

# JI-ENT

APRIL 2008

JI-ENT INTERVIEWS "HARUKA" DIRECTOR

## TSUNAKI AKI

DVD REVIEW

## HARUKA

BEYOND THE STREAM OF TIME  
A TALE OF THE EIGHT GUARDIANS

A JI-ENT PICTORIAL

## SAKURA-CON 2008

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

## JI-ENT SPECIAL FEATURE





# J!-ENT INTERVIEW: TSUNAKI AKI

The director of "Haruka: Beyond the Stream of Time-A Tale of the Eight Guardians" on "Haruka", Seattle and the anime industry  
Interview by Michelle Tymon and Dennis A. Amith. Photography by James Ferguson.

In March 2008, "HARUKA: Beyond the Stream of Time-A Tale of the Eight Guardians" director Tsunaki Aki (Last name/First name) was a guest at the Seattle, Washington anime convention "Sakura-Con".

At the time of the interview, anime fans at Sakura-Con were presented with a premiere screening of the first two episodes of "HARUKA: Beyond the Stream of Time-A Tale of the Eight Guardians" (aka "Harukanaru Toki no Naka de").

The first volume DVD was released on April 22nd from Bandai Visual.

Tsunaki's work include "Zeguy" (Character Designer), "Eat-Man '98" (Animation Supervisor), "Pokemon 2000-The Movie" (Animation Director), "Yu-Gi-Oh!" (Animation Director), "Initial D" (Animation Director) and many more.

For "HARUKA: Beyond the Stream of Time-A Tale of the Eight Guardians", Tsunaki's challenging and most spectacular work yet by taking KOEI's "neo romance game" and a beautiful manga series by Mizuno Tohko, taking the characters and the Heian environments of the game and manga to an animated form.

**J!-ENT:** Before we discuss "HARUKA", let's get to know a little bit about you. What was your favorite anime and manga growing up?

**TSUNAKI:** As a child, I liked "Kyojin no Hoshi" and "Ashita no Joe". These are two titles that were very important to me to get into this industry.



**J!-ENT:** Is this your first time in the United States? What do you think of Seattle so far?

**TSUNAKI:** This is my first time. Seattle has been a place I've wanted to visit since I was in junior high school. If I was ever to go on vacation overseas, this was the first place I wanted to visit. And I know it's for work, but I feel very lucky and very happy that I was invited to come here. I'm a very big Bruce Lee fan and his grave is located here in Seattle as well as the university he attended. This place has a lot of importance to him, so it was a place I really wanted to visit. In doing this type of work, Bruce Lee has a lot of influence in what I do. For example, the way he thinks, his philosophy, and he left a lot of important phrases. Whenever I'm in a slump, his

words always make me feel motivated again.

**J!-ENT:** Is there any kind of American food that you wanted to try while here in the US?

**TSUNAKI:** As for food, we actually just went today but it was McDonalds. I wanted to see what the taste was like in the place it originated. I was surprised that the taste wasn't heavy and it was rather light. I was expecting something a lot more heavy and it was actually very easy to eat.

**J!-ENT:** Was it your dream and passion to work in the anime industry or did you expect yourself having another kind of career?

**TSUNAKI:** When I was in high school, I started thinking about wanting to get into this industry. One of the main reasons for that was because of my father. He had many interests such as sports like swimming and fishing and he also liked cameras and photography, especially 8mm cameras. At the time, 8mm cameras were pretty new, so my father would go buy the camera and take footage of their families. It was pretty unusual to get to see yourself moving on a screen at the time, so watching that was a lot of fun.

I liked to play with my father's camera and I thought it'd actually be fun to create my own films and so I filmed my own family using my own scripts and costumes. Then I would gather the children in the neighborhood and show them my films. What I liked to watch was their responses and just to see them react and enjoy it. That was really special to





# J!-ENT INTERVIEW: TSUNAKI AKI

Director of "HARUKA: Beyond the Stream of Time"

me and it was just playing around but I did spend all night working on the films just so I could show it to them the next day. All the troubles and all the editing I had to do was worth it just because of the audience's reaction and that made me want to create something.

