

## The Notenki Memoirs: Studio Gainax And The Men Who Created *Evangelion*

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- ISBN 4847014073
- ÅI 2002, Wani Books

English edition:

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- Design & layout: Natalia Reynolds
- Cover Design: Jason Babler
- ISBN 1-4139-0234-0
- English text ÅI2005 published by A.D. Vision, Inc., under exclusive license from Wani Books, Co. (Tokyo)

### Preface

In the summer of 2001, we hosted the 40th annual Japan Sci-Fi Convention (SF2001) at the Makuhari Messe convention center in Chiba, Japan. It had been a full 20 years since DAICON 3, the very first sci-fi con we'd hosted, and it's going on 24 years since we first became active (as they say) in the biz. In the beginning, I was a kid who didn't think much about anything, who preferred the pleasures of the moment to any long-term uncertainties about the future. I was just a regular kid. What changed me was a series of encounters, an unbroken procession of chance meetings that thrust me from my young and vigorous but ultimately clueless boyhood, and transformed me into the man I am now.

More than anything, it was DAICON 3 that played the greatest role in many of these encounters, and now here we were again, hosting SF2001. I guess you could say the

convention marked an era in my own career, so I decided to treat the occasion as an opportunity to synthesize the past two decades into the form of a record of my youth.

Naturally, most of the things I remember happened to me personally, so those are the things I mainly write about. And there's a distinct possibility that this account of mine may not even be accurate, in the sense of being based on hard, objective facts.

At the very least I'm trying not to write any outright lies, so please forgive me of any faults in my memory, or if others happen to remember things differently. That's just the nature of the beast.

I hope this book will serve as an aid to readers who want to learn the truth behind the rumors of how we got from DAICON to GAINAX, as well as information on things they might want to know about us. Of course, if you do fall into that category you must be even more of a geek than I am. . .



## The Complete Notenki Chronology

Everything you need to know about the history of the Japan Sci-Fi Conventions, General Products and GAINAX

- 1957 September: Born in Osaka
- The first-ever Japan Sci-Fi Convention (Meg-Con) was held in May, 1962
- The Tokyo Olympics were held in October, 1964
- 1964 April: Enter Tadaoka Elementary School
- The first moon landing happened in July, 1969
- The Japan World Exposition was held in 1970

- 1970 April: Enter Tadaoka Junior High school
- 1973 April: Enter Seifu High School
- *Uchu Senkan Yamato* (“Star Blazers”) aired in Japan in 1974
- 1976 April: Enter Kinki University’s Nuclear Engineering Department
- *Star Wars* came out in 1977
- 1977
  - April:
    - ★ Join the sci-fi club (Toshio Okada enters Osaka Electro-Communication University)
  - July:
    - ★ See Hiroe Suga for the first time at the Seigunsai
    - ★ Cofound the Confederation of Kansai Student Sci-Fi Clubs
- 1978
  - April:
    - ★ (Takeshi Sawamura enters Otemon Gakuin University)
    - ★ Meet Toshio Okada at the Seto-Con sci-fi festival
  - August:
    - ★ Make convention debut at Ashino-Con (the 17th annual Japan Sci-Fi Convention)
    - ★ Meet Takeshi Sawamura and Hiroaki Inoue
    - ★ Intend to host a convention, but give up because of excessive red tape
- *Kido Senshi Gundam* (“Mobile Suit Gundam”) aired in Japan in 1979
- 1979 August: Hold 4th annual Sci-Fi Show in Mielparque Osaka Hall

- 1980
  - April:
    - ★ (Hideaki Anno, Takami Akai and Hiroyuki Yamaga enter Osaka University of Arts)
  - August:
    - ★ At Tokon 8, lobby for and receive approval to hold DAICON 3
  - September:
    - ★ Participate in Worldcon
    - ★ Meet Masaharu Ueda and Toshihiko Nishigaki
    - ★ Meet Hideaki Anno, Hiroyuki Yamaga and Takami Akai
    - ★ Begin planning the opening animation for DAICON 3
- The movie version of *Kido Senshi Gundam* came out in 1981
- 1981
  - March:
    - ★ (Hiroe Suga debuts in *SF Hoseki* magazine)
  - Spring:
    - ★ (Toshio Okada drops out of Osaka Electro-Communication University)
  - August:
    - ★ Hold the 20th annual Japan Sci-Fi Convention (DAICON 3) in Morinomiya, Osaka
  - Fall:
    - ★ Start living with friends at Juso; my first period of lethargy
  - October:
    - ★ Drop out of Kinki University
    - ★ Begin preparations for opening the General Products store

- ★ Sell videos of opening animation to clear DAICON 3 debt
- End of year:
  - ★ Hideaki Anno, Takami Akai and Hiroyuki Yamaga participate in the production of the first two episodes of *Macross*
- 1982
  - Start of year:
    - ★ Begin preparations for hosting our second sci-fi convention
  - February:
    - ★ Open the General Products store
  - Spring:
    - ★ Form the DAICON 4 planning committee; rent an office
  - May:
    - ★ Help out with Ideon festival
    - ★ Begin work on DAICON FILM productions (*Aikoku Sentai Dainippon*, *Kaettekita Ultraman* and *Kaiketsu Notenki*)
    - ★ Start writing “Tame ni naru General Products Koza” column for *Animec* magazine (Rapport)
    - ★ Hiroyuki Yamaga participates in *Macross* production in Tokyo
  - July:
    - ★ *Ultraman* production halted
  - August:
    - ★ *Kaiketsu Notenki* and *Aikoku Sentai Dainippon* are completed and shown at the 21st annual Japan Sci-Fi Convention (Tokon 8)
- 1983

- January:
  - ★ Hideaki Anno moves to Tokyo
- March:
  - ★ DAICON FILM completes production on *Kaettekita Ultraman*
- April:
  - ★ Takeshi Sawamura joins Japan Television Workshop
  - ★ Planning for DAICON 4 begins in earnest
  - ★ Begin production on opening animation for DAICON 4
  - ★ Yoshiyuki Sadamoto and Mahiro Maeda help with opening animation
- August:
  - ★ Hold 22nd annual Japan Sci-Fi Convention (DAICON 4) at the Osaka Koseinenkin Hall
- September:
  - ★ General Products store changes location
- Fall:
  - ★ Begin project planning for what will become *Oritsu Uchugun*
  - ★ Nationwide screenings of DAICON FILM productions held
  - ★ Takeshi Sawamura quits Japan Television Workshop and starts working for General Products
  - ★ Hideaki Anno helps on production of *Nausicaa* and the *Macross* theatrical release
- 1984
  - January:
    - ★ *Kaiketsu Notenki 2 - Minatomachi Junjo-hen* complete
  - April:
    - ★ Open SID coffee bar inside the General Products store

- June:
  - ★ DAICON FILM production *Hayauchi Ken no Daiboken* complete
- July:
  - ★ Begin filming *Yamata no Orochi no Gyakushu*
- December:
  - ★ Host Wonder Festival pre-event at the Osaka store
  - ★ General Products cuts loose from Okada Embroidering and incorporates; GAINAX, Inc. is founded
  - ★ A portion of the General Products staff breaks off
- 1985
  - January:
    - ★ A design studio is set up at Takadanobaba in Tokyo and production begins on the *Oritsu Uchugun* pilot
    - ★ Shinji Higuchi shows up at the *Orochi* studio
    - ★ The first Wonder Festival is held at the Tokyo Trade Center
  - May:
    - ★ The new studio is formally established at Takadanobaba
    - ★ Begin designing *Oritsu Uchugun*
  - August:
    - ★ Second Wonder Festival is held; afterward, it's decided to hold a Wonder Festival every summer
    - ★ Shinji Higuchi and Showji Murahama join GAINAX
  - December:
    - ★ *Yamata no Orochi no Gyakushu* is completed and released

- 1986
  - January:
    - ★ The studio is moved to Kichijoji-Higashi in Tokyo, where production begins on *Oritsu Uchugun*
  - August:
    - ★ Appointed chairman of the Japan Sci-Fi Fan Group Association Committee
- 1987
  - March:
    - ★ *Oritsu Uchugun* shows in Toho Foreign Film Branch theaters
    - ★ Takeshi Sawamura leaves General Products
    - ★ GAINAX studio location is moved to Kichijoji-Minami
  - June:
    - ★ General Products moves company headquarters to Tokyo and merges with GAINAX
    - ★ Junichi Osako is made president of the Osaka store
  - August:
    - ★ Establish candidacy for the following year's convention
  - September:
    - ★ Produce *Marionette*, a promotional video for the musician BOÏWY
  - October:
    - ★ Produce *Hyper Robot Compo*, a commercial film for Victor Television
    - ★ Hiroki Sato joins General Products
    - ★ The corporate office is moved back to Kichijoji-Higashi
    - ★ The General Products Tokyo store opens for business
    - ★ Planning begins on *Top o Nerae!*

- 1988
  - August:
    - ★ The 27th annual Japan Sci-Fi Convention (MiG-Con) is held at the Minakami Hot Springs in Gunma, Japan
  - October:
    - ★ The first volume of *Top o Nerae!* goes on sale
  - December:
    - ★ Produce *Dragon Quest Fantasia Video*, an original live-action special effects film for video
- 1989
  - January:
    - ★ Produce *Tomoyasu Hotei Guitarhythm* animation
  - March:
    - ★ Produce *Fence of Defence Data No. 6* promotional video
  - July:
    - ★ *Top o Nerae!* complete
  - August:
    - ★ PC game *Denno Gakuen Scenario 1* goes on sale
    - ★ Hiroaki Inoue leaves GAINAX
  - October:
    - ★ *Komatsu Sakyo Anime Gekijo* begins airing on Mainichi Broadcast
    - ★ The premiere issue of *Cyber Comics* comes out
- 1990

- January:
  - ★ Takeshi Sawamura returns as the new president of GAINAX
- April:
  - ★ *Fushigi no Umi no Nadia* begins airing on NHK
- May:
  - ★ Hold PC game convention
- August:
  - ★ PC game *Silent Mobius* goes on sale
- November:
  - ★ Marry Hiroe Suga
- The Gulf War happened in 1991
- 1991
  - March:
    - ★ *Fushigi no Umi no Nadia* finishes airing
  - May:
    - ★ PC game *Princess Maker* goes on sale
    - ★ Original video release of 1982's *Otaku no Video* goes on sale
  - July:
    - ★ Anime-Con is held in San Jose, California
- 1992
  - January:
    - ★ General Products hosts its last Wonder Festival; rights to the convention are transferred to Kaiyodo
  - February:
    - ★ General Products closes up shop

- March:
  - ★ PC game *Fushigi no Umi no Nadia* goes on sale
  - ★ Planning begins on *Aoki Uru*
  - ★ Toshio Okada leaves GAINAX
  - ★ Hiroyuki Yamaga is appointed president of GAINAX
- December:
  - ★ GAINAX-NET online service opens up
- 1992
  - June:
    - ★ PC game *Princess Maker 2* goes on sale
  - July:
    - ★ Production on *Aoki Uru* stalls out
    - ★ Many GAINAX employees leave
    - ★ Planning begins on *Evangelion*
- 1994
  - March:
    - ★ Host GAiNA Matsuri (GAINAX Festival) at the Minakami Hot Springs in Gunma, Japan
  - July:
    - ★ Move corporate office from Kichijoji-Higashi to a location close to Mitaka Station, Tokyo
  - September:
    - ★ Takami Akai breaks from GAINAX and establishes the independent AKAI game development house (later to become Nine Lives)
  - December:

- ★ CD-ROM art collection *Sadamoto Yoshiyuki* goes on sale
- ★ Yoshiyuki Sadamoto's *Shinseiki Evangelion* ("Neon Genesis Evangelion") manga begins running in Kadokawa Shoten's *Shonen Ace* comics magazine
- The Kobe Earthquake happened in January 1995
- The Aum Shinrikyo cult attacked Tokyo subways with sarin gas in March 1995
- 1995
  - July:
    - ★ GAINAX Forum opens on Niftyserve online service
    - ★ The second GAINA Matsuri is held at Itako in Ibaraki
    - ★ Japan Internet homepage goes up
  - October:
    - ★ *Shinseiki Evangelion* begins airing on TV Tokyo
- 1997
  - March:
    - ★ *Shinseiki Evangelion Gekijoban - Shito Shinsei* film opens
  - July:
    - ★ *Shinseiki Evangelion Gekijoban - The End of Evangelion* film opens
    - ★ PC game *Shinseiki Evangelion - Kotetsu no Girlfriend* goes on sale
- 1998
  - January:
    - ★ Hideaki Anno-directed film *Love & Pop* opens
  - May:
    - ★ Undergo an audit from the Regional Taxation Bureau

- July:
  - ★ First daughter - Yukino - is born
- October:
  - ★ *Kareshi Kanojo no Jijo* (“His and Her Circumstances”) begins airing on TV Tokyo
- 1999
  - August:
    - ★ *Ai no Awa Awa Hour* begins airing on DirecTV
- 2000
  - April:
    - ★ First volume of original anime *FLCL* goes on sale
  - December:
    - ★ Hideaki Anno-directed *Shikijitsu* begins showing at the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography
- 2001
  - August:
    - ★ 40th annual Japan Sci-Fi Convention (SF2001) is held at the Makuhari Messe in Chiba, Japan

Osaka - The whole future was sci-fi

### The end of my youth

When I was a kid, I don't think I was quite the geek I am now.

As far back as I can remember, television was always a part of home life. The same goes for comic magazines like *Shonen Magazine* and *Shonen Sunday*, which made their debut in this world long before I did. Since much of the anime and manga of my formative years leaned toward sci-fi themes and settings, that genre became (and remains) my favorite. I was drawn in by the strange and powerful lure of futuristic stories - the future seemed so *sublime*, and filled me with longing. For a kid in those

days, this kind of thinking was par the course. But there were plenty of fun things to do besides watching TV and reading comics, and I certainly didn't spend my entire childhood wrapped up in anime and manga.

In fact, there was really only one difference between other kids of that era and myself - I liked reading novels. I've already forgotten what sparked that interest, but it was in the fourth grade or so when I became an avid reader. While other kids were running around the schoolyard, I was running back and forth to the library. (I don't think it was a time when you *bought* the books you liked - if you wanted to read one, you just went to the library.) I was hooked on sci-fi and mystery. Of course, the stories I read were adapted for gradeschoolers, and I simply devoured them. To name a few, there were titles like *Lupin* and *Sherlock Holmes*, and authors like Arthur C. Clarke<sup>1</sup> and Robert A. Heinlein<sup>2</sup> - sci-fi novelists from the mid-'60s, whose works were considered required reading. That's not to say I didn't read other works. I explored almost every aisle of the library... with the result that I became a library assistant by the time I was in the fifth grade, simply because I could stay there for hours on end. All I ever wanted was just a little more time to read. Looking back on it now, my only regret is that I never sought out anyone to share in my little world.

My first encounter with adult sci-fi books, the kind published by Sogensha or Hayakawa Shobo<sup>3</sup>, was during the sixth grade. My initial attempt to finish a full-length novel was by reading *Gray Lensman*, but to tell you the truth, I failed miserably. I only made it halfway through before I got completely lost and tossed it out. My reasoning was quite simple: How can you be interested in a book you can't even understand? And why continue to read a book if you derive absolutely no enjoyment from it? As for the book itself, sci-fi fans are likely to know that *Lensman*<sup>4</sup> is an entire *series* of novels. When a kid in the sixth grade picks up a book in the middle of the series, it's no wonder he can't get through it.

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<sup>1</sup> British novelist who has written a number of sci-fi stories set in the near future, supported by actual scientific theory. Two of his best-known works are *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *Childhood's End*. He currently resides in Sri Lanka.

<sup>2</sup> An American sci-fi novelist. His stories are extremely entertaining and often contain powerful messages concerning human nature. Among his more famous works are *Starship Troopers*, *Time Enough for Love* and *The Door into Summer*.

<sup>3</sup> The majority of sci-fi books put out in Japan in the 1960s and 1970s came from two publishing companies: Sogensha and Hayakawa Shobo. Hayakawa Shobo in particular seemed to be single-handedly supporting the world of Japanese sci-fi with its *SF Magazine* and related publications, prompting Japanese writers to comment that the very genre would fall apart if anything happened to Hayakawa Shobo.

<sup>4</sup> A sci-fi series by E.E. "Doc" Smith, widely considered to be the origin of the "space patrol" and "space opera" genres. The massive scale of the *Lensman* series has earned it many fans. All seven volumes have been published in Japanese, and in 1984 the story was adapted into both an animated film and a TV anime series. Incidentally, *Gray Lensman* is from the middle of the series.

But a little thing like that wasn't enough to stop me from reading books. My next encounter was with Van Vogt's *The Voyage of the Space Beagle*<sup>5</sup>. The main character is a general scientist who is described as both calm and calculating, a leader of men whose path stays true to his goal. I thought he was just the coolest, and the book was so captivating that it shaped my idea of what a scientist is and should be<sup>6</sup>. It's also what spurred my ever-deepening interest in sci-fi. To this day, I still pull *The Voyage of the Space Beagle* off my shelf at least once every two or three years. It never gets old, no matter how many times I read it.

Thinking back, I seem to recall that every time I tried tackling fiction, I'd tire of it almost immediately. I just didn't read that particular type of literature. No, the only stories that really got me excited were sci-fi, mysteries and adventures. I did read plenty of school books, though, and I *still* wonder why so many of those children's stories were so dreary, almost depressing. Maybe it was the shadow of violence that darkened our time. It was, after all, the middle of the Vietnam War. Perhaps for us Japanese, the specter of battle still lingered in our memories, vivid and real. At the very least, it wasn't some far-off drama like you see on TV today. Come to think of it, I was born in 1957, a mere 12 years after the end of the war in the Pacific.

Around the time I was in sixth grade, Apollo 11<sup>7</sup> landed on the moon. What's more, it was broadcast live. I was blown away. All I could think was, *Right now, right this second, humans are standing on the moon!* I was glued to the television, and praises for science flooded my mind. But what really sealed my faith in that most essential field of study was the Osaka World Exposition in 1970<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> A sci-fi adventure novel by A.E. Van Vogt that recounts the adventures of the science exploration vessel, the *Beagle*, and a group of scientists onboard. This book employs tremendous imaginative skill in the way it details the various encounters the crew has with alien life forms.

<sup>6</sup> The main character in *The Voyage of the Space Beagle* is a Nexialist, a so-called "general scientist" who studies science as a whole without focusing on any one field. In the context of this science-heavy novel he qualifies as a superhero. I went into a science major hoping to become a Nexialist myself.

<sup>7</sup> On July 20, 1969, the crew of Apollo 11 touched down on the moon, bringing mankind into direct contact with another planetary body for the first time in history. The live broadcast of the landing was a sensation in and of itself. There was also quite a stir at the 1970 World Exhibition in Osaka, when the United States Pavilion displayed moon rocks that were brought back with the spaceship.

<sup>8</sup> The 1970 World Exhibition was held in the Kita-Senri area of Osaka. The hosting of the Osaka World Expo was linked to Japan's unprecedented growth following the end of WWII, and was seen as a tremendous accomplishment by Japan as a whole. The theme for the fair was "Progress and Harmony for Mankind", a slogan developed in part by Japanese sci-fi author Sakyo Komatsu, who worked on the Exposition's theme committee. A mood of exhilaration and hope for the future swept across Japan, bringing countless crowds to the Exposition. Schoolchildren competed among themselves to see who could go to the fair the most times! In fact, the number of attendees was purportedly equivalent to half the population of Japan at the time.

I think people of my generation will understand when I say that the Osaka World Expo was a symbol of our future, a glimpse of what science would bring about. As anticipated, the U.S. building had moon rocks on display, and of course I went to see them. I stood in line for *two hours* to look at some rocks. But they weren't just any old rocks - they had been brought back from the moon. They carried the promise of a bright and powerful future; they seemed to glow with the confidence of that tomorrow.

After these early experiences, I began to nurture a new belief somewhere deep inside me, a belief that the future was sci-fi, and sci-fi was science.

Again, I don't think there was anything especially unusual about this feeling. Many children of that time - especially boys - probably felt exactly the same way.

### My fateful university acceptance

The deciding factor in my chosen school path was my unwavering faith in science. Kinki University<sup>9</sup> was the scene of my college career, and once there, I chose to study nuclear engineering. The reason was simple: The world was changing, and the future would revolve around electricity. Be it computers or what have you, my vision of the world to be was that electricity would power *everything*. I was sure of it. And electricity for the future meant nuclear energy - or so my 18-year-old brain conceived.

At that point, I hadn't done much research on the subject, but after cracking the books I discovered that nuclear energy was absurd. Harnessing the power of the atom for energy was simply asking too much of humanity. I started to think our future would be better served by instituting an alternate source of electrical power. It would be pretty hard to call Kinki University a first-rate school. My feeling at the time was that it was, at most, second-rate. For one thing, there were hordes of students in attendance, making the campus a virtual wilderness of 4- and 5-story dormitories. That's the kind of school it was. At a time when Nihon University - the mother of all mammoth universities in Japan - boasted an enrollment of 70,000 or so, Kinki University had at least 50,000 students of its own. There was even a certain rumor, told in hushed and serious tones, that if all the students were to actually attend class, the school would run out of desks. No matter how you sliced

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<sup>9</sup> A private university located in the city of Osaka. It prides itself on having one of the largest student populations of any university in Japan. The University is so large, there's a saying about it: "If you throw a stone in southern Japan, you'll hit a Kinki University student." Famous graduates include the sumo wrestler Asashio and the actor Hidekazu Akai. The road leading from the nearest train station to the university gates is popularly known as the *Oyafuko Dori*, ("the street where kids forget all about their parents")! Literally packed with mahjong parlors, coffee shops, and video-game arcades, the street is remarkably successful at preventing students from reaching their classes.

it, it was an enormous school, which is perhaps why in my freshman year I wasn't able to locate the only club that I really wanted to join - the sci-fi club<sup>10</sup>.

During the course of reading those sci-fi books throughout junior high and high school, I stumbled across a publication called *SF Magazine*<sup>11</sup>, which alerted me to the existence of these "sci-fi clubs". When I say "stumbled across", that's no exaggeration. I lived in the country, so it was only once in a blue moon that the local bookstores would even carry anything like *SF Magazine*. It goes without saying that you wouldn't find it in the school library, either.

Anyway, I had a vague notion that once I got into college, I would join the sci-fi club. Maybe it was because I'd never had any close friends to share my love of sci-fi with. But I wasn't able to make it happen - the sci-fi club at Kinki University wasn't an official school club<sup>12</sup>. Their existence wasn't even acknowledged by the university, and as a result they were shunned, without even a clubroom on campus. Hardly surprising, since they weren't even associated with the school. Their status being what it was, I failed to notice the powers they'd put up at the start of the school year, and - at the risk of stating the obvious - was consequently unable to join.

I wanted friends to discuss sci-fi with, but it wasn't to the point where if I couldn't find any I'd think, *I can't take it! I want to die!* or anything. So I left it at that and just stopped looking. I had other pleasures in life besides reading. For example, in high school I played bass guitar in a neighborhood band. I was also positively addicted to skiing, and would hit the slopes the minute the season opened. So my freshman year wasn't exactly miserable. I had fun outside of my obsession with all things sci-fi.

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<sup>10</sup> Most sci-fi clubs are connected to universities, and some of them publish their own fanzines and private translations of foreign sci-fi novels. However, most of these clubs are made up of slackers like me who just want someone else to chat with about hardcore sci-fi topics. Around the mid-1980s, many of these clubs began to merge with manga, anime, gaming and *tokusatsu* ("special-effects features") clubs. Incidentally, at karaoke outings, today's club members seem to sing nothing but songs from 1970s anime programs... despite the fact that most of them weren't even born when those shows came out!

<sup>11</sup> A Japanese sci-fi magazine published by Hayakawa Shobo since 1959. In the early 90s, there were as many as four sci-fi related magazines in print, but only *SF Magazine* has continued its uninterrupted publication of periodicals to date. Some people measure the devotion of sci-fi fans by whether or nor they read this magazine.

<sup>12</sup> An official school club has special benefits, like a reserved room in the student activities building, a guaranteed booth (in a good location) at the school festival, and even a small budget for club activities. In contrast, non-official clubs like the sci-fi club don't really help to improve the school's image, so it's difficult for them to obtain endorsement.

## Encounter with the sci-fi club

It was at the beginning of my sophomore year that I started seeing recruitment posters for school clubs, and more importantly, the sci-fi club. At least! I had finally found a group of friends to discuss sci-fi<sup>13</sup> with.

I had assumed that I was extremely well-read, but after joining the club, I was surprised to discover that my upperclassmen had read a lot more than me. The amount of reading they did was frightening. And once I began talking to them, I discovered the incredible amount of information they actually knew. During the course of a single conversation they'd jump from one topic to another, go back to where they'd started, then take off in a different direction altogether. It was nothing more than idle chit-chat, but it was incredibly entertaining and I couldn't get enough of it. I was *always* hanging around the sci-fi club. Of course we weren't officially recognized as a club by the school, so we didn't even have a room. We would hop from cafe to cafe, but inevitably, we'd end up at the Sunset Inn<sup>14</sup>, a coffee shop near the school's entrance. Just to give you an idea of how often we went there, even now, 20 years later, the Sunset Inn is still the default meeting place for the sci-fi club. A while back, I met up with some of the old crew from the Sunset Inn. When I learned that someone's daughter - still in grade school during our college years - was now out of college, it really drove home how much time had passed. And yes, of course I had to tell her, "Say, didn't you and I take a bath together way back when?" Anyway, it seems that in those days every sci-fi club or group throughout Japan had an old familiar meeting spot like ours. It just went with the territory. Once my place in the sci-fi club was established, college life was just plain fun. It had to be, with friends as crazy as mine!

Take, for example, Mizuno<sup>15</sup>. He's a cop now, but he used to be one of my underclassmen. This guy read his fair share of sci-fi novels, but what he really loved were movies, and he saw a ton of them. For some reason, he was obsessed with that zombie flick, *Night of the Living Dead*, which was playing in theaters at the time.

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<sup>13</sup> This doesn't necessarily refer to reviewing sci-fi novels or anything brainy like that. I just found it amusing to get all fired up talking with people who shared my interest in subjects that most people avoided like the plague. It was all geek-speak for the most part.

<sup>14</sup> A coffee shop located right by Kinki University's front gates. At some point, our sci-fi club just started to meet there (rumor has it they still do today, 20 years later). It was a hangout for the manga club, too. The shop seemed to be doing pretty well, seeing as how their business expanded several times while I was in school and even more after I left. About three years ago, the owner opened a lodge in Hakuba.

<sup>15</sup> **Kiyoshi Mizuno (1958-)** He started out one year behind me at the Kinki Sci-Fi Club. However, the story soon changed when he learned I would have to repeat a year. From that point on, he treated me entirely as an equal. Actually, he seems to be tougher on me than anyone else I know. He's a hardcore fan of special effects (*\_tokusatsu\_*) and horror films, but is currently working as a police officer.

It was all he'd ever talk about, so we gave him the rather appropriate nickname of "Zombie".

Another of my underclassmen was Miwa<sup>16</sup>. Besides sci-fi, he liked *rakugo*, or Japanese comic storytelling. The second you gave him a topic, he'd burst into some funny story. Miwa later spent some time as a director for General Products.

And then there was Yasushi Okamoto<sup>17</sup>. He was an upperclassman of mine (in fact, he was already an alumnus by then), and we always called him "Mr. Yasushi" and stuff like that. He was already famous in fan circles for emceeing and speaking at sci-fi conventions. This may surprise you, but I'm no good at public speaking - my face used to always turn beet red. Yasushi was a master, though, and it was he who taught me how to speak in front of crowds.

Aside from them, there was Ikeda<sup>18</sup>, an older guy in the same year as me who'd recently returned to Japan from Argentina, and an underclassman named Toyama<sup>19</sup>, who works at GAINAX today. Since he first joined the sci-fi club more than twenty years ago, Toyama has had the nickname of "Chestnut head", for no other reason than we all thought his face looked just like a steamed bun with chestnut filling.

All of the guys in our group were one step shy of certifiable. but from what I hear, our eccentricities mirrored those of almost every sci-fi, manga or mystery club at the time.

I think our involvement with the club was more about discussing and exploring sci-fi topics than actually participating in bigger fan-type activities that drive it. No, scratch that. The main thing was just hanging out with friends and having stupid conversations. That's really all it was.

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<sup>16</sup> **Motohiro Miwa (1960-)** My junior during the sci-fi club years at Kinki University. He was the first person I met who was active in the sci-fi fan community outside of university, and I met a number of people through him. Miwa later joined General Products as designer/editor. He loves making lame puns, which earned him the nickname "The King of Humor". He's the master when it comes to finding the weirdest toys you've ever seen. He mysteriously disappeared in 1988.

<sup>17</sup> **Yasushi Okamoto (1952-)** A former member of the Kinki University sci-fi club. He hosted various events during his time with the club, including the Japan Sci-Fi Convention. Okamoto was very well known in his time, and was involved in a wide range of sci-fi fan activities before Takeda and the others stepped onto the scene. He is often remembered for his rapid-fire quips in Osaka-accented Japanese. Even today, many of the old-school sci-fi fans often remark, "If Okamoto was here right now, I'd bet he'd say..." This man was my teacher in the art of storytelling.

<sup>18</sup> **Hideki Ikeda (1953-)** My senior in the sci-fi club. They say he spent three years in Argentina because of his father's business. Ikeda was the type of person who couldn't rest until the matter at hand was done and done well. The logical manner in which he always presented his opinions made a lasting impression on me.

<sup>19</sup> **Shohei Toyama (1960-)** My junior in the sci-fi club. His distinctive appearance is to blame for his nickname - "chestnut head", a moniker that has stuck to this day, more than 20 years later. he still works for GAINAX, where apparently only a few people know his real name. The personality and appearance of Charichanmi from the anime *Oritsu Uchugun* ("Wings of Honneamise") were actually adopted from this man.

One of the members who joined at the same time as me was a guy named Goto<sup>20</sup>. He was one year older than me, and, boy, was he different. He was a member of the Seigun Society<sup>21</sup>, a creative group based in Kyoto. He'd written his own novels, and was the first sci-fi fan I'd met who actually wanted to be a professional writer. Or rather, I should say he was the first person I'd met in my entire life who openly shared his vision with other people. It was quite a shock. Goto knew a *lot* of people, and not just from the Seigun Society. He had connections to sci-fi fandom in places outside of Osaka, and he hobnobbed with the so-called "BNFs" (Big Name Fans)<sup>22</sup>, who were well-known in the sci-fi community.

One day, Goto came to me with the idea of forming a communication network between the various university sci-fi clubs throughout Kansai (the region around Osaka, Kobe, Kyoto and Nara). He asked me to help him set it up, and from that point on, my life changed drastically. I'd always had a tendency to choose the sci-fi club over classes, but that's when I started going to school less and less. I guess you could say that one moment was the first step toward my future.

## Confederation of Kansai Student Sci-Fi Clubs

Back then, the world was in the middle of a sci-fi craze. Almost every university in Japan had sci-fi clubs, ranging from very small to extremely large.

I decided to help Goto, for the simple reason that I thought it sounded interesting. I ran around to university sci-fi clubs far and wide, making contact, having meetings, calling for the establishment of a communications organization, and just helping out where I could. The Confederation of Kansai Student Sci-Fi Clubs<sup>23</sup> (or "the

<sup>20</sup> **Toshio Goto (1956-)** My senior in the sci-fi club. Because he was forced to repeat a year, Goto and I were actually in the same grade at the time of our initial meeting. He writes novels under the pen name of Shunichi Goto (which may actually be his real name - I'm not so sure now). Goto was the first person I met who had the determination to make it in his chosen field.

<sup>21</sup> A longstanding amateur writers' group that used to operate in Kyoto (they're currently based in Osaka). The Society was founded in 1971 and many of its members join as a first step toward a professional writing career. Sci-fi authors Hiroe Suga and Ryo Mizuno were once members.

<sup>22</sup> The term "BNF" refers to non-professionals who became well known through the active roles they once played in the fan community. The title was meant to show respect, but is often used as a term of ridicule instead. Within fandom, BNFs were well known as writers and critics, even though they tended not to be professionally published. They held a great degree of influence with their fellow fans, which set them somewhat apart from the Comiket (Comic Market) writers of today.

<sup>23</sup> An organization that linked all the university sci-fi clubs in the Osaka area. Every month they met and published a newsletter to keep people up-to-date on current events in the sci-fi scene. At its height (around the time of DAICON 4), there were nine participating schools: Osaka University, Osaka Prefecture University, Osaka City University, Kinki University, Otemon University, Ryukoku University, the Osaka University of Foreign Studies, the Osaka Electro-Communication University, and the Osaka University of Arts. In the 1980s, everyone seemed interested in inter-club activities and the Confederation even supplied volunteer staff for events like the Japan Sci-Fi Convention and

Confederation” for short) we established would later become the administrative body for the 4th annual Sci-Fi Show, the first sci-fi event we would host.

It was as if, even then, the student movements of the 1960s retained a glimmer of their former impact - remnants of resistance, like dying embers. I could feel something of it as I traveled around in an attempt to drum up interest in the Confederation. In other words, they didn’t seem to appreciate people from other schools suddenly showing up and telling them this and that. The impression I got was that their clubs were their business - their dominion. I suppose it was to be expected, but since I’d never been a part of any student movements, even in passing, I was initially rather lost as to my next move. They started throwing around English words like “organizer” and “propaganda”, words I’d never even heard before. But on the other hand, it didn’t seem that the ones spouting those phrases had much of a clue what they were saying, either. It wasn’t long before I stopped interacting with those types.

At first, there were four or five schools (including Kinki University) participating in the Confederation. I was thoroughly engrossed in it all, and working so tirelessly that I began hearing calls for me to run the “Secretariat”<sup>24</sup>. And that’s how I ended up becoming the first secretary-general.

I don’t have any idea what Goto’s intentions were, but at this stage the Confederation didn’t have any aspirations of hosting events or anything like that. It was really just a contact committee for the sci-fi clubs in each participating university. We put out a newsletter a few times a year, and that was the extent of it.

To be honest, I didn’t really care what we were doing it for. It didn’t matter. The most important thing was that it was fun. And because it was all I did, I started skipping school more and more. But I never missed a chance to go to the cafes with friends from the club.

A typical day for me involved waking up and heading down to the usual cafe, where I would sip coffee and read some sci-fi. Once my friends began to arrive, we’d get all fired up by some kind of ridiculous conversation. When the sun went down, we would move on to one of the local pubs and get even *more* fired up. That’s how it went every day, and it was fun. As for school, it’s no wonder that I had to repeat my sophomore year. In the midst of all this, I would be attending my first sci-fi event. I forget exactly how this came about, but Miwa, my underclassman and fellow club member, had been active as a sci-fi fan since high school, and he regularly attended

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DAICON FILM productions. However, the Confederation seemed to lose moment after DAICON 4 and quietly dissolved a few years later.

<sup>24</sup> Because groups like the Confederation don’t have an established headquarters, someone takes the job of “secretariat”, and serves as a contact for those outside the group. Basically, the secretary-general functions as a coordinator between groups.

conventions<sup>25</sup>. After asking around, I found that a lot of people in the club and the Confederation were regulars at those cons, too.

To all those who know about sci-fi conventions, I apologize for the unnecessary explanation. But for those who *don't* know, they're fan-sponsored events held annually. There isn't a fixed executive committee or board. Whatever group or organization wants to host one can raise its hands and be counted among the candidates, and the format is different every year. For that reason, the location for the convention can be anywhere within the country, and the theme and presentation - even the date - change each time as well. At a metropolitan-style convention, in areas like Tokyo or Osaka, the meeting hall will be separate from the lodging. There's no real need to reserve lodgings for this kind of gathering. And then there's the resort-style convention, where you may not be able to secure an adequately sized hall, or it may be held in a rural area where reserved lodging is an absolute necessity. In those cases, an entire lodge is rented out for everyone, and the convention is held right there. Those can be weekend events, and the late nights always turn into massive drinking parties. You need stamina for those cons. But that's why many people say that these are the only true sci-fi conventions.

The 2001 event marked the 40th annual Japan Sci-Fi Convention. Many of the people who hosted the earlier Conventions are now big-name authors in their own right. People like Sakyō Komatsu<sup>26</sup>, Yasutaka Tsutsui<sup>27</sup> and Masahiro Noda<sup>28</sup> are

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<sup>25</sup> This refers to the Japan Sci-Fi Conventions, gatherings of sci-fi fans in the tradition of Worldcon, America's international sci-fi convention. There have been over 40 Sci-Fi Conventions, the first of which was held in Tokyo in 1962. The annual event is generally held during summer break, and is attended by amateur groups from all over Japan. Each year, the convention takes a different form. Sometimes it's like a retreat at a hot springs, and other years it's a formal convention with lectures and stage performances. Many professional writers, manga artists, translators, and publishers attend, and it's not uncommon to see some people's involvement with the Convention actually jump-start their careers. Starting in the early 80s, "con reports" by such well-known individuals as manga artist Hideo Azuma served to draw attention to the Conventions. That, coupled with the sci-fi boom of the 1980s, made it a time of focused media interest in the event. The Japan Sci-Fi Fan Group Association Committee governs the organization of each Japan Sci-Fi Convention, even though the event host changes every year.

<sup>26</sup> **Sakyō Komatsu (1931-)** Science fiction writer. He is a leading figure in Japanese sci-fi circles, thanks to works like *Nippon Chinbotsu* (aka "Japan Sinks" or "Tidal Wave") and *Sayonara Jupiter* ("Bye-Bye Jupiter"). He was one of the executive committee members at the 1970 Expo in Osaka, and has been active in a wide range of sci-fi activities. It was while appearing as a guest at a certain sci-fi show that Komatsu met me and some of the others who were active in sci-fi fan circles at the time. He's been quite fond of us ever since. Because Komatsu was working mainly in Osaka (my hometown), I would often solicit his advice when organizing events. He was made honorary head of the planning committee for the 40th Annual Japan Sci-Fi Convention, which I hosted in 2001.

<sup>27</sup> **Yasutaka Tsutsui (1934-)** Science fiction writer. Author of several works, including *Toki o Kakeru Shoujo*, *Kazoku Hakkei* and *Kyoko Sendan*. Tsutsui was made honorary head of the planning committee for the 1975 Japan Sci-Fi Festival ("SHINCON"), which brought in more than 1,000 participants. The level of entertainment incorporated into this event significantly affected

the great-grandfathers of the Convention. It has always been hosted by amateurs, but in the sci-fi world the distinction between fan and author is a relatively small one<sup>29</sup>, and many professional writers participate right alongside the fans. An event like that would be unthinkable in other genres.

I did have a vague notion of what these events were, but I'd never thought of actually participating in one, so it was somewhat surprising to learn that everyone else went to them. It was with the mindset of *Well, I'll just go once and see what it's like* that I filled out an application to a local con<sup>30</sup> in Kagawa.

### First contact with a sci-fi event

Unlike the Japan Sci-Fi Conventions, local cons are put on by fan groups from a particular region. ("Con" is of course an abbreviation of "convention".) Also unlike the annual Japan Sci-Fi Conventions, small-scale fan events are held at various locales throughout the country at any time of year.

