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Seven Samurai

Dir. Akira Kurosawa. 1954. N/R. 3hrs 28mins. In Japanese, with subtitles.

Toshiro Mifune, Takashi Shimura, Yoshio Inaba.

Saving the best—or at least the most renowned—for last, Film Forum concludes its retrospective look at the collaboration between director Akira Kurosawa and actor Toshiro Mifune with what is either the 11th or 9th greatest movie ever made, depending upon whether you believe the critics or the directors who voted in the latest *Sight and Sound* poll. (Among the filmmakers who named *Seven Samurai* one of their all-time faves: George Armitage, John Boorman, Jim Jarmusch and Richard Lester.) No doubt its towering reputation derives largely from Kurosawa's thrilling battle sequences—particularly the rain-drenched, mud-soaked, body-strewn finale, still unequaled in its chaotic dynamism almost 50 years later. For those who've faithfully attended this series, however—and by rights it should have been called "Kurosawa & Mifune & Shimura," as every film features both of the director's favorite actors—much of the fun involves seeing the way that Kurosawa mythologizes his stars' established personas.

Generally speaking, Shimura tends to represent wisdom and Mifune tends to personify impetuosity—a dichotomy that begins with 1949's *Stray Dog* (Mifune as doofus rookie cop, Shimura as his patient superior) and continues, to an extent, in *Rashomon* (Mifune as possibly murderous bandit, Shimura as befuddled woodcutter trying to make sense of it all). In *Seven Samurai*, Kurosawa exaggerates these traits to an almost comical degree. Kambei, the philosophical *ronin*

Also opening

Fear Dot Com

Dir. William Malone. 2002. R. 92mins. Stephen Dorff, Natascha McElhone. A detective (Dorff) investigates a rash of deaths in which each victim logged on to the same menacing website. (Opens Fri; see Index for venues. Reviewed in next issue.)

Ace in the Hole

Dir. Billy Wilder. 1951. N/R. 111mins. Kirk Douglas, Jan Sterling. Also known as *The Big Carnival*, Wilder's film is about a reporter (Douglas) who spins the story of a man trapped in a collapsed mine into a media circus. (Opens Wed 4; Pioneer Theater. Reviewed in next issue.)

played by Shimura, agrees to help the farmers protect themselves against the grasshoppers—whoops, sorry, that's *A Bug's Life*—against the marauders in exchange for nothing but a few sacks of rice, acting largely out of a strange amalgam of altruism and boredom. And Mifune, as the aspiring samurai Kikuchiyo, gives an outsized, almost clownish performance that's forever in danger of being upstaged by his ridiculously phallic sword, which seems to be at least a foot longer than anybody else's. Both characters deepen as the film progresses, but their iconic baggage would travel with them from role to role in years to come. If you missed the other movies, here, at least, is the keystone. (Opens Fri; Film Forum.)—Mike D'Angelo

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