# My favourites from the anime world

By Nadia Tuki Chowdhury

A Few weeks back, there was an article in my favorite weekly magazine about anime. The writer had talked about the cartoons that he had watched as a child, like Samurai X, Robotech, and other timeless classics. Reading that particular piece made me come over with tears, as it took me back to those days, when I too as a kid, had watched such anime for pleasure. I would therefore like to share my experience of the anime world (which is even today, still going on pretty strong) with my readers and how they help me handle the hours of boredom I
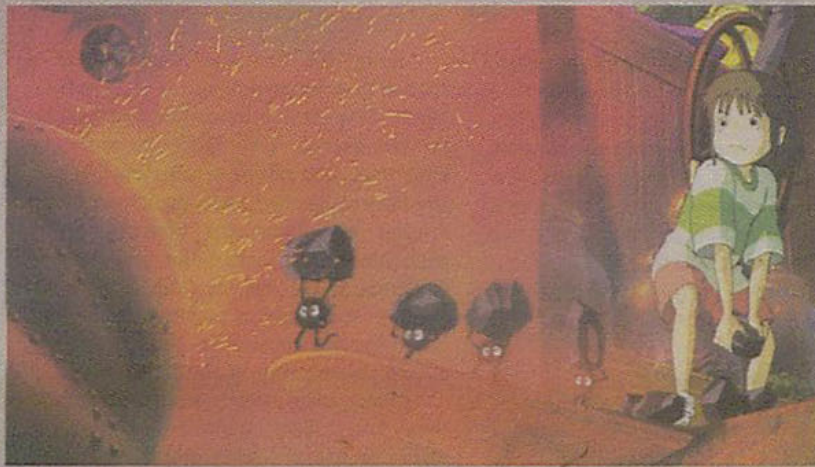
am often exposed to.

My earliest memories are of Robotech. I must have been four/five years old then, when I first watched the Macross saga, the Robotech Masters and the New Generation. All of the three 'chapters', each of which were brilliant in their own right, heralded a new generation of anime and is still followed and copied as a masterpiece. I have no trouble saying that fifty years from now ahead, when technology will surpass human imagination, those who will watch this awesome thing will enjoy it and be able to make the connection.

Somewhere around 1993-1994, we got the privilege of global networking (meaning cable) and before I knew it, I was glued in front of the TV set like a moth to a candlelight watching Ninja Robots on Cartoon Network. Yes, it was definitely cool. The way it portrayed inter-planetary warfare, or the-then popular 'space' culture, when everybody was going whacko over UFOs and aliens and Star Wars made so much money as a result, was excellent. Following a theme close to Robotech, this too is a classic, and will regain its old popularity if shown again, especially among children.

After Ninja Robots, the next anime to enter my life was Cardcaptor Sakura. This was shown in Cartoon Network probably around 1999. Sakura was one of my earliest anime heroines, and the feisty attraction between her and the other protagonist, Li Sharon, added more spice to the tale. It remains one of my favorite animes up-to-date, and yes, you guessed it, I watched the entire run on Animax when they showed it this time.

Cardcaptor Sakura was a stepping-stone to the two greatest-of-all-times anime that I have ever seen. Don't know which ones they are? Arre, Samurai X in

and Fushigi Yugi (Curious Play), yaar. The tale of a man trying to compensate for the horrible crimes he had committed as a samurai and the manner in which he protects the lady whom he loves, became a major choice of mine, along with Fushigi Yugi, the story of a 15-year-old girl caught in another dimension. It must be mentioned that in Fushigi Yugi, the girl, who is the main character, plays a sacred princess and is lucky enough to have FOUR lovers (yes, you read that right, FOUR lovers) under her belt. I could not watch the final episodes of both of them as AXN-ASIA (the channel

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The Da Vinci Code

Review by Gokhra

I Read the book despite warnings that I should not before watching the movie. But that's the whole point of a movie being adapted from a book. It has to change. It has to be a little different or else it is too much of the same. So how bad was it? Well, for those of you who could not wait but get your hands on a blurry camera print, you already know.

