

ORIENTAL CINEMA

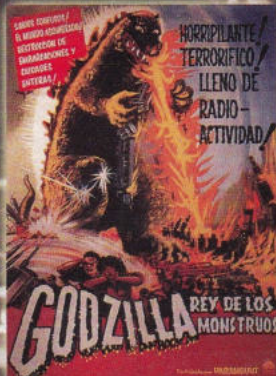
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A NOSTALGIC
TRIBUTE TO GOJIRA,
THE KING OF THE
MONSTER MOVIES!

PLUS:
MARTIAL ARTS,
ANIME,
SUPERHEROES,
KIKAIDA/KIKAIDER,
CUTE GIRLS
AND MORE!

Celebrating
GOJIRA's
50th
ANNIVERSARY!



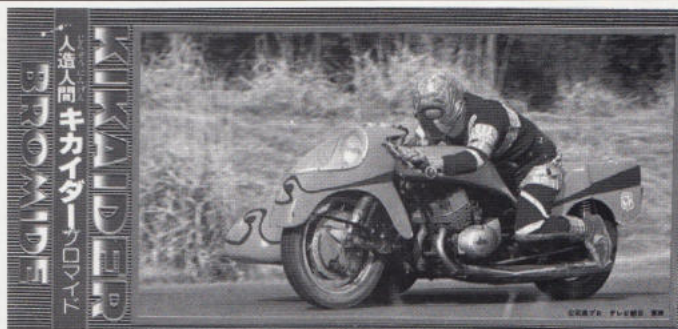
ORIENTAL CINEMA

#22 - 2004

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ABOVE: A photo from an original Japanese source in the 1970s, using the program title's correct spelling.

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EDITORIAL

It's been like two years since we released an edition of *Oriental Cinema*, but 2004 being the 50th anniversary of GOJIRA, I figured there's no way I couldn't not do a magazine this year! But before you go on to read my tribute to a classic movie which changed the face of sci-fi, here's an explanation as to what's been going on with *OC*. It's no secret that digital technology (i.e. the internet and easily-accessible DVDs from various countries/genres) has been changing the world, and the print media industry appears to be a casualty. After all, who would buy a magazine like *OC* when you could get all that same information (free!) from the internet!? Only the most commercially successful magazines can thrive during these times, and let's face it—nobody involved in *OC* was ever able to quit their day-job! As *OC* slowly fades back into obscurity (where it came from), I thought I was going to be miserable, as though a close family member had died. I expected an empty void in my life. Instead, these two years away from *OC* have been like a vacation; a breath of fresh air! I rarely have to sit around watching foreign-language movies any more, and the tedious research & translating are things I really don't miss! I've been traveling, scuba diving, shooting underwater video footage, having exotic wild animal encounters, collecting venomous pets, and producing independent films. *OC* has been holding me back for too long, and I've grown tired of most of the film genres I used to enjoy. I do, however, have a few *OC*s ready for release; these are issues I was working on a few years ago, when I still obsessed with movies. The plan is to release these last few *OC*s over the next four or five years, and then officially call it quits. For future reference, I no longer use my old postal address in Fremont; I disbanded that when my email account (damonfoster@earthlink.net) made snail-

mail obsolete. Anyway, this here paragraph is my 2004 re-cap. The remainder of this editorial was written long ago, when I was still passionate about TV shows. What follows is uncensored, from-the-gut attitude, made when I was furious over Kiku TV's shenanigans in Hawaii. Here goes.....

Elsewhere in this issue is our obligatory superhero section, *Kaizo Ningen Update*, which includes another convention review. Reviews of conventions (i.e. G-Fest and the Asian Fantasy Film Expo) are nothing new in the pages of *Oriental Cinema*. But this is the first time this publication has reported on one which happened at Hawaii. Naturally, being an event on the island of Oahu, the central topic is the series JINZO NINGEN KIKAI DA (人造人間キカイダー), which is better known to Californians as KIKAI DAI, and/or KIKAI DAI: THE ANDROID OF JUSTICE. Though the self-centered



In California during the mid-1970s a young KIKAI DAI fan contemplates a foolish career as a magazine editor, while proudly displaying a favorite T-shirt.



The TV disclaimer ("Do Not Attempt to Imitate the Characters in This Story") fell on deaf ears when KIKAIIDER aired in California back in 1976! The Japanese-language series was a hit for even the most suburban, white-bread of kids!

Hawaiian fans prefer to spell it "Kikaida" (thanks to a transliteration error courtesy of Kiku TV) and that's how we verbally pronounce it, I myself shall write it as KIKAIIDER, because that's how every original Japanese source spelled it when using English text. After all, who am I going to believe? The Japanese who made the series, or trendy Hawaiians?! Truthfully, I'm inconsistent and often spell it "Kikaidar" and "Kikaida" alternately (both have equal merit, I suppose). Regardless, the festival critiqued on page 22 is the Hawaii All-Collectors' Show 2001. I myself was unable to attend the event because of the short notice, otherwise I myself would have been the one writing the review. Very few (if any) mainland superhero fans were able to attend Hawaii All-Collectors' Show that year because it was upon us way too fast. Until very recently, Hawaiians didn't know superhero programs like KIKAIIDER and GO-RANGERS also

KIKAIIDER 01

89 half-an-hour episodes

The Android is a robot made precisely in the image of man. Scientists are now on the last stages of completing Dr. Gill's troops of such robots which are to be used in the evil scheme of monopolizing all the wealth on earth.

However, among the Androids is one called Kikaider. It was made by Dr. Komyoji so much like man that its human conscience conflicts with submitting to Dr. Gill. Kikaider becomes a fighter for justice.

Learning of this, Dr. Gill orders his troops to eliminate Kikaider, who is obstructing his plan to take over the world. Endless battles ensue. Kikaider, riding on his red motorcycle equipped with various fantastic devices, changes into his fighting attire.



ABOVE: An ad for the KIKAIIDER ("Kikaida") series, as originally marketed by Toei (in Tokyo), when they attempted to combine both KIKAIIDER and KIKAIIDER 01. Note the proper spelling, coming right from the horse's mouth!

aired on the U.S. mainland. So unfortunately, little effort was made to promote the Hawaii All-Collectors' Show outside of Hawaii. Though I can't blame the Hawaiians for not being aware of their continental counterparts, I was still pretty pissed off about this. I would have loved to have been able to attend the event, and to have met actors like Daisuke Ban and Shunsuke Ikeda in person. After all, I was a fan of KIKAIIDER in the 1970s when I was a little kid who watched it every Sunday night at 8:00 P.M. I even had a KIKAIIDER T-shirt (it read "Kikaida", so obviously it was imported from Hawaii, not Japan), and it wasn't uncommon for my brother and myself to choreograph mockeries of our favorite Kikaider fight scenes, performed on my grandparents' front lawn (the old folks were impressed by our kicks, jumps & acrobatic flips, but didn't know what the hell we were imitating!).

So after the convention, I sought out the entrepreneurs who made the gathering possible, and made a number of new friendships and email pen-pals in the process. I made it clear to them that there are superhero fans outside of Hawaii (try not to faint!), who would love to take part in Hawaiian festivities. For once, it looked as though the gap between the mainstream fandoms and Hawaii's own unique pop culture would be bridged. I did my best to get the word out to locals that there's an alternative to G-Fest (G-Fest great; don't get me wrong. But my philosophy is the more variety, the better). So the Hawaii All-Collectors' Show could have been the first hint of things to come, the start of a new phase in superhero fandom. Because of KIKAIIDER's popularity in Hawaii, the fandom could

be springboarded into a worldwide phenomena (though obviously, the Kikaider stuff itself could only occur in Hawaii). Were it not for the Hawaii All-Collectors' Show, I wouldn't know all these fans and entrepreneurs. I communicated with Hawaiian upstarts like Tracey Jeremiah and Lane Luna, and also kept in close contact with local experts (i.e. August Ragone, Paul Haberman & William Ferguson) in the genre, and everybody seemed interested in attending the next Hawaii All-Collectors' Show. Several of us saved our money and were making plans to attend the Hawaii All-Collectors' Show 2002.

Though former TV stars Daisuke Ban (KIKAIIDER, BATTLE FEVER J, NINJA CAPTOR, INAZUMAN, INAZUMAN FLASH and RING) and Shunsuke Ikeda (KIKAIIDER 01, RETURN OF ULTRAMAN, KINKYU SHIREI 10.4.10.10) might be considered "hasbeens" by some, their popularity in Hawaii soared in recent years, thanks in part to the Hawaii All-Collectors' Show 2001. This made the possibility of seeing them (at the Hawaii All-Collectors' Show 2002) all the more exciting. Plans were underway to make the Kikaider section of the convention even bigger than in 2001's Hawaii All-Collectors' Show! Not only would both superhero actors return, but other KIKAIIDER cast members were sought out, and it was even rumored that Hiroshi Miyauchi (KAMEN RIDER V3, GO-RANGERS, KAI KETSU ZUBAT, and plenty more) himself might make an appearance! All this, plus an elaborate stage show of martial arts, pyrotechnics and acrobatic stunts! There were plans for these

(Continued on page 46)



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©東宝

GOJIRA



Toho; 1954, Produced by Tomoyuki Tanaka, Directed by Inoshiro Honda,
 Screenplay: Takeo Murata & Inoshiro Honda, Based on a Story by Shigeru Kayama,
 Production Manager: Teruo Maki, Asst. Dir.: Koji Kajita, Film Processing: Toho Laboratories,
 Music Composed and Conducted by Akira Ifukube, Dir. of Photography: Masao Tamai, Lighting Supervisor: Choshiro Ishii, Supervising Art Dir.:
 Takeo Kita, Art Dir.: Satoshi Chuko, Film Editor: Yasunobu Taira, Sound Recording: Hisashi Shimonaga, Released: 11/3/54

Special Effects Crew:

Dir. of Special Effects: Eiji Tsuburaya, Akira Watanabe (Art Dir.), Kuichiro Kishida (Lighting Supervisor), Hiroshi Mukoyama (Optical Printing),
 Mikami Misao (artist/designer), Masao, Isao & Kanji Yagi (FX Technicians and/or prop makers)

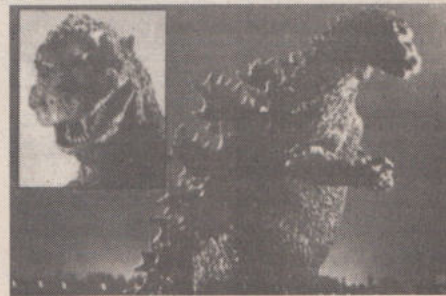


Starring:

Takashi Shimura as Professor Kyohei Yamane
 Momoko Kouchi as Emiko Yamane
 Akira Takarada as Hideto Ogawa
 Akihiko Hirata as Daisuke Serizawa
 Sachio Sakai as Reporter Hagiwara
 Fuyuki Murakami as Dr. Tanabe
 Haruo Nakajima & Katsumi Tezuka as Gojira
 Ren Yamamoto as Seiji

Also Starring: Toranosuke Ogawa, Kan

Hayashi, Keiji Sakakido, Seiji Onda, Kin Sugai, Takeo Oikawa, Toshiaki Suzuki, Tsuruko Mano, Kuninori Kodo, Tadashi Okabe, Shizuko Higashi,
 Kiyoshi Kamota, Katsumi Tezuka, Tamae Sengo, Ren Imaizumi, Masaaki Hashi, Ichiro Tai, Yasuhisa Tsutsumi, Jiro Suzukawa, Haruo Nakajima,
 Saburo Ikedani



American & British title: "Godzilla, King of the Monsters"

Polish title: "Godzilla"

Swedish title: "Godzilla, Uhyrernes Konge"

Belgium title: "Godzilla, roi Des Monstres Koning Der Monsters"

French title: "Godzilla, Le Monstre De L'océan Pacifique"

Spanish title: "Japon Bajo El Terror Del Monstruo"

Mexican, Cuban & South American title: "Godzilla, Rey de Los Monstruos"

Reviewed by Damon Foster

This is where it all began. Japan's influential classic GOJIRA turned out to be one of the most important movies ever made. This celluloid upstart created a whole new genre, "kaiju eiga" (literally monster movie), the term now used both by Japanese and by American fanboys [who think they speak Japanese] to designate Japanese monster flicks. This, in turn lead to offshoot genres like them thar special effects TV shows, or "tokusatsu" (superhero genre, ala' ULTRAMAN and its ilk) legacy. GOJIRA produced the most successful screen monster in history, a charismatic & prolific creature with legions of fans comparable to STAR TREK's "trekkies" (which isn't necessarily a good thing). Worldwide, the character of Gojira ("Godzilla" in English, but you already knew that) became at least as well-known as monsters like Frankenstein, the Wolfman, Usama Bin Laden, Dracula and King Kong—and in many cases, is more popular than any of them. For me personally, I can't under estimate the power of this masterpiece. Though it's not one of my personal favorites (if it were, then it probably wouldn't be much of a "masterpiece!"), GOJIRA spawned a whole film series, which, in turn paved the way for imitation movies from other companies. As a child, I grew up watching the films of Gojira/Godzilla, Gamera, Starman, & Majin, and this later caused me to branch out to the marginally-inspired superhero TV shows (i.e. ULTRAMAN, KAMEN

EIJI TSUBURAYA

(A.K.A.: Eichi Tsuburaya)

Born: 6/7/1901; Sugakawa City, Fukushima Prefecture.

"My heart and mind are as they were when I was a child. Then I loved to play with toys and read stories of magic. I still do. My wish is only to make life happier and more beautiful for those who will go and see my films of fantasy",

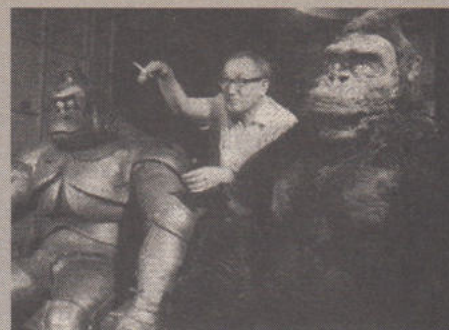


RIDER and KIKAIER) which later came out of Japan. The action in these FX heavy adventure programs paved the way to a love of martial arts, and hence I got into kung fu films and other assorted fantasies from Hong Kong. Because of all these different types of film from various countries, I founded this here magazine in the 1970s. There are plenty of stagnant fans who can forever watch the Japanese monster movies exclusively and boast of their toy collections, but my tastes were never that limited. Though *Oriental Cinema* has branched out and sought every nook & cranny of Far Eastern sci-fi/fantasy, I've decided it was time to re-examine my roots, to get back to basics. Hence this nostalgic issue of *Oriental Cinema*. To write this review, I've randomly chosen one of the many version to critique. There's the English dubbed version of course, and there are untranslated versions, and over the years there have been various pre-record VHS tapes, laser disks and DVD's. I, however, have chosen one of the Japanese tapes with English subtitles. For the purpose of this review, I'm specifically watching a print from something calling itself Zontarian International (doesn't sound real legit to me), the work of Hiroshi Higuchi. This article concentrates on the Japanese version, and generally is not about the English-language, Raymond Burr-injected GODZILLA: KING OF THE MONSTERS, though it will be used as a comparison.

In March of 1954, Toho Movie Co. (Tokyo) was about to collaborate with some Indonesian film company to create a big budget movie, tentatively called EIKO KAGE-NI ("Beyond the Glory"). If they had gone ahead on this project, I would probably be a janitor today and making more money than I now. Anyway, photography was scheduled to begin in August of 1954. But Toho president Tomoyuki Tanaka cancelled the proposed co-production on April 5th because he felt the large budget would be better spent if put toward a completely different idea of his. Tanaka had been inspired by Eugene Lourie's BEAST FROM 20,000 FATHOMS (Warner Bros.; 1953), an American monster movie about an underwater dinosaur reactivated by a nuclear explosion. The classic movie was a success in America, and that visionary, Tomoyuki Tanaka, believed the same type of movie would be popular in Japan, the only country to actually experience the horrors of the H-bomb. Pretty soon, plans were underway to produce DAI KAIJU NO KAITEI NIMAN MARU ("Monster From 20,000 Feet Under the Sea"), a title influenced by both BEAST FROM 20,000 FATHOMS and 20,000 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA. Fortunately, Toho later opted for some originality, and came up with the working title "G", for "Giant". There are widespread stories that the monster was given the name Gojira as an in-joke, he was named after a particular Toho staffer who was large and imposing, and that he already had the nickname Gojira because his physique was reminiscent

Eiji Tsuburaya was quoted as saying in an issue of Caper magazine from 1962. He was first son of Isamu (father) and Sei Tsuburaya (mother; who died when Eiji was three years old). His early years were emotional, being in a Japanese family who followed the Roman Catholic religion which wasn't popular in Japan back then. He entered elementary school in 1908 and developed a love for model airplanes and aviation, which became a lifelong love. At the age of 10, Eiji saw a toy film viewer in a store window. By stealing a few coins (from a cash box in the family store) each day, eventually he could afford to buy the toy. Once he began using it, however, he became aware he couldn't be seen playing with it, because he would have been caught red-handed. His father Isamu would become suspicious as to how Eiji purchased the machine. So he disassembled the projector but before he destroyed its remains, he studied it carefully. Using odds & ends (i.e., bits of wire and a box), he later managed to construct his own makeshift projector, from scratch! He then drew images on long strips of paper and punched sprocket holes and projected these crude cartoons to the amazement of his family. By this time, he admitted how he got the idea, but the family overlooked the crime because they were so impressed with his ingenuity.

In 1916, he graduated from elementary school, and enrolled in the Nihon Flying School (at Haneda). At the age of 15, he became interested in photography and began working at Tsugishima Manufacturing. But in 1919, he was offered another career (by Yoshiro Edamasa at Kyoto's Tenkatsu Film Co.) as an assistant cinematogra-



pher. At a young age, Eiji Tsuburaya had already gotten his first big break into the world of Japanese FX, a new line of work that didn't really even exist yet.

After working in the Japanese army, as part of the correspondence corps., he was hired to work at Shochiku Studios (Kyoto) in 1926, but later found employment at Ogasawara (no relation to the island) Productions, and the Kinegasa Film Union. His knowledge of photography, aviation, miniature jet-fighters and cinematography got him work on pre-W.W.II films such as Teinosuke Kinegasa's IKKURUTA IPPEJI ("A Page of Madness") and Kazuo Hasegawa's CHIGO-NO KENPO. During these years, Eiji





Tsuburaya developed numerous innovations for the Japanese movie industry (i.e. utilizing less developed filming techniques like double-exposures & slow-motion, and usage of camera cranes). According to the website <<http://www.cinescape.com/godzilla/Celebrity>>, written by August Ragone, Tsuburaya's penchant for low-angle photography gained him the nickname 'Low Keytone' (a play on the name of American film star Buster Keaton, and his photographic technique).

By 1930, Tsuburaya had married Masano Araki (19), and in 1931, they had Hajime, the first of three sons (the second son, Noboru, would be born in 1939, Akira was born in 1944). At about this time, Eiji officially began working in "special effects", and the rest is history (he experimented largely with special photographic tricks and became a pioneer in the field). Tsuburaya developed a wooden wagon connected to a detachable crane for manipulating camera angles. He also experimented with lighting techniques, which included special lenses and "mist" effects to emphasize certain types of atmosphere. Some co-workers hated working with him because of his intricate camera set ups and careful attention to detail.

In the early 1930s, he left Shochiku Studios, but accepted work at other companies, such as Nikkatsu and JO Studios. Eiji Tsuburaya was working for Nikkatsu (in Kyoto) when he saw the American movie classic KING KONG (RKO; 1933), a movie which thrilled and inspired him. Young Tsuburaya often fantasized about producing his own giant monster movie, envisioning a potential script about a ship attacked by a giant octopus (he would later involve giant octopuses in KING KONG VS. GODZILLA, WAR OF THE GARGANTUAS, and a rarely seen print of FRANKENSTEIN CONQUERS THE WORLD). He experimented with rear projection and other FX gimmicks. In 1936, there were major changes in the Japanese film industry when the "Toho Block" happened: PCL Studios had merged with JO Studios—creating Toho Studios (in Tokyo), with PCL's Iwao Mori leading this unification. This

movement instigated Japan's first Special Visual Techniques department. In 1938, because of Iwao Mori's advice, Tsuburaya agreed to run the new department at the Tokyo studio (eventually, he commanded over sixty workers, which included cameramen, craftsmen & technicians). Tsuburaya directed his own documentaries and was hired to make pro-Japanese films (for the Imperial Japanese Military) such as the controversial I BOMBED PEARL HARBOR, and KAIGUN BAKUGEKI-TAI ("Navy Bomber Squadron"). The hit propaganda movie was acclaimed and earned Eiji the 'Special Visual Technique Award' from the Japan Cameraman's Association. His convincing miniatures (including a small replica of Pearl Harbor) were so convincing that after the end of W.W.II, many foreigners had mistaken these FX shots for actual battle footage from the war! Though many Japanese movies were destroyed after the war due to "undemocratic" themes, Iwao Mori buried several of these propaganda productions at Toho's auxiliary studio. They were later retrieved, after the end of American oc-



of both a gorilla and whale. "Gojira" is a combination of the words gorilla, and kujira (Japanese word for whale). By any name, GOJIRA was a major financial gamble; the average Japanese production (for 1954) budget was 240,000 yen, but GOJIRA's budget was a massive 60 million yen!

Many talented people were sought out and hired to begin work on this revolutionary new film. Tomoyuki Tanaka hired author Shigeru Kayama, director Ishiro Honda, FX master Eiji Tsuburaya, and screenwriter Takeo Murata. They would all meet and offer useful ideas (i.e. Tsuburaya wanted it to be about a giant octopus like in 1955's IT CAME FROM BENEATH THE SEA), resulting in many drafts, which became hundreds of sketches & storyboards drawn by Iwao Mori. From these basic drawings, Tsuburaya set out to design 3-dimensional models (often sculpted by Mikami Misao and Sadami Toshimitsu). The design of this mutant dinosaur was based on carnivores like Tyrannosaurus Rex and Allosaurus but with exaggerated dorsal plates that are more commonly associated with veggie-lovers like Stegosaurus. The first completed rough model resembled a large headed Tyrannosaurus with snake-like scales to make it look like a creature evolved for an oceanic environment. A second prototype was then constructed (sometimes called a "warty" Gojira), which had large bumps instead of scales for the texture. But eventually, a bulkier model called an "alligator Gojira" was sculpted, and this one was ultimately used. As production began on GOJIRA, the Japanese audience's interest in the production was encouraged via a weekly radio



Toshiro Mifune and others attend the

serial based on the script for GOJIRA, which was also the name of this drama (broadcast from 7/17/54 to 9/25/54) heard on Japan Broadcasting. Production on the actual movie began on 7/5/54, and was wrapped up in 122 days. The project team was divided into three groups: "A" Group was comprised of the cast & crew members doing on-location shooting in the countryside and interiors on one of Toho's sound stages in Tokyo. "B" Group was the special effects department headed by Eiji Tsuburaya and his staff (i.e., Sadami Tishimitsu and Kanzi Yagi), who constructed the latex & foam rubber Gojira costume and its plaster mold. "C" Group handled the few animated shots. One of the most impressive FX shots in the movie (and one which always stumped me) is where Gojira's mouth fire melts some high voltage telephone poles; and the illusion is that they're white hot. In fact, they simply had a separate set of towers made of white wax (painted silver) that was substituted for the metal ones. Under the bright hot lights, the wax towers melted on their own!

GOJIRA is a dead serious, grim, almost depressing movie. In this 1954 originator, Godzilla has no sense of humor and is nothing like the playful creature of later movies. This movie is in sharp contrast to the American sci-fi movies which came also came out in the 1950s. While the likes of TARANTULA, CREATURE FROM THE BLACK LAGOON and INVASION OF THE SAUCER MEN had plenty of comedy and camp, GOJIRA played it straight. GOJIRA was produced just 20 years after the W.W.II bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which for the longest time, had put radioactive contamination in both

cupation. Tsuburaya worked on more war movies (i.e. 1941's HAWAI-MAREI OKI KAISEN, which translates into: "From Hawaii to Malaya: War at Sea") and even a couple flicks based on Wu Cheng En's novel Journey to the West (starring comedian 'Enoken' as Goku the Monkey King).

After WWII's end in 1945 and peace again broke out, Eiji dabbled in optical animation & matting, and developed methods still used by other FX technicians (including all three sons, who followed his footsteps in the FX movie swing of things), and even made the famous Toho logo which appears at the opening of most Toho movies. But there was a period in the late 1940s, when Tsuburaya was discovered by the General Headquarters of the United States occupation forces because he had worked on anti-American war movies. Until the American occupation ended, Tsuburaya wasn't legally allowed to work on movies, and he was penniless. One day, in Kyoto, Tsuburaya was introduced to a classical music composer who took pity on him and bought him some free sake. This occasional drinking buddy turned out to be none other than Akira Ifukube, and coincidentally, both would eventually re-establish contact when they were each employed to work on GOJIRA! In 1948, Toho got tangled up in union disputes causing many striking employees to instigate the Shintoho ("New Toho") Motion Picture Company. In 1949, Tsuburaya began doing freelance & contract work with his own new company, 'Tsuburaya Special Effects Research Inc.', creating FX for not only Toei and Shin-Toho, but also Daiei movies like NIJO OTOKO ("Rainbowman", no relation to the early 1970s TV series of the same name) and TOMEI NINGEN AWAWARU ("Transparent Man Appears"), both of which were reviewed in 1995's *O.C.: The Japanese Science Fiction Issue*. Tsuburaya also had planned to work on an aviation documentary, rather a Japanese version of *THOSE MAGNIFICENT MEN IN THEIR FLYING MACHINES*. Director Ishiro Honda interviewed Japanese aviation pioneers for the proposed Toho project, and although the movie was cancelled, Tsuburaya's relationship with Honda was not.

In 1952, Tsuburaya returned to Toho to work full-time (a move which would last the rest of his life), and contributed to a couple Ishiro Honda films such as Toshiro Mifune's WAN-HE KITA OTOKO ("The Man from the Harbor"). When he heard that Tomoyuki Tanaka was in the process of planning Japan's first giant monster movie, Tsuburaya

volunteered his own ideas. Tsuburaya was specifically hired to work with Honda on a revolutionary idea of Toho executive producer Tomoyuki Tanaka, GOJIRA (which would ultimately earn Tsuburaya his first 'Japanese Film Technique Award'). Tsuburaya and his talented crew constructed not only the Gojira costume (complete with a cunningly hidden zipper at the suit's dorsal spines), but also miniatures constructed at 1/25 scale. The creation of miniatures was a detailed, painstaking process, but one which Tsuburaya had experience at. It was reported that Tsuburaya's perfectionism & scrutiny had intimidated many of the FX crew members. There are reports of Tsuburaya inspecting a miniature set (an entire three block section of Ginza was created) that the technicians had worked hard on, but he didn't find it accurate & detailed enough, so he ordered it destroyed and then rebuilt all over again! Tsuburaya's work on GOJIRA so impressed director Ishiro Honda that he allowed him to select which special effects footage would be used in later movies (i.e. the choice to use Ghidrah's introductory formation in GHIDRAH: THE THREE-HEADED MONSTER was that of Tsuburaya, not Honda). Because of mega hit GOJIRA, Tsuburaya was in big demand doing FX for many Toho movies, and so Eiji and his sons formed 'Tsuburaya Special Effects Productions' in 1963, despite dismay from Toho (Tsuburaya was now both their most valued employee and their competitor!). The fledgling company ignited a humongous TV



movies wrap-up party and celebration.



"tokusatsu" movement still thriving today, starting with TV shows like ULTRA Q (TBS; 1965), and ULTRAMAN (TBS; 1966). Ironically, Toho themselves would later distribute an ULTRAMAN movie theatrically, which was Toho's only involvement with ULTRAMAN.

