



freedom & ADVENTURE

Otaku USA
interviews
anime and
manga legend
Leiji Matsumoto!



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ORIGINS

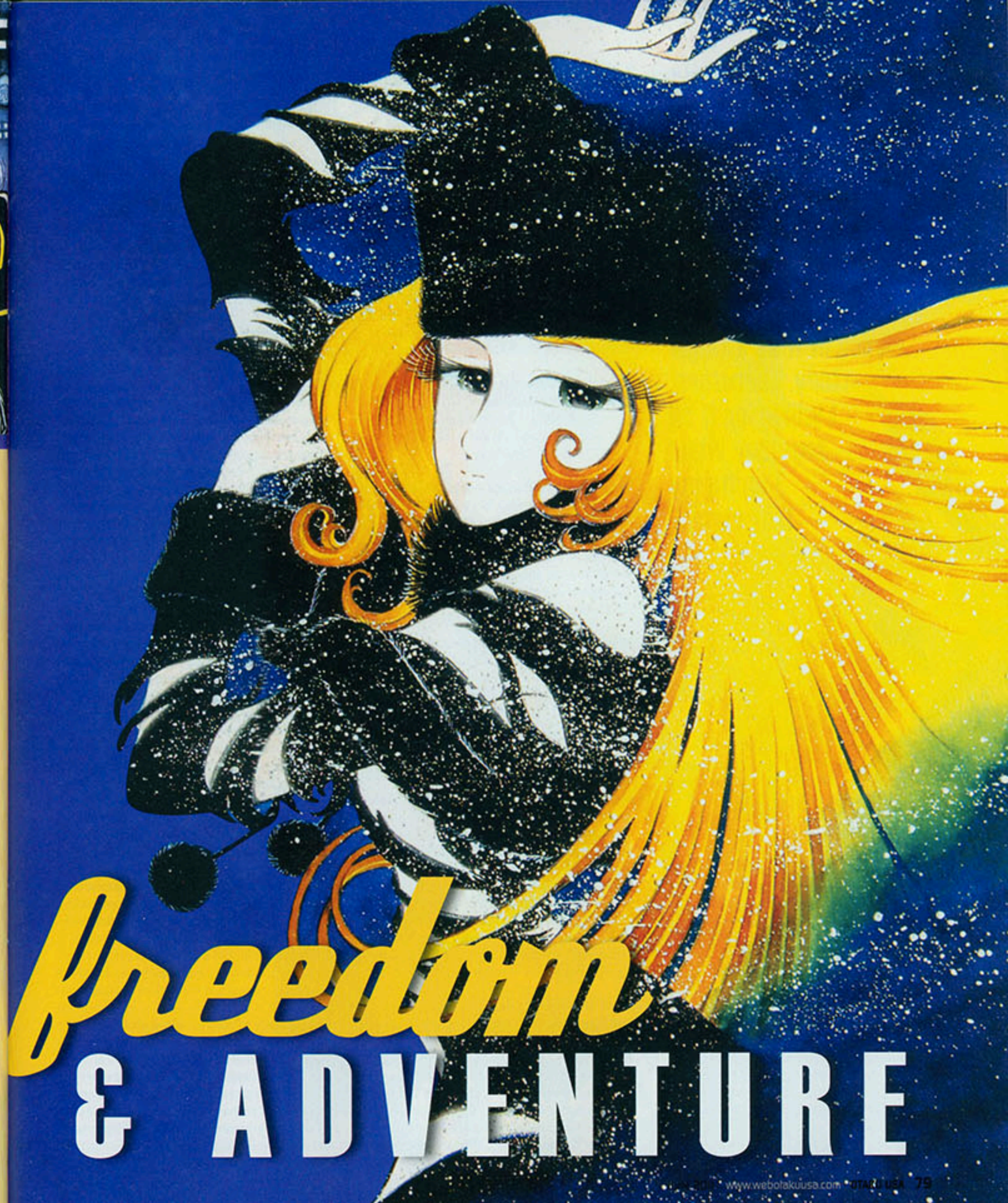
Many of your overseas fans are curious about your background. So let's start with whatever you'd like them to know about your past.