**J!-ENT** A lot of anime fans are familiar with anime that you have been involved with such as "Eat-Man 98", "Pokemon 2000-The Movie" and "Yu-Gi-Oh!", of all the past anime series that you have worked on, would there have been a certain series that you have a special fondness for and would love to direct today?

**TSUNAKI:** Well, starting with something like "Initial D", there are series that have an original story and I would like to work on something like that and I would like to work on things that have a lot of movement like sports anime. And if possible, if I could put together the presentation and everything, I would like to work on my own original story, something that I created. I think that would be an ultimate dream.

**J!-ENT:** "HARUKA: Beyond the Stream of Time" volume 1 was released in the US by Bandai Visual but in Japan, you have worked on the film, special and OAV episode of "Harukanaru Toki no Naka de". What types of challenges did you have when adapting the storyline from what was once a manga series to a television series?

**TSUNAKI:** I really wanted to make it something that respected the original story so I wanted to make sure that we took special care in creating the setting for the series and that it didn't destroy the flow of the original story as well as

*"I really wanted to make it something that respected the original story so I wanted to make sure that we took special care in creating the setting for the series and that it didn't destroy the flow of the original story as well as the art style."*

the art style. Aside from the story, the beauty and sensibility of the characters are really important to the fans of the series.

**J!-ENT:** Was there an underlying theme or message that you wanted to convey to the viewers of "HARUKA"?

**TSUNAKI:** I wish that each person that watches the series feels how wonderful romance is, as well as how fragile and painful it could be as well.

**J!-ENT:** The series has a lot of characters that a viewer can feel an emotional bond with. May it be the character of Akane, Tenma, Shimon. But for you, was there a character in the series that you felt that you wanted to see character development as important.

**TSUNAKI:** Even though Akane and the Eight Guardians are the main characters, in the very core of the story Akram plays a very important part. When Akane is summoned to this completely

different world, she is all alone and has no one she can turn to and that is when Akram appears and reaches out to her, but he is an evil person. Despite that, Akane ends up relying on him and ends up being attracted to him so that is one of the conflicts that she faces. From her meeting him in the beginning of the story and then the battle with him goes throughout to the end of the story. So, I feel like he is a very important character of the story.

**J!-ENT:** Because a lot of anime is distributed internationally and "HARUKA" having a storyline that would appeal to international audiences. Were you ever concerned that international audiences might not understand "HARUKA" due to cultural differences between Japan and the rest of the world?

**TSUNAKI:** In the US, animation such as Disney animation has a lot of movement, over exaggerated facial expressions and over the top movement to express their feelings. But in Japan, what's unique is the limited movement with very few frames in the animation and so there are stopped frame scenes that play a very important role, showing a lot of emotion without a lot of movement. There's a lot of expression in the characters eyes.

I often wonder how each person watching the series takes that in and how they understand it. I wonder if they will get what emotion we were trying to convey through the eyes. Of course, in the important action scenes there's a lot of movement. But there is a beauty in the stillness as well as the beauty of the scenery.





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# TSUNAKI AKI

Director of "HARUKA: Beyond the Stream of Time"

**JI-ENT:** One of the beautiful aspects of an anime such as "HARUKA" is the beautiful sceneries used in the animation. Was there any direction to give to the artists on how you wanted the world of "HARUKA" to look and was it a challenge to come up with the actual look versus what look was conveyed in the original manga?

**TSUNAKI:** The setting for the story takes place in a period very much like one thousand years ago in Japan, during the Heian period. Of course, since that is the setting, there are no bright neon signs and when it's dark, it's very dark and at night they would use candle light but still there is very little light that can be expressed in the art. And within this story, there is the presence of beings called "onryou" (evil spirits). There's the concept of evil spirits back then because people looked at the darkness and didn't know what was there and they imagined what could have lived within it. That imagination created demons and mystical creatures and I felt that that was something important to show. Also, for the manga characters it was very difficult. As I mentioned earlier, respecting the original series and Mizuno-san's art was very important to us and just staying true to it.

