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## A History of Mecha

The genre of mecha has a rich and varied history. From its origins in the 60's to the present day, mecha has grown and developed to be an interesting genre with many major achievements and several prominent figures in the field. This paper seeks to break down the growth of the mecha genre, identify key influences and patterns of its development, and serve as both an introduction to the genre and a survey of the field.

First, before we can go into the history of mecha, we must first clearly define what mecha is. The colloquial definition that often comes up is simply 'giant robots fighting.' While this definition of the genre ignores several aspects, it seems accurate at first glance. When people think mecha, they generally think of series like Golion (in America known as Voltron) and Mobile Suit Gundam, which prominently feature oversized robots fighting other robots. If we take a look at a collection of prominent mecha series and their 'stars', we can definitely see a pattern of large robots emerging: the mobile suits in Gundam are each twenty meters tall, the titular mecha in Gunbuster is ten times that, and the titular mecha in Tengen Toppa Gurren Lagann grows to the size of galaxies. Clearly, size is definitely a prominent aspect in these series. But does it necessarily have to be? When we look at some other series, we see some radically different sizes. Armored Trooper VOTOMS, for instance, features mecha a mere four meters tall, barely twice the height of a normal person. There is no objection among fans that VOTOMS is a mecha series, however. If we go further, to another series Tekkaman Blade, we have a robot that is a mere two meters tall, the exact same size as a person. If we're feeling particularly adventurous, if we look at Little Battlers eXperience, the robots in the show are 6 inch tall remote controlled robots! At first, one might argue that these cross some invisible lower bound that makes them not mecha. However, the question arises: what is the purpose of defining a genre? A genre's best definition is to include multiple works of related content that all influence each other. It lets us know what to expect going in, and lets us trace influences across works. Thus, if it looks like mecha and reads like mecha, then it is mecha. VOTOMS, Tekkaman, and Little Battlers all contain stories and sequences reminiscent of other mecha series, so we clearly should include them. Thus, we have grounds to expand the definition of mecha to 'robots fighting.' But this too fails to grasp the full grasp of mecha. Another famous series widely accepted as mecha is Patlabor, a series about a robot-based police force. While several times the protagonists are forced to fight criminals in their robots, it is by no means the main thrust of the series. Instead, the focus of the show is on fighting crime with all aspects of police work, including investigation, chase sequences, and lots of non-combat experiences. If we try to broaden our definition of mecha at this point, we're left with 'robots.' At this point, we definitely need to recast our approach to defining the genre of mecha; a mere visual definition is no longer sufficient. However, the more we expand the definition, the more extraneous information is added in. As is, with just 'robots' or even a more nuanced definition, we include many other non-Japanese works that never influenced the authors who worked on mecha, like H.G. Wells' War of the Worlds, or series that no fan currently considers mecha, like Chobits. How can we come up with a simple definition to be applied at a glance

without including extraneous series that do not help us understand the genre? Mecha is perhaps defined best as a two-pronged approach. Since we're trying to come up with a genre definition that includes the influences of other mecha series, we can simply formally define mecha as anything influenced by another mecha series, in addition to prominently featuring robots. While the arguments above were critical for a specific understanding of the genre, the gut reaction of 'fighting robots' is still sufficient as a good first pass to guess whether something is mecha or not. As far as my research determined, there exist no series that a gut reaction of 'does it have fighting robots?' would give a false positive. Now all that remains to fully defining the genre is to trace the chains of influence to find the touchstones of the genre, and we can have a broad idea of what exactly is mecha. As such, we now can look at the origins of the mecha genre to trace out its influences.

If we are going to describe mecha as that which follows from mecha, we need a place to start from as the original series, the progenitor that gave birth to everything that was to come. Like manga and anime as a whole, the birth of mecha can be traced back to Osamu Tezuka. In particular, his work *Astro Boy*, which ran from 1952 to 1968, was the foundation for much of what was to come in the mecha genre. *Astro Boy* featured man and machine living together in a futuristic civilization. Atom, the protagonist, was a young boy robot created by a prominent scientist, who, after a series of trials and trevails, was adopted by a kindly professor. Atom went on to fight crime and injustice in the city, taking on rogue robots and criminals. Here in *Astro Boy* we see the seeds of what would give birth to the mecha genre. *Astro Boy* was the first work to seize the imagination of the Japanese public with futuristic robots. It portrayed technology of the future in a creative way to make people interested in science fiction, and by especially bringing robots to the fore, Tezuka primed the public for what was to come. It also introduced what would be a common theme repeated in later mecha shows: people using their new technology to fight for justice. Coming out of World War II, Japan as a nation was naturally sensitive to the idea of war and future technology. Tezuka took that anxiety and reshaped it into a different form.

