

Magic Knight Rayearth Anime

Season 1

Lucy Robin

Intro

Cephiro's in danger and the magic knights have been summoned, but can they save it and Princess Emeraude in just 20 episodes?

We're Lucy and Robin, and we'll be your guides through CLAMP's Wonderland!

Check-In

- It was very hot, but we survived!
- This summer is going quickly, though...

Background

- The Rayearth Tv anime ran from October 1994-November 1995, ending far earlier than the run of the manga, and is told in two 'seasons' to match with the two 'parts' of rayearth.
 - The first half is 20 episodes, the second 29.
 - We're splitting it up into sections so we can tackle this with enough depth to be satisfying but also not just...die of sitting too long. So this installment is our discussion of the first 20.
- I don't have exact dates but the anime went into production around the time the manga started running, some time in 1993, it was kind of fast-tracked thanks to Sailor Moon being such a hit that Nakayoshi magazine and Yomiuri Telecom were hungry to keep the color-coded-best-gal-pals-fighting-evil train going.
- Ohkawa had the story pretty much figured out from the beginning, but both wanted to avoid spoiling everything in the manga AND like, had to make concessions to TV writing and the needs of a longer, more slowly-paced production.
 - We actually have a lot of interviews from the time period about this production! It was the first TV anime production for a CLAMP title and it was a heavily promoted show.
 - We'll discover more as we progress through the years, but I am under the impression from interviews that this was the most involvement CLAMP ever had in anime production. And it was a LOT of involvement. While they did have an in-house writer, Keiko Maruo, who wrote a lot of cute stuff in the 80s like Mapletown Stories and Fairy Princess Persia, Ohkawa actually worked on scripts, which she hadn't really done before.
 - In the CLAMP no Kiseki interview, she makes light of the challenge, "The anime was going to be shown at 7 pm, so there were some restrictions

and requests. For example, if it was going to be shown near New Year's Day, they'd want some kind of New Year's theme in the story."

- Toshihiro Hirano directed it—he's also known as Toshiaki Hirano, the name which is on his current production company.
 - This guy got his start doing animation while he was still in school, but ended up really making name for himself doing character animation for the very successful Macross: Do You Remember Love? movie—and also for his sexy manga for the VERY influential 80s ecchi brand Lemon People that got OVAs he also worked on—most relevantly for us, though not for this first season, is Layer 1, we'll come back to that next month but the main character babe has a VERY distinctive look!
 - He's still prominent in the industry to this day, but another fun fact about him is that he's married to Narumi Kakinouchi, the mangaka behind Vampire Princess Miyu, and worked on all the Vampire Princess Miyu anime/OVAs, AW! I think he worked on the manga with her a bit, too. Love a married team, ha!
 - He worked on the VERY influential Megazone 24 animation with the woman who became the character designer/animation director for Rayearth, and maybe that had something to do with her being hired for this project!
- Atsuko Ishida. She's VERY interesting to me, and I wanted to spend a little time talking about her, too. Because while this series is based on CLAMP's work and they are usually given the most prominent billing for creating it, the anime is distinctive not just in how it translated their work for the screen, but also the special touches added by Atsuko Ishida.
 - She was a very prominent animation director and character designer in the 80s and 90s, though she focuses more on manga these days, like the recent shoujo romcom Zassetsu Otoko to Manga.
 - I think her Flowery Orange Pekoe artbook was pretty influential, too—even if just with anime fans who were excited to see production work and ~spicy~ art.
 - Interestingly enough, she was the character designer/art director on Shamanic Princess, and OVA series that came out in 1996, so something she was working on at pretty much the same time—and it's a slightly sexier kind of girl-focused fantasy anime, not totally unlike Rayearth but aged up a bit? And in the US at least, that OVA series is often advertised as 'for fans of CLAMP'--a testament to how big of a mark CLAMP has left on a certain generation of fans here, and how much weight their name carried in the market! We should do a bonus episode on Shamanic Princess, honestly.
- But the rest of CLAMP actually did a lot of concept work for the anime, including contributions to the object and background design. And I feel like that really paid off? Many times in this anime there are little details with more CLAMP-ish design elements than a busy production staff would necessarily have time and capacity to lavish attention on normally.
 - In an interview from the Rayearth Materials Collection, which I wish I had and will look for next time I'm at a con or a Book-Off, Nekoi says she did all the animal designs for episode 8, which we'll talk about more later but oh man.
 - So much of the writing and work that Ohkawa had to do really went into the second half, so that the anime would stand on its own and not spoil the manga ending, so we'll talk way more about that in our next episode.
- Oh! And the music—it's also pretty great. The sound track is by [Toshihiko Sahashi](#), who is SO prolific—everything from Akazukinchacha to Zipang! But notably The Big O, Gundam Seed and Seed Destiny, all the Full Metal Panic series, Hunter X Hunter, and Ultraman Gaia and Mebius!

