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THE INVISIBLE MAN APPEARS

透明人間現わる
Tōmei ningen arawaru

CAST

Ryūnosuke Tsukigata Dr. Kenzō Nakazato
Chizuru Kitagawa Machiko Nakazato
Takiko Mizunoe Ryūko Mizuki
Daijirō Natsukawa Kyōsuke Segi
Kanji Koshiha Shunji Kurokawa
Teruko Ōmi Kimiko Chōsokabe
Kichijirō Ueda Otoharu Sugimoto
Shōsaku Sugiyama Ichirō Kawabe
Mitsusaburō Ramon Chief Investigator Matsubara

CREW

Written and Directed by **Nobuo Adachi**
Story by **Akimitsu Takagi**
Produced by **Hisashi Okuda**
Director of Photography **Hideo Ishimoto**
Edited by **Shigeo Nishida**
Special Effects by **Eiji Tsuburaya**
Music by **Gorō Nishia**

THE INVISIBLE MAN VS. THE HUMAN FLY

透明人間と蠅男
Tōmei ningen to hae otoko

CAST

Yoshirō Kitahara Chief Inspector Wakabayashi
Junko Kanō Akiko Hayakawa
Ryūji Shinagawa Dr. Tsukioka
Ikuko Mōri Mieko
Jōji Tsurumi Sugimoto
Yoshihiro Hamaguchi Detective Hayama
Shōzō Nanbu Dr. Hayakawa
Bontarō Miake Chief of the Metropolitan Police
Ichirō Izawa Kokichi Kusunoki
Shizuo Chūjō Yamada

CREW

Directed by **Mitsuo Murayama**
Written by **Hajime Takaiwa**
Produced by **Hidemasa Nagata**
Director of Photography **Hiroshi Murai**
Special Effects by **Tōru Matoba**
Music by **Tokujiro Okubo**

INVISIBLE MAN IN JAPAN

By Keith Allison

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James Whale's *The Invisible Man* (1933), based on a story by H.G. Wells, was one of the early horror films that helped establish Universal as the go-to studio for chilling fare. They were, at the time, locked in a battle with Paramount, which had produced a number of controversial horror classics during the early years of the 1930s, including *Island of Lost Souls* (1932), *Murders in the Zoo* (1933), *Supernatural* (1933), and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1931), quite possibly the very final word on pre-Code horror perversity. While these Paramount films earned their places in horror history, none of them developed the iconic status of Universal's big three: *Dracula* (1931), *Frankenstein* (1931), and *The Mummy* (1932); or the godfather of Universal horror, 1925's *The Phantom of the Opera*, starring Lon Chaney.

Measured against those films, *The Invisible Man* was sort of a determined second stringer, though over the years it has remained in the canon of classic Universal horror, joined by second and third cycle films *The Wolf Man* (1941) and *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* (a latecomer in 1954). *The Invisible Man* and the subsequent (not always connected) films in the series, had the advantage of being, let's say cheaper to make in terms of special effects, than your average *Frankenstein* or *Wolf Man* movie. As long as you had the main guy in face bandages and a scene of a shirt dancing, you were good to go and didn't have to spend hours with your star in a makeup chair.

It was a popular enough character that Japan decided to get in on the invisible man game, even though the character had been more or less abandoned in the United States by the time Japan decided to give it a go. The last film in the "Invisible Man" series had been 1944's *The Invisible Man's Revenge*, but Nobuo Adachi made *The Invisible Man Appears* (*Tōmei ningen arawaru*) for Daiei Studios in 1949, at a time when the heyday of all of the iconic Universal monsters was over, and the studio was pitting its classic creatures against Abbott and Costello (they would meet the Invisible Man in 1951).

This Japanese entry into the sweepstakes might not have been an official part of the series, but it certainly holds its own against Universal's films and is better than some of the official Invisible Man films (which included *The Invisible Man Returns* [1940], *The Invisible Woman* [1940], *Invisible Agent* [1942], and *The Invisible Man's Revenge*). Adachi's *The Invisible Man Appears* is, like most of the Universal movies, more of a crime drama than horror or science fiction, though there are enough beakers and scientists with wild Albert Einstein hair to give it a reasonable claim to the honor of being Japan's first known science fiction film – though not its first horror film. Like everyone, the Japanese had been making horror films since the silent era. Plus, there's not much horror in *The Invisible Man Appears*, which looks for inspiration more toward Universal's *The Invisible Man's Revenge*, which is mostly a heist film.

Invisible, Man!

The Invisible Man Appears is about friendly science rivals Segi (Daijirō Natsukawa) and Kurokawa (Kanji Koshiba), who are working on a way to turn things invisible. They are also romantic rivals for the affections of Machiko (Chizuru Kitagawa), the daughter of their employer, Dr. Nakazato (Ryūnosuke Tsukigata). Unbeknownst to his research assistants, Nakazato has already figured out how to turn things invisible and has tested his miraculous formula on a variety of animals. He has hesitated to test it on a human, however, since he's yet to figure out how to turn invisible objects visible again – and because the formula tends to turn living subjects violent and irrational. Instead, showcasing a moment of bad judgment, the scientist reveals his discovery to shady businessman Kawabe (Shōsaku Sugiyama). Kawabe sees dollar signs, but Nakazato refuses to sell him the formula, fearing what could be done with it in the wrong hands, and also because of that whole “going insane” thing.

Kawabe, not one to be deterred by morality or prudent scientific caution, decides to kidnap the professor, steal the formula, and con some poor schmuck into being an unwitting test subject. After all, Kawabe has *plans* for the formula. Incredibly specific, focused, small-scale plans. There's a diamond necklace he wants. Nothing else, just this one necklace, which is nationally famous and would be next to impossible to fence. Any other heist, the combined yields of which could be millions and millions of yen, never crosses Kawabe's mind. While perhaps not the most visionary criminal mastermind, Kawabe is still no dummy. He's not willing to test the invisibility formula

on himself, nor is he willing to sacrifice one of his loyal henchmen, since they're much handier as fodder for bullets. Instead, Kawabe devises the most complicated way to achieve what should be, even for an untalented amateur, a simple heist – especially for someone who counts an invisible man among their ranks.

Soon, an invisible man, complete with Claude Rains style bandages and sunglasses, starts popping up at the jewelry store where the necklace's owner had tried to sell it. Demonstrating his frightful power to not be seen (and some pretty good special effects by Eiji Tsuburaya, who would go on to cement his place in cinema history with his work on *Godzilla* [*Gojira*, 1954]), the invisible man, who claims to be Professor Nakazato, in a ruse so transparent (ha) that it's surprising anyone falls for it, demands the location of the necklace. Despite his powers of invisibility, the invisible man is shockingly inept as a thief, failing time and again to acquire the necklace and never giving up on it in favor of chasing some other type of loot.

The script by Nobuo Adachi, based on a story by Akimitsu Takagi, is something of a threadbare affair, most of its shortcomings manifesting in the fact that this gang of criminals has an invisible man at their disposal and can't think of anything to use him for other than trying to steal that one necklace – a heist which, even though they focus on it exclusively, they can't pull off. One can't help but enumerate the ways in which the invisible man could have lifted the diamonds without breaking so much as invisible sweat. There's also the fact that this invisible man undermines his one skill – being invisible – by walking into a room and loudly laughing and announcing that he has arrived. Had he just hung out over by the curtains and kept quiet, he could have stolen the necklace on his first outing. But that's not as much fun, one supposes, as laughing loudly and doing the dramatic “undress to reveal I am not here” routine that all invisible men love so dearly.

