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Takashi Miike's Dead or Alive Trilogy (2016)
by Kat Ellinger

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DEAD OR ALIVE

DOA DEAD OR ALIVE 犯罪者
Dead or Alive: Hanzaisha

Original release date: 27th November 1999
105 minutes

Directed by **Takashi Miike**
Produced by **Mitsuru Kurosawa, Tsutomu Tsuchikawa, Katsumi Ono,**
Makoto Okada, Toshiki Kimura
Written by **Ichiro Ryu**
Director of Photography **Hideo Yamamoto**
Lighting by **Hitoshi Takaya**
Audio Recording by **Kazuo Numata**
Production Design by **Akira Ishige**
Music by **Koji Endo**
Edited by **Yasushi Shimamura**
Assistant Director **Bunmei Kato**

Detective Jojima: **Show Aikawa**
Ryuichi: **Riki Takeuchi**
Toji: **Michisuke Kashiwaya**
Detective Inoue: **Susumu Terajima**
Yakuza boss Aoki: **Renji Ishibashi**
Yakuza boss Sakurai: **Tokitoshi Shiota**
Yuko Jojima: **Kaoru Sugita**
Mina Jojima: **Momoko Kurasawa**
Mariko: **Mizuho Koga**
Hitoshi: **Kyosuke Yabe**
Hoshiyama: **Yoshiyuki Yamaguchi**
Satake: **Hitoshi Ozawa**
Yan: **Ren Osugi**
Porn director: **Dankan**
Police Chief: **Sei Hiraizumi**
Detective Okuyama: **Hirotarō Honda**
Chinese mafia boss: **Shingo Tsurumi**
Guy in afro: **Tomorowo Taguchi**



