

# FROM ALIEN SCORES

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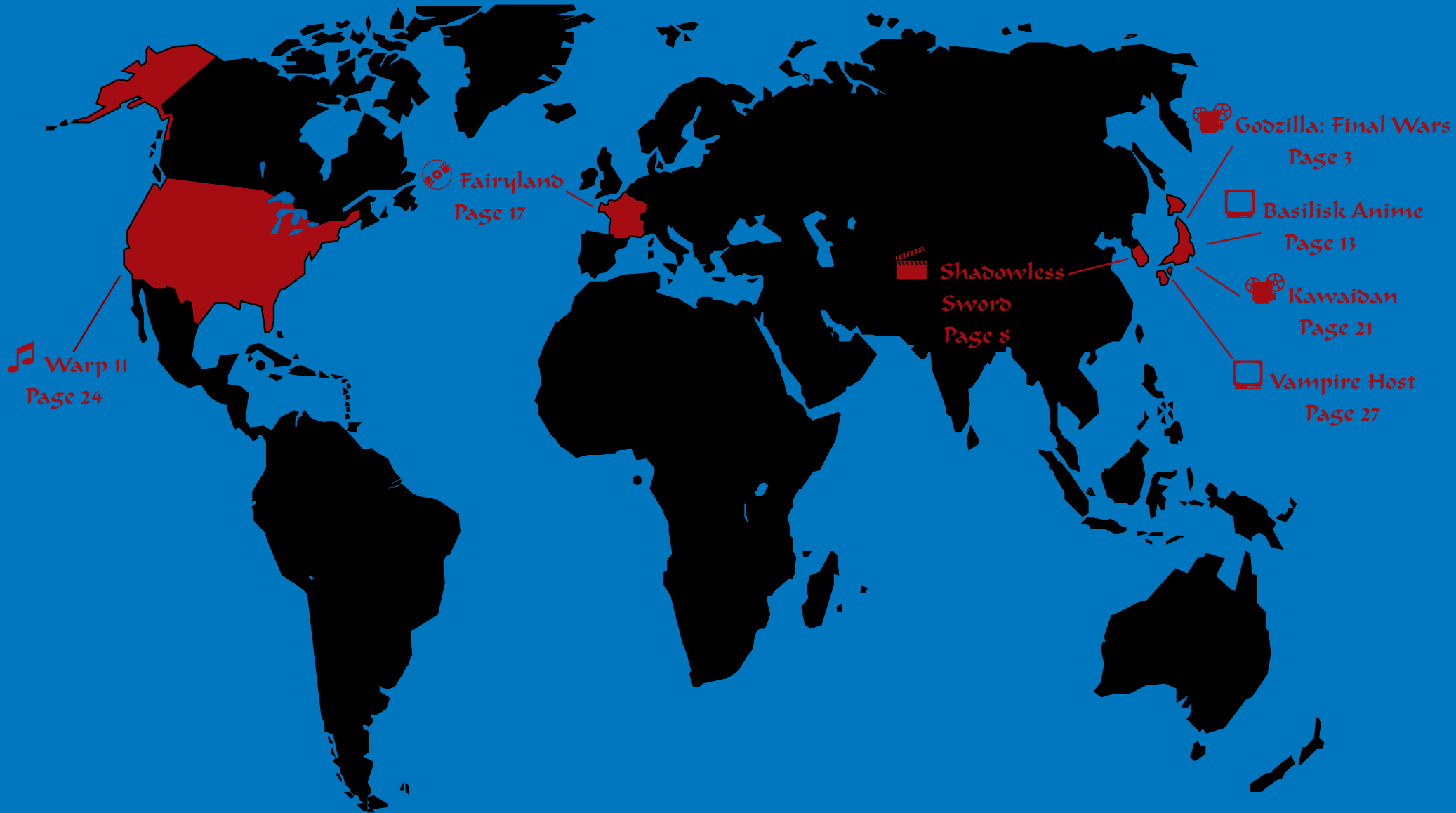
BASILISK ANIME

AND...

**GODZILLA**  
**FINAL WARS**  
ゴジラ ファイナルウォーズ



# Contents:



Godzilla: Final Wars  
(Gojira: Fainaru Uozu)  
Japan 2004  
Directed by Ryuhei Kitamura

Celebrating the 50th anniversary of the premier kaiju franchise, *Godzilla: Final Wars* is both a tribute to the history of the series and an answer to the horrible American movie carrying the Godzilla name.

Toho Studios was not pleased with the U.S. version of Godzilla, nor were most Godzilla fans, and *Final Wars* is clearly an attempt to bring the big guy home, even more so than *Godzilla 2000* and the other post-U.S. Godzilla movies. There are a number of pot shots at the U.S. version, including the appearance of the American Godzilla, who is known here as 'Zilla. 'Zilla gets little screen time, although he is allowed to scuff up Sidney. 'Zilla was created using computer animation as he was in the U.S. film. To prove

that the Japanese suitmation is better, the real Godzilla was performed by an actor in costume.

When the two finally battle it out, 'Zilla is quickly dispatched, almost as an afterthought. The evil alien overlord who is controlling all the monsters on Earth, except for Godzilla of course, remarks that he never should have put his faith in that "tuna-eating" disappointment.

There's also a lame scene set in New York City just before Rodan destroys it that plays on Japanese stereotypes of Americans. None of the other international cities that are wasted during the film, such as Paris and Shanghai, receive this treatment.

In addition to taking shots at the U.S. Godzilla, *Godzilla: Final Wars* pays homage to many of the previous fantasy movie efforts of Toho Studios with actors, characters and





monsters returning from previous entries in the series, a cheesy plot and lots of tank stomping, building crushing, civilization destroying action. Even the basic plot, about aliens who first claim to come in friendship, yet secretly take control of Earth's monsters and plan to conquer the world, is taken from previous films, notably *Invasion of Astro Monster* (1965) and *Destroy All Monsters* (1969).

Final Wars could even be considered a remake of sorts of *Invasion of Astro Monster*/*War of the Monsters*/*Godzilla vs. Monster Zero*, considering that the aliens, the funky sunglass wearing Xilians, originally appeared there, along with King Ghidorah as the alien's pet Monster X and the basic plot of using controlled monsters to take over the world. Even actor Akira Takarada, who played an astronaut in that movie, and Kumi Mizuno, who played an alien femme fatale are back in different roles.

If anything, G:FW suffers from overload from trying to cram in too many references to prior movies. Director Ryuhei Kitamura's trademark technique of combining genres and overloading plots fails him here, as too much time is spent on an incomprehensible and uninteresting story about mutant martial artists and not enough on Godzilla. Following the impressive pre-credit sequence, Godzilla doesn't show up again during the first half of the movie—a serious flaw in a Godzilla movie, although the pent-up demand for the big lizard causes cheers when he finally does make his appearance.