My father was a pilot. He was also a peerless movie lover and had a film projector. Even during the war when he was fighting at the southern front, my younger brother and I would use it to watch animation like *Mickey Mouse* and *Popeye* at home. Because there were as many as 31 movie theaters in northern Kyushu, my childhood environment had movies from all over the world as well as cartoons: *Snow White* [released in Japan 1950] and *Fantasia* [1955]. I saw some films many times until they were burned into my eyes. Gradually, I noticed the differences in the expression of animation from countries such as America, France, and Russia.

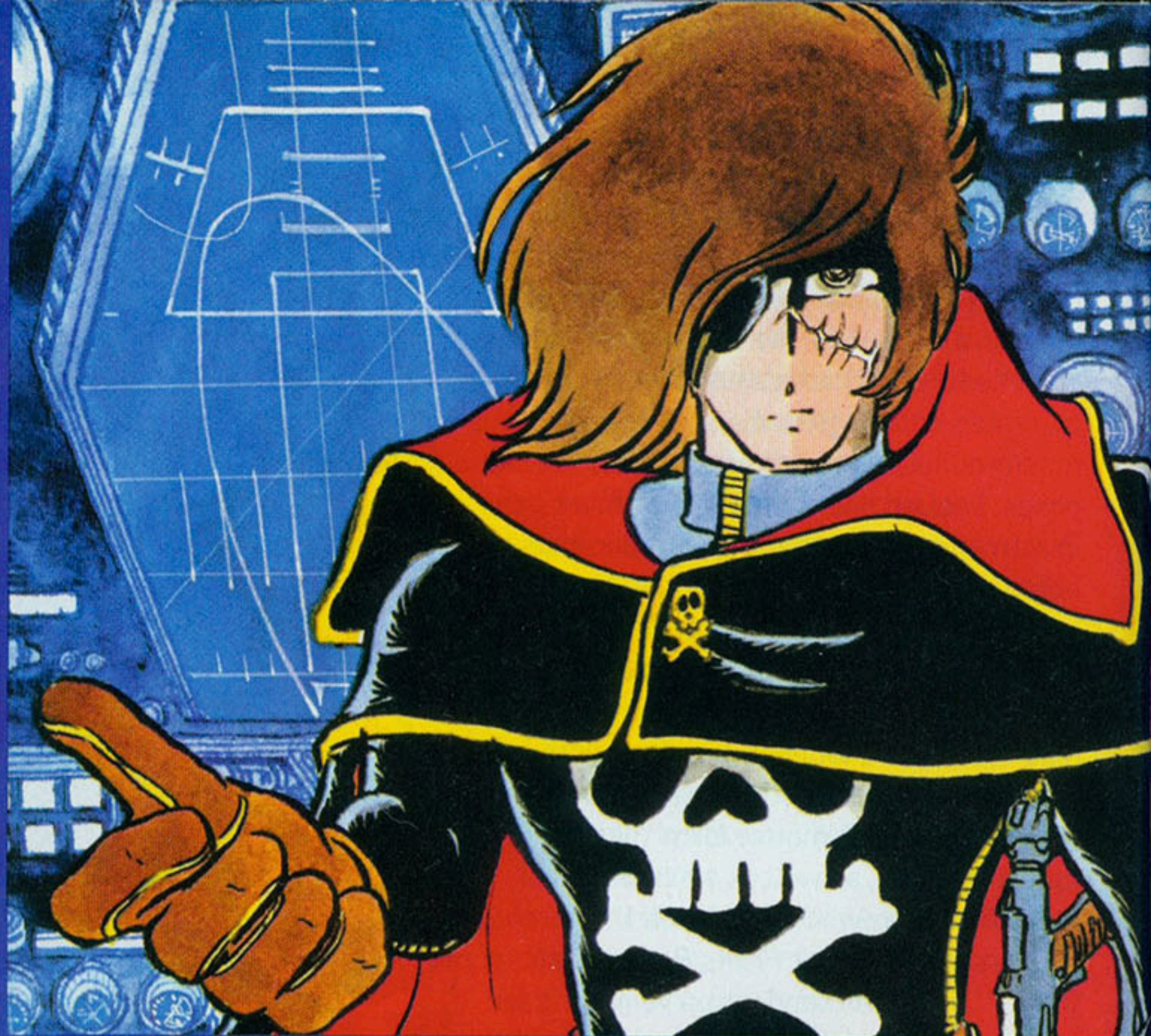
During the war, my family moved to Akashi, Kobe, since my father was assigned to the air base there. In 1943 at a theater in Akashi, I saw a Japanese musical animation called *Kumo To Churippu* (*The Spider and the Tulip*); Osamu Tezuka also saw it in the same theater on the same day. He was 10 years older than me. I was five and he was 15.

