

“SUPERNATURAL: THE ANIME SERIES” (DVD/Blu-ray Review)

Written by Jorge Solis

Sunday, 14 August 2011 08:55



SUPERNATURAL: THE ANIME SERIES (now on DVD and Blu-ray from Warner Home Video) represents a unique concept: it's the first time a popular live-action TV show has been reimagined in Japanese *anime* style. Exploring the journey of Sam and Dean Winchester (original series stars Jared Padalecki and Jensen Ackles) as they travel across the backroads of America, hunting monsters while trying to save the world from the devil and searching for their missing father, this is sibling rivalry at its best, giving horror fans a taste of something stylistically fresh.

The 22 animated episodes mirror the story arc of the first two seasons, mixing in prequels and untold tales that fit within the SUPERNATURAL mythology. The introductory “Alter Ego” sets the tone and expectations: In the opening sequence, with the unflinching violence often seen in anime, someone is stabbed in the eye with a knife. The story sees Sam and Dean investigating a small town plagued by a demonic shapeshifter; during its transformation, the creature blows up into a hideous blob and splits itself in half, green worms spewing out of its chest in pure Japanimation style.



Directors Shigeyuki Miya and Atsuko Ishizuka put their own stamp on the series throughout, steering into different directions in original tales. “Darkness Calling” provides answers as to what patriarch John Winchester was doing while he was missing. In “Till Death Do Us Part,”

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Sam first meets his girlfriend Jessica during their time at Stanford University. Comic-book fans get an adaptation of “Rising Son,” based on the SUPERNATURAL graphic novel of the same name. This prequel follows Sam and Dean as children as their father teaches them how to be hunters. Even the Impala, Dean’s “girlfriend,” is given its own car chase in “Ghost Of The Highway.”

Anyone has seen previous works by production entity Madhouse Inc., such as VAMPIRE HUNTER D: BLOODLUST and PARANOIA AGENT, will instantly recognize how its animators take the mundane of ordinary life and enhance its presentation with stunning artistic imagery. Basic elements like snow falling or even a sunset are given spectacular painterly qualities. The particularly ambitious “All Hell Breaks Loose” Parts 1 and 2 delve into hypersurrealism as the Winchester brothers have an epic confrontation with their nemesis, Yellow Eyes.

As is typical with Japanese animation, SUPERNATURAL was put together in the opposite order than the process is done in the States: the animation is done first, before the voice recordings. The performers must recite their lines within the parameters set by the animators, which leaves little room for improvisation. Padalecki has a tricky time adjusting at first, but his performance does improve in each episode. Though Ackles only speaks in two episodes (Andrew Farrar takes over for the rest), he has a better grasp, perhaps because he previously spoke for BATMAN: UNDER THE RED HOOD. The episodes directly based on the live-action show aren’t shot-for-shot remakes (they run shorter in length), and Padalecki and Ackles don’t repeat the same lines. Sam is much more serious and darker here due to Jessica’s death, and with no restrictions on sexuality, while Dean is portrayed as more of a womanizer. Longtime fans may have a difficult time getting used to hearing Farrar as Dean, who starts off as the comic relief but interestingly develops into a more stoic and hardened hunter as he is given more responsibilities, carrying so much weight on his shoulders.

This series is highly recommended on Blu-ray, with the 16x9 widescreen images presented in full high definition, and die-hard fans should give a listen to the Japanese soundtrack, with voice actors Yuya Uchida and Hiroki Touchi as Sam and Dean. The supplemental materials are reason alone to buy the package: “The Making of SUPERNATURAL: THE ANIME SERIES” takes a full behind-the-scenes look at the animation process, from production meetings and script treatments to in-depth discussions with directors Miya and Ishizuka, while Padalecki and Ackles provide video introductions to each episodes. There are also interviews that took place between season five and the beginning stages of season six. In a solo chat, creator Eric Kripke notes that the live-action series is constrained by its budget and that *anime* is able to do things those producers can’t, citing as an example “Roadkill,” in which Sam has an underwater sequence.

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Don't waste a minute—get your hands on this must-have set! If you haven't watched a single episode of SUPERNATURAL, this is a perfect opportunity for new viewers to jump in, and it will please followers of the series who are waiting for season seven, in which the Winchester brothers will take on Castiel and his army of angels. *Anime* and horror fans will agree that this is a package well worth checking out.

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