

YAMATO FOREVER



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ANIME FEATURE

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ALL ABOARD TO THE LAND OF DREAMS

Veteran animator, *UCHÛ SENKAN YAMATO* episode director, and Anime Expo '95 Guest of Honor **Noboru Ishiguro** shares a special message with English-speaking anime fans. SPECIAL TO ANIMERICA

I debuted as an animator in 1963, when the first animated television show in Japan, *Tetsuwan Atom*, began. So you can say my career parallels the history of Japanese TV animation. In the thirty-two years since, Japanese TV animation has undergone unbelievable changes, both in quality and technique. I've seen them right as they happened, and I'd like to mention a few of the ones which left the greatest impression on me.

The start of TV animation thirty-two years ago gave birth to a new occupation in Japan: *Animator*. Until then, animators existed only in the studio of Toei Animation, which produced but one feature a year, plus a few other studios which produced TV commercials. It was an incredible time when anyone who could draw cartoons—even just a little—could become an animator.

I was one of those persons who dreamed those dreams. I was already making animation on 8mm film in college, so I already knew the basics of animation. When it comes to knowledge of the animation field, I guess you could say that I'm self-taught.

During my high school and college years, I moonlighted drawing manga. Many leading Japanese manga artists such as Shotaro Ishinomori, Leiji Matsumoto, and Fujio Fujiko were born circa my birth year, 1938. All these people grabbed the inking pen around the same time and started drawing manga, and I was one of them. There were two reasons for this.

One was a spontaneous reaction felt throughout a nation of boys and girls who were inspired by the genius of Osamu Tezuka. This will quickly become a very long story if I start talking about Tezuka here, so I won't, but suffice it to say that I was one of those boys and girls inspired by his brilliance. I'll mention the second reason later, but for now, let me say that I've been interested since childhood in the process of animation, in how paper drawings can be made to move. Therefore, for me, the transition from manga to animation was a simple one.

It was unfortunate that the first studio I joined didn't exactly have any senior animators under whom I could study, but it was also the reason I could work at my own leisure. For the animators of that day, creating film for a weekly television series was an unprecedented challenge, and that's how we learned to harness our brute stamina, technical innovations, and bold spirits.

In retrospect, I think making animation back then was very haphazard. After all, once the film made it to the screen, the day was ours. There were no such things as VCRs. Even if a character with blue clothes showed up in the next cut wearing red clothes, there wasn't much that could be done about it once the episode had aired. Sure, someone might bring it up later, but we could always convince them that they were only imagining things. Things were lax, since the next chance to check for mistakes came only during reruns. In that sense, today's animators have it much more difficult. They have to deal with the repeated scrutiny of the VCR. They've gotten nervous. That's probably why there aren't as many bold animated shows on the air as there once were.

In those days, we animators pulled many an all-nighter researching how we could give the impression of maximum animation with a minimum number of cels. This technique later became the preferred method to reduce production costs, so much so that these days, many objects which *SHOULD* be animated and have motion, aren't and don't. For example, in Disney anima-

tion, a flame is always burning, and will never freeze. In Japanese animation, from a character's perspective, a flame might very well freeze. In fact, by deliberately freezing that flame and emphasizing that particular aspect of a scene, an animator may be able to better convey a character's sentiments. This is the soul of Japanese animation, so different from Disney animation, as well as a Japanese style of streamlining which reduces the cel count.



Noboru Ishiguro

From the start, I wanted to be a director. With the shortage of artists, however, it took me five years to make the move from being an animator to becoming a director. Ever since my student days, I've liked to read science fiction, and I'd always dreamed of making a full-fledged animated science fiction production. The problem was that in the animation industry of those days, it was a given that science fiction animation would be a flop. A space background had no diversity, it was said, and so it was assumed that children would become bored. In those days, TV animation was seen as only for children, after all.

Ten years later, in 1974, I heard that someone was going to make a full-fledged science fiction animation. The designs would be by Leiji Matsumoto, whose mecha designs were considered the best in Japan. This production was going to be a heavy and realistic story, like nothing seen before.

That show was *Uchû Senkan Yamato*.

This was exactly what I'd always wanted to do. I was inspired, for this was the kind of show which had never been animated before, and I signed on as the animation director. It was the beginning of a long struggle.

It's kind of funny to look back and think about it now, but back then, there wasn't a single animator who grasped the concept of zero gravity. All the animation done back then featured explosions which dropped downward like fireworks. I had no words to explain the concept, so for the first few episodes, I hand-sketched the explosions and showed the animators what to do. These days, science fiction is the norm, and no one has to worry about this sort of thing...or so I thought. Fifteen years later, in the first episode of *Ginga Eiyû Densetsu* (Legend of the Galactic Heroes), I made the same mistake. The important animation foreshadowing the fate of the heroes, where several busts crumble and fall, had the pieces falling down the screen as though there was gravity in space...

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Star Blazers is the series that launched Japanese animation fandom in North America. Let me say that again, in case you joined us late, or are distracted by the *Ranma 1/2* or *Tenchi!* CD you've got playing in the background: It was the Japanese-animated TV series known as *Star Blazers* which started anime fandom in America as we know it today.

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America Behind the Scenes

YAMATO: A SELECT FILMOGRAPHY

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WHAT THEY CALLED IT IN JAPAN: *Uchū Senkan Yamato* (Space Cruiser Yamato)
WHAT THEY CALLED IT HERE: *Star Blazers • The Quest For Iscandar*
HOW LONG: 26 half-hour TV episodes
ORIGINAL AIR DATES: 6 October 1974 to 30 March 1975

WHAT: In the dying days of a losing war against the Gamilon empire, the Earth's one last hope—the rebuilt dreadnought

Yamato—sets sail into the galaxy with a young crew guided by a dying mariner on a quest toward a world that offers a device to cure the radiation poisoning which will end all life on Earth in one year's time.



WHAT THEY CALLED IT IN JAPAN: *Uchū Senkan Yamato*
WHAT THEY CALLED IT HERE: (Not Yet Released Commercially in the U.S.)
HOW LONG: 130 min. theatrical release
ORIGINAL RELEASE: 6 August 1977
WHAT: Compiled from the first TV series. This is the movie which ignited Japan's "Yamato Boom."