This anxiety from World War II was exemplified particularly in the first work that is universally identified as mecha, Mitsuteru Yokoyama's *Tetsujin 28-Go* in 1956 to 1966. *Tetsujin* focuses on the story of Shotaro Kaneda, the son of a Japanese researcher during World War II. Shotaro inherits control of a secret weapon his father was working on towards the end of World War II, the giant robot *Tetsujin 28-Go*. Rather than give it to the military who were going to use it for war, Kaneda instead uses *Tetsujin* to fight for justice and stop crime. Yokoyama has stated in interviews that *Tetsujin* comes from two major influences: Tezuka's works, including *Metropolis* and *Astro Boy*, gave Yokoyama the idea for the giant robots and technology in his work, and the visual iconography he uses in it; and his wartime experiences, including the terror of the superweapons that the USA and Germany were developing, gave him the idea for *Tetsujin*'s background, and the desire for him to represent weapons being used for peace, not war. Yokoyama said in an interview in 1995 that "when I was a fifth-grader, the war ended and I returned home from Tottori Prefecture, where I had been evacuated. The city of Kobe had been totally flattened, reduced to ashes. People said it was because of the B-29 bombers...as a child, I was astonished by their terrifying, destructive power" (Allison 103). From this, he developed *Tetsujin 28-Go*. After *Tetsujin*, the mecha genre sat dormant for a while. While both *Astro Boy* and *Tetsujin* were popular in their time, neither inspired new series immediately. The nascent fields of manga and anime were growing rapidly, however, and the constant influx of new creative works guaranteed that something would happen in time. That 'something' as it came to be was *Mazinger Z* by Go Nagai in 1972. *Mazinger Z* featured Kouji Kabuto, the son of a professor who built the robot *Mazinger Z* to fight the forces of evil. Kouji fought against the robot armies of Dr. Hell, a German scientist who discovered the

secret of mass-producing robots during an archaeological dig. Go Nagai at the time was already a popular mangaka, being one of the founders of Shonen Jump and creator of the famous ecchi series Harechi Gakuen. At the time, he was looking to start a new series since some of his other works were wrapping up. Having read Astro Boy and Tetsujin as a child, he wanted to make a robot series of his own as well. However, all of his initial drafts he felt were too derivative of the original works. As the story goes, one day Nagai was sitting in a traffic jam and thinking about the issue. He idly wondered that he wanted to be able to just go through the traffic jam without being stopped by the other cars. From this, he naturally concluded that riding a giant robot would solve the problem by letting him go over the jam. This thought inspired his initial designs for Mazinger Z (マジンガーZ). While seemingly obvious in retrospect, Mazinger Z was revolutionary for actually having piloted robots. In Astro Boy the robots were characters unto themselves, with personalities and egos. In Tetsujin the robot acted more like an ally to the protagonist, the child, since he was controlled by remote control. By removing the last layer of abstraction and having the protagonist, Kouji Kabuto, pilot the mech, he made the mech an extension of the main character. By removing the robot as a character, the violence in the series became less tragic: a robot getting destroyed is much less significant than a character we sympathize with getting injured or dying. The series also thrived thanks to the design work of Go Nagai who was able to make interesting robot design and add many cool features to his protagonist's robots. One in particular became a common trope in other mecha series: Mazinger Z had the ability to launch its fist like a missile. The manga was an instant hit, with an anime adaptation being made two months after the launch of the manga and running concurrently for the next 2 years. One of Mazinger Z's episodes had a 30% viewership, placing it as one of the most-watched anime episodes of all time (Mazinger Z Fan Site). Mazinger Z's incredible popularity propelled Nagai to even higher heights of fame, and kickstarted the mecha genre. From 1972, when Mazinger Z first aired, to today, there has always been at least one hit mecha series on the air. Mazinger Z also revolutionized the merchandising industry: the toy company Popy, a subsidiary of Bandai, began releasing figures of the mecha in Mazinger Z to sell to fans of the series in 1971. It was wildly successful, despite initial troubles with design, and merchandising became an important component of mecha shows at the time, being another revenue stream for the companies making them.

