

SPACE SHIPS IN ANIME

by Martin Ouellette



In October 1974 in Japan a brand new television series premiered. Named **UCHUU SENKAN YAMATO (SPACE CRUISER YAMATO)**, it was a co-creation between artist Leiji Matsumoto and producer Yoshinobu Nishizaki and, by 1977, became one of the greatest animation sagas ever created, to the point that its theme song was nearly considered the second Japanese anthem! Matsumoto continued his animation work with the now famous **SPACE PIRATE CAPTAIN HARLOCK**. Both "Yamato" and "Harlock" found an immense popularity outside of Japan and were translated in many languages: "Yamato" in English (under the title **STARBLAZERS**) and "Harlock" in English (same name), French (**ALBATOR, LE CORSAIRE DE L'ESPACE**) and in Italian. The popularity of both animations endures to this day.

In 1982, another show came on the air and started a revolution. **SUPER DIMENSIONAL FORTRESS MACROSS** integrated many of the plot characteristics of **SPACE CRUISER YAMATO**, such as "the lone ship who serves the Earth", the "eternal love triangle" and the "principal character blown to bits". But there was also brand new stuff like a giant transformable ship, incredible transformable mecha designs, insanely realistic combat scenes and unforgettable background music. In 1984, the plot was reworked as a movie and **MACROSS: LOVE DO YOU REMEMBER?** was born, an animation that is still (along with **AKIRA**) considered as one of the greatest ever made.

Simultaneously with the three series we've just mentioned, two other series made their smaller but noticeable mark in the anime ship realm. **MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM** introduced the "Damn, -space-combat-is-3-D!" style, with ships fighting upside down or vertically (which can throw all usual conventions to hell). **CRUSHER JOE** introduced wild ship designs that can still be seen today (the "Minerva" design was copied a zillion times over) in many animations. Some say that **STAR WARS** was behind **SPACE CRUISER YAMATO**. However "Yamato" was created at the very beginning of the 1970's whereas **STAR WARS** appeared in 1976. Which one influenced which is still a subject of hot discussions, but one thing is sure: in any animation or live action movie, you'll always need a ship!



REVIEW SPACE CRUISER YAMATO

by Martin Ouellette

Created in 1974 by producer Yoshinobu Nishizaki and the now more than famous Leiji Matsumoto, SPACE CRUISER YAMATO was a 26 episode space opera detailing the maiden voyage of the "Yamato" and its crew to the planet "Iskandar". By August 1977, it was transformed into a movie and started the wave of Matsumoto's creations that the world would experience during the late 70's and early 80's. The next summer in August 1978, the movie ARRIVEDERCI YAMATO, SOLDIERS OF LOVE was released. In all logic, it was supposed to end the "Yamato" story forever. Hadn't all the crew been killed? That's where one of the most enduring traits of SPACE CRUISER YAMATO begins: If a character dies in one version, it doesn't mean they'll stay dead! ARRIVEDERCI YAMATO was turned into SPACE CRUISER YAMATO II, a TV series where everyone (or nearly everyone) survives.

A TV movie was released in 1979. Called SPACE CRUISER YAMATO, THE NEW VOYAGE, it was so successful that 1980 saw the release of another movie called BE FOREVER, YAMATO. The success of those two movies spawned YAMATO III, a TV series that was supposed to have 52 episodes but was drastically cut down to 25 (which means that the plot had to be resolved rather quickly). The quality of the animation was reduced and all of this caused the series to be a flop. YAMATO III proved to the writer that stretching things forever would prove unwise and FINAL YAMATO was released. Made to resolve all the plot lines of the saga, it was the fitting end to one of the greatest animation sagas ever made. Since then, rumors of a new "Yamato" film have circulated. The "Yamato" in this new movie was redesigned by conceptual artist Syd Mead; those designs were shown at the 1989 San Diego comic convention but since then, nothing new was heard. SPACE CRUISER YAMATO was translated in English under the name STAR BLAZERS (see Star Blazers Overview) and was extremely successful in both the United States and Canada.

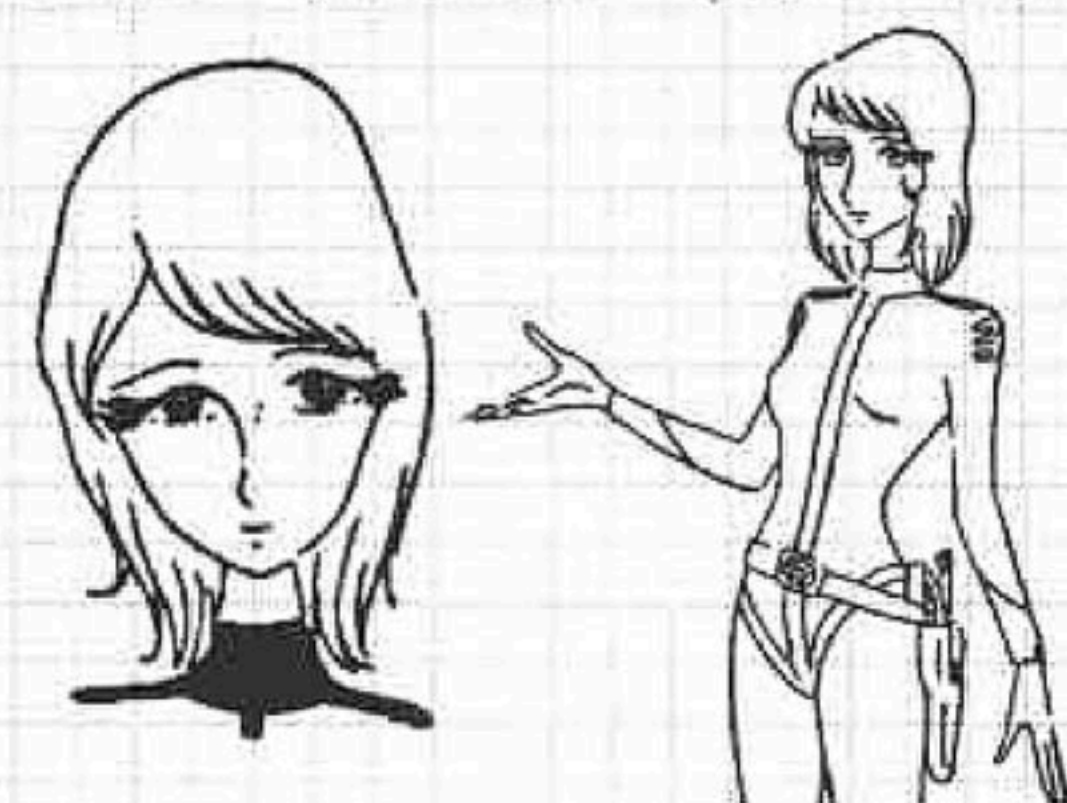
CHARACTERS OF SPACE CRUISER YAMATO

SUSUMU KODAI (DEREK WILDSTAR):



Although his first post was weapons officer, Susumu soon proved himself and was promoted deputy captain of the Yamato by admiral Okita. Rather young for such responsibilities, he often takes rash decisions. This being caused by his desperation to make sure that the Yamato completes its mission. During the long trip to Iskandar, he falls in love with Yuki Mori, radar officer and head nurse of the Yamato crew. He is respected by all, including Dessler, leader of the Gamilas empire.

YUKI MORI (NOVA):



A beautiful young blond woman, Yuki is the personification of kindness and courage. As head nurse, Yuki cares for admiral Okita, who is slowly dying of radiation poisoning. Torn between Susumu Kodai and Daisuke Shima, Yuki eventually falls for Kodai and stays by his side during the entire Yamato saga.

SPACE CRUISER YAMATO

SPACE CRUISER YAMATO:

The most powerful battleship of the Earth United Fleet. It is the very first spaceship equipped with a "wave motion engine", permitting "space warp" displacement. The plans of these engines were furnished by Starsha, Queen of Iskandar.

The Yamato was first conceived as an exodus ship because the human race was going to be destroyed in less than a year by the Gamilas Empire using planetary bombs to irradiate both Earth's entire surface and underground. In the midst of the crisis, an incredible message arrived: Queen Starsha offered humans the cosmo cleaner "D", a machine that could clean the earth of all lethal radiation. One problem though: Iskandar was 148,000 light years away from Earth! To make sure the rescue mission would arrive on time, she sent the plans for a "wave motion engine" which would enable a specially fitted Earth ship to make the trip within the one year limit. This ship was the World War II battleship Yamato, rebuilt into a vast exodus spaceship, but refitted with both the wave motion engine and the highly powerful wave motion gun. Under the command of Admiral Juzo Okita, a young crew of 114 volunteers would join the ship in its voyage to Iskandar.

