

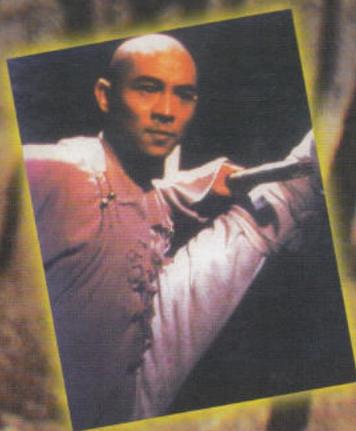


# ORIENTAL CINEMA



#16  
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## THE JET LI ISSUE!



**ALSO  
INSIDE:  
VOLUPTUOUS  
MIKI SAWAGUCHI!**



THE FUTURE  
IS STUPID

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# ORIENTAL CINEMA

#16 - SUMMER, 1999

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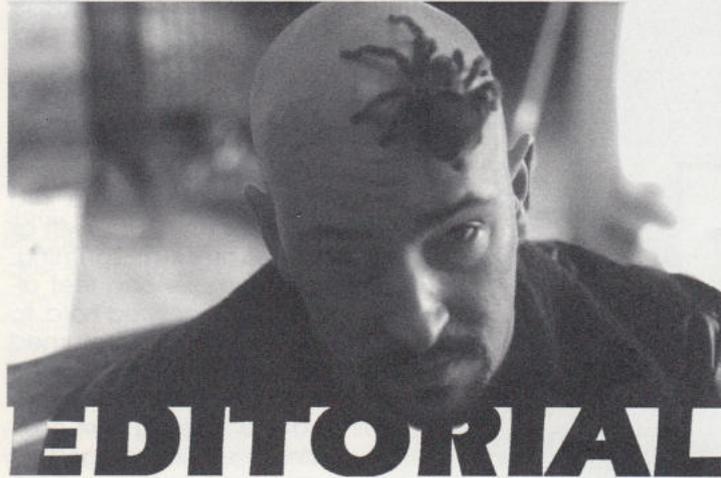
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Shock of shocks, this issue has finally come out! Though in this format, it's considered issue number 16, it's actually my 30th! Can you believe I've made thirty issues of OC?! With OC being almost as old (now that's pretty decrepid!) as myself, it's no surprise that things are slowing down. Used to be I could shoot out three or four issues a year; but these days, I'm lucky if I can muster up the energy to release two a year. Regardless, I apologize for the delay in getting this issue completed. With such drastic delays between issues, it comes as no surprise that so many people think OC has officially folded. The fact that most magazine shops refuse to carry it also doesn't help matters much. Okay, so now that I've apologized, let's head on over to the next phase in this topic: My excuses.....

As I mentioned an issue or two ago, I was doing heavy schooling. Now that I've completed my course, I can resume with OC, so hopefully things will pick up again. Mind you, this doesn't mean I can spend full time working on this one-of-a-kind publication. Obviously, I went to school for a career change; and that's going into effect-- it's become a case of "do or die" basically. That's because I got fired from my place of employment, T.C. Advertising. I slaved away, working with those ego-maniacs for at least eight years, rarely raising a fuss when they based their raises, promotions & special treatment on who the employees were related to, and how much they kissed ass. I tried my best as I worked there, but got treated like shit. I stayed there due to a low self-esteem; I didn't think I could do much better, so I remained with those assholes for years, content to swallow my pride and was convinced I was lucky they kept me around. Eventually, I wised up (more and more immigrants were hired and subsequently promoted; that's Affirmative Action for 'ya) and realized I was disadvantaged because I don't join cliques, don't play golf, don't smoke, wasn't born in a foreign country, and didn't have any relatives in powerful positions in the company. I came to



Minka  
(see last issue)

realize that I wasn't born with the ability to be a brown-noser, and decided the only way to have a career in the back-stabbing work force was to finally get an education. And that I did. But the strain of working full-time, and doing heavy hours of school became too much. Getting very little sleep at night, I had to sleep in my car inbetween school and work. It was a long year and a half; and I got very sick. I thought I was gonna' die. Needless to say, my work suffered, and I was absent a lot. With the quality of my workmanship rapidly fading, one of the company's main "suits", an absolute geek called Chris Freck fired me. Needless to say, if ever I see this power-hungry nerd again, he had better run for his life; that fucking shithead.

But I'm starting over; new skills, new career. Hopefully my education as an AutoCAD drafter (some architectural, some 3d modeling) will be more successful than the eight years I wasted in the graphics department of T.C. Advertising. Time will tell. I'm in the process of wrapping up a brief stint as a temp-worker in the Engineering department of Mediacy, a large company which makes pre-records of major releases, and that includes, of all things, Japanese anime, ironically. The pay was so poor I've had to work tons of O.T. just to make ends meet. With me never home, it should come as no surprise that attention to OC has been minimal. But I'm sending out resumes to find more stable work, and if all goes well, I should have enough time to make OCs more frequent. Time will tell.

Sincerely,

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# 李連杰

# JET LI

**Name:** Jet Li  
**ALIAS:** Jet Lee  
**MANDARIN NAME:** Li Lian Jie  
**CANTONESE NAME:** Li Nin Kit  
**PLACE BORN:** Heibei, Beijing

**DATE BORN:** 4/26/63  
**HEIGHT:** 169cm  
**WEIGHT:** 66kgs  
**FAVORITE COLOR:** white

One day the Primary School of Peking became the battleground for school-bullies. While playing Ping Pong, one of the kids didn't express a lot of generosity, and decided to monopolize the table; talk about "playing with yourself"! But seriously, with this twerp being a real asshole, another local tyke, the young Li Lin Jie (later called "Jet Li" and "Jet Lee") came on over to teach the little bastard a lesson. Young Jet Li was assigned the job of "Monitor" on the school campus that week, and was also a demonstrator of P.E. broadcasts, during morning exercises. Jet had been fatherless since he was two, and somehow, in China this disgraced him. He had been bullied and taunted because of this, so he learned to fight at an early age. Jet jumped up onto the shoulder-height table, in a single bound, and for an encore, gave the little tyrant a swift kick, making him well acquainted with the floor, for more than just a second. The other kids who witnessed this valiant act cheered. Understandably annoyed, the former-ping pong hog screamed in a rage, the Chinese equivalent of: "Damn you! It serves you right to have lost your father!" (numerous kids learned to call people specific, personal names which would be considered individually offensive, and "The Gang of Four" was a popular taunting title too). Still quite sensitive about being fatherless, he jumped down from

the table and chased his crying taunter toward a nearby teacher's room. Other students got in on this near-riot, and eye-witness accounts have it that again Jet hopped up (onto a nearby desk), and down onto his rival, as the fight continued. The other kiddies, as well as teachers, witnessed this.

The teachers' aides and yard-duty personnel were aware that Jet (actually quite a teacher's pet) must have been seriously provoked for him to have gotten madder than a Navajo on Columbus Day; bursting into such violence. The P.E. teacher who saw all this urged the kid to apologize to Jet in the presence of everybody, to smooth things over. This fight, however, provided the teacher in charge of Physical Education with an unexpected chance to find out about Jet's unique jumping abilities and limberness. So he sent young Jet to Peking Amateur Sports School for training in the art of Wushu. So Jet Li started learning martial arts like kung fu and wushu at eight years old, though some sources say he didn't start until age 11.

Jet had to attend classes in the daytime. But at night, once he'd finished his din-din, he went to the amateur sports school. Aside from the usual bending, leg pressing and so on, he also specialized in acrobatic flips (the wireless kind!); he was a born gymnast, and hard working. He quickly became one of Coach

Wu Bin's favorite students. Wu Bin's philosophy, when roughly translated into English, came out like this: "Fists swift as meteors and eyes quick as lightning; back as agile as a snake and feet always in position." He practiced hard, to be rewarded. But when he returned home later that night, his mother worried about him. She felt he was over-exerting himself, and was suffering from over-kill. But her warnings just encouraged Jet all the more, he decided to go all out and defy hardship. From that point on, he went to the Wushu school every day, regardless of weather & seasons. But Coach Wu Bin felt Jet was undernourished. Though his small body seemed to be limber, agile & strong, it lacked the type of force usually inherent in kicking & punching. Wu Bin therefore called Jet's mother and discovered that Jet's family never consumed red meat, and that their diet was a little lacking in proteins. However, the family was neither Islamic nor superstitious/religious (same thing, spelled differently).

How had Jet Li's family adopted such light eating habits? Coach Wu Bin later discovered why; once the family's grandmother fell ill. Her doctor suggested she not eat too much port, mutton or beef-- the meats from four-legged animals. The whole family followed suit, even after the granny's health had improved. "You must be strong before you can master martial arts", the coach advised Jet. In normal circumstances, avoiding red meat is good (though its protein is useful if you do such rigorous work-outs), but my diet consists largely of fruits and vegetarians. But seriously;

Jet had to learn to take meat, which at first, the eight year old kid had a little trouble getting used to; he had to force himself to eat it. In time, it aided his training, and he became quite strong, and well-developed. During these years, numerous kids who started such lessons with Jet later backed out or gave up, since excruciating training and excessive discipline is pretty nasty stuff. Jet, however, became more and more obsessed with martial arts. No matter which style (be it weapons or empty-handed), he would practice time and time again, often until midnight. Jet was aware he needed to be quick, forceful, and steady in all movements-- and agile, limber and flexible in all his joints: Wrist, hipbone, knee, ankle, and so on.

As traditional martial arts developed and spread all over the world (due largely to the then popular Bruce Lee movies and other new hits in the theatrical kung fu boom) like Starbucks in a pretentious yuppie-town, specialized troupes of Wushu performers were started in many Chinese provinces and districts. Peking wasn't an exception, so not surprisingly, Jet was right in the middle of all this. To be a member of an amateur was fine & dandy, but becoming a member of a professional team was totally awesome (dude), or as them Asians (over in Asia) might say, "Most Honorable". Kung fu masters of assorted Peking schools had united. Jet therefore broadened his vision, and he was given even stricter demands. For five consecutive years, this little kid won the Chinese Martial Arts Contest, from 1974 to 1979. Young though he was, his ambition was bigger than Gene Siskell's forehead.

Jet Li and the other Wushu troupe-members had to do tough & hard practice in both the bitter winter cold and the voracious heat of the summers, running around a 350-meter track twenty times a day, sometimes having to complete it within 25 minutes! If that's not enough, they also researched & imitated the styles, routines & characteristics of several different schools. Jet even blended free-style exercises with gymnastics, empty-handed combat techniques and weapons usage, resulting in some unique katas and made Jet's speed proficient in most forms of athletics. He was chosen as the delegate of his team after three years of this torture-- I mean, discipline. Jet, now 11, took part in the National Wushu Championships, the first time for him. Patriotism played a role as well. With Peking being China's capital, Jet felt his home should win, to honor its eight-million bicycle riders. He was a new, rising star, and began to dazzle people.

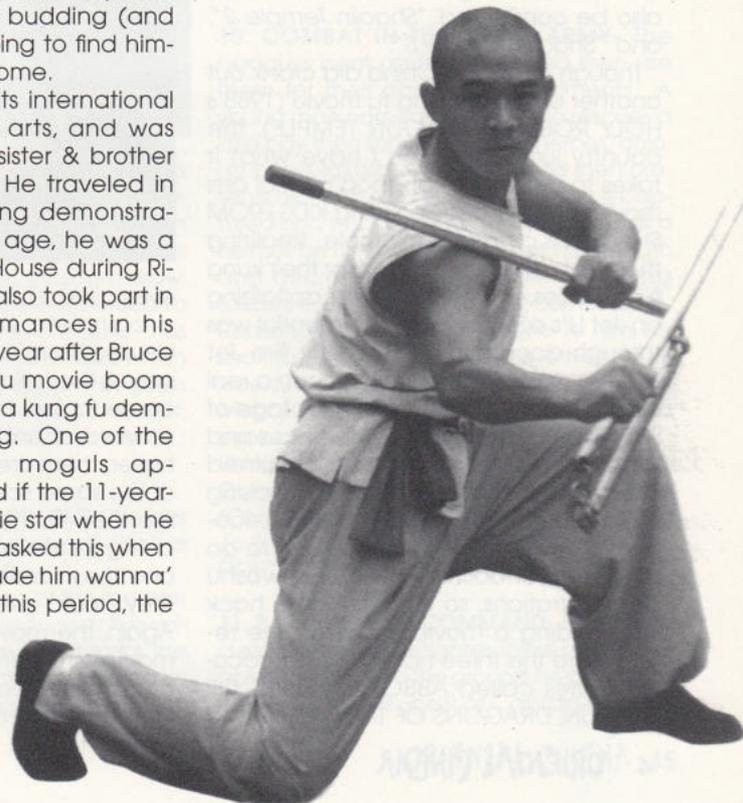
At martial arts conventions, Jet atten-

tively observed the actions of great martial artists as they strutted their stuff. He analyzed their good & bad points. Jet was aware that one would not be able to beat his or her opponents unless these adversaries were completely understood. To Jet, the essence of kung fu was offensive movements combined with defensive movements, both elements play off each other. Jet's interpretation of requirements (set for various contests) was based on thorough studies, as well as an inventive combination of the techniques and styles of various schools: the inner energy of the "Taichiquan", the bombastic & rhythmical "Gun Boxing", the power & strength of the "Dragon Boxing", the flowing "Quangquan", the free "Chaquan", the light & brisk "monkey boxing", and the speed & precision associated with "Crane Boxing". So in Jet's view, the most vital thing was the combining of these different characteristics, and the integrating of the forms of springing, running & jumping, and performing them all with a certain form to convey the beauty of the human body in motion. Having understood this, Jet performed 80-second routine compulsory sets, with his excellent posture, strategy, gracefulness, swiftness & exactness, and by no surprise, won first prize in numerous demonstrations & performances. He won high ranks in the five following categories: "Pu" (traditional theatrical swordplay), duel practice, spearplay, routine boxing, and combative swordsmanship. Rare glimpses of 10-year-old Jet performing can be seen in documentaries like SHAOLIN KUNG FU and DRAGONS OF THE ORIENT-- though the repetitive format of both tends to get dull, they offer seldom seen shots of a budding (and wireless!) star just beginning to find himself; a hint of things to come.

He had given Peking its international recognition for martial arts, and was happy that his mother, sister & brother were all proud of him. He traveled in about 45 countries, doing demonstrations. At this very young age, he was a performer at the White House during Richard Nixon's reign. He also took part in more dramatic performances in his homeland. In 1974, just a year after Bruce Lee's death (the kung fu movie boom now in full swing), Jet did a kung fu demonstration in Hong Kong. One of the more successful film moguls approached Jet and asked if the 11-year-old wanted to be a movie star when he grew up. He was always asked this when he performed in HK. It made him wanna' grow up really fast! By this period, the times were a changing in China. For years, Chairman Mao Tse Tung held the country by the

lytchee nuts, forcing everybody to dress like toilet attendants on the Orient Express. After Chairman Mao's departure from immortality in the early 1970s, the freedom of Red China filmmakers expanded like penises in a Pamela Anderson stripshow, opening up new ideas for the Mainland Chinese movie industry. Meanwhile, Jet continued his occasional international tours; off & on during the 1970s. During one of his performances in America, backstage he received a bouquet of roses and "best wishes" note from Jackie Chan, who, at that point was also in the U.S.

And so thus, for probably the first time, the commie country began work on a kung fu movie. The producers wisely sought out Shaw Brothers studio space for some scenes, and some advice from kung fu movie veteran Liu Chia Liang. And considering Jet Li's track record (superb wushu performances from that period are available in documentaries), it comes as no major shock that he was chosen to star in his country's debut foray into kung fu moviedom. Filmed on location, and utilizing excellent fighters in all the main parts (i.e. the creator of the "Shark-Fin Broad Swordplay", Yu Hsing Wei, who plays the bad guy), SHAOLIN TEMPLE took three years to make (completed in 1981, some say 1982), and allegedly cost ten million dollars to produce. The movie functions on a traditional level, and to the average viewer, it may not seem much different than the many HK movies which were also coming out back then, they themselves dealing with Shaolin Temple themes too. But to informed, knowledgeable fans of the



kung fu genre, SHAOLIN TEMPLE is a classic of its type.

Despite its all too typical plot (not unlike Gordon Liu's MASTER KILLER), 'twas the awe-inspiring mainland Chinese locales, sumptuous photography, superb Wushu acrobatics, nifty cinematography and the over-all attention to detail which made SHAOLIN TEMPLE a winner, and it got the Asian movie-going public really take notice of young Jet Li. Jet Li wasn't the only prolific hero in SHAOLIN TEMPLE. Yu Hai (Mantis Fist Champion) is pretty funny as the Shaolin teacher, and 1981 "National-All-Around" Champion (my, these titles & credentials are stupid!) Hu Chien-Chiang appears as a Monkey kung fu stylist. SHAOLIN TEMPLE was a hit, and, filmed on location (at this important yet deteriorating structure), the movie made the historical site into a popular tourist attraction. Previously, the old monastery was crumbling. Thanks to Jet Li's SHAOLIN TEMPLE, the government of China needed to issue a statement requesting students stay in school instead of going off to study kung fu at Shaolin. When they filmed SHAOLIN TEMPLE, only one guy lived at the nearly abandoned relic, there were no more monks there. Yet ten years later, the vicinity was no longer isolated and secluded-- there were restaurants & stores, just five miles away. An interesting glimpse of current temple goings on is in the documentary SHAOLIN KUNG FU, and also, *O.C.: The Shaolin Issue* from a year or two ago. SHAOLIN TEMPLE had semi-sequels like the horrendous KIDS FROM SHAOLIN and the excellent MARTIAL ARTS OF SHAOLIN (aka "North and South of Shaolin"), which, depending on who you ask, could also be considered "Shaolin Temple 2", and "Shaolin Temple 3".

Though Mainland China did crank out another excellent kung fu movie (1988's HOLY ROBE OF SHAOLIN TEMPLE), the country just really didn't have what it takes to make a lot of good martial arts movies. Jet Li's disappointing KIDS FROM SHAOLIN is a perfect example. Realizing that Red China isn't known for their kung fu fantasies, the next step in capitalizing on Jet Li's skill & cinematic potential was through documentaries (simply film Jet & other martial artists working out; a real cop-out, but it worked). New footage of Jet was filmed at press conferences and birthday parties; plus, they obtained older vintage footage of him exercising & demonstrating as a youngster. An economical way to pad this out was to go to actual Shaolin monks, and wushu demonstrations, so long as some hack was holding a movie camera. The results were the three hastily edited documentaries called ABBOT HAI TENG OF SHAOLIN, DRAGONS OF THE ORIENT and

SHAOLIN KUNG FU, which therefore became Jet Li's final three Mainland China flicks. Culture addicts, historians, obsessive stalkers & Jet Li fans should seek out these three compilations of mishmashed, reshuffled footage, as they're educational, provocative, and enlightening. However, it's obvious they were basically shot back-to-back, since each documentary consists of largely the same footage. Oh sure, each has enough original, independent material so that



Above: Jet Li with Tsui Hark.



every one of them stands on its own as a complete, independent movie, but viewing them side-by-side (for review purposes) like I did was a drastic mistake: I came to feel I was watching the same movie over and over, the differences between them aren't exactly drastic. Many of the same scenes are regurgitated, it's like they had all this footage of monks doing katas, and Jet Li home movies, and they simply re-shuffled the deck so they could give each flick its own title. Again, the movies aren't bad if you like martial arts demonstrations, but to me, it became tedious overkill by the time I got to the third film in this trilogy. Some of

Jet's stock-footage would later appear in yet another documentary, the English-language movie TOP FIGHTER (Molesworth Ltd.; 1996).

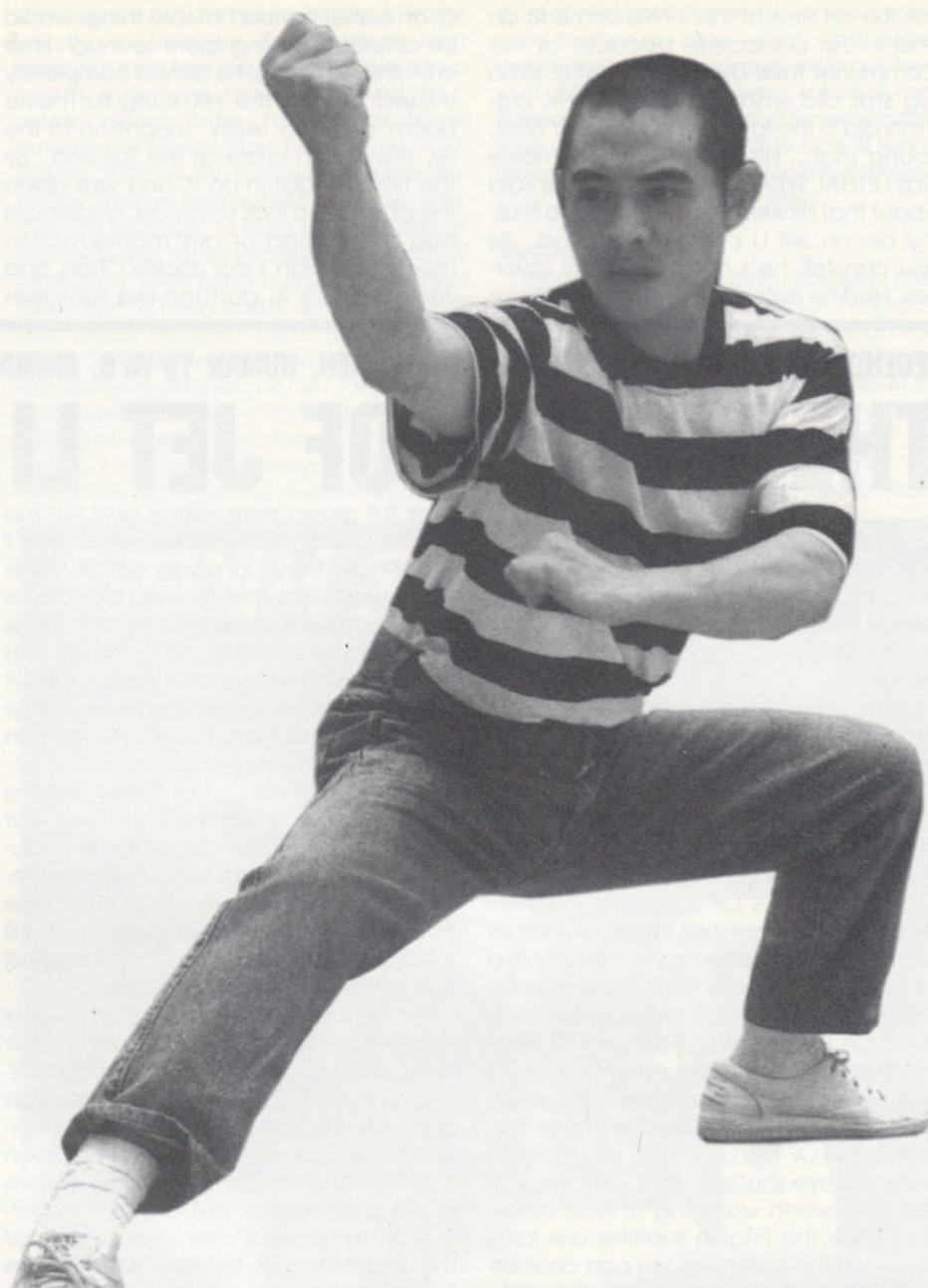
Candid footage of Jet hanging out with Coach Wu Bin (at what appears to be a race-track) isn't the most exciting career for a kung fu star, so in the mid-to-late 1980s, Jet made the logical move and shoved off to Hong Kong, home to the greatest action movies the world has ever seen. By no surprise, it didn't take long for Jet to start getting roles in HK actioners, but some may look cheap or campy when seen today. He didn't become an international star until the 1990s though, with the likes of more modestly budgetted groundbreakers; comedy/fantasies like the ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA farces. This was where he finally established a worldwide, cult following and mainstream success. However, I personally think much of his best stuff was the late 1980s, when he made actual HK action/kung fu films, and not wire-and-pulley fantasies. I pause from this biography to compliment an important film of his, 1989's DRAGON FIGHT. I didn't like the death of HK funnyman Steven Chau (Chow Sing Chi, Chau Shing Chu, Stephen Chow, etc., I hear he's in America now, working on a new Jim Carrey movie), since he was one of the more likeable characters in DRAGON FIGHT. Granted, this early in Stephen's career, his humor wasn't as well developed and some of his stupid antics are downright embarrassing. But on the whole, his co-starring roll (he's 3rd, Ti Wei & Jet Li were ahead of him in popularity back then) is okay.

DRAGON FIGHT is pretty typical of 1980s gangster flicks (kung fu, acrobatic stunts, car chases & crashes, etc.), except that the whole thing is set in San Francisco. Mind you, not all was entirely shot on location: Portions of the airport scene are actually at L.A. International, and there's a drawbridge stunt. I don't think San Francisco has any drawbridges, so perhaps it was one of the ones (High St.? Park St.?) at Alameda. Regardless, the story is more or less another tale of good Chinese coming to America to defeat all them mean blacks and whites, but it also borrows from Fu Sheng's THE CHINATOWN KID in that yet another Chinese (this time it's Dick Wei, not Sun Chien) gets corrupted by the San Francisco treat.

I enjoyed this predictable, stupid movie. The fights aren't absolutely the best the 1980s offered us, but they're still pretty damn impressive and enjoyable. If you can get past the predictable format, and the badly dubbed Americans who can't act (I don't know what's worse; their voices or their dialogue) worth a

damn, then you'll find DRAGON FIGHT to be fairly fun. Not perfect, but it delivers. It's a tribute, a fitting memorial to the 1980s, a climactic end to HK's Golden Decade of modern, urban action/kung fu capers. DRAGON FIGHT's script starts off almost like a factual retelling of Jet's upbringing: He's in a Wushu Troupe (and has studied kung fu since he was eight years old), touring America. Up to this point, DRAGON FIGHT plays like a Jet Li biography. But only this time, his partner (Ti Wei, doomed to be villainous) goes bad and commits crimes in San Francisco. Poor Jet, always Mr. Goody Two Shoes, gets blamed for his partner's atrocities. Ti Wei (aka "Dick" Wei, to all you dicks and American fans) gets work as a hitman for treacherous mobs & tongs, while Jet delivers groceries with Steven Chow. But a botched drug deal brings both rivals back together. Jet's climactic duel with Ti Wei is nifty, but it's Jet's staff swinging against several henchmen at a farmhouse which really thrilled me. Anyway, Ti Wei dies just before the ending credits & out-takes. For more on DRAGON FIGHT, see Garo's review in the filmography.

DRAGON FIGHT- an important, landmark film- pretty much ends the interesting part of Jet Li's career, since after that climactic end to the kung fu genre, we all know what happened to the HK film industry (action films took on a drug-induced, arsty-fartsy turn), and Jet Li in particular. Jet Li finally gained international acclaim thanks to big time HK movie moguls like Ching Tsui Tung and Tsui Hark. Hark was known for his wild fantasies like ZU: WARRIORS OF THE MAGIC MOUNTAIN and A CHINESE GHOST-STORY. So in the early 1990s, the unholy alliance of Jet Li and Tsui Hark pretty much changed the whole *martial arts genre* into the "art genre", resulting in such overdone, overhyped, glossy, headache inducing fodder like ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA and all that SWORDSMAN nonsense. These fantasy art-films, with their heavy dialogue, zillions of characters and gaudy special effects, definitely took audiences by storm. Supposedly, Jet Li had gotten a leg injury somewhere along the way, and that might be why he ceased doing martial arts films, and instead prefers just art (minus the 'martial') films. By no shock, the pretentious snobs, critics, trendies & queers in the art-crowd ate this stuff up, as did the overweight couch potatoes who know nothing about martial arts and couldn't do a roundhouse kick if their lives depended on it. It's no secret that I'm not a fan of these films, so I think I'll just ignore most of them for now-- there's nothing about them you probably haven't read a million times, thanks to ass-kissing critics and OC imi-



tation rags who have groveled at the feet of Tsui Hark, Jet Li and Ching Siu Tung.

Golden Harvest's ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA is an important film in Jet's career. Though this revolutionary ground-breaker isn't one of my personal favorites, it's not hard to see why it took international audiences by storm. There are interesting characters, and the story manages to be pretty interesting (though I didn't appreciate it until I finally saw the English dub). The over-all concept of white invaders being villains was nothing new. But ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA has caucasians with depth. For example, the evil whities are more-or-less "selling America", trying hard to coax Chinese to come to America to work. It's later revealed that the corrupt Americans want slave-labor, not immigrants (Chinese men are discouraged from

bringing their wives along, for fear of settling down in the U.S.A.). There's even a good American character, an elderly priest. Though the old Christian dies midway through the movie, this was an example of changes in the negative stereotypes in HK cinema (hell, just look at the amusing sequel ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA AND AMERICA, where one of the heroes is a blond cowboy!). The characters & story are what made ONCE UPON A TIME appreciated, and not the impossible feats like Jet firing a bullet from his fingers!

Numerous sequels to ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA followed, three of which had Jet Li reprise his role as Wong-- but disagreements had him leave the series later on. Being a Jet Li Issue, I won't be reviewing the non-Jet Li films. I guess I'll save them for the "non-Jet Li Issue" of OC.

But the art films of the 1990s came to an end in Jet Li's career because of the Communist take-over of HK. Jet Li, still a big star, did what many other HK big-shots did in the late 1990s: He went West, young man. His first Hollywood movie was LETHAL WEAPON 4, and the less said about that stinker, the better. And so thus, my bio on Jet Li comes to an end. As you can tell, he's not one of my favorites. Had he entered the HK movie scene

at an earlier period, I'm sure things would be different. Having spent so much time in Mainland China, he almost completely missed out on the HK kung fu movie boom, and only really caught on to the HK '80s action craze at the tail end. By the time he got in on it, and was given the chance to kick some ass, audiences had grown tired of any martial/action movie that didn't star Jackie Chan, and Jet got stuck in cartoon-like fantasies

about suspension wires and exploding dirt.

One thing is for sure; Li Lian Jie's Western nickname, "Jet" Li is terribly accurate, for many of his movies consist of flight scenes, more so than fight scenes. Regardless, the following filmography features as many Jet Li reviews (presented in alphabetical order) as me and my homies had time for. -Damon Foster

## LEGENDS OF KUNG FU, WEIGHTLESS SWORDSMEN, HUMAN YO-YO'S, ANIMAL SNUFF-FILMS AND EXPLODING DIRT:

# THE MOVIES OF JET LI

大生堂少林

### ABBOT HAI TENG OF SHAOLIN

1988. Released by: Tai Seng Video, Distributors: Bigstar.com, Rell.com, Amazon.com. Featuring: Hai Teng, Li Sze Ming, Jet Li, Wu Tao Nam, Sun Lu Yun. Reviewed by Damon Foster

An earlier Jet Li movie, and I suppose it's as good as any, to getting an introduction to Jet's superb martial arts skills. ABBOT HAI TENG OF SHAOLIN, however, is one of those rarest of things, an actual kung fu documentary-- something which, until recently, was more scarce than the concept of birth-control in a Mexican household. As such, it's educational, historical, and enlightening-- a real eye-opener (unless you watched it along side similar documentaries like DRAGONS OF THE ORIENT; in which case, it's a real eye-shutter). So this movie was definitely worth watching at least once, and since the English subtitles are fairly visible, all the better; so we can chuckle at lines like: "He's already sweat soak".

But do they really expect me to believe this Shaolin monk (real life kung fu oldtimer Hai Teng) to be an 86-year-old virgin? Do they think I really believe he's doing a single fingered handstand? Yeah right, and I wanna' put my face in K.D. Lang's armpit! We never see how Hai Teng gets in and out of this incredibly rigorous (possibly impossible) 1-fingered handstand position and only see him from one angle; he's motionless. Though his feet are leaning on the wall, I suspect he's got suspension wires (just like Jet Li himself!) or some sort of support behind him. But at this age, the fact that he could do anything like that (with or without hidden help) is still pretty amazing. Increasing my skepticism is that there are movie sound FX dubbed in, all through the movie! In one shot, at the very beginning, it's funny because we

hear full grown men yelling, and yet the monks are actually little kids! I don't know how they can pass off all these fights, work-outs and sparring sessions as documentary fodder, so long as they've got the same schlocky sound FX and kiais heard in the average HK kung fu fantasy! The so-called "sparring" scenes are a little too choreographed, too movie-like; I'm not at all convinced of their authenticity. At least a couple of these sessions are sped-up, and it's really obvious. But other scenes made me really re-evaluate my knowledge of kung fu & cinema. Abbot Hai Teng teaching a student how to use a bench as a weapon; and all this time I thought Jackie Chan invented that gimmick for 1970s comedies!

The rigorous work-outs of orthodox monks sure look strenuous, using their hands, feet and head to hit solid objects-- no wonder their hardened bodies can generate such lethal strikes! Also of interest are those holes in the floor, as seen in SHAOLIN TEMPLE: These indentations in the Shaolin floor are called "mysterious" & "miraculous", yet it's obvious that the exact steps & katas, over the years (or centuries) are what caused these dents in the brick work. Kung fu founder Dah Mo (aka Tak Mor, Darma, Darma, Bodidarma, etc.) is mentioned of course, and they even show footage of Hai Teng meditating in the same cave that the Indian pilgrim supposedly stayed in, 600 years ago. This kung fu founder is no stranger to OC readers, but in this movie, his name gets a new translation, a new variation: Tat Hui.

There are incredible kung fu demonstrations by many Mainland Chinese traditional fighters, and of course, one of them is Jet Li. This is old footage of him, possibly from the late 1970s or early 1980s. Attired in really dorky gym clothes that only a Commie or second-hand bargain shopper would wear, and actually having hair on his head, it's hard to know for sure if this footage pre-dates SHAOLIN TEMPLE, but I suspect not. I think that the

by Damon Foster, Garo Nigoghossian, Jeff Goodhartz, Alberto Martinez & Linda Arroyo

second "Shaolin Temple" movie (KIDS FROM SHAOLIN) sucked so bad that Red China's second nitch was to make documentaries like this one. By padding out spots with work-out footage of Jet Li, they could exploit the name and make money. But there's also stock-footage from SHAOLIN TEMPLE (it looks like they transferred it by projecting the flick on a wall somewhere and having a movie camera capture these cruddy images), which this documentary (or, "mockumentary" is more like it) tries unsuccessfully to pass off as training footage, like Jet Lee really dresses like a 600 A.D. priest in his spare time (but then, considering how geeky his modern clothes are, he might as well dress like a monk of yester-century)?! In one crappy looking projection from SHAOLIN TEMPLE, Jet Li is fighting with another monk, and the subtitles claim it's a real life challenge-- from a Japanese! But there's plenty of footage of young Jet working out, and many other impressive martial artists strut their tough. We also see a minute or two of Jet getting advice from his real-life teacher, Coach Wu Bin.

