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Winter 1991

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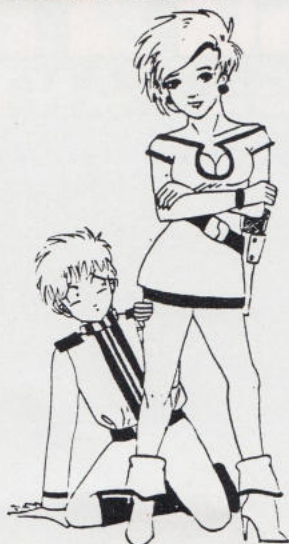
ULTRAMAN

a complete guide to the Ultra Series!

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ALIENS • Kurosawa's DREAMS • METALDER •
KAMEN RIDER BLACK RX



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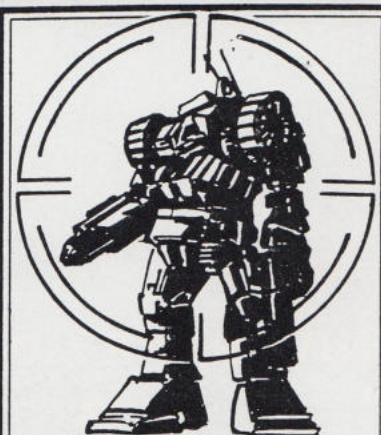
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THE MAGAZINE OF JAPANESE FANTASY

(MAR'KA•LY'TE) *n* : any of giant Flying Atomic Heat Projectors used in the 1957 war against the Mysterians. Dish Gun/Reflector has a diameter of 200 meters.



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CRANK IN



Yes, the first issue of *Markalite* was censored by the Saudi government on account of Markalite Maiden, Kumi Mizuno's face not being covered with a veil, and referred to as a "maiden" (i.e. virgin)... oh well, our boys in the dunes will have to wait to flip through these pages!

HAPPY 1991! The new year looks promising for works pouring out of the Japanese fantasy industry; talented, young visualist/director Kieta (FUTURE NINJA) Amamiya has been signed on to helm Toei's 13th entry in its "Sentai Series" BIRDMAN TASK FORCE JETMAN, which premiered on Japanese TV in February; Actor Hiroshi Miyauchi (KAMEN RIDER V3, ZUBAT) will carry on from his guest starring role in SPECIAL RESCUE POLICE WINSPECTOR, to appear in a similarly veined series to appear in March from Toei; The biggest recent news of all is Toho's 60th anniversary production (which we announced last issue) of GODZILLA 3 (tentative title)—Now,

BANNED IN SAUDI ARABIA?

we have a detailed update direct from Toho and the men who will create this potentially exciting film, and bring a popular past monster back to life. Read our exclusive scoop elsewhere in this issue!

On the subject of Godzilla, the future of GODZILLA VS. BIOLLANTE stateside seemed bleak when a *Variety* headline screamed that Toho was suing Miramax Pictures (sex, lies and videotape...) for non-payment. But a Markalite contributor confirmed that the film was dubbed, and is now awaiting a possible fall release. GUNHED on the other hand should be in release this summer.

Speaking of comebacks, over the last 10 years or so, several attempts to revive old heroes in feature films or sequels to past TV series have been tried (SKY RIDER in 1979; ULTRAMAN 80 and movie versions of MOONLIGHT MASK in 1980 and HEROIC HARIMAU in 1990), but the most durable Superhero/SF series of all has to be ULTRAMAN—whose most recent boom in popularity exploded in 1988 and is still mushrooming into Spring 1991! This year also halles the 25th Anniversary of the "Ultra Series," so we present a complete overview of the programs—so hold onto your Beta Capsules! ULTRAMAN IS BACK!!

August Ragone

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: Mr. Robert Dunham; Damon Foster—Oriental Cinema; Director Jun Fukuda; General Products USA; Mr. Tohru Hirayama; Mr. Oshiro "Wong-san" Ihaku & Family; Mr. & Mrs. Makoto Inoue & Taro-chan; The Staff of Inukuma; Sensei & Mrs. Shotaro Ishinomori; Mr. & Mrs. Yuji Kaida; Mr. Chikara Kanou; Mr. Masahiro Katayama—The Japan Cartoonists Association; Mr. & Mrs. Nobuoki Kinoshita & "Zoa Jr."; Ms. Michi Kominato and the Staff of #M1; Mr. & Mrs. Akira Kubo; Shuichi Miyawaki—Kaiyodo Hobby; Monty & Allison Montgomery; The Maruko Inn—Setagaya; Mr. & Mrs. Mark Mascot; Mr. & Mrs. Teruyoshi Nakano; Mr. Nakajima & the Staff of Inabaso Ryokan; Mr. & Mrs. Hiroshi Ohno—Ishimori Pro.; Toshinobu Ohi; Mr. Junichi Ohsako; Overseas Travel Center; Butch Portillo; Yoshihiko Shibata & the Shizuoka Gang; Toshinobu Takagaki & the Violent Monster Region-gumi; Mrs. Takahashi & Terue; Aoki Takashima—K Design Ltd.; Mr. & Mrs. Fumio Tanaka; Greg Shoemaker; Maestro Masaru Sato; Mr. Saegusa—Craft Box Shadowmoon; Mr. & Mrs. Kenji Sahara; Mr. Shinichi Sekizawa; Michael Stein—Filmfax Magazine; Mr. Kazuo Sumiya; Mr. & Mrs. Fumio Tanaka; Revell Walker and Gang; Michael Weldon—Psychotronic Magazine; Special Thanks to Directors Koichi Kawakita and Yoshimitsu Banno for another wonderful afternoon at Toho Studios; and Our Gratitude to Professor Akira Ifukube and Wife for their valuable time and generous hospitality. Thank you all! Special dedication to Renate Susan Tipsword—who got us off the ground in a moment's notice and suffered the pains of a harrowing schedule, we couldn't have done it without you! This issue is dedicated to the talented crew at Tsuburaya Productions... *SUWATCH!*

LETTERS

Just thought you'd like some constructive criticism re; your SPECTREMAN article:

I would like to have seen more mention of some of the episodes themselves. In my opinion, many of the early shows were pretty well done, considering what they had to work with, while much of the later stories looked slapped together.

I happen to like the English dubbing, which was done in Rome, by many of the same people who dubbed many an Italian zombie movie. I always got a kick out of some of the '70s references ("He's hotter than Elton John!" "Like the Earthling Rocky...") and really strange dialog "If Magulah sees us, it's momma shut the door!" to fit into the actors' mouths. I suspect that the reason the show wasn't called "SPECTRALMAN" over here was because SPECTREMAN is easier to say.

Mel Welles has been doing voice-over work in foreign films for years (he was the voice of the grandfather in RETURN OF THE GIANT MONSTERS). In SPECTREMAN, he voiced Overlord, Karas and many of the incidental characters. He directed the films LADY FRANKENSTEIN and MANEATER OF HYDRA, as well as appearing in films and TV since the '50s.

Charles Howerton also worked on the English version of SPECTREMAN. He also did the voice of Otto/Ota and occasionally acted as the narrator. He can be seen in the late '70s film UP FROM THE DEPTHS.

Did you know that there are two different English versions of episode #4 "Apeman In The Streets"? One version is the Mel Welles version and the other is done more or less straight with some foreign sounding voices, not unlike those Hong Kong kung fu voices, Karas is called Lah and Rita is Riea(?). None of the SPECTREMAN U.S. music is heard over the Japanese, and although the opening and closing credits are the same, the end music is a song in English about Dr. Gori and Planet E, pretty horrible. [That song is a direct translation of the original end theme song from SPECTREMAN—ed.]

Koji Ozaki (Arthur/Kaga) and Takamitsu Watanabe (John/Sado) as well as another supporting actor who appeared in several SPECTREMANs were cast in GODZILLA VS. MECHAGODZILLA as of all things, space ape-men!

Kip Doto
Margate, Florida

Thanks for the additional info on SPECTREMAN! The Specterman article was there to refresh people's memories. You haven't heard the last of Specterman in the

pages of Marklite, stay tuned!

Will Marklite be publishing episode guides? (I hope), as I'm a big fan of ULTRAMAN. Next, before Toho cancelled MOTHRA VS. BAGAN (hope they change their minds), did Toho produce any drawings of Bagan, as I'd like to see what this monster was going to look like. Last question, back in the mid-seventies I would from time to time see a TV show on UHF I don't remember the title, but I do remember these things: It was set in Japan's samurai age, the hero could turn into a lion-faced warrior and battle against this Devil-like villain and his monster minions. Each week the head bad guy would send one of his new monsters and a legion of skull-faced ninjas for an evil mission, then the hero would change from a human into this super-warrior with a lion head. What can you tell me about this show?

James B. Cash
Cerritos, CA

The title of the show is LION MARU, check the Superhero Rollcall in issue #1. Don't worry, episode guides and an in-depth report on LION MARU are forthcoming!

While Marklite was in Japan this past Summer, we were able to see the storyboards and designs for MOTHRA VS. BAGAN. Hopefully Mr. Kawakita, who was assigned to do the SPFX will let us reproduce the designs in a future issue of Marklite.

When I picked up the October 1990 issue of Psychotronic magazine, I saw your advertisement in it, and just couldn't believe it! I thought the days of the Japanese Fantasy Film Journal and Japanese Giants were long gone! Those were great fanzines! I'm really glad to see that there are still some Japanese Fantasy fans left aside from the very few that I still keep in touch with!

To summarize my opinion of the magazine, let me just say that I am seriously considering naming my first born after you for finally publishing a quality magazine for us "old gaurd" Japanese Fantasy fans. Anyway, I really enjoyed the extensive coverage of GODZILLA VS. BIOLLANTE, and am looking forward to seeing the reviews of it in Marklite's second issue. The Godzilla: Toho and Film Trends piece was good too.

I have posted bulletens about your magazine on a few computer networks, including CompuServe, Prodigy, and the NetNews System. I'm sure you'll be hearing from a few extra people because of this; most of the Godzilla fans I keep in touch with are on these networks.

Virtually all of the comments I saw about

Marklite on these networks were very favorable. The quality of the graphics was often mentioned, as well as that of the writing. The only criticism I remember reading was about the photographs being a little unclear. [rectified—ed.]

A bit of news you may not have heard yet, GODZILLA'S REVENGE and WAR OF THE GARGANTUAS are now being duplicated and should be released by Paramount Home Video within 6 months or so. Aside from the just released Gameboy Godzilla game, in which Godzilla must try to rescue Minilla (that's what the game calls Minira even though he's much more commonly known as Minya in the U.S.) Toho will also be releasing a second NES Godzilla game featuring Rodan, instead of Mothra, as Godzilla's partner sometime in early 1991.

Dave Milner
New York, NY

Thanks for your interest! We remember your name from some of those old fanzines. Looking forward to seeing your article(s) in Marklite soon! Thanks for the letter!

RE: Your first fantastic issue of Marklite!

Great! Fantastic! Finally a magazine devoted to live-action Japanese Fantasy/Sci Fi. I have only recently re-discovered this particular and peculiar cinema so this magazine comes as a great surprise.

I liked the the index to live superheroes, but found it hard to read due to the photo backgrounds. Nice try though. Love to see more.

I would like to see future articles on video availability of these shows in the states. And an article on SPIDERMAN. I have been trying to track down anything on this show. I'd love to hear from anybody who has anything, copies? Pictures? Looking forward to your next issues.

Paul A. Rogus
Los Angeles, CA

We have recieved some comments on the picture quality of the photos in issue #1 and you can be sure that we are just as picky about photo clarity as anyone. We hope you all agree that the photo problems have cleared up with this issue!

We plan to do extensive articles on Toei's live action superhero shows, including KAMEN RIDER, the Sentai series (DYNAMAN, FLASHMAN, etc.), and others, so SPIDERMAN won't be far away!

Please mail all editorial questions, comments, criticisms, etc. to MARKLITE Letters, P.O. Box 6846, Oakland, CA 94603.

Coming in December 1991 from Toho . . .

GODZILLA vs. GHIDORAH

Old Rivals Clash and Filmmakers Reunite in the Big G's 18th Entry!

Key sources at Toho confirmed to *Markalite* last November that pre-production is well underway for what is being called *GODZILLA VS. KING GHIDORAH*. Though the series' executive producer Tomoyuki Tanaka retired from the company early in 1990, he has clearly decided to make at least this one exception. He first approached series veteran Shinichi Sekizawa to write a new plot, but Sekizawa declined due to health reasons and a long-standing disinterest in the series.

Apparently happier with Kazuki Omori's work on *GODZILLA VS. BIOLLANTE* than Japanese audiences were, he has retained the director to write the new film. Also encoring is Koichi Kawakita as director of special effects. Mr. Kawakita contradicted reports that *GODZILLA VS. KING GHIDORAH* would feature a "Mecha-Ghidorah," telling this reporter that there would be "no change in the original design."

Koji Hashimoto, demoted by Tanaka to line producer of the project, indicated that although Kawakita and Omori were expected to direct *G VS. KG*, yet nothing was final at the time.

Kazuki Omori, busy completing another picture, could only find time to be interviewed on his own radio show. He claimed to have developed a greater respect for the special effects genre than he held before (perhaps due to the influence of Kawakita, whom he deemed "a first-class director") and believes he will do a better job on the new picture. He revealed that his script would not have a third monster in it, as Hashimoto and Kawakita had expected, but that King Ghidorah would be three times his original size. When asked about the logistics of this—given the obvious difficulty the staff had had in moving Biollante around—he replied, "Well, he will be flying, you know."

Omori delivered his first draft to

the Toho staff on December 24, 1990. Principal photography is set to begin in May and end in August 1991, with an eye towards a Christmas release. While this is not an overly luxurious schedule, the production will benefit from the several months' advance planning denied the previous entry. Though disappointed by Omori's first draft, both Hashimoto and Kawakita expressed positive feelings about the production.

STOP THE PRESSES!!

We have just confirmed the name of the new film's musical composer; Mr. Iwase of Toho Music Publishing told us, and we didn't believe it. So, we called the man himself and *he* confirmed it without a doubt; on March 18, 1991, Maestro Akira Ifukube signed the contracts with the brass at Toho! He will record in September.

Stay tuned, *Markalite* will continue with the latest on the new film, direct from the men behind the cameras!



Godzilla, Kazuki Omori, Koji Hashimoto, Koichi Kawakita, and Ghidorah are the featured motivators in front of and behind the cameras for the latest monster epic: *GODZILLA VS. KING GHIDORAH*, the centerpiece of Toho Studios' 60th Anniversary celebration.



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Markalite *Preview*

A Superhero Adventure from the people who inspired ROBOCOP

NEO TOKYO: The turn of the century. The massive international crime syndicate "Cartel" gains a foothold in Japan.

Cartel's commando squad "Team Phantom" secures 75% of Neo Tokyo. Detectives Jyodo and Nishijo of the Mobile Police Bureau are put on the job.

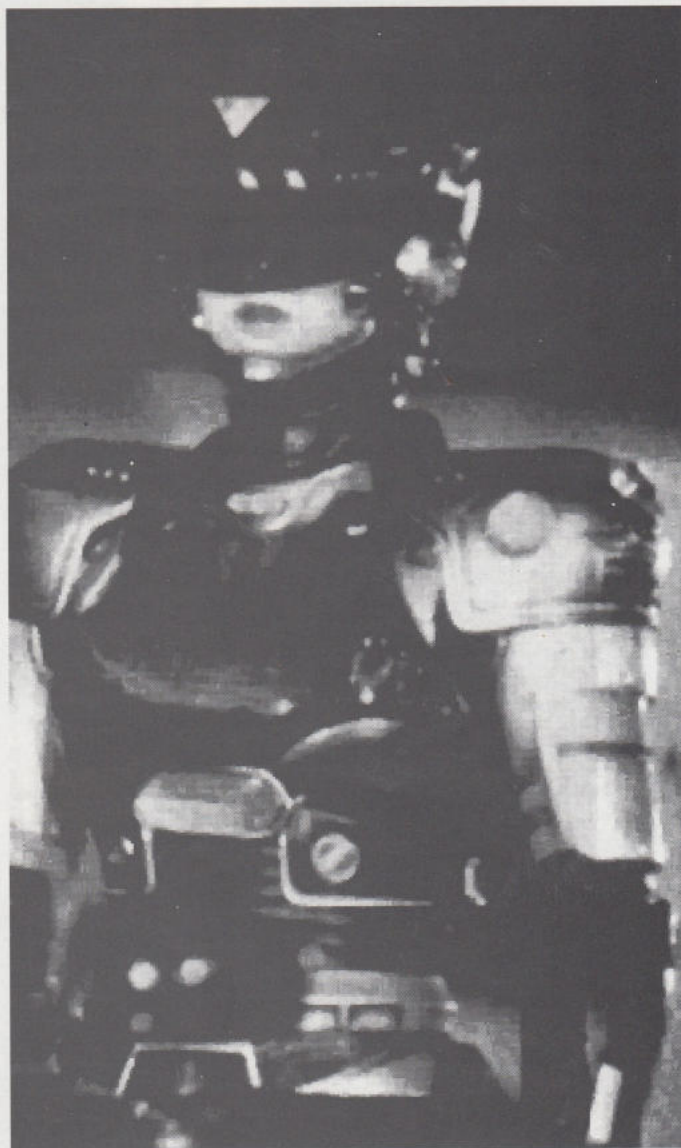
The Police Battle Robot is sent to gather data on the whereabouts of Cartel's Neo Tokyo Headquarters. The HQ's chief, Henry Oba (Shiro Sano), sends the Commando Squad and super powered criminal "Amadeus" to attack the research party.

Caught in the crossfire are party leader Naoya Koizumi and his girlfriend Kaoru (Azusa Nakamura). During the siege, the two disappear in a wall of flames.

A year passes. During an assault for the remainder of Neo Tokyo, the Commando Squad is attacked by the battle machine "BattleCop," who enters the fray to save Nishijo from certain death.

It is learned that Kaoru was saved by the dying Koizumi and cybernetically transformed into BattleCop to revenge herself against Cartel. The Commando Squad counterstrikes, but is completely vanquished by the BattleCop, who is impervious to all super modern weapons.

Nishijo learns of Cartel's final operation in Japan and with the assistance of BattleCop, they break into Cartel's Neo Tokyo Headquarters. The two confront Henry Oba and his minions, and during a desperate battle, Nishijo is killed. Alone, BattleCop faces the final challenging duel against Amadeus...



Azusa Nakamura stars as the title character in Toei Video's newest entry in its live action original video series, "V Cinema."

LADY BATTLECOP is the first in a series of proposed SF/Super Hero films to be produced by veteran Susumu Yoshikawa—see interview on pg. 69

LADY BATTLECOP (ONNA BATORUKOPU)

Starring:

Masaru Matsuda, Shiro Sano and Azusa Nakamura

Director: Akihisa Okamoto

Stunts: Osamu Kenta (JAC)

Special Effects: Nobuo Yajima

Written by: Hayakazu Miyashita

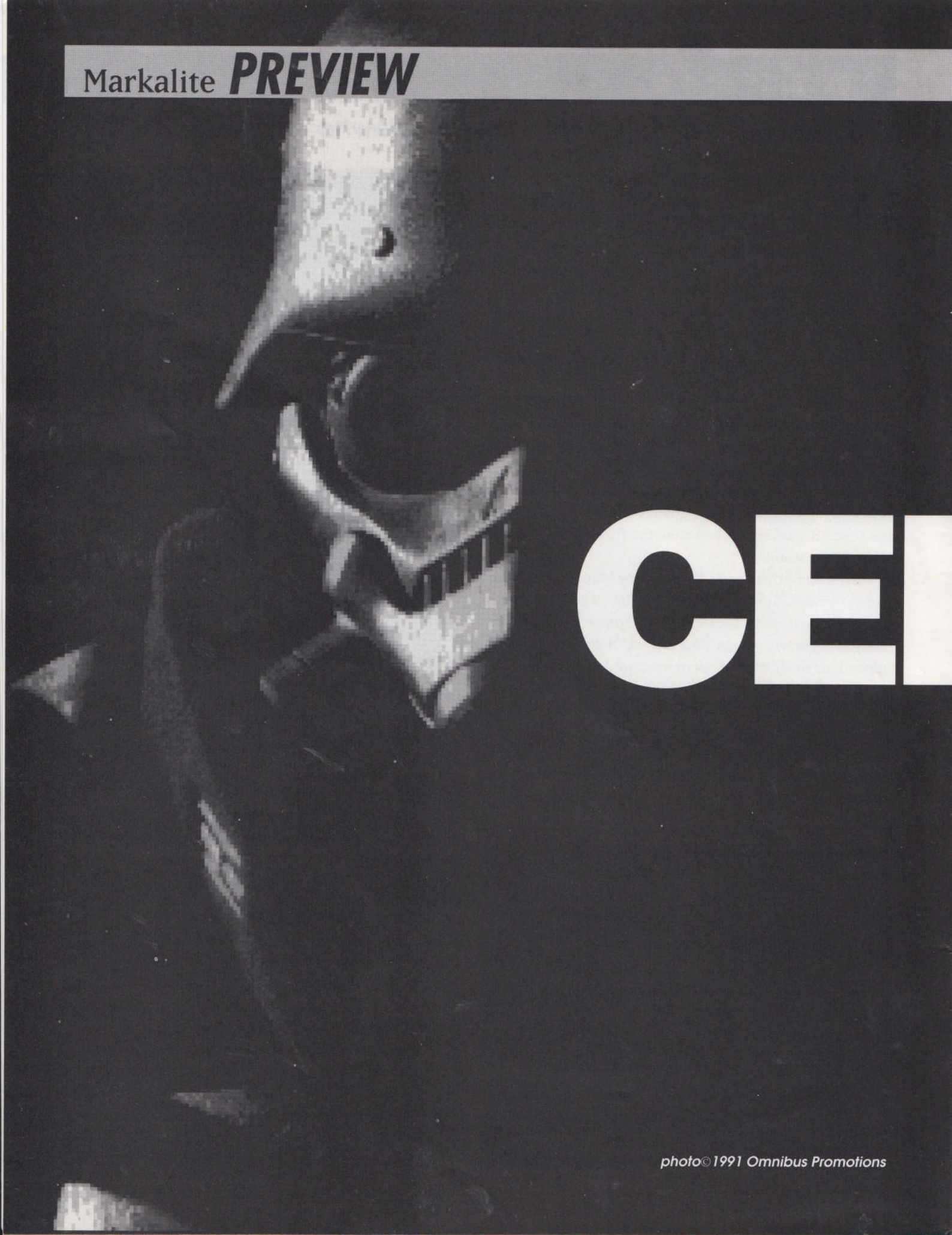
Visual Support/Character Design: Keita Amamiya

Produced by: Toei Video, Tohokushinsha and Sega Enterprises

Running time: 81 minutes

Release Date: November 1990

Markalite **PREVIEW**



CE

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CERBERUS—THE DOGS OF HELL

DIRECTOR MAMORU OSHI'S LONG AWAITED SEQUEL TO "THE RED SPECTACLES"

CERBERUS

THE DOGS OF HELL

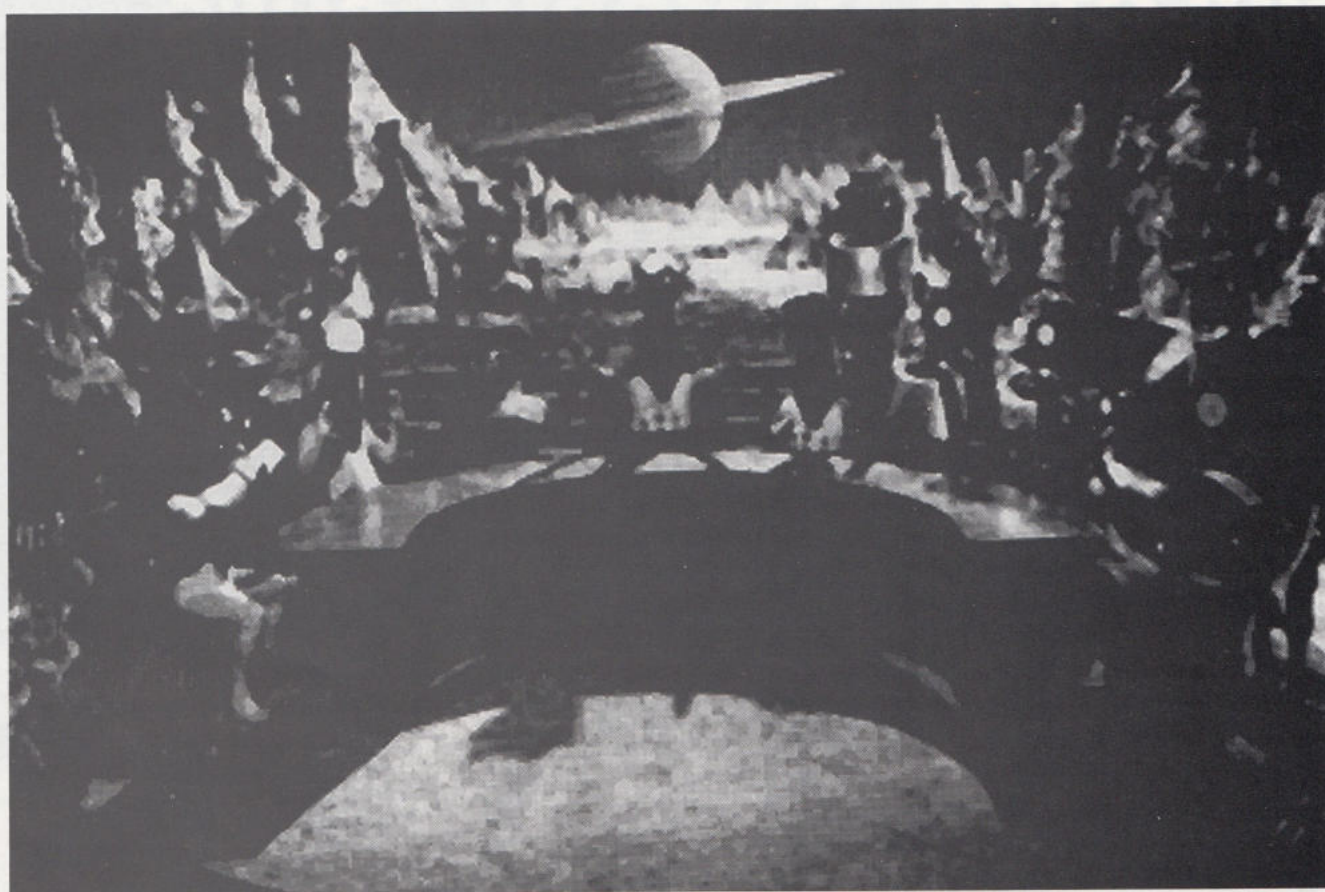
August Ragone

Originally as CERBERUS ISLAND (KERUBEROSU SHIMA) and then STRAY DOG this March will see Mamoru Oshi's latest film CERBERUS—THE DOGS OF HELL. Oshi and partner/designer Yutaka Izubuchi (BIOMAN, CHANGEMAN and PATLABOR) are taking a break from the duties of Headgear, the team responsible for the highly successful animated movie/TV series MOBILE POLICE PATLABOR, to lens this semi-sequel to 1986's

bizarre film, THE RED SPECTACLES (AKAI MEGANE). The highly anticipated film will emphasize and expand the short scenes concerning the armored soldiers in "Protect Gear" from SPECTACLES into a nonstop rollercoaster ride. Produced by Plex, Bandai, FUJI-TV and Oshi's own Omnibus Promotions, and shot on location in Hong Kong (with Golden Harvest stuntmen last used in TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES), CERBERUS—THE DOGS OF HELL features the action-packed exploits of the special police Cerberus Squad, heavily armed and ready for danger.

A number of experts from various companies such as Hideo Tanaka, director of the SUKEBAN DEKA series, sculpter Fuyuki Shinada, the man who built Biollante, special effects makeup artist Tomoo Haraguchi (who is currently working on the Tohokushinsha/Tsuburaya Films' latest, MIKADROID) and others have contributed to Oshi's upscaled actioner.

CERBERUS—THE DOGS OF HELL will be released to awaiting fans by Shojiku/Fuji across Japan on March 24th. Watch out for the Straydogs of the Cerberus Panzer Squad!



ALIENS!

The Uchujin in Japanese Fantasy Films

A

preeminent device featured throughout the history of Japanese Science Fiction films has been the depiction of "Uchujin," or extra-terrestrial aliens.

They come from distant and diverse worlds and civilizations, and of course find themselves in or around Japan. Their purposes for coming vary, though their plans often stem from desire to invade and conquer the planet Earth. Beneath the surface of this recurring

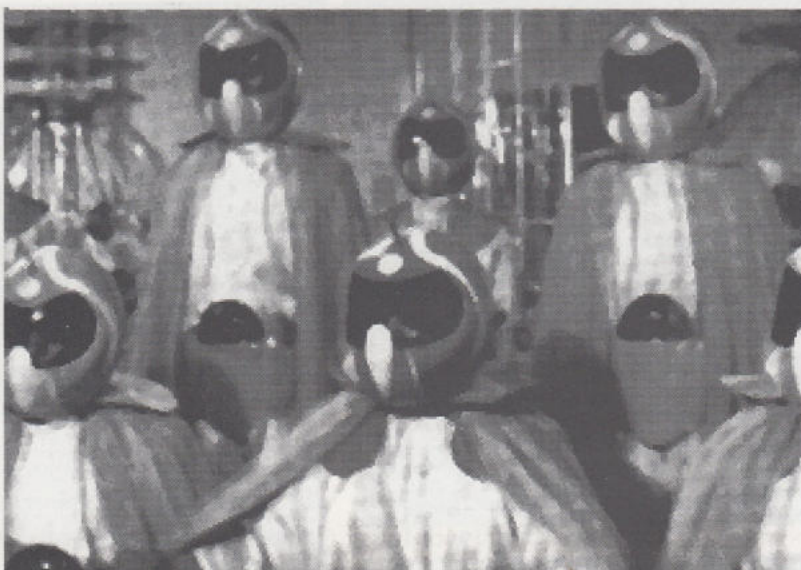
alien invasion theme lies signals which reflect the great mixture of feelings held by Japanese society about foreign things.

ETHICS & ATTITUDES

The development of these attitudes can be traced back to American Commodore Perry's 1853 arrival in Tokyo Bay, whose naval might forced opening of Japanese ports, ending nearly two centuries of insularity under the Tokugawa shogunate. Having developed as an isolated island culture, surrounded by the vast "unknown" openness of the sea and whatever might exist beyond it, the

Japanese found themselves suddenly shocked into an immediate awareness of their extreme vulnerability to outside forces—a situation continuously echoed in the subsequent Science Fiction genre.

Japan's cinematic fiction also relates to the nation's experiences with the outside world in those storylines wherein alien forces select the Earth for repopulation, hoping to escape problems on their own worlds. Historically, a lack of natural resources to support her dense population has forced Japan to rely heavily on trade with



The Council of the Emerald Planet in the Starman Series (opposite); A Parian in the flesh and disguised loom mysteriously in WARNING FROM SPACE (right); THE MYSTERIANS battle for possession of Earth (left).

other nations for survival and continued growth, especially as Japan began adapting western industrialization to the country's own culture and needs. [If modern Japan were cut off from all its food exports, the nation would literally starve to death inside two months—ed.] Japan's economy became too large for its tiny nation to support, leading to militarization and aggression against other nations. The shattering conclusion to this Second World War was the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The Japanese have been considered among the most frequent borrowers from other cultures, yet at the same time the most tradition-oriented of societies in the modern world. Despite the enormous changes within Japan over the past hundred and fifty years, if foreign influences are absorbed into the country, it is not without a cautious speculation as to how these influences may effect or best benefit Japan and its people. Japanese movie aliens, the ultimate Gaijin (foreigners), often appear as bizarre, powerful intruders bearing threatening possibilities of cultural disruption, devastation, or outright conquest. How interesting it is that, as the scale of economic advantage tips further from the United States and closer to Japan, we begin to see slightly similar depictions of the Japanese in our own media.

A common character trait of the Japanese alien invader is a contempt for the human species, which dominates and abuses the planet Earth. Invaders often adore the Earth for its resources, many of which are already being ruined by overly selfish and destructive human indulgences. Sometimes the most blatant attack is launched against the very basic fabric of Japanese society and its institutions, through the weakening, corruption or subversion of Japanese cultural traditions, ethics and morals.

EARLY SCIENCE FICTION FILMS

In 1956, Daiei Studios released *UCHUJIN TOKYO NI ARAWARU* (Spacemen Appear in Tokyo), released in the U.S. as *WARNING FROM SPACE*. This film features aliens from a distant planet called Paira who come to Earth not as invaders in pursuit of conquest, but to warn humanity of a burning planetoid bound on a collision course for our world. The Paira attempt, through peaceful means, to convince the peoples of Earth that they must abandon their aggressions against one another, especially the build up of nuclear weapons, and focus their attentions on the newer, greater threat. Normally appearing as giant star-shaped lifeforms with one huge eye in the center of their bodies, the Pairans don hu-

man disguises to conceal their true form from those who would react with hysteria at the sight of their physiogomy. As one of Japan's first major, serious science fiction films [made expressly with the U.S. market in mind—ed.] *WARNING FROM SPACE* was quite unique and refreshing for its scope of vision that went beyond the typical cold war Us-against-Them mentality that was permeating the science fiction material of the West and other countries during this time.

In 1957 Toho released *CHIKYU BOEIGUN/EARTH DEFENSE FORCE*. Shown in the U.S. as *THE MYSTERIANS*, it is one of Japan's most respected early science fiction film classics, about Earth's, and specifically Japan's, attempts first to deal with, then to drive away, the human-like aliens from Mysteroid. These Mysterians lost their planet, and most of their people, to nuclear devastation. It is discovered that their designs on Earth include the abduction of and mating with Earth women, which they need to perpetuate their dying race. Miscegenation has always been a difficult, if not taboo subject in Japanese society due to certain tribal/cultural traditions that have included a history of encouraging national pride through racial purity. The Mysterians force the Japanese to confront some of their own societal fears and inhibitions, as their scientific lead-



A swarm of Natal creep in a lunar cavern from *BATTLE IN OUTER SPACE* (left); a possessed human vampire of *GOKE* (middle); the computer-conscious X-ites plot the conquest of humanity in *MONSTER ZERO* (right).

ers must coordinate the formation of a multinational Earth Defence Force.

Despite their cold use of force to achieve their goals, the Mysterians still evoke some degree of sympathy as a race of dying people clinging to whatever hopes for the future they may have left. We may find their actions appalling, but the reasons for their behavior are somewhat easier to understand than those of many Uchjin invaders to follow.

A number of these would engage in more direct and inhumanly savage attempts at the mass genocide of all humankind (leading to special effects sequences that often command more attention than the actual aliens). In 1959, Toho's *UCHU DAISENSO/THE BATTLE IN OUTER SPACE* introduced beings from the planet Natal who launch attacks on Earth from their base on the Moon. Very little is ever learned about the Natal; throughout *UCHU DAISENSO* they remain the "them" in a strictly Us-against-Them battle. A similar tale was Toho's 1977 *WAKUSEI DAISENSO/THE WAR IN SPACE*.

ALIEN HORROR

A most bizarre variation on the alien invader theme came in 1968 when Shochiku released *KYUKETSUKI GOKEMIDORO (GOKE, BODYSNATCHER FROM HELL)* in its 1978 U.S. release). In this unusual story, Gokemidoro is a space organism that subsists on blood. It can possess human bodies like a vampiric parasite, turning its host-victim into a vampire

which craves human blood to nourish the alien entity inside, spreading uncanny vampirism like a disease amongst stranded jet crash survivors. This invasion finds alien creatures human blood for food, and human bodies for colonization.

ALIENS IN THE KAIJU EIGA

Beginning with the 1965 film *KAIJU DAISENSO/THE GREAT MONSTER WAR* (aka *MONSTER ZERO/GODZILLA VS. MONSTER ZERO*), the alien-presence theme became firmly established in the Kaiju Eiga. Using computerized control, the governors of Planet X stage a raid on the barren surface of their own world by King Ghidorah, to be witnessed by visiting astronauts from Earth, convincing them of the Planet's need for Godzilla and Rodan to ward him off. But their true intention is to gain control of all three monsters and use them to colonize the Earth.

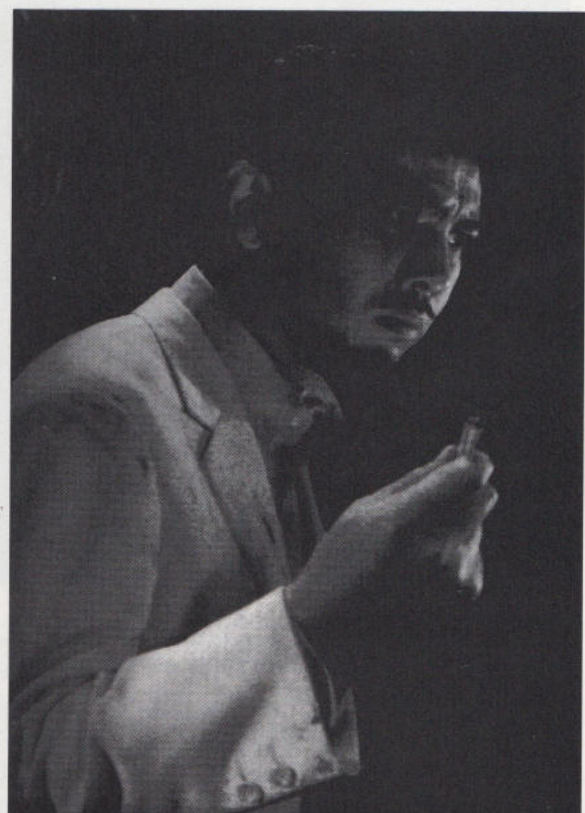
The "X-seijin" are governed by electronics, resulting in an emotionless sameness about them—they lack any real individuality or ability to function independently of their computers. This becomes their weakness when it is discovered that they can be destroyed by a single, high-pitched, sound frequency which disrupts their equilibrium. This could represent a plea for greater individuality among the Japanese themselves.

A plan similar to the X-seijin's was employed by the people of Kilaak in *KAIJU SHOSHINGEKI/DESTROY ALL MONSTERS*. In this futuristic

tale, all the Earth's monsters—Godzilla, Rodan, Mothra, etc.—are contained on a region of Ogasawara Island called Monsterland. The Kilaaks seize the monsters and turn them loose, but their control is undone by human ingenuity; even King Ghidorah fails to save the aliens.

In 1970, *Gezora*, a giant cuttlefish monster worshipped by the South Pacific natives of Selgio Island; *Kameba*, a gigantic turtle; and *Ganime*, an enormous crab, are discovered to have grown to such proportions as a result of an alien amoeba lifeform having entered their bodies and possessing them. This was Toho's *DECISIVE BATTLE! GIANT MONSTERS OF THE SOUTH SEA*. (Called *YOG, MONSTER FROM SPACE* in the U.S., the aliens were referred to as Astro-Quasar lifeforms.)

In the 1972 movie *CHIKYU KOGAKI MEIREI, GOJIRA TAI GAIGAN (THE EARTH ATTACK COMMAND: GODZILLA VS. GIGAN)*, we meet the M-seijin, who are searching out a new planet because the effects of pollution are devastating theirs. They plan to take over and rejuvenate the planet Earth, partly by exploiting human desires for worldwide peace. In defense of their home planet, Godzilla and Angilas succeed in forcing away the aliens and their spaceborn monsters, Gigan and Ghidorah. In death, the defeated aliens revert to their true form, that of an advanced species of cockroach, a life form humans look on as being just as annoying as these alien versions found humans to be.



Some of Toho's humanoid Uchujin: The Kilaak leader from *DESTROY ALL MONSTERS* (left); Mutant cockroach in human's clothing in *GODZILLA VS. GIGAN* (above right); an alien-possessed human (Kenji Sahara) in *YOG MONSTER FROM SPACE*.

1974 delivered a new technological threat of extraterrestrial construction to challenge the world: the Mechagodzilla! Introduced in *GOJIRA TAI MEKAGOJIRA*, Mechagodzilla was created by Uchujin of an unspecified third planet from a mysterious, great cosmic black hole which threatens it. These aliens construct a mechanical war machine, a robot monster in the image of Godzilla meant to destroy human civilization, as well as Godzilla himself. These aliens are in reality simian-like creatures. A second group them arrives on Earth in *MEKAGOJIRA NO GYAKUSHU/REVENGE OF MECHAGODZILLA*

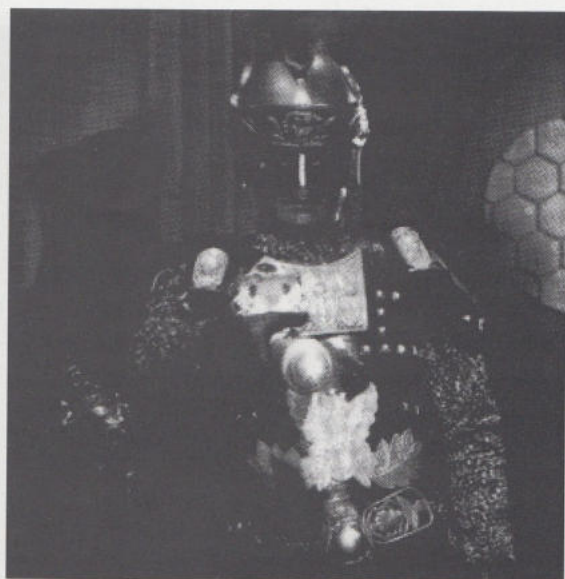
(*TERROR OF MECHAGODZILLA* in the U.S.), the 1975 sequel. Here they express their deep contempt for humans as a race with polluted minds that they feel the globe would be better off without.

