

QuestNews

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The Official Publication of QuestClub™



SCHWAATCH!

Greetings from Nebula M78 and welcome to the QuestClub, the official U.S. ULTRAMAN™ fan club! The QuestClub and this publication, *QuestNews*, exist to keep fans up-to-date on news about ULTRAMAN and his activities and to also allow fans to keep us informed about their "Ultra" activities. Also included in this premiere issue of *QuestNews* is a special pull-out guide to the entire ULTRA Series written by Bob Johnson and August Ragone, co-editors of *Markalite*, the magazine of Japanese fantasy.

It's been an amazing experience to "meet" all of you through your applications. Many fans drew on theirs, or enclosed personal notes expressing their excitement about being reacquainted with ULTRAMAN. Because ULTRAMAN has been around since 1966, there are many fans in their 20s and 30s who grew up watching the original television shows in the 1960s and 1970s. Our younger QuestClub members are currently growing up with the new Harvey Comics series and the syndicated *ULTRAMAN: Towards the Future* (UTTF) series that aired last year (and which are now available on home video, see p. 4).

ULTRAMAN is quite busy this year, as this, and subsequent issues of *QuestNews* will show. There's the three-part Harvey Comics mini-series, which will be published this fall as a trade paperback edition, and a new monthly comic series (see story on p. 2), and the L.A. Hero home video release of all 13 episodes of UTTF plus the animated feature *ULTRAMAN: The Adventure Begins*. But our lead story is the new ULTRAMAN series that began production in Los Angeles last month. The working title of the new series is *ULTRAMAN: The Ultimate Hero* and this is the first time ULTRAMAN has been produced in the U.S. and only the second series to be shot in English (the first was UTTF).

In addition to our line of UltraWear, two new exciting ULTRAMAN products have been released for QuestClub members: a fantastic, quality art poster and 100 sets of the Harvey Comics mini-series signed by cover artist Ken Steacy. Ordering information for these new items has been included with this newsletter. ULTRAMAN will also make a personal appearance at the San Diego ComicCon, August 19-22. QuestClub members will receive first notice of these and other upcoming events.

We hope you enjoy your new QuestClub membership. Feel free to write us with your comments. Welcome to the Club!

ULTRAMAN: The Ultimate Hero

Production Begins in Los Angeles

Lights, cameras, "Ultra" action! That's the scene on the set of the new live-action television series *ULTRAMAN: The Ultimate Hero*, which began production in Los Angeles on June 14. Featuring all new stories and cast, plus the return of the deadliest of ULTRAMAN's foes, this promises to be the best Ultra series yet! It's also a doubly historic occasion, as it marks the first time ULTRAMAN has been produced in the

United States and it's the tenth live-action ULTRA series.

Kane Kosugi, the son of Japanese martial arts star Sho Kosugi, stars as Kenichi Kai, an armory specialist with the Worldwide Investigative Network Response Team, known as WINR for short. Kai is also the alter-identity of ULTRAMAN. Kane's martial arts skills include karate (in which he received a black belt at age 5), aikido, judo and tae kwon do and his credits consist of several martial arts films, including the 1983 Cannon Films release, *Revenge of the Ninja*.

Kasugi is joined in the cast by Sandra Guibord (*One Life to Live*, *Miami Vice*) as WINR Communications Operator Theresa Beck, Robyn Bliley (*JFK*, *The Young and the Restless*) as WINR Attack Fighter Pilot Carolyn Fontaine, Rob Roy Fitzgerald (*Thelma & Louise*, *Gleaming the Cube*) as WINR Hawk Gunner Eric Sanders, and Harrison Page (nominated for an Emmy award for his guest appearance on *Quantum Leap* and has appeared in TV shows including *Sledge Hammer*, *The Wonder Years*, *Hill Street Blues* and the feature films *Lionheart* and *Article 99*) as WINR Captain Russell Edlund.

The series, which will finish filming in mid-September and remain in post-production until March 1994, is being produced by Tsuburaya Productions Co., Ltd. in association with Major Havoc Entertainment, Inc. of North Hollywood, California. Executive Producer is Noboru Tsuburaya; Director and Co-Producer, King Wilder; Co-Producers Kazuo Tsuburaya, Julie Avola and Victor Garcia; Production Designer, Aaron Osborne; Creature Effects Supervisor, Kevin Hudson; and the Miniature Effects Supervisor is David B. Sharp.