**JI-ENT:** For "HARUKA", there were a total of 26 episodes, did you feel that you would of liked the storyline to go much longer and there was a lot of underlying storylines that you wanted to feature?

**TSUNAKI:** I definitely felt that 26 episodes weren't enough. The manga is still continuing for "HARUKA" and the

*"Bruce Lee has a lot of influence in what I do. For example, the way he thinks, his philosophy, and he left a lot of important phrases. Whenever I'm in a slump, his words always make me feel motivated again."*

ending hasn't been drawn yet, but we had a deal for the anime series to be finished in 26 episodes. So, the first half of the series is based off the story from the manga but the rest of the story was based off of Akram being the main character and then the relationship of Akane and Akram to the very end and connecting those stories. But if I kept it at that, it would be a very dark and unhappy story, so we wanted to make a comical type story if time had allowed.

**JI-ENT:** Was there any major changes you made during the creation of HARUKA from you original plan? Especially of how a certain character was to be featured in "HARUKA"?

**TSUNAKI:** The ending hasn't been made in the manga yet, so one of the main things that were discussed was the end of Akram and we had a lot of meetings discussing how to handle it. This is also from the manga series as well but there is a demon called "Nue" and there was a storyline for it and we expanded upon it as well as gave it a little bit more detail. Then there was adding lighter touches to the story. It was like adding little small branches

from the original story.

**JI-ENT:** Let's get back to questions of getting to know a little more about you. Is there a foreign country that you like would like to visit?

**TSUNAKI:** Probably somewhere in Europe. Somewhere that has a lot of art, like Paris, Venice and Rome. I'd also like to see the Sagrada Familia as well.

**JI-ENT:** What other influences do you have—such as manga, TV, movies or novels?

**TSUNAKI:** I really enjoyed the setting of the world in "Blade Runner" and thought it was very interesting.

**JI-ENT:** Do you have a favorite director? (any – Japanese, American, Asian, etc.)

**TSUNAKI:** In the case of animation directors, there is Sugino Akio from "Ashita no Joe" as well as Araki Shingo from "Kyojin no Hoshi". If I hadn't seen the works of these two people, I probably wouldn't be here as I am today. They are that influential to me.

**JI-ENT:** Earlier this month, there was news that there would be collaboration between Walt Disney Co. Japan and two Japanese animation companies. When you first heard that, what was your impression of Disney acknowledging Japanese anime.

**TSUNAKI:** For me, their production methods are on opposite ends of the spectrum, but they are both getting something that the other side doesn't have. That is the impression I get.







