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Spotlight on Last Exile

Posted on Monday, July 12 @ 03:37:10 2004
by [Staff](#)

[bckat](#) writes "Last year I e-mailed my sister from Japan to give her the heads up on a high-quality, retro-looking anime I was following on TV. I wasn't particularly bowled over by *Last Exile's* story, but Kouichi Chigira's character relationship-focused direction, Mahiro Maeda's early 1900s Germany-inspired production design, and Range Murata's artistic world setting and character designs kept it on my viewing schedule. *Last Exile* spoiled me for any other animation I was to watch in my yearlong stay in Japan. It was a champagne title, against my usual fare of more simply made but still entertaining "good beer" titles.



In *Last Exile*, Claus and Lavie are longtime childhood friends who make ends meet by delivering messages via their van-ship, a two-seater hybrid race car aircraft. Claus is a natural pilot like his father before him, and Lavie is Claus's tomboyish navigator and mechanic. Their goal is to reach the turbulent

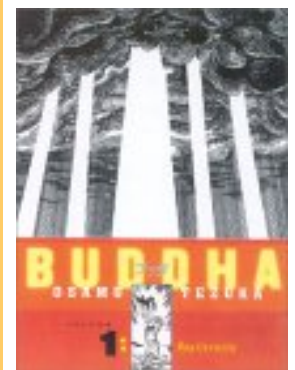
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jet stream known as the Grand Stream where their fathers were lost. During an off-hours vanship race that they were certain to win, they drop out to assist an injured courier whose life-threatening mission they inherit. The unusual cargo they accept is a little girl with a mystery.

The kingdoms of Anatoray and Disith are at war, their battles presided over by the all-powerful, cruel Guild. Anatoray's Napoleonic riflemen face their enemy on stages attached to huge airborne battleships. Vanships get into dogfights with shuriken-like fighter aircraft. The killing fields of sea and air are one in *Last Exile*, as the sky at times appropriates the properties of the ocean.

The anime is awash with influences from the World War I era, including allusions to German flying aces Max Immelmann and Manfred von Richthofen (a.k.a. the Red Baron), and the Art Deco commercial break frames.

Character conceptual artist Range Murata attended Anime Expo 2004 courtesy of Geneon/Pioneer. His *Last Exile* character artwork was featured in the dealers room by the Tokyo-based Gallery of Fantastic Art (GoFa), which also displayed his books *Spheres*:



Lastexile 1st Character Filegraphy [sic], (c) 2003; *Spheres: Lastexile 2nd Character Filegraphy* [sic], (c) 2004; and *Rule: Illus. & Products Range Murata*, special edition, book for Range Murata collection 003, (c) 2004. The GoFa exhibit will travel next to Animagic in Koblenz, Germany, July 23-25, 2004.

Tezuka also produced mature stories that dealt with injustice, human rights and the environment. Buddha: Kapilavastu is one of those stories. [Read the Review!](#)

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Other *Last Exile* staff at Anime Expo were director Kouichi Chigira and character designer Minoru Murao (courtesy of Geneon/Pioneer), who designed the side characters when Murata became too busy to work on them.

Murata studied product design in college and has done illustrations and designs for novels, magazine covers, posters, and game software. His approach toward character design is that of an overall designer. He considers the world setting in the choices he makes. Looking at a design, he said, you should be able to tell that each character laughs and acts differently.

The departure point for creating a character design is the difference between *Last Exile* and other anime. Simplicity is usually very important because a number of artists must work with the design. But anime studio GONZO told Murata to do whatever he wanted. They placed no limitations on his work. GONZO said, we don't care how hard it is to animate, just do it.

Interestingly, Murata's first character design for the Guild's Dio was rejected by director Chigira, but it was recycled and used for Dio's attendant Luciola.

The clothing in *Last Exile* could actually exist in real life. Murata's knowledge of fashion design (he has his own fashion line) can be seen in the details. Designs for the Guild are more structured, artificial because it's a futuristic world setting.

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Director Chigira thought Irish ethnic music would work well for this title. He described the female-trio Dolce Triade as very feminine in person, but capable of making masculine music.



Chigira knew *Last Exile* would be a difficult story from the start. When the series first aired in Japan, they only had five to six weeks of episodes in stock. Later, this contributed to a feeling that they were making episodes on the spot. If he could make one more episode, Chigira would focus on the peacetime activities of Claus and Lavie.

Last Exile is 26 episodes long. It is distributed in the U.S. by Geneon/Pioneer. The official web site is <http://www.lastexiledvd.com>.

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