WHAT THEY CALLED IT IN JAPAN: *Saraba Uchū Senkan Yamato: Ai no Senshitachi* (Farewell, Space Cruiser Yamato: Soldiers of Love)
WHAT THEY CALLED IT HERE: *Farewell to Space Battleship Yamato: In the Name of Love*
HOW LONG: 151 min. theatrical release
ORIGINAL RELEASE: 5 August 1978
WHAT: Investigating a mysterious message from space, the crew of the *Yamato* learn that



a great white comet speeding toward Earth is actually the home of a world-devouring empire. Crossing swords with the Comet Empire fleets and an old enemy, the *Yamato* battles its way home in time to see the destruction of Earth's fleets. After assaulting the citadel hidden inside the comet, the survivors of the *Yamato's* crew make the ultimate sacrifice for the freedom of the galaxy.

WHAT THEY CALLED IT IN JAPAN: *Uchū Senkan Yamato II*
WHAT THEY CALLED IT HERE: *Star Blazers • The Comet Empire*
HOW LONG: 26 half-hour TV episodes
ORIGINAL AIR DATES: 14 October 1978 to 7 April 1979
WHAT: Expanded retelling of the second movie which leaves half the cast alive, paving the way for further sequels.



WHAT THEY CALLED IT IN JAPAN: *Yamato: Aratana Tabidachi* (Yamato: The New Voyage)
WHAT THEY CALLED IT HERE: *Space Battleship Yamato: The New Voyage*
HOW LONG: 90 min. TV movie
ORIGINAL BROADCAST: 31 July 1979
WHAT: The *Yamato* crew team up with their honorable former adversary, Desslar (Dessler) to defend planet Iscandar from the forces of the Black



Nebula Empire. Queen Starsha sends Mamoru (Alex) and their infant daughter, Sasha, to safety aboard the *Yamato*, sacrificing herself and her planet to save her friends and destroy the enemy fortress.



WHAT THEY CALLED IT IN JAPAN: *Yamato: Eien ni* (Be Forever Yamato)
WHAT THEY CALLED IT HERE: *Be Forever Yamato*
HOW LONG: 145 min. theatrical release
ORIGINAL RELEASE: 2 August 1980
WHAT: The *Yamato* escapes the Dark Nebula Empire's blitzkrieg attack on Earth and searches for the enemy's base in order to find a way to deactivate the doomsday bomb. They fight their way to the enemy home-world, only to find it's Earth in the future. A titanic battle reveals the true face of the enemy.



WHAT THEY CALLED IT IN JAPAN: *Uchū Senkan Yamato III*
WHAT THEY CALLED IT HERE: *Star Blazers • The Bolar Wars*
HOW LONG: 25 half-hour TV episodes
ORIGINAL AIR DATES: 11 October 1980 to 4 April 1981
WHAT: A stray doomsday missile plunges into the sun, causing a reaction which will incinerate Earth in one year's time. While searching for a new home, the *Yamato* becomes



embroiled in the gigantic galactic war between the Bolar Federation and the Galman Empire. Armadas clash, alliances shift, and the *Yamato* follows the avatar of a persecuted religion to a hidden world which holds the technological key to averting the solar crisis—if they (and their ally, Desslar) can overcome the Bolar black hole bombs.



WHAT THEY CALLED IT IN JAPAN: *Uchū Senkan Yamato: Kanketsu-Hen* (Yamato: Final Chapter)
WHAT THEY CALLED IT HERE: *Final Yamato*
HOW LONG: 158 min. theatrical release
ORIGINAL RELEASE: 19 March 1983
WHAT: The water world Aquarius, on its eternal orbit through the cosmos, inundates the planet Dengil. The priest-king of Dengil warps



Aquarius toward Earth to drown humanity and claim his ancestral homeworld (it seems the Dengil tribe fled Earth during Noah's flood). Captain Okita (Avatar), long presumed dead, returns to lead the battle, only to sacrifice himself and his ship to stave off disaster.

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WHAT: In the dying days of a losing war against the Gamilon empire, the Earth's one last hope—the rebuilt dreadnaught *Yamato*—sets sail into the galaxy with a young crew guided by a dying mariner on a quest toward a world that offers a device to cure the radiation poisoning which will end all life on Earth in one year's time.

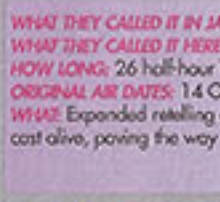


WHAT THEY CALLED IT IN JAPAN: *Uchū Senkan Yamato*
WHAT THEY CALLED IT HERE: (Not Yet Released Commercially in the U.S.)
HOW LONG: 130 min. theatrical release
ORIGINAL RELEASE: 6 August 1977
WHAT: Compiled from the first TV series. This is the movie which ignited Japan's “Yamato Boom.”



WHAT THEY CALLED IT IN JAPAN: *Uchū Senkan Yamato: Ai no Senshi-tachi* (Farewell, Space Cruiser Yamato: Soldiers of Love)
WHAT THEY CALLED IT HERE: *Farewell to Space Battleship Yamato: In the Name of Love*
HOW LONG: 151 min. theatrical release
ORIGINAL RELEASE: 5 August 1978
WHAT: Investigating a mysterious message from space, the crew of the *Yamato* learn that

a great white comet speeding toward Earth is actually the home of a world-devouring empire. Crossing swords with the Comet Empire fleets and an old enemy, the *Yamato* battles its way home in time to see the destruction of Earth's fleet. After assaulting the citadel hidden inside the comet, the survivors of the *Yamato*'s crew make the ultimate sacrifice for the freedom of the galaxy.



WHAT THEY CALLED IT IN JAPAN: *Uchū Senkan Yamato II*
WHAT THEY CALLED IT HERE: *Star Blazers • The Comet Empire*
HOW LONG: 26 half-hour TV episodes
ORIGINAL AIR DATES: 14 October 1978 to 7 April 1979
WHAT: Expanded retelling of the second movie which leaves half the cast alive, paving the way for further sequels.



