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Battle Royale

2000

Batoru rowaiyaru

バトル・ロワイアル

Original Theatrical Version | Release date 16 December 2000 | Runtime 114 minutes

Special Edition Director's Cut | Release date 7 April 2001 | Runtime: 122 minutes

CAST

Takeshi Kitano
Yūko Miyamura
Michi Yamamura
Ai Iwamura
Takashi Taniguchi

Kitano (as 'Beat' Takeshi)
Training Video Girl
Reporter
Previous Year's Winner
Shūya's father

THIRD YEAR CLASS-B SHIROIWA JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

BOYS

Shin Kusaka
Ren Matsuzawa
Gōki Nishimura
Shigehiro Yamaguchi
Tarō Yamamoto
Masanobu Andō
Yukihiro Kotani
Osamu Ōnishi
Yūki Masuda
Shirō Gō
Sōsuke Takaoka
Yutaka Shimada
Junichi Naitō
Shigeki Hirokawa

Yoshio Akamatsu (Boy 1)
Keita Iijima (Boy 2)
Tatsumichi Ōki (Boy 3)
Toshinori Oda (Boy 4)
Shōgo Kawada (Boy 5)
Kazuo Kiriyama (Boy 6)
Yoshitoki Kuninobu (Boy 7)
Yōji Kuramoto (Boy 8)
Hiroshi Kuronaga (Boy 9)
Ryūhei Sasagawa (Boy 10)
Hiroki Sugimura (Boy 11)
Yutaka Seto (Boy 12)
Yūichirō Takiguchi (Boy 13)
Shō Tsukioka (Boy 14)

Tatsuya Fujiwara
Hirohito Honda
Yōsuke Shibata
Satoshi Yokomichi
Takashi Tsukamoto
Ryou Nitta
Yasuomi Sano

Shūya Nanahara (Boy 15)
Kazushi Niida (Boy 16)
Mitsuru Numai (Boy 17)
Tadakatsu Hatagami (Boy 18)
Shinji Mimura (Boy 19)
Kyōichi Motobuchi (Boy 20)
Kazuhiko Yamamoto (Boy 21)

GIRLS

Tsuyako Kinoshita
Eri Ishikawa
Sayaka Ikeda
Tomomi Shimaki
Tamaki Mihara
Yukari Kanasawa
Misao Kato
Takayo Mimura
Hitomi Hyūga
Anna Nagata
Kō Shibasaki
Satomi Ishii
Chiaki Kuriyama
Haruka Nomiyama
Aki Maeda
Satomi Hanamura
Sayaka Kamiya
Aki Inoue
Asami Kanai
Mai Sekiguchi
Takako Baba

Mizuho Inada (Girl 1)
Yukie Utsumi (Girl 2)
Megumi Etō (Girl 3)
Sakura Ogawa (Girl 4)
Izumi Kanai (Girl 5)
Yukiko Kitano (Girl 6)
Yumiko Kusaka (Girl 7)
Kayoko Kotohiki (Girl 8)
Yūko Sakaki (Girl 9)
Hirono Shimizu (Girl 10)
Mitsuko Souma (Girl 11)
Haruka Tanizawa (Girl 12)
Takako Chigusa (Girl 13)
Mayumi Tendō (Girl 14)
Noriko Nakagawa (Girl 15)
Yuka Nakagawa (Girl 16)
Satomi Noda (Girl 17)
Fumiyo Fujiyoshi (Girl 18)
Chisato Matsui (Girl 19)
Kaori Minami (Girl 20)
Yoshimi Yahagi (Girl 21)

Continued over page...

Battle Royale 2000 (CONTINUED)

CREW

Directed by

Kinji Fukasaku

Screenplay by

Kenta Fukasaku

Original novel by

Kōshun Takami

Produced by

Kimio Kataoka, Chie Kobayashi, Kenta Fukasaku and Hisao Nabeshima

Editor

Hirohide Abe

Director of Photography

Katsumi Yanagijima

Music by

Masamichi Amano and Warsaw National Philharmonic Orchestra

Art Director

Kyōko Heya



Battle Royale II: Requiem

2003

Batoru rowaiyaru II: Chinkonka

バトル・ロワイヤルⅡ 鎮魂歌

Original Theatrical Version | Release date 5 July 2003 | Runtime 133 minutes
Battle Royale II: Revenge Edition | Release date 21 February 2005 | Runtime 155 minutes

CAST

Tatsuya Fujiwara
Ai Maeda
Shūgo Oshinari
Ayana Sakai
Haruka Suenaga
Natsuki Katō
Yūma Ishigaki
Miyuki Kanbe
Masaya Kikawada
Yōko Maki
Takeshi Kitano
Riki Takeuchi
Aki Maeda
Shinichi Chiba
Yoshiko Mita
Masahiko Tsugawa

Shūya Nanahara
Shiori Kitano
Takuma Aoi
Nao Asakura
Haruka Kuze
Saki Sakurai
Mitsugu Sakai
Kyōko Kakei
Shintarō Makimura
Maki Souda
Kitano (as 'Beat' Takeshi)
Riki
Noriko Nakagawa
Makio Mimura
Takuma's mother
The Prime Minister

CREW

Directed by
Screenplay by
Produced by
Editor
Director of Photography
Music by
Art Director

Kenta Fukasaku and Kinji Fukasaku
Kenta Fukasaku and Norio Kida
Kimio Kataoka, Shigeyuki Endō, Mitsuru Kawase
Hirohide Abe
Junichi Fujisawa
Masamichi Amano and Warsaw National Philharmonic Orchestra
Toshihiro Isomi



Classroom Chaos: The Millennial Pull of *Battle Royale*

BY MATT ALT

Japan has long been a master of apocalypse. Part of this is because apocalypse is no fantasy there. It has suffered natural disasters in the form of massive earthquakes and tsunamis; man-made ones such as the fire-bombings that levelled Japan's cities in World War II; and, of course, the almost godlike power of the nuclear weapons that finally ended that global conflict. Is it any wonder that forces beyond human control have so long fascinated Japanese artists? Films portraying the fall of cities and even entire nations have long numbered among the Japanese film industry's most high-profile exports, from Ishirō Honda's 1954 *Godzilla* and its endless sequels to "panic movies" like the much-remade *Japan Sinks* and countless anime epics ranging from the gloriously over-the-top television series *Fist of the North Star* (*Hokuto no ken*, 1984-1987) to highbrow theatrical fare like Hayao Miyazaki's *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (*Kaze no tani no Naushika*, 1984) or Katsuhiro Ōtomo's *Akira* (1988).¹ Even still, when *Battle Royale* arrived in foreign cinemas in 2001, audiences reeled in shock. Here was something new, even more terrifying than a monster toppling a city: a vision of humanity toppling civilisation all by itself. *We have met the enemy, and he is us.*

Perhaps no other director, in Japan or anywhere else, was better positioned to understand this than Kinji Fukasaku. He was aged 70 when *Battle Royale* debuted and the film was born in part out of lived experience, for his own high-school class had been drafted into wartime labour during World War II. "I was working in a weapons factory that was a regular target for enemy bombing," he told *The Guardian* in a 2001 interview.² "During the raids, even though we were friends working together, the only thing we would be thinking of was self-preservation. We would try to get behind each other or beneath dead bodies to avoid the bombs. When the raid was over, we didn't really blame each other, but it made me understand about the limits of friendship. I also had to clean up all the dead bodies after the bombings." As a survivor of this tumultuous era in Japanese history, Fukasaku was well aware of the complicity of the Japanese educational system, and adult society as a whole, in brainwashing children for war. (For example, one of the final issues of the popular boy's comic magazine *Shōnen Club*, published just before Japan's surrender in 1945, provided children with detailed instructions on how to arm and detonate hand grenades.)³

¹ The novel 'Nihon chinbotsu' by Sakyō Komatsu was published in 1973 and released as a film directed by Shirō Moritani that same year. It was subsequently remade as a radio drama in 1980, a new feature directed by Shinji Higuchi in 2006 and as an anime series in 2020.

