

JFFS

JAPANESE FANTASY FILM SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Winter 1983 - Summer 1984

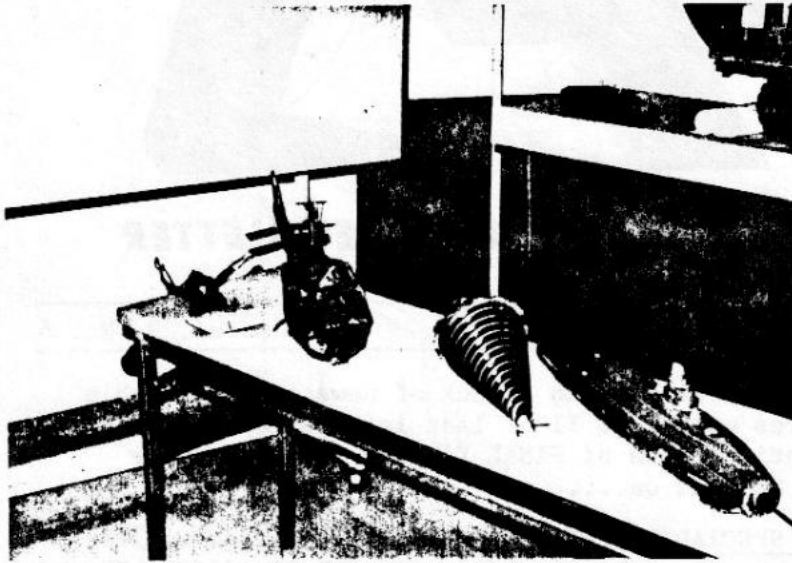
Vol. 3, No. 6

After a somewhat lengthy delay, due in large part to a lack of news made available from Japan, the JFFS Newsletter returns with Part II of last issue's report on the 1982 Japan Special Effects Convention, news of FINAL YAMATO, and some other interesting tidbits of information! So read on.....

SPECIAL REPORT (PART II): 1982 JAPAN SPECIAL EFFECTS CONVENTION--The place was the modest Suginami-Kokaido convention center in Tokyo on Friday August 20, 1982. The doors were set to open for registration at 10:00 a.m., but by 9:00 a.m. on the hot, steamy morning there were already about 500 anxious convention-goers lined up outside. Many of those waiting in line were decked out in various designs of Godzilla T-shirts or superhero regalia. At 10:00 promptly, the doors opened and an orderly procession into the hall began, with 2000 people eventually filing in. Just inside the main lobby, surrounded by dealers frantically setting up their tables, was a display of original miniatures and props from various Toho films and TV superhero shows. The item which attracted the most attention was the huge miniature mazer canon used in WAR OF THE GARGANTUAS. The last 18 years had not been particularly kind to this super-vehicle. Many of its metal parts were well rusted, all of the electronic inner mechanisms had rotted away or been torn out, and some of the wooden pieces were beginning to warp and rot. Nonetheless, it was a most impressive sight, all told about 4 feet long (minus the tractor vehicle which once was used to pull this device). Right beside the original mazer canon was a small fan-made model mazer canon and tractor, fully operational by remote control. The deep sea diving bell from LATITUDE ZERO was on hand, having been defaced with a shot from a can of green spray paint. The diving bell was of surprisingly small scale--surely a larger scale model could have been made to achieve more realistic results especially since the diving bell did not appear with other miniatures in the underwater scenes. This model was cast entirely in metal. The UNSF Gohten from the 1977 film THE WAR IN SPACE was probably the best conditioned vehicle on hand, though it was hardly in mint condition. The rear booster jets were partially detached, revealing a complex system of electrical wires/lights and plastic tubes for emitting special effects

JAPAN SPFX CONVENTION II





smoke. A table in front of the larger vehicles held the large plexiglass eyes of Hedorah, the smog monster. The eye and vien patterns were painted on the back surface of the plexiglass, and small holes were inserted on the tops where cables once were attached to move them. Nothing else remained of the Hedorah costume. The detached head of the Varan puppet used in DESTROY ALL MONSTERS angrily glared at the passer-bys who leaned over for a close look at the miniatures, no doubt ready to enforce the hands-off policy that the fans observed. Lined

