

Grand Prix Cinénygma (Best Film) – Luxembourg International Film Festival (2006)

Best Art Direction (Jury Award) – Austin Fantastic Fest (2006)



STARFISH HOTEL

A Japanese Mystery

OFFICIAL PRESS KIT – ENGLISH

2005 / Japan / Supernatural Thriller / 35mm / Color / 1:1.85
Dolby Stereo / Japanese with English subtitles / 98mins

Writer/Director

John Williams

Production & Sales

100 Meter Films

www.starfishhotel.jp

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Saneicho Mansion 201 / Saneicho 4-12 / Shinjuku-ku / Tokyo / Japan / 160-0008
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"A kind of enormous Pandora's box in which dreams abound....one of the most mind-blowing films at the Cognac Film Festival."

EXCESSIF.COM

"...gorgeous and exact, with the kind of subtle surrealism more at home in the sedate moments of a Miike film, or a Tsukamoto...Starfish Hotel is like a dream itself, or a hallucination..."

HEROIC-CINEMA.COM

"...[features] a bravura performance by veteran [Akira] Emoto...KIKI's portrayal of Kayoko...quickly forms into a hypnotic performance dripping with sexually charged ennui...With Starfish Hotel, John Williams has come of age as a film director, and made his mark on Japanese film."

JAPANVISITOR.COM

"A stylish meditation on equivocal identities and the pleasures and dangers of giving yourself over to other worlds in the dark."

MILL VALLEY FILM FESTIVAL

"...successfully recreates the milieu familiar to fans of acclaimed Japanese writer Haruki Murakami."

SEATTLE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

"...handsomely stylish, hypnotically atmospheric and, no question, very weird indeed...Fans of the offbeat and the surreal will be in their element..."

SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL

"...sleek direction, quality lensing and a solid cast..."

VARIETY

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TAGLINE

If you like a mystery...welcome to the Darkland.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Strange things always happen in Jo Kuroda's mystery novels.

There is always a sinister rabbit called Mr. Trickster; and somebody always ends up dead. A man's wife disappears and he finds her working in a brothel deep in the heart of the city. There is a universe called the Darkland that can only be entered through a hidden tunnel. There is a young girl that the man had an affair with in the dead of winter, two years ago. She would only meet him in the eerie, crumbling Starfish Hotel. Now she's disappeared too. If you meet Jo Kuroda one night don't tell him your dreams...

PLOT SUMMARY

Yuichi Arisu slaves away in a cold, geometrical office everyday, in a humdrum job, somewhere in the huge, impersonal city of Tokyo. Every night he commutes home to his distant wife, and buries himself in the mystery novels of Jo Kuroda, a writer who has conjured up a strange alternative universe called the Darkland.

Then, one night, Arisu's wife disappears. The following day he falls asleep on the train on his way home and wakes in a siding to find Jo Kuroda sitting opposite him. The writer persuades Arisu to tell his own story. So begins a second story about events that took place two years ago in a snow-bound town in the far north of Japan. There, in the eerie, crumbling Starfish Hotel Arisu begins an affair with a young woman called Kayoko.

Is Arisu's story a memory, a dream or just a story? As the plot in the past unfolds, the present-day story of the search for his wife also becomes more and more bizarre. Arisu traces his wife to a private detective and then to an underground brothel called Wonderland. But the brothel burns down and the detective is murdered. Arisu becomes the main suspect in a murder case. Then the walls between fantasy and reality break down completely when Arisu stumbles into the Darkland...

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FILM STYLE

Starfish Hotel blends American detective fiction, and the Japanese supernatural tale to create an original Japanese Gothic mystery. The film borrows its visual style, themes and mood from classic Japanese supernatural films such as *Ugetsu Monogatari* (*The Tale of Ugetsu* – dir. Kenji Mizoguchi) and *Take Yabu no Naka no Kuroneko* (*Black Cat* – dir. Shindo Kaneto) and is filled with visual references to the Japanese mystery genre, which began in the Taisho period, when European and Japanese elements fused in art to create unique hybrids. The film also pays homage to contemporary Japanese writers in this tradition, such as Haruki Murakami, who creates a limbo realm between the real and the supernatural.

