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## Ran (JAPANESE-FRENCH-COLOR)

Tokyo, June 1.

An Orion Classics release of a Herald Ace-Nippon Herald-Greenwich Films co-production. Produced by Masato Hara, Serge Silberman. Directed by Akira Kurosawa. Stars Tatsuya Nakadai. Screenplay, Kurosawa, Hideo Oguni, Masato Ide, based on "King Lear" by William Shakespeare; camera (color), Takao Saito; music, Toru Takemitsu; art directors, Yoshiro Muraki, Shinobu Muraki. No further credits provided. Reviewed at Tokyo Film Festival, May 31, 1985. Running time: **161 MINS.**

Lord Ichimonji Hidetora . Tatsuya Nakadai  
Taro . . . . . Satoshi Terao  
Jiro . . . . . Jinpachi Nezu  
Saburo . . . . . Daisuke Ryu  
Lady Kaede . . . . . Mieko Harada  
The Fool . . . . . Peter  
Kurogane . . . . . Hisashi Igawa  
Tango . . . . . Masayuke Yui  
Lady Sue . . . . . Yoshiko Miyazaki

Akira Kurosawa has turned once again to Shakespeare for source material, just as he did nearly 30 years ago when "Macbeth" became the memorable "Throne Of Blood." Now, at age 75, the director has made his most costly epic to date, and it's a dazzlingly successful addition to his distinguished career. Pic should mop up in its home territory, and exceed the business of his previous film, "Kagemusha," in art houses the world over.

The basis of "Ran" (literally, "Chaos") is "King Lear," but with a few minor modifications. Chief of these is that the old king's offspring are now three sons rather than three daughters, though all the basic motivations of the original remain intact. On his 70th birthday, Lord Hidetora announces he's passing authority on to his eldest son, Taro; when his youngest, Saburo, who genuinely cares for his father, violently protests, he's banished. Subsequently, Taro treats his father shamefully, as does the middle son, Jiro, and eventually the two join forces to attack their father's castle. Only the old king, now losing his mind, survives the carnage, and since Jiro has arranged to have his brother murdered, he assumes total power. Pic climaxes with a battle between Jiro's forces and those of Saburo and his allies, with most of the principals expiring.

With great tragic material such as "King Lear" to work with, Kurosawa is in his element. He starts the film in a leisurely way as he sets up the drama and intros the principal characters, but from the very beginning his use of bold color and dynamic camera angles indicates a master at the peak of his powers. The two major battle sequences, the first about an hour into the film, the second providing the climax, are superbly staged and, for sheer spectacle, have not been equaled in the cinema for several years.

Daringly, Kurosawa stages the first part of the attack on the king's castle without any sounds of battle; only sonorous music accompanies the violence and destruction, as lethal arrows zip brutally into bodies; the ladies of the court fall upon each other with daggers when they realize defeat is inevitable, until only the old king sits in the blazing building, miraculously unscathed. Only with the noise of the gunshot that kills Taro does Kurosawa, utilizing a superb stereo soundtrack, introduce the deafening din of the battle.

The second major action sequence is set in spacious fields and hillsides as the colorful armies meet in mortal conflict and riders crash from their galloping horses in countless numbers.

In addition to these genuinely enthralling sequences, Kurosawa provides gripping drama and intrigue in the court scenes. Changing the sexes of the king's heirs provides not only fine roles for three excel-

lent actors, but also gives Mieko Harada, as the evil, scheming Lady Kaede (who goads first one brother than another into war and destruction), the opportunity to play an unforgettable character role, a role similar to that of Lady Macbeth in "Throne Of Blood;" her fate is spectacularly bloody.

Tatsuya Nakadai, in superb makeup, is the king, and it's a tribute to this relatively young actor that he's so convincing in the role; the later scenes of despair and madness are immensely moving. In the part of the fool, the king's loyal jester, Peter, a well-known Japanese transvestite, is startling and touching.

Those who criticized the Westernized music in "Kagemusha" should find no cause for complaint in Toru Takemitsu's excellent score, and visually the film is quite breathtaking. Indeed, all technical departments are first-rate.

At just over two hours and 40 minutes, "Ran" seems not a moment too long; the intensity of the drama easily sustains itself over this running time. Credit must go to French coproducer Serge Silberman (who previously produced films by the late Luis Buñuel) and Kurosawa's Japanese backers for allowing this peerless director to make his long-planned epic. Its success is a credit to all. —*Strat.*