

ARMORED TROOPER VOTOMS

By Tim Eldred
Based on Translations
by E.H. Migaki and
Katsuyuki Suzuki

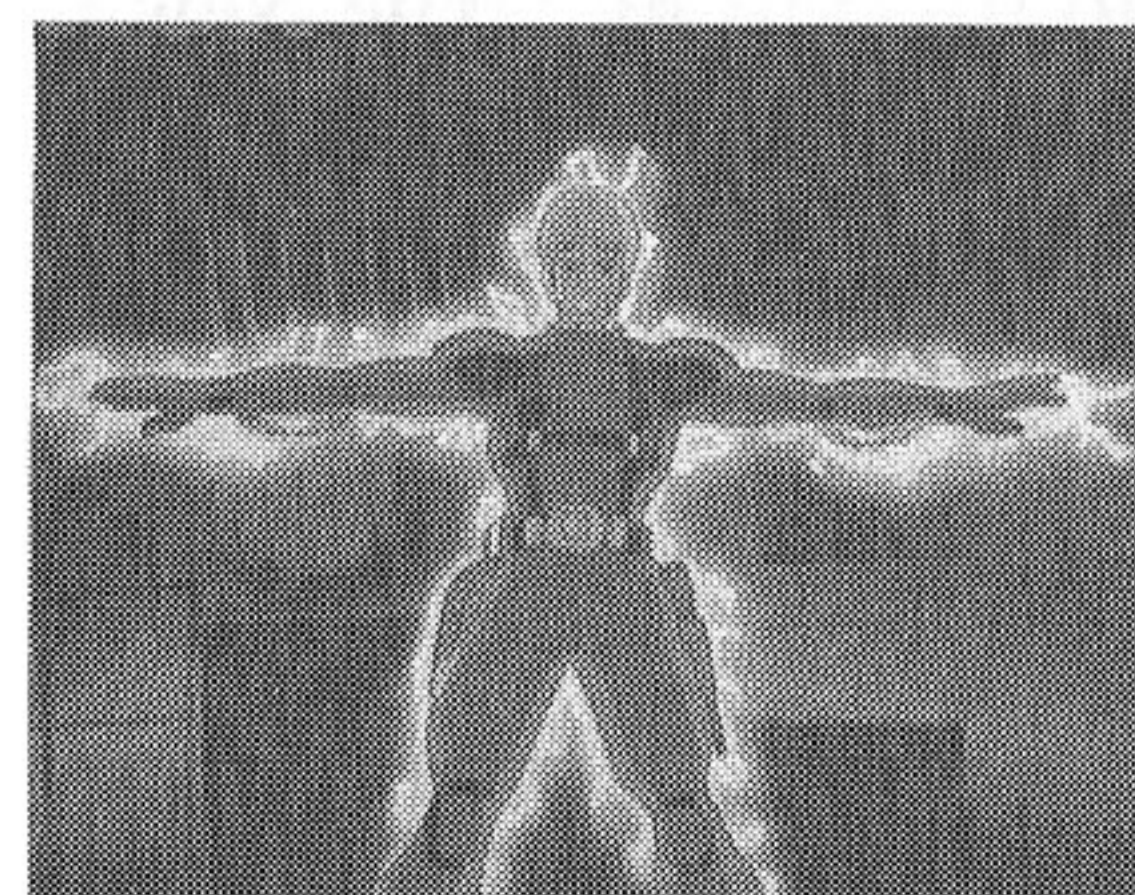
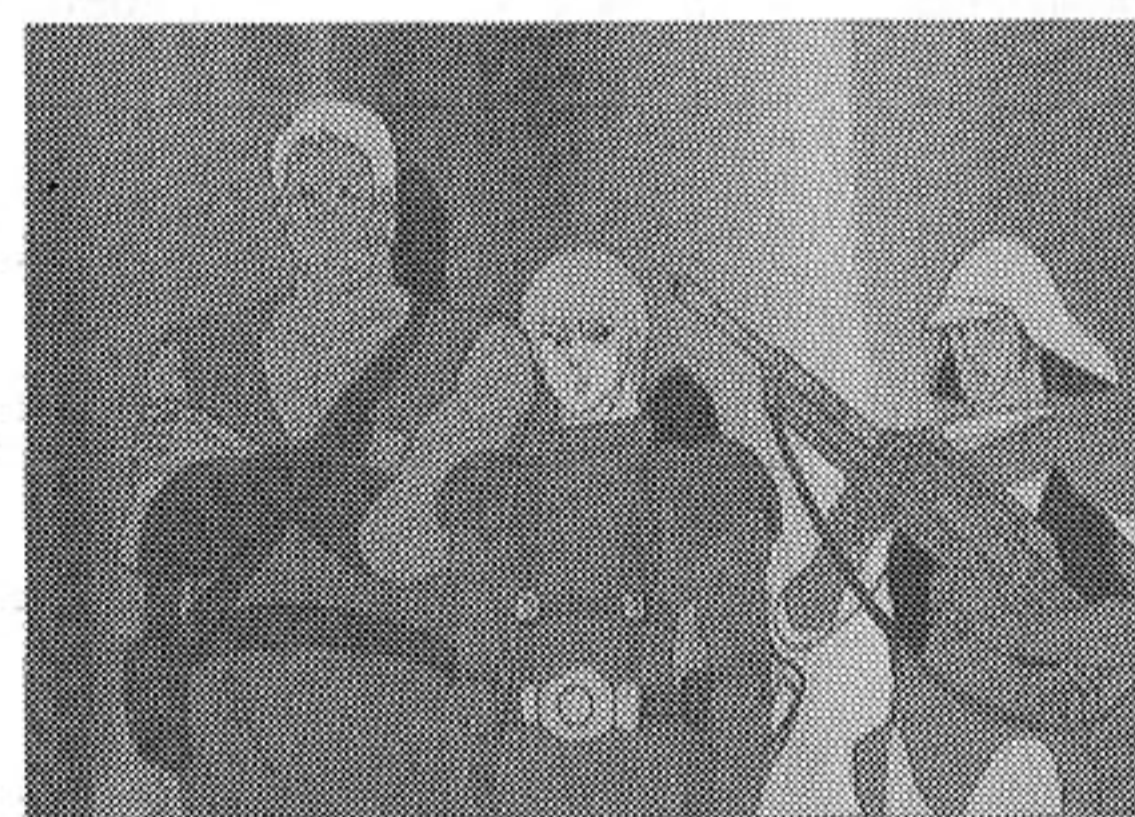
First of a Two-Part Article

It was early 1983, a boom year for post-*Gundam* Japanese animation. Writer/director Ryosuke Takahashi

had introduced *Fang of the Sun*, *Dougram* to audiences eager for more of the exciting new potential that *Mobile Suit Gundam* had inspired by shifting perspective away from the robot superteam shows of the Seventies. Takahashi showed audiences that the animated robot could also work as a tool to further human goals, and *Dougram* was Takahashi's first step into this philosophical territory. He was about to take a bigger one.

"After *Dougram*, I wanted to write a fantasy," Takahashi says. "I wanted a world in which robots were not unnatural, but that was difficult to combine with a fantasy story, and I didn't want to copy *Dunbine*... I changed my plans and created *Votoms*."

This new series, released by Nippon Sunrise, was broadcast from April, 1983 to April, 1984. Although ratings were not particularly strong at first, *Votoms*' popularity virtually exploded over the following years as spinoffs emerged on video and in print. Today, some consider *Votoms* to perhaps rival *Mobile Suit Gundam* in both scope and complexity, giving rise to the suspicion that it was indeed a series ahead of its time.



Part of the reason for *Votoms*' later success might be attributed to the meticulous planning that went into the series from the beginning, especially when Takahashi began to stretch the limitations of the television medium.

"In TV there is always the possibility of cancellation," Takahashi says, "so we divided the story into several parts to present variety and left gaps that gave us the opportunity for future stories."

Takahashi started with an intriguing premise: If a soldier knows nothing but war all his life, what happens to him when the war ends and he must rejoin society? At first, Takahashi reasoned, some would seek simulation of war in a battle ring, similar to a wrestling match, and over time and after seeing many people and places, the soldier would become rehabilitated.

The soldier Takahashi had in mind would later become Chirico Cuvie, but many other elements would be developed before his saga could be fully realized.

When Takahashi was envisioning the setting for his story, he was strongly influenced by the 1982 film *Blade Runner*. Co-writer Soji Yoshikawa remembers Takahashi considering the inclusion of a replicant-like being. Things began to fall into place.

"There were discussions at Nippon Sunrise at that time about different ways to operate a robot and whether it was enough for a soldier to have ordinary human ability. Our 'perfect soldier' concept arose from that."

With this new concept as a catalyst, Takahashi began to build Chirico's character upon deeper observations of war in general.