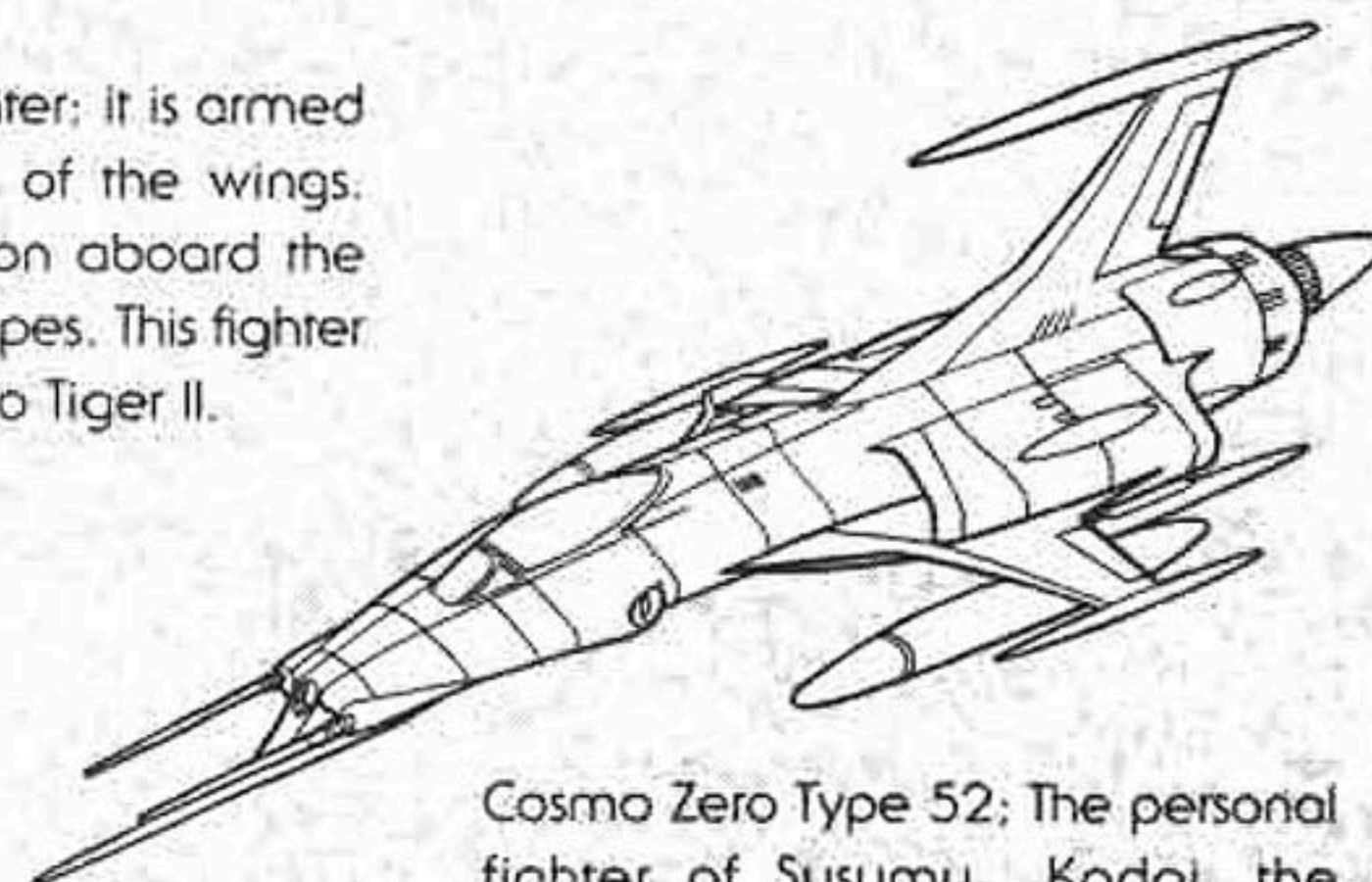
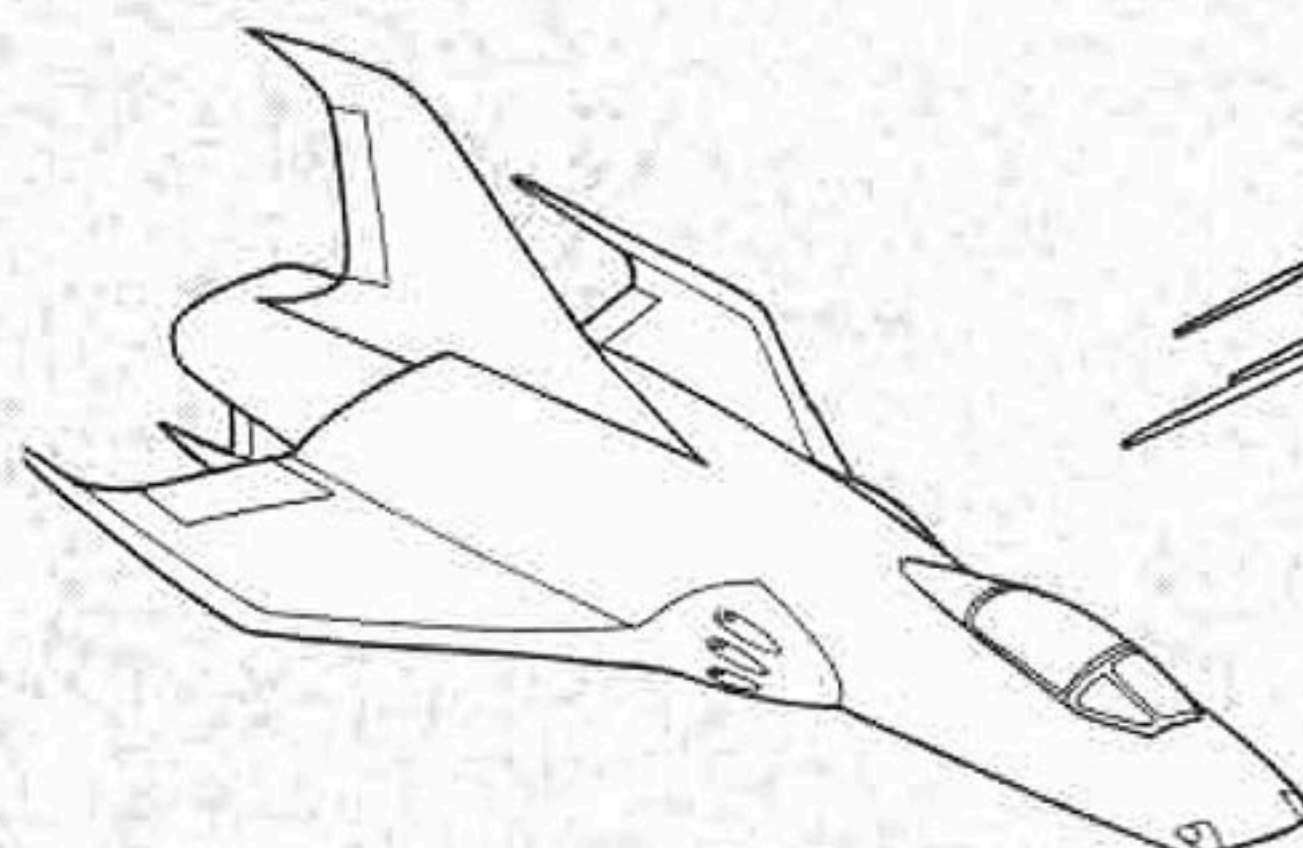
The Yamato carries many jet fighters. The ship contains a small factory that can produce missiles, cannons, shells, and anything the crew might need. When the Yamato travels inside the atmosphere of a planet, two wings extend to stabilize the ship.

Length: 265.8 meters
Width: 34.6 meters
Height: 77.0 meters

Armament: 3 triple shock cannon turrets, 2 small triple shock cannon turrets, 8 beam cannon turrets, 16 feather light beam cannons, 12 missile gates (forward section x6, stern section x6), 8 chimney missile gates, 32 missile gates (16 on each side), 1 wave motion gun, fighters (number not specified).

COSMO TIGER & COSMO ZERO TYPE-52

Cosmo Tiger: This is the standard EDF fighter; it is armed with six cannons mounted at the roots of the wings. The Cosmo Tigers of Black Tiger Squadron aboard the Yamato are painted yellow with black stripes. This fighter will eventually be replaced by the Cosmo Tiger II.

