

PRODUCTION NOTES

The first draft of **RAN** was written in February-March of 1976, one of several Kurosawa wrote in the wake of the success of *Dersu Uzala*. In this he worked with long-time collaborators Hideo Oguni (1904-1996, twelve scripts, beginning with *Ikiru* in 1952) and Masato Ide (b 1922, three scripts, beginning with *Red Beard* in 1965), and in the beginning it was based on the story of 16th century warlord Motonari Mori and his three extremely faithful sons – Kurosawa wondered what if they were not faithful. It was only until well into the scripting process that he realized the similarity to *King Lear*. But in those times, only sons could be heirs, unlike *Lear's* daughters. Kurosawa also gave his protagonist a back history of bloody conquest, which the director found lacking in Shakespeare's original, and added the pivotal figure of Lady Kaede.

After the opening of *Kagemusha* in 1980 – which was considered to be less expensive to make, and more “bankable” than RAN – Kurosawa noted that now he had the actors, horses, armor, and crew to realize his dream: he just needed the money. But even at this stage of his career, he had great difficulty in finding financing. His long-time home base Toho refused to produce (although they would distribute), reasoning that the expected \$10 million budget would be prohibitive when one of their normal features cost only 1 to 2 million. (Although the following year, they'd spend over 10 million on their *Godzilla* remake.)

Although France's Gaumont would eventually pull out of the project, its head Daniel Toscan du Plantier approached veteran producer (of, among many others, five films with Luis Buñuel) Serge Silberman at the Deauville Film Festival in 1982. He decided to take it on personally, and production was slated for July 1983. (Silberman revealed that he had the same deal as with Buñuel, They had to both agree on all issues, and in fact contractually he retained “final cut.”) But Silberman had his own financing problems, and finally Japanese foreign film distributor Nippon Herald arranged a \$10.5 million loan from Sumitomo Bank, with Silberman's company Greenwich Films putting up \$1 million and handling world distribution.

While shooting actually began in June of 1984, pre-production had already been years in the making. Kurosawa had, through the years of waiting, storyboarded the entire film in his own watercolors (these have been published, with the script), and had selected famed composer Toru Takemitsu (1930-1996) from the beginning. The 1400 costumes eventually occupied designer Emi Wada (b. 1937) for three full years, the quest for authenticity extending to the use of 16th century weaving and dying techniques when Kurosawa became dissatisfied with the look of modern chemical dyes. The eventual costume cost was itself \$1 million, with some robes taking three months themselves for dying and hand embroidery, with Kurosawa setting the distinctive color-coding of the characters.

The sets, at both Kurosawa Studios in Tokyo and on location, were planned by the husband/wife team of Yoshiro and Shinobu Muraki, regular Kurosawa collaborators since 1955. The massive set for the Third Castle was built on the slopes of Mt. Fuji and designed to be burned. The 21 ft. high outer walls (the top of the inner keep reached 51 ft.) were made of boards, then covered with styrofoam stones modeled from blown-up photos of actual castles. These were then coated with cement four times and painted – a months long process. To give a good burn, the keep was packed with lumber and drenched with 400 liters of kerosene, while

wire netting was rigged to keep fiery fragments from dropping on to the outer walls, To provide non-toxic smoke for the Lord's descent, bags of dry ice were dropped into containers of hot water on cue. This set cost \$1.6 million.

The rest of the staff was composed almost entirely of Kurosawa regulars. The multi-camera filming (Kurosawa shot throughout with three cameras running simultaneously) was directed by Asakazu Nakai and Takao Saito. Production manager was Teruyo Nogami (b. 1927) again Kurosawa's "right hand woman," as she had been since *Rashomon* in 1952. And, as "director counselor," *Godzilla* director Ishiro Honda, best friends with Kurosawa since their earliest Toho days.

