

ORIENTAL CINEMA

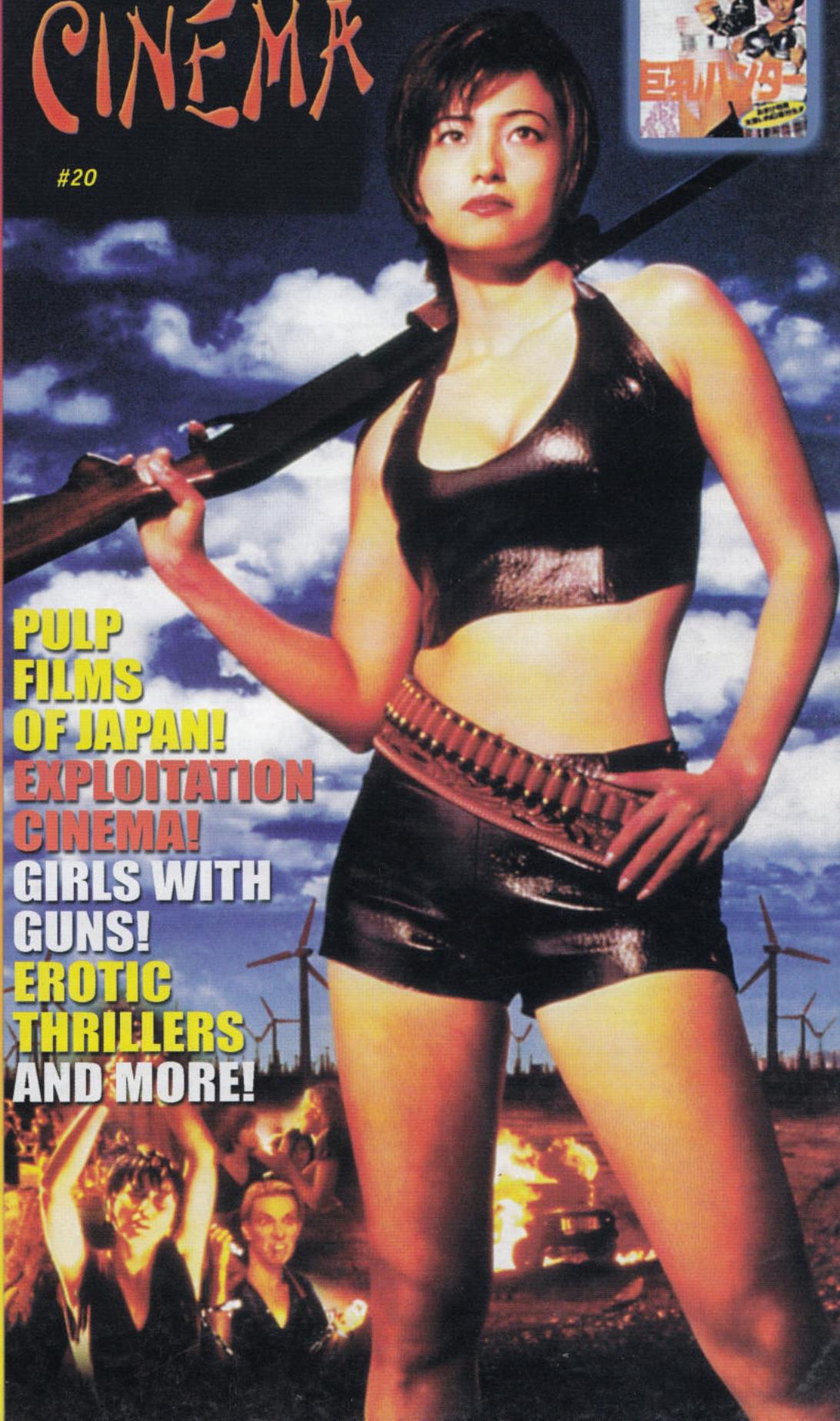
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ORIENTAL CINEMA

#20 - WINTER 2001

INSIDE FRONT COVER - EDITORIAL

1 - LETTERS

3 - ASIAN PULP CINEMA

19 - TERROR YAKI

23 - ASIAN ODDITIES

30 - HONG KONG HEROES

34 - KAIZO NINGEN UPDATE

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EDITORIAL

As you can tell from the ridiculously outdated title ("Oriental"?! Who says that old word any more!?!?), Oriental Cinema is the longest-running Asian filmzine in the English-language world (the publication is almost as old & decrepit as myself). Back when I was around 11 or 12 years old, the name "Oriental Cinema" seemed to have such a nice ring to it that I knew I'd better snatch it up before somebody else did! OC made its debut back around 1978 (but it's roots, in the form or other can be traced back to 1975), and over the years, I've covered a lot of different genres. I still remember early OC articles which were not only handwritten, but written in crayon (but it was high quality crayons supplied by Crayola, the maestros of the crayon scene!). Most of the time, OC has catered to topics I grew up on; subjects which are true to my heart. It became obvious, however, that OC can't continue to exist if I only concentrate on the genres that I personally prefer. With each issue of OC, it gets a little more difficult to find new things to write about. So I occasionally do research out there, to see what Far Eastern film genres OC has never given the time of day. One such topic is the "Pink films", or rather, sleazy exploitation films of Japan. I don't personally have much taste for the stuff (I date real women and therefore I'm not intimidated by them, so I don't need to see them tortured), but let's face it; OC needs to expand and grow. I've run the old topics like superheroes, kung fu and giant monsters into the dirt, to the point that I'm regurgitating the same flicks & reviews over and over again (just how many times have I reviewed GAMERA VS. GUIRON?!). Don't get me wrong— these are classic topics which will always be part of OC. But every couple years or so I decide to evade monotony by incorporating new stuff (like two or three years ago when I decided to cover an occasional pornography video, or the time I shocked everybody by reviewing American martial arts farces).

I frequently read similar publications like She and Asian Cult Cinema, partially to support fellow editors & writers, but also to learn from their coverage of Japan's sexploitation movies— and find their reviews to be more entertaining than the movies themselves. But I always felt jealous of the reviewers who have access to such movies; and the more I read, the more I feel overwhelmed & intimidated at the sheer volume of these films; there's no way to catch up! Unfortunately, in the area where I live, there are really only a couple Japanese videotapes, and both of them are nearly an hour's drive away, each direction! There are bridge tolls, congested traffic and parking fees to contend with too. This is discouraging and disheartening. When I drive all that way to rent videotapes, I want to get my money's worth, and tend to stick to familiar territory like Ultraman, samurai flicks and Godzilla movies. Over the years, I've seen Japan's adult movies displayed on the shelves of Japan Video (at San Francisco's Japan Center), but was too wishy-washy to take a gamble and rent them. If I paid good money to rent such a



videotape and ended up hating it, I would have wasted a whole trip. Naturally, I always played it safe and stuck to the movies and TV shows (i.e. KIKAIDA) which I know won't disappoint me, and were well worth the effort. With this type of caution & prejudice on my part, it looked as though OC would never branch out.

In recent months, however, this has finally changed! Imagine my surprise when, at a nearby (damn near within walking distance) videotore I found a videotape of SASORI IN U.S.A. (A.K.A SCORPION'S REVENGE)! I was amazed to see that even here in the suburbs, Japanese cinema is now accessible. I no longer need to brave deepest, darkest San Fransissy to rent Japanese videotapes. In the days that followed, I located other rare (until recently) releases, such as ZERO WOMAN: ASSASSIN LOVERS and the wonderfully titled BIG BOOBS BUSTER! These rarities began popping up out of the woodwork. I never thought that Go Nagai's THE NINJA DRAGON, or horror movies like BAPTISM OF BLOOD & THE HAUNTED LANTERN would be readily available, out here in the middle of nowhere!

The long overdue appearance of Japanese exploitation movies in the American mainstream couldn't have happened at a better time. In the 1990s, I got disillusioned with the then-popular genre of HK action movies. As the kung fu film turned into the wire & pulley film, I found myself running out of worthwhile Asian actioners to review. But now I'm doing my best to jump on the band wagon, and I'm starting with a film series of independent releases, shown in America under the banner "Asia Pulp Cinema". So the central topic of this edition of OC is the live action releases of Asia Pulp Cinema— I shall review as many of their videotapes as I can get my hands on.

However, I don't know how many (if any) of Asia Pulp Cinema's movies qualify as "Pink Films" (whatever the hell that term means) or even exploitation films, for that matter. So I again invite any fans & experts to contribute reviews to OC. Whether you're into Japanese adult films or superhero cartoons for children, all topics are welcome in OC. If anybody is interested in sending in reviews in trade for credit and free issues of OC containing the review (s), I look forward to hearing from you. Although OC manages to scrape by and appear in stores all over the world, it certainly hasn't turned a profit for me personally. With the amount of work I put into it, I'm lucky if I break even; so obviously, I don't have the money to pay anybody to write for OC. OC may be widespread and semi-known, but it still remains a fanzine; made by fans, for fans— and is a labor of love. Sometimes it's more like a "labor of hate". I guess that means OC is really just a "labor of like somewhat".

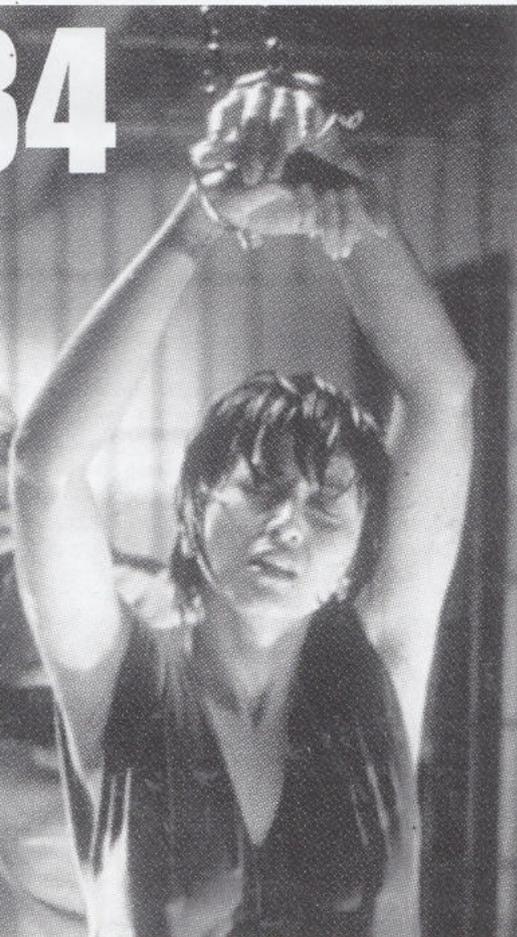
Sincerely Mine,
Damon Foster

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34

LETTERS



Damon,

First off, reading the Letters column (in *O.C.: Godzilla 2000*) I found that letter by Charles E. Bowersock to be the funniest shit I have EVER read! Second, "Chaparrita Asari" and Mariko Morikawa are intensely solid babes. Third, your review of GOGO FIVE. I'm in total agreement with you. It has gotten to be really formulaic and predictable. Ever since BATTLE FEVER J, on through more recent stuff like TIME RANGER (all by Yatsude Saburo), it's become half-hour toy commercials. It's as if they're trying to repackage last year's idea as something new and fresh. I take it there's no hiatus in sight for this generation.

However, the only thing that has been giving it a new look has been the "Power Ranger" genre which has become watchable as the season progresses, despite the butcher job that Saban has done to KAMEN RIDER BLACK RX, METALDAR, SPIELVAN and SPACE SHERIFF SHIDER. Growing up in Hawaii, I too remember Shotaro Ishimori's SECRET TASK FORCE: FIVE RANGERS, along with other heroes such as DENJIN ZABOGA, AKUMAIZER 3, etc., and Hawaii's favorite, the "Kikaida" brothers.

Keep up the good work man,
Karl Kletzker
Honolulu, HI

To whom it may concern-

I am Godzilla fan I have trying to find a fan club for Godzilla and now I have in two Godzilla C.D.s. Can you send me the information about joining. Thank you for your time.

Yours truly,
Eric Sheil
Gainesville, TX

Dear Eric,

I no for can see for what not this Godzilla fan club, but I for this enjoy edit magazine, and although it exhausting for mine. So very exhausting.

Mine Truly,
Damon Foster
Over Here, Home

Your otherwise excellent career profile on Sammo Hung (in *O.C.: The Sammo Hung Issue*) was marred by some outrageous errors concerning GAME OF DEATH actors Gig Young and Hugh O'Brian. First, you owe the latter an apology for killing him off in print. Hugh O'Brian (yes, it's O'Brian, not O'Brien) is very much alive.

/What? Really?!? I got that misinformation from some British publication called *Fist of Fury*. I wonder what other errors of theirs I've spread around! Or maybe they were right, and I was wrong— perhaps I got something missed up. It's so embarrassing when this happens, but I suppose it's inevitable. What's really scary is that I thought that zine was so informative, and used them as research material more than once! -DF/ The murder-suicide tragedy you claim happened to him actually happened to Gig Young. And it wasn't a girlfriend, but a wife who was murdered. Before shooting himself, Gig Young killed his wife— his fifth wife, to whom he'd been married for about three weeks.

On page 8, you express bewilderment over a Sammo Hung quote in *Fist of Fury* magazine. For the record, that quote was borrowed from Bey Logan's *Hong Kong Action Cinema* book.

I also have some comments about *O.C.: The Jimmy Wang Yu Issue*. In your editorial, there's a statement about Catholicism being the world's fastest religion. I'm dubious about the accuracy of that statistic. However, I can tell you that because of the influx of Moslem immigrants in recent years, Islam is now the fastest growing religion in America.

The Jimmy Wang Yu career profile was excellent and very informative, but I must correct an error made on page 10. No, Jackie Chan is not relegated to a "minor role as a henchman" in the subtitled 1970s obscurity, POLICE WOMAN. I've viewed the English dub, RUMBLE IN HONG KONG, and I can assure you Jackie has an important role as a juvenile delinquent in the picture. POLICE WOMAN/RUMBLE IN HK can be described as a weird hybrid, a mixture of action film and juvenile delinquency drama. What it can't be described as is a good movie. It's a dog, to put it bluntly.

Turning to the filmography, why did you let Linn Haynes get away with that statement about TWO CAVALIERS being the only film to feature both Jimmy Wang Yu and Chen Sing? Just a few pages before his review can be found the review for another flick co-starring the two, namely FOUR REAL FRIENDS. And what did Mr. Haynes mean by saying TWO CAVALIERS shouldn't be confused with the identically titled John Liu/Angela Mao movie? Excuse me? That one is called TWO GREAT CAVALIERS, so the names are not the same. Did Mr. Haynes mean similar, not identical titles? Or does he own an obscure print of the Liu/Mao flick that really does use the TWO CAVALIERS title?

Moving to Hong Kong Heroes, your

review of Shaws THE INVINCIBLE ONE failed to mention its 1993 remake, THE BAREFOOT KID. Also included in Hong Kong Heroes was a review of CROUCHING TIGER, HIDDEN DRAGON (this picture seems to have garnered more praise from American critics than any martial arts film in cinema history). In the review, Louie Ambriz made the assumption that mainland actress Zhang Ziyi had a martial arts background. Wrong! Zhang Ziyi, who's being touted as the "new Gong Li", is an ex-ballet dancer, like her co-star, Michelle Yeoh. It's interesting to note that CROUCHING TIGER had a large enough budget to eschew the thin wires of the typical HK fantasy, and instead, the flying scenes utilized heavy cables (clearly visible on camera), that were later digitally erased via computer.

Finally, I just viewed Xenon's CHESH BOXER DESTROYER and was surprised to discover this is Wang Yu's THE HERO. Yes, the video is dubbed and appears to be uncut. And as is typical of Xenon, there's deceptive box art which claims Li Yi Min is the film's star (he is in the movie alright, but only has a small role).

Lana Zukowski
Phoenixville, PA

Dear Damon,

Well, I've finished reading *O.C.: The Jimmy Wang Yu Issue*, and I must say to have not enjoyed an issue of *O.C.* this much since your Sonny Chiba Issue so long ago! By the way, I noticed you dropped the "And Video" from the title. Good move, since it served no real purpose anyway. /I included "And Video" to the title back in the 1990s, because in time, it seems that theaters will go out of business. In much the way that videotores drove drive-ins into obsolescence (it's sad, I know), cinemas may eventually become extinct too. But videotores seem to be flourishing. So my goal, back in the 1990s, was to gradually change *O.C.*'s title to *Oriental Video!* But even with theaters on the decline, the word "cinema" still pops up, either in website titles, or the names of videotape distribution companies. So it looks like the word "cinema", unlike "oriental", will stand the test of the times. -DF/

The one thing I never understood about the original "One Armed Swordsman" series was Wang Yu's continuing to use that broken sword. The Zato Ichi character probably was grateful that our boy Wang had two "handicaps" to his one!

I have to admit that I liked most of these East/West joint productions, SEVEN BROTHERS MEET DRACULA, CALL HIM MR. SHATTER, THE STRANGER AND THE GUNFIGHTER, etc.

They are not your run-of-the-mill kung fu movies. I just wish I could find THREE SUPERMEN AGAINST THE ORIENT on video. /No chance. My tape, and everyone else's in America comes from bootleg networking, and every version I've seen is of bad quality. -DF/ I admit that I didn't like STONER much and didn't even know about AMAZONS AND SUPERMEN. Unlike you, I rather like THE MAN FROM HONG KONG!

As to the BRUCE LEE: SUPER DRAGON film, it was like the COUNTER ATTACK / THE CHINESE STUNTMAN situation. These two were the same movie with differences in some of the footage. COUNTER ATTACK had Odd Job in it, with no sign of him in THE CHINESE STUNTMAN, which in turn had longer versions of the same fights and a couple of additional ones too! The video box claimed COUNTER ATTACK was longer, but that honor goes to THE CHINESE STUNTMAN cut! In the case of BRUCE LEE: SUPER DRAGON, some of the prints had some Wang Yu footage spliced in, and some didn't! In any case, it was from some old Wang Yu movie (I forget which). As far as I know, Bruce Li never worked with Wang Yu!

Yeah, Lo Wei was a hack director. It's a shame he worked for Golden Harvest! When you can't do a decent sequel to THE CHINESE CONNECTION

with Jackie Chan as your star, you're a hack! Lo Wei looks even worse when you consider that a rival studio did a mostly likable sequel called CHINESE CONNECTION II (A.K.A. FIST OF FURY II) with Bruce Li!

Robert Mallory
Franklin, N.C.

Dear Damon,

Congratulations on O.C.: The Jimmy Wang Yu Issue. A superb survey! You are one of the people who really tries to find these films and looks at them. This is so very important, believe me! Best Wishes,
Tony Williams
Carbondale, Ill.

Dear Damon:

The new QC: The Jimmy Wang Yu Issue came out really impressive /I certainly hope so! Not only did I not make a dime off it, but it cost me at least a thousand dollars to produce! The magazine was disastrous for Draculina Publishing too, and was exclusively a labor of love. For obvious reasons, we can't make a lot of magazines which are that good! -DF/, I thought. A good-looking book! Happy to have been a part of it. Please let me know how I can ever help out in the future.

All the best,
Dale Berry
Bakersfield, CA

NEWSFLASH! JAPANESE SUPERHEROES COME TO AMERICA!!!

Did you know that on July 20-22, 2001, there was a convention in Hawaii which had guests from TV shows like KIKAIKAI, RETURN OF ULTRAMAN, KIKAIKAI 0-1, INAZUMAN, BATTLE FEVER J, and INAZUMAN FLASH?! Of course you didn't; it's not like they went out of their way to let America's large superhero fandom know! But now the good news: Such prolific cast members may be back again in the summer of 2002! Mainland superhero fans unite (and start saving some money!), and make plans to attend the "Hawaii All Collectors Show 2002"! This may be your only opportunity to meet such charismatic guests as Daisuke Ban (KIKAIKAI, NINJA CAPTOR!) and Shunsuke Ikeda (KIKAIKAI 0-1, RETURN OF ULTRAMAN). Plan your vacation now, and prepare for a rare experience! For info on the event, see website: <http://www.ukulele.com/preview/> Or contact those running the show: iw@ukulele.com, and www.ukule.com! If we let Wayne & Ilene know there are legions of superhero fans outside of Hawaii, they may be more likely to bring back the heroes of Japanese TV!!!

I'll be seeing you guys in the tropics! Aloha, Damon Foster



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ASIA PULP CINEMA™



Reviewed by Damon Foster

One of the problems we have finding foreign films is that most American video stores don't think their clientele wants to watch them. It's different if you live in an over-crowded melting pot like San Francisco (but us suburbanites don't always have the time to drive that far, only to have our cars broken into). And yet there I was, in a suburban Blockbuster Video. I don't often shop there for largely the same reasons I avoid Starbucks's coffee (well, that's not a good example—the smell of coffee disgusts me almost as much as the yuppie scum who stand in line at Starbucks every working morning), it's that whole corporate buy-out and take-over thing, where they wipe out the independents and mom & pop shops. Regardless, it's hard not to avoid Blockbuster 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year. So once in a while, I find myself at Blockbuster Video. I know they censor the gory movies, but since I don't rent that many gory movies, it matters not to me. So anyway, there I was at Blockbuster one day. Amazingly, I made a new discovery (yes, at Blockbuster): a recent Japanese live action movie called SCORPION'S REVENGE! I carefully examined the box (almost as closely as I examined the babe on the cover, wearing the leather hot-pants), and saw a video label I carelessly read as "Asia Cult Cinema". I thought that Tom Weisser's video releases had actually made it to Blockbuster! But I was completely wrong again. I double checked the video label on the

tape itself, and compared it with the title of Weisser's magazine. They're two distinctly entities: "Asian Cult Cinema" and "Asia Pulp Cinema".

If any company is able to bring rare Japanese exploitation movies into a suburban shit-hole like Hayward, Calif., they deserve a closer look. So I've done some research and come up with the name Central Park Media. One of the main founders of this N.Y.-based vendor is John O'Donnell, who's background has always been in Japan and Asia; having gone to Japan for the first time at 13 years old. For a time, he not only lived & worked in Japan, but majored in Japanese literature (during his college years). Central Park Media was launched in 1990 (as a New York-based boutique media publisher) by John O'Donnell and video industry executives. They started off by making arrangements with some Japanese licensors to buy a few (about 8 or 9 videotapes) anime titles. Though anime had had a big fandom in America's underground since the mid-1970s (thanks in part to that boring series, STAR BLAZERS), people in the video industry said O'Donnell was crazy for trying to release anime on such a mainstream level. For those of you who give a damn about cartoons, Central Park Media has established itself as perhaps the leading American distributor of anime. They also made what they call "America's first CD-ROM game based on anime" (Buichi Terasawa's TAKERU: LETTER OF THE LAW). Not

only does Central Park Media release videos on its own label, but it also distributes videos by other wellknown groups, such as San Francisco's Viz (U.S. home of RANMA 1/2). According to some press releases and/or materials I received directly from Central Park Media, it has about 50 employees, and has four wholly owned subsidiaries: Mangamania (direct to consumer sales), Binary Media Works (Internet publishing activities), A18 Corporation (handles mature entertainment products), and Software Sculptors (handles computer software publishing). Parent company Central Park Media deals in television, Internet, home video, publishing, computer software, merchandising, audio soundtracks, and distributes directly to U.S. and Canada. But of more interest to OC readers is their newest branch: Asia Pulp Cinema (specialized in live action cult movies from Japan). What sets Asia Pulp Cinema apart from the countless anime pushers & dealers is that they concentrate on Japan's live-action movies, and it's about time! Though Toho's Godzilla movies have always had a mainstream American following, and HK's kung fu films continue to over-populate the shelves of video-stores, Japanese live-action has never had a huge following in America.

Asia Pulp Cinema started in 1999, when it branched out from its parent company (Central Park Media), cashing in on its success in distrib-

uting them ever-popular Japanese cartoons. They got the idea for doing this label once they realized how "manga-like" many of the Japanese live-action movies are. BIG BOOBS BUSTER, it goes without saying, is very cartoon-like in its nature. So, one of the things they look for is "how anime" or "how manga-like is this movie?". So Asia Pulp Cinema started by acquiring the Japanese cult-hit, WEATHER WOMAN ("Something like WEATHER WOMAN is just as crazy as a live movie as it is in the comic version", O'Donnell stated in an email to me), which they released on August 24th, 1999. "We want to do with live action what we've done with anime", said John O'Donnell, managing director of Central Park Media. According to a newspaper interview, O'Donnell said: "Certainly, this isn't high-end foreign film product, but mass entertainment that the average American video buff can sit down with a few guys, drink a few beers, and have fun watching. It's not aimed at the cineaste looking for the latest Ingmar Bergman movie."

WEATHER WOMAN was the first (and many believe it's the best) live-action movie that Asia Pulp Cinema released, but hot on its trail was another film festival hit, CLOSE YOUR EYES AND HOLD ME (billed as a Japanese version of THE CRYING GAME), from the creators of the critically lauded SHALL WE DANCE? Some time there after, they bought the rights

to BIG BOOBS BUSTER, from the same filmmakers. But according to the interview, "We reject ten titles for every one we pick-up", John O'Donnell said. With the possible exception of SEDUCE & SWINDLE, Central Park Media steers clear of talky dramas, preferring movies with a faster pace, content which moves quickly. "We find that many of the best foreign flicks are those which can be watched with the sound off—in other words, a story told in pictures, which is pretty much what movies are supposed to be, anyway. If there is too much talking, sometimes it makes it harder for the average fan to get involved with the movie." O'Donnell also went on to say: "From a SISKEL & EBERT perspective, they're B-movies appealing not because of the script or the acting, but a gun that shoots 2,000 bullets at once without having to reload". According to Central Park Media, most of their releases are direct-to-video films that were already successes in

Japan's rental trade. Japan doesn't have a "direct-to-video stigma", unlike America, where direct-to-video movies are sometimes frowned upon. In Japan, quality movies are made for direct-to-video. As for the genres, key areas are comedy, ninja/samurai, hard boiled action, gangster/yakuza, horror, and erotica (they don't do anything actually pornographic, though R is what most of their titles would be if they had them rated). They do distribute sexy movies, but no X-rated filth.

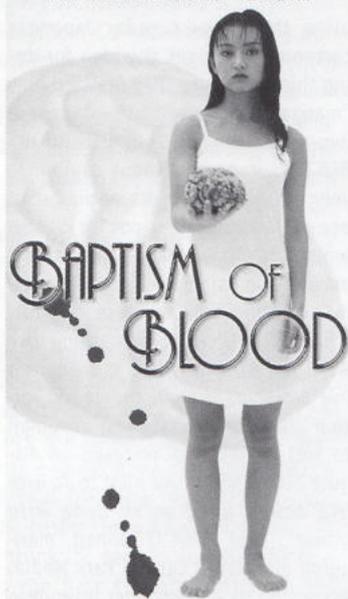
Asia Pulp Cinema is promoting these films with give-away posters & magnets, and of course they do more promotions via their website. John O'Donnell believes that the movies (which have excellent subtitles) are sold at a reasonable rate, considering that HK movies often go for \$30.00-\$50.00 a pop. At the time of this writing, all of Asia Pulp Cinema releases are from Japan. This, however, doesn't mean it will always be

this way. Asia Pulp Cinema is also considering releases from Korea, for future release. I suspect, however, that if and when APC starts distributing Korean movies, it will take a while for such films to reach "normal Joe stores" and be available to the common man. The best way to rectify this is to always ask your video store if they have any new foreign flicks in, and let them know that you want the Asian shlock kind, not the Academy Award winners. If you speak up, you'll get listened to; let the store personnel know that you want to see more funky foreign flicks. Central Park Media had the same problem with anime, at the start. The dealers would say, "Well, no one ever comes in here and asks for anime - why should I carry it?" Central Park Media gave them big posters which say "Ask About Anime," and guess what? The stores started hearing from their anime fans real quick.

Though anime has been a part of

OC for many years, the genre isn't my main thing, so until Asia Pulp Cinema appeared, I was completely unaware of Central Park Media. In future issues of OC, I hope to review any and all of Asia Pulp Cinema's live action releases, as they come out. At a time when anime runs rampant and continues to be the dominant fandom, I think it's vital that we support any company willing to release rare, live-action movies with English translation. So although my reviews aren't all positive (let's face it, some movies just plain stink, and I'll critique them as I see them), what follows are honest, critical reviews (nobody is paying me to write these reviews, so this magazine is not intended as a shameless plug or free advertising for Asia Pulp Cinema) of all the Asia Pulp Cinema releases which were available to me, at the time of this writing.....

SAKURA'S ABDO+ +0 UNCOVER
A HORRIFYING FAMILY SECRET+...



BAPTISM OF BLOOD Japanese title: "Senrei" (which means 'Baptism') Released: February 24th 1996 (Nakano, Tokyo), Dir.: Ken-ichi Yoshiwara (AKA Kenichi Yoshida), Prod.: Haruhiko Yoshida, Katsuaki Takemoto & Hideo

Arai, Original Story: Kazuo Umezu, Music: Torsten Rasch, Producer of English version: Stephanie Shalofsky, Associate Prod. of English Ver.: Christopher Peel, Running Time: 93 Min.



Cast: Rie Imamura, Risa Akikawa, Chihiro Tago, Naoko Amihama, Mie Yoshida, Reviewed by Damon Foster

With an inaccurate title like BAPTISM OF BLOOD, not to mention a shot of a cute girl holding a brain (on the videotape box), this intriguing psycho-drama will undoubtedly attract a lot of disappointed sleazewads, bootleggers and gorehound degenerates. But there are really only a couple of intensely gory scenes in this entertaining movie; the remainder is an intelligently written story which kept me enthralled from start to finish. A movie like this is hard to categorize; I suppose it's considered "horror", but the approach breaks all the rules of horror and there are long stretches of talky drama, and huge dialogue scenes which are bound to confuse or bore the average Fangoria (does that old magazine still even exist?!) reader. I don't think BAPTISM OF BLOOD is very accurate, but the Japanese title SENREI (just "Baptism", without the "Of Blood" part) is even more misleading. Sure, the main protagonist Sakura Uehara (Rie Imamura) attends Catholic school, but that's minor to the script, it's not even major enough to consider a subplot. I think a more likely title would have been PSYCHOTIC OLD LADIES WHO FANTASIZE ABOUT BRAIN TRANSPLANTS, or perhaps ALL HALF-BREEDS HAVE MENTAL PROBLEMS. Needless to say, director Kenichi Yoshida (I've seen his name spelled differently elsewhere) is rather offbeat, and one day, I hope to see more of his work, like something called CIRCUS BOYS. Equally offbeat is Kazuo Umezu, the creator of the original Senrei manga which inspired this

movie.

Tales of the Fountain of Youth are nothing new, nor are sagas about ugly old people who gain agility & vivrance via the sacrifice of younger people— that old movie WASP

WOMAN is one such example. BAPTISM OF BLOOD more or less follows that same format, but in a slower pace, concentrating instead on the people whom this effects, rather than the grotesque procedure itself. Because much



REI AMAMURA— Before appearing in movies like BAPTISM OF BLOOD and LEGEND OF THE DEVIL, she was a TV star, making guest appearances on specific episodes of different TV shows, including: CHOTTO IIMONO and EKO EKO AZAREK. Readers of OC may best remember her for her appearance in the 18th episode of ULTRAMAN DYNA, called YAMI O YOBU SHOHJO TACHI ("The Girls Who Call Up The Darkness"), which was based on some comic book, but looks like a rip-off of THE CRAFT.

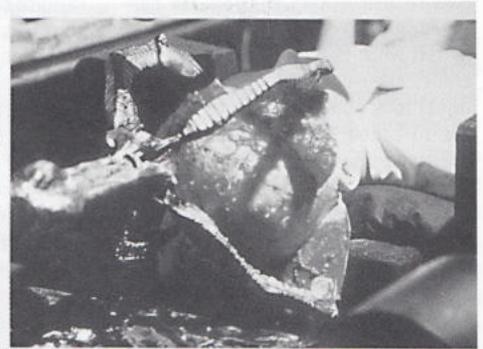
FILMOGRAPHY:
SIN HEART (HATO NI S) (1995) PRETTY GOOD (CHOTTO IIMONO) (1995) BAPTISM OF BLOOD (SENREI) (1996) LEGEND OF THE DEVIL (SHURANOSUKE ZAMMAKEN) (1996) XX (DOUBLE X) IIV (SHUNAYAKA NA BIJUN) (1997) 13 NEN-ME NO CHOUNOURYOKU SHOUJO (1997) EKO EKO AZARAK (1997) MR. Y'S NEIGHBOR (Y-SHI NO RINJIN) (1997) NERAWARETA IDOL (1997) MASSACRE'S ANGEL (MINAGOROSHI NO TENSHI) (1997) GOKUDOU-SENGOKUSHI FUDO 2 (1997) ULTRAMAN DYNA (1998) SHONAN BAKUSOZOKU 2 (1998) GOKUDOU-SENGOKUSHI FUDO 3 (1998) WE ARE NOT ALONE (MOU HITORIJANAI) (1998) THE MOON (TSUKI) (2000)



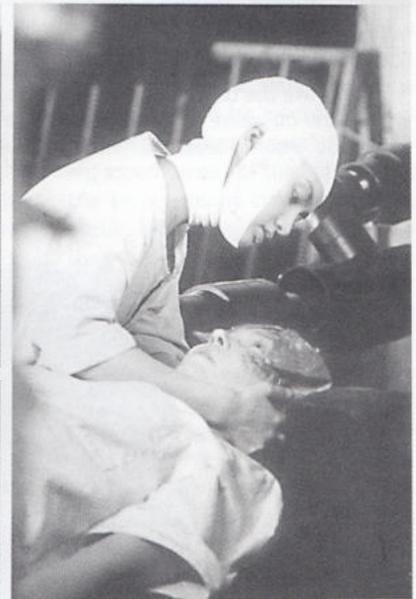
of the running time resembles a soap opera (complete with affairs, cheating spouses, etc.), one could easily leave the room for a few minutes to take a dump and miss all the gore shots, and return and still think he's watching a regular drama. If this dialogue-heavy movie had no subtitles, then it would have been a complete waste of my time, but because all is translated, BAPTISM OF BLOOD remained entertaining throughout. If nothing else, the low key approach made the few gore scenes that more intense (don't watch the brain-transplant scene while eating spaghetti!), and so effective that I cringed. It's different than in a movie like DAWN OF THE DEAD, where there's so much bloodshed that you get used to it; BAPTISM OF BLOOD lures you in with fascinating characters going through their hum-drum lives, and then goes for the jugular and takes no prisoners.

The story is about some old lady who suffers from both skin & brain problems. The problem with the skin is that it develops random bruises for no particular reason. The problem with the brain is that she's abusive then over protective to her daughter, alternately. In one stupid scene, the old bat smacks around a school girl, and the hits miss by a mile. This scene is horrendously staged, badly acted and very unconvincing; you remember when Spock hit Nancy Crater (the salt-vampire) in the STAR TREK episode: "The Man Trap"? Afterwards, it's revealed that this same old lady plans to have her brain transplanted into that of her daughter, by using this really bizarre machine she keeps hidden in her mansion. The brain transplant scene is both gory and realistic (at least, I think so—I've never seen an actual brain-transplant, though I've been looking into getting a new one for myself), but it occurs in the middle of the movie, not the climax. The remainder is more tense drama, and much of it deals with more characters, and many of them, including some piano teacher, appear to be half Caucasian. I won't give away the ending (or the beginning or middle, for that matter), because a story like this is best viewed if you don't know the outcome. *** -DF

BIG BOOBS BUSTER (AKA "Chonyu Basta", which means "Big Tit Hunter") Tohokushinsha Film Corp.; 1990, Prod.: Katsuaki Takemoto, Director/Screenplay: Hisashi Watanabe, Exec. Prod.: Taro Maki, Original Story: Koichiro Yasunaga, English Version (Central Park Media Corp.; 1999) by Stephanie Shalofski & John O'donnell, Cast: Harumi Kai Mariko Itsuki, Toru Minegishi, Aya Katsuragi, & Hideyo Amamoto (AKA Eisei Amamoto), Reviewed by Damon Foster



BAPTISM OF BLOOD



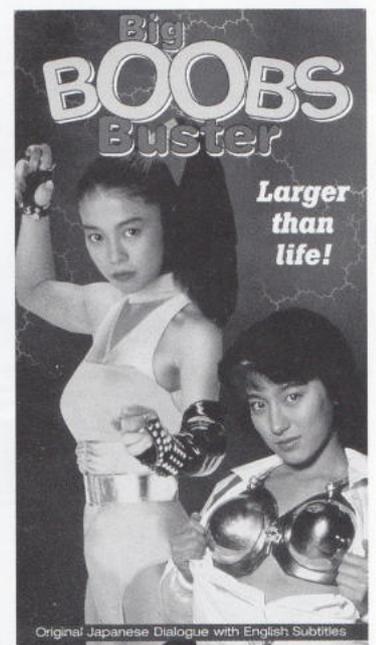
This movie is just another example of people wanting to make a movie based on a successful manga, in this case the source material is from Koichiro Yasunaga. How, just how did they botch up this one?!? It's no secret that for years, the Japanese have been a world leader in cinematic ineptitude, but this one takes the cake. Are they deliberately trying to prove their film-making industry is composed of morons? This movie has such a promising title, I couldn't have imagined that they could screw up even this concept! With an idea like this, I was expecting a sure winner—it would be difficult to not do this one correctly. The premise could have been so fun; superheroes and large tits—two of my favorite things! I was hoping for another ROBOTRIX, that 1991 Chinese/Japanese co-production from Golden Harvest and Shochiku films. Though I only gave that one two stars (see review in 1992's O.C.: The Sonny Chiba Issue), it was entertaining and comes off as a masterpiece of vigilante breasts, compared to BIG BOOBS BUSTER. Perhaps it was my pre-conceived expectations which set me up for disappointment. I think if BIG BOOBS BUSTER was called "More Silly Girls In their School Uniforms", it wouldn't

have been such a let down. So far, I think BIG BOOBS BUSTER is the worst film that Asia Pulp Cinema has released. I wonder why they bothered; I suspect it must have been very, very cheap to buy. Maybe Tohokushinsha paid Asia Pulp Cinema to take it off their hands. I think BIG BOOBS BUSTER must be satirizing something I'm unfamiliar with, because I simply don't get it. It's a comedy, and remotely amusing (I almost smiled once or twice at their better jokes), but on the whole, is crap. Amazingly, producer Taro Maki has a following, so it must be his other films (i.e. EL HAZARD and TENCHI MUYO IN LOVE) that are worth watching.

