

BRANDED



TO KILL

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KOROSHI NO RAKUJIN
1967



CAST

JÔ SHISHIDO as Gorô Hanada
KÔJI NANBARA as Number 1
ISAO TAMAGAWA as Michiko Yabuhara
ANNU MARI as Misako Nakajo
MARIKO OGAWA as Mami Hanada
HIROSHI MINAMI as Gihei Kasuga

CREW

Directed by **SEIJUN SUZUKI**
Produced by **KANEO IWAI, TAKIKO MIZUNOE**
Written by **HACHIRÔ GURYŪ**
(AKA: **SEIJUN SUZUKI,**
ATSUSHI YAMATOYA, YÔZÔ TANAKA,
CHÔSEI SONE, SEIICHRÔ YAMAGUCHI,
YUTAKA OKADA, TAKEO KIMURA,
YASUAKI HANGAI)
Cinematography by **KAZUE NAGATSUKA**
Edited by **MUTSUO TANJI**
Production Design by **SUKEZÔ KAWAHARA**
Music by **NAOZUMI YAMAMOTO**

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SEIJUN SUZUKI, CONTRACT KILLER

by Jasper Sharp

The process by which the reputations of certain filmmakers rise or fall over the years is a fascinating one, as too is the way in which some films acquire a patina of respectability with the passing of time. Now seen as an undisputed classic of Japanese cinema, the truth is that few outside of a small coterie of local cinéphiles and critics cared much for *Branded to Kill* (*Koroshi no rakuin*) upon its initial release on 15 June 1967, least of all Kyûsaku Hori, the president of the Nikkatsu studio that produced it, who famously fired its director Seijun Suzuki claiming that his films didn't make sense and didn't make money.

The slighted Suzuki, a Nikkatsu employee since 1954, was not going to take things lying down. Hori's subsequent blocking of a planned retrospective of his works organized by Kazuko Kawakita (daughter of the famed husband and wife team of Nagamasa and Kashiko Kawakita who had played such an instrumental role introducing Japanese cinema to the West from the late-1920s onwards) was the last straw, and Suzuki sued the company for unfair dismissal. Support from fellow filmmakers was strong, but this lawsuit against his former employers had the ultimate effect of making Suzuki a *persona non grata* with those in the industry who might otherwise have funded future projects.

The critic Shigehiko Hasumi once claimed that Japanese cinema in the 1970s was "characterised more by Suzuki's absence than by Kurosawa's". The legendary director of *Seven Samurai* (*Shichinin no samurai*, 1954) made two films in this decade: the independently-produced *Dodesukaden* (1970), amazingly Kurosawa's first colour film, was a resounding commercial flop that drove the exasperated filmmaker to the brink of suicide, while his return to more familiar epic territory with

the Siberian-shot Sovscope 70 production *Dersu Uzala* (1975) was bankrolled by the Russians, so can't really be described as Japanese.

Suzuki fared even worse, managing only one release, *Story of Sorrow and Sadness* (*Hishû monogatari*, 1977), released by Nikkatsu's rival studio of Shochiku. Its portrait of a professional golfing model who experiences the flipside of fame when she attracts a crazed fan stalker heralded Suzuki's return, at least in terms of its exuberant use of colour – for which he had become renowned through works like *Youth of the Beast* (*Yajû no seishun*, 1963), *Kanto Wanderer* (*Kantô mushuku*, 1963) and *Tokyo Drifter* (*Tôkyô nagaremono*, 1966) – after having been saddled with the cheaper option of monochrome for *Branded to Kill*. In stylistic and narrative terms, however, *Story of Sorrow and Sadness* was even more off-the-wall than the film his former boss had dismissed as "incomprehensible", and even his champions in the critical establishment weren't able to persuade a cinema-going public increasingly swayed towards Hollywood that Suzuki was really what the domestic industry needed.

