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MASTER ARTIST KEN KELLY'S

MICRONAUTS

ISSUE 13
THE LUCKY ISSUE

RODAN / FIGHTING FIGURES
VOTOMS / PENDANT VINYLS

NEWS, REVIEWS, COLUMNS, MUSIC, FASHION + MORE

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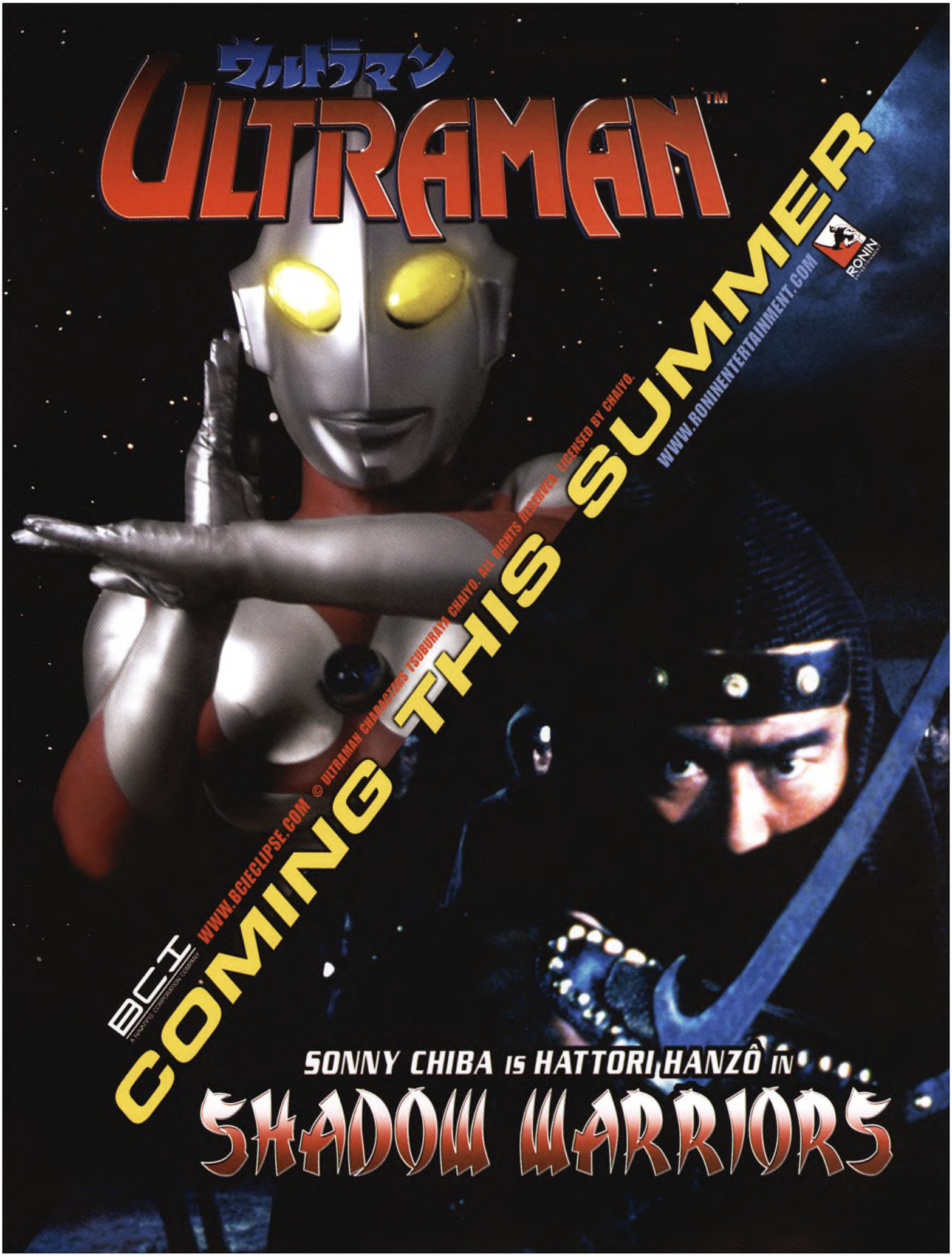
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Tim Biskup's
Alphabeast:

CALLI
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Publisher
Brian Flynn / brian@super7magazine.com
Super7 Media, Inc. / San Francisco, CA

Editor
Justin Kovalsky / justin@super7magazine.com

Design
Brian Flynn / Geoff Allen / Caleb Kozlowski / Darlene Gibson
Hybrid Design, Inc. / www.hybrid-design.com

National Ad Sales / Staff Writer
Chad Hensley / chad@super7magazine.com

Retail Directors
Karen Stanley (store) / karen@super7store.com
Isaac Ramos (web) / isaac@super7store.com

Gracious Contributors & Special Thanks
Ken Kelly, Hiddy of Secret Base, Oka Narue of Medicom, Takeshi Sakamoto, Dave Waugh, Tim Brisko, Hirosuke Nishiyama of Balzac, Isaac Ramos, GOE of Evilegend 13, Sam Flores, Jeremy Fish, Sun-Min Kim, Hiro Hayashi, Roger Harkavy, Neil O'Rourke, Mark Gradwell, Kaminaga-san of Marusan, John Cafiero of Osaka Popstar, Ray Fong, Matthew Porter, Martin Harris, August Ragone, Mark Kollecker, Liz Russell, Rob Arevalo, Devon Morf, Jeremy Whiteaker, Western Addiction, Buckethead, Frank Kozik, Denise and Omar of Ningyoushi, Chad the dog, Susan, Suzi Nuti, Bwana Spoons and John Patterson of Media Blasters.

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Editorial / Submissions
justin@super7magazine.com

Contact / Goodie Boxes
Super7 Magazine
540 Delancey St., Suite 303, San Francisco, CA 94107
415.227.4700 / www.super7magazine.com

Retail Location
Super7 Store
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415.409.4700 / www.super7store.com

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THINKING LUCKY

ARTWORK BY BWANA SPOONS

They say that luck is nothing more than the moment that opportunity meets preparation. While I'm usually the last person to embrace such a seemingly unromantic view, after working on our lucky 13th issue of Super7, I'm inclined to agree.

It was this issue's cover story on master artist Ken Kelly's Micronauts paintings written by Dave Waugh that led me to believe that perseverance is really the key ingredient in good luck. As you'll learn in the article, one of Kelly's masterpieces, a stunning rendering of the popular Micronauts character named Antron, was commissioned in the late '70s but went missing for nearly 30 years. Recently, it was unearthed and saved from rotting in a basement in New York. And get this. The painting's value can be estimated at around 25,000 dollars! While many would say it was pure luck that the art was located after all those years, it never would have never been found without the relentless focus (OK, some may call it obsession. You say tomatoes...) of our very own contributor Dave Waugh and the die-hard Micronaut fan base. Intrigued? Just wait until you read the story and take in Kelly's Antron for yourself. You'll be glad that Waugh never let his childhood memory of this gorgeous painting fade.

When you think about it, it's through a similar sort of determination that we achieve the things in life that are worth achieving — whether its finding an extremely rare toy after years of searching, nurturing lasting friendships or finding an enjoyable career. There's nothing lucky about those things. We create them simply by caring about them for the long haul.

Justin Kovalsky
Editor, Super7

FRANKENSTEIN IS DEAD–LONG LIVE FRANKENGHOST

SUPER7 CREATOR BRIAN FLYNN REVEALS NEW VINYL FIGHT FIGURE

Contenders beware. There's a new vinyl fight figure in town. Brian Flynn, Super7 publisher and co-principal of Hybrid Design in San Francisco, has created another Japanese-style fight figure. Produced by popular toy brand Secret Base in Tokyo and named the Frankenghost, Flynn's figure is only the second Secret Base toy in history designed completely by an American — the first was the Skull Pirate created by legendary underground artist Pushead. (Flynn also designed the head sculpt for the popular Secret Base toy, the Ghostfighter, back in 2005.) Available exclusively at Super7, the Frankenghost will debut on July 23, 2006 at San Diego Comic-Con. Flynn talks character culture and design inspiration.

S7: What is it about the Frankenstein character that lends itself so well to your new toy design? Brian Flynn: Many of Secret Base's toys are filled with references to older toys — from Astro-mu, Henshin Cyborgs, King Walders, Cocobat Joe and very literally the Fink-Shit. When it came time to design this figure, I wanted to reference a vintage toy as well, but I wanted it to have an "American" influence. These references embody the deep collector-geek love and passion we have for the toys. You don't have to get the reference to love the toy, but if you do, it gives it another level of depth. I collected Universal Monster toys for years, so it was really a no-brainer.

Still, there's more happening than just a super-deformed take on Frankenstein. I wanted Frankenghost to have a certain charm. I like the campy `60s monsters that have a great sense of horror and fun at the same time – Rat Fink, Weird-Oh's, the Munsters, Addams Family, Nutty-Mads, etc. I think you can still have really gross or scary things that have humanity and personality. For example, a ghost can be scared of certain things. A monster can love candy and have a history of cavities. The tiniest monster can bully a giant. Those kinds of playful nuances are endearing about characters and are necessary in my opinion.

Please tell us about the Frankenghost's back story. There are a million stories about Frankenstein alive, but the Frankenghost starts where the others left off. In the original movie, at the end, Frankenstein is trapped in the castle as the villagers burn it down. This is the ghost of Frankenstein, the spirit of the monster after that moment. Even his boots are spirits clawing and chomping their way around the ring.

What was the process like creating the Frankenghost as opposed to the Super7 x Secret Base Ghostfighter collaboration? Was there much exchange between you and the owner of Secret Base, Hiddy? I got involved with Secret Base when we began working together on the Ghostfighter. I was a fan before that, and originally we discussed the possibility of doing a recolor of the Skull Brain, but I decided to get a bit bolder and asked if I could do a head sculpt instead for Super7. Hiddy was excited about the collaboration from day one, and the Ghostfighter head was the first sketch I sent him. I did about 40 sketches first, and then picked that one to send to him. From there, a sculptor named Betch crafted the head, and nailed it first try. I had no changes at all. In hind sight, after seeing the final pulls from the mold, I would have made the cracks on the head longer, but he did a great job. For the Frankenghost figure, I sent a lot more preliminary ideas and options, and Frankenghost was the one Hiddy really reacted to. There were quite a few more we considered, but that was the character that won the fight. So, how else do you become a fight figure? You have to win fights!

Speaking of scrapping, have you and Hiddy discussed how the Frankenghost will fit into the larger Secret Base fighting family tree? When Hiddy and I started to discuss the new figure I wanted to make, he wanted to make very sure that it fell into the Secret Base world... He wanted to make sure it was a fighter at heart. In his previous toys he was very literal with this [incorporating] boxing gloves and fighting uniforms, but I wanted the new figure to be a bit more of a reluctant fighter. The underdog or misunderstood fighter coming from out of the shadows that stands up for others when no one else will.

SOMETHING WICKED THIS WAY COMES

SUPER7'S EVIL GHOSTFIGHTER THINKS LOVE SUCKS

Here to battle the forces of love that manifested in the previously released Super7 Valentines Day and White Day Ghostfighters, the dastardly doppelganger known as the Evil Ghostfighter hit the streets May 13th. Translucent yellow vinyl, with red and black highlights and a red "X" marking his arm, the Ghostfighter is back and he's looking for a fight. Hopefully you managed to snag one of these angry apparitions before they disappeared into the darkness. If you missed out, be on the look out for the ultra lucky 13th Ghostfighter to be released soon at super7store.com!

BURNING DOWN THE HOUSE

SUPER7 x MARUSAN GIANT MELTDOWN GODZILLA

Based on the success of the initial release of the Marusan giant-size 15" Godzilla glow-in-the-dark vinyl in Hawaii green spray or Hawaii blue spray at last year's San Diego Comic-Con, Super7 now presents the final incarnation of our favorite fire-breathing monster. Cast again in glow vinyl, this Meltdown spray variation in shades of orange and red, takes its visual cues from the highly sought after Bandai Meltdown vinyl toys based on Godzilla vs. Destroyah. Limited to only 50 pieces, this figure will makes it's debut at San Diego Comic-Con 2006. With the original two versions selling out in only days, expect that this figure will bring the house down.

IT'S MODEL-ESQUE WITH YMSF

REVIEW BY SUPER COLLECTOR LEON STEELE

My mother always says, "If you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all." While I take her advice to heart, the YMSF Godzilla line tugs me both ways. Let's start with the good. And when I say good, I mean great: the sculpts. The YMSF sculpts are phenomenal. I can't think of another Godzilla vinyl that can stand on only two feet with the tail suspended in the air while still maintaining such keen detail. But what YMSF earns points for in accuracy, they lose altogether in functionality. Though sold as vinyl toys, these figures are more like pre-painted vinyl model kits with very limited posing options. These new editions are vastly improved over some of the older figures — YMSF's earlier Megalon comes to mind — that had problems even standing, so kudos to the company for stepping up their game. Just don't expect a toy. Expect a static, great looking model that has some bonus movement. If you can dig that, you will be pleased with YMSF's new line.

HEDORAN TO THE HILLS
GARGAMEL HITS WITH NEW FLYING HEDORAN AND BAKOBASO

Imagine these two cute-but-menacing monsters towering 50 feet above your home bent on haplessly trampling civilization. Spooked? Well fear not. The only thing that these two crazy kaiju are going to crash is your toy collection, and judging by these early photos, that would be nothing but nice. Brought to us by the Japanese toy company, Gargamel, the new 9" flying Hedoran sculpt (left) pays homage to the original flying IKB Hedoran toy from the 1970s. We cannot wait to see the paint on this amazing sculpt. On the right, the 9" Bakobaso with clear vinyl chest and bone insert is sure to please kaiju collectors with an eye for detail. These two toys represent another amazing showing from Gargamel.

