

TRAIL OF BLOOD (1972)

Category : DVD REVIEWS (S-Z)

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Directed by Kazuo Ikchiro

Review by David Carter

Released by AnimEigo

Running Time: 88 minutes

Rating: Not Rated

Color format: Color

Audio/Subtitles: 2.0 Stereo Japanese/English Subtitles

Region Code: 1, NTSC

Aspect Ratio: Anamorphic Widescreen

16:9 Enhanced: No

Special Features: Program Notes, Still gallery

Trailer Online: No



Samurai films are one of the more intriguing genres in Japanese cinema. The samurai period in Japanese history is a rich setting for stories and typically filmmakers have paid a great deal of attention to historical accuracy. Though the two groups of films share many similarities, the importance of the setting in samurai films is one of the primary differences between it and the American western. In the western all of the focus is on the characters and their conflicts; the setting is often an afterthought. In samurai films, however, the real-life political dramas and social issues of the time when the film is set plays an important part in both fiction and non-fiction films. AnimEigo has just released the first installment of the "Mikogami Trilogy", THE TRAIL OF BLOOD, and it also combines a fictional plot with accurate historical details.

Jokichi of Mikogami is one of the country's best swordsmen, but he lives a nomadic life wandering the countryside. All of that changes when Okinu offers him shelter during a rainstorm and tends to his wounds. While Jokichi recovers, Okinu is threatened and harassed by Kyubei, an arrogant Yakuza. Jokichi fights the Yakuza off, but the clans vow to hunt him down wherever he goes. Jokichi and Okinu go into hiding, marry, and live a peaceful life until Jokichi is called away on business. While traveling he is discovered by the same Yakuza, who still have revenge on their

minds. He keeps his vow to Okinu and doesn't retaliate when he's humiliated and when they cut off two of his fingers, but it's the last straw when Okinu and their son are murdered by three Yakuza bosses. Jokichi picks up his sword once again to track down and kill the three bosses, starting with Kyubei.



THE TRAIL OF BLOOD is a nice take on the "reluctant warrior" plot. Jokichi successfully hangs up his sword and makes a new life for himself for several years. Unlike most films, which show this in flashback, THE TRAIL OF BLOOD has this occur linearly in the story. It gives the film a different feel and will cause viewers to sympathize with his character far more, since they will be able to greater understand his motives for revenge. As it's the first part of a trilogy, THE TRAIL OF BLOOD spends a lot more time setting the story than it does with swordfights. Though this film is self contained, it definitely feels like part of a larger story and will leave you wanting to see the next installment.

AnimEigo primarily releases anime series, but they've started to become one of the best sources of samurai DVDs. The print of THE TRAIL OF BLOOD is outstanding and looks far better than even some newer films do on DVD. The best part of the DVD presentation, though, is the subtitles. AnimEigo is the only company (to my knowledge) that puts such a high level of detail into their subtitle presentations. If more than one character is speaking, their dialogue appears in different colors for ease of understanding. In addition to that, AnimEigo translates signs and gives explanations of certain words and phrases that are relevant to the plot. Though it may seem minor, the lengths that AnimEigo has gone in this area are certain appreciated and it puts them ahead of many better known companies who release Asian cinema.



THE TRAIL OF BLOOD is a good samurai action film that spends a decent amount of time on character development. The effect is that the viewers understand why Jokichi is the way he is and why he wants revenge. Though the film has some excellent action sequences, it's not just mindless swordplay since each fight has a reason behind it. THE TRAIL OF BLOOD is a great movie and it will have you ready to see the next two chapters in the saga.