**Ran**  
*(Chaos, 1985)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>Tatsuya Nakadai</td>
<td>Lord Hidetora Ichimonji</td>
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<td>Akira Terao</td>
<td>Taro Takatora Ichimonji</td>
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<td>Jinpachi Nezu</td>
<td>Jiro Masatora Ichimonji</td>
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<td>Daisuke Ryu</td>
<td>Saburo Naotora Ichimonji</td>
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<td>Mieko Harada</td>
<td>Lady Kaede</td>
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<td>Yoshiko Miyazaki</td>
<td>Lady Sue</td>
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<td>Masayuki Yui</td>
<td>Tango Hirayama</td>
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<td>Peter</td>
<td>Kyoami</td>
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Kurosawa was equally comfortable making films about medieval and modern Japan or films based on Shakespeare, Dostoevski, Maxim Gorki, and Evan Hunter. He loved American westerns and was conscious of them when he made his early samurai pictures. When someone told him that Sergio Leone had lifted the plot of *Yojinbo* for *A Fistful of Dollars* spaghetti western with Clint Eastwood, Kurasawa told his friend to calm down: he’d lifted the plot himself from Dashiell Hammett’s *Red Harvest* (Schlock filmmaker Roger Corman stole the plot back for a sword-fighting science fiction nudie movie, *The Warrior and the Sorceress* in 1984, and in 1995 *Last Man Standing* with Bruce Willis. The story, as they say in the film business, has legs.) For much of his career he was appreciated far more in the West than in Japan. Zhang Yimou (director of *Red Sorghum* and *Raise the Red Lantern*) wrote that Kurosawa was accused “of making films for foreigners’ consumption. In the 1950s, Rashomon was criticized as exposing Japan's ignorance and backwardness to the outside world—a charge that now seems absurd. In China, I have faced the same scoldings, and I use Kurosawa as a shield.”
Kurosawa wrote:

What is cinema? The answer to this question is no easy matter. Long ago the Japanese novelist Shiga Noya presented an essay written by his grandson as one of the most remarkable prose pieces of his time. He had it published in a literary magazine. It was entitled “My Dog” and ran as follows: “My dog resembles a bear; he also resembled a badger; he also resembles a fox. . . .” It proceeded to enumerate the dog’s special characteristics, comparing each one to yet another animal, developing into a full list of the animal kingdom. However, the essay closed with, “But since he’s a dog, he most resembles a dog.” I remember bursting out laughing when I read this essay, but it makes a serious point. Cinema resembles so many other arts. If cinema has very literary characteristics, it also has theatrical qualities, a philosophical side, attributes of painting and sculpture and music elements. But cinema is, in the final analysis, cinema.

The role of director encompasses the coaching of the actors, the cinematography, the sound recording, the art direction, the music, the editing and the dubbing and sound-mixing. Although these can be thought of as separate occupations, I do not regard them as independent. I see them all melting together under the heading of direction.

With a good script a good director can produce a masterpiece; with the same script a mediocre director can make a passable film. But with a bad script even a good director can’t possibly make a good film. For truly cinematic expression, the camera and the microphone must be able to cross both fire and water. That is what makes a real movie. The script must be something that has the power to do this.

Characters in a film have their own existence. The filmmaker has no freedom. If he insists on his authority and is allowed to manipulate his characters like puppets, the film loses its vitality.

I intended to be a painter before I became involved in film. A curious turn of events, however, brought me to cinema, where I began my present career. When I changed careers, I burnt all the pictures that I had painted up until then. I intended to forget painting once and for all. As a well-known Japanese proverb says, “If you chase two rabbits, you may not catch even one.” But since becoming a film director, I have found that drawing rough sketches was often a useful means of explaining ideas to my staff....

When I was young and still an art student, I used to dream of publishing a collection of my paintings or having an exhibition in Paris. These dreams were unexpectedly realized with the publication of my pictures for Kagemusha. Life is strange indeed. Now the drawings I made for Ran have been made into a collection. Inquiries about exhibitions are coming on from all over the world. It seems like a dream.

I cannot help but be fascinated by the fact that when I tried to paint well, I could only produce mediocre pictures. But when I concentrated on delineating the ideas for my films, I unconsciously produced works that people find interesting.

The best book on Kurosawa is Donald Ritchie, The Films of Akira Kurosawa, 3rd ed., University of California Press, 1999. The original script and Kurosawa’s gorgeous storyboards are available in Ran, Shambhla, 1986. Kurosawa once wrote that he didn’t “really like talking about my films. Everything I want to say is in the film itself; for me to say anything more is, as the proverb goes, like ‘drawing legs on a picture of a snake.’” After Jean Renoir, one of his two favorite filmmakers (the other was John Ford) wrote an autobiography, Kurosawa decided it was okay to write about the life that produced the films. His Something Like an Autobiography (Knopf, 1982, 1978) is the happy result. Two good web sites devoted to Kurosawa are //members.aol.com/ronintom/Kurosawa.htm and //www2.tky.3web.ne.jp/~adk/kurosawa/AKpage.html.

–to receive the Angelika Film Center’s weekly film summaries and screening times, send an email to ldamelio@compuserve.com with your email address
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–for information on major American films, including detailed plot summaries: www.filsite.org
–email Bruce Jackson: bjackson@buffalo.edu
–email Diane Christian: engdc@acsu.buffalo.edu
–for the series schedule, links and updates: www.acsu.buffalo.edu/~bjackson/movies.html
–to get on the listserv for the class send an email to listserv@listserv.acsu.buffalo.edu with this line & nothing else as the message: sub greatmovies-list Firstname Lastname

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