Famous ULTRAMAN monsters returning to battle our friend from Nebula M78 include Aboras, Baltan, Banilla, Chandra, Dorako, Gabora, Gomora, Jamra, Kemura, Monster DaDa, Pestar, Pigmon, Red King, Teresdon, Zambora and Zeton.

The 13-episode series will be released to home video in Japan starting in November and the entire series will be complete and available for broadcast in March 1994.

THIS ISSUE:

NEW SERIES IN PRODUCTION
ULTRAMAN POSTER
COMIC BOOK GOES MONTHLY

ULTRAMAN TO APPEAR AT COMIC CON
ANIME EXPO '93 REPORT
SIGNED COMIC SETS AVAILABLE

ULTRAMAN Comic Book

To Begin Monthly Publication

Based on the success of the three-part mini-series it published this spring, Harvey Comics Entertainment will expand the ULTRAMAN comic book series to a monthly publication this fall. The monthly series will be part of Harvey's new Nemesis Comics™ division. It will feature a new storyline and different characters than the Ultracomics mini-series, but the first issue will include the character of Jack Shindo. The premiere issue, tentatively titled "Resurrection" is due out in November.

In related news, Harvey Comics will be releasing a trade paperback compilation of the previously published ULTRAMAN mini-series this October. This bound edition will sell for \$5.95 and features a new, original cover by Ken Steacy. It will also include pages of the collector's cards that were available with the polybagged, Virgin CoverSM comic books.

Anime Expo '93:

Did You Really Expect to Find ULTRAMAN Here?

During the Fourth of July weekend, *Markalite* magazine co-editors Bob Johnson and August Ragone attended the Anime Expo in Oakland, California. (*Anime*, pronounced ah-nee-may, is a new term used for Japanese animation.) What follows is Bob Johnson's report:

Because *Markalite* is mainly devoted to Japanese live-action films and TV series, you may wonder what we were doing at an animation convention. We heard that they were having a live action panel on Saturday. Fearing the worse, we decided to volunteer to be on the panel and make sure things were done right.

We got to the room (after it had been changed without notice) and found panel coordinator Ricky Chau and two other attendees ready and anxious to start. As it turned out, we were the entire panel! (I don't know what they had planned if we hadn't volunteered.) We started showing clips from various live-action shows and the curious started filing in. Fifteen minutes into the panel we had 30 people in the room.

The panel lasted 90 minutes, during which we showed clips from the cream of the Japanese crop, including *ULTRAMAN*, *ULTRAMAN Ace*, *ULTRAMAN 80*, and *GRIDMAN* (a new show from Tsuburaya Productions). The crowd was very enthusiastic to hear about the new series, *ULTRAMAN: The Ultimate Hero*, and responded very well to *GRIDMAN*.

At the end of the panel, we had an Ultra-Quiz and awarded an array of prizes provided by Ultracom (the U.S. company that distributes and licenses ULTRAMAN worldwide). The Ultra-knowledge in the room was pretty good, so no one went away empty-handed.

The QuestClub membership applications and UltraWear fliers left on the literature tables went fast, and there was even a 16mm film room showing episodes of the English-language *ULTRAMAN* from 1966, along with other vintage 1960s Japanese TV series.

The dealer's room was awash with imported Ultra-paraphernalia and goods thanks to Pony Toy Go-Round, Heroes World, Kimono My House, San Francisco Science Fiction and Newtype Hobbies. There were plush, vinyl, resin, plastic and paper ULTRAMANS. You could also buy laserdiscs, CDs, videos, books, magazines, toys, models, bookends, flashlights and just about anything else you could think of putting ULTRAMAN's likeness on.

For an animation convention, there was plenty of ULTRAMAN to go around!

SARKA UNVEILS NEW ULTRAMAN ART POSTER

It's the perfect addition to any room--the brand new ULTRAMAN poster from Sarka Ltd. Set in a futuristic city landscape, the poster features ULTRAMAN in battle with a flock of winged, reptilian alien invaders. The 18" x 24" poster will be available for sale through the QuestClub at a discount to our members and at retail outlets.

