



Take the hardsuits of *Bubblegum Crisis*, add the magical girl sensibilities of *Sailor Moon*, and add some cutesy mascots that could be straight out of *Pretty Cure*, and you have *Cyberteam in Akihabara* - and if that sounds like an unholy chimera of a show, you wouldn't be too far from the truth. Time for a trip to the anime basement...

Hibari Hanakoganei sees herself as a typical 12-year-old girl. She's just about to begin high school, and she's looking forward to the changes that high-school life will bring to her. To mark the occasion, her parents have offered to buy her a gift, and what she wants is a Pata-Pi - robotic, trainable toys that are all the rage at the moment. They're also banned by her school, but she's not about to let that small detail bother her. Conveniently, she doesn't even have to wait for her parents to get it - following a word of advice from an old man who'd been peeking up her skirt, Hibari heads for the top of a local hill, where a winged Pata-Pi falls into her waiting hands. No prizes for guessing, then, that this is no *ordinary* Pata-Pi...



First, a confession: I was warned before deciding to review this series that it was one of the worst series out there. But hey, I'm nothing if not adventurous. I also firmly believe that it's good to watch the rubbish every so often, as it helps you appreciate the good that much more; and that writing a review that puts the boot into a series can be a rather cathartic experience. I went into watching this series, then, fully expecting to hate it – so let's see how it lived up –or down- to expectations.

Let's talk about the setup, first. In most magical girl shows, it's the mascot characters who act as the source of information while the girls do the transforming and the fighting. To its credit, *Cyberteam* doesn't follow that - here, it's the mascots (the Pata-Pi toys) that do the transforming, becoming huge warriors (or 'Divas') under the urging of their owners. That seems to be about as original as the series gets, though: the rest of the setup follows the magical girl numbers.



Hibari is eventually joined by the other girls that will make up the five-member Cyberteam - rich, spoiled girl Susume, who speaks in the most annoying fashion; tomboy and wannabe starlet

Tsugumi; Osaka girl Kamome; and, later in the series, the quiet and mysterious Tsubame. As each girl is introduced, something unusual happens to them to push them into revealing their powers, usually in the form of the bad guys provide a challenge-of-the-week that must be dealt with. Each episode has one-half slice-of-life and one-half action, with the series taking a very long time before it gets around to revealing just what the villains of the piece are after. The series dates from 1998 and has the visual design and feel of comedy shows from around that time (think

*Slayers*

and you wouldn't be too far off the mark), and has a healthy reliance on visual cues such as sweatdrops and whatnot that give you a big pointer that the series is meant to be a comedy.

If it's meant to be a comedy, though, it failed. I didn't laugh, once. Instead, I was finding myself getting more and more annoyed as the series went on. The human characters are more annoying than the Pata-Pi, which I think is probably a first for a magical girl show; the girls seem to have little in common and little connection between them, not so surprising in Tsugumi's and Tsubame's cases as they're both outsiders, but Hibari and Susume are presented as best friends without ever showing us much to believe why that should be the case. Susume's style of speaking is also very grating - she's the ojou-sama type, spuriously adding an affectation (rendered in the subtitles as "That I do say") to the end of almost every sentence. Hell, Hibari herself comments on how annoying her friend's excessive formality is, and now we get to experience it as well. For twenty-six episodes. Yay.



The lead 'bad guys' are also nonsensical. Initial villain Shooting Star makes regular appearances, and does nothing but talk incomprehensible nonsense each time. His master, coincidentally(?) the principal of the girls' school, starts the series apparently limited to a vocabulary of just one sentence - it's the final third of the series before he does anything useful. As a rare saving grace, the lesser villains - imaginatively code-named Death Crow, Black Falcon and Dark Pigeon (or Jun, Miyama and Hatoko when they're off-duty) - are probably the most interesting characters in the series, due in no small measure to the way they seem to be cribbing from their equivalent characters in *Sailor Moon Sailor Stars*, which had aired in Japan a little more than a year before

*Cyberteam*

. The episodes of the series that this trio get devoted to them are actually the highlights of the series, and I can't help but wonder what could have been if they'd gotten their own spin-off series. Enjoyable as they are to watch, though, their presence alone is far from being enough to give the series any lasting appeal.

The story itself also idles in neutral for most of the series. Around the mid-point, there's an episode that kicks heavily into flashback mode, explaining events going back a hundred years (and featuring characters drawn from legend that are even older than that) that flow into the plans that are now afoot to change the world. The way it's presented gives you no indication as

to what the *outcome* of those plans will be, in terms of good or bad, although you have to assume from the demeanour and attitude of the two leaders of the plotting that it's not going to be good. It's all left so vague, though - and sprinkled with far too much bullshit dialogue - that you could interpret it in any number of ways. Sometimes that can be a good thing, where a show's characters or settings are appealing enough to encourage you to make that effort.

Unfortunately, *Cyberteam* just doesn't seem to be capable of creating that level of enthusiasm, and to add insult to injury the main "plot" is then handily forgotten about again until there are only four or five episodes left in which to tie the whole thing up.

That the show does actually try to tie things up was a pleasant surprise - there are a few episode cliffhangers through the series that seem to get conveniently forgotten about, come the next episode, so not doing the right thing was a genuine worry. That said, the end is very anti-climactic - after the big build-up to this world-changing event that everyone can see coming... nothing. A few talky scenes with Hibari declaring her heartfelt feelings, and that's your lot. Given the way the rest of the series had turned out, I probably shouldn't have expected much more, but it's all just hugely disappointing.

The most over-riding feeling throughout was that the series really didn't know what it was trying to do or be, a feeling that was borne out by the packaging used when the show was getting its "singles" release: the packaging for the first two volumes of the series emphasised the magical girl aspect of the show, with images of Hibari and co in their school gear and a fluffy feel to them. The third volume on, though, saw the emphasis changed to the Divas - "Look!", it said, "This is a serious mecha / combat show!", and the front cover plastered with several quotes singing the show's praises. I can only think that the authors of those quotes were watching something else - and it also tells me that the show was struggling to find an audience. The more I saw of the series, the more I understood why. No single segment of *Cyberteam* ever got better than a "meh" out of me, and the finale - for all that it's meant to be the climactic final battle, and all that - doesn't fare any better. It's not even a case of wasted potential, as the way the series was structured there was never much potential there anyway - it's just a string of happenings with little to string them together, and only rarely is it not a chore to watch. One to pass on.

For full episode summaries and screenshots, check the reviews of the individual releases:

- » [Volume 1: Cyber Genesis](#)
- » [Volume 2: Cyber Trouble](#)
- » [Volume 3: Cyber History](#)
- » [Volume 4: Cyber Rebirth](#)
- » [Volume 5: Cyber Friends](#)
- » [Volume 6: Cyber Destiny](#)