After Mazinger Z ended, ending the series with the destruction of the robot and a new pilot showing up in the new robot Shin Mazinger to star in a later series, new mecha shows started appearing in force. The next one to become popular immediately after Mazinger Z ended was Getter Robo, a series created by an assistant of Go Nagai, Ken Ishikawa. Getter Robo, centered a band of heroes fighting the evil Dinosaur Empire with the secret weapon Getter Robo, was unique in terms of its design. It too had concurrent manga and anime series. Getter Robo, rather than being one mech that stood on its own, was actually a combination of three mechs that the three heroes piloted individually. In addition, it could transform between multiple different modes depending on the situation. Sadly, Getter Robo is now mostly mistakenly known as a Go Nagai series, since Ishikawa was heavily influenced by Nagai's art and writing style. After Getter Robo was the series Brave Raideen. Brave Raideen, directed by Yoshiyuki Tomino, was very much a departure from the norm of the time. Even compared to previous series, the design for Raideen was extremely bright and colorful, and he had the ability to transform which was only relevant in a few episodes. Tomino confirmed in interviews later on that the design was very much done to sell toys of Raideen ("Profile: Tomino Yoshiyuki"). Despite the fact that it was designed for marketability, Raideen was still an incredibly popular series which influenced future mecha series. Notably, it was the first series to have a mecha that wasn't mechanical: the robot was actually magical in

nature, and was in fact its own character, undoing some of the changes that Nagai had done while writing Mazinger Z. While Nagai's standard continued to hold in the industry, Raideen was proof that it was not necessarily the only successful strategy. After Raideen was Combattler V, which spawned a trilogy of series that covered the end of the 70's. Combattler V was unique in its take on plot compared to other mecha series. Whereas Tetsujin, Mazinger, and their followups were predominantly based on monster-of-the-week episodes, with a new threat to deal with weekly and little continual plot, the Combattler V trilogy was the first to advance the plot on a regular basis and form a continuous story out of it. This was the first step in taking mecha from action-heavy mindless entertainment to a full fledged genre of its own.<sup>[1]</sup> The series that took the ideas of Combattler V and ran with it, making a truly plot-driven series that demonstrated the potential the mecha genre had, was Mobile Suit Gundam in 1979. After Brave Raideen, Tomino was upset with what he felt was the over-merchandising and friendliness of current mecha series. He tried to subvert the norms in 1977 with Daitarn 3, which featured large amounts of character death and a general grim tone, but still felt like the robots of the time were too encouraging of violence. He decided to set out to make a work that illustrated the horror of war and that did not romanticize the mecha at all ("Profile: Tomino Yoshiyuki"). The end result was Gundam, a series that radically differed from any other mecha series at the time. Gundam also popularized the idea of having a specific mechanical designer for the show, in this case Kunio Okawara. Okawara had done specific mecha design work for previous shows, and was the first person ever credited as 'mechanical designer' for his earlier work on the show Hurricane Polymar. Tomino instructed Okawara to make more 'realistic' mecha like the powered armor in Heinlein's Starship Troopers, which Tomino was a fan of for its criticism of war and its mechanical designs ("Profile: Yoshiyuki Tomino"). From this, Okawara created a huge array of designs, focusing on making things that he felt could fit well in the real world. Based around a war of independence fought by rebels in space colonies, Gundam was already much more political than any series to date, featuring lots of moral debate about who was necessarily in the right with characters landing in shades of gray and authority figures revealed to have ulterior motives. Characters died in tragic accidents, the protagonist is scared of war, and people are scarred by the events of the plot. The mecha themselves were unique in their weaknesses: guns ran out of ammo, joints weakened and failed, battles were decided by mass production more than specific super powered robots. Needless to say, the bold experiment that was Gundam failed miserably at first, with low viewership throughout and nearly being cancelled at one point. Even surviving that it was cut from its initial 52 episode run to a mere 39. While Tomino blamed things from the sponsors not trusting his vision to his work being compromised by directors looking for ways to merchandise the series, the much simpler explanation is that the series, for being innovative at many parts of the story, really dragged on in the middle of the show, with extended segments that did little to advance the overall plot. If the author of this paper could make an aside, as a fan of what Gundam has become, the original series was pretty bad. Tomino did make a novelization of the series that expressed his true vision of what the show should be towards the end of its production run (which were translated by Frederick Schodt to English in 1990, and updated in 2004). That said, after Gundam had finished running, Bandai, who at this point was a major company both in anime, manga, and merchandising, purchased the rights to the mecha in Gundam and started making model kits of the show ("Robot anime special"). This is where Gundam's strengths began to shine through: Okawara's original designs that differed from anything previously seen in mecha were extremely popular among both kids and older collectors. As the legend goes, a World War 2 model fan added a model of the Zaku II, the mass-produced mech that the villains in Gundam use, to the German side of his dioramas, and found that it fit in perfectly with the real-life