According to this movie, Hai Teng became a monk at 22, learning under sifu Yuen Wu & Ju Feng; and he studied kung fu for 60 years. We learn a little of his upbringing, and see a couple shots of him as a youngster. Hai Teng reminisces about being a young Shaolin monk, having to carry buckets of water up hills, which we've all seen re-enacted in the movies. Hai Teng's interest & exploits in Buddhism was so great that he even went to Tibet to philosophize with their monks, Lamas and camels. At one point, he refused the opportunity to start a Shaolin Temple in New York! Can you blame him? I mean, think of it: "Third Floor: Law Offices, Print Specialists, Shaolin Temple and H&R Block. Watch your step." He had received an invitation to do this, in his early years. Granted, he's old (and probably dead by now), so his demonstrations & katas aren't im-

pressive at all-- not compared to that of his younger, more agile, more energetic students. \*\*1/2 -DF

### BLACK MASK

1996, Dir.: Daniel Lee Yan-Kong, Action Dir.: Yuen Woo-Ping, Cast: Jet Li, Lau Ching-Wan, Karen Morri, Françoise Yip Fong-Wah, Patrick Lung Kong, Xiong Xin-Xin, Moses Chan Ho, Chung King-Fai, Ken Lok Tat-Wah, Lawrence Ah Mon, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Well, I've seen worse. This modern, semi-futuristic fantasy should amuse anybody who managed to sit through SAVIOR OF THE SOUL or HEROIC TRIO. BLACK MASK is based on some comicbook, but don't expect another DRAGON FROM RUSSIA or STORY OF RICKY. It's

a dark, dimly lit, sometimes gloomy farce, and is one of those rarest of things, a HK science fiction movie. Let's face it, the only really great HK sci-fi flick was INFRAMAN-- them Hong Kongese just don't have what it takes to make especially fun sci-fi. Not only is BLACK MASK a little drab, but not very original. It's a combination ripoff, swiping ideas from not just James Bond flicks, but GREEN HORNET and BLADE RUNNER also come to mind. In regards to the spy romps it tries to imitate, the real obvious part is the music. The classic "spy" guitar-riff, however, is too slow, and not very catchy-- perhaps an uppity score could have made this into a really entertaining ad-

venture. There's a brief guitar solo which never quite takes off; it sounds almost identical to Johnny Rivers' classic garage-rock hit, "Secret Agent Man", but the movie never quite utilizes any such fun tunes, and prefers to keep everything, both audio & visual, in a generally lackluster state.

I was relieved to read, in the opening credits, that kung fu choreography veteran Yuen Woo Ping organized the fight scenes. Thanks to him, the fistplay in BLACK MASK is at least watchable. It's most certainly not Yuen's best work (now there's the biggest understatement since "Whopie Goldberg is ugly!"), since there's enough distracting wirework, unnecessary FX and chop-edit ineptitude to remind us current HK action movies suck. Yet the fights are indeed okay, and if you cram all the best shots together, you just might get something as exciting as a mere five minutes of the average 1980s HK actioner! So as long as we lower our standards and not expect another classic action film like BOOK OF HEROES or OUTLAW BROTHERS, the martial arts, flying leaps, acrobatic flips, explosive gunplay and special effects will manage to entertain.

The tale's opening shoot-out is okay. Though Jet Li stars in BLACK MASK, I felt it was Lau Ching-Wan who stole the film, as a cop determined to nab the local gang of drug-dealing, computer-hacking, kung fu kicking, gun-toting villains. They're part of some genetic experiment; scientifically engineered warriors (remember Ricardo Montalban's squad in the STAR TREK episode, "The Space Seed"?) who are pretty tough, but they also happen to be pretty mean. Their ugly, long-haired leader is nasty, as is some cute bitch in black leather and fishnet stockings. They're immune to pain, which makes defeating them harder than finding a Mexican who's not Catholic. Fortunately, one member of this group defects from their atrocities, and wears a mask to make him look rather like the Green Hornet. This hero, played by Jet Li, aids the cop in his battle-- inbetween stupid shinanigans at a library where he works, that is. Eventually, Jet Li, with a little help from his cop buddy, wipe out all the villains and then the movie ends. \* -DF

### BODYGUARD FROM BEIJING

Dir.: Corey Yuen Kwai, Action Dir.: Corey Yuen Kwai, Yuen Tak, Screenwriter: Gordon Chan Ka-Seung, John Chan Kin Chung, Starring Jet Li, Christie Cheung, Kent Chang, Ngai Sing, Leung Wing Chung, Ng Wai Kwok, William Chu Wai-Lim, Reviewed by Damon F.

Just another average crime-drama.

BODYGUARD FROM BEIJING isn't really a bad movie, but it's unremarkable and really just didn't do anything for me. I'm just guessing, of course, but I think it's a ripoff of the American movie THE BODYGUARD, starring Whitney Dallas, or whatever the hell she's called. I've not seen that movie (and never will) because its sappy, pretentious, weak little theme song (played to death on commercial radio back when the movie came out) annoyed the hell out of me during the film's release. But I saw enough clips and spoofs of THE BODYGUARD to get the impression that this here BODYGUARD FROM BEIJING just might be a Hong Kongese variation on the story.

Cute Christie Cheung makes almost any movie worth seeing because she's so pretty. And Jet Lee's performance isn't that of the naive, innocent idiot he's commonly cast as. Lee plays a cool, slick character, and although he lacks the charisma of Chow Yun Fat, his character does command a considerable amount of respect from the audience. He's a skilled, professional, no-nonsense bodyguard determined to get the job done.

The action quality is adequate, I guess. The opening shoot-out would have been more effective were it not for a ridiculous scene of a bunch of men-in-black who pull out large white sheets and jump into a swimming pool. I just couldn't figure out why they did this; I thought I was watching a comedy which was going to spoof them dumb "water-folley-musicals", or whatever they're called. But this is a modern crime-drama, and a pretty serious one; so why such an artsy-fartsy pattern would befall this opening sequence set at a swimming pool, I know not. But it doesn't matter, since the gun shoot-outs are average at best. Hell, in one scene, there's a stupid editing blunder; a real continuity flaw: Watch for the shopping mall scene where Jet fires his pistol at an assassin on an escalator. There are other people in the mall, and the script called for the other patrons on the escalator to bend their heads down and cover their ears, once the shooting starts. Well, one guy on the escalator was impatient for his "15-seconds-of-fame", and just couldn't wait! This idiotic extra already has his arms protecting his ears, before the hitman pulls out his gun!

In the script department, it's the same old story of some bodyguard protecting a lovely woman (she's a witness, the story is similar to Clint Eastwood's THE GAUNTLET) who at first doesn't like him, but the two of them eventually fall for each other. But being a HK movie, and one of Jet Lee in particular, the two of them never actually make it into bed. Jet is still to unrealistically wholesome for that sort of thing. Anyway, inbetween scenes of Lee



installing lotsa' surveillance equipment & other high-tech gadgets all around the chick's luxurious house, and scenes involving some foolish kid (the wintesse's little brother) who plays with guns, there are occasional bouts against the local villains. Since the gunplay was not directed by John Woo, it's nothing spectacular. But BODYGUARD FROM BEIJING's kung fu fights are okay. The fist fights are pretty slick, but there's no really impressive stuntwork. Yet I still was somewhat entertained by these fist-cuffs, since the suspension-wire crap was kept to a minimum; though it's still present. \*1/2 -DF

## 中季英 九气

### BORN TO DEFENSE

(British dub: "Born To Defend"); 1986, Presented by: Sil Metropole Organization Ltd., Executive Prod.: Fu Chi, Dir.: Jet Li, Prod. Manager: Lam Ping Kwan, Screenplay: Sze Yeung, Ping Jie, Er Ge, Special Action Sequences Designed & Directed by: Tsui Siu Ming, Cast: Jet Li, Kurt Roland Peterson, Zhad Er Kang, Paulo H.P.Tocha, Reviewed by D. Foster

Born to "Defense" (though I did see an English-dubbed rental released as "Born To Defend" on a store-rack somewhere, which makes sense; but as yet, I've not rented this version)? Just what illiterate idiot thought up that title?! And was it the same bigoted moron who made this Jet Li's most brutal, most prejudiced movie? This is Jet's cruelest film, his character delights in nearly torturing the Americans to death at the climax, and BORN TO DEFENSE is just as racist as any 1970s chop-sockey caper. This movie is so blatantly anti-American that it makes you wonder what these stupid chinks (referring only to the film's writers, and not Chinese people in general) have up their asses. Just what's *their* problem? Were these writers around in post-WWII China? Were they really downtrodden by black & white sailors? Speaking of post-war settings, that says it all about BORN TO DEFENSE. That's the reason I guess I'll forgive its moronic assumption tat all round-eyes are evil (but I swear, it's been several weeks since I raped a Chinese hooker!), since the setting is after the war, and I don't doubt for a minute that some American G.I.'s were making shambles of the Chinese peasantry. In fact, the scenes near the beginning, of a wreckless driver (an American soldier) are more than similar to that of Sonny Chiba's THE KILLING MACHINE.

So again, the approach is chop-sockey

inspired, but with a certain 1980s flare: Superb acrobatics, thrilling kung fu, and sensational stunts! Despite the movie's pretentious, pro-Chinese, anti-everybody else approach, the action scenes make all these shortcomings forgivable, and so long as we take it as a cartoon adventure, and not some factual documentary on humanity, BORN TO DEFENSE is, well, Born To Entertaining! Born To Fun! Born To Enjoying! You like it movie, no?! I very like it much, is loved for fightings! View it on Chinese New Year, and chant: "Gung Hei Bok-Choil!"

The saga begins during the tail end of WWII, as them wonderful, can-do-no-harm people, the Chinese are having a shoot 'em up with tanks & soldiers of that most dreaded of homosapiens, the vastly inferior (gasp!) non-Chinese (get them out of our country!)! Eeeyu! In this case, it's them especially evil Japanese of course (get them off our planet!). This is the funnest war-movie footage I've ever seen; the explosions, gunplay, tanks and flying leaps really make Jet Li and the other Chinese heroes look prolific and charismatic, and anybody who can incorporate gymnastics into WWII gunplay is okay in my book. But after the war, there's a scene of Jet Li giving blood which rally made me cringe! The scene of needles going into Jet's arm were a little too excessive & explicit for my taste. But the real script, of course, has Jet Li in the marketplace, fighting tournaments, and bars wiping out the round eyed, foriegn devils. The Chinese-versus-American bar-fight is strange in that it almost makes the yankees look good! They're having fun & living it up, it's the uptight Chinese who's party animal characteristics amount to playing stupid flutes (and badly), and being generally uptight. Hell, at first it looks as though these yankee sailors are trying to let Jet Li and friends in on the humor & clowning around, yet Jet's jealous friends will have no part of it. Regardless, both groups immediately become rivals as the caucasians harass local hookers, so eventually, Jet Li has no choice but to go psycho and kill them all. \*\*\* -DF

## 龍之天作

### DRAGONS OF THE ORIENT

(aka "Dargons of the Orient" as it was misspelled on a video rental box), Shin Shin Film Prod.; 1988, Dir.: Rocky Law, Cast: Yang Ching, Wang Chun, Jet Li, Reviewed by Damon Foster

An interesting look at China's history, its culture, and its marital arts. This

documentary's scenic footage (much of it from a helecopctor, at the opening) of temples, forests & mountains drags on a little too long and seems like the work of some tourism burough, but otherwise the movie is decent. It speaks of historical martial artists, mentioning Wong Fei Hung, Hung Xi, Fung Si Yue (aka Fung Sai Yuk), and of course the Ten Tigers of Kwantung. It then comes to the present, showing pictures of Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan, and Kim Tai Chung (who's actually Korean, not Chinese), of all people. Then it quickly cuts to its obligatory Jet Li training footage (with the overplayed "Drunken Master" music we've heard a zillion times), some of which also appeared in SHAOLIN KUNG FU, another documentary.

There's also a dramatic sequence that tells the story that re-occurs off and on, throughout the movie: Some female reporter from HK comes to Mainland China to find out about Shaolin's kung fu. None of the people in this lengthy skit are bad fighters, but to me, the story is just acted out to encourage tourism. But there's some strange stuff; like the water wells supposedly at Shaolin. One well has sweet water, while another has a bitter flavor. It's never explained how or why common wells have different flavors--perhaps I don't want to know. Anyway, after more kung fu demonstrations, our two "hosts", or rather, protagonists look at a few sculptures and antiques. Normally, I find this stuff tedious, but it was a refreshing change from the endless katas and staged bouts. Speaking of "staged", they again show stock footage from SHAOLIN TEMPLE or some such film, where Jet Li and another actor play dueling monks. And, as in ABBOT HAI TENG OF SHAOLIN, we're told that this clip is of Jet Li accepting a challenge from a Japanese guy. I don't get it; if they need to bullshit us, at least respect our intelligence a little.

Like that other documentary, ABBOT HAI TENG OF SHAOLIN, artificial sounds a plenty; fake noises abound whenever people "fight". Don't they have live sound microphone/camera combinations? I think this would be more appropriate for a "factual documentary than the artificial sounds they took from kung fu movies. It's strange that they felt the need to "enhance" these work-outs with sounds like that of some old Bruce Li movie! I wonder how these martial artists feel about being dubbed in! Since most martial artists are glory seekers, show-offs, and wannabe performers, this film had no problem finding kung fu masters more than eager to demonstrate for us. Granted, their skills are sensational-- but if you've seen one Chinese

girl working out, you've seen 'em all, and the repetitious format lost my attention early on.

There's also some daredevil indurance type stuff. Breaking dishes & bricks takes skill and a tough body. But the scene of the guy rolling on broken glass can be explained: The glass doesn't look sharp, and the shards are lying horizontal, not pointing up vertically. The kata in the fire is no biggie; lotsa' people do 'fire-walking'! It's not that hazardous if the feet keep moving, and basically stomping out the fire as they go-- and it helps to have the feet wetted before doing such a, well-- feet feat. Some of the other feats done are a little harder for me to debunk, and do require endurance and a high pain threshold; not to mention the willingness to perform like a freak in some circus side-show. These sequences are made all the more amusing with such bizarre subtitles like: "He's practicing Iron Finger. Such title is tofu for him."

Jet Li's footage is spliced here and there, at various points in the movie to remind us this flick belongs in a Jet Li biography. Some old shots of him with Wu Bin, family stuff (i.e. his mother's birthday party), playing chess with old men to show his respect for his elders, and other work-out scenes, some of which can also be seen in other documentaries. \*\*1/2 - DF

#### DR. WAI IN THE SCRIPTURE WITH NO WORDS

1996, Dir.: Ching Siu Tung, Action Dir.: Ching Siu Tung, Ma Yuk Sing, Screenwriters: Sandy Shaw (Siu Lai King), Szeto Cheuk Han, Ah Lun (Lam Wai Lun), Running Time: 90 Min., Starring Jet Lee, Rosamund Kwan, Takeshi Kaneshiro (Gum Sing Mo), Rosamund Kwan, Charlie Yeung, Choi Nei, Ngai Sing, Law Kar Ying, Billy Chow Bei Lei, Johnny Kong Yeuk Sing, Reviewed by DF

Jet Li as the "King of Adventurers"! He battles villains, which include ninjas and an occasional sumo wrestler, in order to get his hands on some magic box! But wait; there's more! Foolish people who look into this box are burned by some deadly light, which turns them into zombies! Obviously, this 1996 movie is serious fun, a refreshing change from all them Wong Fei Hung morality plays! Much of this story reminds me of all that post-"Indiana Jones" stuff; successors dealing with mythical adventurer/novelist "Wisely", of films like THE LEGEND OF WISELY and THE 7TH CURSE.

Speaking of fictional literature, that's where this movie gets artisty and starts to stink. It seems that this humorous, imaginative adventure is actually part of

a book being written by some boring office workers who we cut back to several times as the haphazard script jumps back and forth. The same actors (Jet Li, Rosamund Kwan, etc.) play both the modern-day paper-pushers and the old style (circa 1920s) adventurers.

The modern-setting scenes pretty much suck. Jet Li and other novelists behind thier computers, talking about some divorce. Rosamund Kwan (playing a bitchie wife), though cute, is really boring. These scenes are scan-button fodder, just get to where these people do their story-telling-- that's when DR. WAI IN THE SCRIPTURE WITH NO WORDS salutes the "Wisely" legend, dazzling us with nifty sets, huge props, a monstrous rat, stunts, and let's not forget: Kung fu!

At times the battles are almost as spiffy as that of an '80s adventure. About 80% of the battles is the real deal, the cables which disrespect gravity & our intelligence aren't over-used. This is ironic, seeing as if ever there was a script which could conveniently include such airborne feats of stupidity, it would be this far-fetched fantasy. The story, though rather hard to follow unless you've got a humongous TV screen to read them tiny subtitles, has something to do with the quest for both scriptures and a magic box. \*\*1/2 - DF



#### FIST OF LEGEND

1994, Director: Gordon Ka-Seung, Action Directors: Yuen Woo-Ping, Yuen Cheung-Yan, Yuen Sun-Yi, Kuk Hin-Chiu, Running Time: 102 Min., Cast: Jet Li, Shinobu Nakayama, Chin Siu-Ho, Ada Choi Siu-Fun, Yasuaki Kurata, Billy Chow Bei-Lei, Paul Chun Pui, Yuen Cheung-Yan, Yuen Sun-Yi, Ko Kiu Lei To, Jackson Lau Hok-Yin, Tam Suk-Mui, Lee Man-Biu, Lam Kong, Reviewed by Damon F.

Wow! So HK movie-makers, in the 1990s, were capable of martial arts films of this magnitude? Then why have they chosen to produce mainly crap, all these years!? FIST OF LEGEND has got to be Jet Lee's best movie; it harkens back to the good old days! It's an updated successor to the average 1970s chop-sockey romps, but with a better budget, more skillful crew, and people with a lot of experience. It reminds me of Sybelle Hu's RENDEZVOUS OF JAPANESE KANTO, which, like FIST OF LEGEND, is basically a remake of Bruce Lee's FIST OF FURY. The similarities between FIST OF FURY and FIST OF LEGEND are striking, since they're based on the same story. But LEGEND is not a scene-by-scene remake of FURY, it's not like seeing INVASION OF THE SAU-

CER MEN and THE EYE CREATURES back to back-- since there are significant differences between both interpretations of Chen's Ching Wu School. Many of the same elements (Japanese occupation of 1906 Shanghai, the bashing of the insulting sign, racial tensions, the poisoning of a kung fu teacher, etc.) can be seen in both films, but the deck has been re-shuffled.

Personally, I think LEGEND is even better than Bruce Lee's movie, because it's not as boring or depressing. There are many more fights, and I dare say the ones in LEGEND are as good as those in FURY. Also, LEGEND, being a 1990s film, isn't as prejudiced as FIST OF FURY, which has got to be one of the most racist movies ever made (perhaps second only to BIRTH OF A NATION!). It's better than any of Steven Chow's FIST OF FURY 1991 crap anyway, that's for damn sure. I wish FIST OF LEGEND would have been as influential (on HK movie moguls) as FIST OF FURY was! Think of it, they could have made all these shlocky, cool ripoffs, with titles like FIST OF LEGEND III! They could hire some Let Lee immitator (perhaps called "Jet-Ski Lee", "Rocket Lee", "Jet-Fighter Lee", "Air-Craft Lee", or even Ho Chung Lil), and made a whole slew of amusing imitations! But alas, HK was more interested in human yo-yos of the Ching Dynasty, so there will never be a THE BIG LEGEND, THE LEGEND CONNECTION, RETURN/WAY OF THE LEGEND, ENTER THE LEGEND, or GAME OF LEGEND. Too bad, we could have had a whole new renaissance of unintended comedies. Ironically, I did in fact hear that there was some elusive sequel called FIST OF LEGEND II: IRON BODYGUARDS! Assuming this is true, the film in question doesn't star Jet Li, but rather "Jet Le"! I swear I'm not making this up! Also appearing in IRON BODYGUARDS (which again, I've no proof the movie actually exists) is Jean Claude Van Damme's stunt-double!

Jet Li is mighty impressive in LEGEND, thanks to abundant use of a stunt-double; some guy without a leg injury who doesn't need suspension wires. Even so, Jet seems to look good too; finally, a movie which is truly deserving of his skills; a flick which actually let's us see Jet's high-speed punches, beautifully executed kicks, and an excellent kata or two. That is, assuming he really did any of this. Sprinkle his fights with a couple 1980s-style stunts, and a little bit of weapons stuff, and you've got one of the most exciting kung fu films of the 1990s. Co-hero Chin Siu-Ho (MR. VAMPIRE, GHOSTS GALORE, THE TAI CHI MASTER) is an outstanding fighter too, and nearly upstages Jet Li himself. A strong supporting role

comes to us courtesy of Yasuaki Kurata, an oldtimer, a veteran, and a father to martial arts cinema. Though he usually played Japanese villains, he's given us some memorable performances over the years. A complete filmography of him just wouldn't be possible; his roles number in the hundreds, at least; possibly thousands! If ever there was an actor I would like to interview, it would be Kurata—I'm sure he's got some stories to tell. Though older now, and making occasional use of a stunt-double, he acts & fights well in *FIST OF LEGEND*. Though he plays a Japanese martial artist who duels with Jet Li, he's not a villain, in fact it's he, though playing a Japanese, who delivers the most righteous dialogue in the movie. Despite their fight (and a nifty bout it is), the two characters remain friends and Kurata doesn't die!

More Japanese vs. Chinese martial arts, but this time, the script makes it clear that there are no good guys, no bad guys—everyone has a racist streak. Jet Li's Chen character has a Japanese girlfriend, Mitsuko, and his fellow Chinese won't accept her! The other characters in this story of the early 20th century (just a few years after the Boxer Rebellion) Ching Wu kung fu school are equally interesting, as these student strive to find out which Japanese soldier (aided by a Chinese traitor, of course) poisoned the food of their teacher. Plenty of challenges and fights, plus dialogue in both Japanese and Chinese, during the course of this excellent movie. In the end, Chen (Jet Lee) defeats the Japanese general who instigated the poisoning. But there's a trick ending: We're all expecting the Japanese soldiers to gun down our hero, just like in *THE WARLORD AND THE ACTRESS*, *FIST OF FURY*, *RENDEZ-VOUS OF JAPANESE KANTO*, and Bruce Le's *BRUCE AND SHAOLIN KUNG FU*. But instead, it's revealed our hero (Jet Lee) wasn't really shot. The ending is a little confusing, but I still love the movie. \*\*\*\*\* -DF

#### A SECOND OPINION:

**FIST OF LEGEND-** I saw this movie a long time ago so I don't have a great memory of it, but I do know that Jet Li's kung fu is his most realistic here. He doesn't use a lot of wires, and performs some great moves in *FIST OF LEGEND*. It's a remake of Bruce Lee's *CHINESE CONNECTION*. It's not as good as Bruce's film, and includes a cop-out ending, contrast to Bruce's suicidal leap into the air in this film. \*\*\*\* -Alberto Martinez (aka "Matango")



#### FONG SAI YUK

1993, Dir.: Corey Yuen Kwai, Action Dir.: Corey Yuen Kwai, Yuen Tak, Screenwriter: Jeff Lau Chun Wai, John Chan Kin Chung, Tsui Kong, Starring Jet Lee, Sybelle Hu, Josephine Siao, Fong Fong, Michelle Reis, Chan Chung Yung, Paul Chu Kong, Zhao Wen Zhou, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Though I don't know who the hell Adam Cheng's Chan Ka Lok (he only appears briefly at the beginning and ending of *FUNG SAI YUK*) hero is, and as usual the excessive wire-work & MTV-style of quick-edits gave me a headache, I did in fact find *FUNG SAI YUK* to be somewhat entertaining. Jet Lee actually amused me in this one, the character is likable and even funny (i.e. he and Tiger Lui's musical interlude one morning). The romantic poetry gets sappy after a while, but otherwise, even the quirkiest scenes remain tolerable, despite inevitable slow sequences which tend to drag and are obviously just filler so video releasers can chop the tapes in half to rip us off. But regardless, on the whole, in the final analysis, in the end, when you get right down to it, I guess *FUNG SAI YUK* is one okay little comedy. *FUNG SAI YUK* didn't make me into a born again fan of weightless Chinamen and overpaid film-editors, but then again, if it were a woman, I wouldn't kick it out of bed.

First Jet Lee butchered the Wong Fei Hung legend in *ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA*, and now he's bastardized another factual folk hero, Fung Sai Yuk—who I no little about. I thought Fung Sai Yuk was the same dude as Fung Si Yi, mentioned in *FIVE MASTERS OF DEATH*. But that character is of Shaolin, there's no Shaolin in *FUNG SAI YUK*, a typical ripoff of *ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA*, but not as boring or nauseating. At least visually, Fung Sai Yuk looks just like Wong Fei Hung, but is a more mischevious character, an obnoxious son who sneaks around behind his father's back, much like Jackie Chan in *DRAGON LORD*. In fact, there are sports/kung fu tournaments in *FUNG SAI YUK*, which also remind me of *DRAGON LORD*.

There are intriguing characters throughout, like Fong Sai Yuk's sexually confused friend (she falls for Jet's mother, who herself, is love hungry), and of course Jet Lee's amusing mother, who tries to mimick Western fashions, with disastrous results. Equally silly is Tiger Lui, a character I thought for sure was a villain; but a plot twist changed all that—so this movie isn't as predictable as the rest.

Despite predictably overdone wire-work (hell, in one scene, the cables are

clearly visible), there are still plenty of enjoyable kung fu fights in this story about: Anti-Ming mercenaries blah blah blah, winning a girl's hand in marriage blah blah blah, woman dresses as a man unconvincingly and a woman falls for him/her blah blah blah, pre-arranged marriage blah blah blah. Let's see, what else? Oh yes, there's the gory death of a blacksmith toward the film's opening. Otherwise, it's typical of 1990s "wire fu", but I did get a slight chuckle out of the scene of Jet Lee in drag. He makes an ugly woman; I wouldn't kiss him, not even with your lips. \*\* -Damon Foster



#### FONG SAI YUK 2

1993, Dir.: Corey Yuen Kwai, Starring Jet Li, Michelle Reis, Josephine Siao Fong, Corey Yuen Kwai, Adam Cheng Siu Chow, Amy Kwok Oi Ming, Ji Chunhuo, Reviewed by DF

The first *FONG SAI YUK* was infinitely more tolerable than this hasty follow-up. The first flick had me laugh once or twice, but in this inferior mess of a sequel, the only amusing character is Fung Sai Yuk's mother (who was also pretty silly in *FUNG SAI YUK*). There are two main problems with *FUNG SAI YUK 2*....

Numer Uno: It tries to take all the same elements & situations as seen in the first movie, and include & re-arrange them.

FONG  
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2



In the first movie, most of this nonsense made sense, it was able to be squeezed into the plot (s). But this time around, the nonsense just makes more nonsense. Yet again, we've got the stupid contest, the eccentric mother, and vying for some chick's hand in marriage (and her vagina in bed). They were so concerned with "living up" (don't ask me why) to the predecessor that they forgot to create an even remotely coherent plot to let FUNG SAIYUK II stand up on its own merrit. So instead, the viewer is left with a series of disjointed shinanegans, and a vague plot, if any.

Numero Two-o: Yes, here we go yet again; and I'm really getting sick of whining about this: Lame fights! Hell, this is a HK movie, damn it; it's not expecting too much, we should get to see some enjoyable martial arts! But no siree, what we've got here is more of that haphazard, post-MTV style editing and endless wirework. People flying in the air unrealistically, and zillions of headache-inducing clips, cuts & edits, so you really can't tell what the fuck is going on. The first FUNG SAIYUK at least had some martial arts. Martial arts, remember them? It used to be how well you could kick & punch, but now the martial arts seem to be the product of aviation.

Like I said before, my favorite character in both films is Fung Sai Yuk's mother; the actress playing her is pretty funny. In one scene she does a half-ass Zato Ichi impression to defeat a squad of samurai at some creek (this whole battle was nifty, except that everybody is surfing without surf-boards). Fung Sai Yuk himself later uses the swords of these samurai (apparently, the word "samurai" is both singular and plural; though I'd rather say "samurais" to show there's more than one) when he too tries to be Zato Ichi (he blindfolds himself), as he slaughters several treacherous villains (Chinese backstabbers), in order to rescue his mother from a grueling hanging sequence (the bad guy has a noose around her neck, allowing Jet Lee's rescue to feature more gravity-defying acrobatics and similar worthless shit).

The script, amazingly, is pathetically simple: Fung Sai Yuk is a member of Mr. Chan's (the mysterious revolutionary seen briefly in the first movie; at least this time around, we see who he is; played by Adam Cheng, I think) sect. There's another guy in the Sect, who's ugly, has no eyebrows and is incredibly mean, so Fung Sai Yuk eventually has a duel to the death with this slimey, corrupt villain. That's the whole story, but since that whole tale would take up only fifteen minutes or so, the whole concept is stretched out and bogged-down with

endless filler; bad comedy, dialogue galore, uninteresting characters who add nothing positive to an already intolerable script, and lots of suspension-rope garbage. \* -DF

### HIGH RISK

{aka "The Timid and the Brave"} Wong Ching Motion Pictures' 1995, Dir.: Wong Jing, Starring: Jackie Cheung, Jet Li, Chingny Yau, Lam Kwok Bun, Valerie Chow, Wu Ma, Charlie Yeung, Reviewed by Damon Foster

A Bruce Lee salute is just what the sagging HK movie scene needs to liven up this otherwise decaying film industry. So it's Jackie Cheung's Bruce Lee imitation which really highlights this otherwise average action/comedy/thriller. His kung fu fight proves that the simple things work best; I found it a lot more fun than the endless explosions, John Woo-wannabe gunplay and helicopter crashes which supposedly "highlight" HIGH RISK. My other favorite scenes are short spoofs towards the beginning, where Jackie, playing movie star Frankie, is behind-the-scenes, on the set of typical, 1970s chop-sockey films. Though these bits are satirical, I felt they should have made the whole script for HIGH RISK into one of these classic, old-style films.

One of the funniest things is the guy representing kung fu star Frankie's manager. He's clearly meant to look like Willy Chan, except that this one is a flaming homo. It never before occurred to me that Willie Chan (Jackie Chan's manager; no relation) had a feminine persona. Also starring in HIGH RISK of course, is martial arts master Jet Li, who, amazingly, does even less martial arts than pop-star/singer Jackie Cheung (who's single fight is more fun than all of Jet's action scenes combined). Where as Jackie's satirical character is played for laughs, Jet plays the serious character, one with real emotions, depth and a vendetta against a savage villain who killed his family and a bus loaded with elementary school children. Jet's leading lady is the ever beautiful Chingny Yau, and since their romance is used sparingly, it's one of the few love-stories (in recent years) that didn't annoy me.

As a movie on the whole, HIGH RISK is pretty good. Scenes of boring dialogue aren't as long & dull as they could have been, and the scenes of humor (i.e. Jackie Cheung spoofing both Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan) had me laugh out loud nearly three whole times! There are strange flaws, however. For example, most of the movie takes place at a big, posh hotel called the Granduer Hotel. But this is spelled three separate ways in

HIGH RISK: There are two signs featured, one of which is spelled correctly, "Granduer Hotel". Another spells it 'Granedur Hotel', and then of course there are the subtitles which spell it "Grandtu Hotel".

There's a female character who's name is clearly pronounced Joyce, but the subtitles (plenty of misspelled words and poor grammar throughout, as always) call her "Jace". But these are minor gripes, because I can't think of anything serious to complain about (other than they're allowing Jackie Cheung to upstage Jet Li, who's a far superior martial artist). It is, however, a little awkward how it so abruptly switches from blood & gore to slapstick comedy, and then back again. Oh well, an uneven film isn't necessarily a bad film.

This script has Cheung as a kung fu movie star called Frankie, who is supposedly known for doing all his own stunts. It's apparent that they're spoofing Jackie Chan, who, for years, claimed he did all his own stunts, yet there's speculation that this has been a lie. Rumors include: 1. The climactic kick where Chan wastes Benny Urquidez in DRAGONS FOREVER was actually Yuen Biao, not Jackie, doing this beautiful horizontal midair spin kick! 2. Jackie was doubled for extensively in the pachinko-arcade battle in THUNDERBOLT, because Jackie's foot was broken at the time of the shooting. 3. In RUMBLE IN THE BRONX, it's suspected it was actually director Stanley Tong who did the building-to-building jump, not Jackie. I think this was reported by Clyde Genital (or whatever the fuck his name is), and I have recently begun to dispute this account. The film's outtakes tell me it was indeed Jackie, but perhaps Stanley Tong did it too, as a rehearsal. But these ramblings are quite irrelevant; the point being that the cruel satire in HIGH RISK goes further than that, with the character of Frankie having his stunt-double (Jet Li) do all his stunts and then simultaneously lie to the press, relentlessly. But the parodies of Jackie Chan don't last long, because a group of military-like villains have raided a fancy hotel to steal jewels, and blast half the clientele away in the process. At some point, a girl is trapped in a bathroom, and the villains have unleashed snakes and an iguana (of all things); just what idiot wrote this script?! And does he know a damn thing about animals? So iguanas and snakes are bloodthirsty people-eaters!? Most of the time, it's Jet Li as the hero who uses plenty of gunplay and a little martial arts to rescue the hostages and thwart the villains from hijacking the whole building. Jackie's character is presented as a bumbling poser who can

never live up to his image in films, until finally, attired in a yellow, GAME OF DEATH track-suit, battles a main villain and eventually beats him to a bloody pulp. So the good guys win, and Frankie (Jackie Cheung) gets full credit for defeating the brutal jewel thieves, only this time, he definitely deserved some of it. \*\*\* -Damon F.

### THE HITMAN

*Presented by Charles Heung, Producer: Gordon Chan, Administrative Producer: Tiffany Chan, Admin. Assoc. Prod.: Stanley Wu, Assoc. Prod.: Gin Lau, Art Dir.: Bill Lau, Scriptwriting Idiots: Chan Heng Ka, Vincent Kwok, Starring: Jet Li, Eric Tsang, Simon Yam, Gigi Leung, Sato Kenji, Raul Rapovski, Io Kwang Kim, Hidari Meiken, Timmy Ho, Reviewed by DF*

Hell, Chuck Norris had a movie called THE HITMAN (1991), and that movie, an American one no less, was a lot more amusing than this boring exercise in tedium! We all know that current HK cinema is as enjoyable as sticking your face in K.D. Lang's armpit, but for these films to become worse than American ones?!?!? I never thought I'd see the day. But Jet Li's THE HITMAN is a typical example of HK movies going downhill. THE HITMAN does have some deceptive slickness, like something from a 1980s classic (therefore fooling us into thinking we're about to partake on another thrilling adventure), but within the first ten minutes, it becomes aggravatingly obvious that this movie will suck, big time! Despite the occasionally nice cinematography, and a lavish interior or two (but then, how hard is it to take a movie-camera into a luxurious, large building?), what we got here is a fairly low budget (and low fun) movie. The film quality looks to be a little on the poor side at times, almost reminding me of cheap 1970s chop-sockey-- only nowhere near as fun a movie.

Obviously, it's cheaper to pay actors to talk (and talk, and talk, and talk, and talk, and talk, and talk), than to hire martial arts choreographers and stuntmen. So this misleading movie fools us into thinking we're watching an action film, but it's really just a pointless, meandering soap-opera that seems to go on forever. The scenes of dramatic dialogue (all eleven-levens of them!) don't maintain the audience's interest because there really aren't any compelling characters in the film. Jet Li plays some boring, naive geek, and Eric Tsang isn't as funny as he was back in the days of them "Lucky Stars" flicks. Tsang was kinda' funny in one of THE HITMAN's scenes though: He jumps in mid-air, trying to fire a pistol in the tradition of Chow Yun Fat

in THE KILLER and/or Hiroshi Yamaguchi in KAI KETSU ZUBAT, but not until he's airborne does he realize the gun lacks bullets! Eric Tsang's other humorous moment is where he tries to upstage Jet Li's fighting ability (though we see very little of it). Tsang replies by knocking out an attractive woman. In regards to battered women, let's just say that I prefer them extra crispy. Regardless; these were the only amusing scenes in this flick's attempts at comedy. Simon Yam, on the other hand, was my favorite character in the movie. He plays a cool cop and/or detective, but his screentime is somewhat limited, so maybe that's why I liked him-- he wasn't around enough to be boring. I've not been so bored since I listened to the latest Phil Collins hit, which goes: "Gaze into my Forehead; You're gettin Sleepy- Sleepy- Sleepy".

