# Mecha Anime Recommendations



**Mobile Suit Gundam – Movies I, II and III** *(1979)*
This is where Gundam started and where the main Universal Century (UC) timeline originates as well as the Newtype mythos. It has fantastic characterization and is wonderfully written. Being the first of the real robot genre, it treats its characters as just everyday people in difficult circumstances. If you don't mind late 70's animation, then this is a must see. The only caveat is that because the movies are edited down (sorta) from the TV series, you need to watch them back-to-back in one sitting.

**Aura Battler Dunbine** *(1983)*
This is a standalone fantasy mecha series that was also written by the same chap behind Gundam (Yoshiyuki Tomino). The mecha are powered by the pilot's aura and built from the limbs of giant insects/monsters. It's entirely standalone too and was aimed at an older audience, so the writing is a lot more nuanced. The characterization is also brilliantly understated. Series like Escaflowne owe a lot to Dunbine. The OVA is okay too.





**Armored Trooper VOTOMS** *(1983)*
Set in the distant Astragius galaxy it covers the latter part of the hundred-year war between the Gilgamesh and Balarant forces. It's probably the bleakest real robot and most realistic mecha anime out there and much of the story and setting were responsible in the creation of Heavy Gear. Written and directed by Ryosuke Takahashi, it is pretty heavy going but well worth watching. Interestingly almost all the OVAs add to the main narrative and are very much worth seeing too.

**Armor Hunter Mellowlink** *(1988)*
The only VOTOMS OVA that is a separate sidestory featuring all new characters. Whilst supervised by Takahashi, some of the direction was handled by Shinichiro Watanabe, the guy behind Cowboy Bebop. The series is also interesting as the protagonist, Mellowlink Arity, doesn't pilot a mecha but instead takes them out on foot. It's also a classic revenge story and each episode is nicely self-contained too. Also Mullets FTW!





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**Blue Comet SPT Layzner** *(1985)*
Set in the then future of 1996, the Cold War is still ongoing, and humanity is starting to colonize Mars. Into this appears the Gradosians, a mysterious race of humans that have access to incredibly potent weaponry. Layzner is hugely influential, from games to anime, with games like Zone of the Enders, Armored Core, Omega Boost and Virtual On using a lot of the mecha rulesets (Dragonabll Z also riffs off Layzner too). It's also probably my favorite real robot show.

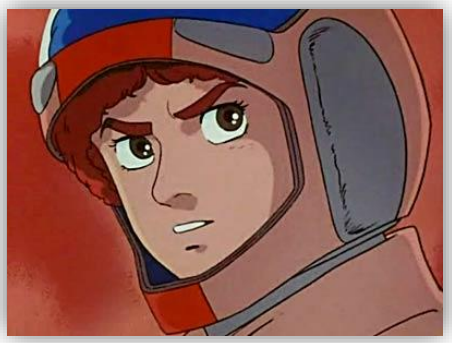
**Gunbuster** *(1988)*
A short OVA dealing with the invasion of a powerful alien insectoid race bent on wiping out humanity (their larvae gestate within stars). This is also a great little super robot show and was one of Gainax's formative works. It also starts out nothing like how it finishes, so stick with it. The newer sequel Diebuster is also totally worth checking out but its stylistic approach is quite a bit different.





**Mobile Police Patlabor** *(1988)*
Set in another then future of the early 90's, labor technology has facilitated rapid industrial growth in Japan. To combat the now new misuse of this hardware, the mobile police are formed. The continuity for Patlabor is a bit tricky so start with the OVA's and Movies (though the third movie is worth skipping). The TV series is essentially a reboot, so can be watched separately. On the whole, Patlabor is very lighthearted and possibly has the most likable characters in all of anime. The second movie is also amazing.

