Anime for Grown-Ups – Anime Detour 2022
Jessi Silver and J.C. Horvath

Disclaimer: "Anime for Grown-Ups" describes anime that we think has some appeal to older or more experienced anime fans, and is not meant as a broad judgment against media created for wider audiences.

The items below are presented with descriptions including content warnings, and ways to watch them legally (if available). Content warnings are meant for informational purposes, and may not include details regarding very specific/niche content concerns.

Early Japanese Animated Shorts at the National Film Center of Tokyo – Selections range from 1917-1941 and can be accessed for free from the Center's website. Information is in English. - https://animation.filmarchives.jp/en/index.html

- *The Dull Sword* – 1917, dir. Junichi Kouchi – A samurai pays for a sword and doesn't get what he bargained for. Uses stop-motion animation that hearkens back to storytelling scrolls and woodblock prints, and is reminiscent of later kamishibai storytelling.
    - Related – *Momotaro Sacred Sailors* – 1945, dir. Mitsuyo Seo – A retelling of the story of Momotaro, reinterpreted as a WWII tale of Momotaro and friends going off to aid in the war effort. **CW: War propaganda.** *Available on BD from Funimation*

Animerama – A trio of animated films, originally conceived by producers at Nippon Herald, produced at Osamu Tezuka's Mushi Productions studio and directed by Eiichi Yamamoto. Made to appeal to what was then an untapped marked for animation – adult viewers – as well as a worldwide market. Draws from Western stories and settings. Tezuka's involvement varied as the projects struggled to get made, and he left to do other things prior to *Belladonna of Sadness* which is very much Yamamoto's piece.

- *A Thousand and One Nights* – 1969 – Water-seller Aladdin/Aldin falls in love with a beautiful slave named Miriam, who he steals away from the slave market. After they make love, Aladdin is pursued by Miriam's original buyers and framed for murder. Draws from several stories and elements from the *1001 Nights*, though the narrative becomes unfocused in the second half. Utilizes several interesting and experimental animation techniques, including using scale models to depict parts of the setting. **CW: Sexual Content, sexual assault, violence/murder, slavery.** *Available on BD from Discotek Media*
- *Cleopatra* – 1970 – In the future, Earth faces a threat from a group of hostile aliens assembling a "Cleopatra strategy." In order to identify what this strategy entails, three individuals are sent back in time to inhabit the bodies of individuals close to Cleopatra where they bear witness to her various affairs. The weakest of the three films, this was produced in a very short time frame and failed upon release for various reasons both within and outside the control of the creators. It does still contain some unique visual material, though its overall tone leaves something to be desired. **CW: Sexual Content, violence/murder, colorism.** *Available on BD from Discotek Media*
- *Belladonna of Sadness* – 1973 – Easily the strongest of the three Animerama films, this tells the story of Jeanne, a young medieval bride who's raped by the local lord on her wedding night. As she struggles to recover from this, the cries of her soul summon a demon who helps Jeanne to unlock the power inherent in her sexuality, which she eventually uses to lay the ground work for a new idea of liberated and egalitarian society. Based on concepts found in Jules Michelet's *La Sorciere*, which describes a somewhat invented tradition of European witchcraft. **CW: Sexual content, rape, violence**

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Lupin the Third: Part 1 – 1971-72, 23 episodes, dir. Masaaki Osumi, Hayao Miyazaki, and Isao Takahata. Lupin the Third, grandson of master thief Arsene Lupin, travels the world with his companions to steal treasures and cause heartburn to Inspector Zenigata of Interpol. This series serves as an origin for the *Lupin* franchise in animation, and lays the groundwork for many of the stylistic and tonal beats of later incarnations. It also features directorial work by Hayao Miyazaki and Isao Takahata, who were called in to replace the original director who left over creative differences. **CW: Violence, murder, some sexual content.** *Available streaming at Crunchyroll, and on disc from Discotek Media*

