



ANIME

Akira

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

Akira is very probably the first animated feature with a genuinely novelistic density of incident and character. Its narrative speed and complexity are such that viewers who come to it without prior knowledge of the manga (comic-strip) version tend to find it almost overpowering. On the other hand, viewers who see it while engrossed in the original find it a sophisticated reinvention of its source. *Akira* the film uses the same characters and more or less the same incidents as *Akira* the graphic novel, but innumerable points of detail are changed and the film's patterns of parallel action are quite different in structure and pace from the original. The film virtually demands to be 'read' alongside the manga, and amounts to a kind of commentary on it.

Otomo's storyline is not particularly groundbreaking as science fiction. The film version sits comfortably between *Blade Runner* and *2001*: urban dystopia meets the next link in the evolutionary chain. At this level, Otomo's main achievement is probably the sheer credibility of his vision of futuretech, as seen in the fully thought-through designs of vehicles and laboratory equipment. Where the story possibly does go beyond such latterday staples of American SF as cyborgs and replicants is in its linkage of psychic powers with genetic mutation: the story's premise (concealed in the film until it approaches its climax) is that Akira's unprecedented psychic development produced molecular changes that touched off a massive, silent cataclysm.

New or not, this conceptual nicety yields some extremely arresting images in the film's closing scenes. The Tokyo independent filmmaker Shinya Tsukamoto has already picked up Otomo's concept in a series of resourceful movies about humans mutating into metallic grotesques; Tsukamoto's most ambitious film to date is called, logically enough, *Tetsuo*.

SF trappings aside, Otomo's story undergoes some fairly remarkable mutations of its own. It starts out embroiled in a feud between pill-popping delinquent bikers, broadens to take in terrorist guerrillas, demented scientists and a military coup, and winds up envisaging the birth of a new universe. This 'exploding' structure would seem unprecedented if it were not for King Hu's equally singular *A Touch of Zen*, which also expanded its frame of reference from the domestic to the political to the cosmic. The correspondence is no doubt purely coincidental, but Otomo echoes King Hu in using a simple psychological gestalt to keep his microcosmic bikers in balance with his macrocosmic rebirths.

Tetsuo's problem is that he has been bullied ever since he arrived in the orphanage where Kaneda became his 'elder brother' and protector, and the

film's sub-text is Tetsuo's gradual but decisive emergence from his place in Kaneda's shadow. The climactic scenes are interrupted by collective flashbacks to the childhoods of the central characters. First, to the orphanage where Kaneda and Tetsuo met; then, to the colonel's research centre, where Kiyoko, Masaru, Takashi and the perennially youthful Akira underwent their induced psychic growth. What makes these flashbacks so poignant and affecting is their origin in shared memories, which successfully implies the way that those doing the remembering are about to be subsumed into a new collective identity. But there is also a deep pathos in the way that Otomo draws and colours them, far removed from the high-tech cityscapes and hard-edged action of the rest of the film. They resemble nothing so much as frames from one of Hiroshi Shimizu's vintage movies about childhood (say, *The Introspection Tower*, 1941), which also dealt with questions like bullying and rebellion against authority.

Simply as animation, *Akira* is an undoubted tour de force. It preserves the extraordinarily detailed graphic style of Otomo's original-drawings and matches it with equally detailed multi-planed movement and a colour spectrum that prefers shades to bold primaries. The most spectacular set-piece is the psychic attack on Tetsuo by Kiyoko, Masaru and Takashi, a self-defeating stunt involving toys and other tokens of childhood, but comparable visual and aural dynamics can be found throughout, even in the simplest scenes of exposition. It helps no end that the animators worked to a pre-recorded dialogue track; this obviously guided the film's pacing, but it also gives the action far more dramatic immediacy than is usual in animated features.

Time and again, the film avoids aesthetically predictable decisions. The music, for example, is neither screaming electric guitar solos nor grandiose 'new age' noises but a surprisingly low-key, post-rock score in which wordless vocal sounds play a large part. The action does unfold in robustly physical terms, with a great deal of violence and a great many explosions, but the film's centre is still and quiet. Beyond all the terrestrial and cosmic cataclysms (Otomo, one guesses, subscribes to the 'big bang' theory of the origin of universes), *Akira* manages to express a particular kind of adolescent confusion and despair, locating it precisely between a disturbing vision of childhood and a sense that adult 'maturity' is a sham. Its sensibility is closer to Nicholas Ray than Ralph Bakshi, let alone the dozens of also-rans in the field of Japanese animation.