The local con I went to was a two-day event held in Kagawa during Golden Week (late April to early May). It was called the Sci-Fi Festival 78, or "Seto-Con". My memories of the place itself are a little hazy, but I'm pretty sure it was some kind of municipal hotel close to Ritsurin Park. I think they rented the whole place out. There were lots of fans like us in attendance, but the recently-debuted Baku

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the direction of future Sci-Fi Festivals. In 1993, his *Danpitsu Sengen* was released in protest of the language control acts in effect at the time (lifted three years later, in 1996). Tsutsui has appeared in various movies, theatrical plays and TV dramas.

<sup>28</sup> **Masahiro (Koichiro) Noda (1933-)** Television producer, science fiction writer and translator. He is also the president of Japan Television Workshop Co, Ltd. Noda organized the very first Japan Sci-Fi Festival, and is quite well known in Japanese sci-fi circles. Self-proclaimed "Commander-in-Chief" of Uchugun (aka the Space Force Club - see below), he has translated several space operas, and he has penned his own original novels. He is also a widely-known collector of pulp magazines. Noda is a skilled TV producer, and the creator of the children's show "Hirake! Ponkikki", which owes its popularity to the main characters, Gachapin and Mukku. He remains a fervent supporter of the sci-fi fan scene, and his fan club "Uchugun" is still in operation. Noda lent me a helping hand in getting General Products off the ground. He has played the role of company auditor since GAINAX's founding.

<sup>29</sup> The Japan Sci-Fi Convention was originally established by budding sci-fi authors who hadn't yet made names for themselves. It was to provide an opportunity for them to publicize their work, and to allow fans to interact with each other. Many authors and editors owe their professional debuts to such fan-to-fan interactions at the Conventions. Since professional authors are themselves enthusiastic fans, many attend simply to meet like-minded people to socialize with. It's very common for the Conventions to feature recreational times when authors, editors, and fans all casually sit together, drinking sake and conversing. It's difficult to imagine something like that happening under any other circumstances.

<sup>30</sup> The Japan Sci-Fi Convention only happens once a year, so certain fan groups in each area often host their own regional conventions known as "local cons". Most of these small conventions are held at regular intervals and form a focal point for fan activities in the area.

Yumemakura<sup>31</sup> was also there for a panel discussion. Even some of the more popular BNFs showed up, promoting their self-published fanzines. And when I saw my friend Goto on stage mixing it up with the big boys, I was impressed all over again.

People not in the know might wonder what the heck kind of sci-fi event this was, and in true Shikoku fashion there were competitions to see who could eat their udon noodles the fastest, while in the main hall people were sitting around in circles having lively discussions.

When night came, they busted out the sake, and things *really* started to heat up. On one side of the room you'd have a group of girls whooping it up in geek-speak, while elsewhere another group would be holding a serious discussion on some sci-fi topic. There were even people who'd brought their used books and whatnot to sell. All in all, it made for a pretty unusual atmosphere. . . but I didn't mind one bit. In fact, I remember thinking, *Yeah, I could get used to this.*

It was at this event that I met someone who would come to have a tremendous influence on my life. His name was Toshio Okada<sup>32</sup>, and we would later go on to host a Japan Sci-Fi Convention together, and later cofound both General Products and GAINAX. I first heard of him from Onishi, a friend of mine through my Confederation connections. He was attending Osaka Electro-Communication University, and said that someone exactly like me had just entered his school. Onishi had shown up to this local con too, and that's where he introduced me to Okada.

In those days, we didn't have the word "otaku" yet, but my first impression of Okada was, *Here's a geek if I've ever seen one.* With his girly long hair and his freakishly excited way of speaking, all I could think was, *This guy is exactly like me?*

Well, I guess he was like me, in a way. But still, it wasn't exactly thrilling to be compared to a guy like that. I didn't talk to him much that first time we met, so it wasn't like we became fast friends or anything.

Anyway, I remember thinking to myself that if a local con is this fun, just imagine how much fun a Japan Sci-Fi Convention would be! I had already put in my application for the 17th annual Convention (commonly known as the Ashino-Con) to be

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<sup>31</sup> **Baku Yumemakura (1951-)** Science fiction writer. Yumemakura is famous for his "fantastical fiction", which includes both the *Kimeira* and *Maju-gari* series as well as *Onmyoji* (which became quite popular). He is also well-known for his love of outdoor activities, such as fishing and mountain climbing, and he has written several essays and travel reports. I have known him ever since his professional debut, and we remain on good terms. We tend to run into each other at conventions and the like.

<sup>32</sup> **Toshio Okada (1958-)** President of Otaking Co., Ltd. Since our first meeting in 1978, Okada has been the single most influential person in my life. He opened a sci-fi shop called General Products in 1982, and later helped found GAINAX, eventually becoming its president. After stepping down from the company, he was an adjunct instructor at Tokyo University (1992–1997), lecturing on the otaku culture of Japan. Okada currently works as a writer, and occasionally appears on TV as a guest commentator. He is the author of *Bokutachi no Sennou Shakai* and *Otaku-gaku Nyumon*.

held that summer, and it was with bated breath that I awaited the opportunity to attend,

## Kansai entertainers

And now, on to Ashino-con<sup>33</sup>.

The Japan Sci-Fi Convention sprouted from the idea of doing something like the World Sci-Fi Convention (aka Worldcon, which is held in the US) in Japan. The first one was held in Meguro, Tokyo. Conventions tend to have abbreviated nicknames, usually “something-Con” (this, too, was patterned after Worldcon). The 17th Japan Sci-Fi Convention was held at Lake Ashino, so its nickname was “Ashino-Con”. In case you’re curious, the one held in Meguro was called “Meg-Con”, and the one we would later host were nicknamed “DAICON”. That was because they were held in Osaka, and the character used for the “o” in Osaka can also be pronounced *dai*.

Brimming with expectation after the event in Kagawa, I headed for Lake Ashino by way of Tokyo. It was smack dab in the middle of summer break, and I had hatched an ambitious plan for a summer trip. I would go from my native Osaka to Shinagawa in Tokyo, where along with some friends from the club I would attend the Space Science Exposition<sup>34</sup>, hosted by the Japan Shipbuilding Industry Foundation (now known as the Nippon Foundation). From there I would go on to Lake Ashino.

I guess I was no different from any other sci-fi fan out there. The Japan World Exposition in Osaka had me hooked, and I couldn’t get enough space and rockets stuff. The Space Science Exposition promised displays of a moon lander, a moon rover and a Saturn rocket brought over from the US, so I figured seeing all that would get us even more fired up for the Sci-Fi Convention. That was the plan, but in retrospect, maybe it wasn’t such a bright idea after all.

Ashino-Con was a three-day event, but unlike local cons, it was attended by a large number of professional writers and editors. They may say there’s not much difference between a fan and a pro in the sci-fi world, but in Osaka there just aren’t that many chances to rub elbows with writers. Tokyo was different though, and I just couldn’t wait to get to the Convention, where I could hang around people I wouldn’t normally have the chance to interact with.

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<sup>33</sup> The 17th annual Japan Sci-Fi Convention, held in the summer of 1978. About 400 people attended the three-day, two-night lakeside camp held at Lake Ashino in Hakone. The Convention itself was organized as a loose collection of independent events put on by various attendees, and was purposely planned not to feel like a traditional convention.

<sup>34</sup> The Japan Shipbuilding Industry Foundation (now known as the Nippon Foundation) hosted the Space Science Exposition in Tokyo and Shinagawa in 1978. The theme was space exploration, and the event featured many fascinating exhibits that were simply irresistible to science buffs. Among those exhibits were a real Saturn V rocket, a mock-up of the space shuttle (which was still under development at the time), and a lunar exploration vehicle.

But as it turned out, it wasn't so much fun. There was a party the first night, and I was able to have a conversation with a writer. That was nice. But after that? My feeling at the time was, *Ok, this is odd. It wasn't supposed to be like this.* It was as if the convention had provided the vessel, but it was up to us to decide what to put in it. I for one was unsatisfied. I don't know whether it was because there wasn't enough sci-fi to be had, or because the hosts weren't paying enough attention to us, but I was let down nonetheless. I'd been looking forward to spending three days thoroughly immersed in sci-fi, but there wasn't enough of an effort to cater the Convention to first-timers. I felt like the only fun I had was just hanging out with my usual crowd - and we would invariably end up sticking together. Which is why, on the afternoon of the second day, my buddies from the club and I went riding on the ropeway. I mean, we'd come all this way to attend the Sci-Fi Convention, and we ended up just wandering through the city. If sightseeing had been our reason for coming here, then I guess it was fun enough. Above all, I think it's important to share experiences with people - to eat from the same pot, as it were.

Still, while we were there, we decided we shouldn't waste the opportunity to cosplay<sup>35</sup> [Short for "costume play", this simply refers to the act of putting on a costume and pretending to be a fictional character, usually from some well-known work. These days, cosplay is practically synonymous with the amateur comics convention, Comiket (Comic Market), but the whole cosplay tradition without a doubt began with the Sci-Fi Conventions - which usually included a costume "fashion show" somewhere on the schedule of events.] (although in those days we didn't call it "cosplay" - we just called it dressing up in costume). For one of the parties, we stole some toilet paper from the bathroom and mummified one of our buddies. The final touch was taking the cardboard roll in the middle, cutting it in half, and taping the halves over his eyes. Then we ran around saying he was a Tusken Raider from *Star Wars*. But there was one snotty little kid who kept tearing off chunks from our friend's costume, saying, "You guys are weird." We gave the little brat a good smack on the head for it, but then someone standing off to the side came rushing up and informed us we'd just whacked the child of none other than Aritsune Toyoda<sup>35</sup>. Oh well. I guess we've passed the statute of limitations by now. . .

Fun aside, here I was, fresh from Seto-Con and the Space Science Exposition, and I'd had a whale of a time at both events. Ashino-Con, on the other hand, just didn't have a thing going for it. I feel bad for the hosts when I say this, but that's really how much of a letdown it was.

Maybe they'd say the problem was that my expectations were too high, but it looked like we weren't the only ones feeling a little bored. After dinner one night, I got

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<sup>35</sup> **Aritsune Toyoda (1938-)** Science fiction writer. Known for the ancient historical motif that runs through his books. His works include *Pachakama ni Ochiru Hi* and *Mongol no Zanko*. Toyoda also writes for television and radio. Among his more notable scripts are *Tetsuwan Atom* ("Astro Boy") and *Eight Man* (aka "8 Man", or "Tobor the 8th Man").

together with Okada and some of the other guys from the sci-fi club. Since we didn't have any place to hang out, we plunked ourselves down in front of some vending machines and began one of our pointless conversations. Okada and I had met for the first time only a few weeks earlier, but we started going off about things like, "What if *Uchu Senkan Yamato* ("Star Blazers")<sup>36</sup> had been made in China?" We were just making things up as we went along, having a blast talking and acting out sci-fi movies like *Godzilla* and *Star Wars*.

As we continued to entertain ourselves, a small crowd started to gather. They listened to our silly conversation and really started getting into it. That only encouraged us, so we tried doing something else. They got into that as well. It was the first time I realized how enjoyable it was to perform for an audience. Or maybe I was just caught up in the moment. Either way, our little performance in front of the vending machines, which had started at around 10:00 at night, ended up going until sunrise the next morning - about eight hours, all told. By morning we were almost ready to drop from exhaustion. Neither of us even had the energy to get up and eat breakfast.

Before we knew it, there was talk of us being put on stage prior to the closing ceremonies. Apparently, someone on the convention staff had seen our routine, and thought it'd be even more fun if we performed in front of a bigger crowd. They'd already worked us into the schedule before presenting the idea to us. As it happened, the staffer in question turned out to be Mr. Komaki, who would later go on to be editor-in-chief of *Animec* magazine. Okada heard the proposal, and said (in our native Kansai dialect), "Hey, they gave us 30 minutes! We could do this!" "Forget it", I shot back. "I'm beat." "What're ya talkin' about?! We've already come this far - how could we not do it?" I was about to retort with "Whaddaya mean, come this far?!" but he was so insistent that I had to give in.

Of course, neither of us had been on stage before. But in a way, we had been rehearsing all night long, and we had the jokes and the timing down pat. I don't mean to toot my own horn, but again, our audience ate it up. "Sci-fi standup" they called it, and from the looks of things, no one had done anything quite like it

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<sup>36</sup> At Ashino-Con, Okada and I indulged in a live storytelling session that began with us playing off the question of what the space battleship *Yamato* (from the famous TV anime *Uchu Senkan Yamato*, AKA "Star Blazers") would have been like if it had been built and flown by the Chinese. These narratives retold the *Yamato* story with absurd gags, like the sound of a gong whenever the ship took off and a dragon symbol on the gun turret. There were many other variations, including an American version, a Russian version, and, of course, a Cowboy version. We also borrowed liberally from other stories, acting out famous scenes from various movies, excelling particularly at retellings like "The gun turret that melted under *Godzilla's* breath", "The *Orion* docking at a space station" (based on *2001: A Space Odyssey*), and of course, "The mole goes active and departs its container on the *Thunderbird II*." We branched out with such classics as "X-wing vs. Tie-fighter" and "Mogera heads through the Mysterian Dome", coming up with new ideas on the fly and getting better each time we performed.

before. We were dubbed the “Kansai Entertainers”, and we would end up alighting a number of different stages over the next several years. I guess we made quite an impact, because all of a sudden it seemed like everyone knew our names.

With Ashino-Con coming to a close in that fashion (among other things), I couldn’t help feeling my future would be all about sci-fi. Or maybe it’s just that I learned how great it felt to be accepted by an audience.

## Holding the 4th annual Sci-Fi Show

Our first stint as stage performers now over, those of us heading back to Osaka stood at the bus stop, talking smack about the convention while we waited.

“The end was fun. . .”

“Conventions have been kinda rotten lately.”

“We could probably do it better ourselves.”

“Yeah, we could.”

“Why don’t we hold our own convention?”

And so forth. As for me, I was so unbelievably tired I just sat there on the bench, my mind unplugged. You wouldn’t think it, but all that talk we were throwing around sparked something inside us - something that would lead to us hosting our own Sci-Fi Convention.

By the time we arrived in Osaka, though, even I was all fired up to host a Japan Sci-Fi Convention. The first thing we did was tell the guys in the Kinki University sci-fi club what we wanted to do. . . but the upperclassmen were unanimously against it. Basically, they didn’t think we could just jump in and host such a major event. They thought we should start slow, do a few smaller conventions, and then once we’d gotten the hang of things we could move on to the Japan Sci-Fi Convention. The thing is, we didn’t want to hold small events - we wanted to do the Convention. So we didn’t discuss it with them anymore. But because of that, we later found ourselves running into a real doozie of a problem. . .

The next thing we did was take the topic up with the Confederation. We ran into a few bumps along the way, but in the end we all agreed to do it, and our Kinki University club would take the central role. The “few bumps” I mentioned were, of course, dissenting opinions and calls for a more conservative approach from various members of the other sci-fi clubs. But this was no time to break ranks. We met with the dissenters and naysayers and somehow convinced them to get on board. A guy named Musa<sup>37</sup> from the club at Osaka Prefecture University told me that I should write up a plan. I’d never written anything like that before, but I gave it a

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<sup>37</sup> **Ikuo Musa (1958-)** A former member of the Osaka Prefecture University Sci-Fi Club. He was of great help to me with several sci-fi events, and put his excellent writing skills to use in the publishing of sci-fi related newsletters.

shot. I put my schooling to good use and drew up a report, like I would have done for an experiment. (I was a science student, after all.) And in those days there were no word processors, so I wrote the whole thing by hand.

When I showed Musa my grand scheme for hosting the Japan Sci-Fi Convention, he said he had no idea I could write something like that. I remember not knowing exactly what that was supposed to mean, but more than anything I felt relief that I'd now be able to count on his help. So that's how it went, and little by little the Confederation as a whole decided to go along with it.

We found a hall and posted an announcement in *Sci-Fi Magazine*. That's when the whopper of a problem reared its ugly head. We were contacted by an organization called the Fan Group Association<sup>38</sup>. Their full official title is the "Japan Sci-Fi Fan Group Association Committee". Founded in 1965 by Masahiro Noda and Takumi Shibano<sup>39</sup>, the organization is supported by the membership of sci-fi fan groups from all over Japan. I'd never even heard of it (though later, I would go on to chair this committee until 2001). Apparently there was a system in place whereby the Japan Sci-Fi Convention could only be hosted by organizations pre-approved by the Fan Group Association, but I had no way of knowing that.

Our biggest problem was now with the upperclassmen, who we'd snubbed during the planning stages. We newbies lacked the lateral ties to fans that they had, nor were we a part of their information networks. Because of this, we were soon informed by Mr. Kadokura<sup>40</sup>, then chairman of the association Committee, that next year's Japan Sci-Fi Convention was being held in Nagoya. We were stunned.

When we got the full story, it was clear that we were in the wrong. We accompanied Mr. Kadokura to Nagoya to speak with the host for the next year's convention, and

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<sup>38</sup> The official name was "The Japan Sci-Fi Fan Group Association Committee". It is a coalition created to facilitate interaction among fan groups all over Japan. It was established in 1965 at the urging of the famous Japanese sci-fi author, Takumi Shibano, among others. The Committee convenes once a year to decide who will host the Japan Sci-Fi Convention and to determine the winner of the Seiun Award - Japan's highest honor for science fiction writers. A chairman and an office manager are also appointed to coordinate the exchange of information among members.

<sup>39</sup> **Takumi Shibano (1926-)** A grandfather figure in Japan's sci-fi scene. He published the very first Japanese sci-fi fanzine, *Uchujin*, which would later be the starting point for many of Japan's science fiction writers. In 1962, Shibano both chaired and organized the first Japan Sci-Fi Convention. He then went on to found the Japan Sci-Fi Fan Group Association Committee in 1965. The Committee would serve as a platform on which amateurs could organize sci-fi events and activities throughout Japan. He still participates in almost every Japan Sci-Fi Convention as well as the World Sci-Fi Convention (or Worldcon). Shibano is dedicated to promoting international exchange in the realm of sci-fi fandom. He has also translated many books under the pen name of Rei Kozumi.

<sup>40</sup> **Junichi Kadokura (1947-)** A sci-fi fan who was chairman of the Japan Sci-Fi Fan Group Association Committee during our preparations to host our first Sci-Fi Convention. He works for a computer company full-time, and is also a well-known music collector. Kadokura has a great knowledge of music and audio in general, and has consequently done audio/visual work for many sci-fi events.

immediately withdrew without any further argument. The problem was, we already had the hall reserved, so we were at a loss for what to do next. But in good time, Space Force Club<sup>41</sup> representative Hiroaki Inoue<sup>42</sup> had a brilliant idea. According to him, there was an event called the Sci-Fi Show<sup>43</sup> that had originally been sponsored by Masahiro Noda. It had been held three times already, so sci-fi fans were well aware of it.

“Why don’t you guys hold your convention under that name instead?” he suggested.

## My first event

I first met Mr. Inoue at a regular meeting for the Osaka chapter of the Space Force Club. I wasn’t in the club myself, but I’d heard that a top representative was coming from Tokyo to attend the meeting - and since Okada was a member, I tagged along in order to introduce myself to Inoue. After that, I went all the way to Tokyo to meet with Noda and obtain his permission to host the event. Once that was taken care of, I borrowed the big “4th Annual Sci-Fi Show” sign and set about getting preparations underway. As it turns out, Inoue would later join me as one of the founding members of Studio GAINAX. . .

There was someone else I met through the Space Force Club, a fellow by the name of Takeshi Sawamura<sup>44</sup>. He had quite an unusual background. His father had been a choreographer for *bunraku* puppet theater, meaning he grew up surrounded by

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<sup>41</sup> This fan club was established by famed sci-fi writer and translator, Masahiro Noda, who proclaims himself Commander-in-Chief of the club. The other members also use military ranks in addressing each other. Noda is a TV producer, and his club also functions as support staff for various TV-related events. The club makes it a point of not limiting their activities exclusively to the realm of Noda’s writing. This is a philosophy that found favor among the DAICON members, and the two groups often cooperated. Many Space Force Club members have gone on to become professionals in the visual media, publishing, and game industries. The club is still active, hosting events such as “Sci-Fi Christmas” each year.

<sup>42</sup> **Hiroaki Inoue (1958-)** An anime producer I met at an event organized by the members of Uchugun, the fan club established by author Masahiro Noda. Inoue came into the anime industry through Tezuka Productions. Okada later invited him to participate in the founding of GAINAX, but Inoue ended up leaving after the production of *Oritsu Uchugun* (“Wings of Honneamise”) and *Top o Nerae!* (“Gunbuster”). We fell out of touch for about a decade, but got together again when GAINAX and A.I.C. (Animation International Company, where he currently works) collaborated on an anime production. He is known throughout the industry for his famous greeting, “Hey, so-and-so! What’s happening?” He still plays an active role in Uchugun as the club’s leader.

<sup>43</sup> An event started by Masahiro Noda in 1973. Back then, sci-fi conventions tended to be rather solemn and academic, focusing on the independent work of the attending members and featuring panel discussions about major novels. In contrast, the Sci-Fi Show was more like an entertainment expo, thanks to Noda’s TV production experience. The first three Sci-Fi Shows were organized by Noda and held in Tokyo, but he allowed us to organize the fourth one.

<sup>44</sup> **Takeshi Sawamura (1959-)** Former president of GAINAX. He met Toshio Okada at an event put on by Uchugun, and later became one of the core Sci-Fi Show staff members. His outgoing

show business. He also told me he'd done some work as a child actor. He had all these stories, like how he'd landed a role in Daiei's *Daimajin*<sup>45</sup>, only to get so scared by the huge *Daimajin* statue that he broke down sobbing and couldn't perform... or how he'd been a candidate for a role in *Magma Taishi*<sup>46</sup>. Ultimately, though, he didn't want to be an actor, so he didn't pursue it past childhood.

Sawamura knew Okada through the Space Force Club, and Okada had told him something about our Confederation. As soon as Sawamura heard about it, he went off and formed a sci-fi club at his own university, and then petitioned to join the Confederation! That was the kind of guy he was, a real go-getter. Meeting Sawamura added a lot of energy to our later activities. He was the most brazen of us all, almost larger than life. As it was only our first event, the rest of us would sort of hang back and hesitate to interact with some of the professionals around the stage, but not Sawamura. He'd walk right up to them and start name-dropping some of the people he knew through his father, and before you knew it he was just chatting away.

Afterward, I said something about how he sure knew a lot about show business, to which he replied, "I don't know the first thing about it. All I did was throw out the names of some of my dad's friends. That's all it took." Needless to say, I was very impressed.

But getting back to the Sci-Fi Show, the Confederation was hosting it and it was to be a stage-centered event. The "Kansai Entertainers" made an appearance, but the rest of it was stuff like magic tricks, stand-up comedy and sci-fi themed ballet. Basically, anything we could think of. We packed that event as full as we could. Still grumbling about how boring Ashino-Con had been, we were determined to make this one as fun as possible for the attendees.

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personality made him a driving force behind the Sci-Fi Convention and other events hosted by DAICON FILM. After graduating from Otomon University in 1983, he went to work for Japan Television Workshop Co, Ltd., the production company run by Masahiro Noda. Sawamura would later join General Products, after which Toshio Okada would invite him to become the president of GAINAX. He left GAINAX in 2000. Incidentally, the character of Nekkerout from *Wings of Honneamise* was modeled after him.

<sup>45</sup> A pseudo-historic sci-fi film produced by Daiei in 1966. An eight-meter tall statue of a god comes to life and rescues farmers from oppression. The meticulously crafted miniatures used in the destruction scenes became legendary among special effects fans. *Daimajin* is marketed in the U.S. by ADV Films.

<sup>46</sup> A TV sci-fi series from P Production based on the manga by Osamu Tezuka. Rocketman Ambassador Magma fights monsters manipulated by an evil alien called Goa. Naosumi Yamamoto's music in this series is quite impressive.

For the opening film<sup>47</sup>, we used the rocket liftoff scene from the Apollo 11 documentary film *Moonwalk One*. Sci-fi writer Sakyo Komatsu was at the event, and I heard he was so surprised by our opening film that he wondered aloud how in the hell we'd managed to acquire it. The simple fact was, we'd borrowed the footage from the Japan Shipbuilding Industry Foundation. They'd hosted the Space Science Exposition we attended on our way to Ashino-Con, and we learned that the Foundation owned a number of space-related items (especially those dealing with NASA) they would lend out at no charge. We'd simply borrowed it like you would something from a library. It was interesting that our experience at the Space Science Exposition would eventually affect our Sci-Fi Show, though. . .

The Seigun Society helped with preparations for the show, which is how I ended up meeting Hiroe Suga<sup>48</sup>, the woman who would later become my wife. I say "woman", but then, she was just a 14-year-old kid, still in the ninth grade. We met and that was the end of it. But it was still a real eye-opener to meet someone like her. My friends and I hadn't gotten into sci-fi fandom until college, but here she was, still in junior high but nevertheless quite involved in fan activities. It was surprising to meet someone so young creating her own original stories, hoping to one day make it as a professional writer. I know I'm probably belaboring the obvious here, but when we met I didn't have the foggiest notion that we would later end up together. As for the Sci-Fi Show, we were able to get Studio Nue to participate - in the costume portion, no less. We would go on to collaborate with them on *Macross* (discussed later), and they would even help out with the opening of the General Products store. In many ways, they've been a great "big brother" studio for us, right up to the present. I have an especially close relationship with Haruka Takachiho<sup>49</sup>, and

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<sup>47</sup> A few years before DAICON 3, the Japan Sci-Fi Convention began a tradition of showing a short film during the opening ceremony. It was probably intended to be an initial hook into the convention. The content would vary from montage-type compilations using existing footage to works showcasing experimental computer graphics. I found that if the Convention made the film themselves, it was much easier to keep everyone motivated throughout the planning stages, right up to the day of the convention itself. For DAICON 3 in 1981, we did a cel-animated opening anime. This production was all thanks to the help of Hideaki Anno and many others.

<sup>48</sup> **Hiroe Suga (1963-)** A sci-fi author and also my wife! She made her professional debut at age 17 with the short story "Blue Flight". She received Seiun Awards for her works *Merusasu no Shonen* and *Sobakasu no Figure*. In 2001, she received an award from the Mystery Writers of Japan, Inc. for her book *Eien no Mori Hakubutsukan Wakusei*. She is also a master of Japanese classical dance. Suga has helped out with all of the Sci-Fi Conventions that I've worked on. She currently resides in Kyoto with our beloved daughter (I live apart from them right now because of my job).

<sup>49</sup> **Haruka Takachiho (1951-)** Novelist associated with Studio Nue. Well known for his works *Crusher Joe* and *Dirty Pair*. His passion for anime has at times led him to write some rather biting critiques on the subject and the works within it. For example, his "Gundam is not sci-fi" comment in *OUT Magazine* (1980) caused a storm of controversy in anime fandom. I am on pretty good terms with Takachiho, and often see him hanging around the GAINAX offices.

both my wife and I owe him a great deal. Of course, I had no idea at the time how close we would later become.

When all was said and done, I was quite pleased with how the Sci-Fi show turned out. We got a lot of positive feedback from the attendees as well. But we still hadn't hosted the Japan Sci-Fi Convention... which is why in 1979, we set our sights on DAICON 3.

## The road to hosting the Japan Sci-Fi Convention

Doing the Sci-Fi Show gave us both the confidence and the connections we needed for the Japan Sci-Fi Convention. We even managed to gain a little experience - one of our upperclassmen's many suggestions for such an undertaking. The show had been the perfect dress rehearsal for the Convention.

Truth be told, though, while we were confident we could make the Convention a success, when it came time to actually host the event, we quickly learned that we didn't know much.

First off, we didn't have the purest of motivations for hosting the event. We didn't like Tokyo fans, didn't like the Fan Group Association, and we sure as hell weren't going to stand for defeat at the hands of a bunch of *Tokyoites*. These die-hard fans all seemed to brag about the advantages of living in Tokyo, like how close they were to writers, publishers and other industry types. But what really got our goats was how no matter what we said, they'd turn it around and start lecturing *us*. We just couldn't stand their "Sure I know that - I know *everything!*" attitudes. It seemed like almost every Tokyo fan we bumped into thought he was better than everyone else, and wouldn't stop running his mouth until he'd made himself the king of the molehill.

In retrospect, I think maybe the fans themselves - us included - were just childish. That probably explains why ever single "debate" among sci-fi fans would quickly degenerate into a shouting match, like kids fighting over a toy.

Another part of it was that we felt excluded as newcomers, even among the other Kansai fans. It wasn't like we were running around biting everyone's heads off or anything, but from an outside perspective we probably seemed like troublemakers. We certainly didn't *mean* any harm, but looking back, I have to say we did have a little chip on our shoulders.

But I digress.

We did the Sci-Fi Show with the intent of eclipsing the Convention. Even then, there was the widespread idea that sci-fi was big enough to accommodate anything, which is why we actively promoted anime and *tokusatsu* special-effects films that

weren't considered "true sci-fi"<sup>50</sup> by the old-timers. Most of the staff was a mixture of sci-fi and anime fans anyway, which I'm sure had an impact on our planning. We were moving further and further away from the approach of our upperclassmen... but on the other hand, it brought favorable attention from the pros. I guess they noticed the amount of energy we carried with us, even if our ideas were all over the place.

Sakyo Komatsu had apparently taken a liking to us, and decided to throw us some work. He called and asked if we'd help out backstage with Osaka Philharmonic Festival<sup>51</sup>, a public symphony concert held at the Osaka Festival Hall. We were basically acting as gofers, running around backstage. We weren't even close to playing any kind of administrative role, but we still got to see what it felt like to be backstage at a major event, and I think the experience was well worth it. We even got to see conductor Takashi Asahina in person. But the most powerful realization of all was that someone like Sakyo Komatsu had finally noticed us.

## Formal candidacy

Having resolved to host DAICON 3<sup>52</sup>, we quickly announced our candidacy<sup>53</sup> at the next convention. It goes without saying that this time we followed all the official procedures and curried all the right favors. DAICON 3 would be held in 1981, so we planned accordingly.

The staff for the Sci-Fi Show had been composed mainly of Confederation members, but as with any convention, the inevitable always happens. Either the volunteers enjoy themselves and decide to stick around, or they want nothing more to do with

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<sup>50</sup> Some fans are picky about what is true sci-fi and what isn't. Even if the definition of science fiction is rather vague, it doesn't stop some people from getting into heated debates over it - sometimes for nothing other than to prove how they themselves are "true fans". The debates tends to hinge on whether a given show contains a "sense of wonder" (vis-a-vis science), but the phrase itself is equally hard to define. You often hear twisted criticisms like, "The film was well-done, but mediocre as a sci-fi." In contrast, other fans are simply keen on things that haven't been done before, and are willing to embrace almost any new concept as "sci-fi".

<sup>51</sup> Sakyo Komatsu and some other important individuals from Osaka organized an event to promote the Osaka Philharmonic Orchestra. One of the goals was to help bring orchestral music to the local public. Komatsu had been impressed with the success of our first Japan Sci-Fi Convention, and offered to let us help out behind the scenes.

<sup>52</sup> DAICON 3 was held at Osaka's Morinomiya Piloti Hall on August 23-24, 1981. All told, there were about 1,500 people in attendance. The event was unique for the time because of the cel-animated opening anime, the unprecedented size of the guidebook, sales of original merchandise, and simultaneous events including showings and seminars.

<sup>53</sup> The Japan Sci-Fi Conventions are managed by groups of volunteers who are selected by a vote at the Fan Group Association meeting the year preceding the Convention in question. (Now they're selected two years in advance!) In order to avoid lengthy discussion and conflicts between rival groups at the meeting, under the table negotiations are encouraged before hand.

conventions and leave for good. It's been the same in all my 20 years of experience, an endless cycle of grouping and regrouping.

As we Sci-Fi Show holdovers and other Confederation members were making the rounds of university clubs in search of volunteers, we ran into a few crotchety guys who told us to knock off all the "propaganda". We were only asking if they wanted to do an event with us! At the time, I didn't even know what "propaganda" meant, but I do remember thinking that those guys were idiots, not to mention rude.

Other people would say things like, "It's not that I don't want to do an event. I wouldn't mind helping out. It's just, I'd rather do this sci-fan thing the right way, and not rush into things." Our way of doing things must have seemed a little extreme from their standpoint.

I seem to recall quite a few people leaving the group after the Sci-Fi Show was over. After all, we'd assembled that staff from the same crowd we were talking to here. But on the other hand, some of the guys who helped out have remained with us for 20 years now. As they say, to each his own. The most important thing was always the success of the event. It didn't really matter whose feelings got hurt along the way - resolving friction within the group just wasn't one of our priorities.

Between Okada's bizarre statements and Sawamura's overbearing pushiness, we had our share of discord and internal strife. And of course you had people calling out things like, "What's more important - school, with your so-called tests and reports, or doing the Convention?!" We were that gung-ho.

At first, we mainly wanted to use Confederation members to staff DAICON 3, but one thing or another conspired against us, and eventually we had to branch out and find volunteers from various clubs in the area. By the time we were finished, the DAICON 3 executive committee felt more like a band of mercenaries.

The year before DAICON 3, we all traveled to the U.S. to check out Worldcon<sup>54</sup> in Boston. We wanted to see with our own eyes the event that had started it all, and bring back as much of that atmosphere as we could. We also seized the opportunity to visit Disneyland<sup>55</sup> (Tokyo Disneyland hadn't even opened yet). We thought going to a theme park would give us ideas for planning our own entertainment segment for DAICON 3. We wanted our convention to be enjoyable for everyone.

Incidentally, all this fun meant I would end up repeating my sophomore year for the second time, but I couldn't have cared less.

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<sup>54</sup> Worldcon was the original model for the Japan Sci-Fi Convention. Worldcon has been held every year since 1939, except for a brief hiatus during WWII. We went to Noreascon Two, held in Boston in 1980. Worldcon is mainly held in the U.S., but goes overseas every four years. A group of Japanese fans is working to host the 2007 event in Japan.

<sup>55</sup> We visited Disneyland in the U.S. to study event organization, both how to organize the staff and how to provide seamless entertainment for visitors when several events are running simultaneously. We also visited the then newly-opened Tokyo Disneyland just before DAICON 4. Our concept of creating "alternate worlds" within DAICON 4 was largely influenced by what we saw at Disneyland.

## The DAICON 3 decision

At Tokon 7<sup>56</sup> the following year, we announced our candidacy for sponsorship of the following Convention, and were formally recognized. We were filled in on a number of things by Mr. Kadokura of the Fan Group Association, whom we had met during all the hubbub of the previous year. Inoue of the Space Force Club also gave us a number of tips. With their help, we spent some time wheeling and dealing and generating a buzz for DAICON 3.

We even made some promotional items. At first, we threw around the idea of emblem patches and whatnot, but after due consideration of our budget, we opted for something that would give us more bang for our buck. We distributed packs of cigarettes (Mild Seven, a popular Japanese brand) with a picture of a Powered Suit on the package.

The illustration was done by Kitayama<sup>57</sup>, a guy from the Kinki University sci-fi club who dreamed of becoming a manga artist. He drew an amazing image of a Powered Suit with a big cigarette for a bazooka and a lighter for his finger. We also sold these cigarette packs at DAICON 3 as official goods for the event.

This time around we played by the rules, and we glided into sponsorship of the Japan Sci-Fi Convention without a hitch. Even the nickname for that year was a no-brainer - it was the third Convention to be held in Osaka, so the obvious choice was “DAICON 3” (again, because the “o” in “Osaka” can also be pronounced *dai*). Once our sponsorship of the Convention had been finalized, our next step was to make Sakyo Komatsu honorary chairman to the executive committee. We thought that since it was being held in Osaka, who better to ask than one of the biggest local literary figures around? But he turned us down cold.

“Nah, I ain’t gonna do it. But tell you what, I’ll introduce you to Musashi Kanbe<sup>58</sup>. Get *him* to do it.” Those were Komatsu’s exact words.

We asked Kanbe, and he accepted. . . but I still nurtured the dream of having Sakyo Komatsu as our honorary chairman. It would end up being another 20 years before

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<sup>56</sup> This was the nickname for the 19th annual Japan Sci-Fi Convention, held at Asakusa Kokaido in Tokyo in August 1980. About 1,300 people attended. The host for DAICON 3 would also be chosen at this event, and our staff worked very hard to win the honor.

<sup>57</sup> **Hitoshi Kitayama (1959-)** My underclassmen at Kinki University as well as a member of the University Sci-Fi Club. He had been a member of our staff since the Sci-Fi Show. Kitayama was always there to help out with DAICON FILM, though I never had the chance to work closely with him. He once aspired to be a manga author, but now works at his family’s auto shop, doing restorations (and loving it) on broken-down autos.

<sup>58</sup> **Musashi Kanbe (1948-)** Sci-fi author whose witty and versatile style has allowed him to cover a broad range of genres in his works. A resident of Osaka, he served as honorary chairman to the executive committee for DAICON 3. In 1986, he won the Nihon SF Taisho Award for his title *Warai Uchu no Tabi Genin*.

he graciously accepted for the 40th Japan Sci-Fi Convention, which was hosted at the Makuhari Messe.

Actually, after DAICON 3 was over, someone brought up the idea of us doing another convention. We jokingly responded, “Yeah, sure. How about in, say, another 20 years?” Well, the 40th Convention wasn’t in Osaka, as DAICON 3 had been, but imagine my surprise when I later found out we would indeed be hosting the event again in 2001!

## Meeting Anno, Yamaga and Akai

Having secured the position to host the Japan Sci-Fi Convention, we began preparations for the event - and were faced with the decision of the opening film.

For the Sci-Fi Show we’d screened borrowed footage, but for DAICON 3 we wanted (if at all possible) to make our own original film. At that point, Okada spoke up.

“I met this guy named Nagayama<sup>59</sup> at for news photos he took in the aftermath of the Great Hanshin earthquake in 1995, but he died tragically in a car accident later that year. the *Ultra Q*<sup>60</sup> screening, and he says he knows someone who can make anime.”

Nagayama turned out to be a man of many talents. He would later go on to the work for General Products writing technical manuals for our do-it-yourself garage kits, and he even played a major supporting role in *Yamata no Orochi no Gyakushu* (“Orochi: The Eight-Headed Dragon”), a live-action DAICON film. Tragically, he died in a car accident the year of the Kobe Earthquake (1995), but if he were alive today I’m sure we’d still be great pals.

Nagayama introduced me and Sawamura (I’m pretty sure he came along, too) to Anno<sup>61</sup> and Yamaga<sup>62</sup> at a place called Solaris<sup>63</sup>, a sci-fi themed cafe in Kyoto. They had both just enrolled in the Osaka University of Arts<sup>64</sup>.

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<sup>59</sup> **Tatsuto Nagayama (1960–1995)** Helped form the anime production group "SHADO" during his high school years. I met him while he was attending school in Kansai. He and Hideaki Anno are from the same town, and it was Nagayama who introduced me to Anno and his friends. An aspiring cameraman and writer, "Mr. N" (as he was affectionately known) helped General Products by writing the instruction manuals for many of its products. We all thought he bore a strong resemblance to a seal. He played the role of the suspicious archaeologist in *Yamata no Orochi no Gyakushu*, and later received publicity

<sup>60</sup> A live-action *tokusatsu*, or "special effects" TV show produced by Tsuburaya. It preceded even *Ultraman*. The show was in black and white, and since it was rarely rerun some volunteers organized public screenings. It wasn’t common to have a VCR at home in those days, so the screenings drew many viewers.