designs of the rest of the military. With the merchandising a massive hit, Gundam quickly picked up steam in later reruns, and quickly became a hot topic of mecha anime. With the funding from merchandising, Tomino made a slimmed-down version of the series as a movie adaptation, cementing Gundam's popularity both in Japan and, shortly after, abroad. Gundam thus spawned the genre that would eventually be called "real robot," in opposition to other series of the time which would be called "super robot," distinguishing between the style of how the world and mecha are portrayed. mecha are portrayed.

After the success of Gundam, real robot series became a viable option for directors starting new shows. In addition, with Gundam being principally anime and movie based, it signalled a shift out of manga and into anime for mecha, with series receiving bigger budgets and being able to have overall better quality and express their ideas better. The next series of note, in 1982, was Super Dimension Fortress Macross. In an interesting confluence of events, the director, character designer, and head writer were all part of the same Gundam fan club back in college ("Macross Liner Notes"). Macross was initially proposed in late 1979 as capitalizing on the wave of Gundam popularity that was surging thanks to the merchandising. However, due to financing delays and other problems, Macross was in drift for a while until another studio picked up the idea and brought in people to work on it. Compared to Gundam, Macross also was focused on the interaction of people and the tragedy of war. However, compared to Gundam, Macross was much more light-hearted and optimistic, with comical moments and plotlines that end in happy endings, even a Romeo & Juliet subplot that ended with the two marrying by the end of the series. Rather than focusing more on the tragedy of war like Gundam, Macross as a main plotline focused on the glory of humanity and their pursuit of happiness even in the face of danger. There is also a running subtheme throughout Macross and its later sequels of the importance of music as a uniquely human thing, inspiring people and expressing emotion. In terms of mecha design, Macross created the mecha design of robots that transform into jet planes, which later became popular in the western series Transformers and MechWarrior. In fact, Transformers toys were originally repainted versions of Macross toy molds. Macross also led to the a massive legal problem in regards to its international release. The animation company reached an agreement with an American company, Harmony Gold, to distribute Macross internationally. However, American networks would only put shows with over 60 episodes in syndication, and Macross was only just over 30 episodes long. To 'solve' this, Harmony Gold proceeded to edit Macross together with two other series, Mospeada and Cavalry Cross, and make a 'new' series called Robotech. While Robotech was incredibly successful in America, Harmony Gold positioned itself as the sole owner of the Robotech intellectual property and resisted any efforts for further Macross series to enter America, souring relations with the Macross license owners, and complicating Macross for localization nigh-permanently.

By the 80's, mecha had finally come into its own, and covering all the series that existed at the time would be a futile effort. Gundam was incredibly popular during this time period, making several series that dominated the popular culture. Macross had a sequel of its own, along with new 'super robot' series cropping up during the 80's. However, in terms of 'notable' series, there were not as many as in the 70's. Mecha had gone through a lot of development in the late 70's and early 80's, and the 80's were largely spent expanding on the ideas that had already been developed. Kunio Okawara, the Gundam mecha designer, went on to make Armored Trooper VOTOMs, which Tomino later called "the pinnacle of real robot" ( "Profile: Tomino Yoshiyuki"). It, like Gundam, was focused on the effects of war on humanity and the reality of its situations. Transformers in 1984 was the first mecha series to air first in America rather than Japan, despite being done by a Japanese animation company and sponsored by a

Japanese toy company in addition to Hasbro. It did represent the first real cooperation between American and Japanese animation, however. The major new innovation in the genre was the formation of Studio Gainax in 1984 by Hideaki Anno and others. Anno was an animator on Macross who was well-known in the industry for his good work. When Hayao Miyazaki, the famous director, was looking for animators for Nausicaa, Anno brought some of his work to show Miyazaki. Miyazaki was extremely impressed and hired him on the spot ("Official biography"). With Miyazaki's endorsement, Anno formed an animation studio, Gainax, to do his own work and contract out to other companies. While they mostly did non-mecha work, in 1988 they created the show Gunbuster, which was unique for being one of the few mecha shows to pay any attention to physics, creating a story that centered around the effects of special relativity on space travel, resulting in a refreshingly unique take on the effects of technology on people ("Official biography"). While not causing a revolution in the industry, it did put Gainax's name in the open, which set them up for their most influential work down the road.