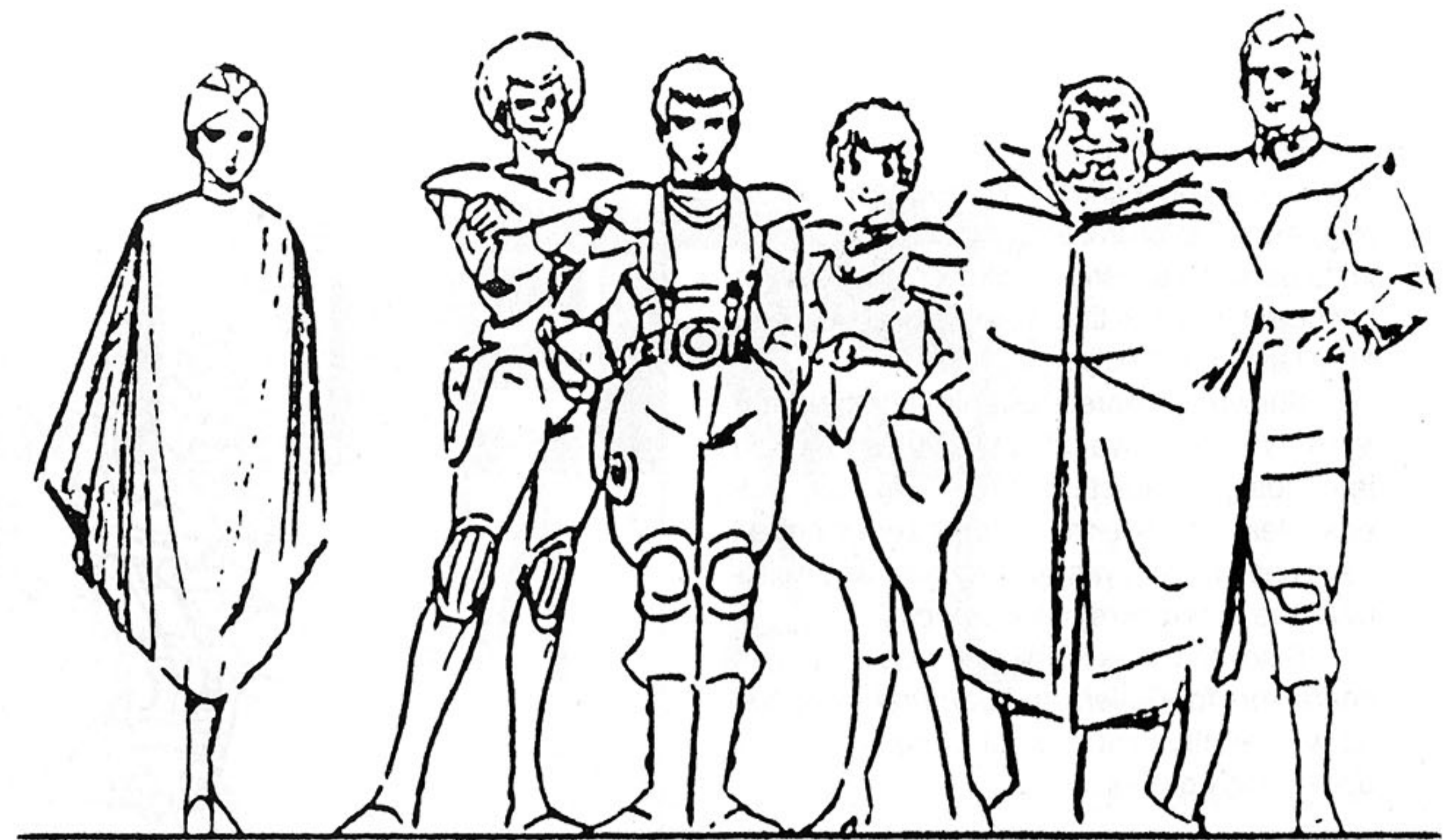
"There will be war," Takahashi says, "as long as there is a tendency in people to either dominate or want to be dominated."

Takahashi explored this peripherally in *Dougram* but, as he admits, the viewpoint was too broad and the characters not strong enough.

"In *Votoms*, the camera is more intimate and concentrated on the hero. I wanted the hero to have a strong personality which would refuse to dominate or be dominated."

Together, Takahashi and Yoshikawa forged ahead with the first part of the story. As they progressed, they found Chirico's character too strong to remain bound to one place and so as locales changed, the focus of the story drew tighter as well. But, incredibly, they still had not thought of an ending. Story writer Toji Gomu recalls how this problem was dealt with.

"Generally, this type of robot anime has an ending figured in when we start. But when Chirico's battles were over, we wondered, how would he fill the void in his heart? Would he have to live without hope? To answer these



questions, I think director Takahashi prepared the god-story to help Chirico along."

The "god-story" is said to have been inspired by Arthur C. Clarke's short story, "The Nine Billion Names of God," which involves a gigantic computer of divine proportions. Around this basic premise, Takahashi built the image of the planet Quent, to which Chirico travels in the final segment of the series. Yoshikawa recalls the extensive logic that had to be worked out to maintain the integrity of the story.

"We had to write the history of everything. It was difficult, but if we could make this kind of story, we might even explore the occult although that would normally be impossible for TV."

Consequently, it was decided not to over-emphasize either the occult or the "mere human ability" aspect so as not to drift too far into melodrama. But what was created inspired so much intrigue that the follow-ups have been nonstop since 1984. No less than nine video releases (including three original video releases), a series of "side-story" or companion novels called *Blue Knight Berserger*, an OAV "sequel" series, *Armored Hunter Mellowlink*, and numerous books have carried the world of *Votoms* far beyond its original premise.

Takahashi went on to create many other successful animated series including *Round Vernian Vifam*, *Panzer Blade Galient* and *SPT Layzner*, but many still consider *Votoms* to be Takahashi's masterwork. Although it might seem easy to categorize *Votoms* as "serious" robot animation, Takahashi reminds us of its sentimental ending.

"A happy ending is not a probable one in a series like this... after all, we wouldn't want to see someone like Chirico raising a family." Conversely, Takahashi says, it wouldn't necessarily be a good thing if the heroine were to meet a tragic end, so the story ends as it does.

Perhaps Takahashi got to write his fantasy after all.

Character Design

Having worked under veteran character designer Soji Yoshikawa on *Dougram*, Norio Shioyama was permitted to design the *Votoms* characters on his own. From the beginning, Shioyama wanted to design Chirico Cuvie on the basis of the character's disposition.

Echoing Takahashi's philosophy, Shioyama says, "I first imagined Chirico as a boy whose mind was damaged by the war. As he meets various people and experiences various things, the wound heals."

The look of the character softens to reflect this as the story progresses. As the project evolves, the character becomes slightly less severe and more mature-looking, allowing a greater range of expression.

This differentiates Chirico from a supporting character like Vanilla, who does not require an extensive facial vocabulary and thus can look severe in any instance.

Fyana, on the other hand, requires a different design approach. Shioyama wanted her "perfect soldier" nature to set her above ordinary humans. Shioyama originally wanted Fyana to impart a feeling of queenliness or even divinity.



As Fyana's character was written into more and more action scenes, it became necessary to toughen her up for practical reasons. The original impetus is still apparent, however, especially in her depiction in the third *Votoms* video release, "The Last Red Shoulder."

Shioyama shared key animator duties on *Votoms* with Moriyasu Tanikuchi, who would later design characters for *SPT Layzner*. Videos released since the *Votoms* series ended have been all Shioyama's designs, and epitomize the characters' appearances.

Shioyama has since gone on to design characters for *Galient* and *Samurai Troopers*, as well as illustrations for various *Votoms* books and posters.

Mechanical Design

Kunio Okawara has become one of the most respected and imitated mecha designers in animation, having worked on virtually every major program from *Mobile Suit Gundam* to *Dragonar*. But to this day, Okawara says, *Votoms* remains his favorite.

Part of the reason was the time frame. Fresh from *Mobile Suit Gundam* and *Dougram*, Okawara had established the three basic criteria his next set of designs would follow.

"First," Okawara explains, "when we eventually produce the products [the models, toys, etc.] they must pose exactly as designed without modification.

"Second, the products should be smaller in scale than the *Dougram* robots, which are too big.

"Third, they must look as if they were made in a factory of today."

Once established, these three ideas result in some of the most appealing (certainly some of the most realistic) robot designs from that era. Designing products as products and



not merely as "quick-buck" merchandise was a new approach at the time and served to add an incredible degree of logic to the designs.

Later, however, when it came time to design new robots for the videos, some of the concepts were set aside in favor of "characterizing" the newer mecha for the sake of the story. But Okawara justly takes pride in the quality of his original designs that rise a cut above the standards of even six years later.

Screenplay

Working on *Votoms* gave assistant director Toshifumi Takizawa and script writer Jinzo Toriyumi something of an education in both the

freedoms and restrictions of new age animation. Unlike most previous animated programs, *Votoms* was never intended solely for child audiences.

"It's mainly for older students who are more sophisticated," Takizawa says, who enjoyed working on *Votoms* but had to acclimate himself to the smaller target audience.