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CAST

Sato Koichi (Arisu)

One of Japan's top box office male stars, seen most recently in *The Uchoten Hotel* (dir. Koki Mitani) and *Aegis* (dir. Sakamoto Junji). He has appeared in countless domestic TV dramas and films, his first being the 1981 film, *The Gate of Youth* (dirs. Kinji Fukasaku and Koreyoshi Kurahara). He also starred in *Ring 2* (dir. Joji Ida), *Samurai Resurrection* (dir. Hideyuki Hirayama) and the highly successful *KT* (dir. Sakamoto Junji). He has been the recipient of numerous awards for both lead and supporting roles, including the Japanese Academy Awards, Blue Ribbon Awards and Nikkan Blue Sports Film Awards, as well as awards and prizes from the Tokyo International Film Festival and Yokohama Film Festival.

KIKI (Kayoko)

Made her film debut in *Vital* (dir. Tsukamoto Shinya) and recently starred in *The Pavillion Salamandre* (dir. Masanori Tominaga).

Emoto Akira (Mr. Trickster)

One of Japan's most respected and highly-awarded character actors, honored by such prestigious bodies as the Japanese Academy Awards, Blue Ribbon Awards, Hochi Film Awards, Kinema Junpo Awards and the Mainichi Film Concours. Recent film credits include *Memories of Matsuko* (dir. Tetsuya Nakashima), *Japan Sinks* (dir. Shinji Higuchi) and *It's Only Talk* (dir. Ryuichi Hiroki). Other credits include *The Eel* (dir. Shohei Imamura), *Zatoichi* (dir. Takeshi Kitano) and *Samurai Resurrection* (dir. Hideyuki Hirayama).

Kimura Tae (Chisato)

Well-known for her television work and recently appeared in the feature films *Japan Sinks* (dir. Shinji Higuchi), *Birthday Wedding* (dir. Naoki Tazawa), *University of Laughs* (dir. Mamoru Hosi) and *Train Man* (dir. Masanori Murakami). She will soon be seen in Hideo Nakata's *Kaidan*.

Kushida Kazuyoshi (Kuroda)

One of Japan's top stage directors and also an actor who appears on stage and screen. Most recently seen in *Nobody Knows* (dir. Koreeda Hirokazu) as well as in *Vital* (dir. Tsukamoto Shinya) and *1980* (dir. Kera).

JOHN WILLIAMS – WRITER/DIRECTOR

Born 1962, grew up in South Wales. Studied French and German literature at Trinity College, Cambridge. Began to make films in University. Made several short films before moving to Japan in 1988. Since moving to Japan has made eight short films and a documentary about human rights abuses in Sri Lanka. His first feature film, *Firefly Dreams (Ichiban Utsukushii Natsu)* was released in Japan in 2001 and he was nominated for Best New Director by the Directors Guild of Japan in the same year. *Firefly Dreams* sold to 15 territories and won several awards both in Japan and at international film festivals. He is currently developing a number of narrative and documentary feature film projects, as well as completing a novel.

Awards (*Starfish Hotel*)

Grand Prix Cinénygma (Best Film) – Luxembourg International Film Festival (2006)

Best Art Direction (Jury Award) – Austin Fantastic Fest (2006)

Awards (*Firefly Dreams*)

Audience Award (Best Dramatic Feature) – Cinequest San Jose Film Festival (2002)

Golden Maile Award (Best Feature Film) – Hawaii International Film Festival (2001)

NETPAC Special Mention – Karlovy Vary International Film Festival (2001)

FIPRESCI Award – Mannheim-Heidelberg International Film Festival (2001)

Lino Brocka Award (Best Film) – Cinemanila International Film Festival (2001)

Miura Award (Best Cinematographer) – Japanese Society of Cinematographers (2001)

SIGNIA Award – 1st Infinity International Film Festival of Torino (2001)

Best New Director (Nominated) – Directors Guild of Japan (2001)

PRAISE FOR FIREFLY DREAMS

“Astutely crafted...[with] strong human appeal and emotional resonance.”

