

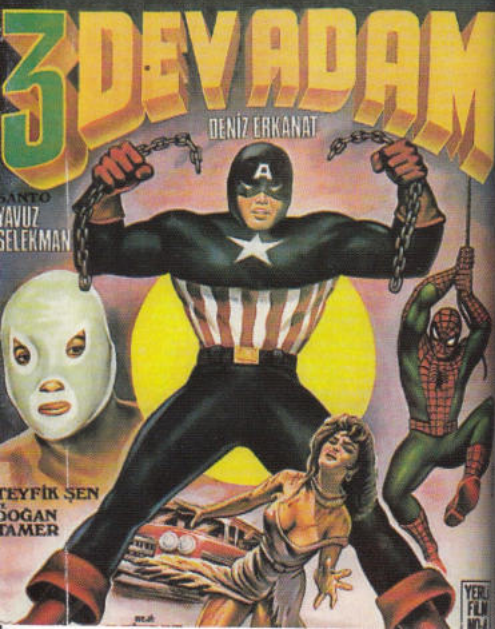
ORIENTAL CINEMA

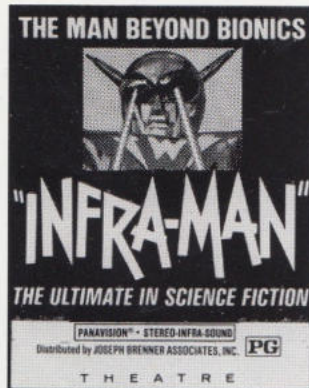
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THRILLS! SPILLS!
KILLS! CHILLS!
ANIME!
KUNG FU DIVAS!
SUPERHEROES!
GIANT MONSTERS!
OBSCURE
B-MOVIES
FROM TURKEY
AND
KOREA!

THE
FILMS OF
LUCY LIU!

AND A SPECIAL
TRIBUTE TO
INFRAMAN!
CELEBRATING
INFRAMAN'S 30TH
ANNIVERSARY!

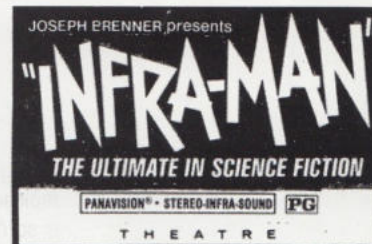




ORIENTAL CINEMA

Inframan 30th Anniversary Tribute Issue

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to another edition of my irregularly published, somewhat yearly magazine, *Oriental Cinema*! I can barely remember when I made the 1976 issue of *Oriental Cinema*, the 1978 issue of *Oriental Cinema*, or even more recent editions like the 1990 edition of *Oriental Cinema*, or even the 2000 edition of *Oriental Cinema*. On second thought, I do remember the 2000 *Oriental Cinema* because it was *O.C.* #33: *Godzilla 2000* (duh!). Last year's issue is also pretty fresh in the memory of even an old fart like me because it was 2004, and *O.C.*, much like theaters all over the world, was celebrating the 50th anniversary of *GODZILLA, KING OF THE MONSTERS* (Toho; 1954). With all this talk of movies about Godzilla and other giant monsters, some thoughts come to mind. These past three or four years (when I've finally started growing up) have generated a lot of comments from friends & fans, statements like: "What are you doing at this convention? I thought you weren't into giant monsters any more!" "I thought you said you no longer liked Godzilla & other big creatures!", and so on. There's a certain truth to all these comments; after all, I sold most of my kiddy toys years ago and can't keep track of all the new Godzilla movies. But on occasion, while flipping the TV channels, I might occasionally catch a screening of an old classic like *MONSTER ZERO*, *BLACK SCORPION*, *TARANTULA*, *EARTH VS. THE SPIDER*, or *THE GIANT GILA MONSTER*. When that happens, it's like I'm a kid again, and it's as though these past five or so years never happened. Hell, I still get tears in my eyes when I see the endings of *DESTROY ALL MONSTERS* and *GHIDRAH THE THREE HEADED MONSTER*! So it's hard to tell whether I've truly outgrown these exotic creatures or not! I'm working on a theory as to what's going on in my head, and here's the result.....

As very young children, we don't always realize that special effects are artificial. As a baby in the 1960s, I honestly believed the huge creatures in *ULTRAMAN* really were giants on the rampage, and that *ULTRAMAN* was what we would later call a "reality program". I realized I'd been had when I saw the reptilian *Gohorasaurus* (Gomora in Japanese) toss some miniature tractors which were obviously toys. I became aware that I was watching men in rubber suits—but maybe this rationale never quite sunk in. As I grew up watching things like *BLACK SCORPION* (the first monster movie I ever saw) and Japan's many flicks, there was always a part of me who still seemed to think these unique animals were for real. When *Godzilla & Gamera* clomped across the screen, I was looking at them right in their eyes, and was not wondering who was in the costume. When these amazing creatures got defeated, I got a little upset, as though the militia was guilty of "cruelty to animals"! In recent years, the word "animals" seemed to sum it all up for me. I was probably 6, 7 or 8 years old when *GODZILLA VS. THE SMOG MONSTER* got its American theatrical release in the early 1970s. The message I got from that movie was that an animal (in this case, *Godzilla*) was trying to protect the Earth's fragile eco-system, despite mankind's best efforts to destroy that very same eco-system.

Though I had loved *BLACK SCORPION*, *GAMERA*, *TARANTULA*, etc., I think *GODZILLA VS. THE SMOG MONSTER* really made me concerned about how the world is decaying, and that the whole problem is massive human expansion. Today, I can take almost any worldwide problem (be it ecologi-



ABOVE AND RIGHT: Editor Damon Allen Foster has the rare opportunity of finally meeting a genuine "Dai-Kaiju" in person—feeding raw meat (by hand!) to a wild, 17'-0" crocodile in a secluded Central American lagoon!



cal, political or social) and link over-population as the cause of it. From global warming to terrorism, the culprit would appear to be simple: Too many people. In my old age, I've embraced nature—from wildlife expeditions to caring for injured wild animals. Getting back to the movies, I think that although the movies are entertaining, they give a lot of animals a bum-wrap. With the depiction of so many creatures as evil, no wonder so many people have irrational phobias! One of my first pets, in recent years, was, appropriately, a "Black

Scorpion"! The species is actually an Emperor Scorpion, and he's named Destron (after the villainous scorpion dudes in KAMEN RIDER V3). I also have a large tarantula, which I named Spiga (after the giant tarantula in SON OF GODZILLA and DESTROY ALL MONSTERS). I also have a decent-sized skink who bears a resemblance to Manda (ATRAAGON, DESTROY ALL MONSTERS, GODZILLA'S REVENGE), though I named it Sage, after the Monkey King. I've smuggled my venomous bugs into conventions more than once, just to scare the fanboys. It's amazing how many obsessive dorks think they're so cool for collecting plastic toys of these creatures, and yet they run screaming like pussies when confronted with the real deal!

In more recent months, I came as close as is humanly possible, to meeting a real "Godzilla" in person! While the city boys & film buffs kept trying to out-fanboy each other with the latest Godzilla DVDs & kiddy toys, I was in a foreign country, a mere three feet from a 17'-0" crocodile. It was an incredible experience, and gave me a flashback to when I was a child, watching MONSTER ZERO for the first time. The locale of this recent encounter was the beautiful country of Belize, and most of my other excursions (snorkeling, shark encounters, scuba diving, exploring ancient Mayan caves, feeding sea-turtles, etc.) were paid for, and planned in advance by tourism agencies. But I had a day to myself in this foreign land, and decided to do some unscheduled, and "unofficial" exploring of my own. Hell, I had already sliced my hand open (requiring a trip to the hospital, in a foreign land, no less!) and lost a lot of blood in a scary cave, so I was ready for anything! So I figured I might as well go explore a lagoon I was warned about, because of its wild, hungry crocodiles. The tour guides never recommended going there, but my curiosity got the better of me. I eventually found the secluded lagoon. There were no signs, no warnings. There was also no barricade between the land and the water of this lagoon on Ambergris Caye. It was barren and empty. In a lawsuit-crazy country like the U.S.A., there would be either signs, blockades or hunters to wipe out the crocodiles (similar to the terrible situation in Florida where alligators are killed simply for being alligators). But at this amazingly wild lagoon, pretty soon, I found myself feeding raw chicken to a reptile at least twice my size. With no warnings or protection of any kind, the gentle carnivore could have easily taken a bite out of me and wiped me out using his death roll. But he was only interested in the raw meat dangling from my hand. It was a magical experience in my life, and it really put that whole "giant monster" thing into perspective: So the next time a toy-collector

BELOW: Foster meets the inspiration for Zigra, while taking part in the 1st annual Shark Wrestling Championship!



asks me, "Have you really outgrown giant monsters?," I can reply: "I'm still into giant monsters. But the ones I deal with now are for real, they're not made of rubber."

But enough of my arrogant, anti "obsessive fanboy & city-boy" ramblings! Let's talk about this edition of OC! Here we go again, with another (my 38th!) issue! This time around, the long-running magazine (that's like three volumes and 38 zines!) features the obligatory babe (this time it's Lucy Liu, last issue it was Nina Li Chi), plus something a little different: A special retrospective on Hong Kong's INFRAMAN (Shaw Brothers; 1975)! To fans of superhero movies, this nostalgic flick is the most under-rated movie in history! This is at least the 3rd time OC has reviewed this classic Hong Kong superhero movie (perhaps the only HK superhero movie!!), but I realized that for once, there should be a decent look at this fine film; a review which will finally do INFRAMAN justice. I think what really inspired me was a message on an Internet newsgroup; one of the many many newsgroups (full of fanboys with way way way too much time on their hands!) which focuses on superheroes & movies of TV. The message was



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from some idiot calling himself Stuart Johnson, who mentioned he had seen "the Korean INFRAMAN", or words to that effect. I had made the assumption from this moron's (anybody who thinks Run Run Shaw is Korean must be retarded!) statement that maybe there was a Korean movie involving the character Inframan (after all, Koreans have their own illegitimate Batman, Flashman, Mazinga & Ogon Batto movies), which just goes to show how this type of misinformation gets started. I did in fact seek this non-existent film, but I did indirectly score a Korean version of the exact same Shaw brothers flick (but more on that later). Later on, some hasty website (the work of another no-talent) mentioned INFRAMAN starred Li Hsiu Hsien, "*of FIST OF FURY*", and somewhere else I read somebody call Li Hsiu Hsien "*Mr. FIST OF FURY himself!*" Not only do I not recall the guy appearing in Bruce Lee's ground-breaking movie (granted, I've not watched *FURY* in years and he could play a background character), but these retards rarely mention that Li Hsiu Hsien later changed his name to Danny Lee and was a thriving, successful, prolific actor-film-maker throughout the 1980s and 1990s— and continues to be a part of showbiz today. With morons like them spreading such misinformation about INFRAMAN, I decided it was time that *OC* devote more time to this under-rated movie, and set the record straight. So hence, this edition of *OC*!

I myself have grown up watching this movie. I first became aware of it during its 1976 theatrical release all over California, because of the thrilling trailers ("The Man Beyond Bionics") I had seen on TV. Because the design of this acrobatic superhero was so close to that of the Japanese superheroes I was absolutely in love with, I made the natural assumption that this obscure new INFRAMAN was a Japanese movie. After all, 1976 was also when KIKAIKID (A.K.A.: "Jinzo Ningen Kikaido") aired in California with English subtitles, and you can bet that me and many other white-bread elementary school kids were salivating over the program, experiencing excitement and severe culture shock every Sunday night at 8:00 P.M. We were also heavily into the likes of KAMEN RIDER, ULTRAMAN, RAINBOWMAN and other TV programs of Japan's superhero boom, and were thrilled to see that one of these recent superheroes (some strange 'new kid' in town: "Inframan") had his own feature-length movie. I was so unclear as to what "Inframan" was, that I was calling him "Intraman" (with a T) until fellow schoolboy Brian Tuomey corrected me. I was, however, confused that I could find absolutely no reference to INFRAMAN in any of my Japanese superhero books. There was no shortage of pictures of the Kamen Riders, the Ultra Brothers or the Kikaidas— but Inframan was conspicuously missing. I could even find photos of lesser known, cheap obscure heroes from Japan, like Green Man & Red Man, but no Inframan; despite what was playing in the local theaters. I had gotten sick of seeing endless photos of these common heroes, and yet Inframan himself, the only one with a major theatrical American release, was completely absent in this contradictory, confusing situation. Ultimately, it was an issue of the late American magazine *The Monster Times* which set the record straight in an article called "Chinese Chillers", where INFRAMAN was reviewed along with BLACK MAGIC (another Shaw movie). I was really surprised to read that INFRAMAN was the work of Hong Kong movie makers, since they had managed to emulate the Japanese product so well. But this realization that INFRAMAN was Hong Kongese certainly explained a lot! I was always interested in Chinese kung fu, but it was the movie INFRAMAN which first introduced me to names like The Shaw Brothers, Run Run Shaw, Li Hsu Hsien, Danny Lee, etc. To me, INFRAMAN was the start of something really big; not only would it grow to be one of my favorite movies, but it indirectly got me head-over-heals in love with HK movies, INFRAMAN was the bridge between Japanese style sci-fi (which I was into long before I got into the Chinese stuff) and Hong Kong action movies.

Making an INFRAMAN magazine has proven to be a frustrating experience. I asked local, American filmbuff types if they knew how to get material on this forgotten sci-fi masterpiece, and all-too often, they lump it in with ULTRAMAN, INAZUMAN FLASH and the other Japanese inspirations. Non-superhero fans made the assumption that Inframan stuff would be in all

them Japanese superhero books which have always been so common in Japanese book stores (i.e. Kinokuniya Books in S.F.'s Japan Center and L.A.'s Little Tokyo). But this is not the case (hell, I knew that when I was a little kid), because INFRAMAN was never released to Japan, and is absolutely not a part of their nostalgia. There's no Japanese version of INFRAMAN; the closest thing I could find was the Korean dubbed version, which is just a bootleg of the American video rental! So I turned to Chinese sources and found the same problem; INFRAMAN isn't remembered in HK either (let's face it, HK fandom is non-existent compared to that of Japan and The West). Hardly anybody in HK/China gives a damn about preserving their cinematic heritage unless it's a major money-maker like Bruce Lee or Jackie Chan, and many movies over ten years old are easily forgotten. Until the Celestial Pictures DVD release in 2004, I thought there were no original Chinese language prints of INFRAMAN left. It's for this reason that so much of this issue of *OC* concentrates on this fine film (INFRAMAN deserves better than to be only remembered by ignorant web geeks who haven't a clue). Obtaining photos and information on the movie has been like pulling teeth; locating these things is a time-consuming pain. But ironically, once I was able to actually find this stuff, I was shocked at how cheap much of it is. Though the original HK movie poster did cost me nearly \$200.00 (ouch!), I also bought a set of B/W glossies in great condition, and the price for all four of these stills was just a dollar fifty! That's right, six quarters (hell, I paid way more for postage!). Obviously, I'm living on a different planet and have a completely different set of values than the average film-buff. INFRAMAN brings to mind the old saying: "*One man's treasure is another man's garbage*". Though this issue is complete and I shall start work on another new issue of *OC* with a completely different topic, I shall still try to add to my INFRAMAN collection. If any of you out there have any INFRAMAN-related material not present in this edition of *OC*, I hope to hear from you. I'm willing to make full-size, color laser copies of my INFRAMAN posters (suitable for framing & hanging!) in trade for decent copies of any INFRAMAN pictures & clippings I lack. Regardless, I hope this issue of *OC* has been worth the effort and you enjoy this special edition, which I guess concentrates both on treasure and "garbage"!

-Damon Foster
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<http://www.lilsproutz.com/DF/>
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BELOW: Damon Foster wins first place at the International Stingray Races! However, afterwards Foster was disqualified when careful examination of the photos revealed that Damon is a magazine writer, and not a stingray at all.



CONVENTION REVIEWS:

EVENT: GodzillaFest
(AKA "SF Godzilla-Fest")
DATE: Nov. 17-23, 2004
LOCATION: Castro
Theater & Japan Center
(San Francisco, CA)
By Damon Foster
<damonfoster@earthlink.net>



Tsutomu Kitagawa, Damon Foster and Akira Kubo.

I thought the usage of the word "Fest" made this one-shot event sound too much like G-Fest (which, in turn, sounded too much like G-Con), but otherwise I've few complaints about this "SF-G-Fest", San Francisco's first major Godzilla convention. If it were I, and not Bob Johnson, Bob Beavon, August Ragone, David Chapple & Richard Pusateri who were running the show, I would have called it G-Spot. But seriously, any time you get to see kaiju celebrities like Tsutomu Kitagawa, Russ Tamblyn, Hiroshi Koizumi, Jerry Ito and Akira Kubo in person, you know damn well it's a kick-ass event. It lasted like three weeks (model kit displays at one place, video games at another), but I was only there for a couple days because none of the guys involved (yes, I'm quite insulted.....to say the least) went out of their way to let me know about this nearby (a fifteen minute drive from my house!) event. When I got there, I was surprised to see how big the event was, since they had to have been preparing this thing for several months. Personal grudges aside, it was nice to see old classics (i.e. WAR OF THE GARGANTUAS, MOTHRA, etc.) on the big screen, as well as newer stuff like GODZILLA-MOTHRA-KING GHIDORAH: GIANT MONSTERS ALL OUT ATTACK and GODZILLA: TOKYO SOS. Guest Tsutomu Kitagawa is known mainly to the American audience for his roles in the Godzilla costume (in GODZILLA 2000, GODZILLA VS. MEGAGUIRUS, GODZILLA AGAINST MECHAGODZILLA, etc.). But the on-stage interview (translated by Brad Warner) also mentioned Kitagawa's early years as a martial artist for Chiba's J.A.C., where he did karate & stunts for numerous superhero programs (i.e. AKUMAIZA 3). As somebody devoted to both martial arts and Godzilla, he revealed he frequently wears a yellow-tracksuit (ala' GAME OF DEATH) under the Godzilla costume! So Kitagawa represents two different types of dragons (Godzilla and Bruce Lee) simultaneously! -Damon Foster

EVENT: Kikaida Fan Fair
DATE: April 13, 2002
LOCATION: Japanese
Cultural Center (Oahu,
HI)
By Damon Foster
<damonfoster@earthlink.net>



It's strange to be reviewing a convention so many years after it happened, but in the previous OC, I stated I would review this event in this here issue— and besides, OC was never topical or up-to-date to begin with (OC is more of a nostalgia thing). By now you know that I was initially pretty bitter about the Kikaida Fan Fair I attended; but it was so long ago, I've completely forgotten what I was so pissed off about! As I recall, the

Japanese Cultural Center was architecturally inappropriate for such a large event— resulting in long, twisting lines of people crammed together like sardines. There were performances, like a Kikaida stage show and actor Shunsuke Kikuchi attempting some sort of half-assed kendo demonstration, but there were no seats or any room for an actual audience! Like I said before, it was nice to be in the presence of Japanese superhero actors like Daisuke Ban (JINZO NINGEN KIKAIDA, INAZUMAN FLASH, NINJA CAPTOR, etc.) & Shunsuke Ikeda (KIKAIDA 01, KINKYU SHIREI 10.4.10.10) and to get their autographs. But I still question the logic of such a badly organized event. Them Hawaiian promoters from KIKU TV, JN Productions and/or Generation Kikaida (whatever they're called this week) must have been smoking too much of the old Maui-wowie! What's really funny is that a nearby grocery store, aware of JINZO NINGEN KIKAIDA's popularity in Hawaii, had to hire extra security guards (and angry ones at that!) to keep Kikaida fans from using their already over-crowded lot! Boy, what a mess the event was. -DF

EVENT: King of the Monsters: A 50th Birthday Salute to Godzilla
DATE: June 24 -29, 2004
LOCATION: Egyptian Theatre (Hollywood, CA)
By Brett Homenick
<thehumanvapor@yahoo.com>



Armand Vaquer, Akinori Takagi, Richard Pusateri and Yasuyuki Inoue.

This film festival, organized by the Japan Foundation and the American Cinematheque, kicked off a summer of conventions and various other shows celebrating the 50th anniversary of the theatrical release of the original GODZILLA. Director Masaaki Tezuka (GODZILLA X MEGAGUIRUS, GODZILLA X MECHAGODZILLA) was on hand the first two nights, but his interview was handled by someone on the Egyptian Theatre staff, which meant that Mr. Tezuka wasn't asked the uber-technical questions the audience no doubt wanted to hear. Pretty much the only interesting detail uncovered from his interview was that he does not like to be compared with Shusuke Kaneko, the dude who directed the Heisei Gamera trilogy. Art director Yasuyuki Inoue and model maker Akinori Takagi, two elderly gentlemen who worked on Toho films during the Showa era, also attended many of the film screenings. Among other things, they revealed that crayfish from a nearby stream were used as stand-ins for the Meganulon in some of the scenes in which those critters are underground in RODAN and that Mr. Takagi went behind to Toho's back to dig a hole in the effects stage to launch the P1 rocket in MONSTER ZERO. As intriguing as these discussions were, they were often held before the films screened, throwing off the schedule entirely. (STAR TREK actor George Takei, who apparently doesn't disown RODAN anymore, spoke immediately following that movie, but my friends and I had to leave before his talk commenced due to the poor scheduling.) Be that as it may, it was a treat to see such movies as RODAN, MONSTER ZERO (which was attended by Nick Adams's son Jeb) and DESTROY ALL MONSTERS (atrocious "international" dubbing and all) on the silver screen, though some of the prints were clearly showing their age. Overall, the film fest proved a fun event, rough around the edges though it may have been. It's always good to see the likes of Peter H. Brothers, Brant Elliott, Armand Vaquer, Richard Pusateri, and the usual group of fanboys associated with these events, which made the scheduling debacle just that much more tolerable.

- Brett Homenick

EVENT: Ban Daisuke in
San Francisco
DATE: July 26, 2004
LOCATION: Super 7
(Japan Town, S.F.)
By Damon Foster

*Damon Foster and
Daisuke Ban.*



I now have a lot more respect for JoAnne Ninomura (representative of Hawaii's KIKU TV), and/or "Jinzo Ningen Productions", "JN Productions", "Generation Kikaida" or whatever. Last issue I was frustrated that the Hawaiian superhero scene seemed so self-centered, but things are changing this year. Not only did Daisuke Ban ("Jiro" of JINZO NINGEN KIKAIKA, also called KIKAIKAIDER: THE ANDROID OF JUSTICE) go to the San Diego Comic Con, but he also made an appearance at the toy-store Super 7 (which has its own magazine). Having grown up on the original KIKAIKA/KIKAIKAIDER series, it was inevitable that I would attend such an event. My interest in all-things-psychotronic is fading and I rarely travel great distances to meet celebrities or go to conventions any more. But with Daisuke Ban appearing at a venue just a twenty minute drive from my house, how could I miss such an opportunity?! I'd seen him in person before, but it was great to hang out with him on a more casual level (though KIKAIKA aired in San Francisco, it never generated the same huge ratings that it had in Hawaii), since there were probably only about 30 or 40 people in the store. Ban & Ninomura showed up early (he wasn't scheduled until 6:00 P.M., but they were in Super 7 by 5:45 P.M.), and Ban was nice, modest & humble— coming up to each of us personally, singling out everybody with a friendly greeting and handshake. With Generation Kikaida's superb DVD releases of the KIKAIKA live action program, it's great that Ban hasn't developed an ego. The event lasted about an hour, with some basic questions & answers (JoAnne Ninomura translated for him), and then it was plenty of autograph signing and photo opportunities. It was a small event, but very pleasant. -DF

EVENT: G-FEST XI

DATE: July 9 - 11th, 2004

LOCATION: O'Hare International Holiday Inn Hotel,
Rosemont, Illinois

By Brett Homenick
<thehumanvapor@yahoo.com>

*Right: Robert Scott Field,
Teruyoshi Nakano, Mark
Rainey & Brett Homenick.*



The 50th anniversary of the release of the original GODZILLA to Japanese theaters also marked the year of the most successful G-FEST event to date. With an estimated 1,400 attendees on hand for the festivities, G-FEST once again proved that it stands as the premier Godzilla celebration in North America. Former Toho special effects director Teruyoshi Nakano (GODZILLA VS. THE SMOG MONSTER, GODZILLA 1985), whose career in Godzilla films spans three decades, was this year's honored guest, and he delighted the con-goers with an enthusiasm and an affability that most G-FEST guests have become well-known for. During his session, Mr. Nakano instructed his captivated audience how to build various explosives (!), revealed that Nick Adams was busted for trying to smuggle two trunkfuls of aphrodisiacs back to the U.S. after completing work on his kaiju films, and discussed what went into the creation of some of the genre's more bizarre monsters, like Gigan. On Friday, the international version of MONSTER ZERO and a subtitled print of TERROR OF MECHAGODZILLA played at the nearby Pickwick Theater. It came as a pleasant surprise to all attendees that the 2003 Godzilla film, GODZILLA: TOKYO S.O.S., would screen at the Pickwick Saturday night (obviously, it was announced that 2002's GODZILLA X MECHAGODZILLA would be shown that night). More than 750 fans packed the theater to see what was then the latest Godzilla film. Other presenters included: GODZILLA VS. KING GHIDORAH actor Robert Scott Field, Hugo Award-winning artist Bob Eggleton, Videohound's Dragon author Brian Thomas, Japanese Giants creator Mark Rainey, G-Fan editor J.D. Lees, Mad Scientist editor Martin Arlt, and model maven Stan Hyde. -Brett Homenick
<thehumanvapor@yahoo.com>

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SHAOLIN VS. TERMINATOR



MARTYR X

Lucy Alexis Liu

By Damon Foster

Here we go with this issue's obligatory babel! Get your nausea medicine ready, because we're gonna' voyage into deepest, darkest Mainstream America (where Blockbuster Video rules the masses just like "Big Brother"!) as we have a laughable look at the career and films of Lucy Liu! This is gonna' suck, but hopefully it will be worth a chuckle!