Its obvious foibles are easily dismissed, however, because *The Invisible Man Appears* is an entertaining cops 'n' robbers picture with the addition of a few science fiction elements. Director Nobuo Adachi has a bag of tricks that keep things interesting, from silent film-style dissolves and wipes to the use of handheld and point-of-view cameras to, of course, a bunch of “invisible guy” special effects. There's little mystery behind the mystery (the true identity of the invisible man is revealed about halfway through the film and is exactly who you expect him to be), but it's still fun thanks to spy direction and a good cast.

Particularly interesting is Takiko Mizunoe, who has a supporting role as Kurokawa's sister, Ryūko. Although a limited role, hers is substantially more memorable than that of leading lady Chizuru Kitagawa. Mizunoe towers over her co-stars and spends the film clad in a stunning array of outfits and looking like someone on her way to a party with Marlene Dietrich and Greta Garbo. In her off-screen life, Takiko cut her hair short and almost always wore tailored men's suits and formal attire. She began her career on stage, often playing male roles. Later, as she transitioned from stage to screen, she maintained a cool, modern, and controversial crossdressing chic that grew out of Weimar Berlin and was honed to perfection by Dietrich. She cut a sophisticated image, challenging convention of feminine attitude and style in the same way as many actresses of the 1920s and early 1930s. She was also a labor organizer (rallying stage performers to protest for better wages and working conditions, for which she was arrested), a lifelong bachelorette, and an outspoken feminist at a time when such fragrance was unheard of.

Takiko Mizunoe's career as a film actress was brief, but her involvement in the industry far outlasted her screen roles. There's a reason why, despite her relatively small (if pivotal) role in *Invisible Man Returns*, most of the articles about the movie end up being mostly about Takiko Mizunoe. She became the first female film producer in Japan, finding a niche for herself at Nikkatsu when it reopened. Nikkatsu was Japan's oldest film studio but had been shuttered during the war, surviving on its chain of theaters while its film production business and equipment was subsumed in a deal brokered, much to Nikkatsu's displeasure, by Daiei. When Nikkatsu decided to get back into the game in 1954, they found a willing stable of experienced filmmakers ready to jump ship from Daiei and Shochiku. Nikkatsu promised them more creative freedom and a better chance for advancement. Takiko Mizunoe was among the people who took the offer. Her first two films as a producer were *Hatsukoji Kanariya musume* (1955) and *Midori harukani* (1955), directed by Inoue Umetsugu, who went on to acclaim directing candy-colored musicals and spy films at both Nikkatsu and the Shaw Brothers studio in Hong Kong. *Midori harukani* starred Ruriko Asaoka in her screen debut. Asaoka would go on to become the biggest female star at Nikkatsu during its golden years.

The following year, Mizunoe changed the face of Nikkatsu and Japanese cinema when she produced *Season of the Sun* (*Taiyo no kisetsu*), the first of the *taiyozoku* or "Sun

Tribe" movies about and aimed at Japan's post-war youth. Based on a 1955 novel by future Tokyo mayor and political lightning rod Shintarō Ishihara, *Season of the Sun* was controversial for its depiction of jaded, self-indulgent Japanese youths idling away their lives at beaches, in bars, on the dance floor, and at local boxing gyms along Japan's coast. The old guard was indignant over this depiction of new Japanese culture, so indolent and disrespectful...so *international* in its flavor. Predictably, when the old are outraged, the young are enthusiastic. This was the first time Japanese cinema had offered something besides movies for adults or children, the first time someone had looked toward teens and twenty-somethings and tapped into the sense of alienation, ambivalence, and independence that had arisen among them in the post-war years.

Season of the Sun became more than a film. It became a sensation, a touchstone that reoriented Japanese culture (or at least a portion of it) toward youth, in much the same way as was happening in the United States and, a few years later, Swinging London. It spawned an entire (though short-lived) genre, and the hand at the tiller was the "cross-dressed fair lady," Takiko Mizunoe. She went on to produce several more defining films for Nikkatsu, including *Crazed Fruit* (*Kurutta kajitsu*, 1956), another Sun Tribe film which was built around a minor player in *Season of the Sun*, Shintarō Ishihara's lanky younger brother, Yūjirō. Although his role in *Season of the Sun* was tiny, his appearance was enough to turn heads – especially the heads of women.

Yūjirō Ishihara rocketed to stardom, becoming Nikkatsu's most bankable superstar and modern Japan's first teen idol. Around Ishihara's fame, and out of the ashes of the Sun Tribe films (which, like Icarus, flew too close to the sun), developed Nikkatsu's signature "borderless action" style, modeled after American noir and "youth gone wild" movies and French crime films. Mizunoe, architect of the Sun Tribe films, was again at the center of a craze that swept Japan. She produced several of Nikkatsu's best and most successful borderless action films, including *I Am Waiting* (*Ore wa matteru ze?*, 1957), *Red Pier* (*Akai hatoba*, 1958, a remake of the 1937 French crime classic *Pépé le Moko*), and *Rusty Knife* (*Sabita naifu*, 1958), all starring Yūjirō Ishihara and another of Nikkatsu's young female superstars, Mie Kitahara (also in *Crazed Fruit* and one of Ishihara's most frequent co-stars). Mizunoe also produced *I Hate But Love* (*Nikui an-chikushō*) in 1962, a pairing of Ishihara and Ruriko Asaoka directed by one of the great mavericks of Japanese cinema, Koreyoshi Kurahara. Her last film at

Nikkatsu, produced in 1967, was Seijun Suzuki's mad, career-making/career-ending masterpiece, *Branded to Kill* (*Koroshi no rakuin*).

The other interesting name associated with *The Invisible Man Appears* is effects supervisor Eiji Tsuburaya. *The Invisible Man Appears* was one of Japan's first science fiction films, and it's fitting that Eiji Tsuburaya was there the day Japanese science fiction was born. His name would become synonymous with Japanese special effects films. The company he founded, Tsuburaya Productions, remains active to this day. Compared to what he would accomplish a few years later on *Godzilla*, *The Invisible Man Appears* is a showcase of modest but inventive effects. The wonders of an invisible man film were well-established by this time. Audiences expected to see the invisible man undress, revealing nothing underneath his layers of clothes. They expected to see objects move around, doors open and close, things like that. The invisible man almost always has to drive a vehicle and smoke a cigarette, and there better be a dancing shirt. Tsuburaya delivered all of the above and then some. His "undressing" and "floating objects" scenes are substantially better than the scenes in which actors are pantomiming fights with the invisible man, which mostly involve the actors clutching at their own lapels.

