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This month's Dyna Club

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Interview with Jissouji Akio

----With Tiga, you did your first Ultraman in a long while. How was it?

No, it doesn't feel like it's been long. In addition to Ultraman himself getting revived

over and over again, I've always been close to Ultra. I didn't feel any gap at all. I

particularly didn't even feel like I was picking up something old. The child is father to

the man (laughs).

----Your works not only express fantasy, but also the eroticism in adult movies. Are you ever

aware that you're making a kids' show?

That's a detail. Just because it's a kids' show doesn't mean there's a different way to

film it. Children are sensitive. Don't ramble on like an adult. They see the footage as it is.

----Looking at your past books, you were quite in despair about tokusatsu.

There was such a period for a while. From now on, there may be a point where tokusatsu is

done interestingly. In that sense, I tried to include longer special effects in Tiga's "Flower."

[Editor's Note: Jissoji talks in length about his struggles with Ultra-Seven's shrinking budget and the failure to get special-effects movies produced in his book Nightly Disk Monster Mugenkan (1988)]

----On the other hand, what was better in the past?

If there's something different than the past, it's that there's far less time required for

the contents. Including the preparations at the filming location too, the contents of the

drama are also shorter by around 3 minutes (Note: For 30-minute time slot dramas, the

original Ultraman was around 24 minutes, but it has become around 21 minutes in the latest

work). It's quite a big bottleneck. Including the titles before and after the drama, the

supplementary material is long. In total, about one episode's worth is removed from the drama. We can't go about reducing the special effects, so since we can't fool around too much in the main story, we might head in the direction of making the contents of the special effects more interesting.

----Does the footage planning come from the director?

Sometimes I choose ideas from various people. When I think about it myself, I think about it... This time, I had a hard time creating the script. I prepared three (one of them is Hattori's work), and I intended to do two, but it ended up being only one because there wasn't time for scriptwriting. It was a script that took a lot of work to film (Note: I prepared it as Oota Ai's script). It's the same with everything I do, but it takes more time to get up and running than preparing at the filming location. And with the recent trend, despite this work, many have not been able to write drama scripts that move people, although it's possible for animations. They lack the reality required in a drama. It's fine for a fantastical novel, but we're talking about videos.

[Editor's Note: The episode Jissoji is referring to as having written but not directed is Ultraman Dyna Episode 37 "Yumenokatamari". The unproduced script is "The Musician's Forest"]

----Even when it's about monsters, it still has to revolve around human drama...

And you're right. You have to control human emotions, the fundamental part of humans. So I wish I had done a little more research into the officers. It's not that I dislike stories about the officers. For Tiga, I was able to depict Takaki Mio-san well.

----Takaki Mio-san played the lead role in your Ultra Q The Movie, didn't she? I got a peek at the filming of the scene where Iruma was abducted by the flying saucer, and thought it was really captivating.

Children are captivated by erotic things. Takaki-san is a charming person.

----Have you seen the other directors' works?

No (laughs). I didn't. Even for movies, I don't view the works of

others. But I wish I knew
about the rules regarding the regulars in advance. In the past, there
were directors like
Tsuburaya Hajime who would show me the regulars, and tell me to
suppress the main cast
member's position, and that I don't need to prepare the panels for
the set. That doesn't
happen anymore.

----From the fictional world of Tiga, the incident happened close to
reality.

I love it when everyday stuff and dream-like stuff are right next to
each other. You never
know who lives next door, just like "The Targeted Street" in Seven. I
depict the point when
everyday human reality takes a leap.

----When abnormal lifeforms like Manonians appear in an everyday
world, is there a
difference between a human's acting and a masked actor's acting?
Yeah, I guess there is. A mask has only one expression. To show
expression, a lot of things
have to be done. So I guess it's difficult.

----This is the first time you're teamed up with Director Sagawa.
Nominally, that's true, but actually, some episodes like Ultraman's
Kaiju Graveyard were
directed by Sagawa-san, who until then was a cameraman (Note: In the
second half of
Ultraman, production was unable to catch up, and things seemed to be
in complete harmony at
the filming location). It was the same with Skydon. For Ooki (Jun)-
kun, I teamed up with
him much later, from Seven onward. Ooki-kun returned to Tsuburaya Pro
during around Abolas.

----Such things aren't on the records, so it's a precious story. Was
the appearance of
Ooki-san's name as a producer of Tiga in the credits meant to
mourn him?

