

## MUSHI-SHI: Volume 1 Review (Published in Death Ray Magazine)

FILM \*\*\*\*\*

EXTRAS \*\*\*\*\*

2005

125 mins

Out 22 October

£21.99 (starter-set)/ £15.99

Director: Hiroshi Nagahama

Writers: Aki Itami, Yuki Urushibara, John Burgmeier, Yuka Yamada, Sean Whitley

Starring: Travis Willingham, You Nakano

***Mushi master Ginko travels a yesteryear Japan, spreading enlightenment and harmony between humans and mushi.***

As if lulling us from the ceaseless genre-clones, supernatural fantasy/horror Mushi-shi opens with a twist. The opener has no J-pop, no characters and no action, just a montage of leaves played out to a laid-back guitar and vocals number. It demands relaxation and offers a beautifully crafted mysticism in return.

Typical to the 'spirit underworld' theme (recalling Hayo Miyzaki's Spirited Away), the mushi are ethereal beings, neither living nor dead, almost a manifestation of the life force itself, basic, pure and imperceptible to all but a few humans. Ginko is one of those few, a Mushi-shi (Mushi Master), a type of travelling healer, who spreads enlightenment and alleviates the problems caused by the mushi's supernatural powers (which are seemingly endless). Each episode tells a self-contained story of human/mushi conflict. All are of the highest standard, but of particular highlight is the first episode, the charming tale of a boy whose drawings come to life and his grandmother, a semi-mushi caught between worlds. The dialogue and relationships here hold real naturalism and have us craving for further development. Sadly, this is lost with the stand-alone episodic structure- there are very few recurring characters and hence little continuity. This, however, is one of very few negatives and the story is magnificently captured. The laid back nature throughout is near therapeutic, the frailty of the yesteryear Japan serving as a constant reminder of humanities relative microcosm of life amongst the vibrant richness of the planet upon which it resides. It is a simplicity and humanity that is as rare as it is beautiful.

The artwork gives it's subject a deserved delicacy that sets the canvas for some wonderful cinematography; Travis Willingham provides a brilliant Ginko and all is held together with a suitably moody accompaniment of strings, piano and percussion. Mushi-shi truly is a unique escapism and fantasy, an absolute treat.

***EXTRAS: Tour of animation studio; nearly forty minutes of behind-the-scenes, including an informative but not overly entertaining discussion with director Hiroshi Nagahama and lead actor Yuto Nakano and the beautiful opener.***