

A New Era Begins

A Look at Evangelion 1.11 You Are (Not) Alone

A Film Review by Jon K. Chrisawn
3 December 2014

The Lowdown:

Evangelion 1.11: You Are (Not) Alone
Format: Blu-ray

1st film of a projected 4-film series titled:
Rebuild of Evangelion

Remake of original Japanese 26-episode
TV series Neon Genesis Evangelion that
began in 1995

Japanese Theatrical Release: October
2007
American Home Media Release: March
2010

Spoken Language: Blu-ray offers option
of Japanese w/English subtitles or
English

Director: Hideaki Anno (chief), Kazuya
Tsurumaki, and Masayuki

Running time: 101 minutes.
Genre: Anime, Mecha
Studio: Funimation
ASIN: B0030ZOYHC



What's old is new again for the Japanese animation empire that is *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. Pronounced “a-van-geh-l-eon,” the series aired on Japanese TV in 1995 and was a cultural milestone. The apocalyptic mecha anime series exploded on the scene in an era where anime was widely considered pedestrian entertainment for children. However, creator and director Hideaki Anno, with *Evangelion*, transcended genre boundaries and drew in adults who marveled at the series’ mixture of religious imagery, action-packed battles and philosophical meanderings. *Eva* signaled a new era in Japanese animation nearly two

decades ago and it's making a dramatic comeback. In 2007, Hideaki Anno launched a four film remake of his landmark anime series, *Rebuild of Evangelion*, but is *Evangelion 1.11 You Are (Not) Alone* another rallying call or is it a eulogy?

So what is this anime stuff anyway? An anime is, essentially, a Japanese cartoon. Like American cartoons, anime has specific conventions, styles and genres. Originating from Japan, anime features Japanese voice acting; however, when an anime is brought

What is “Mecha” anime?

The mecha genre of anime focuses on giant humanoid robots that are piloted by humans. Mechs either fight against each other or battle an outside threat that is too large for conventional weaponry. Besides *Eva*, the most widely known mecha anime is probably the *Gundam* series. Japan recently constructed a real life *Gundam* in Tokyo which attests to the anime's cultural significance.

over to the United States, English dialogue is usually recorded. Virtually any anime DVD or Blu-ray you buy will give you the option of spoken Japanese with English subtitles (known as a “sub” in the American anime community) and spoken English (a “dub”). While it's still fairly niche, anime in America experienced a boom in the late 90s that coincided with *Eva*'s original Japanese release. I was swept up

in that boom. While I still enjoyed American cartoons like *Dexter's Laboratory* and *Ed, Edd, and Eddy*, I was just as enthralled by anime like *Digimon Adventure* and *Outlaw Star*. There was something different about anime; it was more serious and engaging than the American cartoons I enjoyed. The stakes in anime were always higher: the destruction of the world, the death of the hero or even the need for survival. America was inundated with great anime during the late 90s and early 2000s, and it was largely due to the original *Eva* series and its maturity and flair. Just looking at *Evangelion 1.11*'s Blu-ray cover—a giant robot standing shoulder-to-shoulder with skyscrapers from the perspective of an onlooker on the street below—is enough to stir those same ancient feelings of excitement in me.

Evangelion 1.11 You Are (Not) Alone paints a bleak picture of society. In a not-to-distant future, humanity is engaged in a constant struggle against giant monsters known as “Angels.” Angels are constantly terrorizing Tokyo-3, drawn inexplicably towards Terminal Dogma and the GeoFront: a massive underground facility that houses clandestine organization NERV. To combat Angels, NERV created monsters of their own: the Evangelion. The human-piloted Evangelion are bizarre fusions of monster and machine and are humanity’s last hope for survival. The principal cast of *Eva* includes reluctant pilot and introspective protagonist Shinji Ikari; his stern, calculating father and NERV Supreme Commander Gendo Ikari; the equal parts loopy and serious woman Lt. Col. Misato Katsuragi; and the mysterious, icy female pilot Rei Ayanami.



From left to right: Shinji Ikari, Gendo Ikari, Misato Katsuragi, and Rei Ayanami

The series focuses on Shinji’s relationships as much as it does on robot fighting. The plot: after years of little—if any—contact, Gendo calls for Shinji to join him in Tokyo-3. The day of Shinji’s arrival coincides with an Angel attack, and Shinji barely escapes to NERV HQ with Misato who will eventually become his ward. The Ikari family reunion is not joyous, however. Soon after arriving at HQ, Gendo demands that Shinji pilot an Evangelion. Distraught that his father only sent for him because he “had a use for him,” Shinji refuses. Undeterred, Gendo calls for the previously injured Rei Ayanami to pilot

the Eva. Shinji takes pity on her and agrees to become the pilot in her stead. So, with that out of the way, how good is the film?

The *Rebuild of Evangelion* tetralogy is ambitious to say the least. How can a 26 episode series be condensed into four films? Carefully, as it turns out. *Eva* manages to recap the first quarter of the series without sacrificing too much character development. The film's pacing is necessarily swift, yet it rarely feels rushed. Some sequences are truncated or cut entirely, but *Eva* never feels like a film assembled from disparate parts. The film is a complete, self-sufficient story from beginning to end. While the original anime gave ample time for the characters to reflect and stew on the happenings of the show, *Eva*'s brisk pace doesn't always allow such reflection. Nevertheless, character moments shine through and propel the story towards its explosive conclusion. Shinji's inner monologues may be reduced, but the best and most relevant of them are preserved or tweaked slightly to fit in with the new continuity. Shinji's relationships with his distant father Gendo, the pseudo-matronly Misato and his co-pilot Rei are developed just enough to carry the plot believably onward.