ALIENS AND A GIANT TURTLE

As Toho had its staple of Kaiju Eiga productions, with its trademark *GODZILLA* series, the competitor Daiei had its own popular monster, *GAMERA*. The gigantic, fire-breathing turtle had his first experience with uchujin invaders in 1968 with the film *GAMERA VS. SPACE MONSTER VIRAS*, released in the U.S. as *DE-*

STROY ALL PLANETS. Aboard an alien spaceship, two boys discover that the men aboard are only the bodies of humans, captured by squid-like aliens who combine into one large monster to challenge Gamera.

In 1969 another two boys find an empty flying saucer, which kidnaps them and takes them to a faraway planet in *GAMERA VS. THE GREAT EVIL BEAST GUIRON* (originally titled *ATTACK OF THE MONSTERS* in its U.S. release). Two women agents who remain on the planet, Barbella and Flobella, are searching for a new world to live on, their civilization having perished despite its obviously advanced



Uchujin come in all species, genders and costumes: The humanoid-apes from GODZILLA VS. MECHAGODZILLA (left); The Roman rejects from THE WAR IN SPACE (above right); and the scheming brain-eating females in GAMERA VS. GUIRON (lower right)

technology. They offer deceptive hospitality to the boys, their true intentions being to kill them and consume their brains, supposedly for knowledge they can use to help them enter and adapt to human culture and civilization. In addition to this attitude, when one of their people is injured, they are expected to kill any individual that is no longer useful. The major factor in the demise of the alien world's civilization may have been its loss of basic values and respect for life. [There is a suggestion in the script that the world's new "Ice Age" and repopulation by monsters was actually brought about by computer failure caused by the aliens' overwhelming technological ambitions—ed.]

1971 introduced GAMERA VS. THE DEEP SEA MONSTER ZIGRA. On their world of origin, Zigrans lived in the sea and ate the

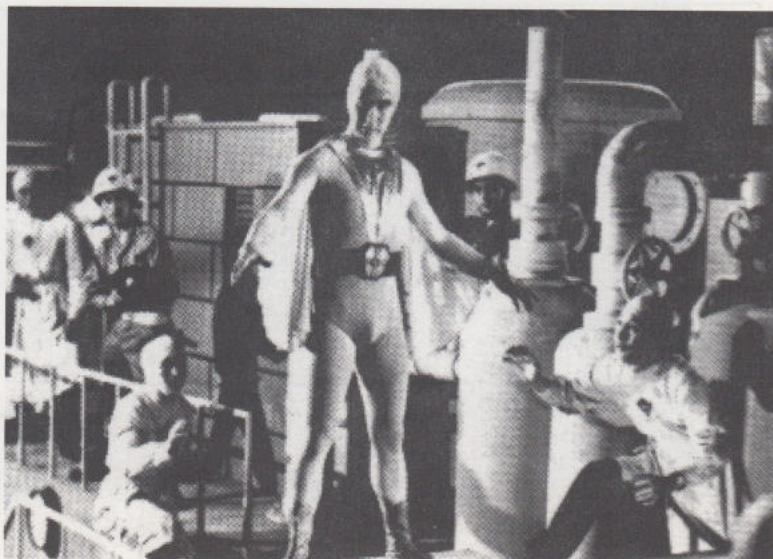
inhabitants of the land. But their sea became so polluted that they needed to move on to another planet with similar conditions for sustaining their lifeforms. Zigra finds Earth to be perfect, except that inhabitants of the land eat the sealife—yet are polluting the waters at such a rate that humanity will have to be conquered quickly if this planet is to be at all livable.

HEROES FROM THE STARS

Another, quite different Uchujin offered a hand of friendship to planet Earth throughout the 1950s in Shinto's TV series KOTETSU NO KYOJIN or SUPERGIANT. Dubbed STARMAN in the U.S., the role was made popular in Japan by actor Ken Utsui. Decked out in supertights and stoic Japanese expression, SUPERGIANT would venture forth from his home on the Emerald Planet to fight evil invaders and extra-

terrestrial threats from other worlds, all to save the people of the Earth. Rescuing Japanese children from the hostile cosmic foreigners seemed destined to become his specialty, and a tradition that would flourish throughout future Japanese superhero adventures. Inasmuch as its children represent the future of Japan, they also represent the future of humanity for the entire planet. In the context of innumerable Japanese fantasy productions, they are easily often identifiable as symbolic of all the Earth's children.

The similar superhero YUSEI OJI/PLANET PRINCE came from the then-young Toei Studios in 1959. Known in the U.S. as THE PRINCE OF SPACE, he was portrayed by actor Toshio Mimura. His identity on Earth was that of a humble shoeshiner, defending our world from The Phantom Ambassador. Another superhuman be-



The weird, squid-like alien Viras and his minions from Daiei's GAMERA VS. VIRAS (left); Ken Utsui takes on all comers as the Supergiant in Shintoho's late fifties film series (right); The original poster art for Toei's PRINCE OF SPACE (below).

ing, played by Shinichi "Sonny" Chiba [see interview in issue #1-ed.], was Ironsharp, who appeared in UCHU KAISOKUSEN/INVADERS FROM THE SPACESHIP (1961); released in the U.S. as INVASION OF THE NEPTUNE MEN, he was renamed SPACE CHIEF.

The concept of the alien superhero was an especial success in Japan, one which continued developing and expanding on Japanese television for decades. One of the most successful and durable alien heroes since 1966 has been Tsuburaya Productions' full-color ULTRAMAN and subsequent Ultra Series [see overview in this issue-ed.]. These Series began an incredible phenomenon in Japan, a boom of television programs showcasing giant alien heroes battling gigantic monsters, mutations or grotesque alien invaders of all shapes and sizes.

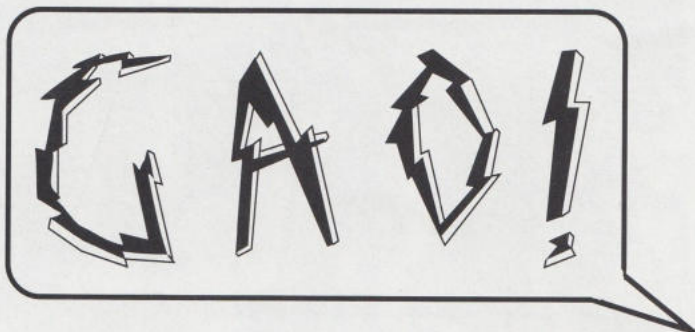
These beings came in a myriad of colors and forms, such as the likes of SPECTREMAN, NATIONAL KID, PLANET PRINCE, CAPTAIN MAGMA, MIRRORMAN, BAROMONE, THUNDER MASK, HYUMAN, ZONE FIGHTER, BANKID, MEGALOMAN, DENZIMAN, GAVAN, MACHINEMAN, SHARIVAN, BIOMAN, JUSPION, SHAIDER, FLASHMAN,

SPEILBAN, and many, many others; and we're sure to see many others come to our world via the fantasy genre for the years to come.

Uchujin have been a part of Japanese films for over 30 years. They afford us a way of looking at ourselves, as a civilization, through the eyes of others. Each country has its own problems, and corresponding interpretations of Uchujin. They can show us how to band together to fight a common enemy, or demonstrate how foolishly we destroy our own planet. Either way, they will have much to teach us for years to come . . . KEEP WATCHING THE SKIES!

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GIGANTOR

art © Mitsuteru Yokoyama

THE SPACE-AGE ROBOT



IS BACK . . . SORT OF

FRED PATTEN

Scott Wheeler, a young Hollywood makeup effects artist, has bought the home-video rights to the 1960s TV cartoon series. He hopes to make GIGANTOR available on cassettes, more as a nostalgia-hobbyist activity—he was a rabid GIGANTOR fan as a boy—than as a business venture. So far, he has been getting a cruel education on the realities of the American home-video industry. Most of the people who would love to have GIGANTOR on video, don't know that his tapes exist. Hopefully that will change soon—and *Markalite*'s readers may be just the people to help change it.

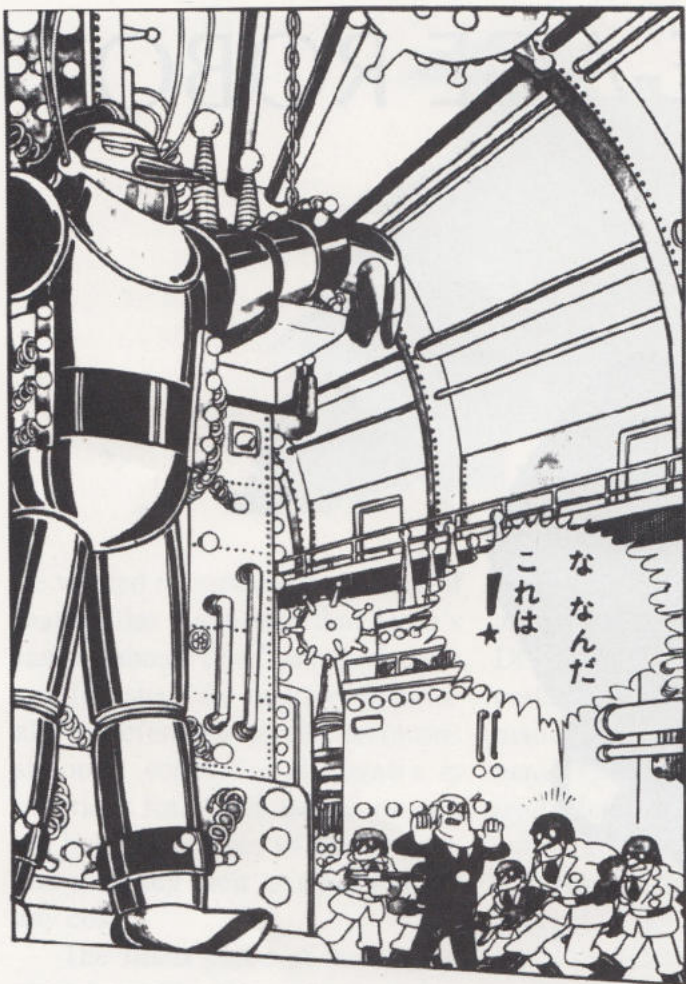
GIGANTOR was one of a handful of Japanese TV cartoon series that were "Americanized" in the mid-1960s. It was produced by Fred Ladd, who also gave us ASTRO BOY and KIMBA THE WHITE LION. Most fans remember these two more fondly, but Ladd says that GIGANTOR was the most popular at the time, especially with the younger viewers.

"You're talking really more about an adult's appeal [with ASTRO BOY and KIMBA] than for kids," Ladd says today. "Some of these shows, especially KIMBA, would often be talk-heavy. There'd be so much plot exposition that [Osamu] Tezuka wanted to get across. So every time there'd be a lot of dialogue . . . talk, talk, talk, arguing back and forth—you'd lose the kids! You and I were already adults, so we

could understand what Tezuka was trying to get across. We liked the philosophical discussions about robots' rights in ASTRO BOY and the stronger characters in KIMBA. But the kids were action-oriented, so they were turned off by all the talk. They went more for GIGANTOR."

GIGANTOR also had a greater focus for juvenile appeal in 12-year-old Jimmy Sparks, Gigantor's master. It was harder to identify with a young invincible flying robot or a young talking lion cub, than with a normal boy who just happened to be entrusted with the controls of the world's most powerful robot—at least for young American viewers. In Japan, ASTRO BOY came first and was more popular, but GIGANTOR was a close second.

MIGHTY ATOM (TETSUWAN



scientist, Dr. Shikashima (in the U.S., Bob Brilliant), to look for hidden plans. Dr. Shikashima's young son, Tetsuo (Buttons Brilliant), is a pal of the boy detective, Shotaro Kaneda (Jimmy Sparks), which brings him onto the case. Shotaro learns that Dr. Shikashima had been a key scientist in the military's top-secret robot project, and was presumed killed in the 1945 bombing that destroyed the laboratory. But the robots that the criminals are using are the project's defective but still mighty Nos. 26 and 27, which indicates that the laboratory was not as thoroughly destroyed as was believed. The criminals are now trying to track down the No. 28 model that the project had been on the verge of perfecting.

It turns out that Dr. Shikashima is still alive and has been working secretly ever since the war to single-handedly complete Iron Man No. 28, to be used for peaceful criminal gangs and the police, represented by Shotaro-kun and Police Chief Otsuka (Inspector Ignatz Blooper), for control of the three robots. Two mysterious men appear, who seem to be working against both the police and the criminals. They turn out to be government secret agents, the Murasame Brothers. The elder is the leader of the pair, but when he is killed in action, his kid brother Kenji (Dick Strong) fulfills their mission for both of them. The comic-book serial ends with Iron Men Nos. 26 and 27 destroyed and the criminals dead or captured. Dr. Shikashima gives Iron Man No. 28's control box to the heroic Shotaro so he can use the robot for his police work, and the scientist returns to his family and pure research.

This story was so popular that Yokoyama wrote IRON MAN NO. 28 adventures for the next ten years. Most of them were variants on the themes of criminal gangs trying to gain control of No. 28, or trying to build other robots stronger than him. Young Shotaro and Police Chief Otsuka were the only regular characters, although Dr. Shikashima made frequent guest appearances. In 1960 there was a short-lived (14 episode) live-action TV program. Its special effects were very crude, and most fans of IRON MAN NO. 28 would rather forget that it ever existed. (see *Superhero Roll Call* last iss.—ed.) Yokoyama also produced a wide variety of other comic-book series at this time. Some that made the transition to TV cartoon series were BABEL 2, SALLY THE WITCH and GODMARS. However, around the late 1960's, Yokoyama began to concentrate upon serious stories for Japan's adult comic-book readers. His most recent works are almost exclusively historical melodramas set in feudal Japan.

IRON MAN NO. 28, both in production sequence and in popularity, was Japan's second boys'-adventure TV cartoon series. The TCJ black-&-white cartoons ran for almost four years in prime time on Japan's Fuji TV network, from October 20, 1963 through May 25, 1967, although there were only 96 different episodes—83 original and 13 of the U.S. version. Ironically, the TV series began just as Yokoyama himself was tiring of the comic book, and he produced its final story halfway through the TV run. Most of the TV episodes used original stories, and featured a greater variety of story ideas. There were some changes made during the translation from comic book to TV. The military project to develop a super-robot became a two-man project of Dr. Shikashima and Dr. Kaneda, Shotaro's father. This narrowed any gaps between the two, and provided a stronger reason for Dr. Shikashima's gift of Iron Man No. 28 to Shotaro.

A larger regular cast was needed for the TV adventures, so Dr. Shikashima (Bob Brilliant) and Kenji Murasame (Dick Strong) became permanent characters, and Dr. Shikashima's wife and son became fairly regular supporting characters. TCJ developed the

ATOMU aka ASTRO BOY) began as a comic-book series by Tezuka in 1952. It was Japan's first major boys'-adventure comic to feature futuristic and superhero themes, inspiring many imitations throughout the 1950s. Then Tezuka opened his own animation studio Mushi Productions, which developed MIGHTY ATOM as a TV cartoon series that premiered on New Year's Day 1963. It was such an immediate hit that other television animation studios sprang up instantly, they scrambled to bring ATOM's most popular comic-book competitors to life. Japan's second TV-animation studio, TCJ (Television Corporation of Japan), put GIGANTOR on the air just ten months later, in October 1963, followed by EIGHT-MAN (aka EIGHTH-MAN) in November. An indicator of these programs' popularity in Japan is the number of episodes produced for each: 193 for MIGHTY ATOM, 96 for GIGANTOR, and 56 for EIGHT-MAN.

GIGANTOR (TETSUJIN NIJU-HACHI-GO or IRONMAN NO. 28 in Japan) was the creation of comic-book artist Mitsuteru Yokoyama (born June 18, 1934). He wrote and drew IRONMAN NO. 28 for *Shonen* magazine from 1956 through 1965. The title refers to the fact that Gigantor was the final success of a secret WW2 military project, after 27 frustrating failures. Needless to say, the American translations never mentioned that Gigantor's original purpose had been to defeat the Allied armies! Fortunately for us, a U.S. bombing raid, near the end of the war, destroyed the secret laboratory before Gigantor was completed.

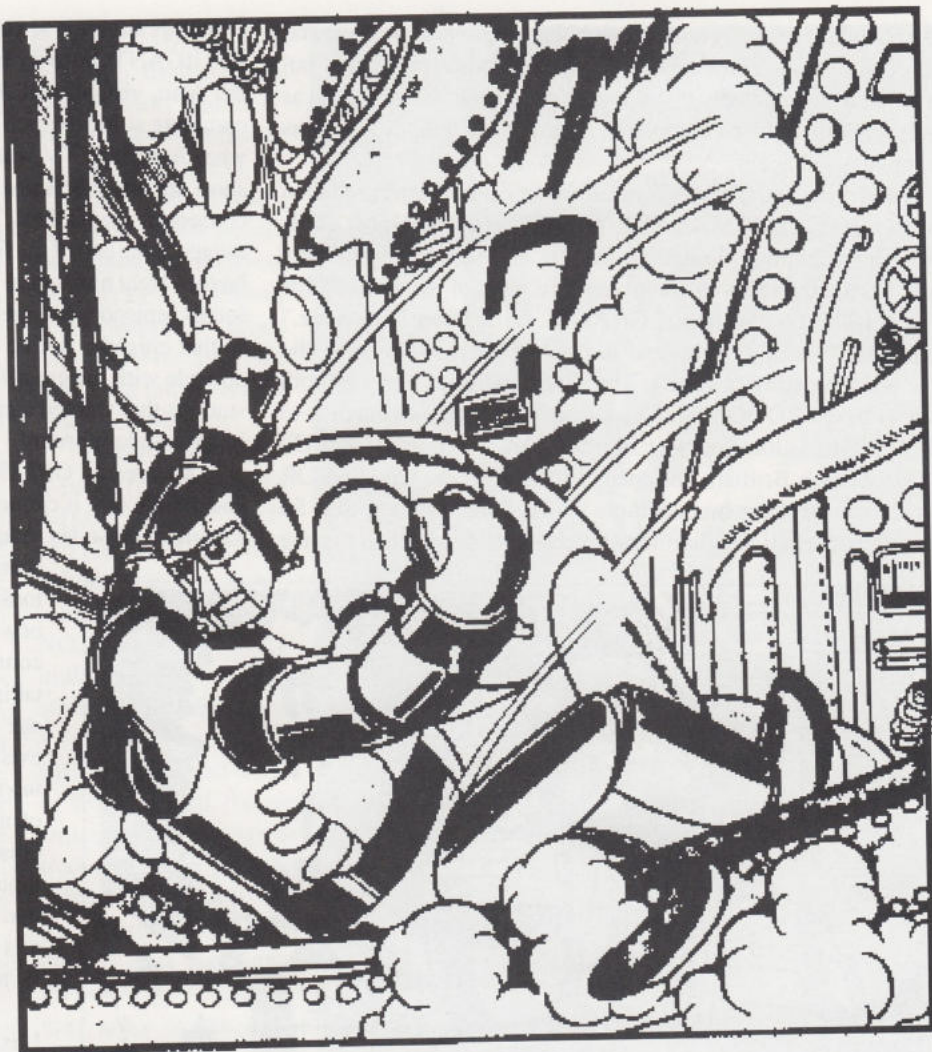
Yokoyama's original story begins ten years after the war. Tokyo is being terrorized by criminals using two powerful robots for their robberies. They also break into the home of a deceased

series with an eye towards international TV sales, so more adventures were set in exotic parts of the world, and Police Chief Otsuka's affiliation with the Japanese police was made more vague so that he would look more like an inspector in any country's police force, or in an international organization like Interpol.

Fred Ladd remembers that GIGANTOR was brought to his attention in late 1963 or early 1964. He produced it during 1964 and 1965, distribution deals were worked out during 1965, and it began syndicated broadcasting in January 1966. "ASTRO BOY was first," he says. "I didn't begin any production on GIGANTOR until well after ASTRO BOY finished production and it was already a big success."

ASTRO BOY (MIGHTY ATOM) had started on Japanese TV in January 1963, and Japanese salesmen immediately tried to sell it to U.S. television. NBC was interested, calling in Fred Ladd, an independent producer who specialized in dubbing foreign movies into English. In fact, Ladd was busy at the time with an original U.S./Belgian co-production theatrical cartoon feature, PINOCCHIO IN OUTER SPACE, and NBC felt that this made him some sort of expert in cartoons about young robots. Ladd agreed that ASTRO BOY should be very popular with American children, so NBC bought the program from the Japanese and hired Ladd to dub the half-hour episodes into English for them. ASTRO BOY went on the air in America in September 1963, and by the end of the year it was an obvious hit.

Ladd recalls that "the same agent, the same rep who had represented Tezuka and Mushi Productions, came to NBC and tried to sell ASTRO BOY. They liked it and offered him a price, but he thought it was too low. He turned down NBC's deal—he thought it was not a very good deal for the Japanese studio! Well, the Japanese really wanted to do business with NBC! So they fired that agent, hired a new agent whose name coincidentally was also K. Fujita—but it was for Kiyoshi; they weren't related—and he brought it back to NBC and made the deal. This left an embittered first agent. So he got ahold of IRON MAN NO. 28 which was by TCJ, Mushi's rival studio at the time, and he came back to NBC and said, 'Look, you're doing very well with ASTRO BOY; it's really taken off. So of course you'll want another great robot show! Now that we know it's a success, I've got another great robot show.' We intend to make 52 ASTRO BOYs and then stop.' As it turned out, ASTRO BOY was so popular that we made another 52 episodes later, but they weren't figuring on that at the time. 'We wouldn't want another one; it would just compete with ASTRO BOY. So thanks very much, but we don't want it.' So Fujita came directly to me and said, 'Here's IRON MAN NO. 28, What do you think of it, Mr. Ladd?' [After watching it, I] called NBC and told them, 'This really does have potential. What do you want to do about it?' They still weren't interested. So I said, 'How would you feel if I



took the show?' And they said, 'What do we care? Go ahead! If you don't, somebody else might—probably will! Better you than somebody else! So buy it!' So that was it. NBC did not want it, under any circumstances, but they wouldn't hold it against me if I bought it myself and went into competition with them!

"So I signed the deal with K. Fujita and I got IRON MAN NO. 28, or IRON ROBOT 28, depending on who translates it for you. As it turned out, this made Fujita think that there was a lot of money in animation for him, so he started his own company in Japan to produce cartoons and he made MARINE BOY, and it ended up losing him all the money that he'd made on GIGANTOR and it drove him into bankruptcy! But I wasn't involved with MARINE BOY."

As it turned out, it was lucky for posterity that Fred Ladd did produce GIGANTOR as his own program. NBC hired Ladd to produce ASTRO BOY and KIMBA THE WHITE LION as an NBC subcontractor. This meant that Ladd turned all of the film negatives and soundtrack recordings over to NBC when he was finished. And when NBC closed its films division in the late 1970's, everything was thrown out! This is why the current attempts to restore ASTRO BOY must rely upon finding film collectors who have a few of the 16mm episodes in their collections. But Fred Ladd owned GIGANTOR, and he kept all of the negatives and sound tracks. They have been gathering dust in storage, but they have been kept available.

GIGANTOR was not Fred Ladd's alone at the beginning. He

and a friend, Al Singer, created Delphi Productions to produce and market the show. They expected to create other programs, but Singer died unexpectedly of coronary arrest at the age of 46, just as GIGANTOR was being completed. The name Delphi Productions was never used again.

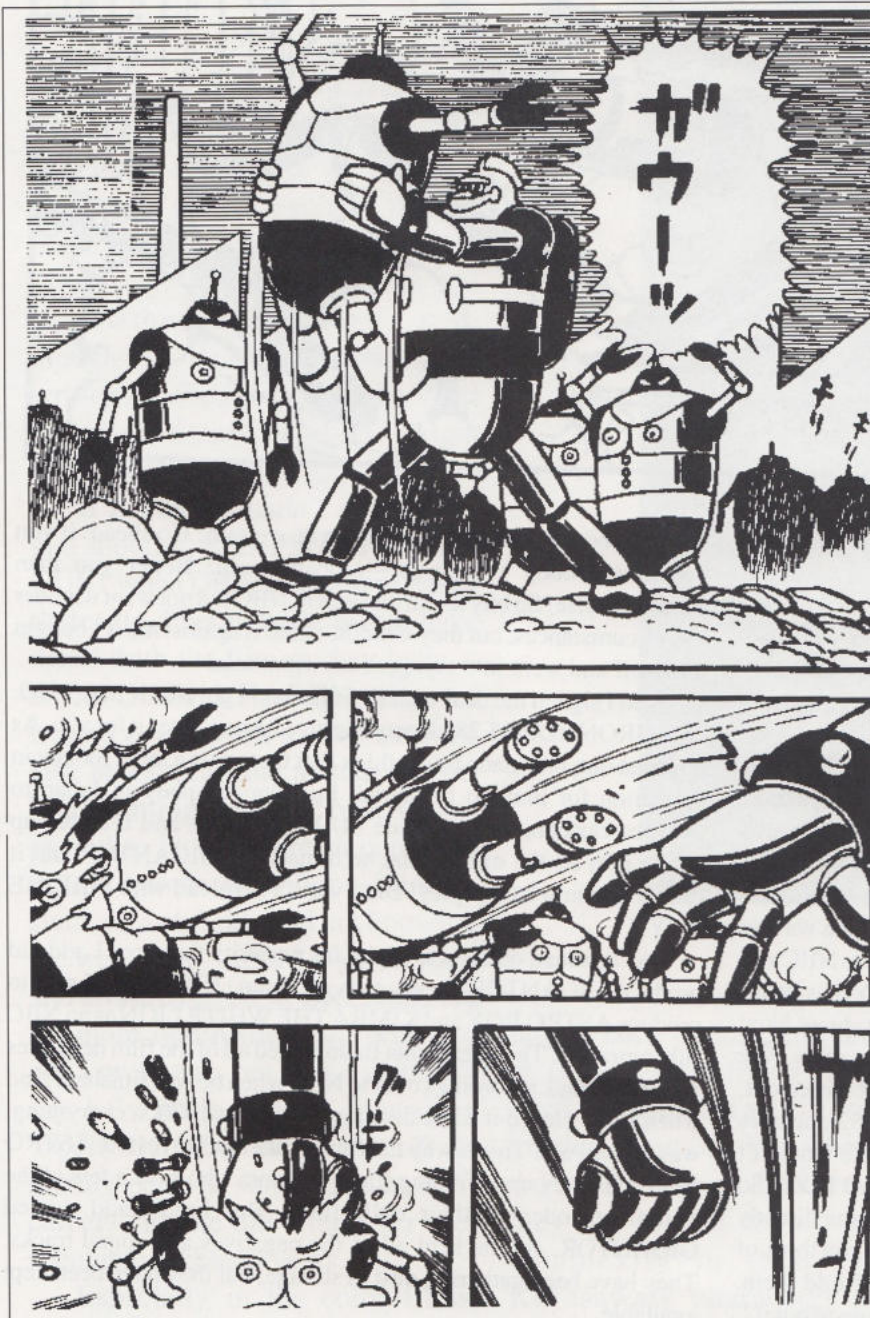
Ladd produced GIGANTOR in the same way that he produced ASTRO BOY and KIMBA THE WHITE LION, and most of his other film dubbings. He had a scripting and voice team in New York, personal friends to whom he gave most of his work: Cliff Owens, Billie Lou Watt, and Gil Mack. "And Peter Fernandez," Ladd adds. "Mack, Owens, and Watt were the main three — the same little repertory company. They had developed into a smooth team with ASTRO BOY, and it was easy for them to swing over to GIGANTOR. Billie Lou was Jimmy Sparks, of course, and Gil Mack was Bob Brilliant and many others. But the GIGANTOR characters were more human, more realistic and less cartoony. So we couldn't use all the gimmicky voices. Dick Strong had to have

criminals shooting at people. And the typical story resolution was for GIGANTOR to fly in at the last moment and smash something up. Also, virtually all ASTRO BOY and KIMBA episodes were complete stories which could be shown in any order, which was what American TV wanted, while GIGANTOR regularly ran to short serials. The same villain usually appeared in two or three consecutive episodes. The formula was that the villain would escape at the end of the first episode, so the heroes knew they would have to fight him again. Then there would be a stronger fight in the second episode, and they would think that he was killed at the end of that episode. But he would make a surprise return in the third episode with his greatest threat yet. This was unacceptable to TV stations that wanted a program with episodes that could be shown in any random order."

As a result, GIGANTOR was changed to such an extent that Ladd feels that it cannot accurately be called a translation of the Japanese episodes. Ladd worked closely with TCJ, indicating scenes that had to be changed so they would not look like cliffhangers. TCJ essentially made new episodes for the American market. They contained more stock footage of GIGANTOR taking off, flying, and landing. Original footage was filmed for many endings, reusing existing animation from other episodes showing the characters relaxed and happy at the end of an adventure, over the background of the episodes needing new conclusions. New dialogue was written to leave open the possibility that the villain might return someday, but that this particular episode was definitely and satisfactorily over.

GIGANTOR was distributed by Trans-Lux Productions. The distribution was excellent during the 1960's. It was routine for GIGANTOR, on one independent station, to outdraw Walter Cronkite on CBS's 6 P.M. News. But that was because 6 P.M. was still part of the children's TV period in the 1960's. Parents knew that they could see the news later, after the kids were in bed. Still, this enabled Trans-Lux to advertise that GIGANTOR was Number One for its time period, in whatever market the advertisement was tailored for. And Trans-Lux advertised GIGANTOR heavily.

Despite this, there was never any GIGANTOR merchandising. The reason was the program's syndicated nature. Children's merchandising requires strong character popularity to be successful. A Bugs Bunny toy will sell much better than a toy of an anonymous bunny that's just cute. Cartoon characters shown on network channels have national exposure, so their merchandise will sell everywhere. But syndicated programs are sold on a station-by-station basis. A cartoon program that is very popular in one geographic area might be totally unknown in another. Merchandising licensees are reluctant to take chances on characters who do not have guaranteed continent-wide expo-



sure. NBC tried to merchandise ASTRO BOY after his program's initial popularity in 1963, but had very little success because of its on-here, off-there nature. Ladd figured that if NBC with all its resources couldn't sell ASTRO BOY to the merchandisers, he would be wasting his time to try to sell them GIGANTOR.

ASTRO BOY, GIGANTOR and KIMBA were all popular during the 1960's and the early 1970s, but by the end of that decade, they had practically disappeared from television. There were three reasons, at least two of which applied to each program. First, the taboos against violence in childrens' TV programming had grown much more strict by the end of the 1970's. Second, there were enough color cartoons on the TV market that most stations were no longer willing to buy black-&-white cartoons. Third, the distributors of the programs disappeared.

ASTRO BOY and KIMBA were technically owned not by NBC but by NBC Films, a subsidiary that sold programming which NBC did not show on its own network, to the syndicated market. In the 1970's the U.S. government ruled that this violated national anti-trust laws. A company could produce and broadcast programs, or it could sell programs to other companies, but it could not do both. NBC was forced to close NBC Films.

In GIGANTOR's case, Trans-Lux phased out its TV distribution activities to concentrate on manufacturing video monitors. Its biggest success was in the financial community, where the famous Wall Street ticker-tape machines were replaced by Trans-Lux's "Jet" monitor which showed stock market changes much more rapidly. Trans-Lux's video library, which included both GIGANTOR and SPEED RACER, was transferred to Alan Enterprises. Fred Ladd describes Alan as a personal friend, but Trans-Lux was a big company and Alan was "just one guy ad a phone in a little office." Still, Alan was still making some sales for GIGANTOR into the early 1980s, several years after ASTRO BOY had disappeared.

For the most part, GIGANTOR has been off the air for ten years or more. During this decade, the home-video market has grown explosively. Many old, "lost" movies and TV programs that had faded to nostalgic memories have become available to the public again. Now Scott Wheeler wants to add GIGANTOR to the list.

Wheeler identifies himself as one of the age group who really loved GIGANTOR as a young boy, and who are now in their mid-20s to mid-30s. He has grown up to become a Hollywood makeup effects artist, designing and applying unusual and grotesque designs for SF and horror movies. During the 1980s he became aware of Japanese animation fandom and attended a few club meetings, including one at which Fred Ladd was a guest speaker. But most of the animation shown at these screenings was current, not the TV cartoons of the 1960's.

"GIGANTOR was my favorite TV cartoon when I was a kid,"

Wheeler says, "and my best friend's favorite cartoon, too. But they weren't showing it at any of these fan meetings. Nobody had any of the Japanese cartoons that old. But somebody told me about a fan in another part of the country who had some GIGANTORs on tape. So I wrote to her and she sent me a copy of her tape. Well, I got together with my fiancé, who is now my wife, and I said 'This was my favorite show when I was a kid!', and we looked at it and it was a 20th-generation copy of a 16 millimeter film that somebody had projected against a wall and videotaped. I just thought, this is crazy! This is the only thing that I can see of my favorite cartoon!? Something's got to be done!

"That was how I got the inspiration to do it myself. I saw it as partly a hobby, and partly as a second job to keep myself busy between makeup assignments. I had seen



Fred Ladd talking at a fan club about how he had made GIGANTOR and those other programs, so I knew that he was local. I found him in the phone book. I called him and I said, 'Let's do something with GIGANTOR,' and he said, 'Well, make me an offer.' ... I ended up licensing the home video rights and 50% of the merchandising rights for GIGANTOR for a seven-year period.

"My goal with these videotapes is to make something that's a quality product from start to finish, whether or not you think GIGANTOR is good. A lot of people think that it was one of the most horrible cartoons ever made. But I think that GIGANTOR, in the format that I'm presenting it, has a lot more integrity than what a lot of cartoon video packagers are putting out. They're taking lousy prints of public domain works, mastering them on 3/4-inch tape in high-

speed duplication in the 20-hour format or whatever it is, in the slowest format that they can get that tape rolling at and doing it just grotesquely cheaply, and giving people a throwaway product. I didn't go for a flashy package because I felt that if someone wants to by GIGANTOR, they would buy it because they know what it is. I don't think I'm going to win a whole new audience with these video tapes. I'm going to bring it back for the people who want to see GIGANTOR again.

"I put it on the two-hour format so the video tape will last; it'll look good for more plays. It was mastered from the original film negative. We made low-contrast prints from the original negatives because the prints master better than the original negatives on the Rank Cinatel. We went on a Rank Cinatel, which is the finest machine available for mastering from film to one-inch tape. I considered the new digital format, but I think that it offers a falsely good-looking picture. It's a sharper picture because it's subtracting information. The one-inch looks like the original film to me.

"Actually [the tape] looks much better than the original broadcast — much better contrast from dark to light, sharper lines on it. But that's because we have better TVs today. I'm proud of the product; I think it's about as good as I can do on half-inch tape. There comes a point, considering the original source, where it would become overkill to enhance it any further. There comes a point where all you're doing is showing what's wrong with the original film.

"GIGANTOR is actually so technically low-quality that I had trouble with the film-to-video transfer people not taking it seriously. It's a good company, one of the best in Hollywood, and they take very good care of transferring current color film to video. But they also get a lot of work from these people who make cheap videos of old public-domain cartoons, whose only concern is to make the videos as cheaply as possible. And those old 1930s cartoons are technically a lot like GIGANTOR. So even though my instructions were for a high quality transfer, the people they assigned to it obviously felt that GIGANTOR was just more of those old cartoons that nobody really cared about. I'd get back the check dub and I'd see all these black specks all over. I'd say, 'No, this is no good. We have to do this all over.' And they couldn't see what I was making such a fuss about, because nobody else who was mastering old cartoons like this had shown any interest

at all.

"I had to get Fred Ladd in. I have nothing but the highest praise for him. After we made our deal, I had to go to Africa for awhile to work on a show, and while I was gone, Fred worked out a deal that saved me about 50% of the cost of doing the one-inch masters. After we started doing them, he came in and actually supervised the mastering of the first episode to make sure it looked the way it did on film. All this out of his own generosity; he gets nothing extra for this. And then when I had trouble with the film not being properly cleaned, and they claimed that the trouble was on the original negatives and it wasn't their fault, Fred got real angry with them. He went down to them, and it's a long trip for him to Burbank, and he showed them personally that the trouble was just dirt that they should have cleaned off, and had them re-do it. He's given a lot of his time and effort. He's been wonderful!"

Unfortunately Ladd has not been in a position to help sell GIGANTOR videos. Wheeler alone had only been able to afford to have two cassettes made so far, as of 1989. Volume One contains episodes 1 through 3; Volume Two has episodes 4 through 6. Wheeler first attempted to sell them by mail order, but the number of orders received did not cover the cost of ads in the film collectors' magazines. He next tried to sell GIGANTOR through a national video distributor.

"A lot of the reaction that I got from those distributors that showed any interest in GIGANTOR at all, was that I was putting too much on each tape. I have three half-hour episodes for \$14.95. They also said that I don't have a flashy enough package. My video sleeves are illustrated with stills of Gigantor and the main characters, which make it obvious that these are black-and-white cartoons. That's primarily because I had thought of GIGANTOR's appeal as being to the nostalgia market, like to the people who collect videos of THE THREE STOOGES. But the nostalgia for GIGANTOR isn't big enough to be worth these distributors' time. They all insisted that these were cartoons and they would have to be marketed to children.

"They also wanted to change the package to a full-color painting of a more dramatic Gigantor that would make him look like a modern, Transformer-type TV cartoon. I think that would be deceptive, that the public would see a full-color drawing and think that these are color cartoons. I showed the first video to

my five-year-old nephew, as kind of a test, because some people say that GIGANTOR is too dated, it won't play to kids anymore. He was riveted! He watched it over and over and over again. What I realized is that, in comparison to what he sees on TV right now, GIGANTOR has a lot more action and a more involved plot. They're simple enough that a child can understand them, but the characters act with more intelligence and awareness than in most TV cartoons today. And the idea of a young kid owning a real robot is really exciting to a five-year old kid. He didn't seem to be the least concerned that it [wasn't in] color. He's probably watched [the first tape] thirty times by now. So he certainly wouldn't complain if the package had been misleading.

"I just don't like the idea of putting GIGANTOR into the same category as those cheap, low-quality videos that are designed to be seen only a few times before they wear out. I want to make GIGANTOR permanently available for its old fans, and for the TV and animation historians who take it seriously.

"I can't afford to bring GIGANTOR back as a public service; between the two volumes, with 500 copies each, I've invested about \$7,500 just in production costs. That means there are 52 GIGANTOR episodes that I have the rights to, but . . . I can't spend any more money on [releasing more or on] advertising, so the old fans that I've made the videos for don't know that they're available."

Even more frustrating is that there are unauthorized GIGANTOR tapes on the video market that are better publicized than Wheeler's authorized editions. "These bootleg tapes are hurting my chances. The average consumer or collector doesn't know the difference, so if he sees a GIGANTOR tape advertised, he doesn't know if it's the copyrighted one or not. And if he buys it and it's one of the 20-generation copies, he's going to say, 'This is really bad,' [and isn't] going to want to pay for one of my tapes, because he won't realize that it's made from the original masters and is of much better quality."

During the time that this interview took place, Scott Wheeler has turned over the marketing of his two GIGANTOR tapes to Books Nippan in Los Angeles. Books Nippan is the major retailer of Japanese animation videos in North America, and it can make GIGANTOR accessible to the animation collector. But Books Nippan distributes only inside this very specialized

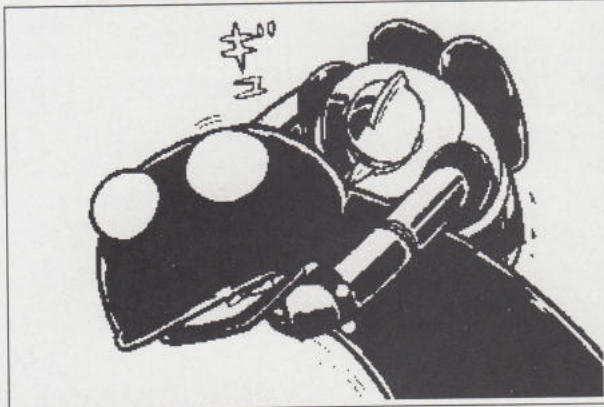
market. The majority of the GIGANTOR fans of 20 years ago are part of the general public today, and unlikely to learn through the standard video retail outlets of the existence of the GIGANTOR videos.