The director borrows too much from other movies not in the Godzilla cannon, notably the *Matrix* series. There's even a scene taken from *Independence Day* where a disgraced mutant redeems himself by flying his fighter into the alien mother

ship to destroy the shield generator. And it was hardly an original idea when used in *Independence Day*.

The entire main story line was junk: Mutants who live to fight have been born on Earth and are trained into an elite monster fighting force under the command of the U.N. Our hero is one of these. It turns out that they are a product of a mix of human and Xilian breeding. Apparently



## Japan



**Original  
Language:**  
Japanese  
(some lines  
in English)

**Subtitled in  
English by  
Sony Pictures**

**Format:**  
Movie

**Genre:**  
Science Fiction/  
Kaiju

the Xilians were here in prehistory since there a brief sub-plot about a mummified monster (Gigan) that is connected to them. The Xilian DNA allows the mutants to be mind-controlled by the aliens and turn on humanity. Our hero is immune because he is a “Keiser” as is the head alien. It seems being a Keiser allows you to suddenly have the ability to use the force to deflect laser bolts and revive Godzilla when the plot requires it. Oh, the Xilians want to use humans as cattle. Exactly how, when and why humans and Xilians managed to interbreed to produce the mutants is never explained. If the mutant DNA has been around since prehistoric times, why haven’t mutants also been around that long? The mutants all seem to be about 25 years old. And if the Xilians have been around for such a long time, why are they just now getting around to enslaving the Earth? Seems that it would have been simpler before the pesky humans got a hold of monster-stomping flying submarines.

Kitamura’s signature style is obvious here in his scenery-chewing villain, a pointless-but-cool high-speed motorcycle chase/kung-fu fight, sword and kung fu fights between humans, mutants and aliens, and the various long stylish coats his characters wear so they can dramatically flap them around. Kitamura certainly has a flair for filming action scenes and making his actors look good, but none of



this added to the movie and it detracted from the important stuff: Big Monster Fights.

There are a number of good scenes of monsters destroying cities, such as Anguirus destroying Shanghai, but Rodan didn’t get enough time and didn’t seem very convincing in his New York destruction derby and King Seasar was obviously a





guy in a suit with silly floppy ears. While the quick dispatching of 'Zilla was meant to be funny, there are monsters that gave Godzilla a movie's worth of trouble in previous films who are defeated in at best a couple of minutes of fighting, or in the case of Hedorah, a couple of seconds. Blink and you'll miss the smog monster.

Although the kaiju guest list is long, not every noteworthy past adversary or ally could be brought in, Jet Jaguar, for example, is noticeably missing from the movie as is MechaGodzilla. One familiar face that should have been left in the Toho Studios archives is Minilla, the son of Godzilla. Even though he does reconcile the humans and Godzilla at the end of the movie, his part could have been cut out and it wouldn't have been missed. The scenes with him are simply painful to watch.

Kitamura does add some interesting new twists into the formula. The idea that soldiers, even super-powered mutant kung-fu soldiers, armed with rocket launchers and portable mazers could take on and defeat even low-powered giant monsters is silly, but provides for an amusingly cheesy action scene, complete with what are obviously tiny toy tanks being destroyed. Bringing in the Goutengou (known in the U.S. as the Atragon from its appearance in the 1963 *Undersea Battleship*) and its

sister ships not only paid tribute to older Japanese science fantasy movies, but also gave the humans a fighting chance against the giant monsters.

Masahiro Matsuoka did a creditable job as Shin'ichi Uzaki, the one mutant not under the control of the aliens, but his story line is too nonsensical for him to be convincing. Kazuki Kitamura, however, is simply awful as the despicable leader of the Xilians. He over-acts and throws temper tantrums and doesn't seem bright enough to put on his boots without help. Some of this may be the director's fault, as Kitamura's villains tend to be over-theatrical.

Professional wrestler and martial artist turned actor Don "The Predator" Frye steals the movie with his dominating performance as the maverick captain of the Goutengou, one of four monster-busting submarine/airships that form the front line units of the Earth Defense Force. Frankly the movie would be much better if the mutant story line had been dropped in favor of showing more of the Goutengou, the Éclair, the Karyu and the Rambling, letting their eccentric captains take center stage.

Frye may not show much nuance to his performance, but neither do any of the other actors here, and he delivers his silly lines with conviction.

"There's two things you don't know about the Earth," Frye, as Captain Gordon, warns the alien commander. "The first one's me. The second one's Godzilla."


Frye is actually convincing putting himself in Godzilla's class. Not many actors could pull off that line.

Many of the minor roles in the movie are played by actors who have a history with the Godzilla franchise. One such notable actor is Akira Takarada, who starred fifty years ago as a naval officer in the first Godzilla movie and in various roles in several sequels, who gets significant screen time as the secretary-general of the United Nations. Kumi Mizuno, a popular actress with scores of Toho movie roles including in several Godzilla entries, plays the commander of the Earth Defense Forces. In fact, if there is an older Japanese actor with a few lines of dialog or a cool scene, it's a good bet they've been seen in a Godzilla movie before.

Even the actresses who played Mothra's fairies in recent movies are back, although the Peanuts (who originated the roles) don't appear.

There are some interesting cosplay possibilities for fans of the movie short of building monster costumes. The Xilians have a retro-cool leather clad look with long jackets and funky sunglasses. It's a





stylish update to their 1960's wardrobe from their first appearance. The mutants wear very cool paramilitary uniforms and body armor, again with long coats, a Kitamura staple. The best outfit to do, if one has the physique of a pro-wrestler, would be that of Captain Gordon of the Gotengou. Gordon's outfit looks like an updated version of an eastern-bloc officer's uniform, again with a long coat. There isn't a lot of choice for women cosplayers, although the blonde, dreadlocked, female captain of the Karyu did look very cool in her all-too-brief appearance and there are female mutants who are part of the Earth Defense Forces.



Shadowless Sword  
(Muyeonggeom)  
Korea 2005  
Directed by Kim Young-jun

I'm really rooting for the Koreans.

The Korean film industry has made amazing strides in recent years, exploding onto the international market with a number of ambitious and increasingly well-done genre films.

They are taking notes from both the Japanese and the Hong Kong film industries, and their work shows a strong influence from both, but they are combining that with a home-grown esthetic that is quite refreshing.

But they are not quite where they need to be and *Shadowless Sword* shows both intriguing progress and the weaknesses they still need to overcome.