The ULTRAMAN poster joins a line of 12 fantasy quality art posters from Sarka Ltd., founded by Los Angeles artists Philip Felix and Gary Montalbano. Felix and Montalbano work extensively in animation development and production design and have completed projects for Warner Brothers, Universal and Marvel Productions, among others. Both artists, who



Hot off the Presses: Artist Philip Felix brings the new ULTRAMAN poster to the printer in Los Angeles. Posters are offered at a discount to QuestClub members.

collaborated jointly on the ULTRAMAN poster, will be appearing at the San Diego ComicCon August 19-22, where they will sell and sign posters at the Sarka Ltd. Booth (#635).

The poster, which is a standard size suitable for framing, will retail for around \$15.00 in stores, but QuestClub members can mail order one for only \$12.95 unsigned and \$17.95 for posters signed by the artists, plus \$3.00 shipping and handling for each poster. Additional posters are available for \$9.95 each unsigned, and \$14.95 each signed plus a shipping and handling fee of \$4.50 for two or more posters. (CA residents please add 8.25% sales tax.) Checks should be made out to Ultracom, Inc. and mailed to ULTRAMAN Poster, c/o QuestClub, 12440 Moorpark St., Suite 150, Studio City, CA 91604. Please allow 4-6 weeks for delivery. Dealer inquiries are also welcomed.

Monster Attack Team

Celebrates Japanese Sci Fi TV Shows

Do you live in the Dallas, Texas area? If you do, you're very lucky indeed—because Dallas is the home of the *Monster Attack Team* or MAT for short.

Founded by QuestClub member Edward "Edzilla" Holland, MAT is dedicated to the appreciation of Japanese live action Sci Fi shows and toys and is named in honor of the scientific agency featured in the *RETURN OF ULTRAMAN* series produced in the early 1970s.

Co-hosted by Team Leader Holland and his cohort "Ultra Joe" Riley (another QuestClub member), MAT has its own television show on TCI Cable of Dallas (Channel 23B), which airs Thursday nights at 11:30 pm, Saturday evening from 7-8 pm and Sunday afternoons from 4-5:30 pm. MAT is planning to expand the show to Fort Worth cable TV in the next few months under the guidance of MAT and QuestClub member Michael Keller.

According to "Edzilla," *UTTF* tapes have been spotted at Lone Star Comics Stores "throughout the Metroplex." He reports that Dallas is about to be graced with a new Japanese animation store called Cybernet, which is scheduled to open in August.

MAT also publishes a newsletter and presents programs at science fiction conventions, like they recently did at the Dallas Fantasy Fair. For more information, write to Monster Attack Team, 3908 Rochelle, Dallas, TX 75220-1814 or call (214) 352-6191.

COMPUTER CONNECTION

ULTRAMAN on CompuServe

Want the latest news on ULTRAMAN? Can't wait for your next issue of *QuestNews*?

Let your computer cover the "Ultra" news beat for you. Next time you're at your keyboard look up our friend from Nebula M78 on CompuServe. ULTRAMAN threads can be found in the Show Biz, Sci Fi TV and Comic Book forums. Happy downloading!

MAJABA RULES!

According to your QuestClub responses, Majaba is the king of all the ULTRAMAN monsters, with 101 members choosing this ant-like foe from the *UTTF* series. Majaba's T-Shirt is also the best-selling monster shirt in the UltraWear line.



Autographed Comic Books Offered to QuestClub Members

Cover artist Ken Steacy has autographed 100 sets of the Harvey Comics ULTRAMAN mini-series exclusively for QuestClub members. These three-book sets are available for the members-only price of only \$14.95 per set and are limited to no more than 3 sets per person, due to limited quantities. Postage and handling is \$2.50 for one set or \$3.50 for two or three sets (CA residents please add 8.25% sales tax). To order, send check or money order made out to Ultracom, Inc. for the appropriate amount, plus your name, address and the number of sets ordered to: ULTRAMAN COMICS, c/o QuestClub, 12440 Moorpark St., Suite 150, Studio City, CA 91604 (you can also use the enclosed order form). Please allow 4-6 weeks for delivery. Quantities are limited, so order your set today!

BRING YOUR CAMERA !

