

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

The Studio Gainax Saga in Four Parts

PART
4



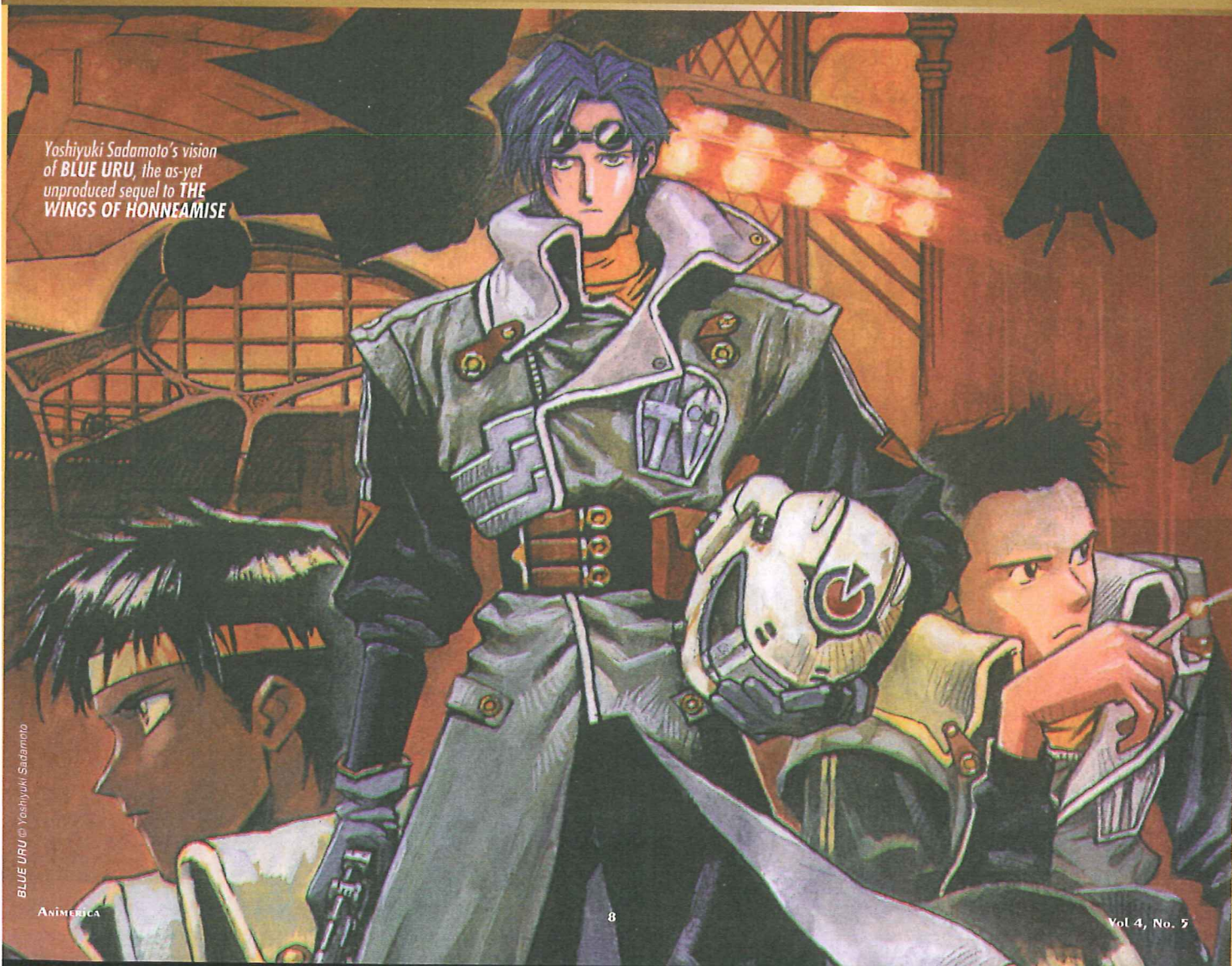
Tanaka from OTAKU NO VIDEO (aka Toshio Okada)

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.