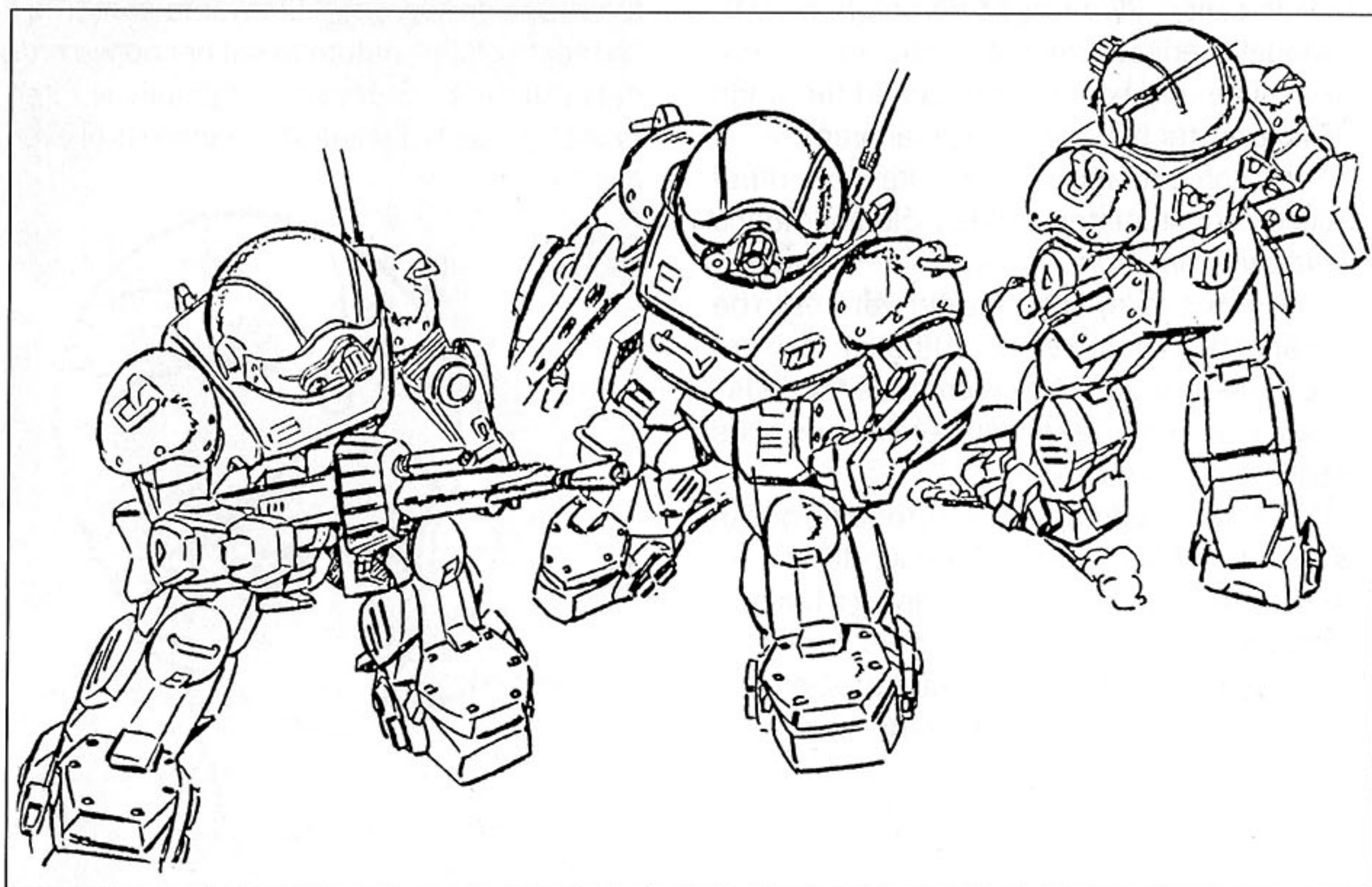
"Because our target was more narrow," Takizawa says, "we found that we didn't need universal understanding and weren't limited by it... we could do exactly what we wanted. In that sense, the project was very flexible."

"I had a hard time changing my emphasis," Toriyumi explains, who had written chiefly for younger audiences prior to this project. Toriyumi was not with *Votoms* from the beginning but did write the first few "Sunsa" episodes, which contain minimal dialogue.

"I kept trying to fill lines," Toriyumi says, "but director Takahashi always told me it was too much." Toriyumi also wanted at that point to add more to the romance between Chirico and Fyana but here, too, there was a compromise.

"Earlier the two were enemies who eventually discovered a kind of empathy, a similar psychological bond," Toriyumi says. "In this part of the story, Chirico and Fyana don't speak much to each other but then they don't have to, because they express their love just by knowing each others' mind." ■

The second part of this article will appear in the next issue of ANIMAG



LETTERS ANIMAG

DEAR ANIMAG

I would like to thank you from all of the anime fans around the world for finally giving us a bible for Japanese animation. The best part of your magazine by far is the section where you give episode-by-episode accounts of the hottest anime tapes. These are very helpful when the tapes are available only in Japanese. I especially appreciated your *Zillion* article; without it I would have been lost when I acquired the tapes.

The only suggestion I have would be a review section. Before I sink \$100.00+ into a laser disc, I would like to know what I'm getting.

I believe this improvement would boost your magazine over the top.

Jerry W. Suggs, Jr.
Thomasville, North Carolina

I think you'll be pleased next issue when ANIMAG debuts what promises to be one of the most debate-inspiring features we've ever published. Stay tuned.

DEAR ANIMAG

Recently I picked up a copy of your fourth issue (it only took me seven months to find one), and when reading through it I thought I found an error in the article about *Bubblegum Crisis 2: Born to Kill*. You printed that Linna's friend's name is "Eileen," but at the end of the OAV, the name shown on the gravestone is "Irene." The two sound alike when pronounced in Japanese (at least I think they do), so I could see that there might be some confusion. Which is correct? I would have to say that the girl's name is "Irene," but I could be wrong. Although this may seem trivial, it is important to a fan of the *Bubblegum Crisis* series such as myself.

Mark A. Malloy
Towson, Maryland

As you've guessed, "Irene" is correct. Because the notoriously ambiguous Japanese

kana syllabary gives no clue as to English spellings, our translators—and editors—must make decisions based on available information (and at that time, based on the kana "a-i-ri-n," "Eileen" was as good a guess as any). It's not until BBC 7: Double Vision that the English spelling can be accurately confirmed.

DEAR ANIMAG

I was pleasantly surprised to get Issue No. 10 of your publication. I was worried that the magazine might not last but again, you pleasantly surprised me. I hope you have an Issue No. 100 someday.

Anyway, about the other reasons I wrote you this time: Please keep *Mongo's Manga* if space allows. I like that feature, and it convinced me to get the issues and tapes of *Dominion*, which I enjoyed. Thanks, Mongo!

I had some ideas for some other columns you could add in a few issues. First, I see there are some Japanese software and video games around. Maybe an article reviewing what is available for the American computers and Nintendo game systems, eh?

I like the technical sections with the specs, schematic views, etc. Please keep that up. Well, those are about all the suggestions I had for you.

Russ Bullman
East Alton, Illinois

We've considered adding a column on Japanese software/video games for some time now, but until we can assemble a sufficient backlog of pertinent information, we'll have to keep the idea on the back burner for the time being.

LETTERS ANIMAG

DEAR ANIMAG

I am an avid anime aficionado, and have faithfully patronized your publication except in two instances or rather two issues that I am missing. Your constructive and very informative contents have been helpful for non-Japanese anime lovers in order to further appreciate anime, and for those outside to come into the fold of this very vibrant and lively field. Yet comparatively speaking, other publications on anime (in particular, those published in Japan such as *Newtype* and *Animage*) are more advanced.

Specifically, since anime is bright and vibrant colors, so to speak, shouldn't you have more pages of colored inserts instead of the bland black-and-white panels? Black-and-white rendering may be okay for samples of character designs or samples of manga panels, but if it is obvious that a picture is in color, it should be presented in color. Especially if it's dealing in anime. This is one thing I should complain about, especially in regard to your Animated Plastic section.

In addition, there are simply not enough pictures. And pages, for that matter. Also, the frequency of publication is too slow and unpredictable at times.

I hope my criticisms haven't hurt you in any way. Just consider these things said as from one 'avid anime aficionado' to another.

Raymond Sison
San Juan, Manila
The Philippines

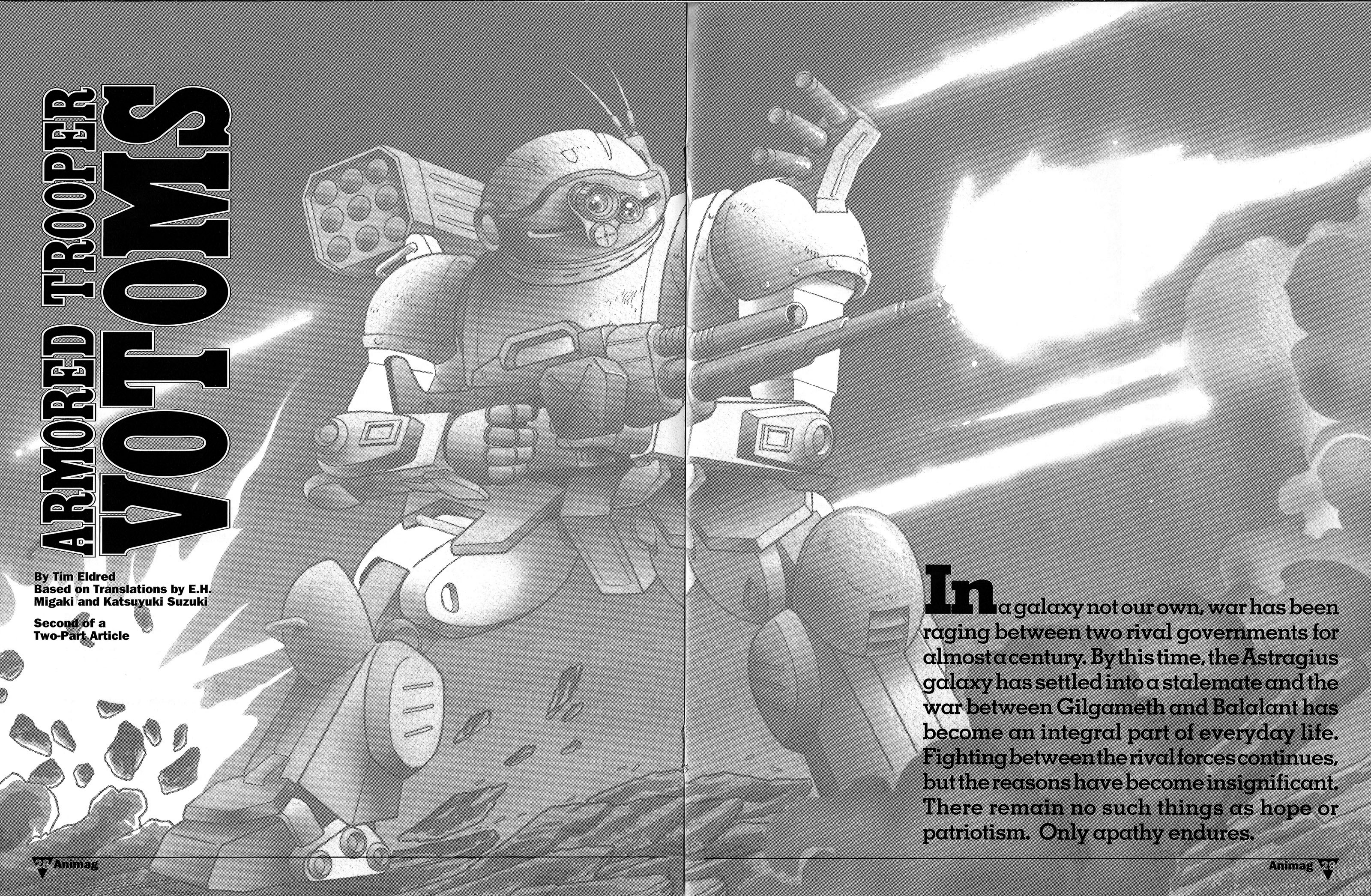
Of course *Newtype* and *Animage* are more advanced than ANIMAG—they've had a head start. Seriously, though, Japanese animation magazines are backed by a huge, multimillion- (maybe even billion-) dollar industry. Until the American market catches up—even just a little—ANIMAG must remain its own humble self.

