with older guys. He's never arrogant about his talent, but you won't get his respect by status. Girls love it because of the variety of appealing guys on display. Though the series loses some impact the umpteenth time Ryoma pulls out a surprise tennis move to win the day, the interaction of the team gets you through.

☐ **Hikaru no Go 100 min. VIZ Media. 2005-2007. DVD 10 discs. \$24.98.**

Who knew a board game could be so exciting? Hikaru no Go follows the journey of a sixth grader, Hikaru, from being an ordinary guy to becoming a competitive Go player. Hikaru uncovers a haunted Go board of his grandfather's basement and accidentally summons the spirit of the medieval Go player Sai Fujisawa. Sai lingers on Earth to play the ultimate game of Go and together, they'll become an unbeatable team. A sweet series, the balance between the strategy of the game and the everyday interactions of Hikaru's life make the drama work.

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☐ **DNAngel The Complete Collection 650 min. ADV Films. 2005. DVD 5 discs. \$89.98.**

Daisuke is literally another person sometimes – when his curse is activated by thinking of the girl he likes, he turns into the legendary Dark, the expert thief who daringly “collects” fine art objects. As Daisuke and Dark contend with recognizing real love, a returning nemesis, and fight to protect the city they love, a sweet and adventurous anime especially great for tweens is born.

🐱 **The Cat Returns 75 min. Walt Disney Home Entertainment. 2005. DVD 2 discs. \$29.99. ISBN: 978-6-308-96856-3**

Hikaru saves a cat from getting run over and ends up engaged to the prince of cat kingdom. Of course, she’s not a cat, yet, but if the cats have her way, she will be! Her magical quest into the world of cats to regain her humanity and get out of her engagement is rollicking and hilarious, especially for anyone who guesses their own cat thinks they are touched by royalty.

☐ **.hack//SIGN Anime Legends Complete Collection 650 min. Bandai 2006. DVD 6 discs. 49.98. ISBN:978-1-59409-723-2**

Tsukasa has a problem. As one of the millions who daily plays the online role-playing game the World, he suddenly discovers he can’t log out, nor does he have any sense of his “real” body back in the world. When a piece of stray programming gains sentience and starts threatening the World itself, Tsukasa may be the key to unlocking the World’s full potential or destroying it and all the players. The first in a slow-paced but suspenseful vision, where viewers rarely see the characters outside their chosen game avatars, is an intriguing assessment of the lives we all live online.

For the BL fans

One of the hottest manga crazes right, boys love or yaoi (romances between two male leads) are underrepresented in anime thus far. Here are a few appealing titles for those fans wanting more of their favorite subgenre.

☐ **Mirage of Blaze: The Complete Collection 325 min. Anime Works. 2006. DVD 4 discs. \$39.95.**

Takaya Ohgi is on the surface an ordinary high school student, but when he’s suddenly recruited into a supernatural battle, it is revealed that he is the reincarnation of a legendary lord of Feudal Japan. The spirits of the original combatants in Japan’s bloody civil wars possess modern-day humans to continue their power struggles. On top of all that, there’s an intense and slightly twisted sensual tension brewing between Takaya and another possessor, Naoe, that teases fans of brooding boys love and yaoi. Though the series never gets sexually explicit, it does get violent, keeping it aimed at older teens and adults.

☐ **Loveless Collection 300 min. Anime Works. 2007. DVD 3 discs. \$34.95.**

This anime brings to life the lush, complicated universe of the manga bestseller. Ritsuka is an isolated 12-year-old boy: his brother murdered, his mother abusive, and his own memory of the last two years disappeared. Enter Soubi, a college student who claims to be a friend of his older brother, and promises Ritsuka he can lead him to his brother’s murderers. Ritsuka is desperate for an ally, and Soubi seems to be it, but their destiny is far more complicated than Ritsuka can know. The edge of boys’ love to this series is romantic, on the level of a strong crush, and never veers into actual sexuality, but it can unnerve some viewers given the age difference between the main characters. Nonetheless, it’s beautifully animated, and a compelling mystery at its heart.

☐ **Kyo Kara Maoh! 125 min. Geneon. 2005-2007. DVD 9 discs. \$24.98.**

Yuuri is transported to a magical fantasy land...by being flushed down the toilet. He discovers he’s the new demon king for this country full of elaborate costumes, antiquated customs, and a plethora of pretty men. Suddenly he’s told he has to perform ceremonies and go on quests, and while everyone’s trying to be helpful, Yuuri’s has no idea what he’s doing. An incredibly silly series, this is not true boys’ love -- even if Yuuri is mistakenly betrothed to another young man, Wolfram, within hours of his arrival. It appeals to boys love fans in search of charming men and goofy humor, but it also appeals on a broader scale to fans of comedy with a fantasy flavor.

