



HOTTARAKE NO SHIMA --- HARUKA TO MAHO NO KAGAMI
(OBLIVION ISLAND: HARUKA AND THE MAGIC MIRROR) is a November, 2014
LVCA DVD donation to the Hugh Stoupe Memorial Library of the
Heritage United Methodist Church of Ligonier, Pennsylvania. Below is Kino Ken's
review of that film and dvd.

Japan 2009 color feature animation fantasy 100 minutes
Fuji Television Network / Production I.G / DENTSU / PONY CANYON
Producers: Daisuke Sekiguchi, Katsuji Morishita, Shinji Takagi, Mami Okada,
Chihiro Kameyama, Kaeko Sakamoto, Justin Cook, Carly Hunter, Victor Sgroi

16 of a possible 20 points

**** of a possible *****

Key: *indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance

(j) designates juvenile performer

Points

- Direction: Shinsuke Sato
- 0 Editing: Tsuyoshi Imai
- 2 Animation Camera
- 1 Lighting
- Special Visual Effects: Yi Ma (Supervisor)
- 1 Screenplay: Hirotaka Adachi, Shinsuke Sato,
Kristi Reed (English-language version)
- 2 Music: Tadashi Ueda* (except closing song)
- 2 Art Direction: Masanobu Nomura*
- Background Design: Nobuhiro Hatori*

- 2 **Animation Director: Naoyoshi Shiotani***
Character Designers: Ren Ishimori, Ryo Hirata
 - 2 **Sound Director: Takeshi Ui***
 - 2 **Voices Cast: Haruka Ayase* (Haruka, age 16), Miyuki Sawashiro (Teo the Fox), Naho Toda* (Haruka's mother), Nao Omori (Haruka's father), Mitsuko Tanimura (Miho, Haruka's girlfriend), Iemasa Kayumi (The Baron, villain), Tamaki Matsumoto (Cotton, Haruka's lost doll), Hiroshi Iwasaki (Younger Soldier Brother), Masaaki Okabe (Mabarowa, store owner), Kozo Shioya (Older Soldier Brother), Yuji Ueda (Picanta), Hidenari Ugaki (Decargot)**
 - 2 **Creativity**
- 16 total points**

At the time of initial screening, **HOTTARAKE NO SHIMA --- HARUKA TO MAHO NO KAGAMI (OBLIVION ISLAND: HARUKA AND THE MAGIC MIRROR)** was the most expensive feature animation produced by Japan. Based partly on Japanese folklore, with elements of Alice in Wonderland and a supporting character that appears modeled on Piglet from the Pooh books, **OBLIVION ISLAND** targets teenage girls. Both subtitled and dubbed versions are available on the Blu-Ray / DVD Combo Pack released by Funimation being reviewed here.

Opening sections of the film introduce us to heroine Haruka, a sixteen-year-old girl with a single parent. Her mother died years earlier from a terminal disease, probably cancer. Before that occurred, preschooler Haruka pledged never to neglect an heirloom mirror given her, rather unwisely, by a dotting forebear. That promise is not kept. The toiletry item vanishes. According to a tale read her repeatedly in early childhood, a certain deity permits such objects to be stolen away by fox servants. They are taken to an underground hideaway appropriately named Oblivion Island. There they become part of a vast metropolis of discarded human artefacts.

Bored with the company of her friendly, bookish peer Miho and frustrated at the inattentiveness of overtaxed dad, Haruka recalls the lost mirror. Can she truly relocate it by making an offering to the god of lost articles? After an acrimonious dialogue with her father, she sets out to the shrine of that deity. It

seems to be adjacent to her grandmother's former home. Miho is left behind, clueless about her chum's intention.