SEEING IS BELIEVING
BWANA SPOONS X SUPER 7– STEVEN THE BAT PROTOTYPE FINALLY ON U.S. SHORES

It's been a long time coming, but Steven the Bat is finally here! Well, he's almost here. (Sigh.) As many of our readers know, Steven the Bat is a ridiculously cool character toy created by Bwana Spoons that was scheduled for release from Super7 in late in 2005. After several months of factory delays, we finally have a painted prototype of this 5" vinyl figure and we are officially excited... again. Once the final production runs arrive, Steven will be available in five variations — Fig Belly (Shown here in green with eyes closed. This is the sleepy-eyed Super7 exclusive version. There will also be a version with open eyes.), Black Metal is My God (black), Purple Nights (black and purple) and Candy Corn (orange and yellow). To further whet the appetite, check out Spoons' lovingly illustrated packaging (designed by Super7's Brian Flynn) in which Steven hangs upside down. Keep checking super7store.com for updates because the day of the Bat is nigh!

SMOKED SQUID
FRANK KOZIK'S KAIJU VINYLS FROM WONDERWALL

Popular artist Frank Kozik, most famous in the designer toy world for his iconic Smokin' Rabbit character, has teamed up with Japanese toy company Wonderwall to contribute to their upcoming vinyl kaiju series. Kozik explains that "Wonderwall's idea for the line was to divide the world into monster territories. I wanted to do the oceans and what I created was Ika-Gilas, the Demon Squid."

Ika-Gilas is a 5-inch vinyl and comes bagged with header card. Color ways of the monster include translucent clear, translucent purple, translucent green, and an upcoming opaque version. The opaque edition of the toy will be available in the United States at Kidrobot and in very limited quantities in Japan. Kozik will sell the clear vinyl versions himself, including 50 pieces that he'll have on hand for his appearance at this year's San Diego Comic-Con. Each color way of Ika-Gilas will be limited to 100 pieces and will retail for $100 each.

DRESSED TO IMPRESS
SAM FLORES' FATIMA

Ladies and gentlemen we're proud to present Fatima. Give her a big hand. Or a pair of them to be more exact. Unmistakably the lineage of Sam Flores, this elegant waif is his second foray into vinyl and the first in a series of collaborations between Ningyoushi and Upper Playground.

She's an ambiguous beauty. Sorrow. Serenity. Resignation. It's hard to pinpoint her exact state of mind, because in essence she's all the above and more. Sam explains: "In my work, Fatima represents different emotions in each painting. She's sort of withdrawn and closed off from her surroundings. I see a lot of beautiful things in this world, but so many people are oblivious to everything that's around them. They just need to open their eyes a little more and look up for once."

There are four versions available, two of which – the pink and the yellow – feature rather fetching floral headdresses, a nod to the rich flora that populates much of Sam's recent work. Meanwhile the green and gray offer more naturally flowing hair.

Be warned though, though the green and pink are editions of 450, there are only 54 of the yellow and gray. The yellow is an upperplayground.com exclusive and the gray will appear at samflores.com. So get in quick. Judging by the current prices of his Tiger Babies, the secondary market won't be nearly as pretty as Fatima.

EASY DOES IT
THE TURTLECAMPER BY JEREMY FISH

Ah, the open road. There's nothing like hitting the highway without a care in the world and nobody knows it better than San Francisco-based art star, Jeremy Fish. Mr. Fish also seems to embrace another old cliché — that the journey is best enjoyed slowly. Very slowly. Inside of a giant skull and a strap-on camper... of course! Jeremy is one of the most imaginative artists working today and this new toy produced by US toy distributor StrangeCo is evidence. The Turtle camper is limited to 1000 total pieces and will release this June. In addition to the standard color way (500 pieces), two other variations are forthcoming — the silver skull edition (limited to 350 pieces) and gold skull edition (limited to 150 pieces). Also, be sure to check out Jeremy's new Nike shoe in this issue's fashion section.

ARACHNIDS AND CONFECTIONS
SUN-MIN KIM'S SPIDER BOOM QEE

The newest figure in Toy2R's 8-inch Qee Artist Series comes from none other than Sun-Min Kim, one half of the dynamic duo behind those oh-so-popular plush toys, Ugly Dolls. For her Qee, Kim chose Toy2R's Toyer as her platform, a Qee with the head of a super-deformed skull. But it's not just any old skull. This spooky-cute three-eyed thing is actually designed to look like the skeleton of one of Kim's original characters named Spider Boom.

"Spider Boom eats cake. Lots of cake," she says laughingly. Spider Boom began life in an illustrated story that Kim created for her husband and Ugly Dolls collaborator, David Horvath, and the character has now spun off into toys. Kim says that Toy2R has the exclusive toy license for her oddball arachnid in 2006 and that "this Qee is just the beginning." The 8-inch Spider Boom Qee also comes packed with a 2-inch Sun-Min Kim Qee keychain based on the artist herself.

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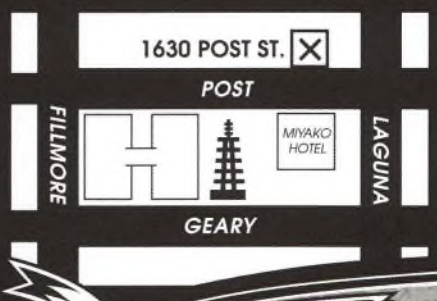

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ROUNDING BASES
A BEVY OF RECENT RELEASES FROM JAPAN'S MOST POPULAR TOY BOUTIQUE – SECRET BASE

Plush Skull Brain

Secret Base has created pillows in all sizes, but recently the company released a soft version of an existing character, the Skull Brain. The first version of this little cutie was created in black, red and white felt with airbrushing on the brain area. There's even a little string coming out of the top of the brain so you can hang it from your rearview mirror! This release was sold as a set with a matching vinyl Skull Brain. Shortly after the set was released, a full color version, purple and black Skull Brain plush was released all by itself. Everything about this deformed comic version of the already classic Skull Brain is amazing, especially the mini header card.

Obake Dog

Get ready for some serious nerd debates over this release from Secret Base — the Obake Dog! Some say it is an ugly mutt that needs to be put to sleep, while others want to take the dog home and collect all its variations. Love it or hate it, it is still the newest original toy from Secret Base. Fans were teased with the appearance of a small Obake Dog logo on the back of the Plush Skull Brain set. The pop-out eye and bandaged Mad Ball-style head is lots bigger and more detailed than the heads on the Mad Ball Mantis, much closer to the size of original Mad Balls. (Secret Base creator Hiddy is a collector of old US Mad Ball toys.) The detailed design of the head lends itself to many paint options, while the body is mega simple with never before seen tiny bubble fingers and what look like Snoopy's feet. Obake Dog is a strange clash of ideas; perhaps we will see this body used with several different heads in the future or fabric clothing to cover the simple body. We will have to wait see what is next for Obake Dog.

Valentine's Day and White Day Mantis and Underwear Sets

It is a special time of year when we celebrate our loved ones. Hopefully your special one collects Secret Base just like you! On Valentines Day in Japan a gray vinyl with pink spray Skull 2 Mantis & Mad Mantis set was released. The set included a pair of men's underwear, one toy and it was packaged in a small can that said "House of Toys." The Mad Mantis looks especially cool with the white paint around the face. On White Day (3/14/06) a pink vinyl with gray spray Skull 2 Mantis & Mad Mantis set released. This time the set consisted of women's underwear and one toy packed in a soft pouch printed with a glittery Secret Base logo. The combination of underwear and toys is perfect — two necessary items in your life. Mix and match a pair or collect them all.

THE HORROR IS CLEAR
BALZAC'S RAREST SKULLMAN TOY EVER

As many Super7 readers know, the Super7 staff loves the Japanese band Balzac, as proven by our exclusive orange Balzac figure from last issue. In an attempt to make their promotional toys cooler than darn near everything else in the universe, Balzac has just released a set of five clear Skullman figures with clear vinyl bags that fit over the toys wonderfully creepy heads. Visually arresting in five different color ways, there's a catch to acquiring these cool fellas; you have to spend 100,000 yen (about 900 US dollars) at Balzac's clothing boutique called Shocker in Osaka, Japan just to get one single color variation. The horror in acquiring a single figure, much less an entire set, boggles the mind. To ease your pain, however, feel free to check out Balzac's worldwide mail order site at evilegend13.com/shockerworldwide where you can score all sorts of cool band related merchandise including some amazing toys — just not these babies.

LOOKING FOR A CURE
BEWARE THE TERROR'N

The Tokyo-based shop Cure has just released its newest figure — the Terror'n. A laughing pumpkin-head in a robe with a haunted Santa hat and a ray gun tucked behind it's back, this toy may be one of the most surreal mash-up figures we have ever seen. Initially released in translucent orange or purple vinyl color ways, you never know what the guys at Cure will come up with next.

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CHANGE IS GOOD
YAMATO TOYS LICENSES MEGAZONE 23 GARLAND

In 1985, the booming home video market in Japan ushered in the era of the Original Animation Video (OAV), direct-to-video anime that didn't have to follow the time and content constraints of broadcast TV shows. This, combined with the explosion of transforming robots on TV and on toy store shelves, provided fertile ground for an OAV like *Megazone 23*.

Megazone 23 had a recipe for success: character and mecha designs by prominent industry veterans, solid production values, and a strong dose of metaphor about the economic bubble Japan was enjoying at the time. It made enough money to spawn two sequels, and was also briefly licensed by Harmony Gold to be reworked into the unreleased *Robotech: The Movie*.

Unfortunately, *Megazone 23* wasn't as successful in attracting a major sponsor to produce toys and models, and aside from a few garage kit releases, the robot designs never got much exposure in 3-D. Now, after 20 years, Yamato is appeasing fans of the anime by releasing a 1/12 scale version of the Garland, the stolen military robot that ends up in the hands of hero Shogo Yahagi.

Yamato's Garland stands roughly 9.5" tall in robot mode and features magnetized joints that aid in the transformation to motorcycle mode, real rubber tires, and a 4.75" figure of Shogo. As with their previous *VOTOMS* and *Macross* offerings, expect Yamato's usual extreme attention to detail.

The Garland is being offered by Yamato USA at a suggested price of $129.95, and is scheduled for release in June. For more details see yamatotoysusa.com.

GET REAL
SUPER7 X REAL HEAD EXCLUSIVE SET

Of the many Japanese vinyl micro-companies that have emerged recently, Real Head is one of the hottest and most adored by Japanese and American collectors. Naturally, it was just a matter of time before Super7 teamed up with Real Head creator Mori-san for a toy release. In Super7's signature colors, this clear orange vinyl set will hit this summer at the Super7 store in San Francisco. Pictured here from left to right are the Real Head x Super7 Mutant Evil, Mutant Bigaro, Mutant Head and Mutant Chaos figures—all four heroes from Mori-san's Real Head universe! We're keeping the release dates a secret, but we can tell you that the toys will be dropped one at a time over the period of a month. Keep checking super7store.com for updates.

KENTUCKY FRIED COSMOS
SUPER7 X CHICKEN FEVER

Even the most extreme alien conspiracy theorists don't expect extraterrestrials to come in the guise of poultry. But they've probably never discussed the matter with the toy makers at Sin+Wombat, the Japanese company that brings us the Chicken Fever toy. Made as exclusives for the Super7 Store in San Francisco, this black vinyl toy with orange and white spray was released on April 29th; an orange version with black and silver spray was also released on May 27th. Limited to 50 pieces of each color way, these aliens are ready to invade any and all collections.

MONSTER FACTORY
PATIENCE YOUNG JEDI

Brian Flynn was born in the midst of a hurricane in 1875. After spending his formative years underachieving at various tasks, he decided the world was not ready for his forward thinking vision of the future and was cryogenically frozen until 1994. After reawakening, Brian hit the streets, and decided that ruling the universe through the hidden mysticism of arcane Star Wars references, binary pulsar radio emission patterns, vintage Japanese vinyls and Coca-Cola was the only way to go. He is the publisher and owner of Super7 magazine, a world-class designer and a high-level toy collector.

For all the die-hard vintage vinyl collectors out there, I was able to watch, but not purchase, the hyper rare red and blue spray antler on Yahoo auctions recently. This is the exact same figure shown in the Saito digest toy books, which so many of us know so well. It is always exciting to see these figures pop up, even though I know my chances of ever owning any of them are almost non-existent. So, in a round-about way, when Mr. Saito got in touch with us after seeing issue 12 of Super7, we were shocked to find out that we had a few toys even he did not have. Not wanting to part with our Barom-1 kaiju, Mr. Saito still managed to get an Argentinian Peguira figure from the Super7 Store that he had not been able to find. It is hard to believe, that collecting for as long as someone like Mr. Saito has, that there are still pieces which are frustratingly unattainable for every level of collector.

This brings me to my larger point. I have been collecting Japanese vinyl figures for 15 years now, and I can list hundreds of figures that I am still looking for. It seems that so many collectors I run into these days are frustrated by the lack of availability, immediacy or price of many of the figures that they are looking for. Unfortunately, this genre of collecting is not as easy as many others, where stock is so much more prevalent. For example, if you want an old comic book like X-Men #1, a blue Snaggletooth from Star Wars, or a Topps Mickey Mantle, simply go to ebay and there are plenty to be found – as long as you are willing to pay the price. Japanese toys, especially desirable toys, are always in short supply. When these rare toys do show up, collectors are willing to break the bank trying to acquire them. So, my advice to the newly frustrated collector is, be patient. It took me 15 years to acquire one of the two top toys on my want list, and never along the way was I offered a single one. The other top toy on my list I am still looking for.

