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WE ARE ALIENS

by Kohei Kadowaki



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SYNOPSIS

«Hey — what if I told you I am an alien?» In a small Japanese town, an ordinary boy's quiet betrayal sets in motion something he will spend the rest of his life trying to forget.

INTERVIEW WITH KOHEI KADOWAKI

Why target the subject of school bullying ?

I didn't initially intend to explicitly address «school bullying» in *We Are Aliens*. It was through the storytelling of these two boys — and following the evolution of their relationship from primary school to adulthood — that this theme imposed itself, emerging as a tangible social reality.

Our society is made up of very different individuals: some benevolent, others malicious, as well as people whose sincere intentions can be misinterpreted. This spectrum of human personas is vast. When you don't focus on just one type of person but observe them all impartially and objectively, some profiles naturally emerge.

Why tell the story from the children's point of view?

There was no question of diverting attention away from Gyotaro and Tsubasa's story. In an earlier version, I gave more space to their families' points of view. Ultimately, I moved away from that; trying to tell everything in a single film would have only led to a superficial approach.

Why do the two protagonists look so much alike during childhood? I projected a part of myself into each character, though this doesn't directly serve the narrative. It's part of the creative process — what happens «behind the scenes.»

At the beginning, Gyotaro and Tsubasa are the same height. Years

later, Tsubasa is noticeably taller than Gyotaro.. However, when they meet again as adults, Tsubasa is noticeably taller than Gyotaro. This visual contrast suggests that their trajectories diverged as they grew up. In the childhood sequences, I didn't want to emphasize any difference between them. In the swing scene, for example, I chose to show them as strictly identical, with the same height and weight.

Is this story drawn from your personal experience?

From those years, I remember two particularly striking memories: a very intense first love and the drifting apart of a friend. This work was born from a desire to tell these two experiences by letting them dialog as a single motif. However, many parts are fictional or inspired by stories shared by friends.

Why choose a fragmented structure and multiple points of view?

In *We Are Aliens*, I wanted to share a personal perspective on life, society, and human relationships, while confronting the differing viewpoints that arise from them. It wasn't simply about confronting a life where everything seems to succeed, against one that has come to a standstill. I chose to represent two individuals at different ages and in very distinct situations to allow their thoughts to break through according to their specific contexts.

What animation technique did you use?

I relied on standard animation software and mastered techniques. What mattered most to me was finding the best production workflow. I directed *We Are Aliens*, but I also supervised the animation and handled the background and color design. It is, of course, impossible to animate a film entirely by yourself. Therefore, I immediately wondered: how can I ensure true visual consistency when several people are working on the film?

Within the studio, the producers and I established a very close communication system with the lead animators to convey my intentions and targeted feedback. For the most delicate adjustments—those difficult to put into words, like slight drawing corrections or nuances in facial expressions—I spent several hours a day moving through the studio to apply the necessary changes myself.

How did rotoscoping help you?

With *We Are Aliens*, I sought to represent all the «useless» movements children often make. These are difficult to draw accurately. To give them more credibility, I combined live-action footage from different angles with the use of rotoscoping, which helped improve the overall quality of the animation.

What are your influences?

To represent the characters' emotional shifts, I relied on my intuition and personal experience. It is all a matter of perspective and how to make people feel those of Gyotaro and Tsubasa. I don't claim any specific style or conscious influences in the staging.

However, regarding the depiction of daily life, I think I was influenced by Sylvain Chomet's *The Illusionist*, which observes human life through a fixed camera with great care and delicacy. In the same spirit, I admire painters capable of capturing everyday life from unique angles, such as Albert Anker, Norman Rockwell, or Johannes Vermeer.



Technical crew

Direction: Kohei Kadowaki

Screenwriting: Kohei Kadowaki

Image: Kohei Kadowaki

Editing: Kohei Kadowaki, Kenichiro Tachikawa

Music: Yaffle

Artistic crew

Tsubasa Goto: Ryota Bando

Gyotaro Hoshi: Amane Okayama

Biography

Kohei Kadowaki

Born in 1996, Kohei Kadowaki graduated from the department of design from the University of the Arts of Tokyo, before joining an animation production company. Now independent, he stages several plays and advertisings, before specializing in animation films.

His distinct visual style incorporates live action sequences with 3D CGI, that give his works a unique profundity.