<sup>61</sup> **Hideaki Anno (1960-)** Movie director and member of GAINAX’s board of directors. He was still enrolled at the Osaka University of Arts when he participated in the production of the DAICON 3 opening animation. One of his specialties is animating complex action scenes with mecha and lots of explosions. One of the most talked-about sequences he has done is the famous “God Soldiers” scene in director Hayao Miyazaki’s *Kaze no Tani no Nausica* (“Nausicaa of the Valley of the

I had very little interest in anime back then, so I wasn't expecting anything spectacular. When I was introduced to Anno, I said something like, "They say you can make anime. What kind of stuff can you do?" At this, he whipped out a pad of

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Wind"). He played a role in the founding of GAINAX, and made his professional directorial debut with the OVA *Top of Nerae!* ("Gunbuster"). After his tremendous success with the TV series *Shinseiki Evangelion* ("Neon Genesis Evangelion"), he went on to pursue his interest in live action, producing *Love & Pop*, *Shikijitsu* and several other films.

Anno is a big fan of special effects films and several mainstream anime titles, especially the classics *Uchu Senkan Yamato* ("Star Blazers / Space Battleship Yamato"), *Ultraman*, *Kamen Rider* ("Masked Rider"), and *Gundam*. He usually lumbers around slowly, in almost the same manner as the God Soldiers he animated years ago. In fact, the only time he seems to show any real energy is when he's doing an Ultraman or Kamen Rider impression. Anno eats neither meat nor fish, and is thus often assumed to be a vegetarian. This is actually a misconception - in fact, he dislikes green onions, peppers, and many other vegetables. Basically, he eats an extremely unbalanced diet.

<sup>62</sup> **Hiroyuki Yamaga (1962-)** Movie director and GAINAX's current president. Originally from Niigata Prefecture. Directed *Oritsu Uchugun* ("Wings of Honneamise"), GAINAX's first commercial film. While he was still a student at the Osaka University of Arts, he helped create the DAICON 3 opening movie, along with Hideaki Anno and Takami Akai. Yamaga has been with GAINAX since the beginning, and was only 22 years old when he directed the company's cinematic release. From the time he was an elementary student, Yamaga has proclaimed that he would become famous someday. On one occasion, he supposedly went so far as to tell one of his neighbors in Niigata that her house would one day be demolished to make the parking lot for the "Hiroyuki Yamaga Memorial Hall." Since it is very hard to tell what he is thinking just by looking at his face, he is often compared to the puppets from the 1960s TV show, *Thunderbirds*. Yamaga assumed office as the president of GAINAX in 1993. Despite a 14-year absence, he returned to the director's chair for the production of the recent GAINAX titles *Mahromatic* and *Abenobashi Mahou Shotengai* ("Magical Shopping Arcade Abenobashi").

<sup>63</sup> A sci-fi themed cafe that used to be in Kyoto. The owner was apparently into sci-fi and had decorated the interior of the cafe with sci-fi film posters and models of spaceships. It was a favorite gathering spot for local sci-fi fans. As a matter of fact, Nagayama used to work there part-time. I used to drive Hiroe home to Kyoto on a regular basis, and we would often stop by the cafe on these trips.

<sup>64</sup> A private college located in Minami-Kawaguchi in the south of Osaka. Anno, Akai and Yamaga were classmates in the Visual Concept Planning Department. The time when these three met is often considered the beginning of GAINAX. Unlike Kinki University, the Osaka University of Arts is located very far from any train station, and the campus is up on a hill, surrounded on all sides by fields. No video arcades or cafe shops can be found anywhere nearby. And since a film screening or live performance is always happening somewhere on campus, attending class in costume is not considered unusual at all.

accounting paper and started drawing. After a bit, he held the pad up and flipped the pages rapidly. A Powered Suit<sup>65</sup> ran across the paper.

I was stunned. I remember thinking, *This guy's incredible!* It's hard enough drawing a *single* Powered Suit with all the lines and complex shapes, but here he was *animating* one right in front of us. I'd seen a flipbook comic before, but this was the first time I'd watched someone actually make one. And for something he had just drawn up on the spot, it was really, really good.

That settled it - we were doing an anime for the opening film. And while Sawamura and I were getting all fired up and excited, Yamaga, who was sitting next to us, leaned back too far in his chair and crashed to the floor. The table was in chaos.

"What happened?!" we cried, scrambling to help him back up. "Are you alright?" His response: "I had the hiccups, so I was holding my breath to get rid of them. I guess I forgot to breathe again."

A man who can make Powered Suits moves, and another who collapses because he forgot to breathe. What a pair! It was a meeting I'll never forget.

I actually have another funny story about Yamaga. When he was in junior high, he took an I.Q. test. After he had finished, the teacher angrily called him aside.

"Now listen there", said the teacher. "I've had enough of your fooling around! There's no way you could have made it this far with a score like *this!*" Apparently, the test results showed Yamaga's I.Q. to be 40. Someone with a score of 100 is considered to have normal intelligence, so a 40 is ungodly low.

Almost no one in the general population would ever get a score like that. But Yamaga hadn't been fooling around - he'd gotten that score because he'd thought so hard about every single answer that he ran out of time. According to the story, they even called his parents, worrying them to no end in the process. Once we heard about this, we all started calling him "40".

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<sup>65</sup> This refers to the armored combat suit featured in Robert A. Heinlein's novel *Starship Troopers*. The shape of the suit isn't described in the book, but the Japanese paperback edition contains illustrations by Studio Nue, and their concept influenced the designs of many anime robots thereafter. The phrase "Powered Suit" is a general term, but among Japanese sci-fi fans it specifically means the suit designed by Nue for *Starship Troopers*. This complicated Powered Suit appeared as the main mecha in the DAICON 3 opening anime, and Anno's dynamic animation was a sensation, to say the least.

I met Akai<sup>66</sup> some time later. Yamaga brought him in to help with the anime, but apparently Akai had been less than thrilled at the prospect of working with a bunch of weirdos. I later found out that he had only agreed to come because we might actually *pay* him for his work, and that was a heck of a lot better than sitting around studying. Yamaga and Anno seemed to be in complete agreement with him on that. Since their freshman year, they had been taking on jobs making video footage for various projects. Of course, these were non-paying jobs - all they got were their production expenses.

Whereas I had lost any future “vision” I had the moment I joined the sci-fi club (and instead ended up going wherever the wind might carry me), Anno, Yamaga, and Akai had a clear idea of what they wanted to do.

They knew they had talent, and that they were going to take the world by storm. Over the 20-plus years that we’ve been friends, they’ve done nothing but prove that talent to me over and over again.

## The opening animation

Anno said he could make anime, but he had never attempted a *cel* anime<sup>67</sup> before. That wasn’t a major problem, because we had all kinds of people on our staff willing to offer up random information. Apparently, there was a shop called Animepolis Pero<sup>68</sup> that sold anime cels for insane amounts. Each second of anime footage burns

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<sup>66</sup> **Takami Akai (1961-)** Game director and illustrator. Originally from Yonago in Tottori Prefecture. Akai is currently a member of GAINAX’s board of directors. While a student at the Osaka University of Arts, he met Anno and Yamaga, and together the three created the opening animation for DAICON 3. Though he is of a fairly diminutive stature, Akai is a multi-talented individual, and an absolute genius when it comes to models, illustrations, movies, special effects and games. He took the gaming world a giant leap forward when he created the PC game Princess Maker, giving rise to an entirely new genre of “nurturing simulation” games, wherein players make decisions that will affect the main character’s actual personality.

In 1994, Akai left GAINAX to launch his own software development studio, Nine Lives. However, he returned to GAINAX in 2001 to become a member of the board of directors. He again got the chance to show his incredible talent when he did the character designs as well as some additional artwork for GAINAX’s *Seikai no Monsho* (“Crest of the Stars”).

<sup>67</sup> Many anime fans back in the day had a strong desire to try their own hands at animation. A so-called “paper anime” only requires some drawings done on paper and an 8mm camera. Thus it is really cheap and simple for individuals to create their own anime. However, *cel* anime isn’t so easy. Paint and cels are expensive, and it takes more than a handful of people to color the huge number of cels required for any given project. The DAICON 3 opening anime was the first animated feature Anno and the others had ever attempted. Lack of experience aside, the very idea of making a cel anime by hand in the first place was just absurd!

<sup>68</sup> The granddaddy of all anime shops. The stores sold anime goods, used cels, and design sketches, and were usually located next to Toei-affiliated theaters. This chain laid the foundation for today’s anime shops. Back then, they were the only places you could buy a blank cel and the right kind of

through several cels, so if you have to buy each individually - and at a high retail markup - your budget is blown before you can even begin.

But we had a plan. We bought a single cel at Animepolis Pero and took it to the vinyl yards in East Osaka<sup>69</sup>.

“Scuse me, you have anything like this?” we asked the guy working there.

“Sure do!” he replied, bringing out a roll of sheet vinyl. he said he’d sell it to us for ¥2000 a roll (about US \$9 in 1981 dollars).

*Now we’re talking’!* we thought. We bought one, took it home, and cut it up. Then we tried painting on it... and it was nothing like a cel. You could get the color on there alright, but as soon as it dried it would peel off. And if you stacked the cut pieces while the paint was still wet, they’d stick together.

But then again, it wasn’t like we had any other options. So we kept right on working with the vinyl sheets. It was bad enough that this was our first-ever cel anime, but using the wrong materials for the job only doubled the headaches.

Our production site was an empty room in the factory/house where Okada’s family lived and ran their business, Okada Embroidering<sup>70</sup>. For animation paper we used B5 (176 x 250 mm) sized accounting paper, we made our own tap<sup>71</sup> by hand, and punched the holes for the tap into the cut vinyl sheets with a two-hole punch - the kind that office workers us.

Anno, Akai, and Yamaga were working full-time on the opening animation. There were always others around as well, though, and things could get pretty cramped. What’s more, we didn’t divide our production process into the appropriate stages (unlike how we do now, as pros). Okada would discuss things with Anno, Akai, and

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paint to do an anime. The problem for us was, the supplies were sold for hobby use, and buying in bulk for a full-length anime was far too expensive.

<sup>69</sup> East Osaka is home to many small factories, including vinyl manufacturing plants and other specialized production yards - enough to form large industrial districts. Each district is commonly referred to by the type of product manufactured there. Thankfully, these places welcome amateur buyers. A real anime cel is made of acetate film, but we didn’t know that and used thin sheets of vinyl instead. The sheets ended up sticking together when stacked, and the paint wouldn’t adhere very well, either.

<sup>70</sup> The embroidering company run by Toshio Okada’s family, conveniently located near Osaka Prefecture University. The Okada’s own a large warehouse. With their permission, we used one whole floor of the building to make our anime. A large number of our staff pretty much lived there during the production of the DAICON 3 and DAICON 4 opening animations. General Products was also started through an initial investment from Okada Embroidering, and remained a part of the company until it was incorporated in 1984.

<sup>71</sup> A tool used to hold cel art during the drawing and photography stages of an anime production. It consists of three pegs on a ruler-like metal strip, which are used to align the illustrated paper to the anime cel. We couldn’t even afford commercial-grade cels and paper, much less a proper tap, so we had to punch holes in the vinyl sheets with a plain, old office hole punch. We fabricated our “tap” out of cardboard and short sections of a paintbrush. It wasn’t particularly accurate, as there weren’t enough holes, but it did the job.

Yamaga, and between the four of them they'd lay down the general outline. Then Anno and Akai would get to work on drawing the frames and Yamaga would be in charge of direction and art. I don't know what kind of "direction" was going on exactly, but I strongly suspect it was different from what we would call directing today. This was a homemade anime, after all. If I had to say who did what, I guess Okada was the producer, Yamaga the director, Akai the character animator, and Anno the mecha animator. The rest of it was just grabbing whoever happened to be there and forcing them to trace cels, slap on paint, or do whatever the situation called for. For the filming, we set up a tripod on a platform, fixed the camera in place and started shooting frame by frame. And we didn't have a timing sheet<sup>72</sup>, so Anno would just stand off to one side going, "OK, frame one... OK, frame two..." By April of 1981 we'd begun production on the line art, and by June or so we were painting the cels. As it turned out, we were working on that anime right up until the morning of the convention.

Okada was by far the biggest troublemaker on the set. One day, he was having it out with the rest of the anime staff, arguing about a scene in the climax. A signal fire is coming from a Powered Suit, and the smoke from the fire is supposed to turn into the Ide Gauge<sup>73</sup>. But Okada didn't like it.

"The Ide Gauge is just weak!" he exclaimed. "It's got no impact, We should *definitely* have it form, like, a stylized version of a girl's pussy! Now *that* would be impact! We need to do something that's never been done before - otherwise, there's no point in doing this at all!"

He started going off about this and just wouldn't back down. The rest of the staff turned to Kazumi<sup>74</sup> (this was before she married Okada, so she was still Kazumi Amano at the time) and begged her to say something to make him stop. Even then, she was famous for her ability to control him.

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<sup>72</sup> A sheet of written instructions used for photographing cels. The sheet contains a table describing the cel number for each frame and how to layer the cels. It's an absolute necessity for any professional anime film production, where animation and photography are taken as two separate tasks, but amateurs like us didn't know anything about that.

<sup>73</sup> The TV anime *Densetsu Kyojin Ideon* features a mysterious symbol that appears on the front screen of the *Ideon's* cockpit whenever the Ide's super energy is charging. The DAICON 3 opening animation has a scene showing a glowing Ide gauge. Okada tried hard (but failed) to get us to replace it with a mark that represents the female genitalia instead.

<sup>74</sup> **Kazumi Okada (1958-)** A member of our staff since the Sci-Fi Show and a childhood friend of Toshio Okada. The two were married just after the founding of General Products in 1982. So far, she is the only thing we know of that can calm the often explosive passions of Toshio. Because of this unique ability, she came to serve as something of an "Okada Control Unit". She was also in charge of accounting and general affairs for General Products and GAINAX, and handled all sorts of business matters. She stayed on with the company even after Toshio left, advancing to her current position as manager of public relations. She is a very petite woman, and at times a little air-headed, but adored by one and all. Incidentally, her maiden name is Amano.

“Well, if you really wanna do something no one’s ever done before”, she began, “why don’t you have a shit-eating contest instead? You want impact? *That’s* impact.” Okada didn’t say another word, and the “pussy proposal” was thankfully laid to rest. That, however, wouldn’t be the last time Okada chimed in with some insane suggestion. After that, every one of his wild ideas was answered with the chant, “Shit-eating contest... Shit-eating contest...”

We packed a large number of student staffers into our little anime sweatshop and set them to coloring cels, but it’s still safe to say that the ones who actually made the anime were Anno, Yamaga and Akai. With everyone being amateurs and all, it’s no surprise that the process was so painfully slow. Like I said, it literally wasn’t finished until the last possible moment.

We finally presented the fruits of our labor at the opening ceremony, and it was extremely well-received. We were happy. We had them hooked.

Osamu Tezuka<sup>75</sup> couldn’t make it in time for the opening, but he joined everyone for the nighttime party at the hotel. During the celebrations, he heard some discussion about the opening anime and said he wanted to see it. So they scrambled around for the footage and showed it again, right there on the spot. Afterward, Anno, Yamaga and Akai introduced themselves to Mr. Tezuka, and Yamaga’s self-introduction was hilarious. Sitting nervously in front of this legendary man, he said, “My name is Yamaga. That’s spelled *yama* plus the *ga* in *gassho* (or “New Year’s greetings”).” He then proceeded to draw the symbol for *yama* in the air, index fingers of both hands working in tandem. (In case you don’t know Japanese, *yama* means “mountain”, and it is so simple to write that children learn it in the first grade.) Yamaga *still* introduces himself like that.

I wasn’t there myself, but I heard that after Akai and Yamaga showed Mr. Tezuka the film, he commented, “Well, there certainly were a lot of characters in the film. A lot of characters... However, there were also some that *weren’t* in the film.” At first they couldn’t figure out what he was getting at, but then it suddenly hit them - they hadn’t used a single one of Tezuka’s characters in their film!

For DAICON 4, not only did Mr. Tezuka make a special point of showing up in time to see the opening animation, he was also kind enough to help us with the convention planning. So you better believe we used some Tezuka characters that time!

Our little opening anime for DAICON 3 generated a lot of buzz. A magazine called *Animec*<sup>76</sup> featured it in an article of theirs, and those who’d seen it were discussing

<sup>75</sup> **Osamu Tezuka (1928–1989)** The “God of Manga” truly needs no introduction. You could even say he is the one who started it all for Japanese animated TV programs. All of us on the staff were overwhelmed with gratitude when we received his praise for the DAICON 3 opening animation.

<sup>76</sup> An anime magazine published by Rapport starting in 1978. The first editor-in-chief was Masanobu Komaki. While major anime magazines were leaning toward “reviews” that read more like advertisements, *Animec* became popular among fans for its in-depth analyses and large proportion of

it with their friends. Pretty soon we started getting requests from interested people, asking us to make it available to the public.

This was a good thing, because hosting the convention had plunged us into the red<sup>77</sup>. We decided to form a deficit relief committee by selling videos and 8mm reels of the film. For a group of amateurs, I have to say we were bending over backward to cater to the fans. We included stickers with all-new illustrations, and we threw in storyboards and bonus items for free. The videos sold much better than we'd expected. Not only did they pull us out of the red, we even made a tidy little profit. That profit would later be invested in preparations for DAICON 4 and production costs for the DAICON film series.

### DAICON 3

The basic premise behind DAICON 3 was to create a meeting place for sci-fi fans, writers and the like, where they could gather and have pointless discussions about goofy things. DAICON 3 took that collection of silly conversations and turned it into a show. We'd make it loud, and we'd make it *real*. That's the stance we took. All told, there were 80 people on staff. While the main activities were going on in the large hall, there were side attractions<sup>78</sup> all around. And then there was the dealers' room<sup>79</sup>. Our policy from start to finish was to make sure attendees had fun, and to make the Convention as exciting as we could. We blazed new trails with DAICON 3, taking directions that had never been explored by previous cons. It became a model of sorts for the mainstream Japan Sci-Fi Conventions of today.

The large hall had a maximum capacity of 1500 people. We got so many applications that by spring we had to stop accepting new ones. There was a lot of hype surrounding it before it even started, due in part to the amount of press we received.

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reader-contribution pages. This hardcore magazine even did a feature on our DAICON 3 opening anime, despite the fact that it was an amateur production. *Animec* also featured columns by Okada and yours truly of General Products. It was also in this magazine that Haruka Takachiho presented his now famous argument that *Gundam* was not sci-fi.

<sup>77</sup> DAICON 3 was privately sponsored by me and the rest of the staff. All told, it put us in debt to the tune of 2 million yen (about U.S. \$9,000 in 1981 dollars). We had expected to be in debt, but this was a lot of money for a bunch of mere college students, and repaying it was a heavy burden. We started selling the opening anime on video in order to make up the loss. That was two years before any "OVA" (original animation video) was ever released.

<sup>78</sup> These included seminars for no more than a dozen people, all occurring simultaneously with the stage performances being held in the big hall. All throughout the convention, DAICON 3 featured seminars and other activities in addition to the main performances in the hall. It was very sophisticated for an event hosted by amateurs.

<sup>79</sup> This is the name of the marketplace at a convention. Many private clubs sell fanzines and other goods. Comiket (Comic Market) took this idea from the Japan Sci-Fi Conventions, and basically expanded on it.

News of the Convention was posted in magazines<sup>80</sup> - even ones other than *Sci-Fi Magazine* - and the editor-in-chief of *Animec* was himself a big sci-fi fan. I think a lot of it had to do with the simple fact that there were a lot of avenues out there for promoting our con, and they were quite busy doing so.

On the day of the Convention, I was busier than a one-legged man in an ass-kicking contest. For starters, the truck I'd rented for hauling things stalled out, and ten or so staff members on the scene had to drop everything and help push-start it. Most of the staff was running around like mad, but one guy - Kamimura<sup>81</sup> from the Osaka University sci-fi club - just sat around watching the costume show. even today, 20 years later, that story is still told as an example of what you're *not* supposed to be doing when you're on the staff. Kamimura swears up and down it was an honest mistake, but no one believes him.

Since most members of the staff were students, there were very few of us who actually had driver's licenses. Because of that, I was forced to play chauffeur to the transport team the entire time... on top of my *other* responsibilities as a member of the executive committee. As we were packing up after the Convention, we soon discovered that there was way too much stuff to fit into a single truck, so I rushed over to a nearby car rental agency and told them to rent me the biggest truck they had. The clerk pointed to a four-and-a-half ton long-bed monster. I'd never driven anything close that size before, but I went for it all the same. I literally thought it was over for me when I had to back up to the loading dock at the convention hall. I mean, *none* of the guys giving me directions could even drive! As it turns out, I would later go on to drive almost every kind of vehicle possible, everything from super-compact utility vans to four-and-a-half ton trucks like this one.

Another perk of DAICON 3 was the dealers' room. We'd seen people making and selling original items when we went to Worldcon for research, and we brought that idea back with us. When we'd gone to Worldcon, none of us could speak any English, but we still had fun wandering through the dealers' room. All you needed to know was that people were selling everything imaginable - some people were fashioning fantasy-style swords out of metal and selling them right there! There

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<sup>80</sup> Back in the early 1980s, there were four sci-fi specialty magazines: *SF Magazine*, *SF Hoseki*, *SF Adventure* and *Kosotengai*. *SF Magazine* is in circulation to this day, while *SF Adventure* is currently published as *SF Japan*.

<sup>81</sup> **Yasuhiro Kamimura (1962-)** A member of the Osaka University Sci-Fi club who joined our group after DAICON 3. He oversaw production of the independent films we were working on. He found employment with NTT right around the time DAICON FILM went under. Though it seemed he had actually gotten one of those "respectable" jobs, Kamimura soon found himself unable to suppress his otaku blood and was ultimately invited to join GAINAX by yours truly. He was put in charge of general business affairs. Coincidentally, Yasuhiro and I were born on the same day and have the same blood type. Not the discriminating type, he is a willing fan of whatever trends come along in the worlds of sci-fi, anime, and special effects.

were commercial dealers too, which was very interesting, because at that time in Japan, a commercial booth at a sci-fi convention was a rare sight to see.

But even the dealers' room can get pretty boring if the only action is vendors selling merchandise. So we asked a *Star Trek*<sup>82</sup> fan club to set up a space where people could play a *Star Trek* simulation game on PCs (incidentally, a PC was called a "My Com"<sup>83</sup> back then, which was short for "my computer"). We built a cockpit-like enclosure out of plywood and cardboard and set up eight NEC PC-8001s inside. Some staff members dressed up in *Star Trek* garb to explain the game to interested passers-by. In those days, hardly anyone had ever seen eight whole PCs in one place, so that attraction drew quite a crowd.

The executive committee produced all kinds of items to sell as official goods at the Convention. Between the tiny mascot figures (all hand-made, of course) and little Nahaha<sup>84</sup> heads (Hideo Azuma's<sup>85</sup> manga character), the female members of the staff were like indentured laborers in some attic sweatshop, working feverishly to try and meet their quotas. We also had some Powered Suits made out of polyresin. We weren't calling them "garage kits" yet, but that's pretty much what they were. We must've had a dozen or so varieties in all, and every single one was sold out within minutes. That made quite an impact on Okada. He saw what a huge demand there was for little trinkets. Apparently, seeing it first-hand was what gave him the idea to start up the General Products store later on.

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<sup>82</sup> A sci-fi TV series enjoying an especially devoted following of hardcore fans, commonly known as "Trekkies". These Trekkies comprise a large percentage of the total sci-fi fan population. In Japan, *Star Trek* was broadcast in 1969 under the name *Uchu Daisakusen*, and reruns were shown over and over and over again, especially in the Kansai area.

<sup>83</sup> One year before DAICON 3, NEC released its first personal computer, the PC-8001. Affectionately dubbed "My Com" (for "My Computer") in Japan, it became an instant hit among enthusiasts. However, the *Star Trek* game written for it didn't make any sense to the majority of those who attempted to play it - even after careful explanations from fans of the show.

<sup>84</sup> One of Hideo Azuma's manga characters. Easily identified by its big watery eyes and huge mouth (which is always open), the character has appeared in various manga titles. Hideo Azuma was wacky enough himself, and the silly character was well-known (but probably not "popular" in a general sense) among sci-fi fans. It also made an appearance in the DAICON 3 opening anime. because of Nahaha's simple design, many hand-crafted character goods based on it have been sold at the SCI-FI Convention. General Products produced a floor cushion featuring an illustration of the character.

<sup>85</sup> **Hideo Azuma (1950-)** Manga artist who was tremendously popular in the early 1980s. He was well known for his cute drawings and zany brand of comedy. He has achieved an almost rabid following in the sci-fi fan community with works such as *Fujouri Nikki* ("Journal of the Absurd"), which boasts an obsessively-researched collection of anecdotes appearing in science fiction stories from all generations and places. You could even say he is the man who introduced the elements of bishoujo (lit. "beautiful girl"), the Lolita complex and absurdist humor into the world of manga. Characters from his titles *Bukimi ga Hashiru Nahahakan* and so on have been made into all sorts of merchandise, some of which were produced by General Products.

DAICON 3 was a huge success. Now I knew for certain that we'd gone in the right direction with it. I think the rest of the staff was equally pleased with the outcome - DAICON 3 was the perfect example of how things should be run. We'd lost a lot of people after the Sci-Fi Show, people who were fed up with the hassle of working on an event. But a lot of these staff members stayed on to work DAICON 3 as well, which shows how great the experience was for everyone. I had a fantastic time myself, and so did the attendees. DAICON 3 really exceeded all of our expectations.

### After the party

Missteps aside, we'd managed to make DAICON 3 a gratifying experience. We had hosted the Japan Sci-Fi Convention and DAICON, and both had been successes. But I was literally burned out - that's why I returned to school, still a sophomore after six years.

Since entering Kinki University, the only time I'd actually gone to class was in my freshman year. I joined the sci-fi club at the beginning of my sophomore year, and gradually went from skipping classes to not going at all. The reason: I'd finally made friends I could really talk to, the kind of friends I'd always dreamed of having. My days were filled with too much fun to be ruined by school.

Because I hadn't been attending classes, my "return" to school wasn't much of a return at all - and it was a foregone conclusion I'd have to repeat my sophomore year *again*. On the one hand, there were professors telling me I'd be better off actually quitting the university and reapplying, because at this rate I'd never be able to graduate. On the other hand were my parents, who kept nagging me to buckle down and get serious about education. But I didn't want to think about it. For the moment, I just returned to my pre-convention lifestyle of hanging out in cafes, drinking coffee and reading novels. I basked in the absence of a convention to plan; the truth of the matter was, the Sci-Fi Show and the Convention had worn me down to indifference.

I thought of quitting school for good and getting a job. I even went on a few interviews. I thought since I'd been so successful organizing different events that maybe I should make a career of it. I interviewed at two or three places for that kind of position, but it didn't work out.

Even though I was unable to find a job, I dropped out of school in the fall anyway. I had no intention of reapplying. I just spent my days loafing about, not doing much of anything. I had been ablaze with enthusiasm, but for too long. Now all that was left of me were cinders.

There have been several times in my life that I've lost every ounce of energy and completely deflated, and this was the first. The reasons were different each time, but the result was always the same - utter lethargy. I didn't feel like doing a single thing.

There was a three-bedroom apartment in a place called Juso<sup>86</sup> in Osaka that we converted into our base of operations during the latter stages of DAICON 3 preparations. It was the same area where the movie *Black Rain* was later filmed. One of the staff members, Masaharu Ueda<sup>87</sup>, was living there on his own.

Ueda was a member of the sci-fi club at Osaka University. As a high school student, he'd participated in Ashino-Con. It turns out that when he first saw us he made a solemn vow never to get involved with our kind, but soon after that he ended up participating in the Sci-Fi Show. By DAICON 3, he was on board as a full-fledged member of the staff. It wasn't long after meeting him that I moved into his place, and for several years it was our den of operations. We brought DAICON 3 to life in that apartment, which meant I was there pretty much all the time.

I continued to stay in Ueda's apartment even after the Convention was over. In other words, I was freeloading. I had dropped out of school, was living rent-free in my friend's apartment, and spent my days going to cafes in Umeda to read novels and shoot the breeze with my pals. That's the kind of life I was living. No energy, no drive, no plans for the future.

I'd taken to drinking almost every day, either at home or in a pub somewhere. It was about that time that people began to notice a foreign man with steel clogs roaming the streets of Juso. It was Steven Seagal, before he became a Hollywood star. I once saw a man of that description myself, and I'm pretty sure now that it was him. Coincidentally, Anno would go on to cast Seagal's daughter Ayako Fujitani in one of his own films. But I digress...

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<sup>86</sup> A district of Osaka, one stop from Umeda on the Hankyu line. It's a major commuting hub where Hankyu's Kobe, Kyoto, and Takarazuka lines all meet. Ueda rented an apartment in Juso, which was the ideal gathering spot. It was easily within walking distance of Umeda. That meant we could go drinking in Umeda without having to worry about making the last train. The apartment was like a home away from home for staff members who lived far away or just didn't want to go home for one reason or another. This apartment helped maintain a bond among members of the DAICON 3 staff well after the event was over, and that bond would eventually give rise to another bold project.

<sup>87</sup> **Masaharu Ueda (1960-)** A member of the Osaka University Sci-Fi Club during his college years. The 3-bedroom apartment he alone occupied would become our base of operations while working on our films and preparing for the Sci-Fi Convention. During that time, there were staff members at the place 24 hours a day. He has worked with GAINAX and General Products off and on, but has always kept in touch with us over the years. Ueda was appointed Secretary General of the Japan Sci-Fi Fan Group Association Committee two years after I was elected Committee Chairman. He continues to fill that office today. He had the reputation of being quite the philanderer, so he was often referred to by the nickname "Ataru", after the skirt-chasing protagonist from the old hit anime *Urusei Yatsura*. He is a total book junkie.

## Opening the General Products store

I was still content to loaf around all day, but Okada, spurred on by the success of the dealers' room at DAICON 3, was planning to open a sci-fi specialty shop<sup>88</sup>. I wasn't particularly interested in commerce at the time, so I gave it little thought. That's when he approached me.

If you're just going to sit around doing nothing, why not help me open up the store?" he asked. Honestly, I didn't want to do it, but it wasn't as if I had any other prospects (not that I was really looking). Plus, this was a *friend* asking for my help, so what else could I do? I reluctantly agreed to come on board. The store would be opening in February of the following year, so I promised I'd help out through April. General Products was Japan's first sci-fi specialty store. The name was taken from *Ring world*<sup>89</sup>, the novel by American sci-fi author Larry Niven<sup>90</sup>, and referenced a trading company managed by a race of aliens known as Puppeteers. We received permission from Niven himself to use the term for our shop.

I had no business experience whatsoever, and I certainly never imagined I'd be fit to work retail. Little did I know that we would later incorporate General Products and that yours truly would become the company president!

Once I actually started working for General Products, I soon found that it was a lot more than a retail business. We did product planning and licensing<sup>91</sup> negotiations

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<sup>88</sup> A specialty store for sci-fi related goods. There were a few such shops in Osaka before General Products was established, but they all went out of business within a few months. General Products was the first successful sci-fi specialty shop in Japan, despite rumors that it wouldn't last three months. Back then, most sci-fi shops sold imported goods from foreign films, but General Products innovated by focusing mainly on its own original products.

<sup>89</sup> A series of sci-fi novels written by Larry Niven. It's the grand tale of an investigation team comprised of multiple alien species on a journey through an enormous artificial world. The world itself was created inside a gigantic ring with a diameter approximately equal to the diameter of Earth's orbit (about 186 million miles across) and one million miles from inner wall to inner wall. Published in Japan in 1978, it received the Seiun Award the following year. The title is so popular that sequels are still being written today.

<sup>90</sup> **Larry Niven (1938-)** Prolific American sci-fi author. His grandiose style and the overall entertainment value of his writings have won him great fame. In fact, the name of our store is a nod to Niven's works - in his *Known Space* series, a race of technologically-advanced aliens known as Puppeteers operates a company called General Products. The fan club, which our own store managed, was called the Known Space Fan Club, and the newsletter we put out was the *Puppeteer Tsushin* ("Puppeteer Bulletin"). Niven himself agreed to our use of these names.

<sup>91</sup> In order to sell a product based on any copyrighted subject, permission is required. In the past, such permission was given only to established manufacturers, and before General Products, it was unthinkable for a small garage kit company to even ask. General Products also came up with the one-day licensing system, which allows amateur dealers to sell copyrighted materials only on the day of a particular event, and successfully lobbied many licensors in Japan to consent.

with companies like Toho<sup>92</sup> and Tsuburaya<sup>93</sup>; we commissioned illustrations from professional artists like Hideo Azuma and Kazutaka Miyatake<sup>94</sup>; we even produced our own merchandise. It was rewarding work, and I had fun doing it.

To give an example, when we went to the Toho offices to ask for the rights to make a *Godzilla* model kit, they initially turned us down. Around the same time we went to see Tsuburaya about some other licensing matter and they agreed. The next time we met with Toho, their representative was stunned to hear that Tsuburaya had given us the OK to use their trademarked characters. Eventually, negotiations were reopened and we secured the rights to do *Godzilla*! It was really invigorating being part of deals like that, back when “garage kits”<sup>95</sup> were just starting to crack the surface of traditional product rights business.

Whenever you start up a new business, there are always those who envy your success. Once, when we were visiting Kaiyodo<sup>96</sup>, we got introduced to a model wholesaler

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<sup>92</sup> A film company that has produced (and currently holds copyrights to) many giant monster movies. Even in the early days of General Products, Toho was very cooperative in permitting the manufacturing of garage kits. Toho, in conjunction with NHK and Sogo Vision, was also the anime production house for the GAINAX TV anime *Fushigi no Umi no Nadia* (“*Nadia: The Secret of Blue Water*”).

<sup>93</sup> A famous production studio founded by the late Eiji Tsuburaya. Their *Ultraman* products are very popular among fans of the live-action special effects genre. General Products has released many Tsuburaya-related items over the years, including the *Jet Beetle* and *Ultra Hawk* model kits, a necktie pin with the insignia of the Science Special Search Party, and even an *Ultraman* t-shirt.

<sup>94</sup> **Kazutaka Miyatake (1951-)** Mechanical designer and illustrator for Studio Nue. Made his anime debut with *Zero Tester*. Miyatake has also worked as a mechanical designer in a wide variety of media, including special effects shows, games, and manga. Among his masterpieces are *Saraba Uchu Senkan Yamato - Ai no Senshi-tachi* (“*Farewell Space Battleship Yamato - Soldiers of Love*”), *Chojiku Yousai Macross* (“*Super Dimensional Fortress Macross*”) and *Sayonara Jupiter* (“*Bye-Bye Jupiter*”). He even designed several of the space battleships that appeared in *Gunbuster*.

<sup>95</sup> Limited-production model kits for hardcore fans. They are often produced in places like the designer’s home or garage. Unlike mass-produced model kits, garage kits have the feel of a hand-crafted product. Another difference is that mass-produced model kits require advanced design skills and thousands of dollars for each metal mold, while resin kits can be made for a few hundred dollars. With resin, it’s also possible to create complex and detailed surfaces that would be very hard to duplicate with a metal mold. This is just another reason why garage kits have captured the hearts of hardcore modelers. The kits are pricey because of their small production runs, but as they are made by fans for fans (who have a great knowledge of and interest in the subject) they have remained popular. Finishing a garage kit model takes some fairly advanced assembling and painting skills. Many of the cute girl figurines you see today are high-quality products and sell quite well, but it’s questionable as to how many of them are actually hand-built.

<sup>96</sup> A model shop in Osaka that entered the garage kit market at about the same time General Products did. Okada was a regular patron of the shop. After General Products opened, the two companies butted heads on a number of occasions, but the relationship improved through such events as the Wonder Festival. Kaiyodo took over the Wonder Festival after General Products quit organizing it, and thus the companies became allies. In 2000, a collaborative project between Kaiyodo and Furuta Seika for a product called the “Choco Egg” became a huge success. Kaiyodo currently dominates the miniature figure market.

who just happened to be there. He took one look at us and said, “Oh, right. Those tight-fisted hucksters.” He was probably speaking out of both ignorance and denial of the up-and-coming garage kit industry, but we took the insult as a call to arms. We would prove ourselves to people like him by changing the face of the market - someday garage kits would be sold in every modeling store throughout Japan! And it didn’t take long to make it happen, either. By the time of *Evangelion*, our vision was realized in full.

I acquired both an increasing amount of stress and a growing sense of fulfillment as our place in the industry began to shift. What started as a motley crew of amateurs became one of real professionals with enough money to make things happen. Having languished in the wake of DAICON 3, I began to imagine that the next “festival” coming to rescue me from my lethargy was in fact General Products.

The store opened as planned on Valentine’s Day 1982, one year after DAICON 3. On opening day we were greeted by a line of 200 customers. Among them were two future GAINAX employees: Hiroki Sato<sup>97</sup>, who later joined the staff for the next Sci-Fi Convention and currently works as a company director, and Jun Tamaya<sup>98</sup>, now a game director. Much later, Sato told me that he remembered Okada and I passing out “I ♥ Sci-Fi” stickers to the people in line. He said Okada was telling people to take only one sticker each, whereas I was cheerfully handing out fistfuls to whoever would take them. He says he still has his sticker from that day. Unfortunately, I remember none of it.

We were completely sold out soon after our doors opened for business. We’d prepared what seemed to be an adequate quantity of product, but the unexpected level of patronage had quickly depleted our stores. Over half of the customers entered the

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<sup>97</sup> **Hiroki Sato (1964-)** Anime producer and member of GAINAX’s board of directors. While employed with the Transportation Bureau, he played an active role in DAICON FILM, putting forth whatever spare time he had. I sought to employ his incredible knowledge of garage kits and models, and ended up hiring him as the manager of General Products’ Tokyo branch in 1987. He was put in charge of all PR issues surrounding *Shinseiki Evangelion* (“Neon Genesis Evangelion”), and has been an anime producer for GAINAX ever since *Kareshi Kanojo no Jijo* (“His and Her Circumstances”). He is an extremely dedicated individual, and pours every ounce of his love into anime, models and toys. His strict adherence to the Way of the Otaku may have seemed rather extreme at times, but despite his seriousness, people started to affectionately refer to him as *tencho-san* (lit. “store manager”).

<sup>98</sup> **Jun Tamaya (1963-)** He also came to us from the Osaka University Sci-Fi Club, and participated in the production of *Dainippon*, *Ultraman*, and other DAICON FILM titles. He had a certain knack for design that seemed to be independent of whatever medium he was working in. This ability would land him a position at General Products, and later GAINAX, where he was named chief of CG art and played a vital role in the development of such games as *Dennou Gakuen* (“Cyber School”) and *Princess Maker*. Tama-san is his nickname, and a particularly apt one at that, as his physical appearance is very round indeed. (\_Tama\_ can also mean “ball” in Japanese.) He once prided himself as the heaviest of GAINAX’s heavyweights, but lately he has been watching his weight because of diabetes.

store to be greeted by nothing but empty shelves. The night after opening day, some part-timers and I stayed in the shop and labored long into the night churning out huge numbers of our own vacuum-formed garage kits. After 3:00 AM my body completely gave out, so I laid a sheet of cardboard on the floor and used it as a bed. Just as I was falling asleep, someone burst in the store. Still groggy, I opened my eyes... and was greeted by the boot of a policeman in my face. Our store was on the ground floor. The second floor was an apartment. The neighbors living above us had apparently reported us for making too much noise. But the cops didn't do anything. They just said something like "it's already so late, even if you do quiet down it won't make much of a difference", and then left.