He became known as the "Father of Japanese Special Effects"; in fact his staff at Toho gave him the nickname 'Oyaji' (meaning 'Pops'). One of his last movies was Honda's LATITUDE ZERO (Toho; 1969) a movie which attempted to bring Japanese sci-fi to a more international level, featuring mainly American actors and shot almost entirely in English (the movie, however, is under a self-imposed ban over Toho's own copyright paranoia because much was based on Ted Sherdman's LATITUDE ZERO radio play). It was intended as a co-production with an American company, but the American deal had fallen apart, forcing Toho to take up the slack. If that's not bad enough, Tsuburaya became ill shortly after LATITUDE ZERO's completion. During production of GODZILLA'S REVENGE, his helpers Teisho Arikawa & Teruyoshi Nakano had more responsibility because by now they had gotten enough experience to handle the special effects on their own (they reported directly to Honda, now unofficially directing FX). Tsuburaya was ailing yet received credit (for GODZILLA'S REVENGE) out of respect, while his proteges did the actual work, and Nakano went on to special effects for many of the Godzilla movies which followed. *As for Eiji Tsuburaya, he died at the age of 69 (of pneumonia), on January 25, 1970. There were a number of Toho staffers who were actually relieved by his passing, as they no longer needed to adhere to his rigid standards. Pretty soon, the budgets (and some say the quality) of the Godzilla movies dropped, as the movies were now known for both stock-footage and less-than-packed theaters.

Tsuburaya's sons continued the Tsuburaya Special Effects Productions company, though the family is known for having short life-spans. One of the Tsuburaya sons died a few years after his father. Noboru Tsuburaya kept the ULTRAMAN legend thriving until his death in the late 1990s. Eiji's grandson Hiroshi (a superhero actor on TV) died a couple years ago.

The Tsuburaya family is Japan's premiere family of special effects, and Eiji Tsuburaya himself (still dead, after all these years!) will forever be remembered as a visionary and for his outstanding contributions to Japanese cinema.

the Japanese water supply and the Japanese psyche. The sensitivity in regards to atomic warfare continues today, as proven by the bans on ATTACK OF THE MUSHROOM PEOPLE, ULTRASEVEN #12 and LAST DAYS OF PLANET EARTH (all of which had themes involving nuclear mutations). GOJIRA may seem so serious today that it's unintentionally laughable, but for it's time, it was an intelligent, critically acclaimed social commentary against nuclear weapons; and it predates the 1960s by six years! According to writer Shigeru Kayama's original final draft, the screenplay was to end with Emiko & Ogata in a helicopter, coming back to where Gojira died, and place a wreath on the water to honor the late hero Dr. Serizawa. GOJIRA didn't originally conclude in the manner that the finished product did, with the silent prayers for Dr. Serizawa on a ship. Thanks to massive promotional gimmicks and exploiting the Japanese public's fears of nuclear attack, 9,610,000 people went to see GOJIRA in Japan. It debuted in the 28th year of Showa, breaking all box office records for Japan's comparatively young motion picture industry, and Toho was now on the international map. GOJIRA helped Toho in many ways. Aside from the major financial success, international critical acclaim and skyrocketing reputation of Toho, Tsuburaya went on to win the Japanese Film Technique Award for his work. GOJIRA went on to be considered by many fans (both kaiju otaku and serious film scholars alike) to be the second greatest Japanese movie ever made, the first being Akira Kurosawa's SEVEN SAMURAI. Coincidentally, Takashi Shimura stars in both GOJIRA and SEVEN SAMURAI. Among those who attended the GOJIRA wrap ceremony & party was Toshiro Mifune himself, also a SEVEN SAMURAI star.

As great as it is, this B/W oldie has its problems. For example, when the people on Ohta Island (also called "Odo Island" and "Oda Island" in other versions) hear Godzilla's footsteps, not only do these footsteps sound like Taiko drums, but the sound remains exactly the same as Godzilla is walking underwater (the villagers see Godzilla's footprints lead into the sea, yet the sound effects don't change). There's also a really chintzy little miniature helicopter during the storm scene on the island. The movie is very crude, but it reflects the technology of the times; and by Japan's 1954 standards, it was probably state-of-the-art. My favorite scene in GOJIRA is the first time we see the title villain. People are at Mt. Hachiba (on Ohta Island), and this is the scene which made cinematic history. Though the effect is anything but special (it's just an unimpressive, electronically-controlled puppet from the chest up, matted behind a hillside horizon), it's still pretty amazing to see the first ever shots of Godzilla. The character of the zoologist (Takashi Shimura) is fascinated with Godzilla and takes pictures (slides) of the huge

lizard, while the villagers panic. Strangely, once he gets back to a Tokyo briefing room and shows the slides on the screen, the image is actually a painting of Godzilla and not the same prop we saw in the previous shot. I don't know if this was an error or if the producers decided the puppet didn't look convincing enough. Either way, it's a jarring inconsistency in the movie, because the drawing doesn't look like the prop Godzilla we had just seen. There are other screw-ups in GOJIRA too. Watch for the scene where Dr. Serizawa takes care to wear protective rubber gloves when handling the mini-oxygen destroyer which he drops into the fish tank. Whatever deadly chemical is on the little device shouldn't touch human skin (otherwise, he would hold it bare-handed), and yet he fails to remove the gloves before handling & embracing the movie's leading lady! If the oxygen destroyer can eat away oxygen, fish and radioactive dinosaurs, it doesn't seem far-fetched that it could react similarly to a woman's blouse, bra and skin!

More than once, I've read speculation (from dorks who have enough time on their hands to debate this topic) that Godzilla's roar was that of a synthesized foghorn or a moose's mating



MOMOKO KOCHI

(A.K.A.: Momoko Kouchi, Momoko Okouchi)

Born: 3/7/1932 (Tokyo, Japan)

Died: 11/5/98 (Tokyo, Japan)

Momoko Kouchi was first discovered when she auditioned for Toho's 6th annual New Face Contest in 1953 (which also got Yu Fujiki's & Akira Takarada's feet in the door). She immediately got roles under director Kaijiro Yamamoto, but even her first movie (A WOMAN'S HEART RELEASED) paled in comparison to her role as Emiko Yamane in the most famous, notorious, successful Japanese movie of the time, GOJIRA. It became the most known role of her career, though it's rumored she did

call. Though I've never actually played the movie out loud in the Pacific Northwest to see if any horny mooses came running, I didn't believe this. In fact, the Gojira roar was created by reverberating the noise emitted from a stringed musical instrument called a contrabass. It was rubbed by a coarse leather glove, while the instrument was tuned an octave below the average bass range. At first, altering the sounds of normal animals had been experimented with, in much the way American movie monster growls (King Kong was a lion's roar played backwards, and the Creature from the Black Lagoon snorted like a pig) were created back then, and although some of these grunts were used in later Toho monster movies, the atmosphere for GOJIRA required Godzilla to have his own distinctive roar, a bellowing sound that didn't sound like any known animal. The sound FX for Godzilla's footsteps was obviously accomplished by a large drum, but vibration was needed, so they were actually striking the drum with a large rope. The rope's fibers created an "echo" sound.

Though this movie claims to show the end of GOJIRA, who gets liquidated by the Oxygen Destroyer, the climax itself implies a number of

work in other films. In 1959 Kochi decided to "upgrade" her acting ability (what's wrong?! GOJIRA and THE MYSTERIANS ain't good 'enuff fer' ya?! Sheesh!!) and began getting formal training. She began a more "serious" career in Shakespearean stage plays, but she did make her second and final appearance in a Gojira movie, when she reprised her role as the now aging Emiko Yamane in GOJIRA VS. DESTROYER (Toho; 1995). Director Takao Okawara was accustomed to working with less interesting actors and was highly impressed by Momoko's experience and concentration (all her scenes were completed in a single day). However, she died three years later, of intestinal cancer. She's been dead ever since.



different sequels, some direct, some not-so-direct. The most obvious being Takashi Shimura's climactic words on the ship (not in the English dubbed print), where he suspects more Godzillas may be about. Higuchi's English subtitles translate the venerable doctor's words as "I can't accept Godzilla was the single last survivor of its species. If we go on conducting nuclear tests, it is quite possible that others of Godzilla's kind might again show up somewhere in the world." Sure enough, the following year, his words would ring true with the 1955 sequel (GOJIRA NO GYAKUSHU, GODZILLA RAIDS AGAIN, GIGANTIS THE FIRE MONSTER, IL RE DEI MOSTRI, or whatever the hell you choose to call it) where the second Godzilla is discovered on an island battling Angilas—proving Serizawa died in vain! Another direct sequel, though taking place many years later and involving its own bizarre timeline, was GODZILLA VS. DESTROYER (featuring the return of now aging Momoko Kouchi, reprising her role as Emiko Yamane), where the Oxygen Destroyer itself has mutated some gigantic crustacean for another of the Godzillas to battle. Believe it or not, there's at least a third possible sequel, but it's purely speculation, or maybe just an in-joke: Episode #35 of ULTRAMAN (TBS; 1966) involves a ghost-like skeleton monster called Shibozu. This comical creature bears a striking resemblance to the deteriorating bones of Godzilla (seen at the end of this movie), and word has it that on the set of ULTRAMAN, technicians joked around that the designs of these bones could prove Shibozu is actually Godzilla's ghost! For copyright reasons, Shibozu and Godzilla aren't really related in any official production, but I for one like to link up all these stories, so as far as I'm concerned, this officially links Godzilla and Ultraman into the same universe!

I could never appreciate the movie as a child. I guess I was around 7 or 8 when I first saw it, and considering that I had already been wowed by MONSTER ZERO, GODZILLA VS. THE SEA MONSTER and other elaborate movies which I still consider the true "classics" of the Godzilla series, the comparatively bland 1954 oldie didn't impress me in the slightest. Had it been the first Godzilla movie I ever saw, then I would have probably been comparing it with "normal" monster movies like DRACULA, THE BEAST FROM 20,000 FATHOMS, or FRANKENSTEIN (by the way, I had watched THE MUNSTERS long before I actually saw FRANKENSTEIN, so when I saw Boris Karloff in FRANKENSTEIN, I thought it was Herman Munster in a really bad mood!). As a typical monster movie, it would have sufficed, but having seen the outlandish antics of Godzilla's later movies, I was expecting something at least as exciting as KING KONG VS. GODZILLA! As a runt, I was disappointed that the original Gojira failed to clap his hands, throw rocks, fly or jump for joy! Of course, the movie I



AKIHIKO HIRATA

(AKA: Akihiko Onoda)

Born: 12/26/1927 (Kyojo; South Korea)
Died of lung cancer on 7/25/1984 (Tokyo, Japan)

Hirata got his formal education (starting with kindergarten) in the Japanese Imperial Army during the wartime-era, and continued on through college (attending a military academy), but later entered the prestigious Tokyo University. After graduation, he surprised his family by choosing a career in acting. He caught the attention of director Ishiro Honda, because of his first roles (in EVEN THE MIGHTY SHED TEARS and 1953's EMBRACE). The director cast the 27-year old actor in the W.W.II drama FAREWELL RABAU (1954).

But the role which would make Akihiko Hirata a major supporting actor (in future Toho flicks) came later in 1954, the legendary GOJIRA. Hirata was originally cast to play the character of Ogata, but after more auditions and screen tests, Akira Takarada got the role and Hirata was chosen to portray Serizawa, the tormented, one-eyed scientist of the movie. Though his roles in his next five Godzilla movies weren't as prominent, his portrayal of Dr. Mafune (another brilliant yet unique scientist) was pivotal to TERROR OF MECHAGODZILLA, the official end of the original classic Godzilla series. So Hirata was in the original, classic series from start to finish and took part in both the beginning and ending of it. He was also scheduled to appear in GODZILLA 1985, but he (Hirata, not Godzilla) died of lung cancer before production began on the big lizard's comeback. Though his roles weren't always the most prominent in Toho's monster movies, he became one of the most recognizable faces in the genre.

Akihiko Hirata appeared in many other (non-kaiju) movies, including a re-occurring role in the ULTRAMAN (TBS: 1966) TV show, war movies, comedies, and samurai movies like SANJURO and Toshiro Mifune's SAMURAI TRILOGY.



SHIGERU KAYAMA

A.K.A.: Koji Yamada (his real name)
1906-1975

Shigeru Kayama was born in Tokyo on 7/1/1906. He enrolled at Hosei University, and took classes in Business, but he later dropped out. Kayama started working

at the federal government's Treasury Department, but was more into writing. He wrote the story "Revenge of Olen Pendeck" in 1947 and entered it in a contest in *Detective Magazine*. "Revenge of Olen Pendeck" was accepted and published later that year, which started his professional writing career as a novelist. A detective story called "Eerie Story Kai Man So" was his second book, earning Kayama the New Novelist Prize. The author's career flourished, and he went on to write many fantasy, adventure, and science fiction novels; books like *Mantis Island*, *Moon's Devil*, *Peach of Solomon*, *El Dorado*, and *Kikumora*. His writing ability, creativity and imagination caught the attention of Toho's Tomoyuki Tanaka, who hired him to write the screenplay for *GOJIRA*. His other monster movies include *GIGANTIS THE FIRE MONSTER* and *THE MYSTERIANS*. But he passed away on February 7, 1975.



HARUO NAKAJIMA

Haruo Nakajima was in his early 20's when he auditioned for Toho, and originally hoped to work in chanbara (AKA: "samurai movies" and "jidai-geki") flicks. Because of his superb strength, he became one of two actors (the other was Katsumi Tetsuka) who wore the thick, heavy Godzilla suit (reputed to weigh over 100 lbs.!) for the original *GOJIRA*. It was a grueling job because of poor ventilation in the costume, and hot, bright lights which were required for the camera's high shutter speed (the effect was necessary to slow down Nakajima's movements, to give the illusion of being a huge, lumbering behemoth). According to his memoirs, the average shooting schedule included a 7 to 10 minute practice (without the hot lights), followed by an actual take. Nakajima could only last three minutes in the cumbersome costume, so they shot as much footage at once as was possible, to lessen the amount of time spent in the Gojira suit.

Nakajima and Gojira both fainted on the set more than once, and on a good day, a full cup of sweat could be removed from the costume! Walking in the suit was a pain and required a lot of advance practice, not just because of the weight, but also the stiff legs and heavy feet which were easy to trip over. To avoid having to wear the whole damn costume for the "feet only" shots, Tsuburaya's boys constructed some Gojira legs with suspenders, so that Haruo Nakajima wasn't completely suited up unless absolutely necessary for the shot. Despite the strenuous experience which left him with stomach cramps and sore muscles, Haruo Nakajima went on to make a living in monster costumes (thanks to improved technology and ergonomically safe suits), working in the Godzilla series up until his retirement in 1972. During his prime, it wasn't uncommon for him to go to the local zoo and observe the movements of large, lumbering animals to perfect his craft.



saw when I was a child wasn't the original Japanese *GOJIRA*, but the American edited print, *GODZILLA: KING OF THE MONSTERS*. But today, in my old age, I can finally accept *GOJIRA*, and its American re-vamping, *GODZILLA: KING OF THE MONSTERS*. *GOJIRA* now makes sense to me, and appeals to me on several levels. *GOJIRA* is comparatively realistic, as far as the kaiju eiga goes. Hell, it's one of the few movies in its genre which could almost be considered "believable". The approach and atmosphere portray Gojira in a mysterious manner, almost to the point of being speculative; rather like the Loch Ness monster or Big Foot. But I like animals even more than hoaxes (to me, monsters, ghosts, intelligent Jerry Springer fans, and UFOs are all hoaxes), so *GOJIRA* appeals to me as an animal lover too. Though Gojira is a villain, he strikes me as an animal who is instinctively protecting his environment. He takes advantage of the situation (I assume it's the nuclear testing which endowed him with the ability to spit fire), and destroys buildings and every ocean-polluting ship which comes by. In one scene of Gojira's destructive rampage, I noticed several birds in a cage. It seems he never seeks to harm them, in fact his attacks are aimed more at man-made structures than human life-forms themselves. Gojira struck me not as an ominous villain, but a wild animal who's disturbed by the artificial changes to his Eco-system. Apparently, lead star Akira Takarada (who cried when Godzilla, not Serizawa, died!) agrees with me. A lot of people do, otherwise there wouldn't have been so many sequels.

For this review, I've been concentrating on the Japanese version of *GOJIRA* (an English subtitled print from some company calling itself "Zontarian", most likely the work of fans). But with the Japanese *GOJIRA* so fresh in my mind, it was hard not to re-watch its altered American version (again), *GODZILLA: KING OF THE MONSTERS*, for an easy comparison. *GODZILLA: KING OF THE MONSTERS* re-arranges scenes, taking portions from near the ending of *GOJIRA* and putting them into the beginning. The scenes of ravaged people (their homes destroyed by Godzilla) are edited around Raymond Burr in the wreckage and at some mobile emergency hospital unit. Much of the movie is now presented as a flashback, and I must say, the American editing is pretty convincing, more so than later attempts (since then, there have been dozens of Japanese films & TV shows which have been "Americanized"). But pretty soon, here comes the badly dubbed character Emiko Yamane, whose first few shots are filmed from the back of her head; or rather the back of an American stand-in's head! The obvious double talks to Burr and the whole conversation is pretty awkward. It's beyond obvious that Burr and Momoko Kouchi weren't shot together as they speak of her character's father. Even back in a naive period like the 1950s, I'm

TAKASHI SHIMURA

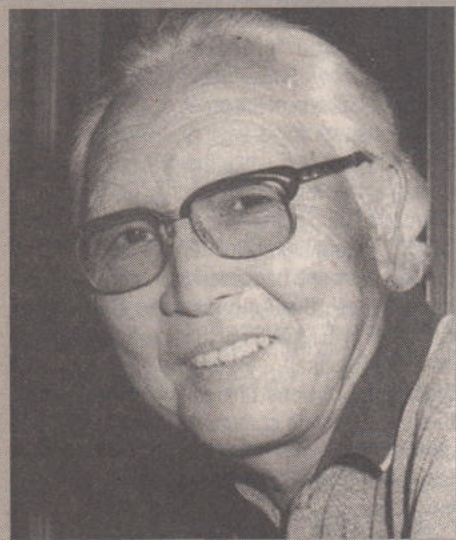
(1905-1982)

After a long stage career, Shimura appeared in his first film in 1935. But eight years later, he appeared in Akira Kurosawa's *SANSHIRO SUGATA* (1943), and became not only one of Kurosawa's favorite actors to work with, but a Toho regular as well. Shimura appeared in nearly every Kurosawa movie made un-

til 1965, but is known mainly to kaiju otakus and other dweebs for his memorable role as the paleontologist in *GOJIRA*, but other Toho sci-fi roles include: *RODAN*, *THE MYSTERIANS*, *THE LAST WAR*, *THE THREE TREASURES*, and *GORATH*. Takashi Shimura can also be seen in Daiei movies like *THE WHALE GOD* and *THE BRIDE FROM HADES*.



志村 喬



本多
猪四郎

ISHIRO HONDA
(A.K.A.: Inoshiro Honda)
(1911-1993)

Ishiro/Inoshiro Honda was born on March 5th, in Yamagata Prefecture, and some time well after that, he was drafted into the war and served for the Japanese Imperial Army in Manchuria. He led a platoon and never lost a single soldier, but did end up as a P.O.W. After W.W.II, he returned to Japan and saw what the H-bomb had done to Hiroshima. The grim images had a lasting affect on his creativity, and ultimately this influence would show itself when he began directing movies such as *GOJIRA*. When he entered Japan's post-war movie industry, he served as an understudy to Kaijiro Yamamoto (another famous Japanese director) at PCL Studios. So Honda was with Toho Studios from the very beginning, having worked at PCL Studios even before its merger with JO Studios, which created Toho.

He started out directing documentaries, but never achieved fame for them. Some of the projects, like *THE FISHERMEN* (about fishermen living in Okinawa) were never completed because Toho wasn't interested. Though *THE FISHERMEN* was

later produced by another studio, Honda's relationship with Toho was about to be solidified. This famed director became the Akira Kurosawa of monster movies, because of *GOJIRA*. He worked closely with special effects director Eiji Tsuburaya, resulting in a film which made movie history. Honda once recalled: *"We (Tsuburaya & Honda) were at the Matsukaya Department store rooftop (in Tokyo's Ginza District), discussing the possibility of starting a fire at Shinbashi and having it spread to Ginza, and we wondered what people might think of us if they had heard our conversation. Sure enough, at the first floor exit, we were stopped and questioned!"* Ishiro Honda directed the international ground-breaker, *GOJIRA*, resulting in great success for all involved. He would go on to achieve great fame as a director of "serious" science fiction movies such as *GORATH* and *THE MYSTERIANS*. Another Honda directorial was 1958's *VARAN - THE UNBELIEVABLE*, which was created at the request of an American television studio. By this time, most of Toho's movies were filmed in color, but since most TV shows were still in B/W, that's the format that *VARAN* was shot in. After they had filmed a few scenes in the standard 35mm format (required for TV), it was decided to release *VARAN* theatrically. The intention was to re-film these shots with the widescreen cinemascope format, but because of time constraints, they simply cropped the top and bottom of the movie!

But Toho didn't want Honda to be Godzilla's "exclusive" director, and Honda found it difficult to envision Gojira in more humorous and/or heroic roles (i.e. he was reluctant to cast Mothra as a mediator for Godzilla and Rodan in *GHIDRAH: THE THREE-HEADED MONSTER*), specifically those of the late 1960s and 1970s. Though his approach wasn't comical enough for the likes of *SON OF GODZILLA* (dir.: Jun Fukuda), he did return to direct the classic of all classics, *DESTROY ALL MONSTERS*. He collaborated with others as the script was written and started incorporating ideas about undersea farming being the only way to feed the monsters being studied at



Ogasawara Island. But for budgetary reasons, much of that was removed from the finished script.

Though Honda's success continued to flourish, the Godzilla movies did not. When Eiji Tsuburaya's health deteriorated, Honda directed not only *GODZILLA'S REVENGE* (Toho; 1969) itself, but almost all of the movie's special effects scenes, working with Tsuburaya proteges Teisho Arikawa and Teruyoshi Nakano.

At Toho, Honda directed 49 films, 30 of which were SF/monster related. Upon leaving directing, he worked on numerous TV shows including *RETURN OF ULTRAMAN*, *KINKYU SHIREI* 10-4/10-10, *THUNDER MASK*, and however you choose to refer to *RYUSEI NINGEN ZONE* ("Zone Fighter", "The Zone Fighters", "Zone: The Human Shooting Star", "Meteroman Zone", "Zone: The Human Comet", and so on). Honda also was brought on to be Akira Kurosawa's assistant director on *KAGEMUSHA*, *RAN*, *DREAMS*, *RAPSODY IN AUGUST*, and *MADAIYO*.



伊福部昭



AKIRA IFUKUBE

Born: May 31, 1914 (Hokkaido)

From 1923 to 1926, Akira Ifukube lived in the village of Otofuke, where his father was the mayor. The village's population was half Japanese and half Ainu (an old, indigenous tribe of Japan), both of which had their own type of folk music, which he was exposed to. He also heard songs by travelers from other parts of Japan. In his younger years, Ifukube studied the violin and a Japanese musical instrument called the shamisen. He heard the music of Manuel de Falla, Johann Sebastian Bach, Maurice Ravel, and Igor Stravinsky while attending junior high school (in Sapporo, which is Hokkaido's biggest city), and this European classical music influenced him to compose his own tunes. Fellow students felt that composition is very difficult, but to Ifukube, it didn't seem so hard because for years he had been influenced by the freedom allowed by the improvisational style of the Ainu music & dancing.

Although he went on to study forestry at Hokkaido Imperial University at one point, his main interest remained music, and in 1935 he won 1st prize (in a contest promoted by Alexander Tcherepnin) for Japanese Rhapsody, his first orchestral composition. A year later, Alexander Tcherepnin returned to Japan to teach modern western composition and Ifukube was one of his students. Ifukube won honorable mention for his Piano Suite at the I.C.S.M. festival (Venice), in 1938. When he got out of college, Ifukube worked as a

lumber processor and forestry officer. During W.W.II he studied vibratory strength and elasticity of wood. W.W.II ended, and he was diagnosed as having radiation over-exposure, so he had to quit his forestry work. He became a professional composer and music teacher. He taught at Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music from 1946 to 1953. He was at the centerpiece of concerts, performing internationally known hits by Ludwig van Beethoven and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

GOJIRA was his first musical score in a monster movie, and the beginning of a long career. Surprisingly, he was able to write the music before he ever saw any footage. He also created Godzilla's bellowing roar. Ifukube had a very hard time selecting an appropriate growl, and even grieved over it! Director Ishiro Honda was very impressed by Ifukube's concern and attention to detail. Between 1951 and 1975 he became known all over the world, for his soundtracks for Japanese movies. But most of the time, he was frustrated while writing a film score, because unlike U.S. film score composers, Japanese film score composers are given only three or four days in which to write the movies' music, and he's not happy with all the film themes he's done over the years. He was hired as a professor at the Tokyo College of Music in 1974, and was promoted to college president in 1975. He published *Orchestration*, a 1,000-page book on theory. Since 1987, he's been president of The Institute of Ethnomusicology at Tokyo College of Music. The Japanese government has decorated him with the Order of Culture and the Order of the Sacred Treasure. He's one of Japan's most highly regarded classical composers and is responsible for some of Japan's greatest symphonic works and over 250 movie soundtracks.



amazed anybody fell for this! The double is looking rather downward at Burr (he's lying on a stretcher and has Band-Aids), but the stock shot of Momoko Kouchi (where she says: "Yes, he's leaving with security officials tomorrow") appears have her looking straight ahead, obviously speaking to somebody standing upright. Later, Burr goes to "Odo" Island (called "Ohta Island on my other videotape) via helicopter, but it's painfully obvious he's sitting in a room and not a helicopter at all. Then Burr, presumably in the outdoors, questions some islander, but it's apparent that they're still in a studio because of the echoes. Back in Tokyo, Japanese characters damn near speak in two different voices, as they appear to alternate from being dubbed and then alternately (with no smooth transitions) using their normal live voices! The worst dubbed character has got to be that of the old fart Dr. Yamane, who pronounces words like "phenomonon", "radey active" and "Guzz-zilla". Worse yet, at one of the press conferences, he's erroneously dubbed saying: "this creature is over 400 feet tall", while the original Japanese dialogue had him claiming this Guzz-zilla (or "Gudzilla", according to Emiko's dubber) was about 170 feet high. But despite all the technical problems and bad actors who play the Japanese extras, the Americanized GODZILLA: KING OF THE MONSTERS is probably as good as GOJIRA itself. There are problems, but they're not obvious unless you're scrutinizing them and making comparisons like I was, and considering it only took them a day to shoot Raymond Burr's scenes, they didn't do a bad job at all.

The pacing is quick, because mere seconds after the title, that oceanic mutation Gojira destroys his first ship. We don't actually see the Big G do this, because that would give away too much too soon. Instead, we just see an admittedly crude super-imposition of fire under the water; presumably, Gojira aimed his mouth at the doomed ship. Though I personally would have thought it was the act of bad guys in submarines or maybe coincidental volcanic eruptions, these mysterious exploding ships lead zoologist Kyohei Yamane (Takashi Shimura) to stake his reputation on the line and go out on a limb, publicly suggesting (with a straight face, no less!), that some unknown creature is responsible. He uses the Yeti ("snowman footprints in the Himalayas", the subtitles read) as an example; though I somehow missed the episode of IN SEARCH OF where a mythical Tibetan ape sets fire to Japanese ships! One thing is for certain: The crisis is one hum-dinger of a doozy. The quest for an answer leads Yamane and others to Ohto Island, where the villagers believe in some evil demon called "Gojira" and/or "Godzilla". In the old days, they would have sacrificed female virgins, but as of 1954, either that practice was abolished or they simply couldn't find any. Coincidentally, there is in fact a giant

monster lurking about who destroyed the ships. Despite different timelines (Ohta legend goes back hundreds of years, while Godzilla didn't appear until after the nuclear testing), the destructive lizard is immediately named Godzilla and Gojira (depending on who you ask), based on the lore of Ohta. Yamane suspects Godzilla is one of the last creatures from the Jurassic age, because a trilobite (prehistoric crustacean) is found by Gojira's foot print. But the trilobite is radioactive (prompting a friend to tell Dr. Yamane, "Professor! Better not touch it!", according to the English subtitles, but in the dubbed print, the exact same line is worded: "Don't hold it in your bare hands"), prompting Yamane's wild hunch that them Godzillas are the last of the dinosaurs, no doubt surviving & breeding deep in an underwater trench, until the nuclear testing changed their Eco-system. "I'd hazard to speculate that H-bomb explosions might well have dislodged the creature from its habitat", Yamane's subtitles explain. The theory causes controversy and debates which didn't make it into the American print, with the explanation: "The rash spreading (that's how it's spelled in the subtitles) of this notion would engulf the country in horror". To stop Godzilla from coughing upwards at the helpless ships, the Japanese army starts some underwater depth charges, but these bombs only provoke Godzilla further, to attack Tokyo Bay. While Dr. Yamane continues to study Godzilla (pointing out that Godzilla thrived "during a period experts call the Jurassic" and "We estimate from the photo that the animal must be about 170 ft. tall"), the script adds dimensions to various human characters (their importance to the story doesn't surface until long

宝田明



AKIRA TAKARADA

Born: 4/29/34; Chosun, Korea

Akira Takarada was born to Japanese parents in Korea, and in 1948, he came to Japan for the first time. Takarada was chosen as one of the 6th annual Toho New Faces (along with soon-to-be leading lady Momoko Kouchi) in 1953. Pretty soon, Toho put him to work in films. Akira Takarada was chosen over Akihiko Hirata to play GOJIRA's romantic male lead, Ogata, because his good looks made him a better pair with the character of Emiko. "For me, it was actually just the third film of my career, but it was my first blockbuster. I was told that I would be the main character for the first time, so I was very happy. When I got the screenplay, it had a thick red cover with

"Gojira" in big black letters. I thought to myself, 'What the hell is this?'," Takarada recalled. Takarada's scenes (drama) and the monster scenes (special effects) were filmed independently of each other, so throughout the production, he didn't know what to expect and had low expectations. "The whole time, I couldn't really feel it was realistic, but when it was finished and I saw it at the cast and staff screening, I cried at the ending. Did the humans really have the right to attack Gojira? It is the humans who are actually evil, so I actually felt pity for Gojira."

