

HEIAN "ARISTOCRATIC" PERIOD (794-1185)

Gate of Hell (*Jigokumon*)

1953 Daiei, 86 minutes, color

- ▶ **Director:** Teinosuké Kinugasa
- ▶ **Cast:** Kazuo Hasegawa, Machiko Kyo, Isao Yamagata, et al
- ▶ **Recommendation:** Of historical background interest. A psychological thriller.
- ▶ **Ratings:** AllMovie 4/5, Amazon.com 4/5, IMDb 7.3/10, Rotten Tomatoes -/69%

In 1159, when samurai Endo Morito defends his lord from a coup attempt in the Imperial capital of Kyoto, he is to be rewarded with anything he desires. He asks to marry Lady Kesa, not realizing that she is already wed to Watanabé Wataru, one of the ruling family's lieges. Even after finding out, Morito clings to his wish, challenging the husband to release her, but Lady Kesa unshakably stays faithful, and Morito's stubborn obsession eventually leads to tragedy.

Awards: Cannes Film Festival (1954), Palme d'Or. New York Film Critics Circle Award, Best Foreign Language Film. 27th Academy Awards (1954), Best Costume Design, Best Foreign Language Film (honorary).

DVD: Region 1 (USA) version not commercially available

VHS: Home Vision Entertainment (2000)



Kuroneko "Black Cat" (*Yabu no naka no kuroneko* "Black Cat from the Grove")

1968 Toho, 99 minutes, b&w

- ▶ **Director:** Kaneto Shindo
- ▶ **Cast:** Nobuko Otowa, Kiwako Taichi, Kichiémon Nakamura, Kei Sato, et al
- ▶ **Recommendation:** Atmospheric and violent samurai ghost story, surprisingly erotic.
- ▶ **Ratings:** AllMovie 3/5, Amazon.com 4.7/5, IMDb 7.6/10, Netflix 4.1/5, Rotten Tomatoes 92%/87%

In the 10th century, Yoné and Shigé, mother and daughter, are raped and murdered by arrogant mercenaries at their farm just outside of Kyoto, south of the Rashomon "main city gate." Three years later their onryo "vengeful ghosts" begin to lure samurai to their haunted home and kill them. The Emperor himself orders general Minamoto Raiko (949-1021) to vanquish the menace. He sends the wild and fierce young warrior Gintoki, who discovers in an eerie, beautiful scene that the specters are his own mother and wife. After spiritual purification, he meets the demons in a thrilling fight.

DVD: Eureka Video (non-USA PAL region 2 version)

Rashomon

1950 Daiei, 88 minutes, b&w

- ▶ **Director:** Akira Kurosawa
- ▶ **Cast:** Toshiro Mifuné, Masayuki Mori, Machiko Mori, Takashi Shimura, et al
- ▶ **Recommendation:** Not of historical interest. No major samurai combat.



Great plot. A masterpiece of world cinema, one of the finest films ever made.

- ▶ **Ratings:** AllMovie 5/5, Amazon.com 4.5/5, IMDb 8.5/10, Netflix 3.8/5, Rotten Tomatoes 100%/93%

A story of rape and murder told from wildly different, conflicting, and self-serving points of view.

The director said this of *Rashomon*: "Human beings are unable to be honest with themselves about themselves. They cannot talk about themselves without embellishing. This script portrays such human beings -- the kind who cannot survive without lies to make them feel they are better people than they really are." (Akira Kurosawa, *Something Like an Autobiography*)

Rashomon "main city gate" is the name of the southern gate built in ancient Nara and Kyoto.

Awards: National Board of Review (1951), Best Director, Best Foreign Film. Venice International Film Festival (1951), Lion of San Marco for Best Film. 24th Academy Awards (1952), Honorary Academy Award.

DVD: Criterion (2002), Essential Art House (2008)

Taira Clan Saga (*Shin Heiké monogatari* "New tales of the Taira Clan")

1955 Daiei, 108 minutes color

- ▶ **Director:** Kenji Mizoguchi
- ▶ **Cast:** Raizo Ichikawa, Ichijiro Oya, Michiyo Koguré, Tatsuya Ishiguro, et al

