

Director Roundtable
General Manager Tatsuya Ishihara x
Director Yasuhiro Takemoto x
Director Touko Takao

They've worked politely, earnestly, and diligently to depict Kyon's facial expressions, the change in Nagato, and another meeting with Haruhi in *Disappearance*. What stories will the three people who created the storyboards tell?



Sights that were inspired by the world created in the original novel

—Since everyone has read the novel the movie is based from, would you each tell your impressions of it?

Ishihara Before I began work on the *Haruhi Suzumiya* television series, Producer Atsushi Itou asked me "Who is your favorite character?" Only having read the first novel, I answered "Mikuru Asahina." He then told me, "When you finish the fourth novel, *Disappearance*, you'll love Yuki Nagato." And true enough...I became a Nagato fan after reading the novel.

Takemoto Outside of *Disappearance*, Haruhi is always the troublemaker in the series. But in *Disappearance*, it's Nagato who becomes the troublemaker. When I read the original work, I was surprised to read a story that differed from the rest of the series until that point. Our protagonist Kyon was thrown into a world all by himself. Up until then Kyon had ignored the part of him that thought everything was interesting, but now he wanted to return to it. I had a hunch the readers were like "Ah, he's finally got it now."

Takao When I read *Disappearance*, the first thing that popped into my head was a winter scene. I had been able to sense the colors until then, but now I could sense the scenery. That was an awfully good atmospheric feeling I got. It linked Nagato's loneliness and sense of helplessness to winter. I thought it would be a lovely video.

—When did you decide to make *Disappearance* into a long movie?

Takemoto When we were organizing the "re-airing" of the television series, we began talks on making *Disappearance* into a movie.

Ishihara Thus we started work on the scenario very early on. We were finished with it before *The Melancholy of Suzumiya Haruhi-chan* was being animated.

—In the television series you've used the titles "Brigade Chief Representative" and "Assistant Brigade Chief", but you used "General Manager" and "Director" this time. Why did you change that?

Ishihara This time Haruhi has disappeared, so without a Brigade Chief I can't be a "Super General Manager." I get the feeling that Haruhi would go "I'm the Brigade Chief, so you'll be the Assistant Brigade Chief." (laughs) This time, I overlooked Haruhi's orders.

Drawing a love story and resolution and return

—When you decided to make *Disappearance* into a long movie, what kind of work did you think it would be?

Takemoto Not revealing anything else, I've worked on bringing all of the stories from the original works into animations.

Ishihara This was Producer Itou's idea. As a result, it came to be nearly 170 minutes long.

Takemoto In order to properly animate the original work, about that much time is necessary.

—When you were animating this work, what concept did you decide on?

Ishihara A "love story."

Takemoto Before we put that into effect, we gathered ourselves, the Chief Animation Director Nishiya, Super Chief Animation Director Ikeda, and the important animation staff and talked about the direction of this work. At that time my proposal was "A story of Kyon's resolution and return."

—So a "love story" and "resolution and return?"

Takemoto What I mean by "resolution" is referring to the time when Kyon is alone and gives up. Up until that time he had "resolution" by pretending not to look at the truth. "Return" is Kyon's inner actions to return to the SOS Brigade. It's those wishes and desires that drive his "return." I proposed designing the movie around these two points to everyone. I get the sense that not only did we design the movie around "resolution and return," we also designed it around Ishihara-san's "love story" as well.

Ishihara I disagree. My impression is that "love story" and "Kyon's change" were woven together. This might be a different approach.

Takemoto My thinking is that the love portion of *Disappearance* is quite thin. (laughs) Even though I said "resolution and return," I've been thinking there's a simpler way to say it. *Disappearance* is "the story of Kyon seeing things in a new light."

Ishihara That's very interesting.

Takemoto After all, it's the story where Kyon puts everything back to "the way [he] thinks it should be."

Ishihara That's something we could say about all of the *Haruhi Suzumiya* works. We and Kyon realize that this isn't a different world when he meets Haruhi again.

Takemoto That's similar to what Koizumi said in the film.

"*Disappearance* is 'the story of Kyon seeing things in a new light.'" (Takemoto)

—Was there anything you thought about when drawing images this time?

Ishihara We were aware that this was going to be a movie, but we thought about linking it to the *Haruhi* series.

Takemoto Of course it's not a television series, but it's still a *Haruhi Suzumiya* work.

Takao I became aware of this when working on images for the "re-airing." I made sure to show the feeling of the atmosphere in the work by not moving the camera, showing the surroundings, and other techniques for the viewer become aware of what was going on inside Kyon. After the world changed, he's very lonely. Nagato, Koizumi, and Asakura too were very lonely. Mikuru... I'm not sure about if she was lonely or not. (laughs) Everyone on the staff conveyed "loneliness" in images as well as techniques.