DEAD OR ALIVE 2: BIRDS

DEAD OR ALIVE 2 逃亡者

Dead or Alive 2: Tobosha

Original release date: 2nd December 2000
97 minutes

Directed by **Takashi Miike**

Produced by **Mitsuru Kurosawa, Tsutomu Tsuchikawa, Yoshihiro Masuda,**

Makoto Okada, Toshiki Kimura

Written by **Masa Nakamura**

Director of Photography **Kazunari Tanaka**

Lighting by **Toshihiro Seino**

Audio Recording by **Mitsugu Shiratori**

Production Design by **Akira Ishige**

Music by **Chu Ishikawa**

Edited by **Yasushi Shimamura**

Assistant Director **Kimiyoshi Adachi**

Shu: **Riki Takeuchi**

Mizuki: **Show Aikawa**

Kohei: **Kenichi Endo**

Chieko: **Noriko Aota**

Boo: **Edison Chen**

Hoo: **Masato**

Woo: **Teah**

Magician Higashino: **Shinya Tsukamoto**

Orphanage director: **Yuichi Minato**

Big brother Toshi: **Manzo Shinra**

Man with telescope: **Tomorowo Taguchi**

Woman in black hat: **Hiroko Isayama**

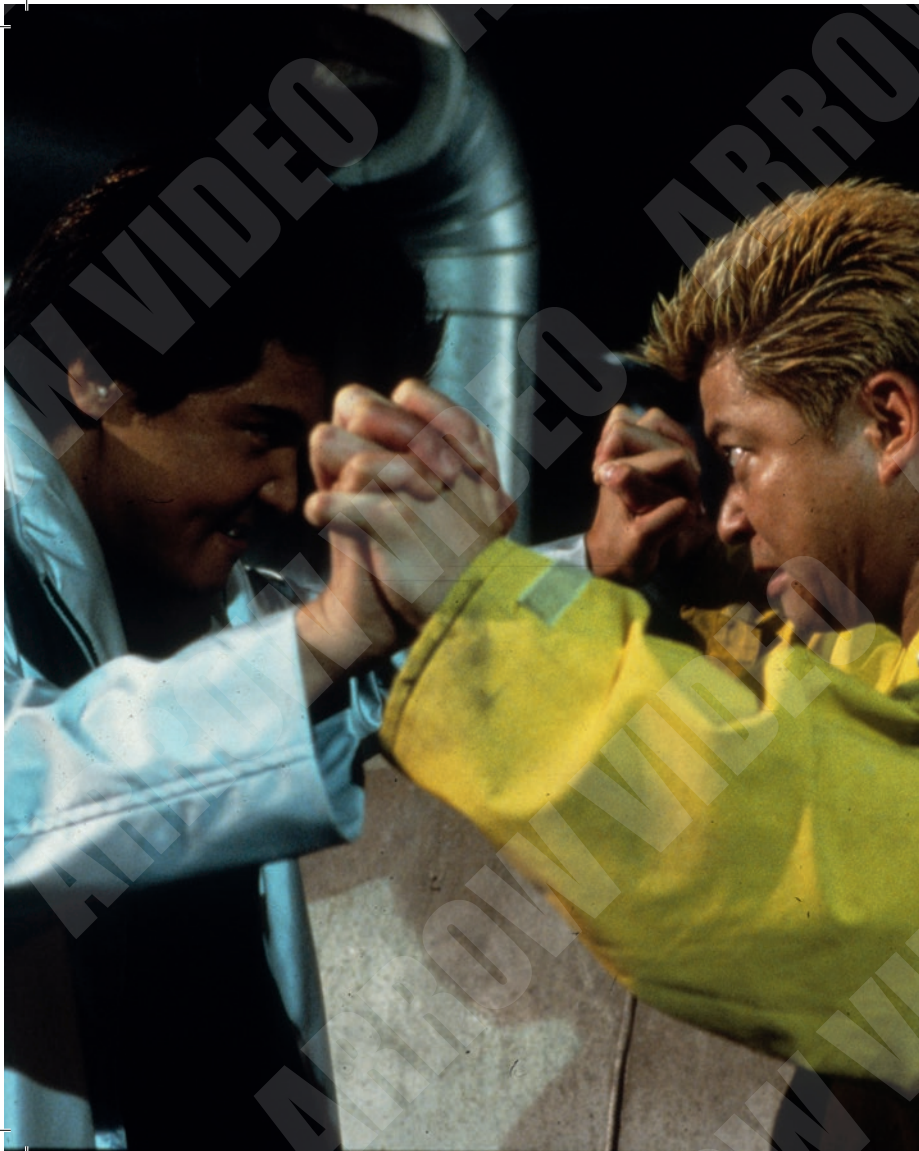
Big Dick Jiro: **Yoshiyuki Yamaguchi**

Informant with umbrella: **Toru Tezuka**

Mizuki's stepfather: **Ren Osugi**

Mizuki as a child: **Hidetaka Hisano**

Shu as a child: **Fumito Moriwaki**



DEAD OR ALIVE: FINAL

Original release date: 1st December 2002

88 minutes

Directed by **Takashi Miike**

Produced by **Mitsuru Kurosawa, Tsutomu Tsuchikawa, Makoto Okada,**

Yoshihiro Masuda, Toshiki Kimura, Willie Chan

Written by **Hitoshi Ishikawa, Ichiro Ryu, Yoshinobu Kamo**

Director of Photography **Kazunari Tanaka**

Lighting by **Choi Lai Hung**

Audio Recording by **Multi Windows Productions**

Production Design by **Yip Shuk Wah**

Action Director **Li Chung Chi**

Music by **Koji Endo**

Edited by **Hidekazu Takahara**

CGI Producers **Misako Saka, Kaori Otagaki**

Assistant Director **Kimiyoshi Adachi**

Interpreters **Pang Chin Kau, Kaoru Ishikawa**

Honda: **Riki Takeuchi**

Ryo: **Show Aikawa**

Jun: **Josie Ho**

Fong: **Terence Yin**

Michelle: **Maria Chen**

Ko: **Hiroyoshi Komuro**

Dictator Wu: **Richard Chen**

Prisoner: **Jason Chu**

Pregnant woman: **Rachel Ngan**

Gangster: **Ken Lo**

Gangster: **William Duen**

Ping: **Tony Ho**

Donald Panutat

Christopher Wee

Bonnie Lai

Terri Kwan

Chan Hiu Pan

Tam Wai Ho

Chan Chun Chung

Cheung Kuen

THREE EXTREMES: TAKASHI MIIKE'S *DEAD OR ALIVE* TRILOGY

by Kat Ellinger

Picture the scene: as night closes in, death and debauchery reign in the orgy of chaos which erupts on the city streets, in seedy nightclubs and piss-soaked warehouses. Every appetite is catered to, no matter how sinful or depraved; as long as you can afford to pay the price, nothing is off limits. A girl hurtles to her death, screaming as she plummets from a high-rise building. Scavengers swoop in to pick over her bloody carcass as it lies mashed on the concrete, the drugs she was carrying too tempting to resist. As businessmen sit in sweat-filled strip clubs, women rub, strip and gyrate for their enjoyment, the motivation for these pretty young things being not hard cock, but cold cash. But who cares when you can taste all that beautiful flesh? And who cares when you can shovel down twenty plates of noodles, and they just bring more? Who cares when you can Hoover down a twenty-foot line of coke and feel like a superhero? Who cares when you can seize dominance and rip open a tight asshole in a public bathroom? Eat, snort, fuck: everything is permitted for those who can afford it. But be careful, because you might get caught in the middle of a massacre and those noodles will spill out on the floor along with your guts. Or maybe, while penetrating your partner, an uninvited guest might surprise you from behind with a knife in your throat. There's always the risk, and that's part of the fun. But even if you lose, it's not all bad. If you're lucky, all that cocaine you snorted might just make it a bit more fun as you sit gibbering in the back seat of your car, enjoying those last few moments before your brains splatter all over the windscreen and your head explodes into a lump of charred flesh and bone. This is hell on earth, where only the fittest will survive: consume or be consumed.