Chizuru Kitagawa and Daijirō Natsukawa are wooden as the pair of lovers caught up in this crazy plot. Kitagawa in particular is saddled with a hapless role that demands she alternate between meekly agreeing to a "marriage-off" competition between her two suitors and being a helpless damsel in distress. Luckily, Takiko Mizunoe and Shōsaku Sugiyama are on hand to liven things up. As the transparently (ha) villainous Kawabe, Sugiyama gets to devour scenery. And given her off-screen style and history, it's no surprise that Takiko Mizunoe turns in a far less "damsel in distress" performance. Mizunoe's Ryūko, besides looking fabulous, gets into the thick of things, laying traps for the invisible man and, during the film's finale, mounting her own rescue operation at Kawabe's serial villain seaside retreat/dungeon.

Despite being a fun blend of light science fiction and heist film, *The Invisible Man Appears* didn't inspire Daiei to launch an invisible man franchise. They didn't entirely abandon science fiction, however. In the wake of *Godzilla*'s success, Daiei came up with their own *Kaiju*: Gamera. If never the measure of *Godzilla*, Gamera certainly proved a lucrative and iconic character in its own right. Daiei also concentrated on

the long-running *Zatoichi* series, starring Shintarō Katsu; and in a bid for a second giant monster series, it produced three *Majin* films (all 1966) about a giant stone god that comes to life and stomps on medieval villages. But while Daiei might have been finished with the invisible man, Japan wasn't. Like Eiji Tsuburaya, the invisible man soon appeared at a new home: Toho.

Send in the Invisible Clowns

By the middle of the 1950s, the cycle of Universal monsters had expired. The brief revival in *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* was extinguished by that film's hackneyed sequels. Horror was out of fashion, and science fiction was interested in giant tarantulas and scorpions and other *Godzilla*-inspired giant horrors of the atomic age. In Japan, however, there was still mileage to be wrung out of the venerable invisible man. In 1954, some five years or so after the release of Daiei's *The Invisible Man Appears*, director Motoyoshi Oda made *The Invisible Man* (*Tōmei ningen*, aka *The Invisible Avenger*). Oda trained under Kajirō Yamamoto and alongside Akira Kurosawa and Ishirō Honda. During the war, he became a go-to director for competently, quickly-made filler that could keep the industry afloat during the years of conflict. He never achieved the acclaim of fellow apprentices Honda and Kurosawa, but he also never hurt for work. In 1954 and '55, he made his two highest-profile films: *Invisible Man* and *Godzilla Raids Again* (aka *Gigantis the Fire Monster* or *Gojira no gyakushū*), Toho's cheap, rushed (but not unentertaining) sequel to *Godzilla*.

Invisible Man is just as cheap and rushed, but it *is* unentertaining, consisting mostly of padding, dull conversations, and characters who only qualify as characters because, what else are you going to call them? Things start off promising as a car collides with *something* no one can see. As the crowd tries to puzzle out what just happened, one of them notices blood appearing on the asphalt followed by, amazingly, a naked dead man. In a note clutched in his hand, the man explains that he can't take being invisible anymore and is committing suicide. He also warns that society should be wary; there is *another* invisible man out there. And that's pretty much all of the invisible man action for the next 45 minutes, as the film settles into a monotonous story about mobster Yajima (Minoru Takada), who runs a cabaret and, in his spare time, dabbles in drug smuggling. Middling thug Ken (Kenjirō Uemura) wants to use one of the club's singers, Michiyo (Miki Sanjō) as a mule, but she's not enthusiastic about the idea. Just

as Ken is finding his sleazy thug groove by slapping Michiyo around, in walks a sad clown. Somehow, that's a metaphor for this entire film.

The clown is Takamitsu Nanjō (Seizaburō Kawazu). He's also the other invisible man. Or rather, he *would* be the invisible man, except he spends the entire film in his Pagliaccio costume, which no one seems to think is weird. Part of the time, it theoretically makes sense, as his modest employment is as the cabaret's sign-wielding ballyhoo man, because, what person wouldn't see a sighing, melancholy clown holding a sign and think, "That place looks sexy!" But Nanjō remains in the clown costume even when he's off the clock, sulking around his apartment and not as thankful as he should be that he lives in a building full of people who don't think he's a creep for wearing a clown costume 24/7. Of course, the viewer knows it's because he's invisible under the make-up (though this movie forgets about the mouth and eyes, which is why previous invisible men always covered their mouths and wore sunglasses; a depressed clown in sunglasses was too much even for this film), but one who isn't privy to that information could be forgiven for not wanting to associate with this sad sack who slumps around gussied up in full clown make-up all the time and whose only friend in the world is the little blind girl who lives next door.

When news of the invisible man spreads across town, scumbag Yajima hatches a scheme to capitalize on the fear. He dresses his gang up in the iconic Claude Rains trench coat and face bandages and has them rob banks and race tracks while they boisterously claim to be invisible men. The logic of this ruse is... well, there is no logic. Again, being an invisible man has *one* advantage when it comes to pulling a bank job, and that's *being an invisible man*. If you bust in fully clothed and clearly visible, merely *shouting* that you are an invisible man, it sort of undercuts the edge being invisible would give you. Not to mention that someone might call your bluff. It's like yelling that you have the strength of Superman while doing curls with a five-pound dumbbell. Luckily for the completely visible invisible men, Tokyo seems to be in a forgiving mood and just accepts that they're invisible while clearly seeing them. It must be that famous Japanese politeness.

The only guy who harbors any inquisitiveness is news reporter Komatsu (Yoshio Tsuchiya). He investigates the invisible man case and before too long is on the trail of Nanjō the sad clown. When the gang kills the blind girl's grandfather during some typical "down at the docks" gangland shenanigans, Nanjō finally gets angry enough

to remove his clown make-up and fuzzy ball hat and get down to some serious invisible manning. This means the film delivers only its second invisibility effect at the 45 minute mark, when it's more than halfway over and with nothing in between but a glum clown walking around with a sign. How Nanjō became an invisible man is explained in a couple of lines of dialogue, depriving viewers of the previously *de rigueur* scene of a guy drinking a formula from a test tube. Motoyoshi Oda tries to pad things out with cabaret numbers, but other than the high-energy opening song and slinky dance, most of the numbers are as boring as everything else that drags this film out to a feature-length runtime that feels longer than its 70 minutes.

Eiji Tsuburaya is once again on hand to do the special effects, but they are few and far between. This film has fewer special effects than *The Invisible Man Appears* but tries to make up for it by including more bikini-clad dancing girls, as well as a little bit of pulp magazine cover style light bondage. We eventually get the requisite undressing scene and some floating objects and, of course, the invisible man playing a few keys of a piano and having his footprints appear in sand, but that's about it. There *is* a scene of the invisible man riding a moped, but that effect is undone by the training wheels and tow cable. The rest is just people talking to a nonexistent actor or pantomiming getting punched by an invisible clown. The lack of effects probably has to do with the fact that the film was a B-picture made on a tight schedule and with a tiny budget, but it also probably has to do with the fact that Tsuburaya was pulling double duty, working on the (scant) special effects for *Invisible Man* while also serving as the film's cinematographer. Tsuburaya the cinematographer fares better than Tsuburaya the effects pioneer. In fact, the one thing to recommend in *Invisible Man* is Tsuburaya's photography. It's not particularly inventive, but he does capture a lot of mid-century Tokyo. Much of the film was shot on the streets of the Ginza neighborhood, so as a window into the daily bustle of Tokyo at that time, it's interesting.

