

# FIRES ON THE PLAIN

By Shinya Tsukamoto



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“Smell the earth.  
Smell the water and air.  
Smell the sap.

Smell the peeling skin. Smell the scattered  
organs and your own rotting flesh.”

Shinya Tsukamoto

## Cast

**Shinya Tsukamoto** (Tamura), **Lily Franky** (Yasuda),  
**Tatsuya Nakamura** (Corporal), **Yusaku Mori** (Nagamatsu),  
**Yuko Nakamura** (Tamura's wife)

## Crew

Director and Scriptwriter: **Shinya Tsukamoto**  
Cinematographers: **Shinya Tsukamoto**, **Satoshi Hayashi**  
Original Story: **Shohei Ooka**  
Assistant Director: **Satoshi Hayashi**  
Music: **Chu Ishikawa**  
Production Manager: **Kaori Saito**, **Ayako Yamanaka**  
Costume: **Hitomi Okabe**  
SFX molding: **Masako**  
SFX sculpting: **Chiharu Rikuta**, **Natsuko Kado**  
Weapon modeling: **Tatsuya Mine**, **Yoshiyuki Siroiwa**,  
**Aya Yumiba**  
Special effect: **Satoru Narumi**, **Taku Nakano**  
Sound: **Masaya Kitada**  
Editing: **Shinya Tsukamoto**

## Production

Producer: **Shinya Tsukamoto**  
Production Company: **Kaijyu Theater**  
International Sales: **Coproduction Office**



# FIRES ON THE PLAIN

By **Shinya Tsukamoto**

Japan, 2014, 87 min., colour

## Synopsis

In the final stages of WWII, the occupying Japanese army in the Philippines is rapidly losing ground, facing local resistance combined with an American offensive. The final few Japanese survivors, having almost been wiped out, have crossed the threshold into a realm where there are no friends, no enemies and no God.



## Long Synopsis

In the final stages of WWII, the occupying Japanese army in the Philippines is rapidly losing ground, facing local resistance combined with an American offensive. It is only a matter of time before the few survivors are wiped out.

Private Tamura, suffering from tuberculosis, is abandoned by his platoon. At the field hospital, a group of soldiers with untreatable diseases and injuries are left outside to die. Private Tamura



joins them and becomes acquainted with a young soldier named Nagamatsu. That night, the hospital is destroyed by enemy fire, but Tamura escapes uninjured and flees into the jungle, throwing himself at the mercy of nature's overwhelming forces. Unable to go on and assuming that his end is near, he takes out his grenade, intending to kill himself, when he notices some wild yams growing nearby. Since yams are inedible unless cooked, Tamura heads to a nearby village in search of matches. He discovers that the village has been deserted after a ransacking by Japanese soldiers. Tamura is taking a nap in the village church when a young couple arrives. The woman screams in horror when she sees Tamura. Tamura yells to try to calm her down, but panics and pulls the trigger of his rifle to silence her. She is the first person he has ever killed. Tamura heads back to the hill where he discovered the yams and finds there three soldiers, busy harvesting his food supply. From them Tamura learns of the desperate situation of Japanese soldiers, and of the order to assemble at Palompon a port town at the other end of the island, from where they are to be evacuated. Tamura and the soldiers start walking across the island to the rendezvous point.

Along the way Tamura is reacquainted with Nagamatsu, who had also fled when the hospital was attacked. Nagamatsu has survived by running errands for Yasuda, a middle-aged bully of a soldier. Tamura empathises with the fragile Nagamatsu.

As they near the rendezvous point, the soldiers must cross a clearing strewn with the corpses of Japanese soldiers, where Americans wait in ambush. Tamura and the soldiers decide to move at night, but the Americans attack mercilessly with their superior firepower, until all that remains are corpses, body parts and chunks of flesh.

Tamura survives the assault and decides to surrender, but then sees another soldier do the same, only to be shot dead by a Filipino guerrilla. Tamura then roams the jungle, which has been transformed into a hell on earth, piles of bodies everywhere. Extreme fatigue numbs his mind, and he and the handful of other survivors are transformed by hunger. Nagamatsu offers him meat from a «monkey» he has caught. When Tamura realises that Nagamatsu is actually hunting the surviving Japanese soldiers, not monkeys, to feed himself, he crosses into a realm where there are no friends, no enemies and no God.



