



Onibi

Onibi: The Fire Within

Rokuro Mochizuki

JAPAN, 1996

101 minutes ■ Colour/35mm

Production Company: **Gaga Communications**

Executive Producer: **Hiroshi Yaman**

Producer: **Yoshinori Chiba,**

Toshiki Kimura

Screenplay: **Toshiyuki Morioka**

Cinematographer: **Naomasa Imaizumi**

Editor: **Yasushi Shimanura**

Production Designer: **Hirohide Shibata**

Sound: **Yukiya Satoh**

Music: **Ken-ichi Kamio**

Principal Cast: **Yoshio Harada, Reiko**

Kataoka, Sho Aikawa, Eiji Okuda

Print Source/Foreign Sales Agent: **Gaga**

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Production: **Gaga Communications.**

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While the Japanese gangster film has a long and venerable history, in recent years this tradition has been given a major shot in the arm by a celebrated group of filmmakers, including Takeshi Kitano, whose *Fireworks* is playing in this Festival. This group also includes Rokuro Mochizuki, whose last film was the internationally acclaimed *Another Lonely Hitman*. Not for him Takeshi Kitano's macho romantics or goofballs like Kaizo Hayashi's *Miku Hama*; Rokuro created instead a fully-realized, deadly serious philosopher, intent on seeing his vision of justice carried out.

Rokuro's new film, *Onibi: The Fire Within*, amplifies the themes and concerns of his last outing with even greater success. Again this film comes from an original story by Yukio Yamanouchi, the former legal consultant of Yamaguchi-gumi, the largest crime syndicate in Japan. His unique experiences have yielded a number of novels about unusually intriguing figures within the gangster brotherhood and Rokuro's cool, performance-driven style seems best suited to adapting his work.

Once called "Ball Of Fire" for his prodigious killing ability, Kunihiro is released from prison. But his former colleagues now seem only interested in money and self-preservation. He decides to go straight, rejecting an offer of work from Tanigawa, a lieutenant in another gang. He ends up living with his prison friend, the flamboyantly gay Sakata. After a spell of manual labour, Kunihiro is finally persuaded to re-enter the

gangster world as a driver. Still disgusted by the new leadership, he takes refuge in an increasingly intimate friendship with Asako, a piano player at a classy nightclub. Her past seems even more complicated than Kunihiro's and she is unable to assist him with his existential crisis as he plummets deeper and deeper into a world he has come to hate.

Kunihiro is completely driven by his own code of ethics: death befalls those who deserve it without mercy; those people with good hearts get full protection. This Melville-like cool and steely resolve plays out perfectly in the hands of Yoshio Harada, a veteran of outlaw roles for the likes of Seijun Suzuki and Masahiro Shinoda in the seventies. Frequently spiced with moments of quixotic humour – much of it driven by Kunihiro's extremely unusual relationship with Sakata – *Onibi: The Fire Within* is a thoughtful, beautifully-crafted journey into the soul of an honourable man.

■ **Noah Cowan**

Rokuro Mochizuki was born in Tokyo, Japan in 1957. At 24, he began studying at the Image Forum's Research Center for Cinematic Arts. He made his directing debut in *Final Taping: Strip*, and then established his own production company, E Staff Union. Feature films include: *Skinless Night* (1991), *The Underworld Reporter*, *Debeso*, *Kitanai Yatsu*, and *Onibi: The Fire Within* (96).

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