

Television

Dorama

The next hottest thing on the export list from Japan is **Japanese live action TV drama**, AKA "**Dorama**." The Power Rangers is an example of a Dorama that has already hit it big, but tonnes more titles are gaining momentum in hobby shops, comic book stores and fan conventions across the U.S. If the surge in popularity of anime is any indication, Dorama should get huge.

Just Like Mike

In England David Beckham is a Soccer God. He is to Soccer what Michael Jordan was to basketball. He's been instrumental in creating worldwide appeal for the game and influencing mainstream fashion - to many kids, he is the face of soccer. A new term has even been added to the soccer lexicon, as kids try to "Bend it like Beckham." He may be over 30 and married, but that hasn't stopped him from becoming a tween heartthrob as well. In a recent YTV Hit List interview with Hilary Duff, she proclaimed that her #1 crush is Sir David (Okay, so he's not a "sir" yet, but it's only a matter of time).

Speaking of Beckam, a reality TV series called "**Really Bend It Like Beckham**," is being developed in Australia. David goes one on one with 20 kids in an attempt to pass on his football prowess. Although this series has no scheduled release in Canada, soccer is the fastest growing sport here (hockey's just so darn expensive!) so it's probably just a matter of time before someone picks up this show.

New Anime Alert

A new series is looking to become the next North American anime hit. **Witch Hunter Robin**, already super popular in Japan, is coming to our shores next month via Cartoon Network. Not only will anime fans love it due to the action, great animation and strong storylines, but this series is also likely to make it big with the Goth crowd due to the dark subject matter.

Technology

Name That Tune

Did you know that there's a term for that song you can't get out of your head? It's called an "earworm;" defined as: A song or tune that repeats over and over inside a person's head. Add not being able to name the song and you've got a very annoying, yet all too familiar scenario on your hands. Enter "**song tagging**" - a mobile service that allows users to identify songs by pointing their phones at a speaker. It operates using a cellphone and text messaging technology. After pointing the phone at a speaker for 30 seconds, the technology identifies the song from a database of 1.7 million tracks and then sends back the title. Already launched in parts of Europe, expansion is planned for Italy, Finland, Australia, China and more. There is a plan to license this technology to mobile operators so a North American release can't be too far behind.

Not Your Average Ring

We all know how cell phone users like to customize their ringtones. Well in South Korea personalizing **ring-back tones** are the hottest thing. Instead of hearing the usual "bring, bring" while you wait for the phone to be answered, you hear a song/sound clip chosen by the phone owner. This technology is currently being tested in North America and, if

released here, is bound to be big with tweens/teens as yet another way to express individuality.

Mobile 'MiniCars'

Remote control minicars: hugely popular with kids; cellphones: not so much*. So what would happen if the two were to unite? Japanese toy giant, Takara, recently unveiled an RC minicar called "Choro Mode," a spin-off of their Choro mini-RC vehicles. These **cars are controlled by mobile phones**; they use the tone signal attached to the phone's earphone plug to control the car. Although there are no plans to release this fun fone in North America, so far - we don't doubt the concept is too far behind as cellphone companies are constantly looking for ways to reach a wider market.

*When it comes to the youth market, cellphone ownership is mostly hot with teens – if a tween has a cell it's usually because their parent has given it to them for safety reasons, and they're fine with that.

Music

Popera

For the most part, kids and opera music don't mix, but that soon may change now that certain cool kids have caught wind of New Zealand singing sensation **Hayley Westenra**. Nothing ignites a surge in popularity better than a pretty face, killer voice and wicked style – and Hayley has all three. The 16-year-old's first international release, *Pure*, has beaten debut albums from past modern classical singers like Charlotte Church and Russell Watson. She is even number eight in the mainstream pop album charts of the U.K., between singer Daniel Bedingfield and hip-hop group Black Eyed Peas. Her hit album features her singing over strings played by the Royal Philharmonic. Already a huge celebrity in the Australia, New Zealand and the U.K., watch for Canadian kids pick up on her as well.