² Steve Rose, "The Kid Killers," *The Guardian*, September 7, 2001. See pp. 40-47 of this booklet.

³ Frederik Schodt, *Manga! Manga! The World of Japanese Comics* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 2001), p. 51.

That the dark fantasy of *Battle Royale* resonated so deeply with turn-of-the-millennium Japanese audiences was a testament to trying times. While real-life Japan in 2000 wasn't in nearly as bad shape as the fictional Japan of *Battle Royale*, the nation was in serious trouble. In the 80s Japan was ascendant, the planet's second largest economy, a financial powerhouse. Then came an epic 1990 stock-market crash, followed by a total collapse of the real estate market. By 1992, it was clear that there would be no return to the glory years. Over the next decade, Japan's incredible postwar economic miracle sputtered, then ground to a jarring halt. The economists solemnly declared that the gains of the 80s had been a mirage – or in financial lingo, a bubble. And Japan's bubble had most definitely popped. Fortunes had been lost and lives had been ruined. Depression, of both financial and emotional varieties, set in. Suicide rates spiked to some of the highest known in the developed world. Over the 90s, as Japan's youth and young adults grappled with the realisation that the Japanese dream was no longer within their grasp, strange trends began manifesting in Japanese society.

Pundits invented an entire new vocabulary to describe the seemingly incomprehensible behaviours of this alienated new generation: *Otaku* fanatics who eschewed adult responsibilities for the virtual realities of games, comic books, and cartoons; *parasite singles* who lived with their parents their whole adult lives; *enjo kōsai* compensated dating, by high school girls who sold their bodies to dirty old salarymen in exchange for designer clothing and handbags; *hikikomori*, young adults who never ventured out of their childhood bedrooms at all.

But perhaps the scariest of all, at least at the turn of the millennium, was one called *gakkyū hōkai* – literally, classroom chaos. It was coined by the mass media in the mid-90s in response to reports of discipline breaking down in elementary schools. The term spread like wildfire through society. In a nation where the education system was seen as sacrosanct, and teachers with hearts of gold such as *Mr. Kinpachi in Class 3B* numbered among the most beloved characters in popular entertainment, the idea of schoolchildren running roughshod over their elders struck terror into the hearts of grownups.⁴ This fearmongering didn't sit well with everyone, of course. Critics saw an outdated, inflexible system of cram schools and “examination hells” and authority figures blaming children for their own personal failures. This societal panic obviously influenced the novelist Koushun Takami, who penned the bestselling 1999 novel *Battle Royale*, and Fukasaku himself, for the term is provocatively deployed in the first moments of the movie for ironic effect. It's like Fukasaku raising a giant middle finger at the grown-ups: *You want classroom chaos? This is the real thing.*

⁴ The drama *Sannen B Gumi no Kinpachi-sensei* first aired from 1979 to 1980 to massive popular acclaim, and continued to run for another eight seasons over the next thirty years. In *Battle Royale*, Takeshi Kitano's portrayal of the twisted teacher who accompanies his charges to their dooms is an obvious inversion of Kinpachi-sensei, an idealistic young teacher who stands up for students in trouble.

Battle Royale was destined for controversy from the get-go. The scenes of schoolkid violence provoked uncomfortable comparisons to a real-life murder case in Kobe from 1997, involving a fourteen-year-old serial killer who preyed on younger children. Takami's story so roiled the 1998 Japan Horror Fiction Awards that the judges chose not to declare a winner at all that year rather than recognize his work. Submitting unpublished manuscripts to awards like these was the way most unknown authors made their first professional debuts in Japan. For Takami, a former newspaperman who quit his day job to chase a dream of becoming a novelist, getting shunned in this way must have seemed a crushing blow. But word of the contentious and extreme story reached the ears of an editor by the name of Yūichi Akata who specialized in subcultural topics. The only problem was, he had no way of reaching Takami. This was an era before author websites or social media or even widespread email, so Akata resorted to taking out a want ad in a popular subcultural magazine called *Quick Japan* to establish contact. Fortunately for Akata, Takami saw it, and the rest is history. The book went on to sell more than a million copies and chart on the Japanese bestseller list, reaching number 10 in 2001.

Fukasaku's 2000 theatrical adaptation almost faced a similar fate. Its release in December of that year came just six months after a sensational crime involving a teenager hijacking a bus in Fukuoka, stabbing a passenger to death and holding the remainder hostage until the bus was stormed by riot police. With the topic of youth crime still dominating headlines, Japan's movie regulator Eirin slapped *Battle Royale* with a rarely-used and commercially disastrous 15+ rating, a decision the director quickly attempted to appeal. In the midst of the process, Japanese politicians seized on the film, declaring it "crude and tasteless" on the floor of the National Diet. Fukasaku dropped his appeal in the hopes of quelling the controversy. When the politicians doubled down on their demagoguery, even going so far as to demand it be pulled from circulation, he fought back. He released a provocative statement to the press that concluded, "kids, if you have the courage, you can sneak in. And I encourage you to do so." More than anyone, Fukasaku knew that the true antagonists of the film didn't even appear onscreen. They were the lawmakers who had sent the children into the battle zone in the first place, just as they had him and his schoolmates in the 1940s. Japan's kids must have followed the director's advice, for *Battle Royale* went on to become the nation's third top-grossing film for 2001.

Such was the tumultuous socio-political backdrop to the film's reception in Japan. Western audiences, understandably unfamiliar with *Kinpachi-sensei* or debates over classroom chaos or the rest of it, were forced to take *Battle Royale* purely on its own merits. Which was actually quite difficult to do, at least if you happened to be an American; the movie wouldn't see a mainstream release there for eleven years after its Japanese debut. (Britons were more fortunate; the film debuted in the United Kingdom in September of 2001.)

The culprits were a combination of timing and lack of context. September of 2001 was not a particularly great moment to release any movie, let alone one as extreme as *Battle Royale*. In the UK, the *Daily Mail*





predictably excoriated the film as “mindless and objectionable.”⁵ So too were American test audiences and film distribution companies flummoxed, unaware of the cynical spirit of social criticism in which Fukasaku directed the film. All they saw were high school kids slaughtering each other – visuals painfully reminiscent of the 1999 Columbine High School massacre, and all the more difficult to watch after the shock of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Japanese audiences could interpret *Battle Royale* as a parody of wartime history and a critique of their educational system. In America, the pitched, desperate violence felt all too real. *Ain't it Cool News* reported that when Toei screened it for American lawyers in an attempt to find a distributor, they were informed “they’d go to jail” if they ever released the film in the United States.⁶ This in turn fuelled unfounded rumours that the film had been banned there, burnishing its underground outlaw charm all the more for those few who did manage to see it.