His career flourished in the years to come. Aside from appearing in more Godzilla movies and other sci-fi flicks, he also tried his hand at comedy and spy movies. Akira Takarada is also an accomplished stage actor, has done both variety shows (in the 1980s, he became known as a musician) and commercials, and has been in 190 movies to date, and counting.



八木正夫

MASAO YAGI

(Special Effects Artist)

Born: 1926, Aichiken

The Yagis are a prolific family of special effects, perhaps Japan's second most important FX family (the first would be them Tsuburaya dudes). According to an interview which appeared in some TV Magazine book on Toho FX movies,

Masao Yagi is currently the chairman of Eiksu Productions (at least, he was back in 1984, when the book was published), the company best known for its FX props in such superhero productions as KAMEN RIDER, HENSHIN NINJA ARASHI, CHOJIN BAROM 1, THUNDERMASK and more. The company was formed by Masao, his son Isao Yagi and artist Mikami Misao (more on him next issue).

But Masao Yagi's career can be traced back at least to the 1940s. His father was involved in the war movie HAWAII-MALAY SEA BATTLE (1942). So Masao joined pops, Eiji Tsuburaya and others who were working its miniatures. Mr. Yagi's models were so convincing that when Douglas MacArthur and other U.S. officers viewed the movie, they were convinced that they were watching actual aerial photography of the attack!

Obviously, Masao worked in GOJIRA too, otherwise his bio wouldn't be in this article. He, like his brother Kanji, went to Toho to join his father's team. Working under Tsuburaya (who was a Toho big

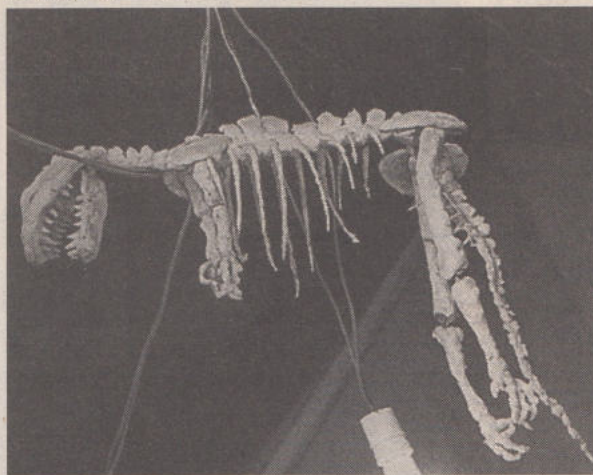
shot even back then), they had to get revolutionary when it came to designing the right materials for the Gojira costume. At that time, the rubber purchased from the U.S. could not be used without being treated. So, "We constructed a dry box of timbers and galvanized iron sheets. We placed infra-red lamps inside, to heat up the rubber. We had to repeat this procedure so many times", he chuckled. The interview went on to say that they used an electric fan to circulate the air inside the costume (presumably, to eliminate potentially harmful vapors). Later, they improved their costume making techniques, when GIGANTIS THE FIRE MONSTER began production. They got ideas from looking at rubber balloons. The qualities of rubber were enhanced when granite was added. If the mixture came out sticky, they added sulfur to the mix. As a result, a new material was invented, and it would later be made by others who would give it the name latex. In the years that followed, Masao Yagi would join Daiei to lend his experience to many of the 1960s Gamera movies.

after Gojira does) such as Yamane's daughter Emiko (Momoko Kouchi), her boyfriend Hideto Ogawa (Akira Takarada), and a brilliant young scientist called Daisuke Serizawa (Akihiko Hirata). Though jet planes, machine-guns and electrical wiring have proven futile in stopping Godzilla's attacks on the city, Dr. Serizawa's invention, the Oxygen Destroyer, just might do the trick. Though reluctant at first, he thinks it over for two, possibly even three minutes, and pretty soon, he agrees to use this deadly weapon (even though it's only in the experimental stage). This terrible device is activated underwater, near where Godzilla sleeps, but Serizawa kills himself (to keep his dangerous secret out of evil hands) shortly after detonation. Gojira has been defeated and the movie ends, but the story goes on. Dr. Yamane, on the boat, speculates that there may be more of these creatures around. From then on, the money just rolled right in.

*** -Damon Foster

COINCIDENCE, ILLEGITIMATE SEQUEL, OR IN-JOKE?!

For years, Japanese fans and film production staffers alike have been amused to notice that the ghost Shibozu, found in the Monster Graveyard in episode #35 of *ULTRAMAN* (TBS; 1966), bears resemblance to the dying Godzilla!



TOMOYUKI TANAKA

Born: 4/26/1910; Osaka

Died: 4/2/1997; Tokyo

Soon after his graduation from Kansai University in 1940, Tanaka was hired to work at Toho as a cameraman, but four years later he produced his first film. By the early 1950's, Tanaka had worked his way up the corporate ladder and was president of Toho (he held the position for 60 years!). However, there are other reports that say he didn't become the Toho president until the 1970s. Regardless, he was desperate for an idea in the early 1950s, and

later was quoted as saying: *"I was up against a deadline when I first thought of Gojira, and I made it up all at the last minute. At that time, Toho was collaborating with Indonesia to make a blockbuster film to be called 'BEYOND THE GLORY'".* But the movie had problems from the start: Ryo Ikebe (later of *BATTLE IN OUTERSPACE*, *THE WAR IN SPACE* and Sonny Chiba's *THE EXECUTIONER*) and Toshiko Yamaguchi were scheduled to be the main stars of *BEYOND THE GLORY*, but they couldn't get visas from the Indonesian government. Tanaka had no choice but to cancel the production, but now he had to come up with a major project to replace it. Tanaka was nervous and sweating as he left Indonesia, and on a plane ride back to Tokyo, he looked down on the ocean and had a vision.

After he got back to Japan, he went to Toho's FX department. *"I asked special effects expert Eiji Tsuburaya, who I knew wanted to make a movie about a giant octopus in the Indian Ocean, and decided to make ten or so models, about 2 meters tall, all in clay. We picked one from that."* After several meetings and discussions, they decided that the villainous monster of the proposed movie should be both frightening and have some likeable qualities. By now, the American movie *THE BEAST FROM 20,000 FATHOMS* had been released. So ultimately, a dinosaur was chosen to be the monster in Toho's upcoming movie, so that the creature could be "re-activated" by nuclear bombs,

both to cash-in on the Japanese public's very real fear of this, but also to convey the mutant dinosaur as a victim of circumstances.

According to some website, Tanaka stated: *"After completion, critics gave GOJIRA a lot of bad reviews, so I was really worried about it. But on opening day I went to Shibuya; what I saw at the theater was a line of people as long as a snake, so inside I thought 'Alright!' I knew the line was for Gojira, but I couldn't resist asking people what they were standing in line for. Over 9,691,000 people went to see it, and next to 1963's KING KONG VS. GODZILLA (1,200,000), it was the biggest box office draw of the Gojira series."* Tomoyuki Tanaka produced more than 200 films (such as more kaiju movies, but also period flicks like *AKAHIGE*/"Red Beard" from 1965), including some directed by the acclaimed Akira Kurosawa. Their 1980 film *KAGEMUSHA* ("Shadow Warriors") was nominated for a Best Foreign Film Oscar, and took the "Palm d'Or" award at the Cannes Film Festival. In 1981, Tanaka was bestowed with the Kun Santo Tanho Award. Tomoyuki Tanaka passed away in 86, because of a stroke.



HONG KONG HEROES

Hong Kong flicks categorized by decade, a sampling from each! Once more, they're divided into these categories: The 1970s, the 1980s, the 1990s, and the Zero's (which is now). I've been critiquing HK movies for so long that it's getting a little tougher to find ones I've not seen already. So I once more invite any film fans or writers to send critiques of their favorite, least favorite or indifferent movies. Those willing to take part should contact me. Anyway, here's one final thought before going on to the reviews: Them Tai Seng video releasers sure are stupid! I finally sat down to watch my pre-record of HE-ROIC TRIO (released by them Tai Seng morons, no less), and the videotape starts out with a few seconds of the movie's English dubbed version. I thought, "Great! I've finally found an English dubbing despite what's written on the box about subtitles!" After the opening credits, I see a couple seconds of people riding a van, and they're all speaking with British accents. But then the shot freezes and "Stop", is super imposed, making it obvious that some retard, who had been copying the film from some old laser disk or DVD, had just realized his mistake and abruptly ended the recording. This 1996 VHS release then goes blank for a while, and then the opening credits start all over again! From here, the whole movie is finally presented, in subtitled form. Coming from Tai Seng Video Marketing Inc., who took it upon themselves to be a watchdog group which sought out "bootleggers", it's inexcusable that they, of all people would release an actual pre-record in this condition. I'm so relieved that we now have companies like Crash Cinema who are honestly passionate about the movies they release, so we no longer need to tolerate Tai Seng's hypocrisy and "dominance"! I won't deny that most of Tai Seng's distribution practice has been good, and that over the years, they have helped all of us see many movies, but until they get their act together, they should be careful about pointing fingers at other video distributors. -DF

1970s:

火 併

DUEL FOR GOLD

Shaw Brothers; 1971, Prod: Run Me Shaw, Dir.: Chu Yuan, Screenplay: I Kuang, Cast: Ivy Ling Po, Chin Han, Lo Lieh, Chen Chun, Wang Ping, Tsung Hua, Reviewed by Damon Foster

The subtitles are so damn low that most of the time, they're completely illegible. This is unfortunate, because I would have really liked to know what the hell was going on! Fortunately, this movie is fairly simple in its approach, and it's absolutely action-packed! Understanding every aspect of the story simply wasn't necessary, because most of the running time consists of swordfighting! DUEL FOR GOLD is a great flick! It also gets pretty gory at the end. In the final analysis, I'm giving this one three stars (***) even though it probably deserves more. A better subtitled version would earn a total of four stars (****) and if there was a conveniently English dubbed version, I'm sure DUEL FOR GOLD would be worth a whopping five stars (*****)!!!

The reason I sought out DUEL FOR GOLD to review (as opposed to any other one of a hundred HK sword-films) is because I thought it was from the 1960s. After all, it's got Ivy Ling Po, a young Lo Lieh and other familiar faces whom I associate with the movies them Shaw Brothers

were cranking out in the 1960s. There's a certain crudeness to the movie too, so as I watched it, my suspicion (of when it was produced) grew stronger. But as I got to the ending of the movie, I finally began to suspect that this was in fact a 1970s movie, because it was simply too good, too thrilling, and too over-the-top to have been one of the Shaw Brothers' 1960s movies!

I don't normally associate Ivy Ling Po with gory swordplay thrillers; my strongest memory of her was for her appearance in the so-called "classic" musical, THE GRAND SUBSTITUTION. But in DUEL FOR GOLD, she's swordfighting, jumping up onto the second story of pagodas and bleeding with the best of them! She still looked pretty young & beautiful in 1971, and hadn't aged much since the 1960s movies I saw her in.

The script for this very entertaining adventure would appear to be quite simple; in fact it's so simple that maybe there wasn't really a script! Or at least, that's my impression because I couldn't read the subtitles and probably didn't need to. The setting is some town located near a gold mine. So naturally, the town has a thriving economy; not to mention a very busy bank. That's the setting. And now, the plot: Every sword-slinging martial artist wants to steal the gold and keep it all to his or herself!! That's it; that's the story! Greed has people deceiving each other, fighting each other, stabbing each other, throwing knives at each other and so on! It pits sister against sister, brother against brother, bad guy against bad guy! Actually, it's hard to tell if there are any good guys in DUEL FOR GOLD. Nobody is established as being particularly righteous; nobody is out for justice. Everyone just wants gold! It's just one sword fight af-





ter another, and they're all very entertaining. There's a lot of bloodshed, and a lot of those high-flying leaps accomplished by reversed film, in fact one brief shot has Lo Lieh and his opponent flying like Superman, up onto a very, very high tower. I normally don't like excessive wire-work, but this shot is so cute because the flying swordsmen appear to be miniatures. Regardless, there are no survivors, so none of these greedy protagonists gets the gold. They're too busy double-crossing each other. Lo Lieh is the last one to die, and he was the one I was rooting for. Even Ivy Ling Po, who normally looks so innocent in movies, dies in a bloody mess.

***-DF

空手入白刃

DAGGERS 8

Honest Films (H.K.) Co., in Association with Goldig Films (HK) Ltd., Prod.: Alex Gouw, Assoc. Prod.: Chao Sou Ching, Directed by Cheung Sum & Wilson Tong, Action Director: Wilson Tong, Cast: Mung Yuen Men, Lily Li, Wilson Tong, Chui Chung Shun, Chan Lung, Cheng Kang Yip, Yeung Wah, Lau Chi Hao, Chan Yu Mei, Cheung Sum, Reviewed by Damon Foster

These late 1970s EAGLE SHADOW rip-offs are getting harder and harder to critique! With the absolute repetition of the flicks in this whole kung

fu "training scene" genre, I'm really running out of things to say about them. It's amazing that the old saying "If you've seen one, you've seen 'em all" was actually invented before this type of film. DAGGERS 8 is another story of a guy avenging his teachers' deaths (in this case, three teachers and one questionable grandfather are avenged), where the word of choice is "Teacher!" Much of the dubbed dialogue goes something like this: "You're quite right, teacher!" "I'm not your teacher." I'm surprised that they only say "But still" twice, and the token cocky female only says "Hmm!" three or four times. I think the real problem with these mundane movies is that they started out as parodies of the kung fu movie genre, but so many of them came along that they became a legitimate genre all their own. When the amount of spoofs is nearly equal in number of that which they were satirizing, they're no longer funny. It becomes hard to tell if they're making fun of something or just being stupid.

But still, I'm not saying I didn't like DAGGERS 8. It's an okay example of average 1970s chop sockey and kung foolishness. The fight scenes are as good as ever, and the astounding mid-air somersaults are.....well.....astounding, of course! There are also a couple of honestly funny (intentionally funny, that is!) scenes which made me nearly crack a smile!! One of these scenes happens at the beginning, when Mung Yuen Men is trying to memorize a poem, as part of his scholarly homework. The line of the poem that his domineering Granddad wants him to memorize is "To leave one's home alone, is silence", but our hero can't remember it. So his bumbling servant tries to pantomime the words behind Granddad's back. Mung Yuen Men watches the mannerisms and completely misinterprets the gestures as: "When you climb up using your hooks, it's to escape smallpox!" Later on, there's a goofy sequence where the protagonist is nearly mugged by two destitute opera actors who have resorted to thuggery.

The real problem with DAGGERS 8 is that it's perhaps just a little more predictable than average, even for such a formulaic genre. Our heroic Mung Yuen Men just goes around getting people to teach him kung fu: There's a scene where a restaurant owner strengthens him by having him do strenuous food preparation in the restaurant, for example. Once the restaurant owner/teacher is killed by the bad guy, Mung Yuen Men just goes off to learn more kung fu from other people (who get stabbed to death too), which includes some stupid style called "Catch the beggar". Meanwhile, token baddie Wilson Tong receives his mail (orders to kill certain people) from smuggled books I presume, because he keeps meeting up with some street vender who's selling books. These cycles just keep repeating themselves, and since there's

really only one main villain (he has no henchmen), most of the battles are one-on-one duels which get old, and despite the skill of all involved, I dare say the fights get dull.

The cast features lesser-known faces, definitely not the most well-known of the 1970s or early 1980s. Though Lily Li (AKA Li Li-li) seems familiar because there are numerous actresses with names like that, the most prolific person involved is director, screenwriter, martial arts choreographer & main villain Wilson Tong. His name sure seemed to ring a bell, as does his face. But then I realized I was confusing him with Winston Tong, former lead singer of the bizarre late 1970s punk/goth band, Tuxedo Moon. The main hero in DAGGERS 8 is credited as Mung Yuen Men, but I suspect his name might also be translated sometimes as "Meng Yuen Wen", a name I remember from 20 years ago when I saw COWARD BASTARD in a Chinatown theater (that's right, Chinatown once had theaters!! Can you believe it?). Regardless, Mung Yuen Men was a superb martial artist, but his appearance in these types of goofy movies always made him look like more of a clown (I think Billy Chong was Jackie's most charismatic wannabe) than a kung fu master.

Mung Yuen Men plays Chu Chi Chung, a martial artist who disappointed his Granddad, who wants his grandson to get out of the violent world of kung fu. So Granddad hires an assassin called Pa Su Lung, according to The Encyclopedia of Martial Arts Movies. But a program booklet for DAGGER 8 calls the character "professional killer Bah". Regardless, this ruthless, knife-wielding assassin is played by Wilson Tong. Tong's character has been hired by the deceitful granddad to kill all his grandson's teachers! Actually, you don't find out that Granddad is the culprit until later on (it's a major plot twist I didn't see coming!), so I apologize for giving it all away. Later, evil Tong turns on the Granddad and stabs him to death too. So by the time DAGGERS 8 ends, our young hero has at least four deaths (that's five, if you count his deceased brother, whom I forgot to mention) to avenge! Fortunately, they were all killed by the same villain, which makes the job easier.

** -DF

1980s:

TIGER ON BEAT

Cinema City; 1988, Dir.: Lau Kar Leung, Prod.: Wellington W. Fung, Tsang Kwok Chi, Exec. Prod.: Karl Maka, Cinematography: Cho On Shun & Joe Chan Kuong Kung, Art Dir.: Eric Lee, Costume Designer: Sherry Kwok, Action Stunt Coordinated by: Lau's Brothers, Car Stunt Coordinated by: Dave





Devils' Stunt Unlimited, Editor: Wong Ming Lam, Music: Teddy Robin Kwan, Theme Song Sung by: Maria Cordero, Screenwriter: Tsang Kwok Chi, Cast: Chow Yun Fat, Nina Li Chi, Conaan Lee, Tsui Shui Keung (AKA Norman Chu), Gordon Liu (AKA Liu Chia Hui), David Chiang, Shirley Ng, Ko Fai (AKA Kao Fei), Tommy Tam, John Keung, James Wong, Sun Tin Ha, Ti Lung, Bill Tung, Michael Hsiao, Sun Tin Ha, Shing Fui On, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Though Jeff Goodhart did deliver a capsule review of this fine film for *O.C.: The Hong Kong Gangster* Issue long ago, it surprised me that after all these years, I myself have never reviewed *TIGER ON BEAT*. And so today, there I was trying to meet some sort of self-imposed deadline and I realized this edition of *O.C.'s* "Hong Kong Heroes" column lacked its obligatory 1980s movie. Since my miserable life has hit rock bottom in recent months (laid off during a recession and nobody is hiring!), I don't have a dime to my name. So going out to rent a movie to review is not an option. So instead, I went through my videotape archives and found my tape of *TIGER ON BEAT*. I have only a vague recollection of having seen it before, and my memories were fond. Then why the hell haven't I reviewed it yet?! Well, as I watch my bootleg tape of the movie, I'm immediately annoyed about how bad the English subtitles are. It's a horrible transfer, with the subtitles dropping well below the actual screen most of the time. Now I see why I never wanted to sit through this movie. I hear there are better versions (i.e. prints on laser disk and/or DVD), and that there's an English dubbed version in Great Britain (but allegedly, they got the titles confused between *TIGER ON BEAT* and its sequel). Needless to say, in my grim state I can't afford to buy much of anything, so I'm stuck with this crappy videotape.

Bad subtitles or not, *TIGER ON BEAT* lived up to all expectations and is well deserving of its repu-

tation as a great action film. Being a 1980s movie, there's superb adventure in effect here, complete with dastardly villains, well-written characters, and last but not least, action! Conaan Lee is a pretty good martial artist, and even co-hero Chow Yun Fat is made to look good with his admittedly lacking kung fu abilities! The fights are really nice, with splatterings of oh-so-1980s stuntwork, the type of thrills that only the 1980s could offer. It's the work of famous Shaw veterans the Liu Brothers ("Lau's brothers", in the credits) themselves. In fact, the movie was directed by Liu Chia-liang, though credited as "Lau Kar Leung" again. His adopted brother (Gordon Liu, Liu Chia Hui, etc.) plays a villain and has hair this time. So with talent like that, it's no major surprise that this crime

drama goes all out. *TIGER ON BEAT* also succeeds as a comedy, however. I usually don't like Chinese attempts at humor, but *TIGER ON BEAT* is honestly funny, with Chow Yun Fat proving he's got a natural flair for hilarity.

All in all, *TIGER ON BEAT* delivers the goods; after all, it was produced at a time when most of HK's martial arts films delivered the goods! I'm giving it four stars (****), and even though I like *TIGER ON BEAT* a lot, I think maybe four stars is too much. If the action to drama/comedy ratio had leaned more toward action, then I could give this movie four stars (****) without any guilt. If I see the English dubbed version, I'll probably like *TIGER ON BEAT* even more.

The flick starts off with a theme song that steals

Nina
Li Chi



riffs from Billy Idol's "Don't Need a Gun" (which came out at about the same time as TIGER ON BEAT), it's sung in Chinese by somebody called Maria Cordero. Anyway, after the opening credits, we're immediately treated to the silly approach which will guide us through nearly the whole movie (only the action scenes, and the villains are serious), as Shing Fui On nearly catches his wife in bed with Chow Yun Fat. After this humorous scene, we learn that Chow is an undercover cop, and his partner is played by Conaan Lee. Though there are numerous funny gags and cameos by Ti Lung and David Chiang, the real script is about drug smugglers whose nefarious deeds implicate a previously innocent Nina Li Chi. Li Chi, playing the sister of villainous Kao Fei, is as gorgeous as

ever, and a curvaceous body like hers is absolutely unforgettable in an aerobics leotard! Until Amy Yip came along, I voted Li Chi as HK's reigning queen of the padded bra! But somewhere along the way, between the shoot-outs, kung fu kicks, cool stunts and car chases, the bad guys get the upper hand. Both Nina Li Chi and her brother end up dead, and the drug smugglers (evil Americans, of course) now have some girl as a hostage. Fortunately, our comical yet powerful duo of heroes (Chow Yun Fat and Conaan Lee) have a hostage too, because they were able to capture Norman Chu (AKA Tsui Sui Keung) somewhere along the way. The obligatory cliché of the exchanging of hostages segues into the

(continued on page 46)

張徹



CHANG CHEH JOINS FU SHENG

On the evening of 6/22/02, TV news in Asia briefly reported that the prolific, inspirational director Chang Cheh passed away today earlier that evening. Chang's career dates back to the late-1940s at least, and is possibly best known today for his work directing martial arts classics from the Shaw Brothers in the 1960s and 1970s.

Recently, he was recognized for his contribution to Hong Kong cinema via a "Lifetime Achievement Award" during this year's Hong Kong Film Awards (in April), and also nostalgic screenings of his early movies in a retrospective at the Hong Kong Film Archive during the previous year.

Some of the actors who Chang Cheh more or less discovered took part in the late great director's memorial services: David Chiang and Ti Lung (who wasn't able to actually attend the event because of his shooting schedule for a film in Beijing) helped with the funeral arrangement. International sensation John Woo, a former Chang Cheh protégé who now directs Hollywood blockbusters, cried when he heard of his mentor's death, because he did not make it back to Hong Kong to see Chang before he died. According to a Chinese newspaper, Chang Cheh's over 20 students attended his funeral. Ti Lung was originally scheduled to read Chang Cheh's eulogy and biographical info. At the funeral, but because he couldn't make it back to HK, they had to use to somebody else. Chang Cheh's funeral arrangement was #1 news in the entertainment section of the Chinese newspaper World Journal.





In this here edition of OC's ongoing superhero column, we've got reviews of Korea's UNBEATABLE FIGHTER: UREME, Japan's KAMEN RIDER KUUGA, and of course the obligatory anime PATLABOR, THE MOBILE POLICE. Of more interest to superhero fans is our review of an Oahu convention called HAWAII ALL-COLLECTORS' SHOW 2001. Thanks to the hard work of the talented entrepreneur Tracey Jeremiah, the Hawaiian event featured superhero actors Daisuke Ban and Shunsuke Ikeda, both of which appeared in numerous Japanese TV shows from the 1970s! When me and other mainland superhero fans first heard that there were all these new conventions (both Ban & Ikeda have returned to Hawaii several times since the HAWAII ALL-COLLECTORS' SHOW 2001) in Hawaii, we felt that the islands' scene might be worth looking into. Could it be that our local conventions (i.e. G-Fest and the Asian Fantasy Film Expo) were being given a run for their money?! I decided to break the cultural barrier and attend the recent "Kikaida Fan Fair" (4/13/02) in Hawaii, and hoped it would be as good as I had heard the HAWAII ALL-COLLECTORS' SHOW 2001 was. Well, it wasn't. The 4/13 event I went to was a terrible experience which consisted largely of little kids (hundreds of them) and standing in line outdoors for hours, and getting a bad sunburn in the process. The people at KIKU TV (a Honolulu station) probably made a lot of money off this occasion but ethically, the convention struck me as being absolute crap. I'm really not happy with Joanne Ninomiya at KIKU, or the asskissing fanboys who grovel at her feet. I spent a lot of money to attend that worthless event and came away very, very disillusioned. I went there to share some nostalgia, to relive what it was like to be a little kid in the 1970s watching these superhero programs. But what I felt like was a little kid who had received the proverbial pie-in-the-face, and that my passions & hobbies had become a complete joke. The only people who could enjoy that thing were little brats, the most obsessive geeks and Oahu otakus. But enough of my anger; I'll give that pathetic "Kikaida Fan Fair" a harsh review next issue. For now, you can read about the superior, ground-breaking convention which made this new Hawaiian fandom possible, at a time when corporate slimeballs hadn't taken over and received undue credit. -Damon A. Foster

무적의파이어 우리매

UNBEATABLE FIGHTER: UREME

("Moo Jug Wi Faita Ureme") 1993, Producer: Kim Chung Ki (Original director), Director: Lee Han Yul, Writer: Kim Chung Ki, Released: 6/8/93, Starring: Shim Hyung Rae, Yang Jong Chul, Yu Bin, Reviewed by Damon A. F.

Yet another edition to Korea's UREME movie series. Over the years, I've reviewed a lot of Korea's UREME farces, and thought I was beginning to figure them out. OC has covered these superhero romps in order, and saw it blossom from a cheap, badly made movie (as in UREME #1), all the way to being FX heavy extravaganzas (i.e. UREME #6) which could find an audience in America if somebody would dub them in English, or at least give them English subtitles. Though UREME #1 and UREME #2 bordered on being unwatchable, the more polished look of UREME #3 (and it's successors like UREME #4 and UREME #5)



showed a gradual improvement, to the point where these low budget movies could almost compete with the more advanced superhero stuff coming out of Japan. After UREME #6, I thought the sky was the limit, and that they would just keep getting better. But alas, along comes this here comparatively new UNBEATABLE FIGHTER: UREME and the whole UREME genre seems to be going downhill. I'm not sure what happened, but this series seemed to reach its peak with UREME's 5 & 6.

