

# STREAMLINE PICTURES

## IMPORTERS OF OUTRAGEOUS ANIMAE

The distributor of the best in Japanese adult animation.

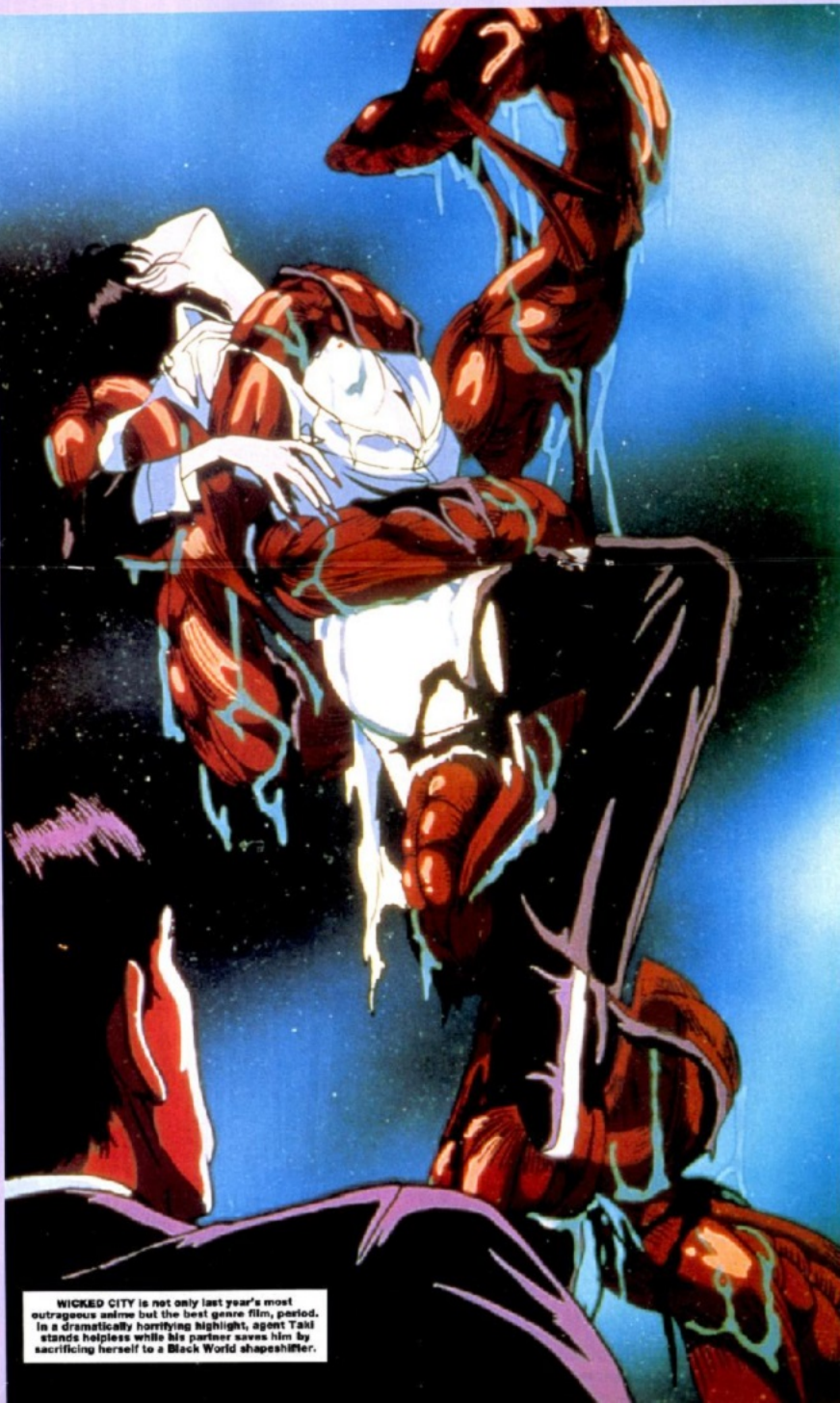
By Todd French

Psychic cyberpunks, demi-vampire heroes, mutant titans with brain-blowing pugilistic abilities, all served up with heavy doses of orgiastic sex and gore—yes, today's Japanimation is light-years removed from the sunny-cel realms of such classics as *ASTRO BOY*, *THE EIGHTH MAN*, and *GIGANTOR*. If you've recently become familiar with the work of such serious anime aces as Dezaki, Otomo, Miyazaki, and Kawajiri, you probably have Streamline Pictures to thank. Among stateside distributors, the Los Angeles-based company has quite possibly done more than anyone else to garner the art form's acceptance in this country.

"I consider it 'alternative animation,'" says Streamline president Carl Macek, "an alternative to Disney and TV animation shows. The best thing about Japanimation is that it's by filmmakers, not animators. When you look at the finest Japanese animation, you say, 'Here's the work of Otomo or Kawajiri!' These aren't cartoons; these are the works of directors who have something it's animation doesn't mean that it's not a valid form of entertainment."

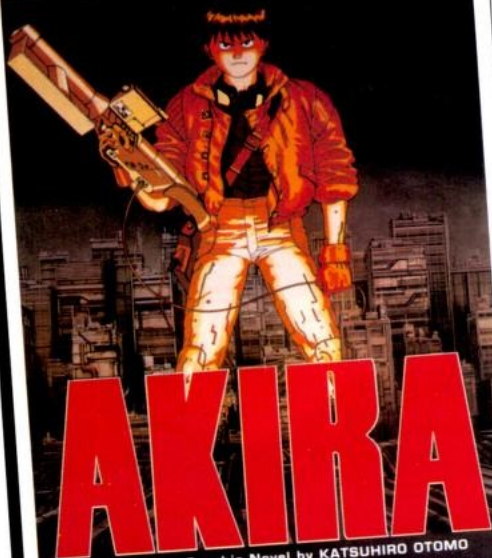
This new wave of alternative animation had been available to U.S. fan groups as far back as 1975. However, it was relegated mostly to the realm of video and laserdisc, where (especially in the latter format) it became an acquired taste among hardcore devotees willing to shell out big bucks in order to own the latest offering from their favorite anime auteurs. For the average filmmaker, however, opportunities for theatrical viewings were few and far between, mostly the odd entry at occasional film festivals, such as the perennially popular *LUPIN III: CASTLE OF CAGLIOSTRO*. Meanwhile, other worthwhile entries met disastrous fates: Tezuka's *PHOENIX 2772* was cut down to 88 minutes and badly dubbed to boot; Miyazaki's environmental science-fiction parable *NAUSICAA OF THE VALLEY OF THE WIND* was picked up by New World Pictures in 1984, re-edited to 98 minutes, shorn of adult material, and consigned to video obscurity. But perhaps the most INHIBITING stateside factor was the tendency for mainstream film moguls and audiences alike to regard animation as strictly the G-rated province of anthropomorphized animals and dinosaurs.

That changed in 1988. Aware of the growing strength of anime fandom and the potential market for Japanese science-fiction animation, Macek (who, along with *REN & STIMPY* creator John Kricfalusi, had co-founded independent animation company *Saunter*), formed Streamline Pictures with film distribution executive Jerry Beck and set



**WICKED CITY** is not only last year's most outrageous anime but the best genre film, period. In a dramatically horrifying highlight, agent Taki stands helpless while his partner saves him by sacrificing herself to a Black World shapeshifter.

Neo-Tokyo is about to E • X • P • L • O • D • E



**AKIRA**

Based on the Graphic Novel by KATSUHIRO OTOMO

Art Director TOSHIHARU MIZUTANI • Chief Animator TAKASHI NAKAMURA •  
Scenario IZO HASHIMOTO • Music SHOJI YAMASHIRO • Producer RYOHEI SUZUKI  
Character Design / Script / Direction KATSUHIRO OTOMO

Katsuhiro Otomo's *AKIRA* is one of the best and most successful Streamline releases. The cyberpunk science-fiction imagery at times recalls Ridley Scott's *BLADE RUNNER* and the ultra-violence of Kubrick's *A CLOCKWORK ORANGE*, in the opening motorcycle joust (below).

about bringing the best available Japanimation to the awareness of cinema-going North America. At last, on a semi-regular basis, these films could be seen as intended, in all their big screen glory. [See

CFQ 20:4:47.]

