



**CONTACTS:**

Annalee Paulo, 42West LA | [Annalee.Paulo@42west.net](mailto:Annalee.Paulo@42west.net) | (310) 477-4442  
Hilda Somarriba, 42West LA | [Hilda.Somarriba@42west.net](mailto:Hilda.Somarriba@42west.net) | (310) 477-4442  
Todd Nickels, 42West NY | [Todd.Nickels@42west.net](mailto:Todd.Nickels@42west.net) | (212) 277-7555  
Kabeer Malhotra, 42West NY | [Kabeer.Malhotra@42west.net](mailto:Kabeer.Malhotra@42west.net) | (212) 277-7555  
Guillermo Restrepo, Brigade | [Guillermo@BrigadeMarketing.com](mailto:Guillermo@BrigadeMarketing.com) | (917) 580-6566  
Lucy Rubin, GKIDS | [Lucy@gkids.com](mailto:Lucy@gkids.com) | (212) 528-0500

GKIDS

# SYNOPSIS

Shohoku's "speedster" and point guard, Ryota Miyagi, always plays with brains and lightning speed, running circles around his opponents while feigning composure.

Born and raised in Okinawa, Ryota had a brother who was three years older. Following in the footsteps of his older brother, who was a famous local player from a young age, Ryota also became addicted to basketball.

In his second year of high school, Ryota plays with the Shohoku High School basketball team along with Sakuragi, Rukawa, Akagi, and Mitsui as they take the stage at the Inter-High School National Championship.

And now, they are on the brink of challenging the reigning champions, Sannoh Kogyo High School.

## ABOUT SLAM DUNK

Slam Dunk is a manga by Takehiko Inoue that was serialized in Shueisha's Weekly Shonen Jump from 1990, issue No. 42, to 1996, issue No. 27. The series, which depicts the personal growth of several high school basketball players, has sold more than 140 million copies in Japan. It has inspired numerous boys and girls to get into basketball. An anime series (that ran from October 1993 to March 1996), several video games, and other media based on the manga have also been produced. The Slam Dunk Scholarship was established in 2006 to support young basketball players in Japan. In 2018, a new, 20-volume shinsoban edition with all new cover illustrations was published, with volume divisions at each milestone in the story. An artwork compilation, PLUS / SLAM DUNK ILLUSTRATIONS 2, was released in 2020 to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the series' launch.

## ABOUT THE DIRECTOR - TAKEHIKO INOUE

Born in 1967, from Kagoshima prefecture. In 1988, "KAEDE PURPLE" was nominated for the 35th Tezuka Prize and made his debut as a manga artist. From 1990 to 1996, "SLAM DUNK" was serialized in Weekly Shonen Jump, becoming an unprecedented hit and becoming a social phenomenon. Other serialized works include "The Chameleon Jail" (1989), "BUZZER BEATER" (1997-1998), "Vagabond" (1998-), and "REAL" (1999-).

# JAPANESE CAST

**Ryota Miyagi:** Shugo Nakamura

**Hisashi Mitsui:** Jun Kasama

**Kaede Rukawa:** Shinichiro Kamio

**Hanamichi Sakuragi:** Subaru Kimura

**Takenori Akagi:** Kenta Miyake

# ENGLISH DUB CAST

**Ryota Miyagi:** Paul Castro Jr.

**Hisashi Mitsui:** Jonah Scott

**Kaede Rukawa:** Aleks Le

**Hanamichi Sakuragi:** Ben Balmaceda

**Takenori Akagi:** Aaron Goodson

# CREW

**Original Manga “SLAMDUNK” Written and Directed by:**

Takehiko Inoue

**Sequence Directors:**

Naoki Miyahara, Toshio Ohashi, Yasuhiro Motoda,

Humihiko Suganuma, Haruka Kamatani, Katsuhiko Kitada

**CG Director:** Daiki Nakazawa

**Animation Character Designer & Animation Director:**

Yasuyuki Ebara and Takehiko Inoue

**Animation Sub Character Designer:** Yukiko Ban

**Character Modeling Supervisor:** Kei Yoshikuni

**BG & Prop Modeling Supervisor:** Yuki Sato

**Technical & Rigging Supervisor:** Hiroto Nishitani

**Senior Animation Supervisor:** Kazuki Matsui

**Technical Animation Supervisor:** Kai Makino

**Simulation Supervisor:** Daisuke Ogawa

**Effect Supervisor:** Taro Matsuura

**Senior Lighting Composite Supervisor:** Toshiaki Kimata

**Lighting Composite Supervisors:** Keisuke Arai and Masaaki Kamada

**Art Director:** Kazuo Ogura

**Background Designers:** Nobuhito Sue and Eiko Tsunado

**Color Designers:** Shiori Furusyo and Naomi Nakano

**Compositing Director:** Shunsuke Nakamura

**Editor:** Ryuichi Takita

**Sound Director:** Koji Kasamatsu

**Audio Recording:** Yasushi Nagura

**Casting Producer:** Yoshimi Sugiyama

**Music Producer:** Ryuta Koike

**2D Producer:** Kentaro Mouri

**CG Producer:** Yuta Ogura

**Production Executives:** Hiromi Kitazaki and Takeshi Himi

**Animation Producer:** Kazuhiro Nishikawa

**Producer:** Toshiyuki Matsui

**Music:** Satoshi Takebe and TAKUMA (10-FEET)

**Production Company:**

TOEI ANIMATION and Dandelion Animation Studio



# INTERVIEW WITH TAKEHIKO INOUE

## ***When and what made you choose to become a manga artist?***

Inoue - I've always liked drawing ever since I was a child, and so I always thought I would be doing some sort of drawing-related job. When I was in high school I had to think about my future path in realistic terms and considered being a manga artist as a profession. So, I thought maybe I should go to an art university. At that time I actually hadn't drawn a single manga yet. I liked to draw so I was making illustration-like drawings, but I had never put them into frames and layouts to make it into a story. I don't really know how I recklessly thought of becoming a professional manga artist then.

## ***Your first work was drawn after you decided to become a manga artist in high school, right?***

Inoue - I ended up going to a regular college. So as a start, I thought I'd apply for the monthly amateur prize in Weekly Shonen Jump and some other magazines. So I drew a 31-page one-shot story and sent it in. I think that was the first time I drew manga.

## ***Did you teach yourself how to draw manga?***

Inoue - Yes. I think manga drawing is self-taught for most people. I don't know if it is like that now but it was like that then. Especially since I'm from Kagoshima, I didn't have that kind of information, I was just trying to copy and imitate. I didn't know how to draw backgrounds, so there weren't many backgrounds.

## ***Did you research the tools for drawing manga yourself as well?***

Inoue - For tools, I learned by reading Osamu Tezuka-sensei's books on how to draw manga and reading how to draw manga sections in magazines. I learned things like that manga is drawn with inks and pens, that there are things called screen-tones, and that it's okay to erase it if you accidentally go over the outlines. I just read and learned. It wasn't until I started working as an assistant that I really learned how to draw manga. When Tsukasa Hojo-sensei was serializing "CITY HUNTER", I was hired as an assistant. That was the first manga manuscript I saw. I thought, "This is so beautiful!" I had to draw the background, but I thought, "Uh, is it okay for me to draw on this?"