WHAT THEY CALLED IT IN JAPAN: *Yamato: Aratana Tabidachi* (Yamato: The New Voyage)
WHAT THEY CALLED IT HERE: *Space Battleship Yamato: The New Voyage*
HOW LONG: 90 min. TV movie
ORIGINAL BROADCAST: 31 July 1979
WHAT: The *Yamato* crew team up with their honorable former adversary, Desslar

(Desslok) to defend planet Iscandar from the forces of the Black Nebula Empire. Queen Starsha sends Mamoru (Alex) and their infant daughter, Sasha, to safety aboard the *Yamato*, sacrificing herself and her planet to save her friends and destroy the enemy fortress.



WHAT THEY CALLED IT IN JAPAN: *Yamato: Eien ni* (Be Forever Yamato)
WHAT THEY CALLED IT HERE: *Be Forever Yamato*
HOW LONG: 145 min. theatrical release
ORIGINAL RELEASE: 2 August 1980
WHAT: The *Yamato* escapes the Dark Nebula Empire's blitzkrieg attack on Earth and searches for the enemy's base in order to find a way to deactivate the doomsday bomb. They fight their way to the enemy homeworld, only to find it's Earth in the future. A titanic battle reveals the true face of the enemy.

WHAT THEY CALLED IT IN JAPAN: *Uchū Senkan Yamato III*
WHAT THEY CALLED IT HERE: *Star Blazers • The Bolar Wars*
HOW LONG: 25 half-hour TV episodes
ORIGINAL AIR DATES: 11 October 1980 to 4 April 1981
WHAT: A stray doomsday missile plunges into the sun, causing a reaction which will incinerate Earth in one year's time. While searching for a new home, the *Yamato* becomes embroiled in the gigantic galactic war between the Bolar Federation and the Galman Empire. Armadas clash, alliances shift, and the *Yamato* follows the avatar of a persecuted religion to a hidden world which holds the technological key to averting the solar crisis—if they (and their ally, Desslar) can overcome the Bolar black hole bombs.



WHAT THEY CALLED IT IN JAPAN: *Uchū Senkan Yamato: Kanketsu-Hen* (Yamato: Final Chapter)
WHAT THEY CALLED IT HERE: *Final Yamato*
HOW LONG: 158 min. theatrical release
ORIGINAL RELEASE: 19 March 1983
WHAT: The water world Aquarius, on its eternal orbit through the cosmos, inundates the planet Dengil. The priest-king of Dengil worps

Aquarius toward Earth to drown humanity and claim his ancestral homeworld (it seems the Dengil tribe fed Earth during Noah's Flood). Captain Okita (Avator), long presumed dead, returns to lead the battle, only to sacrifice himself and his ship to stave off disaster.



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LAND OF DREAMS from page 7

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These fans would raid our garbage cans for thrown-away character sheets and pencil sheets and take them home as though they were little bits of treasure. I would often attach pieces of background art which had already been filed to used cels and give them away to visiting fans. In retrospect, I could have made a small fortune, had I sold them. But in those days, used cels were nothing but industrial waste. Tatsunoko Production was even burying their used cels in their yard. I'll bet you could still dig there today and find a *Gatchaman* cel or two.

Because of the low ratings—and because of the US\$20,000 we regularly exceeded on the per episode budget—producer Yoshinobu Nishizaki decided to shorten the 39-week broadcast schedule to only 26 weeks. Of course, all our thinking and production schedules were built around the 39-week plan, and when the word came down that we'd be making an early wrap-up at Episode 26, Episode 20 was already in production. That's why the *Yamato* spends twenty-five episodes to get to Iscandar, but makes it home in only one.

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The Japanese fans caught wind of this, and started asking if they could see the film. Nishizaki thought about renting a theater for a day for a *Yamato* convention, but as the days went by, the demand spread throughout the country, and that's when the producer realized that this could be a prime business opportunity. He started negotiating with all the theaters in Tokyo, but none of them thought an edited version of a canceled show could bring in an audience, and they all refused. Finally, a four-theater franchise agreed to screen it, and it seemed as though the fans would see the film at last.

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Fans lined up for an early YAMATO screening



Early line-art for Captain Harlock

going to tell my parents?" That's when a male voice replies, "Tell them we're married!"

But the main emphasis of the important eighth episode is Derek avoiding his turn in the radio room... because he has no loved ones left alive. Wildstar's entire family was wiped out in the Earth-Gamilon war, and he blames *Yamato's* Captain Avatar (Okita) for surviving the battle which claimed his older brother, Alex Wildstar (Mamoru Kodai). The aged captain refuses to leave the younger officer to his sulking, as he, too, has no surviving family to whom he must bid farewell. The two survivors end the episode by toasting their determination to complete their mission, shouting "We will return!" toward their distant homeworld as triumphant music blares away on the soundtrack. Then the music fades, and the scene closes with the radio-esque voice-over intoning, "We are leaving our solar system, we can no longer communicate with Earth."

Pretty heavy stuff for a kiddie cartoon.

In the second TV series, there is a particularly dark episode where the Comet Empire, having wiped out the Earth Defense Fleet, demands the planet's unconditional surrender. To demonstrate its superiority, the Comet Empire burns the Earth's moon. The blood-red moon rises behind the towers of Megalopolis, throwing lurid red backlighting over the proud towers of Earth's capital city, turning them from futuristic buildings to tombstones. The Comet Empire citadel rises in front of the flaming moon, and all you can hear is Prince Zordar's insane, endless laughter. The action then cuts to Desslok's flagship, where a wounded and bleeding Wildstar is facing the Gamilon leader himself over drawn pistols... the last, unforgettable scene of that episode. American viewers unused to this kind of high drama must have found themselves saying, "Wait a minute! Aren't you supposed to end every cartoon with the good guys laughing about their victory? Aren't the *HEROES* supposed to win? What are these *BAD GUYS* doing!?"

Star Blazers had a sense of continuity never seen before and rarely seen since—even in live-action TV shows. Once the *Argo* finally reaches Planet Iscandar, an engineering assistant named Sparks (Yabu) leads a mutiny, kidnapping Nova and attempting to set up a colony on Iscandar, believing there will be nothing living on Earth to which they can return. In a typical TV series, Sparks would have appeared only in that episode, but in *Star Blazers*, we see several glimpses of the pessimistic engineering assistant throughout the previous episodes, well before his eventual desertion and mutiny. Just as the character was established early on, his motivation did not suddenly come from out of nowhere in the twenty-fifth episode; rather, every time we see Sparks, he's gloomy and pessimistic, doubting the mission's chance of success.