## Director's Comment

It has been 70 years since Japan took part in an armed conflict, and in that time there has not been a single Japanese casualty of war. Now there is a concern that the idiocy of war will be forgotten, with so few left who have witnessed its horrors. The price of those 70 years of peace is a tendency to look away from death. As a result we have become collectively fearful of anything "dirty." Within our sanitized urban jungle, our brains have overdeveloped while our bodies have lost touch with physical sensation. We have lost the

awareness of what it is to be alive.

In a trance-like state, we have tried to brush death under the carpet rather than acknowledge it as an uncompromising reality of nature. Removing ourselves from death brings us precariously close to it without an appropriate sense of respect or awe.

Since the 1990s I have made movies about the anxieties of those



#### Director's Comment

who confuse reality with fantasy in the city's virtual-reality mindscape. I have depicted the foolishness and violence of people as they attempt to escape this environment.

This violence should not lead us to the ultimate foolishness of war.

The tragedy of war is often shown in movies from the viewpoint of the victim. I chose to show the terror of war through the depiction of a regular man who is turned into a murderer. He must kill others whether he wishes to or not. This is the reality of war. People quickly become accustomed to the absurdity of killing, and stop questioning it. Instead they roam aimlessly, in a similar manner to the one we use in the modern world.

For this reason, it was important for me to record the madness of killing under an expansive blue sky, against lush green and vivid red vegetation, surrounded by all-consuming natural beauty. I wanted to depict the human condition alongside the vastness of nature.

Previously I made movies about humans trapped within the city. With this film I want to show modern city dwellers that the city is not the world. That it is just a rudderless boat floating in the sea of nature. I wanted to ask why we opt to go to war, by showing people engaged in the foolishness of it. If fighting is a primal instinct, I wanted to investigate whether intelligence had a role to play in it.

I do not believe in propaganda movies, so what you take away from my film is up to you. I can still sense the horror and screams of those who decayed in the jungle during WWII. I receive it by radar, which is directly connected to my spine, and I have injected those sensations into every frame. If you sense any of this, I have succeeded.



## Interview with Shinya Tsukamoto

*Can you explain how you view the relationship in your films between life in contemporary Japanese cities, which is very peaceful, and life on the battlefield?*

**Shinya Tsukamoto:** My earlier films such as TOKYO FIST and BULLET BALLET describe the relationship between the city (solid and hard, like concrete) and human (soft, like flesh). The city has

## Interview

developed so much, to the extent that we forget about the natural world around us. The city is non-organic, clean and safe. Living inside such an environment, we can hardly imagine the possibility that some day we are going to die, death seems phantasmal and we never fully grasp what it means to be alive. The protagonists of my previous films are those who scream loudly, even violently: “Yes, we are living now”. It is similar to trying to wake up from a dream by pinching ourselves. We might find proof of our existence in a boxing ring, for example, by beating each other up.

My protagonists are healthy, especially within this sterile urban environment. But most people today are living in an urban society, and concentrating their attention on computers. This is unhealthy and dangerous. Life becomes like a dream, and if something goes wrong, they might commit a serious crime. They see life like a video game, and could easily go on to commit murder. The peaceful last 70 years in Japan made people unaware about the meaning of life and death. The generation who still recalls the war has almost disappeared. Fewer and fewer of people know from their own physical experience how terrifying war is. That is why danger is increasing – we are conjuring up some imaginary enemy to justify going to war.

*How did you encounter the original story by Shohei Ooka?*

**ST:** I was not particularly conscious about war, but when I was a

teenager, I read a lot of books. Among these was Black Rain by Masuji Ibuse. The first time I read Fires on the Plain was at that time, and it stayed in my mind. I remember that it gave me a really vivid sense of what war is like - how terrifying it is. It felt very real to me. I felt the war was portrayed as something very immediate. The novel Fires on the Plain has this very original sense of realism to it, which made me feel as if I were in the shoes of the main character while I was reading it.