## ***From there, you became a pro.***

Inoue - Yes. The serialization of my manga "The Chameleon Jail" being published was confirmed. I caused inconvenience for [Tsukasa Hojo] then, but I told them "since the publication [of "Chameleon Jail"] has been decided, please allow me to quit." Hojo-sensei said something like, "Oh, do your best."

## ***Being the professional manga artist you wanted to become, looking back on your career now, which work do you feel was a turning point?***

Inoue - Well... I'd say all of them. "The Chameleon Jail" was canceled after twelve weeks, but I gained a lot through the experience. I don't remember how many one-shots I'd drawn then, but I hadn't drawn that many. I started the series completely inexperienced. During those twelve weeks, I had readers read it every week, and I received feedback on their impressions in a questionnaire. I learned a lot through that. In that process, I learned about technical things and the kinds of responses I would receive depending on what I offered. I can say that those twelve weeks were a very intense experience and a big turning point for me. If it wasn't for that, I don't know if I would have been able to continue with the next serialization, "SLAM DUNK". "SLAM DUNK" was the first work that was accepted by the readers, so it was an experience that changed everything completely, and it was another big turning point. "Vagabond" is a work I drew because I wanted to do something completely different from "SLAM DUNK", I wanted to draw something that was the opposite of that. I was taken to another world when I drew "Vagabond", whether it's in the story or in my work. There is also the fact that if I hadn't drawn "Vagabond", my career wouldn't have developed like this. For example, my exhibition "The LAST Manga Exhibition." It was a work that broadened my horizons in many ways. Except, "Vagabond" is not completed yet, I really want to hurry up and draw that.

***So you are very motivated to draw.***

Inoue - I've always wanted to draw. It's just, I haven't been able to. Also, as for "REAL", when I was drawing "Vagabond", since "Vagabond" is a world that is far from the modern world, and it is more of a spiritual world, I wanted to draw a person who is closer to our reality, someone who could be spotted in my neighborhood. That's why I drew it. That said, again, I ended up jumping into a world that seemed familiar but also unknown to me: wheelchair basketball. I found the world of wheelchair basketball to be a very wide world. Regarding "BUZZER BEATER", it was the first online manga. I uploaded it when the internet was not so widely available, and it took a long time to download. But I felt that it had many possibilities and I was inspired by the existence of it. Also, it was an experience that made me realize that there is a way to draw manga with less seriousness. All of them were turning points for me.

***You always have a strong desire to try new things.***

Inoue - That is true. I might not be able to repeat the same thing. Maybe it's my personality. I'm bad at tracing.

***So, when you were approached about turning "SLAM DUNK" into a movie long after the serialization ended, did you feel like you were "tracing" at first?***

Inoue - Well I didn't know I was going to direct it at that time. I get those kinds of approaches often but I didn't feel that I wanted to do it that much at first.

***According to the producer Mr. Matsui, he didn't take "No" for an answer. He never gave up and made different visual proposals and pilots and presented them to you. After many years, he finally got a "yes" from you. What was the reason for you to tilt to a "yes"?***

Inoue - I know. You would wonder why. I must've lost control for a bit. Well, one of the reasons was his passion, after all. I was moved by him making new proposals and trying to convince me again and again. I think that's definitely a part of it. Another thing was the last image of the final scene of the pilot that he made had a really nice drawing of the face of Sakuragi. It made me think "Ah, it's a good face drawn by a human hand". It powered my decision for me to say "YES". I also had something inside of me. A desire within myself to make people happy. People in the world for me, for example, it's my manga readers and anime viewers. For the people who read and watched "SLAM DUNK", it ended in a sort of unexpected way, you know? For me personally, that's the way I wanted the story to end. But for the audience, I heard that it was rather surprising and I think it might have made some of them sad... I felt a big accomplishment but at the same time, I know I may have made some of the audience sad... For example, when the total number of books sold reached 100 million, I wanted to express my gratitude by putting out newspaper advertisements and renting an abandoned school and holding events there. I also made an illustration collection, a complete version of the manga, and a shinsoban edition of the manga. I did that sort of thing, but I still wanted to make people happy by drawing something new. I saw people's happy faces each time. If it makes people happy, that's what I thought.

***I heard you met the producer, Mr. Matsui for the first time in December 2014. What do you remember about that time?***

Inoue - I met him because I knew I was already willing to do it. It wasn't to judge whether to do the project or not. It was to meet and greet him. I had no idea what was waiting for me. If I had known that it would be this much work to begin with, I wouldn't have said "yes".

***Was coming up with the storyline the first thing you worked on for this project?***

Inoue - That's right. I just listed the things I wanted to do. Put some pillars in roughly. I think I started it like that. I was in my twenties when I was drawing "SLAM DUNK", over the course of six years from when I was twenty-three years old to twenty-nine years old. I was becoming better and better the more I drew. Physically also, I had more stamina. It was a time when the impossible did not seem impossible. My perspective was straight up. The protagonist had a big physique and had incredible potential hidden within himself. He was a character with unlimited possibilities. I think it matched me at that time perfectly. That's why I wanted to focus on and preserve that period of time, the height of the season. I wanted to end the story right



there. But twenty-six years have passed since then and my perspective and values have shifted a lot. Maybe not shifted but increased. I learned that there is a lot of pain and a lot of things that just won't work. I think it's the same for everyone, and I experienced too. Sometimes we hold that pain and sometimes we can overcome the pain. I wanted to depict the film from that new perspective. Isn't it like this for everyone? Not everybody has unlimited possibilities, and therefore many of us are living with pain. I thought I'm at the point in life where I can depict the story from that perspective. I wanted to put the spotlight on things like that, to focus on things like that. If I were to do, I had the desire to do so with that kind of perspective.

***What was the direction for the visual of this film? What did you aim for?***

Inoue - Something that's not smooth or shiny. Something with texture. That's what I was attracted to. That's why I think I said things like, for example, "the texture of paper". Also, I had to have the sense of "the feeling of life". In order to depict basketball realistically, even from my poor knowledge, basketball which has ten characters moving separately I thought it must be impossible to hand draw each of their moves. That's why I thought using CG was a must. With that being said, if "SLAM DUNK" was using CG that looked like CG, it wouldn't make sense either. I knew that because that's what I would have thought too. I didn't want to do that, I wanted the characters in the film to have life. The characters are living there. I wanted to accomplish that visually, that's why I said a lot and we did a lot of trial and error.

***I heard you personally retouched a lot of cuts. According to the staff, it was the first time to have the director himself drawing this much.***

Inoue - Oh really? The first time, huh? They should have told me 'no director does this much.'

***About the retouch work, what were you most careful about while working on it?***

Inoue - Giving the characters life. I've always thought I had to do something like that the whole time. Everything I did was to give the characters life. Retouching is straightforward work, but I focused on giving life to all the characters throughout. In the manga there's drawings and stories but it all comes down to the characters. For me, characters must have life. That's literally the lifeline of the work and what determines whether this story has life or not. That's why I pleaded with them to let me do the retouch work if possible. I wanted to do as much retouching as I could to bring the level up to where at least I could be satisfied. I would know when the characters have life. I can tell "oh, now it has come to life". But it wasn't the final process so I think it was the result of the hard work done by the staff who worked on it after I retouched it.

***I think giving directions to make your vision come true became one of the most important points. How did you feel about giving directions to your staff?***

Inoue - I'm not really good at communicating or conveying my thoughts to others, to begin with. On top of that, I hate explaining what I'm trying to create. I thought, "This is what it means to be a director..." I came to the understanding that communication and decision-making were the main jobs of the director. However, my staff doesn't need extensive explanations either, you know? I draw. They get it without words.