On the positive side are the technical

achievements.

The cinematography here is quite competent. While it doesn't steal the show, the filmmaking serves to tell the story and advance the plot.

There's a couple of places where the cutting is a little less than it could be, where the narrative flow isn't communicated well as it should be. On the plus side, they've learned from the best Chinese productions to make







good use of the natural beauty of the landscape of their country.

The sets and costuming are very well done.

It's refreshing to see the different cultural influence the Koreans bring to their design after watching so many Chinese and Japanese movies. The Koreans are more gritty and grungy, more raggedy, yet with a swaggering flair. From the wannabe pirate look of the street gangs at the beginning, to the black leather armor of the bad guys to the cool outfits and straw headgear of the Bidomon gang members, the costumes are fantastic.

The set designs are simply wonderful. Lots of variety, good set dressing, and plenty of cool backdrops to the martial arts action.

And those martial arts are also impressive. The actors actually look like they can do the moves. The assistance from wire work and CGI is noticeable, but is better than average for modern martial arts movies. Yes, you can tell the throwing stars are computer generated, and there are scenes where I think the wire work is overdone, but for the most part, the fights look pretty cool.

There's some wire-assisted rooftop hopping and other flying wire bits, but I see that as an homage to classic period HK films.

However, I thought the "organs exploding out of the body" effects were really unnecessary and the ending battle between the hero and the main villain used too much CGI processing. They don't do a good job of explaining the martial arts bits to the uninitiated viewer. As an experienced martial arts film fan, I didn't need exposition to tell me that the bad guy had poisoned her blade with snake venom, or that they were using their

internal energy to enhance their martial arts, or that the flying was accomplished by focusing their Chi. I suppose these days everyone has at least seen *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and similar movies, so the film shorthand is obvious.

While the martial arts are fun and plentiful, it seems to me that they were trying just a bit too hard to be innovative in their fight scenes. For example, there's a lengthy underwater fight scene that included underwater sword fighting and underwater throwing-star-dodging while the bad guys leaped above the pond like frogs raining down attacks.

It was just a little too much.

However, there are some really well done acrobatics, ably assisted with some non-intrusive CGI and some slightly intrusive wire work. The fights between the two female warriors, Yeon Soha and Mae Yeongok are amazingly acrobatic and gracefully choreographed.

The acting is also decent. There's a few scenery chewers early in the movie who've watched Captain Jack Sparrow too much, but even the over-the-top performances work. And the more flamboyant characters tend to pay for their exuberance pretty quickly.

The main villain and his number one henchwoman both are properly menacing without going too far, leaving the excesses to a few lower-ranking bad guys who get to ham it up entertainingly but briefly before being put down by the good guys. The evil kung fu monk

with big mace in particular does a nice job in his role as boss monster.

I liked the acting in this movie much better the second time I watched it. The first time I missed some of the nuances the actors were using to illuminate what their characters were aware of, but the audience didn't.

The problems with the film show up when looking at the plot and character development as a whole.

The plot itself is a good basis for a movie. This is a period piece set in the 10th century telling the story of the foundations of the Korean nation. The nation of Balhae has been overrun and is in the process of being conquered by the evil Georan. Aiding them is the Killer-Blade Army, a group of renegade Balhae led by a disgruntled Balhae prince.

The opening set-piece battle is quite impressive, although a little darkly lit and too-quickly over as the Killer-Blade Army kills the reigning Balhae prince.

With him dead, there's no member of the royal family left to put on the throne and rally the people against the invader.

Except... his brother, the exiled prince who has spent the past 14 years living as a fence in a foreign land and hiding from assassins.

Our heroine, Yeon Soha (played by *Arahan's* Yoon So-Yi) is sent to retrieve Prince Jeonghyeon and safely escort him back to take the throne. But the Killer-Blade Army is also on the trail.

## South Korea



Original  
Language:  
Korean

Subtitled in  
English by  
New Line Cinema

Format:  
Movie

Year  
2005

Genre:  
Ancient Action/  
Martial Arts



And Jeonghyeon isn't exactly thrilled to be going back. After all, being prince and leading a revolution isn't exactly a safe job. Everybody else who's tried got sliced up by the bad guys. And, hey, it's not like he was treated well by his people. He is a political exile after all. So we get a lot of Jeongyeon trying to escape from his protector when she's not busy saving him from the assassins.

And this is where I had the problem with the movie the first time around. Jeongyeon is played as a ne'er-do-well who has no sense of responsibility and doesn't want to be a hero. He tries to trick his way out of trouble, rather than fight. In the beginning, he needs Soha to rescue him from faceless cannon-fodder villains. Yet by the end of the movie he's the badest swordsman of them all.

I was also expected to believe that Jeongyeon and Yeon Soha didn't recognize each other even though he was the one who originally taught her to fight. You'd think he would be able to put two and two together when she shows up with his old sword.

But the prince does manage to take out the monk when Soha isn't around to save him and there are other scenes that reveal he used to be a bad-ass fighter. Soha's long glances at the prince do convey that she realizes he's more than just a fop, even if she can't understand why he isn't the man she used to know.

I just didn't think that the director's storytelling was sufficient to illuminate the plot on the first viewing.

I wish there had been a little more character development, more interaction between the leads that didn't consist of Jeongyeon trying to get away and Soha stubbornly insisting that he's the new king. There's a bit where Jeongyeon sees the deprivation of his people and it moves him, but it



was a cookie-cutter, throwaway scene without sufficient emotional impact.

In the end, this isn't a groundbreaking movie, it's firmly in the mold of dozens of other historical swordplay epics. But that's not necessarily a bad thing – *Shadowless Sword* proves that the Korean film industry is perfectly capable of making an entertaining, good-looking movie in the genre that is competitive with the output of their more experienced international rivals.



Cosplay opportunities: As noted before, there are some excellent costume designs available to replicate. One advantage is that many of the designs are a little torn up and pieced together, particularly the street gang's, so the tolerances are not as severe as some other movie costumes would be. At the same time, the costumes are quite complex and would be a challenge to make. Yeon Soha's outfit, for example, consists of a complex martial arts robe similar to period Chinese dress, but with an elaborate belt and a leather under-armor that laces at the neck and either extends as far as the hands or includes some sort of embossed leather wrist armor piece.

The key prop for either Jeonghyeon or Yeon Soha would be the *Shadowless Sword* itself. It has a nicely recognizable hilt design.