Welcome to the uncompromising world of Takashi Miike's *Dead or Alive* (1999). The opening act described above depicts a garish postmodern nightmare. The Hanging Gardens of Babylon sponsored by MTV: everything has a price, everything has a consequence, hedonism is not free. Miike injects post-punk energy into the montage to dizzying effect. His highly stylised entrance is breathtaking, memorable, and obscene. His opening is pure "Takashi Miike," representing a spirit that more than 17 years later is firmly embedded in the hearts and minds of cult film fans. Since then, the director has taught us to expect the unexpected, but there is one thing we can be sure of: anything he turns his hand to — regardless of how much input he has been given in terms of casting or script — he will subvert and mould into something completely his own. If there is one film that is testament to this fact, it is *Dead or Alive*. Once he picked up the gauntlet, he ran with it over an entire

trilogy, flying in the face of expectation each and every time. The result was three very different films — a tale of gangster versus cop caught in the middle of yakuza and Triad gang politics (*Dead or Alive*); a story of two childhood friends turned hitmen, reunited after years of separation in a bizarre twist of fate (*Dead or Alive 2: Birds* [*Dead or Alive: Tobosha*, 2000]); and a dystopian cyberpunk satire (*Dead or Alive: Final*, 2002) — films which on the surface only have co-stars Show Aikawa and Riki Takeuchi in common. But dig a little deeper and, despite the differences in tone and pace, a number of themes can be found that create a common bond, not only in terms of a trilogy but in terms of Miike's wider universe.

The writing of Tom Mes — in his groundbreaking study *Agitator: The Cinema of Takashi Miike* — provides a useful starting block from which to consider the director's key themes and motifs. This book was the first to assert that Miike was a true auteur. Despite the fact that the director worked primarily as a hired hand within the studio system, a series of thematic traits could be found in the majority of his work. As with Seijun Suzuki (*Branded to Kill* [*Koroshi no rakuin*, 1967]) the system made no impact on the director's creative flow, with constraint instead becoming a catalyst for innovation. While Suzuki was chastised and then ultimately relieved of his contract for refusing to cater to conventional taste, Miike's rule-breaking rebellion caught the attention of audiences worldwide. As Mes points out, 1999 and 2000 "were crucial years for Takashi Miike, who saw his international reputation definitely established as a result of more festival screenings than ever before."¹ This came off the back of films like *Dead or Alive*, as well as *Ley Lines* (*Nihon kuroshakai*, 1999), *Dead or Alive 2: Birds*, *The City of the Lost Souls* (*Hyoryu gai*, 2000) and the infamous *Audition* (*Odishon*, 1999). Mes views the formation of Miike's themes as beginning in his direct-to-video career, but it was from his first real theatrical release, *Shinjuku Triad Society* (*Shinjuku kuroshakai*, 1995) that "the director's themes, concerns and style come to their full fruition."² Writing in 2003, Mes tracked the development of these elements, identifying six distinct common points³

1. The rootless individual
2. The outcast
3. The search for happiness
4. Nostalgia
5. The family unit
6. Violence

1 - Mes, p. 181

2 - Mes, p. 63

3 - Mes, pp. 21-33



The sixth point, violence, is usually driven by the first five, with the underlying motivation fuelled by humanistic concerns: the need for connection, the construction of identity, and how this forces individuals to make choices in life, not all of which are good. Mes focuses on cultural outsider/alienation for much of his argument, as well as the importance of belonging. And it is from here that we can expand our understanding of the director's body of cinema, some of which has been asserted as nonsensical or outrageous when considered outside of its context by mainstream commentators — this is especially true of 2001's *Ichi the Killer* (*Koroshiya-ichi*), a film which came under attack when it was misconstrued as being misogynistic and sensationally violent for the sake of being violent, with many (including UK censors) missing the point entirely.