***So they'd understand by seeing your drawing.***

Inoue - Right. I did a lot of corrections to the animation drawings toward the end of the production of this film. But since I've never done it before, I didn't know how to do it. So I draw in instructions over the frames. "The facial expression in this frame is a bit different, can you do it more like this?" For acting as well, I draw instructions like "The timing's a bit off. Becomes like this at here." When seeing the revised version and it becomes exactly how I envisioned it to be after my corrections made me think "Oh yeah, I'm glad I did this." My vision really comes across. Manga-making is a teamwork, as well with the assistants. In our case, I draw characters and my assistants draw backgrounds so I don't really have to fix their work or give them instructions. So on that note, I could maybe say communication was a higher hurdle to jump over.

***Not only for drawing but also for the music and sound effects, you had to communicate your vision with others. I believe that was your very first time to experience that?***

Inoue - I come from working in a world where there's no sound, so sound is something I generally think I have no control over. That's why I had no requests to make regarding sound [for the film]. If it's about basketball sound effects, I can say things like "I want the dribbling to sound stronger here," or "I like the sound of the net when the ball goes in, but in this scene, this is a swish so do not put much sound". But when it comes to music, I let them handle it. I just briefly communicated what I had in mind before they started and commented on the results if I noticed awkward parts. That's how I went about it.

***You also had the work to direct the voice actors.***

Inoue - My understanding of how this movie should be was that it shouldn't be overly exaggerated, even in the basketball plays. I wanted things to look natural. I told almost all the people that that was my basic stance on this film. Then on top of that, I told them about each character and their roles, like, "He's a high school kid who's a bit badboy, belongs to a basketball team and he's stupid." After that, we work on it together and seek the answers together. I think that's how it went. This was the reason why I never got involved with voice actors when TV series were broadcasted. During those years, I think the voice actors of the TV series faced their roles as professionals and nurtured the characters in their own ways. If I had asked them to play the characters again in this film, I might have had to end up asking them to throw away all that and start over. I couldn't do that. I mean, the root is the same; it is me, and it is "SLAM DUNK". But I'm considering this film as a new tree coming out of the same root. So as for the acting as well, I wanted to prioritize the characters being high school students on a regular basketball court. My briefings were that sort of thing.

***I heard the production continued up until the last minute.***

Inoue - Yes, we kept working on it until the last minute. On the final day, ...well, it was the final day after many extensions. But on that final, final day, we had to finish by 8 p.m. We finished at 8:03 p.m. At that very moment, I really felt like saying.... "Ahh, thank you!"

***What conversation did you have with the staff after the completion of the film?***

Inoue - I spoke a little with each person. Many told me that they had new experiences through the production of this film. I was happy to hear that. Personally, I just wanted to say "Thank you!". I'm like a baby. A baby that was just born into the world with a splash.

***So you swam frantically, right?***

Inoue - Yes, that's right. I don't know why but I was frantic. It's really all because everyone worked so hard.

***What did you learn by making a film as an animation director?***

Inoue - I learned that the beginning is the most important thing. I said this earlier but communicating and making judgments were a big part of the job, just like the work of a foreman. I've always failed each time at having a birds-eye-view and this time I did as well. I tried to take a step back but little by little in my mind I became one of the players. I tend to forget to look at it from afar, so how well I make the original blueprint at first is important, I think.

***How do you hope the fans will receive this film?***

Inoue - Earlier I said I wanted them to be happy [from seeing it]. But what does that actually mean, to be happy? I think there are various ways to approach it. What I thought I would do was have them "encounter" the film. For example, once you finish reading an interesting manga, you can no longer have the experience of "reading it for the first time". So, those who have already read it would say to those who haven't read it yet, "What? You're reading it for the first time now? I am jealous.!", you know? I wanted those who have read "SLAM DUNK" way before to have an experience that feels like the "first time". I thought that was one of the ways to make the fans happy. So I wanted people to 'encounter' the film. I wanted them to know that there's a "SLAM DUNK" like this. I'd be happy if the audience sees the film as if they are meeting "SLAM DUNK" for the first time. And for those that are actually their first, of course it's their first time. I'd really love the audience to watch it in the theaters. The screen is big and the sound is absolutely better at theaters.

***After making it into a film, was there a change in the way you see and feel about “SLAM DUNK”?***

Inoue - It's always remained alive inside of me since the manga serialization finished. That world, and the people too. Therefore I've been having realizations here and there that I took notes of. Like, “Maybe this guy is this kind of dude?”. This film felt like a new platform to introduce those [new realizations]. I don't think this feeling is going to change, even after making the movie. I will continue finding things that weren't written into the film, the deeper layers of its world. “Oh maybe it's like this...”. I think I'll keep on having those moments and I'll keep taking notes of them, even though I won't announce them. I don't know. But I think I will continue to enjoy [its world].

## **INTERVIEW WITH PRODUCER TOSHIYUKI MATSUI**

*After working at a movie company, a TV station, and as a freelancer, he is currently affiliated with Toei Animation. As a producer, he has worked on a wide range of projects, from live-action films such as “Rock'n'Roll Mishin” (2002), “BALLAD” and “Hana no Ato” (2009), to animation such as “Re: Cutie Honey” (2004) and “Popin Q” (2016).*

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***First, Mr. Matsui, could you tell us how you got into the film and animation industry?***

Matsui - I've loved manga since I was a child. I used to collect thousands of them at my parent's home, so I often had my friends over and turned it into a manga library. I loved movies as well. Thanks to my father's work, I was in an environment where I had easy access to the movie theater, so I used to watch movies there all day as a child. I loved movies so much that I wanted to be a movie producer, but at the time the Japanese movie industry was in a declining period and there weren't any producer job offers at movie companies. So, I applied for a position as a video maker which was directly under a movie company that was producing V-cinemas [direct-to-video films]. It seemed to be the place where I could gain the most on-site experience compared to other movie-making companies. On set, I was so busy that I didn't even get to sleep every day, but it was a valuable time to learn the basics of good old filmmaking, where the director and the staff were united under the sense of a team.

***Please tell us about the process of launching the “THE FIRST SLAM DUNK” project.***

Matsui - At that time, I was entrusted with an in-house project to transition from videotape to DVD. And that's how a project was launched to make the first DVD of the TV series “SLAM DUNK”. That was the beginning of everything. For me, the generation that hadn't interacted with the original [manga] or the anime in real-time, it was an opportunity to meet “SLAM DUNK” for the first time. A product called “SLAM DUNK DVD-BOX” was released in July 2003 and received a tremendous response. There were not only “thank you” messages for the product, but there also were many voices saying “I want a sequel”. Receiving those great responses from the fans, I once again realized the greatness of the work “SLAM DUNK”. Then, in the fall of 2003, I went to the original author's agency and asked if it could be made into a movie.

***What was the reaction of the original author's agency at that time?***

Matsui - The answer was “no”. I think there was a lot of energy, however it lacked a concrete plan. But I couldn't give up. I wanted to respond to the voices of “SLAM DUNK” fans that arrived after the release of the DVD-BOX. I want to visualize the shock that I had when I first read the manga. Looking back, I think that was the driving force behind getting the project going.

