

Transfunket 10 (5/24/09) Report

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Last month, just one day before I headed to the states for BotCon, I had the pleasure of attending what is probably the only current Transformers-based convention in Japan: Transfunket! For those who have not heard of it before, Transfunket is an event centered mainly around TF doujinshi, with many participants displaying other materials such as information zines and plenty of custom-crafted toys. Typically held biannually, the event is not only a gathering place for many Japanese TF fans, but also has frequent participation from artists involved in official Transformers publications.

Being that I was rather worn out from getting all prepared for BotCon, I attended the event in a somewhat halfhearted fashion, basically just ducking in for the last couple hours to see what kind of new publications had been put out for sale. Despite stateside perceptions of doujinshi as being largely hentai or boys love material, there are actually lots of cool SD-style tributes, fanfiction-like adaptations, and info compilations related to various corners of TF obscura. And of course, there is some BL and hentai material if that's what you're into (personally, I'm not). All of these publications were present in abundance, but imagine my astonishment after arriving in the middle of a presentation by three of the most central Japanese TF artists/creators: Imaki "Imaking" Shouji (Beast Wars II, Neo, Metals manga, Q-Robo), Iwamoto Yoshihiro (Galaxy Force manga), and Tsushima Naoto (Stargate Battles, Henkei).

After their panel concluded, Tsushima in particular was busy responding to a flurry of requests for drawings from people lining up, even after the event itself had begun to wind down. I think I must have seen him oblige the requests of 30 people consecutively. I was actually very excited to speak to Imaki Shouji, since I had enjoyed his Beast Wars manga hugely while I was in high school and college. His clean, humor-laced art style always seemed very unique, and brought a lot of imagination to what was otherwise a merely adequate anime. The guy was just awesome. In addition to letting me take our picture together, he also drew me sketch of Q-Robo Convoy (since I hadn't prepared any art stock paper, I think he ended up drawing it on the back of one of the resumes I had with me.)

As you can see from the picture, he looks almost exactly like his "ImaKing" Easter Island head caricature that he often inserted into the BW compilation books. What was an even greater surprise to me was that he had been a frequent viewer of the TV show that I had previously worked on! That made for some interesting conversation. I also found out about a BWII side-story he wrote for Transfunket 8 detailing the events between the Beast Wars II and Neo mangas. I was able to pick this up, which was a great treat.

After talking to Imaki-san, I got the chance to chat with Iwamoto and Tsushima-san, who were also cool enough to do sketches for me, with Tshushima's being on a color print that he had prepared for the event. I also noticed a piece of original art of Convoy and Megatron that Tsushima had made for the convention booklet. Talking to everyone, I was able to get some interesting information:

- When Imaki Shouji worked on the manga for the Beast Wars series, Takara did not impose any creative constraints whatsoever, and basically let him do what he wanted with it. He said they were very easy to work with. His favorite series among the three was Neo.
- Tsushima Naoto seemed very excited about the release of the Stargate Battles compilation (now out in Japan), and explained how it was different in tone from the Henkei manga in that it was written for fans of the G1 cartoon, whereas Henkei needs to cover a lot of ground to establish the TF line with kids who may not be familiar with it.
- The conclusion of The Stargate Battles, where most of the Transformers become temporarily missing in action after plummeting to Earth, was not an intentional lead-in to the events of Car Robots. This was more like a fortunate coincidence.
- Iwamoto-san was very excited to be able to work on Transformers during Galaxy Force, but was also very nervous and concerned with how serious Transformers fans would respond to his work. He seemed pleased that fans overseas had shown interest in it.

All three were tons of fun to talk with, and I also was able to get pictures of the three shikishi (original hand-drawn art) that they had created and put on display for Transfunket 10.

Another of the most exciting points of the event for me was checking out the information zines that some fans had assembled, most notably the one for Super God Masterforce from Fuwakudou. Masterforce generally has a poor reputation among Japanese fans due to its divergence from the American style of the original series and a move towards

more typical anime elements, so it was nice to see some love shown for the series. Despite being as much of a Masterforce fan as I am, the book even had some design sketches that I hadn't seen before, including one of the Godmasters with characters that didn't make the final cut!

The illustration shows two characters: Shinichi (right side of the page 1 group shot above), a rather rough-and-tumble, bolo-tie sporting Cybertron Godmaster is described as a spy, and apparently was replaced by Clouder. Mayumi (right side of the page 2 group shot above), an attractive female Destron Godmaster, was cut entirely. The presence of this character may have been the root of the rumor that Buster was originally conceived as a female character. In these early sketches, however, he seems to authentic to his series appearance as a somewhat effeminate male. Inexplicably, Cancer is shown dancing behind him. A couple additional designs for what are presumably Buster and Hydra are also shown. If Fuwakudou hadn't taken the time to assemble this book, I don't know where I would have been able to see this material!

All in all I was very glad I had stopped by Transfunket 10, despite not being present when the event commenced. Having attended the event a couple times before, it was clear to me that the number of attendees and participants had grown hugely from its previous incarnations. According to the final announcement of the organizer, Transfunket has in fact grown so large that its future hangs in the balance, as their current fan-based staff is having difficulties managing an event of this size. They announced that there will be no Winter Transfunket later this year, as there normally would be. The uncertain future of the hown-grown event made me feel all the more fortunate to have attended it, and like many who enjoyed the experience, I'll be hoping for Transfunket's continuation next year.