The outfits of the members of the Killer Blade Army are quite cool, but there's not much that really says which movie these bad guys are from. They dress much like the members of Firewind's army from *Seven Swords* for example. But they still have some cool-looking costumes, props and distinctive personalities. The archer character would be perfect for a costumer who




naturally has a long-hair-and-beard heavy metal look. Mae Yeong-Ok's red and black outfit in particular would look smashing if done right.

For the costumer looking for a fun outfit that nobody else will do, or who wants something different in an ancient martial arts outfit, there's lots to like here.

Funny thing, they don't wear the outfits in the movie that they wear in the promotional shots. So the illustrations for this article can't be used as a reference.





Review based on episodes fan subbed by iy4ever-fansubs, Katana Fansubs and Okoisugoi fansubs.

Licensed in the U.S. by Funimation. The series is available now on DVD.

like they appear in Yamada's comic. The plot is also very close to that of the source material.

The manga in turn is adapted from a novel, *The Kouga Ninja Scrolls*, by Yamada, which also served as the basis for the live

# Gennousuke

KOUGA CLAN

*"To the one I love: Prepare to die!"*

In historical Japan the Shogun Ieyasu Tokugawa sets two rival clans of powerful ninja against each other to decide the succession of the shogunate, thus destroying any chance of happiness for a pair of star-crossed lovers.

As far as the art and design goes, this short series is a very accurate adaptation of the manga of the same name by Futaro Yamada and Masaki Segawa. The producers should be congratulated for their respect for the source material as they do a good job of making the animated characters look just

action movie *Shinobi: Heart Under Blade*. The novel is due out in English from Del Rey Books by the end of the year, about the same time that Funimation is releasing the movie in the U.S. In future issues I'll be taking a further look at the Basilisk franchise.


The story starts in 1613 when Shogen Kazamachi of the Kouga and Yashamaru of the Iga are summoned to demonstrate the power of their respective ninja clans before the Shogun.

In attendance are Danjo Kouga and Ogen of the Iga, the elderly leaders of their respective clans. They had been in love in their youth, but war and treachery caused

# Basilisk

甲賀忍法帖





them, and their clans, to become bitter rivals. Even a peace treaty negotiated by Hattori Hanzo couldn't stop the hatred that existed, although there is hope that this will change with the growing love between their grandchildren.

But Oboro and Gennosuke's love will prove just as star crossed as their elders' as the treaty is broken by the Shogun and the other members of the clans eagerly begin to test their deadly skills against their traditional enemies.

The artwork and animation are excellent, the ninja and their powers are interesting and unique, and the plot well constructed in its simplicity. Betrayal, plots and fights fill the episodes as the members of the clans maneuver for the kill.

In the end, will the lovers overcome the hatred and find happiness? No, it's pretty obvious that they are doomed to kill one another as the slaughter progresses.

The plot here is pretty straightforward: the 10 top ninja from each side are set to fight until one side is entirely wiped out. The winners will receive the favor of the Shogun, the losers' clan will be exterminated. The

# Koshiro

IGA CLAN

Japan



Original  
Language:  
Japanese

Subtitled in  
English by  
Funimation

Format:  
24 Episode  
TV Series

Genre:  
Historical/  
Fantasy



twists come in as each side maneuvers for the kill.

The Iga ninja try at first to hide the breaking of the treaty from Oboro and Gennosuke, knowing the lovers will oppose the fight. The Iga ninja use Gennosuke's relationship with Oboro to invite him to stay in their village where they can keep him neutralized while waiting for the chance to kill him.

Kouga ninja, who don't yet know of the breaking of the treaty, but who are suspicious of their rivals, then try to infiltrate to find out what is going on and make sure Gennosuke is safe.

Additional plot complications occur as ninja who know about the breaking of the treaty maneuver to slay opponents who are not yet aware of the situation. Ninja match their bizarre powers against each other in intense battles. Pretty much the whole series is duplicity and killing with a little time out to advance the romantic tragedy of the main characters.

The powers and appearance of the ninja are all fascinating, inventive, often grotesque and fun to watch. There are many interesting characters. The only flaw is that with only 24 episodes to resolve the death of 20 ninjas, plus a few extra for good measure, some characters have to die quickly to clear the stage for the next

combat. Despite this, the characters are fully formed and well introduced. Even minor characters make the most of their brief time before they are snuffed out by a rival ninja.

These ninja are also masters at using trickery and misdirection as part of their attacks. They truly are ninja and not just fighters with super powers.

When the ninja of the Iga Hidden Hilt Group find out about the breaking of the treaty, they lie to Oboro and begin their attempts to slaughter the rival ninja behind her back. At first it looks as if by striking first they will easily destroy the opposition before the Kouga Swastika Valley Group can even find out about the war.

But the Kouga have plenty of surprises to spring as well, and while they get a late start, they quickly demonstrate that they shouldn't be taken lightly.

For an anime with such a simple premise, the execution manages to keep the viewers interest. The animation is well done, the voice acting is top-notch and the action and suspense never let up.

Among the cool characters fighting on

the Kouga side are the blimp-like Jouske Udon, the spider-like Shogen Kazamachi and Jubie Jimushi. The latter is a formidable opponent despite being a quadriplegic. The truly nasty and duplicitous Okoi also fights for the Kouga and does much to even up the score with the Iga group, by using her deadly sexual allure. Gyobu Kasumi can merge with walls and the earth to sneak up on opponents.





The Iga boast a number of tough ninja, among them rubbery Rousai Azuki, slug-like Jingoro Amayo and Nenki Mino, who can use his hair to attack. The Iga also have two beautiful and deadly women ninja. Hotarubi dresses in a lovely purple outfit, carries a poisonous snake and can summon glowing butterflies. Seductive Akeginu has a sexy red outfit and is also a formidable fighter.

The women characters are beautiful but deadly, while many of the male characters are all ugly beyond belief, although there are a handful of pretty boy types.

Of the two main characters, Gennosuke is respected by his enemies and seems to be perhaps the most skilled ninja. He doesn't seem to need a bizarre mutation to be formidable, and his superpower makes him quite deadly. Oboro has no ninja skills whatsoever, but was born with the power of "eyes of disruption" which prevents any ninja who sees her eyes from using any ninja ability.

With solid animation, good art, an entertaining story line and plenty of action from the first episode, Basilisk is a great anime that is fun to watch. This is one of the standout series from Japan's 2005 summer season.

Speculative fiction content: While set very specifically in historical Japan, and with

real historical figures and events involved, this is very much a dark fantasy. These are not realistic warriors, but super-powered ninja with often-inhuman forms. While there is no overt magic use, the powers of the ninja are equivalent to supernatural abilities.