***When did the movie project for “SLAM DUNK” start moving?***

Matsui - In 2009, the agency said “Please give us the proposal if there is one”, so I thought I'd try to convey my thoughts in a concrete form somehow. I immediately consulted Mr. [Kozo] Morishita

(\*current chairman) and Mr. [Hiromi] Kitazaki (\*current senior director) of Toei Animation, to whom I had been indebted since the DVD-BOX planning. They set up a project team and from there, I made a total of five video letters and proposed them to Mr. Inoue via the agency.



### ***Could you tell me about the content of the video letter?***

Matsui - It's been more than ten years since the manga series and the TV anime series ended, so the first video letter I made in 2009 was not only for targeting fans of the original manga and anime series but also for children and teens of today to convey to them the enjoyment of basketball through making an exciting visualization of it. I wanted to express the fun of basketball itself through animation, so we analyzed the basketball styles of Shohoku and their opponents. We also interviewed a real high school basketball team so that we can express the tactics and strategies, the fun of playing, and the depth of the competitions that happen within a second of time. I edited it together with all that in mind and presented it. From the second one in 2010, we started working on a pilot version of the actual animation production. At that time, the animation industry was transitioning from 2D to 3DCG. It was the era when the CG technology revolution began. At this time it became possible to create high-level anime drawings that preserves the character image, to express dynamic actions, and to create high-definition images, and so the range of things we could express was greatly expanded. However, it was still in a transitional period. Japanese people in particular were not familiar with 3DCG characters, and advanced 2D animation was still thought of as the best option. However, I didn't think it was realistic to draw a lot of Mr. Inoue's characters and animate them, and more than anything, CG technology seemed an attractive tool for expressing basketball plays, so I decided to try it anyway. In order to motivate us, we borrowed the gymnasium of the former Kanagawa Misaki High School, where Mr. Inoue's fan appreciation event "SLAM DUNK 10 days after" was held, and with the cooperation of professional street basketball players, we recorded the basketball scene from the original manga with motion capture and tried to reproduce it. What surprised us was the speed of play that was depicted in Mr. Inoue's manga and the actual time (the number of seconds) of the play matched perfectly. How? Mr. Inoue must have drawn the image in his head in the manga, so how was it possible to match the actual play time so perfectly? This was a shocking fact. That's why the second video letter was a pilot version made from a technical approach, where we used the data recorded by the motion capture to move the CG-modeled characters and to see what kind of look would be most attractive to the eye.

### ***How did Mr. Inoue react to that video letter and pilot version?***

Matsui - We received his comments through the agency. We only wanted to visualize the spirit of the project's intention and to verify the animation technology. We weren't expecting to receive the green light for the movie adaptation from this. We were just happy that there was still a possibility and that we could move to the next step. I appreciated it.

### ***Then that must have made the next pilot even more important, right?***

Matsui -Yes. The next one took a long time to produce, including the preparation period. It was developed before and after the 2011 earthquake. I approached it with the intention of making a compilation of the previous two. Who should be directing this film when we actually start the production of the film? I chose the staff while keeping that in mind. In terms of the production system, we teamed up with the largest company that was at the forefront of the CG industry at the time. While considering the production system that is needed to produce a movie, I made a short reel as if we were producing a part of the movie in advance, and proposed it as the second pilot in 2012. The beauty of the visuals, the presence of the sound effect, and the exquisite taste were unprecedented. I had nothing but a great feeling that we would achieve something magnificent.

### ***What was the result?***

Matsui - It was a "No". Now that I think about it, it must have been somewhere far from what Mr. Inoue had in his mind. The number one reason was the characters didn't feel alive. His feedback was that there was no feeling of them moving around with any life. I think that's most likely because I was making a "SLAM DUNK" based on the manga [as if] created by a unique anime director.

### ***What happened after you realized that?***

Matsui - Of course there was no way I could give up at that point. So I begged to do another pilot. But creating the second pilot took enough energy for a full movie and after that point on, it was a thorny road. Maybe Mr. Inoue knew that because he gave us the notice that "the next one would be the last one." At the time I was working for a TV network but I resigned after that. I

really wanted to try it with my back up against the wall. At that time, the words of Studio Ghibli producer Toshio Suzuki stuck with me: “There is a period of 10 years that people have to bet their lives on”. It seems that for Mr. Suzuki, the ten years he worked with Mr. [Hayao] Miyazaki was an important make-or-break time in his life. He said on the radio, “It’s like a law that applies to everyone, and if you work hard during that time, you won’t have any regrets in life.” I was encouraged by those words that I chose a life with no regrets.

### ***Did you think you stood a fair chance?***

Matsui - I can’t say I thought I had a chance. But I thought I could let go of it if I tried this hard and it still didn’t work. I was at a point of reflection and I had received a piece of valuable advice during the previous pilot-making. Specifically, I understood that I had no chance of winning if I didn’t face this fight truly from Mr. Inoue’s perspective. I simply thought “Let’s create a visual that would excite Mr. Inoue together!” In order to achieve that, we had to make what we would want to see if we were the first audience [of “SLAM DUNK”]. I thought that would create a space where staff can take initiative and hold discussions. Then the team came together as one centering sequence director Mr. [Naoki] Miyahara and Mr. [Toshio] Ohashi. We were able to create an amazing team. That’s how we made the third pilot.

### ***What was specifically different content-wise?***

Matsui - This time, I tried to express the animation by combining 3DCG with a 2D animation look, hand-drawn 2D animation, and a hybrid. Of course, from the character design to the facial expressions, we extracted all the frames from the manga and made a collection of facial expression reference material, and we were very particular about following the original. This became the prototype of this film. And this time, I made a short pilot using an instrumental song as a base purposely without adding voices. And it was also a tone and melody that reflects the flat worldview as much as possible, and it was used as a foundation for the purpose of complementing the image. All the staff put the same thought into all the cuts. In order to express the characters’ lives, the theme was to inject the soul of the creator into the picture.

### ***How did you feel when you completed this pilot version?***

Matsui - That was the last chance for this project and it was down to the wire. I was leading the team and working really hard on it too. However, I couldn’t even draw a single line or a dot. I was reminded that my job was to entrust the staff and create a workspace where they can unite under a single purpose, which is to create what Mr. Inoue wants to watch and that also is what the audience wants to watch. I believe that was the fruit of the eleven-year training I had gained since the beginning of the project. Of course, I felt the most response and sense of fulfillment from it too. In the spring of 2014, right after the third pilot, a proposal, including additionally produced cuts that we couldn’t finish in the previous pilot, was presented to Mr. Inoue as the fourth pilot and that was the last proposal. I think that the biggest gain from the production of this pilot version was that the structural foundation of having Mr. Inoue as the director of this film was set there.

### ***You talked previously about the process of launching the project and the production of the pilot versions. You didn’t meet Mr. Inoue himself during the production period of the pilot versions?***

Matsui - Right. I was receiving his comments on the pilot versions but I never met him in person during that time. I always thought I wanted to take a look inside his head if I could meet him.

