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FILMS OF THE DAY



Black Rain

In Competition

"THESE are ordinary people who by accident encountered The Bomb," says director Shohei Imamura of his latest film, *Black Rain*, which screens in competition today. "In fact, they are so ordinary

that one Japanese critic, reviewing the book on which the film is based, wrote that the family is so common that, if they had not been exposed to the atomic bomb, there would have been nothing to write a novel about, and therefore nothing to make a movie about."

Imamura has long been an outspoken critic of Japan's imperial system and of the role played by Japan in World War II—a subject which, even today, can cause historical revisionists to twist the words used in high school history books. But, with *Black Rain*, Imamura puts politics aside and, instead,

concentrates on the purely human: on the effects of the Hiroshima bomb on the personal lives of those who survived the immediate blast.

The film starts just a few minutes before the bomb drops, showing the mundane, day-to-day activities of a handful of characters on whose lives the film will focus. Then, a shot of the sky shows an oddly shaped object falling towards the ground and, seconds later, Hiroshima is destroyed.

In the ensuing confusion, Imamura manages to bring sharply into focus both the innocence of those affected and the tremendous

ignorance of the victims about what has just happened. Nuclear power was unheard of. Radiation was not a reality. Those in Hiroshima had no idea what had happened.

But the horror of the actual explosion is dealt with only briefly and intermittently in the film. Instead, the bulk of *Black Rain* takes place some five years after the catastrophe, as those who were exposed to the radiation continue to drop dead from its effects. The main character is a young girl, Yasuko, whose aunt and uncle fruitlessly search for a husband for her: despite medical check-ups, the families of prospective grooms are scared off by the fact that she was exposed to the black rain which fell on Hiroshima after the bomb exploded.

Despite the nature of the material, Imamura insists that *Black Rain* is not an anti-nuclear film, nor is it an attempt to portray the Japanese simply as victims of The Bomb. "I have tried to depict the human condition in a very deep sense," he says. "Simply put, the Japanese could be seen as victims in this film. But I don't think I've presented them in that way. And my previous films have most definitely not put forward the idea that Japan was just a victim."

Imamura has become something of a regular fixture at Cannes, having won the Golden Palm for *The Ballad Of Narayama* in 1983, and having directed the official Japanese competition entry, *Zegen*, in 1987. But this international acclaim has not helped him raise funds for his films in Japan. Echoing the feelings of many a Japanese director, he comments: "It's so hard to come up with finance, sometimes I wonder if I'm a movie maker or a fund raiser!"

Jeff Sipe

● *Black Rain* (above left, both pics) — concerning "ordinary people who by accident encountered The Bomb"

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