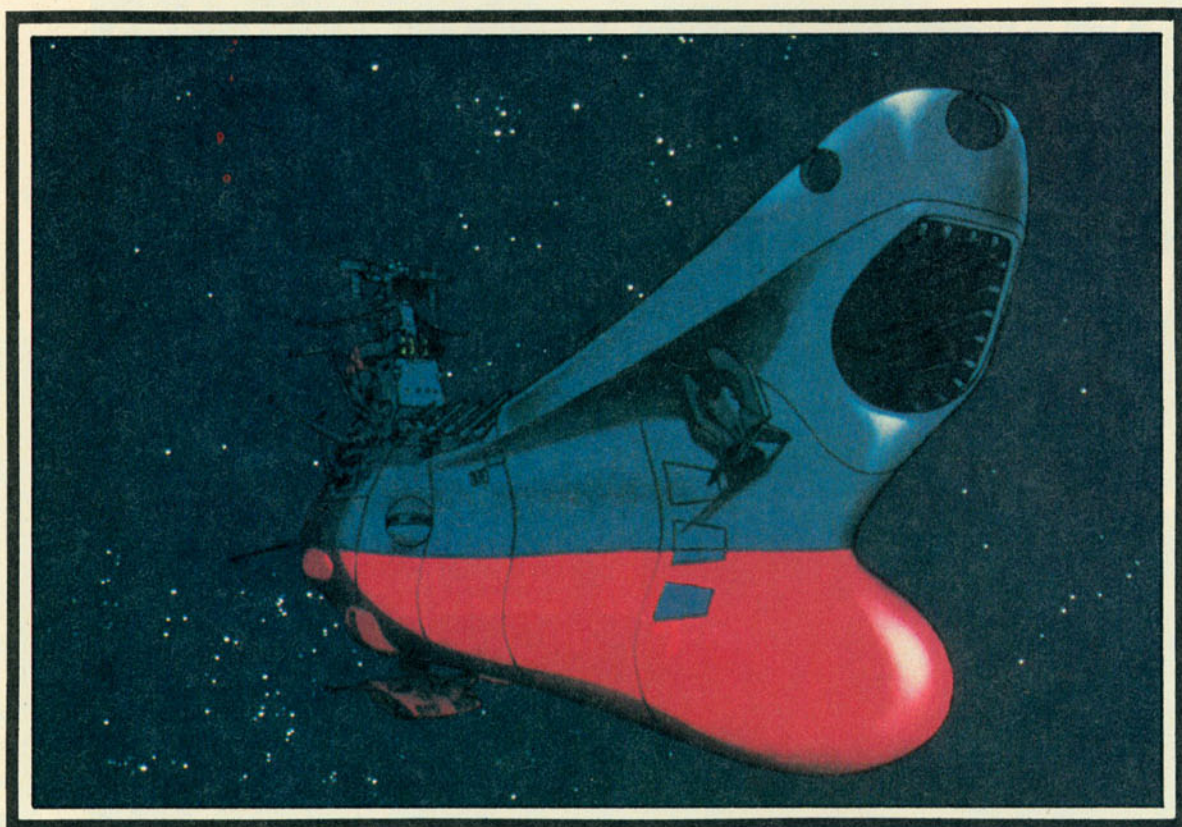


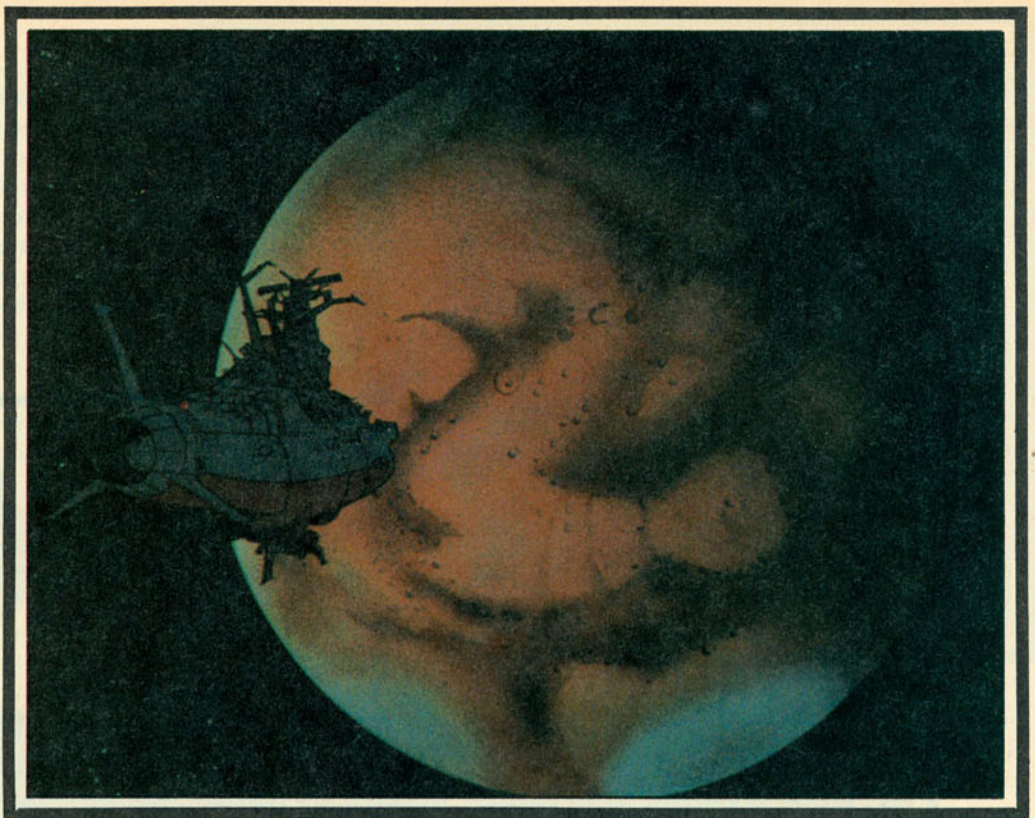
SPACE CRUISER YAMATO



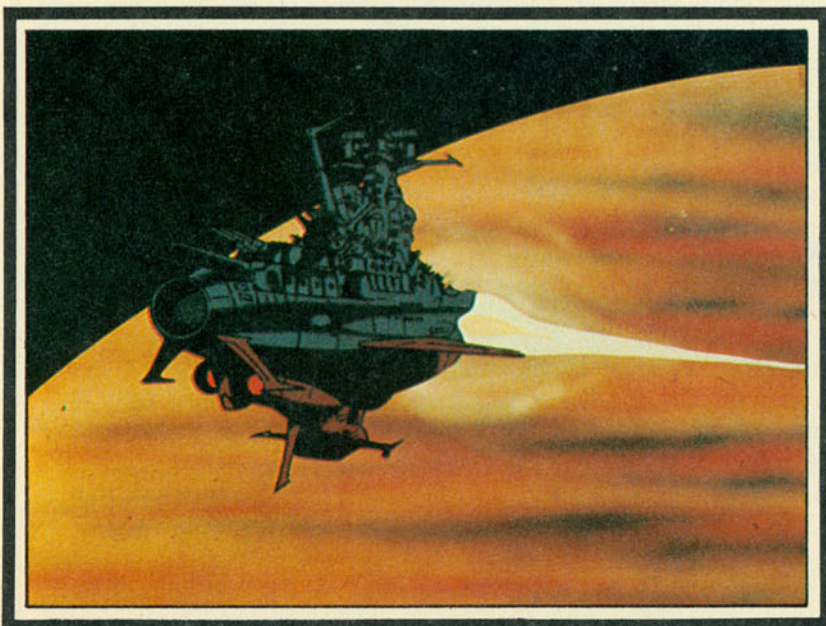
Its real name is *Uchuu Senkan Yamato*. Here, it is known as *Star Blazers*. Most Americans are aware of it only peripherally, and those adults who do recognize the name may be quick to consign it to the back of their minds as being "...just a cartoon, for children..." Yet, in this country alone, it has thousands, if not millions, of fans who are eager to see more of it and to latch onto any or all of the related merchandise.

Run in odd time slots which vary from city to city, the two season, fifty-two episode television series has spawned a host of fan clubs, and both Japanese bookstores and comics and specialty shops are doing a booming business keeping those fans supplied with books, soundtrack albums and tapes, toys, calendars, and the like. Quite simply, it is a phenomenon, and what has appeared here so far is only the tip of the iceberg.

Space Cruiser *Yamato* is, in fact, an import item, and in its native Japan it has enjoyed snowballing popularity since it first debuted a decade ago, as a black-and-white comic series by Reiji Matsumoto and an animated television series produced by Yoshinobu Nishizaki. The series was at once touted by both audience and professionals alike, and has been a seminal influence on much of the animated and live action science-fiction that has come since, all over the world.