### ***When did you actually get to meet him?***

Matsui - It was December 2014 at a business dinner. I’d been proposing cinematization through video letters and pilots for five years, but I still hadn’t received an official “OK” from Mr. Inoue. There was a possibility that he would say “NO” at the first meeting. So our nervousness on that day was incredible. Actually, I had been sober for a long time in hopes that the project would come to fruition. At that meeting, Mr. Inoue’s opening words were, “Isn’t it okay to lift the [drinking] ban today?” In retrospect, I think he probably said that on purpose to ease my nerves. At the end of the day, we talked about various things there and we were able to receive his approval. On the way home, perhaps because I was free from the tension in the meeting and also maybe because I was tipsy, the history and episodes from the past five years ran through my head like a flashback. I

couldn't believe that it was happening. That day became an unforgettable day for me.

**You entrusted the original author Mr. Inoue with script writing and directing. What was your intention there?**

Matsui - When I first met him, I approached him about script writing and directing the film, and thankfully he accepted. Of course, I thought that no one but Mr. Inoue could write the lines for the characters, but the biggest part was the character drawings. In other words, I thought that if he didn't get deeply involved in the drawing of the characters, we wouldn't be able to make a movie that would satisfy the readers and fans, let alone Mr. Inoue himself. I told him, "I think that there's no other way than to ask you to write the script and direct it." With Mr. Inoue's approval, production began in January 2015, starting with developing the concept of the script.

**We have interviewed the staff in each division about the specific production of the film, but as a producer, how do you look back on the production so far?**

Matsui - I believe that my determination and preparation as a producer have been solidified through the five-year process of making video letters and pilots. And by making the 3rd and 4th pilot versions, we were ready to have Mr. Inoue come on as a screenwriter and a director. Having him in the center of the production, creating "a TAKEHIKO INOUE film" that is 100% pure was my desire as a producer. So I've worked hard to create an environment for that.

***I'm sure it was hardship after hardship during that time, but if you dare to mention an episode from that time, what would it be?***

Matsui - I think that the producer's anguish was the sound part more than other things. The sound makes the image stick, so I wanted to do it toward the end as much as possible. However, since we chose a production method that relies on pre-visualization made with 3DCG to build up the overall film and then elaborate, pre-scoring is unavoidable. We needed to record lines first, then the character's CG model could be created based on the expression of the voice. If that is the case, then we have no other choice than to arrange the voice actors first. When recording the voices, the 3DCG characters were pre-visualized without facial expressions. Since this was the first time the director recorded the voice for an animated video, I thought it would be extremely difficult to direct the voice actors only by looking at the character with no facial expression and covering it with his imagination. When the director selected voice actors, he cared more about the "quality of the voice" from when they spoke naturally in their everyday life than the "quality of acting". I wanted the audition to be as flat as possible and let him explore freely from a wide range of options. I want to make a director Inoue film as a single movie. That's why I decided to look for options not bound by the cast of the anime TV series this time. That's the answer I had come up with from my journey up to that point. After that, I explained my answer to some of the voice actors of the TV series who were involved in the production of the pilots, as well as other voice actors from the TV series. I explained to them the history of the project. My thoughts as a producer of this film. My perspective: the manga, the TV series, and this movie are all completely separate works that have their own lives. I told them that I think that "SLAM DUNK" should continue to be loved and passed down from generation to generation. I poured my heart out to them. I can only thank the cast and the people at the affiliated agencies who sent me to help us advance the film.

***All the staff united together and repeated the process of scrapping and rebuilding.***

Matsui - Yes, even now. The production of this film is exactly the repetition of trial and error, and scrap and build. The staff of this film is full of professional craftsmen. Normally, the more professional they are, the more difficult it is to "break" [scrap the previous work], because, in other words, it means to break their past self. Trial and error requires a strong will, while scrap and build requires great courage. Everyone has seen how the director has been at the center of the staff, guiding everyone, and continuing to make this movie with great determination. I think that it will be a valuable experience for all the staff and will lead to self-confidence when you stick with it until the end and complete the movie. With that feeling, the director and staff are still working together to make it.

***What kind of movie do you think it will be?***

I would like to say "Welcome to the world of SLAM DUNK" to the audience who encounter "SLAM DUNK" for the first time in this movie. Manga experience, basketball experience, and movie experience— I hope they will enjoy it all. For fans who have been waiting for a long time, I would like them to enjoy Mr. Inoue's new work as a single movie. It should be something that can only

be described as “new work”.

**Finally, is there anything you would like to say to the fans?**

Matsui - We want the audience to feel the one and only “SLAM DUNK” that is unique to movie theaters. This is a movie that is being made with such hopes. Twenty-six years have passed since the end of the manga and the fairly same amount for TV anime series, and I believe that this will be a special film that fans should watch. The feeling of excitement you get from watching a movie, the moment when you can feel that surprise and joy, I think those are important feelings that you can only experience the first time you see it. I don’t want to have you lose that emotional freshness, so I’d love you to watch it without any preconceptions. That’s the only thing I wish for. It would be greatly appreciated if you could continue to support us until the completion and release of the film.

## INTERVIEW WITH SEQUENCE DIRECTORS NAOKI MIYAHARA, TOSHIO OHASHI AND YASUHIRO MOTODA

### NAOKI MIYAHARA

*Born in 1965, from Nagasaki prefecture. Joined Toei Doga Co. (now Toei Animation) in 1986. His works as an animation director and CG director include the “Dragon Ball” series and the “Precure” series. His directorial works include the feature animation “Pop in Q” (2016) and the short animation “Petit ☆ Dream Stars!” Let’s La Cookin? Show Time!” (2017)*

### TOSHIO OHASHI

*Born in 1976, from Tochigi prefecture. Studied CG at Digital Hollywood and joined Polygon Pictures after graduating. Worked on the opening movie of “Street Fighter IV” and received high acclaim, including being selected for SIGGRAPH ASIA. After that, he launched ACT iii. His directorial work includes “Layered Stories 0” (OV/2017).*

### YASUHIRO MOTODA

*Born in 1979, from Chiba Prefecture. Having built up his career at a game production company and an animation production company, he currently belongs to ACT iii and is active as an animation director. “Transformers Prime Beast Hunters” (2014), for which he created characters, won a Daytime Emmy Awards. Other works include the 3DCG animation series “My Friends Tigger & Pooh”.*

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**What kind of work have you done prior to this work?**

Ohashi - I was making the opening movie for “Street Fighter IV”. A Capcom producer told me, “I want to make something with a new look that has never been seen before.” What I made was something like “a picture drawn with Sumi ink that is moving”. It became a hot topic at that time, with everyone saying, “What is this innovative video?!”.

Motoda - Wasn’t it also selected for SIGGRAPH ASIA?

Ohashi - I felt like I was taking the world by storm.

Miyahara - It’s a legend.

Ohashi - To unravel the original source, I thought, “What would happen if I made ‘Vagabond’ move?” I made a concept board and a test movie based on that idea. I told Director Inoue about that, too, on the day we first met. “I’m sorry, I ripped off your work.”

Miyahara - Yes.

Ohashi - Mr. Inoue was the person who created [Vagabond] which influenced my most representative work, so for me, this work is like repaying an obligation. I want to put everything I’ve learned since “Street Fighter IV” into this work to repay my gratitude.

Motoda - As for me, I didn't have many turning points...

Miyahara - What about the one that won an award?

Ohashi - That's right. Don't you need to talk about "Emmy (winning) Motoda"?

Motoda - I won a Daytime Emmy Award for Outstanding Individual Achievement in Animation for "Transformers Prime Beast Hunters". But that's because we had a good team. I am aware that I was just the representative for the team. As for myself, I honed my skills as an animator a few years ago with the 3DCG TV series "My Friends Tigger & Pooh". After that, I was at a place where I was getting selected as a leader. Just when I thought "I got this", I was invited to join Ohashi's "Street Fighter" project, the promotional video for "Super Street Fighter IV". That's when Ohashi beat me up.