Though she's best known (for better or worst) to the American humdrum mainstream for her role on TV as Ling Woo (a character on the ALLY McBEAL television series), or maybe her appearance on SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE, I first became aware of this sultry, very lucky actress when

I saw her in the immensely entertaining Jackie Chan farce SHANGHAI NOON (Touchstone Pictures; 2000). She must have some mysterious charm, because she doesn't strike me as being particularly attractive or talented. Even so, it's rare that Jackie's leading ladies are so unknown to me, so I later tried to see what other productions she had been in, but searches in more familiar territory (i.e. HK action movies) turned up only one film, Danny (INFRAMAN) Lee's RHYTHM OF DESTINY. But her role in this 1992 Hong Kong drama seemed quite small. I had begun to think she hadn't acted anywhere else. Little did I know that all this time, she was an American star; which just goes to prove how isolated I am from the domestic market (I never sat through an episode of ALLY McBEAL and I'm not likely to)! I didn't realize she was a local gal until a few months later when I sat through the over-rated CHARLIE'S ANGELS (Columbia Tristar; 2000). By the time I realized she wasn't in many Asian movies, it was too late to cancel this article (back then, I had deadlines to meet). Oh well, this piece will give me a chance to trash more American movies!

For what it's worth, Lucy Liu was born in Jackson Heights (New York), on 12/2/68 to Chinese parents. Her father was a biochemist and mother was an engineer— until they gave up their careers and sought out the "American Dream" in NY. But college credentials from foreign countries are as useless in America as pork chops are in Israel, so her father became a

salesman, and her mother was now a Macy's clerk. So Lucy Liu was raised in America, and grew up speaking both English and Mandarin.

According to an interview with her (which I saw on some website), she encountered the usual prejudice and misconceptions that Asian American kids often encountered growing up in the U.S. during the 1960s and 1970s. Liu stated: *"When I was little, people would come up to me and do karate chops and say, 'Oh, you're Chinese, you must know karate.' I hated that. Now if someone asks me if I know karate, I can say, 'Yeah, I do, and I can kick your ass.'"* Her first brush with drama came when she auditioned for the school play Alice in Wonderland. She got to play the title role, resulting in the first Asian Alice! Liu graduated from Stuyvesant High School (Brooklyn) in 1986, and she enrolled in the University of Michigan, where she earned a degree in Asian cultures & languages. In addition to learning the accordion, she also took courses in Voice, Acting, & Dance. Lucy also became interested in rock climbing, skiing, and horseback riding; activities she still takes part in. Her schooling gained her a reputation as a talented multimedia artist and photographer as well.

Liu pursued a showbiz career after graduation, and had to pay for acting lessons by working three jobs (as a secretary, an aerobics instructor, and a hostess at a restaurant). Lucy Liu's first professional acting role was in 1991, as a waitress on that horrid piece of go-bolemic-now-to-look-as-perfect-as-us garbage, BEVERLY HILLS 90210. It was only a bit part, so pretty soon she tried her hand at Hong Kong movies, and had a minor supporting role in RHYTHM OF DESTINY (Magnum Films; 1992). But she returned to America and began making a name for herself by playing bit parts in TV programs, such as a regular part on PEARL, not to mention one-shot appearances on COACH, E.R., and THE X-FILES. Then in 1998 she was cast (as Ling Woo) on ALLY McBEAL. The petite (5'-1") actress had originally auditioned for the role of some other character. But ALLY McBEAL's producer was impressed enough with her audition that he created the character of "Ling Woo" specifically for Liu. Ling Woo was originally intended to appear in just a few episodes, but proved to be so popular with the program's viewers that she was made into

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a regular character. Later, the whole cast received an S.A.G. Award for Best Ensemble Performance in a Comedy Series, and Liu herself earned an inaugural Ammy Award, which honors Asian-American actors and filmmakers.

Not surprisingly, both Liu's semi-good looks and increased exposure on TV resulted in greater opportunities to act (if you can call it that)—on the big screen. She had supporting roles in LOVE KILLS, FLYPAPER, MOLLY and PAYBACK. Liu's first Emmy nomination was for Best Supporting Actress in 1999, but her first major role was in the Jackie Chan caper, SHANGHAI NOON. In it, she played a princess in late 1800's Manchu-dominated China, who was kidnapped and brought to America. Though SHANGHAI NOON didn't go down in history as being one of Jackie Chan's better movies, I personally enjoyed it, and found it to be an important movie. Jackie's American movies like RUSH HOUR or RUMBLE IN THE BRONX are dime-a-dozen nonsense, and interchangeable with many urban action comedies. SHANGHAI NOON, however, kept the tradition of period kung fu movie alive, at a time when we see so few costume drama martial arts movies (CROUCHING TIGER HIDDEN DRAGON doesn't count as a "martial arts costume drama", and is more of a "high-flying supermen costume drama"). Though she only did a little fighting in the Jackie Chan blockbuster, Liu does practice some martial arts, including Kali-Eskrima-silat, which is knife & stick fighting from the Philippines.

The modest returns for SHANGHAI NOON led to more substantial roles for Lucy Liu, such as in the exceedingly hyped CHARLIE'S ANGELS; which has become considered her big "breakthrough" role. In the fall of 2000, she joined the CHARLIE'S ANGELS trio (she was the final Angel to be cast). She joined during her co-stars' third month of intensive martial arts training. Liu already had less to learn than her fellow cast members, having studied Kali-Eskrima-Silat for years. Being a bigshot Hollywood production, there were plenty of out-of-control egos, hissy fits, and feuds between the spoiled-rotten cast members, even between Liu and Bill Murray (who played Bosley). It was reported (and contradicted in other sources, such as a Premiere magazine article where the reporter was impressed by the trio's sister-like bonding) that the three "Angels" themselves didn't get along,

but whatever conflicts were quickly resolved, since both Liu & Cameron Diaz took part in Drew Barrymore's wedding (to that idiot from FREDDIE GOT FINGERED) shortly after the film's completion.

Despite her successful big break into cinema, she still came back to do occasional guest appearances on TV. She supplied the voice for the character of "Liubot", a virtual humanoid on two episodes (shown 5/13/01 and 2/10/01) of the Fox cartoon FUTURAMA (aah yes, Fox is just as good at cartoons as they are at making non-biased news!). The story of the episode had something to do with a virtual humanoid downloaded from a computer and was largely a spoof of the Napster scandal which was mak-



ing news headlines at the time.

In April of 2001, she was nominated at the BT Ethnic Multicultural Media Awards (E.M.M.A.), which were designed to highlight the importance of ethnic minorities in their chosen professions. Hosted by comedians Richard Blackwood and Nina Wadia (at London's Grosvenor House Hotel), the nominees included Craig David, Eddie Murphy, Denise Lewis, Destiny's Child and of course Lucy Liu. Awards were given in several categories including film, music, TV, art, journalism and entertainment. Liu is also a gifted artist (her art was first displayed at the Cast Iron Gallery in London in 1993). She received a grant to study art in China, resulting in an exhibit (of mixed media photography) which chronicled her ex-

periences there. The exhibit debuted at a Venice, CA gallery in 1997.

Lucy Liu has gone on to be one of the most prolific Asian-American actresses in history, Anna May Wong would be proud! If nothing else, Liu strikes me as being very lucky. Personally, I don't see what all the fuss is about, but her audience of fans has made her very successful. I think she's not the greatest looker, and her talent is limited. Anyway: What follows are reviews (in alphabetical order) of as many crappy Lucy Liu films as I could sit through without puking my guts out. I am, however concentrating on movies and only movies, and certainly can't be bothered to sit through and critique her countless TV appearances in junk like PEARL, E.R., HIGH INCIDENT, COACH, N.Y.P.D BLUE, L.A. LAW, MICHAEL HAYES, THE X FILES or some Showtime feature called RIOT. I also think it's a safe assumption that this publication will not have a complete episode guide to ALLY MCBEAL. There are other movies she's reportedly appeared in (according to various conflicting Lucy Liu appreciation websites created by obsessive, horny fanboys), such as JERRY MCGUIRE and the enjoyable AUSTIN POWERS 2: THE SPY WHO SHAGGED ME. However, I'm not including these two movies in this filmography because I honestly couldn't spot her in either film, and doubt the validity of the sources which included these flicks in their filmographies of Liu. It's bad enough that I was misled into watching a miserable piece of shit like JERRY MCGUIRE.

LUCY LIU MOVIE REVIEWS:

BALLISTIC: ECKS VS. SEVER-

Devastatingly uninteresting crime drama with plenty of action: Gunplay, explosions, car-crashes and some martial arts. I suppose I didn't like the monotonous techno music which goes on forever, but because I was so absolutely detached from BALLISTIC, I wouldn't go so far as to say I was focused enough to actually like or dislike anything about this routine actioner. There's not a single compelling character anywhere in this strange story of Lucy Liu kidnapping a boy, as part of some revenge plot against the main villain, Agent Clark. There's talk of microscopic "bio assassin" (?) thingies, and that the kidnapped boy is actually Antonio Banderas's son, but all these subplot twists just add confusion to a story not worth ana-

lyzing or debating. Liu's climactic fight with Ray Park is tolerable though. I'm giving BALLISTIC no star, but that's because it's uninteresting to the point of being non-existent; I'm not saying it's absolutely horrible (we have movies like CHARLIE'S ANGELS which gracefully accept that label). M.F.H.; 2002, In Association with Franchise Pictures, Dist.: Warner Bros., Prod.: Chris Lee, Dir.: Kao, Cast: Antonio Banderas, Lucy Liu, Gregg Henry, Ray Park, Talisa Soto, Miguel Sandoval, Terry Chen, Roger R. Cross. -DF

CHARLIE'S ANGELS- I was never crazy about the original series, but if they could have made this movie a sequel involving the now aging, original cast members, then this quirky flick would have been interesting. But instead, it's just another terrible remake, and proved to be an unpleasant experience, a genuinely unpleasant film to sit through. This unbelievably inferior movie is jaw-droppingly bad, so much so that I'm really at a loss for words. Throughout this horrendous excuse for a movie, I was in absolute dismay that such a horrendous product was made. The abundant comedy (if you can call it that) is beyond stupid and belongs on the cutting room floor! The overall approach of CHARLIE'S ANGELS is too rushed; too fast-paced for it's own good (it's just an excuse to show the angels in as many outfits as possible, and the editing is abrupt; making the script a disjointed mess). The martial arts fight scenes might be slightly better than average for an American movie (all three actresses try their best, though it's obvious none are masters of karate!), but it's really just a bunch of crafty editing, stunt-doubles and of course wirework. For what it's worth, the fight staging was done by at least one of Yuen Wo Ping's brothers, Cheung-Yan Yuen. Because of Ping's hit, THE MATRIX, they hired his brother to work on CHARLIE'S ANGELS, to rip off THE MATRIX's style. Cheung-Yan Yuen isn't the only genre favorite who's talent was wasted on CHARLIE'S ANGELS. Lucy Liu's stunt-double was none other than Michiko Nishiwaki herself, who's certainly no stranger to OC readers. But the only thing good about this Hollywood blockbuster of CGI schlock & bad comedy is the scene at the race-track, because Drew Barrymore is showing some decent cleavage. Columbia/Tristar; 2000. Directed by: McG.,

Script by Ryan Rowe, Ed Solomon and John August, Cast: Cameron Diaz, Lucy Liu, Drew Barrymore, Bill Murray, Sam Rockwell, Kelly Lynch, Tim Curry, Luke Wilson. -DF

CHARLIE'S ANGELS: FULL THROTTLE- It's a lively, colorful movie, but because the humor falls flat (what moron wrote this junk?) it's not a comedy, and the many fight-scenes consist exclusively of FX trickery—so it's not a martial arts film. This type of movie falls under the category of, "Stupidity" as opposed to "Comedy". Blockbuster Video really does need to start a section for Hollywood's mainstream "Stupidity" movies such as this embarrassingly bad piece of garbage. The entire soundtrack consists of various pop tunes (from metal, to



rap, to 80s new wave, to surf) and so nobody is left out. I almost cracked a smile (that's as close as CHARLIE'S ANGELS: FULL THROTTLE came to making me laugh) when John Cleese misunderstood and thought Lucy Liu was a prostitute. But otherwise, once you get passed the hot chicks in tight clothing premise, this fantasy/adventure/stupidity is so dumb it's unwatchable. The story has something to do with the quest for some rings, and all these bad guys, bad gals and colorful characters seem to want them. There are fights, explosions, motorcycle chases, etc., but it's all reliant on CGI crap, and it's just a matter of time before I could generate the same quality of digital thrills using the exact same computer I'm using to type this review. Columbia/Tristar;

2003, Directed by: McG, Cast: Drew Barrymore, Cameron Diaz, Lucy Liu, Bernie Mac, Demi Moore, John Cleese, Chris Pontius, Jaclyn Smith. -DF

FLYPAPER- Complex subplots and seemingly unrelated characters, whose paths eventually cross tend to remind me of PULP FICTION. But FLYPAPER is a little hard to categorize—because of the constant attempts at humor, it should definitely be classified as "Comedy", but I did not find it in the local videostore's Comedy section; it was in the Drama section (I guess that's because FLYPAPER is only amusing, not actually funny). Though Lucy Liu is displayed prominently on the videobox's cover, she's only one of several

characters in this bizarre tale about a cheating fiance's entrapment, a surfer dude who experiments with rattlesnake venom, and many other over-the-top characters who find themselves in one ridiculous situation after another. Though largely comedic, there's enough dark comedy, occasional grimness and bloodshed (i.e. Liu slicing her own ankle to escape from shackles!) to add impact. There are completely irrelevant conversations which go nowhere and don't add to the script (s), but on the whole, this movie is entertaining. This is the type of movie you should rent when you're around "normal" people. Let me explain what I mean: You, as an OC reader, most likely aren't normal. So if you had your way, you would prefer to watch videotapes of kung fu, Japanese superheroes or giant monsters—right? Well, there are times (i.e. holidays, when you're with boring relatives) when you

may find yourself in charge of renting a video for the whole family. Though FLYPAPER is vulgar and deserves its R rating, it straddles the line between mainstream and demented. Hell, it's better than sitting through Pierce Brosnan's THE THOMAS CROWN AFFAIR, which is what I had to do one Thanksgiving because I was with family members who aren't ready for something really cool like an old Starman classic. Citadel Entertainment; 1997, Cast: Craig Sheffer, Robert Loggin, Sodie Frost, John G. McGinley, Illeana Douglas, Sal Lopez, Lucy Alexis Liu. ** -DF

GRIDLOCK'D- Tim Roth and the late Tupac Shakur in a grim, vulgar, depressing story of human trash. The characters in this movie are

almost all druggies, and are such unlikable, foul-mouthed losers that I really couldn't care if they got arrested, shot dead by mobsters or if they died of drug overdoses. GRIDLOCK'D was made for simpleminded people, perhaps it was made for actual drug abusers; I don't know. Maybe it's a realistic portrayal of life on the street? Its attempts at humor are obviously intended for people with limited intellect. Regardless, Lucy Liu has a small role as one of the many druggies, and being such an early film in her career, she's not given much to do. The real star is Six-Pack Shakur, or whatever the hell his name is (I mean, whatever the hell his name was; he got shot dead by rival "gangstaz" after completing this movie). I admit that I was at least mildly amused by this dumb movie, but I sure as hell can't recommend it. If you like artsy editing, flashbacks, drug addicted street

trash (who sound illiterate; unintelligible at times), and excessive use of the word "fuck", then you might wanna' check out GRIDLOCK'D. If nothing else, it's better than CHARLIE'S ANGELS. But then, kissing your own grandmother with your tongue is better than CHARLIE'S ANGELS. Polygram;1996, Prod.: Damian Jones, Paul Webster & Erica Huggins, Cast: Tim Roth, Tupac Shakur, Thandie Newton, Charles Fleischer, Howard Hesseman, James Pickens Jr., John Sayles, Eric Payne. -DF

KILL BILL: VOLUME 1- Though acclaimed director Quentin Tarentino has often made references to Asian martial arts films in his own movies, KILL BILL is his first actual martial arts film. As far as mainstream Hollywood directors go, Tarentino is still my favorite, and that was before I saw this superb homage to Far

Eastern action movies and Italian spaghetti westerns! It's so full of in-jokes (i.e. GREEN HORNET theme music, none-too-subtle Shaw Bros. tributes, nods to both KAGE NO GUNDAN and THE YAGYU CONSPIRACY, etc.) that there's no way to list them all. How often do we get to see Kamen Rider ZX (Shun Sugata), The Street Fighter (Sonny Chiba), Space Sheriff Gavan (Kenji Ohba) and The Master Killer (Gordon Liu) all in one film?!?! KILL BILL crosses barriers and breaks new grounds, even if the script is absolutely typical (revenge, need I say more?), reminding me of Japan's ZERO WOMAN movies. I love how Tarentino brings in such unique elements (i.e. an anime flashback, Japanese all-girl musical trio the 5.6.7.8s, who play 1960s style rockabilly) based on his own personal whims. KILL BILL was initially trashed by a lot of critics because of it's gore and violence, but those idiotic critics obviously haven't seen a lot of samurai films. Oh, I forgot—this is suppose to be part of a Lucy Liu filmography. But the less said about her, the better. As I watched KILL BILL and saw the facial close-ups of her, it dawned on me that she's butt ugly. Regardless, her climactic sword fight with heroic Uma Thurman is decent, with Thurman in an outfit inspired by GAME OF DEATH. Miramax; 2003, Dir.: Quentin Tarantino, Cast: Uma Thurman, Sonny Chiba, David Carradine, Daryl Hanna, Kenji Ohba, Lucy Liu, Gordon Liu.**** -DF

LOVE KILLS- There must be at least three movies with this title (the best being the one about Sid Vicious, but that one is called SID & NANCY in America), so it would have helped if the people who made this erotic thriller would have done some simple marketing research first. This movie is a Tarantino-esque caper which alters between grim and comedic, and on the whole, manages to be witty, amusing and silly—but not actually funny. The story is complex and at times unpredictable, and manages to toss in plenty of colorful, interesting, over-acting characters (but none are likable). This is not the type of movie I would normally enjoy watching, so its massive two whole star rating is very kind, in my book. The story is confusing, but seems to involve enough jewel thieves, poisoned drinks, bloodshed, fags and obscene language to make it consistently amusing. Lucy Liu has only a small role as one of the gun-toting thieves, and although she looks hot in a silver skirt, I think Lesley Ann Warren looked even better (though Loretta Devine has the best cleavage). I don't know



who the hell this lead actor Mario Van Peebles is or where he came from. My guess is that he was originally one of the guys in Milli Vanilli. This movie is better than CHARLIE'S ANGELS and GRIDLOCK'D, at any rate. But then, drinking the Jacuzzi water from a San Francisco bath-house is better than CHARLIE'S ANGELS and GRIDLOCK'D. Ivan Caine Productions; 1998. Prod.: Mario Van Peebles, Mark Buntzman, Written & Directed by Mario Van Peebles, Cast: Mario Van Peebles, Lesley Ann Warren, Donovan Leitch, Loretta Devine, Louise Fletcher, Daniel Baldwin, Robert LaSardo. ** -DF

MATING HABITS OF THE EARTHBOUND

HUMAN, THE- As I sat through this ever-so Hollywood romantic comedy, it became so obvious that I'm scraping the bottom-of-the-barrel again and having critiqued films for so long, I've really run out of flicks to critique. Though highly sexual and "adult" in nature, this R-Rated movie is unbelievably naive and childish. I've always hated (with few exceptions) sappy movies like this, and THE MATING HABITS OF THE EARTHBOUND HUMAN is an unfunny, thoroughly embarrassing experience. I can't believe people find this junk to be funny. This is not only the worst Lucy Liu movie I've ever seen, but one of the worst movies ever made, period! A typical story of boy-meets-supermodel, boy-screws-supermodel, boy-impregnates-supermodel, etc. This semi-docu-drama loses even more credibility because "boy" isn't even rich! Who are they kidding?! It's completely predictable, even though it attempts at being witty by presenting everything from the point of view of outerspace aliens watching a documentary on human mating rituals. It's not science fiction though, except for its depiction of Carmen Electra being attracted to a white guy who acts like a white guy and he's not wealthy! Carmen Electra goes out on a limb as a non gold-digger (quite a performance) too. Once again, Lucy Liu is a token background Asian American who isn't given much to do (as one of Electra's room-mates, co-workers and fellow nightclub sluts), and is completely over-shadowed by Electra, who wears a variety of sleazy outfits to remind us we're all lusting after her but will never get such a "catch" (unless we win the lottery). THE MATING HABITS OF THE EARTHBOUND HUMAN is absolute trash and not worth the celluloid it was shot on. Wels Film Pursuits Ltd.; 1999, Written & Directed by some Idiot called: Jeff Abugov, Produced by some Asshole Called:

Larry Estes, Co-Prod.: Victor Ho, Cast: Mackenzie Astin, Carmen Electra, David Hyde Pierce, Markus Redmond, Lucy Liu, Lista Rotondi, Trashed by Damon Foster

MOLLY- It got off to a good start, with this hilarious guy (Michael Paul Chan) in the nut-house who starts singing "Old McDonald Had A Farm". Elisabeth Shue plays the title retard, rather a female Forest Gump. There are some funny moments where she embarrasses her brother in public (almost reminding me of Jackie Chan & Samo Hung's relationship in HEART OF THE DRAGON), but pretty soon the character gets a seemingly successful brain operation to bring the I.Q. up and once she starts falling in love and the movie ditches the comedy, it's all downhill. But even as a drama, it's consistently tolerable, I admit that I learned to respect and care about all the characters involved, but I would have rather gotten more laughs out of it. I think Hollywood overdid the film's sex appeal by having almost everybody look attractive and young. Let's get real here and have some heffers! There should have been more ugly people to at least give this soap-opera some believability. It's rather hard to feel sorry for a retarded individual when I'm too busy checking out her tits. As for Lucy Liu's role, it's pretty insignificant; she's only in it for a few minutes (making it one of her best roles!), as a secretary who occasionally babysits the film's main psycho, I mean, protagonist. If you can sit through MOLLY for free, go for it; but don't actually pay to watch the damn thing. MGM; 1998, Prod.: William J. Macdonald, Written by Dick Christie, Dir.: John Duigan, Cast: Elisabeth Shue, Aaron Eckhart, Jill Hennessy, Thomas Jane, D.W. Moffett, Elizabeth Mitchell, Lucy Liu, Robert Harper, Michael Paul Chan. * -DF

