



## Arcady Communications, Inc.

Arnold J. Friedman, President

June 15, 1983

Steve Harrison

Re: Star Blazers

Dear Mr. Harrison:

Stand fast. Don't despair. Help is on the way. The letter you sent to Claude S. Hill, at Westchester Films, Inc., has finally found its way to us, along with your first issue of Space Fanzine Yamato.

Our company handles the advertising, publicity and promotion for Westchester Films, and probably the best way for you to "open communications" with them is through us. I know that will be a lot easier than trying to keep in touch with Westchester directly, since it's not a company the size of Universal or 20th Century-Fox, and they are all running as fast as they can just to keep up with the business of distribution.

Your fanzine, for example, arrived the day most of us left for the NATPE convention in Las Vegas. That's the National Association of Television Program Executives--the big annual domestic market. There are a whole bunch of cons, markets, expositions and seminars which come so close together it's like being pelted by a meteor storm.

In January the Association of Independent Television Stations met in Los Angeles; then throughout the year there are international markets in London, Monte Carlo, a few in Cannes and one in Miami; there's NAB, BPA, LPTV, MIP, AMIP, VIDCOM and--as they say in the show business--many, many more.

Some of the larger companies are learning to split up and send different members of their staffs to different meetings, but companies like Westchester don't have that option. As President, Mr. Hill must attend most of them, and his Vice President, Anne Cody, is also kept on the run. I go to some of them. So, with all of us traveling a great deal, it's really hard to keep up with the mail.

...more

This, of course, is in addition to the main business of our business-- which is the buying and selling of television programs. More travel, and a lot more time.

And I wonder if you know that in addition to Westchester, Mr. Hill is responsible for coordinating the activities of a consortium of companies that distribute, among other properties, the Marvel Super Heroes. Spider-Man, Spider-Woman, The Fantastic Four, Captain America--that whole crowd. He's also preparing to launch (pun intended) a satellite delivered basic cable service called The KidVid Network, which will transmit 21 hours a week of programming.

So I hope you begin to see how your enterprise, like that of Captain Kirk, was a welcome but relatively small presence in a vast galaxie. Up to a year or so ago, I had been in touch with other Star Blazers fans and fan clubs across the country, and maintained a more or less regular correspondence. But as it became less than more, we came to realize that the task was too much for our force. We simply couldn't keep up.

However, it seems to me that a solution to this problem would be for us to keep in contact with a few fan clubs and fanzines like yours, and let you keep up for us. With this letter, I'll give you what information I can about the status of the "Star Blazers" series, and you can pass it along.

There is good news and bad news, but the bad news is also old news-- and it's no worse than it was.

The good news is that Westchester does have all U.S. distribution rights for the Yamato episodes, which it will continue to syndicate under the domestic title of "Star Blazers." This includes 25 half hour programs, which you call Star Blazers 3.

The bad news is that this third series has not yet gone into English language production. The strategy for marketing "Star Blazers" is to create a broader base of viewers by increasing the exposure of the first two series before releasing the third. As you know, the first time around "Star Blazers" was traded to stations in exchange for time (this is barter-syndication) and the time that was best for Hasbro Toys--which was sponsoring it--was the time when small children were watching. Since tots do not comprise our audience, the bulk of the viewers for whom "Star Blazers" is intended was precluded from seeing it. How so many teens and young adults managed to find the series remains a mystery of sorts, since it certainly wasn't easily accessible to viewers who were at school or work. Yet, as you well know, although the series had no network release, a vast network of enthusiastic fans exists across the country.

...more

The nature of the initial release was only one of the problems. Around that time, another syndication company brought another Japanese made series over. As it has been explained to me, the American production (released here as "Battle of the Planets") was not made with the same care and understanding as were the Yamato episodes. Instead, I'm told, the distributor "filled out" with awkward inserts of inferior animation. "Star Blazers," for the record, contains only original animation. Every foot, every frame, was made by Academy Films.

What was done for the "Star Blazers" series, as I understand it, was to edit footage from various episodes and from the outtakes, so that the programs are presented in a consistently faithful flow. New scripts were written; new voice-overs used; new sound mixes made--all first class and top quality.