Cosplay potential: Oboro and Gennosuke both wear very attractive semi-historical outfits that would make a good choice for cosplay. Some of the supporting ninja, such as Akeginu, Hotarubi, Koshiro Chikuma and Tenzen Yakushiji would also make for good cosplay as they are distinctive,

# Tenzen

IGA CLAN

wear nice outfits, but are still human in appearance.

However, because of their inhuman forms, ninja such as Rousai Azuki and Shogen Kazamachi would be difficult to recreate.

Overall all of the characters are well-designed and distinctive in appearance, although some of the characters truly are grotesque in looks. Characters either are incredibly beautiful or incredibly ugly.





# FAIRYLAND

Fairyland  
The Fall Of An Empire  
2006

How could I resist doing a review of Fairyland's new album in the first issue of *From Alien Shores*? *The Fall of An Empire* is epic symphonic heavy metal that tells a sword and sorcery tale. It's by a French band whose former lead singer is Spanish (Eliza Martin, ex-Dark Moor) and current lead singer used to be with Belgian band

Magic Kingdom. Musically the band follows the lead of Italy's Rhapsody of Fire (nee Rhapsody). The lyrics are sung in English. The album artwork is by a Chilean. And it's only available in Japan.\*

International enough for you?

Anyway, the album picks up from where their previous album, *Of Wars In Osyrhia*, left off. Like the work of the aforementioned Rhapsody of Fire, Fairyland's albums tell a connected story. It's the musical equivalent to a massive, multi-volume, fantasy-brick epic.

The forces of the Empire of Osyrhia have been defeated by the forces of the Dark Lord Cenoss and the good people of Osyrhia have been enslaved. Cenoss has seized the seven guardian stones that were

meant to protect the land and killed all of their guardians but one: Doryan. This noble hero, the main character of the story told in the album, is captured by the Dark Lord and ensorcelled – turned into a frozen statue at the side of Cenoss' throne. The power of the Gods of Light is diminished and 500 years of darkness falls across the land.

The only free kingdom is the ice lands to the north, who seal their borders and wait for the fate of the world to change.

The album opens with *Endgame*, which starts out as a gentle, keyboard-heavy instrumental with some background chanting. It's very much in the mode of Rhapsody's philosophy of “cinematic metal” or metal that evokes the background



\*OK, since I wrote this, the album has been released in Europe as well.

# FAIRYLAND



music found in epic movies.

Next is the title track, lamenting the defeat of the forces of light and wondering if the Gods have abandoned Osyrhia. The courage of her heroes remains, but still the empire falls.

***Lost in the Dark Lands*** reveals that the Dark Lord has returned to his capitol of Eldergrave. Having enslaved the formerly free men, the heroes lost on the field of battle are the lucky ones. ***Slaves Forlorn***, an instrumental with more chanting continues the theme as both songs tell the story of the slaves, some of whom are forced to fight gladiator battles for the amusement of their chaotic overlords.

The theme changes direction with ***The Awakening***.

*"I've waited long for another chance;  
With the Gods' light shining in my heart;  
Now that life flows in me again;  
I will fight 'till the end of my days."*

The power of the Gods of Light has slowly marshaled over the years and Cenos' dark spell imprisoning Doryan is finally broken. He slips into the arena and leads a revolt of gladiators. The 2000 newly-free warriors slip north to safety swearing vengeance on the forces of the dark.

***Eldanie Uellë*** is the frost queen, ruler of the last free kingdom, who welcomes the warriors, equips them and adds the forces of her kingdom to the growing rebel army. This is the most memorable song on the album, with

guest vocalist Flora Spinelli adding a feminine counterpoint to Leclercq's lead vocals.

Unfortunately the next song ***Clanner of the Light***, is a bit of a let down. It's not a bad song, but it just doesn't stand out.

I think that's the one problem with the album. While all of the songs are well constructed and technically well executed, there aren't any songs that are truly outstanding. Fairyland is a very consistent and competent band, but I couldn't pick out any one song that really wowed me.

And if you can tell me what a "clanner" is, please do.

***To The Havenrod*** is a pleasant instrumental, but not quite forceful enough to carry the theme of the march of the army of the light to ***The Walls of Laemnil***. With this later song, the forces of good lay siege to the enemy fortress, seize the stones of power and turn the tide against the Dark Lord.

***Anmorkenta*** is a triumphal song with the forces of the light on the offensive.

Did I say that no song stands out from any other? ***In Duna*** does stand out. It's quite a change of pace, with a more Blackmore's Night sort of feel to it. It's more light Celtic metal than epic power metal. The lead vocals are taken over quite admirably by guest artist Sarah Leyssac. Her voice is perfectly suited to the epic, yet tragic lament for those still lost. Comparisons to Nightwish and the lighter work of After Forever also come to mind.

France



Original  
Language:  
English

Format:  
Album

Genre:  
Epic Fantasy/  
Symphonic  
Heavy Metal



*The Story Remains* is a 10 and a half minute long epic with considerable variety over it's length with metal guitar segments, keyboard segments and orchestral segments fusing together. It serves as a coda to the story, relating the triumph of the light and the return of the land to freedom.

Spinelli also provides vocals for *Look Into The Lost Years*, a softer song, again as with *In Duna*, more like Blackmore's *Night* or *Nightwish* than the rest of the album.

The album finishes with a bonus track *Across the Endless Sea* that is actually one of the best songs on the album – good epic power metal.

While I normally like the more Dio-style power metal vocals as opposed to the harsher death metal style, I think that Leclercq's lead vocals here are just too even and pleasant. This is essentially a rock opera, and he is signing the part of the hero Doryan. Doryan is a man who has seen everything he cared for destroyed, his friends cut down, his countrymen enslaved, been tortured and made to endure 500 years of torment as a living statue. He just doesn't seem angry enough.

All music and lyrics are by Philippe Giordana and he really is the heart and leader of the band. He does an excellent job of blending the metal elements with the orchestral elements.



# FAIRYLAND

The CD comes with a beautifully designed booklet. Not only do they list all of the lyrics, something I really appreciate, but the work is filled with fantastic paintings by Gonzalo Ordóñez. Ordóñez's work is a perfect fit for the album and really helps to sell the underlying story.

Each member of the band gets a full page painted illustration of himself done up in epic fantasy style by Ordóñez.

He's a real find as a fantasy artist and hopefully will see many more commissions. His work should be on book and game covers as well as album jackets.

Cosplay opportunities: not many, but I'd be impressed if anyone tried to build the sword and sorcery outfits that Ordóñez has come up with.

Band website:

[www.fairyland-metal.com](http://www.fairyland-metal.com)

Gonzalo Ordóñez website:

[genzoman.deviantart.com](http://genzoman.deviantart.com).