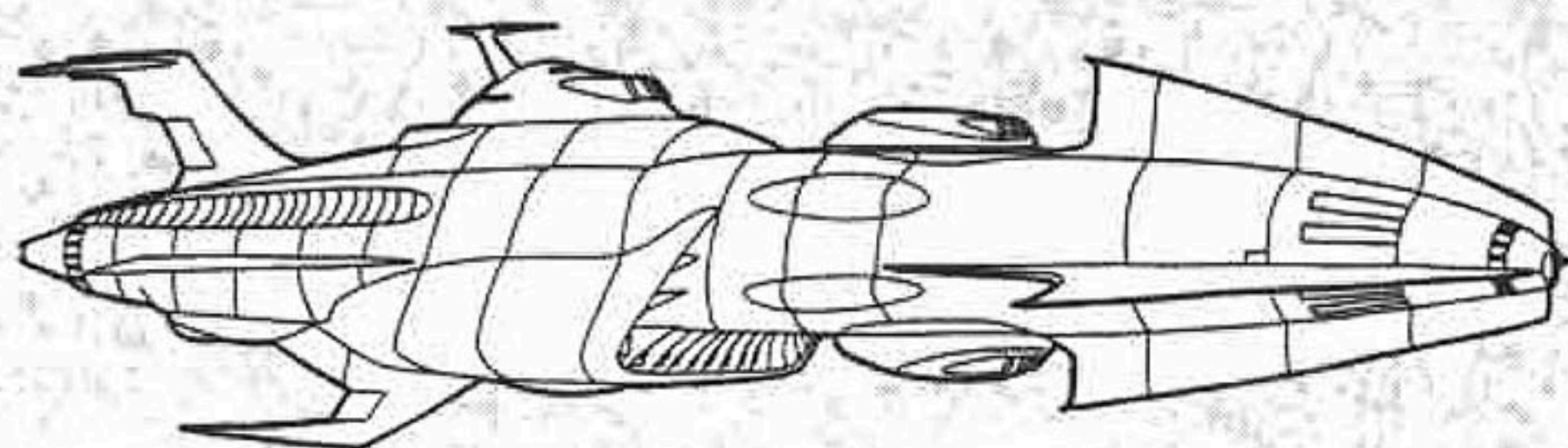


Cosmo Zero Type 52: The personal fighter of Susumu Kodai, the Cosmo Zero is armed with four cannons and can carry a variety of underwing ordnances. It will also be replaced by the Cosmo Tiger II.

SPACE CRUISER YAMATO

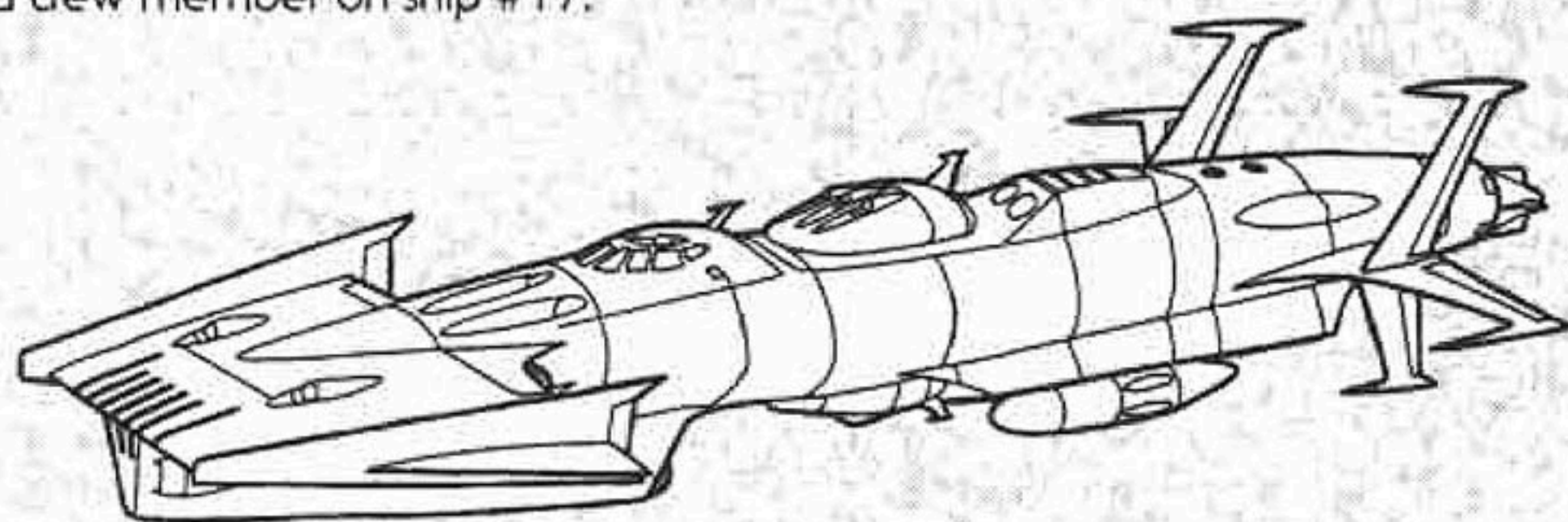
M-2174 CLASS BATTLESHIP OKITA:

This ship was one of the first to be constructed when it became evident that the human race was in grave danger of being destroyed by the planet-destroying bombs launched by the Gamilas Empire. The M-2174 class ship was constructed in a scramble situation and its design shows it. Small and primitive, it looked like an ancient submarine with wing-like projections. Its armament was somewhat better than it looked, with four triple beam cannon turrets (two on the top and two on the bottom) and eight guided missile gates in the nose. The ship we see on this illustration is #225 of the Earth Defense Force and is commanded by a famous war hero, Captain Juzo Okita (later Admiral).



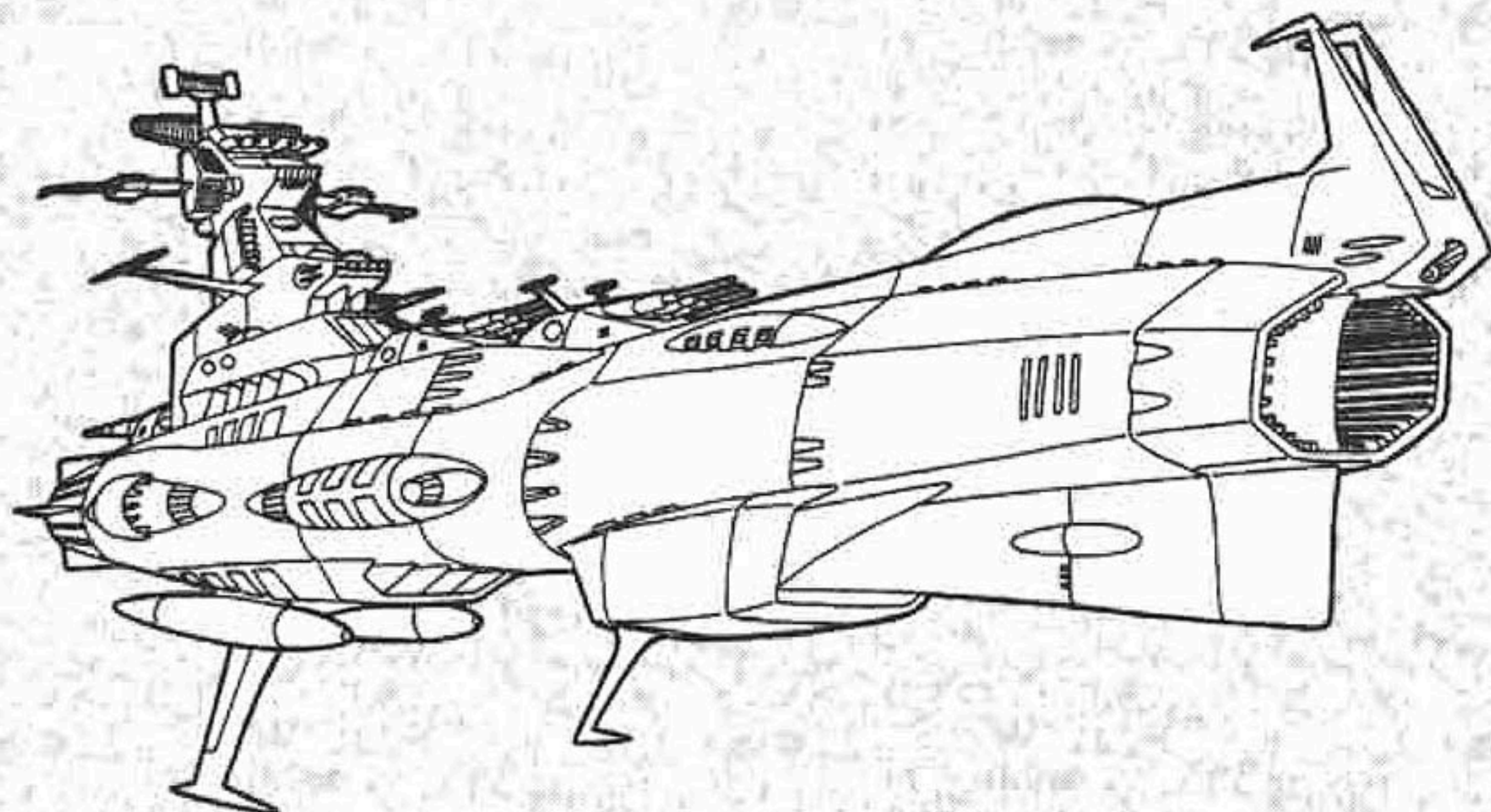
M-21881 CLASS BATTLESHIP YUKIKAZE:

This is the standard ship of the Earth Defense Force. Rather flat, small and very fast, it was conceived for hit-and-run attacks, not the broadside combat Yamato is accustomed to. There is no conning tower like the Yamato-type ships, which means that the bridge is secured from direct hits since it is placed very low on the structure. The armament is composed of three missile launching gates, two small size triple beam cannon turrets (one on the top, one on the belly) and small missile launchers and beam ports dispersed on the surface of the ship. Mamoru Kodai was a crew member on ship #17.



E.D.F. MAIN BATTLESHIP CLASS:

This ship is the new battleship class in the E.D.F. It is used mainly as a commanding ship to lead fleets and serve as combat flagship. Its main armament is composed of three triple heavy beam cannon turrets and a wave motion gun (very similar to the Yamato's). Its secondary armament is made of many (though unspecified) light beam cannon turrets, torpedo, missile launchers and such. From afar, it strongly resembles the Yamato.



DAISUKE SHIMA (MARK VENTURE):



Chief helmsman of the Yamato, Shima is level-headed and cool under fire while his best friend Susumu is rash and hot-tempered. Although Shima failed to impress Yuki enough for her to fall in love with him, he later meets Teresa of Telazart (ARRIVEDerci YAMATO) and falls in love.

ADMIRAL JUZO OKITA (CAPTAIN AVATAR):



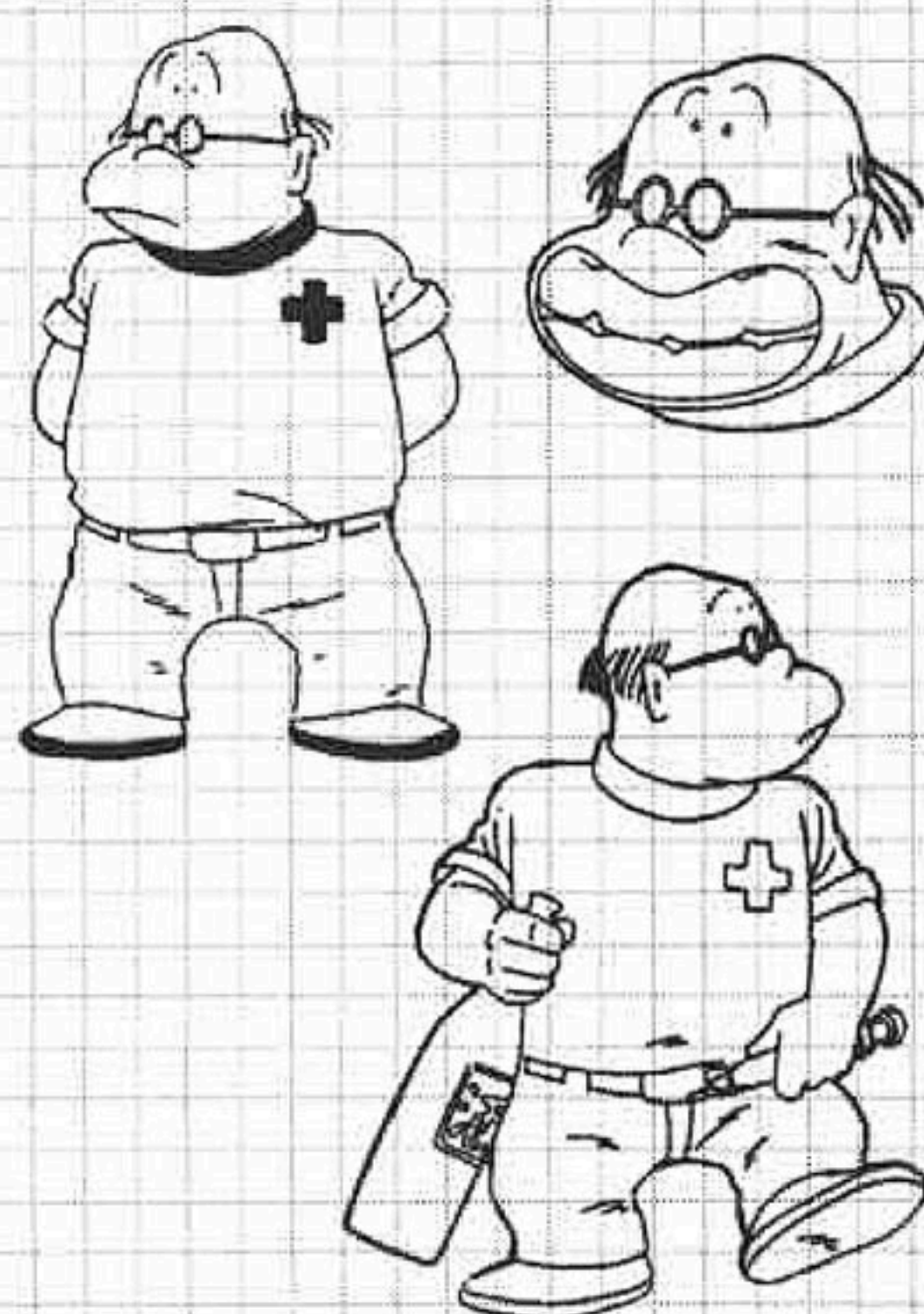
Admiral Okita is the most experienced officer of the Earth Space Fleet and a most wise commander. Although he's very sick from radiation poisoning, Okita accepts the command of the Yamato out of love for his home planet. Fatherly loved by his crew, he nevertheless experiences some problems with Susumu Kodai because he was in command of the YUKIKAZE (Snow Wind) on which Susumu's brother Mamoru was supposedly killed. Okita leads the mission successfully, but dies at the doors of Earth (only to be revived in FINAL YAMATO).

SHIRO SANADA (SANDOR):



Yamato's science officer, Sanada has a knack for anything that needs repairing (or being tampered with!) His incredible technical feats have saved the Yamato more than once, in situations so desperate no one else would have tried anything to save her. Sanada also seems to be very good at subterfuge, to the point of being able to dissimulate the fact that both his arms and legs are cybernetic implants!

