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If Casshern Doesn't Do It, Who Will?

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paradigm of keeping animals—is both unstable but also comforting in a lifestyle that is itself in a state of shift and fluctuation (180).

Allison positions *Pokémon* as allowing the consumer both to raise imaginative creatures and to achieve a heroic status (à la *Power Rangers* and *Sailor Moon*) by becoming a Pokémon master. She uses the Foucauldian theorization of knowledge (and, by extension, power) to promote *Pokémon*'s emphasis on knowledge acquisition and creature care over the eye candy fetishization (in the Freudian and Marxist sense) of the *Power Rangers*' and *Sailor Moon*'s "money shot" (103). For Allison, it isn't that *Pokémon* is devoid of fetish but rather that the interactivity inhering in *Pokémon* bequeaths a more empowering, or at least less exploitive, fetishization in children's play. Here Allison makes her boldest franchise-specific assertion: "*Pokémon* capitalism" allows commodities to "double as gifts and companions" (197) by referencing a milieu of premodern animist spiritualism in "New Age" aesthetics. The pocket monsters promote capitalist Japan's ascendancy, but act as the accomplice and corrective of its monstrous exploitation of its people. Curiously, Allison never defines what "New Age" means exactly, nor where this age is taking Japan and North America in terms of capitalist cycles of accumulation, alienation, and healing. The answer, by implication, is not much of anywhere.

Anecdotes of violent incidents perpetuated by persons connected to these pop culture products dot the book, but because Allison stresses the lack of causality between the two, it is unclear what the references accomplish. While she rightly avoids the antifan sentiments of older academic research in this area, Allison assumes that U.S. fans equate Japaneseness with coolness and lack interest in their products' authentic Japaneseness for its own sake. This drives home her point about fan fetishization. However, it overlooks fans' need for authentically Japanese narratives behind the products that can speak to their identities as fans, many of

whom participate in an active pedagogy of Japanese culture to make sense of both of them.

Nevertheless, Allison researched her theoretical tools and her subject matter very well. She makes especially keen insights on hybridity, mutability, and performativity in unexplored contexts of character identity. While postmodern in much of her approach, Allison remains steadfastly critical, even Marxist in her sensibilities toward the likes of Usagi and Pikachu. However, even those who do not occupy any of these critical camps should nonetheless make room on their shelves and in their reading schedules if they are at all interested in these new configurations of production and play.

Note

1. Susan Napier, *Anime: From "Akira" to "Howl's Moving Castle"* (New York: Palgrave, 2005)

If Casshern Doesn't Do It, Who Will?

DEBORAH SHAMOON

Kiriya Kazuaki (director). *Casshern*. 2004. Momentum Pictures. ASIN B0007Q6RZ4.

Japan may produce more science fiction epic films and television shows than any other country, but except for the Godzilla franchise, nearly all of them are animated; the United States still corners the market on live-action sci-fi. The reason, obviously, is money: the two-hour-plus special-effects extravaganza is prohibitively expensive to produce. But perhaps advances in CGI could change that. Behold, *Casshern*: Kiriya Kazuaki's massive, visually stunning epic. It features live actors performing in front of a green screen, with all the effects and nearly all the backgrounds added digitally. According to its IMDb entry,¹ its budget was a paltry \$6 million, compared to \$200 million for *Spider-Man 2*, released the same year. With a visual aesthetic much closer to anime and Hong Kong action

films than *tokusatsu* (“special effects” films and TV shows such as *Ultraman*), *Casshern* could indicate a new direction for the genre, away from rubber-suited monsters and campy effects. But while the look is new, the story remains deeply indebted to classic 1970s anime and suggests that lingering memories of World War II have not lost their grip on the Japanese artistic psyche, even in the twenty-first century.

The film *Casshern* is a remake of a 1973 anime TV show called *Jinzo ningen Kyasshan* (Artificial human Casshern), directed by Sasagawa Hiroshi and produced by Tatsunoko, briefly revived in a straight-to-video series in 1993.² The new film version has a shiny CGI gloss and serious tone meant to appeal to the thirty-somethings who grew up watching it. Upon its release in Japan, the film did fairly well at the box office (although it never reached number one).³ DreamWorks bought the rights soon after, but never provided a U.S. theatrical release. In October 2007, Paramount Home Entertainment released a DVD labeled a “director’s cut,” but in fact the runtime was cut by nearly thirty minutes, obscuring the political message of the film. It seems unlikely the director himself made those cuts.