If nothing else, this is one of the few HK flicks to use the actors' real voices, since many scenes were shot with live-microphones; something which used to be unheard of in HK movies.

The drama sucks, most of the comedy sucks, and speaking of "sucks", the word applies to the action too. There are only a few fights, and most of them are incredibly short, and simple. There's no high-speed kicking, and only a little bit of impressive stuntwork. Perhaps this was intended; maybe the writers were going for a more realistic, less flashy approach. There are also a couple gun shoot-outs. But be it "gunplay" or "fistplay", the correct term is "child's play"-- there's really nothing spectacular to offer here. But that all changes during the last ten minutes, when Simon Yam finally aids Jet Li & Eric Tsang in their battle against the villains. This final confrontation is okay. Though the kung fu pales compared to Jackie Chan and the gun shots pale compared to John Woo, the climactic fight is worth seeing. Granted, it's slow compared to HK's Golden Years and won't impress old-timers who've seen Chinese cinema at its best, but I did rather enjoy the otherwise boring drama's climax. More kicks, punches, an occasional acrobatic wire stunt, and some nifty gunplay-- what we've come to expect from even the worst HK movies.

The story has something to do with hitmen, and some Japanese mafia (yes, in 1970s tradition, Japanese are once again portrayed as evil, sub-human skum). Jet Li and Eric Tsang are among those assassins hired to avenge the death of a truly slimey yakuza leader. Being the typical assassin-film, expect the obligatory "Hero-on-assignment-and-feels-guilty-and-doesn't-want-fellow-hitmen-to-kill-innocent-kids etc".

There's some mysterious, masked phantom called "Angel of Punishment", "Killer Angel", and "King of Killers". He's a good assassin (he only kills the most evil of villains), but the movie is still sort of a whodunnit, as the good guys talk their way through situation after situation in search of this mysterious character. Eventually, after all the Japanese (and their obligatory, caucasian henchman) are killed, it's revealed police chief Simon Yam was the masked killer all along. So, in order to be an uneven movie which confuses its audience, there's this watchable, yet absolutely out-of-place series of fights at the grand finale. Anyway, somehow, Yam, Li & Tsang get all this reward money (I guess the Japs they killed were worth some yen too), and it ends with them all toasting each other as millionaires, on some yacht. Let's see, what else happened? Oh yeah, Jet Li has a crush on Eric Tsang's "aspiring-lawyer" daughter. That's it, the movie is over. I never wanna' see it again; I'd rather invest my life savings in a Michael Jackson daycare center. 1/2 -DF

### A SECOND OPINION:

**THE HITMAN-** It's a shame that this 1.50 minute waste of my time may be Jet Li's final HK film, this movie is a mess! It tries being too many things and ends up being nothing. The film's central plot is workable, but it too often loses it's way with unfunny comedy and untouching relationships. I've found Eric Tsang fairly amusing in the "Lucky Stars" films, but unbearable in most other cases. Even though he & Jet's antics do figure into the main plot, there is still way too much time wasted on this boring stuff. Even the action scenes are lacking. While the fights and gunplay are as proficient as most other HK films, there is no dramatic build-up whatsoever. In this film, thing just happen. Yawn. Oh yeah, did I mention that it's one of Jet's worst? \*1/2 -Jeff Goodhartz



### KIDS FROM SHAOLIN

1983, Chung Yuen Motion Picture Co., Prod.: Liu Yet Yuen, Dir.: Cheung Sing Yim, Exec. Prod.: Fu Chi, Prod. Supervisor: Lau Fong, Screenplay: Leung Chi Keung, Ho Shu Hua, Cast: Jet Li, Wong Chiu Yin, Dim Nam, Yue Hai, Zhang Jien Hwu, Reviewed by D. Foster

I'm so glad this infantile farce is more commonly known as KIDS FROM SHAOLIN, and not the original, yet highly inaccurate title "Shaolin Temple 2"; since this inferior follow-up has nothing to do with *the* SHAOLIN TEMPLE. Made by the same crew of the predecessor, and starring some of the same people, but I don't recommend anybody watch both movies side-by-side; there's no comparison, and no continuity.

The opening scenes of animation (cartoons of Taoists working out and frolicking) are pretty cute, but almost immediately we switch to some river. These kids, and that damn river, seem to dominate most of the movie. My god, these stupid scenes drag on forever, there's just no end to this embarrassment! "Coming of Age" movies are among the most nauseating to watch, and at times, this stinker gets just as aggravating as any 1980s Molly Ringworm movie! In fact, KIDS gets worse, as at times it straddles over the line into semi-child pornography. The kids are irritating enough with their clothes on, but the scenes of little boys asses & dicks make me wonder just what sick pedophile wrote this script! In one scene, a man is so happy he has got a new baby boy (all his other offspring are daughters) that he plays with the infant's cock and places his face on it! *Sick!!* Obviously, this movie has a different audience than SHAOLIN TEMPLE. That classic's target viewership was martial arts fans, but KIDS FROM SHAOLIN was made to attract a neglected audience: N.A.M.B.L.A. members.

This dumb movie has another blow against it: At first, it starts out (gaspl) as a musical! Other than Trey Parker's exceptional CANNIBAL: THE MUSICAL (aka ALFRED PACKER: THE MUSICAL), I hate musicals. In one brief scene in KIDS FROM SHAOLIN, even Jet Li himself starts to sing. I don't know if that's really Jet's voice, but his annoying chant sounds like that of oldtimer Yueh Hua (remember his singing in 1960s films like COME DRINK WITH ME and THE MONKEY?) with a bad case of shivers.

With all these blows against it, Jet Li's second film deserves no stars at all. Excessive little kids, and distasteful comedy, and penial worship-- all grounds for a severe trashing. But low and behold, the climax features (shock of shocks!) some emmensely enjoyable swordplay and acrobatic stunts. The grande finale of flying poles, 3-sectional staffs, and sword swinging is fun. These climactic duels make the first half of KIDS worth sitting through-- almost! If you want a second opinion on this one, go to *O.C.: The Shaolin Issue*, where Jeff Goodhartz reviewed it under its "Shaolin Temple 2" title.

But since he and I agree on this movie, it's not much of a second opinion, I suppose.

The basic script is suppose to be about how some Shaolin descipals (who live at a riverside cottage, not Shaolin Temple) befriend local Taoists of rival Wu Tang (aka Wudong) clan, and how they unite against marauding bandits. But, among the four "but still"s, several "bastards" and women who always go "hmm!", there's also a lot of filler about boys and girls who try to get acquainted, at some river. Jet Li stars as the main heroic Shaolin guy, who eventually befriends a bitchie Taoist swordswoman, and learns her style of swordsmanship-- I mean, swordswomanship. Jet Li's limberness, skill & speed make the movie kinda' tolerable though. \*\* -DF



#### KUNG FU CULT MASTER

(aka "Lord of Wu Tang"; part of Arena Video's 'Wu-Tang-Collection'), 1993, Dir.: Wong Jing, Action Dir.: Samo Hung, Starring Jet Li, Francis Ng, Samo Hung, Richard Ng, Chingmy Yau Suk Ching, Cheung Man, Ngai Sing, Leung Ka-Yan, Gigi Lai Chi, Reviewed by Damon Foster

In the good old days ("good old days" refers to any period when KUNG FU CULT MASTER wasn't in production), Chinese fantasies had actual plots. But now that HK script-writers have finally run out of ideas (thanks for the memories, guys), they compensate for this lack of stories by padding out their stupid farces with tedious dialogue, way way way way way too many characters, and endless scripts about infinite numbers of sects who are always fighting themselves and each other. Tossing in wire-enhanced human yo-yo's helps to distract the audience, to make us assume this lame excuse for a script actually has a beginning, middle and end. Hell, you could hack out any random half hour from this incomprehensible mess and the continuity wouldn't suffer one bit.

It's sad to see oldtimers like Samo Hung & Liang Chia Jen in secondary roles, again it's an uncharismatic Jet Li (he was charismatic in FIST OF LEGEND, SHAOLIN TEMPLE, MARTIAL ARTS OF SHAOLIN and ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA AND AMERICA) as the hero, and once more he plays an uninteresting, naive, type. With lackluster roles like this, it's easy to think he has no acting talent. Francis (FROM ZERO TO HERO) Ng plays Jet Li's father--who has an absolutely nonsensical suicide scene which must

have been written by somebody on acid--but the only remotely interesting character in KUNG FU CULT MASTER is Richard Ng's silly portrayal of a vampire.

If you're into silly romps, then what the hell?! It's exactly the same as other 1990s crap. I have one good thing to say about this quirky adventure: Unique training scenes! We see Jet Li as a kid, watching his parents kill themselves in the most deranged, baffling manner, so he vows revenge and is raised by the Taoists of Wu Tong (aka "Wu Tang"). He gets bullied by the kung fuers, even as an adult. So he's not a kung fu master yet. I thought, "Fuck! We're gonna' have to sit through training scenes to he can avenge his parents!" But no, the way he learns kung fu is by tricking some monstrous wizard (who's stuck in a boulder; go figure) to put a curse on him! Now why didn't I think of that? Regardless of this dung-for-brains scriptwriting, pretty soon Jet is holding his own against the various sects (who all fight for no reason other than to keep FX makers and wire-pullers employed); he's flipping, leaping, flying, soaring, gliding, talking and firing-smoke out of his hands (like everyone else in the movie); you know, all the stuff we learned in local karate schools. With all these fights, I mean flights-- and corny costumes, it's amazing they managed to squeeze in some infantile romance. But considering how unbearably long the farce is, I guess they had time for everything. 1/2 -DF



#### LAST HERO IN CHINA

Win's Motion Pictures; 1993, Dir.: Wong Jing, Action Dir.: Yuen Woo Ping, Screenwriter: Wong Jing, Starring:

Jet Li, Cheung Man, Dicky Cheung Wai-Kin, Natalis Chan Bak-Cheung, Leung Ka-Yan, Gordon Liu Chia Hui, Anita Yuen Wing-Yee, Chu Chung-Shun, Chu Teet-Wor, Yuen King Tan, Reviewed by Damon Foster

My god, this shit is getting stupid. This is one of several silly movies where Jet Li plays factual folk-hero Wong Fei Hung, and yet again, the guy is made a mockery of. If Wong Fei Hung knew he was being depicted in such a stupid manner, he'd turn over in his grave. As far as this outlandish stupidity goes, I admit that I got a chuckle out of the obligatory lion-dance scenes. Rival martial artists get involved, but are attired as a giant centipede! This monstrous prop is okay, and the scenes are amusing, giving this lame excuse for comedy a permanent place under the category of "PLAN 9 FROM OUTERSPACE of kung fu movies"! Yes,



these sequences are so bad they're good. The centipede (several men inside, with MASTER KILLER's Gordon Liu at the head) has sharp arms which can cut flesh, so Jet Li's lion-dancers are defeated. In kung fu movie tradition, Jet later observes animals, and see's a rooster devour a centipede. So later, Jet dresses up as a chicken, looking like a reject mascot from some sport team. So in a chicken uniform, Jet takes on the centipede, and uses some sort of mid-air, "cockfighting" inspired technique to defeat the centipede and kick all the bad guys. But the reason the actual rooster killed the multi-legged arachnid was for food-- so I was expecting Jet to eat Gordon Liu. Had this happened, then this wacky, idiotic comedy might have made sense.

But there's more to LAST HERO IN CHINA than red, fibre-glass centipedes full of Chinese kung fu villains. It's about about talking, lame foolery, more talking, suspension wires, and of course, even more talking-- about 75% of which is useless, it does nothing to enhance the plot and seems only added to stretch out this movie to an emmense length. There's absolutely endless rambling about a brothel next to Wong Fei Hung's kung fu school. So this tedious, pointless dialogue is considered funny? Pathetic. Hell, the most amusing gag is the fake large teeth (resembling those wax things sold around Halloween time) that one of the students wears. Perhaps if this so-called "comedy" was in the hands of more talented comedians like Steven Chow or Ng Man Dat, it could have been made into something more humorous.

This film being such an absolute miss is amazing, considering the talent behind it. Beautiful actress Cheung Man shows she really can kick, I didn't know she had such skills! Granted, some of her stunts are "enhanced" (yeah right, and the Pope isn't in it for the money) by extension wires-- like a scene where she kicks flying spears with impossible accuracy-- but I was still impressed by her fighting. Kung fu old-timers Gordon Liu (MASTER KILLER) and Liang Chia Jen (THUNDERING MANTIS) also appear. Gordon Liu's most embarrassing salute to suspension wires has him riding a spinning lamp, like it's a flying saucer.

So this movie is a "Plan 9" in more ways than one! Liu plays the main villain, and although Liang Chia Jen is heroic (one of Wong Fei Hung's students), he's just a co-star at best, he's not given enough screentime, because if he did, he'd upstage Jet Li. According to an interview with Liang Chia Jen which was in OC's Jackie Chan Issue, Liang dislikes the endless wire effects which have plagued 1990s "kung fu" (if you can call them that) movies. This would also explain why Liang isn't allowed to fight as much as Jet, in LAST HERO IN CHINA. Though it seems Liang was forced into doing an unlikely, graffiti-insulting jump or two, it seems that most of his fights are more realistic, and on ground level. Yet again, it's Jet Li of course, who prefers the air-borne nonsense.

Used to be I'd watch two, maybe three kung fu films a day, but today, it's taken me nearly a week to get through this unbearably long flick! I swear, I must have sat through 30 minutes a night-- but that

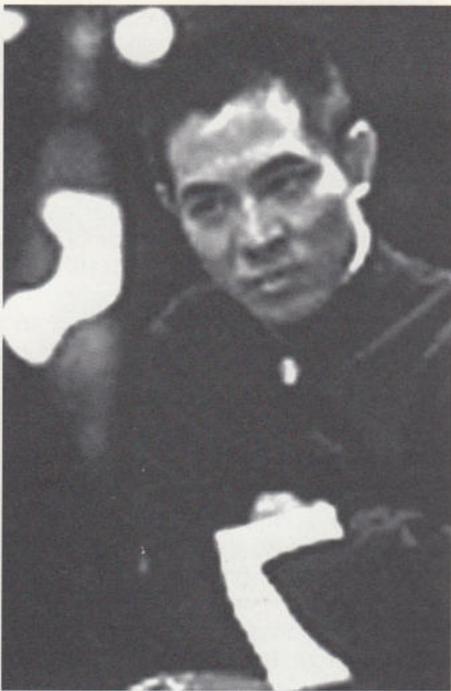
would make this romp about five hours long! It most certainly seemed that way. I don't know, I just don't get it; in the old days, I would be watching real kung fu and incredible stunts, but today, I'm watching Jet Li drink poison, like an idiot, and he goes deaf as a result-- adding a long sequence which makes the movie drag EVEN MORE! Regardless, I guess in the long run, this is one poor movie. Though it's obvious they put a lot of work into it, both its comedy and drama are pointless and they drag. There are a few good kicks and punches, which, if severed from the remainder of LAST HERO IN CHINA, could be quite entertaining. I don't hate the movie, but I really feel it's only fair at best.

Yet again, them post-Manchurian Chings are up to no good, and them annoying round-eyes aren't much help. Fortunately though, earth is blessed by Wong Fei Hung and his students, not to mention a couple Persians (played by Chinese like Cheung Man though, not darkies). Cheung Man's sister was kidnapped by corrupt monks, in a script stolen from Li Ching's KNIGHT OF KNIGHTS (Dir.: Hsih Chu), a 1960s Shaw Brothers movie. Regardless, inbetween talky shinanigans which go nowhere, good guys and bad guys clash. The high-flying leaps and chop-edit nonsense are such shames, for the non-midair kicks and punches are quite good-- there's superb kung fu & swordplay, but these are mere minutes of excitement in an abnormally long film. Just when I was convinced I was seeing some slick kung fu, along come the weightless martial artists whose wire feats are so far-fetched, fake and unconvincing that it's impossible to sustain dispellief. So by the time Jet Li finally defeated Gordon Liu, I didn't care any more; I was just glad this mess of a movie was over. And thus, there's an eventual climax to: "Jet Lee vs. Flying Saucer Liu". \*-DF

#### LETHAL WEAPON 4

Warner Brothers; 1998, Directed by: Richard Donner, Starring: Mel Gibson, Danny Glover, Chris Rock, Jet Lee, Eddie Kou Sheng, and Conaan Lee, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Just what the fuck was that all about?! Being an avid hater of over-rated, Hollywood hype, I've never seen the other three LETHAL WEAPON fiascos, and after sitting through this embarrassingly tacky movie, I think it's a safe assumption that to view the three predecessors would be a drastic mistake. Speaking of drastic mistakes, LETHAL WEAPON 4 is Jet Lee's American deput, not including when he toured America as a kiddie (part of some



Wushu troupe), and all those HK flicks shot in America. Though I don't love many of his Chinese movies, they're all masterpieces compared to this sappy, irritating loser of a movie. *LETHAL WEAPON 4* is typical American mainstream crap: Predictable down to the last milli-second, and simpleminded beyond belief. This is definitely brain-in-neutral trash, made to appeal to the mainstream, ultra-normal, American mainstream audience, which I've always known to be a bunch of cultureless, narrowminded idiots. My god, I was so embarrassed just walking into the theatre, and verbally saying "Lethal Weapon 4" when I purchased my ticket. I've not been so embarrassed since the time I accidentally filled my "inflatable soul mate" with helium, while my living room window was open and there was a strong breeze! But seriously, as I sat there in the theatre, watching one uninspired situation after another, I felt that all I was seeing was so beneath me; I really couldn't believe that I was in the theatre, trying to think down to a simple-minded level which would allow me to be entertained by such idiocy.

First of all, what the hell was that awkward opening sequence all about? Some guy dressed rather like Robocop, using a flame-thrower and machine-gun to blow up some shops? I mean, I know Hollywood ran out of ideas long ago, but this opening shoot-out is just plain nonsensical. Later, Mel Gibson & Danny Glover start having all these conversations about relationships, pregnancies and women. So THIS is humor?!?!? This movie's attempts at humor is mindbogglingly naive. And people called BASEKETBALL sophomoric?!?! I

think the audiences & critics alike have got their wires crossed. Anyway, after more half-ass attempts at humor (cop-partners keep bickering; this "chemistry" is what keeps this film series going, amazingly), it's revealed there's some sort of plot in this film, finally. The plot, for what it's worth, deals with Chinese triads.

Chinese triads are, of course, the villains. I have no problem with this, though I know some P.C. whiners will scream, "Racist!" Hell, as far as I'm concerned, the heroes in the film should have been yelling at the villains: "Lousy, yellow-skinned, chink commie bastards!" I mean, why the hell not?! Hong Kong's action movies have always treated caucasians badly, and even some of Jackie Chan's films try to convince us that all Americans are "round-eyed devils". But so as not to sink down to the level of the average bigoted HK movie, this U.S. counterpart does manage to throw in a few "good" Chinese characters too, so that the hollier-than-thou, politically correct, bleeding heart liberals won't have fits as though their lives were permanently marred. Eddie Kou Sheng, best known for his role in John Woo's *HEROES SHED NO TEARS*, plays an illegal immigrant called Mr. Hong. I had hoped he would have had a good kung fu duel with villainous Jet Lee, but alas, their confrontation lasts mere seconds; Eddie Kou is strangled to death immediately. It's sad to see Kou Sheng's American debut be even more pathetic than Jet Lee's, since I've watched Kou Sheng since the 1970s, when he was in Chinese chop sockey flicks.

If nothing else, Jet Lee steals the film. He's the only guy in the movie who has even the slightest bit of charisma. He doesn't talk much, and when he does, it's almost always in Chinese-- so he's spared from being involved in the many stupid lines of dialogue which TRY to be humorous (I've seen funnier jokes in a Polly Shore movie; now that's sad). Lead heart-throb Mel Gibson never did much for me, and in this sappy movie, where he's always talking about marriage to his pregnant girlfriend (my god, this conversation got old!!), it's safe to say that his performance wasn't memorable. Danny Glover, who I never heard of before, is some big guy who also thinks he's funny. He's one of two token blacks, the other being Chris Rock, that whiny comedian who was on the lame, final season of *IN LIVING COLOR* (no surprise that the show went off the air shortly after his joining). Also on hand is Conaan Lee (no relation to Jet), who's already a familiar face, both in U.S. and H.K. movies. As with Eddie Kou Sheng, Conaan Lee is given virtually nothing to do. He doesn't even

fight in this one.

Speaking of fighting, Jet Lee does deliver a decent kick or two. So there are smatterings, here and there, of HK-inspired action, and vague hints that HK movies used to be entertaining. But let's face it; what we're watching here isn't a 1980s HK thriller, but a 1990s American blockbuster stinker. So the battles (there are maybe two or three, and they're pretty short) are all mercilessly bogged-down with the chop-edit approach, the staple of bad American martial arts duels. Anyone not blinder than this movie's fans knows that Jet Lee is an excellent martial artist, but in *LETHAL WEAPON 4*, you'd never know it-- anyone can be made to look good using tricky camera angles and deceitful editing. So in short, Jet Lee got the part for being Chinese, and not being a martial artist. Hell, this role could have just as easily been given to George Takei, your local donut maker, that lady who played Mrs. Livingston in *THE COURTSHIP OF EDDIE'S FATHER*, your local clothes washer, or that most Chinese of Chinese, that most Asian of Asians, David Carradine himself!

Once upon a time, three cops on a boat discovered a ship full of illegal immigrants. The scenes on the boat make no sense; they've caught this big shark that's flopping around on deck, and they keep talking about pregnant women getting married. Seems to me that the audience would be more interested in knowing why there's some rubber shark on board. But anyway, these cops keep following the Chinese immigrants, counterfeiters, smugglers and tong members, and in one scene, a Chinatown boss yells at Mel Gibson: "You plick!" I should sue, they stole that line from my own *HOT DOGS ON THE RUN!!* Anyway, other dialogue (be it chasing Chinese hoodlums or proposing to pregnant women) consists largely of the word "fuck". Though I'm the most foul-mouthed person I know next to Marvin Quan and Mike McCintosh, I can't help but think the movie would be more fast-paced if they would splice out just a few "fuck"s. Regardless, during the car chases and "heart-warming" scenes of family matters, I couldn't help but notice that the Chinese villains, particularly Jet Lee and his squad of black-clothes-wearing mobsters, are the coolest characters in the movie-- they definitely should have been the good guys. For what it's worth, cops Danny Glover & Mel Gibson eventually confront all the Chinese immigrants, counterfeiters and taid/tong dudes at some rainy dock down by the waterfront one night, allowing for more shoot-outs, exploding cars, daring rescues underwater, some blood-



shed, and lame martial arts. Jet Lee and the other Chinese bad guys die. The movie should have ended there, but instead we got more nausea to try and stomach: Mel Gibson's girlfriend at the hospital gives birth and we're suppose to find it cute and touching. Only a fag would like this shit. -Damon Foster



### MARTIAL ARTS OF SHAOLIN

(aka "Shaolin Temple 3" & "North And South of Shaolin"); Pearl River Film Prod. Ltd.; 1986, Producers: Ann Tse Kai, Liu Yet Suen, Lam Ping Kwan, Lu Yin Pei, Action Dir.: Lau's Family, Asst. Dir.: Sze Yeung Ping, Lau Chaw Chau, Exec. Prod.: Fu Chi, Planner: Chan Man, Script Writer: Sze Yeung Ping, Dir.: Law Kar Leung (aka Lau Kar Ling & Liu Chia Liang), Running Time: 1 hr., 20 Min., Cast: Jet Li, Hu Han Diang, Huang Oiu Yan, Yu Chang Hui, Yu Hai, Sun Jian Kui, Liu Huai Liang, Reviewed by Damon Faust

Easily one of Jet Li's best films! A Mainland Chinese effort, but don't expect another of them boring documentaries. The commies were smart to hire HK kung fu veteran Liu Chia Liang (here spelled Law Kar Leung) to direct this one, and so MARTIAL ARTS OF SHAOLIN is as close as Red China has come to generating a HK 1970s chop-sockey style. But it's got a certain flare and creativity to it normally missing from the old HK capers; it's definitely the work of Communist China; not only do we see a few more shots filmed at Shaolin Temple itself, but toward the beginning of MARTIAL ARTS OF SHAOLIN, there's an impressive sword battle on top of China's Great Wall. If you enjoyed SHAOLIN TEMPLE and THE HOLY ROBE OF SHAOLIN TEMPLE, then by all means see this one. It's big fun for everybody, except for that unfortunate snake that Jet Li slaughters at the beginning of this otherwise great movie. That's the reason I'm taking a star from its otherwise 4-star (\*\*\*\*) rating.

The acrobatics are terrific. The kung fu is excellent. And the swordplay is wor-

thy of other praiseful adjectives too. Let's see, I just used both "terrific" and "excellent". So what should I use in describing the quality of the swordplay? Okay, I got it: The swordfighting is mui bueno!

The characters are pretty likable too. They slightly hint at a possible romance between a couple characters, but not enough is made of it to let it get annoyingly sappy. Jet Li is amusing as he wears a couple different costumes (to elude them Manchus), and I got quite a chuckle out of the over-acting co-hero who freaks out (like a Chinese William Shatner) when he finds out it might be Jet, not himself, who could possibly marry the flick's female lead. Many of the cast members are the same as in SHAOLIN TEMPLE. But I don't think they're playing the same characters, because SHAOLIN TEMPLE was set during the beginning of the Tang Dynasty (600-to-1000 A.D.), and MARTIAL ARTS OF SHAOLIN is set a few hundred years later, during the 1600s, the reign of the infamous Ching Dynasty. The villains are Manchus, but this story takes place well before the destruction of the temple.

Jet Li plays a Shaolin monk who Lion-Dances his way into some imperial court, for a botched assassination attempt. The local Manchurian army leader is a real asshole, so Jet, and a couple of other martial artists tried unsuccessfully to kill the guy. The three of them do in fact succeed (a gal chops the bastard's head off) eventually, but that's at the end of this action packed movie. Inbetween, there's comedy, plenty of action, minimal little kids, and quirky yet oddly catchy music. \*\*\*-DF

## 龍行天下

### MASTER, THE

1989, Dir.: Tsui Hark, Cast: Jet Li, Yuen Wah, Jerry Trimble, Crystal Kwok Kam Yan, Billy Blanks, To Wai Woo, Lam Ping Hong, Reviewed by D. Foster

Easily the dumbest, most stupid of Jet Li's many "coming-to-America-to-beat-up-the-whities" movies. The acting sucks as bad as the dubbing, and whoever wrote this lame, embarrassing story should be ashamed of itself. Part of the problem is its typically unrealistic approach as far as the way real gangs look & behave. But granted, the flick is Hong Kongese, not American, so they're just not good at understanding America's stereotypes and ethnic diversities. The romp's unrealistic approach would be

okay if the movie were some sort of spoof or slapstick comedy, but since most of THE MASTER takes itself seriously (or tries to), such badly written characters (with idiotic dialogue to boot) really make the whole movie into just another moronic farce full of unintended humor. Granted, the retarded script amuses for all the wrong reasons, so this stinker can be considered another "Plan 9" or HK 1980s movies.

The action scenes themselves aren't very good, except for some of the kung fu. The stunts aren't particularly impressive; for example, Jet Li is sliding down some long decorative curtain in a multi-leveled parking-lot, as he pursues a group of wetbacks. Now, if it were Jackie Chan who did this, it would be more impressive, because we know that it's real, no stunt double, and it would not only be done all in one shot, but we might have seen it from several different angles; instant replay! But instead, we got Jet Li doing it with choppy editing, which implies a stunt-double was involved. Other scenes, like Jet Li and some caucasian blonde villain clinging onto the tops of moving cars, has been seen before, and is no big deal. But again the one okay thing about THE MASTER's action sequences is the fights. The kung fu isn't bad. I'm not saying the martial arts are great or even good, but they do suffice. Though I don't understand why one battle consists largely of Jet swinging his backpack around (to hit racketeers of some black gang), instead of concentrating on his potentially beautiful wushu kicks.

The opening sequence takes place in some womens' gymnasium. These are out-of-place and have little to do with the remainder of THE MASTER. At first I thought it was just a gratuitous effort to show curvaceous white women in fight leotards. But being gymnasts, many of these chicks look like anorexic dikes, yuck! In fact, it's here that we meet THE MASTER's blonde female (if you can call her that; she's flatter than a bottle of 7-Up that was opened a hundred years ago last Thursday!), Anna. This butch-looking chick deliberately picks a fight with some girl, and yet is suppose to be the film's heroine? She trips some lady just for being prettier than her? What comes next is some lame, brief womens' wrestling match, and it's all pretty pointless. Regardless, Anna is kicked out of the gym, and later finds herself hanging out with kung fu immigrants like Yuen Wah (in a rare, non-villainous role) and Jet Li. Jet Li has his own problems, like these bumbling cholos who idolize him. These three spicks look like rejects from some old Suicidal Tendencies video. Re-



THE MASTER



ardless, at least these blundering Mexicans become good guys pretty early on in the film, and eventually help Jet in his battle against the film's real gang of villains: A mish-mash of different races, and they look kinda' rich and are lead by some white martial artist who likes going around challenging and defeating local Chinese martial artists. Toss in a bullshit romantic subplot (some office worker girl who shuns her bosses advances, and instead goes for Mr. Cleanman himself, Jet Li), and some really bad continuity flaws, and you get this mild inducer of chuckles, *THE MASTER*. \*1/2 -DF

#### MY FATHER IS HERO

1995, Dir.: Corey Yuen Kwai, Yuen Tak, Screenwriter: Sandy Shaw, Wong Jing, Starring: Jet Lee, Anita Mui, Yu Rong Guang, Blacky Ko Sau Leung, Ken Lo, Wai Wong, Ngai Sing, Damian Lao, Chung Yun, Reviewed by Damon F.

"Mom, are the ants enough for your soup?" Did I read that subtitle correctly? I had to watch that part over again. I thought cobra bladders were bad enough, but does this enjoyable flick mean to say that them thar Chinese (over in China, no less) eat ants too?! Is

there anything they don't eat? According to *MY FATHER IS HERO*, the ants are useful in relieving some sort of illness. Perhaps they're a cure for indigestion & heartburn, so now I know where Alka-Seltzer gets its name, "ant-acid" from. Another weird thing about *MY FATHER IS HERO*, and Chinese people in general, is the way words like "uncle" are interchangeable with words like "sir"; it starts to seem like everybody over there is related.

There's something about seeing Anita Mui (if you can get past that snouzer, she's quite a looker) in semi-tight pants doing high kicks, which makes *MY FATHER IS HERO* bearable. Granted, being a typically inferior 1990's flick, it's got its share of boredom, slow-pace, talkiness and cliches, but the acting is believable, and the writing is intelligent; I actually cared about the characters: Jet Lee's cop who's forced to neglect his family, his heart-of-gold-partner-scoundrel (who dies, unfortunately), the terminally ill wife, etc.

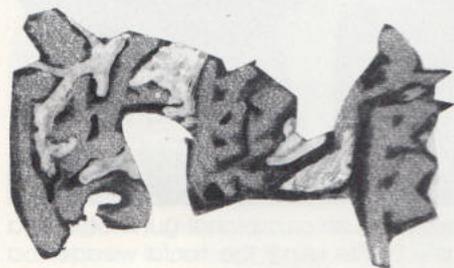
The quality of the kung fu stunts is almost like that of the 1980s. Though a weightless, string-enhanced Chinaman is inevitable in any Jet Lee movie, the emphasis this time is on genuine kicks,

punches, an occasional gunshot, and a nifty battle using the tonfa weapon; a fight which rather reminded me of a similar one (also tonfas, also on a ship) between Jackie Chan and Richard Norton in *CITY HUNTER*. Though some scenes in this touching father-and-son tale do tend to drag, the climactic bouts, as Jet Lee wipes out the bomb-dealers, make it all worthwhile.

The setting of this thoroughly amusing, modern-day crime drama is both Mainland China and HK; it goes back & forth as Mainlander detective Jet Lee investigates bomb smugglers in HK. The main villain is one hell of a brute (who, in one scene battles Jet Lee while dangling from a speeding diesel truck). The way he beats up that little kid (same kung fu tike seen in *NEW LEGEND OF SHAOLIN*, and he again does a good performance) really makes it obvious who the bad guys are-- there are no "grey areas" in *MY FATHER IS HERO*. Jet Lee goes undercover to stop these villains from blowing up an auction aboard a ship, and gets help from his son (who can hold his breath for a long time, so he plays dead to fool the bad guys), and gunslinging police-woman Anita Mui. \*\*\* -D.F.

## A Second Opinion:

**MY FATHER IS HERO-** If you want to see the definitive Jet Li movie, the one that defines what his films are about, this is the movie to check out. Li plays a con artist who abandons his son to live a life of crime, only to have second thoughts. Anyways the kung fu is what we're interested in here; if you can call it kung fu! Li demonstrates his usual brand of off the wall, wire-dependent kung fu, hanging in midair for an unbelievable amount of time, and the one scene that sticks out is the scene where Li has his son tied to a rope and uses him as a human yo-yo to thwart off the bad guys! One interesting note: The villain in this movie is also the title hero of IRON MONKEY. The problem with this movie is not only its unbelievably phony kung fu but also it tries to be serious and at the same time sappy and dopey. It's obvious this is supposed to appeal to children and attract an adult audience but the tone conflicts with itself too many times. \*\*1/2 -Alberto Martinez



## NEW LEGEND OF SHAOLIN

1994, Dir.: Kirk Wong, Action Dir.: Corey Yuen Kwai, Screenwriter: Wong Jing, Starring: Jet Li, Chingny Yau, Wang Lung Wei, Deanie Yip, Chan Chung Yung, Damian Lau, Chu Ko Liang, Adam Cheng, Kai Chun Wah, Reviewed by D. Foster

It's not a very original film. Not only does it blatantly rip off ideas from Japan's KOZURE OKAMI ("Lone Wolf And Cub") stuff, but yet again, there are the usual cliches like: The quest for a secret map tattooed on somebody's back, more Manchu vs. Shaolin stuff, a rival sect or two, and of course yet again, Jet Li's naive (infantile shyness) approaches to relationships with women. But there are three things about NEW LEGEND OF SHAOLIN which make it unique: Numero Uno- Throughout most of the movie, Chingmy Yau is covered neck to toe. Numero Three-o- There are some little kids featured all through the farce, and yet they're not annoying! In fact, the twerps are cooler than many of the grown-ups! Numero three-o- The main villain is an actual monster! Jet defeats him (when he's still a normal human) at the movie's



beginning, leaving the villain to burn in some fire. But he returns later, a burn victim, and he looks like Freddy Kreugar in samurai-armor! Called the "poison man" (having achieved new kung fu via potions), this scary creature also drives around in some futuristic car, some sort of shiny silver battle tank which fires sharp projectiles and has a habit of falling down through roofs. This device is certainly out of place in a period film (where the Ching Dynasty achieved such space-age technology is beyond me), but if Japan's "Fuun Lion Maru" has a jet-pack, then I guess we can accept NEW LEGEND OF SHAOLIN's stupidity too.

The fights are okay in this one! Gravity-defying special effects are expected, and I'm learning to tolerate this obligatory nonsense-- but it's the occasional "powder-puff kicks", as I call them, that make the action of NEW LEGEND OF SHAOLIN so entertaining. Jet Li's swordplay is terrific, and the flick's non-wire stuntwork is decent as well. Rather than start a whole new paragraph (I know it's proper to separate each paragraph by topic, but my main concern is saving space, not adhering to the pointless technicalities of good grammar, English, mathematics or whatever) to comment on the merits of the movie itself, I think I'll just change the topic right here. This paragraph started out claiming that the action is tolerable. Well, so is the whole film in general. It's not one of Jet Lee's best movies (but then, none of them are), but it was watchable. The dialogue & drama gets boring, but over-all, it's an imaginative little fantasy.