The war books I read at that time were generally written from the victim’s point of view. But not Fires on the Plain; that shows that once we go to war, we are the perpetrators. We might kill someone. This is a source of fear as well as of frustration. And beyond that, there is the fear of just having one’s life in this world terminated. Then I was making films at high school, and I already started to feel that I wanted to make a film out of the novel at some point in the distant future. When I turned 30, I started to think more concretely about this, and I began to write a script. But it was a big project, and as a story, it is very profound, so I kept postponing my plans. And lately, I started to feel that if I did not do it now, I would never be able to do it.

*There is the original adaptation of FIRES ON THE PLAIN by Kon Ichikawa, which was made in the 1950s. How aware were you of this earlier adaptation?*

**S.T.:** When I was at high school I watched a lot of Japanese films, and I saw it in the Namiki-za Theater in Ginza. It was very impressive. However, when I read the novel, the image I had was very different from what I got from Ichikawa’s film. His film looks at the dark part of human nature, rather than nature and landscapes. The sense of nature is to some extent limited. Conversely, in my film I wanted to capture the greatness of nature. In the novel, in the midst of the battles there are very visual descriptions of the natural surroundings such as blue skies and red flowers. There is also a beautiful river, right there among the misery of war. That was very memorable for me. Kon Ichikawa’s film was shot in black and white, and I wanted to shoot within this natural environment. We might have a hard time understanding why human beings are capable of such horrific acts amid the beauty of nature as it is something quite absurd – that is what I wanted to describe.

*The original novel is also known for addressing the theme of cannibalism. Your interpretation does not focus on this. Can you explain why?*

**S.T.:** For me, it was not that important, although it was the biggest theme in the novel. For me, it is war that creates such horrific situations, rather than cannibalism. At the beginning they are humans but later on, they are just like monkeys. They no longer even know what is right and what is not.

*Your scenes contain a lot of darkness. Why did you choose to shoot in this way?*

**S.T.:** This was in the original novel, which had a lot of darkness in its descriptive scenes, especially on the front line. We can hear the scratching of metal items from the surrounding soldiers, and we never know if they are friend or foe... Then a tank shows up. I wanted to convey this without showing it. Soon flesh explodes and scatters all around, and even though we cannot see the enemy, we are aware that this has happened. I wanted us to wonder, “What made this happen?”

*Apart from FIRES ON THE PLAIN, there are not many Japanese films that have been so critical about WWII.*

**S.T.:** Other than FIRES ON THE PLAIN by Kon Ichikawa, you might also know Shohei Imamura’s BLACK RAIN – although actually this was told from the victim’s point of view. From the perpetrator’s point of view there probably have not been that many films. That is why I wanted to make this film. In Japan we still predominantly have the feeling that we were victims of WWII. Although we acted as the aggressor towards many countries, we still have this victim mentality. And also, with the atomic bombs dropped on Japan, the shock of our defeat was very strong, so since then we have just been left with this feeling of being victims. That is probably why there have not been so many Japanese films from the perpetrator’s

## Interview

point of view.

*Can you think of any other reasons why there are not more examples of films like yours?*

**S.T.:** It is because it is easier to arouse the audience’s sympathy if you do it from the victim’s point of view. They will understand why we should not become involved in war because they identify with the victim. But what is most frightening is, while it is terrifying to be a victim, it is even scarier to be a perpetrator. We might die, but we might also kill others – that is the most frightening idea. This is not even because we hate each other, rather it is because of what the leaders of both opposing countries have decided. This is the reason we have to kill each other. In my opinion, it is a ridiculous reason, but we have been repeating it throughout our history.

And if we become the perpetrators again, there will be victims. There is a lot of fear about becoming a victim of war, so for me, what I needed to do, even though I ran the risk of the film not fitting into the common template, was to make the film from the perpetrator’s point of view.

I wanted to show “us”, I did not want to clearly define an “enemy”. In the film, bullets would fly towards us, but I did not show who fired them. The bullets just came by themselves. We cannot see the enemy, nor the generals who are supposed to have commanded

us. I see the film as a closed-room piece in a grandiose natural environment where the question is raised “against what and for whom are we doing all this?”