**Space Runaway Ideon** *(1980)*
Another Tomino classic and possibly the bleakest. It was also an influence for Evangelion. Ideon is also the most powerful super robot, bar none (as one of its "weakest" attacks cuts whole planets in half). The premise is built around the discovery of the ruins of an ancient alien civilization, including that of the Ideon. Powered by the mysterious Ide, an alien race known as the Buff Clan (yeah, I know it's weird) are hell bent on capturing it. You'll need to watch both the TV series and movies, as the movies finish off the story.





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**Super Dimension Fortress Macross** *(1982)*
One of the first real robot shows to feature transformation and was very much an influence on Transformers (interestingly the same mecha design, Shoji Kawamori worked on both). Dealing with yet another alien invasion, this time by giants, the mecha element was the means by which tiny humans could square off against a much larger enemy. Macross was the first part of the hacked together Robotech (with Southern Cross and Mospeada comprising the rest); the original Macross is far superior though.

**Tekkaman Blade** *(1992)*
Released abroad as Teknoman, it was meant as reboot to the successful Tekkaman series from the 70's. Set a few hundred years in the future, humanity is being ravaged by the Radam, the most dangerous of which are the Tekkamen. However, not all of the Tekkamen fight for the Radam. One in particular, that of Blade, fights for humanity. The story for this is actually very good and quite dark at times too. Avoid the spin-off sequel but check out Detonator Orgun, as that's a similar reboot to the original Tekkaman.





**The Five Star Stories** *(1989)*
This was a one-off OVA movie and partly covers the first book of the manga, written by Mamoru Nagano. Set in another universe it covers the power play of various planet-based nation states across five-star systems in the Joker Cluster. It's a good primer for the series and sets the scene for the immense manga (that's still ongoing). In any case, you should read the manga of The Five Star Stories, as its scope and execution is mind boggling (to the extent it makes series like Dune appear rather limited and parochial). The mecha design in this is also incredibly ornate. The 80's series Heavy Metal L-Gaim is not connected but acted as the foundation for the story.

**Eureka Seven** *(2005)*
One of the more recent Bones series, it riffs off a lot from Solaris in some ways. In short, humanity has colonized a new planet that is infested with coralians and has energy called trapar all over the place. The latter allows the mecha to surf through the air, which is pretty cool. The characterization and writing is also very well done. Avoid the movie though, it is dire. However, the sequel series is actually pretty decent.





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**Super Dimension Century Orguss** *(1983)*
Done by many of those who worked on the original Macross. Orguss is based around a dimensional bomb fracturing reality and the multiverses overlapping. As such, the whole series is quite imaginative, and the characters are very warm with it. It's been somewhat overlooked as the years have passed but it's very much appreciated these days. It also had a lovely opening as sung by Casey Rankin. The sequel OVA is interesting but don't watch the English dub, as it's notoriously awful.

**Super Beast Machine God Dancouga** *(1985)*
One of my favourite super robot shows, it features a collection of angry teenagers fighting off an alien invasion by a force called the Muge. The mecha doesn't actually appear until about 15 episodes in and all the fights are very weighty. The pilots also need to get angry to power the transformation, which isn't a problem as they're teenagers. The OVAs for this are also great, especially God Bless Dancouga. The only caveat to watching Dancouga though is that it is VERY 80s. Bar that, it's great fun. The new TV series is sorta okay though.





**Panzer World Galient** *(1984)*
Another Takahashi mecha anime but this time featuring medieval mecha. Set on the planet Arst, a young prince vows to overthrow the evil forces lead by the apparently despotic Marder. Not is all as it seems though and what transpires is one of the more interesting real robot shows from the 80s. The first two OVAs are compilations but the third is definitely worth seeing, as it's quite mysterious (don't want to spoil it too much though).

**Overman King Gainer** *(2002)*
Set in a strange frozen future, it follows the plight of a town trying to migrate somewhere warmer. The mecha design, by Akira Yasuda (of Street Fighter fame), is very odd but wonderful nonetheless and the main character is a gamer. Whilst this is another Tomino show, it's a lot happier and more optimistic in tone. It's a bit strange in places but much of that is to do with the world setting but the characters are good and the series is very watchable.