Fortunately the broadcast medium provided a window of opportunity throughout this period in the wilderness. Suzuki first turned to television in 1968 with the one-off drama *A Duel* (*Aru kettô*), an episode in the TBS series *Good Evening Dear Husband* (*Aisai kun konbanwa*), and TV commercials provided his main means of earning a living for several years following his firing from Nikkatsu. His two best-known small-screen works, however, are *A Mummy's Love* (*Miira no koi*, 1973), a characteristically oddball entry in Fuji TV's *Horror Unbalance Theatre* (*Kyôfu gekijô anbaransu*) series representing Suzuki's first stab at the horror genre (and most probably Japan's first ever mummy movie), and *Fang in the Hole* (*Ana no kiba*, 1979), an instalment of Fuji's *Sunday Horror* (*Nichiyôbi kyôfu*) series, in which a murdered gangster returns from the grave to haunt his lover. The unrestrained nudity and bloodshed of the latter in particular are indicative of the wild anything-goes approach of 1970s Japanese TV, while both demonstrate how, despite obvious budgetary shortcomings, the uniquely eccentric vision of a filmmaker renowned for his expressive use of colour and scope refused to be hemmed in by the 4:3 ratio – a fact well-worth bearing in mind when Suzuki's hour finally arrived with his return to critical acclaim, *Zigeunerweisen* (*Tsigoineruwaizen*, 1980), which was filmed in this standard Academy aspect ratio.

Before looking at *Branded to Kill* in more detail, it is worth further considering Hasumi's notion that Suzuki was somehow more crucial to the national film culture of this time than Kurosawa, a director famed for his role in bringing the country's cinema to an international audience and the first filmmaker from Japan to have a book devoted to him in the English language, Donald Richie's *The Films of Akira Kurosawa*, published back in 1965.

At this stage, it is fair to say that the golden age represented by Kurosawa was already well over – 1965 was the year in which *Red Beard (Akahige)* was released, the director's final collaboration with Toshiro Mifune and his last for his studio, Toho. Suzuki's, however, was in full swing. The mid-60s represented the last great gasp of the traditional studio system, an era in which the production-line levels of output persisted (487 Japanese films were released in 1965) but in which the studios did not have enough resources to give specialist treatment to would-be auteurs; to take the same financial risks, for example, that Toho had done with *Seven Samurai* (1954), the most expensive film of the period, and one which had taken over a year to produce.

Sure, throughout the decade there were the various studio tent-poles, although these tended to be driven by their stars or special effects, not the name of the director on the poster. The bulk of Nikkatsu's output consisted of program pictures turned out at a conveyor-belt rate of some half dozen a month to feed the rapidly changing schedules of the exhibition outlets within its distribution chain. Provided one didn't stick one's head too far above the parapet, such an environment was conducive to and tolerant of a certain level of experimentation for directors like Suzuki, who directed forty films during his tenure at Nikkatsu, following his debut with *Harbor Toast: Victory Is in Our Grasp (Minato no kanpai: Shôri o wagate ni)*, 1956). This is almost double the number realised by Kurosawa during a period at Toho lasting twice as long.

This studio system epitomized by Nikkatsu was fracturing circa 1967, however, with corners cut, directly-operated venues closed and the contracts of stars and directors ruthlessly severed over the following years in order to fend off the crisis brought about by falling attendances across

the whole spectrum of Japanese cinema. The Nikkatsu that had produced Suzuki's previous films was a very different beast from that which went on to produce *Blind Woman's Curse (Kaidan nobori-ryû)*, 1970) and the *Stray Cat Rock* films (*Nora neko rokku*, 1970-71) and which would commit itself fully to erotic Roman Porno line in November 1971. *Branded to Kill* was released on the cusp of this change.

Hasumi points out that by taking his employers to court and thereby fighting the studio system, Suzuki "was mythologised and turned into a symbol of the season of rebellion" among local cinéphiles during the heated political climate of the era, which anticipated the events May 1968 in France that led to the cancellation of that year's Cannes Film Festival partway through. (Suzuki was only informed of his dismissal by phone on April 1968, while working on *Good Evening Dear Husband*; he sued Nikkatsu in June of this year.)

