

Capturing Beautiful Storytelling in Anime Through Cinematography

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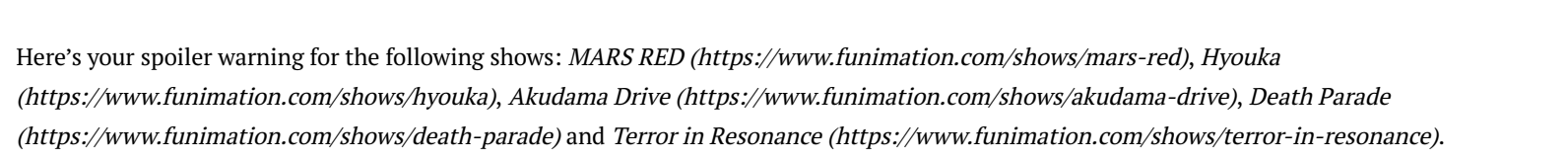
I enjoy watching anime for many reasons, but what I *really* love is when an anime's art and scene direction elevates the storytelling in a beautiful and nuanced way.

Directors who take creative liberties in setting the tone or conveying a message for certain scenes have my utmost admiration. Whether it's camera framing, lighting or character blocking, these artistic decisions transform scenes and give a whole new meaning to the story, world-building and characters.

I'm no film expert, but I do want to share my appreciation for some of my favorite shows by picking apart one scene where I believe the art and scene direction works exceptionally well.

Here's your spoiler warning for the following shows: *MARS RED* (<https://www.funimation.com/shows/mars-red/>), *Hyouka* (<https://www.funimation.com/shows/hyouka/>), *Akadama Drive* (<https://www.funimation.com/shows/akadama-drive/>), *Death Parade* (<https://www.funimation.com/shows/death-parade/>) and *Terror in Resonance* (<https://www.funimation.com/shows/terror-in-resonance/>).

MARS RED



<https://www.funimation.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/MARS-RED-Premiere-Header-1.png>

I was initially drawn to *MARS RED* (<https://www.funimation.com/shows/mars-red/>) because, well, *hot vampires*. What I was actually drawn to was the theatrical aspects of the first episode.

Enter Misaki, a stage actress-turned-vampire who's locked in a deep underground prison and mostly converses and performs lines from the play "Salome," and Colonel Maeda who's in charge of Code Zero. Throughout the episode, subtle hints point toward Misaki and Colonel Maeda as being each other's fiancé, but they never had the chance to meet each other before the former turned into a vampire.

During the final scene, Misaki escapes from prison dressed in her "Salome" costume and heads toward the empty city. The scene cuts to Colonel Maeda who's also walking in the city, and it becomes clear that the two will eventually meet.

RELATED: *MARS RED English Dub Announcement, Cast & Crew Revealed* (<https://www.funimation.com/blog/2021/03/28/mars-red-english-dub-announced-cast-crew-revealed/>)

Misaki is noticeably walking on a straight path, which is further emphasized by the bridges and power lines in the scenery background. She has one path, which leads to Colonel Maeda.



<https://www.funimation.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/MARS-RED-Episode-1-1024x576.jpeg>

The two reunite on a circular platform and Misaki formally introduces herself while twirling in a circle with Colonel Maeda. Everything comes full circle for Colonel Maeda when he realizes too late that Misaki, who's about to meet her death as dawn arrives, is his fiancé.

It's not often that an anime offers more than one mode of storytelling, but *MARS RED* (<https://www.funimation.com/shows/mars-red/>) builds Misaki and Colonel Maeda's forbidden and tragic romance through theater performance and the parallels between their relationship and Salome and Jokanaan's relationship from the play. The difference is that for Misaki and Colonel Maeda, reality is their stage.

Hyouka



https://www.funimation.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/HYOUKA_08_0207-1024x576.jpg

Perhaps my most favorite work from Kyoto Animation, *Hyouka* (<https://www.funimation.com/shows/akadama-drive/>) holds a special place for many reasons: the smart and witty characters, the deeply layered mysteries and the engaging narrative.

Hyouka (<https://www.funimation.com/shows/hyouka/>) outlines other shows in turning mundane situations into a visual feast. As the story focuses on the Classic Literature Club with members who work together to form logical deductions of life's seemingly small mysteries, it can be easy to bore viewers with just the club talking to each other, but Kyoto decided to flex their talented animation skills and took the story to new heights.

RELATED: *The Works of Kyoto Animation, From Violet Evergarden to Free!* (<https://www.funimation.com/blog/2019/08/02/celebrating-the-works-of-kyoto-animation/>)

It's honestly difficult to pinpoint one scene where the art and scene direction excels because there are so many, but the one that stands out is the café scene between Hotaro Oreki and Eru Chitanda. The two are just acquaintances here, and Oreki isn't exactly sure why Chitanda has asked to meet him in the first place.

