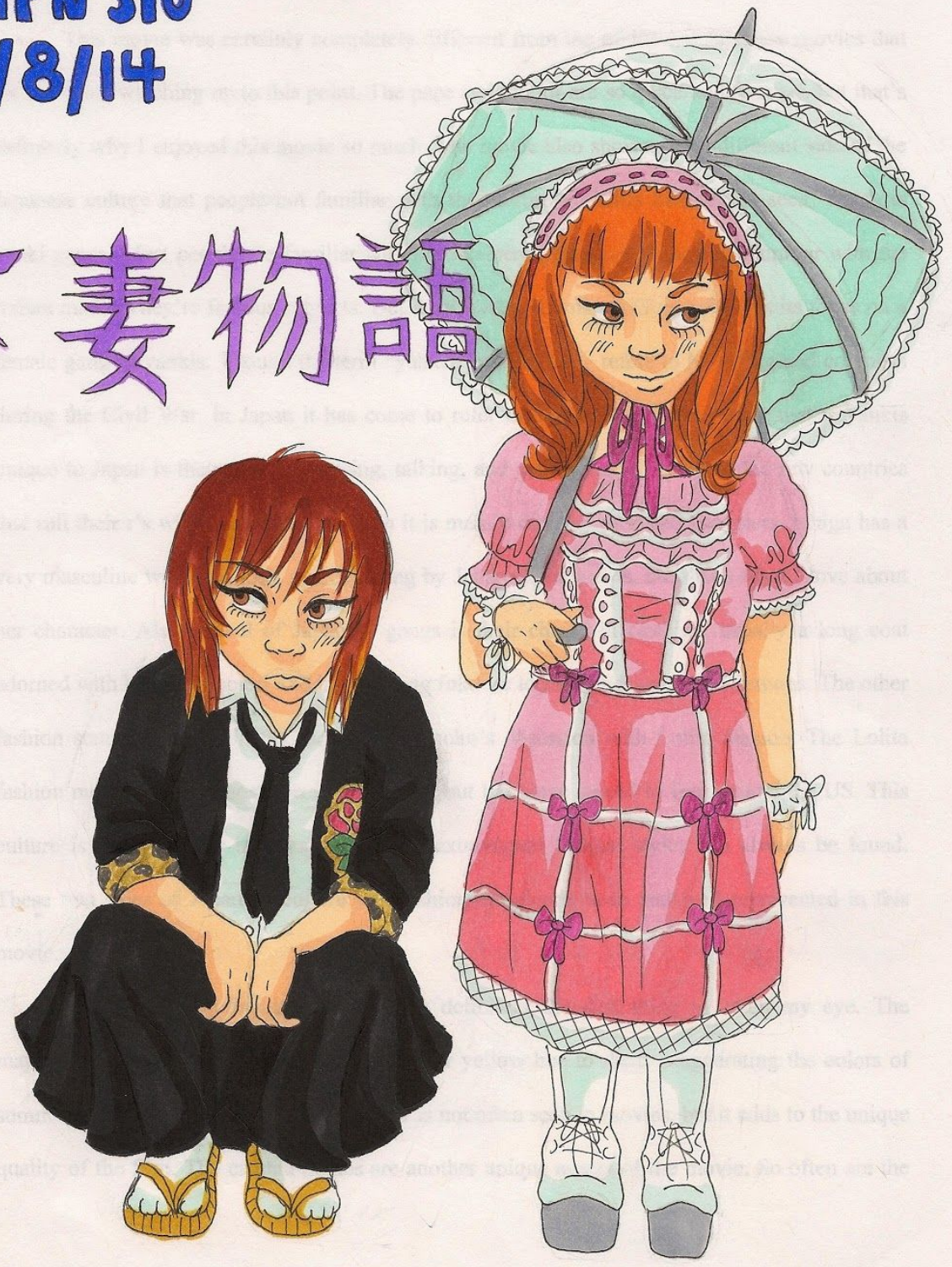


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Kamikaze Girls (2004)