ANIMAG welcomes letters from its readers. Address correspondence to ANIMAG, P.O. Box 31492, San Francisco, CA 94131. Please include a daytime phone number. Letters may be edited for length or clarity.

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Second of a
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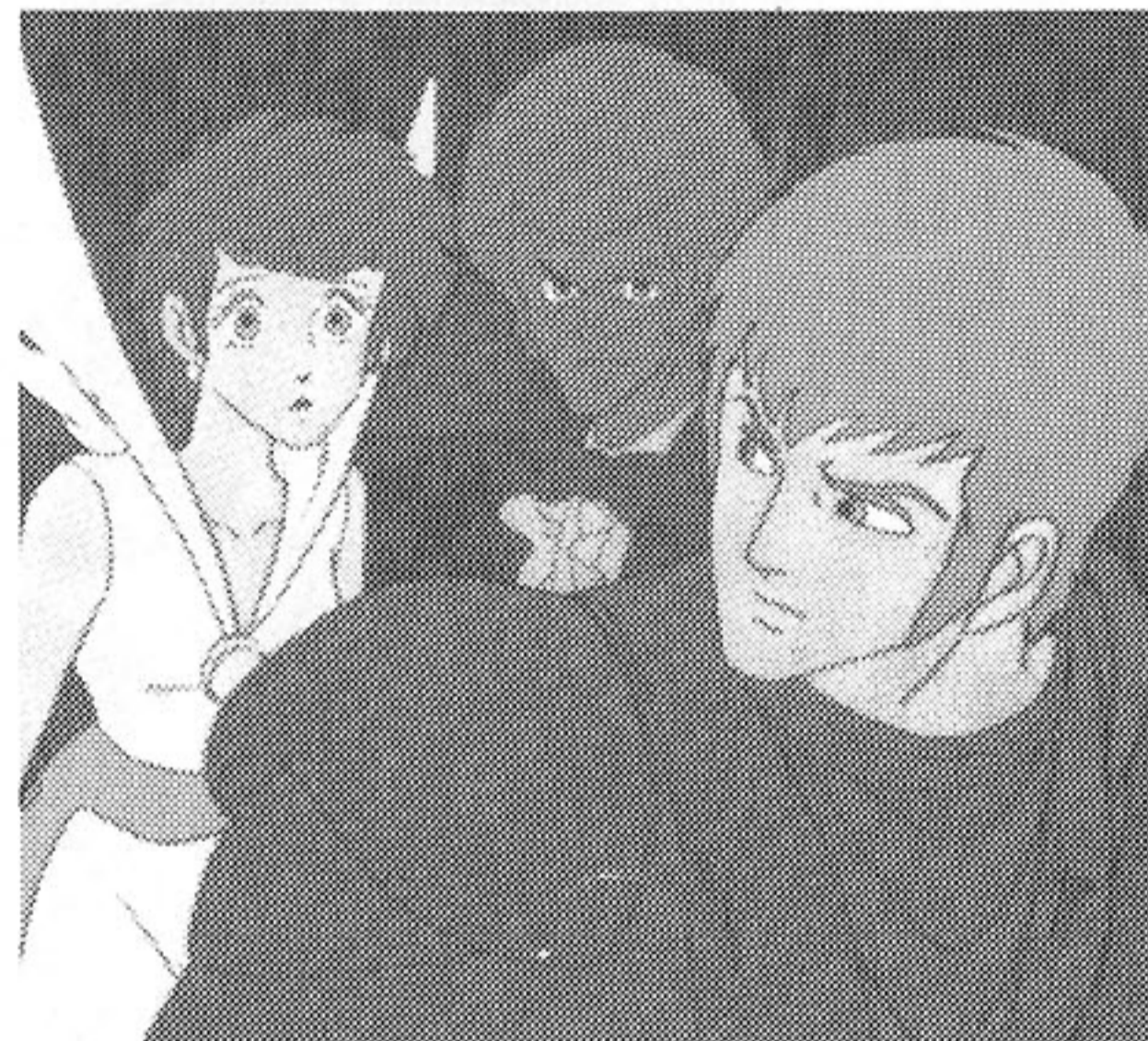
In a galaxy not our own, war has been raging between two rival governments for almost a century. By this time, the Astragius galaxy has settled into a stalemate and the war between Gilgameth and Balalant has become an integral part of everyday life. Fighting between the rival forces continues, but the reasons have become insignificant. There remain no such things as hope or patriotism. Only apathy endures.

The first twist the war takes in its early days is the advent of the Armored Trooper, or VOTOM [V(ertical) O(ne-man) T(ank for) O(ffense and) M(aneuvers)] in scientific jargon. Similar to the powered suits in Robert Heinlein's classic science fiction novel, *Starship Troopers*, the ATs make possible a range of combat that escalates the war even further.

As the *Votoms* series begins, the next such superweapon is nearing completion. Things are about to get worse.

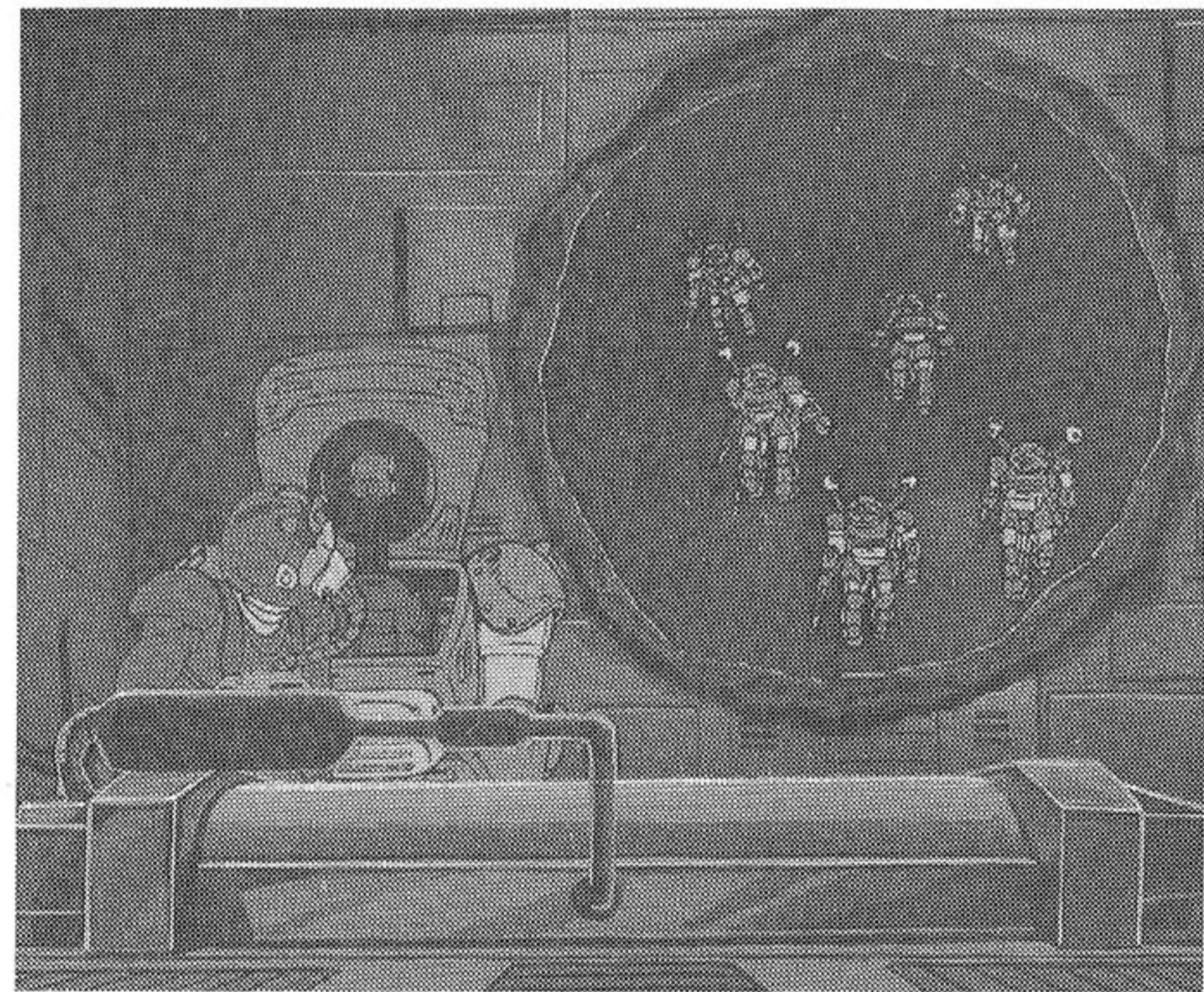
Chronologically, the story actually begins in the last animated video release, *Red Shoulder Document: Roots of Ambition*, set just over a year before the first episode of the television series.