## **Kwaidan** (1965)

Director: Masaki Kobayashi

Starring: Katsuo Nakamura, Keiko Kishi,

Rentaro Mikuni

The Criterion Collection DVD

161 minutes

### Guest Review by Rich Berman

I have been struggling to think of some catchy way to open this review and condense how I feel about this film in one sentence. The only thing I can come up with is this: *Kwaidan* is one of the best movies that I have ever seen.

On the surface, *Kwaidan* is just an anthology of ghost stories based on the work of the nineteenth century author Lafcadio Hearn. Honestly, anthology films tend to be forgettable. Sure, there might be a gem or two in the mire, but, generally, nothing too

thought provoking. *Kwaidan* breaks the mold. The visuals and set designs are so rich and masterfully done that it seems more in place for a Hollywood cast of thousands epic rather than a horror film. The opening credit sequence itself is haunting, with different colored inks swirling in water. Kobayashi eschewed the easy route of excessive gore and cheap thrills for subtle psychological terror that builds to a crescendo with each tale.

In the first story, “The Black Hair,” a samurai (Rentaro Mikuni) abandons his wife (Michiyo Aratabe) for greater fortunes in another province. However, he soon gets buyer’s regret and longs for his first wife. Can he regain what he so callously discarded?

The opening to this tale sets the tone, not only for this story, but the whole film. The audience is taken through a visual tour of sorts of the samurai’s abandoned and weed-overgrown manor while a narrator begins to weave the tale.

“The Woman of the Snow” is another vignette of love and the supernatural. A woodcutter (Tatsuya Nakadai) is trapped in a snowstorm and encounters a vampiric spirit (Keiko Kishi) who spares him for a price. The woodcutter later marries and has a happy family. Will he keep his end of the bargain?

The key visual here is the apocalyptic snowstorm at the beginning. The forest is virtually turned into an alien landscape, with green skies and a Dali-esque eye staring down.

Although the sets are the real stars in *Kwaidan*, this tale is also the most touching and human. All



**Japan**



**Original  
Language:**  
Japanese

**Subtitled in  
English by**  
Criterion

**Format:**  
Movie

**Genre:**  
Historical/  
Horror



of the characters are sympathetic, which makes the turn of events that much more dramatic.

“Hoichi the Earless” is the centerpiece of the film, being the longest story and the most sweeping. A blind musician (Katsuo Nakamura) is forced to sing for a ghostly clan. Can a priest save Hoichi?

This is easily my favorite tale in a movie of great stories. From the opening sea battle sequence to Hoichi’s various encounters with the ghosts, the visuals are consistently rich and detailed.

The vignette is also striking because Hoichi is a complete innocent, yet, he is still being haunted. While the previous tales dealt with human failings, here the protagonist is sought after by the supernatural due to no fault of his own.

The final story, “In a Cup of Tea,” is certainly the strangest. It’s a story within a story dealing with the horrors of what one can find in a bowl of water. To reveal any more would ruin the story.

This one has the most subdued visuals of the film. It also has the creepiest moment that provides the perfect ending to the whole movie.

The Criterion Collection DVD which I viewed provides a crystal clear transfer

with good subtitle work. My only problem with it is that has too many unintentional spoilers. The booklet provided contains a short overview of the film and its source material written by David Ehrenstein. However, he manages to reveal the twists and surprises in each of the stories. Even the chapter titles unveil far too much



information. In fact, the chapter selection screen for “In a Cup of Tea” shows the final image of the film. The original trailer for *Kwaidan* is included, but it shows the climax to “Hoichi the Earless.” I think that one should see the whole movie

before getting into any of the other extras provided.

If you are a foreign film or horror fan or just appreciate great cinema, *Kwaidan* is a must have for your collection. Whenever I see those lists of great horror films that

show up around Halloween, I’m always surprised that *Kwaidan* never makes the list. It’s a shame that a true classic like this is so under appreciated. I recommend the Criterion Collection DVD, but just be aware of the spoilers.



So just how good can a Star Trek theme rock band be?

Actually, pretty good.

Warp 11 is a Sacramento, California-based filk band that performs at local venues in Star Trek costume singing punk

rock about Westly Crusher and the joys of fucking green-skinned girls.

Oh, and they also sing about the awesomeness that is William “he’s on a five year mission to get laid” Shatner.

The group has released three full

albums so far, neatly balancing a true Trekker’s attention to the minutia of Star Trek lore with a tongue-in-cheek sense of humor.

Musically the band has such a wide range that it’s hard to describe just what

# WARP 11





kind of rock and roll they perform. Styles range from folk rock to alt rock, from bluesy ZZ Top riffs to the industrial punk and metal of Nine Inch Nails to the rock of the Red Hot Chili Peppers. There's even a couple of country songs and a light disco/Barry White song: "Baby You Make Me Crazy".

And then there is the red-shirt reggae stylings of "I Always Knew I'd Die Alone" with the immortal lyrics :

*"I lost half my buddies in a Romulan raid,*

*"We were taking the trenches*

*"While the captain got laid.*

*"Now the casualty rate keeps getting' bigger*

*"And I'll never get my own action figure."*

Warp 11 does a nice job of matching the style of the song to the theme. For example "Q" is just as annoying musically as the character. This is brilliant but makes for a song I don't want to hear more than once. The Up-With-People-like "Wesley Crusher – Yeah" is also perfectly fitting to the subject, but really hard to listen to more than once.

But most of the songs are quite enjoyable hard rock/punk/metal with an occasional slight leaning toward rap metal such as on "Give It Up For The Captain."

Among the good matches between lyrics and style are "Welcome To Our Cube" which perfectly pairs a Borg theme with excellent industrial rock and "The Ballad of Bones" with haunting country rock.

Among the other great rockers are "Auto Destruct", "Set Your Phaser For Fuck" and "Red

Alert"

No, seriously, "Set Your Phaser For Fuck" is a screaming hard rock song with great vocals, amazing guitar riffs and drum beats.

That isn't to say they don't have the occasional misfire. "Kill, Kill, Kill the Klingons should be a screaming punk manifesto, but instead it's insipid soft alt-rock.

The genius of the band is how the band combines punk music attitude, and common punk themes such as getting laid, getting drunk and sticking it to the man with Star Trek themes.

"Rage Against The Federation" exemplifies the band's working class, anti-authoritarian punk esthetics, taking the part of the typical "red-shirt" who is left to die as Kirk gets it on.

Yeah, it's great to be Kirk, but what about all of the men under him who got whacked by the monster of the week? Quite a few of the band's songs take the point of view, or at least mention sympathetically, the poor security officers who know they are doomed to die in space while Kirk is getting it on with the female guest star of the week.