Thrice upon a time some evil Manchus of the Ching Dynasty wanted a treasure that was tattooed to the backs of some young Shaolin monks. These kids escaped the temple just as them Ching bastards were destroying it. In one scene, villains resembling ninjas use their shields to become UFOs, which is both imaginative and dumb. So while the vengeful manchus seek out the boys and their treasure-map, the kids hang out with a father (Jet Lee) & son, and a couple of female con-artists, one of which is played by Chingmy Yau (RAPED BY AN ANGEL, CITY HUNTER). Chingny's mother imper-

sonates corpses (it's part of their scam) until she eventually dies for real. Much is made of her death scene, the mourning goes on forever-- as though we're supposed to give a damn. Anyway, the kids, as well as Chingny Yau, live happily ever after, thanks to the kung fu, swordplay and flight-capabilities of Jet Lee; who manages to defeat not only villainous Wang Lung Wei (FLASH FUTURE KUNG FU, FIVE MASTERS OF DEATH) but some monstrous mutant right out of STAR TREK: DEEP SPACE ELEVEN; or whatever the fuck it's called this week. \*\* -Damon Foster

## A SECOND OPINION:

**THE NEW LEGEND OF SHAOLIN-** A rendition of the *Lone Wolf and Cub* series, THE NEW LEGEND OF SHAOLIN is a great family-oriented film particularly if you wish to avoid "standard" family fare like Disney's MULAN. Non-stop action & laughs, plus an oriental cutie (Chingmy Yau Suk-Ching) for dad, THE NEW LEGEND OF SHAOLIN was my first Jet Li film. Directed by Wong Jing, Jet Li exhibits his skill in martial arts and talent with the incredible three-sectioned staff, reminiscent of work in Liu Chia Hui's MASTER KILLER. After THE NEW LEGEND OF SHAOLIN's initial scenes having Li battling his soon-to-become arch-enemy Poison, our hero embarks on a bizarre adventure. Accompanied by his combatant son, Li meets a richman who hires Li as a bodyguard, and clandestinely protects the buffoon from his new young bride and playing-possum mother (actually notorious thieves). Subsequently, our hero (Jet Li) must protect six young Shaolin students, each tattooed with a piece of some treasure map, from the scorch-faced Poison. \*\*\*\* -Linda Arroyo

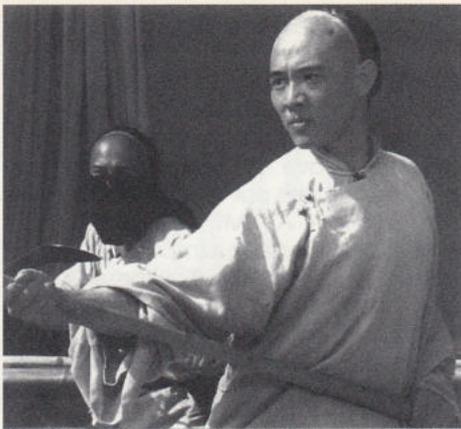


## ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA

1990, Dir.: Tsui Hark, Action Dir.: Yuen Cheung Yan, Yuen Sun Yi, Lau Ka Wing, Starring: Jet Li, Rosamund Kwan, Yuen Biao, Kent Cheng, Jackie Cheung, Jimmie Wang Yu, Wu Ma, Reviewed by Garo Nigoghossian

I've written about this movie soooo many times that I'm really not looking forward to going over the plot. So I'm going to try to do this as simply as possible. Let's see if this works:

Jet plays Wong Fei Hung, a Chinese folk-hero, who runs a health clinic. Evil white people are kidnapping Chinese people and are selling them into white-slavery. Wong doesn't like that idea so much so he stops them. There is also a subplot, one including Wong's relationship with Aunt Yee, which doesn't involve



incest (they are not related by blood); and one involving an opposing martial artist named Iron Robe Yim, who is fooled by the evil white people.

Whew!! Am I glad *that's* done. Some people hate this movie because it's not filled with fight scenes and it's a bit story-heavy. I liked and thought it was fun. Yes, there is a bit too much wire-work during the end fight scene but it's still a fun fight scene. I mean come on, the wire work is a lot less than what would appear on the screen in later movies. Look at ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA 4, you'd think there is no gravity in China after watching that film.

This is the movie that made Jet Li a star again after the lull in his career after the Shaolin Temple films. I guess the people in HK liked to see Jet playing Wong Fei Hung, since Kwan Tak Hing was way too old to be doing Wong Fei Hung at this time, so I guess he's a good replacement. The cast also has Yuen Biao, but the big crime was to give him no fight scenes. Why hire him if you're not going to let him kick some ass? The movie also has Rosamund Kwan in it, who is a bitch in person, but that's another story.

Tsui Hark directs the movie in his usually cool style and handed the fight directing chores to one of the Lau brothers, Ching Siu Tung, and an uncredited Yuen Woo Ping who handles the fights with flair. This movie was a huge hit in HK, and I think it's because the audiences got to see a new interpretation of one of their screen heroes. They modernized him and gave him a 90's slant which the audiences got hooked into. Of course, new interpretations don't always work: Look at Godzilla or The Avengers, they show that some things should stay the way they are. But ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA works and Tsui & Jet should be happy about that. \*\*\* -Garro Nigoghossian

#### A SECOND OPINION:

**ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA**- Everyone else loves this stuff, so I keep wondering what I'm missing. So here I go again, watching it (for the third time) to see if

I'll finally "get it". I'm viewing the English dub, which should help to make sense out of this mess. This complex drama isn't as bad as I thought, but the distracting camera tricks insure I'll never become a born-again, diehard fan. Some of the swordfights are amusing, and the scene of the Peking-opera assassins (killers going under cover, during the stage-play) lashing out at Jet Li (in the audience) ignites an okay battle, but on the whole, these FX and chop-edit shinanigans just don't do anything for me. The story and characters are interesting in a tale of Wong Fei Hung getting blamed for crimes committed by market racketeers, and hassled by foreigners, Chinese kidnappers, and "Imperial dogs" (as Kent Cheng calls them). \*\* -Damon Foster

#### ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA 2

1991, Dir.: Tsui Hark, Action' Dir.: Yuen Woo Ping, Running Time: 109 Min., Cast: Jet Li, Donnie Yen, David Chiang (aka "John" Chiang), Xiong Xin Xin, Cheung Tit Lam, Paul Fonoroff, Rosamund Kwan, Reviewed by Garro Nigoghossian

Like any successful movie, there has to be a sequel. You usually hope that the sequel is close to or as good as the first film. Most times, you're let down, thinking, "How the hell could they do this to one of my favorite movies?" Very rarely does a sequel surpass the first movie in quality. It does happen, though. GREMLINS 2 was better than GREMLINS, EVIL DEAD 2 was better than EVIL DEAD, and ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA 2 is better than the first one.

Yuen Woo Ping takes over full fight directing this time, and the fights are great. Yes, there is wire work but there is also a lot of the fighters' skills on display. Yuen Woo Ping's martial arts choreography won him a HK Oscar for fight direction that year. The highlights include Wong beating up the anti-whitey brigade in the town square, Wong fighting the leader of the anti-whitey brigade in their hideout, and Jet & Donnie's big fight at the



ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA 2

end. All fight fans should enjoy these fights. However, gay people might be turned off from the film, due to a lack of gay sex.

All around, this is a better movie. Better story, better fights, and no gay sex. The high quality of this movie didn't last long because ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA 3 ends up being a let down, but that's another review all together.

Jet returns as Wong Fei Hung and Rosamund Kwan returns as Aunt Yee. Unfortunately, Mok Sui Chung replaces Yuen Biao. This time, they all go to a doctors' convention with Wong. At the same place, an anti-foreigner establishment is running wild trying to kill whitey. Wong protects whitey and whitey is grateful. Wong thinks he needs help protecting whitey so he tries to enlist the help of the town constable (played by Boston's own Donnie Yen). But in a cruel twist of fate, the constable is in league with the anti-whitey brigade so Wong has to kick all their asses in the name of righteousness. \*\*\*\* -Garro Nigoghossian

#### A SECOND OPINION:

**ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA 2**- The story is more interesting than the first one, and the characters are just as well defined; if not a little on the complex side. The majestic scenes of the legion of martial artists doing thier katas in the sunset (on a beach) are still as awe-inspiring as ever. Plus, the kung fu is slightly more realistic, less wire-dependent than that of the first ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA, though this sequel's sequence involving flying stacks of balanced table's is every bit as dumb & far-fetched as the original's "ladder" fight. On the whole, it's a decent flick, now that I've seen the English print (once again, I initially saw this one when it was new in a Chinatown theatre, and hated it then). The English dubbing is good, but fast, so certain lines can be misunderstood. For example, in one scene, Jet says: "Let Cousin Li go now!", which sounded like: "Let Cousin Ego, now!" In another scene, some guy says he has "urgent business", and I thought he said "virgin business!"

Plot has Wong battling a fanatical cult called the White Lotus Sect, who misuse their peudgalism to combat all foreigners; the script is more than similar to LEGENDARY WEAPONS OF KUNG FU (Shaw Bros.; 1982). Toss in a little naive romance (Rosamund Kwan and Jet Li are so annoying together!), irritating oggler Foon (Wong Fei Hung's trusty assistant), and a disapointing, endless duel between Donnie Yen and Jet Li, and behold, this review of an average movie is complete. \*\*\* -DF

### ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA PART 3

1992, Dir.: Tsui Hark, Action Dir.: Yuen Tak, Screenwriter: Tsui Hark, Starring: Jet Lee, Rosamund Kwan, Max Mok Siu Chung, Lau Shun, Mo Shao Min, Xiong Xin Xin, Reviewed by DF

The opening subtitle reads: "The persons, characters and story of the film is artistically presented, and not a true reflection of the history". You don't say! Here's my response to that: "The persons and characters in story don't have weight, but in real history, actual persons obeying the law of gravity". But still, Jet Li's high-speed katas and weapons swinging are poetry in motion; his form, speed, skill, talent and agility are always a charm to behold, but yet again, it's all ruined by unnecessary edits, and horrendous choreography. And once more, a potentially good battle sucks because they would rather change it from being an actual kung fu fight, to a silly situation: In this case, one minute he's disarming villains using what resembles a towel, and later he's dodging a bunch of fake lions in another of them ridiculously staged lion-dances. This liondance bullshit drags on forever.

So again, I repeat: The action scenes are not always genuine fights, but rather, awkward situations. Another example: Jet Li on a slippery floor, dodging battle-axes that the henchmen (yet another rival sect) are throwing at him. Now, if such shinanigans were authentic, this sequence would consist of thrilling feats. For example, were this the work of Jackie Chan, the oiled-up floor, and the flying projectiles would have been authentic; a definite thrill, knowing the lead actor was risking his life and not just fooling around. But seeing Wong Fei Hung do such stunts is almost like watching some cartoon. It's like seeing Speed Racer's Mach 5 successfully jump from cliff-to-cliff, and then a viewer saying: "Wow! I bet Speed Racer's stunt double was scared! That scene gave me goose bumps!"

When Wong Fei Hung (spelled "Wong Fey Hong" in the subtitles; this week isn't dangling from a fishing line to play down the viability of Jet Lee's superb kicks, he's naively romancing Aunt Yee (Rosamund Kwan) again, even though some Russian who dresses like Dr. Doolittle has the hots for her too. Yet again, the relationship between Aunt Yee (aka "Peony") and Wong Fei Hung is so innocent and childish that it's all pretty embarrassing to watch. Why can't the guy be a real man like the rest of us, and go stampeding for the clitoris, at the drop of a hat?!? Equally uninteresting is our high-flying hero's aversion to some steam-engine. Again, this minor subplot (subplots, like

bullshit, run rampant in ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA III) shows modern technology and a foreign one at that- coming to China and meeting resistance from Chinese traditionalists (i.e. Wong himself) who's not ready to accept this industrial revolution. Though Wong's introductions to movie cameras (hand-cranked oldies) and movie projectors are amusing, all these concepts are pointless, dull filler-- added just to pad out an already padded out script.

As for the story, we're talking rival lion-dancers who kill each other during these extravagant performances. One such fake lion, the largest one, bites men as though he's eating them. Toss in some double-crossing Russians, and plenty of john-foolery (he's one of Tom's relatives), and that pretty much sums up this stupid farce. \* -DF

### ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA AND AMERICA

1997, Dir.: Samo Hung, Screenwriter: Sharon Hui, Sa Long, Szeto Cheuk Hon, Philip Kwok Wai Chung, Sze Mei Yee. Starring: Jet Li, Rosamund Kwan, Richard Ng, Xiong Xin Xin, Chan Kwok Bong, Jeff Wolfe, Joe Sayah, Crystal Bell Eucht, Lung Kong, William Fung, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Though Wong Fei Hung never really visited the Old West to the best (or worst) of my knowledge, this is one cool film! What Jet Lee's Wong Fei Hung character really needed, from the start, was something to break the monotony-- to put old Wong out of his element. So for once, the character is put in some unique, unlikely situations. This is not a realistic movie by any stretch of the imaginative imagination; it's as far-fetched as any other film in the ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA series, but since it deviates from the typical bullshit I've come to expect from this series, it has certain things the others lack: Logic, well-defined characters, a coherent script, and great acting.

Martial arts westerns are nothing new. Billy Chong's A HARD WAY TO DIE, Toshiro Mifune & Charles Bronson in RED SUN, David Carradine's so-called "Kung Fu" (hah!) series, Italy's rarely seen THREE SUPERMEN IN THE OLD WEST, and that mad-caper THE STRANGER AND THE GUN-FIGHTER, which had the unlikely team-up of Lee Van Clief and Lo Lieh. ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA AND AMERICA gets my vote as the best of these "Westerns", I guess we can call them "Easterns"!

Chinese kung fu movies taking place in America are more common than flies on an Ethiopian child, but the H.K. movie-makers used to choose the ugliest, least

talented caucasian actors they could find. Actors who couldn't act, and served only to make us look bad, compared to the "superior", "triumphant" Chinese. Yet amazingly, I guess Chinese filmmakers have finally grown up (which shocked the hell out of me), because in ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA AND AMERICA, it's never implied that all round-eyes are evil, and all these Americans play their parts well! They sound convincing, not stupid-- and most of the dialogue is tolerable. This is NOT one of those HK movies where the English conversations sound like they were written by a retard. The English talking scenes (about 35% of the film's over-all dialogue is between cowboys) look & sound like that of any actual American-made western.

The fights are very good for a Jet Lee movie, since at least half of the kicks aren't enhanced by fishing-lines. There are some really fun fights scattered throughout. Though an occasional exaggerated leap is inevitable, the unlikely setting (hell, there's a blond, lassoing cowboy who does a "wire-leap" over a stagecoach, at one point!) makes it so silly, that there's plenty of unintended humor. It's silly that the American characters are impressed with the Chinamen's ability to kick, and not the fact that these same Chinamen can fly like Superman.

The story has Jet Lee and Rosamund Kwan (who I hear, from inside sources on the set in Texas, that she was a complete bitch around American fans) coming to America, visiting some Chinatown. So the inevitable white-against-Chinese prejudice is to be expected, since that's how it was back then when Chinese were treated as slaves, as they built that railroad for pennies a day. Regardless, Wong Fei Hung gets amnesia (and has a humorous, creative dream sequence) during a battle with savages, and somehow ends up with a tribe of American Indians. This subplot reminds me of a very similar episode of STAR TREK, except that it was Captain Kirk, NOT Wong Fei Hung who was convinced he was a Navajo. Later, Jet Lee loses his amnesia and rejoins his fellow Chinese. The script has good & bad native Americans, good & bad whites, and good & bad (mostly just "good", though) Chinese. Jet Li befriends both caucasians and cherokees before his climactic duel with some odd, scary-looking bandit with fake eyebrows. Though it's never explained how this psychotic, long-haired, semi-"vampiric" villain learned kung fu kicks, their bout, like the whole movie, is immensely entertaining. \*\*\*1/2 -DF

## SHAOLIN KUNG FU

Mei Ah Laser Disk Co. Ltd., Starring: Jet Li, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Mainland Chinese documentary on the current monks at Shaolin Temple. Not much on history, but the incredibly strenuous work-outs of these fanatics-- I mean, Shaolin priests, is not only bewilderingly impressive, but disturbing! I flinched and cringed at their groin-toughening techniques! I always knew Shaolin guys were devoted to their arts & tradition, but I didn't know just how obsessive they are until I saw documentaries like this and ABBOT HAI TENG OF SHAOLIN! I reviewed SHAOLIN KUNG FU a few years back in *O.C.: The Shaolin Issue*, where I commented on Hai Teng's one-fingered handstand (also seen in the guy's own documentary mentioned about 30 words ago) and how amazed I was, though I've come to suspect that it might be faked. The amount of stretches & dangerous work-outs are insane, these dudes must have the hardest, most flexible bodies in existence! It's another Chinese documentary, but the narrator explains (in Chinese) all this, as we read subtitles which are better than those of your average HK actioner. But the sparring scenes all look as staged as those in the other two documentaries (though at least this time, the sound FX aren't over done!), the fights are a little too graceful and exact to be authentic sessions; and tend to resemble those in common kung fu films, though they're spiced up with fancy wushu moves. In one scene, spear-carriers surround a fellow monk, and due to an editing error, some of these monks look right at the camera, it's obvious the cameraman or director has just yelled "Cut!" in Chinese. There's also more on the famous receding bricks, or rather, "foot dents" of Shaolin.

Diehard fans of Jet Li are advised to check out this movie and the other two documentaires, as he's all over the place. Yet again, much (not all) of the Jet Li scenes (work-outs as a child, press conferences, etc.) can be seen in ABBOT HAI TENG OF SHAOLIN and DRAGONS OF THE ORIENT. We also get to see some rare stills & posters from SHAOLIN TEMPLE (just how long them Chinese gonna' ride the hype of that single movie?!?), and explains how the flick helped re-popularize Shaolin. Jet is once more credited as "introducing Shaolin" to the world! Hell, that dweeb David Carradine did that over twenty years ago! I won't under estimate Jet's contribution to kung fu cinema, but this movie over hypes him. He's all through this documentary, in rare footage as he dazzles us with his speed, limberness and mastery of several weapons. At a press

conference, the subtitles say, "He even tells about his work of Hwang Fei Hung"- I guess ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA was in the planning stages. We also see Jet hanging out, pretending to have a candid conversation with his teacher, Coach Wu Bin yet again, though the subtitles translate him as "Wu Pin" this week.

The startings of both SHAOLIN KUNG FU and its sister movie, ABBOT HAI TENG OF SHAOLIN are nearly identical, with the same opening shot panning in on the temple during the credits. There are plenty of other snippets which appear in both documentaries. All in all, SHAOLIN KUNG FU, the best of the three documentaries, is a real eye-opener, and worth checking out; though the endless scenes of monks working out get repetitious and it's not worth watching the movie a second time (even though I did, to refresh my memory as I review it again). \*\*\* -DF

# 少林寺

## THE SHAOLIN TEMPLE

Producers: Chung Yuen Films Production (1981), Dir.: Chang Chin Yun, (Cheung Kam-Yim), Producer: Liu Yi-Yuan, Martial Arts instructor: Yu Hai, Action Directors: Ma Yin-Tat, Yu Hai, Poon Ching-Fuk, Wong Seung-Hoi, Cast: Jet Li, Yu Hsing Wei, Yu Hai, Ting Feng, Liu Wai Liang, Wang Hsiang Ai, Pan Ching Fu, Hui Chun Hua, Reviewed by Damon F.

It took me nearly 16 years to see this one, but since Berkeley's U.C. Theater showed an English-dubbed version, I figured, what the hell? It's better than renting the Japanese version from Japan's Japan Video, where the movie is probably in Chinese with Japanese subtitles. Any old classic is bound to get a lot of hype, and having seen it so late, all the hype got my hopes up and I was expecting something better. I wasn't necessarily disappointed, but a lot of the comedy and drama was kinda' dumb, and I was thoroughly disgusted at the absolutely tasteless cruelty to animals which happens more than once in this surprisingly typical kung fu movie.

As a Mainland China movie, it definitely blows away typically Red Chinese art films like RED SORGHUM (who's bright idea was it to make a movie about bamboo?!), FAREWELL MY CONCUBINE and other boring crap. But then, consider the source of this review; I'm a fan of kung fu, not talky dramas. SHAOLIN TEMPLE, complete with revenge, training scenes, and one "but still" in the dialogue, is really no different than MASTER KILLER or

any other HK kung fu historical to deal with the Shaolin Temple. It looks like something made in the 1970s. At times, its decent budget resembles a Shaw Brothers Film, but at other times, the scratchy film, outdoor scenes and occasional bloodletting made it more closely resemble any one of a hundred HK kung fu farces which still appear on late night TV. I don't mean this in a bad way and wouldn't be surprised if THE SHAOLIN TEMPLE makes its way to American TV soon, if it hasn't already. The only thing which set this fairly enjoyable movie on its own is its lack of any familiar faces (to the best of my knowledge, only Jet Li himself made the transition into HK films).

Be it HK or Mainland China, the highlight is of course, the fights! Yes, the swordplay and fistplay in SHAOLIN TEMPLE are quite good, thanks to an outstanding cast of China's most limber, strong & energetic performers. The nature of these fights, katas and weapons demonstrations won't impress anyone who's more into the contemporary HK stunt work of the 1980s (don't expect to see Jackie Chan fall through a plate-glass window), but if you want a perfected glimpse of HK's chop-sockey styles of the 1970s, SHAOLIN TEMPLE will astound & amaze you. My scalp is still sore from just watching that monk do forward "head springs" (imagine gymnastic handsprings, aka forward cartwheels, but with the head; not the hands touching the ground!) They're all in perfect physical condition, and it's not hard to see why Jet Li has long since become such a big star.

For general entertainment value, SHAOLIN TEMPLE definitely succeeds. It's not all fights, there's also some of the usual drama and comedy. Some of the comedy is intentional, some of it isn't. Intentional humor (which didn't make me laugh much) involved a frog and a dog, and scenes of monks quickly thinking of exceptions to justify they're indulging in meat (dog meat; yummiel!) and alcohol. Unintended comedy included a couple lame ballads near the beginning, music so oldfashioned you would think the film came out in the 1940s or 1950s. Oh well, what do you expect from a bunch of backwards, out-of-touch, Communist hacks!? But still, not bad for being the People's Republic of China's first kung fu movie.

The setting is during the approximate period of "600-to-1000-A.D." Actual footage shot at a current Shaolin Temple, plus lavish Chinese countryside footage adds production value to this story of Hsiao Hu (18-year old Jet Li; his debut), a young peasant who's father was murdered by the Emperor's evil nephew, Wan (Yu Hsing-wei). Naturally our heroic

Jet goes to the Shaolin Temple to become a monk, shave his head, learn kung fu and eventually get revenge. This whole story is based on actual paintings on a Shaolin Temple wall depicting the "13-pole monks" saving the Tang Emperor. The whole concept is loosely based on how the people overthrew emperor Wang Shi Chun's Dynasty and brought in the Tang Dynasty. \*\*\* -DF

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## SWORDSMAN II

1992, Dir.: Ching Siu Tung, Stanley Tong, Kwai Lai, Action Dir.: Ching Siu Tung, Yuen Tak, Cheung Yiu Sing, Screenwriter: Tsui Hark, Hanson Chan, Tang Pik Yin, Cast: Jet Li, Rosamund Kwan, Brigitte Lin, Michelle Reis, Fennie Yuen, Yang Yee Kwan, Waise Lee, Chin Kar Lok, Reviewed by DF

I did in fact see the first SWORDSMAN back when it was new, in a Chinatown theater, but never reviewed it, because I found it to be one of those rarest of things, a flick so incredibly god awful that it was beyond reviewing. A product so bewilderingly inferior that it defied words. Though I've managed to review other worthless stinkers (AMSTERDAM CONNECTION, Tri-Star's Fraud-Zilla, LETHAL WEAPON 4), SWORDSMAN was beneath them. Yet here I am, hoping to make this Jet Li filmography as complete as possible, and therefore faced with the horrendous task of dredging up words for SWORDSMAN's equally poor follow-up, SWORDSMAN II. This useless piece of shit ties with LETHAL WEAPON 4 as being my least favorite, or rather, most hated Jet Li movie.

As far as production values go, SWORDSMAN II is another special effects



SWORDSMAN II

extravaganza, and it's no major shock that so many people like this fantasy blockbuster. But any time Tsui Hark and Ching Siu Tung collaborate, I'm bound to hate it. Their style of film just doesn't sit well with me. Though the likes of SWORDSMAN II achieved positive critical raves from arthouse-geeks and non-martial artists who don't realize your local dojos aren't part of the aviation industry, I really feel that this 1990s genre killed the period-kung fu fantasy film genre, and changed them into pretentious art-films. Crap like this is part of the reason we no longer see the really fun stuff like MONKEY WAR and THE KID WITH THE GOLDEN ARMS. As a typical example of this bastardized genre, SWORDSMAN 1, SWORDSMAN 2 and I'm sure SWORDSMAN 3: EAST IS RED all have way more in common with an abstract painting than a martial arts period drama like AVENGING EAGLE. I think the one way I could deal with a severe case of imagery overkill (i.e. the SWORDSMAN films, BRIDE WITH WHITE HAIR, etc.) such as this would be at a party, with only minimal attention directed at the TV. If you're just glancing over at the screen as the tape plays, seeing images of flying horses, quick cuts, exploding trees, heads flying off for no reason, then such overdone fantasies can amuse. But when I sit down and really try to take in all this post-MTV editing, endless characters, a zillion subplots and subtitles which fly by faster than Bill Clinton on a date, the whole flick gets to be too much-- it's really headache inducing.

So because the whole thing consists of special effects and hype, it can't be considered, a kung fu movie. So do I like it as a period-fantasy? Well, no-- not really. This movie has similar ancestors, like DUEL TO THE DEATH, A CHINESE GHOST STORY and ZU: WARRIORS OF THE MAGIC MOUNTAIN. None of these were my favorites, but all were somewhat coherent (though signs of this sort of nonsensical craziness were creeping up even back then, in the 1980s), as the writers were smart enough to concentrate all their imagery & FX on just a few important characters. But if you want to see some truly fun, basic fantasies, check out old classics like THE FAIRY AND THE DEVIL, THE MAGIC SERPENT and MONKEY WAR-- these charming adventures managed to be both over-the-top & creative, and yet the scripts actually offered a beginning, middle and end.

Here's another reason why I hate SWORDSMAN II: More cruelty to animals! You all know I'm an animal lover, and when I see a movie which advocates the killing of small, helpless, innocent creatures, that's where I draw the line. This infuriates me no end! I try to toler-

ate the filmmaker's sick tastes, because perhaps they're showing us humans a side of ourselves we just don't want to see. For example, I'm condoning cruelty to animals every time I bite into a hamburger of pepperoni pizza. I suppose in a perfect world, we would all be vegetarians. Regardless, I found the footage in SWORDSMAN II to be particularly upsetting, to see swords slaughtering live (well, not for long) snakes and live emperor scorpions. There's some misconception that these two types of animal are out to get us. Let me just say that I've handled many snakes, and many scorpions, and have never been harmed by either. They're incredibly mellow, and make wonderful pets.

Scripts don't matter in artsy-fartsy crap like this. Jet Li plays some swordsman who's troupe of martial artists keep dealing with sects and high-flying Japanese in the forest. Rival wizards, the quest for a scroll again, and Brigitte Lin in some sort of androgynous role. Lotsa' fog, lotsa' darkness, and lotsa' grim special effects. The script is impossible to follow, amid the high-speed subtitles, film editing done by coke-heads, and things which explode for no reason. If you're just looking for random background images, and quick-fix amusement, SWORDSMAN II may suffice; but don't expect to understand this nonsense. -DF

太極張三豐

## TAI CHI MASTER, THE

{Eastern Heroes' re-release title: "The Deadly China Hero"},

Eastern Prod. Ltd.; 1993, Dir.: Yuen Woo Ping, Screenwriter: Kim Ip, Cast: Jet Li, Michelle Yeoh, Fennie Yuen Kit-Ying, Yuen Cheung-Yan, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Finding a Jet Li costume-fantasy which lacks wirework is like finding an Abe Vigoda porno movie. So THE TAI CHI MASTER is no exception. Yes, there are plenty of ridiculous scenes of high-flying leaps, as always. But amazingly, in this case, one or two of the flights actually "enhance" the battles (like in 1960s Shaw classics!), and don't detract from their credibility too much! For example, there are a couple appropriate scenes of our heroes, Jet Li and Michelle Yeoh, achieving flight. They're flying toward the villain, establishing their presence at the beginning of a fierce battle. Once the fights start, a great deal of it is real kung fu and swordplay, just like in the good old days (in this case, the "good old



days" refers to anything which came out before ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA). For every scene of a person flying through the air like a football, there are twice as many slick punches, cool kicks, enjoyable stunts and masterful sword-swinging performed by, well-- masters, of course! So what I'm trying to say is that for once in the 1990s, we have a kung fu fantasy, which, though far-fetched like all of them, is uh, "down to Earth"!

This is probably one of my favorite Jet Li farces, and with a cast like this, it's no major shock. Michelle Yeoh does her best (though her introductory battle in the restaurant has way too much wire crap, this fight stands out, it's out-of-place in an otherwise fun movie), but I was glad to see a role by Chin Siu-Ho (GHOSTS GALORE, MR. VAMPIRE), a personal favorite of mine. At first, his part in THE TAI CHI MASTER was great, for about the first half of the film. He plays Jet Li's co-hero. But we can't have that now, can we? Of course not, he'll upstage the main man. So regrettably, Chin Siu-Ho (see OC's previous issue, for more on him and his brother Chin Kar Lok) eventually becomes the movie's villain, so that they'll duel and Jet Li kills him at the climax.

There are a couple of shots of ducks (Jet plays with them during a state of stupor), and shock of shocks! None are killed! Can you believe it?! I was amazed! Many Chinese movie-makers have a sick fetish for slaughtering innocent creatures, and then boasting about it via film footage. But I guess this movie was a little behind schedule and they couldn't find time to torture small animals.

These two Shaolin monks get exiled from the temple, and must adapt to life

in the real world, in this action-packed adventure. One monk (Jet Li) remains good and joins up with some rebellious Taoists who wish to overthrow the Manchu oppressors. The other monk (Chin Siu-Ho) takes the opposite route, and actually joins the villainous army, and in the course of his promotions, becomes one of the most merciless of all the Chings. In the long run, good Jet Li and bad Chin Siu Ho end up dueling to the death. Michele Yeoh aids Jet Li and the ill-fated good guys (all the Taoists die). During the proceedings, expect plenty of one-on-one fights, single-against-many fights, and equal doses of kung fu and sword fighting. Before the ending credits, Jet Li learns Tai Chi (considered a "soft" martial art, but when performed by an expert, can be as effective as kung fu), which is what he uses to wipe out Chin Siu Ho. But by this time, there was enough in-fighting & killing among the villains so that when Chin dies, his fellow Manchu soldiers more-or-less cheer the efforts of former enemies Jet Li and Michelle Yeoh. \*\*\*1/2 -Damon Foster

#### TOP FIGHTER

*Full Plate Productions; 1994, Producers: Toby Russell & George Tan, Executive Prod.: Roy McAree, Written by George Tan, Dir.: Toby Russel, Featuring: Bruce Lee, Jimmy Wang Yu, Yuen Biao, Jet Li, Liang Chia Ren, Ron Van Clief, Jackie Chan, Samo Hung, Gordon Liu, Bolo Yeung, Bruce Li, Jim Kelly, Jean Claude Van Damme, Reviewed by Damon Foster*

Hopefully the last documentary I'll have to sit through! But this round-eyed production, being in English, was less of a strain than the three Chinese documentaries I had to sit through in my never-

ending quest to seek out every Jet Li-related flick. This devastatingly informative compilation is sort of a "sequel" to another documentary; the equally excellent CINEMA OF VENGEANCE (1993) reviewed elsewhere (it lacks Jet Li) in this issue. TOP FIGHTER is really an enlightening look at martial artists; not just the obligatory pieces on big-shots like Bruce Lee, Jean Claude V.D., Jackie Chan and Jet Li, but it goes deeper into the genre, featuring portions on lesser known, but equally important heroes of the genres, little known stars who are also familiar faces to anybody raised on low-budget, HK chop sockey. Unlike CINEMA OF VENGEANCE, which also concentrates heavily on 1980s action films, TOP FIGHTER leans mainly toward that long forgotten, under-rated, misunderstood, classic genre of 1970s kung fu capers. Not just Yang ("Bolo") Sze and Jim Kelly, but people like Casanova Wong, Ron Van Clief and Huang Jeng Lee.

TOP FIGHTER starts off with the climactic battle of Larry (BRUCE LEE IN NEW GUINEA) Lee's THUNDERKICK, and later even explains that Larry's style is Okinawan "goju-ryu" karate, and that he was once a fight-teacher for the Royal HK Police. Anyway, after the credits (still with THUNDERKICK in the background), we see World Karate Champion Joe Lewis talk of the many different martial arts styles, their countries of origin, their Chinese roots, mechanical execution of the techniques, and manner of execution. Shortly there-after, historian David Weeden talks as we get distracted by his funny hat and even funnier teeth. Regardless, the movie rolls along; I could really go on forever, saying who was interviewed and when, and which movies' scenes are used, sometimes ineffectively, to visually illustrate that which the experts are talking about. For example, early on, they're talking about historical battles, but the overdone leaps and acrobatic swordplay seems hardly accurate as historic documentation. Another interesting guy interviewed is Larry Tan (founder: "Tai Harmony") who talks of Bodidarma (i.e. it's believed Tamo/Damo/Bodidarma etc. came to China in 527 A.D.), as we see the Damo sequence from BRUCE LEE THE INVINCIBLE, and Chan Sing's rendition of the famed Indian priest in TAMO MONK. Speaking of veteran oldtimer Chan Sing (aka Chen Sing, Chen Hsing, Chen Xing), he's also seen battling Yasuaki Kurata in some flick, and it's revealed that he, like Larry Lee, is also a practitioner of goju-ryu karate.

It was nice to see stereotyped "monk" Gordon Liu interviewed, and speaking decent English. He says: "I am Gordon Liu Kar Fei", and accidentally calls his

MASTER KILLER movie "36 Champion", when we know he means "36 Chambers". Jet Li's scenes edit to that of Jet Li, and the transition is an in-joke for anybody who remembers CAPTAIN SCARLET AND THE MYSTERONS (same music, same way of cutting back & forth). Regardless, the Jet Li footage is the same old shit which was shown all over the three Chinese-language documentaries, but what the narrator says is interesting: "Jet Li became the first martial arts action film star in China's history, as well as being a smash success in many overseas markets. His popularity was such that fans from all over to China would come to his home, many of them walking great distances. Lines of people stretching five miles, would wait days just to see him. The reception he received from the HK film community was just as enthusiastic. Top producers and directors ALL wanted to make a film with him."

In the same interview that's also in CINEMA OF VENGEANCE, the ever charismatic Jimmy Wang Yu talks about how old movies didn't rely on "camera tricks", unlike movies today. And the chop sockey shots of a younger Wang Yu in action, using his admittedly crude kung fu (though not bad from an athlete known as a champion swimmer, not fighter!), is way more exciting than the glossy current stuff coming out of HK. And, as with CINEMA OF VENGEANCE, Bruce Li (a highlight; to me, he's an unsung hero of kung fu cinema) is interviewed. We see Li in THE CHINESE STUNTMAN (aka THE COUNTER-ATTACK) BRUCE LEE SECRET, and he points out that HK director Jimmy Shaw (not a Shaw Brother) is the one, not Ho Chung Tao himself, who coined the name Bruce Li. The other kung fu Bruce, Mr. Lee himself, is of course saluted as well, featuring behind-the-scenes stuff from ENTER THE DRAGON; and more vintage shots of Bruce Lee at tournaments & old work-outs-- scenes which some people might still consider rare. It is interesting to see and here the accounts from Lee's earliest students, though.