On one of Gilgameth's training planets, Odon, resides the base of Red Shoulder Battalion, an elite unit of AT pilots with a reputation for such violence and corruption that they are nicknamed the "Bloodsucker Squad." The leader and creator of this battalion, General Yoran Peruzen, has pulled some bureaucratic strings to enlist a certain young AT pilot, Chirico Cuvie, into the Red Shoulders.



Throughout his training Chirico remains a silent enigma, an attitude that earns him only resentment from his peers. The base commander, wondering if Chirico was sent in as a covert spy or assassin, sends men to kill him but this proves difficult when Chirico emerges as the most resourceful survivor in the battalion. His reaction time is utterly inhuman, and when Peruzen intervenes in the assassination attempt against Chirico, it is revealed that Peruzen has been scrutinizing Chirico since birth in a quest to find a genetically superior warrior.

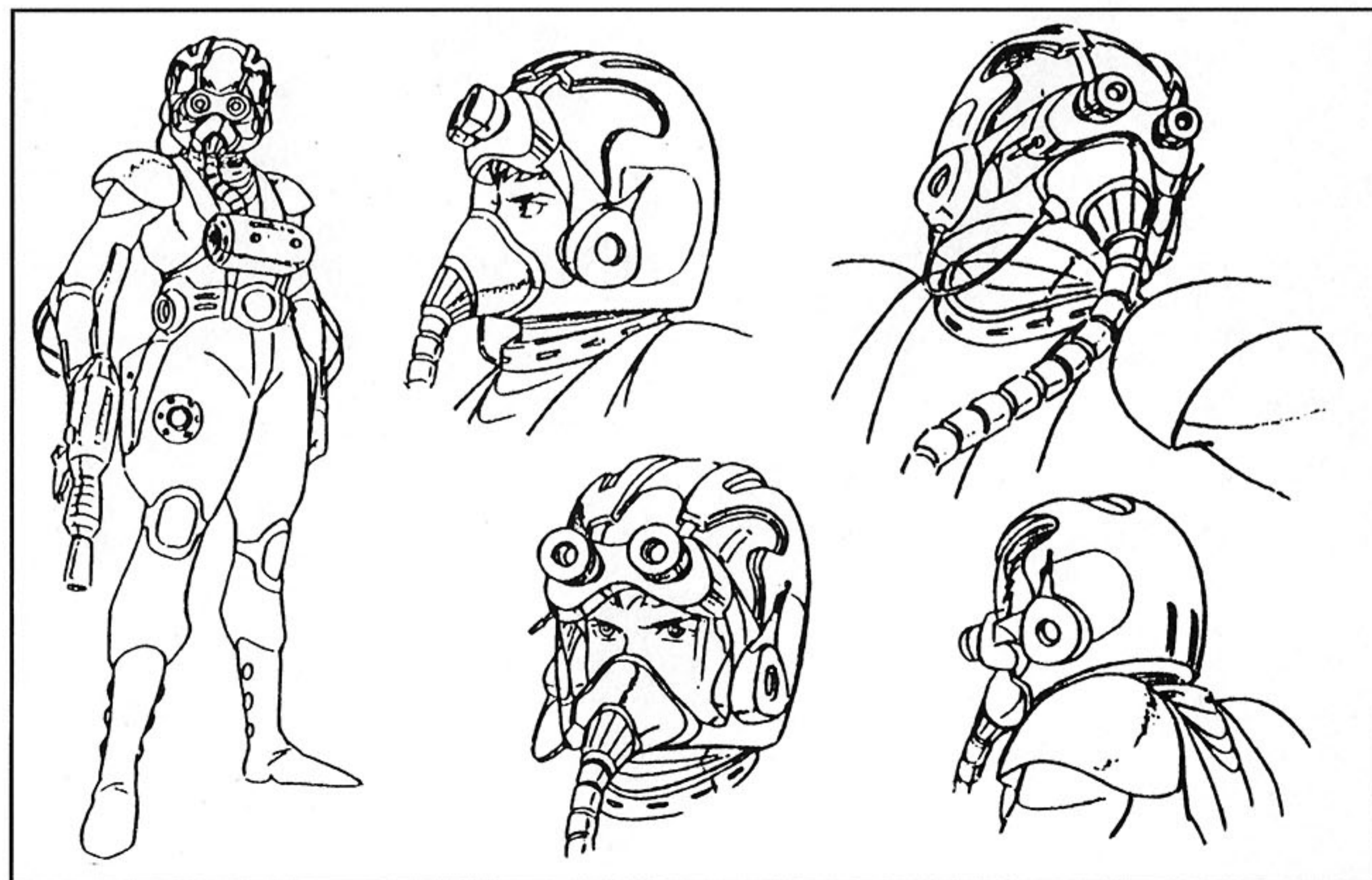
Some time later, Chirico takes part in the battalion's ultimate mission: engaging Balalant forces and annihilating Sunsa, a planet deep inside strategic territory. It is a mission that



the government does not expect Chirico to survive . . . but he does.

EPISODES 1-13 (TV Series)

Following the Sunsa mission, Red Shoulder Battalion is disbanded before its various atrocities can be linked to its leaders. Chirico and his platoon are separated and sent to lesser posts. As the first episode of the TV series opens, a quartet of Gilgameth officers conduct an illegal operation that will soon lead to their defection. Under the command of General Albert Kiri and four of his staff, a unit of ATs raid an asteroid base belonging to the Merukian Army, an ally of Gilgameth. On this asteroid is a huge cache of gold, their main objective. But there is also something else.



It is to this platoon that Chirico Cuvie has been assigned. Unknown to him, an order has also been passed down to terminate his life. Chirico notices the Merukian insignia on the ATs they destroy and protests the action, causing him to be left behind on guard duty while the gold is absconded.

Ending up in a dark chamber, Chirico finds a mysterious, cylindrical machine and opens it to discover the other objective: a woman lying in a tube of energy. Chirico is

shocked when she opens her eyes and looks straight into his own. Trembling, he closes the tube as the others approach and order him out into space to spot incoming vessels.

He leaves the asteroid and looks back to see a bomb flying straight for him. The explosion hurls him deep into space, turning his AT into a coffin . . . until a warship of the Merukian Army picks him up. The officer in charge, Colonel Jan Paul Rochina, interrogates Chirico about his involvement in the raid but the fugitive soldier knows nothing of his former commanders' subterfuge.

Taken to Planet Merukia, Chirico is tortured further but escapes his prison and flees. He now believes he has been betrayed. Revenge is foremost in his mind but he also

harbors the image of the woman he saw on the asteroid. What Chirico does not yet realize is that there are plots within plots, and that his destiny is linked with the woman's in a way that will change the galaxy forever.

Months pass, in which a truce is signed between Gilgameth and Balalant after the decisive raid on Sunsa. The war now cools, but stagnation remains and tensions persist. Chirico wanders across Merukia to the city of Uoodo, formerly a war base but now a dirty pesthole of vagrants. Corruption runs rampant in Uoodo's "peace preservation police," which is taken over by a pair of familiar faces: Boro and Esukai, two of Kiri's officers from the asteroid raid. They now masquerade as important personages to conceal their identi-



ties and simultaneously drain the city of a valuable mineral called jijirium, which (in addition to its market price) serves an important purpose in their organization, now called the "Secret Society."

Chirico hides out in a junkyard from biker thugs and meets a trio of Uoodo citizens: Gotho (a scrap dealer), Coonna (a street girl), and Vanilla (a local bookie). Realizing Chirico is a former AT pilot, Gotho quickly sets him up as a contender in Uoodo's battle ring arena, where spectators gamble on mock AT combat games.

Chirico reluctantly agrees to participate but his actions soon draw the attention of both the police and a mysterious woman called "Phantom Lady" by the locals. The woman, Chirico discovers, has attended every recent battle ring bout in order to find a "special pilot."

Chirico clashes with Uoodo police in a cat-and-mouse game of revenge that is watched intently by Colonel Rochina of the Merukian Army. Before Chirico escaped from him, a tracer was surgically implanted in his

body. Rochina hopes to track Chirico back to his treacherous leaders.