Film festival screenings were enough to spread word of this strange new movie from Japan that was too hot for American distributors to handle. *Battle Royale* was far from the first violent movie to provoke strong reactions from industry insiders and moviegoers both. But there was something distinct about this particular film’s take: the schoolgirls. From the first moments of the film, the female characters assert themselves as the equals or betters of their male counterparts. Many of the best scenes centred on them, and in particular on Chiaki Kuriyama, who fends off the advances of an aggressive schoolmate by stabbing him repeatedly in the crotch. The idea of plushie-clutching schoolgirls surviving a pitched battle, rather than the musclebound jocks you might expect, captivated foreign audiences. It was no coincidence that Kuriyama went on to reprise a similarly shocking role as Gogo Yubari the flying guillotine-wielding schoolgirl assassin in Quentin Tarantino’s 2003 film *Kill Bill Vol. 1*. Six years later in 2009, Tarantino singled out *Battle Royale* as his favourite film of the previous two decades, declaring “If there’s any movie that’s been made since I’ve been making movies that I wish I had made, it’s that one.”

Like every great piece of art, *Battle Royale*’s influence continues to ripple throughout culture at large, endlessly referenced and name-checked in dozens of films, television shows, and games. The elephant in the room, of course, is *The Hunger Games* series, the first book of which debuted in 2008 and the first film in 2012. It features an eerily similar setup of teenagers forced into deathmatches by venal grownups. (In response to a question from the *New York Times* in 2011, author Suzanne Collins claimed that she had never heard of Takami or Fukasaku’s work before turning in her draft of the manuscript to her publisher.)⁷ And video gamers

5 Christopher Tookey, ‘Like Lord Of The Flies, with axe murders’, *Daily Mail*, September 14, 2001.

6 Scott Green, ‘With One Week To Its Home Video Release... “Battle Royale” Red Band and Behind the Scenes Clips’, *Ain’t it Cool News*, March 13, 2012. <https://www.aintitcool.com/node/54255>

7 Susan Dominus, ‘Suzanne Collins’s War Stories for Kids’, *The New York Times Magazine*, April 8, 2011, p. 30. <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/10/magazine/mag-10collins-t.html>

flock to *Battle Royale*-style titles such as *PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds* and *Fortnite: Battle Royale*, both of which are said to have been directly inspired by Fukasaku's work.

The director passed away in 2003, and it's tempting to wonder what he would have thought of a world where millions of teens willingly entered into virtual last-man-standing competitions run by massive corporations. Even as Western society grows more and more dystopian in many ways, *Battle Royale* thankfully remains fiction – but its power comes from how dangerously close it skirts to the realities of human nature. It's a perfect and fitting swansong for the career of a filmmaker whose works continued tweaking the establishment right up to the very end.

Matt Alt is a Tokyo-based translator and writer. He is the co-founder of the localisation company AltJapan Co., Ltd., a firm that specialises in producing the English versions of Japanese games, manga, and other forms of entertainment. His work as a writer has appeared widely in publications including The Japan Times, The Economist 1843, Wired, CNN, Slate, The Independent, and The New Yorker website. He is the co-author of Yokai Attack! The Japanese Monster Survival Guide (Tuttle, 2011). His latest book is Pure Invention: How Japan's Pop Culture Conquered the World (Constable, 2020).





The Doom Generation

BY ANNE BILLSON

In a near-future Japan plagued by high levels of unemployment and delinquency, a random class of junior high school children (ninth grade, thus roughly 14 or 15 years old) is kidnapped, fitted with explosive collars, equipped with objects (anything from a paper fan to an Uzi) that might or might not be useful as weapons, sequestered on an island, and forced to kill one another as part of a government programme designed to curb rebellion in the rest of the population. “Pour encourager les autres” as Voltaire might have said. If any of the schoolchildren stray outside the constantly shifting safety zones, or if there is more than one survivor at the end of three days, their collars will explode. This is the premise of Koushun Takami's dystopian novel *Battle Royale*, published in April 1999 and filmed the following year.

The Hunger Games (2012), the film adapted from the first part of Suzanne Collins' dystopian Young Adult trilogy, was greeted by a chorus of complaints from *Battle Royale* fans, denouncing it as a pale copycat. In Collins' story (the first volume of which was published in 2008), a totalitarian post-apocalyptic government selects a boy and a girl from each of 12 districts and forces all 24 to fight to the death in a booby-trapped arena in a media spectacle devised as a way of discouraging insurrection in the general population.

Perhaps the premise is similar, but, starting with the respective novels, there are differences in treatment and tone. *Battle Royale* is related in multiple third person narrative, whereas *The Hunger Games* trilogy (filmed as a tetralogy) has a single first-person narrator. The rules of engagement are different. And the much bloodier slaughter of *Battle Royale* is less of a media event (though media are ever-present) whereas *The Hunger Games* plays up the reality TV spectacle.

But this is to wilfully overlook that *Battle Royale* is itself a variant on a recurring scenario that has long permeated genre cinema: humans hunting humans. The most famous novel about children fighting each other to death on an island is William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954), but the seminal text is probably Richard Connell's 1924 short story *The Most Dangerous Game*, also known as *The Hounds of Zoroff*, in which an American big-game hunter finds himself trapped on a Caribbean island owned by a Russian aristocrat who hunts humans (the “game” of the title referring to the quarry, not the sport itself), and has to turn the tables on his captor if he is to survive. The first and most famous direct adaptation was the 1932 RKO film produced by Ernest B. Schoedsack and Merian C. Cooper, the team that made *King Kong*.

As a thinly veiled metaphor for capitalism, the oligarchy, class, economics and so forth, *The Most Dangerous Game* subgenre is never not political, and its variations on the theme of state-sanctioned or oligarchy-amusing death matches are legion. Rich people hunt poor people for fun in *Hard Target* (1993), *Surviving the Game* (1994) and *The Hunt* (2020). Robert Sheckley's 1953 short story *The Seventh Victim* (later expanded by the writer into three novels) was filmed by Italian filmmaker Elio Petri as the stylish, satirical *The Tenth Victim* (1965), starring Marcello Mastroianni and Ursula Andress (armed in one scene with a deadly double-barrelled brassière) as victim and huntress in a future society where, in place of war, humankind's aggressive tendencies have been channelled into a form of legalised murder whereby hunters stalk and kill officially designated victims.

Another Sheckley story, *The Prize of Peril* (1958), anticipates the rise of reality TV with a show in which a participant, in quest of a large cash prize, volunteers to be hunted by professional killers while viewers look on and, sometimes, send help; it was filmed by Yves Boisset as *Le Prix du Danger* (1983). More recently, *The Purge* film and TV franchise (2013 onwards) depicts a dystopian America in which, for one 12-hour period each year, all crime – including murder – is legally permitted.

A variation on the scenario presents bloodthirsty gladiatorial combat as a spectator sport as another attempt to ensure the population's thirst for violence is never directed towards the ruling classes. In Paul Bartel's broadly satirical *Death Race 2000* (1975), produced by Roger Corman, drivers actively try to run over pedestrians ("Toddlers under 12 now rate a big 70 points!"). *Rollerball* (1975) stars James Caan as the champion who refuses to retire from his lethal sport, designed to quell subversive individualism in a totalitarian future. In *The Running Man* (1982) by Stephen King (writing as Richard Bachman), the impoverished protagonist, seeking prize money to pay for his daughter's medical treatment, signs up for a TV game show in which he must evade a team of hitmen. King's socio-political satire is watered down in the 1987 film version, in which Arnold Schwarzenegger is sentenced to wear a two-tone Spandex bodysuit as he gets stalked by gimmicky homicidal gladiators and issues groan-making quips such as "He had to split" (of an antagonist who has just been sliced in half).