Nevertheless, the fact is that no one outside Japan would have batted so much as an eyelid at the time. Seijun Suzuki's name meant nothing to foreign journalists (a few of his films, such as *Gate of Flesh*, had been released to the European exploitation circuit, but were never celebrated at more highbrow international events), and it seems highly likely that if Suzuki's career had ended with the *Branded to Kill* farrago, his name would be as well remembered overseas today as such contemporaries at Nikkatsu as Toshio Masuda, Buichi Saitô, Tan Ida and Umetsugu Inoue, similar purveyors of populist pulp generally a lot more profitable than Suzuki's films.

It was during his 1980s renaissance that Western viewers first came to enjoy the pleasures of Seijun Suzuki's idiosyncratic brand of cinema, somewhat perversely through a work that, while regarded as among his finest back in his home country, is relatively little seen or discussed overseas compared with the earlier studio-bound part of his oeuvre. Produced through his independent Cinema Placet company, the surreal ghost story *Zigeunerweisen* was the first in Suzuki's stylish Taisho Trilogy of arthouse movies that continued with *Heat-Haze Theatre (Kagerô-za)*, 1981) and *Yumeji* (1991) – so-called because they were all set during Japan's Taisho era (1912–1926), in which Eastern and Western fashions, mores and political ideas commingled, creating a heady cultural brew that resulted in an inevitable nationalist backlash, exacerbated



by the deteriorating economic situation following the Great Kanto earthquake of 1923 – incidentally the year of Suzuki's birth.

Zigeunerweisen gave Suzuki his first real international exposure when it was awarded a Special Jury Mention at Berlin Film Festival in 1981, leading to his first overseas retrospective in 1984 at Pesaro Film Festival. From these appearances on foreign radars, the Suzuki legend began to grow, and ironically the studio-shot back catalogue of the man charged with losing Nikkatsu so much money when he worked there probably earns more for the company nowadays from overseas retrospectives and DVD releases than any of his contemporaries.

So the question is, how do we position *Branded to Kill* within Suzuki's oeuvre and within the broader situation of Japanese film history at large? Misguided by the small sample of films produced by Nikkatsu at the time that have made it to Western eyes, many have claimed that Suzuki's swansong for the company somehow went against the grain of its roster of predominantly gangster and delinquent-youths-on-the-loose flicks, that it was somehow intended as a cheeky subversion of the formulaic nature of such genre films.

A closer look at Nikkatsu's releases across the decade reveals an output that was incredibly eclectic and threw up just as many cinematic quirks as the typical Suzuki film. It was certainly not as unwaveringly masculine as some have suggested: there were also more female-oriented lines of musicals, romances, literary adaptations and exotic overseas adventures alongside the more macho mash-ups of Western-inspired action genres, which included Takashi Nomura's 'Suki-yaki Western' *Fast-draw Guy (Hayauchi yarô)*, 1961) and Tan Ida's swashbuckling tale of adventure on the high seas, *Pirate Ship: Tiger of the Sea (Kaizoku-sen: Umi no tora)*, 1964) – both of which, incidentally, feature *Branded to Kill*'s Jô Shishido, the face of many a Suzuki title, whose collagen-enhanced physiognomy was a crucial component of his iconic, larger-than-life onscreen presence.

By comparison, work by Suzuki such as *Gate of Flesh (Nikutai no mon)*, 1964), an adaptation of Taijirô

Tamura's groundbreaking novel about a guild of prostitutes set during the occupation, its thematic companion piece *Story of a Prostitute (Shunpuden)*, 1965), another Tamura adaptation about a military "comfort woman" serving alongside the troops in a remote outpost in Manchuria during the war, and *Fighting Elegy (Kenka erejii)*, 1966), a high school-set allegory for the rise of Japanese militarism scripted by New Wave luminary Kaneto Shindô, were rather less frivolous in their ambitions and all the better regarded by local critics for this.

