

On a day in 2000, at a certain pub, the three creators of **The Big O** got together and to discuss their passionate thoughts...!

### **Kazuyoshi Katayama**

The director of **The Big O**, he has also worked on other anime including **Sentimental Journey** and **Giant Robo**. An established pro of robot dramas.

### **Keiichi Sato**

**The Big O** character and mecha designer/supervisor. He has worked with director Kazuyoshi Katayama since **Giant Robo**, and has also worked on the **City Hunter** TV special.

### **Hitoshi Ariga**

**The Big O** manga artist (see inside front cover for more information).

***The Big O** is finally starting to be released on video/DVD.*

**Ariga:** I'd like people who weren't able to catch it on TV to take this opportunity to check it out

**Sato:** Even people who dismissed it by just saying "I don't have cable." [**The Big O** was originally shown in Japan on the Wowow cable channel—Ed.] But I guess that's how it is. When you can't see it, it's sour grapes.

**Ariga:** I was hoping that the manga would help to get people interested. I'm hoping it'll get people to buy the DVDs and videos, so it's an important piece of media in that respect. I know that I shouldn't stray too far.

**Sato:** Well, we're going to keep needing your help. *(laughs)*

**Ariga:** I'll do my best. *(laughs)*

**Katayama:** Well, I'd like people to enjoy the world of **The Big O** by both reading the manga *and* watching the anime.

**Ariga:** Yeah. For example, there are rumors that Seebach looks just like Roger.

**Sato:** That's the difference between the anime and the manga. Oh! I know... I could do a design for an original character to appear in the manga, like I mentioned before.

**Ariga:** Could you please? That'd be great!

**Sato:** Even if it's a bit-part robot?

**Ariga:** I would love it if you could do a MegaDeus! The military police are like the ants beneath your feet the way they are now. I wanted to do a story where they built a robot against the top brass' opposition, only to find out they can't control it. Of course, Dastun would be totally opposed to it all along.

**Sato:** Wow, that's so... cliché! (*laughs*)

**Ariga:** Yeah, I know. I want it to be straightforward and not put too much thought into it. It doesn't anything to do with the rest of the story, either.

**Katayama:** But Paradigm Co. even has the military police under its thumb. Alex ultimately wants to pilot a giant robot himself. He's the kind of guy who doesn't feel good about letting someone else be the pilot.

**Ariga:** Oh, in the storyboard for Schwarzwald's episode in this volume, there was a scene with an extreme close-up of Alex that my editor told me to eliminate.

**Sato:** What? Really? (*laughs*)

**Ariga:** In the last panel where he showed up, Alex said about Seebach, "He could use a MegaDeus too. But it was destroyed. But the scene we printed in its place was Seebach burning up while he sings. (*laughs*) Well, it was due to availability of page space. The next page had to be a two-page spread, so I just couldn't fit it in.

**Katayama:** Seebach is there when Schwarzwald's unmasked face is show. Like a parallel existence...

**Ariga:** Yeah. Almost like a spirit...

**Katayama:** Well, in the beginning, all I wanted was a criminal who took delight in people's reaction to his crimes, like in **Batman**.

**Ariga:** That was my intention too. I thought of him as a megalomaniacal monster.

**Katayama:** In Episode #4 ("Underground City"), when I finalized the script and brought up all that stuff about memory, Schwarzwald became a character who couldn't exist after he had been unmasked. He could be Roger's dark shadow, or his carbon copy.

**Ariga:** When I saw the anime I didn't know what you had in mind. I just thought. "Schwarzwald is so cool! I'd love to delve deeper into this character."

**Sato:** **The Big O** gets too deep if you read into it. You don't know what's real and what's not.

**Katayama:** You could keep drawing forever if you're not careful.

**Ariga:** Well, I wanted to draw the moment when Schwarzwald is born. He's the kind of character who sticks around until the last episode, so instead of having Schwarzwald just show up, I wanted to draw how Seebach *became* Schwarzwald. But then I was surprised when I heard about your idea for him.

**Sato:** A fan asked, "Schwarzwald is German for 'Black Forest,' but what does it mean?" I was like, *sigh*.

**Katayama:** The name "Schwarzwald" signifies the insanity, the primal scars, in the European psyche. A long time ago, Europe was covered in dense forests, and you didn't know what lurked in the darkness. There was a lust for conquest that was inversely proportional to the fear. The Black Forest holds strong meaning to Westerners.