The scene opens up with nervous tension between them, supplemented by the constant ticking of a clock whose pendulum is in the shape of a heart. The ticking clock and heart-shaped pendulum represent Oreki's own beating heart.

As the viewers, we're looking at Chitanda from Oreki's eyes and he notices her lips when she speaks. At this point, it might seem to the viewer that he's attracted to her and suspects that she wants to confess to him, but it turns out she wants to ask him for a favor.



<https://www.funimation.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Hyouka-Episode-10-1024x576.jpeg>

When she explains the favor, the camera cuts to a blooming flower, which can be interpreted by us as viewers as Oreki's growing interest in Chitanda. Whenever he makes direct eye contact with her, he looks away, and at one point, the camera cuts to the café owner working behind the bar from Oreki's perspective.

Not much is happening in this scene, but it's the camera framing and subtle character movements that make the scene so captivating. Two high schoolers are discussing a mystery, yet the scene wants us to focus on the small details that establish the start of their relationship.

Hyouka (<https://www.funimation.com/shows/hyouka/>) engages viewers by prodding at our brains to form our own deductions of what's actually happening in various scenes, and honestly, it's so much fun to watch.

Akadama Drive



<https://www.funimation.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Akadama-Drive-Tesseract-12-1024x574.png>

I always binge all 12 episodes in one day, *Akadama Drive* (<https://www.funimation.com/shows/akadama-drive/>) has easily become one of my favorite shows. The show oozes cyberpunk with nonstop action, a ragtag cast of characters and social commentary about a corrupted society. It's also rife with character deaths that you can't say you didn't see coming, but are inevitable, and the perfect choice to the show.

RELATED: *Make Your Own Akadama Drive Executioner's Sword Handle Papercraft* (<https://www.funimation.com/blog/2021/03/20/make-your-own-akadama-drive-executioners-sword-handle-papercraft/>)

One character I want to call out is Swindler, the most ordinary person in the group, who doesn't live up to her reputation until her final moments.

As she pleads her innocence in front of the Executioners, the scene alternates between her telling the siblings and Courier that she's a Super S-Rank Akadama and her lying to the Executioners that she isn't an Akadama.



<https://www.funimation.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Akadama-Drive-Episode-12-1024x576.jpeg>

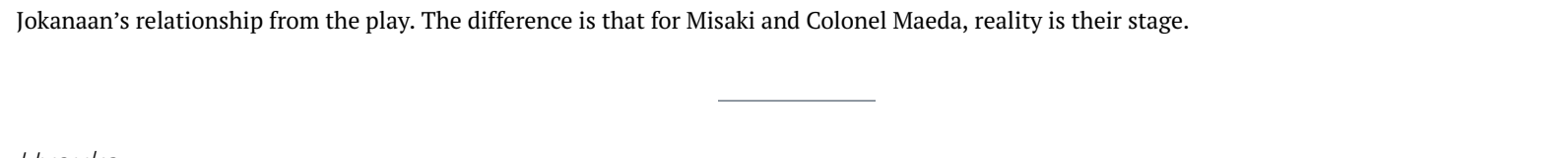
The scene is broadcast live for everyone to see, but for us, we see both sides of Swindler. The constant camera cuts along with Swindler's dialogue drive home the idea that she *does* live up to her reputation as someone who can perfectly lie and sway public opinion.

RELATED: *Akadama Drive Wins Anime Trending's Anime of the Year* (<https://www.funimation.com/blog/2021/02/28/akadama-drive-wins-anime-trendings-anime-of-the-year/>)

When the Executioner stakes her to the cross, it's basically the Executioner killing the public's faith in the police force that she's supposed to protect them. Turns out they're the real bad guys, and Swindler accomplished what she set out to do, bringing a fitting end to her character arc.

It's also worth noting that it's snowing when she dies, and winter symbolizes death and endings.

Death Parade



<https://www.funimation.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Death-Parade-Screenshot-2-1024x576.png>

I always return to *Death Parade* (<https://www.funimation.com/shows/death-parade/>) when I feel like being an emotional wreck. I wrote about my personal experience with the show (<https://www.funimation.com/blog/2020/05/19/what-are-you-watching-death-parade-why-we-love-the-shows-we-watch/>), and I will continue preaching about this masterpiece because it captures the human experience so damn well.

The brevity of human life and all the pain, regret and suffering that come with it are deeply explored in Quindecim, a place between life and death that judges souls either into oblivion or reincarnation. Decim is an arbiter who's supposed to judge souls without any emotional attachments. He's supposed to be soulless, just like the dolls he puppeteers.