Eddie Cockrell, VARIETY

“...A gentle reminder of cinema’s golden years.”

Mark Schilling, THE JAPAN TIMES

“Beautifully Shot!”

Dan Fainaru, SCREEN INTERNATIONAL

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JOHN WILLIAMS - FILMOGRAPHY

Japan

- 2005 *Starfish Hotel*, 98mins, 35mm, Dolby SR, Narrative Fiction
2001 *Firefly Dreams*, 116mins, 35mm, Dolby Stereo, Narrative Fiction
1998 *Ima Doko*, 40mins, Digital Video, Narrative Fiction
1996 *Midnight Spin*, 70mins, 16mm, colour, Narrative Fiction
1995 *The Man on the Platform*, 20mins, Documentary Drama
1994 *Voices from Sri Lanka*, 50mins, High8 Video, Documentary
1993 *Promises*, 30mins, 8mm, sound and dialogue, colour
1992 *Sashimi*, 10mins, 8mm, sound, colour, Narrative Fiction
1991 *Orpheus Pineapple*, 30mins, 8mm, sound, colour, Narrative Fiction

United Kingdom

- 1987 *The Haunting*, 12mins, 16mm, sound, b/w, Narrative Fiction
1984 *The Audition*, 12mins, 16mm, silent b/w, Experimental
1982 *Trapped*, 8mins, 16mm, silent, b/w, Experimental

KEY CREW

Benito Strangio (Director of Photography)

A celebrated Dutch director of photography, his recent feature film credits include *Jacky*, *Invisible Light*, *Isles Flottantes* and *Paradise Girls*. *Jacky* was as one of the discoveries of the 2000 International Film Festival Rotterdam, where it premiered. That critical success was then followed by selection for Un Certain Regard at the Cannes Film Festival in 2000. Earlier in his career he worked alongside internationally-renowned directors of photography Sacha Vierny and Reinier van Brummelen on films by Peter Greenaway such as *The Pillow Book* and *8 1/2 Women*.

Katsumi Kaneda (Production Designer)

Highly-regarded Art Director and Production Designer with a career stretching back to the early 1980s. Recent credits as Art Director include the phenomenally successful *Pacchigi* (dir. Kazuyuki Izutsu) as well as earlier films such as *Hero Interview* (dir. Michio Mitsuno), *Shoot* (dir. Kazuki Omori) and *Mr. Baseball* (dir. Fred Schepisi). Nominated for the Award for Best Art Direction for his work on both *Jiro's Story* (dir. Tokihisa Morikawa) and *Bu su* (dir. Jun Ichikawa) at the 1987 Japanese Academy Awards.

Saito Iwao (Conceptual Designer)

Best known for his work as Production Designer on the *Ring* series, his credits also includes time spent in Hollywood working on *Alien 4* as well as the two Hollywood remakes of *The Grudge*. He has a long and impressive list of Japanese feature film credits and is considered one of the top Production Designers currently working in Japan.