When it comes to *Dead or Alive*, three distinct themes that build on the model designed by Mes can be drawn out to provide further analysis (although these themes are in no way exclusive to these three pictures alone): the three extremes of love, loss and decadence. It's especially important to recognise the way in which these elements are utilised to drive characters to self-destruction. Although "love" seems self-explanatory, and it relates to many of the points outlined by Mes — the search for happiness, nostalgia, the family unit and even violence — what is meant by this is a very specific type of love, a painful, dangerous kind of love that reduces characters to react in desperate, savage and brutal ways. "Loss" usually follows love, echoing the message: human connection is fragile and finite. Miike subverts the commercial code within this context — the code which demands viewers are provided with resolutions and happy endings — instead creating something far more penetrating and profound, while casting a cynical eye over cinematic stereotypes, especially with regard to the hyper-masculine action hero. "Decadence" relates to the Japanese tradition of *ero guro nansensu* (erotic grotesque nonsense, frequently abbreviated to *ero-guro*), an artistic movement which grew out of the decadent and culturally-experimental era of 1920s Japan. *Ero-guro* as both a cultural and art form was initially provoked by social and political anxieties of a developing consumerist society. It eventually found its way into film, becoming associated with sixties and seventies Japanese erotic or "pink" cinema, which commonly linked sexuality with depictions of the grotesque or with sadomasochistic violence. Although Miike avoids an emphasis on "erotic" with *Dead or Alive*, at least as understood in *ero-guro* terms, decadent themes are very much at the forefront of the trilogy. At the turn of the millennium, consumer excess, economic recession, and the changing nature of gender identities ensured that *ero guro nansensu* had never been more relevant. Miike, in particular, is remarkable for his use of the third aspect, *nansensu* or "nonsense," a factor regularly ignored or minimised in the main bulk of filmic depictions of *ero-guro*. On this level the director is distinctive as a contemporary filmmaker exploring the tradition on a postmodern playing field, a factor arguably rivalled only by peer Sion Sono (*Strange Circus* [*Kimiyona saku*], 2005)], although the two filmmakers take very different approaches to exploring the form.

All three of the *Dead or Alive* films were produced during a period of furious activity for the director, roughly spanning the years 1998-2005. Within this period he astounded audiences worldwide with a series of genre-defying pictures that earned him the reputation of being one of the most dangerous contemporary filmmakers working out of Japan, a notoriety especially true of the first film in the *DOA* trilogy. However, it is important to note that Miike had already made a start down this road as far back as *Shinjuku Triad Society* — the first chapter in the "Black Society Trilogy" — which featured flashes of the grotesque he would fully flesh out in *Dead or Alive*. The director continued his path a year later with *Fudoh: The New Generation* (*Gokudo sengokushi: Fudoh*, 1996) — notable for its portrayal of hermaphrodite assassins and murderous children. Only twelve months after that Miike mixed yakuza action with Gothic monstrosity for *Full Metal Yakuza* (*Full metal gokudo*, 1997). It was also during this early period that Miike demonstrated his propensity for dramatic poetry, notably in his lyrical opus *The Bird People of China* (*Chugoku no chojin*, 1998); he also made a surprisingly deep exploration of love in the pop idol-infused *Andromedia* (1998). Meanwhile, 1997's *Rainy Dog* (*Gokudo kuroshakai*), the second in the "Black Society Trilogy," laid down a formula picked up by the *Dead or Alive* films, with both series' middle installments pushing violent excess slightly to one side to instead focus on tragic, character-driven studies, outwardly wrapped in the guise of action flicks.

The first of the *DOA* films focuses on local gangster and nightclub owner Ryuichi (Takeuchi) and Jojima (Aikawa), a detective investigating a spate of gangland killings. Ryuichi has amassed a small fortune from his shady dealings with local yakuza, part of which he has put to good use by sending his younger brother Toji to the States to study. When his brother returns, his problems begin. Toji does not agree with Ryuichi's lack of moral boundaries or lust for power, and this causes a rift between the two. The conflict between the two brothers, one trying to save the other from an involvement in crime, harks back to a similar dynamic in *Shinjuku Triad Society*, where main protagonist Tatsuhiro is a cop working on the margins of respectability, yet attempting to reconcile his family by rescuing his brother from a life of crime. Family conflict is also an issue for Jojima, who is trying to balance the stress of a sick daughter with the demands of his job, noticeably straining the relationship between Jojima and his wife. However, it is his love for his daughter that makes him desperate enough to beg for financial assistance from a yakuza boss (Renji Ishibashi) in order to pay for her operation — this line also has some similarity with *Shinjuku Triad Society*, where Tatsuhiro is seen taking bribes from local gangs to provide for his sick and aging parents.