Seeing it on the same screen, we were hooked in the same way. His father also had a projector at home, so we grew up in very similar environments. Therefore, when we met years later, we were surprised to learn we "met at that time." Moreover, Shotaro Ishimori [known more popularly as Shotaro Ishinomori] and I were born on the same day. The three of us got together and bought various old-fashioned artifacts such as movies like *Gone With the Wind* [Japanese premiere 1952] and we declared ourselves the three greatest Japanese anime maniacs.

Going back to my childhood after the war, my father was out of work. So we grew up in awful poverty, but the towns overflowed with American soldiers who brought 10-cent comics and I could buy them on the street for just 5 or 10 yen. Therefore, I got plenty of them. Here also I noticed the difference in expression between Japanese manga and comics from America, France, and Europe like *Barbarella*.



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After that, I connected with the sprouting of science and technology. I was a high school freshman (1953-1954), and at the local train station just outside, there was a science exhibition at a department store, Izutsuya.

Suddenly, color TV made in Japan was displayed there. TV broadcasting had just started that year, and color broadcasting started seven

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years later, in 1960. It spread out from the exhibition to this and that over the next 20 years. It was fun to have these strange encounters in northern Kyushu; it was a different kind of place. A variety of such things became imprinted on me.

YAMATO

During the making of *Farewell to Yamato* (1978), you objected to the ending of the story, but many fans liked it and thought it was the proper ending for *Yamato*. Do you still have the same opinion about it now?

Yes, I still think so. People are born to live. I apply this to everything I write; Harlock, Emeraldas, and *Galaxy Express 999* will never fall. I absolutely intend to say that until my own curtain call.

Yes. So in the next work [*Yamato: The New Voyage*, 1979], the producer and I got into a big fight since he liked to kill everyone and I hated it.

This is the difference between producer and creator. I actually got very angry, throwing the stupid script away saying, "I don't care anymore," and decided to go it alone and make my own

works. I couldn't stand by and watch it turn into a sob story about death, and I could no longer put up with the disagreement. He didn't want to let it go, and I was tired of it.

About the live-action *Yamato* movie that just came out, I read the script for it and thought it was stupid. I just threw it away. I thought, "Those idiots!" and refused to participate at all. It's foolish just to make them die. If it were me, not one person would be allowed to die.

They also used my design without permission, but since *Yamato* gave me my first chance, I just kept silent about it.

When I create a story and a character, I think about why I'm doing it and put my whole self into it. So if the character is easily killed off, it feels to me like my child or my brother was murdered.

After *Yamato*, which of your anime works had your closest involvement?

Galaxy Express and *Queen Millennia*. Both the TV and movie versions. I'm now in the midst of making a 3-D anime of *Harlock*.

What will the CG *Harlock* movie be like?

The movie is made both as CG anime and for the so-called 3-D "pop-up" or "stereo" presentation. There is a lot of opportunity in this type of expression, but also some limitations. I still want to maintain the atmosphere or the intention of the original so I have to keep my eyes wide open not to miss those.

What is your opinion of CG animation?

Briefly, my main principle is not to damage the look and feel of the original manga. I'm trying to make new *Galaxy Express 999* movies, both anime and live-action. 999 and other titles are in the midst of a relaunch. It should be released after the CG *Harlock*.

THE RING OF TIME

American readers are not accustomed to concepts like your "Ring of Time" in which characters appear in multiple identities and the stories do not flow in a straight line. How would you explain that to them?

For me, all my works are one big work in a sense. When I write, I am aware of it as a single story. Therefore, I will bring it all together when I write my last story. However, if I begin to write that now, I'll get the feeling that I'm approaching my own demise, so I don't want to do it yet.