Then there is the enmity between bridge officer Mark Venture (Daisuke Shima) and radio operator Homer (Yoshikazu Aihara). In the first series, when a homesick Homer is starting to lose it, Venture acidly observes, "Homer's *SICK!*" During the second series, Homer loudly resents Venture's abuse of his precious communications equipment. Years later, when Venture dies in *Final Yamato* (premiering in Japanese theaters during 1983, and coming soon in English from New Jersey-based Voyager Entertainment), Homer has the only dry eyes on the bridge. This may seem like a small thing, but it's little writing touches such as this one which help explain why this series continues to be so popular so many years after the end of its TV run.

On top of the story and character development, *Star Blazers* also had a great asset in its music. Most cartoons had only a small selection of endlessly repeated music, but a huge variety of instrumental, choral, even disco music was produced for *Yamato*, and the series' English adaptors wisely kept it intact, opting not to replace it with a small variety of cheaply produced music, as was done with several other imported TV anime series of the day. Even though many fans may not have recognized the series' overseas origin until nearly the end of the series, *Star Blazers* fully acknowledges its Japanese origins in the music's solemn signature.

We the fans knew that there was more of *Star Blazers* in Japan than had been translated up until that point. Many of us first started canvassing Japanese bookstores and grocery stores to look for info on those as-yet untranslated *Yamato* features, and this led many of the earliest fan translators to acquire the *Nihongo* skills necessary to support their curiosity.

In science fiction fandom, there have been and always will be fans who identify with a particular series. Just as SF fans distinguish themselves by the lines "I'm a *Star Trek* fan" or "I'm a *Dr. Who* fan," early American anime fans have always been—and will continue to be—proud to exclaim loudly, for all the world to hear...

"I'm a *Star Blazers* fan." ★

THE STAR BLAZERS YOU DIDN'T SEE

"We're off to... GOOD HEAVENS, NOVA, PUT YOUR CLOTHES BACK ON!" Think you know the *real* *STAR BLAZERS* now that you've sat down and watched the eighteen-volume *"STAR BLAZERS: THE COLLECTOR'S EDITION"* from Voyager Entertainment? Think again! Series enthusiast **Walter Amos** takes us on a sentimental journey, pointing out the *STAR BLAZERS* most of us American fans never got to see.

While there are unquestionably numerous examples of anime series which have been so greatly re-edited and rewritten as to be virtually unrecognizable compared their Japanese counterparts, *Star Blazers* is not one of them. It's a sad fact of TV in the U.S. that many sponsors (and the audiences they cater to) will not accept many of the prevailing themes in Japanese animation which, taken in context, seem not to raise a single eyebrow nor motivate nary a PTA petition when aired in their native Japan. This trend is particularly marked in programs aimed at children, or broadcast during so-called "family viewing" hours, and as a result, programs with excessive violence or sexual themes would never be accepted for such broadcast. When *Star Blazers* first aired in the U.S. in the very early '80s, there was no video or laser disc animation market; television was all there was, and one had to live with its constraints.

Star Blazers was especially remarkable in that it was able to push the boundaries as far as it did. Before *Star Blazers*, sequential storytelling was virtually unheard of in television animation series; these episodes had to be seen *IN ORDER* for the story to make sense. A personal favorite anecdote based on this series' departure from accepted animation norms comes from a friend whose mother happened to be nearby while he watched the show. He was watching the last episode of the first season, where Derek Wildstar (a.k.a. Susumu Kodai) is pleading for the life of his beloved Nova (a.k.a. Yuki Mori), seemingly dead in an act of self-sacrifice to save the ship. Wildstar begs, "Please, God, make her wake up!" This friend's mother takes a second look and asks, astonished, "Did they just say 'God' in a cartoon!?"

Star Blazers presented its viewers with many of these otherwise unexpected dramatic surprises.

Nonetheless, despite its many innovations as far as the American animation market is concerned, some segments from the original Japanese *Yamato* series still had to be cut or altered to accommodate American broadcast. Some of these cuts were very minor, possibly trimmed for time, while others may have included violence too graphic for a presumed afternoon "kid-vid" audience.

Probably the longest and most significant single segment cut from the series is the exposition from early in the first series about the history of the battleship *Yamato* in World War II. The battle in which the battleship is sunk is shown in some detail, in order to explain why the ship's hull now rests at the bottom of the sea recently evaporated by Gamilon planet bombs.

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going to tell my parents?" That's when a male voice replies, "Tell them we're married!"

But the main emphasis of the important eighth episode is Derek avoiding his turn in the radio room...because he has no loved ones left alive. Wildstar's entire family was wiped out in the Earth-Gamilon war, and he blames Yamato's Captain Avatar (Okita) for surviving the battle which claimed his older brother, Alex Wildstar (Mamoru Kodai). The aged captain refuses to leave the younger officer to his sulking, as he, too, has no surviving family to whom he must bid farewell. The two survivors end the episode by toasting their determination to complete their mission, shouting "We will return!" toward their distant homeworld as triumphant music blares away on the soundtrack. Then the music fades, and the scene closes with the radio-esque voice-over intoning, "We are leaving our solar system, we can no longer communicate with Earth."

Pretty heavy stuff for a kiddie cartoon.

In the second TV series, there is a particularly dark episode where the Comet Empire, having wiped out the Earth Defense Fleet, demands the planet's unconditional surrender. To demonstrate its superiority, the Comet Empire burns the Earth's moon. The blood-red moon rises behind the towers of Megalopolis, throwing lurid red backlighting over the proud towers of Earth's capital city, turning them from futuristic buildings to tombstones. The Comet Empire citadel rises in front of the flaming moon, and all you can hear is Prince Zordar's insane, endless laughter. The action then cuts to Desslok's flagship, where a wounded and bleeding Wildstar is facing the Gamilon leader himself over drawn pistols...the last, unforgettable scene of that episode. American viewers unused to this kind of high drama must have found themselves saying, "Wait a minute! Aren't you supposed to end every cartoon with the good guys laughing about their victory? Aren't the *HEROES* supposed to win? What are these *BAD GUYS* doing?"