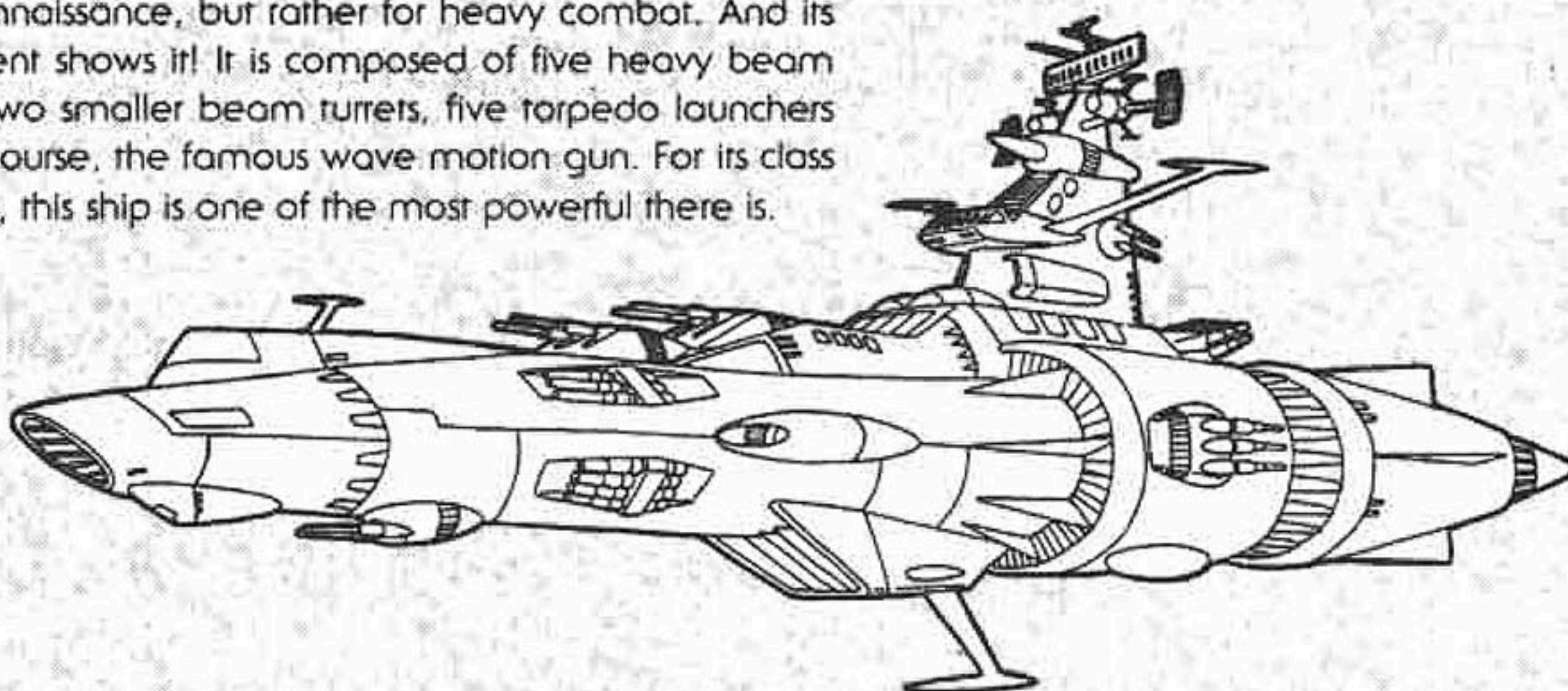
DR. SADO (DR. SANE):



An unlikely doctor, he needs to gurgel down a tremendous amount of sake to keep himself alive. In the American version, the sake is replaced by spring water. However, all in all, since the job of being chief medical officer of the Yamato must be a rather stressful position, Sado's little weakness for the strong stuff can be understood (to some extent).

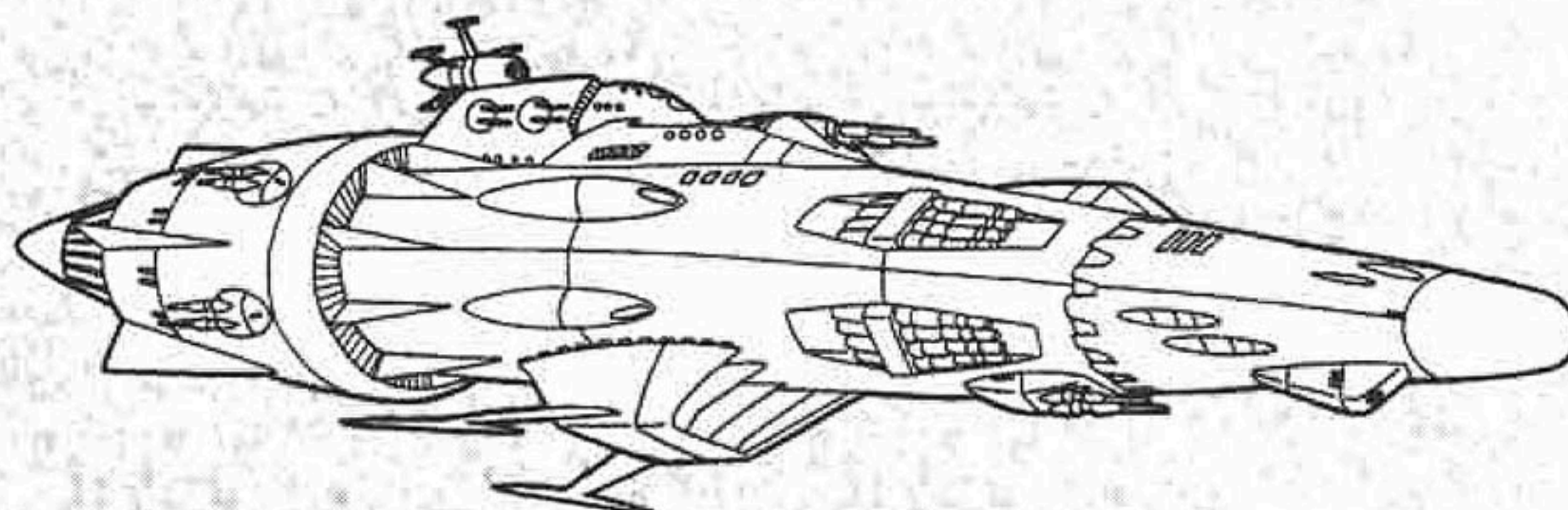
E.D.F. BATTLE CRUISER CLASS:

The ship we see on this illustration belongs to the E.D.F. Moon Base. As we can see, it does not have the enormous amount of antennae the other ships have. It is not for reconnaissance, but rather for heavy combat. And its armament shows it! It is composed of five heavy beam turrets, two smaller beam turrets, five torpedo launchers and of course, the famous wave motion gun. For its class and size, this ship is one of the most powerful there is.



E.D.F. DESTROYER CLASS:

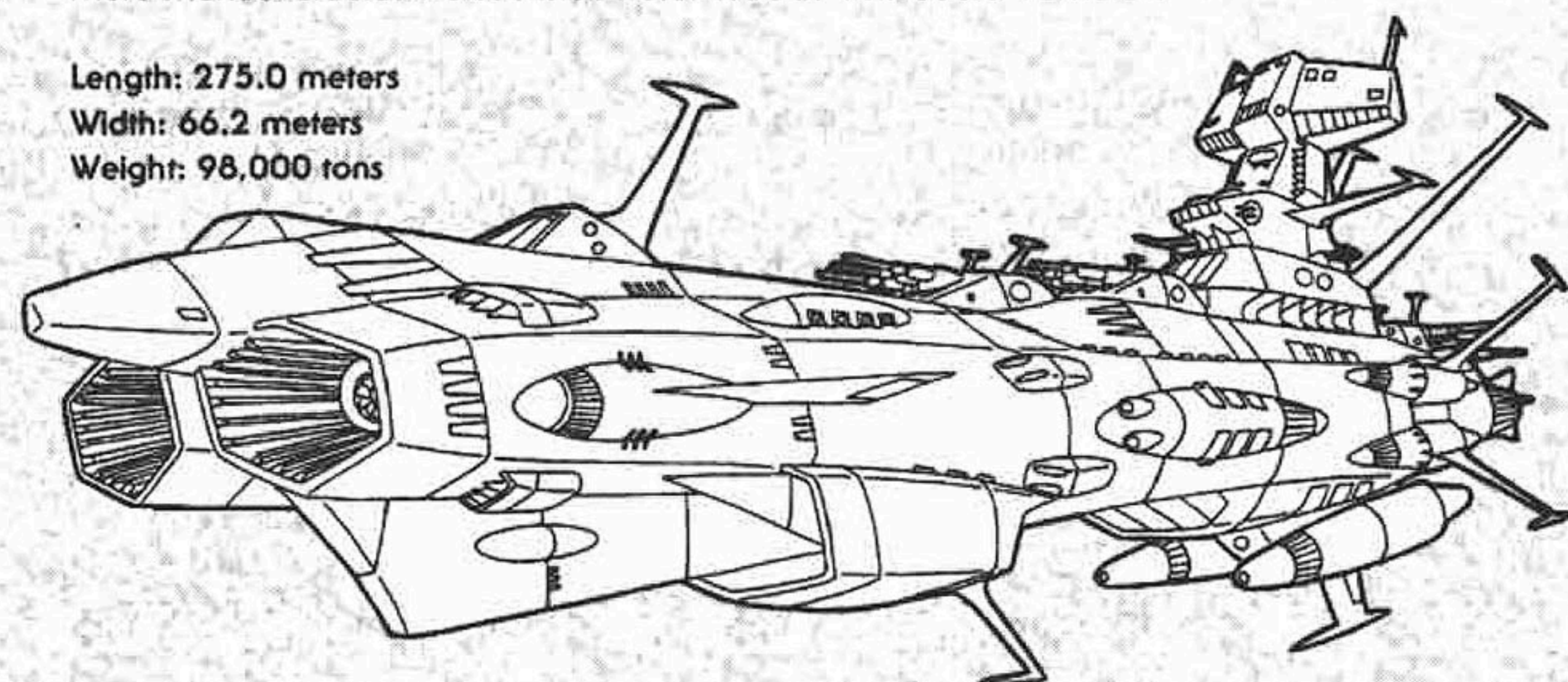
It is the fastest ship in the entire Earth fleet. Very submarine-looking and quite small, its armament is very heavy for such a small ship. It consists of two double heavy beam cannon turrets (one on top and bottom), four double medium beam cannon turrets, four small beam turrets, four quad-tube torpedo launchers, and small multiple missile launchers dispersed all over the ship. Of course, the engine section is enormous considering how small the ship is.