ULTRAMAN to Appear at ComicCon

Want to meet ULTRAMAN in person? Come to Nemesis Comics Booth #247 at the San Diego ComicCon August 19-22 and you can do just that. (Check at the booth for the times ULTRAMAN will visit each day.) Nemesis Comics, a new division of Harvey Comics, will also have ULTRAMAN giveaways for fans. (continued...)

The new ULTRAMAN poster will also be on sale at the Sarka Ltd. Booth (#635) in the Dealers Room.

The biggest comic book show on the West Coast, the ComicCon "draws" more than 20,000 comic book fans every year to meet with top artists and writers in the comics field. A four-day adult admission costs \$50, adults over 60 and children ages 7-16 are \$25 and children under 7 accompanied by a paying adult are free. For more information about ComicCon, phone (619) 491-2475.

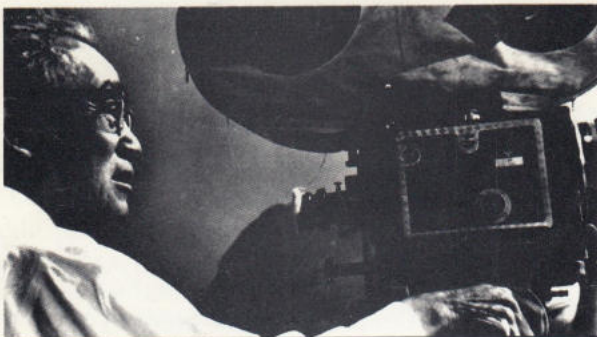
ULTRAMAN and Ken Steacy "Schmooze" in Santa Monica



Harvey Comics cover artist Ken Steacy got to meet his hero ULTRAMAN when they both came to Collector's Paradise in Santa Monica on April 3-4, 1993 to sign the first issue of the ULTRAMAN comic book and meet their eager fans. We're sure you know who's who in this photo!

Write to QuestNews

Let's hear from all of you! Letters, cards, and drawings of ULTRAMAN are all welcome submissions here at QuestNews. What would you like to see more of in QuestNews? Less of? Let us know! Send your stuff to Editor, QuestNews, c/o QuestClub, 12440 Moorpark St., Suite 150, Studio City, CA 91604. (If you want drawings returned, please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope.) QuestClub member letters and artwork will be printed in future issues of QuestNews.



This inaugural issue of QuestNews is dedicated to the memory of Eiji Tsuburaya, creator of Ultraman. -Editors

QuestNews is published quarterly by Ultracom, Inc., the official licensor and distributor of ULTRAMAN shows and products. ULTRAMAN™ and related characters

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Address all correspondence to: Editor, *QuestNews*, 12440 Moorpark St., Suite 150, Studio City, CA 91604.

All submissions become the property of Ultracom, Inc.

Make the Scene with UltraWear

Tired of wearing the same old clothes? Looking to make an "Ultra" fashion statement? Dress up your wardrobe with the power of

ULTRAMAN and his alien foes Barrangas, Bogun, Gerukadon, Kilazee and Majaba. Six different 4-color designs (one for each monster, plus one for ULTRAMAN) are available in adult sizes S, M, L and XL printed on white 100% cotton pre-shrunk T-shirts. ULTRAMAN baseball caps are also available, made with high-quality black canvas with red embroidery and an adjustable strap. These T-shirts and caps sell for \$11.95 each, plus \$3.00 shipping & handling per item. (CA residents please add 8.25% sales tax.) Please allow 4-6 weeks for delivery (but it's usually less). To order, mail your name and address,



a list of items and sizes ordered with a check or money order for the amount due (including shipping costs and applicable tax) made out to Ultracom, Inc. to: UltraWear, c/o QuestClub, 12440 Moorpark St., Suite 150, Studio City, CA 91604.

NOW ON HOME VIDEO

ULTRAMAN: Towards the Future and ULTRAMAN: The Adventure Begins

Fans of the UTTF series can now get episodes on home video, plus the animated feature *ULTRAMAN: The Adventure Begins*. The first six volumes of the 13-episode UTTF series are currently available and the set will be complete by the end of 1993. Distributed by Books Nippan USA and produced by LA Hero, Inc., the UTTF episodes retail for \$14.95 each, and *ULTRAMAN: The Adventure Begins* goes for \$24.95. These videos are available at Tower Video, Sam Goody, the Wherehouse and other major video retailers in the U.S. and Canada. (Many video stores will be happy to special order them for you.) The tapes are also available on a mail-order basis from Books Nippan, 1123 Dominguez St., Unit K, Carson, CA 90746. Contact them for ordering information and they'll also send information about other Japanese series available on home video.

