

## Document Citation

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By LESLIE FELPERIN

**A**nime fans were set drooling when reports started surfacing about designer-turned helmer Shinji Aramaki's debut adaptation of manga-favorite "Appleseed." Pic's newfangled tech USP gives 3-D CG-created images an old-fashioned 2-D cel-animation or comic-book look. Craft connoisseurs won't be disappointed with the splendidly executed result. However, everyone else is likely to wonder what the fuss about given the plot's dated cyborgs-and-supercomputers hijinks, animated previously in 1988 under Kazuyoshi Katayama's direction. Seeds sown through specialist fest and limited theatrical play will reap good cash crop when the DVD release rolls round — as long as pirates don't shake the tree too early.

Haruka Handa and Tsutomu Kamishiro reprise the story from Masamune Shirow's 1985 award-winning manga bestseller of the same name. Set in a post-apocalyptic 2131 A.D., buff-bodied girl mercenary Deunen Knute (voiced by Ai Kobayashi) finds herself spirited away from the badlands to the gleaming utopian city of Olympus. There she's reunited with her ex-b.f. Briareos (Jurota Kosugi), now half-man, half-cyborg.

Deunen learns from new handler Hitomi (Yuki Matsuoka) that Olympus' serenity is founded on the use of bioroids, genetically engineered clones who hold key positions in the city's government. Hitomi herself is one. Superpowerful computer Gaia (many names from Greek mythology are used throughout) monitors all, through the mediation of seven Yoda-esque elders who float around Olympus' council chamber on airborne bubbles that look like Hippity Hops.

When a shadowy faction opposed to the bioroids' civic control start blowing stuff up, Deunen and Briareos team up to protect the city. Eventually, Deunen finds that discovering who is behind the attacks is entwined with uncovering forgotten events from her own childhood.

Hard-to-follow storyline (which is about 15 minutes longer than the 1988 version) shares a bit too much information about the politics of Olympus to maintain interest for all but die-hard fans. Newbie viewers will be left twiddling their thumbs while waiting for Deunen's next bout of butt-kicking action sequences. Despite heroine's Lara Croft-style toughness, pic generally skews toward a femme demographic with minimal gore but lots of girly guff about love and friendship.

Combination of near photorealistic backgrounds with anime-style char-

acters, however much they are enhanced by 3-D rendering wizardry, looks jarring at first, but soon settles into an easy harmony. Aramaki and his design team suggest play of light through subtle, liquid modulations of color on moving objects, minimizing the use of dark lines to limn shapes, although eyes in particular still have a drawn, "cartoony" look. Character design, though of a high order, is still of a piece with typical anime style.

Soundtrack features several well-known dance music purveyors, particularly group Basement Jaxx and superstar-DJ Paul Oakenfold, along with more traditional composer Ryuichi Sakamoto. Musical package should be an extra fillip for marketeers if savily exploited.

## APPLESEED

(ANIMATED — JAPAN)

A Micott & Basara, TBS, Geneon Entertainment, Yamato, Toho, TYO, Digital Frontier, MBS production. (International sales: Geneon, Tokyo.) Produced by Sori, Hidenori Ueki, Naoko Watanabe. Executive producer, Sumiji Miyake.

Directed by Shinji Aramaki. Screenplay by Haruka Handa, Tsutomu Kamishiro, based on the manga by Masamune Shirow. Camera (color); music, Paul Oakenfold, Basement Jaxx, Carl Craig Vs. Adult, Akufen, Atom TM, T. Raumschmiere, Ryuichi Sakamoto; theme song ("Appleseed"), Boom Boom Satellites; production designer, Shinji Aramaki; sound director (Dolby Digital), Yota Tsuruoka; sound designer, Koji Kasamatsu; character designer, Masaki Yamada; background designer, Nobuhito Sue; mecha designer, Takeshi Takakura; CG producer, Yusaku Toyoshima; CG director, Yasuhiro Otsuka. Reviewed at Locarno Film Festival (Piazza Grande), Aug. 13, 2004. Running time: 105 MIN.

Voices: Ai Kobayashi, Jurota Kosugi, Yuki Matsuoka.



**BLASTING OFF:** Deunen Knute (voiced by Ai Kobayashi) battles to save a city from sinister forces in Shinji Aramaki's "Appleseed."

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