☐ **Gravitation Complete Collection 325 min. Right Stuf. 2006. DVD 4 discs. \$59.99.**

This melodramatic, hyper, and occasionally ridiculous boys love tale follows Yuiichi Shindo in his quest for fame and respect as a rock star and, of course, for cold-blooded romance novelist Eiri Yuki’s heart. A fan favorite, this series careens back and forth from the depths of despair to the bliss of requited love, familiar to anyone who’s gone through the heights and depths of teen love. Teen fans guffaw at the slightly dim but determined hero, and Yuki’s unflappable brooding causes more than a few hearts to flutter, but the friendship and trip to rock and roll stardom add depth and variety. There’s never more than a few kisses in the TV series (though the sequel OVA gets slightly more explicit, but not terribly so), making it fine for most teens.

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Action and Adventure, Buckle and Swash

These titles all have the touch of the fantastic, but the key ingredient is adventure, exploration, and good old fashioned action.

☐ **Last Exile Complete Collection 650 min. Geneon. 2005. DVD 7 discs. \$99.98.**

Last Exile is an excellent example of anime creators' fascination with steampunk, or obsolete technologies as a source for an alternate world where, as here, dirigibles are the way to go, or as in Steamboy, steam is the ultimate source of power. This series, alongside a stunning world, boasts complicated characters, breathless action, and a military thriller at the heart that will satisfy both teen and adult fans alike. The animation is gorgeous, both for the environment and for the derring-do of the airship crews.

☐ **Eureka Seven 125 min. Bandai. 2006. DVD 8 discs. \$24.98 each.**

Renton is the son of a war hero who dreams of being part of the Gekkostate, a group of mercenaries who use a kind of air boarding technology and mecha to ride particle waves and confront the military. Although the premise requires a suspension of logic (after all, robots airboarding doesn't make a whole lot of sense), the execution of this series proves that it's more concerned with the depth of its characters and the problems mercenary life leads to than simply cashing in on the extreme sports trend. Slick animation makes it a wild ride, and the teen leads give it a strong appeal for teens and up.

☐ **Black Cat 100 min. Funimation. 2006. DVD 6 discs. \$29.98 each.**

The Black Cat (also known as Train Hartnet) is a teen boy conditioned to be a lethal assassin -- whatever he may think of his missions, he will always complete them with speed, accuracy, and zero compassion. Then he meets Saya, a charming bounty hunter, and discovers there may be more to life than simply perfectly executing orders. This series look great, with suspenseful action and plentiful moments of both pathos and humor. It's nothing new, but it's an appealing entry for conspiracy-driven action pieces, most suitable violence-wise for teens and up.

☐ **Bleach 100 min. VIZ Media. 2006. DVD 5 discs. \$24.98 each.**

Despite being able to see ghosts, Ichigo would much prefer to lead an ordinary teenage life. But when Hollows, or malevolent souls, attack his family, he must become a Soul Reaper: a super-powered guide for wayward souls and a protector of humankind. With supernatural action, well-rounded characters, a strong dose of snide humor, and kinetic animation, this series is great for teens and up.

☐ **Hellsing Ultimate 50 min. Geneon. 2006. DVD 2 discs. \$24.98 each.**

The Hellsing Corporation has a secret weapon in their fight to exterminate all vampires: the incredibly powerful agent Alucard (check out his name spelled backwards) who, although he's kept under certain restraints, excels as one of

the most vicious fighters in their secret war. Partnered up with a newly minted vampire, Victoria, and strategically unleashed by the calculating Integral Hellsing, he wreaks controlled havoc. The violence, gore, and sexuality make this an adult series, and it's loved by fans of splatter-filled horror with black humor.

Short but Remarkable

For those who want a taste of what anime can do, or may want to show something short to a crowd, these are all short but sweet examples of the form.

☞ **Blood the Last Vampire 83 min. Manga Video. 2003. DVD. \$19.98.**

In this atmospheric, blood-soaked short film, vampires are barely human and the "good guys" are part government agents, part ruthless exterminators. Saya is a U.S. Army base high school's best, last hope of defeating these undead monsters, but her stoic attitude and melancholy humor don't endear her to anyone. This short film is entirely about action -- those looking for character development or a substantial plot will be disappointed. The animation, however, is top-notch, and is a memorable example of how style can make a story. The violence makes this best for adults, although many older teens enjoy similarly horrific scenes in films as well.

☞ **Kakurenbo: Hide & Seek 50 min. US Manga Corps Video. 2005. DVD. \$19.98.**

Animated with eloquent computer animation rather than traditional hand-drawn animation, this ghost story come to life follows kids as they test their bravery going into a part of the city where, it's rumored, demons kidnap children in a dangerous game of hide and seek. Each child has their own strategy, but will they get out alive? Strong atmosphere and remarkably creepy sounds, from whispered stories to pounding pursuit, make this a vivid as a cautionary nightmare.

☞ **Voices of a Distant Star 30 min. ADV Films. 2006. DVD. \$19.98.**

What happens when two teenage would-be lovers are separated not by just distance, but by time itself? As Mikako, recruited as a pilot for humanity's war against a mysterious alien race, travels further and further from Earth, her text messages must travel light years to reach high school sweetheart Noboru. First it's days between messages, then months, then years. No matter how strong their feelings, can they find each other again? The creation of one man on his home computer, this anime has a strongly personal look and feel, with extraordinary results. Great for teens, especially as a short film to discuss.