PAYBACK- Mel Gibson in a violent drama about a thief who got double-crossed by other thieves. The overall premise is pretty typical, but there's enough bloodshed and slickness to make it tolerable. Lucy Liu's role, much like her breasts, isn't that big, but it's a decent character and she looks hot in leather. She plays some sort of dominatrix who's also a member of some Chinatown gang. The main star is Mel Gibson himself though, and I still don't see why he's so popular. He's fairly effective as the movie's hero, but since the guy himself is a thief, the character deserves all the abuse he gets from mobsters, crooked cops, etc., and I had little sympathy for him. On the whole, the movie is watchable, I guess. Paramount; 1999, Prod.:

Bruce Davey, Dir.: Brian Helgeland, Cast: Mel Gibson, Gregg Henry, Maria Bello, David Paymer, Bill Duke, Deborah Kara Unger, James Coburn, John Glover, Lucy Alexis Liu. *1/2 -DF

PLAY IT TO THE BONE- I saw this comedy-drama a while back and don't remember it too well. Lucy Liu doesn't have a big part (a hooker who gets punched & knocked out by the gorgeous Lolita Davidovich) as I recall, and it has something to do with two boxers on a road trip. I guess it must have been pretty routine, because none of it remained in my admittedly small brain. My favorite scene is where Robert Wagner slabs some chick (Lolita Davidovich) who kept teasing him. 1999, Dir.: Ron Shelton, Prod.: Stephen Chin, Woody Harrelson, Antonio Banderas, Lolita Davidovich, Lucy Liu, Tom Sizemore, Robert Wagner, Richard Masur. -DF



RHYTHM OF DESTINY- Sitting through this subtitled, Hong Kong-made flick was no easy task. RHYTHM OF DESTINY is little more than a non-action variation on A BETTER TOMORROW. Again, you've got your two brothers (one is honest, the other works with triads), the Christian church symbolism, the "bad" brother ends up in jail for a while, and of course the death of their parent—only this time, it's the mother, not the father who dies. Though the similarities end there, I couldn't help compare the two, because the memory of A BETTER TOMORROW enabled me able to foresee every plot twist that happens in this boring, stupid movie. This is not one of Danny Lee's better movies, and I don't like Aaron Kwok, period. His character sings and dances, and with those dance moves, I can't believe Kwok is suppose to be playing a heterosexual! But his love interest is played by Lucy Liu, in what's probably her only HK film role, though I could be mistaken. She's not given much to do, because a number of HK's bigger stars are present. Though most of the movie is light-hearted, there is an action scene at the end where Danny Lee is killed in a sword fight. This is a modern movie taking place in urban HK, yet the villains carry samurai swords around. As an action movie, RHYTHM OF DESTINY is worthless, because there are hardly any fights and what few it does have are absolutely uninteresting. But to be fair, this movie is a drama, not a crime drama. Magnum Films; 1992, Prod.: Danny Lee, Executive Prod.: Parkman Wong, Dir.: Andrew Lau, Cast: Danny Lee, Aaron Kwok, Cheung Man, Shing Fui On, Ng Ma, Or Sau Leung, Jiu Kau, Lok Ying Kwan, Lucy Alexis Liu, Peter Lai. -DF

SHANGHAI NOON- This was the first Lucy Liu movie I ever saw, and I ended up compar-

ing it (unfairly) all her other movies with this superior product as a result. SHANGHAI NOON really is one of the few Lucy Liu movies (the other one is KILL BILL Volume 1) that's worth a damn. Though it's one of her best movies, it's not one of Jackie Chan's best movies (though it is probably my favorite Chan flick since CITY HUNTER). But how often in the 21st century does America produce a martial arts period film involving Ching Dynasty soldiers?! This western adventure borrows heavily from RED SUN and ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA AND AMERICA, but it's still a fun farce with plenty of fight scenes and laughs! Jackie Chan plays a Manchu guard who comes to the old west to rescue a kidnapped princess (Lucy Liu) in this action/comedy. Though this is clearly a vehicle for superstar Jackie Chan, the script also gives Liu a role of some importance for once. So this is one of her only decent films, and I want to end this section on a positive note. Touchstone Pictures; 2000, Producers: Gary Barber, Roger Birnbaum, Jackie & Willie Chan, Dir.: Tom Dey, Cast: Jackie Chan, Owen Wilson, Lucy Liu, Brandon Merrill, Roger Yuan, Xander Berkeley, Eric Chen. *** -DF

OKAY, THAT'S ENOUGH.....

Over the years, I've written a lot of filmographies, and have therefore critiqued the career of many a movie star. Usually, I work hard and go all out, trying my best to make my filmographies complete. I dare say that more often than not, my filmographies are the most complete of any given actor or actress. But I've never seen such a high percentage of horrible movies as I have doing this attempted filmography on Lucy Liu. For the first time, I've given up. I simply can't tolerate any more of this garbage. Sitting through RHYTHM OF DESTINY and CHARLIE'S ANGELS was bad enough, but I think THE MATING HABITS OF THE EARTHBOUND HUMAN was the last straw (I've reached a new low). I'm abandoning the search, for the first time ever! It's not like me to give up, but this whole article has been a truly nauseating experience. Believe it or not, there are some movies which are too bad even for me to review! Though I won't deny that Lucy Liu has some talent (I've heard rumors of this), I honestly can't stomach any more of this junk. My research indicates that she's in at least three other movies: BANG (1997), GUY (1998), and THE COMPANY MAN (2001). But considering what I've had to sit through so far, I think I've been tortured enough, and because THE MATING HABITS OF THE EARTHBOUND HUMAN put such a bad taste in my mouth, I'm not going to even give the remaining Lucy Liu movies a chance. -DF



LUCY LIU

GUEST APPEARANCES ON TV:

BEVERLYHILLS 90210 (1990)
 DELLAVENTURA (1998)
 ENTERTAINMENT TONIGHT (1998)
 E.R. (1994)
 FUTURAMA (1998)
 GOOD DAY NEW YORK (1999)
 HERCULES: THE LEGENDARY JOURNEYS (1995)
 HOME IMPROVEMENT (1991)
 JOHNNY QUEST: THE NEW ADVENTURES (1997)
 L.A. LAW (1986)
 MICHAEL HAYES (1997)
 NASH BRIDGES (1996)
 NYPD BLUE (1997)
 ROSE O'DONNELL SHOW (1999)
 SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE (2001)
 TODAY (1999)
 X-FILES (1996)



"INFRAMAN"

인프라맨 超人

中國超人

インフラマン

INFRAMAN (A.K.A.: "The Super Ultraman", "The Chinese Superman", "Super Inframan", "Inframan vs. The Volcano Monsters", "The Chinese Ultraman", "The Superman")

USA MOVIE—Science Fiction; 2 hrs. ★★★
"Infra-Man." (Chinese; 1976) He's an energy-efficient, solar-powered superhero. Li Hsiu-Hsien, Wang Hsieh. Demon: Terry Liu

Cantonese title: **JUNG GWOK CHIU YAN**
Mandarin title: **ZHONG GUO CHAO REN**
Turkish title: **BIONIC ADAM CANAVARLARA KARSI**
Italian title: **INFRAMAN L'ALTRA DIMENSIONE**
American & French title: **INFRAMAN**

German title: **INVASION AUS DEM INNEREN DER ERDE**

7:40 **MOVIE**—Science Fiction
"Infra-Man." (Chinese; 1976) He's an energy-efficient, solar-powered superhero. Li Hsiu-Hsien, Wang Hsieh. Demon: Terry Liu. (1 hr., 45 min.)

Shaw Bros.; 1975, © Joseph Brenner Associates, HK release date: 8/1/75, *The Super Inframan VCD* © Celestial Pictures; 2003, *The Super Inframan DVD* © Celestial Pictures; 2004, Prod.: Run Me Shaw, Executive Prod.: Peng Cheng, Dir.: Hua Shan, Stunt Coordinators: Yuan Hsiang, Tang Chia, Make-up: Wu Hsu-Ching, Art Dir.: Johnston Tsao, Asst. Dir.: Li Yung-Chang, Cameraman: Tadashi Nishimoto (AKA: He Lan Shan), Editor: Chang Hsing-Lung, Editor: Chiang Hsing Lung, American Editorial Supervisor: E.H. Glass, Filmed in Panavision, American Version: titles by The Optical House, Sound-Song-Sound and Choosing: Picture Scores, English Version: Peter Fernandez, Mix: Emil Nercoda Cast: Danny Le Hsiu-Hsien, Wang Hsieh, Terry Liu, Wuan Man-Tzu (AKA Yuen Man Tse), Lu Wei, Dana Tsen, Lin Wen-Wei, Huang Kin Lung (AKA Bruce Le), Liang Man Yi, Giang Yang, Lu Shen, Tsen Su Yi, Reviewed by Damon A. Foster

There's no doubt that the feature-length movie **INFRAMAN** is a blatant imitation of the superhero TV shows of Japan. It borrows quite heavily from Toei's 1970s programs like **INAZUMAN** (Toei; 1973), **ROBOT KEIJI** (Toei; 1974), and of course the **Kamen Rider** genre. Other possible inspirations include not only the **Ultra Brothers**, but the **FIREMAN** (Tsuburaya; 1973) series. Detractors & purists will call it a "rip-off" of the Japanese innovators, while die-hard **INFRAMAN** fans might go so far as to con-

sider it a "successor", and I guess both groups have a point, and neither is completely wrong. Unlike Japan's unsung heroes, which were produced by smaller companies and TV stations, **INFRAMAN** had the advantage of being an actual motion picture produced by Hong Kong's then-kings of international movie-making, the notorious Shaw Brothers. So **INFRAMAN** had an unfair advantage over its predecessors, and was actually able to get international release (it was shown in theaters all over the world).

"I was expecting to see one of those great bad movies like **GODZILLA VS. THE SMOG MONSTER**, or the immortal **INFRAMAN**". -Roger Ebert (during a mid-1970s review for **SLITHIS**)

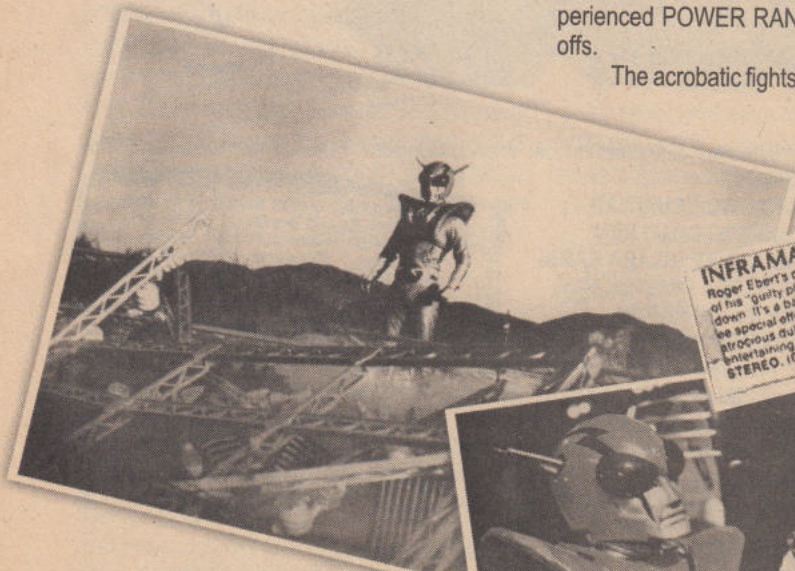
For once, the Japanese "henshin boom" (I know INFRAMAN was theoretically Chinese; but the approach was absolutely typical of Japan's superhero genre) was open to international audiences. Unfortunately, this is a luxury that wasn't given to the companies like Tsuburaya, P Productions or Toei—the pioneers who actually invented the genre which made INFRAMAN possible. Because INFRAMAN so closely mimicked the hero programs of Japan, the superhero fans (reared on international releases of ULTRAMAN, Shin-Toho's "Star Man" oldies, etc.) welcomed this Hong Kongese variation with open arms. To me, INFRAMAN is every bit as fun as any Ultra Brothers TV show, and in many cases, is better. I've spent a huge portion of my life watching superhero action of this nature, and unlike the film critics & B-movie freaks of America, I know what I'm talking about. But that's because I was raised on TV shows like KIKAIER (Toei; 1972), ULTRAMAN (Tsuburaya; 1966), GO-RANGERS (Toei; 1974) and so on. But with something as exotic (to the American public) as INFRAMAN, just how would the domestic audience react?!

Though Gene Siskel called INFRAMAN one of Roger Ebert's "favorite films" on an episode of the 1970s series SNEAK PREVIEWS (which has undergone many name changes over the years, not to mention cast changes!), both critics poked fun at it. Fat-head Roger Ebert called INFRAMAN a "guilty pleasure" more than once, and I still don't see

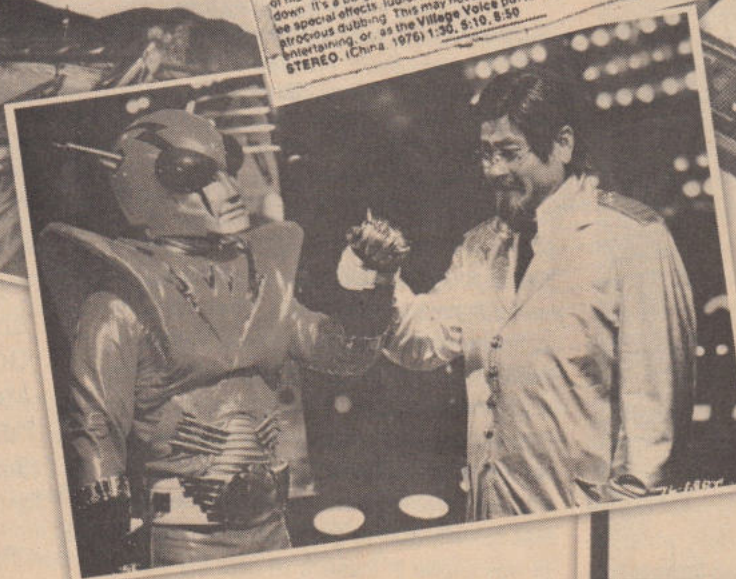
why anybody would feel guilty about enjoying INFRAMAN. Others compared its monsters to the "McDonald Land" commercials! The common feeling (among American mainstreamers raised on movies like CASABLANCA and TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE) is that INFRAMAN is some bizarre, completely ridiculous movie that makes no sense. So obviously, INFRAMAN is in the line of fire. The like of THUNDERMASK (Toho; 1973) and INAZUMAN FLASH (Toei; 1974) were spared these attacks because they were half-hour episode TV shows, and as such, they never hit American theaters. INFRAMAN's harshest critics strike me as being a bunch of ignorant fools who just don't get it, because they never looked past INFRAMAN. If any of these one-dimensional retards were to have studied the genre more closely, they would have seen were it all started: Traditional Japanese sci-fi like ULTRA Q and the Godzilla movies paved the way for the slightly more over-the-top superhero programs like ULTRAMAN and MIRRORMAN. Then Toei made the next step: They took the concept to a new level with more colorful programs of the "Henshin" boom like the Kamen Riders, the Kikaidas, and the Inazumen. Taken as a HK variation of the Japanese Henshin boom, INFRAMAN makes sense and succeeds in its task: To entertain using an abundance of monsters and martial arts fight scenes. What's so bizarre about that!? Perhaps today things are different, because U.S. pop culture has experienced POWER RANGERS and other rip-offs.

The acrobatic fights in INFRAMAN are re-

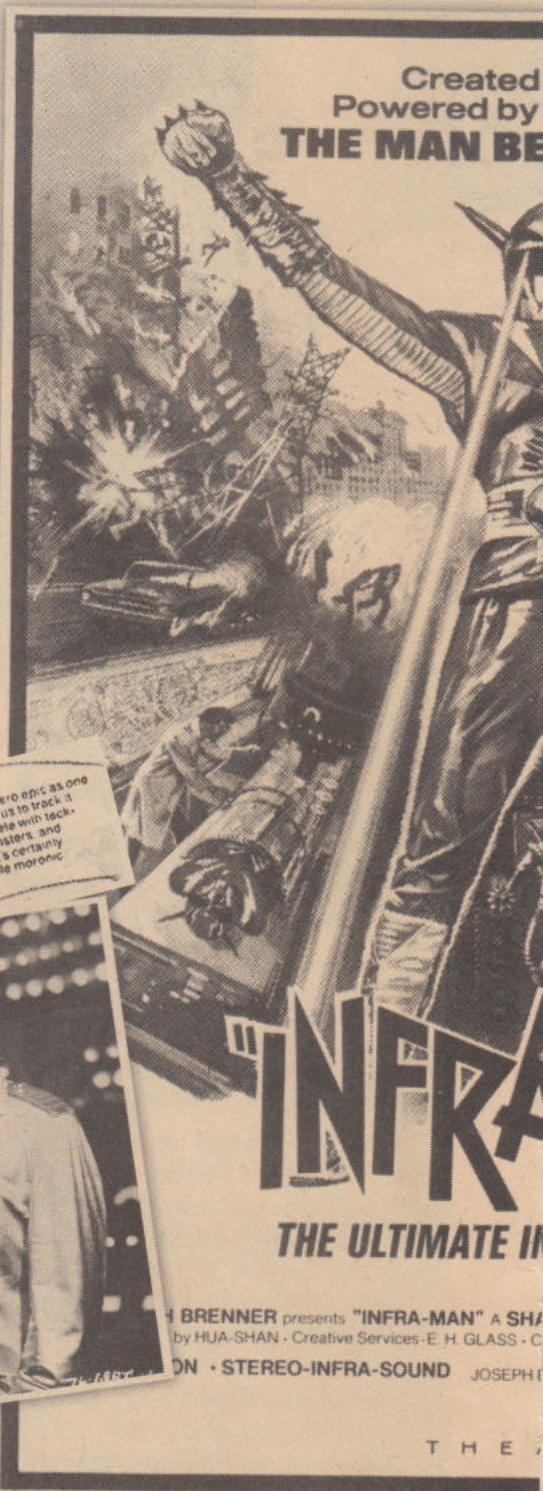
ally well done. The typical Shaw Brothers stuntmen are no strangers to tumbling & kung fu, so it wasn't such a far-fetched idea that they could imitate the superhero-karate action seen on Japanese TV at the time. Lead hero Danny Lee, not to mention co-hero Bruce Le, manages to refrain from the kung fu movie style martial arts (i.e. "crane technique" and so on) so popular on Chinese screens at the time, and attempt more superhero-ish stances during their fights. Gone are most of the kung fu grappling hands & "swinging arm" trappings seen in



INFRAMAN
Roger Ebert's citation of this laughable Chinese superhero epic as one of his "guilty pleasures" in Film Comment encouraged us to track it down. It's a bargain-basement winner, all right, complete with tacky special effects, ludicrous dialogue, dime-store monsters, and atrocious dubbing. This may not be a great film, but it's certainly entertaining, or, as the Village Voice put it, "Enjoyable morose."
STEREO. (China 1976) 1-30, 5-10, 8-50



"Terrific family film entertainment... INFRAMAN is just plain fun."
-San Francisco Chronicle



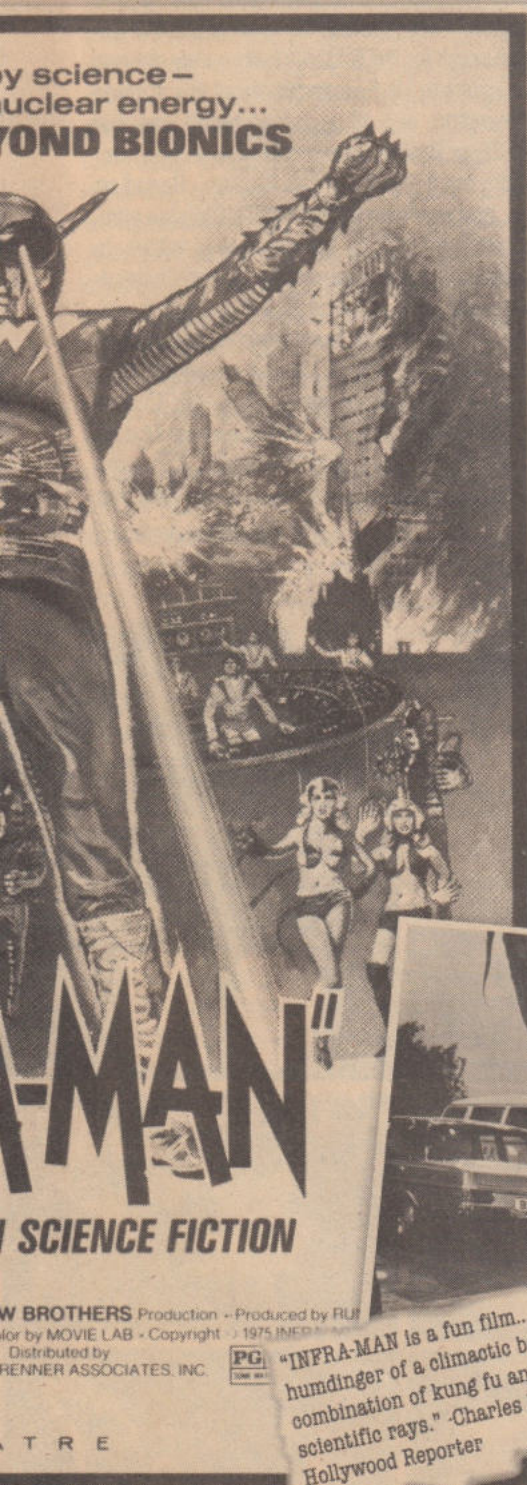
HK flicks of the period, except for maybe a couple scenes: Bruce Le clashes with Lin Wen-Wei on top of a mountain, but before they can overdue the Chinese armblocking, a swift punch sends both combatants rolling downhill (why Le also falls is anybody's guess, since he's not the one who got punched. I can only assume the character is clumsy!). Another scene which utilizes a little of the old "patty cake kung fu" is where a spider monster uses one of several arms to block heroic Bruce Le's attack. Inframan's first battle with Monster Plant (not

actually named in the English print) involves some typically Hong Kongese wirework. But for the most part, the remainder of the action looks more Japanese-inspired. The stuntmen in the Inframan costume (sometimes it was Danny Lee himself) deserve special praise for fighting in such a vision-impairing suit. I did notice that in Inframan's first battle, the mask wobbles a little and doesn't seem to be fitting the stuntman's head very snugly, but otherwise, stunt-coordinator Tang Chia did a decent job of emulating 1970s-style Japanese TV karate. The main difference is that INFRAMAN puts in just a little more acrobatic flipping than in the average Japanese program. INFRAMAN's worst example of acrobatics occurs near the beginning; where a stuntman has just done a mid-air summersault off a trampoline. Gymnastic flips are nothing new to HK stuntmen, but doing such a feat in a thick rubber dragon costume causes the flying dragon to stumble upon landing, and although there's a quick cut, it's apparent that the dragon doesn't have solid footing, despite crude editing which changes the creature into villainous Terry Liu.

Trying to find actual information on the people involved in this movie has been a challenge, but hopefully the bios presented herein will suffice. While we all know about Run Run Shaw and of course Danny Lee, I was most keen to find out more about the unsung heroes of INFRAMAN, such as cameraman He Lan Shan, who's not even listed in the movie's English credits. I researched the guy, and it came as no shock to find out that this expert on movie cameras & cinematography was actually a

Japanese named Tadashi Nishimoto (see his bio in this article). Much of the text I found on him was only in Japanese or Chinese; what few English pieces concentrated more on the technical aspects of movie cameras and lighting. For example, Nishimoto worked on YANG KEI FEI, and the interview goes on about how he used 18 mm, 35 mm, 40 mm, 50 mm, 75 mm, and 100 mm lenses (all standard lenses). Later, he worked on WU TSE TIEN, using anamorphic lenses (based on the Tohoscope format). The lenses included 100 mm, 75 mm, 50 mm, but these lenses did not give them very accurate focus. The article went on to discuss aperture sizes and compared different lenses. Nishimoto mentioned that he didn't feel confident with the wide-screen format. He said that composing in wide-screen is difficult and if you don't do it well, the whole picture looks bad. Besides which, for widescreen filming, you really need a good and experienced assistant. This might explain why INFRAMAN doesn't look like it was filmed by somebody who's good at the letter-boxed format (INFRAMAN looks great on a movie screen, but most videotapes look awkwardly cropped when seen on TV). Regardless, many interviews go in-depth on stuff like this (technical details about equipment), details that I don't care about, I would prefer that they concentrate on the movies themselves first.