Wheeler is gradually making contact with other GIGANTOR fans who are at least offering moral support. "There have been suggestions or requests that I should try to start a GIGANTOR comic book or toys or models. Unfortunately, there's not enough potential money in GIGANTOR for any big company to be interested in buying the rights, and I don't have any money to invest in doing it myself. But some fans have suggested . . . a limited-edition item for hobbyists and collectors, and I'm looking into that.

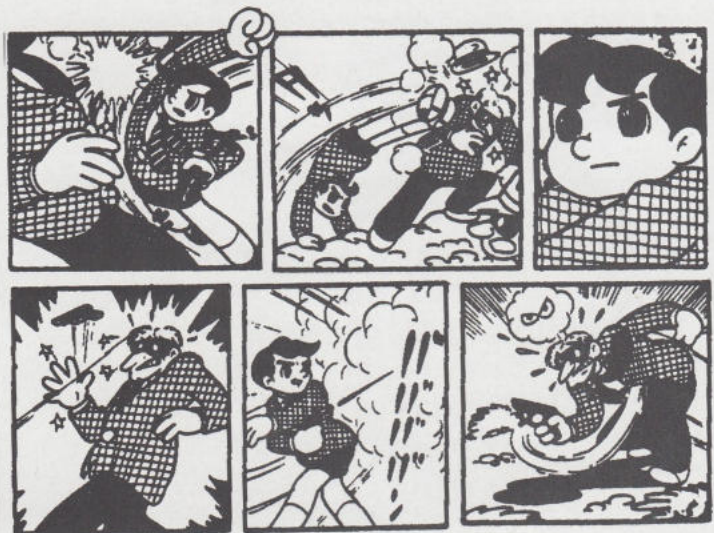
"People are also telling me about the 1980 GIGANTOR color remake in Japan [set in the 1990s—ed.]. My first thought is that if I can't afford to do anything more with the GIGANTOR rights that I already have, I sure can't afford to buy a completely different GIGANTOR in addition to the expense of dubbing it into English. But [its producer] TMS (Tokyo Movie Shinsha) has an office in Hollywood now and has been making animation for American TV. So it will at least be easy to talk with them."

Scott Wheeler enjoys hearing from other GIGANTOR fans and anyone who is interested in helping support and promote the videos' existence. "Books Nippan sells to a lot of comics shops, so if people will tell their local comics shop that they can get official, fully-authorized, high-quality GIGANTOR videos from Books Nippan, that will help. If anybody lives near a video store that stocks a particularly good selection of animation, tell them about GIGANTOR. Every bit will help to bring GIGANTOR back!"

The series emphasizes that Shotaro (right panel) is a 12 year old boy detective. He regularly carries a gun, worn in a shoulder holster.



all art © Mitsuteru Yokoyama



IRONMAN NO. 28 aka GIGANTOR (TETSUJIN NIJU-HACHI GO) A Fuji TV Presentation of a TCJ Production; Created by Mitsuteru Yokoyama; 83 + 13 half-hour b&w episodes; Broadcast from October 20, 1963-May 25, 1967; Timeslot: Sundays 8pm-8:30pm (episodes 1-25), Thursdays 7pm-7:30pm; AMERICAN VERSION: Produced by Delphi Productions; Executive Producers: Fred Ladd & Lou Singer; Theme Created by Lou Singer & Gene Raskin; Music Coordinators: Dan Hart & George Craig; Title Design: Robert E. Lee; Supervising Editor: P.A. Zavala; Sound Recording: Titra; Voices: Billie Lou Watt, Peter Fernandez, Gilbert Mack & Cliff Owens.

The GIGANTOR videos are available from Books Nippan, 1123 Dominguez St., Suite K, Carson, CA 90746. Books Nippan's price is \$19.95 per tape, to cover its own profit and Wheeler's, plus a postage & handling charge of \$2.50@ or \$3.00 for both when ordered together. Wheeler's arrangement with Books Nippan is that he will not compete with them while they are acting as his agent, so he is no longer personally selling the videos.

Markalite *Interview*



Stalking Dogora the space monster

In a film industry where most of the caucasian actors are anything but, Robert Dunham is an amazing exception. Not only has he costarred with the likes of Godzilla, Mothra, Dogora and The Green Slime, but from 1956 to 1974 became one of the top stuntmen in the Japanese movie industry. He test drove and raced Japanese cars for twelve years, as well as being an extremely prolific writer. His subject matter has ranged from automobiles and car racing, to the environment, to erotic fiction and sexual self-help articles. He speaks fluent Japanese, and when the Japanese auto industry first broke in the United States, he became a foreign correspondent for many car magazines. But, most of all, Robert Dunham is a really nice guy who is very proud of his association with Japanese SF/Fantasy films.

INTERVIEW BY KIP DOTO
EDITED BY BOB JOHNSON

How did you get started in Japan and how did you get involved in these films?

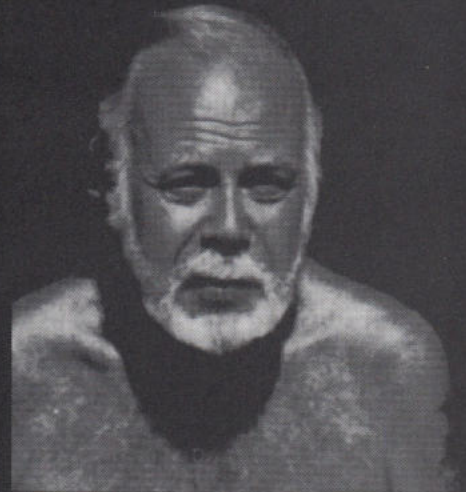
Initially I didn't have any idea I would get into Japanese films because I didn't speak the language. I was in the Marine Corps during the Korean War and went to Japan on R&R, fell

in love with the country, came back to the states and thought 'Geez, I'd really love to be able to get back to Japan.'

I tried kicking around LA/Hollywood for awhile...and accomplished nothing. I'm talking about after the Korean War, '54/'55. Everybody was out of work. Nobody was getting anything, unless you were a Robert Redford/Tab Hunter type and somebody picked you out of a crowd. There was nothing available and I thought 'Jesus, I'll go back to Japan.' Not particularly with the idea of being an actor, because I knew nothing about the industry over there. But, I went back, completely not knowing what I would get involved in. Except that I wanted to get back to Japan, marry a Japanese gal and start my new life.

ROBERT DUNHAM

THE FOREIGNER WHO KEPT JAPAN SAFE FROM MONSTERS!



*Robert Dunham,
Toho's favorite foreigner
circa 1990*

So, I went back in late '55, early '56 and I got involved in all sorts of businesses: import/export, teaching English, selling educational books and so forth. Nothing at all to do with the movie industry. Then I went to a Japanese language school for a year and a half. Five hours a day, five days a week, because I figured if I didn't learn the language regarding anything I wanted to do, then I would be out of the ballgame.

Many of the foreigners that went over there were employed by IBM or Coca Cola or some other American company. Most of them never bothered to pick up the language. But being out in the field, so to speak, I felt that I had to learn Japanese, so my main thrust the first year and a half I was back there was just study Japanese and get the feel of the country. I didn't have the chance to meet many people in the foreign community so I got involved in a group called the **Tokyo International Players**. They put on four plays a year mainly for the foreign community. The British Embassy, the American Embassy and several of the English speaking embassies would partly sponsor this group of players. It was a big social event for the foreign community to get dressed up and go to the theater. It would be comparable to say "Little Theater" here in the States. I got involved in that group and after my first audition, I got the lead in a play called "**Laura**," you might remember the movie. **Dana Andrews** was the detective and **Gene Tierney** was Laura. I played the detective. One night as we finished, a guy named **Ed Keane** came backstage unexpectedly. He was an American. He handed me his card and asked 'How

would you like to be in some Japanese Movies?' and I said 'Geez, I've been thinking about it.' And he replied 'I have this agency, the **Kokusai Agency**,' and 'would you like to come out for a screen test?' That's how I originally got involved in the whole film scene. If I hadn't been involved in **TIP** I may never have gotten a break in the Japanese movie scene. [Ed Keane also played the Mayor of Newkirk City in **MOTHRA**-ed.]

I backed into it, so to speak. I wasn't thinking 'well hell, I'll just go over and show myself around.' I didn't even know there was an agency for foreign talent. So after I'd been in three or four stage plays, there were write ups and reviews in the newspapers and this is when, I guess, this guy was looking for someone who could act, rather than walk on a scene. So he snagged me from this semi-professional group. From there, I got introduced to the other studios, and eventually worked for most of the major studios, **Toho**, **Toei**, **Daiei**, **Nikkatsu**... **Kokusai** would say 'we got this guy, he can speak Japanese, he can stand in front of a camera and say his lines correctly in Japanese or English.' And then it just mushroomed from that initial introduction.

The non-Japanese players in most of these films did not seem to be real actors. Were they businessmen who were in the area at the time?

A lot of the people who were registered with the agency [**Kokusai**] would come over to see Japan, they weren't actors, and some friend of their's would say 'hey, you can get fifty bucks a day as an extra or a

walk on or a one liner and the agency would get their number so if they needed somebody they would call up and sometimes be desperate because they couldn't find anyone. So a lot of times it was more of a lark for these people, back or whatever. They were businessmen or someone you'd meet in a hotel lobby and some bird dog from **Kokusai** might grab them and say 'hey, you wanna be in a movie?' And just grab 'em up! So the person could say 'I went to Japan, I was going to see Kyoto and so forth, and all of a sudden this guy walks up to me and I got a part in a movie! So, you're right, alot of these guys weren't actors and were snagged off the street, so to speak.

I noticed in the Japanese versions of these movies, many of the caucasian actors would speak with a German or European accent with Japanese subtitles...

One of the guys who was a partner in the agency was a guy named **Johnny Yusef**. He played everything. He helped direct some scenes, he was an actor, he owned half of this agency. He's Turkish. Most all the guys you took as German, these were Turks, and many were his family. Any time there was a speaking part and they needed somebody, he'd often use his family, his brother, his uncle, his wife or whomever. So the German-type accents you hear are actually Turkish. All these Turks also spoke



fluent Japanese because they were born in Japan.

There were one or two guys, I think, in **GODZILLA VS. MEGALON**. There was a scene where I was at a computer board and there's a guy standing next to me, he was German. Nice guy. He was in Japan teaching and studying the martial arts. [The actor's name was Rolf Jessup-ed.]

What I would like to do is go over the four movies I'm sure everyone reading this magazine would be interested in.

Yes, with all the others, most of the

time I played a heavy, like a dope smuggler or an assassin or a kidnapper or military person.

*There's a detective film with Nick Adams, **THE KILLING BOTTLE**. Were you in that?*

No, but I'll tell you a story about **Nick Adams**. I think he's the actor who committed suicide, overdosed or whatever. After I finished **Dogora**, the part where I played the insurance detective, **Toho** sent it to the States with me. They had a deal set up for a showing in Los Angeles. I met some of the

wheeler dealers of the film industry there. They sent me over as the lead actor. They were planning to do a series with this detective, and I was supposed to be cast in the series. The guy says 'OK, so he's OK in this film, but he doesn't have any name in the States.' And I lost the series to this **Nick Adams**. I didn't think he was that great an actor, but he had done **THE REBEL** series, so he had a name from TV.

*Do you have any remembrances from **MOTHRA**?*

I had a very small part in that. I played

"I was getting tired of using **ROBERT DUNHAM** as when it was pronounced in Japanese it came out 'Ro-bar-to Da-nu-ham-mu.' Not very macho or even sexy for that matter. At the time, Nick Adams was playing Johnny Yuma in **THE REBEL** TV series. Since I sort of looked like him...well kind of...and liked the shortness of Yuma, I took that for my last name. I had a son named Danny, so I took his first name. I learned later that Danny Yuma comes out close to 'Tane-uma' when pronounced in Japanese fast. The literal translation of 'Tane-uma' is 'Stud Horse.' As *tane* means *seed* and *uma* means *horse*. In my later films I went back to Robert Dunham as the name gave an image too difficult to live up to!"

a city official. When the crowd was being unruly because it [Mothra] was eating Tokyo Tower, and so forth, I was trying to calm the people down as I recall. I haven't seen that one in quite a long time.

Any remembrances of any of the stars?

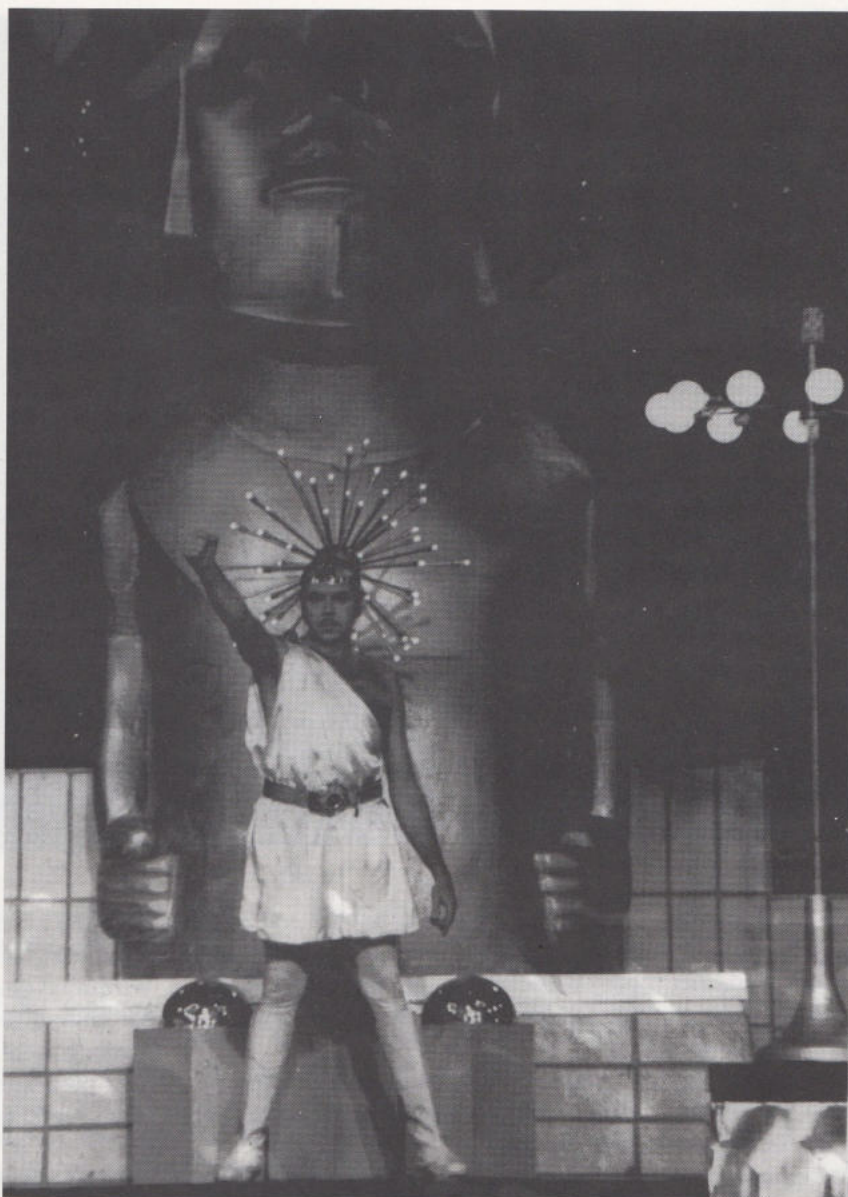
The Peanuts. Those were the two cute, little twins. They were a singing group and were very popular in Japan at the time because they were twins, and twins are very rare in Japan.

Was there anyone else?

Yes, **Frankie Sakai**.

After the film it so happened that Frankie and I were taking the same flight from LA to Hawaii once. I was kissing a girl goodbye at the LA Airport and he walked by, so I introduced him and so forth. When we got to Hawaii we split. He had his own group he was travelling with. I don't know how it happened, but we got on the same plane when we left Hawaii to go back to Tokyo, and I'm kissing a different girl goodbye at the airport. When we arrived in Tokyo, my wife was at the airport and she's kissing me hello! After we got off the plane, he took me aside and said 'Hey man, what's the secret?' He was a funny guy to work with, always turned on and English was no problem for him

I knew **Jerry Ito**, too. He played the part of Nelson, the evil promoter of the Peanuts. I knew Jerry personally, outside the film business. He's an Eurasian who did a lot of nightclub work...master of ceremonies, comedy acts, etc. Mainly because he was fluent in Japanese. When I first started acting he kinda looked down on me as a newcomer. But, when I started to take parts away from him, we rather drifted apart. He does a poor job of overacting in **MOTHRA**, but you have to remember that that's what the [Japanese] directors usually like when dealing with foreign actors.



How was it working with Ishiro Honda in MOTHRA and DOGORA?

Honda was the director. Perfect guy to work with. Very, very smooth guy to work with. He wasn't as meticulous as some of the other directors in Japan, if you're getting into the **Kurosawa** class, of course. Maybe I found him easy to work with because we spoke the same language. He would speak a little bit of English when there were other [non-Japanese] actors and sometimes I would be called over to help out when he'd say 'I can't get it through this thick guy's head what I want him to do!' So I would, for no extra pay, act as an interpreter sometimes when a film was being shot. This happened on many shoots!

In the case of a star from the States who could not speak Japanese, how would the director get his point across?

Bill Ross, who had a production com-

pany called **Frontier Enterprises** generally was involved in that. With many of the co-productions, he would have his hand in it. They would call him, whether it was **Nikkatsu**, **Toei**, **Daiei**, etc. because he spoke fluent Japanese. He would be involved in the business side as well as the production side.

I just got an interesting letter from **Bill Ross** in Japan, by the way, it just came in yesterday. He just finished a **Kurosawa** film called **DREAMS** a Warner Brother's picture with an 11 million dollar budget. **Bill Ross** was the Production Manager, he handled all the money. He said **Kurosawa** couldn't get a nickle unless he signed the check. Towards the end of last year, when the film was shot, he was working for the Warner Bros. Completion Bond Co., which guarantees that the film is going to be done. He

was working for them, but was directly working for **Kurosawa Productions**. He said he never had the opportunity to write so many million dollar checks!

He has his own production company now [in Japan] that makes cartoon animation. It doesn't mention anything about the U.S. market so far. But, he's still in the film production business, that's where I worked with him. He's doing a series for **Tezuka Productions**. He's going to Los Angeles about once a month and their doing voice-overs for a **Tezuka Production** [TV] series about the Bible. Being sponsored by an Italian TV Network and **NTV** in Tokyo.

He's just finished a contract with **DIC**, one of the largest animation houses in the U.S., and that started in 1984 and lasted until 1989. So, I guess he's been pretty busy.

Do you keep in touch with many people you used to work with over there?



I just keep in touch with, really personally, with Bill Ross, and his company name is Frontier Enterprises. A guy named **Cliff Harrington**, who works for him as a voice talent and also dubs scripts. When he gets a Japanese movie to dub into English, his wife, Michiko does the first translation, from the Japanese script, then Cliff Harrington sometimes helps to match the words to the actor's mouth movements for lip-syncing, getting the right number of syllables. So Cliff works for him [Bill

Ross], both as a voice dubber and in the same crew I was in. He's the only other person, because all the others are scattered, I'm talking about the foreigners now.

As far as the Japanese, did you ever keep in touch with any of the actors you worked with?

Not really, but alot of film people, if I was on the set doing a Toho film, I would walk down the street to get to a building where they were shooting on a particular set, they would say "Hi, Dunham-san." They might be working on another flick, but I knew them from a previous film. But, social activities while you're doing the movie itself, you go out after the production and get a couple of beers, but generally the Japanese actor keeps pretty much to himself. Although everything is compatible with the shoot, I've never had a problem working with anybody. No conflicts of interest, some guy thinking you're stealing his shot or whatever. That never comes up. Outside the production period of a particular picture, I don't know of anyone who keeps in contact. A lot of foreign actors come over there...I say actors, but I put that in parenthesis ...go over there for a couple of flicks and then go on. You know, they're travelling around the world and they need a few extra bucks. So they get a walk on part.

So I don't keep in contact. I went to the same body building club as Ken Takakura. We always chatted there, went to the snack bar and so forth. But, that was in that particular setting. I've been invited to premier parties, but after the picture all the actors prefer to go their separate ways.

Did you ever meet Eiji Tsuburaya, the SPFX Director? What were your impressions of him?

For the most part, the special effects were done on a completely different sound stage, where they had the monsters and all that stuff. You're shooting a film like DOGORA, and you go over to where they're doing the special effects and peek in, but most of the stuff, looking back now, except for THE GREEN SLIME, where the monsters were right there attacking the people, you weren't involved with the special effects as an actor. All the rest is done in a lab, like DOGORA, with the monster in the sky. We'd react, like "oh God, There it is!" but it was all done in the studio.

I had heard that Tsuburaya almost co-directed some of the films with Honda, because the special effects were so much a part of the films.

Yes, but he didn't do anything with the actors. As far as the characters and their



lines, that's all Honda. A lot of it is planned in advance, but I never personally saw them getting together and rapping heads. At the same time, you have two different teams shooting. What goes on behind closed doors with Honda and the special effects, doesn't involve you as an actor.

How did you wind up in GODZILLA VS. MEGALON?

As I mentioned, I had an agent in Japan, **Kokusai International**, and they got all my parts. **Bill Ross** was a quasi-agent, because when he was into a production, like **THE GREEN SLIME**, he was heavily into the production end of it. He would do all the local casting, so whenever there was a production he was involved in, I got a part. He got me the part in **FLIGHT FROM ASHIYA, MASTERMIND** with **Zero Mostel**, and I was a stuntman too. I did a lot of stuntwork in addition to my acting. Sometimes I would be contracted to a picture where all I did was the stunts. Other times I would be contracted as an actor, and they would have a car chase or motorcycle crash, then I would double for the Japanese guy and do the stunts. And, in **MAS-TERMIND**, I did all Zero Mostel's stunts.

What were your impressions of GODZILLA VS. MEGALON?

On that particular picture, it was more of a fun thing. Since I was usually playing a heavy, I received a lot of kidding when walking around the studio in my tights and toga and jeweled tiara! This was not a challenging part, and I believe that was the movie in which my car made more than I did! It was a really flashy sports car. It was a car I built specifically to rent to movies. It was a kit car on a Volkswagen chassis. It looks like a Model T Ford, and was called a "**Berry Mini T.**" The main actor used it in a car chase. They [Toho] rented the car, and only used it in a few scenes, but they couldn't let it go, and it's so much a day for the car. I think it was locked in for about three months. When I went down for my paycheck, there was one for me and one for the car, and the car made more than I did. They drove it through fire and did a couple 360 degree spins in it and I thought "gee, what the hell are they doing with my car?!"

Looking at the chase scene though, it seems like they're overly cautious with the car.

Well, they aren't like Hollywood. They

don't want to blow up a stretch limo for a three second action shot. In fact, when I would crash a car, they would get an old taxi and paint it up so that that car could crash. Then they would take a brand new car and lift it over with cranes and gently put it down on the roof, then the people get in it and they add the smoke and so forth, and the people would crawl out of the car. But, that wasn't the car that actually did the crash.

Were you involved with any of the stunts in MEGALON?

Toho had already contracted a stuntman by the name of **Gypsy Tamba** to do the driving. Gypsy and I raced stock cars together (off screen) for fun and profit. We belonged to the same racing club, **The 105 Miles Club**, which later took the more sedate name of **NAC (Nippon Auto Club)**. The original name came from the only requirement to become a member...hit a top speed of 105 MPH going around Meiji Park in downtown Tokyo. Quite a feat when you consider the location. Gypsy and I did stunt work together in numerous films, for some pretty good fees. Since Gypsy was the stunt coordinator on **MEGALON**, he had the authority to hire his own "boys" and got me involved in driving the motorcycle in the chase scene with two cars. There really wasn't much to the "assignment." Nothing really dangerous was asked for or even attempted. Running up and down an off-terrain setting, coupled with a few power slides in the dirt and a jump over a small car are not exactly considered "prime time" for a stunt driver. The leap over the car was accomplished by using a small ramp placed out of camera range on the other side of the car. The finale where the bike crashes into a shed was meant to be silly. In the film it looks as if the bike stopped and then just fell over with the rider...and that's what happened, whereas I wanted to do a lay-down and slide the bike through the little shack with maybe the whole thing bursting into flames. Often a stunt man tries to pad his part in order to warrant asking for more money for a certain stunt. I didn't do the last part of this scene where the driver is covered with dripping paint or cement after he falls down. Too slap-stick for me, and anyway, I had to get back to the studio that day to record and didn't want to have to clean up on the way.

What were your impressions of the director of that film, Jun Fukuda?





He wasn't as easy to work with as **Honda** was. I got the impression that he didn't have the confidence that **Honda** did. He was a little bit unsure, so a lot of times he would shoot a scene from three different angles, instead of using three different cameras, then he'd sit around for a half an hour and decide whether he wanted to take that one or not. **Honda** knew what he wanted and if he got it on film, that was it. A lot of times you would do a scene 10 or 12 times, and other times you'd do it on the first take. **Fukuda** looked like he was under some pressure, and lacking the confidence of **Honda**, this resulted in a lot of retakes that we, the actors, felt we had done pretty good. Sometimes he'd say OK, but wouldn't strike the set. Then he'd go home, think it over, and the next day we'd reshoot it. That was the impression I got of **Fukuda**.

*One of your best parts had to be that of Mark Jackson in **DOGORA**.*

Without a doubt it was my biggest role in a Japanese film. I enjoyed playing the part even though it was a bit difficult doing all the dialogue in Japanese. The dubbing job on this was terrible. I suspect it was done in the States by some real schlock outfit. I hope no one who sees this thinks that's my real voice!

How about the Japanese actors?

A lot of times they'd make three or four films and then disappear. Unless they are really, really established, like **Ken Takakura** or **Yosuke Natsuki**, he was the Japanese detective in **DOGORA**. As a matter of fact, I think he was in **BLACK RAIN**.

*He was also in **GODZILLA 1985**...*

But he had aged quite a bit (laugh).

How was he to work with?

He was a nice guy. We had a lot of fun. There were a few lines originally where he had to speak some English, so I was coaching him while we were waiting for the scene to be shot. We didn't do anything socially off screen, but he was a very pleasant person to work with.

*I liked the chemistry between you in **DOGORA**, the rivalry...*

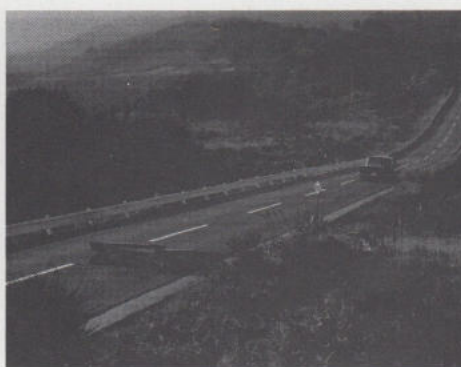
There was one scene when he comes down through the window, from the floor above into the room where I'm packing to get out and we have a little Karate scene there, and the last scene where he's saying goodbye at the airport...it's not just because it was written into the script, but we got along well off camera too.

Was there anyone else?

Akiko Wakabashi (the gang's moll) was one fine example of a sexy Japanese woman, but as far as I know she never got out of the mold of playing a sex-pot...even in the **James Bond** flick [YOU ONLY LIVE TWICE—ed.]. Dated her once during the filming but nothing ever blossomed. Damn!

Looking at the film, you tower over the Japanese





actors. Was this a problem?

I had to be careful, because of my height, not to steal a scene when the attention should be on somebody else. I never got called on it, but a few times I thought it best to be careful.

There weren't many American actors as main characters in the earlier Toho films, unless it was a co-production, so why was the character of Mark Jackson so prominent in DOGORA?

That particular script called for a foreigner for that part.

Did you have much competition for the part?

For the role in DOGORA specifically, there was no other casting for the part, because I had worked with Honda before in some other movies [not of the Sci Fi genre, except for MOTHRA—ed.] and he said "I want that guy." So, I was cast without even an interview. Also, Johnny Yusef [of Kokusai] made a percentage, so he was in there batting for me. In the case of DOGORA, where I was requested, they knew I could speak Japanese and could handle the part, so there really was no competition.

You also did a movie for Toei, THE GREEN SLIME?

Not exactly a super-flick, but it got some press when it was released here in the States. I played the part of Capt. Martin...third lead to **Richard Jaekel** and **Robert Horton**. They were OK to work with, but I always got the feeling that because I was a local hire and not from Hollywood, that I was a rather second class actor in their opinion. Off screen they both stayed pretty much to themselves, but I had no problem working with them on the set.

There wasn't too much heavy acting in this. In fact, both of them would probably like to forget the whole experience. I think they took the parts just for the ride to Japan. I've never seen **Bob Horton** in any other film, but **Jaekel** seems to always have work.

He's the Police Chief in the **SPENSER FOR HIRE** TV series.

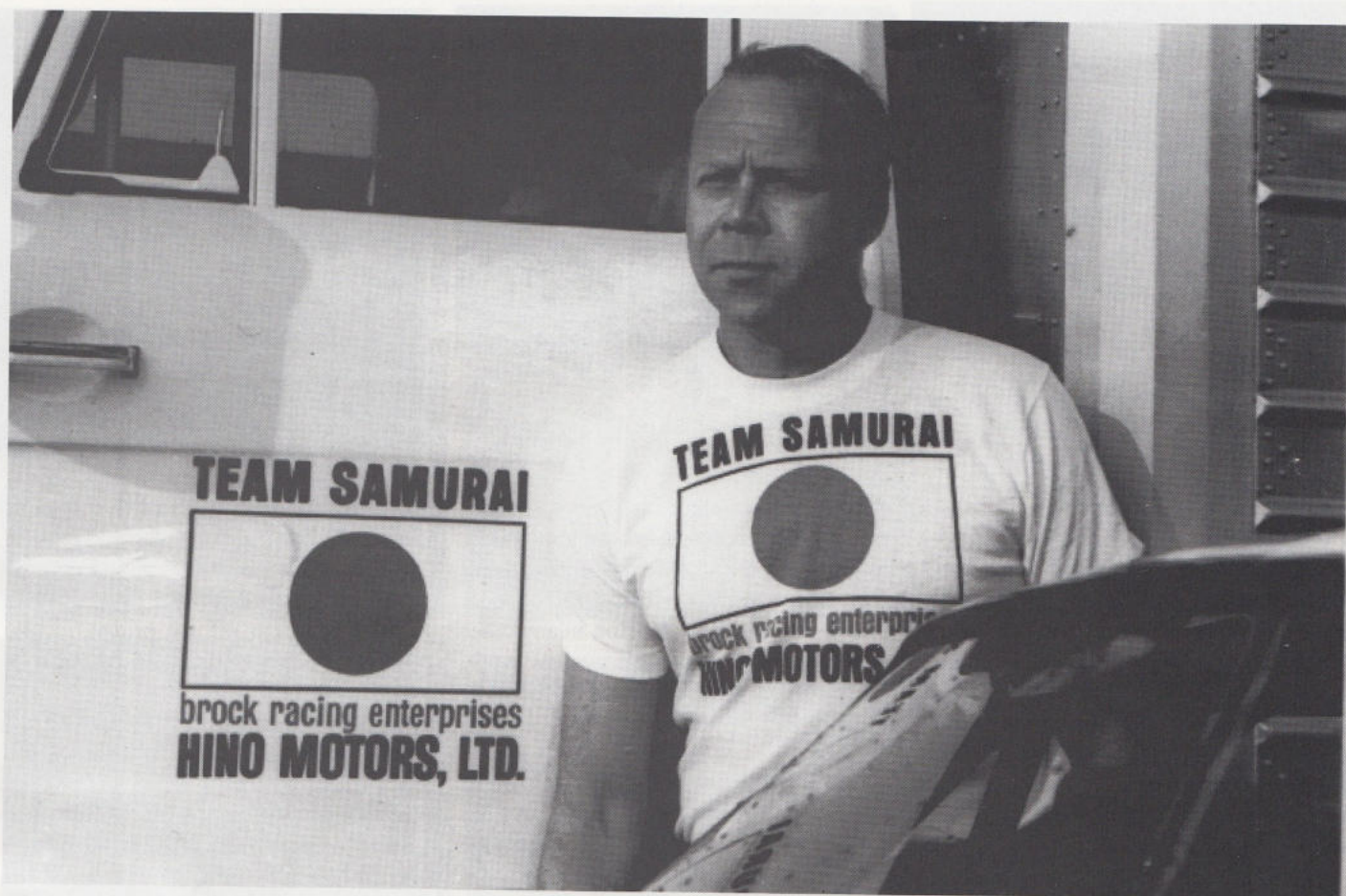
Let's talk a little about your stunt work.

Most of it was chase scenes, but I did work with a group called "**The Gypsies.**" These were all maniac Japanese guys. I got into stunting through my racing for Toyota (Hino Division), where I met all these guys who told me they were into stunting. No one knew I could do any stunts, because I

was billed as an actor, so when this came around, I started working with the Gypsies. They were all crazy and would do anything. "Jump off a building?" "Sure!" "Want to drive your car off the bridge?" "No problem!" and I enjoyed working with them.

As a matter of fact, I just saw **DAYS OF THUNDER** yesterday. Two of the stuntmen in the credits are guys I worked with in Japan. One was **Cary Lofton**, who I worked with in **MASTERMIND**. I can't believe he's still stunting! He was in his fifties when he worked on **MASTERMIND** in the late sixties, so how old is this guy? In his seventies? And he's driving stock cars in this film!





You also mentioned you were a race car driver?

Yes, I raced professionally for 12 years. I raced for **Toyota** for six or seven years, then I raced for **Datsun** for another five or six years. I raced up until the time I left Japan in 1974. Did I tell you the story about the guy who came over from Hollywood?

No, you didn't.

When I came back to the states, because acting was not a fulltime job. In other words, you weren't working every week. So I interspliced it with racing. Toyota wanted me to come over to the States, they were building a car called the Contessa. This was back in the mid-sixties, and it was a rear-engine car which was designed in Italy which they [Toyota] wanted to test in the American market. This was when Toyota was still building stuff that looked like it was out of a shoebox, this was before they really got going in the U.S. They wanted to get exposure in the States through racing. So I went to Los Angeles and contacted a few people in the racing business. We got a \$450,000.00 budget [from Toyota] to run a racing team for a year, so we had plenty of

money. We raced all over the West Coast, and as far east as Denver. We were a factory team, called "**Team Samurai**." Nobody knew we had all this money from Toyota to run these cars but, we had big vans, pit crews and the whole bit!

When we were building the cars in El Segundo, which is right down the beach from Los Angeles, one day this little guy walks into the shop and says "I'm going to the cinematography school at UCLA, I have to do a twenty minute film for my thesis, and I want to do it about racing." So, we're a bunch of weekend warriors and he wanted to go around and get us welding the frame, building the engine, and so forth. We said "Sure, why not, bring your camera in!" So this guy practically lived with us for a month. Went to the races, took all kinds of footage and such. I got talking to him and I had a film in the can which I brought to the States to try to sell to TV called **THE TIME TRAVELLER** which had been shown once in Japan. It was a Twilight Zone-type picture without special effects. He said "I have all this film, and I'm going to have to put it all together!" And I said "Look, why don't you come up to my apartment. I got a film here that I did and we'll look at it

and rap around about it for a while." So I showed him the complete film and I'd stop and say "See, if you want a closeup of this guy, to get a reaction shot..." and I'm coaching this guy on how to put a film together! Once he finished the film, I never saw what he put together, and I lost contact with the guy.

Then I'm back in Japan and I get a call from Los Angeles, and it was him. He said "I'm coming to Japan, I've got some great ideas, but I need some special effects and I understand it is pretty cheap to get special effects done in Japan." So I said "Yeah, sure, why don't you come over, I'll meet you at the airport and you can stay at my house if you want." And he thought that would be great. So I called **Bill Ross** and I told him I got this "Turkey" coming over from Los Angeles, and I don't have the connections that you do at all the studios and asked him if he could show him around. I didn't know if he had any money or not, but Bill said "Sure, I'll show him around, I'm not doing anything for the next week or so." So the guy arrives and I take him to Bill Ross, and Bill takes him around and introduces him to everybody that you could possibly imagine! He called me and said



"Well, I have to go back to the States, I made some contacts and I'm going back." So, Bill calls me on the phone and says "Geez, what the hell did you stick me with? This guy is out of his mind! He's crazy! I introduced him to all the right guys at the various studios, and they thought he was nuts! They thought I was nuts for even bringing him around!" So then I lost contact with the guy, and that was it. Turns out today, that guy was **George Lucas!** I could have been in on the ground floor!

When Ross recognized his name in **STAR WARS**, he said "Geez! What did you do to me?" And I said "What do you mean? You had first crack at the guy!" Bill thought he was nuts, and he probably was at the time for their [the Japanese] way of thinking. So I got a mark on the guy! I haven't kept in contact with him, but if I mentioned the name of the film we did,

which he called "**The Stainless Steel Carott,**" and mentioned Japan, he would remember me. But, I haven't called in that favor! I was waiting for a biggie!

What are you doing right now?

Writing. I just finished a screenplay about the Korean War, entitled "**Blessed Be The Damned.**" Now I've got to go out and sell it. I also have a stage play which I'm trying to get produced in Sarasota [Florida]. In fact, we have alot of little theaters here.

I have three books, including one called "**Keyhunter**", which is a blood-on-the-wall, splatter-type story. Every scene, somebody's getting killed. Also a love-story which needs one more rewrite which is called "**Suddenly It's Spring.**" If you picture Spencer Tracy and Katherine Hepburn, then the title is quite obvious. Not like **On Golden Pond**, but it's a love story about some older people who discover that

there is a spring out there. This could easily be a movie, and I have a few people in Hollywood who I have marks on, so I'll take it from there. . .

We wish the thank Robert Dunham for his valuable time and cooperation on this interview. And for the generous loan of his photos reprinted here. There were a lot of things he told us about that WE CANNOT PRINT; like the story about Linda Miller (KING KONG ESCAPES). . . But, sorry, we promised not to tell!

As of this writing, Mr. Dunham has returned once more to Japan for a "short vacation." Editor Bob Johnson related the news to Dunham that Toho was gearing up fo shoot a new Godzilla film this summer, to which Mr. Dunham replied, "It's just a vacation; unless I land a role in this new movie . . ."

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Bob Johnson
with
August Ragone

January 1st, 1991 will mark the 25th anniversary of ULTRA Q, the first in the highly successful "Ultra Series" produced by special effects master Eiji Tsuburaya's film factory, Tsuburaya Productions. July 17th, 1991 marks the 25th anniversary of the series that would set the pace for Japan's superhero craze, the original giant from the Nebula M78, ULTRAMAN! But no new incarnations had been forthcoming in the past 10 years . . . until now—the 1990s!

Throughout the last twenty years, at least 14 different Ultra-beings have come to the Earth at one time or another, to battle the evil monsters and/or sinister aliens who've threatened the existence of the human race. So far, eight Ultra Series have been broadcast on Japanese television, from ULTRA Q's debut to the arrival of ULTRAMAN 80 on television screens across Japan. There have been spin-offs, imitations, theatrical shorts, commercial endorsements, stage shows, reams of merchandise—the Ultra Series has become deeply entrenched in Japanese pop culture. George Lucas should be green with envy.

Aside from Toho's box office champ Godzilla, ULTRAMAN and its brethren are the most well-known characters in the world. Southeast Asia, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Philippines, Mexico, Central and South America, Puerto Rico, among others, have all been touched by the Ultra Series phenomenon—the poor old U.S. has only been graced by ULTRAMAN, released through United Artists Television (now owned by media master Ted Turner). If you were lucky enough to live in Hawaii in the early '70s, you may have been able to watch ULTRA SEVEN, and a horde of other Japanese superhero TV programs.

So, in honor of the 25th Silver Anniversary of the Ultra Series, we present synopses of the most famous Japanese SF/fantasy teleseries of all.

All photos in this article are
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THE ULTRA SERIES

25 Years of Science Fantasies from



"For the next thirty minutes, your eyes will leave your body and arrive at this strange moment in time..."

ULTRA Q (URUTORA Q)

January, 2-July 3, 1966

28 episodes

Produced in B&W, ULTRA Q can be considered a Japanese hybrid of "Twilight Zone" and the "Outer Limits." The series featured very literate scenarios, often exploring areas untouched by the theatrical works done at the company's older cousin Toho, and showcasing special effects that were equal to Toho's. Even with the show's core being heavily SF, it didn't lack the monsters and aliens that are required to keep Tokyo busy.

Jun Manjome (Kenji Sahara), an aviation pilot and amateur SF writer, is joined by Daily News Photographer Yuriko Edogawa (Hiroko Sakurai) and Jun's Hosokawa Air Service partner, Ippai Togawa (Yasuhiko Saijo), as they investigate strange phenomena and raging monsters throughout Japan. They are occasionally accompanied by the internationally renowned scientist, Dr. Ichinotani (Ureo Egawa).

One particularly excellent segment, episode #5 "Pegira Appeared!", finds Manjome and an Arctic team trapped and threatened by a deadly giant mutation. With suspense and tension at its peak, the monster is ward off within a hair's breadth of killing the entire team. The story combines the best elements of THE THING FROM ANOTHER WORLD and the opening sequences of THE BEAST FROM 20,000 FATHOMS, yet has its own unique atmosphere, making it one of the best monster-based episodes of the series.

