

How to Get Addicted to Anime

Written by Carl Malmstorm

Hi! With any luck you are reading this article as someone who has hopefully seen an episode or two of anime and is wondering what else is out there as anime series go. If you're reading this as someone that's never seen anime and is wondering where a good place to start is, that's fine too. If you know more about anime than I ever will and are reading it because you read everything posted to the JAS web site, please keep reading anyway. You may not learn anything new, but I hope you'll at least be entertained.

It has now been just about one year since I was first introduced to anime. Since then my bank account has dwindled, and my video shelves have grown exponentially, but I've found an interest that's unlike any other. The idea behind this article is to give someone like me about eleven months ago an idea of what to look for in terms of other truly good anime series out there, where you can look for them, and what to expect out of it (financially and psychologically). I might as well start with the series that first got me hooked...

Fushigi Yuugi

Okay, the basic plot behind Fushigi Yuugi is that two 9th Graders, Miaka and Yui, go to the library after school one day and end up getting sucked into a book. The world of the book bears a certain resemblance to ancient China and it turns out that Miaka has the destiny of being the Miko (the priestess) of the animal god Suzaku. As Miko, she has seven Seishi (protectors), and she has to find them to call Suzaku, who will make wishes come true.

I'll admit that at first glance this doesn't sound like the most exciting plot for an anime, but in all the anime I've seen of the past year, I still think it's far and away the best. I try to think of it as The Princess Bride of anime. It has lots of comedy, true love, truly evil villains, twists, turns, betrayals, and everything you'd expect from a good fantasy adventure. I first started watching the series at episode 13, and that's actually not a bad place to start. One thing many new addicts to anime should learn is that some anime series take a little while to grow into. For Fushigi Yuugi, I'd say that it takes between eight and ten (out of 52) episodes to really get into.

Now, where can you get this? Pioneer acquired the rights to commercially release the series in America (I'll explain more about commercial vs. fansubbed releases at the end of the article) and Volume 1: Episodes 1-4 will be released in both Japanese with English Subtitles format (~\$30) and English-Dubbed format (~\$25) on November 24th. It seems that subsequent releases of three episodes at a time will follow about every two months.

The Irresponsible Captain Tylor

The Irresponsible Captain Tylor is a spoof on every starship-bearing science fiction or anime series ever made. The thing that differentiates this from other parodies is that it has a real plot with real characters and a definite unpredictability to it. Okay, maybe the line between 'comedy' and 'parody' starts to blur here... Anyway, the idea is that Justy Ueki Tylor is a young man looking for an easy life, so he joins the United Planets Space Force. If that sounds a little odd, it gets better. Through circumstances beyond his control, he's given command of a ship full of military rejects and is sent on no end of dangerous missions. The thing is, Tylor lives life by doing what he wants to do. When this coincides with the UPSF's wishes, then so much the better, but it's nothing to bet on.

This is arguably the funniest anime series I have ever seen. I loved the whole thing, and I'm looking forward to the release of the OVAs (Original Video Animations are direct-to-video anime series or sequels that do not air on television). Everything about this series is funny, but yet often manages to make the occasional subtle (or not-so-subtle) point. You can start right at the beginning of Tylor with no problem.

The Right Stuf has released the entire television series (26 episodes, 8 volumes) and will be releasing the OVA series next year. So far, it's only available in subtitled format, but this, too, may change next year. Volumes are \$19.95 each.

Maison Ikkoku

Okay, before we go any further, I should let you know right now that I'm a big fan of romantic comedy in anime. This means that I'm a little biased towards them.

However, Maison Ikkoku is a great series no matter what your favorite anime sub-genre is. That said...

The basic plot behind Maison Ikkoku is pretty simple. Godai is a ronin in the modern Japanese sense: he's a student who has failed to get into a university and is now scrambling to get into whatever piddly little second- and third-rate universities are left. He lives in a fairly run-down boarding house known as Maison Ikkoku, and his life is made no easier by the obnoxious drunks that are his neighbors. These folks see Godai as an object for their amusement. Well, into Maison Ikkoku comes Kyoko, a beautiful, recently married and widowed manager. Well, Godai is a normal twenty-year old, while Kyoko's led a pretty sheltered life. While Godai falls instantly in love, Kyoko has pretty much sworn off men. You can see where this is going...

It's a simple idea, but the stories are hilarious, touching, and often painful to watch all at the same time. Within three episodes you'll really care about Godai and Kyoko, and you'll really cringe whenever Godai screws up (which happens a lot, by the way).