Streamline's first coups were the theatrical releases of Hiro Miyazaki's *LAPUTA: CASTLE IN THE SKY* and *TWILIGHT OF THE COCKROACHES* in spring and summer of 1989. The former had already been dubbed into English when acquired for a six-month test marketing period. *TWILIGHT* was released in a version with subtitles written by Macek. Though both films met with minor success on the art house circuit, Streamline had more ambitious projects in the wings. With the release of Japanese comic book and anime artist Katsuhiro Otomo's violent, visionary cyberpunk sci-fi thriller *AKIRA* later that year, Macek and Beck became major suppliers of anime to America. Dubbed by another company (like *LAPUTA*), *AKIRA* became a cult fave, grossing \$1 million at the domestic box office.

On the heels of that success, in 1990 Streamline distributed *LENSMAN*, based on the space opera novels by E. E. "Doc" Smith, followed in 1991 by the *ROBOT CARNIVAL* anthology and Miyazaki's *Lupin III* feature *CASTLE OF CAGLIOSTRO*. Subsequent titles include the future-warrior splatter-toon *FIST OF THE*



Animation festival fave *CASTLE OF CAGLIOSTRO* received new life on video, in a dubbed version.

## FILM GUIDE

By Todd French

NOTE: Although Streamline is still in the theatrical business, they now handle a wide variety of anime on video, including features and OVA (original video animation). Wherever the video version of a feature differs from its theatrical release, this has been noted.

## FEATURES

### AKIRA

★★★★

Writer-director: Katsuhiro Otomo. An Akira Committee Production, 1989, 124 mins.

Otomo's breathless adaptation of his 1800-page graphic novel remains an anime landmark. This visually stunning cyberpunk epic explores themes of anti-consumerism and political corruption at breakneck speed. In 2019, 31 years after WW III, the reactionary government strives to crush marauding rebels in Neo-Tokyo while various factions vie for control of Akira, a prescient organic mass with apocalyptic powers. Caught in the struggle are a band of punk bikers led by good guy Kaneda, his put-upon lieutenant Tetsuo (name translates as "Iron Man"), beautiful rebel Kay, and a group of psi-gifted kinder controlled by the government elite. When Tetsuo's nascent psychic abilities emerge, the warring parties must unite to stop the power-drunk youth from hooking-up with Akira and precipitating a new cataclysm.

Though occasionally short on sense (no doubt due to narrative compression) and saddled with a metaphysically diffuse ending, *AKIRA* is a staggering achievement. Dystopic vision of the future rivals *BLADE RUNNER* in sheer scope, and the movie works as both pop action epic and thought-provoking meditation on Nippon concerns of cyclical annihilation-and-renewal and moral accountability.

Released theatrically in an adequate but pedestrian English-language version (the flat dialogue and delivery seldom lived up to the mind-boggling imagery, and the use of actors to voice multiple



roles was occasionally obvious), the film is available in two video versions. The subtitled and letterboxed SPECIAL EDITION is the preferred choice for fans, especially since AKIRA is one of the few films to feature pre-recorded dialogue, a la Disney (most anime is post-dubbed), which was carefully lip-synched by the animators.

## THE CASTLE OF CAGLIOSTRO ★★

Director: Hayao Miyazaki. Script: Miyazaki & Manya Yamazaki. A Monkey Punch/Tokyo Movie Shinnsha Production, 1980; 1991, 100 mins.

As evidenced by films like LAPUTA: CASTLE IN THE SKY, MY NEIGHBOR TOTORO, KIKI'S DELIVERY SERVICE, and NAUSICAA OF THE VALLEY OF THE WIND, Japanese animation giant Hayao Miyazaki is an artist of painterly sensibilities and consummate compassion. Whether dealing with cautionary ecological themes or benevolent trolls, Miyazaki's films are rich, innocent, gentle tales. CASTLE OF CAGLIOSTRO, one of the director's "Lupin III" series, is strictly fluff, but it's fun-filled action-slapstick on a grand scale. Based on the comic manga created by Japanese author Monkey Punch, the film reads like Hitchcock's TO CATCH A THIEF by way of Disney. The fast-paced, boisterous story has slickster thief Lupin ("The Wolf") tracing the source of the counterfeit bills that have blown his latest heist. Tracking the money to the country of Cagliostro, the criminal soon finds himself battling to save a beautiful princess from an evil duke.

With tons of revved-up incident, memorable characters, and the trademark sumptuous Miyazaki backgrounds, CAGLIOSTRO is furious, non-stop enjoyment. From the gallant Lupin to his winning sidekicks, a hard-drinking marksman and a stoic samurai, the cel-crew are a winning lot. Along with the various hair-breadth escapes, gun fights, ninja battles, air attacks, and pratfalls, the film boasts a clock-tower finale that's a doozy. As much concerned with concepts of chivalry and loyalty as a high-octane larceny, the movie is a delight. Previously shown at festivals in a subtitled version, Streamline's video features fine dubbing.

## FIST OF THE NORTH STAR ★★

Director: Toyo Aahide. A Toei Animation Co. Production, 1986/1992, 110 mins.

Silly, incomprehensible, comic-gratuitous, brain-blowing epic is like a combo of MAD MAX films and STREET FIGHTER video games, garnished with heaping doses



Combining sex and violence is almost *de rigueur* in anime, as with the lovely but lethal spider lady in WICKED CITY, an interdimensional shapeshifter from the parallel Black World.

of Sergio Leone and chop-socky flicks. In the wake of a nuclear holocaust, remnants of humanity battle in a lawless wasteland against marauding raiders and mutant demi-gods. Their only hope is a race of enlightened super-human warriors, chief among whom are the Fist of the North Star and the First of the South Star. Ken, the current North Star, must overcome renegade spiritual brethren Shin and Jagi while questing for his kidnapped love, Julia. Meanwhile, Ken's very unenlightened older bro, Rach, appropriating Ken's status, embarks on world conquest with an inevitable climactic duel deciding the fate of Julia and the wounded planet. Edited into a film from a 200-some part TV series, the movie is mainly a series of unbelievably gory hand-to-hand show-downs between ill-defined characters. Folks either get blown apart (North Star technique) or sliced-and-diced (Southern Star style), with smatterings of trite mysticism thrown into the proceedings ("Power without perception is spiritually useless," quotes one sage). Film is further hampered by flat and immobile animation style, confusing storyline, occasionally incongruent dubbing, and a chief villain's not-too-convincing last-minute change of heart. Visual equivalent of having to go back to high school and reread only the battle scenes from "The Song of Roland." For gore and hard-core anime buffs only.

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## LENSMAN ★★

Director: Yoshiaki Kawajiri & H. Kurokawa. An MK Company Production, 1986/1990, 107 mins.

A boy on a backwater planet dreams of joining an honorable rebel elite and taking on an evil galactic empire.

Now, it's not STAR WARS but the enjoyable though slightly derivative LENSMAN, the anime adaptation of E.E. "Doc" Smith's famous space opera novels. An often dazzling blend of conventional and computer animation, the film tells the tale of Kim, a space jockey eager to join the Galactic patrol in its fight against the evil domination of the cosmos by the Boskone Empire. When Kim is chosen to become a member of a secret order of inter-planetary freedom fighters called "Lensmen" (after the power-enhancing alien artifact grafted onto their wrists), all the tried-and-true sci-fi staples occur (except for the cloying droid play), but the inclusion of diverting computer graphics (mainly in the numerous dog fights and the devilish Lord Helmet's appearances) are an unexpected plus. Lots of selfless derring-do, battle set-pieces, oddball characters (including a septuagenarian D.J. rebel), and hair-breadth escapes make this good fun. Favorite part: Kim and his comrades collide with nasty, decadent, drug-addicted snails! Good dubbing and sound; a laser disc version with the original Japanese on a second soundtrack is also available.