That said, such films represented but one aspect of Suzuki's considerable output, which also included titles like *Fighting Delinquents (Kutabare gurentai)*, 1960), *The Flower and the Angry Waves (Hana to dotô)*, 1963), *Detective Bureau 23: Go to Hell, Bastards! (Tantei jimusho 23: Kutabare akutôdomo)*, 1963) and *Tattooed Life (Irezumi ichidai)*, 1965), portraits of outlaw life of a more generic nature, yet rendered in a sprightly style that was anything but generic.

Still, none of these latter titles look in any way out of alignment with other releases by the company. The defining features of Nikkatsu's films were that they were pitched at a young cosmopolitan audience open to what was going on in the rest of the world. Most downplayed their Japanese origins (in stark contrast to, say, the *yakuza* films released by Toei), embracing the fashions, music and iconographies of Europe and America in a manner that earned them the tag-line 'mukokuseki', meaning borderless, or of no fixed cultural identity.

One need only need look at Takashi Nomura's *A Colt is My Passport (Koruto wa ore no pasupôto)*, a *film noir*-styled story of two hitmen on the run from the mob that looks (and sounds) as like it might have been directed by Sergio Leone, to see that, in terms of conception at least, *Branded to Kill* isn't quite as "out there" as has been suggested. Another Shishido starring vehicle, released a few months before Suzuki's, on 4 February 1967, its portrait of loner outlaws unfolds within a similar no-man's-land of industrial wastelands, anonymous tower blocks, landfill sites and other liminal spaces captured in moody chiaroscuro monochrome and expansive NikkatsuScope widescreen to create a unique and disorienting mood.

That said, *Branded to Kill* still presents quite an extraordinary experience. Opening with the sharp crack of gunfire beneath the Nikkatsu logo before the lilting theme tune kicks in to accompany the credits, from the offset the viewer is immersed in a world that can only be described as pure cinema. Its tale of Shishido's hitman, Gorô Hanada, and his attempts to rise to top-dog position in the underworld ranking of contract killers is pared down to mythic abstraction, its diegetic world the absolute distillation of the *mukokuseki* ethos.

Kazue Nagatsuka's cinematography renders the strong lines and rigid geometry of the modernist interiors of Hanada's own apartment space or the various smoky dive bars in which he skulks in a similarly oblique fashion to Raoul Coutard's work on Jean-Luc Godard's *Alphaville* (1965), conjuring up a completely otherworldly atmosphere through the expressive use of spotlighting, reflections, and low-key illumination, all heightened by the images of falling rain or shower water that add a noisy shimmer to this monochrome graphic minimalism. The everyday spaces of Tokyo have never looked so alien nor so alienating, with potential death lying in every shadow.

At the beginning of the story, Hanada is number three in an organised crime hierarchy in which it is never clear who is employer or fellow employee. Who and where, for example, is the *maboroshi* (phantom) number 1? Could it be, perhaps, the wife (Mariko Ogawa) who flirts openly with a colleague while Hanada's nose hovers over the steaming rice cooker that provides fuel for his killing commitments? Or the exotic but deadly beauty played by the half-Indian actress Annu Mari, whose lair is adorned with rows of Lepidoptera specimens pinned to her walls and who commissions the botched assignment that throws Hanada's life into jeopardy?

The film's ceaseless visual invention often strays over into the realm of the ludicrous. There's a cartoon logic to some of the killings, as Hanada cold-bloodedly slays an unseen victim from another room by inserting his pistol into a drainpipe, rises to take a pot-shot through an open window while riding an inflatable weather balloon, or secretes himself within the mechanism of an elaborate advertising hording in the shape of a giant cigarette lighter.



“Time and place are nonsense,” Suzuki once famously said of his films, and one could well describe the film as the cinematic equivalent of a 1960s Pop Art collage, as some have done. With the baroque framing and editing ellipses increasingly echoing the confused frame of mind of a protagonist kept as much in the dark as the viewer, we might even question whether what we are witnessing is nothing more than a washed-up assassin’s paranoid fever dream. (How many times do we see Hanada swigging from his hip flask to steady his hand as the stakes get higher?)