Dead or Alive also demonstrates that love also has the power to inspire sacrifice. Toji gives his life to protect his brother, stripper Mariko (Mizuho Koga) offers herself up to the yakuza at the request of Ryuichi — her love for him obvious in a scene where she attempts to discuss the child they lost — an act for which she pays dearly. The notion of sacrifice echoes repeatedly in Miike's films; even in the pre-millennium, post-direct to video period



of the director's career a number of examples can be found in works as diverse as *Rainy Dog*, *Full Metal Yakuza*, *Andromedia* and *The City of Lost Souls*.

The deaths of Toji and Mariko leave Ryuichi with nothing left to lose — the brothers are already orphaned, as we learn from the early scenes when Toji is seen talking to his mother's grave. Jojima comes to the same conclusion about his own life when his wife and child perish in a car bomb set by a vengeful Ryuichi. These events also convey a tragic sense of time lost. Each of the protagonists becomes so blinded by their own egotistical desires — Ryuichi's quest for power, Jojima's obsession with solving the case — that they miss what is really important: spending time with their respective families, whether real or surrogate. What this results in is a loss of hope, which devolves into a loss of control, the denouement of which in turn exhibits a complete loss of reality. Fundamentally, if we can take anything away from *Dead or Alive*, it is the theme of corruption and loss of the soul.

Dead or Alive 2: Birds inhabits the concept of love more than any of the other films in the trilogy. What begins as a conventional story about two hitmen evolves quickly into something far deeper and more satisfying. This time Aikawa and Takeuchi return to play Mizuki and Shu: perfect examples of the "rootless individual" and the "outcast" as defined by Mes. On returning to the island orphanage where they grew up, to escape city-based violence as well as Shu's impending arrest, the narrative blends past and present to explore the deep connection between the two main protagonists, using nostalgia as a key plot device. And through the use of flashbacks, the film builds up a solid core in its portrayal of childhood love, an innocent, pure love that contrasts wildly with the other two installments in the trilogy.

The flipside of this is carved out in unflinching terms, with "loss" equating to the loss of innocence. Juxtaposing flashbacks of childhood fun with flash-forwards of extreme violence, the director creates an alarming effect — the light (happy) world of children, set against the dark (brutal) world of adults. The *pièce de résistance* of which is a scene in which Mizuki and Shu put on a play to entertain the children in the orphanage (the story of which firmly belongs in the *nansensu* part of this discussion) while the sequence is continuously disturbed by a montage of explicit gang violence taking place back in the city. Scenes of slaughter, gun fights, bloody swordplay and even necrophilia are set against contrasting moments showing bright-eyed children laughing at the lighthearted show. The theme of the child and adult connected as one is visited again when the hitmen leave the island to embark on a killing spree. The director breaks from realism at key moments by swapping the adult protagonists with their child selves — climaxing in a furious shootout where the victims are also shown as children before the moment of death. Miike had earlier experimented with this idea of character-switching in *Audition*.

Not satisfied to leave it there, Miike takes the matter into deeper territory with a retelling of Mizuki's past — childhood trauma is a key factor in some of Miike's most potent works, including *Fudoh*, *Audition*, the TV series *MPD Psycho (Taju jinkaku tantei saiko)*, 2000), and to some extent *Ichii the Killer*. A flashback shows that Mizuki left the orphanage to be fostered by an artist, but that optimism turned to tragedy when the boy returned home one day to discover his foster father in the midst of suicide by severed jugular.

By pure contrast, selflessness and love underpin the concept of killing for cash. Mizuki reveals his plan to donate the money he makes from professional killing to buy vaccinations for children in need; trading the life of a worthless crook for those of many innocent children seems like a reasonable deal. This ties in with Miike's wider recurring theme of children as a redemptive force. In his work, children are fragile and can be damaged, leading to deviance in adulthood, or their innocence and purity can offer salvation to the corrupt (*Rainy Dog* provides a perfect example of this with the protagonist redeeming himself when he allows the love for his son to enter his heart). Despite its darker elements, the film ends with a message of love and hope: the arrival of a baby immediately following scenes of death offers the potential for a fresh start.

In *Dead or Alive: Final*, the conclusion of the trilogy, love represents a utopian ideal: a beautiful life in a faraway land and the hope of a newborn child. Set in a dystopian future, heterosexual relationships are outlawed by Dictator Wu (Richard Chen). The population is limited by a birth control drug. Those who refuse to take the drug are exiled and left to fend for themselves in the wilderness outside the city walls. It is up to heavy-handed cop Honda (Takeuchi) to enforce the law, clashing with resistance forces living on the margins of society, as well as with replicant Ryo (Aikawa), in the process of his mission. While the film simultaneously satirises and celebrates cyberpunk cinema (demonstrated in its overt references to *Blade Runner* [1982] and *Tetsuo: The Iron Man* [Tetsuo, 1989]), Hollywood science fiction (*The Terminator* [1984] and *The Matrix* [1999]) as well as becomes something of an ode to Hong Kong action flicks (from the casting of Josie Ho and Terence Yin to the copious use of outrageous stunts and wirework, and the obvious reference to John Woo in the dictator's name), it also includes some interesting ideas surrounding the themes of love and loss.