I think I'm telling you what you and your readers already know. The point is that the "Battle of the Planets" series, which was successful in Japan and was very well sold to stations here, turned out to be a big disappointment. Viewers complained loud and long about what seemed to them to be a ripoff. Many of them, like "Star Blazers" fans, were familiar with the original series. Stations took the heat--and didn't like it. Now that they've had a bad experience with Japanese animation, we have to overcome their fear that they'll get burned by the same rockets, as it were.

Meanwhile, back on Earth: Westchester Films does not renew Cluster Television's option on "Star Blazers" and decides to market the series differently the second year out. Instead of allowing it to be scheduled in early morning or early afternoon hours, Westchester is negotiating for the late afternoon (4 to 6 pm--after school and after the soaps) and maybe into what is called prime time access. That's where we know our audience to be. Wouldn't you like to see it programmed back-to-back with Star Trek! (I thought that as a Trekkie you'd appreciate that.) A station could create a block of powerhouse programming with a schedule like that.

So, we're regrouping. And we're coming in for another attack on the market. (MUSIC UP AND OVER) We'll win, because we must win. Because our cause is just. Besides, we have a lot of money invested in this property. We're committed and we're dedicated. It's a good series. It's a great series. (MUSIC SWELLS TO CRESCENDO) And with Space Fanzine Yamato behind us, we can't lose. (MUSIC UP AND OUT)

I realize we're not exactly repelling Gamilons, but you know, this IS a good cause. What we have here is a quality product, far superior to most of what has ever been seen on U.S. television. Like most of the people at Westchester (and presumably like most of your readers) I was at first overwhelmed by the animation--then impressed by the thought and care that went into the development of characters and storylines. It is superb storytelling. But here I am preaching to the converted. You and other fans with whom I've been in contact know more about the series (and have more artwork and artifacts from it) than we do.

...more

Last Fall, just before or after your Micro-Con in Grand Rapids, I represented Westchester at Creation-Con in New York, at the Statler Hilton Hotel. A sizeable contingent of Star Blazers/Yamato fans had turned out, and I think Ardith Carlton ( Carlton-Con?) was among them. Was she wearing a Star Blazers suit? I have a picture here somewhere of a young lady with long blond hair sitting in the front row during a screening of what I think were Star Blazers 3 episodes.

I told the fans what I could of Westchester's plans, and I'll be glad to share this information with you now. I can update them a little, but not much is new.

Let's talk about marketing strategy. Mr. Hill and his associates feel that before putting the third series into distribution in The States they ought to create a market for it by getting the first two seasons into a wider orbit. One goal is to break through the Stubborn Barrier at stations. Most program buyers seem to regard all animation as the same: it's all for 2-11 year olds. But "Star Blazers" has continuity and sophistication and is intended for older audiences who can follow a plot, who can identify with well-drawn characterizations, and who like to think and feel.

Often the best way to convince station executives of this is simply to let them see an episode. Some are hopelessly hooked after only a few scenes. Others still don't get it. For them, a cartoon is a cartoon is a cartoon. It's an educational process. You have to teach them before you can sell them.

Then, every once in a while we get to watch somebody while he's watching "Star Blazers" for the first time, and that is really something special to see--that first breakthrough. That moment when they begin to realize what they've discovered, when they're having that "Oh, wow!" experience. A sort of SF Satori. This must be what it's like when teachers watch students discovering something they've been trying to hammer into them for weeks.

Mr. Hill tells of one program manager who watched an episode and then turned to him in wonder and said, "What was that!"

I think program buyers at stations are beginning to soften, to come around a little. For one thing, they've been receiving lots of mail, I'm told, from fans asking for--demanding--the "Star Blazers" series. That can't hurt, you know. I was told at the con that individual cards and letters are more effective than petitions--since there are more of them, and they roll in at various times. It's easy for one petition, no matter how long it is, to be put aside. This sounds right to me. How do you feel about it?

So--Phase I of Westchester's marketing plan is to get wider distribution for the first two "Star Blazers" seasons. Phase II will be to launch the third series. In the mean time, it has to be reproduced here. That's a big job and an expensive one. A rule of thumb in producing any kind of programming is to have some evidence of advertiser support and/or positive station reaction before going off the deep end to make something

...more



for which there may be no market. First Westchester will prove the market --and we all feel strongly that "Star Blazers" is a viable, commercial program with a substantial potential audience. When it catches on and creates the need for another "Star Blazers" adventure, we'll have it ready and we'll meet the need.