For die-hard fans of Japanese cinema, it's interesting to see so many Toho bit players in lead roles. Unfortunately, the script gives most of them little to do. Seizaburō Kawazu is a non-entity as Nanjō, the invisible man who spends most of the film as a clown with a hangdog expression. It's possible that the film was attempting to make a point about the state of Japan and Japanese veterans in particular, given what is revealed about how Nanjō becomes invisible, by having Nanjō drift through modern post-war Japan as either an invisible man or a clown. All nations have a tendency to demand their young go to war, laud them while the war is on, then abandon them

when they return, regarding them as broken, dangerous, or crazy, refusing to provide mental healthcare, avoiding them as employees, and all the while thanking them for their service. But intending something is not the same as achieving it.

The actor who fares best is Yoshio Tsuchiya as the reporter. His is the only role that is well-written (the gangsters don't appear often enough, but they're fine when they do), and it's nice to see him in something approaching a lead. A man who studied to be a doctor and whose father instilled in him a love of Shakespeare, Tsuchiya never showed much interest in entering the picture business but was persuaded to go for an audition by none other than Akira Kurosawa. Kurosawa loved him, though never enough to cast him as a lead. Although never a star, he was one of Toho's hardest working players, and you'd be hard pressed to watch one of their samurai or science fiction films and not catch at least a glimpse of him. After appearing as the farmer Rikichi in *Seven Samurai* (1954), Tsuchiya shows up in nearly every Kurosawa film during the 1950s and '60s. He was also a mainstay of Toho's science fiction films, beginning with *Invisible Man*, the studio's second science fiction outing. Starting with 1955's *Godzilla Raids Again*, he appeared in five Godzilla films, his last one being 1991's *Godzilla vs. King Ghidorah* (*Gojira vs. Kingu Gidorā*).

The other thing that might make *Invisible Man* of interest to fans and historians is that not only does it star the leader of Godzilla's Planet X (Tsuchiya), and not only was its director of photography Eiji Tsuburaya; but the actor who plays the invisible man who commits suicide during the film's opening is Haruo Nakajima. He might not be a familiar face, but that's because he's famous for what he did with his face obscured. Starting with the original and reprising the role throughout the 1950s and '60s, Nakajima was the man inside the Godzilla costume.

Alas, other than a chance to see the background and bit players of Toho get a movie all to themselves, and perhaps get a glimpse at some nice street scenes, there's little reason to watch *Invisible Man*. In every way, it's a step backward from the fun, effects-filled *The Invisible Man Appears*. Motoyoshi Oda does his best to cobble together a passable film with little money and little time but just doesn't pull it off. Given how little interest Toho seemed to have in the invisible man, in their invisible man film, called *Invisible Man*, one would think that this movie got it out of their system, especially since they were about to go on one of the greatest winning streaks

in the history of science fiction cinema. With success after success in the Godzilla franchise, other *kaiju* movies, and their space invasion films, why bother revisiting a "monster" whose best days were in the past? Something must have kept someone at Toho interested in the concept though, because they had one more invisible man-type film in them, *The Human Vapor* (*Gasu ningen dai 1 gō*, 1960).

The human vapor might have only been sort of an invisible man, but there was one more straightforward invisible man film to be made before that. In 1957, the ball was served back to Daiei. They decided to give the invisible man another go with a bigger budget, a more authentic science fiction feel (including theremin music), and a title as enticing as what American International Pictures was dreaming up in the States.

A Fly in the Ointment

It seemed by 1957, the only people who might be interested in the invisible man were producers of nudie cutie movies, who couldn't get enough of movies in which a horny scientist turns invisible and watches women take their clothes off. Well, nudie cutie producers and Japan. Eight years after *The Invisible Man Appears*, Daiei decided to give him another go. The studio had been relatively inactive in science fiction, but they were one of the preeminent houses for "respectable" fare, starting with Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* (1950) and including Teinosuke Kinugasa's *Gate of Hell* (*Jigokumon*, 1953) and Kenji Mizoguchi's *Ugetsu* (1953). They made several ghost stories between 1949 and 1957, but their only science fiction film during that period was the strange, apocalyptic *Warning from Space* (*Uchūjin Tokyo ni arawaru*, 1956).

The itch must have been growing to get back into the science fiction game, though. Toho was on a tear, the success of *Godzilla* having paved the way. Although never the measure of Toho's science fiction and *kaiju* empire, Daiei's Gamera yielded six films between 1965 and 1971 and was resurrected in the 1990s. In the years before Gamera, however, Daiei was still searching, and although *Warning from Space* was a bizarre, compelling film, it wasn't the sort of thing one could turn into a series. But the invisible man? He was proven franchise material, albeit a franchise from another country and a couple of decades earlier. The question was how to go about it without just repeating what they'd done in 1949. Once again, Universal provided

the template. When creativity and budgets were flagging, Universal propped up their classic monsters by pitting them against one another in nutty free-for-alls that might have been short on the polish, chills, and artistry of the originals but tried to make up for it with novelty, action, and the sheer fun of seeing the Wolf Man and Frankenstein's monster smash up Dracula's castle as they fought one another.

The invisible man hadn't been a part of those monster team-ups (*or had he been???*), his sole venture into such a realm pitting him against Abbott and Costello. Daiei had no history of werewolf, vampire, or mummy movies, though it might have been cool to watch the Invisible Man square off against a traditional Japanese spirit or *yokai*, the likes of which had been appearing in the studio's ghost films. But in the end, it was obvious that the only fitting opponent for an invisible man is the invisible man's natural enemy: a tiny flying hitman. Thus was born *The Invisible Man vs. The Human Fly* (*Tōmei ningen to hae otoko*).

The film opens with an impossible murder aboard an airplane. A man walks into the bathroom alone and is discovered, moments later, dead from stab wounds. No one saw anyone enter the bathroom with the victim nor leave it. This murder is just the opening salvo in a killing spree, all of the dastardly deeds committed under similarly impossible circumstances. Assigned to the case is Tokyo police inspector Wakabayashi (Yoshirō Kitahara), who jokes that the only solution he can see involves the murderer being invisible. This offhand joke is taken seriously by Dr. Tsukioka (Ryūji Shinagawa), who has been working on a cosmic ray with a local mad scientist and discovered one of the byproducts of their research is a ray that can render objects invisible. Tsukioka's lab partner, Sugimoto (Jōji Tsurumi), thinks the invisibility ray could aid the police in their investigations, but Tsukioka is quick to caution that they've not perfected a way to reverse the invisibility without riddling the subject with cancer. This doesn't stop Sugimoto from trying the ray out on himself, though he protects his head and hands so that the movie can show us some scenes of just his head floating around, eating a banana.

Meanwhile, the murders continue, and it doesn't seem like invisibility is the explanation. Instead, *tininess* is the explanation. The murderer, we learn, possesses the ability to shrink down to the size of a fly, allowing him ingress to all sorts of seemingly inaccessible locations, where he can grow back to normal size, commit his

heinous act, then shrink back down to make his escape unseen by anyone around him who didn't notice a full-sized guy throwing down a test tube full of smoking vapor moments before then inhaling it and shrinking down to the size of an insect.

