



KUROSAWA

The Men Who Tread on the Tiger's Tail

Kurosawa's final film of the war years (in fact Japan surrendered while it was still being made) is the shortest of all his features. *They Who Step on the Tiger's Tail* (1945), running just under an hour, is taken from a popular *kabuki* drama. Set in the late 12th century, it tells how the young general Yoshitsune, fleeing the murderous jealousy of his older brother, the shogun Yoritomo, arrives with his followers at a checkpoint manned by Yoritomo's forces. The general's followers, led by his steward Benkei, are dressed as Buddhist priests, while Yoshitsune himself is disguised as their porter. When the post commander, Togashi, suspects the ruse, Benkei pretends to find his 'porter' lazy and beats him. Though seeing through the trick, Togashi is so impressed by this bold defiance of feudal convention, and the loyalty that it evinces, that he lets the party through.

Given the stringent situation of the country, Kurosawa was allowed only a single set, the checkpoint post itself; the rest of the film had to be shot on location. He welcomed this stipulation, finding it made the film 'much easier to shoot'. But he also made an anomalous change to the action: the casting of the comedian Kenichi Enomoto (known as Enoken) in the additional role of a real porter, aiming (he claimed) to 'make the picture come alive' – a move described by Donald Richie as 'a bit like adding Jerry Lewis to the cast of *Hamlet*'. Whatever Kurosawa's intentions, Enoken's relentless gurning soon becomes tiresome; but the idea can be seen as a dry run for the far more successful use of the two greedy, cowardly peasants as a downmarket Greek chorus in *The Hidden Fortress* (1958).

Tiger's Tail, though completed in 1945, wasn't released until 1952, under a blanket ban by the US Occupation authorities on all *jidai-geki* (period films); they were held to be inherently 'feudalistic' and 'reactionary'.

Philip Kemp, booklet accompanying *Early Kurosawa* BFI DVD set

THE MEN WHO TREAD ON THE TIGER'S TAIL (TORA NO O FUMU OTOKOTACHI)

Director: Akira Kurosawa

Production Company: Toho Co. Ltd.

Producer: Motohiko Itô

Screenplay: Akira Kurosawa

[Based on the *kabuki* play *Kanjincho* by]: Gohei Namiki

Photography: Takeo Ito

Lighting: Iwaji Hiraoka

Stills Photography: Takaichi Shikida

Editor: Toshio Goto

Art Director: Kazuo Kubo

Music: Tadashi Hattori

Sound Recording: Keiji Hasebe

Sound Effects: Ichiro Minawa

Cast

Denjiro Okochi (*Benkei*)

Susumu Fujita (*Togashi*)

Kenichi Enomoto (*porter*)

Masayuki Mori (*Kamei*)

Takashi Shimura (*Kataoka*)

Akitake Kôno (*Ise*)

Yoshio Kosugi (*Suruga*)

Dekao Yoko (*Hitachibo*)

Hanshiro Iwai (*Yoshitsune*)

Soji Kiyokawa (*Togashi's messenger*)

Yasuo Hisamatsu (*Kajiwara's messenger*)

Japan 1945

60 mins

KUROSAWA

The Most Beautiful (Ichiban Utsukushiku)

Sun 1 Jan 13:50; Mon 9 Jan 18:15

The Men Who Tread on the Tiger's Tail (ora no O Fumu Otokotachi)

Sun 1 Jan 16:20; Wed 11 Jan 17:55

No Regrets for Our Youth (Waga Seishun ni Kuinashi)

Mon 2 Jan 12:45; Tue 10 Jan 20:40

Seven Samurai (Shichinin no Samurai)

Mon 2 Jan 16:50; Thu 5 Jan 18:30; Sat 28 Jan 15:30 BFI IMAX

One Wonderful Sunday (Subarashiki Nichiyôbi)

Tue 3 Jan 20:40; Sun 15 Jan 11:50

Scandal (Shûbun)

Tue 10 Jan 17:45; Tue 24 Jan 18:10 (+ intro by season co-curator Ian Haydn Smith)

Kagemusha

Wed 11 Jan 19:35; Tue 31 Jan 19:35

The Idiot (Hakuchi)

Fri 13 Jan 19:45; Sat 21 Jan 16:50

Dodes'ka-den (Dodesukaden)

Sun 15 Jan 18:05; Mon 16 Jan 17:50

Kurosawa Season Introduction

Wed 18 Jan 18:20

High and Low (Tengoku to Jigoku)

Thu 19 Jan 17:45; Sun 29 Jan 18:00 (+ intro by season co-curator Ian Haydn Smith)

The Lower Depths (Donzoku)

Thu 19 Jan 20:20; Mon 30 Jan 20:20

The Hidden Fortress (Kakushi Toride no San-Akunin)

Fri 20 Jan 20:20; Fri 27 Jan 17:45

The Bad Sleep Well (Warui Yatsu hoho Yoku Nemuru)

Sun 22 Jan 18:00; Sun 29 Jan 14:30 (+ intro by season co-curator Ian Haydn Smith)

Sanjuro (Tsubaki Sanjûrô)

Thu 26 Jan 21:00; Tue 31 Jan 17:50

Course: The Kurosawa-Effect

Wed 11 Jan – Wed 22 Feb 18:30

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