E.D.F. FLAGSHIP ANDROMEDA:

The Andromeda was originally built to replace the Yamato as the Earth Defense Force flagship. Although it looks a lot like the Yamato, it is bigger, has more weaponry, is faster and more maneuverable. We see the Andromeda in "Arrivederci Yamato".

Length: 275.0 meters
Width: 66.2 meters
Weight: 98,000 tons

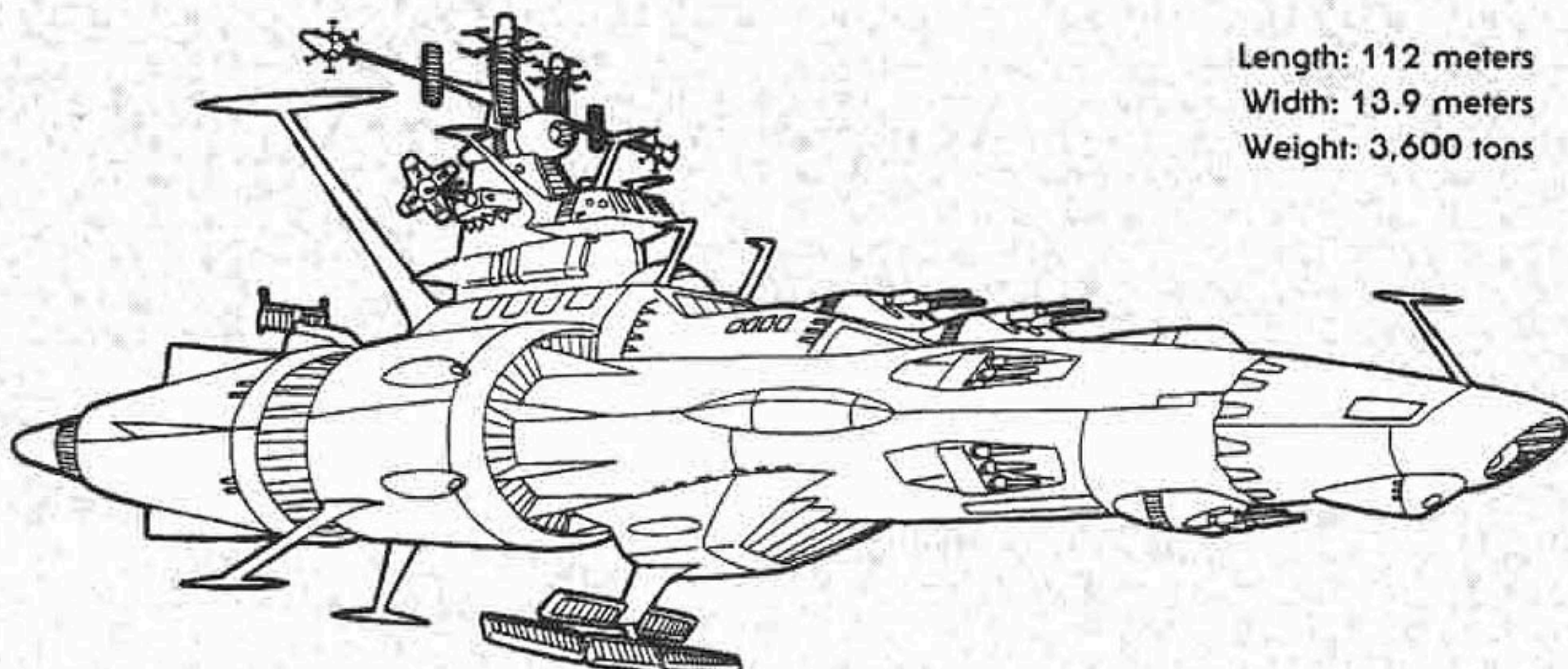


Armament: 4 triple heavy-beam cannon turrets, medium and small beam cannon turrets (many), 4 torpedo launchers, missile launchers (many), 2 wave motion guns

SPACE CRUISER YAMATO

E.D.F. ESCORT CRUISER CLASS:

The escort ship for the "Earth Natural Resources Transport of Supply" fleet. Its duty is to protect and guard the natural resources supplying ships, within and outside the solar system. Its data banks contain tremendous amounts of information and its armament is extremely heavy for a ship this small. It is composed of three triple heavy beam cannon turrets, four medium beam cannon turrets and four triple tubed torpedo launchers. Of course, there are small missile launchers scattered all over the ship. Susumu Kodai, the series' main character commands one of these ships.

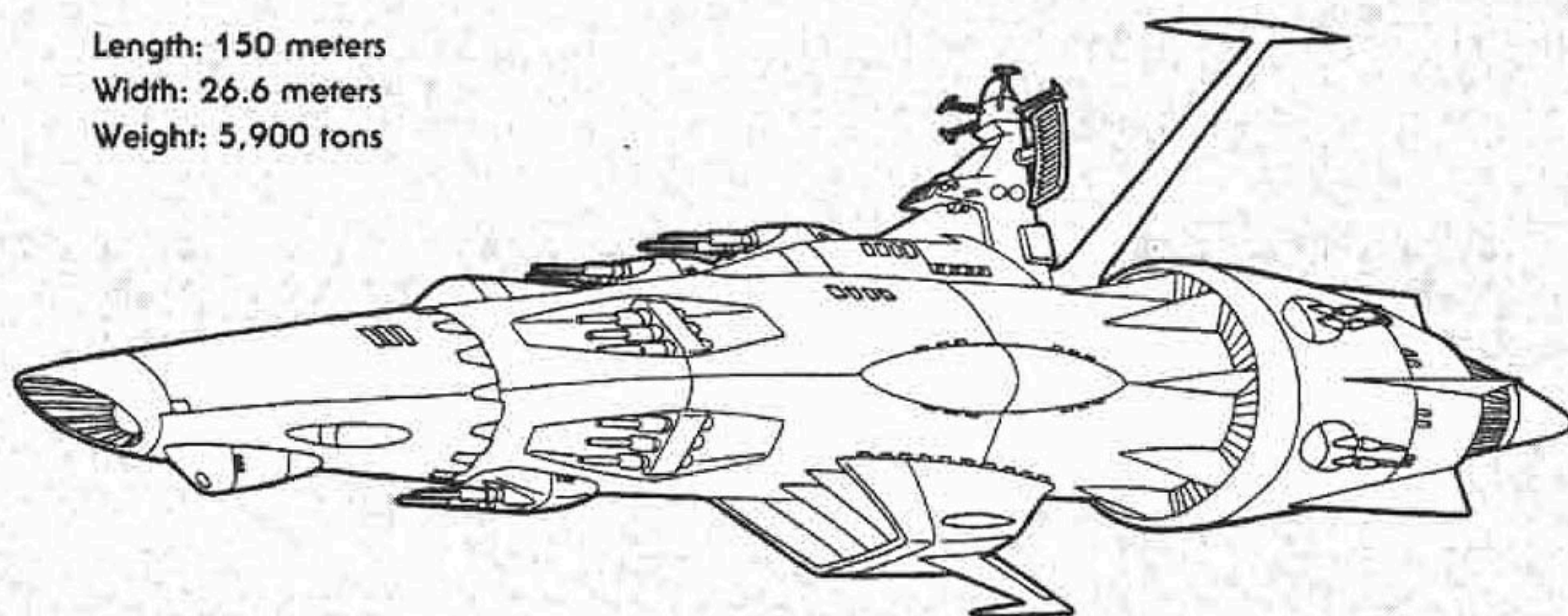


Length: 112 meters
Width: 13.9 meters
Weight: 3,600 tons

E.D.F. PATROL SHIP CLASS:

It is a small size cruiser that goes outside the solar system. Its main duty is to patrol around planet Pluto and beyond. It is mainly used by the "Middle Distance Fleet". Although its armament is very light, it contains plenty of search and electronic equipments like radar and E.C.M.. Daisuke Shima, one of "Yamato"'s main characters, is captain of one of those ships.