Another counterpoint is the glow-in-the-dark unpainted Ghostfighter. I have had several people complain to me about how difficult this figure is to find to finish their Ghostfighter collection. To clarify completely, there are only 33 glow Ghostfighters in existence. They were promotional (not for sale) gifts in Japan from Secret Base, and only a handful of them made it over the water to the states. With the majority of them still residing in Japanese collections, and 10 or less stateside, to let the hunt for a glow Ghostfighter ruin your collection is doing yourself a disservice. The fact of the matter is, many of us will probably not be able to own one, simply because there are far more collectors than there are figures. Those of you that do want one, and keep up the hunt, may eventually find one, but, much like my top wants, it may take a few years to do so. The thing is, when you finally do find one it will be that much sweeter, and that much more enjoyable along the way. Don't let this hobby sour you, enjoy the ride, and focus on what you do have, because tomorrow there will be someone struggling to find the toys you already own – just like me, and just like Mr. Saito. To share my frustrations, pictured above, are a few of the gems I have had the misfortune of not getting lately.

01. Red Antler with blue, yellow and green spray courtesy of Yahoo Japan. 02. Kamen Rider Amazon GT car with box. 03. Tigermask's car of choice. Very stylish. 04. Large Yonezawa Inazuman Cycle with box. 05. Large Barom-1 car still in the box! Curse you Groove5020! 06. Sun faded Hawaii Gorosaurus; close but no cigar. 07. Oh man, just looking at that Doublas M2 is hard to do. 08. All of the large figures in the Giant Robot family.

Hiddy is the owner and driving force of Japan's premier boutique toy company, Secret Base. Secret Base has been producing some of the most inventive five-inch vinyl toys on the planet and there's no end in sight. In each issue of Super7, Hiddy will be sharing his thoughts with his rapidly growing legion of US fans.

HOUSE OF SECRETS
HANGING WITH HIDDY

Though it can get really manic running Secret Base, it's always great when friends drop by the shop in Tokyo. Recently, I hung out with my good friend Ussun who is now working at Three Tides Tattoo in Osaka — my hometown! (1) Ussun brought with him a super talented artist from the US named Mike Giant. Giant is a very nice guy and he's become popular with tattoo people in Japan. I bought this cool sweatshirt from Giant's San Francisco-based fashion label, Rebel8. (2) It goes really well with the denim Nikes that I picked up. (3) I do love Nikes, however, I also think these Adidas Qee toys are quite cool. (4) Another toy that's caught my eye lately is the Cure x CCP Hedorah — amazing! (5) When I'm not working on toys or checking out new releases, I like to read comics like One Piece. (6) The tiniest details in this manga are captivating and the universe that author Eichiro Oda creates is so elaborate and comical. I think this title is put out in the US by Viz Communications if you'd like to try it for yourself. Of course, I also like listening to music like the US punk rock band Zebrahead. (7) This is their latest CD released in Japan. Sooner or later though, I always end up back at Secret Base headquarters to create new toys. Here are just a few of our latest releases: the SB Obake Dog plush and the new Balzac plush in various styles. (8) I wanted to make something that people could always have with them instead of the normal showcase vinyl toys that I make! These were actually designed by an artist named Hilo. And finally, I'd like to introduce the brand-new Secret Base vinyl toy, the Obake Dog! (9) I hope that you enjoy it!

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Take-shit is the creator and bass player for the Japanese hardcore band Cocobat, as well as a columnist for Warp Japan *and* Cool Trans *magazine. He's notoriously addicted to all things Henshin Cyborg, Microman and Devilman and his toy collection is so insane it would make you weep. He has also been involved in the creation of many toys over the years including the highly influential Fink-Shit figure, Medicom's Cocobat Joe, Microman-style, Micro-Shit toys and Be@rbricks.*

GARBAGE DIGGER
BEHIND THE MASK

In the 1970s, many soft vinyl hero toys had human faces hidden under their masks — whether it was Tiger Mask's alter ego Naoto Date or Kamen Rider's secret identity, Takeshi Hongou. Bullmark also released the Ultraman Kyodai (known in the US as the Ultra Brothers) with soft removable masks. Many assume that Bullmark's figures faces are exactly alike for any particular toy. But, if you look closely, every figure has different characteristics. Even the slightest difference in the paint on the eyes can change the toy's overall aesthetic — this is why that many collectors say that the life of the toy is in the eyes. Bullmark also created a carded figure with five different masks in bright colors, which is very hard to find.

The first removable mask toy was probably Marusan's Ultra 7 pendant created in 1967. When Ultraman Taro hit Japanese theaters, the Ultraman Family toys were more in the spotlight than the kaiju characters from the film. It was because of the success of the Ultraman Family toys that more and more heroes were produced around this time.

Later, Ultra Taro, Ultra Haha (Mother) and Ultra Chichi (Father) were made not with removable masks, but with revolving headpieces. When you'd spin the top of the character's helmet the toy's face would change from human to hero form! This is considered an ingenious design by many soft vinyl aficionados and it is one of my favorite toy gimmicks. It's also interesting to note that the Ultra Haha is considered by most experts to be the best female sculpt of the 1970s.

Though you may not be familiar with the name Oka Narue, when you hear the list of Japanese toys that this distinguished gentleman has made you will undoubtedly flip. Whether he's cranking out obscure vinyl toys for Take-shit's punk band Cocobat or new Glen Danzig figures, Oka fills his days toiling away as a toy producer for Medicom Toy company in Japan. Oh yeah, he's also the inventor of a little toy line called Kubricks. Maybe you've heard of it.

NOTES FROM THE UNDERGROUND
POSI-TRACTION TIN CAR

In this installment, I'd like to talk about the Posi-traction Tin Car — the second toy that I helped make for Take-shit's band Cocobat. The product was released from Zaap!, the company that I worked for back in 1998. We took pre-orders for the toy while we created it — just like we did for Cocobat's first toy, the Cocobat Joe. At first, I had no idea how to turn Pushead's artwork for Cocobat's album *Posi-traction* into a toy, but the idea took shape when we came across a tin manufacturer called Ichiko at a toy show. Today, when I make a toy with Pushead or Take-shit, selecting materials and going through the process is easy, but back then everything was so unclear. It was like we were stumbling around in the dark. So, I still feel deeply that the product turned out well, even when I look at it now. For the black and white version, we made only 300 pieces exclusively for *Warp* magazine. Soon, Take-shit told us that that he really wanted to do another version of the car using an idea that he had — the Fink-Shit. But I will leave that story till next time. The color packaging shown here was designed by Seven Stars in Japan (the same studio that designed Bounty Hunter's logo). I've also shown the mail order box.

While the combination of art and toys is a revolutionary concept for media mavens and trend seekers, master painter Ken Kelly has apparently never perceived a division between these two worlds. Or at least that seems true when one considers Kelly's work on one of the most popular and successful toy lines of the `70s and `80s — the Micronauts.

Although Kelly is most famous for his work on KISS record covers (*Destroyer* and *Love Gun*) and for his fabulous fantasy paintings depicting Conan, Vampirella, Darth Vader and more, Kelly's Micronauts paintings represent a truly amazing body of work. Commissioned by toy corporation Mego in the `70s to produce package art for their first line of original Micronauts figures for the US market called the Aliens, Ken faced an ironically titanic task.

As many *Super7* readers know, the Micronauts began as an imported Japanese property (Takara's Microman line) that was repackaged and renamed for sale in America. Spurred by Mego's desire to branch out from the pre-existing Takara products with brand new characters, the bizarre Aliens featured shocking, glow-in-the-dark brains and interchangeable weaponry that made them an instant hit with children. Today, they are highly sought after by Micronauts collectors across the globe.

When Kelly first received the call from Mego in 1978 about the opportunity to paint the Aliens packaging, he'd been crafting cover paintings for Creepy and Eerie magazines as well as producing work for KISS. The designs that Mego had in mind for the line were right up Ken's alley — fantastical and larger than life. Ken recalls, "They wanted me to make this 4-inch piece of plastic look like a 30-foot-tall, living breathing menace. I said, that's cool. I can do that." Obviously, Kelly achieved the desired effect and more, producing some of the most breathtaking paintings that toy aficionados have ever laid eyes upon.

OH ANTRON, WHERE ARE YOU?

MASTER PAINTER KEN KELLY AND THE MICRONAUTS

Text and photography by Dave Waugh

Ken Kelly's Hornetroid was the second in a group of eight paintings made for Micronauts packaging in the late '70s. Next to the recently rediscovered Antron painting, it's considered the prize piece of the series.

الموجة
ترجمة: أحمد عزت

Left: Antron and Membros pull a high-tech drive-by on rival Micronauts in the Terraphant one Sunday afternoon.

Right: One of the later paintings in the series, the Lobros lacks some of the laborious line work of the others in the series. Still, Lobros keeps up the fight!

OH ANTRON, WHERE ARE YOU?

The first two paintings that were completed took Ken approximately 2 to 3 weeks. "The Antron and the Hornetroid were the first [in that order]. "Kelly recalls. Considered by many to be the best of the batch, Antron was painted by Kelly and handed over directly to Mego founder Marty Abrams only to disappear entirely from the public realm for almost 30 years. Only recently, the Antron painting has resurfaced. But more on that in a moment...

Meanwhile, back in the '70s, production continued as the Micronauts Aliens were released in two different waves. The first series of toys was mass-produced for the US market, while the next would be under-produced and sold largely in Italy. The remaining six paintings in the Aliens series were completed at a furious pace and created under the high stress of corporate deadlines. "Suddenly, Mego said 'Hey! We need six of them. Now.' You could almost see it in the paintings — like an assembly line thing. And that's not the way you want to do this stuff, but hey, that's what the call was and I stepped up. Those all happened a week apart. Bang, bang, bang, bang, bang," says Kelly. The paintings that Kelly speaks of were of Repto, Membros, the Terraphant vehicle and the 2nd series Centaurus, Lobros and Kronos figures. They were oil on canvas and each were about 30" by 34".

Top row: These original Micronauts toys are from the collection of author Dave Waugh. Each of the figures and vehicles are in their original packaging which has been autographed by Ken Kelly.

Bottom row from left to right: Kelly's rough sketch for the Hornetroid is enough to send most art students into the dregs of depression. Next, check out these cool Italian Micronauts figures also signed by Kelly. I Micronauti, baby! Finally, don't forget old Repto from the US Mego line, or he'll use his saw hand to break into your home and steal your toys.

The idea to switch from the photographic style box art previously used for the Micronauts to colorful fantasy artwork was brilliant and it fit well with the organic design of the Aliens. Although Mego went out of business shortly after the release of these toys for unrelated reasons, the legacy of this original line and Kelly's paintings lives on in the hearts of today's collectors. In fact, the very paintings themselves actually reside with one of today's top Micronauts collectors, Rumel Tomiampos.

After the original paintings were photographed for the production cycle, Mego returned all of the Aliens artwork to Kelly except for the oh-so-elusive Antron. Ken, in turn, sold these works to private buyers. The paintings shifted hands a couple of times over the years until they finally fell into the capable care of hardcore Micronaut fan and art lover Tomiampos.

Tomiampos vividly remembers the day that another old-school toy collector told him someone had the original Membros art for sale. He says, "I think it was selling for around $1,850. I contacted the seller and told her if her initial deal fell through (there was another interested buyer), I would be willing to purchase it. The seller e-mailed me back and told me that if I was willing to pay that price that she would let me have it." Tomiampos continues, "This person had purchased the paintings from Ken Kelly when he was still an upcoming artist. After she agreed to sell me the Membros, I asked her if she owned any of the other Micronaut paintings. She informed me that she owned seven of the original eight pieces, but really didn't want to sell anymore of them, the Terraphant being her favorite."

Eventually, she did break down and let them go. This dealer's only wish was that the paintings would go to a good home and that they'd remain in a set; of course Tamiampos has displayed these treasures with all the pride of a brand-new parent. "If I ever would consider selling them," he says assuredly, "I would only sell them as a set and to a good home too. I've had an offer as high as $70,000, but don't want to part with them. If the Smithsonian or the Museum of Art in D.C wanted them, I would most likely donate them so that everyone could enjoy them." Tamiampos has also generously lent the paintings to be photographed for the 2002 Hero Factory Micronauts card set. Still, even with all seven of the masterpieces in one place, the Antron painting was nowhere to be found. Just where in the world was the very first and oft considered best paintings in Kelly's series? The answer, it seems, was to be found in the darkest depths of the Abrams family home.

Left: With obvious brawn and brains, Membros was one of the more popular Micronauts characters — thanks in no small part to Kelly's killer rendering.

Right: The painstaking detail in the Kronos painting makes this mantis dressed in a pink leotard look much more menacing than he should.

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OH ANTRON, WHERE ARE YOU?

Left: The lost Micronauts painting. After being buried deep in a basement for decades, Ken Kelly's Antron still looks phenomenal. As this was the first that Kelly painted in the series, the precision and detail is unmatched by any of the Micronaut paintings.

PART 2: NO MOM! PLEASE DON'T TRASH MY PRICELESS PAINTING.

"If I couldn't be Trump's kid born into money," Ken Abrams quips, "at least I was born into the Micronauts." Abrams is the son of Marty Abrams, the founder of Mego toys. Ken Kelly's prize Antron painting used to hang in young Abrams' bedroom when he was a boy. It remained there as the centerpiece of his living quarters surrounded by Led Zeppelin and Springsteen posters until he left home to attend college in 1984. However, even for the Abrams, Antron too became a faded memory.

Until 2002, that is, when the Palisades Retro Series of Micronauts was released. A card set featuring the seven original Kelly paintings was created, from which the Antron was conspicuously missing. After several failed attempts at acquiring a photograph of the painting from Marty Abrams himself, it was thought that the painting was lost forever. Then, in 2004 at MegoCon in NYC, a convention dedicated to everything Mego, the entire Abrams' clan was in attendance. This was the chance to set the record straight on the whereabouts of one of Kelly's keenest sci-fi paintings.