## THE PROFESSIONAL (GOLGOL 13) ★★

Director: Osami Dezaki. Script: Hideyoshi Nagasaki, based on graphic novels by Takao Saito. A Tokyo Movie Shinnsha Production, 1983/1993, 70 mins.

This nihilistic Nippon assassin flick is an anime masterpiece, albeit a very downbeat one. Twaking the conventions of the existential killer-for-hire genre, Dezaki's film plays ingenious riffs on its material, taking surprising twists and turns at every point. The film's eponymous loner

anti-hero Golgo 13 (a.k.a. Duke Togo) is a super-cool killer who resembles Mr. Spock on steroids. When he sanctions the son of a ruthless oil magnate, the latter responds by using his financial clout to dispatch squads of government hit-squads and a trio of memorably monstrous killers on the Professional's trail. Combining conventional cel-work with computer animation, the climactic showdown in the oil baron's high-tech office fortress goes over like gangbusters—thanks to the baroque gore quotient and a finale that stands all pat action clichés on their heads.

Indicative of Dezaki and Nagasaki's take on the futility of violence, revenge, and the further carnage it engenders is the way in which they foil the expected pay-offs: as when the hit-man's loyal flunky gives him the run-down on his enemy's plans before he reluctantly tries to collect on the bounty. The cel-work is dazzling, at times even poetic; a shore-side shooting with enough swooping glances for a John Woo film; an extreme close-up of a bullet popping into a victim's brain, etc. The set-pieces, including a duel in an ascending elevator and Togo's kiss-off of the billionaire are superb. The latter, a direct lift from (or homage to) the ending of ROBOCOP, has Togo blow away his victim into a swan-dive out of a skyscraper window. In spite of the balletic, slo-mo lashings of blood, it's hard to say of any film in the medium—or many live-action ones—that grapple (under the guise of escapism) with the utter waste underlying the spuma of slaughter. Like UNFORGIVEN and BULLET IN THE HEAD, this is a beautiful but unlovely film, and the final

ironic, abrupt shot on a rain-swept night street says it all.

## ROBOT CARNIVAL ★★

Directors: Fukushima & Katsuhiko Otomo. "Opening/Closing": HiroYuki Kihuzume ("Starlight Angel"), Man Lando ("Claude"), HiroYuki Kihuzudo ("A Tale of Two Robots"), Kouji Morimoto ("Franken's Gear"), Hideotoshi Ohmori ("Deprive"), Yasuomi Umetsu ("Presence"), Takashi Nakamura ("Nightmare"). An A.P.P. Co. Production, 1987/1991, 97 mins.

Like many anthology-format features, this is a mixed bag. Adopting a "Man against (or in love with) Machine" theme, the film is filled with genial but inconsequential mech-mate soap opera fluff ("Starlight Angel," "Deprive") and, content-wise, is too wispy and diffuse to really sustain extended interest. However, the feature does contain two superb episodes: the wrap-around segs by AKIRA creator Katsuhiko Otomo, which have the Robot Carnival descending on a futuristic desert burg; and Yasuomi Umetsu's enchanting and totally moving "Presence." The latter tale, about an inventor's initial inability to cope with the very human feelings with which he has—unwittingly—endowed his beautiful android, is an affecting meditation on unrequited love and responsibility. The Umetsu episode also scores some gentle and knowing satiric jabs at Nippon anime for its penchant for relegating its cyborg femmes to the role of pliable sex-toys ("I'm not a pet," the inventor's creation protests). With its understated mood and atmosphere, "Presence" scores well above the rest of ROBOT

CARNIVAL's metal *sturm-und-drang*. Kudos should also go to HiroYuki Kihuzudo's "A Tale of Two Robots," which amusingly transplants all the clichés of the mecha genre to an 18th-century Japanese setting.

Since most of the episodes are non-dialogue, the laser disc featuring alternate Japanese and English tracks is mostly a moot point, although an amusing element of the "Two Robots" sequence is that its foreign (apparently European) villain always spoke English, even in the original Japanese version.

## TWILIGHT OF THE COCKROACHES ★★

Director-writer: Hiroaki Yoshida. A TYO Productions Inc./Kitty Films Inc. Production, 102 mins. 1987/1990.

A spell-binding combo of cartooning and live action, TWILIGHT OF THE COCKROACHES is a mordant, serio-comic allegory of the Holocaust and one of the single most thought-provoking works in the anime field. This consistently moving film tells the story of a sylvan roach tribe which has found refuge in the bachelor pad of the incredibly plucky Saito. Meanwhile, young femme

roach Naomi becomes increasingly bored with the pampered paradise and her staid mate Ichiro. When brave soldier roach Hans arrives on the scene via the "war-torn" house across the yard, Naomi finds herself falling for the stranger, who also provides the complacent tribe with a first-hand report of his race's struggle for survival. When the lonely Saito eventually hooks up with the insect-offing girl across the way, the two embark on a roach genocide spree, and the tribes unite for a last-ditch suicidal attack on the human lovers. Imaginative and involving, TWILIGHT manages to conjure fairly substantial sympathy for the household bane, and the last third takes on tragic dimensions when the couple goes on the war-path. A solid work of *cinéfantastique*.

Unlike most Streamline films, this was distributed theatrically in a subtitled print (which is still available on laser disc). "The human characters don't speak, and the cockroaches speak in Japanese, so subtitles almost make it seem like cockroach language, in a funny way," explains Macek. "It's like Jabba the Hut in STAR WARS, talking in subtitles." Videocassette features fine dubbing.

#### VAMPIRE HUNTER D ★★★

Director: Toyoko Ashida. Epic/Sony Inc., 1982/82, 90 mins.

Imaginative science-fiction, gothic-horror actioner reads like a macabre variation on SHANE. In A.D. 12,090, last vestiges of humanity are ruled in feudal fashion by despotic vampiric overlords and their mutant flunkies. Comely villager Doris offers herself to the mysterious sword-wielding vampire hunter "D"—himself a dhampire (i.e., a living demi-vamp crossbreed whose powers match those of his undead opponents)—in exchange for slaying tyrannical lord nosferatu Count Magnus Lee. When Doris is chosen to become the vampire's bride, D makes a lone assault on the count's demon-infested stronghold. Melding classic horror, science-fiction, western, and samurai motifs, the movie provides plenty of thrills and off-beat bits of characterization, with the laconic D coming across as a combo of Sanjuro, Captain Kronos, and Robert E. Howard's puritan avenger, Solomon Kane. Among the memorably bizarre touches: the monster-be-gone Coleman lanterns that work on the undead populace, and D's wise-cracking, sentient hand, which (a la OUTER LIMITS' "Demon with a Glass Hand" episode) revives him from death. The creepy-crawlies, including a missile-armed giant and trio of serpent lamia sisters, are nicely realized.



Another staple of anime are buxom leading ladies, usually in tight-fitting spiffy space outfits. AFFAIR ON NOLANDIA, one of the DIRTY PAIR series, is one example of this popular form.

Smartly directed by FIST OF THE NORTH STAR's Toyoko Ashida, the film also boasts an effective, moody score by TM Network. On the negative side, the dubbing by Streamline is erratic, with the voice for Count Magnus being the worst offender, and the annoyingly processed nasal tones given to the hand are no match for the deep, sardonic voice of the original. On the whole, splendid stuff, but seeing it on the big screen, where it was shown in a subtitled print, is definitely preferable.

#### WICKED CITY ★★★

Director: Yoshiaki Kawajiri. Writer: Kiseki Chou, based on the novel by Hideyuki Kikuchi. A Japan Home Video Production, 1989/1994, 80 mins.

For untrammeled visual chutzpah, it's hard to top anime director Kawajiri's future-gothic noir thriller. This lean, adult horror entry comes across like a weird bonding of John Carpenter's THING and every cop-buddy film you've ever seen. The story's premise is that over the last 500 years, humankind has co-existed (fairly) peacefully with the interdimensional shape-shifting populace of the parallel Black World. With monstrous transdimensional terrorists out to smash the earth as it's up for re-territorialization, moderates on both sides pair up tough-guy cop Taki Renzaburo and Black World agent Makia in a bid to halt the baddies before time runs out.

