

Brother

Takeshi Kitano

USA/JAPAN/UNITED KINGDOM,
2000

107 minutes ■ Colour/35mm
Production Company: **Recorded Pictures Company**
Producer: **Jeremy Thomas, Masayuki Mori**
Screenplay: **Takeshi Kitano**
Editor: **Takeshi Kitano**
Music: **Joe Hisaishi**
Principal Cast: **Takeshi Kitano, Omar Epps, Claude Maki**

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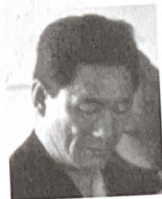
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In his best films, Takeshi "Beat" Kitano combines his characteristic style of deadpan comedy and explosive violence with meditative and moving explorations of characters living by the rigorous code of the Yakuza. In recent films such as *Fireworks* and *Kikujiro*, tragic circumstance is tempered by unspoken bonds and deep emotional exploration. His latest masterwork, *Brother*, again takes us into the world of hard-boiled criminals bound together by tradition and mutual respect. Living on the edge of society, the values these men hold most dear are those of discipline, courage and, most importantly, honour.

Kitano plays Yamamoto, a member of the Japanese Yakuza deeply involved in a gang war with a rival clan. With the rest of his family all but wiped out, and staring defeat in the face, his only option is to start a new life in Los Angeles where he has a younger brother, Ken. Implacable, his shoulders half-bowed by his tough life, a slight twitch glancing across his face from time to time, Yamamoto is a silent but deadly force. Ken is a small-time drug dealer, but the arrival of big brother changes the scene completely; he brings a ruthless and logical efficiency to everything he does. His strong-arm tactics attract immediate attention and soon they find themselves negotiating with the big boys. Growing in size and power, Yamamoto's gang seems unstoppable until they take on the local Mafia, who will do anything to maintain their grip on the LA underworld.

Claude Maki as Ken and Omar Epps as Denny, one of the gang members, bring an invigorating freshness to the film. Kitano is, as always, indisputably brilliant, infusing Yamamoto with a cynical, understated charm – the perfect sensei, teaching his pupils the deadly art of the Yakuza. Kitano's style has the precision of a watch – every scene carries meaning. The action is intense and, at times, shockingly brutal (one should not forget that this is a gangster film!). Yet *Brother* is also full of surprising tenderness and humour. As Japanese Yakuza values enter American life, the tension is palpable and, in the end, deeply moving. Simply put, *Brother* is Kitano's finest work to date.

■ **Noah Cowan**



Takeshi Kitano was born in Tokyo, Japan in 1947. He entered show business in 1972 under the nickname Beat Takeshi and became a huge success in Japan as a stand-up comic. His career has included writing novels, poetry and newspaper columns, as well as acting and painting. Selected

filmography: *Violent Cop* (89), *Boiling Point* (90), *A Scene at the Sea* (91), *Sonatine* (93), *Getting Any?* (95), *Kids Return* (96), *Fireworks* (97), *Kikujiro* (99) and *Brother* (00).

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