



Project Introduction:

Whew hey everyone! So this is the beginning of a project that I have had in the back of my mind for quite some time and finally decided to start working on. A quick rundown of what this actually is, it's a somewhat showcase of the animation found within the main One Piece anime (so, no movies/specials/filler arcs between canon arcs etc. although that may be something I will attempt to tackle one day if this does well). This will also include some insight into the anime industry and essentially give some insight on behind the scenes and why certain decisions are made as well as giving names of the hard working animators to their respective scenes. Hopefully this whole thing will continue to give a bit of insight into the One Piece anime as I believe that it is greatly underappreciated and while criticisms of it are valid, there definitely needs to be more of an understanding as to why the anime is the way it is. This will be a long journey ahead so please bear with me! Let's get started!

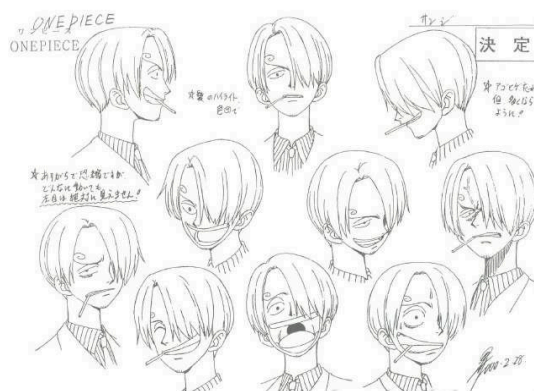
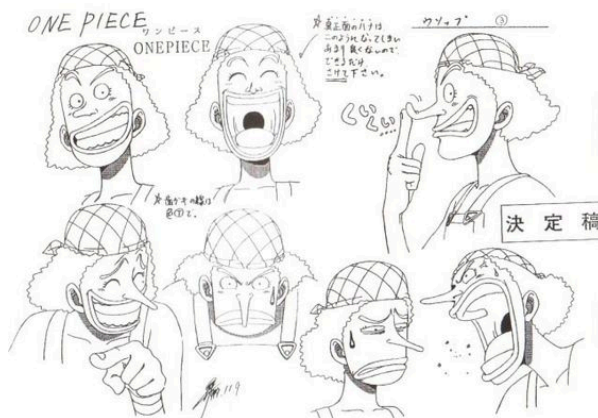
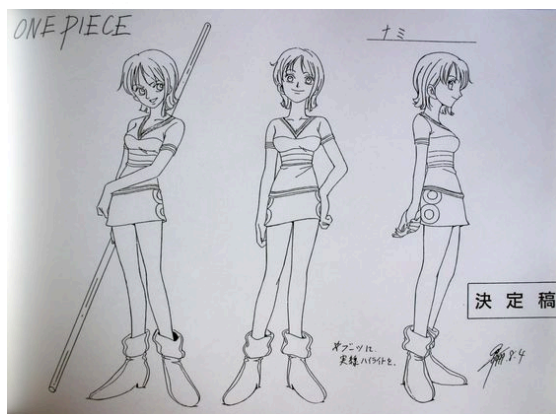
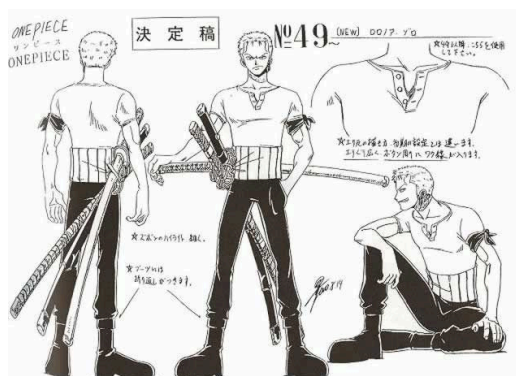
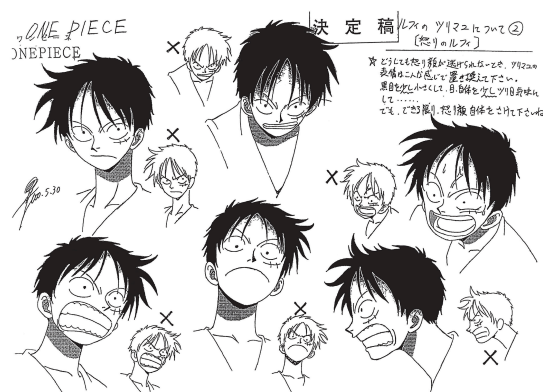
The One Piece anime, including movies and specials, is animated by Toei Animation, and they are responsible for many other famous animated properties and adaptations, including Digimon, Dragon Ball/Z/GT/Super, Sailor Moon, Toriko, Gegege no Kitaro among many others. They animate many different series and have a big load to take on. This is something that will be touched on later, because it greatly affects the anime in later years. But for now, I'll be going through the arcs, starting with the East Blue saga.

East Blue:

The East Blue saga is made up of episodes 1-53 (including some filler) and consists of quite actually not that many noteworthy animated scenes, even though it covers many arcs (*Shells Town, Orange Town, Syrup Village, Baratie, Arlong Park, LogueTown*). Animation throughout this portion of the anime was quite limited, using minimal movement and taking appropriate shortcuts where necessary. Scenes are also quite hard to tell exactly who animated what due to the style consistency. There are a few noteworthy scenes though, but first I would like to introduce the rough structure of how the anime is made.

An important part in animation is someone who is the *Character Designer*, someone who essentially designs the characters and in this case, attempts to replicate Oda's style for it to be

easily animated. During this part of the anime, the character designer is **Noboru Kizumi** who would continue to be the character designer for the anime for the next 10 or so years. These are the some of the sheets he made for the main characters:



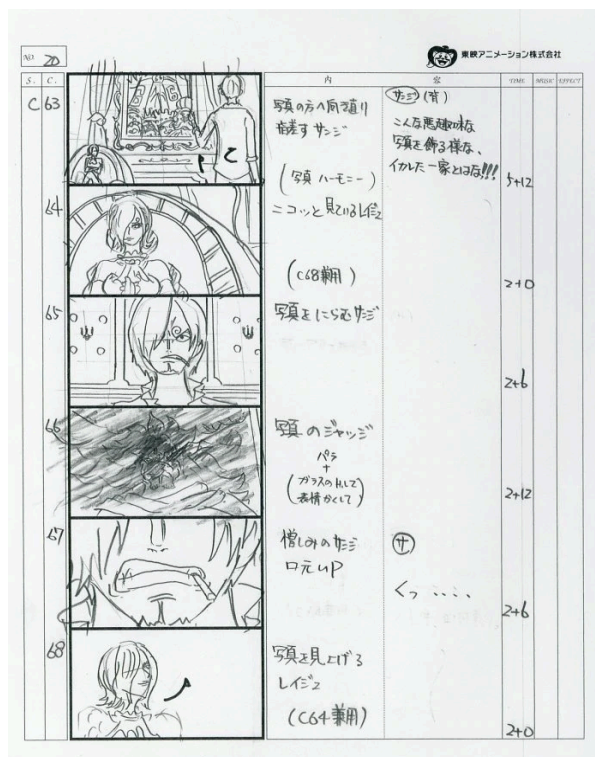
This is something I'll continue to showcase as we continue to go through each of the arcs, showcasing the strawhats as they pop up in the story. When the time comes, we will also compare the changes of style and why things have changed. But for now, I'll just present the first designs.

