

'Tokyo Vice': American reporter's tale of crime underworld 'yawningly long'



CHENNAI: Films on gangsters are nothing new and they have had an arc beginning from the American Westerns to Godfather fare. HBO Max's "Tokyo Vice," created by J.T. Rogers in a series of eight episodes, are yawningly long and offer little novelty or finesse.



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Narrating the adventures of a real-life American journalist, Jake Adelstein, who learnt Japanese, lived in Tokyo, worked for a leading newspaper and wrote about all this in his eponymous book, the work takes us on a dark and deadly ride through the dazzling neon-lit metro.

His dealings as a crime reporter with the city's underworld and the police have largely inspired the television series. But his bestselling memoir has been questioned in *The Hollywood Reporter* which reveals that his friends and colleagues at the daily have raised doubts about the accuracy of his reporting.



The series follows the adventures of a real-life American journalist, Jake Adelstein, who lived in Tokyo, worked for a leading newspaper. Supplied

The director's portrayals play out like a fictionalized account of Tokyo's seedy underbelly where the yakuza and bar hostesses have a love-hate relationship with cops. In an early sequence, we hear one of them telling Adelstein (played by Ansel Elgort) that there are no murders in Japan, followed by several scenes of gore, blood and bodies in what turns out to be a bitter power play between two gangsters — Ishida (Shun Sugata) and Tozawa (Ayumi Tanida).

Woven into this, though not quite neatly, is a subplot on a bar girl, Samantha Porter (Rachel Keller), who had run away from her hometown after stealing money from a nunnery. This is similar to Adelstein's personal story: He left Missouri, leaving his

family behind including a sick sister. It is never quite clear what had driven him in the first place to land in Tokyo and try so hard to get into a Japanese-language newspaper with a tag like *gaijin* (foreigner) mocking him.



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There are far too many exaggerations bundled into the episodes as there are plot-driven conveniences. Samantha's character, for one, comes off as highly unbelievable, especially the way she switches allegiances from Adelstein to a yakuza, Sato (Show Kasamatsu).

However, two relationships are nicely written. Adelstein develops a lasting tie with crime cop, Hiroto Katagiri (a compelling Ken Watanabe, a solid pillar in the Japanese movie industry), and the reporter also has a great professional camaraderie with his newspaper supervisor, Emi Maruyama (Rinko Kikuchi), and these convey a certain warmth that is otherwise lacking in the series.

The effort to get the celebrated Michael Mann, who is nearly 80, to set the tone of the series by asking him to direct the pilot plot, backfires in the remaining seven episodes. The contrast is too glaring to be missed, and even the couple of credible performances, Elgort's included, cannot lift "Tokyo Vice" out of its sordid mess.