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**Vision of Escaflowne** *(1996)*
Another fantasy mecha show, this time set on Gaea. A world where the Earth hangs in the sky. The setting is really interesting and the characters are great. It's also quite well animated for a TV series. In addition the music, by Yoko Kanno, is fabulous. Whilst this is technically a shojo show (so aimed at girls) it still makes for great viewing regardless of what gender you are. The movie is also good but is more of a retelling of the series, with some differences.

**Neon Genesis Evangelion** *(1995)*
Pretty much Gainax's and Hideaki Anno's magnum opus. Starts off as another post-apocalyptic monster of the week super robot show but changes into something far more complex and profound. Often (mistakenly) criticized for being downright incomprehensible, it has to be watched carefully. There are new movies being made currently and they've changed much of the story. In any case, you should watch it all as it's basically great.





**Fang of the Sun Dougram** *(1981)*
One of the first Takahashi mecha anime and deals with a group of rebels trying to overthrow a tyrannical government using huge mecha and guerrilla warfare. Was incredibly popular, not only for its attention to realism but also the characters and narrative. It's also the main influence on much of Western mecha design, to the extent that Battletech/MechWarrior pretty much ripped the whole thing off.

**Gurren Lagann** *(2007)*
Part of Gainax's new wave of shows directed by Hiroyuki Imaishi but this was very much a full throated homage to the classic robot shows of the 70s (especially Getter Robo and Xabungle). The characters are great and the story is nicely paced too. It also gets properly epic, so stick with it. The movies are also worth a look but are again more of a retelling than a narrative continuation. Overall, it's a very upbeat and pathos driven show. A lot of fun basically.





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**Xam'd: Lost Memories** *(2008)*
A newer Bones anime that was released initially on PSN. Set sort of in an alternate reality, it deals with the ongoing war between two nation states. Of which one uses strange biological weapons that mutate people. The writing in this is utterly fantastic and the whole series is very understated. The characters are really great too. Possibly one of the best shows of recent years and very much a must see.

**Furi Kuri** *(2000)*
The first of Gainax's new wave and it's a wonderfully surreal little OVA (though the narrative is actually quite well done). For the most part it's just plain bonkers and deals with the young Naota coming to terms with his brother going away and his new hosekeep Haruko. Also mecha and alien electric guitars play an important role. The show also has fantastic music by a Japanese band called the pillows.





**Macross Plus** *(1994)*
Whilst part of the Macross saga, Macross Plus is more standalone. Set around the development and testing of new variable fighters, the story features the love triangle between a group of old friends. It's a nice short OVA and it's done very well (again Shinichiro Watanabe directed this). The English dub also features Bryan Cranston, which is pretty cool in and of it itself. There is a movie too but again that's a retelling but still worth a look.

**Gundam 0080: War in the Pocket** *(1989)*
Made to commemorate the then 10th anniversary of Gundam, 0080 is a UC timeline sidestory featuring all new characters during the final days of the One Year War. Based around the viewpoint of a small boy who befriends a young Zeon pilot, it's one of the most heartfelt and accessible of all the Gundam stories. Word of warning though, you will cry hot tears if you watch this.





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**RahXephon** *(2002)*
A modern retelling of the classic Raideen, it's far more mysterious and is beautifully directed by Yutaka Izubuchi (who's also one of my all-time favourite mecha designers). The narrative also takes a fair few unexpected turns, so it's worth sticking with it. The movie and OVAs are also worth looking at too.



**Gundam 0083: Stardust Memory** *(1991)*
This was meant as a bridging OVA between the original Gundam and Zeta, so much of the story is built around explaining how things have changed and why. Apart from that, it's nicely directed, in part again by Shinichiro Watanabe, and is a good jumping off point for newer viewers. It's also one of the few Gundam series to pretty much feature all the major Japanese mecha designers.