All the fuss notwithstanding, the grand opening of General Products had gone pretty well. But I don't know any of the financial details. I was just a regular employee with a nominal monthly salary of ¥80,000 (about US \$360 in 1982 dollars). The company itself existed only as a part of Okada Embroidering.

April came rolling around, and Okada approached me asking, "So, what're you gonna do now? You can quit, but you've got nothing else lined up. Why don't you stick around and help out at the store?" I was more than happy to do so. I'd grown rather fond of the business of planning and producing garage kits, and I don't think I could have quit. It was different from doing contract work. I discovered the joy of manufacturing your own designs, and seeing that succeed in the marketplace.

Some of the students from the sci-fi club that I'd met through DAICON 3 built garage kits for us part-time. I think for them it felt more like a continuation of the Convention than an actual job. The ones who did the pouring for the plastic casting<sup>99</sup> were mainly guys from the Osaka University club. Most of them repeated at least a year of school. On average, they graduated within five or six years, but there were some who dropped out, never to be heard from again.

Late at night, it's easy to mistake a botched piece of resin for a rice cracker, and a few of us got burned on that one. Plus, we were always spilling the epoxy liquids on the floor and making sticky messes of our shoes when we walked over it. Basically, it was a great time.

One of the Osaka University students was a guy named Gyoten<sup>100</sup>, a very unusual name indeed. Just looking at the kanji characters, I had no idea how to pronounce

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<sup>99</sup> One of the casting materials used to create garage kits. Two different epoxy liquids are mixed and poured into a mold, where they solidify after a few minutes, forming a model part. Epoxy resin is a little tricky to handle because if it's poorly mixed it either forms bubbles or doesn't solidify enough. Pieces of hardened resin have a nasty habit of looking like potato chips to exhausted people working through the night, so handle with care!

<sup>100</sup> **Takashi Gyoten (1962-)** During the early days of DAICON FILM, he was kind of like the boss of Osaka University's Sci-Fi Club. He lived in an apartment close to the University, and it served as our base of operations for a few months during the production of *Kaettekita Ultraman*. He went on to become a high school mathematics teacher, and is now a Buddhist priest.

it. So I asked him. When he told me it was pronounced “Gyoten”, I teased him about it, saying it sounded like some Buddhist monk’s name. But as it turned out, he really *did* grow up in a Buddhist temple! After he graduated from college he worked as a teacher for a while, and then became a professional monk himself. That’s what he’s doing now. It’s really weird to look back on those times and think about what an interesting gang of characters we had working at the store.

## Ideon Festival

Through an introduction from Mr. Komaki<sup>101</sup>, the editor-in-chief of *Animec* magazine, we were commissioned to promote the theatrical version of the *Densetsu Kyojin Ideon* anime. Anyway, we thought up an advertising plan at SUNRISE, and also came up with a few promotional items for the film. Part of the plan was for Okada and myself to appear on TV and in person as the so-called “Devil Twins”, in order to ensure the film’s success.

It was then that we became acquainted with anime director Yoshiyuki Tomino<sup>102</sup> as well as Mamoru Nagano<sup>103</sup>, who was still a college student.

To this day, if someone mentions the Ideon Festival<sup>104</sup>, I immediately get red in the face. I don’t know if it’s because we were young and stupid, or because we just got too carried away, or *what*.

## The Sci-Fi Convention revisited

Amidst these events and projects, a lot of different things started happening at once; in order to talk about them all, I’m going to have to jump back and forth a bit.

<sup>101</sup> **Masanobu Komaki** Editor-in-chief of the cult anime magazine *Animec* when it first went into print in 1979. Over the course of his editorial career he has earned a huge following for the in-depth nature of his publications. He is also famous for naming the Gundam RX-78 from the original *Kido Senshi Gundam* (“Mobile Suit Gundam”) TV series. Komaki also gave Okada and me a regular column in *Animec* magazine, titled “General Products’ Tricks of the Trade”.

<sup>102</sup> **Yoshiyuki Tomino (1941-)** Famous anime director and creator of *Kido Senshi Gundam* (“Mobile Suit Gundam”). Also directed the movie *Char no Gyakushu* (“Char’s Counterattack”). GAINAX participated in the production of this film by contributing mechanical designs.

<sup>103</sup> **Mamoru Nagano (1960-)** Manga artist and illustrator. His big break came when he did the character and mechanical designs for *Juusenki L-Gaim* (“Heavy Metal L-Gaim”). His serialized manga, *The Five Star Stories*, has an energetic fan base and is now a well-established title. The Mortar Headd mecha appearing in the story have become a staple among garage kit makers, and even contributed to the development and sophistication of the model industry and its products.

<sup>104</sup> Event which promoted the theatrical release of *Densetsu Kyojin Ideon*. Okada and I made an appearance there as the “Devil Twins”, spoofing the twin characters from the movie. Our performance, which included an ominous dance (complete with theme song), is embarrassing to think about even now. Sometimes people still ask me to come to their meetings as a guest of honor because they’ll be showing video footage of the Ideon Festival. Oh, how I’d love to strangle them...

While I was helping Okada set up the General Products store, I was still freeloading off Ueda, living rent-free in his Juso apartment. Things were going quite well with the store, but my personal life was going nowhere. It turns out that Sawamura and another of my friends, Nishigaki<sup>105</sup>, couldn't stand to see me like that anymore, and had gotten together to hatch a plan. They ordered me to move out of Ueda's place, and even went so far as to locate a cheap apartment for me.

I haven't told you about Nishigaki yet. He was another member of the Osaka University sci-fi club. He used to play rugby, and stood a burly six feet tall. In truth, he was the very embodiment of a gentle giant, and was affectionately referred to as "muscle-head". He was quite popular in the sci-fi club. Maybe a little too popular - it took him eight years to graduate! Nishigaki's father did business in the Momodani area of Osaka since way back when, and everyone seemed to know him. In fact, we found out about the shop space for General Products through one of his connections.

Anyway, it would be about another month before my apartment was ready, so I decided - though I forget the exact reason why - to move out of Ueda's place and stay with Okada and his parents. Only this time, it wasn't exactly freeloading. After all, General Products was owned by Okada's family business, Okada Embroidering. On top of that, it was only a temporary thing for me until I could secure a place of my own. Living with Okada also made it easier for me to work at the store, mainly because I could discuss business with him whenever the need arose. In the middle of all this, we somehow decided that we would do another Sci-Fi Convention.

I think the impetus came from one of our coffee shop discussions. All of us remaining sci-fi clubbers were chatting it up as usual in some cafe in Umeda, and I recall someone piping up, "hey, let's do the Convention again!" I thought to myself, *What, again? Talk about a waste of time*, but everyone else was still ecstatic over the success of the last Convention. Their eyes sparkled with anticipations as they began to chant, "Yeah, let's do it!" *Why are you telling me all this?* was my feeling at the time... but the fact is, they were all looking up to me and counting on me to make it happen, and it was kind of flattering. They kept badgering me, and finally I relented.

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<sup>105</sup> **Toshihiko Nishigaki (1959-)** A former member of the Osaka University Sci-Fi club. It was Nishigaki who was ultimately responsible for getting his club involved with DAICON. While in high school he was a member of the rugby team, but even though he is tall and built like a house, he is also a very good-natured person, a gentle giant, so to speak. Yanaran from *Wings of Honneamise* was modeled after him. His family owned an embroidery business in Osaka, which yielded many business connections that he used to the great benefit of General Products and the DAICON projects. Nishigaki was appointed head of the executive committee for the 22nd Japan Sci-Fi Convention (DAICON 4). He graduated from college a whole eight years after enrolling. He currently works for a semi-conductor firm.

I was still feeling somewhat sluggish even then, so part of me wanted to do something to wake myself up. A convention probably wouldn't be a bad way to get the jumpstart I needed. I started feeling more and more positive, until I was finally psyched about it. *If we're going to do this*, I thought, *we need to make this the best convention in all Japan*. And how, you may ask, were we going to make this the "best"? Simple - we would have the craziest content, the most activities, and, of course, the most people. That was our goal.

It was a matter of common sense that university sci-fi club members should be the people running things. Seeing as how Okada and I were busy with the store, the role of head of the executive committee fell this time on Nishigaki, who was still a student and sci-fi club member himself. It wasn't our intention to sit behind the scenes and pull the strings, but that's just how things worked out. Even if Nishigaki hadn't been chosen to head the committee, I'm sure he still would have played a pivotal role as a member of the core staff.

The next Convention's location had already been decided on, so we set our sights on the following year. We began to prepare ourselves for candidacy to host the Convention in 1983. With two years before the actual event, however, there wasn't much preparation to be done. Even so, we had several dozen staffers ready and standing by.

To us, making the "best" convention in all Japan meant that we had to have 4,000 attendees. Why 4,000? Simple - the Osaka Koseinenkin Hall, which is where we planned to hold the event, had both a large and medium-sized hall. Between the two of them, there were 4,000 seats. For that many attendees, we figured we'd probably need more than 200 people on the staff, in which case we'd need to start scouting and training them. One way to do that would be to hold a minor local event prior to the main show, but the prospect of planning *another* convention was less than thrilling. That's when someone posed a better idea - making our own independent films!

## Establishing DAICON FILM

In the spring of 1982 we set up the DAICON 4<sup>106</sup> executive committee, establishing at the same time the independent film production group DAICON FILM<sup>107</sup>. Our

<sup>106</sup> The 22nd annual Japan Sci-Fi Convention was held at Osaka Kosei Nenkin Hall in 1983. The 4,000 or so in attendance marked an all-time high for the event. The site was arranged as an offworld colony, and attendees were treated as immigrants to the planet. The colony was planned to the last detail, from the creation of an "authentic" broadcast station, right down to the printing of local currency. The two years spent preparing for the event, coupled with the production of three films in the interim, resulted in a very highly trained staff that helped make this rich and complex event a big success.

<sup>107</sup> A movie production group established to promote DAICON 4, and serve as a training ground for

primary goal was to train the DAICON 4 staff, but the “official” reason was to make films for promotional screening at next year’s Japan Sci-Fi Convention in Tokyo.

Making a film is itself a kind of event. The idea is to create a production process where you and the staff grow and learn to work as a team. We thought that something like producing a film - a worthwhile activity in and of itself - would be the perfect way to build a workable chain of command, and also keep the staff motivated for an event that wouldn’t happen for another two years.

There was something else we had going for us. When we sold copies of the DAICON 3 opening animation to cover our mounting debts, we ended up not only coming out of the red but also making a tidy profit to boot. We were now in a position to turn that profit into working capital for the films.

This is backtracking a bit, but when Studio Nue<sup>108</sup> saw the DAICON 3 opening anime, they contacted us with an “urgent business” matter to discuss. They wanted people to work on the production of their new original TV anime *Chojiku Yosai Macross*<sup>109</sup> (also released in the U.S. as one of three story arcs for *Robotech*), which was still in the planning stages. So when production began for the new show, Anno and Yamaga went to Tokyo to join the staff. It was their first professional gig, and the experience would prove useful in producing their own amateur work.

During the *Macross* production, Studio Nue called up asking for more people who could handle the work - which is how I ended up meeting Mahiro Maeda<sup>110</sup>. As it

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the staff. The head members of this group were for the most part the same people who made up the DAICON 4 executive committee. However, DAICON FILM continued to make movies well after the event was over. Forming right after the end of DAICON 3, the group produced two anime shorts and six special effects films in four years.

<sup>108</sup> A group of sci-fi artists established in 1974. Among its members are Naoyuki Kato, Kazutaka Miyatake, Haruka Takachiho, Shoji Kawamori and Kenichi Matsuzaki. Generally speaking, their activities included illustration, movie planning and conceptual sci-fi design work, as well as writing novels and scripts. They’ve exerted an enormous influence in the realms of anime and special effects films. Just like GAINAX and General Products, this group started as a club of college buddies. The work Anno and the others had done on the DAICON 3 opening animation caught the attention of Studio Nue, who invited them to Tokyo to help out with the production of the TV anime *Chojiku Yosai Macross*.

<sup>109</sup> A TV anime created by Studio Nue that aired in 1982. It was ambitious for a sci-fi anime, combining various plot elements, like a love triangle, an idol singer and fighter jets capable of transforming into robots. Many talented but inexperienced young creators took part in the project, and the footage they produced was top-notch. On the flip side, the production site was chaotic and disorganized, and the labor shortage made some episodes rather painful to watch. A movie version was produced in 1984, and other sequels to the show are available in various formats.

<sup>110</sup> **Mahiro Maeda (1963-)** Maeda had known Takami Akai in high school (both from the same town, Yonago in Tottori Prefecture), and had also worked with Yoshiyuki Sadamoto, on the set of *Macross*, so he was a natural addition to the DAICON 4 opening staff. Later, he was employed by GAINAX and using his excellent design skills, laid the groundwork for *Fushigi no Umi no Nadia* (“Nadia: The Secret of Blue Water”). After leaving GAINAX, Maeda became a key player for Studio Gonzo, and went on to direct such cutting-edge works as *Ao no Rokugo*. His handiwork

happened, Akai knew a fellow, Hiroshi Yamaguchi<sup>111</sup> (who is now a famous anime scriptwriter), and Yamaguchi introduced us to Maeda. In that same way, I was also introduced to Yoshiyuki Sadamoto<sup>112</sup>, who was from the same university as Maeda. Sadamoto and Maeda were still students when they were hired onto the *Macross* production team. Later, they would both return to help us with the DAICON 4 opening animation. I think it would be safe to say that the core of GAINAX was formed by this point. We'd all come together through our mutual involvement in the oh-so-literary sci-fi clubs in the area, but it *felt* more like being in a sports club. Everyone had so much energy!

Now that the General Products store was open for business, we used our customer base as a pool to scout new talent. If someone showed interest in what we were doing, or even if they just seemed to have a lot of time on their hands, they were immediately propositioned and added to the staff. General Products functioned both as a hangout for DAICON 3 veterans and as a place to find potential recruits. The first three films we planned were *Aikoku Sentai Dainippon*, *Kaettekita Ultraman* and *Kaiketsu Notenki*. We also intended to do a few live-action films, including a version of *Thunderbirds*, but in the end it was reduced to these three. We got to work on producing them... all at the same time!

Most of the plotlines were hammered out over drinks at the local pub. With talent like Okada, Sawamura, Anno and Akai at the core of these admittedly rather silly back-and-forthings, the films turned out to be a snap to produce. It was actually a workable system.

We rented some office space in Umeda for the DAICON 4 executive committee to use. Film production was underway in Ueda's Juso apartment, General Products

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also appears in various special effects titles, like *Heisei Gamera* and *Ultraman Powered*, in which he did the character designs for the monsters.

<sup>111</sup> **Hiroshi Yamaguchi (1963-)** A scriptwriter who has worked on projects such as *Gao Gai Gar*, *Shinseiki Evangelion* and *Ao no Rokugo* ("Blue Submarine No. 6"). Takami Akai, Mahiro Maeda and he are all from the same hometown and remain very good friends. After coming to Tokyo as an animator and later gaining experience as an editor for Studio Hard, he distinguished himself as a screenwriter. As far as characters, he can easily handle anything from the geeky goofiness of a hardcore otaku to the calm, steely composure of a hardboiled detective. Before moving to Tokyo, he helped out with the production of *Aikoku Sentai Dainippon*. Incidentally, he's also the one who got Shinji Higuchi involved with DAICON FILM.

<sup>112</sup> **Yoshiyuki Sadamoto (1962-)** Manga artist and character designer. He actually made his debut as a manga artist while he was still a university student. Also during his career at Tokyo Zokei University, he and his underclassman Mahiro Maeda managed to participate in the production of *Macross*. And later, Sadamoto had a hot Osaka summer when he, Yamaga and Anno were brought onto the DAICON 4 staff. After graduation, he went to work for Telecom Animation Film, and helped to manufacture products mainly intended for foreign markets. However, having directed *Honneamise*, Sadamoto played an important role in the founding of GAINAX. Incidentally, he is also in love with European automobiles.

was open for business, and everything was moving right along. My first period of lethargy was finally over.

### *Kaiketsu Notenki*

This<sup>113</sup> was a parody of hero shows, with yours truly playing the main role. It was originally intended as a satire of Toei's old *tokusatsu* ("special effects") TV series *Kaiketsu Zubat*<sup>114</sup> with Hiroshi Miyauchi<sup>115</sup> as the indomitable Zubat.

Now, I had personally never seen *Kaiketsu Zubat* - I'd never even heard of it. But Okada was a huge *Zubat* fan, and it was his idea to do the parody. As for me playing the lead, that was Sawamura and Akai's idea. The reason, I'm ashamed to say, has to do with the main character's name. *Notenki* means "carefree" in Japanese, and apparently my face is so jolly-looking they just had to use it in their parody. Heh. Unlike the other two films, which were shot on 8mm<sup>116</sup>, *Notenki* was done on video-tape<sup>117</sup> partly because it would acquaint the staff with shooting and film production on a simple, easy-to-use format.

<sup>113</sup> The traveling hero (played by yours truly, Yasuhiro Takeda himself) that was the inspiration for the title of this book. It was made for video in 1982, and it has become my signature performance. Once I visited a client, and the receptionist said, "Hey, it's *Notenki*!" That anecdote has become a favorite joke among some of my friends. The plot of the film revolves around a private eye named Ken Hayakawa whose best friend Goro Asuka was killed by the evil organization of Backer. Ken vows to avenge his friend by transforming himself into *Kaiketsu Notenki*. It was a direct rip-off of *Kaiketsu Zubat* (see next note). *Kaiketsu Notenki* was produced as a fun project between the two tiring productions of *Dainippon* and *Ultraman*. The movie was a no-brainer - we made it to relax. We were young.

<sup>114</sup> A special effects superhero TV series created by Toei in 1977, starring Hiroshi Miyauchi as a private eye named Ken Hayakawa, whose best friend Goro Asuka was killed by the evil organization of Dakker. Ken wears reinforced suits of the kind developed for space exploration, and becomes *Kaiketsu Zubat* to avenge his friend. Despite being such a low-budget show, the daring story and visual arrangements were well-received by some enthusiastic fans. *Kaiketsu Notenki* was created as a spoof of the show after Anno showed a *Zubat* video to Toshio Okada.

<sup>115</sup> **Hiroshi Miyauchi (1954-)** Actor who played such roles as Shiro Kazami from *Kamen Rider V3*, Akira Shinmei (the "Blue Ranger") from *Goranger*, Soukichi Banba from *Big One*, and let us not forget... Ken Hayakawa from *Kaiketsu Zubat*! Mr. Miyauchi seems to exude an aura of heroism.

<sup>116</sup> Most self-produced movies today are filmed on video, but in the early 1980s, 8mm film dominated. One film cassette lasts for 3 minutes, and costs about \$10, including development. The film can't be reviewed without first being developed, so you have no second changes with each shot. 8mm is much more difficult to use than a video camera, making the filming experience far more stressful.

<sup>117</sup> *Kaiketsu Notenki* was filmed with a Sony Handycam, which had just been released on the market. Although it was purportedly "handy", the camera itself weighed more than 22lbs, and the battery only lasted 20 minutes. Still, production costs were much cheaper than with 8mm, and filming with the camera was so easy that even inexperienced students could take turns directing and filming movies in a pretty laid-back atmosphere.

Another thing about this film was that it had no director. Maybe I shouldn't say there was no director; that wasn't exactly the case. The direction would just change hands from one scene to the next. That's why there are about a dozen names listed under "Director" in the ending credits.

At first, I really hated the fact that I got stuck playing Notenki... but after four productions, I have to admit that I still have the costume. Despite the fact we were doing a simple parody of a hero show, I must say that after years of playing the character I feel decidedly more heroic. Of course, when I tell friends about this they all laugh at me (I guess I would laugh, too). Oh well. It's a little-known fact that many actors who played heroes in the past tried to keep their roles a secret. After all, no matter how you look at it, "masked hero" shows are little more than afternoon theater for kids. Some of the actors in the *Godzilla* movies kept their involvement hidden for years before finally admitting to it in public. It's the same with amateurs.

I guess all I'm trying to say is that even after all these years I've still got a soft spot in my heart for Notenki. I even appeared in the costume show at the 2001 Japan Sci-Fi Convention along with my three-year-old daughter Yukino, for whom I'd commissioned a cute "little Notenki" costume. She had a wonderful time doing it, and keeps asking me when we can go on stage together again. I might have created a monsters...

### *Aikoku Sentai Dainippon*

Compared to *Notenki*, production on *Dainippon*<sup>118</sup> was a serious undertaking. We put a lot of careful consideration into the props, costumes and casting, and we made Akai the director.

The show was about a squad of heroes, which meant we had a lot of lead roles to fill - five in all. We gave the characters silly names, like Ai Kamikaze, Ai Harakiri, Ai Geisha, Ai Suki-yaka, and Ai Tempura. Naturally, the actors we cast were all rank amateurs. For the role of Ai Kamikaze (the leader) we cast Shuichi Hayashi<sup>119</sup>,

<sup>118</sup> This self-produced film (the name means "Patriotic Rangers of the Great Nation of Japan") directed by Takami Akai was produced by DAICON FILM in 1982. As the title suggests, it was a spoof of Toei's *Sentai* (superhero team) series. It was shown at the Tokon 8 in 1982 as a way of promoting DAICON 4, which would be held the following year. This amateur movie was appreciated for its realistic explosions and miniatures. As you might guess from the title, the characters were pretty crudely named, and the story was a no-brainer. However, we were puzzled as to why some sci-fi clubs reacted to our film with anger...

<sup>119</sup> **Shuichi Hayashi (1962-)** Member of the Osaka University Sci-Fi Club, originally from Kyushu. He is a very hot-blooded individual. He joined our group just after DAICON 3 ended, and starred in DAICON FILM's *Aikoku Sentai Dainippon* and *Ultraman*. During DAICON 4, he also played a central role as our stage manager. After that, he resumed his studies and went on to become the head of R&D for a pharmaceuticals company.

a guy from the Osaka University sci-fi club who was more than a little odd. I heard he was originally from the city of Hakata in northern Kyushu, and while he looked completely normal, he was the most hard-core geek you'd ever meet. He studied German in college just so he could read the *Heidi* books in their original language. The character of Ai Geisha was played by a fledgling nurse who I hear is now married to a hospital director. All told, the cast breakdown was three from Osaka University, one from Kinki University, and one from a nursing college. Sci-fi author Akira Hori<sup>120</sup> even made a cameo.

This film was a parody of Toei's *sentai* (fighting squad) series<sup>121</sup> of TV shows, and at the very least, our explosions were every bit as good as the originals. If you've seen the film you'll know what I mean. Explosions were our thing. True, it was just a parody, but that's no reason to take the easy way out by settling for cheap store-bought pyrotechnics. At first, we followed up with some contacts and found a special-effects explosions expert, but we weren't impressed with the results. They weren't what we'd hoped for. Because the explosions used real gunpowder, they were a step up from ordinary firecrackers, but not *enough* of a step up. We demanded more explosions! This hiccup in the project was probably what kicked our fledgling independent film production group into high gear for the first time. We decided to make our own explosives<sup>122</sup>.

Most of the production staff were college students, and many of them were science majors of one sort or another. This was a lucky break for us. What we did was (and still is) rather illegal, so I'll have to omit the details. Suffice it to say we succeeded in manufacturing our own explosives, and because of that, our little 8mm special-effects film turned into something truly amazing.

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<sup>120</sup> **Akira Hori (1944-)** Though his primary occupation is working for an engineering firm, he is also a hardcore sci-fi enthusiast and highly esteemed sci-fi author. *Taiyoufuu Kouten* and *Babylonian Wave* are two of his greatest works. Since he is an alumnus of Osaka University, we used that connection to force him into the filming of *Aikoku Sentai Dainippon*. We had the honor of casting this most illustrious individual as General Fujiyama, but he would later request that we cut this scene.

<sup>121</sup> Toei's first *sentai* (superhero team as in Power Rangers, etc.) TV series was *Himitsu Sentai Goranger*, which came out in 1975. All the shows in the series featured five (occasionally three) defenders of justice in colorful costumes fighting against evil. As of 2002, 26 series had been produced. *Aikoku Sentai Dainippon* mimicked the plot of shows in this genre.

<sup>122</sup> During the production of *Aikoku Sentai Dainippon*, we decided the climax would require some explosives. We asked another film production group for help in creating the explosions, but the results didn't look very convincing, so we ended up making our own instead. It must be against the law to do something like that, but the statute of limitations should have expired by now... I hope! There were many missteps in the explosion-making process of the *Dainippon* production, but we went on to do *Ultraman*, and by the time we began work on *Orochi*, we had really gotten the hang of it and finally achieved the results we were looking for.

Of course, explosions weren't the only draw for the film. We were amateurs, but we took the production very seriously. A lot of effort was put into both the props and the costumes.

We filmed all over Osaka, from the then-empty lot on the Osaka University campus, which was earmarked for a new medical research hospital, to various parks around the city, including the one by Osaka castle and the one where the World Expo of 1970 was held. We got a lot of onlookers while filming in the Osaka castle park, and ladies selling souvenirs at nearby booths were extremely supportive, always cheering us on. When one of those nice ladies asked us when our "show" would air, one of the staff members responded with "Sometime next April." What a meanie.

We also met up with kindergartners on field trips, which led to a number of impromptu "PR" sessions. I remember one little kid piping up that he'd never heard of us or this show, to which a fast-talking staff member shot back "That's because it's still a secret; this is a secret TV show starting next year, so be sure to watch us when we get on the air!" He was a meanie, too.

Our film finally premiered the following year at Tokon 8<sup>123</sup>, the 21st annual Japan Sci-Fi Convention. On the whole, it was well received, but one sector of the fan community denounced the film, complaining of "antisocial" and even "right-wing" story elements. What an idiotic thing to say. It was just the kind of half-witted argument sci-fi fans love to toss around. Seriously, the whole point of our film was simply to make you laugh, and crack jokes about what fools we were making of ourselves onscreen. If you gave it half a second's thought (if you even had to think about it at all) you'd realize that *Dainippon* certainly wasn't trying to foist any kind of nationalistic ideology off on the audience - we were just having fun. I guess that concept was lost on some of the more marble-headed members of the sci-fi community.

But maybe it was more subtle than that. Maybe some people who didn't like our group saw the film as their chance to get in a hit. Old school sci-fi fans certainly didn't mind telling us that special-effects films and anime were not "true sci-fi", whereas our position was that they were.

As a side, the theme song for the film used the music from the previous year's *Taiyo Sentai Sun Vulcan*, to which we wrote our own silly lyrics. Even now, there are a lot of sci-fi geeks who sing our lyrics at karaoke instead of the real ones.

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<sup>123</sup> The 21st annual Japan Sci-Fi Convention held at Nihon Toshi Center in Tokyo in 1982. The number of attendees was about 1,500. Like DAICON 3, Tokon 8 was a large, well-organized convention running both stage performances and side seminars. The following year's plans (for DAICON 4) would be finalized at this convention, so many members of our staff attended the con to promote our group. After the costume show (the final event of the con), we screened *Aikoku Sentai Danippon* and followed it up with our own live performance.

## *Kaettekita Ultraman*

Today, this film's<sup>124</sup> official title is *DAICON FILM-ban Kaettekita Ultraman*, reflecting that it was *our* version of the Ultraman character. Now, 20 years since its original production, it has actually been released on DVD with *Ultraman*-originator Tsuburaya Production's full permission. I'm still very proud of this work. It's a fine example of an independent, 8mm special-effects film. But it was a long and windy road to success.

Since the project was originally Anno's plan, we made him the director. When I first heard the pitch, my thoughts were, *This sounds like fun and I really want to do it... but can we?* Still, we were linked by the common goal of making next year's Sci-Fi Convention the best in all of Japan, so there was no way we'd let ourselves be done in by something like this. The finished product ended up quite good, and I'm personally proud that we decided to tackle the project. It wasn't easy, but it was a great experience.

*Ultraman* was the largest in scale and by far the hardest of the three films to produce. I think it was our karma for doing three films simultaneously. Production on the film even ground to a halt at one point, but in the end we pulled it off. The production site may have been populated with paper-bagging volunteers, but there was a sense of everyone being there because they all wanted to *create* something.

We didn't finish it in time from Tokon 8, but the following year we showed it at a special screening party to rave reviews. You can still buy the DVD from GAINAX, and if you watch it I'm sure you'll get a sense of the amount of energy we had back then.

People always ask me what the "Kaettekita" part in the title means, so maybe I should answer that question here. The world means "returned" in Japanese, so the overall sense of the title would be "Ultraman is back!" To understand what that means, you'd have to know that Anno had already produced two Ultraman short films for class projects at the Osaka University of Arts. In the second of those films Ultraman leaves Earth to return to space, so in the third film he's come back. That's all it was.

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<sup>124</sup> This self-produced *tokusatsu* film was completed by DAICON FILM in 1983. It was directed by Hideaki Anno and the special effects were supervised by Takami Akai. It was a serious special effects movie based on Tsuburaya Production's *Ultraman*. The film features an impressive story concept, backed by a complicated script and convincing special effects. Anno played the role of Ultraman without any makeup. Production began at the same time as the *Dainippon* and *Notenki* films (which would be shown at the Sci-Fi Convention in the summer), but we were taking such great pains in producing *Ultraman* we were afraid it wouldn't be possible to finish it and *Dainippon* at the same time. Thus, *Ultraman* was pushed off until the following spring. And thanks to Tsuburaya Production's generosity, our version of *Kaettekita Ultraman* is now available on DVD from GAINAX.

## DAICON 4

Getting back to the topic at hand, the major preparations for DAICON 4 were well underway. (It wasn't like we focused all our attention on making movies, you know!) Thus far, the Japan Sci-Fi Convention held in Kobe and hosted by Yasutaka Tsutui<sup>125</sup> had attracted the largest number of attendees. It was viewed almost reverentially among fans, which mean if we wanted to make DAICON 4 the best in all Japan, we had to outdo this one.

Our basic ideas for the Convention were the same as with DAICON 3. Today manga, anime and special-effects films can generally be included in the category of sci-fi, but back then anything that wasn't a novel wasn't seen as "true" sci-fi, and was generally looked down upon. Even now, 20 years later, there are still people who cling to this outdated definition of sci-fi. What we wanted to do was introduce those pariahed formats into the mainstream, and judging by the current state of affairs in the sci-fi world, it looks like popular opinion has won out in our favor. But it was a lot of work getting there. We took plenty heat for our ideas, for reasons that would be unthinkable from today's perspective.

## The Osaka Philharmonic

One of our plans for the Convention was to get the Osaka Philharmonic to play for us. Thanks to Komatsu's earlier introduction we had the contacts in place, so without further ado we headed over to their office to negotiate. We didn't even make an appointment. We just showed up on their doorstep asking if they could put on a performance for us, so they didn't even believe us at first. Who would? Here we come out of the blue, asking the entire Osaka Philharmonic to play for our club party.

"Do you kids have any idea how much it costs for the entire orchestra to do a single performance?" we were asked. No, we didn't. "How about the conductor? Who'll do it? And what about the score?" We were absolutely clueless.

"We don't know anything. We haven't even thought it through, yet. *You tell us,*" we said.

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<sup>125</sup> This is referring to "Shin-Con", the 14th annual Japan Sci-Fi Convention, held in Kobe in 1975. Yasutaka Tsutui was making a name for himself as a professional writer, and the production of the con was a labor of love for him. However, he appointed someone else to the task of managing the executive committee. The object of the Con was to promote and familiarize people with sci-fi, and events included a talk by comedy storyteller Beicho Katsura, a jazz performance from Yosuke Yamashita and a drama scripted by Tsutui himself. It was very enjoyable. The number of attendees was about 1000, which at the time was very high, exceeding all previous cons and a few that were still to come.

In the end, the Philharmonic arranged for us to meet with a conductor... but the guy wouldn't listen to a word we said. We had all kinds of music ideas already picked out, but he wasn't having it. We went back and forth with him until he just gave up and left the bargaining table.

What we'd wanted was music from *Star Wars* and *Star Trek*, Akira Ifukube scores, themes from *Ultraman*, *Gundam*, and *Yamato*... stuff like that. But with no conductor we were dead in the water. We decided to take the matter up with one of the music producers from Toho that we knew through General Products (as you can see, all kinds of good connections came from the store). He was kind enough to introduce us to another conductor, and this time the guy immediately understood what we wanted to do.

But we still had no musical scores. Back to Toho's music department. We were able to acquire some scores from them, but the conductor had to transcribe the rest from old LPs, with the help of local music students. After filing an application with JASRAC (Japanese Society for Rights of Authors, Composers, and Publishers), our preparations were in order.

We asked Osamu Tezuka to be the commentator for each piece of music, and he gladly accepted. But afterward, he was stunned to learn that almost none of the Convention staff had actually seen the orchestra perform. "Why didn't you let them listen?" he asked me, and I replied that they had work to do. "Their satisfaction comes from a job well done", I said. Maybe some people would think that's silly, but if you ask any of the staff present on that day, they'd give you the same answer.

### *Ken Hayakawa, Private Detective*

Someone had the idea of playing on the fact we'd done *Kaiketsu Notenki* (a parody of the TV show *Kaiketsu Zubat*) by inviting the real McCoy to appear at the Convention. The show's main character, Ken Hayakawa (aka Zubat), was played by actor Hiroshi Miyauchi, so we hunted down the location of his office and paid him a visit, traveling all the way to Akasaka, Tokyo.

The first time we met Miyauchi we were blown away. He was *exactly* like his onscreen persona. I'm talking an honest-to-goodness hero. And we were sitting right next to him. Every single one of us who met him became an instant fan.

We told him about our plans for the Convention and about our *Zubat* parody. At the end, I capped it off with our request: Would he be so kind as to appear at the Convention in full character, dressed up as Ken Hayakawa himself?

"Sure", he said. "No problem. I still have the costume, in fact."

It was amazing. He wasn't put off in the least by our crazy request. However, Miyauchi was shrewder than we thought. Guess who ended up footing the bill for that outrageous costume of his!

## Too many sweatshops

Since the opening animation for DAICON 3 had generated such an enthusiastic response, we simply had to do another one for DAICON 4. The attendees would expect nothing less, and the staff was raring to go. Even Yamaga left his work on *Macross* to help us make it. If the DAICON 3 anime had been “handcrafted”, then DAICON 4’s was an industrial production. We rented our own dedicated production studio in Morinomiya, right near Osaka Castle. The studio occupied an entire floor of an old building called the *Hosei Kaikan*<sup>126</sup>, which means “Sewing House” in Japanese (it was managed by a clothing manufacturer’s union). Nishigaki, the head of the executive committee for the Convention, secured it through one of his connections, and we packed the main staff in like sardines.

That’s not just a metaphor. The whole building would be locked down promptly at 9:00pm, and no one could get in or out until the next morning. Naturally, we weren’t working on the kind of schedule where we could just pick up and leave every night at 9:00, so the majority of the staff would end up getting locked inside. Imagine it - the middle of the summer, locked inside an old building, with the air conditioning shut off to save power! I’m not kidding when I say it was sweatshop conditions for the anime staff. They had to paint cels long into the hot nights, drowning in rivers of sweat. It was pretty much your nightmare production site.

As before, production on the anime wasn’t fully completed until the morning of the Convention itself. We had originally planned to play it simultaneously in both halls, but with only one completed reel, we were forced to show it on a single screen and stagger the screening times.

With two halls - one seating 2500, the other 1500 - we had plenty of stage events planned. That meant we needed stage settings, and lots of them. We organized a carpentry team to build the backdrops, then stuck them inside a rented warehouse with all the materials and told them to get cracking. This warehouse didn’t have air conditioning either, but they worked at it day after day. The locals simply assumed that a bunch of college kids had gotten together and started up a sign-making business. People would come by and offer them compliments: “You kids are young, but you sure do work hard!” It was nice.

In addition to those two “sweatshops”, there were several other locations around town where various groups were continuing with other preparations for the Convention - so many in fact that I couldn’t keep track of them myself. Not that it was my job to do so or anything. . .

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<sup>126</sup> This old building, located near Morinomiya, was managed by a labor union of apparel manufacturers in Osaka. We were able to rent an empty floor for the summer, thanks to one of Nishigaki’s (the executive manager of DAICON 4) connections. Because of its convenient location, we often held meetings there. The problem was that the building closed in the evening, so our staff had to work through the night locked inside, enduring the summer heat as there was no air conditioning.

## The day

The actual day of DAICON 4 was filled with a bewildering number of events all running simultaneously. Therefore, I was only able to personally experience the few I was in charge of.

One thing I can say for sure is that everyone who attended was very excited about being there. Many people who came to that event have since gone on to become professional authors, animators, and editors. Even now, when I meet people for the first time, a surprising number of them break the ice by saying they went to DAICON 4, or even better, that they got my autograph at the *Notenki* screening party. It was a large event - with a turnout of 4,000 - and it really made an impact.

## Afterward

After DAICON 4, I didn't experience the same sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach that had plagued me after DAICON 3. I was still so busy with my work at General Products that there wasn't any time to get depressed.

Another thing was that DAICON FILM, the Convention's executive committee, continued their film production work even after the event. They kept making movies and showing them at special screenings around the country. Among their productions were *Kaiketsu Notenki 2*<sup>127</sup> and the puppet show *Hayauchi Ken*<sup>128</sup>. Still, it'd be hard to say that they were able to maintain the same level of passion that they'd demonstrated in the months before DAICON 4. I guess there's a limit to how far you can take amateur production work. They began to lose steam once the thought of DAICON 4 was no longer there as a motivating factor.

Sawamura had since graduated college and had gotten a job working for Japan Television Workshop, a production company based in Tokyo. But after DAICON 4, he quit his job and moved back to work for General Products. He was made

<sup>127</sup> A movie produced by DAICON FILM from around the end of 1981 through January 1982. The first *Notenki* was filmed on video camera, but this second movie was done on 8mm. The short winter days limited the amount of time we had to film, so if you make a movie with a lot of outdoor scenes, I don't recommend doing it in the winter. I played the main role, ended up getting sick, and still had to work at the General Products store, so I was completely exhausted the entire time. The supplemental title for this film was *Minatomachi Junjohen* ("A Harbor Town Tale of Unspoiled Emotions").

<sup>128</sup> In 1982, DAICON FILM produced a puppet movie titled *Hayauchi Ken no Daiboken* ("The Great Adventures of Quick-Draw Ken"). It was a live-action movie with puppets. Numerous scenes required special effects, so we rented a house near the General Products store and used that as our effects studio. Anno and Akai opted not to participate in this movie or *Notenki 2*, in order to give the younger staff an opportunity to hone their skills. The film was made after DAICON 4, when the staff's morale was starting to decline, and consequently, there was no push to produce a sequel.

producer of Akai's first 16mm film project, *Yamata no Orochi no Gyakushu*<sup>129</sup>, or *Orochi the Eight-Headed Dragon* (I'll just call it *Orochi* from here on out). They planned on making it their last independent film, and they wanted to go out with a bang.