Your humble author asked Ken directly what happened to the painting that hung in his bedroom as a child. He redirected the question to his mother who responded with the following statement, "I think I threw that ugly thing out." Immediately, hundreds of die-hard Micronauts and Ken Kelly fans' hearts dropped deep into their bellies as a collective gasp seemed to resound across the universe. Ken Abrams quickly calmed the potentially riotous crowd with these words: "There's no way Marty let her throw that thing out. No way, no how, is that thing in the garbage." Ken soon took it upon himself to scavenge the old Abrams household that very weekend. After his fourth attempt at rummaging through the basement, he found the missing painting tucked between a few framed family paintings and buried deep in a crawl space. The mystery was finally solved, to the delight of a multitude of Micronauts devotees. Today, it seems that the Abrams will never again let Antron out of their view; the piece now hangs high above Marty Abrams desk in his personal office in New York. So please, enjoy this photograph of little ol' Antron. This is the first time he's ever been in a magazine and he's apparently made quite a journey to be here.

Left: Repto is one tough looking alien, but not nearly as tough as Ken Kelly is for having painted him in less than seven days. Kelly says, "That's what the (job called for) and I stepped up." Huzzah!

Right: Getty up, Centaurus. Kelly's masterful rendition of this hybrid horse alien somehow makes the actual Centaurus toy seem a touch less than majestic.

ROCK THE VOTOMS

MILITARY MECHA MAYHEM

By Roger Harkavy/Photography by Geoff Allen

In the early 1980s, the mecha anime revolution was in full swing. Giant heroic robots with swords and samurai-styled helmets were fading away, being replaced by faceless, gun-wielding military machines. Leading the charge were shows like *Macross, Xabungle, Srungle, and Dunbine. Armored Trooper VOTOMS*, yet another robot series with a nonsensical but cool-sounding name, continued the trend toward a greater degree of "realism" in robot anime.

VOTOMS is actually an acronym for Vertical One-man Tank for Offense and Maneuver System. Most likely, the name was coined because it sounded cool, and the meanings for the letters were assigned afterwards. *VOTOMS'* contribution to the robot toy world, though, is unquestionable.

"VOTOMS was developed based on the success of the Dougram series, which was largely due to the sales of the plastic models, and (had the goal of making robots) even more realistic," according to Asahina Yoshikazu, a product designer at Takara during the 1980s. Dougram ended its run on TV in early 1983, but in late 1982 Takara was already developing *VOTOMS* to fill the void. Based on his success handling the *Dougram* anime, Ryosuke Takahashi was hired as the new series' producer, and Dougram mechanical designer Kunio Okawara was recruited to create the robots.

Takahashi's vision for the robots of *Armored Trooper VOTOMS* was different this time. The robots, or Armored Troopers, were going to be small compared to their contemporaries, standing just under four meters, and they were going to be versatile. He envisioned robots battling in space, in the desert, in swamps. They were also going to be completely de-romanticized. Drawing on his experience growing up in postwar Japan, where husks of ravaged Jeeps could be found nearly everywhere, he imagined a future where a robot vehicle was simply a tool that was used and discarded.

Takara wanted their VOTOMS toys to match the anime designs exactly, in some cases even duplicating the actual mechanisms the robots used in the show. They also wanted to follow the formula behind Dougram's success: the toys would be marketed towards model builders who wanted to create their own special versions of the robots they saw on TV. Takahashi's idea of a mass-produced robot with optional parts for every occasion fit well with this plan.

The MacGyver-like ingenuity of the show's protagonist, Chirico Cuvie, also helped the marketing mission along. Chirico, a rogue soldier from the dreaded Red Shoulder squad, spent most of the early episodes fighting his enemies using robots he rebuilt from discarded ones in junkyards. Chirico's yen for customizing a robot, abandoning it, and then starting anew with another salvaged one mirrored what Takara wanted from their consumers — buy one robot, fix it up the way you want, and then buy another to customize a different way.

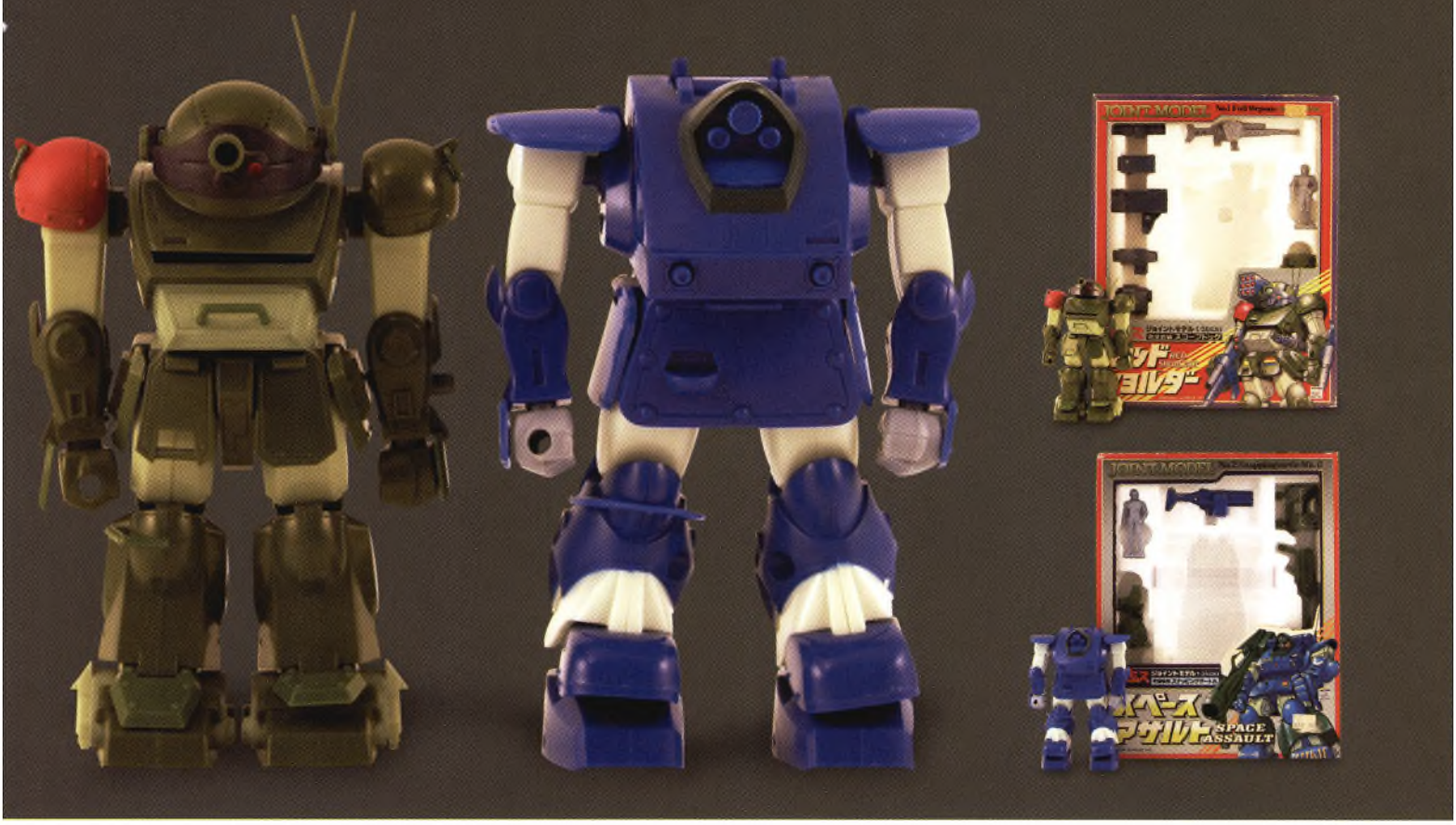
Unfortunately, Takara wasn't as enthusiastic about committing their resources this time around. A much smaller budget was allocated for the show, and out of necessity, Takahashi designed the show in four "stages." Like the different acts of a play, each stage of the show would take place in a specific locale, making it easy for animators to reuse backgrounds and other animation elements. This modular aspect to the story line also made it easy to end the show in case it was cancelled before the 52-episode mark, the point at which an anime series was deemed successful. Despite the sole sponsor's cold feet, *VOTOMS* made it. Fifty-two episodes aired between April 1, 1983 and March 23, 1984. The toys and models sold, but didn't hit the level of success that Takara had previously experienced. "I don't think they ever reached the popularity of the Dougram toys," Yoshikazu says. He notes that the model kits didn't sell as well as the Dougram kits, either.

Like the Dougram toys before them, VOTOMS toys were made in 3 scales: 3" 1/60 figures, 5" 1/35 "Joint Models" and 7" 1/24 "Dual Models." Again, names like Joint Model and Dual Model were employed to convey the idea that these weren't simply toys, but model kits to be customized. Okawara was also commissioned to do a series of illustrations for the boxes, and while his artwork wasn't displayed prominently on some items in the toy line, many collectors consider the huge Okawara painting on the Dual Model Red Shoulder Custom Scopedog box to be a true work of toy art.

The 1/60 series of figures featured a high metal content, making for seven solid but somewhat less poseable pieces. Despite their small size, the designers managed to work a high level of detail into them, including things like removable hip, knee, and foot armor, "mud skis" on the aquatic robots, and flip-up visors. Out of the seven 1/60 figures, two versions of the Scopedog, the ubiquitous "grunt" mecha, were included, as well as some more exotic designs like the Diving Beetle and Berserga. The 1/60 packaging also features a strange definition for VOTOMS: Very Obnoxious Tagger's Out-of-sight Murder Service, which is definitely the product of an overambitious graphic artist rather than a reference to anything in the TV show. The 1/35 Joint Models were oddities because they were completely devoid of any

Left page: With opening cockpits, rifles with removable parts and a plethora of posing possibilities, the 1/24 scale Dual Models showcased Takara's toy engineering brilliance.

Right page: Though these 1/35 Joint Models by Takara lacked die-cast parts, collectors loved them for their extremely customizable nature.



large metal pieces. This shortcoming was more than compensated for by the Joint Models' highly customizable nature. Both toys came with many optional weapon and armor pieces that could be clipped on to create different variants of the mecha. The Red Shoulder Custom Scopedog came with a standard backpack as well as the full suite of spring-loaded weapons that Chirico used in early episodes of the show. The Snapping Turtle could be outfitted with armor to create a Space Assault version, complete with a missile-firing bazooka.

The 1/24 Dual Models were prime examples of Takara's excellent toy engineering, featuring opening cockpits, the ability to assume a kneeling pose (known as the "down form") to pick up the pilot, rotating scopes, rifles with removable clips, and numerous metal parts. The Scopedog, molded in drab military green, included a standard-issue backpack with extra ammo clips. Takara's second offering in this series, the Brutishdog, a customized salmon-pink version of the Scopedog, featured a gattling cannon/claw combo that replaced the right hand and a specialized backpack. The Holy Grail of this toy series for collectors, the Red Shoulder Custom Scopedog, shared the color scheme of the standard Scopedog, with the notable exception of one shoulder painted blood red. In addition to the standard Scopedog equipment, the Red Shoulder also included Chirico's weapons suite and a special "Round Mover" jet pack for flying around in outer space.

No VOTOMS collection can be considered complete without one of the more bizarre Takara offerings, the Choro-Q Scopedog. Like the Choro-Q Dougram that came before it, this 3" Scopedog was rendered in the classic "super deformed" style. It transformed into a small, dragster-like version of the mecha, which doubled as a pull-pack racer.

During the 1980s, some VOTOMS toys found their way into America. The biggest domestic source was Twentieth Century Imports, a Japanese model wholesaler who had big plans for the *VOTOMS* TV show. At one point, TCI announced that they would be releasing a subtitled version of the show direct to home video. Perhaps to foster interest in the series, they sold many of the 1/60 toys at rock-bottom prices. Unfortunately, the subtitled videos never materialized, and it wasn't until the 1990s that Central Park Media released *VOTOMS* on video in America.

In Japan, *VOTOMS'* life extended far past the original TV series. In fact, three direct-to-video movies, a twelve part spin-off series called Armored Hunter Merowlink, and a five-part conclusion to the saga were released over the next ten years. As the 1990s drew to a close and mecha nostalgia entered full swing, Takara began reviving the property with reissues of the toys and new video games for the Playstation.

Two of the three toy lines, the 1/35 Joint Models and 1/24 Dual Models, were re-released in slick new packaging. These pieces remained largely unchanged, keeping their original construction, accessories, and features. Clear and chromed reissues of these toys were also churned out by the Takara factories, but weren't well received by collectors, who preferred normally-colored versions. Many of

THE ROBOT IN THE MIRROR

Many collectors who start delving into VOTOMS discover that some Red Shoulder Custom Scopedog toys have the right shoulder painted red, while others have a red left shoulder. Which version is correct? The answer is actually "both."

In the world of *VOTOMS*, the Red Shoulder Squad is the elite corps of the Gilgameth army, the baddest of the bad. They paint the right shoulder of their Armored Troopers red to signify the bloody missions they're sent on.

Our protagonist, Chirico Cuvie, is an ex-Red Shoulder. In the inital episodes of the TV series he's trying to lay low in a town called Uoodo. He hooks up with a group of scavengers who find out about his piloting background and push him into Battling, an arena sport where VOTOMS fight each other for big bucks.

While preparing for one battle, Vanilla, one of the scavengers, paints the left shoulder of Chirico's Scopedog red, commenting that it will freak out his opponents. Chirico nonchalantly notes that they actually paint the right shoulder red. This shocks the group, and they start to realize that there's a lot more to Chirico than they assumed.

So technically, right is correct and left is wrong; but they're both shown in the anime. If the toy represents a true Red Shoulder, the right shoulder needs to be red. However, if the toy depicts the one that Vanilla was dressing to impress, the toymakers need to make the same mistake he did and paint the left shoulder red!