UNBEATABLE FIGHTER: UREME lacks the over-the-top approach which made the other movies so zany. With a lower budget, UNBEATABLE FIGHTER: UREME omits the cartoon robots and sets of the other UREME flicks I've seen, and has a much smaller cast. Nearly the whole story takes place in a forest. There are technical problems galore, many of which plagued the first couple movies. It's almost as though we've gone back to the 1980s when the UREME series started. The editing is terrible, and there are problems with lighting and cinematography, making UNBEATABLE FIGHTER: UREME look like an amateur movie. The film grain changes frequently, as does the color, proving the cameraman was inexperienced and knew little about colored-gel lenses. Whenever the superheroes and invaders exchange laser beam fire, it's obvious that some sort of flawed projection screen (or wall?) was needed for the super-impositions. There's this annoying, black dot (presumably a hole in the wall, or some type of utility outlet) that appears on the screen whenever somebody is going to zap somebody else (and then it disappears again once the visual FX shot ends, only to reappear later on, during the next battle). I can't believe the cameraman or director didn't spot this flaw when they meshed the footage, but this certainly appears to be the case! Another strange effect is the miniature spaceships. Fortunately, the spaceship dogfights are intended to actually be small, so there's no problem with scale. But these spaceships (crude, hand-made paper-mache' or Styrofoam models painted silver) have visible suspension wires. They're live action this time, unlike older films where they were often cartoons super-imposed with live actors.

This is obviously a troubled production. Though my tape of it is an actual pre-record, it's apparent that this tape is incomplete, because the videobox has photos of scenes which never actually happen in the film (but the pictures do show characters unique to this particular movie and not any other I've seen). I don't know if the people who designed the label never communicated with the idiots who



edited the actual movie together, or if there are alternate versions of this bizarre kiddie movie. The way it begins is really strange: There are these images of the space monsters attacking people, accompanying the opening credits. There's no music or voices. Then we abruptly cut to what was obviously intended to be the middle of a scene. Some scientist is embracing a woman. As the scientist fondles (some humor) her, she suddenly changes into an alien. But what was the build up? Who was this woman? Why did the monstrous spy choose to look like her?

Shim Hyung Rei's role provokes as many questions as the rest of the movie. He was in most of the movies, playing that heroic retard, but this time, he's only halfway involved. Since this character is so much like his famous "Young Gu" character (from other, non-UREME movies), that's what I assume he is, and that's what I'll call him. As the clown-like idiot Young Gu (?), Shim has a less prominent role. If the photos on the videobox are any indication, then the editing is a good thing, because for once an UREME movie isn't bogged down by his excess clowning around. The bumbling dork quickly changes into the superhero Esperman, who plays it serious. But not only is Shim heavily stunt-doubled for in the fight scenes, but many times we get full views of the stuntman's face! The stuntman gets a prominent role and no attempts are made to disguise him! It's as though Esperman just changes back & forth, into two completely different guys who look nothing alike! Esperman's long time leading lady Dae-Illi (sexy space babe in a leotard and white wig) is played by some new actress not in the other UREME movies I've reviewed, and her stunt double is pretty obvious too. Though the actress is able to fall on the ground, even the simplest kicks and punches are the work of a blatant stuntman. It's painfully obvious, one second we see a cute girl in a fighting stance, and in the next shot it's obviously the muscular body of some male gymnast who delivers the admittedly excellent spinning-back kicks.

But even bad movies can be fun, right? Hell, this movie is entertaining and kept me consis-

tently amused. I don't speak Korean, so I don't know what's going on, but the costumes are colorful and the martial arts are exciting. I still think Korean tae kwon do is one of the more exciting martial arts to appear in movies, and in the case of this movie, the kicks deliver the goods (even though I don't know how alien cyborgs mastered the martial arts!). Some of the villains look cool (i.e. these two warriors with spikes sticking out of their heads), and on the whole, this movie is constantly watchable. Though it lacks the budget & ambition of even the first couple films, it's apparent that the filmmakers have some experience now, and are able to come up with something halfway decent. Though I think UREME's 4, 5 & 6 are better than this hasty follow-up (which I suspect to be the 8th or 9th in the series), I still consider the first two to be the worst in the UREME series.

Script: Some little boy has befriended an adult alien called "Ma-ru-gi", who may very well be his father, I'm not sure. This alien is a good guy, but there are rival aliens ("Luca", "Khan", "Per-Per", and "Mo-Mo") who want to kill him for some revenge plot I guess, though I couldn't tell who was avenging whom. These villains are also planning to kidnap "Dr. Yang" & "Chado-li", I guess. Fortunately, superheroes like Esperman (now wearing a white helmet looking like something from an Ultra series), Dae-Illi and the mighty spaceship Ureme come along to save the day. The superheroes and good alien manage to defeat all the bad guys, when the bad guys aren't busy fighting among themselves. Plenty of laser beams, acrobatic flips, explosions and karate kicks make it all worthwhile. ** -DF

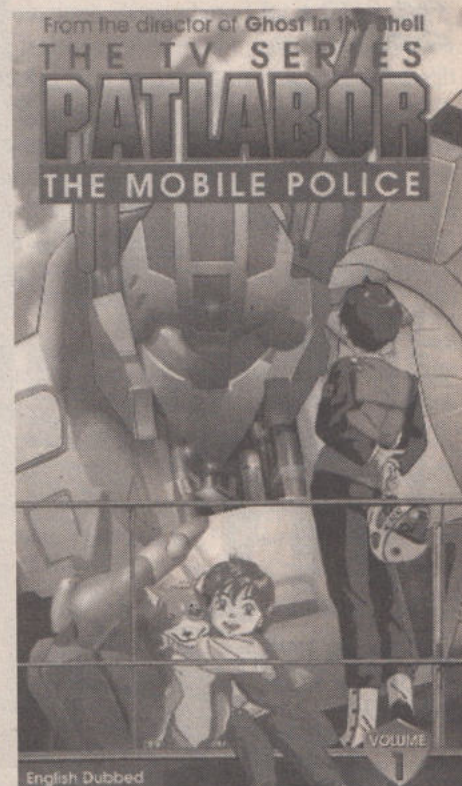
PATLABOR, THE MOBILE POLICE: Volume 1

Headgear/Emotion; 1989, Produced by: Sunrise, Presented by Bandai & Tohokushinsha, Music: Kenji Kawai, Screenplay: Kazunori Ito, Mamoru Oshii, Animation: Nobuyoshi Nishimura Akio Takami, Chuichi Iguchi, Atsuo Tobe, English Release by Central Park Media & U.S. Manga; 2001, Producer of English Version: John O'Donnell, Reviewed by Damon

Foster

When I first saw the videobox of this typical Japanese cartoon, my first thought was, "Not another Gundam!" Being a late 1980s TV series, the robot designs look more than similar to the likes of GUNDAM, MACROSS and DUNBINE. The artwork of both the robots and the people is completely indistinguishable from other Japanese animation. But as I sat through the first five episodes on this English dubbed tape, I came to realize PATLABOR's one unique trait: It's quite realistic, for anime; that is. The approach is generally slow-paced and talky—at times it gets very, very dull. There's no suggestive material for adults, so I guess PATLABOR is for children. But they must be very intelligent, alert children! The characters are complex, and some of the subplots do manage to get somewhat interesting at times. Though the over-all story deals with human pilots who control giant robots, the scripts concentrate more on the people themselves, and not whatever battles they're involved in. I don't know if the series got more over-the-top or exciting later on, but this here tape ("Volume 1") deals largely with drama, character development, heavy dialogue and comedy. Its lackluster approach could almost make it the "heroic robot" answer to STARBLAZERS or CAPTAIN HARLOCK, but PATLABOR doesn't take itself so seriously, and it's far less pretentious.

At a time when most Japanimation about robots is flashy and artsy fartsy, I suppose PATLABOR's non-spectacular setting is a re-



lief. Finally, here's a series which deviates from the norm. There might be other programs like this too, but PATLABOR is the first one I tried sitting through. I'm all for any program that can be different, and I give Tohokushinsha (or whoever the hell produced it) an A+ for effort. But the program is just so damn boring that my mind kept wandering. PATLABOR isn't absolute crap, but I just didn't find the premise to be interesting. Diehard anime fans who can't get enough of this stuff might wanna' check it out if the tape is available in Blockbuster's bargain bin, but to the casual viewer, PATLABOR is just a waste of time, ef-

fort, and VCR heads. Maybe this program has some sort of "soap opera" effect; I can see its continuing stories being interesting if viewed broadcasted on TV, on a weekly basis. But trying to sit through the full 120 minutes (all in one sitting) like I did is a frustrating experience. For what it's worth, the episodes on this tape are called "Ingram Activated", "Kanuko Appears", "Special Vehicles Dept. 2", "Go to Demon Mountain", and "Labor x.10 Out of Control".

The story would appear to be in the future, when robots are commonplace. These aren't like the robots of MAZINGA Z or YUUSHA



GO NAGAI COLUMN #5

by Frank Strom

(The fifth edition of Kaizo Ningen Update's continuing mission to explore the world of artist Go Nagai)

KEKKO KAMEN IN LOVE (A.K.A. "KEKKO KAMEN 3")

1993 Japan Film & Video

Directed by Tomo Akiyama

Starring Asami Katsuragi, Mayumi Yoshioka, Mayumi Takahashi, Chika Matsui

English version by Video Search Of Miami

In all honesty, I'm not convinced that Go Nagai actually invented the "nudie-cutie" super-hero genre. Surely some American cartoonist (if not a European

one) like Wally Wood must have beaten him to punch by a few years or even a decade. The French comic BARBARELLA, while not strictly superhero fare, did involve costumes and sci-fi settings along with nudity and (pretty mild) sex. Regardless of who was there first, this was a genre Nagai made his own, reaching levels of absurdity that lesser talents can only dream of. It's a stupid, infantile genre, and no one is more qualified to do it than Nagai!

CUTEY HONEY was his first and by far most famous, introducing the formula of a costumed super-heroine (in various stages of undress) battling both pervert villains and horny friends alike. While that sounds innocuous enough (especially with a modern perspective), you have to marvel at the context it was done in: This wasn't an "adult" series done for some men's magazine -- This was a comic strip intended for and published by a major mainstream boy's magazine. Cultural differences allowed for such a thing to happen in the first place, but even still, Nagai was really pushing it with some of the content. He'd already raised the ire of concerned parents groups with his late 1960s series HARENCHI GAKUEN, which featured anti-authority themes and nudity -- The former probably being more a concern than the latter. Best of all, it was approached with the wild abandon of an evil genius or diabolical child! The line between the two blurs when it comes to Nagai.

Coming into the 1970s, Nagai exploded creatively (and financially) -- The early part of the decade saw him concoct his "big three": MAZINGER-Z, DEVILMAN and CUTEY HONEY. Each one of the three was practically a genre unto itself. But his heyday seemed to be winding down during the second half of the 70s. The quality of art and energy was still there, but there were no more hugely pivotal creations. He kept plugging away with more super-robots, more demons, and more nudie-cutie heroes, including

KEKKO KAMEN. The title KEKKO KAMEN is of course a spoof on the successful 60s comic GEKKO KAMEN (AKA "Moonlight Mask"), which Nagai had previously lampooned with a short comic series called GEKKO RAMEN/RAMEN MASK (yep, the old noodles-on-the-head gag). The series itself (published in 1977 by Jump Comics in five collected volumes) owed more to CUTEY HONEY with occasional nods to Shotaro Ishimori's super-hero comics like CYBORG 009, KIKAIKID and KAMEN RIDER. But unlike Cutey Honey, who is nude SOME of the time, the mysterious Kekko Kamen is nude ALL of the time, wearing a red mask, scarf, gloves, boots, and nothing else. Utilizing a high school setting, the series focuses on the heroic Kekko Kamen defending the virtue of the predominantly female student body from the lecherous machinations of the wicked school principal (a metal-masked harlequin/joker/fool figure) and a host of oddball teachers and super-villains. It's heavy on bondage imagery, ridiculous gags and fight sequences. In almost every battle, Kekko Kamen polishes off her foe with a flying spread-eagle crotch drop to the face (you can see the obvious gags coming, right? Figuratively and literally). The equivalent is Kamen Rider's "Rider-Kick." It's a decent strip, and better than a lot of Nagai's other (more pedestrian) late 70s offerings.

But given the problems with featuring a constantly naked protagonist, it was a long time before KEKKO KAMEN was adapted into another medium. It's probably a good example of just how much social morality (or perhaps more what is and isn't considered acceptable) in Japan has changed over the years; In the '70s, KEKKO KAMEN was a boy's magazine feature, but in the '90s it had to be produced as an adult video. Strictly softcore, mind you, with no amping up of the sexual content. If anything, it's more timid than the original comic. A series of three live-action videos were produced by



RAIDEEN, because they have no personalities; they're more like tractors with arms and legs. These giant robots are called "Labor"s because they were designed to do heavy manual labor. The police patrol has their own series called "Patlabor" ("Patrol Labor") robots. The first episode introduces the human pilots (Captain Goto, Asuma, Shinobu, Shinji and others) of these Patlabors, and the second episode has a tournament where the pilots pit their Patlabors against each other to determine rank—these are the most uninteresting robot battles I've ever tried to stomach. Next comes the third episode, followed by the forth: "Go

to Demon Mountain". This is one of the more interesting episodes, because it involves a giant monster. The final episode on the tape goes back to pitting robot against robot, but it's been playing as I typed up this review, so I wasn't able to give it complete attention. *-DF

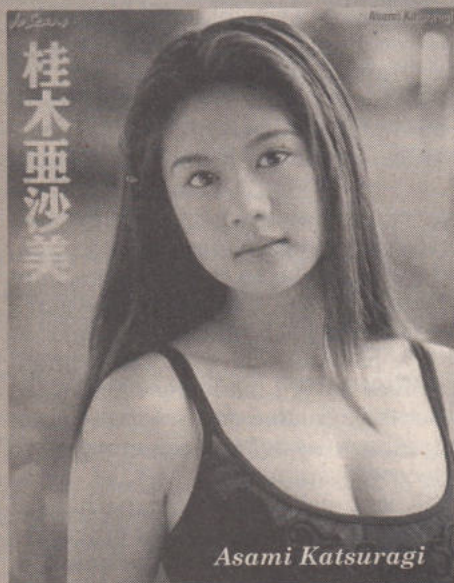
KAMEN RIDER KUUGA

(AKA: "Kamen Laida Kuuga", "Masked Rider Cougar", "Masked Rider Kuuga", "Masked Rider: Sky Moth") Toei; 2000, In Association with Ishimori Pro., Broadcast on: TV Asahi, Consisting of 49 episodes lasting from 1/30/00 to 1/21/01, Main Writer: Toshihisa Arakawa,

Cast: Jyo Odagiri, Shingo Katsurayama, Nobuyuki Yoneyama, Takeshi Matsuyama, Mie Nanamori, Yoshitaka Ootsuka, Shio Mizuhara, Kaori Mizushima, Mr. Kitarou, Masaharo Mori, Takashi Inoue, Rie Okada, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Since I loathe this program so damn much, I'll try to make this review brief and to the point. I see no reason to go in-depth or be particularly informative as I review this useless excuse for a Kamen Rider series. I simply don't give a damn about the names of the characters, their plight, the stories, or anything about

(Continued on page 24)



Japan Film & Video, while around the same time another company released an animated version, which was pretty awful and less famous than the live-action one.

KEKKO KAMEN IN LOVE is the third entry in the live-action series. Like the other two entries, this stinks. For a video based on energetic prime-era Go Nagai material, KK IN LOVE is shockingly dull. It just drags and drags. You keep hoping it will just hurry up and fucking end already! I swear to God; it seems to end, then just keeps going. Yeesh! As the title suggests, Kekko Kamen falls in love. Her paramour is the new school music teacher, who sits in his room playing classical pieces on a piano as Kekko Kamen pummels thugs all around him. Late in the film, they continue on that joke with the music teacher playing piano amidst a big climactic fight scene, which evolves into a ballet (sounds funnier than it actually is, unfortunately). There are two plots here: Kekko Kamen's up & down romance which results in her being ineffectual as a superhero, and despondent Principal Satan (no joker's make-up this time, what gives?) calling it quits as a

villain. Satan's family (including a niece named "Cutey Bunny" - - Joshua Quagmire take note!) arrives to offer moral support and fight Kekko Kamen - - There are several fight scenes in this video, all of them terrible - - Neither exciting, well performed or even funny. In the climactic one, a whole army of Kekko Kamens come into play - - The school students in disguise - - A sequence taken directly from the original comic. At least one of these faux Kekko Kamens has a much more attractive figure than the real one, which seems just plain wrong somehow. The good guys win, the bad guys lose, you know the drill.

A lot of the humor in these KEKKO KAMEN videos is very true to the spirit of Go Nagai - - Not using specific jokes from his comics, but done in his style with a sense of anarchy, absurdity and questionable taste. One of the better instances in KK3 is a running gag about a sado-masochist student who purposefully breaks rules in order to be beaten and punished by the school disciplinary officer (who inevitably ends up as her love interest). But unlike the comic, where the strong visual storytelling makes up for any lack of understanding of language, in this version you feel like you're missing something, even with English subtitles. Nothing worse than feeling left out of a joke! But the fatal flaw here is that the production doesn't go far enough in its outrageousness. It comes across as very reserved, which is immediately apparent just looking at how they present the lead hero. They cover her up. They dress Kekko Kamen in a scarf the size of a blanket and keep her wrapped up in it most of the time. Call me nuts, but I thought the core joke to the entire concept was a naked superhero. While I understand the situation regarding Japanese censorship at the time this was produced, the problem could have easily been solved with a little digitization over the vagina which in turn could have been played up in some jokes (Nagai's comics

have done that often enough). One gets the feeling the production crew was embarrassed working with a naked woman and maybe even embarrassed to be involved in this project in the first place. Overall, the production values aren't very good (I've seen full blown porn videos like the KITORA series which put this one to shame in that respect), and the whole thing seems totally amateur. In fact, KK IN LOVE often plays like one of those bad overlong comedy sketches SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE is famous for. That ain't good. *-Frank Strom

*COMICS/MERCHANDISE NEWS:

On the comics front, DEVILMAN AMON continues serialization in MAGAZINE-Z monthly with script by Nagai and really really awful art by some other guy. Samurai strip SEGUN is up to a sixth volume from Kodansha Futabasha's Action Comics imprint has two new items: CUTEY HONEY and LEGEND OF ANGEL (which may be a deceptively repackaged reprint of 90s era NEW CUTEY HONEY) and more noteworthy, a 170-page MAZINGER ANTHOLOGY MANGA (Reprinting the old Star Comics edition of GRANDIZER, featuring excellent Grandizer VS Great Mazinger material from the mid 1970s). In the toy/Merchandiza-Z department, Medicom Toy has a new line of Nagai robot action-figures - - Maziner-Z, Great Mazinger, Getter Robo & Getter Robo-G (what? No Steel Jeeg!?) - - but unlike their terrific Raideen toy, these are die-cast metal, only 4 inches tall and kinda overpriced at \$30 a pop. Dynamic Toys (yes, a Nagai company) has a detailed & accurate Grandizer action-figure/statue complete with saucer. Most all this stuff can be ordered domestically through Diamond Comics Distribution.

*Frank Strom on the web:

<http://Frankstrom.weirdcrap.com>

Convention review: HAWAII ALL-COLLECTORS' SHOW

Dates: July 20th -22nd, 2001

location: Neal Blaisdell Center ("N.B.C.") on Oahu

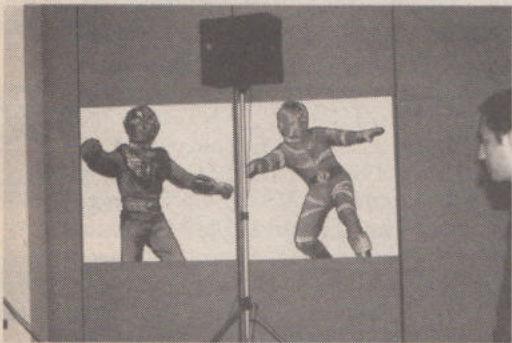
By Jason Tayros

You know, for certain groups of people, the ultimate nostalgic event would mean different things: a Beatles reunion concert, an Elvis (R.I.P.) tour, perhaps a classic STAR WARS trilogy cast reunion. However, for fans of Japanese superhero fans, especially those fans who grew up in Hawaii in the 1970s, it would mean only one thing: The return of title heroes of TV programs like JINZO NINGEN KIKAIDA (A.K.A.: "Kikaider, The Android of Justice"), and KIKAIDA 0-1 (A.K.A.: "Kikaider Zero-One"). The Kikaida brothers are back!! Thanks to Ilene & Wayne (and local Hawaii fans Tracey Jeremiah and the late Gaylord Cambra), this fantastic dream of an event, believe it or not, came true. Mr. Daisuke Ban and Mr. Shunsuke Ikeda made, indeed, a triumphant return to Hawaii. It was Mr. Ban who played the title hero in JINZO NINGEN KIKAIDA (Toei; 1972), or rather, his alter ego (robot in human disguise) Jiro. Mr. Ikeda played the older android brother Ichiro in a sequel series KIKAIDA 01 (Toei; 1973). Ichiro could turn into the robot superhero Kikaida 01 (Zero One). The actors appeared together at the "Hawaii All-Collectors Show". The venue? Neal Blaisdell Center (known to the locals as "N.B.C.") Exhibition Halls. The dates? For the record: Friday, July 20th and Saturday, July 21st, 2001. This was the first of many reunion appearances that the Kikaida duo would make in Hawaii.

This collectors show usually boasts toys, comics, stamps, coins, vintage furniture, jewelry, you name it. In that sense, that weekend was no exception. Also in attendance were the giant Richard Kiel who played the popular villain "Jaws" in the James Bond films and Ben Chapman, the man behind the mask of the Creature of the Black Lagoon. Make no mistake, however. This year, at this particular show, the main draw for the Hawaii fans were the original Kikaida actors. Once inside the Collectors Show halls, I made my way toward an off-set space with my path labeled with simple colored construction paper, printed with the 2 words "Kikaida Room" and arrows below, beckoning me to proceed. I couldn't help but wonder, *"Is this really happening?"*

The space dubbed the "Kikaida Room" was not much bigger than, perhaps, 2 racquetball-court rooms, if that. No matter, though. The magic of 70s tokusatsu nostalgia was in the air and that was what I cared about most at the time. I'm guessing the same could be said for most, if not all, of my fellow Kikaida fans in the room. At the back of the room stood a table at which the nice people of Ohana Designs Hawaii were selling a super cool commemorative "Kikaida Hawaii Tour" t-shirt; apparently, tons of them. Of course, I bought one! Beside their table stood 2 glass display case / counters, chock full of Kikaida & 01 memorabilia: cards, books, toys, c.d.s, etc.. In fact, visitors to the Kikaida Room could also see some (replica?) props from the shows. Jiro's white helmet & red guitar plus Ichiro's blue helmet and trumpet filled one of the bottom shelves! Gaylord Cambra (whom I had the honor of speaking to, albeit briefly) informed me that the Kikaida Tour crew (perhaps Mr. Ban and Mr. Ikeda themselves?) asked if they could put the props in there for the duration of the show. Of course, Cambra said "Yes!"

The sales crew from the local shop Collector Maniacs was there with a prime location beside & behind the glass case, offering the latest in Kikaida & other tokusatsu goods. Along with the S.I.C. version of Kikaida's infamous motorcycle "Sidemachine", one of the most recent popular sellers was being offered: Chara Wheels from Hot Wheels, such as Kikaida on his Sidemachine (the original version! Yeah!), 01 on his Double Machine, and Inazuman's Raijin-Gou in Car Mode (incidentally, Mr. Ban also starred in both INAZUMAN and INAZUMAN FLASH). From the center of the room snaked metal railings about waist-high, to orderly guide the queue of fans hoping for autographs toward the stage. This line led first to the table where signature tickets (\$25 for the duo and \$15 for one of them) and photographs for signatures were being sold (these photos were apparently taken on Oahu that very weekend, featuring the suit actors and, in others, the actual celebs themselves, posing for the camera). Fans were then led up the few steps left of the stage to get up close to their long-time heroes. The modest-sized stage stood at the front of the room, above which were signs reading "Kikaida" & "01", backed appropriately



by red curtains on one side and blue curtains on the other. A charming painted mural of our brother heroes flanked the right side of the stage (and provided a great background for picture-seeking fans).

The very first stage show (of 4 planned) that weekend was short and sweet. It did not feature much fight contact between the actors. Most of it was feet-shuffling and more like a martial arts version of Madonna's "voguing". However, the thought did cross my mind that, if I were Mr. Miura (the man who built these particular show costumes), I probably wouldn't want the suit performers to be striking each other either! No stunt suits for these guys. We were looking at the main "hero" suits right there. Intro music played for each of the three characters: first Hakaida, second 01, and third (even the Japanese people know who our favorite is): Kikaida! Timing was a bit weird for the stage show. "Ichihiro" (Mr. Ikeda) had to "call" Jiro many times before Kikaida finally appeared. Don't get me wrong, though. I didn't let those little things get to me. Kikaida was back in Hawaii! I wanted to enjoy this as much as possible.

Mr. Ban and Mr. Ikeda stepped from behind the curtains and onto the stage, waving "shaka" and declaring "Nice to meet you!" to the grateful Kikaida fans. In turn, the fans gave them a warm welcome with applause, whistles, cheers, and the chattering of hungry camera shutters. Mark Olson, a young translator, stood upon the stage with them, bridging the language barrier between the stars and their fans. However, the gratitude on the onlookers' faces was probably quite clear to our Japanese-speaking heroes.

From where I stood, Mr. Ban seemed to have an interesting look on his face. Perhaps (and I am only guessing), he was wondering if this visit to Hawaii was a half-baked idea. Perhaps he was misled by this early crowd that only filled half the room at the time, to believe that he and Mr. Ikeda would not get a rambunctious greeting from Hawaii's "Generation Kikaida" (as we were dubbed by the media). If that, indeed, was Mr. Ban's initial wonderings, I am glad for him, Mr. Ikeda, and all us Kikaida fans that those hypothetical thoughts were happily proved wrong during those 2 days.

The fan attendance in that room SWELLED as people arrived after finishing work. It is my guesstimate that about 1,200 people paid visits to the Kikaida Room. Smiling faces, handshakes, and photos with the heroes dominated that weekend. Many fellow fans expressed to me how impressed they were by Mr. Ban's and Mr. Ikeda's "Aloha Spirit". I too was impressed. The celebrities were really very giving. This might sound sappy but it was truly touching. They made time to shake hands and take photos with EVERYBODY, young and old. One family brought their mother (?) in her wheelchair to duplicate a group pose photo with Mr. Ban that they took probably some 27 years ago! I did not have the pleasure of speaking to anyone in that family but I did catch a glimpse of their old 70s photo. It was of their Mom standing with Mr. Ban, surrounded by the children who were now, like me, in their 20s or 30s. Somehow, having seen that bit of fun nostalgia with Mr. Ban take place kind of summed up how special this event was for all of us. In all honesty, I had met Mr. Ban by chance at a toy convention in Tokyo a year prior to this event in Hawaii. He was kind enough to spare a few moments to speak with me. I was glad for that. It was then that he told me of the possibility that he might one day re-visit Hawaii. I'm glad that, this year, it finally came true. For me, the big rush of the event was seeing all of my fellow fans in person. It was no longer just my older sister and younger cousin gathered around my aunty's television on Wednesday night, hugging our pillows, riveted to Kikaida on the screen. Now, instead, in that Kikaida Room at the N.B.C., I could bask in energy given off by all my fellow fans. Love for the Kikaida show was no longer a lonely thing. Seeing everyone remember our golden childhood of the 70s together like that was truly refreshing.