Though the Shaw Brothers Movie Company produced a lot



"INFRAMAN is a fun film.... culminates in a humdinger of a climactic battle that is a combination of kung fu and the latest scientific rays." -Charles Ryweck, The Hollywood Reporter



of masterpieces in their time, not all of these movies were completely original. Back in their heyday, it wasn't uncommon for movie tycoon Run Run Shaw to spend his Sundays watching the films of competitors; sometimes viewing as many as eight flicks in one day. By viewing these movies, the Shaw Brothers produced many movies which were "inspired" by their rivals. It's not known whether it was one of the Shaws themselves who got the idea to "borrow" ideas from Japanese kiddie TV, or if it was one of their workers. But INFRAMAN got more than ideas from Japan. In addition to the costume makers and cameraman, INFRAMAN also swiped special effects scenes (the burning buildings at the beginning) from the Japanese disaster movie TIDAL WAVE (with Lorne Greene), A.K.A. SUBMERSION OF JAPAN. It's also not uncommon for Shaw movies (and HK movies in general) to take music from other soundtracks, and INFRAMAN is no exception. While kung fu movies often relied on old songs from spaghetti westerns, INFRAMAN gets a tune or two from ULTRASEVEN and I think I heard some other background music which might have come from MIRRORMAN. Some audio "highlights" in INFRAMAN are schizophrenic to experience: Like the scene where the spider monster grows giant. Though the

sound effects sound like they're from an Ultra series, the music is the same majestic "Aaaaaah" which was 'sung' in the beginnings of both FIVE MASTERS OF DEATH (where the Shaolin Temple is burned down) and MIGHTY PEKING MAN (when the giant ape first breaks out of the mountain). As for my comments on the sound quality itself, I think there are problems, particularly in Inframan's kiai's (war cries). For example, in the English version: As Inframan fights, we can barely hear his original Chinese voice because of the loud sound effects. He can be heard clearly a few times (i.e. when he throws his missiles at the tree monster he yells "Fire Bomb" in Chinese, and he goes "Ah!" as he falls into the water later on) only. Ironically, this is exactly what happened in the first few episodes of ULTRAMAN (the hero's voice became faint because it's lost in the mix) when that series got its English-dubbed release for American TV. Other sound effects sound like Toho hand-me-downs, such as the mechanical doors which open and close, emitting motor sounds not unlike that from KING KONG ESCAPES, GODZILLA VS. THE SEA MONSTER and GODZILLA VS. GIGAN.

Another reason INFRAMAN is so easily associated with the Japanese is the English voice dubbers like Corrine Orr and Peter Fernandez.

These masters of voice-overs dubbed in a lot of Japanese stuff over the years, from TV shows (SPEED RACER, ULTRAMAN, etc.) to movies (Godzilla movies, Gamera movies, ALAKAZAM THE GREAT, etc.). But they have rarely, if ever, dubbed in any low-budget movies from HK! I honestly can't think of any kung fu movies that featured their voices, although these voice-over maestros can be heard in Japanese karate movies like THE EXECUTIONER and Etsuko Shiomi's SISTER STREET-FIGHTER. Needless to say, Peter Fernandez's group did their usual excellent job at dubbing INFRAMAN into English. Peter Fernandez also wrote the English script for INFRAMAN before they dubbed it. I spoke to Mr. Fernandez about this at some convention, and all he remembered was that the Shaw Brothers had supplied a written transcript, but it was in broken English. Based on this, and watching INFRAMAN's Chinese print, he wrote a script for the dubbers to follow. In comparing the English version to the Chinese-language VCD, I found that the English version is pretty faithful. But a few character names were changed: Wang Hsieh's character, Professor Liu Yingde became 'Professor Chang' in Fernandez's version, and the villain Mutant Drill is now simply called "Nemesis". There are a few lines which were changed completely. For

(Continued on page 16)



Above: Inframan on a motorcycle?! This prop never made it into the film.

DANNY LEE

(A.K.A.: Li Hsu Hsien, Le Shao In)

Cantonese: **Li Xiu Xian**

Pinyin: **Lei Sau Yin**

Born: **Canton, China** (other sources say Shanghai)

Date of Birth: **August 6, 1953**

Education: **Graduated from HK University**



Though American audiences will know him best as playing the title in **INFRAMAN** (his fifth film, right after some gambler movie), and of course his co-starring role in John Woo's **THE KILLER**, many of us feel Danny Lee Hsu Hsien is one of HK cinema's most important personalities, period. Regardless, Danny Lee didn't do well in school and was sometimes absent to work, because his family needed the support. Growing up, he held policemen in high regard. So after his graduation from high school, he tried entering the police academy, but couldn't complete the necessary courses (some say it's the result of asthma and its physical hardships). So he found work as a mechanic. At the age of 13, he developed a love for swimming, and began studying judo with his friend Ling Yao Chung. Later, he studied tae kwon do, and won a silver medal for a competition.

In 1970, Danny was one of the very first to enter the TVB (a TV station still popular today, called "Wu Shie Din Su" in Chinese) acting school when it was new. When he finished in December 1971, he joined the Shaw Brothers movie company (owners of TVB). It was here that he crossed paths with the legendary director Chang Cheh, who was impressed with Lee's dedication to the craft of acting. Danny Lee was then cast to appear in **7 BLOWS OF THE DRAGON** (Shaw Bros.; 1972), largely because his swimming ability could prove useful in this version of "The Water Margin" (AKA "Outlaws of the Marshes"). On the set of **7 BLOWS OF THE DRAGON**, he was given the nickname Lang Li Bai Tiao ("Flowing With the White Flowing Wave"). Though he didn't get the lead role, he now had his foot in the door, working for the Shaw Brothers movie company, where he learned acting and more martial arts. By 1973, he was hired for his first starring role in

RIVER OF FURY (believed to be called CHAIO HU HSING in Chinese, Dir.: 'Zang Zen Tsu?', w/ Lilly Ho, unless my sources of information are conflicting again).

Over the next few years, Danny Lee acted in a wide variety of Shaw movies (i.e. **BRUCE LEE: HIS LAST DAYS**, **MIGHTY PEKING MAN**, **THE SAVAGE FIVE** and of course **INFRAMAN**), and stayed at the Shaw Brothers dormitory, which also had accommodations for his mother to stay. By this time, he had become quite a film-buff himself; when he wasn't swimming, he could

often be found in theatres, making it a point to watch at least three movies a week, both for entertainment and inspiration. But in 1978, he started his own production company, which would later create 1981's **THE EXECUTOR**, A.K.A.: **HEROIC COPS**, which would be his first pairing with Chow Yun Fat. Danny Lee's first directorial was 1982's **FUNNY BOYS**. But Lee became most wellknown for playing cops & detectives, and this typecasting started with 1984's **THE LAW WITH TWO PHASES** (which earned Lee both the Hong Kong Film Award and the Taiwanese Golden Horse). Some audiences felt **THE LAW WITH TWO PHASES** was too violent and must have been exaggerated, but the HK police felt it was very realistic and occasionally referred to the actor as "Lee Sir" and "Officer Lee"! Lee went on to receive numerous awards (from police organizations) for his depiction of realistic police procedures and donating money to the families of policemen killed in the line of duty.

THE LAW WITH TWO PHASES went on to inspire the work of other directors such as that of Kirk Wong, and even John Woo's **A BETTER TOMORROW**. They, in turn, would later ask Lee to appear in their movies. Danny Lee was co-director of Woo's **JUST HEROES**, which was a benefit project for the now aging Chang Cheh. In the late 1980's, Lee was also one of the first producers to back Stephen Chow (both worked together on **JUST HEROES**, during Stephen Chow's early, brief, "dramatic" period) and is sometimes credited for discovering him.

By now, Danny had founded a successful company called **Magnum Films**. But Lee's major, international hit was 1989's **THE KILLER**. At first, Tsui Hark's company did not want Lee in the role of yet another cop, but both John Woo and Chow Yun-Fat insisted, since Danny was so much in the public's conscious as being an upstanding cop, which they felt they was mandatory for the role. Though Lee's screenwork has tapered off in recent years (reduced mainly to cameo appearances in movies like **YOUNG**

A N D DANGEROUS V), both Danny Lee and **Magnum Films** are still active in behind-the-scenes work.

What follows is one pain of a filmography on Danny Lee. Because of different translators, dialects, decades, and different countries these names may originate from, there will be inaccuracies & mistakes! But hopefully, this listing of his films will be a good starting point for future Danny Lee researchers:



Danny Lee Filmography (in alphabetical order):

ACES GO PLACES 5: THE TERRACOTTA HIT (1989)
AGAINST ALL (1991)
***AI SHING CHEN WAN WAN** ("A lot of Love", dir.: Lo Tsen)
ASIAN CONNECTION (1995)
BETTER TOMORROW, A (1986)
BIG BOSS (1981)
BIG SCORE (1990)
BLUE LIGHTNING (1991)
BRAVE ARCHER (1980)
BROTHERHOOD (1986)
BRUCE LEE, HIS LAST DAYS (1976)
CAN'T STOP MY CRAZY LOVE FOR YOU (1993)
CASE OF THE COLD FISH, THE (1995)
CITY COP (AKA: "GONG PU") (1995)
CITY COP II (1995)
CITY ON FIRE (1987)
CODE OF HONOR (1987)

COP BUSTERS (1985)
COP OF THE TOWN (1985)
***DA DAO WONG WU** (a spear hero)
***DA LAO CHIEN** (1970s gambling film)
DR. LAMB
ELEGY OF LOVE AND REVENGE (1987)
EXECUTOR, THE (1981)
FINAL JUSTICE (1988)
***GUNG CHO SHA KWAN SAN** ("Three People Together", w/ Ivy Ling Po)
HARDBOILED (1992)
HE IS MY ENEMY, PARTNER AND FATHER-IN-LAW
HERO OF CITY
***HSU MA** (something to do with a horse) (1972?)
INFRAMAN (1975)
JUST HEROES (1987)
KILLER, THE (1989)
LAW ENFORCER, THE (1986)
LAW WITH TWO PHASES, THE (1984)

LEGEND OF THE DRAGON (1991)
MAFIA.COM (2000)
MAGNIFICENT SCOUNDRELS (1991)
MAN WANTED 3 (2000)
MARK OF THE WOLF (1976)
MIGHTY PEKING MAN (1977)
NO COMPROMISE (1988)
OILY MANIAC ("Yo Gwei Tzu" or 'Boy Ghost') (1975)
ORGANIZED CRIME & TRIAD BUREAU (1993)
PARKING SERVICE (1986)
PORTRAIT OF A SERIAL RAPIST (1994)
POWERFUL FOUR (1992)
RED SHIELD (1991)
RHYTHM OF DESTINY (1992)
RICH AND FAMOUS
RIVER OF FURY (1973)
ROAD WARRIORS (1987)
ROMANCING BULLET (2000)
RUN AND KILL (1993)
SEVEN BLOWS OF THE DRAGON ("Dong Kao Chu")

SAVAGE FIVE, THE ("U Hu Chian") (1975)
STUNNING GAMBLING, THE (1982)
SWORD STAINED WITH ROYAL BLOOD, THE (1993)
TIGER ON BEAT 2 (1990)
THANK YOU SIR (1990)
TO BE NO. 1 (1996)
TRAGIC HERO (1987)
TWIST (1995)
***TWO MASTERS** ("Suang Hsia") (1971)
UNDECLARED WAR (1990)
UNTOUCHABLE MANIA (2000)
UNMATCHABLE MATCH (1990)
UNTOLD STORY, THE
***UO PA** ("Bad Man"?)
WALK IN (1997)
WHITE STORM (1999)
YOUNG AND DANGEROUS 5 (1998)

*-Full details not known.

INFRAMAN has an interesting cast; basically it's a cast of unknowns. The only really established star was old-timer Wang Hsieh. But even he was aging (despite the wig) and past his prime when he appeared in INFRAMAN. Of course, the title hero is played by none other than Danny Lee (called Li Hsu Hsien back in the 1970s) himself. But he was no superstar back when he made INFRAMAN! Co-hero Bruce Le acts and fights well enough, but in 1975, he was only a Shaw extra called Huang Kin Lung. Dana Tsen appeared in a few exploitation films, and Terry Liu supposedly worked with director Hua-Shan (not one of HK's more wellknown directors) in some other movie. But on the whole, INFRAMAN's budget must have gone toward making sets and costumes, since there are really no superstars (no Ti Lung, no Fu Sheng, no David Chiang, etc.) or major Shaw discoveries in the movie. Depending on who you ask, Danny Lee may be the one exception. It would appear that the Shaw's wanted to push him as a sci-fi star, because he also was in Ho Meng Hua's horror movie OILY MANIAC (Shaw Bros.; 1975), and starred in their KING KONG rip-off, MIGHTY PEKING

The movie's original title JUNG GWOK CHIU YAN can be translated a number of different ways, such as "The Super Ultraman", "The Chinese Superman", or even "The Chinese Ultraman". The program booklet for the HK International Film Festival listed it as "The Super Ultraman"! Though I don't know if Japan's ULTRAMAN (TBS;1966) and the American Superman character have the exact same name in Chinese, it seems that both "Ultra" and "Super" are identical when translated into Cantonese, which would explain why INFRAMAN can have so many different titles. It's obvious that the Shaws were ripping off Superman's famous "S" emblem when they designed the original INFRAMAN movie poster, proving they're pretty inept when it came to

Obviously, I think INFRAMAN is a great movie— otherwise I wouldn't have spent so much of this issue reviewing it. But it's a wonder there were never any sequels. INFRAMAN held its own at the box office when it was released in HK on 8/1/75, shortly before SUPERMEN AGAINST THE AMAZONS (debut: 8/6/75), another Shaw superhero movie. But INFRAMAN wasn't the smash hit the

[illegible]

When Mikami was young, he originally wanted to be a classic, traditional artist (like Picasso), but couldn't afford to go to Tokyo Geijins University, which was their biggest art school. His hopes of being a full-time

With the experience he had gotten working on both Godzilla and Gamera films, Mikami struck out on his own: From there he collaborated with others (the Yagi family) to found Ekisu Productions, which concentrated mainly on art and prop making— Ekisu Productions was hired by Toei, Daisai and other companies, and worked

At this point, Toei employees were all from a union (perhaps they still are) and required days off—but with Mikami being a freelancer, he could work extra days. Mikami took pride that his approach differed (he would change eye-hole positionings of masks designed by Ishimori, for example) from that of the younger Ishimori. Ishimori was a manga artist, so his work consisted largely of one-dimensional comic-book style



Shaws were hoping for; perhaps because its audience was kids; kids who could go pay to watch INFRAMAN, or stay home and watch KAMEN RIDER (Toei; 1971) or other originals on TV for free. There was even a marketing campaign to coincide with the movie's release, which included at least two different dolls. The dolls were displayed all over HK stores during the movie's release, and some even made their way to Hawaii when INFRAMAN had its Chinese language run. One doll was described as having intricate designs which included vinyl suit and detachable boots (it sounds like the 2003 doll released by Dog 9), and the other was a typically plastic design rather like a Bull Mark doll, but with an unproportionately large head (a "Super Deformed" look), see photo below. Unfortunately, no collectors had the foresight to stock up on these dolls when they actually were available back in 1975. My attempts at locating any proved to be beyond futile. I could probably have found a live plesiosaurus

in Loch Ness before I could have found an original Inframan doll. Let's face it, INFRAMAN and its dolls came and went in 1975, and the movie left so little an impact that nobody cared to preserve it. I tell ya', nostalgia just isn't what it used to be! A year later, during INFRAMAN's American release, it was supposedly the intention of Joseph Brenner Associates to make merchandise like dolls available, but it never caught on.

The 1970s Infra-dolls are pretty much history, but other INFRAMAN collectibles still pop up from time to time. There are a number of stills, plus movie posters from America and Europe. Joseph Brenner Associates released not only the American version, but the version seen in France—in fact it's the exact same movie poster (artwork by Basil Gogos, who's superb paintings have impressed all of us; be they on the cover of *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, or Misfits records & CDs), so the only major difference is in the language—and the size of

the posters. Personally, my favorite INFRAMAN posters are the ones from Germany, Thailand and of course Hong Kong itself. I also love the INFRAMAN poster from Turkey (where it's called BIONIC ADAM CANAVARLARA KARSI, which means "Bionic Man vs. Monsters"), but for all the wrong reasons! The Turkish poster tries to make INFRAMAN look more like an American hero, or rather, more westernized superhero. Our title hero is depicted as looking like a cross between the comic book character The Phantom, and Italy's own Super Argo. It also reads in Turkish: "From the Jules Verne book, SUPER INFRAMAN" (the German poster makes this mistake too)! Who would have thought that Jules Verne provided the basis for INFRAMAN!? Only in the incredibly entertaining Turkish film industry could things be this screwed up! The Turkish poster (which credits mysterious names like "Vufi Ford", "Helene Piao", and "Dennis Rogers") is beautiful, but

sketches. But Mikami would take these basic, flat designs and carry them a step further, giving them depth and a 3-dimensional look to ready them for the sculpting & mold making process. Ishimori liked Mikami's improvements and they made a good team. It usually took about a week for Mikami to complete the mold process, before showing it to the directors & producers for their final approval. From there, masks were often made (by a different crew) out of fiber-glass and plastic, and the body suits were made of polyester and sometimes spandex.

Ekiu Productions also collaborated with others to construct Ikuta Studios. He was also independent from Ekiu Productions, and it wasn't uncommon for him to occasionally go to other Asian countries (i.e. Hong Kong, Shanghai, Taiwan). Back around 1974, he received a phone call from Hong Kong, and the rest is history. The representatives or translators explained that the famous Shaw Brothers were about to make their own version (INFRAMAN) of the Japanese superhero. Unfortunately, details on Mikami's work on this cult classic are hard to come by, because nobody in Asia really cares about the movie any more. This Mikami bio came from an interview in the late, lamented Japanese magazine, "Kiyara Dama" (AKA: "Character Dai Manjin")

Volume 5 (2000), from Tatsumi Publishing Co. The interviewer mentions the title INFRAMAN, and Mikami is completely surprised that the guy has heard of this movie (in The Far East, INFRAMAN quickly became obscure).

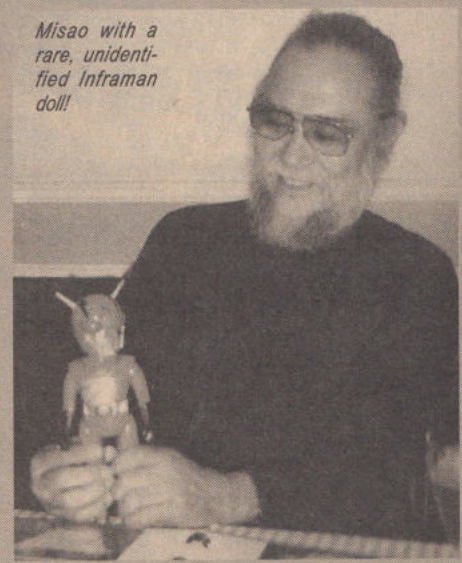
Anyway, Mikami designed a lot of the characters in INFRAMAN. When he first went to the Shaw Brothers Studio in HK, they had already designed Inframan's mask. So Mikami was hired to design the remainder of the costume, everything below the head. He gave them his flat sketches & designs as well as complete instructions on how to make molds, but while the Chinese technicians were sculpting the three-dimensional models, Mikami had to return to Japan. They completed the molds and prototypes on their own. Then Mikami returned to HK to see the finished result, and thought it was terrible! He was really disappointed with the designs.

The unpleasant results of the INFRAMAN experience made him realize that more skill was needed by all people involved in special effects design. So he decided to start a new company, largely inspired by INFRAMAN's short comings. The result was Cosmo Productions, which was responsible for props/costumes in KYODINE, THE KAGE STAR, the MESSAGE FROM SPACE program, X-BOMBER, KAMEN RIDER SUPER 1 and

SKY RIDER (AKA "Kamen Rider", "Kamen Rider Shin").

As for Mikami Misao today, little is known. Last I heard, he was in Shanghai, drawing interior designs—but even that was back in 2000.

Misao with a rare, unidentified Inframan doll!



completely irrelevant and every bit as inaccurate as the Korean pre-record's box. There's also a strange Italian movie poster that I saw, but the cast includes: "Anthony Lawrence", "Tom Malden", "Diana Winter" and "Susan Corey"! I assume these are Italian-generated pseudonyms made by releasers who wanted to make audiences think this was an American movie, since they certainly don't sound like the names of Italian voice dubbers!

To an extent, Roger Ebert had a valid point—as much as I hate to admit it. Though I don't enjoy INFRAMAN only to laugh at it, the flick does feature some classic blunders which generate unintended humor (but then, no movie is perfect, and I think every movie has flaws). The most obvious blunder is where one of our heroes is lying on his back because the scientific headquarters has been hit by a

plant-like, tentacled monster who officially got a name ("Monster Plant") finally, when the Chinese-language VCD got released in 2003. Anyway, Plant Monster's victim clearly has a rip in the crotch of his pants. This isn't so obvious on TV, but seen in the theatre, this shot had the audience laughing in hysterics! It's almost as though cameraman Tadashi Nishimoto deliberately wanted us to see the rip in the clothing! Though I don't know why this was his last Shaw Brothers movie, it's funny to imagine (this is pure speculation on my part) that he got fired because Run Run Shaw saw the scene of the fellow's crotch. Far more subtle is how these Chinese "Science Patrol wannabes" (for lack of a better term; but we can now call them 'Researchers', now that the VCD's subtitles call their base 'Research Center') can afford silver costumes, a halfway decent interior headquarters and crash helmets, but their vehicles (Chu Ming drives a common, beat up old Volkswagen, but it does have their lightning-

"Okay, okay, Dr. Freeex admits it - he loves kung fu films. Not just any chop-socky 'Master, he insulted our school POW WHACK CRUNCH', but the really over-the-top ones. He also has a soft spot in his heart for ungainly rubber monsters (and if you're reading this, chances are, you do too). And superheroes. So he loves Inframan. Let us ignore the fact that this film is apparently made up of episodes of a television series." /Wrong. -DF/ "Let us ignore the fact that this TV series is an obvious rip-off of the Japanese Ultraman. /Wrong again. -DF/ And let us definitely ignore the fact that the prefix infra- means 'under', as in 'Infrastructure'. ('Look! It is Underman!' just doesn't have the same panache.) -Review from the website 'Bad Movie Report' at <<http://www.stomptokyo.com/badmoviereport/inframan.html>>

TADASHI NISHIMOTO

(Cameraman/cinematographer)

AKA: **He Lan Shan, He Lanshan, Ho Ran San.**

Before 1965, the majority of Shaw Bros. films were sent to Japan for musical scoring, dubbing, and processing (at the Far East Laboratories). So Japanese film staffs realized there was work to be had in Hong Kong. Tadashi Nishimoto first went to work in H.K. in 1956, to get work in the country's growing movie industry. But this was a time when Chinese still hated Japanese people. So for film credits, he assumed a Chinese alias, He Lan Shan. He was hired to work with (& improve) HK film companies, and to photograph LOVE WITH AN ALIEN (1957), the first Chinese movie to have a Japanese cameraman. But he soon realized that HK's technical level (and lighting facilities) were about ten years behind Japanese standards—many Hong Kongese movie studios didn't even have enough electric power to run their facilities! A popular movie camera (used in Japan) at that time was called a Mitchell N.C., which the Japanese considered state-of-the-art. But the Shaw Brothers studios, the biggest Chinese film-making facility at the time, possessed only two of these. They also had no zoom lenses in the 1950s (the Shaw's didn't use a zoom lens until 1967, when working on Inoue Umetsugu's HONG KONG NOCTURNE). The Shaws may have been HK's top movie-makers, but their

lighting equipment was also obsolete. Their lights were okay for B&W movies, but not for the then-new (to HK) concept of color photography (the technical personnel in HK had little understanding of light sensitivity and color balance).

Few (if any) Shaw movies were made with sync-sound, but they began experimenting with this when they made EMPRESS WE TSE TIEN (which started production in 1960 and was released in 1963). But getting back to He Lanshan, he too got in on it; his first sync-sound film in HK was Yue Feng's fantasy, MADAME WHITE SNAKE (1962). But the star, Lin Dai, and the rest of the cast, couldn't get used to it. Consequently, that film was shot partly with synchronous sound, the rest of it was dubbed. In Japan, shooting with synchronous sound was already an established practice. In MADAME WHITE SNAKE, Nishimoto used new anamorphic lenses (produced by Japan's Kowa Optical Works).