Takemoto From the start of our drawing, we decided that we weren't going to move the camera much, especially not carelessly. In those cases, it helped make the atmosphere a very important feature.

—What gave Takao the chance to participate in making the storyboards?

Takemoto Actually, she was the one who came to us. When Ishihara-san and I began work on the storyboards, our schedule was very tight and so we said "Well, would you please assist us?"

Takao When I was reading the novel, I could clearly see the images of an animation in my head. They were so concrete I could feel the colors. Certainly I wanted to participate in making the storyboards, so I went separately to Ishihara-san and Takemoto-san and asked to join.

Takemoto In addition to our trust in Takao-san, we had a lot of directors. But I think this work is distinct of Takao-san.

Ishihara She was also on the staff creating storyboards for the "re-airing" television series, but she said "I feel I left things undone."

Takao That's true. I'm a little shy to talk about it, but when I was directing the "re-airing", I regret depicting the girls in my own style.

—Are there any feelings about Takao-san being a female director?

Takemoto That's a difficult thing to talk about, but I feel that you can produce a work without having the genders interact. That's because there's a definitive difference between men and women. As a result, the finished product would be different as well.

Ishihara I'm very interested in a woman's point of view and also from a mental point of view when producing the work itself. I've done what I could with a man's point of view, but it's very interesting to have a woman's point of view for *Haruhi Suzumiya*. I can say that Takao-san was very helpful.

Takemoto I have the same opinion. I used her opinions as a reference many times.

Takao We all gave each other our opinions. It was a lot of give and take. I was able to experience the difference in men and women's points of view during our discussions. Especially about Nagato. There are other women directors at Kyoto Animation beside myself and when I talk to them, there's a different view of Nagato from the men. She is a humanoid interface, but I see her as a "woman."

Ishihara Ah, you spoke about that.

Takao The producer asked me about it at the end.

"I see Nagato as a 'woman.'" (Takao)

Ryouko Asakura and Koizumi. The two people who weren't chosen.

—The storyboards for this work were split into 6 parts: A-F. Who worked on each one?

Takemoto Ishihara-san and I split the beginning and end. The C and D parts were done by Takao-san.

Takao I was in charge of the C and D parts, but we all talked about how to illustrate the story.

Takemoto We had a lot of discussions. I can't say how many hours we spent talking about things. And the number one topic that we discussed was...

All (Ryouko) Asakura.

—Was she the reason why you'd spend something like 8 hours of discussion one day?

Ishihara Well, to that extent, she's quite the interesting character.

Takao She's genuine. I don't mean to say she's a simple murderer though. If you have a program that removes her opposition, then she'll be in a position to follow orders because she can't escape that. It's just how eventually we as humans can't escape our "fate." I think she sees everything other than Nagato as suffocating.

Ishihara She is somewhat of a sad character, isn't she?

Takao But in the end she was erased from the world. What kind of feeling would she have when that was done? We talked over issues like that one-by-one.

Takemoto Things like how she herself recognized her own fate.

Takao You have to put such details into the backgrounds and storyboards when you do a drama.

—Were there any other characters you talked about?

Takemoto We discussed (Itsuki) Koizumi a few times as well.

Ishihara He has a confession, and at first I had no emotional attachment to Koizumi, but the female staff had quite the strong attachment to him. I was surprised at Takao-san's psychological depiction of him.

Takao I had a strong sense that Asakura and Koizumi both were "people not chosen." In the story, Nagato, Asakura, and Koizumi all fit in that category. "People not chosen" is a very important aspect in the *Disappearance* world.

Takemoto After the world changed, Koizumi became a Pierrot type of character. Other character's emotions and states were overwritten, but his remained the same as ever. I felt so sad for him. At the voice studio I asked of his seiyu, Daisuke Ono, "I'd like you to express the sadness of Pierrot."

Ishihara Such a pitiful position to be in. But the one who illustrated that "people not chosen" aspect was Takao-san.

Takao I hadn't noticed it before, but I might have become a Koizumi fan. (laughs)

Mikuru who knew everything and Haruhi's worthiness as the story's symbol

—Then how about Mikuru Asahina? She's another complex character hidden in the background.

Takemoto This time the depiction of her older self was very important. Due to that, her younger self absorbed the lack of screen time. I don't want to cause a misunderstanding, this time the older Mikuru knew the entire story as if she was an bystander. Conveying that feeling was very important.