One Piece at this stage was very cartoony and had quite a different style, especially compared to a lot of the current anime/manga at the time and it still continues to have a distinctive style to

this day. Following these sheets allows for a good sense of continuity, which is very important with anime. If anyone out there attempts to draw something without looking at a reference, it's not going to look quite as well as we want it to. So in using a reference, we can have a better grasp as to how the character looks from certain angles, heights compared to other characters, facial expressions and more.

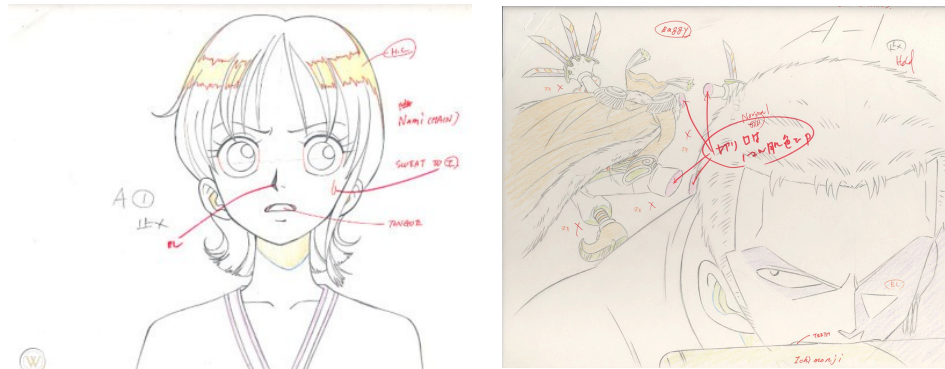
In order to keep these characters looking somewhat similar so as to not disrupt the viewer's experience by seeing jarring styles, someone works as a *Chief Animation Director*. They aim to ensure that characters remain consistent throughout the episode, and that they are *on model*. So, how is this achieved? Well, we'll have a look at the process on how something is conceptualised and then put to screen.

Initially, a script is conducted. Going through the manga, people take what is deemed necessary material and put it into script format. It is important to note that as the anime and manga continue to go on for years, the gap between the anime and manga release shortened significantly, resulting in pacing issues. Keep this in mind for later as this is something I plan to touch on. Then a storyboard is created, having very rough lines in order to convey what is to be created. Here is an example:

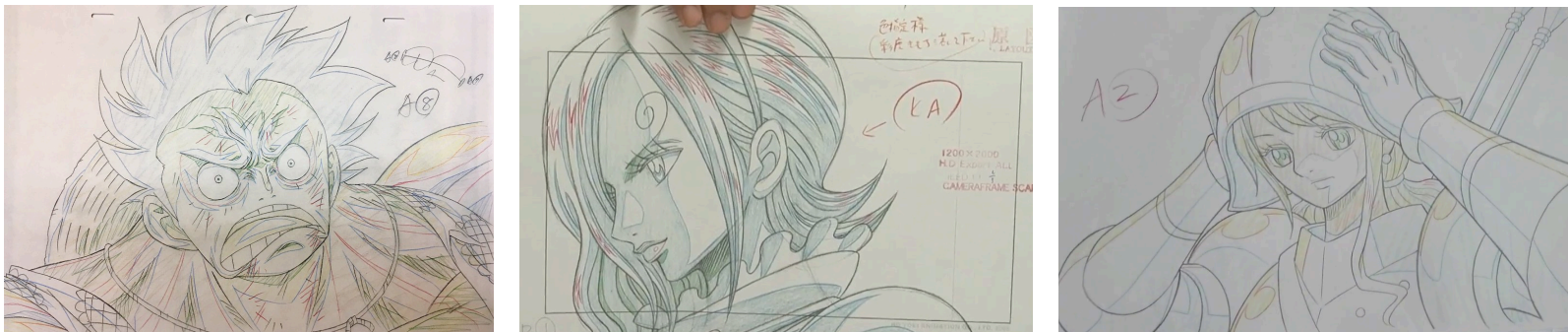


A good storyboard can make or break an episode, as it dictates angles, how long scenes linger on screen, etc. Once the storyboard has been decided on, the animating can begin. Scenes are appointed to animators, where they create something called *Genga*.

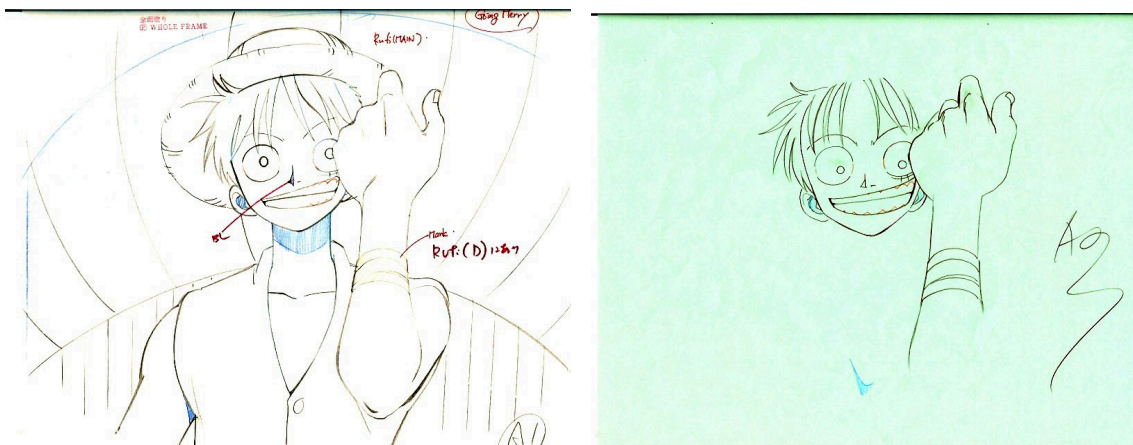
This is done on paper, similar to how it's done in other parts of the world. Here are some examples of older Genga:



Even though times have changed and anime has become digital, with some animators now exclusively animating digitally, the anime industry still uses Genga, using paper and pencil to create their scenes. Here are some examples of newer Genga:

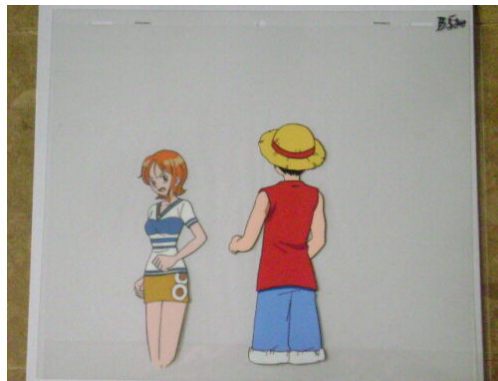


Once the genga has been created, the *Chief Animation Director* will go in and correct what is necessary to ensure that the style remains consistent. Others may also help participate in this process, such as an *Animation Supervisor*. Here is an example of a Genga being corrected to ensure that it remains consistent in style:



In doing something like this, some animators can animate great action and keep their lines rough to save time, and an *Animation Supervisor* can clean it up and make it look good.

After this has been completed, the Genga is then made into what is called Animation Cels. This is not exclusive to Japan, as for decades this is a process that has been used. This is a transparent sheet that had the lines and colours painted on, and is then photographed over painted backgrounds. Yeah...A long and dubious process indeed. This is not common place anymore due to how time consuming it is, and with the rise of digital, creating colours, effects, filters and backgrounds are much faster and easier to accomplish. Here are some examples of One Piece animation cels:



I would have much preferred to share cels directly from the anime itself and not the movies but they are quite difficult to come across and have more than likely been sold off from Toei long ago. But they will suffice, as it gives a good idea as to what they look like.