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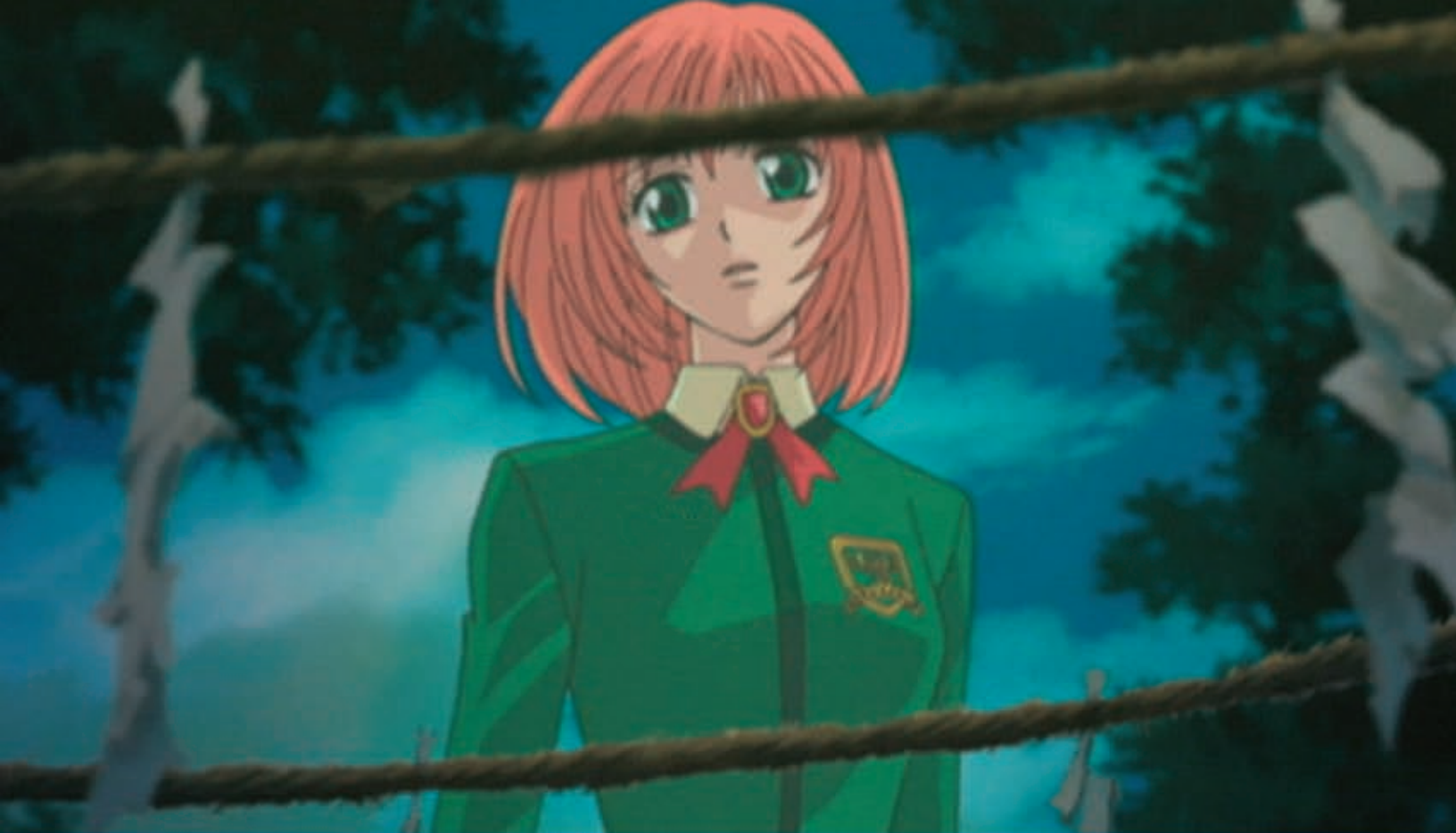


IMAGE: Akane, the main character of the "HARUKA: Beyond the Stream of Time" series

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**J!-ENT: What is your feeling of the state of Japanese animation right now?**

**TSUNAKI:** It's a little bit difficult these days. Currently, it's very hard for good, young talent to grow in the current environment. Due to the production cost issues, a lot of the work instead of staying domestically is taken outside to other countries so the newer talent doesn't get to grow. That is one thing I worry about in this industry.

**J!-ENT: Is there any anime series or manga that you enjoy right now?**

**TSUNAKI:** I don't watch a lot of anime excessively, but I do keep track of what's popular right now and what's being made right now. When new shows begin, I always make an effort to watch the first episode.

**J!-ENT: If you have one word to describe yourself, what word would that be and why?**

**TSUNAKI:** "Walk on", to keep on moving. To keep working without stopping. This is a phrase that once

again comes from Bruce Lee, who I respect. In this business there isn't a retirement age, but when I can't draw anymore that's probably when I'll stop. It's a very similar phrase in Japanese (Keizoku wa chikaranari).

**J!-ENT: In every interview we do, we have a word play which we give you five words, you give us your definition for each word:**

**a. LOVE**

**TSUNAKI:** A privilege for every living creature.

**b. SUCCESS**

**TSUNAKI:** The rings on a bamboo reed. Life is like the length of the bamboo and so each ring is like a success and the length up to that is the growth to get to that success.