The band also makes the Enterprise out to be a space-going frat party.

Lyricaly, the band does have certain, ah, obsessions. Seven of Nine shows up in a lot of songs. Green-skinned girls seem to be the band's shorthand for hot, easy and exotic one-night stands. The sexual frustration of the Vulcan Pon Far gets much mention too.

V.S.A.



Warp 11

Boldly Go Down  
On Me

Red Alert

Suck My Spock

Original  
Language:  
English

Format:  
CD

Genre:  
Filk/  
Rock/  
Parody

The band also does a song called “Yeah Brother” on each album. Each one is different and distinctive and none are a cover of the song from the classic hippy episode. “Yeah, Brother 3.0” in particular rocks hard.

Some characters get much more attention than others. The holy trinity of Kirk, Spock and McCoy are referenced most often. Then there are the attractive



female co-stars, there’s a nice alt-folk rock ode to Yeoman Rand, for example. Seven of Nine is the only *Voyager* character that gets mentioned, but she more than makes up for it by her frequent appearances in the lyrics as the ultimate object of lust. *Deep Space Nine* and *Enterprise* are entirely ignored.

Uhura is only mentioned in passing and I wish they’d skipped “Suds Me Up Sulu.” Strangely, since Klingons are frequently mentioned, Worf is completely absent.

But Wesley Crusher gets several songs, ranging from the ironic punk rock “Crusher” to the wimpy aforementioned “Wesley Crusher, Yeah”.

And then there are the songs about Klingons.

The best of these is “Sto Vo Kor”. It manages to be a good punk song and be funny at the same time. It’s told from the point of view of a wimpy Klingon who is dismayed to be killed in his first combat, but then realized that he now gets to party down with Kahless for all eternity.

Some of the songs also address fannish topics such as “Trekkie Girl” and “A Song for People Who Never Watch Star Trek.” There’s also a song explaining “Why I’m In A Star Trek Band.” Note: it has to do with chicks dressed as Klingons performing oral sex. “Captain Caught Me On the

Holodeck” is a funny musical theater style song about getting caught betraying Star Trek by enjoying Star Wars fandom a little too much.

Captain Karl Miller provides the lead vocals on most of the songs as well as bass with Chief Engineer Brian Moore on lead guitar while Chief Medical Officer Jeff Hewitt plays drums when he isn’t busy self medicating

Keyboardist and Chief Science Officer Kiki Stockhammer takes over lead vocals for the hard blues rocking of “My Electric Man”. Her strong, smoky voice is perfect for the sexually charged ode to her lust for the “fully functional” Data. This is one of the best songs the band has, and it would be nice to see her take over the lead vocals for more songs in future albums.

With a few exceptions, which might just be my personal preference for certain styles of music, most of these songs can be listened to more than once. The band is talented enough as musicians that they songs are quite good as songs, independent of the Star Trek fun.

They’re as cool as Mr. Spock, ‘cause they live long, prosper and they rock.

All three albums can be purchased on the web at the band’s website: [www.warp11.com](http://www.warp11.com). Their fourth album is due out in June.



The Vampire Gigolo

# ヴァンパイアホスト

～夜型愛人専門店～

テレビ東京 毎週日曜日 深夜 1:00 ～ 1:30 放送

テレビ北海道 5月20日(木) 深夜2時30分放送スタート

ヴァンパイアホスト主題歌 最新情報



Vampire Gigolo  
2004

*"I'm pissed off now! In the end, I'll suck  
your blood!"*

— Suou

She's a brash, violent Japanese schoolgirl who investigates supernatural crimes! He's an arrogant vampire teen heartthrob! Together they squabble, fight evil and cosplay! With a little bit moreumph, this could have been a classic, as it

is, *Vampire Gigolo* is merely a diverting 12-episode TV series.

Also sometimes called *Vampire Host*, the series is based on a one-volume manga *Yorugata Aijin Senmonten – Blood Hound* by Kaori Yuki. Yuki is best known as the



artist for the gothic-themed mangas *Count Cain* and *Angel Sanctuary* so she's working in familiar territory.

Reading the manga (available for viewing online scanlated by Risa-chan at [www.manga-volume.com](http://www.manga-volume.com)) helps to understand the basic set-up of the series as well as the first story line that spans the initial two episodes.

This is a good thing, as the TV series is not available in English\* and my Japanese is only good enough to pick out the frequent use of "Kyuuketsuki" (Vampire) and "Tasuke" (Help!).

The manga is more nuanced and better plotted than the TV series, although the plot of the 3-chapter manga is reasonably close to the story of the first two episodes. The TV series is handicapped by the need to set up a continuing series and by the need to tone down many of the sexual overtones of the original.

Although I must admit, the TV show does keep a lot of the sexual overtones of the manga, even if they are more subtle about it. The first story line preserves the lesbian teacher/student relationship that is central to the plot and an S/M relationship is key to the second.

In both versions, Rion Kanou (played by Komukai Minako in the TV series) is a mouthy and disrespectful teenager who is searching for her best friend. Her only clues (in the TV version of the story) are a message left on her

phone asking to be saved from a vampire and a card for the Kranken Haus Host Club.

And here we need a little cultural note: In Japan, there are theme cafés and clubs where the employees dress up in costume for the amusement of the clients. These range from the fairly innocent cosplay coffee shops where the waitresses dress up as anime characters or maids to full-on brothels. One type that caters to women is the butler café where handsome waiters dressed and acting as British butlers pamper the clientele. Clubs with other themes also exist.

So Kranken Haus features pretty young men pretending to be vampires who serve up chills and thrills to the women customers along with their drinks. In *Vampire Gigolo*, only main male character, Suou (Matsuda Satoshi), is really a genuine vampire. In the manga, all of the hosts are vampires, one of the biggest differences between the two versions. The hosts in the manga also go much farther with their clients than they do in the TV show.

Rion is justly suspicious of the "perverts" at Kranken Haus, after all they are the only vampires in the neighborhood and the card seems to point straight to them. She's a bit put out when she finds that the vampires are really just fakes with plastic fangs.

The first episode is a pretty standard introductory

Japan



Original  
Language:  
Japanese

Subtitled in  
English by  
Bandai

Format:  
12 Episode  
TV Series

Genre:  
Horror/  
Comedy

*\*Events continue to overtake my ability to finish this zine: Bloodhound vol. 1, with the first four episodes is now available subtitled in English in a commercially-licensed release with two more volumes due out soon.*



episode. Rion investigates the club and doesn't believe Suou when he says he's never seen her friend. Suou tries to give her the bum's rush, but she picks up a bottle of wine and drops it on the floor in a typical Rion bid to force them to let her work off her debt. She thinks this will let her snoop around the club and find evidence. She's a little distressed when she's told she just broke a \$1,000 bottle of wine and that she'll be paying it off for quite a while.