By the beginning of the 90's, mecha was running out of content to expand on and was branching out into highly experimental series. G Gundam was a Gundam series that imitated martial arts movies, and Gundam Wing took a more 'super robot' like approach to Gundam, with fanciful designs and a few key mechs in the plotline fighting clearly villainous characters. Macross's first series in the 90's was Macross 7, focused on the trials and tribulations of a rock band in space. Super robot shows had also gotten rather silly, with series like Shippu! Iron Leaguer, a show focused on a sports tournament that's played in mecha and the corruption of the league that runs it. In this environment, people became nostalgic for older, classic series. The first major response to this shift in desire was Super Robot Taisen, an RPG for the Gameboy and later the NES. It featured mecha from classic Gundam, Mazinger, and Getter Robo series. It quickly became popular and spawned several sequels. The series, in time, evolved from simply an homage to classic series to actually influencing the genre as a whole with its presence. 4th Super Robot Taisen was the origin for the term 'real robot,' and several reboots of classic series only occurred after their inclusion in Super Robot Taisen, such as a Getter Robo reboot in the late 90's and the Mazinger sequel Mazinkaiser. The plot for Mazinkaiser was actually created originally for a Super Robot Taisen game to pad out the game length, and when they consulted Go Nagai about the script, he decided to spin it off into a full series.

The most influential main-stream mecha series, however, came out in 1995: Neon Genesis Evangelion. After the success of Gunbuster, Gainax tried to expand, but found their money supplies drying up. Miyazaki employed them semi-regularly, but Anno felt that Miyazaki was limiting his creative talent. In addition, Anno was falling into a severe depression at the time ("Official Biography"). When he was beginning to recover, he tried to make a sequel to one of his favorite works, Wings of Honneamise, but was shot down due to a lack of funding. In this miserable state, Anno was out drinking with other company representatives when a TV network representative asked him for a show to put on their network to fill out some space. As the story goes, the representative asked him for 'something, anything, I guarantee you a timeslot' ("Official Biography"). Anno promised that he'd make a simple, classic mecha anime to air, since Gainax needed the work. However, when Anno sat down to actually start creating, he found himself instead writing something directly opposed to the silly and light-hearted shows that were becoming standard at the time. Evangelion, which started seemingly normal and friendly, became extremely dark, with lots of violent and disturbing scenes towards the end of the anime, and questioning lots of tropes of mecha that had gone unexamined: is it moral to force a few individuals to protect the world? Can a child handle the psychological strain of war? What kind of father would send his own child to battle evil and constantly risk their life? While no one can agree whether

Evangelion was popular at the time or not, due to confusion about what exactly the viewership numbers represent and whether they appreciated Evangelion's unique take on mecha, Evangelion did become wildly popular after it finished airing, becoming a permanent fixture in the minds of mecha fans. After Evangelion, the silliness inherent in the beginning of the 90's faded out. Instead, shows returned to more classic forms of determination and grittiness, with even the uplifting shows taking more cues from classic Mazinger and Getter Robo and introducing more introspection and maturity.

Now, in the 21st century, mecha is currently undergoing several unusual shifts. Intensely character-driven shows like Gundam SEED and Code Geass are becoming popular, both of which focus on the characters and their personal growth far more than the horrors of war or the technology of the setting. This drive is helping mecha as a genre evolve into something truly respectable, driven forward by the success of Evangelion and other late 90's series. In addition, Super Robot Taisen is becoming an unstoppable market force. New games in the series come out once every three or four months, and an old series appearing in a Super Robot Taisen game inevitably leads to a reboot of the franchise within a year at most. Series like Brave Raideen and VOTOMs suddenly became popular again despite being dormant for over 20 or 30 years. Even Gundam is getting in on the trend, with a reboot of the original Gundam series slated to come out in the next year. The creators of classic series, however, are retiring from the field now, with the creator of Gundam no longer formally working on any of the series and the creator of Macross dying earlier last year. Finally, the shift from manga to anime is finally reversing. Having mecha in a show is no longer a guarantee for funding, as merchandising fury over robots is finally cooling down. As such, many creators are shifting to manga to tell their stories instead of anime, with important series like Kurogane no Linebarrel starting purely as manga and only getting further adaptations down the line. Each influence seems to be pulling in a different direction, with classic series coming back suggesting a return to old norms but the phasing out of the old guard suggesting a new revolution, and massive popularity of series suggesting mecha is thriving and a shift to manga suggesting mecha is cooling off. Time will tell where the genre is going, but one thing is certain: mecha's influences will persevere.