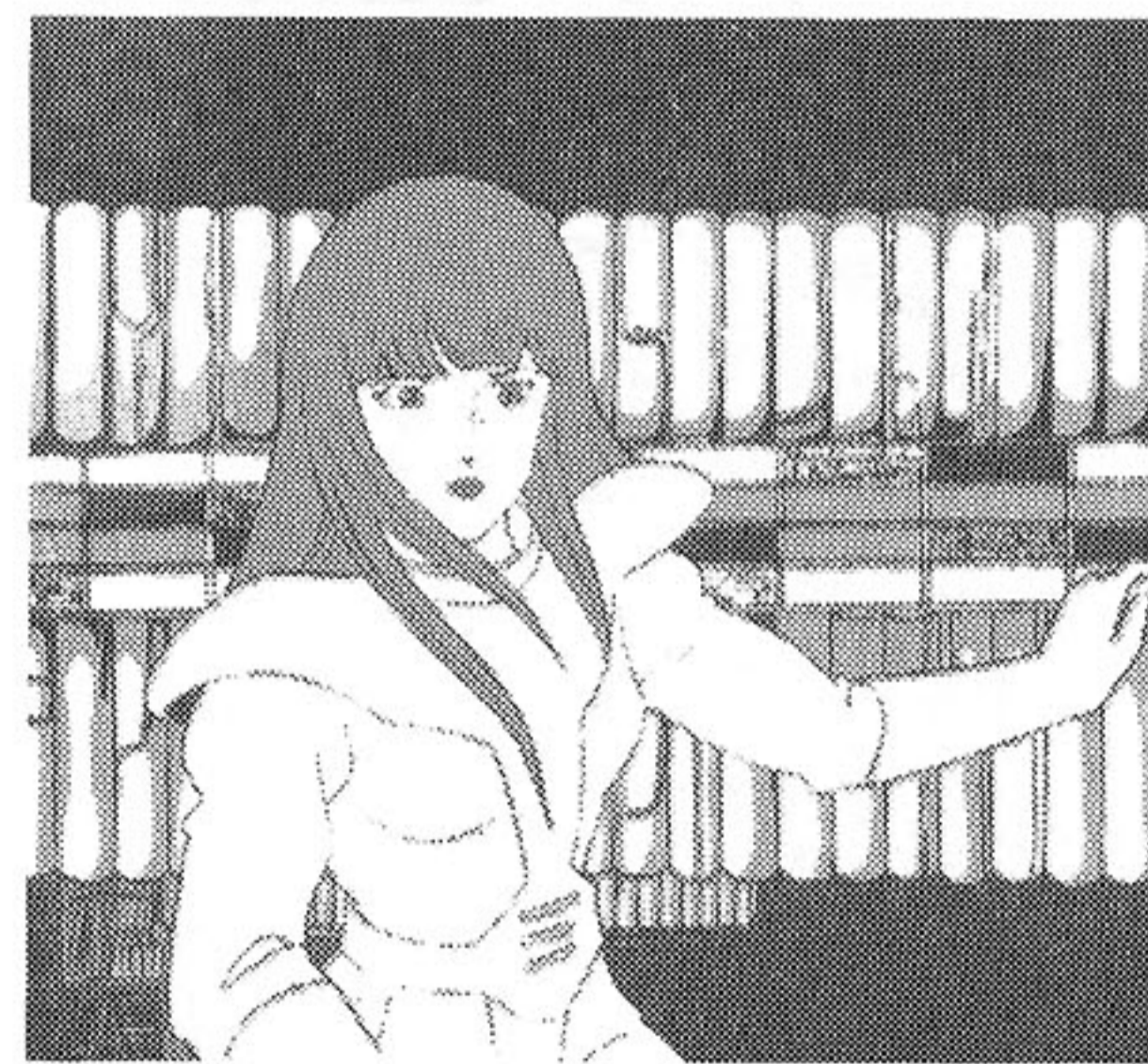
The element that ties all these factions together is the Phantom Lady. Along the way, Chirico discovers that she is the same woman he saw on the asteroid and was in an early stage of development at the time. Her real name, Chirico learns, is Proto-1. She is the new weapon being developed for the battlefield and is a genetically created warrior called a "perfect soldier." Her artificial nature requires that she periodically bathe in jijirium energies, and therefore cannot defect with Chirico when he asks. Chirico gives her a name of her own . . . Fyana.

When Rochina puts the pieces together he orders an AT attack on Uoodo that will serve the dual purpose of capturing the rebel officers and recovering Proto-1. Rochina fails at both tasks and Fyana escapes with her superiors, leaving Chirico and his new companions in the midst of a bloodbath.

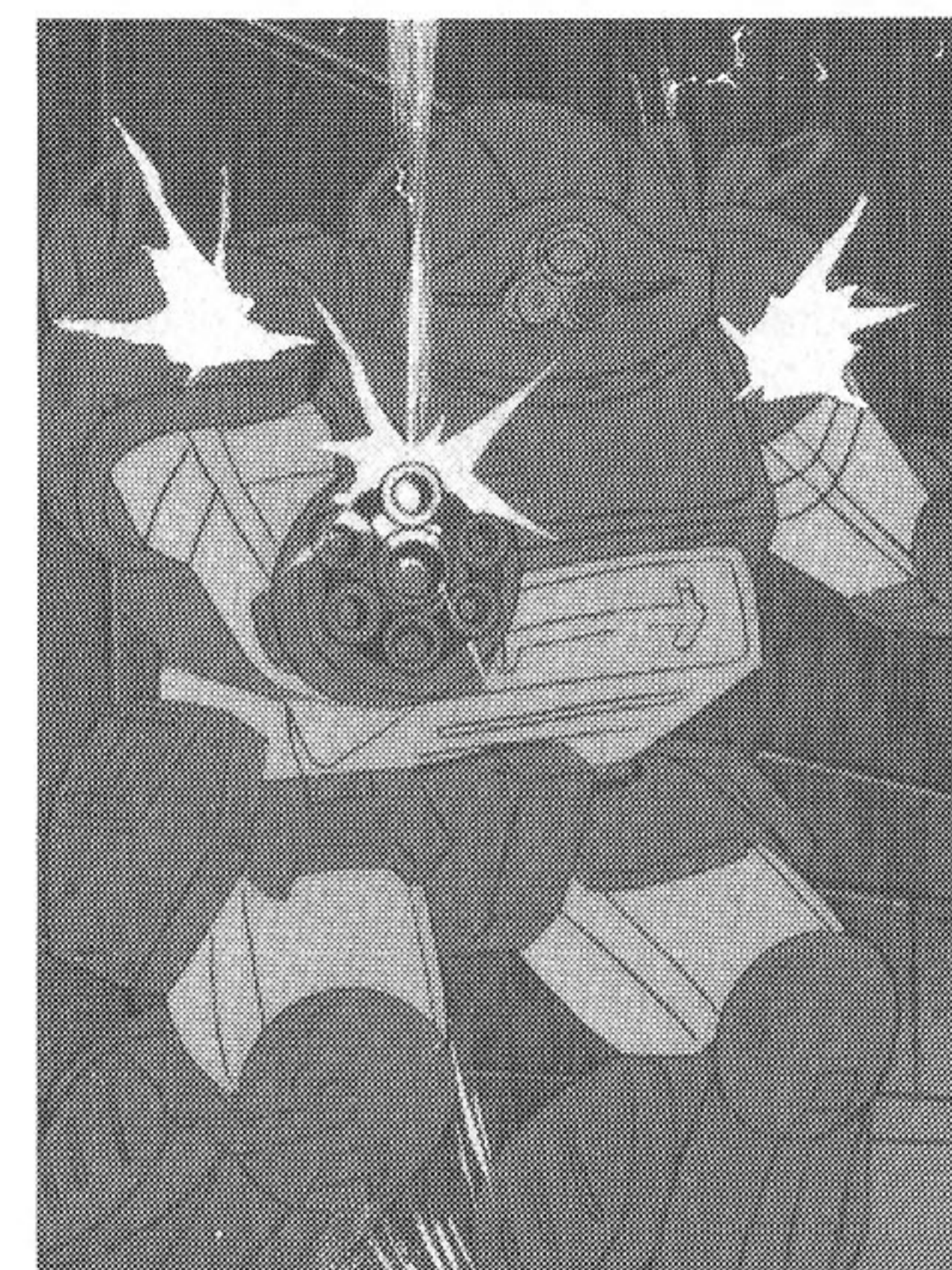
THE LAST RED SHOULDER (OAV)

Frustrated at losing his operation in Uoodo, Albert Kiri moves the Secret Society into its next phase: development of Proto-2, the next perfect soldier.

To this end, Kiri and the Secret Society combine their resources with retired general Yoran Peruzen, who resides in the underground ruins of a base in the Merukian desert.



Meanwhile, Chirico is reunited with three of the toughest former Red Shoulder platoon members who agree to accompany him in one last raid on Peruzen's base guarded by the rest of the Red Shoulders.



In a pastoral forest setting, the base's garden, a sleeping figure is awakened by Fyana's soft voice. The figure is Proto-2, whom Fyana has named "Ypsilon." Fyana guides him through this new world with her gentle teachings. It is not long, however, before Ypsilon's artificially ingrained killer instinct manifests itself, and while Chirico and his companions prepare to strike, Fyana learns that Peruzen himself designed Ypsilon to be the ultimate death machine, the one who will rid Peruzen of the troublesome Chirico at last.

As the Secret Society prepares Ypsilon for the task, Chirico and the others attack the base. They soon battle their way inside but are met by Ypsilon, who proceeds to pick them off one by one.

Chirico once again escapes through luck and wit in time to witness Peruzen's demise. Fyana has been taken away from him, and Chirico is even more determined to free her from her captors.

EPISODES 14-27 (TV Series)

Left to wander again, Chirico makes his way to the jungle-saturated nation of Kummen. Rochina and his supervisors watch Chirico's progress with interest, for Kummen is currently embroiled in civil war and they believe the Secret Society may be involved.