Yoshiyuki Sadamoto's vision of **BLUE URU**, the as-yet unproduced sequel to **THE WINGS OF HONNEAMISE**





Ryuichi Sakamoto

Celebrated composer who shared the Academy Award with David Byrne for the score to *THE LAST EMPEROR*. Sakamoto is well known in both the U.S. and Japan for his music, both in Yellow Magic Orchestra and solo.

Koji Ueno, Yuji Nomi and Haruo Kubota composed original pieces for *WINGS* under Sakamoto's direction, while Sakamoto personally composed the four main themes—the "Opening," "Leiqunni's Theme," "Royal Space Force Anthem," and the "Prototype C"—of which "Out, to Space," played during the march-of-history sequence, is a variation.

Yamaga says he did the "rough" of this scene—available on the *ROYAL SPACE FORCE* box set—as a personal guide for Sakamoto to compose to.



Jo Hisaishi

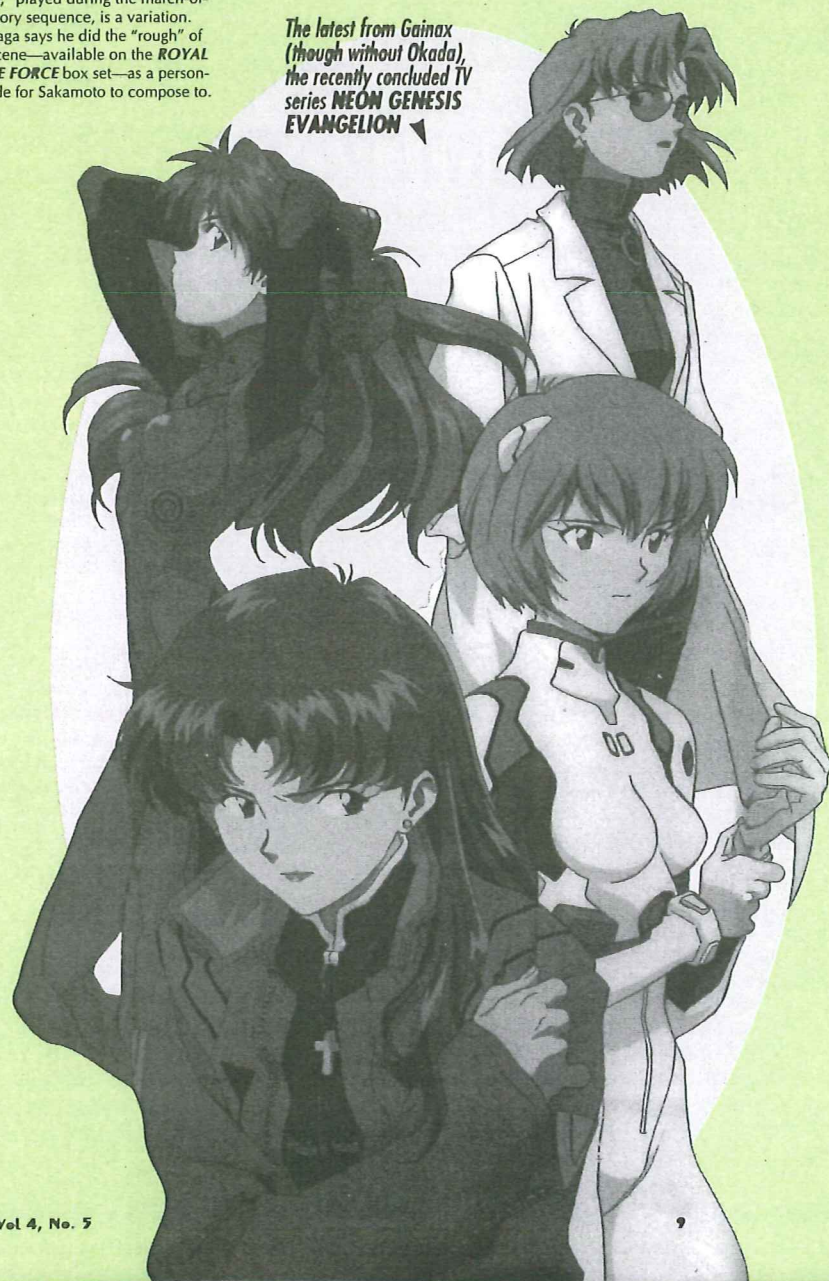
Miyazaki's musical composer on most of his films, including *MY NEIGHBOR TOTORO*; *LAPUTA*; *NAUSICAÄ OF THE VALLEY OF WIND*; *PORCO ROSSO* and *KIKI'S DELIVERY SERVICE*.



