

Original Animation Video: Patlabor 1, Mobile Police Review by Marton Carungay

"The year is 1999 and Tokyo's Mobile Police have a new weapon in the war on crime—advanced robots called Labors are used to combat the criminals who would use the new technology for illegal means. The suicide of a mysterious man on the massive Babylon Project construction site sets off a cascade of events that may signal the destruction of Tokyo. What is the connection between the suicide, the new Mobile Police AV-XO Zero Labor, and a berserk prototype tank? When Patlabor cops Noah Izumi and Azuma Shinohara investigate an unexplained wave of rogue Labors rampaging across the city, they uncover a sinister revenge plot to infect Tokyo's eight thousand Labor population with the deadly BABEL virus. With the future of the city hanging in the balance and a typhoon poised to trigger the devastation, Noah, Azuma and their teammates must destroy the source of the virus—the giant Babylon Project in Tokyo Bay—in a die-hard battle to the finish."

The recommendations coming from various sources were fair enough. Patlabor, they say, is a "sophisticated" animé show. I interpreted that as a series that had a complex, hard-to-understand storyline. Still, I gave it a whirl and got hold of the VHS videocassette that featured Patlabor1: Mobile Police, the first OAV (original animation video) from this Japanese animation series dubbed and translated into English.

Having seen far fewer animé movies than a dedicated animé fan, I could still understand why the Patlabor series has earned its own following on the Internet. The plot in Mobile Police is puzzling at times, but far from linear. Patlabor1 is faithful to the futuristic police-cum-detective theme of the Patlabor series. There is nothing predictable about it, and the viewers must attentively follow the show step-by-step as the mystery unravels gradually.

Patlabor1: Mobile Police also highlights the "mecha" in this mecha-animé. Fans of the subject will appreciate the novel use of the mechs in this movie (as well as the show). There are plenty of spectacular scenes and still shots featuring the use of Patlabor mechs in combat, but mostly in light of "police duty". The action is prominent (and enjoyable) at the very beginning and also towards the very end of the movie. The mech-related action scenes are effectively downplayed during the middle parts; it seemed necessary for plot development during this "slow detective work phase" of the movie.

Nevertheless, a light dose of humor and slapstick maintained the show's momentum in spite of the slower, action-starved sequences.

Patlabor1 is a solid OAV, and will appeal to those who enjoy following detective-style storylines and non-linear plots. The effective use of Patlabor's beautifully-designed mechs adds the visual eye candy for those fond of the genre. Patlabor's genuine sophistication is a far cry from your typical "good killer robots vs. evil killer robots" style of mecha-animé.

Title: Patlabor 1 Mobile Police
Distributor: Manga Entertainment
Running time: approx. 100 minutes
Format reviewed: VHS, English dubbed