**c. CREATIVITY**

**TSUNAKI:** One of the big themes of my life. If I didn't have this, I wouldn't be able to do animation.

**d. PEACE**

**TSUNAKI:** Something that the world and the human race should try to achieve.

**e. AKANE of "HARUKA"**

**TSUNAKI:** Hope.

**J!-ENT: Are you working on any current projects at this time in Japan?**

**TSUNAKI:** I am currently working as an animation director for a new show that is starting in spring. The title is "Neo Angelique".

**J!-ENT: What final message would you like to give to the fans of your work?**

**TSUNAKI:** I heard that Shojō manga is a relatively newer genre in the US so for the people that are watching "HARUKA", I'm hoping it will become a reference for the romance in their life and I hope that they will find their own true romance. ■

MICHELLE TYMON is a translator and entertainment-writer-at-large.

DENNIS A. AMITH is the founder/owner of J!-ENT and is an entertainment-writer-at-large.

For more information on "HARUKA: Beyond the Stream of Time-A Tale of the Eight Guardians", please visit:

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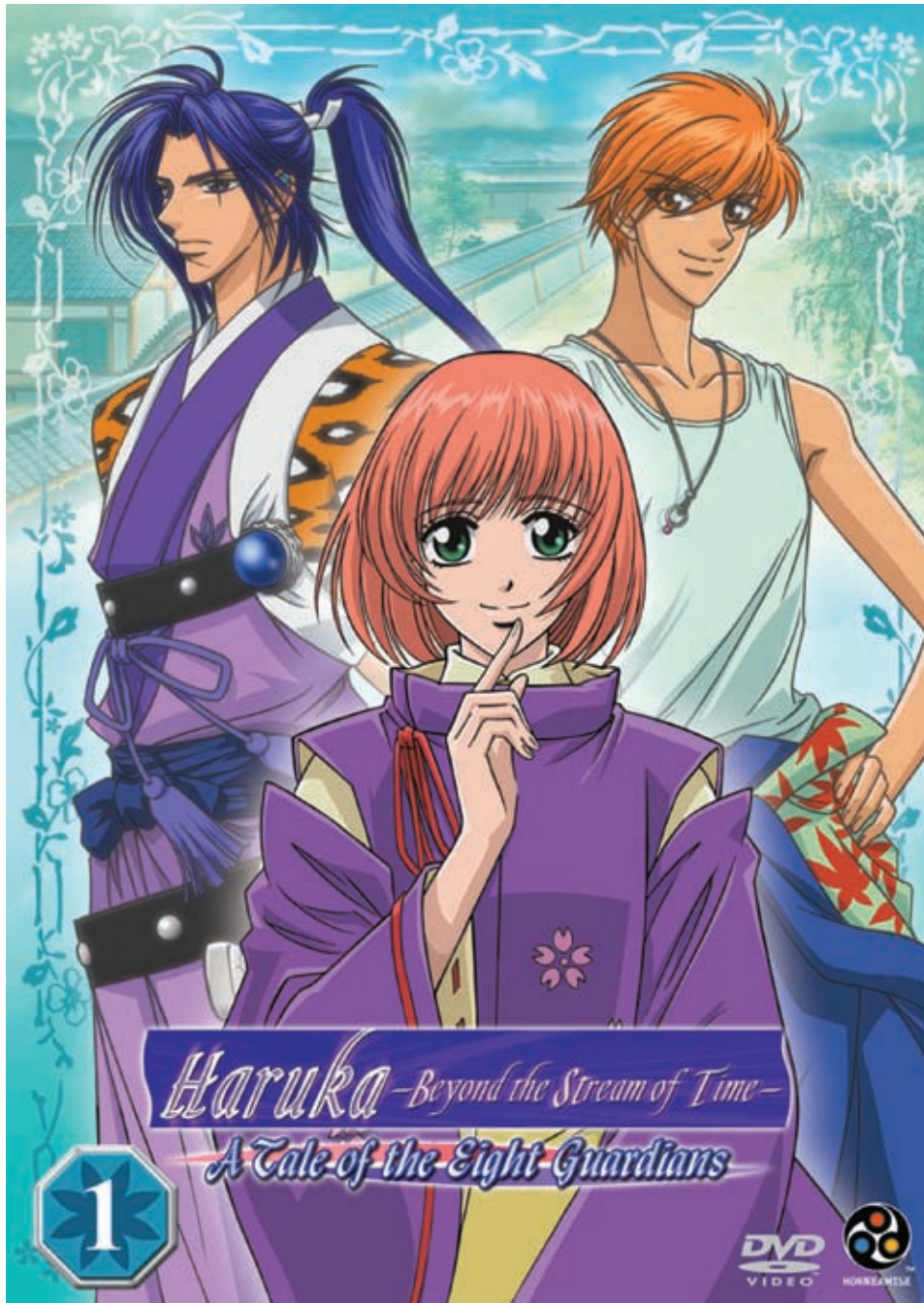
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## THE FATE OF THE PRIESTESS OF THE DRAGON GOD

