

REVIEWS

Disturbing apocalyptic future fantasy like cyberpunk Disney

AKIRA

An Akira Committee production. 3/89, 124 mins. In Dolby and color. Director, Katsuhiro Otomo. Director of photography, Katsuji Misawa. Special effects, Takashi Nakamura. Art director, Toshihaur Mizutani. Music, Shoji Yamashiro. Screenplay by Katsuhiro Otomo based on his comic.

With the voices of: Mitsuo Iwara, Nozumo Sasaki, Mami Koyama, Taro Ishida.

by Daniel Schweiger

Few comics-to-film adaptations have the mind-boggling task of animating an 1,800 page graphic novel, yet comics artist-turned-animated-film director Katsuhiro Otomo manages, incredibly, to bring to AKIRA the visceral power and finely detailed artwork evident in his epic comics masterwork. Far more than a breathless exercise in pop color futurism, Otomo provocatively sums up the biblical themes of destruction and rebirth that have marked Japan's evolution, and fixed Nippon's animation since ASTRO BOY.

AKIRA's apocalyptic fantasy is set 31 years in the future in a monolithic neo-Tokyo, rebuilt on the impact crater of its nuclear destruction. This city might symbolize man's resurrection, but the steel and glass phoenix is also the epitome of heartless capitalism.

Government soldiers ruthlessly club demonstrators, rebels attack with no regard to civilian casualties, and aimless youths wreck the streets in motorcycle rumbles.

The film chronicles gang rivals Kaneda and Tetsuo who discover their nascent psychic abilities as they battle with the power elite to possess AKIRA, a prescient organic mass with awesome psychic powers, a government experiment gone awry. A group of psi-powered government mutants join with Kaneda and beautiful rebel Kay to destroy Tetsuo, corrupted by the power of his newfound psychic abilities, before Tokyo is annihilated for a second time.

Otomo's anti-consumerist message gives AKIRA a disturbing and contemplative power, but he's pursued these naturalistic desires at comprehensibility's expense. In condensing the story's lengthy print serialization, Otomo sacrifices character development for orgiastic Armageddon. Cyphers abound, particularly with Akira, who is turned from the comics' exploitable child to a mass of brain tissue. Otomo goes for a mystical 2001 climax, a barrage of light,



Kaneda, a psi-powered street gang rumble, fighting for the survival of Neo-Tokyo.

floating skyscrapers, and childhood flashbacks. It's all confusing albeit hauntingly beautiful.

AKIRA works best when it uses action instead of dialogue to express itself. Taking stylistic cues from BLADE RUNNER and BRAZIL, the movie never fails to amaze with its boundless imagination. Motorcycles leave color trails, Tetsuo reforms an arm out of circuitry, teddy bears and toy cars become ravenous biomechanical creatures. As in other Japanese animation, flesh is always churning, with Tetsuo ultimately becoming a Cronenbergian mass of popping skin.

The key to AKIRA's impact lies

with its breathtaking animation, some of the most impressive work to appear since FANTASIA. Otomo's vivid cels become cyberpunk Disney, every bizarre city dweller and scrap of metal given astonishing individuality. AKIRA's movement achieves a fluidity that puts rotoscoping to shame, with dozens of camera planes and steadicam shots giving Neo-Tokyo a cramped texture that even surpasses BLADERUNNER'S 2019 L. A. With its knockout visuals and searing thought, AKIRA might be the first Japanese cartoon to break through the half-assed kiddie shows that Nippon is unfortunately known for. □

Rehash of V done in the name of H.G. Wells

WAR OF THE WORLDS

Paramount TV syndication of a Triumph Entertainment Corp. of Canada production. 10/89, 60 mins. In color. Executive producer, Frank Mancuso, Jr. Producer, Jon Andersen. Production designer, Gavin Mitchell. Executive story consultant, Jeremy Hole.

Dr. Harrison Blackwood Jared Martin
Dr. Suzanne McCullough Lynda Mason Green
John Kincaid Adrian Paul
Debi McCullough Rachel Blanchard
Malzor Denis Forest

by Lawrence Tetewsky

Newly installed executive producer Frank Mancuso, Jr., the maestro behind Paramount's FRIDAY THE 13TH has done the impossible. Nobody ever considered that Paramount's syndicated WAR OF THE WORLDS

series could possibly get worse, but in scrapping the show's connection to H. G. Wells and George Pal's film version, Mancuso's "new, original look and tone" for the series, subtitled THE SECOND WAVE, makes one yearn for the low-level quality of the first year.

Shunting aside the show's original creator and producer, the father-and-son team of Greg and Sam Strangis, who still have financial participation in the series, Mancuso has inexplicably transformed the show's recognizably contemporary milieu into a burned-out pseudo-cyberpunk post-apocalyptic hell a la MAD MAX. Derivative is the operative word for the new show. Supplanting the Pal-inspired aliens of last year are extraterrestrial fascists indistin-

guishable from humans in a kind of rehash of V. It's the first season all over again, but with less imagination.

Besides doing away with the Pal-inspired aliens, Mancuso makes the mistake of killing off the show's most popular character, Ironhorse, played by Richard Chavez. Deprived of government funding, returning regulars Jared Martin and Lynda Mason join up with a rag-tag mercenary underground battling the new alien menace.

It's all a poorly contrived rehash of stock situations better done elsewhere, laced with a sense of scientific improbability. Let's just hope Paramount doesn't ask Mancuso to "fix" STAR TREK next! □



Denis Forest and Catherine Disher, the V-inspired alien fascists of WAR OF THE WORLD's second wave invasion.