Top right: Look closely at the last line of copy on the side of the 1/60 scale Takara boxes. This bizarre take on the VOTOMS acronym actually has nothing to do with the anime; it's something of a comical mystery to VOTOMS fans and graffiti artists alike.

Below right: Behold all seven of the 1/60 scale VOTOMS die-cast toys.

Below: The super-deformed Choro-Q Scopedog transforms into a sort of mini-pullback racing car.

these were overproduced by Takara, and found their way into America through Diamond Comic Distributors.

Two video games for the Playstation were released in special collector editions that included the 1/24 Scopedog and Red Shoulder toys in new olive and gray color schemes. A third video game was also released with something special: a new Dual Model toy, the Slashdog. The toy was based on a design from the video game that was specialized for arena combat. Roughly two-thirds of the Slashdog's parts came from the existing 1/24 Scopedog mold, but new boosters for the legs, a high-tech visor, a claw arm attachment, and a new rifle were sculpted for it. To top it all off, the toy was cast in a menacing crimson color scheme.

As a result of the various reissues that Takara has done over the years, anyone who wants a VOTOMS Dual Model or Joint Model toy can find one easily and for a reasonable price. Collectors who hunt only vintage pieces have noted that even the hardest piece to find, the Dual Model Brutishdog, is reasonably priced compared to other 1980s mecha toys like those from Macross and Gundam.

In recent years, Takara has helped keep VOTOMS alive by licensing the property to a new generation of toymakers. Toy company Yamato released a 1/12 scale Scopedog toy that stands approximately 12" tall. The toy features nearly every feature of the Scopedog from the show, including a spring loaded "armor punch," and "roller dash" wheels and "turn pick" mechanisms in the feet. Yamato has also

been releasing multiple option packs that include the various hand weapons and backpacks for the 'dog.

Takara has also been hard at work on their own new toys. A line of 1/48 scale "Actic Gear" (a brand name derived from the words "active" and "artistic") is currently in full swing, and the small size of the robots is making it possible for Takara to offer vehicles such as the AT Fly transport chopper. Takara has also revived the Dual Models, appending "Zwei" (German for "two") to the moniker. The first release was a painted and weathered 1/18 scale Scopedog that came with a Microman Chirico figure, and additional figures are expected to be announced.

VOTOMS, considered by many to be the high water mark for mecha shows, gave us some of the best realistically-styled robot toys ever made. The legacy of Takara's unforgettable toys lives on to this day, and looks like it will extend into the future for some time to come.

CHECKLIST: ORIGINAL *1/60 AT Collection series*, No. 1 Mid-09-ST Scopedog, No. 2 Mid-09-GC Brutishdog, No. 3 Heavy-04 -ST Standing Tortoise, No. 4 Mid-09-WR Marshydog, No. 5 Heavy-14 -WPC Snapping Turtle, No. 6 Heavy-06-WP Diving Beetle, No. 7 Heavy-Q-64 Berserga

1/35 Joint Model series, No. 1 ATM-09-ST Full Weapons Scopedog Red Shoulder, No. 2 ATH-14-SAC Space Assault Snapping Turtle Mark 2

1/24 Dual Model series, No. 1 ATM-09-ST Scopedog, No. 2 ATM-09-GC Brutishdog, No. 3 ATM-09-RSC Red Shoulder Custom Scopedog, Choro-Q series, Choro-Q Scopedog

REISSUES: *1/35 Joint Model series*, No. 1 - ATM-09-ST Full Weapons Scopedog Red Shoulder, No. 2 - ATH-14-SAC Space Assault Snapping Turtle Mark 2 (Both were also issued in translucent versions.)

1/24 Dual Model series (first reissues, late 1990s), No. 1 ATM-09-ST Scopedog, No. 2 ATM-09-GC Brutishdog, No. 3 ATM-09-RSC Red Shoulder Custom Scopedog (All three were also issued in both translucent and chrome versions.)

1/24 Dual Model series (second reissues, 2005), RDM-1 ATM-09-GC Brutishdog, RDM-2 ATM-09-SA Scopedog for Perfect Soldier (included Round Mover and new weapons), RDM-3 ATM-09-RSC Red Shoulder Custom Scopedog

Special Edition VOTOMS Playstation Games, Blue Knight (included Dual Model ATM-09-ST Scopedog reissue in olive/grey) Uoodo/Kummen (included Dual Model ATM-09-RSC Red Shoulder Custom Scopedog reissue in olive/grey) Lightning Slash (included Dual Model ATM-09-GSC Slashdog)

Choro-Q series, Choro-Q Scopedog (sold as part of a 4-pack with Dougram, Giant Gorg, and Galient) (This was also issued as a transluent version.)

THE FIRE & THE FURY

THE CLASSIC MONSTER TOYS OF RODAN

By Chad Hensley/Photography by Tim Brisko/Toys from the collection of Mike Johnson

The eponymous monster in Toho's 1956 film *Rodan* is a titanic pterodactyl that's endured the test of time both figuratively and literally. Though being prehistoric and 160 feet tall adds to this kaiju's surface appeal for wide-eyed children, the true key to Rodan's lasting popularity is his on-screen camaraderie with the King of Monsters, Godzilla. Though Rodan technically dies in his debut film (burned to a crisp in an erupting volcano) the character later appeared in the 1964 film *Ghidorah: The Three-Headed Monster* to team up with Godzilla in an out-and-out war against Ghidora. Over the next 40 years, Rodan makes five more appearances in Godzilla films, each time joining forces with the lizard lord to topple an adversary. In two of these movies, Rodan even got complete makeovers. First, in 1993's *Godzilla vs. Mechagodzilla* the reptile is transformed into a spiny, violet-colored creature called Fire Rodan. Then in the 2004 film *Godzilla: Final Wars*, a modernized, muscle-bound interpretation of the winged monster manifested. Naturally, due to the character's enduring grasp on audiences' hearts, toy companies have pumped out a veritable flock of Rodan vinyl toys over the years.

Bullmark released the first Rodan toy in 1970 in the form of a 9-inch standard sized vinyl and smaller pink mini-sized vinyl, but it wasn't until a decade later that another vinyl incarnation of the monster appeared. In 1978, Popy debuted their 6-inch Rodan as part of their King Zaurus series in which each vinyl figure touted unique imprinted footprints. Then, the very next year in America, Mattel put out a large plastic version of Rodan in a one-shot series called World's Greatest Monsters.

The WGM figure is especially noteworthy because it is in the same scale as another Mattel toy line from the same time period--The Shogun Warriors. It has a wingspan of 38", massive movable claws, and a lever on the toy's neck that controls the figure's beak-like mouth. However, unlike the toys in the Shogun Warriors line, all of which are based on toys previously released by Popy in Japan, the World's Greatest Monsters Rodan has no Japanese counterpart.

It would be nearly thirteen years before another Rodan terrorized toy store shelves. In 1992, Bandai finally showed the fire bird some love by releasing an 8" brown Rodan as part of their expanding Godzilla series. The next year, this figure was reissued with a slightly different paint scheme in Bandai's Godzilla Memorial Box figure collection. Also in 1993, Bandai dropped a new 8" Fire Rodan in violet-colored vinyl. Consequently, the company did two more versions of Fire Rodan; one as part of the 1996 Godzilla Forever series and the other in their Godzilla Island/Toho Kaiju series. The Godzilla Forever Fire Rodan is cast from the same mold as the standard release, with a more detailed paint job on the veins in the monster's wings. The Toho Kaiju Fire Rodan is molded in a smaller 6-inch scale,

Opposite page: Red Popy Rodan

Top (left to right): Marmit Rodan from mini-figure set and Marmit mini SD figures.

Right: Bandai reproduction next to two original Bullmark vinyls.

Bottom (left to right): Original Bullmark mini vinyls, M1 Bullmark reproductions and Popy figure variations.

and is very different from the two larger versions, boasting a bright red body and a white beak.

Also during the '90s, a few Japanese toy companies offered a few off-kilter Rodan toys. These oddities included a miniature super-deformed, disk-firing Rodan that came on a blister card made by Tomy, and a blocky, super-deformed Rodan that could be transformed into a pterodactyl egg produced byTakara. In the last few years, both M1 and Marmit have contributed to the growing roost of Rodan toys. Marmit churned out a chunky 10-inch vinyl of Rodan as part of their Vinyl Paradise line in three different color ways. Marmit also made a nice super-deformed, two-inch Rodan articulated at the neck to be given away as a prize at Japanese toy shows. One of the coolest pieces, however, Marmit's Para-baby Rodan vinyl, is much more detailed than the Vinyl Paradise version and came with a mini vinyl of the monster in flying pose; a second Para-baby Rodan was soon released accompanied by a miniature flying saucer! Both Para-babies were produced in different color ways; there was a common green vinyl version, a show exclusive, unpainted beige, and an unpainted smoke white vinyl. More recently, M1 produced a 9-inch standard-size Rodan figure based on the original Bullmark mold in flesh vinyl with brown spray as an event exclusive. Other color variants of this toy include a metallic green spray on brown vinyl event exclusive, and a glow-in-the-dark version. A couple of M1 3-inch mini-sized reproduction vinyls have also been released in yellow and brown.

Not to be outdone, Marusan and Bearmodel have created their own versions of the giant pterodactyl. Marusan's 8-inch Rodan vinyls come in both standing and flying forms. The Bearmodel middle-sized Rodan is available in yellow, brown, and unpainted, translucent red vinyl.

So there you have it: a complete report on all of the Rodan toys that you could ever want. Now get out there and start hunting down the pieces that appeal to you most!

Top row (Left to right): Original large scale Bandai Rodan figures, Mattel Jumbo sized flying figure in box.

Second row: Original large scale Bandai Fire Rodan figures, Smaller scale Bandai Fire Rodan tag and spray variations, Smaller scale Bandai Rodan and Final Wars variations.

Third row: Baremodel figures, Marmit vinyl Paradise figures, Marmit Para-baby figures with UFO, Marmit Para-baby with mini flying figures.

Bottom row: Marmit mini flying figures, Marmit Final Wars Rodan, Marusan Standing Rodan, Marusan Flying Rodan, YMSF figures.

CHECKLIST

Rodan: Bullmark 9" Standard-flesh vinyl light blue paint or dark blue paint, Bullmark 9" Bandai 1991 Blue vinyl reproduction, Bullmark 9" M1 reproduction-flesh vinyl with green, blue vinyl with red, flesh vinyl with brown or glow vinyl with pink and yellow, Bullmark mini-pink vinyl with dark red spray, pink vinyl with light red spray, pink vinyl with gold beak, Bullmark mini M1 reproduction-brown vinyl or yellow vinyl, Popy-white eyes, gold eyes with grey spray or gold eyes with silver spray, Mattel-US jumbo scale figure, Tomy-mini SD firing figure, Takara-wind-up SD egg, Bandai large scale figure-1992 brown vinyl with gold spray or 1993 Memoriao Box brown vinyl with silver spray, Bandai-small flying figure from 1992 Godzilla vs Mothra box set, Bandai smaller scale figure-brown vinyl, Marusan Flying Rodan-brown vinyl, Marusan Standing Rodan-brown vinyl, Baremodel middle size Rodan-yellow vinyl, brown vinyl or translucent red unpainted vinyl, Marmit Vinyl Paradise-yellow vinyl with green and red, translucent blue unpainted vinyl or brown vinyl with gold, Marmit Para-baby with mini flying figure-flesh unpainted vinyl with white mini, reddish-brown vinyl, white unpainted vinyl with flesh mini, green vinyl with blue paint, or blue vinyl with yellow paint,Marmit Para-baby with mini UFO-red vinyl, flesh unpainted vinyl, or orange vinyl, Marmit mini SD figure-green vinyl with red, pink vinyl with red, black transucent unpainted vinyl, silver unpainted vinyl, black unpainted vinyl, translucent grey unpainted vinyl, brown unpainted vinyl, aqua unpainted vinyl, blue unpainted vinyl, yellow unpainted vinyl, translucent blue unpainted vinyl, Marmit Mini set figure-brown vinyl. **Fire Rodan:** Bandai 8" large version-1993 purple and tan or 1996 Forever series with veins on wings, Bandai 6" smaller version-first paint with Godzilla Island tag, first paint with Toho Kaiju series tag, darker red paint with Movie Monsters tag or dark brown vinyl from 50th anniversary Memorial box. **Final Wars Rodan:** Bandai red vinyl normal version or brown vinyl theater version, Marmit Brown vinyl with blue spray.

WE ARE THE CHAMPIONS

THE ORIGINAL FIGHT FIGURE–TAKE-SHIT'S FINK-SHIT

By Super7 Staff/Photography by Robert Arevalo

And then, everything changed. While that may sound melodramatic, it strikes fairly close to the truth. In the same way that Kenner changed the scale of action figures forever with its diminutive 3.75" Star Wars line in 1977, Cocobat bassist Take-shit helped kick off an underground designer movement when he released his Fink-Shit figure in 1999. Born on the same date as the influential Bounty Hunter Kid Hunter vinyl, (For politics sake, both parties say their figures were released at the same time), the Fink-Shit stayed in the background of Japanese toy fandom for years before it's true influence would begin to show.

The Fink-Shit was an evolution of a previous toy that Take-shit helped create — the Posi-traction Tin Car made with Oka Narue at Zaap. Using the Fink head mold created by Take-shit's friend Hasabe for the Posi-traction Tin Car, Oka and Take-shit later decided to make a fighting style body to match the head as a visual nod to Take-shit's semi-professional shoot-fighting career. Enlisting the aid of sculptor Cosmo Liquid, and produced at the local Hirota Studios factory, the Fink-Shit was the first of what would become a legacy of fight figures. To appreciate the toy better, it is important to note that everything about the Fink-Shit has layered meaning for its creators. The head is inspired by the classic Rat Fink character while incorporating the same glasses that Take-shit actually used to wear. The body is sculpted in specific reference to Take-shit's fighting style complete with gloves and outfits similar to those worn by Take-shit in the ring. Originally released in green or red vinyl and painted white and black with gold accents, the figures came in a small nylon fruit bag, and were available at Cocobat concerts. Later, a second run of figures cast in translucent gray vinyl were released, in additon to a t-shirt that simply read "fightoy."