From the first erotic-violent set-piece in which a Black World succubus-spiderwoman scampers after Taki (yet manages to maintain garters and stockings with aplomb), the film propels itself with non-stop imagistic verve. Some of the cels are nothing less than galvanizing, as when scores of blood-red tentacles burst from

a marble-white statue of the Virgin Mary during a duel in a church. As shown in DEMON CITY SHINJUKI, Kawajiri is a master at portraying a haunted megalopoli in which mortals and monsters live in blood-lashed—and often cynically cruel—co-existence. A superb bonding of Nippon themes of kinetic carnage and co-operation, WICKED CITY rates as one of the all-time champs of grotesque anime.

This is one of Streamline's better dubbing jobs: perfectly suited to the film noir look of the images is the hard-boiled tone of the English dialogue, written and directed by Greg Sznegoff, who also voices Taki.

#### WINDARIA ★★★

Director: Kunihiko Yuyama. An IDOL Co. Presentation, 1986/1992, 95 mins.

Beguiling, often pointed Nippon anti-war fantasia. On the fabled pastoral world of Windaria, two mythical kingdoms, the militaristic Shadowlands and the less-tesh sea-side realm of Lunaria, are headed for inevitable clash over latter's monopoly on fresh water. Seeking to thwart the jingoistic saber-rattling of their elders. Also embroiled in the war are young bucolic couple Alan and Marie, whose valley society is encroached upon by both factions. When Alan acts as go-between for the royal kinder, he's duped by Shadowland gentry into becoming the catalyst for the tragedy that rocks both realms. Despite obvious cinematic refs to everything from DUNE's dynastic wars over melange and water rights to ROMEO

AND JULIET, the movie works as both anti-war bromide and bittersweet love story, aided by strong characterizations, solid animation, and emphasis on adult themes of loyalty, greed, and betrayal. Occasional framing narration (via the dying, repentant Alan) is sometimes intrusive, but elemental concerns of harmony and co-existence make this one of the better realized pieces of feature anime. Streamline dubbing is generally fine.

## FEATURETTES

#### DIRTY PAIR: AFFAIR ON NOLANDIA ★★★

Director: Masaharu Okunuki. A Studio! Hue Sunrise/NTV Production, 1985/1992, 57 mins.

Adapted from Haruka Takachicho's comic *manga*, AFFAIR ON NOLANDIA pits the trouble-shooting interstellar spit-fires Kei and Yuri in a mission to save a child psychic from exploitation by a power-mad villain out to breed a line of subservient psycho-kinetic slaves from the girl. Landing on Nolandia, the curvy agents find themselves not only dodging death and sabotage from the enemy but enduring psychic onslaught from the frightened child. Sexy and moderately exciting space opera fluff occasionally suffers from now-dated, primitive animation, but still manages to be fun and diverting. Anime fans of the bosomy, super-destructive space sleuths will enjoy this combo of pulchritude and action. Good dubbing. Other Streamline DIRTY PAIR OVA releases include PROJECT EDEN and CONSPIRACY OF FLIGHT 005.

## NEO-TOKYO ★★★

Directors: Rin Taro ("Labyrinth"), Yoshiaki Kawajiri ("Running Man"), Katsuhito Otomo ("The Order to Stop Construction"), Haruki Kadokawa Films, 1985/1993, approx. length 50 mins.

An anime omnibus produced in 1987 for the Tokyo International Fantastic Film Festival, NEO-TOKYO (originally dubbed MANIE-MANIE, or "Tales from the Labyrinth") avoids the pitfalls of most genre animation flicks by not peaking early but saving its best seg for last. A trio of science-fiction and fantasy tales ranging in length from 12 to 23 minutes, the film effortlessly ease shifts from tone poem wistfulness to cyber-punk grue. "Labyrinth," Taro's episode, which doubles as the movie's framing device, follows the "Through the Looking Glass"-style adventures of a young girl and her cat as they are led through surreal and disturbing dreamscapes by a sinister clown. Kawajiri's segment, "Running Man," is a meld of Chancieresque pulp noir and ferocious cyber-splatterpunk. Set in the 21st century, when race-car drivers are now pessionically "plugged" into their vehicles, story revolves around a hard-bitten reporter's attempts to get the scoop on the longevity of Zach Hughes, the last decade's Death Race champ. "The Order to Stop Construction." Otomo's offering, is a pitch-black comic melding of Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" and Kubrick's 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY. A young bureaucaut, sent up-river to investigate his predecessor's disappearance and pull the plug on a building project in the jungle, finds himself the only human on the site, locked in conflict with the project's (short-circuiting) robot foreman, who's determined to finish his objective at any cost.

With surreal images of streetcars filled with irradiated, skeletal commuters and clock-headed "salarymen," Taro's seg is basically an innocence vs. experience meditation, its power somewhat lessened by its use as a bridging device for the other episodes. Kawajiri's "Running Man" (seen in an edited version on MTV's LIQUID TELEVISION) is a lean and stark technological terror tale providing mordant commentary on our own society's media-fed bread-and-circus morbidity. But the Otomo episode is easily NEO-TOKYO's most stunningly sustained achievement and one of anime's best and a bleakest dystopic visions. A perfect balance between horror and humor (as things worsen, the snotty supervisor's meals wind up with escalating doses of scrap-metal "seasoning").



The splendid **VAMPIRE HUNTER D** cleverly combines Gothic and sci-fi elements with a loner protagonist worthy of Clint Eastwood.



**NORTH STAR**, **THE PROFESSIONAL: GOLGO 13**, and **VAMPIRE HUNTER D**, all in 1992. **SILENT MOBIUS** and **NEO TOKYO** enjoyed a spring run in 1993 at the Los Angeles Nuart theatre, and Streamline wares received widespread coverage in a 1994 festival at the Santa Monica Laemmle Four, which culminated with the premiere of **WICKED CITY**.

Though originally only in the business of theatrical distribution, Streamline has recently packaged a number of popular TV anime serials and Original Video Animation (OVA). Macek recently came out with the complete **ROBOTECH** product line, released in two versions: the "consumer edition" features all 85 uncut episodes as they were aired on American television; the "connoisseur edition" includes the English versions paired with the original Japanese episodes, with subtitles. Streamline has also acquired mini-series such as **DOOMED MEGALOPOLIS**, **CRYING FREEMAN**, and **3X3 EYES**, (the later a story of battling immortals, "replete with guns, girls, and grotesque monsters"). Streamline is also releasing the first several episodes of the phenomenally popular **NADIA: SECRET OF BLUE WATER**, a terrific mix-

ture of elements as disparate as Jules Verne, space opera, and cliff-hanger serials. All in all, there are over 60 titles available for sale through their mail order catalogue (including some vintage 1950s' British animation such as **CLUTCH CARGO**); and some of their more prominent features are now available to be rented on store shelves, courtesy of a new deal with Orion.

**B**esides wider availability, the other advantage of Streamline is that audiences can at last understand the plots, thanks to English dubbing, whereas the laserdiscs bought by fans in the old days tended to be unsubtitled Japanese imports (which resulted in a subsidiary industry supplying translated scripts). This is something of a double-edged sword, however, creating an interesting dilemma for Macek and Beck: Japanese producers had long been interested in dubbing for the American market, but American fans were seldom if ever satisfied with the English-language versions. It was as if not understanding the dialogue added an extra level of mystique, which was often dispelled by the prosaic dialogue of careless translations.

"The Japanese companies got involved with dubbing companies that gave low bids and did bad work, giving a bad im-



age to the product," explains Macek. In a separate interview, Beck adds, "We were not happy with the **LAPUTA** English version ourselves, but the **AKIRA** is a better job, and I think the fact that they were on the big screen overwhelmed the weaknesses. We wanted to dub films not just faithfully but also give a complete English reflection of what the Japanese version is."

Despite Streamline's attempts to do a better job with their in-house translations of post-**AKIRA** releases, not everyone is satisfied. In fact, the quality of dubbing seems to be almost irrelevant to hardcore fans, who consider the issue a matter of principle: just as an artist is considered to have sold out when he tailors his art for wider acceptance, the dubbed versions were perceived as impure degradations of the originals, even by people who can't speak Japanese!

