

Shogun Assassin Blu-ray Notes

For the best possible image quality, we used the original Shogun Assassin as a guide to completely reconstruct the movie using our pristine masters of the original two Lone Wolf and Cub films. We literally laid the new video on top of the old, precisely recreating every edit. With the exception of about 8 seconds of stock footage of some castles that we were not able to obtain, every frame has been restored using uncompressed 24p 1080p 2.35:1 anamorphic source materials.

Shogun Assassin vs. Lone Wolf and Cub

Shogun Assassin was created by editing together footage from the first two [Lone Wolf and Cub](#) (Kozure Ookami) films, "Sword of Vengeance" and "Baby Cart at The River Styx". It uses about 11 minutes of footage from the first film and 70 minutes of footage from the second.

The Lone Wolf and Cub films are based on the original manga (story by Koike Kazuo, illustrations by Kojima Goseki), a 142-episode epic, which ran in "Manga Action" between September 10, 1970, and April 1, 1976.

The Tokugawa Mon

The symbol that appears through the credits is the official family crest (or Mon) of the powerful Tokugawa clan, which ruled Japan as Shoguns from 1603 until the end of the Edo (Tokugawa) period in 1868. These symbols were similar in function to flags, and like flags, it was considered sacrilegious to desecrate or destroy them.

Additionally, any official Shogunate document was considered somewhat sacred, and as such demanded great respect, which is why everyone was shocked when Lone Wolf sliced through his death sentence.

The Yagyu Clan vs. The Shogun (or shouldn't this film really be called Yagyu Assassin?)

The most obvious difference between the Lone Wolf and Cub films and Shogun Assassin is the Shogun himself.

In Shogun Assassin, the shogun is portrayed as a cruel madman who rules the empire of Japan with an iron fist, whereas in the Lone Wolf and Cub films, he is a neutral figure that is only talked about and never seen. In the LW&C films, the white bearded figure known as the Shogun in Shogun Assassin is Retsudo, head of the infamous Shadow-Yagyu clan and instigator of a plot to unseat Ogami Itto from his position of Official Shogunate Executioner.

Stock Footage

A few seconds of Shogun Assassin consists of stock footage that we were unable to locate. These short cuts have not been restored, and thus are of lower quality than the rest of the film.

Himeji Castle

The white building that appears in the unrestored stock footage at the beginning of the film is Himeji Castle. In film and television, it is frequently used in place of Edo Castle (home of the Shogunate during the Tokugawa Era) because of its size and pristine condition -- and also because Edo Castle no longer has a large central tower, which subtracts from its castle-like appearance.

Today, Himeji castle is the most visited castle in Japan and can be seen in such films as Ran and The Last Samurai.

Ronin

In the early years of the Tokugawa Era, the Shogunate was vexed by the problem of the large number of Samurai who became masterless as their Daimyo fell and lost their domains. These masterless Samurai were called "ronin," and many of them went on to become teachers of swordsmanship, Confucian scholars, somewhat-privileged farmers, or reverted to commoner status. In the film, Lone Wolf chooses to "walk the road of vengeance" and becomes an assassin for hire.

Seppuku

Although the term "Harakiri" (literally, to "cut the belly") is mentioned in the the film, the more proper term for this ritual is "Seppuku".

Seppuku was a ritual form of suicide-execution, mainly indulged in by the Samurai, which originated in the late 1200's. It involved disemboweling oneself with the sword, after which the execution-assistant, or "Second," delivered the decapitating coup-de-grace. This was Lone Wolf's official role in Shogun Assassin (in the early narration, Daigoro states that his father, "...cut off the heads of 131 Lords for the Shogun"). There were many reasons for which samurai committed, or were sentenced to commit, seppuku (breaking the code of conduct or being on the losing side of a plot were the most common) but samurai would also sometimes commit seppuku to protest an action by their Lord which they felt to be unfair.

Wardrobe Trivia

When Lone Wolf and his son are ordered to commit harikiri, they are wearing the traditional white Death-robos, worn specifically for the seppuku ritual.

Duel in the Wheat

As cumbersome as it may seem, if, for example, Samurai from two different domains decided to fight each other, both sides would agree on the site of combat and avoid using dishonest means to take unfair advantage of each other. This is portrayed in Shogun Assassin, in the scene where the Shogun offers Lone Wolf a duel with his son in return for his freedom -- and Lone Wolf accepts because he knows that even the evil Shogun would not act treacherously after making such an offer in public.

The Assassin's Fee, 1000 Pieces of Gold

In 1601, the 'gold' coin called a "koban" was first minted, and was worth 1 ryo.

It should be noted that 1 ryo was a lot of money, since it would buy 1 koku (about 5 bushels) of rice, which was about a year supply of for your average peasant. So hiring the Lone Wolf was a serious investment.

The Jizo Statue

While gathering food and water to help nurse his father back to full strength, Daigoro comes across a small loaf of bread in front of a Jizo statue. One of the most beloved of all Japanese divinities, Jizo Bodhisattva ("one who seeks enlightenment") is the patron protector of infants, mothers, travelers, and firemen. He is usually portrayed as a child-monk, often carrying a pilgrim's staff with six rings that jingle to warn animals of his approach. Jizo also carries the bright jewel of Dharma truth, whose light banishes fear. As the patron saint of infants, Jizo takes particularly keen interest in children who die prematurely. When they are sent to the underworld to build stone towers (as punishment for the grief caused to their parents by their early death) and beaten by a demon, Jizo comes to rescue them. Even today, there are often heaps of stones around Jizo statues, as many believe that a stone presented to Jizo will shorten the time that their child suffers in the underworld.

Masters of Death

The fighting-style and weaponry of the Masters of Death is based on a kind of jujutsu (judo) called the Takeuchi-style "Harness" technique, which is among the most influential of the jujutsu styles.

Trivia

When Daigoro and his father arrive in the town looking for a room, a strange man steps out of a doorway and stands next to a Tanuki statue. These popular figures, with their large bellies, flat straw hats and trademark large genitalia can be found in front of stores, temples and restaurants, serving as a symbol of good-luck and prosperity.

In Shogun Assassin the camera only shows the top of the sign, which translates "Gounomori". In Sword of Vengeance the full sign and phrase can be seen, revealing "Gounomori Hot Springs". Amid this confusion, we have decided to not caption it.

The two female ninjas who attack with their straw hats are dressed as priests on pilgrimage.

The knife-filled vegetables that are thrown at Daigoro and his father are called daikon (a kind of giant, white radish). These vegetables were among the basic staples during the Edo period and their shape (strangely resembling a part of the male anatomy) makes it the source of much earthy humor in Japanese movies.