The 1960s was also when the Shaw Brothers started making HK's first color movies, and also when the Shaws began constructing fancy interior sets, starting with WANG CHAO CHUN (1964). As for Tadashi Nishimoto, he continued working on Shaw Brothers movies, but was also hired to return to Japan, to do cinematography for Shin Toho movies like TOKAIDO YOTSUYA KAIKAN and JIGOKU, both of which he achieved acclaim for.



Tadashi Nishimoto (left) with Bruce Lee on the set of GAME OF DEATH.

Nishimoto photographed about 30 HK movies in the 1960s, shooting various flicks simultaneously. Conditions improved in 1961, when Shaw Movietown was constructed. Then, he shot just two films a year (one at a time), because these were "epic" movies. The shooting schedule involved 45 to 50 working days over a five or six month period. However, YANG KWEI FEI (1962) took a year to shoot; working nine-hour days (excluding overtime), unlike his years in Japan, where he worked standard eight hour days. The director & photographer weren't entitled to overtime wages, but Nishimoto didn't have to work too much overtime during those days. Nishimoto went on to film many other period movies, including THE SWALLOW (1961), Yue Feng's LAST WOMAN OF SHANG (1964), and King Hu movies like SONS OF THE GOOD EARTH (1965) & COME DRINK WITH ME (1966).

Tadashi Nishimoto continued to work for Run Run Shaw and his brothers through out the 1960s, and saw the company rise as their films improved. Not only did they buy 200 Nikatsu action films (for release and "inspiration"), but they upgraded their equipment: By 1968, they began to use the Arriflex, a movie camera which is light & fast (in Japan, the Arriflex was

bolt emblem on the door!) are sadly behind the times. Unlike Hayata, these guys don't have rayguns and in one scene, they utilize a small chainsaw to fend off a marauding monster. What's really strange is that they went so far as to design a slick motorcycle (it could have been a slightly altered Kamen Rider cycle) for Inframan to ride, but the prop never appears in the film. The budget didn't allow for many miniatures, so we don't see any jet planes, spaceships or submarines, and most of Inframan's "giant" scenes are accomplished via primitive forced perspective shots. There are other accidentally funny moments too, like in the dubbing and inadequacies in the special effects. There's also some intended humor, like when giant-sized Inframan steps on the human-sized spider monster: As the comparatively small monster runs from giant Inframan, the monstrous bug emits a sound that's more than similar to the sounds of the

human fly monster in the original THE FLY (Twentieth Century Fox; 1958). Rip-off or in-joke? I suspect the latter.

Our hero (Danny Lee/Li Hsu Hsen) is named Raymar in the dubbed print, and Rayma in the subtitled print. Speaking of names, his employers are never given one other than "a satellite station" (dubbed) and "research center" (subtitles). They're a group of scientific soldiers (Raymar, Tsu Ming, Professor Chang, Su Long, etc.) similar to Japanese armies like the Science Patrol or the Ultra Garrison. One of the members of this satellite station is Chu Ming (Lin Wen-Wei), also spelled Zhu Min—who gets kidnapped & brainwashed by the villains. The villains are hastily introduced and not very well identified. The English version explains that they're subterranean mutants, descended from creatures in the ice-age. The subtitled version more-or-less agrees with this, but tends to prefer to call them "devils" more

often than "mutants". Their sexy leader has gone down in cinematic history as being called "Princess Dragon Mom" thanks to the opening credits and one of Wang Hsieh's dubbed lines (though when she says her own name in English, it sounds more like "Dragamon"). But according to the Celestial Pictures VCD, her name is "Princess Elizub"! Her equally attractive assistant, played by Dana Tsen, is She-Demon (dubbed) and Witch Eye (subtitled). Their Viking-like henchmen are called "Spectre Skeletons" and other marauding "ice monsters" include: Fire Dragon and Monster Drill. Regardless, the silver suited martial artists & motorcycling researchers are commanded by the Professor (Wang Hsieh), who decides that the only way to protect HK from monsters, fires and earthquakes is to change righteous Raymar into the electronic superhero Inframan! Though resembling Japanese predecessors like Inazuman & Ultraman, and

already in use for news photography). Its downfall was that its viewfinder was smaller than that of the Mitchell N.C. movie camera, and not as good for time-lapse photography and optical effects. Nishimoto personally preferred usage of the Mitchell N.C., but it got phased out (except when needed for shooting certain special effects). For example, this camera was used in a scene for YANG KWEI FEI, doing an FX technique known back then as "jeiding" ("catch the ceiling")—today we call them forced perspective shots. It's the process of filming a miniature in conjunction with a full-size set. In front was the model, in the background is the full-size set or a painting. At that time the paintings & model sets were often painted in Japan, but Shaw dependence on the Japanese was about to be diminished somewhat. In 1965, them Shaws constructed their own laboratory and from then on, all dubbing & processing on Shaw movies was done there. The first Shaw movie processed at their own laboratory was Xue Qun's DOUBLE TROUBLE (1968).

However, the Shaw Brothers weren't through with Japanese ingenuity. Raymond Chow (then working for the Shaws) requested that Nishimoto introduce them to the talented director Inoue Umetsugu (who got to keep his real Japanese name in the credits for HK movies!), who therefore went on to direct the Shaw spy caper, THE BRAIN STEALERS and a hit called HONG KONG NOCTURNE.

But Inoue Nishimoto liked to cut costs whenever possible, and save money when making movies. Nishimoto, on the other hand, liked to go all-out and take full advantage of every cent of the budget. So Tadashi Nishimoto and Umetsugu had disagreements on the sets of their Chinese movies, and ultimately had a falling out. Nishimoto also didn't like the way Inoue Umetsugu directed his movies, because although they were Chinese films with Chinese actors, they still looked like Japanese movies (Inoue wrote the scripts in Japanese, and they were later translated into Chinese).

But Inoue's films were hits, inspiring other Japanese directors to seek work in HK (with the Japanese film industry declining and HK kung fu films being the next big thing, many Japanese film makers re-located). Then Choi Lan recommended Nakahira Yasushi (Yang Shuxi) and Murayama Mistuo (Mu Shijie). This was the first time Shaw had made action-genre films. Nishimoto collaborated with fellow Japanese on eleven films altogether.

According to an interview (with Nishimoto) that I read somewhere, he enjoyed working with Li Hanxiang (whom he compares with Akira Kurosawa) and Yue Feng (the "Chinese

Kenji Mizoguchi"). In the interview, Nishimoto said: "*Li shares with Kurosawa an innovative spirit. In each of their films, you can detect new changes, employing progressive techniques. For instance, in YOJIMBO, the widest lens Kurosawa would use would be a 75 mm lens, and the longest, a 500 mm telephoto lens. Li is also like that. He is very good at sketching. When I first worked with him, he would personally check through every shot, looking through the viewfinder. But then, after working together in so many films, he knew my camera positions and compositions intimately and that they conformed to his requirements. So, he did not continue to check every shot. Hence, we began a phase of mutual discovery.*"

He also went on to say that Yue Feng and Kenji Mizoguchi both have a conservative approach in creating atmosphere. The rhythm of their films are quite similar and they both like to use long takes.

The widescreen format was introduced by America's 20th Century Fox. Consequently, by the late 1960s and early 1970s, virtually every film made at Shaw was in widescreen, much to the regret of Nishimoto, who never felt confident or comfortable with this difficult method.

In the early 1970s, Nishimoto crossed paths with the one and only Bruce Lee. Lee hired Nishimoto to film RETURN OF THE DRAGON (Golden Harvest; 1972), although the movie doesn't necessarily represent the best work of either Bruce Lee or Tadashi Nishimoto. Even so, Lee was confident enough with Nishimoto to hire him to film the fight-scenes for GAME OF DEATH, but Nishimoto never completed the job because Lee cancelled the project in favor of the American epic ENTER THE DRAGON. Nishimoto wanted to film the U.S. blockbuster, but didn't get the job because he spoke no English and couldn't communicate with director Robert Clouse. Nishimoto also wasn't given the chance to continue his work on GAME OF DEATH during its completion in the late 1970s; but some of Nishimoto's footage (all the original, non-stock footage scenes of Bruce Lee) did end up in the film, and Nishimoto remained uncredited.

Tadashi Nishimoto's final film for the Shaw Brothers was of course, the under-rated INFRAMAN! To American fans, this is where the story should begin, instead of end. But because INFRAMAN is virtually forgotten in both Japan & China, few of Nishimoto's interviews even mention the existence of this movie, unfortunately. One of Nishimoto's only references to this often-neglected film appeared in a program booklet ("A Study of Hong Kong Cinema in the 1970s") for The 8th HK International Film Festival, but even that minor blurb gets the name wrong and calls it "The Super Ultraman"! -Damon Foster

WANG HSIEH

To American audiences, Wang Hsieh is known almost exclusively as INFRAMAN's "Professor Chang".

Indeed, he was never a really big star, even in HK (though his son is a popular musician there; but I don't know the guy's name). However, Wang Hsieh contributed to a number of entertaining and not so entertaining movies, including.....

MAFIA VS. NINJA- Wang Hsieh as a Shanghai racketeer who gets killed by ninjas so that an over-acting Alexander Lou can get his "Reveeeeeeeenge!" ***

ASIA POLE- Though Wang Hsieh does karate chop a table in half, this early 1960s drama is simply too boring to sit through. Noteworthy only because it's probably Jimmy Wang Yu's first starring role, and that the villain is Japan's Jo Shishido.

SUMMONS TO DEATH- Typically 1960s spy fun with Wang Hsieh, Fanny Fan, Tang Chang, Lo Wei, Hao Li and some other familiar faces. Nifty surf music and bongo drums highlight the opening fight on a ship! ***

The year 1975 was a particularly busy year for Wang Hsieh; not only did he work on INFRAMAN (arguably his most prominent role, though he didn't get top billing), but he appeared in other Shaw Brothers movies, like the Ho Meng Hua directorial OILY MANIAC (a horror movie set in Malaysia), and the lavish historical THE LAST TEMPEST (Dir.: Li Han-Hsiang), which also starred Ti Lung, Ivy Ling Po, Yung Wang Yu, Terry Liu and Yueh Hua.



Young Wang Hsieh with Ye Feng.



王俠

has a human-to-hero transformation more like that of Kikaida, he has some distinctly Chinese traits, like wushu punches and flying around in the clouds like the Monkey King! Using these abilities, as well as karate kicks and a laser beam (called 'Sun Ja') painfully similar to that of Ultraman, Inframan wages war against the prehistoric invaders! After his classic battle where he grew giant to fight a big orange bug, an angry Princess yells: "He's destroying my monsters!" in Joseph Brenner's release. But in the Celestial Pictures' re-release, that exact same line is subtitled: "What a Chinese Inframan!" They then equip Inframan with "Thunderbolt" fists (according to press ads; but it sounds to me more like they're pronouncing it "Thunderball fists"), or simply "Thunder Fists" in the VCD. Unfortunately, after about the middle of the movie, INFRAMAN starts to run out of steam. They introduce some youngsters who nearly ruin the fun. The scene of Professor Chang talking to his daughter (Yuan Man-Tzu, A.K.A. Yuen Man Tse) is just plain nauseating and should have been cut from the movie. She's depicted as some sweet, wholesome girl, but seems to get a big smile when she reads some Satanic horror book simply called The Devil. But pretty soon, the movie picks up pace again. The monstrous mutants steal Inframan's blue prints, and even kidnap the scientist's daughter (the oldest sci-fi cliché in the book). Naturally Rayma and the other Researchers go to Mount Devil to rescue her. The climactic battle of kung fu and sci-fi FX is totally kick ass. Inframan destroys the Princess and her remaining monsters in their cave while Bruce Le and the other soldiers waste the black suited henchmen; skull faces, Viking horns and all! ***** -Damon Foster.

TERRY LIU

(A.K.A.: Liu Hwei Zu)

One of the many "pretty faces" of 1970s Shaw Brothers movies who disappeared with the 1970s. Most Hong Kongese audiences don't remember her, in fact she's more wellknown in America for her role as the villainous princess in INFRAMAN, because the movie went on to become a cult classic. Nobody seems to know what happened to her, but during her prime, she appeared in a number of movies, including THE LAST TEMPEST (Shaw Bros.; 1975,) and the Cheng Kang directorial KING GAMBLER (Shaw Bros.; 1975) which also featured Chen Kuan Tai, Tsung Hua, Chen Ping, Ku Feng, and Yuan Man-Tzu (the girl who played Professor Chang's daughter).



劉慧茹



The INFRAMAN review in Ron Haydock's great magazine King of the Monsters (April, 1977) was called "Inframan vs. the Volcano Monsters", though I don't think writer Stan Karpels was trying to imply that this is the movie's title. Although the article took up four whole pages and featured an impressive photo or two, it amounted to little more than packaged press material. It quickly became apparent that the writer hadn't actually seen INFRAMAN, because almost the entire piece was the basics of the script. It is interesting to note, however, than nowhere in the article is the name "Princess Dragon Mom" used, instead Terry Liu's character is referred to as "The Demon Princess". I never saw any other issues of this superb publication, but this issue alone had coverage of Godzilla (an article called: "Godzilla, Superhero of the 1970s"), as well as Ray Harryhausen stuff and a look at gorillas in the movies, specifically Dino De Laurentis's then-new KING KONG movie. Getting back to their INFRAMAN piece, the only critical insight comes from Charles Ryweck's review in The Hollywood Reporter.

BRUCE LE

(A.K.A.: Huang Kin-lung, Huang Jien Lung, Le Shiao Lung, Shiao Leung, Bruce "Li")

呂小龍

Bruce Le is a native of Thailand, who studied kung fu in Burma. Little is known about how this INFRAMAN supporting actor got into showbiz. According to material in the late, lamented *Martial Arts Movies* magazine of the early 1980s, the Shaw Brothers themselves wanted their own Bruce Lee imitator, right after Lee's 1973 death! The article itself, which appeared in the magazine's February 1982 issue (Vol. 2, No. 2) was called "The Selling of Bruce Le to American TV", and much of it was very biased, with a grotesquely pro-Bruce Le feel to it. Bruce Le himself boasted: "the Shaw Brothers gave me big money to sign with them" and claims it was the Shaw Brothers who named him Bruce Le! In reality, the Shaws had no interest in the Bruce Lee wannabe genre (the only Shaw movie about Bruce Lee was Betty Ting Pei's *BRUCE LEE: HIS LAST DAYS*). It's more likely that he was only a contract actor & bit player, and that the Shaws simply chose not to renew his contract. He must have only been in the background (i.e. an insignificant henchman) in Shaw flicks, because I've never gotten a good look at him in any Shaw film besides *INFRAMAN* (where his role is fairly substantial). After *INFRAMAN*, either he quit or he was dumped, but was ready to go to the independent film route, and founded his own company, Dragon Films, in 1977. Though he claimed the Shaws invented the name "Bruce Le", he was credited Huang Jien Lung in *INFRAMAN* and all sources indicate the name was coined around 1976, at the same time when his cheap independent movies were underway. Several of Bruce Le's late 1970s movies were created under the banner of P.T. Insantra, a small HK movie company which marketed these typical kung fu films at international audiences still hungry for Bruce Lee-inspired movies.

The former king of Bruce Lee exploitation films was of course Bruce Li, who was now ready to move on to bigger and better things. When Bruce Li left the Bruce Lee imitation zone, Huang Kin-lung was ready to step in and fill the void; and thus, he became "Bruce Le", the name used in the aforementioned flicks from P.T. Insantra. According to the February 1982 issue (Vol. 2, No. 2) of *Martial Arts Movies*: "There's a Chinese custom; they don't call you 'junior', they just drop a letter in your name." This ridiculous statement, however, is a quote from Roy Winnick (owner of Best Film & Video Corp.) who had bought several of Bruce Le's movies (from P.T. Insantra) at the time, to show on American TV. The hype and ludicrous statements continued: "He's different from the original Bruce Lee—he can act. Lee was more of a happening than a talent." Winnick later called Bruce Le "the successor" of Bruce Lee! Personally, I felt Bruce Le was a great martial artist, but couldn't act worth a damn and didn't look like Bruce Lee at all.

The owners of movie company P.T. Insantra were Duncan Leong and Robert Theh (psudonym: Robert Jefferey), who were successful in selling Bruce Le's movies to America, Europe and Latin America



Bruce Le in *BLACK SPOT*.

(places where kung fu movies and Bruce Lee were still considered "exotic"), but such films were easily forgotten, and often ignored in Asian countries. *ENTER THE GAME OF DEATH* was the first Bruce Le film that P.T. Insantra sold to Roy Winnick's Best Film & Video Corp., and its 1980 debut on KTLA (a Los Angeles syndication TV station) resulted in unexpectedly high ratings and positive feedback from KTLA programmer David Simon. Next, both *TREASURE OF BRUCE LEE* and *BRUCE AND SHAOLIN KUNG FU* were sold to Showtime. Bruce Le, and the chop sockey scene in general, was now featuring a second wave in popularity. In October of 1982, Le flew to Los Angeles to videotape introductory segments for KTLA's "Kung Fu Week". While in L.A., it was reported that Le also met with Century Video (another American syndicator) about negotiating to make *THE FIVE FINGERS OF DEATH PART 2*, which never saw the light of day. There were other proposed Le projects intended to be international productions, ones which I suspect (I could be wrong) never got off the ground, such as: a "Silent Flute" type story called *HARE KRISHNA* (which would have been shot in India) and even an "A-Team" like crime drama called *F.I.S.T.* But in the 1980s, audiences were tiring of old school chop sockey for the second time, and Bruce Le's career was going downhill.

Bruce Le did have a few last gasps, however. He never became an international superstar or a Bruce Lee successor, but he did appear in some international adventures (i.e. *CHALLENGE OF THE TIGER* and *BRUCE STRIKES BACK*) in the 1980s with decent budgets. With the Bruce Lee mockery phase ending (he did keep the name Bruce Le, however), he did play prominent roles in strange movies like *REVENGE OF THE KICKFIGHTER* and the bizarre American-Filipino co-production *FUTURE HUNTERS*, where's he's credited as "Bruce Li"! Could it be that all along, his intention was to be a Bruce Li imitator? Did things really get that bad? However, Bruce Le's international blockbusters (for him, anyway) did keep him in the public eye, and his popularity didn't seem to dwindle much in South America and parts of Europe.

Le tried his hand at both directing and acting, for the movie *BLACK SPOT* (Chinese title: *HEI-SU TSO LAN*), which cost a lot of money to make and was at least three years in the making. Shot partially in Thailand, France, Taiwan and Mainland China, this tale of drugs in a Golden Triangle was the most expensive movie of Le's career. The film company had seen Le's earlier groundbreakers (in the 1980s) and had enough faith in his ability so they invested enough money for equipment, people (including crew members from *THE LAST EMPEROR*), extras from Thailand and Burma, and the cooperation of the Thai army for usage of soldiers and tanks. Though nobody died doing the stunts & explosions, Le broke his leg doing a stunt. He was briefly hospitalized, but knew there were hundreds, perhaps thousands of *BLACK SPOT* staffers & cast members awaiting his return, to resume production. Le returned to the set in crutches, to complete the movie. On a movie poster for *BLACK SPOT*, his name is spelled "Le Shiao Lung" in English.

BLACK SPOT never left much of a dent in America or Asia, but was a major hit in France, some reports stating it was a number one hit there. It looked like Bruce Le was in the midst of an inevitable comeback. His next proposed project was a horror fantasy, of the typical "fox ghost woman seductress" variety. An American company, no doubt impressed by *A CHINESE GHOST STORY* and the so-called HK "new wave" movies of the late 1980s, was supposedly investing money so that Le could go to Mainland China to shoot the proposed film. The tentative title was *ZUN GWEI HU* ("Man and Ghost-Fox"), and the intention was to hire Sybelle Hu, because of her slight resemblance to Bridgette Lin, who was known for appearing in the genre. This information came from *Cinemart #8* (1990), but to the best of my knowledge they never followed up, so it's not known at this time whether or not Bruce Le completed the intended movie. Whatever happened to the guy is anybody's guess. - Damon Foster

Bruce Le and Sybelle Hu; circa 1990.



Filmography:

BIG BOSS PART 2, THE (AKA: FIST OF FURY 2) (1976)
BLACK SPOT (1990)
BLOODY HERO (1976)
BRUCE AND DRAGON FIST
BRUCE AND SHAOLIN BRONZE MEN (1982)
BRUCE & SHAOLIN KUNG FU (AKA: BRUCE VS. THE BLACK DRAGON)
BRUCE, KING OF KUNG FU (1980)

BRUCE LEE FIGHTS BACK FROM THE GRAVE (1976)
BRUCE LE'S GREATEST REVENGE (AKA: DRAGON'S GREATEST REVENGE)
BRUCE'S FINGERS (1980)
BRUCE STRIKES BACK (AKA: BRUCE LE STRIKES BACK, and XIONG ZHONG) (1980)
BRUCE THE SUPERHERO (1979)
BRUCE VS. BILL
CHALLENGE OF THE TIGER (AKA:

GYMKATA KILLER?) (1978)
CLONES OF BRUCE LEE (1977)
COBRA (1981)
ENTER ANOTHER DRAGON (1981)
ENTER THE GAME OF DEATH (1980)
FUTURE HUNTERS
KING OF KUNG FU (A.K.A.: ENTER THE GAME OF DEATH, and SI WANG MO TA) (1978)
LEGEND OF BRUCE LEE (1980)
MAD COLD-BLOODED MURDER (1981)
MY NAME CALLED BRUCE (1978)

NINJA VS. BRUCE LEE (1982)
RE-ENTER THE DRAGON (1978)
RETURN OF BRUCE (AKA: BRUCE'S REVENGE: THE DRAGON RETURNS)
RETURN OF FIST OF FURY (1977)
RETURN OF RED TIGER (1980)
REVENGE OF THE KICKFIGHTER (1986)
SUPER GANG, THE
TREASURE HUNTERS (1984)
TREASURE OF BRUCE LEE (1980)
YOUNG BRUCE LEE (AKA: YOUNG DRAGON) (1976)

THE VIDEO RELEASES: The Bootleg:



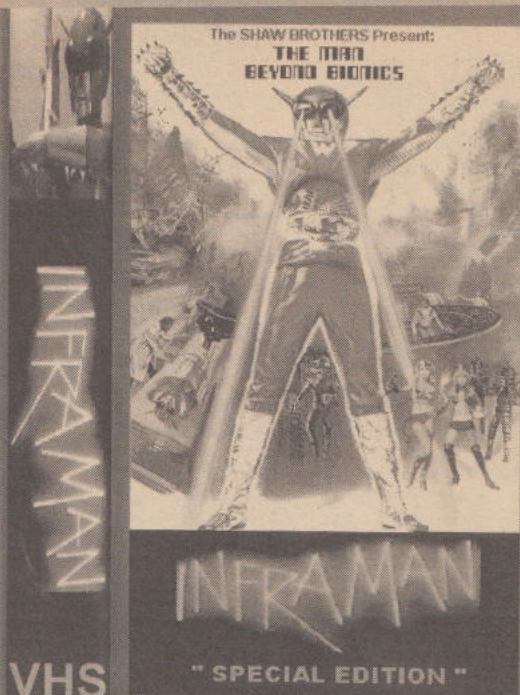
*"Thunderball Fists?
I can Have Such a
Thing?"*

Heroic Science Officer Ray Ma is chosen to become the bionic superhero INFRAMAN in order to save the world from the evil PRINCESS DRAGON MCM and her army of crazed mutants and monsters. Using his high tech weaponry and superior Martial Arts skills he destroys each monster one by one!

Made by Kung Fu movie masters the Shaw Brothers and produced by Joseph Brenner.

This Special Edition includes:
- Feature film in a rarely seen WIDESCREEN format.

