

otaku: (oh-TAH-koo) *n.* Term used to refer to fanatical devotees of anime or manga. Japanese speakers might use this term in a pejorative sense to denote someone lacking in social graces and breadth who is obsessive about a certain subject. —*The Complete Anime Guide*

The Conscience Of The OTAKING



Tanaka from OTAKU NO VIDEO (aka Toshio Okada)

PART 2

The Studio Gainax Saga in Four Parts

As Mel Brooks once said, "It's good to be the King." In our exclusive four-part interview, ANIMERICA talks with **Toshio Okada**, the otaku of otaku...the Otaking! Join us for the royal saga of the rise and fall and rise again of super-studio Gainax and more industry buzz than Robert Altman's **THE PLAYER**. Interview by **Carl Gustav Horn**

You may know him through his anime alter ego, "Tanaka," in **OTAKU NO VIDEO**. But the real-life man is hardly less of a character—going to college only so he could join a science fiction club, he formed a small group of fan amateurs into **Daicon Film**, which amazed fans on both sides of the Pacific with their "garage video" anime productions and super battle-team live-action shorts. On Christmas Eve, 1984, the former Daicon Film group went pro as **Studio Gainax**, the zealot heretics who made **ROYAL SPACE FORCE: THE WINGS OF HONNEAMISE** (1987), **AIM FOR THE TOP! GUNBUSTER**

(1988), **NADIA: THE SECRET OF BLUE WATER** (1989), and **OTAKU NO VIDEO** (1991). Conversant with English, Okada was one of the key planners of AnimeCon '91, one of the first major U.S. conventions to be devoted entirely to anime. But in 1992 he resigned the presidency of Gainax and made his way to Tokyo University, where the former dropout now lectures on multimedia. Returning to the U.S. for Otakon in 1995, Toshio Okada gave his first-ever interview to the English-language anime press. This four-part account gives a rare and controversial inside angle on Gainax, the most iconoclastic of all anime studios.

MISFITS DREAMING OF A BETTER WORLD IN OTAKU NO VIDEO. NOTE OKADA'S ALTER EGO IN THE CHAR AZNABLE OUTFIT (BELOW).



PLAYERS CLUB

The faces and names you'll need to know for this installment of the ANIMERICA interview with Otaking Toshio Okada.



Yoshiyuki Sadamoto
ANIMATION DIRECTOR **THE WINGS OF HONNEAMISE**
CHARACTER DESIGNER **THE WINGS OF HONNEAMISE, NADIA: THE SECRET OF BLUE WATER, NEON GENESIS EVANGELION**



Kenichi Sonoda
CHARACTER DESIGNER **OTAKU NO VIDEO, BUBBLEGUM CRISIS, GALL FORCE** CREATOR **RIDING BEAN, GUNSMITH CATS**



