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Boy Kanipan(July 3rd, 1998 - January 29th, 1999) Portals: 1990s Speculative fiction Retrieved from " Nov 22, 2007 I'm never that comfortable with films of series. Mostly, that's because all too often a film of a series consists of some kind of edited-all-to-hell clip show that tries and totally fails to boil down the story of a long series to a relatively much shorter film. Knockin' on Heaven's Door isn't that, which is very much in its favour. Rather, it's basically like a two-hour "lost episode" that belongs somewhere in the middle of the series - without spoiling anything, by the end of the series, there's characters missing who are still present in this film. Another point in the film's favour ... is that it's pretty much equally accessible for existing fans and those unfamiliar with the characters. While there's plenty of details that might be lost or not fully comprehensible for new viewers, by and large the film stands up well as a stand alone drama, introducing its characters and their situation. However, this in a way exposes another major weakness of films of series. Series are, by nature, episodic. They devote an episode to introducing a character or exploring their personalities. Once this is done, they generally have plot episodes, in which the main thrust of the series is pursued, and then they have one-shot episodes that have our characters in some kind of interesting situation, but which is basically unrelated to the plot - if there is one. Films, by contrast, do all of this at once. The procedure is totally different, and a director or scriptwriter used to a series format adapts less well to a film format. Knockin' on Heaven's Door exemplifies this - while the film as it is works, it's more obvious and cumbersome than a film directed by a director used to a feature-length format. The storyline, also, suffers in this way. It's not that it's a bad story, in fact it might make a great two- or three-part episode, but as a film, the material comes across as stretched, holey and lacking in substance. It's also remarkable in that it's not half as quirky or original as Cowboy Bebop's famously eclectic mixtures of ideas: biological terrorism unleashed by a madman with a mysterious and sinister military past, fascinated by death and bent on destroying the world, with cod philosophical pretentions to fil gaps between action and a garnish of some fashionable christian mythology. It's all very generic really, and frankly the only things that make this Cowboy Bebop and not something much more generic are the familiar characters, who are luckily strong enough to make the thing hang together. The new characters are not much to speak of, either - Vincent the aforementioned madman, a hacker accomplice, a Moroccan information seller and, of course, Electra, a tough, wildcard femme fatale with a mysterious connection to our antagonist. Electra comes off as the best realised of these, and, perhaps not coincidentally, closest to a series character (though she's a dead ringer for a more mature version of BGC2040's Priss as well). Vincent seems very like main series antagonist Vicious stripped of his hatred of Spike, which is to say, not that special and a bit rabid and foaming for credibility. The film drags. It's just too long. What this is primarily due to is unclear; maybe an over-developed story with far too much exposition (every character seems to need every other to explain nanomachines to them, it seems. We, however, do not), or perhaps the increasingly egregious and segmented action scenes (why are there spitfires on Mars? Who knows, let's cut back to Spike being pursued by military jets for no apparent reason!), or it could be the ponderous attempts to fashion some sort of existential aspect to the story ("I'm not insane, the rest of the world is." - oh really? You don't look thirteen years old, Vincent, but you sound it). Philosophical-minded action films are not especially uncommon, good and effective ones are extremely rare. Suffice it to say that I was surprised and rather disappointed when the apparent climax occured and passed with a good half an hour left on the clock. As I say, the film hangs almost completely on the main characters. It would have been unthinkable to not bring the original cast in for this gig too (can't speak for the dub cast, don't know), and they all acquit themselves just as well as they do in the series. Music, too, such a central part of the series, is again provided by Yoko Kanno and the Seatbelts; while the styles used in and prominence given to the music may not be to everyone's tastes, the versatility and range Kanno's score covers while still retaining a high basic quality standard is nothing short of incredible. Visually, the quality seems to have been kicked up a notch; the animation of the series was never bad, but the film is sumptuous and extremely well detailed. However, one of my main bones of contention remains. The art design is realistic, unapologetically multicultural and sort of grimy, very credible in its way, but under even cursory analysis, it's illogical in the extreme. Why is Mars covered in early twentieth-century New York-style tenement blocks and labyrinthine Moroccan markets? Has anyone remembered that it has one third of earth's gravity? Is there, in fact, any reason for this to be set on Mars at all, other than to tie in all these diverse elements? It's sci-fi doing what sci-fi does most often and least well - making half-baked stuff up to accomodate its ideas, with no thought for maintainance of disbelief suspension. I was never as bowled over by Cowboy Bebop as many people seem to have been. Overall I liked it, certainly, in fact I thought some of it was absolutely excellent, but other parts I thought were pretty terrible, and it was quickly clear that the series was never going to be "a classic" in my eyes the way it is for lots of others. This was primarily because of its disjointedness and apparent lack of story direction, and the same is true of this film. Now, after watching it, I'm left with the same "...well, so what?" feeling a significant amount of the series gave me, but because of the length and the negative impact it has, I have comparatively more holes to pick at as well. Perhaps if you're a real fan, this film has more to offer, but overall, for me, while I'd not actually call it bad, this doesn't reach the already kind of saggy standard the series set. What did you think of this review?