

Ghost Dog Practically Defines RZA

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A film seemingly tailor-made for rapper, song writer, & music producer The RZA, who's score accompanies it, Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai embodies the intersection of hip-hop, mobster posturing, and "Asian spirituality" that practically defines the former Wu-Tang member's aesthetic.

Directed by independent film veteran Jim Jarmusch ("Down by Law," "Dead Man"), Ghost Dog stars Forrest Whitaker, in a characteristically great performance, as the titular character, a hit man who lives by the Hagakure, the old Japanese text on how a samurai should live. His methods are suitably eccentric: he communicates with his employers, an aging Jersey mafia family, solely by carrier pigeon and he accepts payment only on the first day of autumn. Yet the usual arrangement goes awry when the lead mobster's daughter witnesses one of his killings, and his bosses try to have him rubbed out.

This would all be routine enough were it not for Jarmusch's insistently offbeat direction and unexpectedly comic script. Far from being intimidating lords of the underworld, Ghost Dog's employers have trouble paying the rent for their hideout, and spend much of their time watching old Betty Boop and Woody Woodpecker cartoons. The head honcho (Henry Silva) barely speaks, and when he does, it is usually in bizarre non-sequiturs, which are matched only by those of one of his consigliore, an almost deaf old man (Gene Ruffini).

Yet there is no condescension in Jarmusch's treatment of any of his characters. The Mafioso are treated with compassion, they are not brutal villains, nor are they bumbling fools, they can get the job done when it needs to be, but they are, like all of the characters in the film, out of touch with contemporary society. Ghost Dog's lifestyle diverges so very much from those of the world around him that his only friend is an ice cream salesman who doesn't speak English (Isaach de Bankole). In a telling quote from the Hagakure (sections of which are sprinkled throughout the film), it is stated that every generation is different, and there is no way to return to the ideals of those that have passed. It is a theme that delicately explains the strong current of sadness that runs through the entire film--upon being shot, one of the mobsters exclaims that he is grateful that he will be able to die like his mobster forebears. And beneath all of the wonderful characterizations and stylized action is The RZA's wonderful score that provides both a driving momentum for the action and a minor-key sadness to match the ever-present gray skies.

[Source](#)