The Running Man also illustrates a more recent wrinkle on the formula, already anticipated by Sheckley, Nigel Kneale (in his 1968 teleplay for *The Year of the Sex Olympics*) and Peter Watkins (in his 1971 mock-documentary *Punishment Park*), exploiting the proliferation of reality TV and the internet, in which mutual slaughter is broadcast as public entertainment, often with attendant gambling opportunities. *Series 7: The Contenders* (2001) and *My Little Eye* (2002), are simply exaggerating the premises of popular TV endurance or elimination game shows such as *Za Gaman* (or 'The Endurance', a Japanese endurance game show of the 1980s, best known in the UK for having been featured on *Clive James on TV*), the French show *Fort*

Boyard (1990 onwards) and its British variation *The Crystal Maze* (1990 onwards), the *Survivor* franchise (1997 onwards), the *Big Brother* franchise (2000 onwards), and *I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here!* (2002 onwards) – and pushing them to lethal but horribly logical extremes.

Takami's *Battle Royale* was adapted for the screen by debuting screenwriter Kenta Fukasaku, and directed by his father, veteran filmmaker Kinji Fukasaku, best known for having helmed the *Battles Without Honor and Humanity* series of yakuza films (1973-1974) and Japanese portions of the Hollywood war film *Tora! Tora! Tora!* (1970).

Kinji Fukasaku was quoted extensively on the film's official website: "I immediately identified with the 9th graders in the novel, *Battle Royale*. I was 15 when World War II came to an end. By then, my class had been drafted and was working in a munitions factory. In July 1945, we were caught up in artillery fire... It was impossible to run or hide from the shells that rained down. We survived by diving for cover under our friends."

"After the attacks, my class had to dispose of the corpses. It was the first time in my life I'd seen so many dead bodies. As I lifted severed arms and legs, I had a fundamental awakening... everything we'd been taught in school about how Japan was fighting the war to win world peace, was a pack of lies. Adults could not be trusted. The emotions I experienced then – an irrational hatred for the unseen forces that drove us into those circumstances, a poisonous hostility towards adults, and a gentle sentimentality for my friends – were a starting point for everything since."

The director was able to parlay this visceral connection to the story into his filmmaking, which effortlessly combines his expertise in ultra-violence (teenage girls in school uniform going Sam Peckinpah on each other) with the politics of school cliques (mean girls, nerds, sporty jocks), teenage melodrama (secret crushes, unrequited love), storytelling skills (we're never in any doubt as to who is doing what to whom), and a deftly controlled drip-feed of information about the 42 schoolchildren as individuals, making them more than just anonymous cannon fodder. Fukasaku Senior also evinces a fierce sympathy for the combatants, evident in the way he makes every death count emotionally.

But for all the child-on-child bloodshed and other exploitation elements, *Battle Royale* has an intensely moral core. You can sense Kinji Fukasaku's righteous anger directed at the adults punishing the younger generation for their own shortcomings in so barbaric a fashion. And among its more obvious metaphors is condemnation of the notoriously competitive Japanese school system, where the extreme pressure can lead to bullying, psychological damage and suicide.





Battle Royale quickly became a sensation, despite being condemned (by adults, of course) as harmful to youth and labelled as “crude and tasteless” by members of Japan’s National Diet. It premiered in October 2000 at the Tokyo International Film Festival before a successful Japanese release in December of the same year. In 2001 it was unleashed on the rest of the world, beginning with the International Film Festival Rotterdam in January, though it would be another 11 years before the official American release, a delay attributed to the still raw memory of the Columbine High School massacre in 1999, and the anxiety of Japanese distributors about the possibility of lawsuits similar to those arising from so-called copycat incidents after the release of Oliver Stone’s *Natural Born Killers* (1994).

Novel and film were followed by a 15-volume manga series, illustrated by Masayuki Taguchi, in which Takami was able to expand on and explore in greater detail the backstories and psychology of the characters from his novel. The two-volume *Blitz Royale* (2003-2004) to which Takami lent his name though both story and artwork are by Makoto Hashimoto, bears scant relation to the film sequel, despite being subtitled *Battle Royale II*. Takami did, however, write another manga: *Battle Royale: Angels’ Border* (2014), illustrated by Miko Ohnishi and Youhei Oguma; it’s a side story exploring the backstories and clarifying the motivations of two of the schoolgirls who, in the original novel, attempt a show of solidarity by holing up together in the lighthouse.

To say that *Battle Royale II: Requiem*, the 2003 film sequel, was not as well received as its predecessor is an understatement. “Where the first film was knowingly outrageous, the follow-up is merely trite,” Miles Fielder wrote in *Empire*, and most reviewers followed suit. A handful applauded the film’s admittedly audacious premise, but while the original *Battle Royale* was an instant hit and has racked up a rating of 88% on the Rotten Tomatoes website, the sequel weighs in at a lowlier 30%, and floundered at the box office.

Without a novel to provide the template, Kenta Fukasaku wrote an original screenplay, with his father once again assigned to direct. But Kinji Fukasaku died of prostate cancer in January 2003, after having shot only one scene (featuring Takeshi Kitano, who reprises his role from the first film in flashback). Kenta Fukasaku duly took over directing duties, crediting his father as co-director and dedicating the film to him.

Battle Royale ends with the game’s two survivors, Shūya Nanahara and Noriko Nakagawa, on the run. Picking up the story three years later, *Battle Royale II: Requiem* begins with a panoramic view of Tokyo, tinged ominous orange. An elegiac choir gives way to the *Battle Royale* theme – *Dies Irae* from Verdi’s *Requiem* – as the skyscrapers are dynamited and collapse. It’s an image clearly intended to evoke the 2001 destruction of the World Trade Center, which heralded an escalation of international terrorism. A written caption duly informs the spectator: “The world has entered the Age of Terror. The leader of the anti-BR act ‘Wild Seven’

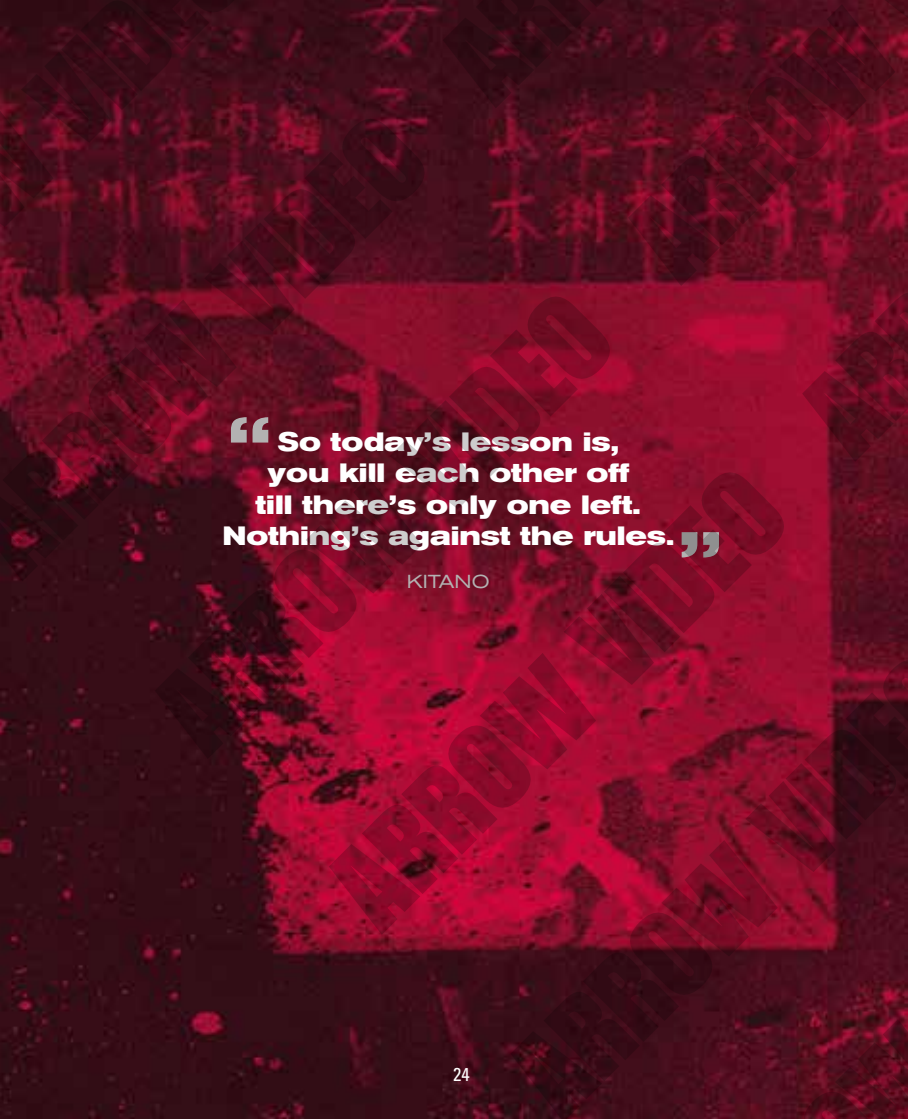
Shūya Nanahara is an internationally wanted terrorist. The grown-ups start a new game, under the name of 'Justice'. New Century Terrorist Counter-Measure alternative: BR2."