Star Blazers had a sense of continuity never seen before and rarely seen since—even in live-action TV shows. Once the *Argo* finally reaches Planet Iscandar, an engineering assistant named Sparks (Yabu) leads a mutiny, kidnapping Nova and attempting to set up a colony on Iscandar, believing there will be nothing living on Earth to which they can return. In a typical TV series, Sparks would have appeared only in that episode, but in *Star Blazers*, we see several glimpses of the pessimistic engineering assistant throughout the previous episodes, well before his eventual desertion and mutiny. Just as the character was established early on, his motivation did not suddenly come from out of nowhere in the twenty-fifth episode; rather, every time we see Sparks, he's gloomy and pessimistic, doubting the mission's chance of success.

Then there is the enmity between bridge officer Mark Venture (Daisuke Shima) and radio operator Homer (Yoshikazu Aihara). In the first series, when a homesick Homer is starting to lose it, Venture acidly observes, "Homer's *SICK!*" During the second series, Homer loudly resents Venture's abuse of his precious communications equipment. Years later, when Venture dies in *Final Yamato* (premiering in Japanese theaters during 1983, and coming soon in English from New Jersey-based Voyager Entertainment), Homer has the only dry eyes on the bridge. This may seem like a small thing, but it's little writing touches such as this one which help explain why this series continues to be so popular so many years after the end of its TV run.

On top of the story and character development, *Star Blazers* also had a great asset in its music. Most cartoons had only a small selection of endlessly repeated music, but a huge variety of instrumental, choral, even disco music was produced for *Yamato*, and the series' English adaptors wisely kept it intact, opting not to replace it with a small variety of cheaply produced music, as was done with several other imported TV anime series of the day. Even though many fans may not have recognized the series' overseas origin until nearly the end of the series, *Star Blazers* fully acknowledges its Japanese origins in the music's solemn signature.

We the fans knew that there was more of *Star Blazers* in Japan than had been translated up until that point. Many of us first started canvassing Japanese bookstores and grocery stores to look for info on those as-yet untranslated *Yamato* features, and this led many of the earliest fan translators to acquire the *Nihongo* skills necessary to support their curiosity.

In science fiction fandom, there have been and always will be fans who identify with a particular series. Just as SF fans distinguish themselves by the lines "I'm a *Star Trek* fan" or "I'm a *Dr. Who* fan," early American anime fans have always been—and will continue to be—proud to exclaim loudly, for all the world to hear...

"I'm a *Star Blazers* fan." ☆

THE STAR BLAZERS YOU DIDN'T SEE

"We're off to... GOOD HEAVENS, NOVA, PUT YOUR CLOTHES BACK ON!" Think you know the *real* *STAR BLAZERS* now that you've sat down and watched the eighteen-volume *"STAR BLAZERS: THE COLLECTOR'S EDITION"* from Voyager Entertainment? Think again! Series enthusiast **Walter Amos** takes us on a sentimental journey, pointing out the *STAR BLAZERS* most of us American fans never got to see.

While there are unquestionably numerous examples of anime series which have been so greatly re-edited and rewritten as to be virtually unrecognizable compared their Japanese counterparts, *Star Blazers* is not one of them. It's a sad fact of TV in the U.S. that many sponsors (and the audiences they cater to) will not accept many of the prevailing themes in Japanese animation which, taken in context, seem not to raise a single eyebrow nor motivate



nary a PTA petition when aired in their native Japan. This trend is particularly marked in programs aimed at children, or broadcast during so-called "family viewing" hours, and as a result, programs with excessive violence or sexual themes would never be accepted for such broadcast. When *Star Blazers* first aired in the U.S. in the very early '80s, there was no video or laser disc animation market; television was all there was, and one had to live with its constraints.

Star Blazers was especially remarkable in that it was able to push the boundaries as far as it did. Before *Star Blazers*, sequential storytelling was virtually unheard of in television animation series; these episodes had to be seen *IN ORDER* for the story to make sense. A personal favorite anecdote based on this series' departure from accepted animation norms comes from a friend whose mother happened to be nearby while he watched the show. He was watching the last episode of the first season, where Derek Wildstar (a.k.a. Susumu Kodai) is pleading for the life of his beloved Nova (a.k.a. Yuki Mori), seemingly dead in an act of self-sacrifice to save the ship. Wildstar begs, "Please, God, make her wake up!" This friend's mother takes a second look and asks, astonished, "Did they just say 'God' in a cartoon!?"

Star Blazers presented its viewers with many of these otherwise unexpected dramatic surprises.

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cavemen, it would seem warping in the world of *Yamato* can also cause the clothing of some female crewmembers to vanish. Yes, in mid-warp, first Nova's outer uniform and then her

undergarments momentarily fade away. Moving from one American taboo (sex) to another (violence), it's interesting to note that when Wildstar, Nova, and IQ-9 (a.k.a. Analyzer) are trapped by Gamilon tanks on Titan, they are forced to fight for their lives. In *Star Blazers*, we're told that one of the tanks they're fighting is merely a robot drone, but this is plainly not the case, as evidenced by the scream easily heard in the Japanese version when Wildstar shoots the tank's all-too-mortal driver. Similarly, the driver of the other tank is taken out not by a falling avalanche, but by Wildstar, who shoots him in the chest after finding older brother Alex Wildstar's gun (a.k.a. Mamoru Kodai).

Similar results ensue later when the Star Force assaults the Gamilon base on Pluto and its dreaded Reflex Gun. Several soldiers on both sides are killed in the fight to destroy the gun, although one wouldn't know it from watching *Star Blazers*. The characters who are killed are nameless, rather like security's "Ensign Expendables" in the old *Star Trek*, and although *Star Blazers* does a much better job on the whole at showing the effects of war—far better than any American-made cartoon I can think of—for some reason, it seems that the death of single, individual characters is still considered more traumatic than the death of many. Perhaps the saying, "One dead man is a tragedy; a thousand dead men are a statistic" hold true for cartoons as well, at least on American TV.



The next significant change comes when the Star Force finally captures a live Gamilon soldier. As Dr. Sane (a.k.a. Dr. Sakezo Sado) is examining him, Wildstar breaks into the room. *Star Blazers* presents this confrontation as leading to the flashback of the death of Wildstar's parents during Gamilon planet-bombing, after which he tries to engage the Gamilon in a fistfight. Events in the Japanese version proceed differently, of course, with Wildstar carrying a knife with which he plans to kill the Gamilon in revenge for the death of his family.

