

## Black Rain ★★½

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**Year of Release:** 1989

Review by Randy Parker

**Country:** USA

**Verdict:** Skip It

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*Black Rain* has all the trappings of a hit movie. Its director is Ridley Scott, best known for *Alien* and *Blade Runner*. The movie was produced by the red hot team of Stanley Jaffe and Sherry Lansing, who gave us *The Accused* and *Fatal Attraction*. The lead role is played by Michael Douglas, a proven box office draw. With this line-up, it should come as no surprise that *Black Rain* is as slick as the beaches in Alaska. But unfortunately, while it looks great on the surface, *Black Rain* is empty at the core.

Douglas plays Nick Conklin, a street-smart New York detective. Andy Garcia plays his partner, Charlie. Together, they're assigned to deliver a vicious killer to the police in Osaka, Japan. But at the airport, their prisoner escapes, and they're forced to stay in Osaka to recapture him. The movie offers loads of gritty and gory action, while also exploring the culture clash between the American detectives and their Japanese counterparts.

Conklin is your generic, macho tough guy. He drives a big motorcycle, wears black leather, and doesn't like to play by the rules. And therein lies a major problem with *Black Rain*: the main character is not only unlikable, but also an uninspired regurgitation of Dirty Harry and his imitators.

Garcia is appealing as Charlie, but unfortunately

his character is woefully underdeveloped. Kate Capshaw provides unnecessary window-dressing in a small supporting role. The stand-out is Ken Takakura, a Japanese superstar appearing in his first high-profile American film. He plays the conservative, Japanese detective assigned to baby-sit the American cops. Takakura showers his character with depth and conviction, but there's only so much he can do with the limited screenplay. The movie invests far too much energy into its cops and robbers plot and far too little into character development.

The real stars of *Black Rain* are the stunning direction and exotic setting. *Black Rain* is the first American production to be filmed in Osaka, Japan's third largest metropolis. The city streets are crowded and bustling with life. The night-time is pierced by more neon than you'd find in Las Vegas and Times Square combined. Scott captures Osaka's excitement and intensity with a strong eye for composition. His lighting and shadow effects, for example, are exquisite.

The movie's problem is that it asks us to take it seriously as a character study and as a cross-cultural comparison. But on those levels, *Black Rain* is a washout.