First of all Ron Howard's movie is extremely faithful to Dan Brown's best-seller. So if you read the book and expect some of the same then you will not be disappointed. If you haven't read the book then watching the film will render that activity pretty much obsolete because you have seen everything anyway. Except that the book does have a better ay of connecting the pot twists and turns.

It deals with Christian conspiracy theories. The movie (and the book) has a splattering of lengthy dialogues. It's a proper talking movie with occasional chunks of educational 101 courses on religion, history and art.

And then you have the gunplay, car chases and mad-monk murders.

Tom Hanks stars as Robert Langdon, a Harvard professor of symbology, in Paris to give a lecture. Somewhere along the road to fame he ends up becoming infamous. He's implicated in the murder of a highly respected curator at the Louvre who, in his dying moments, has managed to leave behind a cryptic message that's somehow tied to Leonardo da Vinci! Hmm, so that's how they got the name. Genius, eh?

The movie then leads ont to a furious scavenging hunt for clues that basically tear don the foundations of 2,000 years of Christian doctrine. Doctor Langdon is closely accompanied by a French cop and cryptologist Sophie Neveu (Audrey Tautou) who may be more central to the mystery than either of them realize.

Hot on their trail is a relentless detective Bezu Fache (Jean Reno). Then there is tormented mad Albino monk who kills a nun without the slightest hesitation. He is Silas (Paul Bettany) and our primary villain of the piece.

Other characters include Sir Leigh Teabing (Ian McKellen), an old friend of Robert's obsessed with the Holy Grail who offers him and Sophie refuge.

The problem is that the movie may be a little confusing for those who have not read the book and a little boring for those who have as there is nothing new on offer.

The major source of initial disappointment is that Tom Hanks seemed miscast as the character described in the book. But despite that he pulls off very well with his common man quality.

The movie has its formulaic doses of thrills, action and humour as evident in a scene where McKellen surrounded by police officers, asks, "Did that old cannabis charge finally catch up with me?" This man provides depth to all the scenes he is in.

At the end you wish there was a different way to meld the action scenes with the long art-history lectures. The movie is great but not as good as the hoopla preceding it. So in the end you better go read the book.

