



KUROSAWA

The Hidden Fortress

(Kakushi Toride no San-Akunin)

If Kurosawa had proven himself skilled at subverting the conventions of Japanese genre filmmaking, with this hugely entertaining film he not only proved he could embrace a straightforward adventure, he showed he could beat most other filmmakers at their own game. His trump card was to foreground two lowly farmers. One of Kurosawa's most influential films, it's a rip-roaring ride.

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A story of rival clans, hidden gold and a princess in distress, *The Hidden Fortress* is a thrilling mix of fairy story and samurai action movie. It was Kurosawa's first film shot in the widescreen process of Tohoscope, and he exploited this to the full in the film's rich variety of landscape locations, including the slopes of Mount Fuji.

The Hidden Fortress became Kurosawa's biggest box office hit to date and won several awards, including the Golden Bear at the 1959 Berlin Film Festival. Some twenty years on, the film's influence would have even greater impact on world box offices, when George Lucas borrowed its plot for the first of his *Star Wars* series.

BFI Player

This epic adventure, with its sweeping narrative and well-defined characters, is one of Kurosawa's most accessible and rousing pictures. At times, it seems as if the director has made a Hollywood version of feudal Japan – the fire festival sequence resembles a big production number from a musical. But, what makes it interesting is Kurosawa's observations on ancient Japanese society. For example, through the eyes of a cloistered princess (fleeing to safety with the mysterious General Rokurota, played by Toshiro Mifune) we witness religious rituals and the role of women in a male hierarchy. George Lucas cited *Hidden Fortress* as his inspiration for *Star Wars*, with the two bungling, disreputable soldiers transformed into R2-D2 and C-3PO. An engrossing film.

***Sight and Sound*, January 1995**

A contemporary review from 1959 Berlin Film Festival

Kurosawa's *The Hidden Fortress* erupted into the festival like a rhinoceros into a prairie of mild sheep. Never before has Kurosawa's allegiance to John Ford been more apparent; this, one felt, was the definitive Eastern-Western. The story is simple: a Samurai in disguise is conducting a Princess in disguise through enemy lines. To render their passage less ostentatious, the Samurai enlists two peasants into their company with the promise of gold. The by-play of these deceitful, raucous peasants, acted in broad, antic Kabuki vein full of comic whoops and barks, forms the light relief in a series of hair-breadth escapes, dazzlingly choreographed sword fights and shock effects timed with a master's instinct. There is one moment strongly recalling the appearance of the Indians in *Stagecoach*: the little band seems to have reached temporary

security when from every fold in the innocent landscape a menacing army materialises.

The superior adventure film obviously lies close to Kurosawa’s heart, and his authority in the genre commands respect. Far below the stature of *Seven Samurai* in its conception, *The Hidden Fortress* is an example of a popular theme handled with such skill and enthusiasm as almost to disguise the fundamental lack of narrative distinction. Toshiro Mifune, stunningly athletic and as controlled as a panther, is the star.

Sight and Sound, Summer/Autumn 1959

THE HIDDEN FORTRESS (KAKUSHI TORIDE NO SAN-AKUNIN)

Director: Akira Kurosawa
Production Company: Toho Co. Ltd.
Producer: Masumi Fujimoto
Associate Producer: Akira Kurosawa
Production Supervisor: Hiroshi Nezu
Production Accountant: Koichi Noguchi
Production Assistant: Takuyuki Inoue
Assistant Directors: Mimachi Yanagase, Yoshimitsu Sakano, Kan Sano, Yoichi Matsue, Masahiro Takase, Yasuyoshi Tajitsu
Script Supervisor: Teruyo Nogami
Casting: Yuichi Yoshitake
Screenplay: Ryuzo Kikushima, Hideo Oguni, Shinobu Hashimoto, Akira Kurosawa
Director of Photography: Kazuo Yamasaki
Lighting: Ichiro Inohara
Assistant Lighting: Sei Arai
Stills Photography: Masao Fukuda
Special Effects: Toho Special Effects Co Ltd
Editor: Chozo Obata
Art Director: Yoshiro Muraki
Assistant Art Director: Shinko Kato
Art Supervisor: Kohei Ezaki
Costumes: Masahiro Kato
Hair: Yoshiko Matsumoto, Junjiro Yamada
Music: Masaru Sato
Choreography: Yoji Ken
Sound Recording: Fumio Yanoguchi
Sound Assistant: Yoshiro Miyamoto
Sound Mixing: Hisashi Shimonaga
Sound Effects: Ichiro Minawa
Swordplay instructor: Yushio Sugino
Horseback Riding Instructors: Ienori Kaneko, Shigeru Endo

Cast

Toshiro Mifune (*General Rokurota Makabe*)
Misa Uehara (*Princess Yuki*)
Minoru Chiaki (*Tahei*)
Kamatari Fujiwara (*Matakichi*)
Takashi Shimura (*General Izumi Nagakura*)
Susumu Fujita (*General Heiei Tadokoro*)
Eiko Miyoshi (*lady-in-waiting*)
Toshiko Higuchi (*farmer’s daughter*)
Kichijiro Ueda (*girl-dealer*)
Koji Mitsui (*soldier*)
Yû Fujiki (*barrier guard*)
Yoshio Tsuchiya (*samurai on horse*)
Kokuten Kodo (*old man in front of sign*)
Takeshi Kato (*fleeing, bloody samurai*)
Toranosuke Ogawa (*magistrate of bridge barrier*)
Nakajiro Tomita, Yoshibumi Tajima (*potential slave buyers*)
Ikio Sawamura (*gambler*)
Senkichi Omura (*soldier*)
Sachio Sakai, Akira Tani (*captured foot soldiers*)
Makoto Sato (*Yamada foot soldier*)
Yutaka Sada (*guard at bridge barrier*)
Yoshio Kosugi, Haruo Nakajima, Senkichi Omura (*Akisuki soldiers*)
Takeo Oyabigawa (*guard at pass barrier*)
Tadao Nakamura (*young man*)
Niyoshi Kumaya, Shoichi Hirose, Etsuro Nishijo (*Yamana soldiers*)
Masayoshi Nagashima (*Yamana samurai*)
Fuminori Ohashi (*samurai who buys horse*)
Shin Otomo, Minoru Ito, Haruo Suzuki, Shigemasa Kanazawa, Hiroyoshi Yamaguchi, Haruya Sakamoto (*samurai on horseback*)
Kazuo Hikita, Ichiro Chiba (*Yamana foot soldiers*)
Rinsaku Ogata (*second young man*)
Yutaka Nakayama (*soldier*)
Nichigeki Dancing Team (*female dancers*)

Japan 1958
138 mins

KUROSAWA

The Hidden Fortress (Kakushi Toride no San-Akunin)
Fri 20 Jan 20:20; Fri 27 Jan 17:45
The Idiot (Hakuchi) Sat 21 Jan 16:50
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)
Scandal (Shûbun)
Tue 24 Jan 18:10 (+ intro by season co-curator Ian Haydn Smith)
Sanjuro (Tsubaki Sanjûrô) Thu 26 Jan 21:00; Tue 31 Jan 17:50
Seven Samurai (Shichinin no Samurai) Sat 28 Jan 15:30 BFI IMAX
High and Low (Tengoku to Jigoku)
Sun 29 Jan 18:00 (+ intro by season co-curator Ian Haydn Smith)

The Lower Depths (Donzoku) Mon 30 Jan 20:20
Kagemusha Tue 31 Jan 19:35
Course: The Kurosawa-Effect Wed 11 Jan – Wed 22 Feb 18:30

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