Yosuke Yafune (Editor)

Since starting his career as Assistant Editor to Tome Minami on *Dreams* (dir. Akira Kurosawa), he has worked on a wide variety of projects such as *Blue Fake* (dir. Yasunari Izuma), *Nagisa* (dir. Masaru Konuma), *Kamachi* (dir. Rokuro Mochizuki) and *Ubume no Natsu* (dir. Akio Jissoji). He also edited *Death Note* (dir. Shusuke Kaneko) and recently completed its sequel by the same director, *Death Note 2*.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

*"I love the strange flavor of the Japanese mystery story, which blends American hardboiled detective fiction and elements from traditional Japanese supernatural folk tales. **Starfish Hotel** grew from my fascination with the genre and the key to the story and the visual style is the word MYSTERY. Of course there's the world of Mystery Novels, with their cheap, lurid covers, but then there are other mysteries: the mystery of the opposite sex, the mystery of the city, the mystery of the human heart, the mystery of existence itself. **Starfish Hotel** explores these different layers of mystery.*

In this film, I use the visual style of film noir and combine it with a range of peculiar Japanese locations. The atmosphere evoked by the noir genre is full of mysterious elements: the single strong light source, the webs and bars of shadows on faces, the low-angles revealing oppressive ceilings, the darkness in the corners of the screen. I believe that we have created a rich darkness, from which anything might – and does – emerge.

This is the story of a man caught in a web, woven from the shadows of his own fears and desires, so the story is really a kind of myth about human consciousness. Arisu in an Everyman figure. But the story is also deeply rooted in the unease that I feel every day in the city of Tokyo. It's a massive unreal city, where the line between the real and the imaginary is always about to snap: a city on the edge of a nervous breakdown. The psychological background to the story lies in this sense of troubled reality in contemporary Japan.

*I have lived in Japan for 17 years now and my first feature film, *Firefly Dreams*, had a warm reception here. Critics and public alike found elements of "Japanese-ness" in the film, which they found surprising given that the filmmaker was a "foreigner". Although I was pleased with these reactions they also made me feel uncomfortable. For me the film was a very personal statement about identity and friendship that happened to be made in Japan, the country where I live. Maybe that's why I turned more introspective with *Starfish Hotel*, which does not take place in a very tangible social reality. Some of the same themes and motifs crop up though – there are tunnels that lead the protagonist into another realm, just like in the first film, but the subject of identity is more complicated here – both the identity of the protagonist, of the filmmaker and of the film itself. I hope it won't be so easy to*

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pigeonhole this film. I was also very drawn to the unique visual atmosphere of the Taisho period and its architecture, which appears in the film. The concept of Wayo Sechu (the blending of European and Japanese elements) was a key idea in the production design, and the whole story. As a "foreign" filmmaker in Japan I am fascinated by the tensions and the beauty that emerges when two cultures meet to create something new and "in-between".

In a world of hardening identities I like the idea of blurred identities, of fuzzy border crossings, and of more mystery than clarity. In that sense the film has a political meaning, and is actually a comment on contemporary Japan."