At some point, we of course see more Jackie Chan crap, with yet another interview with Jackie saying how audiences want to see him, and not his "da-bo" (he's trying to say 'double'). We get the point, Jackie-- now shut up already! To illustrate the talks of child Chan's drama/acrobatic school years, there's footage of some Monkey King play, and appropriate scenes of Jackie in Wong Ching's (the exploitation actor, not the director of the same name) EAGLE SHADOW FIST, one of Jackie Chan's earliest kung fu capers. Though the main hero is Wong ('TIL DEATH DO WE SCARE) Ching, the movie did have Jackie as a

supporting role as an acrobatic stage-performer. At one point, Jackie says, when commenting on old repetitious chop-sockey: "Audient is boring", but he means, "The audience got bored." There's also footage of some old movie (subtitled) with Jackie in pigtails, that I couldn't identify-- perhaps it's a non-martial arts film along the lines of ALL IN THE FAMILY; an early 1970s New Years movie. There's also a battle between Jimmy (hero) Wang Yu and Jackie (villain) Chan in POLICE WOMAN (no, not the one with Angie Dickinson).

Following the Jackie Chan section, come comparatively rushed bits on Jackie's "brother" Samo Hung & Yuen Biao. This documentary implies that Yuen Biao is damn near as successful as Jackie & Samo, and yet not too long ago, I could have sworn that Biao was stuck in lame-ass Filipino movies. Hung is also credited with discovered Liang Chia Jen, which in this movie, is spelled Liang Chia Ren. It seems "Beardy" (as he's called in England), is called "The Brigadeer" in Jamaica. Liang Chia Jen (THUNDERING MANTIS) says he was a fan of Ti Lung & David Chiang, and like Ti Lung, he learned his martial arts on the film sets, and got his career via luck and chance.

Alexander Lo, who I know as Alexander Liu, is properly identified here. Last issue, I mistakenly called him Chin Lung and Chen Lung (see page 40) because of his role in John Liu's NORTHERN KICKS AND SOUTHERN FIST. In reality, "Chin Lung"

is the comedic character, obviously a Jackie Chan (J.C.'s real name: Chan Lung) imitator. Thanks to Lana Zukowski for the correction. Anyway, according to TOP FIGHTER, Alexander Lo/Liu is a tae kwon do master and highly sought after fight choreographer, and can be seen in INCREDIBLE KUNG FU MISSION, SHAOLIN TEMPLE AGAINST LAMA, SHAOLIN VS. LAMA, NINJA IN THE FINAL DUEL 2, and of course, MAFIA VS. NINJA, where he delivers his classic line: "Reveeeeeeeengel!"

In the Tan Tao Liang ("Flash Legs") interview, I was surprised to hear he now teaches in California, but not to see what incredible kickers his students are. Tan Tao Liang recalls when he used to teach tae kwon do to college students in Taiwan, a particular student, John Liu (who as we all know, went on to be quite an accomplished movie "leg-fighter" himself; i.e. NINJA IN THE CLAWS OF THE C.I.A.). Tan recalls that John would clean & cook for Tan, in return for Tan's teachings; John's mother requested this because John was having, "problems at home". Regardless, this movie states that John Liu later went on to actually defeat Chuck Norris in a competition!

So though the Jet Li stuff only lasts about five minutes, I think this movie is outstanding; just as good as its sister-documentary, CINEMA OF VENGEANCE. The work of Toby Russel & George Tan can not be underestimated, these guys are worth their weight in gold! \*\*\*\*\* - Damon Foster



# JET LI 李連杰

## JET LI ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- 1971: Graduated from a Martial Arts Course at Beijing Athletic School
- 1974-'79: Represents China (8 times) for guest performance in over 40 countries, including Europe, Africa, America, Asia, Middle East
- 1975: 3rd China Martial Competition; Gold Champion
- 1977: National Martial Competition; Gold Champion
- 1978: National Martial Competition; Gold Champion
- 1979: 4th China Martial Competition; Gold Champion
- 1981: [films]

SHAOLIN TEMPLE 少林寺  
KIDS FROM SHAOLIN 少林小子

1986: [films]  
MARTIAL ARTS OF SHAOLIN 南北少林  
BORN TO DEFENSE 中環

1988: [film]  
DRAGON FIGHT 龍在天

1989: [film]  
THE MASTER 龍行天下

1990: [films]  
ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA 黃飛鴻

1991:  
ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA 2 黃飛鴻之二：男兒當自強  
SWORDSMAN 2 虎子

1992:  
ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA 3 黃飛鴻之三：獅王爭霸

1993:  
FONG SAI YUK 方世玉  
FONG SAI YUK 2 方世玉 II：萬夫莫敵 (方世玉)  
LAST HERO IN CHINA  
KUNG FU CULT MASTER 功夫之王  
TAI CHI MASTER 太極宗師

1994:  
NEW LEGEND OF SHAOLIN 新少林  
BODYGUARD FROM BEIJING 中南海保鏢  
FIST OF LEGEND 精武英雄  
SHAOLIN KUNG FU 少林

1995:  
HIGH RISK ハチ・リスキー  
MY FATHER IS HERO 給爸爸的信

1996:  
BLACK MASK 黑俠  
DR. WAI IN THE SCRIPTURE WITH NO WORDS

1997:  
ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA AND AMERICA  
THE HITMAN ザ・ヒトマン

1998:  
LETHAL WEAPON 4 天龍四



# TERROR WANI

## Intro by Joseph Granese

While discussing this classic Daiei "Majin" series with editor Damon Foster, I realized just how long he'd been a fan of Asian cinema, and how difficult it was to build a movie collection in the years before the multimedia revolution of the late '90s. Contemporary fans need only wander into the nearest video store to sort through a rack of dubbed 'n' subbed monster movies, samurai flicks, martial arts masterpieces and anime. This is a very recent phenomenon, something that may go unnoticed by 'lifers' who've already seen films that the rest of us are just discovering. When I mentioned the new "Daimajin" trilogy to him, he didn't seem particularly excited at first. "Is there something different about these three DaiMajin tapes than the previous versions? I do in fact have all three films already, in one form or another. I got them back in the 1980s."

Further conversation revealed that these were old unsubbed copies, the type of tape that comprises the mainstay of many "old timers'" collections. That was a time when fifth and sixth generation copies of untranslated videotapes were the coin of an underground realm. Collectors responded to two-line ads in pulpy mags, then gleefully duped their best stuff onto low-grade blank tapes that cost \$10 each. Twittering the rotary tuners on primitive VCRs that cost more than \$1000, they traded with like-minded associates, building a collection of cinematic rarities which, if not of the best quality, were highly entertaining. In contrast, most of my Asian films are new, commercially released versions, many of them on Laser Disk and DVD. This is mostly because my interest in live-action Asian cinema has enjoyed a relatively recent revival. As an adolescent, (A stage many believe I have never left.) I enjoyed Saturday afternoon martial arts films, seated in the theater with a jury of my peers, laughing at the low quality dubbing and marveling at the fighting prowess.

The pressure of gaining an education soon replaced that innocent interest, followed immediately by a brief term as a responsible and productive adult.

During that period, I missed out on the

utter addiction to those films that were virtually unheard of by mainstream moviegoers. Today, having succumbed to mid-life crisis, I find myself actively seeking the old movies and cartoons that I loved in my youth. For me, it's been an easy quest, thanks to guys like Damon who paved the way for the ongoing renaissance of Asian cinema in America. It seems like every time you turn around, another of the great old films of the '60s is returning with a new lease on life, a glitzy package, and a crisp set of subtitles. Such is the case with "Daimajin," "Return of

Daimajin," and "Wrath of Daimajin," newly released by A.D.V. Films.

A.D.V. has already made an impact on Kaiju fandom, with their release of "Destroy All Monsters" and "Gamera: Guardian of the Universe." Affordably priced and well marketed, these titles have enjoyed significant public acceptance. Released in the original Wide Screen Letterbox format, "Daimajin" combines the excitement of Samurai film with the horrific action of the giant monster genre. Directed by Yoshiyuki Kuroda and Kimiyoshi Yasuda from a Tetsuo Yoshida screenplay, "Daimajin" features the acting talents of Miwa Takada, Yoshihiko Aoyama, Jun Fujimaki, and Riki Hoshimoto as the Majin.

The Masaichi Nagata production features original music by the legendary Akira Ifukube over the cinematography of Fujio Morita. This alone qualifies it for inclusion in any fan's permanent collection. Over the years, the film has been released under many names, including "The Devil Got Angry,"

"Majin the Hideous Idol," "Majin, the Stone Samurai," and "Vengeance of the Monster." The 1966 Daiei classic boasts effects still credible by modern standards.

Set in the Togukawa Shogunate, (1603-1868) The breathtaking scene when the Majin finally comes to life is truly a cinematic legend. It is unforgettable, even by jaded modern standards. No dinky models here. The film's protagonist is an incredible, party sized, leap off the screen angel of justice come to pass judgment on the evils of mankind.

The three films in the A.D.V. "Daimajin" series are now in stores. Several of the larger chains have copies for rent if you'd like to check them out before committing to the series. If you're ready to buy, I found them online at Amazon.com for \$12.99, not much more than the blank tapes used to make those old copies two decades ago.

## GIANT MONSTER GAMERA

("Dai Kaiju Gamera") Daiei; 1965, Planned by Yonejiro Saito, Screenplay: Nisan Takahashi, Dir.: Noriaki Yuasa, Photography: Nobuo Munekawa, Recorded by: Riichi Watanabe, Gaffer: Saicho Ito, Art Dir.: Akira Inoue, Music: Tadashi Yamanouchi, Film Editor: Tatsuji Nakashizu, Asst. Dir.: Shime Abe, Prod. Manager: Hiroaki Kamijima, FX Photography: Yonesaburo Tsukiji, Special Arts: Akira Inoue, Optical FX by Kazufumi Fujii, Gaffer: Mamoru Ishizawa, Prod. Manager: Kiyoshi Kawamura, Cast: Yoshiro Uchida, Eiji Funakoshi, Junichiro Yamashita, Michiko Sugata, Harumi Kirtiachi, Yoshihiro Kitahara, Kenji Ohba, Reviewed by Damon Foster

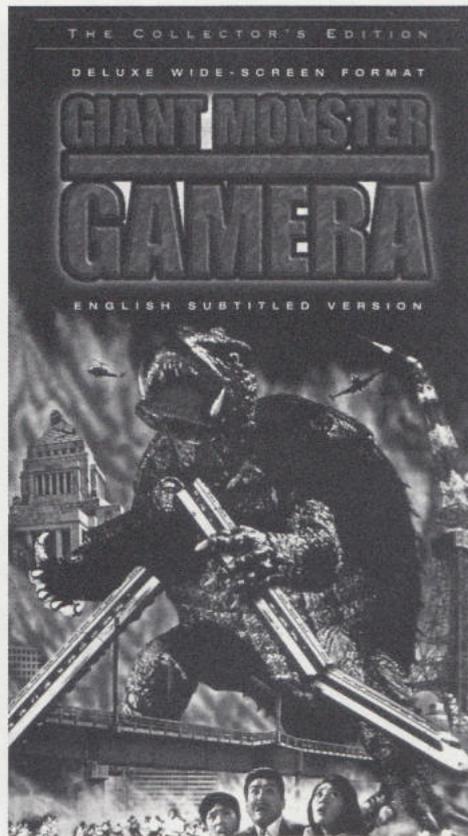
This excellent, American-released tape of GIANT MONSTER GAMERA confirms that so far, 1999 has been a good year for Japanese monster fans in the States; or rather, U.S. fans of the Daiei film company in particular. No less than two movie monsters have made their way to home video-- they're the two most famous creatures in Daiei history: Majin and Gamera! The first two Gamera videotapes are long overdue proof that finally, the fans-- or rather, supporters of the genre are actually getting some say-so on these under-rated productions. For example, the introductions on the backs of the Gamera videotapes were written by none other than August Ragone himself, long time expert and promoter of the genre at hand. Augie is no stranger to the fandom, having appeared on numerous Bay Area TV shows, and his work on publications like HENSHIN and the legendary MARKALITE magazine can't be forgotten. Some of his intro on the back of the new video, GIANT MONSTER GAMERA reads as follows: "Daiei's

GAMERA series, has been perceived as a reply to rival Toho's own monster champion, *Godzilla*. Actually, GAMERA was created more by chance than rivalry. After the disastrous attempts in shooting a movie about hound-sized radioactive rats, Daiei President and Executive Producer Masaichi Nagata (*RASHOMON*), while gazing out of the window on a flight home from America, envisioned a giant sea turtle flying amid the clouds. GAMERA, the original mutant terrapin was born!"

But I can't help but wonder why mine wasn't used on this videotape's back cover! I sent them one which read like this: "Hold on to your gonads and your gal's titties, because Daiei President Masaichi Nagata (who kicked ass with *RASHOMON*, my nigguh!) presents GIANT MONSTER GAMERA, a fan-fucking-tastic variation on Toho's *Godzilla* movies!" Expecting this to appear on the box cover as the film rested in the children's section in local videostores, I thought I would confirm with Neptune Media, so I gave these releasers a call. They basically said, "No Comment", so I made the logical assumption that my intro was lost in the mail; it must have never reached them. So, to once again convey my love of the genre, I so selflessly wrote another intro, expecting it to appear on the back of the videobox displayed proudly at Toys 'R Us. Yet some how, Ragone's piece appeared instead; my new liner notes, to appear next to the shot of Gamera at Tokyo Tower went a little something like this: "Shit!! Fuckin' aye! Can you believe some mother fuckers have finally gotten the balls to release the greatest Jap turtle of them all!? I'm so excited about the re-release of GIANT MONSTER GAMERA that I'm about to cum all over myself-- and you too! One thing is for god-damn sure, Daiei President Masaichi Nagata may have seemed like a greedy old Jew bastard, but at least he wasn't no faggot!" But low and behold; the videobox comes out with neither of my reviews, and it instead sticks to August Ragone's no-nonsense approach! As such, I can only assume that the U.S. Postal Service leaves much to be desired.

But enough of my politically incorrect silliness; and onto the review. William Fergusson and the other folks at Neptune Media did an excellent job at releasing this movie to video, the approach is nearly as good as that of the *ULTRAMAN* pre-record from a few years back, when Fergusson was involved with Expressions in Animation. GIANT MONSTER GAMERA is the uncut Japanese version, rather like Sandy Frank's alternate release of the same film as *GAMERA* (1985), except that it was a dubbed version. So what we

have now is yet another version of the same movie, now re-titled (again) GIANT MONSTER GAMERA, but beautifully presented in the widescreen letterboxed version, which crystal clear English subtitles. There are many who will say this is the best version of the film, but I don't think anybody really has enough time on his hands to sit down and watch all three translated tapes (*GAMERA*, *GIANT MONSTER GAMERA* and *GAMERA THE INVINCIBLE*) side-by-side! If somebody was that anal and that fanatical, they might wanna' see if there's a French-dubbed version with Vietnamese subtitles. After *GIANT MONSTER GAMERA* ends, there's



some of that nifty "supplemental" stuff for nostalgia; trivia buffs might get a kick out of seeing the coming attractions for *GAMERA THE INVINCIBLE* (thanks to Ted Newson for going through old archives to dig up this gem!) when it got its American TV release in the late 1960s, as well as a Japanese theatrical trailer for *DAI KAIJU GAMERA*. There's other movie-release material we get glimpses of too, including some stills and the original promotional book.

The thing that most impressed me about the subtitles & credits was seeing a then-little-known actor listed, Kenji Ohba. If you've been reading OC for years, you know Ohba went on to star in *SPACE SHERIFF GAVAN* (see OC's "Robo-Hero-Issue", which focused on characters of Japan's Metal Hero Genre), and can also be seen in *BATTLE FEVER J*, *LEG-END OF THE EIGHT SAMURAI*, *KAGE NO*

*GUNDAN*, and he had tiny cameos in *THE KILLING MACHINE* and Yasuaki Kurata's *TIGER'S CLAW*. He was an adult in these various 1970s and 1980s productions, so obviously, he was just a kid in *GIANT MONSTER GAMERA*. He might be the kid who steals Toshio's (Yoshiro Uchida) rocks, or one of several teenagers dancing to instrumental surf music in the club scene. But I suspect Kenji Ohba is the youngster (about 14 years old) who's kneeling next to his grandparents when the old lady says: "We see terrible things if we live too long".

But as I watch Neptune Media's version of this so-called "classic", the thrill of their print quickly fades. I don't dislike this movie, but consider all the infinitely more exciting Japanese sci-fi movies coming out of Japan in the 1960s: *GHIDRAH THE THREE HEADED MONSTER*, *TERROR BENEATH THE SEA*, *MAGIC SERPENT*, etc. So Daiei's *GIANT MONSTER GAMERA* is not an example of Japanese science fiction as its most fun. *GIANT MONSTER GAMERA* is tolerable, worth sitting through at least once if you haven't already, but it could have been much better. Though we can finally see the movie as Daiei intended it, *GAMERA* still comes off as a typical *Godzilla* imitation, and the only way it breaks new grounds is that it's probably the first Japanese monster movie that dealt largely with little kids. Otherwise, it's got the familiar clichés & formulas more commonly associated with Toho/Tsuburaya productions: International newspaper headlines announcing the monster's attack, monster revived from prehistoric hibernation via atomic explosion, monster rampages city and people run, and of course, a newspaper reporter after that big scoop. Also on hand, of course, are the ingenious scientists who devise a plan to eliminate the marauding giant after military attacks prove as effective as using a photo of Ellen Degenres as a turn-on.

What follows is the obligatory story, which I've re-hashed more than once. Next issue I'll review the second Neptune Media release of this movie, the 1960s American TV print, *GAMERA THE INVINCIBLE*, which has all new (it was back then, anyway!) editing & footage, hastily acted & edited by its U.S. releasers. But for now, I conclude my review of this more commonly seen print, *GIANT MONSTER GAMERA*:

Like I've said more than once, specifically in *O.C. The Gamera Issue* a few years ago, prehistoric mutant turtle Gamera gets revived in the arctic. Just look at that cheap Eskimo village consisting of two paper-mache' igloos and obviously Japanese actors trying to portray Eskimos! There's some really bad English dialogue (like when the Eskimo

chief calls Gamera the "Devils Envoy", the "Devil's Convoy", or whatever) before a jet fight causes a nuclear explosion and Gamera, that fire-eating flying-saucer himself, pops out. In-between reporters and other bits of filler, Gamera goes on the usual rampages, not just among glaciers, but among Japanese buildings too-- that's to be expected. The Gamera costume, miniatures and other special effects are almost as good as that of a Toho movie. In one scene, an American army general with the acting ability of an emptied can of Diet Cherry Coke says: "Huge toilet! 60 meters, what's going on around here?" Though I'm picking on this film, the truth is that these kaiju flicks are true, near & dear to my heart, they always touch me, even in my old age. Several Godzilla movies give me not-so-dry eyes, and the scenes of Gamera saving kiddy Toshio from the damaged lighthouse had that same effect, for once! But on the whole, GAMERA, whether you know it as DAI KAIJU GAMERA or GIANT MONSTER GAMERA is a B&W, lackluster bore. Even the climax, where Gamera is lured into a rocket drags on and has plenty of footage of uninteresting characters. \*1/2 - Damon Foster

#### DAIMAJIN

("Great Majin") Daiei Co. Ltd.; 1966, Dir. Kimiyoshi Yasuda, Written by Tetsuro Yasuda, Cinematographer: Fujiro Morita, Dir. of Special Effects: Yoshiyuki Kuroda, English Release by ADV Films (A.D.V. Films, 5750 Bintliff #217, Houston, TX 77036-2123, 713-977-9181, <http://www.advfilms.com>), Starring: Miwa Takada, Yoshihiko Aoyama, Jun Fujimaki, Ryutarō Gomi, Ryuzō Shimada, Reviewed by Damon Foster

It's been a great many years since I watched this classic Japanese fantasy/drama, but as I watch this excellent new pre-record (distributed to North America, thanks to John Ledford, Janice Williams and the other folks at ADV Films), it all comes back to me; this masterpiece of Japanese mystery was a childhood favorite of mine. I eagerly watched it every time the dubbed version came on television, under its American TV title:

MAJIN, MONSTER OF TERROR. As a twerp, I found it strange to love a movie so slow-paced and talky-- but this added to the intrigue, knowing the climactic fifteen-or-so minutes were gonna' be in sharp contrast to the serious, believable tone of the majority of the movie. Since, unlike Daiei's other popular monster films series (Gamera's farces) of that period,

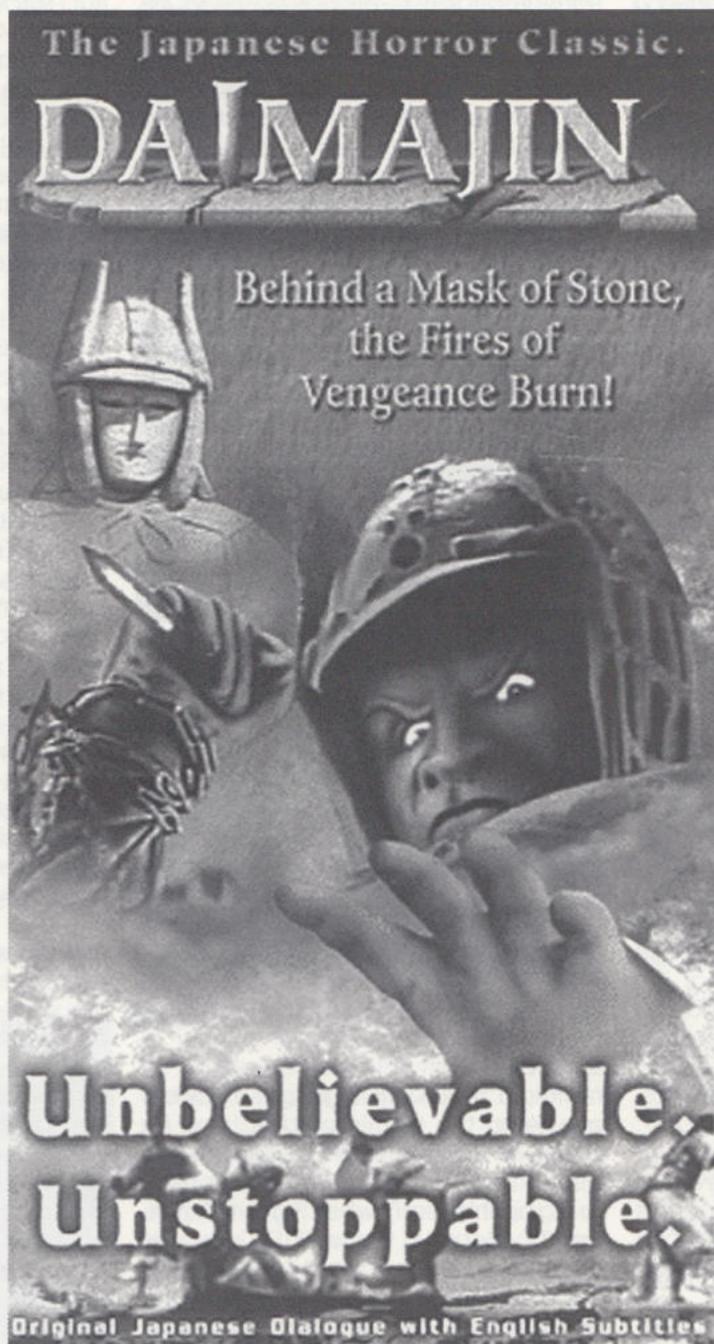
or how much caffeine did it take to crank out this exceptional trilogy in just one friggin' year?! Anyway, the other two films are also available from ADV Films (a company known for releasing even more anime, for what it's worth), and have been released as WRATH OF DAIMAJIN (aka "Return of Giant Majin" as it was seen dubbed on U.S. TV) and RETURN OF DAIMAJIN (aka "Majin Strikes Again", though I don't think there's a dubbed print in existence). Reviews of both ADV Films releases will be in the next couple OCs. I highly recommend you purchase all three videotapes, as they made a handsome display when placed side-by-side; it's rather like a jigsaw-puzzle-effect, forming a complete Majin face.

One thing I don't understand about the video rental's box, and that of all three films in fact, is the disclaimer which warns that some scenes might not be suitable for young viewers. The English-dubbed TV print I saw was uncut, it's as complete as this new release. The TV stations never added disclaimers. Sure, there's some swordplay and a little blood, but there's nothing explicit or graphic. Times sure must have changed since I was a child; has political correctness really gotten that out of hand?

In comparing this subtitled print with TV's dubbed "Majin, Monster of Terror", the differences are minimal. I like both versions equally, for different reason. This subtitled version lacks commercials, obviously, and is letterboxed, showing us all its widescreen, don't-miss-an-inch glory. However, the English voice-over print from yester-year is more convenient in that you can look away from the screen for a while and not miss anything-- subtitles do have that disadvantage of requiring absolute attention. I do feel that the kid "Take" (pronounced "Talk-kay") had a really inappropriate voice, dubbed by a very feminine sounding lady. This made me think this boy was a girl, albeit a very, very ugly girl. That mole on his face still makes me cringe-- now there's a runt in serious need of toenail clippers and a Band-Aid!

In the "Monster-of-Terror" version, Majin's alter-ego god is called Shino (perhaps because he's worshipped by the old

(continued on page 48)



DAIMAJIN was intelligently written, and perhaps more for adults than the kiddies. I'm glad to say that this excellent combination of melodrama and horror still shines out today, DAIMAJIN will always deliver the goods.

There were two other Majin movies made after this one, and what amazes the hell out of me is that they were all made in 1966! Granted, the Japanese are workaholics, but just how many drugs,

# HONG KONG HEROES



## SNAKE DEADLY ACT

Directed by Wilson Tong, Starring: Wilson Tong, Ng Kun Lung, Philip Kao, Reviewed by Zilla Greene

Ever notice an amusing similarity between a good porno movie and a good kung fu movie? The writing is uninspired, character development is nonexistent....but if they're worth their salt, they get straight to the good stuff! I find this to be especially true of SNAKE DEADLY ACT; although the characters and plot are hard to follow, you never have to wait five minutes for the next fight scene.

The basic theme of the movie is "snake fist", the infamous snake style of kung fu. A unique feature of snake fist is that it carries with it a deadly blow; the "dim mal", or touch of death. This makes the snake fist fight sequences in SNAKE DEADLY ACT very unique. The martial artists really avoid blocking as much as possible, since any contact with this lethal blow could spell certain death. Therefore, much of the fight consists of acrobatic dodging! Snake fist also encompasses some of my favorite footwork in martial arts cinema, very fluid and dancelike. Other martial arts techniques that make an appearance include the shadowless kick, drunken style, and a terrific weapons sequence involving a shortsword and a fan.

The plot is lame, although the characters are interesting enough. Kwok Chung is the morally upstanding son of a Chinese businessman, who is incessantly followed by two things; a strange bum and a lot of trouble. When the bum comes to his rescue twice, Kwok learns that he is Yue Yi, a master of the snake fist. After some cajoling, Kwok is taken as a student, and uses his newfound abilities to thwart the schemes of his father. I won't ruin the ending for you, but let's just say that there's more to that Yue Yi than meets the eye!

The copy I got was in Cantonese, with both Chinese and English subtitles which were hard to read, so I had to do a lot of rewinding to figure out what was going on. It didn't help that the subtitles were white (a common color of the costumes in the movie!). But all in all, SNAKE DEADLY ACT was a fun and exciting movie, definitely worth it for the numerous and fluid-like fight sequences. I'd have to give it three and a half stars. \*\*\*1/2 -Zilla Greene

## 1980s:

### AMAZON COMMANDO

{aka "Jackie Chan's Crime Force"}, Released by Arena Video, Distributed by Eastern Heroes, Starring: Bridgett Lin, Reviewed by Frank Strom

Due to the high profile American theatrical release of Jackie Chan's TUMBLE IN THE BRONX and FIRST STRIKE, we currently find ourselves in a boom period for Chinese kung fu films on American video shelves. Hey, I for one couldn't be happier-- It means I don't have to drag my lazy ass into Chinatown to rent videos of questionable picture transfer quality. Now I can cruise past the suburban teenyboppers as the local Suncoast and feed my need for chopsockey in the "under \$10.00 section"! There's something rather kinky about buying a grade-Z Yukari Oshima Filipino flick one door down from "Wicks & Sticks. Actually, much to my anger & dismay, the Suncoast chain recently abandoned its glorious cheapo section in favor of adding a (hopelessly outmoded already) DVD section. Fuck 'em. I know when I'm not wanted!

But wait! All is not lost! The neighborhood Blockbuster went belly up (ha ha!) and agast-- standing in its place stands the mighty morphin' Video Craze! They've got all the bargain chopsockey tapes for rental!! And a two-fer-Tuesday special!!! Lemme' tell ha', my private parts were harder than a SAILOR MOON fan's at a nursery field trip. The force of Buddha's palm has shown me the way, so stand back-- it's freakin' video frenzy time!

Okay, just remember there's a reason these are cheapo videos, and it's best to be on your guard. You never know when you'll be suckered into a \$6.00 copy of YOUNG MASTER only to find out it's not only not dubbed, but not letterboxed either (subtitles? Who reads subtitles?). So what's the catch with this tape? Easy-- it's marketed as a Jackie Chan film. Those not totally clueless will know better. But those who know better may still want to check

it out since it includes three, maybe five minutes of legitimately obscure Chan footage tacked on before the real movie. It's hard to tell where this footage came from, but I'd guess it was shot while sets were still standing from some other film (DRUNKEN MASTER 2, maybe?). Nothing special, really so only the hopelessly fanatical need bother.

The actual featured film JACKIE CHAN'S CRIME FORCE (originally titled AMAZON'S COMMANDO) is worth a look on its own merits. By no means your typical Chinese babe-fu effort, it lacks the hyperactive (non special effects) fights that are the bread and butter of the genre. And while I'm picking on its short-comings, let me also point out that star Bridgett Lin ain't no Moon Lee or Yukari Oshima (also the bread and butter of the genre, as far as I'm concerned). In fact, CRIME FORCE isn't a kung fu film at all! Hey! I been robbed!!

Surprise, surprise. What we have here is in fact a western. No, wait-- It's a broads-behind-bars flick. No--A war movie! Actually, it's all of the above and more! It starts as a prison picture with Lin (wearing an eyepatch) leading a hand picked team of lady inmates in a jailbreak. Turns out Lin is working for the government on a secret missions to destroy the bad guys (Nazis? Japanese? Yanks? This is during W.W.II, but you're not too clear on who the villains are) chemical factory. The girls ride around on horses and it plays a lot like THE WILD BUNCH. Eventually the heroes raid the factory and fall one by one (like KELLY'S HEROES or THE DIRTY DOZEN). The lead baddie has a twin brother. The good guys win, the bad guys lose-- but at what cost?

It's loads of fun and the heroes are all broadly drawn comic book characters (the eye-patched leader, the cowgirl, the lady wrestler, the samurette, etc.). The setting is W.W.II, but the costumes and hairstyles aren't a bit convincing-- The "Cowgirl" character has a spiked punk do & wear heavy eye-makeup, making her look more like an early '80s era Japanese lady wrestler like Dump Matsumoto or Bull Nakano-- More so than the lady wrestler does! \*\*\*1/2 -Frank Strom

## SECRET OF SHAOLIN POLES

(aka "Prodigal Boxer 2"?) Dir.: Au Yang Chun, Released by Ocean Shores Video; 1983, Starring: Meng Fei, Shoji Karada, Reviewed by Lana Zukowski

Meng Fei again plays legendary hero Fong Shih Yu in this sequel to THE PRODIGAL BOXER. Judging by the presence of a young, pre-stardom Kuo Chui in a tiny role, this film was made in the early-to-mid 1970s.

Lay Kar Wing (aka Liu Chia Yung) turns up here under his Bruce Law alias. He plays a man who at first seems to be a bad guy, when he impersonates Fang Shih Yu; however, he soon becomes the latter's disciple and then gives his life for him.

On THE PRODIGAL BOXER, Lau Kar Wing had worked as a fight choreographer and probably held the same position on this film. I say probably, because what is presumably a translating error resulted in Lau Kar Leung (aka Liu Chia Liang) famed Shaw director and elder brother of Lau Kr Wing, being listed as the picture's choreographer. And before anyone leaps to the conclusion that Lau Kar Leung did indeed work on the movie, let me point out that SECRET OF THE SHAOLIN POLES is never mentioned in any filmography of him.

In the first film, famed Japanese actor Shoji Kurata (aka Yasuaki Kurata) played the main villain (who, naturally was killed by the hero). In the sequel, he portrays the twin brother of that character. This equally evil fellow, a Japanese named "Dragon Lee", is less motivated by a desire to avenge his dead sibling than by lust. He's so obsessed with a hooker with a hear of gold (yes, this tired cliché again) that he arranges to buy her from her madam, but that doesn't keep the lecherous creep from trying to rape Meng Fei's girlfriend (the hooker intervenes and winds up dead).

The climax has Shoji Kurata apparently not grief-stricken by his lady-love's death threatening to rape the girlfriend on top of the Shaolin poles, if Meng Fei won't show up to fight him.

So what are the Shaolin poles? There're the same poles rising out of the ground to form a battlefield for hero and villain that we've seen in numerous films before. But the poles in this movie are booby-trapped, making them extremely dangerous for the combatants. There are two decent (not spectacular) fights on the poles, the first of which ends with Lau Kar Wing dead and Meng Fei severely injured. The second battle occurs at the climax and (of course) ends with Shoji Kurata's death.

But the picture isn't quite over yet. First, Meng Fei must duel head evildoer Chang Yi (spelled Chang Yee here) who once again plays a white-haired villain (which

he's probably done more times than just about anyone).

Leg-fighter Delon Tam (aka Tan Tao Liang) shows up as a crippled master who teaches Meng Fei but he doesn't have enough to do here (the training sequences are too brief for this movie to qualify as an EAGLE'S SHADOW/DRUNKEN MASTER rip-off).

Plot? The story is so similar to that of THE PRODIGAL BOXER that SECRET OF SHAOLIN POLES qualifies as a quasi-remake of its predecessor. To put it succinctly, Meng Fei's Fang Shih-Yu is initially defeated by the villains, but thanks to training from Delon Tam, he emerges triumphant at the end. \*\* -Lana Zukowski

## 1990s:

### EVIL INSTINCT

Starring: Carrie Ng, Pan Dan (aka Pan Gang, Pan Dang) and some guy, Running Time: 90 Minutes, Reviewed by Linda Arroyo

Renowned for her role in the 1992 box office hit NAKED KILLER, Carrie Ng stars in EVIL INSTINCT (aka EVIL INTENT)...a Category Three film. Though lacking the ferocity of NAKED KILLER, EVIL INSTINCT does blend an interesting concept of vampirism and naginism (Hindu for "serpent woman") to create a blood-sucking serpent. Unfortunately, there's no fans of glowing red eyes...instead we get a snake in babes' clothing (played by Carrie Ng) and a dash of human drama. A premise shown in many modern vampire flicks which tends to be tedious and incomprehensible.

Besides the human crime-drama, EVIL INSTINCT rips off BASIC INSTINCT's famous interrogation room scene where Ng (replacing Sharon Stone) crosses her delectable legs...though without revealing her bush (sorry guys). In fact, eager voyeurs get so see more of Carrie Ng's bare back (and I mean only her back) throughout the film, than any other vital body parts (with the exception of the movie poster displaying Ng in the buff covered only by a boa constrictor). Incidentally, EVIL INSTINCT does have a galore of nude oriental babes (insurance sales chicks, actually) performing S&M games and the sultry Pan Dan (aka Diana Pang) gleaming those juicy round melons. But Carrie Ng's alluring presence overshadows the cast of players.