**Infinite Ryvius** *(1999)*
A very interesting and ambitious show this one, also one a few awards too. Set in the future, the Sun has produced a strange phenomenon known as the Geduld which has stretched across the orbital plane. The series is set aboard the Ryvius, following an accident, and features a huge roster of characters. Due to the fact that the Ryvius rescued schoolchildren, it's very much a come of age drama. This series is very much underappreciated I feel.

**Megazone 23 - Parts I, II and III** *(1985)*
One of the first ever OVAs, it features transforming bikes designed by Shinji Aramaki and proper 80s cheese. Initially set in what appears to be 80s Tokyo, things take a massive turn when all is not what it appears. Its main premise is also very similar to the Matrix films but the Wachowskis denied the connection. The first part is probably my favourite but the narrative holds up well across all the installments. Minor warning, as the second part is pretty gory in places.





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**King of Braves GaoGaiGar** *(1997)*
Originally intended as a kids super robot show, it gained a huge following nonetheless. Based around the antics of the Gutsy Geoid Guard as they fight off the mysterious Zonders, it's very much in the monster of the week mold but does it really well and has a lot of passion too. Not to mention having my all time favourite combination sequence in any anime. It also features a ginger cyborg as the main character, which is nice.



**Gundam: 08th MS Team** *(1996)*
Basically Gundam meets Vietnam, the series is set in the latter part of the One Year War in the jungles of Southeast Asia. As a result, the focus is much more grounded and based around more obvious military tactics. The characterization is also great and the music, by Kohei Tanaka, is brilliant. There is also a spin-off movie that's worth seeing too.



**Heavy Metal L-Gaim** *(1984)*
Set during the events of long war within the Pentagona System, much of this series would make its way into The Five Star Stories. The series covers the plight of Daba Myroad and his ragtag rebellion against the godlike Oldna Poseidal. The mecha in this show are also very grounded and use quite hardcore approaches to tech too. The OVAs are quite good too, if a little crazy.

**Zeta Gundam** *(1985)*
The direct follow on to the original Gundam and continues the Amuro and Char story arc. Much has also changed since the end of the first Gundam and the Earth sphere is a far more politically complex place. Many regard Zeta as pretty much the pinnacle of UC timeline Gundam and they're not wrong; it's a truly great series. Avoid the movies though, as they're a weird mix of old and new animation and as such are pretty jarring to watch.





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**Wings of Rean** *(2005)*
This is quite confusing to explain; the Wings of Rean novels were Tomino's retelling of Dunbine but without the mecha. The anime follows on these novels but now includes mecha. So whilst this is still set in Byston Well and has aura battlers, it's a very different series. The only downside to Rean is that the anime is clearly too short but for the few episodes it has it is still really good. This is classic Tomino and probably one of the most important anime series of the last few decades.

**Turn A Gundam** *(1999)*
This is one of the few alternate timeline Gundam shows I like, though technically it's meant to unify all of them. In any case, an advanced technological colony on the Moon now wants to come back to Earth. An Earth that has regressed to early 19th Century era technology no less. What ensues is a pretty interesting series with really great mecha designs by Syd Mead. The music by Yoko Kanno is also great. This is also the only non-UC timeline series that Tomino has helmed. Many regard this to be a very special series and it's also pretty damn standalone too (so there's no excuse not to watch it).





**Giant Robo** *(1992)*
This is such a great anime, it combines a multitude of disparate series penned by the late and great Mitsuteru Yokoyama and then puts them all under one deliciously retro banner. Set in an alternate future, the Shizuma drive has solved the world's energy problems but all is not what it seems and the evil agents of Big Fire are bent on exploiting the truth. This series also had some serious production values and took years to finish (despite only being 7 episodes long). The Ginrei OVA is worth a look but avoid the new TV series.

**Gun X Sword** *(2005)*
The best way to think of this show is basically Cowboy Bebop crossed with Trigun with added mecha. The premise is a pretty great one, so I don't want to spoil it and the characters are all pretty likable too. It's generally quite fun throughout as well.