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QuestNews Extra

THE ULTRA SERIES

Science-Fantasies From Tsuburaya Productions Co., Ltd.

by August Ragone & Bob Johnson
Co-Editors, *Markalite Magazine*

Tsuburaya Productions Co., Ltd., producers of ULTRAMAN, was founded in 1963 by special effects master Eiji Tsuburaya.

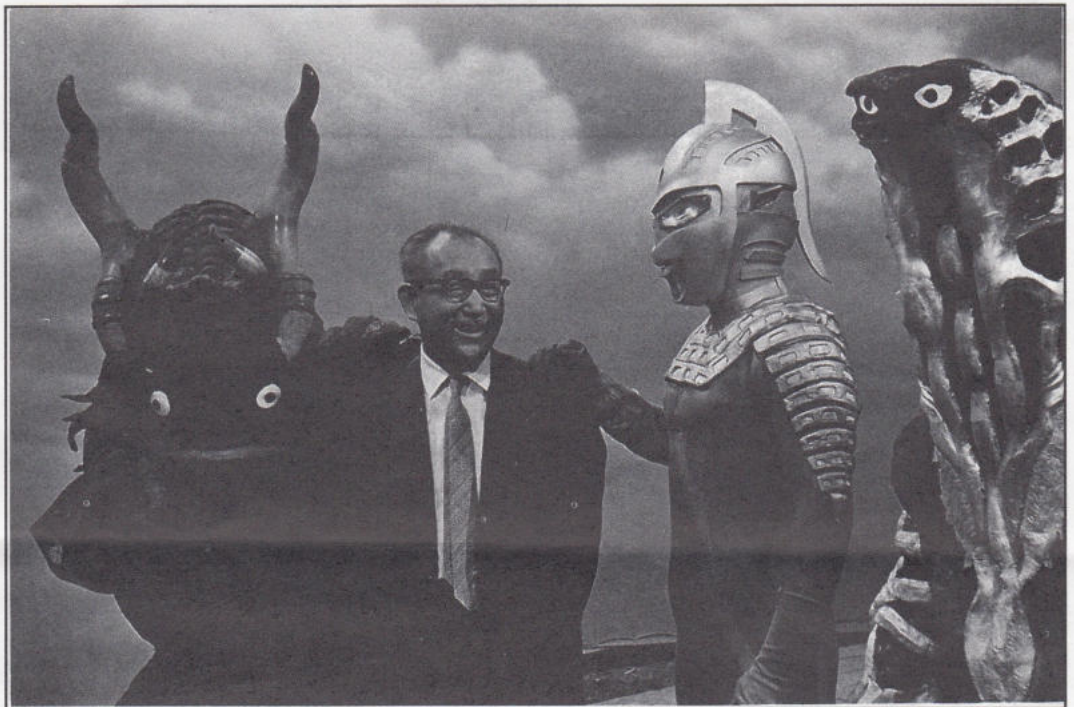
Famous as the creator of Toho's *Godzilla* special effects, Eiji Tsuburaya and his new company attracted both the top people in the special effects field and the Japan Science Fiction Writers Club, who worked together to create a new science fiction TV show.

Using one of only two Oxberry 1200 Optical Printers in the world at the time (Disney had the other one), the talents assembled worked under the personal supervision of Eiji Tsuburaya during 1964-65 to film an unusual show that premiered on Japan's TBS network in January 1966.

The name of this new show was *ULTRA Q*, and its success paved the way for the ULTRAMAN series that remain popular to this day. More than 400 TV episodes and a half-dozen ULTRAMAN films exist, as well as over 3,000 licensed products.

Production began in June 1993 on the tenth live-action series, tentatively titled *ULTRAMAN: The Ultimate Hero*. This series, which is being filmed in Los Angeles, is the first to be produced in the United States.

To commemorate this historic occasion, we celebrate by reviewing the previous ULTRA series.