As the corpses pile up, Wakabayashi struggles to solve the crimes, grasping at ever more outlandish scenarios until he hits upon "perhaps it's a very tiny murderer who can also fly." Once he's drawn this astounding conclusion, he decides the only way an honest cop could possibly catch a murderous human the size of a fly is to use the invisibility ray, cancer be damned. Exactly how being invisible gives you an advantage over a little flying murderer is of no real concern. Citing the whole "you will be invisible forever or die of instant cancer" side effect, Tsukioka regrettably refuses to let the inspector use the ray. However, when word of the ray leaks out, the sinister forces behind the human fly decide they want it as well, forcing Tsukioka to consider using the ray on himself in order to combat this diminutive menace.

The Invisible Man vs. The Human Fly predates the American horror classic *The Fly* (1958) by several months, and the fly in Daiei's film is nothing like the one in the 20th Century Fox film. Daiei's inspiration was actually *The Incredible Shrinking Man*, which was released in Japan just before this film went into production and proved a reasonable enough hit that one can assume it was the primary inspiration for pitting an invisible man against a wee contract killer. Screenwriter Hajime Takaiwa realizes an invisible man doesn't have the greatest screen presence, and that in a battle between a fly-size hitman and an invisible guy, the fly-sized hitman provides more potential in terms of story and special effects. As a result, this film hardly seems interested in any of its invisible people. The idiot lab assistant who renders himself partially invisible is a one-off gag who plays no role in the film other than to eat that banana. When Tsukioka decides to render himself invisible, it happens when more than half the movie is over. Even then, he has limited screen time. There's not even an undressing or "unraveling the head bandages" scene, since this particular method of making someone invisible does the same for their clothes, baggy suit, fedora, and all.

The bulk of the film is taken up by detective Wakabayashi and his team always being one step behind the human fly. Said human fly is initially represented in the film as nothing more than a mysterious buzzing before someone drops dead, but once the film reveals him for the first time, there's no reticence about showing him again and again. The effect is achieved by simple superimposition, which means any time he's on screen, the human fly is semi-transparent and only vaguely integrated into

the scene around him. The best bit is when he lasciviously prowls around the bare midriff of busty cabaret dancer Meiko, played by B-movie bombshell Ikuko Mōri. It also means that depending on the care put into any one scene, the human fly looks to be the size of anything between a fly and a bottle of beer. As to why he can fly, that's explained away by a bit of well-researched hard science consisting of reasoning along the lines of, "A human who is small enough? Well, of course they'd be able to float." But that's neither here nor there, especially once the human fly escalates his reign of terror from knocking off a few people to holding the entire city hostage with a mad bomber scheme that sees the film go full "tiny *kaiju*," complete with legions of soldiers and equipment deploying, panicked citizens running through the streets, and exploding miniatures.

The Invisible Man vs. The Human Fly was the first film for director Mitsuo Murayama. He keeps it moving at a good pace with an able cast that never acknowledges how absurd the whole thing is. It follows the lead of Toho's *Invisible Man* not just by making the invisible man a good guy but also by padding out its run time with saucy cabaret numbers. As these numbers are built around Ikuko Mōri, they are welcome. Plus, as clumsy as the human fly effects might be, they are also charming, and they're certainly plentiful.

1957 was a major year for Japanese cinema. The market was pivoting away from the two-party system of "stuff for grown ups and stuff for children" and beginning to pay attention to a new demographic of consumers that had arisen since the end of World War II: teenagers. In previous decades, youths would have probably been toiling away in the factories or on the farm (regardless of whether they were in the United States, Japan, or England) and either supporting a family of their own or contributing their wages to a familial pot to help make ends meet. That changed in the 1950s, and the youth market suddenly had some cash they wanted to spend. Thus the rise of the malt shop, rock and roll, hot rod culture, and the drive-in movie. Japan might not have had drive-in theaters, but they did have an emerging post-war youth culture that had grown up on American films and was looking, like their contemporaries in the US, to rebel against the generation that had led the world to war.

This sort of youth culture film would find its spiritual home at Nikkatsu, but Daiei's ridiculous *The Invisible Man vs. The Human Fly* is pure drive-in teen movie material, right down to the cheap titillation of its cabaret numbers and the endearingly ludicrous special effects. If you swapped out Mitsuo Murayama's name for Roger Corman and released it to the drive-in circuit on a double bill with *Horrors of Spider Island* (1960), no one would bat an eye. To have this much strangeness grafted onto an otherwise straight-forward cops and criminals film makes for entertaining cinema. But not, alas,

entertaining enough for Daiei to sink more money into more invisible man or human fly films – meaning, sadly, we never got *Zatoichi Meets the Human Fly*.

But we got close. Sort of.

In 1960, Daiei must have figured that if samurai-meets-ghost horror films such as Nobuo Nakagawa's *The Ghost of Yotsuya* (*Tokaido Yotsuya Kaidan*, 1959) were popular, who wouldn't want to see a flailing samurai wave his sword around at an invisible opponent? *Invisible Demon* (*Tōmei tengu*, aka *Invisible Goblin*) was written by Tetsurō Yoshida, who had been working on the samurai film franchise *Akado Suzunosuke*, and directed by Mitsuo Hirotsu, who worked on a few samurai films starring Raizo Ichikawa as well as 1958's supernatural film, *Hakuja komachi*, featuring *The Invisible Man vs. the Human Fly*'s Ikuko Mōri. *Invisible Demon* splits the difference between vengeful ghost story and invisible man story. Tetsurō Yoshida must have enjoyed writing at the weird end of the spectrum. His subsequent career includes a number of high-profile sci-fi and supernatural films, including both the *Daimajin* and *Yokai Monsters* trilogies in the 1960s. His final credit is 1970's *The Invisible Swordsman* (*Tōmei kenshū*), directed by Yoshiyuki Kuroda, Yoshida's collaborator on the *Yokai* films. *The Invisible Swordsman* is a truer "invisible man" movie than *Invisible Demon*. It's about a vengeful swordsman who obtains a magic potion that turns him invisible—and gives him glimpses of the spirit world.

Both *Invisible Demon* and *Invisible Swordsman* remain, like invisible men, elusive. But then...so once was *The Invisible Man vs. the Human Fly*. And where are we today?

Keith Allison is a writer and pop culture historian living in New York. His interest in film and adventure started at an early age, when he was left to his own devices in the wee small hours and discovered the Universal monsters: Godzilla, and "Matinee at the Bijou." He has written for Alcohol Professor, The Cultural Gutter, Teleport City and the book Sex and Zen and a Bullet in the Head. He is also the author of Cocktails & Capers: Cult Film, Cocktails, Crime, and Cool.





INVISIBLE MEN: GHOSTS OF THE POST-WAR ERA

by Hayley Scanlon

One figure looms large over Japanese genre cinema, quite literally in one sense, eclipsing the rich history of *tokusatsu* special effects movies which extends from the silent era into the present day. Godzilla is most often read as an embodiment of nuclear anxiety, inspired by the Lucky Dragon 5 incident in which a group of Japanese fishermen became accidental victims of American weapons testing. Even before Godzilla was awakened by destructive and irresponsible science, however, B-movie cinema had developed a preoccupation with the role and responsibility of the scientific community as guardians of future safety.

