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STREET NOBSTER

現代やくざ 人斬りと太
Gendai yakuza - hitokiri yota

Original release date: 6 May 1972
88 minutes

CREW

Directed by **Kinji Fukasaku**
Screenplay by **Yoshihiro Ishimatsu, Kinji Fukasaku**
Produced by **Koji Shundo, Toru Yoshida, Kenji Takamura**
Director of photography **Hanjiro Nakazawa**
Lighting by **Hideo Motomochi**
Audio recording by **Tadahisa Komatsu**
Production design by **Shuichiro Nakamura**
Action director **Takashi Hio**
Music by **Toshiaki Tsushima**
Edited by **Osamu Tanaka**
Assistant director **Shinichi Hashimoto**

CAST

Isamu Okita **Bunta Sugawara**
Boss Yato **Noboru Ando**
Gunji **Kyosuke Machida**
Kimiyo **Mayumi Nagisa**
Kizaki **Asao Koike**
Owada **Asao Uchida**

Karasawa **Nobu Yana**
Miyahara **Hideo Murota**
Taniguchi **Noboru Mitani**
Katsuko **Mayumi Fujisato**
Tetsuo **Nenji Kobayashi**



MOB RULES: FUKASAKU'S STREET MOBSTER

by Jasper Sharp

Street Mobster marks a game-changing moment in the evolution of the yakuza genre, in which the classic tropes of honour and gang loyalty espoused in Toei's *ninkyō eiga* ("chivalry films") of the 1960s, characterised by the stylised violence and clean-cut heroics of the studio's most emblematic star, Takakura Ken, were brutally swept aside with a bold and bloody fanfare. The kimono-clad, katana-wielding protagonists of the classic *ninkyō* titles inhabited a very different world to the unruly rabble with knives and snarls depicted by Fukasaku Kinji. While the rituals and dynamics of gang life of these earlier films, typically shot on studio sound stages, usually unfolded in the historically safe spaces of the Meiji (1868-1912) or Taisho (1912-26) eras, Fukasaku took his camera to the streets to present a hidden parallel history to Japan's postwar miracle that touched a raw nerve with many viewers of the time.

The original Japanese title spells out the radical shift in approach: *Gendai yakuza: Hitokiri yota* translates as 'Modern yakuza: murderous hoodlum' or 'murderous good-for-nothing'. Nevertheless, Fukasaku's revolution itself belonged right at the tail end of a six-part series starring Sugawara Bunta that had kicked off three years before with *Law of the Hoodlum* (*Yotamono no okite*, 1969) and continued with *Hoodlum's Code* (*Yotamono no okite*, 1969), *Shinjuku Hoodlum* (*Shinjuku no yotamono*, 1970), *Returning the Offering Cup* (*Sakazuki kaeshimasu*, 1971) and *Three Brothers Bloody Cherry Blossoms* (*Chi-zakura san kyōdai*, 1971). However, despite the contemporary settings, these previous entries – the first two of which were directed by Furuhashi Yasuo, then the third, fourth and fifth by Takakuwa Shin, Saeki Kiyoshi and Nakajima Sadao respectively – didn't stray quite so far from the *giri* (self-sacrificing loyalty) versus *ninjō* (humanity or compassion) dramatic template of their *ninkyō* predecessors.

This final entry, however, has all the hallmarks we associate with the director's most celebrated cycle, the *Battles Without Honour and Humanity* (1973-74) series. Its raucous displays of grasping avarice, in-yer-face pugnacity and craven acts of self-preservation presented a complete stylistic as well as a tonal rupture with the old guard, unfolding in an unflagging barrage of frenetic zooms and whip pans, canted angles and disorienting cuts, the agitated handheld camera pitching the viewer right into the maelstrom of the action.