*You plan to release the film domestically for the anniversary of the end of World War II next year. Do you think that your film’s subject matter can instigate debates in Japan?*

**S.T.:** As a mere filmmaker, I am not too familiar with the exact political situation, but from the viewpoint of a normal citizen, over the past 70 years, we have tried to think hard about how to avoid getting involved in military conflicts. Now, I still think one should avoid resorting to military solutions, but we have been seeing more and more people in Japan who wish to erase the fact that we lost the war and who claim we are a strong country. They are looking for as many excuses as possible to do so. I feel this is frightening and I think there are also many others who feel this.

Now that the Japanese government is thinking about renouncing the anti-war clause in the constitution, maybe this film can offer a contrary opinion not to do so.

The cultural climate of the country is starting to become more rightwing, so it will become more and more difficult to produce and release a film like this. That is why I thought it was the right time to make it, and to let people know through major festivals like Venice

– especially in the competition. I wanted people to know about the film and discuss it, after seeing it on such a respected international stage.

*Regarding the film’s production, who put up the budget up for FIRES ON THE PLAIN?*

**S.T.:** It was me, through my company, Kaijyu Theater.

*Was this your choice?*

**S.T.:** I made FIRES ON THE PLAIN exactly as I wanted. To be more precise, with FIRES ON THE PLAIN given the current climate in Japan no one wanted to put any money into it. I asked producers I knew well if they would invest in it. But they all said, “No, it’s impossible”. It seems as if people want to talk about any other subject aside from this. And instead, the kind of pro-war film – films which suggest that we should go to war – are favoured, and somehow they get money and attract audiences. This is very frightening. I knew FIRES ON THE PLAIN would cost a lot of money – it is the most expensive film I have ever made – but I knew I had to do it at this point in time. So without any reasoning behind it, I started making it anyway, and we all pooled our resources. And as we were preparing it, little by little, more and more people started getting involved.

*Who were the people who came to help you out?*

My company paid the people who played important roles in the production, though it was not very much. And the others were volunteers – friends and people who liked my previous works. They could not have done it if they did not like my films, otherwise it would have been too hard, as I asked a lot of them. They had to have a lot of passion for the project.

Most of the actors I used in the film were not particularly well known, apart from Lily Franky and Tatsuya Nakamura, who star in it. In Japan, it would be Lily Franky who would attract the audience.

*You also act in the film.*

**S.T.:** I have acted in many of my films. This time, when we shot in the natural environment, with just a small crew, it was actually very tiring. We felt like going home early but we even had to continue shooting with a high level of tiredness. I was also working hard on my acting, but I was rather like a monk, so I never got angry. I stayed calm and just asked to do another take. It was extraordinarily hard work, but we went ahead and did it. It would have been too impolite to ask another actor to endure that. It was better to do it myself than to ask someone to put up with the situation, as it was so hard.



## Interview

*You started your own company, you are the producer, director and writer of all your films, and you own the rights to most them. Is this unique in Japan, or are there other directors who own their own companies and do everything themselves?*

**S.T.:** There might not be any other companies like mine, but I never think of the way I operate as anything particularly special. There are, of course, those who are both directors and producers. There may not be any others who do everything, though. Since I started shooting my first films in 8mm, I have acted and done everything. I am just continuing the same way. Sometimes I raised financing from sponsors, or I do projects for them for money, but I try to do my projects as much as I can. That is why I operate as a production company. At the beginning, I worked through other production companies, but now, even when I receive financing, I work with Kaijyu Theater because it is the most efficient way to spend the budget we have.

*What is special about the way in which you work, compared with that of other director/producers?*

**S.T.:** To be honest, I never think of myself as that special. But since the beginning, when I started to plan this film, I knew that I just had to do it. And I worked on it little by little. At the beginning, I did not know if I could hire anyone professional, so I was just going to do it with a volunteer crew. Then, I thought I could just set the camera up

and perform in front of it by myself. It is a Japanese film, so it would have been shot with a fixed camera, in the style of Yasujiro Ozu. It could also have been interesting like that, but during production Mr. Hayashi joined. He was the assistant director for Kotoko and he could operate a camera. After he joined, the camerawork became more dynamic. So basically, Mr. Hayashi and I made it, with a large volunteer crew around us.