Macek disputes this view. "All cartoons are dubbed," he laughs. "Cartoon characters don't talk. Dubbing is not a sign of disrespect. If you're watching some Japanese

monster flick, the dialogue really isn't that profound anyway to require truly literal, painstaking translation. Other than for educational purposes, I really can't see the reason for subtitling."

In the Winter 1994 issue of *World of Fandom*, the Streamline president offered his own reflections on criticism that his commercial-mindedness has resulted in his playing fast-and-loose with fan-beloved anime works: "Well, we're talking about two different kinds of fans here," Macek said. "Streamline is out to please what you might call the counterculture, the **REN AND STIMPY** crowd, which is not the same as the fans who have gotten so far into Japanese animation that they're studying the total Japanese culture. They want all their movies and tapes subtitled, in detail, so they won't miss the slightest nuances in the original Japanese language. This is fine from an academic angle, but the general public simply will not be bothered to read subtitles! You can't please everybody, and I've chosen to

# OUTRAGEOUS ANIMAE

## TO DUB OR NOT TO DUB

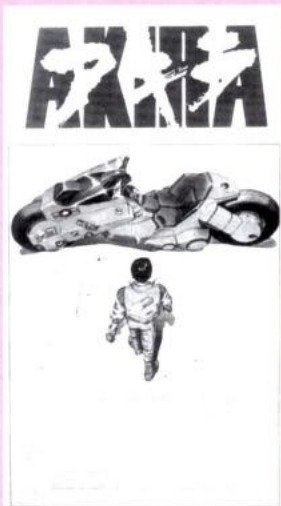
*The purists want subtitles, but the average viewer prefers English.*

By Todd French

Forget about critical nitpicking for a moment. What do average viewers want when perusing a piece of Japanese animation? Tom Stewart, owner of Super Collector, a Southern California-based comic book and video store that is the biggest distributor of Japanimation in the Orange County area, offers his perspective on fan demand for subtitled versus dubbed product.

"There are two different areas of customers in the Japanimation world," says Stewart, whose Fountain Valley store includes 1,000 anime titles, 80 per cent of which are stocked at a given time. "You've got the hard-core anime fans who think that any kind of dubbing is just blasphemy, and will accept nothing less than a subtitled video. You also have the 'Blockbuster Video' type, who is probably looking at this stuff for the first time, and wants it in English. I tend to feel you can appeal to a wider market with a dubbed video than a subtitled video, and in the end you'll wind up selling more dubbed copies. I would say that we're about equal on sales [either dubbed or subtitled], but I know for a fact that dubbed videos do much better in regular stores than don't cater to the hard-core anime fan."

Stewart, an avowed ROBO-TECH addict from the '80s, worked for a Newport Beach Japanese import company, Digital Waves, from 1989 to 1992, before opening Super Collector in December of 1993. Ready access to Japanimation titles at Digital Waves led to Stewart's being wowed by the genre-bending content of many of the digital-carried titles and resulted in his desire to found Super Collec-



In a rare move sure to please fans, Streamline released a subtitled version of AKIRA in addition to the usual dubbed version.

tor. The store currently carries titles from such top-notch distributors as Streamline, Central Park Media, AnimEigo, A.D. Vision, and Dark Image Entertainment, to name a few. Some of the Streamline product, which are among Super Collector's "hottest titles," include FIST OF THE NORTH STAR, the ROBO-TECH "Perfect Collection," and THE DIRTY PAIR series.

A frequent anime staple on the fan-con circuit, Stewart breaks down the shifting economic demographics of fan interest, ranging from convention specialties, as follows: "At an animation con, 90 per cent of the people are going to want subtitled, and only ten per cent will want dubbed. You get more of the hard-core fans in one

place than a retail store or a mail-order catalog distributing them through Video Giant.

"However, if I went to a STAR TREK convention I'd probably bring mainly dubbed anime titles because most of the fans will be experiencing Japanimation for the first time or maybe second or third, so they will want the dubbed product. If I were going to AnimeExpo or AnimeAmerica [both annual summer West Coast anime cons], I would bring mainly subtitled items for the exact opposite reasons, because the audience has been exposed to anime for many years. In passing, I'd say that, in the last two years, over 400 new titles have come out in America. Before that, there were probably only two or three distributors that carried Japanimation; now there are over 10."

On the subject of viewer-content demand, Stewart admits that the Super Collector videophile probably tends toward "the more violent or explicit material. We probably sell that material 2-to-1 over the more family-oriented stuff, though some of that really does sell well: DRAGONBALL Z, for instance. Our best-selling titles would probably include the UROTSUKI-DOJI [a.k.a. WANDERING KID] series, as well as the GUY series from A.D. Visions, which has proven to be one of the more explicit things ever released. We also import a lot of strictly Japanese titles like MONSTER CLASSROOM, and L.A. BLUE GIRL to name a few."

So there you have it. Clearly, the only way to please all of the people all of the time is to make both subtitled and dubbed anime available to viewers. As they say, the customer is always right. □

the story's ultra-dark man vs. machine themes reach an epiphanic climax that's sheer perfection. The poetic, compressed narrative approach of these episodes requires relatively minimal dialogue, resulting in an easier-than-usual dubbing job for Streamline, who acquit themselves quite nicely.

### SILENT MOBIUS

★★★

Director: Michitaka Kikuchi. A Kadokawa Publishing Co. Production, 1991/1993, approx. 50 mins.

In the 21st Century, humanity is besieged by trans-dimensional predators led by monstrous Lucifer Hawke. The only hope lies with a bevy of beautiful psionic cops, who combine modern police procedure with arcane fire-power to halt the otherworldly threat. When they discover that lovely Katsumi has become the focus of Hawke's personal ire due to her nascent psychic gifts, the officers induct her into their ranks for the occult fight to the finish. Based on the popular *manga* by Kia Asamiya, the film delivers the goods despite confusing flashback structure. Diverting enough, even though reminiscent of "CHARLIE'S ANGELES Meets ALIENS." One problem: heroines are pretty much interchangeable, thanks to near-identical design of pointy, triangular features. Adequate but uninspired dubbing.

### OVA SERIES

#### CRYING FREEMAN VOLUME 1

★★★

Director: Daisuke Nishio. Toei Video, 1986/1992, approx. 50 mins.

Adapted from the 1989 *manga* of writer Kazuo Koike (LONE WOLF AND CUB) and artist Ryoichi Ikeyami (MAI, THE PSYCHIC GIRL), this is the first of five Toei-produced anime OVAs by director Daisuke Nishio. A rather flat and stilted style is overcome by compelling storytelling of an over-powering love saga. Emu Himo, a talented (and virginal) young artist witnesses the violent sanction of a Yakuza member by the Chinese mafia hit man, "Freeman." Once a critically lauded poet, Yo Hinomura became the brainwashed tool of the infamous 108 Dragons after stumbling across some photos of a gang killing. The premier assassin of the Dragons, and unwilling her apparent to the gang's throne, Yo is dubbed "Crying Freeman" for the tears he weeps after every murder he commits against his will. When the Dragons dispatch Freeman to kill the beautiful Himo (who has fallen in love with him), she begs him to take her virginity first. As a result of the union, Freeman and his former target pledge eternal love and set out to thwart various foes, including the Yakuza and police.

Though the series lacks the kind of visual verve and passion of Ikeyami's original drawings (*manga* is currently being serialized by Viz Premiere Comics), there's no denying the power of simpatico between Emu and Freeman. This is due in no small part to the otherwise ambiguous amorality of the brutal pulp-meller world opposing them (major cop Nitta and the Yakuza literally wind up "in bed" with each other). Imaginative scenes abound: an in-the-air, slo-mo track with Freeman as



**FIST OF THE NORTH STAR**, basis of an upcoming live-action film, multiplies the violence to an occasionally amusing but mostly ludicrous quotient.

he blows away a police-guarded Yakuza boss; the "rape" of Freeman's psyche as he's riddled with the acupuncture needle-relayed orders of the 108 Dragons. One complaint which will surface in later episodes: Yo's struggle out of mafia bondage is compromised somewhat in that the 108 Dragons only wipe out other thugs, often with agendas more detestable than theirs (hey, the 108 Dragons even turn out to be a grandma and grandpa-led concern). Nevertheless, the love and bullets scenario is never less than commanding, and the down-beat, joyless attitude towards violence is indicative of the hit-man's tragic, lachrymose mood.