Nausicaä

The heroine of what is arguably Miyazaki's most beloved film, *NAUSICAÄ OF THE VALLEY OF WIND*, Nausicaä is the warrior princess of a people who live in a world which has been devastated by ecological disaster. Nausicaä eventually manages to build a better life for her people among the ruins through her nobility, bravery and self-sacrifice.

The latest from Gainax (though without Okada), the recently concluded TV series *NEON GENESIS EVANGELION* ▼



INTERVIEW WITH TOSHIO OKADA, PART FOUR of FOUR

In Part Four, the conclusion of the interview, Toshio Okada discusses the dubious ad campaign for *THE WINGS OF HONNEAMISE*, why he wanted Ryuichi Sakamoto for its soundtrack, his concept for a sequel and the "shocking truth" behind Hiroyuki Yamaga's!

ANIMERICA: There's something I've wondered about for a long time. You know, the ads for the film had nothing to do with the actual film!

Okada: [LAUGHS] Toho/Towa was the distributor of *THE WINGS OF HONNEAMISE*, and they didn't have any know-how, or sense of strategy to deal with the film. They handle comedy, and comedy anime—what you would call cartoons. And they were thinking that this film must be another *NAUSICAÄ OF THE VALLEY OF WIND*, because *NAUSICAÄ* was the last "big anime hit." But when they finally saw *WINGS*, they realized it was *not* another *NAUSICAÄ* [PANICKED SCREAM] and they thought, "Okay, Okay...we'll make it *NAUSICAÄ* in the publicity campaign!" [LAUGHS]

ANIMERICA: At one time, the film was to be called "*LEIQUNNI NO TSUBASA*" instead of *HONNEAMISE NO TSUBASA* (*THE WINGS OF HONNEAMISE*). What brought on the title change?

Okada: Okay, you should understand that, in Gainax, no one ever refers to this film as *THE WINGS OF HONNEAMISE*. To them, its one and only title is its original one, *ORITSU UCHUGUN*—"THE ROYAL SPACE FORCE." But Bandai said to us, "If you really want to call it that, it's fine—but we'll stop our involvement with it." So, we had to think about another title.

ANIMERICA: Bandai thought it was a bad title?

Okada: For them, a good title is *NAUSICAÄ OF THE VALLEY OF WIND*. [LAUGHS] That's a *real* title for an anime movie. It should be, "Something of Something."

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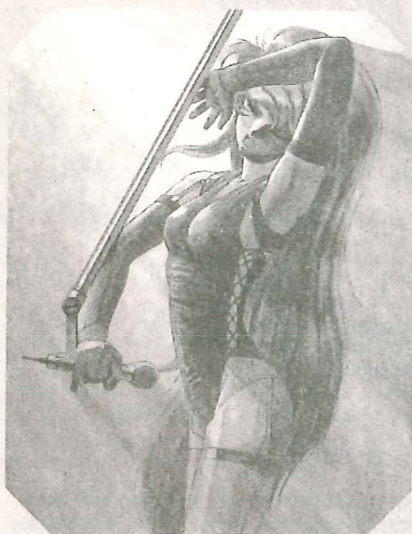
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IMAGE IS EVERYTHING

WINGS' ad campaign, as orchestrated by its panicked release company, was modeled to make the film seem more like its successful predecessor, **NAUSICAA OF THE VALLEY OF WIND** (shown above). Rather than a film about man's first foray into space, the ads portrayed **WINGS** as a sort of romance/mystical crusade to find a lost "holy book" which would save the land.