Ohashi - I won't give an okay.

Motoda - It was a wake-up call. I guess I didn't know anything about animation. But I managed to survive and finish the project, and I was put in charge of the promotional video animation for the game "Marvel vs. Capcom 3". It was a lot of fun, and I got trained a lot too. As an animator, my level has risen to the point where I am no longer afraid of anything no matter what comes my way.

Miyahara - I worked on "Dragon Ball" series for a long time. After that, after switching to CG, I worked on various animes. I encountered motion capture in the production of a short film "Django's Dance Carnival" of "One Piece" series, and thought, "Oh, this is really fun". Later, when I was working on the ending of "Precure" series, I started working on motion capture more seriously. But at that time, it was an era when only two characters' worth of data could be taken at once. From there, it gradually evolved to up to five people's worth of data, then ten people's worth of data. Then I started to think that it could be used for many other things than just dance. For example, sports. Just when I was thinking that someday I wanted to try that, the offer for the movie "SLAM DUNK" came. So I decided to help out with the pilot version.

Ohashi - Polygon Pictures, where Motoda and I originally worked, was approached to produce the pilot, working together intensely with Mr. Miyahara.

***How many years ago did you start working on the pilot version?***

Ohashi - Ten years ago. I know this because we just talked about it while having drinks together remotely.

Miyahara - Yeah. I made a total of three pilots.

Motoda - I participated starting from the second pilot, but I think it was around the time after the Great East Japan Earthquake. I remember thinking that it would be great if this work could brighten the dark mood of the world.

Ohashi - Each time we tried different looks and approaches.

Motoda - In the beginning, the 3DCG animation with 2D animation look technique wasn't fully developed yet. From the third one, it was finally ready to use. Therefore the third one was the first one to have the 2D animation look which lead to the last pilot we made, I think.

***And that 2D animation look was the one that made an impact on the director, Mr. Inoue, and got this project off the ground?***

Miyahara - I think that the more familiar-feeling look had a more direct appeal to the director when it comes to the characters.

Ohashi - I remember Miyahara-san retouching everything, especially the faces. At that time, CG character models were sort of lacking facial expressions. So we started with developing a tool that could add lines or wrinkles to the characters' faces.

Miyahara - Yes, I did.

Ohashi - Scratch, scratch, scratch....

***How did it go after the production actually started? Was there anything different that other animation projects didn't have in the "direction" work of this film?***



Ohashi - First of all, we didn't start off with any storyboards.

Miyahara - The director said that it was difficult for him to turn storyboards of still-picture into visual. That's why we started off by putting things into videos instead and then added and switched drawings and texts in them. How should we describe it? Videoboards?

Ohashi - Pre-visualization?

Miyahara - Right, right.

Ohashi - There are CG characters that are animated by filming motion capture of a basketball scene. We follow it with various cameras and edit the cuts from a huge amount of material. Normally, I would draw a storyboard as a sequence director, and then it would become a video. But instead of doing that, we started by discussing "how this match should be shown in this film" with everyone. We started with no material. I didn't know how many times we went around in a circle. Every time we watched it, we would do something like a puzzle, saying, "Maybe we should do this here and..." I think it was a lot of redoing, that we couldn't have done with a normal project. I feel like I was still doing that up until just recently.

### ***So you've been doing multiple scraps and builds repeatedly?***

Motoda - Rather than scrapping, it's more like putting new ideas on the table. Each of us gave ideas saying "How about this?" and we all discussed whether we should do it or not. But of course, the final decision was made by the director.

Ohashi - The "yes" and "no" from the director was justice for us. We were so impressed by the comment from the director like, "Wow that's how you see it?" I thought I'd never be a match with him even after doing this job for over a decade.

Miyahara - It made me realize the differences between the author and the anime director.

Ohashi - The level of digging into the characters' personalities is overwhelmingly different. The director was so deeply troubled by this that I thought that even a live-action film would not delve so deeply.

Miyahara - It seemed like it was a fresh surprise for the director himself to know the setting was so extensively made for anime, like, "The regular animation works that I've always been watching were made with such detail!"

Ohashi - The director said, "I can't believe I have to dig so deep." He also said, "If I can't draw manga anymore in the future, it's your fault." We may have provided the materials, but it was the director himself who gave deep thought to them saying "Hmm" and took them home and made final judgments. Also, he often said that "Manga is a weekly serialization. It is repeatedly built on as an addition." Like, "nobody knows what happens to the story in three weeks". I still get this same impression when I see the director working on this project. As the film is made, the characters gain more life. That makes the director question his previous decision on character development like, "This was not right". That is the basis for scrap and build.

### ***Do you think the end result was something that could not have been reached if you started off with a complete storyboard?***

Ohashi - Definitely, especially the scenes of the basketball game. I could never have drawn anything like that even if I was told to.

### ***What were the new challenges for the basketball scenes?***

Ohashi - "Recreating realistic basketball." In animation. Crazy amounts of density, and expressions of speed. I doubt if I could do it even being forced to be draw storyboards.

Motoda - It might look too organized or feel awkward in the timeline. I was especially in charge of the basketball scenes as a sequence director. Miyahara-san once said that I was like an action-movie director.

Miyahara - Yes.

Motoda - It's difficult. We are using motion capture to shoot ten people actually playing basketball for forty minutes. Many cameras are set to generate different materials from different angles. As Ohashi said, we pick from them and then create the visuals from there. I think it would be very difficult to achieve this through storyboards.

Ohashi - There's definitely something good about things that were created by coincidence, isn't there? If there is a storyboard there are only things that were put there intentionally.

Motoda - Also, the director gets in the mindset that he himself is in his youth as a part of it. And it was impressive that he had his own measurements of the speed of characters' actions and reactions, specifying that "This character's heart must respond with this speed", and "The body would start reacting at this kind of speed and respond to the voice like this" when he directed. I'm an animator too, so I could relate to that. But of course, he thought about it more deeply than I did, and I was impressed by the high level of the thought of manga artists. I thought it was amazing.

Ohashi - I wonder if they are all like that?

Motoda - I'd guess just Mr. Inoue?

Ohashi - I told him "It's not fair". When he was checking the basketball scenes while I was editing the timing and making things faster-paced, the director said, "Hmmm... It feels a bit slow here...". So I cut one or two frames then he said "Yes, that's it!". I gained that sort of editing ability after many years of being an animator. I thought "What? Why do you have that ability already?".

Motoda - Oh yeah.

Ohashi - The editor Takita-san said the same thing, "That's not fair!"

***I get the impression that drawing manga and directing movie are similar but different jobs.***

Ohashi - Only they are in different languages.

Miyahara - Oh yeah, right.

Ohashi - It's like there's a vision of what to create but not knowing how to talk about it. So it needs to be translated.

Miyahara/Motoda - Yes.

Ohashi - And the learning speed of the director is crazy fast as well.

Miyahara - He says things like 'add 6 frames there'.

Motoda - Right. He recently started to talk like that.

Ohashi - A director's skill is usually built based on the experience of being presented with the work carefully made by all the staff being asked like, "What do you think?" But Mr. Inoue, compared to most people who get better gradually after working on several projects, jumped to that high level only by doing this one.