Eiji Tsuburaya and the cast of *ULTRA SEVEN*. (Photo courtesy of Tsuburaya Productions Co., Ltd.)

ULTRA Q

(January 2, 1966—July 3, 1966;
28 episodes)

The first of the "Ultra Series," *ULTRA Q* is a hybrid of shows like *The Twilight Zone* and *The Outer Limits*. Featuring literate scenarios and exploring areas untouched by the theatrical works produced by

studios like Toho at the time, this TV series showcased special effects that were equal to those found in theatrical releases at the time. Its core was science fiction (sf), and the series was full of monsters and aliens. The show was a runaway hit, setting the stage for the next in the series.

ULTRAMAN

(July 17, 1966—April 9, 1967;
39 episodes)

A policeman from the "Land of Light," located in the M78 Nebula, is escorting the monster Bemlar to the "Space Graveyard." When the monster's travel-sphere escapes to Earth, the policeman follows in hot pursuit. During the chase, the sphere collides with an airship piloted by Hayata, a member of the Scientific Investigation Agency ("Science Patrol"). Contrite, the alien policeman combines his being with that Hayata, restoring his 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 organization created to investigate and defend the Earth from unnatural phenomena and is manned by Captain Muramatsu, Ito, Arashi and Fuji. The Science Patrol's job is to fend off giant monsters—and Hayata is there to save the day as ULTRAMAN. But this new superhero can only fight for a limited period of time on Earth—his powers diminish rapidly in our atmosphere and a warning light on his chest begins to blink from blue to red when his power is depleted.

In the last episode, "Farewell ULTRAMAN," our hero's warning light is damaged by the alien Zeton—and ULTRAMAN is rescued by his superior, Zophy, while Zeton is destroyed by the Science Patrol. Zophy separates Hayata from ULTRAMAN, and they return to M78.

ULTRAMAN was an instant hit in Japan, with even higher ratings than ULTRA Q, and ULTRAMAN became the Japanese cultural equivalent of America's Superman. Although all the episodes had roughly the same format, there were strong characters and excellent sf concepts to move the series along. ULTRAMAN inspired a wide variety of imitations, none of which could match ULTRAMAN or the "Ultra Sequels" for sheer quality or invention.

ULTRA SEVEN

(October 1, 1967—September 8, 1968; 49 episodes)

Agent 340 is on an assignment from M78 to map the Milky Way. To study the Earth, he assumes the identity of "Dan Moroboshi" and joins the Ultra Garrison, an elite branch of the Terrestrial Defense Forces, comprised of six members—Captain Kiriya, Soga, Amagi, Anne, Furuhashi and Dan. When scheming aliens threaten the world, Dan uses the "Ultra Eye" glasses to revert to Agent 340—known as the honorary "seventh member" of the Garrison, "Ultra Seven"!

Ultra Seven's most effective weapon is the "Eyeslugger," a boomerang controlled by telekinesis that detaches from his helmet, easily slicing objects and opponents to pieces.

In episode



#49 "The Greatest Invasion in History," Dan, critically wounded in battle against the monster Pandon, reveals his identity to Anne, who loves him. She pleads with him to stay, but he is ordered to back to M78. Before leaving, Seven decides to rescue Amagi, who was captured by the aliens. Seven again battles Pandon, defeating it and saving Amagi before the Garrison smashes into the Goth base to destroy it. As dawn approaches, Ultra Seven streaks towards home, leaving Anne and the Earth behind.

Character development and sf drama are very important elements of ULTRA SEVEN, demonstrating the best the Ultra Series has to offer. Although episodes from other entries have been as good or better, ULTRA SEVEN cannot be topped for consistent quality and drama.

RETURN OF ULTRAMAN

(April 2, 1971—March 31, 1972;
51 episodes)

During a battle between two giant monsters, auto racer Hideki Goh saves a young boy from a falling building, but is himself trapped beneath the destruction. He is revived by an alien from M78—and since this being resembles the original ULTRAMAN, he acquires the name "New ULTRAMAN." After his miraculous recovery, Goh is asked to join the Monster Attack Team—consisting of Captain Kato, Minami, Ueno, Kishida and Oka—who employ special weapons to deal with the continuing monstrous threats.