Just two days before completing this article, I was saddened to learn of the untimely death of Mr. Gaylord Cambra who, along with Tracey Jeremiah, was responsible for making Mr. Ban and Mr. Ikeda's nostalgic Kikaida visit to Hawaii a reality. Apparently, Mr. Cambra, still in his 30s, was working out at a gym when he passed out, suffering from a heart-attack. Unfortunately, no one was able to revive him. Though few of us tokusatsu fans knew him personally, we (the Kikaida fans and, perhaps, the celebrities whom he helped to learn that they are still loved) all benefited from his generosity, kindness, and hard work. For that, we will remember Gaylord and we will always be grateful. Rest in Peace. -Jason Tayros



Photos
from the
HAWAII
ALL
COLLECTORS'
SHOW



the show—I suppose I don't think too highly of the people who made the series either. Why, just why is it that all our childhood heroes (Godzilla, Ultraman, Gamera, and now even Kamen Rider!) are being bastardized like this?! Is the new generation of kiddies really that much different than the twerps who were supporting such TV shows & films 20 or 30 years ago? In the 1960s & 1970s, we had actual sequels (be it Gamera or Kamen Rider), which worked so well when viewed in chronological order, but in more recent years, audiences have become jaded, and demand that the same old names ("Kamen Rider", "Godzilla" etc.) be placed on completely different characters (which I think are unworthy of the name)! Watching KAMEN RIDER KUUGA hurt almost as bad as watching Tri-Star's butchering of Godzilla! It seems I've finally gotten too old to enjoy any new films & TV shows (regardless of the genre), which, in turn, tells me I'm too old to continue publishing OC.

But before I really get specific and tell you what I hate about KAMEN RIDER KUUGA, let me at least try to discuss the TV show's good points (I don't imagine this will take up a lot of space): Well, it seems to have been written in an intelligent manner. It's very serious, and in its own dull way, is really well done, I suppose. At least there aren't a lot of little kids in it. Much of the story can be taken as a standard crime drama, because it too involves a squad of cops (Nobuyuki Yoneyama, Takeshi Matsuyama, Takashi Inoue, etc.)—in fact much of the script deals with regular humans (instead of monsters and superheroes). It's definitely the most realistic Kamen Rider program to date. The characters have depth too. If somebody were to bother translating this otherwise crappy series into English, it might be worth a damn. But taken as is (in Japanese with no subtitles or dubbing), KAMEN RIDER KUUGA is recommendable to Japanese audiences exclusively. It's not a universally thrilling program like KAMEN RIDER (Toei; 1971) or KAMEN RIDER V3 (Toei; 1972); those are classic oldies which transcend language and cultures and can be fun whether you're fluent in Japanese or not. So I guess as an average example of sci-fi, KAMEN RIDER KUUGA is tolerable. But don't expect a lot of superhero action, because as a superhero program, it's worthless.

Now that I've completed what was meant to be my "positive" paragraph, I can get back to some good solid trashing! Like I said up



above, KAMEN RIDER KUUGA is a no-nonsense program. But is this always such a good thing?! Where's the camp? The cheesiness? The entertainment?! KAMEN RIDER KUUGA strikes me as being little more than a soap opera, full of tedious dialogue, and an endless abundance of unimportant characters. Though I normally think originality is a good thing, I simply don't understand why anybody would want to deviate from the traditional concept that much! If they had taken the antennas off our title hero and called this boring series simply KUUGA, then maybe this would have been okay. Instead of advertising it as "a new hero" or "a



Rie Okada

new Kamen Rider", they should have called it "a new soap opera with an occasional superhero, sometimes"! For example, one character played by Kaori Mizushima really bogged down some of the latter episodes, because she's in some nauseating subplot (a scientist mother and her son). Mizushima alone made me fall asleep!

I think Toei wasn't willing to put a lot of money into this series. This would explain the crude, cheap-looking shot-on-video format which couldn't even afford Film Look! It also explains why the action-oriented scripts and epic battles are no longer present. Gone are the days when we could expect to see a Kamen Rider (i.e. Kamen Rider V3 or Kamen Rider X) beat up at least five villains per episode. In KAMEN RIDER KUUGA, we're lucky if he kicks the ass of just one villain. On those rarest of occasions, when Kuuga actually does confront a monster, it's usually very short, and our lame excuse for a hero gets his ass kicked a lot anyway. Before I go into the plot, let me just say that I've only watched episodes 40 through 47, and I'm basing my review of the overall show on these lame chapters. If there are other episodes which are way better, then I apologize for this ill-informed review. But since there's very little variety in the episodes I've sat through, I'll assume they're all equally uninteresting.

Not that I really care, but the script would appear to deal with motorcyclist Godai Yuusuke (Joe Odagiri), who can morph into the superhero Kamen Rider Kuuga—who, in turn, can increase toy sales by becoming the Kuugas "Mighty", "Titan", "Pegasus" and "Dragon". There's really not much difference between these various versions of Kamen Rider Kuuga because this way, the toymakers can largely work with the same molds (the only major difference between Kamen Rider Mighty and Kamen Rider Titan, for example, is the colors!) and not start from scratch. Fortunately for Kamen Rider Kuuga, he doesn't have to do a lot of fighting, and spends more time socializing, motorcycling, talking on cell-phones (that annoying "beep" seems to happen in every episode) and living in a slow-paced, mellow setting. But every now and then, he must make his magical spear materialize so that he can fight the typically evil army of monstrous mutants. This time they're called "Gurongi". The local cops are also on the trail of these dangerous beasts. All this, plus a lame ending song ("Aozora ni Naru") for the credits. -Damon Foster

ASIAN ODDITIES

プルガサリ

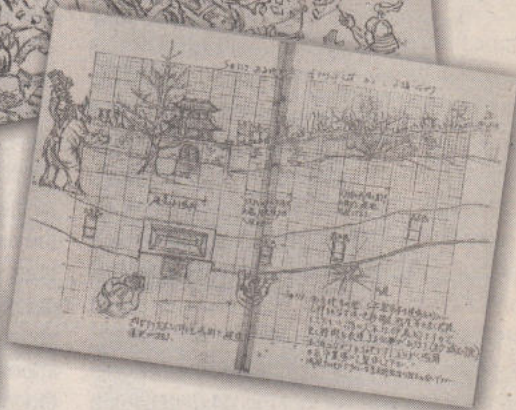
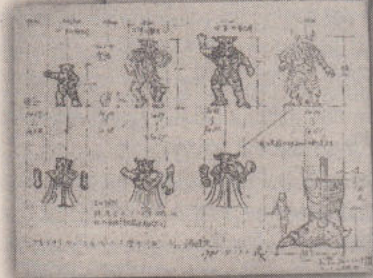
怪獣の大怪獣

PULGASARI

(AKA: "Pulgasary") Korea

Film Export & Import

Corp.; 1985, Dir.: Chong Gon Jo, Screenplay: Kim Se Ryun, Photography: Cho Myong Hyun & Pak Sung Ho, Art: Ri Do Ik, Music: So Jong Gon, Special Effects: Kim Duk Ho, SFX Art: Pak Chong Gil, Make-up: Ri Yong Gu & Om Man Sik, Editing: Kim Ryon Sun, Recording: Rim Yu Song, Costumes: Rim Hong Un, Lighting: Ro Dong Chon & Ri In Bom, FX Advisor: Teruyoshi Nakano, Cast: Chang Son Hwi, Ham Gi Sop, Ri Jong Guk, Ri In Gwon, Yu Gyeong Ae, Ro Hye Chol, Ri Ryong Un, Kenpachiro Satsuma, Reviewed by Damon Foster



I've had this North Korean fantasy on tape for years, but was too disgusted to watch it because one too many American fan-boys were so eager to see this movie. The only reason the local kaiju geeks were intrigued with this Korean movie in particular was because of involvement by famed Japanese veterans of the genre Teruyoshi Nakano and Kenpachiro Satsuma. Koreans have made many great monster movies (i.e. TYRANNO'S CLAW and DRAGON TUKKA), but because these superior flicks had no help from Kenpachiro Satsuma, Teruyoshi Nakano or other Japanese masters, the domestic dorks ignored them. So

needless to say, I developed a chip on my shoulder early on, and for the longest time, I refused to watch and review my tape of North Korea's first ever monster movie. I shall now break my silence.

But first, some background on PULGASARI: The original director of PULGASARI was South Korean Shin Sang Ok, who sought asylum in the U.S. in 1986, right around when the movie was completed. Shin Sang Ok offered a ludicrous story, claiming that he and his wife were kidnapped in the late 1970s, and held in North Korea where he was "forced" to make movies for North Korean dictator Kim Jong Il! I've heard of being embarrassed about movies you've made, but this is getting a bit ridiculous! Look, Shin Sang Ok; if you don't like PULGASARI, just say so! I suppose we'll never know the full truth. (to be fair, the North Koreans commies are known to kidnap workers, but it still sounds exaggerated to me.) As for Kim Jong Il, who continues to rule the Communist country with an iron hand, he's a known film buff who founded a film school (in Pyongyang) that became a routine tourist stop. Most of their movies are of course pro-totalitarian government (emphasizing the greatness of their socialist creed), but they did make a few fantasy films, PULGASARI being the most wellknown. "Kim Jong Il watches every single film made in North Korea. He gives comments on acting, directing and everything else. If he compliments

some actor, he or she suddenly becomes a star", said Kim Hae Young, a North Korean actress who defected to the South in 1998. "The stars are those recognized by the Worker's Party as good actors. They get paid more, live in better homes and sometimes even have cars, which is very rare in the North", she said. In recent years, North Korea's economic problems curtailed the country's movie-making. Kim Bo-ae, a South Korean businesswoman, tried in 1990 & 1995 to collaborate with North Koreans on a film project, but political tension ended those efforts. Now the two countries are on better terms and Kim Bo-ae plans to return to North Korea to discuss a new film which might utilize actors & script writers from both the North and South.

Despite the conciliatory climate between both Koreas (and the North is considered respectable in the South; South Koreans enjoyed a North Korean childrens' troupe of acrobats and a charismatic Kim Jong Il impressed South Koreans during his tour), PULGASARI bombed in theaters there. People in South Korea saw PULGASARI as old-fashioned and crude. South Korean audiences prefer movies (i.e. American movies) with better special effects, and the kids were so uninterested that they would rather keep on watching cartoons or playing video games. Although South Korean theaters were empty wherever



With all the controversy surrounding the first North Korean movie to ever show in South Korea, was it worth it? Well, in my opinion, there's no single "yes" or "no" answer. I agree with the Japanese, in that the crudeness is a welcome sight, in this age of CGI-regurgitating

So PULGASARY certainly isn't a perfect

MAKING OF PULGASARI
 サツマ・ゴジラから見たプルガサリ

ミニブル、スタンバイOK!

ブルガサリとおいどん 薩摩刺八郎

資料提供：薩摩刺八郎

means she could lose her own life as well. But as the lead heroine, she's willing to sacrifice herself for the good of the villagers. **1/2 -DF

THE PING PONG CLUB

(A.K.A.: "The Losers' Club"), Minoru Furuya/Kodansha; 1995, In Association with: Kitty Film, Broadcast on TBS, English Version by: Software Sculptors & AnimeOne.com, Distributors: Binari Media Works Central Park Media, Music: Kobayashi Yatsuyoshi, Directors: Hata Masami, Takashi Tanasawa, Toshiaki Kanbara, Kenchiro Watanabe & Yukio Takahashi, Animation: Daijiro Sakamoto, Toshiaki Kanbara, Osamu Nanami, Hideo Maru, English Version by: John O'Donnell & Stephanie Shalofsky, Voices: Jimmy Zoppi, Kosuke Okano, Buddy Woodward, Takumi Yamazaki, Mark Percy, Tsutomu Takayama, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Here's a Japanese cartoon which is hard to critique. A TV program so strange that it defies description. This, however, isn't necessarily a bad thing. Whether you choose to call this bizarre anime series THE PING PONG CLUB or THE LOSERS CLUB, this definite oddity is unique—that's for damn sure. I've watched this English-dubbed (and badly!) pre-record all the way through, twice! I managed to sit through the entire 100-minute running time all in one sitting, both times. So although THE

PING PONG CLUB is beyond strange, it somehow managed to win me over. It took a while to figure this animated program out, but I think I can finally put a label on it: It's a spoof of them Japanese sport-team cartoons. For those who don't know, Japanese have had cartoons about sports since the 1960s at least. Cartoons about the daily lives of soccer players and baseball are common place. Two of the soccer cartoons aired in my area many years ago: AKA KICHI NO 11 (listed simply as "Soccer Boy" in local San Francisco TV Guides) enjoyed a lengthy run on a nearby Japanese language channel, and years later, a Mexican station aired SUPER CHAMPION's Spanish-language version. Anyway, what the genre of "sports anime" offered was programs taking place in the lackluster world of high school athletes. This was unlike the "anime race car" genre (SPEED RACER, SUPER CAR: GATIGER, etc.) which deals with crime, adventure and/or life-threatening stories. What the "sports anime" genre focused on was the charisma of the teams and how they strived to win.

Now, if my guess work about this genre is correct, THE PING PONG CLUB is sort of an alternate look at the concept (rather like in the 1980s when MARRIED...WITH CHILDREN came along to offer an alternative to the "traditional", more wholesome sitcoms). So THE PING PONG CLUB tells the story of a bunch of guys (Maeno, Hiromi Izawa, Takeda, Tanaka, and Tanabe) who have dysfunctional friendships and are looked down upon by everybody else in the high school. The approach of this comedic program gets surreal (like a David Zucker classic) at times, which gets really distracting; this messy, fast-paced approach may add extra cheap laughs, but it makes it difficult to follow the overall script. It also makes it damn near impossible to identify the characters, because of all the figurative costume changes (you never know when Maeno or Takeda is going to magically materialize in a butterfly costume or ballerina dress). It's rather like THE YOUNG ONES in that respect; these really awkward sketches seem spliced in at random times, upsetting the flow of the script.

Okay, so I've established that this parody is one weird cartoon. But as a comedy, do I think it succeeds?! Well, that's a good question. I suppose it's a hit. I can see why Japanese audiences would think it's funny: It satirizes not only the over-dramatizations of Japanese anime (i.e. freeze frames and sky color changes to show emphasis & emotional impact), but takes swipes at other prime-time Japanese TV



like gameshows (i.e. SHOTEN and NARUHODO! THE WORLD), and jidai-geki programs. But most of you have probably never seen nor heard of these other programs and genres! So the humor in THE PING PONG CLUB was written for the Japanese audience only. As such, it's really unlikely that anybody would dub such an exotic product into English, but this seems to be the case. Not surprisingly, the Japanese puns and specific references make no sense when translated into English. On the box cover, there's a quote from something calling itself "Tokyo Pop" (a website, maybe?), which compares THE PING PONG CLUB to SOUTH PARK. As a major SOUTH PARK fan myself, I find the comparison unfair. THE PING PONG CLUB is only amusing, whereas SOUTH PARK is hilarious. Both programs share a certain cutting edge vulgarity, but the similarity ends there. Regardless, what follows are reviews of all the episodes (each is about 15 minutes long) on this video release:

#23: "Friendship"- The first segment on the tape does a lousy job at introducing the main characters. It's got the usual abrupt cuts & skits which spoof game-shows and even TOYAMA NO KINSAN; the Sugi Ryutaro TV series where the samurai hero always reveals his yakuza tattoo at the episodic climax to both startle & sentence the villains. But in this English version, they tried to make the joke more universal by dubbing: "Enough! My cherry-blossom tattoo can see through everything!" Then the spoof segues into Toei's KAMEN NO NINJA AKA KAGE show of the 1960s, when the character of Kyoko appears in the superhero uniform of the program. I found these scenes amusing, have seen both TOYAMA NO



KINSAN and KAMEN NO NINJA AKA KAGE. But most non-Japanese have never seen either TV show, so this brief sequence will make no sense to the casual viewer, who will wonder why the modern premise has suddenly become full of samurai and taking place in an old setting. Regardless, as quickly as the "chanbara tribute" begins, it ends. We come back to the real world and the script is about thief Tanaka, whose petty crimes seem to have positive intent: It would appear that he's just caring for hungry dogs & cats, but his true motive comes out at the "climax". This is one of the few episodes which ends with a funny punchline, so you'll just have to see it. I don't want to give away the ending.

#24: "My Dearest Little Tsutomu"- Bizarre yet funny chapter about a senile old man who's convinced that ventriloquist dolls are alive—and his relatives! At one point, the elderly geezer strikes a pose and the sky changes color as he throws a wooden head (a car severed the head from a puppet), looking like a character from one of the old Japanese baseball cartoons. Though most of the jokes are about the elderly gentleman's suicidal tendencies and obsessions with fake people (be they ventriloquist puppets or blow-up sex-dolls), there's a silly spoof of Go Nagai classics: When Maeno stumbles and his forehead is impaled by a Mazinga doll, he has a nightmare that he morphs into a hungry spider monster, in a sketch which salutes DEVILMAN.

#25: "Saturday Hare"- Huh? What? This chapter is just plain weird. In one scene, a tree grows out of a guy's head. Similar nonsense (i.e. a parody of drive-in restaurants) follows. Then comes a boxing match. By the time they spoof "The Tortoise and the Hare", I finally guessed that this chapter has Izawa and a rival student trying to impress a girl, but it's not staged particularly well and all is not clear. This episode never should have been dubbed; it's a mess.

#26: "The Wimp"- Takeda has erotic dreams and boasts about it too much. This somehow results in a conflict with red-headed student and all-around bitch Kyoko. After plenty of "anime overacting" and clowning around, I rather got the impression that this nonsensical story has something to do with Kyoko being a domineering cunt who looks down her nose at the guys in the Ping Pong Club. This is where the series fails; if the character is of such a high so-

cial status, she wouldn't really be hanging out with the scorned Ping Pong Club.

#27: "The Outcast"- Something to do with "the silent treatment" (at Maeno's expense), and peer pressure on the campus, but there is a catchy little musical interlude with a song which goes "Here I go-go!" sung by Maeno himself. Maeno seems to turn into a squid at one point, but it's just another satirical hallucination—if that makes any sense.

#28: "Shorty"- At first it looks as though Maeno is now their teacher (oh well, he was a squid in the previous episode, so anything is possible in the world of THE PING PONG CLUB), as he gives some sort of lecture on the world history of ping pong. I don't get it, he's usually depicted as a student. But the real story is about some short kid who excels at ping pong.

#29 (Part 1):- "Project: Doctor Maeno"- Costumes a plenty, as Maeno & Izawa disguise themselves as doctors (Chinese doctors, no less) in order to examine the naked female students. It could have been funny (in a sophomoric, PORKYS sort of way), but it's just too zany and over-the-top. It gets so ridiculous that it numbs the impact of any jokes or punchlines.

#29 (Part 2):- "Project: Doctor Maeno"- Maeno sings "Here I Go-Go" again (actually doing a duet with Izawa), and although this episode is a direct sequel to the previous one, it's the funnier of the two. Our disguised heroes get to torture & videotape Kyoko—in the nude.

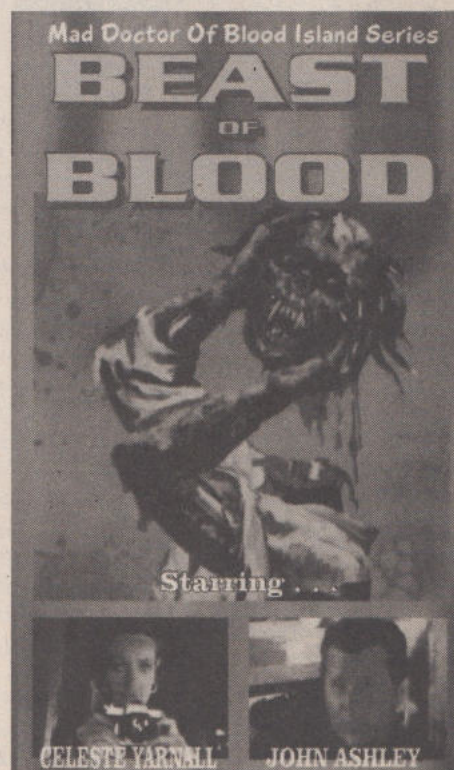
I think THE PING PONG CLUB is good. It might not be downright hilarious (though it tries), but it's not boring either. There are amusing characters, distinctive music (some songs are irritating, others are catchy), interesting artwork and unpredictable plot-twists. I'm also relieved to finally see a Japanese cartoon where some of the characters actually look Japanese. The bumbling duo of Maeno & Izawa have narrow, squinty eyes, and not the same old exaggerated, Caucasian round eyes that Japanese programs have always been plagued with. Though I pretty much got a kick out of this farce, there are some subplots that don't make sense even to me. There's some unimportant female character who comes in every now and then. She's a student who calls fellow students "Instructor". I honestly can't tell if she's supposed to be a stupid bimbo or if this is a translation error.

I think director Hata Masami is responsible

for two of the funnier episodes (#23 and #24) on this tape, and they each deserve a three star rating (well, almost). But the later episodes shown, directed by other people, don't live up to the laughs I was expecting, and come off more strange than humorous. The latter episodes only warrant two stars (**), so I guess on the whole, I'll round the rating off to an uneven 2-1/2 star rating. Something called "Gamer's Republic" gave this tape a four star (****) rating, but that's their opinion. You be the judge; watch THE PING PONG CLUB and tell me what you think. In the final analysis, I enjoyed this tape. I'm glad that something this unique and so outside the American mainstream is now available to us in English. But straight dubbing won't do the trick. This program is so damn Japanese that some scenes should have been physically altered. There are visual discrepancies which don't transcend the pop cultures of America & Japan. **1/2 -Damon Foster

BEAST OF BLOOD

(AKA: "Beast of the Dead") Hemisphere Productions; 1970, Based on a Story by: Beverly Miller, Music: Tito Arevalo, Cinematography: Justo Paulino, Associate Dir.: Armando Herrera, Executive Prod.: Kane W. Lynn, Produced and Directed by Eddie Romero, Cast: John Ashley, Celeste Yarnall, Eddie Garcia, Liza Belmonte, Alfonso Carvajal, Bruno Punzalan, Angel



Buenaventura, Beverly Miller, Johnny Long, Eddie Romero, Reviewed by Damon Foster

John Ashley in another Filipino-American co-production. There are those who would argue that despite the heavy Filipino involvement, *BEAST OF BLOOD/BEAST OF THE DEAD* is an American movie, 100%, but those people obsess over tiny details and have no lives. At least 95% of the dialogue is in English (though there are a couple unsubtitled Tagalog conversations too), and the film's star is the late John Ashley, who was at one time a minor actor in America, having appeared in *THE BEVERLY HILLBILLIES* and a Frankie Avalon "beach party" movie or two. Despite his Presley-ish good looks and somewhat decent acting ability, he didn't seem to be that big a hit. So it would appear that he moved to the Philippines where exploitation movies could be made dirt cheap, resulting in several movies, such as this one and *MAD DOCTOR OF BLOOD ISLAND*. *BEAST OF BLOOD* is a direct sequel to *MAD DOCTOR OF BLOOD ISLAND*, which I reviewed back in the early 1990's, in *O.C.: The Bruce Lee Issue*.

As far as production values go, *BEAST OF BLOOD* is a definite improvement over the horribly edited *MAD DOCTOR OF BLOOD ISLAND*. But since it's been so long, I can't accurately compare the two movies and determine which is the better of the two. I'll hazard a guess and say that *BEAST OF BLOOD* is an overall improvement. Both are somewhat entertaining, in a cheesy, low-budget, B-movie (C-movie? Z-movie?) sort of way. The highlight of *BEAST OF BLOOD* is a decapitated zombie head with fangs! The head rests on a shelf in a mad scientist's laboratory, while the evil doctor experiments on the severed body. What's really funny (and unintentional) is that we're supposed to believe that this head is being kept alive, and its former body is in full view of the unfortunate head! The doctor talks to this angry head, and wants for it to answer him. But the angry head is mad that the corrupt scientist has not only turned him into a gross-looking mutant, but decapitated him. Cripes, talk about being overly touchy! So the head simply isn't talking to the bad doctor, and if he weren't a disembodied head, would be giving the doctor the "cold shoulder". The head does look around though, and occasionally manages to turn his head (or should I say, "turn his whole self") left and right, despite the absence of a neck! It's pretty obvious that the head is a make-up appliance (granted, it's eerie & cool; with slick

Celeste Yarnall



fangs and mutant skin!) connected to an actor's face, and that the guy in this mask is just sitting down behind a table, shelf or cabinet. But by the end of the film, this head has finally had enough abuse and just isn't going to take it anymore! Much like in *RE-ANIMATOR*, the head gains telepathic control of its body which breaks free and causes havoc. This is when the head finally starts to talk, in a creepy yet tacky voice! They should have really played up the camp and had this head talk throughout the movie. This scene is hilarious, and might have inspired David Byrne to start his own band about five years later.

I think there are at least two different versions of this movie in existence. The tape I'm viewing is a hastily re-titled release, called *BEAST OF THE DEAD*. There are a couple awkward jumps in the editing, made all the more obvious by the jarring contrast in the music, which just abruptly changes. I suspect the version called *BEAST OF BLOOD* (which, strangely, is what's on the videobox for my tape, though the movie itself says *BEAST OF THE DEAD*) is the more complete of the two, though I've never seen it—and don't care to. It's not worth going out of my way to find a movie just to see a few seconds of footage I missed. *BEAST OF THE DEAD* has a dominant orange tint all the way through it. This bright color is so intrusive that we can hardly see any other colors besides black and grey tones. The trees, water, sky and people all look as though a bright red-ish light is shining on them. It really looks washed

out, and would be better off if viewed on a B/W TV, assuming that such things still exist.

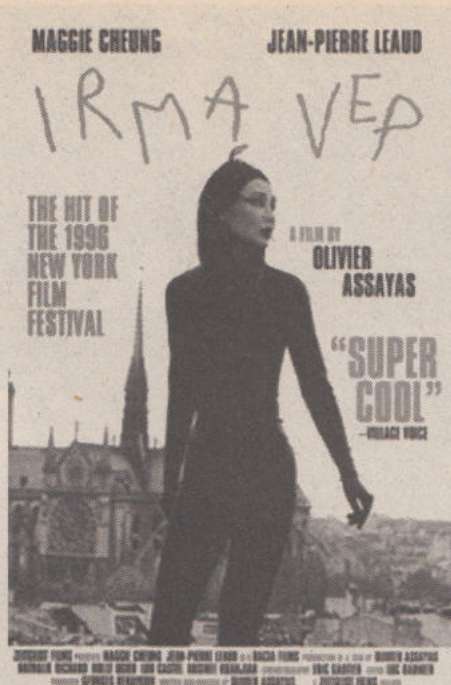
As is often the case with John Ashley's Filipino movies, he again manages to get a decent actress to play his leading lady. In *MAD DOCTOR OF BLOOD ISLAND*, it was the late Angelique Pettyjohn ("Shauna" from *STAR TREK*, and was in Kitten Natavidad's *TAKING IT OFF*), and his love interest in *BEAST OF BLOOD* is Celeste Yarnall. She too is most commonly remembered for a *STAR TREK* guest appearance, she was in the episode called "The Apple", where she makes out with Chekov and later does high kicks in a skirt, when albino natives attack her & the Enterprise crew for not pleasing 'Vall'. She made guest appearances in other TV shows too, like *HOGAN'S HEROES*, *IT TAKES A THIEF*, *LAND OF THE GIANTS*, *BONANZA*, *LOVE: AMERICAN STYLE*, *WILD WILD WEST*, *THE FBI*, *MANNIX*, and *THE MAN FROM UNCLE*. She's now a grandmother, but still makes an occasional cameo; in the 1980s she was on an episode of *KNOT'S LANDING*, and in the 1990s, was on *MELROSE PLACE*. Her movies include a Roger Corman movie called *THE VELVET VAMPIRE*, and Elvis Presley's *LIVE A LITTLE, LOVE A LITTLE*. She was also a model (not surprisingly), and was active in politics at one time. Today she's a writer, having authored books on the care of cats. To find out more about Celeste Yarnall, visit her website: <http://www.celesteyarnall.com/>.