Chirico enlists as a mercenary at Assemble EX-10, one of several paramilitary bases scattered throughout Kummen to eradicate the Bera Guerillas. The Bera Guerillas' king, Kanjielman III, refuses at first to allow modern ways to destroy the agricultural kingdom his fathers died to create.

Resigned to fighting fire with same, Kanjielman reluctantly accepts the aid of the Secret Society. Represented now by Boro, the cartel cares about little more than robbing Kummen of its rich jijirium deposits.

After escaping the destruction of Uodo, Gotho, Coonna and Vanilla make their way to Kummen and parlay their city-born resource-



fulness into a nightclub established in a village near EX-10. They are overjoyed at their reunion with Chirico, but with skirmishes constantly erupting with the Bera Guerrillas, Chirico has little time to rest before he is thrust back into battle.

Platoons of ATs clash time and again in the dark jungles of Kummen, and Chirico soon finds himself up against a lethal opponent—the Bera war leader, a maniacal demon who pilots the “Blue AT.” When Chirico first glimpses the Blue AT’s fighting style he is certain it’s Fyana, reasoning that only a perfect soldier could fight that efficiently.

The pilot of the Blue AT turns out to be none other than Ypsilon, who has now fallen in love with Proto-1 and has vowed to destroy Chirico forever. The plot thickens once again when Chirico finds Fyana in Kanjielman’s castle and makes several attempts to free her. By now Rochina has joined the conflict, effectively mopping up another Secret Society operation.

This time, however, Chirico gains a bit of revenge by spirited Fyana away (with a portable jijirium cylinder) and by witnessing the end of one more former commander, Boro. One enemy still survives . . . Ypsilon.

EPISODES 28-38 (TV Series)

Having narrowly escaped the fall of Kummen in a tiny space shuttle, Chirico and Fyana next find themselves on board a gigantic, unnamed spaceship. A search through the lumbering vessel reveals full weapon stocks but no crew, only automatic controls that cannot be shut down.

Resigned to go wherever the ship takes them, the two at last begin to enjoy a quiet, romantic moment when an anthem blasts through every cabin. Following it to a film archives room, Chirico is horrified to witness records of the Red Shoulder Battalion and all its atrocities. He is haunted by the nightmare as the ship carries them into Balalant territory and a waiting battlefleet. Forced to defend themselves, Chirico and Fyana draw the attention of the Secret Society and Rochina, both of who want to resume the chase. The Gilgamesh Army is against taking action that might endanger their treaty with the Balalant, so Rochina decides to defect and follow his own path.

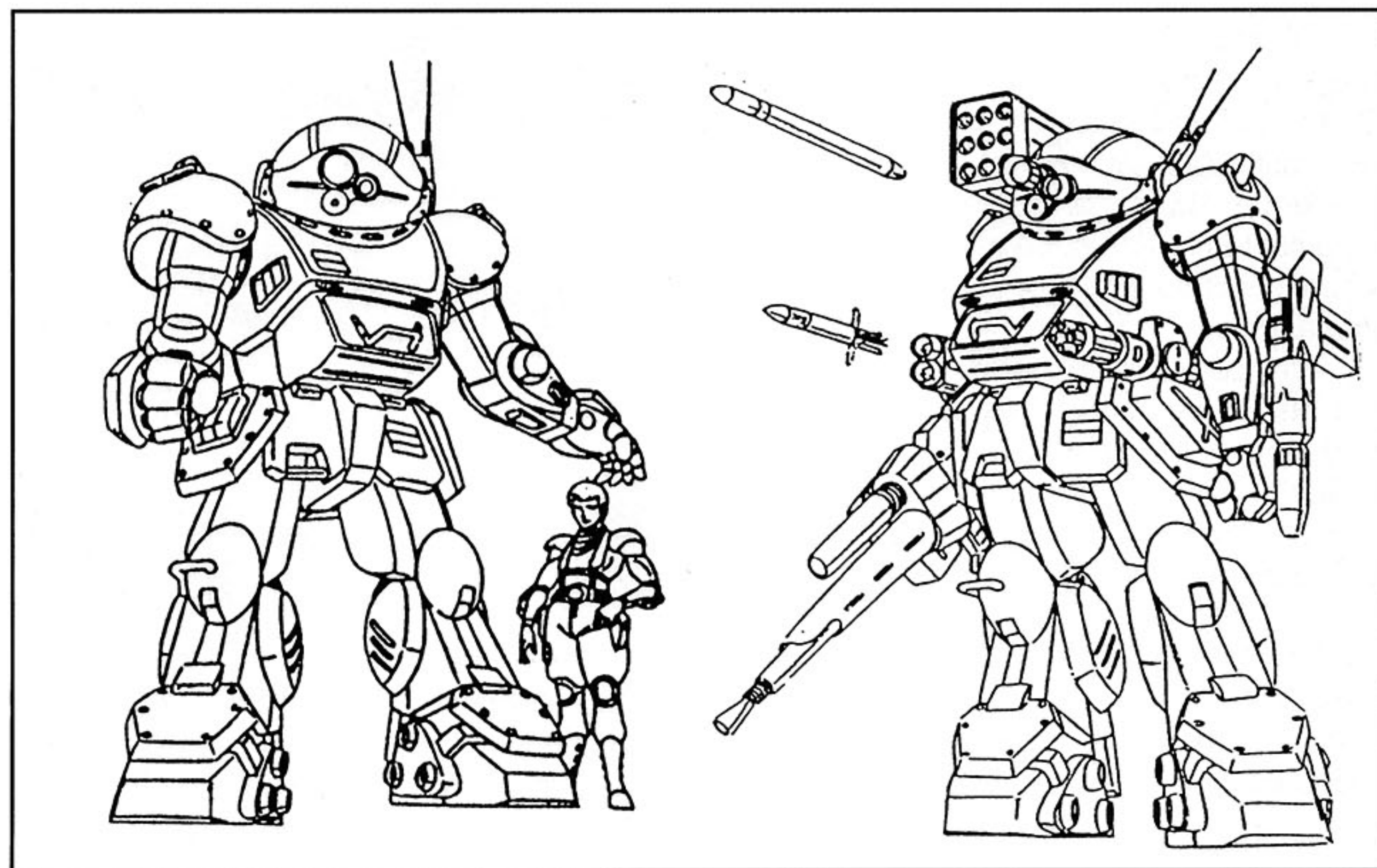
Ypsilon, meanwhile, is obsessed with destroying Chirico and reclaiming Proto-1. Ypsilon leads several attacks on the two, all the while observed by the Secret Society’s twin scientists Aron and Guran, who are assigned with the task of learning all they can about the perfect soldier.

Besieged by both Ypsilon and the Balalant, Chirico and Fyana crash-land on an airless desert world littered with wreckage from the war. Convinced that some outside force wanted to send him here to Sunsa, Chirico is subsequently surprised by the reappearance of Gotho and the others, who currently employ themselves as scrap merchants. Their supplier is



a hard-bitten woman named Sophie, who offers the two fugitives shelter in her fortress.

Ypsilon and his AT army are not far behind, however, and when Coonna accidentally reveals Chirico as a former Red Shoulder (one of the demons responsible for the destruction of Sunsa), Sophie is only too willing to turn him over to his enemies. The ensuing battle brings the Balalant Army down on them all and scatters the survivors, including Sophie, who angrily tracks Chirico across the treacherous desert. Gotho’s group finds Chirico in time to stop Sophie but their problems aren’t over—Fyana has not taken a jijirium bath in days and is now close to death. Finally reaching the ruins of an old city Chirico locates the substance needed to save her as Rochina makes his move.



Now a member of the Balalant Army with his own fleet, Rochina captures the entire group in a gambit to pit Chirico against Ypsilon in a final confrontation. When that battle finally begins, Rochina studies Chirico’s every move; despite Ypsilon’s genetically perfected abilities, Chirico matches him blow for blow, fighting far beyond any normal human’s capability.

“I see now,” Rochina shouts. “Chirico is a natural perfect soldier!”

Shocked, Fyana stops the fight, but not in time to save Ypsilon who dies insisting that Chirico *must* be a perfect soldier, for he could not bear the thought of being defeated by a mere human. Finally confronted with the



missing links to his true heritage, Chirico leaves Fyana in Rochina’s care and flies to Planet Quent, where Rochina promises he will find the answers.

EPISODES 40-52 (TV Series)

Although Ypsilon is gone, the Secret Society still pursues Chirico, who has now earned the attention of the cartel’s leader, Albert Kiri. Also intrigued by the mystery of the legendary planet, Kiri monitors Chirico’s progress via Aron and Guran, who are less careful about Quent’s inhabitants than Kiri likes; this is the realm of the fabled Quentmen, who once held power over the entire Astragius galaxy but gave it up three thousand years ago to become desert dwellers and mercenaries. Since then, every attempt by the major armies to land here has ended with the intruders vanishing without a trace.

Also casting an eye on Quent, Rochina deduces that he has been following the commands of a superior mind . . . something as yet unseen.

Fortunately for Chirico he once more meets Lou Shako, who had previously fought with him in Kummen and now guides him through the lore of the Quentmen in hope of finding the hidden connections with Chirico’s past.

The Gilgamesh Army sends a fleet to join the multi-sided pursuit under the ruse of reclaiming Proto-1. The delicate situation is finally pushed over the edge and turned into a full-scale firefight.