It's really sad to see a charismatic, veteran old-timer like Eisei Amamoto (here translated & credited as "Hideyo Amamoto") in dreck like this. It's hard to believe that this is the same guy who was once in such entertaining Toho movies as KING KONG ESCAPES and WHAT'S UP TIGER LILLY. Though he's only onscreen (as a perverted old voyeur who monitors the school girls) for a few minutes, just seeing him performing so below his talent proves how much Japanese film standards have declined since the 1960s. His involvement isn't even mentioned in some of the press

releases, which concentrate more on the fact that the movie features stars of adult films, "along with an exciting storyline of sexy superheroism".

This inaccurately titled farce confirms the stereotype that all Asian women are flat-chested. The dialogue is full of lines where the school-girls compare their breast size. I think they had to differentiate the "voluptuous"

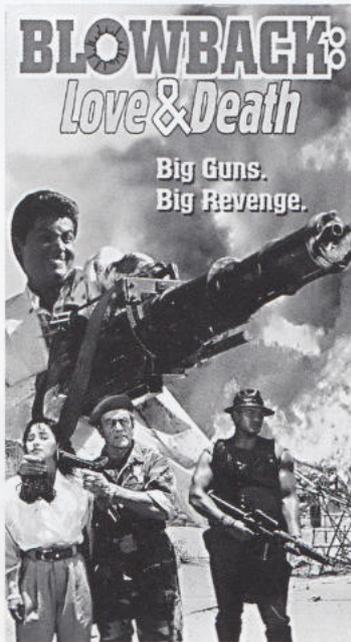


from the "flat-chested" just to let us know which was which. None of the gals in **BIG BOOBS BUSTER** are particularly stacked, and it's really hard to tell what they consider big. The chicks they consider "busty" (yeah, right) look about average to me, and the so-called "flat" ones look about the same. I suspect that back in 1990, voluptuous Japanese women were scarce. Times have changed since then, because we now have truly gorgeous, beautifully built women like Yuki Aoyama, Mariko Morikawa, Sakura Sena, Miki Sawaguchi and Momoko Mashiba. I'm not saying that the gals in **BIG BOOBS BUSTER** are ugly; they're quite pretty of course. I think the best scenes are the ones involving spandex (like the title heroine) and a scene later on where women exercise & wrestle wearing leotards. There's

also a decent shot of these women in one-piece, white bathing suits.

Despite some shots of naked breasts and chicks getting physical, there's nothing pornographic, and the story is quite innocent and clean: After being rejected from male students for not having big titties, Masako (Harumi Kai) wears spandex and goes around as a vigilante, knocking out voluptuous female students near her campus. She then makes a mold of the defeated, semi-chesty girl's chest and says: "If you should corrupt another man with those huge tits again, I'll parade this bust mold in front of the whole town." The acting isn't bad, but the fight scenes (if you can call them that) are short and horribly choreographed—these dumb bimbos make Amy Yip's minor action scenes (in **ROBOTRIX**) look like Jackie Chan's

action scenes (in **PROJECT A**)! There seems to be no blatant lesbianism, but the girls do feel each other up several times. Anyway, the bit about a spandex-clad babe stalking other cute chicks almost works, and takes up the first half of the film. But in the middle, they shift gears on us and Harumi Kai suddenly joins some athletic team and trains to run in a race. This makes no sense; the story suddenly becomes completely uneven. For what it's worth, she wins her race. -DF



BLOW BACK: LOVE & DEATH (A.K.A.: "Blow Back 2") Japan Home Video; 1990, In Association with Matsushita Promotions, Producers: Wataru Ishii, Hiroshi Akanoma, Tohji Katoh, Dir.: Atsushi Muroga, Screenplay: Toshimichi Ohkawa, Executive Prod. of English version: John O'Donnell, American Release: Central Park Multimedia; 2000, Ordering Information: Central Park Media, 250 West 57th St. #317, New York, NY 10107 phone: +1-212-977-7456, ext. 201; Cast: Riki Takeuchi, Mie Yoshida, Shun Sugata, Keishi Hunt, Takashi Matsuyama, Mike Monty, Reviewed by Damon Foster

For a Japanese movie (and a Japanese action movie, no less!), **BLOW BACK LOVE & DEATH** isn't bad! At times, this gunplay adventure is almost as fun as some of the lesser-quality HK movies of the 1980s or early 1990s! One newspaper piece called this one "a John Woo-style actioner, which expended more than 300,000 bullets". Considering the quality of Japanese action movies, this here **BLOW BACK** blah blah blah (whatever) isn't half bad. As you can tell, I'm not comfortable with the title, however. The videobox and previews (on other tapes) call this crime drama **BLOW BACK: LOVE & DEATH**, but on the tape

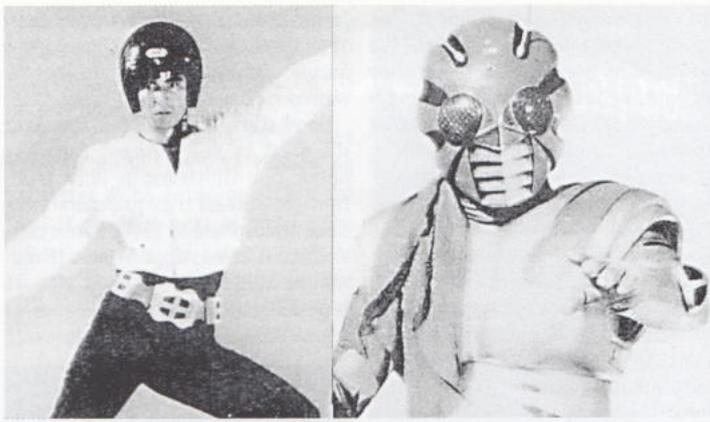
itself, it's called **BLOW BACK 2**. I don't know if the first movie ever made it to America, but I've certainly never heard of it.

The main hero is some young guy called Riki Takeuchi (later in **TOKYO MAFIA: YAKUZA WARS**), whom I've heard called the "Chow Yun Fat of Japan" because of his gunplay movies. Whatever. But the co-hero is Shun Sugata, who steals the film. Sugata was also in **LICENSE TO LIVE** (Daiei; 1999), but is best known as Ryo Murasami (the heroic Kamen Rider ZX) in 1984's **KAMEN RIDER SPECIAL**. Naturally, he's aged since 1984, and I wasn't certain it was the same guy until I did some painstaking research. It wasn't easy determining this, because there's no Japanese text to match up, unfortunately. I suspect that the all-English credits have something to do with this being almost a Filipino co-production. The language in the movie is 99% Japanese (though there are a few English and Tagalog lines scattered here and there), but the setting is entirely in the Philippines, where the whole movie was filmed. Only the main characters speak Japanese (they do virtually all the talking, too), all the extras and background characters are obviously local Filipino folk.

Speaking of Filipinos, I wish Dario Bestenera had a bigger part! His character is called "Hulk", and he's one of the only likable characters in the whole movie. Not including American actor Mike Monty, he speaks the best English, though his only English line is "No problem!" The remainder of the time, he's speaking Tagalog or bad Japanese. But his Japanese is nowhere near as bad as Mie Yoshida's English. The lines where she tries to speak English come off as downright painful. She definitely needs to either get with it or be dubbed! It just hurt to hear her struggle with even the most simple of English words. She came off as a retard!

On the whole, it's really just another gunplay adventure, but because the characters are interesting, I actually got into it. The camaraderie and male-bonding reminds me of when John Woo used to make worthwhile shoot-'em ups, but other elements of this movie are definitely inspired by spaghetti westerns. The opening credits take an idea or two from **FISTFUL OF DOLLARS**, and during the final show-down, there's even a musical watch to symbolize our hero's revenge, which is a quick steal from **FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE**. After the savage ambush caused by the villains at the movie's beginning, it's hard not to cheer Riki Takeuchi on his trail of vengeance, which takes up the remainder of the movie. What also adds to the fun is the unrealistic way the gunfights are staged—Riki guns down hundreds





BLOWBACK star Shun Sugata also played KAMEN RIDER ZX!

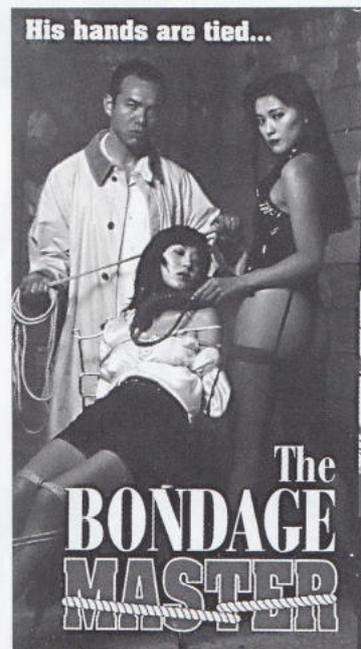
henchmen, all of whom are firing at him; fortunately, they all seem to be really lousy at aiming their guns. This is definitely fantasy here, there's no realism other than the story's dead serious approach.

Due to government instability in the late 1980s, the Philippines became a haven for organized crime. Takeuchi plays Joe (an outlaw from Japan), who's buddy Baku (Takashi Matsuyama) was gunned down by guerrillas lead by an evil American called Wildcat (Mike Monty of LAST PLATOON and VIOLENCE HUNTER). So Joe vows revenge, and seeks them bad guys all over the Philippines— along the way, he's joined by gun-toting co-heroes Shun Sugata and leading lady Mie Yoshida (BAPTISM OF BLOOD). Their final shoot-out is outdoors, at some cheaply built army base, in a battle reminiscent of war movie stuff seen in BULLET IN THE HEAD. Plenty of bullets, bloodshed and explosions ensue, courtesy of the same special effects crew who brought us PLATOON and even APOCALYPSE NOW. Regardless, it appears that only Riki himself survives the carnage, and even that I'm not sure of. He, like everybody else, is a bloody mess by the time the ending credits role. While every other character has been off'd, Riki still appears to be breathing until the very very end. He does close his eyes, but I don't know for sure that he's supposed to be dead. ** -DF

BONDAGE MASTER, THE *Tohokushinsha Film Corp.; 1996, Directed by Jin Hoshino, Screenplay: Jun Furusho, Co-Produced by Keisuke Konishi (CLOSE YOUR EYES AND HOLD ME, and SEDUCE & SWINDLE), English Version Executive Producers: John O'Donnell, Stephanie Shaolfsky, T-bone Wang, Doshell, Propivo, Central Park Media, 250 West 57th St. #317, New York, NY 10107; Cast: Yukijiro Hotaru, Yoriko Ikuta (duel rolls!), Hiromitsu Noriyasu, Masayuki Watanabe, Ai Yasunaga, Reviewed by Damon Foster*

I've never been really all that into bondage or S&M (don't let my black

leather clothing fool you; I cry if I so much as stub my toe!), so scenes of torture, even voluntary torture, do little for me. However, I did in fact enjoy these kinky scenes in THE BONDAGE MASTER, because the women are so hot. In tight clothing, skimpy leather, and of course in the nude, the chicks look excellent, and I don't care whether they're getting whipped or just standing there. It's the attire (or lack of it), not the activity which I consider to be the real turn on. But as somebody who's interest in this sleazy stuff rivals my interest in the common cold, I've naturally not seen a lot of bondage films. THE BONDAGE MASTER is the first one I've ever seen, even though I'm sure there have been thousands made before it, and probably hundreds made since it's completion. I tend to think that maybe the others aren't as good as this one (I could be wrong, having not seen any others), because I really, really enjoyed THE BONDAGE MASTER. Perhaps it's my favorite release from Asia Pulp Cinema. It's hard to be certain (as to whether or not I vote it "their best"), because the movies are all from dif-

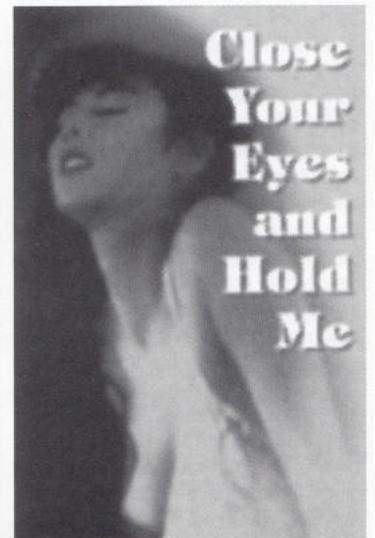


ferent genres and can't be compared. As a superhero fan, it seems logical that THE NINJA DRAGON impressed me the most. The problem is, it's not one of the better superhero movies I've seen. THE BONDAGE MASTER, on the other hand, is indeed the best (because it's the only one!) bondage movie I've ever seen! Sure, it lacks the things (martial arts, monsters, superheroes, etc.) I normally require as part of a daily diet, but THE BONDAGE MASTER really caught me off guard. Because I normally look down on pink films and sleazy farces, I had very low expectations for THE BONDAGE MASTER, and was therefore pleasantly surprised. Though there are whippings & performances (w/ role playing, etc.) in Tokyo clubs like the Black Lizard, most of the running time concentrates on the story and characters.

The pace is slow and the premise is talky, let's get that straight. But the acting is excellent and the characters all manage to have depth. I was consistently interested, and really fascinated by all the characters in the story. Despite the slow pace, the movie never bored me. My favorite character is a rough yet noble cop, the way he intimidates the film's slime-balls (in the Tokyo underground) is so cool; he's my favorite character in the film. Also worthy of praise is actress Yoriko Ikuta. Aside from being beautiful, she plays dual roles (as sisters), and had me fooled. Though the clothing and make-up has a lot to do with it, I hadn't guessed she played two completely different sisters (one is a Med-School student, and the other an S&M babe who runs from yakuza while wearing a short leather skirt). Lead hero Shiro the Bondage Master (Yukijiro Hotaru) commands considerable respect from the viewers too. In one scene, he gently ties up a new comer (a shy, 18-year old girl) to gain her confidence & trust. It drags on for a while (reminding me that some people actually get off on this stuff) and I wanted to Scan passed it, but it does manage to establish the title character as a good guy and not some sicko.

This enthralling story is about Shiro Matsumoto (Yukijiro Hotaru), The Bondage Master, who's unique touch and mastery of roping has made him a living at Tokyo's seedy S&M clubs. His wannabe protege is a bumbling fool called Hitoshi (while Shiro ties real women, Hitoshi must practice on those most submissive of women: blow-up dolls!), who never quite gets a knack for this line of work. There's enough comedy early on, to make me think that the whole movie is completely light-hearted. But just when we've settled into this, along comes a gang of drug-smugglers called the Blue Dragons, who kill one of the club's

bondage girls, and they're fighting over a large quantity of stolen cocaine. The dead woman's sister (Yoriko Ikuta) gets kidnapped, and unless our S&M heroes can locate and return the stolen drugs, the bad guys will kill her. So the obligatory exchange is arranged, and suddenly the movie switches back to comedy as the S&M crew leads the bad guys on a wild goose chase in some dark, dingy warehouse. The antics are pretty funny, and almost reach the slapstick level of them action/comedies that came out of HK in the 1980s. While the yakuza are pulling out knives, the bondage crew retaliates with whips and fancy rope tricks! Not realistic, but when the villains are killed, captured or absolutely humiliated at the climax, it's hard not to cheer The Bondage Master and his helpers to victory! A very, very entertaining movie! **** -DF



CLOSE YOUR EYES AND HOLD ME *Tohokushinsha Film Corp.; 1996, Dir.: Itsumichi Isomura, Screenplay: Yuka Honcho, Original Story: Shungiku Uchida, Producers: Keisuke Konishi, Akihiro Yose, Tsutomu Kuno, Executive Prod.: Tetsu Uemura, Music: Hiroki Sakaguchi, English Version Exec. Prod.: John O'Donnell, English Version Prod.: Stephanie Shalofsky, English Version Assoc. Prod.: Christopher Sippel, Central Park Media Corp. 250 West 57th Street, New York, NY 10107; Cast: Kumiko Takeda, Kazuya Takahashi, Natsue Yoshimura, Kunihiko Ida, Koji Sueyoshi, Reviewed by Damon Foster*

First I enjoyed THE BONDAGE MASTER, and now I'm somewhat entertained by this Japanese variation of THE CRYING GAME?! What's gotten into me?! Never before was I interested in kinky fetish/erotica like this! Yikes, does my new tolerance of these adult films mean that I've finally grown up? Rest assured, I still love the more "wholesome" stuff like superheroes & monsters (I still insist that I prefer KAMEN RIDER V3 over

CLOSE YOUR EYES AND HOLD ME; I swear it!), but I think my in-depth look at Asia Pulp Cinema has broadened my horizons. Asia Pulp Cinema offers many eye-opening experiences! Case in point: CLOSE YOUR EYES AND HOLD ME. For the first half of the movie, I was completely enthralled; I was on the edge of my seat. While there are predictable clichés (i.e. a man in a car hits a stranger but she recovers and they start a relationship; I've seen this in other movies), the characters are interesting. Though her character would be "better off without a dick" (to quote Randy Quade when he spoke to trucker Mr. T. in FREAKED), Kumiko Takeda is quite a hottie! Her eyes are beautiful, and because her character exists in a world where flawless make-up is on her face at all times (even when hospitalized, her cosmetics & hairspray remain unchallenged), her whole face is stunning. Bodywise, she's great too, and by Japanese standards, she could be considered busty—though I don't know for a fact that this is natural (a surgeon's scalpel might be the real hero here). Kumiko Takeda seems to be as popular as Kei Mizutani; if you type Takeda's name on Alta Vista or another search engine, you'll get dozens of websites (which have tons of her photos available for free). In this movie, she proves herself to be both a good actress and a good actor! I had previously seen her in one of the many ZERO WOMAN fiascos, where she sucked (she seems to do some "sucking" in this movie too, but it was required in the script) and was disappointing. But that's because I don't care for most modern Japanese action movies. Their dramas, however, are well-written—my opportunity to see her in an action film, and then this movie, side-by-side, was a good opportunity to compare genres. Yes, them Japanese haven't made a really fun actioner since 1982's ROARING FIRE, and are better off making comedies and dramas.

So on the whole, CLOSE YOUR EYES AND HOLD ME proved to be somewhat interesting—at first. But midway through the flick, the story ran out of steam. It started off introducing its characters (a fiance confused by his own bisexual cravings, a hermaphrodite misfit with a death-wish, etc.), but once we know all of them, the story rushes itself and regresses into another "who's screwing who" plotline. Perhaps the movie is intended for people in the closet, or those who are confused by their own sexual preference. I admit to being confused by my own sexual taste; for example: I like having sex with my girlfriend, but would also like to screw this other girl I work with. Then there's that chick at school I would also like to bang. Oh yeah, and what about the hundreds

of women I see at the night clubs? I would also really like to meet your girlfriend (and perhaps your neighbor's wife), if you don't mind. Yes indeed, I'm a confused individual, but I'm so glad I came out into the open and admitted it. But seriously, I still couldn't quite get the point proposed by CLOSE YOUR EYES AND HOLD ME, once the plot shifted gears and became a softcore fuck-a-thon. As a movie, it's probably worth the price of rental; I spent two or three bucks to rent & view it, but I sure as hell wouldn't buy it at full price. I do suspect that fans of THE CRYING GAME should get maximum satisfaction from CLOSE YOUR EYES AND HOLD ME, and might not regret paying the full price to own the actual pre-record.

With sex on everybody's minds these days (as opposed to the 1970s, when it was on their breath), here's a story about sexual promiscuity of the employees of some big, fancy office building. Much to his girlfriend's regret, a guy (and co-worker) falls for a hermaphrodite (a human with both male & female genitals). This trans-gender person (Kumiko Takeda) likes chicks too, so we get some obligatory lesbo action. There's no full frontal nudity or anything X-rated, but the movie offers some titty. I was surprised that there's talk of pregnancy. I had assumed that all these horny people (if

the camera angles were different, this could have been pornographic) who are humping each other, be they straight, bent or bisexual, were exercising proper precaution and putting on the old "love gloves" as I call them. No mention of potential disease hazards are mentioned, which I think is the downfall of erotic movies like this. Anyway, the main female character (the one without a cock) nearly kills herself because she's pregnant. She's visited by her boyfriend (who acquired a taste for chicks with dicks), and well-hung Kumiko Takeda. They console her at her bedside in a hospital, but I get the impression the three way love affair will continue if they make a sequel. **1/2 -DF

THE HAUNTED LANTERN (AKA: "Otsuyu") *Tohokushinsha Film Corp.; 1997 In Association with King Record & Marubeni, Prod.: Yoshimi Arai & Tetsuji Hayashi, Dir.: Masaru Tsushima, Screenplay: Yuka Honcho, Original Story: Encho Sanyutei, Music: Kotaro Nakagawa, Dir. of Photography: Shoji Ebara, Art: Tetsuo Harada, Editing: Hirokazu Sono, English Version: Exec. Prod.: John O'Donnell, Prod.: Stephanie Shalofsky, Prod. Coord.: Michael Palan, Translation: K. Westlake, Subtitles: Captions Inc. (Los Angeles), Ordering In-*

formation: *Central Park Media, Cast: Yuuna Natsuo, Tsuyoshi Ujiki, Junna Suzuki, Akaji Maro, Gitan Otsuru, Reviewed by Damon Foster*

Good stuff, Manard! But seriously, it's great to see a recent Japanese horror film which hangs onto tradition and at least tries to generate the same atmosphere as 1960s horror classics and is at least comparable to oldies like KURONEKO and KWAIDAN. In fact, THE HAUNTED LANTERN is a lot like KURONEKO (both movies deal with

THE HAUNTED LANTERN



KEI MIZUTANI BIO



Born: 5/7/74 Place of Birth: Aomori Prefecture Height: 5'-3" (162 cm) Measurements: 36"/92 cm (bust), 23.5"/60 cm (waist), 35.5"/90 cm (hips) Occupation: nude model for many books (i.e. SASHIN-SHU)

Kei Mizutani is best known internationally for her roles in softcore sex capers like WEATHER WOMAN and LADIES' PHONE SEX CLUB. Her career started as a nude model (finding photos of her with clothing on can be difficult!) in magazines, such as the book genre "sashin-shu" (hard cover, nude art pictures), and Japanese men's magazines like Bejean and Paw. From her early years doing countless naked photos, she worked her way into Japanese TV, appearing on numerous TV programs (including Japan's bizarre, erotic game shows) until eventually she made the transition to film and became an international sensation. Ironically, she later went back to TV and played a villain in the superhero program GINGAMAN, while her movie WEATHER WOMAN was becoming a hit at film festivals all over the world.

A funny thing happened when Kei Mizutani was at the San Diego Comic Con 2000. She and people from APC were on the hotel balcony, shooting photos of her raising her skirt, like in WEATHER WOMAN, for promo use. Suddenly, the hotel security guards came up to the room, and said that they had a complaint from another guest that "someone was making kiddie porn on the balcony!" They demanded to see her passport, so they could verify she is over 18 (she is). Kei was

shocked, but also very happy, to hear that Americans thought she looked younger than 18!

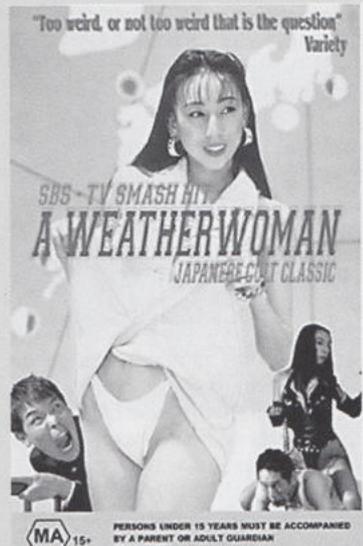
She gets so many requests for personal appearances and the like, that A.P.C. set up an official fan club (on the web) for her, at www.keimizutani.com. They've got lots of photo galleries for free (the ones with her clothes on) and lots more for fan club members only (the ones with her clothes not-so-on), who get a free video for joining the club. The site has pictures of Mizutani in her white wig (which she wore in GINGAMAN) at her fan club site. APC has gone on to license more Kei Mizutani movies, and will be releasing SUMO VIXENS and TERMINATRIX later this year, along with UNDRESSED FOR SUCCESS.

Kei is now writing a monthly article for FIGURE OH ("Figure King") magazine in Japan, which covers the world of action figures. She is very big in this world, since her action figure from the TV series GINGAMAN was the only one in the line to sell out and become a major collectible in Japan. She was wearing a white wig in the series, and looked really great.

The following filmography of Kei Mizutani's movies may or not be complete. I've based this information on a number of sources (such as Cameron Scholes' publication She Vol. 2, Number 13; 2000), and therefore came up with varying versions, alternate translations and conflicting titles. One source had a large Mizutani filmography, which included such titles as "Tokyo Decameron", "Tokyo deka meron", "Tokyo Deka Melon", "Big Tokyo Tits", "Sensuality" and "3 Short vignettes", but these are all alternate interpretations of the exact same movie! But of all the confusion I had to sort through and correct, the best example would be for a film listed somewhere below as IMAGE CLUB WAR: PUSSY OF THE ANGEL (the title listed on page 11 of She). If you think this is a colorful title, I saw the same video listed at some Japanese Kei Mizutani website (<http://www.cine-japan.com/Idols/KeiMizutani/filmography.htm>), where it's called: "Image Club War: Angel Of Cunt"!

FILMS:

- DRIVE SHITAINONI (WANT TO DRIVE)
- THE HISTORY OF MADEMOISELLE Q (THE LADIES PHONE SEX CLUB)
- MIDARA NA KOI (INDECENT LOVE) [1994]
- PUREI GARU? (PLAY GIRL?) [1994]
- CHIJO KYOSHITSU (PASSION CLASSROOM) [1994]
- DEIDORIMU (DAYDREAM) [1994]
- SEKUSHYARU BODEI KEI (SEXUAL BODY K) [1994]
- RABAZU KEI (LOVER'S K) [1994]
- O-TENKI O-NEI-SAN (THE WEATHER WOMAN) [1994]
- KIKEN NA HOUKOU (DANGEROUS AROMA)
- YOUJO KEI- MATIRARU GARU (BEWITCHING KEI, THE MATERIAL GIRL) [1995]
- KINJIRARETA ASOBI (FORBIDDEN PLAY) [1995]
- HARENCHI SUKURU (INFAMOUS SCHOOL) [1995]
- INSATU NO TORIKO (SLAVE TO DIRTY KILLING) [1995]
- IMEKURA SENSO, TENSHI NO SUMATA (IMAGE CLUB WAR: PUSSY OF THE ANGEL)
- SHIN DOKUDAMI SOU (NEW DOKUDAMI APARTMENT) [1995]
- NUREGOTOSHI (THE PLAYBOY: 1995)
- HEISEI HARENCHI GAKUEN (SCHOOL'S INFAMOUS SYSTEM) [1995]
- SUKEBAN ONNA KYOOSHI (BAD GIRL TEACHER) [1995]
- HANA NO ONNA SUMO (SEXY SUMO GIRL & SUMO VIXENS) [1996]
- SHIRI GARU (ASS GIRLS) [1996]
- REIPU MAN NO EDO NO. 6 (RAPEMAN OF OLD TOKYO: NO. 6) [1996]
- OTOKO GUI NO. 2 (BOY TOY NO. 2) [1996]
- ONNO GAI: GEKIJOOBAN (FEMALE PET: THE MOVIE) [1996]
- Q JO NO MONOGATARI (STORY OF MS. Q) [1996]
- KONYA MO ZEKKOUCHO (TONIGHT IS GOOD) [1996]
- TOKYO DECAMERON (THREE TALES OF MADNESS & SENSUALITY)
- SHINNIN ONNA KYOSHI: YUJWAKU NO REOTARDO (NEW FEMALE TEACHER: LEOTARD OF TEMPTATION) [1997]
- TOKYO ZIGORO TORITSUKARETA ONNATACHI (TOKYO PLAYBOY WHO MAKES THE GIRLS CRAZY) [1997]
- GIRUGAMESSHU NAITO (GILGAMESH NIGHT) [1997]
- RABURI ENJURU 2 (LOVELY ANGEL 2) [1997]
- HIJOBANKEN KEDAMONO (NO MERCY GUARD DOG) [1997]
- EKUSUTASHUJI SPECIAL: SHINNIN ONNA KYOSHI (ECSTASY SPECIAL: NEW FEMALE TEACHER) [1997]
- MIDONAITO ROZU (MIDNIGHT ROSE) [1999]
- KINDAN NO KAJITSU 2: KINSHISOKAN NO SASORI (FORBIDDEN FRUIT 2: INCEST SATORI) [1998]
- SEIJU SENTAI GINGAMAN (STAR-BEAST TASK FORCE: GINGAMAN) [1998]



a pair of ghost women who haunt a forest and kill some men, and romance others), I might go so far as to say it's just as good. I liked THE HAUNTED LANTERN a lot; not only did I watch this one all in one sitting, but was completely interested from beginning to end. Well, almost. The final five minutes made no sense and should have been cut from the movie completely. This ridiculous ending almost makes me want to take a star off the rating, but to do that would be unfair to the remainder of THE HAUNTED LANTERN, which is quite suspenseful. Here's an enjoyable movie, I recommend it. It's well worth the asking price of thirty bucks (suggested retail: \$29.99) or whatever, if you can't find a nearby store where it can be rented.



Being a 1997 film (though released to America & subtitled in 2000), it's in color of course, and benefits from some flashy special effects not possible in the old, B/W 1960s horror dramas. For example, the opening scene (a dream sequence) has some colorful CGI effects where a samurai, having battled some evil soldiers who wear sloppy make-up on their faces, is killed by small orange balls which swarm all over him (causing him to disintegrate). This colorful, far-fetched sequence seems more in tune with fantasy than straight horror, but it doesn't dull the affect of the chills (i.e. the maggots which fall out of a guy's flesh!) which are to occur later on in THE HAUNTED LANTERN.

Our main hero would appear to be a former samurai (he tired of nobility and would rather be a painter) called Shinzaburo Hagiwara. He and his fool-hearty buddy Tomozo start out as a likable duo, they could either be crime fighters or a comedy team, but the movie doesn't really take that course. Before long, careless trouble-maker Tomozo is molesting some chick named Tsuyu and blaming his friend Shinzaburo. The girl, like her sister, ends up committing suicide, and their ghosts seek revenge on hapless Shinzaburo, once they've impaled Tomozo on a stake. The ghost girls have decent make-up appliances, looking almost like Klingons in some shots! As is typical in Asian folklore (be it KURONEKO or A CHINESE GHOST STORY) these scary women fly through the forest. Also reminiscent of Chinese horror films are the scenes of a priest battling the ghosts using paper talismans, only instead of a Chinese Feng Shui, the ghost-buster is a Shinto

priest (and a blind one; he's got these bright contact lenses, rather like Key Luke's Blind Master Po from KUNG FU). The climactic sequence where Shinzaburo attempts to break free of the ghost's seductive possession is pretty cool. After this battle, the movie should have just ended. Instead, they tacked on some illogical, brief scene set in modern times involving a new born baby who won't stop crying. I'm sure it had some relevance to the story and offered a "trick ending", but I found it redundant, and simply didn't get it. If I had the time to watch the whole movie over again, perhaps it could be made clear to me. This is a dumb bit they spliced on at the last minute, but the remainder of THE HAUNTED LANTERN is pretty damn good. *** -DF



THE LADIES' PHONE SEX CLUB (AKA "The History of Mademoiselle Q") Cente Studio; 1996, In Association with: Akita Shoten, Producers: Katsuaki Takemoto, Tsutomu Kuno, & Hiroshi Murano, Dir.: Yota Watanabe, Screenplay: Ryoni Kou, Original Story: Haruka Inui, English Version by: Humphrey G. Kumano, T-Bone Wang, Doshell Propivo, Translation: Lighthouse Productions, A Release of Asia Pulp Cinema, Cast: Sho Kawaide, Kei Mizutani, Minako Ogawa, Tetsu Watanabe, Shoichiro Akaboshi, Kengo, Alfred Ito, Reviewed by Damon Foster

I knew I wouldn't like this one because of the title alone. THE LADIES' PHONE SEX CLUB? I've never been into phone-sex (or its more recent descendant, cyber-sex), so naturally I'm not likely to get into the film. I think sex on the phone is stupid, and besides, I keep falling off! But seriously, getting back to the movie: Didn't I just read that for every Japanese video Asia Pulp Cinema releases, they turn down

Shoichiro Akaboshi, star of LADIES PHONE SEX CLUB and GUYFERD.

城石文雄(赤星昇郎)



ten?! Yikes, I would really hate to see the other ten they rejected, if this nonsensical farce was considered the best of the batch! How, just how, did they watch this ridiculous caper and decide it has an audience in America (or anywhere else, for that matter!)? Who's idea was it to release THIS one?! I watched this plotless mess in dismay— my jaw dropped more than once as I sat through this shot-on-video cheapie. I only rented it, so it only cost me about three bucks. But if I had actually bought the damn tape, I would demand a refund. I suspect the only reason they singled out this loser of a film is because a co-star is Kei Mizutani. Still banking on the success of WEATHER WOMAN, it seems Asia Pulp Cinema will release damn near anything that features her.

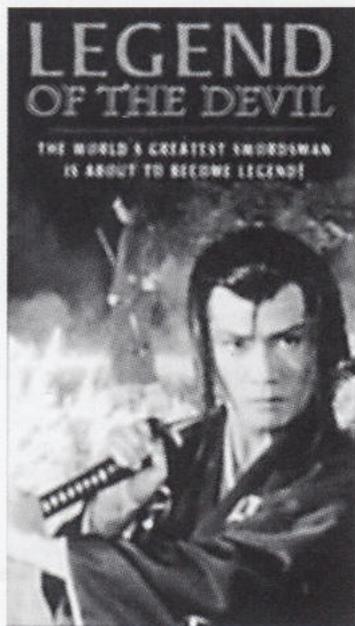
As bad as it is, I hate to admit that this low budget video had me laugh out loud several times. It's a comedy, and there really are a few decent gags. I think I must have laughed at about five different scenes. This movie came close to being not so terrible. I almost regret trashing it because it does have its moments. Granted, it's lively and colorful, and if you're the type who likes a fast-pace with over-the-top shenanigans and flamboyant characters, you might want to ignore my trashing and rent it, or maybe buy it if it's in a "marked down" bin, and I suspect it's on its way to that. Another good point for this otherwise worthless video is the abundance of beautiful women; sometimes nude, but usually in tantalizing attire. Kei Mizutani is absolutely stunning in her tight leather outfit, and almost makes the movie worthwhile because of her incredible sex appeal. As amazing as she is, my favorite character is still a bumbling superhero called "Mouseman". He doesn't do much, but in his store-bought Batman cowl (but with Mickey Mouse-like ears), he's pretty funny and deserves way more screentime. Another target audience is pornography fans. Though we still don't see any actual pubic hair, or full frontal nudity, the love-making scenes (usually lesbian stuff) do get fairly explicit. It's hard to tell if the erotic scenes are meant to be humorous or romantic.

What really botched up THE LADIES' PHONE SEX CLUB is the moronic way the script is written. I think is problem is caused by its being based on some comicbook by Haruka Inui (who also made the manga Ogenki Clinic).

Some far-fetched concepts look okay in printed form, but THE LADIES' PHONE SEX CLUB is a classic example of a story (or stories?) which makes no sense when converted into live action format. It gets artsy at times, and there are abrupt flashbacks, dream sequences & fantasies. It becomes almost impossible to follow the script or really identify the characters because of all these strange edits and costume changes. It all seems to take place in some surreal world where the laws of existence are, well, non-existent. I tried figuring out why they're constantly interrupting the story (assuming there really is one), and I've come to the conclusion that they're trying to squeeze in lots of random, intrusive satires— rather like the odd transitions in the early 1980s British series THE YOUNG ONES. THE LADIES' PHONE SEX CLUB is an off-the-wall slapstick comedy, but I think they really overdid it. From the brief spoofs of martial arts films (a short samurai training scene, and a parody of the Streetfighter videogame), to the not-so-brief spoofs of pornography & pink films, THE LADIES' PHONE SEX CLUB is a confusing, complex, quirky video that can be viewed starting at any point in the film, and it still makes just as much sense.

