

THE CONCLUSION

A re-release in a "Directors Cut" DVD edition of the conclusion of the beloved anime series known as "Rurouni Kenshin". *by Dennis A. Amith*

SAMURAI X: REFLECTION DIRECTOR'S CUT

Suggested for 17+, 98 minutes, 2004
(ADV Films)

One of the most beloved anime television series to be released in the U.S. was "Rurouni Kenshin".

The story of Kenshin Himura, a wanderer who is cursed to seek atonement for his life as an assassin, known as "Hitokiri Battousai" (sword-bearing master assassin).

Known for his quick and deadly style of swordsmanship, throughout the TV series, you have learned to enjoy watching Kenshin through his many adventures kicking the asses of bad guys and his relationship and friendships with Kaoru, Sanosuke, Yahiko, Megumi and many others.

After the end of the television series, in 1999, four OAV's were released (released as a Director's Cut and two episode OAV volumes as "Trust" and "Betrayal") which is the prequel to the television series.

In the OAV series, we learned more about Kenshin's past, more about Tomoe (Kenshin's first wife) and how he received the scar on the left side of his face.

Also, in the same year, a motion picture was released.

In 2003, anticipation was very high when it was revealed that the conclusion of the "Rurouki Kenshin" series known as "reflection" will be released as two OAV's.

The conclusion received praise but also backlash from hardcore fans when fans saw the death of

Kenshin and a dying Kaoru. Opposite of the "happy ending" that series creator, Watsuki Nobuhiro envisioned and a conclusion that he did not write.

In "reflection", the storyline takes place fifteen years after the television series.

The storyline is a reflection of memories through the eyes of Kaoru. How she came to love the man she stood behind and a focus on their relationship but how Kenshin lives each day in pain and atoning to the murders he committed as "Battousai" and the pain from his past which is the death of his first wife Tomoe (which is revealed in the prequel OAV's "Trust" and "Betrayal").

In the first part of the "reflection", everyone has matured and Kaoru waits for the return of Kenshin (which he hasn't returned for many years), their son Kenji, now a teen, left home to train under Kenshin's masterm Hiko Seijuurou and feels that his mother is wasting her time waiting for Kenshin (since he has not seen his father since he was a young boy). To make matters worse, it appears that Kaoru is very sick.

Within that fifteen year span, we learn that the timeline is during the Meiji era. No more war, soldiers are now military and no longer samurai's, swords are not used and there is peace in Japan but for Kenshin, there is no peace.

For the people he has slaughtered, he seeks atonement and the scar on his left cheek will forever remind him of his sins.

Through various flashbacks, we see things from the past of how Kaoru grew fond of Ken-

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shin. Through various storylines from the TV series shown via flashbacks, you learn about Kaoru's loneliness, her longing for Kenshin to show that he cares for her and that she is also in his mind, not just his first love, Tomoe.

Through this "Director's Cut", we see flashbacks of Kenshin and Kaoru's marriage, bearing and raising a child, Kenshin giving up his swordfighting and giving his sword to Yahiko as a coming-of-age gift and his several quests for atonement which he has returned each time... but for some reason, he has not returned for many, many years.

An older Yahiko takes care of Kaoru, who is very sick and learns about Kenshin and Kaoru's relationship and most of all, learns how she got sick.

The second OAV is the emotional rollercoaster and if you do not want to be spoiled, don't read any further.

You learn through the second OAV (or second half of the movie) that Kenshin has returned once before during those many years of waiting but during his quests for atonement and coming into contact in areas with sickness and epidemics and he has contracted a deadly disease and is not doing well.

Kaoru, wanting to be close to Kenshin wants him to give her the disease that he has. Wanting something from him to show that he is still with her, when he is gone on his quest.

This is the one of the most saddening and tearful storylines I have watched in my life. A story-

line that is almost like watching a friend who is dying from a disease or cancer. Absolutely heartbreaking.