A note: as has been pointed out in an earlier article by *Video Watchdog* editor Tim Lucas, the character of Emu Himoto is a dead-ringer for actress Jennifer Connolly (who has a popular following in Japan), so the series is a must for her enthusiasts everywhere.

Dubbing and stereo sound are fine. The first OVA covers the initial nine manga issues.

**VOLUME 2:  
"SHADES OF DEATH,"  
PART ONE** ★★★

Director: Daisuke Nishio. Toei Video, 1988/1992, approx. 50 mins.

The second Nishio-directed OVA in the *CRYING FREEMAN* saga, "Shades of Death" (Part 1) is a worthy follow-up to its predecessor and, in some respects, proves to be even better. With Yo and Emu growing into their respective destinies as leader and consort of the 108 Dragons, the OVA's plot revolves around the couple being targeted by would-be usurpers in the organization, and Freeman's duel with beautiful, black assassin Kitsch. The lethal and imaginative face-offs—Yo excises his targets with knives between his toes, while Kitsch favors an electrified armor-corset—are all vivid and memorable. Scenes of the inner-workings of the Dragons are especially fascinating (like the desert mutants in *HILLS HAVE EYES*, the mafia chiefs are named after heavenly bodies), and with the introduction of the Felliniesque gargantuan granddaughter of the elderly

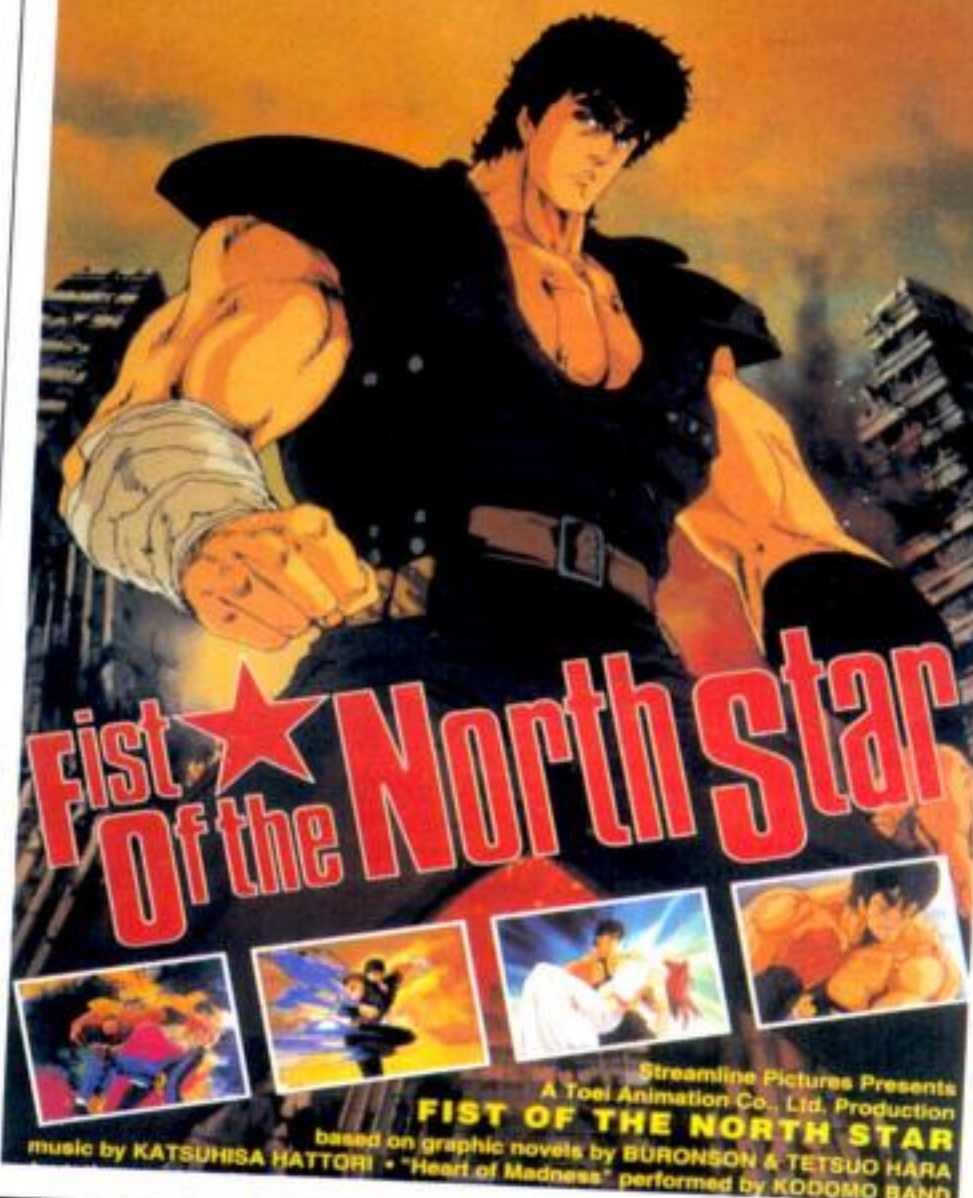
gang heads, a subtext of familial reconciliation and responsibility abounds in the first half. Though emphasis on Yo's down-beat predicament seems to fall by the wayside as he and Emu take their places at the top of the criminal power-heap, the two remain appealing figures, and the plot's crammed with decidedly Asian concepts of personal honor and sacrifice (as exemplified by Freeman's right-hand man, Koh), ironically set against the contest of an all-pervasive, crime-riddled universe which would make Dr. Mabuse envious. There are a few eyebrow-raising moments, as when the black Kitsch uses a white pigment spray to disguise herself and evade Dragon hoods dispatched to kill her. (Given Japan's world-renowned xenophobia, there's a disturbing racist undercurrent here that will resurface in #3 to a more obvious degree). In spite of the usual limited character movement, individual scenes remain dazzling: assassin Kitsch's slow-mo, knife-wielding pirouette in the midst of a climactic nighttime duel on the deck of the 108 Dragon submarine packs the kind of grandiloquent eros-thanatos wallop on which anime dotes. The Streamline dubbing, image, and sound quality are all first-rate.

**VOLUME 3:  
"SHADES OF DEATH,"  
PART TWO** ★

Director: Johel Matsuro. Toei Video, 1988/1993, approx. 50 mins.

The third anime OVA featuring the reluctant assassin with the over-worked tear ducts falls short of previous episodes. Though technical credits are superb, the main plot, with 108 Dragon head Freeman smashing a black terrorist organization queasily smacks of the sort of racist xenophobia for which the Japanese are famous. An interesting subplot has Emu mastering an evil samurai sword, the Muramasa, in an attempt to shield her husband from the baneful blade, which has been sent to the Dragons in the hope of putting a lethal hex on the lachrymose killer. As usual, the action soars whenever the relationship between Freeman and Emu takes center-stage (though a test of her love makes Arnie's hazing of Jamie Lee

**AN EPIC ASSAULT ON THE SENSES**



try to please the general public rather than the Japanese anime purists. It's probably more important to wake up the public to the basic fact that there's lots of good stuff in Japanese animation, rather than to try to persuade them to look at a cartoon with subtitles and footnotes to explain all the Japanese pop-cultural references."

**D**ubbing controversy aside, Macek is not only extremely proud of Streamline's role as a force for popularizing Japanimation for the general public; he also lauds his company's efforts in pioneering sound-effects enhancement on their anime products. This ties in to one of the problems that bedevils imported Japanimation products: dialogue and effects are generally "wedded" onto the same tracks, instead of being separated on different tracks, which makes transferrence exceptionally difficult.