Characters pop up with little in the way of introduction, only to disappear again without warning, while Suzuki abstains from clearly signalling flashbacks and other temporal changes for what they, further adding to the hallucinatory dream logic. None of this appears to make any sense at all, and it seems obvious why Hori, the president of a company facing an uncertain financial future, might dismiss this febrile vision as incomprehensible.

But within the butterfly-effect maelstrom of the narrative, some form of meaning does come across. We might rationalise the film as an abstract meditation on the absurd extremes of life as a freelance gun-for-hire in the increasingly anonymous, corporate and competitive world of a rapidly modernising Tokyo, or even more specifically, as analogous to Suzuki’s own precarious position within the Nikkatsu hierarchy of its contracted directors.

What is perhaps interesting is how Suzuki’s film coincided with two other existential treatises on the lives of professional criminals that popped up simultaneously elsewhere – namely John Boorman’s *Point Blank* (released in the US on 30 August 1967) and Jean-Pierre Melville’s *Le Samourai* (which premiered in France on 25 October 1967) – all appearing so closely together in their distinct parts of the globe that there can be absolutely no question of mutual influence. Clearly there was something heady in the air in 1967 linking East and West.

But ultimately *Branded to Kill* is of a style all of its own. It operates simultaneously as a singularly nonconformist yet technically-polished mood piece and

as a sophisticated cinematic Rorschach that can be savoured again and again, with every further viewing revealing previously unnoticed aspects and individual meanings. Nonsense it may be, but it is intelligent, stylish and deliriously enjoyable nonsense, nonetheless.

*Jasper Sharp is a writer and curator specialising in Japanese cinema and is the co-editor of the website MidnightEye.com. His books include **Behind the Pink Curtain** and **The Historical Dictionary of Japanese Cinema**.*

*All quotes from Hasumi, Shigehiko, ed. Suzuki Seijun: **The Desert under the Cherry Blossoms**. Rotterdam: **Tijger Reeks**, 1991.*



TRAPPED IN LUST

AIYOKU NO WANA
1973



CAST

GENJIRÔ ARATA as Hoshi

MOEKO EZAWA as Mayuko

NOZOMI YASUDA as Yumeko

RIE NAKAGAWA as Mami

KAZUO 'GAIRA' KOMIZU as Saigo

HATSUO YAMAYA as 'Boss'

CREW

Directed by **ATSUSHI YAMATOYA**

Produced by **GENJIRÔ ARATA**

Written by **YÔZÔ TANAKA**

Cinematography by **TOSHIHIRO ASAKURA**

Music by **KAZUO SUGITA**

TRAPPED IN LUST. HACHIRÔ GURYŪ AND THE CASE OF THE MISSING AUTEUR

by Jasper Sharp

Branded to Kill's script is credited to a certain Hachirô Guryû – the ‘hachi’ part of this pseudonym, meaning ‘eight’, referring to the number of members of this project development team of which Suzuki was the lynchpin. The other seven were Atsushi Yamatoya, Yôzô Tanaka, Chûsei Sone, Seiichirô Yamaguchi, Yutaka Okada, Takeo Kimura and Yasuaki Hangai. A number of these figures were later to become better known for their work in Nikkatsu's new Roman Porno adult line, launched on 20 November 1971, of which *Trapped in Lust (Aiyoku no Wana)* provides a fascinating, albeit slightly unorthodox example, a sort of sexed-up reimagining of the original mould-breaker.

These include Sone, a former scriptwriter co-credited with Teruo Ishii's *Blind Woman's Curse* (1970), who went on to become the first director to establish any sort of legitimacy for Roman Porno in the eyes of critics, and Seiichirô Yamaguchi, who was rather less fortunate, in that his most famous work, *Love Hunter (Rabû hantâ)*, (1972), attracted the eyes of Tokyo Metropolitan Police instead, leading to his conviction on charges of obscenity. (He was later cleared, but subsequently faded from view as far as film history is concerned.)