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**Tetsujin 28-go** *(2004)*
This is a pseudo-reboot of the original 1950's series and is basically the basis for all modern day Japanese mecha. It's set after the events of the Second World War as Japan rebuilds, amongst this is the usage of Tetsujin 28 to fight crime. Originally intended as a weapon, much of the series covers the darker side of war and how Shotaro can use Tetsujin 28 to improve the society he now lives in. The retro styling is also great and if you enjoyed Giant Robo then this is as good, though arguably far bleaker.

**Gundam 00** *(2007)*
Another alternate timeline Gundam but this time set in AD (rather than UC). The main premise of the show is the appearance of an organization called Celestial Being that pilot very powerful Gundams, with the task of eradicating war. The protagonist is also an ex-Muslim freedom fighter, so this series is suitably progressive. It's also basically a modern retelling of Layzner, so in that regard I like it quite a bit. Much of the apparent plot armor bothers some people, but in truth the entire tech is telegraphed. The series has great music by Kenji Kawai and the movie is worth seeing too.





**Round Vernian Vifam** *(1984)*
This is a really nice series, as it's basically about kids getting left behind by their parents during an alien invasion and their journey back to Earth. Like Ryvius, it's very much a coming of age tale (with mecha). The characters are really good and the situations they have to deal with together are well thought out too. The OVAs are good and the sequel series Vifam 13 is decent as well.

**Hades Project Zeorymer** *(1988)*
This is a short super robot series based (very loosely) on a manga. The premise is that a huge shadow corporation is planning on conquering the world with hugely powerful mecha. What stands in their way is the mighty Zeorymer and the diminutive teenager Masato. Though he is by no means what he seems. In truth, this is more of a cult classic but the animation is great and it's very watchable.





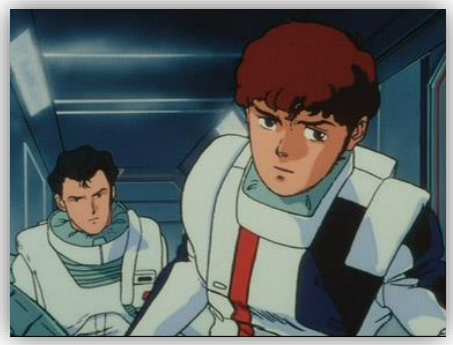
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**Combat Mecha Xabungle** *(1982)*
Unlike much of Tomino's output during the 80s, Xabungle was actually pretty cheerful. Set in a post-apocalyptic future, people fight over the remnants of past wars. Amongst this Jiron hopes to make his way to riches. The mecha in this show are pretty cool and the characters are just great. The movie is totally worth seeing, as it follows on from the series.



**Dangaioh** *(1987)*
A classic short super robot OVA with stupidly nice late 80s animation. It's also quite a brutal anime, as the titular Dangaioh was originally meant for evil (though the pilots have other ideas). Whilst it's only 3 episodes long, it's really great fun to watch. Avoid the new Great Dangaioh series though as it is pretty crappy.



**Gundam: Char's Counterattack** *(1988)*
The final part of the Amuro and Char story arc, it's also the first Gundam I saw. Set against the frantic backdrop of an asteroid drop on Earth by the remnants of Neo Zeon it covers a lot of ground in a single movie. It also references a lot of prior material from the previous series, so if you want to get it all you'll need to watch them but it's entirely watchable in its own right though. This is very much classic Tomino and necessary viewing.

**Giant Gorg** *(1984)*
This was a classic standalone mecha series from the mid-80's directed by Yoshikazu Yasuhiko, who also did much of the art directions for the series including the main character and mecha designs. Set on a mysterious island in the Pacific, Yu Tagami ventures there to find out what happened to his archeologist father. What he finds is something else entirely. The pacing of this show is amazingly done and the characterization is both warm and nuanced. Despite looking like a kids show it is also quite brutal in places.