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THE KIDS ARE ALLRIGHT

STREETS OF FIRE (1984) is a somewhat retro-styled musical drama that features Michael Paré as a moody, leather-jacketed hero and Diane Lane as an enigmatic rock star who is kidnapped by a ruthless biker gang led by an obsessed Willem DaFoe. **LEONARD MALTIN'S VIDEO AND MOVIE GUIDE** entry reads: "This 'rock 'n' roll fable' is actually a 1950s B-movie brought up to date with a pulsating rock score (principally by Ry Cooder), state-of-the-art visuals, and a refusal to take itself too seriously." Stunningly photographed on a soundstage, **STREETS OF FIRE** combined the look of the lush 1961 film adaptation of the musical classic **WEST SIDE STORY** with the music video style of the only three-year-old MTV; a blend that made its mark on '80s style and music. Along with **MEGA-ZONE 23's** obvious reference to the film (a theater marquee in the animation displays the name of the film prominently), the opening song of the classic '80s OAV series **BUBBLEGUM CRISIS**, "Konya wa Hurricane," closely echoes one sung by the fiery Lane in **STREETS OF FIRE**.

ANIMERICA: Like **FUSHIGI NO UMI NO NADIA** ("Nadia of the Mysterious Seas")?

Okada: Yeah. Exactly. So it was necessary that we came up with something like **THE WINGS OF HONNEAMISE**.

ANIMERICA: Where did "Honneamise" come from? I've always wondered why they chose something that sounds French.

Okada: Yes, it's French, but it doesn't mean anything. [LAUGHS] When they ordered us to come up with another title, all we could think was that we were going to make an utterly meaningless title, "Honneamise"—meaning nothing.

ANIMERICA: Well, wasn't the name of Shiro's kingdom, "Honneamano"?

Okada: Yes, but we came up with that *after* the new name.—"Oh, **THE WINGS OF HONNEAMISE**...? What is Honneamise? Ah! Oh yes, it's the country's name!" [LAUGHS]

ANIMERICA: You just liked the sound of "Honneamise"?

Okada: It wasn't that it sounded right to us, but that it was a meaningless sound—so, we liked it. [LAUGHS]

ANIMERICA: Like "Kodak" or "Haagen Daz"—those names also have no meaning.

Okada: [LAUGHS] Yeah.

ANIMERICA: I like the little legend that was made up about "Honneamise," to explain it—about a bird who one day tried to fly to heaven and was turned by God into a fish for his temerity.

Okada: Yeah. Mr. Yamaga was drinking some whiskey, and thinking, "Oh, yes—the *meaning*!" The publicity people had told him that this new title had to have some kind of story behind it. He said to them, "Oh, yes—but—but—I'll have to have some drinks before I can come up with one!" [LAUGHS] And they said "Ohhhhhkay!" That's all.

ANIMERICA: So you chose that meaningless title because you didn't want to call it anything else in the first place?

Okada: Yes. On the LD box set, it's finally called **THE ROYAL SPACE FORCE**.

ANIMERICA: Concerning the music, why did you want to have Ryuichi Sakamoto for **WINGS'** music? Were you a fan of his?

Okada: No, no. [LAUGHS]

ANIMERICA: You just thought he'd be good?

Okada: It's not that, but...in Japan, at that time, he was the only choice for an original movie soundtrack.

ANIMERICA: Why do you say that?

Okada: Composers for ordinary anime music can make a pop song, something

in the *enka* [Japanese "country music"—Ed.] style—you know, just songs, like an opening theme. But they can't do orchestration, or a sad melody like "Leiquinni's Theme." I didn't really like Sakamoto's style back then, or even now. But I know his talent, his ability to construct a strong score, and write an entire orchestration. That's why I chose him.

ANIMERICA: Why not, for example, Jo Hisaishi, who composes the scores for Miyazaki's films?