Honda is forced to the edge by his love for his son (who has been kidnapped by anarchists) but is then also made to re-evaluate some of his core values because of these feelings; once again we see that a child can act as a redemptive force. The central narrative of families being banned from existence also provides the opportunity to bring in one of the director's main themes surrounding the significance of the family unit. Throughout the plot we meet several characters who are unable to face life without the prospect of connecting as family, which drives them to break the law. The family within this context becomes a metaphor for



completeness and therefore fetishised. This is something Miike would continue to return to in his films, an aspect seen at its most uncompromising in *Visitor Q* (*Bijita Q*, 2001).

The loss of family as a catalyst for self-destruction becomes a major plot point. This is shown when the young couple is used as bait for the anarchists. It is also tied to the loss of innocence when Honda's reality crumbles completely and he loses his wife and son. Dictator Wu is all too familiar with the power of family, and he uses it as a tool to manipulate his citizens. A deeper reading would suggest that far from wanting to save humanity from its own destructive energy — the public reason given for his policy on population control — his motive lies somewhere in a fear of the family and of what it represents. Ironically Miike utilises the Wu character to give an innovative take on the Frankenstein's monster theme. The doctor (or Dictator in this case) creates the perfect "man" in the form of a middle class family unit, something he outwardly professes to despise. Only male homosexual love is advocated by the new world order.

Homosexual love is a crucial point when it comes to decadent themes throughout the series and how they are connected to Miike's wider themes. These would appear to blossom from the director's relationship with the *ero-guro* tradition, which by its nature seeks to subvert norms, especially those of sex and gender. Talking about *ero-guro* in its early literary form, Jeffrey Angles asserts same-sex love as a key point, stating that "when applied to literature, the terms, *ero*, *guro*, *nansensu* are used to describe a wide range of writing that depicts the sexual, bizarre, ridiculous, irrational, frivolous, or dandy-esque. In its more erotic manifestations, *ero guro nansensu* writing frequently describes forms of sexual desire that Japanese society had in recent decades started to consider aberrant and perverse, such as sadomasochism, fetishism, male-male homoeroticism, female-female homoeroticism, and nymphomania."⁴

Speaking in 2002, Miike said of his use of homosexual characters, "some people try to categorise what is normal and abnormal without taking into account the complexities of human nature. In reality people are very complicated, each with different thoughts and beliefs. I try to put all these complexities into my films and present the audience with something beyond what they perceive as normal."⁵ If we are to take the director at his word, then this stance ties in perfectly with the underlying motivation of *ero-guro* tradition.

Homosexual characters cover the spectrum of the director's films. The trend started in *Lady Hunter: Prelude to Murder* (*Redi hanta: koroshi no preyudo*, 1991), *A Human Murder*

4 - Jeffrey Angles, *Writing the Love of Boys: Origins of Bishonen Culture in Modernist Japanese Literature* (2011)

5 - *Dead or Alive* (UK DVD, 2002)

Weapon (*Ningen kyoki: ai to ikari no ringu*, 1992), *Shinjuku Triad Society*, *Rainy Dog*, *The Bird People of China* and *Blues Harp* (1998), and has stayed with Miike as his career has developed; later examples include *Ichi the Killer*, *Gozu* (2003) and *Big Bang Love, Juvenile A* (*46-okunen no koi*, 2006). Gay characters continue to present themselves in features as recent as *Lesson of Evil* (*Aku no kyoten*, 2012). Dictator Wu's celebration of his own homosexuality in *Dead or Alive: Final* is another riff on this theme. Not only has he created a family of replicants, but also an erotic sex object to amuse himself with: a semi-clad, saxophone-playing young man. The penultimate shot also features Wu engaged in the act of gay sex as he stares in wonder at the appearance of a giant phallus-headed robot.