Hiromasa Ogura
ART DIRECTOR **PATLABOR 1: THE MOVIE, PATLABOR 2, GHOST IN THE SHELL**

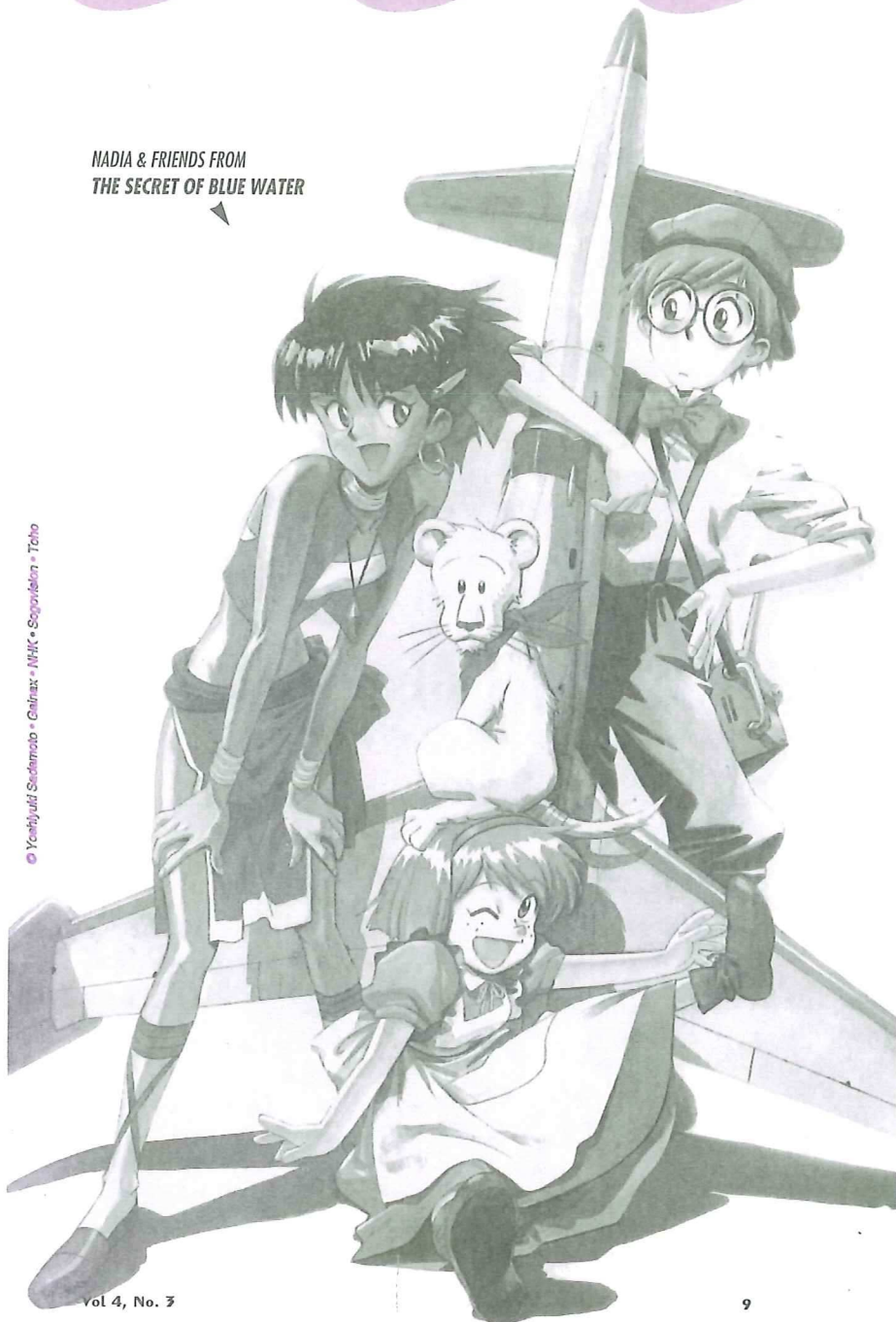


Haruhiko Mikimoto
CHARACTER DESIGNER **MACROSS, MACROSS II, MACROSS 7, GUNDAM 0080, AIM FOR THE TOP! GUNBUSTER**



Shoji Kawamori
MECHA DESIGNER **MACROSS, PATLABOR, GUNDAM 0083**
WRITER/DIRECTOR **MACROSS PLUS**

NADIA & FRIENDS FROM
THE SECRET OF BLUE WATER



INTERVIEW WITH TOSHIO OKADA, PART TWO

In Part Two of the ANIMERICA interview, Toshio Okada discusses the origins of Gainax as an anime studio, the genesis of **HONNEAMISE**, and how Gainax's "chaos strategy" worked for **GUNBUSTER** but not **NADIA**.

ANIMERICA: Your journey into the anime industry all sort of started after you quit college in 1981, after only three days. Why? What happened?

Okada: Well, after just three days I'd met the head of the science-fiction club. After that there was no need for me to go to school, because I only went to college in the first place so I could join a science-fiction club. In those days, Japanese high schools never had SF or anime clubs. I didn't really want to go to college...I just wanted to join their club. So once I did, I never went to my classes again. Then the college sent me a letter asking me if I wanted to quit. [LAUGHS] So I said okay.

ANIMERICA: What college was that?

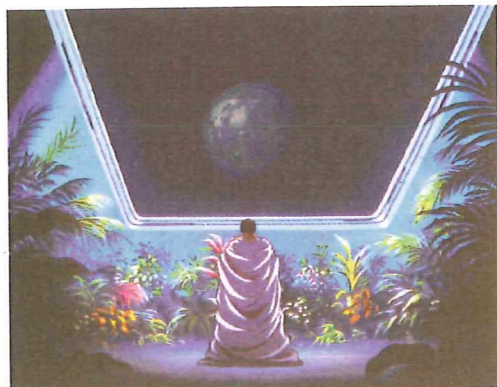
Okada: Ahhh...Osaka Electrical College?...uh...I forget. [LAUGHS] They taught economics, business and computer science. But I never went to any such classes.

ANIMERICA: And how was it that you came to meet Hiroyuki Yamaga?

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22

working in shifts, so that there's always someone watching over the Earth."

Though they are in frequent contact with their superiors, messages from the homeworld take about one year to reach the isolated moon base. After an incident which caused their communications to go down, the base team checked their messages and found they had received two messages, one warning them that war was brewing, the next with a more dire message of imminent destruction. No more messages were received, and the group realized that their homeworld was gone, leaving them stranded on the moon. Following this, in both the



SHION AND MOKUREN AT WATCH OVER THE EARTH FROM THE MOON BASE'S ARBORETUM

comic and video stories, the scientists debate among themselves about going down to the Earth. In the manga version, the deciding voice against the trip is team leader and linguist, Hiiragi (but only after Gyokuran raises the first dissenting voice, if only to thwart his rival Shion's desire to leave the moon for the Earth). In

the animated version, the scientists begin to be struck down by the virus while the discussion is still raging, thus making it a moot decision.

Q: Where does the virus come from? Is it just spontaneous, or...?

A: As far as we can tell, it's just spontaneous. Creator Hiwatari really doesn't dwell on the details, neither in the manga nor in the anime.

Q: Why is Rin so interested in Tokyo Tower?

A: One of the criticisms often made against the animated feature-length epic **AKIRA** is that there's too much story in creator Katsuhiro Otomo's original comics to fit comfortably in the approximately two hours allotted for the video version. In some ways, **PLEASE SAVE MY EARTH** suffers from the same problem; i.e., 21 *tankôbon* or compiled volumes of writer/artist Saki Hiwatari's original Japanese comics, which somehow must be made to fit inside six half-hour OAV episodes.