Okada: Jo Hisaishi always writes one or two melodies, and the rest of the soundtrack is constructed around them. You can see that in *NAUSICAA* and *LAPUTA*. But his kind of style wouldn't have worked for *WINGS*. As I said—for better or for worse, the film has a very differentiated structure, and we needed a score to match that. So I told Sakamoto, "Don't make the soundtrack all by yourself. You should direct it, but get a staff with real musical talent, young or old, and incorporate their work."

ANIMERICA: Like harmony within the chaos. I see. Were you ever planning to make a sequel to *WINGS*?

Okada: Back during the 1987 premiere, Yamaga and I were talking about the next story of *WINGS*. It would be that world, a hundred years later. A spaceship from the world of *WINGS* then journeys to our present-day Earth, from their homeworld, four light-years from us.

ANIMERICA: Wow! Interesting! So they'd be ahead of us technologically. Four light-years...so the world of *WINGS* is around Alpha Centauri?

Okada: Yeah. Four light-years away.

ANIMERICA: But you never pursued that idea seriously?

Okada: Well, no one asked me. [LAUGHS] But when we'd finished *WINGS*, and were at the "premiere" in L.A., Yamaga and I were always talking about what the next stage of the story would be, one-hundred years after the original. On Earth, it would either be the present day, or the near-future.

ANIMERICA: You could set it in the *GUNBUSTER* universe and *really* screw up the timeline. [LAUGHS] Is it true, by the way, that *GUNBUSTER* is the future of *NADIA*?

Okada: No, not really. The similarities are because Anno was trying to get an idea..." Ohhhhhh...I'm not getting anything..." [LAUGHS] "I need a name for a spaceship...how about...something from... *GUNBUSTER*! [LAUGHS] How about *Eltreum* or *Exelion*?"

ANIMERICA: I think it's more interesting to have *NADIA* be the past for *GUNBUSTER*. Because *NADIA* is already a parallel universe, and *GUNBUSTER* is definitely a parallel universe.

Okada: Yeah. I'm still interested in the hundred-years-later story of *WINGS*. But right now, it'd be almost impossible to make it.

ANIMERICA: What is *BLUE URU* about? What's its story?

Okada: Have you ever seen *STREETS OF FIRE*?



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COULD THE WORLD OF *WINGS* BE AT ALPHA CENTAURI?

Although there is no indication of "extra" suns in the original film to account for Alpha Centauri's trinary system, the idea of *WINGS*' story taking place around our nearest neighboring star is truly intriguing.



OKADA THE AUTHOR

Along with teaching multimedia at Tokyo University, Okada has just recently released his first book, *BOKUTACHI NO SENNO SHAKAI* ("Our Brainwashed—or Brainwashing—Society") is an analysis of Japanese society published by the Asahi Shimbun press, also the publisher of *AERA* magazine, for which Okada is a regular columnist. In the book, Okada argues that interactive communications are creating an inevitable "paradigm shift" in Japanese society that will eventually move the average Japanese away from the tradition of regarding of others' values as most important, to regarding one's own values as most important. This will happen, Okada maintains, because such phenomena as the Internet bypass the hierarchical "brainwashing" of the mass media—TV, movies, etc.—and create an environment where everybody, as Okada puts it, can try to brainwash everyone else (WIRED has referred to this as the transition from "one-to-many" to "many-to-many"). He goes on to describe how this will create new types of voluntary societal groupings: once people acknowledge their own values as foremost, they will seek out those who share those values, and social development will then revolve around study and coordination of said values, similar to Internet usegroups. While this kind of societal shift has been noted by writers examining American society, Okada's extending it to the traditionally less individualistic Japanese society may make it a more radical concept to his particular audience. A review in the March '96 *NEWTPE* reported that the book, targeted at "thoughtful" 25-to-35-year-olds, has been reaching unexpected audiences, such as junior-high and high-school students, as well as being found in the business sections of many bookstores. At Otakon '95, Okada announced that he was also writing a book on otaku outside of Japan.