It is often the case that sex in the films of Takashi Miike belongs to the domain of power rather than of the erotic, thus subverting the code that sex in mainstream cinema should always be titillating. This is evident in the opening scene of *Dead or Alive*, where a male is being violently penetrated in a public bathroom. What is witnessed is the act of penetration as a dominating force as opposed to an act of pleasure or love — a message repeated in *Dead or Alive: Final* (echoing flavours seen in *Shinjuku Triad Society*, which contains aspects of male-on-male sadomasochism, gay prostitution, and a scene in which cops use anal penetration and humiliation on a man they are interrogating). A major motif in the first film is the act of sex reduced to a commodity, no different than taking drugs or the consumption of food. Miike also revels in *ero-guro*, frequently tying sex to the grotesque. These factors come into play in a scene in which a prostitute spits out semen after servicing her pimp. It is also startlingly obvious in another key moment where a drugged-up girl lays sprawled out on the floor, while a man fluffs an eager-looking dog in preparation for bestiality porn. This thematic concept hits its peak with the depraved image of a beautiful, drugged-up girl lying in a pool of her own feces, after having been gang raped and subjected to a forced enema (the latter scenes taking place off-camera).

If you read between the lines, domination is constantly linked with some recurring themes: fear of impotence and insecurities about penis size, which normally coincides with moments of "nonsense" comedy. It is used so often it becomes a running joke throughout Miike's early nineties to mid-2000 period. In *Dead or Alive* the matter arises in the scene in which Mariko is killed by yakuza Aoki as she lies in a pink paddling pool full of her own filth. Aoki has just finished injecting himself with heroin when he declares "they all laugh when they see it. But they love my cock. Sorry it's so small." Shortly after he mercilessly kills the girl by forcing her head under the foul liquid with his foot. There is a vicious energy in the portrayal of this scene that suggests Aoki has an issue with his ability to perform, or with his own virility, so he takes it out on the women he pays for. In the second installment there are additional penis jokes to be found. The first occurs within the play that Mizuki and Shu perform with the help of some other amateur actors at the orphanage. Shortly

beforehand their friend Kohei is heard discussing how the two boys not only loved each other but were staunch rivals in childhood. He displays great pleasure in describing how the duo tried to upstage each other in a school nativity that culminated in Mizuki stripping off his Wise Man garb to whip Shu with chains he had hidden underneath, provoking the latter to take out a towel fashioned as a “huge prick” to begin hitting his friend. During their present-day ribald show, Mizuki, dressed as a kappa with a robotic arm, lifts up the woman’s skirt he is wearing to reveal a penis fashioned from a torch. One of the women in the cast, dressed as a bee, is invited to join him, as he grinds against her. The torch falls off (indicating impotence) and the whole cast gleefully stamp on it as the children cheer. The second instance is slightly more cynical, but nevertheless fits the same nonsense remit as the former, when during a killing spree a victim is shot in the head while masturbating, and is shown with what is supposed to be a giant sex organ (pixilated for effect) of at least two feet in size. His grieving lover is later presented with the same part packaged in brown paper and is seen sobbing over it (although the opposite of impotence in this case, the removal signifies post-mortem castration). In an attempt to outdo himself with every chapter, part three holds the premise of an entire city made impotent by a power-hungry megalomaniac, the resolution of which sees the two replicants joining together to build a massive robot with a phallus for a head.

By the time you reach the literal climax of *Dead or Alive: Final*, the appearance of the robot seems perfectly logical if you have learned the right lessons from the previous two chapters. The final battle scene between Jojima and Ryuichi is something that needs to be seen to be believed. After cars explode and the other gang members are violently despatched, the narrative takes a break from reality altogether. In having a bazooka, and then a glowing energy ball appear as weapons from nowhere, and then choosing to blow up the world, Miike is taking a stand against mainstream tradition by refusing to conform through the direct use of *ero guro nansensu* — it is nonsensical, and yet when taken in context makes perfect sense as a statement piece. Likewise the ending of part three also follows this same rule-breaking formula. In-between there are plenty of other moments of glorious nonsense to be found: knife-throwing clowns in a brightly-lit cabaret, men who speak in magic tricks, weapons that appear from nowhere (like a brick from the back of a Hawaiian shirt), crazy amateur dramatics where animals and mythical beings have sex, and slapstick action, it’s all there. Miike creates a world within which anything is possible, even breaking into magical realism at times and allowing the two protagonists to sprout giant bird wings in *Dead or Alive 2: Birds*, as if it’s a completely everyday occurrence. But then, for Takashi Miike, it is. Yet, for all the violence and depravity, for all the bizarre and surreal freak show elements, one thing is clear: no matter how painful, no matter how far it pushes people to the edge, there is magic to be found in love. Love will always triumph over adversity, and this is the place where real heroes are made.

Kat Ellinger is the Editor-in-Chief of Diabolique Magazine and co-host of the Daughters of Darkness Podcast.





