HELLO WORLD

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2019/98min/Colour/English Subtitles
Distributor: Anime Limited

Director: ITO Tomohiko
Cast: KITAMURA Takumi, MATSUZAKA Tori, HAMABE Minami

Online screening information:

Sat 20 Feb 48 hour rental window from **10.00am**

Mon 1 Mar 48 hour rental window from **6.00pm**

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"Hello, World!" is the first computer program most beginners write, a very simple program that outputs a basic message. It's an appropriate title for a film about two of the most complicated problems humans have to deal with. One is Big Data, or how we handle data sets too large to be dealt with by the most sophisticated of traditional software. The other is love.

With both data and love, memory is key. Since 1986, the amount of data stored in the world has increased 200-fold, and the storage method has shifted from analogue to digital. The two central characters in this charming but dense science fiction romance love books, but they're increasingly out of date. Hard copies now make up a tiny fraction of the world's media. Shy, indecisive Naomi and his self-contained classmate Ruri live in a near-future Kyoto in which a gigantic database grown from a mapping system can actually recreate the city and its inhabitants at any recorded period.

If a city and its people can be recreated at any time from pure data, what's to prevent that data being rewritten to correct previous bad decisions and missed opportunities? Only the system's own defences, which can erase, amend, update and reboot memory with one click.

Tomohiko Ito's 2019 film will definitely appeal to fans of his earlier work, such as *Sword Art Online* or *ERASED*. Its plot will also provide food for thought for science fiction aficionados. The images have enormous charm, inventiveness and energy. Mado Nozaki's screenplay doesn't overload us with exposition, allowing the visuals to carry most of that load - the final shot provides a massive plot twist in a few seconds.

The story is set in Kyoto. The city, depicted in glowing 3D animation, is very much a backdrop for the inner struggle of the characters and the huge computer system. Different stages of graphic rendering show digital Kyoto in a much more stripped-back state, while the visuals of the system in operation are delightfully trippy, as if every psychedelic album cover and avant-garde music video you ever saw was brought to life.

The plot also relegates most of Yukiko Horiguchi's charming character designs to backdrop status. Only the main characters get any development, but they're quite enough for a movie that needs to work through heavyweight SF concepts. They also hark back to much earlier anime; Naomi, at first just another tongue-tied schoolboy, is a throwback to the undaunted spirit of *Star of the Giants*, putting himself through a gruelling programme of physical testing to achieve an aim that seems hopeless. Ruri, meanwhile, may remind fans of a certain age of the aloof, reserved, intelligent Madoka Ayukawa of *Kimagure Orange Road*.

This is a film with big ideas and mindblowing visuals, wrapped around an engrossing story. You don't need to be an Ito fan, or an anime fan, to enjoy it.

Helen McCarthy