I, OTAKU

What exactly is an "otaku" to the Japanese? When asked in a 1994 interview, *M.D. GEIST*'s creator Koichi Ohata explained the origins of Japan's "otaku" as follows: "First, I would like to explain the origin of the word *otaku*. Japan's economy was stable in the 1980s, and the standard of living was high. In other words, just leading decent lives wasn't a problem for most people in Japan anymore. Being content with their material needs and information, some young people just didn't want anybody to meddle in their lives. They started to avoid self-assertion and conflicts with other people. To preserve their privacy and in order to devote themselves to only what they wanted to do, they tried to create a wall between themselves and outside world. They feared to call other people by their names and recognize values of other people. Those who cannot call people by their names started to use the second-person word *otaku* (originally this word meant another person's house or organization) to protect themselves. People laughed at them and started to call these shameful weirdos *otaku*, whether they knew the people in question or not. The word *otaku* was a discriminatory word at first. As most *otaku* were also anime/comic fans, people began to recognize anime fans as *otaku*."

Currently, maniac fans in any field are called *otaku*, but this word was a discriminatory word when it first appeared. So I am not happy personally when people say I am an *otaku*. Anime fans in the U.S., however, love and enjoy animation, and they exchange their friendships among themselves. I feel that the word *otaku*, as used in the U.S., is different from the original meaning. I think it is a good phenomenon that fans in the U.S. call themselves *otaku*. I want *otaku* in the U.S. to stimulate us anime creators the way it used to be."



© Yoshiyuki Sadamoto

SMALL BLUE THING

Yoshiyuki Sadamoto devotes a section to *BLUE URU*—Yamaga's planned "successor" film to *WINGS*—in his 1993 art book *ALPHA*. Incidentally, Yamaga's recent description of the basic outlook of *BLUE URU* does not exactly match Okada's. The July 1987 issue of the now-defunct Japanese anime magazine *OUT* gives *BLUE HISTORY SHIROTUGU* as one of the many proposed "release" titles for the film and this title is also given on page 31 of *ANIMATE COLLECTION 07* with a somewhat different spelling.

ANIMERICA: *STREETS OF FIRE*? Yes.

Okada: That's it.

ANIMERICA: What?

Okada: That's it. There's this girl singer, and this pilot comes with his airplane and takes her away, and then the hero, in his blue plane, comes to town [MIMICS TOUGH-GUY VOICE] "Uhhh! My girl has gone!" He gets very angry, gets some people together, and goes and saves her. [LAUGHS] That's all.

ANIMERICA: This was Yamaga's idea?

Okada: Yeah. So I said no. Never. I won't make that film. [LAUGHS] Yamaga was very angry. [LAUGHS] But I said...

ANIMERICA: Oh, my God. That's—that's why, y'know, in *MEGAZONE 23*, they're watching *STREETS OF FIRE*...!

Okada: Yes.

ANIMERICA: He really likes that movie?

Okada: Ahhhh....He thinks I do, too. [LAUGHS] So I said to him, if you don't have any *interesting* ideas for me, the film isn't going to get made. Yamaga is a very clever and talented man. But even *he* couldn't come up with an idea he was *really* interested in, so instead he proposes this parody film.

ANIMERICA: Because he had no idea, he made a parody?

Okada: Because, in truth, he had neither the *emotion* nor the idea to make a new anime film. It was because of that I suggested to Gainax that they not make another anime film for at least two years.

ANIMERICA: Until you get new ideas...?

Okada: No. To have the *right* emotion. Not the "schedule" mentality, where you're saying, "Oh, it's spring, we've got to make a new anime film!" You should ask Yamaga some day, "Is it true that *BLUE URU* is *STREETS OF FIRE*? Okada says so." He'll be, "Uhhh...Yes! No! Yes! No!" [LAUGHS]

ANIMERICA: Occasionally, I've asked Gainax's translator to ask Yamaga questions for me about *WINGS*, and Yamaga has responded, "You know, I don't remember—it was ten years ago."

