

Document Citation

Title	Tenshi no kuzu
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Source	<i>Toronto International Film Festival</i>
Date	1994 Sep 08
Type	program note
Language	English
Pagination	287
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	Ishii, Sogo (1957), Hakata, Tukuoka Prefecture, Japan
Film Subjects	Enjeru dasuto (Angel dust), Ishii, Sogo, 1994



Tenshi No Kuzu

Angel Dust

Sogo Ishii

JAPAN, 1994

116 minutes ■ Colour/35mm

Production Company: **Twins Japan Inc./Euro Space**

Executive Producer: **Satoshi Kanno**

Producer: **Taro Maki, Kenzo**

Horikoshi, Eiji Izumi

Screenplay: **Yorozu Ikuta, Sogo Ishii**

Cinematography: **Norimichi**

Kasamatsu

Editor: **Hiroshi Matsuo, Sogo Ishii**

Art Director: **Tomoyuki Maruo**

Music: **Hiroyuki Nagashima**

Sound: **Nobuyuki Kikuchi**

Principal Cast: **Kaho Minami, Takeshi**

Wakamatsu, Etsushi Toyokawa,

Pyoko Takizawa

Print Source: **Celluloid Dreams, 24**
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A certain cool existentialism, mixed with a hip technical flair, is now at the heart of young Japanese cinema, and Sogo Ishii is its current master. He does not stop there, however, for he knows how to combine that mood with real human characters in believable situations which focus light on contemporary society. Those who loved his *The Crazy Family* for its deliciously wild dark humour will not be disappointed, for that sense of black comedy underlying the most horrific of current life is still in place. Here, however, he goes into much darker places, establishing a subversively disquieting mood.

The setting is Tokyo, that wondrous cosmopolitan gem which is also a computerized nightmare. There has been a series of murders of women every Monday at rush hour in the subway. Setsuko, a police psychiatrist specializing in the criminally insane, takes up the investigation. Soon, she is led to a former lover, Aku. He was also once an investigator, but currently "deprograms" religious cult members in a highly unorthodox way.

The murders continue at an increasing rate and the city is hysterical. Setsuko becomes obsessed with finding the killer, and Aku plays mind games which have her near the brink of breakdown. The film then delivers a double punch, one involving Setsuko's husband, the other at the end – neither of which can be given away.

Against a glittering, high-tech backdrop, *Angel Dust* gives us real human beings. In

part, this is because of the persuasive dual performances of Kaho Minami – Setsuko – who brings to her role a finely honed intelligence, combined with deep compassion, and of Takeshi Wakamatsu – Aku – who rides precisely that edge between madness and reason. *Angel Dust* maintains tight suspense and fascination throughout. It is the best thriller to have yet come along in the new Japanese cinema.

■ **Dimitri Eipides**

Sogo Ishii was born in 1957. While studying film at Nippon University College of Fine Arts, he formed the "Kyoei-sha" ("crazy") film group and made his first Super 8 film: *Panic in High School* (76). It gained a cult following. In 1978, he remade the film in 35mm for a major studio, Nikkatsu. He has directed films in every genre and has become the leading light of the "new" Japanese cinema which grew from underground culture. His *The Crazy Family* (84) became an international critical and box office success. *Angel Dust* (94) is his second feature.

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