Although the tone of the series was serious, with comedy relief kept to a happy minimum, there were excellent episodes that explored the more whimsical sides of the genre—such as episode #15 "Kanegon's Cocoon," about a greedy young boy, who, becomes a monster that must eat money in order to survive.

This immensely popular series set the stage for the next in the "Science Fiction Special Effects Series" . . .

Tsuburaya Productions



"I am a being from the Nebula M78..."

ULTRAMAN (URUTORAMAN)

July 17, 1966-April 9th,
1967—39 episodes

This was the first project from Tsuburaya Productions to feature a giant superhero—in full color, no less.

A policeman from the "Land of Light" is on a routine mission to escort the monster Bemura to the "Space Graveyard" (also called the "Monster Graveyard" in US episodes). Somehow, the monster's travel-sphere goes off course, and Bemura tries to escape to Earth, with the policeman in hot pursuit. During the chase, the being's sphere collides with an Earth vehicle piloted by

Hayata (Susumu Kurobe), a member of the Scientific Investigation Agency ("Science Patrol"); he is killed in the impact. Contrite, the alien does what it can for Hayata, combining its being with that of the Earthman, thus restoring the human's life. To ensure peace on Earth, the alien gives Hayata the "Beta Capsule," a device with which he can transform into the hero—Ultraman!

The Science Patrol is an international organization concerned with the investigation of and defense from unnatural phenomena on Earth. The Japan HQ is manned by Captain Mura (Shoji Kobayashi), Ito (Masaya Nihei), Arashi (Sandaiyu Dokumamushi), and Fuji (Hiroko Sakurai). With Ultraman around, you know that most of the unnatural occurrences have to do with giant monsters! Hayata, a Science Pa-



trol member, is right in the midst of the action, always there to save the day as Ultraman. But the intervention of the silver giant never made the Science Patrol obsolete, as demonstrated in several episodes, especially #37 "The Littlest Brave," in which the monster Geronimon attempted to resurrect all of the monsters that Ultraman had defeated in the past; though Ultraman finally overpowers the creature, it is a new weapon invented by Ito that disintegrates Geronimon.

Ultraman can only fight for a limited period of time on Earth, since his powers diminish rapidly in our atmosphere. When depletion nears, a warning light (Colortimer) begins to blink from blue to red, signaling this message. All known Ultra-beings possess warning lights.

In the last episode, #39 "Farewell Ultraman," our hero's warning light is damaged by the evil alien "Zeton"—who had been in the midst of a siege against Science Patrol HQ. Ultraman is rescued by his superior, "Zophy," while Zeton is destroyed by the Science Patrol. This was the first time another Ultra-being was introduced.

Zophy separates Hayata from Ultraman, giving the human his own existence back—though he must be reunited with the spaceman again or he will die. Leaving the Earth, Zophy and Ultraman fly towards the "Land of Light," located in the M78 Nebula.

ULTRAMAN was a instant hit in Japan, winning an even higher viewership than *ULTRA Q*. "Ultraman" became the Japanese cultural equivalent of America's "Superman." Although all the series' epi-



Ultraman and the Science Investigation Agency



sodes had roughly the same format, there was quite a bit of character development and many excellent SF concepts were explored.

After ULTRAMAN came a wide variety of imitations, none of which could match it or its sequels for sheer quality or invention.

“The Earth in is Danger! Even now the hand of evil is stretching out from the myriad stars to seize the world . . .”

ULTRA SEVEN (URUTORA SEBUN)

October 1, 1967-September 8, 1968—49 episodes

Agent 340 is on an assignment from Nebula M78 to map the Milky Way. While doing so, he comes across the Earth, a planet that interests him very much. In order to study the planet more closely, he assumes the identity of “Dan Moroboshi” and joins the “Ultra Garrison,” an elite branch of the Terrestrial Defense Forces. But, when scheming aliens and evil monsters threaten the world, Dan uses the “Ultra Eye” glasses to become Agent 340—known on Earth as the honorary “seventh member” of the Garrison, “Ultra Seven”!

The Ultra Garrison is comprised of 6 members—Captain Kiriya (Joji Nakayama), Soga (Shinsuke Achina), Amagi (Satoshi Furuya), Anne (Yuriko Hishimi), Furuhashi (Sandaiyu Dokumamushi), and Dan (Koji Moritsugu).

Even in his human guise as Dan Moroboshi, Ultra Seven can manifest clairvoyant and telepathic abilities, both utilized

many times during the series, in times of either investigation or crisis.

Ultra Seven fought a wide variety of aliens and monsters, with all the skill of a professional soldier—not bad for a cartographer. In his battles, Seven’s most effective weapon is the “Eyeslugger,” a “boomerang” which detaches from his helmet; controlled by telekinesis, it can easily sever objects and hack opponents to pieces.

After successfully guarding the Earth, Seven’s energy supply nears depletion—if he does not return to his homeworld, he will die. This is bad timing, as the “Goth” aliens have begun a major invasion of Earth; neither Seven nor the Garrison are able to stop their reign of terror. In episode #49 “The Greatest Invasion in History” (conclusion), Dan, after being critically wounded in battle against the aliens’ monster “Pandon,” reveals his identity to Anne, the Ultra Garrison’s medical center technician and biochemist. She loves Dan and pleads with him to stay; but, ordered to return home by his commander, Dan/Seven must soon leave for Nebula M78. Before doing so, he determines to battle Pandon and break into the enemy’s HQ to rescue Amagi, who was captured by the Goths. With the odds against Dan, both Anne and his commander try to convince him that he is too weak. Of course Seven does go against Pandon, defeating it and saving Amagi before the Garrison smashes into the Goth base to destroy it. As dawn approaches, Ultra Seven streaks off towards M78, leaving Anne and the planet Earth behind.

ULTRA SEVEN had the most serious tone of all the Ultra Series, and is considered by many Japanese fans to be the best of

the eight. The character development and the SF drama are very important elements in ULTRA SEVEN’s scenarios—so much so that in several episodes, Seven only makes a brief appearance, while in certain other episodes, he appears for a battle that lasts less than a minute. Of course, this doesn’t mean that the series never showcased conflicts against monstrous beings . . .

ULTRA SEVEN demonstrates the best the Ultra Series has to offer. Although episodes from the other entries have been as good or better, ULTRA SEVEN cannot be topped for consistent quality and strong drama that can totally envelop the viewer in the storylines and the character dilemmas.

And even though it was produced in 1967, ULTRA SEVEN still stands up to any number of SF series produced today, Eastern or Western.

“It is the Age of Monsters . . .”
RETURN OF ULTRAMAN
(KAETTEKITAURUTORAMAN)
April 2, 1971-March 31,
1972—51 episodes

During a battle in Tokyo between the two monsters “Takkong” and “Zazarn,” auto engineer and racer Hideki Goh, while saving a young boy, is trapped beneath the destruction caused by Takkong. Though pronounced dead, he is revived for his valiant deed by another alien from M78. Since the new being assigned to the Earth resembles the original Ultraman, he acquires the same name—distinguished by the name “New Ultraman.” After his miraculous recovery, Goh is asked to join MAT (Monster



Attack Team)—an elite task force of the Terrestrial Defense Forces, formed to battle the many beasts that inhabit this “new age.”

The MAT team consists of Captain Kato (Nobuo Tsukamoto), Minami (Shunsuke Ikeda), Ueno (Wataru Mitsui), Kishida (Ken Nishida), Oka (Mika Katsuragi), and Goh (Jiro Dan). They employ special weapons and airships in order to deal with the continuing monstrous threats to Japan. Together, MAT and Ultraman create a formidable alliance, using teamwork to restore peace to the world.

Goh’s off-time hours are shown with his racing employer/mentor Sakata (Shin Kishida), Sakata’s sister and Goh’s love Aki (Rumi Sakakibara), and the youngest Sakata, Jiro.

New Ultraman’s powers and weapons are fairly similar to those of the original Ultraman, except that he wields the powerful “Ultra Bracelet,” which can be used as a burning, slicing energy (much like Ultra Seven’s Eyeslugger), and can be transformed into the Ultra Defender (a shield), the Ultra Lance, or the Ultra Cross. This weapon was given by Ultra Seven to

Ultraman as a catalyst against the space monster “Bemstar” in episode #18 “Enter Ultra Seven!”; Many of the later Ultra Series would employ this type of plot technique.

In this particular Ultra Series, it seems that Ultraman has the control over the transformation, signaling Goh when to do so. In early episodes, such as #3 “Takkong Strikes Back,” Goh acts rashly and arrogantly tries to become Ultraman but can’t, almost killing himself and Minami. Later in the series he seems to have gotten closer to Ultraman’s psyche and can change at will.

The first-third of the series was very well done, combining the best elements from both ULTRAMAN and ULTRA SEVEN. Beautiful special effects techniques and stunning camera angles appeared in almost every episode (some of which, including #1, were made by no less a talent than Ishiro Honda). The early monster designs and suit construction were excellent and added many memorable monsters to the Ultra Series. These monsters and the camera work, along with some very creative lighting also highlighted such episodes as #5 “Two Giant Monsters Attack Tokyo,” #6 “Monsters vs. MAT,” #32 “Duel at Dusk,” #33 “The Boy and the Monster Tamer” and #35 “Beware! The Light-Monster Priz-Devil.”

With very few exceptions, after episode #38 “When the Star of Ultra Shines,” the series became more juvenile, and at times a bit silly. #38 is considered, by some fans, the “last episode” of RETURN OF ULTRAMAN, at least in terms of story continuity. Therein, New Ultraman is rendered helpless by the alien Nakul and his bodyguard-monster Black King; the Earth is in dire straits and MAT is powerless to stop them. It’s up to Ultra Seven and the original Ultraman to bail New Ultraman

out of this desperate situation. Tragically, Sakata and Aki are both murdered at the hands of Nakul, and the show seems to be lacking for human drama afterwards. This is not to say that the later episodes were totally worthless; many of the scenarios stand out, such as #47 “The Targeted Woman” and the whimsical, Ultra Q-ish #48 “May I Take the Earth?”

Sloppy monster suits, outlandish designs, and less than stunning visuals added to the deterioration apparent in the last dozen segments of the show. All of this culminated in the last episode, “The Five Ultra Commandments,” in which Zeton, who defeated Ultraman in the original series, returns to menace the world again, as a pawn of the alien Bat. But this time, the once powerfully impressive alien looks pathetic—the suit appears cheaply and hastily slapped together, boasting none of the grace and detail of the original.

Needless to say, Ultraman finally won this time around, before flying off to Nebula M78. Jiro Sakata and an alien posing as Goh Hideki appear in an episode of the next Ultra Series . . .



New Ultraman (far left); the members of the Monster Attack Team



"It will be time when the Ultra Rings shine . . ."

ULTRAMAN ACE (URUTORAMAN ÉSU)

*April 7, 1972-March 30,
1973—52 episodes*

The "Yapools," an evil alien race from another spatial dimension, are at war with Nebula M78 and Earth. They hope to win this war with use of huge artificial "Superbeast" monsters and other interplanetary allies, hoping to corrupt the humans to their will. Assigned with the task of preserving galactic peace are the Ultra Brothers: Ultraman, Zophy, Ultra Seven, New Ultraman, and "Ultraman Ace," who are sent into battle against the Yapools. Because he has mastered his "Metallium" powers, Ultraman Ace is dispatched to the Earth to battle the Yapool invasion there.

Ultraman Ace merges with Seiji Hokuto (Keiji Takamine) and Yuko Minami (Mitsuko Hoshi), two brave souls killed by the superbeast Belocron during its attack on Hiroshima ("hokuto" means "north" and "minami" means "south"). Each are given

an "Ultra Ring"—when Seiji and Yuko touch the rings together at the proper time, both merge into the single being Ultraman Ace!

Yuko and Seiji become members of TAC (Terrible-monster Attacking Crew), which was assembled out of the ashes of the Terrestrial Defense Forces, destroyed earlier by the Yapools. From their underground base, Captain Ryu (Tetsuro Sagawa), Yoshimura (Mitsuhiro Sano), Mikawa (Keiko Nishi), Yamanaka (Junichi Okita), and Kono (Tadaaki Yamamoto) man the weapons and devices built to counter the Yapool threat.

Later in the series Yuko develops strange powers of molecular alteration and materialization. She discovers that she is a descendant of a race which once inhabited the Earth's moon. After learning this, she returns to her own dimension, leaving Seiji with both Ultra Rings.

Ultraman Ace possesses a wider variety of deadly rays and weapons than the earlier Ultrabeings. He also expands on the flips and leaps that had begun in RETURN OF ULTRAMAN—moves which would become trademarks of the Ultra Brothers.

Ace and the Ultra Brothers continue their struggle with the Yapool, fighting many bizarre and horrible creatures. From time to time, when an enemy or situation is too much for the Ultramen to handle, they are aided by Ultra Father, ruler of the Land of Light.

One of the toughest foes faced in ULTRAMAN ACE was the Yapool alien, "Ace-Killer," introduced in episode #13 "The Five Ultra Brothers Executed!". The Ultra Brothers are lured to a deserted planet with "Ultra Signs," telekinetic messages flashed in the sky. Too late they learn it was all a trap. Meanwhile, the superbeast

Barabbas is running amok in Japan, and nothing stands in his way; even the combined might of TAC is ineffective. Back on the planetoid, Ace manages to set himself free and returns to Japan to stop Barabbas.

Ultraman, Ultra Seven, Zophy, and New Ultraman are all placed on huge crucifixes by Ace-Killer, who then proceeds to steal the Ultra Brothers' powers. By hoarding these powers within him, Ace-Killer hopes to destroy Ultraman Ace once and for all. After a long battle against the superbeast, Ace is victorious and flies back into space to save his brothers. Ace-Killer is waiting, and almost wins the battle, until the other Ultra Brothers channel their remaining energy into Ultraman Ace. With these energies flowing in him, Ace uses the "Space-Q"—a ball of pure energy—destroying the Ace-Killer and saving the Ultra Brothers from crucifixion.

Finally, in the end, the combined forces of TAC and the Ultra Brothers are able to overcome the evil Yapools . . . but will they ever return to this dimension?

The first-third of ULTRAMAN ACE was fairly well done, with some highly imaginative scenarios. One of the best scripts of ACE was #4 "The 3 Million Year-old Superbeast Appears", the tale of a tortured artist; possessed by the Yapools, he is losing his sanity. Generally however, beginning with this series, the TAC uniforms, weapons, and vehicles started to become more outlandish, a trend which would grow larger in the next in the series . . .

"Ultraman No. 6 . . ."

ULTRAMAN TARO (URUTORAMAN TARO)

*April 6, 1973-April 5,
1974—53 episodes*



Space monster Bemstar from RETURN OF ULTRAMAN



This entry in the Ultra Series was reportedly the most expensive, but was nevertheless the most comical of the entire series. It tells the story of Ultraman Taro, and his struggle to manhood and maturity.

Earth is being attacked without warning by monsters and creatures that appear seemingly from thin air. ZAT, the Space Science Guard, is now in operation to protect the world from any and all dangers. The Japan branch is manned by Captain Asahina (Akira Nagoya), Aragaki (Takahiko Tono),

Kitajima (Hidehiro Tsumura), Nanbara (Toyoyuki Kimura), Nishida (Kiyotaka Mitsugi), and Moriyama (Noriko Matsutani).

Kotaro Higashi (Saburo Shinoda), a young boxer also striving to maturity, is stopped one day by a kind woman, who gives him a strange "badge," saying it is

a good-luck charm. Soon thereafter he joins ZAT, and enters into the defense of Tokyo against the space beast Astromons. His plane is destroyed by the monster, and in the twinkling of an eye, Kotaro is teleported to the Land of Light in the Nebula M78. There, "Ultra Mother" has assembled all of the Ultra Brothers to witness the "birth" of a new Ultraman. Combining the essence of this new being with the human soul of Kotaro, Ultra Mother, tells him that in times of need, he must use the "Ultra Badge" that

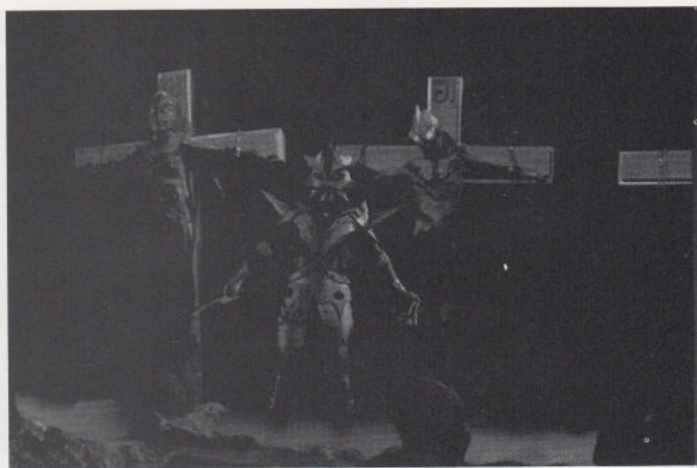
she had given to him back in Tokyo. He does and is returned to Earth—in the same instant he left—as "Ultraman Taro."

In tests to prove his maturity and his worthiness to become an Ultra Brother, Taro faces many old Ultra Monsters, such as Memphiras from ULTRAMAN, Eleking from ULTRA SEVEN, Bemstar from RETURN OF ULTRAMAN, among others. He must also fight a horde of the silliest monsters you'll ever see in an Ultra Series.

As with the two previous series, ULTRAMAN TARO starts out somewhat impressively, but within the first-quarter of the series, it rapidly gives in to plots that even Daiei would have rejected for its GAMERA films. Even the men behind the giant turtle series NEVER came up with such convoluted scenarios as you'll see in TARO. The series had its moments, but is better known for its outlandish monsters and stories, all obviously targeted at the very juvenile audience which had made GODZILLA VS. MEGALON so successful. This age group may be the reason why ULTRAMAN TARO was one of the most popular and highly rated entry in the '70s



The 6th Ultra Brother—Taro (left); ZAT—the Space Science Guard (right) from ULTRAMAN TARO



Ultra Series, though current fans of the Series have a different view.

In the end, Taro finally proves his maturity, and is granted the ultimate reward—release from the series! Ultra Mother comes to Earth and, mercifully, takes Taro back to Nebula M78.

"A man with the bright eyes of a lion..."

ULTRAMAN LEO (URUTORAMAN LEO)

*April 12, 1974-March 28,
1975—51 episodes*

The "Magma" aliens are plotting to invade the Earth, and will begin by sinking the Japanese islands with the twin monsters "Red Gilas" and "Black Gilas." Dan Moroboshi (Koji Moritsugu), alias Ultra Seven, has been sent to stop them. Seven finds the alien and its monsters quite a challenge and is almost killed. He is saved by an alien from the "Galactic Lion System," located in the L77 constellation. This alien, "Leo" wandered to Earth after an earlier Magma invasion destroyed his homeworld. Ultra Seven, not able to fight

because of a leg injury, and refusing to return to M78 due to the urgency of the Magma invasion of Earth, takes Leo under his wing, and christens him "Ultraman Leo."

He assumes the guise of Gen Otori (Ryu Manatsu), as he joins the ranks of MAC—Monster Attack Corps., with Dan Moroboshi (now walking with a cane) the crew's captain. The crew: Kuroda (So Kuroda), Shirakawa (Mieko Mita), Akaishi (Kenji Oshima), Momoi (Kyoko Aratama), Aoshima (Yuichi Yanagisawa), and Matsuki (Tomoko Ai). Together, they battle the Magmas, their monsters, and other aliens who threaten the Earth. With Dan acting as Gen's mentor, Leo is summoned by the use of the "Leo Ring."

Ultraman Leo later discovers that his brother Astra is still alive, and from time to time they fight together for the Earth. Then, it is learned that the legendary immortal being, Ultraman King, is not a myth after all, and he rallies forth to save Leo from alien trap. And of course, the Ultra Brothers get involved when the aliens' eyes get too big for their conquests.

These mighty forces are able to stop the

Magmas after a long struggle, but the battle has not yet ended. The evil Commander Black sends his horrible "bio-saucer" creatures and "Blackstar" monsters to crush all who oppose him in his mad quest to rule the galaxy. In the initial attack, MAC is destroyed and all of its members killed!

With anger burning in his heart, Ultraman Leo fights on with hope and fury against the horrors of Commander Black, eventually defeating him. The cost is heavy, but the Earth is safe once more, and Ultraman Leo flies off into space. . .

ULTRAMAN LEO is a return to a more serious Ultra Series, and a very violent one at that, spurred on by the trends evident in Toei's superhero series and the films of Bruce Lee and Sonny Chiba. Of all the giant superhero series of the period, LEO is undoubtedly the most violent one. This attempt at a more serious tone resulted in well-done scenarios and photography.

As ULTRAMAN LEO was being completed, the energy crisis of the mid-to-late '70s finally affected television as it had cinema; Tsuburaya Productions decided to give the Ultra Series a rest.



The contrasting monsters of *ULTRAMAN TARO*: the respectable *Cosmorikid* (left) and the ridiculous *Roadora* (right)



An Alternate Universe . . .

THE ULTRAMAN (ZA URUTORAMAN)

*Animated. April 4, 1979-
March 26, 1980
—50 episodes*

The rising costs of live-action production collided with a surge in popularity of animation in Japan (the "Anime Boom"), spurred on by the successes of SPACE BATTLESHIP YAMATO and LUPIN III, among others. Tsuburaya Productions decided to rewrite the Ultra Mythos to fit in with the format of this medium. The show was ultimately co-produced with Nippon Sunrise (now just Sunrise), later to be famous for its SF robot soap-opera MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM.

The Far East Zone of the Earth Defense Force has an orbital space station carefully monitoring several bright lights, taking the

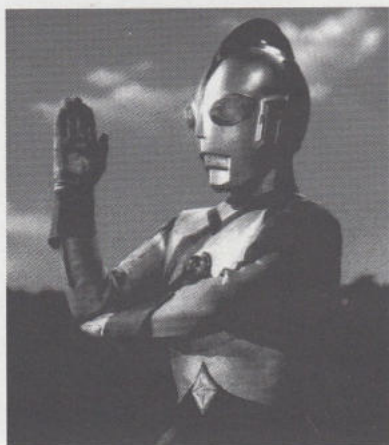
form of symbols appearing over the skies of such major cities as New York, Paris, and Tokyo—these are signs of the "Ultras" who had come to the Earth in ancient times. The EDF organizes a new tactical team to investigate these strange phenomena, the Science Garrison. Young pilot Choichiro Hikari takes a ship beyond the space station for further investigation, but after being overcome by a blinding light, he finds himself in another dimension, standing before an "Ultraman" from the planet U40. Desiring a journey to the Earth to aid mankind, the Ultraman requires a human linkage for which Hikari agrees to be the subject. Their identities are merged, so now Hikari can summon the Ultraman by using the star-shaped "Beam Flasher," which is placed on the forehead.

Known as "Ultraman Joneas" (aka "Joe"), he has a wider variety of power-rays than any of the live-action versions, due to the relatively higher versatility animation could achieve for lesser costs than live-

action FX. This animation was fluid at times, and limited at others, but on the whole was an enjoyable change of pace from the live-action Ultraman adventures.

A motion picture, adapted from the series, was released as a video cassette in the U.S. as THE ADVENTURES OF ULTRAMAN in 1982. A very well-done production put together solely for the U.S. market, it has not been available in Japan as of this writing. The film focuses more on the SF drama—Joe fights only one monster—with most of its running time revolving around Hikaru's journey to U40 and the Yamato-ish space war for control of the cosmos. Also available in the U.S. is a cassette of directly translated episodes, more in keeping with the spirit of the series' format, called ULTRAMAN II.

At the end of the series, Ultraman Joe's love for the Earth is finally realized when he is transformed into an individual human being. What could be next . . . ?



"The Ultraman Teacher" (left); the Utility Government Members (middle); the monster Crescent from ULTRAMAN 80



"He came to us from a star. . ."

ULTRAMAN 80 (URUTORAMAN ÉTEI)

April 2, 1980-March 25,
1981—50 episodes

Back to live action, back to basics, back to great special effects, back to fun! ULTRAMAN 80 got Tsuburaya Studios off to a great start for the 1980s.

Although there was never really an "origin" episode, Takeshi Yamato (Hatsunori Hasegawa) a junior high school teacher in Tokyo, is the human identity of "Ultraman 80," the newest M78 agent sent to Earth.

It is learned that many of the monsters that threatened humanity were the result of "negative energy" from human anger and hatred (an idea which scooped GHOSTBUSTERS). Yamato/80 feels that humans need to learn understanding and compassion, for this reason he assumes the task of teaching the young.

For 10 years, monsters have not appeared anywhere in the world, and most people show no concern over any future threats they feel will not happen anyway—most are not old enough to remember those events. The Earth Defense Army forms the Utility Government Members, an elite team to countermeasure the disasters that Captain Oyama (Gin Nakayama) feels will soon break loose. Enlisted into his command are Jyono (Eri Ishida), Harada (Daisuke Muso), Tajima (Shuhei Nitta), and later joined by Cheif Ito (Masaaki Daimon). Yamato also signs up, and finds his triple life something of a stress. Emphasis of his adventures later sways from his teaching career and leans towards his U.G.M. work, a transition taking place starting in the second-third of the series.

Yamato and the U.G.M. fight a variety of well-designed and -executed monsters. Gone are the silly and outlandish critters, back are the serious reptilian beasts and

sinister aliens. And of course, some favorites are back: Gahora and the Baltans from ULTRAMAN.

Later in the series, three other Ultra beings show up: Ultra Father appears to warn 80 of a crisis in #38 "Ultra Father's Voice Echoes in the Heavens." And in one of the best episodes of the series it's "80 vs. Ultra Seven," sort of. A young school soccer star is injured by a motorcycle gang, the leader being the brother of the boy's school rival. While in the hospital, the boy dreams of his hero, Ultra Seven, who comes to life via the boy's negative energy to track down and kill the motorcycle gang. This sets the stage for a battle royal between "Seven" and 80.

There was also a female Ultra added, Yurian, who appears in her Ultra form in the last two episodes—though she appears in the human form of Noriko Shirasaka (Yuriko Kosaka) from #43 on.

One cannot say enough about ULTRAMAN 80, about the stories, the characters, the special effects, the overall production values—ULTRAMAN 80 is great.

Unfortunately, the series came during the crest of the animation boom, and played opposite the late Osamu Tezuka's remake version of *Mighty Atom* (*Astro Boy*). This made it hard for 80 to live up to its potential in the TV ratings game, but it managed to survive for 50 episodes.

Movies, Shorts, and Beyond...

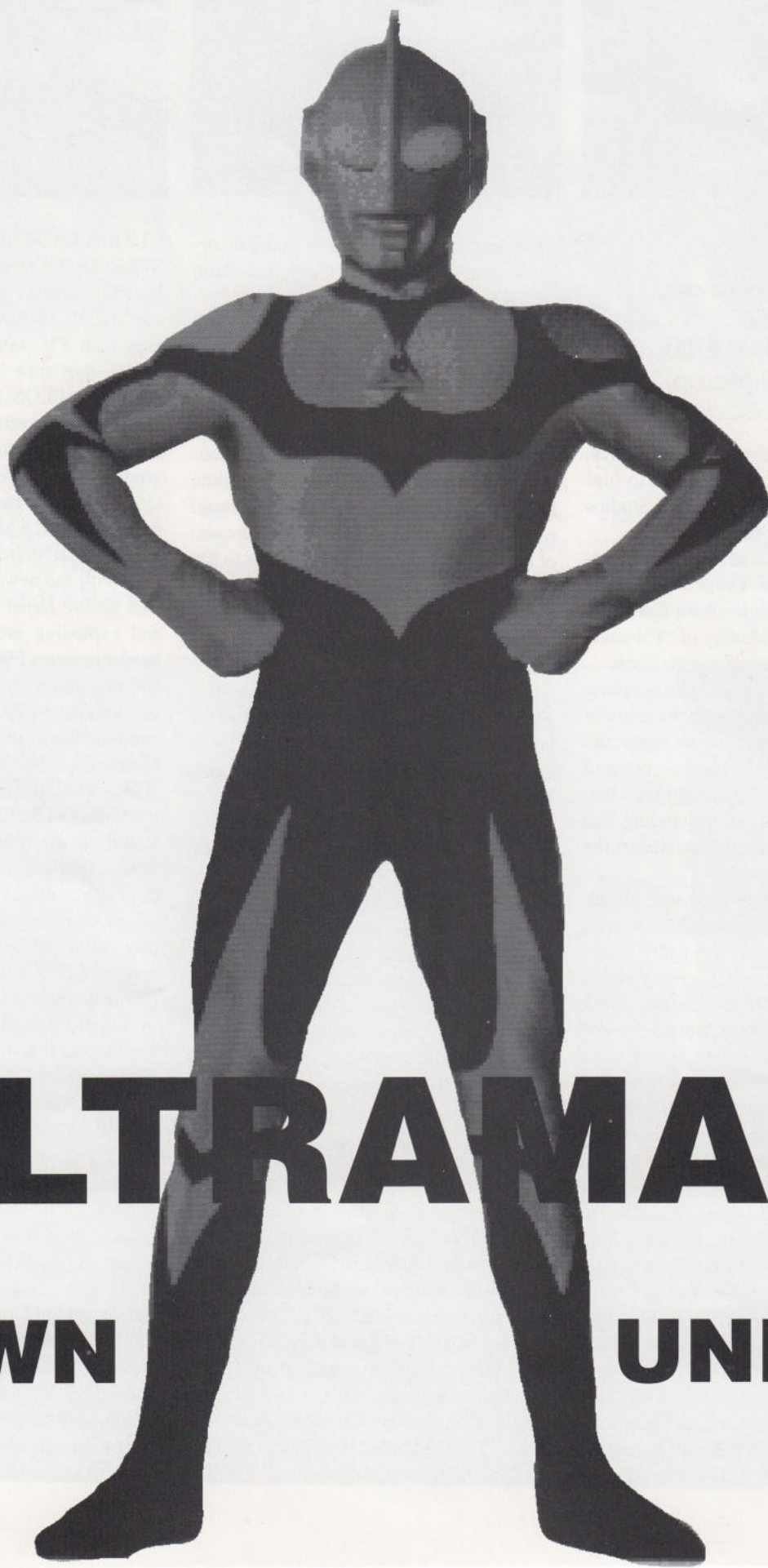
Over the stretch of the Ultra Series, there were a number of features which played theatrically, such as ULTRAMAN (1967; released as the cofeature for KING KONG ESCAPES, a compilation of episodes). TV episodes from RETURN OF ULTRAMAN, ULTRAMAN TARO, and ULTRAMAN LEO were put together as part of Toho's Champion Festivals. 1979 saw [director] AKIO JISSOJI'S ULTRAMAN (compilation), ULTRAMAN: BATTLE OF THE MONSTERS (compilation), and THE SIX

ULTRA BROTHERS VS. THE MONSTER ARMY (Japan/Thai coproduction). In 1984, we had both ULTRAMAN ZOPHY and THE ULTRAMAN STORY; there were also such TV shorts as ULTRA FIGHT (1970—big time wrestling, Ultra-style), ANDROMELOS (1984—"Mobile-Suited" Ultramen vs. bio-mechanical beasts), and a new animated movie and teleseries for youngsters, THE ULTRA-MAN KIDS (1986). Finally, the U.S. saw the animated movie ULTRAMAN—THE ADVENTURE BEGINS [reviewed last issue—ed.].

With the newest "Ultra-man Boom" first hitting Japan in the summer of 1988 and exploding into late 1989, there have been numerous TV specials, variety shows, and documentaries on the Ultra Series or just Tsuburaya Productions in general. A combination of these was presented in the March 23, 1989 broadcast of THE MEN WHO MADE ULTRAMAN (URUTORAMANO-TSUKUTA OTOKO-TACHI). Based on the best-selling book by Akio Jissoji, this was a recollection of the early days at Tsuburaya Productions, the people of vision employed there, and the trials and tribulations of creating and producing the original ULTRAMAN. Of course, the story revolves around Jissoji, his eccentric brand of direction, and how he turned stubborn producers and fellow studio staffers around to accept his vision.

In February of 1990, "Entertainment This Week" ran a feature on how Ultraman has taken over Japan, and how Tsuburaya Productions is setting its sights on North America. This was followed-up by several reports on CNN in January 1991, with another sales pitch of its myriad series to the U.S., emphasizing its catalogue of Ultra Series. And in Japan, production is gearing up for future productions; already we have two new filmic incarnations of ULTRA Q and ULTRAMAN (see elsewhere in this issue—ed.) in release currently—1990s Ultra Series Now! So stay tuned! ULTRAMAN IS BACK!

Markalite *Preview*



ULTRAMAN

DOWN

UNDER



Bob Johnson

From the Land Down Under which spawned YOUNG EINSTEIN, CROCODILE DUNDEE and MAD MAX, comes a new hero for the 1990s—ULTRAMAN! Ultraman? That's right! Our favorite superhero from Nebula M78 is back in an all-new teleseries coproduction from Tsuburaya Productions and the government-owned South Australian Film Corporation (SAFC)

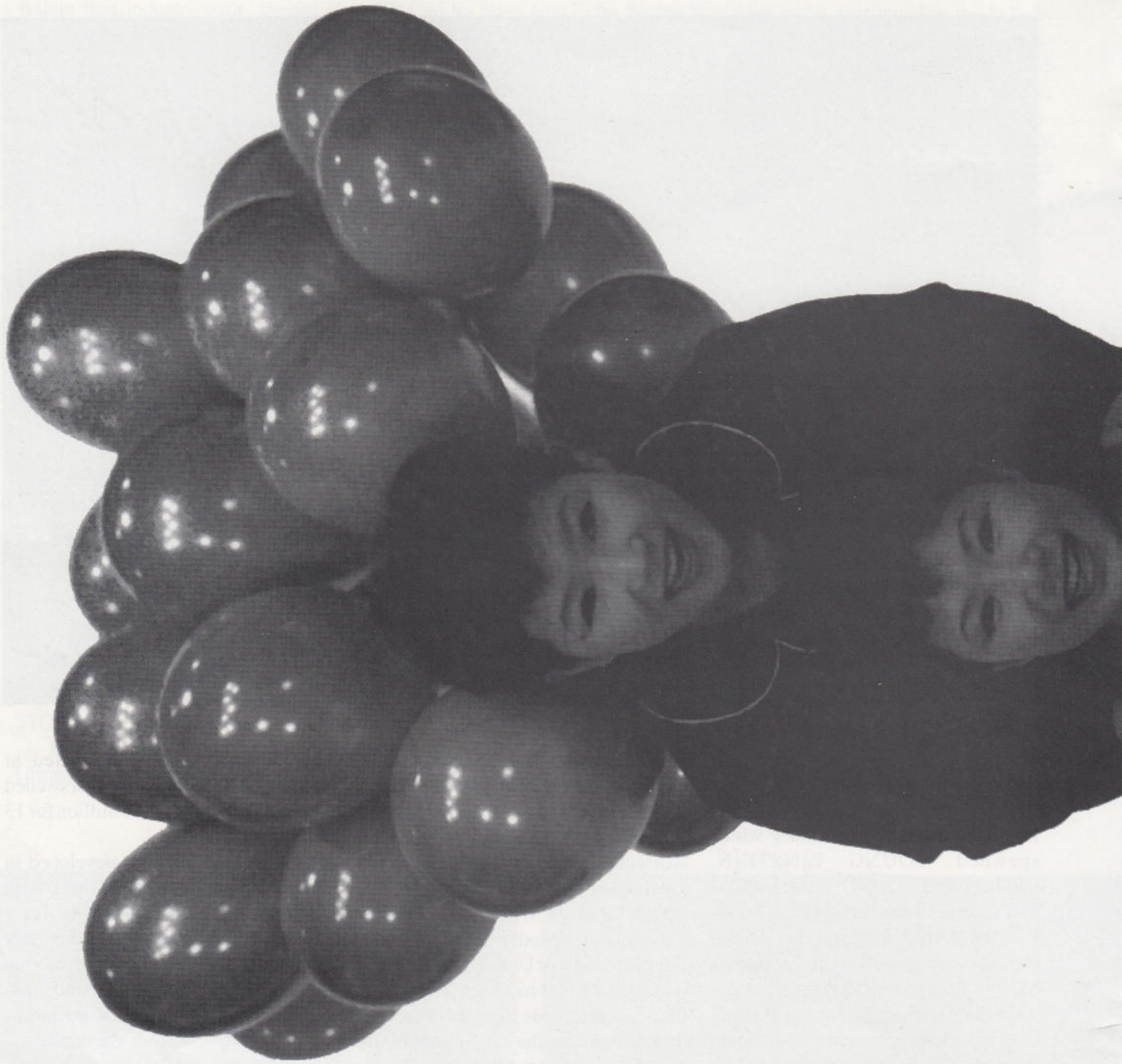
With a mutual agreement between Noboru Tsuburaya (Eiji's second son and current president of Tsuburaya Productions—ed.) and the SAFC's Richard Watson, a new Ultraman is now flying through the skies of God's Own Country! But why Australia? According to Noboru Tsuburaya, "In the past

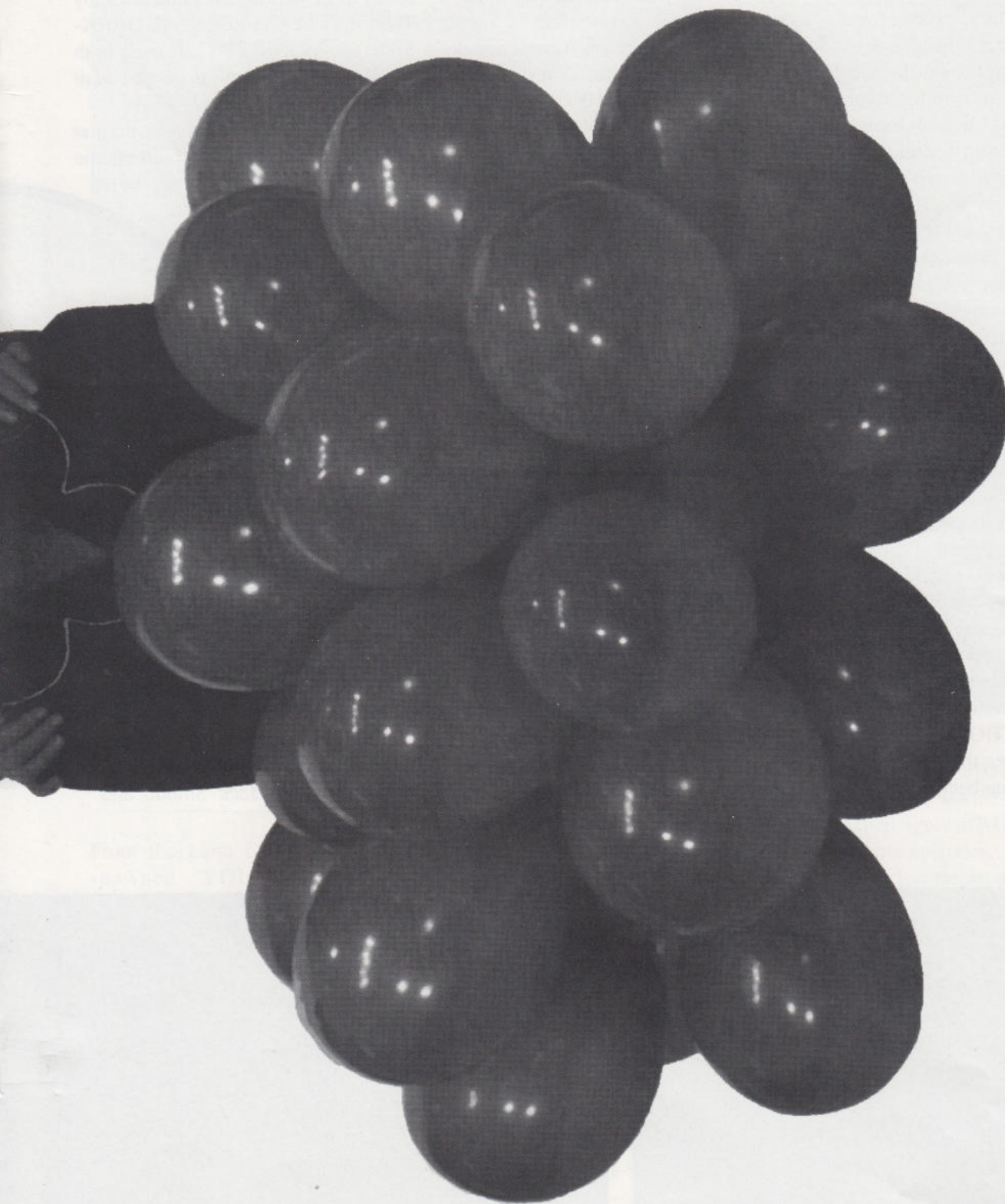
year (1988-1989—ed.), I have done an extensive survey of the World market and have determined that the place to begin the expansion of Ultraman is in Adelaide (Australia) through the South Australian Film Corporation." He added, "Richard Watson and his staff have shown an understanding and belief in the spirit of Ultraman and all that he stands for." It has been determined that in world-wide sales of merchandise, Ultraman is the third in popularity, trailing only Mickey Mouse and Charles Schultz's Peanuts characters. So why not try to expand into larger markets? This is being done by shooting the series—in English—with an "international" cast, rather than the usual all-Japanese actors. The special effects are state-of-the-art, combining classic film techniques with the latest in film-to-

video optical effects. Budgeted at AUS\$4.2 million the series' cost swelled to a final figure of AUS\$6 million for 13 half-hour episodes.