The first third of this series was excellent, with beautiful special effects (FX) and stunning camera angles in each episode (Episode #1 was directed by Ishiro Honda of *Godzilla* fame), but after episode #38 "When the Star of Ultra Shines," the series became more juvenile. However, some of the later episodes do stand out, particularly #47, "The Targeted Woman," and the whimsical, ULTRA Q-ish #48, "May I Take the Earth?"

In the last episode, "The Five Ultra Commandments," Zeton, who defeated the original ULTRAMAN, returns to menace the world again. New ULTRAMAN wins this battle, then flies home to Nebula M78.

ULTRAMAN ACE

(April 7, 1972—March 30, 1973;
52 episodes)

Yapools, an evil race from another dimension, are at war with M78. 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.

ULTRAMAN Ace merges with Seiji Hokuto and Yuko Minami, two brave souls killed by the monster Belocron during its attack on Hiroshima ("hokuto" means *north* and "minami" means *south*). Each is given an "Ultra Ring" and when Seiji and Yuko touch the rings together at the proper time, both merge into the singular being—ULTRAMAN Ace!

Yuko and Seiji become members of TAC (Terrible-Monster Attacking Crew), joining Captain Ryu, Yoshimura, Mikawa, Yamanaka and Kono in their underground base.

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

One of the toughest foes faced in ULTRAMAN ACE was the Yapool alien called Ace-Killer (episode #13, "The Five Ultra Brothers Executed!"). The Brothers are lured to a planetoid trap, while the monster Barabbas runs amok in Japan. ULTRAMAN Ace manages to free himself and returns to Japan to stop Barabbas. Ace-Killer tries to steal the Ultra Brothers' powers in the hopes of destroying ULTRAMAN Ace, but they channel their remaining power to Ace, who then destroys his would-be Killer.

ULTRAMAN ACE was well done, with some highly imaginative scenarios (one of the best was #4, "The 3 Million Year-old Superbeast Appears"—a tale of a tortured artist who is possessed by the Yapool). Generally, however, beginning with this series, the TAC uniforms, weapons and vehicles became more outlandish, a trend that would continue in the next series.

ULTRAMAN TARO

(April 6, 1973—April 5, 1974;
53 episodes)

This Ultra Series entry was reportedly the most expensive, but was comical in its approach, telling the story of ULTRAMAN Taro and his struggle to manhood.

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, staffed by Captain Asahina, Aragaki, Kitajima, Nanbara, Nishida and Moriyama.

Kotaro Higashi, a boxer, is presented with a strange "badge" by a woman who tells him it is a good-luck charm. Kotaro joins ZAT and enters into a battle against Astromons, during which his plane is destroyed.

Kotaro is teleported to Nebula M78, where the Mother of Ultra has assembled the Ultra Brothers to witness the birth of a new ULTRAMAN. Combining the essence of this new being with the soul of Kotaro, Mother of Ultra tells him he must use the "Ultra Badge" that she had



given to him. He does and returns to Earth—the same instant he left—as ULTRAMAN Taro.

As with the two previous series, ULTRAMAN TARO starts out impressively, but is best known for its outlandish monsters and stories, all obviously targeted at the more juvenile audience that made TARO one of the most highly rated entries in the '70s Ultra Series.

In the end, Taro proves his maturity, and the Mother of Ultra takes him back to M78.

ULTRAMAN LEO

(April 12, 1974—March 28,
1975; 51 episodes)

The Magma aliens are invading the Earth. Dan Moroboshi (aka Ultra Seven), almost killed by monsters, is rescued by a being from the L77 constellation who wanders to Earth after the Magmasi destroy his home world. Seven, unable to fight because of injuries, yet unable to leave due to the urgency of the invasion, takes the being from L77 under his wing, and transforms him into ULTRAMAN Leo.

Leo, assuming the identity of Gen Otori, joins MAC (Monster Attack Corps) with Dan and Kuroda, Shirakawa, Akaishi, Momoi and Aoshima. Gen transforms into the new hero with his "Leo Ring."

ULTRAMAN LEO is a return to a more serious Ultra Series, and a very violent one at that, influenced by the martial arts films of Bruce Lee popular at the time. As ULTRAMAN LEO was being completed, the worldwide energy crisis of the mid-1970s finally affected the cost of television production as it had already affected cinema; Tsuburaya Productions decided to give the Ultra Series a rest.