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with regard to her undergarments. In anticipation of meeting Queen Starsha, Nova has put on her best dress, and while she models it for the *Yamato's* appreciative crewmen, IQ-9 zips past and flips the dress up. As more veteran anime fans know, relatively tame "panty shots" like this are fairly common in Japanese animation, but again, such mildly naughty fare may not have been thought suitable for younger American audiences.

Perhaps the most grotesque scene edited from the U.S. *Star Blazers* series is the production of the infamous "Royal Bee Jelly" on a planet visited by Nova and IQ-9. In *Star Blazers*, we do see a group of insectoid "bee people" being used as slave labor to work the machines



which create this "favorite food of Leader Desslok," but what we *DON'T* see is the jelly being produced from the bodies of prisoners fed into the machine the others are so industriously working!

Another change, fairly small by comparison, was made later in the same episode. We see that the Queen Bee eliminates the elderly leader of the insect insurrection not by merely ordering her guards to take care of him, but by pointing the huge laser cannon she was supposed to use on a Gamilon tanker ship directly at him, blasting the surly centenarian to smoking smithereens.

As the Star Force approaches the halfway point of its mission, it is confronted by a huge Gamilon base on the planet Balan. The base had been under the command of General Volgar (a.k.a. Gale), but was placed under the control of General Lysis (a.k.a. Dommel) in order to ensure the defeat of the Star Force. Of course, Volgar (whose personality matches the implications of his English name) is mortified, and in an amusing scene cut from *Star Blazers*, gets royally drunk and trashes his very tastelessly decorated quarters, all while threatening a guard as well as his two concubines, both of whom were most definitely cut from the English version.

Another example of the desire to censor the loss of expendable characters can be seen when the Star Force encounters a Gamilon space fortress emitting a vibration-inducing field designed to literally shake the ship to pieces. The nefarious plan is first

discovered when a Star Force plane is destroyed in the field. In *Star Blazers*, we're told the pilot was the ship's scientist, Sandor (a.k.a. Sanada), who of course "got out just in time." In reality, the expendable pilot wasn't so lucky.

One of the final significant edits in the first *Star Blazers* series occurs when the Star Force is drawn to the planet Gamilon. Despite a brutal beating, the Star Force manages to fight back and destroy much of the Gamilon civilization. Desslok (a.k.a. Desslar) goes mad at the sight and orders a renewed attack using all remaining Gamilon forces. His aide, General Krypt (a.k.a. Hiss) protests that if they keep fighting, all of Gamilon may be destroyed; in the original Japanese series, Desslok simply shoots him and orders the attack. In *Star Blazers*, Desslok's desperate act of madness is toned down, with Desslok simply ignoring Krypt with a remark to the effect that his underling's defeatist attitude is what has kept them from winning all along.

It's interesting to note that most of the major edits and rewritten scenes occur in the first series, but this doesn't mean that the second season entirely escaped the scissors of censors. The first and most amusing edited scene is a brief shot near the beginning of the second series, when the Star Force is leaving Earth and the *Andromeda* is dispatched to stop them. The *Andromeda* is first detected by our protagonists, not on radar, but by the pilot Conroy (a.k.a. Kato), who just happens to be looking out a small window at the time. The amusing detail which was cut centers on the fact that the window from which the sighting was made was not located in his quarters or even from an observation deck, but from a small viewport above a urinal stall in the men's bathroom!

In a touching counterpoint to the Gamilon interrogation scene in the first series, a similar episode transpires with a captured Comet Empire soldier. Disturbingly, despite being "good guys," it seems even the Earth forces can employ some brutal interrogation techniques, as evidenced by the suffering of the captured Comet Empire pilot. The grim aspect of this scene was excised from *Star Blazers*, suggesting that the complex device on the pilot's head was merely a sophisticated lie detector or some such harmless gadget, and not in fact a cruel device of physical torture.





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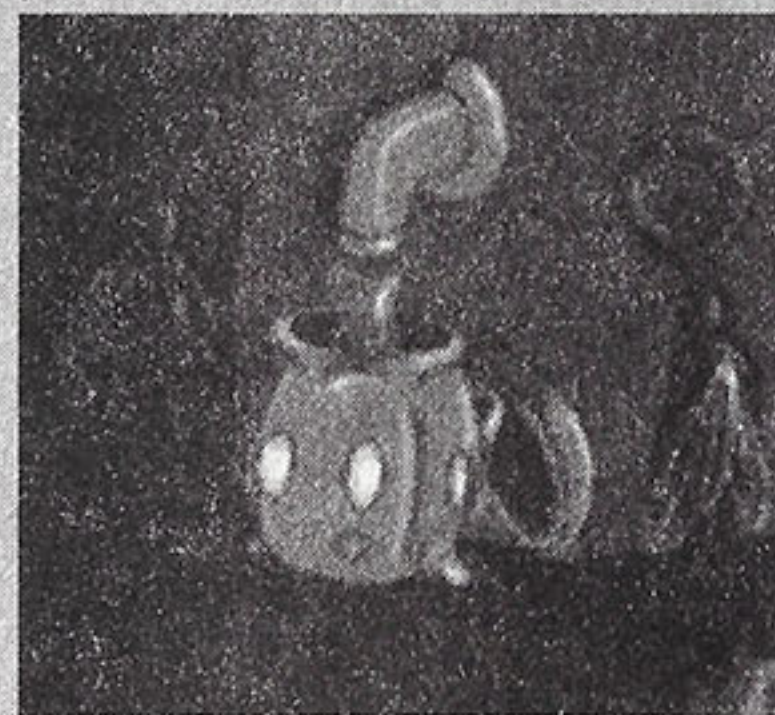