We note with interest that Ms. Carlton commented, in her "Westchester Woes" story, that Westchester has been "making comments about a lack of funds." You said she got carried away, but by now she may have been carried back, and if so, please ask her who told her that. Mr. Hill talked with Michael Pinto a few times, and so did I, but I don't recall that we would ever have considered this to be his business, even if it were true! More likely, what Mr. Hill said was he didn't wish to allocate funds for production of Star Blazers 3 at this time, for marketing reasons cited above.

After all, we're talking about a lot of money here, and it's not good business to spend it prematurely. What would we have done with a completed American production of Star Blazers 3 in 1982--when Star Blazers 1 & 2 were still being distributed? Stations won't buy three seasons at a time. Listen, we've got a big enough job with the first two!

I'll give you a for-instance: you wrote that you've sold about 100 copies of Space Fanzine Yamato's first issue. Would you have invested in typesetting and other production expenses, then the cost of this first printing, if you didn't know you had fans for the 'zine ready and waiting? And probably complaining to you about the delays, as so many have been complaining to us. See what I mean? Until you were sure there was a market for your product, I doubt if you went galloping off in all directions to produce it. Either will Westchester Films.

The problem is not how to make the series, but how to market it. Ms. Carlton says the project is now in limbo--and I suppose that's one way to put it. I don't feel very comfortable with the allusion, since I think Limbo is a region on the border of Hell. On the other hand, souls there are only kept out of Heaven on a technicality--like lack of baptism. I don't know how "Star Blazers" will receive its baptism; I don't know whether the contemporary television marketplace is heaven or hell; and I don't know which way "Star Blazers" will go from Limbo ( or how long it will stay there)...but I do know the series has soul.

"But," to quote Ms. Carlton, "enough of this babbling."

It looks as though a lot of work went into your first issue, and it's quite impressive. It's well written and composed; it has style and authority ( although it's not authorized by anybody over here !). If you are able to continue supplying your readers with the kind of information contained in the first issue, and that which was promised, I think you will have a successful publishing venture. And you'll certainly be meeting a need. Please be careful about infringing on any copyright and/or trademark material. If you want to use something of Westchester's, just ask Mr. Hill and he will probably give you permission, as long as

...more

you're not selling it or realizing a profit from it. You'll need to have this ok in writing.

We'll help all we can. I realize that telling you "Not yet, not yet" is not precisely what you want to hear. But it's better than "Not at all."

Plans are presently to:

1. Market Star Blazers 1 & 2.
2. Produce the U.S. version of the third series. All 25 half hours are now in the U.S. ( At Limbo Labs, tell Ardith.)
3. Produce the series with the same care and fidelity used for the first two adventures. No alien animation.
4. Merchandise the series. Manufactureres are not interested in licenses unless the programs are seen in the markets where the products will be available. In other words, why sell Star Blazers T-Shirts in Grand Rapids if the show isn't on the air there to create a demand for them?

Concering #3, above--I presume you understand why footage must be added. It replaces footage cut during American production: scenes of violence, nudity and sometimes a little boozing. I've sat and listened as patiently as I can to Yamato purists who don't want a single frame changed. And I've read what some of the critics have had to say about "harmless violence" and so on. Frankly, I don't need to see kids blowing each other away with deadly weapons, or whole cities totaled, and I don't find anything attractive about a role model who is stoned on drugs. Sake, like all booze, is a narcotic. And alcoholism is enough of a drug problem for teens and young adults without any encouragement from us. I'd be interested in learning what you think about this. Want to take an editorial position?

Westchester, as far as I know, will maintain continuity by replacing deleted scenes with other Yamato footage. I think you will agree this was skillfully done last time around. It might be interesting to ask your readers if they can supply examples of what they consider to be "matched" scenes from the first two series.