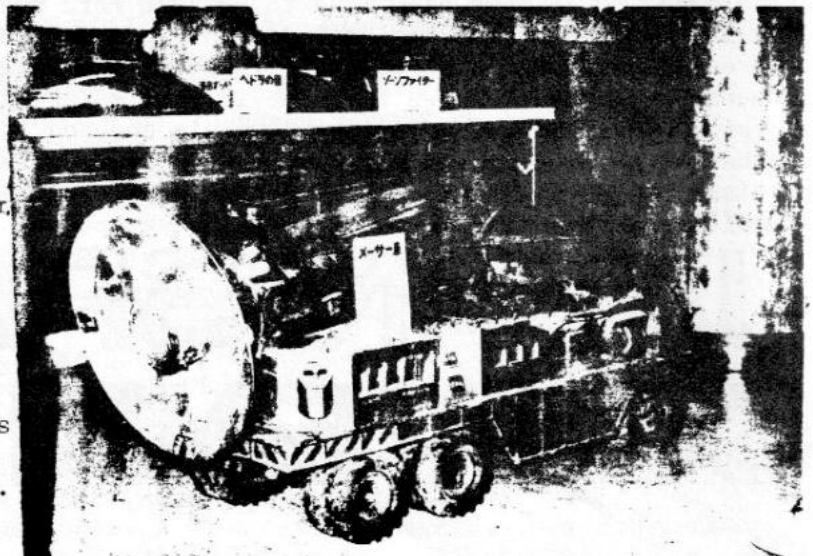
up farther down the table were a small Atragon model, the nose drill from a larger-scale Atragon, a miniature helicopter from WAR OF THE GARGANTUAS, and a Zone Fighter doll. The small Atragon was approximately two feet long, and a rusty metal bar stuck out of its bow where the drill piece once had been. The large drill piece belonged to the Atragon model which had been used in a majority of the water tank shots. The large Atragon must have been close to 7 feet long, judging from the size of the drill. The WAR OF THE GARGANTUAS helicopter had been used in an explosion and thus was pretty well mangled (in that condition, it was rather hard to understand why it had been kept around at all). Among the other miniatures on hand were the research submarine from SUBMERSION OF JAPAN (TIDAL WAVE), Zone Fighter's spaceship 'Smokey', and an underwater submarine pen from ULTRA 7.

As interesting as all these fantastic vehicles may have been, hardly a soul paused to observe them on the way in, as everyone's main objective was to rush into the auditorium for a good seat for the convention's opening program. After a brief greeting by Yuuji Kaida (one of the convention organizers), the lights dimmed and the program commenced. To the starins of electronicized music (including some Ifukube themes), an amateur 8mm film introduced the convention.

The film featured a mixture of monsters and vehicles from a wide variety of SF films--from the cucumber monster of IT CONQUERED THE WORLD to Boba Fett and his Slave I. One of the best scenes

depicted a cel animated King Ghidorah being blasted from the sky by a miniature mazer canon, with the flaming remains of the beast crashing to Earth and reforming into the FORBIDDEN PLANET Id monster.

Following the opening film were twenty minutes of trailers for American 1950's science fiction classics and B-films. Next came the big treat of the opening program...35mm Japanese science fiction film trailers. First up was a trailer for the Japanese release of the American version of GODZILLA. Interestingly enough, in Japan this film was converted to cinema-



scope format by cropping off the top and bottom portions of the film. All of the English dialogue in the film is translated via subtitles in this version. The trailer procession continued with the super-submarine adventure KAITEI GUNKAN (ATRAGON), the confrontation of good vs. evil in MOSURA TAI GOJIRA (GODZILLA VS. THE THING), Godzilla's first color/scope film KING KONG TAI GOJIRA, Kong's return in KING KONG NO GYAKUSHU (KING KONG ESCAPES), the ultimate monster gathering of KAIJU SHOSHINGEKI (DESTROY ALL MONSTERS), the onslaught of pollution in GOJIRA TAI HEDORA (GODZILLA VS. THE SMOG MONSTER), and the humorous escapades of GOJIRA TAI MEGARO (GODZILLA VS. MEGALON). Each trailer, having been produced well before the film's final editing had been completed, contained scenes and camera angles not shown in the final version. Audience reaction to the trailers was loud and spirited. As various actors, staff credits, monsters, and vehicles appeared on screen, enthusiastic applause broke out.