As nagina Penny Ng, a senior insurance salesperson, Carrie Ng becomes a suspect in a murder investigation, however she cleverly pins the wrap on Wendy (Pan Dan), her young competitor. But the unrelenting flatfoot soon follows Penny's trail of blood after sacking her...though in vain, since Penny suddenly aged beyond recognition without her regular stimulant in-

jection (a substitute for blood-cravings) to keep her young. By the end, the goodie-cop becomes a nagin, killing his first victim in a nightclub. \*1/2 -Linda Arroyo



### THE SIXTY MILLION DOLLAR MAN

Win's Motion Pictures; 1995, Starring: Steven Chau Sing Chi, Ng Man Dat, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Yet another quirky exercise in nonsensical slapstick from Hong Kong's favorite comedy team: Stephen Chow and Tat Man Dat. As such, SIXTY MILLION DOLLAR MAN is pretty typical and predictable, movies like this are more common than homosexual males in the cast of the Broadway play Cats. The farce isn't Steven Chow's worst, but it won't live up to GOD OF GAMBLERS III: BACK TO SHANGHAI or LOVE ON DELIVERY, which I still consider to be his most hilarious films.

This one is okay, it's fairly lively, offers a decent laugh or two, beautiful women and some cool computer FX. So on the surface, it's worthwhile and vaguely amusing. But substance wise, it's no classic; the story is shallow & hastily written, and the characters are too zany (not to be confused with funny) to be interesting. There's really no originality what-so-ever, the title is obviously taken from that old Lee Majors show (THE SIX MILLION DOLLAR MAN, remember that boring, cheap hunk of crap!?), there's a lengthy spoof of PULP FICTION (more effective than the half-ass attempt in Leslie Nielson's SPY HARD, if nothing else), and the later half is an absolutely blatant rip-off of Jim Carrey's THE MASK (am I the only one who thought that film sucked?), but not as stupid. The computer FX are the highlights of THE SIXTY MILLION DOLLAR MAN. Though not as effective as those in American blockbusters like THE MASK, they're pretty cool, like one fairly funny scene where Steven Chow becomes a toilet.

The script starts off with Steven Chiau Sing Chi as a spoiled millionaire student in Hawaii who befriends a mad scientist (he's Chinese with an Einstein hair-style) who works at some university, and creates bizarre creatures (i.e. a living hand) in his

spare time, down in his Frankentstien-ish laboratory. Our arrogant hero (Steve Chow Sing Chi) pisses off some yakuza ("Japanese triad", as translated in the subtitles) who obliterate him. So the deranged scientist rebuilds him into a magical superhero, sort of. He doesn't actually fight, but his limbs (i.e. his penis is made from a sprinkler and garden hose; hardy har har) can become household objects which prove useful in controlling unruly, ridiculously savage students who hassle their school's teachers. Eventually, the plot thickens when them yakuza dudes come back to start more trouble, and one of them has also become a mighty cyborg (in a latex bodysuit obviously satirizing the new Robin in BATMAN FOREVER). Both androids fight (if you can call it that) it out in a magical series of gimmicks meant to be funny, and our hero wins just in time for the out-takes and ending credits. Jackie Chan (who got the idea from Burt Reynolds's CANNONBALL RUN stinkers) was the first HK guy to put outtakes in his films. Where as Jackie comes off as a fun loving guy who finds such bloopers funny, Steven Chow lives up to his image of a snob by seeming honestly annoyed when props don't function as planned. \*1/2 -Damon Foster

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**VELVET GLOVES**

1997, Starring: Jade Leung, Man Pui Pui, Hon Chuen, Reviewed by George Garvey

Someone recently said "Girls with Guns" films are over. Wrong!! Jade Leung and her heroic comrades are members of China's Public Security Bureau. Wanting even more excitement they train to be members of the "Special Unit". The "Special Unit" handles terrorists, kidnappers, counter-revolutionaries.

As the film opens, Jade and friends are on an actual mission to rescue a kidnap victim. The kidnappers are holed-up in an abandoned building. Jade and comrades use guns, kung fu, knives and explosives. They rescue the victim but he don't look too good in that cage. Okay, back to the base, their commander tells them they suck. So he has their

training increased. Some of the training sequences are demanding, these gals were put through it!! Jade's dad is a general. This causes problems with one of her comrades named Yu Man. Yu Man's dad was allow ranking officer who told her to "graduate or don't come home". Jade Leung's character is kinda' stuck up. When they're off duty she doesn't hang out with her comrades. Jade's comrades are a very friendly bunch and you will end up liking them more than Jade! Some of them have good martial arts abilities especially Fu Ling. One hilarious scene has the smallest member of the unit having to fight the biggest hand-to-hand combat instructor to stay in the program.

Okay, off-duty time, everyone goes into Shanghai. Jade hangs out with Dad The General. Everyone else goes out and beats up on some Armani-Suit wearing, call-phone talking, look like they came from HK yuppie trash! Then they get into a street fight with some construction workers and their very annoying yuppie boss. It's cool!! Back at the base, their commander denies his gals were beating people up in town. Next-action time-filthy, running dog terrorists are making poison gas a nearby factory. Our heroic gals are sent in, no shooting allowed. Before you know it, fists and feet are flying! The bad guys get beat down hard!! There's just one problem-they're part of f the training staff! The commander didn't want them to hold back so he didn't tell them. More training follows and then off-duty time again. Jade hangs out with you know who, the other go to a karaoke club. Songs about getting through hard times and good comradeship. Okay, sounds goofy, but in today's two-faced, backstabbing world their friendship and

good spirits were nice to see.

But the fun don't last long. They are soon called out on a ral mission. More filthy, running dog terrorists are holed-up in a building under construction. Jade and friends are sent in. Pretty soon everyone is going at it. Lot's of shooting and fighting. Once again, some of the gals are impressive. Some aren't. Yu Man gets her butt kicked by half-whitey villain Eddie Maher (remember him from IN THE LINE OF DUTY 4?). But Jade shows up just in time to put a hole in his head. Some of the bad guys get shot, some get kung fu'd, some beaten down with bamboo poles. Graduation day- you get a speech, a parade. The music isn't as good as in THE WOMEN SOLDIERS, but Jade and her heroic comrades can kick butt on Brigitte Lin Ching Hsia and her Nationalist running-dog lackeys any day. I liked this film, it's fun!!! \*\*\*1/2 -George Garvey



彭丹

Pan Dang of SIX DEVIL WOMEN and EVIL INSTINCT.

## SIX DEVIL WOMEN

*Running Time: 90 Minutes, Starring: Pauline Yeung and Pan Dan (AKA Pan Dang, Pan Gang), Reviewed by Linda Arroyo*

Seduction, carnapping, romantic beatings (!), a titillating shower scene, catfights, cut-throats, and decapitation all in one film, and not necessarily in that order. *SIX DEVIL WOMEN* begins with a criminal gang in prison reminiscing cold-hearted murders as they prepare for their trial and sentence, rotating from present to past events....a story within a story (without subtitles). The only two familiar stars were Pauline Yeung and Pan Dan/Pan Dang, recognized from *OC's Femme Fatales Issue (OC#23, AKA "Number Nine")*. This black comedy film is quite a surprise from your typical nonsensical rubbish put forth as crime cinema (e.g. *ROCK & ROLL COP*).

Pauline Yeung plays the gang-leader's girlfriend ("Devil 1"), who won her over with a couple of quick slaps to the face and a quick bang to his former girlfriend's ("Devil 2") displeasure. Then there's the professional carstopper ("Devil 3") played by Pan Dan (an Amy Yip look-alike, though unable to fill her cup size), whose plans of marrying ended when her boyfriend turns her over to the police. The apparent ugly-duckling ("Devil 4") of the lot and lesbian ("Devil 5") who together with Yeung's greedy-gold-digger sister ("Devil 6") during totals the "Six Devil Women".

Script: A ruthless gang retells their series of murder & carnapping by luring unsuspecting drivers with the help of sex bodacious femmes posing as ladies in distress, allowing their male partners to kill, steal, then sell the victim's car. All in a good day's work. \*\*1/2-Linda Arroyo

## CINEMA OF VENGEANCE

*Presented by Vengeance Prod., A Toby Russell Film, A George Tan Prod., Exec. Prod.: Roy McAree, Director of Photography: Kenneth Stipe, Edited by Scott Mary, Featuring: Chen Hui Min, Jimmy Wang Yu, Samo Hung, Liu Chia Hui, Jackie Chan, Simon Yam, Steve James, Cynthia Rothrock, Don "The Dragon" Wilson, Reviewed by Damon Foster*

One hell of a documentary! This enlightening, educational epic tells you everything you need to know about HK movies, it's quite captivating! I've watched it at least three times, and it still amazes me just how many HK super-stars (new and old) they managed to interview. Some of these guys speak decent English, while others are subtitled; but regardless, if you're a fan of martial arts films, you've just gotta' see this immensely thorough documentary. Produced by Westerners, it's all in English, and a must see for all supporters of the

genre. Other than Gary Daniel's relentless asskissing every time Jackie Chan's name comes up, *CINEMA OF VENGEANCE* is exceptionally excellent. It's made by the same people who did *TOP FIGHTER*, another documentary (reviewed elsewhere in this issue), and one which is more than similar to *CINEMA OF VENGEANCE*.

The abundant film clips are expected. *CINEMA OF VENGEANCE* starts out with a scene from Liang Chia Jen's old chop-sockey film *THE VICTIM* (and the guy is even interviewed!), followed by *THE HEART IS THAT ETERNAL ROSE*. An interview or two



Above, director John Woo and Lau Kar Leung of *CINEMA OF VENGEANCE*.



later, Jimmy Wang Yu is interviewed and we see images from his oldies like: *ONE-ARMED SWORDSMAN*, *CHINESE BOXER* (here called "King of Boxers"), and for the inevitable Jackie Chan piece, we see clips from some of Jackie's non-Golden Harvest (I suspect Golden Harvest was stingy & greedy with their films) films like *ISLAND ON FIRE*, *FANTASY MISSION FORCE*, *DRUNKEN MASTER*, Jackie's dock duel with Chen Hong Lie in *SNAKEFIST FIGHTER* (here subtitled as "Cub Tiger From Canton", or something like that), and a fight in Jimmy Wang Yu's rarely seen *POLICE WOMAN*, where Wang Yu & Jackie (as a hench-villain) battle it out around some crashed car. There are endless other clips too, covering most genres of HK action, from sword movies, to Chow Yun Fat/John Woo shoot 'em ups. But of all the clips, the most thrilling were those from flicks we haven't seen;

rare old stuff that's probably never been released on video:

*MAGIC PALM* (courtesy of Cheng Du Film Co.) looks like a typical 1960s sword movie along the lines of *THE TWIN SWORDS*, and although I would love to get my hands on such a hard-to-find production, I'm even more fascinated with clips from B&W oldies like *STORY OF BOOK & SWORD* (courtesy of Biangsang Films) which features a young Liu Chia Liang, and *WONG FEI HUNG: TRAPPED ON TIGER MOUNTAIN* (courtesy of Biangsang Films). It's damn near impossible to find kung fu films from the 1940s or 1950s, but in this case, the people at *CINEMA OF VENGEANCE* seem to have done so. Sure, the footage from these antique kung fu oddities is crude, and the action isn't particularly impressive when seen today. But being actual roots of the kung fu genre we've grown to know & love, such classic films seem priceless to me for sentimental, if not historic value. Accompanying these ancient clips are interviews with old-timers like Liu Chia Liang (here called Lau Kar Leung) and of course, the late Kwan Tak Hing (aka Khan Tak Hing, Kahn Tak Hing). On the topic of old, impossible-to-find videos, does anybody out there know how we can go about reaching Biangsang Films?!

But more interesting than the plentiful clips are interviews with anyone and everyone! From Hollywood script writer Ed Khmara to Samo Hung, the familiar faces which pop up is mind-boggling. Cynthia Rothrock, Donnie Yen, Sophia Crawford, Simon Yam; the list goes on. Some of the interviews are misleading though. It's kinda' weird to see hear talk of Donnie Yen being a major star in the 1990s period-film revival, and yet he's simultaneously seen fighting a black guy on a skyscraper! Speaking of African Americans, the late Steve James is interviewed briefly too. He talks about his appearances in numerous ninja movies, while we simultaneously see high-paced clips from HK ninja thrillers. With all due respect to the dead, I must say that it's misleading to make it look as though Mr. James starred in thrilling kung fu movies from HK. He was a great guy before his cancer-related death a few years back, but let's be realistic here; his movies sucked! With roles in garbage like the *AMERICAN NINJA* series, he never had a chance to really demonstrate his skills.

But, of all the interviews, I feel the most important one in *CINEMA OF VENGEANCE* was that of Bruce Li! Though he was in dozens of films and was a familiar face on late night TV, he's really quite outspoken, and must have a lot of stories to tell! As far as I'm concerned, they should have just interviewed him (Bruce Li, AKA Ho Chung Tao) all through *CINEMA OF VENGEANCE*.

(continued on page 48)



away from the impact of the action (can you imagine how annoying these scenes would look in a live action film?!), but the action scenes aren't what really amused me about GOLGO 13: QUEEN BEE.

The best part of this 60-minute movie is the drama, the characters. They're all quite intriguing and interesting (same thing, spelled differently) for once, the situations kept me on the edge of my seat. Female soldier "Queen Bee", though she has shoot-outs with Golgo 13 (who fucks her and kills her; in that order), she's not actually a villain-- Golgo 13 just kills anyone for money. Queen Bee is an interesting, sultry and yet likable character (hell, she fucks ALL the guys in her platoon, quite commendable). Some people would call her a "slut" (not a bad thing, so long as a minimum of feelings are hurt), or "sleazy", but I think "generous" would be a better term.

The female form is drawn to look impossibly perfect, inhumanly sexy. Such an unrealistic figure is only common within the models, actresses and poseur-teases of Hollywood-esque surgery. I would rather the artists draw such characters as having an occasional stretch-mark, slightly protruding stomach or whatever, and not leave every part so impossibly firm. Hell, it's the live-action mainstream's worship of surgically-enhanced beauty which has resulted in thousands of young women resorting to anorexia, and the old "binge & purge" of bolemia. In comparison, I do respect the obese fans of cartoons. Though their one-dimensional role models are also unbelievably fit, this has not influenced their out-of-shape fans! Despite visually gorgeous characters on the screen, anime fans aren't fooled into unrealistic standards and continue to wear



### From Japan:

#### GOLGO 13: QUEEN BEE

Saito Productions; 1998, Dir.: Osamu Dezaki, Screenplay: Akihiro Tago & Matt Aicher, Character Design & Animation Directors: Akio Sugino, Hiroshi Uchida, Art Dir.: Mieko Ichihara, Directors of Photography: Hirokata Takahashi & Hajime Noguchi, Music Dir.: Seiji Suzuki, English language version written and directed by Jack Fletcher, Available from Urban Vision, 5120 Goldleaf Circle Suite 280, L.A., CA 90056, <http://www.urban-vision.com>, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Wow, now here's one good cartoon-- and it's gory, adults only. The famed assassin of Japanese comic-books, Golgo 13 has always been of interest to me, ever since I saw Sonny Chiba play the character in GOLGO 13: THE KOWLOON ASSIGNMENT. So every time I watch an animated version of Golgo 13, I think I'm watching a one-dimensional Sonny Chiba!

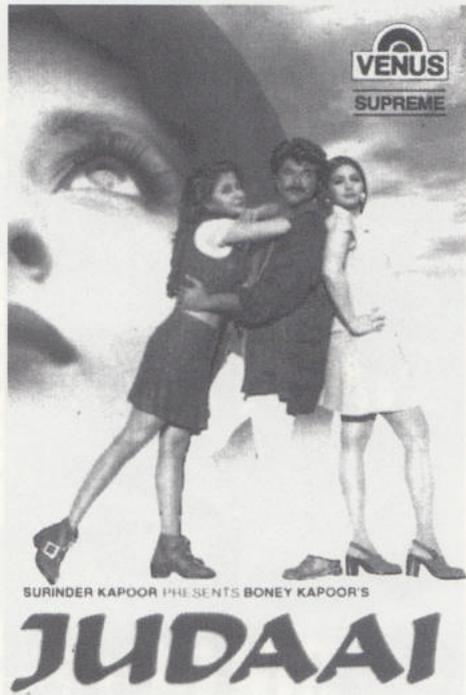
The artwork is awesome, and the animation is okay-- the only problems being during crowd scenes, where everybody except maybe a main character seems to be holding absolutely still! And being a pretentious (though enjoyable) Japanese anime video, there are, of course, some artsy-fartsy images and freeze frames. There's some symbolic, semi-pretentious imagery which adds to the intrigue, like a nude woman shooting a guy, and blood splatters across her tits. Similar artsy-stuff presented is always intrusive and take

their blubber with pride, as these couch-potatoes lounge about and eat to their heart-attack's content!

In the script department, marksman/assassin Golgo 13 is at it again, being paid to shoot people. It's all about a corrupt politician running for president, and South American revolutionaries. There's no point in going absolutely in-depth on the plot, because that would spoil all the gimmicks, tricks and plot twists. The characters and scenes are interesting, so check out the



movie yourself if you're in the mood for some tolerable Japanese cartoon fun. If



you can't find it, then rent some other cool video and enjoy that too, with my blessings. \*\*\* -DF

### From Uudjia:

#### JUDAAI

Presented by Surinder Kapoor & Boney Kapoor, Dir.: Raj Kanwar, Music: Nadeem-Shravan, Lyrics: Sameer, Running Time: infinite!, Cast: Sri Devi, Anil Kapoor, Urmila Matondkar, Reviewed by Linda Arroyo

Unfortunately, JUDAAI is one of a few disappointing film from Queen of Indian Cinema, Sri Devi, and apparently her last movie role. A few years back, scandalous tales were reported that Sri Devi was pregnant by Anil Kapoor's brother, producer Boney Kapoor, who was already married with children. Eventually, Boney Kapoor and Sri Devi married which in turn halted her career (traditionally, Indian actresses discontinue acting after marriage).

Never the less, Sri Devi made a splendid finale in this very long and garrulous flick. As a money-monger (much like my relatives), Sri Devi indulges in extravagance after persuading hubby (Anil Kapoor) to marry again for a large dowry. Similar to SAAJAN CHALE SASURAL with Govinda and cutie Karisma Kapoor, JUDAAI glamorizes polygamy with a touch of humor. Playing the young vivacious bride is Urmila Matondkar, who seemed to have gotten our dear editor's attention back in O.C.: The Shaolin Issue/#s 14/28 /DF here. *In-deed, but when I plastered those pictures of her all over the issue, I was so busy jerking off that throughout the issue, I kept ac-*

*identally misspelling her name as "Urmila Matondkar", not Matondkar! -DF.* Though lacking Sri Devi's curvaceous figure plus acting & dance experience, Urmila does shake her tush with the best of them during dance numbers.

Anil Kapoor, equal to Sri Devi in any film they're together in, plays the ignored husband who disagreed with the arrangement, but gradually finds solace with the young bride (Urmila) while his wife literally rolls in her bed of money. With non-existing fight-scenes /*Those are the worst kind!* -DF/, JUDAAI is nothing more than a tragic love story, a general element in older Hindi-films re-introduced today after the smash hit RAJA HINDUSTANI. Nonetheless, the musical score and Sri Devi's swaying rump compensate for the long and talkative film.

Script: A driver and his gold-digging wife invite a threesome relationship. The third party inherits a large dowry which suits the wife plenty. However, her greedy eyes don't notice that hubby and kiddies are being snatched away by the new bride. \*1/2 -Linda Arroyo

### From Jajapan:

#### GONIN 2

1997, Directed by Takashi Ishi, Cast: Ken Ogata, Mai Kitajima, Yumi Nishiyama, Reviewed by George Garvey

This film is not a sequel to GONIN, a film which I think sucked and was over-rated. This film is about revenge and being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Ken Ogata is a machine-shop owner who's wife is raped by some yakuza thugs. She commits suicide and the scene where Ken Ogata finds his wife's body hanging in his small factory is sad and very powerful!!! Cut to the opening credits where the dreary and ominous music tells you that this film is not going to be a happy one!!

We meet five women (only three are important to the story). Nani, a martial artist, Sari, a gal who likes extendible batons, Chiharo who in the beginning is involved with the crooks but then joins the others. There is also a prostitute and a housewife - these two are soon out of the picture. Ken Ogata makes his own sword and then goes looking for revenge. All five women show up at an underground jewelry store. Nani, looking very cool and stun gun in her purse has "plans" which are soon interrupted by a gang of robbers. Nani notices that the video cameras have been turned off. Things start going sour fast! Fearing they will be killed the women fight back. Lead by Nani who uses her stun gun on the robber and get his gun. She is joined by Sari and her extendible baton. Nani shoots one of the robbers and now Nani and Sari both have guns. Nani takes a

crook hostage and soon the other gals join in. The crooks are on the losing end. Nani and cohorts grab the jewels for themselves and escape! They hide out at a disco, look over the loot and start partying. In the meantime, Ken Ogata is cutting up some yakuza is cutting up some yakuza at an apartment and then makes off with a lot of cash! Yeah!! Things go from bad to worse. The ho gets killed and the housewife soon splits and is never seen again.

It's up to Ogata, Nani, Sari & Chimera to take care of business. Okay, so they're not a bunch of Yukari Shimmy's. But Annie-athletic and mean looking- has what it takes to be an action star. And veteran actor Ken Ogata commands every scene he's in. One memorable scene is a shoot-out in a kitchen with Nani, Sari and Chiharo trading shots with yakuza types. Dimly lit with red light it looks more like a bizarre nightmare. While the bullets are flying Ken Ogata slices up a yakuza boss. In the end Ogata chops up this one gangster who is little more than an annoying zombie with a dumb haircut and then dies in a hail of bullets. Then Nani and friends come out with guns blazing! Six months later, the big boss of the gang is leaving a night club with some ho's and bodyguards. The film goes from color to sepia-tone as Nani and friends gun down everyone in slow motion. Closing credits soon roll with that ominous music again. A lot of people complain that Japanese gangster/girls w/ guns films don't have as much action as the Chinese stuff, has unnecessary nudity and are too cynical. Some truth to this. This shouldn't stop you from enjoying some of these films. Some of them are good in their own way and this is one of them. \*\*\* -George Garvey

### From Amerijica:

#### TOMORROW NEVER DIES

Presented by Albert R. Broccoli's Eon Prod. Ltd., 1997, Based on Ian Fleming's "James Bond" character, Prod. Supervisor: Callum McDougall, Music: David Arnold (song "Tomorrow Never Dies" by Sheryl Crow), Dir.: Roger Spottswode, Cast: Pierce Brosnan, Jonathan Pryce, Michelle Yeoh, Teri Hatcher, Ricky Jay, Gotz Otto, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Though this movie didn't disappoint me really, I don't actually love the film-- I've never been much for James Bond movies. A few years back, I did manage to sit through YOU ONLY LIVE TWICE so I could see Tetsuro Tanba, Mie Hama & Akiko Wakabayashi speaking real English, and I do get kicks out of Bond imitators like HK's ACES GO PLACES flicks, HK oldies like SUMMONS TO DEATH and them two silly "Flint" movies with James Coburn. So I'm not entirely unfamiliar with the genre. But of

course, the only reason I tolerated TOMORROW NEVER DIES was again to see another wellknown Asian star (Michelle Yeoh of SUPER COP, etc.) in a non-Asian flick. In fact, that's all anyone ever said about TOMORROW NEVER DIES, it's been described as a "Michelle Yeoh flick", little has been said of this Pierce Brosnan dude, whoever the hell he is. Even before this movie came out, all I heard about it was "Michelle Yeoh this", and "Michelle Yeoh that"-- and some of these statements were from self-centered, apathetic fools who STILL haven't seen her many HK movies! So I was expecting Michelle Yeoh to be throughout the film, and to steal it from under the nose of James Bond (Pierce Brosnan) himself. Imagine my surprise when she didn't really get a lot of screen-time until like the MIDDLE of the film (from then on, she's a real co-star). For what it's worth, her two or three short fights are, like the rest of the fistplay in TOMORROW NEVER DIES, lame. I had thought they would take a few pointers from her far superior HK movies and incorporate the same type of excellent fight choreography, and superb stuntwork she's known for. Granted, she's older now (and now she's EVEN OLDER!!), and can't do the types of backbreaking action scenes she did in her Golden Years (the 1980s), but the fights in TOMORROW NEVER DIES are pretty damn weak. I guess they had to make her kung fu look bad, so as not to upstage Pierce Brosnan (which would be a task easier than taking pork-chops from a Muslim). Yeoh's kung fu fight with some Vietnamese is the only battle which is entertaining, but even that fight is crap when compared to the stuff she did in any of her previous films.

Other cast-members include Jonathan Pryce, who is well suited to play the role of the main villain. I've only seen him in one other film, and absolutely hated him because that film was EVITA. I ended up seeing that god-awful musical as part of a blind date; the chick suggested we go to the movies and EVITA happened to be playing. I genuinely loathe pop, funk & hip-hop related music, and because EVITA is a Madonna vehicle, I wasn't thrilled about sitting through this pretentious movie. But I figured, "What the hell? It's a biography about an activist in South America, right?! History fascinates me, so we can't go wrong, even if pop's most over-rated whore is the star!" But the chick (for the record, I never banged her because this date was disastrous) who dragged me to the theater neglected to tell me EVITA was a musical-- a type of film which I happen to despise. Needless to say, the three-hour running time of EVITA made this an overwhelmingly unpleasant experience, and I grew to hate Jonathan Pryce and everyone connected to this pathetic movie. But Pryce is good in TOMORROW NEVER DIES, he should stick to

playing villains. Also on hand is British comedy-actor Geoffrey Palmer, who, as a child, I found hilarious as the doctor in an episode of John Cleese's incredibly funny FAWLTY TOWERS series, and Geoffrey Palmer starred in his own 1970s comedy show called THE RISE OF REGINALD PERIN, a lackluster sitcom which bombed; not big loss.

I'm giving TOMORROW NEVER DIES two stars, and considering that this movie isn't my cup of tea, that's very kind. It's an amusing, watchable tale, with slick pacing and interesting dialogue. It was good to finally see honest-to-goodness miniatures again, and not just the usual computer-generated crap. The international locales are amusing too. I still say the German language sounds like homeless people extracting phlegm from their throats. I can make fun of Germans, for I am part German (or rather.....I was, I had that part surgically removed; so now I'm Jewish). Locations include not only parts of Asia, but some snowy place, Scandinavia I guess, and then they go to BigMac, I mean, they fly to Jumbo Jack! I'm sorry, what I meant to say is they go to Hamburg! It's a city I think is located next to Cheeseburg, which in turn is near the newer, 1990s place called Gardenburg. There's also a nearby village which smells bad, called Limburg, just down the street from a cold place called Iceberg.

But being a pretentious, over-budgeted, big-shot American movie, some aspects have to suck, of course. For example, Bond's opening scenes where he removes nuclear bombs from a Siberian terrorist camp; there's some fist-play, but it's all child's play to anyone who's seen even the worst Chinese films! Pierce's fighting ability, or rather, disability, is amazingly bad, it's striking that in this day and age, Caucasian stunt-choreography STILL sucks!! This same opening sequence has the obligatory gunplay, which is tolerable, unless of course you've seen vintage John Woo. The producers of TOMORROW NEVER DIES obviously did try to amuse us with this action-packed approach; but they're so obsessed with their feeble action that they neglect logic: i.e. Bond in a jet-plane attacked by his co-pilot while another villain (in a pursuing jet) fires at them; he'd be shooting both Bond and his fellow-villain!

Regardless, it's a fairly watchable, amusing tale of a media mogul who thrives on publicity, and since this corrupt, insane millionaire commands his own empire of henchmen and monstrous war vehicles (reminding me of stuff in Tsuburaya's MIGHTY JACK series), there's no shortage of killings & controversy to aid in his next project: Starting WWII. Meanwhile, James Bond exists, so we gotta' see this womanizer in a thankfully brief scene of obligatory romance. It's a whittle movie after all,

so yet again, it's as predictable as is humanly possible, the love-subplot being tacky, cheesy and cliché-ridden (and how!), and as disgustingly embarrassing as is feasible....my god, this is some seriously stupid shit!! Yikes! Thankfully, his love interest is quickly killed off by the villain, in absolutely predictable fashion. Anyway, she's dead, but that doesn't matter, because Bond teams up with Michelle Yeoh's character, and they kiss at the end, after all the bad guys are killed. But before that, there's a lot of gunplay, some enjoyable motorcycle chases, explosions, underwater stuff, and a lot of high-tech gadgets and other futuristic items. There's also a little bit of martial arts, but the less said of that, the better. \*\*1/2 -Damon F.

## From Japan:

### MEGUMI KUDO- FMW FINAL MEMORIAL ANTHOLOGY

*Presented by: Toshiba, Distributed by E.M.I. Video, Starring: Megumi Kudo Reviewed by Frank Strom*

The behind-the-scenes story of lady wrestler Megumi Kudo is interesting. Much more interesting, as a matter of fact, than most of her matches. What we have here is a video special commemorating Kudo's ring career from her beginnings in the Japanese pro-wrestling scene as a bottom of the card act in AJW to her recent retirement as a marquee star with the blood & gimmicks "garbage" promotion FMW.

Kudo broke into pro wrestling in 1986 with the All Japan Women promotion (the world's oldest & by far best all women promotion). This was at near the end of AJW's glory days, when its major attractions the Crush Gals and villainous Dump Matsumoto were soon retrying. Kudo's "classmates" in training included future stars Aja Kong, Bison Kimura, Kaoru, and Combat Toyoda. Not having much success with the promotion (nor developing into a stellar ring worker), Kudo left AJW (perhaps let go) in 1988 and wound up working as a Kindergarten school teacher. Frontier Martial Arts Wrestling (FMW) began promoting in 1989, centered around rough & tumble megastar Atsushi Onita and a blood and gimmicks type product the Japanese call "Garbage Wrestling". Kudo joined FMW in 1990 and soon became the star of their ladies' division. With her major rival being old classmate Combat Toyoda (now sporting a Dump Matsumoto/Bull Nakano "Road Warrior" persona). Kudo's matches were pretty straight pro wrestling (and nothing special at that), but things changed drastically when Atsushi Onita retired in 1995. Onita specialized in violent gimmick-laden death matches such as no-rope barbed

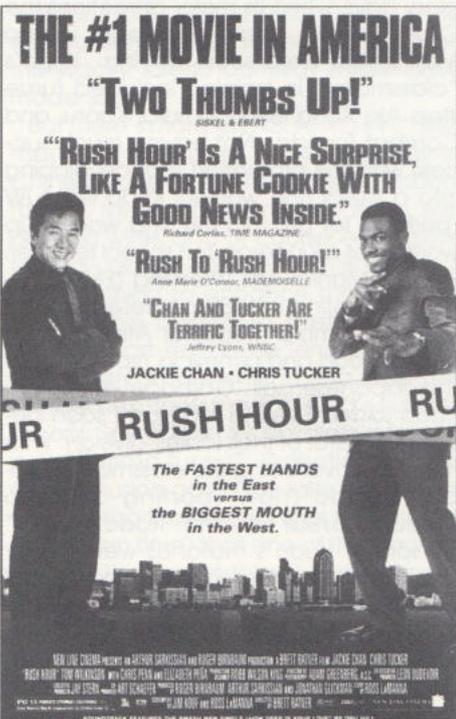
wire matches, broken glass matches, explosive matches, and many many variations there-of. There were FMW's signature, and with top draw Onita retiring, someone had to continue with it. You got it-- Kudo became the female Onita, participating in gory death matches an even using Onita's entrance song "Wild Thing". While most of these matches weren't very good, they did help make Kudo infamous as one of the few women in the business who worked this type of crazy match.

Megumi Kudo was never a great worker, but she was a hard worker, which I always find admirable since there are so many lazy performers in wrestling. The best matches in her career were interpromotional ones, specifically Kudo & Toyoda vs. Bull Nakano & Akira Hokuto from an FMW card, and her most high profile match Kudo & Toyoda vs. Manami Toyota & Toshiyo Yamada from AJW's 1993 supercard Dream Slam I. Near the end of her career, Kudo had a memorable (and grisly) series against LLPW's #1 tough girl Shinobu Kandori (a former Judo specialist who looks like Antonio Inoki in drag!). Some of these bouts are featured on this video (in highlight form) as well as others with Miss Mongol and Shark Tsuchiya. Also included are interviews with Combat Toyoda, Onita, and all time great Rimi "Jaguar" Yokota, who trained a lot of AJW's best workers. A special bonus is AJW training footage from Kudo's class in 1986. \*\*\* - Frank Strom

**From America:**

**RUSH HOUR**

New Line Cinema, 1998, Producer: Roger Birnbaum, Arthur Sarkissan & Jonathan



Glickman, Story: Ross LaManna, Dir.: Brett Ratner, Screenplay: Jim Kouf & Ross LaManna, Starring: Jackie Chan, Chris Tucker, Chris Penn, Tom Wilkinson, Elizabeth Pena, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Jackie Chan in yet another disappointing American blockbuster. Being so so so so Hollywood, and so absolutely, moronically mainstream, I think it's his worst movie in a while, this predictable sell-out doesn't live up to his other international epics (MR. NICE GUY, RUMBLE IN THE BRONX, etc.) in recent years. This monotonous exercise in tedium and blatant predictability really does an exceptional job at catering to the simple-mindedness and limited intelligence of the American movie-going public; so at the expense of creativity and whatever uniqueness Jackie Chan once had (don't think about the good old days of DRAGON LORD or DRAGONS FOREVER, as you'll cry), RUSH HOUR was a hit, it was the #1 movie in America, for at least a week. So yet again, the repetitious, unimaginative approach succeeds at the box-office.

First of all, just who the fuck is this Chris Tucker idiot?! Before this lame flick, did this guy actually do anything? Hell, he's a Chris Rock (IN LIVING COLOR, LETHAL WEAPON 4) wannabe!! Who would want to imitate that guy? That annoying, high-pitched screech of a voice, and those absolutely unfunny mannerisms are grandiose demonstrations in annoyance. My guess is they chose this unknown, never-was-been Tucker fellow to be Jackie's partner because Chan won't let anybody upstage him-- and an unimpressive no-talent like Chris Tucker can only make Jackie look good, even in a movie like this where Chan comes off as lame.

The fights are okay though. It's Jackie's usual wit which really makes his acrobatic antics so amusing. Though Chan is old and really looks his age for the first time in a movie, he still does some innovative gymnastics involving every day objects like chairs, a detached steering-wheel, and large antique vases. He's still pretty damn energetic and limber, and even at 44, he's still the most impressive of the martial arts comedians. So though on the whole, I was let down by this bad excuse for an action comedy, I think Jackie Chan's kung fu quirkiness makes RUSH HOUR worth tolerating.

Apparently, I'm alone in my reaction to the movie. Let's see what other critics had to say, and I'll offer my responses:

"Two Thumbs Up?" -Siskel & Ebert. Well, Siskel & Ebert can just go shove their thumbs up their asses, I doubt these two ugly, ridiculously overpaid egomaniacs (Note: this review was written several months before Siskel's passing) have ever seen classic Jackie movies from the '70s & '80s! There's also this one: "Chan And

Tucker Are Terrific Together!" -Jeffrey Lyons, WNBC. I think Lyons oughta' be hit-- with his white cane. This one killed me: "The best action comedy of the year!" -Marian Etoile-Watson, GOOD DAY NEW YORK. In that case, there must have been no other action comedies in 1998.