This movie was certainly different from the traditional Japanese films that we have been watching up until this point. The pace and humor were so quick and unusual, but these things only made me enjoy the movie more. The film also showcased a different side of Japanese culture that, mainly those who are unfamiliar with the culture, those outside of Japan would not understand, which is the subject of “yanki” gangs. Most people are familiar with the Japanese yakuza, just as they are familiar with the Italian mafia; they are famous subjects. But what makes *Kamikaze Girls* unique is its focus on an all female yanki, biker gang. In America, the term “yankee” was used to refer to those who lived in the New England colonies during the Civil War era. In Japan, the term has come to refer to delinquent youths, just as early American colonists were seen as delinquents to the British empire. But what makes yankis unique to Japan is their way of dressing, speaking, and acting. Japan is one of those unique countries where its inhabitants roll their r’s when speaking, although mainly done by men and those who are considered gangsters.

Ichigo, a member of the yanki biker gang, has a very masculine way of talking and behaving by Japanese standards, but that is what I love about her character. She is straightforward, persistent, and everything that a typical Japanese citizen isn’t; it is especially rare to see in female characters as well. Another typical aspect of Japanese biker gangs is their choice of clothing, usually a long black coat adorned with blazing kanji characters and intimidating folklore imagery like dragons or demons. Ichigo is all of this wrapped up into one, creating a somewhat stereotypical yet unique characters in terms of Japanese yanki culture.

Momoko, on the other hand, is presented as a super feminine character who is obsessed with lolita fashion culture, another unique fashion subculture seen mainly in Japan though it has since spread to Western countries. Dresses adorned with bows and frills are typical of this style of fashion, which is what every piece of clothing is in Momoko's repertoire. She lives and breathes "kawaii" culture and has a, quite literally, unhealthy obsession with sweets as they too reflect a sense of cuteness. The clashing of these opposite personalities strangely creates a strong bond between the two characters who become inseparable by the end of the film. The comical chemistry between them keeps the viewer wanting more as we explore their unique and unusual adventures in the small rural town of Shimotsuma, while representing two very different Japanese fashion cultures.

The unique lighting of the film was the first thing to catch my eye. The majority of the scenes had an unusual orange or yellow hue to them, exaggerating the colors of summer or twilight. The use of color filter is not often seen in movies so it certainly added a unique sort of quality to the film. The camera angles are another interesting aspect. Throughout the film, the angles are presented in ways that are very non-traditional, in my opinion. This was done to allow the audience a view of multiple subjects within one shot. One subject is usually shown up close in the foreground, either talking to the audience or giving facial expressions, while another subject is in the background acting as comedic relief by goofing off. There are many instances of this between Ichigo and Momoko throughout their adventures, such as the introduction of the unicorn pompadour man at the pachinko parlor. The camera is focused on his massively long hair while we see Momoko in the background making odd, repulsive faces at the sight of his outrageous hairstyle.

Though I can't say that I've ever been involved with someone who is obsessed with lolita fashion and sweets raised by an ex-yakuza father, or a yanki girl trying to find her way out of a biker gang, this film does bring back certain memories for me. During the summer of 2008 I stayed with a high school friend at her home in Tokyo where we experienced unusual adventures of our own while exploring rural areas within the city and becoming lost and needing to take a taxi to get back to her home.

I give *Kamikaze Girls* a 4 out of 5. I found the film to be very humorous and interesting, while also giving an important message about the bond of friendship that two very different people can share. The only problem, in my opinion, was the quick introduction and dismissal of minor characters. I understand that the film portrayed Ichigo and Momoko's friendship as what is most important, but I think it could have been improved with a bit more interactions between other characters as a way of showing how their personalities have changed from before and after the two of them became friends. Overall the film was incredibly enjoyable as it featured a unique set of characters, adventures, and even special effects.