You learn why Kenshin hasn't returned home for many years. You see the reunion among Sanosuke and Kenshin. You also learn Kenshin's real name. But most of all, you learn that two of your favorite lead characters from "Rurouni Kenshin" are dying.

Needless to say, for fans of the series, "reflection" is a love it or hate it conclusion to the popular anime series.

I recommend viewers to not stop at the credits because there is an epilogue featuring Kenshin and Kaoru's son Kenji in a touching scene reminiscent of his parents youth.

As for the DVD release, the

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“Director’s Cut” features an extra additional 13 minutes of footage not included in the U.S. release of the OAV edition.

The OAV’s are now spliced together to make 98-minute film version.

As for special features, interviews with the Japanese voice actors as they talk about the making of the first OAV of “reflection” and also the conclusion of the series.

It was definitely nice to hear Suzukaze Mayo and Fujitani Miki talk about their feelings of the characters development in “reflection” and also their feelings regarding the end of “Rurouni Kenshin”.

Also, included on this DVD is commentary by the English dubbed voice actors for Kenshin, Sanosuke and Kaoru.

Some may find the commen-

tary very interesting, especially how one of them interpreted the ending of “reflection”.

Also, included are the clean opening and ending animations, production sketches and ADV previews.

As for the video, I was very happy to know that the release is Anamorphic and looked brilliant on my widescreen. I felt the animation was just beautiful and noticed no irregularities.

As for the audio, I watched “reflection” in its original Japanese dialogue (2.0) with English subtitles. So, I really can’t comment on how good the English voice acting is, nor can I talk about how well the stereo 5.1 mix is.

All in all, I was extremely touched and saddened by “Samurai X: reflection”.

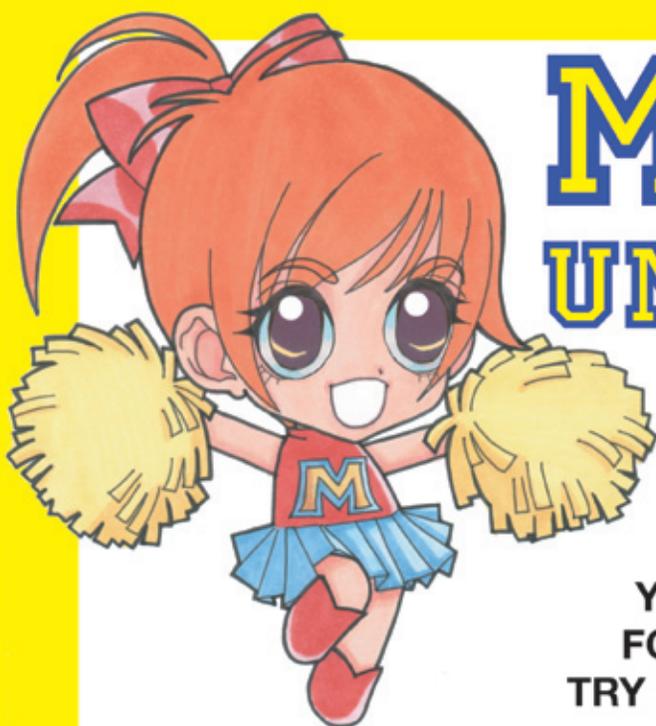
If this is truly the conclusion,

then so be it. I actually welcomed the serious and more mature tone to the storyline.

“Rurouni Kenshin” purists may take this conclusion as fan fiction since it wasn’t creator’s Natsuki’s “happy ending” but for those who accept the ending as is, you will truly feel that Kenshin is died in peace and has reached atonement.

It may not be the happy ending that one may have expected but I applaud Yoshida Reiko (screenwriter) and Furuhashi Kazuhiro (director) for taking the risk of crafting this amazing storyline.

I really enjoyed the conclusion of “Rurouni Kenshin” and I highly recommend this “Director’s Cut” edition of “reflection”. **A+**



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