- 7 rare trailers:
- Original Theatrical Trailer
- 3 Ten second TV spots
- 3 Thirty second TV spots



Don't let the full color labels fool you, this is an American-made bootleg. But even so, it's probably the only way to get a decently letterboxed view of the movie's English dub, since other prints are badly cropped at the sides. This "Special Edition" is also recommendable because it has seven rare trailers from its American release: Original theatrical trailer, three ten second TV spots, and three thirty second TV spots! This is not to say that this tape is perfect: The original 35 mm print that they copied it from seems to have suffered some wear & tear, and the color is rather washed out. But this illegitimate tape was almost sued into oblivion. As the story goes, the mysterious Joseph Brenner (who's rumored to have distributed other movies) materialized out of the woodwork to threaten the bootleggers with legal action. Somewhere I heard Brenner did this once before, when some independent artist wanted to include Inframan's image in some comicbook. So anyway, this videotape was then pulled from their catalogues. But it still pops up occasionally on Ebay. -Damon Foster



Goodtimes Home Video

Goodtimes Home Video released this screwed up version in 1994. It's an okay tape I suppose, which suffers from the same pan & scan (which plays havoc with the movie's widescreen scope) as in the one from Prism. I also was annoyed at the way they altered the opening credits with some sort of cheap video special ef-

fects. This strange print now inserts stock footage of the villainous monsters, and gives them names like: "The Octopus Mutant" (Monster Plant), "The Laser Horn Monster", and "Emperor of Doom" (Fire Dragon). The Demon Princess's dragon form (that's her who belly flops onto the road at the movie's beginning) is called "Giant Flying Lizard", apparently the releasers didn't bother to take the time and watch the movie first. One monster is now called "The Driller Beast" (Mutant Drill)—even though his name is clearly pronounced "Nemesis" (the only monster identified in the English voice dubbing) in the movie itself. Though the box agrees with me in that it mentions Inframan's Thunderball (not thunderbolt) Fists, the notes also say INFRAMAN features "Li Hsiu Hsien of FISTS OF FURY fame"! Huh?!?! Do these morons mean Li Hsiao Lung, AKA Bruce Lee?! I hope not, I would like to think they have at least some common sense. When FISTS OF FURY was produced, Li Hsiu Hsien had just signed a contract with Shaw Brothers, so there's no way in hell he could be in FISTS OF FURY (a product of the Shaw's fiercest competitor, Golden Harvest). I suspect this classic error comes from the fact that FISTS OF FURY's original title is THE BIG BOSS, and there also happens to be a 1981 movie called THE BIG BOSS, which Danny Lee does appear in. -Damon Foster

the Korean version:

Like I mentioned elsewhere in this issue, I first heard about this 1990s release by accident; it was a complete misunderstanding! Some moronic geek on a newsgroup mentioned he had seen "the Korean Inframan"! Being quite a moron myself, I assumed there was some sort of Inframan rip off made in Korea (after all, Korea shamelessly ripped off OGON BATTO, MAZINGA Z, BATMAN, and FLASHMAN; so anything is possible), so I sought it out! But "the Korean Inframan" turned out to be their pre-record of the



연소자관람가

Hong Kongese movie itself. As you can see from this amazingly inaccurate (the Koreans are giving the Turks a run for their money!) video box, the Korean tape is anything but legitimate! Since when do Godzilla, Biollante and Ultraman Ace co-star with Inframan!?! Even worse, this illegal-as-hell release (but Korean store owners don't seem to mind) doesn't even come directly from HK, despite geographic similarities. This Korean tape appears to be copied from the American release from Good Times Home Video! The movie is dubbed in Korean, and for some reason, the opening destruction scenes (and Dragon Mom's belly flop onto the highway) are cut out. The tape starts with the same formation of Inframan's English name in the title, and then a cheap super-imposed "Inframan" (in Korean calligraphy) segways into a song and montage intended only for Koreans: Some song is sung in Korean (by a chick), and also has Korean subtitles (presumably the lyrics, so Koreans can sing along!) as we see various stock shots & highlights from the movie. It's similar to the way Goodtimes edited their version of the opening credits. -Damon Foster

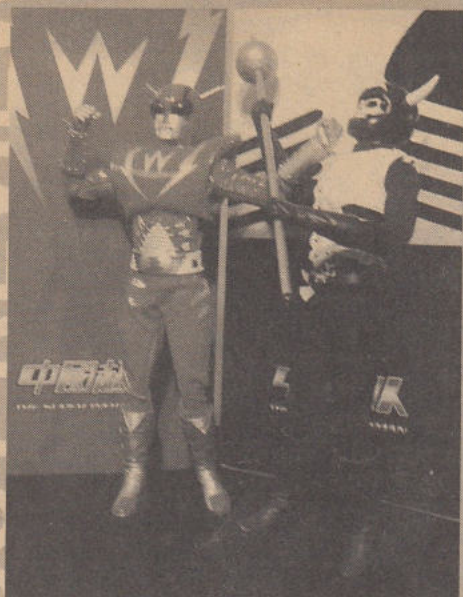


Prism:

I believe this here Prism release from the early 1980s to be the cleanest videotape of INFRAMAN. It's probably my favorite videotape of the Joseph Brenner print, because the picture is decent. The color is more vivid than the "banned" bootleg, but it lacks the full picture seen on the bootleg, because nobody bothered giving it the "Pan & Scan" treatment. This is one of the better prints available on video, and looks a lot like the TV version that was released to American TV stations in the early 1980s. -Damon Foster

Celestial Pictures:

Ah yes, 28 years after the movie's release, we've finally got a beautiful, vivid, crystal clear, silver disk (VCD & DVD) of INFRAMAN! It's subtitled, which is really interesting. It's nice to see an alternate take on the translation. There aren't too many differences between the English & Chinese versions, but this VCD includes some neat superhero music which was removed from Joseph Brenners' print. It's too bad, because this catchy tune makes the fights more exciting. Whether you get the DVD, the VCD or the 'Koobo' (?) package which includes not only the movie but little dolls (one box has Inframan and a Spectre Skeleton, and the other has just a black Inframan which never appears in the movie), this spectacular Celestial Pictures release is a must for any collector! For more information on their many excellent releases, go to www.celestialpictures.com or write to: Celestial Pictures Ltd., Shaw Administration Building, Lot 220, Clear Water Bay Rd., Kowloon, HK. I can't praise this disk enough! -Damon Foster



Dog 9 re-released these beautiful, 12" dolls in 2003, to coincide with the release of the Celestial Pictures disks, but the original doll (according to second-hand descriptions and eyewitness accounts from fans who bought the dolls in the 1970s but destroyed them with fire-crackers!) was released all over Hong Kong in 1975, and these dolls made it to Hawaii and suppos-



edly even Chinatown stores in the states. Regardless, these current dolls aren't perfect: Because of Inframan's gloves being detachable (and portable, optional Thunder Fists to attach), they fall off constantly. Not only that, but Inframan's Fire Bombs (stomach missiles) are removable and these tiny pieces of plastic can easily come loose and get lost.

Also, it's interesting to note that the doll makers at Dog 9 (in Hong Kong) contacted me in 2003 and requested I send them my rare Inframan materials so they could include them on the dolls' packaging & labeling. I was happy to help out, but my extensive collection has cost me a lot of money, time, blood sweat and tears. I wasn't about to cough up the goods for free! I requested a single free doll for my effort, or a tiny acknowledgement on the packaging. Apparently that was asking too much and I never heard back from them. While I would never doubt that Dog 9's over-priced (mine cost me nearly a hundred bucks each!), limited-edition dolls are gorgeous, I think them dogs can go screw themselves—doggy-style of course. The look is flawless, but if these dolls keep losing their hands, the price should be lower. -Damon Foster



今次大會的另一焦點《中國超人》，最終也不負眾望成功跑出，令不少喜歡此電影的朋友感動非常。

The "Koobo" sets:

As mentioned in the review of the Celestial Pictures disk, this is a nice little combination. You get the best-ever print of THE SUPER INFRAMAN (with optional Mandarin or Cantonese soundtrack, and optional English subtitles), along with some cute little (2.5") dolls in the same package! One box



makes sense because the dolls are Inframan and a Spectre Skelton. The other box includes, of all things, a black Inframan (?). Seems to me that a better idea would have been to make a doll of the demon princess or one of the other villains. A black Inframan is obviously a cheap excuse to use the exact same mold again, but in that case, they could have made a white Inframan (to represent the frozen Inframan in the ice chamber battle), at least that actually happens in the movie. I also don't know what the hell "Koobo" means. -Damon Foster





LEFT: Small Italian poster.
BELOW: Danny Tsen.
RIGHT: Turkish poster.
RIGHT & BELOW: Italian one-sheet.

INFRAMAN L'ALTRA DIMENSIONE

ANTHONY LAWRENCE · TOM MALDEN · DIANA WINTER · SUSAN COREY · TERRY LIU

— R. MARVIN SHAW BROTHERS

EASTMANCOLOR PANAVISION STEREO INFRASOUND

丹娜

DANA TSEN

(AKA: "Da Na", "Dana", and "Lei Dana")

Though this beauty has one of the prettiest faces (and the legs & hips are nothing to scoff at) ever to grace Hong Kong theaters in the 1970s, Dana Tsen never left much of an impression in moviedom. She wasn't even credited in the English credits for her role as INFRAMAN's "She Demon", nor was she even mentioned on the HK movie poster! But did appear on the cover of Shaw movie magazine Southern Screen #209 (July; 1975), the seventh edition released in 1975. Whatever happened to her is anybody's guess (she probably married into money and didn't need to act any more), but she can also be seen in Bruce Li exploitation movies like IMAGE OF BRUCE LEE & BRUCE LEE IN NEW GUINEA, plus Callan Leung's GOLGO 13: THE KOWLOON ASSIGNMENT (starring Sonny Chiba). Additional information is always welcome.



BİONİK ADAM CANADARLARA KARŞI

RENKLI-TÜRKÇE CINEMA SCOPE



INFRAMAN L'ALTRA DIMENSIONE

ANTHONY LAWRENCE · TOM MALDEN · DIANA WINTER · SUSAN COREY · TERRY LIU

— R. MARVIN SHAW BROTHERS EASTMANCOLOR PANAVISION STEREO INFRASOUND

丹娜

中國超人

新奇！刺激！興奮！大開眼界的電影

邵氏公司又一偉大貢獻
一九七五年大製作
全世界矚目





侵襲地球



特技變幻
銀幕罕



ไอ้มดแดง

THE SUPER INFERAMAN



เรื่องเรียงทักกันเข้ามา
เจ้ามนุษย์ได้พิภพทั้งหลาย
ข้าไม่ยั้ง.....

มดแดงตัวนี้มีฤทธิ์ กว่ามดแดงทั่ว
ทั้งดงดงเกาะ และเกาะดงดง
ต่ำมิไม่เลี้ยง เสาธัดดงดง

ผลงานภาพยนตร์ประจักษ์
ของ ชวโร บราเดอร์

นำโดย

หลิวเซียน



บริษัท ซี.ยู.นิชั่นบราเดอร์ส จำกัด

中國超人



japanese fantasy/sci-fi section:

TERROR YAKI

GODZILLA, MOTHRA AND KING GHIDORAH: GIANT MONSTERS ALL-OUT ATTACK

(AKA: "GMK", "Godzilla, Mothra, King Ghidorah: Daikaiju Sogougeki", "Godzilla, Mothra, King Ghidorah: Daikaiju Sogougeki", "Gojira, Mosura, Kingu Gidorâ: Daikaijû sôkôgeki", "Godzilla, Mothra, King Ghidorah: The Giant Monsters' General Offensive" and so on) Toho; 2001, Producer: Shogo Tomiyama, & Hideyuki Honma, Screenplay: Keiichi Hasengawa, Masahiro Yokotani & Shusuke Kaneko, Music: Kô Ôtani & Akira Ifukube, Cinematography: Kenji Takama, Film Editing: Isao Tomita, Casting: Tadao Tanaka, Art Dir.: Toshio Miike & Isao Takahashi, Prod. Management: Koji Maeda, Special Effects: Junko Aoki, Shusuke Kaneko, Makoto Kamiya, Yuichi Kikuchi, Takayuki Matsuno, Kiyotaka Taguchi, Shinji Higuchi, Cast: Chiharu Niyama, Ryudo Uzaki, Masahiro Kobayashi, Shirô Sano, Takashi Nishina, Kaho Minami, Shinya Owada, Kunio Murai, Hiroyuki Watanabe, Shingo Katsurayama, Toshikazu Fukawa, Masahiko Tsugawa, Eisei Amamoto (AKA: Hideyo Amamoto), Nobuaki Kakuda, Takafumi Matsuo, Kazuko Kato, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Remember all the hype ("another DESTROY ALL MONSTERS!" etc.) a few years ago for this disappointment when it

was underway?! I've sat through GODZILLA, MOTHRA AND KING GHIDORAH: GIANT MONSTERS ALL-OUT ATTACK three or four times over the past few years. It's hard to say, because I've never once been able to sit through this mediocre flick in one sitting, all the way through. Either I get distracted or disinterested, or I fall asleep. Today I can finally say I've seen the entire movie and my final verdict is pretty much negative. I never reviewed it before because such a view would be unfair; having never sat through the whole damn thing. I think the beginning alone killed it for me, for the way it just blatantly comes out and bastardizes itself from the movies which were always true and dear to my heart. Almost immediately, actor Ryudo Uzaki lectures for some soldiers about how the only time Godzilla ever attacked Japan was 1954 (so I guess I just dreamed up GODZILLA VS. THE SMOG MONSTER?). Didn't they pull this crap in GODZILLA 1985?! To add insult to injury, this conference also acknowledges the Tri-Star G.I.N.O. (Godzilla in Name Only) movie, when some guy says: "A few years ago another giant monster attacked America at New York City". So GODZILLA, MOTHRA AND KING GHIDORAH: GIANT MONSTERS ALL-OUT ATTACK exists in the same time-line as G.I.N.O., and not a classic like MONSTER ZERO or GHIDRAH: THE THREE HEADED MONSTER. Needless to say, I

realized at the beginning of GODZILLA, MOTHRA AND KING GHIDORAH: GIANT MONSTERS ALL-OUT ATTACK that I was in for a rough ride!

Special effects-wise, I guess GODZILLA, MOTHRA AND KING GHIDORAH: GIANT MONSTERS ALL-OUT ATTACK has its moments. There's plenty of CGI stuff (i.e. the unconvincing fishes which swim by submarine Satsuma) of course, but at the core, we've still got the same traditional props and rubber monster costumes. While the design of the new Baragon offers a pretty slick face, I thought Mothra looked less convincing than in the REBIRTH OF MOTHRA trilogy, and Godzilla himself wobbles and gets pretty clunky at times— still looking like a guy in a suit (I thought Toho had overcome that glitch in the previous four or five films). Not only did I think the Godzilla design backtracked in quality, but its eyes lack pupils. While the white-eyed look might make Godzilla look more menacing and even scary, the character lost some of the charm and likable qualities I had come to enjoy. Also, as somebody who's inter-acted with many genuine reptiles, I can safely say that these new Godzilla eyes don't look very reptilian. The only times I've seen eyes like that on a reptile is if it's dead, or is a snake about to shed its skin. For once my favorite FX in a Godzilla film were just the shots of Godzilla walking around, I was particularly impressed by an aerial view of the



Big G wading in the water, approaching the land. As for the long overdue skirmish between Godzilla and Baragon, I wouldn't kick it out of bed.

I also think Toho is getting just too pre-tentious & paranoid. They're absolutely psychotic when it comes to copyrights, as humorously hinted to in AUSTIN POWERS 3: THE SPY WHO SHAGGED ME. Though we know the title is GODZILLA, MOTHRA AND KING GHIDORAH: GIANT MONSTERS ALL-OUT ATTACK, there are circled trademark symbols after each monster name when the DVD plays: An "H" after Godzilla, an "R" after Mothra and a "TM" after Ghidora. So you could almost read the stupid title like this: GODZILLAH, MOTHRAR AND KING GHIDORAHTM: GIANT MONSTERS ALL-OUT ATTACK. Toho, quit flattering yourselves!

All in all, ALL MONSTERS ATTACK blah blah blah strikes me as being below average. I wasn't real fond of its predecessor (GODZILLA X MEGAGIRUS, which it shares no time-line with) because it too has the same type of uninteresting human characters, extremely uninteresting female leads (in fact, the girl in this film looks a lot like the female soldier protagonist in MEGAGIRUS), and army stuff. I think GMK goes down a notch, because even Godzilla himself was less interesting and I preferred the design in MEGAGIRUS.

It's a somewhat tolerable (I never said I hated it) story of TV reporter Yuri Tachibana (Chiharu Niyama), who discovers all this bullshit about Japan's legendary "Guardian Monsters": Baragon, Ghidorah and Mothra. The premise is stupid, but at least Mothra has no midget fairy helpers, and Mothra even makes its debut by drowning a bunch of young troublemakers who tried to kill a dog! Eisei Amamoto (veteran of countless movies and TV shows) plays some ghostly old man in the forest, in what appears to be his last film before his

death a couple years later. The Guardian Monsters prophecy says that these dormant giants are fueled by the tormented Asian souls of people who died in WWII (here we go again!), but somehow I don't think they're the souls of the Chinese torture victims of the rape of Nanking. The brief battle between invading Godzilla and Guardian monster Baragon (who can no longer spit a ray like in FRANKENSTIEN CONQUERS THE WORLD) is okay, but much of the script annoys us with roving reporter Chiharu Niyama. With her brown-red hair tint, and the style itself, she's identical to the way so many Japanese girls look in this decade (the zeros), in fact, she looks a lot like the other kids we see in the movie's crowd scenes, etc. Her militaristic father (Ryudo Uzaki) isn't much more distinguishable or interesting, with his determination to destroy Godzilla (a subplot right out of GODZILLA 1985). Anyway, after some father-daughter quality time and computer generated missiles which drill into things, Godzilla finally takes on some more monsters. This time he defeats Mothra and Ghidorah, as opposed to GHIDRAH THE 3 HEADED MONSTER where he and Mothra defeat Ghidorah. In this case, Godzilla wipes out Mothra so Mothra becomes some sort of magical essence to combine with the form of the defeated Ghidorah (or "Ghidorah", as they're spelling it this week), so that Ghidorah can come back to life to fight Godzilla again, only to be defeated yet again, in an underwater battle.

On the whole, the climactic battle with
G h i d r a h
(Baragon &

Mothra have much smaller roles, this flick is not the 'monster marathon' we were lead to believe it would be) is more magical (in a Disney sort of way) than thrilling, and is the least interesting Godzilla vs. Ghidrah fight I've ever seen, and I've seen plenty! Lots of artificial CGI atmosphere, slow-paced action, night-time setting and unconvincing underwater stuff isn't what made the Godzilla-Ghidrah battles in GHIDRAH THE THREE HEADED MONSTER, MONSTER ZERO, DESTROY ALL MONSTERS and even ZONE FIGHTER great! Regardless, after Godzilla finally kills Ghidrah again, it looks as though Ryudo Uzaki's missile (fired from a submarine) destroys Godzilla. Then we're suppose to be so relieved that this uninteresting human character survived. We're also expected to shed tears up happiness when the father and daughter are united. I didn't give

a damn. *1/2 -
DF



THE DIMENSION TRAVELERS

Bandai Visual; 1998, Based on the novel by: Taku Mayamura, Director: Kazuya Konaka, Screenwriter: Sadayuki Murai, Co-Dir.: Hideki Onuki, Digital FX: Yoshihiro Shiki, Masao Yosiwara, Planning: Yoshihiro Ueno (Bandai Visual) & Tsuburaya (Tsuburaya Pictures), English Version: Asia Pulp Cinema, Central Park Media, John O'Donnell and Stephanie Shalofsky, Cast: Chiharu Niiyama, Yasue Sato, Satoshi Tsumabuki, Reviewed by Damon Foser

There's definitely an audience for artsy-fartsy movies like this, so long as that audience has some clue as to what to expect. Though this weird movie is categorized as "science fiction" (on the box of the English dubbed VHS tape I've just watched), you need to be extremely open-minded before watching a movie like this, because at times, it's more like an art film. Unfortunately for me, *THE DIMENSION TRAVELERS* is not a "quick fix" adventure type of sci-fi movie. *THE DIMENSION TRAVELERS* is a complex, confusing, talky movie with what appears to be a fascinating story. I say "appears to be" because it's really hard to follow. There is an interesting sci-fi story in effect here; but it's more of a hidden under current than an obvious script. If you can manage to filter out the bizarre editing, constant dream-like transitions and plain out strange inserts, then it's possible to enjoy this movie, but you need to be incredibly patient. Though credited as being based on some novel by Taku Mayamura, this oddball movie reminded me more of *THE MATRIX* and *NAKED LUNCH*. It's not as entertaining as either movie, but it does have the same unique approach, and at times it's so weird it's in its own world. As an innovative drama, it succeeds. As for sci-fi, I don't know. My narrow view insists that sci-fi have a decent amount of special effects. There aren't many FX in *THE DIMENSION TRAVELERS*, although there are some exploding buildings (CGI stuff) near the end.

I'm giving this movie a kind rating of two whole stars (**), because the acting is fairly good, the characters border on being remotely interesting and the girls are pretty. For much of the film, I was intrigued with the apparent dream sequences, apparent flashbacks and apparent hallucinations, and kept wondering: "Did that actually just happen?" But eventually, all these transitions to wierd scenarios (apparently independent of each other) got frustrating and tedious. I got tired of the guessing game and wanted at least one character to be explained, or to have one of these make believe worlds make a little sense



and have relevance to the over-all script. I got irritated with the dis-jointed approach and lost interest by the time I reached the movie's middle. Then I fell asleep, and had brief dreams and images of my own. I woke up later in *THE DIMENSION TRAVELERS* and was slightly startled. Now I started wondering, "Did that actually just happen in the movie, or in my dream?" It certainly added to the effect of watching *THE DIMENSION TRAVELERS*, it's almost as though the movie's boring approach deliberately set out to make me

sleep and dream, to more fully experience this unique movie which questions dreams and reality. Looking back on it, it's rather creepy.