Next we're confronted by a grainy image of a gun-toting Nanahara and the Wild 7 standing in front of a red, black and white flag, staring defiantly into the camera like terrorists recording a video prior to a hostage murder or suicide bombing. 'The die is cast' proclaims Nanahara (a translation of the words attributed to Julius Caesar as he crossed the Rubicon in 49BC, indicating the point of no return). "We will never forgive the grown-ups who made us kill each other. Stand up and let's fight together. Now we declare war against all grown-ups."

It's a bold move, implicitly aligning Nanahara, hero of the first film, with al-Qaeda, the terrorist group responsible for the 9/11 attacks. (His fellow survivor, Noriko Nakagawa, is comprehensively side-lined in the sequel, appearing only in the film's closing minutes.) The story then proceeds in similar style to the first film, but with a few new tweaks, not all of them successful. Another class of ninth-graders, this time consisting exclusively of dropouts and delinquents, is abducted and fitted with metal collars primed to explode if they fail to comply with the rules of the game. But this time the students wake up to find themselves wearing camouflage jackets; as the film goes on, it's apparent that watching people in battle fatigues shooting each other feels more like a regular war movie, a less transgressive spectacle than internecine violence between pupils dressed in school uniform.

In another tweak (reminiscent of Lewis Teague's 1991 sci-fi actioner *Wedlock*), each explosive collar is linked to that of a member of the opposite sex, so that if one student dies or strays more than 50 metres from the other, both teens die. Following in the footsteps of Takeshi Kitano, the *sensei* in charge of orientation is once again played by a flamboyant actor familiar from Japanese genre cinema: this time it's Riki Takeuchi, star of Takashi Miike's *Dead or Alive* trilogy, playing a disgruntled teacher with his own name. One of his first acts is to write the names of 22 countries on a chalkboard: these include Japan, Cambodia, El Salvador and Afghanistan. "What do these countries have in common?" the sensei asks. "They have been bombed by the USA in the last 60 years." Another bold move, explicitly establishing the US as *deus ex machina* villains.

This time the objective is not for the teenagers to kill each other, but to turn their weapons against Nanahara and his Wild 7 warriors in their heavily guarded headquarters on the island of Sentan. They are given 72 hours to kill Nanahara before the Americans, it is implied, will lose patience with their submissive Japanese allies and start dropping bombs. But unlike its predecessor, the sequel doesn't make it easy to latch on to individual faces amid a swarm of adolescents with bad haircuts. Only two characters stand out: Takuma Aoi, a sullen



**“ So today’s lesson is,
you kill each other off
till there’s only one left.
Nothing’s against the rules.”**

KITANO



delinquent with dyed blond hair, and Shiori Kitano, daughter of the first film's Kitano, who has deliberately sought a transfer to this class in a quest to avenge her father's death.

The protracted introduction, set-up and explanation of the rules culminates in the reluctant conscripts storming Nanahara's island in boats, filmed with a jittery handheld camera à la Robert Capa, *Saving Private Ryan*-style, during which many of them are shot, blown up, or have their collars triggered. The few who make it to *terra firma* play out a chaotic version of a first-person shooter game before a handful of survivors finally penetrate the fortress stronghold, only to almost immediately switch to the side of rebels after the latter remove their explosive collars, severing links to the adults who have been controlling them.

In the film's second half, the teenagers unite to resist heavy firepower from attacking adult soldiers (making you wonder why, if the powers that be really wanted to get rid of Nanahara and the Wild 7, they didn't send in the adult military in the first place), but the dearth of characterisation and unvarying ultra-violence (even the wild card of vengeance-seeking Kitano is thrown away) sap the story of its power and obscure its themes, as one indistinguishable character after another is mown down by gunfire before delivering a maudlin dying speech and an exhortation to "Keep fighting!" or "You've got to see it through!" Narrative coherence isn't helped by the inexperience of Kenta Fukasaku and his young cast. Tatsuya Fujiwara, credible as a traumatised schoolboy in the first film, is rather less credible as the supposedly battle-hardened Nanahara of the sequel.

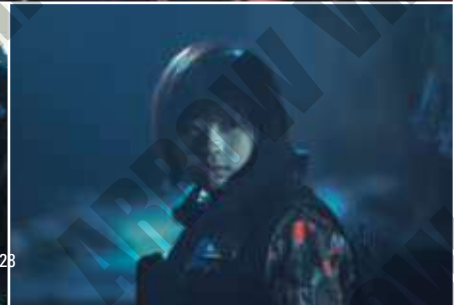
In a "three months later" coda (filmed in Pakistan), the survivors join their comrades in Afghanistan. Everyone beams happily, with only the girls' headscarves hinting that this ostensibly welcoming country, dubbed by some western observers as "the world's first terrorist-sponsored state", is unlikely to be a paradisiacal refuge for the women, at least while the Taliban continue to wield influence there. This ending – which by implication ranges the young fighters alongside the likes of Osama Bin Laden – comes across as naïve rather than subversive, though it does imply, not without reason, that terrorists don't spring fully formed out of the ground but are largely created by the destructive foreign policies of aggressive superpowers.

There is a plausible theory that the plethora of dystopian Young Adult fiction of the late 20th and early 21st century (*Battle Royale*, Jack Womack's *Random Acts of Senseless Violence*, Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*, Jeanne DuPrau's *City of Ember*, James Dashner's *The Maze Runner*, Veronica Roth's *Divergent*, Mike Carey's *The Girl with all the Gifts*, Meg Rosoff's *How I Live Now* and so forth) has been – either subconsciously or by design – a method of mentally preparing its predominantly young readership for a bleak future riven by high school shootings, socioeconomic instability, war, pandemic and global warming.

But there is more than one modern government that would like to quell youthful individualism and idealism, and the public is as ready as ever to be distracted from glaring social injustice by scapegoating and violent spectacle. Twenty years on, *Battle Royale* seems more pertinent than ever in its depiction of the older generation betraying a younger one by bequeathing them a future in which criminally mishandled economies, political corruption and ecological irresponsibility will likely lead to the sort of climate catastrophe and social unrest in which survivors will literally have to fight one another to survive.