It was not until three years later, in 2002, that the influence of the Fink-Shit figure would begin to manifest when Hideaki Kinoshita (who worked with Oka at Zaap) started his shop, Secret Base. More commonly known as "Hiddy," Hideaki approached both Take-shit and Oka about making a figure for his new shop that could fight against the classic Fink-Shit figure. Using the same sculptor, Cosmo Liquid, Secret Base's first figure was made — the Skull Bee. Soon thereafter, Hiddy would produce the apprentice to the Skull Bee, the Skull Brain, this time using the sculptor Kiyoka Ikeda. As the popularity of Secret Base and the fight figures began to grow, new variations were designed including a mummy-wrapped Damaged Brain, a Halloween-themed Pumpkin Brain and Obake (Ghost), as well as a collaborative figure with the Japanese punk band Balzac depicting their Paperbagman mascot character.

In late 2003, Hiroaki Okada of Gargamel approached Hiddy about manufacturing a new fight figure called Gargamess for their shop. Asking both Oka and Take-shit for their approval, their first collaborative figure, half Gargamess, half Skull Brain was released as a premium mail-in offer in *Warp* magazine. After this, the first three

WE ARE THE CHAMPIONS

Right: The only three color ways of the invariably influential Fink-Shit figure.

Below (Inside box moving clockwise from top left): A sampling of fight figures directly inspired by the Fink-shit: First up, a group shot of today's hottest fight brand, Secret Base. Next, the Gargamel gang will wrestle you down. In the upper right corner, we have the excellent alien pugilists made by Real Head.

Decorating the bottom left, the Warp magazine Gargamel x Secret Base Skullbrain is cast in glow vinyl with a clear brain. To the right, the Blobpus monster is followed by Chicken Fever, and Cronic's Maverasu and Zyurai Asu figures. Next, check out these amazing Pharos and Damnedron figures by Rumble Monsters. And finally, this is the original shirt that Take-shit made back in 1999 to coincide with his Fink-Shit figures. Let's here it for the champ!

Gargamess releases were made as collaborative figures between Secret Base and Gargamel; unfortunately, Kiyoka left Secret Base to work with Gargamel, and the relationship sadly soured. Kiyoka's last figure sculpted for Secret Base was the Pushead designed Skull Wing, although it wasn't released until early 2005. Gargamel soon began making their own custom fight figures, introducing the Bullmark homage Bullmask and the Street Fighter video game-inspired Pinwheel. Later releases include the kaiju inspired-Gappa, the cone headed Cumberlain, the wolfman-esque Wheelbarrow, the collaborative Gargadeath (with Napalm Death bassist Shane Embry) and a single figure-sized fighting ring that doubled as a coin bank.

And the list of people inspired by the Fink-Shit and Secret Base goes on. In 2004 Real Head founder Mori-kun began his own fight figure company. Based on his own styles and interests, the first releases were the Mutant Evil, the Mutant Head and a caricatured self-portrait of Mori, the Oni-Head. Working in relative obscurity for much of 2004 and 2005, Real Head continued making figures and variations in small runs, introducing Mutant Bigaro and Mutant Chaos in the fall of 2005. The four Mutant figures represent the heroes of Mori-kun's world, and 2006 saw the release of the first of the four villains, the Kaiser.

It was also in 2005 that fight figures exploded in both the Japanese and American consciousness in a larger context. This began with the release of the aforementioned Secret Base and Pushead collaborative Skull Wing and continued with San Diego Comic-Con release of the Ghostfighter (designed by Brian Flynn of Super7). Multiple Secret Base figures were released in collaboration with Japanese retailer Atmos and the Japanese fashion brand Devilock. Even more recently, several new companies began designing their own fight figures as accessories to the growing army of toys in this style. Sin + Wombat developed the Chicken Fever alien, Blobpus and Cronic both debuted their self-titled figures, and a new company named Rumble Monsters developed two slightly larger fight figures, the Damnedron (a cross between Hedorah the Smog Monster and the Creature from the Black Lagoon) and the Pharos which was developed with the help of artist Rockin' Jellybean.

Many new fight figures are on the way in 2006 including artist Pushead's Skull Pirate (for Secret Base) and Brian Flynn's Frankenghost (Secret Base x Super7). It's amazing to think that all of this was spawned from the innocent fan-made beginnings of the Fink-Shit seven years ago. Only time will tell how far the fight phenomenon will go, but with over 300 variations so far, it seems the battle has just begun.

Fighting Family Tree

1999 — **Fink-Shit**
Take-shit / Oka Narue / Cosmo Liquid Hasabe / Hirota Studios

Secret Base

2001 — **Skull Bee**
Hiddy / Cosmo Liquid

2002 — **Skull Brain**
Hiddy / Kiyoka

2003 — **Skull Damage**
Skull Pumpkin
Obake
Hiddy / Kiyoka

Warp Magazine

Fusion Wrestler
Hiddy / Hiroaki / Kiyoka

Gargamel

Gargamess
Bullmask
Pinwheel
Hiroaki / Kiyoka

Real Head

Oni-Head
Mutant Head
Mutant Evil
Mori-kun

2004 — **Paper Bag Man**
Balzac / Hiddy / Kiyoka

Skull Wing
Pushead / Hiddy / Kiyoka

2005 — **Ghostfighter**
Brian Flynn / Hiddy / Betch

Gappa
Cumberlain
Wheelbarrow
Hiroaki / Kiyoka

Gargadeath
Shane Embry / Kiyoka

Mutant Bigaro
Mutant Chaos
Mori-kun

2006 — **Skull Pirate**
Pushead / Hiddy / Betch

Frankenghost
Brian Flynn / Hiddy / Betch

Kaiser
Mori-kun

additional figures launched in 2005

Chicken Fever
Sin + Wombat

Maverasu Zyurai Asu
Cronic

Blobpus
Kaiji / Tiger Jet Michiko

Pharos
Rumble Monsters / Rockin' Jellybean

Damnedron
Rumble Monsters

Opposite page: Kanegon pendant.

Below, from left to right: The rare red Keiji-K pendant by Popy, a bootleg of Barom-1, the regular blue Keiji-K by Popy, and the Barom-1 pendant by Popy.

VINYL IS A KID'S BEST FRIEND

AN INTRODUCTION TO SOFT VINYL PENDANTS

By Mark Kollecker/Photography by Liz Russell

Whether you already own countless Japanese toys or you're just starting your own army of heroes and monsters, soft vinyl pendants are an inexpensive and fun way to build up any collection. Pendants first appeared in the 1960s, when children from Japan were likely to wear these 8- to 10-centimeter-tall versions of their favorite television characters around their necks — like their very own space-age protectors. Even though loads of cool characters displayed in signature action and flying poses were produced over the years, pictures of pendants in Japanese toy books are scarce, mostly because hardcore Japanese collectors considered pendants gimmicky low-dollar items meant for child's play. Indeed, this is a fascinating area of toy collecting that is often overlooked by the toy intelligentsia.

Marusan, the grandfather of all vinyl toy makers, was the first company to produce pendants, although they didn't do so during their initial run of character toys during 1966. In fact, the first and only pendants by Marusan–Booska and Ultra Seven — were made in 1967. The Ultra Seven pendant features a removable mask that conceals the identity of the hero's alter ego, Dan Moroboshi sporting the iconic Ultra Seven goggles. Both of these Marusan figures are absurdly hard to find and tend to fetch uncharacteristically high prices for pendants. Still, interested buyers take heart; a modern replica of the Booska pendant made by Ichiko can usually be found for as little as ten bucks on Yahoo Japan.

Also in 1967, a group of ten pendants was released featuring heroes and kaiju from popular live-action TV shows of the era. The sculpts and paint jobs on these pendants closely resemble the soft vinyl toys made by Bullmark during this era, though there is a possibility that the figures may have been bootlegs. There are no manufacturers' marks to be found on either the toys or their packaging. Plus, even though each figure sports a production company copyright on the bottom of the foot, it's always the Tsuburaya Productions copyright. And, as any good kaiju geek knows, Garuban and Godzilla were Toei and Toho properties, respectively. Nevertheless, these pendants are relatively easy to find and are among the few pendants, along with those made by Nitto in 1971, that actually featured kaiju. Included in this group are Kanegon from Ultra Q; Ultraman, Red King, Alien Baltan, and Gomora from Ultraman; Ultra Seven, Eleking, and Alien Godora from Ultra Seven; Garuban from Captain Ultra; and the king of monsters himself, Godzilla.

Nitto soon pumped out some cool kaiju pieces based on monsters from the Gamera series of films by Daiei. These pendants are identical to their mini-size vinyl toy counterparts by Nitto with the addition of the token stems and chains found on all pendants. Featured in this series are Gamera, Gyaos, Barugon, Jaiger, Viras, and Gappa. The pendants in this series can be located with a little luck and patience. The most difficult to find are Gyaos and especially the Viras.

VINYL IS A KID'S BEST FRIEND

Right: Ultraman Monsters: (left to right) Gomora, Ultraman, Red King, Kanegon.

Below from left to right: Bootleg Kamen Rider (missing mask), Kamen Rider Stronger (Popy), Kamen Rider Amazon (Popy), Kamen Rider V3 (Popy), Kamen Rider X (Popy), Popy Cute Shows: (L-R) Robo 110 Ban, 8-Chan, Robocon, Teacher Gantsu, and Giant Monsters: Garuban, Godzilla.

Based on the number of character licenses and the array of toys they produced, one would expect that the soft vinyl juggernaut Bullmark would have lead the way in the production of pendants. This, however, is not the case. There seems to be only two pendants that can be confirmed to be Bullmark: Triple Fighter and Red Man. Both were produced in 1972.

Throughout the mid-70s, Takatoku took up some of the slack left by Bullmark in the vinyl pendant market. They produced many pendants based primarily on the giant hero shows popular at the time. Examples include Mirrorman, Iron King, and Silver Kamen. Takatoku also made pendants based on some of the henshin hero shows such as *Akumaizer 3* and *Zubat*. In addition to having great sculpts, pendants made by Takatoku often feature the characters in fighting and ray-shooting poses.

However, it was Popy that cranked out the vast majority of soft vinyl pendants throughout the 1970s. The licenses they held were many and varied and included popular characters from all genera of Japanese television. The pantheon of Popy pendants included characters from the Ultraman and Kamen Rider franchises; henshin heroes such as Ninja Arashi, Barom-1, Inazuman, Keiji-K, Kikaida 01, Ninja Captor, and Kagestar; sentai shows (usually featuring the Red Ranger) such as *Go Ranger*, *Jak-Q*, and *Sun Vulcan*; children's shows such as *Robocon* and *8-Chan*; and animated shows such as *Jetter Mars* and a variety of super robots.

Most pendants were displayed and sold in stores on cardboard backing cards, which featured a colorful drawing of the character and had about a dozen pendants hanging off the bottom. The pendants were sold individually and shopkeepers often threw the empty backing cards away. However, a slight shift in the paradigm occurred in the mid '70s when Popy joined with a small company called Patra to come up with a new way to market pendants to kids and parents. Patra, a company that produced bath toys and other small toys, had been creating pendants as early as 1972. Some of their pendants include Denjin Zaboga, Ultraman Leo, Red Baron and Mach Baron. The Popy/Patra pendant package included a soft vinyl pendant packed in a two-or three-part clear plastic capsule which sat on a plastic base. Also included in the capsule were several smaller toys such as plastic racing cars, small metal pin-back badges featuring Warner Brothers cartoon characters, rulers, and small plastic trains and motorcycles. Finally, there were plastic pieces which, when assembled, turned the capsule into a pencil holder, bank, jewelry holder, or mini terrarium depending on the enclosed directions. The entire capsule was contained within a plastic mesh bag. A cardboard tag hung on the outside of the bag and featured character artwork plus the Popy and Patra logos.

Many other companies produced pendants over the years and continue to do so today. Nakajima made versions of Tekkaman and Pegasu. Bandai made several highly sought after Kamen Rider pendants. Relative newcomer M1 has also made a pendant version of Matango.

Left (left to right): Popy Pendants: Ultraman Ace, Zone Fighter, Detective Keiji-K, Ninja Arashi, Kikaida 01, Inazuman, Barom-1.

Middle row (left to right): Zubat by Takatoku, Iron King by Takatoku, Mirrorman by Takatoku, Spectreman bootleg, Fireman by Popy, Zabitan by Takatoku, Silver Mask fighting pose by Takatoku, Triple Fighter by Bullmark, Jaiger, Barugon, Gamera and Gappa, (missing Gyaos and Viras) pendants by Nitto.

Bottom row: Denjin Zagoba, Simone from the Star of Seine, Red Baron, Ultraman Leo, Mach Baron, Thunder Mask and Ban Kid pendants by Patora, Gekko Kamen, Sun Vulcan, Ninja Captor, Spade Ace and Kagestar pendants by Popy.

Opposite page:
Baltan-Seijin pendant.

Left (left to right): Ultra Seven, Alien God, and Eleking.

Below (left to right): Popy/Patra capsules: Jetter Mars with capsule opened to show contents and set up as a pencil holder, Red GoRanger, Denjin Zaboga.