Regarded as Japan's first completely extant science fiction film, 1949's *The Invisible Man Appears* is unusual in comparison to the later special effects movies of the '50s and '60s in that it remains entirely forward looking, relegating the trauma of the war to background context rather than primary motivation. Rather than Wells' original novel, *The Invisible Man Appears* takes its cues from Universal's 1933 adaptation directed by James Whale and starring Claude Rains, originally running under the title “透明魔” (*Tōmeima*) meaning “invisible demon” but swapping the murderous intent of Whale's hero for a less violent shift towards a noirish crime spree. A valuable diamond neckless, the Tears of Amour, serves as a suitable MacGuffin and symbol of post-war greed and selfishness.

Perhaps still a difficult message for the censors' board under the American occupation, *The Invisible Man Appears* is resolutely pro-science, but wary of its misuse. The title cards bookending the film remind us that there is no such thing as good or bad in science, but that its discoveries can be used for good or ill with the implication that the decision rests with us alone. Nevertheless, no real reason is given for Dr. Nakazato's research into invisibility, even if we can later attribute an application in law enforcement, though it's clear that none of the scientists are keen on their work being appropriated by the military. It is therefore a double irony that,

as in many other *tokusatsu* films from the '50s and '60s, manipulation of the human body necessarily results in the side effects of violence and madness. Having been tricked into testing the invisibility serum on himself, ambitious scientist Dr. Kurokawa becomes obsessed with the Tears of Amour, believing that if he can steal the necklace villainous industrialist Kawabe will produce a cure restoring his visibility.

Kawabe, like the two doctors vying for Nakazato's approval, has his eye on the professor's daughter Machiko. Nakazato had implied that whoever was able to perfect the invisibility technology first would be entitled to Machiko's hand in marriage though she, quite rightly, sought to turn them both down despite harboring an attraction to the more earnest of the two, Segi. The misuse of the technology is not at the hands of the scientists letting their thirst for knowledge, lust for personal power, or vanity get out of control, nor is it at the hands of an authoritarian government or shady military, but at those of a thuggish businessman who is, perhaps, the real source of post-war anxiety. In these troubled times, greed and self-interest were rampant, and exploitative corporatism might turn out to be a bigger threat than bad science or dangerous technology. Unlike later invisible men, the scientist Kurokawa is rendered "invisible" by the anti-intellectual force of a man like Kawabe who is intent on stealing cutting edge technology to misuse it for personal gain.

Nevertheless, Nakazato eventually decides to accept responsibility for inventing something without considering its full implications and causing harm to society in the process. The closing title card echoes the opening one in telling us that there is no good or bad in science, only that its usage defines its nature. Eight years later, Daiei decided to resurrect the Invisible Man, but took a more defensive position on the technology which created him, insisting that tech developed by the right people was in some sense good in contrast to that developed by the militarist government during the war which was necessarily bad and could have no "good" application.

Like many of the B-movie *tokusatsu* adventures that would follow, *The Invisible Man vs. The Human Fly* brings wartime trauma to the fore, implying that this bodily corruption is an extension of the spiritual corruption suffered by those who lived through the conflict. *The Invisible Man Appears* had opted to minimize the threat of violence in favor of emphasizing the immoral criminality of casual gangsterdom, thuggish armed robbery, and the obscenity of fighting over a shiny diamond necklace when so many were going hungry, but *Human Fly* opens with a murder which turns

out to be one of six recent mysterious cases of unexplained violent death. The only clue the police can come up with is a matchbook from a local cabaret bar, Club Asia, later realizing that some of the victims had served together during war.

Where Kawabe had been motivated purely by greed and self-interest, Kusunoki is obsessed with revenge against those who have wronged him. Left behind after the war, only he was charged as a war criminal and forced to pay for the transgressions of all. Now he wants them to pay too, and in ironic fashion – killed by the very technology they helped to create in order to win a cruel and pointless war. The serum, recovered from a bunker on a Pacific island, shrinks a man down to the size of an insect and gifts him the ability to fly. Kusunoki has been feeding it to one of his minions, Yamada, who has been flying about committing murders and funding the enterprise through bank robbery. As usual, however, the transformative technology has dangerous side effects – Yamada has become addicted to the human fly serum and ampules are in increasingly short supply. Kusunoki uses his addiction to further manipulate him only to become irritated when his increasing violence and paranoia mess up his plans with the inconvenience of "unnecessary" killing.

Meanwhile, earnest policeman Wakabayashi jokes that perhaps the murders are being committed by the "Invisible Man", only to be told that such a thing is no longer as far-fetched as he might think. In fact, his own childhood friend, Tsukioka, is currently involved in invisibility research, investigating "cosmic rays". Where the human fly serum is obviously evil – immediately misused not only by Kusunoki and his desire for revenge, but by Yamada who uses it to spy on his crush, the dancer Mieko, by buzzing over her breasts and getting annoyed when she swats him away, the invisibility device is posited as wholly good at least in its opposition to the Human Fly. At the end of the picture, Tsukioka, who has discovered a way to reverse the invisibility in contrast to the invisible men of previous instalments, decides to hand the technology over to the authorities who, the film seems to say, can be trusted to use it properly and keep it out of the hands of those who might not.

Invisibility might be reversible, but Kusunoki remains transformed by the human fly serum, zipping around in an oddly bug-like helicopter and becoming ever more insectile in his creeping venality. In this he's an encapsulation of embittered post-war manhood, one of many who feel they've been unfairly made to pay the price for a national folly. Consumed by thoughts of revenge, he resents losing six years of his

life in prison and returning to a very different Japan where he chases “small potato” business opportunities and pursues a nefarious plan to turn the weapon used against him back on the society which created it. Ironically accusing Yamada of “killing people like they were insects”, he imagines himself a more sophisticated criminal mastermind and is somewhat validated when the TV brands him the “ultimate evil” in alerting Tokyoites to a new existential threat.

Where Kurokawa was rendered invisible by post-war thuggery, Kusunoki is a man transformed by wartime trauma. The invisible man had also appeared in 1954 in a new version by *tokusatsu* specialists Toho, once again boasting effects by the father of the genre Eiji Tsuburaya. Nanjo, the Invisible Man at the film’s center, chooses to hide in plain sight, dressing in an elaborate clown outfit complete with traditional makeup. Like Kusunoki he was part of a special scientific squad during the war, becoming an “Invisible Man” against his will. The authorities believed they could cover up the existence of the invisible men because the squad was wiped out on Saipan at the end of the war, but some at least have survived – a fact exposed by the suicide of one of Nanjo’s friends who throws himself under a car and leaves a note explaining that living life invisible is something he can no longer bear.

Unlike the other invisible men, however, Nanjo has remained good and kind, if also lonely and afraid. He is unfairly demonized as dangerous by a media reaching hysteria about the potential threat posed by those who came back from the war changed beyond all recognition. In this, Nanjo embodies the “invisible men” of the post-war era who came home from a war in which they’d done things they could not be proud of, afraid they were no longer fit for decent society, and finding that it in any case had little space for them in a struggling economy with few opportunities for those looking to build new lives for themselves. Describing himself as a “monster created by militarism”, Nanjo chooses to isolate himself, forming a friendship only with a little girl who is blind and therefore unable to perceive his difference, and later with a conflicted cabaret dancer trying to mitigate her unavoidable connection to the red light district. Generating a solidarity of the marginalized, he dares to forge a new path forward in which they can “live by helping each other” but is only redeemed with the restoration of his visibility when he has sacrificed himself to save the innocent.