**Ariga:** I went to the library to do some research when I drew that episode, to get some reference to create the character.

**Sato:** He started out handsome, you know.

**Ariga:** Yeah. I got to take a look at a color rough draft of him and Angel standing together outside the dome. I thought he looked so cool! But then in the end he ended up having a triangular face.

**Sato:** The negotiator was fooled, too. (*laughs*) At first the bandages were cut in a cross shape, and he looked a little handsome. I had made him as handsome a character as Char Aznable was to Amuro [in the anime **Mobile Suit Gundam**—Ed.], according to Katayama's vision. But as we kept talking, we decided we should do a different kind of betrayal of anticipation. He could even be a freak. We'd make people wonder what he really looked like under that mask. "Oh, what the hell, why not." (*laughs*)

**Katayama:** But he's better *because* he's masked. His garish exterior sets off his inner darkness.

**Ariga:** I know what you mean. I think it was a good idea to hide his face. It makes him mysterious.

**Sato:** Do you know a character called Mr. No from **Tiger Mask** [late 1960s-early 1970s wrestling anime based on the manga by Ikki Kajiwara and Naoki Tsuji—Ed.] He's a

masochist who has a bowling ball in his head. *(laughs)* Schwarzwald's the same as him; you have no idea what he's thinking.

**Katayama:** He could look identical to Roger, or he could be an average-looking, shabby guy. But then a guy like that could have read a news article about Schwarzwald, and he just started to think *he's* Schwarzwald. Like a Schwarzwald Syndrome.

**Ariga:** That could've been more interesting!

**Katayama:** That's why it's better to never show his face, in any form.

**Sato:** Things that you can't see are scarier. It's psychological.

**Katayama:** I hope people can feel the psychological thriller aspects, the horror aspects.

**Sato:** The Big O has an expressionless mask because I want people to feel it's a bit scary. It's true that it could look like a champion of justice since it acts heroic, but it has a mask, and you don't know when it might turn into a monster. In any case, it's scary. There are a lot of things scarier than people.

**Sato:** Roger's face has changed a lot compared to the beginning of the manga. He looks more mature, in a good way.

**Ariga:** But my readers have mentioned that he has more of a baby-face now, because he's gotten rounder in general and his eyes got bigger. So he looks younger. His body got more buff though. *I can see how he could look younger. But manga is a continual process, so you can see by looking at Vol. 1 that he changes somewhere in the middle.*

**Sato:** well, that's true in the anime too! It's just because I'm irresponsible. *(laughs)* I don't pay too much attention to it, and the animators are like that too. He really does look older than he's supposed to be, especially in the anime. He could very well be over 30. We try to be conscious of the fact that Americans don't look baby-faced, but even more than that, he's not a character you would draw looking immature. The biggest influence was during the recording session for Episode #1.

**Ariga:** Mitsuru Miyamoto's voice as Roger?

**Sato:** Yeah. That settled it! He has a really sexy voice. *(laughs)*

**Ariga:** The first time I heard his voice was in some movie that he dubbed, and in

**Kochi-Kame** [full name **Kochira Katsushika-ku Kameari Koenmae**

**Hashutsujo**, aka "This is the Police Box in front of the Kameari Park in Katsushika Ward," a long-running **Weekly Shonen Jump** manga which started in 1979—Ed.]

Both these roles are different from Roger. Roger is Roger. When Roger moved and spoke for the first time in Episode #1, there was a part of me that was going, “D’oh!” And going through the script, the way Mr. Miyamoto read his lines was different from the way I had inflected them in my head.

**Unknown:** *Yeah! I was surprised at the first cry of “Big O,” because he had placed the emphasis on the “B.”*

**Sato:** One of my staff said the same thing the other day. They had all thought that he would emphasize the “O,” but it was the “B.” Then the other costars started to do the same, all the way to Episode #13. They put it simply, it’s like listening to actors mispronounce names in the dramas and stuff I watched when I was young. (*laughs*). There was a certain ecstasy in having your preconceptions be demolished. Everyone had expected that the “O” would be emphasized until they heard it.

**Ariga:** I’m sure the audience thought so too when they saw the title.

**Katayama:** And it’s said so subtly. Well, nobody besides Roger and his associates say it, anyway.

**Ariga:** When I read the script, I imagined him talking a bit quieter. Like the line “I see, you were created by a human being...” But then he starts *yelling* it. “Wow, so *that’s* what Roger’s like!”