DAICON FILM and General Products were separate organizations, but our business relationship was very close. General Products employees like Sawamura and myself were involved in the making of the films, and the General Products store was the perennial hangout for DAICON FILM employees. So when DAICON FILM ran out of money halfway through the filming of *Orochi*, General Products, which had really hit its stride, stepping in and financed the remainder of the film.

Part of the reason why DAICON FILM kept going after DAICON 4 was because of a mistaken belief that the party would never end. Even General Products had no more than a handful of employees, and DAICON FILM's main staff was comprised of college students who would eventually graduate or lose interest. It was just a matter of time before the whole thing ground to a halt, but no one understood that then. As staff members began to drop like teeth from an old comb, it became more and more painful to be a part of things. But it turned out this was just one more step along our path toward becoming filmmakers. Once we were able to overcome this phase, we shed our amateur skins and became full-fledged professionals in the industry.

One incident that springs to mind was a minor mutiny within General Products itself. Led by me, several General Products employees descended on Okada. He was the one who'd started the company in the first place, and what's more, it was formed as a division of his family's Okada Embroidering Corporation. Our beef was that lately he hadn't been fulfilling his responsibilities as head of the company. We gave him an ultimatum: Shape up, or we'll ship out.

I have no idea what Okada's real thoughts on the matter were. From where I stood, it just looked like he was sick of running the store.

"If anyone's going to quit, it should be me", he said in response to our threat. "If all of you were to leave, the company would go under for sure. I'll quit, so you guys keep going, OK?"

He looked as though all the wind had left his sails. But the next day he just came in like nothing ever happened. The issue never seemed to be formally resolved.

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<sup>129</sup> Monster movie directed by Takami Akai, which was produced by DAICON FILM in 1985. Set in Akai's hometown of Yonago, its plot centers on a mythical monster named Yamata no Orochi ("eight-headed dragon") that tramples the city. This marked the pinnacle of DAICON FILM's production history, and was filmed using incredibly expensive 16mm film. The movie itself was hard to make because of the ever-expanded scale of production and the shortage of staff. Eventually, we ran out of money and were forced to accept financial support from Bandai, who later distributed this movie on video. The DVD version is currently available through GAINAX.

Later, during the filming of *Orochi*, the same problem once again reared its ugly head. This time it was all of the rest of the employees against Okada and *me*. Same story - if we didn't get our acts together, they'd quit. Apparently, they were upset about the fact that Okada and I did all our planning at the coffee shop next door. "You two do nothing but sit around chatting and drinking coffee all day", they complained. "We can't take it anymore!"

I snapped. Maybe I just didn't like taking the heat myself, but for whatever reason, I felt betrayed. I thought we were all on the same team, but now this.

In the end, we never could come to a resolution. Several of the members left to form their own company - which oddly enough, continued to accept subcontracting work for General Products. A few years later, our two companies would merge, and then split once again.

I learned something from this experience. The simple act of people gathering around someone they feel they can trust and trying to talk out their problem can cause emotions to come into play and actually make the problem much, much worse. Which is a shame, because most of the time, the initial problem was something quite trivial.

Incidentally, one of the part-time illustrators was a manga artist named Sonoyan (better known as Kenichi Sonoda<sup>130</sup>). Later, both of us would end up moving to Tokyo and living in the same neighborhood. I guess we just can't get rid of each other!

At the General Products store we also sold fan comics on consignment from none other than Masamune Shirow<sup>131</sup>, who was still an amateur at the time.

Okada was working with Yamaga on some OVA (original video animation) project around this time, but they didn't tell me much about it. You know the rest of this story - the project would turn into GAINAX's first commercial film, *Oritsu*

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<sup>130</sup> **Kenichi Sonoda (1962-)** Manga artist. He is well-known for his recent titles *Houshin Exaxxion* ("Cannon God Exaxxion") and *Gunsmith Cats*. I first met him while he was still a student at Osaka University. He came to General Products hoping to consign some of his dojinshi fan manga. For a while, he also worked part-time for our store, assisting with product development. He later moved to Tokyo and went on to become character designer for *Gal Force* and *Bubblegum Crisis*, as well as an independent manga artist. One question that often comes up regarding this author is how the characters in his manga can seem so intelligent and wise, while the author himself is such a sleaze. His nickname is Sonoyan.

<sup>131</sup> **Masamune Shirow (1961-)** Manga author with a large following. He typically puts out a low volume of very high-quality work, and his style is characterized by skillfully-wrought illustrations and well-detailed worlds. Among his more famous works are *Appleseed* and *Koukaku Kidoutai* ("Ghost in the Shell"). When he was still a student at the Osaka University of Arts, he used to bring his dojinshi versions of *Appleseed* (only a fan work back then) in for consignment at the General Products store. Shirow also designed the aircraft the main characters fly in GAINAX's PC combat flight simulator *Aoki Uru* ("Blue Uru").

*Uchugun*<sup>132</sup>, aka *The Wings of Honneamise*. As for Anno, he'd long since moved to Tokyo and was making quite a name for himself as a professional animator.

## Chairman of the Japan Sci-Fi Fan Group Association Committee

For the 24th annual Japan Sci-Fi Convention, or “Gatacon Special”<sup>133</sup>, I nominated myself as candidate for chairmanship for the Japan Sci-Fi Fan Group Association committee. I already had close ties with the Association, and received enough votes to win the position.

We had been holding something of a grudge against the Japan Sci-Fi Fan Group ever since they shot down our first Convention plan, forcing us to hold the Sci-Fi Show instead. And when the DAICON 3 opening animation won the Seiun Award<sup>134</sup> but was denied the prize on the grounds that it hadn't been screened in general theaters, that grudge turned into open hostility. We were, in effect, robbed of the Seiun Award and had to accept an Honorable Mention instead.

Among the many sci-fi fans I met at this time was a fellow named Kakizaki<sup>135</sup>. Every time I spoke with him, he'd tell me the same thing: “If you were chairman of the Fan Group, you wouldn't be having these problems.” As it turned out, Kakizaki was the head of the executive committee for Gatacon Special, and he did nothing but

<sup>132</sup> GAINAX's first movie, released in 1987. It was also the first theatrical film Bandai ever produced. It was scripted and directed by Hiroyuki Yamaga. Yoshiyuki Sadamoto created the characters, and together with Hideaki Anno directed the animation. On staff were some very well-known individuals, though they were all novices back then. They were later joined by Shinji Higuchi and Takami Akai, who had just finished *Orochi*. The music was composed by Ryuichi Sakamoto and the sound effects were done by veteran sound engineer Atsumi Tashiro. Most people reading this book have probably seen the film.

<sup>133</sup> The 24th annual Japan Sci-Fi Convention held in Niigata in 1985, known as the Gatacon Special Summer Festival. The reason for the “Special” was because it was the Gatacon festival's 10th anniversary. There were about 1,300 people in attendance.

<sup>134</sup> This annual award was first presented in 1970. It designates the year's finest work of science fiction, and is awarded at the Japan Sci-Fi Convention. There are eight categories, ranging from short and long novels to comics and visual creations in various other media. The attendees of the convention vote for the best work in each category. Next to the Nihon SF Taisho Award, it is perhaps the most prestigious award in the realm of sci-fi. (Incidentally, the Nihon SF Taisho Award was established in 1980, and the winners are determined by a group of professionals.) In 1982, the DAICON 3 opening animation received more votes than anything else, but the Fan Group Association disqualified it.

<sup>135</sup> **Kazuyoshi Kakizaki** Originally from Niigata Prefecture, he is a hardcore sci-fi fan, and one of the so-called “BNFs” (Big Name Fans). Unlike most of the Kanto area sci-fi elite, he was actually a good friend of mine and the rest of the DAICON 3 and 4 staffs. He was very tall, standing over six feet. He was also a very open-hearted individual, and the ladies really feel for him. When asked why he got involved with the DAICON staff, he replied “Because all sorts of problems just seem to crop up around those guys. It makes things more entertaining.” He was the model for a character (also named Kakizaki) who appeared in *Chojiku Yosai Macross*.

sing my praises to the Fan Group committee. But I have to confess that wasn't all we had going for me. Most of the "aye" votes came from fictitious fan clubs that we made up, just so they could "vote" in the election! Yep, we rigged it, and Kakizaki knew all about it.

Anyway, I won the election, and I served as the committee chairman for over 16 years. But after all those years, I get the feeling that all I really did was just make things a little easier for Mr. Kadokura and Mr. Maki<sup>136</sup>.

I wasn't able to get a hold of Kakizaki for a very long time, and then in July of 2001 I received news that he had succumbed to an illness. Tragic indeed that I would not hear from him again.

## Wonder Festival

Because of General Products' success in developing and expanding small-lot licensed model products, other garage kit makers<sup>137</sup> soon sprang up and followed suit. There had been pirated product lines in existence before General Products came along, but I believe we were the first small-lot production group to seek licensing for our product lines and sell them with official sanction.

When new garage kit makers started popping up, the last thing on our minds was accusing them of being copycats. Instead, we proposed getting everyone together for some kind of direct-sales event. After all, we finally had friends on our block! What we came up with was Wonder Festival<sup>138</sup>.

We'd been called "tight-fisted hucksters" for making our garage kits, but we'd started a revolution. Model shops that had previously been content to sell kits from the big-name makers like Bandai and Tamiya were now beginning to develop and market their own original designs. From the beginning, our goal was to make the things

<sup>136</sup> **Shinji Maki (1959-)** Sci-fi researcher and critic. He is famous for his collection of old and rare sci-fi novels. Maki was the Secretary General of the Japan Sci-Fi Fan Group Association Committee when I announced my candidacy for Chairman.

<sup>137</sup> As garage kits came to be more widely recognized, the number of garage-kit makers increased and many local hobby stores started releasing kits under their own brand name. Bookstore owners and avid readers don't tend to write their own novels, but in contrast, hobby store owners and avid hobbyists love to make models. For these pricey kits, a maker need only place two or three magazine ads. The market established by General Products and Kaiyodo is now booming, thanks to some small stores in Shikoku and Kanazawa, as well as continued enthusiasm from modeling clubs.

<sup>138</sup> The Wonder Festival is like a flea market for garage kits. The event organizer takes care of the licensing issues so that amateurs can sell their garage kits (of copyrighted subjects) on the day of the event. This spot-licensing system was first seen at Wonder Festival. Only in the garage kit market are individuals allowed to compete on equal ground with the major manufacturers. The Wonder Festival contributed to the expansion of the garage kit industry by providing an opportunity for both pros and amateurs to show off their wares side by side.

we wanted ourselves, because we just weren't satisfied with the range of products manufactured by big-name modelers. Predictably, those big-name modelers didn't show one bit of interest in garage kits.

We were also complete amateurs when it came to distribution, but we *did* know how to organize a successful 4,000-person event, so we didn't hesitate for a moment when it came time to plan Wonder Festival. We knew we could do it, and do it well. We decided to hold the first Wonder Festival in Tokyo. It was just the logical thing to do, considering the advantages a venue in Tokyo would hold - not only for the future popularization and maturation of the garage kit industry in general, but also for our business in particular. Remember, we were the same guys who'd made DAICON 4 the grandest Convention in all of Japan, just so we could thumb our noses at Tokyo! We couldn't resist holding a little "pre-event" event in Osaka right before the actual one in Tokyo. We held it at the General Products store, and it was a huge success. We had people lined up outside like it was the grand opening. The first Wonder Festival was a great success for us, but it was still very small-scale. We rented out half of a floor of the Tokyo Trade Center in Hamamatsu. We didn't need more space simply because there weren't that many garage kit makers around at the time, and amateur dealers were almost nonexistent. Another thing that made this one different from other events of its kind was that we charged admission. Unable to foresee the impact of an admission fee on attendance, we decided to keep it small just in case.

But we needn't have worried - we would soon be shrieking in delight! So many people showed up that we had to shuffle them in and out in shifts. Later, we would increase the scale of the event and begin holding it biannually - one in summer and one in winter. We continued to use the Tokyo Trade Center, but with each subsequent Wonder Festival we'd have to rent out more and more floor space, until finally we ended up renting out the whole damn building. And the place still overflowed.

Since Wonder Festival was held twice a year, it felt like we were in a perpetual state of event planning. It also brought back the party-like atmosphere we had first experienced during the preparations for the Sci-Fi Show. Wonder Festival held a lot of meaning for me personally, and also drew volunteers from the rest of the DAICON 4 staff. It even captured the eye of copyright license holders, who went on to draft amendments to the licensing system that would grant single-day licenses to all amateur dealers registered for the event, a truly Herculean move for copyright law.

After the breakup of General Products, toymaker Kaiyodo took over as the main sponsor for Wonder Festival, and they still continue in that role today.

## The founding of GAINAX

Amid the preparations for Wonder Festival, both Okada and Yamaga began setting their sights on professional animation production. Startup capital was supplied by General Products to the tune of two million yen (about US \$8,500 in 1984 dollars). Okada also recruited Hiroaki Inou, one of the guys we'd met earlier through our sci-fi fan group activities. Back then, Inoue was working for Tezuka Productions, and we were counting in him to bring in some much-needed professional experience. All we'd ever attempted to produce by way of anime was an 8mm independent short. Anno and Yamaga had worked professionally as animators, but just as low-level production site employees, not as planners, producers or directors. If they were going to do this anime, they were going to have to do everything themselves, from start to finish. And Okada was still a rank amateur. Not only did he not know the first thing about producing an anime, he didn't have any direct industry connections. That's where Inoue came in.

Producing this new anime professionally meant getting a budget, and one place we could pitch our project was Bandai. There was a guy there by the name of Shigeru Watanabe<sup>139</sup>, whom we'd met through contacts at General Products. Initially, he'd been in charge of Bandai's Real Hobby series<sup>140</sup>, but he'd since transferred over to their Emotion film label (later to become Bandai Visual). We decided to use Watanabe to get our foot in the door.

The timing was perfect. The plan made it all the way to the office of the then-president of Bandai, Mr. Makoto Yamashina<sup>141</sup>. As it turns out, Yamashina wanted to advance their anime film production anyway, so *Oritsu Uchugun* was changed from

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<sup>139</sup> **Shigeru Watanabe (1957-)** A producer who is also on the board of directors for Bandai Visual. We met when General Products was still in business. At the time, Mr. Watanabe was involved in product planning for Bandai, and worked on such projects as the "Real Hobby Series", a line of figurines marketed toward hardcore enthusiasts. He is also the one who arranged for Bandai to help fund the production of our first theatrical anime release. If it hadn't been for him, Okada and Yamaga's dream of producing a feature length motion picture might never have been realized. For a time, he was actually the president of Bandai Visual, but voluntarily stepped down because he "[wanted] to make anime, to be at the heart of the creative process." It was a move that made him famous throughout the industry. He is truly a man of character. Incidentally, he is the same age as me, and the two of us have gone out drinking together many times.

<sup>140</sup> A Bandai-produced series of plastic models that included Daimajin, Ultraman and Gamera. Considering the choice of subjects, the unpainted parts, and large volume of reference materials, these kits were designed specifically for hardcore fans.

<sup>141</sup> **Makoto Yamashina** The second president of Bandai Co. Ltd., one of the largest toy manufacturers in the world. He is the company's current chairman, and is responsible for taking it forward into the real of visual media. It is largely through his efforts that Japan's anime industry has prospered.

an OVA<sup>142</sup> project to a theatrical film production, and the budget was accordingly upped from the original ¥40 million (about US \$167,000 in 1984 dollars) to a whopping total expense allocation of ¥800 million (US \$3.3 million)!

There was, however, resistance within the company toward this foray into filmmaking. As a result, the project became a two-stage plan where we would have to start off with a pilot film. If the project was deemed sufficiently sales-worthy, we would be allowed to proceed with production of the main film.

The trade name for our new production company, GAINAX, was registered at the earliest stages of the Bandai animation project. Basically, we needed a corporate vessel to hold the production funds, so that's what GAINAX became. The history of the name itself is now the stuff of legends. Believe it or not, it doesn't come from any foreign words - it's 100% pure Japanese. In the Yonago dialect of Tottori, the word *gaina* means "big". Even now, the city hosts a festival called Gaina Matsuri, which means "Big Festival". Both Akai and Yamaga knew about this *gaina* word, and as the story goes, they each independently came up with the idea of using it for the company name, without consulting with each other first. The "X" at the end was just stuck on to make the name look more like "the name of an anime robot" (I know, I know... that's a pretty silly reason). Anyway, that's how we got "GAINAX". There's something else, though. I recently learned that in the Aichi dialect the word *gaina* means "rowdy" or "loose cannon"! Rather funny, because that's not too far from the mark, either...

As we were registering GAINAX, we decided to go ahead and ride the financial wave by incorporating General Products. It had, until then, remained a division of Okada Embroidering. We didn't make General Products the production company from the start because we still intended to disband the bridge corporation GAINAX as soon as the film production was complete. It wasn't our intention to found a new company. Incidentally, we hired Masahiro Noda on as comptroller at that time, and he's still with us today.

For a while, people were under the impression that GAINAX started out as a subsidiary of Bandai, but that's a mistake. The fact is, General Products capitalized the new company and registered it, but Bandai paid all the production expenses. I was the one who personally handed in the registration forms for both corporations. I got an accountant to show me the ropes on the paperwork and to go through the entire process, and then I marched down to the Sakai attorney general's office and submitted the forms in person. I found it extremely interesting.

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<sup>142</sup> Short for "Original Video Animation". OVA is straight-to-video anime intended to be sold through retail, instead of airing on TV or screening in theaters. OVAs tend to be targeted at hardcore fans who have high expectations of quality. The first product of this kind was Mamoru Oshii's *Dallos*, released by Bandai. Among GAINAX's OVA titles are *Top of Nerae!* ("Gunbuster") and *FLCL*.

Before registering, we had a discussion and fixed the date of the founding on Christmas Day, but I got confused and jumped the gun. I actually completed the registration on December 24, making the founding date Christmas Eve instead.

Another funny thing was that I listed the same business activities on the registries for both corporations, meaning that anime production wasn't actually listed under GAINAX. I'll never hear the end of that one.

The starting lineup of business executives for the two companies was Okada as president of GAINAX, INC., and me as president of General Products, Inc. That was it.

Okada and Yamaga actually moved to Tokyo to begin production of *Oritsu Uchugun*, setting up a studio at Takadababa in Shinjuku. I remained in Osaka, and the running of General Products was left entirely up to me, both in name and in fact. Some people left the store altogether, but I wasn't one of them. Just because I remained in Osaka didn't mean that I'd broken off business relations with Okada and the rest of the boys at GAINAX. For one thing, shooting for *Yamata no Orochi no Gyakushu* was still underway in Osaka, and I was still actively participating in the project as both a scene director and general staffer. The thought of moving the General Products headquarters to Tokyo wasn't even a consideration at that point. I still felt connected by our activities as a group, and thought of the split headquarters as nothing more than a new arrangement. Other members of the group may have felt differently... I don't know.

I listed myself among the board of directors for GAINAX when I registered the company, and now I'm the only remaining founding member of the board. All the people who worked on *Oritsu Uchugun* were in their 20s at the time. We were all just babes in the woods, but by now every one of those people has gone on to become a successful animator or director.

Now that I'm on the topic, there's a character in *Top o Nerae!* ("Gunbuster") who was based on one of these people during GAINAX's early stages. The model for Captain Tashiro was our sound director Atsumi Tashiro, a veteran who had also been in charge of sound for *Uchu Senkan Yamato* ("Star Blazers"). He was exactly like Captain Tashiro.

### *Yamata no Orochi no Gyakushu*

As the GAINAX team was just starting production of *Oritsu Uchugun Honneamise no Tsubasa* ("The Wings of Honneamise"), the Osaka gang and I were keeping ourselves busy with *Yamata no Orochi no Gyakushu*.

Unlike the professionals at GAINAX, we had to rely almost exclusively on help from volunteer amateurs. DAICON FILM had completely run out of funds for the movie by this point, and General Products was forced to put in some cash to keep the project afloat, leaving us with no money to pay the staff. They really

were volunteers, and we couldn't even afford to feed them - everyone brought sack lunches.

Because of all this, we began to see conflicts arising from a lack of commitment to the project. Akai was the director and his whole reason for involvement was most likely resume-building - he wanted to go pro. Sawamura was the producer, and his primary concern was just completing the thing. He was working hard to see that happen. I, on the other hand, was simply having a good time with it. As a scene director and all-around staff member, I had learned to enjoy being in front of the camera, but I had other responsibilities, too. The General Products store wasn't going to run itself, so devoting myself exclusively to film production simply wasn't an option. On top of that, a lot of the volunteer staff members began asserting their own interests, creating even more disharmony on the production site. Despite any differences in motivation, we were all supposed to be gathered together for the purpose of creating this film and making it as good as we possibly could, but that just wasn't how things turned out.

I personally didn't care whether we were pro or amateur. All that mattered to me was the strength of our commitment and what we wanted to get out of it. My old action-oriented attitude of "Act first, talk later" was still the same as it was when we were organizing the Sci-Fi Show.

But the situation was different. This was the largest project DAICON FILM had ever undertaken, both in terms of scope and volume, and it was our first time working with 16mm film. It was one new, untested thing after another, and it seemed like no matter how much footage we shot, we just couldn't finish the thing. It became too trying for the staff, many of whom had joined for no other reason than to experience something new, and one by one they started dropping out of the project. I wanted to say, "You were the ones who signed up for this, so you might as well stick it out to the end", but truth be told, I didn't really feel like chasing after them. Among the staff members who stayed were Shinji Higuchi<sup>143</sup>, Anno's friend from Tokyo, and Sawamura's former classmate Showji Murahama<sup>144</sup>, who was still in college.

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<sup>143</sup> **Shinji Higuchi (1965-)** Director of *tokusatsu* or special effects shows, such as the *Heisei Gamera* series. He just sort of dropped in on DAICON FILM during the production of *Yamata no Orochi no Gyakushu* and would end up living at the studio for over a year, becoming an essential member of our special effects team. He is a self-proclaimed "dynamic special effects nut". Later, he participated in the production of *Wings of Honneamise* and *Gunbuster*, and he directed *Nadia: The Secret of Blue Water*, from the "Island" story arc onward. You could say he exploded onto the scene, and he continues to show great visual savvy with special effects and anime. He's a very pleasant and approachable character, and people refer to him as "Shin-chan". As a matter of fact, *Evangelion's* main character, Shinji, is named after him. Incidentally, he met his wife Noriko Higuchi (née Takaya) on the set of *Honneamise*.

<sup>144</sup> **Showji Murahama (1964-)** Anime producer and CEO of Gonzo Digimation Holdings (DGH). He was still a student when he joined our staff for DAICON 4 and *Yamata no Orochi no Gyakushu*. He later dropped out of college and joined GAINAX, overseeing production of *Honneamise*. After

Despite all the struggles, the *Orochi* project was moving toward completion. And I can't say we didn't have some good times, too. But we ran out of money before the completion of sound production, and the project stalled while we waited for additional funds.

General Products wasn't in a position to invest any more money into the project, and we didn't know what to do. After a lot of consideration, we finally decided to sell off the video rights to Bandai.

After a long string of brutal setbacks and unforeseen troubles, *Yamata no Orochi no Gyakushu* was finally completed in 1985. It would be DAICON FILM's swan song. The end of our amateur film production also meant the loss of a platform for our group activities. With *Orochi* finished, Akai moved to Tokyo to join the *Oritsu Uchugun Honneamise no Tsubasa* production as an assistant director. I sent Higuchi and Murahama to the Tokyo production site as well, because Higuchi had distinguished himself as a special effects director and Murahama had worked his tail off. As for me, I returned to my usual work at General Products.

Following the completion of the *Fushigi no Umi no Nadia* film, Murahama would leave GAINAX, and together with Mahiro Maeda, Hiroshi Yamaguchi, and Shinji Higuchi would go on to found the anime production studio GONZO. Takeshi Mori<sup>145</sup> joined studio GONZO the following year.

### *Oritsu Uchugun Honneamise no Tsubasa*

GAINAX was able to finish up the pilot version of *Oritsu Uchugun* at the studio in Takadababa, but for the actual production they needed a bigger place, so the studio was moved to Kichijoji-Higashi. I myself was so wrapped up in General Products matters that I don't really know what things were like on the production site, but I did see the first trial screening in person. The finishing touches hadn't yet been applied, but that didn't matter. I was blown away. I'm ashamed to say I even cried. It was that moving.

The finished *Oritsu Uchugun* began showing in Toho Foreign Film Branch theaters throughout the country in March of 1987. I went to a theater in Osaka and saw it again. Looking back, I kind of regret not being more involved in the production of the film. It really was amazing, and it would've been nice to have been a bigger part of it, but I was in Osaka, giving General Products my full attention.

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producing *Nadia*, he left GAINAX along with Mahiro Maeda and Hiroshi Yamaguchi. The three went on to found Studio Gonzo, which has released many of its own titles since.

<sup>145</sup> **Takeshi Mori** Anime writer/director. He assisted with the direction of *Nadia: The Secret of Blue Water*, and later joined Murahama's startup company, Gonzo. There, he directed the TV anime *Vandread*. He was also a part of many other projects, including GAINAX's *Otaku no Video*, which he directed.

It's commonly believed that while *Oritsu Uchugun* was a well-made film, it was a failure at the box office. That's completely untrue. It may not have been a huge hit, but it certainly wasn't a flop. Not a single theater canceled its run, and at some locations, it actually had a longer run than initially planned. I think a false apprehension probably emerged because a few people voiced their own unfounded assumptions - that a story as complex and subtle as this couldn't possibly draw crowds, and from there the rumors just took on a life of their own.

Regardless, this was a big-budget production. For an animation budget in Japan at the time, ¥800 million was a huge chunk of change. It would have been large even for a live-action Japanese film. The budget scale meant that reclaiming all the production costs at the box office simply wasn't feasible.

With a successful anime production and an established relationship with Bandai under their belts, it would've been a real shame to just dissolve the company at that point. Okada, Inoue, and the rest of the assembled GAINAX staff also expressed their fervent opinions that the company should be allowed to continue on. But the huge studio needed for the theatrical production was too expensive to maintain, so GAINAX had to move once more - this time back to the tiny studio in Kichijoji-Minami.

## General Products moves to Tokyo

The flip side of GAINAX's new success was the ever-worsening state of affairs at General Products. The Wonder Festival had expanded beyond belief, and slowly but surely the garage kit industry was growing larger and more entrenched. Despite all that, General Products items weren't doing very well in the marketplace.

We still had some hits, like our life-size Kamen Rider mask<sup>146</sup>. It was something everyone thought of doing, but only we could actually pull it off (we made it out of soft vinyl<sup>147</sup>, a material that was still a rarity in the garage kit world). But even with successes like this, the future of General Products was still cloudy.

To make matters worse, as production on *Orochi* concluded Sawamura and I started to disagree professionally, and he ended up leaving the company while *Oritsu Uchugun* was showing in theaters.

In short, General Products was in trouble.

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<sup>146</sup> A full-size replica made of soft vinyl. The helmet can actually be worn, but does not provide adequate protection for motorcyclists!

<sup>147</sup> One of the materials used to manufacture garage kits. It was originally believed that vinyl was too coarse to show much detail, and was thus deemed unsuitable for monster models. However, it was later proven that very fine detail really could be achieved with this material. The adoption of soft vinyl drastically lowered garage-kit prices - depending on the type of vinyl, its cost can range from one-third to one-half that of epoxy resin.

I also started to believe that if I continued doing business in Osaka, I would eventually hit a brick wall. Working in the character business meant getting approval from licensors. And all the licensors were in Tokyo. Plus, there was the biannual Wonder Festival, also in Tokyo. And by now, General Products was hurting so bad financially that even the cost of going to Tokyo three or four times a year was getting to be a major drain on the company's resources. Wonder Festival was rapidly becoming the store's primary source of investment capital, and there didn't seem to be anything I could do about it.

I had to face facts. After much agonizing, I finally decided to move General Products operations to Tokyo. I left the Osaka branch store in the care of Junichi Osako<sup>148</sup>, one of the guys who'd been on the Japan Sci-Fi Convention staff, and the rest of us merged with GAINAX. Incidentally, that same Junichi Osako is now a novelist. Some members of my staff weren't too keen on leaving Osaka, so they left the company instead. This left us with a combined staff of about ten employees.

Shouting! Running! Laughing! Crying! Yasuhiro Takeda and the First Big Bash of the 21st Century

**In-depth coverage on Yasuhiro Takeda, Chairman of the Planning Committee for the 40th Annual Japan Sci-Fi Convention-SF2001 & Japan Sci-Fi Fan Group Association Committee**



- Date: Aug. 17–19, 2001
- Location: Nippon Convention Center (Makuhari Messe) in Mihama-ku, Chiba

<sup>148</sup> **Junichi Osako (1962-)** Novelist and author of *Zoa Hunter*, among other titles. I met him while he was still attending the Osaka University of Arts. At that time, he was running around from event to event, helping out with various tasks. He later made his debut as a manga author while also doing some acting. He was a very active member of the sci-fi scene, and was even the manager of the General Products store during its transfer from Osaka to Tokyo.

The year was 2001. It was the first year of the new century, a time that many sci-fi fans had dreamed of. It was also the first time in 13 years that GAINAX would host the Japan Sci-Fi Convention. Yasuhiro Takeda, General Manager for GAINAX, put his genius to work as the Chairman of the Planning Committee - but he would also step down as Chairman of the Japan Sci-Fi Fan Group Association Committee, a position he'd held since 1986. It was a proud moment for Mr. Takeda, and we were right there with him. It was a proud moment for Mr. Takeda, and we were right there with him. We now present an in-depth report of the 56 hours we spent with the now ex-Chairman, from the day before the convention right up until he said his goodbyes.

Friday, August 17th. Weather: cloudy, partly sunny.

- *11:30 AM* I arrive at the convention site, accompanied by a fellow editor from *Comic Gum* magazine. Mr. Takeda, along with some other GAINAX staff who are helping out with the convention, and approximately eighty volunteers are already gathered in front of the “Sci-Fi Hall”, where the main part of the convention will be held. The air is abuzz with chatter. We had met with Takeda once before to discuss our report, but we opt to introduce ourselves again. When asked if there is anything he would prefer not to be reported, his immediate answer is, “Not at all. Feel free to report anything.” *Well then! He won't mind if we talk about a little of this, or touch on some of that, will he?* I thought to myself. *Alright, let's get this report underway!*



Sakyo Komatsu, a major player in Japanese sci-fi, is shown here prior to inaugural greetings.

- *11:35 AM* A reminder is given to the convention staff on how things should be run. “One person’s negligence makes the entire staff look bad. Pay attention and work.” Harsh words, but there are no signs of nervousness among the staff. On the contrary, everyone seems in a good mood, anxious for the momentous event that is about to begin. I can’t decide whether they seem more like school kids about to go on a field trip or otaku heading to a Comiket fan-comic convention. I guess everyone loves a good party!
- *12:05 PM* People start setting up for the convention. Staff members keep accidentally stepping on the lines that exhibitors have put out to aid in setting up their displays. “Hey, don’t step on that!” Takeda keeps yelling angrily. “It’s times like these that tell you a lot about a person, the kind of personality they have. You can tell some people just once not to step on ‘em, and they’re careful never to do it again. But others will just keep on steppin’ on them, no matter how many times you tell them not to.” Does stepping on the lines just get on his nerves, or is it somehow connected to a dark event in his past? Takeda returns to the second floor and has a smoke by himself.
- *12:30 PM* Takeda and the others receive folding bicycles and internal-use PHS phones to aid in their preparations. The Sci-Fi Hall itself is a huge area, some 36,000 square feet, and the convention is also renting the International Hall. The bicycles and phones are indispensable in allowing communication to quickly pass between the various divisions. It’s just too bad everyone won’t be running around in Notenki costumes. . . I hurry after them, my head filled with the kind of ridiculous daydreams only a hardcore otaku would have.
- *1:30 PM* The energy level of the staff has begun to gradually rise. The male staff members are putting up tents and erecting stages, while the females make little packages of program books and name tags for the attendees. Mr. Takeda rides around on one of the bicycles, giving out detailed instructions. “Here I am, the committee director, and I still have the urge to poke my nose into every little thing”, he admits. “I’m not sure why, though.”
- *3:00 PM* Takeda leaves the convention site to pick up his wife, sci-fi novelist Hiroe Suga, and their daughter Yukino. He has lunch while out. Afterward, Mrs. Suga joins the staff. The entire family is working to put this convention together. I tip my hat to them.
- *4:25 PM* A meeting is held in one of the secondary offices to decide who will be working where. Tomorrow promises to be another chaotic day, and Takeda and the others all look serious. “There’s just too many things to think about”, he gripes.

- *5:00 PM* Another meeting is held to discuss the opening and ending ceremonies. “It’s the day before the convention, and nothing’s been decided. Everyone’s still scrambling all over the place.” Uh, come again?
- *6:40 PM* Dinner consists of pre-packaged bento meals, after which the next day’s assignments are announced. Takeda gives out orders using a handheld mic.
- *7:50 PM* Takeda returns Yukino and Mrs. Suga to the hotel.
- *9:10 PM* Uniforms and nametags are handed out to staff. Takeda calls out each person by name and gives them their uniform. Like always, he’s making the crowd laugh.
- *10:00 PM* Orders are given to begin constructing a Monolith. This piece of art was settled on by merit of its best being able to reflect this, the grandest sci-fi convention of the year 2001. It will be placed squarely in the middle of the Sci-Fi Hall.



The day of the convention. A meeting is held to hammer out the remaining issues.

- *10:30 PM* Prizes are sorted for use in the quiz shows as well as the 40th anniversary con party. Takeda is starting to look tired. We’d like to help, but everyone’s expressions are so deathly serious that we find ourselves unable to approach. . .
- *11:00 PM* Preparations continue. Takeda rides around the place on his bicycle, occasionally stopping for a smoke in the designated smoking areas. Everywhere he goes, people gather around him. He chain smokes and chats cheerfully with them.
- *2:30 AM* The monolith is finally finished. It looks better than planned, and even Takeda seems satisfied with it.



Constructing the monolith

- *3:00 AM* Takeda checks everything over one last time. His eyes look tired, and his legs barely have any energy as he pedals the bike. It looks like weariness has finally caught up with him. He heads off to the hotel, and to bed.

Saturday, August 18th. Weather: cloudy, afternoon showers

- *6:00 AM* Takeda is awakened by a phone call from Mr. Takami Akai, who is in charge of the opening animation. He tells Takeda that, “It won’t be ready for the opening ceremonies, but will probably be ready for the closing.” Considering the other projects Mr. Akai is working on for this event, it is decided to cancel the anime altogether.
- *6:50 AM* Takeda shows up at the hall wearing the same type of uniform he distributed to everyone the day before. He eats a bento for breakfast, a gloomy look on his face - I suspect he’s still troubled by the matter of the opening animation. Staff members are constantly coming to him for further instructions, and I wonder if being relied on like this is actually a source of inspiration for him.
- *7:05 AM* After breakfast, Takeda gives the staffers their instructions. It’s an important lecture, detailing how to keep a 1,700-participant, 300-guest event running smoothly. Everyone listens intently, their faces earnest.



Takeda takes a quick break  
and eats with Yukino.

- *7:50 AM* The preparations that have been going on since yesterday appear to have reached the final stage. Many of the staff members worked all night to get everything ready. Takeda spot checks, riding around on his bicycle and calling out to people. He also checks on the reception desk, which is located in the international conference hall on the 1st floor.
- *8:15 AM* Takeda has a cup of coffee at a cafe next to the reception desk. “Man, I gotta apologize to everyone at the opening ceremony”, he says sadly. I knew that canceling the anime had affected him, and watching him is even starting to making me feel down.
- *8:30 AM* Mr. Akai shows up looking mentally and physically exhausted. It’s decided to post the opening anime on the convention’s website at a later date. Takeda looks somewhat relieved at having finally figured out how to deal with the situation. *Phew! I’m happy for you, Mr. Takeda!* I think, imagining myself striking a triumphant pose.
- *8:35 AM* preparations for the opening rehearsal begin inside the convention hall. Takeda gives detailed instructions regarding the lighting, audio and video footage to be used.
- *8:55 AM* Rehearsal for the opening ceremony gets underway.
- *9:00 AM* Doors open to the public.
- *9:15 AM* Inside of one of the waiting rooms, Takeda holds a meeting with Sakyo Komatsu, the honorary head of the planning committee. Komatsu, who will be delivering the opening speech, has actually declined this position in the past, so

it's little wonder that Takeda was so insistent on getting him to accept this time around. Takeda also greets Tsukasa Shikano and writer Haruka Takachiho, both of whom are in charge of the opening act. Takeda takes this opportunity to hand everyone in the room his business card. He's visibly disappointed a moment later, when Mr. Komatsu looks at the card and says "Wani Books? I didn't know they were still around." On the other hand, Mr. Komatsu's card (which was made especially for this event) was an ad for *Mahoromatic*, the popular comic running serially in *Comic GUM*. Wow!

- 9:30 AM Takeda checks on the reception area. A few hundred people have already gathered around the entrance. The crowds and the excitement remind me of *hatsumode*, when visitors line up for the traditional New Year's visit to a shrine. Prior preparations and an efficient staff ensure that the admittance of participants goes quite smoothly. Takeda has a big smile on his face.
- 9:45 AM Takeda enters the convention hall to witness the opening ceremony. Everything is set and ready to go. Takeda himself appears calm and ready to take on everything that comes that way. No wonder he's earned himself a nickname "the big guy". Sorry, I don't mean to sound cocky...



Takeda runs into manga artist Kenji Tsuruta.

- 10:05 AM The opening ceremony begins and Takeda's speech kicks off the event. "This thing is running for 30 nonstop hours, and there are a whole lot of things going on! So have fun, but don't push yourselves too hard, OK?" He continues, saying "Sci-fi fans tend to be pretty cliquish. Too cliquish, really, because they're always staying within their own groups. That can make an event like this pretty exclusionary and actually raise the average age of the participants (which this year was 36). Following this convention, I will be retiring from the position of chairman of the Sci-Fi Fan Group Association Committee. Doing this will hopefully give a younger generation the opportunity to work on this event, and

make it accessible to a much wider audience. I look forward to coming back again - as an attendee, this time - and enjoying an all-new Sci-Fi Convention.” The audience applauded appreciatively.



With author Masaki Yamada.

- *10:20 AM* Sakyō Komatsu makes his opening speech. Takeda stands at the rear of the stage and watches, his face full of emotion.
- *10:25 AM* Mr. Komatsu’s speech ends, and Takeda comes back out onstage after. He’s supposed to go over general dos and don’ts with the audience, but suddenly he bows and starts apologizing! “There’s something I have to apologize for”, he begins, snickers already coming from the audience. “We couldn’t get the opening anime ready in time...” Suddenly, everyone bursts into laughter and applause! Those sci-fi fans sure love it when things go wrong! Watching Takeda apologize so sincerely must’ve been like seeing some of the very entertainment they’d come here for! Phew, good thing huh? (Well, not that good, I guess...)
- *10:35 AM* The opening ceremony concludes, and Komatsu, Takachiho and Shikano perform the opening act, *Kyoyou* (“Education”). Meanwhile, Takeda chats with the staff backstage.
- *12:10 PM* Takeda eats lunch with his daughter Yukino at a restaurant on the 1st floor. Things have been pretty intense for him all morning, but it seems like he’s finally been able to catch a breather. His face is one of contentment as he looks at his daughter.
- *1:00 PM* Takeda visits the greenrooms next to the restaurant and chats with some of the guests.