Anne Billson is a novelist, film critic, screenwriter and photographer. Her horror novels include *Suckers*, *The Ex* and *The Coming Thing*; non-fiction books include monographs on John Carpenter's *The Thing* and Tomas Alfredson's *Let the Right One In*, Billson Film Database and *Cats on Film*. She lives in Belgium.









'Today's Lesson is... You Kill Each Other'

BY JAY McROY

At the dawn of the millennium, the nation collapsed.
At 15% unemployment, 10 million were out of work
800,000 students boycotted school and juvenlike crime rates soared.
Adults had lost all confidence, and now fearing the youth,
they eventually passed the Millennium Educational Reform Act.
A.K.A. The BR Act.

With these ominous words punctuated by Masamichi Amano's powerful score, Kinji Fukasaku's *Battle Royale* (2000) propels audiences into an alternative dystopian present that is at once the stuff of nightmares and yet strangely familiar. Based on Koushun Takami's 1999 novel of the same name, *Battle Royale* has quickly achieved the status that very few motion pictures ever attain – it has become a phenomenon. Websites dedicated to the film and its 2003 sequel, *Battle Royale II: Requiem*, flourish on the Internet, while home video sales around the globe remain consistently high (an impressive feat given the film's limited theatrical release in nations like the UK and the US). In a now legendary video introduction for Sky Movies, the US director Quentin Tarantino championed *Battle Royale* as his 'absolute favourite film' released since 1992. Tarantino's enthusiasm should come as no surprise, however, as Chiaki Kuriyama, the actress who plays Takako Chigusa, once again donned a school girl uniform to portray the deadly mace-wielding dynamo Gogo Yubari in *Kill Bill Vol. 1*.

In Japan, where members of Parliament attempted to ban both the novel and its cinematic adaptation, *Battle Royale* became one of the highest grossing motion pictures in the country's storied film history. It also received well-deserved critical respect, as evidenced by its impressive showing at the 2001 Japanese Academy Awards, where it won awards for Most Popular Film, Newcomer of the Year (the film's two young leads, Tatsuya Fujiwara and Aki Maeda, were both recognised for their breakthrough performances), and Outstanding Achievement in Film Editing (Hirohide Abe). The film also garnered six additional nominations: Best Film, Best Director (Kinji Fukasaku), Best Actor (Tatsuya Fujiwara), Best Screenplay (Kenta Fukasaku), Best Musical Score (Masamichi Amano), and Best Sound Recording (Kunio Andō).

With its fusion of horror and science fiction motifs, its tension-filled plot, and a talented cast headed by media icon 'Beat' Takeshi Kitano, it might seem easy to dismiss *Battle Royale* as an edgy, ultraviolent film orchestrated to appeal to a cynical, rebellious spirit that has long been a defining feature of youth culture. To do so, however, would be to pay Fukasaku's filmic phenomenon a grave disservice. The very fact that *Battle Royale* has achieved cult status in Japan and abroad suggests that despite certain cultural specificities, the film ultimately transcends national boundaries, 'speaking' to audiences from many different social and political backgrounds.

In her frequently cited introduction to her 1969 novel, *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Ursula K. Le Guin famously claims that, contrary to what one might assume, science fiction as a genre "is not predictive; it is descriptive." This statement can easily be expanded to encompass numerous modes of speculative fiction, including films that, like *Battle Royale*, feature horrific scenarios that resonate with an uncanny immediacy in our reality television culture. This spectacular, almost mythical survival narrative allows audiences to ruminate upon a variety of contemporary issues that might otherwise be impossible to explore within the context of less expansive film genres.

Battle Royale confronts viewers with an over-the-top experiment in social Darwinism gone horribly wrong. With its island setting and violent confrontations, Fukasaku's film resembles such classic motion pictures as 1932's *The Most Dangerous Game* (directed by Irving Pichel and Ernest B. Schoedsack), in which survivors of a shipwreck are hunted for sport, and Peter Brooks' 1963 *Lord of the Flies*, in which marooned British schoolboys battle one another as the veneer of 'civilised society' slowly falls away. Sydney Pollack's 1969 film, *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?*, Peter Watkins' gruelling *Punishment Park* (1971), and John Carpenter's action-packed *Escape from New York* (1981) are also important influences upon *Battle Royale*. In Carpenter's movie, the rigidly timed explosive capsules injected into the neck of Snake Plissken (Kurt Russell), the rugged prisoner charged with rescuing the President of the United States of America from Manhattan (now a maximum security island prison), anticipates the deadly collars worn by Fukasaku's young prisoners. *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* and *Punishment Park* also pave the way for Fukasaku's film, as in both films characters struggle for survival in 'games' overseen by authoritarian figures. While the premise of Pollock's movie is a last-person-standing dance marathon that unexpectedly turns deadly, Watkins' *Punishment Park* is perhaps the more direct antecedent, as the contestants forced into hopeless conflict are selected because they, like the students in *Battle Royale*, fail to conform with the militant government's notions of proper social conduct.

In its exploration of a society in disarray, *Battle Royale* functions as a veritable web of allegory. It is a film that, through the use of strategically placed title cards, quite literally asks its viewers to speculate upon the

significance of the film's catastrophic and, at times, heartrendingly tragic moments. As a title card following a particularly violent showdown in a once-abandoned lighthouse inquires, "You know what this means?", Shūya (Tatsuya Fujiwara), the film's battered and frustrated male lead, responds to the written text he could not possibly have read by looking down at the camera and shouting, "How should I know what it means?" The implication here is obvious. The question is undoubtedly directed towards us, the film's viewers, and like the embattled students we must contemplate, at the very least, the implications of the violent scenarios we witness. Consequently, we are drawn progressively deeper into *Battle Royale's* 'heart of darkness'.

The impact of economic crisis upon a population is conveyed as one of *Battle Royale's* primary concerns right from the start. As the text flashing across the screen during the film's opening titles makes immediately clear, the action is set in the wake of an economic depression not altogether dissimilar to the financial downturn Japan faced following the bursting of the so-called 'bubble economy' in the early 1990s, or, indeed, the economic recession ravaging many national economies as of 2010. As is generally the case during difficult economic times, unemployment and bankruptcy exact often brutal tolls upon those who find themselves struggling to make ends meet, including a nation's youth. Shūya's father's suicide during one of *Battle Royale's* earliest flashbacks is directly linked to his failure to secure consistent employment. Naturally, financial insecurities heighten competition for available jobs, and this aggressive struggle is mirrored by the no-holds-barred battle for survival at the core of Fukasaku's film. "Life is a game," Kitano, the former teacher turned game master, advises the students before they are sent out to kill one another, "so fight for survival and see if you're worth it." Ironically, the spectre of economic hardship drives Kitano to work long days and nights monitoring 'the game', a schedule that alienates him from his wife and daughter.

Similarly, *Battle Royale's* deadly game can be understood as a commentary upon academic pressures, especially for Japanese junior high school students nearing the end of their 'compulsory education'. The extremely competitive and highly stressful nationwide examination many 9th grade students undergo exacts a tremendous emotional and psychological toll upon the youth, especially when economic recession limits employment opportunities for those who do not score well enough to attend the best high schools. In some cases, social and family pressures result in self-destructive and, in some extreme instances, suicidal behaviour. Thus, *Battle Royale's* 'last student standing' motif can be read as a figurative representation of this competitive ethos. In a clear reference to Japan's pressure-filled scholastic environment, the frantic Motobuchi, armed with a crossbow, "exclaims 'X equals -b over 2a! Everybody's serious, huh? Fine then! I'll survive...go to a good school!'"