J-pop

With all the Asian imports infiltrating the Western world it's only a matter of time before their stars make it big here as well. Crystal Kay, a huge pop star in Japan, is a singing sensation with a sexy R&B image similar to Beyonce and Ashati. Ready to try her luck over here, Epic Records will be releasing "4Real", her first Western-world album (includes English versions of her hit songs), on the European and U.S. shores. A producer who has worked with Destiny's Child is even attached to this project. Though the buzz has been minimal so far, America may be ready to open its musical minds to a new face of urban music and get a taste of a leading face of J-pop - so we know Canada can't be too far behind.

An Unlikely Boyband

Cute rock 'n' roll boys have taken the place of boybands in the hearts of many of today's tweens. Meet **Phantom Planet** - they're not particularly cute and they don't sing cheesy love songs, but they're a group of five guys that are likely to have an impact on those kids trying to get into indie rock. Although we doubt it's the kid market they're going for, the fact that they sing the theme song to *The O.C.* ("California"), not to mention the fact that their latest video was directed by none other than Spike Jonze – makes them cool in just about anyone's eyes.

Video Games

New From Nintendo

The company's anticipated secret project has been unveiled, to some muted-trumpet fanfare. The **Nintendo DS** is a handheld system with two backlit screens. TWO - that's twice as many screens as the company's hit Gameboy Advance system. What kind of gameplay enhancements will two screens provide? Nintendo claims that gamers will no longer have to switch focus between different camera angles in sports games, or between map and battle screens in adventure games - that stuff'll be on two different screens now.

A playable Nintendo DS system will premiere at the Electronic Entertainment Expo this year in Los Angeles.

Movies

What's going on around the world?

Animation has always been the format du jour for the kiddie market. The surge in use of CGI and Computer Animation in box office hits like **Finding Nemo** and **Shrek** have spurred many filmmakers to employ the technique. Watch for Spain's very successful and award-winning **The Living Forest** to make a debut in North America in 2004. From the U.K. comes **The Water Warriors**, a totally CGI creature fest with some help from The Jim Henson Company. But for those who believe traditional hand drawn animation is dead; older kids can look no further than France's fiercely creative, imaginative, and brilliant **The Triplets of Bellville**, which is sure to get a Best Animated Feature Oscar nod in February. And from Hayao Miyazaki, the creative genius behind **Spirited Away** and **Princess Monoke**, comes a new animated feature, **Howl's Moving Castle** sometime in 2005.

Toys

Smell a Hit?

Move over Hello Kitty - Ocha-Ken is on the scene. This stuffed canine character from Sega toys has ears and a tail made from tea leaves and omits the calming smell of green tea. Huge in Japan, this toy is being marketed not only as a cute collectible, but also as an aromatherapy stress reliever. Expect to see this pooch popping up over here - not only 'cause we're suckers for cute things from Japan, but also due to the emerging trend of tea being cool with youths.

Stuff That Stinks

This spring seriously guard your nose from any boy carrying a Stink Blaster because, well, they seriously stink! They may come with a containment unit, but with names like **Butt Breath Bob** and **B.O. Brian** you can imagine that the smells are potent and boys will be dying to share the shock value - from Spinmaster Toys.

Girls, on the other hand, prefer delicious smelling toys like Strawberry Shortcake, so this spring Dynatech is releasing **Smelly Bellys** - a group of collectable, scented beanie toys. Each one comes in a plastic egg, so you don't know which one you're about to crack open - will it be Camilla Vanilla or Supa Strawberry, etc.? They're like a Kinder Surprise meets Beanie Baby and with over a million sold in the U.K. and Australia, we'd say these toys smell of success.

The Battle Continues

The 'battling toys' trend continues. **Xevoz**, a new action figure line from Hasbro, will allow kids to build figures and play with them in a battle game. The figures' parts are interchangeable - allowing for lots of customization (which is also huge with kids). There

will also be a web element where you can build virtual characters. Will Xevoz be the next Beyblade? Only kids will tell.

Branded Board Games

While it's not exactly aimed at their demographic, the show CSI: Crime Scene Investigation is popular with tweens. So it will be interesting to see if the new **CSI-branded board game**, targeted at 13+, will be a sought after item. On a related note, we're curious to see if other TV show-branded board games are going to start making appearances...

Toy Bites

Licensing Company Images & Brands

We saw the success of McDonalds McFlurry Maker this past Christmas. More companies will jump on the band wagon - Kellogg's, Bowling (Jets), Chucky Cheese...really, the opportunities are endless.