The story would appear to be about some guy (Kengo) with a panty-hose fetish. That's right, a panty-hose fetish. I have a word for men with that fetish: Heterosexual! His disturbed brother is convinced he's a superhero called Mouseman, and another supporting character is played by Shoichiro Akaboshi. This bald actor is best known for his role as scientist Takeo Jyoseki in the 1996 superhero series GUYFERD. Shoichiro Akaboshi starred alongside title hero Matsuyoshi Kazama (AKA Go Kazama) as they defected from the villains ("Crown") of the excellent Tokyo TV program. Regardless, Akaboshi's daughter in THE LADIES' PHONE SEX CLUB is played by Kei Mizutani. There are other hot chicks in the movie too, but only a few times do they actually engage in phone sex. It would appear that the title THE LADIES' PHONE SEX CLUB is only for the English video release (it's really suppose to be called "The History of Mademoiselle Q", not that this title makes any more sense). Anyway, the movie ends some time after our main hero finds his true love (a girl who sometimes wears a strap-on dildo!) played by Sho Kawaide, and

then Kei Mizutani runs off with Mouseman, or something like that. - Damon F.



LEGEND OF THE DEVIL (Japanese title: SHURANOSUKE ZAAMAKEN) Tohokushinsha Film Co.; 1996, Producers: Yoshimi Arai & Tetsuji Hayashi, Original Story: Takeshi Narumi, Screenplay: Hiromichi Nakamoto, Dir.: Masaru Tsushima THE HAUNTED LANTERN, FEMALE NINJA MAGIC & LESBIAN COLONY), Music: Hiroshi Sakaguchi, Exec. Prod. of English Version: John O'Donnell, Running Time: 90 Min., Cast: Masaki Kyomoto, Rieko Miura, Rie Imamura, Atsuo Nakamura, Daisuke Ryu, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Shit or garbage? That is the question. Normally, I love Japanese sword-play fantasies, but if you rent LEGEND OF THE DEVIL and are expecting another MAGIC SERPENT or ZIPANG, you're out of luck. LEGEND OF THE DEVIL must take its ideas from some truly exotic, ultra-Japanese traditions, stories or ideas—for it makes no sense to a round-eye such as myself. I couldn't get into the movie, it did nothing for me. Unlike a classic such as MAJIN: MONSTER OF TERROR, I don't believe LEGEND OF THE DEVIL was intended for international audiences. To a non-Japanese like myself, it comes off as weird, confusing, disjointed and of course unique—but in all the wrong ways. I don't see the point of it, and really just didn't get it. If this movie has any fans, I would like for you people to write to me and justify this movie's uneven, anything-goes approach. Explain just who decided this movie qualifies as "entertainment". I would really like to know how something like this could be considered fun.

It was made in 1996 though, so I'll give it some credit. The mid-1990s were notorious for HK's equally com-

plex sword films & fantasies, all about rival sects and overdone shenanigans in forests. LEGEND OF THE DEVIL has a lot of these elements too, but never relies on choppy, distracting edits or suspension wires—its few swordfights are legitimate, traditional kendo action. The swordplay isn't particularly thrilling, but it's okay and worthy of half a star. The other good thing about the film is actor Masaki Kyomoto, who was also in Akira Kurosawa's RAN. He plays the hero pretty well, and comes off as fairly charismatic, commanding enough respect from the audience to make his performance worth while. His hair style and make-up make him look typical of old style heroes of Japanese legend & film, so it's obvious from his first second on screen that he's the hero. His character is Shuranosuke Sakaki, who I know nothing about. This character, and Masaki Kiyomoto himself deserves a better script, because under the right conditions, he could easily make a movie exciting. With an appallingly bad script like this, it's hard to speculate that the character is interesting, but I'll give him a half a star for his effort. That's two half stars for LEGEND OF THE DEVIL, and since they both add up to a whole star, I'm feeling too guilty, if not generous. There's a part of me which feels the flick doesn't deserve a damn thing.

I knew early on that this is a low budget film when a "rampaging monster" goes through the town of Edo (now called Tokyo). His footsteps are loud and make the city tremble. People yell "Kaiju!" and run for cover. Imagine my dismay when the monster turned out to be not only of regular human size, but is an overweight black man! Yes, you read me correctly. The kaiju is some grotesquely fat Negro with no shirt on. I really had to sober up and watch this whole sequence over, to be certain I hadn't imagined this whole illogical opening! It turned out to be no dream, it actually happened in LEGEND OF THE DEVIL. Did somebody splice this in as a joke, to piss off the director?! I realize the movie is too cheap to afford a monster costume, but to hire some African or African American fatso to clomp around and growl is pretty pathetic. The people who made this movie have got to know what they're doing I suppose, but my jaw simply dropped when I saw this shirtless Fat Albert terrorize the geishas and samurai of old Japan. This concept has simply got to be a spoof of something I've never seen. The fellow in question is Emanuel Yarbrough, an amateur sumo world champion—but I still don't understand his relevance to the film. The press and previews are quick to boast that the special effects team (Omni-bus Japan) are the same ones who worked on MOTHRA and ULTRAMAN ZEARTH, but it seems they didn't have

Yoko Saitoh

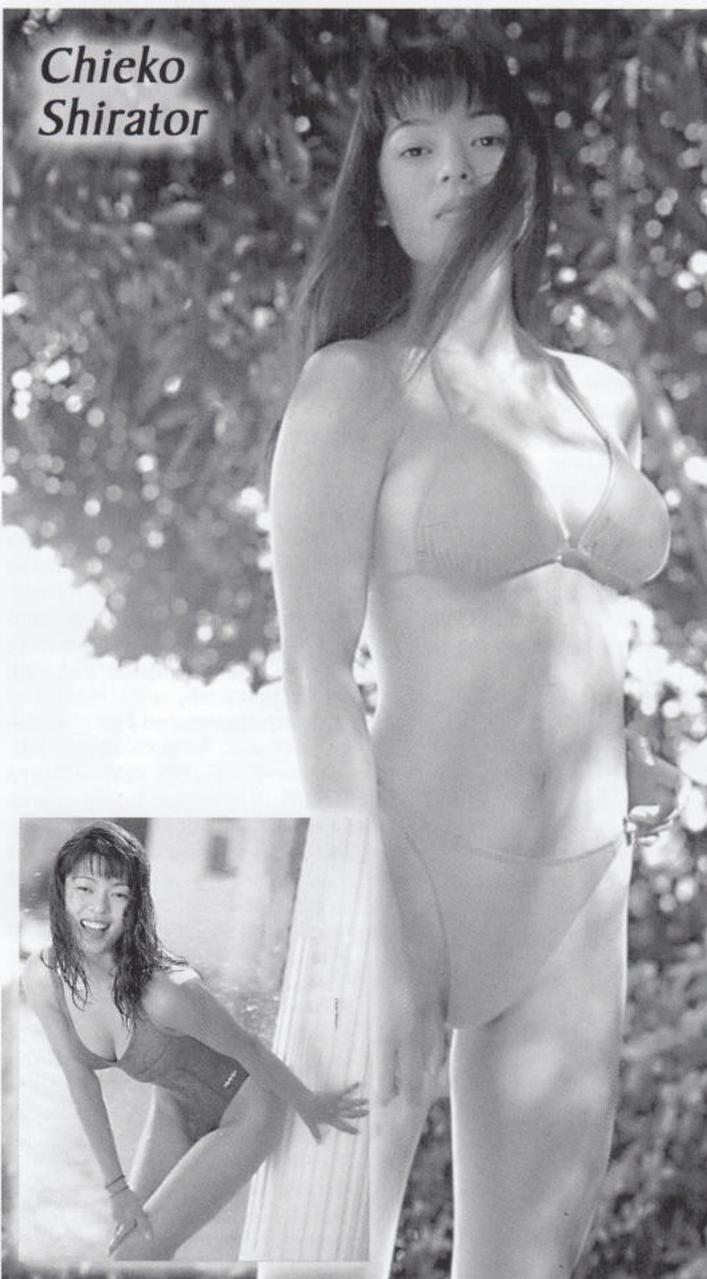
(AKA Yokou Saitou, Yoko Saitou, Yokou Saito, etc.)

Born: May 17, 1968—in Nagano
Education: Elementary and high school in Nagano, College at Northern Virginia Community College (graduated in 1990)
Hobbies: Golf and Swimming

Worked four years as a local announcer in Nagano for Asahi Broadcasting (being a regular on the TO-NIGHT II late-night TV program; as host Jiro Ishikawa's beautiful sidekick). She now works for Hori Productions as an actress & glamour model, and as a magazine interviewer. A photo book (Moi Cree—Yoko Saito) is available of her, with pictures taken by photographer Hidemi Ogata. She had the lead role in SASORI IN U.S.A. (AKA SCORPION'S REVENGE).



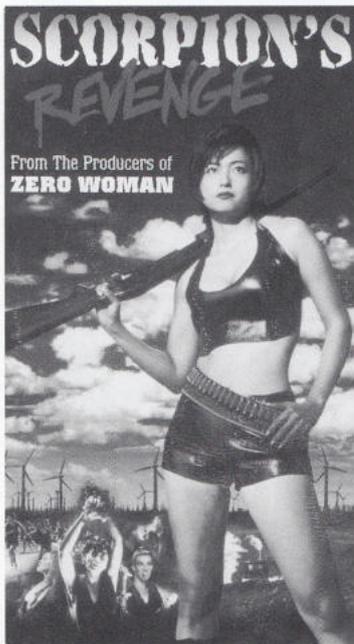
Chieko Shirator



5% the budget of either.

Fortunately, the remainder isn't quite as moronic as the obese negroid's onslaught at the city of Edo. The remainder is a slightly more coherent tale about the search for a magic sword or two. Lead heroic swordsman Shuranosuke Sakaki (Masaki Kyomoto) tries to protect Princess Mayu (Rie Imamura) from a squad of ninjas, when he finds himself in the middle of rival, treacherous clans. Also complicating matters is a squad of female kabuki performers (in reality, almost all kabuki was performed by men) who are in fact an underground army of swordswomen who have heavy metal haircuts despite the old Japan setting. When all these uninteresting groups aren't boring us with tedious dialogue, they're fighting over some stupid sword. There are also mild doses of the occult here and there (though certainly not enough to warrant the highly inaccurate title), and at the end, our hero encounters some old wizard; he's an immortal villain with a crystal ball. Even when decapitated, he doesn't die. Some hot chick also tries to blow him up with dynamite, but even that doesn't kill him. He survives to terrorize at a later date, leaving *LEGEND OF THE DEVIL* open for another sequel. A sequel would be nice, because after this nonsensical hodgepodge, things can only get better. * -DF

SCORPION'S REVENGE *Original Japanese version: "Sasori in U.S.A." (1997). Producer: Shinsuke Yamazaki, & Hideo Sugimoto (ZERO WOMAN), Production Company: Vision Sugimoto, Presented by Central Park Media Corporation & Asian Pulp Cinema, Directors: Tomoko Hoko, Noboru Tsuoda, Daisuke Gotoh (ZERO WOMAN), Original Story: Tohru Shinohara, Screenplay: Toshimichi Saeki, Executive Producers:*



Masaaki Yokouchi, Hideo Sugimoto, Yutaro Kawamura, English Version: John O'Donnell & Stephanie Shalofsky, Distributors: Pony Canon, Toru Shinohara, Vision Sugimoto, Wani Books & Fuji TV, Running Time: 86 Min., Cast: Yohko Saitoh, Shizuka Ochi, Kristin Norton (V.R. TROOPERS), Michael Hegedus, Takanori Kikuchi, Tetta Sugimoto, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Like I said before, this is the movie that started this issue of OC., the first Asia Pulp Cinema movie I've seen. The Japanese videostores are about an hour's drive away, and most of the local Chinese videostores closed down years ago. Things have certainly changed since the 1980s, when local Asian videostores were more plentiful in the East Bay than guns in a junior high school! With the scene drying up, it's becoming more and more difficult to find things to write about (it's also hard to find major subject matter for OC, which for years concentrated on "theme issues"—but I've used up all the major "themes"!). But then, a fateful thing happened..... I was saved by Asia Pulp Cinema. It's always nice when Asian films, be they HK action, Japanese anime, or in this case, moronic exploitation reaches my safe suburban city! There I was in Blockbuster Video, of all places, and in the "New Releases" section, I see this gorgeous Japanese woman in leather hot-pants, carrying a gun. The box of this movie, *SCORPION'S REVENGE*, mentions this flick has the same producers as the popular *ZERO WOMAN* movies; of which I hear there are ten. So I decided it was about time that OC learn about this popular genre.

Even to somebody like me, who's been raised on such unrealistic topics as fire-breathing turtles, flying monkeys, and acrobatic robots, a movie like this is far-fetched and requires a massive effort to utilize disbelief! Maybe that's why until recently, I never actually watched a lot of exploitation movies. An exploitation movie, such as *SCORPION'S REVENGE* (AKA *SASORI IN USA*; but there's nobody called Satori in the film) is misleading for its slow-paced approach and dull beginning—it's easy to think we're about to watch a coherent, believable saga. But pretty soon, a lot of over-the-top shenanigans occur, which make this flick incredibly awkward and uneven. I wish these people could decide whether they want to be true-to-life or all out fantasy. If this were a fantasy movie, where anything goes, then all that transpires is perfectly acceptable. But *SCORPION'S REVENGE* presents itself in a serious manner, and yet it throws in all these ridiculous elements later on, which makes everything absolutely unbelievable, to the point of being ridiculous.

But I guess that's the nature of exploitation; they break the rules in order to entertain—and that they do. Though the concept is completely stupid, I admit to enjoying every minute of this guilty pleasure! *SCORPION'S REVENGE* didn't make me a convert, but it did open my eyes; I shall have to seek out more Japanese exploitation films now, finally! Japanese exploitation movies are nothing new (hell, Asian Cult Cinema has critiqued them for years), so I won't attempt to ever do a complete filmography on the genre and find out when the first Japanese exploitation films were made.

What I really don't understand about this film is the highly inaccurate Japanese title, *SASORI IN U.S.A.* Who the hell is Sasori? The main heroine in this farce is called Nami Matsushima (played by Yohko Saitoh), and her co-hero is called Yukiko. The English title, *SCORPION'S REVENGE*, is pretty stupid too. Sure, there's a scorpion in the film. He's an emperor scorpion, to be more specific. But he only crawls around for a few seconds, and has no real reason to seek revenge. What happens at the climax is heroic Yohko Saitoh struggling with a villain, and during the scuffle, a scorpion just happens to sting the villains' leg, therefore saving Yohko's life. It's never explained what an emperor scorpion (they hate the sun and prefer damp areas like forests) is doing out in the bright, hot sun of the California desert. They should have explained that the scorpion had escaped from a zoo, or from a truck which was making a delivery to some local pet-store near the desert. Regardless, I'm trying to figure out why the cute little fellow was seeking revenge. Since scorpions rarely sting people, I think villainous Jiro must have partially rolled on him, and the scorpion retaliated. At the climax, Yohko talks of the little arachnid, and states, "I won't mind if he bites me." Of course she wouldn't mind, for the scorpion wouldn't bite her! There's not a documented case in history, of a scorpion ever biting anybody.

Being a Japanese movie taking place in America, I was of the mistaken impression that this would be a "hot topic" selling out to America. You know, like when Jackie Chan started making American movies, or Tri-Star's *FRAUD-ZILLA* (AKA *G.I.N.O.*). But this is not the case. *SCORPION'S REVENGE* is still just a Japanese movie, despite the Los Angeles setting. As is often the case when foreigners come to America to make a movie, they get some really bad American actors (they're cheap & desperate, I guess), and will use any excuse they can to toss in Japanese dialogue. In this case, early on in the movie, the heroine (in prison) befriends a "Japanese American", who's got this ridiculously

thick accent and only a vague grasp of the English language. Same thing with Yohko herself; she's supposed to be this Japanese business woman working in California, but her English is hardly good enough to even work the simplest job, even McDonald's. The only thing worse than her English is her acting, and the only thing worse than her acting is her fighting ability (her fight with some blonde, prison dike is painful to watch). On the whole, the movie is tolerable. It's worth the price of rental, and maybe even worth buying if it's marked down—but I wouldn't want to spend full price to buy it new. It's not that tolerable!

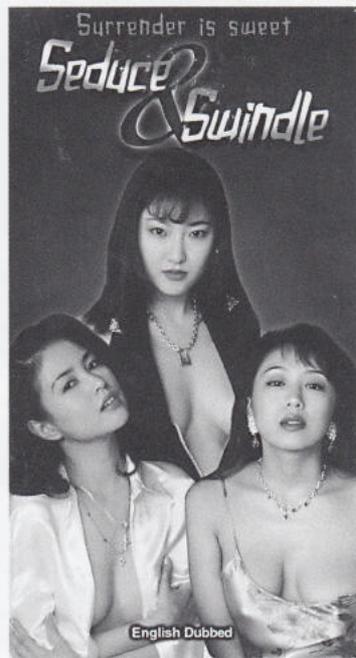
I'm also curious to know just why they think all American males are abusive. So we're all a bunch of evil rapists?! Hey, whatever turns the chicks on, I say (if there was no demand, there would be no supply!). But seriously—I would really like to have a little "talk" with the people who wrote this story. Better yet, I would like to have a little "talk" with their girlfriends and wives, perhaps to inspire some future scripts they could write. Come to think of it, the American women in this movie aren't treated much better; they're pretty cold-blooded too; the women in the prison are all pretty mean—and some of them are downright ugly! When was the last time you saw an ugly woman in a *Woman-in-Prison* (AKA *W.I.P.*) flick?! This is the one realistic element in *SCORPION'S REVENGE*. As I understand it, *SCORPION'S REVENGE* is a remake of some old prison movie or series from the 1970s. Not only that, but I suspect it was all inspired by yet another manga/comic, because let's face it; damn near everything in Japan comes from manga. Hell, I wouldn't be surprised if, thousands of years ago, the first Shinto priests got all their ideas from some comic book.

But how is this drama as a movie? Well, in the final analysis, *SCORPION'S REVENGE* is one of those unintended comedies that's simply, "So bad, it's good!", and I was never bored—I was consistently entertained. For what it's worth, it could almost be considered well-made, perhaps even classy. The early slow motion scenes (of sex and make-out shots) of Yohko and some guy in bed do look pretentious and drag on, but at least we get to see the chick's titties. The action scenes, however, get downright stupid. There's this blind girl who's a sharp-shooter, for crying out loud (her blindness adds nothing to the story and makes no sense)! This type of implied skill works in a *Zato Ichi* movie, or other types of martial arts fantasies, but it looks dumb in *SCORPION'S REVENGE* and destroys what little credibility the movie had left. In one scene, she's getting all dressed up with a bridal gown, and

yet has a mirror in front of her (she can't see, remember?!) as her lipstick is applied— I think the writer has been sniffing too much Crazy glue. I also got a chuckle out of the obligatory harmonica in the prison. How many prison movies have a prisoner who plays a harmonica, ninety-nine jillion, maybe? Perhaps there really are a lot of harmonicas in prisons, don't know. I've never been to prison, because I've never been convicted or caught committing a crime. Anyway, the worst thing about it is the misleading video rental box. She never dresses like that anywhere in the movie. I felt deceived and ripped off! But I imagine the releasers made more money that way. It's pretty misleading, but we all have bills to pay. By the way, how do you like the cover of this edition of OC?!

Storywise, Japanese immigrant Yohko gets accused of the "death" of her boyfriend and ends up in one of those women's prisons where the warden preaches the gospel of Jesus (in between raping the inmates), the prisoners are whipped & tortured, and some even receive an arrow to the foot when they're not paying attention to the sermon. The prison scenes are absolutely typical of other prison movies, right down to the harmonica. Off and on though, there are flashbacks involving lawyers, and they go on about how L.A. is the land of lawyers, and the "city of lawsuits". This may be true, but because of this tendency, you'd think the prison guards would ease off of whipping prisoners with leather straps, and firing an arrow into a blind chick's foot (with dozens of witnesses nearby), because there just might be lawyers eager serve the victims. But I'm getting realistic here, reviewing a silly movie made by morons who don't know anything about reality. Regardless, the prison scene ends by the middle of the movie, as all the ladies riot and several escape the barbed-wire fences, gun-wielding security guards, helicopters, etc. Fortunately for Yohko, her friend's house is just a desert's trek from the prison (how convenient!). It's also convenient that the cops are too stupid to search this house! Speaking of cops, there don't seem to be many existing in this dimension. In one scene, a Yukiko opens fire in a church to kill the groom (he was white & American, and therefore raped her long ago) and appears to get off scott free. She even hangs out in the church with Yohko immediately after the shooting, so they can lament and reminisce. Anyway, Yohko discovers that her boyfriend Jiro isn't really dead after all, it was just a plot, and a bad plot at that! I guess she's a witness to his botched plan, so he needs to kill her. He pulls out a gun, and there's a car chase through a desolate area, but

eventually she gets the upper hand and shoots the guy dead with his own rifle. ** -DF



SEDUCE AND SWINDLE

Tohokushinsha; 1996, Produced by Keisuke Konishi (THE BONDAGE MASTER, CLOSE YOUR EYES AND HOLD ME), Director: Masato Hironishi, Screenplay: Junichi Inoue, Original Story: Yoshitaka Hiroyama, Dir. of Photography: Haruhisa Taguchi, Editor: Kunihiro Ukai, Executive Producer of English version: Humphrey G. Kumano, Dubbing Supervisor: T-Bone Wang, Translation: K. Westlake, Running Time: 84 Min., Released by Asia Pulp Cinema & Central Park Media, Cast: Mikio Osawa (also starred in NIHONSEI SHONEN, which means "The Boy Made in Japan"), Noriko Hamada, Noriko Hayami, Minori Terada, Miyuki Iijima, Reviewed by Damon Foster

I'm not at all qualified to critique soap-operas, since my field is still along the lines of action and/or sci-fi, but I'll give it my best shot. But first of all, when reviewing SEDUCE AND SWINDLE, I need to set the record straight, right up front: There are no monsters or superheroes to be found anywhere. There's not even any gunplay. This is drama here, and only drama. As drama, it succeeds. So I'm trying to give it the benefit of not comparing it with the actioners and fantasies I gravitate toward. Even so, I still ended up somewhat prejudiced as I watched this otherwise decent little story. The real problem was pre-conceived notions caused by what I read on some press material: SEDUCE AND SWINDLE was categorized as "Thriller"! Though it's entertaining, it's not likely to "thrill" anybody, it's not that type of film. Either they categorized it this way out of deceit, stupidity or maybe it was an accident.

There are really only three sequences where SEDUCE AND SWINDLE comes off as even remotely "thrilling"! They are: 1. A cop roughs up the main culprit (he who seduces and swindles). 2. In flashbacks, a nun slits her wrist and there's some blood. 3. The swindler and a rival swindler have a short struggle, and it involves a wooden kendo sword. But these scenes are short and not real important to the plot—the remainder of SEDUCE AND SWINDLE is just story and character development.

On the video box itself, this love story is categorized as "Erotica". Though I don't recall a lot of full frontal nudity of either sex, and it never gets downright pornographic, the label "Erotica" seems to suit this movie somewhat (I'm not certain what other genre it falls under). There are a number of long, drawn-out scenes of couples in bed, but on the whole, I think the script still concentrates more on characters and the story—it's a drama first, perhaps a comedy second, and a 'softcore' adult film third, if at all. Erotic movies have never done much for me, so some of the sex scenes dragged on too long, in my opinion.

I managed to watch this timid tale of romance all the way through, in one shot. I must say, I was impressed. SEDUCE AND SWINDLE is fascinating, with enough plot twists and intriguing characters to maintain suspense. It really helps that this one is dubbed in English. I'm one of those rarest of Asian film fans, somebody who prefers voice-dubbing over subtitles. Though the voices sound corny (and don't always fit the look of the characters), it's a relief to be able to look away from the screen once or twice and know I've not missed anything. The catch being that the voices make even the more serious scenes come off as comical. I heard them say "but still" once, even though I don't think these are the same voices who used to dub in all them old Chinese kung fu movies of the 1970s. The English dubbing is a nice feature, because this movie is almost all talking (except for the bedroom scenes), and were it subtitled, the experience would have been headache inducing.

The real catch, coming from a psychotronics fan, is that I'm not sure how somebody would promote or market such a film. There are many sci-fi fans who collect their favorite movies & TV shows on tape and/or DVD. But are there drama fans who collect their favorite soap-operas and love stories? Do they? And if so, what's the point?! When I buy a Godzilla movie, I can later watch it with friends and say: "Watch the part where Godzilla destroys the flying saucer!", and "Check this scene out—watch that giant foot crush that army tank!". Now, let's switch from imagination & FX mode, to adult

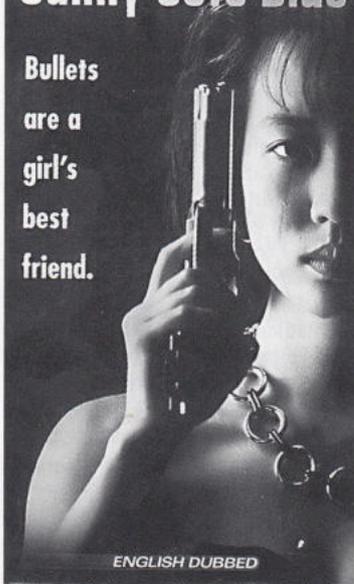
drama mode! Can you imagine anybody buying a tape of SEDUCE AND SWINDLE and showing it to friends and saying: "Okay, watch this part: They're about to talk!", or "Here's the part where they talk some more!", and "Okay, now's where she talks to somebody else!" My point is that I'm not certain this movie is worth the retail price of about thirty bucks (that's \$29.99 plus tax). However, as a rental, it's good entertainment. If you're in a mood to view a well-written story, SEDUCE AND SWINDLE is worth renting. The other attraction is of course the ladies in SEDUCE AND SWINDLE. They're pretty, of course, and two or three of them do display some nudity. I suspect lead actor Mikio Osawa isn't a bad looker himself, for all the ladies and gay boys in the audience. Just don't expect all-out X-rated crap—the characters spend most of their time with their clothes on.

Scriptwise, there's this brilliant conman Fujisawa (Mikio Osawa of 1997's THE KEY) who specializes in Marriage Fraud; he meets rich women, befriends them, gains their trust, does the nasty with them, and then dumps them right after he "borrows" a lot of money. His tactics are well done, and the story seems realistic, except for one flaw: All the women are good-looking! I don't believe all pretty girls are that gullible (and if I knew where such ladies could be found, I'd be there). Trust me, I know from experience that attractive women can manipulate men, it's not always the man who's in control. They should have thrown at least a couple ugly, old, disgusting women into his life to add credibility—women so nasty-looking that they're desperate enough to fall for Mikio's charms & deceit. Regardless, the cops are onto his scam, so they hire an excon (he too once excelled at Marriage Fraud) to trap him. These two rival swindlers compete for the same woman, with the old-timer (who, in an unexpected plot-twist, turns out to be Mikio's father!) even impersonating a Shinto priest. The antics are amusing, and though it gets tacky when Mikio and his female accomplice engage in phone-sex, I still recommend this cute little story. I won't give away the ending, or the beginning or middle, for that matter. You'll just have to rent it (and see for yourself) when you're in the mood for powerful drama and powerful titties. **1/2 -DF

SUNNY GETS BLUE Japan Home Video; 1991, Producers: Wataru Ishii, Binbun Furusawa, Yutaka Morita, Screenplay: Toshimichi Ohkawa, Photographer: Atsushi Muroga, Music: Seiichi Kyoda, Song: "Sunny Gets Blue" by Dennis Gunn, Cast: Natsumi Nanase, Keishi Hunt, Takahashi Matsuyama, Mie Yoshida, Hitomi Okazaki, Dennis Gunn,

Sunny Gets Blue

Bullets
are a
girl's
best
friend.



Michael Coleman, Maximilian Schuler, Peter Serafin, Manjot Bedi, William H. Pierson, Francisco Quitano, Mel D. Hemsndez, Aoey I. Mantanona, Melody D. Brady, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Somebody must like low budget, Japanese action movies of the 1990s, because they do in fact exist, for better worse. In the case of SUNNY GETS BLUE, it's for the worse. This one is so bad that it makes me like BLOW BACK (a movie which borders between "decent" and "adequate") even more. SUNNY GETS BLUE is from the same cast & crew which brought us BLOW BACK, but lacks Riki Takeuchi's charisma to save it. If you like seeing people get shot just for the sake of seeing people get shot, or if you simply need to see triggers being pulled, then SUNNY GETS BLUE delivers. Though the movie is unremarkable, there's no shortage of gunplay.

The problem with the shoot-outs isn't the shoot-outs themselves, it's the fact that I really didn't give a damn who lived, or who died. There are no interesting characters in the movie, and none of them are likable. Though some movies can produce charismatic anti-heroes who take the law into their own hands, this movie fails at this. The so-called "anti-heroes" in SUNNY GETS BLUE aren't much nicer than the villains. In fact, the lead hero (Takahashi Matsuyama) is introduced by showing him shoot an old man to death while he robs the guy's convenience store! Later, we meet the co-hero (Keiishi Hunt), who's immediately established as being a two-faced traitor. And we're suppose to sympathize with these two guys for the rest of this uninteresting movie?! Worse yet is the acting ability of everyone involved. When Japanese actors like Takahashi Matsuyama, Mie Yoshida, Natsumi Nanase attempt to speak English, it's beyond pathetic. The movie

takes itself seriously, and yet the scenes of these Japanese morons trying to pronounce the simplest of English sentences are so bewilderingly bad, it comes off as comical—in a pitiful, embarrassing sort of way. This is not to say that the American villains can perform any better. The leader (an Anton LaVey-ish bald guy) over acts, and even his dialogue seems awkward. Though he's an American, English-native-language speaker, his strange sentences are obviously the work of scriptwriters or directors whose English skills are minimal. There's one incredibly stupid scene of illiterate Takahashi Matsuyama in a strip joint, talking with a nude blond (Davina Bryan) with some beautiful implants. She's got enough silicon in her body to kill an elephant! The conversation is so ridiculous; between Takahashi Matsuyama's non-existent grasp of English, and the walking silicon & peroxide promotion's absolutely non-existent grasp of acting (and non-existent usage of braincells), this short talk is just plain agony to watch. I'm being ridiculously generous by giving this movie a whole star; that's a quarter star for the action, and a quarter star for unintended humor, and a quarter star for the bimbo's (Davina Bryan) left breast and a quarter star for her (Davina Bryan) right breast.

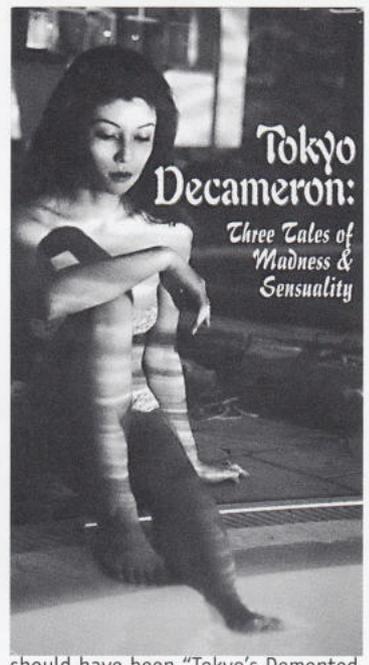
Equally minimal are the production values. The scenes shot on location at Key West, Florida, look like vacation footage. There are random shots of beach-bathers, etc., and it's apparent they just whipped out the movie camera and took shots at random. There are tourists waving and smiling at the camera!! It's pretty stupid, but it does give the impression that all these Americans are waving at the Japanese characters, which makes it funny. How's that for secretive thieves? Everywhere they go, people notice them, smile and wave! One of these candid shots offers some nipple (almost), and some woman is adjusting her bathing suit strap. Regardless, I think I've established that the planning & photography stink. Even worse is the music. There are scenes meant to be grim, menacing or dramatic—and yet we hear this happy jazz music! The theme song, "Sunny Gets Blue" (hence the title) has got to be the most obnoxious sound that the human ear has ever heard, and its affect on me is comparable to that of "Puberty Love" in the movie ATTACK OF THE KILLER TOMATOES! The song ("Sunny Gets Blue") starts off with this high-pitched voice screeching "S-u-n-n-y...!!!" which is a truly nauseating torture for the ear to behold. The full line in this funky disco/jazz (whatever) is of course "sunny gets blue" but it sounds so much like the old SESAME STREET theme that I was expecting the remainder of the song to

be "S-u-n-n-y days, sweeping the flies away! Friendly neighbors!" The idiot singing the movie's theme song is adult, but he screams it out with such a high-pitch voice that he really sounds like the kids who sung the SESAME STREET opening song, except that by comparison, the SESAME STREET song actually rocks.

The setting appears to be America (New York, Atlanta and Florida), but much of the footage was obviously shot in Guam, for budgetary reasons (I guess after BLOW BACK, they wore out their welcome in the Philippines). The script is little more than two Japanese thieves kidnapping women while running from a gang of American thieves. There are weird elements added here and there, like the radio D.J. our two 'heroes' listen to, in their car. They're in Florida, so the DJ speaks in English (and sounds a lot like George Takei), but is saying some really strange stuff, obviously written by somebody who's English ability is challenged. The DJ says: "The temperature in New York City will rise as high as Key West in Florida. You can't be too happy about that. Actually, you should be worried; this is very scary thing. You know why? Key West is corrupted and has—gays! Well anyway, the final destination will be Heaven." I had to watch this stupid (yet funny) scene over again to make sure I heard that correctly. At this point the Japanese subtitle read (in Katakana) "homo", so I guess I heard right. Okay, whatever! Anyway, the good guys' hostage is some Japanese girl called Sunny (Natsumi Nanase), who finally escapes at the end when she shoots one of her captors (Keiishi Hunt) dead, but first, he and his doomed partner shoot all the evil white guys (and one black guy, and one guy who appears to be Middle Eastern). * -DF

TOKYO DECAMERON: THREE TALES OF MADNESS & SENSUALITY (A.K.A. "Tokyo Deka Melon", "Tokyo Big Tits") Tohokushinsha Film Corp.; 1996, Prod.: Akihiro Otsuka, Tomoki Nishikawa, Tsutomu Kuno, A Koichi Kobayashi Film, Original Story/Supervisor: Akio Jissouji, Executive Prod.: Tetsuji Hayashi & Kazuhiro Mori, Dir.: Koichi Kobayashi, Running Time: 88 Min., Cast: Kei Mizutani, Hitomi Shiraishi, Hitoe Otake, Eisaku Shindo, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Perhaps there really is a word called "decameron" in the English language, though I've never used it, and don't know what this word means. More likely, "decameron" comes from the Japanese title, where they say "deka meron". "Deka" is a Japanese abbreviation for our own 'decadence', and "meron" is obviously their poor attempt at saying 'melon'. So I guess the literal translation of this title



should have been "Tokyo's Demented Big Tits"! I don't think the boobs in this exploitation film are particularly big, but the title is just kinky enough to apply to this movie. Yep, it's kinky and falls under the "erotica/fetish" category, but this drama struck me as being really interesting. Most of the characters (everybody except the dorky guy who carries a spoon around) are intriguing, and the intelligent approach kept me on the edge of my seat. Tough it's considered a trilogy, all the stories intertwine at some point; the three of them appear to be happening simultaneously. So at times, it has almost a Quentin Tarantino-ish approach, it reminded me of the parallel stories in PULP FICTION or JACKIE BROWN. Being a drama, TOKYO DECAMERON is of course quite talky and slow in parts, so don't seek this one out if you're in the mood for action or anything more imaginative. However: If you're up for some well written drama and some unsuspecting surprises which actually make you think, then TOKYO DECAMERON will satisfy. The approach doesn't make this into what I consider to be the type of movie I'll watch over and over. Though I did watch the first chapter ("Two Women Named Mariko") more than once just to understand it, this movie is the type of film where it loses its impact the second time around. It's not like a sci-fi movie or an actioner where I'll show it to friends and say "Watch this part!" Once you know what's going to happen, there's really no point in watching it all over again.

Drama fans aren't the target audience, however. Obviously, it's the sleazewads and fetish sickos who this very adult movie is aimed at. I've figured out that there are at least four main categories of fanatical viewer for this film, and they are: Men who hate

women, men who love to hate women, men who hate to love women, and men who've never touched a woman and therefore hate them. I don't believe I fall into any of these categories, so naturally I couldn't relate to whatever pleasure these torture scenes are supposed to generate. Though all these bondage-like scenes are amusing, it rather worries me that there are guys out there who get off on this stuff. I think some kinky stuff like this is okay once in a while, so long as the viewers are mature and intelligent enough to realize what we're seeing is a purely fictional work, and not some sort of "how to" guide to dysfunctional relationships—as though anybody would strive for such a thing.

But as "mature" as it is, TOKYO DECAMERON is not pornography, so nothing is especially explicit. I recall little or no full frontal nudity, and during its few sex scenes, there are no penetration shots. Were it released in America theatrically, it would have gotten away with a pretty tame "R" Rating. This is another reason why I liked it; despite all the tasteless scenes and perverted activities, it all manages to look somewhat clean, and considering the nature of the content, this classy look was no easy task.