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**Gargantia on the Verdurous Planet** *(2013)*
Set in the far-off future, it deals with the remnants of humanity in deep space fighting an intractable foe called the Hideauze. One of the mecha pilots in the war, Ledo, ends up getting transported to an unknown planet after a big operation and it's here where things get a lot more complicated. The setup in this is similar to Layzner and the buddy relationship with the pilot and the mecha's AI, called Chamber, makes for much of the series' appeal. Written by Gen Urobuchi, it has clear ties by to older mecha anime by Ryosuke Takahashi.

**The Big O** *(1999)*
A fascinating Sunrise mecha show that took the whole noir premise behind Batman and turned it into something very new. Based around the life of Roger Smith, he lives in Paradigm City as a negotiator. However, all the inhabitants of the city, including Roger, have lost their memories. Roger also has a butler and a giant mecha he can summon called The Big O. His partner is also an android called Dorothy who rightfully thinks Roger is a louse.





**Gasaraki** *(1998)*
A very hardcore military drama on the surface but more involved in a cultural sense as the series progresses. Mainly because it incorporates Noh theater and pivotal aspects of Japanese history. The ending is pretty out of place but this is one of the better instances of recent mecha anime by Ryosuke Takahashi. The mecha design, by Yutaka Izubuchi, is also noteworthy for its gritty approach.

**Aldnoah.Zero** *(2014)*
Another of the more recent mecha anime written by Gen Urobuchi. While Gargantia took a leaf from Layzner, Aldnoah.Zero is closer to VOTOMS. Especially in regard to the main character Inaho and his similarity to Chirico Cuvie regarding his personality. Inaho is more analytical though and much of the compelling parts of this series are when he has to take on technologically superior opponents and figure out their weakness. The premise is set in the future after humanity finds an alien power source called Aldmoah on Mars. This results in the creation of new group of humans on Mars that now think they can conquer the Earth.



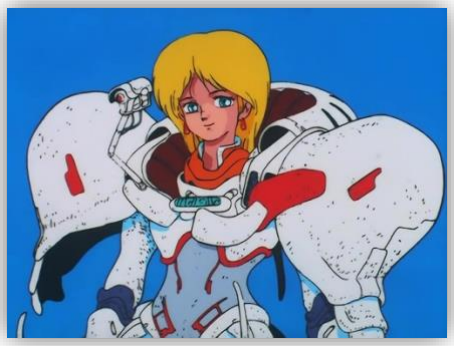


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**Knights of Sidonia** *(2014)*
Based on the Tsutomu Nihei manga of the same name and is set upon a generational starship called the Sidonia fleeing from an alien enemy called the Gauna. Mecha called Guardians protect the Sidonia but the history aboard the ship is more involved than anyone realizes and the origins behind Tankiaze Nagate's incredible piloting abilities are suitably mysterious. This is pretty much a modern monster of the week show but it's more involved and nuanced due to Nihei's approach. The mecha are refreshingly industrial with it.

**Dragon's Heaven** *(1988)*
A one-off OVA based on the manga of the same name by Makoto Kobayashi. Set in the far-off future after a war between humanity and machines, the mecha Shaian is a relic of that conflict and teams up with a new human pilot Ikuuru to face off against an old foe. The style of the anime is partly inspired by the work of Moebius and has some serious animation talent behind it. It also has a fun live action opening segment. Sadly, this is the only instalment of the story in anime form but it's worth seeing.



## Notable mentions:

- **Mazinger Z** – **Shin Mazinger Z** – **Mazinkaiser**
- **Getter Robo** – **Shin Getter Robo**
- **Brave Raideen**
- **Galaxy Cyclone Braiger**
- **Macross 7** – **Macross Dynamite 7**
- **Macross Frontier**
- **Gundam ZZ**
- **Victory Gundam**
- **Gundam Unicorn**
- **Gundam Thunderbolt**
- **Bio Booster Armor Guyver**
- **Flag**



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