**Sato:** My expectations for the character of Roger Smith were demolished—in a good way—after he got his voice.

**Ariga:** I agree

**Sato:** The director and everyone else all had their own ideas for the show. A lot of people contributed their opinions. I had also always thought Roger would be a more indifferent character.

**Ariga:** That’s how I drew him in the beginning of the manga, as a really calm, disinterested character.

**Sato:** At first the scriptwriters thought so too. They were asking, “Doesn’t he shout out the weapon names?” “Doesn’t he yell, ‘Chrome Buster?’” There are times when I could see him shouting that. Even if he doesn’t shout, he’s an odd enough character as it is, sitting there in his dress jacket. He’s not the type who wears some kind of special giant robot piloting suit.

**Ariga:** The back of his suit might rip if we made him do some heavy-duty action. Incidentally, I found out why Roger is so buff when I saw him in action in the anime. Sitting in that cockpit, with those pedals, you get a workout in your arms and legs. His heels are drawn in close too. IT would be perfect is there was just something that developed his abs. It doesn't look like he works out at home, but he's so buff, so it must be the cockpit. It looks pretty tough.

**Sato:** Ok, let's put in some springs. *(everyone laughs)*

**Katayama:** There's a character called Shwarvinegar in the anime **Chou Machine Eiyuuden Wataru** [*Super Machine Heroic Legend Wataru*, 1988-1993] and his cockpit is a fitness machine. I think his voice actor was Tesshou Genda [Dan Dastun], and he went. "heh heh heh." [Note: Actually, in **Wataru**, Tesshou Genda played the character Ryujin-maru—Ed.]

**Ariga:** When I saw the cast list, and I saw that Genda was doing Dastun, I was worried that he was going to sound like a typical Genda character. But he really was perfect for Dastun. What a pro. Was he doing what the director asked?

**Sato:** *Exactly* what he asked!

**Ariga:** Episode #10 ("Winter Night Phantom") is a tearjerker. *Schwarzwald's voice was good too.*

**Ariga:** Yes, he was cool.

**Sato:** Katsunosuke Hori was a direct request from the director.

**Katayama:** I'd always loved Hori.

**Sato:** Ever since you got into this industry.

**Ariga:** It *had* to be his voice.

**Katayama:** "Someone intelligent who's gone crazy."

**Sato:** When we were recording Episode #12 ("Enemy is Another Big"), the film didn't make it in time again. [Note: Unlike American animation in which the voices are recorded first so they can be lip-synched with the animation, anime voices are usually dubbed after the animation is completed.—Ed.] But his craziness was awesome. When we put the clown costume on him I really didn't know how it would turn out.

*How about Dorothy? (laughs)*

**Sato:** When we were casting for the roles, we were worried that there wasn't anyone suitable for Dorothy...

**Katayama:** But we figured that Akiko Yajima would do a good job. We were mostly worried that she would fit *too* perfectly. That's why she's not doing it exactly as the casting criteria dictated, but we put into consideration that "*je ne sais quois*." We did have worries, but I'm glad we went with Yajima.

**Sato:** We debated more about Angel. She was the most difficult one. I had an image of her in my mind as like the *first* Fujiko Mine [Yukiko Nikaido—Ed.] from the **Lupin III** TV series. The second Fujiko [Eiko Masuyama—Ed.] just wouldn't work.

*She starts to sound too cheap.*

**Sato:** But in the audition, they all played her like the Second Fujiko.

**Ariga:** It has to be the first one.

**Sato:** So we're deciding, and we ask, "Well, how about this person?" and we ask her to not play her like the second Fujiko. There would be situations where we would intentionally have her act like the second one anyway, and we figured that was inevitable. A serious Angel came up in the last episode the other day, and I thought, finally, this is it! I thought her true character was coming though, and it made me feel she was perfect for the role. She was stunning.

**Ariga:** Angel's difficult in the manga too. I don't know how to handle her. I don't know how the last episode is going to turn out—I mean, I don't know what's going to happen in general. What I'm regretting now is that I've got a bunch of people working for her, and that all defer to her as "Angel-sama" [Lady Angel, Master Angel—Ed.]. In the anime, Angel is a lone wolf. I didn't know that when I started drawing the manga, so I already had a couple of her pawns moving about (*sigh*). That was a failure.

