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MOODY TALES OF TEENS IN PERIL

# BOOGIEPOP PHANTOM

## VOL. 1: *EVOLUTION ONE* and VOL. 2: *EVOLUTION TWO*

***Boogiepop Phantom***, a 12-episode TV series, owes a lot to ***Serial Experiments Lain*** in its visual style, emotional tone, and themes of teen angst. While ***Lain*** filtered everything through the title character's consciousness, it did so against the backdrop of cyberspace. ***Boogiepop*** opts for a succession of different narrators based at different high schools, but avoids high technology in favor of a more psychological approach tinged with horror, mysticism and the occasional sci-fi element. Weird phenomena are evident everywhere, including the Angel of Death known in local urban legend as "Boogiepop"; strange lights in the sky; a lurking serial killer; and dispossessed souls preying on vulnerable teens. It's no easier to comprehend than ***Lain***, at least not after the first six episodes, but, like ***Lain***, it rewards more-demanding fans and compels further viewing.

Each episode is a separate story told by a different narrator, a schoolboy or girl faced with a bizarre problem. A shy girl is summoned by the "ghost" of a boy she once liked but who disappeared. A male senior is able to "see" fist-sized spiders over the hearts of people feeling guilty and he is the only one able to remove them (and eat them!), relieving their guilt. A girl spreads the dubious philosophy of a mysterious younger girl named "Panuru," who may or may not have even existed. A boy gets obsessed with a junior high girl at his after-school job and tries, under the influence of aromatherapy, to remake her in the image of a sexy cyberbabe from his favorite computer game. A veteran cop describes a secret organization seeking to hunt down and kill "special kids" who have evolved beyond ordinary humanity (a metaphor, perhaps, for the Japanese school system?).

The multilayered stories interlock in all sorts of intriguing ways. Each episode includes references to other story threads that have or haven't occurred yet. The same scene is sometimes repeated in a later episode from a different narrator's point of view. There are frequent flashbacks to key events that occurred five years earlier when a serial killer was on the loose. Each episode jumps back and forth in time so often that close attention is required to keep track of the timeline at any given point.

Recurring themes include the near-suicidal alienation of its teen characters, the various pressures they face (most notably entrance exams), and their misguided, sometimes self-destructive attempts to relieve the pressure. Also prominent is the failure of parents and adults to protect the children, as well as the corruption of certain authority figures. The closest thing to a continuing character is motorcycle-riding schoolgirl Nagi Kirima (voiced in the English dub by ***Pokémon***'s Rachael Lillis), who seems to be investigating the strange goings-on. Another vaguely recurring character is the elusive "Boogiepop" herself, an exotically dressed female who appears at crucial moments in a couple of the episodes but whose role remains unclear.

The story is set in a small Japanese city surrounded by hills. As in ***Lain***, there are numerous background shots of the streets, parks, landscapes, and objects of the city. The urban settings are nicely detailed and the camera often lingers on them, although the surrealistic touches of ***Lain*** are absent. One questionable feature of the visual scheme is the draining of color from most backgrounds and the muting of it in the characters' costumes. The character design itself is not as strong as it could be, with many of the characters too simply rendered and looking too much alike. This seems to be part of the design strategy, to keep everything a little darker, more abstract, and less clear. Still, ***Lain*** demonstrated that it was possible to achieve such effects without eliminating the bold lines, bright colors and strong graphics we've come to associate with anime.

***Boogiepop*** is a fascinating show designed for the more cerebral anime fans and those with a taste for the morbid and melancholy. It is demanding and original and goes deeper into psychological strata than most anime, in ways that must certainly resonate with Japanese teen viewers and just might do the same with Americans.

**DVD FEATURES:** While the English dubbing may be above average, the Japanese voice track is still preferable. The few extras include a pair of short trailers for the series, a short music video, and an audio track consisting of commentary by Jeff Thompson and Joe DiGiorgi, both of whom were involved in the preparation of the series for the American market. They talk a little about the production process, including voice-casting, but mostly about the series itself and their own reactions to it, including references to things that happen in later episodes that may annoy viewers who might not want to know those things yet.

**BRIAN CAMP**



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