THE ULTRAMAN

(Animated, April 4,
1979—March 26,
1980; 50 episodes)

The still-rising costs of live-action production collided with a surge in popularity of animation in Japan in the late 1970s, leading Tsuburaya Productions to rewrite the Ultra mythos to fit animation. This animated series was co-produced with Nippon Sunrise, famous for its sf robot soap-opera *MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM*.

The Far East Zone of the Earth Defense Force monitors several bright lights—signs of the "Ultrans" visitors to the Earth in ancient times. The EDF organizes a new tactical team—the Science Garrison—to investigate. Pilot Choichiro Hikari is overcome by a blinding light in his spacecraft and finds himself standing before an Ultraman from the planet U40. To aid humanity, the Ultraman merges identities with Hikari, who can now

summon the Ultraman by using the new "Beam Flasher" on his forehead.

Known as ULTRAMAN Joneus (aka "Joe"), he has a wider variety of power-rays than any of the live-action versions, due to fact that animation FX cost less than live-action FX. The animation was fluid at times, limited at others, but on the whole was an enjoyable change of pace from the live-action ULTRAMAN adventures.

ULTRAMAN 80

(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, junior high school teacher Takeshi Yamato is the human identity of ULTRAMAN 80, the newest M78 agent sent to Earth. Many of the monsters that threatened the Earth in the past were found to be the result of "negative energy" from human hatred (a storyline that predates *Ghostbusters* by several years, we might add!). Yamato feels humans need to learn understanding and compassion to stop this "negative energy," so he becomes a teacher.

Monsters have not appeared for a decade, and most people show no concern about the potential of monsters in the future. Nevertheless, the Earth Defense Army forms the Utility Government Members, an elite team of monster-fighters staffed by Captain Oyama, Jyono, Harada and Tajima. Yamato also signs up and the UGM fights a variety of well-designed, well-executed monsters. Gone are the silly and outlandish critters of *TARO* and *LEO*, replaced by serious reptilian beasts and sinister aliens.

The stories, characters (including the female Ultra, Yurian), special effects, and overall production values all add up to make *ULTRAMAN 80* a great series. Unfortunately, the show was on during the crest of the Japanese animation boom, making it hard for *ULTRAMAN 80* to live up to its potential in the ratings game, so Tsuburaya Pro put the series to rest once again.



ULTRAMAN 80 IN BATTLE!

ULTRAMAN: TOWARDS THE FUTURE

(Syndicated 1990-92, current U.S. Home Video Release; 13 episodes)

This co-production between Tsuburaya and the South Australian Film Commission was a successful attempt to revived the image of ULTRAMAN throughout the world.

Astronauts Jack Shindo and Stanley Haggart encounter the space monster Goudis on the surface of Mars. As Goudis attacks them, it is intercepted by ULTRAMAN. Haggart is killed trying to escape, the monster is defeated, and the injured Shindo is left with

ULTRAMAN, who saves Shindo's life by merging their beings.

On Earth, bacteria from Goudis make their way into our atmosphere mutating lifeforms into creatures of tremendous proportions. Challenging the Goudis threat is UMA (Universal Multipurpose Agency), led by Colonel Arthur Grant, a military-type who seems to know more about the emergency than he is willing to let on.

Shindo (presumed dead on Mars by his UMA colleagues) brings his newly acquired Ultra Identity into the war against the Goudis monsters. UMA tries to identify the Goudis bacteria and plan how to contain it and figure out how Shindo got back to Earth (without a spaceship, no less) and who this ULTRAMAN is.

ULTRAMAN: Towards the Future has a lot to offer—the flavor, concepts and designs are Japanese but the live-action pho-

tography, characters and special effects are definitely of a Western slant—a cross between the original *ULTRAMAN* and Gerry Anderson's *UFO*. The series is being released on home video this year in the U.S. by L.A. Hero. Episodes 1-are already available and the remaining seven will be out before year's end.

This summer, a new ULTRAMAN series is being produced in Los Angeles by Tsuburaya Pro in association with Major Havoc Productions, to be completed in early 1994. So stay tuned—ULTRAMAN is back!

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