

Movie Review: Monsters Club (Japan, 2011)

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As much an ideological treatise - or, more accurately, a study of one - as it is a film in any conventional narrative sense, Japan's Toshiaki Toyoda continues his restless and seemingly continual reinvention of himself with **Monster's Club**.

A project launched after Toyoda read *Industrial Society and Its Future* - the manifesto written by Ted Kaczynski, best known as the Unabomber - **Monster's Club** is a film that dares to take Kaczynski's ideas seriously. Rather than react with a simple negative knee-jerk response Toyoda dares to consider that maybe Kaczynski's outrage may have been based in something valid and then ask himself what would drive a man to react to those realizations with a campaign of terror rather than charting some other course.

Eita - seen recently in Takashi Miike's *Hara-Kiri* - stars as Ryoichi, a youngman who has abandoned society and now lives a solitary life in a cabin high up in the wooded mountains, a cabin where he prepares elaborate pipe bombs which he mails to the CEO's of various media companies while writing a manifesto of his own. Disgusted with a system that requires conformity to maintain the status quo, the stresses of that enforced conformity leading to one Japanese suicide every fifteen minutes, Ryoichi has chosen to withdraw, to withdraw and destroy.

There's more to it than that, of course, and over time Ryoichi's privacy is invaded by visitors both supernatural and more tangible. His younger sister turns up, bringing an unwelcome reminder of his family and hidden tragedies there, as do a strange forest creature and the ghosts of his two dead brothers. And his interactions with all of them provide brief glimpses into why Ryoichi now lives the life he has chosen.

Monster's Club is, in many ways, an experiment more than it is a film. It has virtually no narrative at all, Ryoichi existing as an almost entirely static character, one whose only proactive activity is the mailing of his pipe bombs. Do not expect story or progression here, there is none. Instead what Toyoda gives us is as pure a character study as I have ever seen put on screen, one driven by ideals and abstract concepts as much as emotion.

To be sure, Toyoda executes his goals with all the style that you would expect of the man behind **Blue Spring** and **Nine Souls** - the music is typically excellent - with the characters brought to life by a sterling cast that also includes Yosuke Kubozuka (**Ping Pong, Go**) and Jun Kunimura (**Outrage, K-20**). Editing and photography are both excellent and on a technical level the film easily matches the high standards of quality Toyoda has held throughout his career. But those do not keep the film from being an at-times frustrating experience. **Monster's Club** often feels as though Toyoda was gifted with a brilliant premise and strong cast and then couldn't quite figure out what to do with them. It's a statement, not a story and for many that will make for incredibly difficult viewing, particularly since the skills and abilities to tell a strong story are obviously on display.

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