Story concepts were developed in Japan by a staff of veteran writers, with the scripts being Aussized by Terry Larsen. The designs for the new Ultraman—the monsters, the mecha, the set designs—were drafted and finalized by Tsuburaya Productions in Tokyo. The fabrication of the monsters, minature, and special effects shooting were all done in Adelaide, under the watchful eyes of Paul Nicola—who did the SPFX work on FLIGHT OF THE NAVIGATOR and TIME GUARDIAN—and Koichi Takano, a veteran SPFX expert who has handled most of the previous Ultra Series" episodes. The managing director of the SAFC

MARKALITE MAIDENs—Winter 1991





THE PEANUTS—Yumi & Emi Ito (1960)

stated that the production of **ULTRAMAN: TOWARDS THE FUTURE**, had been integral in developing Australian special effects film technology. "No doubt it will benefit the Australian film industry with special effects skills that didn't exist before."

The monsters, designed by Jo Yoshida, are brought to life by Nicola's crew through a combination of tabletop "muppets" and the time honored man-in-the-suit techniques. The puppets and suits match each other quite well, and the finished illusion is quite good. The designs themselves are reminiscent of the previous Ultra Series, but with a decidedly '90s twist.

The cast and crew of **ULTRAMAN: TOWARDS THE FUTURE** feature several fresh faces of the Australian film industry: Dore Krause who plays the hero Jack Shindo, Ultraman's alter-ego, studied acting at the Lee Strasberg Institute in Los Angeles, the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in Pasadena, and the workshops at UCLA. Dore is also a 14-year student of the martial arts. He trained in the style known as Wing Chun, under the eye of William Cheung, who was one of Bruce Lee's teachers. He has appeared in the films **HUNTING** and **KINK IN THE PICASSO**, and on stage in **WEST SIDE STORY** and **A CHORUS LINE**.

Robert Simper, the man behind the Ultraman mask, has been in a number of

Aussie plays and teleseries since moving there in 1979. He has appeared in the films **SKY RADAR**, **HOWLING III: THE MARSUPIALS** and **MAD MAX BEYOND THUNDERDOME**. Gia Carides plays Jean Echo, Shindo's possible love interest. She is a very widely seen actress on Australian television and stage. Her film credits include **PHAR LAP**, **THE COCA-COLA KID**, **AM I OK NOW?**, **BACKLASH** and **MIDNIGHT SPARES**. Ralph Cotterill, who plays the gruff Arthur Grant, might best be remembered as the scientist in **HOWLING III**. The series' director, Andrew Prowse, is an award winning film editor, who has also worked as a sound editor and a documentary filmmaker. He was second unit director on the film **CYCLONE TRACY**, before his directorial debut in 1988 with **DRIVING FORCE**.

In the fall of 1988, Tsuburaya Pro planned to bring back the silver superhero in the form of a new series—based on a 1969 story proposal entitled "Ultraman Continues" (Zoku Urutoraman, which later developed into the 1971 teleseries **RETURN OF ULTRAMAN**) Several original cast members would be reunited in this story, in which Ultraman returns to Earth, and Hayata searches for a successor to the Beta Capsule. There was to be a 90-minute pilot and 4 one-hour segments, followed by another 26 or more half-

hour segments. Overseas distribution deals halted the productions, to accommodate foreign co-investment. In the winter of 1989, Tsuburaya announced the plans for a forthcoming Ultraman series to be distributed in the U.S. by Teletrib (**TALES FROM THE DARKSIDE** and **MONSTERS**). Teletrib both confirmed and denied its involvement in a new Ultraman series.

Tsuburaya Productions found that soliciting for a production house in the U.S. was cost-prohibitive, but shortly thereafter discovered the South Australian Film Corporation right in their own backyard. Coproduction negotiations commenced in the summer of 1989. Once the production contracts were drawn up, the staff was gathered and planning began in earnest.

Episode #1 "Signs of Life," tells the origin of the new Ultraman coming to Earth to confront the Goudes Threat. On the planet Mars, astronauts Jack Shindo and



Stanley Haggart encounter the space monster Goudes. As the creature turns to attack them it is intercepted by Ultraman—during a fierce battle, Haggart is killed trying to escape in his spacecraft. The monster is finally defeated, and Shindo is left face to face with Ultraman.

Back on Earth, bacteria from the Goudes monster makes its way into our atmosphere, saturating the land and sea masses, and mutating selected animals

into creatures of tremendous proportions. Challenging the Goudes threat is UMA (Universal Multipurpose Agency), a multinational organization formed to investigate strange phenomena and explore the realms of the unknown. They are led by Colonel Arthur Grant, a rough military type who seems to know more about the emergency than he is willing to let on. UMA, meanwhile, utilizes the latest in monster-fight-

ing equipment to protect the Earth. By the second episode, "The Hibernator," Shindo (thought dead on Mars) joins UMA and brings his newly acquired Ultra Identity into the war against the Goudes monster.

As the series progresses, UMA tries to solve the mysteries of: the bacteria and how to contain it; how Shindo got back to Earth after his ship was destroyed; and who in the hell is Ultraman?

ULTRAMAN: TOWARDS THE FUTURE has a lot to offer for the Japanese Fantasy fan, and also for the uninitiated—the flavor, concepts, designs are Japanese but the live-action photography, characters, and special effects are definitely of a Western slant, sort of a cross between the original ULTRAMAN and Gerry Anderson's UFO. The first 7 episodes of the series deals with "the Goudes Threat."

Titled ULTRAMAN GREAT for Japanese release, the remaining 6 segments are referred to in the Japanese press releases as "Variety Chapter," and, as with the majority of the past Ultra Series, are in a non-serial format. The 13 episodes are being released in Japan on video cassette in multiples; the first three constitute a "feature-length" introduction, with the remaining cassettes to feature a pair of episodes each, with laser discs to be available early this year. All of the editions from Bandai/Emotion Video are available in English

with Japanese subtitles, or in a Japanese-dubbed format. Interestingly, the Japanese voice actors feature Shoji Kobayashi (Captain Muramatsu in ULTRAMAN and Tobei Tachibana in KAMEN RIDER) as Arthur Grant, Masaki Kyomoto (from KAMEN RIDER BLACK) as Dore Krause, and narration by Hiroshi Fujioka (Takeshi Hongo in KAMEN RIDER, Onodera in SUBMERSION OF JAPAN).

Some controversy has arisen in Australia over the inflated production costs of ULTRAMAN: TOWARDS THE FUTURE, as Australia's conservative parliamentary opposition called for a select committee inquiry into three aspects of the state's film industry. The appointment and resignation of Richard Watson, options for the future of the SAFC and the film industry in South Australia, and the reasons behind the over-projected budget of TOWARDS THE FUTURE. Janet Worth, in defense of the SAFC and TOWARDS' budget overruns, pointed out the fact that production of the series brought advanced special effects technology to Australia, and that the SAFC had signed a deal for world-wide release (excluding Japan and Australia) with New World Television in the United States. So, Ultraman in Australia may yet continue towards the future...

For the rest of the world, U.S.-based New World's first plans are to



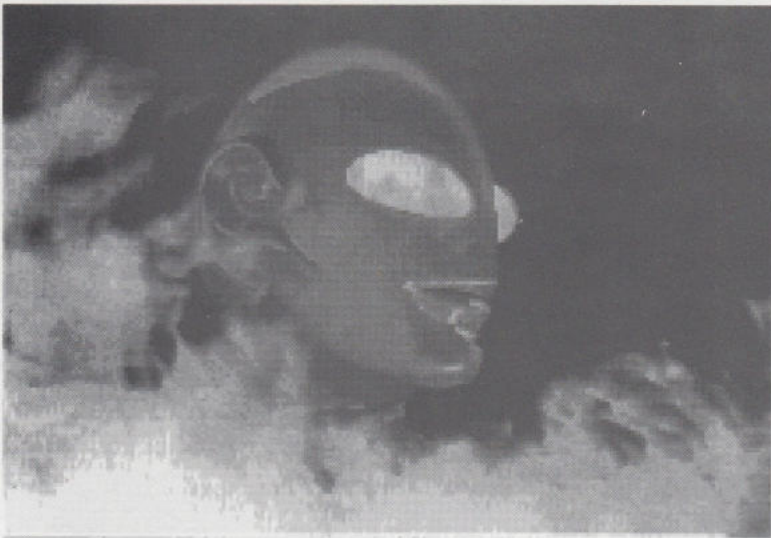


edit episodes into a feature film(s) for European release. They had geared up quite a monster-based publicity campaign for the superhero at the Milan MIFED festival held in the fall of 1990. As of this writing, New World doesn't

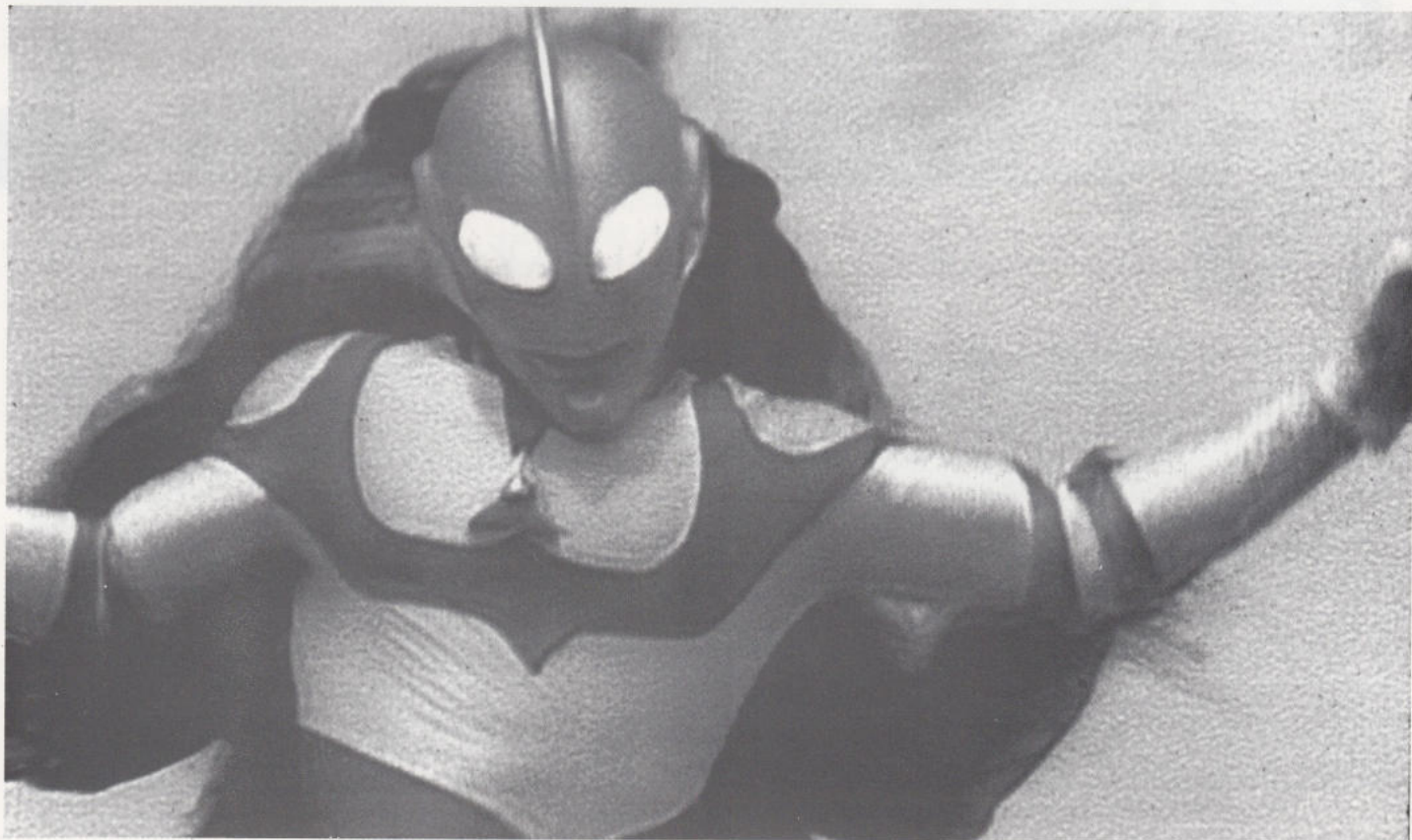
know if there is a market for ULTRAMAN: TOWARDS THE FUTURE in the U.S., and there are no concrete plans for an impending release—if you are interested in seeing the series, write to New World, 1440 S. Sepulveda Blvd.,

Los Angeles, CA 90025, and let them know! There are a lot of people out there who remember ULTRAMAN from their childhood, and who aren't necessarily fans of all Japanese fantasy, but might enjoy seeing the Silver and Red on the





ULTRAMAN: TOWARDS THE FUTURE aka ULTRAMAN GREAT (URUTORAMAN GURETO) A Bandai Co., Ltd./ Ultraman Production Committee Presentation; Produced by Tsuburaya Productions & the South Australian Film Commission; Executive Producer: Noboru Tsuburaya; SAFC Executive Producer: Richard Watson; Supervising Producers: Kiyoshi Suzuki & Gus Howard; Producers: Kiyoshi Suzuki & Sue Wild; Series Director: Andrew Prowse; Original Scenarios: Sho Aikawa, Hidenori Miyazawa, Chiaku Konaka, Akinori Endo, Satoshi Suzuki; Series Writer: Terry Larsen; Director of Photography: Paul Dallwitz; Editors: Richard Hindley & Nicolas Holmes; Production Designer: Andrew Blackland; Special Effects Supervisor: Paul Nicola; Special Effects Consultant: Koichi Takano; Music: Shinsuke Kazato, performed by the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra; Ultraman Design: Hirotugu Murayama; Monster Design: Jo Yoshida; Mechanical Designs: Kunio Aoi. Series Design Coordinator: Naoki Yamamoto. STARRING: Dore Krause (Jack Shindo), Gia Carides (Jean Echo), Ralph Cotterill (Arthur Grant), Grace Barr (Kim Shaomin), Llyod Morris (Charles Morgan), Rick Adams (Lloyd Wilder), Steve Apps & Robert Simper (Ultraman); Mike Read & Johnny Halliday (the Monsters). Available in VHS format as ULTRAMAN GREAT (English Version) BES-570 or (Japanese Version) BES-580. Write to: Bandai/ Emotion Video, Kato Building, 1-26-6 Shinjuku-ku, Shinjuku, Tokyo



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Legend of the Stars

AKIO JISSOJI TAKES US BACK TO THE UNBALANCE ZONE

Bob Johnson

In today's modern society, we read daily in the newspapers about companies and individuals exploiting the Earth's natural resources for their own selfish gains. So, what if the Earth finally got fed up and decided to fight back!? This is the premise of Tsuburaya Productions' **ULTRA Q THE MOVIE—LEGEND OF THE STARS** (URUTORA KYU ZA MUBI—HOSHI NO DENSETSU).

1989: Tsuburaya and their distribution arm, Shochiku/Fuji Films, entered into a lucrative deal with Sega Games, Inc., to form "Tsuburaya Film Co.," an official production house to create films based on the concepts created by Tsuburaya Pro, and approved of by the tripartite corporation. **ULTRA Q** was the first of these projects submitted for a feature-length treatment, at the helm of the project development was veteran director Akio Jissoji (**ULTRAMAN**, **ULTRA SEVEN**, **TOKYO BABYLON**, **UTAMARO'S WORLD**) and Jissoji's fa-

vorite scenarist and long-time partner, writer Mamoru Sasaki (**ULTRAMAN**, **SILVER MASK**, **IRON KING**, Oshima's **DEATH BY HANGING**).

1966: Tsuburaya Pro brought to Japanese television a black-and-white series showcasing a different menace to humanity each week. **ULTRA Q** captured the imagination of viewers all over Japan—little did Tsuburaya Pro know that they had created a cultural phenomenon which would still be alive, and bigger than ever, a quarter of a century later! The special effects of **UL-**

TRA Q visualized a world of science fiction, which had been popular in Japan since the 1950s. The mysterious atmosphere and social issues that were showcases of the series appealed to the show's many viewers. ULTRA Q warned of the dangers facing mankind in the future . . . and that future is now!

1987: The beginning of the current Ultra-Boom. Tsuburaya Pro put the original ULTRA Q teleseries back on the air, with showings of two episodes at midnight. This proved to be very popular, renewing interest in the series and leading to plans for a film [at one point to be produced by Ishiro Honda].

April 14, 1990: ULTRA Q: THE MOVIE opened in Japanese theaters, bringing to the big screen an all-new, full color version of the series which started the still prominent Ultra-Craze.

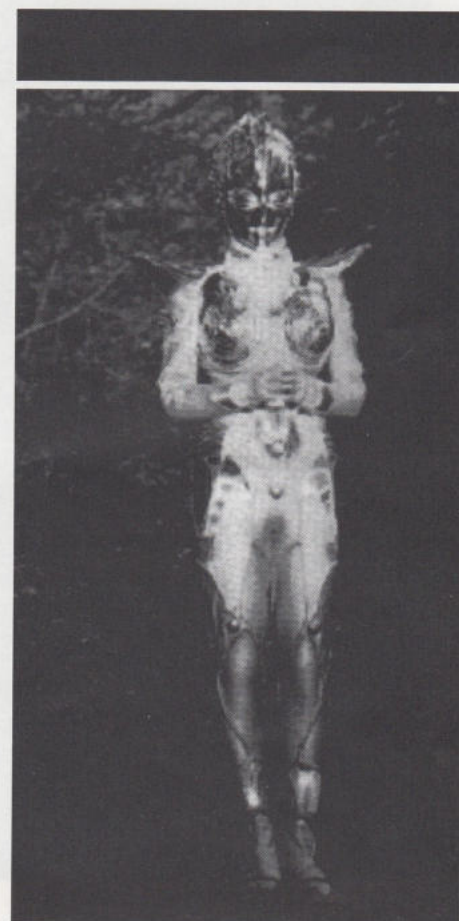
A series of bizarre murders begin to occur near land developments and construction sites in Japan. All of the victims have a three-centimeter hole through their chests and are covered with salt water, the only M.O. apparent in the deaths.

Two television reporters from TTV, Jun Manjome (Toshio Shiba)

and Ippei Togawa (Shingo Kazami), arrive on the scene to report on the rash of strange deaths. A specialist, Dr. Ichinotani (Jin Nakayama) is also conducting his own investigation.

While further murders occur, Yuriko Edogawa (Keiko Oginome), a female reporter from TTV, and Tetsushi Hamano (Masami Horiuchi) are conducting research at the "ancient capital" of Nara for an upcoming TV special on ancient history. They are forced to stop when they discover that the videotapes used to record the data have been damaged by salt water! With nothing accomplished, Hamano leaves for Yoshinogasato to do some location scouting. While there, he comes across a construction site. Hamano is upset that construction has started there, as if in ignorance of the rich history of the area. The sound from all the construction awakens Nagira, a giant monster. Nagira destroys the construction sight and kills all of the workers. Hamano vanishes along with the beast.

While investigating Hamano's disappearance, Manjome, Ippei and Yuriko find a life-size clay statue on Ryu Island, off Western Izu. The mysterious statue comes to life.



*"... ULTRA Q
is so
nostalgic"*

The ancient monster Nagira strikes (opposite); The new Ippei, Yuriko and Manjome witness a horrible event (left); Manjome comforts alien-descendant cult leader Mayumi Hoshino (right); Mayumi transforms into the "chariots of the gods" alien-form of the "Wadatsujin" (above).





nal ULTRAMAN. Yasuhiko Saijo, who played the original Ippei Togawa in the ULTRA Q teleseries, appears in a special cameo.

Also look for Toshio Shiba, who starred as the hero of the teleseries SILVER MASK and also appeared in another ecology-gone-mad film, GODZILLA VS. THE SMOG MONSTER. Jin Nakayama, who essays Dr. Ichinotani, is also well known to Ultrafans as Captain Oyama from ULTRAMAN 80.

There are even a couple of retired superheroes in the cast: Eiji Tsuburaya's nephew, Hiroshi Tsuburaya played SPACE SHERIFF SHAIDER and a grown-up Hiroyuki Takano, who played the teleseries hero

Kentaro Shiratori 17 years ago in SUPERHUMAN BAROM-ONE. There are other cameos and familiar faces, but the fun is in finding them for yourself!

Special effects chores were handled by veteran director Junkichi Oki (aka Jun Oki), who served as an assistant director on the original ULTRA Q series, under the tutelage of effects master Eiji Tsuburaya. He has worked on a great many productions, directing live action as well as special effects—e.g. MIGHTY JACK, RETURN OF ULTRAMAN and FIREMAN—and became famous for his sunset/dawn lighting and unique compositions. The designs for Nagira, Wadatsujin, and the statue were drafted by Noriyoshi Ikeya, veteran monster-designer whose credits include the teleseries ULTRA SEVEN, SILVER MASK, MIRRORMAN, FIREMAN and IRON KING. The actual special effects scenes were shot at Kokusai Hosei Studios in Tokyo. The miniature sets are larger in scale even than those used in the Godzilla series.

No other director could capture the mysterious images and strange atmosphere of ULTRA Q better than veteran Ultraseries director Akio Jissoji. He started his career with Tsuburaya Pro in the later phases of the original ULTRA Q as a consultant. He went on to make an idelible mark on the Ultraseries.

Born in Tokyo in 1937, Jissoji graduated from Waseda University and joined the ranks of television production at TBS (Tokyo Broadcasting System). In 1965 he moved into the cinematography department where he worked as an assistant director to Hajime Tsuburaya on a SPFX TV movie called SPY—THE PARALLEL LINE, a co-production between Japan and France. It was this collaboration which led Jissoji to work at Tsuburaya Pro.

Besides working on ULTRA Q, Jissoji also directed episodes of ULTRA SEVEN and OPERATION: MYSTERY! Jissoji's trademark camerawork, composition, atmosphere and character development are best known to American fans from his work on ULTRAMAN, where he directed such stand-out episodes as "Gift From the Sky", which got him into a rather huge controversy with the big-wigs at TBS, when Jissoji poked fun at the hero by making him mistake a spoon for the Beta Capsule while trying to turn into Ultraman!

Akio Jissoji's early days with Tsuburaya Pro are chronicled in the book "The Star Field and the Moon Ship—The Men Who Made Ultraman", which was made into a TV movie in 1988 [see ULTRA SERIES 25th ANNIVERSARY, elsewhere in this issue—ed.].

When asked about ULTRA Q, Jissoji stated that "I didn't want to make a totally new work, because ULTRA Q is so nostalgic." He did not, however, try to make it into a nostalgic film. "I didn't want to shoot it in black and white because a new audience, unfamiliar with the old ULTRA Q, will see [the new movie]. If I pursued nostalgia, it would have become a very uninteresting film." There are many ways to describe the work of Akio Jissoji, but one would never call it uninteresting!

Speaking to them in a female voice, it tells them not to look for Tetsushi Hamano! After this warning, the statue suddenly attacks the trio with high-speed, saltwater bullets. After escaping, they come across a mysteriously beautiful woman, Mayumi Hoshino (Miyo Takagi). "Please don't look for Mr. Hamano . . ." she says, in the same voice as the murderous statue's.

Later, the trio encounters Mayumi again who is preparing to leave the Earth. Before the authorities can stop them, Nagira wreaks havoc on the city...

For many fans of Tsuburaya Pro, there are quite a few familiar faces in ULTRA Q: THE MOVIE. The most obvious are the three detectives investigating the series of bizarre saltwater murders—they are played by Susume Kurobe, Shoji Kobayashi and Sandaiyu Dokumamushi who (among many other genre roles) starred as Hayata, Captain Muramatsu and Arashi, respectively, in the origi-

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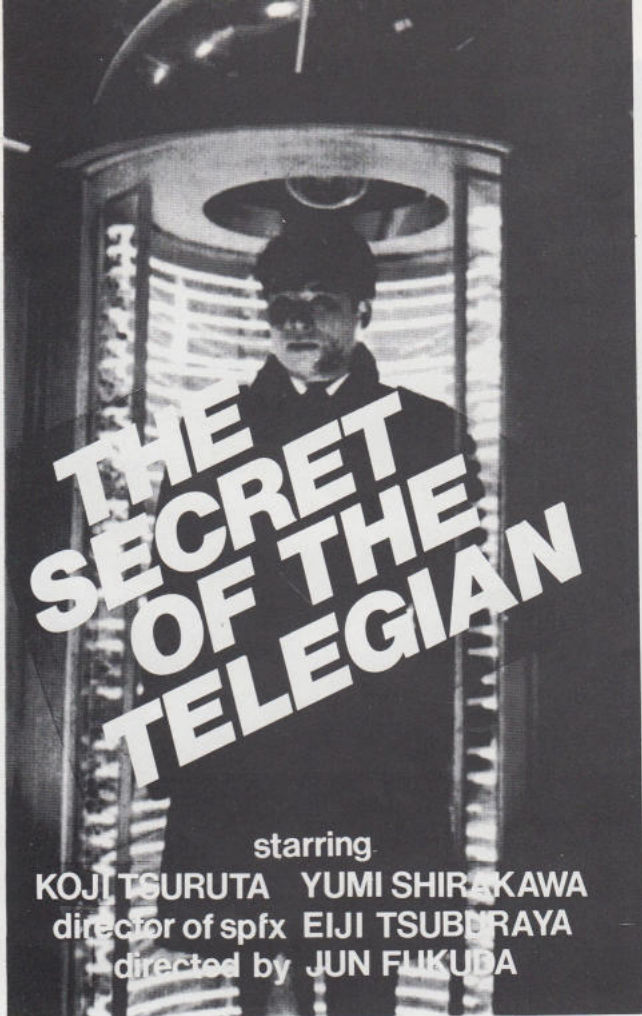
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BUILDING

GODZILLA



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Those interested in special effects prosthetics might find the most interesting aspect of *GODZILLA VS. BIOLLANTE* to be the Godzillasaurus suit itself.

Since *GODZILLA—KING OF THE MONSTERS!* was released over 35 years ago, all of the monsters in Toho's fantasy films have usually been shot using monster-suits, with the exception of wire-operated creatures like Mothra.

A monster-suit is something like a stuffed animal with an actor inside. Each time a film is produced, the staff either creates a new Godzillasaurus suit, or repairs the last one; if you look at Godzillasaurus's physiognomy carefully, you will see a slightly different Godzillasaurus in each of the films. Among some Japanese SPFX fans, each Godzillasaurus has his own name, such as "Kin-Godzi" (Godzillasaurus in *KING KONG VS. GODZILLA*)

and "Moth-Godzi" (Godzillasaurus in *MOTHA AGAINST GODZILLA*). As long as Godzillasaurus appears in films, he will have a repertoire of varying characteristics, according to the story at hand. He could be very violent or evil, or, sometimes, friendly towards humans. When he appeared in *SON OF GODZILLA* (1967), he was a very responsible father! In a sense, Godzillasaurus's monster-suit is the "face" of each Godzillasaurus film.

1975's *TERROR OF MECHAGODZILLA* was the beginning of a long rest for the series. When 1984's *GODZILLA* went into production, the staff went back to the concept of the original: "Fear risen from the distortion of Nature caused by civilized human society."

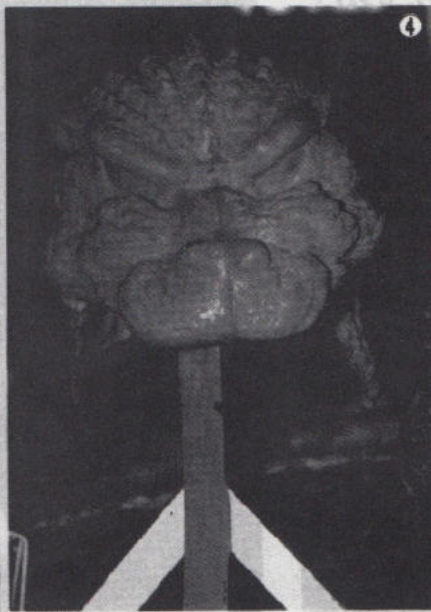
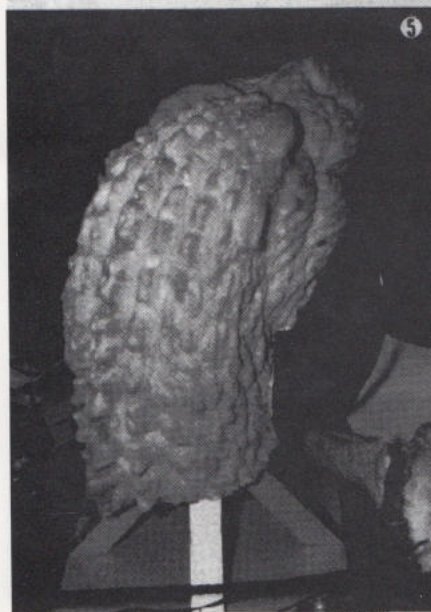
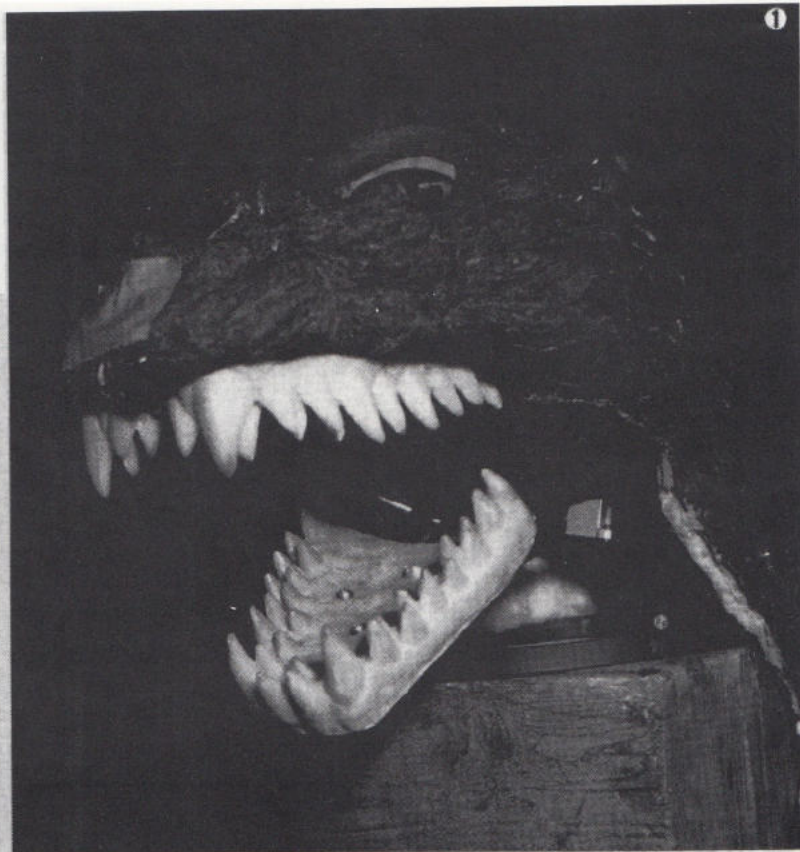
In *GODZILLA—KING OF THE*

MONSTERS!, he had pointed ears and four nails on both of his hands and feet. These physical characteristics were passed on to the suit in the second film, *GODZILLA RAIDS AGAIN*. But in *KING KONG VS. GODZILLA* (1962), he lost his ears and one nail from each foot. This Godzillasaurus became the standard form for the monster, until *GODZILLA* (1984), when a Godzillasaurus with ears and four-nailed feet returned.

GODZILLA VS. BIOLLANTE's plot continues directly from the story of the last entry. Naturally, the new Godzillasaurus monster-suit invokes the image of the original monstrosity crafted by Teizo Toshimitsu.

For *GODZILLA VS. BIOLLANTE*, two monster-suits of Godzillasaurus were produced: one for the scenes shot in various water situations, the "Sea Godzillasaurus"; and the "Land

THE DETAILS OF A MONSTER- SUIT UP-CLOSE



Godzilla," for other SPFX shooting, a suit completed in September of 1989. There are also several other manifestations of the monster produced for this film, one of them is the Close-up Godzilla—a cable- and pneumatic-articulated mock up in the same scale as the suits (1/50). This was created using the same materials and molds for the suits.

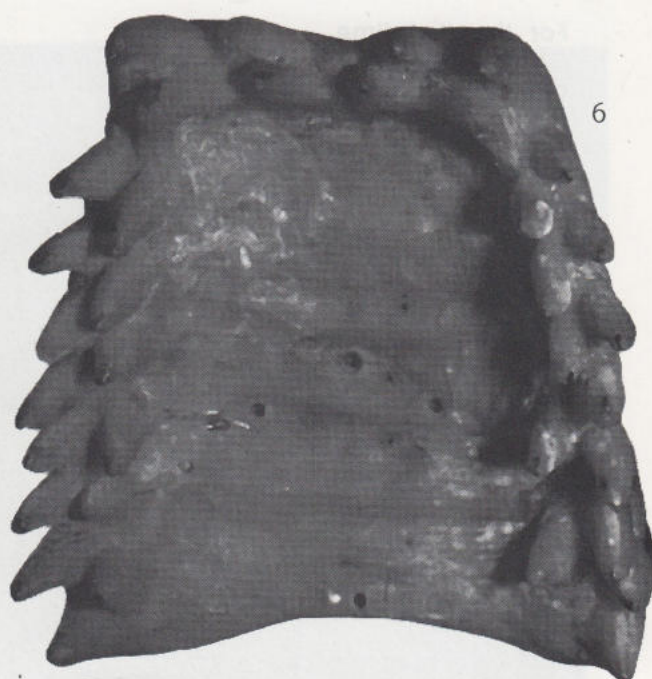
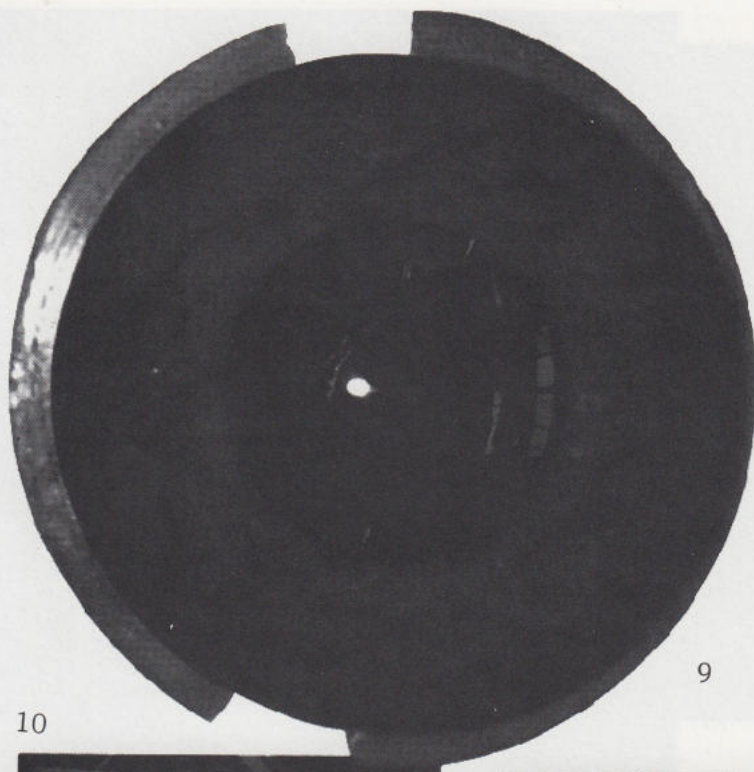
Toho's new monster-suits are manufactured quite differently from those of the 1954-1975 designs. During those years at Toho, the design and realization was handled by individual teams. Nobuyuki Yasumaru, who succeeded Mr. Toshimitsu, continued to apply the same methods taught to him during his first 20 years in charge of Toho's Special Art Department. The huge budget of 1984's GODZILLA offered him a chance at newer and more Western

methods. The older monster-suits were generally built from foam urethane pieces, carved into shape by technicians (only the head and hands were sculpted, cast and poured from liquid latex). Little chips of urethane were applied to the monster-suits to add body texture, a process which would prove to be difficult and sometimes uneven; a great deal of time and skill would be required to make the end result shine. Now things are different, Mr. Yasumaru, almost single-handedly, fashions the suits himself, achieving a tremendous degree of control over the finished work.

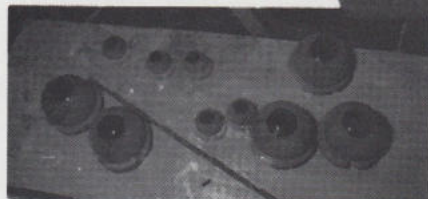
First, Yasumaru starts off by building a 1m. model of the monster [see the interview with Mr. Yasumaru elsewhere in this issue—ed.]. After suggestions from the directors of both live action and SPFX, this model is completed

and approved; Yasumaru uses it as a reference-model for building the suit(s). Next, Yasumaru sketches the figure of the actor who will play the monster—both frontal and profile—on a wall in his workshop. Yasumaru then draws the outline of the monster over that, giving him an exact guide by which to figure proportion and size for the suit(s). Yasumaru next constructs a full-size wire frame, lined with wood and filled with scraps of foam rubber and wood. Using modeling clay over this "skeleton," Yasumaru and his assistants create the entire figure, with complete features, by sculpting all of the details by hand. The tail and dorsal fins are fashioned separately. Once this process is completed, plaster casts are taken from the clay sculpture, and finally a heavy latex mixture of Eversoft foam rubber is

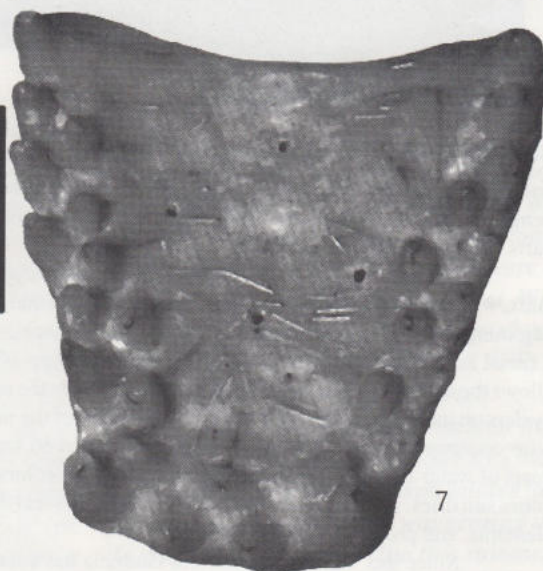
BUILDING GODZILLA con't on pg.62



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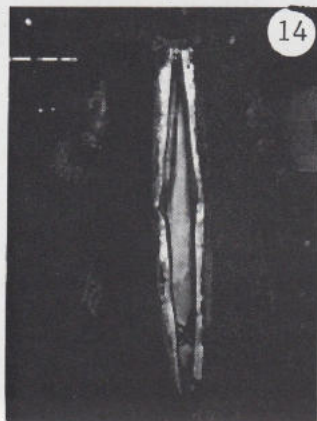


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(1) The head of the "Land Godzilla" suit in the building stages. Although the "Sea Godzilla" was made in the same molding process, the impression of each seems slightly different. (2) The head cast in synthetic resin. Since the seam down the center is clearly visible, the pleats are easily recognizable. (3) The right side of (2). The lower jaw is exposed because the latex pieces have not yet been added. The articulated features are radio controlled; at this point, the servo-motors have already been installed, as well as the pneumatic air devices. (4) & (5) Pulled from original mold. (6) & (7) The jaw pieces, laid out for your inspection. (6) Upper jaw. (7) Lower jaw. (8) The opposite sides of (6) & (7). These will be refined by the Special Art Department. (9) Godzilla's eyeball. This is the one for the monster-suit(s), and is about the same size of a real eye. (10) The large pieces are for the monster-suit(s). The smaller pieces are for the 1 meter- tall "Close-up Godzilla." (11) The dorsal fins for close-up shots. Constructed of FRP, the interior is lined with electrical light rigging. (12) The dorsal fins made of latex for action scenes. (13) Yoko Nagata of the molding staff, who has been finishing the dorsal fins. She is applying a dark-colored, liquid latex. (14) The installation of the dorsal fin and fasteners. The Godzilla suit is 50mm (approximately 2") thick, on the average, and weighs 110kg (approximately 229 lbs.)—which is twice the weight of the average male. If used in the pool, the urethane foam will absorb quite a bit of water; therefore its weight increases. A mere mortal would find it impossible to move.