The word *jitsuroku* emerged in the 1970s as a buzzword to describe the new gritty approach Fukasaku brought to the table, an approach subsequently embraced by other Toei directors like Nakajima Sadao and Yamashita Kôzaku. Bearing similar connotations to 'exposé' in the English language, the two characters comprising the word, literally meaning 'true record', were regularly to be seen boldly emblazoned across the front pages of the more sensationalistic newspapers of the era (and indeed even to this day). They promised a complete and unflinching access to a lawless demimonde beyond everyday experience, and in a cinematic context, a documentary-style verisimilitude. Unsurprising perhaps that the word would also work itself into the titles of many of the era's sex films, such as Nikkatsu's *True Story Shirakawa Kazuko: Naked Resumé (Jitsuroku Shirakawa Kazuko: Hadaka no nirekisho*, Sone Chûsei, 1973), a tell-all chronicle of Roman Porno's first major star's ascent into the limelight.

The rift between the old and new is immediately signalled in Fukasaku's film in the expository pre-credit sequence in which our feral antihero Okita Isamu recounts his turbulent upbringing, narrated over a montage of grainy blue-toned monochrome still shots and flashback footage that abruptly bursts forth into the distinctive hues of Fujicolor, the cool palette of which only serve to make the crimson sprays of blood explode more violently from the screen.

Okita's birthdate of 15 August 1945 is a significant one, coinciding with Emperor Hirohito's surrender address to the nation, bringing about an end to World War II and a more optimistic new beginning, at least for some. With his father a casualty of war and his mother a drunken slattern who disappears from the picture at early stage, Okita is presented with few other paths through life in the lawless dog-eat-dog world of the immediate postwar decade than crime. As he rages uncontrolled through the streets of Kawasaki as a *chinpira* gang runner, he finds an uneasy solidarity amongst other rootless members of his generation, a swarm of growling and spitting young thugs similarly smarting from the scars of societal and parental neglect in the new moral vacuum.

Our story begins proper after Okita emerges from a lengthy spell in the slammer, gazing at the garbled mess of the smog-filled skyline of a city changed beyond recognition. The old gangs now rule roost. The street punks outnumber the normals, as he observes, and the bosses of the rival clans operate behind a facade of corporate respectability. Celebrating his liberty by immediately diving into the hot tub with a young beauty at a soapland bathhouse (a semi-legit brothel then known as a *toruko-buro*, or Turkish bath, before a campaign by a prominent Turkish scholar forced the name change), he soon finds himself in hot water of a very different kind.

The series as a whole, but most specifically Fukasaku's final episode, not only changed the tenor of the yakuza film. It thrust a new star to the forefront too, in the figure of Sugawara Bunta, a man who would come to personify the new breed of screen gangster. Or rather, just like Okita's emergence from his spell in confinement, it marked his return to leading man status after a period of a decade in which the local film industry had changed dramatically.

Indeed, although ten years older, one can find many parallels between Sugawara's own life and that of the character he plays. He was born in 1933 in the northern city of Sendai, where his father, Sugiwaru Yoshisuke, an artist who exhibited his Western-style paintings under the name of Hazama Jirô, was then working as a journalist for the Kahoku Shinpô newspaper. Sugawara was just four when his parents broke up and he moved with his father to Tokyo where he was raised by his new stepmother, a woman he believed to be his real mother until a shock discovery several years later. At the age of ten, he was evacuated back to Sendai, but returned to the capital at the end of the war.

Sugawara then enrolled at the prestigious Waseda University to study law, during which point he started modelling for the fashion designer Nakahara Junichi. Nevertheless, unable to pay his tuition fees, in 1955 he was forced to terminate his studies. While continuing to model, he made his first minor screen appearance in 1956 in a romantic musical melodrama directed by Hidaka Shigeaki called *Fog Descends in Sorrow Street (Aishû no machi ni kiri ga furu)*, an opportunity he told Mark Schilling in an interview published in *The Yakuza Movie Book: A Guide to Japanese Gangster Films* (Stone Bridge Press, 2003) that he treated as "another kind of part-time job". Following this, however, he was scouted, at the age of 25, by the smallest of the six studios then in operation, Shintoho, who at the time was struggling to retain even a miniscule share of the market with an output predominantly consisting of luridly-marketed low-budget crime and horror pictures.