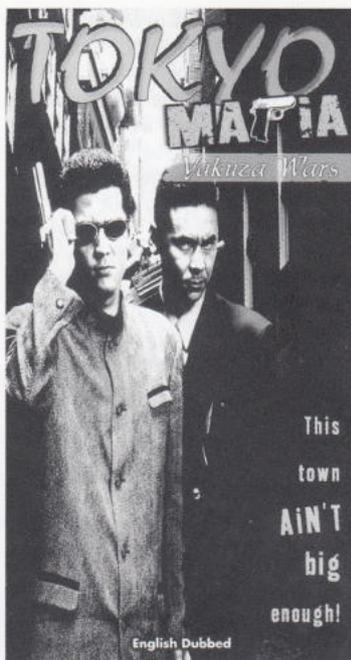
There are three stories in this feature-length movie: The first one is called "Two Women Named Mariko" (one is a slave to the other's every twisted desire. What dark past ties the two together?) and stars the voluptuous, stunning Kei Mizutani, better known for her role in WEATHER WOMAN. "Two Women Named Mariko" has a hilarious scene where a dominant woman (wearing a nazi-esque uniform) tells three pussy whipped guys to go running around outside to find the car-keys that she threw out the window of her apartment. If they can find the key, they can shake-the-sheets with her. But there's a catch: While outside in the parking lot, they must be naked as they frantically search! Though I don't understand the whimpy guy with the spoon, and the frequent helicopter sound effects, this is a fascinating story which had a trick ending which completely caught me off guard. After an abrupt link (remember the links between sketches on MONTY PYTHON'S FLYING CIRCUS?), we dive into the second story, "Lesbian Dream" (five women's summer vacation of playful lust turns terrifying with the discovery of a dead body). Though all the women are pretty, this one didn't do much for me. In one scene, a group of lesbians decide they need to put their flowers in a vase. They've no vase, but they do have this young, submissive gal they've turned into a slave. The flowers require a hole with some moisture, and a certain orifice on the female body has this— so without giving too much

away, let's just say I would like to trade places with the flower stalks. Last but not least ("Lesbian Dream" was least because of the artsy-fartsy approach and the confusing flashbacks), was "The Man in the Pillory" (obsessed with revenge, a dancer tracks down the man who tortured and raped her sister) which takes a while to get to any interesting story-telling, but becomes worth the wait. It's hard to say whether the rapist is really the villain or not, because he spends most of his time tied up & terrorized by a vengeful, leggy woman, and because we actually hear his side of the account. This alcoholic rapist is an interesting, complex character, as are most of the characters in TOKYO DECAMERON: THREE TALES OF MADNESS & SENSUALITY. *** -DF

TOKYO MAFIA: YAKUZA WARS *Gaga Communications; 1995, Producers: Toshihiro Sato, Yoshinori Chiba, Masaki Kai, Seiichi Shirai, Dir.: Seiichi Shirai, Screenplay: Akinori Kikuchi, Original Story: Kazuhiko Marakami, Producers of English Version: Stephanie Shalofsky & John O'Donnell, Dubbing Supervisor: Tom Wayland, Translation: K. Westlake, Cast: Riki Takeuchi, Masayuki Imai, Rieko Yasuhara, Hiroshi Miyauchi, Kojiro Hongo, Shohei Yamamoto, Reviewed by Damon Foster*

Though I've edited OC for most of my life and therefore watched varying Asian film genres forever, I admit that I've only seen a handful of yakuza movies. So I can't compare TOKYO MAFIA: YAKUZA WARS to other films in its field, nor can I tell you whether or not TOKYO MAFIA: YAKUZA WARS qualifies as a "good" yakuza movie. However, as a movie in general, it's pretty good. Though the situations & betrayals are typical of any gang film (be it Italian Mafia, Chinese tong or whatever), I was still consistently entertained by TOKYO MAFIA: YAKUZA WARS. At times, it gets downright interesting. It's a tolerable movie, but suffers because of the writing. There are way too many characters and rival gangs; and each and every one of them likes to talk. So there are plenty of slow scenes. It's also very confusing, due to the complexity of the script. Too many of these guys look alike, which certainly didn't help.

Riki Takeuchi seems to lead a gang of "good guys" (but the approach is realistic and there are grey areas; no "good", no "bad"). But even his boys aren't angels, because of their profession. There aren't too many ways that I can be considered Politically "Correct", but there is one exception: In regards to animals. Riki's gang profits from illegal whaling; they've bought these out-of-service whaling boats despite some ban on whaling (when did the ban happen? I was of the impression them Japanese still



mercilessly slaughter whales with no concern). Fortunately, we never see any whales get harpooned, but the whole premise behind their business makes it hard for me to root for them. As disappointing as the story is, at least this one is dubbed in English, fortunately. I know most of you prefer subtitles, but when a movie is as talky as this one, I like it to be as user-friendly as possible, so I like the English soundtrack. Granted, more about the story should have been translated— much remains unclear.

This fairly decent (not great) movie has smaller roles for old-timers like Kojiro Hongo (former Daiei regular) and even Kamen Rider V3 himself, Hiroshi Miyauchi (as Officer Hamada) makes a brief cameo. I wish he had a larger role, he's always been a hero of mine for his work in TV shows like GORANGERS, KEY HUNTER, JACKERS, KAMEN RIDER V3 (of course!), KAI KETSU ZUBAT, THE WAR IN SPACE, Japanese SPIDERMAN, WINSPECTOR, etc. As for the aging Kojiro Hongo, his movie credits include the rarely seen JUDO SAGA (a 1960s remake of SANSHIRO SUGATA), KUJIRA KAMI, WAR OF THE MONSTERS, RETURN OF THE GIANT MONSTERS, RETURN OF GIANT MAJIN and DESTROY ALL PLANETS. I must confess that, at his age I did not recognize him in TOKYO MAFIA: YAKUZA WARS, and were it not for the credits, I wouldn't have known he's in the flick. So I watched TOKYO MAFIA: YAKUZA WARS again, and sought him out in particular. I did finally recognize him, but in addition to the inevitable aging, he's wearing sunglasses (even indoors), which certainly didn't help. He plays the leader of the main gang. The only other cast member I've seen before is of course the main star, Riki Takeuchi, of BLOW BACK and other 1990's crime-dramas.

The story (or stories?!) seems to

be a link in a chain; characters are just vaguely introduced and the climax concludes nothing, so it's probably part of a series. It tells of all these rival gangs in Tokyo: The Dragon Heads, the Teitoku, Taiwan's Blue Dragons, the Ishiyama, some HK gang and the Yamaryu, whom Ginya Yabuki (Riki Takeuchi) defected from because they brutally beat him into a bloody pulp. Speaking of which, beatings are plentiful. There's gore, sliced off limbs and enough fist-fights to keep the tension. It's not really an action movie, but it does have some punches, a little gunplay, some almost gratuitous bloodshed and even a few kung fu kicks. The fights had me screaming for more, because the premise tends to lean more toward dialogue and character development. Eventually, the tension mounts, resulting in an all-out gang war, presented as a montage of clips. We get the impression that Yabuki's yakuza won the explosive battle, but then it just ends. Like I said, the movie isn't completely impressive on its own. If the other movies (before and after) actually exist and ever get released, then it will all make more sense. **1/2 -DF

WEATHER WOMAN, THE (O-TENKI O-NEI-SAN) *Tohokushinsha Film Corp.; 1995, Written & Directed by: Tomoaki Hosoyama (the self-proclaimed "John Waters of Japan") who also directed COCAINE YAKUZA, SUMO WRESTLING GIRLS & LESBIAN COLONY, Prod: Tetsu Adachi, Co-Executive Prod: Tetsuji Hayashi, Story based on a popular manga Otenki Onesan (by Tetsu Adachi), Co-Producer: Akihiko Yose. Based on the Manga by: Tetsu Adachi, Music: Kunihiko Ida, English Version by Central Park Media Corp. (in association with Asia Pulp Cinema); 1999 Running Time: 84 minutes (approx.), Cast: Kei Mizutani, Takashi Sumida, Yasuyo Shirashima, Ren Osugi, Hideyo Amamoto. Reviewed by Damon Foster*



This isn't the first time THE WEATHER WOMAN has been reviewed in Q.C., but since it's such an entertaining, worthwhile caper, one more look won't hurt. I suspect THE WEATHER WOMAN is one of Asia Pulp Cinema's only major international hits (it earned Kei Mizutani the coveted "Best Actress Award" at Italy's 1997 Satire & Humor Festival), their other bread and butter might be CLOSE YOUR EYES AND HOLD ME. It's definitely one of the better films they're offering. It's a zany comedy, one which at times gets so far-fetched that it becomes a fantasy film, but there really aren't enough supernatural and or superhero scenes to make this movie qualify as science fiction or fantasy. These imaginative genres are spoofed, much like Japan's pink films and the news broadcasting industry. As a comedy, it had me laugh out loud more than once—especially at the hilarious pervert subtitles describe as an "enema enthusiast"! In the long run, I think I can safely say that THE WEATHER WOMAN is better than average for a Japanese comedy, and if you're up for something which can easily shift between innocent and sleazy, then you should check it out. As I watched it, I figured that something this wacky could only be inspired by a Japanese comicbook. So I did some research to confirm my suspicion, and yes indeed, it turns out THE WEATHER WOMAN is based on the manga by Testu Adachi; and in turn, spawned the anime series WEATHER REPORT GIRL (which I believe predates this live-action movie). The movie itself was successful enough to spawn a sequel (WEATHER WOMAN RETURNS) and was one of the top ten Japanese movies of 1996, and was honored that year at the Stockholm & Oslo film festivals.

However, I could do without the occasional artsy approach. I couldn't make heads or tails of the odd subplot about people jumping off the tops of skyscrapers. The lead character (Weather Woman) jumps off this building twice, and it's never really explained how she survived this fatal fall. Granted, this acrobatic woman has super-human powers sometimes, but I still think the scenes of her (and some male admirer) on the building tops are pretty stupid, and that they make no sense. Perhaps they're satirizing some aspect of Japanese culture or Japanese pop culture I'm alien to; whatever the motives are, they went right over my head. Equally irritating are the musical numbers. The songs are remotely catchy, and the dance moves are choreographed pretty well, but toward the climax, they overdid it. At the beginning of the movie, these musical interludes were okay, because it was part of the story: Some sleazy exhibitionist "spices up" the weather

report on the local news, via skimpy clothing and other erotic gimmicks. By the time the movie ended, and the song & dance numbers returned, my attitude was: "Okay, we get the point already!" The acting is really nice. Kei Mizutani plays her part well as some arrogant, bitchy slut who gets no respect from me. She's sexy of course, but I was put off by her nastiness and throughout the film, I thought she was a villain, and was hoping she would get killed at the climax. Another memorable performance is that of Eisei Amamoto, who seems to have changed his name to "Hideyo" Amamoto, if these credits are any indication. I really hate when Japanese kanji can be translated so many different ways! The only way to know the truth is to find the guy and ask him just how he personally pronounces his first name! Anyway, I know there are those who will consider him a "has-been", because he used to appear in more decent movies like KING KONG ESCAPES (where he played villainous Doctor Who), and of course as a thug in GHIDRAH: THE THREE-HEADED MONSTER. But at least he can still find work! As I see it, he's not the has-been; the has-been is the Japanese film industry in general. The Japanese will probably never make movies as good as the ones they made in the 1960s and early-to-mid 1970s, and so long as he lives (which I suspect won't be too much longer), Mr. Amamoto will continue to appear in the movies of Japan, regardless of the quality that decade delivers. I think THE WEATHER WOMAN helped to stereotype him as a "dirty old man", because he would later play a similar role in the vastly inferior BIG BOOBS BUSTER.

Kei Mizutani plays a flamboyant, domineering "Weather Woman", in a script which is more than similar to an episode of MARRIED....WITH CHILDREN, where Kelly Bundy (Christina Applegate) and her padded push-up bra do the same thing. I wouldn't be surprised if THE WEATHER WOMAN's writers saw this episode of the famed American sitcom and were inspired to write a more-than-similar story. But this Japanese version is more elaborate than the 30-minute American TV originator, because it's longer! The concept once again involves a sexy woman who does provocative things to boost the TV station's ratings despite the censors and notoriety she causes. During the proceedings, we can expect laughs, nudity, some bondage, and a fetish scene or two. Eventually, there's a plot twist: A rival woman (the boss's daughter) takes over and becomes the new Weather Woman. Naturally, the two Weather Women form an instant rivalry. The new Weather Woman had spent time

in Europe, and seems to bring with her some sort of European witchcraft, or new age mysticism. The original, ousted Weather Woman (Kei Mizutani) goes out to the woods to undergo some training, to learn how to manifest her own magic, and control the weather. Her satirical training scenes seem to involve a lot of whipping. Scenes of pain-inflicting never did much for me, but in these scenes she's wearing some sort of shiny, sexy one-piece bathing suit—so I won't complain. Regardless, she eventually achieves magic powers, so she and the enemy Weather Woman meet for a climactic duel. Their magical battle involves a sword, a whip, and some colorful costumes, and will amuse anybody familiar with the samurai fantasies and superhero comic books that are being satirized here. In the end, Kei Mizutani emerges victorious, and presumably resumes her job as the flamboyant, sexually liberated Weather Woman of the title. *** -DF



WEATHER WOMAN RETURNS Director: Tomoaki Hosoyama, Music: Kunihiko Ida, Subtitles: Hiroko Moore & Mark Stoyich, Original Story: Tetsu Adachi, Ordering Information: Central Park Media Corp. (in Association with Asia Pulp Cinema), 250 West 57th St. Suite 317, New York, NY 10107, phone: 1-212-977-7456, ext. 201, fax: +1-212-977-8709; Cast: Misa Aiki, Ryo Kurihara, Ryoko Kato, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Another all too sad case of a hasty sequel. This isn't common in the movie business; a movie is a big hit, and despite its being complete, money-grubbers insist on a follow-up, which, more often than not, fails to live up to the predecessor. WEATHER WOMAN RETURNS is typical of this

problem. By making this movie (it's best left forgotten, rather like EXORCIST 2: THE HERETIC), they ruined the Weather Woman genre and did a real dis-service to audiences. As you can tell, I was disappointed by WEATHER WOMAN RETURNS. The title is very misleading, because the Weather Woman does not return! Kei Mizutani is nowhere to be found, so instead we get scenes of some unremarkable looking woman bathing in a stream, or hot-springs. Not only is she only average in appearance, but these abruptly edited scenes appear to have been added at random, having little or nothing to do with the story.

If the title were different (and perhaps it is, in the Japanese version), and instead the liner notes stated something like, "In the tradition of WEATHER WOMAN", then maybe the flick could stand on its own merit. But even then, because of the similarities of plot, such a film would go down in history as a rip off of the original, so forget I mentioned it. Well then, how about this: even "A New Weather Woman" or "Another Weather Woman" might have been better titles, but even those would automatically make us compare it to the original. I guess there's no getting around it, the people who made this movie were in a no-win situation, and they set themselves up for failure.

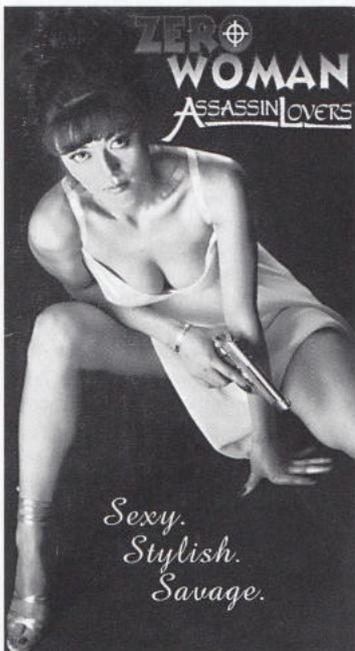
For what it is, WEATHER WOMAN RETURNS is not actually a bad movie. There are some funny moments, and the characters are both lively & entertaining. While it's not as amusing as the first film, it does manage to maintain some of the same weirdness, as far as music and surreal dream sequences. It looks to me like they were working with a budget which was far less than that of WEATHER WOMAN, so considering what they're up against, they did a decent job of coming up with a movie which is at least fun at times. There's one area where WEATHER WOMAN RETURNS improves over the original: It manages to stick to its basic script, and omits the out-of-place scenes of people jumping off of skyscrapers for no reason. Because the setting of WEATHER WOMAN RETURNS isn't urban Tokyo, there actually are no skyscrapers to be found. On the whole, I think WEATHER WOMAN RETURNS is neither great nor awful, it just sits there and exists. Though the movie isn't striking, there was some talent involved; there's photography by Satoshi Murakawa, known for his special effects work on ZERAM and GAMERA.

The setting is the countryside, where two TV stations are competing. One station is about to fold, and despite desperate measures to boost ratings, they just keep getting further into debt. Then, on the night of their

weather report, the hostess (who's also the programming director and inheritor of the station) flashes her panties. This character (played by Misa Aiki) is a meek, conservative girl, so it gets more of a shock than when Kei Mizutani's character did it in the first film. Once again, the live unveiling of her underwear boosts ratings, much to the regret of rival station Trendy TV. The hot chick (Ryoko Kato) who runs Trendy TV engages in a live duel with Misa Aiki, as both weather women battle it out via questions, costumes and arm-wrestling. Some scenes are funny, some scenes are stupid. But villainous Ryoko Kato suffers defeat because some guy put laxatives in her drink. So right there, on live TV, she takes a big dump and it ruins her career. Fortunately, we don't actually see the act of defecating, but it's still kinda' funny. The movie is just that: Kinda' funny. As opposed to genuinely funny, like the first movie was. ** -DF

ZERO WOMAN: ASSASSIN LOVERS A TBS Service Inc.; 1996, Producers: Shinsuke Yamazaki & Tomoko Hojo, Original Story: Tohru Sugimoto, Screenplay: Masahide Kuwabara & SEigo Inoue, Directed by Masahide Kuwabara, Production Company: Vision Sugimoto, Executive Producer of English Version: Christopher Sipple, Producer of English Version: Stephanie Shalofsky, Associate Producer of English Version: Christopher Sipple, Production Coordinator: Karel Havle, Translation: Katsuho Shimoharu, Running Time: 87 Min., Cast: Kumiko Takeda, Keiji Matsuda, Marie Jino, Jiro Dan & Tokuma Nishioka, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Yikes. For the remainder of this filmography, I must review and sit through every Zero Woman movie that Asia Pulp Cinema has available. There are other films in this series available



(I've seen a whole slew of them at a nearby videostore), but fortunately, I'm only obligated to view the ones from Asia Pulp Cinema. I've tried sitting through ZERO WOMAN: ASSASSIN LOVERS and the other entries in the Zero Woman series before, and found these uninteresting movies to be quite a challenge. This is the first one I'm actually reviewing (I'm doing this in alphabetical order), and find that it's just a standard, routine crime drama, if you ask me (though I admit nobody ever asks for my opinion on anything). ZERO WOMAN: ASSASSIN LOVERS is slickly staged and cool in its own right, but I think maybe they should aim for "entertaining" (remember that abstract concept? Some Japanese filmmakers don't seem to), or perhaps "original". However, I must be open-minded, because this film series has enough fans who can see & appreciate something that I can't.

Melodrama, gangsters, gunplay and some slow-motion; the things we normally associate with HK movies of the 1980s and early 1990s (only it was fun back then). To me, ASSASSIN LOVERS comes off as loosely derivative of John Woo's HK classics, but the similarities are probably just coincidental—Woo did not invent this sort of movie. I guess what I'm trying to say is this: If you've seen one gangster movie, you've seen 'em all—and I've "seen 'em all" several times. Regardless, I think others would be more impressed by this movie than I was. Asia Pulp Cinema went so far as to use this film's music in their promo (for other releases) which appears on the beginning of most of their videotapes, but ASSASSIN LOVERS is far from being their best film. I wonder if the other "Zero Woman" movies will also reach us, and if they're any better. I hear there are different lead actresses used in the other movies. In this case, the heroine is played by Kumiko Takeda (CLOSE YOUR EYES AND HOLD ME). Needless to say, she's a real beauty. This is natural, because I can't see them casting a homely woman in this role. She looks great in a skirt and leather boots—but then, many homely women could look good dressed that way too.

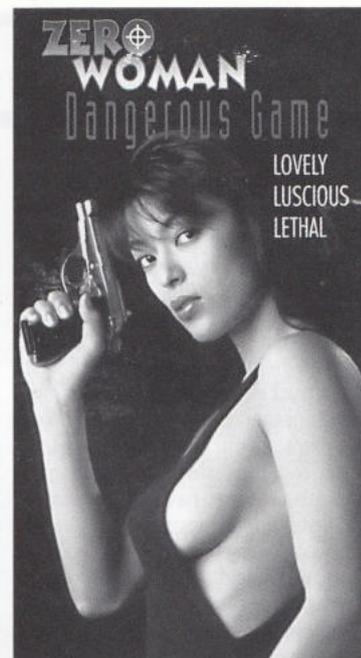
Though interrupted by some B/W, artsy-fartsy dream sequences (something to do with Zero Woman's past as a school girl with a suicidal father and a two-timing mother), it's really just another familiar story about assassins and gangsters. Kumiko Takeda plays the main character, and she plays her badly—with no facial expression or emotional depth. She's one of the "Zero Women", members of some crime fighting squad called Division Zero, but her domineering boss makes this team seem as corrupt as the enemy yakuza's themselves. She's been as-

signed to kill some yakuza kingpin who's got a fetish for that submission/dominance bondage stuff, which he performs with the aid of some topless chick. Speaking of topless, we get to see Kumiko Takeda's breasts, during an obligatory, sappy love-making scene with rival hitman Katsumura (Keiji Matsuda). Though they both fornicated, they're really enemies still, so they do shoot guns at each other more than once. Eventually, they both team up to wipe out the local gang, and the climactic shoot-out, though decent, only lasts a little while. But then, when we think they'll live happily ever after, along comes a leader from Division Zero, who shoots the co-hero dead. It's a depressing ending for an already depressing film. So people pay money to see something as grim as this? No thanks. 1/2 -DF

ZERO WOMAN: DANGEROUS GAME TBS; 1998, Producers: Shinsuke Yamazaki, Yasushi Enomoto, Tomoko Hojo, Shunji Sakai, Original Story: Tohru Shinohara, Screenplay: Miyuki Takahashi, Takashi Kaneda, Hidekazu Takahara, Director: Hidekazu Takahara, Production Company: Vision Sugimoto, Executive Producer of English Version: John O'Donnell, Producer of English Version: Stephanie Shalofsky, Cast: Chieko Shiratori, Ichiho Matsuda, Mitsunori Miyazaki, Yasuyuki Miyagawa, Daisuke Ryu, Tadashi Okuno, Shiro Shitamato, Keizo Nagashima, Reviewed by Damon Foster

After watching ZERO WOMAN: ASSASSIN LOVERS and thought it was just a bad action film, I was semi-surprised at this one, I think it's the better of the two. There's even less emphasis on action than the first one, which is a good thing, because Japanese haven't been good at staging action scenes since Sonny Chiba declared bankruptcy (in the 1980s) and had to abandon his Japan Action Club. Knowing that Japanese action movies suck, the producer, director and writers all seemed to agree that they would concentrate on drama, this time around. There are couple lame gun-fights, but on the whole, this intriguing film concentrates on dialogue and characters who have actual depth, and interesting things to say.

But on the whole, this low budget film didn't do much for me either. Once again, the lead heroine, Zero Woman (AKA Rei) is a facially expressionless robot. I now realize this is intentional, but it doesn't make the character any more interesting. She's a gloomy, depressing character, and although actress Chieko Shiratori (who bears a striking resemblance to Kumiko Takeda, of ASSASSIN LOVERS) is another beauty, she's playing the least interesting character in ZERO WOMAN: ASSASSIN LOVERS. She just



unenthusiastically plays this role (and looks like she's about to turn to the producer and say: "Okay, so where's my pay check?") with no depth or emotion, and meanwhile, all around her are these colorful, sometimes even likable characters. Another thing I noticed about this film is that it's shot on video, though it was hard to tell, because they used some sort of Film Look digitizing to trick us. But the credits mention TBS (Tokyo Broadcasting Service), so it's a dead give-away that what I'm viewing is a TV movie! Even so, if you like looking at decent-looking Japanese chicks, and don't have exceedingly high expectations for films, you just might find this drama to be worthwhile.

But I'm trying to be fair here. This story of agent Rei (Chieko Shiratori) and former prostitute Nana (Ichiho Matsuda) might be entertaining to some people. So I did some research to see what other critics thought of this tape. Sean Connolly, of the website "Anime Showcase" <<http://www.animeshowcase.com/>> had this to say about ZERO WOMAN: DANGEROUS GAME: "While I welcome character development in a movie, I tend to like interesting character development. All of the character development focuses around Rei (Chieko Shiratori) and Nana (Ichiho Matsuda) and their connection. Nana is a high city girl who will basically do anything to survive. She was a former prostitute who then hooked up with the Yakuza then, of course, betrayed them. So, she has a lot to say about her life. However, being intrigued by Rei's demeanor, she pokes and prys her way into her life. On the flip side of the coin, Rei seems taken in by Nana and she wonders about the dullness of her own life." Obviously, Connolly didn't find this premise to be interesting; I, however,

did. But although my review of the movie is more positive than that of the website, I guess basically the movie is getting two thumbs down.

It's this story of another Zero Woman (an undercover agent working for the Zero Department; a shadow division of the police) having to protect an irritating witness, so she can testify at some trial. The witness (Ichiho Matsuda) is annoying at first, but at least she's a lively character, which is more than I can say for Rei/Zero Woman herself. These two females don't trust each other at first, but must live together, eat together, feed Zero Woman's exotic pet fishes together, shop together, sleep together, masturbate together, have an experimental lesbian relationship together, and so on. Meanwhile, the local villains are pretty odd. This yakuza gang seems to be composed of homosexual men who smuggle human organs for the black market. There are a couple scenes of graphic gore, and a strange sequence in an insane asylum (it seems the local mad scientist makes money on the side by selling the internal parts from his dead patients). The whole premise is interesting, which includes a trick ending I didn't expect. But since I don't think you should bother to see this movie (though it does show Chieko Shiratori's titties), I'll tell you what happens: That spunky little witness makes a break for it, only to suddenly come back at the end of the film with her own mob, and shoots the kingpin (who now has cannibalistic tendencies) in the head. I gotta' tell you, I didn't see that one coming. * -DF



Zero Woman: The Accused

ZERO WOMAN: THE ACCUSED *Vision Sugimoto; 1996, Prod.: Shinsuke Yamazaki, Tomoko Hojo, Original Story: Tohru Shinohara, Screenplay: Yuka Honcho, Dir.: Daisuke Goto, Music: Takashi Nakayama, English Version: John O'Donnell & Christopher Sippel, Cast: Mai Tachibana, Yujin Kitagawa,*

Hajime Tsukumo, Tetsu Watanabe, Shinji Yamashita, Reviewed by DF

I'm three films in, and though I generally don't like the Zero Woman series as a whole, this edition strikes me as the best of the bunch. The others that I've seen are boring dramas with cliché-ridden crime drama trappings. **ZERO WOMAN: THE ACCUSED**, however, strays from the unimaginative "girls & guns" theme that the other carbon-copy, dime-a-dozen Zero Woman fiascos keep regurgitating. For once, the characters do have depth, and the story honestly was interesting to me! Even Zero Woman herself actually has a personality for once, and it's about time! This movie is low on generic action, but the intriguing characters more than make up for it. Again, I admit to being biased here, because current Japanese action movies don't impress me as a rule. They have yet to generate the explosive action that HK was doing in the 1980s, and although that's an unfair comparison on my part (make-up models can't compare with actual martial arts masters like Moon Lee or Yukari Oshima!), I always look back on that genre as being the high point in action movies. But when it comes to writing stories and concentrating on characters, the Japanese still have an inkling of talent—so naturally I'll give higher marks to Japanese movies where the emphasis is on characters & scripts.

I suspect that this is the first (or one of the first) movie in the series, because it actually explains something about Zero Woman's previous life as a normal cop. She was presumed dead (lost in a burning building, though no body was ever found), and was later recruited to be an assassin—it's a lot like the premise behind the HK movie **ISLAND OF FIRE**.

There are hasty moments in the script, too: Like when Zero Woman needs to kill some guy, so she befriends his mistress. The meeting between the two ladies is badly written. Zero Woman catches the chick shoplifting in some make-up store. Their abrupt friendship (leading up to the part where Zero Woman poisons her drink) is badly written; the mistress is not well introduced at all; I couldn't tell this unimportant character was the guy's lover, and found the whole sequence to be a time-wasting subplot, only added for a trendy lesbian scene where both women get into bed together.

Otherwise, it's an interesting story about a serial killer in Tokyo's sleazy, promiscuous gay and/or bisexual community. Speaking of promiscuous, Zero Woman herself is at her horniest; she's eager to do it with men, queers and even hops in bed with that chick whom she drugged. I didn't mind the sex scenes, because actress Mai Tachibana

has such nice breasts. But life isn't all fun; Zero Woman still has to obey her cruel boss and do the obligatory assassination, so there's some occasional bloodshed. What really caught me off guard this time is that when she tells her boss, "I am not a murderer", he beats her up! Anyway, it turns out the villainous stabber (of horny, sometimes perverted men) is her friend Mitsuru. Mitsuru is a bisexual freak who prances around the Tokyo streets in drag—he entices then slaughters the unsuspecting men. At the end of the movie, after his gory spree of blood & blow jobs, she's forced to deliver a bullet to his head. The guy had it coming and unlike Zero Woman, I didn't cry, but it's a powerful scene regardless. ** -DF

ZERO WOMAN: THE HUNTED *Vision Sugimoto; 1997, Producers: Shinsuke Yamazaki, Tomoko Hojo, Yasushi Enomoto, Original Story: Tohru Shinohara, Director: Norihisa Yoshimura, Screenplay: Akiko Yamahana, Norihisa Yashimura, Takafumi Ohta, Music: Takashi Nakagawa, A Release of Asia Pulp Cinema, Cast: Mikiyo Ohono, Reina Tanaka, Ko Watanabe, Yoshiaki Fujiwara, Daisuke Ryu, Kazuki Nagasawa, Reviewed by Damon Foster*

This entry in the never-ending "Zero Woman" series has a couple really nifty gimmicks: 1. The scene where the title heroine is on an amusement park ride and shoots some old man in the forehead is quite a nice special effect! 2. Poisonous body oil, placed on the female breast! Just as the gals' male lover (s) reverts to babyhood, they get this toxic lotion in their mouth, cough up blood and die! The only problem is that I couldn't really tell what happened; we see his mouth on her boob, and then there's blood. At first, I thought the fellow had bitten off her tit.

But otherwise, this cheap, boring, shot-on-video (but not at first, I think they used "Filmlook" or 8mm for the first five minutes) movie is my least favorite "Zero Woman" farce to date, and I wasn't crazy about the film series to begin with. I paid to see and review this rental, and feel ripped off. Once again, the title heroine is a generally non-emotional, facially expressionless (yes I know, it's intentional because she's a coldblooded killing machine) model who meanders from shoot-out to shoot-out, with a glassy-eyed, dull look. In this case, her few fist fights are incredibly bad; it's obvious lead actress Mikiyo Ohono has no concept of fighting and it's just painful to watch her in "action", if you can call it that.

Watching this terrible video makes me realize that doing a magazine on all the releases of any one video label



Zero Woman: The Hunted

(in this case, Asia Pulp Cinema) isn't a good idea. It seemed like an easy, quick way to get another issue of OC released, but if I have to sit through dull, badly made stuff like this, it makes this hobby seem like a painstaking chore; a job without pay. I still respect Asia Pulp Cinema because they're making rare films available to us, but naturally, not all their releases are worthwhile. I still like the idea of reviewing all their releases (it gives OC a chance to cover a wide variety of films I would otherwise never see), but I felt that sitting through **ZERO WOMAN: THE HUNTED** was a long, devastatingly uninteresting experience. If, however, you enjoy the overall film series, go ahead and see **ZERO WOMAN: THE HUNTED**. You might like it more than I did (alternate views and opinions are valid), and I don't want to discourage fans of the "girls and guns" genre.

Zero Woman Rei (played by anorexic Mikiyo Ohono this week), an assassin of the Zero Force, continues to shoot people and wish she didn't have such a job. Her first hit involves some fat German businessman in a swimming pool. We see her in a bathing suit (and later on, in the nude, of course), but she's so thin she's damn near androgynous. This opening battle is one of the more gripping duels in the video, as she exchanges bullets with musclemen and some big hairy white guy who appears to be a wrestler (he's certainly not qualified to be considered an "actor"). Pretty soon though, she falls in love with a dorky waiter who gets in the way (so some Zero Force representative wants him dead). Zero Force uses a rival Zero Woman (not to mention some well-placed, yet lethal body oil!) to kill him. So Rei kills that rival Zero Woman. Oh yeah; one more thing: Both Zero Women once played together as kids, according to some flashback involving a cruel bully. -DF



藪の中の黒猫

KURONEKO ("Black Cat" "YABU NO NAKA NO KURO NEKO") A *Kindai Eiga Nihon Eiga Shinsha Production 1968*, Dir.: Kaneto Shindo, Exec. Prod.: Nobuya Horiba, Setsuo Noto, Kazuo Kuwabara, Screenplay: Kaneto Shinbo, Photography: Kiyomi Kuroda, Music: Hikaru Hayashi, Cast: Kichiemon Nakamura, Nobuko Otawa, Kei Sato, Rokko Touro, Kiwako Taichi, Taiji Tonoyama, Takao Kanze, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Because I wasn't very impressed with KWAIDAN (granted, I've aged since then and might appreciate it now), I decided to steer clear of 1960s Japanese horror movies for a while, and so there KURONEKO sat (on the shelf at San Francisco's Japan Video), for years. But finally, during an era where modern Japanese, Hong Kongese and Koreanese movies do little for me, I finally decided to escape into the past. I figured that even if KURONEKO disappointed me, it had to be better than the majority of movies made now a days. I've been aware of KURONEKO for years, even as a kid I remember seeing the now famous image of the demonic woman carrying a hairy, clawed arm & hand in her mouth.

Thankfully, KURONEKO turned out to be an entertaining, enthralling movie! Even my girlfriend, who's way more normal & Americanized (she actually watches FRIENDS, for Christ sake!) than I could ever hope to be and tends to frown at subtitled movies, was cap-

tivated. We were both on the edge of our seats for the full running time. Our eyes were glued to the TV set. So KURONEKO is an effective thriller. The atmosphere is great, and the acting performances are excellent. The fact that it had subtitles certainly helped. The story is simple enough that the subtitles might not be necessary, but following the script closely is a big part of the intrigue. It's beyond better than average (***) , but it's not exciting enough to win my highly coveted five star (*****) rating. Only my favorite films get that honor. But as a wellmade horror drama, it does the job. So four stars (****) sounds about right. Hell, maybe I should re-watch KWAIDAN again— maybe my tastes have changed enough that I'll enjoy that oldie as well.

However, many of my readers prefer the more over-the-top stuff, or films which depict exploitation, action, or gore. There's not much of that in this timid soap opera. Action fans and gore-heads should steer clear, as you guys would only think I'm crazy (or crazier) for giving this cheap little talker such a rave review. There is some bloodshed, and a few love-making scenes, but that's all. The most gruesome scene is at the beginning, where a cat (normal, pet cat) is licking the blood from a corpse's neck! Though we know they simply put milk (or some other drink that cats fancy) on the fake injury make-up, and that the actress held still, it's still a rather chilling ef-

fect. That's about it though, in terms of gore. If, however, you like classic Japanese cinema of the 1960s, KURONEKO should be a welcomed addition to your video collection.

The story is blatantly predictable: Some war-torn, starving samurai warriors raid a household, steal food and then rape & kill the two women (mother and her daughter-in-law) who reside there. The women come back to life as cat-demons, rather typical of Asian legend (animal-ghost-people hybrids are very common in Chinese folklore too). Naturally they seek revenge, as they lure, seduce and slaughter foolish samurai who wander into their forest. The women are both rather pretty, even in their ghost make-up (maybe it's the "goth" in me which finds the pasty face look attractive) and lack of real eyebrows. When the daughter-in-law flies through the forest, in her white gown, it looks like a pre-cursor to A CHINESE GHOST STORY, since all these legends are semi-related. In some scenes, when samurai warriors catch on and realize they won't get laid (and that she would rather suck their blood than their cocks), they swing at her using their swords. She evades them using high-humps, and acrobatic flips— but this is as close as it ever comes to involving any real martial arts. Anyway, the plot thickens when one of the wandering samurai, Hachi, turns out to be a relative from the past! One of the cat-ghosts was his mother, and the other was his wife! Worse yet, he's been hired by a local warlord, to kill both ghosts! That's where the real story begins. But because the nature of KURONEKO is substance and not flash, I don't feel right about giving away the ending. Let's just say that I found it to be anti-climactic. See for yourself, and you be the judge. **** - DF

DEMON WARRIOR: KOJI Executive Producer/Original Story: Toshio Maeda, Producers: Ryoichi Yoshimoto, Yasuhito Yamaki, Dir.: Yasunori Urata, Screenplay: Takao Kawaguchi, Character Design/Animation Dir.: Gito Muto, Production Company: Phoenix Entertainment,

Executive Producer of English Version: Humphrey G. Kumano, Dubbing Supervisor: T-Bone Wang, Translation: Lighthouse Productions, Released by: Anime 18 (www.anime.com), 1-800-833-7456, 250 West 57th St., Suite 328, New York, NY, 10107, Running Time: 120 Min., Reviewed by Damon Foster

"For Screening Purposes Only", my videotape says. Well, no shit! I certainly would only sit through this example of horror anime to review it, I sure as hell didn't actually enjoy this perverted example of erotic filth. Unfortunately, this is another depraved videotape from that sicko Toshio Maeda, who inflicted the world with garbage like the notorious UROTSUKIDOJI: LEGEND OF THE OVERFIEND (AKA "Exorsister" and "Wandering Kid"), not to mention DEMON BEAST INVASION and NIGHTMARE CAMPUS. If nothing else, DEMON WARRIOR KOJI is at least a little more decent than all that UROTSUKIDOJI crap. At least this here DEMON WARRIOR KOJI is vaguely watchable, and a couple parts in the story almost get coherent. At one point, I actually thought I could identify a character or too. But for a Japanese cartoon to be better than UROTSUKIDOJI, the goal is easily met. Saying DEMON WARRIOR KOJI is better than UROTSUKIDOJI is like saying "getting poked by a small pin is better than having your head cut off". So, as far as X-Rated Japanese animation goes, DEMON WARRIOR KOJI could possibly be one of the better ones, and if you're lame enough to get a steady diet of this nonsense, then there's no harm in adding DEMON WARRIOR KOJI to your disgusting collection.