Which parts of the story go? Which parts stay? Essentially, it's the screenwriter's task to condense those less-essential parts of the overall saga to better focus on those crucial story and plot elements which justify the financing of the project as an animated series in the first place. Although it's given great emphasis in the early episodes of the animated series, the Tokyo Tower subplot (as well as the details of Rin's

quest for keywords) is eventually dropped in order to tell the story of the series' interlocking characters and their intertwined destinies which are, after all, the reason we're watching **PLEASE SAVE MY EARTH** in the first place.

In the manga, we learn that the research base where the seven scientists are stationed also has a fearsome military capability. Alien technology, we learn, is so advanced that even a modest outpost such as the one on the moon is capable of utterly obliterating the Earth. To prevent this occurrence, access to the station's military defenses is restricted by the use of individually chosen passwords. Each of the seven scientists has his or her own keyword; each keyword is selected on the basis of its meaning to its owner; each keyword is changed several times by each character as the story progresses.

In the anime version of **PLEASE SAVE MY EARTH**, Rin menaces Takashi, the son of the man in charge of renovating Tokyo Tower, so that changes will be made according to his specifications. What those specifications are or how he plans to use it to destroy the moon base (as he explains to Haruhiko in the third OAV episode) is something we never find out in the anime version; in fact, after securing several of the necessary keywords, Rin seems to lose interest in the project and drops it entirely.

In the manga, however, we find out that Rin plans to modify Tokyo Tower to allow him to use it as a sort of psychic amplifier, establishing contact between he (and the main computer on the deserted moon base). "I intend to destroy the moon base," Rin says. "I don't want Earth to repeat our failed history. Our civilization made many mistakes, and it paid dearly for them. I'm going to try to save the Earth, if I can." In the anime, Rin never follows up on this intention, but in the manga, he not only rigs Tokyo Tower to his specifications (chosen, as he explains, because he's "always had a special liking for Tokyo Tower"), but actually establishes contact with the moon mainframe and initiates his nefarious plan.

Q: Why does Hiiragi say in the third episode, "Should we have gone down to Earth while we had time"? Isn't it too late by that point for the alien scientists to seek a cure on Earth?

A: Actually, the decision to go or not go down to Earth was one which had been bitterly debated among the scientists for some time before the virus struck. Shion, for example, was the first to suggest that they desert the moon base and relocate on Earth. Gyokuran, Shion's longtime rival, opposed Shion's idea on principle, while the other scientists were torn. After all, there was a strong sense of duty among them—felt most strongly, perhaps, by Mokuren—that the destruction of their homeworld didn't negate their essential mission; i.e., to observe and analyze the Earth. Now that the homeworld has been destroyed, Mokuren reasons, it's more important now than ever that they continue their work.

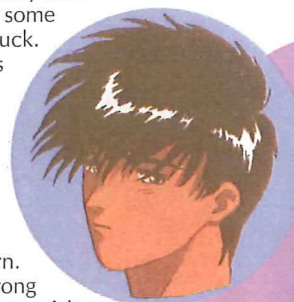
Shortly after Hiiragi makes the decision as team leader that everyone will remain on the moon, the virus begins infecting the scientists one



MOODY ISSEI



TAMURA
The perfect retainer, the always calm and serious Tamura works for the wealthy Matsudaira family as a guardian to their rebellious young son, Takashi. Laazo Matsudaira, Takashi's father, is responsible for the renovations to Tokyo Tower. Tamura's deep sense of obligation, both toward his paying job of looking after the "young master" Takashi, and his lonely friend Haruhiko, stem from the death of his younger brother by suicide, for which Tamura blames himself and seeks to atone by protecting his ward Takashi and his friend Haruhiko with his life.



FRAGILE HARUHIKO





MAN OF ACTION
JINPACHI

by one, thereby rendering further discussion pointless. In other words, Hiiragi doesn't second-guess the wisdom of going down to Earth "while (they) had the time" because he hoped to find a cure there, but because he had hoped to find companionship and solace among the peoples of Earth who, we are reminded, are so much like the peoples of his destroyed homeworld.

Q: When Jinpachi, Issei and Alice finally meet up with their other "moon dream" friends at Hiiragi's house in Kawasaki, they're surprised to discover that what they took for future events actually happened in the past. Just how long along ago were the alien scientists on the moon, anyway?

A: In the anime, the relative point in time the alien scientists exist on the moon is undefined, other than a single clue. In the fourth episode, Mokuren listens to a piece of music from Earth by German composer Robert Schumann (1810-56)—who, like Haruhiko in *PLEASE SAVE MY EARTH*, attempts suicide by throwing himself into a river—which Hiiragi is trying to "translate" for her. (After the meaning of the lyrics begin to be revealed, Shukaïdo decides to take as his keyword one of the translated lines from the music: "Seeking paradise in a dream.") The music could have been a modern radio broadcast, or contemporary to Schumann's time—it's left unclear.

In the manga, however, creator Hiwatari took a more playful approach, opting not for a classical piece of music in the scene but for *enka*, a maudlin genre whose closest U.S. analog is country-western. Elsewhere in the manga, several of the scientists watch television transmissions from Earth, which leads us to conclude that they must have been on the moon during a relatively recent period. (One of the shows they watch is a typical Japanese soap opera. When the story turns to the depiction of a three-way love triangle, the scientists wryly conclude, "Romance is the same no matter what planet you're from.") In other words, after the virus takes its deadly toll, little to no time passes between incarnations. With this in mind, it's probably safe to assume that the time the alien scientists are on the moon is only a generation or so away from Alice, Rin, and the others.