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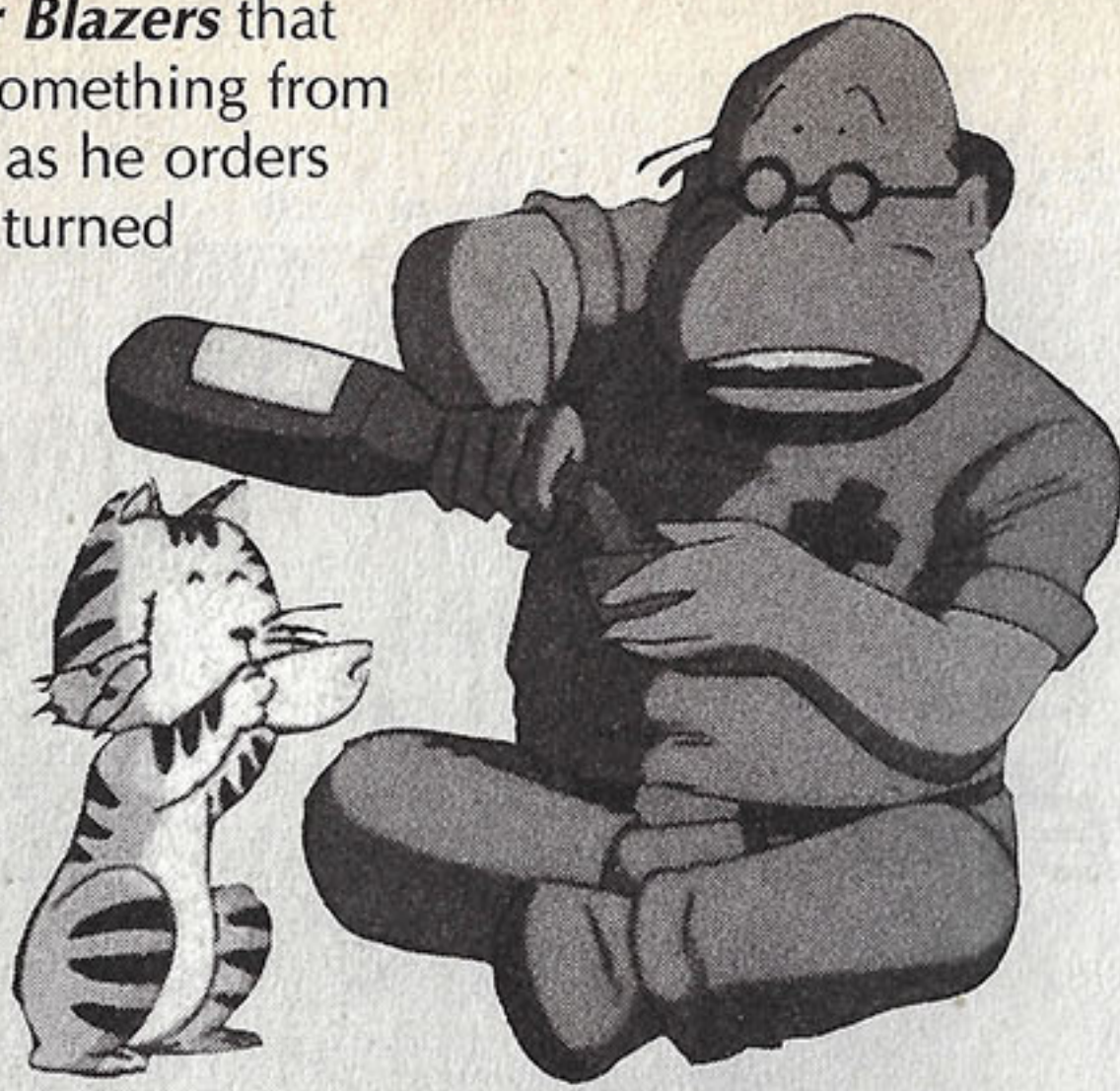
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It's good to see in *Star Blazers* that Wildstar has learned something from the previous incident, as he orders the pilot released and turned over to Dr. Sane.

The final altered scenes in the second series all take place in the same episode, toward the very end of the series, when the Star Force is fighting within the Comet Empire itself. In order to defeat the Comet Empire, burly space marine



Sergeant Knox (a.k.a. Saito) plants several bombs in the enemy energy core and stays behind to detonate them. In the English version, when Wildstar and Sandor return to the ship, we hear Dash (a.k.a. Nanbu) say, "Knox got out just behind you"...a fairly transparent falsehood, even to relatively naive American viewers.

During the trip back, Wildstar flies out along with Conroy in Conroy's plane. Although they barely manage to scrape back into the *Yamato's* hangar, in the original series, Conroy dies from sustained injuries just before the plane comes to a crashing halt. In the English version, this detail is omitted. (Of course, it deserves to be noted that in the little-seen third series, the Japanese found an equally artificial way to get around this loss by introducing the pilot-captain's twin brother!)

As the Comet Empire lies in ruins and Prince Zordar prepares to escape in his giant dreadnought, he decides—perhaps rather wisely—to leave behind two of his generals, as well as his treacherous daughter, Invidia. The ironic part, of course, is that Invidia (Sabella) isn't his daughter at all, but his mistress...! Chalk this one up to yet another plot point substantially altered in the English version.

Rather than focusing on the changes made in *Star Blazers* compared to *Yamato*, it is my hope that this article will encourage not only the understanding of the series among old *Yamato* hands, but among those who are new to the series, as well. It's important for both old and new fans to appreciate what an excellent adaptation of the *Uchû Senkan Yamato* series *Star Blazers* really is, especially when the relatively small amount of changes made to the English version compare to the much greater entertainment offered by the series as a whole.

To all fans of *Star Blazers* everywhere, I offer a hearty "Kampai!" toast with a glass of Dr. Sane's Highly Suspect Spring Water. (You thought I'd forget to mention that, didn't you? Who, me? Forget that wonderful "water," as they called it in the English version, on which Dr. Sane manages to be soused most of the time...? Ha, ha—Hic!)