Casshern offers a nightmare vision of an alternative future, in which Japan was not defeated in World War II but has colonized most of Asia and Russia, destroying both the natural environment and the native people. The visuals are lush and astonishing, packed with hulking, decaying machinery, monumental architecture, and an evocative mixture of *kanji* and Cyrillic text. *Casshern* looks like a 1930s Soviet propaganda poster come to life—with robots. It’s a golden twilight and deep red-tinted fusion of retro-fascist, goth, and steampunk aesthetics that looks refreshingly original in a sea of green-and-black-toned *Matrix* rip-offs (including the latest *Appleseed* movie). It’s probably not going too far to say that *Casshern* is the most visually inventive sci-fi film since the first *Matrix*. *Casshern* is not so much a live-action film as a

computer-animated film with occasional close-ups of live actors. Furthermore, Kiriya (the writer, director, and cinematographer) makes it work because, rather than trying to make it all look real, he revels in an anime-type fakeness appropriate to the operatic storyline. He makes the human actors move like anime characters and in the fight scenes uses quick cuts, point-of-view shots, and extreme close-ups so you never have time to wonder how it’s done. Even in the static dialog scenes, he arranges the actors in beautifully staged, CGI-embellished tableaux, like the layered panels of a manga page. Many scenes with the live actors are filmed to look deliberately blurred, distorted, or overexposed, and shot in grainy black and white for daringly long segments. It’s the only way to make this hybrid of CGI and live action work and to give the convoluted story gravitas by foreclosing any questions of logic and believability.

The Nazi- and Soviet-inspired aesthetics of the backgrounds establish the ominous tone of the story. In this alternative-future Greater East Asia, ruled by a decaying, corrupt Imperial Japan, a group of Frankenstein-like clones called the Neoroids (or Neo-Humans, depending on the translation) attempt to destroy all humans with their robot army. Humanity’s last best hope is Tetsuya (Iseya Yusuke), a reanimated corpse with posttraumatic stress disorder and a stretchy vinyl exoskeleton that prevents his superstrong body from exploding. Although Kiriya has eliminated some of the more childish aspects of the TV version (notably the robot dog Friender), the characters are mostly stock types from 1970s anime: Tatsuya’s unloving scientist father Dr. Azuma (Terao Akira); his sickly, sainted mother archetypically named Midori (Higuchi Kanako); his innocent, childlike girlfriend Luna (Aso Kumiko); and the evil council of wrinkly old politicians. The team of Neoroids is equally stereotypical: the charismatic psychopath Burai (Karasawa Toshiaki) as the leader, the bitchy fighting girl (Sada Mayumi), the vain handsome guy (Kaname Jun), and the irritating

hunchback (Miyasako Hiroyuki). As with so much anime, there are long soliloquies on what it means to be human, the evils of war, vague mysticism, and rampant oedipal conflict, all ending of course with the obligatory image of Tetsuya and Luna as children, running together in an idyllic green field.

Although there are occasional mentions of cloning and terrorism inserted to give the plot a veneer of currency, like many anime of the 1970s the real context of *Casshern* is World War II and the expression of collective guilt over Japanese wartime atrocities, in this case, vivisection and the slaughter of civilians. When the film begins, Dr. Azuma receives funding from a smarmy government lackey named Naito (Oikawa Mitsuhiro) to grow spare body parts in a lab. While the government hopes to extend the life of its aging leader General Kamijo (Nishijima Hidetoshi), Dr. Azuma primarily wants to cure his wife, who has gone blind from exposure to environmental pollution. A mysterious accident in the lab causes the parts to assemble into full bodies. Thus the Neoroids are born, and Azuma is able to revive his dead son Tetsuya. But the secret truth of Azuma's lab, revealed at the end of the film, is that the body parts were harvested from an ethnic group in a colonized region of central Asia called Zone 7. This population, called Original Humans, have cells that are capable of regeneration; they have been systematically slaughtered and harvested by Japanese soldiers, of whom Tetsuya was one. The name Zone 7 is a reference to the notorious Unit 731 in Manchuria, where during the war Japanese scientists carried out vivisection and other experiments on thousands of men, women, and children. Among the experiments were attempts to amputate and reattach limbs and internal organs.⁴ The name of the official who funds Azuma's lab, Naito, is also a reference to the second-in-command at Unit 731, Lieutenant Colonel Naito Ryoichi, who after the war testified to the Americans and later went on to found the controversial Green Cross blood

bank, accused of unethical practices in the late 1980s.⁵ The Original Humans literally embody the lands and cultures of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, which Imperial Japan intended to use as raw materials to sustain itself.

Both the Neoroids and Tetsuya are haunted by the violence of their shared past, which in the trauma of being revived they have repressed and partially forgotten. Throughout the film, Tetsuya suffers disturbing flashbacks to his time as a soldier in Zone 7 when he shot a civilian, but the full significance of this murder comes at the end of the film, when the Neoroids' identity as the Original Humans of Zone 7 is revealed. Burai and Tetsuya share several moments of intense recognition but, tragically, are unable to realize their shared humanity and work together to end the war, and so the film lurches toward its inevitable apocalyptic end.