Yes. I got approval from Tsuburaya Pro. When it comes to human life,
you never know.

----What are your religious views?

I'm Buddhist. Even the name of Jissouji is like the name of a
mountain with a temple (ji).

I really love the atmosphere of temples. And things like Buddha
statues too.

----Kaiki Daisakusen (Operation: Mystery)'s Kyoto chapter deeply

impresses me even when I
watch it now. The former capital is really SF-like. Hero dramas
are great too, but I
wish to see more of your fantasy dramas.

I want to do them. When it comes to SF, everyone goes to the Tokyo
Waterfront City (laughs).

It's dull. Fantasy can be found somewhere much more different. If I
had the money, I'd put
together a set that corresponds well with reality.

----The eldest son of the Jissouji family, "Chinabou," had a strong
presence. That surprised
me.

The actor I requested wasn't available, right? I'm no Hitchcock, but
I thought I'd make my
mark somewhere. I did it this time too. I was told to do it with
Hanejirou. The script didn't go well.

[Editor's Note: Chinabou is Jissoji's Tanuki doll]

----Normally, they're cute, but depending on the way you use them,
they can become scary.

Dolls are mysterious, aren't they?

Dolls are scary. Any cute stuffed toy you suddenly see in the
darkness feels like a
different lifeform. The doll gets possessed by a soul. Human
depravity too. That's why the
doll floats along the river.

----In this age, I think it's interesting to see footage of matter
having a soul, like
human emotions.

It'd be great if we had more of such stuff. When it comes to horror,
it gets realistic.

It's interesting when the dark side in our hearts connects with a
heroic story. Even in

videos, beheading and blood is common. That is a big pity.
Imagination is slowly withering
away. Ultraman needs more fantasy.

----The image of Bakugon standing still upon looking up was too
simple, and yet frightening.

It's great when dream and reality are intertwined. I think children
understand that best.

Adults have experienced that too much. They're like cumulative
things. While I want to

create a Mito Koumon-like Ultraman, and while we may have won, it was
a tough way of

winning. In fact, we might have lost. Maybe the nightmare still
continues. Something like

that.

----How are background musics chosen?

For Tiga, I didn't use background music. This time, I read the script but couldn't imagine

it, so I guess that's why there was no music, just sound effects (laughs). Last year, I

already had the music in my mind beforehand. If I don't have the music in my mind

beforehand, I can't film it. This time, it's hard. If only I had something like harpsichord music...

----Kaiju Play feels like a play within a play.

I made Murai (Sadayuki)-kun's script easier to understand in the end (Note: I even made a

rare second final version of the script). There's a doll in this one too. A Western doll.

Yotsuya Simon's. The character Narumi was modeled after Shibusawa Tatsuhiko-san and played by Shimizu Kouji.

----The effect of the wide-angle lens is very distinctive, isn't it?

When taking sets such as the headquarters, I use a wide-angle lens to show its size. Also,

it's good to use a wide-angle lens to create a different dimension in the footage. It's

interesting when the perspective gets distorted. I'm told I do a lot of close-ups, but it's

the same as when an artist draws. There is no reasoning. It's just my own sense, and can't

be explained in words.

----Does the director get to decide the cast?

I hardly know the actors. The producer decides for me. I listen to the opinions of my

fellow directors, like Hattori (Mitsunori)-kun. I especially don't know about young people

these days (smiles wryly). Shimada Kyuusaku-san's role in "Dream" was originally intended to

be played by Kishida Kyouko-san, but due to scheduling issues, it wasn't possible. So I had

Shimada-san read the lines as they were.

----What do you think of recent tokusatsu shows?

There's virtual reality, but with computer graphics, you can create anything, even in

tokusatsu. It makes it feel like a game. Instead, we need to develop the story with

life-sized fear, and the fear of groping around in the darkness, in

empty space. If you can
simply create anything with light, then it ends up feeling like a
game.

----Anything about new techniques?

Digital compositing flattens the screen. I don't like CG. It's anime-
like. Tsuburaya

Pro's charm is utilizing practical effects when possible, so that the
virtue of the

miniature work shows on the surface, I feel.

----What was your impression regarding the hectic schedule?

They made a good set for me. Better than a movie set. I'll continue
to do Ultraman. After

all, I didn't have any regrets this time.

(Recorded on 26th April '98)