There were three figures in particular among the Hachirô Guryû team who would be more consistent collaborators with Suzuki in the future. Takeo Kimura was the art director whose distinctive set designs had made many of the Nikkatsu Action movies the 1960s, and in particular Suzuki titles such as *Gate of Flesh* (1964) and *Tokyo Drifter* (1966), such a joy to behold. His presence as part of the team is interesting in that it demonstrates how the look and style of *Branded to Kill* were already key considerations at its scripting stage, and his input was very much a core component of the ‘Suzuki Brand’ when the director returned to the filmmaking fold in the 1980s.

Kimura left Nikkatsu when it made its wholesale switch to adult pictures, but the backstory of the two other Suzuki collaborators with their dirty fingerprints all over *Trapped in Lust* – director Atsushi Yamatoya and screenwriter Yôzô Tanaka – suggests that this transition, as dramatic as it may seem, nevertheless didn't represent such a complete rupture with the past.

Both, like Sone, were lower-ranking Nikkatsu employees during the 1960s who moonlighted in the independent *eroduction*, or pink film (*pinku eiga*) world, with all three partnered on scripts, under the pseudonym of Yoshiaki Ôtani, for the legendary leftwing maverick Kôji Wakamatsu.

Yamatoya helmed five pink films in total, including *Season of Betrayal (Uragiri no kisetsu)*, (1966) and *The Pistol that Sprouted Hair (Mô no haeta kenjû)*, (1968) for Wakamatsu Productions. Today, however, he is primarily remembered as a scriptwriter, penning Roman Porno scripts for such well-regarded works as Toshiya Fujita's *Wet Sands of August (Hachigatsu no nureta suna)*, (1971) and *August Is the Smell of Eros (Hachigatsu wa erosu no nioi)*, (1972), Chûsei Sone's *Foreign Mistress Oman: Fallen Equinox Flowers (Rashamen Oman: Higanbana wa chitta)*, (1972) and *Naked Rashomon (Showa onna michi: Rashomon)*, (1973) and Norifumi Suzuki's notorious Sadean spectacle *Star of David: Beautiful Girl Hunter (Dabide no hoshi: Bishôjo-gari)*, (1979). Outside of Roman Porno, he retained a crucial creative association with Seijun Suzuki, writing the director's *Story of Sorrow and Sadness, Capone Cries Hard (Kapone ô ni naku)*, (1985) and his surprising foray into *anime* with *Lupin the Third: The Golden Legend of Babylon (Rupan sansei: Babiron no ôgon densetsu)*, (1985).

Yôzô Tanaka too, as a scriptwriter, was incredibly prolific within the Roman Porno field, with such titles as Sone's *Virgin Courtesan (Maruhi jorô shijô)*, (1972) and *Sigh (Tameike)*, (1973), Masaru Konuma's *Flower and Snake (Hana to hebi)*, (1974) and *Wife to Be Sacrificed (Ikenie fujin)*, (1974) and the 1977 Shôgorô Nishimura remake of *Gate of Flesh (Nikutai no mon)*, originally filmed by Suzuki in 1964. Outside of Nikkatsu, he wrote the scripts for such landmarks of 1980s Japanese cinema as Shinji Sômai's *Sailor Suit and Machine Gun (Sêrâ-fuku to kikanjû)*, (1981) and *The Catch (Gyoei no mure)*, (1983), and Yôichi Sai's *The Woman in the Black Dress (Kuroi doresu no onna)*, (1987).



Trapped in Lust was Yamatoya's only film as a director to be released by Nikkatsu. Technically speaking it was not, however, a Roman Porno film. As an independent feature made outside of the studio system, it is a better described as a pink film, although Nikkatsu at this point had something of a symbiotic relationship with this less reputable production sector in that it would pad out its cinema schedules with these independent productions included on the lower part of its triple bills alongside two bona fide Roman Porno produced in-house.

The production outfit behind *Trapped in Lust* was a small enterprise called Tenshugikan, headed by a certain Genjirō Arata, who also plays the lead role. It represents one of Arata's few acting appearances, but he would acquire a greater significance within Japanese film history as the bull-headed producer who brought Suzuki back to critical attention with *Zigeunerweisen* (1980), touring the film across Japan in a large tent theatre when unable to secure conventional distribution for it.

