

## **"If only we could allow him to commit hara-kiri."**

The speaker here (Yabé) is actually speaking in favor of Sanzaémon, since hara-kiri is considered a dignified death for a samurai, as opposed to being beheaded, which is the way of execution of the common criminal.

## **"Dear... Please open the shoji for me."**

A 'shoji' is a wooden-grid door or window covered with rice-paper

## **"Kanémi Sanzaémon. Your pension of 130-koku shall be returned to 280-koku as it was before."**

Of koku, George Sansom says that: "...the product of one choo (approx. 2.5 acres) of first-class paddy," which are wet fields where rice is grown, "is of the order of 10 koku, a koku being the equivalent of about 5 bushels of dry measure in England or the United States." Furthermore, "...in all discussion of the amount and quality of the crop, the ruling fact is that 1 koku of rice is the average annual consumption of one person." He also states the amount of labor that's needed for producing such a sizable amount: "To cultivate one choo of mixed (wet & dry) arable land required the full-time labor of four or five men."

## **Edo Period**

Sword of Desperation takes place sometime during the Tokugawa Era (approximately 1603-1868, also called Edo Period), the period named for the 15 generations of Tokugawa Shogun (Military Overlords) who ruled the nation, maintaining a relatively static society, for over 250 years. This period of military-rule was characterized by its relatively peaceful order overall, clear division of the social hierarchy, extravagance by the privileged classes, isolation from the West, and a lot of convoluted treachery, as well as many important cultural and intellectual developments.

For many centuries, Japan had a form of feudal system, in which the servants, vassals and palace guards of the Daimyo (the military Lords of independant regional domains, who maintained a castle, a home base, and several strategically-located satellite fortresses) were granted a piece of land (a fief), or in most cases, a stipend that came with a specific official post. In return, the vassals were expected to dedicate their lives to the service of their masters. The relationships between masters & vassals were based on this reciprocity of services and rewards, and were emotionally very strong.

Almost two-hundred Daimyo-ruled domains and their associated castle-towns existed in the early Tokugawa period, whose sizes varied according to the Daimyo's holdings and the agricultural production of the fiefs under their control. However, the number of Daimyo decreased quickly during this era, as the Tokugawa Shogunate practiced strict enforcement over Daimyo domains to reduce their power.

## **Unasaka Fief**

Unasaka is a fictional fief, and is apparently based upon the Shonai fief, which is now Tsuruoka City in Yamagata Prefecture, where the author Shuhei FUJISAWA was originally from. FUJISAWA has set several of his stories in Unasaka fief during the Edo Period, including the stories adapted into *The Twilight Samurai*, *The Hidden Blade*, *Love and Honor*, and *AnimEigo's The Samurai I Loved*; all are available on DVD in North America.

## **Shuhei FUJISAWA (Original Writer)**

Shuhei FUJISAWA was born December 26, 1927, in Yanagata Prefecture, Japan, and was widely considered the number one samurai novelist when he died on January 26, 1997. He published over 50 books in his lifetime, and had over 23 million of his paperbacks printed. He generally wrote historical fiction, and focused on the humanity of his characters in his stories, in order to convey aspects of Japanese history and culture in a more realistic manner.

Sadly, he never saw the adaptations which made his work internationally renowned, as the first of his "Samurai Trilogy," directed by Yoji YAMADA, did not hit the big screen until 2002, five years after his death.

The "Samurai Trilogy" includes, Academy Foreign Film Award nominee, *The Twilight Samurai* (2002), *The*

Hidden Blade (2004), and, Love and Honor (2006) . AnimEigo had also released The Samurai I Loved (2005) which was adapted from his novel "Semishigure".

Other than the 5 film adaptations and DVDs released in North America (including this Sword of Desperation), 3 additional films of his books have recently been produced. On top of that, his stories have been adapted into over 20 TV series and plays.

### **Hideyuki HIRAYAMA (Director)**

Born in Japan in 1950, Hideyuki HIRAYAMA started his film career soon after graduating from the Nihon University College of Art in 1971. He has served as assistant director to several well-known directors, such as Juzo ITAMI, Tai KATO, and Toshiya FUJITA. His directorial debut was in 1990 with the horror comedy Maria's Stomach. His blockbuster film series is a horror comedy , "Haunted School." He directed 3 of the 4 films in 1995, 1996, and 1999. His 1998 film Begging for Love (Aio kou hito) won a total of 69 awards all over the world, including the FIPRESCI Prize of the Montreal World Film Festival the Japanese Academy Best Film and Best Director Awards.

### **Etsushi TOYOKAWA (Lead Actor - KANEMI Sanzaemon)**

Born in 1962, he began his acting career by joining the sho-gekijo theatrical troupe "Under Thirty." Though like many new theater actors, he struggled to make ends meet until he got his first big break in 1992, in the television drama "Night Head."

In addition to many other industry awards, he has been nominated three times for the Japanese Academy Best Actor award, and twice for the Best Supporting Actor award.

He is currently one of the most sought after actors in Japan, due to his ability to take on a broad variety of roles, from comedy to drama.