As with other vintage Japanese toys, various bootlegs exist of pendants. Some are actually very nice and fill in gaps that licensed makers failed to capitalize on such as the Spectreman and the removable mask Kamen Rider pendants. Others appear to be copies of licensed goods designed to deceive the buyer such as the bootlegs of the Ninja Arashi and Barom-1 pendants. Others still were made of thinly blown polyvinyl, called pori (poly) by Japanese collectors, and sold at mom and pop confectionery shops and train stations. These pendants are usually not painted and retain flashing from the molds along their seams. The Ultraman, Mirrorman, Spectreman, and Kamen Rider series saw many pori pendants made of their characters. Another type of unlicensed pendant was released that portrays original characters — so they can't really be called bootlegs. These feature original kaiju similar to the Marusan original series of soft vinyl from 1970. However, a quick look at these pendants will reveal more than a passing resemblance to kaiju featured on shows such as *Ultra Q* and *Ultraman*.

With a little effort and a minimal outlay of money, a nice collection of vintage soft vinyl pendants can be assembled. Novice collectors may find pendants a fun way to start a vintage collection. Most of the pendants pictured can be purchased for between $10 and $20. Seasoned collectors may want to add some pendants to their collections for the variety they offer. Since pendants are not often pictured in reference books, there is a challenge in hunting them down and discovering pieces you never knew existed. A search of the auctions listed on Yahoo Japan usually reveals two or three pages of vinyl pendants. Pieces occasionally turn up on eBay, especially from Hawaiian sellers. A missing chain is not a big problem, but avoid pendants that have a broken stem. Original store display backing cards for soft vinyl pendants are also very collectible and make a nifty display for your collection. You could also make a statement about your youthful and vibrant view of the world by wearing one around your neck.

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THINK IT TO DEATH
THIS IS WESTERN ADDICTION

Take your pick from these punk "looks." There's, (A) a shaved head, Levi's, and an Army jacket. Or (B), a lip ring, a wristband and eyeliner.

If you picked A, it might remind you of how punk used to look — nothing fancy, slightly off kilter, and certainly not fashionable. That look may have garnered strange glances at one time, but there was more to it than dressing like Travis Bickle in *Taxi Driver*. There was an exciting, galvanic sound that relates to this time in punk's history — driving, urgent, guitar heavy hardcore. And that sound is alive and well in the San Francisco band, Western Addiction.

The members of the band met as co-workers at SF-based record Label, Fat Wreck Chords. Featuring Jason on vocals and guitar; Ken on guitar; Chicken on bass and vocals; and Chad on drums. Several Western Addiction members play in other bands, however this is Jason's first band. He was also the catalyst for the project, "I was standing around at a show and I said to myself, 'I am so tired of watching everyone else do something cool, I want to try... So the next day I came to work and said to Chad, 'Um, you play drums, I can kind of play guitar, do you want to get together and play some songs?' It was the weirdest thing. It was like asking another grown man on a date," he laughs. Soon after, they convinced Chicken and Ken to join.

After solidifying their sound, the band recorded the "Remember to Dismember" 7" on Fat Wreck Chords and a split 12" with New Mexico Disaster Squad for No Idea Records. They then recorded their first full length for Fat Wreck Chords, entitled *Cognicide*, a word of Jason's own creation. "A lot of people have been able to figure that one out so its not that crazy... Cognicide... thinking something to death. I do it all the time," he says. Jason also takes on the role of primary lyricist. His words take shape in ambiguous, poetic verses that quickly transform into something profoundly substantial. However, he's also capable of very straight forward moments. For example, the song "Animals and Children" describes his company of choice. He explains, "I think when you get older a part of you dies, so those are some pure things. Kids and animals — both seem to be so happy."

Since the release of Cognicide, the band has played such diverse shows as sold out venues in Japan with NOFX to basement shows in the US on their own. To keep up to date on what stunning things the guys in Western Addiction can do with riffs and lyrics check out www.westernaddiction.com and www.fatwreck.com.
—Devon Morf

HISTORY OF VIOLENCE
BUCKETHEAD

If you've never heard of Buckethead, the experimental virtuoso guitarist with a bent for the strange, he's an original that rarely fails to enchant. High praise? Perhaps. But when you're a self-proclaimed protector of chickens who taught yourself to play guitar in a cemetery, and you sound something like the cosmic love baby of Sun Ra and the ghost of Randy Rhoads, it's impossible not to impress curious music nerds. This DVD from Media Blasters chronicles the first 13 years of Buckethead's career complete with freak-out animated segments, music videos, four unreleased recordings, and an insane scrapbook of art and oddities culled from Buckethead's archives. For more info on the artist and the DVD go to bucketheadland.com or media-blasters.com.
—Justin Kovalsky

MUTANT MASSACRE (01)

There's nothing toxic at all about this rad Hedorah t-shirt made by Mutant Massacre. Available in black and white, orange and black, or red with glow-in-the-dark print, this tee captures the essence of Toho's smog monster in style. Wear it proudly and let your fellow toy fans know you know what's up with the current king of kaiju in Japan.
www.super7store.com

SUPER7 (02 – 04)

Super7's new line of tees has arrived just in time to keep you looking fresh this summer. First, check out the new Skid shirt that pays homage to Katsuhiro Otomo's classic animated film, Akira. Next, the S7 Ribcage shirt shows you stay true to your toy roots 'til death. And finally, the Walker Camo tee features a subtle Endor Forest-inspired camouflage. Being a toy geek never looked so good.
www.super7store.com

STUSSY/ SEVENSTARS (05)

This old-school windbreaker was made made by Stussy and designed by Seven Stars studio in Japan in celebration of Seven Stars ten-year anniversary. In simple black with an amazingly detailed demon-mask-and-crossed-sword embroidered patch, you really can't go wrong with this one. Good luck finding it Stateside though — this was a Japan-only release.
www.7stars.co.jp

OSAKA POPSTAR (06)

This Osaka Monstar t-shirt was illustrated by popular underground and gallery artist, Dalek, for the NYC punk band Osaka Popstar. It gets extra cool points from S7 for its interpretation of the old *yokai* (spirit) named Kasabake from Japanese folklore. Dalek's rendition of the friendly and playful umbrella monster both suits the band and looks super-cool. This one is a must-have.
www.osakapopstar.com

08

09

10

11

SHOCKER (07,08)

The fashion label that's run by the members of Japanese punk band Balzac, Shocker, continues to drop cool stuff Stateside via their recently launched worldwide mail order site. Now, US fans of the band and their punk-inspired Japanese street fashion can order fresh items like this eye-patch skull and crossbones tee or these bone gloves for extremely reasonable prices. www.evilegend13.com/shockerworldwide

DOGGPONY X DC SHOES (09)

Super7's own web retail director and toy guru, Isaac Ramos, is a man of many interests. In fact, he's so into music that he started his own record label called DoggPony that's been going strong since 1999. Now, DoggPony is releasing this slick sneaker via DC Shoes. Designed by Ramos with illustration and lettering by world-renowned artist Mike Giant, these gray canvas kicks with yellow embroidery get S7's stamp of approval. www.dnp006.com

RAY FONG X ADIDAS (10)

Adidas has paired up with Bay Area graffiti legend-turned-art superstar, Barry McGee (a.k.a Ray Fong) for their Adicolor line of urban-inspired kicks. A three-way collaboration between Adidas, McGee and San Francisco's HUF shoe boutique, this shoe is packed with bells and whistles — four pairs of laces, a new reproduction of Barry McGee's 'zine titled Larceny, and a gorgeous box illustrated by McGee himself. Available in 12 locations worldwide, these sneaks sold out immediately. www.hufsf.com

NIKE FISH CLASSIC (11)

After designing hundreds of pro skateboard and t-shirt graphics, Jeremy Fish has gone big-time with his brand-new shoe for Nike Skateboarding. The Fish Classic is a twist on the Nike Air Classic SB. Fish has customized the shoe with a victorian pattern lasered on the upper, a metallic gold swoosh and a fuzzy pink bunny on the heel. Destined to live up to name, the Fish Classic will be available this summer. www.nike.com/nikeskateboarding

MATANGO – ATTACK OF THE MUSHROOM PEOPLE

HORROR THAT GROWS ON YOU
MEDIA-BLASTERS.COM

Seven castaways stranded on a fog-entombed island, slowly succumb to their base desires, metamorphosing into inhuman beings under the influence of a delicious, but sinister, poison fungus. With hallucinatory scenes that were ahead of their time, this eerie thriller still holds up after all these years due to the decidedly adult approach taken by director Ishiro Honda (*Godzilla*) and screenwriter Takeshi Kimura (*The Last War*).

Following the footsteps of *The H-Man* (1958), *Secret of the Telegian* (1960) and *The Human Vapor* (1960), the premise for *Matango* (1963) is based on a Lovecraftian short story "The Voice in the Night" (1907) by British author William Hope Hodgson (1877-1918). Science Fiction authors Shinichi Hoshi and Masami Fukushima adapted Hodgson's tale, with Kimura working their adaptation into a decidedly dark screenplay typical of the downbeat scribe.

Toho's fantasy films of the era relied on Eiji Tsuburaya's wondrous visual effects to help carry the narratives, but *Matango*'s success rests with the experienced ensemble cast, who are the heart and (lost) souls of the picture: Akira Kubo (*Throne of Blood*), Hiroshi Koizumi (*Later Chrysanthemums*), Yoshio Tsuchiya (*Seven Samurai*), Kumi Mizuno (*Summer Clouds*), Kenji Sahara (*Chushingura*) and Hiroshi Tachikawa (*Sanjuro*). But, is Matango an allegory of man's inhumanity to man? Is it a parable on the loss of self-identity in the industrial age? You decide.

Sourcing a newly remastered transfer, Media Blasters' DVD of *Matango* is fully letterboxed with English and Japanese audio on separate tracks. Extras include a full-length commentary with actor Akira Kubo, an interview with assistant visual effects director Teruyoshi Nakano, and author Fukushima reciting passages from his original treatment over a selection of production stills — all fully subtitled in English. Highly recommended — no pun intended. —*August Ragone*

PIECE BY PIECE

AN INSIDER'S LOOK AT AN OUTSIDER ART FORM
PIECEBYPIECE.COM

When most people hear the word graffiti, they envision wrecked subway cars along the tracks in New York City. But that's all about to change. The newly released Piece By Piece DVD is going to shift that frame of reference from NYC to the San Francisco Bay. Narrated by prolific local writer SENOR (a.k.a. RENOS), this DVD reveals the history of SF graffiti and its interaction with the people, places and vehicles that inhabit the city.

Director Nic Hill has found every photo, black book, video clip, and every writer involved in the scene. What makes Hill's documentary ring so true is the fact that the history is told by the writers themselves, not some celebrity voice-over. We get to meet members of the founding crews TMF and TWS, hear the tragic tale about the death of graffiti legend TIE and see the work of writers like GIANT and GREY who are changing the current graf landscape.

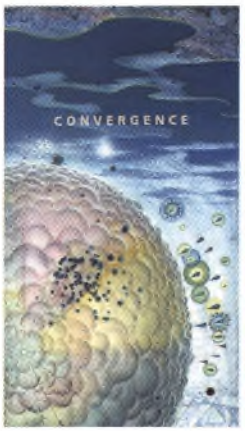
In the DVD's extras, you'll run side by side with writers such as ATARI, BUTER, and REYES while they bomb the city at night — offering the kind of excitement and insight that only writers know. —*Geoff Allen*

THE MYSTERIANS

MYSTEROID NEEDS WOMEN
MEDIA-BLASTERS.COM

Produced during the Golden Age of Japanese Cinema, *The Mysterians* (1957) was a hit around the world. In the mid-1980s, Ishiro Honda and Eiji Tsuburaya's invasion epic disappeared from US television and became a "lost film." Now, a beautiful transfer, in all its anamorphic Tohoscope glory, is available from Media Blasters — jam-packed with extra features. There are six audio tracks, Japanese Mono and 5.1 Surround remix, English 5.1 Surround, Spanish Mono, Akira Ifukube's Isolated Score and Audio Commentary. Other extras include photo and design galleries, and storyboards (presented in slideshow), as well as the original Japanese theatrical trailer. Don't worry; everything in Japanese is subtitled in English.

If you aren't already a fan, but have a soft spot for classic 1950s science fiction pictures, such as *The Day the Earth Stood Still, Forbidden Planet* and *The War of the Worlds*, you'll love the iconic and emblematic images of *The Mysterians*. —*August Ragone*



CONVERGENCE

BY MARS-1, DAMON SOULE, DAVID CHOONG LEE, NOME EDONNA, BRETT AMORY AND OLIVER VERNON
PUBLISHER/2ND ROUND PRODUCTIONS

Spores, clouds, exploding nuclei and the beginning of what looks like a geodesic dome — oh my! A Timothy Leary dream? Dead show after effects? Bad Mexican food? No, it's the cover of Convergence by everyone's favorite painstakingly precise paranormal painter, MARS-1. This 256-page book was partially created by the same quartet that participated in the excellent book, 4 Words — Damon Soule, David Choong Lee, MARS-1 and NoMe Edonna — with the addition of new kids Brett Amory and Oliver Vernon.

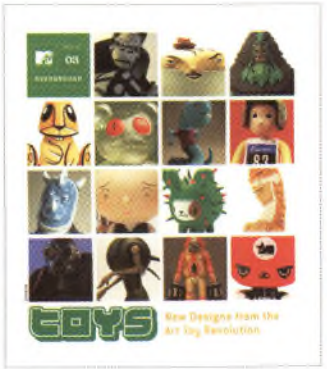
In biology, convergence is the tendency of unrelated animals and plants to evolve similar characteristics under similar environmental conditions. In this book, Convergence is the culmination of six aesthetically divergent artists whose work deals with ever-evolving urban landscapes and people. Unlike the usual themed books, Convergence is all over the metaphysical map. The odyssey starts off with Damon Soule, who combines a 3-D graffiti aesthetic with cartoon-like characters. Mr. Lee then makes a stylistically sharp left turn with his beautifully realistic portraits that are layered over with old bus transfers, pieces of cardboard and cigar box tops. Next up, MARS-1 shares a far-off world where his extraterrestrial Observer and Invisible Plan characters freely roam. Brett Amory then reflects on the mundane trappings of modern life through photo collage and thick gestural paintings. The fifth chapter is saved for NoMe, a popular Bay Area artist known for his spilled-paint artwork. His contribution to the book is a whimsical world of gelatinous germs and odd beings with oral fixations. Rounding out *Convergence* is newcomer Oliver Vernon with his pairing of subcutaneous creatures adorned with Mayan-like patterns. What makes this book so successful is the fact that the six artists gathered here subtly capture the essence of our collective mindset as we make our way through life in bustling cities.

