

Blu-Ray Review: Landmark Japanese Film 'Harakiri' in Criterion Form

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on October 19, 2011 - 3:55pm

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CHICAGO – I'm always amazed when smart people tell me they don't see foreign films. The fact is that our foreign film market is worse than it's ever been with fewer and fewer works from other countries actually making an impact in this one. I see dozens of foreign films a year and I'm still just chipping at the iceberg of the international film scene. One of the countries with the most vibrant filmmaking histories is Japan and for proof that they've been making intriguing dramas for decades now look no further than the Criterion edition of "Harakiri," a striking drama that won the Special Jury Prize at the Cannes Film Festival and has recently been released on Blu-ray for the first time.



Blu-Ray Rating: **4.0/5.0**

Without the Criterion Collection, I wonder if "Harakiri" would even be on DVD, much less Blu-ray. Some of their titles — "Carlos," "Diabolique," "The Third Man" — clearly would still be (and in some cases are available in alternate editions) but there are definitely smaller, older, foreign films in the Criterion arsenal that might have been lost to history entirely if not for the most important series of home releases in the history of the disc. "Harakiri" may not be the first film to grab your attention from the collection but if you're looking for something a little deeper, a little more interesting, a little more historically unique, there's something riveting about this dark deconstruction of loyalty and the Samurai system. It's not in my personal Criterion Top Ten but a solid transfer, great booklet essay by Joan Mellen, and a few interesting special features make this lost award-winner one of the more interesting releases of the month. Go see a foreign film.



Photo credit: Courtesy of the Criterion Collection

Synopsis:

Following the collapse of his clan, unemployed samurai Hanshiro Tsugumo (Tatsuya Nakadai) arrives at the manor of Lord Iyi, begging to commit ritual suicide on his property. Iyi's clansmen, believing the desperate ronin is merely angling for charity, try to force him to eviscerate himself - but they have underestimated his honor and his past. Winner of the 1963 Cannes Film Festival's Special Jury Prize, Masaki Kobayashi's *Harakiri* is a fierce evocation of individual agency in the face of a corrupt and hypocritical system.

Special Features:

- o Video introduction by Japanese-film historian Donald Richie
- o Excerpt from a rare Directors Guild of Japan video interview with director Masaki Kobayashi, moderated by filmmaker Masahiro Shinoda
- o Video interviews with star Tatsuya Nakadai and screenwriter Shinobu Hashimoto
- o Original theatrical trailer
- o Booklet featuring an essay by film scholar Joan Mellen and a reprint of Mellen's 1972 interview with Kobayashi

"Harakiri" stars Tatsuya Nakadai, Rentaro Mikuni, Akira Ishihama, and Shima Iwashita. It was written by Shinobu Hashimoto and directed by Masaki Kobayashi. It was released on Criterion Blu-ray on October 4th, 2011.



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