His first appearance for the studio, low down in the credits for Ishii Teruo's proto-yakuza movie *White Line (Shirosen himitsu chitai)*, 1958), led to him rising up the ranks in two further titles for the same director, the female gang boss movie *Rage of the Queen Bee (Joôbachi no ikari)*, 1958) featuring studio glamour girl Kubo Naoko, and the ski slope-set thriller *Struggle to the Death in a Blizzard (Môfubuki no shitô)*, 1959). Sugawara landed his first starring role in *Girl Divers at Spook Mansion (Ama no bakemono yashiki)*, Magadani Morihei, 1959), playing a rather bland police detective amongst the bevy of lissome pearl divers whose coastal community is beset by a string of supernatural phenomena. Alas, Sugawara's reign as a Shintoho star in a further dozen or so titles, including playing the dashing military lieutenant hero in *Female Slave Ship (Onna dorei-sen)*, Onoda Yoshiki 1960), was cut short by the studio's bankruptcy in 1961. He weathered out the greater part of the decade at Shochiku, but despite appearing in literally dozens of titles for this larger



company between 1961 and 1967, was not afforded even a fraction of the same favour as he had enjoyed with his previous employers.

During the period after dropping out of university, Sugawara ran with a pretty wild herd, as he himself hints at in his interview with Schilling. “Even a job as a bartender in a dive would have been OK. Instead, I ended up working as a kind of errand boy. I hated that, so I tried something else and, when I’d scratched up some money, I’d go drinking. I was living on ramen and stuff like that. If I woke up the next day without money, I’d go out and look for a job. That’s the kind of life I was living... I had yakuza friends... I would meet them at bars – at places where I was a regular.”

It was another real-life gangster figure that ushered in the next phase in Sugawara’s fortunes. In 1965, Shochiku cast former gang boss Andô Noboru (1926 - 2015), just out from a six-year prison stretch the previous year, in *Blood and Rules* (*Chi to okite*, Yuasa Yoshio, 1965), a dramatic account of his criminal antics that launched him on a new path as an actor and in which Sugawara appeared as one of his gang members. After a number of further pictures together, Andô was coaxed over to Toei by the producer Shundô Kôji and invited Sugawara to join him. Andô appears as the gang boss Yatô in *Street Mobster*, while two other films based on his life directed by Satô Junya, *Yakuza and Feuds: The True Account of the Ando Gang* (*Yakuza to kôsô: Jitsuroku Andô-gumi*, 1973) and *True Account of the Ando Gang: Story of Attack* (*Jitsuroku Andô-gumi: Shûgekihen*, 1973), are emblematic of the *jitsuroku* approach.

Born in 1930, Fukasaku himself had led something of a chequered career by the time he embarked on his first film with Sugawara. Just three years older, he had similarly experienced the hardships of the war and its aftermath firsthand. Entering Toei in 1953 as an assistant, he made his directing debut during the peak years of Japanese film production, with the two *Drifting Detective* (*Fûraibôtantei*, 1961) outdoors adventures. Effectively intended by the studio as little more than screen-fillers, they nonetheless are of interest in that they feature early starring roles for Chiba Shinichi, later better known globally as the star of *The Street Fighter* (*Gekitotsu! Satsujin ken*, Ozawa Shigehiro, 1974), Sonny Chiba. Several further crime and action potboilers ensued before Fukasaku’s first real film of note, *Jakoman and Tetsu* (*Jakoman to Tetsu*, 1964), a Hokkaido-set tale of derring-do starring Takakura Ken as the titular Tetsu, as he fights to protect the inhabitants of a fishing village from Tanba Tetsurô’s one-eyed outlaw, Jakoman.