The Elder Scrolls IV
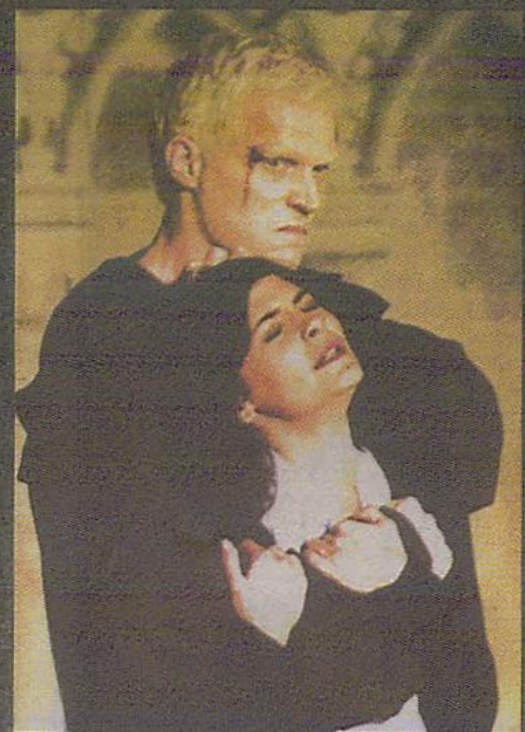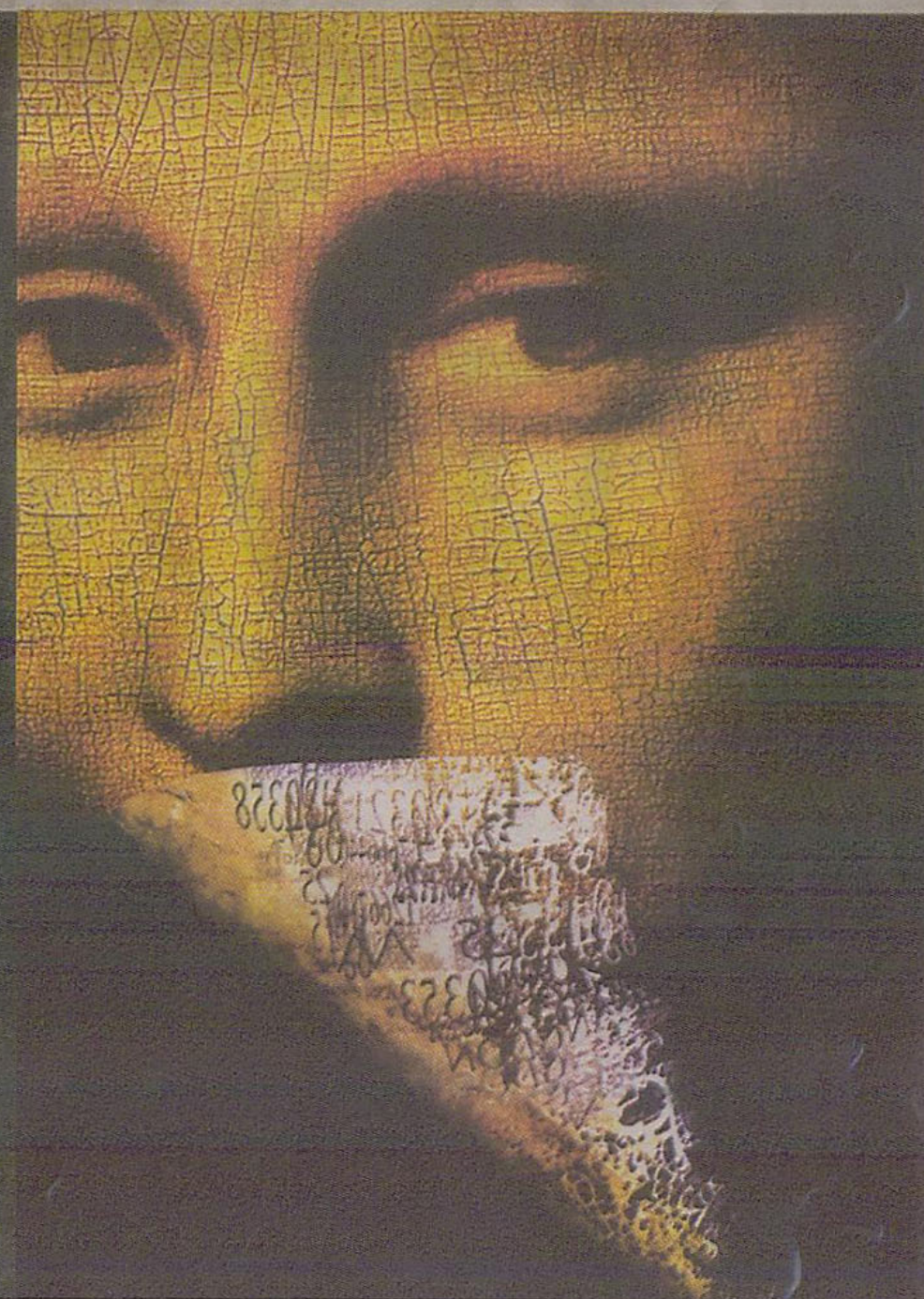
O BLIVION is simply one of the best role-playing games ever made.

This is a rare and remarkable achievement--a huge, open-ended, complex, detailed role-playing game that's fun to play and a pleasure to behold. Oblivion not only delivers everything that earned the Elder Scrolls series the devoted loyalty of a huge following of fans, but also significantly improves on the weaknesses of its 2002 predecessor, Morrowind.