We just did everything by ourselves. For instance, we only had one real gun, so we replicated it ourselves. We worked on it painstakingly until it really looked authentic. By working so hard together, we could make it happen. There were some really good people among the volunteer crew too.

Just for the really difficult parts, we hired some very important professionals. We made it like that, like a puzzle, trying to use money efficiently. I know it sounds very strange, but my filmmaking is always very strange, so maybe it is normal after all.

*Finally, what is the theme or message of the film?*

**S.T.:** War is terrifying. I feel that our sense of living has been diminished nowadays, and this makes our image of death rather obscure. This in turn means we are embarking on a direction that leads us towards war without fully realising it, and that is scary. The theme is the fear of war. I have always had this theme of the "city"

and the struggle of living inside an environment made of concrete. This time, instead of concrete, it is nature, and within it we humans are such small and insignificant entities.





## War in Japanese Cinema

In his adaptation of Shohei Ooka's 1951 novel *Fires on the Plain* (NOBI), Tsukamoto gives us a hell-on-earth vision of war that is unflinching in its grisly detail. Like Soviet director Elem Klimov's *COME AND SEE* (1985), its episodic structure piles on horror after horror, offering a nightmarish indictment of the primal fear and animalistic savagery that the lawless environment of the battlefield induces in all its participants.

There has been no other Japanese film like it, particularly in recent years. Though remaining true to the structure of both the original novel and Kon Ichikawa's 1959 version of the novel *FIRES ON THE PLAIN*, Tsukamoto places the viewer far more vividly within the subjective private hell of Private Tamura, detailing his real-time descent into the human soul's darkest abyss, through tuberculosis, privation, starvation and eventually cannibalism, all evoked through sickly colours, feverish camerawork and unsettling sound design.



## War in Japanese Cinema

The Allied Occupation of Japan from 1945-51 restricted the nation's filmmakers ability to revisit themes relating to World War II. When they did, the films tended to dwell on the more heroic exploits of the country's military leaders, like Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto (who engineered the attack on Pearl Harbor and the Battle of Midway before dying when his plane was shot down by American fighters in 1943). This is the case in a number of films, including Ishiro Honda's *EAGLE OF THE PACIFIC* (1953), Abe Yutaka's *BATTLESHIP YAMATO* (1953) and Toshio Shimura's *GOD OF WAR ADMIRAL YAMAMOTO AND THE COMBINED FLEET* (1956).

Kon Ichikawa's earlier version of *FIRES ON THE PLAIN*– his second film set during wartime, the first being *THE BURMESE HARP* (1956), in which a private serving in Burma disguises himself as a monk and travels across the country on a peace mission – was a landmark film, with its narrative devoid of all sense of ideology as it depicted the horrors of war. Nevertheless, it retained a strong human element. Tsukamoto's reworking of the original is more visceral and more immediate, with all vestiges of its characters' morality stripped away, and the focus placed firmly on their physicality as they struggle for survival in an evocatively rendered jungle environment.

There were other films throughout the 1960s that detailed the grotesqueness and absurdity of the battlefield. Seijun Suzuki's *STORY OF A PROSTITUTE* (1965) depicted life on the

frontline during the Sino-Japanese War in 1938 through the eyes of a military comfort woman, while Yasuzo Masumura's *HOODLUM SOLDIER* (1965) used the character of a yakuza gang boss stationed among the ranks serving in Manchuria to question notions of blind obedience to authority. Additionally, his *RED ANGEL* (1966) told the story of a nurse serving in a field hospital during the same conflict. Kinji Fukasaku's *UNDER THE FLAG OF THE RISING SUN* (1972) took a critical look at the hierarchies of those responsible during Japan's military campaigns in the South Pacific in the tale of a war widow – whose husband went missing in New Guinea – still seeking compensation 30 years after the war. She is told she will not receive anything, because he was executed for desertion.