ANIME: A BRAVE NEW WORLD

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☐ **Read or Die (OVA) 90 min. Manga Video. 2006. DVD. \$19.98.**

Yomiko Readman has a very special talent -- she can control paper. She can form it into anything she wants, from giant airplanes to tiny missiles, which all comes in handy as she's a secret agent for the British Library. Unfortunately for her boss, it's almost impossible to get Readman to stop, well, reading. She does it anywhere and everywhere, and really can't be bothered with anything else. An action-packed adventure with a bookish heroine? One of anime's most memorable and imaginative heroines, and the inspiration for the spin-off Read or Die TV series.

The Nostalgic Classics

Anime has, after all, been around for more than fifty years, and these favorite older series are happily available for new and old fans alike.

☐ **Mobile Police Patlabor TV Series Boxed Set 440 min. US Manga Corps. 2003. DVD 4 discs. \$99.95 each.**

One of the standout earlier mecha series, this title combines old-fashioned police work with giant robots, or mecha, called labors. Labors are used for many purposes by the police, from construction to fire-fighting, but they can also be impressive weapons. As the criminal underworld develops labors of their own, the police try to fight back despite limited upgrades and all too human pilots. The look may be dated, but this series still combines detective work and human frailty with some effective robot fights.

☐ **Mobile Suit Gundam Wing Complete Collection 625 min. Bandai. 2006. DVD 5 discs. \$49.98 each.**

Though it was originally all about selling toy robots, the collective Gundam epic includes over twenty five different anime series and films. The stories follow the conflict between colonists living on orbiting satellites around Earth and their conflict with the planet-based government of the Earth Alliance. Order is maintained by young soldiers piloting giant robots, called mobile suits. Mobile Suit Gundam Wing falls in the middle of the many titles, and newly collected in economical box sets, it makes for a good entry into the mythology for new fans.

☐ **X Remix Complete Set 650 min. Geneon. 2006. DVD 5 discs. \$124.98.**

The end of the world is coming, and it all boils down to who you want to win: humankind, though we will likely continue destroying the planet, or the Earth, which free of pollution will flourish. Seven men and women are called to fight on opposite sides, but in the end the grand battle is less important than each chosen member's reasons for staying in the fight. One of CLAMP's trademark manga brought beautifully to life, it's a favorite for fans of epic, mystical battles that count on character as much as apocalyptic visions. This TV series is also the only way fans of the story can get any resolution, as the incomplete manga is on permanent hiatus.

☐ **Astro Boy Ultra Collector's Edition 1220 min. Right Stuf. 2006. DVD 11 discs. \$129.98.**

This is the series that launched a thousand series, and Tezuka's world-famous tale of a robot who would be a boy is now available in high quality box sets of the original episodes released in 1963. The series released here has only two episodes subtitled, while the rest are as close to the original English dubbing as the producers could manage, providing as good as an example as possible of many Americans first taste of anime. The series may seem odd to today's anime fans, but the impact it had on the art form is impossible to measure. Parents and teens should enjoy watching this set together.

Titles You Might Have Missed

These titles are currently out of print, but they're definitely keepers if you already have them in your collection, and are titles to seek out if you can find them.

☐ **Martian Successor Nadesico 510 min. ADV Films. 2002. DVD 3 discs. \$9.98.**

If you want inane but clever parody, this title is for you. Taking on every cliché from space and mecha anime, this series casts the cheerful, determined, and slightly off-kilter Yuriko as a brilliant battleship captain who is humanity's last hope against invaders. Add a terrified but kind ship's cook (also Yuriko's crush), a macho, clumsy robot pilot, and host of wacky crew members and put them in loopy, homage-laden situations, and you've got the heart of Martian Successor Nadesico. It is inherently silly, and a must for fans, but it's also easily enjoyed by new viewers.

☐ **Cardcaptor Sakura Complete Collection 875 min. Geneon. 2005. DVD 9 discs. \$99.98.**

Sakura is your typical forth-grader -- bubbly, waiting to grow up, and with a big crush on her older brother's best friend. Her world is turned upside down when she opens an ancient text and activates a series of magical cards -- she is now responsible for locating and containing all of the unleashed cards before they wreak havoc on her world. Her family and friends are drawn into the quest, and the series turns around her traditional, magical girl adventures. This is a great series for tweens and teens, adapted from the equally engaging CLAMP manga series, and appeals especially to girls.

☐ **Revolutionary Girl Utena 125 min. Software Sculptors. 2003. VHS dubbed. \$19.99; DVD 2 discs. \$29.99.**

Revolutionary Girl Utena has a reputation among fans. It is known for a stylized, Art Nouveau look, Freudian pretensions and sexual imagery, a lesbian subtext that's more text than sub-, and a strong female character who manages to shine through all of the artifice. The story is an oddball trip through a vividly imagined but fantastical world where high schoolers duel to win a bride and Utena herself would rather be a prince than a princess. Both the TV series and the film share the same appeal, though the film gets decidedly more sensual and thus remains best for older teens and adults.