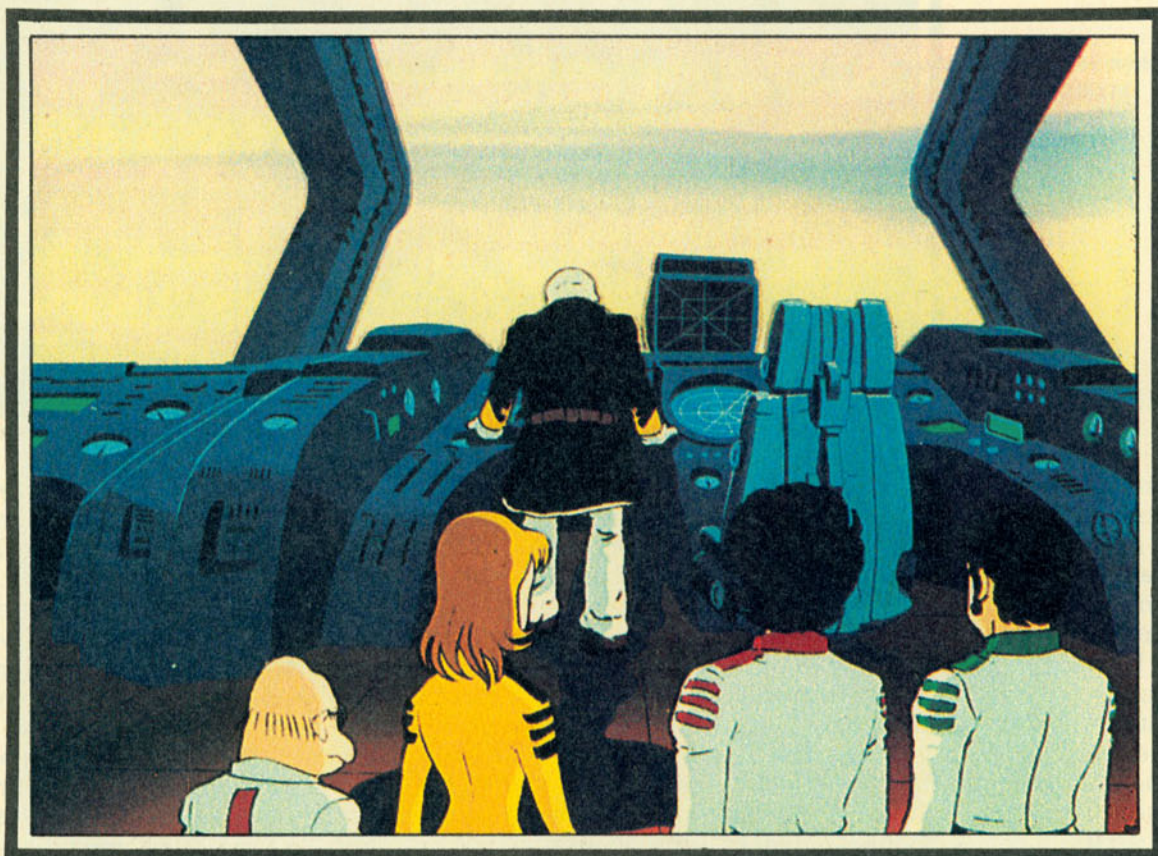


Upon examination, the story contains many of the classic elements of which success is made. A crew of soldiers, scientists, idealistic young space cadets, at least one beautiful good-hearted girl, a smart-alecky robot, and a cat are united under the leadership of a wise, old veteran captain. Earth is at war and losing, desperately struggling to survive a withering assault from a race whose home is far outside our galaxy. Just when all seems lost, a message comes, bearing an offer of help from the queen of the distant planet Iscandar. Earth's resources are too severely depleted to allow for the construction of a new vessel in which the heroes can fight their way through enemy territory to accept this aid. And so the old battleship Yamato, sunk toward the end of World War Two, is located, gutted, refurbished, and turned into a space battleship. Even before the ship is launched, though, complicated subplots between the various characters have begun to emerge. The hero wrongheadedly blames his commander for the death in battle of his beloved older brother. Both the hero and his best friend fall in love at first sight with the messenger from Iscandar, who has died in fulfilling her mission. The Yamato's chief nurse (who also acts as the radar and analysis officer) is a doppelganger of the dead woman. The enemy aliens are ruthless and far better armed than the Yamato's crew. They are also, as it turns out, motivated by something nobler and far more compelling than a simple love of destruction...



And so it goes, until the mission is completed, and the earth is saved. Simply told, in one and two part installments which are complete adventures in themselves, even as they serve to advance the main plotline, *Space Cruiser Yamato* is far more sophisticated than a casual glance would lead one to expect, and transcends the genre of straight space opera or war stories.