The story has something to do with demons on an urban rampage, so it's all too similar to the WICKED CITY stuff. As for the super-human heroes (hired by Police Chief Kanzaki), they remind me of both DEVILMAN and THE X-MEN, except that unlike Wolverine, the blades come out of heroic Koji's arms, not his hands. The plot basically has Koji and his fellow mutants (demon people? It's never explained) seeking a murderous demon or two. Plenty of gore follows, and there are



even a couple scenes of a rampaging, giant monster. But there are numerous sex scenes, and they're blatantly graphic. It's really very explicit, there are at least three episodes on this tape and they're all gratuitous. Some of these "erotic" (though they did not turn me on at all) scenes make sense and add character development, like when Koji screws some zombie-chick and she experiences her first orgasm. But most of the other sex scenes are just plain gratuitous, they're trying to meet some quota of penetration shots, so that every orifice on the female body can be violated. In-between the gory stabbings and scenes of rape, there does seem to be a somewhat interesting story (or so it seems), but I was trying to eat breakfast while watching this stupid tape. It did manage to kill my appetite. -DF

TOKYO: THE LAST MEGALOPOLIS E.X.E. Co.; 1987, Producer: Seikichi Iizume, Screenplay: Kiazō Hayashi, Executive Producer: Takashige Ichise, Based on the Novel by: Hiroshi Aramata, Art Dir.: Takeo Kimura, Special Effects: Yukimitsu Kanno, Director: Akio Jisoji, Conceptual Designs: H.R. Geiger, Cast: Kyusaku Shimada, Mieko Harada, Junichi Ishida, Haruka Sugata, Shintaro Katsu, Ken Teraizumi, Sanshi Katsura, Tamasaburo Bandoh, Jo Shishido, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Good, maybe even better than average. TOKYO: THE LAST MEGALOPOLIS is an imaginative, well-written combination of horror & fantasy, and yet at times, it seems more like science fiction; which it's not. There are a number of slick gimmicks sprinkled here and there. My favorite shots were the short scenes of Ray Harryhausen

wannabe monsters. These little critters (and one marauding statue with several arms; rather like the one in GOLDEN VOYAGE OF SINBAD, but not as good) are the highlight of the film, and deserve more screentime. In that respect, it reminds me of THE GATE (ironically, it's from about the same period). The cinematography is beautiful too, like a scene where Jo Shishido (filmed from outside a building) enters the building and goes upstairs: The movie camera, still placed outside, pans up to a second story window where Shishido (at the top of the stairs) reaches his destination. There are also glowing "demonic" eyes, and a little bit of bloodshed here and there.

This was based on some really thick novel (as were the many animated videos on the market, at least one of which I reviewed a while back), and it certainly shows; they're trying to cram way too much into a single movie, and that's its downfall. It's really hard to keep up. The end result is a disjointed, confusing, complex movie. Just when I thought I knew who all the people were, they kept abruptly introducing all these new characters which were clearly unnecessary to the script. The endless parade of new faces which pop up every ten minutes gets really distracting, and since none of them particularly stand out, the whole movie got very tedious by the time it ended. My mind wandered more than once, and the slow pace literally put me to sleep—I had to take a two hour nap before I could get through the second half of the tape. Even though the movie alternates between complex and talky, I'm still giving it my "better than average" rating of three whole stars. Though the movie didn't absolutely thrill me every minute, I still think it's a well done piece of work, and if I only considered it "average", I would feel guilty. They should have hacked out at least 30 minutes of pointless footage, and eliminated the many irrelevant characters. If they could have shortened this movie, it would flow a lot smoother and be more entertaining. So I am indeed recommending this here subtitled version I just screened. If, however you can only find an untranslated version, don't bother—you'll be bored to tears.

What I really found interesting wasn't the special effects or the designs by H.R. Geiger (best known to sci-fi fans for his designs in ALIEN, but I know him best for that disgusting poster he painted which temporarily appeared in some old Dead Kennedy's album), but the usage of the occult. I'm no history major, but having been raised on monster movies, I've always been fascinated with all things demonic. It's interesting how often a pentagram is used in this film, for the

horror scenes. This is strange, since the film depicts Asian variations of the occult, and yet the characters are using this demonic star that I normally associate with European black magic or Pagan wicker. Maybe there's some common tie between ancient Europe & ancient Asia; I don't know. There's also plenty of Chinese-style folklore present; they use Chinese-style talismans, there's reference to the goddess Kwan Yin (AKA "Kwan Ying"), and one character calls himself a "Fusu-Shi", I believe he's trying to pronounce Feng Shui. It appears there's some history and diverse cultures in the story, but unfortunately for me, there's very little education of that nature in the film. The story concentrates just on the characters in the story, and assumes we're all historians and understand each reference.

Evil wizard Kato Yasunori (he looks like a Japanese Herman Munster) enjoys dressing like a soldier and summoning powerful ghosts, such as that of Masakado Taira. Yasunori's reason for wanting to revive such a destructive spirit isn't entirely irrational, it seems he wants to rid Tokyo of corporate corruption and turn it into the holy ground it once was many years ago last Tuesday. His destructive plan is countered by rival wizards of the heroic Tsuchimikado Clan. I'm not certain, but they appear to be Shinto priests. In one scene, Yasunori's magic unleashes some attack birds who sound just like Ebirah! Anyway, Yasunori keeps causing earthquakes & kidnapping females as he works with the subterranean ghost—but meanwhile, there's way too much time spent on some contractors, businessmen and surveyors. These guys are trying to rebuild Tokyo, add subways, etc., and their conversations drag on forever. I tell you, when Shintaro Katsu, Jo Shishido (TOKYO DRIFTER, ASIA POLE, STAR WOLF) and other characters open their mouths, it's damn near impossible to avoid the scan button!! In-between their boring talk scenes, there are interesting effects, like where some chick overcomes her possession by coughing up a big demonic bug/larva thing that was in her stomach! Eventually, a gifted priestess called Keiko sneaks into the bad guy's underground layer, and there's some sort of magical battle. Though effects in other parts of the movie are pretty cool, this ending is anti-climactic. It's little more than flashing lights and some smoke, before she finally stabs the villain in the stomach with a samurai sword. But then there's one of them stupid trick endings where we think the villain might still be alive, or back from the dead. So I guess they made a sequel, which might be worth checking out. I'll get back to you on this later, and let you know. *** -DF



Convention Review:

Posing with a superb 6 foot paper-mache sculpture mady by David Lee Smith.



I could have attended the more recent G-Fest 2001 (but that was held way over in Chicago or some place). For one thing, the amount of celebrities at G-Fest 2000 was truly astonishing and I don't think a G-Fest of this magnitude will ever happen again (G-Fest 2000 will be remembered as "legendary"!). There were special effects experts from both sides of the world; who'd have thought we would ever see Tom Savini and Koichi Kawakita in the same room?! Old favorites like Gamera director Noriaki Yuasa (see review for G-Fest 1999 in [O.C.: Godzilla 2000](#)) and Robert Scott Field returned, not to mention Godzilla suit actor Haruo Nakajima— no stranger to American sci-fi conventions. There were new faces too, like Keita Amemiya (director of ZEIRAM, MOON OVER TAO & CYBER-NINJA), and actress Megumi Odaka (of GODZILLA VS. BIOLLANTE and so on), not to mention Mach Fumiake, the former wrestler who played a super heroine in GAMERA: SUPER MONSTER (Daiei; 1980)! I was shocked to see her, because I had just had a small conversation with her in the elevator and didn't recognize her; nobody told me who she was!

Personally, I think the real heroes were the organizers and people who worked like slaves, behind the scenes to make the convention a success. In the old days, I would have been hanging out with friends I've known since the 1970s, like Bob Johnson & August Ragone. When the hotel jerked me around (see review of "Shim Hyung Rei tribute", below) and had me doing a panel with equipment I wasn't familiar with, Ragone magically appeared out of nowhere and saved the day by showing up and adjusting the equipment so that it would function properly. But by this time, we were all working on projects with conflicting schedules (sometimes in competition with each other), so we didn't see much of each other. We did manage to exchange "hellos" and karate kicks as we passed by each other in the hallways though. Most of the time, they were moderators on the panels, interviewing celebrities; as were Ed Godziszewski and Stuart Galbraith. There were even smaller presentations which went on virtually unnoticed, such as Lewis Austin's comical "Six Degrees of Godzilla" (linking up Godzilla to unlikely actors via a family tree of film, just like that book on Kevin Sausage— or whatever the hell his name is) quiz. I thought the whole thing was a bit silly, but I was amused enough to take part, briefly. Lewis knows his trivia, but I did manage to stump him, with the name Jackie Chan! Here's the formula: Jackie Chan got grappled by Bruce Lee in ENTER THE DRAGON (or Jackie doubles for Riki Hoshimoto in FIST OF FURY; an alternate route). From Bruce Lee, we link to the series IRONSIDE, because Lee did appear in an episode of this Raymond Burr crime drama. Of course, anybody not completely moronic knows Burr was in GODZILLA, KING OF THE MONSTERS. Regardless: All these different presentations at G-Fest, plus Hisataka Kitaoka's acrobatic demonstrations (as he discussed his roles playing various Ultramen) added up to fun times at G-Fest.

However, not everyone was there to work on projects or express creativity. Believe me, there was ample opportunity to do the old fanboy thing. There was not one, but two dealers' rooms full of over-priced toys, and at least a couple rooms full of model kits of Godzilla, Gojira, Gigantis, the Big G, and the King of the Monsters as well. It became apparent that "deversity" is not in the vocabulary of the askissers and sniveling autograph hounds who were groveling at the feet of suit actor Haruo Nakajima and special effects expert Koichi Kawakita. So repetition ran rampant at G-Fest 200; from the materialistic otakus who drooled over Godzilla memorabilia, to the obsessive neurotics who would come up to me and ask: "I have an important question for you, it's vital that I know the answer! What did you think of the sequence in GODZILLA VS. SPACE GODZILLA where...." (fortunately, I always had a friend nearby to rescue me from such trivial gibberish!), to the widespread usage of ill-fitting Godzilla T-shirts (black shirt with "Gojira" written in Japanese was the design of choice), it was all too typical, as

Place: Hollywood Rosevelt Hotel (Hollywood, Los Angeles)

Dates: July 14-16, 2000

Guests: Noriaki Yuasa, Madison Carter, Tom Savini, Sadamasa Arikawa, David McRobie, Koichi Kawakita, Michael Keller, Haruo Nakajima, Bob Johnson, Keita Amemiya, August Ragone, Megumi Odaka, Robert Scott Field & more

Also in Attendance: Mach Fumiake, Takahiko Mamiya, Scott Gilbert, Madison Carter, Louis Austin, Stan Hyde, David Kalat, Barrie Evans, Mark Okui, Storm, Glen Danzig, Arriana Hobbs, Keith Aiken & more

Organizer: William Ferguson

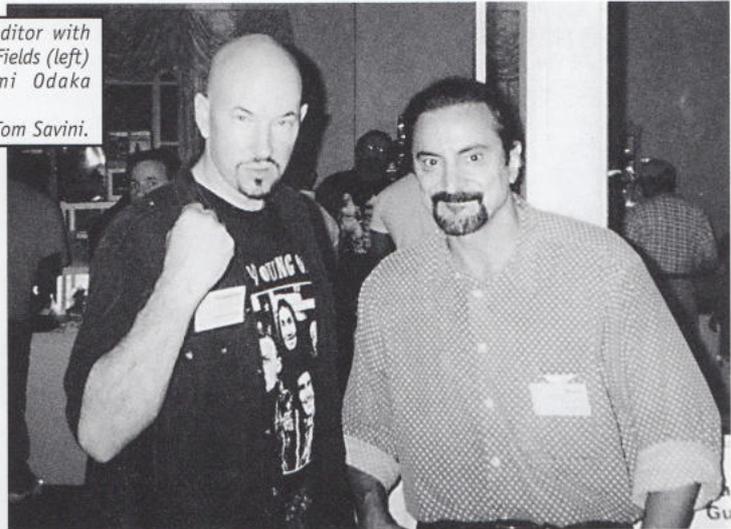
Founder: J.D. Lees

Reviewed by: Damon Foster

This is the second time G-Fest has put me in a room doing a panel discussion with no microphones, and it's really starting to get on my nerves, trying to yell over a loud soundtrack from the video clips. But otherwise, I had fun and wish



Left: Your editor with Robert Scott Fields (left) and Megumi Odaka (right).
Right: With Tom Savini.



far as sci-fi cons go— be it anime, Star Trek, or in this case, Japanese monsters. William Ferguson, who assumed the hair-raising (perhaps hair brained?!), stressful task of organizing this “Gigantic Fest”, wanted deversity, instead of what 90% of the con was composed of: Godzilla this, Ultraman that, Godzilla here, Ultraman there. Hell, there was even some panel on that fuckin’ Godzilla cartoon on Saturday mornings. Pathetic!

So I was glad to see Keita Amemiya (ZERAM, etc.) show his movie MOON OVER TAO, and the abrupt appearance by Mach Fumiake was an unexpected surprise. Even so, I felt that most of the convention was geared toward the narrowmindedness of people who only watch feature-length monster movies, so I made a last-ditch effort to organize a couple presentations to remind people that not all Asian science fiction was created by Eiji Tsuburaya. So I gave it a shot and rushed together a couple last-minute projects; my two skits were.....

Numero Uno: SPECTREMAN STAGE-SHOW: Using a Spectreman costume created by Ed Martinez and Dennis Lancaster, I choreographed a short stage fight where I battled villains played by David McRobie (editor of Xenorama), writer Madison Carter, and Michael Keller (Monster Attack Team). This brief battle lasted mere seconds, but since there were only about 12 audience members (everyone else was off watching SON OF GODZILLA—again), I felt we outdid ourselves. Though this short fight-scene was simple to organize, the Spectreman mask nearly suffocated me, and I was sweating like an eskimo in the Sahara Desert.

Numero Two-o: TRIBUTE TO SHIM HYUNG REI: Me and co-host Michael Keller were up late the night before, practicing our dialogue for this retrospective of the Korean movie maestro Shim Hyung Rei (A.K.A. Shim Hyung Lei and Ray Shim), which was scheduled to take place at 11:00 A.M., Sunday morning. Imagine my surpise when I showed up at the room to set up at 10:45 A.M., and discover I was locked out. I asked several people how the hell I was to get into the room, and I got the run around, a lot of “go ask so and so”, blah blah blah. Meanwhile, fans are coming up to me asking when and where the Shim Hyung Rei panel would be, and I felt so embarrassed for not having any answers. At the last minute, some hotel worker did show up with a key to let us in, but by this time, most of my audience had given up; they left to go see some other presentation. So it’s like 11:05 A.M. and people are waiting while I frantically fumble with the VCR, the video projector, the loud speakers and other equipment I’m not real familiar with. It was aggravating & stressful, and them jerks at the Rosevelt Hotel really made me look like a disorganized idiot. I was furious at the hotel for their ineptitude, and abruptly left the con shortly after this panel (I had originally planned on staying longer). Fortunately, the panel ended up being a smash hit, but I think the fact that me and Keller were blatantly drinking beers & burping on stage helped create a more “festive” (“G-Festive”?) approach. The talk included trivia & clips from Korean movies (TYRANNO’S CLAW, SUPER BATMAN AND MAZINGA V, the UREME series, etc.), and also I think my choice of campy footage was a perfect companion for the wide-spread usage of beer by both hosts. It made this the least formal, most laid back “performance” at the con, and I hate to admit it, but we did end up with something similar to MYSTERY SCIENCE THEATRE 2000, minus the vacuum-cleaner and talking gumball machine. The first portion of the discussion concentrated on some really campy movies, like HERO FLASH, and most of the people in the audience were punks and friends of mine. So as I finished off my first bottle of Heineken, I spouted off “fuck”, “pissed” and “shit” several times. By the end of the presentation, I eased off the profanities, because the room had gotten crowded and there might have been little kiddies present.

The Egyptian Theatre was just a few blocks from the hotel, which made it convenient to watch movies (i.e. ULTRAMAN TIGA and GODZILLA VS. DESTROYER) on the big screen for once. Given that working on the activities & projects at G-Fest made me aggravated and stressed, the location of the Egyptian couldn’t have been more perfect. It’s right next to the Church of Scientology, which in turn was right in our path. Them Scientology crackpots were always standing

out front, handing out cards and offering a free “Stress Test”. I responded by grabbing these little pieces of “advice” and tearing them up violently! This shredding of their wacko litterature really took care of some aggression & helped calm me down, so I shall have to thank that freak L. Ron Hubbard for this service. The stress test was a success!

Between the video-projection rooms and the screening a few blocks away at the Egyptian Theatre, there was no shortage of cool movies to watch. The original GOJIRA (Toho; 1954), SON OF GODZILLA, GAMERA VS. GUILLON, D, MOON OVER TAO, and RING were all warmly recieved by the fans, as were the Japanese superhero movies shown in the “Henshin” video room (where they showed the ultra rare WATARI AND THE FANTASTICS!! Where the hell did they find that one?!?!), not to mention the hotel’s closed-circuit TV station of the same name. I didn’t spend a lot of time watching feature-length movies, but I did finally get a chance to watch GODZILLA VS. DESTROYAH all the way through in the Egyptian Theatre (previously, I never saw the whole film in its entirety, I found it too boring for video— in the theater it was nice to see though).

On the whole, G-Fest 2000 was great stuff. I enjoyed it every bit as much as the previous G-Fest I attended, reviewed in O.C.: GODZILLA 2000. But there were some definite problems on hand. Because the event was so huge, there were behind-the-scenes conflicts and inevitable finger-pointing & backstabbing tendencies. This is common in all groups of people. But in this case, the stress had a negative affect, resulting in a complete lack of a program booklet, and instead we had to try and seek out these paper cards taped to the walls to designate when & where the presentations are going on. Plenty of these placards had scribble and handwritten adjustments all over them. The lack of a paper booklet to describe the events really took its toll on all of us, and made the whole convention look incredibly disorganized, and created a frustrating experience for everyone. So much for G-Fest 2000, but what lies ahead for conventions of this nature? Well.....

Unfortunately, a convention as incredible as G-Fest 2000 can only happen once in a lifetime. Everybody I’ve spoken to agrees that the more recent, toned down G-Fest in Chicago paled compared to the historic event I just reviewed. I myself only go to one convention a year, and in 2001, I had to choose between G-Fest 2001 and the Asian Fantasy Film Expo #2 in New Jersey. Either way, I would have to save up money for expenses. Since Chicago’s cut-rate G-Fest 2001 featured no major guests to make the expensive trip worth my while, I chose A.F.F.E. #2. Hell, their guest was none other than Hiroko Sakurai (see full convention review next issue)!!! At the AFEE, I was told (by Paul Haberman) about yet another convention to feature Japanese sci-fi guests: The Hawaiian All Collectors Show, which was held in July of 2001. It seems that several cast members from KIKAIKER 0-1 were in attendance! I did not believe this at first. Not only that, but so was guest hero Daisuke Ban, familiar to superhero fans for his major roles in KIKAIKER, INAZUMAN, INAZUMAN FLASH, and NINJA CAPTOR! Once it was confirmed that these guests were going to be at that Hawaii show, I was furious. I wish I had known far enough in advance to make arrangements! Why the hell was there no advertising outside of Hawaii?! There’s a rumor going around that prolific stars from Japanese superhero programs may be returning to The Hawaiian All Collectors Show next year, so I hope the superhero fans of the world will plan their vacations accordingly! Tracey Jeremiah was the mastermind behind bringing the guests to The Hawaiian All Collectors Show, so superhero fans may want to let him know that we’re interested in an encore! You may email him at TJeremiah@lesea.com. While you’re at it, contact the people who are running the convention itself, by emailing: hulagirlsvsgodzilla@ukulele.com. Let’s make it clear that it’s in their best interest to bring stars like Shunsuke Ikeda and Daisuke Ban to these events, because it would be quite lucrative for the people running the convention— but only if we know about these events and are able to prepare for such long, expensive trips!! You can find out more about The Hawaiian All Collectors Show by checking out the Yahoo club, <http://clubs.yahoo.com/clubs/tokusatsuplanet>.



ASIAN ODDITIES



From America:

55 DAYS AT PEKING Samuel Bronston Pictures Inc.; 1963, Dir.: Nicholas Ray, Set Decoration, Production & Costume Design: Veniero Colasanti & John Moore, Starring: Charlton Heston, Ava Gardner, David Niven, Flora Robson, John Ireland, Harry Andrews, Leo Genn, Robert Helpman, Phillippe Leroy, Kurt Kasznar, Paul Lukas, Massimo Serato, Ichizo Itami, Reviewed by Damon Foster

For years, I've wanted to see this "epic blockbuster", this "classic spectacle" of American masterpiece cinema. After all, any movie which stars Britain's David Niven, Ava Gardner, and psycho-right wing extremist & gun-enthusiast Charlton Heston has got to be a masterpiece, right? Sure, whatever. My main interest comes from years of watching Chinese kung fu movies, so I've learned all about their 1900 wannabe revolution, the ill-fated Boxer Rebellion. Plenty of HK actioners deal with that turbulent period in Chinese history, the notorious disappointment LEGENDARY WEAPONS OF KUNG FU (Shaw Brothers; 1982) being the most wellknown of them. Naturally, they're all pro-Chinese in content, depicting the foreigners as the villains. I must say, despite my "barbarian, foreign devil" heritage, I always sympathized with the doomed Chinese heroes in such films, but it was hard not to, because the Chinese patriots were the script's righteous heroes, right?! Who's going to root for the stereotypical villains?! So anyway, I've finally gotten a chance to view this early '60s spectacle from America, and have gotten a chance to see the story from a non-Chinese perspective, where the Americans, Europeans and occasional Japanese are the heroes, and it's the Chi-

nese who serve as bad guys. But before I give out my thoughts on this alternate opinion movie, let's see how others reacted to it.

Being a critic, it's very bad of me to be so easily influenced by the reviews of others— my opinion sways depending on the wind! More than once I've watched a movie and had my own opinion on it, and then I read a conflicting view and think to myself, "Oh, I see! So I was completely wrong about it!" I admit this is a terrible way for a writer's mind to work, and yet I was curious to know what other people had to say about 55 DAYS AT PEKING. So I did some research, and came to a website called "AMC: Reel Views" <<http://amc.thoughtbubble.com/review/list>> and got a few different critiques of the film, and here's what different people had to say:

I have always been interested in this movie. Due to the fact that I went to Oberlin College and one of sites on campus is an arch to the memory of those missionaries, and many Oberlin Guards that were killed in the Boxer Rebellion. Today it is the P.C. thing to view the Boxers as noble fighters against European domination. Only problem is they killed at least 40 times more Chinese than Europeans, Americans or even Japanese. The sob plot with Ava Gardner gets a little soapy through. -Reviewed by Cat (a no name slob) <jf5165@aol.com>

This movie is a dull and boring piece of crap! -Reviewed by Jason

Interesting, mostly accurate, historical fiction. No injustices done in terms of Oscar, though. -Reviewed by Steven Eury

This movie is only interesting if you are curious about Hollywood's ability to grossly distort history. -Reviewed by Big Mike (mjones@linfield.edu)

This film is terrible. The story and acting are very poor. -Reviewed by Frank

This movie is in bad taste like a fart in church. -Reviewed by Phil

You have to be drunk to see the movie! -Reviewed by Jack Daniels

This is a great movie. The sets are spectacular and the history is fairly accurate. I highly recommend! -Reviewed by Keith Valles (vallesmk@washburn.edu)

It damn long to be so bored! -Reviewed by Frank N. Stein

I love anything with Charlton Heston. The movie itself was sad. Too many good people dying. But in the end when Charlton Heston remembered to go back for his Sgt.'s daughter, I started to cry. -Reviewed by Jennifer

Not a bad movie, although I think it should of been edited and condensed down to around 90 minutes, or so. Some good action battles. The scenes showing the Chinese leaders plotting strategy are a bit boring and lengthy, and I think that is what makes this movie dull to many viewers. -Reviewed by Howard

This film is an interesting telling of the Boxer Rebellion in China and the heroism of the Ambassadors of the World's Great Powers. It IS my belief that they should have left when the Empress of China requested it but that was then and this is now and we don't view the so-called benefits of Western Civilization the same way as our ancestors did. But they were brave—you have to give them that. -Reviewed by Cassandra Morrison (cassie89703@yahoo.com)

This movie is one of the classics that would be hard to redo. Yes, the acting is poor and the story would not make any sense to the under educated. This movie is more a documentary than anything else. Filmed in Spain, the location is extremely accurate to the original legation quarter in Peking. Many characters are close to accurate and the uniforms are very well done. Heston's character was only a USMC Lieutenant and not a Major as portrayed. This film must be seen in letterbox due to the original filming size and the immense scenery. In normal scene mode it is close to "as other review would say" crap. -Reviewed by T. Hillman

In regards to the critiques we've just seen, I think each and every one of them has a valid point. Though I don't know where the website found these reviewers (some of them are quite illiterate, and have problems with basic grammar), they all have something to say that I can relate to. I have to agree, to a certain extent, with Frank N. Stein. He was right when he said: "It damn long to be so bored!" Truer words were seldom spoken. I agree, it damn long to be so bored for me too! I specifically agree with some fellow calling himself "Big Mike", because he stated: "This movie is only interesting if you are curious about Hollywood's ability to grossly distort history." Truer words were seldom spoken, and these words strike me as even truer than "It damn long to be so bored!" 55 DAYS AT PEKING exaggerates things and alters the facts,— but they had to, how else could you make Charlton Heston seem like a good guy!? If Hollywood ever makes a movie where Hitler is the hero, and the Jews are sub-human scum who need to be wiped out for the benefit of mankind, they would understandably have to alter the facts on that story too! So in 55 DAYS AT PEKING, the Caucasians are treated as

victims: if they're not trapped in a structure with dozens of Chinese trying to break in and kill them (imagine if this movie took place in a house and instead of Chinese boxers, it was zombies— well, then you'd have NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD; there are some similarities), or they're out in the open, terrified that some ruthless, conniving Chinese sniper might shoot or throw a knife them. The whole premise of 55 DAYS AT PEKING is stupid, if you take this fictional account as absolute fact. So instead, take it as fantasy, rather like SHADOW OF THE VAMPIRE (which wants us to believe actor Max Shreck was really a blood sucking vampire— PUH-LEASE!!!) or Trey Parker's somewhat more accurate ALFERD PACKER: THE MUSICAL (A.K.A. CANNIBAL: THE MUSICAL).

Being that the movie is told from an American viewpoint, it naturally concentrates on the foreigners trapped inside Peking's Hsi-ku Arsenal. Little is mentioned of the similar violence going on in Tientsin, where the East Arsenal had quite the reverse of the situation (7,000 Boxers trapped inside, fending off the surrounding foreigners). But this magazine is about movies, damn it— and I can't waste space getting too historical. Though I don't claim to be a historian, I'm often fascinated by the topic (I'm always enthralled by the documentaries on The History Channel, The Learning Channel, Arts & Entertainment, etc.), and if you want to read more about the factual happenings during the Boxer Rebellion, go to John W. Guy's excellent website, "Role of the United States Marines During the Relief of Peking" at <<http://history.acusd.edu/gen/corps/guy1.html>>. Though it too deals with the battle from an American perspective, it seems to be based on eyewitness accounts and is thorough & gripping. The site also includes precious, rare photos from the period, of actual Boxers from the Boxer Rebellion! Among other things, there's a photo of a female boxer who belonged to a sect of Woman Boxers called the "Sect of the Red Lantern" (Hong Deng Zhao).

The worst thing about 55 DAYS AT PEKING isn't that the Chinese Manchu leaders are depicted as evil, but that American filmmakers just didn't know how to depict them. Instead of hiring Chinese actors, they again went for all out stupidity and hired obvious Caucasians. It was one thing to attempt this in the 1950s or before, when people were more ignorant, but in the 1960s?! Some of these white people are so incredibly unconvincing that I assumed at first, that they were meant to be British twits wearing Chinese robes! Speaking as a big nosed white myself, I made my independent video (HOT

DOGS ON THE RUN) entirely comedic because it was such a stretch for me to play a Japanese samurai! With something this far-fetched, 55 DAYS AT PEKING should have been a comedy. Villainous Prince Tuan (even the eye make-up doesn't disguise his blatantly Caucasian features) looks like a cross between Fu Man Chu and of course, Ming the Merciless! I kept expecting to see Flash Gordon squash the Boxer Rebellion in one of his spaceships, or that a make-up heavy iguana was going to smash the forbidden city! But the worst Chinese villain of all, is the "Empress Dowager" herself! Not only does the actress look & sound like Queen Elizabeth going to a costume party as a Dragon Lady, but the name "Empress Dowager" has always annoyed me. Dowager is an English word, meaning "a widow enjoying some property from her deceased husband", and/or "an elderly woman of dignity". We could avoid a lot of cultural confusion if she were known more by her real name, Empress Tzu Hsi (1835-1908). Interesting to note that she escaped Peking after the rebellion, and did so by disguising herself as a peasant. At the end of the movie, we see her in peasant attire (as she mourns the end of her kingdom), so the movie does have some accuracy.

The best thing about 55 DAYS AT PEKING is the brief scenes of Chinese kung fu. This movie pre-dates THE GREEN HORNET by about three or four years, and any movie which shows a Western, pre-Bruce Lee look at kung fu is fascinating to me. There are really only two short scenes involving Chinese martial arts, since in 1963, "kung fu" was almost non-existent in the English language. One kung fu scene in 55 DAYS AT PEKING takes place at a foreigners' banquet, in honor of Queen Elizabeth's birthday. The evil "Ming the Merciless" basically crashes the party, and rudely interrupts the proceedings to show off some "entertainment". A small troupe of Boxers (perfect attire, looking a lot like the characters in Chinese kung fu movies, and reminded me of the kung fu dudes in Jet Li's ONE UPON A TIME IN CHINA) does an acrobatic demonstration of kung fu, wushu and daredevil swordplay. Though Charlton Heston never actually stabs anybody, you get a sense that the Chinese are convinced their training & magic will make their bodies immune to weaponry, just like in the beginning of 1982's LEGENDARY WEAPONS OF KUNG FU (the most over-rated kung fu movie until CROUCHING TIGER HIDDEN DRAGON came along). The other martial arts sequence is even shorter, when Charlton Heston & David Niven are sneaking around at night. They actually have a few Chinese helpers with them, and one of the helpers jumps a Ching guard and knocks him out via the obligatory karate chop to the back of the neck (it's the 1960s, remember). But the actor forgot to yell "Hi-yah!"

Sadly, the fellow doing the chop is just a henchman, a minor background character who's never given a name. Once more, it's the blue-eyed devils which are the real heroes.

In the final analysis, do I consider 55 DAYS AT PEKING to be a hit, or a miss? Well, a little of both, I guess. It's neither good nor bad, it just exists. I agree with others that it's way longer than it needs to be. When I read up on the Boxer Rebellion, I was surprised to discover that the script is more faithful to actual events than I expected— in fact I think it's more faithful than the chop-socky depictions from HK. After all, Chinese kung fu movies, whether they're about the Boxer Rebellion or not, are about kung fu: Empty-handed fighting. 55 DAYS AT PEKING is not about empty-handed fighting. Chinese kung fu movies might want you to believe that the Yao rebels were heroic martyrs who had the guts to pit kicks against bullets, but according to this movie, the Yao rebels had not just swords, but were aided by two-faced Manchu soldiers who utilized a few guns and cannons. But again, the ignorant casting of obvious honkeys in major Chinese roles is the film's downfall. The only Chinese in the film, aside from a 14-year-old girl (a half-breed), are background extras, mainly just for crowd scenes. By putting British stage actors in the roles of prominent Manchu politicians, they botched up the story with an unintendedly surreal, sometimes comical look. With this type of unacceptable miss-casting, they should have gone all-out fantasy adventure. But because of the round-eyed members of the Ching Dynasty, 55 DAYS AT PEKING will be remembered as an embarrassment, instead of the masterpiece it was once considered. It was hard for me to find, so I feel it comes close to being a "lost film". Oh yeah, and the scene where Heston gets annoyed at his leading lady: He hears she once cheated on her former husband. This doesn't phase him. What gets to him is the fact that the lucky man who got some, turned out to be a Chinese!

Storywise, Charlton Heston plays some sort of cavalry-like soldier who romances Baroness Natascha (Ava Gardner) while stuck in Peking's international settlement. She was quite a piece of ass, but I didn't shed any tears when the "Chinese fanatics" (according to the video box) give her a fatal bullet later in the movie. Obviously, things aren't going well between the local Yao rebels who call themselves "The Fist of Righteous Amity" (AKA "Fists of Righteous Harmony", depending on how you choose to translate it)— which in turn the Americans & British translate as "Boxers". After one cowboy-like soldier shoots a Chinese sniper from a roof-top, David Niven is quick to point out: "You're not in the West now, you know. You don't go around shooting Chinese like you do red

Indians!" Anyway, this amusing, semi-educational movie rolls along, and our Caucasian heroes are up against a mass of Chinese rebels, though in the crowd scenes, if you look closely, it's obvious that many of the Chinese are actually Spanish extras (I believe the movie was filmed in Spain to cut costs)! Even the Chinese songs & victory chants don't sound like any Chinese music or singing style I've ever heard of. The course of the tale plays more like a "war is hell" (an innocent child is killed, a soldier loses a leg, families are separated, etc.) movie than a thrilling actioner, and just when you think the heroic whites are about to be raided by the advancing boxers and their swords & cannon fodder, our heroes are saved by the arrival of more German, Scottish, American and Arab troops. They do some funky marching and perform some parade music, but I hear some of this actually happened, according to eyewitness accounts. ** -Damon Foster



From Korea:

SHIRI (A.K.A.: "Swiri") 1999, Producer: Kang Je-Kyu, Director: Kang Je-Kyu (AKAKang Jae-gyu), Action Dor.: Jung Doo-Hong, Running Time: 127 Min., Cast: Han Seok-Kyu (AKA Han Sok-kyu & Han Suk-kyu), Choi Min-Sik, Song Kang-ho, Yun Ju-Sang, Kim Yun-jin, Park Eun-Suk, Cho Deok-Hyeon, Jeong Jin-Oh, Kim Sang-Mi, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Here I go again, reviewing yet another Korean movie. As far as Korean movies go, I found SHIRI to be about average. While not as fun as DENG CHIRI SSANG RAITU or SKY WARRIOR: EAGLEMAN, at least it's not as stupid as a lot of Shim Hyung Rei's childish comedies. Regardless of my so-so reaction to it, SHIRI broke virtually all the records ever set by a Korean flick (i.e. it being the most expensive Korean film ever, and topped box office records set by TITANIC). SHIRI graced the pages of many Korean magazines and was the subject of many talk shows in Korea, resulting in a phenomenon that Koreans called "The Shiri syndrome"! I, however, do not see what the fuss is all about. SHIRI strikes me

as just another action film, no better or worse than crime dramas from America or Japan. As is often the case with Korean styles and cultures, it looks like a combination of Chinese and Japanese elements, when viewed by outsiders (i.e. Americans and Europeans). As of 4/1/99, more than 1.8 million people in Seoul alone had seen SHIRI. It became an international hit by late 1999, thanks in part to its airing at Canada's Fantasia '99. The VCD (Korean or Cantonese language) sold well in Malaysia, and was one of the first Korean movies to be readily available there.

This is director Kang Jae-gyu's (his name has appeared in the pages of OC before) second movie, who's first movie (1996's THE GINGKO BED) was also a success. According to a website I saw, the 38-year old director "Got the idea for this film when I saw THE ROCK", which would explain the similarity of music scores for both action films. Speaking of action: Another guy I don't understand is the film's action director, Jung Doo-Hong (a former soldier in the South Korean army), from the Choongchung province. The Tae Kwon Do expert became an entrepreneur (during his early 20's), in the Korean stunt industry, since his first stuntman job in the 1990 film (until then, Korea never had a major stunt group because the Korean movie industry rarely acknowledged stuntmen as being an important part of movie making) THE GENERAL'S SON. He soon worked his way up to action director (in Lee Il Mok's SIRASONI), and kept climbing his way up, coordinating stunts in the 1991 hit THE GENERAL'S SON #2, and 1995's TERRORIST. In 1998, he started the Seoul Action School, and then he and his proteges worked on the 1999 movie BEAT. He was involved in the action sequences for numerous Korean TV shows, and in time would be awarded the MBC Special Action Award for Outstanding Contribution to Stuntwork. He was the youngest action director in the Korean movie industry. For more on this guy, read his excellent interview in [Asian Cult Cinema #29](#). His staging of the shoot-outs in SHIRI strike me as being average at best, but considering the history of Korean action films, and the current low standards set by both Japan and H.K., the battles in SHIRI can still be considered quite decent. SHIRI lacks the grace of HK's Golden Years, and tends to look more like the gritty, realistic style seen in most Japanese movies.