When the Invisible Man appeared in 1949, he did so as a warning about the misuse of bad science and the rising inequalities of the complicated post-war economy. By the 1950s, he’d become a more sympathetic figure. For Daiei, he was now a force of order, an unambiguously good instrument of law enforcement and a guardian of justice. For Toho he was the melancholy ghost of the middle-aged man who’d been transformed by militarist folly, and like the 1949 Invisible Man knew he could never change back. The Human Fly, meanwhile, was everything that was rotten in the current society – embittered, greedy, and vengeful, an example of bad science for which there was no legitimate application. Someone had to take responsibility – in 1949 the benevolent professor, in 1954 the Invisible Man himself, and in 1957 the authorities now apparently sufficiently redeemed to be worthy of trust with a potentially dangerous technology. The true responsibility, however, rests with us in accepting that science may have no right and wrong, but we collectively have the power to decide how it is used and who is given power over it.

Hayley Scanlon is a freelance film writer and editor of East Asian cinema website Windows on Worlds.



EIJI TSUBURAYA: THE SPECIAL EFFECTS MAN APPEARS

By Tom Vincent

A Page of Madness (Kurutta Ichipeiji) is a technical marvel. Originally released in Japan in 1926, Teinosuke Kinugasa's film is now considered by many scholars as a groundbreaking masterpiece of avant-garde cinema and has been compared to such canonical films as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari, 1920)* and *The Last Laugh (Der letzte Mann, 1924)*. Whilst there have been multiple interpretations of the film's themes and narrative, there is, at least, one common consensus: it was an extraordinary technical accomplishment. From the opening moments, the virtuosity of the camerawork, editing, and optical effects seamlessly come together to depict a stunning portrayal of an illusionary world inside a mental asylum. The wide range of techniques used easily impress: fluid dolly shots going from close-up to wide; dizzying camera pans harmoniously being intercut; subjects appearing and transforming; and in-camera distortion effects. Perhaps the most impressive are the shots that have multiple exposures where it challenges the viewer with notions of space and time.

Like the vast majority of films from the era, *A Page of Madness* was considered a lost film until Kinugasa himself discovered a print in his shed in 1971. During its subsequent re-release, Japanese audiences would have taken great interest in the names in the film's credits. Kinugasa had become a widely respected director (his 1953 film *Gate of Hell [Jigokumon]* won the Palme d'Or at Cannes), and the story was credited to Yasunari Kawabata, who had won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1968, the first Japanese author to do so. Whilst these two figures dominate the film's discourse, its achievements can also be attributed to a crew working collaboratively, taking risks, and experimenting with cinematic form. As Aaron Gerow has observed, the film's production notes reveal a "vibrant picture of multiple figures actively engaging in cinematic creation on the set, working in multiple ways".¹ And for such a technically adept film, one name in particular stands out, credited as Assistant Cameraman: Eiji Tsuburaya.²

1 - Aaron Gerow, "A Page of Madness: Understanding a Work in Its Time, Flicker Alley, 2017

2 - The credit in the film reads Tsuburaya Ei-ichi (円谷英一). Ei-ichi was Tsuburaya's given birth name, but he would later professionally adopt his nickname, Eiji (英二).

By the time *A Page of Madness* was re-released, Tsuburaya had become a household name in Japan. Whilst his extraordinary special effects work on Toho's *tokusatsu* films gave him great acclaim and fame, it was arguably the launch of the *Ultra* franchise that established the name 'Tsuburaya' in the high ranks of Japanese popular culture. In 1963, at the height of Godzilla's success, Tsuburaya Productions was founded. Through his namesake company, Tsuburaya was able to produce special effects sequences for other film studios alongside his regular work at Toho. However, it was the decision to branch into television that dramatically changed the company's, and Tsuburaya's, fortune, and between 1966 and 1968, Tsuburaya produced three series that would make an indelible mark: *Ultra Q (Urutora Kyū)*, *Ultraman (Urutoraman)*, and *Ultra Seven (Urutora Sebun)*. Japanese TV audiences were transfixed by the fantastical worlds produced by Tsuburaya, where the restrictions of television budgets and filming schedules were met with creative resourcefulness. Whilst Toho was supportive of Tsuburaya's company, there may have been some eventual discontent, as a Tsuburaya TV episode would have remarkably high production values with special effects sequences that could, at times, compete with the big screen outings of Godzilla, Mothra, et al. The success of the *Ultra* shows is a tribute to Tsuburaya's legacy, where limitations in technology or resources did not impede creativity and often resulted in inspired solutions.

Tsuburaya was a quick learner during his nascent years in the film industry. In 1919, aged 18, he got his first film job as an assistant cameraman, and for the next several years worked in an industry that saw a staggering amount of artistic, technical and commercial development when it was transitioning into the dominant form of mass entertainment. Film genres that would later dominate emerged, particularly historical or *jidaigeki* films. Japanese cinema's rise in popularity was helped in part by the popularity of Benshi, the narrators who would perform alongside the screening of silent films. Over the course of a decade, Tsuburaya worked as an assistant and camera operator, before becoming a cinematographer in his own right. He shot dozens of films, mainly swordplay and historical dramas, and would also collaborate with Kinugasa again after *A Page of Madness*. Tsuburaya was not just a dependable camera operator: he became known for his experimentation and his desire to master equipment and learn new techniques.

Tsuburaya's appetite for professional advancement would reach new heights thanks to a giant gorilla. *King Kong* was a big box office hit when it was released in Japan in 1933 and the impression it made on Tsuburaya cannot be underestimated, who was always eager to talk about Skull Island's most famous son in interviews in later decades. Not only did it foretell the genre Tsuburaya would eventually become synonymous with, but it confirmed that special effects could be a serious endeavor. Tsuburaya fastidiously studied *King Kong*, working out how particular sequences were achieved, from Willis O'Brien's groundbreaking stop frame animation, to the intricately designed shots with miniature models, to the multiple-exposure process shots combining live-action footage with visual effects. Its influence was not just how impeccable the special effects were, but how they were used to create a world that was at the service of the story and characters: audiences could absolutely empathize with the titular character, despite it actually being a two-foot-high puppet. Tsuburaya would have been acutely aware that the success of *King Kong* depended on advancements in film technology: improved camera lens designs and motorized film transports were necessary in making the miniature models appear life-size, and improved optical printers and film stocks were vital in making the complicated effects shots work (it was only in 1926 when Kodak introduced the first successful duplicating film stock). Tsuburaya knew you had to have the right tools, but you could also be inventive, and push the available technology to be used in new and exciting ways.