Haruka finds herself observing two boys playing with a small plane in the sacred grounds. They eventually lose track of their toy and depart without it. The girl finds the glider, wonders why younger children are so careless, then sits down idly on steps leading to the shrine entrance. A hot sun eases her into drowsiness. Haruka relaxes into a sprawling sleep, leaving keys she brought with her laying a few inches away on the stairboard. When the sleeper awakens much later, it is twilight, the magic hour before stars appear. Stretching to shake off torpor, the girl accidentally knocks her keyring off the plank. It drops through a gap between boards to flagstones below. The owner crouches down and scrambles underneath the wood where she succeeds in locating her keys. Haruka restores them to their former location. She's about to crawl back out of her covert when an amazing sight intervenes. Something is moving the abandoned aircraft nearby. It isn't the wind. Rather, a small foxlike creature has entered the temple grounds. Haruka passively watches it pilfer the boys' abandoned aircraft. She observes this activity without interfering, even when the stranger draws closer, attracted by metallic glitter from her keyring. Failing to note the owner enveloped in shadows, miniature robber grabs a bonus and scurries away unmolested. Haruka follows stealthily, coming to a pond where an offering egg she had earlier left at the shrine, also stolen by freebooting fox, was floating on the surface. She reaches out, touches dodgy ovoid, attempts to draw it out of the water. The object seems to heat, becoming irresistible. Haruka is suddenly sucked into the water, spurted back out skyward, then re-immersed by a slenderizing vacuum. Plunging down into unfamiliar, dark netherworld, the teen finds herself deposited on top of a loaded cart. Present beside her is the very robber she has been tracking. Each screams in fright and tries to pull away from the other. These actions imbalance their vehicle, which starts to roll away on a plankway resembling a roller coaster's. Moving downhill, the wagon picks up speed rapidly. Haruka speeds towards an unfamiliar fantasy city.

Piecemeal, the girl learns she has come to the homeland of lost and neglected human possessions. It is ruled over by an avaricious baron who lusts after power. He has a fatal childish fascination with glitter.

Haruka sets off in search of her mirror, resolving to recover it. Teo, the foxy collector who has involuntarily become guide and confederate, is wheedled into assisting in order to retain keys he desires, keys Haruka insists were neither neglected nor lost. Since Teo disavows being a thief, he accepts grudgingly a novel mentoring role. Haruka, in return, defends him from a trio of bullies bent on persecuting the little fellow.

After several pursuits by these hostiles seeking revenge and sadistic pleasure, the two protagonists learn Haruka's mirror is in fact somewhere even more subterranean than their current location. It has been swiped from the Baron by a group of evil lurkers of a genuinely thieving, antisocial variety, who live in caverns below the city Teo calls home. Haruka's plan to foray into their territory is resisted by her partner.

Subplots involve Teo's coercion into betraying his human friend, an uprising of island citizens against the Baron's minions, Haruka's blundering into a marionette theater where she encounters a stuffed lamb plaything of her infancy, and several chases through various permutations of reality by an uncannily indestructible villain.

Will Haruka ever find her way back home with Mother's mirror? Watch the second half of the film to see further obstacles she must overcome.

The Swiss cheese screenplay tosses motivations and causes to the wind. Frenetic editing catapults heroine from one unlikely predicament into another with no logical connection.

Yet OBLIVION ISLAND is a formidably expert production. Sound and lighting are artistically executed beyond reproach. Rollicking, upbeat music peppered with clamorous interludes of thrilling menace and serial metamorphoses create a richly textured sonic atmosphere. Details of construction, masterful interplay of light and shadow, sound recording which captures every slight vibration and murmuring --- these are consistent assets. Characterization of humans is evocative, emotionally authentic, complex, layered. Not so the fantasy creatures, who seem superficial and stereotyped. Teo is drawn more like Ernest

Shepard's Piglet than a true fox. The Baron's backstory is incomplete and unconvincing. An intriguing marionette manipulator team of husband and wife is left undeveloped. How the Baron became empowered over the others is similarly cloaked in mystery, though it seems to have something to do with his unique ability to fly overhead of the citizens.

Aside from occasional lapses into repugnant noise, the music of the picture is moving and melodic, if rather repetitious.

With themes of treasuring the past and keeping family communication open and respectful, the film sends significant messages to rebellious teens. Adults can savor intricate details of sets and sound gradations. However, the film is not recommended for preteens due to frequently languid pacing, its adolescent point of view, frank exposition of death and sorrow, and a single profanity.

Extras in this set are plentiful. Here's a listing with running times:

1. Behind the Scenes --- 5 minutes
2. A Visit to Fushimi Inari Shrine mini-documentary --- 5 ¼ minutes
3. Battleship Island: An Actual Oblivion Island --- 5 ½ minutes
4. Greetings At The Premiere --- 4 ¾ minutes
5. A Word From the Cast --- 10 minutes
6. The U.S. Premiere --- 8 minutes
7. Haruka and Teo's Panel Puzzle --- 4 minutes
8. A Journey Through Fox Folklore --- 26 minutes
9. Two Sierra Leone Relief Spots --- ¾ minute total
10. Three Original Teasers and Trailers --- 2 minutes
11. Original TV Commercials --- 4 minutes total
12. U.S. Trailer --- 2 minutes

and previews of Funimation releases

Obviously, a set well worth its purchase price. Discover and relish it.