RELATED: *What Are You Watching? Death Parade* (<https://www.funimation.com/blog/2020/05/19/what-are-you-watching-death-parade-why-we-love-the-shows-we-watch/>)

The Black-Haired Woman, or Chiyuki, who's his assistant throughout the show, eventually finds out the truth of her existence and her past. In an attempt to judge her based on whether she wants to sacrifice another life so she can live again, Decim's emotions start to unravel when he witnesses her selflessness. She has a strong desire to live again, but it doesn't triumph over other people who will also grieve for their loved ones.



<https://www.funimation.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Death-Parade-Screenshot-3-1024x578.jpeg>

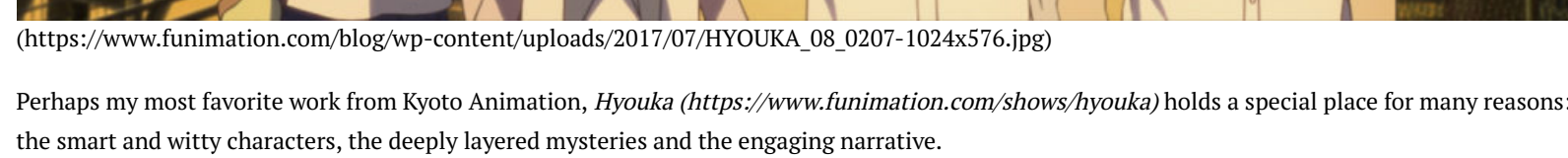
Decim grabs at his chest, assuming he's grown a heart, and his eyes pulse. After hearing and seeing Chiyuki's desperation, the mirage that he constructed visibly cracks. While it's a classic visual cue of revealing someone's emotions shattering, the effect is still full of impact.

The crosses in Decim's eyes disappear and he looks more human, and once he cries, the moment has officially transformed him from a soulless arbiter to a human who feels sorrow.

RELATED: *Some of Our Favorite Moments from Yuzuru Tachikawa's Reddit AMA* (<https://www.funimation.com/blog/2020/08/19/deca-dence-some-of-our-favorite-moments-from-yuzuru-tachikawa-reddit-ama/>)

This scene is one of many from *Death Parade* (<https://www.funimation.com/shows/death-parade/>) that always leaves me in tears. The show manages to convey human emotions, from selflessness to grievance, in ways that are breathtaking but beautiful at the same time. Most important of all, we accept all of those emotions for what they are.

Terror in Resonance

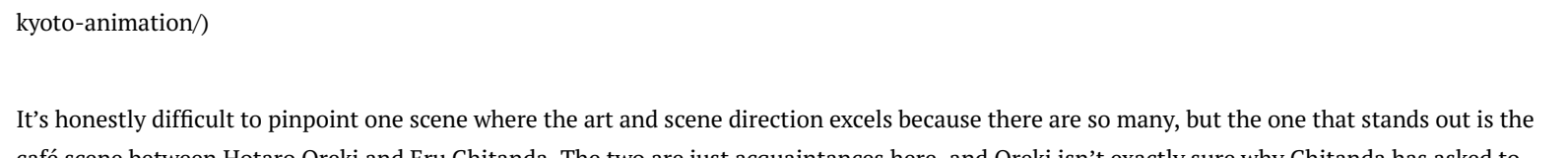


<https://www.funimation.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Terror-in-Resonance-MAPPA-Feature-1024x578.jpeg>

Terror in Resonance (<https://www.funimation.com/shows/terror-in-resonance/>) stepped in a never-ending sense of doom, yet it manages to capture the essence of humanity in truly beautiful ways. The Ferris wheel scene in particular is the perfect example of showing contrasting emotions and somehow balancing them in harmony.

In the Ferris wheel cabin, Lisa wears a vest with multiple bombs attached, and it's up to Twelve to try to defuse them within a short timeframe. The two are drenched from being outside in the rain, but given the tense and bleak situation, the water droplets running down their faces can also be seen as tears.

While Lisa is initially fearful and unsure of what the outcome will be, Twelve is resolute and calm, which describes how they view their futures.



<https://www.funimation.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Terror-in-Resonance-Episode-9.jpeg>

Tension builds the higher they go up, but once they reach the top, Lisa and Twelve's emotions swap. Twelve confesses that he's starting to regret his choices that have led to their current situation, but from the flashbacks of him being happy with Lisa, it's because he was hopeful for a different future rather than one filled with despair.

RELATED: *The Works of MAPPA, From Terror in Resonance to Sarazanmai* (<https://www.funimation.com/blog/2020/08/14/the-works-of-mappa-from-terror-in-resonance-to-sarazanmai/>)

When Lisa recognizes his feelings, she looks out at the moon. The moonlight clears away the clouds and shadows, representing Lisa's acceptance of her future (death).

Freedom is one of the core themes of *Terror in Resonance* (<https://www.funimation.com/shows/terror-in-resonance/>), and while Lisa and Twelve feel trapped in their situation, they eventually do find their freedom—even if the ending is heartbreaking (and one I still can't get over).



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