***What is the visual direction of this film?***

Miyahara — Director said "Not smooth but with a rough texture." I think that was the number one key phrase. "What can we do to achieve that rough texture?". Seeing the director drawing with Sumi ink, I thought he was looking for that sort of quality, the hand-drawn feel of using those drawing materials.

Ohashi - Also, paper? The director always said "rough texture" or "making it dirty like" about how he wanted the CG. I tended to focus on the drawing materials like brushes and pencils, but there was a moment when I thought it might be paper. There is a rough textured base to draw manga on, then on top of it, what kind of lines should we draw and how should we paint it? He's been fighting with paper for decades, right? That might be what I should try to do.

Miyahara - Doesn't it feel like we are facing a white piece of paper as our opponent?

Motoda - I think it'll come out to be something you've never seen before.

***Are there other requests that the director is particular about?***

Ohashi - Eyes?

Miyahara - Yes, eyes. Eyebrows as well. He says things like "Can you pluck one hair from this edge?"

Ohashi - The director and Mr. Miyahara are having conversations about things that I have no idea about. That's a conversation between drawing artists, isn't it?

Miyahara - I've been making small adjustments like half the line of the lower eyelid. Not a full line but half the line.

Motoda - That's our latest topic, isn't it?

Miyahara - Facial expressions are everything after all.

Motoda - We need to create these facial expressions with the characters' faces that the director currently is drawing.

Miyahara - Yes, with the current ones, not the ones from the past.

Ohashi - The director said, "I'm also growing and improving" and "the best face I can draw right now". There's no way we can draw that.

***How about you all? Is there anything that you are particular about?***

Ohashi - I thought that if an extremely famous artist came, I would feel intimidated or hesitant, which would affect my creativity. So even if I had to pretend to be stupid, I tried not to hold back.

Motoda - Of the three of us, I was the last to join after the production really began. I saw the CG director, Nakazawa-san [Daiki] throwing ideas around and thought, "Ah, it's okay to throw out ideas without being asked in this team." That's part of the reason why I kept making suggestions. I would even rework things that were already OKed.

Ohashi - The director was like, "There was more we could do on that.?"

Motoda - He likes it.

Ohashi - "It's super cool" he says.

Motoda - Of course, it's probably because of the director's large caliber that it is allowed. However, not having to hold back as Ohashi just mentioned helped me a lot.

Miyahara - The atmosphere is really great. I'm sorry to be rude, but I wonder why the atmosphere is so good for a first-time director coming from outside the industry. Film directors have the impression of being at the top of a pyramid, at the top of the staff. But for this film, he's right in the middle of us. He's surrounded by the staff. "The staff is all working together and Director Takehiko Inoue is right in the middle of it." That is what's making our workplace more healthy and comfortable.

***How would you describe film director, Takehiko Inoue?***

Motoda - He's a hard worker. I got a strong impression of an explorer from him.

Ohashi - I think so too.

Motoda - He didn't just easily get to this position, I think he rather worked his fingers to the bone and thought everything through until he was worn out.

Ohashi - I wonder if the director may have toiled to surpass himself the whole time. This title is a work that will receive negative comments from some no matter what he does. Why is he releasing this? I think the past ten years have existed in order to find the answer to that question. Then, I think he probably came up with an answer of his own. And now I think we are also working extremely hard to help him deliver the answer he found.

Miyahara - The director has an absolute measure, so he can do both manga and animation, I think. It is a proper ruler, straight and unshakable, that could be applied to work in any world. That is why he can create a masterpiece even if it's his first time making a movie.

Ohashi - Well then the next film as we...

Miyahara - If the director says "Our next film would be..." it's a win for us.

Ohashi - Yes, yes, yes. I'm doing this because I would be happy if he says, "Making movies is so much fun." If luck is on my side, and that happens, we'll happily come running to work with him again.

Motoda - It might take another ten years from now.

***You've been making it for such a long time, and you've repeatedly scrapped and rebuilt it. Was there a moment when you lost your heart?***

Ohashi - Never. Because I have faith in him. I've seen him struggle so I don't want to easily call him a "genius". But even still, he has overwhelming talent. I have complete trust in his value.

Miyahara - Each time I see the completed drawings, I think about the fact that the audience will be very happy with it when it comes out into the world. I'm working on this project thinking that I want to witness that moment. I will do my best until it is done.

Motoda - Personally, I was playing basketball myself, and it was right around the time the original manga serialization of "SLAM DUNK" began. It was a time that had the most people saying, "I joined the basketball club after watching 'SLAM DUNK'." I had to face the reality that I could not succeed as a basketball player. It was through basketball that I tasted both setbacks and successes. Sometimes human relationships went well, and sometimes they didn't, but I was able to get such important experiences through basketball. After that, I was away from basketball for about 20 years, but I was able to return to it with this film. Also, recently, players such as Rui Hachimura and Yuta Watanabe went to the NBA. Thanks to this film and those players' success, my love for basketball has grown tremendously again. I am grateful to the director Mr. Inoue, and to Mr. Hachimura and Mr. Watanabe for reviving my passion for basketball.

***What kind of movie do you think it will be?***

Ohashi - It's an anime on the outside, but sometimes I feel like I'm making a documentary. Because I'm following these "humans".

Miyahara - They aren't "characters".

Ohashi - It's "humans" that are there.

Miyahara - Normally, I make anime with the stance of "How can I make the audience happy?", but this time I wanted to work in a way that brings out 100% of what is in the director's head. Since he is already facing the audience, I thought that if I can make an image of what the director is thinking, this film would be a success. Therefore, I think that we could call it our achievement if it becomes "Takehiko Inoue = this movie".

Motoda - Agreed. This is The Inoue Film.

# INTERVIEW WITH ANIMATION CHARACTER DESIGNER/ ANIMATION DIRECTOR YASUYUKI EBARA

*Born in 1981, from Gunma prefecture. He has been in charge of drawing and directing animation as a freelancer. In recent years, he has done many productions for Production I.G. and WIT STUDIO. His work as an animation director and action animation director includes “GUILTY CROWN” and “Attack on Titan” series. As a character designer and animation director, he has done “Kabaneri of the Iron Fortress” series.*

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***Please tell us what brought you to become an animation creator.***

Ebara - I have loved drawing since I was a child. Instead of the various other related occupations such as manga artist and illustrator, the reason why I became an animator was because of the craftsmanship of the job. I think I was attracted to the act of drawing pictures as a material and a blueprint, not as a completed illustration.

***Kids who know that there is an occupation called animator are rare, I would assume.***

Ebara - When I was a kid, I really liked anime like “Dragon Ball”. One day there was a TV program that showed the backstage of the production for that show. When I saw a moving character drawn in a flick book in the show, as a kid I was shocked. After that, I saw “Neon Genesis Evangelion” when I was in junior high school, which was another turning point. The second half of that TV series would show the uncolored images of the key frames or... maybe not the key frame but the layout, in the preview of the next episode. By seeing those, I felt like I saw behind the scenes, and I became more interested in the industry as a result of my attraction to the work behind-the-scenes. So, after graduating from high school, I entered an anime vocational school.