Arata produced all of the films in Suzuki's celebrated Taisho Trilogy, which also include *Heat-Haze Theatre* (1981) and *Yumeji* (1991). All three were penned by Tanaka with Kimura's distinctive art direction contributing to the Suzuki style. In fact it is easy to see traces of *Trapped in Lust* in Tanaka's script for *Zigeunerweisen's* ghostly tale of two friends – one a refined scholar of German always clad immaculately in Western dress, the other a saké-swilling, kimono-clad libertine – who nevertheless share very similar tastes in women (specifically reincarnated doppelgangers).

Tanaka's plot for it is not so much a remake of *Branded to Kill* as a rearrangement of its basic elements – a hitman told to lie low after fouling up a job, a wife seen to die who keeps disappearing and popping up in places she shouldn't, and numerous other segues into the surreal. There's also the doll motif carried over from Yamatoya's earlier *Dutch Wife of the Wasteland* (*Kōya no dacchi waifu*, 1967), a film released mere months after *Branded* that nonetheless shared many memorable elements with it (the 'Dutch wife' of the title refers to the Japanese term for a sex doll).


Trapped in the Lust is a brilliant testament to the fact that, rather than mere cheap exploitation, in its

early days, the adult film genre was regarded as liberating, daring and anti-authoritarian, and that interesting and intelligent things could be realised within it – and indeed were being realised in its first decade before succumbing to decadence in the 1980s.

Similarly, it highlights how directors are seldom the solitary creative geniuses they are taken for when creating their best work. The concept of the auteur in a studio such as Nikkatsu makes sense in that directors tended to assemble a certain crew of collaborators (or *gumi*), and work again and again with the same performers, whether by choice of whether assigned by the studio head. A certain style and stance is therefore inevitable across a single director's body of work, but what is really fascinating about *Trapped in Lust* is how it demonstrates this crucial input from the director's regular associates. It might therefore be seen as a missing piece in the puzzle in trying to make sense of Suzuki's evolving oeuvre, a stepping stone between *Branded to Kill* and *Zigeunerweisen* in which Suzuki is conspicuous by his absence.

The Hachirō Guryū collective had several further scripts waiting in the wings before its ringleader was fired in 1968, perhaps as a warning shot by Nikkatsu president Hori to the studio's other creative staff to tow the company line and make more commercially-driven works. Because of this incident, such tantalising prospects as the putative sequels to both *Fighting Elegy* and *Branded to Kill* were never made...

However, another sort of sequel to *Branded to Kill* was eventually directed by Suzuki. The long awaited follow-up, *Pistol Opera* (*Pisutoru opera*), was released in Japan on 27 October 2001, with Shishido's 'number 3' given a female twist and played by Makiko Esumi. Despite its script attributed to Hachirō Guryū, many of *Branded to Kill's* original team were not party to this new film, having moved on to pastures new (or in the case of Sone, having disappeared from view entirely). Yamatoya himself had sadly passed on to cancer of the oesophagus in 1993. (His son, Gyō, born in 1976, followed in his father's footsteps to a screenwriting career, albeit in a very different sector of the market – in kids anime – with credits for such television series as *Kinniku Man*, *Transformers* and *Naruto*.)



One could fuel an entire retrospective of films whose constellation of shared staff and thematic elements feed backwards or forwards to Suzuki's iconic yet iconoclastic masterpiece of 1967, with Yamatoya's input in many of these ironically more a constant than that of the actual *Branded to Kill* director himself. *Trapped in Lust* suggests the extent to which *Branded to Kill*, while perhaps not such a typical work by its director as it is sometimes labeled, represents a 'Last Supper' moment, following which Suzuki and his seven Hachirô Guryû disciples (plus the crucial new figure of Genjirô Arata) went their own ways out into the wider world of Japanese cinema to cause havoc and shake it up for good.

Jasper Sharp

ABOUT THE TRANSFER

Branded to Kill was transferred and supplied by The Criterion Collection.