The script is so unbelievably cliché-ridden and a blatant ripoff of all the typical American crime-dramas that I'm not sure I even want to go into detail about it! Some little Chinese girl is kidnapped, so Chinese cop Jackie Chan is sent to America to rescue her from the bad guys. He's paired up with an LA cop played by annoying-breakdancer-who-thinks-he's-funny Chris Tucker. Yet ANOTHER two-cop buddy-buddy flick; my god, I'm so sick of this shit!!! Naturally, they don't get along at first, but that all changes once their comedic antics lead them to the different villains they must kick or shoot. In this case, the "culture shock" has the black cop trying out Chinese take-out food for the first time in his life-- the script is pathetic!

After Jackie's occasional punches, and Chris Tucker's embarrassingly bad "ebonics" one-liners & disco moves, these two heroes finally confront the remaining villains: A Chinese triad, aided by a corrupt white politician and/or law enforcer, whom, of course, we were lead to believe was a good guy at the beginning of the movie, but a "plot twist" changed all that. So anyway, that irritating little Asian girl gets rescued (unfortunately), and then RUSH HOUR ends (fortunately). \*1/2 -DF

**From Korea:**



**YOUNG GU AND THE DINOSAUR JUJU**

Released by Wool Video, In Association with: Daewoo Electronics Co. Ltd., Release Date: 12/14/93, Produced, Written & Directed by Shim Hyung Rei (a.k.a. Shim Hyung Lei and Ray Shim), Music: Kim Chang Wang, Starring: Shim Hyung Rei & Seo Chan Ho, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Korea's dinosaur movie king, Shim Hyung Rei (who now has his English name, "Ray Shim"!), is at it again-- for better or worse. Don't expect another TYRANNO'S CLAW if you decide to sit through YOUNG GU AND THE DINOSAUR JUJU. At least TYRANNO'S CLAW, and even Shim's earlier movies (like the outerspace UREME series) was coherent, made sense and had a point. This demented rip-off of GORGO and MONSTER FROM A PREHISTORIC PLANET, however is just too strange. I guess Shim was confused, or maybe there were massive problems on the set, which resulted in re-edits and chaotic writing. I

여름방학 대개봉!!

# 영구와 공룡 째째



감독·주연·심형래



출연: 양준혁·서원성·서한호·오성우·홍성숙  
 촬영: 김안동, 조명: 조길수, 특수: 이정일, 조감독: 장경원  
 전상·녹음: 영화진흥공사  
 공룡제작: 엠투코리아  
 주·영구아트무비 창립작품

don't know what happened, but this movie is most certainly an oddity. What's really strange is that the giant monster, Juju bears a striking resemblance to the original Yongary in 1967's YONGARY, MONSTER FROM THE DEEP. Juju is way more faithful to the Yongary of the 1960s, than Shim's own remake, YONGARY 1999!

Despite a higher budget, this sequel doesn't live up to the fun of its 1992 predecessor, YOUNG GU AND THE GOLDEN BAT-- now that was a fun movie, despite budgetary limitations. Hell, the character of Young Gu doesn't really even look a whole lot like he did in the superior part-one. He's still mentally-challenged, and still has fake freckles and blacked-out teeth, but the original Young Gu was a country bumpkin; this here new baffoon has an urban dwelling. He even goes to school with kids, perhaps they're junior high

school age. Regardless, Shim, like his fictional Young Gu character, sure as hell doesn't look like a teenager! So I guess this officially confirms that the character is a retard. Until I saw TYRANNO'S CLAW, SUPER HONG GIL TONG and SPARKMAN (the movies where he goes against his own self-imposed stereotype), I had assumed Shim Hyung Rei himself was mentally retarded, since he plays the role of an absolute idiot so well, it's frightening. But in fact he's a genius, since he's produced some of the most entertaining movies to come out of Korea-- though YOUNG GU AND THE DINOSAUR JUJU isn't one of them.

The giant marauding dinosaur looks pretty nifty, though not as spiffy as the imaginative creatures in the wonderful TYRANNO'S CLAW. The big reptile is a nicely designed costume, but its movements aren't very natural. The suit was

obviously made to look good (which it does), but the inexperienced FX makers in Korea are far behind their Japanese cousins. The costume's spine is too stiff (much like that of 1967's YONGARY), so the head and neck (other than the jaw) doesn't move much. The miniatures are okay. The helicopters had me fooled into thinking they were real, but there are some serious problems with the footage of jet planes. Some of these planes are genuine, and were filmed off a TV screen! I suspect the footage was swiped from some news broadcast! It's really obvious and distracting, the way the film grain suddenly changes. But the only really flawed miniatures are the buildings. These structures look okay when left alone, but once or twice, once the giant behemoth grabs these skyscrapers, they wobble and begin to really look like the cardboard boxes they really are.

There are some interesting people involved in this production. Of course there's writer/actor/director Shim Hyung Rei himself (a guy virtually introduced to the U.S. by yours truly), but also appearing is Seo Chan Ho. A tall, scary looking guy; he's a Korean cross between Shing Fui On (THE KILLER, GHOSTLY VIXEN) and the villain of the live action TOKYO MEGAPOLIS movies. Seo Chan Ho plays a villain in YOUNG GU AND THE DINOSAUR JUJU, and was also the evil caveman leader in TYRANNO'S CLAW. He plays a good guy in DRAGON TUKA (one of Shim Hyung Rei's movies for Zero Nine Productions) who defeats the villainous alien "Tuma". At the time of this typing, he's now living in Japan playing a villain in some Japanese independent wrestling TV show. The music for YOUNG GU AND THE DINOSAUR JUJU was done by Kim Chang Wan, who leads some Korean rock group called "Sanallum".

Lovable clown Young Gu rescues a recently hatched (his egg was in a cave hibernating, but volcanic activity woke him up) dinosaur called Juju, who was being stoned by obnoxious kids. By that I mean the brats tossed rocks at him, they didn't have him smoke pot. But Young Gu and his cheap rubber friend (who sometimes sounds like a puppy dog) get captured by three greedy men, who presumably wanna' sell him (maybe both our heroes) to a zoo. I don't know, much like I don't know why one of the three men resembles (Seo Chan Ho) Lurch, from THE ADAMS FAMILY. He's got all this white crap on his face, like a vampire or zombie, but I don't think he's meant to be either one! But these three men get killed by the firebreathing giant, a parent dinosaur who's come to rescue its son. In a scene of hilariously bad special effects, the huge dinosaur spits fire and melts the three villains. The melt down effect, obviously done with wax dummies, is so pathetically un-

convincing it's funny! But it's also a little gruesome, hardly what you would expect to see in a childish kiddy flick like this. Anyway, the giant dinosaur goes on the typical post-Godzillian raid, destroying buildings and the militia as it seeks to rescue its kidnapped offspring. But unlike MONSTER FROM A PREHISTORIC PLANET (AKA GAPPA and GAPPA THE TRYPHIBIAN MONSTER), the ending in this film is rather grim. The giant monster gets shot to death by the soldiers! It's killed! A concerned parent is shot down in cold blood! This was not what I expected! And then they shoot the baby Juju too! We're lead to believe it's dead, as Young Gu gives a convincing crying performance. But just before the ending credits and catchy Korean folk-theme-song, baby Juju arises; he was only playing dead after all. So again, Young Gu is happy. \* -Damon Foster

## From America:

### ORGASMO

1997; Presented by Kuzui Enterprises, Executive Producers: Kaz Kuzui, Noriaki Nakagawa & Mark Damon, An Avenging Conscience Production, A Trey Parker

movie, Written & Directed by Trey Parker, Starring: Trey Parker, Dian Bachar, Robin Lynne, Michael Dean Jacobs, Matt Stone, & Ron Jeremy Reviewed by Damon Foster

The kung fu fights in this American/Japanese co-production are short, few and far between. But when they happen, they're fun. Star, director & writer Trey Parker (SOUTH PARK, BASEKETBALL, CANNIBAL: THE MUSICAL) is a good martial artist, his kicks are well executed. His best battle is toward the movie's opening, as he fights off three or four slimeballs who are mad because he interrupted their shoot (making some truly perverted porno movies). Speaking of pornography, that's what this comedic caper is really spoofing. Though there's no full-frontal male nudity, and definitely no hardcore sex scenes, this is still a pretty sleazy, vulgar movie. There are no penetration shots, but this is a movie for adults only.

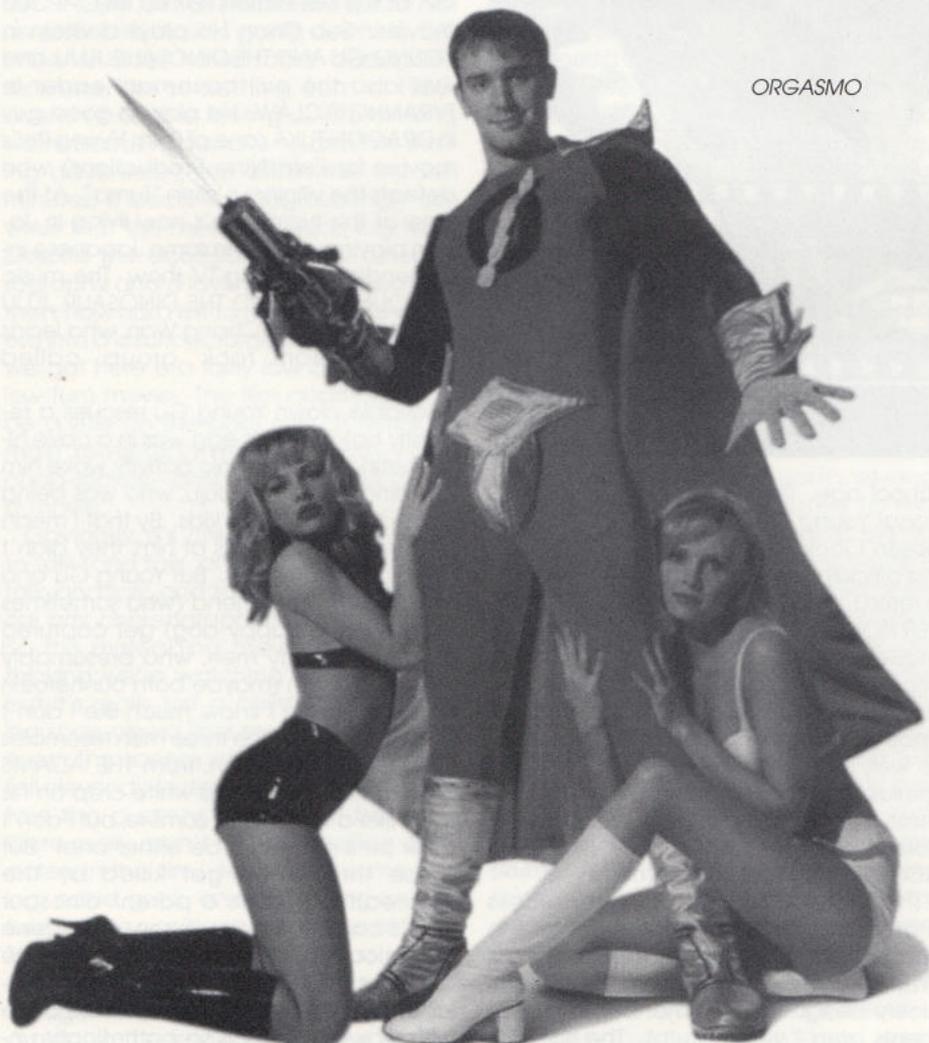
I really enjoyed the comedy in ORGAZMO. There aren't a whole lot of people making "full-force-comedies" these days, in an era of Julia Roberts and sappy romantic nonsense. In the tradition of the excellent Zucker Brothers comedies, ORGAZMO is high potency humor, it rarely

deviates from the nonstop bombardment of laughs. And when it does take a brief breather from the hilarity, it's just to add a little character development, and that character development, in turn merely sets up the next joke, making the upcoming gags that much funnier. This movie is really just an American comedy, and perhaps it doesn't actually belong in OC, but this review was intended for the late, lamented HEROES ON FILM magazine, I didn't want this piece to go to waste. Besides, this hilarious movie was trashed by critics, so I felt the need to come to the rescue and present an opposing view.

Admittedly, Trey Parker's over-the-top approach isn't for everybody. I however, love all his work. I'm an avid SOUTH PARK fan (this has got to be the funniest cartoon ever made, and really puts over-rated crap like THE SIMPSONS to shavel!), and felt BASEKETBALL had its moments too. I pause here to mention an older Trey Parker movie, CANNIBAL: THE MUSICAL. Based on the true story of Alfred Packer (in the late 1800s Packer lead an ill-fated group of miners through the wilderness, and as the men died of starvation, cannibalism was inevitable), it's the funniest musical ever made. I went so far as to check out the so-called "uncut" European version (ALFRED PACKER: THE MUSICAL), having been misled into thinking it was three minutes longer. In fact it's only about 15 seconds longer, with an extra chorus to one of the songs. Why they even bothered to cut the scene out is beyond me. Regardless, the sound was edited much better in Troma's American CANNIBAL: THE MUSICAL, than that of the European ALFRED PACKER: THE MUSICAL. So if you get a chance, seek out the American version, it's immensely entertaining and Trey's songs began to rub off on me-- I've been singing about snowmen ever since. Speaking of music, Trey sings in his band DVDA (also with Matt Stone), for the opening credits; a catchy spoof of Bruce Springstein called "Now You're A Man", a rockin' ditty that blows away most of the rock 'n roll heard on commercial radio these days.

But getting back to ORGAZMO, the subject at hand: In this funny saga, Trey Parker, plays a fanatical Mormon. He's sickeningly wholesome & clean-cut, but happens to be at either the wrong place at the right time, the right place at the wrong time, or maybe the right wrong at the wrong right. Whatever the situation, he unwittingly, accidentally gets involved with slime-fucks like Ron Jeremy! Desperate for money, Trey Parker's latter-day saint goes against his own obsessive beliefs, and finds himself playing the X-rated superhero Orgazmo, in a series of successful adult films. Subplots include some annoying Japanese guy who tries to "rap" in a sushi-bar, Trey's saccharine-sweet girlfriend, and a few

ORGASMO





**101 CM: J-CUP**  
Miki Sawaguchi



thugs that "Orgasm" must beat up every now and then. Eventually, Orgazmo and his trusty sidekick (a master of "Hamster-style" kung fu) finally defeat the evil kidnappers (who also make porno movies), to rescue Trey's fiancé. \*\*\*1/2 -DF

**From Japan:**

**101 CM: J-CUP**

*Presented by Messiah Video, Starring: Miki Sawaguchi, Jun Yoshida, Kousoku Mori, Masahiro Tabuchi, Raman Kobayashi, Bakaya Kimura, Hiroshi Shimabukuro, Reviewed by Damon Foster*

This is the best X-rated Japanese video I've ever seen; it's better than last issue's

AN AFFAIR WITH MY PROFESSOR, at any rate. This cheap, quirky little shot-on-video comedy actually has some censorship, however. Pubic hairs are pixilated and digitized, so there really is no full frontal nudity. As somebody who doesn't care to see this (some body parts are better to be felt than seen), I don't mind their blacking these shots out. But I do ask the question, "why bother?" It seems to me that if they're not going to show it in graphic detail, then maybe they should have concentrated on something else. But instead, we see lengthy blow-job scenes which aren't clear or completely visible. I don't get it; perhaps there's an uncut version available, but the Japanese video rental store I got the tape from seems to only carry this incomplete print. So I have not

seen the uncensored version, and don't care to.

Miki Sawaguchi has got to be one of the sexiest women in Japan. A busty Japanese beauty, and yet her tits are real, not surgical wonders; her boobs are "authentits"! These two beauties have a natural sagging quality which I find infinitely more arousing than the implanted fakes of Amy Yip or last issue's Minka. Don't get me wrong; all these chicks are a major turn-on, and being a male, I support the universal feeling all us guys share: "Hey, I just wish I could do 'em all!" Fat chance, I know. Sawaguchi has nice legs and a trim figure, with a small body which makes her stunning hooters stand-out all the more. Her face is equally pretty, except for one small problem:

The teeth!! Yikes, those are nasty!! Just what kind of inbreeding produced such horrid teeth!?! But I'll try not to be too hard on (don't pardon the pun) the gal's teeth, for two reasons..... Numero Uno: Perhaps it's only us Americans who give a damn about straight teeth. I've seen some ghastly dental appendages on people over the years, but more often than not, it's connected to the mouth of an Asian or British. Numero Two-o: Her teeth are her one visual flaw, and that makes her realistic; wholesome in a way. Here's a babe I think is untouched by cosmetic surgery. She's confident with what she's got, and her teeth being as "unique" as they are suddenly becomes incredibly arousing to me. She's an over-all, strikingly sexy woman, and it's all natural to her. This makes her infinitely more desirable than Pamela Anderson or any other Hollywood mutants from the surgery table.

As for the quality of this no-budget video itself, the whole tape is okay. I feel she strips too much, and too early on. And she's fucking all these guys too soon, the tape starts, and then they cut to the chase. Sawaguchi has a body which is appropriate for more subtle teases; she's the type who would look stunning in leotards, bikinis, skintight zebra-print tank tops, spandex, leather, rubber, etc. Personally, I would love to see her in ill-fitting clothing, perhaps doing physical activities to show her breasts in different positions; situations for those of us with severe tit fetishes. This would be cheap, easy, and wouldn't require the pixilated censorship which occurs through out this cute little example of Japanese pornography. So on the whole, this weird video is enjoyable. There are plenty of things about it (there's no English translation of any kind) that I don't understand at all, but that didn't stop me from polishing the erotic torpedo-- and enjoying every minute of it.

The script, which was really just intended to show Miki getting banged by all these guys, an obligatory shower scene, and to show an occasional up-the-skirt crotch

*(continued on page 41)*



## Toshiro Mifune, Samurai

-Joseph Granese

Looking back, I realized that my introduction to the great Toshiro Mifune was probably in an American motion picture. I remember a certain spring day when, bored with the rigors of high school, I coerced two of my colleagues into an afternoon of unrepentant truancy. I was always, as you've probably guessed by now, a bad actor. Having escaped the sylvan campus without detection, we made our way to the nearby residential neighborhood where I'd secreted my prized possession, a gleaming black 1960

Thunderbird.

Freed from the shackles of academia, we decided not to totally abandon our intellectual enhancement, and chose to attend the \$1 matinee screening of John Frankenheimer's testosterone laced feature "Grand Prix." It was one of those teenage experiences that are never forgotten, a cinematic high-point that nurtured my overall addiction to film, and justified the consistent squandering of my fortune, \$6 at a time. (Plus \$2 for a box of Dots when available.) Mifune was hardly the star of "Grand Prix." He played a wealthy Japanese industrialist obsessed with the idea of winning at motor racing. Even in that small part, his performance was memorable enough to earn a permanent place in my mind and tickle me ever so slightly when I speak ex cathedra on the significance of his better known work, classics like "Seven Samurai," and "Yojimbo." As my cinematic sophistication (as it were) grew, I noticed Mifune in many roles. He shone in "Yamamoto" and the more accessible "Hell in the Pacific." Believable in "I Bombed Pearl Harbor," his craft shone through a character role in "1941" that many felt was offensive.

Curiously, Mifune never intended to be an actor. When World War II ended, he was, like most members of the military, unemployed. Similar to the "Ronin" he would later play onscreen, he found himself wandering Japan looking for work. In 1946, he applied for a job as a cameraman at Toho studios. By the most random of chances, he found himself in an audition. Asked to portray a drunk, Mifune called on personal experience and turned in a credible performance. His spontaneous acting impressed his judges, a group which included the young director Akira Kurosawa. The two were to become an unstoppable team in the years to come.

But first, there were dues to pay. Mifune was cast in Senkichi Taniguchi's 1946 film "To the End of the Silver Mountains." Well received, his work earned him the lead role in the 1948 Kurosawa feature "Drunken Angel." "Rashomon" followed in 1950, and "Seven Samurai" in 1954. For the next dozen years, the two would make a series of films that would define serious Japanese cinema. Nearly 50 years later, after playing everything from a doctor to a bandit, Mifune was said to have favored his role in "Seven Samurai" above all others. I am inclined to agree. When I think of Toshiro Mifune today, my memory invariably falls on an image of him, sword drawn, defending his master with honor and courage. For years, American viewers were unable to enjoy much of Mifune's best work. While his American films were readily accessible, precious few of the vast library of films made in Japan had ever been seen on this side of the Pacific. Of those, many found themselves shown on late-night TV, thoughtlessly cut and riddled

with commercials.

Now, thanks to the Samurai Cinema series from AnimEigo, two more of his finest films are available in the United States. The 1964 classic "Samurai Assassin" starred Mifune as Niuro Tsuruchiyo, a lonely, hard drinking Ronin desperate to regain the legitimacy of his chosen profession, Samurai. Considered by many to be the finest Samurai film ever made, "Samurai Assassin" was a Tomoyuki Tanaka production directed by Okamoto Hihachi from a screenplay by Shinobu Hashimoto. The Samurai Cinema Laser Disk release is presented in widescreen, 2.2:1 aspect ratio, with English subtitles. Based on an historical incident, "Samurai Assassin" recounts the events leading up to the March 1860 ambush murder of Naosuke Ii, an official in the dying Shogunate. As the assassination is planned Mifune's Niuro is at the very depths of his life, homeless, lonely, and frequently drunk.

The product of an inappropriate affair, Niuro never knew his real father's identity. Cast out of polite society over another alliance, he has little to live for and less to lose. Driven by his overwhelming desire to return to his rightful station in life, is prepared to endure any ignominy, betray any kindness, to reach his goal. This is a truly magnificent film from start to finish. Brilliant black and white cinematography, a legendary performance by a great actor, and a gut-wrenching finish deliver a complete aesthetic experience. The exquisite quality of this new digital release marks "Samurai Assassin" as an important addition to any collection.

While you've got the MasterCard handy, check out another new Samurai Cinema release featuring Toshiro Mifune, the 1970 Hiroshi Inagaki film "Incident at Blood Pass." Produced by Mifune and Yoshio Nishikawa, this feature marks the last appearance of Yojimbo, a character made famous by Mifune. The film unites Mifune with another Japanese legend, actor Shintaro Katsu. Each actor had agreed to appear in a film made by his colleague. Katsu's effort was known as "Zatoichi Meets Yojimbo," featuring him in his best known role, as Zatoichi, a blind swordsman. To complete the deal, Mifune produced "Incident at Blood Pass." Yojimbo is sent on a mysterious quest without even knowing his final

*(continued on next page)*



shot, has her as a high school student who, after school, works as a door-to-door maid. Predictably, the opening shows her in school uniform. I know a lot of Japanese men see young chicks in these stupid-looking Sailor-ish school uniforms during commutes, etc. So I guess it's these same men who have therefore developed kinky fetishes for girls dressed like rejects from a Catholic School. Personally, such uniforms do nothing for me. Regardless, the story has Miki getting groped and later raped by one of her fellow students. But this rape, set in a classroom, is one of those sick deals where she ends up enjoying it. Damn, just what kind of message is this tape giving to horny men?! During the various sex scenes, Miki's moans & groans, even during orgasm, sound like cries of pain, or protest. I guess that's just how she sounds during sex, but it sure makes all the sex scenes, even when she's enthusiastically sucking some guy's cock, seem non-voluntary! So anyway, she gets boinked by a fellow student, a construction worker, a transvestite (this homo is envious that she has breasts & he does not), and of course, the guy who's house she cleans. The guy has lights and video equipment, so he videotapes them doing the old "horizontal jitterbug". Afterwards, we're treated to some casual, candid footage of her. She's really just making small talk and acting a little bashful. I don't think she's acting, her mannerisms & speech patterns tell me it's behind-the-scenes footage that they added on at the end, just to make the tape longer. Perhaps these down-to-earth scenes were included just to show her comfortable with her surroundings. She smiles as though to confirm to us that she wasn't in pain (despite how it looked), and that the tape was made with her consent and full cooperation. \*\*\*1/2 -DF

**From America:**

**THE MYSTERIOUS MR. WONG**

Monogram Pictures; 1935, Presented by Norman Pictures, Dir.: William Nigh, A

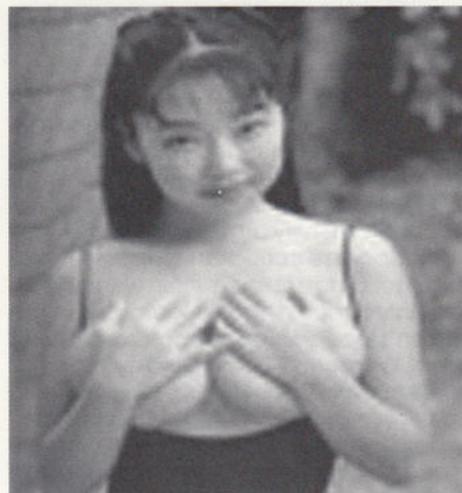
*George Yohalern Production, Based on the story: The 12 Coins of Confucius by Harry Stephen Keeler, Screenplay: Nina Howatt, Adapted by Lew Livingston, Cast: Bela Lagosi, Wallace Ford, Arline Judge, Re-viewed by Damon Foster*

I always get a chuckle out of ignorant, non-Asians portraying ignorant Asians. Lagosi sure looks dashing in that exquisite Chinese robe, but where did this Mr. Wong get that blatantly Transylvanian accent?! In one scene, Lagosi is talking in Chinese on the phone. Even then I can hear his accent, especially since the Chinese guy he's talking to seems to really speak some Chinese. But authenticity quickly fades when you recall that on this Chinaman's (some sort of historian or linguistics expert) office door, it reads, "Orientalogy", is there such a word? Horrendous sound quality (due to a then-new technology) doesn't help matters much. It's got that "Stormy" sound throughout, as though it's constantly raining. Yes, this flick is one hell of an oldie; but not a goody. It was only two or three years after Lagosi's most famous, only-acclaimed role (DRACULA), and it's sad to see how quickly his career dwindled, like an overnight hasbeen. For it's time, THE MYSTERIOUS MR. WONG might have offered a chuckle or two. But seen today, it's a naive, obsolete bore.

Plot: In a Chinatown full of Caucasians with funny mustaches & funnier eyebrows, evil Mr. Wong seeks the 12 coins of Confucius, as the completed set will endow its owner with luck, power, or something else really nice. So this Mr. Wong (a poor man's Fu Man Chu) sends his tong's henchmen (most of them are more whites made-up badly!) to go hang & stab people (no major violence or bloodshed; most of the killings are implied as we see the aftermath only) in the quest for them coins. A bumbling cop tries to add comic relief, but that stereotypical Irish accent really got on my nerves. Slightly better is our main hero, a wise-cracking newspaper reporter. The guy offers more bad dialogue, but at least it gets remotely amusing. Example: Some gal is invited to a for-



mal event, and she says: "In that case, I'll dress!" He replies: "I hope so!" More cute lines happen too, like.....Q: "You know a Chinese named Wong?" A: "I don't know any Chinese that aren't named Wong!" Speaking of Wong, this Hungarian-sounding Chinaman captures both the reporter & his new girlfriend, and ties them up in a basement until the cops arrive and save the day. Lagosi is shot dead. No blood, no special effects, no real action, no thrills. They just come in and pull the trigger. Yawn. -DF



**Toshiro Mifune cont.**

destination. Given cryptic instructions, he dutifully travels to the appointed location high in the mountains. Reaching the pass, he insinuates himself in a tea-house famous for their top-shelf osake, much of which is consumed during the course of the film.

Here he faces off against Gentetsu, a disgraced doctor played by Katsu, as the mystery begins to unfold. Complicated by lechery, greed, and more of that deluxe sake, the story snowballs to its conclusion as a caravan carrying the Shogun's gold is ambushed at the pass. Two or three viewings may be necessary to sort out all the intricacies of the plot, which easily bears the extended scrutiny. Again, the Samurai Cinema release enjoys the high quality found only on digital media. Presented in full color, widescreen at a 2.2:1 aspect ratio, "Incident

at Blood Pass" is masterfully subtitled. The package includes extensive production notes and historical references. As the day of the Laser Disk comes to an end, these two films may be among the last available in the popular format destined to become the "Ronin" of the 21st Century. -Joeseeph Granese



# KAIZO NINGEN UPDATE

## TEKKAMAN: BLADE II

(Stage 2: "Alien Intruder", two chapters), 1994; Sotsu Agency/Tatsunoko Prod., American Release: Urban Vision <<http://urban-vision.com>>, Executive Prod.: Ippei Kuri, Dir.: Hideki Tonokatsu, Art Dir.: Yoshimi Unno, Character Design: Hirotoishi Sano, Scenario: Hiroyuki Kawasaki, Music: Takashi Kudo, English Language Version Directed by Jack Fletcher, Running Time: 60 Min. (contains two 30-minute episodes), Reviewed by Damon Foster

After trailers for other Japanime, like FINAL FANTASY, PSYCHO DRIVER, TWILIGHT OF THE DARK MASTER, DRAGON SLAYER: LEGEND OF HEROES, BIO HUNTER, and the latest "Gatchaman" remake this week, I finally got the point of all this: The point being that Japanese animators have way too much time on their hands! Regardless, this here Jap-toon has nifty art, as is always the case with Japanese cartoons. I suppose the real problem is that for once when watching an animated tape, I had expectations which weren't especially low. But last issue, if you'll recall, I was somewhat amused by this tape's predecessor. This follow-up doesn't live up to the previous outing for them Tekka men & gals. The other installment somehow managed to have interesting characters (no easy task in the barren wasteland we call "anime"), but this disappointment quickly disintegrates into typically mundane, *one dimensional characters drawn on transparent plastic who fall in love*; the type of sappy,

pretentious shit which normally deters me from Japanese animation.

Though the story is uninvolving, and the predictable characters are snore-inducing, I've nothing but praise for the technical qualities. Them Japanese artists (over in Japan, how convenient for them!) did their best, as always; and that animation quality is fairly spiffy too. But during the transformation scenes, why is it we only see nude women magically materializing into their over-sized robot costumes? We never see naked dudes! I'm not complaining, mind you-- I've no desire to see male nudity. But it just seems silly that the chicks (who now have nipples, but no pubic hair) appear with no clothes, yet the males do remain clothed, in the exact same situation.

The only interesting character is some androgynous guy (?) who plays a harmonica in a graveyard. I thought this crucifix (pendant) wearing, knife-wielding phantom was meant to be a woman, because we see it naked briefly (remember, in "anime land", men never remove their clothes). But there are no female breasts, and since its only full-bodied naked shot is a shadow or silhouette, we see no cock either. Regardless, this sultry, mysterious character only appears briefly, toward the end of Stage 2's second episode, so this mysterious Tekkaman (some sort of treacherous anti-hero) isn't given enough screentime to make the whole tape worth sitting through.

Them invaders at Radham must really like sex! And I'll tell you why: There's no end to

them pricks! Earth's battle against the aliens of Planet Radham is much like that Energizer rabbit, in that it just keeps going, and going. Also the gripe-filled inner-rivalries between the Tekkamen superheroes themselves doesn't help matters much. But wait, this all isn't predictable and cliché-ridden enough; so let's toss in some romance, to squash out what little originality this videotape might have. So Yumi Francois fell in love with some guy she has dreams about, he's a founding Tekkaman called D-Boy. A Tekkawoman called Aki also has the hots for D-Boy. But they all learn to get along, so they can emerge victorious in an anti-climactic battle in outerspace with the Radham invaders, resulting in the usual spaceships, explosions, etc. That's where STAGE 2's first episode ends. It's immediately followed by STAGE 2's second episode, where D-Boy is nearly killed in a duel with a rival Earthling, who's also a Tekkaman. The younger "good" Tekkamen seek revenge against this mysterious human who's turned his back on his own kind. Then the episode ends, and it's too bad-- it was just getting interesting. \* -Damon F.

## UREME

(aka UREME #1; full Korean title: WEI GE AH SEO ON: UREME, which means: "From the Alliance: Thunder-Hawk") Prod.: Kim Chung Gi, Asst. Prod.: Kan Do, Script & Continuity: Hon No & Hei San, Editor: Kim Chung Gi, Dir.: Kim Chung Wong, Animation: Chech Dong Gun, Animation Asst.: Choy Hang Ni, Ani-



# 우뢰매

mated at Seoul Animation Studio, Starring: Shim Hyung Rei, Kim Jong-Ah, Released on Video: 4/28/88 Running Time: 90 min., Reviewed by Damon Foster

This Korean tape starts off with a commercial for SKC, a Korean brand of videotape. Them Korean tapes are actually pretty bad; their magnetic particles flake off and damage VCR heads! Hell, even these original pre-records have an unhealthy, unsettling rattle when I rewind them! I had better review this tape and complete this article before it self-destructs, taking my VCR with it! So anyway, as I watched this first film in the series, I'm under the impression that the Korean, like the Chinese, film their movies silent and later dub them (and badly!). I'm afraid UREME reaches new levels in stupidity, it's impossible not to watch this one without touching your Scan button at least five times. I felt like I was watching THE BRADY BUNCH in Korean. These scenes drag on forever.

The costumes are cheap yet colorful, and once or twice the suspension wires (for flying people) are clearly, unapologetically visible! The battles are crudely filmed, looking like the photography & processing of some independent, 8mm quickie. Last and certainly least, lead actor Shim Hyung Rei is just not the superhero type! He's short, stocky, uglier than the rear end of a bull dog, and has more chins than a Chinese phone book. Amazingly, once he's in his red superhero costume, he plays his part effectively, he's quite serious as the heroic Esperman. He's no martial artist; which explains why there's virtually no two-fisted action in the movie, and very little in the remaining films (to be reviewed in future issues of OC). So with very little (if any) martial arts, the battles consist mainly of super-imposed laser beams. Though crude, they suffice, and there are a lot of them throughout. Other duels are cartoons of spaceships & robots, mixed in with the live action heroes. The latter half is full of astonishing sci-fi battles! If you just see these scenes, that's about two or three stars worth of entertainment, but again, the very beginning is pretty stupid. The opening comedy does not deserve anything, so on the whole, I'll round the movie off to a single star.

There's only one Korean word I know, and that's "Korea" (the name of the country most Koreans lived in until they discovered California). Since "Korea" is the only Korean word I know, the film's dialogue is entirely alien to me. So I'm guessing, but it looks like ugly alien transvestites are planning world domination. Meanwhile, jolly campers are fooling around. In one scene, a kid's pants fall down. Is this child pornography, or yet another example of feeble humor? Later, an alien spaceship, the animated 'Ureme' crashes. A lovable bafoon (Shim Hyung Rei) stumbles inside and meets Dai-Illi (Kim Jong-Ah), a sexy space babe who wears a common aerobics leotard. Also in the space-

ship is some old wizard, injured in a battle with the evil invaders. Exactly why, I don't know, but they turn the Korean clown into a mighty superhero, Esperman! And it's a damn good thing too, since them outerspace rejects from THE ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW are hassling Korean scientists! Despite their battles with Esperman, they still manage to burn down buildings (cartoon jets super-imposed over actual footage of crumbling buildings, probably taken from a news cast!), and kidnap that sexy space heroine Dae Illi (pronounced "Daily"). So Esperman, driving the spaceship Ureme is off to rescue her! The enemy's Earth base is located at Antarctica or some other place with a lot of snow. The heroic rescue is rich in lasers, maybe a chase or two, and cartoon giants, mixed in with shots

of real glaciers. Ureme becomes a robot, who battles an alien robot, and even a green monster! Devilman, eat your heart out! After all the evil aliens, robots & monsters are wasted, Dai Illi and Esperman fall in love with each other. While Dae Illi is quite delectable, Esperman still looks like a Korean Lou Costello. \*-Damon Foster

## MEGALOMAN

Toho; 1979, filmed at Toho Eizo Studio (Tess), Broadcast on Fuji TV from May 7, 1979, to December 24, 1979, Creator/Original Story: Tetsu Ganya, Co-Producer: Yoichi Manoda (SF cameraman for such films as KING KONG ESCAPES & DESTROY ALL MONSTERS), Stuntman: Jun Murakami, Music: Seiji Yokoyama, original theme song lyrics: Tetsu Ganya, Song Writer: Shozo Tozuka, Stunts:



외계에서 온 우뢰매

감독: 김형기  
주연: 심형기  
천은근

싸워라..... 에스퍼맨  
이겨라..... 데일리  
지구의 평화를 지켜라  
우뢰매 로버트!!