But voila! Animation has been created! All that's left is music, sound effects and voice over and you've got yourself an anime. Wonderful. Easy right? Yeah, not exactly. All of this takes time and patience. And this is something that needs to be remembered. *Time*. A very important keyword in the animation industry and a lot more important than the word *budget* that likes to get thrown around. Due to One Piece being a long running weekly series, the animators have a lot less time than, say, *My Hero Academia* or *Demon Slayer*, two very prominent seasonal anime. These series do not have more money shoved into them, more *budget*, than One Piece that results in higher quality and consistent animation, a problem the One Piece anime definitely faces further down the road.

Here's an example:

Michelangelo is one of the most famous artists of all time, due to his remarkable attention to detail in his works present in the High Renaissance period. One of his most famous works is the Statue of David, an incredible piece of work that was worked on for

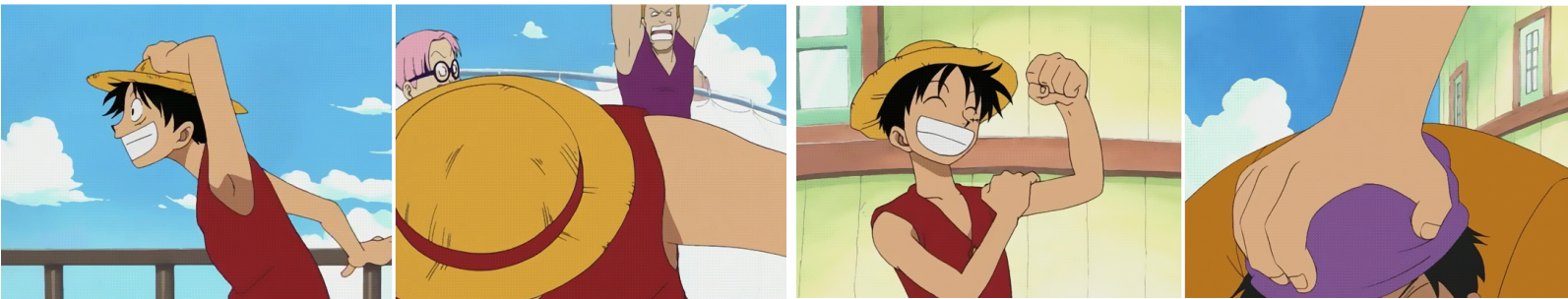
3 years. However, if you were to tell him to replicate it but say, give him a month, he's not going to get anywhere near the same results as the piece where he spent 3 years on. It would be quite rough around the edges, and quite rushed. No matter how much money you throw his way, he still won't be able to get anywhere *close* to those results. And this is the same with any artist, including animation. This is a big misconception in the anime community, and that is that as long as you throw money at people, they're going to end up creating incredible works, regardless of the poor time management. That is just not how it works.

This does seem like quite a ramble, and it's already quite long prior to even reaching the main aspect of this whole project, in which I showcase animators, but this is important background information that needs to be understood prior to delving in. With that very long introduction, let's now get to showcasing animators!

Some of the animators that were present on many early One Piece episodes include: Kazuya Hisada, Masahiro Shimanuki, Naoki Tate, Jin Inaba, Tadayoshi Yamamuro. Please note, there are many others involved animating wise, but these are some key names, and ones that will develop and evolve as the years go on.

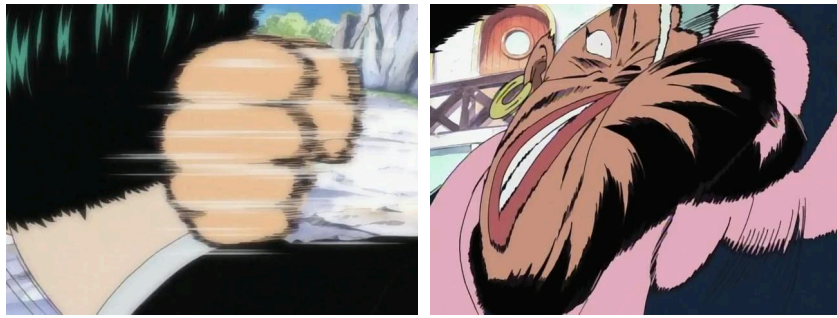
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Kazuya Hisada is someone who will pop up later and fulfill a more important role in the series, but in the early days he created some great scenes with some snappy timing, while using lines to help convey impact. He is found throughout early One Piece, however due to the limited animation and consistent style thanks to **Noboru Kizumi**, he can be difficult like most during this era to spot.



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Hideaki Maniwa is more prominent in his animation, being more pronounced due to his camera movement on his characters. He also created the most animated piece of early One Piece in [episode 23](#) where he creates seemingly natural movement of the background of the ship and water, making the sea feel powerful and heavy.



He uses subtle smears usually on impact to further enhance the idea that whoever is being hit, is being hit HARD.



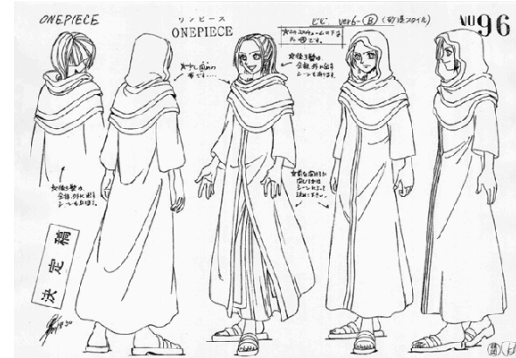
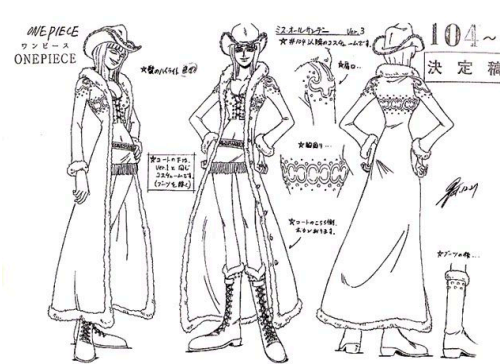
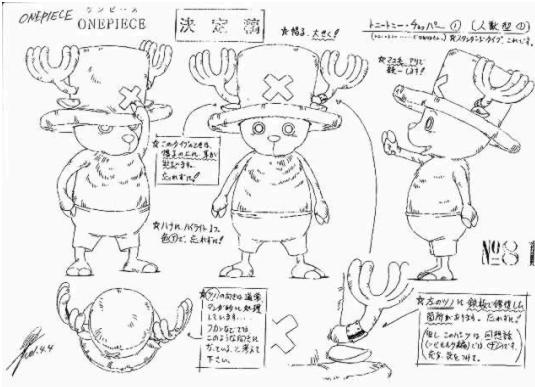
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So what have we learnt so far.

Well, there is a lot of hard work that goes into the production of an anime series, and that is no different with One Piece. Early episodes for the most part had not too many interesting scenes animation wise, and the animators essentially got the work done in order to produce and release the series week to week. It will continue to be a bit of a slow start, with arcs like Alabasta and SkyPiea being similar in the regard of not many noteworthy scenes however, we can begin to see the cracks of emerging stars and evolving styles that will later become staples within the series.