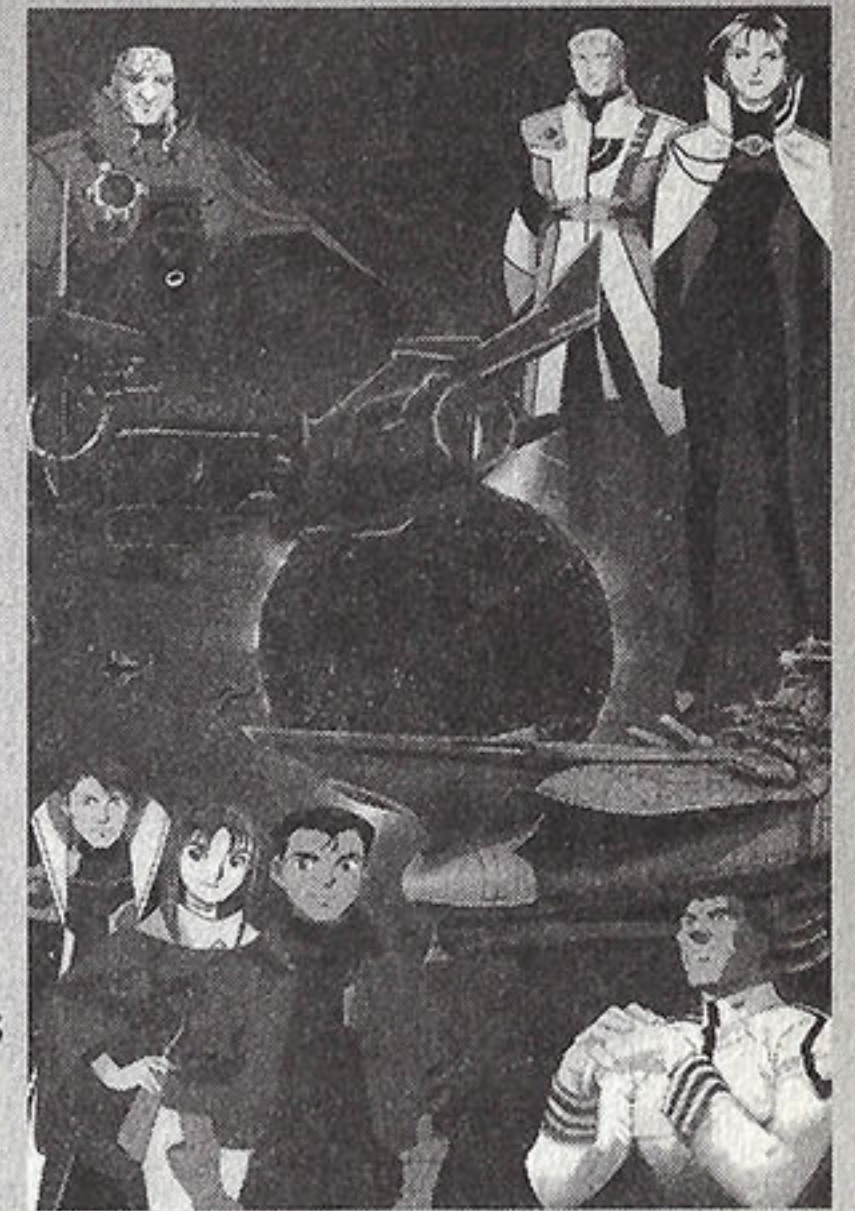
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Note that this article has been edited for length; for a longer version, as well as several other excellent articles on *YAMATO/STAR BLAZERS*, please see *MANGAZINE* Issue No. 36.



YAMATO 2520: THE NEW CHALLENGE

In 1988, *Yamato* producer/co-creator Yoshinobu Nishizaki, looking to revitalize the *Yamato* legend, contracted conceptual artist Syd Mead (*Blade Runner*) to create several redesigns of the *Yamato* for a new film. Mead completed several redesigns of the exterior and interior from which the producers selected their favorite, and hopes ran high that the veteran series would emerge triumphant yet again to set new records of popularity among fans.

At the 1989 San Diego Comic Convention, Mead unveiled the new design during a slide-show presentation. The newly redesigned *Yamato* was revealed to be sleeker, highly futuristic, and feature four wave-motion gun firing gates.



After years of production difficulties, speculation, and delay, the long-rumored project became a reality when the seven-volume *Yamato 2520* OAV series debuted in December 1994. As reported in an earlier issue of *ANIMERICA*, *Yamato 2520* chronicles the story of the eighteenth ship to bear the honorable name *Yamato*. This incarnation is peopled with a heroic cast of characters designed by Toshiyuki Kubo'oka, with mecha designs by Makoto Kobayashi, both of whom are involved with the animated production of another anime epic, director Yasuhiro Imagawa's *Giant Robo*.

In the 26th century, the Earth's enemy is the far-flung stellar empire Sirene, which now controls much of our galaxy. Sirene's advanced technology harnesses the power of "magnetic monopoles," subatomic particles which, unlike the magnetic particles we're accustomed to, have only one polarity, either positive or negative. This technology gave the formerly nomadic Sirene access to unlimited energy, which they used to create the ultimate scientific civilization.

As the population of both Sirene and Earth spread throughout the galaxy, the two cultures inevitably clash in what will come to be known as the "Galactic One Hundred-Year War." The new *Yamato* OAV series begins in the year 2520, seventeen years after the signing of a truce between the two world governments.

In the story, the planet Rimbo was the main battleground of the Galactic War. According to the conditions of the truce, flight is now prohibited above a certain altitude. Naturally, the impatient youth of Rimbo dream of a day when they can ascend into the sky. What adventures await them out there?

Reaction to the *Yamato 2520* OAV volumes released thus far have been mixed. Enthusiasts of the original *Yamato* series seem less than enthused with the decidedly subpar animation of the OAVs, although the soundtrack by New York jazz musician David Matthews has been generally well-received. As fans of the series know, impetuous youths have always played a big part in the series' drama; whether *Yamato 2520's* cast of clenched-fist hotheads will earn audience sympathy remains to be seen. Additionally, the new series' proposed storyline—"the entire history of the galaxy up until 2520"—has prompted some fans to question if producers have bitten off more than they can chew, especially given that only seven half-hour episodes have been announced to date.

"For these past few years," says *Yamato* producer Nishizaki in the program book for the *Final Yamato* theatrical release, "and throughout the *Yamato* drama, I have told a story. The theme is fight with a belief in man, fight with a belief in the future, and the way will become clear. Most importantly, the theme must be 'Love mankind above all else.'"

If this is truly the overall theme of the *Yamato* legend, can any new series hope to live up to it? With a new crew, a new ship, a new focus (and reportedly, after the first OAV episode, an all-new production staff), *Yamato 2520* stands poised to take that challenge.

Julie Davis