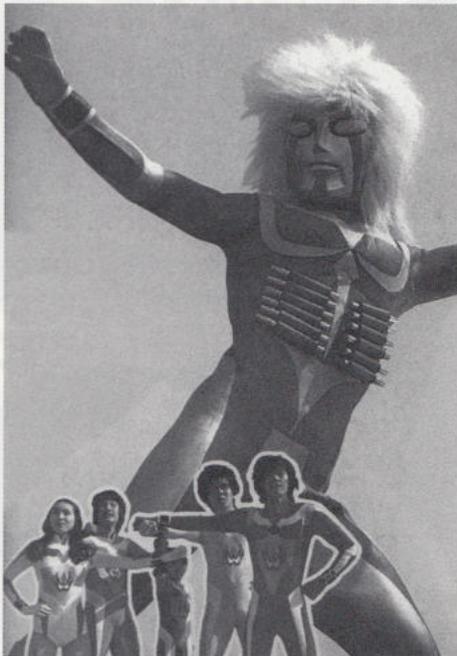
연소자권칼가

*Japan Action Club (co-ordinator: Junji Yamaoka). Starring: Yuki Kitazume as Takashi Shishidou, Madoka Sugi as Ran Takamine, Jimmy Araki as Seiji Kurokawa, Pepe Hozumi as Hyosuke Yuri, Koji Komichi as Ippei Mashiro, Yukiko Takabayashi as Mari Shishido (our hero's mother), Takao Inoue as Takamine (Ran's martial arts father), Yuki Kitazume as Captain Dagger, Susumu Kurobe as Berokk. Reviewed by David McRobie and Chris Elam*

This is one great show! It has the five members in their various colors (three men, one kid and a woman), a leader who doesn't fight, bad guys who quarrel with each other, lots of henchmen to beat up, at least one giant monster per episode and a giant hero to battle it. What more could you want? What? there's also a rocking cool theme song (unfortunately, those Italians changed the theme into a weird techno-type thing, which is okay, but doesn't compare to the original) and some really great effects. The hero also has the longest hair of any superhero, ever. And to top it all off, there are NO heroic robots in this show! I'll take an Ultraman-type being over *Super-Sentai* robo junk any day. And yes, it is pretty cheap looking, but in a good, we'll-do-better-than-you'd-think-we-can kind of way.

Okay, a little background on the show: It was produced by Toho and ran for 31 exciting episodes on Fuji-TV from 5/7/79 to 12/14/79. Yuki Kitazume (?) plays a silver helmeted bad guy (and is also Takashi's brother, Arashi) called Captain Deleto in the Italian episodes I've got (getting Japanese ones is more difficult, since little of the show was ever released to consumers), but the villain's real name is Captain Dagger. Pepe Hozumi (he plays one of the TV show's heroes) was a child actor, co-starring with Kojiro Hongo and Bokuzen Hidari in TOKAIDO OBAKE DOCHU (Daiei; 1969). Anyway, I can just see the studio heads at Toho sitting around a desk dreaming up this show, seeking a potential hit: "Let's see, Ultraman is really popular, and *Battle Fever J* has a giant robot and a color-coded hero team, so let's combine the two, replace the robot with an Ultraman-type and add a dash of *Zone Fighter* to it!" Presto! MEGALOMAN is born! The only thing missing is a couple cameo appearances by *Godzilla* (which would have been kinda' cool as well)." The cast is all quite good (from what I can tell in the Italian dubbed version), with the red and blue fighters being the best. Blue does a credible Bruce Lee imitation, right down to yelling like him while he fights. Despite this show being produced by Toho, all the stunts and fights are done by the phenomenal Japan Action Club. Needless to say, all the fights are well done. There are a lot of interesting camera shots in here as well, especially the ones where we see the monster looking down at the people (this sort of shot was also done in SPACE GIANTS quite a lot). Megaloman's fighting style was called "Uchu (space) Kenpo" in the toy commercials advertising his doll. Hey, does anyone have one of these? They look cool too!

The monster designs are generally pretty good, nothing really outlandish and/or silly, ala ULTRAMAN TARO. There are one or two clinkers, but all in all, nicely done. Megaloman himself looks mostly like an illegitimate Ultra Brother, kind of a hippie, what with the long hair and all. He doesn't have all the rays and beams the Ultra Brothers use, and only once shoots fire from his hand. He sure makes up for it in fighting, though. Up to this point, only *Zone Fighter* was as agile and acrobatic. Next year's ULTRAMAN 80 was the next giant hero to be this quick, but he had a three minute time limit where as Megaloman doesn't appear to have any energy drain. This is part of the appeal of the hero, as he can be on the screen fighting monsters as long as he needs to, where as we normally have to wait for the final minutes of an Ultra-program for the hero to show up. Megaloman could almost fit in the *henshin* hero mold, if he weren't so darn big.



He could be considered the successor to Iron King, in terms of fighting skill. Anyway, Megaloman is a great fighter.

It's a little hard for me to judge some of the effects work, because the episodes I have are from Italian TV and range from nice to a bit grainy. So I can't really speak of any composition of matte lines and stuff like that. The costumes are all neat, including the throw-around guys. I find it funny that in their human forms, the henchmen all wear what look to be priestly robes, and that this series was shown in Italy, of all places. But all in all, they did a good job on everything. Some of the henchmen actually get to express differing emotions, making them more individual than most throw-around guys. In their "true" forms, they wear black spandex with yellow lightning bolts and have see-through helmets over their brains.

The basics: Takashi (Megaloman's human form) and his mother Mari escape from their home planet during a raid by Captain Dagger (Capt. "Deleto" in the Italian print). The

Megaloman is defeated and Takashi's father disappears in battle with Dagger, but not before telling his son to go to Earth and protect his mother. There he (naturally) lands in Japan and they befriend a martial arts instructor and four earthlings: Seiji (blue), Hyosuke (comic relief; yellow), Ippei (green; a kid who's not too annoying and can move pretty well for such a little spud), and Ran, the pretty girl in pink. Mari is something of an electrical genius, and can help heal injured people and build amazing weapons in a short period of time. She also wears a white outfit on occasion, making her the *sixth* member of the team. She never fights, though.

To prove it's kung fu and not a Japanese style, they all wear the traditional Chinese outfits and not a gi. In the course of any given episode, we see them practicing their kung fu (it looks like five animal style) and acting like semi-normal humans. I'm glad these scenes are in most of the episodes, as it shows that even super heroes have to practice every day to stay in shape. You can't just inherit skill along with superpowers. These people use the bracelets to detect monsters and then turn into their super powered forms. They usually wipe out the henchmen after Takashi transforms himself into Megaloman to battle that week's episodic monster (s). At his disposal is the fiery hairball ("Megalofire!"), and various weapons like a sword and a pair of sai (the three pronged pokers). No fancy beams or rockets for this hero, just his basic kung fu (he, like his alter ego, rely on jumping reverse crescent kicks as a finishing move). The sensei, Takamine, is also Ran's father, explaining her expertise in martial arts.

Apparently this team has no "official" type of backing. There are no fancy cars (in fact, there is only one car that everyone uses), no flying machines, nothing that most of the *Sentai* type shows have. There is no special agency that these people belong to either, no UGM, PAT, MAT or even GUTS. It's just Takashi and his mom, along with the four Earthlings fighting to save the world. The military hardly gets involved either, even when a monster is destroying a chunk of cityscape. Later in the series, Takamine is apparently some sort of military man as well. It's strange to see *no* jets or super scientific equipment attacking the monster in every episode.

Episode Synopses: The episode titles are all translated from Italian titles, as that's all I had to reference them with, and it's still easier than straight Japanese, eh. I'm relatively sure they would come out about the same. Well, most of them. Some I just couldn't figure out. You'll see.

**1. THE FIERY SUPER MAN STRIKES!** In the origin episode we meet all our principals and see a flashback of the last time Takashi saw his father. It also tells of how they got to Earth. Mari his mother, gives him the Megalobracelets which allow him to beat the first monster, Kamagidon, in battle (along with

him practicing his reverse crescent kicks over and over). In a bit of irony, a stray fireball wipes out the first Earth baddies in their car. Don't play with fire, eh? Script: Tatsuo Tamura, FX Dir.: Yoichi Manoda, Dir.: Taku Nagano \*\*\*

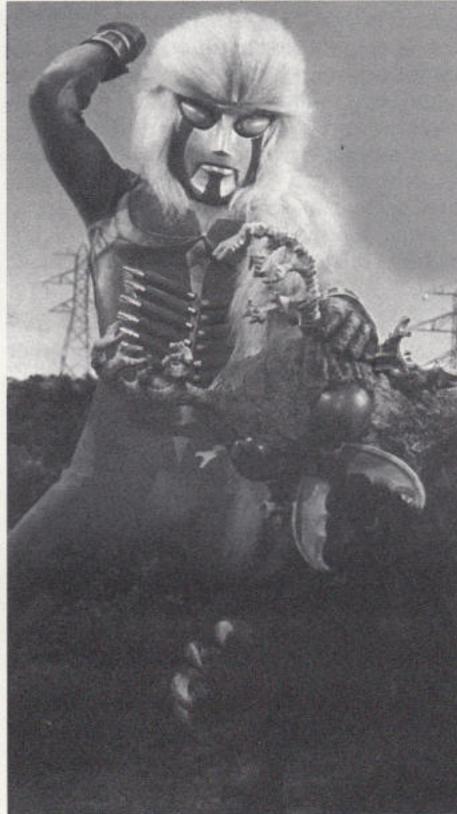
**2. THE BRACELETS OF FRIENDSHIP:** We see that the monsters are all shot to Earth by some kind of cannon. This one is an insect-type of creeper-crawler with six arms called Goran. It zaps everything it sees, but a kid gets away. Ran discovers Takashi "powering up" when he goes to the village to find the kid. Mari and the sensei give the other four their power bracelets, which they then all use in the first group battle. Each of them appears to adopt an animal fighting style, with Takashi using the dragon. Ran using the crane, Seiji using a leopard, Itsukei using the tiger and little Ippei being the monkey. They mop up the bad guys while Megaloman does his thing to the bug. The gang also finds out that their bracelets can be thrown to distract the monsters, and the bracelets will return to them. Too cool! \*\*\*\*

**3. THE SHOUT OF THE SPACE TEAM!** Our monster this time is a four legger, Zaninga, that has a pretty good design. The team is shown the secret base, while Itsukei has a friend, Katsua, that is injured during Megaloman's first fight with the beast. He loses when it knocks him into some high voltage power lines. During the second battle, the first fireball has no effect. Does Megaloman have it in him to try another one? Script: Tatsuo Tamura, FX Dir.: Shinichi Kozawa, Dir.: Samaji Yanagase \*\*\*\*1/2

**4. APPEARANCE OF THE MAGNETIC MONSTER:** Now this is one goofy looking monster, called Dobura, mostly because of the poorly placed head (the neck sprouts out from between its legs, making the rest look like nothing more than an elaborate codpiece). It sort of resembles a starfish, and it sets a refinery on fire. Megaloman to the rescue. The monster leaves and Megaloman puts out the fire (this whole sequence calls to mind ULTRAMAN #13). Meanwhile, Seiji is working as a mechanic with his father when he gets an emergency call and has to leave. He finds the bad guys' base, who then proceed to chase him to the top of a building. Takashi shows up and we have a spectacular fight, then & there in the basement. The monster shows up and Megaloman stops it yet again. Afterward, Seiji makes up with his father. Who says happy endings don't exist any more? Watch for an appearance by Shigeo Kato, a bit player in many Toho FX pictures, including KING KONG ESCAPES (where he played Dr. Who's boat night watchman), GODZILLA VS. THE SMOG MONSTER (construction worker), and GODZILLA 1985 (Yahata-Maru's radio man). Script: Takuhiro Tomita, FX Dir.: Shinichi Kozawa, Dir.: Samaji Yanagase, Guest Star: Shigeo Kato as a construction worker. \*\*\*\*

**5. THE STAR OF MT. HOSHIMIGOKA-** Ippei & Ran are out at night where they meet little Michika. The monster Gamereon arrives, then immediately takes a nap. That flight to Earth must be tiring. The bad-guys kidnap Michika, so our heroes must rescue her. During the first half of this fight we hear comedy sound effects. Once the monster and Megaloman start their battle, the sound FX are gone. Michika is found badly wounded, but Mary treats her and she's all right. Meanwhile, the aliens have started some kind of missiles burrowing into the earth. Script: Tatsuo Tamura, FX Dir.: Shinichi Kozawa, Dir.: Samaji Yanagase, Guest Star: Michiko Nagahama.\*\*\*

**6. ORDER: OPERATION INVASION-** The mon-



ster in this episode, Zubogu, resembles a couple of the old "Freakies" cereal characters melted together and covered with compost. In the first battle, it blinds Megaloman with its smoke, forcing a draw. Then Takashi has to practice blindfolded to figure out how to beat the creature. This monster is also guarding those missiles, which appear in different parts of Japan. My guess is they are going to sink the island! Script: Takuhiro Tomita, FX Dir.: Shinichi Kozawa, Dir.: Samaji Yanagase. \*\*1/2

**7. FIGHTING THE WARRIOR OF LOVE** (This is as close as I can figure out; if anybody else has an idea, let me know. -DM)

A spacecraft gets hit by one of the monster carriers, which then lands near an active volcano. The monster Terumosu absorbs the energy of the magma and starts its destroying spree. Megaloman fights it, only to fall

into the volcano. When he gets out, we see him change back to Takashi for the first time. He also uses his Megalo-sword, but the monster absorbs it as well. During the fight, Ippei uses a laser gun (or perhaps more accurately, a label gun) of some kind for the first time. In Megaloman's second confrontation with the monster, he uses some exploding darts and the sword to relieve the beast of its huge cranium. Script: Tatsuo Tamura, FX Dir.: Koichi Kawakita, Dir.: Shohei Tojo. \*\*\*

**8. ON GUARD, SMALL HERO-** In this episode, the usually happy-go-lucky Hyosuke appears listless, while little Ippei and family go fishing. Ippei find some sort of object, gets kidnapped by the aliens, escapes, gets surrounded, etc. until Takashi flies in to rescue him. Our guest monster this time is a metallic beastie called Suchirunesu, who has a mace as a weapon. I bet you can't figure out Megaloman will use the monster's own mace against it at the end, can you? There's an appearance by Chotaro Tugin, who had supporting roles in Toho fantasy films, including GODZILLA VS. THE SEA MONSTER (Ichiro), DESTROY ALL MONSTERS (SY-3 co-pilot Okada), and YOG, MONSTER FROM SPACE (Gezora's victim, Yokoyama). Script: Takuhiro Tomita, FX Dir.: Shinichi Kozawa, Dir.: Shohei Tojo, Guest stars: Rika Fujie as Ippei's mother, Chotaro Tugin as Ippei's father \*\*1/2

**9. A UFO AND A DEAD SOLDIER IN THE SEA-** There is a fiery wreck at sea, and Hyosuke's friend Katsua is back, trying to find out what happened. He has to knock Katsua out to save him. After the first battle, Captain Dagger has the monster Doradoza wipe out his own men! What a cold hearted snake! But all is for naught, as Megaloman turns around and destroys the monster as well, and Katsua is okay. Script: Tatsuo Tamura, FX Dir.: Shinichi Kozawa, Dir.: Shohei Tojo. \*\*1/2

**10. COMBAT IN THE CRIME ARMY-** The badguys beat up two men, and then use them for their dastardly experiments. A young man named Shingo Kudo rescues a little boy, then shows up at our heroes' dojo. He beats Takashi in a match and then presents him with a sai as a gift. Shingo is captured and put in a tube. The villains install a helmet on him which increases his strength and decreases his will power. He fights Takashi briefly, and the helmet comes loose. Realizing what has been done to him, he sacrifices himself to save the others. Our weekly monster, Jamado, is a strong one, but Megaloman blows a hole into its body and explodes it. Script: Takuhiro Tomita, FX Dir.: Shinichi Kozawa, Dir.: Samaji Yanagase, Guest Star: Hideaki Ohara as Shingo Kudo (Ohara played the Zone family's ally Takeru Jo in RYUSEI NINGEN ZONE; aka ZONE FIGHTER). \*\*1/2

**11. BATTLE FOR THE COMMAND-** Every time a seismologist investigates these mysterious objects drilling into the ground, he gets killed. General Maito is upset at Captain Dagger,

which leads to a disagreement in person, and then to a full fledged sword fight between the two. Captain Dagger wins, and takes the gold helmet. There are lots of goons to fight in this episode, and Ippei get one of the spears in his leg. Our monster is named "Nun-chuck", I guess because its hands and tail come flying off (they sorta' look like "flying guillotines") and hit Megaloman whenever it wants them to. Doesn't really help it, though. There is also a mysterious comet approaching the Earth now. Script: Takuhiro Tomita, FX Dir.: Shinichi Kozawa, Dir.: Samaji Yanagase, Guest Star: Chotaro Togin \*\*\*1/2

**12. THE GREAT CHALLENGE-** The gang is worried about the approaching comet, and Mary has a flashback to the first time she saw it (she's holding little Takashi, I presume). There's a lengthy chase of Seiji by the baddies in a cop car and a station wagon?! There hasn't been a bad guy car as funny looking since TRIPLE FIGHTER's villains had an armada of VW bugs. Anyway, during the fight, Hyosuke sues a staff and Seiji uses sai to defend themselves. The last big drill bomb is sent, along with another monster, Rezakkusu, to protect it. This one looks like a pile of sea weed with fangs and eyes. Megaloman then filets it. He uses the Megalo-Fire to destroy the big bomb, which also causes the rest (and there were a lot, but I didn't count them) to explode. The Earth is saved! Script: Tatsuo Tamura, FX Dir.: Shinichi Kozawa, Dir.: Samaji Yanagase. \*\*\*

**13. THE BATTLE OF THE MONSTERS-** Dagger's base is still approaching the Earth. Our weekly monster is a one-eyed beaky thing, Miramonokuru (Mirror Monocle), which can reflect rays back onto the source. Bet you can't guess what Dagger's plan is this week is, can you? The badguys have infiltrated

the military. The gang goes and looks for the monster. During the fight, Megaloman's fireball is reflected back on him. He uses the "Fist of Megalo" (Megalo Blade) to spear the creature in its eye (ouch!), and then destroys the spy. This was a slower than normal episode. Script: Tatsuo Tamura, FX Dir.: Shinichi Kozawa, Dir.: Samaji Yanagase, Guest star: Kotaro Tomita- Dagger's himan collaborator; Tomita was the incompetent Seatopian agent in black in GODZILLA VS. MEGALON, and Dr. Ota in TERROR OF MECHAGODZILLA. \*\*

**14. THE EARTH'S CHILDREN ARE THREATENED-** The monster Boarein attacks some campers with orange mist. Ippei and some friends of his are caught by the baddies, and gassed by the monster, which makes all the kids change but Ippei, who is immune for some reason. He plays along to find out what's up, and the little kid who lured them in gives them all guns. They attack Takashi, but the gang arrives and he has to go fight the monster. Its mist turns Megaloman's hair pink, and while victorious, he is infected by the gas. Will they figure out why Ippei is immune? Let's just say milk does a body good. Script: Takuhiro Tomita, FX Dir.: Shinichi Kozawa, Dir.: Shohei Tojo. \*\*1/2

**15. INNER CONFLICT-** Captain Dagger sends Maki to Earth. He is a survivor of the Megalocorps, but under Dagger's control. He is destroying buildings for the bad guys, who are still driving around in that damn station-wagon. Dagger equips the monster Yunigon (Unigon?) with a special crest, which will be used later. During the fight, Megaloman kicks off the monster's crest, so Maki is supposed to blast him, but has to decide who he will shoot- Megaloman or the monster? During the battle with the henchmen, our heroes

suddenly use their weapons-- just where are they hiding these? Script: Tatsuo Tamura, FX Dir.: Shinichi Kozawa, Dir.: Shohei Tojo. \*\*\*

16 (not available for review) This is a missing episode, but is the first part of the next one.

**17. WHERE IS THE SECRET BASE?** Megaloman slices off the Paraboran's wings, and it bails the fight. The badguys continue a reign of terror around the village, dressed as a variety of workers(kind of like a Japanese Village People). In a good fight, the gang uses all their weapons (where do they keep these?) and Megaloman destroys both monster and secret base, even though the flying saucer escapes. Script: Tatsuo Tamura, FX Dir.: Koichi Takano, Dir.: Samaji Yanagase, Guest stars: Koji Imai- Rujii; Natsumi Kano- the girl (Ryuji's sister?). \*\*\*1/2

**18. PROOF POSITIVE-** This episode starts off with a montage of monsters fighting Megaloman. The military is watching films of Megaloman defeat these monsters. I'm not sure why. However, the secretary is a spy for Dagger and she unleashes a pink goo (it reminds me of the slime in the movie THE UNKNOWN TERROR) which promptly dissolves two of the military guys. Takashi rescues one, and then the building is covered by the glop (which is a nicely done effect). Our villainess (this is the first one, what, does Toei have a monopoly on women as villains in shows?) plants bugs and generally makes a nuisance of herself. The monster Kyanza can move underground by turning itself into the pink foam, which makes it a difficult foe for Megaloman to fight. Script: Takuhiro Tomita, FX Dir.: Shinichi Kozawa, Dir.: Shohei Tojo, Guest Stars: Takashi Sofoyama-General Kamiya; Fukumi Kuroda- female spy. \*\*\*

**19. THE SECRET OF THE SCALES-** This one starts out with the bad guys raiding a scientific lab. This time they are scale fish people who attack from underwater. The fish people appear to have been transformed against their will (those nasty aliens!) and don't like Captain Dagger. This means during the climax he kills the head fishman, but misses all of our heroes. Our monster this week is Arumunga, a creature re-



sembling one of Marvin the Martians' "Instant Martians", complete with two re-attachable heads. Before this one is destroyed, it slices off some of Megaloman's hair. Script: Tatsuo Tamura, FX Dir.: Shinichi Kozawa, Dir.: Shohei Tojo. \*\*\*1/2

**20. THE GREAT INVASION OF MONSTERS-** In the opening shot we see Seiji leave on a plane. I don't know why he does this. We are also introduced to Berokk (alias Susumu Kurobe, and we all know who he is) as Capt. Dagger's main scientist. He has a plan, and it involves more monsters than you can believe: Zonbiron, Barigen, Suidorasu and Bonbaron as well as Arumunga are all in this episode. It's pretty much one long, exciting fight, with Megaloman getting crucified at the cliffhanger ending. I still find the crucifixion imagery weird to see from a country of Buddhists, but it is an alien thing to do. Script: Tsunehisa Ito, FX Dir.: Shinichi Kozawa, Dir.: Shohei Tojo. \*\*\*\*

**21. THE HEROISM OF MARI-** All the badguys, including the monsters, are glibating at Megaloman's predicament. The cross seems to be draining his power. Mary shows up (The team's sixth member, in white...?) and immediately gets captured. Will Megaloman sacrifice himself and the Earth, for his mother's life? OR will they be able to work out a happy ending? What do you think? It's a great battle with four monsters, whatever happens. However, one of the monsters severs more of Megaloman's hair, and this makes Berokk very happy. Script: Seiya Yamazaki, FX Dir.: Shinichi Kozawa, Dir.: Shohei Tojo. \*\*\*\*\*

**22. THE SECRET OF THE MEGALO-FIRE-** Seiji has returned and Takashi is weak (from hair loss-teehee). Captain Dagger and Berokk analyze Megaloman's hair samples and turn it into a power source for a weapon. Captain Dagger sends a saucer to attack a refinery, and Tanamine calls the army in to stop it. This is nice to see, jets attacking. Good change of pace. Berokk tests his weapon, and the monster Songa appears. At the end of the battle, Megaloman is blasted and disappears! Script: Tatsuo Tamura, FX Dir.: Shinichi Kozawa, Dir.: S. Fukazowa. \*\*\*

**23. INFERNAL PRISONER-** We flash back to the previous episode, and then everyone is searching for Takashi. he is in the baddies hideout, attacked to a device and being tortured. Berokk (naturally) gloats about how he managed to capture Takashi, and then Captain Dagger gets in his two cents worth. The monster Kajuron appears, and fights more jets, but without Megaloman

they are pretty useless. One of the underlings helps free Takashi, but dies in the process. Takashi manages to destroy the machine, saucer and monster before the nicely shot sunset scene at the end of the episode. Script: Tsunehisa Ito, FX Dir.: Shinichi Kozawa, Dir.: S. Fukazowa. \*\*\*

**24. BLOOD URGE-** A vampire woman attacks a man in the still of night. Takashi and Ran search, and discover more attacks of the same nature. Our second female villain doesn't seem to get along with Berokk. The badguys chase our heroes in that damn station wagon again, and prove to be lousy shots (this must be where the Empire gets



their stormtroopers, eh). Takashi gets to do some cool leaps over cars, though, and Captain Dagger gets some nice new threads (pretty cool, purple and black). He turns the vampire woman into the monster Byakumu (Vacuum) by means of a *monster* chamber. There's some neat FX when an earthquake swallows up Takashi and Megaloman comes flying out later. Vacuum is a monster with a huge noggin and suction cups for hands, and it bleeds red smoke. Script: Tsunehisa Ito, FX Dir.: Shinichi Kozawa, Dir.: S. Kukazowa. \*\*1/2

**25. THE DEATH OF SEIJI-** In this episode, Berokk somehow becomes a teacher at the school Ipei would be going to if he weren't so busy saving the world. Planes mysteriously explode in cool FX scenes. Our agile monster Zatan (Satan?) gives Megaloman a good battle, but not before Seiji takes a knife to the chest, courtesy of Berokk. After the monster is defeated, the gang grieves and

probably vows vengeance. If this were a "Power Ranger" type setting, Seiji would only have been scratched, I suppose. Script: Seiya Yamazaki, FX Dir.: Shinichi Kozawa, Dir.: S. Fukazowa. \*\*\*

**26. THE MONSTER ZAGNO ZVIDER-** A UFO crashes, and Daggers' men kill all the occupants but one girl, Ioki, before the gang arrive. She's someone Takashi has known before, and Ran is jealous about them renewing their "friendship". Ioki gives Takashi a charm to wear in is pendant, and it's a trick - he can't change into Megaloman now! Good thing Ran has more on the ball than Takashi. Must be that jealous female nature.

She tells him, Ioki has second thoughts, but gets killed as well as the monster Zubaida (Zvider? Spider? does use a web substance on Megaloman. There is no Italian translation for Zagno, Zvider, etc.). Script: Seiya Yamazaki, FX Dir.: Koichi Takano, Dir.: Samaji Yanagase. \*\*\*1/2

**27. (no title available)-** Takashi and Hyosuke battle some badguys, and during the fights, Hyosuke's bracelets get taken from him. Berokk uses the bracelet to control Megaloman, or at least his arms. This works. Captain Dagger sends the mosner Jadonga out to attack, and Ipei and Ran have to fight their way up a tower to try and save Megaloman. Hyosuke, wounded in the earlier battle, finally makes it up and zaps the beast. Later, Takashi gives Hyosuke his bracelets back. Script: Takuhiro Tomita, FX Dir.: Koichi Takano, Dir.: Samaji Yanagase. \*\*\*

**28. THE SACRIFICE OF HYME-** Hyme crash lands in a saucer. He meets up with Takashi, and

they have a fight. He then spares Takashi's life, and later meets up with Captain Dagger and Berokk, who's not real happy about him being there. Hyme undergoes a transformation into the monster Buffalon, who is still able to use weapons in his fight with Megaloman. Hyme turns out to be Berokk's son, and we now what's going to happen now. Script: Seiya Yamazaki, FX Dir.: Shinichi Kozawa, Dir.: Eiryu Ueno. \*\*\*

**29. TAKASHI, DON'T SHOOT THE MONSTER!** The badguys sneak attack the gang at a mine. They gas Ran and Hyosuke and take them to the base. They escape and try to fight their way out, but Hyosuke is captured and placed in the transformation chamber. Then, a regular badguy is placed in with him, to complete the princess. The goon isn't real pleased about that. The neat looking monster Terogirasu appears, and Megaloman gets ready to battle it. Ran sneaks out of the base dressed in one of the black outfits

(yow!) and lets the others know the monster is Hyosuke! Good thing Mari is around to invent another pistol to separate Hyosuke from the body of the monster. This is a pretty great episode. Script: Tsuneshisa Ito, FX Dir.: Shinichi Kozawa, Dir.: Eiryu Ueno. \*\*\*\*

**30. DAGGER'S COUNTER-ATTACK:** The gang is in space- they have found out Takashi's dad is still alive! I'm not sure how it happened, but they are happy. Takamine is tricked by Dagger and captured. When they release the monster Desupa, they use Takamine as a hostage so Megaloman

won't fight the critter. Ran shoots her dad with a teleport gun, but Berokk opens fire on him and kills him. Berokk also dies, but the goons have captured Ran. She fights thme off in the base, and Mari comes to her rescue. Then she sees Captain Dagger's face for the first time. Meanwhile, Megaloman is still battling Desupa. Script: Tatsuo Tamura, Takuhiro Tomita, FX Dir.: Shinichi Kozawa, Dir.: Shohei Tojo. \*\*\*\*

**31. THE ULTIMATE CHALLENGE-** This is it, the big showdown we've been waiting for! Ran looks for Mari in the secret base while

Megaloman finishes off Desupa. We find out Captain Dagger is Takashi's (twin?) brother Irashi. He and Takashi fight, and Daggo's helmet is broken and Takashi see's himself. Mari later tells Takashi what happened, but I couln't get hold of it. Dagger makes himself into the giant Dagger, who looks like a big Battle-Hwak. He and Megaloman have a great battle, but we all know how it is going to end. The Go Shishido shows up and they all say good-bye. Script: Tatsuo Tamura, Takuhiro Tomita, FX Dir.: Shinichi Kozawa, Dir.: Shohei Tojo. \*\*\*\*1/2

## TERROR YAKI cont...

priestess Shinobu), but this would appear to be a name made up for easier pronunciation for Americans, since in DAIMAJIN, it appears that the benevolent deity's name is "Arakatsuma" (try saying that one ten times fast!), though I heard it mentioned in DAIMAJIN only once. The story's royal family is the Hanabasa Clan, but in the version we grew up on, this last name was pronounced Hanabuza.

Excellent photography & cinematography highlights this grim tale of feudal Japan, and how a warlord strives for conquest, sending his samurai squad to wipe out the ruling family, the Hanabasas. Jun Fujimaki plays Kogenta, a surviving Hanabasa supporter who helps the royal brother & sister (potential heirs to the throne) escape as their parents are slaughtered by the villains. The young boy is played by the same kid who

played Gam in SPACE GIANTS, but this character (Tadafumi) grows up, having found refuge at the stone statue of Majin-- a scary place that most people won't go near. But a little kid with an ugly mole and a stupid-looking wig, called "Take" later ventures to the unholy statue of Majin, in hope that the supernatural forces will wipe out Samanosuke, Gunjuro, and the other evil rulers, who have turned the local village into a slave-labor camp. Samanosuke has unrealistically slaughtered a elderly priestess (no eyebrows, and she's got black teeth; she's nasty-looking!) and plans to crucify both our heroes Kogenta and Tadafumi, but Princess Kozasa (Tadafumi's sister) prays to Majin, who therefore comes to life. The scenes of this giant samurai going on a rampage on the oldstyle village are really cool. For once there's a Japanese monster trashing a miniature city

which lacks any fleeing newspaper reporters, or jet-planes. This is a purely Japanese style monster movie, even though it was inspired by German movies like DER GOLEM (1914), DER GOLEM UND DIE TANZERIN (1917), and DER GOLEM (1920). The miniature towers and pagodas are flawless, and only us experts can really tell which scenes of Majin are the actual, huge 4.5 meters high; about twice the height of an average man) statue, and which scenes are of costumed actor Riki Hoshimoto (who would later be in CHINESE CONNECTION). Regardless, the grim, walking statue wastes several villains, before crucifying Samanosuke himself, using a large metal spike. His job done, Majin's spirit flies (via fire-ball) back to his mountain tomb, while his physical stone-body crumbles in the remains of Samanosuke's empire. \*\*\*\* -DF

## HONG KONG HEROES cont...

He speaks decent English, and it's interesting to hear what he has to say about being labeled a Bruce Lee imitator, back in the 1970s. Here's one guy who deserves more exposure. \*\*\*\* -Damon Foster

### HER NAME IS CAT

1998, Directed by Clarence Fohk, Cast: Wong Pui Ha, Michael Wong, Reviewed by George Garvey

New action gal Wong Pui Ha stars as "Cat", a former Mainland China body-guard who came to HK to work as an assassin. Tall and athletic, she's a cross between Carrie Ng and Yeung Pan Pan. Wong Pui Ha can also be seen in THE GROUP, a film that basically sucks but her

fight with Ken Lo at the end is pretty good.

Michael Wong is John the Cop, who pursues Cat and eventually becomes involved with her. He tries to act in this once, he wants to show us he can be a "sensitive" guy! This film reminded me of NAKED KILLER! At times, this film is emotional and sweet in its own way. But make no mistake-- this is an action film, stylish and violent. A botched robbery, an S&M killing, an assassination job gone wrong with Cat and her ex-boyfriend shooting it out on the roof-tops while his new girlfriend finishes off the victim on the street below and then stabs Michael Wong. Cat is attacked at her apartment and fights for her life as her place burns down around her, then a shoot-out in an alley, Cat escapes!

Cat hides out at Michael Wong's place. She's been wounded and recuperates there. She has been keeping an eye on him and she knows all about him. She takes him prisoner in his own place, she usually has him hand-cuffed. But she feeds him, watches TV with him, takes

care of him. It's nice and weird at the same time. After a few days, she leaves. Mr. Choi The Gangster and religious hypocrite is behind most of the stuff that happens. He tries to have Michael Wong killed but Cat saves him. They escape and spend a few days on a beat. The cops show up and arrest Cat. She thinks she's been sold-out by Michael Wong. Cat is tortured at the police station. She escapes while being transported to court. After saying good bye to John, she's off to the church to confront the treacherous Mr. Choi. Sister Shin who is Cat's contact and the ex-boyfriend are also there. Slow motion gun fight, kung fu, crashing chandeliers, large needles through the head, John gets his ass kicked by Sister Shin (yeah!), Cat stomps Mr. Choi!! Trigger-happy cops gun down Mr. Choi and Cat! Too bad she couldn't escape again!!! I would have liked this film to become a series like the IN THE LINE OF DUTY films. Wong Pui Ha is a welcome addition to the Girls With Guns scene. Let's hope she gets film worthy of her talents. \*\*\*1/2 -George Garvey

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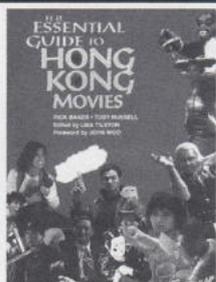
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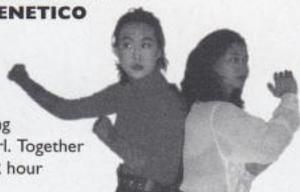
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