SHIRI and its cast are tolerable, but did little for me. The characters look and dress alike, which confuses things and makes it difficult to identify any one actor. There are no particularly compelling characters, nor are there any stand-out performances. This is not to say that the acting is bad; they do all play their emotions rather well, and convincingly. The lead female actress is Kim Yun-jin (though this crafty

character could hardly be considered a heroine), and she, like other cast members, undertook grueling training at the Seoul Action School during the summer months; which included extensive training in the use of guns, and even some martial arts— though there's very little fist-fighting in SHIRI itself. Kim Yun-jin plays an assassin, and the coniving character could almost be considered well-developed. Ironically, despite the babe's extensive training, her most effective scenes of assassination are the ones which are the least flashy. Like the scene where she (disguised in a labcoat) walks by her intended target, in a hallway. Blink and you'll miss her. The alcoholic assassin simply walks by her victim and he falls dead a couple seconds later— it's later revealed she somehow fired a small, poisoned needle into the unfortunate scientist's neck!

Being a South Korean film, the villainous North Korean communists are at times depicted as the most lowly, despicable, brutal barbarians ever. Their savage training scenes border on disturbing (prisoners of war are slaughtered & decapitated during the first five minutes alone!), and this savage characterizing is comparable to the way the HK movie makers used to depict Japanese in the 1970s. Anyway, the script deals with two South Korean agents, heroes: Han Sok-kyu, and Song Kang-ho, who are seeking a particularly cunning female spy (from the North) played by Kim Yun-jin. She uses many weapons (guns, needles, explosives, etc.) while trying to gain some new liquid bomb called CTX. So far, so good— we've got a script which deals largely with urban action, drama, and even some war movie stuff (some scenes reminded me of A BULLET IN THE HEAD, others brought EASTERN CONDORS to mind), as our two South Korean heroes, looking almost identical in their conservative suits, try to locate the enemy agent chick. Where they really botched it up is when they decided that one of the two good guys is dating the bitch! Sure, she's suppose to be some crafty, tricky master of disguise and deception, but it's so obvious from the beginning that they've got their enemy right under their noses! It's hard to suspend disbelief, rather like watching the old SUPERMAN series (or movies) where nobody can put two and two together and realize Clark Kent & Superman are one in the same! In-between the stupid plot twists & obligatory romantic interludes, there are indeed some inspired action scenes (i.e. the burning corpse which falls from a building window down onto a car!) though. There's some dull drama, but also enough snipers, espionage action, SWAT teams and gunplay to maintain interest. As the undercover villain, Kim Yun-jin spends a lot of time doing domestic stuff like tending to her fish-tanks, because later on, these little fishies are a major plot point— in fact, the name Shiri (also

pronounced & translated "Swiri" in some dialects) is that of a fish native to South Korea. Anyway, by the time our two idiotic heroes realize Kim Yun-jin is the villain they've been seeking all along, it's almost too late, for she and another main villain (Choi Min-sik) were right about to assassinate a politician or two as they attended a sporting event. I don't want you to lose any sleep, so just rest assured the villains (Kim Yun-jin and Choi Min-sik) get shot via plenty of blood, and the politicians do not. Oh yeah, one of the two heroes dies too, but since I can't tell them apart, it's not important. ** -DF



From India:

MUTHU 1995, Produced by Kavithalaya Productions P. Ltd, directed by K.S. Ravikumar, starring: Rajinikanth, Meena, Sarat Babu and Radharavi, reviewed by Isabelle Stephen

MUTHU was shown at the Imperial theatre during the Fantasia festival (see complete coverage elsewhere), on July 30th 2000. Before the movie began, Karim Hussain (one of the programming directors of the festival) did a short presentation to tell us that Muthu is "an experience", Muthu is "a way of life". He reassured us by saying that we would definitely understand the story of the movie even with the partial subtitles. I was really not convinced but found his presentation quite funny. Then the movie began. My first reaction was: "Oh my god! What's that???" and I thought about leaving the theater right then and there, but the song was so good that it distracted my mind from the flick's tacky hero, and I finally had a good laugh at a main character (some weird guy) who has such good sentiments (he sings a song about "Earth who loves man, man who loves Earth", all the while swinging his scarf with such style!). But soon I found myself really getting into the movie.

MUTHU is a comedy, a love story, a martial arts movie (some cool fight scenes!), a drama, and also a musical. Muthu fights, sings and dances!!! He is a superhero with a mustache! The

music of MUTHU is absolutely exquisite, the rhythm of Indian songs is irresistible. It is hard to not thump your feet and wave your hips. Muthu's facial expressions are just too funny (the character looks so confident)! Muthu is definitely my discovery of the year 2000! A very special film that everyone should appreciate. Even if the version I saw was partly subtitled, I had no problem understanding it. Karim was right, the movie is so visual that we understand everything, and he was right too, when he said that Muthu is an experience. Rajinikanth, the lead actor who play Muthu, is considered the "Jackie Chan of India". The movie was a huge success in Japan. It may look like a movie made in the seventies but no, it was made in 1995. It is a colorful movie, full of life. Sometimes it may be a little bit long (the movie is two and a half hours long!), but I found each scene charming. Speaking of charming, you really have to see Meena, the actress who play Ranganayaki, she is so beautiful!!! It is a pleasure to see her dance and sing.

The story revolves around Muthu, a servant in a big property (where servants are considered part of the family). The story begins with the birthday of Muthu's master. His master's mother is angry because her son isn't married yet. The master doesn't want to get married even after meeting his niece Padmini. Then, there is a big quiproquo after the master falls in love with an actress, Ranganayaki and announced to his mother that he changed his mind and he would get married. Of course, everybody thought that he would marry his niece Padmini (yeah, you read right, Padmini is his niece). In the meantime after a big fight at the theater, Muthu and Ranganayaki, the actress, have to flee together and while they try to find their way back to Muthu's master place, they fall in love. **** -Isabelle Stephen

From Mexico:

CHANOC Y EL HIJO DEL SANTO VS LOS VAMPIROS ASESINOS (Chanoc & The Son of Santo vs The Killer Vampires) 1981, Produced by Fernando Uribe, Directed by Rafael Perez Grovas, Assitant Dir.: Jose Amezcuita, Script: Roberto Marroquin, Director of Photography: Alfredo Uribe, Cast: Nelson Velazquez, Rubi Re, Marcos Vargas, Arturo Cobo Cobitos, Carlos Suarez, Santo El Nemascarado De Plata, El Hijo Del Santo, Reviewed by Damon Foster

The son of Santo does several decent karate kicks in what could almost be considered a Mexican kung fu film! Damn near any movie which features some martial arts is of interest to "Asian Oddities", the column where anything goes. In this case, what "goes" is this terrible Mexican adventure— it should go right down the drain. Anyway, before I go any further, I think I should at least give a vague introduction to the genre of Mexican wrestling mov-



ies. Them Mexicans started making movies starring their favorite masked wrestlers of the ring. The movies were generally like spy films or sci-fi films, only much cheaper, and always have one bout in the ring (shot live, as it happened), to pad out the story of wrestlers pitted against criminals, vampires, mummies, etc. Being that such productions were made in a 3rd world shit-hole like Mexico, none of these films have worthwhile budgets, and most of them are absolutely unwatchable. Very few ever got released to America, and the reason is obvious: The movies generally suck!!!! Amazingly, there was a high point in Mexican wrestling movies: The late 1960s and early 1970s. There were two or three movies made during this period which are actually tolerable, one of which LAS MOMIAS DE GUANAJUATO ("The Mummies of Guanajuato"), has gone down in history as being the best in Mexico's cinematic Lucha Libre! For once, there was a Mexican movie with a budget and a coherent script. No Mexican movie could qualify as action packed, but this one came close. Sadly, this enjoyable movie was when the genre had reached its pique— it was all downhill after this. It's interesting to note that by 1973, the quality of the films had begun to sink. This is purely a guess on my part, but this was also the period where Chinese kung fu films finally became international hits. Could it be that the wave of action-packed Chinese movies made the comparatively slow-paced Mexican movies obsolete?

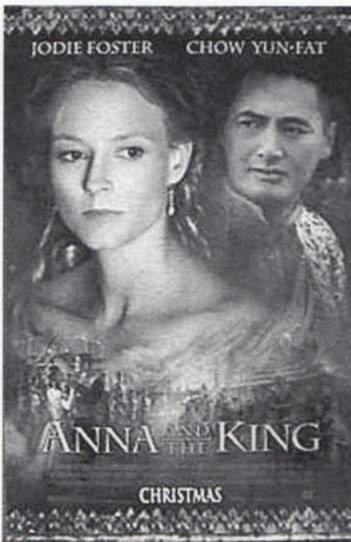
If my theory is true, then 1981's CHANOC Y EL HIJO DEL SANTO VS LOS VAMPIROS ASESINOS would seem to confirm this. This movie is appaulingly bad, and it shows that the genre had died down considerably, it's worse than the 1960s Santo films (SAMSON IN THE WAX MUSEUM, SAMSON VS. THE VAMPIRE WOMEN) that were actually good enough to be dubbed into En-

glish back in the 1960s. This long, boring movie is absolutely heavy on the dialogue, and since it's not worth the price of dubbing or subtitling (any sort of translation would have cost more than making the whole film itself), it remains entertainment for Spanish-language speakers only, but even they don't have bad enough taste to enjoy this thorough waste of time. When they're not talking, they're singing. There are at least for ballads in this movie, so it pretty much qualifies as a musical. Also, I was surprised it was made in 1981, because the fashions are so very 1974! I guess it took a while for Mexico to catch on.

This is one of the last film appearances of the late great wrestler, El Santo—the most famous “Luchadore” in Mexican wrestling history. His theatrical antics in the ring were way ahead of any of that WWF garbage, and he entertained us in the 1960s (SAMSON VS. THE VAMPIRE WOMEN) and the 1970s (LAS MOMIAS DE GUANAJUATO), but in this movie, an aging Santo appears for a few seconds at the beginning, before he basically passes on the torch to his son (“El Hijo Del Santo”). They both only appear together for a few seconds and give each other a loving embrace before Santo Jr. goes off on his own adventure. This opening takes place in a cave, and we basically see Santo Jr. in uncostumed form, without his mask. But a Mexican masked wrestler who willingly reveals his identity is unheard of. So even in his mild-mannered form, he's wearing huge sunglasses, a fake mustache and an obvious wig—he looks ridiculous without the obligatory silver mask. In this film, his “transformation” into his wrestler form is not simply a case of putting on his silver mask & wig—he uses magic or some sort of transmuting technology! He's got some little device which he throws to the ground and creates a puff of smoke, and PRESTO! He's in his superhero wrestling costume! Sadly, he hardly ever does this. The son of Santo only appears for a few minutes (less than five) during the whole running time. Not including his unexciting, uncostumed form, the hero's role amounts to little more than a cameo.

Because it's all in Spanish, I couldn't follow the plot, so nevermind. Let's just say that a couple of inept, aging comedians (one of which wears yet another fake mustache & wig) take up most of the film, as a squad of dogooders seek out some thieves (who wear rubber vampire masks for a few seconds, and hang out in a cemetery) that smuggle diamonds. Action is nearly non-existent. Horror is absolutely non-existent (don't be misled by the title). There is one wrestling match hastily edited in, at random, featuring Hijo Del Santo, Charles Bronson Mexicano, Voltio Negro, El Polaco, Madldito Mendoza, and although it's one of the better scenes in

the film, it has nothing to do with the remainder of the plot, and is ruined by high-speed to produce a “comical” affect. It's amazing that this movie stinks as bad as it does, because El Hijo Del Santo was off to a good start! During his two (count 'em, two!) short fight-scenes outside the wrestling ring, he shows off some promising karate kicks! He's doing forward-snap kicks and spinning-back kicks, and although the choreography could have been better, these two short battles aren't bad. It's rather strange that in the ring, he's doing the typical wrestling moves, but outside, he's using karate kicks, as do the regular, non-costumed heroes who take up the whole film (they all have some basic knowledge of kicks and aren't all bad). The image of a crime-fighting, costumed superhero doesn't last long though, because the majority of the movie is inept comedy and tedious dialogue. -DF



From America:

ANNA AND THE KING 20th Century Fox; 1999, Director: Andy Tennant, Writers: Peter Krikes, Steve Meerson, Running Time: 2hr 10min., Starring: Chow Yun Fat, Jodie Foster, Bai Ling (THE CROW, THE LOST EMPIRE) & Keith Chin, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Finally, American movie makers have cast Chow Yun Fat in a role which seems to suit him; a part which relies on his acting ability instead of his obviously limited ability at action & stunts. I think Chow looks right at home in his role as the majestic king of Siam. However, the part strikes me as requiring a shaved head, like Yul Brenner in the movie and the Broadway hit THE KING AND I. Chow's greasy, slicked back hair seems too modern for the 1862 setting.

MY only real problem with ANN AND THE KING is that it's simply not my genre of choice. Other than a little bit of bloodshed here & there, and an exploding bridge at the climax, there's no action. That's okay though, I wasn't expecting any. So I tried accepting it as a historical. In this manner, the



movie almost succeeds. The first hour is interesting because of the cultural comparisons between the British and the Siamese. My, them Asians sure come off as a bunch of backwards, ignorant, superstitious savages! Chow himself plays an egotistical dictator (granted, he's a very well-dressed egotistical dictator) who condones atrocities. But the educational value dies in the middle of the movie, when the story shifts gears and focuses more on Chow's growing friendship with Jodie Foster. I've sat through nearly the whole movie (but the latter half caught me dozing more than once), and now I can finally give the verdict; basically a “thumbs down”. Some scenes are interesting, so I didn't hate the movie. I was bored a few times, and could have used a little more action and comedy, so I think I'll only give it one star. To be fair, this movie may very accurate historically, I don't know. It's based on real people. Anna Leonowens really existed. I heard the cable station, A&E had a biography of her, but unfortunately, I never saw it. Siam is based on a real country (it actually existed!) too, but it's now called Thailand. The flick, however, couldn't do location filming in Thailand, because the Thais felt the script defamed The King, who's a much revered figure over there.

One more thing: This is the first Jodie Foster movie I've sat through in its entirety since the 1970s when I saw THE LITTLE GIRL WHO LIVES DOWN THE LANE. I never really liked her or her dyke-like voice, and her last name was a constant source of torment for me when I was a child. So let me set the record straight once and for all: She and I are not related! She's not my brother! I must say, however— she performs well in this movie. She's lost the masculine voice I used to find so annoying, and in ANNA AND THE KING, her British accent is damn near convincing.

Story-wise, it's all about British colonial rule in places like Siam and Burma. Jodie Foster plays Anna Leonowens, some teacher sent to Siam to teach English to the King's little spoiled brats. She too has a son, and this subplot drags on, more than once. King Chow Yun Fat has many wives and concubines, and despite rivalry from

murderous Burmese soldiers, he still finds time to talk about white elephants. He gets frustrated that Anna thwarts some of his country's primitive atrocities, but he eventually develops respect for the cocky feminist. * -DF

From Korea:



YONGGARY 2001 (AKA: “Yonggary vs. Cyker”, “Yonggary 2000”, “Yonggary 1999”, “Yonggary 1998”, the movie was recently released as “Reptilian”) ZeroNine Entertainment Co. in Association with: Media Film International, Casting: Robin Eckland & Anthony Barnad, Director of Photography: An Hong Kim, Visual Effects Design: Zeronine Digital, Created by Hyung Rae Shim, Screenplay: Marty Poole, Edited by Steve Swersky, Executive Producers: David A. Smitas, P.I. Leone, Yong Ho Lee, Produced & Directed by Hyung Rae Shim, Cast: Dan Cashman, Bruce Cornwell, Dennis Howard, Matt Landers, Richard B. Livingston, Donna Philipson, Wiley Pickett, Brad Sergi, Briant Wells, Harrison Young, Reviewed by Damon Foster

So this is the upcoming Korean movie that so many people were talking about?! The movie that they started working on 1996 and showed a trailer of at the Milano film festival in 1997? The movie they tried to sell for three million dollars at Cannes 1998? The only reason American fanboys were so obnoxiously anxious to see this flick in particular (as opposed to more entertaining efforts like TYRANNO'S CLAW or DRAGON TUKKA) is because they all thought it was a sequel to the 1967 Korean movie, YONGARY: MONSTER FROM THE DEEP. Not only does this new Yongary have a different spelling (the extra ‘G’), but a more accurate title for this recent release would be Y.I.N.O. (Yongary In Name Only!). Y.I.N.O. is as big a bastardization as Tri-Star's GODZILLA (AKA G.I.N.O.), and it has many similarities to Tri-Star's abomination. Y.I.N.O. is yet another example of an Asian icon (in the tradition of Godzilla, Ultraman, Jackie Chan, etc.) coming to America and getting changed for the worse. But there's a twist; the strange thing being that despite the absolutely American trappings, this is still theoretically an Asian movie! The cast is entirely American, as are the settings, because producer Shim Hyung Rae (AKA Shim Hyung Lei, Shim Hyong Rye, Shim Hyung Rei, Ray Shim, Hyung Rae Shim, etc.) wanted to fool everybody into thinking this is an American movie! At that he succeeded, that's for damn sure. The generic cast of

2001년 한국 SF 액션의 새로운 도전



American never-was-beens looks pretty generic and typical of the casts in Hollywood blockbusters, even though the version I'm reviewing is completely dubbed in Korean. Though ZeroNine Entertainment succeeded in making a worthwhile "American film", I think that defeats the whole purpose! A few years back, I reported that Shim Hyung Rae decided to bring Yonggary/Yonggary back to the big screen because he was disappointed that the original (1967's YONGARY, MONSTER FROM THE DEEP) owed all its special effects to a Japanese company. He wanted to make a version of the monster which was "Korean". Despite the irritating Korean pop song at the ending credits (this will definitely be cut from the American version!), this movie is anything but Korean in nature— it's distinctly American!

Come to think of it, I did spot one Korean actor in Y.I.N.O. Watch for the frightening, tall miner with a bizarre chin. He's Seo Chan Ho, and can also be seen in DRAGON TUKA, TYRANNO'S CLAW, and has an absolutely pointless role in YOUNG GU & THE DINOSAUR JUJU. At one point in his career, he was also doing wrestling on Japanese

TV. He seems to have a prolific list of credits, and yet in Y.I.N.O., he is just a minor background character— blink and you'll miss him.

Though Y.I.N.O. disappointed me somewhat, it's not a bad film. It's okay. There are a number of neat effects shots, like at the beginning, when miners are investigating what appears to be a uranium mine, and one guy is killed by a volcanic (at least, I think so; I won't know for sure, until they release an English version) explosion. Bodies disintegrate and we see the corpse's skeleton! Later on, there's an alien spacecraft, and these miniatures are great, just as good as anything I ever saw in STAR WARS or STAR TREK. When Yonggary finally attacks some city, soldiers in jet-packs engage him in combat! All in all, the movie is entertaining, and even the acting seems to be well done. The characters appear to be well defined, and the cast's performances are far superior to that of Tri-Star's G.I.N.O. I feel Y.I.N.O. is much better than G.I.N.O., and perhaps I'll go so far as to say it's every bit as good as GODZILLA 2000 (in my opinion). It's not a wonderful film, but they obviously put a lot of work

into it; it two months to create the character and three months to develop the scenario concepts.

Its downfalls are the alien invaders themselves (they've got a neat robot look but are obvious hand-puppets) and of course, the title monster. Yonggary is entirely made up of CGI effects, to cash in on Tri-Star's appalling movie. He looks like Tri-Star's so-called "Godzilla", and moves just like him, with that same artificial style of calculated, move-by-numbers pacing that all CGI creatures have. It's so sad that the Koreans don't understand the concepts of tradition and fandom. When Toho saw what an injustice Tri-Star had done, they were quick to get back to basics with the superior GODZILLA 2000. Shim Hyung Rae has no respect for fans (hell, they wouldn't let G-Fest or the Asian Fantasy Film Expo show it, but were certain to send it to Cannes!) of the originals, and instead of making something remotely faithful to the original movie, he completely bastardizes the concept. Obviously, Shim is going for the global, big bucks by cashing in on GINO. In 1998, they shipped a 2-minute trailer sample (later available on the Internet, for fans to download and view) to America, and according to an interview in the Korean magazine Shin Dong Ah, they received orders from 70 different countries (if this were completely true, I think the movie would have come out earlier)! An early attempt to pitch the product was at Cannes '98, when YINO was in head-on competition with GINO! So Zero Nine tried countering with some really elaborate YINO merchandise, like mugs, ties, baseball caps, and even more suggestive stuff like panties, condoms and a rape alarm! When he took YINO to all these big film festivals, his colleagues in the Korean film industry laughed at him, since even the most famous Korean directors have problems getting their movies shown internationally. Shim's company, ZeroNine Productions concentrates exclusively on sci-fi films, since it's their only chance at worldwide success. Though Shim Hyung Rae himself toiled in Korean sci-fi films since the 1980s (and OC has been covering them

forever!), his company, Zero Nine has actually made only made four sci-fi films (not including YINO): YOUNG GU AND THE DINOSAUR JUJU, TYRANNO'S CLAW, POWER KING, and DRAGON TUKKA.

According to the interview, problems arose in making the giant dinosaur (who looks a lot like Yonggary '67) costume for YOUNG GU AND THE DINOSAUR JUJU, as is obvious to anybody who saw the movie about this stiff, plastic dinosaur. So it was suggested that the Koreans once again get their FX from Japan. But instead, Zero Nine hired technicians and students, to create their own crude dinosaur for the movie. The mistakes encountered educated everyone, and without YOUNG GU AND THE DINOSAUR JUJU, this here YINO wouldn't exist. Oh Tae Hyoung, one of the establishing members of Zero Nine, went on to say: "In the second movie (TYRANNO'S CLAW), we filmed the flying scene with the teranodon and cave-man without any safety equipment. The scene has a lot of activity, and some actors were injured. Director/main actor Shim worked very hard, and other actors had to keep up (like in Jackie Chan movies). If they have no technology to use, they make up for it with risks to their body (like in HK movies)." The third movie was POWER KING, a science fiction & superhero film similar to STAR WARS, which represents a major improvement in special effects since YOUNG GU AND THE DINOSAUR JUJU. Their other big, pre-YINO film, DRAGON TUKKA (which allegedly exported to ten nations and made 300,000 dollars!) was an attempt to connect Korean history with aliens. The more popular characters in the movie were the ones resembling Japanese samurai, and Chinese heroes (i.e. the guy resembling the Monkey King), which disappointed Shim. He wanted to popularize Korean heroes, such as "Ssa-tto" (mayor of ancient Korea), "San-Jug" (Korean ancient thief), and "Er-Sa" (secret agency who work for people to punish corrupt politicians), a group I suspect has also been translated as "Sulsa", and considered "Korean ninjas". Regardless, with all this experience at sci-fi movie making, Zero

English version: REPTICIAN.



FANTASIA 2000

by Isabelle Stephen

Nine was ready for their biggest challenge: YINO! It cost 7 billion won to do the special effects, but since I know nothing of Korean currency, this figure doesn't mean shit to me.

Writing this review got me depressed. People will probably remember this movie while the original classic may remain forgotten. So I tried to do some research and find out whatever I could about the original YONGARY, MONSTER FROM THE DEEP. It seems that the 1967 film cost "70 million mon" (Korean currency) to make. I suspect it was the Japanese company Daiei (I just compared the FX and sound to Gamera movies) who handled special effects, but read it was Toei who distributed it to America. It was a hit in Korea, and it's rumored that rip-offs (with names like GAEGARY, GWANGGARI, and GAEMINGARI) were created—though nobody has ever seen these films. According to an issue of the outstanding Japanese magazine Uchusen, there's some guy named Sei Mura, who's a collector of rare old 8mm films, and as of 1992, actually had some behind-the-scenes "making of" footage from the 1967 YONGARY! The only known photo (below) of this shows an incomplete Yongary costume, taken before the horn was added to Yongary's snout. But, getting back to the topic of YONGGARY 2001.....

The story has something to do with miners or archeologists who dig up some dinosaur bones in a cave. While these Americans talk (and do plenty of it) and argue over who knows what, a squad of alien invaders has decided to attack the earth. Doing so requires a beam which brings the dinosaur bones back to life and flesh grows on them—and hence the giant monster Yonggary! Not only have the space cyborgs unleashed him, but they can teleport him to select cities, to go on rampages. His body lights up and emits beams, and these visuals look

like a quick steal from Godzilla's meltdown effects in GODZILLA VS. DESTROYER. Yonggary smashes plenty of cities and battles the military, and I've got to admit, it's exciting! Coming from me, this is a major statement, because I normally can't get into CGI crap. Eventually, a scientist manages to rid Yonggary of his link with the invaders, by placing some sort of amulet or talisman (it was found in the cave with Yonggary's bones) on the rampaging monster's forehead. In Korean, I couldn't tell exactly what was going on, but when Yonggary becomes a good guy, the soldiers at some United Nations base sure seem happy about the monster's transition. The alien android bad guys, however, aren't thrilled. So they morph another giant monster, supposedly called "Cyker", on the video box. Cyker and Yonggary have a decent battle. They're both computer generated, and therefore look like badly super-imposed cartoons, but the fight is still okay. Whenever Yonggary tears off one of his enemy's limbs, tentacles spring from the beast to grapple with Yonggary (these scenes remind me of stuff in GODZILLA 2000, but it's hard to know who had the idea first). But eventually, Yonggary decapitates and defeats Cyker, so the alien spaceship makes a hasty retreat, either into a black hole or another dimension. I think a better climax would have been if Yonggary would have sought out the alien ship and destroyed it (that's why Godzilla remains cool, he'll wipe out both monsters and the flying saucers responsible for them!). Yonggary is the victorious good guy, but all this fighting has worn him out. So it ends strangely, with badly animated helicopters flying the sleeping giant out of the city. His dangling from strings almost reminds me of Kong being carried by helicopters (1963's KING KONG VS. GODZILLA), but it's not as comical. ** -Damon Foster

Place: Imperial Theatre, Montreal Canada Days: July 13th through July 31st
Director: Pierre Corbeil

Guests:

Maki Terashima International Operations Manager of Production I.G presenting "BLOOD:THE LAST VAMPIRE"

Hiroyuki Kitakubo Director of "BLOOD: THE LAST VAMPIRE"

Shu Lea Cheang Director of "I.K.U."

Tokito Ayumu Actress of "I.K.U."

Lau Ching-Wan Actor of "RUNNING OUT OF TIME" and "VICTIM"

Amy Kwok Actress of "VICTIM"

First off, a little bit of history: From July 13 to 31 was the fifth edition of one of the biggest Asian movie festivals: Fantasia (in Montreal, Canada). Everything began five years ago when a group of people (with the same taste for fantastic and horror movies) got fed up relying on bootleggers and bad-quality tapes to see the movies they truly loved. According to Mitch Davis (one of the programming directors of the festival), there are many film festivals in Montreal. So with the help of Pierre Corbeil (from Vision Globale), who took the chance to finance the first Fantasia, the festival was a success and it didn't stop there—it kept getting bigger and acquired a good reputation. What could you expect from Fantasia? Well, lots of movies (53 movies this year, of which 28 were Asian movies), short-films (31 shorts this year, nine of which are Asian), and also some important guests: Movie directors, actors and producers from all around the world, and the chance for the public to chat with the guests in Q. & A. sessions. If you can stand to see between 3 and 5 movies per day (my back still hurts!), if you don't mind waiting in line up to 2 hours, if you want to meet your favorite movie directors and actors, if you want to see lots of movie premieres, if you want to extend your vision on movies from all around the world and if you want to be surprised, then consider taking your next vacation in Montreal, Canada.

The Festival officially began on July 13th, but the day before, Mitch Davis (one of the programming directors), invited me to go to the avant-premiere of the festival. They showed the X-MEN movie. Since it's not an Asian movie, I will just say that it was surprisingly good. It was a foretaste of the festival with a cool theater ambiance. People were just euphoric! For the official movie premiere of the festival, the place was sold out. They presented a Canadian movie called BETWEEN THE NIGHT AND MONTEVIDEO. After some delay, I can say that the movie was so-so in comparison to the other movies of the festival. After the movie, I had a little chat with Attila Bertalan, the director (who is also the actor of the movie), and he told me that he was really satisfied with the public reaction. I will not say more since it has nothing to do with Asian movies.

So, now, let's concentrate on the Asian guests of the festival! I met Shu Lea Cheang, the director of I.K.U., outside the theater a few minutes before the presentation of the movie. She said that she was really nervous because the movie she was to present was the producer's cut and she had never seen it. I was to ask her why it was not her cut that was shown but then, we all had to go into the theater... She presented the movie by say-



ing: "Do you like sex? Do you like your sex cyber?" The crowd was really energetic! There was a wonderful ambiance in the place. And, well, the people calmed down during the movie... People seemed to be disappointed by the movie and so was Shu Lea Cheang. At the Q & A she said that her version was more graphic and less experimental. I didn't speak to her after the movie, because she didn't seem to be in such a good mood.

Lau Ching-Wan, the Hong Kong superstar, made two appearances on stage to present his two movies: *RUNNING OUT OF TIME* and *VICTIM*. He answered the public's questions after the movies. He was accompanied by his wife, Amy Kwok who was also the lead actress in *VICTIM* (she played his wife). Lau Ching-Wan had a really warm welcome. He is a really kind man and he took the time to sign autographs and took pictures with his fans. At the Q. and A., somebody actually asked him where he got his hair cut, so in addition to him recommending where in Hong Kong to get a good haircut, he also talked about working with Amy Kwok in films, that he likes to work with his wife even if sometimes he wants to kill her!

Maki Terashima, the International Operations Manager of Production I.G presented the movie *BLOOD: THE LAST VAMPIRE*, with the director Hiroyuki Kitakubo. They also did a Q and A period after this animated movie (which is somewhere between the short movie running time and that of feature-length, but is considered feature-length). The movie is only 48 minutes long and was shown with 4 short movies of 2D and 3D animation: *ILL*, *HEAVY ROTATION*, *TOKITAMA HUSTLE* and *PLUG*. Maki Terashima told us that there will be no movie for 2001 (last year she presented *JIN-ROH*), because *BLOOD: THE LAST VAMPIRE* took 3 years to make. She couldn't tell if there would be any new animation for 2002. We really hope so because the movies of Production IG are always wonderful!

Here is the list of the Asian movies I saw with a brief thought: *GEMINI*: Slow but with very realistic fight scenes *THE MISSION*. Needs more violence. *BULLETS OVER SUMMER*: Really cute comedy, touching and funny. *I.K.U.*: Soft porn, too soft to be really interesting. *A.L.I.C.E.*: The 3D animation is great, they just forgot to find an original story. *REBIRTH OF MOTHRA 3*: The kind of movie to laugh at. Really good in its genre. *2000 A.D.*: Typical American action movie, just too typical. *UZUMAKI*: Completely fucked up! Hallucinating! *DEAD OR ALIVE:: E-X-P-L-O-I-T-A-T-I-O-N* (I liked it!) *ATTACK THE GAS STATION*: Crazy! One of the funniest movies of the festival! *RUNNING OUT OF TIME*: With two of the more popular actors, this can't be bad. *CHAOS*: A sensation of calm nothingness. *THE BLACK HOUSE*: Begins like a comedy and finishes as a horror movie. *VICTIM*: Disappointing, we wanted a horror movie! *BLOOD: THE LAST VAMPIRE*: Cool animation, great fight scenes. *RING 0*: We should have learned more about the terrifying *Sadako*. *ULTRAMAN TIGA: THE FINAL ODYSSEY*: Children liked it very much! *MUTHU*: My absolutely favorite movie of the festival (see review elsewhere)!

All movies were in competition. The public had to vote for their three favorites. So here is the result and my short review of each of these movies in the Asian section: Third Place goes to *THE MISSION*. This is a gangster movie where we follow five bodyguards. I know that this movie was a huge success and that it is this movie that made director Johnnie To famous, but I am not really enthusiastic (I found that there was not enough action). Well, the gunfights were really good but still... I have to admit that it was really funny to see the five guys when they had nothing to do, playing with a ball of paper. Johnnie To was able to show us the human side of the gangsters and not only the "supermen" side. I didn't really like it but I'm sure that everybody who likes gangster movies will absolutely love it!

Second place goes to *BLOOD: THE LAST VAMPIRE*: A girl has to pose as a new student at Yokota Base to investigate and kill a group of vampires. The story is simple but the movie is awesome! I have to specify that this is an animated movie. This is my kind of movie! A cute girl who kicks butt! Yeah! Production IG also brought us the wonderful *JIN-ROH*, and the classic *GHOST IN THE SHELL*. So the animation is impeccable, a must see!

First place goes to *RUNNING OUT OF TIME*: Of course! A Johnnie To movie. A guy who has 4 days left to live decides to do something big, something really big: steal a diamond necklace with the help of a police mediator. The thing is that the mediator doesn't know that he is being manipulated. A strange bond forms between the two men. This was a great movie! I preferred this one over *THE MISSION*. Maybe it looks a little bit too much like a typical U.S.A. action movie, but it is really effective. The two actors, Lau Ching-Wan and Andy Lau, are one of the greatest duos I've ever seen! Action packed movie! Wonderful!

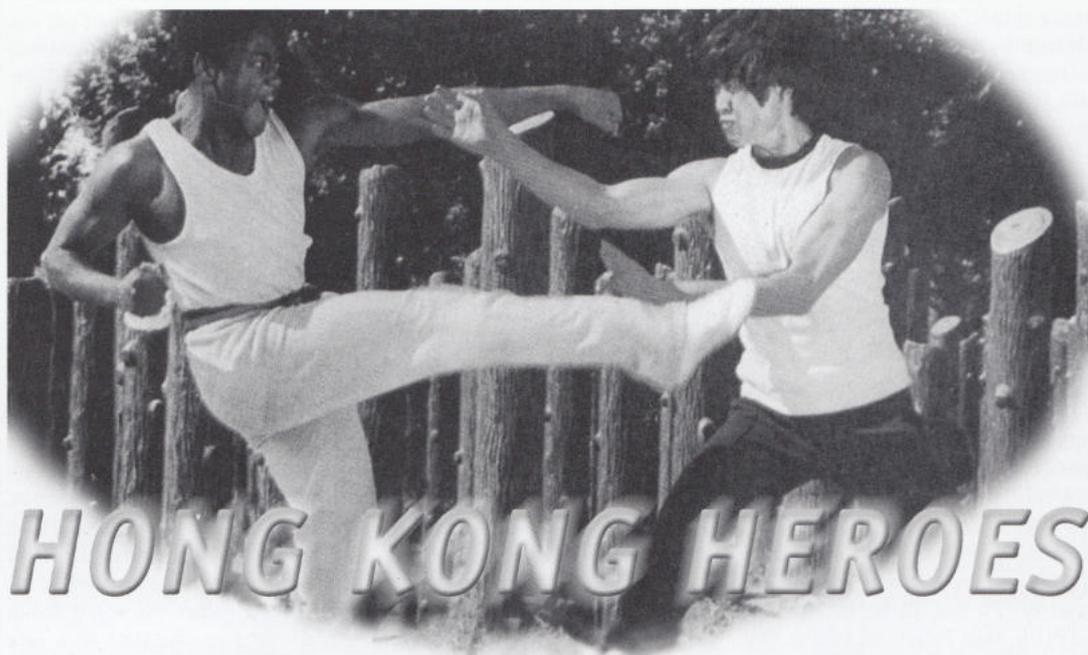
To conclude I'll leave you with my own top three of the Fantasia festival:

3- BLOOD: THE LAST VAMPIRE. See the short review two paragraphs up

2- UZUMAKI: This is a completely crazy horror movie. This movie comes from a manga by Junji Ito. I didn't read it but I saw a couple of drawings, and this live action movie managed to perfectly illustrate these drawings, it is amazing! In a small town some people seem to be fascinated by spirals ("Uzumaki" means Spiral), fascinated to death... The special effects were wonderful, I never saw anything like that before. The story is really bizarre, everything in this movie is strange.

1- MUTHU : This is a little bit special. A couple of days before the showing of the movie the programming directors learned that they would not receive the movie from India in time. So they chose to present the video copy that they received for the review. The thing is that the video was not entirely subtitled and the colors were really weird. So they announced the movie as "a video version, partly subtitled with strange colors". They mentioned that they would reimburse the tickets if that doesn't suit the viewers. I would absolutely not have gone to see the movie, but my boyfriend insisted "if it's boring, we will just leave". So I finally said okay. Before the movie Karim Hussain (one of the programming directors) did a presentation in a very humorous way. He said that "Muthu" is an experience; "Muthu" is a way of life. He explained to us that maybe people found it tedious to make lots of subtitles, so they just put the more important subtitles in, etc., so although it can convey the basics of the script, you wouldn't understand every line in the movie. Seems horrible? But no! It was so great! The movie is full of wonderful fights, beautiful costumes, singing and dancing. It is sometimes a comedy, sometimes an action drama, sometimes a musical, sometimes a love story. Everything at the same time! /Sounds like every Indian movie I've ever seen. -DF/ The movie is 135 minutes long and that was not long enough! I want more of *MUTHU*! Rajinikanth is a wonderful singer, actor, dancer, fighter! And with a mustache! I hope one day we will have more access to Indian cinema. Karim was right, it IS an experience! Well, 'till next time keep on enjoying Asian movies! -Isabelle Stephen





Intro by Damon Foster

Welcome to another edition of OC's continuing look at Chinese kung fu movies! As has always been the case, I'm dividing it into five categories, each category representing another decade. To the best of my knowledge, OC is the only publication which regularly reviews the movies of so many time periods; the competition rags and the dime-a-dozen websites are still busy drooling over *THE BRIDE WITH WHITE HAIR* and *CROUCHING TIGER HIDDEN DRAGON*. So anyway, once again, OC presents fifty years of Hong Kong action, based on its decade. Before we get into the film reviews themselves, here's fifty years of kung fu films, as I personally see it:

The 1960s: The classic period. Obscurities and crude films which are important historically, for they laid down the groundwork for what would later be the kung fu film. Peking opera stars start learning real kung fu, and occasionally, are allowed to use such skills. Most of the movies concentrate on story, romance and music, however. Case in point: *THE GRAND SUBSTITUTION*

The 1970s: Chop sockey shlock! Not only does this vital period represent HK's entry into the exploitation field, but this is where the kung fu film finally gets international acclaim, and HK gets put on the cinematic map! The movies were gaudy and cheap, but very fun—this is probably my favorite period for Chinese action movies! But not all 1970s kung fu farces are great, and *KILLER PRIEST* proves this.