Says Macek, "A problem is that a lot of studios don't have the sophisticated backup ma-

terial. When Japanimation is sold to a foreign market, you find that the music and effects are wedded on right and left tracks. The best reality would be having two tracks for effects and two for dialogue—you don't often get optimum material. If the foley is too loud, you have to lower it, and the ambient sound gets lowered since they're married. We add sound effects and try to enhance the soundtrack to take advantage of the ambient sound. We'll add wind effects, night air, film techniques, to increase the sound of the foley as it's married to effects. In *DOOMED MEGALOPOLIS*, there's a sound *leitmotif* for each character, for effects of psychological motivation. We utilize state-of-the-art techniques to suspend disbelief and to add ambience and perspective. Most cartoons are flat. In our films, you can tell whose mouth the sound is coming from."

In addition to distributing Japanimation, one of Streamline's other recent projects is a

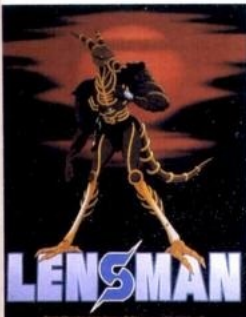
Curtis in TRUE LIES look fairly tame in comparison); and a scene near the end in which Eimu executes a nude sword ritual to entrance a bunch of thugs and summer Freeman has a true erotic charge. But there is a disturbingly bigoted bent to a scene in which our Occidental-looking Japanese superman dominates black amazon terrorist Bugnuq. The self-sacrificing Eimu's heroics aside, Freeman's face-offs with terrorist leaders Jigon and Shikebaro seem perfunctory compared to the imaginative slayings in the previous two episodes. Recommended for the compelling romance between the protagonists. Streamline's dubbing and sound still rate fairly high.

## VOLUME 4: "A TASTE OF REVENGE" ★★

Director: Shigeyasu Yamazuchi, Toei Video, 1988/1994, approx. 50 mins.

Latest OVA in the popular crime-melior saga has Freeman challenged by Naitai, a fanatical religious out to use the 108 Dragons' influence to spread his Great Bear God cult throughout the world. His plan includes use of superhuman world wrestling champ Oshu Togoku to depose Freeman so they can substitute a cult clone who will take his place as the crime cartel's head. This volume may not duplicate the combo of romance, violence, and pathos from the first two OVAs, but there's plenty to enjoy. What makes the fourth episode absorbing is the inclusion of the Togoku character, a sociopathic but honorable—and orphaned—ogre who yearns as much for family as he does for the destruction of Freeman, his rival in martial arts prowess. In the OVA's climactic duel, the latter manages to take on a tragic dignity and you wish there had been more action with him. Otherwise, the same level of exciting and violent excursions are on hand, though Great Bear God baddie Naitai winds up

The space opera **LENSMAN** mixed traditional cel work with computer animation.



**ROBOTECH: THE SENTINELS** is a feature-length sequel to the popular **ROBOTECH** series, now offered in a collector's edition featuring the dubbed versions and the originals.

posing also as much threat as the rest of the reluctant assassin's enemies. (If he has enough supernatural power to render the Dragons unconscious, why can't he stop a lethal sword stroke from Fu Ching Lan's Muramasa?) Some nice touches include Freeman's enemies gradually being dumped onto the spines of a cart's dragon statue. The usual solid dubbing.

## DOOMED MEGALOPOLIS VOL 1: "THE HAUNTING OF TOKYO" ★★

Director: Rin Taro, A Toei Video and Oz Production, 1992/1993, approx. 50 mins.

The burgeoning 1920s metropolises of Tokyo is under supernatural siege as ruthless necromancer Kato attempts to raise the city's slumbering guardian spirit, Taira No Masakado. Visually impressive but senseless first chapter is light on character development and story subtlety, but it delivers the goods with a surfeit of scary duels and demon-mongering as unlikely heroess stand up to the (significantly militaristic) Kato, who attempts to use virginal girl Yukari in his nefarious plot to summon Nasakado's ambiguously defined ghost. (Guy's only his city's deliverer when he's sleeping under the turf?) The animation's pretty simplistic and stilted, but pace never lets up, and Streamline stereo sound helps greatly.

## VOL 2: "THE FALL OF TOKYO" ★★

Director: Rin Taro, A Toei Video and Oz Production, 1992/1993, approx. 50 mins.

Stymied by failure to wreak vengeance on newly renovated Tokyo and unable to effect resurrection of guardian spirit Masakado as his supernatural flunky, sorcerer Kato

psychically rapes virginal Ukari (the physical act completed by her possessed brother) in the hopes his subsequent offspring, female child Ukiko, will give him access to Masakado's dormant power. Second OVA in anime vet Rin Taro's period horror series is crammed with visual inventiveness, never stinting on fast and furious occult set-pieces. The general atmosphere of Nippon fatalism and the bleak vision of a world where absolutes such as good and evil can, at best, hope for an eternal see-sawing draw is rather mesmerizing and unique. Having the municipal government accept the existence of the supernatural is also quite novel. It lacks the apocalyptic poetry of UROTSUKI-DOJI or the compelling scares of WICKED CITY, but the series is still good horrific fare.

## VOL 3: "THE GODS OF TOKYO"

## VOL 4: "THE BATTLE FOR TOKYO" ★★

Director: Rin Taro, A Toei Video and Oz Production, 1992/1993, approx. 47 mins.

The Battle for Tokyo's arcane soul concludes in episodes 3 and 4 of Rin Taro's horror anime epic. Though apparently defeated in "Fall of Tokyo," installment 3 has the newly risen Kato scheming to use the subway system construction project to wake a supernatural dragon that slumbers beneath the city. By unleashing the dragon, Kato hopes he finally will be able to gain control of the city's guardian spirit, Masakado. Called in by the authorities to investigate, Prof. Terada and psychic Kuroda build a robot (inspired by the release of METROPOLIS!) to foil Kato's

mission. Meanwhile, Masakado's champion, the chase Shinto priestess Keiko has married into the doom-laden Tatsumiya family to protect Ukiko from the sorcerer's machinations. In "The Battle for Tokyo," the ever-thwarted Kato uses Ukiko as a vessel to solve a mathematical equation which will set the moon on a crash course with the Earth! Taking advantage of the mass destruction (to put it lightly), Kato will finally achieve his long, sought-after revenge. As the supernatural nexus of the storm grows closer, the battle reaches such cosmic proportions that temple maiden Keiko and the sorcerer become the respective personifications of the Goddess of Mercy and the Spirit of the Dead. The Tatsumiya family skeletons are also brought to light in the ensuing struggle.

The series ends on a slam-bang note, though American genre fans expecting the customary grue-lashed duel may be mystified by its ending on a Buddhist note of cosmic reconciliation.

## LUPIN III: TALES OF THE WOLF

## VOL 1: "ALBATROSS: WINGS OF DEATH" ★★

Director: Hayao Miyazaki, A Toei Movie Shinshe Production, 1977/1982, approx. 30 mins.

ALBATROSS is the first of two 1977 second season LUPIN segs directed by Miyazaki (under the alias of "Tsumoto Teruki") now available from Streamline. The plot has the gentleman cat burglar and his cohorts attempting to foil the plans of maniacal industrialist Professor Lonebach, who, in addition to kidnapping Lupin's sexy girlfriend Fujiko, intends

to blackmail the world with his atomic bomb-outfitted 1929 airship, *The Albatross*.

Assisted by marksman Jigen, and harried (and helped) by unflinching nemesis and interlop cop Zenigata, Lupin takes to the air to defeat the mad bomber. Based on the characters created by Monkey Punch, ALBATROSS is exciting, fun, and filled with copious bits of inventive action. Miyazaki, who has crafted any number of heart-in-the-mouth Sopwith Camel histrionics, makes the final battle between Lupin and Lonebach genuinely suspenseful and amusing (Lupin and Jigen are forced to battle it out...in their undies), while some tame nudity via Fujiko spices up the proceedings. Though animation is dated by today's standards, the situations are well-crafted, and Streamline's dubbing and sound assists are fine. The LUPIN series has seen three incarnations (in 1971, 1977, and 1984) and five feature films. Miyazaki joined the short-lived 1971 TV series in mid-first season, directing the final ten of 23 episodes.

