

# Space Runaway Ideon

---

Written by Dan H

*Space Runaway Ideon, or Legendary Great God Ideon (Densetsu Kyojin Ideon / 伝説巨神イデオン)*

*Director: Yoshiyuki Tomino*

*Production: Sunrise*

*Episodes: 39*

*Aired: May 1980-Jan 1981*

## Premise

---

On a sparsely colonized planet in the Andromeda Galaxy, researchers have uncovered the mysterious remains of an ancient ship and three armored vehicles that combine to form a giant robot. They have barely been restored to working order when unusually human-like aliens calling themselves the Buff Clan arrive, believing the planet to be the resting place of a legendary source of infinite energy. When the Buff Clan destroy the human settlement, the survivors escape aboard the ship, using the robot, Ideon, to protect them from the alien pursuers who fear the ancient relics are harbingers of their own destruction.

## Why It's So Damn Important

---

Mere months after finishing up Mobile Suit Gundam, Tomino Yoshiyuki and Sunrise Studios were back on the air with another new take on the "Super Robot" genre. Like Gundam, Ideon wasn't terribly successful, being canceled before its planned episode run. Unlike Gundam though, Ideon never "took off" afterwards, remaining a "cult" show at best. But if relatively few people actually saw the show, many people in the anime industry saw it and took note, making Ideon paradoxically an influential show nobody remembers. Little "homage shots" to the Ideon and its signature attacks show up all over the place (Gurren-Lagann, for instance), and Anno Hideaki listed Ideon as one of his greatest influences in producing Evangelion.

The influence this show had on Evangelion brings up an interesting parallel, since like Anno, Tomino was in the depths of depression while working on Ideon, and this is easily his darkest and most violent work to date. The situation of the refugees grows increasingly hopeless as they find they have nowhere they can escape to, and the big red robot that's supposed to be everyone's hope turns out to be a frightening monster with a mind of its own, powered by the fear of death and capable of cutting planets in half. The final message is one of humanity as a failed species undeserving of a second chance. The show, and subsequent movie *Be Invoked*, have one of the largest character casualty rates ever, and cemented Tomino Yoshiyuki's reputation as a particularly morbid director in the early 80s.

Not that you'd realize this from watching the first few episodes. Ideon begins with very little forewarning of things to come, setting up an almost stereotypical premise for a giant robot show before destroying it. You have your plucky cast, little animal sidekick, the big red trucks that combine to form a supernaturally powerful big red robot, Japanese-speaking aliens with a ridiculous name, etc. It's hard not to imagine this was on purpose. Tomino creates what in 1980 was an almost perfect paint-by-numbers action anime, drawing in unsuspecting viewers just a little before taking the whole genre apart.

The animation is actually pretty good for its day; one can see a clear improvement on the anime of the 1970s. Lines are sharper and more consistent, colors are richer and more varied, shading is more sophisticated, and animation is more complex and more integrated with the scene as a whole. The soundtrack, while full of unremarkable incidental music, has a couple of excellent orchestral tunes courtesy of Sugiyama Kouichi, an old anime music veteran perhaps more famous for his later video game scores.

### So What's Not To Like?

---

Well, the "slow approach" to setting up the premise of the series makes the first several episodes rather less interesting. At first, I wondered whether I was actually watching the same show other people were describing. You have to wait quite a bit until Ideon actually gets started in earnest and the plot picks up. And even when it gets interesting, there are the usual "enemy of the week" filler episodes where nothing happens but another battle for the heroes to get through.

The ending also has issues. This show shared the original Gundam's fate of cancellation, but whereas Sunrise was able to rewrite Gundam's final episodes to near perfection, Ideon's ending is a train wreck. There's a gripping buildup to a conclusion and then...a voiceover that basically says, "So yeah, some amazing stuff happened. Damned if we're showing you anything." Fortunately, Tomino and Sunrise created the movie Ideon: Be Invoked in 1982 in order to wrap up the story properly. And it's so good, I'd almost say the point of watching the show is in order to get to the film.

So basically, amazing show, but you better be patient.

#### Similar Shows

---

Invincible Superman Zambot 3

Mobile Suit Gundam

Super Spacetime Fortress Macross

Ideon: Be Invoked

Aura Battler Dunbine

Heavy Metal L-Gaim

Neon Genesis Evangelion