These films adopted the firmly anti-authoritarian stance that marked the era, with all of their makers having experienced life in wartime Japan (Suzuki was actually drafted to serve in 1943). Subsequent filmmakers have not always had this direct experience, so the reality of the full horror of war has dulled as the years have passed. With the recent success of such films as *YAMATO: THAT LAST BATTLE* (2005), *FOR THOSE WE LOVE* (2007) and *THE ETERNAL ZERO* (2013), the war film in Japan has retreated into the realms of myth, melodrama and fantasy.

Tsukamoto's *FIRES ON THE PLAIN* is a much-needed reality check in the face of this current trend, evoking the world of pain, fear, death and misery of those sent into the midst of the battlefield to



### War in Japanese Cinema

fight for a cause that lost in the fog of war. It is a film without the heroics and sense of victimhood that have played such a major part in recent war films produced throughout the world, where there is no just cause and the line between the soldier's simultaneous status as killer and potential prey is left obscure, reduced to the state of a machine whose only goal is survival against an enemy that is barely glimpsed.

Jasper Sharp, film scholar, author of Historical Dictionary of Japanese Cinema





## Kaijyu Theater (Kaijuu Shiataa, 海獣)

No director in Japan has maintained such a complete degree of control over his films and filmmaking practice as Shinya Tsukamoto. The term 'auteur' is easily applied – he has directed, written, produced, shot, edited and worked on lighting and art design for all fourteen of his features, and even acted in most of them.

Central to this enterprise is his company Kaijyu Theater, which Tsukamoto established in 1985 to present live stage productions. The name comes from his love of the kaiju eiga (giant monster) genre of films, such as GODZILLA and MOTHRA, although he substituted the first character (meaning 'strange') for the alternative ideogram with the same pronunciation of 'kai' (meaning 'sea'), to give the alternate reading of 'Sea Monster Theater'. The

## Kaijyu Theater

troupe mounted an average of two plays a year, all realised with their own handmade sets, props and costumes, which were initially staged in a makeshift tent theater, constructed in a car park next to Tokyo's Takadanobaba Station.

While in high school, Tsukamoto had made a number of increasingly ambitious 8mm films with titles such as MR. PRIMITIVE (1974) and STORY OF A GIANT COCKROACH (1975), but the declining condition of the Japanese studio system at the time left few opportunities for the future filmmaker to fulfil his original career ambitions. With the involvement of his fellow theater troupe members, however, Tsukamoto eventually returned to the 8mm format. Pooling their collective resources, the group made THE PHANTOM OF REGULAR SIZE (1986) and ADVENTURES OF ELECTRIC ROD BOY (1987), the latter based on Tsukamoto's original stage-play.

During this time, Tsukamoto funded his endeavours by working full-time at an advertising agency, making TV commercials. This, however, left little time for his own creative projects, and with his passion for filmmaking rekindled, he quit his job to focus on the feature debut with which he would launch his career. Entirely self-financed, TETSUO: THE IRON MAN (1989) was shot using 16mm monochrome stock, and made inventive use of stop-motion for its special effects sequences. Initially unable to find a Japanese distributor for the finished film, he submitted it to Rome

International Fantastic Film Festival where, much to his surprise, it received the Best Film Award. TETSUO rapidly went on to gain a massive worldwide cult following, and its vivid depiction of a man who transforms from flesh to metal in a decaying, post-industrial metropolis has seen it long regarded as a key title in the cyberpunk science fiction subgenre.

Since this startling emergence on the filmmaking scene, Tsukamoto has produced all his subsequent work through the Kaijyu Theater company, often completely self-financing. Exceptions are externally funded projects HIRUKO THE GOBLIN (1991), GEMINI (1999), NIGHTMARE DETECTIVE (2006) and NIGHTMARE DETECTIVE 2 (2008). Half of BULLET MAN (2009) was funded by Asmic Ance. It is because of his high degree of control beginning at the scripting stage and continuing throughout the entire production process, that Tsukamoto has managed to maintain such an unrivalled singularity of vision, with an uncompromising and almost obsessive exploration of his core themes in such diverse works as TOKYIO FIST (1995), BULLET BALLET (1998), A SNAKE OF JUNE (2003), VITAL (2004), KOKOTO (2011) and now FIRES ON THE PLAIN (2014).