- The opening theme, Yuzurenai Negai, was awarded the "Best Theme Song" at the first ever Animation Kobe Awards in 1996! And will remain playing in the back of my mind forever. The widely known English dub of this anime that was available in the US when we were kids had a dubbed theme song which, wow what a project to have to do, kinda haunts my dreams with how saccharine and smiley it sounds to me? But the music side of it is amazingly shot through with wailing 80s guitars and we had a great time with it during our watch party. It is definitely a song to pump your friends up before you go fight evil!
- Rayearth did not end up on TV in the US to take over the Sailor Moon timeslot, which nerds at the time actually were expecting!
- But it did end up on TV in the Philippines where it made a big impact and super influenced the generation who watched it. I'd love to hear from filipino fans!

Discussion

- Ok, since we just spent like six episodes discussing the plot of the Rayearth manga, we're not going to give complete play-by-plays of the anime. Instead, we're going to discuss the ways it differed from the manga in pretty broad strokes.
- Season 1 covers the first half of the manga, or Rayearth 1 (depending on your reckoning). Basically, it goes from the beginning to the climactic and traumatizing conclusion with Emeraude.
- It was a really fun watch, and I think they did a good job of successfully stretching the plot to fit into 20 episodes.
 - They mostly did this by extending the parts of the story where the girls are traveling.
 - For instance, they spend much more time having adventures in the Forest of Silence on their way to the Legendary Spring Eterna.
 - In this version, there is a large ominous rock that keeps magic out of the forest. It also seems to have changed gentle forest creatures into monsters.
 - So, naturally, the girls have to destroy this rock, with some help from Ferio.
 - Once the stone is gone, the girls are able to use magic, but that also opens them up to attacks from Alcione and the like.
 - Basically, this allowed the show to spend way more time in the Forest of Silence without slowing down character progression, and I think it was cleverly done.
 - They also added in episodes to help the girls advance their powers and their weapons, which basically served as character-development. There's a whole episode where Umi is stuck in an illusionary version of her old life, and has to make the choice to go back and help her friends.
 - Hikaru has a similar episode, where she has to give up on the things she misses and focus instead on the challenges in Cephiro.
- They also make some interesting changes to Ferio's character. He kind of felt like a different character, but not in a bad way!
 - The show developed his character into more of a trickster. They took the fact that he's lying about his past, and made lying and trickery a key character trait.

- Yes, this made him feel kind of different, but it also added some depth to his character. There was more room in general to play with characters, and I think they did a good job of developing him along with the girls.
- Instead of an earring, Ferio gives Fuu a brooch that allows them to communicate over long distances, and that helps him be part of the ongoing plot. They frequently meet up with him, sometimes without realizing he's on their tail, and it was almost always a delight.
- He even works with Ascot and Caldina at points, which I think served as good character development for all of them.
- Towards the end of the series, we learn that Ferio is being flippant about his past because it's also been obscured from him. When his sister became the pillar, he asked her to have his memories removed so that he wouldn't be a burden to her, since the pillar can only pray for Cephiro, not people she cares about.
 - As Emeraude's powers weakened, the seal on his memories was broken, and this serves as another sign that the girls are approaching the final battle. It also gives us a little insight into Emeraude, and some foreshadowing of what's to come.
 - Also, this really made me think about what life was like *before* the pillar...since clearly there was a before, right? But isn't Emeraude the only pillar they've ever had? Oh well, I guess we'll need to watch season 2 before we can really address that.
- From about the second episode on, we get to see much more of Cephiro and its citizens than in the manga.
 - We were kind of expecting this, since it would be hard to create 20 episodes and *not* show more of the land and its people. The show still stayed pretty separate from them, though, mostly focusing on the main characters.
 - We also get to see more monsters, which is nice, because it means we also get to see the girls kick more monster butt.
 - There was definitely a town called Bentley--it may have been where they ran into Presea? SO yeah, the car names were still in play!
- We were surprised at how long Alcione survived in this version. She was defeated around the same point as in the manga, but then she was just hanging out in the background for pretty much the whole series.
 - I'm not even 100% sure she *did* die.
 - With her personal investment in gaining Zagato's favor, she actually sabotaged Ascot for an episode, which helped extend his arc for much longer, as well--it took many more episodes of him trying to defeat the girls before he was convinced not to use his monster friends that way.
 - They, they managed to draw out most of the minions' arcs, which also allowed more time for character development.
 - Anyway, Alcione's survival meant *she* was the one pointing out how Zagato's actions didn't make sense if he really just wanted to rule over Cephiro. It also meant she got to find out that he was in love with Emeraude, not her, and that

added an extra touch of betrayal that was somehow a little more impactful than him straight up killing her.