John Ashley reprises his role as Dr. Foster

(no relation to myself), who starts the movie on a boat, leaving Blood Island because of the monstrous atrocities in the previous film. But it turns out the Polynesian island still has other chloroform mutants, and one of which has stowed away, onto the boat! When this scary looking, sicko monster goes on his rampage on the boat, it's pretty exciting, despite the rushed approach. There's no blood or gore, or any sort of terror, because it's really just a guy in monster make-up who's swinging a stick around, hitting the sailors on the boat, and they're exchanging punches. It's pretty silly to watch, but a can of gasoline is knocked over, which ultimately leads to the ship's explosion. This opening sequence is the best part of the movie, because once John Ashley swims back to shore and starts romancing a chick or two, it gets pretty boring. It seems that the evil scientist, Dr. Lorca didn't die a fiery death in MAD DOCTOR OF BLOOD ISLAND after all. He's scarred and crippled, but continues his ghoulish experiments on human victims, in a new laboratory. Not only that, but he kidnaps some cute blond chick, so John Ashley teams up with some Polynesian-looking natives (including a native gal who takes her top off in one scene) to form a rescue mission. I guess the good Filipinos wear Hawaiian attire (including an occasion lei of flowers around the neck), to easily differentiate them from the villainous Filipino henchmen, who wear a combination of streetclothes and army fatigues. Anyway, much of the movie concentrates on the human against human battles, as both groups stalk each other in the jungles, exchange gunfire and machete stabs. These action scenes are remotely exciting, but I was hoping to see more monster action. Once Ashley and his helpers rescue the girl and wipe out the villainous army of guerrillas, we do finally see some monster action. But this scene of the rampaging headless mutant killing the villain and plundering the laboratory is way too brief, and ultimately, BEAST OF BLOOD ends up being only a minor improvement over MAD DOCTOR OF BLOOD ISLAND. I'm giving it only two stars, but if they could have coaxed the monster head into more talking, the rating would have been higher. ** - DF

IRMA VEP

Dacia Films; 1996, Directed by Olivier Assayas, Producer: Georges Benayoun, Screenplay: Olivier Assayas, Cinematography: Eric Gautier, Mu-



sic: Luna and Sonic Youth, Cast: Maggie Cheung, Jean-Pierre Leaud, Nathalie Richard, Antoine Basler, Nathalie Boutefeu, Alex Descas, Dominique Faysse, Bulle Ogier

Maggie Cheung, a heart-throb of HK cinema, in a French drama? I'm not sure how the hell this happened, and now that I've sat through IRMA VEP, I'm not sure why it happened. Did this weird (yet intriguing) little movie come out the way it was intended? I've just watched this awkward concoction, and if it didn't look pretty cheap to begin with, I would have assumed that the movie had to have been cancelled in mid-production because it went over budget. It's as though they simply ran out of film, because IRMA VEP just ends abruptly, with no rhyme, reason or explanation. This is just a timid little soap-opera, with vague elements of comedy here and there. The video box said it was a "spoof of the French film industry" (or words to that affect), which could explain my confusion over it; I don't know a damn thing about French movies. Now that I've watched IRMA VEP, I feel I know even less about French movies! What's even weirder is that Maggie Cheung plays herself. I've seen other HK stars appear in European movies (Lo Lieh was in at least three Italian movies, Ti Lung & David Chiang each appeared in one of Britain's Hammer films), but the motives always made sense—these were stars known for a certain genre who lent a hand (to Europeans) by playing the types of characters they're good at, when Europeans finally started making martial arts movies. IRMA VEP certainly doesn't fall

into this category! What's stranger is that the beginning of the movie has flashbacks to Hong Kong's HEROIC TRIO, establishing Maggie Cheung as a star of adventure fantasies. The remainder of IRMA VEP, however, is slow-paced, often pointless drama. But then again, consider the source of this criticism. I'm geared towards monsters, superheroes and kung fu—not the art films of France or other countries who should give up on movie making. Perhaps IRMA VEP is meant for intellectual people, progressive people, or homosexual people. The pretentious types who critique movies using phrases like: "film noir", "pathos", "neo-expressionism", and any other big words not in my vocabulary. I don't know. What I do know is that IRMA VEP isn't recommended for the average Maggie Cheung fan. If you want entertainment, stick to POLICE STORY or HEROIC TRIO. But, Maggie Cheung or not, IRMA VEP is recommended for anybody who's up for an offbeat, revealing look (rather like a behind-the-scenes process, like one of them mockumentaries such as SPINAL TAP) at the current state of French movie-making, with brief commentaries on that of HK & America too. At this, the light-hearted IRMA VEP manages to be at least somewhat interesting, but ultimately, I felt that the approach was too weird, and it wasn't "user friendly" enough. I thought that it was way too anticlimactic, it's one of those movies where I was consistently interested throughout, not knowing if I was actually enjoying it or not. Then, when it just suddenly ended and very little was concluded, I thought there wasn't much of a conclusion and felt like somebody had told me a long joke, but they forgot the punchline.

At first, I was relieved that at least half the dialogue is in English, because the French actors don't speak Chinese and Maggie Cheung doesn't speak a lot of French. All the French dialogue is translated by subtitles. But then we get this character called Rene Vidal (Jean-Pierre Leaud), a director. The guy's accent is



so thick that most of the time, I couldn't understand what the hell he was saying! This fellow needs English subtitles for when he speaks English. Compared to him, and most of the other Frenchies in IRMA VEP, Maggie Cheung's English comes off as flawless; it sounds half British and half Chinese accented. Everything she says is completely clear. As for them French, is it true some people find the sound of this language to be romantic? They say French is the "language of love"! Granted, French sounds more romantic than Tagalog (but then, the mating call of a yak is more romantic than Tagalog), but to me French still sounds like bizarre English words. For example, in a party scene in IRMA VEP, some lesbians are dancing to a French language song, and it sounded like the guy was singing: *"I love one-eyed Clyde, whose teeth are mean!"*

I guess the only good thing about IRMA VEP is that it gives us ample opportunity to see sexy women wearing shiny, tight black body-suits! It's blatantly inspired by Michelle Pfeiffer's Catwoman character from BATMAN RETURNS. There are French actresses whose bodies look incredibly arousing in these outfits. I think Maggie Cheung's main asset is her face (especially when she's got all this semi-goth make-up on), but her legs and hips look decent in the form-fitting costumes too. The name of this sultry woman, Irma Vep, is an anagram for "Vampire", and it's all based on Louis Feuillade's 1915 silent serial, LES VAMPIRES. Before I saw IRMA VEP, I had never heard of this old, silent B/W series, and I never would have guessed that the French ever produced anything like this.

For what it's worth, this barely tolerable movie has Maggie Cheung playing Maggie Cheung, a HK actress working in France. The character/actress has been hired by a stressed out director (Jean-Pierre Leaud), who was really impressed by Cheung's HEROIC TRIO. This has-been director is working on an ill-fated remake of the silent serial, LES VAMPIRES (1915), which, despite the title, had no actual vampires. In fact, it's really just another typically European heist yarn which romanticizes thieves. If nothing else, IRMA VEP gives us a chance to see actual footage (at least, it looks grainy and crude enough to convince me it's authentic) from LES VAMPIRES, as Maggie Cheung and Jean-Pierre Leaud watch selected scenes in a screening room to get inspiration. I must say, the original actress who squeezed into that tight outfit (I didn't think they had get-ups like that way back in 1915!) looks far more

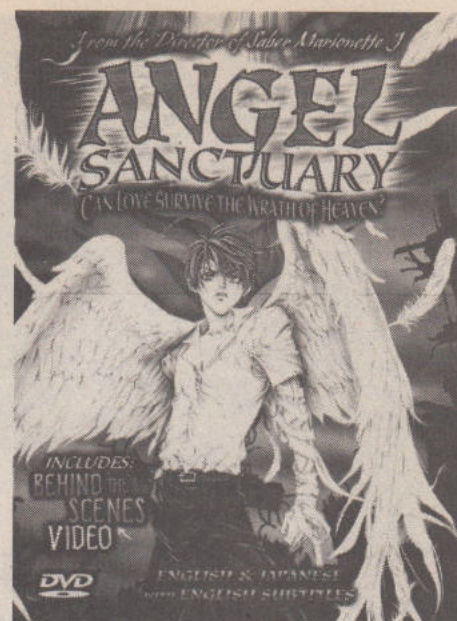
voluptuous than the modern actresses who play the part elsewhere in the movie. Though I think the 1915 ample-bodied actress is the hottest chick in IRMA VEP, I know others would consider her "too fat". Regardless, IRMA VEP meanders on, and seems so absolutely candid that very little of it looks staged! If I didn't already know it's all acting, it could have easily come off as being a genuine, behind-the-scenes film. IRMA VEP's performances are casual and down-to-earth, and the hand-held camera increases the sense of realism. It's more effective than crap like THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT and any of television's so-called "reality TV" garbage. The story basically has Maggie Cheung trying to play the role of a French woman, and the problems (communication gaps, arguments on the set, horny lesbians within the crew who hit on Cheung, etc.) which keep holding her back. There's also a strange scene where Cheung decides to go prowling around at night (in her costume), to get the feel of her character—and ends up stealing jewels from the hotel room of some naked chick with nice, saggy titties. Anyway, the movie later ends after the has-been director scratches up the film to give it some artsy-fartsy look, which makes their hard work all in vain. On the whole, IRMA VEP is every bit as stuffy as the French intellectual cinema it claims to be poking fun at. * -DF

ANGEL SANCTUARY

Bandai Visual; 2000, Released by Central Park Media in association with: Emotion, Original Writer:

Kaori Yuki, Screenplay: Kiyoko Sayama, Kenichi Kanemaki, Storyboard: Kiyoko Sayama, Animation Dir.: Masami Shimoda, Character Design: Shuichi Shinamura, Art Dir.: Shuichi Shimamura, Itsuko Takeda, Music: Hikaru Nanase, Created by Hal Film Maker, Executive Producer of English Version: John O'Donnell, Producer of English Version: Stephanie Shalofsky, Translation: Katsuho Shimoharu, Reviewed by Damon Foster

The artwork of this animated videotape is beautiful, and the script has some intriguing moments, so I have reservations about the negative review I'm about to write. I think the real problem isn't with ANGEL SANCTUARY—it's with me! I tell ya', it really sucks being a stupid loser like myself! I'm just too much of an idiot to understand this complex story! I also suspect that the three 30-minute chapters on



this videotape aren't the first in the series, but it's hard to tell. Perhaps if I had seen the first three episodes instead of these random chapters, ANGEL SANCTUARY would have made more sense to me. But as it stands, ANGEL SANCTUARY came off as an absolutely confusing story full of contradictions and conflicting characters—there are no clear lines to separate heroes from villains, so it's hard to tell what's going on.

As you can tell from the title, this fantasy-drama deals with angels and Heaven. There are also demons, but it's not clear which group is considered the bad guys—there are good & bad angels, and also good & bad demons. It doesn't help that both groups take on human form; if the demons all had stereotypical horns and the angels always walked around with their wings, halos & harps, it would have been easier to differentiate between the two. Instead, they all assume mortal human form and they argue, spout off plenty of names I can't identify, and get into an occasional fist fight (though the premise isn't exactly action-packed). Perhaps some of the script is based on old Middle Eastern folklore like Christianity or its similar cousins like Islam and/or Judaism. I really don't know, since all that towel-head stuff (i.e. Christianity, God, The Holy Bible, etc.) is of no interest to me, I know very little about it. I did find it strange though, that early on in the videotape, they mention "Adam" and his wife "Lilith". As I understand it, Christian legend told us that Lilith was a female devil of Hebrew concoction. Now it seems that at one time she was married to "Adam", but I thought Adam fooled around with some chick named "Eve" and they ate apples. I don't know, whatever. It's all just a bunch of



Middle Eastern mythology to me.

Perhaps ANGEL SANCTUARY is recommendable to educated historians, religious fanatics and experts on ancient mythology, because the characters, names, stories & references just went right over my head.

Now comes the dreadful part: Trying to describe the story! Well, some guy is possessed by the spirit of a deceased angel; no, wait. Okay, the fellow is the reincarnated embodiment of the angel, but I thought angels were immortal and didn't die because they're technically not living humans, right?! Anyway, there are other kids in his school who are also possessed by demons & angels. Meanwhile, our main hero is also in love with his sister! Yes, this movie is pro-incest! They all interact and don't like each other, their dramatic scenes are highlighted by music that sounds like something Philip Glass would do. Hhhmmm. I'm not doing a good job at describing this script, so instead I'll tell you what I read on the box: "A beautiful angel wages war against god- and loses. Reborn as a human boy, Setsuna struggles with horrific visions and supernatural powers. Angels and demons flock to his awakening, spoiling for battle. Will Setsuna lead them to the apocalypse, or to salvation?" * - DF

KICK THE MOON

Presented by Cinema Service in Association with Terasource Venture

Capital, Producer: Kim Mi hee, A Fun & Happiness Production, Director: Kim Sang-jin, Star-



ring: Lee Sung-jai, Cha Seung-won, Kim Hae Soo, Reviewed by Damon Foster

I don't know exactly why this new South Korean comedy-drama is called KICK THE MOON, because there's no space travel involved. There are, however, several kicks. There are two kinds of kicks: 1. Jokes, as in the phrase "just for kicks" and "I got a kick out of this movie". 2. Martial arts kicks. The fight scenes aren't especially good or plentiful. But they needn't be, because KICK THE MOON is not really an action film. Truthfully, KICK THE MOON is difficult to classify. On the whole, I suppose it's a comedy; but there are full stretches of film where I didn't laugh once. So I guess it's actually more of a drama, which is the movie's strong point. It's very well written, and although there are many characters littering the screen, I cared about each and every one of them! Everybody in this complex farce

has depth, and in their own eccentric ways, are likeable. So in the final analysis, I think it's safe to say that KICK THE MOON is an enjoyable, charming movie! So long as you don't expect gut-busting humor or kick ass stunts, I think KICK THE MOON is well deserving of the four-star (****) rating I'm giving it. Fortunately, the videotape I critiqued was copied from the flick's DVD, and it has subtitles.

Yes, subtitles! There are many Korean DVDs which now have English subtitles. Because they're designed specifically for the DVDs, the subtitles are clear and completely legible, something I can't say about the average HK movie! I was also amazed at just how good the subtitles are, as far as grammar goes. The only flaw seemed to be when people are leaving some restaurant, the subtitles read: "Good-bye! Good-buy!" and "Buy! Study hard!" They spelled "bye" two different ways, and I really couldn't tell if this was a spelling error, or if them Koreans are ahead of us and doing a play on words: After all, the customers have just bought ramen, so they could be complimenting each other on a "good buy", as in "good purchase"! Anyway, I probably would have been bored silly if KICK THE MOON lacked translation, because it's quite talky. After all, this is a drama with some comedy, or maybe a comedy with some drama. So naturally it's dialogue heavy. The subtitles really helped me to understand this delightful story. I was still a little confused a few times, because of unnecessary characters (i.e. a soldier who rides a bicycle, and his character goes nowhere and adds nothing to the script), and a strange opening sequence at some party where guys are attired in drag (wigs and all), and it's never explained why. If they would have trimmed out ten, maybe fifteen minutes, then KICK THE MOON would be even better.

A few issues ago, I reviewed another recent



Korean movie, SHIRI. SHIRI was a major hit (though it didn't impress me all that much), and now I get to watch KICK THE MOON. Could it be that Korean flicks are rapidly improving? I got disillusioned with Japanese movies in the 1980s and disillusioned with HK movies in the 1990s. Is it a likely prediction that South Korea is becoming Asia's best film producing country?! Time will tell. If other Korean movies are as enjoyable as KICK THE MOON, then I think South Korea is a country to watch for in the future.

For me, the hard thing to accept about the likes of SHIRI and KICK THE MOON is the quality of the martial arts fight scenes. Though neither movie can fairly be called a martial arts movie, I still have this unfair prejudice that fight-scenes should be as good as what the Hong Kongese were doing in the 1980s, or what the Japanese were doing in the 1970s. This isn't fair for me to compare them like this, since we're talking about different decades and different cultures. The fight scenes in KICK THE MOON tend to be more of a "realistic" variety. The sound effects are so realistic they're dull, and the kicks and punches aren't very graceful. I've noticed a trend in Korean films; a preference for doing their own style of action which owes little to the methods used by Chinese & Japanese filmmakers. Though I will always prefer the stunt-laden thrills of HK's 1980s cinema, I have to give the Koreans credit for sticking to their guns. If nothing else, I appreciate KICK THE MOON's insistence on having its own realistic form of cinematic combat, at a time when both America and HK are dredging out CGI-enhanced spats which also rely on suspension wires.

KICK THE MOON tells the story of two adult men (Gi-dong Choi and Yueng-joon Park) who once knew each other in high school, but now one of them is a teacher and the other is a gangster. Though much of the story involves them both fighting over the same girl, there are plenty of other interesting characters & subplots too. Much of this silly, light-hearted story deals with bumbling students (the pupils of teacher Gi-dong Choi) who want to join Young-joon Park's mob. There's also a funny police officer who goes around flashing his badge, and a villainous mobster who bears a striking resemblance to HK's Shing Fui On. Even the mobsters have depth, including the villains. I won't give away much else about this story, because a script like this is best when viewed as the movie plays; my review wouldn't do it justice. Without giving too much away, let's just say that our two

heroes (the gangster and the teacher) unite with high school students to battle a large gang of thugs. The good guys win, and both of them are beaten to bloody pulps during the climactic free-for-all. But nobody in KICK THE MOON actually dies. **** -DF

TOKYO MAFIA: BATTLE FOR SHINJUKU

(AKA: "Gangster Tokyo Mafia: Battle For Shinjuku", "Tokyo Mafia Gangster: Battle For Shinjuku") Tohokushinsha Film Corp.; 1996, Prod.: Yoshinori Chiba, Toshiki Kimura, Dir.: Takeshi Miyasaka, Screenplay: Kosuke Hashimoto, Original Story: Kazuhiko Murakami, Music: Daisuke Suzuki, Executive Prod.: Hiroshi Yamaji, Executive Producer of English Version: John O'Donnell, Prod. of English Version: Stephanie Shalofsky, Dubbing Supervisor: Tom Wayland, English Version Post-Production: Bang Zoom! Entertainment, English Dubbed version released by Asia Pulp Cinema (www.asiapulpcinema.com) and Central Park Media (www.centralparkmedia.com), Starring: Riki Takeuchi, Masayumi Imai, Asami Sawaki, Tomoru Taguchi, Cho Bang Hou, Kouichi Sugisaki, Asami Sawaki, Reviewed by Damon Foster



Another English-dubbed gangster movie, but not a particularly good one. It's part of the same series of movies which includes TOKYO MA-



FIA: YAKUZA WARS (see review in O.C. Asia Pulp Cinema), easily the better of the two. TOKYO MAFIA: BATTLE FOR SHINJUKU is just another routine gangster drama and one which has few (if any) qualities to make it stand out from the rest. It's grim, depressing, a little dull at times, and worst of all, it takes itself way too seriously. One thing I'll give it credit for is that it's almost realistic. But if I want gangster realism, I'll watch the Discovery channels' documentaries on John Gotti or Al Capone. I really didn't care if TOKYO MAFIA: BATTLE FOR SHINJUKU is semi-realistic, because there's not a single compelling character on this 85-minute videotape.

They don't skimp on the bullets and blood-letting. I suppose there's an audience for this stuff; it's just a generic crime drama, of which there are plenty (if there was no demand, there would be no supply). I guess the majority of TOKYO MAFIA: BATTLE FOR SHINJUKU is watchable. It gets boring at times, but I've seen worse. TOKYO MAFIA: BATTLE FOR SHINJUKU was just barely involving, enough so that I didn't actually fall asleep. It's one of those movies which keeps you somewhat interested, just to the point where you'll watch it, and expect something interesting to happen. It's not great or even good, but it's tolerable. Just watch it for the shoot-outs, bloodshed and slutty babes.

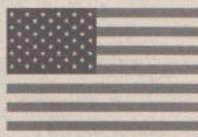
For what it's worth, it's about a vengeful gun-slinger called Yabuki, played by Riki Takeuchi. Granted, the actor is somewhat charismatic as he goes after characters in the Teitokai Mafia. The only reason Takeuchi is so cool is because of his slicked back hair, black clothes and leather trench-coat. Unfortunately, Riki Takeuchi (not an unfamiliar face to OC readers; in the 1990s he starred in a whole slew of yakuza dramas) has the acting diversity and emotional depth of a common brick. Anyway, the script drags on, as Takeuchi seeks to hire and train a bunch of uninteresting, unlikable characters to help rob money from the mob's money-laundering bank. During the proceedings, there are half-assed gun-fights, but also some gratuitous brutality and a couple sex scenes (we see female breasts only, it's not X-Rated). The only entertaining character is some old man (leader of the Teitokai gang) who's so senile, he's funny. There's also this boxer who appears from time to time, but he's not an important part of the script and isn't given anything to do. Eventually Riki and his small group of cannon-fodder helpers do go up against the villains so our "hero" can get his revenge (flash-



backs indicate they shot him and excommunicated him in a previous movie). The climactic shoot-out is particularly ridiculous because most of the villainous henchmen insist on using samurai swords. In a martial arts movie, this would have been completely acceptable, but in this case, the heroes all have guns! Either the expendable henchmen are morons, or they're taking some sort of "kamikaze" approach for symbolic reasons. By the time TOKYO MAFIA: BATTLE FOR SHINJUKU ends, all the Teitokai mobsters are dead, and so are most of the "good guys". The only survivors are Riki Takeuchi himself, and his leading lady, some skinny chick who's long legs look incredibly delectable in a black skirt. Unfortunately, she spends most of the farce wearing pants. * -DF

THE ONE

Columbia/Tri-Star;
2001, Dir.: James
Wong, Written by: Glen



Morgan & James Wong, Prod.: Glen Morgan
& Steven Chasman, Cast: Jet Li, Delroy
Lindo, Carla Gugino, Jason Statham, James
Morrison, Dylan Bruno, Richard Steinmetz,
Running Time: 87 Min., Reviewed by Damon
Foster

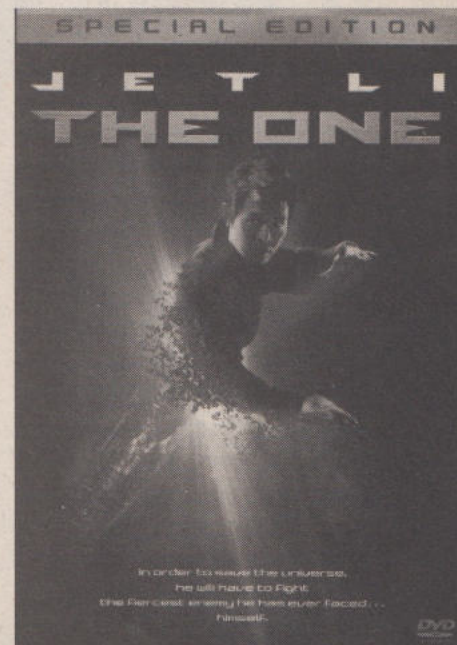
This has got to be my favorite American-made, Jet Li movie to date! I realize that's not saying much, but THE ONE is pretty gosh-darn-fuck-heck entertaining; being a sci-fi romp. As such, it's a lot like THE MATRIX— but then, every American adventure to come out after THE MATRIX is a lot like

THE MATRIX. But THE ONE doesn't only rip off THE MATRIX exclusively, I could also see ample doses of TIMECOP, UNIVERSAL SOLDIER and that STAR TREK episode "Mirror Mirror" (which, in turn was spoofed on SOUTH PARK. Ah yes, the greatest animated comedy series ever! I wish I was critiquing SOUTH PARK instead of THE ONE!). Hell, in this movie, the "bad Jet Li" should have had a goatee and beard. Regardless of the heavy intake from previous productions, I still think THE ONE can be considered a fairly "original" movie. It's a very creative story, even though it takes things from older stuff. It also takes stuff from other things. Let's face it, the movie industry has basically been around for a hundred years, and scripts have come and gone, stories have been remade, ripped off, regurgitated and so on. So no new movie can be entirely "original" any more, and so the only way to be "original" is to rip off elements from assorted different "original" movies!

Normally, when critiquing a Jet Li movie, I would always critique the martial arts from the stand point of a martial artist. But today, American cinema continues to prefer special effects over the actual power of the human body. And THE ONE, being a sci-fi film, seems perfect for the FX-dependent fight scenes. As with THE MATRIX, it's completely explained how the character (s) achieved such superhuman abilities, so when a single kick can send a human flying through the air like a soccer ball, it's completely acceptable. Though it's never explained how Jet Li can become weightless and could prob-

ably even count to ten while being stationary in mid-air, all these fantasy elements work well in an idiotically fun movie such as this. Taken as a dumb sci-fi movie with some fantasy martial arts, it works and entertains. Even so, I couldn't help but notice a striking similarity between Jet Li's duel with his evil twin to the climactic battle in the far superior DRAGONS FOREVER (Golden Harvest; 1987). Jet is in this factory, fighting among railings that he grabs, flips over, etc. Many of these moves are strikingly similar to that of Yuen Biao in DRAGONS FOREVER. The difference is that Biao did these dangerous stunts for real, all by himself. Jet, on the other hand, is dependent on CGI stuff and suspension wires to do the exact same thing. This doesn't make THE ONE any less amusing, but it certainly puts things into perspective.

For what it's worth, the acting is okay. Jet Li's English has improved and now he's completely intelligible! I think the best actor, however, in THE ONE is that big scary looking black guy who was also in Li's ROMEO MUST DIE. When I trashed that stinker of a movie, I thought the fellow's name was Isaiah Washington, but that's apparently somebody else (African American communities may have many Isaiah Washingtons!). Now I think the name of this dude is Delroy Lindo. But all the actors perform well in THE ONE. Even Jet Li himself tries his best to play different versions of Jet Li. This must be no easy task for him, since ugh, well....just between you and me, Jet still seems like the same ass-



backwards, under educated poor kid he was growing up in that Communist dictatorship where the peasants got their entertainment from watching rice grow. Anyway, you got your good Jet Li, your not-so-good Jet Li, and then the all-out bad Jet Li. I think they should have let each of these Jet Lies (pronounce it how you will) wear different clothing though, because it becomes hard to tell which is which. Li's limited acting ability makes it hard for him to help us differentiate between the Lies. I was able to guess that the good Jet Li was more of a "victim on the run" (remember Brandon Lee in *RAPID FIRE*?) with a concerned facial expression. The bad Jet Li attempts to have more of a cynical smirk, and his "evilness" is conveyed by showing him enjoy listening to grunge music (Jet's headbanging is uncoordinated though, because Pearl Jam or Alice in Chains were never big in Beijing) while driving a van. But before this bad Jet Li can really rock out, a cunning Delroy Lindo (I got his name right!), hidden in the back of the van, pulls out a gun on him. Then they have a really interesting conversation, but then we get a routine car crash and a very lame fight between Lindo and Li. Unfortunately, Lindo dies; and he was the most charismatic actor involved. He was on screen just long enough to satisfy the movie's token black quota.

It's a fairly routine, post-*THE MATRIX* script involving the travel to different time-periods. Oops, I'm sorry! That was in *TIME COP* and *AUSTIN POWERS: THE SPY WHO SHAGGED ME* (which was a really funny movie, I might add!). Because of the ability to travel to all these different parallel universes, the government has had to organize a large task force to regulate these different zones, these soldiers are called Time Cops and Universal Soldiers. No, wait a minute; that can't be right! Let's see; oh yeah, they're called "Multiverse Agents"! These guys make sure everybody stays in their own universes (now stay put, damn it!) because if a bad Jet Li leaves his own universe, it can cause problems. There's a lot of weird stuff going on, like in one scene there's some rat crawling around with what looks like a radio antennae sticking out of his ass. It also gets hard to tell which Jet Li is fighting in which universe, but each of these parallel worlds has slight differences to help distinguish them. For example, one world has Al Gore



as the American president, while the other has George Bush as the American president! This makes sense, because every good adventure movie needs plenty of gore and bush! But seriously, the bad Jet Li goes around on a rampage, shooting and killing people, in a series of fights which look more like videogames than real martial arts duels. There is, however, one crudely done "human fight" (i.e. no CGI dependency) with the good Li taking on Multiverse Agents in a hospital hallway. This is the "good" Jet Li, so remember, he's too nice to kick somebody up in the air for an extended period. So instead, he relies on half-assed, Jackie Chan wannabe tactics involving handcuffs and a wheelchair. It gets fast-paced and confusing, and becomes a case of too much Jet Li (I've had this feeling before)! But eventually, after plenty of mayhem, the two Jet Li's do have a

one-on-one duel, thanks to a fairly convincing stunt double (an imitator like him should be called "Jet Dragon Li"!). After this explosive, spark filled fight, the bad Jet Li is caught, arrested and transferred to some sort of "prison universe" populated by filthy bad guys. As these dirty scum bags decide to check out the new bitch, the bad Jet Li explodes into action, in sort of a kung fu version of the game King of the Hill! This is a brilliant ending, empowered by a rockin' score, slick cinematography and some really cool martial arts performed by Jet Li. Though this is only the ending of the movie and it's a short scene, I think it's the best fight, because there are no cuts, no edits, and no FX. It's just a continuous take of Jet Li battling all comers, as the camera pans back to show the whole bleak, post-*ROAD WARRIOR* setting. *** -DF



BOOK REVIEWS



"Pepsi brings back your dead ancestors!"