Tetsuya as Casshern is in the end not much of a hero, but there aren't really any "good guys" in the film, only more-or-less sympathetic bad guys, reflecting Japan's own wartime past. Tetsuya's personal war crime, half repressed, has left him spiritually dead, even after his body is reanimated, and only complete destruction of the world can offer him the slightest hope of redemption. This is a sober reflection on the lingering effects of the war on the Japanese spirit. In *Bodies of Memory*, Igarashi Yoshikuni writes that the repressed memories of World War II return in Japanese popular culture in monstrous, horrifying form.⁶ The monstrous bodies of *Casshern* are a reminder of Japanese war crimes, both individual and national, which have still not been adequately examined or atoned for.

As the war between the humans and the Neoroids escalates, Tetsuya's mother begs him to stop it. But as he fails to prevent Burai from detonating an enormous bomb, I am reminded of the tagline of the original TV show: "*Kyasshan ga yaraneba, dare ga yaru?*" ("If Casshern doesn't do it, who will?"). When it comes to transcending human nature and ending warfare, perhaps no one. This is a bleak ending indeed, but as

Japan begins to flirt with a return to militarism, it is one that is still relevant.

Notes

1. <http://imdb.com/title/tt0405821/>
2. Jonathan Clements and Helen McCarthy, *The Anime Encyclopedia: A Guide to Japanese Animation Since 1917*, revised and expanded edition (Berkeley, Calif.: Stone Bridge Press, 2006), 90.
3. <http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/encyclopedia/anime.php?id=3439>
4. Peter Williams and David Wallace, *Unit 731: Japan's Secret Biological Warfare in World War II* (New York: The Free Press, 1989), 48–49; Sheldon Harris, *Factories of Death: Japanese Biological Warfare, 1932–1945, and the American Cover-Up* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 81–82.
5. Williams and Wallace, *Unit 731*, 241.
6. Igarashi Yoshikuni, *Bodies of Memory: Narratives of War in Postwar Japanese Culture, 1945–1970* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000).

Psychoanalytic Cyberpunk Midsummer-Night's Dreamtime: Kon Satoshi's *Paprika*

TIMOTHY PERPER AND
MARTHA CORNOG

Kon Satoshi (director). *Paprika*. 2007.
Tokyo: Sony Pictures. ASIN B000058V80.
Translated as *Paprika*. Columbia-Tristar.
ASIN B000PFU850.

Paprika is a delicious animated version of a science fiction novel by Yasutaka Tsutsui about a device that allows psychologists to enter people's dreams.¹ Although much lighter in tone than Kon's previous films, *Paprika* is deeper than it seems. Three of the most illuminating allusions in *Paprika* are to Ryutaro Nakamura's 1998 *Serial Experiments Lain*, Mamoru Oshii's 1984 *Beautiful Dreamer*, and Oshii's 2004 *Innoshenzu*. These three create a map for locating

Paprika's psychoanalytic cyberpunk exploration of fantasy and reality.

Paprika is not a difficult anime the way *Lain* and *Innoshenzu* are. Its images draw from avant-garde anime but Kon's earlier *Millennium Actress* is a more adventurous challenge to filmic continuity and separation of frame, background, and action. *Paprika* reinvents some well-known concepts—that dreams are windows into other realities and have great power, that the boundaries of self are not set by consensus reality, that troubles stew in the worlds revealed by dreams, and that dreams can be accessed like playing a DVD with the bio-psycho-electronic DC-Mini machine in the film. Such ideas go back to Lum in *Beautiful Dreamer* and the 1945 British film *Dead of Night*, and to Freud, *Alice in Wonderland*, and Australian aboriginal ideas about the Dreamtime as that great place of gods, totems, and origins that lives with us forever in eternal synchronicity.² So *Paprika* invites a middlebrow audience to see familiar mysteries in vivid, primary-color life.

But *Paprika* can bewilder certain viewers. Something is difficult in *Paprika*—the nature of dreams, of the *kami*, and of art itself.

Take an example of what *Paprika* is not. In the classic *Wizard of Oz* film, Dorothy travels from a black-and-white, Depression-era America to a Technicolor Land of Oz located in a dream-like Somewhere Else, and, when Dorothy finally returns to Kansas, the film becomes a trip There and Back. But the DC-Mini machine in *Paprika* is not a magical cyclone bringing us to a Slumberland where fantasy comes true. Yes, one can enter dreams through the DC-Mini, but the machine opens a two-way gate. The DC-Mini lets the dream world escape from our minds and materialize in concrete solidity right here in *our* world. Then its power becomes contagious. Because it lets dreams emerge into reality, dreams coalesce into ever more complex dreams—and then *those* dreams become real. So anyone using the machine can infect other people's dreams. When three DC-Mini machines are stolen at the