The film was enough of a success to see Fukasaku partnering up with Takakura again for *Wolves, Pigs and Men* (*Okami to buta to ningen*, 1964), who played one of three brothers (alongside Mikuni Rentaro and Kitaaji Kinya) for whom blood ties mean nothing when a

big stash of filthy lucre comes between them. The film is seen as very much anticipating Fukasaku’s later *jitsuroku* output, but this Molotov cocktail of gritty realism, abrasive violence, and overwhelming cynicism in its depiction of those left behind by Japan’s economic miracle of the 1950s didn’t gel with the public mood of the year of the Tokyo Olympics when it was released. Furthermore, it also arrived a mere fortnight after another Takakura film, the title that is seen as marking the beginning of Toei’s more stylised *ninkyô* line, *A Story of Japanese Yakuza* (*Nihon kyôkaku-den*, Makino Masahiro, 1964). Takakura and Fukasaku would never work together again, and with his film’s box office failure, the director was sidelined at Toei while the actor became its hottest property.

Over the next five years, Fukasaku directed but a small handful of titles at Toei, the most noteworthy of which was *The Green Slime* (*Ganma 3-gô: Uchû daikusen*, 1968), an American co-production filmed at the company’s studios featuring a non-Japanese cast and a legendary funky theme song by Richard Delvy. His best known works from this period – *Black Lizard* (*Kurotokage*, 1968), *Blackmail Is My Life* (*Kyôkatsu koso waga jinsei*, 1968) and *Black Rose Mansion* (*Kuro bara no yakata*, 1969) – were made when he moved over to Shochiku on loan.

Fukasaku’s return to Toei with *Japan Organized Crime Boss* (*Nihon bôryoku-dan: Kumichô*, 1969), featuring another *ninkyô* icon, Tsuruta Kôji, playing alongside Andô Noboru and the director’s actress wife, Nakahara Sanae, marked the first time he worked with Sugawara, who had moved over to the studio two years prior. While it was certainly full of all the elements of the titles that would launch the director to the forefront of the genre over the next few years, at this point he was still very much viewed as a bad box-office prospect by his producers.

The industry as a whole was in a precarious position by the 1970s. While released by Toei, Fukasaku’s two great critical hits from the early part of the decade, *If You Were Young: Rage* (*Kimi ga wakamono nara*, 1970), about a group of youths attempting to make their way in 1960s Tokyo by clubbing together to buy a truck, and his damning indictment of the government’s activities during and after the Pacific War, *Under the Flag of the Rising Sun* (*Gunki hatameku moto ni*, 1972), were both produced and financed independently. Between these titles, Fukasaku served as assistant director (along with former Nikkatsu helmer Masuda Toshio) on Twentieth Century-Fox’s *Tora! Tora! Tora!* (Richard Fleischer, 1970) and made another yakuza film featuring Tsuruta and Andô, *Sympathy for the Underdog* (*Bakutogaijin butai*, 1971)

And then the assignment that would first place Fukasaku alongside Sugawara in his first leading role for the director. With Sugawara’s streetwise renegade at the eye of the storm



of the director's raw and electrifying aesthetic, *Street Mobster* consummately blended violence and action with social commentary, thrusting the yakuza genre into new territory.

The two were back mere months later with the effective retread of the same story, *Outlaw Killers: Three Mad Dog Brothers* (*Hito-kiri yota: Kyōken San-kyōdai*, 1972), then shortly after that, the first of the *Battles Without Honour and Humanity* films. A critical as well as a commercial smash (it was voted the second best film of the year by Kinema Junpo magazine), the first instalment of this epic saga of postwar organised crime gangs saw Toei, Japan's leading producer of mob movies, consolidating its grip on its home turf and director Fukasaku Kinji emerging to secure the position of its kingpin, a role he would justifiably retain for much of the 1970s.

Jasper Sharp is a writer, curator and filmmaker based in the UK. He is the co-founder (with Tom Mes) of the website Midnight Eye and the author of Behind the Pink Curtain (2008) and The Historical Dictionary of Japanese Cinema (2011). He is also the co-director, alongside Tim Graham, of the documentary The Creeping Garden (2014).