Tony Rayns, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, March 1991

AKIRA

Director: Katsuhiro Otomo

Production Company: Akira Committee

Executive Producer: Sawako Noma

Producers: Ryohei Suzuki, Shunzo Kato

Associate Producer: Yoshimasa Mizuo

Production Co-ordinator: Ken Tsunoda

Production Managers: Yoichi Ikeda, Takahisa Yokomizo

Production Assistant: Keiko Nobumoto

Screenplay: Katsuhiro Otomo, Izo Hashimoto

Based on the graphic novel by: Katsuhiro Otomo

Director of Photography: Katsujii Misawa

Animation Photography (Asahi Production): Atsushi Okui, Akio Saito,

Kazuta Furubayashi, Shuichi Ito, Hideko Takahashi, Tetsu Keibu,

Kazunobu Okeda, Yoichi Hasegawa, Yuki Asaine, Toshiyuki Umeda, Youji

Toki, Hiroyuki Matsuzawa, Yukinori Sakai

Animation Photography (Toms Photo): Hajime Hasegawa, Kenichi

Kobayashi, Takashi Nomura, Hiroshi Kanai, Moriyuki Terashita, Hitoshi

Nishiyama, Hitoshi Shirao, Takahisa Ogawa, Hironori Yoshino, Kiyoshi

Kobayashi, Atsushi Yoshino, Kazunari Ichinozuka, Mika Saki, Atsuko Ito,

Kyoko Osaki, Rie Takeuchi, Koji Asai

Artist Special Effects: Takashi Maekawa

Background Special Effects: Noriko Takaya

High-Tech Lab Computer Graphics: Ryoichiro Debuchi, Yuriko Amemiya,

Yukiko Furubayashi, Naoko Motoyoshi

Chief Animator: Takashi Nakamura

Directing Animators: Yoshio Takeuchi, Hiroaki Sato

Key Animators: Atsuko Fukushima, Toshiyuki Inoue, Tomihiko Okubo,

Masuji Kigami, Yoshiyuki Okiura, Sadahiko Sakamaki, Satoshi Hirayama,

Seiji Muta, Satoru Utsunomiya, Kazuyoshi Takeuchi, Toyoaki Emura,

Masatomo Sudo, Shinichi Suzuki, Hitoshi Ueda, Kuni Tomita, Ayumi

Tomobuki, Chiharu Sato, Yasuhiro Seo, Yoshinori Tokiya, Hideki Nimura,

Hirotsugu Kawasaki, Osamu Nabeshima, Masaharu Tada, Koichi

Hashimoto, Hidehiko Okano, Hiroyuki Horiuchi, Yasushi Nagaoka,

Morifumi Naka, Shinya Ohira, Hiroyuki Kitakubo, Satoshi Urushibara,

Hideko Yamauchi, Yasuomi Umetsu, Akinobu Takahashi, Shinichi

Terasawa, Toshiaka Hontani, Tatsuo Ryuno, Shoichi Masuo, Shuichi

Obara, Yoshinori Kaneda, Toshio Kawaguchi, Masaaki Endo, Kyoko

Matsubara, Shinji Otsuka, Tatsuyuki Tanaka, Kazuyoshi Yaginuma, Jiro

Kanai, Hiroyuki Takagi, Makiko Futaki, Shinji Hashimoto

Animators (Telecom Animation Film Co): Koichi Maruyama, Yoshinobu

Michihata, Masanori Ono, Kenji Yazaki, Hiroaki Noguchi, Toshihiko

Masuda, Yuichiro Yano, Yuko Kusumoto, Hiroyuki Aoyama, Seiichi

Takiguchi, Hirokazu Suenaga, Toshiya Washida, Keiko Tomizawa

Colour Keys: Kimie Yamana, Michiko Ikeuchi, Setsuko Tanaka

Animation Checkers: Mitsunori Murata, Hisahiko Komiya, Hitomi Tateno

Layout Artists: Takashi Watabe, Kiyomi Tanaka

Background Artist (Studio Fuga): Tsutomu Uchida, Asako Kodaira, Satoshi

Kuroda, Miyuki Kudo, Kenji Kamiyama, Katsufumi Hariu, Mariko

Kobayashi, Noboru Tatsuike, Hajime Soga, Tatsuya Kushida, Sanae