The 1980s: The thrills continue, as HK movie makers learn the ropes

and make their own thrilling blockbusters. Many 1980s action films are just as thrilling as the 1970s farces, but with the slick look and Hollywood wannabe budgets, I can't help but think that the HK film scene has been corrupted and has lost its innocence. There were a few 1970s style kung fu movies made in the early 1980s, however. Just ask Lana Zukowski, she's about to review *KUNG FU EXECUTIONER*.

The 1990s: There seemed to be an urge to get back to basics, to emulate the kung fu movies of the 1970s and the sword-hero films of the 1960s. This combination of Chinese culture and American technology makes numerous hits for the international market and the arthouse crowds. But the actual kung fu of the 1970s, and the superb stunts of the 1980s are neglected in favor of special effects and excessive wirework. HK cinema has now definitely lost its innocence, and its lost its roots. Even so, I did manage to find one enjoyable 1990s kung fu caper, and it's called *GREAT HERO FROM CHINA*.

The Zeros: Perhaps it's too early in the century to make a judgement, but it would appear that for the most part, the HK kung fu film has become the Hollywood kung fu film. Most of the major talent has come to America. Granted, these new American/HK hybrids are a cultural icon all their own, and it's becoming difficult to tell what's a Chinese movie and what's an American movie. As for the quality of the martial arts, it seems to echo the wire & pulley shit which killed the kung fu film in the 1990s. But the decade is young, and it's al-

ways possible that people will realize they've been had, and demand a higher quality product. But for the time being, audiences aren't interested in a quality product, they're interested in garbage like *ROMEO MUST DIE*.

And now, the reviews:

1960's:

萬古流芳

THE GRAND SUBSTITUTION *Shaw Bros.; 1965, Producer: Run Run Shaw, Directed by Yen Chun, Cast: Li Lihua, Li Ying, Ivy Ling Po, Tien Feng, Hao Li, Reviewed by Damon Foster*

I could have sworn I reviewed this musical in OC years ago, but I couldn't find which issue it was in—and besides, I was given the rare opportunity to view it in an actual theater (even though the print was washed out and had too much red tint to it) which I felt would give the drama a better chance at a positive review, than if I tried watching the videotape again. Watching it in the theater was an interesting experience. At one point, it was embarrassing. I had decided that, rather than writing notes in the dark, I would record my comments on an audio cassette. So I grabbed a taperecorder and an audio cassette which should have been blank. But it had some hard rock music on it. In the theater, when I tried to press the "Stop" button, I accidentally hit "Play", and the tape recorder's volume was turned up all the way. I tried fumbling with the damn thing, while people in the au-

dience "Shshshs"-ed me! The seconds seemed like minutes until I finally was able to turn the recorder off, and spent the rest of the movie sunk down in my seat so nobody could see me.

Though the washed out, excessive red coloring diminished the affect of the Shaw sets, the masterful craftsmanship was still somewhat apparent—though not as good as the sets in many of their 1970s films. *THE GRAND SUBSTITUTION* is an oddity because it was a blockbuster & humongous hit for its time, and yet it didn't keep the hit musicals coming. The genre seemed to go out with a bang, because this movie was such a success. Even so, a year or two later, it's record was broken by Wang Yu's classic, *THE ONE-ARMED SWORDSMEN*, which told film-makers that the romantic epics were out, and swordfighting is in! Though the HK filmmakers continued to make occasional musicals, *THE GRAND SUBSTITUTION* was damn near the last of a dying breed, but at least it allowed the genre to go out with a bang. Though it was a classic for it's time, it comes off as painfully cliché-ridden when seen today. That's cliché-ridden to people familiar Chinese opera costumes, anyway. Even when the characters aren't singing, their movements and mannerisms are so incredibly Peking opera that it looks stupid. The dainty way the maidens walk, the villain who constantly strokes his beard, and that "all important", circular head gesture (like the guy is watching a bug fly around in a circle) normally used when a character is getting philosophical, is all just a little too Monkey King-ish. Hell, just watch the scene where Tien Feng is about to walk away, and you'll see that same type of gesture that the Peking opera soldiers use on stage when they're about to march. Most





of you probably aren't even familiar enough with Chinese dramatic gestures to even notice these subtle little references to Chinese opera, but all these moves are painfully obvious to those of us who've watched a lot of this old stuff.

The setting and approach is just like a kung fu film, but with no kung fu, and no swordplay. It's about villainous leader Tu An Chia, who wants to kill every member of minister Chao Tun's clan. The evil warlord's troupes wipe out all but one, a baby—because a substitute baby was killed instead. But none of this is actually shown; there's very little violence or bloodshed here. In one scene, Tien Feng (looking almost young; but I've never seen him not old) plays a swordwielding assassin who does a reverse-film jump up onto a wall. I was expecting some swordfighting or ninja-like action, but instead, he kills himself by running head-first into a tree. Later, some chick's tongue is cut out, but we don't see enough footage to make seem actually gory. Regardless, the hidden baby grows up to be Ivy Ling Po—playing a 15-year old boy named Wu Erh. I don't like them casting an attractive woman to play a boy. I was checking her out, and the film made me feel like both a pedophile and a homo. Anyway, she/he (it) frolics in the forest and arrows a couple cartoon ducks (a budgetary problem, but in an artificial musical like this, animated birds are acceptable) before meeting her long lost mother Princess Chuang Chi, played by Li Lihua. So now the plot thickens, and Ivy Ling Po discovers that the evil minister, Tu An Chia, killed her father. Unfortunately, the two of them don't actually clash, because this isn't an action movie. She just chases the guy a little and while he's running up some stairs, finally stabs him. The cut looks cut in more ways than one. I can't tell if something was censored, or if the blow

was meant to be an out-of-site thing, but they do show the old bastard's dying body rolling down the stairs.
*1/2 -DF
1970's:

KILLER PRIEST (A.K.A.: "Killah' Priest") Supervisor: Lai Yee Soung, Prod.: Tran Thanh Mai, Writers: Chou Ya Tsu, Dung Yen Lyoung, Consultant: Ku Ea, Fighting Directors: Chen Chuan, Ho Ming Hsiao, Asst. Dir.: Hsu Chin Win, Unit Prod.: Li Kung Wei, Huang Kuo Fu, Starring: Chen Hsing, Chia Ning, Wen Chiang Lung, Kao Fei, Chen Lui, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Unfortunately, this movie was re-released from the defunct Ocean Shores label (it still says "Ocean Shores" later in the flick, when the icon pops up!), and is now part of the "Wu Tang Collection"—whatever that means. In this case, it means they hastily changed the title from KILLER PRIEST to KILLAH' PRIEST! The screen just abruptly blacks out (we lose the picture), just so they could make the title illiterate! It's obvious that this videotape has been infected by what I jokingly call "The Ebonic Plague", there are ads at the beginning for some hip hop magazine and a rapper's C.D. Different strokes for different folks, I suppose. I still don't quite understand why they would change the title of this film, unless they get some pleasure from endorsing a derogatory stereotype. I was wondering if maybe the whole movie was going to be dubbed into ebonics. I was expecting to hear Chen Sing say: "Yo, you is be mah kung fu student, know' wahm sayin'?" Later, another character might say: "Ah's is be practicin' mah kung fu, an' ah's a gonna' avenge mah' homeez death. Know wahm sayin'?" But no, nothing else about the movie was changed. In fact, the voice-dubbing is so ultra-typical that I counted them saying "But still" no less than nine times.

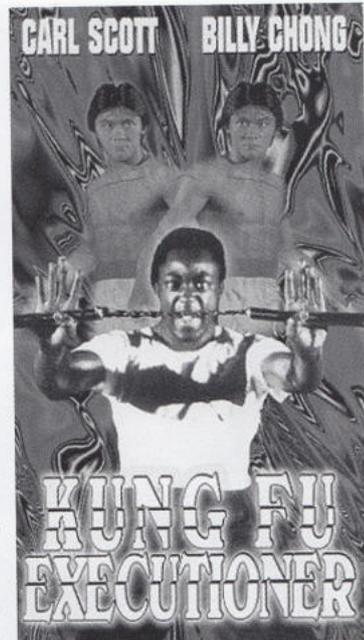
But it doesn't matter who re-released it this week, or what ethnic group this videotape is intended for, because KILLER/KILLAH' PRIEST leaves much to be desired. Even to myself, who's always loved 1970s chop sockey, this movie is poorly made. The title character turns out to be none other than the famous monk Dahmo (here pronounced "Tahmo"), the real guy who founded kung fu at Shaolin Temple six hundred years ago last Thursday. My favorite version of Tahmo was the TV version starring Liang Chia Jen in the title role: The series TAK MOR, ORIGINATOR OF KUNG FU. So it becomes

hard not to compare that version with KILLER PRIEST. But KILLER PRIEST simply can't compare with the infinitely superior TV series. In that show, Liang Chia Jen plays a charismatic, righteous character who's completely likable. His exploits alone are so inspiring it almost made me want to become a Buddhist! Sadly, Chen Hsing's performance isn't even that of a likable character. Though he's considered a good guy (and is constantly saying: "Buddha bless you"), he comes off as rude, pushy and intrusive; he's so unlike the wise, easy-going, lovable monk of the TV show. And yet, there are similarities: In both this movie and the series, the famed Indian Buddhist uses magical powers to fake his own death and come back from the grave. In both, he also convinces a young man to join him at Shaolin and become a monk, much to the regret of the guy's annoying, persistent girlfriend. Because both these subplots seem popular, I suspect they're part of some old Tahmo fable, or perhaps based on fact. One day, I shall have to do some actual research on Tahmo's history.

This is a talky story (if it were subtitled or had no translation, I couldn't have sat through this junk) of Tahmo coming to town to deal with a devious Taoist villain, and a sniveling politician (like a mayor or sheriff) who helps him. The story has a few unexpected elements, like Tahmo virtually walking on water (he uses a tiny, flimsy reed as a surf board), and some other far-fetched fantasy where the Taoist proves he can control the weather. He makes it rain to end a drought— at first the townsfolk regard him as a hero, but later he pours poison in the water supply and wipes out most of the town. Meanwhile, Tahmo wants some doctor to become his kung fu student, and I'm not sure why. Eventually, Tahmo and his pupil do finally fight the bad guys (and henchmen wear blue & green makeup— it's never explained why), but the fights are substandard. They also overdue those impossible leaps. I like reverse film leaps and trampoline affects, but I think in KILLER PRIEST we had too much of a good thing. The only person who's fighting skill I liked was the leading lady, but she gets killed during the ending battle so that her love interest can avenge her death. -DF

1980's:

KUNG FU EXECUTIONER (A.K.A.: "Black Jim Smashes All") Eternal; 1981, Prod.: Peng Chang, Dir.: Lin Chan Wei, Released by Arena Home

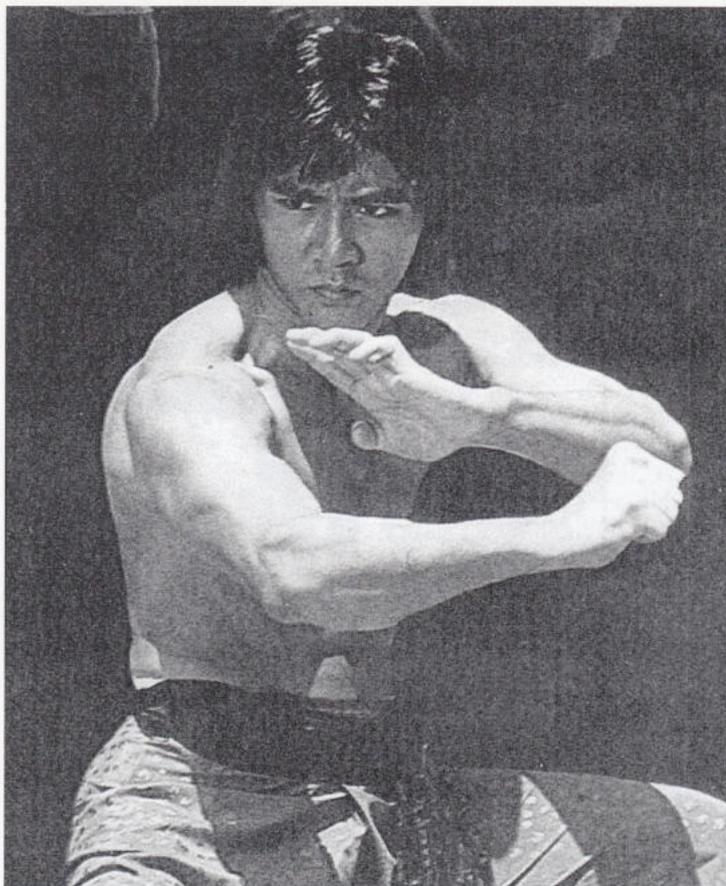


Video (1998), Starring: Billy Chong, Carl Scott, Chen Sing, Chiang Tao, Chen Yu-hsin, Lan Yiu-li, Miao Tien, Andre Wong, Reviewed by Lana Zukowski

Ever wished there was a low budget GODFATHER remake set in 1930s Shanghai and starred Billy Chong in the Michael Corleone role? Dream no more, because such a film really does exist, the early 1980s (?) obscurity, KUNG FU EXECUTIONER. Francis Ford Coppola's complex tale of warring Italian/American mobsters was stripped to its bare bones and re-imagined as a tale of warring 1930s Chinese gangsters. What writer/director Lin Chan Wei has created is "Kung Fu Godfather Lite" (don't expect the richness of the original).

The fun comes from seeing low budget imitations of specific scenes from THE GODFATHER (no, I won't spoil the film for you by revealing which scenes. But I will say the famous scene where Alex Rocco is shot through his sunglasses is not copied— well, not here anyway. There is a HK picture that rips off that scene, but I can't recall its title). The fight choreography of KUNG FU EXECUTIONER tries hard to copy Bruce Lee's style, and Billy Chong is sometimes forced to do a bit of Bruce Lee mimicry. This is unfortunate, because Billy is an extraordinary martial artist in his own right, and doesn't need to copy anyone. That being said, the action is not well staged. The fights are brief, brutal affairs, and one stand out sequence has a nunchaku wielding Billy Chong slaughtering a gang of Japanese swordsmen. Not enough scenes like that!

Black martial artist Carl Scott co-starred with Chong in A HARD WAY TO DIE (AKA SUN DRAGON) and also



turns up in this film. He's shoe-horned into KUNG FU EXECUTIONER in a pointless role. Most of his scenes have nothing to do with the main plot. And Carl Scott doesn't team up with Billy Chong to battle the villains, but appears in solo fights instead. Rounding out the cast are chop sockey veterans Chiang Tao and Chen Sing, the latter playing the main villain. A karate stylist, Chen Sing enjoyed a lengthy career in HK cinema, despite his limited martial arts skills and an out-of-control weight problem (he just kept getting fatter and fatter over the years— not unlike certain American action stars, right?).

To sum up, KUNG FU EXECUTIONER is a low budget actioner with mostly mediocre martial arts, of interest solely to Billy Chong completists—and to those who want to see a (lame) kung fu variation on THE GODFATHER., which changes the ending (translation: Billy Chong's "Michael Corleone" walks away from the family business at the end). Rent THE GODFATHER instead, and then view its even better sequel (but avoid Part III). Foot note: These days, Billy Chong is a popular TV star in Malaysia. * -Lana Zukowski

1990's:
GREAT HERO FROM CHINA
 (A.K.A.: "Martial Art Master Wong Fei

Hong" & "Martial Art Master Wong Fei Hung") Great Audience & TV Production Ltd.; 1993, Released by Filmswell International Limited, Directed by Lee Chiu, Starring: Jean Carlo (AKA Chin Kar Lok), Mark Lim (AKA Lam Ching Ying), Shirley Ng, Raymond Sun, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Yet another Wong Fei Hung movie. So I thought this movie would be typical of movies from the 1990s. Lead hero Chin Kar Lok even looks like Jet Li's version of Wong Fei Hung as seen in ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA and its clones. To an extent, GREAT HERO FROM CHINA is indeed just like the other movies of the 1990s. However, there's something which makes this one different; it's got a unique, sometimes scarce element: It's called kung fu. Remember that? It flourished in HK cinema in the 1970s, and it got even flashier in the 1980s. Then, it dwindled in the 1990s when the likes of Tsui Hark realized that suspension wires were cheaper than martial arts choreographers. Though GREAT HERO FROM CHINA has its share of 1990s slickness and Harkian cinematography, it still manages to incorporate some excellent, high-speed martial arts, several times in the movie! I was pleasantly surprised because I actually enjoyed this one, I liked it a lot. I think Chin Kar Lok's skills sur-

pass that of Jet Li, and he's got a more likable persona! He should be an international star. American audiences were impressed enough with Jet so that he could come out here and make it rich. Yet Chin Kar Lok plays the same role, does it better and yet remains unknown in America. But he can also be seen in SHAOLIN AVENGERS, Shogo Shiyutani's FIGHTING FIST and even MR. VAMPIRE 4.

With a lame release like this, it's not hard to see why Chin Kar Lok remains basically an international obscurity. I guess somebody thought "Jean Carlo" (?) should be his new "English" name! Though it does sound like an Americanized version of "Chin Kar Lok", I think the time is long past that Americans need their heroes to sound American. Hell, the names Chin Kar Lok and Lam Ching Ying (in the credits to the left) are ones I added, these actual names don't appear in this English release itself. The voices appear to be the same old English dubbers we remember mainly from dubbing 1970s films, but most of the voices are new (it's been a long time, I'm not sure how many of those old dubbers are still in the business). They do say "But still" once. There are transliteration errors in the dubbing, like when Chin Kar Lok inter-acts with the British Trade Commissioner. It's obvious that in the Chinese version, both are speaking different languages, Cantonese and English. But with everything dubbed in English, it gets weird, especially when the translating character opens his mouth. For example, they're in Canton, and are Chinese. But the guy says to our hero: "So I see, you do understand some English." It's too obvious that they should be speaking to each other in Chinese, I think this dialogue should have been cut from the film completely, or maybe the meaning could have been altered. Otherwise, their voice dubbing is okay, but some purists may not like this videotape (it's readily available, I picked it up at Blockbuster) because of the lazy pan & scan. The format is not letterboxed, so the widescreen sides are cut off. I don't care, but in one scene (watch for the first battle in the casino, after the guys are done betting on who's cricket is tougher), a couple henchmen endure a fall from a second story floor, and after they descend completely out of the shot, we see the obligatory "powder-puff", so I'm sure it was an impressive thud on the ground! But all we see is the

rising dust when they disappear to below the TV screen.

What few credits we get say: "Great Audience & Television Production Ltd.", which makes me wonder if perhaps it's a TV movie, or made for direct-to-video. It's clearly shot on film (not video), so I do think it got a theatrical release. But maybe it was largely financed by some TV station or video company. I don't know. With both Lam Ching Ying and Chin Kar Lok in it, I suspect it's at least partially a Golden Harvest production. But Harvest isn't credited on the video release I found. It's unfortunate that I couldn't find out more about this great film, even my search on the Internet turned up nothing but companies trying to sell me the tape I had just rented.

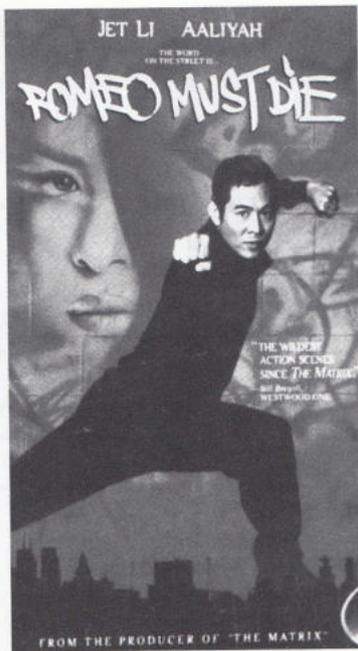
Any movie which pits Chin Kar Lok against the late Lam Ching Ying has got to be a good one. I really enjoyed GREAT HERO FROM CHINA a lot. I could do without our hero's naive romance with some Japanese chick called Yoko (she's not an uninteresting character; but Wong Fei Hung buys her a toy Monkey King, which she talks to), but on the whole, I highly recommend this exciting little movie. There is indeed some far-fetched wirework in GREAT HERO FROM CHINA (but it's not as bad as that in CROUCHING TIGER HIDDEN DRAGON, ONCE UPON I TIME IN CHINA or any of that SWORDSMAN garbage), yet there's way more actual kung fu. The martial arts are high-speed, and with some very skillful, limber, fighters. This movie can not only appeal to the typical bootleggers and new comers who drool over the endless wave of wire & pulley fantasies, but the old-timers and fans of real martial arts movies will get a kick (a spinning back kick, no less!) out of it too. Some of the wire scenes (there are only a few; I promise!) aren't very well done-- it's obvious the wires were visible, so they blurred the top portion of the screen to hide them and it ends up looking worse than the wires themselves. But still: I loved the swift kicks and swordplay. I don't care for those stupid scenes of a single opponent running on his enemy's shoulders (just what moron invented this? I first saw it in an episode of 1982's SUN VULCAN, and thought it was silly then!), because if I was one of those guys, I would step aside and watch the fellow fall down. The occasional scenes of heavy wooden objects becoming airborne due to a single kick are dumb, and I

admit to having lost interest during a stupid umbrella duel in GREAT HERO FROM CHINA, but otherwise, this is an excellent kung fu farce!

The setting appears to be late 1800's Canton, because the young character Wong Fei Hung (Chin Kar Lok) is nowhere near as prolific (he doesn't seem to be a doctor yet) as he would be later in his career, and there's also a subplot that involves them nasty British peddling opium to the Chinese victims. It's all pre-boxer rebellion. Anyway, we see the death of aging Wong Kei Ying (one of the "Ten Tigers of Kwantung"), our hero's father. Another good guy who dies early is called "Brother" Wai, but this interesting character was only introduced so that he could die in a swordfight with a villainous Japanese played by both Lam Ching Ying and his stunt-double. But this isn't 1970s chop-sockey, where Japanese are depicted as the most lowly, despicable scum imaginable. Being a 1990s movie, it's got a little of that P.C. sensitivity, even though Lam Ching Ying has his bloody, climactic swordfight with Wong Fei Hung. Though Wong Fei Hung wins, both survive and become friends, Wong even forgives his opponent and stops him from committing hara-kiri. So far, the script is pretty good. But the movie ends after their swordfight! There's a whole subplot (about British villains getting the populace addicted to opium) which is never concluded! We never see the outcome. There's the obligatory, stereotypically evil white guy (I'm starting to believe it myself), two-faced politicians and Chinese racketeers to kill! I think the main villain (the son of a politician) is the same guy who played the futuristic warrior in DEVIL'S DYNAMITE, but I'm not certain. I assume there's a sequel out there, where Chen Siu Ho finally wipes out the villains who remain untouched in this movie. I shall have to seek it out. **** -DF

ROMEO MUST DIE Warner Bros.; 2000, Producers: Joel Silver & Jim Van Wyck, Dir.: Andrzej Bartokowiak, Story: Mitchell Kapner, Starring: Jet Li, Aaliyah (who - just as this issue was going to press - died in a Bahamas plane wreck on August 25), Isaiah Washington, Russell Wong, Delroy Linde, Anthony Anderson, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Were it not for the staggeringly bad LETHAL WEAPON 70 (or whatever), I would consider ROMEO MUST DIE to be Jet Li's worst film. The fight



scenes vary in quality. The opening battle in a disco is amazingly lame, and later, when Jet Li fights his way out of a prison, it's equally stupid: He throws rice in some guy's face, and later battles prison guards while hanging upside-down. This isn't kung fu, and the stunts aren't impressive—it's all just chop edit shit (a bad American trait) and ridiculous wirework (a bad Chinese trait). So already, this poor excuse for an action film suffers from the worst of both worlds. Fortunately, the remainder of the battles in ROMEO MUST DIE rise up to the level of being "okay". Jet Li takes on some "niggaz" on a stairway, is tackled by a hot Eurasian chick who rides a motorcycle, and his climactic duel is with Russell Wong (VANISHING SON, THE LOST EMPIRE). These battles, and the rest, are fairly tolerable. None of it can compare with the thrills of 1970s or 1980s HK action cinema, but despite the ridiculous scenes of gravity defiance and obvious stunt-doubles, the fights are at least entertaining. A few times, they actually rip off old Sonny Chiba movies (THE STREETFIGHTER, KARATE BEAR FIGHTER, etc.), because they show x-rays of broken bones, during crushing blows. The high-tech animation of a sharp stick piercing a woman's heart is really a nifty touch! Otherwise, the skirmishes, though amusing, aren't remarkable in the slightest. Oh well, I suppose it's not fair of me to try and want every martial artist to be cool like Jackie Chan.

I really don't think I'm qualified to review this movie (but I paid money to rent it, and that money won't be spent in vain) because the target audience has nothing to do with my

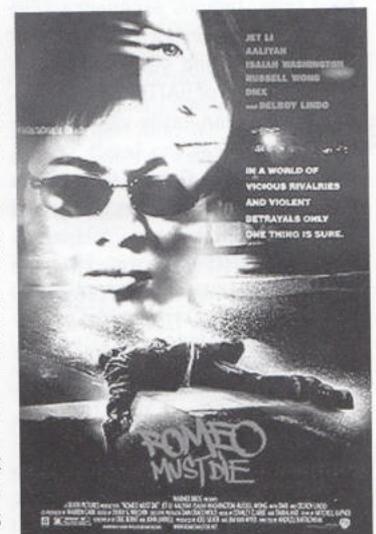
demographic. ROMEO MUST DIE was constantly shoving hip-hop down my throat, which is fine if you groove to these tunes. I, however, just happen to rock. I have hated funky music since the 1970s when they called it disco (I still call it that). I felt alienated as I watched the film, and was force-fed a constant onslaught of rap & techno. Needless to say, the movie just isn't my style and my reaction against it is biased. It's clear that this movie was made exclusively for the black and/or urban audience. Well, I hope they enjoyed it, and they can have it.

Getting past the unspectacular fights and the ethnic tint, what do I think of ROMEO MUST DIE as a movie? Well, not much. They're so Politically Correct (they have to be, because in this day and age, anybody with the ability to point and open their mouth is at risk of yelling "Racist!") that it gives away any possible plot twists. It's so obvious that this semi-"whodunnit" will have both an obligatory black villain, and an obligatory Chinese villain, and that ultimately, it will be the ever-corrupt, money-grubbing white men who are at the top of it (but the rich white yuppies don't seem to encourage the killing, for once). P.C. sensitivity has made this movie quite predictable. The acting is neither good nor bad (it just happens), but even Jet Li is uninteresting. The only character I thought was cool was Isaak O'day (played by Isaiah Washington). The rest of them seem to be typical of a new breed of stereotypes—stereotypes (i.e. the obligatory black brother whom we know will get killed) that people might not be aware of yet.

Jet Li himself comes off as a stereotype, because of the oh-so Chinese music they play. It's interesting that the scenes of the African Americans are accompanied by modern dance music, while the Chinese characters always have a score which sounds like Americans making bad Chinese music (complete with those annoying, stereotypical flutes!). They should have gone against this typically racial bias, and played modern Canto-pop for Jet Li & Russell Wong's scenes! Wouldn't it be cool if we got to hear the singing talents of Samuel Hui, Anita Mui or Fay Wong?! It would be even funnier (and a reverse of typecasting) if, by that same token, the blacks had to contend with Masai tribe drums, or bushmen music! Then, to make it even sillier, it should have been country-western music when the young white yuppies

start playing golf. So what's the point of this paragraph? I don't know. I just needed to pad this issue out so that it could hit the stores sooner. I guess what I'm trying to say is that with such obvious double-standards and PC crap, they should have made this movie into an over-the-top comedy. As a serious film, ROMEO MUST DIE is pretentious, stupid and disappointing. ROMEO MUST DIE does two things: 1. It falls flat on its face. 2. It misses the mark. Both of these things mean the same thing, but are spelled much differently!

As is apparent from the title, there's a little bit of Romeo and Juliet here. Jet Li escapes a HK prison so he can come to San Francisco and avenge his brother's death. There's a rivalry between a black mafia and of course the obligatory Chinese tong, but that doesn't stop Jet from getting a fancy for a hot black girl. Naturally, there are many cute girls in this movie. In-between the endless musical samplings of everything the ghetto has to offer, and small doses of Football to add nausea, we see an expected story about betrayal and corruption. Jet Li gets to the bottom of things, and realizes that for the most part, the killings are in-house: Blacks killing blacks and Chinese killing Chinese. Who didn't see that one coming a mile away?! Eventually, there's enough action (mostly wire fu, but also a car/motorcycle chase and bullets) to make the movie almost worth watching, with Jet Li killing off the last few remaining black villains (i.e. Anthony Anderson, who's stupid in this movie, but was actually funny in ME, MYSELF & IRENE and an episode of NIGHT STAND), and then when Jet Li finally realized there are evil Chinese guys too, his stunt-double seems easily matched by villainous Russell Wong's stunt-double at the climax. -DF



KAIZO NINGEN UPDATE

バトルホーク

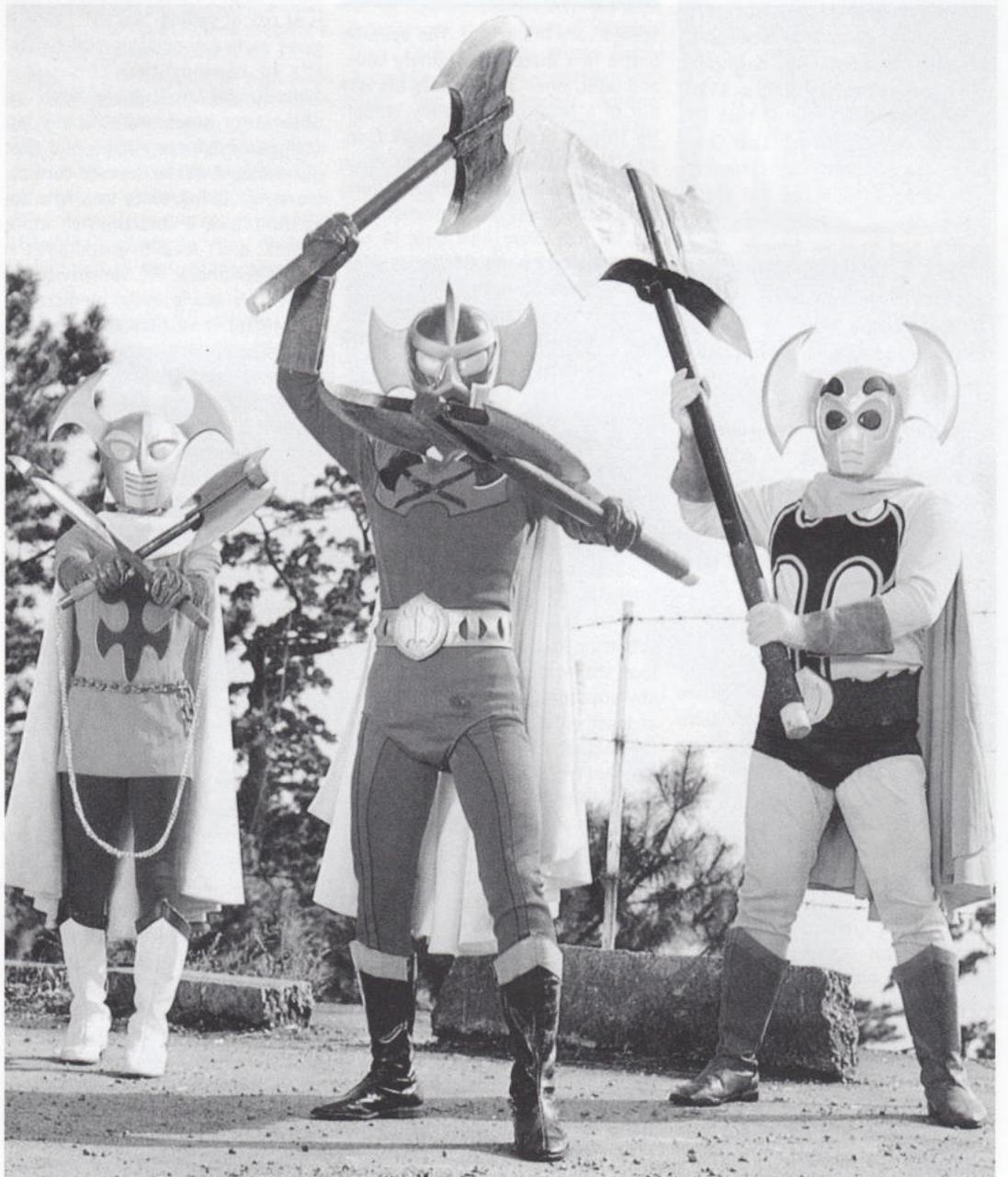
BATTLE HAWK *Dynamic Pro; 1976, In Association with: Kokusai Hoei, Broadcast on Tokyo Channel 12; Sunday nights (7:30 to 8:00 P.M.), Consisting of 26 30 min. episodes (color; 16mm), Story Writer: Go Nagai & Ken Ishikawa, Producer: Shinko Okuma (Toyo Agency), Tadao Shinohara (Nack), Directors: Taku Nagano, Ken Yamada, Tetsunosuke Tsuchiya, Script Writer: Shinsen Tsuji, Sayoshi Keinshin, Ito Tadahisa, Hiroshi Koenji, Susumu Yoshida, Cameraman: Isamu Yonezawa, Set Design: Matsuo Tsutsui (Kaibe Productions), Music: Akihiro Komori, Martial Arts Dir.: Kanta Ina, based on a Manga by Go Nagai, Special Effects by Satoru Nakano, Main Special Effects Director: Sadaaki Arikawa, Starring: Kazuya Tokimoto as Shogo, Shinsuke Fukae as Daijiro, Mimi Fukada as Yurika, Eiichi Kikuchi (AKA Hidegata Kikuchi) as Byako Doushi/White Tiger, Reviewed by Damon Foster*

Long before I sat down to watch my first episode of this excellent BATTLE HAWK series, I had been working on a review of the comparatively new ULTRAMAN DYNA (full of dull episodes which are a pain to watch). Why is it that sitting through episodes of ULTRAMAN DYNA seems to be a long, tedious experience (I've been trying to review DYNA for well over a year), and yet I can watch three episodes of BATTLE HAWK back-to-back?! I can easily view (on the edge of my seat, no less!) several episodes of this Golden Oldie all in one sitting. As the years go by, and I must stomach more recent Japanese superheroes (if you can call them superheroes!) like GO GO FIVE or the Ultramen DYNA & TIGA, it's easy for me to think that in my old age, I've finally outgrown the genre of Japanese superheroes. I keep thinking, "I loved them when I was a baby, and continued to love them as a boy. As a teenager, the passion for the topic

just grew. In my 20's, my appreciation for Japanese superheroes showed no signs of slowing down." But now that I'm just a few years from 40, it seems (sometimes) like I've finally had enough: I'm force-feeding myself the programs from the 1990s and beyond, but I'm watching such programs for review purposes only. It's

not like in the 1970s and 1980s when I watched superhero productions because I actually enjoyed them. *QC's* superhero column, *Kaizo Ningen Update* used to be the funnest part of *QC*, but it became more of an obligation, and a chore. Could it be that I've finally lost interest in superheroes?

If BATTLE HAWK is any indication, the answer is a solid "No!!!" BATTLE HAWK proves that it's not my interest in the topic which has deteriorated, it's the quality of the programs themselves which has deteriorated. As I finally got to watch episodes of BATTLE HAWK for the first time, I felt like a kid again (only fatter and



hairier— except for my ugly bald head). *BATTLE HAWK* is not a program I grew up on, yet the action-packed opening credits give me the same thrill as childhood favorites of nostalgia (i.e. *KIKAIDA* and *GO-RANGERS*), a spine-tingling chill I got back in the 1980s when I observed the opening credits for *INAZUMAN FLASH* for the first time. *BATTLE HAWK* was made during the indisputable Golden Years of Japanese superheroes, when Japanese superheroes really were Japanese superheroes. They were their own genre, and not the sci-fi programs (with superhero elements) seen today which concentrate more on special effects & dull plots than actual superhero action. *BATTLE HAWK*'s theme song is cool and typical of pre-*STAR WARS*, Japanese superhero themes, a type of music (mixing jazz, military march music, lounge and a pinch of rock 'n roll) all it's own.