Trailers from recent American productions followed, at which point the crowd began to thin out, making its way towards the dealer's rooms. But once the opening program was completed, there were still plenty of activities and attractions to pass the time between visits to the dealers rooms. The Wonder Film Contest ran the full course of both days, featuring a non-stop array of often clever amateur SF and fantasy films. The contest winner had a plaque presented to him by Ishiro Honda himself on day 2. Early Friday afternoon featured phase 1 of a Japanese SF trivia contest in the main hall. Upstairs in the Neo Feras fan club room, crowds waited in long lines to see a huge display of superhero show masks and costumes. There was also a display in tribute to the late Ryo Takayama, designer of many Ultra monsters and of the fearsome stone god Majin. Head masks of Takayama's most famous creations could be seen--Majin, Red King, Gomora, Ragon, and more. This room was undoubtedly the most difficult exhibit to visit during the entire length of the convention. On the third floor,



another fan club had decorated the walls with scope frame blowups of famous special effects scenes, and a video monitor was set up to show retrospective tapes of SF films and TV series which included scenes never shown in the Japanese versions of films (such as the Frontier missile attack on Godzilla from GODZILLA VS. THE THING).

The day's activities came to a close at 7:00 p.m. and the hall closed to the public. We were able to remain to watch rehearsal for the following day's finale--a superheroin musical/dance production which would include an appearance by Tetsuko Kobayashi, the actress who played the Empress of Mu in ATRAGON.

After a somewhat grueling rehearsal (for the participants), we adjourned to a small Japanese-style hotel where an all-night video program was being held. Among the videos shown were SFX clips from films never released in Japan such as DRAGONSLAYER. Two episodes of ULTRA 7, the favorite Ultra series among Japanese fans, were shown, one of which drew quite a bit of laughter from the crowd (apparently even the 'serious' fans of these shows don't take these shows too seriously). The dawn was welcomed by a screening of STAR TREK II (not to be released in Japan until March of 1983).

Though the video program continued on, nearly everyone headed over to the Sugunami Kokaido to get a good seat for Saturday's main event--a 35mm screening of SANDA TAI GAILA (WAR OF THE GARGANTUAS). The film was preceded by 35mm trailers for FRANKENSTIEN CONQUERS THE WORLD and WAR OF THE GARGANTUAS....and after that, the

finished 35mm footage of Frankenstein battling the giant octopus which was never used in FRANKENSTIEN CONQUERS THE WORLD. Intended as the concluding scene for the film, this footage starts out with Frankenstein having killed Baragon. He picks up the lifeless body of the monster and throws it over a cliff. While moving away from the forest fire, Frankenstein encounters a giant octopus crawling across the landscape (for no apparent reason), and a fierce struggle ensues. The battle comes off much better than expected, and the photography is most impressive. Medium shots of the battle are intercut with extreme long shots of the monsters squaring off in a massive miniature set--a cliff overlooking a small lake, with the forest fire raging in the background. The octopus eventually grabs Frankenstein by the neck and slowly drags him to the edge of the cliff where the beasts tumble into the churning waters. Frankenstein vainly struggles against the octopus, but he is slowly dragged beneath the surface to his death. Though quite impressive, the exclusion of this scene from the final cut of the film seemed to be a wise decision--it is totally out of place and just plain gratuitous.

WAR OF THE GARGANTUAS in its original Japanese form was of special interest in pointing out the differences in the soundtrack between this and the US version. The US version has rearranged a number of the action themes and substituted a different theme for Ifukube's military march. Strangely, a number of tense scenes in the Japanese version were completely unscored such as Gailah attacking the nightclub singer and Sanda's arrival at the end when he saves Kumi Mizuno. This film was definitely meant to be a direct sequel to FRANKENSTIEN CONQUERS THE WORLD, and many references to the Frankenstein monster were made during the course of the film.