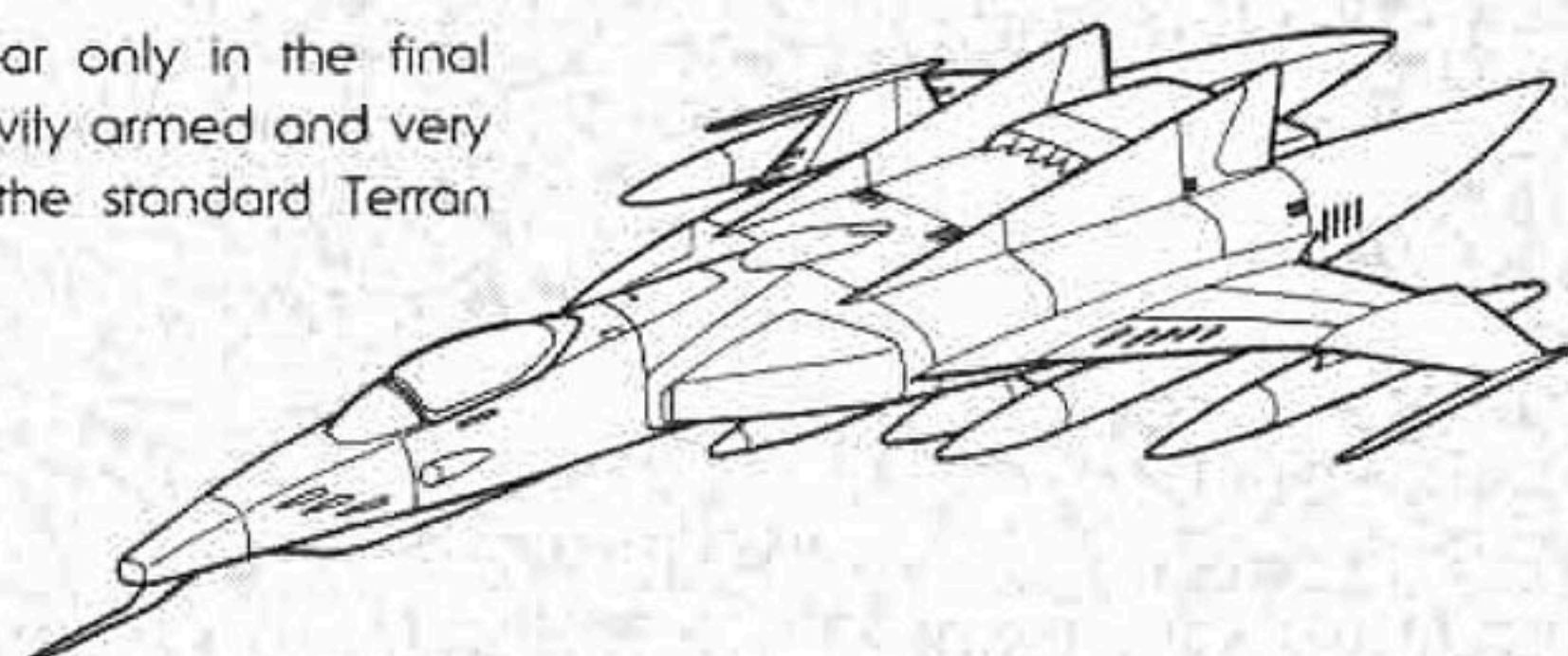
Length: 150 meters
Width: 26.6 meters
Weight: 5,900 tons



Armament: 3 heavy beam cannon turrets, 4 triple torpedo launchers, missile launchers (many)

COSMO TIGER II

This advanced craft will appear only in the final part of the Yamato saga. Heavily armed and very fast, it will possibly become the standard Terran fighter.

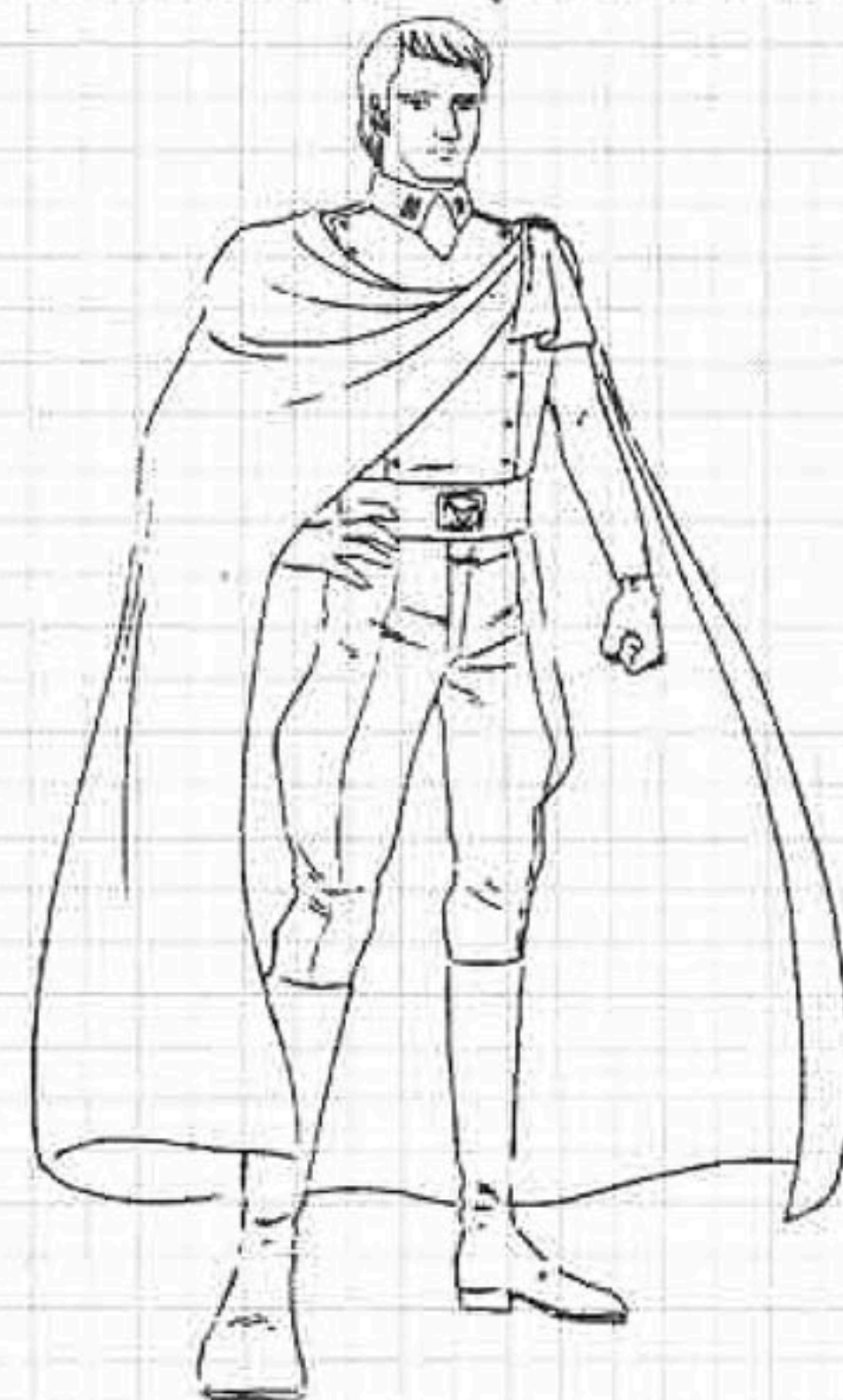


MAMORU KODAI (ALEX WILDSTAR):



Although he was presumed dead when his ship, the YUKIKAZE, crashed on Titan, the Yamato crew finds him alive on Iskandar, living with Queen Starsha. The legend wants that the crew was supposed to find Captain Harlock in Mamoru's place, but it seems that the producers did not like the idea. He and Starsha have a little girl named Sasha (we meet her in NEW VOYAGE and BE FOREVER YAMATO).

DESSLER (DESSLOK):



The leader of planet Gamillas, Dessler, desperate to save his planet, orders an attack on Earth in order to relocate his people there. Despite being, at the beginning, a fierce enemy of the Yamato crew, he soon becomes moved by their courage and decides to help them instead. His sense of honor is great and his courage is renowned.

STAR BLAZERS' STORY

As many people will see, there are many similarities between the story lines of STAR BLAZERS and SPACE CRUISER YAMATO (other than the animation of course!). Here is a quick rundown of STAR BLAZERS' plot.

In the year 2199, Desslok, leader of the dying planet Gamilon, decides that the earth could be a nice place to relocate his people. He orders his forces to drop radiation bombs to destroy the population, leaving the planet vacant for his people. The resourceful humans hide in underground cities and are, for some time, able to resist. Unfortunately, radiation is seeping through the ground and contaminating the underground settlements and water sources. In one year's time, radiation will saturate the earth and the human race will perish.