Its creators have concerned themselves with universal themes like love, honor and bravery, people who care for one another, who believe in causes, and who will sacrifice the good of the few for the good of the many, even when the many are oblivious or ungrateful. What makes these traditional elements work here is the obvious sincerity of the approach, and the nearly flawless execution. The honesty of the characterization is never marred by cheap and easy gimmicks, or by any false notes. In addition, both the comics and animation artwork are characterized by this same kind of delicacy and simplicity, combined with tremendous power, and all of these qualities are supplemented by imaginative and innovative designs that have become more spectacular with each succeeding chapter, as the adventures have kept on coming.

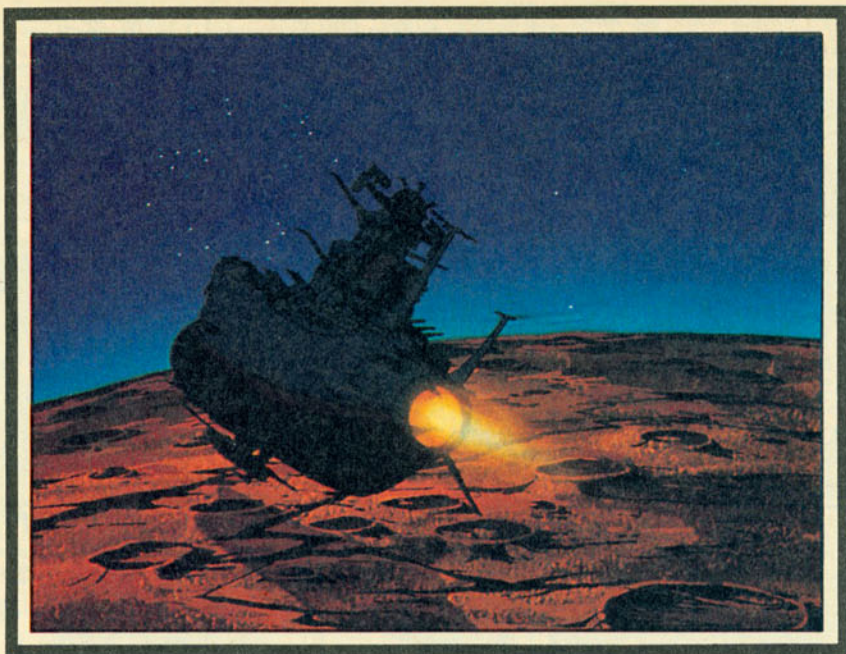


The same story that comprised the first season of the television series was also produced as a theatrical film, which was in turn followed by a second film, *Arrivederci, Yamato*. In this film, as the title implies, most of the main characters were killed off and the Yamato itself destroyed in a last-ditch effort to protect earth from a new menace.

The fan outcry over the end of the series was such that Nishizaki and Matsumoto substantially revised this story when they produced the second season of tv episodes, this time allowing the ship and many of the protagonists to survive. In America, of course, the story was censored into what seems to be regarded as appropriate blandness for children's viewing, and everybody survives. Which would make the opening sequences of *Space Cruiser Yamato—The New Voyage*, the made-for-tv movie that came next, come as an awful shock to any American who saw it. One of the earliest and most touching moments in the film shows the survivors, many of them newly recovered from serious wounds incurred in the last battle, gathering at a monument to pay tribute to the memory of their fallen comrades. It's a pity that few Americans will ever see this scene or many of the others like it. They are part of what gives the Yamato saga its depth. Battles are won, or lost. People die. New cadets sign on. Love stories continue, or come to a conclusion. Enemies become friends. Stories end.

At present, the Yamato saga stands at eight entries. In addition to the two television series, two theatrical films, and the telefilm already mentioned, there have been three additional theatrical films—*Be Forever Yamato*, *Yamato III*, and *Final Yamato*.

However, they do not comprise one storyline or continuity. Several of these, like the second television series and *Arrivederci, Yamato*, are mutually contradictory. Planets and characters die in one branch of the story, but continue hale and whole in another. The plots intertwine and twist across one another. So far, the series has had three different conclusions. Perhaps, however, the title of the most recent movie, *Final Yamato*, is indeed the last word on the subject.



Our thanks to Kevin Seymour and Yuji Hiramatsu of **Books Nippan** bookstore in Los Angeles, California, for their help in supplying reference materials and the illustrations used in this article.

The full-color animation comics which recount the adventures of the tv series **Star Blazers**, in English, are available through Books Nippan.