- *1:40 PM* Takeda moves on to the main event area. He hears from the staff that everything went well at the reception.
- *1:50 PM* The Sci-Fi Fan Group Association Committee calls a meeting in the convention hall. They are meeting to vote on recipients of the Seiun Awards. They also discuss the location of the next convention, which is scheduled for 2003. As Tochigi prefecture is chosen as the convention site, the event is nicknamed T-CON. Takeda speaks on a number of different issues, including Gifu prefecture being given preference for the site of the 2004 convention. Finally, he moves on to the biggest agenda facing the Committee - revising the rules and regulations for holding a Sci-Fi Convention. The debate becomes increasingly heated - especially when Takeda himself decides to enter the fray. Chairman or no, Takeda isn't afraid to speak his mind (which earns him more than a few complaints). Just watching the proceedings is enough to make me pretty nervous. The debate rages, going past the scheduled end time of 3:30 pm to finally conclude at 4:00. At the end of the meeting, Takeda formally announces that today he will be resigning from the Committee. Ms. Noriko Maki is named a candidate for the position of Committee chairwoman.
- *4:20 PM* After the meeting, Takeda goes to the main office and interviews with Anime Paradise. He comments on the theme of the 2001 Sci-Fi Convention and the future of GAINAX.
- *4:35 PM* Takeda is a panelist on "The Sci-Fi Fan Group Association Committee - Past and Future", held in room 205 of the International Conference Hall. This project aims to shed light on the 40-year history of the convention, including that of previous Committee chairpersons and executive directors. Upon learning that Takeda has held his chairman's position for 16 years, original Committee chairman Masahiro Noda exclaims, "Takeda is like Samaranch!" Takeda flashes him a wry grin. Perhaps it was exhaustion, but when the topic turns to the origins of the Sci-Fi Convention, Takeda decides to get in a little shuteye. *He must be pretty exhausted after that Fandom meeting, huh?* I think to myself. As soon as the topic shifts to the more recent history of the convention, however, he suddenly begins talking rather animatedly. He even tosses out a succession of "behind-the-scenes" stories, some of which simply cannot be reported to the general public! The reactions of those present was split between stunned silence and peals of laughter.
- *6:00 PM* Takeda moves on to the Sci-Fi Hall. There is a lot of activity here, as the area is jam-packed with a variety of different events. Takeda bikes around the square exchanging business cards with participants. Everywhere he stops, a crowd gathers. *Man, Mr. Takeda sure is popular!* I think to myself. I guess he

doesn't have to wear a weird costume to get attention anymore... Just then, I turn and see the monolith. Whoa! People have been throwing money offerings at it! And somebody dedicated a mini-monolith next to it, too! I immediately vowed to contact Mr. Clarke and tell him that I'd send him some pictures of the sight. Takeda is running around, happy as a child at play. "Wow. You can never tell what a sci-fi fan's gonna do, huh?" he asks.

- *6:40 PM* Takeda goes to the reception area. He greets Hiroyuki Yamaga, President of GAINAX, who is dressed as a character from *Abenobashi Shotengai* ("Magical Shopping Arcade Abenobashi"). The two chat for a while.
- *7:30 PM* After checking things out in the hall, Takeda heads for the Makuhari Prince Hotel, which is located right next to Makuhari Messe. There, he attends the Sci-Fi Convention 40th Anniversary party, which is being held in the Prince Hall.



Listening intently to Mr. Noda's speech at the 40th anniversary party.

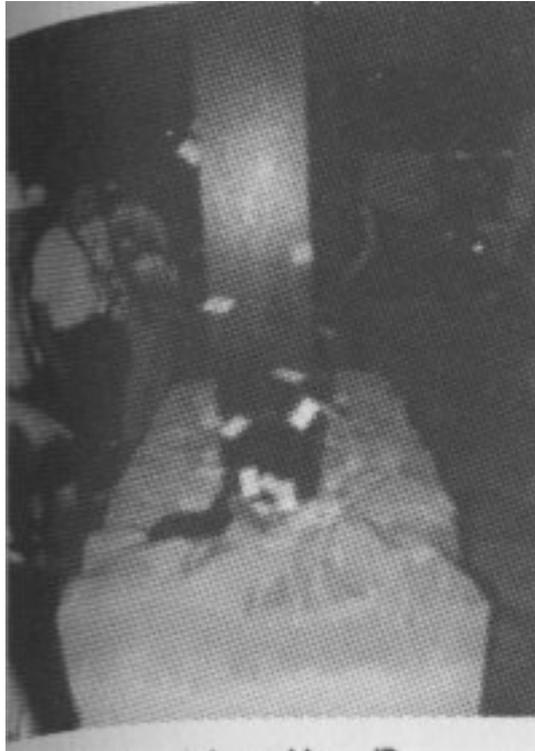
- *8:15 PM* The party gets underway. Takeda makes the opening speech, which is followed by a toast from Mr. Noda. Takeda looks a little more relaxed now that points on today's agenda are (for the most part) taken care of. "If I eat, I'll just end up getting sleepy", he says, and begins chatting with the guests

and participants. He finally breaks down and eats when Noda decides to field a comment from each and every woman at the party, which takes an interminably long time. Takeda wolfs down food as if he were throwing coal into a furnace. In the last 30 minutes of the party, he gives party gifts to all participants.



He moves around slowly  
with a helium tank.

- *10:00 PM* After the party, Takeda returns to the event hall for an interview with *Osaka Nikkei Newspaper*. During the interview he comments on the fact that many sci-fi fans are from Osaka, and relates everything from DAICON FILM to the founding of GAINAX. He speaks non-stop for about 40 minutes.
- *10:45* Takeda takes a break at a smoking area located behind the main office. He chats for a while with his sister and other family members who were present for the festivities today.
- *10:55 PM* Takeda goes to the Sci-Fi Hall and talks to manga artist Mrs. Bang Ippongi (who is dressed up in costume). He doesn't waste time exchanging business cards here, either. Before you know it, all 200 of his cards are gone. With a start, I realize that someone has coiled a sacred *shimenawa* rope around the monolith. Takeda is speechless.
- *11:30 PM* Takeda takes a short break at the Amazing Cafe. Then he's on his bike again and making the rounds.
- *12:00 AM* Takeda has to be back here early tomorrow, so he decides to head back to the hotel. He makes a quick stop by the main office, upon which the staff immediately points out that arrangements have yet to be made for the closing ceremony. An impromptu meeting gets underway.
- *12:30 AM* Takeda returns to the hotel.



The mini-monolith gets blessed? What's going on here?!

Sunday, August 19th. Weather: clear

- 8:00 AM Takeda is awakened by an e-mail message on his cell phone. The subject line “silver” makes him jump right out of bed - he had completely forgotten about the balloons! Come 4:00 this morning, the Sci-Fi Hall was already supposed to have been decorated... with silver balloons that should have been inflated by 6:00 yesterday. Takeda runs frantically for the event hall. Once there, he picks up a helium tank and makes his way unsteadily to the center of the hall. He's raring to go, but the weight of the tank slows him down a bit, and it's no problem for us to follow him. A crowd of curious onlookers has gathered, eager to see what's going on. Takeda belts out instructions, and the staff begins to blow up a pile of balloons. Takeda belts out instructions, and the staff begins to blow up a pile of balloons. Takeda inflates them so quickly that for a moment I think to myself *What is this guy, a street performer?*
- 8:45 AM The staff gathers in the center of the hall to discuss the closing ceremony. Once the details are all hammered out, Takeda makes for the smoking area behind the main office. There, he talks with Tetsuya Kohama from Tokyo

Sogensha while smoking two cigarettes he bummed from one of the staff members. During the conversation, Takeda mentions the idea of *Notenki Memoirs* to Mr. Kohama, who quips “Are you trying to win the Seiun award or something?” Takeda laughs it off, but then I start to wonder. *C-could it really be? Is that what he’s after?!*

- *9:30 AM* Takeda looks quite content as he watches the silver balloons go up in the air, one by one. He tells me that from the very beginning, he knew that silver would be the color for this event. When I ask him why, he says “2001... It just sounds silver, you know?” Hmm.
- *9:50 AM* Takeda drops by the reception desk on the 1st floor. He and the staff hold a meeting in the lounge adjacent to reception. The topic - closing ceremonies.
- *10:10 AM* Takeda holds another meeting inside the convention hall, again regarding the closing ceremonies. It’s decided to end the convention with footage of the monolith, from its initial construction to how it appears now. *Uh, can you really just run with something like that?* I think to myself, but it appears my worries are unfounded. Not a single concern is raised, and the staff simply sets about its preparations. I’m just amazed at how they can move so quickly to make this vision a reality!
- *10:15 AM* Takeda meets with Mr. Sakyō Komatsu to discuss the closing speech.
- *10:20 AM* Takeda realizes that he hasn’t had breakfast yet. He dashes to the main office hoping to score a bento, but they’re already gone. Devastated, he grabs a few cookies to tide himself over.
- *10:25 AM* Takeda goes to room 301A in the International Conference Hall. He takes part in a Q&A session about the history of sci-fi conventions, titled “The First Sci-Fi Convention”. He speaks extensively on the subject, and everyone present listens intently.
- *12:10 PM* Rehearsals for the closing ceremony begin at the convention hall. It looks like some of the ideas for the ceremony are being employed here for the first time, and Takeda is giving his staff some rather detailed instructions. I stand there, stunned by how fast they can get things done. They sure are spry for their age! (Sorry.)



At Bang Ippongi's booth.

- *12:50 PM* Takeda goes to the reception area on the 21st floor to pick up his daughter Yukino. Now his whole family is there! His mother comes up to me and says hello, which I thought was very nice of her.



No one knows he's still wearing the Notenki costume underneath his slacks.

- *1:15 PM* Preparations for the closing ceremony begin. Takeda and Yukino go to a greenroom and change into their Notenki outfits for the costume show. I move closer, trying to contain my excitement. There it is - the legendary Notenki! But I had no idea the actual costume was so... (deleted). I work up the nerve to ask Takeda how long it's been since he last wore the suit, and could almost visualize one of those anger marks you see in manga and anime popping up on his forehead. "Not since the movie..." he replies. I knew it.
- *1:25 PM* Takeda and Yukino head backstage. They return a moment later, Takeda screaming "I messed up! The independent films' awards ceremony comes before the costume show!" He scrambles to take off the costume and change into

a suit. There's not much time, however, so he ends up keeping his Notenki pants on under his slacks. Heh heh.

- *1:40 PM* The first part of the closing ceremony begins. The awards ceremony kicks off without a hitch, as if the mad rush backstage had never occurred. Takeda changes into his Notenki outfit again. By this time, he is quite sweaty.
- *2:00 PM* The costume show begins. At the show's climax, the Notenki father and his daughter come onstage. Yukino seems a little embarrassed by the wild cheering from the audience, but then she strikes the famous Notenki pose! That gets her another round of applause. Good job, Takeda! She's now officially a sci-fi fan!
- *2:15 PM* The Ankoku Seiun Award is announced. "Unfinished opening anime" wins the Project category, and the Monolith wins Freestyle. Takeda proudly receives the award in his Notenki costume.
- *2:25 PM* Takeda returns to the greenroom and changes into a suit again, this time for the Seiun Award ceremony. He changes, by the way, right in front of Mr. Komatsu, Takumi Shibano, Takayuki Tatsumi and Shinji Maki.

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name: dummy
file:
notenkimemoirs-little-notenki
state: unknown

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Here they come! The original Notenki and mini-Notenki!

- *2:40 PM* Quick meeting about the closing speech with Mr. Komatsu.
- *2:45 PM* The second part of the closing ceremony begins. Takeda chats with Akai and Yamaga backstage while the Fanzine Award is announced. He tries to placate Mr. Komatsu, who is pretty much bored and ready to go back to the lounge.
- *3:20 PM* The Seiun Award is announced. Takeda presents awards to the winners from each category. For the Japanese Feature-Length category, Hiroe Suga's *Eien no Mori - Hakubutsukan Wakusei* is chosen! This makes the third time in convention history that Mr. Okada presented his wife with this award. Following her acceptance speech, Suga tearfully addresses her husband, now poised to retire as chairman. "We thank you for your hard work these past 16 years", she says.

- *3:50 PM* The award ceremony concludes. Noriko Maki is brought onstage and introduced as the next chairman of the Fan Group Association Committee. She delivers a speech and, with tears in her eyes, presents Takeda with a lovely bouquet.
- *4:05 PM* Mr. Komatsu delivers the closing speech, at which point the convention officially comes to an end. Seeing Hiroe's and Maki's tears, Takeda snuffles "Almost made me wanna cry, too."
- *4:15 PM* Cleaning of the Sci-Fi Hall begins. Halfway through cleaning, Takeda begins filling out forms for "YUCON", a sci-fi convention to be held in Shimane next year, as well as "T-CON 2003", which will be held the year after that. As of next year, Takeda will be just a participant at conventions.
- *5:10 PM* Takeda takes pictures with all the staff members in front of the Monolith, which has become both the symbol and funniest subject of this convention.
- *6:00 PM* convention officials and staff members attend the after-party. Now that everything is done, everyone looks happy and content. Takeda makes a speech to start the party. "Great job, everyone. The convention went well, without too many mishaps." And then there was complete silence. Takeda quietly places his left hand on his hat and pushes it down, covering his eyes. He bites down, the smallest of sounds escaping his lips. Wow, Takeda is crying! A murmur spreads through the crowd. . . and then people are pushing their way forward, cameras in hand, hoping to snap a photo of this moment. Others stay where they are, laughing and applauding. "Hey, enough already!" Takeda says, grinning through his tears and shooing away those responsible for the flurry of flashes. He moves to speak again, the voice catching in his throat. "I . . . I just want to say thank you for putting up with all my selfish demands over the past 20 years." Thunderous applause echoes through the hall. "This will be my last time to host a Sci-Fi Convention. But if another event comes up in the future, I hope we can all get together, like this, and have some fun." Speech finished, Takeda raises his glass in toast.
- *7:23 PM* Takeda chats with the staff while key people from each section make their speeches. Says Shinji Maki, "I didn't know passion was in Takeda's blood."
- *7:35 PM* Takeda makes the final speech, bringing the evening to an informal close. "You're welcome to stay here and drink all night if you like, but remember - you're not crashing at my place." To the very end, Takeda never forgets to make people laugh.



Takeda presents his wife with the Seiun Award, triggering a round of applause.



Takeda is completely speechless... but why are those people in the back laughing?

### Reporter's note

I can't count how many times during the compiling of this report I would think to myself, *Wow, Takeda does stuff like this, too?* It didn't matter what was going on - Takeda was always getting involved, adding input, taking an active role, and even giving pep talks if needed. He made people laugh, and was never afraid to poke fun at himself. I'm reminded of when Takeda said to me, "I love being here, in the center of it all. I love it." These past three days have taught me exactly what Takeda meant by that. When I confided in him that this was to be my first sci-fi convention, he responded "Don't think of it as a real sci-fi convention. Sure it's going to be energetic and a lot of fun, but a real convention is when everyone gets

together in some little crowded room and just talks, nothing but sci-fi.” In other words, even if it’s just sci-fi lovers getting together and making some noise, that’s enough. Place doesn’t matter, format doesn’t matter - what matters is actively participating, not just observing the proceedings from afar. You have to be there in the thick of things, talking and laughing and getting to know one another. I really feel that these are the ideals that have kept Takeda going all these years.

Of course, attending a single sci-fi convention wasn’t enough to understand everything that Takeda has accomplished over the past two decades... but it was enough to let me catch a glimpse of it, and I was grateful for the opportunity. When I caught sight of those tears during his final speech, I found myself wanting to call out, “Thank you for all your hard work! Starting next year, you’ll finally be able to enjoy these conventions. You’ve earned it.”

## Tokyo - And then, moving to the capital

### GAINAX House

Our first outpost in Tokyo was a small dwelling that would later become known as “GAINAX House”<sup>149</sup>. It was a single home occupied by single men from both GAINAX and General Products.

Not too long after the move, we became acquainted with another otaku who had come from North America (Canada, actually). His name was Toren Smith<sup>150</sup>, and his love of manga had brought him all the way across the ocean to Japan. He’d run out of money somewhere along the way, however, and was having a hard time of it. Apparently, Okada had met Smith during our Osaka days. The Canadian had visited the General Products store in Momodani with sci-fi author J.P. Hogan, who was in Japan for the Sci-Fi Convention. Naturally, after hearing his foreign friend was down on his luck, Okada suggested we put him up at GAINAX House.

Toren went on to be a success in his own right, later returning to North America and becoming president of a publishing company in the US. He is one shrewd fellow - not only did he make plenty of manga-related connections while he was here, but

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<sup>149</sup> This is what we called the old house GAINAX rented out for its Osaka staff. It was located near our studio. It was almost empty after the completion of the *Oritsu Uchugun* film, so when General Products was suddenly relocated to Tokyo, many of the single male employees ended up living in this house together.

<sup>150</sup> **Toren Smith** A fervent fan of Japanese manga and anime. He first came to Japan in 1986, along with sci-fi author J.P. Hogan, who was attending DAICON 5. He was basically a strange Canadian freeloader, who somehow ended up living at a rental house for GAINAX and General Products employees. He eventually married a Japanese girl and opened his own translation company, Studio Proteus, which produces English language versions of Japanese comics and anime and sells them abroad. He now travels back and forth between Japan and America.

he snagged himself a beautiful Japanese wife to boot. I still remember one morning, shortly after we woke up; the door to Toren's room opened and out walked a young lady we'd never seen before!

Make no mistake, GAINAX House was a den of rabid bachelors. Nobody cleaned or even straightened up - ever. When we received a visit from Hiroe Suga (who for a time was staying at a boarding house in Tokyo and working as an author), she was literally "sickened" by the smell. The color drained from her face and she beat a very hasty retreat.

Ultimately, we elected to move out of GAINAX House. When the landlord came by to give the place a once-over and release us from our contract, he was stricken speechless. Almost immediately after we vacated, the house was demolished.

## Tokyo life

Following *Oritsu Uchugun*, GAINAX found itself involved in a number of different projects. In addition to creating a promotional video for the BOÄWY song "Marionette"<sup>151</sup> and TV commercials for Victor's "Hyper Robot Compo", they were working on sales promotions and planning for their next theatrical release. Sadamoto and Maeda took the lead on that assignment, even turning out a pilot film before the project was put on indefinite hiatus.

Then GAINAX was commissioned by Bandai to do an OVA for Masamune Shirow's *Appleseed*<sup>152</sup>, with Akai sitting in the director's chair. They even produced a live action promotional video for it. The idea for the video supposedly came from a life-size mask of Briareos Hecatonchires (a character from *Appleseed*), made by Fuyuki Shinada<sup>153</sup>. They also borrowed a replica Willis Jeep from manga artist "Mr. I", often referred to as SUEZEN<sup>154</sup>. Mr. I was one of the animators on *Wings of Honneamise*, and had apparently received the jeep from anime guru Yasuo Otsuka<sup>155</sup>

<sup>151</sup> We made a music video for a BOÄWY song titled "Marionette". Hiroyuki Kitakubo and Masaharu Maeda directed it. Later, we took part in the production of the video for the song "Guitarhythm" by ex-BOÄWY guitarist Hotei Tomoyasu.

<sup>152</sup> An OVA based on Masamune Shirow's futuristic police manga. GAINAX produced the live-action footage (directed by Takami Akai) for a special feature included on the DVD.

<sup>153</sup> **Fuyuki Shinada (1959-)** A professional modeler and garage kit maker. He designed the monster suits used in the *Heisei Gamera* series. The ultra-realistic models and costumes he designed have won him many fans among the special effects crowd. He eventually opened his own studio, named Vi-Shop.

<sup>154</sup> Manga author whose works include *Yadamon* ("Yadamon: Magical Dreamer") and *Marine Color*. He also gained some experience as an animator when he worked on the production of *Wings of Honneamise*. He comes across as an extremely serious person. He seems innocent enough, but his sometimes wildly insulting portraits have caused the blood to drain from his subjects' faces.

<sup>155</sup> **Yasuo Otsuka (1931-)** An animator since the dawn of Japanese animation. His name is now ubiquitous in the industry. He has worked as animation director for titles such as *Taiyou no Ouji*

. This connection would lead to GAINAX publishing an entire CD-ROM's worth of jeep-related art and research compiled by both SUEZEN and Otsuka.

Meanwhile, having completed the move to Tokyo, General Products continued to produce its line of garage kits and other merchandise, as well as prepare for upcoming Wonder Festivals. We only had four employees, but when the day of the Festival rolled around, we could always count on the help of former Sci-Fi Convention staff members. Among the loyal were Kamimura, who was then working for NTT, and Sato, who had been employed by the city of Osaka. Those two would eventually join GAINAX. In fact, I imagine you'll see their names on many of the products put out by the company today.

During this period, one of Bandai's producers struck a deal - if GAINAX could come up with an anime that "would be able to sell at least 10,000 copies", then Bandai would gladly fund the project. Upon hearing this, Okada got to work on a proposal for *Top o Nerae!* ("Gunbuster")<sup>156</sup>. The plan was to have Shinji Higuchi direct, Haruhiko Mikimoto<sup>157</sup> provide character designs, and to release the whole thing as three 2-part OVAs. For some reason, though, the project stalled. By the time they finally got the green light, Higuchi had other commitments and was unable to direct. As fate would have it, Anno decided to give the initial script a read-through, and became so fired up that he volunteered to fill in for Higuchi. This would mark his professional debut as a director.

*Gunbuster* turned out to be a very difficult endeavor. The majority of Bandai's attention was focused on the first *Patlabor*<sup>158</sup> OVA, which was being produced at the same time, so *Gunbuster* was relegated to side-project status.

Nonetheless, Anno became completely obsessed with the project. For the first episode, he stuck pretty closely to the original script, but with each subsequent

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*Horus no Daiboken* ("Adventures of Horus: Prince of the Sun"), *Lupan Sansei* ("Lupin the Third"), both the old TV series and the movie, *Cagliostro no Shiro* ("The Castle of Cagliostro"), and *Mirai Shonen Conan* ("Future Boy Conan"). He has extensive knowledge of military vehicles, especially the jeeps used by the U.S. military, and has written about this subject in great detail. GAINAX has published a CD-ROM presenting a 50-year history of the jeep, including many illustrations handpicked by Otsuka. He even provided the narrator for the release. Incidentally, Mr. Otsuka is also Yoshiyuki Sadamoto's respected mentor.

<sup>156</sup> This six-volume OVA series marked Hideaki Anno's directorial debut. It contained all sorts of elements included to boost sales, such as robots, cute girls, action and sports. The concept for the show is apparent in the title, which comes from a combination of *Top Gun* and the title of another Japanese anime called *Ace o Nerae*. When the show was planned, no one predicted that it would be so well-received as a genuine sci-fi anime, and loved by so many fans for such a long time.

<sup>157</sup> **Haruhiko Mikimoto (1959-)** Illustrator and character designer. He went from being a more or less unknown animator to doing character designs and art direction for *Chojiku Yosai Macross*. That is one spectacular debut! He was also in charge of character designs for *Gunbuster*.

<sup>158</sup> The series portrayed a police squad in the near future who use robots called Labors. It was a mixed-media project, including an OVA directed by Mamoru Oshii and a manga illustrated by Masami Yuki. It was later expanded into TV series and movies.

episode his own unique touch became increasingly apparent. For the last episode, he did the unthinkable - he filmed the episode entirely in black and white on color film. Deliberately doing so cost the studio a lot more money, and a whole lot more effort than was necessary.

During production, the studio became increasingly cramped, and so GAINAX - along with General Products - moved back to the Kichijoji-Higashi studio, where it had earlier produced *Wings of Honneamise*. This studio was three times as large, giving the anime production staff plenty of room to grow. General Products followed suit and increased their own staff as well.

### Third Sci-Fi Convention

The next Sci-Fi Convention was held in Kanazawa, and of course I attended. Once there, I was approached by the staff for the following year's Sci-Fi Convention (probably because I was Chairman of the Fan Group Association at the time) and the first words out of their mouths were, "We can't do it!"

*You pack of spineless wimps!* I felt like screaming. Now that I've had time to calm down and think about it, though, I wonder if skipping one convention would've been such a big deal. However, my initial reaction was to immediately assemble the troops - specifically, Okada and Inoue. The three of us decided there would indeed be a Convention, and that we would host it ourselves. In a way, our attitude toward those quitters was one of pride, something along the lines of, "If you're just going to give up, then we'll show you losers how it's done!"

The decision to sponsor the event had been made in the absence of an executive committee, and our preparations continued without any organizational framework. Nevertheless, there were still decisions to be made, like choosing a venue and assembling our staff.

For the locale, we settled on Mizukami Hot Springs in Gunma Prefecture. We decided to go with a so-called "resort-style" convention, renting out both a hotel and the Mizukami town hall. As for the staff, we'd recently moved our base of operations to Tokyo... though of course, we looked forward to seeing them on the actual day of the Convention. Fortunately, other former staff members were already living in Tokyo, having found jobs there after graduation.

We eventually organized an executive committee, a mixed bunch composed mostly of former DAICON staffers like myself, and a number of people from the Space Force Club. Led by Inoue, this club is dedicated to the works of sci-fi author Masahiro Noda, who also happens to be GAINAX's auditor. (Incidentally, since Noda refers to himself as the "Commander-in-Chief" of the Space Force, the members of his fan club also give each other military ranks.) These two groups formed the core of our staff, and we got the rest of the help we needed through our various connections. It

was basically the same old routine from our DAICON days. The only real difference was that we were no longer college students.

We decided to dub this Convention “MiG-Con”<sup>159</sup> in a playful abbreviation of the venue’s name - Mizukami, Gunma. MiG-Con differed from DAICON in that we didn’t have time to formally train the staff. Also, as far as events go, we couldn’t seem to come up with anything too terribly mind-blowing, so we decided to focus on visual content instead. Now that we were pros, we had plenty of connections in the industry, and we fully utilized them.

One attraction we put together was the “Mystery Train”. Convention-goers taking the train from Tokyo to Mizukami would first receive a send-off at Ueno station by some costumed members of our staff. Once aboard, they would be entertained by a mock hijacking at the hands of an “evil organization”. Upon arrival at Mizukami, guests would be greeted by more costumed staff members.

Unfortunately, our mixed staff didn’t function as well as we’d hoped. Most of the members were veterans of either the Space Force or DAICON, and even though we were all volunteers, the DAICON group tended to act like self-appointed “instructors” to the others. That may have had something to do with it.

I’m sure there are some mixed feelings about the whole experience, but luckily, tensions never boiled over and the event went off without a hitch.

## Second period of lethargy

Shortly after MiG-Con came to a close, volume 1 of *Gunbuster* hit store shelves and enjoyed immediate sales. That’s when I began to give serious thought to leaving General Products and GAINAX. I couldn’t tell anyone why, though. How could I explain to them that my girlfriend (who I would later marry) had dumped me? I was actually thinking of moving to Hokkaido and working on a farm or something. I was distracted, and unable to focus on my job.

When I was going through my first bout of lethargy, it was the founding of General Products and the subsequent DAICON 4 preparations that brought me back to life. As luck would have it, at some point during my ponderings of farm life in Hokkaido, I lost the urge to quit General Products. I’ve come to refer to this situation as “the monkey with its hand in the jar”. Imagine a monkey that can’t remove its hand because he’s holding onto something inside a jar. If the monkey would just release its grasp on what’s inside, it would be free. The analogy here is that sometimes the

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<sup>159</sup> The 27th annual Japan Sci-Fi Convention held at Minakami Hot Springs in Gunma in 1988. The entire hotel, and the local activity halls, were booked for the con. It was managed by members of GAINAX, General Products, the Space Force Club, and a few former DAICON staff members from Osaka. There wasn’t much preparation, but the con was packed full of entertainment, like games in the hotel swimming pool, a bonfire dance in the garden, fireworks, and even a tiresome late-night hike into the Tanigawa Valley. About 1,200 people attended.

solution is just to let go - and when you do that, you can finally see what you've been holding all along.

## Dragon Quest

I'm sure everyone who reads this knows how much of an influence Japan's *Dragon Quest* (aka *Dragon Warrior*) series has had on role-playing games, or RPGs. General Products had negotiated a merchandising deal with *Dragon Quest* maker Enix, and our products were manufactured and on the market by the time we moved to Tokyo. The first thing we did was approach Enix about acquiring the licensing rights. "If this is about Mr. Toriyama's characters", our contact person began, referring to the manga artist whose character designs were used in the game, "I'm afraid we can't help you." I replied that it wasn't the *characters* we wanted - rather, we were interested in producing various items and equipment appearing in the game. His response: "Hmm, interesting. No one's ever approached me with something like this. Let's get together sometime. I'd like to hear more."

From there, we formulated a plan for making replicas of swords, keys, and other items. Among these was a full-size replica of the Sword of Loto (or Sword of Erdrick in *Dragon Warrior*) made out of soft vinyl. It was sold as a do-it-yourself kit, but you can still occasionally find the fully-assembled item for sale. All this just goes to show that the garage kit industry was still in its infancy... Anyway, Enix actually ended up using one of our model swords in a TV advertisement for *Dragon Quest 4*. Expanding on that concept was the "Dragon Quest Fantasia Video"<sup>160</sup>, a live-action special effects film depicting several famous scenes from the *Dragon Quest* series. The projects also included a musical clip featuring a full orchestra.

The video was produced by GAINAX, with Takami Akai handling directorial duties. General Products was in charge of the cast's equipment, and the bulk of the filming was done on sets constructed at Nikkatsu Studio in Chofu. I was under the impression that since I was a producer I'd be able to sit around all high and mighty, but that's not quite how it turned out. Maybe it had something to do with my past experience on sets, or maybe I just couldn't leave well enough alone, but somehow I ended up becoming an assistant director. Not *the* assistant director, mind you, but the third assistant director. A gopher, in other words.

I suppose it was a little awkward to have a producer also acting as an assistant director, but for some reason, I decided to involve myself with the special effects as well. Back when we were still producing our own independent films, I had never

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<sup>160</sup> This special effects music video from 1988 was based on the hit game *Dragon Quest*. It was backed by the "Alegard" (Tokyo Metropolitan) Symphony Orchestra conducted by Koichi Sugiyama. The video was created by a top-notch staff including Shinji Higuchi (special effects), Tomio Haraguchi (special makeup), Fuyuki Shinada (monster sculpting) and Hideaki Anno and Yoshiyuki Sadamoto (animated effects). It was directed by Takami Akai.

supervised that particular element, but somehow, I was able to swing it on *Dragon Quest*. I learned a lot from a fellow named Onoue<sup>161</sup>, our key supplier of materials on set. He's still in the special effects business, working on several cutting-edge projects.

We also had a life-size (or close to it) model of the Dragon King's head. It had been made by Fuyuki Shinada, who gained notoriety for his design work on the *Godzilla* films. One day, Shinada was staring intently at a three-foot long model tank sitting in a corner at Nikkatsu Studio. Finally, he turned and said, "This is the #61 from *Gappa*, isn't it? I wonder if they'd get angry if I took it..." He seemed half-serious about taking the thing home with him, but he gave up after it proved to be too heavy.

Incidentally, the head portion of the Dragon King had been cut and sculpted from a kind of Styrofoam board called kapok. It's often used in special effects, but can double as a comfortable bed on late nights at the studio. Those big blocks of foam were just the right size. If they hadn't been cut yet, we'd sleep on top of them, and if they had been cut, we'd nestle inside the hollowed-out area. The larger props were made somewhere in the studio in Chofu, while the small ones were actually manufactured in my Kichijoji apartment (where several former DAICON staff members who went pro spent many nights). Work on the film pretty much went on from the wee hours of the morning until very late at night. Dirty, scruffy-looking men were going in and out of my place all night long, and when we opened the windows in the morning, the smell of thinner (which we used with adhesives) was overpowering. The neighbors started to complain, and I was eventually evicted. Luckily, this occurred after production on the film was complete.

The film's debut was held at the Tokyo Bay NK Hall in Maihama. It played to the accompaniment of a full orchestra, conducted by Koichi Sugiyama<sup>162</sup>. For me, it's amazing that this entire project began with a simple interest in garage kits! But this is exactly how our business developed and expanded.

### *Komatsu Sakyo Anime Gekijo*

It was around this time that GAINAX produced a rather unique work called *Komatsu Sakyo Anime Gekijo* (lit. "Sakyo Komatsu's Anime Theater")<sup>163</sup>. This anime

<sup>161</sup> **Katsurou Onoue (1931-)** Director of special effects films. He is currently the managing director of a company called Tokusatsu Kenkyujo. He has been in charge of special effects for countless TV "hero" series. In more recent years, he has been working with digital effects as well. Some of this more well-known works are *Bakuretsu Toshi* ("Burst City") and *Gamera 3*.

<sup>162</sup> **Koichi Sugiyama (1931-)** Composer whose songwriting talents cross over a wide range of genres. Famous for being a video game enthusiast himself, he has composed the scores for video games - particularly the RPG classic *Dragon Quest* ("Dragon Warrior") series published by ENIX. He has also composed music for a variety of animated works, including *Densetsu Kyojin Ideon*. Sugiyama came up with the parody theme song that we borrowed for DAICON FILM's *Kaettekita Ultraman*.

adaptation of Mr. Komatsu's short-short novellas was financed by Bandai, and aired as a daily TV series. Yamaga was put in charge of the script, and we asked manga artist Jun Ishikawa<sup>164</sup> to provide the character designs. The series was released for sale and rental, but surprisingly, it never caught on, remaining a sort of "phantom project" in GAINAX's body of work.

The original plan was to make *Shinchi Hoshi Gekijo*, as Hoshi's name was practically synonymous with the short-short. We presented the idea to Mr. Hoshi<sup>165</sup> at a hotel in Ginza, directly after he met with his publisher. We asked him to consider an anime version of his works, but he immediately responded with a flat-out "No."

"I'll be perfectly honest with you", he said. "I don't want anyone else touching my work - at least not while I'm alive. Wait until I'm dead. I won't offer any complaints then." So much for negotiations.

We were left searching for someone to turn to, and after giving it some thought, we decided that Sakyo Komatsu would be our next best bet. When we approached him without idea, we told him what had happened with Hoshi, to which he replied, "Yeah, that sounds like him." And just like that, he accepted our offer.

Incidentally, even though Mr. Hoshi passed away several years ago, we still haven't worked up the courage to tell his family about the promise he made. . .

## Gamemaker GAINAX

Even with an undertaking like *Dragon Quest* to keep us busy, we still decided to move ahead with our production of *Gunbuster*. Volume 2 sales were impressive, so it was only logical that we continue with Volume 3. If it hadn't sold as we'd hoped, it was possible the last volume would have just been canceled. But things were going well for us, and GAINAX was on the brink of a major turning point.

I had been admitted to Kichijoji Hospital after injuring my knee on a skiing vacation<sup>166</sup>. Akai came to visit me while I was recuperating, and it was during one of our conversations that he suggested we make our own PC game. He had bought a computer back when we were still in Osaka, and he'd been a gamer ever since. He played all sorts of games, but felt that most were uninspired both in terms of graphics and overall production. Akai believed that with the know-how GAINAX

<sup>163</sup> A collection of anime based on short stories by Sakyo Komatsu. The characters were designed by Jun Ishikawa.

<sup>164</sup> **Jun Ishikawa (1951-)** Manga artist. Famous for his works *PUNK DRAGON*, *From K, Datte Saru Nandamon* and so on. He's also well known as a manga critic and media commentator.

<sup>165</sup> **Shinichi Hoshi (1926–1997)** Master of "short-short" sci-fi stories. Made his literary debut with "Sextra", which was featured in the fanzine *Uchujin* in 1957. He wrote 1,000 stories in his lifetime.

<sup>166</sup> I took a break from my busy schedule and went skiing with my wife. While we waited in line, a newbie skier crashed into my wife, and they both fell on top of me. My knee ended up bearing the weight of them both, and I was hospitalized for a little over a month because of it.

had already accumulated, we would be able to score it big in the gaming industry. Having no objections, I went along with his plan.

Our first PC game, *Dennou Gakuen* (“Cyber School”)<sup>167</sup>, was a hit. Aside from the programming and music, Akai did everything himself, so we already had the advantage of low production costs. And just as he’d predicted, the enhanced graphics of our game made a big impression on the market.

We used pretty much the same setup for subsequent titles. Character designs were commissioned from various animators and manga artists whom we had previously dealt with, either through GAINAX or General Products. Our third PC title used characters from *Gunbuster*.

In this way, applying the expertise we’d acquired through anime production, GAINAX also came to specialize in game-making. Gradually, the number of staff members working solely on PC games began to increase.

Following his work on the game version of Media Work’s *Silent Mobius*<sup>168</sup>, Akai would produce his masterpiece - the “nurturing simulation” game *Princess Maker*<sup>169</sup>. This title actually spun off an entirely new genre of games, wherein the play takes the role of parent and makes decisions that affect the behavior and fate of his or her foster child. *Princess Maker* had a huge impact on the PC game market, which by this time had reached a plateau and was in dire need of a new hit. *Princess Maker* was also a major source of income for GAINAX, which, following completion of *Gunbuster*, had no new projects in the works.

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<sup>167</sup> A PC game created and directed by Takami Akai. The object of the game was simple - get a girl onscreen to perform a striptease by answering questions. Back then, games were mainly designed by the programmers, so the graphics and direction tended to be quite poor. Akai thought he could use his graphical and directorial skills to make a successful game, so he produced *Dennou Gakuen* (aka *Cyber School*). It was an immediate hit, and four games were made in the series.

<sup>168</sup> A sci-fi manga series by Kia Asamiya. It tells the story of a special police squad consisting of six women with supernatural powers who fight demons from an alternate dimension. The popular title has been spun off into movies and an animated TV series, as well as novels and drama CDs. The GAINAX-produced PC game was supervised by the creator Asamiya himself, and showcased GAINAX’s outstanding CG capabilities.

<sup>169</sup> This PC game directed by Takami Akai was released in 1991. The player becomes a foster father and educates an eight-year-old girl. It was the origin of the nurturing simulation genre. If you screw up raising your daughter, she gets sick, or even turns delinquent and runs away from home. The game garnered many fans throughout the nation (irrespective of gender) who longed to become daddies. Akai single-handedly constructed the game architecture and also designed all the characters. The series was expanded further by the release of *Princess Maker 2*, which incorporated even more action, and *Princess Maker 3*, designed for the PlayStation.

### *Fushigi no Umi no Nadia*

I guess you could say it was *Nadia*<sup>170</sup> that gave GAINAX its name recognition in mainstream Japan - up until then, only hardcore fans knew the company. This marked a serious turning point for us.

Meanwhile, tensions had peaked within the company. Things had turned sour between Okada and Inoue as they fought for company leadership. But the ensuing power struggle came to an abrupt halt when Okada invited none other than Sawamura to head up GAINAX.

We were all taken by surprise. Shocked, even. I mean, this was *Sawamura*. When it came to running General Products, he and I couldn't have disagreed more. Maybe Okada didn't feel like he could talk to me about it first. I don't know. At any rate, there were those in GAINAX who saw this as a move on Okada's part to try and consolidate power, but the truth is, he really struggled with his decision. He apparently consulted Yamaga and Akai about how to resolve the situation, at which point somebody brought up Sawamura's name. "If he isn't doing anything right now, maybe he wouldn't mind coming and giving us a head", or something to that effect, and the wheels were set in motion.

