

Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai by Jim Jarmusch

I Plot summary. Fill in the gaps with the words below.

inherits - wrath - showcases - retainer - hoodlum- ordeal - payback - character - hit man
- post modernist - witnesses - portrayed - bankrupt - soundtrack - romantic -

Ghost Dog revolves around its title _____, an African-American mafia _____ who has taken the spiritual and philosophical posture of a samurai, and his attempts to reconcile his beliefs with those of his employers. Ghost Dog (Forrest Whitaker) devotedly carries out assassinations for his _____ Louie (John Tormey), a mafia foot soldier who once saved his life. Things become difficult when the mafia's don, Vargo (Henry Silva), orders the murder of one of his associates because he is sleeping with his daughter Louise (Tricia Vessey). Ghost Dog successfully carries out his mission, but Louise _____ the murder. In order to maintain his image with his daughter, Vargo must adhere to the mafia's philosophy on revenge and _____. Ironically, Vargo orders the elimination of Ghost Dog. The rest of the film _____ Ghost Dog's quest for survival. His _____ is complex, as he also has to adhere to the samurai code and protect his retainer.

Ghost Dog deconstructs the myths and conventions of the gangster and samurai films. For instance, the mafia that is _____ in Ghost Dog is completely decadent, contrasting strongly with the largely _____ and luxurious gangster world shown in films such as *The Godfather* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1972) and *The Untouchables* (Brian De Palma, 1987). The godfathers in Ghost Dog are aged, _____ and lonely.

The chaotic environment that surrounds Ghost Dog is in a large part due to the collision of different cultures. Ghost Dog himself is a product of such a cultural clash. He is an African-American _____ who reinvents himself as a powerful Japanese warrior working for Italian-American gangsters headquartered in a Chinese restaurant.

The _____ is great; it's made by the hip-hop artist RZA, but most of it will be enjoyable to people who aren't into hip-hop.

Ghost Dog is a violent _____ film permeated by an inexorable sense of hopelessness. The Hispanic man who is building a boat on top of his roof further highlights the film's bleakness. He resembles a busy Noah working on his ark of salvation before the _____ of God destroys humankind. Even so, the film tries to convey the hope of a possible non-violent solution, which may be reached by the younger and more educated generations. As the samurai tradition is passed on to an intelligent little girl, and while Vargo's book-loving daughter _____ the mafia leadership, one can only hope the future is more peaceful. For Jarmusch's characters, a deep spirituality is their only means of survival and achieving transcendence, even when surrounded by a violent and illogical environment.

II Film reviews

Match the following words to their synonyms in the reviews.

Inappropriate
Ridiculous
Storyline
Quiet / muted

Subordinate
First rate
Dark

- The movie sits in some awkward place between tones; it's too bloody to be funny and too silly to be dramatic and too self-indulgent to be anything other than what it is, one more bad movie. (*By Stephen Hunter - Washington Post Staff Writer -Friday, March 17, 2000*)

- Ghost Dog? Ghost Plot.

Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai is a film that showed much promise, but delivered none. The tone of the movie attempts to be serious, but at the same time, displays mafia characters who's "Abbott and Costello slapstick antics" discount any validity the film may have offered. This is one of the most loosely framed plots I have ever seen, combined with horrendous acting (aside from Forest Whitaker). I do not recommend this movie to anyone. (*tripedady9 May 2001*)

- A Tour de Force for Whitaker

Men clinging to noble, outdated ideals in a world that no longer cares about such things: that's the concept here. Whitaker shows amazing strength and control in an antihero role that is necessarily secretive and subdued. Silva and Tormey turn in solid performances -- Tormey is especially poignant as the second-fiddle Mafioso, torn between his admiration of Ghost Dog and his devotion to his own sempai (Silva).

The excellent soundtrack, courtesy of RZA, adds its own sombre-yet-hip mood to the work. Jarmusch frames his characters on rooftops, on 'hood byways, in mansions, in the back rooms of Chinese restaurants, and everywhere there is a feeling of the walls closing in, of things coming to an end, of finality. See it. It's a good movie. (*redheadgrrl27 August 2004*)

- Top-notch

Basically, Jim Jarmusch's best (and most accessible) film; Ghost Dog is the spirit of this possible future. We don't have to have the worst of every culture, we could actually bring together the best. Magnificently written, shot, performed - and, despite a grim finale, one of the most optimistic films on this topic I've ever seen. (*winner5510 July 2006*)

https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0165798/reviews?ref_=tt_ql_3

III Writing

In your groups, write a review of the film “Ghost Dog”. The aim of your review is to help people decide if they might want to see the film. You should provide the names of the main actors and the directors, provide a brief outline of the plot and give your opinion of different aspects of the film. Conclude by saying whether or not you would recommend it. Approximate length: 500 words. This piece of work will contribute to one of your writing marks for the semester. Marks will be awarded for the following:

- **Structure:** is there an introduction, a main body and a conclusion?
- **Content:** do you include the details mentioned above? Do you explain and justify your opinion effectively?
- **Language:** do you use a wide vocabulary including the appropriate terminology for discussing various aspects of a film? Are your sentences correctly formulated with accurate spelling?

KEYS

I Plot summary

Ghost Dog revolves around its title **character**, an African-American mafia **hit man** who has taken the spiritual and philosophical posture of a samurai, and his attempts to reconcile his beliefs with those of his employers. Ghost Dog (Forrest Whitaker) devotedly carries out assassinations for his **retainer** Louie (John Tormey), a mafia foot soldier who once saved his life. Things become difficult when the mafia's don, Vargo (Henry Silva), orders the murder of one of his associates because he is sleeping with his daughter Louise (Tricia Vessey). Ghost Dog successfully carries out his mission, but Louise **witnesses** the murder. In order to maintain his image with his daughter, Vargo must adhere to the mafia's philosophy on revenge and **payback**. Ironically, Vargo orders the elimination of Ghost Dog. The rest of the film **showcases** Ghost Dog's quest for survival. His **ordeal** is complex, as he also has to adhere to the samurai code and protect his retainer.

Ghost Dog deconstructs the myths and conventions of the gangster and samurai films. For instance, the mafia that is **portrayed** in *Ghost Dog* is completely decadent, contrasting strongly with the largely **romantic** and luxurious gangster world shown in films such as *The Godfather* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1972) and *The Untouchables* (Brian De Palma, 1987). The godfathers in *Ghost Dog* are aged, **bankrupt** and lonely.

The chaotic environment that surrounds *Ghost Dog* is in a large part due to the collision of different cultures. Ghost Dog himself is a product of such a cultural clash. He is an African-American **hoodlum** who reinvents himself as a powerful Japanese warrior working for Italian-American gangsters headquartered in a Chinese restaurant.

The **soundtrack** is great; it's made by the hip-hop artist RZA, but most of it will be enjoyable to people who aren't into hip-hop.

Ghost Dog is a violent **post-modernist** film permeated by an inexorable sense of hopelessness. The Hispanic man who is building a boat on top of his roof further highlights the film's bleakness. He resembles a busy Noah working on his ark of salvation before the **wrath** of God destroys humankind. Even so, the film tries to convey the hope of a possible non-violent solution, which may be reached by the younger and more educated generations. As the samurai tradition is passed on to an intelligent little girl, and while Vargo's book-loving daughter **inherits** the mafia leadership, one can only hope the future is more peaceful. In the multicultural worlds of Jarmusch's films, an ethnic confrontation that leads to catastrophic consequences seems to be inevitable. And for Jarmusch's characters, a deep spirituality is their only means of survival and achieving transcendence, even when surrounded by a violent and illogical environment.

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