Whilst Tsuburaya will always be widely associated with special effects, his career took an imposing detour in the 1930s. Having gained a reputation as a meticulous and demanding cinematographer working at different studios, Tsuburaya was charged with making propaganda films for the Imperial Japanese government. Tsuburaya's position was not an exception: Imperial Japan took great strides in exerting its influence on the film industry, directly commissioning films at studios, and demanding nationalistic themes to be portrayed. Perhaps the most incongruous of these films is *Across the Equator (Sekidō Koete, 1936)*, where Tsuburaya was both director and cinematographer. Produced in partnership with the naval ministry, this feature-length documentary depicts a voyage around the South Pacific with a ship of navy cadets. At first, the film seems to be innocuous: young servicemen are seen arriving into various ports, including Malaya and Hawaii, where they experience and share other people's diverse cultures. Tsuburaya certainly had the knack to capture the wonderment and friendship the crew must surely have felt during this voyage. However, by the end,

the film's true intentions are laid bare and becomes a raging critique of how the isolationist policies of past Japan needed to be rectified. Whilst the film ultimately becomes an uncomfortable viewing experience, it is an extraordinary historical record and encapsulates the provocative environment Tsuburaya and other filmmakers were obliged to work in.

Tsuburaya's return to fiction films would include his first dramatic feature as director, but he would soon begin to work almost exclusively as a technical and effects supervisor. *The Daughter of the Samurai* (*Atarashiki Tsuchi*, 1937), a Japanese-German co-production, is particularly intriguing as it contains some impressive special effects sequences produced by Tsuburaya, including the film's thrilling climax: a volcanic eruption! Tsuburaya's use of miniature models to portray the destruction caused by an unstoppable force of nature would famously become one of his specialties. In 1937, Tsuburaya joined Toho's Special Arts Department, which was the specialist in-house unit tasked with creating process and effects shots for films. Tsuburaya was able to bring nearly twenty years of experience with a repertoire that now included equipment design, smoke effects, matte painting process shots, rear projection, miniature filming, and model animation. Whilst Tsuburaya was given a degree of autonomy at Toho and was able to pursue his interests in developing special filming techniques, his career took another dramatic turn when the imperial government ordered him to work at an aviation academy. As a young boy, Tsuburaya was fascinated with airplanes and wanted to become a pilot. Before he joined the film industry, he enrolled in a flying school, but his piloting career was tragically cut short when his instructor died in an accident. Tsuburaya was finally able to realize his childhood wish, and over the course of around three years, he became a pilot in the course of making flight training films. Tsuburaya's experience in aerial cinematography would prove to be invaluable in his perfecting of special effects.

Tsuburaya was still able to work at Toho amongst his assignments at the aviation academy, but the production of propaganda films became dominant due to imperial government edicts. The most significant of these films was *The War at Sea from Hawaii to Malaya* (*Hawai marē oki kaisen*), which was released in December 1942 to commemorate the anniversary of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. At the time, it was the most expensive film made in Japan and would become the highest grossing. It was also a critical success and would be named as Kinema Junpo's best

film of the year. Tsuburaya's contribution to the film was crucial as the numerous battle sequences required extensive special effects. Under Tsuburaya, the Special Arts Department at Toho had grown, and the experienced crew was given the responsibility to recreate various incidents, including Pearl Harbor. The attacks on battleships are extraordinary: the intricate and detailed models are precisely filmed with carefully chosen camera angles and slow-motion giving an accurate impression of scale. Tsuburaya's experience as a pilot is ably demonstrated by the realism of the sequences involving model aircraft, and how they were able to be intercut with newsreel footage. As impressive as the special effects are, they are also recognizably Tsuburaya's and have the hallmarks of the master filmmaker. Some shots would not look out of place in a Godzilla film, foreshadowing Tsuburaya's future career. *The War at Sea from Hawaii to Malaya* would be loosely remade in 1953 as *Eagle of the Pacific* (*Taiheiyo no washi*) with special effects by Tsuburaya and was produced by Tomoyuki Tanaka and directed by Ishirō Honda, the creative team that would reunite again for *Godzilla* (*Gōjira*, 1954) the following year.

Produced by Daiei Studios, *The Invisible Man Appears* (1949) was made during a testing period in Tsuburaya's career. In the immediate post-war years, when the film industry was rebuilding itself under the jurisdiction of the Occupation authorities, Tsuburaya became blacklisted. It is claimed that officials did not look too kindly at Tsuburaya's realistic Pearl Harbor footage and concluded he must have had access to classified information.³ By 1948, Tsuburaya's position at Toho became untenable, so he left and set up his own company, creating special effects for different studios. As most of the films Tsuburaya worked on during this period would only have required relatively straightforward effects, he would have relished working on *The Invisible Man Appears*: it not only gave him an opportunity to work in the science fiction genre, but it was also a chance to flex his technical craftsmanship. In much the same way he studied *King Kong*, Tsuburaya would have been deeply knowledgeable about how the special effects were created for Universal's *Invisible Man* films, and it is a testament to his ingenuity that the effects in *The Invisible Man Appears* hold up remarkably well when compared to the Hollywood versions, despite working with a reduced budget and having limited resources available. The film is also a showcase of Tsuburaya's skill with the travelling matte process. The classic Invisible Man scenes where the character undresses are handled with aplomb and have the requisite 'floating' clothes

3 - August Ragone, *Eiji Tsuburaya: Master of Monsters*, Chronicle Books, 2007. For further information about Tsuburaya, Ragone's book, the first English language biography, is recommended.

and objects. These were achieved by combining shots on set with footage of the actor filmed in front of a black background wearing his costume over a black suit. This technique was also used in what is perhaps the most impressive effect: the Invisible Man sitting on a chair smoking. Another outstanding effect is when the antagonist becomes invisible, where he sees himself gradually disappear in a mirror until all that remains is his laboratory coat and shirt. The multiple exposures required for this shot to work are flawlessly composited.

By the early 1950s, Tsuburaya would be back at Toho and would soon bring legendary *kaiju* to life, eventually becoming known as the "Father of Tokusatsu". Tsuburaya will eternally be lauded as the pioneer of Japan's special effects and it is serendipitous that he would also create the special effects for *The Invisible Man Appears*, arguably the first major Japanese science fiction film. Whilst *The Invisible Man Appears* did not launch the genre and style of filmmaking in the way that *Godzilla* did five years later, it gives us a fascinating glimmer of what *tokusatsu* would become with one of its leading creatives.

Tom Vincent is the Archivist at Aardman Animations, and has written about and presented on the history of film technology.







ABOUT THE TRANSFERS

The Invisible Man Appears and *The Invisible Man vs. The Human Fly* are both presented in their original 1.37:1 aspect ratios with mono audio. The High Definition masters were created using the best surviving film materials for the two films, which in both cases were 16mm exhibition prints. As a result, these masters feature anomalies like gate weave, scratches and exposed film edges that we felt could not be effectively repaired without further compromising the integrity of the original image. We hope these issues do not affect your enjoyment of these two rare pieces of *tokusatsu* history, available outside Japan for the first time. These masters were produced and delivered to Arrow Films by Kadokawa Pictures.

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc & Booklet Produced by **James Flower**
Executive Producers **Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni**
Technical Producer **James White**
Disc Production Manager **Nora Mehenni**
QC **Alan Simmons**
Production Assistant **Samuel Thiery**
Blu-ray Mastering **Bea Alcalá, The Engine House Media Services**
Subtitling **The Engine House Media Services**
Artwork **Graham Humphreys**
Design **Obviously Creative**

SPECIAL THANKS

**Alex Agran, Keith Allison, Kat Ellinger, Etsuko Furutsuki, Yuko Kobayashi,
Kim Newman, Jon Robertson, Hayley Scanlon, Tom Vincent**



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