The script of this lackluster, slow-paced drama deals with schoolgirls like Midori Kogawa (Chiharu Niiyama) and Mayumi Awase (Yasue Sato), who seem to have split personalities. To the outside world (s), they both appear to have mental disorders. They go in and out of different hallucinations presumably created by their minds, except they, like other confused people, all go to the same worlds and interact, continuing their mutual lives regardless of what fantasy world, or dimension they're in. But later, it's realized these chicks are mutations called "Capables", who's fantasy worlds and dreams manufacture the actual places and people involved. The chicks randomly jump from dimension to dimension, and encounter dysfunctional parents, rigid insane asylums, school girl cliques, some old man who laughs whenever he holds a microphone, a mysterious person called the "Haverdasher" and, worst of all, different variations of all of these environments which add to the confusion. Later, the movie attempts to have some rationale which explains all this confusion, and that rationale is called the "Palace of Pleasure". Though this floating castle looks almost exactly like the old Comet Empire from *STARBLAZERS*, it's actually more like the title world of *THE MATRIX*, because it too has human prisoners who live in some sort of fantasy world, or worlds. So there you have it, my take on this oddball movie. But if you want another perspective, here's what's on the rental box: "*Worlds collide! Freakish events jolt Midori from the life of an ordinary schoolgirl. Mysterious soldiers appear to terrorize her, declaring her a dangerous mental patient. Her own family seems to agree. Her best friend claims to be perfectly sane, but from another dimension. Is Midori losing her mind? Or is she a Dimension Traveler, with powers that could blow the universe apart?*" Maybe these liner notes explain something about

the story, but they're not the way I would have described the movie. This just goes to prove that an oddball drama like this is completely open to individual interpretation; for better or not-so-better. ** -DF

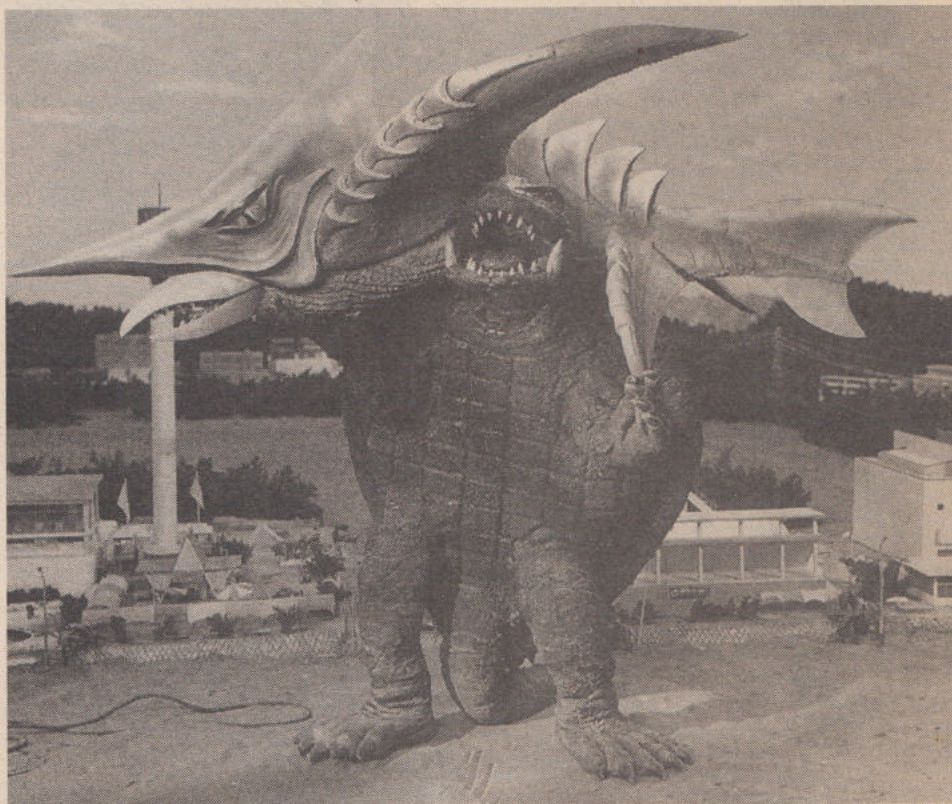
GAMERA VS. ZIGRA

(English dubbed version from Neptune Media) AKA: "Gamera Tai Jigura", Daiei; 1971, Produced by Hidemasa Nagata (AKA Masaichi Nagata), Dir.: Noriaki Yuasa, Screenplay: Niisan Takahashi, Music: Shunsuke Kikuchi, English Version by Heast Entertainment Inc. in Association with Neptune Media, Original American TV version: Sandy Frank; 1985, Starring: Reiko Kasahara, Mikiko Tsubouchi, Koji Fujiyama, Isamu Saeki, Shin Minatsu, Yasushi Sakagami, Gloria Zoellner, Reviewed by Damon Foster

By now, I think I've finally critiqued each and every version, of each and every Gamera movie, that Neptune Media released to America's home video market. So last and certainly least, I've reached their particular print of GAMERA VS. ZIGRA's English dubbed version. Last issue, I managed to chuckle at their subtitled tape (Neptune Media; 1999), of the same movie, and many years before, in *O.C.: The Gamera Issue*, I reviewed the American TV version (Sandy Frank; 1985). GAMERA VS. ZIGRA, like many Gamera movies, simply has too many alternate versions. Though not as boring as the original GAMERA THE INVINCIBLE (AKA just GAMERA, another movie with alternate prints and hybrids), I think this particular videotape is Neptune Media's worst release, or at least the most ridiculous. The English voices are taken right from the mid-1980s release from Sandy Frank, which I think is the movie's best print. It looks like it was pretty easy to take the Sandy Frank soundtrack and dub it over some Japanese laser disk. Though it lacks the widescreen format seen in this here Neptune Media variation, it also lacked the god-awful theme song that the little kids infected us with. Neptune Media's dubbed ZIGRA maintains both the irritating dubbed

voices and every occurrence of that nauseating song which appeared in the Japanese version. If it wasn't bad enough to keep that horrendous song in the movie, them Neptune people went ahead and retained the subtitles (in an otherwise dubbed print) for some of the musical interludes, so we can again understand the lyrics for some of the most irritating music ever recorded.

As for the quality of the dubbing itself, it's about average, I suppose. There are a few lines which didn't sound clear, particularly during the anticlimactic climax where people are stuck in a bath-isscope. It sounds as though the two scientists are called "Dr. Henry" and "Dr. Juan", but I think the latter was meant to be "Dr. Wallace". Then there's a false alarm where we're lead to believe everybody in the bath-iss-scope is supposed to have died because of a lack of air. So then a whimpering woman muttered what



sounded like: *"Then your daughters on vacation"*, so after listening again, more closely, I heard the correct line: *"Then they died of suffocation"*.

The movie's token little girl and obligatory halfbreed always wants a "coke", while in the subtitled version she was more health-conscious and wanted "juice" most of the time. The only major audio change, however, is that now the movie takes place in the year 1985 (according to some old man on the beach). What's interesting is that it could very well be 1985, because I recall very few jarring "1971" fashions.

Could you imagine somebody trying to make GODZILLA VS. THE SMOG MONSTER (Toho; 1971) set in 1985?! A timely movie like that could only take place in 1971! But what's really weird about the voice-dubbing for Neptune's/Frank's ZIGRA is that I couldn't really identify the voices. Villainous Reiko Kasahara has a voice that reminded me of Corrine Orr's, while other voices sound like the work of them "But still" people who are more commonly associated with 1970s kung fu movies. It's really hard to tell, but I suspect it's the voices of some new comers who didn't

dub that many movies. They changed the name of the space babe this time, she's now called either Laura Lee Wora or Laura Lee Vara, it's hard to tell what they're saying. Either way, this name isn't any less complex than the character's real name (Chikako Sugawara) in the Japanese version.

Yet as a movie, regardless of what version you're laughing at, GAMERA VS. ZIGRA isn't really much worse than the other Gamera kiddie fiascos. For one thing, it's one of the few Gamera classics which lacks flashbacks (to previous films) and stock-footage! Even as a tiny tot, I saw right through the flashbacks, they were obviously cheap filler, and occasionally gave the releasers an excuse to add extra monsters to the movie posters so that the audiences would think they were going to see another DESTROY ALL MONSTERS (Toho; 1968). The special effects are decent, especially considering Daiei Movie Co. was about to file bankruptcy! The miniature set at the beginning of the movie (resembling Moonbase Alpha from SPACE: 1999, which GAMERA VS. ZIGRA predates) looks just as good as the moonbase seen in DESTROY ALL MONSTERS; the only exception being Chikaku Sugawara's land-rover which looks like a toy jeep. Villainous Zigra is a really awesome in design, both its costume form and flying/swimming miniature puppets are quite slick. Later in GAMERA VS. ZIGRA, there's the obligatory military-vs.-villain battle, and the scenes of miniature jets are meshed with the actual footage of real jets beautifully. The interior set of the flying saucer is okay, but I still can't figure out the ceiling: These alien shark-birds are obviously an advanced race (anybody who can construct a space vehicle out of gum drops and Linkin' Logs is beyond genius!), their technology still lacks efficient bug-killer. They've got these cobwebs all over the ceiling! Even stranger is the giant, talking Zigra head. It looks dead and never moves its mouth when it talks. I can't tell if it's supposed to be a dormant Zigra himself talking, or if it's some kind of oracle or mechanical communication device. As I watch



this movie for the hundredth time, I've noticed another flaw. Watch for the scene where Zigra's dorsal fin destroys a ship. This takes place supposedly before Zigra gets exposed to our atmosphere and grows huge!

I think the subtitled version (***) is the better of the two. Almost everybody in ZIGRA got on my nerves in both versions, but they're easier to ignore in the subtitled version. Even so, GAMERA VS. ZIGRA is never uninteresting. It may be unbelievably stupid, but it's also very entertaining. I don't think I could admit outloud to non-kaiju fans that I've watched this movie many times and had fun at every single viewing. I guess I'm being hypocritical again, because elsewhere in this issue, I trashed Roger Ebert for considering INFRAMAN a "guilty pleasure". I can admit with pride to loving INFRAMAN, but for me, the bewilderingly infantile GAMERA VS. ZIGRA dubbed Neptune Media tape (**1/2) is beyond being just a "guilty pleasure". I guess that makes it a "guilty of murder pleasure", or maybe "legally insane and unable to testify pleasure"? I don't know what to call it, but it's definitely one of those "so bad it's good movies, or Golden Turkeys. The musical equivalent would be the music of William Shatner ("Hey Mr. Tambourine Man" and "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds"), as heard on that Golden Throats C.D.

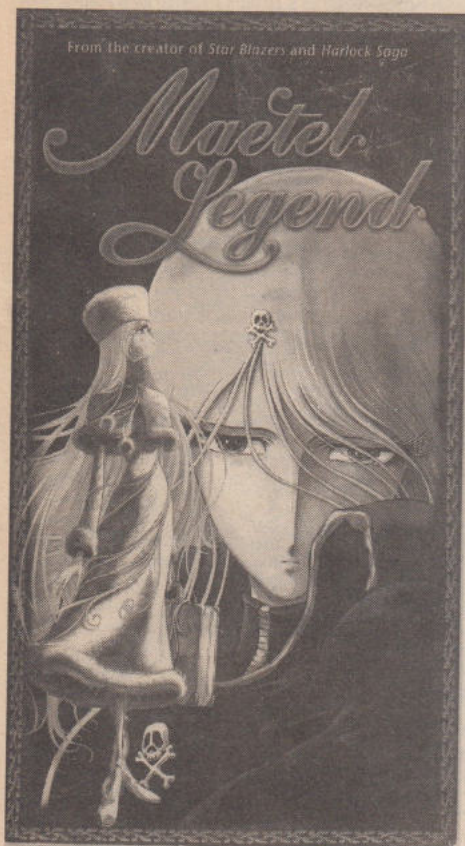
Zigra, a hungry shark with a beak, leaves its alien planet because there's not enough Eurasian half-breeds and Japanese kids to eat over there. I was hoping to see a shark feeding frenzy, but no such luck. Zigra hypnotizes an attractive astronaut woman called Laura Le Wora (Eiko Yanami), and considering how hot she looks in a bikini and mini-skirt, I don't blame him. She has trouble running in high-heels and go-go boots, but tries her best to chase two obnoxious earth kids played by Yasushi Sakagami and Gloria Zoellner, an obvious half-breed (half Japanese, half not Japanese). As is the case with Carl Craig in DESTROY ALL PLANETS, director Noriaki Yuasa just couldn't find a full-blooded white kid (thinking this would attract American

viewers) who knew fluent Japanese, so they compromised and met us halfway. Regardless, our two young protagonists had immediately mastered the controls on the alien space craft (not an uncommon feat for the small geniuses in Gamera's flicks), so naturally Zigra hates them and that fire-breathing, flying turtle Gamera becomes their guardian. Gamera rescues the infantile duo more than once, and naturally is defeated by Zigra in the first battle of the monsters. So once again, Gamera goes unconscious, which is accomplished by turning off the lightbulbs in the friendly

giant's head because it's cheaper than constructing actual eyelids to convey shut eye. Though the kids are prominently scripted to say "cute" stuff, there are also a few scenes of adult scientists, like a dull sequence involving a submerged bathyscaph (it was lowered, however, from a helicopter! The helicopter has to remain flying for the full duration, which is pretty stupid. Predictably, we never see the helicopter again, once the bathyscope is lowered under the water). Earlier in the movie, sultry villainess Laura Lee kept turning adults into helpless sleepwalkers and threatens to feed the kids "to the dolphins" while dragging the



twerps to a tank full of killer whales (well, I suppose technically, killer-whales are a species of dolphin, but neither species is known for eating Japanese kids, unfortunately), at Japan's Sea World amusement park. Anyway, the brilliant scientists working at Sea World realize that soundwaves eliminate alien control, which implies they must have watched Toho's MONSTER ZERO. Anyway, geologist Laura Lee (Eiko Yanami) is "de-alienized". Shortly there after, Gamera has a really lame battle with Zigra where he converts Zigra's spine into a xylophone before burning him up. **1/2 - DF



MAETEL LEGEND

Vega Entertainment; 2000, in association with: Tsuburaya Creative & Art Collection House, Original Story: Leiji Matsumoto, Exec. Prod.: Motoki Kitakoshi, Kazuhiko Inomata, Tsukasa Urakawa, Dir./Storyboard: Kazuyoshi Yokota, Screenplay: Mugi Kamio, Music: Masamichi Amano, Producers of English Version: John O'Donnell & Central Park Multimedia, Producer of English Version: Stephanie Shalofsky, Dubbing Supervisor: Tom Wayland, English Language Audio Post Production: Taj Productions, Available from

www.centralparkmedia.com and animeone.com, Reviewed by Damon Foster

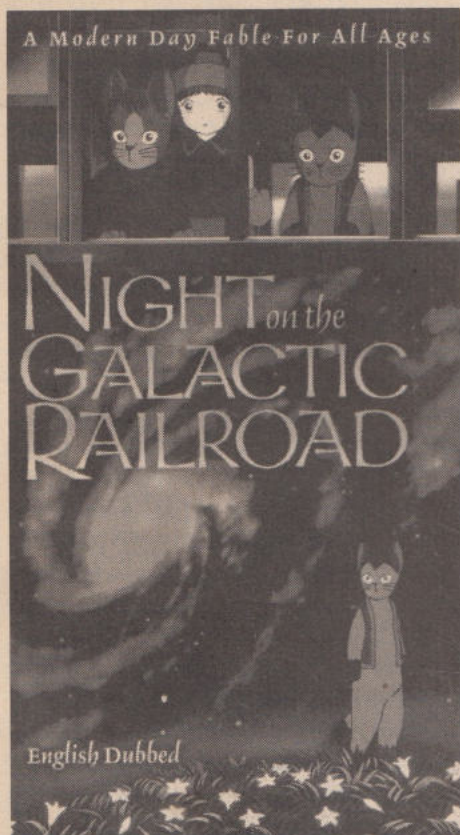
I'm embarrassed to admit that although I've been into Japanese sci-fi all my life, only now have I finally seen any of Leiji Matsumoto's GALAXY EXPRESS 999 stuff! Though I watched some of Matsumoto's "space opera" cartoons when I was a kid in the 1970s, I was at the peak of my anti-anime stage in the 1980s when his CAPTAIN HARLOCK AND THE QUEEN OF A THOUSAND YEARS (or whatever this mish-mash of two programs was called in America) was broadcast locally. It would have been a good chance to finally see Matsumoto's GALAXY EXPRESS 999 every day, dubbed in English. But because of my own personal backlash against the sudden popularity of Japanese animation, I would have nothing to do with this series, and thus, GALAXY EXPRESS 999 was something I never got exposed to. Fortunately, along comes yet another video release based on this classic Japanese TV show.

There are good and bad things about MAETEL LEGEND. First, the good things: As a rookie to this whole series, MAETEL LEGEND was a great place to start. It explains the beginning of the story and was a great way to introduce me to it. Like all of Leiji Matsumoto's cartoons, MAETEL LEGEND is slow paced and takes time to develop all the characters. There are some boring scenes of course, but on the whole it was an interesting experience. And now, the bad things: The problems with MAETEL LEGEND are the same problems which plague all of Leiji's work, as well as Japanese cartoon industry in general. Characters again tend to look alike (the characters Maetel, Emeraldas and their mother look damn near identical with the same physique, eyes, etc.), and there are all the same Matsumoto stereotypes: You got your fat guy, your blonde babe (s), and of course an old man. I suppose it's to be expected, since they obviously have a winning formula which they will forever exploit and regurgitate. I think that in the final analysis, the bad points and good points are at about an equal level, making MAETEL LEGEND pretty average for Japanimation.

The setting is some alien planet populated by humans, but this place is now suffering a horrible ice age which is wiping out the human race. Despite human technology, the humans on the planet are dying out, like most of the planet's animals; the only survivors seem to be a pack of wolves who learned to adapt in the harsh environment. So scientists have devised a way to make the race of humans survive: Turn them into robots! Despite the existence of a space train (which they call "three nine", but I always thought it was called "nine nine nine", like the band) which offers free public transportation from planet to planet, the population decides it would be easier to become machines! The leader of these domineering robots is the villainous "Hard Gear", a power mad dictator who's robot minions are enforcing even unwilling people to become robots. Two blonde princesses called Maetel and Emeraldas wish to remain completely human, despite their mother's (the planets queen) eventual transformation into a dangerous robot. From here, the story becomes stretched out, and padded out, based on something that goes like this: Evil Robot: "You must become a robot!" Defiant Human: "But I don't want to become a robot! I won't!" Evil Robot: "Yes, you will!" Defiant human: "Will not!" Evil Robot: "Will!" Defiant human: "Will not!" Evil Robot: "Will!" Defiant human: "Will not!" Evil Robot: "Will!" Defiant human: "Will not!" Evil Robot: "Will!" Anyway, you get the point. But during the routine script, there are some nifty images, like the garage-bin of human corpses who's crying souls (reminding me of a more grim version of Casper The Friendly Ghost) fly upward as rats chew on the bodies. There are a couple brief ray-gun shoot-outs between the two heroines and the hench-robots, but too much of the story deals with the queen's gradual transformation from loving mother to dangerous cyborg. While other people become robots instantly, her transformation as gradual, to build emotional tension as the queen struggles with loyalty and identity. Eventually, even the queen herself becomes the reigning robot, and takes over the robot army. Fortunately, by now the two sisters have escaped onto the Galaxy Express 999, so off they go into space. They escaped the planet of the robots, but the adventure is just beginning. **1/2 - DF

ASIAN ODDITIES

From Japan:



NIGHT ON THE GALACTIC RAILROAD

Asahi Group/Herald Group; 1985, Prod.: Masato Hara, Atsumi Tashiro, Original Story: Kenji Miyazawa, Screenplay: Minoru Betsuyaku, Character Design: Takao Kodama, Animation: Marisuke Eguchi, Art Dir.: Mihoko Magoori, Photography: Yasuo Maeda, Music Composition: Haruomi Hosono, Dir.: Gisaburo Sugii, English version: Central Park Media, Anime One, John O'donnell & Stephanie Shalofsky, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Knowing this 108-minute cartoon was fantasy, I knew better than to place unfair standards of scientific accuracy on it, otherwise, I couldn't have accepted all the talking cats. But if it's going to be about talking animals, I was hoping it would be funny like Daffy Duck, or at least remotely interesting like Winnie the Pooh. But NIGHT ON THE GALACTIC RAILROAD is one of those bizarre fairy tales along the lines of the classic

story Alice in Wonderland. As such, it's incredibly weird, period. Like many fables, it's full of odd stuff, there are countless characters and situations I really couldn't figure out. There's nothing outrageous or over-the-top in this wholesome video, because that would have made it entertaining. This movie is slow-paced and boring. I don't know what inspired anybody to write this script, I don't know what this is based on and I don't want to know. I don't care.

It starts off pretty realistic (except that it's set in a fantasy world populated by talking cats), with lead character Giovanni getting irritated with his classmates and then going to work at a mundane job. His mother is sick, so he must care for her and do the shopping. A sizable portion of the story has him going off to buy sugar, milk and bread. They also talk about this cat's father, who appears to be a paleontologist or archeologist. But eventually, he and his friend Caminella get on one of those outerspace trains (just like in GALAXY EXPRESS 999), and suddenly NIGHT ON THE GALACTIC RAILROAD loses its realistic, logical approach. This train takes them into outerspace, where they encounter the Milky Way and an assortment of oddball characters (i.e. some character who catches birds to eat, and his magic makes their legs taste like candy) which just come and go, with no rhyme or reason. More than once, NIGHT ON THE GALACTIC RAILROAD takes on a Jesus freak approach, which might make sense only to religious fanatics. After the strange train returns Giovanni to his home, he learns that his buddy Caminella actually drowned the night before. So presumably, the train was taking Caminella to Heaven and all the other people on the train were ghosts (i.e. some people were survivors of a natural disaster, or so they thought), I guess. I don't know, and don't give a damn. Sometimes, strange movies can be fun, but in this case, it's just a strange movie that's strange (not to mention boring). -DF

From America:

THE MASTER GUNFIGHTER

Billy Jack Enterprises; 1975, Music: Lalo

Schiffrin, Screenplay: Harold Laplan, Producer: Philip Parslat, Dir.: Frank Laughlin, Cast: Tom Laughlin, Ron O'Neal, Lincoln Kilpatrick, JoAnne Abu-Qartoumy, Barbara Carrera, Victor Camp, Hector Eli, Micheal Lane, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Best known for his "Billy Jack" trilogy in the early 1970s, Tom Laughlin went against both stereotype and financial success when he made this Western-Eastern, inspired by Japan's GOYOKIN (Tokyo Eiga; 1969) and another Eastern, RED SUN. Though THE MASTER GUNFIGHTER is decent, it wiped out Tom Laughlin financially, and his film career ended. It's a shame, because although his films aren't my favorites, I gotta' hand it to him for combining genres & martial arts at a time when many American film producers weren't. As in the Billy Jack movies, Tom Laughlin comes off as such a likeable guy that it's a shame to see him go. The 2002 DVD release even interviews him and several cast members. THE MASTER GUNFIGHTER is no masterpiece, but it looks like he was on to something— if he'd have kept making movies, he would probably be considered even more of an innovator in American cinema, and no doubt he would have gone on to make some really exciting flicks. Regardless, seeing this movie made me realize just how many "Easterns" (RED SUN, THE MASTER GUNFIGHTER, THE STRANGER AND THE GUNFIGHTER, KILL BILL, SHANGHAI NOON, ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA AND AMERICA, etc.) there are. Maybe somebody should write a whole article on this sub-genre.

Every time I've seen Tom Laughlin fight, I've come away thinking it's painfully obvious that he knows little or nothing about martial arts. His kendo action in THE MASTER GUNFIGHTER looks pretty slow and not particularly exciting. On his DVD interview, he goes on about how "easy" it was to film the swordfights, since he was really just doing stances and some basic swings. I think they should have spent more time choreographing the swordplay, but at least some of his moves look very much inspired by Japanese samurai movie battles— his best fight is where he slices several Span-

iards on a beach. As a western, there's just as much gunplay as there is swordplay, and the shoot-outs are somewhat more effective.

As a movie, it's okay. I like genre hybrids, and this one falls somewhere inbetween spaghetti westerns and Zato Ichi. Mind you, I don't think it's as good as either one; it lacks the atmosphere and cool music (Lalo Schiffrin's score reminds me too much of TV's PLANET OF THE APES program, so THE MASTER GUNFIGHTER seems like a TV movie) of a Sergio Leone film, and Laughlin doesn't have the same charisma as Shinatru Katsu. There's not a lot of impact because of the movie's tame approach; it's all pretty clean. Some scenes are so badly edited that it detracts from the power of the action scenes. For example, when Laughlin has shoot-outs with the bad guys, we don't always see him pull his gun up out of his holster. We just abruptly cut to a villain, and then back to Laughlin, who's gun is already drawn and he's pulling the trigger. This might be a series of editing errors or a deliberate artistic statement, but it doesn't give the elusion of him having the quick reflexes required to shoot several armed men all at once.

The DVD release (Ventura Distribution Inc.; 2002) is only okay too. Though it's nice to see interviews with the now aging Tom Laughlin, his son (the director) and pretty actresses like Barbara Carrera & JoAnne Abu-Qartoumy, the designer didn't take the concept of "TV Safety" into consideration when they transferred the movie. The opening credits, presented on the sides of the screen can be partially cropped off if you don't have a large TV screen.