### HARUKA - Beyond the Stream of Time - A Tale of the Eight Guardians

Volume 1 includes 2 episodes (52 minutes), but volume 2 through 9 will include 3 episodes (74 minutes). Rating: Suggested 13 UP, Released by Bandai Visual, Region 1, 16:9LB Anamorphic, released on April 22, 2008

Beyond the stream of time, there lay a peaceful capital city on sacred ground protected by Four Gods.

One day, the Four Gods were stolen away and the capital of this alternate world is over-

run by vengeful spirits.

"HARUKA-Beyond the Stream of Time-A Tale of the Eight Guardians" is a tale of Akane, the chosen priestess of the Dragon God and her Eight Guardians as they clash against the demon clan in hope of saving the capital.

The storyline of "HARUKA" may be reminiscent to past anime hits such as "Fushigi Yuugi" and "The Vision of Escaflowne" which three high school students, Akane and her friends Tenma and Shimon are whisked away to another world.

But that's where the comparisons end. The story based on the hit manga series "Haru-

kanaru Toki no Naka de" by Mizuno Tohko (currently serialized on "Shojo Beat") features a storyline that takes place in the Heian period and you are introduced to several characters in the first two episodes.

In the first episode, you see the demon known as Akram who summons Akane to another world.

Akane, alone and separated away from her friends learns that she has special powers and is told that she is the priestess of the Dragon God but with people wanting to be close to her, she doesn't know who to trust.

What she does know is that she has destructive power that she has no control of. Power that could save the peaceful capital city or power to destroy everyone.

I found the first two episodes engaging, enjoyable and visually, the artwork and character designs to be lush and beautiful.

The beauty of the Heian period is captured very well in the anime series and the characters are well-acted.

There are a total of 26-episodes in the entire series and Bandai Visual plans to release a total of nine volumes.

Each volume contains an 8-page booklet which features artwork, an episode synopsis, character profiles, poetry and staff interview with director Tsunaki Aki and other creators.

The DVD is only in Japanese with English subtitles but I hope that doesn't deter a curious viewer because the Japanese voice acting on "HARUKA" features a very good number of top notch voice actors which include Kawakami Tomoko (Utena from "Revolutionary Girl Utena", Chiriko of "Fushigi Yuugi" and Noelle of "Tenshi ni Narumon"); Shin-Ichiro Miki (Kojiro (James) of "Pokemon", Fujiwara Takumi of "Initial D" and Urahara Kisuke of "Bleach"); Tomokazu Seki (of "Gundam" fame and also Van Fanel of "The Vision of Escaflowne", Hidaka Ken of "Weiss Kreuz") and more.

As for special features, there is bonus footage of "The Demon's Soliloquy" which is more or less the demon Akram talking about the next upcoming episode.

As for the first two episodes alone, I'm pretty much guessing that the viewer will be in for one emotional roller coaster storyline filled with a lot of action throughout the whole series.

The first volume of "HARUKA -Beyond the Stream of Time-A Tale of the Eight Guardians" is definitely one of the most beautiful and enjoyable anime to come out in 2008. Definitely check it out!

— DENNIS A. AMITH

**J!-ENT DVD RATING: A**



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