- *Lupin the Third: The Woman Called Fujiko Mine* – 2012, 13 episodes, dir. Sayo Yamamoto – An exploration of the character motivations of Lupin's long-time rival, Fujiko Mine. Written and directed by women, this interpretation of Fujiko's story makes strong use of the character's sexuality while subverting some of the more sexist "damaged woman" tropes that plague similar characters. **CW: Sexual content, brainwashing, violence.** *Available on BD from Discotek Media*
- *Lupin the Third: Part Five* – 2018, 24 episodes, dir. Yuichiro Yano – Lupin and the gang are forced to wrangle with a new challenge to their typical activities **–** an internet-connected public and new forms of social media that make it difficult to hide in the shadows. This season's narrative also addresses bigger questions regarding the relevance of classic characters to a world that has changed so much from the time that they were created. **CW: Violence, mild fanservice, parental abandonment, reference to sexual assault.** *Available streaming at Crunchyroll and on BD from Discotek Media*

Future Boy Conan – 1978, 26 Episodes, dir. Hayao Miyazaki – An adaptation of Alexander Key's "The Incredible Tide," the story takes place in a future where war and environmental catastrophe have covered all but a few areas of Earth in water. Conan lives on a small island with his "grandfather" and believes that they're the only survivors until a girl his own age named Lana washes ashore. After threatening foes come to "retrieve" Lana, Conan and friends go on a world-hopping adventure to discover the truth about other surviving groups of humans. This family-friendly series is a must-watch for anyone interested in the development of director Miyazaki's personal set of aesthetics and themes that appear in his later work. **CW: Violence, smoking/alcohol use.** *Available on BD from GKIDS*

Roujin Z – 1991, dir. Hiroyuki Kitakubo – With Japan's population aging and birthrate down, a gap in available care staff is hitting a crisis level. The Ministry of Public Welfare joins with scientists to create a fully-automated hospital bed to attend to every need of the elderly. Mr. Takazawa an elderly man confined to his bed, becomes the first test subject, but his home-care nurse Haruko sense the injustice of the situation and sets off to help Mr. Takazawa regain his autonomy. This satire, written by Katsuhiro Otomo, examines the ways in which the elderly and the young are both marginalized and denied agency by society. It's also very entertaining. **CW: Violence, body horror, lack of medical consent.**

Shoujo Classics - as part of an "unofficial classic shoujo trilogy" – The anime series *Princess Knight*, *The Rose of Versailles*, and *Revolutionary Girl Utena* are often grouped together in that their stories all involve, to some extent, an examination of the role of gender as a function of the protagonists' lives. While the relationship there is undeniable, I'd posit that the anime *Dear Brother* bridges the gap more completely between *RoV* and *Utena* based on its visual elements, setting, and character interactions.

- *Dear Brother* – 1991, 39 episodes, dir. Osamu Dezaki – Nanako begins her first year at Seiran Girls' Academy, but as a member of the middle class she's woefully unprepared for the level of competitiveness and back-biting she encounters, especially once she's mysteriously chosen to

join the school's elite sorority. All the while, she writes letters to her "dear brother," a former cram school teacher who might be more closely related to Nanako's life than she realizes. This story follows several characters whose lives are unexpectedly intertwined. This anime expands upon the story originally created by famous manga-ka Riyoko Ikeda, pulling it into the modern day (at the time). It features many of director Dezaki's go-to visual techniques, including detailed still-frame "postcard memories," conversations depicted in split-screen, dramatic lighting and framing, and use of Dutch angles. **CW: Bullying, violence, attempted suicide, character death, age-gap relationship, medical trauma, drug/alcohol use.** *Available streaming at Retro Crush and on BD from Discotek Media (hurry, the licensing period is very short)*

- *The Rose of Versailles (Lady Oscar)* – 1979-80, 40 episodes, dir. Tadao Nagahama and Osamu Dezaki – As Marie Antioinette ascends the French throne as its new queen, celebration in the French court obscures brewing discontent among the people. Oscar Francois de Jarjeyes, a girl raised as a boy, becomes a member of the French guard and eventually serves at Queen Antoinette's side, but neither Oscar's integrity nor the Queen's pride can stem the building tide. Based on a manga by Riyoko Ikeda, this series features an interesting twist on elements of French history in its passionate, emotional story of love and death. **CW: Bullying, violence, war, classism.** *Available on BD from Discotek Media*
- *Revolutionary Girl Utena* – 1997, 39 episodes, dir. Kunihiko Ikuhara – Utena Tenjou irritates the teaching staff of Otori Academy by wearing a boy's uniform, but this habit comes as part of the role she's attempting to fulfill. Many years ago, she was rescued by a prince, and now aspires to become one. When she encounters the abused Anthy Himemiya, the rose ring given to Utena long ago unlocks her way into the school's dueling arena where she and other fight for Anthy's hand. The winning duelist has a chance to unlock a great and mysterious power. This iconic take on both the magical girl and shoujo drama genres explores and criticizes masculine archetypes while incorporating themes of same-sex romance and recovery from trauma. **CW: Violence, sexual violence/rape, bullying, PTSD.** *Available streaming on Crunchyroll and on BD from Nozomi Entertainment*