Alabasta:

Alabasta continues on with episodes 62-130 (including filler). Character Designer, **Noboru Kizumi**, continues to create his designs for the next few strawhats (and Vivi!). He continues to replicate Oda's style quite well, save for the lankiness of the long limbs. However this usually appears when animators animate action scenes.



Names from very early One Piece continue to be present, however some more animators begin to shine throughout these periods.

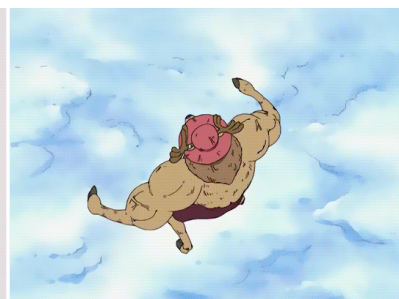
Katsumi Ishizuka is an animator that has strong beginnings with One Piece, with very strong character acting in more humorous scenes and heavy action. Like **Hasada**, his use of speed lines are incredibly strong, making his scenes feel fast and his impact feel heavy. Alabasta shows his first climax scene, in which he animates the Gomu Gomu no Storm performed by Luffy against Crocodile. He will be known as the climax animator for the next few arcs, animating some of the most iconic scenes in the entire series.



His strong use of speed lines upon impact really stand out, really conveying weight in his work.



Hideaki Maniwa has quite a snappy yet smooth style. He was prominent in the earlier episodes, but during this period he really shines. He knows when to use faster timing for key aspects of scenes to make action feel fast yet appropriately paced. He animates a few scenes in other specials and in other movies, but this is the last time he has stand out animation in the main series.



Kenji Yokoyama provides very fluid motion, being able to really make those legs long, similar to Oda himself. This really helps make his scenes feel as if they're straight from the manga. He continues to be a key animator and supervisor throughout the series and provides stronger animation in later arcs.



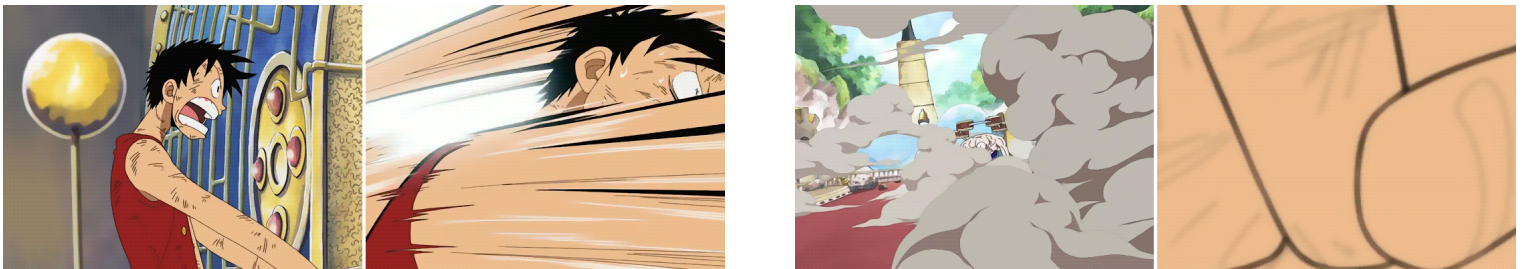
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SkyPiea:

SkyPiea continues down the road of the series, with episodes 144-195, having quite limited animation with not too many scenes standing out from the rest as opposed to Alabasta. That's not to say it's a badly animated arc, just that the animation continues to do its job as the animators cruise on through the series. **Noboru Kizumi** continues to design the characters, giving the strawhats new outfits for the arc.

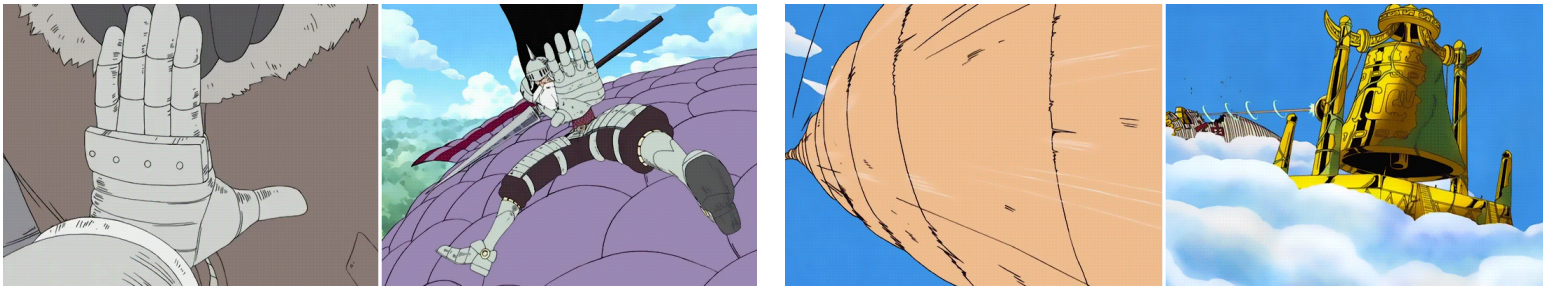
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Masahiro Shimanuki, who is a prominent animator throughout early One Piece, makes a good spectacle in Skypiea. Showcasing wildly animated limbs, he too uses speedlines to help convey Luffy's attack on Enel. His shakey character acting on Enel really helps convey the impact of Luffy's Gomu Gomu no Bazooka. His exaggerated expressions and poses really match Oda's own work.



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Katsumi Ishizuka is back, continuing to use his strong use of speedlines and slight camera movement. His scene with Luffy's Gomu Gomu no Golden Rifle feels incredibly powerful, with him conveying the speed and force Luffy uses in order to strike Enel. This is also the first look at him creating something in 'slow motion', something that is done later on in the series to a much stronger degree.

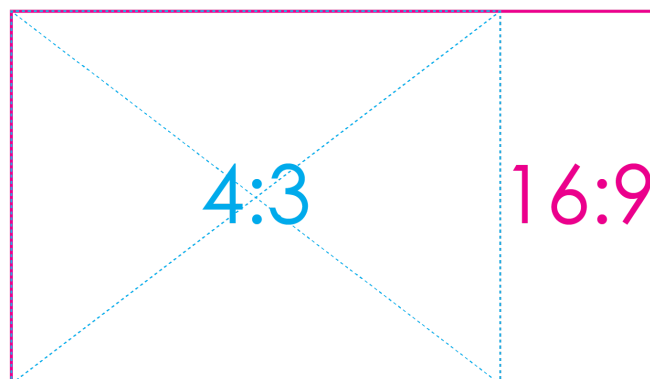


Water Seven:

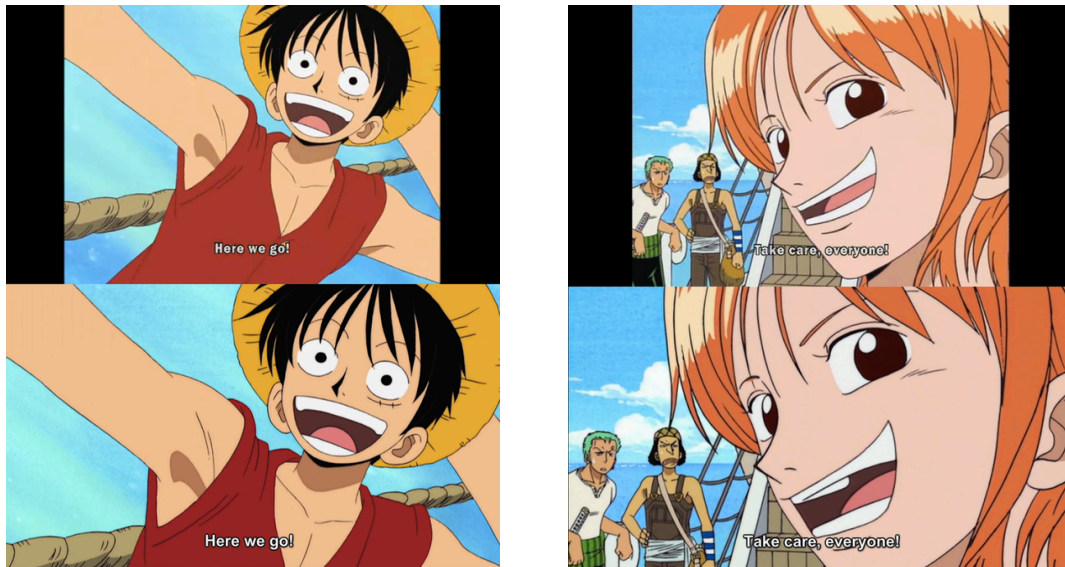
Water Seven marks an important change anime wise, ranging from episodes 207-263. This could also be argued in regards to story wise as well, but that's a conversation for another day, and certainly not here.

But yeah Water Seven is hella good.

Upon episode 207, the anime ditches the old 4:3 episode format and changes to a new format, using the aspect ratio of 16:9.



Because of this new format for the anime, older episodes were later 'remastered' to fit this format, with the frame resized and cropped to fit the appropriate ratio. Colours were slightly fixed so they appeared less faded and lines were slightly darkened so they weren't lost within the drawing. However doing this results in aspects of the drawing being lost which can result in some awkward framing and strange close ups, especially on already close up frames of characters.

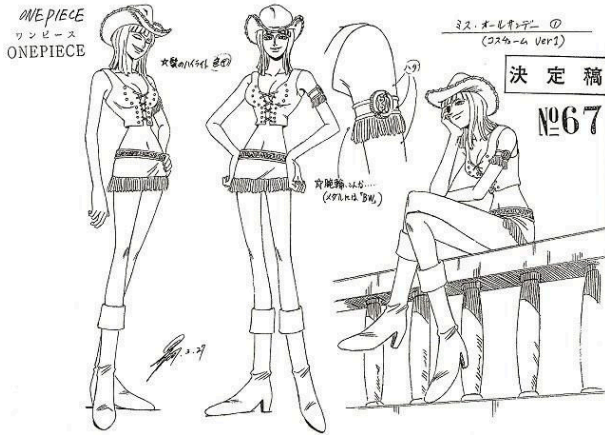


Due to the new ratio, I believe this is where the anime switches to digital and no longer uses cels. Unfortunately I couldn't find any concrete evidence however due to the ratio change, as well as colours being altered slightly and lines appearing more clear on the screen prior to the remaster, this leads me to believe that that is the case. If found otherwise, I'll update here!

Once again, **Noboru Kizumi** continues to work on the character designs. At this point in the series, he really showcases more of Oda's traits, focusing more on the lankiness and slim designs Oda has created. Sleak is definitely how I would describe these current designs. Everyone feels quite tall. Oda's style has also changed and evolved over the years, especially in the face where it feels more defined in this period, with sharper features.



Here is a showcase of Robin's design in this arc. Unlike her first appearance during Alabasta, her legs are much longer, and again, very sleek in the features. This is also the arc where I feel it is becoming more apparent that the breast size of the female presenting characters appear larger, and this is something that is continued in both anime and manga. However, note that regardless of your opinions on how this is portrayed in the manga, *it is exaggerated more in the anime*. And boy, does it get worse as time goes on.



Due to these sleeker designs, it allowed more freedom for the animators to exaggerate and create dynamic poses and movement.

A key player in this department is none other than **Naoki Tate**. Tate is someone who had worked throughout early One Piece as mentioned before. During this era, he also had worked on *One Piece Movie 6: Baron Omatsuri and the Secret island*, a movie in which we had never seen a style like for the anime at the time.



It's a killer movie please go watch it if you haven't seen it! And if you have seen it go watch it again.

Why are you still here? Go watch it and come back to this. Don't worry I can wait.

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Naoki Tate had worked on this movie and was greatly inspired by the designs and has stuck to a similar style to this day. These are the early days of him experimenting with this loose, minimalistic style but you can definitely see his influence already. It is still quite rough, but after this arc, he seemed to grasp the style and make it his own.

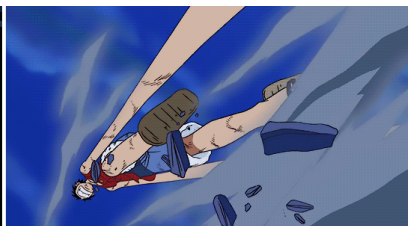
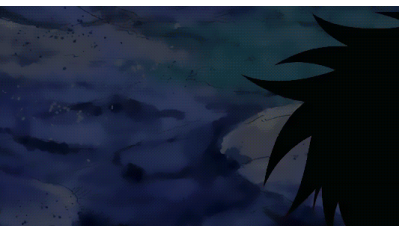


The influence of Baron Omatsuri is already quite clear. His simplistic use of lines, minimal shading and exaggerated expressions really makes him stand out during this era compared to others who usually stick to the character sheets.

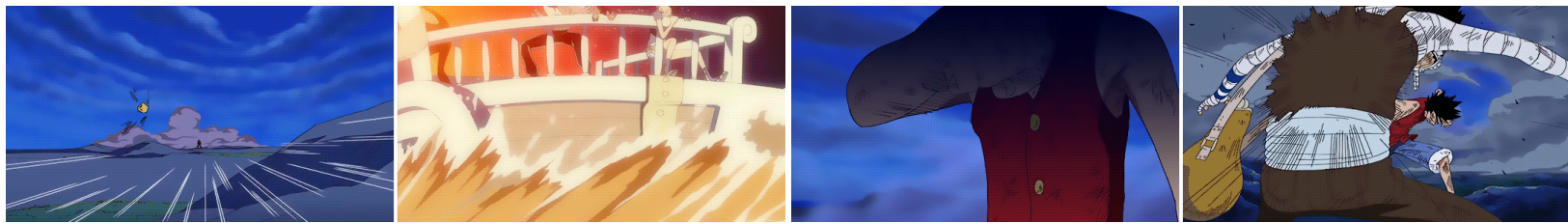
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Masahiro Shimanuki pops up again, with his gatling reminiscent of his Gomu Gomu no Octopus Fireworks cut. His timing is somewhat slow, continuing his use of speedlines to convey motion. His poses are dynamic, making the characters move in a way where it's seen as interesting rather than just static running.

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Katsumi Ishizuka is back at it again, using his strong use of line work to really make that Gomu Gomu no Bullet against Usopp hit hard, figuratively and emotionally.



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Enies Lobby:

Enies Lobby marks a very critical point in the One Piece anime, covering episodes 264-312. While it adapts some of the most emotional parts of the series, often praised as one of the best arcs in the series (also by yours truly), ratings were actually down and the anime was very much close to being cancelled! For a more indepth read as to why this happened and what was going on, please give this [document](#) a read. It goes into great depth on what was going on week to week in regards to the anime and it gives a good perspective of the changes made that impacted the anime and why it's formatted the way it is to this day.