Bullying, a common practice in many cultures that privilege both hierarchy and community, can compound scholastic and social pressures, and it, too, is one of Fukasaku's major preoccupations in *Battle Royale*.





Though one person's specific agenda frequently emerges as dominant, bullying is ultimately a cooperative rather than individualised activity, an all-too-prevalent process by which group solidarity is strengthened through the collective abuse and banishment of a perceived 'outsider'. In *Battle Royale*, Noriko and Mitsuko are depicted as having been the targets of bullying, with Mitsuko exacting particularly brutal vengeance upon members of the cliques that treated her cruelly.

Given the theme of social pressure in *Battle Royale*, it is only fitting that Fukasaku frames the BR Act's annual 'fight to the death' as a media event designed to entertain and distract the nation's populace. From the film's opening moments, during which a mob of frenzied reporters and camera operators jostle to capture the disturbing smile on the blood-spattered face of a young girl who has survived a previous *Battle Royale*, we are immersed within a media-saturated culture. In highly industrialised societies, media technologies often allow greater surveillance, making it increasingly easy to monitor a person's every movement. *Battle Royale* engages most critically with this mode of control through the collars that each 'contestant' is forced to wear. At once a tracking mechanism, a covert listening device, and a method of execution, the collars are an ever-present reminder of what is ultimately at stake when a populace surrenders liberty in exchange for the illusion of security and the panacea of material comforts.

If we view the tiny island on which the students are imprisoned as a microcosm of the larger world, with all of its pressures and challenges, then how the students react to the dystopian, militaristic culture of surveillance depicted in the film takes on added significance. *Battle Royale* offers a variety of prospective models of social resistance, some of which are far more effective than others. When faced with a brutal scenario in which those who 'win/survive must do so at the expense of their classmates, some students choose not to play the game at all, committing suicide rather than succumbing to the demands of a culture that values competition and achievement at all costs. Others call for solidarity without a viable program for action, a gesture that, though well intentioned, leaves them vulnerable to the bloodlust of Kiriya, the sociopathic 'transfer student' who fully embraces the 'game' for the sheer thrill of destroying those around him. Two groups – one comprised exclusively of females and the other composed of males – emerge as slightly more, but by no means completely, successful. In the case of the first alliance, the façade of domestic cooperation inevitably crumbles due to an overpowering undercurrent of paranoia and ulterior motives. In the case of the latter grouping, the promise of freedom through violent guerrilla actions against the military complex that dictates the 'rules of the game' finally disintegrates due to a combination of insufficient training and a single-mindedness of purpose that momentarily blinds them to more immediate threats.

One small group, however, proves successful. Accordingly, it is to this friendship forged by Shuya, Noriko, and Kawada – with its privileging of honour, solidarity, and sacrifice in the face of death, that one must ultimately

turn to begin to understand *Battle Royale*'s most profound questions. If together they have what it takes to survive 'the game', what does it mean that only Shūya and Noriko make it back to Tokyo alive? Is Kitano's death a defeat, or is it ultimately a suicide by proxy designed to ensure the perpetuation of values he once deemed extinct? Are the warrants that force Shūya and Noriko into a fugitive lifestyle virtual death sentences, or are they, given the social authority from which they must now 'run', badges of honour? If *Battle Royale* teaches us anything, it is that our world may indeed have much to learn from the deadly lessons visited upon the students of Shiroiwa Junior High School.

Jay McRoy is a writer, filmmaker and a Professor of English and Cinema Studies at the University of Wisconsin – Parkside. He is the author of Nightmare Japan: Contemporary Japanese Horror Cinema (Rodopi Contemporary Cinema Series, 2007), the editor of Japanese Horror Cinema (Edinburgh University Press, 2005), and the co-editor (with Richard Hand) of Monstrous Adaptations: Generic and Thematic Mutations in Horror Film (Manchester University Press, 2007).





Director's Statement

I immediately identified with the 9th graders in the novel, *Battle Royale*. I was fifteen when World War II came to an end. By then, my class had been drafted and was working in a munitions factory. In July 1945, we were caught up in artillery fire. Up until then, the attacks had been air raids and you had a chance of escaping from those. But with artillery, there was no way out. It was impossible to run or hide from the shells that rained down. We survived by diving for cover under our friends.

After the attacks, my class had to dispose of the corpses. It was the first time in my life I'd seen so many dead bodies. As I lifted severed arms and legs, I had a fundamental awakening ... everything we'd been taught in school about how Japan was fighting the war to win world peace, was a pack of lies. Adults could not be trusted.

The emotions I experienced then – an irrational hatred for the unseen forces that drove us into those circumstances, a poisonous hostility towards adults, and a gentle sentimentality for my friends – were a starting point for everything since. This is why, when I hear reports about recent outbreaks of teenage violence and crimes, I cannot easily judge or dismiss them.

This is the point of departure for all my films. Lots of people die in my films. They die terrible deaths. But I make them this way because I don't believe anyone would ever love or trust the films I make, any other way.

BATTLE ROYALE, my 60th film, returns irrevocably to my own adolescence. I had a great deal of fun working with the 42 teenagers making this film, even though it recalled my own teenage battleground.

Kinji Fukasaku





The Kid Killers

First published in The Guardian on Fri 7 Sep 2001

The veteran Japanese film-maker behind Tora! Tora! Tora! has turned his talents to murderous teenagers. Steve Rose talks to Kinji Fukasaku.

It has taken 40 years for Kinji Fukasaku to break on to the international scene – and he had to murder 40 schoolchildren to do it. His latest film, *Battle Royale*, generated a national controversy in Japan with its violent premise, in which a class of schoolchildren are coerced into killing one another, until only one remains. A tacit indictment of Japan's competitive education system, its disaffected youth, and its faded martial pride, the film was opposed and almost banned by the government. Naturally, it then became a massive domestic hit.

Battle Royale has all the hallmarks of an angry young director out to make his name, but Fukasaku's name is already well-known in Japan. Aged 71, he is probably the most commercially successful director the country has ever produced. He began in the 1960s, shooting non-mainstream crime films, gradually making the genre his own, harnessing national frustration at Japan's postwar poverty, and sating audiences' desire for straightforward, contemporary action movies. His gangster output reached its peak in the 1970s, with the yakuza series *Battles Without Honor*, and *Humanity*, Japan's nearest equivalent to *The Godfather*.

These films have had a direct influence on modern directors like Takeshi Kitano (who plays the teacher in *Battle Royale*), *Audition* director Takashi Miike, and even Quentin Tarantino. Fukasaku's other work has covered just about every genre, from the war epic *Tora! Tora! Tora!* to *The Black Lizard*, a collaboration with Yukio Mishima, to *Message From Space*, a low-budget Japanese rip-off of *Star Wars*.

You're 71 years old. Why make a movie about teenagers?

Teenage violence has become a major social problem in Japan in recent years, but the phenomenon is confusing to adults. In the past there was still violence but there were always reasons behind it, like poverty. These days it is more difficult to understand, and so they don't know what to do about it. I have always been interested in the subject, but I am primarily a film-maker, and I didn't know how to make a film about it in a commercial way until I found this story.

Did you find it difficult to relate to modern teenagers?

How the children in the story reacted to violence reminded me of my own experiences during the second world war, when I was 15, the same age as the children in the film. So in a way I could identify with their situation. Children these days don't know anything about war. Even their parents didn't really experience it.