Being an animated film, visuals are extremely important. The first film I ever saw in a theater was Pixar's *A Bug's Life*. I remember sitting in the oversized theater seat and being thrilled by the expressive, lifelike—at the time—characters and the film's frantic, kinetic action scenes. In 1998, *A Bug's Life* was on the bleeding edge of what was possible in the animation world. Likewise, *Evangelion* pushes towards animation's horizons with outstanding visuals. While it's tough to beat the hand-drawn beauty and fluidity of the original anime, *Eva* benefits from modern animation techniques in several ways. I watched the Blu-ray version of the film on a high definition television, so my viewing environment was optimal for an impoverished college student. The image

clarity is second-to-none. Early in the film, Misato holds up a manual for Shinji to look over and the barcode label on the manual immediately struck me. I could see the space between each line of the barcode and the words “Printed in Japan” crystal clear despite how tiny the text was on the screen. The film’s widescreen aspect ratio grants the viewer a better vantage point into the post-apocalyptic world of *Eva* (compared to the square-like 4:3 ratio of the original TV series). Lonely forests, derelict cityscapes and the majesty of the Tokyo-3’s underground GeoFront are all impeccably rendered and sharply defined.



Left: Scene from Original Anime. Right: Evangelion 1.11 Version of Same Scene

The film’s cast of characters are also expertly crafted. From the subtlety of each character’s facial expressions to the intensity of the mecha combat, *Eva*’s cast is alive and vibrant. While each character is unique and interesting, it’s clear that the animators spent a large amount of time perfecting the film’s massive robots and monsters. The two Evangelion mechs featured in the film are insanely detailed and, if you’ll allow me to enter “fanboy” mode for a moment, pretty damn awesome. Unit 00 and Unit 01 share only a common humanoid shape. Each Eva Unit is equipped with different armor

plating that hint towards each being an entirely different creature. Unit 01's helmet seems to conceal two eyes and a mouth, while Unit 00's helmet is more cyclopean. In the same manner, each Angel is unique and perfectly menacing. The three Angels featured in the film possess vastly different properties and methods of attack. The first Angel is terrestrial and humanoid while the final Angel is strictly geometrical and floats with some unseen force. What makes the Angels such effective and unsettling antagonists are the tiny hints of their own sentience. The film's first Angel, upon realizing defeat is inevitable, desperately performs a suicidal explosion in hopes of taking Eva Unit 01 down with it. The film's final Angel lets out a human-like cry in its death throes: a chilling coda to an epic battle. The Angels feel like more than just mindless monsters for the heroes to destroy. And what of the Eva Units themselves? *Evangelion* doesn't fully address what the Angels are and how the Eva Units are different, but it's a smart tease to get you hyped for a sequel.

There are, however, a few things I felt were absent from the film. *Eva* suffers from what I call "First Film Syndrome". Simply put, the introductory chapter of a film series is almost always the weakest. Consider, for example, *Star Wars* and *The Empire Strikes Back*: while *Star Wars* is a great and important film, the critical consensus suggests that *Empire* is a better film. With all the characters and themes established, a sequel has more room to explore complex issues and embark on exciting new adventures. The rapid pace of the film compounds *Eva*'s First Film Syndrome. There's much less time to explore Tokyo-3 compared to the original anime. I would have loved to see more of Terminal Dogma and the inner workings of NERV. The film's shorter runtime and increased pacing fails to provide the same level of immersion offered by the anime series.

The religious symbolism and philosophical questions that the series is famous for are less apparent in the film as well. The film retains the distinctly cross-like explosions from the first Angel's assaults and even gives audiences a glimpse of the crucified Angel Lilith that resides far below Terminal Dogma. There's also mention of the "Hedgehog's dilemma," a concept discussed by the original anime series at length. However, occasionally it feels like *Eva* is moving forward way too fast and the complex religious symbolism and philosophical ideas (such as the Hedgehog's dilemma) are reduced to mere reference and are not as seriously engaged. This criticism should be taken with a grain of salt, however. The Christian imagery is obvious to me as an American, yet I could be missing the Shinto and Buddhist concepts since I'm not well versed in either of those faiths. Ultimately, however, the film remains engaging and interesting. I expect the subsequent entries to engage the religious and philosophical material more adequately.

"...the closer they get, the more they risk hurting each other... it's really no different for people."

NERV scientist Ritsuko Akagi describing the Hedgehog's dilemma to Misato.

THE FINAL VERDICT

Evangelion 1.11 You Are (Not) Alone is a great film and, on its own terms, an interesting adaptation of a beloved anime classic. The film can also serve as a great primer for those interested in diving into the world of anime. The new *Eva* is sleek, tightly paced and bursting at the seams with dynamic action, yet somehow manages to retain some amount of the series' signature blend of philosophy and religious symbolism (even if it is a bit lacking). The film's pacing doesn't allow the same level of immersion into the material as the original series, but the incredible visuals and competent storytelling more than make up for it. *Evangelion* stands on its own and

opens the door to a brand new era for the legendary Japanese anime franchise. (4/5
Stars)