O.C. hasn't had book reviews in years, mainly because I'm too busy already, but also because I don't often see books worth reviewing. Also, quite frankly, I don't read that many books. But in recent years, I've taken quite an interest in traveling, and with the increased security caused by them crazy Arabs on 9/11/01, the waits at airports are sometimes as long as the flights themselves. So as a result, I have had to rediscover the joys of reading, resulting in three distinctly

different literary discoveries. Though each book is completely different from the other two, I think each of them is recommendable to OC readers, but for entirely different reasons. Tokyo Scope: the Japanese Cult Film Companion is a superbly written book on Japanese films, while Anguished English appeals to a more universal audience, for its sheer gut-busting humor. Last and certainly not least, the photo filled, large Fantastik Turk Sineması! -D.A.F.



FANTASTİK TÜRK SINEMASI

Kabalcı Yayınevi (İstanbul); 1999

Himaye-i Etfal Sokak Kredi Han No 8B

Cağaloglu 34410 İstanbul

Tel: 0212-526-85-86, Faks: 0212-513-63-05

Authors: Giovanni Scognamiglio, and Metin Demirhan

Wow, I just love this book; and most of it isn't even in English! The title obviously means "Fantastic Turkish Cinema", but there's no point in calling it that because almost the whole thing is in Turkish. For years, I've been fascinated by movies from Turkey, even though the country isn't known for its movie making. There were Turkish-Italian co-productions which aired in different European theaters, but according to pages 387-396 (the only pages written in English), it wasn't until director/actor Yılmaz Güney came along in the 1980s that Turkey began getting representation in international film festivals.

This super cool book is packed with photographs of rare Turkish movies, usually in genres like sci-fi, superhero, fantasy and western. Because of copyrights, we'll probably never see things like Turkey's Lone Ranger, Turkey's Star Trek, Turkey's El Santo, Turkey's Star Wars, Turkey's Wizard of Oz, or Turkey's Dracula. But thanks to this excellent book, we can at least see photos and full color posters of these blatant rip-offs! Any movie which so overtly rips off STAR TREK (starring Cemil Sahbaz as "Kaptan Kirk", and Erol Amac as "Mr. Spak") is worth checking out for the sheer novelty of it! Personally, I would love to see BATMAN rip-offs like ALTIN COCUK and ALTIN COCUK BEYRUTA! I'm also really intrigued by the films of Cuneyt Arkin, who hoped his western name, George Arkin would help him become an inter-



national superstar. It didn't, despite his contributions to the genres of superhero, martial arts and sci-fi.-DAF

Anguished English

1987; Dell Publishing, Group Inc. (666 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10103)
Author: Richard Lederer

No doubt QC's readers have spent time watching movies with voice-dubbing or English subtitles; translated words which don't always make a lot of sense, depending on the skill of the translators. If you enjoy the hilarity caused by communication gaps and translation errors, you'll love Anguished English! This hilarious book is the best in its series (follow ups include More Anguished English and Bride of Anguished English), and it's an immensely entertaining collection of actual blunders from students, foreigners, and writers who were under such major deadlines that they apparently didn't have time for proofreading.

Just one misspelled word can make a sentence a lot more colorful, and the meaning can change drastically, too. For example, when her daughter was too sick to go to school, a mother wrote a note (to the teacher, who authored this book) which was supposed to read: "Please excuse Mary from being absent yesterday. She was in bed with cramps". But mom's note to teacher was one letter away from incestuous implication and accidentally came out as: "Please excuse Mary from being absent yesterday. She was in bed with gramps". Much of these assaults on the English language come from the tests and reports of the students themselves, such as: "Three kinds of blood vessels are arteries, vanes, and caterpillars", "Artificial

insemination is when the farmer does it to the cow and not the bull", "The Gorgons had long snakes in their hair. They looked like women, only more horrible", "The divine wind protected Japan by sinking the fleet of invading Mongrels", and "The difference between a king and a president is that a king is the son of his father, but a president isn't".

I found this book to be so funny that at times, I thought it might be unhealthy. One time I laughed to the point of watery eyes and near suffocation. One laughter spell lasted a massive five minutes, and I honestly felt pain in my stomach and lungs, so I finally had to put this book down. Not only are some of the excerpts humorous, but there are occasional samples of artwork (an artist's vision of the accidental

imagery!) which convey these bizarre sentences. Of all the zany blunders in Anguished English, I think my personal favorite category is that of bad or too-literal translations (no doubt this comes from decades of me watching kung fu movies). The chapter "Lost in Translation" starts on page 137, and begins with John F. Kennedy's impassioned 1963 speech at the Berlin Wall, where he wanted to say "Ich bin Berliner", which means, "I am a Berliner!" But what he accidentally said was "Ich bin ein Berliner!", which means: "I am a jelly donut!" Better yet: When Pepsi-Cola first entered the Chinese market, the product's slogan, "Come alive with the Pepsi generation" was rendered into Chinese as "Pepsi brings back your dead ancestors"! In the tradition of Anguished English, I got together with artist Nina Kempf to design our own cartoon to interpret this line, hence this section's logo! These funny sentences remind me of an experience of my own: Back in the 1980s, I went into a Japanese restaurant (Shogun, in San Leandro) and the sign read: "Please see your hostess to be eaten!"

Granted, this book has nothing to do with Far Eastern movies. I know many of you are obsessive fanboys who won't deal with any topic which has nothing to do with movies or TV shows.

But my love of this sort of humor comes directly from my interest in the genres at hand. It all started for me when I was a little boy, writing my first fanzine in the mid-1970s. I was critiquing a TV show (IKKYU-SAN) about a Buddhist monk. Having not seen many Buddhist monks, I felt the need to give a visual description of his appearance, which included the shaved head. Shortly after my publication came out, a reader



by the name of Tony Malanowski sent me a letter of comment, and was quick to point out: "By the way, if Ikkyu-San has no hair, he's bald. Saying he's 'balled' means something completely different". -DAF

Tokyo Scope: The Japanese Cult Film Companion

Cadence Books; 2001

P.O. Box 77010

San Francisco CA 94107

www.pulp-mag.com

Author: Patrick Macias

Over the years, there have been many books about Far Eastern flicks; and I've read more than my share. You've got your Steve Rifles, your Bey Logans, your Tom Weissers, your Ed Godziszewskis, your Ric Meyerses, and so on. But of any of these writers, one man stands out: Patrick Macias, the author of this absolutely superb book. For once there's an author who's interest in the genres is as diverse as my own. Whereas most of the others cater only to single genres (i.e. HK movies, Japanese movies, martial arts movies, giant monster movies, etc.),

Macias has been around and knows the full spectrum. Macias's written material can jump from one genre to another and make comparisons between genres and has way more depth & knowledge than the other writers (who won't watch a movie unless it has a giant monster or some HK gangster) on the topic of Far Eastern films. At a time when many writers will critique "Godzilla, Godzilla and more Godzilla", writers like Patrick Macias are such a relief. Here's a guy who likes kung fu movies, giant monsters and Japanese superheroes, so it should come as no surprise that this book, Tokyo Scope is excellent; even if the writing gets too stuffy & technical (in a Gene Siskel-wannabe sort of way), and it gets dull more than once.

Though he "pats" (maybe that's how he got his first name) himself on the back a little too much and the book features some really awful artwork, a few stupid comics and pointless ads, the book is otherwise absolutely kick ass. It's a definite must for the bookshelf of anybody who's collecting books on the topic of Asian cinema. Tokyo Scope isn't perfect, but it's damn good.

As somebody who never really got into the movies of old-timers like Akira Kurosawa, Kenji Mizoguchi or Nagisa Oshima, I always got bored when reading old books on these movie makers and their so-called "classics (if I read one more raving review of RASHOMON or REALM OF THE SENSES, I'll puke) of Japanese film". Tokyo Scope concentrates more on Japan's genres I can relate to and grew up on; genres like giant monsters and Sonny Chiba's karate movies. But the book isn't only about exploitation and/or trash films. Tokyo Scope must have taken years to make, because there's stuff written by the one and only Kinji Fukasaku, and an amazing interview with Yoshimitsu Banno, whose stories about working on GODZILLA VS. THE SMOG MONSTER are fascinating! This whole book is enlightening, informative and highly recommended.

The 240-page book's section on Japanese monster movies brought back a lot of fond memories, even if they were Patrick's fond memories, not mine (GODZILLA VS. BIOLLANTE is a little over praised). The pieces on Chiba's movies brought back both fond and not-so fond memories, but it too was loaded with useful information (i.e. Eiji Go of THE EXECUTIONER is Jo Shishido's brother!). The section on pink films did not bring back any memories, because I don't think I've ever seen a pink movie. I have, however seen many black & white movies. -DF



TERROR YAKI

MYSTERY OF THE NECRONOMICON:

(AKA: "Book of the Dead") Central Park Media; 2000, Producers: Tatsuya Tanaka, Naoto Igai, Ryoya Sumura, Dir.: Hideki Takayama, Character Design: Yutaka Sunadori, Animation Dir.: Koichi Fuyukawa, Masaku Kaneko, Art Dir.: Nizaburo Kaiho, Prod. Manager: Yoshitaka Makino, Screenplay: Ryo Saga, Original Story: Abogado Powers, Music: Kazuhiko Izu, Hiroaki Isano, Production: Discovery/Jof Studio, Executive Prod. of English Version: Humphrey G. Kumano, Dubbing Supervisor: T-Bone Wang, Translation: New Generation Pictures, Distributors: Anime 18 (ASubsidary of Central Park Media), Running time: 60 Min., Reviewed by Damon A. Foster

This animated videotape is erotic horror, for Christ's sake; and yet I enjoyed the damn thing! Worse yet, it was directed by the notoriously disgusting Hideki Takayama, the same mentally deranged sicko who cursed the world with UROTSUKIDOJI and other examples of animated filth. I seem to re-

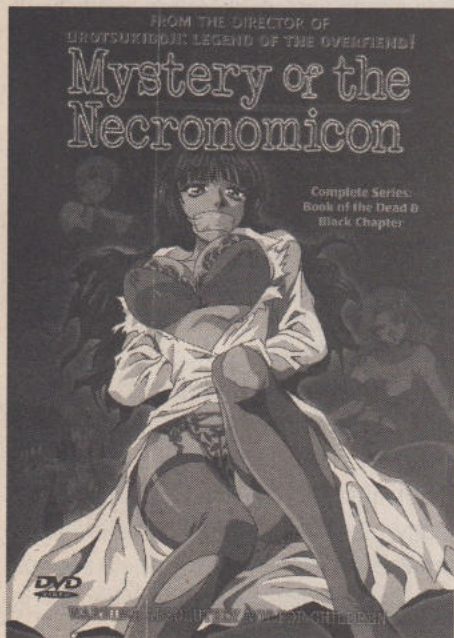
member hating other examples of this idiot's work and proudly denounced him and his cartoons in many an issue of *OC*. But this hour-long tape had me intrigued from start to finish. What's gotten into me?! Have I gotten weak? Have I lost my rebellious edge? I think maybe I've gone *soft*. I guess so, because X-rated cartoons certainly don't get me *hard*. But seriously, I'm still surprised that I actually found MYSTERY OF THE NECRONOMICON: BOOK OF THE DEAD to be watchable. Perhaps I've reviewed so many examples of "adult anime" that I've actually developed a taste or rather, a tolerance for it. One thing I found interesting about BOOK OF THE DEAD is that the ending credits on the tape itself have a lot of Korean names. Though absolutely none of these Koreans are credited on the videobox, I suspect maybe this tape is a Korean co-production. The Korean crew seemed to do some sort of digital work, though nothing about BOOK OF THE DEAD makes it seem any less Japanese than any other carbon copy Japanese anime.

For what it's worth, I think BOOK OF THE DEAD is one of the better examples of the genre. Sure, there are a couple graphic scenes of sexual intercourse, but they actually seem to be important to the plot for once. It's still very disgusting, but the sex scenes

are nice and short. They don't drag on forever, unlike UROTSUKIDOJI or NIGHT WALKER. There's far more dialogue and script than there are scenes of people doing the old 'horizontal jitterbug', and I was relieved. No need to Scan past scenes which I was expecting to last a lifetime. I guess director Hideki Takayama finally got laid and didn't need to have women tortured quite as much as in the old days, so BOOK OF THE DEAD doesn't overdo the X-rated crap.

It's downfall is too many female characters who all look alike. They all have the same eyes, same breasts, etc. I really got confused about midway through the tape, and it became necessary to rewind the tape more than once, in order to keep up with whatever the hell is going on. I really don't have too much else to complain about. I still think it's stupid to draw all female bodies as looking like anorexic models with breast implants, but this unfair standard is the norm not only in Hollywood bimbo-dom, but in Japanese anime as well. I did think some of the dialogue doesn't seem staged well when translated into English. The voice-dubbing is okay, but some lines & conversations come off as awkward or painfully naive. At times, people are just repeating the bloody obvious; here's a mildly exaggerated example: "If somebody here was killed, well that means somebody must be a murderer!" or maybe: "So, if you did not kill them, that means you're not the murderer. In that case, I must speculate that the victims were killed by somebody else!"

The tape starts off with a narrator introducing us to the world of Japanese anime; I've seen this intro on other tapes too. The voice explains that pubic hair generally isn't acceptable in Japanese anime. I see, got it. Cartoon characters can't be seen with hair on parts of their bodies, but it's perfectly okay to show women getting raped, graphic



glimpses of blowjobs and even cum dripping down the mouth from a lesbian who was forced to suck off a fat guy?! Anyway, this two-part tape has something to do with a serial killer on the loose at a secluded mountain resort, surrounded by snow. The mysterious villain in this effective, sometimes gory whodunit also likes slicing the skin off his victims' faces and pulling their eyeballs out of their sockets. Meanwhile, there are occasional subplots so that excess characters can have sex. In one scene, a man uses his camcorder and blackmail to have his way with a woman. The main hero is some detective guy who has both nightmares and chicks. The character has considerable charisma despite his dark past. It seems he once dealt with some evil cult of devil worshippers or witches, I guess. We really don't see much of them, but it's vaguely explained in some flashback that our womanizing hero interrupted a ceremony held by the coven, and they've been seeking revenge ever since. There are additional characters and subplots, but they're only of interest if you're more than just a casual fan of Japanimation. And if you are, then go see the videotape itself. The stories & situations are interesting, and if I start giving away its ending, there would be no point in seeking it out. This review has been of the first tape (BOOK OF THE DEAD), but two more 30-minute episodes are on the follow-up videotape which is also available. *** - DF

モスラ

REBIRTH OF MOTHRA

(*"Mosura"*, Toho; 1996, Dir.: Okiihiro Yoneda, Prod.: Shogo Tomiyama & Hiroaki Kitayama, Special Effects: Koichi Kawakita, Music: Tohru Watanabe, Screenplay: Masumi Suetani, Cast: Megumi Kobayashi, Sayaka Yamaguchi, Aki Hano, Reviewed by Damon Allen F.

As bewilderingly infantile (and how!) as REBIRTH OF MOTHRA is, I still enjoyed it. I had come to expect it to be another dis-



graceful bastardization, because that's what them Japanese are obsessed with. But unlike recent productions depicting Godzilla, Ultraman, Gamera and Kamen Rider, REBIRTH OF MOTHRA did not bore me!! It irritated me, it annoyed me, it even made me want to throw up— but it's not boring! Considering that boredom is a necessary ingredient in Japanese cinema these days, REBIRTH OF MOTHRA's exclusion of boredom is a major feat in itself! So let me repeat: Yes, REBIRTH OF MOTHRA is another unholy retelling, from Japan no less— but it's not boring! Another reason I managed to stomach this childish farce (I've managed to sit through it at least four times!) is because, quite honestly, the character of "Mothra" was never one of my favorites. So I really didn't care what the hell they did with the name "Mothra", whatever inaccurate movie they want to slap the "Mothra" tag on is fine by me.

But if they had to go and make an over-the-top re-capitalizing of the "Mothra" legend, they could have at least tried to improve over the original. The thing I always hated about the Mothra classics of the 1960s was they usually had those two twin fairies (a notable exception being the excellent DESTROY ALL MONSTERS; easily Mothra's best movie ever) which annoyed me so. I thought that a new Mothra would be a great opportunity to start with a clean slate and avoid the really sappy shit: i.e. the singing

midgets and their god-awful songs. I was both bewildered and disappointed to see yet another couple of actresses are playing these mini-babes; worse yet, they sing no less than three horrible songs (one of which is the all too familiar Polynesian ditty "Mosura-yah! Mosura-yah!", a tune all us kaiju fans know quite well by now). Them Toho idiots had a good chance to learn from past mistakes, but instead they completely botched it up. It's not only the singing of Megumi Kobayashi and Sayaka Yamaguchi that I hated. All the music in REBIRTH OF MOTHRA is crap, there are these annoying violins which seem to be blaring almost constantly. Whatever happened to slick, wacky theme music (GODZILLA'S REVENGE, GODZILLA VS. COSMIC MONSTER, TERROR BENEATH THE SEA, GODZILLA VS. MEGALON, GREEN SLIME, or GODZILLA VS. THE SMOG MONSTER) of the good old days?! Hell, I sure do miss Richira Minabe, Masaru Sato and Akira Ifukube!

Aside from being too much like Disney, Willy Wonka and/or Sid & Marty Kroft, REBIRTH OF MOTHRA suffers from obvious technical problems. There are lame stunts: When actor Kenjiro Nashimoto (playing Gato) rolls down a hill and is knocked unconscious, it's so obvious that he's deliberately ending his roll and planting himself on a spot on the ground. Equally bad is a scene where some panicking construction worker is hit by a car: The stuntman literally jumps up to hit the windshield. The design of the flying moth version of Mothra needs work, too. Not only does Mothra look like a plush teddy bear, but its legs don't move well (it's quite inferior to the mechanical flying puppet of Mothra in GODZILLA VS. THE THING). Worse yet, this new Mothra has chicken feet!! What's up with that?! Another technical glitch is a scene where a newscaster (a chick who would be worth a good shag) announces the villainous monster "Desghidora" has now acquired flight. Yet the three-headed giant doesn't magically sprout its wings until after the announcement!

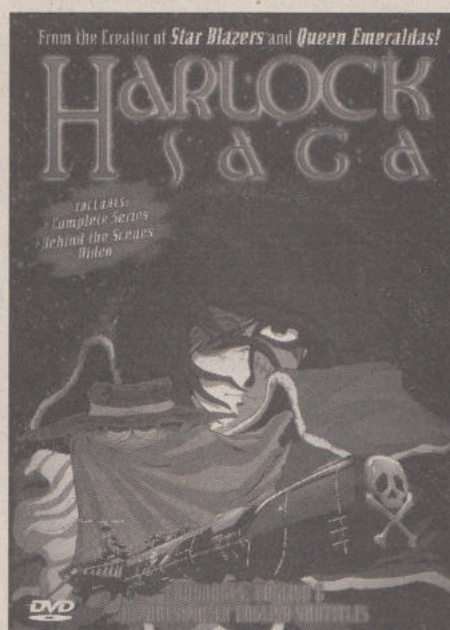
But despite REBIRTH OF MOTHRA's many, many flaws, I was still somewhat entertained by it. It was nice to finally see both versions of Mothra (moth and caterpillar) in-



teracting together for the first time in cinematic history. Though the flying moths are rather chintzy, I liked the designs of Desghidora and the worm version of Mothra. Desghidora is a beautifully designed monster, and Mothra's maggot form looks dead-on like the ones from the classic films of the 1960s! I also liked the movie's pro-environmental theme. Though I'm Politically Incorrect in most ways, I've always felt the need to preserve the earth's precious ecology. The sad fact is that the world continues to decay and many animals are on the verge of extinction, but at least movies like this won't let us forget.

The script tells us about not two, but three mysterious fairies. The eldest one is Belvira (Hano Aki), who's evil and she rides this little flying lizard/robot thing called Garugaru. Not only that, but because of some ancient prophecy, she's been able to revive a hibernating space monster called "Desghidora" (or "Death Ghidora", depending on how you choose to translate it), who, despite the name, isn't actually related to that other three-headed monster from space, King Ghidrah. Remember, REBIRTH OF MOTHRA is a rip-off, not a sequel, so they can get away with such preposterous things. Belvira & Garugaru have these little dog-fights (ala STAR WARS) with her friendly sisters Mona (Megumi Kobayashi) and Lara (Sayaka Yamaguchi) who ride on "Ferry". But Ferry, unlike the triplets, isn't an actual fairy at all, but rather a mini-Mothra—confused yet? Okay, so the writers have been sniffing the super-glue, but a movie like this isn't meant to be rational! So anyway, the three doll-size chicks, and their flying tiny monsters all left their magical island because of the discovery of Desghidora, who's destroying the Hokaido forests. Meanwhile, two little kids (Kazuki Futami & Maya Fujisawa) learn about the importance of family. They, like their parents, are taking up most of the movie's screentime. Eventually, we do see more monster footage, because both Mothra forms (moth and meal worm) have left their island to rid earth of rampaging giant Desghidora. One of the two Mothras doesn't survive, despite all these bizarre new abilities moths can now do: Firing lightning and laser beams! After the sur-

living (the younger of the two) mothra buries Desghidora in another underground tomb, the villainous bitch Belvira escapes. This is a really stupid ending, because that black-attired wench caused a lot of destruction. I would have loved to have seen one of the over used kids stomp on the evil little woman! But instead, her two kindhearted, push-over sisters let Belvira get off scott free! This scene alone makes me like this stupid movie even less! Anyway, after the triumphant Mothra flies away, the family members all smile, and it's supposed to be one of them heartwarming, "feel good movies". Yeeeeee-uck!!!!!! An amusing viewing experience, regardless. ** -D. Allen F.



HARLOCK SAGA: CLASH OF THE SPACE PIRATES

Shinchousha/Bandai Visual; 1999, Original Story & Executive Dir.: Leiji Matsumoto, Original Opera "Der Ring Des Nibelungen" by Richard Wagner, Character Design/Executive Animation Dir.: Hideyuki Motohashi, Music Dir.: Kaoru Wada, Music Conductor: Konstantin D. Krimeys, Music Performed by Moscow International Symphonic Orchestra, Dir.: Yoshio Takeuchi, Produced by Bandai Visual & 81 Produce, Executive Producer of English Version: John O'Donnell, Producer of English Version: Stephanie Shalofsky, Dubbing Supervisor: Tom Wayland, Translation: Kevin McKeon, Running Time: 90 Min., Reviewed by D. Allen Foster

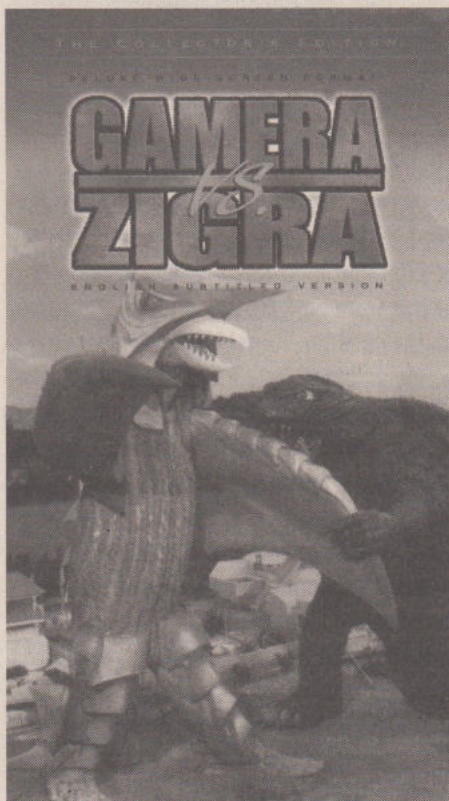
Yet another videotape about the famed space pirate of Japanese cartoonism, Captain Harlock. I remember watching the original TV series faithfully, over 20 years ago when it aired on a local Japanese TV station with English subtitles. I remember watching it every Sunday night, at roughly the same timeslot which had aired the more exciting stuff like KIKAIDA and GO-RANGERS a few years before. Though I watched the old space opera series faithfully, it was never one of my favorites because it was so boring; but this was shortly before the glorious VHS revolution made anything and everything available to view. Since I lacked a VCR and couldn't comprehend having a "video collection" of stuff like ULTRAMAN or KAMEN RIDER, I had to take whatever I could get—even if it meant sitting through CAPTAIN HARLOCK every week. Right after CAPTAIN HARLOCK went off the air, VCRs became affordable, and it was possible to obtain many videotapes from Japan itself. So as the early 1980s began and I was able to indulge myself in heaping doses of SUN VULCAN and INAZUMAN FLASH, I found that CAPTAIN HARLOCK and the other slow-paced space anime programs (STAR BLAZERS, GALAXY EXPRESS 999, etc.) were obsolete and easily forgotten.

But along comes this screener tape of one of CAPTAIN HARLOCK's many follow-ups, HARLOCK SAGA: CLASH OF THE SPACE PIRATES. For years, I managed to avoid other productions (MY YOUTH IN ARCADIA, QUEEN EMERALDAS, etc.) in this series, but this videotape piqued my interest. Sadly, the "interest" quickly became "disinterest", because HARLOCK SAGA: CLASH OF THE SPACE PIRATES is even more boring than the original program! HARLOCK SAGA: CLASH OF THE SPACE PIRATES is talky, slow-paced and at times confusing; packed to the brim with strange names and characters I'm not familiar with and couldn't identify. Though the character development is full enough to differentiate the characters (for once everybody doesn't look alike), none of them are very interesting or compelling, so almost immediately I felt alienated from whatever this tedious story is suppose to be about. I suspect that a lot has happened since the ending of the mid-1970s TV show.

There's a 20 year gap here, and my memory is worse than the videotape itself. Though I remember the charismatic pirate, Captain Harlock himself, I was still pretty lost and came to feel that this tape is useless unless you're a diehard Harlock fanatic who knows every detail of the entire Captain Harlock legacy, and a fanatic who memorized every exotic name and knows exactly what each of these beings represents. For me to know this much about such a complex story, I would have to get my hands on every single Captain Harlock videotape ever made (there could be hundreds, for all I know), and spend all my time sitting on the couch watching them, analyzing every detail. I would have little time to go out and have a social life and would need to live in front of my TV screen. Doing so would mean I wouldn't go out to eat, I would have to eat at the couch itself. Naturally, I would have no time to go exercise, because I would be too busy studying characters like Mimei, Emeraldas, Tadashi Daiba, Tochiro and stuff like "The Rhein Gold". I would, of course, get very obese in the process. This may explain a lot about fandom (regardless of genre) in general.

Though the videobox gives this one the subtitle "Clash of The Space Pirates", the Space Pirates never do clash. So instead, the videotape itself tells us the subtitle is "The Rhein Gold", and these three chapters have Harlock and his fellow space pirates trying to locate this powerful substance. One of the sailors onboard the Arcadia (the spaceship with skull & cross bones in front) is Tochiro, who explains: *"The Rhein Gold is the center of the universe—the essence of time itself which rules the entire universe. What could this all be about?"* Ah yes, truer words (especially the *"What could this all be about?"*) were seldom spoken, I mean, dubbed. There's plenty of lyrical dialogue and technical conversations, and even though I had gotten a decent night's shut-eye, this videotape still put me to sleep. After the nap, I rewound the tape to watch what I missed, but by the time I reached the 3rd episode ("The Rhein Gold Part 3"), I found myself getting sleepy once again. So I went and bought a caffeine heavy soft drink (Mountain Dew, though I think Red Bull

would have been more appropriate) in order to sit through the rest of the tape. By this time, even more characters (i.e. some angry space god who awakens because of a prophecy) had been introduced and everything got needlessly complicated. Worse yet, our heroes never do have a major battle to defeat the villains, which is practically begging the viewers to buy or rent the next tape in the series. Sorry, but I wasn't entertained or even interested and couldn't give a damn as to how the series concludes; so long as it's a quick death. -D.A.F.