The afternoon program featured a film clip and slide presentation about current US releases and an interesting assortment of short special effects films by Mike Jittlov, including the amusing WIZARD OF SPEED AND TIME. This was followed by stage appearances for the two headline convention guests--Tomoyuki Tanaka and Ishiro Honda, who both reminisced about their careers in special effects films. All too quickly came time for the superheroine finale, featuring dancers dressed as the heroines Miss America (BATTLE FEVER J) and Denzigirl (DENZIMAN) pitted against Tetsuko Kobayashi and her villainous troupes. As the cast of the finale took a final bow on stage, the 2nd Japan SPFX Convention came to a close.

ONE MORE TIME.....A NEW GODZILLA FILM(s)?--Yes, once again the rumors have started to fly about the possibility of a new Godzilla film....but this time the rumors revolve around two separate projects, and they emanate from different sides of the Pacific! As nearly as two months ago, COMING ATTRACTIONS magazine reported an American Godzilla project that was in the preliminary stages, and a new report in the upcoming issue of CINEFANTASTIQUE confirms this news. With full agreement by Toho, a new Godzilla feature is planned for release as early as summer of 1984. It would be a big budget production planned to be shot in 3-D, with Steve Minor, director of FRIDAY THE 13TH--PART III, set to direct this effort. With the financial success of FRIDAY THE 13TH--PART III, Minor and his backers were anxious to find a new property for 3-D treatment. Minor observed, "For a long time I felt that the monster movie had not been properly treated with the post STAR WARS technology. By that I mean the classic monster movie where you have the one giant monster against the city. Having done FRIDAY THE 13TH in 3-D and explored only the very surface of what possibilities 3-D offers, it became clear that there could be a perfect marriage of a big monster movie and 3-D. I used to be a big Godzilla fan as a kid...Godzilla is arguably the most famous monster of all time. Why not do GODZILLA, KING OF THE MONSTERS in 3-D? So that's what I am doing."

Toho agreed with Minor and gave him permission to pursue his plans. Minor said, "Toho supports me in my project and they understand the kind of film I'm making. The approach is to make the best monster movie ever made. The movie will be in the spirit of the original Godzilla film, but it is a totally new film

played absolutely straight. It is going to be scary, full of suspense. It is diametrically opposed to the more recent Godzilla films and we're getting away from the man-in-the-suit. We'll be using stop motion to bring the creature to life."

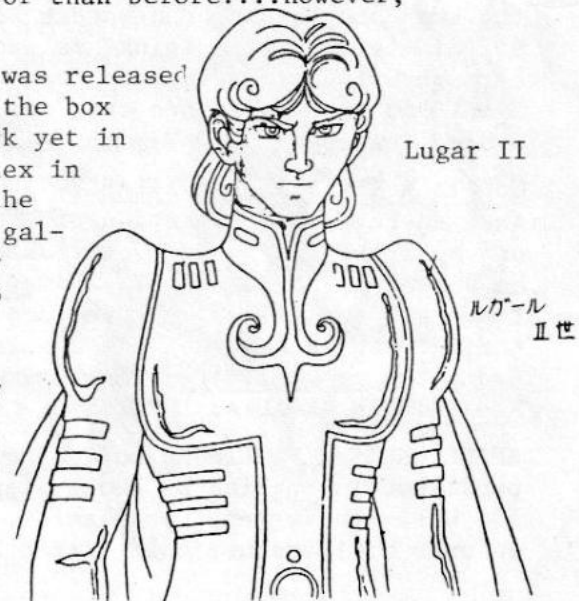
Using 3-D (a process similar to the one used for SPACEHUNTER) plus stop-motion animation will present Minor with a number of special effects obstacles which he will have to overcome, as both miniatures and optical work with 3-D is very tricky. Even if these problems can be overcome, it is uncertain whether the effect can be carried off and present the illusion of great size that would be necessary.