Jasper Sharp, film scholar, author of Historical Dictionary of Japanese Cinema



## Director/Actor

### Biography

Born in Tokyo on 1 Jan 1960, Shinya Tsukamoto first started making films with an 8mm camera at the age of 14. He won the Grand Prize at Rome International Fantastic Film Festival for his feature film debut TETSUO: THE IRON MAN in 1989. His major works include TOKYO FIST, BULLET BALLET,

## Shinya Tsukamoto 塚本 晋也

GEMINI, A SNAKE OF JUNE, NIGHTMARE DETECTIVE and KOTOKO. He is also a well-known actor, and has appeared in many works by other notable directors. His distinctive style, in which he is involved in all elements of production, direction, screenwriting, photography, lighting, art direction and editing, has won him many awards in Japan and abroad.

### Filmography

*THE ADVENTURE OF DENCHU-KOZO/  
DENCHU KOZO NO BOUKEN* (1987)  
*TETSUO THE IRON MAN / TETSUO* (1989)  
*HIRUKO THE GOBLIN / HIRUKO YOKAI HANTAA* (1990)  
*TETSUO II : THE BODY HAMMER / TETSUO II : BODY HAMMAER* (1992)  
*TOKYO FIST / TOKYO FIST* (1995)  
*BULLET BALLET / BULLET BALLET* (1998)  
*GEMINI / SOUSEIZI* (1999)  
*A SNAKE OF JUNE / LOKUGATSU NO HEBI* (2002)  
*LIZARD / TOKAGE* (2003)  
*VITAL / VITAL* (2004)  
*JEWEL BEETLE / TAMAMUSHI* (2005)  
*HAZE / HAZE* (2005)  
*NIGHTMARE DETECTIVE / AKUMU TANTEI* (2006)  
*NIGHTMARE DETECTIVE 2 / AKUMU TANTEI 2* (2008)  
*TETSUO: THE BULLET MAN / TETSUO: THE BULLET MAN* (2009)  
*THE WISTLE / HAZAKURA TO MATEKI* (2010)  
*KOTOKO / KOTOKO* (2011)



Actor

## Lily Franky リリー・フランキー

Lily Franky was born on 4 November 1963 in Fukuoka. He is an actor, writer, musician, illustrator, photographer, essayist and maker of animated films. Lily Franky is known for his best-selling autobiography *Tokyo Tower: Okan to Boku to, Tokidoki Oton*. His film debut saw him appear alongside Shinya Tsukamoto in *BLIND BEAST VS. KILLER DWARF* by Teruo Ishii (2001). Subsequent film and television roles include *COCORICO*

*MIRACLE TYPE* (2002, TV), *ALL AROUND US* by Ryosuke Hashiguchi (2008), *THE SHIKISOKU GENERATION* by Tomorrow Taguchi (2009), *BOYS ON THE RUN* by Daisuke Miura (2010), *LOVE STRIKES!* by Hitoshi One (2011), *AFRO TANAKA* by Daigo Matsui (2012), *THE DEVIL'S PATH* by Kazuya Shiraishi (2013) and *LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON* (2013), directed by Hiroyuki Koreeda. The latter was screened in Competition at Cannes.



Actor

## Tatsuya Nakamura 中村達也

Born 4 January 1965 in Toyama, Japan. Tatsuya Nakamura is an actor, musician, drummer and founder of the band Losalios. His first film role was in Shinya Tsukamoto's *BULLET BALLET* (1998), and he subsequently appeared in *LAMANT* by Ryuichi Hiroki (2004), *THE BLOOD OF REBIRTH* (2009) and *I'M FLASH!* by Toshiaki Toyoda (2012), *A ROAD STAINED CRIMSON* by Tetsuhiko Nono (2013), *BLAZING FAMIGLIA* by Kazuyoshi Kumakiri (2013).