To promote the project, the boys have been on the road with signings at the prestigious LA MOCA and SF MOMA. *Convergence* should be part of every art groupie's library, but with an edition of only 2000, this book is sure to sell out. *—Geoff Allen*

FIRST AND FIFTEENTH: POP ART SHORT STORIES

BY STEVE POWERS
PUBLISHER/VILLARD

The second book from the cannon of Steve "ESPO" Powers steps deep into the gallery productions that Powers creates — large-scale panels that connect to form a story. Reproduced for the first time in a book, these panels pull reference from storefront signs and comics, but they are a totally fresh form of visual art. First and Fifteenth reads like a graphic novel with stories of street corner swindles, big bad bullies and super heroes that might as well give it up. It is nice to hold this book in your hands and really get a chance to look at all the lines you might miss when seeing them at full scale in a large gallery space. *—Isaac Ramos*



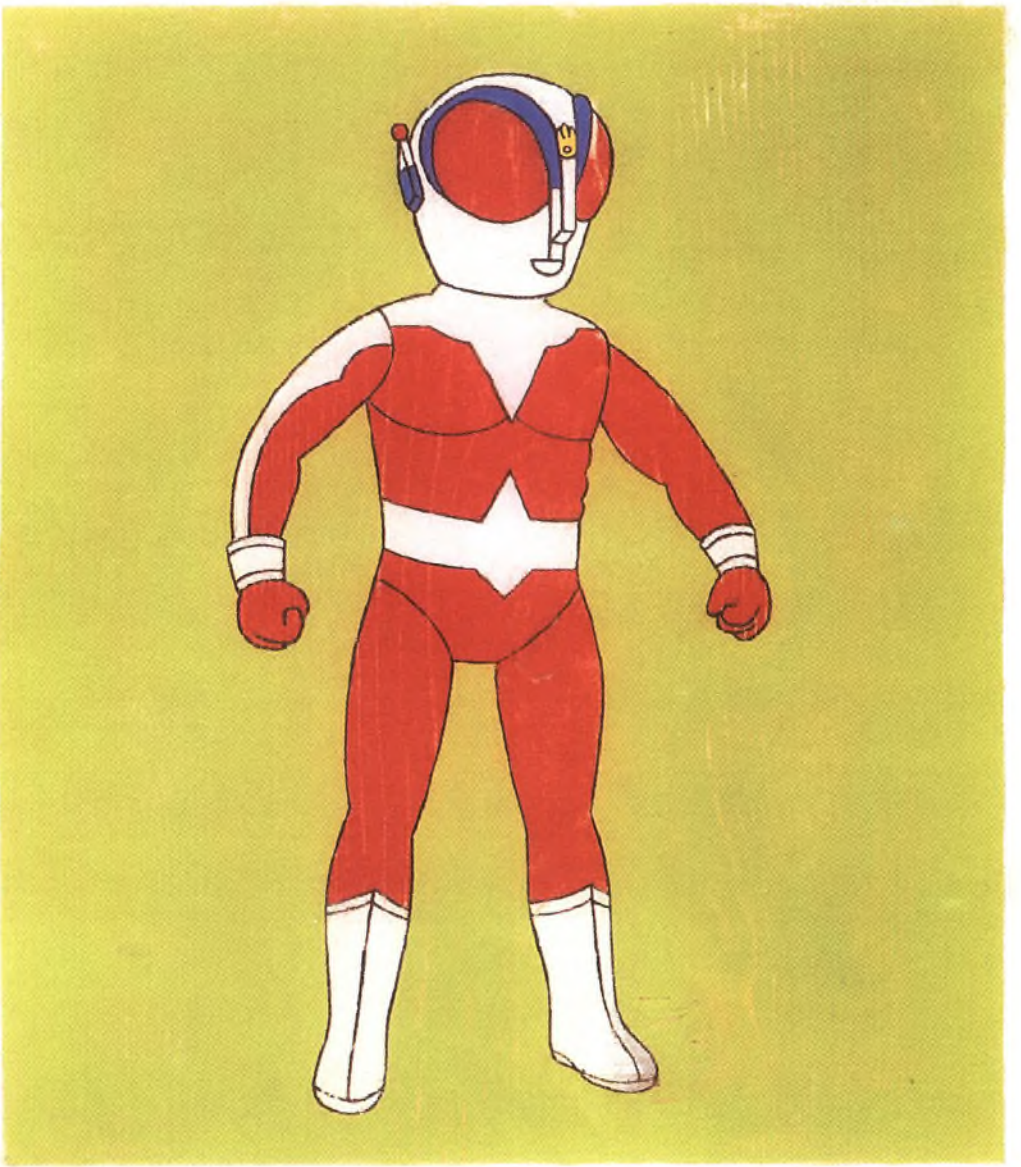
NEW DESIGNS FROM THE ART TOY REVOLUTION

BY JIM CRAWFORD AND GREGORY BLUM
PUBLISHER/ MTV BOOKS

MTV has teamed up with US toy distributor StrangeCo to create this highly pleasing picture book about designer toys, peppered with interviews with the likes of Nathan Jurevicius, Gary Baseman and more. It functions largely as a nice introduction to a variety of Western vinyl artists and a few Asian designers, but if you're looking for a complete historical portrait of vinyl on a global scale, you might look elsewhere. Otherwise, the curatorial style, informative interviews and top-notch photography are engaging, making Toys a solid purchase for new and seasoned toy collectors alike. *—Justin Kovalsky*

8 CHAN-HACHAN

ZANIKA



FIREMAN

ROCKBAT

KURE KURE TACORA

MATTHEW PORTER TACKLES TOYS

Matthew Porter grew up in the South of England and graduated from Edinburgh College of Art in 1997. Soon after, he hopped on a plane to America where he's lived and worked, dabbling in such varied subject matter as Mexican wrestlers, giant robot cats, and Monkeys in tuxedos. He is co-owner of Bluebottle Art Gallery, (bluebottleart.com) located in Seattle, Washington. Recently, he participated in the custom toy show "100 Circus Punks Rule NYC" at the Toy Tokyo Showroom. Porter's Animal Alphabet series was published as a children's book by Simply Read Books this past May and more of his work can be seen at powkid.com

THE ART OF MARTIN HARRIS

Martin Harris is an artist of storybook fantasylands whose miniature scenes of whimsy are painted with awe-inspiring detail in soft-hued watercolors. Animals, critters and bizarre creatures animate colorful worlds of gentle humor. A collector of Corgi Toys, Rupert the Bear annuals,1960s shonen comics (boys action comics from Japan) and Japanese soft vinyl kaiju by Bandai, M1, Marusan and Bullmark, Harris also has an intuitive interest in the symbolism of the Tarot. For more on Harris, check out www.outregallery.com

01		02	03
		04	05
06	07	08	09
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14	15	16	17

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12. KIKAIDA FIGHTER
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ISSUE 09. Japanese Talkers/ Tiger-7/Tim Biskup/Secret Base
ISSUE 10. Keiji-K/Robby the Robot/MARS-1/Gargamel
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06. ROCKET $40
19.75" x 27.5" silkscreen print
Art by Brian Flynn.

07. SUPER7 WORLD $125
19.75"x 27.5" silkscreen print
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08. ROBOT ORIGIN $40
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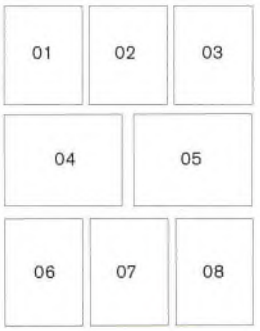

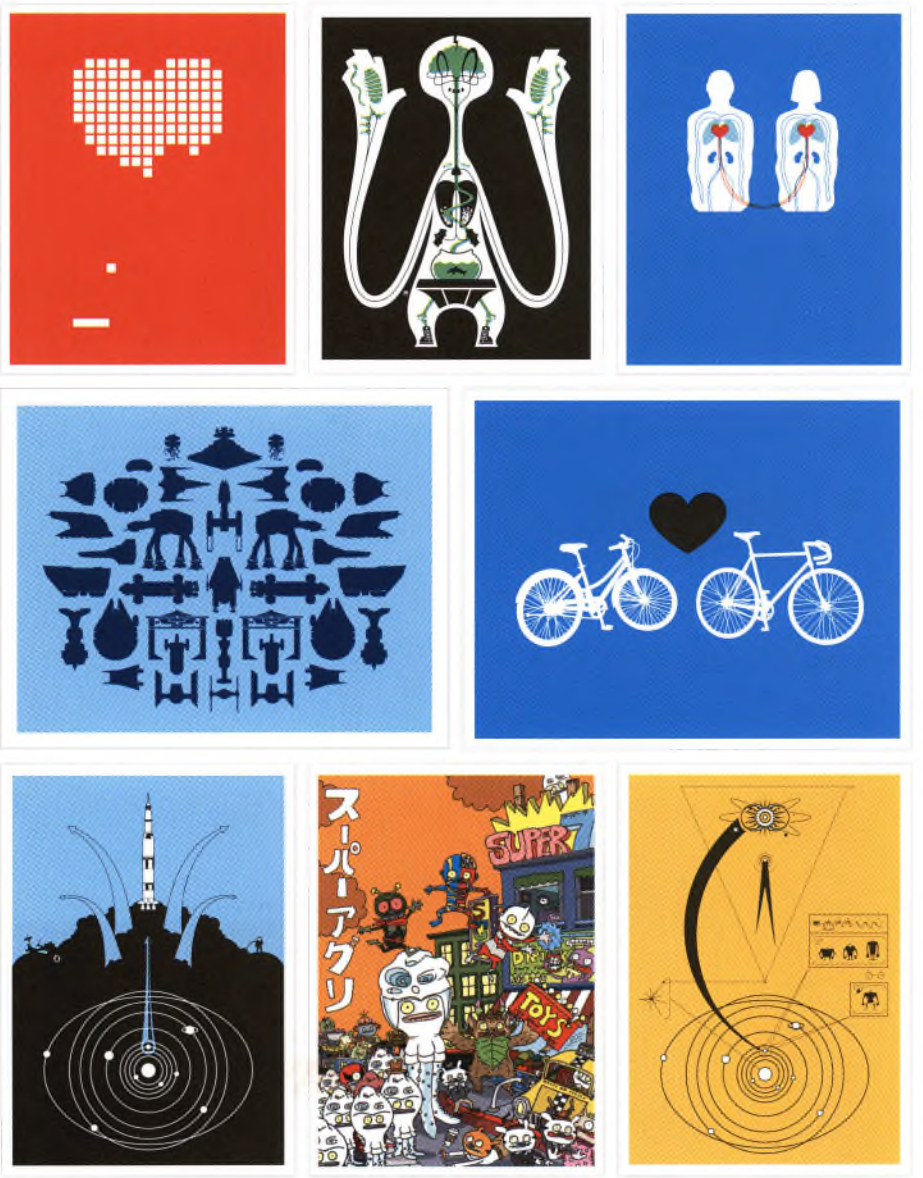

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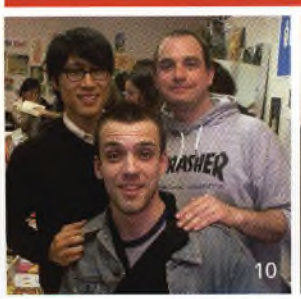
SUPER7 ROCKS N' BOWLS

01. Get your bowl on! The *Super7* crew hooked up with painters of the pentagram Mike Sutfin and Pushead for a wild night at the lanes. **02.** *Super7* designer Geoff Allen knocked down more beers than pins, but look at that form. **03.** With high pants and even higher blood alcohol levels, the lanes were just a little sexier that night thanks to Team Swollen Liver. Note the double sock attack of editor Justin Kovalsky. So hot right now. **04.** The brains and beauty behind the Super7 empire at APE. Brian Flynn was there, too.

05. Artists Bwana Spoons and James Jean taking a break for the fans at APE. **06.** Brian's doctor shows us his latest X-ray. This proves it... he really does have toys on the brain. **07.** Bats, whales and picklebears... oh my! Steven the Bat stopped by to check out Bwana's pre-APE party and art show KILLER at the Super7 store. **08.** Phil Spector may have created the Wall of Sound, but Bwana's art rocks the Wall of Color at the Super7 Store. **09.** Have you ever had that dream where you wake up naked in a box of fresh new Ghostfighters? Me neither. **10.** The holy trinity — artist Derek Kirk Kim, Super7's Devon Morf and Philip from the band Sanawon. **11.** Owner of Asian Man Records, Mike Park came by Super7 to rock the house during the Cherry Blossom festival in Japantown. **12.** Young girls and sensitive boys alike packed the Super7 Store to hear the song stylings of Mr. Park. **13.** Opening for Park, Shinobu set the stage for an enjoyable afternoon at the Super7 Store. **14.** Park moves more merch than the S7 Store.



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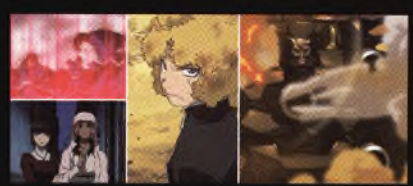

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