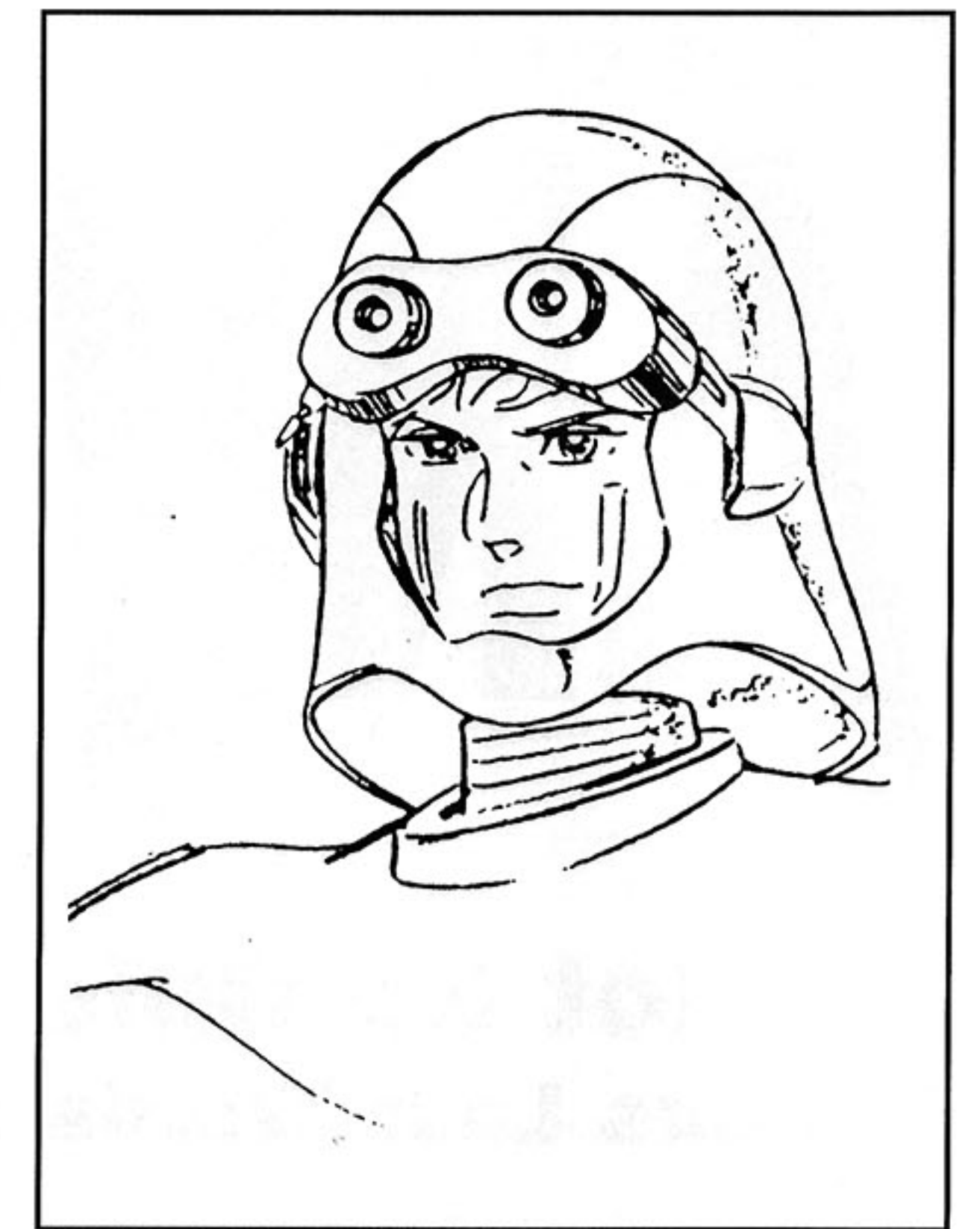
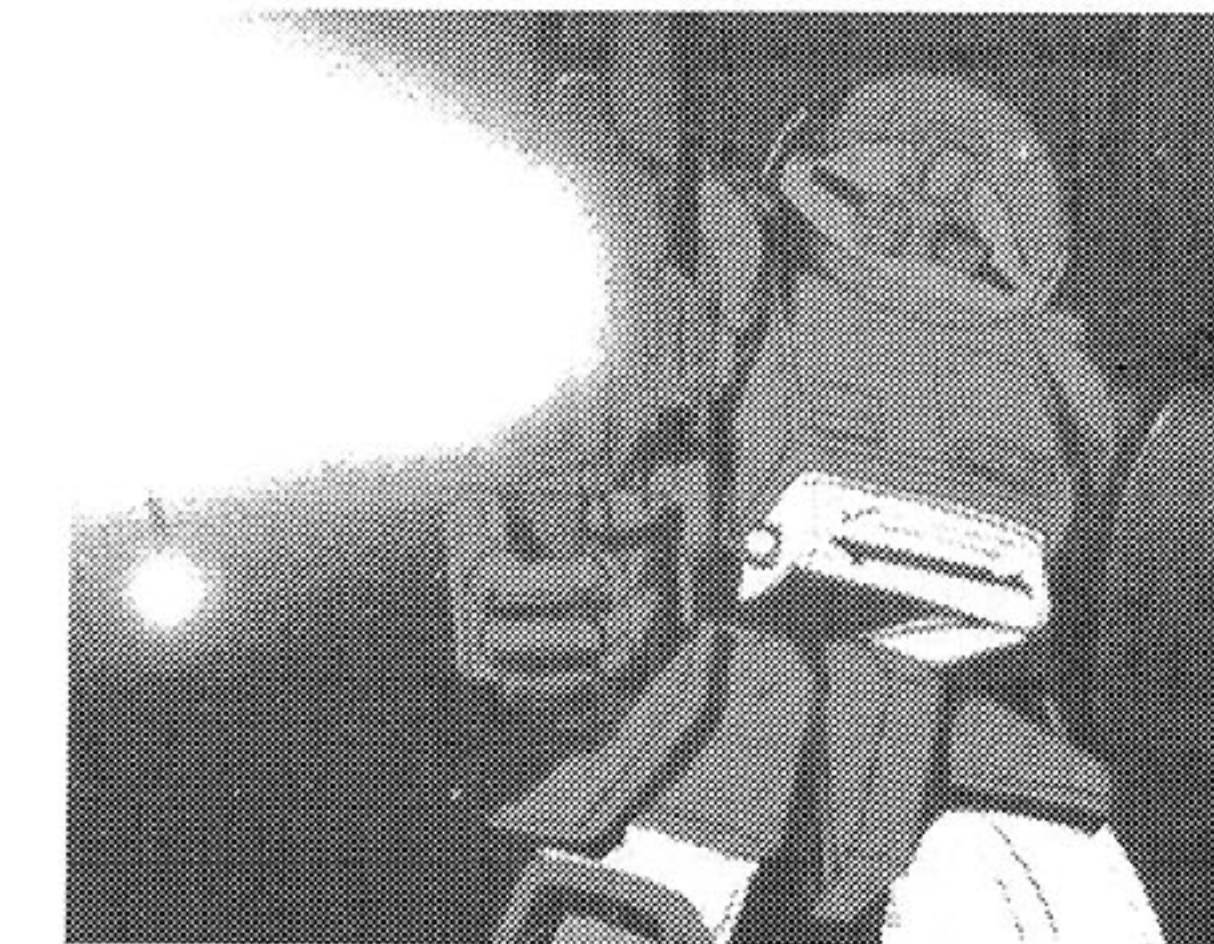
When Quent itself fires on the fleets of warships battling in orbit, Chirico, Rochina and the others flee directly into the hands of Albert Kiri. The leader of the Secret Society has little time to gloat before his ship is seized by an unseen force.

“Wiseman,” Chirico proclaims, finally giving a name to the unknown entity that has been manipulating all of them for its own inscrutable purposes.

The ship is drawn to a machine planet where Chirico speaks to Wiseman’s mind and all is revealed.

Three thousand years ago, the planet Quent reached the peak of its technological and philosophical

existence. At that point, rebel elements proclaimed themselves physically perfect as well, and suggested that they could now conquer any world they desired. Horrified by the implication, the rest of the populace exiled these “mutants” and abandoned the culture that led to this point in their evolution. Hundreds of years later, the mutants return to pool their knowledge into a vast computer they name “Wiseman.”



Possessing the mutants’ desire for godhood, Wiseman uses its power to influence separate sides of the galaxy into a war. With war, Wiseman says, come technological and physiological advances . . . and eventually, a perfect fighter it can use to rule the entire galaxy. Now, at last, that fighter has appeared . . . Chirico Cuvie!

With this revelation comes a historic truce between the Gilgamesh and Balalant, who are now bent on destroying the god and his “successor.” The destiny of the Astragius galaxy is at stake.

BIG BATTLE (OAV)

Chirico and company cool their heels after the Wiseman war back on Planet Merukia when it becomes apparent that the war is reviving once again. To meet its new challenge, the Balalant Army is developing its own perfect soldier, a brutal cyborg named Niba with a psychotic obsession against the Red Shoulder Battalion which nearly killed him on the battlefield.

Chirico’s arrival is the spark that ignites Niba’s flame, and when the resultant big battle ends, both Chirico and Fyana realize that as long as they live and the war is fought, they will only be the tools of others.

Stealing a jijirium hibernation tube, the two float off into deep space. Their friends wonder if they will ever find peace in a galaxy that may never know anything but the hell of war. ■

Tim Eldred is a comic book writer/artist whose credits include Lensman, Captain Harlock, Broid and Chaser Platoon, published by Eternity Comics.