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Tour of Anime International Company (AIC)

Posted on Friday, March 26 @ 05:25:14 2004 by [Staff](#)

[bckat](#) writes "Arriving late is never cool, but the head office of Anime International Company (AIC) is in Nakamurabashi, a local train stop in Tokyo and not an express stop. As luck would have it, my friend and I were stuck on an express train.

It was already dark when we made our way down a typically narrow Japanese city street toward AIC. Soon we arrived at a nondescript three-story building. To the right of the entrance was a ubiquitous nest of commuter bikes. Across the way a life-size Spider-Man inflatable doll filled a second-floor window of a hair salon.



Our tour of AIC started on the third floor where the production management team does its planning and scheduling. It looked pretty much like any other busy, paper-cluttered workplace. But though it was evening, no one looked like they were going home anytime soon.

AIC's five production teams have churned out such highly recognizable titles as Tenchi Muyo!, Ah! My Goddess, Bubblegum Crisis, El-Hazard, and Vampire Princess Miyu. Founded in 1982, AIC's first releases were Mega Zone 23 and Gall Force. Their first fully digitized, all CG anime was Mahou Yuugi (Magical Witchland), a five-year project which premiered in 2001.

On the second floor, an all-female team of digital painters was using PaintMan to color Tenchi Muyo!, as well as a subcontracted title. A painter might routinely finish a hundred frames a day. After three or four years, a painter could look forward to becoming a color designer.



We watched someone editing in another section. A stack of storyboards sat forlornly nearby. Then we met a character designer for BPS (Battle Programmer Shirase) who was doing quick roughs of a woman character.

The first floor is the animators' room. The inbetweeners are the basic staff or minimum wage earners in a studio. Higher up in the pecking order are the key frame animators, storyboarders, and directors.



In the basement, we were shown gorgeous background art for El-Hazard that just happened to be lying around. Our guide pulled additional artwork from their archives. I left the premises happily waving a pencil drawing from Ai No Kusabi.

But our tour guide saved the best for last as we enjoyed dinner at a small neighborhood Chinese restaurant with [Hiroki Hayashi](#), introduced to us



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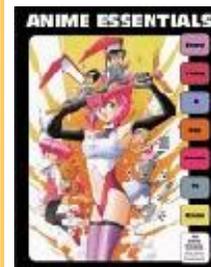
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simply as the director of El-Hazard and Burn-Up Scramble, currently airing on TV. Hayashi is associated with many of AIC's titles either as a creator or director: Battle Athletes, Bubblegum Crisis, [The Legend of Black Heaven](#), Magical Witchland, Tenchi Muyo!, to name a few.

When my friend and I were on our way home to sleep, Hayashi and our tour guide returned to AIC to continue working through the late night and early morning hours.

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