As price goes, Maison Ikkoku is a bit pricy. It's \$29.95 for two subtitled episodes or \$24.95 for two dubbed ones. Currently about 24 subtitled episodes (which can be hard to find) and 28-30 dubbed episodes have been released. However (and this is a BIG however) the series runs 96 episodes, and Viz releases them at a rate of about 8 per year. It should all be released by about the end of 2007. It's still a great series, though, if you can stand the wait.

Ranma ½

Ranma is one of those series that I consider to be "embarrassingly addictive." With a plot like this there should be no real reason why you get addicted to it, but yet, oddly enough, you do.

Again, the basic idea is simple. Ranma is a trainee in his father's martial arts school. On a training trip to China, he and his father fall into different parts of a cursed spring and as a result, whenever Ranma is splashed with cold water, he turns into a girl. His dad turns into a panda. Hot water can turn them back into their original forms, though. You can deal with the piglet, cat, and duck once you get into the series.

Well, upon their return to Japan, Ranma's dad Genma calls in an old favor with another martial artist friend of his, Soun, and the two live at his dojo (training hall). For reasons that will be made clear MUCH later in the series, they refuse to go home. Of course, this situation becomes even more complicated with the fact that many years ago Genma and Soun arranged for Ranma and one of Soun's three daughters to marry when they were older. Well, after discovering Ranma's little problem, the two oldest sisters graciously offer the youngest sister up as the sacrificial bride. Everything snowballs from this point.

Like I said, Ranma 1/2 is an embarrassingly addictive series, but it's also a lot of fun. No word sums up the series quite so well as "silly." It's easy to get into and you can start at the beginning (or pretty much anywhere else) in the series.

Like Maison Ikkoku, Ranma is a bit pricy, and it's also released by Viz. It's a little confusing to explain, but tapes can run from \$25 to \$35 and have two or three episodes on them. Again, the dubs are cheaper than the subtitled versions, but be careful that you know which one you're getting when you buy it. Unless it says "Subtitled Version" somewhere on the cover or spine, you've got the dubbed version. About half the TV series (3 1/2 of 7 seasons) is available. The subtitled versions are lagging by about a season. Also, the OAVs and the theatrical movies have also been released in both forms.

Vision of Escaflowne

Unlike the others, I'm actually pretty ambivalent about Escaflowne. However, I'm lonely in that viewpoint, so I'm including this series as well.

The basic idea behind Escaflowne is that a high school girl named Hitomi (this is a popular theme in anime, if you hadn't noticed) is magically transported to a planet called Gaea after saving the life of a young king, Van, who "sort-of" followed (or was chased by - it's not exactly clear) a dragon to Earth. The young king was doing this as his proof of kingship and for the opportunity to retrieve the dragon's Draco-Energist that can power the Guymelefs (over-sized fighting suits - known as "mecha" in other anime series) of Gaea. Well, Gaea has it's share of problems and soon Van with his Guymelef Escaflowne and Hitomi are on the run from an evil, destructive country that has an agenda that involves Escaflowne.

It is very much a fantasy series and parts of it are reminiscent of seventeenth-century Italy, pre-colonial India, nineteenth- (and maybe twenty-first) century Germany. The visual art of Escaflowne is amazing; the music is a departure from what you hear in almost any other anime series. It has a very Gregorian Chant feel to it. It is also a series that you need to start watching at Episode 1.

Vision of Escaflowne is only available through mail-order. Check out the web site <http://www.animevillage.com> if you're interested.

In conclusion...

Well, those of you that know at least something about anime may have noticed that Neon Genesis Evangelion is noticed by it's absence. There's a reason for this. It's not that Evangelion isn't both a great and addictive series (it is). However, JAS is showing it this quarter, so you, the newly-introduced to anime, should hopefully have seen some of it and can draw your own conclusions. For those of you who cannot make it to our showings, my best suggestion is to rearrange your life to make it to these showings.

Now, before I wind this up, I want to give you a quick idea where you can purchase these videos and what exactly "fansubs" are. First off, the best place to go to find anything anime (including mail-order retailers) is the Anipike. If you'd sooner go and hunt out your anime fix on the streets of Chicago, any decent video store (Suncoast, Coconuts, The Stars Our Destination) should have something from one of the above series. If not, check the Anipike.

Also, I did not include any series that have not been commercially licensed in America, because I did not want to get into the whole idea of where to hunt for the best fansubs. However, if you're wondering what fansubs are, this is the basic premise: not every anime series produced in Japan makes it to America. In fact, not many do (although this is changing). So, many die-hard anime fans acquire Japanese laserdiscs and actually subtitle whole series by themselves. This can be a legal grey-area (copyright rules, sales, etc.). If you want to know more about it take a look at <http://www.fansubs.net/fansubs.html> to get a better idea of what these are.

Well, I hope you've found this useful (or at least entertaining). Good luck on finding a new addiction!