Healthy Living / Active Lifestyle theme in Toys

Spin Master Bella Ballerina Kit which teaches ballet to girls is expected to be a big 04 seller.

Rebel against fashion dolls - GOTH DOLLS

Bleeding Edge "Goths" are 12'-14'-inch dolls that come as plush or fashion doll-esque - they just have a different sense of style (think piercings, cuts & tattoos). Apparently these dolls are gaining popular with the gothy ghouls *and* boys.

Fashion

Initially, it was cool

Now that initials have been played out on everything from sweaters and wrist bands to necklaces and wallets, it's time for the next fashion-meets-personalization fad...astrological symbols. While always popular in magazines, horoscope diagrams are ready to jump off the pages and into the fashion world.

The "it" emblem

Nothing says preppy like that tiny crocodile – well, except for that little man on a horse, of course. With tonnes of celbs sporting Lacoste these days you can expect to see those name brand loving preppers adding a colourful Lacoste T to their must-have list. Did you know that the tiny crocodile was the first logo to ever adorn a shirt? The classics never totally disappear, do they?

Fashion Radar

For the most part tweens aren't willing to be that ostentatious with their style. Following the mainstream Gap crowd is where their comfort lies, but here are a few items you may see on the **style influencers**: vintage pieces like cardigans and old, worn out jeans, thick socks with sandals, satin bomber jackets, patterns that don't match (e.g. Stripes with floral), jumpsuits, cowboy boots, and ick... overalls.

Accessory of the moment – pins. Whether they're tiny 80's inspired buttons or large fabric flowers, pins will be flaunted everywhere this spring.

Ribbons, buttons and bows – on everything!

Misc

Winter Wonderactivities

What better way to deal with the Canadian winter than hitting the slopes with the **PowderStick** by Riva. This inventive 2 in 1 winter toy can be used as a snowboard or a sled - for those not quite ready to hit the slopes in a vertical fashion.

Expect to see this product on the local tobogganing hills soon.

Making Memories

The DIY arts and crafts movement has been big for a while now with no end in sight. The current hot craft with adults is **scrapbooking** and it's not surprising to see the trickle down effect happening. Several kid-targeted scrapbooking kits are already hitting the market. Sandylion is one company that's targeting kids with special books, decals and licensed products like Disney Princesses, Looney Toons and Barbie.

Books

Welcome Back Nancy!

Nancy Drew is making a comeback. This March, four new paperbacks will be released starring the girl detective (who has now graduated from high school). While she's still solving mysteries, Nancy has been 'modernized' - she drives an environmentally-friendly car and uses computers. In addition, the books now include pop-culture references - to help today's readers connect. Not stopping with books, the Nancy Drew name has been licensed for apparel, video games, and bags. Oh, and a movie is also in the works. You go girl!

What's a kid to do?

When it comes to selecting a book to read, kids have little more than the cover to decide whether or not they'll like it. Enter a couple kids from the U.K. who sought to change that by setting up a website called **cool-reads.com**. The site gets an estimated 1 million hits a month from kids worldwide who want to read reviews on the latest teen and tween novels. We know kids love to give their opinion and that word of mouth is very important to them - this site turns any kid into a reviewer via the star rating system and the ability to send in written reviews. Companies are also taking this site seriously by logging on to see how their books are rating. The site is also a useful tool to see just what kids 10-15 are into.

Manga still hot

Manga, a style of comic that traditionally uses black and white Japanese animation, has made its mark on mainstream kid culture as a hugely popular form of entertainment. So it's not surprising to hear that publishing giant Random House will be releasing a number of Manga comics in Spring 04. Also, due to the popularity of these comics in the Western world, entertainment company Tokyopop has introduced Mangas based on non-Japanese shows like SpongeBob SquarePants and The Fairly OddParents.

YTV DECODER (every issue we give you the skinny on some kid vernacular)

Ghetto: When something is tacky/awful/cheap or just ugly it is usually "ghetto." Can apply to a person, place or thing as well.

DISCLAIMER: The trends that the YTV Trend Huntaz comment on come from the buzz on the street, the mall, the Internet, and numerous publications. YTV does not guarantee that all of the above information will come to fruition, but you can pretty much believe us as we are obsessed with this stuff.