ABOUT THE TRANSFER

Street Mobster has been transferred in High Definition by Toei Company and the film is presented in its original aspect ratio of 2.35:1.

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc and booklet produced by: **Ewan Cant**

Executive Producers: **Kevin Lambert and Francesco Simeoni**

Technical Producer: **James White**

QC: **Nora Mehenni**

Blu-ray authoring: **Visual Data Media**

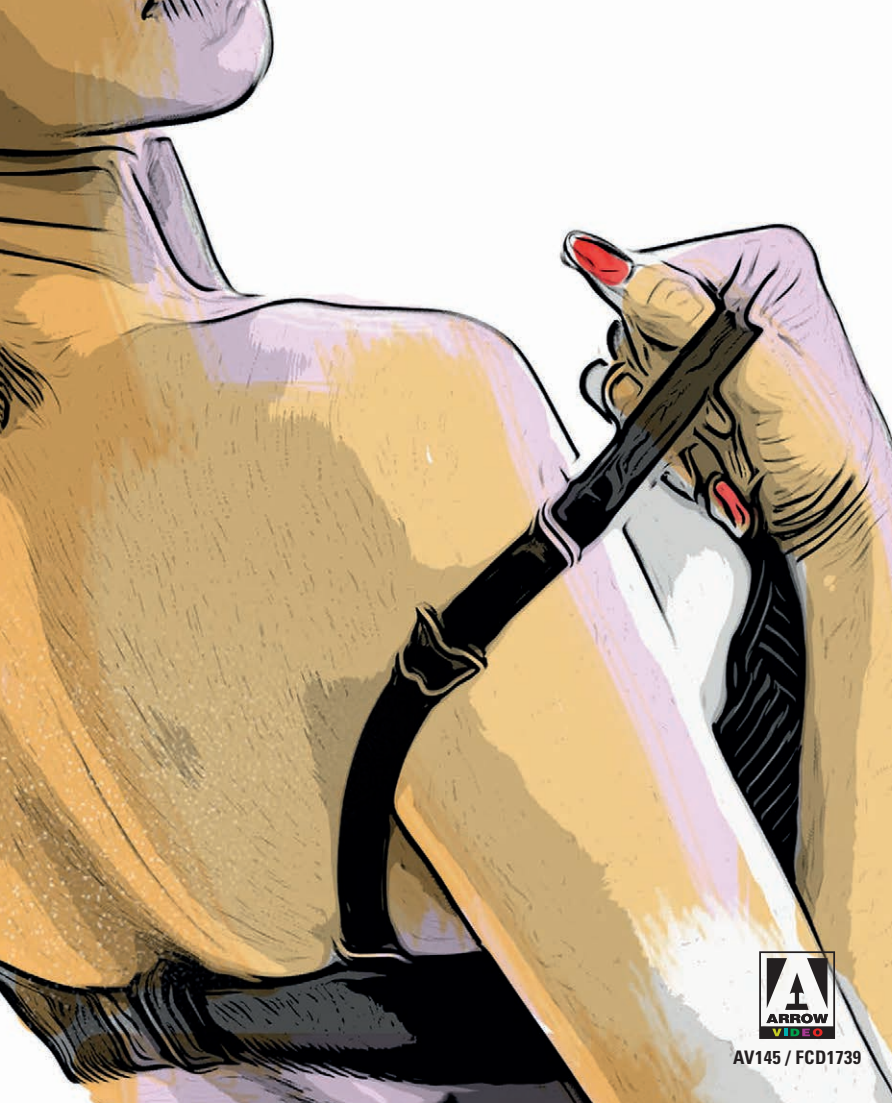
Subtitling: **The Engine House Media Services**

Artist: **Chris Malbon**

Design: **Obviously Creative**

SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Sigrid Larsen, Tom Mes, Leroy Moore, Jasper Sharp, Naoki Shinozaki,
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