Okada: That's probably the truth. I almost forget myself, because we saw the film two or three hundred times, and had so many different ideas about it. So you forget.

ANIMERICA: The last time I got information on *URU* from Yamaga, he said that he did not yet know what the story was going to be. So maybe he discarded that earlier concept, threw it away.

Okada: No, when he gave the synopsis of *URU* to the Pioneer people—Pioneer LDC was to be *URU*'s main sponsor—the story was almost exactly the same as *STREETS OF FIRE*.

ANIMERICA: You know, you haven't changed much, compared to your pose in the *AILE DE HONNEAMISE* book.

Okada: Ah, yes. This is the stance from *JO JO'S BIZARRE ADVENTURES* BAAAAA!!! When I was young, I was stupid...forget it. [LAUGHS] ☆

ANIMERICA thanks the staff of Otakon '96, Neil Nadelman, Studio Gainax for their indulgence and information on Daicon film, and of course, Toshio Okada himself for making this interview possible.



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Illustration by Yukihisa Fujita

GAINAX SELECT FILMOGRAPHY YOUR GUIDE TO THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF GAINAX!

All of Gainax's five original productions are available in the U.S., with the current exception of **NEON GENESIS EVANGELION** (see "AnimExpress" in Vol. 4, No. 3); however, the first several volumes of the series are currently available as Japanese imports. **NEON GENESIS EVANGELION** from Starchild/King Records; VHS/LD; 52 mins. (two episodes each); (Vol. 1) KIVA-249/KILA-149; ¥5,300/¥5,800.



THE WINGS OF HONNEAMISE

Manga Entertainment; English VHS/Subtitled VHS; 119 mins.; Catalog No.: 7-800-634-797-3 (8)/7-800-635-253-3 (6); US\$19.95/\$24.95.

GUNBUSTER

U.S. Renditions; Subtitled VHS; three 60-min. vols.; Catalog Nos.: USR-VD1/USR-VD3/USR-VD5; US\$34.95 each. These subtitled tapes are now out of print; watch for re-release through Manga Entertainment in the near future.

THE SECRET OF BLUE WATER

Streamline Pictures (distributed through Orion Home Video); English VHS; Eight volumes, approx. 100 mins per volume; Catalog Nos. (first two vols.): "The Adventure Begins": #91193; "The Island Adventure": #91223; US\$14.98 each. **THE SECRET OF BLUE WATER** series condenses the original 39-episode **NADIA** storyline—essentially what was released in Japan as the condensed "The Nautilus Stories" LD Box.



OTAKU NO VIDEO

AnimEigo; Subtitled VHS; 100 mins.; Catalog No.: AT093-002; US \$39.95. Comes with extensive liner notes by translators Yoshida and Ledoux.



DAICON FILM

Released through Daicon Film's (and later Gainax's) merchandising arm, General Products, Daicon Film's video and LD stock passed to Gainax when General Products closed down in 1992. All of the Daicon Film releases are currently sold out, and Gainax has no plans to re-release them. The listings below are based on two catalogs of the now-defunct

General Products. No information on **KAIKETSU NÔTENKI** or **KAETTE-KITA ULTRAMAN** is available; note that the catalog video lengths given differ from those given in other sources. But, since GP did have a U.S. division, you may be lucky enough to find some of these used.

DAICON FILM COLLECTION LD

Contains Daicon III and IV Opening Anime, plus their pencil tests, and **THE REVENGE OF YAMATA OROCHI**. Laser disc; ¥16,000. **WARNING:** Any given copy may have drop-outs due to the "laser rot" which affected older laser discs.

KAIKETSU NÔTENKI 2

Said to contain a "special U.S. location," this is the further adventures of the moped-riding, guitar-slinging hero. Beta/VHS; 30 mins.; ¥13,000.

AIKOKU SENTAI DAI-NIPPON

"An army of red bears from the North are invading Japan. Save the sovereign nation! Patriotic Taskforce Great Japan!" Beta/VHS; 30 mins.; ¥13,000. ☆