Actor

## Yusaku Mori 森優作

Born 4th December 1989 in Osaka, Japan. He is gifted with languages, before discovering acting he studied translation in England from the age 17 to 20. Playing the role of Nagamatsu in FIRES ON THE PLAIN marks his debut as an actor.



## Composer

### Chu Ishikawa 石川忠

Born in Kanagawa Prefecture, Japan, in 1966. He discovered his passion and talent for music early on and assembled his first band when he was 18. He is the founding member of the bands 'Der Eisenrost' and 'Zeitlich Vergeltes'. In 1986 he met Shinya Tsukamoto and began his long-term collaboration with him. Working on most of Tsukamoto's films as a composer, he has now become an important component within them.

### Satoshi Hayashi 林啓史

Satoshi Hayashi is an assistant director who has worked extensively with Shinya Tsukamoto since A SNAKE OF JUNE (2002), on films including VITAL (2004), NIGHTMARE DETECTIVE (2006), TETSUO: THE BULLET MAN (2009) and KOTOKO (2011).

## Assistant Director



## Japan's War

From the Japanese perspective, what is generally referred to as World War II may rather be called the Asia-Pacific War. Beginning in Asia with Japan's invasion of Manchuria in 1931 – or, at the latest, with its aggression towards China in 1937 – the war extended to the Pacific regions with Japan's air attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941. The Pacific War, which Japanese strategists had planned as a blitzkrieg to be completed within a limited timeframe, was prolonged far beyond expectation, progressively draining

material and human resources. The end of this unsuccessful conflict came only in the aftermath of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. Nonetheless, the signs of loss were apparent well before this date, both in the ruins and devastation caused by American air raids on Japan's industrial and urban areas, and among the millions of soldiers of the Imperial Japanese Army deployed in Asian and Pacific battlegrounds. At the beginning of 1943, the victory of Allied forces over the Japanese in



## Japan's War

Guadalcanal marked a decisive turning point in the conflict, starting an unbroken string of defeats.

While the conduct of Japanese military forces had been praised by the international community as disciplined and valorous in both the Sino-Japanese war of 1894-95 and the war against Russia in 1904-05, during the Asia-Pacific War they committed cruel crimes against civilians and prisoners of war. This increasing use of violence parallels the degeneration of the Japanese state and its society, a situation that both preceded and accompanied the war. The totalitarian wartime regime imposed a militaristic ideology and strict control over individuals, which deeply affected civilian life, but was particularly harsh in the barracks and on the battlefields, where abuse and violence towards soldiers by their officers became routine. The military code required soldiers to commit suicide rather than surrender or be taken prisoner. Even a private who was captured but able to escape was expected to kill himself once he was returned to his unit. This inhumane and irrational discipline was kept intact even during the last, desperate phase of the war, when a collapse of morale swept through the ranks of the Japanese armed forces. As the Allies advanced, frontline units crumbled into abandoned corpses and defeated survivors.

The war fought by the Japanese in Asia and the Pacific was an intricate patchwork of assailants and victims, the cowardly and the brave, abrupt frenzies and unexpected compassions, a war

where flashes of nostalgic reminiscences accompanied acts of inconceivable ferocity, and survival was bartered for a pinch of tobacco or salt. It was a men's affair where women appeared only to be raped and killed by degraded and isolated men, living on the border of irrevocable doom and sublime lunacy.

The public history and memories of the Asia-Pacific War in Japan largely continue to be influenced by an emphasis on the victimhood of the Japanese masses – regarded as casualties of the wartime regime – rather than on the victimisation of the civilian population of Asian and Pacific countries. By omitting these other victims of Japan's war, history and memory are thus whitewashed and sanitised of the crimes committed by the Imperial Army. Private Tamura was a writer in his civilian life, and now wanders around the Philippines when the battle is almost over, carrying an army-issue hand grenade, given to him so he could commit suicide at the appropriate time. Even though he focuses on individual sufferings, Tsukamoto does not seek absolution from Japan's war crimes; rather he takes us on a Dante-esque journey through the twists and turns of both the individual human mind and a collective insanity.

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