But here's a quick recap:

The anime at this time had really started to grind to a halt pacing wise. Many people believe this to have happened in later arcs, like Marineford or even Fishman Island. But the material being adapted at this point was not a lot. Due to the risk of getting cancelled, the anime was moved from it's prime time slot Sunday 19:00 to Sunday 9:30 on Fuji TV on October 2006, where it still airs to this day. Endings were removed and the longer openings took its place, going from 1:50 minutes to 2:30 minutes.

Yeah. Quite a jump.

This change also resulted in a degree of censorship. Long gone were the days of incredibly bloody Luffy punching Crocodile, or Zoro being basically painted red.



Smaller spurts of blood now come from wounds. People also spit up significantly less blood when hit hard.



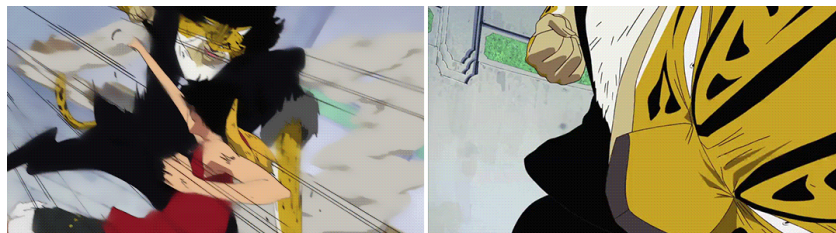
Minimal trickles of blood found, usually now reduced to faded blood smudges (if that) and maybe one trail found down the head.

Blood has made a comeback in later arcs, but I don't think it has rivaled or matched that of earlier One Piece.

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Naoki Tate really comes into this arc with a more refined version that he had been experimenting with in Water Seven. His action and effects are incredibly blobby, with exaggerated features and minimalistic lineart. His minimal shading also allows him to be flexible in his designs, going off the character sheets while also still maintaining that his characters look like the characters they're meant to represent. If his work was to be over corrected, a lot of his action wouldn't feel as strong and would lose that uniqueness of his work.

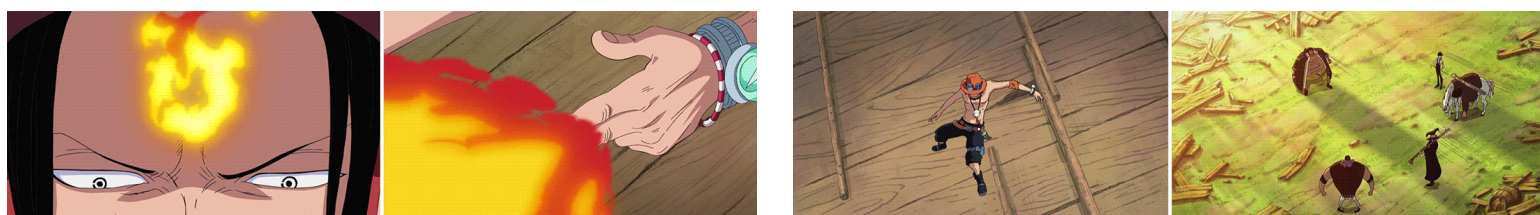




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Ken'ichi Fujisawa is a new face in this list! He showcases more of his skill further on into the series, but here he shows the beginnings of his somewhat blobby style, especially with his effects work.

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You know him by now. **Katsumi Ishizuka** continues his strong cuts, continuing the trend of being the climax animator while also providing a nice scene early in the battle between Luffy and Lucci.

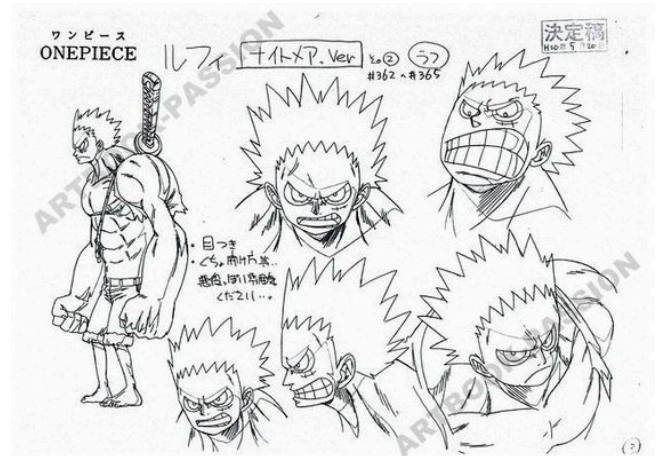
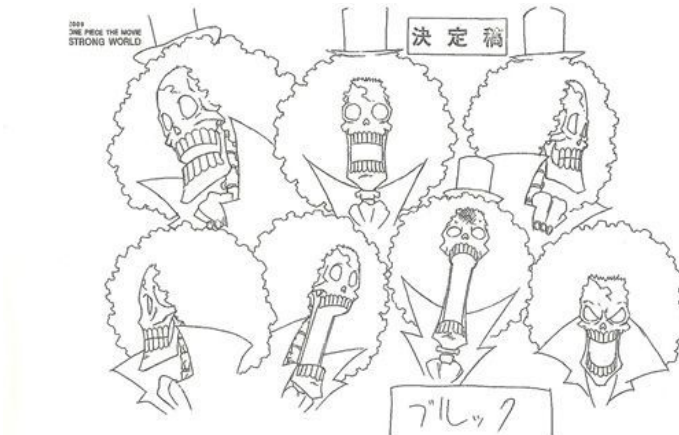


Speed lines continue to be used, more pronounced and evident than Ishizuka's earlier works. Really helps convey the impact of Lucci's punch.



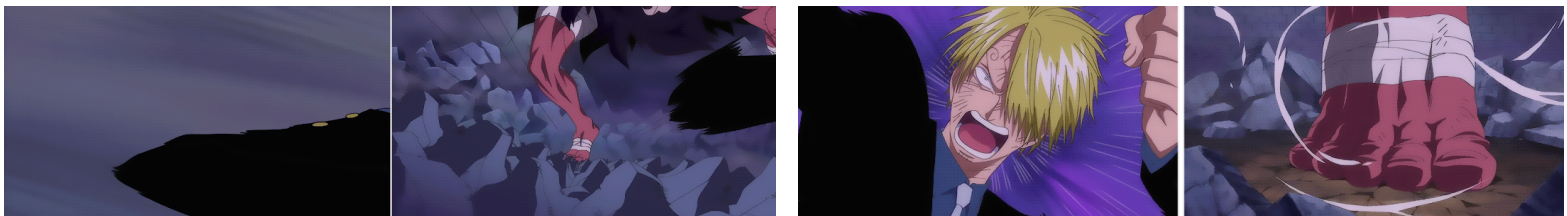
Thriller Bark:

Thriller Bark marks additional changes to the anime. **Noboru Kizumi** is no longer the *Character Designer* for the anime and is replaced by **Kazuya Hisada**. While the changes aren't too drastic to begin with, **Kizumi's** long and lanky designs are slowly replaced with more short and stocky designs from **Hisada**.



More prominent animators also become present during Thriller Bark, showcasing new talent on the series as well as showcasing previous animators who have continued to evolve.

Naotoshi Shida is someone that I think everyone reading this will be familiar with if they have watched the One Piece anime. His style is the most distinctive and well known out of everyone we've covered so far. Shida's modern style is like liquid, with sharp edged shapes that are used to shade the face. He also likes to use exaggerated timing, feeling as if everything is incredibly sped up yet oh so smooth. This is his first appearance with his modern style but it most certainly is not the last.