BATTLE HAWK is definitely a Toei wannabe series, which is fine by me! This blatant imitation of *AKUMAIZER 3* (with doses of *INAZUMAN* and *GO-RANGER* tossed in here and there) lacks the budget of the average Toei program, and is instead about equal in quality to the TV shows from P Productions. But *BATTLE HAWK*'s cheap approach is a blessing for me: They didn't have the money to go all-out sci-fi with overdone special effects, so they instead concentrated on fights and superhero thrills. Sadly, my enthusiasm for *BATTLE HAWK* isn't shared by everyone—the series only lasted 26 episodes and never went down in history as being a classic program. I consider it a pioneer though, because it demonstrates an early glimpse of superhero team action (again, inspired by Toei's *GO-RANGER* and of course *AKUMAIZER 3*), at least a few years before the redundant Super Sentai genre got jump-started by the likes of *BATTLE FEVER J* and *DENZIMAN*. Though not the work of Toei, I consider *BATTLE HAWK* to be a link in a chain, and definitely a "pioneer that got scalped"! The

original *BATTLE HAWK* script had, much like *JINZO NINGEN KIKAIDA*, established that the bad guys had many different monsters & soldiers. But unlike *KIKAIDA* (which was a hit and lasted for many episodes), *BATTLE HAWK*'s ratings were low. So it was in later episodes where many (not all) the excessive villains finally made hasty appearances only to get killed off. The earlier episodes mentioned all these bad guys who were to show up. But things didn't go as planned; and the series got canceled too early, so not all the proposed villains ever appeared. *BATTLE HAWK* went down in Japanese superhero history as being a disappointment. I definitely disagree with the Japanese viewers though. To me, *BATTLE HAWK* is a winner! It's 90% of all post-1985 Japanese superhero programs which are disappointments! *BATTLE HAWK* delivers, *TIME RANGER* doesn't! Regardless, last-ditch attempts were made to save the show, like in later episodes when the heroes ditch their over-sized battle axes in favor of traditional swords. Swords were also considered more "heroic" than axes and therefore more appropriate for the heroes to use, but this plot twist didn't improve the ratings.

BATTLE HAWK not only got rejected by Japanese TV, but American TV stations wouldn't give it much of a chance either. Back in the mid-1970s, horror movie host (and actor on the *CAPTAIN COSMIC AND 2T2* children's variety series) Bob Wilkins was trying to purchase *BATTLE HAWK* for release in America. Bob Wilkins (a hero to Bay Area locals and the Sacramento fans alike) was no stranger to Japanese science fiction, having hosted & promoted anything from *ATTACK OF THE MUSHROOM PEOPLE* to *ULTRAMAN*. Shortly after the success of *SPECTREMAN*'s run on channel 2 (KTVU; Oakland/San Francisco), Wilkins sought the least expensive Japanese series he could find, and brought several *BATTLE HAWK* episodes over. As the story goes, he was all ready to dub the series in

English, when others (presumably Bob Shaw) at the TV station saw the footage and objected to the violence. Needless to say, *BATTLE HAWK* never got dubbed in English or shown.

The program seemed forgotten (like a lost series) for years, and to the best of my knowledge, was never released on video, laser disk or DVD. Fortunately, times have changed and Japan's booming cable TV industry is making episodes available for probably the first time since 1976! I've heard there are at least two episodes floating around in the bootlegging underground, and have already reached American fan-based networks of traders. Though I've yet to locate either episode, they are.... Episode #2: *MIKAZUKI KEN TETORU SAPPO* ("Crescent Sword: Fearful Fighter"), and Episode #3: *SHI O KIZAMU TOUJIN BYO MUCHI* ("Lethal Warrior: Cat-Whip"), involving a Cat-Whip is monster.

BATTLE HAWK is an action-packed thriller of a series, and deliberately imitates the Chinese kung fu movies which were popular then. In 1976, that type of action was still considered somewhat new, and seemed to be good thing to copy. It seems that the villains (monstrous terrorists called "Kyogi Nokite") have at least some Chinese blood. They're monsters, of course, but their set (hide-out interior) is distinctly Chinese in design. They all speak Japanese (naturally), but in episode #4: *YOWAMUSHI KISHA TAI TERORU TOUJIN* ("Coward TV Reporter vs. the Terror Warrior"), a villain verbally denounces Japanese karate as being an inferior offshoot of kung fu, though he uses the word "kempo" (kempo is one of the first forms of karate, when it was still basically Chinese kung fu) when he means kung fu. Having Chinese villains and Japanese heroes is quite a reverse from the Chinese kung fu movies where the Japanese are always the bad guys—and it's about time for an opposing view, I must say.

As for the quality of the martial arts

in *BATTLE HAWK*, it's pretty bad—I hate to say. The people in this show got their roles for being "good looking young people", not karate masters! So naturally, the fight scenes are nowhere near as good as those of the Chinese movies which were being made at that same period. There's a fight in the 4th episode where the main actress (Mimi Fukada) falls on her ass (you need to watch closely), despite attempts to cut away. The three young heroes (though I don't think they're very young today) are Kazuya Tokimoto, Shinsuke Fukae & Mimi Fukada, and they fight (if you can call it that) as the Tate family! No, they weren't slaughtered by Charles Manson; his wacko followers wouldn't stand up against ax-wielding superheroes like the Battle Hawk trio (it is a funny concept to think about, though!). The Tates in this story have the Japanese last name, pronounced "Tott-Tay" (or better yet, "Taught-teh"). So remember, when I write "Tate", it's pronounced differently. Regardless, the heroes are battling an evil empire of terrorists commanded by the mysterious "Ogon Taite", supreme ruler of the bad guys. His helpers (vice presidents, if you will) include Kougi Daijin, who, even in live-action form, looks all too typical of other Go Nagai characters! Kougi Daijin is an East Asian branch leader, and appeared in episodes 1-10 (though defeated, he returned one last time to be in episode 25). In his absence, he was replaced by another sub-villain, "Byako Doushi" (episodes 11-26), which means White Tiger. He, like other villains, take place in the sometimes weak (but very fun, none the less!) battles.

Yet, as poor as the choreography is, the fights are all very, very entertaining! The colorful costumes and flashy music really make it all quite fun, as is usually the case in 1970s TV shows. Because the martial arts aren't the work of the Japan Action Club or Toei, it all looks crude, but this never makes them boring. The most talented fighters in *BATTLE*



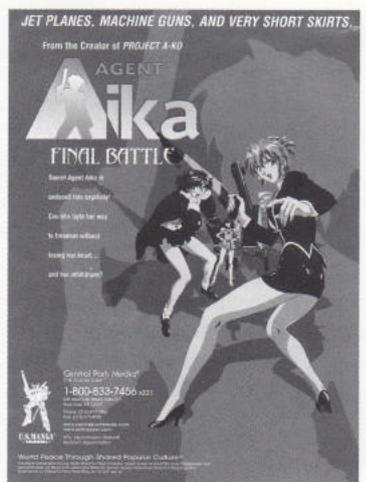
HAWK are the acrobatic stuntmen in the henchmen costumes, some of these unsung heroes are very impressive at the way they fall and flip. There's also plenty of unintended humor, so BATTLE HAWK definitely is heavy on the "cheesy", "tacky" and/or "chincy" value! The villainous henchmen, called Satan Soldiers hardly look menacing, and are little more than men running around in red & pink leotards. The foam rubber monsters, called "Teroru Toujin" (it means something like Terror Warriors) are bulky & stupid-looking at times, but they serve their purpose and aren't much worse than the villains in the likes of INAZUMAN FLASH. Granted, these Sid & Marty Kroft-like critters are meant for children, but I can't help but think that the costume designers are making them look deliberately silly, to add to the entertainment. The most expensive special effect was where the heroine's motorcycle ("Queen Bike") came out of Battle Hawk's jeep ("Battle Jeep") and flew in the air. Despite obvious sound effects taken from Toei's KAMEN RIDER, this sequence ate up a lot of budget and isn't particularly spectacular.

The action and special effects aren't all that's campy. The occasional guest appearances of non-actors make the show even funnier. From the over-

weight Hawaiian woman who appeared in the 8th episode (and speaks Japanese in a very thick American accent), to the absolutely funny-looking white guy in episode #5: HEIWA O KUDAKU TETSU NO TSUME ("Peace Ends: Claws of Iron") who's just on screen enough to prove he's a bad actor and get killed by the warrior Tetsu No Tsume ("Claws of Iron"; no relation to the 1951 Daiei movie of the same name), there's no shortage of colorful characters to gawk at. This series has no classic, Shakespearean performances. I think it's these gaudy, sometimes amateurish elements which make me love BATTLE HAWK all the more. Here we have a low budget TV series, and yet despite the limited funds, I find it far more entertaining than Japan's more recent offerings (programs with comparatively high budgets) like ULTRAMAN DYNA or any of the modern "Super Sentai" garbage. Unlike ULTRAMAN DYNA, good old BATTLE HAWK looks nothing like STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION and lacks the sterile sci-fi look. BATTLE HAWK is nothing but solid superhero action, it's not a sci-fi series masquerading as a superhero series.

Our three heroes got their powers from their grandfather (Teshu Tate), who in turn, picked up this mysticism from a Native American tribe.

It seems the elderly martial artist spent time in America, learning the magic of the mythical "Shasta Tribe"! Being Indians, their weapons included the tomahawk. So the "hawk" in the title refers to the Native American hammers & battle axes, and not the bird of prey. So the three heroes use these weapons (which look way more like the axes used by European decapitators in old times, than anything from American Indian culture!) and throw them in the air. The three axes collide, and we see colorful fire FX & super-imposed lightning flash, our human-form siblings do their mid-air flips and become their costumed forms: Battle Hawk (Shogo), Big Hawk (Daijiro) and Queen Hawk (Yurika). The Shasta Tribe had stated that, according to ancient Native American legend, only a righteous person can summon the Battle Hawk powers and become Japanese super-heroes! Granddad was going to tell the Tate trio more, but he got killed in Episode #1: TOUJIN DOKUROGAMA ("Warrior: Skull-sickle"), by that episode's obligatory Teroru Toujin, a sickle-wielding skeleton with psychic powers. This villain, and the other Teroru Toujin (averaging one per episode) beasts are members of the terrorist group "Kyogi Nokite" (literally, "Crazy Rules", perhaps "Outlaws" sounds better in English!), who are commanded by an oracle called "Ogon Taite". Ogon Taite appears to be little more than a Peking opera mask stuck to a wall, but when his eyes light up and he talks, his sub-villains (i.e. Byako Doushi & Kougi Daijin) are obedient. Some chef and/or sushi delivery guy appears occasionally and adds more comic relief—I guess the obligatory fat hero (Big Hawk) wasn't silly enough. The over-all story of BATTLE HAWK isn't as comical as IRON KING, or as serious as KAMEN RIDER, but instead reaches a good balance between the two. It's incredibly fun, to the point of being spectacular, in fact. There are fist-fights when the humans are fighting, and when they change into superheroes and lead hero Battle Hawk aims his mighty "God Hawk" (a big, funky battle ax), its time to duel. Highly recommended!! It's not often that anything gets the highly coveted, prized, five star rating from me, but BATTLE HAWK deserves it. ***** -DF



Manga Corps, Dir.: Katsuhiko Nishijima, Character Design: Yoko Kikuchi, Created by: Studio Fantasia, Produced by Bandai Visual, Executive Producer of English Version: John O'Donnell, Prod. of English Version: Stephanie Shaolfsky, Dubbing Supervisor: Christopher Sippei, Translation: New Generation Pictures, Running Time: 75 Minutes, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Other chapters of this sexy Japanese cartoon series have been reviewed in the pages of OC before, but such reviews consisted largely of stuff similar to "and then Aika does this!" and "so then Gusto does so and so". No coverage is bad coverage, I suppose, but "reviews" of that nature said little about the series. So I decided it was time to actually review and describe the production in question, to get to the bottom of things. Therefore, I obtained a tape or two of this animated TV program, and can now set the record straight. AGENT AIKA is yet another of those sexy girl hero cartoons. It's a descendent (or rip-off) of Go Nagai's far superior CUTEY HONEY, but it still blows away any of that comparatively tame SAILOR MOON crap. AGENT AIKA is largely the work of Katsuhiko Nishijima, best known for PROJECT A-KO and/or MEGUMI PARADISE (whatever that is). Personally, AGENT AIKA: FINAL JUSTICE tells me he's just another Go Nagai wannabe (who, in turn, could be considered an Osamu Tezuka wannabe, by the standards of old-timers & purists), because his artwork is more than similar to that of the infinitely superior Nagai. The main difference is that Nagai put a lot of thick lines (much like Tatsunoko classics) into his work, which gave the likes of CUTEY HONEY, DEVILMAN and them MAZINGAs a crude yet visually pleasing look. But AGENT AIKA: FINAL JUSTICE is a typical 1990s yarn, and so it puts fine lines,



and a slick (for better or worse) look on an otherwise CUTEY HONEY-like setting.

Regardless, this 75 minute tape consists of three episodes. The title, AGENT AIKA: FINAL JUSTICE doesn't make a lot of sense because nothing seems concluded, I suspect more episodes will follow. But titles involving "end" or "beginning" are useless in the world of anime, much like roman numerals, because there are now more anime productions (I quit counting, after two-jillion) in existence than there are actual numbers in our numerical system. The only way "Final Justice" could apply to Japanese anime would be if every videotape in existence got destroyed or disappeared magically. Anyway, the chapters are as follows:

Trial 5: "The Golden Delmo Operation"- While on vacation at a tropical island, Aika falls for a male impersonator (a villainous blond chick disguised as a dude), who uses some tacky pick-up lines which would never work in real-life. Aika discovers it was a woman who almost seduced her and she's disgusted, proving she's not a lesbian. Aika's climactic spat with episodic guest-villain Ms. Bianca is gripping. For whatever reason, this is the only episode described on the tape, it's as though they added the other two installments after they finished designing the box and hadn't

the time to update it. Regardless, the box describes this script as follows: "LINGERIE NEVER LIES. Aika's on vacation and ready to let her hair down. But she's seduced by a master manipulator intent on revenge. Can Aika fight her way to freedom without losing her heart.... and her inhibitions? Frills will fly tonight!" I guess that pretty much sums it up.

"Trial 6: Delmo Operation White Silver"- One-shot villains Etsuko Nina & Golden Delmo Rio (jet pilots) hire our heroes to do an arial investigation, but we all know it's just a trap; they claim they need to give Aika an "examination". It's an excuse to show Aika in more explicit positions (including a nude shot, to see Aika's impossibly firm tits), under the guise of an examination to get to know Aika's body movements and analyze her fighting skills (yeah, right). The most innovative sequence is Gozo's (Aika's boss) brief, drunken martial arts fight where he defeats several woman while singing karaoke. Toss in just a pinch of lesbianism and some artillery, and what do you get? Why, more of the same, of course.

"Trial 7: The Decisive Battle! Delmo Base!"- Me thinks this edition is the worst on the tape: Early on, them Delmo bitches launch an all-out assault and Aika seems to disappear afterwards— we're supposedly lead to believe she's dead (it's un-

likely that a character called "Agent Aika" would be killed off from a series called AGENT AIKA; who are they kidding?), and are expected to be surprised and relieved when she returns at the very end to defeat the villains. Also not explained is why Aika returns wearing a skimpy outfit resembling something worn by that 70-something pop star, Cher. Not the most interesting episode, but Aika tackles some chick who wears these long blades (rather like Han in ENTER THE DRAGON, and a villain in SHOGUN ASSASSIN), so the fights are as fun as ever. It's also one of the episodes to have inept hero Gusto and some person with a mohawk.

So there you have it, my views of the three chapters on this tape. Now that I've seen this series, I can make more thorough comments. Though AGENT AIKA isn't as grotesque as UROTSUKIDOJI, DEMON WARRIOR: KOJI or any of that other X-Rated anime filth, it's still way too risqué for American TV! There's some obsession with panties in this series, and it really gets pretentious. Nearly all the female characters (who have legs like giraffes) wear mini-skirts, so every minute, there's some lame excuse to show underwear on any one of (and there's more than a lot) the female characters, good or evil. This relentless exposure is beyond gratuitous— it's constant & worse than excessive, and it really gets annoying. We're not just talking underwear here, there are blatant pubic-hair bulges, and yet we don't see any actual hairs during the nudity scenes (which are occasional, not frequent). The endless shots of underwear close-ups make me really wonder about the program's target audience. I cringe to think just what kind of horny geeks get a constant diet of this stuff! It's one thing to jerk off to a TV show involving real women, but to get all hot & aroused from a cartoon?! I have a theory that the boys who masturbate to this type of program must really have difficulty getting laid— and perhaps they've become intimidated by authentic, 3-dimensional women because they can't get any. But am I wrong? I very well could be, this is just some speculating on my part.

Yet as lame as AGENT AIKA: FINAL JUSTICE is, I suppose my reaction to it is mainly positive. It's good, in a bad sort of way, ala' PLAN 9 FROM OUTERSPACE, ROBO VAMPIRE or HORROR OF THE BLOOD MONSTERS. I can just see a bunch of drunk guys sit-

ting around, drinking beers and laughing up a storm while watching this tacky, cheesy release from Central Park Media. It should be amusing to try and count the gratuitous shots of vaginas protruding from knickers. AGENT AIKA: FINAL JUSTICE is stupid, it's just plain dumb fun that doesn't take itself seriously (though it does take money seriously, it seems it was a hit with audiences). The humor and facial expressions don't always translate well into English, and at times the dubbed gags make no sense or seem awkward, particularly when the character of Rion over-acts. So, on the camp level alone, it earns a star. I'll add another star for unintended (?) humor. So far, that's a total of two stars, which means fair, about average. That's better than one star (*) which is below average, or no star (which means complete garbage). But— I'm adding a third star! That's because, for what it is, it succeeds at what it's meant to be: Action/adventure. There's plenty of action, and most of the time, the characters are introduced thoroughly and well defined. If you can look past the distracting, nasty close-ups, there's an actual story here, and it's interesting enough to keep my attention. When it comes to recent Japanese animated TV, I'll stick to the superior WILD 7, but AGENT AIKA offers its share of entertainment too.

The story: Agent Aika Sumeragi fights crime, which includes an army of women called "Delmo"s, who all look alike. They're evil, vengeful bitches who used to work for some master villain called "Hargen", who was killed off in an earlier installment— he never appears on this tape. Aika's side kick (pun intended to the fullest) is Rion Aida, the daughter of some guy called Gozo Aida. Another supporting hero is Shuntaro Michikusa, and I can't figure out his significance, or just what he is. He's either meant to be a queer or a geek— I'm not sure which. He's the most annoying character in the series, and seems to add nauseam by carrying some little pink hand-puppet around, and he plays with it. Whatever. There are additional heroes (added for even more comic relief) who help out from time to time, like a character with a mohawk and a bumbling, love-hungry fellow called Gusto, who's dubbed to sound like a combination of George of the Jungle, and Dudley Doo-Right. There are decent scripts (not too simple, not too



complex) and characters in every episode (see page 37) I've seen, and the stories seem to be all people against people conflicts, as yet I've seen any monsters or robots. Each episode has at least a couple decent battles, it's usually a fist fight (an excuse to show gals doing high kicks while wearing tiny skirts), but there's an occasional gun to be seen as well. The fist fights include both karate and wrestling moves too, but there's too much gravity-defying jumping around sometimes. Whether they're using kicks, sharp-edged weapons, punches or bullets, there's not a whole lot of blood (but plenty of deaths), proving the censors prefer sleaze over gore. *** -DF

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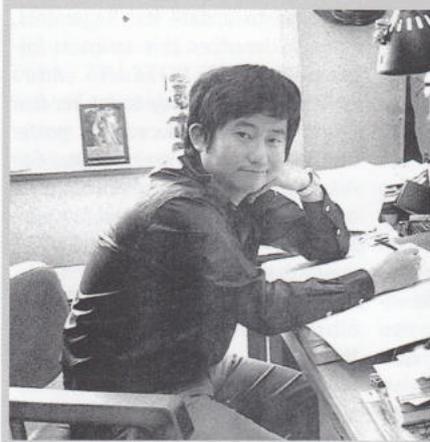
NEW MACHINE: UREME 5 Story: Cheh Dong Kun, Cameraman: Be Song Han & Ing Jung Huo, Lighting: Bi Song Oun, & Kim Sok Yung, Editing: Pak Jun Bih, Special Effects: Chung Do Ang, Original Story: Pak Hei Wong, Screenplay: Chung Choi Su, Art Dir.: Pei Chung Jun, Head Dir.: Chow Mei Wa, Music: Nam Wu San, Starring: Shim Hyung Rei, Bi He Jin, Kim Woo Jong, Reviewed by Damon Foster

As far as Korean superhero movies go, this fifth film is great stuff! It's incredible how much FX, costumes, monsters, miniatures, cartoons, robots and other stuff they can cram into a single movie. The common rule is that the later the UREME movie, the better the production values. So I think it's safe to assume UREME 5 is the best to date, although the fourth one (see last issue) was hard to beat. This is not to say that UREME 5 is flawless. There are minor problems, like unsteady animation and visible wires, once again.

I guess my only complaint against it is the lack of originality. As with the previous movie (see O.C.: The Jimmy Wang Yu Issue) there's that Korean Starblazers rip-off (another battleship in outerspace!), and even the crew's uniforms look like live-action imitations of the Yamato/Argo crew! These early movies didn't get Shim Hyung Rei off to a good start. Now he's a producer, and he still uses other people's ideas, as his recent film characters (Young Gu, Hong Gil Tong,

Ogon Bato, Yongary, etc.) prove.

My mastery of the Korean language (and Korean people in general) is sadly lacking, but this complex script tells me I was wrong in my assumption that Esperman, Ureme & Dae Illi are aliens. UREME 5 seems to imply that perhaps our heroes are descended from an ancient race of advanced (?) earthlings! There seem to be all these Ureme robots in different places, they're dormant until needed (much like the title robot in YUUSHA RAIDEEN). They all have the symbol, the "Thunder Hawk" (AKA 'Ureme'). Some new robot appears in each film. In this one, the robot is within a giant statue (a cheap Majin!) worshipped by natives. The primitive jungle dwellers appear in the first half of this tale. It seems to take place in India, Bangkok, Tibet or whatever country has tigers & elephants. Whatever the country is, it all starts when the Ureme crash-lands in the jungle after a dogfight with an alien spacecraft. The evil invaders in this movie are okay, even if their leader has a rotten pumpkin for a head, and the remainder look like rejects from LOST IN SPACE. Regardless, Esperman's climactic duels with these monsters and robots are pretty damn entertaining. Esperman's motive is to rescue the commander of that same Yamato-ish spaceship from the previous movie. While I'm on the topic of the previous movie, I should point out something I accidentally omitted last issue. Last issue, there's a picture from UREME 4, which shows the Mazinga cartoon characters. Why Go Nagai's famed robots appear in an illustration for UREME 4 is anybody's guess, because they never appeared in the films themselves! *** -DF



**GO NAGAI
#3 (PART
THREE OF
OUR
CONTINUING
LOOK AT THE
RARE WORKS
OF ARTIST
GO NAGAI)**
by Frank Strom

***Video Review:**

Manga Video DEMON KING DANTE Turnon~C; 2000, Story & Art by Go Nagai, Released by Art Pro, Reviewed by Frank Strom

In 1971, Go Nagai committed to art board his first (and best!) "Demon" or "Oni" comic series, DEMON KING DANTE. Well okay, ya caught me - - Two shorter series, DONGARA SANJYUSHI, and ONI, both predate DANTE. For all intents & purposes however, DANTE is the pivotal originator of the themes, concepts, background, subplots, etc., that were done and redone in DEVILMAN, SHIN DEVILMAN, SHUTEN DOJI, and seemingly countless others that continue to this day.

Thus far I've avoided getting into Nagai's whole Demon cycle in this column— There's too much of it, it's long & twisted, confusing, and maybe even a little contradictory. It's also repetitious and (in spite of the hype) not really his best work. Repetitious? Yeah. See, he's only got essentially one Demon story and he keeps doing it over & over & over. What it basically boils down to is Hero-A is possessed by a demon (or Hero-A possesses a demon himself), finds that there are demons secretly living in mortal society, and learns that the demon race predates human society and will one day rise up & destroy/conquer/whatever the world, blah blah blah. Usually Hero-A exerts control over the possessing/possessed demon, fights the others, and so forth - - Awesome action and bloody carnage ensue. Sometimes for laughs. Sometimes intentionally.

Well, it was all done in DANTE first. It's not as long and drawn out as in DEVILMAN and most of the others, which is probably why it works for me. Another reason is that the lion's share of the series is spent on Dante (a dai-kaiju size behemoth) attacking the city, crushing tanks, destroying jets, and all that good giant monster stuff. The other big reason is Dante's design: It fucking rules, okay?! It's just a silhouette, a big evil black blotch - - All shoulders, bat-wing arms, and gaping fang-filled grin! Incredible! Goddamn, I wish I looked like that! Yeah, I wouldn't score with the babes, but still...It might be worth it. Can you imagine going to renew your drivers license looking like THAT? Oh yeah, it WOULD be worth it. While I'm free associating here, I may as well point out the remarkable resemblance Mazinger-Z has to Dante. Nagai so frequently drew Mazinger as nothing but a looming silhouette with a foreboding deathlike grin, looking horribly evil - -Like at any moment he would lash out & destroy



us all and enjoy it. Eventually Mazinger did get around to destroying the world in MAZINGA SAGA, which only proved what I'd suspected all along.

Okay, so back to this DANTE video. It's a pretty oddball item. Have you ever seen the type of video that's based on a children's book (Dr. Seuss, MAKE WAY FOR DUCKLINGS, WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE, etc), where they film the book illustrations while an actor reads the story? That's what I thought this DANTE

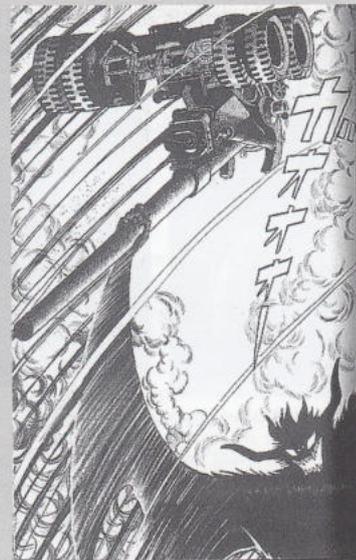
video was going to be, but it's a little different. For starters, it's dramatized with a cast of voice actors, and includes a musical score, and sound effects. In addition, keep in mind that this isn't a 20 page book of drawings - - It's a 600-plus page comic book. The storytelling panel art act as storyboards for a film. The end result - - this video - - is something so close to an animated cartoon, you may as well call it that (Japanese animation has always been of a limited nature, so this isn't really that far removed from that finished product). The panel art is filmed with a lot of pans & moving camera technique, plus some special effects, lighting and color tricks have been added to enhance the original (beautiful) black & white art. And since Nagai in effect was the director (in so far as being responsible for the style and artwork actually used), this is quite a lot stronger in quality than the animated product Japan has turned out in the last two decades.

As an added bonus, the video also includes a short biographical feature on Nagai and selected cover art from the many different editions of DANTE, DEVILMAN and other comics published over the years. I wasn't expecting much from this video initially, but was surprised and happy by how great it turned out to be. I believe this is also the first of a planned series of Manga Videos. *****

*Comics News: DEVILMAN LADY finally concluded after a whopping seventeen collected volumes from Kodansha's KC imprint. Nagai is usually good about keeping comics series short, ending one series and starting a new one before you (or he) get bored - - Seventeen volumes of this inconsistent series was way way too much (we're talking over two thousand pages total here). The closing volumes feature Dante returning to the comics page as the big villain of the piece. Devilman and his nemesis Syrene also make lengthy appearances throughout the series as well.

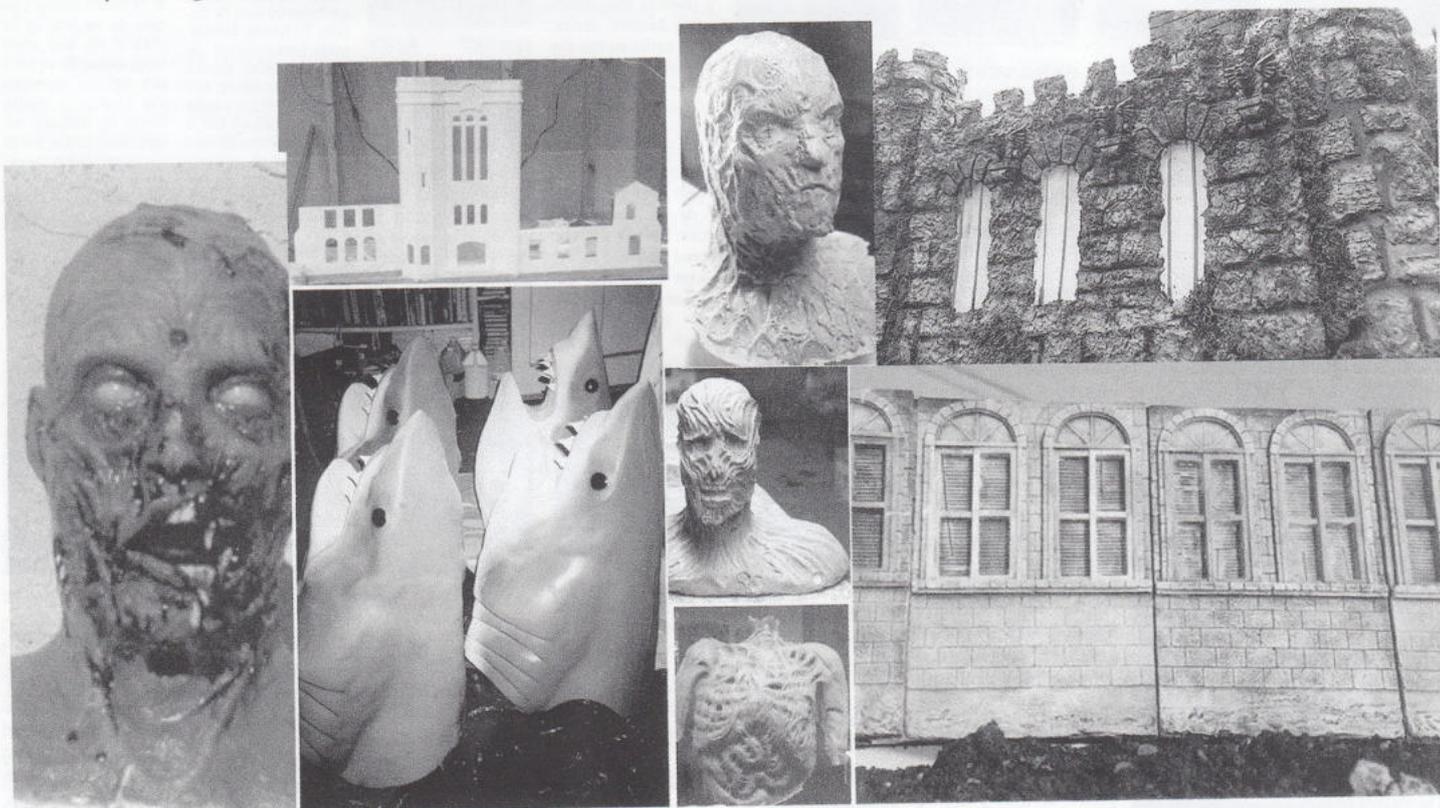
Moving on to bigger & better (or at least different) things, KC comics has begun collecting Nagai's new series KISHIN, with at least two volumes as of this writing. It's an action strip concerning the adventures of a robot samurai in what appears to be a post-apocalyptic feudal Japan. The art is pretty much what you'd expect: Decent pencil layouts from Nagai (action sequences are especially top notch), but bad scratchy weak ink work from the current art assistants.

*Merchandise News: Medicom Toy company is offering a line of excellent high quality robot toys ("Miracle Action Figure DX") including Nagai's Mazinge-Z, Great Mazinge, Getter Robo, and Grandizer. These are imports, but seem to be specifically produced for the American market. I picked up a Brave Raideen at the local comic shop for a measly 30 bucks, which is amazing - - These are the very sort of toys I'm used to seeing retail for \$50-100. All of these are extremely well articulated and come with a lot of accessories. Mazinge-Z comes in a full color version and a black & white version (To simulate the original comic art, I guess). Personally, I don't have the money to burn on such ridiculous frivolity, but even I can afford these. Good toys, good price.



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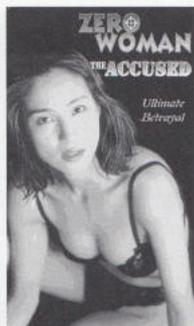
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SUMO VIXENS: In search of the sexist sport, the women of Japan drop their tops and enter the ring! No holds are barred and as these sassy sumo wrestlers brawl their way to glory. Which of our tempestuous teamsters has the heft to win it all? Stars Kei Mizutani (Weather Woman), contains violence, nudity and adult situations. 73 minutes, English dubbed. \$29.99



SEDUCE & SWINDLE: A con artist uses his outstanding sexual skills to swindle wealthy women. His next target: the alluring daughter of a prestigious family. But will this prey prove more than the predator can handle? 84 minutes, English dubbed. \$29.99



ZERO WOMAN: THE ACCUSED (sub): Rei is a woman without a past - without an identity. She's a lethal undercover agent working for the Zero Department, a deadly, shadow division of the police force. Men are turning up dead - brutally murdered with a precision worthy of the Zero Department's finest assassin. Now Rei's on the run from her own kind, hot on the trail of a cold blooded killer who is her equal in every way. Can she track down the murderer before the Zero Department brings her to justice? \$29.99



ZERO WOMAN: THE HUNTED: She was Zero Department's deadliest killer, but her skills made her a threat. Now, this sleek and sexy assassin has been marked for death. It will take every skill she's got to survive. Available in both "R" and "Uncut" versions. English subtitles. \$29.99



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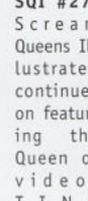
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PARANOID: official orchestrates the heist of a dinosaur skull for an overseas buyer, he assigns an incompetent secret agent, Ling Ling Chai (Stephen Chow), to investigate. He's a master with knives who runs a seedy pork stand in Beijing. Ling's contact is Siu Kam (Anita Yuen), who's been assigned to kill him, thus terminally thwarting the investigation; but of course, they fall in love. \$18.99



BEAUTIFUL GIRL HUNTER: At the age of 18, a normal boy suddenly turns into a raving sex fiend. He lures beautiful girls into a self-constructed torture chamber, only to abuse and finally kill them. The horror and madness reach a terrifying climax when the boy directs his violent focus toward himself. Adults only. \$34.99



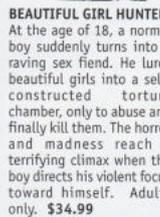
A CHINESE TORTURE STORY: Lovers Little Cabbage and a scholar are put on trial for the murder of Cabbage's husband by an overdose of aphrodisiac, which caused his sexual organ to explode. The real culprit is the magistrate's son, who is committing adultery with the scholar's wife, which was witnessed by Cabbage. The adulterous couple frame the platonic couple to cover up their own affair. The scholar's maid and nanny take the case to appeal in the imperial capital with most of the film revolving around the farcical trial, where the judge uses torture to extort a confession from the innocent lovers. \$18.99



GREEN SNAKE: Maggie Cheung and Joey Wong are two beautiful half-human/half-snakes. Son Ching, after 1000 years of discipline, has begun to evolve from her reptilian form into a human being. Green Snake, with only 500 years of practice, is content simply slithering around, until a Buddhist monk with extraordinary powers becomes their greatest adversary. Livid over the fact that either would dare to even attempt to assume human form, he takes their judgment into his own hands. \$23.99



RAPED BY AN ANGEL: This is a loosely based sequel to the Category III classic, NAKED KILLER, with some of the cast returning in new roles. Chingmy Yau is a television commercial star who attracts stalker-like attention from Mark Cheng, who plays the role of perfect gentleman lawyer/serial rapist, with amazing conviction. Eventually one of Chingmy's friends is raped and killed by him, so she plots to seek revenge, with the help of her triad boyfriend (Simon Yam). In order to lure the sadistic rapist in, she sets an erotic striptease trap with her own body as bait. Finally back in stock! Been out of print for some time. \$18.99



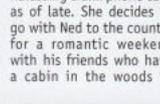
THUNDERBOLT: Jackie is an extraordinary race car mechanic who can diagnose any car's ailments by listening to it drive by. He is also an expert driver and one day gets into a casual street race with Cougar and his custom hot rod. The trouble begins when Jackie beats him and afterward, Cougar, who is involved with the Yakuza, ends up arrested by Interpol agents. He vows revenge and kidnaps Jackie's sisters in order to force him to go to Japan and participate against him in a dangerous race. \$23.99



WET & ROPE: This is a must for all fans of nunsplotation. After being brutally raped, a young woman attempts to commit suicide. A priest takes her out of it and she decides to become a nun. Once inside the convent, she is again a victim of sexual abuse. Adults only. \$34.99



ELECTRICAL GIRL: Jane is a strange woman who releases electricity when she is sexually excited. She falls for her boss, but he is impotent. When she meets a doctor, he is immediately attracted to her, and gives her much needed special treatment. When she experiences her first sexual climax with the doctor, she finds she has another ability. When making love, she can see the winning numbers of the Mark Six Lottery! Adults only! \$18.99



PARANOID: Chloe (Jessica Alba); of "Dark Angel" fame, an up and coming model, has been receiving harassing crank phone calls as of late. She decides to go with Ned to the country for a romantic weekend with his friends who have a cabin in the woods to relax. Their gathering is interrupted when Ned's wife arrives. Ned goes back to London with her, and leaves Chloe stranded on the cabin with a bunch of strangers. Her nightmare has just begun. \$18.99

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