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A Transylvanian princess, a Japanese high school student and a 2000 year old warrior are selected to be part of a small force of powerful psionic warriors assembled to be the defenders of Earth against a nihilistic alien entity bent on pure total cosmic destruction. This somewhat lengthy review is more a personal diatribe on this famous and infamous of animes, Harmagedon. To be kind to the users who simply want a review of the movie to decide whether they wish to see it or not, I've decided to start by explaining why exactly I enjoyed this movie.

Harmagedon must be described as an epic before any other categorization. It is an account of the battle between humanity and a force of pure chaos that wishes to destroy it. This movie succeeds brilliantly in its massive-scale depiction of the battle. Most of the movie is about the espers (psychics) of earth gathering together in an attempt to fight off Genma, the force which has destroyed many galaxies before and is now heading towards the Milky Way. This first part of the movie is easily the most astounding part of the movie, and is the reason why most fans of the movie like it. The segment where Azuma Jo is forced to deal with his supernatural powers is done with utter brilliance. The cinematography in these scenes is so amazing that no other movie, animated or otherwise, can compare in my opinion. The intensity in this part of the movie is what really grabbed me and is why I love this movie so much. The rest of the movie puts many challenges in front of the gathering espers in the form of Genma's minions, demon-like creatures who possess powerful supernatural abilities not unlike those of the heroes. Each ensuing battle is more spectacular than the last, and the espers (particularly Jo) become more disciplined and cooperative with each victory. Although the final battle and its aftermath are my least favorite scenes in this movie, they are an acceptable wrap-up for the plot.

This movie has received much criticism from die-hard anime fans for a variety of reasons. Anyone who watches this film can pick them out: a bizarre and jarring musical score, moral lessons that seem targeted for an audience of children, and many two-dimensional, underdeveloped characters that often boil down to cultural stereotypes. Although I agree with some of these criticisms, it is my firm opinion that the intense action scenes and wonderful animation and direction more than make up for any shortcomings this film has. (I gave this film a 9 out of 10 and stand by it!)

Now, for those of you who have seen this and/or are interested in this film as piece of anime history, I'd like to give my opinions on this film in terms of its influence and originality. Some of the style elements and characters in this film are seen repeated time and again in anime, which may make this film seem like a generic anime based on archetypes. However, it must be realized that this film was made in 1982 when anime was much less developed than it is today. The popular movies and series that had come before Harmagedon; Macross, Gundam, Lupin III and Urusei Yatsura come to mind; are all much different in terms of characters and plot elements. The sci-fi epic/monster movie archetype of anime really came only after this movie, and I can't help but believe that this movie was an influence on later, similar animes. The angst-filled teenager of Azuma Jo has been repeated in countless animes, but was not really a prevalent archetype before Harmagedon. The excellent villains of this film are both despicable, inhuman, and yet eerily disturbing in a way which can be seen in many later animes (check out Silent Mobius for similar antagonists). I also really liked the way that the espers' powers - of course, most notably Azuma Jo's - grew throughout the film until they reached a sort of "ultimate" height in the final battle (watch the final battle in Wicked City for a strong parallel). Add to this the excessive displays of destruction and power that are inseparable from modern anime, and I feel that this film must have made a great impact on all the anime that has followed. It even received a little tribute in the super-spoof Project A-Ko, which you must see for yourself if you've watched all the important animes of the early 80's.

In conclusion, this is an anime that no anime buff should miss. It is an example of exceptional film that, in some areas, has never been surpassed within the art form. It is also a great choice for anyone who has seen little or no anime previously for the very same reasons. Other recommendations: Akira, Patlabor 1, Ninja Scroll, The Professional: Golgo 13, and any Lupin III movie. Harmagedon is arguably the worst anime I have ever seen. For all its supposed classic status, it has bad pacing, terrible characterization, ethnic stereotypes, and a laughable villain. The only reason it is

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remembered is that it was one of the first anime to reach the United States.

The plot follows Azuma Jo, a Japanese high school student who is suddenly teamed up with psionic warrior Princess Luna and the warrior robot Vega in order to save the world from the demonic Genma. Azuma has to learn how to control his powers while simultaneously protect his sister from Genma's shape shifting minions.

There are so many issues with this film it is hard to know where to begin. As a villain, Lord Genma is simply not threatening. For starters, his dialogue consists of continually repeating "Destroy!" Princess Luna describes him as being insane, but he comes across more like a mentally challenged Dalek.

Furthermore, other than Azuma, none of the characters are well developed enough to care about. For instance, the African-American boy who joins the psionic band is a walking stereotype, as is the Indian guru. Even Princess Luna doesn't get fleshed out much. She is briefly suggested to be racist, but this aspect of her character is never explored or resolved.

The film takes far too long to get going. Much of the first hour is spent following Azuma, contributing to the other characters' lack of development. Furthermore, Genma doesn't do much of anything until over an hour into this over two hour film, rendering the proceedings decidedly boring.

In the end, this film is only worth watching for hardcore otaku who want to see everything.

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