Naoki Tate has fewer scenes present in Thriller Bark but his recognisable style continues to shine. His strong use of squash and stretch really helps convey his movement with style.



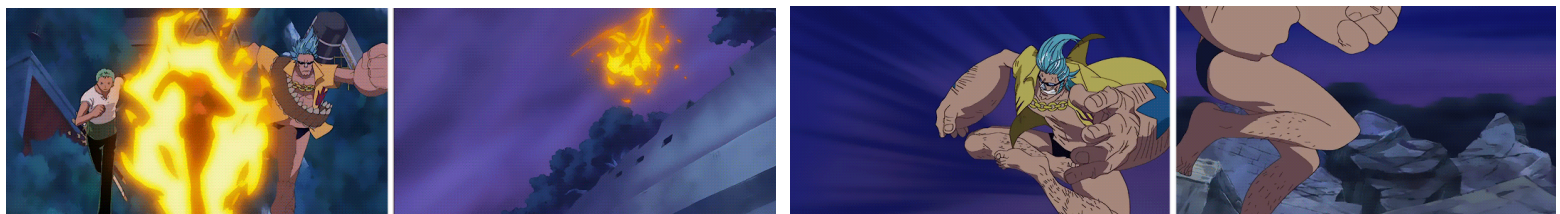
Ken'ichi Fujisawa continues his blobby-like movement and while not being as loose as Tate, it helps to convey a strong sense of movement and bounciness. His facial features are quite big and rounded compared to others.



Ryo Onishi is someone who is an incredible animator. He knows when to exaggerate and move the face, being very prominent in character acting. His style is quite soft, showing subtle movement to convey incredible expressions. This is shown to a greater degree later in the series.



Hiroki Harada for the most part sticks to the character sheets, while using smeary shapes when moving parts of the body. When exaggerating he can reduce the character to basic shapes and lines to help convey an intensity to the scene.



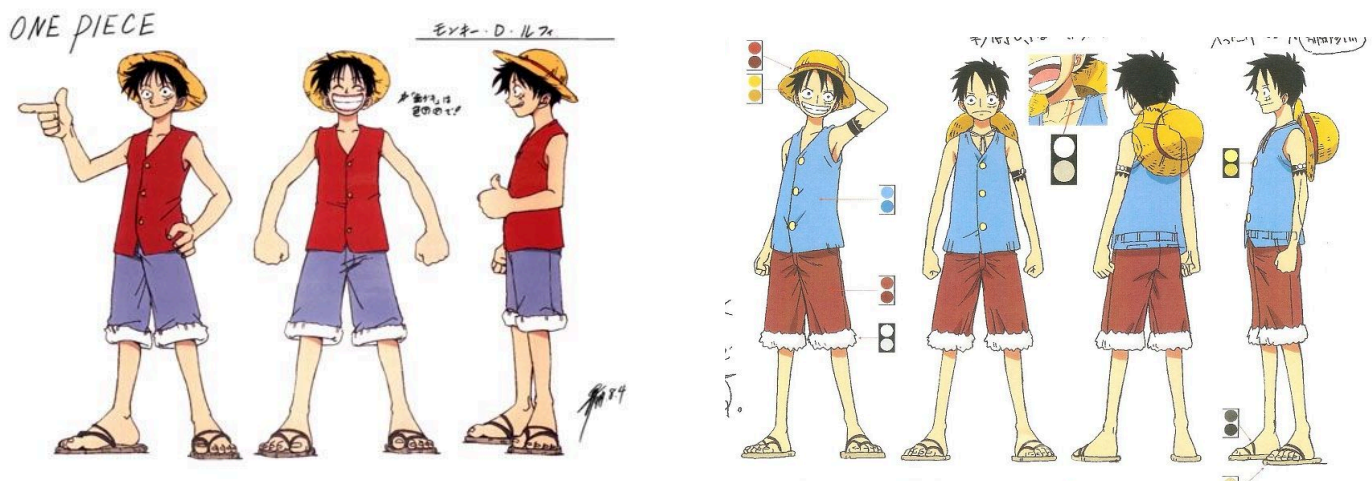
Yoshikazu Tomita is an incredible animator who makes his first prominent appearance in this arc. He too has a very prominent style, with a lot of his work feeling somewhat like liquid metal/mecha like. His timing is smooth yet snappy, having dark blacks and slight highlights being found all over his work.



Sabaody:

Sabaody is a great small arc that is, once again, a pivotal point in the One Piece story. Seems like every arc to One Piece is important. How does Oda do it.

Kazuya Hisada continues his role as character designer for his second arc, which allowed me to find a new character sheet for Luffy in his base form and we can compare how styles and times have changed.



Left is Kizumi, right is Hisada.

Luffy's look has slowly changed throughout the series, and while watching it, it's something that is easily not noticed, especially when binge watching. However when you take time to step back and compare designs, the differences are quite noticeable.

Early Luffy's design had quite short legs and torso, and his features were a lot more exaggerated. His hands and feet were massive, and his hair is thinner with more individual strands of his bangs being shown. Lineart was also thicker, especially with his eye scar being somewhat thicker and more prominent compared to later designs where the line variation is practically non-existent. The straw hat also felt more flat, lacking any type of depth in the brim while also fitting his head more snugly.

The design used for Sabaody shows Luffy to be taller than his beginner design, however not as tall and lanky as that of the Water Seven-Enies Lobby era. Less hair strands are used for his hair, reducing the number of bangs. His face remains being round, however his smile is not as prominent and exaggerated like it once was. The biggest change I think is definitely how the hat is drawn. The top of the hat doesn't fit as snugly as it once did, and the brim begins to have more depth. At this point, the hat is fine however in some instances it can be very overdrawn and bloated and it, quite frankly, looks so awkward and large on his head that it looks absolutely ridiculous.



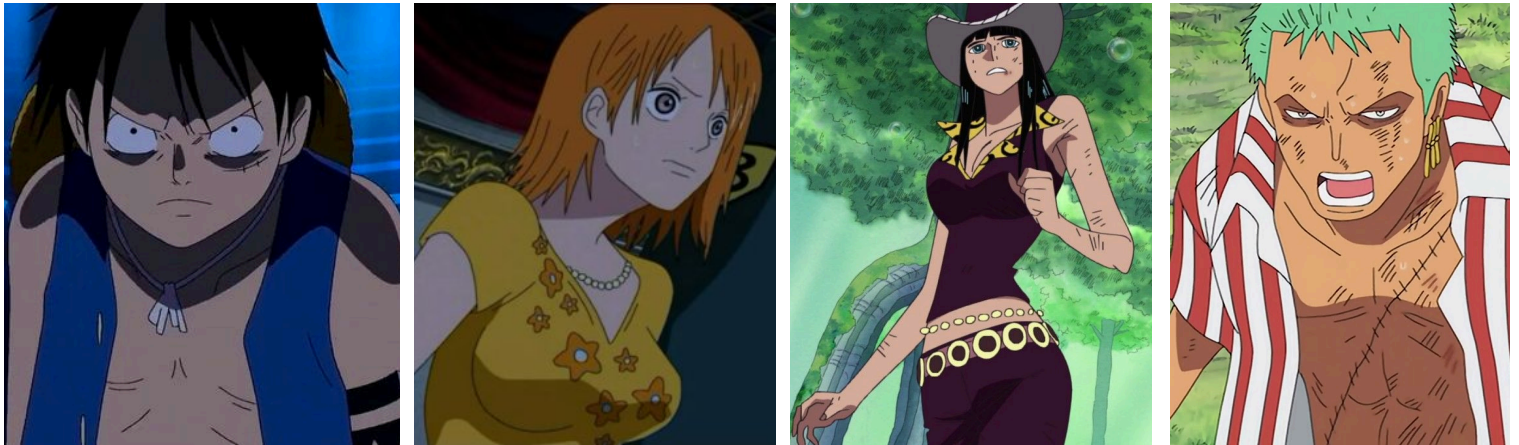
These are the designs of Luffy from the specials *Episode of Nami* and *Episode of East Blue* respectively.