**Katayama:** What if you say she just had hired them temporarily?

**Ariga:** Well, they've already been referred to as her subordinates...

**Sato:** Call them the Angel Girls then. (*laughs*)

**Katayama:** Oh yeah!

**Ariga:** But they're all middle-aged men. (*laughs*)

**Katayama:** That character relationships aren't clingy in **The Big O**. What I hate the most is when they get chummy. For example, Roger thinks nothing of Beck. Beck is convinced that he's the only one of the world who can be a rival to Roger.

**Ariga:** I think that's the good thing about Beck.

**Katayama:** Roger isn't interested in Beck at all. He only thinks of him as some swirly-haired dude. They've all distanced themselves from everyone. Angel and Dorothy are like that too. I thought that would work to spice things up. I eliminated scenes where I thought they were getting too close to each other. Rather than saying "eliminated" I should say "fixed."

**Ariga:** It's like they're reading each other's minds.

**Katayama:** Yes. We don't give the viewer an explanation for why the characters are so emotionally distant from one another. But you can tell what's going on through their actions.

**Ariga:** That's all a directorial technique.

**Katayama:** I've piled on all sorts of things to get the feeling across. And if they don't fit in the world of **Big O**, then I eliminate them, shorten some scenes, move on to the next action sequence.

**Sato:** Well, Dorothy and Roger's relationship, the distance they keep, is actually really difficult to portray.

**Ariga:** I thought it worked really well.

**Ariga:** Don't people tell you that the **Big O** opening reminds them of **Ultraseven** [1967 Japanese live-action science-fiction *tokusatsu* (costumed hero) series, the sequel to **Ultraman**—Ed.]?

**Sato:** They do! (*laughs*) They bring up **Ultraseven** a lot in terms of the opening, and it makes me sad. They just talk about **Ultraseven**, but that kind of style existed everywhere back then, like in spy flicks. So it makes me sad when they automatically think "silhouettes-**Ultraseven**."

**Katayama:** I agree! The James Bond movie openings are all silhouettes, too. It's just a part of '60s pop culture.



**Sato:** We're influenced by **Ultraman**, but first and foremost, we're trying to introduce people to the mood of that era. Mr. Katayama believes it's the right thing to do. What we really want is to get across the *flavor* of that era.

**Ariga:** For the generation who doesn't know that era, for people who watch **Ultraseven** in reruns without anything to compare it to, that's probably the first thing they thought of. Because they have no other comparison.

**Sato:** But those were the good days.

**Katayama:** There was a lot of stuff like that back then, like in commercials.

**Sato:** Somebody likened the characters in **Big O** to the characters in the Torisu commercials. [Animated TV commercials for Torisu whiskey, which played in Japan from 1958 through the 1960s—Ed.] (*everyone laughs*)

**Sato:** But we never know how old the audience is for **Big O**. We get e-mail and snail mail from junior high kids, high school kids, people in vocational schools. We got a letter from someone who could just barely remember the time Apollo 11 landed on the moon. And she was a woman. It's amazing—and she buys Magazine Z every month. You just never know with **Big O**.

**Sato:** I get the feeling that it appeals to a wide range of people, though.

**Ariga:** I guess it's supported by many generations. I want to tell the young people that this is new, this is the real stuff, it's not like the retro-fad popping up everywhere these days.

**Sato:** We're not necessarily denying that we're doing it for our own pleasure, and we're not doing it believing it's right. But we do it knowingly—we're saying "We know all of these great things, so we think everyone else might like a taste of it too."

**Ariga:** To share it.

**Sato:** Yeah, that's how we really felt. But we were doing so many reference-and-homage-type things that people started to look unfavorably at us. They say the grass is greener on the other side of the fence, and people were saying things to us like, "You had a good opportunity, but you went overboard." People wonder why the other creators don't get mad at us, but there are things that they do and don't get mad about. This is a weird story, but someone asked if we got permission from Eiji Tsuburaya [creator/producer of **Ultraseven**—Ed.] to do the **Big O** opening. It's not that kind of era. Although, when they mentioned that I get nervous. (*everyone laughs*)

**Katayama:** Honestly, it made me sad when they asked if it was a rip-off. *(laughs)* It's not like we're using the same monsters and mechs. We want people to think of it as its own thing, the world of **The Big O**. It's an homage.