Q: Who is Sarjalim?

A: Sarjalim is the name of a goddess-deity recognized by the alien scientists. In the second episode of the animated series, one of the reincarnated scientists, Sakura (whose name in Japanese means "cherry blossom"), is on a field trip when the school bus they're in skids on the wet road during a thunderstorm and slams into a guardrail. "No!", Sakura screams. "I don't wanna die! Oh, God! Help me, Buddha! Sarjalim, please save me—!"

In the sixth and final episode of the *PLEASE SAVE MY EARTH* OAV series, we'll learn more about Sarjalim, but for now suffice it to say that the esper powers of the seven scientists are seen as a physical manifestation of the goddess Sarjalim's will. People with these psychic abilities are called "Särches"; Särches with the four tiny red dots in the middle of their forehead are known as "Sarjalians," the blessed of Sarjalim, who are taken from their families at the age of three, nurtured in special schools, and set to the service of their society because of their "divine" abilities to speak with plants and animals, make flowers bloom in the desert, or even see into the future. There is also an element of "grace" involved; for example, Sarjalians aren't just "super-Särches," they're literally the beloved of Sarjalim and as such, subject to special conditions and restrictions.

Take Mokuren. Obviously, Mokuren is a Sarjalian—even without the four dots on her forehead, we would know this by her special ability to commune with plants and living things, and by the special connection/empathy she feels with the "blue



DEPENDABLE DAISUKE

planet," Earth. In the manga, we learn that Mokuren is a Kichéss, which is short for Kitché Sarjalim. Kichéss, who are marked by the four dots, can see into the future and talk with plants, but only one in a hundred million are born with this ability. From the world of the moon people, the Kichéss are sort of high priestesses to Sarjalim, and one of the most important subplots in the *PSME* manga concerns Mokuren and the way others react with and to her—men, for example, see her as a kind of untouchable "Madonna," while women react with envy. (Of course, much to the dismay of her Sarjalian teachers, all Mokuren wants is to be loved as a normal woman...the one thing which is specifically forbidden to her. Is it so far to guess that the main reason she feels such a strong attraction for Shion is that he's the only one who sees her as a woman and not as some avatar of the Sarjalim godhead?)

Just like Solitaire in the James Bond film, *LIVE AND LET DIE*, Mokuren is a Sarjalian who retains her blessed status only so long as she retains her chastity, her "state-of-grace" (again, this is a major subplot in the manga, never addressed in the anime due to time constraints). Shion, the orphaned child whose only parents seem to be warfare and strife, can't help but want to defile Mokuren's purity, because of his own anger at the world which has caused him to live in such a black hole of anger and loneliness. Shion, on the other hand, is not a Sarjalian but a Särches, his psychic ability turned not toward helping others, but to achieving his own ends.

Does Sarjalim exist in a real sense? Do the psychic powers of the alien scientists really flow from her good will, or are they just *X-FILES*-like manifestations of unexplained phenomena? Perhaps even Sarjalim's chosen handmaidens—the nun-like "Lian," whom we'll meet in the sixth episode—don't know themselves. The important thing is that the characters themselves believe it which, if not enough to satisfy our own skepticism, is certainly enough to satisfy theirs.

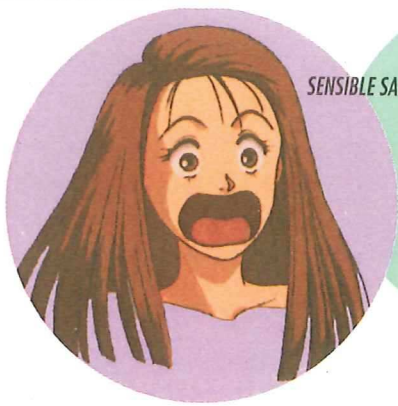


"Promise me you'll watch over the Earth until the very end.
Promise me you won't take your own life..."

Q: Who—or what—is that weird giant cat I keep seeing in the Japanese advertisements for the series? Am I imagining things?

A: No, you're not imagining things. The giant cat is an important character whom we'll meet in the sixth and final episode of the series. Without revealing too much of the plot, suffice it to say that the cat—whose name is "Kyaal," as in "KYAA—! WHAT THE \$@%* IS THAT!?"—isn't a figment of your imagination, but a person just like everyone else in the series, only from a planet where *everyone* looks like a giant cat. (Be sure to look to ANIMERICA to provide detailed information on new characters and plot developments as each volume of the video series is released.)

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SENSIBLE SAKURA



ANIMERICA



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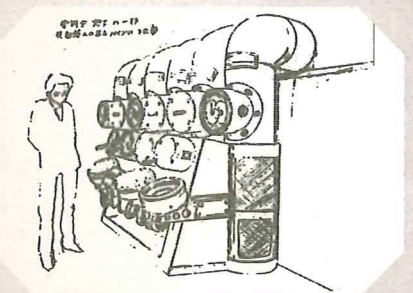
ART IMITATES LIFE...IMITATES ART

The Otaking himself, mimicking a pose from *OTAKU NO VIDEO* where he holds up a kit of the little girl who appears in the Daicon III Opening Anime.



LIFTING OFF

Hirooyuki Yamaga designed the storyboards for the opening credits for the classic TV series *SUPERDIMENSIONAL FORTRESS MACROSS*, which contain a carrier takeoff, just like this scene from the opening sequence of *THE WINGS OF HONNEAMISE*.