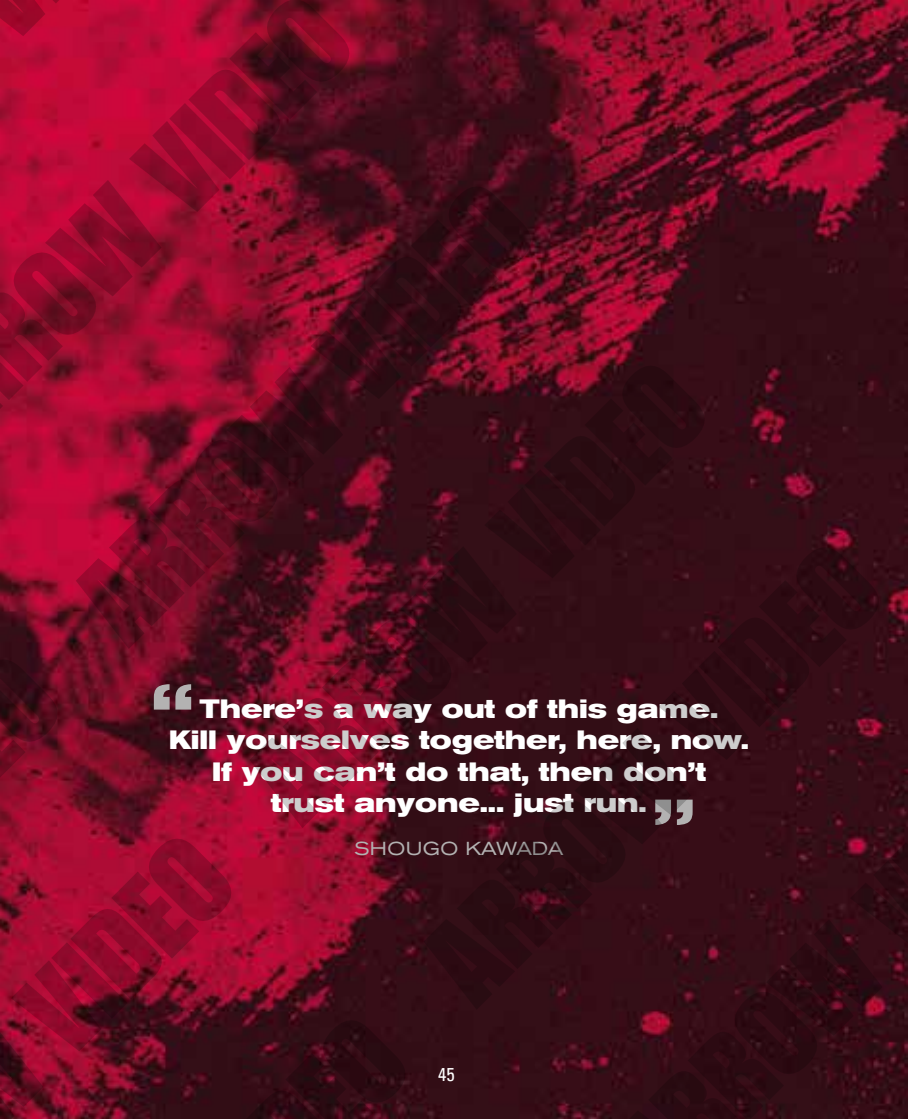
What was your experience of the war?

I was working in a weapons factory that was a regular target for enemy bombing. During the raids, even though we were friends working together, the only thing we would be thinking of was self-preservation. We would try to get behind each other or beneath dead bodies to avoid the bombs. When the raid was over, we didn't really blame each other, but it made me understand about the limits of friendship. I also had to clean up all the dead bodies after the bombings. I'm sure those experiences have influenced the way I look at violence.

There was quite a fuss with the Japanese authorities over the film. What really happened?

A politician raised the issue in the Japanese parliament. He said that *Battle Royale* could be harmful to children, and so they should intervene. Historically in Japan, the film industry has censored itself. But they said censorship should be controlled by outsiders. They were being foolish. We had many discussions but they didn't really go anywhere. By then, the film was already made. I travelled around Japan showing it to kids of 16 and 17, asking what they thought, and I felt that those youngsters were much more sensitive





**“There's a way out of this game.
Kill yourselves together, here, now.
If you can't do that, then don't
trust anyone... just run.”**

SHOUGO KAWADA

and sensible than those foolish adults who wasted so much time discussing the film. They didn't understand that their censorship was more harmful than the film itself. During the war, we weren't allowed to see any foreign films in Japan. Because I had had that experience of regret in my youth, I felt determined to fight against this censorship.

So what was the outcome?

The film was eventually rated R15, for people of 16 and over, which I was very much against. I was hoping it would be shown to people the same age as those in the film. Because it was forbidden, they wanted to watch it even more.

Another of your films people might have seen here is *Tora! Tora! Tora!* Have you seen the new *Pearl Harbor*?

I saw *Pearl Harbor*, but I think they cut certain sequences. I didn't think much of it. I couldn't really understand why anyone would want to make such a film; and its vision of the war seemed so unreal to me. My role in *Tora! Tora! Tora!* was more like a technical director for the aerial combat sequences. I was nothing to do with the screenplay. I had a lot of reservations about the project because I didn't feel the film portrayed the war that I had experienced. In the film, both the Japanese and American officers are portrayed as people who know what they are doing. If everybody had been so gentlemanly like that, the war would never have happened! It was what they did wrong that made them fight.

How was working with Beat Takeshi?

It was great fun, but it wasn't the first time. Ten years ago, I wanted him to star in a film but it never happened because our schedules didn't match. Takeshi was a busy TV personality, and the only schedule he could do was filming with me for a week then going back to TV for a week. I needed eight solid weeks with him. So I had to leave the project, and Kitano ended up directing it, and that became his first feature, *Violent Cop*. This was the first opportunity to work with him since then. I probably wouldn't have made *Battle Royale* if Takeshi couldn't have played that role.

You seem to have so much energy. What's your secret?

[Laughs] *Battle Royale* was the first film in 10 years I've felt passionate and enthusiastic about. So I didn't mind the physical or emotional difficulties. It's no secret. It's just better to do something you like than something you don't!







ABOUT THE TRANSFER

Battle Royale has been exclusively restored by Arrow Films and is presented in its original aspect ratio of 1.85:1 with 5.1 and stereo sound.

The original 35mm camera negative of the Theatrical version and a 35mm dupe negative of the Director's Cut version were scanned in 4K resolution at Toei Company, LTD.

The film was restored and graded in 4K SDR and HDR10/Dolby Vision at Silver Salt Restoration, London.

The 5.1 and 2.0 stereo mixes were remastered by Toei Company, LTD.

All original materials supplied for this restoration were made available by Toei Company, LTD.

This restoration of *Battle Royale* was approved by Kenta Fukasaku.

Restoration supervised by James White, Arrow Films

Silver Salt Restoration:

Anthony Badger, Steve Bearman, Mark Bonnici, Lisa Copson,
Simon Edwards, Lucie Hancock, Ray King, Rob Langridge

Toei Company, LTD:

Naoki Shinozaki, Shujiro Fujioka

Special Thanks:
Kenta Fukasaku



PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc and Booklet Produced by Jasper Sharp

Executive Producers Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni

Technical Producer James White

Disc Production Manager Nora Mehenni

QC Alan Simmons

Production Assistant Samuel Thiery

Blu-ray Mastering and Subtitling Engine House Media Services

Artist Tom Fournier - Oink Creative

Design Oink Creative

SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Matt Alt, Hanaa Anwar, Sarah Appleton, Thomas Beswick,
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