Elsewhere, Inoue was flying solo and busily advancing his own projects. Group TAC<sup>171</sup> had been invited to join a pitch at NHK for a new television program, and they in turn had requested settings and specific character designs (which, incidentally, were based on a proposal already submitted to NHK).

Of course, I think that TAC had actually invited GAINAX (having already produced *Gunbuster*) to assist with the pitch, and not just Inoue. It seems, however, that Inoue viewed this as an opportunity to strike off on his own. He decided to bypass Okada, whom he no longer considered trustworthy, and had Sadamoto and Maeda secretly work on the settings, character designs, storyboards and so forth.

It goes without saying that all this eventually came to light, but the pitch had already concluded, and NHK had decided to go with the idea that Inoue had presented. That idea was *Nadia*, and preliminary calculations showed that the budget for the project would drive GAINAX well into the red.

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<sup>170</sup> This anime series directed by Hideaki Anno broadcast on NHK in 1989. It was supposed to be based on Jules Verne's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* and *The Mysterious Island*, but in this particular scenario, Captain Nemo is the descendant of aliens and the second *Nautilus* fights a giant UFO in space. In all fairness, Verne's work only provided some of the names for the characters. The production schedule fell so far behind that the quality of the midsection had to be reduced, and that part (the so-called "Island" story arc) was handled by another director, Shinji Higuchi. He carried out his responsibility very well

<sup>171</sup> An animation production company founded by sound director Atsumi Tashiro. The group has produced numerous TV shows and movies, including *Manga Nippon Mukashibanashi*, *Touch*, and *Yadamon*. It was also involved in the animation of *Fushigi no Umi no Nadia*.

Okada, Sawamura and myself attended the *Nadia* production meeting at NHK. In no uncertain terms, we demanded that either Inoue step down from the project or GAINAX would withdraw. Thinking back, it wasn't the smartest move we ever made. There was a producer from Toho in attendance, and I wouldn't be surprised if he bears a grudge against us to this day.

They had already filled the director's position, but he said something like "This isn't at all what we talked about in our first meeting", and promptly dropped out of the project. Anno would later be chosen as his replacement, and the rest of the staff - as well as NHK and Toho - sided with GAINAX rather than Inoue. In one fell swoop, Inoue had both left the project and quit his position at GAINAX.

The whole thing was just handled so recklessly. I think the entire mess could have been avoided had there been more communication between Okada and Inoue.

In any event, GAINAX was brought on to produce *Nadia*, and was left facing an impossibly large budget. All said and done, the company ended up some 80 million yen in the red, *and* was denied any of the rights associated with the project. In this sense, *Nadia* both is and isn't a "GAINAX" production.

Some years later, Disney would produce a cartoon that fans in both America and Japan would claim was practically a carbon copy of *Nadia*. Several people asked us if we planned to sue, but the only response we could give was, "Please take this up with NHK and Toho."

Numerous stories have already surfaced about the various mishaps that occurred during the production of *Nadia*, so I'll refrain from going into them here. Suffice it to say that behind each of these events, several *other* events were simultaneously taking place. . .

We never did acquire any of the rights to the anime, but a point was made of letting us have the rights to the game adaptation, something for which we are still deeply grateful. The PC game, which we produced in-house, went on to set record earnings for us.

## GAINAX, the anime production company

Even while *Nadia* was driving GAINAX into debt, it was teaching us the ins and outs of anime production. Moreover, it was introducing the GAINAX "brand" to audiences all across Japan. Of course, it wouldn't be until *Evangelion* that we would receive nationwide recognition, but I think *Nadia* was the first of our projects to have a major impact on anime fans. *Nadia* took those who had liked our work on *Gunbuster* and turned them into outright GAINAX fanatics.

Money losses aside, the good thing about producing an anime program that ran on NHK for an entire year was that it was easy for us to find sponsors. We actually worked on a number of other anime projects alongside *Nadia* in an attempt to defray the production costs, but unfortunately, things didn't go as planned.

Among the projects we worked on were *Naki no Ryu*<sup>172</sup>, *Money Wars*<sup>173</sup>, *Modena no Ken*<sup>174</sup>, *Hono no Tenkosei*<sup>175</sup>, and *Otaku no Video*<sup>176</sup>. Of these, only *Otaku no Video* was original. For a time, we had more than enough to keep ourselves busy. Unlike other production companies, however, we weren't receiving these projects, fronting all the costs ourselves and then reaping the profits. In fact, some of these companies would pool just enough money to pay for the proposal, and then farm out the bulk of the actual anime overseas. Oddly enough, some of these shady producers remain active in the business even now. While veterans of the industry would not be so easily fooled, the simple phrase "Anime sure looks profitable right now..." is enough to deceive any number of clients new to anime.

Recently, a certain prospective has surfaced that claims to have several of the anime industry's big-name staffers attached to it. Seriously, the amount of talent listed is enough to make you think, *With a staff like that, this would be one amazing project!* But of course, the whole thing is a put-on, a kind of bait meant to lure others in. To stray off-topic for a moment, following the success of *Evangelion*, many of the conversations that took place at anime production meetings went something like this:

"So, what kind of project is this exactly?"

"The story is a lot like *Evangelion*."

"Really? Sound great. The thing is, the story can't end like *Evangelion*."

"Oh sure, of course. The ending is a lot different."

"Well, we look forward to seeing it."

<sup>172</sup> This mahjong-themed manga was created by Junichi Nojo. The anime version, titled *Mahjong Hishoden Naki no Ryu*, was released from Bandai as a three-part OVA series in 1988. Scripted by Hiroyuki Yamaga and directed by Tetsu Dezaki, it starred the voice actor Shuichi Ikeda, who is famous for doing the voice of Char in *Kido Senshi Gundam*.

<sup>173</sup> This anime is based on the Soichiro Miyagawa's manga portrayal of the financial world, and it ran serially in *Business Jump* magazine. The anime version had a secondary title, *Nerawareta Waterfront Keikaku* (something like "The Waterfront Conspiracy" in Japan), which positively smacks of a title made during Japan's bubble economy. The anime was released from Sony Music Entertainment.

<sup>174</sup> This anime, released from CBS Sony, was based on Satoshi Ikeda's car racing manga that ran serially in Japan's *Weekly Playboy* magazine. It's a sequel to 1970's *Circuit no Okami*, which launched a supercar boom in Japan.

<sup>175</sup> This gung-ho anime produced by Pioneer LDC was based on the manga of the same title, featured in *Shonen Sunday* magazine. It was the first OLA (Original Laserdisc Anime) created exclusively for laserdisc. The creator, Kazuhiko Shimamoto, wrote the music and lyrics for the theme song.

<sup>176</sup> This OVA portraying an otaku's "success" story was a mockumentary of General Products and GAINAX. It was distributed by Toshiba Eizo Soft and directed by Takeshi Mori. The character designs were done by Kenichi Sonoda. Hiroyuki Yamaga (writing as Toshio Okada) penned the script. The OVA includes some live-action footage (directed by Shinji Higuchi) titled *\_Otaku no Shozo* (lit. "Portrait of an Otaku"). In the US, this OVA is widely regarded as the otaku bible.

It's true. On several occasions, I personally had people ask me, "It's like *Evangelion*, except for the ending. What do you think - could GAINAX do something like this?" Things are a lot better now, but at that time GAINAX was still quite weak in terms of its administration, which meant that projects tended to hit more than a few snags. While *Money Wars* was being made, for example, the deficiencies in our administration became painfully clear when the company we hired to pick up the slack was unable to complete production. For a while there, it looked like we were going to go bankrupt. Our sponsor wasn't going to just turn the other cheek with an excuse like, "They took the money and ran!" so we were forced to do the work ourselves. When *Money Wars* was first screened, however, our sponsor turned to us and said, "I don't care what you guys have been through - there's no way we're going to settle for *that*." So we went back and worked on it a second time, and a third time, before it was begrudgingly accepted with something like, "Fine. I guess this is as good as it's going to get."

By comparison, *Hono no Tenkosei*, *Naki no Ryu* and *Otaku no Video* all turned out well. We also ended up learning something, based in no small part on the degree to which the staff members devoted themselves to their jobs - we learned that we were unable to take on projects for which the sole aim was profit. There had to be more to it than that. Take *Hono no Tenkosei*, for example. It was based on the work by Shimamoto<sup>177</sup>, who was so involved in the project that he even oversaw the show's opening theme.

The truth is, it didn't matter *where* we subcontracted our work. If we couldn't oversee all phases of a project, we had no business being a production company. But there would be some harsh lessons to learn before this simple truth was finally driven home.

We were still stuck in a period of successive losses when the call came to work on the *Nadia gekijoban*<sup>178</sup> (motion picture).

Group TAC had already been subcontracted by Toho to produce the film, so GAINAX's position was something like sub-subcontractor. That being said, GAINAX still contributed many elements to the film, such as the story, the characters and so on. TAC had, as usual, secured a healthy budget for the project. I think their

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<sup>177</sup> **Kazuhiko Shimamoto (1961-)** A manga artist who is famous for a number of exciting titles such as *Hono no Tenkosei* ("Blazing Transfer Student") and *Moeyo Pen* ("enter the Pen"). He is a very passionate person himself, like many of the characters that appear in his manga. He's the kind of guy who wouldn't be afraid to shout to the sun as it sets over the beach. He graduated from the Osaka University of Arts, where he was a classmate of Anno, Akai and Yamaga. He also did the anime version of *Blazing Transfer Student* and *Anime Tencho* for GAINAX.

<sup>178</sup> Like many other successful TV series, *Fushigi no Umi no Nadia* was made into a theatrical film (*\_gekijoban\_*). Originally, the staff from the TV series was going to produce it, but Anno was too exhausted and withdrew. GAINAX was also in the red, and couldn't support the production. In the end, GAINAX was only involved in the plot outline, the character designs (by Sadamoto) and the compilations of TV footage.

impetus for sending *Nadia* our way was to help us recoup the losses we incurred during production of the television series.

There was, however, one sticking point - Anno stated that he would not be involved with the project. Working as director on the original series had burned him out on all things *Nadia*. Luckily, a conversation with Okada and Mr. Tashiro<sup>179</sup> from TAC changed his mind, and he agreed to come on board.

We came up with the basic plot, and Sadamoto designed some new characters, but at the actual production phase, things just weren't happening. Sawamura volunteered to step in and take over the project, but it was no good. Things continued to worsen, until finally we had to just apologize and tell them we couldn't do it. We had already received a 50 million yen advance, however, so of course TAC's first question to us was, "What about the money?" Our response:

"We're sorry, but we don't have it. We've already spent it all. Please forgive us." And that was how we bailed out of the project. Our overall losses were in the neighborhood of 80 million yen, but thanks to the 50 million we received as advance payment, our actual total losses on *Nadia* were 30 million. Incidentally, TAC went on to complete the project relatively quickly and on a small budget.

Later, we would end up scoring a major coup with *Evangelion*, and return all 50 million yen to TAC. So it's not as if we held on to their money indefinitely - it's more like we *borrowed* it until *Evangelion* came along. Luckily, they were willing to overlook the cost of Sadamoto's character designs and the editing of all that television footage. We gladly pocketed the savings and returned them the rest.

### *Olympia* - the phantom project

It was around this time that Okada suggested we pull out of anime altogether.

None of our animated titles were turning a profit - weren't even accepting any new projects. Our in-house animators were kept on, but found themselves with nothing to do.

Okada was the one who had wanted to mimic the practices of other production companies, but our attempts to treat production in that manner consistently lost money... and now he was saying that we should quit.

*You've gotta be kidding me!* I thought to myself. *You frickin' idiot!*

I decided to give Okada a good talking to. I was joined by Akai, who pointed out that GAINAX's involvement in anime was the very thing that gave it its foothold in the gaming industry. Dropping anime in favor of games was precisely the wrong

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<sup>179</sup> **Atsumi Tashiro (1940-)** Anime producer and sound director. He is also the president of the anime production company Group TAC. As sound director, he has worked on many titles since the early TV anime era, including *Wings of Honneamise*. In the anime industry, he is my senior and associate, and was of great help to me during the production of *Nadia: The Secret of Blue Water*. He is a very easygoing person and was the model for Captain Tashiro from *Gunbuster*.

way to go about things. What's more, we were determined to let Anno have another crack at making an anime.

We all headed to Matsumoto to hammer out the details of our next project. The reason we chose that locale was that our brainstorming session would double as a weekend retreat, and we always did those in Matsumoto. Once there, we all began tossing out ideas, and the first major song we hit was *Olympia*<sup>180</sup>.

The storyboards for the project were included in the very first collection of drawings we received from Sadamoto, which meant that the details of this thing had already been thought out to some degree. We came up with some good ideas of our own, but thinking back on it, the way that we came up with them was a little odd. We had just started to get a good grasp of the story when somebody piped up, "Okada, you're not helping. Why don't you sit this one out for a while?" Things started getting back on track, but almost immediately, it was "Anno, now you're not helping. Just hang back for a bit, ok?" Finally, it ended up being just Yamaga, Akai and myself banging out the framework for the project. It might have been wrong, but it was the most expedient way to go about things.

But then we hit a snag, and everything came to a screeching halt.

I think if the same thing happened now I'd be able to do more, but back then I felt almost helpless, as if I'd been backed into a corner. Finally, we all agreed that the project was unsalvageable, and the whole idea was scrapped. I feel like it was my fault, that I was inexperienced as a producer.

Following this incident, Okada announced that he would be leaving GAINAX.

## What followed for General Products

To recap, GAINAX's anime productions consistently failed to recoup their investments, while software sales and the profits earned through Wonder Festival meant that General Products was... well, it was so-so.

In either event, it was decided to go where the profits were. More people were hired on to work at General Products, and plans for expansion were put into place. The first thing we did was set up an editorial department.

Hiroshi Ueda<sup>181</sup>, a staff member from Osaka, used to always say, "Someday, I'm gonna be a magazine editor." And when he elected to make the move to Tokyo,

<sup>180</sup> A stalled project created mainly by Takami Akai, and to be directed by Hideaki Anno. Some of Sadamoto's illustrations were released to the public, and some can also be seen in Sadamoto's art book.

<sup>181</sup> **Hiroshi Ueda (Pen name: Yoshimi Kanda) (1962-)** A former member of the Kagawa University Sci-Fi Club. His connections in dojinshi circles paved his way to General Products. He later organized the magazine *Cyber Comic* and served as editor-in-chief. He left General Products after company cutbacks did away with its editorial department.

the first proposal that came up was a magazine “filled with nothing but *Gundam* manga.”

Ueda’s dream of becoming an editor was finally fulfilled, due in part to some contacts he’d made while working on *Honneamise*. Those contacts worked for Bandai, which had been making forays into publication with the magazine *B-Club* and other such projects. Considering the publication rights involved in making an all-*Gundam* manga, Bandai was the only name that came to mind as a vehicle that could get the project off the ground.

The idea was pitched, and a short time later *Cyber Comic*<sup>182</sup> was born.

During his time at General Products, Ueda was utilized for his editing skills rather than any anime- or garage kit-related projects. And now, as editor for *Cyber Comic*, he had begun to recruit a small team for his burgeoning department.

As it turns out, however, the editorial framework that was set in place was rather lacking. Deadlines for manga artists would be postponed, yet the editors would *still* be unable to get to it in a timely fashion. The production process on their end was different from that of anime, but it brought with it the same kind of pitfalls.

With the department such as it was, books were constantly published behind schedule. And given that Bandai had money invested in this venture, it’s safe to say that they were none too pleased with the results. Finally, our contact (a manager of some department or other) stated that *Cyber Comic* would be continuing *without* the services of General Products.

Naturally, we couldn’t sit back and do nothing. After all, this was the start of an entirely new business venture for us - we couldn’t bear to be pulled from the project just because our editorial staff had been dragging their feet. We did some internal reorganization and went back to Bandai, saying basically, “Look, this is how things are now, and this is how we could do the job for you.” Bandai, however, was quick to find a replacement. Their reply was a simple, “Forget it. It’s over.”

So, we had our idea for a *Gundam* manga, and we were able to get it off the ground. It’s just too bad we couldn’t see it all the way through.

On a similar note, we had also begun work on *ARIEL Comic*, an anthology series in the same vein as *Gundam* that featured a giant, beautiful fighting robot as its pro-

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<sup>182</sup> We approached Bandai about doing a manga magazine packed from cover to cover with *Gundam*-related topics, and General Products was contracted to edit it. The magazine featured the story of Dr. Minovsky, a ninja robot manga titled *G no Kagenin*, as well as a number of other manga stories based on *Gundam*. However, non-*Gundam* subjects were also taken up, like in Ikuto Yamashita’s *Dark Whisper*. Despite the appealing content, the production environment was no better than that of an amateur fanzine, and our sloppy scheduling and management of the creators led to publication delays. In the end, General Products was pulled from the project.

tagonist. It was based on the *ARIEL*<sup>183</sup> novels by sci-fi author Yuichi Sasamoto<sup>184</sup>, we had met through the Sci-Fi Convention. . . and it unfortunately suffered from the same scheduling problems that had plagued *Cyber Comic*. The people on the editorial staff simply weren't that good at their jobs, and it wasn't long before they had ceased to do any sort of follow-up with the authors. When deadlines really got tight, the editor would hole up in his house for days and do it all himself. Even as our tenure on *Cyber Comics* was at its end, we were going up to Asahi Sonorama to bow out of *ARIEL Comic* as well, telling them "Sorry, but we can't do it." We were, in essence, suggesting that we shut down our editorial department altogether; we just didn't have the necessary skills to keep it running.

The department continued on for another two or three years, but it was a disaster. Here's an example of how much of a disaster it was - they were hiring *more* people. They hadn't even asked us first. They just went out and hired them. Sure, they came back with explanations like "But we were shorthanded", to which we replied, "If you're shorthanded, the first thing you do is let us know about it. Don't just go hiring people." We had to explain this to the department more than once which made us develop. . . not so much a sense of distrust, as a serious doubt in their ability to get the job done.

We spent a lot of time addressing the situation, but nothing ever produced any results. The editorial staff had taken to literally locking themselves in their apartments, and one time we even had to climb in through the windows and drag them out to talk. The next day, they wouldn't come out at all. So much time was spent dragging reticent employees out of their houses and into the office that we started referring to it by a special term: "salvaging".

Those on the editorial side that finally tired of this and quit soon began making outrageous claims, like "I was the one that launched *Cyber Comic*", or "Yeah, I made *Dennou Gakuen*." My sympathies to employers who hired them based on those claims.

We had recruited quite a few people to work in our editorial department, but needless to say, none of them were particularly good at what they did. They couldn't even manage the most basic of functions, like scheduling and meeting deadlines.

In any event, we ended up making other contacts and bringing them to work on *Cyber Comic*. One of these was Ikuto Yamashita<sup>185</sup>, who would later assist with

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<sup>183</sup> A comedy sci-fi novel series created by Yuichi Sasamoto and published by Asahi Sonorama. A mad scientist has created a giant female robot, and three female pilots control the robot in order to defend Earth from alien invasion. Masayuki's Suzuki's illustrations were also popular, and *ARIEL* has since been made into an OVA. Resin kits were also produced.

<sup>184</sup> **Yuichi Sasamoto (1963-)** Science fiction author. Famous for his *Hoshi no Pilot* series and *ARIEL*. His works reflect his lighthearted personality, which has also won him many fans. He loves rockets, and has witnessed more live-rocket launches at both NASA and the Tanegashima space center than any other Japanese writers to date.

the design work on *Evangelion*. In the end, the editorial department offered the company nothing more than a larger circle of contacts.

In stark contrast to this, our games division was still turning a profit. Not a huge profit, but it was a steady enough income that we could continue with our haphazard hiring methods.

When all was said and done, the profits from games were not applied to anime production - rather, they were used to take the company in different and ever-expanding directions. It's something I look back on with a lingering regret.

There was a trend for us to do everything possible ourselves. We would use a big manual typewriter-looking thing to write up our own scripts, come up with our own designs and even print out our own proofs.

Of course, this experience was not all bad. GAINAX currently has its own DTP (Desk Top Publishing)<sup>186</sup> department that functions quite well, but the skills of its staff were, in a way, forged by the experience of enduring all the trials of earlier, hands-on production. Our approach in building up the department was hardly the most expedient, however, and it ended up consuming almost all expendable funds from both GAINAX and General Products. But it is not my intent to point fingers and say that so-and-so is to blame. I only wish to explain that the way things were run back then was the result of a lack of understanding regarding our situation.

It was the greatest failure in our attempt to expand the scope of our company.

## PC game convention

This isn't to say that we used all the profits from our PC games to staff the editorial department. We were also hiring programmers and graphic artists in an attempt to strength our gaming department. Even I utilized my meager connections to bring some new people into the fold. Once our games took off and the General Products/GAINAX name became known, we placed an ad and began interviewing people for positions. Unfortunately, there was a very high initial turnaround, and people were constantly coming and going within the department.

Today, there is a large number of subcontracting firms capable of handling graphics and programming, but back then, that simply wasn't the case - we had no choice

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<sup>185</sup> **Ikuto Yamashita** Manga artist, illustrator, and mecha designer. Lauded for his realistic works that feature sophisticated and futuristic designs, Yamashita has attained something of a cult following in Japan. He has written for *Cyber Comic* magazine, contributed to graphic design for *Gunbuster*, and create the *N-Nautilus* (which appears in *Nadia: The Secret of Blue Water*). For *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, Yamashita not only designed the Evangelion itself, he also helped develop the world in which the story takes place.

<sup>186</sup> This is a term for a system of editing and publishing on computers. Akai first suggested incorporating DTP into GAINAX's own design work, and it has been a great success. In the past, doing design work in the printing industry used to require very specialized knowledge, but DTP has made it easy for everyone.

but to hire all these people to work in-house. Truth be told, we were also driven by our total enthusiasm for CG.

Unlike the editorial department, our gaming department never went belly-up. A major part of its success was due to Akai and Tamatani - Akai ran the show and Tamatani was his second-in-command. Tamatani had been around since the Osaka days, working as a staff member at the Sci-Fi Conventions, and he had also been to Osaka University of Arts. In other words, he actually had the ability to create things. The gaming department was meant to be a place of creation. Those with the skill or desire to blaze new trails stayed - the other left.

Our initial products were mostly “strip quiz” games featuring original characters and graphics by Akai. The response to these was quite good. Later, we commissioned original artwork from animators and manga artists outside our company, and developed a game using *Gunbuster* as its theme. Steadily, the number of games that we were producing began to grow.

The difference between anime and games is that in the case of the latter, almost everything is done in-house, from planning to production, right up until the game is ready to sell. This isn't to say we weren't frequently behind schedule - we were. It's just that schedule management and quality control were a lot easier to handle on the gaming side of things. And if something missed its release date, any losses incurred tended to be minimal.

People had definitely taken to the GAINAX brand of PC games. It's just unfortunate that there weren't many chances for us to come face-to-face with them.

We had all been to the Sci-Fi Convention before and walked around the area where convention-goers are welcomed. Similarly, at Wonder Festival (which we used to promote our garage kits), it was very easy to meet and have direct exchanges with our consumers. We felt that this kind of interaction was extremely important.

Thinking back to our own days as consumers, we imagined that the buyers of our products were probably eager to meet the people who had made them, and that they were just as eager to meet the people behind the *games* as the anime. So we took the seemingly logical next step created the PC game convention.<sup>187</sup>

Unlike now, the PC game magazines of the time were still at the height of their enthusiasm for the genre, and the erotically-themed “ero games” hadn't yet entered the mainstream. This combination of factors meant that a lot of game makers were still doing the leg work to achieve recognition, so I thought we might be on to something with the idea of a gaming convention.

Unfortunately, there weren't that many people with us anymore who had convention experience. A lot of work went into getting things into place, but they just couldn't

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<sup>187</sup> This event was held at the Nihon Toshi Center in Tokyo in May 1990. Robert Woodhead, the god of role-playing games, was invited as a special guest. It was hoped that the event could turn into an annual convention, but most of the attendees weren't serious gamers, and the event itself didn't open any new markets for GAINAX or General Products. About 400 people attended.

rise to the occasion. I was extremely dissatisfied with the event as a whole. Looking back (and considering the lack of experienced staffers we had), I think that the very idea of our attempting a PC gaming convention was an error, and was what led to its unfortunate result. I got the impression that those people kind enough to show up were not so much fans of PC games as fans of GAINAX itself.

Actually, there were a few good things that came of the convention. Visitors had the chance to meet Robert Woodhead<sup>188</sup> in the flesh, as well as speak with some rather famous writers and editors from various gaming magazines. It was quite the unusual experience, but I think that people came away from it feeling relatively satisfied.

In any event, based on visitor reactions and our own feelings about the event, GAINAX's PC game convention was the first and last of its kind.

## Marriage

In November of 1990, I married.

Meanwhile, though production costs were driving both General Products and GAINAX squarely into the red, we were still hard at work on *Nadia*, which was airing all over Japan. Our PC game *Silent Mobius* was being criticized by vendors (in that games based on manga just don't sell), but despite that, it went on to sell like gangbusters.

Personally, I felt that the future of the company was starting to look pretty good. Couple that with the fact that I had been dating Hiroe Suga for some 10 years (which is not to say that it hadn't been without its ups and downs - our relationship had been punctuated by my periods of lethargy, yet we somehow managed to reconcile), I decided that it was high time I settle down and get married.

Hiroe had become a published sci-fi author, and things on *my* end were looking up both personally and professionally.

## GAINAX USA

Both GAINAX and General Products looked like they were on the rebound, and it was decided that we would try and expand into the American market.

Japanese anime hadn't yet entered the American mainstream as it has now, but our desire to give it a shot wasn't so much a desire to blaze new trails as it was a kind

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<sup>188</sup> **Robert Woodhead (1959-)** An Englishman and co-creator of the famous video game series *Wizardry*, the original PC role-playing game. He is also a known Japanophile, and lives Japanese anime and comics. He established Animeigo, a company that distributes Japanese anime and manga in the U.S. Animeigo has been striving to expand "Japanimation" outside of Japan. He currently resides in the U.S. and is married to a Japanese translator (whom he met at a PC game convention hosted by GAINAX in Japan).

of hunch. Our thinking was, *It doesn't matter where these guys are - the needs of otaku are the same the world over.*

To us, it didn't matter if it was via garage kits or anime, we just wanted to start getting our products overseas. Hot on the heels of that thought was, *We're going to need another base of operations*, which entailed setting up a subsidiary company. Unfortunately, we couldn't find the right people for the job. I was at an absolute loss for ideas.

Sawamura, on the other hand, was still running around with guns blazing. He volunteered himself to go to America, registering our subsidiary in Texas because of the favorable tax breaks available there. He also wasted no time in recruiting some of the locals for his staff. I couldn't really put my finger on it, but something seemed off about Sawamura's behavior.

Our plan was for GAINAX USA to establish a mail-order service for not just our toys and garage kits, but our entire line of anime-related goods, and to ship them to every state in the U.S.

Concurrent with our preparations to open our Stateside store was the decision to host an anime-style event right there in America. This first full-fledged anime event in the States was dubbed Animecon<sup>189</sup>, and manga authors and anime artists alike flew in from Japan to attend as special guests. We prepared a wealth of anime (on both film and video), and screened them non-stop, 24 hours a day.

The event was a success, and a lot of people showed up. Unfortunately, many of the staff members didn't really care about the convention. People from all strata of the company went over to America to help out, but - amount of people we had on staff notwithstanding - they didn't turn out to be particularly useful. The whole thing turned out to be a kind of training session-cum-overseas vacation. Of course, there were several Americans on the staff as well, and it was thanks to their diligence that the event went as smoothly as it did. Behind the scenes of Animecon's success, however, was the fact that GAINAX USA was not doing well at all. . .

The American staff that had been involved with Animecon would later regroup and even host several anime-themed conventions across America, something which made me very happy indeed.

## The end of General Products

It was around New Year's of 1992 that I announced that this year's Wonder Festival would be the last.

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<sup>189</sup> The convention for Japanese anime was held in San Jose, California in 1991. It was organized by GAINAX, but the management was carried out by local volunteers.

The announcement came so suddenly that the people in attendance were completely shocked, but the news was an even bigger surprise to the staff. Truth be told, it was something of a shock to myself as well.

It seems that the impetus behind our pulling out of Wonder Festival was Akai himself.

“How long are we going to keep selling properties based on other people’s characters?” his argument went. “We’re supposed to be a company that develops its *own* properties, are we not?” And he had Okada’s backing.

The day of the announcement, Okada and Akai both came down to the convention grounds, *That’s strange*, I thought. After all, I was the one giving out the orders and ensuring that preparations were running smoothly. The two of them called me aside, saying they had something to tell me. They made their case, spouting off a list of reasons, and then ended with, “So yeah, we want to pull out of Wonder Festival. What do you think?”

*Huh?!* I thought, but their argument made sense. There was really nothing I could say in response. I’d already made up my mind - I agreed with them. I mean, we couldn’t very well go on subsisting on the intellectual properties of others indefinitely. Sales on our own General Products garage kits were hurting. Kaiyodo and other manufacturers had hopped board the burgeoning garage kit trend, but we just couldn’t put out the kind of merchandise that would give us the break we needed. What’s more, we weren’t even running the retail shop anymore - we’d decided to close it until all construction was complete.

Even now, I can’t recall my exact thoughts on the matter. Why was I so quick to agree? Maybe I was burnt out. Maybe I was tired of peddling garage kits that never produced a breakout hit. Even so, the revenue that the Wonder Festivals provided was nothing to sneeze at, and I would later regret the decision to pull out. As time passed and things within the company stabilized, I thought it would be kind of nice to start developing a line of garage kits and promotional goods again - and in fact, GAINAX-NET now offers models for sale.

At any rate, the announcement that this would be our last Wonder Festival went out that noon across the entire building. The news was most definitely unexpected - even I had no idea that, just a few hours earlier, Akai and Okada had been contemplating such a thing. Everyone in attendance was stunned.

That same day, we had a meeting to discuss handing the reins over to Kaiyodo. We would allow them to use the Wonder Festival name, and give them the molds to all the garage kits we had manufactured. Kaiyodo, for their part, would be in something of a bind if the festival were to disappear altogether. At the same time, there was some concern on their end as to whether they would be able to coordinate an event like this. In terms of having the necessary resources to pull it off, though, they were probably the only ones capable of taking over for us.

There was a lot of bad blood when General Products first opened its doors, with insults and insinuations on both the General Products and Kaiyodo sides. By this time, though, the hatchet had already been well and truly buried. For those elements on our side that remained in Osaka, considering Kaiyodo as enemies without ever really getting to know them, the situation was probably something like sibling rivalry. As garage kits grew increasingly popular, however, even those two factions finally called a truce. I think the fact that Miyawaki<sup>190</sup> (who is sometimes called the “young husband of Kaiyodo”) and I are the same age may have had something to do with that.

Right up until the last day of the Wonder Festival, it had never entered my mind that we would quit doing them; I had already reserved the location for the upcoming summer. As a staff member, however, my main obligation was to help the Festival in any way I could. I turned the reservation over to Kaiyodo.

To look on the positive side, General Products probably didn't have the means to continue making garage kits anyway. Quitting both wonder Festival and garage kit-making altogether meant that the company no longer had a reason to continue operating. As such, it was decided to incorporate what remained with GAINAX. I suppose you could say that by this point, General Products' usefulness had dwindled.

### Okada leaves the company

The dissolution of General Products had hardly drained me of my determination. On the contrary - now that it had completely merged with GAINAX, I was busily putting plans in motion and working toward the future.

On the other hand, following our abortive attempt to get our original anime *Olympia* ready for production, Okada hadn't done a single bit of work. It looked like he was doing a lot of talking with Yamaga about possible future projects, and nothing more. What's more, since reading a book in the *Bessatsu Takarajima* series about re-inventing yourself, he had begun speaking with an affected Tokyo accent, picking up girls and taking them to discos, and acting in a wholly uncharacteristic manner. Well, putting aside my own impressions from the moment, a very real problem was

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<sup>190</sup> **Shuichi Miyawaki (1957-)** The executive managing director of Kaiyodo. He is also a prominent figure in Japan's garage kit industry. He is also a prominent figure in Japan's garage kit industry. General Products and Kaiyodo both started producing and distributing garage kits around the same time, so I suppose you could say he is a former rival. Back then, our companies were business competitors, but these days they're helping each other and working together as allies. For example, Kaiyodo took over Wonder Festival after General Products (due to unavoidable circumstances) had to withdraw its sponsorship. Unlike General Products, who eventually quit the garage kit business, Kaiyodo has stuck with what they do best - creating models. They are the original makers of such hit merchandise as the Choco-Egg (egg-shaped chocolate which has a miniature toy figure inside) and a number of action figures. Today, Kaiyodo dominates the world of figures. Miyawaki is a very affable and popular Osakan, and those who know him often refer to him as the “young gun”.

developing here, in that Okada had taken to spouting off all kinds of whimsical ideas but not actually doing anything to realize them. In fact, as I mentioned previously, he wasn't doing any work at all.

One day, I finally said to him, "We're cutting your salary. Someone who does so little around here has no business making this much." It was actually Sawamura who originally gave the order - it was my job to relay the message. At first, Okada protested, but in the end he gave in.

Now, cutting his salary is fine and all, but in my opinion, it's strange that he should even be retained on the payroll. My thoughts at the time were, Okada should just quit. Here is my reasoning: Okada is the company president. He's the face that we present to the public. If our own president is doing any work, it would only be a matter of time before people - both inside the company and out - began keeping him at arm's length.

Which is why I ended up going to him again and stating point-blank, "You should quit." He refused. "You need to quit", I countered. "Well, I'm not going to", came his reply. We went round like this, over and over again, I don't know how many times. Then he started to waver.

"Alright, I'll quit."

"Wait, I can't quit."

And finally: "Tell you what - let me make one more game. Then I'll quit." By that point, I'd had enough.

"If you just can't find it in yourself to quit", I said, "then *I'll* quit. Who's it going to be, then? You or me?"

It's not like I had any other business prospects lined up. But I'd made up my mind, and was ready to let the chips fall where they may. Of course, I was still in debt and had a car loan hanging over my head - if I quit, it wouldn't be long before I was out wandering the streets. I was aware of all this, but at the same time I had to stand my ground. I knew that if Okada remained, I wouldn't even *want* to stay at GAINAX.

In the end, Okada gave in. He agreed to leave the company.

Until then, Okada had not been regarded very fondly by his co-workers. Some time earlier, there had been a meeting to discuss what direction the company should take in the future. Okada had come wandering in and announced something to the effect that he had no intention of quitting. At this, Yamaga stood suddenly and glared at me angrily. He said some things like "This is a serious discussion. What did you invite him for?" and "I can't even talk with him in the same room" and stormed out. I'd say Okada found himself in a pretty rough spot that day.

What I didn't know was that following this meeting, Okada had talked things over with his wife, Kazumi. He'd decided that he couldn't hold on to his position indefinitely, and that at some point he would have to leave the company.

In his book and at various other places and times, Okada's comment on his departure has been something like "I simply ran out of things to do at GAINAX. For this reason, I decided it was time for me to step down." But Okada, isn't it true that you quit because, especially after everything that happened, you couldn't (as you yourself mentioned) hang on to your post forever?

Our plan was for GAINAX to focus on creating new and better anime - and personally speaking, the relentlessly vocal Okada was a hindrance to that plan. He would go on and on about the details of each project, and believe that what he had to say was having an effect on everyone. On me. But truth be told, he just made things more difficult. It's one thing to talk a lot if what you're saying is focused on the future and grounded in reality. Unfortunately, what Okada had to say by that point was about as unreal as you could get.

Okada's wife Kazumi, however, remained with the company. Any problems we had with Okada stayed with Okada, and had nothing to do with his wife.

As a side note, some shrewd fans have opined that Kazumi's continued presence at GAINAX has allowed Okada to retain some measure of influence in its operations. . .

## The new GAINAX

Okada's absence created an opening, and Yamaga stepped up to join Sawamura as GAINAX's co-president. Following Okada's departure, Akai had said "Considering the history of GAINAX's founding, it would be extremely odd if Yama were not named the next co-president." And this is exactly what happened, with Yamaga now being held accountable for the company he helped create.

In actual fact, though, the ones that really ran the show were Sawamura and Akai, with Sawamura handling day-to-day operations and Akai having the final say on all things project-related. Yamaga had become the new "face" of GAINAX, but little more. The flip side of this was that, for all his influence, Akai was still regarded as a regular employee. We were all aware that this setup was a bit unconventional, but our methodology could never be called "the norm". To this day, we continue to do our jobs with the same mindset we had in our student days, quite removed from the normal societal ways of thought. With Okada gone and Sawamura and Akai running things, it was business as usual in terms of our PC game operations. We even began operating an online service called GAINAX-NET<sup>191</sup>. And all the while, we were back on track developing new anime projects. Unfortunately, it appears that Sawamura and Akai were starting to butt heads with one another.

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<sup>191</sup> A BBS was started in December of 1992, hosting a bulletin board and discussion pages. Offline meetings were also held several times. There were adequate numbers of members during the BBS's heyday, but the hardcore fans tended to divide themselves into small cliques, and it wasn't quite as successful as anticipated. The BBS was closed in 1996 after the rapid spread of access to the Internet.

I say “appears” because the problem didn’t manifest itself in public arguments - rather, it was that the two had very different ideas on how things should be done. At one point, Akai wondered aloud if he should just quit, but nothing ever came of it. Later, when our offices moved to Kichijoji, the disagreements between Akai and Sawamura became more pronounced, and Akai formally stated his intent to resign. He has since returned to work for GAINAX, where he is one of the company directors. I still think it’s a shame we had to part ways in the past, though.

### *Aoki Uru*

One of the new anime projects were considered following Okada’s departure was an idea of Yamaga’s called *Aoki Uru*<sup>192</sup>. It was developed as a sequel to the theatrical *Oritsu Uchugun*, but set some 50 years later. The reason for this was that with no recurring characters or storylines to deal with, it would be easier for potential investors to understand the premise.

As always, we got together for a brainstorming session, where it was decided that Anno would direct and Yamaga would produce and provide the script, which had four planned acts. He turned out the first of the acts, while Sadamoto finished up the character designs. The plans for the main mecha were drawn up by Masamune Shirow and Kazutaka Miyatake from Studio Nue.

For me, this was not so much a period of lethargy as it was a time of not having a clear-cut sense of purpose. I didn’t know how to act, and to tell the truth, *Aoki Uru* had become something of a burden. I lacked motivation, and the sense of energy I had back when I started doing the Sci-Fi Conventions was all but gone. I was just doing as I was told. Overall, I think I found producing *Aoki Uru* to be more of a chore than anything.

The major problem with *Uru* was that it was designed as a theatrical release, and we were unable to foot all of the production costs ourselves. If we funded the project in its entirety and it was a hit, then we would reap all of the profits - but the simple truth was, we didn’t have that kind of money. We were faced with the dilemma of having to begin work on the project, but not having enough funds to see it all the way through. That was when Akai issued his proclamation.

To me, it was like suddenly getting my marching orders. The memo laid down a certain date, and said that if production on *Aoki Uru* didn’t begin in earnest by that date, then Akai would be severing all ties with me, public and private. I still hadn’t quite found my rhythm yet, but let me tell you, I certainly sprang into action.