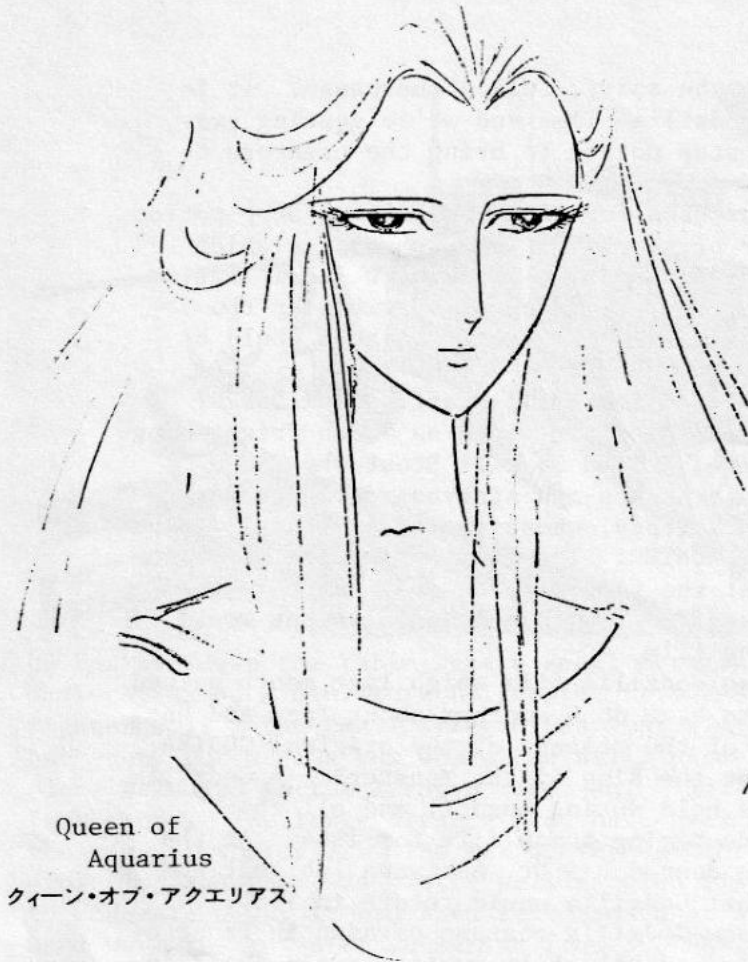
Still in all, Minor has sought to build his technical staff. Fred Dekker supposedly has written a script that Minor has characterized as "both frightening and suspenseful." Production design will be handled by Bill Stout who has already produced a number of preproduction sketches and storyboards. Another member of the team will be co-producer Don Carmody, whose previous credits include forgettable films such as PORKY'S and SPACEHUNTER. The film's plot has not been revealed at this time, but it is known that the film will be shot entirely in America with American cast and technical staff. Toho's only involvement would seem to be in granting permission to do the film.

Not as much is known about the Japanese Godzilla film which last month gained a lot of publicity in Japan. Toho seems to have done another about face and has announced that 1984, the 30th anniversary of the release of the original GOJIRA, will be commemorated by a new adventure for the King of the Monsters. A Godzilla festival which featured 10 re-releases was held during August, and all the publicity for the festival built up towards hyping a new film for 1984. At the festival premiere in Tokyo, Akihiko Hirata donned his Dr. Serizawa lab coat and eye patch to appear onstage, announcing that Godzilla would return in 1984..... and lo and behold, an actor dressed in a new Godzilla costume paraded in front of the audience! A concert of Akira Ifukube's Godzilla film music was also held in Tokyo at that time, and again all the hype was aimed at announcing Toho's new Godzilla film. Even the program book for the festival proclaimed Godzilla's imminent return with the headline, "We Shall Return!" written in English over a montage of Godzilla's previous film appearances. Nothing has been made known in regards to the cast or technical staff--the only thing that has been made public is that the film should be played straight and will be titled REBIRTH OF GODZILLA.