- Speaking of deaths, Presea totally died in this version. The manga did leave her in a kind of bad spot, so I can see why the anime might take that to the extreme and add some extra motivation for the girls, but it's going to be interesting to see how they handle that in season 2.
 - This is definitely the kind of moment that happened because the anime was out-pacing the manga and CLAMP not only didn't have total control over the script, they actually NEEDED to let it diverge and trust that having two different versions was going to work out for them.
 - Which we've already explored a lot with X, but the X movie didn't happen until 1996, and the TV series came out in the 2000s, so this was the first time CLAMP fans would experience the diverging versions!
- This is kind of an aside, but with Clef actually having an adult man voice, I think he actually read as like, a halfling/hobbit to me, not an adult-in-a-child's-body?
 - He spent most of the anime turned to stone and like, communicating with the girls through the gems on their armor or something
- There is one significant anime-only character in this season, a elf-looking guy named Inouva, who basically acts as Zagato's right-hand man.
 - He's there from the beginning, but gets his first chance to shine around episode 15, when Zagato allows him to attempt to defeat the magic knights. Disguised as a sickly woman, Inouva tries to keep them from getting to Windum's temple, and ends up capturing Ferio as a hostage.
 - This was also a like...he was seducing Ferio to make Fuu sad and destabilize their team kind of plan.
 - A few episodes later, Inouva fights them for real, this time in his true form. Apparently he's an elemental that Zagato helped become human. He decides to turn back to his true form, even though it will be a one-way transformation, to help Zagato achieve his mission.
 - Lucy called his human form his "skinsonna," and we can never unhear that.
 - Overall, he was an interesting character. I think they could have done the season without him, but he did give another side to Zagato's character.
- I think the twist was foreshadowed a little differently, and that it read a little differently, too
 - Zagato felt a bit more villainous, and was cruel to Alcione over a longer period of time.
 - It was still the same basic ending, but Presea's death made Hikaru resolve not to let anyone else die BEFORE the end of the series, which changed the stakes a lot!
 - And villagers were scared of the Magic Knights, as if they knew more about their role than they were comfortable explaining.
 - In the manga, other than his treatment of Alcione, Zagato is only CODED as a villain but doesn't actually do much that's specifically evil?

- He's more active shitty to the main characters and his henchpeople in this.
- **When** we read the manga, we kind of predicted that the anime, in drawing out the adventure, would feel more like a video game.
 - After all, the comic reads at such a fast clip with none of the 'grinding for levels' type feeling that JRPGS at the time, especially, were known for.
 - And there were elements of this series that did kinda play into that?
 - Largely Mokona's role!
 - Since Mokona can produce anything they need, like food, and also a kind of structure for them to sleep in--like the Tents in final fantasy games or Leomund's Tiny Hut in D&D, that gave them this less-grounded more-convenient travelling that read as video-gamey to me.
 - Also Mokona's map of where they've gone felt very video-gamey
 - There were some jokes that used video game UI in creative ways, but they were very light on this actually--if anything, the anime underplayed the 'video game' comparisons!
 - Despite the adventure being drawn out, it wasn't actually repetitive monster-of-the-week, random-encounter type plots!
 - Each thing they had to defeat had weak points they had to discover, little mini-mysteries, often involving the townsfolk or delving into the motivations of Ascot, Caldina, Alcione, and Ferio.
 - And while maybe the plot/world felt a little bit like what would have been typical for games at the time, it was more like they were both reaching towards a similar epic-high-fantasy goal.
 - **I'm** struck by how much MORE video-gamey the Sailor Moon anime was than this!
 - Entirely because it is more formulaic, which I think is the like, top-down structural element I associate with games. A game-play loop.
 - In the First Scenario Collection book that was put out for this anime, there's an interview with the director and Ohkawa, and he says something REALLY INTERESTING.
 - --to paraphrase, he didn't want the episodes to be formulaic. Like, sailor moon is 4 times as long, but it also have a very familiar pattern to each episode—which some directors (like our hero Ikuhara, of later Sailor Moon seasons and Utena fame) use to great effect—establishing a pattern means enforcing meaning, but also breaking it leaves a big impact! But Hirano said that 'time to fight, to transform, get the strongest robot, and defeat the enemy for some reason'--that just didn't fit the story of Rayearth. Which is interesting, because it sure does fit the idea of a JRPG!
 - But he's right, it doesn't fit with the elements and pacing that make up the core of this work.

- And then we realized that the moe shows that have become ubiquitous basically ARE ALWAYS IN SUPER DEFORMED STYLES
- And our minds were blown by how much change there actually has been in the visual language of anime JUST SINCE WE HAVE BEEN FANS????
- Yeah, a lot really has changed, especially when it comes to the gag-style comedy shows. Like, whatever became of Hammer Space? You just don't see beats like that anymore.
- And speaking of my boyfriend, I think a highlight for all of us was getting to those last few episodes, and watching him experience The Twist for the first time.
 - Like us, he had kind of suspected things were up between Zagato and Emeraude, but he was totally floored by her turn.
 - Now, it's going to be really interesting to see how he reacts to the second half...and, since we either haven't seen it or barely remember it, it's going to be interesting to see how it all shakes out in general!

Outro (edit for flavor)

We're looking forward to the next 20 episodes because we KNOW there will be a bunch more divergence to discuss! We will be splitting the season season into two viewing session, and thus two episodes, to protect the sanity of us and all of our friends who we are dragging along for the ride.

Until then, you can follow us on twitter, Tumblr, and Instagram @Clampcastpod, on Facebook as Clampcast in Wonderland, and on our website clampcastinwonderland.com.

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Thanks for coming with us on our journey through CLAMP's Wonderland!

Until next time, remember that everything will be alright—

—and try not to lose an eye!