Also, giant robots are wicked cool.

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- Appendix A: How to get into Gundam, plus recommendations for manga
- As a big Gundam fan, lots of people ask me about where to start in Gundam, for there are an awful lot of Gundam series and very little guide about how they’re connected. I’ll be going over the main Gundam series, both anime and manga, explaining how they’re connected to the rest of the Gundam universe, and giving recommendations as to which should actually be read/watched. While most Gundam mangas are simply shot-for-shot remakes of the show in question, some did originate as original manga and are worthy of note.
- Mobile Suit Gundam: The original series, and only mediocre by the standards of the time and worse by modern standards. The movie versions (Mobile Suit Gundam I, II and III) are perfectly good, though. There are two good manga adaptations of note: Mobile Suit Gundam: The Origin and Char’s Deleted Affair. Origin is a retelling of the original series that isn’t a frame-by-frame reshoot of the show, like the other adaptations, but was actually born as a manga first and foremost, and works best as such. Char’s Deleted Affair works best in the context of having been exposed to both Mobile Suit Gundam and Zeta Gundam first. The novelization, translated by Schodt, is great but highly divergent from the original series.
- Zeta Gundam: The first sequel, and possibly the best Gundam series. The movie adaptations lose significant portions of the plot, but are still acceptable. No good manga adaptations.
- ZZ Gundam: Follows from Zeta Gundam, and is not particularly recommended. Came during a time when Tomino was feeling out how dark or happy his shows could be, and suffers a bit for it.
- Char’s Counterattack: Movie conclusion to the storyline told by the first three series. Highly recommended. Novelization is recommended, but currently untranslated.
- Gundam 0080: War in the Pocket: Side story set during Mobile Suit Gundam, familiarity with the

premise of Gundam needed but not much else. Quite well recommended.

Gundam 0083: Stardust Memory: Side story set after Gundam and before Zeta Gundam, familiarity with the events of Gundam necessary, Zeta Gundam recommended but not necessary. Recommended.

Gundam F91: One-shot movie set far in the future of Gundam. Not recommended: plot is highly compressed due to budget issues. Has a manga-only sequel Crossbone Gundam that requires seeing F91 to understand.

Victory Gundam: As the story goes, so depressing it convinced 'Kill 'Em All Tomino' to never kill a character again. Prequel to F91.

G Gundam: Martial arts spinoff. Hilarious in how different it is from other Gundam series, and good in its own right, but not representative of other Gundam series.

Gundam Wing: Standalone spinoff. Very well done, very popular in America when it first aired. Manga adaptation recommended: New Mobile Report Gundam Wing. There's also a standalone spinoff series, G-Unit, which can be read with no background which Miyake-sensei already owns. Highly recommended.

Gundam: 08th MS Team: Another side story set during Mobile Suit Gundam, needs knowledge of premise to understand. Recommended.

After War Gundam X: Standalone spinoff which needs no background, recommended.

Endless Waltz: Sequel to Gundam Wing, which must be seen beforehand to be understood. Recommended.

Turn A Gundam: Very good series, standalone spinoff. Highly recommended.

Gundam SEED: A standalone spinoff that has spawned a series of sequels and formed its own mini-universe. Currently the most popular Gundam variant in Japan. Also spawned standalone manga spinoff, Gundam SEED Astray, which Miyake-sensei also already owns.

MS IGLOO: CGI shorts set during Mobile Suit Gundam, knowledge of Mobile Suit Gundam necessary for watching. Not recommended unless you're already a serious fan, in which case they're quite rewarding. SEED Destiny: Sequel to SEED, requires watching SEED to understand the plot. Opinions are sharply divided about the series.

Gundam 00: Extremely popular standalone spinoff which requires no background to understand, with spinoff mangas that require the show to understand.

Unicorn: A series of movies set as a sequel to Char's Counterattack, requires intense knowledge of entire Gundam canon to fully appreciate, but they're quite shiny even on their own.

Gundam AGE: A standalone spinoff designed to be more kid-friendly than some of the aggressively dark Gundam series, worth watching, no notable manga.