And being a theme bar, she has to wear cosplay outfits while she's at work. Ah, yes, I knew I was going to like this series, with a cute girl who spends half the show in sailor fuku and half in cosplay outfits. In the first episode it's a typical maid outfit that she also wears during the show's opening song, in the second episode it's a tight, Chinese-style dress.

The first episode ends with Rion being grabbed by a pervert after leaving the club. While she's a formidable opponent most of the time — kicking the hell out of poor Suou and anyone else who gets in her way — she's helpless against a real criminal. Luckily Suou suddenly appears and saves her, but not before he's fatally stabbed by the assailant.

This scene was inserted in the TV series for one purpose, so that Rion can discover that Suou is a real vampire. The seemingly

fatally wounded Suou rips off the fancy crucifix that he wears and unleashes his vampiric powers to heal the damage.

This is one of the more interesting aspects of Yuki's vampires. Crucifixes don't hurt them, but instead allow them to control their vampiric natures. In the manga, Rion is surprised when the crucifix she brought to defeat the vampires doesn't

work, in fact, the club is decorated with many crucifixes. This allows the vampires to keep their blood lust in check and masquerade as humans. In the TV show, Suou's cross serves the same purpose and when he needs to go all Dracula on



somebody's ass, he rips off the cross and transforms into, well, the same guy with messy hair. But he's got super speed and can't be killed and such. Um, yeah, they were on a budget.

A lack of vulnerability to crosses isn't the only traditional vampire weakness Suou lacks. He has no problem with sunlight for example and garlic also is harmless as we learn in a funny scene.

But Suou also doesn't have all the traditional strengths of a vampire either. He can't transform, he's basically human who gains super strength, super speed and the ability to regenerate from fatal wounds whenever vamps out.

The second episode picks up the story following the manga fairly accurately with Suou literally sniffing out the killer and coming to Rion's rescue. The TV show plays some of this for laughs, with the villain merely driving off when confronted with a posturing, vamped-out Suou snarling on the hood of her getaway car.

One thing I thought the TV series handled better than the manga was that without the other vampires, there was no need for the silly, grafted-on, yakuza plot that marred the ending of the manga. However, the manga had a much better main plot – the vampires are waiting for the one who can set them free from their

curse and it might be Rion. There's also some interesting back story in the manga that shows why Rion is so quick to believe that vampires are real and the sub plot dealing with her councilman father is also quite interesting. There's a lot more meat to the original story, but that is all jettisoned in favor of simple monster of the week stories in the TV series.

So with that, the series is set, Rion has to hang out with Suou at the club, cosplay and fight the monster of the week until she earns enough to pay for the wine she destroyed.

One of the problems with the series is the lack of any real chemistry between the leads. Komukai is attractive and certainly violent and pouty enough to play Rion, but she should have had bleached blond hair as the character does in the manga. Her iconoclastic and rebellious personality is key to the story, but Komukai comes across as more bitchy than tough. Matsuda is just wrong for the part of Suou. In the manga, Suou is a suave and smooth vampire of advanced age despite his youthful appearance. Matsuda looks too young and acts like some Tokyo street punk even though he supposedly is 200 years old. His look is completely wrong. In the manga, Suou is tall with long blond hair and elegant style while Matsuda is too short





and has spikey hair with blond streaks. His acting is also rough, his transformation scenes are more like a guy turning into a werewolf than a vampire with growls and snarls and jerky motion filmed at a high speed. The special effects for his eyes are cool though, with blood coursing out of his pupils before they turn gold. The only other noticeable difference when he transforms is that his hair gets even more messed up. Dude needs to buy a comb.

While the actor playing the owner of Kraken Haus does an adequate job, some of the other supporting actors ham it up, particularly the ridiculous female police detective.

The police don't come off very good in this show, they are just there to provide very uncomedic comedy relief. The female detective is a buffoon with an overbearing personality, who puts on a bad blonde wig and frequents Kraken Haus disguised as Diana because she has a silly crush on Suou. Her male subordinate is disgusting pervert who, among other things, takes upskirt shots of a dead idol star in one scene. Tokyo wouldn't need an obnoxious school girl and her vampire sidekick to catch criminals if they'd hire some competent police.

The second story, comprising episodes three and four, has our heroic duo facing





off against an invisible man who is stalking a young girl who is on her way up as an idol. Here I learn another new word that I'll never use in real life: tomeningen (lit. invisible person).

Of course, in the best Scooby Doo tradition, the invisibility is all just a trick, although had there are scenes shot from camera angles that should have shown how the trick worked.

This story shows up the weakness in the

The mysteries here aren't very deep, and the identity of the guilty party is never a big surprise. Every non-regular actor is either going to be a victim or the guilty party. The producers didn't have the budget to hire actors to play red herrings.

The series may be low-budget and cheesy, but it's a fun and diverting show good for an evening's entertainment.

In the next 8 episodes the duo take on a fake werewolf, and a killer "Death God"

be done in a variety of common cosplay outfits: maid, sailor fuku, Chinese dress, naughty nurse. Suou wears either vampiric formal evening wear when he's working or typical Japanese punk styles when he's off duty. The hardest part of his costume would be the distinctive crucifix he wears. The best combination would be the outfits they wear in the opening credits, an Elegant Gothic Lolita maid outfit for Rion and formal wear for Suou.

## The Vampire Gigolo

# ヴァンパイアホスト

～夜型愛人専門店～

series: Suou, despite his frequent threats to the contrary, never actually bites anybody. The villains must do themselves in or go hopelessly insane when confronted with the presence of a real supernatural being because the heroic vampire can't actually kill them.

Suou never actually drinks the blood of anyone, other than the donated blood that he's given by the owner of Krankenhaus.

host. In the final four episodes, the series turns darker and finally looks at Suou's origins as the duo face off against killer vampire schoolgirls, including one of Suou's past. I'm really looking forward to watching this subtitled so I can understand what's going on. Oh, and Suou finally gets to snack on some folks, including Rion.

Cosplay opportunities: This is a great series for a couple to cosplay. Rion can

Official websites

(Japanese)

<http://www.toho-a-park.com/dorama/vampire-g/>

<http://www.tv-tokyo.co.jp/vh/>

(English)

[http://www.bandai-ent.com/products/video\\_details.cfm?id=656](http://www.bandai-ent.com/products/video_details.cfm?id=656)