## VOL 2: "ALPHA, LUPIN" ★★

Directed by Hayao Miyazaki, A Toei Movie Shinshe Production, 1977/1994, approx. 30 mins.

This, Streamline's release of the Miyazaki-directed caper of the second LUPIN III TV series (1977-1980), is full-throttle fun. Lupin and his gang are (for once) wrongly implicated in a series of robberies master-minded by look-alike impostor who commit the acts with the aid of a flying robot and its girl pilot, Maki. Maki's father, the robot's inventor, died under mysterious circumstances, and the girl believes the gang is aiding her mission to discredit the military's design on the mecha. When it turns out that the fake Lupin and company are indeed working for the nasty conglomerate that stole dad's work, only the true Lupin and his perennial policeman nemesis Zenigata can save her from the impostor's evil schemes. Anime fans will of course be pleased to note that the episode's "Lambda Robot" is the precursor and dead-ringer for the one in Miyazaki's later '86 work, LAPUTA, but this will hardly diminish the thrills of ALPHA, which features Miyazaki's topical issues of condemnation of those who abuse power along with Nippon fees of rampant militarism. Lupin fans may also get a jolt out of seeing a "what if?" scenario, with the Lupin gang stripped (until truly taking the scene in the last part) of their rough chivalry and presented as a gang of cold-blooded, remorseless felons.



**“All cartoons are dubbed,” laughs Carl Macek. “Cartoons don’t talk. Dubbing is not a sign of disrespect. I really can’t see the reason for subtitling.”**

Good technical credits, with fine Streamline job on the dubbing and stereo sound.

**NADIA (SECRET OF BLUE WATER) EPISODES 1-8 ★★★**

Directed by Hideaki Anno. An NHK, Sogovision Production, 1989/1992, approx. 25 mins.

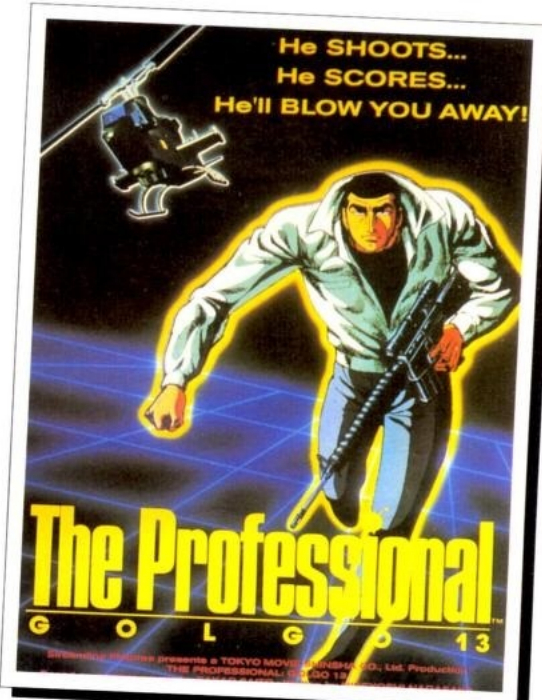
Great stuff! Originally aired on NHK TV in Japan in 1990 as a 39-episode animated series, *NADIA* (Japanese title translates to “Nadia of the Mysterious Seas”) is a cross-genre-cultural delight for action-adventure buffs of all ages. With references from period Jules Vernean fantasia (the series was originally going to be an adaptation of 20,000 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA and Nemo and the *Nautilus* crew figure prominently), Anderson’s *AROUND THE WORLD IN EIGHTY DAYS*, serials, Miyazaki’s *LAPUTA* and Nippon space and mecha operas, *NADIA* is boundlessly frenetic and imaginative fun, with enough hair-breadth escapes to make *RAIDERS* look tame. The plot, circa 1889, is a world-wide chase for the possession of a magic jewel (the eponymous “Blue Water”), currently in the keeps of exotic young beauty, Nadia. Aided by a youthful French science prodigy and a gang of warm-hearted thieves, the orphaned girl (actually alien princess and daughter of Captain Nemo!) quests for her origins while fending off evil designs of fascist tech-oriented Neo-Atlanteans, who intend to use the jewel for a scheme of global domination. The first episodes set up a meeting between Nadia, boy inventor Jean, and *Nautilus* crew as they’re pursued by the rapacious Grandis Gravna Gang and Neo-Atlanteans headed by the megalomaniacal Gargoyles. Dubbing is generally okay, though the voice for Jean is way too old for the character. Sound is not as clear as past

Streamline jobs, but all this is submerged in the sheer energy of storytelling. Streamline currently carries the first eight half-hour OVAs and hopes to pitch the rest to cable. The series was later adapted into two anime films, the second virtually execrated by the original creators. Anime director Anno worked on both *GUNBUSTER* and *WINGS OF HOINNEAMISE*. Filled with rich character development, surprisingly mature content, and blessed with a gorgeous and resourceful young heroine, *NADIA* is the kind of “Sense of Wonder” roller-coaster ride which makes you recall every movie that enthralled you as a kid. Only surpsuses would pass on it. *NADIA* is also a singular achievement for xenophobic Japan, in being the first anime series to feature a non-white lead heroine.

**ROBOTECH: THE SERIES ★★**

Director: various. A Harmony Gold USA Inc./ Tatsunoko Ltd. Production, 1982/1985/1992, approx. 120 mins.

Truly a job for Video Watchdog. *ROBOTECH* was cobbled together from three Japanese series: *MACROSS*, *SOUTHERN CROSS*, and *MOSPEADA*. The Streamline “Perfect Collection” will present the dubbed American episodes coupled with the corresponding episodes of the subtitled Japanese shows in a 4-1-volume set, so anime buffs will get a kick out of comparing Cpt. Henry Global and crew in American and Nippon personae as they defend Earth against alien legions. This definitive introduction to an enduring cross-cultural genre phenomenon (four tapes per series are currently available) is a must for *ROBOTECH* fanatics, in spite of juvenile scripting and primitive animation technique that makes the show look somewhat dated. □



line of hobby kits and figurines, which debuted in 1993 with deluxe kits based on *SPEED RACER*, *ROBOT CARNIVAL*, *AKIRA* and a series of figurines from *ROBOT CARNIVAL*.

Now, the cult popularity of Japanimation has reached the extent that video chains and music stores like Video Giant, Tower Records, and Music Market have entire sections on anime; alternative rocker Matthew Sweet has done music videos featuring clips from *URUSEI YATSURA* and *COBRA*, and even mega-critics Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert have given thumbs up to films like *AKIRA* and Miyazaki’s *MY NEIGHBOR TOTORO*. Yet Macek fears that the market is in danger of burning itself out due to the general blitz of distributors vying for recognition of their product. With the glut of material, the unwary anime convert will find it difficult to distinguish between the superior product and the dross.

“I think the education level of the American public is very slow,” says Macek. “Right

Osami Dezaki’s *THE PROFESSIONAL* enthusiastically overturns the clichés of the violent hitman-for-hire genre.

now, there is an overkill situation because of over-saturation. The consumer doesn’t realize what’s truly good. It’s like the glut of comic books; the buyer suddenly pulls back and buys only Marvel, DC, and Dark Horse. There’s too much material out there, and it’s a very unstable situation.”

Of Japanimation’s penchant for pushing the limits of the art form, Macek concludes, “Animation is the perfect medium for cinematic expressions. There are no physical limitations—you can have a cast of thousands, exotic locales, and dozens of exploding cars and buildings, without going over budget on location scouting, massive casting calls, and expensive special effects. Animation can be funny, adventurous, or romantic. It’s just a matter of being a good storyteller. The epitome of animation is that it’s both realistic and surreal at the same time.” □

**AFFAIR ON NOLANDIA’s Kel and Yurl will return in future DIRTY PAIR featurettes, including PROJECT EDEN and CONSPIRACY OF FLIGHT 005.**