11



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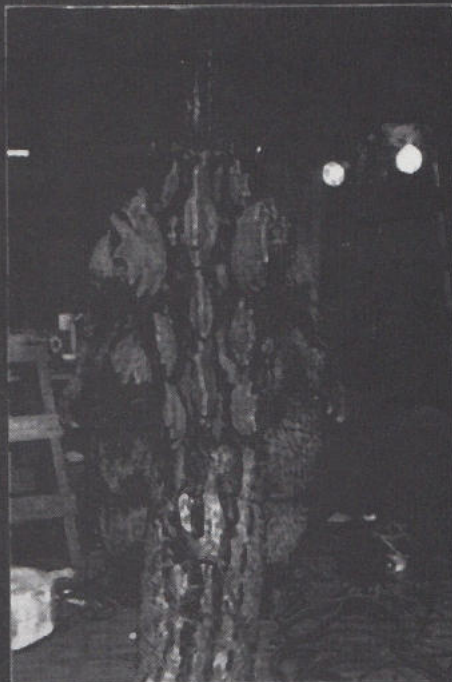


13



12

For the first time, Godzilla's dorsal fins glow without the use of optical animation. A special set of fins made of semi-clear FRP plastic were fashioned, so that the light of special bulbs set within could shine through.



BUILDING GODZILLA con't. from pg. 60

poured into the molds. Once the "pull" is made, each piece is lined with hemp, and several types of latex and urethane are used to touch up the body parts. Complete assembly follows.

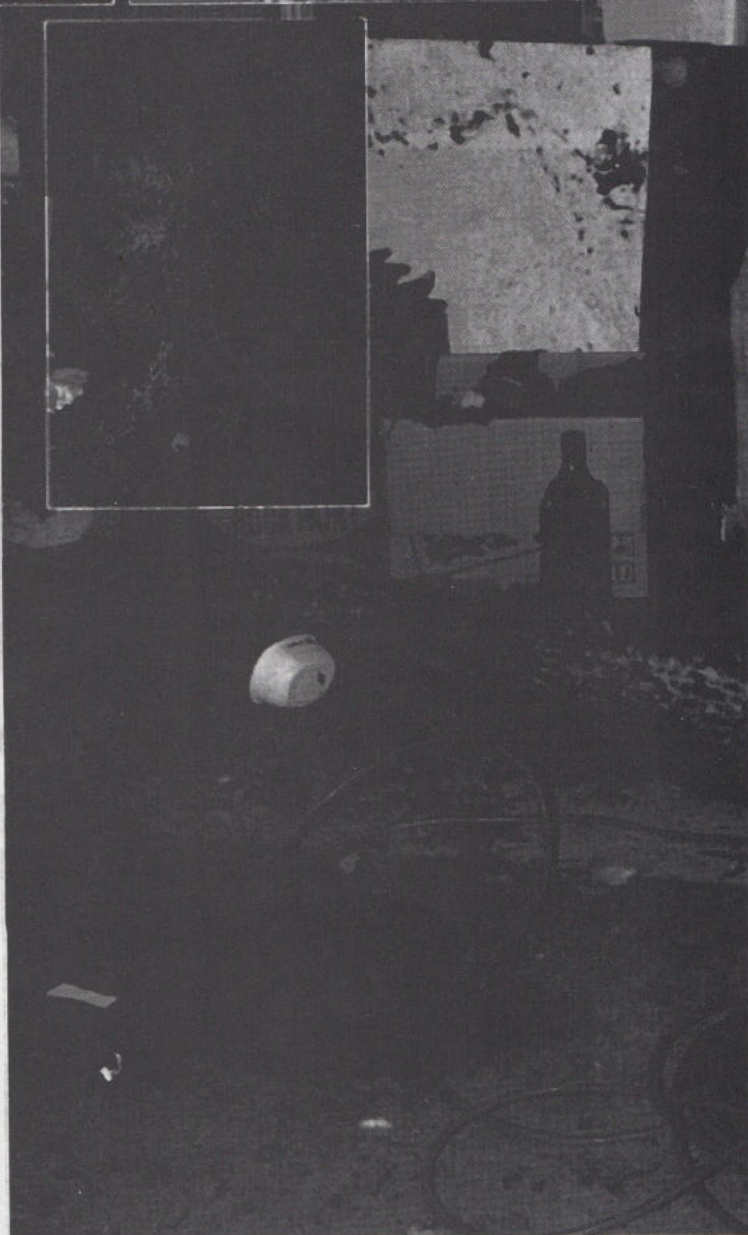
Each part of the suit is reconnected by several layers of epoxy and latex, with an eye diverted towards touching up details that must match the adjoining areas. The tail (cast as a solid foam rubber piece), is inserted with a metal bar, connected to a "seat" in the hind-quarters of the suit. This allows the actor some movement of the tail from inside the suit. The bar has eyelets on its other end, in order to allow operation of the tail by overhead wire operators. Once the entire monster-suit is pieced together, several coats of water-based acrylic paint are added for skin coloration. After the entire suit dries, several coats of lacquer are applied to seal the suit from the elements, and protect the coats of paint.

Since the "skin" of the current Godzilla has been created using this process—pouring latex into plaster molds—some fans who were used to the older process, as used in *DESTROY ALL MONSTERS!* and others, might feel puzzled when seeing the new monster-suit.

The "Bio-Godzi" suits are not too much different in execution from that in the previous film, but there have been several new ideas incorporated, such as the block-foundation dorsal fin piece, which can be completely removed from the suit instead of bending it to the side (which creates much wear and tear). Other improvements, such as more efficient pneumatic pumps (connected to air canisters located in the tail), are used to accentuate the articulation of the eyes, jaws and other facial expressions (such as the movement of the brow and upper and lower lips).

This whole system is comprised of servo-motors, manipulated via a 2-channel radio control device. When the pneumatic lips are drawn, they reveal two rows of vicious fangs growing outwards—Godzilla looks far more violent. But the most unique attribute is the electrically lit dorsal-fins, constructed of FRP (Fiber Reinforced Plastic). Previously, Godzilla's dorsal fins would have to be completely animated to give a radioactive glow. Now, the fins are rigged to flash or light up, depending on the situation. This is then highlighted by the use of optical animation.

These improvements in suitbuilding have primarily been made under the direction of SPFX man Koichi Kawakita, Japan's only hope to carry on the mantle of Special Effects Master Eiji Tsuburaya. With these vast improvements, Toho may once again reclaim the title of "Master Monster Makers," and Godzilla may finally be allowed to step into the age of "high technology."



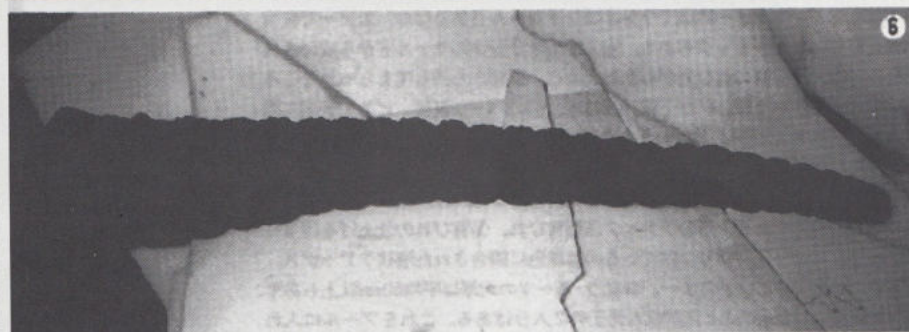
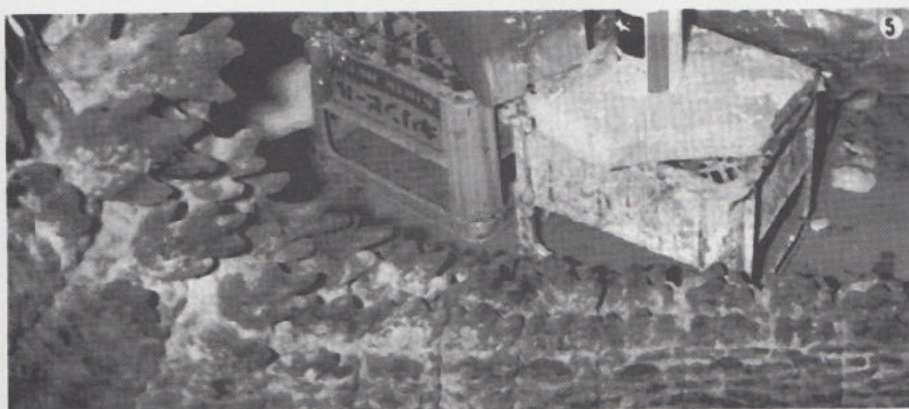


Godzilla is really a monster constructed from a combination of plastics and foam rubber. This suit precedes the one constructed by Yasumaru for the last film in 1984. It is a testimony to his art of monster-building.



The headless suit awaits the attachment of the head (seen on the preceding page). Once the entire suit is joined together, layers of flame-retardant paints and lacquer are applied to the surface.

THE 17th GENERATION GODZILLA



(1) The chest area. (2) The shoulder to the upper arm. (3) The thigh and flank. (4) The groin area and the part to where the tail is attached. (5) From the spine to the tail. (6) The entire tail; however, it is not for the monster-suit. (7) Four nails on each foot—consistent with the Godzilla from 1984. There is no significant detail on the sole.

All photos © Toho Co., Ltd. & B-Club Magazine

NOBUYUKI YASUMARU

The Chief of Toho's Special
Art Department Talks
About the Secrets of
Godzilla Making.

INTERVIEWER: HIROSHI TAKEUCHI

Nobuyuki Yasumaru, a central figure of monster-making at Toho's Special Art Department, succeeding Teizo Toshimitsu, was interviewed about the 17th Godzilla and the secrets in Godzilla-making.

—Would you tell us about the concepts involved in creating the new monster suit of Godzilla for GODZILLA VS BIOLLANTE?

YASUMARU: "I think that the starting point is 'dinosaur,' but in terms of the image, it is 'monster.'"

—Would you explain the process, up to making the monster suit?

YASUMARU: "Before beginning the production of the suit, we made a one-meter-high model and showed it to the director and producer to get their response. Since the old Godzilla study-model from 1984 remained in good shape, we reused it this time by changing some of its features." (photos 1)

—How is it different from the last Godzilla?

YASUMARU: "(Special Effects) Director

Kawakita requested a much smaller neck and head, and a more intense face. That is, making the upper portion thinner and the lower with larger volume. It looks triangular in its overall proportion. We've also made the end of its tail narrower."

—Did you then begin making the suit by referring to this model?

YASUMARU: "That's right. We also asked Kenpachiro Satsuma for his opinion as well, since he's the one who actually becomes Godzilla. He knew what we wanted very well, and was a great help to us."

—I saw the finished monster suit. I was impressed with its excellently constructed open-and-closing mechanism of its mouth, and other attributes. Are there any new devices other than these?

YASUMARU: "No, there aren't any others. I don't believe it's too different from the last one. As I get older, I rather feel that 'special effects' are not only just the flash from gunpowder. There may be a type of special effect expressed with 'silence.' I had first talked to Director Kawakita about this concept—showing Godzilla in silhouette in the beginning and then unveiling his whole figure a little at a time. If Godzilla showed off his action too much, you wouldn't feel fear or the gigantic sense of the monster."

—So, you paid a lot of attention to the detail this time, right? I heard that you also studied the shape of the teeth (see Building Godzilla—ed.) biologically.

YASUMARU: "The image of those teeth are largely based on Director Kawakita's instructions, but we consulted the advice from a dentist as well. Especially about the direction of those teeth. Godzilla's previous teeth (photos 2) cannot really bite anything."

—Do his eyes move too?

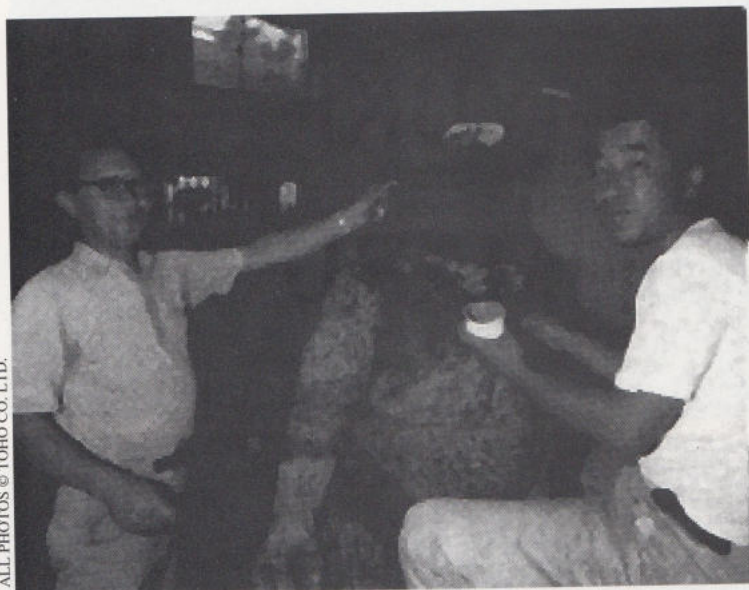
YASUMARU: "His eyeballs move left and right, and the eyelids open and close."

—For GODZILLA VS BIOLLANTE, how many Godzillas were made?

YASUMARU: "There are two monster-suit styled Godzillas, the one we are making here, and the 'Sea Godzilla,' used in the shooting down at the pool now."

—Sea Godzilla?

YASUMARU: "It is a lighter version, because the suit will absorb water while shooting in the pool and it becomes weighted down. The tail's length is cut by about half, but you can't tell since it's underwater. Also for closeups we've made an upper-body section, in the same scale as the suit. Probably this will be used in the same manner as the 'Cybot' in GODZILLA five years ago."



—In 1984's new *GODZILLA*, the *Cybot Godzilla* was shot only using the upper-body as well, isn't that true?

YASUMARU: "Besides that, we have the one-meter-high Godzilla I spoke of previously, and a model of Godzilla in a swimming pose."

—In making *Godzilla*, what do you feel is the most difficult aspect?

YASUMARU: "The shape of his whole

looks like me. Particularly the face . . . a creation must reflect the creator's personality. There has to be something in common with the shape of the old Godzilla, so they look the same. It's just a matter of big or small, but we can make it identical if you look at the shape in part. As an image at least . . ."

—Through fans' eyes, they say "That's different" or "This isn't the same." What

figure. Everything I make somehow

do you feel about this?

YASUMARU: "No matter who says what, 'Godzilla is Godzilla,' I would say. In my mind there is only one image of Godzilla, though."

—By looking briefly, the new *Godzilla* looks close to the original from 1954.

YASUMARU: "I think so."

—When you make a prototype, do you refer to photographs of the old suits?

YASUMARU: "No, I don't. I solely rely on an image. Even when I have a blueprint, I rarely look at it."

—By the way, when did you enter Toho Studios?

YASUMARU: "About 30 years ago. I first worked in the Special Art Department as a part-timer, and soon entered the company. I am from Toyama Prefecture, and where I grew up, wood carving was popular with a lot of fanlight carpenters and such. So, since I was little, I was interested in sculpture and went to study it at the Musashino Art School."

—At Toho, were you involved with monster productions from the beginning?

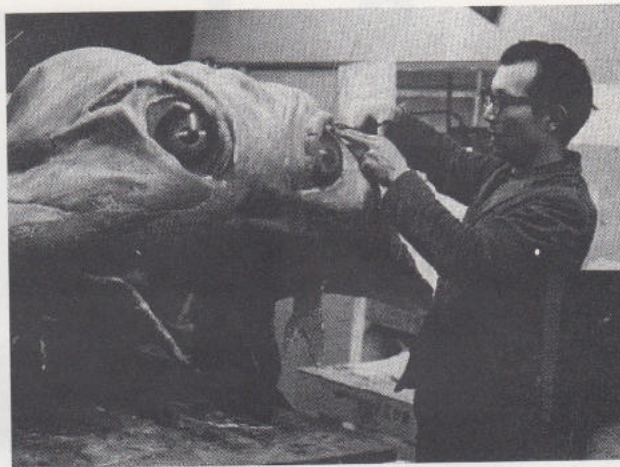
YASUMARU: "No, not in the Model Sec-



Eiji Tsuburaya liked Gorosaurus very much, and said, "You did it, you made a monster!" Since then, I've kept on making monsters. . .



(opposite): Yasumaru works on the 1-meter model for *BIOLLANTE*; (this page top): Yasumaru and Tomoki Kobayashi apply touch-ups before painting. Photo 1 (l): the new monster's teeth are biologically realistic as opposed to 1984's version (r)



Yasumaru with the dismantled 1-meter study model, before creating the new version for BIOLLANTE (left); Yasumaru in 1971 working on Yoshimitsu Banno's psychadellic GODZILLA VS. HEDORAH (right).

tion to make monsters, but I was in the Plaster Section making buildings to be destroyed by monsters. That was because my fellow school graduates, Odagiri and Togashi were there. Plaster is a special job at a film studio, and only sculpture students from art schools could handle it with ease. My first job was on MOTHRA (1961). I built the Tokyu Department Store in Shibuya that Mothra destroys. We worked all night, every night for days, and hardly went home. Also I've built the Diet Building many times."

—Then, from what point did you start making monsters?

YASUMARU: "The Plaster Section was right next to the Model Section, so I often saw the people working there. Because it is sometimes easy to make buildings, in my free time, they'd let me watch them. Teizo Toshimitsu, Eizo Kaimai (who created monsters for RETURN OF ULTRAMAN and sequels, founder of Kaimai Productions), and Kanji Yagi (the founder of Eki-su Productions) used to teach me a lot.

"Then, my first monster was Gorosaurus from KING KONG ESCAPES (1967). It was originally assigned to Ryosaku Takayama, who had made monster suits for Tsuburaya Productions' ULTRA Q and ULTRAMAN. Then Taiko Inoue of the Special Art Department and I visited Takayama at his atelier in Nerima, but the monster he made seemed too pure, and we felt that it didn't mesh well with Toho's special effects. I thought, 'Why don't I do it myself?'"

—Gorosaurus' tone differed a little from that of the previous Toho monsters.

YASUMARU: "Because it's image is 'the

dinosaur.' I wanted to try a new approach. Eiji Tsuburaya liked Gorosaurus very much, and said, 'You did it (made a 'monster)!'. Since then, I've kept on making monsters."

—Among the members of the special effects staff on GODZILLA VS BIOLLANTE, there aren't many who have worked with Tsuburaya as you did, is that right?

YASUMARU: "Yes, I'm already in my 50's, too. Maybe I am the oldest in the entire staff for GODZILLA VS BIOLLANTE. The only people here who knew Tsuburaya are Director Kawakita, Koji Matsumoto of model operations, and Tadaaki Watanabe of special effects... probably that's all. The rest are young people, and they didn't know Tsuburaya at all. Well, I only made the prototype of Godzilla this time, and Tomoki Kobayashi did the rest of the process, mainly.

He will be the one who'll take over in my place."

—Anyway, this monster suit of Godzilla seems to be one of your best.

YASUMARU: "I think so."

—I look forward to seeing this Godzilla moving lively on the screen. Thank you very much for today.

(Recorded on September 9, 1989—Reprinted from the October 1989 issue of B-CLUB Magazine No.47)

(left) The 1-meter fiber reinforced plastic (FRP) Godzilla study-model as used six years ago; (right): the "Bio-Godzi" begins to take shape. Photos by Hariken Ryu and Hiroshi Takeuchi





KAMEN RIDER BLACK RX

Toei sequel tries too hard to top
KAMEN RIDER BLACK

the tri-beam after a mighty struggle, and returns to home base safely. But the weird events are only about to escalate.

The Crisis Empire, led by the Grand Lord Crisis, are out to invade the Earth. For one thousand years, they have ruled a vast area of the galaxy, including worlds of strange creatures and other dimensions. The warlord, General Jak, has been sent to our world with an invasion task force, consisting of four units and unit leaders: Panzer Captain Gatenzone of the Demon Robot Unit, Venom-moth Colonel Maribaron of the Demon Spirit Clan Unit, Naval Captain Bosgan of the Demon Manbeast Unit, and Fang Captain Gedorian of the Demon Otherworld Lifeform Unit. All are ready for their first objective, the squelching of the only thing standing in the way of human subjugation: Kotaro Minami—Kamen Rider Black!

During their first attack, Crisis beams Kotaro aboard their flying fortress before he can change into Black, tortures him, then ejects him into space. Out in the void, Crisis bombards Kotaro with particle beams, which splits the "King Stone" in his body asunder. Slung

August Ragone

Episode #1 "RX—Child of the Sun!"

With Golgom defeated, Kotaro Minami (Tetsuo Kurata) is enjoying a peaceful life with the Sahara family, for whose Sahara Air Service he works as a helicopter pilot.

Kotaro even has time for a girlfriend, photojournalist Reiko Shiratori (Jun Koyamaki).

One day while out on an sky shoot, Kotaro and Reiko are almost ripped out of the air by three strange obelisks, which, upon impaling themselves into the earth, each emit a strange beam. Kotaro is able to shake the copter free of



(opposite): RX—child of the sun; inset: Kotaro and Reiko; (aboveleft): RX battles some of the denizens of Crisis; (right): the Acrobatter smashes a Skull-Demon. All photos © Toei Co., Ltd.

around the arc of Sol, Kotaro is not only saturated with cosmic rays, but is also hurtled back towards the Earth. Smashing into terra firma like a shooting star, the power of the solarized and split King Stone swells and explodes like a super-nova. Out of the fire and brimstone he rises, phoenix-like, to challenge the Crisis Empire as “Kamen Rider Black RX!”

SERIES COMMENTARY

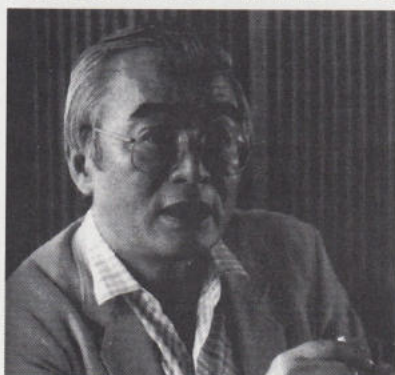
Following the popularity of KAMEN

RIDER BLACK, Toei producer Susumu Yoshikawa decided on a dramatic change for the next chapter in the “Rider Series.” It was conceived as a combination of several Series themes, most predominantly those of the previous Series and the famous SPACE SHERIFF SHARIVAN Series. Comedy and humorous aspects were played up in favor of BLACK’s horror-drama. This change much affects the character of Kotaro Minami. Formerly intense, this time he is more amiable and hu-

morous, a tragic miscalculation on Toei’s part.

In the end we not only have a format that is more derivative of SHARIVAN, with Black RX thrown into otherworldly dimensions (wielding the deadly Ribolcane light-sword), we have a bit of “Batman” thrown in as well, with the ridiculous super-car “Rideron” (kept for Black RX on another world). Of course, it wouldn’t be Kamen Rider without the motorcycle—the revived

Interview with Toei Hero Producer Susumu Yoshikawa



In the '80s, Toei Heroes were in the age of the heavily armed hero.

As the most prolific hero makers, what goals will Toei achieve in the 1990s? Susumu Yoshikawa, the head of the second department of Toei TV (and the most watched producer of the 1980s), speaks about the future of Toei Heroes.

How was the year 1989 for you, including the wrapping of Kamen Rider Black RX?

YOSHIKAWA: “Well, the biggest event was the regretful end of the revived KAMEN RIDER series in September 1989. At first, we planned to broadcast for at least three years, so I had wonderful expectations for it. After all, we have only three programs left, which have been carried over for the last few years. In other words, we’ve been successful with those three. However, these days, broadcasters are producing more information shows, and at the same time, people are becoming more conservative and have been gathering petitions against these action programs. So, the broadcasters also hope that we will decrease the scenes of violence.

“Currently there are about 45 animation programs broadcast on TV. In contrast, there

are only 4 or 5 live action programs—it’s just one tenth of animation. The reason why live action programs are finding a harder time surviving are, first off, animation programs generally have higher ratings. Secondly, it’s difficult to estimate how much a live action program will cost because of special effects. Another reason is that it is the age of the comicbook now, so when we want to produce TV programs based on comicbooks, it is easier to produce them in animation. These are the three basic reasons which the broadcaster must consider. However, in audience ratings, only a few of the animation programs, such as DRAGONBALL, receive higher numbers, but not all of them. For example, if you compare the audience ratings of the four programs on last Sunday morning, the live action shows have higher ratings by a total of ten percent than that of the animated ones. Therefore you

•ROBO-RIDER



Battlehopper, now called the “Acrobatter” (“batter”, i.e. “batta,” is the Japanese word for “grasshopper” or “locust”). And RX’s big-eyed, blocky-bodied design is just too hard to get used to.

A lot happens in the story, with RX jumping between Earth and the otherworld, all the villains and characters on both sides interacting, and sev-

•DEATHGARON



eral “complex” subplots working simultaneously: the Sahara family and Reiko are threatened, captured, and/or possessed by Crisis more than once; the villains’ egos and ambitions against each other are constantly screwing up actions against RX; Crisis’ own cyborg, Kazumi-no-Jo, defects and joins up with the good guys; and, yes, more. There is far too much going on here.

Just to make it easier on the viewer, in times of dire straits Black RX can shift into two other Kamen Riders, “Robo Rider” and “Bio Rider.” He does this by channeling the powers of fear or sorrow, getting to ride a different bike for each

•BIO-RIDER



emotion. As if all this weren’t enough, Shadow Moon returns to challenge Kotaro one mo’ time.

The scripting is predictable, to say the least, very much following the Space Sheriff pattern with little deviation, and is pale in comparison to its parent series. But on their own terms, the scenarios are exciting and stand up reasonably well. Much likewise can be said about both the direction and the acting, although both are pale in most cases. Tetsuo Kurata still turned out a credible performance, but his character’s treatment is 180° off. Although this was somewhat rectified halfway into the

can’t say that animation always is the higher rated. About the budgets, it’s not true that live action always costs more than animation. It all depends on the contours of the story, and actually there are a few that are cheaper to produce than animation. It’s funny to hear that animation is the best medium to render comicbooks, movies like BATMAN and SUPERMAN come from comics (laughs). Well, realistically, since we no longer have such highly rated live action shows, compared to the days when KAMEN RIDER and GO RANGER, were the most popular programs on TV, I’m not convinced about the argument against these shows (laughs). However, if we are allowed to have the understanding of people of every field, if we can have the opportunity to produce more live action programs, and if we can create them with a broader scope, we will be able to realize what I just stated. When the right time presents itself, that’s what I’ll have to do.”

Can you tell us anything about this year’s new series?

YOSHIKAWA: “The Sentai Series will be BIRDMAN TASK FORCE JETMAN. Producer Takeyuki Suzuki is in charge of the series now, starting with EARTH TASK FORCE FIVEMAN (1990-1991). This kind of a production can create quite a creative block if you are in charge of it, year after year. That’s why I decided to ask him to take over for me. It’s true that we needed to change the old concepts and add a new impact to them. Concerning the SPFX, I have asked Mr. Nobuo Yajima to create new scenes that we have never witnessed before, by redefining the way they are shot. Mr. Yajima now holds the mantle of ‘Special Effects Supervisor,’ while Mr. Hiroshi Butsuda, who used to work as an art director in the SPFX group is now the Director. Let’s closely watch the work of the new Special Effects Director, who was raised at Toei for ten

years or more. Therefore, I anticipate how good JETMAN will be, and I believe that you can count on it too.”

Please tell us your impressions for the future of Toei TV.

YOSHIKAWA: “Now, Period Dramas (Jidaigeki), are becoming very popular, and Toei TV is having a prosperous time in their production. What we need to do now is accumulate a number of story ideas and plans. We also have an economic margin so we can again start to produce more action shows.

“Besides TV, we are producing ‘V Cinema,’ which are original live action productions for the home video market (such as LADY BATTLECOP—ed.). Soon we will be adapting an original KAMEN RIDER story for V Cinema, based on the concepts that have been developed by several publishers. We wish to develop our productions in a variety of mediums.”

RX grapples with Shadow Moon; Kotaro & the entire Kamen Rider clan (l to r): Sky Rider, Stronger, Amazon, X, Rideman, Rider 2, Rider 1, Z-Cross, V3 and Super-1.



series, the original KAMEN RIDER BLACK was much more impressively handled.

On the other hand, the production values have improved considerably in most areas—the monsters, robots, demons, etc. are well designed and executed, though Rainbow Industries' staff felt they received superior commissions for KAMEN RIDER BLACK. Nevertheless, there are quite a few im-



pressive villains created, that should have had longer screen time or expanded parts. "Bujin," "Deathgaron," "Kroizell" and Shadow Moon all should have had larger roles in the series than do such absolutely worthless characters as Maribaron or Chacram. Such a waste.

The story culminates into an exciting climax as the entire Kamen Rider clan (who had been training somewhere in Arizona) show up to lend Kotaro a

hand in defeating Crisis. This grand four-part battle is probably the highlight of the series, well holding its own against BLACK. Unfortunately, none of the actors who played the older Riders in their human form (i.e. Hiroshi Fujioka, Takashi Sasaki, Hiroshi Miyauchi, etc.) appear. Oh well, at least we have some henchmen this time . . .

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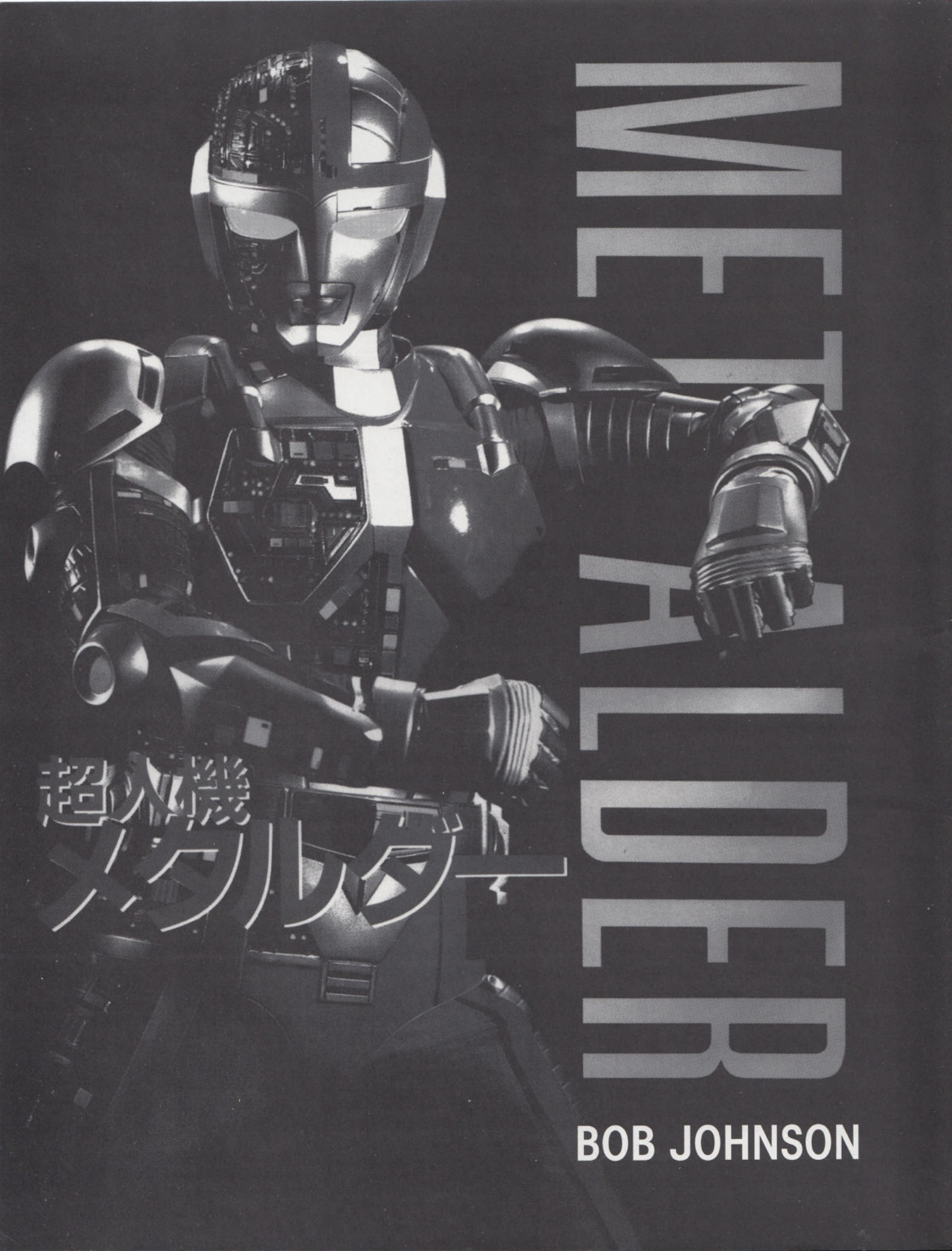
MASKED RIDER BLACK RX (KAMEN RAID A BURAKU ARU ÉKUSU)

STAFF

•Producers—Susumu Yoshikawa, Nagfumi Hori (Toei), Ryo Iguchi, Naoyoshi Yamada (Mainichi Broadcasting)
•Original Story—Shotaro Ishinomori •Serialized in TV-Kun, Shogakukan Learning Magazines, TV-Magazine, Comic Bonbon, TV-Land •Music—Eiji Kawamura •Directors—Yoshiaki Kobayashi, Takeshi Ogasawara •Scenarios—Kenichi Araki, Takashi Yamada, Taku Ezure •Photography—Fumio Matsumura •Lighting—Isao Nakagawa •Art Director—Noboru Miyakuni •Prosthetics—Takeshi Maezawa, Katsumi Ota •Editing—Junkichi Sugano •Musical Director—Kenji Kananari •Sound Effects—Oizumi Visual Sound: Sakuji Abe •Continuity—Yuka Watanabe •Sets—Toei Art Center: Yoshitake Kiwa •Wire Works—Shuichi Kuniyone •Make-Up—Sun Make •Costumes—Tokyo Costumers •Decoration—Taiko Co.: Kenin Suzuki, Hideo Nakamura, Yasutoshi Tamura •Character Coordinator—Satoshi Osano (Ishimori Pro)
•Character Manufacturer—Rainbow Prosthetic Planning •Character Designs—Keita Amamiya, Ryu Noguchi •Associate Producer—Nariki Takadera •Assistant Directors—Noboru Matsui, Naoki Iwahara, Ryuta Tazaki, Terae Anyo •Focus Puller—Masaharu Okabe •Chief Production Manager—Yoshikazu Toriyama •Production Desk—Tetsuo Hashimoto •In Charge of Production—Yoshinori Fujita •Motorbike Cooperation—Suzuki •Video Composites—Totsu ECG Systems: Hiroshi Kondo, Yoshitetsu Maeoka, Yasuo Suzuki, Hideki Ono •Automobile Cooperation—Mazda •Composites—Channel 16 •Processing—Toei Chemical Co. •Assistant Photographers—Toshikazu Kamiaka, Nobutoshi Sasaki, Takeshi Yabu •Assistant Lighting—Katsumi Takeda, Yoshito Mazaki, Tetsuya Matsuyama •Sound Recording Assistant—Toru Kojima •Assistant Editors—Naoki Osada, Seigo Hirasawa, Jun Taguma •Assistant Production Manager—Jo Matsuya •Special Effects Director—Nobuo Yajima •Sfx Photography—Tokutatsu Kenkyujo (Sfx Photography Research): Ei Suzuki, Katsuo Ogami (wire works), Seisen Takahashi (photography), Hoya Hayashi (lighting), Hiroshi Butsuda, Toshio Miike (art direction) •Produced by Toei Co., Ltd. and Mainichi Broadcasting.

CAST

•Kotaro Minami (Tetsuo Kurata) •Reiko Shiratori (Jun Koyamaki) •Shunkicki Sahara (Makoto Akatsuka) •Utako Sahara (Eri Tsuruma) •Shigeru (Go Inoue) •Hitomi (Shoko Imura) •Kazami no Jo (Rikiya Koyama) •Kyoko Matoba (Megumi Ueno) •Lieutenant Hayami (Minoru Sado) •General Jak (Toshimichi Takahashi/Voice—Seizo Kato, Shigekatsu Shibata) •Bosgan (Yoshikazu Fujiki/Voice—Shozo Iizuka) •Gatenzone (Takayuki Kitamura/Voice—Toshimichi Takahashi) •Gedorian (Minoru Watanabe/Voice—Kazunori Arai) •Maribaron (Junko Takahata) •Deathmurder (Tetsuya Matsui) •Grand Lord Crisis (Voice—Goro Naya) •Shadow Moon (Tokio Iwata/Voice—Masanori Iisen) •Narrator—Kazumasa Masamune •Action Directors—Osamu Kenta, Jun Murakami •Kamen Rider Black RX—Jiro Okamoto •Stuntmen—Yasuhiro Takenaka, Kazue Nakajima, Noriko Iida (Japan Action Club) •Opening Theme Song "Kamen Rider Black RX" (Lyrics—Chinka Ko; Music & Arrangement—Eiji Kawamura; Singer—Takayuki Miyauchi) •End Theme Song "Who Do You Love?" (Lyrics—Chinka Ko; Music—Eiji Kawamura; Singer—Takayuki Miyauchi).

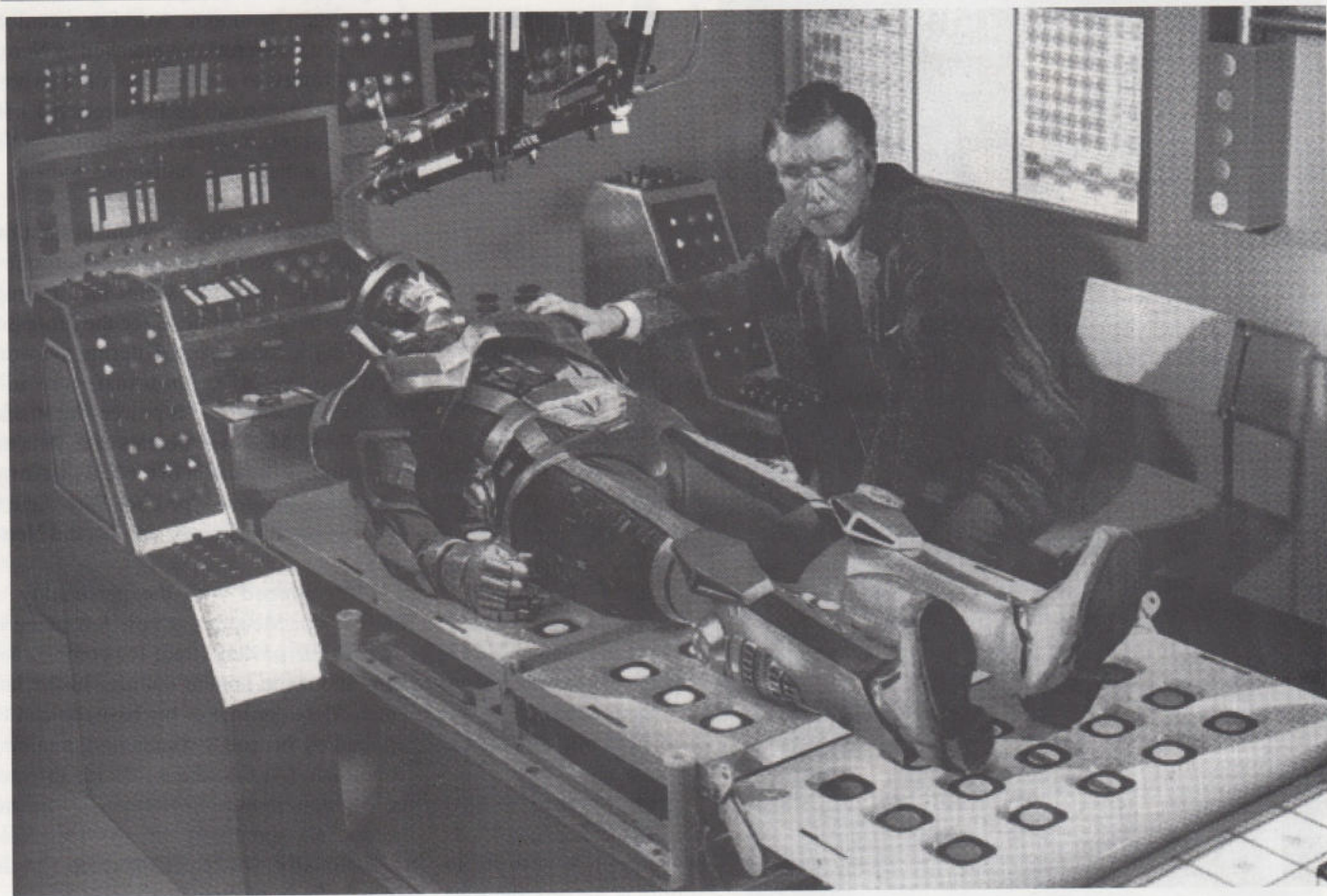


超人機

メタルダーク

MEET HALL OF FAME

BOB JOHNSON



S U P E R M A N C H I N E M E T A L D E R

The Android with the Soul of a Man

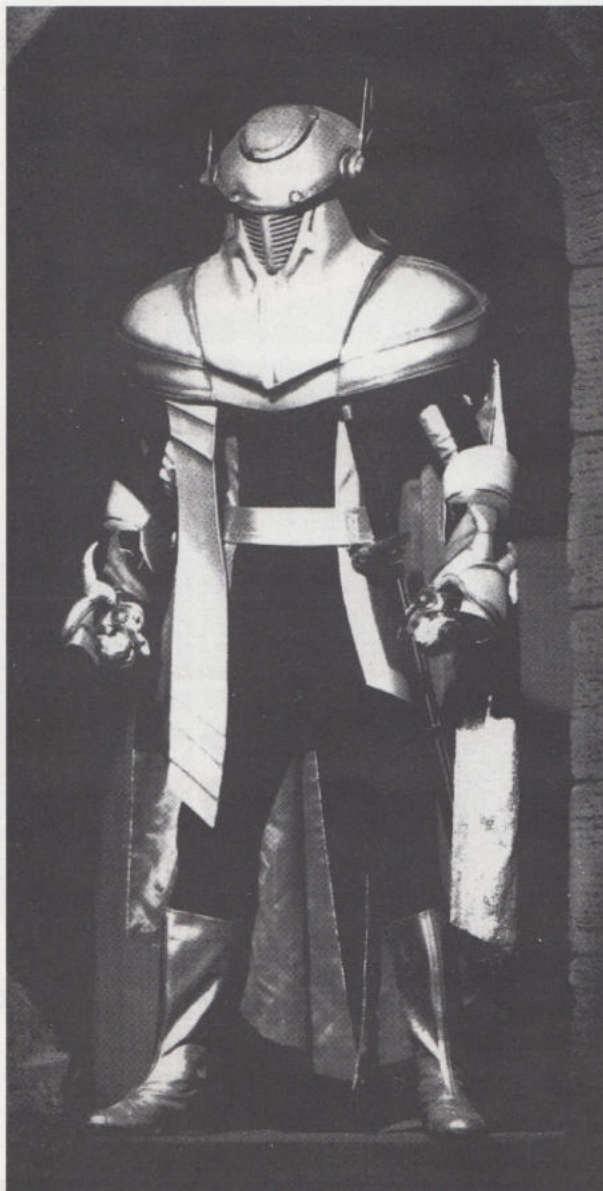
In the mid 1980s, Toei was enjoying a live-action revival, riding high on the success of the SPACE SHERIFF series (GAVAN, SHARIVAN, JUSPION, etc.). But, faced with the renewed popularity of the 1970s heroes, a decision was made to emulate the style of KIKAIER. Instead of doing a new, updated KIKAIER series, Toei opted for a new character and series, similar to the format of the android from the '70s.