Some of your works depict aliens as invaders and occupiers. Was this influenced by the American occupation of Japan after World War II?

No, it doesn't have that meaning. This is a historical viewpoint and in a sense I was influenced by what I had seen during my childhood. I gradually came to notice when I became an adult that as history shows, an invader can be invaded and an occupier can be occupied. The arrogance of

insisting that someone else's land is mine will not work anymore.

Therefore, in the area of real space development, there is a policy never to interfere with life found on another planet. Perhaps the Earth was once observed in that way, so that we would reach the same understanding of noninterference. Never interfere with a living entity. I think this is the great principle of space.

Several years ago, the English version of *Harlock Saga* was published online by Kodansha. The newer version of *Galaxy Express* was also published in English, by Viz. Why are so few of your manga available in English?

They are abundantly available in Italian and French, but somehow not much in English. I wonder why since I grew up buried in a mountain of American films. But the situation is now changing with the Internet. The current version of my manga distribution is going to be multilingual. The music and dialogue accompany each frame with the lines spoken in Japanese and a word overlap in English and Russian. It's just a test version right now, but a *Galaxy Express 999* manga will be delivered this way and play a role in learning languages. Then the whole world will be in partnership, unlike in my time. There will be no borders.

Your drawing style changed quite a lot from the 1960s, when it had a strong resemblance to Osamu Tezuka's style. Did you make a conscious decision to change it, or did it happen by itself?

People's thoughts and experiences change them after their upbringing. I had a moment of awakening when my goals and my way of writing changed. This is the creation of personality. Actually, that moment changes any young manga-ka [comic artist] from "I want to be ..." to "I am."

This is a moment that comes for everyone. Naturally, we start out being affected by our seniors, and at some point we realize the reason for our being and it awakens our creative personality. It comes suddenly and changes everything drastically.

You were very active in anime with many projects in the 70s and 80s, but they decreased in the 90s. What was the cause of the slowdown?

Changing trends and the shifting formation of the movie world. As I said, on a revolving stage I have ups and downs. I endured that along with a lot of other changes in my work in the meantime as well.

I also made a [live-action] feature film called *Ganso Dai Yojohan Dai Monogatari* [*The Very Original Four and a Half Tatami Mat Great Stories*, 1980], an odd story about inkintamushi. You'd call it crotch-rot in English. It's the same bacteria that causes athlete's foot.

I write different things in a variety of genres, and it goes round and round.

Is it easier to create an original anime, or adapt an existing manga?

The tendency is to adapt manga into anime because the staff can absorb the atmosphere. When it is an original project, it has to start from scratch. That's the way it was with *Yamato*, but with *Galaxy Express*, on the other hand, I story-boarded it myself in the beginning.

What do you think of current anime and manga?

Different artists certainly have different ways of expression, senses, feelings, and styles. The younger ones do it their own way and that's fine. The fate or future of manga naturally unfolds, for sure.

In your opinion, who in the current generation of anime and manga creators does everything right?

There are a lot of them, but each has the freedom to breathe and I make it my rule not to judge. You go your way, I go mine. But we are the same company.

What advice do you have for the younger generation who aspires to create manga?

Now you need not limit your comic presentation just to paper. You can draw it in a computer and publish digitally. But in any case you need to cultivate your ability to draw and express a theme through a story as freely as you desire.