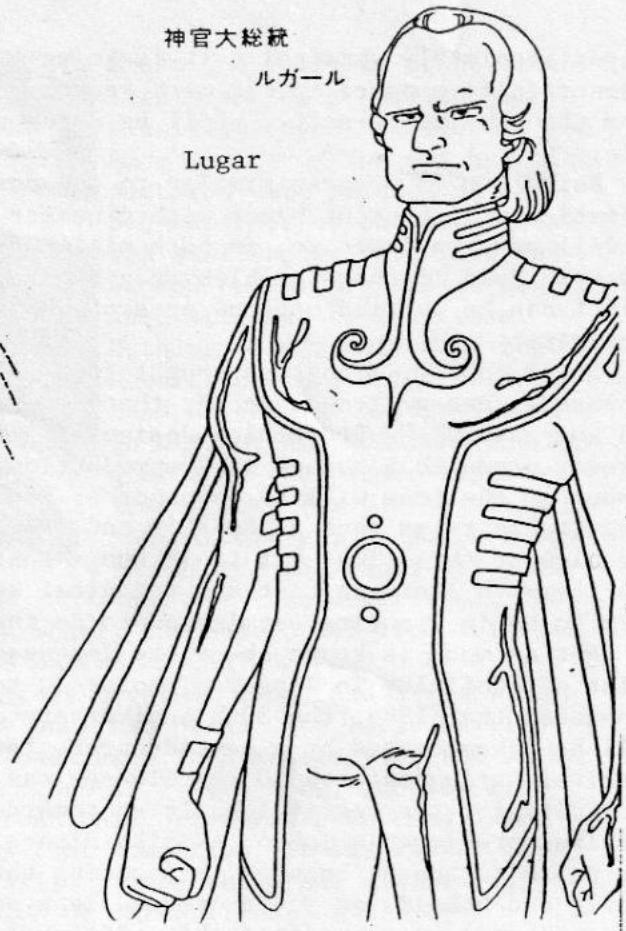
Having been teased many a time over the last few years by other rumors of new Godzilla films, it is difficult to get too excited over these new reports. But at least there seems to be a bit more tangible proof than before....however, for this reporter, I'll believe it when I see it.

THE YAMATO SAILS FOR THE FINAL (?) TIME--FINAL YAMATO was released to Japanese theaters in March, making a big splash at the box office. Featuring some of the most spectacular artwork yet in a Japanese animation film, FINAL YAMATO is quite complex in storyline. As was mentioned in our last newsletter, the water planet Aquarius has caused the collision of two galaxies, and the planet Deingil is completely flooded by Aquarius, killing all its inhabitants except those who escape on the enormous Uruku space city commanded by the Grand Emperor of Deingil, Lugar. Lugar sends a space fleet commanded by his son Lugar II to the Milky Way for the purpose of attacking Earth. The Deingil people are actually the original colonizers of Earth, the ancient race whom legend held had come from the skies to populate Japan--a race known as the Yamato! Lugar feels it is within his rights to use the destructive powers of Aquarius to kill all life





Queen of
Aquarius
クィーン・オブ・アクエリアス



神官大総統
ルガル
Lugar

on Earth and reclaim it for the survivors of Deingil. The conclusion pits the battleship Yamato, symbolic of the spirit of Earth, against the people of Yamato, the original inhabitants of Earth--Yamato vs. Yamato! In this film, the original captain of the Yamato, Jyuzo Okita, returns--the explanation for his return being that a cure for radiation sickness was devised and given to Okita before his brain had died (a very contrived explanation at best). In the film's climax, the waters of Aquarius are hurtling towards Earth when Okita decides that the only way to save our planet is to sacrifice himself and the Yamato. He flies Yamato alone into the onrushing waters and causes the wave-motion gun to backfire, destroying the ship and turning the waters back towards Aquarius. FINAL YAMATO ran a total of 152 minutes in its original release, but producer Yoshinobu Nishizaki was not yet through with milking Yamato for every possible yen. An expanded version of FINAL YAMATO is to be released this fall, causing one Japanese source to remark, "Once again, the opinion of Yamato (Nishizaki) is lowered in Japan."

GODZILLA SCRIPT NOW AVAILABLE--As promised last time, the JFFS is happy to announce that an English translation of the script for the Japanese version of GODZILLA is now available exclusively for JFFS members. Fans of the original GODZILLA will be amazed at how much more dramatically powerful the Japanese version of this film is. For a limited time, copies of this script are available at \$5.00. In the future, we hope to make available scripts for other Japanese SF/fantasy films. Among the possibilities for future scripts are DEMON POND, SPACE CRUISER YAMATO, MY YOUTH IN ARCADIA, LUPIN III--CAGLIOSTRO CASTLE, and SPACE ADVENTURE COBRA.

SPACE CRUISER YAMATO Anime Comics, based on the original series, will soon be published in English by Books Nippan. For information, contact Books Nippan, 532 West 6th Street, Los Angeles, California, 90014 (Attn:Yuji Hiramatsu). These volumes will feature color frame blowups, and are released as STARBLAZERS comics.