***After that, what was the turning point in your professional career?***

Ebara - When I entered the anime industry, I wasn't “better at drawing than other people” or “could draw more movements than anyone else”. I think my skills improved little by little each time I did a project. However, I would say “GUILTY CROWN” was the work that gave me a big chance. From this work onwards, I became closely involved with the director, Mr. [Tetsuro] Araki. Also, I was able to work with people who are very good at this work. I learned about how really talented people draw, and I was inspired by them and it gave me a chance to think about many things. As an extension of that, this was also a job with the director Mr. Araki, but “Kabaneri of the Iron Fortress” was the first time I was in charge of character design for a series. I think I got an offer for the movie “SLAM DUNK” because of “Kabaneri of the Iron Fortress”. After working on the character designs for “Kabaneri of the Iron Fortress” I began to think more deeply about the characters' personalities so that I could show a glimpse of who they are even in a simple standing pose. I think it is related to what I'm doing now.

***You are in charge of character design and animation director for this film, but the order of your work starts from character design, right?***

Ebara - That's correct. It was around the beginning of 2019 that I received an offer from Mr. [Katsuhiko] Kitada, who was involved as a sequence director. Before starting work, I heard, “Doing ‘SLAM DUNK’, the director wants it with the latest style of his drawings, not the same touch from before,” and I thought “Wow...” In other words, we can't use the original manga drawings as they are, so we started by thinking about what we should use as a guideline when creating the character designs. To start off, I drew a character and asked the director, “How do you like it?” Then, I would receive advice such as “I want to do this a little more like this”. He sometimes even added the nuances directly to my drawing with a red pen. I had to create an “image that does not exist”, so I couldn't start without listening to the director. As if I was carving the character, the shape was gradually being adjusted. We continued that kind of exchange for nearly a year.

***Was it a kind of interaction you had never experienced before?***



Ebara - That's right. It was interesting for me. Of course, I was also very nervous. Because after all, the director was also the original author. Usually, when I do character designs for anime based on the original work, I'll look for the point that both parties can agree on and my work is presented to the original author through someone else. But this time I could directly present it to the director in person who is also the original author, like, "I drew this. What do you think?" When I first presented my work to him, I thought, "What kind of job is this?" I thought it was an unprecedented job, and it was a luxurious one too. In the case of normal animation, if there are any corrections to be made after sending it to be checked, the instructions would come back and it ends with a single exchange like "Please do it exactly as instructed". But this time, I was able to have multiple exchanges over a single character. Each time was a learning opportunity that made me think, "This is how I should draw this, huh." As I was working on the character table, I had a feeling that my approach to the touch of the drawing for this project was getting completed little by little.

***Which character was the most difficult to design among the five Shohoku starting members?***

Ebara - I'm not sure if I should describe it as "difficult", but when I drew Sakuragi, I thought, "Oh, is that right?." I read the original manga from when I was in elementary school to junior high school. And this time I learned that the Sakuragi I pictured as a reader was different from the Sakuragi that the director had in his mind. In other words, when I was reading the manga, Sakuragi was older than me. That's why there was an image of Sakuragi being more mature somewhere in my mind.. But then, when I drew him and submitted it, the director said, "Sakuragi is more childish and stupid." I was like, "Oh, that's right, he's a freshman in high school."

***Were there any other "realizations" from the director's corrections?***

Ebara - The director was greatly particular about how the characters' muscles were built. He told me, "Akagi is so muscular that he is called Gori [gorilla], but Sakuragi has more flexible muscles." It was difficult for me to capture the nuance of "flexible muscles". In the end, I had the director correct it by drawing over mine with a red pen. I thought, "I see, this is what he meant." The subtle details that make the curves of the arms exquisite are really amazing. I was surprised every time I saw him draw quickly but full of nuance. If I'm asked to do the same thing, I can't. Anime goes through a lot of peoples' hands before it reaches the final screen. So the original blueprints tend to have rough lines and drawings. I've been involved in animation for a long time and it was becoming [rough] like that for me too. But this time I was asked to deliver delicate lines. I realized that if I didn't pay this much attention to it, it wouldn't achieve visuals like this. That's what I've been paying attention to.

***How is the drawing work going? How would you describe the direction of the drawing in this film?***

Ebara - I wanted to bring it closer to the feeling of the director's recent illustrations. I was aiming to make his recent illustrations move just as they are. Starting from understanding the fact that it wouldn't be the kind of drawing I had been involved with. I've been doing crisp, so-called easy-to-understand anime drawings for a long time, so I started with the question "How should I draw it?" I went through a process of trial and error, trying to figure out what kind of lines to draw to create a drawing like that.

***Probably the thickness of the lines is also greatly considered.***

Ebara - Sure. However, my part is the part that makes blueprints. At the stage of the key animation, it is not possible to completely control the final image. We ultimately aim for that kind of image in the shooting process and the finishing process in the end. However, in order to be able to make the lines thicker and to "soften" the touch or add more nuance later, I kept the key animation in specific ways. That's the consideration I gave to my process.

***How much work do you think you've done so far?***

Ebara - I've been working on it for quite a long time, so I have a feeling that I did "a great amount of work", but even so, the number of finished tasks is probably little over half or so. Also, I think that the director will probably judge it again after seeing it in color and with the acting. I have a feeling that there may be some more work after that.

***Isn't that kind of feeling also something you've never experienced before?***

Ebara - It's never happened before, and I don't think it will ever happen again. It's almost like making something that goes above and beyond the work of "SLAM DUNK". I feel that this is something that is relatively close to the original, rather than the anime of "SLAM DUNK". I feel like I can see the director's thought process. From an ordinary person's perspective, I feel that this is what artistic work is about. This time it's an anime, not a manga, so we outside staff can play a part in it. It's as if the director is carving out a sculpture. He's carving out the final form in his mind carefully so as not to lose its shape, with our help. It's close to that kind of work.

***I get the impression that the production of an animation that has an original source work is about "turning 1 into 100". But as far as I could tell from listening to your stories, I get the impression that you are "creating 1 from 0".***

Ebara - Right, there is a close feeling to "creating 1 from 0". However, from our perspective, it's like "creating what exists in the director's head". So it's kind of a strange job. I think it would be nice if we could all make the "SLAM DUNK" that the director wants. Compared to the beginning, I think I have a better view, but I still can't see the completed final version. I think that we, the creators, also have feelings similar to our audience. I'm really looking forward to it being completed.

# ABOUT GKIDS

Celebrating its 15th anniversary, GKIDS is the producer and distributor of artist-driven and award-winning animation from around the world. The company has scored an astounding 12 Best Animated Feature Oscar nominations with *The Secret of Kells* in 2010, *A Cat in Paris* and *Chico & Rita* in 2012, *Ernest & Celestine* in 2014, *The Tale of The Princess Kaguya* and *Song of the Sea* in 2015, *Boy and the World* and *When Marnie Was There* in 2016, *My Life as a Zucchini* in 2017, *The Breadwinner* in 2018, *Mirai* in 2019, and *Wolfwalkers* in 2021. GKIDS handles North American distribution for the famed Studio Ghibli library of films, one of the world's most coveted animation collections with titles *Spirited Away*, *My Neighbor Totoro*, *Princess Mononoke* and others; as well as the critically acclaimed television series, *NEON GENESIS EVANGELION*. Also, GKIDS is the founder and host of ANIMATION IS FILM, the annual LA-based film festival which embraces the highest aspirations of animation as a cinematic art form, and is a vocal advocate for filmmakers who push the boundaries of the medium to its fullest range of artistic expressions.

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