Megalobox 2: Nomad – 2021, 13 episodes, dir. Yo Moriyama – Several years after his win at Megalonia, Joe has hit rock bottom. Now once again participating in anonymous fights under the name "Nomad," he must come to terms with past mistakes as he helps to rebuild his way into the future. A continuation of *Megalobox*, which was created as an homage to the classic *Tomorrow's Joe* on its 50th anniversary. This series focuses more closely on the struggle of immigrant communities living at the margins, the curses of toxic masculinity, and other important themes. **CW: Violence, sports injury, racism, drug use/abuse, PTSD.** *Available streaming on Crunchyroll and Funimation and on BD by Funimation (4/5/2022)*

Odd Taxi – 2021, 13 Episodes, dir. Baku Kinoshita – Odokawa is a taxi driver who has a knack for remembering faces. When he becomes a person of interest in a missing-person case involving a high school girl, it turns out that he may have more to hide than meets the eye. This Noir mystery series has been a critical darling and sleeper hit over the past year. Its use of animal characters helps to keep its extensive cast straight in the mind of the viewer, while its keen sense of human nature allows their lives to feel real. The show deals with themes related to our online lives, fame-seeking behavior, ambition,

and emotional trauma in a poignant and charming way. A film version with new material will be available in April on Crunchyroll. **CW: Violence, abuse, PTSD, addiction.** *Available streaming at Crunchyroll*

Sonny Boy – 2021, 12 episodes, dir. Shingo Natsume – A classroom of students is transported to an alternate dimension in which they've developed certain superpowers. Now lost without a way to return home, but with the ability to build a society to their own standards, those who lead and those who follow have all the time in the world to explore what it means to live. This series is at once impenetrable and emotionally resonant, containing beautiful imagery and meaningful relationships in a space where having a definable narrative thread would almost feel trite. Best taken in small chunks, with each dreamlike episode the series allows the viewer to muse on its themes in a way that's personal. **CW: Bullying, mild nudity, death.** *Available streaming at Funimation*

Other Resources

- Renaissance Josei (Megan D) – The Story of Animerama blog series - https://renaissancejosei.blogspot.com/2021/01/the-story-of-animerama-origins.html
- Carment Antreasian – Reconsidering Belladonna of Sadness: Still powerful after almost 50 years - https://www.animefeminist.com/reconsidering-belladonna-of-sadness-still-powerful-after-almost-50-years/
- Lynzee Loveridge - Discussing the Socio-Politics of Megalobox 2: Nomad with Yo Moriyama, Katsuhiko Manabe, and Kensaku Kojima - https://www.animenewsnetwork.com/interview/2021-06-04/discussing-the-socio-politics-of-megalobox-2-nomad-with-yo-moriyama-katsuhiko-manabe-and-kensaku-/.173444
- Chatty AF – Dear Brother Watchalong – Episodes 1-7 – https://www.animefeminist.com/chatty-af-158-dear-brother-watchalong-episodes-1-7/
- Lynzee Loveridge – Law and Order with Sonny Boy Director Shingo Natsume - https://www.animenewsnetwork.com/interview/2021-08-11/law-and-order-with-sonny-boy-director-shingo-natsume/.176071
- Justin Sevakis – Buried Treasure: Roujin Z - https://www.animenewsnetwork.com/buried-treasure/2008-04-17/roujin-z
- Kim Morrissy – Interview: ODDTAXI Director Baku Kinoshita - https://www.animenewsnetwork.com/interview/2021-05-17/oddtaxi-director-baku-kinoshita/.172729