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Hidden Fortress

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Hidden Fortress is an incredible movie that I think is most fitting to be an inspiration for Star Wars. I find that the way the first two characters are introduced is one of the ways that the movie controls its story so tightly. The two peasants Tohei and Matashichi fight constantly throughout the movie and highlight the huge difference between the rich nobles and common folk. They speak of journeying to join the war for the sole purpose of making money, not because they believe strongly in either family that is warring. It speaks to the fact that peasants are peasants no matter the situation and a power struggle between rich families does not raise them out of their common born lives. The fact that Tohei and Matashichi are simple is also highlighted by how dimwitted and simple they are, they constantly fight over very basic low grade emotions like feeling greedy or selfish. These two characteristics are commonly and widely looked down on in Japanese culture. The idea of furthering the group rather than the individual and sacrificing so that others can have (instead of hoarding to ones self) is an expectation in this Japanese society. This self sacrifice is literally and figuratively represented by the sister of Rokurota, Kofuyu. She dies in Princess Yuki's place, claiming to be the princess of Akizuki so that the real princess and her samurai protector can escape to a freer land, not for the sake of the princess but for the sake of establishing the Akizuki family name. However because the princess is high born, her outburst is somewhat acceptable for her to have in front of her "servants". Her outburst about Kofuyu dying is not the typical expectation of a woman's reaction, Princess Yuki is loud and forward. Her upbringing was designed as one intended for a male heir, this in my opinion contributed towards her atypical behavior. I believe that all of the traveler's in the group were affected by the gold and that once the gold seemed to be lost in a bonfire, you can see each individuals reaction to the idea of being released from their

obligations. The two peasants are shocked to the point that they are almost unresponsive to stimulus as the gold represents a better life to them, while Rokurota struggles with his decision to drop the wood in the fire which I feel represents his unending feeling of duty towards the Akizuki family and the princess. Refreshingly though, Princess Yuki seems thrilled to be able to relax and let go of her duties and expectations, she gets to open herself up to the joy of singing with other people and having a full interaction. When captured she speaks of this freedom to Todokoro, that she took delight in dancing with the common people “without pretense”, she got to see how things are outside of the castle where she would be locked away. Later in the movie you can see that she understands her role in rebuilding her family’s name and she is made up as a true princess, out of her disguise she is delicate and isolated in a plain room. Though her traveling outfit, wild eyebrows and rough speech have disappeared, the strong sound of her voice remains, now the only way she can revisit the time when she was freer.

Overall this movie is beautiful despite being in black and white. Kurosawa really understands how to command attention to details without the use of color. In fact I appreciated that the costumes were incredibly simple and with the absence of color, revealed many details that would be lost if we could see the color of the fabric. The black and white aspect also lends itself to the mountain scenery and scenes where there are many objects on the screen at once, it is immersing and interesting without being too busy, for example the stampede of revolting slaves at the beginning of the movie – all the peasants blend in together. Another example is when the two peasants Tohei and Matashichi meet Rokurota for the first time, the expanse of white rocks is hypnotizing. Additionally another interesting detail is how explicitly dumb Tohei and Matashichi are, it is literally shown and figuratively implied. They literally can’t read or exist without

arguing or becoming wrapped up in their greed, it's as if it's a function for them to move their story along, stringing events between bouts of fighting and brief peace. Their personalities are pretty static when compared alongside Rokurota, Princess Yuki or even Hyoe Todokoro (whom we only see in two scenes). I don't find the camerawork to be anything special when there are people on the screen however I feel that Kurosawa knows how to capture the beauty of nature, as I have said before through the use of black and white in addition to wide shots of nature tying the characters to the terrain they are traveling on. The music is simple but exciting and I feel that it was exceptional, when it was playing and not playing. The absence of music during certain scenes did not bother me because the music was only used to illustrate a very important plot driving scene. The music is not used at every chance and I think that contributes to the quality of the BGM.

This movie is very relatable despite it being shot in the 1950s, being in black and white, performed in Japanese and shot by a foreign director. In my culture being loyal and honoring your family is important, preserving your reputation and carrying on when no one else can is valued deeply. The inclusion of the two peasants was annoying to me because my father tells me that "You are only as good as the company you keep", which means that Tohei and Matashichi would be very much dead weight and embarrassments to me if I were traveling with them. Not addressing their repeated insubordination would make me feel crazy and I would have spoken upfront to them about their greed and risky behavior, in this way I can't relate with Rokurota except when he gives the two men explicit and firm commands. This movie is unique and fun story about duty and honor without any distracting romance, excessive violence or too much

slapstick comedy, the balance that Kurosawa struck between all the characters is sublime, this movie is definitely a 5/5.