top 5 japanese films about death

**Battle Royale**
Japanese cinema is widely regarded the world over; the humanism of *Grave of the Fireflies*, the patience of *Kurosawa*, the beauty of *Miyazaki...* it’s all good. But there is a darker side even you go down to the illegal stuff. Here, then, is a shortlist of recommendations of films that tackle the only war (except for a common thread of *HKG*’s fire collection) which we all share...but can’t escape DEATH!

The first nominee is **Battle Royale**, an inspired movie about a me-too-added to-a-reality TV show that follows a group of teenage delinquents who are kidnapped, fitted with electric dog collars, given random weapons, and told they have 24 hours to kill everyone else before their collars expire. The film mines gird house appeal with an engaging story - especially when director Kinji Fukasaku takes the adaptation to heart, comparing the movie to his experience of working in a factory as a child during WWII. The legend goes that a bomb hit his factory and Fukasaku had to crawl over the bodies of his friends in order to survive. Fukasaku died before the sequel was made, so if you haven’t seen *Battle Royale...* don’t!

There are two awesome anime about the Big D. First up, **Grave of the Fireflies** (originally the main feature to accompany My Neighbour Totoro), a tragic story of two orphaned children trying to survive a war-torn Japan as the nation loses its battle against the allied forces.

The second is **Barefoot Gen**, a genuinely accurate depiction of the atomic bombings and how they directly and indi-rectly destroyed countless lives. Both movies are pretty long and offer little else besides death, destruction and disappointment. It’s a bitch and few other films really show how innocent people suffer as comprehensively as these two masterpiece. Do not for the squeamish!

For a different view on death, see **Akira** by Akira Kurosawa. This classic movie follows an everyday salaryman who has marked his boss’s position at work to get a city park built. As you’d expect from Kurosawa, the film is touching and sucks you deep into a storylines that seems simple but is laced with the kind of everyday complications we all have to deal with.

A lighter depiction of death is the main theme to **The Ring**. It follows a home video that contains a curse - if you watch it, you’ll die seven days later. The main character, a single mother,Screen shot kills the poor bugger: Is this Japan’s ultimate flat-screen? Either way, it’s bloody scary.

**Ikiru**

Man (brilliantly played by Takashi Shimura) as he is diagnosed with cancer and tries to find some sort of meaning to life. He hangs around with a male nurse one night and a young woman the next, but still he finds nothing to relate to. His family seem distant and the only motivation he seems to have is to try to use his position at work to get a city park built. As you’d expect from Kurosawa, the film is touching and sucks you deep into a storylines that seems simple but is laced with the kind of everyday complications we all have to deal with.

**The Funeral**

*Funeral* (Japanese title: Oshichi), by Yasujiro Ozu, is known as the only movie that Ozu made after the war. In the film, a man (played by Chishu Ryu) is diagnosed with cancer and is given only a short time to live. As he journeys to his hometown to see his family, he reflects on his life and the choices he has made. The film is a poignant reminder of the fragility of life and the importance of making the most of the time we have. 

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**top 5 awesome deaths in japanese movies**

**Princess Mononoke**
Want to see some truly awesome sayonaras? Japanese cinema has plenty of them, but here are five of the most memorable.

**Gojira**
When the case is solved, **Yojiro** is just chilling at home in his own broken arm and a creepy young lady experiencing the ultimate bad hair day comes stumbled towards him. Matters get markedly worse when she crawls through his TV screen and kills the poor bugger (this is Japan’s ultimate flat-screen). It’s bloody scary.

**Grave of the Fireflies**
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**The Ring**

Number one on the list was the only film Kurosawa made that got itself a sequel: the awesome **Yojiro**. This one follows a lone samurai as he stumbles across a town in need and works two gangs against each other to earn his living. From the start we know that “The Samurai” (the man with no name... if only they could make a Western movie with that concept) means business, as he takes on a group of thugs so easily it looks like he’s happy-slapping helpless old ladies. One guy says, “I wasn’t in prison for nothing”; another claims, “I’m going to kill you, I’m going to kill you!” and the last one finishes it off with, “They’ll cut my head off, I’ve broken every law!” The Samurai chuckles and says, “So, you won’t mind if I kill you then?” Protecting their pride (instead of their rocks), the bad guys aren’t discour- aged and The Samurai deadpans “There’s no cure for fools” before killing two with a single stroke and taking the last guy’s arm clean off...all within five seconds! Short, sweet and severe.

Lastly, a film by one of my favorite directors: **Dead or Alive**

**Dead or Alive**
Alive (no, not the crappy Holly Valentine movie!) by Ta- kashi Miike. This is a gritty cop drama with Detective Jo- kuma attempting to track down crime boss Ryuki. The end- ing involves the showdown to all showdows. As Ryuki drives along in his car with two cranies, they spot Jokuma waiting for them. Ryuki coolly states, “This is the final scene” and so starts seven minutes of the strangest cinema you’re ever likely to see. Ryuki’s car crashes, one of his cronies storms through Jokuma’s windshield holding a grenade, which causes the car to explode and fly out of shot, only to land with a crash a few seconds later. The other remaining hench- man then escapes the crash site, finds a bone and announces that Jokuma is dead... but mere minutes later the cop in the car is still alive, with Ryuki’s car crushing one of his cronies and himself walking away. As the car is driven away, a crane is shown flying over the city sky and the audience is left wondering what happened to the man who was supposed to die. The film ends with a shot of the city skyline, which is then replaced by a shot of the camera itself, giving the audience a sense of powerlessness and hopelessness. While the film may not be for everyone, it’s certainly a unique and thought-provoking piece of cinema that will leave you thinking long after it’s over.