GAMERA VS. ZIGRA

(English subtitled version from Neptune Media) AKA: "Gamera Tai Jigura", Daiei; 1971, Produced by Hidemasa Nagata (AKA Masaichi Nagata), Dir.: Noriaki Yuasa, Screenplay: Niisan Takahashi, Music: Shunsuke Kikuchi, English Version by Heast Entertainment Inc. in Association with Neptune Media, Starring: Reiko Kasahara, Mikiko Tsubouchi, Koji Fujiyama, Isamu Saeki, Shin Minatsu, Yasushi Sakagami, Gloria Zoellner, Reviewed by Damon Allen F.

I've reviewed this childish fantasy more than once, but under different versions

(though admittedly, GAMERA VS. ZIGRA hasn't as many alternate versions as some of the other Gamera capers). As a result, my opinions may change from review to review, depending on which particular print I'm watching, and whatever mood I'm in. I don't recall what I may have said about GAMERA VS. ZIGRA in the 1980s and/or the 1990s, so if this here review contradicts what I might have said in previous decades, I apologize (but after all, we're all entitled to change our opinions). But off the top of my head, I might have more bias against this one than the movies which preceded it. The previous Gamera moves all got released to America pretty quickly, so I was able to watch them when I was a child. Being that the average Gamera movie is intended for kiddies exclusively, I grew up on them and for many years I loved them (until I outgrew the infantile approach which plagues most of the Gamera romps). But for whatever reason, GAMERA VS. ZIGRA took a whopping 14 years to get a legitimate U.S. release. By that time, I had grown tired of the childish shenanigans which nearly ruined the like of DESTROY ALL PLANETS and GAMERA VS. MONSTER X. So when GAMERA VS. ZIGRA finally reached America, it was at an unfair disadvantage in my eyes, and I at first considered it inferior to the other films. Today, GAMERA VS. ZIGRA still embarrasses me, because of the bad music and nauseating kids who try so hard to dominate the movie.

However: For what it's worth, GAMERA VS. ZIGRA isn't actually any worse than the other Gamera kiddy farces. For one thing, it's one of the few Gamera classics which lacks flashbacks (to previous films) and stock-footage! Even as a tiny tot, I saw right through the flashbacks, they were obviously budgetary strategies, and occasionally gave the releasers the option of adding extra monsters to the movie posters so that the audiences would think new footage of these creatures was shot for that particular movie. The special effects are as great as always, especially considering they were made at a time when Daiei Movie Co. was in the process of filing bankruptcy! The miniature set at the beginning of the movie (resembling Moonbase Alpha from SPACE: 1999, which

GAMERA VS. ZIGRA pre-dates) looks just as good as the moonbase seen in DESTROY ALL MONSTERS; the only exception being Chikaku Sugawara's land-rover which looks like a toy jeep. Villainous Zigra is a really awesome design, both its costume form and flying/swimming miniature puppets are quite slick. Later in GAMERA VS. ZIGRA, there's the obligatory military-vs.-villain battle, and the scenes of miniature jets are beautifully meshed with actual footage of real jets. Monstrous invader Zigra talks in a grim, low-pitched voice which gets semi-creepy at times, and this certainly helps the atmosphere from being completely Sid & Marty Kroft-ish. I also welcomed the pro-ecological, anti-pollution theme, which was quite common in Japan's early 1970s productions (GODZILLA VS. THE SMOG MONSTER, GODZILLA VS. GIGAN, SPECTREMAN, LAST DAYS OF PLANET EARTH, etc.). The giant monster battles which take place under water obviously had to be filmed on dry land, but smoke & vapors simulate bleeding, and it's both effective and brilliant.

There are both good and bad things about GAMERA VS. ZIGRA. For example, Shunsuke Kikuchi's music. Because of Kikuchi's work on action (i.e. superheroes, crime dramas) TV programs, he's one of my favorite [non-rock] musicians. But his themes reflect the atmosphere of the production. I still hate when children sing that Japanese language "Gamera March" song (in the subtitles the lines include: "You are strong, Gamera") that The Daiei Children's Chorus infected us with. The lyrics were by Hidemasa Nagata and arranged by his partner in puke, Kenjiro Hirose. In fact, that whole Gamera March ditty, whether it's sung by kids or it's just those happy-happy horns disgusts me. There are other Kikuchi tunes, however, that I actually enjoy. In the scene where the hot babe (in the red mini-skirt) is chasing two kids around Sea World, try not to be obsessed with the woman's gorgeous legs and just listen to the nifty background music! It sounds like a combination of surf music and quirky Tokyo pop, and it's quite catchy (in an "Austin Powers" kitsch sort of way). Fortunately, this would later become the theme song for the opening credits of Sandy Frank's 1985 English dubbed version,

set against generic waves and water. Not the most striking visual image, but at least it omitted the kids singing "You are Strong, Gamera" which nearly detracted points from this here subtitled version.

Enough on my comments on the movie as a whole. This review is specifically intended to critique the 1999 subtitled release from Neptune Media. Once again, William Ferguson has done a kick ass job. The video label has liner notes by Steve Ryfle and more info on the inside flap of the video box! There's stuff written by Noriaki Yuasa, Niisan Takahashi and Masumi Kaneda— whoever the hell that is. Regardless, they all have interesting things to say about GAMERA VS. ZIGRA. I won't repeat their stories here, because I want everybody to buy the pre-record and read it for yourselves. But let's just say that Neptune Media has really outdone themselves (again). As for the quality of the videotape itself, you'll get no complaints from me. It's a complete picture because its letter-boxed format shows us the whole widescreen effect, and the subtitles are nice too. Some of the subtitles are also funny, like the scene of kids escaping a space-craft and getting onto a boat, where a little boy says: *"I can handle spaceships, but I'm just no good with motorboats"*. In one scene, some bizarre old man (why he makes a brief guest appearance is unknown and I'm baffled) talks about the year 1971 and says: *"Showa 46, also known as 1971, of course"*. Now we know Japanese year system (so 1972 would be Showa 47, 1973 would be Showa 48, and so on)! The English dubbed version, on the other hand says "1985"! Monstrous Zigra has a good line or two, such as: *"It would be a shame to let the ugly humans retain control of the oceans"*, and *"The ocean shall be controlled only by beautiful life-forms such as myself"*. In the movie itself, it's Zigra who says this dialogue in its masculine, low-pitched voice. However, in the original Japanese trailer, the line is from the female human (Eiko Yanami) villain. Speaking of original trailers, they're on the tape too, of course. Though there are no English-spoken versions of the trailer that I know of, one of the ones on this tape does have English text which says things like: "DEEP SEA MONSTER ZIGRA", "MONSTER OF JUSTICE GAMERA", and

"EIKO YANAMI AS LADY X".

Thanks in part to Neptune Media's stunning work, I'm giving this otherwise embarrassing movie a whopping three stars (***). I might feel too generous later on, because of the movie's short comings, but for sheer entertainment value, it delivers. It's yet another of those "guilty pleasures", a "Golden Turkey", and so on. Though GAMERA VS. ZIGRA has its moments of unintended humor and intended humor which is downright stupid, I still think them MYSTERY SCIENCE THEATER 3000 (or whatever) no-talents were just a little too hard on the film. I do, however, agree with their reaction to the admittedly stupid scene (which I once found funny) of Gamera using Zigra's dorsal fins to produce musical notes. Even they (a never-was-been comedian, a gumball machine and a parking meter) were in dismay that this dumb scene remained in GAMERA VS. ZIGRA. While the editing & pacing of the movie is uneven and amateurish at times, the overall production and continuity manage to suffice and on the whole it's consistently amusing.

Zigra, a hungry shark with a beak, leaves its alien planet because there's not enough Japanese kids to eat over there. In a pretty space-ship which looks like gum-drops & marbles, it hypnotizes an attractive astronaut woman called Chikako Sugawara (Eiko Yanami). Though she's now the evil pawn of the invaders, she still looks delectable in a bikini, mini-skirt and even the same alien hand-me-downs that the vixens wore in GAMERA VS. GUIRON (Daiei; 1968). She has trouble running in high heels and go-go boots, but tries her best to chase two obnoxious earth kids played by Yasushi Sakagami and Gloria Zoellner, an obvious half-breed (half Japanese, half not Japanese). As is the case with Carl Craig in DESTROY ALL PLANETS, director Noriaki Yuasa just couldn't find a full-blooded white kid (to attract American viewers) who knew fluent Japanese, so they compromised and met us halfway. Regardless, our two young protagonists had immediately mastered the controls on the alien space craft (not an uncommon feat for the small geniuses in Gamera's flicks), so naturally Zigra hates them and that fire-breathing, flying turtle Gamera becomes their guardian. Gamera

rescues the infantile duo more than once and naturally is defeated by Zigma in the first battle of the monsters. So once again, Gamera goes unconscious, which is accomplished by turning off the lightbulbs in the friendly giant's head because it's cheaper than constructing actual eyelids to convey shut eye. Though the kids are prominently scripted to say "cute" stuff (i.e. half-breed Helen and her Japanese friend argue as to whose mother is prettier, and half-breed Helen wants "coke", or "juice"), there are also a few scenes of adult scientists, like a dull sequence involving a submerged bathyscaph (according to the subtitles, but I pronounce these submarine-things as "bath-iss-scope"). Half-breed Helen's father Dr. Wallace is played by none other than Koji Fujiyama, an actor who might also be part Caucasian himself, it's hard to tell. He also played a villain in GAMERA VS. BARUGON and an evil samurai (!) in MAJIN, MONSTER OF TERROR. But getting back to the script, sultry villainess Lady X keeps turning adults into helpless sleepwalkers and threatens to feed the kids to the killer whales (since when do Japanese brats resemble penguins or sea-lions?!), at Japan's Sea World amusement park, so the brilliant scientists Dr. Ishikawa (Isamu Saeki) and Dr. Wallace (Koji Fujiyama) realize that soundwaves eliminate alien control, which implies they must have watched Toho's MONSTER ZERO. Anyway, Lady X (Eiko Yanami) is converted back into astronaut Chikako Sugawara (still Eiko Yanami), and thanks to Gamera's mouth fire, Zigma is converted into smoked Zigma. *** - Damon Allen.

DETONATOR: ORGUN

Darts/Artmic; 1991, Producers: Noboru Ishida, Satoshi Koizumi, Dir.: Masami Ohbari, Screenplay & Original Story: Hideki Kakinuma, Music: Susumu Hirasawa, Production Designers: Hideki Kakinuma, Kimitoshi Yamane, Junichi Akutsu, Executive Producer of English Version: John O'Donnell, Producer of English Version: Stephanie Shalofsky, Dubbing Supervisor: Tom Wayland, Translation: Neil Nadelman, Distributed by Central Park Media and/or AnimeOne and/or U.S. Manga Corp., Running Time: 159 Min., Reviewed by Damon Allen Foster



Yawn. I'm really getting too old for this stuff. This animated videotape consists of all three episodes of the short lived Japanese cartoon, DETONATOR ORGUN. I certainly hope they didn't make any follow-ups to this mercilessly uninteresting example of Japanese science fiction at its very worst. DETONATOR ORGUN simply bored the hell out of me; the characters are amazingly uninteresting and the script is needlessly technical. Character names I couldn't identify with and English-dubbed dialogue just flew past me, going in one ear and out the other, making me feel quite brain dead. The only time I actually enjoyed Japanese cartoons about giant robots was in the 1970s (because of the more entertaining stuff like YUUSHA RAIDEEN, UFO DAI APOLON and GETTA ROBO G), but once the 1980s came along and brought us junk like MACROSS, DUNBINE and a zillion different characters all named "Gundam this 'n that", I felt the genre had gotten too serious and too big for its own good. For what it's worth, DETONATOR ORGUN would appear to continue with that ultra-talky genre and oh-so high tech designs. The robots all look so similar that I couldn't really tell who was the heroic Orgun, and who were

the villains. In all fairness, I suppose I could have sat through this videotape (but then, I could also force-feed myself raw liver) more than once and gotten a better grip on the story; and therefore, I could have written a more accurate review. No doubt there are diehard fans of Japanime out there who would enjoy watching this tape more than once. I, however, am not one of them. Obsessive cartoons geeks just might be intrigued by this confusing story.

The only thing I liked about this god-awful example of Japanimation is the occasional unintended humor. It's funny to see such a predictable story regurgitated yet again, full of the usual anime cliches (human pilot controls a robot to battle bad ones, some mysterious woman keeps predicting disasters and so on, alien invaders up to no good blah blah blah etc.). Mind you, even the accidental humor didn't actually make me laugh out loud. I did, however, get a chuckle from a scene early in the tape, where the protagonist goes into a museum. But the sign reads as follows: "History Musium".

In a futuristic setting which reminds us of LOGAN'S RUN while ripping off ideas from MAX HEADROOM, Earth is under attack by the "Evilator", an army of robots from the warlike planet, "Zohma". Battling the attackers is some sort of police group or earth defense organization called E.D.F. Some TV psychic keeps predicting doom and destruction. Well, no shit! Speaking of "shit", the word (as well as "god damn") is uttered more than once, so I guess DETONATOR ORGUN would get the equivalent of a PG Rating. But we wouldn't have much of a cartoon if the outerspace invaders weren't thwarted by a hero, right? Enter the confused guy Tomoru, who enjoys videogames, simulators and has strange dreams. Actually, sometimes it's hard to tell when he's in a flight-simulator and when he's having a dream. Regardless, he's somehow telepathically linked to the gigantic warrior Orgun, who's either a robot or an alien. So Tomoru & Orgun fight as one, against the bad guys. There are explosions and sword-play, but it's all erratic and too artsy fartsy to be very exciting. Give me ASTROBOY any day. -Allen F.

EDITORIAL

continued from page 1...

beautiful, full color banners (50 feet long!) to hang from the buildings of the convention center! Needless to say, all this would have made the price of plane tickets, hotel room rentals and other expenses well worth it!

But alas, this was not to be. The Hawaiian TV station KIKU TV, who had no interest in promoting the original Hawaii All-Collectors' Show 2001, suddenly took over. They came to realize they could still make money off of an old series like KIKAIIDER (or "Kikaida", as they call it), and suddenly they claimed to have "exclusive rights" to a series they ignored for many years. It was disheartening to hear that they forbid the usage of the name "Kikaida" at the Hawaii All-Collectors' Show 2002. So the hopes and dreams of many superhero fans were crushed. Were it not for the hard work of talented people like Tracey Jeremiah who struggled to bring the Kikaider actors back to Hawaii, that domineering TV station wouldn't be basking in this new glory. Even so, I had saved up money specifically for the purpose of going to this now non-existent convention (technically, the great Hawaii All-Collectors' Show 2002 still happened, but it's now without the Kikaider element and therefore out-of-place in OC). As it turns out, KIKU TV, who became eager to cash in on a fad which was revived by the hard work of others, began holding their own lame conventions. With no real alternative, I swallowed my pride and made the unethical choice to attend one of KIKU's infantile events. The emphasis of the occasion turned out not to be anything particularly intelligent (it's not like when Hiroko Sakurai gave fascinating lectures and stories of her career in the ULTRAMAN series when she appeared at the Asian Fantasy Film Expo!), and instead there were many coloring books, little kids, overpriced vendors and school children on stage, singing Kikaider theme songs. I bought a fuckin' plane ticket for this?!?!?

By now many of you are sick of my ranting and raving about how much I hated KIKU's childish "Kikaida Fan Faire" at Honolulu's Japanese Cultural Center, in April of 2002. I'll talk a little bit more about this disappointing kiddy festival in this issue's obligatory superhero column, *Kaizo Ningen Update*. Not only that, but in the next issue there will be my thorough trashing of this "Kikaida Fan Faire", as you read the most negative convention review (written in my Waikiki hotel room, at the height of my fury) of my life. But for now, let me just say that this experience has been another of those

BELOW: Young Damon Foster, a member of the Kikaider Generation.



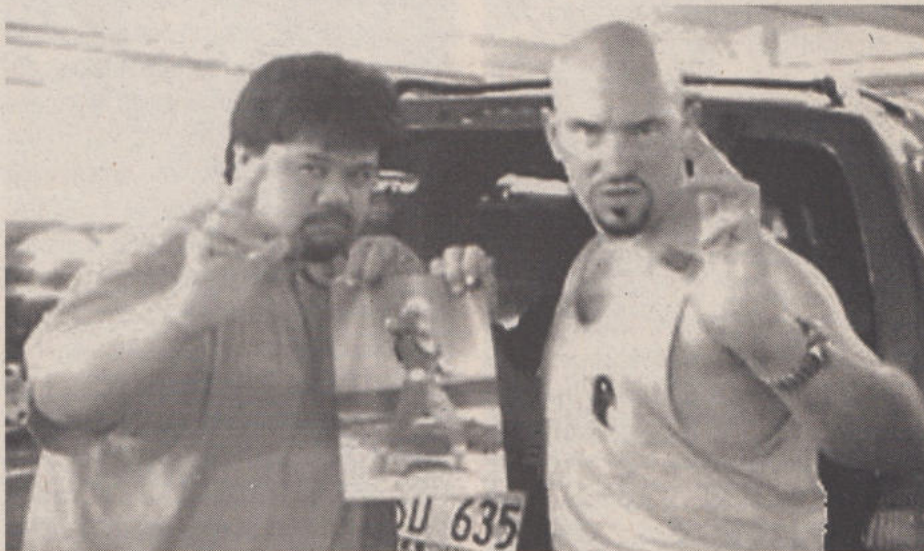
situations involving a heartless corporate take over, and of course the pioneers who got scalped. The potential for a thriving Japanese superhero fandom was there, the possibility for Americans to meet their heroes in events where the language is English. Could you have imagined that one day, we could fly to Hawaii, and not only enjoy some water activities, but see intelligent question and answer sessions (translated into English, no less!) from Japanese superhero TV stars!? Oh, what could have been. Instead, it looks like money-grubbers were quick to take over once the hard work was done, and thus,

a series of enlightening events has been averted, and many members of the original "Kikaider Generation" (adults like myself who were kids in the 1970s and grew up on these stupid TV programs) feel completely alienated. Though there are a lot of really nice people (i.e. Tracey Jeremiah and Duane Chang) in Hawaii, the occasion made me rather bitter toward the Hawaiian scene in general. Worse yet, the event seemed to be a commercial hit (thanks to both the kiddies, and the fanboy lackeys who grovel at the feet of KIKU representatives), and more will probably be on the way. Maybe things will evolve and improve (there's no harm in hoping), but for now, I think these kiddy events will crowd out any possibility of truly enlightening, insightful "Kikaida" events. My hope is that one day, Kikaider's fandom on Hawaii will become as sophisticated as the mainland's Godzilla fandom. So far, the Hawaiian scene has a long way to go, and *G-Fest* & the *Asian Fantasy Film Expo* are a million times better than the horrible *Kikaida Fan Fair* I endured.

Don't get me wrong: I loved my Hawaiian vacation. Not only did I get to see the "Kikaider brothers" (Jiro and Ichiro) in person and get their autographs, but as always, I love the water-sports on Oahu: Surfing, swimming, snorkeling, and diving, where I got to swim among sea-turtles, sharks and an octopus. If KIKU TV had gotten their act together, it could have been one of the best trips I ever took.

Sincerely,
Damon Foster

DAMON FOSTER
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BELOW: Even KIKAIIDER/KIKAIDA fans grow up! Entrepreneur Tracey Jeremia in Hawaii with Damon Foster.

HONG KONG HEROES CONT...

climactic fight, which brings forth the defeat of the villains and the victory of both good guys. Once more, we're treated to bullets and punches, but there are other neat duels: Chow Yun Fat vs. Norman Chu using machetes, and then it's Conaam Lee vs. Gordon Liu using chainsaws! I tell ya', they just don't make movies like this anymore!

****-DF

1990s:

THE KING OF MASKS

Presented by the Shaw Brothers (Hong Kong); 1996, Produced and Directed by: Wu Tian Ming. Executive Prod.: Mona Fong & Hon Pou Chu, Associate Prod.: Titus Ho & Lawrence Wong. American release by Samuel Goldwyn Films; 2001, Cast: Chu Yuk, Chao Yim Yin, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Shaw Brothers!? Hong Kong's former kings of movie making?! Mona Fong?! I didn't know these people were still alive! But since I've loved the Shaw Brothers movies most of my life, it's nice to still see their names at least associated with somewhat recent movies! THE KING OF MASKS is nothing like the classic kung fu movies we came to know them for, and I wasn't expecting it to be. Instead, THE KING OF MASKS is another 1990s drama, much like RED SORGHUM, RAISE THE RED LANTERN and so on. You know, the type of Mandarin-language movie that the pretentious critics are determined to rave about every chance they get. THE KING OF MASKS isn't any worse than the others. I thought THE KING OF MASKS was pretty good. The characters held my attention and the script only bored me once or twice. Being a major release you can get at Blockbuster, instead of one of them Chinatown bootlegs where the subtitles were intended for theaters, the subtitles are crystal clear.

It reminded me of Sammo Hung's PAINTED FACES, because it too deals with old school entertainment (Peking Opera, street performers, etc.) trying to struggle to fit into the changing times. But THE KING OF MASKS appears to take place much earlier in this century; it's probably before WWII, and I'm guessing it's the 1920s. But there's more to it than that, because THE KING OF MASKS has some long overdue social commentary about the treatment of females in Chinese tradition. After the same irritating penile worship which made KIDS FROM SHAOLIN so nauseating, I was relieved that the characters in THE KING OF MASKS eventually overcame this blatant sexism we call "Chinese tradition".

The story of this enjoyable little drama deals mainly with "The King Of Masks", a traveling street performer who combines masks with illusions like magic tricks. The old fellow uses some sort of hidden elastic strap (?) to make the masks snap on and off his face with the blink of an eye, making it look as though he's magically changing his face in the fraction of a second. But he's aging and needs a successor to carry on the tradition once he dies. Though females are allowed to perform doing amazing back bends and contortions, it's traditional that only males take part in the more dramatic, Peking opera inspired things (hence another character in the movie, an effeminate male who plays a female bodizatva in a local



opera). So the King of Masks tries his hardest to adopt a young boy to be his heir. Ultimately, he's deceived and ends up with an adopted, 8-year old daughter. But my favorite character in the movie is this cute monkey that follows the King of Masks around. This little ape is the old fart's pet, and I think he's the best actor in THE KING OF MASKS! Anyway, the story had the old man, his adopted grand-daughter (or so they say! Since he didn't adopt a father for the grand-daughter, I think she qualifies as his daughter, despite the age difference), and their lovable monkey all suffer many problems and set backs: Their boat, which is their home and means of transportation, burns down. Later, the King of Masks is framed for kidnapping! He's about to be executed when the 8-year old girl and the effeminate opera performer risk their lives to prove his innocence. Our elderly hero is released from jail, and by this time, he finally realizes rules were made to be broken and teaches the little girl the secret of the mask/transformation gimmick. I'm usually impartial to "feel good movies", but this happy ending alone makes me wanna' give this cute movie a three star rating. So here goes:

***-DF

THE ZEROs:

TOKYO RAIDERS

2000; American Video Release: 2001, Executive Prod.: Raymond Chow. Produced by David Chan, Unit Production Manager: Cheung Chi Kwong, Screenplay: Susan Chan & Felix Chong, Action Choreographer: Allen Chun Wai Sit, Cast: Tony Leung, Ekin Cheng, Kelly Chen, Toru Nakamura, Hiroshi Abe, Kumiko Endo, Maiyu Ozawa, Yuko Moriyama, Mirami Sirakawa, Pauline Yam, Reviewed by Damon Foster

There are a few half-assed fights, but it takes a little too long to learn why these guys are fighting each other. At first I was glad to see Tony Leung (BULLET IN THE HEAD, HARDBOILED) go into action early on (right after the opening credits) when he fends off thugs using an umbrella, but pretty soon the action ran out of steam for two reasons: 1. Who are these people and why are they fighting? Who's the good guy and who's the bad guy? 2. Quite simply, the fight scenes aren't that good anymore. Though these battles lack the overdone wire stuff of the 1990s, they also lack the speed & stunts of the 1980s. The martial arts aren't horrible, but they're not great either; in fact they're hard to describe. Tony Leung is no martial arts master, and worse yet, many of the henchmen he fights appear to be Japanese extras instead of actual HK stuntmen.

On the whole, this Kong Kongese/Japanese coproduction is disappointing. The tape played and I sat there in front of the TV. So I guess theoretically, I did indeed "watch" TOKYO RAIDERS. But I think "looked at" or "was aware of" would be better de-

scriptions of the situation, because TOKYO RAIDERS is so uninvolved. Them HK movie makers lost their fire years ago, as far as I'm concerned. TOKYO RAIDERS is uninvolved and just meanders from one scene to another and is full of bad comedy and even worse music. The music is quite Hispanic in flavor, at times it sounds like salsa music. I still can't understand why a movie about HK detectives in Tokyo Japan would have a Latino score! Perhaps it suits the light-hearted atmosphere, but otherwise, la musica seems entirely out of place. There are other flaws too, especially for the English version I just sat through. In the original Chinese version, it seems that there are jokes based on communication gaps as the Japanese and Chinese are speaking two different languages. But when all this is dubbed in English, these sequences come off as awkward and should have been cut from this version altogether. I think the best thing about TOKYO RAIDERS is a line on the pre-record's label which reads: "In Cantonese with English Dubbed".

As somebody who's normally not impressed by any new actors & actresses, most of the cast members didn't impress me. The only interesting performance was by that of Hiroshi Abe, best known to QC readers for his prominent role in Japan's GODZILLA 2000 (Toho; 2000). He was also in KAI KARA-SAN GA TORU (1987) and 1994's YAMATO TAKERU. For more on him, see his bio on page 5 of O.C.: Godzilla 2000. He plays a villain in TOKYO RAIDERS, and seems to be one of the few characters to have depth. He's a bad guy, but still manages to get sympathy because of the character's heartache: His unfaithful wife was fooling around with Toru Nakamura. Nakamura was also in GEN-X COPS, where I heard his real voice and thought he was a terrible actor. Fortunately, he's been dubbed in TOKYO RAIDERS, so his deadpan, facially expressionless form of acting is his only flaw. He should always be dubbed. Most of the other cast members are girls, and although they're all pretty, they all look alike.

I guess Tony Leung and some guy called Ekin Cheng play HK detectives in Japan, seeking some guy called Ken (Toru Nakamura), for whatever reason. That's just one of the intertwining subplots. Another has Leung hired by Hiroshi Abe to spy on an unfaithful wife, who, in turn is fooling around with Toru Nakamura. Nakamura, on the other hand, was engaged to be married to Kelly Chen but left her waiting at the church on what was supposed to be their wedding day. So there are boring scenes of Kelly Chen crying over her lost marriage to mobster Toru Nakamura. In between the dull drama and lame excuses for comedy, heroes Tony Leung and Ekin Cheng do manage to fight each other and take on mobsters. Anyway, nobody dies and all the bad guys get arrested after an admittedly decent motorboat chase.

1/2-DF

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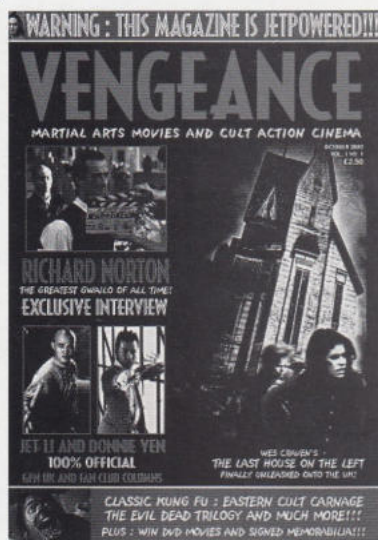
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