This was the basis for METALDER, created by the prolific Saburo Yatsude. SUPER MANCHINE METALDER

(CHO-JINKI METARUDA) premiered on TV Asahi on March 16, 1987. Using elements from various superhero themes, Yatsude conceived one of the best live-action series of the '80s, one fresh and original in theme and content.

Towards the end of WWII, Professor Koga (Ken Uehara), a robotics specialist, is commissioned by the





military regime to produce a robot soldier, which would be mass-produced and set against the Allies, presenting the Japanese Imperial forces with a considerable advantage.

While designing this automaton war machine, news reaches the brilliant scientist that his son has been killed in the Pacific. Realizing the futility of war, the professor disappears with all his plans and the unfinished robot, going into hiding.

Forty years later: An underground, subversive organization, the Neros Empire, formed by the evil God Neros, is after Professor Koga and his un-activated robot—the only element opposing their plans for world domination. Neros has been responsible for every major calamity in the world since the end of the Pacific War.

Its secret base is located beneath the Kiri-hara Concern corporate tower; its Empire is served by four battalions: the Battle-Robot Army, the Panzer Army (heavily armored transforming robots), the Knight Army (men in mobile pow-

ered suits), and the Monster Army (biologically created mutants). Together they are vying for the most sought-after prize in the super-villain handbook, world domination.

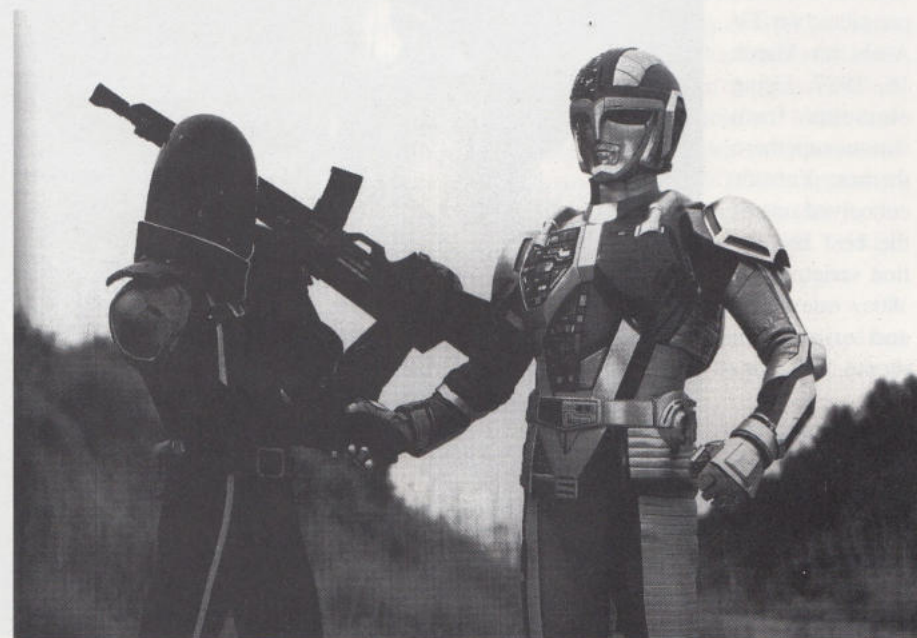
When his secret lab is attacked by Neros, Koga is forced to activate the robot (whose human form resembles his deceased son, named "Tsurugi Ryusei"), which in its battle-form, is a half-red, half-blue android—Metalder!

After awaking the mechanical creation, Koga acts as a decoy, luring the evil empire's hordes away from the secret lab. Tsurugi Ryusei emerges in time to see the professor killed by the robot army. Uttering the word "Ikaru" ("anger"), he transforms into Metalder. Unaware of his powers, he attacks the killers. Metalder defeats the villains, only to lose to the leader of the Knight Army, in a classic samurai-type duel. The stage is now set continuing battle against the Neros Empire.

Programmed with the personality of Koga's son, Metalder is now left alone to discover his powers, train for combat, and learn about the human culture. In the lab, which Metalder makes his base, he can be repaired by his robot companion, a talking Doberman. (At first the producers effected the canine's mouth-movements by having the dog eat something chewy. This technique, luckily, was abandoned later in the series in favor of none at all.)

Also in the cave at Metalder's disposal is a flying car and a sidecar motorcycle, which can jump great distances. While out testing the cycle, Metalder rescues a nature photographer who is being attacked by one of Neros' robots. The photographer, Mai Ohgi (Hiroko Aota), becomes one of Metalder's closest friends. At another point in the series, Metalder is joined by members of an Anti-Neros resistance group, the Jack Task Force (starring the senior member of the Japan Action Club, Hiroshi Watari, and Junichi Haruta and Kenji Ohba) for an exciting two-parter. Another of Metalder's compatriots is Hakko Kita (Hiroshi Kawai of CHANGEMAN fame), an impatient young man who has defected from Neros, and who plays a pivotal role in the defeat of the mad empire.

Originally sent to assassinate Metalder, the Robot Army's honorable marksman Top Gunner challenges the manchine to a showdown duel. When he is disarmed by Metalder, he is denied termination by the android, who refuses on moral grounds to strike down an unarmed duellist. Shaken, Top Gunner is struck by Metalder's sense of chivalry, and



develops a great respect for the machine. Disavowing all allegiance to God Neros, Top Gunder returns after a time to fight at Metalder's side.

Another startling aspect of METALDER, elevating it above the standard "superhero" drama, occurs in episode #3: Metalder is engaged in combat with a member of the Knight Army, Hammer Ben-K. Getting the better of his foe, Metalder is stopped before delivering his finishing blow, when his circuits realize that his opponent is a human being. "Why!?" asks a startled Ben-K. "Because you have life. The most precious of things..." replies Metalder, as he turns and leaves his shocked foe. Much later it is discovered that Ben-K has left Neros and became a Buddhist monk. The tone and feeling of this segment make it the best of the entire show.

Since the series was cut short 10 episodes (42 out of the originally planned 52), the final chapters are a bit rushed in the script department, and the final episode, "The Grand Decisive Battle—Metalder Forever!", is somewhat of a letdown after all the great build-up the series worked at. But this does not detract from the show as a whole as much as it would seem.

The development of the characters, especially the titular star, as he mentally develops human traits, learns about his powers and about the world around him, is excellent. The growing respect and ultimate friendship between Metalder and Top Gunder is also handled very well, with a real sense of camaraderie.

Another element that separates this series from most other '80s Toei hero shows is the soundtrack written by Seiji Yokoyama, with Hiroshi Kumagai conducting the New Japan Philharmonic. This is the same team responsible for the music of the animated

CAPTAIN HARLOCK teleseries. Instead of the blaring horns and electric guitars typical of Shunsuke Kikuchi or Chumei Watanabe, Metalder's duels are accompanied by full string sections as well as brass, a fuller symphonic sound which does not dwarf the show, but rather sets the mood perfectly.

Combining elements from MIGHTY ATOM, EIGHT MAN, and KIKAIER, creator Saburo Yatsude adds a touch of IRONMAN NO.28, turning out a rich, multi-layered storyline which fits well in the Toei Superhero mold. METALDER also differs in that most of the enemies he will face are introduced in the premiere episode, "Forward—Into the World of 100 Demons". This right away gives the impression that a vast army exists, rather than a small group which creates a new robot or creature each week (the same sort of format was experimented on in SUPER ELECTRON BIOMAN, another excellent series—ed.). The legions of Neros are allowed their own individual personalities, with constant boasting, ego-clashing, and down-right brawls breaking out among them, everyone claiming to be the group or individual that will ultimately squash



Metalder. Further twists, turns, and startling revelations follow before a surprise conclusion.

The 1980s saw a string of series continuing from the 1970s, such as the Kamen Rider and Sentai Series, as well as the '80s own Space Sheriffs. But among them all stands METALDER, one of the best of the superhero series of the '80s!



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Akira Kurosawa's *Dreams*

G u y T u c k e r

American criticism of Japanese films (or any films, for that matter), is usually laughably bankrupt; but the critical dismissal of this, Kurosawa's most exciting film in twenty years, is as puzzling as it is disgusting; he's always been the establishment's darling, even though—as Kurosawa himself has written—nobody much in the West has ever written with any real insight about his work.

If Kurosawa hadn't already begun shooting *Rhapsody in August* when *DREAMS* was released Stateside, I bet nobody would have dared drub the film as they have—since *Dodes'Kaden*, they've treated every work as if it were his last; and so, for that matter, has he. The haunting final shot of *Ran* appeared to be his ultimate comment on the human condition—blinded, stuck on a cliffside and not knowing the way off it—afraid to go forward and afraid to go back. *DREAMS* is a far more optimistic film, probably not a great one, but then I wouldn't say he's made a great film since *Yojimbo*. The fact is that all directors peak at some time in their careers, and he did after a very respectable eighteen years.

Especially in his color films, Kurosawa appears to have been

falling back on his craft; and since he *is* the greatest living director, his craft automatically commands greater attention. Yet what makes the color films as disheartening as they are is that there's so little complexity in their outlook; Kurosawa's characters torment themselves and one other unto death,

and that's about it. The theme of his early work—"Why can't people be happier together?" had become "Why is everybody so awful?" Kurosawa has had a surpassingly difficult life, and one can understand why he became so sour. What is miraculous about *DREAMS*, and what American critics have been so



Akira Kurosawa's DREAMS

infuriatingly blind to, is that it represents a leavening of that pessimism. In *RAN*, he was afraid both of going forward and of going back, but here he is willing to go back, to his own *DREAMS*—baring himself far more completely than he has in any other film, or even his own autobiography.



And what Kurosawa does not say in these *DREAMS* is often as interesting as what he does.

The first, "Sunshine Through the Rain," finds him a little boy, spying on a procession of fox demons. This is forbidden, and when he returns home his mother meets him with a knife. "They don't usually forgive,"

she says, handing him the knife. "You must get ready to die." She closes the massive door on him; he turns, walks to a field and sees a rainbow, proof that the foxes did forgive him. *The New Yorker's* Terrence Rafferty thought this part especially undreamlike—a real dream, he wrote, would have ended with the door slamming. Easy for him to say—it's not his dream.

On the other hand, Kurosawa's central failure is to capture a truly dreamlike atmosphere. Stylistically it's his least typical film to date, a mixed, eclectic bag, with peculiar special effects by Industrial Light and Magic—far less "realistic" than their typical work, one imagines he made them work directly from his own paintings. And the photography is somehow less breathtaking than that of his other color films (*GODZILLA* 1985's Kazutami Hara was one of the cameramen, and I think I detect his touch in the best-looking segment, "The Tunnel"). The second vignette, "The Peach Orchard," is little more than the same kind of exactly static group shots he's been glorying in since *THRONE OF BLOOD*; but it also contains the first glimmerings of the picture's theme—the desecration of nature, symbolized here by the removal of the peach trees. Having already offered a portrait of his mother, we are now introduced to his chattering older sisters. This is the last we see of any of his family—his father and two brothers are conspicuously absent.

Next is the most-praised episode, "The Blizzard" (I don't think the dreams were named in the Japanese version—as I remember it, each segment was prefaced by the iden-

tical title card, "I had this dream . . ."). I don't know why everybody likes it so much; perhaps because it's so annoyingly glacial that the critics *know* it's supposed to be *Art*. Kurosawa is an adult for the first time in this sequence, played by Akira (*RAN*) Terao, who does indeed resemble the young Kurosawa. With a beard here, he also resembles the young Toshiro Mifune (more on this later). Called "I" in the script, I shall call this Kurosawa standin "Akira."

The emphasis is more on exhaustion than cold; Akira and his fellows stagger through a wilderness, Akira hectoring them about how much time they're losing. They finally drop, despite Akira's cry "Don't fall asleep! If you do, you'll die!" Akira is then visited by the hypnotic Yuki-Onna (Mieko Harada, the terrifying Lady Kaede in *RAN*), who soothes him with assurances that "The snow is warm, the ice is hot," wrapping him in polychromatic blankets that become a smothering cocoon. Abruptly he breaks through her trancelike song and hears again the blast of the wind; foiled, her true demonic face is revealed and she is whipped out of sight. The snow lifts and the others wake up; they see their objective, a red-flagged campsite, in the near distance.

Thematically this is the least straightforward of the dreams, and is open to multiple levels of interpretation. What springs most to my mind is a recollection of Kurosawa's in "Something Like An Autobiography," when his teacher Kajiyo Yamamoto deeply impressed him by composing a short story marvelously evocative of heat. He himself later had an experience of cold that he likened to that story; and I think



he wanted to capture something of that on film. I also think that Akira's ranting about "time" and the band's painful, snaillike progress is actually a reference to the torturous shooting schedules Kurosawa is notorious for. Akira and Kurosawa are both the leaders of their teams, and must tug their groups along at any cost.

The finest piece of work—the most dreamlike (though too lengthy) and most evocative—is the fourth dream, "The Tunnel." Akira still has the Mifune-like beard here, which he will subsequently shed in favor of the characteristic Kurosawa sunhat and shoulder-pack. In these dreams, Akira resembles Mifune when he has a heroic act to perform; the rest of the time, he's just a callowly youthful observer or victim, or a child on the brink of discovery.

Akira is a soldier walking along a road; in a genuinely frightening moment, he arrives at a tunnel from which a furious growling is issuing. Suddenly a vicious, snapping, grenade-laden dog scampers out, then back in. Akira pads cautiously through the tunnel, and without incident; but on the other end, he hears the footsteps of another. He turns to find an ashen-faced Private Moguchi (played by Yoshitaka Zushi, who's known Kurosawa most of his life—

he was a little boy in *RED BEARD*, a retarded teenager in *DODES'KADEN*, and gives a superlative, deeply touching performance in this cameo role). "Commander," he addresses Akira, "am I really dead? I went home and ate the cakes mother made for me." Akira tells him that that was just a dream of Moguchi's, from his last, dying hours while tended by Akira.

Moguchi sadly retreats, only to be succeeded by the appearance of the entire dead platoon, the sergeant of which bellows "Third platoon present and accounted for—no casualties!" Akira is horrified by what he feels to be an accusation. "I can hardly look you in the face . . . I sent you out to die, I was responsible." He was taken prisoner, but implores them to believe he would far rather have died with them. Yet "They call you heroes, but sent you to die like dogs. But returning to the world like this proves nothing. Go back and rest in peace." They concur—but the dog runs out again, snapping at his ankles.

Akira Kurosawa never went to war. His father was a colonel, and his oldest brother a cavalry officer who died in a fall from his horse during practice. This brother is not *at all* mentioned in the autobiography; the next oldest brother com-

mitted suicide well before the war. The dream is transparently about the tremendous burden of guilt Kurosawa appears to have carried that he never did serve; he was spared because he was the last male heir in his family. The dream exposes not only this guilt, but something of his suicidal tendencies—he repeatedly says he would rather have died. Kurosawa attempted suicide at least twice in his life, once as a student, once in 1971. Yet in his films, the very act of living is presented as potentially heroic—in *IKIRU*, and in Mifune's line "Everyone has to die. But I hate to be killed!" (*RECORD OF A LIVING BEING*, 1955). For all the character's protestations, Kurosawa is unable to visualize Akira as anything as heroic; he cannot visualize himself as a soldier either, which is why the Mifune beard is pasted on. Mifune's screen image represents Kurosawa's better self.

It's about time that someone point out how much of an influence over Kurosawa his "chief assistant director" (the Japanese meaning is closer to "codirector") Ishiro Honda has been. An actor who has known both directors for over thirty-five years, Yoshio Tsuchiya, calls them "brothers" (remember that Kurosawa lost both of his). In the late 1970s,



Kurosawa moved to a house near that of his former "sempai" ("senior")—Honda, Kurosawa and Senkichi Taniguchi were the three favorite pupils of Kajiro Yamamoto, but Honda was drafted in 1937 and served through the very end of the war in China). They started golfing together regularly, and it is during these excursions that *KAGEMUSHA*, *RAN*, *DREAMS* and *RHAPSODY IN AUGUST* have been conceived. The ideas are always Kurosawa's, yet Honda is his invaluable sounding board, present in every stage of planning from the very start. Given Honda's extensive background in special effects films, he must have been a particular help this time; but I think he had the most influence over the effects-light "The Tunnel"—though much of it is indirect.

The dog, encountered before Akira enters the tunnel, represents the threat of war. The tunnel represents the war itself, which Akira passes through as relatively smoothly as did Kurosawa. The mass of dead move Akira to guilt, even as Kurosawa must have felt guilt for surviving where so many others died (in his autobiography, there is a vague delectation about his references to the "Suicide of the Hundred Million" planned if the war should be

lost). Yet he entreaties them to return to being dead, to rest in peace—another recurring Kurosawa theme, that one should live simply and not bother others (this is also the theme of the final dream).

The "troops," all born after the war, were drilled in Imperial Army diction by Ishiro Honda, a platoon leader during his war years. He says he never took the officers' exam because he was "cynical" about the war and didn't care to be responsible for giving such orders as Akira feels guilty about in the dream. Honda also thinks that this particular dream might have sprung from a story he once told Kurosawa, about a member of his own platoon who had been bayoneted, fallen in a stream, yet lived to tell about it (Private Moguchi bears a visible bayonet wound). The pronouncement "No casualties!" might come from the fact that in all the years he commanded it, Honda's platoon never lost a man.

The best segment is followed by the oddest, "Crows," in which young, studious-looking Akira sets out to meet Vincent Van Gogh. When he tries to introduce himself, Van Gogh looks at him crossly. "Why aren't you painting?" Played with fitful intensity by Martin Scorsese (chosen not because of the two directors' friendship, but because Kurosawa

always thought Scorsese resembled Van Gogh), the painter gestures at the field before them: "To me this is beyond belief. As if in a dream, the scene paints itself for me. ... But it's so difficult to hold inside. [So] I work, I slave, I drive myself like a locomotive." Kurosawa goes so far here as to insert a shot of a locomotive. "I have to hurry," Van Gogh declares, bustling away. "Time's running out—so little time left for me to paint." For Akira's edification, he explains the bandage on his head: he'd cut off his ear to perfect his self-portrait.

Van Gogh marches off, a locomotive sounding in the distance. A literal walking tour through some of his paintings follows, but what is essential to this sequence is the part about the ear—Kurosawa no doubt can't help admiring such dedication to one's craft.

Nuclear holocaust is the sole event in "Mount Fuji in Red," which less resembles one of Honda's pictures than you'd think. The shot of Fuji crumbling is fanciful in the extreme; with a clutch of buildings at its base representing a town, there is in fact no such view of the mountain anywhere in Japan. But hey, it's only a dream—a nightmare in fact, illuminating a fear Kurosawa has expressed before only in *RECORD*



OF A LIVING BEING. Akira speaks with an officious-looking man by the shore. "Radioactivity was invisible so they colored it," the man notes. "But that only lets you know what's killing you. Death's calling card. . . . Waiting to die isn't living," he declares, drowning himself. This man was in life a nuclear power plant manager, and does himself in as an act of abnegation; I wonder if it's coincidental that this character, emblematic of the destruction of all humanity, is played by an actor who closely resembles one of the studio executives who have harrassed Kurosawa over the years.

This sequence feeds into "The Weeping Demon," which is strikingly similar in conception and execution to *MATANGO* (1963, written by Takeshi Kimura and directed by Ishiro Honda). In the postapocalyptic world, Akira stumbles across a one-horned demon under a patch of giant dandelions (monstrous and inedible, quite reminiscent of the monster mushrooms of *MATANGO*). "This is all radiation polluted. The flowers are crippled," the demon declares. And so are humans. He used to be human—but humans "made the Earth a junkyard for human wastes." Only mutations remain (Akira apparently excepted).

There's nothing to eat but other demons; and "Even here we have grades. One-horned ones like me get eaten by those with two or three horns. Let them have those horns. Let them look the way they do." It pains them; it is their punishment. His punishment is his low status. He knows presently he will be consumed, and be free in a way the immortal ones never will be; yet he fears this death. In life, he was a farmer, the type that conceals and wastes his own products to keep prices high, while the "famous" demons with three horns just go on suffering—Akira climbs a hill and sees a vale of them rolling in waste and wailing. "Do you want to become a demon too?" the creature purrs, and Akira turns and tumbles back down the hill.

The criticism of modern-day Japanese materialism and desecration of nature is only implicit here, as it was in "The Peach Orchard"; though this is what Kurosawa seems mostly to want to get across, what one also notices is, again, certain parallels to his film career. He is asked if he *wants* to become a demon—for even the one-horned creature in life was a comparatively privileged person. Kurosawa has always been tormented by censors and studio executives, and has also



steadfastly refused to allow most forms of merchandising or profiteering relating to any films made under the Kurosawa Productions banner (this is everything from *THRONE OF BLOOD* on). He sees the demons as fiends in their punishment, but he has to climb a hill to do it. Professionally, Kurosawa too climbed a hill—indeed, a mountain—only to find a catalogue of grotesques at its top. In the dream, he turns and runs back down the hill.

What he finds at the bottom is the "Village of the Watermills," a gorgeous, colorful location. In this final dream, Kurosawa baldly tells us what he's getting at. Akira is present, but again just an observer. The real voice of Kurosawa is realized in that of the grandest of all Grand Old Men in Japanese cinema: Chishu Ryu. Already aged when Kurosawa was young, Ryu has hung on, long outliving the director with whom he is usually associated, Yasujiro (TOKYO STORY) Ozu, and continuing to appear regularly on the stage and in the films of Juzo Itami.

Ryu notes that the villagers live without electricity. "People get too used to convenience. They throw out what's truly good." Light is provided by candles. Akira protests that the night is so dark. "That's



what night is supposed to be," Ryu says cheerfully—it's certainly not supposed to be day. "Man forgets [everything's] just a part of nature." Whatever their intelligence, scientists are not in touch with nature, only making things worse; and people don't know better, "they worship them. They don't see that they're going to perish." Ryu's people have nothing if they haven't pure water and air which can't "dirty the hearts of men."

Crossing the bridge into the village, Akira had seen laughing children putting flowers on a stone there. It is the marker of the grave of a sick traveler who died and was buried there. Everyone puts flowers there out of custom—"most don't know why." Ryu is preparing for a festival—"a nice happy funeral. It's nice to live long and then be thanked." There are no priests here, all ceremonies are done by the villagers, who do not celebrate the death of a young one; but today's funeral is for a 99-year-old woman. "To tell the truth, she was my first love. But she broke my heart," Ryu confides, "and left me for another." He gives a merry laugh. He himself is 103 — "A good age to stop living. [But] It's good to be alive. It's exciting." With that, Ryu joins the procession, preceded by children scattering flower

petals in the path. Akira watches them go by, beaming broadly; then he turns to contemplate the peaceful watermills from the bridge. Then he picks a couple of flowers, lays them delicately on the rock with the others, settles his pack firmly on both shoulders, and crosses the bridge.

The evident didacticism of this sequence will inevitably put many viewers off, and I do suspect Kurosawa of having added most of the rhetoric about how man ought to live, tacking it onto a dream of a watermill village where the end of a long life is a cause for celebration (in direct contrast to the reality of such drunken Japanese wakes as the one he portrayed in *IKIRU*, or the grisly formalities presented in Itami's *THE FUNERAL*).

But compare it to the conclusions of Kurosawa's last several films, in particular *DERSU UZALA*, *KAGEMUSHA* and *RAN*—stark, despairing visions which grip the viewer because of their tragic dimension, yet also betray a disturbing grim-mindedness on the part of the director. With *DREAMS*, Kurosawa has at once made the most courageous film of his career, and declared that life really is worth living after all. Note the floral imagery pervasive in the film—one could write an entire thesis on Kurosawa's sym-

bolic use of flowers in every one of his films (most blaringly in *DRUNKEN ANGEL*). To him, flowers mean life and hope. Akira's final gesture of placing flowers on the grave marker is Kurosawa's way of making peace with the hereafter. Further, Akira's shoulderpack (he wears one in every sequence as an adult) has until now always been slung over a single shoulder. In this final sequence, it is braced firmly over both. Akira crosses the bridge, and the camera moves to examine the rush of the water, which represents the rush of time (a happier echo of the tortured freeze-frame of the flag in the water at the end of *KAGEMUSHA*). It is one of the least ambiguously optimistic conclusions of any film in Kurosawa's career.

Where the great old man means to take us with *RHAPSODY IN AUGUST* is still unclear, but with *DREAMS* he has returned to the sort of socially conscious and stylistically offbeat work on which he built his reputation—his last two films having been more meditations on his own misery. Elements of same are obviously strong here, but firmly balanced, as in the old days.

All photos from *DREAMS* © 1990
Kurosawa Productions



THE DRIFTING CLASSROOM

A Bad Show From A Master Showman



Guy Tucker

In recent years Japan has seen a revival of the live-action fantasy film, with Toho reassuming its old mantle as leader of the field through *SAYONARA JUPITER*, *GODZILLA* 1985, *GODZILLA VS. BIOLLANTE*, *GODZILLA* 1990, *NINETEEN*, *PRINCESS FROM THE MOON*, *TEITO MONOGOTARI* (Tokyo-The Last Megalopolis), *TEITO TAISEN*, and *THE DRIFTING CLASSROOM*. It is significant that the latter project was filmed instead of animated, even though its source was *themanga* of famed horror-fantasy artist Kazuo Umezu. On the other hand, Toho entrusted it to probably the most cartoony of modern Japanese directors, the madly eccentric Nobuhiko Obayashi, who in the 1970s parleyed his notoriety as a director of TV commercials into an erratic but successful feature career.

Though something of a celebrity in Japan, his films after his debut *HOUSE* have received little or no attention outside that country (until New Yorker Films' ac-

quisition of his 1990 comedy *BEIJING WATERMELON*). I can't see why, since none of those movies could possibly have been worse, and one of them, *TENKOSEI* (Heaven's Little Gates, 1984), was one of the best Japanese pictures of the past decade, an enthralling modern-day fable about a boy and a girl whose minds accidentally switch bodies. Far from belaboring the story with the smarmy trappings one would expect from most Western directors, Obayashi examined Japanese sex roles with microscopic care and dazzling assurance, and encouraged a startling performance from the girl playing a boy trapped in a girl's body. (The boy, conversely, seemed to be a perverse jerk as a boy, and a useless whiner as a girl; Obayashi's ultimate comment on Japanese men would seem to be that they long for little more than to be able to urinate from a standing position.)

Obayashi has made a number of pictures no less delicate than *TENKOSEI*, including 1988's award-winning *ICHIJINTACHI NO NATSU* (the story of which seems to have anticipated *GHOST*, even as *TENKOSEI* anticipated *BIG* and its ilk), and received more Japanese critical

plaudits than Kurosawa is grudged today. All these movies, however, also display a certain streak of perversity that Obayashi seems unable to restrain, and *THE DRIFTING CLASSROOM* sees him returning to the style that made *HOUSE* such a trial to sit through.

First-period students and teachers find themselves catapulted to an alternate dimension when the Kobe International School is, quite suddenly, sucked into a space-time vortex one morning. On this new plane, where nothing can be seen but a vast expanse of desert, theirs is a struggle for survival, against forces from without (huge marauding crabs) and within (intolerance and madness prompted by encroaching starvation). Gradually most of the students are done in by one thing or another, until a columnar gateway appears before the dusty ruins of the school; only the youngest of them, Yuichi, is light enough to actually be pulled up into the column and returned back to Japan, where scientists and parents have long been gazing mournfully at the hole the school left behind, waxing philosophic. Yuichi's older brother Sho, left behind with a scattering of survivors,



vows to somehow establish a community in their new domain.

A simple enough story, but Obayashi makes it almost impossible to follow. The first ten minutes, true, are altogether dazzling, beginning with Sho pestering his harried mother until she slaps him; cursing, he runs out the door, then pauses on the steps. Here Obayashi fades from a shot of worried-looking Mom to one of Sho looking at the door that separates them. This is the single most impressive moment in the picture, a sequence that foreshadows the ultimate fate for mother and son—to be forever looking towards one another, each able to perceive the other (the cross-fade shows both Mom and Sho simultaneously looking at their sides of the door), but unable to see or touch. A similar relationship exists between Miss Midori and her fiancé, who is somehow embodied in a good-weather doll hanging on the windowsill. In the last of the opening's many delightful moments, Midori's students catch wind of her approaching marriage and march about the room to a wordless chorus of "Here Comes the Bride"; it is when Jessica, borne aloft by her classmates, is about to present her with a bouquet that the vortex opens, chaos begins, and the movie goes straight to hell.

Special effects consist of bad mattes and worse miniatures, as well as pitiful stop-motion crab monsters. A baby version of the latter, called the Iya, hangs out at the beached school and jitterbugs when it's

upset. This creature got a couple of laughs out of the Japanese audience, who seemed relieved to see something they knew was supposed to be funny. Me, I laughed at everything else. Most of the movie is shot in English, with grotesque acting and line readings, probably encouraged by the director. Even Troy Donahue—not much of an actor, but he should know how *not* to read a line—talks like an automaton. Worst of all is Thomas Sutton, as the archvillain Mark. At first I thought he was supposed to be amusingly self-centered, what with his ceaseless pratings about how the space-time vortex interrupted his soccer game. Then, however, he faces off the crab monsters with the All-American cry "THIS is my big game today!" and I could have thrown up. With other lines like "Anything can be used for food! ANYTHING!" (eyeing the friendly Iya), scenery-scarfing Sutton gives Rod Steiger a run for his money.

The picture doesn't have much going for it besides a tuneful score by Joe (NAUSICAÄ, LAPUTA) Hisaishi, and the performance of Yoshiko Mita as Mom. Though essentially a cameo role, Mita plays it for all it's worth. When Sho is menaced in the parallel dimension, Mom leaps awake, feints as toward an invisible opponent, then grabs a baseball bat, runs outside and hurls it into the vortex-hole; Mita's desperation here is tempered by Mom's bond with Sho (when she jumps up she looks ready to fight herself), and by making every second count,

layering such reactions as she does, only Mita succeeds in creating a believable character.

Once she's thrown the bat in the hole, it suddenly appears in Sho's hands, turning the tide. This is just one of many excruciatingly silly scenes—other prizes include Donahue's farewell (he tells Midori he loves her, then walks off into the desert to die) and Miss Midori's exit (she charms an attacking crab with her piano solo, composed by Obayashi, who writes piano solos for most of his films and appears obsessed with the instrument; witness the girl-eating piano of *HOUSE*, and the means by which Midori appears to fuse with her piano to forever hold immobile that single crab—or whatever). Jessica dies in a crab attack crying "I've always loved you, Mark!" (this is all we ever find out about her). One boy obsessed with chewing gum is pulled bubble-first up into the vortex. Obayashi saves the best for last: Sho and company arrayed before the sandy ruins of their school, determined to make the best of it, Sho communing with his mother across the heavens—when suddenly young Ayumi breaks into his reverie with the declaration (in English), "I want to have your BAY-bee, Sho!" Sho manfully squares his jaw and turns his head towards the great unknown. Most of these young actors were real students of the Kobe International School, and were left back a year due to the classes they missed during shooting. They got off cheap.

I've actually sat through this twice, and admit that it makes more sense the second time—it's not a stupid movie, there's a lot going on in its multiple symbols (there are some interesting things done with Western and Korean pairs of twins). But it's an unapproachable movie. Obayashi is a master showman, but for some reason he just won't put on a good show, deadening the pace with lengthy, badly-lit vortex and crab-attack scenes, interrupting the story with outrageous flashy wipes, shooting with slow film . . . he seems to be showing off all the techniques he knows, but we already knew about them as early as *HOUSE*. Obayashi is like John Boorman, I think—fascinated by technique and theme and by how the two can work together. By that token, then, *THE DRIFTING CLASSROOM* is Obayashi's *EXORCIST II*. It remains to be seen if he will ever equal *EXCALIBUR* or *POINT BLANK*; it's clear he has it in him, but unclear if everything else he has in him won't get in the way.

GODZILLA VS. BIOLLANTE

Has the Symbol of Anarchy Incarnate Returned?



August Ragone

As a result of negative comments pointed at director Koji Hashimoto's handling of 1984's *GODZILLA* (Issue #1), Toho tries to "legitimize" Godzilla by using "respectable" director Kazuki Omori—a man who does not hide the fact that he considers monster films and special effects to be below his talents (interviewed in #1—ed).

After waiting an additional three years from the originally announced release date of December 1986 (delayed largely due to the fact that Toho got worried when *KING KONG LIVES!* took a nosedive in Japan,

forgetting that the film was just plain bad to begin with), *GODZILLA VS. BIOLLANTE* is both a joy and a mild letdown at the same time—a contrast mostly due to writer-director Omori.

In contrast to the previous entry in the series, where both the monster and human drama scenes were somewhat dull, this film tries to pack in so much action, that the story moves too fast, without any let up. The film is like a cheetah pumped up, running so fast that it burns the audience out before its finale unspools.

Everything transpires too quickly—transitions, scenes and cuts—just as you settle into the excitement of a scene, its

over. Omori, it seems, just wants the film to hurry up and end. Perhaps if he was allowed a 2 hour running time, or didn't try to cram so many ideas and characters into the existing 104-minute film, it would be a more mature work. The end result looks as though a lot ended up on the cutting room floor.

All this aside, the movie is anything but boring. But the problems remain: Omori expects everyone to understand his abbreviated ideas because he wrote the scenario, and knows what he's driving at. In playing up to the average moviegoer and the Godzilla fans, Omori makes a strange compromise. This doesn't help the film, it hinders it—shortchanging the special effects work of

Koichi Kawakita and the overall dramatic impact. The first part of the film (beginning in 1984 and moving to "five years later") is very well done and sets the mood of the film with excellent pacing. But pacing and cutting go steadily downhill once Godzilla appears. All transitions virtually disappear; Godzilla's entry resembles a script footnote: "Mihara erupts, Godzilla rises from the crater." This scene, which should have had a suspenseful build up, has none—it is solely based on the expectation of Godzilla showing his face. Much of the film that follows is cast from the same mold. There is more exposition of Kuroki entering the command room (a full 20 seconds) than the opening of the hanger and the take-off of the Super X2 (barely 4 seconds)! When the military might starts moving, there are no sailors reacting on the ships to the leviathan, nor any footage of the Maser-Beam Tank crews—there is not even an entrance scene for these vehicles at all! In fact, Omori relies, not once, but twice on computer graphics to replace dramatic introduction to military-against-Godzilla scenes. Obviously, Omori's greatest abbreviations are in the context of special effects scenes.

The story is intriguing, and contains several exciting points which revolve around aspects other than Godzilla. The industrial espionage angle is interesting, but the "American" and "Saradian" performers are very disappointing—why can't Toho use more actors like Brenda Bakke (from GUNHED)? The dark sunglasses and wild gestures are typical Toho clichés. The Japanese cast is competent and most of the players are adequate, with magnetic presence from Megumi Odaka (as psychic girl Miki), Toru Minegishi (as Col. Gondo), Masanobu Takashima (Major Kuroki) and veteran Ryunosuke Kaneda (as Mr. Okouchi)—all immediately likeable characters, against whom the rest of the cast fares less well. Yoko Tanaka (as Asuka) was highly regarded on both sides of the Pacific for her tremendously moving performance in Shohei Imamura's BLACK RAIN (KUROI AMÉ), but is lost in the shuffle of characters, reduced to looking concerned or frightened. Kunihiro Mitamura (as Kirishima) is given nothing much to do, and barely smiles. Koji Takahashi (as Dr. Shiragami) is too static and distant (ex-

cept before his daughter dies) to generate audience sympathy. It seems that either there are too many characters to focus on (Ishiro Honda used three or four central characters, tops), or director Omori cannot handle actors well. The former is the most likely explanation, given Omori's reputation as an actor's director.

The film's visual image is sharp and crisp, due to the cinematography of Yudai Kato and the art direction of Shigekazu Ikuno. Composition and camera movement are excellent, topped off by Michiko Ikeda's brisk editing. Still, as with Kazutami Hara's work on GODZILLA (1984), Kato's is still no match for Hajime Koizumi's photography under Honda's direction.

Koichi Kawakita, rushing right into this production shortly after wrapping effects for GUNHED, had expected drawbacks in their final execution. With a shooting schedule of only three months in which to complete a myriad of effects sequences, Kawakita and his crew were under an unjust amount of pressure. The end results may not be as spectacular as his work in SAYONARA JUPITER or GUNHED [both reviewed last issue—ed.], but are more consistent overall than Nakano's work in whole or part on 1984's GODZILLA.

The most dynamic special effects in BIOLLANTE revolve around Godzilla, especially in action scenes—the battle in Uraga Channel with the Maritime fleet and the monster's confrontation with the X2 are excellent, although brief, and really show off Kawakita's stuff. They are outstanding combinations of miniature operation (water and air-borne), optical effects, pyrotechnics and suitmation techniques. Yet Omori clips effects scenes because, "...we have a limitation to running time. In other words, [SPFX] reduces the impact of the drama, doesn't it? If the drama scenes decrease in impact, that means that the story is unclear..." Omori has no concept of how powerfully dramatic special effects can be. Kawakita's special effects storyboards—ignored by Omori—and the special effects scenes still on the cutting room floor attest to the excellence that the film could have aspired to...

The next dramatic effects scene occurs during the encounter of Godzilla and Biollante at Lake Ashino, Godzilla moves very vividly due to the use of the

Close-up Godzilla—an articulated pneumatic prosthetic, constructed to lend the monster a variety of expressions—the intercutting between it and the sea suit are very smoothly accomplished.

Biollante looks ominously mysterious in both stages, and manages not to resemble any previous Japanese monster; it clearly is inspired (but not copied) from the current stock of America's "goeey-alien" trend—an excellent departure for Toho, and were suitable for the scenes it appears in, and thankfully fails to look ridiculous.

Godzilla is simply beautiful, this has to be my favorite rendition of the beast since GODZILLA VS. THE THING; everything about the prosthetic is animalistic (as the photo to this review attests); looking like a big mean bear, ready to eat you and your picnic basket. (See Building Godzilla elsewhere in this issue—ed.) From our recent visit to Toho and interview with Kawakita, the effects director has informed us that this is the way the beast is going to look like for some time to come, as the series readies for its 18th entry in late 1991.

Godzilla's character is quite dynamic in the film—very aggressive and furious. The sheer amount of times he uses his radioactive breath is enough for me—no lost little Alices here. Even though the climatic battle is anything but, while discussing the film with Makoto (GODZILLA LEGEND) Inoue in Tokyo, he and I agreed that Godzilla's character was right on the money.