John Williams

Writer/Director

Tokyo, November 2006

FULL CAST & CREW LIST

CAST

Koichi Sato

Tae Kimura

KIKI

Toshiki Ayata

Shiiko Utagawa

Genta Dairaku

Kazuyoshi Kushida

Saori Kitagawa

Kazuo Nawata

Qi Xin

Go Shimada

Miku Yuki

Shunsuke Tobe

Tetsu Mizuguchi

Tatsuya Hattori

Shinya Ono

Jeremy Eaton

Tetsuya Hori

Ai

Shuko Inoue

Junichi Takahashi

Yu Sato

Dahlia

Kay Yokoi

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Sayuri Kanamori

Nao Saito

Koichi Ueda

Akira Emoto

CREW

Executive Producer

Brian Hulse

Produced by

Martin Rycroft

Misako Furukawa

Tsuyoshi Toyama

Co-Producers

Shunsuke Yamada

Yumiko Miwa

Associate Producers

Chinlin Hsieh

Anthony Iaquinto

Paul Tanner

Director of Photography

Benito Strangio

Production Designer

Katsumi Kaneda

Conceptual Designer

Iwao Saito

Set Dresser

Miho Matsuda

Sound Designer

Hiroshi Yamagata

Gaffer

Yusuke Nakanishi

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| | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| Editor | Yosuke Yafune | |
| Script Supervisor | Kazuko Shingyoku | |
| First Assistant Director | Chukon Minami | |
| Music by | Shoko Nagai and Satoshi Takeishi Daisuke Asakura | |
| Assistant Directors | Masaki Takada Jun Ashizawa Shohei Shiozaki | |
| Focus Puller | Manabu Matsumiya | |
| Film Loader | Takayuki Iba | |
| Video Assist Operator/Interpreter | Kaoru Ishizuka | |
| Lighting Assistants | Nagisa Miyazono Yuji Nakaza | |
| Additional Electricians | Akio Kimura Yuichi Kato Takeshi Tominaga Jin Katsumi | Kotaro Tamada Akira Shibuya Koji Yamamoto Michiru Fujino |
| Art Department Assistants | Namiko Iwaki Satoshi Kanda | |
| Set Decorator | Koji Shinoda | |
| Prop | Junko Nogami | |
| Sound Assistants | Kunihito Hiroki Masahiro Yokozawa | |
| Sound Effect Mixer | Kenichi Watabe | |
| Assistant Sound Effect Mixer | Sakura Katsumata | |
| Music Editor | Masumi Ishii | |
| Studio Engineer | Yoshika Ochi | |
| Optical Re-recording Engineers | Akira Udagawa Hiroki Oba | |
| Assistant Editor | Junko Fujikake | |

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| | |
|--|--|
| Negative Cutter | Etsuko Odajima |
| Color Timer | Taro Kuwayama |
| Optical Supervisor | Atsushi Sasaki |
| Hair & Make-up Artist | Kyoko Toyokawa |
| Additional Hair & Make-up | Tomoko Miyazaki |
| SFX Model & SFX Make-up Coordinator | Tomoo Haraguchi |
| SFX Make-up Artist | Makoto Morita |
| SFX Model Maker | Shigeaki Ito |
| Mr. Trickster Costume Made by | Yumiko Noda |
| Wardrobe Supervisor | Akiko Aida |
| Script Consultants | Masaaki Sakai Alec McAulay |
| Script Analyst (EAVE) | Claire Downes |
| Still Photographer | Taka Koike |
| Drivers | Tomonori Miyoshi Akihiko Masuda Tadashi Kohara Tsutomu Muramatsu Toshihiko Kawasaki Daisuke Muramatsu |
| Aizu Wakamatsu Location Coordinated by | Mitsuru Ozawa |
| Chichibu Location Coordinated by | Susumu Yamanaka |
| Marketing | Masazumi Watanabe, Amp Eisho Tokutake, Amp |
| Art Designer | Maho Igarashi Keizo Odagiri |
| Promotion | Satoko Yahata |
| Location Coordinators | Jun Terada Shuhei Minowa |
| Extras Casting | GetSet |
| Production Secretary | Mei Saegusa |

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Production Accountant Miwa Sasaki

Casting by Yoshiyuki Maejima

Production Supervised by Masao Nagai

Location Manager Minoru Takeoka

Line Producer Kei Sugiura

Special Thanks to
Josef Berger
John Cairns
Roger Clarke
Ben Dimagmaliw
Noboru Furukawa
Atsushi Gojo
Yoshinobu Hayano
Kiyoshi Iga
Richard Jeffery
Yoshihiro Kawaguchi
Danny Krausz
Yukiko Manabe
Mitsuhiro Naito
Keiko Rohe
Christa Saredi

This film was made with the support of
Chris Barnet
Victoria Kate Bolam
Beverley Curran
Kazuaki Kaneda
Susumu Kamiya
Tomoko Kawada
Junji Kimata
Michael Kruse

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Mamiko Mori
John Parsons
Robert Roche
Kumi Sato
Joe Sichi
Gill Steel
Tatsuo Toyama
Richard Williams

This film was developed at the EAVE Producers' Workshop 2002

Written and Directed by John Williams

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