SIN CITY

One of Kenichi Sonoda's "rejected" mecha designs and one of his "approved" storefront designs for the garish pleasure quarter in *WINGS*, which, according to Yamaga, was based on an actual such area in Osaka.



Okada: He was on the staff of the Daicon III Opening Anime. At first, Hideaki Anno and Takami Akai were the only two people on its main staff—Anno drew the mecha and the special effects, and Akai drew the characters and most of the motion. But then Yamaga appeared, and said he'd do the backgrounds. Then they all went off to Artland to study professional filmmaking, and worked on the original *MACROSS* TV series. Anno studied mecha design, and Akai had wanted to do characters, but he couldn't because Haruhiko Mikimoto already had such an advanced technique. So when Akai realized he wouldn't get the opportunity to do anything on *MACROSS*, he went back to Osaka. And it was there that Yamaga learned how to direct—his teacher was Noboru Ishiguro [see *ANIMERICA*, Vol. 3, No. 8, for details on Ishiguro's legendary career in anime—Ed.], Yamaga designed the storyboards for the opening credits of *MACROSS*.

ANIMERICA: Wow! I knew he had worked on *MACROSS*, but I didn't know exactly what he did.... Is it true, by the way, that when you were in America to research *WINGS*, you saw *ROBOTECH*?

Okada: Yeah, we were very surprised. Suddenly, in our little hotel room, on our little TV, there's a little Minmei. And, the voice-actor was saying [IMITATES "RICK HUNTER" VOICE], "Oh, Minmei, Minmei..." AAAAAAAHHH!!! [LAUGHS] We couldn't believe it, and had a good laugh.

ANIMERICA: So after Anno and Yamaga worked on *MACROSS*, what happened?

Okada: They went back to Osaka, in 1983, to make the Daicon IV Opening Animation. Of course, those people on the *MACROSS* staff, who would later become very important people in the industry, were quite angry with them. But, as Anno and Yamaga explained to Ishiguro and Shoji Kawamori, they had to go back to Osaka so they could make amateur films again. [LAUGHS] At first, the plan for Daicon IV Opening Anime was to make a fifteen-minute short in 16mm. I liked the screenplay—no dialogue—but the idea of portraying an original world, well, that was the beginning of what would eventually become *THE WINGS OF HONNEAMISE*. We thought we were strong enough to take on such a project, but Yamaga couldn't deal with the storyboards, and Anno couldn't deal with the animation—in the end, it was just impossible. So we quit, and decided to make the five-minute, 8mm film that became the Daicon IV Opening Animation. But when that was done, it was quite natural that Yamaga and I began to talk about the original plan, with the idea of making that film in a professional way. At that time, we were thinking of *WINGS* as a 30-minute movie.

ANIMERICA: How did Yamaga have the idea for *WINGS* in the first place? Was it a short story, or was it always going to be a movie...?

Okada: Well, sometimes, a good idea...no, not just sometimes. Good ideas always flash—just flash—you don't know how, or why, it just comes—and a not-so-good-idea is the kind that comes from only thinking, thinking, thinking, and writing, writing, writing. I don't know where the idea for that first 15-minute concept came from; it just flashed. It might have come during one evening we spent sleeping inside this ancient temple in Tokyo with the Daicon IV animation and convention staff. We were talking about, what kind of film we would like to make, and I said something like, "Hmmm...flash...haaaaaaaa!" And someone else said, "Oh, yes that's good...haaaaaaaa!" [LAUGHS] and then we were all saying "haaaaaaaa!" And so the fifteen-minute concept was completed. It's like I said, there was no pro-

THE WINGS OF HONNEAMISE © 1987 Gainax • Bandal

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ducer, or director, or animation director—just friends who loved animation and science fiction. That's all.

ANIMERICA: Something else I wanted to ask you about *WINGS*...Naghatsumih City, where the Space Force is headquartered, isn't the capital, but rather an industrial town...is that meant to symbolize Osaka?

Okada: Yes, exactly. Because in those days in anime, the hero would always live in the capital city, and that seemed stupid to me. [LAUGHS] In American movies, the hero may be from Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, even Alaska. Not just Washington, D.C.—many, many, places. But in Japanese animation, it's always Tokyo, or just a generic city, with no character. I hate those kind of movies.

ANIMERICA: Yamaga's from Niigata, on the west coast, isn't he?

Okada: Yes. Niigata's a very, very, very, country place, and half the year it sees over thirty feet of snow.

ANIMERICA: Yamaga said recently that the opening of *WINGS*, where Shiro is running out in the snow to the waterside, is just what the scene would look like in Niigata.

Okada: Well, I don't really know, because that scene was drawn by *WINGS'* art director, Hiromasa Ogura, and Ogura had never been to Niigata. So, if Yamaga says, "It is Niigata," well, he's the director, so maybe it's so. But it's not like you're just using a camera, like a live-action film. If Yamaga told Ogura, "Okay, now you must draw Niigata's sea and beach"—what if Ogura didn't know what it should look like? He'd have to say, "Okay, I'll draw a sea and a beach—is this okay?" [LAUGHS] Maybe it looks like Niigata, but maybe not.

ANIMERICA: What exactly did Kenichi Sonoda do on *WINGS*?

Okada: Kenichi Sonoda designed some of the "sin town," the pleasure town.

