

## East meets West in martial arts splatterfest reminiscent of Bruce Lee

Written by Kam Williams

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As a boy, Raizo (Rain) was abducted by a secret society which kidnaps young kids and turns them into cold-blooded killers programmed to do the bidding of diabolical crime boss Lord Ozunu (Sho Kosugi) by the time they are adults. Over the course of his imprisonment in that yakuza dojo, Raizo was put on a rigorous daily regimen and ordered to master a variety of weapons and martial arts disciplines.

Furthermore, he was expected to internalize a number of mind-control mantras, such as “Pain breeds weakness.” and “To survive, you must learn to feel nothing at all.” However, because of his blossoming romantic relationship with Kiriko (Kylie Goldstein), another captive at the orphanage, he never quite lost his sense of humanity entirely.

Tragedy ensues after the beautiful girl allows herself to be slashed across the face by the cruel Ozunu rather than attack the boy she has a big crush on. For, she is subsequently slain for her stubborn refusal to capitulate to the demanding sensei’s will. Only then does Raizo belatedly wise up in reaction, and run away to Europe where he manages to keep a low profile.

Fast-forward a few years and we find him still in hiding in Berlin, a city suddenly plagued by a series of mysterious political assassinations. The hits are being pulled off surreptitiously, leaving the clueless authorities totally confounded. Truth be told, the murders are being performed by a crack team of ninjas dispatched to Germany from the Far East by none other than Lord Ozunu and led by his evil henchman, Takeshi (Rick Yune). And despite the CIA and Interpol agents’ superior firepower, they nonetheless prove no match for these very elusive, shadowy targets.

Luckily, renegade Raizo recognizes the trademarks of his ex-comrades’ work, and he’s still smarting over squandering his last opportunity to save a damsel in distress. Therefore, he’s pumped to spring into action when he realizes forensic researcher Mika (Naomie Harris) has been marked for death for attempting to crack the case.

This is the premise of *Ninja Assassin*, an old-fashioned, martial arts saga directed by James McTeigue ( *V for Vendetta*). The high body-count adventure might be best thought of as an East meets West splatterfest unfolding like a lethal cross of *Crouching Tiger* and Sam Peckinpah. The film features both ballet-like fight sequences found in the former and the sort of gratuitous gore one would associate with the latter.

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One day, the movie might be best remembered as marking the arrival of Rain as a bona fide Hollywood matinee idol. The handsome, Korean singing sensation cuts a very charismatic screen presence here in the title role, making females swoon when not taking on wave after wave of malevolent bad guys. Yes, he is frequently the beneficiary of state-of-the-art, special f/x and carefully-choreographed stunts, still, don't be surprised if he soon emerges as the heir apparent to Bruce Lee as a karate star with immense crossover appeal.

### **Excellent (4 stars)**

Rated R for profanity and graphic violence.

Running time: 99 minutes

Studio: Warner Brothers

To see a trailer for *Ninja Assassin*, visit: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UAJb5BvpPbs>

To see a video of Rain performing his hit "I Do," visit: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gk8FOvo3sQE>