This new high-definition digital transfer was created on a Spirit Datacine from a fine-grain master positive. Thousands of instances of dirt, debris, scratches, splices, warps, jitter and flicker were manually removed using MTI's DRS and Pixel Farm's PFClean, while Image Systems' DVNR was used for small dirt, grain and noise reduction.

The monaural soundtrack was remastered at 24-bit from the original soundtrack print. Clicks, thumbs, and hum were manually removed using Pro Tools HD. Crackle was attenuated using AudioCube's integrated workstation.

Telecine Supervisor: Lee Kline

Telecine colourist: Joe Gawler/Technicolor, New York

PRODUCTION CREDITS

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QC and Proofing: Anthony Nield, Francesco Simeoni

Technical Producer: James White

Authoring: David Mackenzie

Subtitling: IBF Digital

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Design: Emily Fordham

SPECIAL THANKS

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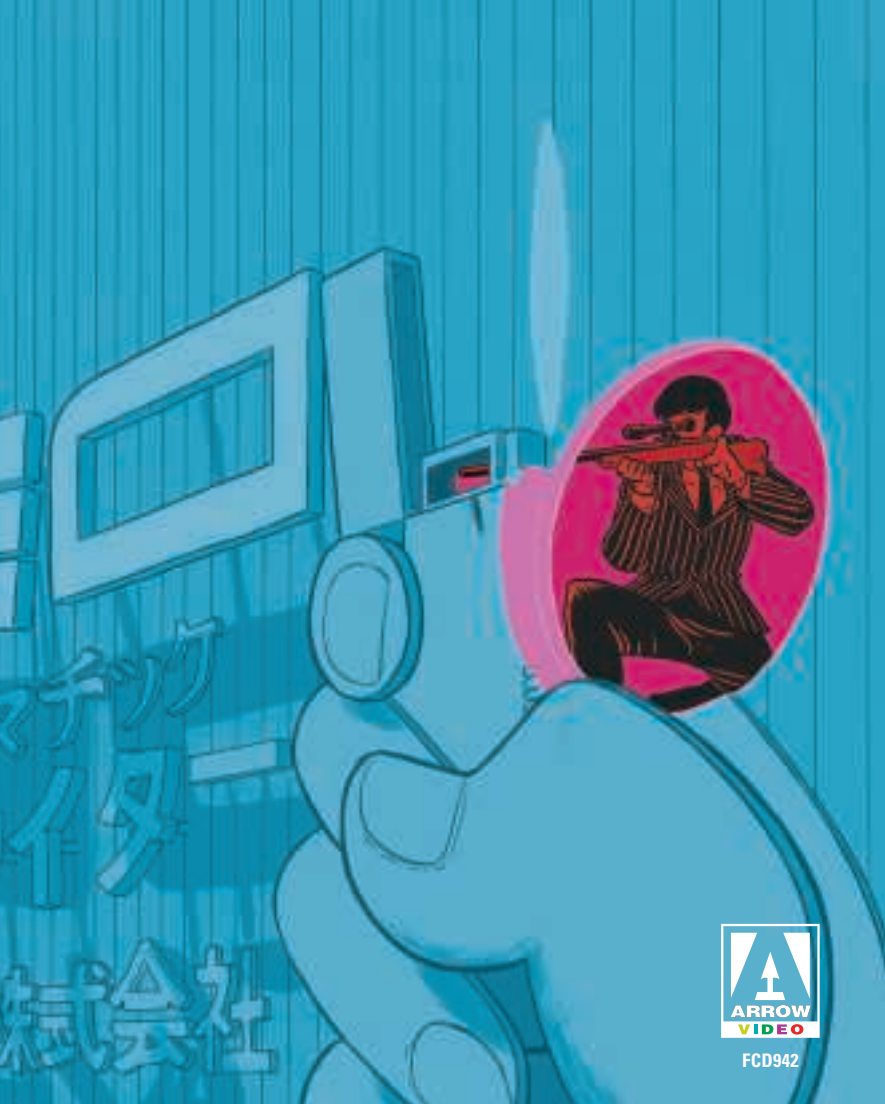
The Suzuki Family

Fumiko Takagi

Koshi Ueno

James White





FCD942