ANIMERICA: That sounds like a good job for him.

Okada: [LAUGHS] Nice, yes. He made lots of designs for it. At first, he was supposed to be one of the main mechanical designers. But I couldn't use his mecha designs because they were too fantastic. So Yamaga told him we couldn't use his designs, and he asked what he could do instead. And Yamaga said, "You...mmm...maybe you'd...maybe you'd like the pleasure town?" Then Sonoda's designs were very good! [LAUGHS] He designed everything there, and we looked them over and we were like...okay! Okay! OKAY! His most famous design was a shop front with a canopy like a skirt, and columns like womens' legs.

ANIMERICA: Did you write the screenplay for the next Gainax production, *AIM FOR THE TOP! GUNBUSTER*?

Okada: I wrote the base story, then I gave it to Yamaga and told him to write the screenplay. And Yamaga said, "Okay, this is my kind of work! But don't hope for a good screenplay. I'm going to make a stupid robot-girl anime." [LAUGHS] I said, like...okay, okay, okay! Then he asked me what I would like. And I told him that I like space best as the setting for everything. We talked for more than three months...I talked, he asked, he talked, and I'd say no...no...no. Then he went back to Niigata, and about a week later he sent me



GAINAX GIRL

GUNBUSTER's bubbly yet determined heroine Noriko Takaya (above). *OTAKU NO VIDEO*'s famous "Misty May" (close kin to "bunny-girl" of the Daicon IV Opening Anime) aside, Noriko's brief but bouncy walk up the road (amply demonstrating her braless status) in *GUNBUSTER*'s opening credits instituted a new phrase into anime jargon—the "Gainax bounce."



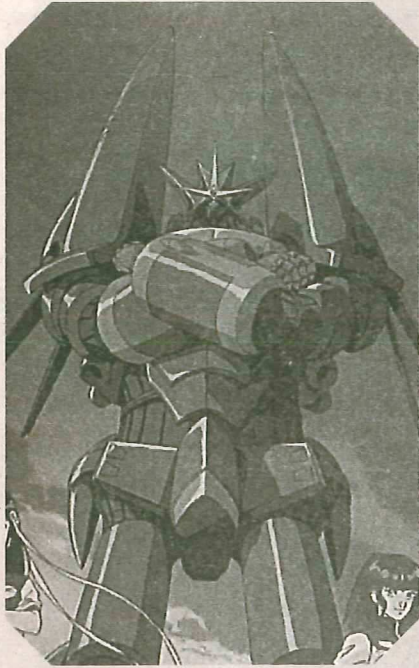
WELCOME BACK

The somber tone of the heart-wrenching conclusion to *GUNBUSTER* was underlined by Gainax's decision to "film" the episode in black and white (all of the episode's cels were simply painted in grey tones) to give a "documentary" feel to the animation.



WHAT'S MY LINE?

On board the *Luxion*, Noriko meets the friendly Smith Toren...say, doesn't that sound familiar? You guessed it, Noriko's doomed love was named after none other than the already legendary founder of Studio Proteus, Toren Smith. Although Smith did not voice the role himself, he did make his mark in anime history as the voice of one of the bridge operators.



THE MIGHTY GUNBUSTER

One of the largest robots in anime (aside from transforming ships such as the *Macross*), the Gunbuster stands between 200 and 250 meters, depending on your estimate, and features such tongue-in-cheek contraptions as the amazing Buster Shield, which looks like a Dracula cape!



NADIA © 1989 Gainax • INHK • Sogovision • Toho

NADIA vs. NAUSICÄÄ

The TV series *NADIA* was Gainax's first real smash hit, winning the ANIMAGE Grand Prix (readers' poll) award in 1991. Its main character, the enigmatic circus acrobat Nadia, was the first to actually push Miyazaki's beloved heroine Nausicaä out of the long-held top spot in ANIMAGE's favorite characters poll.

his screenplay—and when I read it, I was laughing all over the place. And I called up Yamaga, and told him “You’re a good screenwriter!” And he said, “No! That screenplay is stupid!” [LAUGHS]

ANIMERICA: So did Yamaga end up writing the screenplay?

Okada: Yes, but Anno changed *everything!* [LAUGHS]

ANIMERICA: I see. It’s like you say—chaos.

Okada: To *me*, *GUNBUSTER* was a science-fiction film. But to Yamaga, it was a stupid robot-action girl film. [LAUGHS] So he sent the script to Anno. And Anno thought, “Ah! This is a real mecha anime!” And he cut up Yamaga’s screenplay, then asked me, “How do you want to make it?” But everyone else on the staff was telling him, “Make it this way! That way! This way! That way!” Anno was so confused, he gave it to Higuchi and told him, “You can draw the storyboards any way you *like!*” So, Higuchi drew the storyboards...with *no screenplay*. Nothing but a theme: science-fiction-stupid-girl-action-robot-mecha! [LAUGHS]

ANIMERICA: Is that why it’s a comedy at the start, and a drama at the end? It’s so different, Part One from Part Six.

Okada: Part Six was the very first idea I had for the film—and it would be at the very end, I told Yamaga. That last scene, “Welcome Back”—it’s so far from the idea of a stupid-comedy-action-parody-girl-robot film. At that point, every fan is sobbing—Yamaga was so ashamed of himself! [LAUGHS]

ANIMERICA: Maybe *GUNBUSTER* was so successful because it had a little something of everything.

