

Document Citation

Title	Kumonosu-jo
Author(s)	K.C. (Monthly Film Bulletin)
Source	<i>Monthly Film Bulletin</i>
Date	
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Kumonosu-jo (Throne of blood), Kurosawa, Akira, 1957

KUMONOSU-JO (Throne of Blood), Japan, 1957

Cert: A. *dist:* Curzon. *p.c.:* Toho. *assoc.p:* Akira Kurosawa, Sojiro Motoki. *d:* Akira Kurosawa. *sc:* Hideo Oguni, Shinobu Hashimoto, Ryuzo Kikushima, Akira Kurosawa, based on Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. *ph:* Asaichi Nakai. *a.d.:* Yoshiro Murai. *m:* Masaru Sato. *sd.rec:* Fumio Yanoguchi. *l.p.:* Toshiro Mifune (*Taketoki Washizu*), Isuzu Yamada (*Asaji, his wife*), Takashi Shimura (*Noriyasu Odagura*), Minoru Chiaki (*Yoshiaki Miki*), Akira Kubo (*Yoshiteru, his son*), Takamaru Sasaki (*Kuniharu Tsuzuki*), Yoichi Tachikawa (*Kunimaru, his son*), Chieko Naniwa (*Weird Woman*). 9,450 ft. 105 mins.

Two Samurai, Washizu and Miki, who command forts under the authority of Tsuzuki, Lord of Cobweb Castle, throw back the forces of a rival War Lord, Inui. After the battle they are riding through the forest which surrounds Cobweb Castle when they meet an old woman spinning in a lonely glade. She tells Washizu that he will first have command of North Mansion, then, one day, the control of Cobweb Castle. But Miki's son, not his own, will succeed him. The two friends laugh at the old woman, but when they reach Cobweb Castle, the first part of her prophecy comes true. Yet Washizu's wife, Asaji, is not content. She persuades him that he will never be safe until Tsuzuki is dead and the second part of the prophecy fulfilled. Washizu does what she demands, becomes Lord of Cobweb Castle, but announces that Miki's son will succeed him. Now Asaji intervenes again. She tells Washizu she is with child, and insists that he murder both Miki and Miki's son. By this time Washizu is too enmeshed in his own crimes to draw back, but Miki's son manages to escape and join Inui.

Miki's head is brought to Washizu by the assassin. Meanwhile, Inui's men are led through the labyrinthine forest towards Cobweb Castle. Washizu, desperate, returns to consult the old woman again. She tells him he will never lose a battle till Cobweb Forest starts to move. He reports this to his dispirited men, who cheer with relief. But the next day Inui's army cut down the trees for camouflage, and the forest indeed appears to move. Washizu is shot to death by the arrows of his own men.

Akira Kurosawa's re-telling of the story of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* shows all his familiar mastery of atmosphere, action, and the savagery of war. The final sequence, in which Washizu is gradually turned into a walking pincushion by the arrows of his soldiers, is brilliantly horrifying; the locations, set in perpetually cloud-covered hills, evoke just the sombre bleakness which the story demands. But at this point, having made one's bow to the superb visual qualities of the film, admiration ends. Without the insight which Shakespeare brings to the legend, the characters merely act out a grim and sordid melodrama of self-destructive ambition. Kurosawa brings nothing of his own to these people, tells us nothing personal about them, and makes them no more than vehicles for a few simple emotions—greed, ambition, guilty terror, frenetic conceit. The acting, in consequence, seems hollow and unsubtle—although there is a snakily effective performance from Isuzu Yamada as Asaji. Deprived of the inspiration that might have raised it on to the level of the tragedy, this story emerges as a bleak and episodic samurai film; its moral—the futility of ambition—comes as a melancholy afterthought; and its final impression is of a man who storms into a room with an impassioned speech ready to deliver and then discovers that he has forgotten what he came to say.

Suitability: A, B.

K.C.