Ichioka, Toru Hishyama, Tokuhiko Hiraki, Masatoshi Kai

Background Artists (Studio Uni): Jiro Kawano, Kaori Yamasaki, Tatehiko

Uchida, Akira Furuya, Akiyoshi Iijima, Takashi Nakamura

Background Artists (Baku Production): Mitsuhara Miyamae, Hirofumi

Hagimiwa, Kazuhiro Sato, Osamu Honda, Tatsuo Imamura

Background Artists (Ishigaki Production): Yukihiko Shibuya, Mamoru

Konno, Hiroyuki Mitsumoto, Kenichi Takahashi, Hiroyuki Ogura, Kazutoshi

Shimizu, Kazuhiro Kinoshita, Yoji Nazaka, Yukiko Iijima, Eiko Sudo, Yoshie

Kanajima, Kaoru Honma, Fukiko Hashizume

Background Artists (Kobayashi Production): Shinji Kimura, Nobuhiro

Otsuka

Background Artist (Special Co-operator): Takumi Nagayasu

Editor: Takeshi Seyama

Art Design: Kazuo Ebisawa, Yuji Ikehata, Kouji Ohno

Art Director: Toshiharu Mizutani

Music: Shoji Yamashiro

Music Performed by: Geinoh Yamashiro Gumi

Music Director: Shoji Yamashiro

Music Editor: Haruhiko Ohno

Music Recording Directors: Keiji Muraki, Shiro Sasaki

Music Recording: Heizo Yoda, Hideo Takada, Keiichiro Yoshioka

Sound Architect: Keiji Urata

Director Sound Recording: Susumu Aketagawa

Producer Sound Recording: Tokuya Shimada

Production Manager Sound Recording: Kozo Ogata

Supervisor Sound Recording: Tetsuo Segawa

Sound Effects Supervisor: Shizuo Kurahashi

Foley: Kenji Shibasaki, Toyo Onkyo

Dolby Stereo Consultant: Mikio Mori

Voice Cast

Mitsuo Iwata, Nozomu Sasaki, Mami Koyama, Tetsusho Genda, Hiroshi

Otake, Koichi Kitamura, Michihiro Ikemizu, Yuriko Fuchizaki, Masaaki

Okura, Taro Arakawa, Takeshi Kusao, Kazumi Tanaka, Masayuki Kato,

Yosuke Akimoto, Masato Hirano, Yukimasa Kishino, Kazuhiro Kando,

Tatsuhiko Nakamura, Sachie Ito, Issei Futamata, Kozo Shioya, Michitaka

Kobayashi, Hideyuki Umezu, Satoru Inagaki, Kayoko Fujii, Masami

Toyoshima, Yuka Ohno, Taro Ishida, Mizuho Suzuki

Japan 1988

125 mins

ANIME CLASSICS PART 2

Tekkonkinkreet (Tekkon kinkurīto) Sun 1 May 12:10; Thu 5 May 20:50

The Tale of the Princess Kaguya (Kaguya-hime no Monogatari)

Tue 3 May 14:00; Tue 3 May 17:30 (all BFI IMAX)

Akira Tue 3 May 20:30; Mon 23 May 15:00;

Mon 23 May 20:30 (all BFI IMAX)

Lupin the 3rd: The Castle of Cagliostro (Kariosutoro no Shiro)

Wed 4 May 14:30; Tue 31 May 20:45

Fullmetal Alchemist the Movie: Conqueror of Shamballa

(Gekijō-ban Hagane no Renkinjutsushi: Shanbara o Yuku Mono)

Fri 6 May 21:00; Mon 9 May 20:40

Memories (Memorīzu) Sun 15 May 12:00; Tue 24 May 20:40

Grave of the Fireflies (Hotaru no Haka)

Thu 19 May 18:00 + intro by Alex Dudok de Wit, author of BFI Film

Classics: Grave of the Fireflies; Fri 27 May 20:45

This season was co-programmed by writer and academic Hanako Miyata



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Notes may be edited or abridged. Questions/comments? Email prognotes@bfi.org.uk

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