Okada: Yes. Somehow, I thought the “chaos strategy” ended up giving the screenplay a stronger structure. That’s why I think maybe we could have changed *WINGS*. But that was all ten years ago. [LAUGHS]

ANIMERICA: So you’re saying you learned how to make chaos work?

Okada: Yeah. It’s *only* way I know how to make a film.

ANIMERICA: *OTAKU NO VIDEO* seems to have a pretty strong structure. It’s chronological, and you more or less wrote it by yourself. Is it true that in *OTAKU NO VIDEO*, the characters of both Tanaka and Kubo symbolize you?

Okada: Yeah. They’re two sides of my mind. Sometimes I think just like a Tanaka, and sometimes just like a Kubo. Sometimes I’ve taken people aside and told them, “You must become otaku...otaku...otaku...” But other times it’s been people telling *me*, “You must see this...see this...see this!”

ANIMERICA: Wasn’t *NADIA*’s story originally by Hayao Miyazaki? Is that the real reason it seems to show so much of his influence?

Okada: Yeah. The original story was going to be called “Around the World in 80 Days by Sea.” That was Mr. Miyazaki’s plan, fifteen years ago. And the Toho people held onto it, and showed it to Yoshiyuki Sadamoto and told him, “You make it.” And Sadamoto says [IN A GLAZED VOICE] “Yesssss...” [LAUGHS] *NADIA* was a very hard experience. At first,

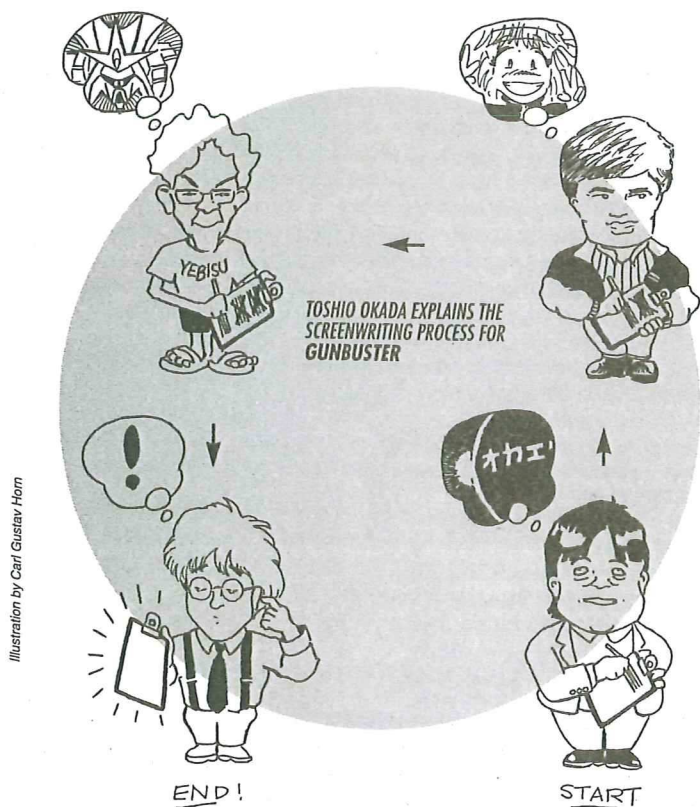
Sadamoto was supposed to be the director. But after two episodes, he said "Okay, that's enough for me!" and went back to character design and animation direction, and Anno took over.

ANIMERICA: But in comparing, say, *OTAKU NO VIDEO*'s structure to *NADIA*, you might say....

Okada: *NADIA* was true chaos, good chaos and bad chaos! [LAUGHS] On *NADIA*, Anno didn't direct the middle episodes, Shinji Higuchi did. And some episodes were directed in Korea—why, no one knows exactly. [LAUGHS] That's real chaos, not good! What I mean to say is, controlled chaos—that's good. Controlled chaos is where you've got all the staff in the same room, looking at each other. But on *NADIA* you had Higuchi saying, "Oh, I'll surprise Anno," hide, and change the screenplay! Screenplays and storyboards got changed when people went home, and the next morning, if no one could find the original, I authorized them to go ahead with the changes. No one can be a real director or a real scriptwriter in such a chaos situation. But on *GUNBUSTER*, that chaos was controlled, because we were all friends, and all working in the same place. But on *NADIA*, half our staff was Korean, living overseas. We never met them. No control.

ANIMERICA: Was *NADIA* the first Gainax film to have Korean animators?

Okada: No, we used Korean animators even on *GUNBUSTER*. But we had never before used a Korean director or animation director. It was real chaos, just like hell. ☆

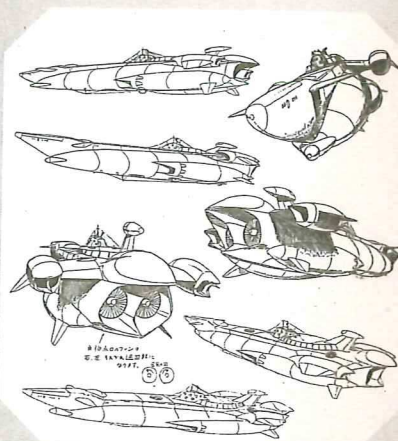


Next: in Part Three, Okada gives his own criticism of his greatest production and greatest failure, *THE WINGS OF HONNEAMISE*, discussing the Japanese response to the film, the self-symbolic nature of the narrative, and contrasting Hayao Miyazaki's creative control with Gainax's chaos.