Ishihara Surely the older Mikuru knows how everything ends as well. She'd know that Kyon got stabbed and the rest would be a mystery for the future. Thinking about that and guessing how she feels inside, I feel a bit sad for her.

Takao Truly. She does say "I know that you'll look back on these high school days nostalgically." I was impressed by that line. Looking over the timeline, and with Nagato and Haruhi, she's only one little point. She knows what she should do, but she also knows what's inevitable. I feel sad for her.

Takemoto That sadness is a bit overwhelming isn't it? I too would do something like she did. Whenever I was troubled while working on something, I would look up at the starry sky and wonder how long it took for all those lights to reach here. The fact that we live for such a short time is somewhat saddening.

Ishihara It's short, very short. (laughs)

—How did you depict Haruhi Suzumiya this time?

Ishihara This time Haruhi's only in a few scenes. Thus we wanted to ensure the viewer got a "sparkling feeling" when she appeared.

Takemoto True. At the time when Kyon is surprisingly reunited with Haruhi, she has that "sparkling feeling" around her. The staff was saying "To Kyon, Haruhi is the sun." If she's gone, so is that "sunlight."

Takao When I think of Haruhi's depiction, I'm reminded of the beginning of the television series in *Melancholy I*. From the beginning Kyon thinks "Aliens, time travelers, and espers?! What's that nonsense?" due to his previous monologue. But Haruhi is different. "It's fun to believe in strange things!" is what Haruhi is about. Haruhi is the symbol of the "It's alright to be somewhat idiotic as a student" values.

—And so for that reason, the reunion with Haruhi is quite dramatic for Kyon.

Takemoto Kyon's quite nervous when he meets Haruhi. (laughs)

Ishihara But wouldn't you feel nervous seeing the woman you like in a different world on close terms with another man? (laughs) That's something that *Disappearance* really brings out: the fact that Kyon does like Haruhi in that way. He heads to her immediately and when he sees her again, it's almost like he falls in love again at first sight. (laughs) When they first entered North High and Kyon began talking to her, he didn't have that same reaction. In fact, it was more of a refusal then. But, I like that "tsundere" aspect of him.

—Is Kyon a tsundere?

Ishihara The biggest tsundere in "Haruhi Suzumiya" isn't Haruhi; it's Kyon.

"The biggest tsundere in "Haruhi Suzumiya" isn't Haruhi; it's Kyon. (Ishihara)

Kyon's weakness, being human, and Nagato as a pitiful woman

—And so what is everyone's thoughts regarding Kyon?

Takemoto In the television series, the directors and the rest of the staff wanted to convey Kyon as being somewhat sarcastic and a bit of nihilist. He'd hate the strange things that were occurring before him, but he didn't find it dull. If he got mad, he'd find a roundabout way of talking about it, speak

sarcastically, and generally ridicule it like any first year student. He's not the type to speak in one word sentences. You could say he's the opposite of shy.

Ishihara He's probably your average high school student. He'd build up little theories to protect himself from being harmed and to make himself look better, but when he saw the Kuyounen Academy Haruhi, he became incredibly nervous. That's the frail side of Kyon.

Takao For the parts of the film that I was in charge of, there were a lot of fragile Kyon scenes that I felt were worthwhile. No matter what character you have, showing their weak side makes them look more human. Thus, I illustrated the thoughts that approached Kyon's inner self.

Takemoto Perfect people are so boring. I've been where Kyon is and so I felt a little sympathetic for him.

—If I'm remembering correctly, it was Takemoto who was in charge of the scene where Kyon addresses himself.

Takemoto It's a bit difficult for me to talk about that scene but... when I read the novel, I thought, this sounds like two Kyons talking to each other, doesn't it?

Ishihara That scene is amazing. For just Kyon's seijyu (Tomokazu) Sugita-san to play two roles at the same time for nearly 7 minutes was amazing.

—And finally, what are your thoughts about Nagato?

Takemoto This is just my opinion, but I've got a hunch that the rest of the SOS Brigade members are normal people that will progress to have a full life while that's not true for Nagato. While she's contending for the top ability in the SOS Brigade, she doesn't have a big existence. When she disappears, it's not strange. Thinking about that ambiance, it makes my chest pound.

—Takao-san, you said a little while ago that you viewed Nagato as a "woman", correct?

Takao Perhaps after the world changed Kyon does too, or certainly she's a character we're attracted to. She's moved up from being an observer. She has such incredible abilities, yet she's willing to throw it all away for the sake of a man. That's the type of girl she is. One of the directors in charge of the D-part, Hiroko Utsumi-san, said "Nagato sure is crafty.(laughs)"

Ishihara At the time she changed the world, you realize that Nagato designed a world that was quite convenient for her. It was designed well to change Kyon's mind. It was very Haruhi-like for her to do that. However, she didn't change Kyon. She thought "I want Kyon to choose." That's the sweet side of Nagato.

