



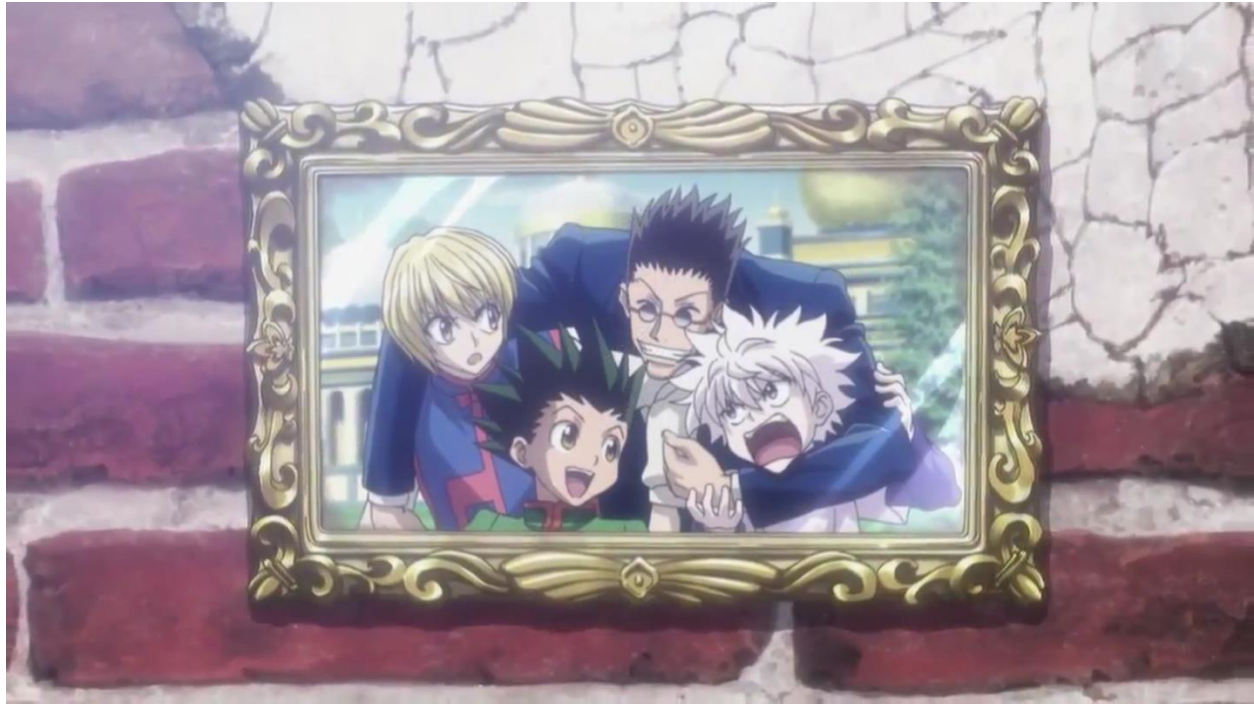
(Credit: Yoshihiro Togashi and Mad House Animation)

The Unconventional Show That Redefined a Genre

By Kaitlin Meaney

Anime is one of those mediums of television and online streaming that can go one way or the other; it can be either tame and happy, brutal and violent, or it can make you think. The genre of Shounen anime in particular includes series that can do all of those things at once, but only a select few that use the third. First to define shounen: a genre of Japanese animation that typically includes high action and follows a male protagonist. The Japanese kanji characters for “Shounen” translate to “boy” with the female counterpart being “Shoujo” which would be Japanese animated series/ manga (comics) aimed towards girls. A common example for Shounen anime would be *Dragonball Z* or *Pokemon*. The plots usually consist of long, (sometimes) drawn out fighting scenes and an end goal that the whole plot is built around, with many obstacles and new characters to be met along the way. These shows, and anime in general, tend to fall into the category of being “cartoons for kids”, but there is more than one series that goes way beyond with more mature content aimed for adults. Case in point, a little series called *Hunter x Hunter*. This show pushed boundaries no one even noticed were there until it came along and crushed them to dust. It is so unconventional and different that it deserves so much more love than it gets.

The series was illustrated by Yoshihiro Togashi and was serialized in *Weekly Shounen Jump* in 1998. The first anime adaptation was released in 1999 and ran until 2001 in Japan. A few years later a new anime series was released in 2011 and was said to follow the original manga more accurately. This one is the more popular and well known version and it is the one I will be talking about in this review.



(Credit: Yoshihiro Togashi) The Fab four; from left, to right, Kirapika, Gon, Leorio and Killua.

The story centres around Gon Freecss, a young boy who was abandoned by his father, Ging, who went on to become a Hunter instead of raising his son. He sets off to take the rigorous Hunter examination in order to become a Hunter himself so he can become the best Hunter in the world and hopefully find his father. He has the mindset of “well if my dad thought being a hunter was better than raising his son, I want to try it too”. Hunters are people who partake in fantastical pursuits such as locating magical beasts, discovering unexplored parts of the world or even just hunting down those who don’t follow the law, to name just a few. While taking the examination he meets three other applicants who become close friends of his: Kurapika, the last of the late Kurta clan who had been wiped out in order to harvest their glowing crimson eyes; Leorio, a medical student; and Killua Zoldyck, the member of a prestigious family of assassins. He also meets Hisoka, a murderous magician (and token female fanservice), who becomes the first of the many villains that occupy this series, and he’s the only one that’s consistent until one whole arc.

Now, that is just the base premise but there is way more to it than just the simple story of a boy wanting to meet his father. This show starts all happy and hopeful, but it eventually gets really real, very slowly. It would be way too much to spoil if I went through the whole series, and frankly it’s better if you go in blind. One thing you should know if you do decide to give this show a chance, is to power through the first few episodes since they do not do the show much justice and will be hard to get through for the faint hearted. What I will discuss, is what this show does right that other shows have either done wrong or never even attempted.

The first thing about this series I loved was the character development and the characters in general, side and main. In every episode or so new characters will be introduced. What is amazing about these characters and how this series handles them gives you enough information

for you to care about them even if you only see them once in a while. Another thing is that these characters are never only seen once; they always pop up again at one point. Due to the information you get in their first appearance, you immediately recognise them and do not question why they would be there or who they are. You feel for them and you root for them. That is an example of great writing right there.

One final thing is that it kept me guessing. Nothing in this show was inherently predictable to the point where you knew characters would make it out of a situation unscathed mentally or physically. This is the breaking of another boundary surrounding anime and that is the notion that the “power of friendship”, or simply being main characters, can solve everything or save everyone. During very tense moments I found myself not knowing for sure what would happen next and it was frustrating but it kept me guessing and kept me interested. The show even has you questioning whose side you’re really on and which characters are right or wrong. It makes you question the concepts of good and evil instead of making evil “bad” and good, well “good”. There are no true good guys or bad guys in this series; they’re just characters with their own moral agenda that does not follow any predetermined rules and it is done so well.

This anime blew me away. There are no words to describe how much I loved this little show that could. I won’t lie, it’s very long and the first few episodes are hard to get through but dang is it worth it. I encourage you to give this one a try, anime fan or otherwise, this show is worth your time.