UNDER THE SEA

NADIA (currently available from Streamline under its alternate title, *THE SECRET OF BLUE WATER*) is also the name of the 39-episode TV show's heroine: a 14-year-old girl working as a circus acrobat in 1889 Paris, pursued by a flamboyant gang of thieves after her pendant, the "Blue Water." Nadia joins up with Jean, a young inventor, on a globe-spanning quest to unlock the secrets of her pendant and her forgotten past, secrets connected with a lost civilization whose super-technology may mean either the conquest of the world or its salvation. Inspired by Jules Verne's *20,000 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA*, references to the turn-of-the-century novel include Captain Nemo and his ship, the *Nautilus*, as well as the show's "steampunk" flavor.



THE NAUTILUS



EVIL IS AS EVIL DOES

NADIA's fearsome world-conquering Gargoyle organization.



NADIA'S SPUNKY SIDKICK, KING, THE LION CUB

NADIA © 1989 Gainax • NHK • Sagovision • Toho



As well as her voice roles, the multitasking Cathy Weseluck has worked as a music director on *MY LITTLE PONY*, casting director and/or director on *EXO-SQUAD*, *STONE PROTECTORS* and *BIBI BLOXBERG*, and she also conducts voice-acting workshops for aspiring voice-actors!



With more anime-in-English than ever before, the voice-actors for English versions of anime are becoming as popular in America as their Japanese counterparts are in Japan! ANIMERICA takes a look at the brightest stars of the domestic voice-acting industry!



Cathy Weseluck

ROLE CALL: "C-Ko," *PROJECT A-KO*;
"Shampoo" and "Azusa Shiratori,"
RANMA 1/2

How did you get started in voice-acting?

I was working on a radio show for CBC Vancouver ("Disc Drive") as an Associate Producer—this is back in '86-'88—when I got an offer by the host of the show to come and do some silly voices for CHQM, a local radio station. I had to do twenty-one commercials for them. They weren't asking for "straight reads," but something more on the silly and different side of things. So, I threw in a myriad of half-baked characters that seemed to live in me into these commercials, and that was the beginning. Jurgen Gothe, the host of the show, had heard enough of my voices just by working with me around the office (these things just come out, you know...) and thought they'd be great to accent some of the commercials he was writing for the station. Anyway, after two years at the CBC, I quit my job to try this voice-thing/acting-thing out, and... presto! I was lucky too, because the animation industry was just starting to "spill up" from L.A. Other than Jurgen, I have to give credit to my gerbils Whiskers and Nibbles, my furry childhood friends. When I was eight, I believed that if I talked in this cutesy little chipmunk-like voice, they'd be able to understand me better. Now that character voice is used for a potpourri of voice effects and baby/chipmunk-like characters in some of the animation episodes I've performed in. My gerbils were buried in our backyard behind the lilac bush and I can't thank them enough for contributing to my career!

Do you do anything special to prepare yourself for a role? Like research of any kind?

Yes, I always prepare, and how depends on what type of character I'm asked to read for. If I'm asked to do a mimic-type thing, a pseudo-Rosie Perez, or Julie Newmar or something specific, I'll rent out a video and get the voice down pat. But it's difficult when we don't have pictures of the characters to work with, or much information—that's when your "on-the-spot" flexibility and acting skills have to come into play, when you have to give them what they want on the spot. Also, the director may have new information that you didn't have before the audition or may ask you to read something you've never looked at. So being able to take direction is a must. Plus, if we're required to "match" the lip-synch accurately, there's no way that can be practiced ahead of time. You almost have to have the knack. I'll usually come up with a couple of ideas per character, record them for myself at home, play them back and critique them. I just pop into casting director mode (I used to do casting) and can usually hear when I'm off and when I'm on the mark. But then, that's just my opinion. The client may be wanting something else and we can never really know if we've given them the right choice. Finally, getting someone else to listen to your voices is helpful because they can tell you from a layman's point-of-view if it sounds like what you're after. The average person is usually the best judge.

When doing a character translated from the Japanese, do you want to hear the Japanese, to see how that voice-actor handled the part?

Yes, I prefer to hear the original Japanese version, if the client wants us to match the sound and/or the energy of the original characters. Plus if you have a little of the original track in your headphones you can hear where the lip synch has to fit to the tee. For me, it helps me to be just that much more accurate. But *too* much of the original track can be distracting, too. It isn't so much to know what the Japanese actor did with the acting, it's to help me technically, to try and synch better.

Is there much room for improvisation in your voice-acting roles, or are you held pretty strictly to the script?

We're held pretty much strictly to the script, almost verbatim! The only time we're able to make changes is when the original script was written in the format of another English-speaking country that has phrases and sayings that are only heard in that country. For example, if the script was written by a British person, there may be a few slang phrases they'd throw into the script for the character to say. A North American audience may not understand the lingo, so we'll change it to be as clear to the real meaning as the writer intended as possible, in a standard North American sort of way. Other than that, unless an actor comes up with a really funny phrase or witty comment, no, we're stuck to the script. In early days of A.D.R., the actors were helping to rewrite as they went because the lip-synch didn't always match and the schedules were tight, but that doesn't happen anymore. Nowadays, the translators work very hard to make sure things are accurate and ready on time.