ABOUT THE TRANSFER

Dead or Alive, *Dead or Alive 2: Birds* and *Dead or Alive: Final* are presented in their original aspect ratio of 1.85:1 with 2.0 stereo sound. *Dead or Alive: Final* contains a treated image with visible interlacing. This presentation is intentional and in keeping with the original release. The High Definition masters were made available for this release by Kadokawa Pictures.

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Discs and Booklet Produced by **Marc Walkow**
Executive Producers: **Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni**
Production Assistant: **Liane Cunje**
Technical Producer: **James White**
QC: **Nora Mehenni, Marc Walkow**
Mastering and Subtitling: **IBF Digital**
Artist: **Orlando Arocena**
Design: **Obviously Creative**

FURTHER VIEWING

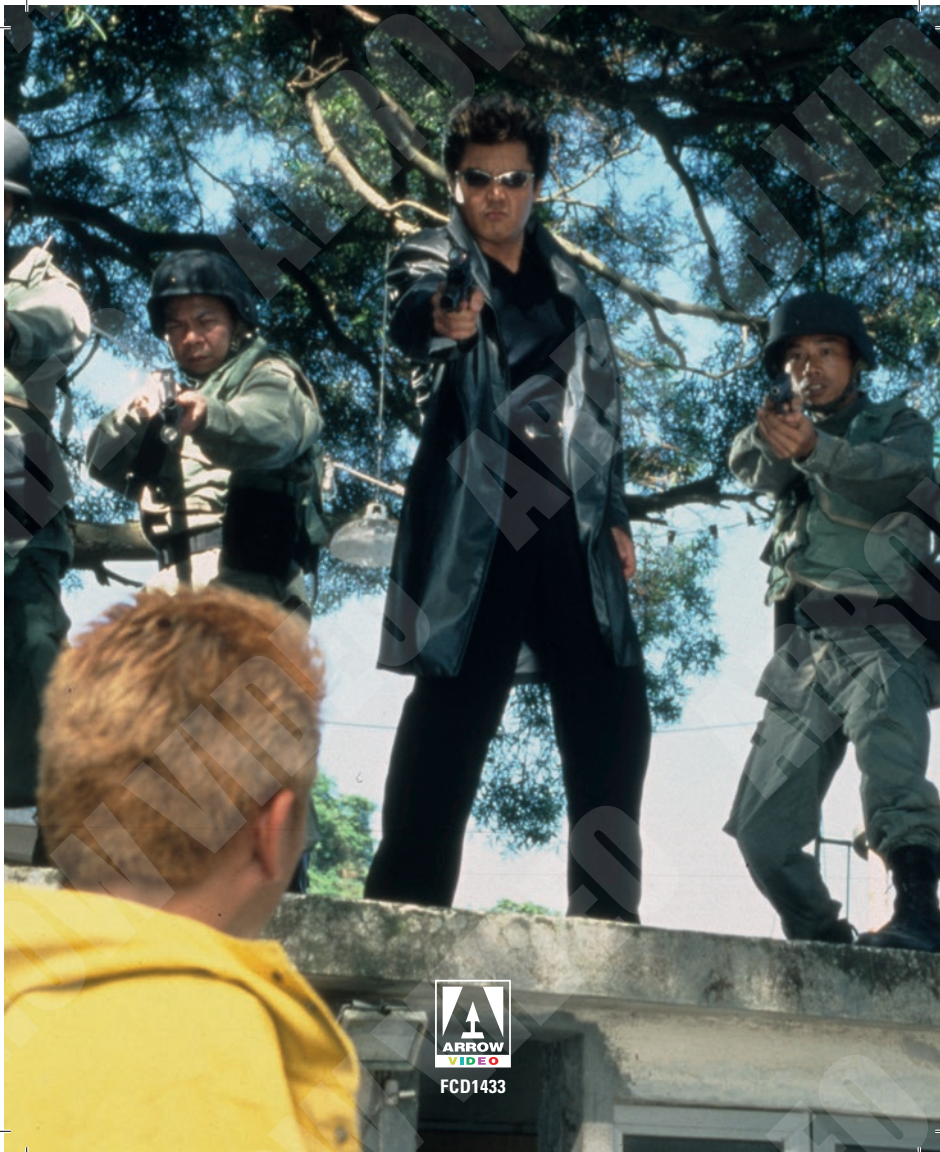
Other Takashi Miike films on Blu-ray and DVD from Arrow Video include *Audition*, *The Happiness of the Katakuris*, and the *Black Society Trilogy*, which includes the films *Shinjuku Triad Society*, *Rainy Dog* and *Ley Lines*. Miike also appears in a new interview discussing his work in yakuza cinema, shot for Arrow Video's *Battles Without Honor and Humanity* release.

SPECIAL THANKS

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