You get to create your own character--the possibilities for customization seem limitless--and then explore the world as you will. There's a compelling main quest for you to follow, which takes about 40 hours to finish the first time through, but the majority of the game's content is peripheral to that main quest. You can root out evil in hidden dungeons, join and climb the ranks in a number of different guilds, visit all the different towns and try to solve everybody's problems, compete in a long series of gladiatorial battles to the death, break into someone's home and rob them in their sleep, etc. Somehow, though, you get swept up in a desperate escape attempt by the emperor and his loyal retinue of protectors. The emperor, voiced unmistakably by Patrick Stewart (Star Trek: The Next Generation, X-Men), recognizes you from a portentous dream and entrusts you with the search for his illegitimate heir. But first, you'll need to escape from the Imperial City's sewers.

Toward the end of this sequence, the game does a clever job of recommending a character class to you based on how you've been playing. For example, if you've gone toe to toe with every goblin you've seen, hacking them up with an axe, you might make a good barbarian.

That's not to say you can play Oblivion like a pacifist, since the main quest and many others are combat-intensive. But all the fighting in this game is probably one of the best parts. Visceral toe-to-toe melee battles have you carefully negotiating the distance between you and your opponent while switching between quick and powerful attacks, sometimes pausing to manually deflect your enemy's blows with your weapon or shield.

Of course, there's much more to the game than combat against a wide variety of scary-looking bad guys. Simply exploring one of the game's towns and interacting with its populace can be a remarkable experience. Characters don't all stand around like they did in Morrowind; they're on a schedule, so they'll go to work in the morning and go to bed at night, and you can catch them going from place to place, talking to each other about recent rumors, and so on. They'll regard you differently depending on your personality and appearance, and you can compel them to like you better using everything from bribery to a fun little persuasion minigame in which you must guess at the other character's disposition and act accordingly. Every line of dialogue in the game is delivered in full speech, and the quality of the voice acting and the writing is generally excellent.

The game's level of challenge feels just right by default, though you can adjust a difficulty slider if you want to make it easier or harder. Growing more powerful in this game feels suitably rewarding, as it should in any role-playing game. As you find new and better equipment or spells, gain mastery over your skills, and increase your ability scores, you'll clearly get the impression that you're becoming much stronger.

All of that aside, the main quest in Oblivion features a solid good-versus-evil storyline that'll give you a reason to see a lot of the world and get wrapped up in a lot of other activities.

Characters will ask you if you're feeling well if you've been diseased. They'll hail you as a hero if you save their town from one of the looming oblivion gates that are threatening the world. They might be apprehensive toward you if you approach them with a weapon drawn, and they'll yell at you and summon the guards if they catch you stealing.

Yet, the more believable a game is, the more believable you want it to be, and it's true that the artificial intelligence in Oblivion doesn't always put on a good show. You can break into someone's home and wake them up for a chat, and they'll chat with you like nothing's happened. The guards still might suddenly show up, seemingly without notice, but probably because one of them saw you crack the lock on the front door. Sometimes you'll battle alongside computer-controlled allies, but while these guys may be likable, they really aren't good at self-preservation.

Considering all that's in this game, however, some reference to the game's technical performance is necessary. On the Xbox 360, you can look forward to a usually fast and smooth frame rate and graphics that look especially dazzling on a high-definition display. On a high-end PC, you can get the game looking even better, though unless you have a fast graphics card and at least a gig of RAM, you might have a hard time getting the game to appear pretty while moving at an acceptable frame rate at a high resolution. The frame rate especially tends to bog down when a lot of characters are simultaneously onscreen.

What's overwhelming about Oblivion is how good it is and how much there is to it. Literally almost everything that's ever been done well before in past role-playing games is in here--done at least as well, if not better.

From the quality of the story and character interaction to the pure thrill of the combat to all the pleasure to be found in the game's little details--the lock-picking minigame, the alchemy system, the way arrows stay stuck in their victims, the ability to eventually create your own spells, the informative full-color manual, all the different books you can stop to read in the game--these things combine to make Oblivion one of the single best, longest-lasting gaming experiences to be had in a long time.