The cast was headed by the great Tatsuya Nakadai as Lord Hidetora, with other previous Kurosawa cast members Jinpachi Nezu as Jiro (an avant-garde theater actor who'd appeared in *Kagemusha*); Daisuke Ryu (a graduate of Tatsuya Nakadai's acting school, who played Oda Nobunaga in *Kagemusha*) as Saburo; Masayuki Yui (a businessman discovered by Kurosawa, who'd play Ieyasu Tokugawa in *Kagemusha*) as Tango; and Hisashi Igawa (already a two-time Kinema Jumbo Best Actor award winner, beginning with Kurosawa on *Dodes ka'den*). Newcomers to the Kurosawa stock company included Akira Terao (a famous rock star and actor, later the protagonist of *Dreams*) as Taro, Mieko Harada as Kaede, and Shinnosuke "Peter" Ikehata (a transvestite who's still a popular Japanese personality) as Kiyoami, the Fool.

Filming, slated for 30 weeks, began in June 1984 (the cast had already been rehearsing in full costume and make-up) and proceeded smoothly in the studio, at Mt. Fuji, at the actual Himeji Kumamoto and Nagoya Castles, and on the mountains and plains near Mount Aso, an active volcano on the southern island of Kyushu. The cast eventually included 1400 actors and extras and 250 horses, some specially imported from America. The castle burning was shot on December 15, 1984, with 400 members of the red and yellow armies and five cameras. Nakadai's makeup took three hours to apply, and he was required to lurch down the steps without looking down, a task Kurosawa himself could not master – without, obviously, chances for a retake. (Nakadai claimed to have no fear and to find the experience "rather pleasurable.") After hours of setup, the cameras rolled at 10:20 in the morning (everyone got very nervous when Nakadai took his own time to emerge) and "cut," 'print', and "douse the fire" were called at 12:50 PM, with 2800 ft of film (32 minutes) shot – the cut sequence takes 2 minutes and 5 seconds.

Filming was marred by three deaths: Ryu Kuze, Kurosawa's longtime fight choreographer, at 76; Fumio Yanoguchi, his longtime sound man, at 67; and Kurosawa's wife of nearly 40 years, Yoko, who had starred in his second film, *The Most Beautiful*. Kurosawa scheduled an emergency two-week shutdown for her last days. She died five days later and, following the funeral, he returned to shooting.

Filming wrapped on February 24, 1985, just one month behind schedule. The battle scene had always been planned to be covered by Takemitsu's music alone, but despite the composer's pleas, Kurosawa had edited his rough cut to Mahler's "Farewell" from *Das Lied von der Erde*. (Takemitsu's score, which he had been toying with since first scripting, is used

in the eventual six-minute sequence.) During final dubbing (which took place April 24 to May 8), Takemitsu quit the film in a rage at Kurosawa's demands for the mixing of the scene of Hidetora at the opening of the gate of the Second Castle. (The premiere was already set for May 31.) At one point Kurosawa contemplated doing the film with sound effects alone, but eventually things were patched up and Takemitsu improvised jazz motifs for Kurosawa on the last day of the mix.

Despite some reports, RAN was not the most expensive production in Japanese film history. The premiere was at the Tokyo Film Festival, and the film opened throughout Japan the next day. It came in second in the Kinema Jumbo's Best Ten poll to Yoshimitsu Morita's *Sorekara (And Then)*.

The U.S. premiere, in the wake of Hurricane Gloria, was at the New York Film Festival on September 27. In introducing the film Kurosawa said that he himself was an illusion - the real Kurosawa was up on the screen.

Very controversially, it was not submitted as Japan's entry for the Foreign Film Oscar, but Sidney Lumet successfully spearheaded a campaign for a Best Director nomination, among nominations for Cinematography, Art Direction, and Costumes, with Emi Wada winning for the last. Kurosawa was slated to take the name of the Best Film winner from the envelope and hand it to Billy Wilder, but had trouble with the handoff even as John Huston, the envelope opener, was down to ten seconds from his oxygen tank. Afterwards, Kurosawa described the three hour+ plus awards ceremony as "a little long."

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