I think it would also be helpful to hear from your readers on the subject of changes made in the series as it is "translated" from Japanese to Americanese. Here we have two different cultures, with varying standards and mores. Japanese television audiences like plenty of action and violence ( it's become a national problem, I 'm told) and they enjoy a degree of nudity in both live-action and animation which is a little premature in this country. On commercial television, anyway. The question is: Should the Yamato episodes be altered? If so, in what ways is it ok to make changes and in what ways does it become censorship? Classic line, I suppose, from the U.S. script of one of the first episodes, is something like: "that's the end of that space ship--and all the robots on it." Should we have left all those real people on the doomed space ship? ( "Well, we just wasted a couple hundred kids. Easy come, easy go, Chief !")

...more

You may want to consider a forum like that for a future issue. Or you could commission an article on the subject. If Ardith still wants to pick on us, here's a perfect opportunity.

I think the cutaway Yamato you offered as a bonus was a splendid idea--especially with the identifications translated into English. I'm sure you made many friends with it. Tell me, when you identify Jerry Fellows and Ardith Carlton as "translators" do you mean this literally? Do they understand the Japanese language?

I have another suggestion, which would make me more comfortable with the 'zine. Larger type. I've always felt 8 point type should be the minimum for anything meant to be read with ease. Six point is for copyright lines and footnotes and throwaway stuff. It's hard for me to read page after page of type set as small as it was for this issue. It makes my eyes tired. You have plenty of room on each page to up the type size, and open the leading. The back cover was fine. You may want to discuss this with Jim & Carolyn Kreiser--and also ask them whether different veloxes would help with the reproduction of your halftones. Some offset printers use 85 line screen--and I have the feeling the cut on page two may have been finer than that, which could be why it muddled up. Oh--and speaking of that picture on page 2--who's who? I guess that's Ardith the Terrible in the middle. Funny, she doesn't look like a killer.

I hope this letter gives you an idea of what Westchester is trying to accomplish, what it is up against. No one wants to produce and distribute "Star Blazers" more than Claude Hill, whose company first made it available to U.S. television audiences. He believed in it then, and he believes in it even more now. It's head and shoulders over any other animated show--and it holds its own against many live action programs as well.

Starlog magazine's review included that opinion: "One of the most entertaining space dramas ever created--animated or otherwise." Writing in Questar, Chris Henderson called "Star Blazers" "The best animated science fiction adventure ever produced." We were very well reviewed by Media Showcase and Ares as well.

Please be assured, and assure your readers, that Westchester still believes in this property and will do everything possible to make it successful. We all have another reason for accomplishing this goal besides our personal enthusiasm and affection for the series. It's our business. It's how Mr. Hill supports his children. It's how he pays us. Believe me, we're working on it. Nobody wants to see the series work more than we do. There are other marketing factors, but we can discuss them when Space Marketing 101 meets again.

In the mean time, if you have any questions, comments or good jokes, please get in touch directly with me at the above address. If I don't know the answers, I'll get them from Westchester. Concerning statements for attribution, please remember that I'm not quoting Mr. Hill in this letter and you should not. If you need quotes from him, let me know and I'll get them for you. If you want to talk directly with him, I'll try to set up a "phoner" when he has some time and it's convenient for you. You can try calling him directly, but odds are he won't be able to take the call unless you catch him between appointments--and then he'll

...more

have to be brief. On the other hand, I've been with him when the phones didn't ring at all, and he's having a nice, ~~liesurely~~, pleasant day. Last time, as I recall, was in 1979. April it was. Lovely day.

If you or any of your associates plan to be in New York, by all means let me know and perhaps we can all get together in Mr. Hill's office. He welcomes the attention you are giving the series, and will make himself available to you, as he has to Michael Pinto and others, if you will give him a little advance notice, and catch him when he's in town.

We all wish you very good luck with Space Fanzine Yamato. It looks like you're off to a good start. You wrote that fans of Star Blazers and Space Cruiser Yamato "...didn't seem to want to interact..." prompting you to start the 'zine. I wonder what you observed which formed this conclusion. Also, since you first learned of Space Cruiser Yamato in 1979, I'd be interested in knowing how. I don't think it was on the air in Grand Rapids.

Again, thanks for being out there for us.

Cordially,



Arnold J. Friedman

cc: Claude S. Hill.