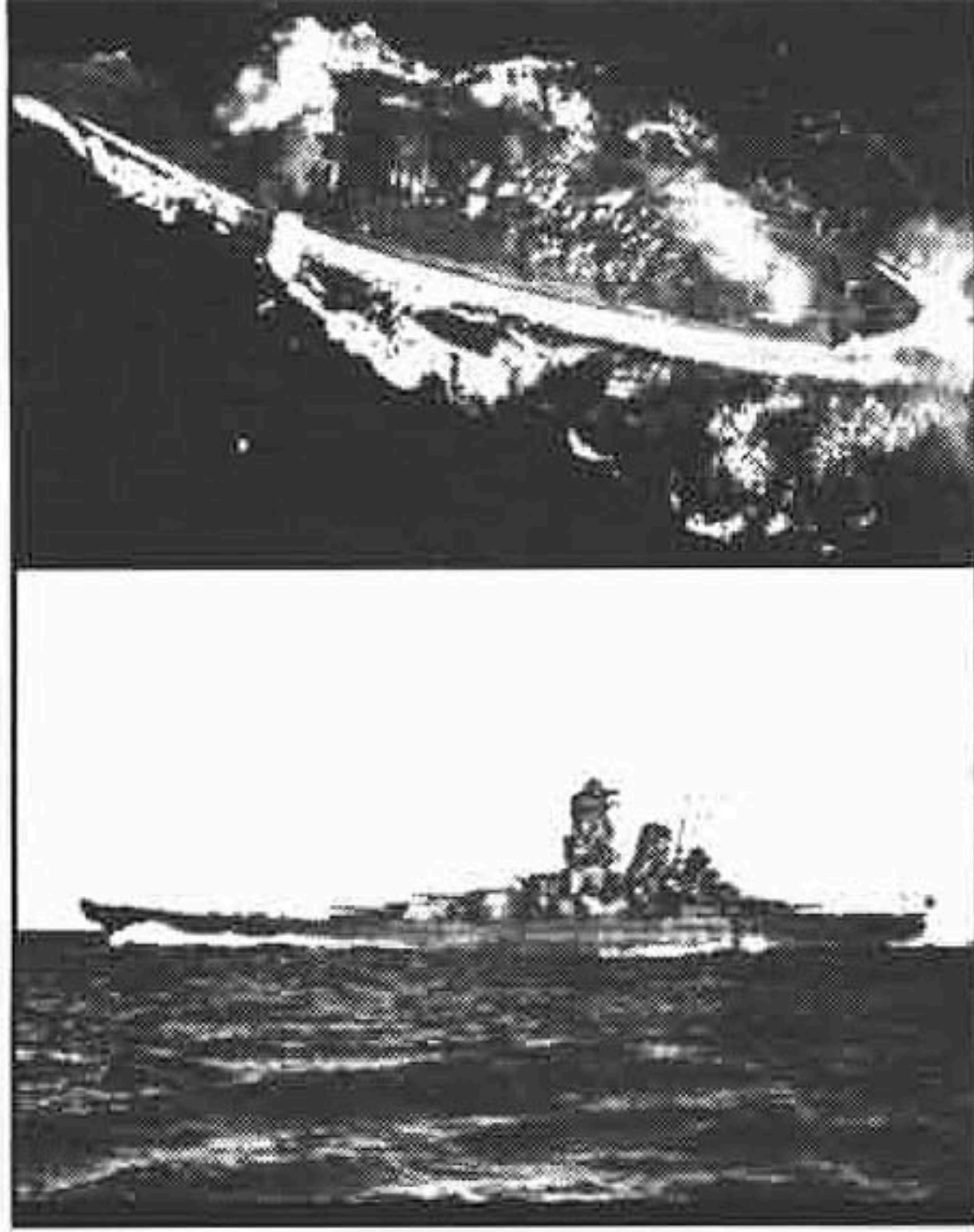
Luckily, Queen Starsha of the planet Iskandar has the cure for this and sends a message offering the Cosmo DNA, a device that can clean the planet of its radiation poisoning. Since her planet is located 148,000 light years away from Earth, the message includes the blueprints of an engine capable of taking a ship through such a voyage in less than one year: the Wave Motion Engine. The population of Earth then commits everything to the reconstruction of the ancient battleship Yamato into the space cruiser Argo. For a weapon system, the Argo uses one of the most powerful weapons ever created: the Wave Motion Gun. A team of young people called the STAR BLAZERS is picked to crew the Argo on its long and dangerous journey to Iskandar.

In the first 26 episodes, the Star Force manages to defeat the forces of the much stronger Gamilon Empire, reaches Iskandar and returns home with the Cosmo DNA, thus saving the Earth. The following 26 episodes' storyline happens a year after the Argo's successful mission. An enormous comet approaches our galaxy. It is the Comet Empire, bent on conquering the universe and led by Prince Zordar, who thinks of himself as the universe's conqueror. As if that wasn't enough, Desslok has forged an alliance with him, out of his desire for revenge against Earth (and specifically the Argo).

The Earth's Defense Council intercepts a desperate plea from Queen Trelaina (Teresa) of planet Telazart, warning Earth of the danger and asking for help. When the government refuses to heed the warning, deputy-captain Derek Wildstar assembles the Star Force once again and with the help of a group of space marines, he steals the Argo and follows the trail of the signal back to its origin. After some minor problems with Desslok they reach Telazart, and Trelaina gives them some much needed explanations of what is exactly going on. During the Star Forces' short time there, Trelaina and Mark Venture, the Argo's navigator, fall in love but Trelaina refuses to leave her world.

After the Argo's departure, Trelaina uses her psionic powers from Telazart, gravely damaging the Comet Empire and keeping it immobilized long enough for the Earth to prepare its defenses. After a monstrous battle, the Earth fleet fires its massed wave motion guns, dissipating the Comet effect surrounding the citadel that forms the core of the Empire. The citadel destroys the Earth's fleet and the Moon. The planet surrenders while the Argo, trapped by Desslok, fights its way through his fleet and rams his flagship. Wildstar and his girlfriend Nova find themselves in a face to face confrontation with Desslok, which ends with Desslok being so impressed by the Star Force's courage that he forgets his plans of revenge and reveals to them the best place to strike the citadel. He departs with his fleet to find a new world for his people.

During the battle, Mark Venture gets killed. The Star Force invades the citadel and manages to destroy its engines, thus immobilizing it for a final strike. Their victory is short-lived though, as Zordar's super-dreadnought nearly destroys the Argo, then fires on Earth with its oversized wave motion cannon (a very, very big one!). Wildstar orders all the Star Force troops back and prepares himself with the help of Nova, to ram Zordar's ship with the Argo. Suddenly, Trelaina appears and with her last strength, disintegrates the dreadnought. Venture, having been brought back to life, witnesses the destruction, and the death of Trelaina. The Star Force and the Argo return to Earth, and are treated like heroes and saviors.



HISTORY OF THE "REAL" YAMATO

In 1934, the Japanese Imperial Navy, looking for quality to compensate for the American fleet's quantity, began the studies for the design of a battlecruiser capable of outclassing any of its adversaries. It needed to be faster, have better armor and guns that could fire farther than any other ship. The general configuration the engineers decided upon was: 64,000 tons, nine 460 mm cannons capable of hitting a target 48 km away and a 410 mm thick armor for the hull and 650 mm thick for the turrets. To build those ships without alerting the American and British governments required absolute secrecy.

The construction of two of those ships was decided for the modernization program of 1937. Construction of the YAMATO began in November 1937, was finished in August 1940 and it became operational in 1941, one week before Pearl Harbor. It hoisted admiral Yamamoto's mark during the battle of Midway but made an about-face before the American aircraft carriers were close enough to be targeted. The YAMATO was torpedoed in February 1941 but was repaired in time to be part of the battle in the Philippine Sea in June 1944. The YAMATO, MUSASHI (the other ship of the YAMATO class) and NAGATO were the principal force of vice-admiral Kurita's fleet in the battle of the Gulf of Leyte. That's where the YAMATO fired its guns for the first and last time on another ship during the attack of the American fleet. Bad visibility prevented the maximum capabilities of its cannons to be used. The YAMATO was destroyed during operation TEN GO. It seems that fires, caused by torpedo hits, reached the ammo magazines and the ship exploded, killing 2,498 officers and sailors. Operation TENGO was a useless sacrifice and caused the death of 3,665 sailors (446 on the YAHAGI battlecruiser and 721 on various destroyers, in addition to the YAMATO crew).