It took a lot of effort, but Anno got his staff and the necessary preparations were made to begin production. I’m sure I must’ve looked like some elementary student

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<sup>192</sup> This story, set ten years after the *Oritsu Uchugun* movie, was to portray the continuing saga of the fighter pilots. The project is currently on hiatus.

who'd barely finished his summer homework on the very last day of vacation, holding it up to his mother and bragging, "There! How ya like me now?" But Akai's (very adult) reaction was to encourage me by saying, "This is where the project really gets underway. Please keep giving it your all."

And so, though we lacked the funds necessary to complete it, production began on *Aoki Uru*.

It was slow work, but work nonetheless. Even while we were out trying to raise funds for the project, however, we were having to pay the staff their salaries, which meant that a lot of money was going out, and nothing was coming in. I decided to go out and find the money myself - in other words, take out a few poor man's loans. I went to I don't know how many loan sharks, and ended up securing some 8 million yen. As a result of borrowing money, however, my day-to-day existence would end up becoming rather pathetic...

After a while, it became obvious that if we didn't meet our budget - and soon - production would be coming to a screeching halt. But nothing seemed to work out right. We wouldn't raise any more capital, and the staff just wasn't making any progress. Even Anno had lost his motivation. Anno, myself, and all the rest of the staff had worked so hard on this project, but we had nothing to show for it.

As for myself, I *still* felt like I was lacking a sense of direction. Again, it was the monkey and the jar - I couldn't see the thing I held for what it was. Maybe it was a misguided sense of pride that had caused this. Maybe I'd thought that I could solve all these problems on my own; or rather, I'd placed too much confidence in my own abilities, thinking that if I just put my mind to it I could do *anything*, no matter how impossible the task. It's not at all an uncommon phenomenon, and an easy trap to fall into if a person doesn't truly know themselves and their limitations. That sort of misguided pride can make a man become less than worthless.

General Products had closed shop. We'd pulled out of Wonder Festival and garage kit making altogether. We weren't even taking on any subcontracting work for anime production. We did continue to make PC games - Akai had seen to that - but there wasn't a lot of work tossed our way. With mere pennies coming in, we were having a hard enough time just paying everyone's salaries.

Finally, the order came down for us to halt production on *Aoki Uru*. We were simply incapable of taking the project any further.

## Reset

After the *Aoki Uru* project got put on hold, I began to think about leaving the company again. In a sense, I was responsible for what had become of the project - it was my own worthlessness that had brought about its failure. I figured GAINAX would be better off without me.

“Come on, just hang in there another two years”, Sawamura told me when I approached him about leaving. “I’m working on some things to help us get the company back on track, and I’m sure I’ll be doing and suggesting some pretty outrageous things. I’m gonna be counting on your support, no matter what happens.”

I really had no reason to turn him down. Not only that, but I felt a kind of dauntless courage in his determination to rebuild GAINAX. I was ready to roll up my sleeves and do whatever it took.

All along, I’d been thinking that I really *needed* to do something to fix the situation. Our conversation came at just the right moment. It’s that monkey and the jar again - the second I agreed to say on, all that anxiety just disappeared. It was like letting go of whatever I’d been holding onto, and suddenly my hand was free. I no longer had the desire to quit.

Sawamura’s first act was to essentially press the reset button on the whole company. When *Aoki Uru* was postponed, we were dangerously short of funds. We had enough cash to handle the day-to-day costs for the time being, but it was clear that if something didn’t change, we’d end up running the company into the ground.

Despite the fact that we had no work coming in, we still had to make payroll. If we didn’t get rid of all the employees hired during our expansion phase, we could forget about anime production - we’d be lucky to say alive.

Something had to be done, but Sawamura and I were hardly the most competent of managers. We just couldn’t fire people, even if they were a drain on the company. So Sawamura called everyone together and made an announcement:

“Making *Aoki Uru* is a major undertaking for GAINAX... but we simply don’t have enough money. The project will be put on hold indefinitely. Furthermore, in the future there may be times when payroll checks won’t be paid out due to lack of funds. Anyone who can’t live with that needn’t come in to work tomorrow. We will pay everyone’s salary up through next month, though. If you want to leave, there’s no need for you to formally announce your resignation. But if you do intend to stay, please let us know.”

And that was that. From the very next day, some people just stopped coming in to work, without any discussion or fuss. I thought it was brilliant. All those employees we hadn’t been able to cut loose had done the dirty work for us. I imagine many of the people who left that day would have a few choice words to say about the incident if asked, but I was more depressed about it than anyone. I was actually quite shocked at some who chose to quit, people who’d been with us since the Osaka days. Even employees that were squarely in my camp stopped coming in after that day, and some of them I haven’t seen or heard from since. As for the ones who stayed, it didn’t necessarily make them any more trustworthy, but since they decided to stick by us when we were down, I made up my mind to place my trust in them.

During this mass exodus, I was living in a rather nice apartment, the one that my wife and I had occupied since our wedding. After the company shakeup, however,

my salary shrunk, assuming I even received a paycheck at all. It got so bad that I couldn't keep up with the rent, so I sent my back to Kyoto to live with her parents and started bunking in a one-room apartment maintained by the company. We called it "the sleep room", because that's all it was. There were three bunk beds packed into 100 square feet of space. The worst thing about it was that sometimes guys would go out drinking and miss the last train, so they'd come over to the apartment to spend the night, bringing women in with them!

I had to borrow against my salary for my living expenses, so every single paycheck was used up before I even got it. Once I paid the loan amount and then the interest on the loan, I was broke again, so I'd have to borrow from my next paycheck just to pay the bills. My life became an endless cycle of borrowing money I couldn't pay back.

At some point I moved out of that apartment and into a tiny room inside the actual company building. It was maybe 50 square feet, and the interior resembled a tool shed. I lived and worked there for close to a year, until it became too miserable to continue. I told them I was in dire straits and needed a raise, so they bumped my salary up enough that I was able to rent a little apartment. In a sense, my situation was about as bad as it could get, but over the next six months or so, I gradually started to feel a hint of optimism. I think what happened is that I finally hit rock bottom, and from there, you can only go up.

Before the end of the second year, I began to acquire a vague sense of my role in the company. I say vague because I still couldn't point to anything in particular to call my "job", but I did acquire a firmer sense of my place in the overall organization. After almost two years of walking in the dark, there was a speck of light at the end of the tunnel.

The company would recover. We were still flying below the radar, but things were slowly on the mend.

## GAINA Matsuri

Even at rock bottom, you still have to work. Following the big company shakeup, Akai suggested we have some kind of event, and we were grateful for the distraction. After all, events were our roots. They had always come before every turning point in our evolution, and we got our start at the Sci-Fi Conventions, after all. Since we weren't doing the Wonder Festival anymore, I think it was just a way for us to go back and rediscover our roots. That was the plan for GAINA Matsuri, or GAINAX Festival<sup>193</sup>.

<sup>193</sup> A GAINAX-sponsored, camp-style convention for fans. Also referred to as "GAINAX Festival". The first event was held in Minakami Onsen, Gunma in March of 1994, and the second one took place in Itako, Ibaraki in July of 1995. The number of attendees was about 200 each. Those events were specifically designed for true GAINAX fans, and the contents were very hardcore indeed.

The event itself was strictly small-scale, with only 200 attendees over a single day and night. We went to the Minakami Hot Springs in Gunma and stayed at the same hotel we used for MiG-Con back in 1988. It was designed to be nothing more than a small get-together for GAINAX fans, so it wasn't a big production by any means. I think everyone had a good time staying up all night for the festivities, though. We even held a second GAINAX Festival the next year in Itako, Ibaraki, where we screened the first two episodes of *Evangelion* three months prior to their air date. The opening sequence as well as other elements weren't quite ready yet, so the screening showed only the raw episodes, but with only 200 people given the opportunity to see the show at such an early stage, I'm sure it was a precious memory for everyone who attended. I remember reactions to the early screener being extremely positive. That night was truly "*Evangelion Eve*". All in all, I was in good spirits for the second GAINAX Festival, and seeing the warm reactions to the show served to reaffirm my faith in the future of GAINAX.

### *Evangelion Eve*

Sawamura's plan for jump-starting GAINAX had worked like a charm, and all the deadbeat employees we couldn't deal with ourselves were now gone. It seemed like as soon as they left, though, they started making up stories about how they'd been single-handedly responsible for GAINAX's successes.

The funniest story I heard was about an ex-GAINAX employee who tried to pull the wool over Sony's eyes. Apparently, this person marched into Sony's office and announced that he'd managed to lure all the people involved in the *Princess Maker* project away from GAINAX and formed his own company with them. Sony was right in the middle of developing the PlayStation, and had just announced the platform's release. It just so happened that GAINAX had been commissioned to produce *Princess Maker 3* for the PlayStation, so when the Sony guy heard about everyone on the *Princess Maker* team leaving GAINAX, he was understandably shocked.

The guy called us up in a panic and asked what had happened. I reassured him that *nothing* had happened. The direction and character designs were all Akai's work, and he was still with the company. Even Hashimoto, the one who did the programming, was still with us. I informed the distraught Sony manager that everyone who had ever had a hand in the game was still securely employed by GAINAX, and he had nothing to worry about. He seemed satisfied after that, but what I find amazing is that a company like Sony could be so completely taken in by such a blatant lie. I suppose it's because they were just starting to enter the game market, and didn't realize that the former GAINAX employee had been trying to pull a fast one.

Ex-employee troubles notwithstanding, GAINAX was finally beginning to recover. And the *Evangelion* project was taking shape.

For Anno, I think *Aoki Uru* being put on hiatus was a weight off his shoulders. I'm sure he'd been just as anxious about it as I was, tormented by the thought that as the director he needed to be doing something to fix things, even though he didn't know *what* to do. But after we put the project on hold and all that pressure was gone, I'm sure he felt a lot better.

Anno knew a guy from King Records named Otsuki<sup>194</sup>, and as the story goes, the two were out drinking one day when Otsuki suggested to Anno that they work on a TV anime project together. Anno agreed on the spot, came back to the office and promptly announced it to everyone. Nobody even batted an eyelash. We all just accepted it without further thought. I remember thinking *OK, so Anno's made the decision then*, and that was that. No surprise, nothing out of the ordinary.

Now that I've had some time to reflect on everything, I've finally realized that our strongest asset has always been our ability to make snap decisions. We were decisive in college, and we were still decisive at GAINAX. It was our defining characteristic as a team. No matter what you're doing, whether it's a show or an event or whatever, the people who are able to get things done are the people who have the strongest drive to take action.

We had no trouble starting up another project right away. All the outside staff we hired on for *Aoki Uru* were now gone, but Anno and the rest of the gang were still there. They went on a retreat to Matsumoto in Nagano and before you knew it, they had a project plan all drawn up. Still, it would take over a year to go from project start to broadcast.

Anno had been running on empty ever since *Nadia* finished, but *Evangelion* seemed to be just the thing to get him up and running again. And once he puts his mind to something, he goes all out. King Records had already secured a timeslot, so once they finished laying down the plot, the only thing left to do was make the show.

One of the key themes in *Aoki Uru* had been "not running away". In the story, the main character is faced with the daunting task of saving the heroine, who's been abducted. He ran away from something in the past, so he decides that this time he will stand his ground. That same theme was carried over into *Evangelion*, but I think it was something more than just transposing one show's theme onto another. I really think Anno inherited something from *Aoki Uru* - the determination not to run

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<sup>194</sup> **Toshimichi Otsuki (1961-)** Anime producer, and member of Kingrecords' board of directors. He is also the president of Ganges, a production studio known for such big hits as *Slayers*, *Shoujo Kakumei Utena* ("Revolutionary Girl Utena") and *Kidosenkan Nadesico* ("Martian Successor Nadesico"). He is also known for introducing a number of now highly-recognized voice actors to the world. The reason he was so committed to *Evangelion* was that he wanted to fulfill a promise he had made to Anno, back when the two were still newcomers to the industry. After *Evangelion*, he worked on *Kareshi Kanojo no Jijo* ("His and Her Circumstances"), *FLCL* and *Abenobashi Mahou Shotengai* ("Magical Shopping Arcade Abenobashi").

away from problems - and what we saw in *Evangelion* was maybe just a reflection of those feelings.

It was right around this “*Evangelion* Eve” period that we decided (at Akai’s suggestion) to move our facilities. The building we were in was pretty old, and we’d just discovered that a portion of it was slated for demolition because of a municipal road expansion project in the works. Deciding to stay in the city of Musashino, we rented a three-story building and moved everything there.

But disagreements between Akai and Sawamura had reached a critical point. Production on Akai’s *Princess Maker 3* had already been approved, and he was also supposed to be a producer on *Evangelion*. Soon after the move, however - right as the anime department was building serious momentum on the *Evangelion* project - Akai broke off from GAINAX to form his own company, taking with him control of the *Princess Maker 3* production.

This isn’t to say that Sawamura and Akai had some kind of falling out. It wasn’t like that. It’s just that GAINAX had been operating with two men at the helm, and that’s one man too many. Each of them wanted to steer the company in a different direction, and when their differences in opinion became too pronounced to ignore anymore, Akai left. Sometime afterward, I asked Akai why he’d been the one to leave instead of Sawamura, and he said, “I could see that Sawamura was interested in doing a number of things with Yamaga, and considering the ideas that those two had, I could see myself butting heads with Sawamura at some point. After I thought it over, it seemed better to leave before the fighting started.”

### *Shinseiki Evangelion*

I don’t think it’s necessary to restate what a tremendous sensation *Evangelion* caused when it started airing on TV. They called it a social phenomenon. It sold record numbers of laserdiscs in Japan, and the DVD is still selling well today.

That’s the *Evangelion* everybody knows, but it sure wasn’t smooth sailing for us during the production phase. When Otsuki brought the proposal to a certain unnamed toy company, the guy there told him a robot with a design like that would never sell. He said the legs were too skinny, and then proceeded to give Otsuki a lecture on the principles of robot design. Otsuki is bitter about the incident to this day. In the end, Sega acquired licensing rights to the merchandise, and the other toy company would later license from Sega or work through them to distribute *Evangelion* models.

We had a number of other problems as well. Book publishers rejected our proposal to have Sadamoto do the manga series, on the grounds that he was too passe to be bankable! Production companies refused to help with the production of the animation. I personally felt confident that the show would be a hit, although I never imagined this amount of success. But not Anno. He was a true believer right

from the get-go. He even promised to buy me a new building from the earnings! His faith in the project was unshakable.

With *Evangelion*, GAINAX began selling more games and software than we ever had since our founding, and other companies rode the same gravy train with their own *Eva*-related products and publications. Anything that had “Evangelion” in the name sold like hotcakes.

## Tax evasion and the birth of my daughter

But we never did get our new building. We were never able to. In May of 1998, GAINAX was audited by the National Tax Agency (NTA) of Japan under suspicion of tax evasion.

It was about 8:00 in the morning and I was still asleep in my apartment when I heard the doorbell ringing. I hadn’t gotten to bed until 5:00 that same morning, so it me it was like being woken up in the middle of the night. When I opened the door I saw two NTA officials standing there, flashing their credentials. I invited them in, and the three of us spent about two hours talking in my room. One of the two kept looking around the place for damning evidence, but of course there was none. I kept thinking how different it was from the girls in *Marusa!!* (a TV drama about undercover tax investigators that aired in Japan in 2003). Yeah, I suppose it would be. . .

Anyway, the head investigator who showed up at the company was even funnier. He took one look at all our computer and started spouting off about how we’d been taken to the cleaners by the computer sales people. “Look at this! There’s a computer on every desk!” he exclaimed. “If they told you that you needed a computer for every single person, then you’ve been had. What a crock!” Maybe he really hated computers, maybe they were getting in the way of the investigation, or maybe that guy was just really behind the times. Who knows.

When they finally informed us that GAINAX was under investigation on suspicion of tax evasion, I was completely stunned. I have to admit, I was aware of the fact that we were doing some shady accounting, but I had no idea how much money was involved. When they told me the amount, I was flabbergasted.

For about a year after that initial raid, I was forced to make almost daily trips to the Tokyo Regional Taxation Bureau, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Bureau of Taxation, and the Musashino Municipal Government Tax Division office. We even had our bank accounts frozen, and the guy handling our case at the Tokyo metro office informed us that if the company went under, it wasn’t their problem. When we complained, it was always the same story: “You still have money, don’t you?” or “Once the president of a company gets arrested, the company could go down at any time” and so on. And every time, our accounts would get frozen again.

To be perfectly blunt, before all this happened I had absolutely no interest whatsoever in the company's finances. I guess I left it all up to Sawamura, but that really wasn't the whole story. I think it was my careless attitude about money that really landed us in that mess. I just assumed that *somebody* would take care of things, and my lack of interest fostered a dangerous disregard for monetary matters. Now I maintain direct control over the company's finances, though my grasp of the whole process is far from perfect. I'm still groping my way through the brush and bramble of accounting and tax laws, and learning new things all the time - which is pretty amazing when you consider how much I used to hate studying. But since I had to work hard to fix what had happened, I figured I might as well learn something in the process.

The tax evasion itself was all Sawamura's decision, but after everything was said and done, I realize that the only reason he did it was because it was so hard to run the company with no money. Before *Evangelion*, GAINAX had been in perpetually dire financial straits. We'd been living hand to mouth ever since the company's founding, and our accounting - if you could even call it that - amounted to little more than collecting payments and deducting costs, something on the level of running a lemonade booth at the state fair. Sawamura understood our financial situation better than anyone, so when *Evangelion* took off and the money really started rolling in, he saw it as possibly our one and only opportunity to set something aside for the future. I guess he was vulnerable to temptation at that point, because no one knew how long the *Evangelion* goose would keep laying golden eggs. I don't think he purposely set out with the goal of evading taxes. It was more that our level of accounting knowledge wasn't up to the task of dealing with revenues on such a large scale.

But all in all, I didn't suffer too much in the aftermath of the tax brouhaha at GAINAX. I didn't have any money, of course, but the reason I wasn't overly focused on it was because my wife and I were expecting our first child in July of that same year. With a new baby on the way, I just didn't have time to think much about tax problems.

And sure enough, when July rolled around our first daughter was born. We named her Yukino. But unfortunately, she was admitted into the infant ICU immediately after she was born, and later her mother joined her in the hospital. For several months the doctors had no idea what the cause of Yukino's physical problems were, but I'm sure they did everything humanly possible to find out, running every single test they could run on an infant. They even checked her DNA. I was worried sick about my daughter, but I couldn't leave Tokyo in the middle of the tax audit, so for about six months I was forced to commute back and forth to Kyoto, leaving every Friday night and returning the following Monday morning.

My wife, of course, had been living in Kyoto for the entire time that all this was happening. About three months after Yukino was born, she took her to St. Joseph's

Hospital in Kyoto on the advice of a nurse who worked for Public Health. The diagnosis they came back with was that Yukino was in danger of developing cerebral palsy. The good news was that she would be able to walk and talk and there didn't seem to be any trouble with her cognitive functions. Her muscular development would just be a little slower than the norm. Even now she's undergoing physical therapy to keep her physically stable.

Those first six months after Yukino was born felt like an entire year to me. Every waking moment was spent worrying about her, and even the weekly trips back to Kyoto felt like an eternity. My wife and Yamaga both tell me that I changed after becoming a father, and I have to agree that it was one of the major turning points in my life. In fact, my daughter Yukino has probably been the one thing to keep me going at GAINAX since the shakeup, and I owe her a lot.

## Moving ahead

So, what is GAINAX like today? Our prodigal son Akai has returned to the fold, and is currently one of the company directors. Yamaga is president, and I am, as always, the general manager. I don't think that will ever change. Even Anno finally made it to the board of directors after helping found the company and working here for 16 years as a film director.

Yamaga is currently cooking up a number of interesting and unusual TV anime projects. He even directed one of them - *Mahoromatic* - marking the first time he has sat in the director's chair since working on *Oritsu Uchugun* 14 years ago. *Mahoromatic* was very well-received, and incidentally marked his directorial debut on a television production. Yamaga is also active in quite a few projects as a director, scriptwriter, or producer, demonstrating his dedication to the vision of running GAINAX as a creator-centric company. These past several years have only reaffirmed our belief that GAINAX's value as a producer and reputation as a company stem directly from our creative talent, and creating shows is exactly what we plan to keep doing.

It has now been 24 years since my initial joy at discovering a sci-fi club in college where I could share my passion with fellow enthusiasts. That youthful exuberance is still with me today.

## Trial in Absentia! Yasuhiro Takeda - The Truth is in Here!

Exclusive interview with Hiroyuki Yamaga, Takami Akai and Hideaki Anno

Takeda is not just the public face of GAINAX, he's also the legendary figure we know as Kaiketsu Notenki... No! I mean, he's Director of Management. Phew! Anyway, we've always wondered what it is about this man that draws people to his side. What is the secret of his almost otherworldly appeal?!

To find out, we conducted this closed-door interview with Hiroyuki Yamaga, Takami Akai and Hideaki Anno, the three men rumored to know *everything* there is to know about this seminal figure in the world of sci-fi. **Read on!**

## Initial Encounters

**Interviewer:** Thank you all for coming. This interview is going to be a part of Mr. Takeda's upcoming book, *The Notenki Memoirs*. The book is going to be written in the first person, so what I'd like to get from you all today are *your* takes on Mr. Takeda. You three seem to know him the best, and I think that if you can give us your impressions of Takeda as a person, it will help the readers gain further insight into his character and draw them into the book even more.

**Akai:** First off, the name "Yasuhiro Takeda" probably isn't going to conjure up any imagines in the minds of most people - especially when you compare him to Mr. Okada, and those two are *always* together. I mean, they might know who [Takeda] is, but you really don't hear people going, "Hey, it's the Kaiketsu Notenki guy!" which is kind of surprising, if you think about it.

**Interviewer:** In the book, Mr. Takeda talks about his first impression of each of you. Would you mind telling me *your* first impressions of him?

**Yamaga:** Akai, you weren't there that first time, right?

**Akai:** That's right.

**Anno:** OK. Well, I got a phone call from Mr. N... That's Tatsuto Nagayama. He has since passed away, but anyway, he called me up and said, "There's a guy I want you to meet." It was at a cafe in Kyoto called Solaris, and Yamaga and I went out there together. Takeda was already there, as well as Mr. Sawamura. They said that they needed our help in making an original anime for the Sci-Fi Convention, or something like that.

**Yamaga:** No, remember? First, they wanted us to come up with a logo for DAICON 3.

**Anno:** Hey, yeah. That's right! They wanted us to make the logo. Then they said something about wanting to make an anime...

**Akai:** Mr. N probably told Takeda something like, "Say, I know these guys who can make anime - movies, even! They're hard workers, *and* they go to film school. I'll introduce you!" Now, I don't wanna talk bad about the dead or anything, but Mr. N was the master of exaggeration.

**Anno:** Yeah, he really enjoyed singing the praises of others, huh?

**Yamaga:** Anyway, I came up with I think five different ideas for the logo and took them to Takeda to get his opinion. I guess that was the first time I really talked to him.

**Anno:** I remember he kept emphasizing that he wanted to see a Powered Suit in motion. I asked someone at the cafe for some paper and sketched out something then and there, saying “*This is how it would move.*”



**Hiroyuki Yamaga** Born in Niigata in 1962. President of GAINAX. Directed the theatrical feature *Royal Space Force - Wings of Honneamise* as well as *Mahoromatic* and *Magical Shopping Arcade Abenobashi*.

**Interviewer:** I’ve heard from some people that the Powered Suit you drew was running, while others have said that it was flying...

**Akai:** It was running, right?

**Anno:** I think I used four sheets of paper in total... But yeah, I just made it kind of run in place.

**Yamaga:** You couldn’t have done something too complicated, could you? I mean, you were drawing it right there at the cafe counter. I guess this is a good example of the “legend” getting all blown out of proportion! (laughs)

**Anno:** Yeah.

**Yamaga:** People seem to think that Anno drew up some awesomely maneuverable Powered Suit bin, like, two seconds or something!  
(all laugh)

**Interviewer:** So, the conversation shifted from you doing the logo to being asked to do the opening animation?

**Anno:** Mmm, something like that. We didn't really discuss any of the particulars.

**Yamaga:** Exactly. There was no definite plan at that point. It was more like, they just wanted to meet us first. But when Anno drew up that Powered Suit right in front of them... well, it certainly made for a powerful first impression.

**Anno:** It was almost like an interview, huh?

**Yamaga:** If you think about it, the way we do business now is pretty much the same as it was back then. It's like, "Yeah, we kind of know what we want, but let's meet this person before we hammer out any of the details." So whenever we meet with someone for the first time, it's more of a "Hey, how are you?" type of thing [than an actual business meeting].

**Anno:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** What were your first impressions of Takeda and the others?

**Anno:** Let's see... They were almost like, what, a type of people we'd never dealt with before. The only friend we had that was even comparable was Mr. N, so we were pretty curious about them.

**Yamaga:** I guess you could it wasn't an *exciting* first meeting, but it wasn't altogether uninteresting, either.

**Akai:** Okada was the only one who had any specific requests. Takeda would just be there next to him, watching everything and going "Wahaha!"

**Yamaga:** The way I remember it, Okada joined us much later. I seem to recall Sawamura and Takeda taking me to Okada's place, talking about an elevator that was in the house or something.

**Anno:** We'd heard that Okada's place was like that base in *Thunderbirds*... and as it turns out, his place had an elevator and really did look like that base.

**Akai:** I think it was around fall, after we'd finished working on DAICON 3, that we started talking about how we should stay on close terms with them... You know, Takeda, Okada, Sawamura and the others. They were an interesting group of people, and it'd probably be fun to keep working with them. We talked about that, let's see, at that late-night cafe next to the boarding house we used to live in.

**Interviewer:** Even having read his book, I'm not so sure I completely understand everything that Takeda does while working on a project. For example, can any of you tell me what he was doing during the production of the opening anime?

**Akai:** That's what we wanna know! (laughs) As far as we can remember, Takeda would come by every now and then, make a lot of noise, do the odd bit of coloring, knock over some paints and brushes and whatnot, scratch up the occasional cel, and get yelled at by everyone else. That's about it.

**Yamaga:** I remember explaining to him over and over what kind of event the Sci-Fi Convention was, and what it was all about. Right up until the day he went there and saw it for himself, he just couldn't get it.

**Akai:** And when we got there, he was already standing in line! We were like, "Hey!" Later, when we were showing the movie inside the hall, Takeda cracked some joke

onstage. There was this loud rumble as one thousand people started cracking up. I think that was his first time experiencing something like that. After that, there was no turning back.

**Anno:** I always had fun at those conventions, y'know? I was more into sci-fi back then.

**Akai:** I'll tell you what really gave me a shock about being part of that group, though - they'll look right at you and start talking smack like they're really enjoying themselves.

**Yamaga:** A lot of the talk about Takeda back then was about his girlfriend, Kan-chan. She's his wife now.

**Akai:** Yeah, she was the victim of some pretty raunchy humor.

**Anno:** These days, people would use the word "sexual harassment" to describe what used to go on. Of course, back then, we didn't even have that word! (laughs)

**Akai:** People would just treat her like one of the guys, even though she was this cute little teenager. I wonder how that got started. . .

**Yamaga:** I blame Takeda. (laughs)

**Akai:** Yeah, that's what it was. Ol' Takeda was trying to put the moves on her, which amused Okada and the others to no end. They'd invent new lyrics for songs, putting in all kinds of words you'd have to censor if I said them here. Hmm, all this over a pair of big tits. (laughs)

**Yamaga:** I remember when she was still in high school, and Takeda would bring her along to one of our hangouts. Okada would start belting out some off-color song, and Kan-chan would just get madder and madder. It was a pretty weird situation. . . Hey, do you remember when Takeda used to call us all "mister"? It was back when we were working on the opening anime for DAICON 3. The second that convention was over, though, "mister" went right out the window and he started calling us by our last names! (laughs) I always remember stuff like that.

**Akai:** The mentality at the time was like, once you got to know each other well, you had to adhere to an almost familial structure. I used to hate that.

**Anno:** Yeah. Takeda can be pretty bossy sometimes.

**Yamaga:** He was worse back then!

**Anno:** Like a politician or something.

**Akai:** Whenever something bad happened, everyone would always go straight to Takeda and complain. Why? It's not like he can make things better for them. The flip side of this, though, is that Takeda used to ask me, "How come everyone comes to me with their problems?!" Now it's like it's his official job. (laughs)

**Anno:** He used to tell me how he loved being number one, nothing can beat number one. When I told him I liked being number two, he got this huge grin and said, "Yeah, that works for me!" (laughs)



**Takami Akai** Born in Yonago, Tottori in 1961. Director of GAINAX. Talented in a variety of fields, including illustration, anime, video games and *tokusatsu*. Counts *Dennou Gakuen* and *Princess Maker* among his directorial credits. Was the character designer for the TV anime *Seikai no Monsho* (“Crest of the Stars”).

**Akai:** Takeda has this image of being the “boss” of the group, but I think that in a way, Okada and Sawamura had a lot to do with that. They both have the desire to motivate people and get them working, but they don’t like to hear complaints.

**Anno:** Yeah, they seemed like they couldn’t care less about fostering any kind of cooperative atmosphere. And they really didn’t like people coming to them with their problems.

**Akai:** I wonder if they made Takeda their go-between for that kind of stuff. . .

**Anno:** If you think about it, they did seem to always keep Takeda out there in the forefront.

**Akai:** Hey, yeah! And do you remember how they used to call him “boss” and stuff like that? Next thing you know, the younger staff members are treating him with all kinds of respect, and then he really was the boss. The way the whole thing went down, I think Takeda’s role was actually rather passive. I think that’s the kind of person he is.

**Everyone:** Aah...

**Akai:** Hey, I've got an idea! Let's play "Takeda the Punching Bag!" Everyone takes turns beating on the thing, *whap whap*, and then goes home feeling refreshed. The punching bag just sits there and takes it.

**Yamaga:** Sounds great!

**Akai:** See, Takeda isn't the kind of person who got where he did out of a burning desire to accomplish something. I think he is where he is because of... I don't know. I don't want to say he's "slow", but maybe that's one way to put it. Slow, but in a good way. See, technically he's in the same league as Okada and Sawamura, but compared to those two he's not so attentive. So if something were to crop up, some problem, I doubt he could come up with an appropriate course of action. But I think that is actually a source of strength, and what has gotten him to where he is today.

**Yamaga:** You always know just the right way to say it! Way to go, Akai!

**Akai:** Uh, I was trying to come up with a witty remark, but I couldn't quite get it to work. I've got an idea, though! I'll get back to you when it's ready.

(all laugh)

**Akai:** Takeda is, how can I put this? It's like his life consists of being backed into corner after corner, biting bullet after bullet. If a job comes along, people instantly take the best parts for themselves and toss Takeda the scraps. But they end up biting off more than they can chew, and Takeda is the one who has to apologize.

**Yamaga:** At DAICON 3, the biggest mystery in terms of interpersonal relationships had to be the Sawamura/Okada connection. It's still a mystery.

**Anno:** Hmm.

**Yamaga:** Heck, I asked Takeda himself about it, and even he couldn't really explain it! It's probably the biggest mystery in our whole group. It might even be the key to explaining how Takeda got where he is today...

**Akai:** I guess all we really have is conjecture, but I personally think they have a kind of love-hate thing going on.

**Yamaga:** Takeda, Sawamura and Okada were always together in those days... but that's not to say they were operating in any cohesive fashion. Instead of, say, a triangle, a better symbol of their relationship would be one line and a single, forlorn dot.

**Akai:** It's like Takeda was the catalyst that allowed Sawamura and Okada to function, you know? We'd be in a lot of trouble if we got caught talking about Sawamura and Okada behind their backs, but if we started talking smack about Takeda, it'd just get laughed off as a joke. (laughs) I suppose it was that kind of interpersonal structure that led to Takeda becoming a leader for us.

**Interviewer:** Was that your stance from the beginning? To treat Takeda in a similar fashion?



**Hideaki Anno** Born in Ube, Yamaguchi prefecture in 1960. Director of GAINAX. Directed *Shinseiki Evangelion* (“Neon Genesis Evangelion”) and *Top of Nerae!* (“Gunbuster”) and live action films *Love & Pop* and *Shikijitsu*. Married manga artist Moyoco Anno in March of 2002 and they are sooo in love! あゝ

**Akai:** Hmm. I don’t think Anno is the type of person who’d concern himself about how to “handle” others.

**Anno:** Nah, I really don’t. There’s no need to even think about that outside of the workplace. Actually, I’m not all that sensitive to interpersonal relationships in general. When it comes to stuff like that, I just kind of nod my head, “Uh-huh, OK.”

**Yamaga:** Takeda is definitely in a class all his own.

**Akai:** He’s kind of a genius, really. Even if you could explain in what way he’s a genius, not many people would get it. If I had to try to sum him up in a single phrase, it would be “He really can’t do much of anything - and that’s what makes him so influential.” See, the meaning just doesn’t come through. I’m not trying to talk bad about him. I’m being sincere when I say that ineptitude is its own form of greatness.

**Anno:** Absolutely. I feel that’s a great advantage for him. All things considered, I think he’s an incredibly strong person.

**Akai:** Of course, none of *us* could weather that type of criticism. Could you imagine if someone called you inept? I imagine Takeda himself wouldn’t be too thrilled about it, but he’s big enough to simply shrug it off.

**Yamaga:** He’s unflappable! Unwavering in the face of the ability, rank or social standing of others!

**Akai:** He's a class act.

**Yamaga:** Yeah. When it comes to apologizing to others, he's second-to-none!

**Akai:** Takeda really doesn't like to be called this, but "rear guard Takeda" and "mop-up man extraordinaire" are two nicknames to describe what he's all about. Whenever a member of his staff mishandles something, he rushes to the client and starts wringing his hands, exhorting "Please accept my sincerest apologies!" He gives these deep, polite bows but the guy's going completely bald! (laughs) He just keeps on nodding his head, but the whole time, he's really thumbing his nose at everything and everyone. I tell you, the guy is brilliant.

**Yamaga:** Takeda's really no good at negotiating, but he's definitely the guy you'd want to take with you to a business meeting. He's absolutely phenomenal at making new friends. Not me, though. I'm just too dry for my own good.

**Akai:** Listening to me, I know it sounds like all I'm doing is badmouthing Takeda, but I'm really not. That's not my intention at all. I'm praising him. I'm literally singing the man's praises.

**Yamaga:** And another thing - when I eat with him, everything tastes great for some reason.

**Akai:** Yeah, isn't that strange? None of the restaurants he's taken me to have been bad. And it's not because he has a list of all the great places in town or anything. If he tells you "the food here is good" and you sit down at the table with him and start eating, sure enough, the food is good. For some reason, it all tastes good. You know what else? He may be sorely lacking in what society deems "talent", but he's extremely charismatic, to the extent that it enables him to run with the "intellectual elite" such as ourselves. You could put him in a room full of gifted eccentrics and he'd end up being their leader. I don't know anyone but Takeda who could pull that off.

**Yamaga:** I think that since becoming a parent, he's consciously taken on that sort of role. Being picked on (by Akai) during *Aoki Uru* ("Blue Uru") probably had a pretty big impact on him. (laughs)

**Akai:** Hey, he was the one who was all fired up about making *Uru*! But though that whole production, I constantly had to push him to finish what he started.

**Anno:** Back then, his motto [attributed to Yamanaka Shikanosuke] was "God, grant us hardship!" We were all like, "Yeah, I'll give you hardship, alright..."

**Akai:** Things were pretty tough for all of us on *Uru*, but he was the least affected of us all. That's why I think he's a genius. Any normal Japanese person would've just bailed out on that project altogether.

**Yamaga:** The only reason I was so rough on Takeda back then was because Akai ordered me to be. And that order is still in effect! (laughs)

**Anno:** I knew that Takeda had wanted to direct something ever since working on *Fushigi no Umi no Nadia* ("Nadia: The Secret of Blue Water"), which is why I suggested he work on the special features for the Nadia box set. *He should be able*

*to handle it*, I thought. It wasn't a huge project, and it was the perfect opportunity for him to make his debut as a producer. He was very excited when I offered him the project, but I ended up doing all his work! Takeda would go out and talk business, but later those same people he'd been negotiating with would call me with questions! Why?!

**Yamaga:** He was just there for show, really.

**Anno:** Yeah. After a while, he was relegated to a kind of half-assed messenger boy. He didn't seem to mind.

**Akai:** All three of us ended up working on it as producers.

**Anno:** We do tend to mix-and-match producing and directing duties on projects, huh?

**Akai:** Sawamura, Okada and even Takeda would really only move into action when some kind of problem came up. You couldn't do something like that at another company.

**Anno:** Something bad happened? Go see Takeda. Got something you don't want to do? Go see Takeda. That's just how it goes.

**Akai:** Hmm, this conversation just can't seem to stay on a positive note. (laughs)

**Yamaga:** It's like, we can't even talk about the guy without it turning into a badmouthing session.

**Akai:** Well, you know some people say "Well yes, I talk bad about so-and-so, but never behind his back!" Well, I don't wanna talk behind his back, so badmouthing it is!

(all laugh)

**Akai:** He's a lovable guy. That's the thing I really like about him.

■

**Anno:** Yeah. There's no way you can hate a guy like that.

**Akai:** We like keeping him happy. And I think it's encouraging for him to keep going as our leader.

**Yamaga:** You can learn a lot about human interaction by watching him interact with others. Pay attention to the way everyone relies on him, the way things start to function around him. It's really fascinating.

**Anno:** Takeda is the best person to turn to when you need help. He understands you. If you say to him, "Please, do something!" it's like he feels obligated to help. And he will find a way to make things happen. We all know we can rely on him... he's like our ultimate weapon. If Takeda can't do anything to help, then there's nothing that can be done. Whatever problem you've got, it's unsolvable.

**Yamaga:** That's also why he tends to shoulder some of the more unpleasant aspects of the job...

**Anno:** He's the be-all, end-all. If he can't help you, nothing can.

**Akai:** You know, everyone talks smack about him, but at the same time, we all depend on him. Interpersonal relationships are a complicated thing, I guess.

**Yamaga:** Whenever the three of us talk about him, Akai ends up talking the most and Anno just sits there remaining silent. Akai is the real Takeda observer among us... Still, I think Anno should contribute something, just to be fair.

**Anno:** Unlike you two, I wasn't around during GAINAX's "formative" years. I mean, I was there, but I was just working on titles. I deliberately chose not to get involved in the goings-on of the company. My thinking at the time was, I'd rather be devoted to my work, creating something meaningful, than worrying about personal relationships and whatnot. Anyway, back when I was working on *Evangelion*, Takeda and Mr. Otsuki from King Record had some kind of disagreement, and I took Mr. Otsuki's side. Later, I was at a bar with Takeda when he suddenly burst into tears. (Everyone hangs on Anno's words) Up until that moment, *Evangelion* was the only thing I cared about. But after I saw Takeda cry, the whole thing seemed so pointless. Seeing that side of him... I remember thinking what a wonderful thing it was. That one single tear washed away any lingering ill will between us. He's an incredibly great guy, and I'm really very fond of him. When I had to pick a host for my wedding reception, there was no doubt in my mind that I wanted it to be Takeda.

**Akai:** You've kept quiet this whole time, and then suddenly you whip out the best story of the night! Aargh, I'm so jealous! (laughs)