

“VAMPIRE GIRL VS. FRANKENSTEIN GIRL” (DVD/Blu-ray Review)

Written by Michael Gingold

Tuesday, 19 October 2010 08:47



VAMPIRE GIRL VS. FRANKENSTEIN GIRL (out today on a two-DVD set and Blu-ray from FUNimation) is exactly what you'd expect from a teaming of the directors (Yoshihiro Nishimura and Naoyuki Tomomatsu) who gave us TOKYO GORE POLICE and STACY. It's a supergory collision between schoolgirls and the undead that represents the zenith of extreme Japanese splatter satire.

As the title suggests, the film deals with what happens when a young woman with bloodsucking tendencies comes to a new school—one which is already a haven for all sorts of freaks, some of whom have formed their own clubs. There's one group of coeds who have raised self-cutting with razors to the level of a competitive sport, and another bunch who take the real-life “*ganguro* girl” trend—dressing and behaving African-American, right down to darkening their skin—to bizarre extremes. In this environment, freshly arrived Monami Arukado (Yukie Kawamura) seems downright normal, and like many another teenager, she develops a crush on a handsome classmate, Jyugon (Takumi Saito), who narrates the film and is thus helpful for introductions like “This is Midori, the oversexed school nurse.” Unfortunately, he's already spoken for by Keiko (Eri Otaguro), queen bee among the school's mean girls. Love stinks, huh?



Only in this case, Monami, being a vampire, has a couple of tricks up her sleeve. She gives Jyugon a chocolate dosed with her blood, to begin turning him into a fellow creature of the night (figuratively; these vamps seem unaffected by daylight) and her new boyfriend. Keiko, of course, isn't about to give up her guy without a fight; add the fact that her father Kenji (Kanji Tsuda), the school's vice principal, is also a science teacher conducting experiments in the basement that Herbert West might find familiar (with the help of Midori and hunchbacked janitor Igor), and the stage is set for the titular bout, and all the hacking, flesh-rending and blood-spraying that goes with it.

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And if you've seen TOKYO GORE POLICE, you know that “spraying” is not a euphemism. The grue gushes as if from firehoses (Nishimura claimed at the movie's New York Asian Film Festival premiere last year that he utilized “two tons” of it) as humans, former humans and not-quite-humans take each other apart, and the opening scene alone features an assortment of ways by which a head can be reduced to an eye-popping skull. Amidst all the red stuff, Tomomatsu's script (based on a *manga* by Shungiku Uchida) finds other ways to slash at the boundaries of good taste, particularly when it comes to the “

ganguro

girls,” who occasion jokes about Barack Obama and Michael Jackson (the latter got a particular rise out of the Asian Fest crowd, given the timing of the screening).

Orchestrating all this outrage and offensiveness without wearing out its welcome is a tricky balancing act, but Nishimura and Tomomatsu pull it off. As in any film of this kind, the gags occasionally stick in the craw without coming out as laughs, though they certainly don't lack for variety, and even amongst all the ultra-mayhem, the directors are also able to mine visual slapstick out of a single drop of blood. The light tone is abetted by the film's spoofing of teen romantic-comedy traditions, and J-cinema fans will appreciate a couple of cameos: Eihi Shiina from TOKYO GORE and AUDITION as Monami's flashbacked-to mom, and director Takashi Shimizu, for some reason lecturing about his own JU-ON and GRUDGE films in Chinese class. This kind of knowing silliness pervades VAMPIRE GIRL VS. FRANKENSTEIN GIRL, a movie whose creators are clearly having a ball and which wholeheartedly invites the audience to join them.

The audience is directly addressed by the directors and their female leads in “Opening-Day Stage Greeting” footage from the film's Japanese premiere, part of a healthy collection of extras on the second DVD and the Blu-ray. There's a lot of jokey banter here (plus the revelation that in Uchida's *manga*, Vampire Girl and Frankenstein Girl never even met, much less fought), though this event might come off as tame for those who've attended Nishimura and co.'s U.S. appearances (think: filmmakers in *fundoshi*). There are also a pair of making-of videos, the second of which is actually by far the most substantial. Lensed by actress Maki Mizui, this 50-minute segment covers the shoot from beginning to end—a period of only two weeks, which means Nishimura says he has over 200 shots to do one day, and Otogura is interviewed after only having two hours of sleep the previous night. The particulars of many makeup/FX moments are revealed (actress Cay Izumi is seen having difficulty eating with her *ganguro* makeup on), and Mizui adds some extra fun touches by jokingly chiding Nishimura from behind her camera (“Mr. Nishi seems to enjoy watching people get hurt, huh?”).

The first on-set featurette is shorter—14 minutes—and accordingly, Nishimura says here that he only has 150 shots to do in one day. There's enough unique stuff here to make it worth a watch,

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like Shimizu revealing that his character, unnamed on screen, is named Mao. The discs' widescreen transfers are sharp and colorful, and while the Japanese-language audio tracks are unfortunately just basic stereo (the English tracks, sporting some rather unenthusiastic dubbing, are in 5.1), they're varied enough to get across all the squishy, splattery sound FX.

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DISC PACKAGE: 🍌🍌🍌👁

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