

# A Colt is My Passport (Koruto wa ore no pasupoto)

Japan | 1967 | 84 minutes

## Credits

<b>Director</b>	Takashi Nomura
<b>Screenplay</b>	Shinji Fujiwara (novel) Shuichi Nagahara (screenplay) Nobuo Yamada (screenplay)
<b>Photography</b>	Shigeyoshi Mine
<b>Music</b>	Harumi Ibe

## Cast

<b>Shuji Kamimura</b>	Jô Shishido
<b>Mina</b>	Chitose Kobayashi
<b>Shun Shiozaki</b>	Jerry Fujio
<b>Funaki</b>	Akiyoshi Fukae

## In Brief

The getaway is often the trickiest part of any bit of criminal skulduggery. After all, heists and hits can be planned, but at a certain point, escapes will have to be improvised, and that's where crime pictures stop being just exercises in cinematic cool and start getting suspenseful.

Here, the crime that must be fled is meticulously constructed, but not exactly to the satisfaction of its instigators - the hitman takes all the information about his target's habits and basically concludes that he has to do the deed in the location that is least convenient for his employers. So in addition to the law being after him, he and his sidekick wind up running from the combined might of two yakuza families. The hitman wants to lie low until he can figure something out, but there's a girl at the truck stop where they're hiding out that Fujio's character has taken a shine to...

The finale is one of the most memorable scenes of the movie; director Takashi Nomura transplants a showdown out of a western to a modern Japanese beach, with cars, automatic weapons, explosives, and carefully laid traps. It's a crazy scene, straining belief a bit but meticulous in its construction.

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## A COLT IS MY PASSPORT: THIS GUN FOR HIRE

Made the same year as such fractured tough-guy fantasies as Seijun Suzuki's scat song of autoannihilation *Branded to Kill* and, on the other edge of the Pacific, John Boorman's similarly prismatic pulp-mortem *Point Blank*, Takashi Nomura's 1967 *A Colt Is My Passport* may have been one of the dying breaths of Nikkatsu's mukokuseki noirs, but what a hot, blistering belch of action savagery and truck-stop heartbreak it was!

Opening with the moans of a haunted harmonica, a sudden gunshot, and the florid, Morricone-oni twanging of an electric guitar, *Colt* begins by practically begging to be seen in the light of the spaghetti westerns that had been sweeping the globe since 1964. And much of what follows—in mukokuseki terms, anyway—remains true to that already distinctly hybrid Euro-American form, as triggerman Joe Shishido and his guitar-strumming sidekick, Jerry Fujio, go on the lam after a job Joe's done too well incurs the wrath of the very mobsters who hired him. (A rare freelancer in the lingering days of long-term studio contracts, the Shanghai-born Fujio had already appeared in Akira Kurosawa's *Yojimbo*, for Toho, and in several films for archsatirist Yasuzo Masumura at Daiei; for Nikkatsu, his Eurasian looks would become yet another index of the genre's internationalism.)

Fans longer familiar with *Branded to Kill* are often quick to note the similarities between the two films: a bird, rather than a butterfly, providing a sudden distraction for Joe's rifle sight; his occupation in both, a hit man on the run. But Nomura has his own, distinctively exuberant style: an alternately cramped and oblivionwide vision of destiny drawn in shotgun blasts rather than Suzuki's surrealist filigree. Dragging a golf bag filled with guns and a freshly crafted time bomb through a dust storm on some barren wasteland, Shishido prepares for the film's astonishing climax by digging a hole in the dirt: Is that his own grave? Is that tiny, skittering fly in the rubble a measure of his own mortality? The answers arrive in the sudden shapes of marksmen materializing from the swirling silt all around him.

*Colt* was another riveting star turn for the insouciant Shishido, who was discovered in a New Face competition at Nikkatsu in 1954. His first films were all supporting parts, and worried that his career might stall before it started, he decided in 1957 on a new face of his own, undergoing plastic surgery that would result in the puffer, comically roguish cheeks and immediately distinctive countenance we now recognize from numerous Suzuki classics. Nomura had been making mukokuseki movies with Shishido since 1961. By 1969, he had turned to directing jitsuroku (true story) yakuza epics like *Showdown at Nagasaki*; by 1976, he had disappeared from Western view.

What Nomura and all the other mukokuseki action directors at Nikkatsu during those wildly inventive days left us with is an indelible legacy of luminous, and sometimes outright loony, images of a world in vibrant chaos, a widescreen wonderland of mighty guys and long-suffering secondaries, gunsels and gamines and crooked uncles, whose collective motto could well have been drawn from one of *Colt*'s longest-resonating lines, a bit of epically hard-boiled hyperbole that concludes: "All that's left for me is dust, and the smell of men and gasoline."

*Chuck Stephens*

