



Gojoe

Sogo Ishii

JAPAN, 2000

137 minutes ■ Colour/35mm
 Production Company: **Suncent
 Cinemaworks Inc.**

Producer: **Takenori Sento**
 Screenplay: **Sogo Ishii, Goro Nakajima**
 Cinematographer: **Makoto Watanabe**
 Editor: **Shuichi Kakesu**
 Production Designer: **Toshihiro Isomi**
 Sound: **Yoshiya Obara**
 Music: **Hiroyuki Onogawa**
 Principal Cast: **Tadanobu Asano,
 Ryu Daisuke, Masatoshi Nagase,
 Jun Kunimura**

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Japan's great iconoclast Sogo Ishii (*Crazy Family, Labyrinth of Dreams*) returns with a spectacular surprise. He has married the kinetic energy of Akira Kurosawa's great samurai pictures with a uniquely deranged brand of Buddhist spirituality, one that owes much more to King Hu than Siddhartha. *Gojoe* also liberally employs the latest CGI technologies to increase the wonder and beauty of its awe-inducing images. Marry these qualities with mesmerizing performances from fine actors – Tadanobu Asano (*Away With Words*), Ryu Daisuke (*Ran*) and Masatoshi Nagase (*Cold Fever*) – and the result is a rather special film indeed.

The setting is 12th-century Japan, a time of social disintegration as the Genji and Heike clans engage in a brutal civil war. "Gojoe" is the name of a bridge near Kyoto, the Imperial capital. Nearby, a Heike sentry is decapitated by an invisible Demon. Two comets speed through the sky. An ancient Oracle predicts great turbulence between the forces of darkness and light.

Meanwhile, Benkei (Ryu), a seasoned warrior who long ago gave up violence for religion, shows the White Monk a Sanskrit inscription which miraculously appeared on his chest, indicating that he will battle the dark forces of chaos.

The Heike clan sends a large force to capture the Demon, but they are slaughtered at Gojoe Bridge by three master

fracas, whereupon he and the Master Demon are transfixed by each other's formidable spiritual energy. We learn that the Master Demon is in fact the Prince of the Genji clan (Tadanobu), in spiritual isolation after the boyhood massacre of his family. Benkei enlists the help of a vagabond sword scavenger (Masatoshi) and they begin to stalk the Prince in his lair beyond Gojoe Bridge.

The legend associated with *Gojoe* is a familiar one in Japan, except Ishii's film kills off many of its important figures, and tantalizingly ends where the legend begins.

■ **Noah Cowan**

Sogo Ishii was born in Fukuoka, Japan in 1957. He established his own production company while studying film at Nippon University. Selected filmography: *Panic in High School* (78), *Crazy Thunder Road* (80), *Burst City* (82), *Crazy Family* (84), *Angel Dust* (94), *August in the Water* (95), *Labyrinth of Dreams* (97) and *Gojoe* (00).

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