Being a long time fan of Koichi Sugiyama for his theme song to the RETURN OF ULTRAMAN teleseries and his score for the GATCHAMAN movie, I anticipated his score for BIOLLANTE—But his score for this latest Godzilla is a major disappointment. Most of it arranged and conducted by the American composer David Howell, it lacks any excitement and is far too repetitive. The cue "Godzilla 1989" are far too reminiscent of John Williams' themes for JAWS, to be exciting—the timing and placement in the film are also haphazard.

Still, for all its faults, GODZILLA VS. BIOLLANTE is an improvement on GODZILLA 1985 in most areas, and could have been a greater film if placed in the hands of a director that was not embarrassed by giant monsters and special effects. The symbol of Anarchy Incarnate is on his way home...

GODZILLA VS. BIOLLANTE

THE GOOD, THE BAD AND GODZILLA!



B o b J o h n s o n

GODZILLA VS. BIOLLANTE is a new and different Godzilla film, but it retains element of the past. The craftsmen that put this film together, worked very hard on the film and brought the enthusiasm of fans rather than professionals doing just another job. However, they had to battle a very rushed production schedule. It is these opposites that I think keep GODZILLA VS. BIOLLANTE from fulfilling its full potential and being the powerful movie it could have been.

The story written by Shinichiro Kobayashi had a lot of potential and was actually a very good idea. I like the concept of a monster that is genetically created from cells taken from plants, a human (the scientist's own daughter) and Godzilla. I also like its metamorphosis from plant to "Super Godzilla." The screen play written by director Kazuki Omori, however, lacks the impact and drama necessary to carry out the concepts brought up in the original idea.

The pacing of the screenplay is fine, and it does a good job of mixing the human characters with the monster scenes. Neither carry on too long or leave you bored. However, many of the scenes lack the impact that they should have. They build up in suspense and then leave you unsatisfied. This also applies to the final battle between Godzilla and Biollante. It is much too

short. Omori's screenplay can best be described as good, but not doing justice to the original premise developed in Kobayashi's story.

The special effects by Koichi Kawakita are excellent. Godzilla himself never looked better. From the design to the execution of the Godzilla suit, everything is as good as could be hoped for. The only complaint I can see is that as production went on, and the suit used for the water scenes absorbed more and more water, the neck, body and arms got very thick. This most apparent in the psychic battle between Miki Saegusa and Godzilla. The suit gives the impression

that Godzilla's head is much too small in proportion to his body. This is isolated to this one particular scene though. Earlier water scenes look fine, and the matching of the suits is excellent. In other Godzilla films you could tell definite differences in the land suit vs. the water suits vs. land puppets or differences in the land suit vs. the water suit vs. any puppets or mechanical versions. In this film the land and water suits, as well as the one to one scale mechanical "cybot" all match perfectly, adding to the believability of Godzilla as a living creature.

There was much more use of Godzilla's ray in this film with new effects designed to make it seem much more intense. When the ray strafed the water in Godzilla's battle with the Navy, the pillars of water spraying upward that were created from it's impact looked particularly impressive. Godzilla also used his atomic breath much more in the battles with Biollante than in past monster slugfests, and the spraying sap and plant-shrapnel are very well done. In making Biollante a plant monster, Toho avoided what could have been a very bloody Godzilla film!

Biollante is a very worthy opponent for Godzilla and ranks right up there with Ghidorah and Mechagodzilla as a classic Godzilla foe. In a time when most screen monsters are either a blob with tentacles or a variation of the creatures from ALIEN, Biollante is a fresh and original design. Not your normal man-in-the-rubber-suit design, Biollante had a menacingly powerful appearance, especially in its second incarnation. The immense mouth and massive rows of teeth look great on screen. The detail on the suit is also well done, making Biollante appear very plant-like, but also combining elements of Godzilla himself, such as a small row of Godzilla-like fins down Biollante's back. The acid-like sap which spews forth from Biollante was a nice touch. It would have been nice to see Biollante strolling along downtown Tokyo trampling

buildings and melting skyscrapers with it's Reptilicus-like sap. But, Godzilla is the badguy in this movie! Biollante has a human concious and is there to stop Godzilla!

A bad Godzilla fighting a good(?) Biollante is a nice switch this time around. Much like 1964's GODZILLA VS. THE THING. It is definitely a move in the right direction to have Godzilla return to a monster of destruction instead of a defender of Earth. But, I prefer him to be neither good nor bad. Godzilla is best as a mysterious force, reacting to his environment and situation. If there's a big monster around, fight it! If the humans are shooting at him, attack! If he is walking through a city and buildings are in his way, shove them out of the way! The mysteries of what Godzilla is are not really touched upon in this film as they were in GODZILLA 1985 but there is no room in this movie for that. This would have just cluttered up the story.

The characters are well conceived, but the only one that is of any interest in the final version is Col. Gondo who is out to retrieve the Anti Nuclear Bacteria from Saradia and stop Godzilla! Most of the character's appeal can be attributed to the fine performance put in by actor Toru Minegishi. He is a good contrast to the spit and polish of Masanobu Takashima's Kuroki. Whereas Kuroki is neat, clean and professional Gondo tends to be rough and unorthodox, but still exierenced and very much up to the task of Godzilla-hunting!

The character of Dr. Shiragami who created Biollante, though similar to Dr. Serizawa from the original GODZILLA, is

a welcome addition. Omori could have made him a maniacal, demented, mad scientist, but wisely showed restraint with the character. Viewers grow sympathetic enough of him that by the end of the film, his death has more meaning then it would have otherwise.

One strange, but interesting subplot involves Miki (Megumi Odaka), a psychic who is used to track Godzilla. There seems to be some type of psychic link with Godzilla. This is best portrayed in a scene in which Miki visits a school for children who display psychic abilities. As she arrives, the children are drawing whatever it is they see in their minds. When asked by the teacher to hold up their drawings, they all lift up their papers every one of which has a picture of Godzilla. This is accompanied by a crescendo of the old, familiar Ifukube Godzilla theme.

Much like the movie itself, the music is composed of conflicting opposites. Koichi Sugiyama's compositions are fine and an improvement over Reiji Kuroku's soundtrack for GODZILLA 1985. But, the tendency for modern composers to go for the symphonic John Williams type of film score continues here. Sugiyama's theme for the Super X2 is very reminiscent of themes used in John William's SUPERMAN. The rock instrumentals probably thrown in for commercial reasons, are very out of place and should have been discarded. Fans for years have wished for veteran composer Akira Ifukube's return to Godzilla movies, and get thrown a small bone here as themes from Ifukube's *Ostinato* album

are included in the soundtrack. Although we get to once again hear classic Godzilla themes as the monster crushes buildings and fights tanks, use of the Ifukube music is misplaced and only manages to point out the weaknesses in the new soundtrack.

It's nice to see the Maser Cannons back, reincarnated as Maser Tanks. They were used so much a generic monster-stoppers in past movies, that for consistancy's sake, it's fun to see them back. The same cannot be said for the Super X. Although the new version is much sleeker and has the addition of a Godzilla Ray Reflector, it is really something that is better left in the rubble of Shinjuku. The main element it adds to the movie is an extra scene or two for Godzilla, and something else for him to fight. (I'm not against a flying ship designed to combat Godzilla, but they need to design something a bit more interesting. Super X2... Rest In Peace.

Overall, BIOLLANTE is a vast improvement over the last movie. Much more creative thought was put into it and great care was taken to bring to the screen a much stronger and more interesting Godzilla. The strengths of this picture far outweigh it's weaknesses, and if entertainment is the main criteria to judge a film on, this movie definitely does entertain. Next year is Toho's sixtieth anniversary and promises to release the biggest Godzilla movie yet. With GODZILLA VS. BIOLLANTE as a springboard, I look forward to the further adventures of everyone's favorite fire-breathing monster.

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GODZILLA VS. BIOLLANTE

Toho hits rock-bottom

Guy Tucker

I had prepared a lengthy demolition of this film, which I sincerely believe to be the worst of the series—yes, worse even than MEGALON, which at least works for children far better than this ever could—but even thinking about its dreadfulness is exhausting, much less hashing out every last detail.

Suffice it to say that Kazuki Omori's script is overwritten and his direction is grotesquely abrupt (what producer Tanaka must think is "kinetic, with rapid tempo"). The actors are not precisely bad, but most are disinterested; Megumi Odaka's psychic girl is admirably intense, and brash Toru Minegishi steals every scene he's in, though Omori finally does not do his character justice—any more than he does that of Godzilla. Never have I seen a more dull and affectless Godzilla.

Koichi Kawakita's task is quite thankless, following on the heels of Teruyoshi Nakano's epic-scaled work on GOJIRA 84. They had the same budget, but Nakano had more time—time to work, and time between pictures. When he and Hashimoto staged

Godzilla's breathtaking grand entrance, the effect was enormously exciting—we had waited nine years for this, and they pulled out all the stops. There's plenty of evidence that Omori overruled Kawakita, and that both directors were rushed; but there's also plenty of evidence that Kawakita doesn't like monsters very much—certainly not as much as he likes "meka." He's admitted his favorite special effects picture to be THE MYSTERIANS, the one Susan Sontag called "a non-stop holocaust," the one where the plot revolves around noisy mechanical devices at war. Kawakita's shots of the new Super X are the most rapturous in the film. He's gone to some trouble with the monsters, no question; but either he or Omori—or both—doesn't understand GODZILLA. Hashimoto and Nakano gave us the return of a living god in 1984; Kawakita and Omori have given us a pissed-off electric dinosaur, a big moaning rose, and a final monster prop so big, it's impossible to move the damn thing—so the concluding battle is the most anticlimactic and unmemorable ZERO's ever given us, worse even than LATITUDE ZERO or YOG. The soundtrack is beneath contempt; the photography, dull compared to the bizarre but glorious luster of GOJIRA 84.

The awfulness of the film, and the virtually universal rejection of it by Japanese fans, speak for themselves. But let some of the professionals get a

word in. Ex-producer Fumio Tanaka agreed that the film is poorly done, and though he does believe Kawakita has a firm interest in monsters, couldn't figure why Godzilla is even in the script to begin with—he has no more character here, Tanaka says, "than FRIDAY THE 13th's Jason." Director Ishiro Honda, who normally takes an "if you can't say anything nice . . ." position on Toho's recent films, spoke at length on the picture's defects, including the one he found most glaring: the filmmakers' failure to present what should have been the high point of the film, the translation from rose-form to Biollante-form (when the rose disincorporates, you can just glimpse the Biollante face matted beneath). When he and Tsuburaya made THE HUMAN VAPOR, "we didn't tell you he can turn to vapor, we showed it!" And Shinichi Sekizawa said, "I looked at the pictures; that was enough."

I've spoken to both Omori and Kawakita; they're obviously decent and intelligent men. Still, it's a shame that Koji Hashimoto abdicated the director's chair; he was Honda's chief assistant on GHIDRAH and has the makings of a brilliant SPFX director, if he's ever able to get a decent script. All three men know that BIOLLANTE was a failure, and all three men are determined to do better next time. In this case, they won't have far to stretch.

ShortTakes is a regular column in *Markalife*, providing the reader with capsule reviews of the current and not-so-current in fantasy films, TV and featurettes from the Land of the Rising Sun.

GODZILLA VS. BIOLLANTE

Toho's Best Since the Original GODZILLA
Nathan Schiff



Five years ago we were introduced to the "New" Godzilla. All previous Godzilla epics, we learned, never happened save for the original. *GODZILLA* 1985 as it was titled in the U.S., attempted to revive the old theme of a vicious menace threatening humanity (with Japan as its first strike). The Japanese version was simply a tired retread with some elaborate and impressive special effects. New World Pictures bought, re-edited and completely destroyed the film with unfathomably brain-rotting footage featuring Raymond Burr observing all the action on a large TV monitor. Pathetic dubbing and dialogue helped to completely bury the picture. A cop-out ending on Toho's part ruined what should have been a climatic show-down, since the introduction of the Super X and it's heroic musical counterpart obviously signified parallels to *STAR*

WARS and it's ilk. (For a complete picture on *GODZILLA* 1985, read the reviews in #1—ed.)

Now we have *GODZILLA VS. BIOLLANTE*. It's apparent that Toho has learned from its mistakes. *BIOLLANTE* is fast-paced, action-packed, stylish, and suprisingly atmospheric in its somber yet piquant portrayal of the new creature, Biollante—a super-plant created from the splicing the genes of a rose, of Godzilla, and of a dead woman. The monster is both beautiful and eerie as it makes its appearance in a lake, emitting whale-like trumpetings from its huge rosebud head. This strange creation is a surreal and ominous sight to behold.

Naturally, Godzilla rises up out of the volcano and is immediately met by the Japanese navy in a fine display of special effects. Super X2, a new airship, unmanned and remote-controlled, is Japan's new defense against our hero this time. It has an interesting modification: a Godzilla-ray deflector, capable of turning and multiplying the monster's own ray against himself. There are plots and subplots which confuse the story: the Saradians and the Americans both want an anti-nuclear bacteria from Japan; as it drains atomic energy, including Godzilla's (it was developed against him), the holder can render all nuclear weapons ineffective. The Saradians (generic Arabs) are the heavies, standing in for post-glastnost Soviets. There's also a psychic girl who can link up with both Godzilla and Biollante. Both the Doctor and the military search for a Saradian secret agent (he's as ludicrous as are all foreign villians in Japanese Sci-Fis) who is out to put a bullet into Doctor Shiragami's head (he created Biollante and the Anti-Nuclear Bacteria).

Godzilla's attack on Osaka is spectacularly handled. During the carnage, anti-nuclear bacteria are fired into the monster, the shells actually drilling into his hide. Godzilla's second encounter with the Super X2 sends it hurtling to a fiery end with a single blast of his breath. Godzilla is next met with the new Maser Tanks (a maser is a high-frequency radio wave; a laser is based on light, a maser is based on microwave); these weapons are variations of the Maser Cannons used in *WAR OF THE GARGANTUAS*.

In their first encounter, Godzilla easily defeats Biollante, setting the colossal plant ablaze. In the end, Biollante reassembles its

molecules and reappears as a multi-tentacled, shapeless mass, with a huge head resembling that of a Mosasaur.

All of the special effects are carefully executed, so as to avoid the old criticism of sets or miniatures looking phony. The Godzilla suit is the finest representation since the original 1954 version. The special articulated head is quite impressive, remarkably fluid in movement and reaction, putting even state of the art animation in the back seat.

The music by Koichi Sugiyama is effective and exciting, although the main theme is too similar to the works of John Williams. Three of Akira Ifukube's popular themes are worked into the picture for, I assume, nostalgic purposes; they are briefly thrown in at random. Then there are the hideous, tinny rock themes which screech to deafening proportions several times during the course of the picture. Why this hateful, dreadful music is employed is beyond me.

BIOLLANTE throws out the psuedo-tragedy nonsense of *GODZILLA* 1985, and is simply an exciting monster movie. But where can Toho go from here? The conclusion of *BIOLLANTE* openly displays that Godzilla has learned his lesson. Can he only return to not being a threat—but defender of the Earth, against whatever new monstrosities Toho can whip up?

Up against films like *TOTAL RECALL*, *DICK TRACY*, *DIE HARD 2*, etc., *GODZILLA VS. BIOLLANTE* would have made a nice summer action/monster show. But, alas, the U.S. handlers will have their inept fun at the cost of a decent movie. *GODZILLA VS. BIOLLANTE* will surely, inevitably be transformed into another laughable, badly-dubbed Japanese monster movie.

GODZILLA VS. BIOLLANTE

A boring plot with excellent SPFX

Kip Doto

Before I can really say anything about *BIOLLANTE*, I must confess to viewing the film on video, in its original language. I feel that I can only comment on certain aspects of this film with any degree of validity.

As I was watching the film unfold, my first impression was to ask myself why, in

this era of global understanding, can't Toho and one of the major U.S. studios get together and produce something for everyone? It seems to me that Toho is really trying to reach a Stateside market. But never have I heard such mangled English since maybe *LATITUDE ZERO*! Non-Asian non-actors abound, and it makes me wonder why an American actor, well known or otherwise can't appear in these films (as in *GUNHED*, *MESSAGE FROM SPACE* or *MONSTER ZERO*—ed.)? Many big stars frequently appear on Japanese TV, hawking everything from beer to watches, so why can't Toho understand that if you're aiming at an American market, you need some American help? ... Okay, back to the film:

Well, I was a bit bored by all the international intrigue. It seemed like quite a while before any action actually occurred. I feel that Toho is heading in the right direction with a more serious approach; however, I fear that they (and perhaps most genre filmmakers in Japan) are too influenced by the onslaught of Japanimation. The music score, at times, became overly melodramatic and the actors often seemed to freeze up (not unlike the cast of *STAR TREK I* in the special effects sequences). On the other hand, the Ifukube themes were utilized with the proper discretion.

The special effects were quite well done (to say the least); Godzilla has never looked better—more animal-like, less like a rubber-suited stuntman. I felt *deja-vu* when seeing certain angles of Godzilla, but I suppose there are only so many ways to photograph a giant monster. Biollante is certainly an interesting creation, side-stepping the tag-team look of two guys in suits hitting each other. I was reminded of the "Gargoyle Vine" (Satan Rose) from *JOHNNY SOKKO (GIANT ROBO)*, as if redesigned by comic artist Steve ("Swamp Thing") Bissette. The battle sequences were fantastic, a definite step above Nakano's pyrotechnics from 1984's *GODZILLA* (see last issue—ed.). I'm afraid the Super X, both 1 and 2, do absolutely nothing for me. Is this really the best defense against the King of the Monsters?

My only comment on the acting is that I found myself slightly bored by it. I'll chalk that up to the language-barrier until I see an English-dubbed version. And speaking of such things, I implore Toho to please refrain from dubbing the film by anyone other than William Ross. It may not be cost-effective, but nobody wants to hear those idiotic Hong

Kong/British/drunken Australian non-actors, babbling as they have in so many kung fu films. And to the Americanization team at Miramax Pictures—leave poor Raymond Burr alone, as well as the many great special effects sequences in this latest *Godzilla* film.



Harmony Gold's **DRAGONBALL THE MOVIE** Mike Kure

Lately, a lot of Japanese animation has been dubbed into English. This is a trend that I'm sure most Japanime fans, like me, welcome. Nevertheless, with the exception of a few standouts like *AKIRA* or *MEGAZONE 23 II*, something always seems to get lost in the translation. And thus, for the chance to better understand a particular film or show, we must put up with lame and inadequate translation and/or lousy voice acting. Happily, I can tell you of one feature that made the transition to English rather nicely.

DRAGONBALL is a compact and very well put together story about the quest for seven magic Dragonballs. From the film's prologue, we learn that by gathering all seven of these balls, the finder is granted one wish by the Dragon God. Once done, the seven balls are again scattered, until another brave soul is able to find them all.

The very likeable hero of this adventure is Zero (aka Goku, or "Monkey"), a strange little boy-like character sporting a long, skinny tail. He is as brave to face the world outside of his own valley as he is naive about it. Zero's most cherished possession is a single magic Dragonball, a gift from his late grandfather. Of course, there are others who want this treasure as well. It is through his "accidental" meeting with Lena, an attractive and perky freelancer out to snag Zero's Dragonball, that he learns about its true nature and the existence of six others.

Until Zero met Lena, he was at peace and blissfully unaware of things not affecting him. But that was to change soon. All was not well in the valley of King Gurumi, a grotesque Jabba the Hut-like creature, who was already out searching for the magic balls, so that he may get his one wish—to eliminate his all-consuming hunger. Through his henchmen, King Gurumi recovers all of the Dragonballs, including Zero's. Naturally, Zero can't let the King get away with this, so with the aid of the weirdest assortment of allies, Zero goes head to head against King Gurumi and his men.

In a truly wild climax, the ever-hungry king mutates into a hideously fat salamander creature and chows down on all of the Dragonballs. He meets his end with the last bite, but in the process calls forth the legendary Dragon God. Zero's group's request for peace in the valley is granted, and the seven magic Dragonballs are scattered, hiding and waiting until Zero and his friends can find them all once again (but that's another story).

I found the English-language *DRAGONBALL* movie to be fun and extremely enjoyable. All the great visual sight-gags remained intact. But what made the impression was the sharp, witty dialogue and the "character" allowed the supporting players—in fact, some of the more clever dialogue comes from these, including Mao-Mao, a little pig dressed in a Chinese military uniform who has the ability to transform into other animals. There's also master Roshi, a wise old hermit who likes to wear Raybans and aloha shirts. He gives Zero his Flying Nimbus, a cloud that allows Zero to zip along the skyways. For anti-macho ninja-lovers, there's Sadaki, a ninjathief for hire, who becomes paralyzed with fear everytime he's near an attractive woman.

Harmony Gold deserves credit for putting this little gem together. Though I'm sure it's no easy thing, it may be easier to translate an action-adventure film because the stress must be on the visuals. But *DRAGONBALL*, which also concentrates on characterization and humor, must have been a more difficult job. The task becomes even more perplexing when you take in account that it's Japanese humor that needs to be successfully translated into humor that we Americans can understand and appreciate. Fortunately for us, Harmony Gold manages to pull it off beautifully.

Try to catch this one if you can—it'll be worth it!

**DRAGONBALL THE MOVIE
PART 1 (DORAGONBORU)**
Original Story by Akira Toriyama;
Directed by Daisuke Nishio; Pro-
duced by Toei Animation Co., Ltd.;
English Version Produced by
Harmony Gold.



DEMON HEAVEN: GHOST HERO

Jeanette Amano

Hiroshi Adachi (played by VIRUS star Masao Kusakari) is in charge of product development at Adachi Corporation, a company established by his late father. Although he has every right to be company president, Hiroshi prefers to keep his old job as a hi-tech engineer, letting his father's former partner run the show.

A strange old man (Eisei Amamoto) sends Hiroshi a parcel containing old books which reveal that the Adachis are an ancient family that had formed an alliance with benevolent goblins. The old man informs Hiroshi that a stone used to seal in evil spirits has been moved, and that unless these spirits are contained, they could overrun the Earth.

Usual horror stuff: a curse, evil spirits and all that, with a sprinkling of hi-tech for that Japanese touch. But this low budget film relies mostly on stupid gags and make-up techniques. Little new to offer.

**DEMON HEAVEN: GHOST HERO
(YOKAI TENGOKU: GOSUTO HERO);**
Produced by Pony/Canyon Com-
munications and Pony Video;
Written and Directed by Makoto
Tezuka; Starring: Masao Kusakari,
Masato Ibu, Eisei Amamoto.



THE EVIL HEART

*An unsettling nightmare from the pen
of Kaz Umezu*

August Ragone

This unearthly tale of utter horror is based on the story "The Girl Being Robbed of Her Heart," originally published in *The Horror*, a comic anthology by Kazuo "Kaz" Umezu. It is one of the most frightening and disturbing horror films ever produced in Japan, not for the faint or the weak of heart . . . heh, heh, heh, heh . . .

A group of school girls ventures on a field trip to a eerie, deserted old mountain village in the wilderness of Japan. As the group settles in for the night, they begin to exchange ghost stories. One of the girls, a quiet and frail individual, begins to weave a strange tale . . .

Her story is of two girls, one bad, one good. Best friends since grammar school, the bad girl is a vicious trouble maker; the good girl is kind, but suffers from a heart murmur. Throughout their tenuous relationship, the bad girl is always playing pranks on her friend, literally trying to see how far she can push the other's weak heart.

One day she accidentally manages a scare so traumatic that it sends the good girl into cardiac arrest. In the midst of the attack, the bad girl is knocked over, sending her careening into an artwork that smashes down on her skull.

Medical help arrives and manages to get both girls to a nearby hospital. The good girl can be saved if she receives an immediate heart transplant. It just so happens that the bad girl has the same bloodtype, and having been pronounced D.O.A., she becomes the donor. Unfortunately, the bad girl is not dead but in a state of catalepsy, and is completely conscious through the operation, feeling the slow horror of her own heart being surgically removed! As the heart is pulled from her chest cavity, she screams her silent vow for

revenge, her vow to repossess her stolen heart . . .

The school girls are spooked at such an eerie story, and they laugh it off as another campfire ghost tale, until the storyteller announces that she is the good girl, and that the story is real. Staring in disbelief, the school girls are nearly shocked to an early grave as the vengeful spirit of the bad girl appears and fulfills her grisly vow of vengeance—ripping the heart out from the good girl's chest.

This 45-minute, made-for-video production has none of the negative connotations that plague similar Western productions. There is in evidence a large budget, slick production values, excellent cinematography and excruciatingly realistic special make-up effects. Also, *THE EVIL HEART* has a class most contemporary Western horror films cannot match.

The direction is superb, lending a most unearthly sense of atmosphere reminiscent of the most horrifying of nightmares. Director Hayakawa, who performed similar tasks on *AGI—THE FURY OF EVIL* (*AGI—KIJIN NO IKARI*, 1983), is aware of exactly what is needed to convey a real sense of horror. Even in the non-gore scenes, the lighting, composition and photography evoke a true feeling of the eerie—the film is remarkably Gothic.

The excellent performances underline these Gothic undercurrents. The girls are wonderfully chilly; and villain veteran Eisei Amamoto essays the doctor in charge of the heart transplant, his detachment an unsettling contrast to the bad girl's silent screams of pain. These scenes are the most nightmarish and frightening in the entire film, with the girl first pleading, then screaming in torture, all cries falling on deaf ears—Amamoto almost seems like a grim Nazi scientist here, carrying out inhuman medical surgery.

Hopefully more of Kaz Umezu's stories will share a similar cinematic fate—a fate with results destined to jolt even the most jaded western gore film addicts. *THE EVIL HEART* is true horror.

**THE EVIL HEART (UBAWARETA
SHINZO; THE GIRL BEING ROBBED OF
HER HEART aka THE STOLEN HEART);**
Produced by Bandai Frontier
Network; Released by Emotion
Video; Original Story and Adapta-
tion—Kazuo Umezu; Direction and
Scenario—Hikaru Hayakawa;
Special Makeup Effects—Funhouse
and Kaimai Productions; Starring:
Eisei Amamoto, Yumiko Takahashi,
Yuko Takeshima. Released: Octo-
ber 1985; Running Time: 45 mins.



METAL SKIN PANIC

MADOX-01

A Robot Die Hard

Mike Kure

This is a thoroughly enjoyable OAV that's laced with some nice, humorous touches. No, I won't mention any here because part of the fun is catching them for yourselves. Many of the recent Mecha-dramas tend to come of a bit too ponderous or heavy-handed. What we have here is a great little adventure with a light touch, yet without getting campy or too over-the-top in its humor. But even beyond that, MADOX-01 offers a good, solid story with plenty of action.

This story begins with the field testing of a new prototype battlesuit code-named Slave Trooper Madox. The battlesuit was developed for anti-terrorist and guerilla activities. Piloting Madox is the comely Ellie Kusumoto, the battlesuit's creator. Her task is not an easy one, for she goes against the U.S. Army's toughest tank commander—the fanatical Lt. Kilgore.

The test turns out to be a milk run for Ellie, as Madox easily turns Kilgore's squad of tanks into nothing more than smoking, useless metal. Kilgore, with his Rambo-esque mentality, can't live with this type of embarrassment and swears vengeance.

On its way back to base, the transport truck is involved in a random traffic accident and the containers housing Madox are lost. No spies, no saboteurs, just bad luck. It is young college student Hiro Sugimoto who manages to find and unravel the secret within the mysterious container. Now, with Madox at his disposal and a world of possibilities open to him, Hiro reasons that the battlesuit would serve as a great way to impress his girlfriend, who he hasn't seen in awhile.

In any case, after firing the suit up, Hiro loses control and causes massive destruction inside downtown Tokyo. The carnage catches the attention of Ellie and Kilgore, and both rush over to respectively save and destroy Madox. Ellie uses the original, larger prototype of Madox to find Hiro

while Lt. Kilgore orders his men in Apache attack helicopters to track him down. It is Kilgore's copters that encounter MADOX first, and more destruction hits the streets of Tokyo. Kilgore ignores Ellie's pleas to stop but responds "Tokyo or Vietnam, it's all the same battlefield to me!"

More spectacular fighting ensues and the climax is reached atop a huge office building where Hiro's girlfriend is patiently waiting for our hero so she can tell him she's going to England for three years! Well, I won't give away the ending, suffice to say that everything reaches a satisfying conclusion. So what if the climactic battle of this video may remind you of the ending to Bruce Willis' DIE HARD? As long as it's fun, right? And this one IS fun!

Story, mecha design and direction by
Noboyuki Aramaki
From Pony Video



CAPTAIN HARLOCK

A Song of Farewell

Mike Kure

This is one of the finest single episodes of any Japanese animated series ever. To me, this is certainly the most memorable. I think it is important that this episode from an old series be noted because it represents in a nutshell, the appeal of Japanese animation on a mature level. Whenever I'm asked by those not familiar with Anime why I like it so, I show them this episode. And almost always, they see my (our) point. Even more gratifying is their desire to see more after viewing this episode.

"A Song of Farewell" comes off as a mini-movie. The entire episode is punctuated by a beautiful score by Misaaki Hirao and Seiji Yokoyama. Director Taro Rin deliberately uses the music to manipulate the mood of a scene, and thus, the viewer's emotion as well. For a simple animated cartoon episode from 1978, director Rin's use of close-ups, angles, light and shadow are impressive—making this a visually striking episode, despite the fact that the animation may not appear to be as polished as today's. Nevertheless, there's definitely

style and substance here.

The entire episode is structured around Yuki Kei, the first officer of the pirate ship Arcadia. Captain Harlock's appearance is limited to "just enough" for dramatic impact, and this works very well.

Kei visits her parents' grave on one of her rare stays on Earth. There, rather coincidentally, she bumps into Kazuya, her father's former assistant and her ex-lover. Through him, she relives a devastating personal tragedy—the death of her father and the subsequent blame placed on him for the destruction of a space colony. Kei now finds Kazuya there to lend her support, and all of a sudden, she finds herself falling for Kazuya all over again—her obligation to Harlock and life aboard the Arcadia seeming less important.

At this point, there's a brief, excellent interlude that flashes back to Kei's first meeting with Captain Harlock, and how he became an important part of her life. Nothing mushy here, but exchanged looks between the two will tell you more about their relationship than mere words or deed. The past melts into the present with Kei telling Harlock that she won't be returning to the Arcadia. Harlock can only wish her well, but keeps any suspicions he has secret.

Waiting for Kei at her parents' home is Kazuya and his wheelchair-bound "sister." Kazuya has already set up shop and has convinced Kei that he wants to continue her father's work, but needs her help. Of course she accepts, but we see that it's all a Mazone trap to get to Harlock and the Arcadia. When Kei discovers her lover's dark secret, that Kazuya had turned into a Mazone lackey, and that Kazuya was also responsible for her father's death and framed him for the deaths of the other colonists, Kei quietly takes it upon herself to resolve things. It was too late to restore her family's stolen honor, but the time for vengeance wasn't.

Kei, dressed in her mother's traditional Kimono, invites Kazuya to the beach so that she may play for him "A Song of Farewell" on the samisen (an ancient Japanese string instrument) that once belonged to her mother. There, amidst the roar of the surf and the low howl of stormy winds, she plays for Kazuya and confronts him with what she knows. The song is a sad one and represents Kei's mixed feelings—the loss of her family and the loss of Kazuya's love. Yet, she knows that Kazuya, whom she still clearly loves, must die. When confronted, Kazuya vigorously denies the charges. But the initial denial turns into ugly arrogance, then cocky laughter—Kazuya was beyond

redemption and forgiveness. He felt no remorse for betraying the people of the Earth to the Mazones, nor did he feel sorry for betraying Kei's father and Kei herself. As Kei pulls out her gun and takes aim, Kazuya, laughing and with open arms, dares Kei to shoot. Kazuya's smirk is quickly snuffed by a single blast from Kei's gun, ripping a hole through his chest. Behind Kei's bowed head is another gunblast and scream; Harlock had dispatched Kazuya's "sister," a Mazone assassin now burning like paper. Harlock's appearance doesn't seem to surprise her. With just a look, Kei asks Harlock to listen as she finishes her song of farewell, which he does. Her past has finally been cleansed. As the song concludes, the image of the Arcadiarises over the horizon, silhouetted against the sunset, like a phoenix rising from the ashes. Kei's new life belongs to the Arcadia.

Directed by Taro Rin
Story - Haruki Yamazaki
Toei Production



SECRET OF THE TELEGIAN

Discovered!

Bob Johnson

What if you could travel anywhere you wanted instantly, through an electric current, commit any crime and leave through that same current, returning to your point of origin? This is the premise of Toho's 1960 film *SECRET OF THE TELEGIAN*. Released in the US in black and white, this has been one of the lost Toho films in this country. Now, Clariotronic Video has unearthed this film and combined the original English soundtrack with the original color print.

The story of the film centers around a device called the Clariotron which enables its inventor to transport anywhere in an instant. The "Telegian" uses this machine to avenge himself on fellow members of the Japanese Imperial Army, who left him for dead in WWII. He first "warns" his intended victims by sending them military I.D. tags.

The film itself is a well-paced murder mystery, though it does not stand up as well

as *THE HUMAN VAPOR*, released the same year, with a similar theme. The special effects by Eiji TSUBURAYA are simple in comparison with films like *HUMAN VAPOR* or *H-MAN*, but effective in conveying the transporter effects needed for this film.

At the time of release, there were not too many precedents in the area of teleportation, aside from *THE FLY* and its sequels. *SECRET OF THE TELEGIAN* handles the subject seriously and matter-of-factly. It is definitely worth checking out.

The Clariotronic color print is not as sharp as you would find on a professional prerecorded tape, though it is better than you would generally find from most companies dealing with public domain films. The video has a full set of newly redone credits at the beginning and great care was taken in transferring the soundtrack to the color print. It is good to see this film resurface after all these years.

Being able to see it in its original color format is an added plus.

Directed by: Jun Fukuda
Produced by: Tomoyuki Tanaka
Special Effects: Eiji Tsuburaya
Written By: Snichi Sekizawa
Music By: Shigeru Ikeno



How Old And New Add Up In DANGAIO!

Bob Johnson

The best of the old and the best of the new is exactly what the makers of *DANGAIO* were shooting for, and they came pretty close. Fans wanting to find out how close, can see in US Rendition's subtitled release of the *DANGAIO* OVA.

DANGAIO is a huge robot which is formed by the combination of four "Danfighters," highly sophisticated (aren't they all?) jets. The pilots of the Danfighters are four ESPers captured from different parts of the universe by Tahsan, a capitalistic scientist, who purges their memories and tries to convince them that he created them and plans to sell them to "The Banker" and his evil pirate organization. When the four youths find this out, they escape, taking the Danfighters and the power of Dangaio with

them. Tahsan's fifth, prototype cyborg swears allegiance to the pirates, and takes off to find and destroy the escapees in his spaceship "The Blood," given to him by one of The Banker's men. As only one of the ESPers has regained enough memory to remember she is from Earth, the chase is on towards our planet! The video comes to an explosive climactic battle between Dangaio and the Pirates' evil robot on Earth, in the middle of Tokyo.

DANGAIO definitely has the slick look and production values of contemporary Japanese animation. The mecha designs by Masanori Kawamori, Yasushi Ishizu and Masami Obari are very slick and very much like other OVAs coming out today. However, the music, mood and approach are very reminiscent of the classic robot series of Japanese TV in the 1970s. The background music by veteran SF Music writer Michiaki Watanabe could be right out of his *MAZINGER Z* or *GETTA ROBO*. Dangaio himself can be seen shooting his massive fists at the enemy while yelling out his array of rays and missiles. The combining of the Danfighters and the split-screen shots of the pilots are right out of *VOLTES 5* or *COMBATTLER V*. Director Toshihiro Hirano keeps everything moving at a breakneck pace and the final fight between the two robots in Tokyo is a welcome change from the galaxy-wide epic confrontations seen in most Japanese animation today.

The ESPers themselves each have their own unique powers enabling them to meet the enemy hand to hand as well as robot to robot. The characterizations, so much a part of Anime today, are present here too. It is a new, flashy animated video with the heart and soul of the robots of yesteryear!

The US Renditions release of *DANGAIO* was the first in a series of releases which also brought *GUNBUSTER* to specialty video shelves in this country. The transfer and packaging are top-notch, and the subtitles are sharp and easy to see, unlike so many other videos where the subtitles are obscured by the video images themselves. US Renditions should be applauded for a job well done. It is unknown at this time whether the other *DANGAIO* videos will see release here, but if not, we can at least have a glimpse at a healthy new direction for Original Animation Videos, in the United States, as well as Japan.

Director: Toshihiro Hirano
Screenplay: Noboru Aikawa
Music: Michiaki Watanabe

CRANK UP

Which Layer are You?

The room is dark. A bag of half-eaten potato chips lies on the floor. A faint glow from the TV set illuminates a bleary-eyed viewer, trying his best to stay awake. Sounds from the television set blare, as an oxygen destroyer strips the remaining skin from Godzilla's bones...familiar? I think this is a scene that almost every reader of *Markalite* has lived through sometime in his or her life. In the days before the home video revolution, fans of Japanese monster and science fiction films would have to brave the wee hours of the morning to catch their favorite movies on the Late, Late Show or sit around on a Saturday afternoon and see them on the local Chiller Diller Matinees.

What is the allure of these imported movies? Why have they been so popular and attracted a large audience of fans even to this day? In the years that I have been a fan of this genre, I have found a multi-level interest in Japanese fantasy films. The first layer is the casual viewer. Everyone has seen one of these films,

like it or not, sometime in their lives. Sometimes it sparks an interest, sometimes it doesn't. The second layer is those viewers who watch because they think these are the funniest films since the Marx Brothers! They love to sit around and cheer on these rubber monster slug-fests! They crack jokes and ridicule the special effects, but they do watch them, every chance they get. The third layer is kids. It is much easier for kids to suspend their imagination and view these monsters as living, breathing creatures. This is the layer we all start out in. The fourth layer is the B-Movie fans. People who like any B-grade movie in existence! Good or bad! Dubbed or not! Usually in the science fiction vein. The fifth and final layer is the true fans, the foundation. This includes the viewers who not only watch the films, but know the actors' names, study how some of the special effects were done. They seek out any information they can find on these movies and try to find out what else is over there in Japan that never made its way over to the late show.

We hope that *Markalite* can cater

to all layers of fans, and maybe create a layer or two along the way. Fans of live-action Japanese TV and films have felt a bit isolated since the final issues of Japanese Fantasy Film Journal and Japanese Giants. While the Anime fandom has had slews of publications and fanzines to rally around, the live-action fan has clung to the irregular releases of prerecords, tape-trading and an occasional Japanese pen-pal. As the number of outlets carrying *Markalite* increases, we hope to hear from the "old guard" fans as well as those who only recently discovered the excitement these movies can generate.

Everyone should notice a marked improvement over issue #1, and we'll only get better as time goes on! *Markalite* is a magazine all fans can enjoy. We also hope it is a periodical that will make Greg and Ed, the fathers of Japanese Fantasy publications, proud!

Now, if you'll excuse me, it's late at night, and I'm sure there's a movie on somewhere...



Tsuzuku, Bob Johnson

MARKALITE TRIVIA CONTEST #2

This contest is a continuing feature in *Markalite*, to see how much you really know about the films and the people who make them. To compensate for driving you insane, we will give out a prize(s) to the entrant who scores highest of all submittals. Each fully correct answer receives a "10" and all partial answers receive a "5"—re: Q: What is the name of Akira Takarada's character in *GOJIRA*? A: Ogata. (5 points) or A: Hideto Ogata. (10 points); two part questions are double points, and so on—Good luck!

1. Name the two songs performed by Yumi Shirakawa in *THE H-MAN*.
2. Who is Kipp Hamilton? And what connection does she have with *Booji Boy*?
3. What traditional folk song does Kumi Mizuno sing in *WAR OF THE GARGANTUAS*?
4. What song performed by "The Peanuts" in *MOTHRA*, is cut from the Columbia Pictures print?
5. Who replaced "The Peanuts" in *GODZILLA VS. THE SEA MONSTER*? What is the name of their song in that film? And who composed it?

The deadline for submissions is April 15, 1990. The decisions of the staff will be final. Winners and the correct answers will be posted in our next issue (available May, 1991).

ANSWERS FROM TRIVIA #1: 1. Yumi and Emi Ito, twin songstresses who went under the moniker "The Peanuts." They played the "Ailenas" in *MOTHRA*, *GODZILLA VS. THE THING*, and *GHIDRAH—THE THREE-HEADED MONSTER*. The group retired in the early 1980s; 2. "Shinichiro Fukuda"; 3. "Baradaki" and "Baranoporder"; 4. The 1966 Rankin/Bass cartoon *KING KONG*, produced by Toei; 5. Science fiction author Shinichi Hoshi and Masami Fukushima; 6. *MARS NEEDS WOMEN* directed by Larry Buchanan; 7. "Space Mons" by Jojiro Okami; 8. The UPA (United Productions of America) man who supposedly hammered out the original treatments for *FRANKENSTEIN CONQUERS THE WORLD*, *WAR OF THE GARGANTUAS* and *HELL IN THE PACIFIC*; 9. Koji Kajita; 10. Yosuke Natsuki, Yukata Sada and Hisaya Ito.



MARKALITE

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—Ishiro Honda's Godzillas

•The Robot-War Spfx of
GUNHED

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