—So that's why she chose to become an ordinary girl.

Ishihara This story is one where a new Nagato is born. Nagato grows a little big like we all do as we get older. Perhaps, since the Integrated Data Thought Entity is stuck at a cul-de-sac when it comes to evolving, they might choose to become humans instead. That's not from the author Nagaru Tanigawa-san, that's just my own guess.

Takao Speaking of Tanigawa-san, he was persistent that Nagato was a humanoid interface of the Integrated Data Thought Entity. But that's why it's significant that she breaks out of that cycle and becomes an ordinary girl. It appears as though her old self died.

Ishihara Such a strong thing to say.

Takao It's like snow. It's the crystallization of water, yet it has such a short existence until it melts.

Takemoto That's exemplified in the short story Nagato writes in the novel story *Editor in Chief* ★ *Straight Ahead!*. That's where she got her name "Yuki" from.

Ishihara This is just a thought that I have, but what would have happened if Nagato wasn't able to get her hands on Kyon killed him. It's not something I've thought about before.

Takao Then wouldn't she be her shadow, Asakura? I don't think such a story could happen. As I said before, Nagato is a "woman." After seeing the parts of her that aren't beautiful, you feel sorry for her.

Ishihara I've got a male point of view, but I know what the yearning a woman feels is like.

Takemoto I asked Nagato's seijyu, Minori Chihara, to act "as though you dislike the usual part of yourself." Depending on the situation, it didn't matter if she acted somewhat flirty.

Takao Thus you were able to feel that Nagato was a "woman" after the world changed. You saw just how isolated she was.

—Were there any conflicts from the staff on the final scene on the rooftop?

Ishihara There were. Various parts of the staff reacted to that final scene between Nagato and Kyon. I heard "How cruel Kyon" a few times. (laughs) But I didn't understand where they were coming from.

Takao I too was a bit bothered by that scene. It was Kyon's actions that worried me. He squatted in front of Nagato where she looked down at him and took her hand. He then didn't blame her for what happened. By doing that, Kyon lowered his defenses the best he could.

Ishihara Ah, so it could be that.

Takemoto It's good to hear different opinions on something people saw together. Isn't it funny how everyone can come up with a different explanation?

—The epilogue after the credits feels a bit symbolic, doesn't it?

Ishihara That was the author Tanigawa-san's idea. He wanted the final bit to be "Nagato hiding her mouth with a book."

—The book she holds is *The Starry Rift*. A famous Sci-Fi book.

Ishihara The book was selected by Tanigawa-san. It's a good way to convey that desire to be individualistic.

—Finally, would you tell us your final thoughts of this work?

Takemoto We made it with the best we could. We worked to fill in every nook we could see. It was fun, and unfortunately, I'm at a loss for words other than that.

Takao Thank you. This was a work that we worked hard to complete every month. We would raise our spirits by wanting to live up to everyone's expectations.

Ishihara This is probably the longest or second longest animated work, isn't it? I'm glad we used that time to carefully convey the moods Kyon was in throughout the film.



Takemoto Explanation: Waking up scene. The eye is shut with heavy eyelids. The story begins from Kyon's point of view. "*Haruhi Suzumiya* is a story from Kyon's perspective, so *Disappearance* opens when Kyon wakes up. Afterwards the world has changed in many ways. The act is repeated many times to serve as a symbol of the story. We wanted to challenge ourselves in animating him looking around the room."



Takao Explanation: After the world changed, Kyon and Nagato are alone in the Literature Club's room. Nagato turns away when she feels Kyon is looking at her. "Ah, he's looking at me. What should I do? It's so stressful. I ain't got a clue for this!" would be Nagato's inner thoughts in a Kansai dialect. The right image is Kyon returning from Nagato's apartment. "The best scene. When I read the novel, I could feel the night's atmosphere. When he said 'I want to meet Haruhi' I thought 'Ah, he's admitting it!'"



Ishihara Explanation: After the world is reverted back, Kyon wakes up in a hospital bed and discovers Haruhi in a sleeping bag beside him. That just warms your heart.... "It's the wholehearted scene where Kyon wakes up and touches Haruhi's face. It's a sweet scene that appears at the end of a drama. Kyon keeps going until he touches her lips. Koizumi's quite the pest in this case. Maybe Kyon would go "Kiss" if he wasn't there. (laughs)"



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