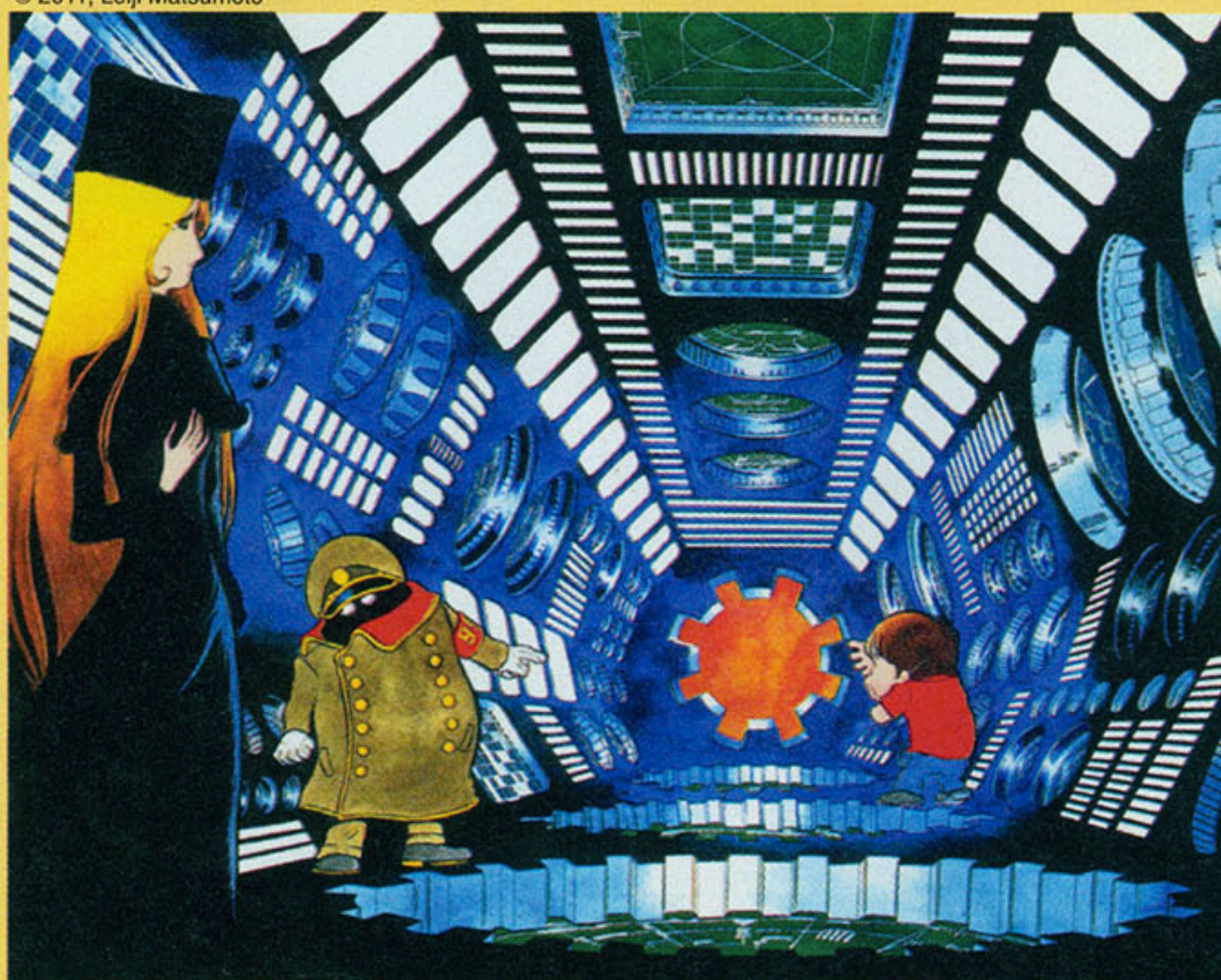
A story is made up of introduction, buildup, climax, and ending. Then there is character establishment and one's own style of art. Success is possible when these three things are satisfactorily achieved.

Internet delivery makes multilingual correspondence possible, so you have new options for your activity. I envy the young because there is infinite potential.

Are there any questions you'd like to ask us?

When you first saw Japanese anime and manga, did it seem strange to you?

No, it was the opposite; we found it exciting. In America we could only see animation once a week on Saturday mornings, and the shows were all very similar. When anime



from Japan appeared, it was like a bomb went off. The differences in the stories and characters was instantly obvious.

Finally, here's an imaginary question: you have a time machine that operates on 100 yen coins, and you have three coins. So please decide:

1. What point in history would you visit?
2. What advice would you give to your past self?
3. What would you do with the last coin?



With the last coin, I would want to see the end of the Earth. With the first one, I would see the beginning of the Earth. With the middle one, I would want to explore space and search for life. ●

Read Tim Eldred's complete interview with Leiji Matsumoto at www.Starblazers.com.