However during this time, Sabaody till Impel Down is an arc that feels quite loose and is a little jarring to the rest of the series. This is definitely not a bad thing and I think is quite welcomed, especially due to One Piece being a long running anime series. Change is necessary otherwise it looks boring, stale and repetitive. That is, when it is executed properly and boy does Sabaody knock it out of the Sabaody park (Haha). *Ba Dum Tss*.

Yeah yeah, look Tuna forced me to put that in so thank him for that.

Unfortunately, many believe this arc to be one of the ugliest because of its loose style in places.

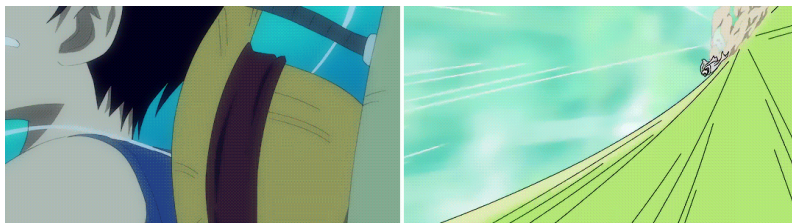
But this is something that I think greatly enhances and appropriately fits the style of One Piece and Oda's wacky designs.



This is a plus in my book. Having a good character designer and strong character designs allows animators to be more flexible in what they're working with. That is why, up to this point, Baron Omatsuri was the best animated thing that Toei had produced at the time in regards to One Piece. So let's have a look as to who shines as bright as Kizaura's leg before striking down Zoro's head.

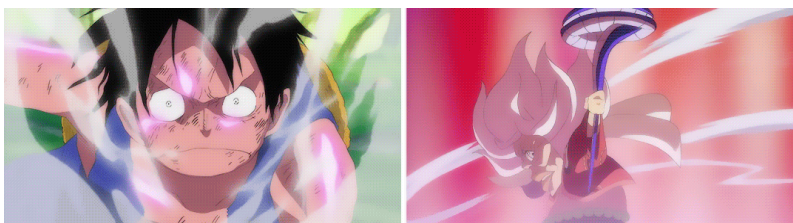
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Naotoshi Shida continues to show off his striking skills, especially with Rayleigh's striking kick against Kizaru. The camera moves with the character, with incredibly smooth movement and his iconic sharp shading and effects.

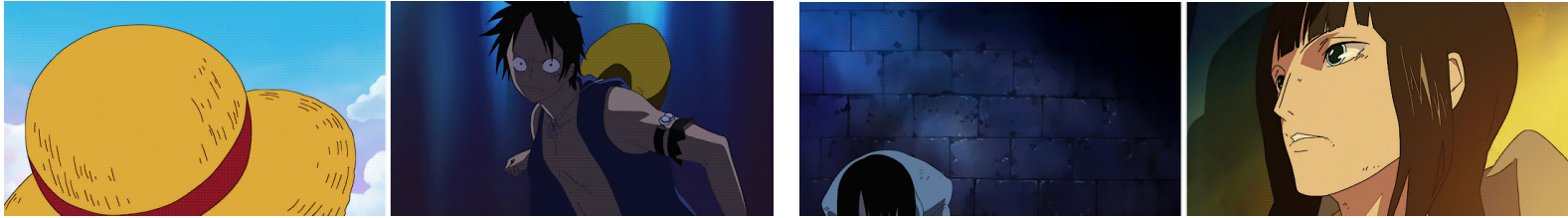


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Yoshikazu Tomita shows off how powerful his hits and effects hit, making each of his scenes feel incredibly powerful.



This is the last time that **Naoki Tate** is this prominent in the series with his key animation. His style is absolutely incredible, having very subtle character acting showcasing the absolute terror of the situation. He continues to pop up here and there as the series goes on.



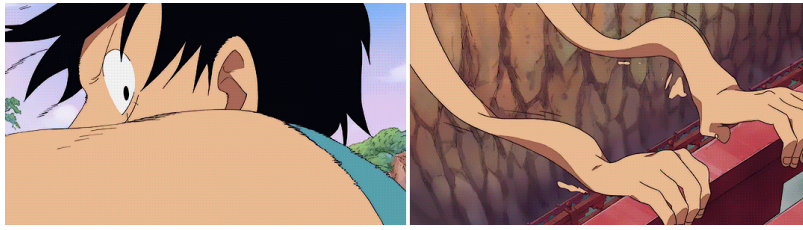
Ryo Onishi makes a great spectacle here, really portraying his character acting in this arc. You can feel exactly how each character is feeling and their thoughts all without even hearing the voices of the characters as well as music placement.



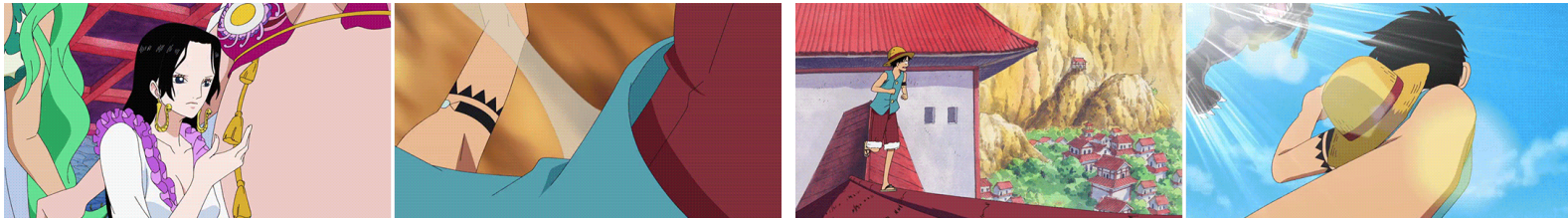
Hiromi Ishigami makes sparse appearances throughout the series, having a similar style to **Tate** during this period. Subtle movements and pudgy shapes are used to make the character convey their actions.



Ken-ichi Fufisawa makes his characters feel really bouncy. Luffy feels like actual rubber in his cuts by the way he makes the arms flail when stretched.



Kenji Kuroyanagi really knows how to turn and rotate the characters in his scenes. He also makes simple scenes look interesting, with Hancock he makes the whole body move in order for her to pull her arm up. He also knows how to make the camera follow the characters so it always feels like the scene is moving.



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- A massive thank you to everyone who has participated and uploaded at [Sakugabooru!](#) Without it, I would not have been able to make nearly as much as I have without all the hard work in identifying and tagging animators' work! Most of the footage used to showcase these animators has come from there! I simply just turned the videos into gifs for an easier showcase.
 - I would also like to issue a big thank you to [Animators Corner!](#) The staff listing really helped me in determining who worked on what episode to identify animators and their works!