The script takes place in 1800s California. As Burgess Meredith's naration explains, some of the characters [in this story] spent time in Japan, and they "returned with the mastery of the samurai sword". If you miss these opening words, you'll be completely confused as to why a few of the Spaniards & cowboys carry samurai swords around! Nothing else in the script ever explains why these swords get such extensive usage at a time when guns & bullets are equally plentiful! Anyway, pretty soon, we're introduced to Tom Laughlin's character: A righteous "goody two shoes" type who often wears big hats which cover his face. He's out to thwart the atrocities of Spaniards & missionaries who find profit in wiping out innocent Indian villages. The attacks on Indian tribes aren't particularly powerful because of bad camera angles and a lack of sufficient bloodshed, but you still get the point. The main villain (Ron O'Neal), however, isn't completely sadistic. He regrets the pillaging he feels forced to do, as it's the only way his own people can survive. One thing is for

sure- everybody in a Laughlin movie, good or bad, has depth. Using a combination of gunplay and kendo, Laughlin singlehandedly defeats all the Spaniards, and then the next morning he duels with and defeats main baddie Ron O'Neal himself. So then he and his leading lady ride off into the sunset. ** -DF

From Korea:

THE FOX WITH NINE TAILS

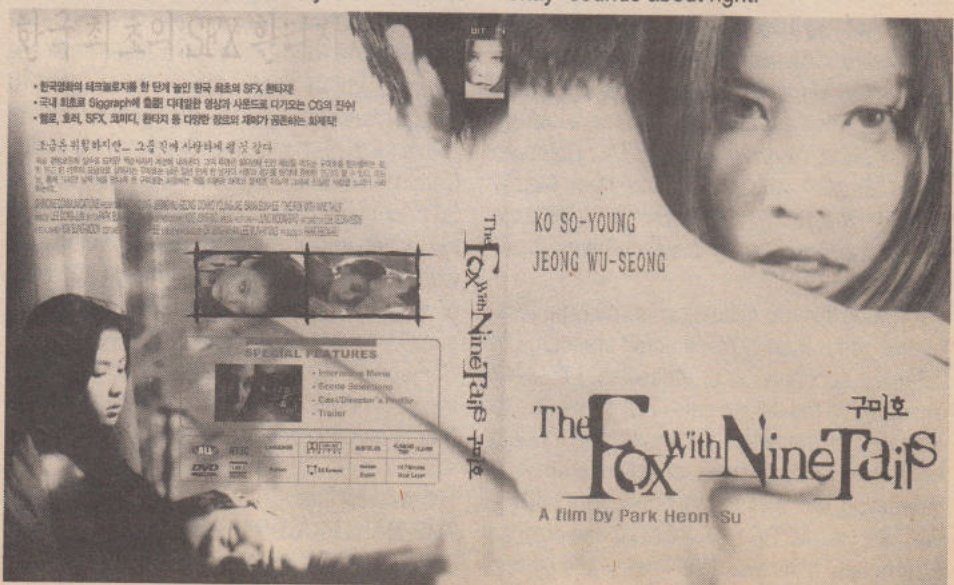
(A.K.A.: "Fox Girl", "Gumiho") *Shincine Communications Inc.; 2001, Prod.: Park Heon-Su, Exec. Prod.: Oh Jung Lee & Mun Hyung, Art Dir.: Lee Seok-Yeon, Special Makeup: Kim Sung Moon, Special Photography: Jung Woon Gyo, Dir. of Photography: Koo Jung Mo, Music: Lee Dong Jun, Cast: Ko So Young, Jeoung Woo Seong, Dokko Young Jae, Bang Eun-Hee, Reviewed by Damon Foster*

This Korean movie bombed during it's late 1990s theatrical release, and I guess that its release to VHS and DVD (some time this century) didn't do much better. Whether you know it as FOX GIRL (according to the English subtitles on the DVD) or its more widely known title THE FOX WITH NINE TAILS, this odd flick fails as a horror movie. It came close though, I thought it was almost a good movie! The production, continuity, acting, cinematography and editing are all done very well. It's obvious that they put a lot of work into this movie. It's definitely an intriguing movie, it held my attention enough so that I was able to sit through it twice, and the first of those two times there weren't even any subtitles. So I really wanted to like this movie, but THE FOX WITH NINE TAILS just doesn't cut it.

As you can tell from the title, it's yet another of those ghost stories where ghosts which are half woman and half animal fly around in the

forrest and seduce men before killing them. I'm not sure what's the significance of this "Nine Tailed Fox" demon, but the character goes way back in Asian culture and I've seen it depicted in other movies (i.e. the cartoon THE STORY OF CHINESE GODS). Most movies about these animal-ghost maidens take place long ago, but THE FOX WITH NINE TAILS has a modern setting. As a horror movie, it misses the mark because it's too slow paced and boring. But the beginning takes place in Hell, which is depicted as being pretty urban. The demons (who look more like aliens) are torturing people, and in one cool scene, a monster pulls a guy's tongue until it stretches to about a foot long, and then cuts it off! This is probably the goriest scene in THE FOX WITH NINE TAILS; the remainder is pretty tame.

Though there are interesting characters throughout, I think the writing is bad, and that's what really killed this movie. I got really frustrated, because some amusing situation would come up and I would be paying serious attention to it, waiting for its relevance to the rest of the story. But characters just come and go, and it gets really distracting; I kept wondering when they were going to go back and explain what became of "Mr. so and so", if they would explain why we just wasted a good five minutes of time. At first I thought it was a last ditch-effort to make the movie longer, but later I started to think that maybe these expendable characters were cameos by Korean celebrities who were hastily written in, at the last minute. The story roles along, and there are long stretches where it's genuinely interesting, but for every intriguing moment, there's a boring one. All in all, THE FOX WITH NINE TAILS is somewhat intriguing and somewhat watchable. It's not great, and not bad. I guess "fair" or "okay" sounds about right.



Scriptwise, it's like I already told you: A spirit woman haunts a forrest, flying through the trees while wearing a white gown, just like Joey Wang in *A CHINESE GHOST STORY*, or Nobuko Otawa in Japan's *KURO NEKO* ("Black Cat"). But there are hundreds, possibly thousands of Far Eastern movies with this theme. So anyway *THE FOX WITH NINE TAILS* starts off in Hell, where one of its denizens is hired to come up to the surface world and defeat a renegade spirit who refused to completely die and instead became a flying fox monster. The fellow sent to leave Hell is called "69". Since he had a steady job down in hell, he's reluctant to come up to Seoul to capture the thousand year old creature. His odd adventures make him really wish he was still back down in hell. I guess 69 can't adapt and probably had been in Hell for hundreds, possibly thousands of years. Modern Korea seems quite alien to him, so he keeps getting in trouble. When he's unable to answer simple questions, an impatient cop (not knowing he's a damned soul from Hell) threatens to beat him up and send him to hell. 69 thanks him and goes on about how he can't wait to get home! Reluctant hero 69 is the funniest character in the movie, but unfortunately, the story concentrates more on the Nine Tailed Fox chick (called "Harah" in her human form), who has fallen in love with a taxi driver (whom she had intended to kill until her emotions got in the way). Too much of the movie becomes a love story between the two of them, and it gets really routine and boring. There are long stretches where there are no horror elements at all, and the script goes overboard on the romance (i.e. Harah gets suspicious of her lover and hires a private investigator to follow him!). Fortunately, 69 and his female assistant Minhee (a cute, fiesty fortune-teller) finally locate the Fox Girl and manage to save her doomed boyfriend. Before the Fox Girl dies, we do finally see some fantasy-style action: Characters fly in the air and fire projectiles (rather like fireballs) from their hands. There's really only a little of this, because *THE FOX WITH NINE TAILS* is a low key, laid back Korean movie, and not one of them over-the-top HK fantasies which go all out. We also get a glimpse or two of sultry villainess Sarah in her monstrous "Fox Girl" form, which is a makeup prosthetics piece resembling a Klingon. ** -DF

From Turkey:
3 DEV ADAM

(AKA: "Les Trois Surhommes", "Three Supermen") Yildiz Film; 1974, Dir.: T. Fikret Ucak, Cameraman: Orhan Kapki, Scenario: Dogan Tamer, Deniz Erkanat, Yavuz Selekman, Mine

Sun, Teyfik Sen (AKA "Tayfin Sen"), Altan Gunbay, Dogan Tamer, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Not since *THE CLONES OF BRUCE LEE* have I seen such a shameless, blatant ripoff! The title alone is a ripoff, because *3 DEV ADAM* translates as "Three Supermen"! (See page 40's photo of *3 SUPERADAM*, a similar movie.) What's even more bizarre is that this dead serious movie is nothing like Italy's humorous *THREE FANTASTIC SUPERMEN* series, in-

stead it rips off both America's Captain Marvel superhero and Mexico's El Santo wrestler! But wait, it gets worse; or better! The villain resembles Spiderman and commits PSYCHO-like murders, killing people as they shower (right down to the scene of blood washing down the drain!). Only a third world country like Turkey could produce such a bizarre novelty and pass it off as a movie! It's a superhero movie and yet there's bloodshed, cruel death scenes, not to mention adult scenes of love making. Though I've championed the cause of preserv-

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ing Turkish movies (they've got guts, that's for damn sure!) for years, I admit that I've not actually watched many. 3 DEV ADAM is probably the first of these wacky Turkish adventures that I've watched in its entirety. At first glance, I think the quality looks about equal to bad Mexican movies (so it's only fitting that the Turkish ripoff the Mexicans, since they couldn't do much worse!), and that their language sounds to me like a weird combination of German, Russian, Persian and Italian. There are a few

English lines present though, such as "Bie bie darling" (under cover agent Julia bids farewell to her Captain America-inspired boyfriend) and the villainous Spiderman wannabe says "Adios mafia" (okay, so that's not really English, but it might as well be) and "Good night, Americano"! In another scene, a police chief talks to an informant who says what sounds like: "Take care friend", if I'm not mistaken. It's hard to tell, because the sound quality is terrible. Hell, when the American superhero takes on the masked

villain for the first time, there were technical difficulties with the sound track and only one layer of sound could be added per frame! So the music drops out right before a punch is delivered, so we can instead hear the sound effect of the punch! Then the music returns until the next hit or fall.

Okay, so I've established that 3 DEV ADAM lacks originality and it just a bizarre film. But did I, or did I not like it? Well, I loved it! It's ultra low-budget, but is action packed, with enjoyable, sometimes long fight scenes performed by some energetic, inventive people! The fights tend to emulate those in Mexican wrestling movies and of course the fisticuffs of Italy's capers. There's also a sprinkling of Asian style martial arts (complete with bad, powerless, formless kicks!), like when the Turkish "Santo" takes on some karatekas and starts the duel with a handspring. 3 DEV ADAM was made after the heyday of Mexican wrestling movies, and in some cases, is better than the Mexican movies (I'll take 3 DEV ADAM over LUCHA A MUERTE any day!). It's dirt cheap fun, and is both exciting & unintentionally hilarious. This is not a comedy, and yet Santo takes a shower with his underwear on! In another scene, he's prowling around and prepares to stick some valuable papers into his tights, but the way he fumbles with the crotch and crotchets into a corner makes it look like he's taking a pee! It does get talky at times (which is frustrating to us non-Turks because of an absolute lack of translation of any kind), and there's a terribly unexciting car chase, but otherwise this comic-book-come-to-life is beyond amusing, and I managed to stomach it all in one sitting!

Sadly, my videotape is a bootleg of horrendously bad quality. I've heard that multi-gen bootlegs like this are all that's left of 3 DEV ADAM, because apparently, there were few film preservers in Turkey until recently. The film quality (looking like the work of amateurs) itself was pretty poor to begin with, so even a pristine print would be substandard. It's unfortunate that decent prints of 3 DEV ADAM are so hard to find, because with the proper voices, this movie would have been a classic "dubbed comedy" (ala' WHAT'S UP TIGER LILLY or Troma's FEROCIOUS FEMALE FREEDOM FIGHTERS!) for the American DVD market. It pains me that nobody thought to salvage 3 DEV ADAM, and that so few people will ever see it. Besides, the jaded, unimaginative American movie public has "high" standards for their superhero movies, and if it doesn't look like THE MATRIX, the local snobs won't buy it. Let's face it, there's a lot of film culture that will fade away and be forgotten.



On the surface, it's just another typical superhero caper. The costumes, cheesy camp and two-fisted action will no doubt remind Americans of the 1960s BATMAN program, but with more of a serious tone, a lot like that of old matinee serials of the 1930s and 1940s. Fans of Republic's B&W oldies will definitely notice similarities. As a masked hero adventure, 3 DEV ADAM might make perfect sense if you don't pay too much attention. I, however, am reviewing this movie, so I payed close attention; which wasn't really a good thing to do. I could have enjoyed it more if I had just turned a blind eye to the really awkward stuff. There are some scenes which are entirely wacky, and had me stumped! Aside from the evil guinea-pig sequence (I'll get to that in the plot; next paragraph), there's this beyond-strange scene where the villain has sex with a woman. Though it's not particularly graphic or explicit, it's still weird to see such a scene in a superhero movie! After all, I thought superhero movies were made for all ages. Stranger still, this bedroom scene has a brief shot of these two ceramic statues (resembling tiny garden gnomes) on a shelf. These two heads, apparently watching the villain screw a chick, look at each other and laugh! This is an out-of-place, comedic gag which happens in an otherwise serious scene, in an equally serious movie. Maybe I dozed off and just dreamed that this happened in the movie. I must have imagined this, so nevermind. Though 3 DEV ADAM does have a couple intentionally humorous scenes (i.e. some drunk is dozing off when the costumed super guys run passed him and he's convinced he hallucinated), the over all approach seems serious.

The story starts off on a grim note, to establish the movie's atmosphere and to introduce the comicbook-inspired villain, The Scarlet Spider! There are actually several of these guys, but because the filmmakers couldn't afford too many of these cheap, badly made, Spiderman-wannabe costumes, we never really get a good look at more than one spider villain at a time! Anyway, this villain (s) likes to kill people via slow, torturous deaths, where the victim see's the instrument of death (i.e. a propellor from a motorboat!) coming toward their face!! But one scene in the middle of the movie defies all rationale. You've heard the old cliché-line, "Throw him to the sharks!", right? Well, what happens if the budget won't allow for sharks? Rats would be a plausible, affordable alternative, since they're known to eat anything (possibly even human flesh if starved). But for some reason, they got their rodents mixed up, and some idiot must have brought guinea pigs to the set, and they were behind schedule to begin with. So

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3 DEV ADAM

DENİZ ERKANAT
RENKLI
EASTMANCOLOR

YAVUZ SELERMAN MINE SUN ALTAN GÜNDAY TEFİR ŞEN HASAN CEYLAN
ERSUN KAZANÇEL DOĞAN TAMER T. FİKRİT UÇAR ORHAN KAPRI



3 DEV ADAM

RENKLI
EASTMANCOLOR

YAVUZ SELERMAN MINE SUN ALTAN GÜNDAY TEFİR ŞEN HASAN CEYLAN
ERSUN KAZANÇEL DOĞAN TAMER T. FİKRİT UÇAR ORHAN KAPRI

AYTEKİN AKKAYA

DENİZ ERKANAT



3 DEV ADAM

RENKLI
EASTMANCOLOR

YAVUZ SELERMAN MINE SUN ALTAN GÜNDAY TEFİR ŞEN HASAN CEYLAN
ERSUN KAZANÇEL DOĞAN TAMER T. FİKRİT UÇAR ORHAN KAPRI

the tortured victim dies a horrible death, watching these two cute little guinea pigs (if I'm not mistaken, these relatives of rabbits are actually vegetarian) come crawling up to his face for a snack! Now, I haven't had a pet guinea pig since I was a child, and although they enjoyed their salt-lick, I can't conceive of them as being flesh-eaters. Granted, the Turkish dialogue might explain that they're "altered" or "mutant" guinea pigs, but I can't help but wonder if Michael Myers saw this film and got the idea to substitute sharks with sea-bass (granted, they're "evil sea bass") in *AUSTIN POWERS: INTERNATIONAL MAN OF MYSTERY*. But I've spent this whole synopsis discussing the villains! We wouldn't have much of a movie unless there were costumed superheroes, now would we?! From the airport comes a trio of crime fighters: "America" (obviously inspired by Captain America, minus the shield!), his love interest Julia, and let's not forget Turkey's own illegitimate Santo! While the heroic "America" hero is passable because there haven't been that many movies about the original Captain America, this Turkish Santo is thinner and hairier than the Mexican inspiration. Actor Yavuz Selekman plays Santo, but thinks nothing of showing his real face (there are numerous non-costumed fights), and his long hair hangs down from under the back of his mask! Anyway, the story roles along like a typical crime drama, until finally we get a series of confrontations between the various "evil Spidermen" and the two masked good guys. What's strange is the climactic battles, because Deniz Erkanat ("America") beats up the last few Scarlet Spiders without his costume. This is a long action sequence, and it's pretty exciting, but it's odd because our main hero is wearing streetclothes.

***-DF

From America:

REPLICANT

Millennium Films; 2001, A Film by Ringo Lam, Prod.: John Thompson, David Dadon, Danny Lerner, Dir.: Ringo Lam, Written by Lawrence David Riggins & Les Weldon, Cast: Jean-Claude Van Damme, Michael Rooker, Catherine Dent, Brandon James Olson, Pam Hyatt, Ian Robison, Allan Gray, James Hutson, Jayme Knox, Paul McGillion, Chris Kelly, Marnie Alton, Reviewed by Damon Foster

It's good to see that former Hong Kong movie director Ringo Lam can still get work. Not only that, but it's surprising to see that Claude Van Damme can still get work! I was of the mistaken impression that once people like Jackie Chan & Jet Li had come to America, Claude

V.D. would have become obsolete. But if *REPLICANT* is any indication, the "Easternizing" of Hollywood did Claude V.D.'s career a good turn, because it got him out of the so-called martial arts phase of his career, and instead he's making more watchable movies like *REPLICANT*. I think I saw most of his old martial arts films from the 1980s and 1990s and I don't recall being impressed. But *REPLICANT* is more of a combination of psycho-thriller, adventure & semi-sci-fi, and under the capable direction of Ringo Lam, I think we have a tolerable movie on our hands. This isn't the first time Ringo Lam has worked with V.D. Lam also directed V.D.'s *MAXIMUM RISK* (Columbia Pictures; 1996), a predictable, unmemorable film that I trashed in an *OC: Chinese Vampires* (#29; 1998). But V.D. and Lam are back together again, and I for one think it's a comeback.

V.D. plays dual roles again (he fought himself in *DOUBLE IMPACT* too), and I might go so far as to say this premise demonstrates his acting ability isn't so bad. His evil self is truly despicable, if not scary. The guy is a savage, merciless, brutal killer. Not only that, but with kicks and punches he wipes out many innocent bystanders, creating the illusion of an ominous, unstoppable killing machine. I kept wondering if the character was suppose to be a robot or something. But V.D. also plays the good guy, an innocent, naive character who gets pushed around so much that it's hard not to root for him when he finally lashes back. This is, or rather, these are two of the better performances in V.D.'s career I'm sure. Of course, there's always the possibility that Ringo Lam's skill is what saved V.D., but Lam wasn't able to save him when they made *MAXIMUM RISK*.

In a decent (not great) script which reminded me of *BLADE RUNNER* and *SILENCE OF THE LAMBS* alike, there's this serial killer on the loose called "The Torch" (V.D.). As a child, he had an abusive relationship with his mother, so now he goes around killing other mothers, and it gets gory at times. In a brief scene which touches on science fiction (but there aren't many special effects in the over-all film because it's crime drama, not sci-fi), a national security company experiments with cloning a "Replicant" (hence the title, I bet you didn't see that one coming!). They make this "genetic double", as they call him, of The Torch. This genetic double, clone, Replicant or whatever you choose to call him is a lot like The Torch, except that he's not evil. He's also not very smart. But being telepathically linked to the movie's villain, he helps a determined cop (Michael Rooker) to track down The Torch. When the good V.D. isn't

handcuffed to a car or plumbing pipe, he's fighting his evil twin. The action scenes (explosions, gunplay, bloodshed, car chases, etc.) get pretty gripping, but there's also some fist fighting. The karate kicks and acrobatic flips are okay, but nothing special. By the time the ending credits role, The Torch has been killed and the good clone V.D. runs off with some hooker (Marnie Alton). **-DF

From Japan:

NIGHT SHIFT NURSES

Discovery/Mink; 2000, Prod.: Hiromi Chiba, Dir.: Nao Okezawa, Executive Prod.: Tatsuya Tanaka, Music: Hiroaki Sano, Screenwriter: Ryo Saga, Production Manager: Masashi Ito, Art Dir.: Kuniyoshi Hino, Co-Production: AT-2 Project, Executive Producer of English Version: Humphrey G. Kumano, Dubbing Supervisor: Dick Tripwire, Audio Post Production: Audioworks Producer's Group, Translation: Lighthouse Productions, Released by: Anime 18 (www.anime18.com), Reviewed by Damon Foster

By now, I've seen so much of this sexuality explicit anime that it no longer phases or grosses me out. It just bores me now. *NIGHT SHIFT NURSES* is every bit as gratuitous as any live action, X-Rated adult video you can think of. They show everything, and everything going into everything. What's ironic about this



release is that the tape starts with an opening montage & intro to the world of Japanese cartoons. They mention that no Japanimation includes drawing of pubic hairs, and yet mere seconds after the feature actually begins, we see a close up of the hairiest woman's snatch I've ever seen drawn in the anything-goes world of anime. NIGHT SHIFT NURSES is obviously one of the newer examples of this filthy genre, because it shows not only pubic hair, but nipples; this is becoming standard for this industry. Anyway, it's about time I start critiquing the videotape itself: The drawings are good (that is, if you actually like drawings of genitalia in action), but the animation quality could use a few more frames. I guess they only needed enough frames to convey back & forth thrusting action. On the whole, NIGHT SHIFT NURSES is okay, as far as adult animation goes. I might go so far as to say it's better than average, for this sort of thing.

There is an actual script here. In fact, it's what I might go so far as to call an interesting one. The characters are developed to a point where they all add to the story, instead of making it confusing. Unfortunately, neither the story nor the people are given much to do, because everybody is too busy screwing and sucking. Inbetween tight close-ups of vaginas discharging like Niagra Falls, I did rather get the impression there was some story with continuing characters (in the three chapters that this videotape is divided into), such as a horny, sex-obsessed man called Dr. Hirasaka. He gets hired by some very liberal, "progressive" hospital which has discovered a way to make more money: Open a special wing of the hospital where all the nurses are sex-slaves for rich clients! Hirasaka is determined to make all young, impossibly firm women submissive to him, via threats, extortion, blackmail, drugs, deceit, and of course videotaping the sexual victims in compromising positions, and other positions. And so that's what he does, and that's what this 72 minute videotape is all about. I suppose the demented doctor could be considered a "villain", but considering the nature of the genre, I think "protagonist" works better. * -DF

From America:

KISS OF THE DRAGON

20th Century Fox; 2001, Action Dir.: Corey Yuen, Prod.: Lue Bessun, Jet Li, Steven Chasman, Happy Walters, Based on a Story by: Jet Li, Dir.: Chris Nahun, Cast: Jet Li, Bridget Fonda, Tcheky Kayro, Rik Young, Burt Kwuuk, Reviewed by Damon Foster

So Jet Li wrote this one?! What exactly did

he do, compile a list of every predictable, over-used cliché known to Hollywood?! KISS OF THE DRAGON is an inferior product, almost as bad as another of his American stinkers, ROMEO MUST DIE! As I sat through KISS OF THE DRAGON, I knew exactly what was going to happen from scene to scene, I knew who would live and who would die, and could spot every plot twist a mile away. KISS OF THE DRAGON is a routine, redundant action film; the type of American movie I've seen a million times. The story is so incredibly run-of-the-mill that it's completely uninvolved. The characters are all such overdone caricatures that nothing they said or did mattered. Bridget Fonda may look incredibly hot dressed as a hooker (though she has trouble walking in those ultra-high heels), but her whimpering character with a sob story is beyond irritating, and her coming on to Jet Li is embarrassing to sit through. The choice of music is really awful, and completely inappropriate for the scenes.



The worst part about KISS OF THE DRAGON isn't the god-awful story and devil-awful characters, but the fight scenes. It's clear that veteran fight choreographer Corey Yuen is doing his best, and that all the actors & stuntmen involved in the fights are good at martial arts. They definitely went all out. Where it fails is the excess usage of the old "chop-edit" technique. Ah yes, what memories. It's been a while since I used the phrase chop-edit, because in more recent years, Hollywood has chosen the post-THE MATRIX method of martial arts which is dependent on special effects. Fortunately, KISS OF THE DRAGON manages to omit excess FX stuff, but they chose the next worst thing: Chop-edit. For those who don't remember, chop-edit is a phrase I use to describe the fight-scenes of bad American martial arts movies made mainly in the 1970s and 1980s. This form of fight-scene consists entirely of quick cuts and distracting camera angles. The reason for this messy method is to hide the actors' inability to fight. It's a good way to disguise somebody's lack of martial arts prowess. Because this method became popular for some reason, latter movies follow suit, even when the people involved (in this case,

Jet Li) are capable of fighting and don't need this distracting, deceitful form of filming. In KISS OF THE DRAGON, the result is plenty of shots of Jet Li kicking outside of the frame and it's often we don't see the intended target. Like I said, I could tell Jet is executing some great martial arts, as are his opponents. It's too bad we couldn't see most of it. Let me elaborate on this problem even further; it's a martial arts movie, after all. I'm going to compare KISS OF THE DRAGON to any one of a zillion different kung fu movies where the photography is done correctly. Almost any old HK movie would be a good choice to gauge it. In this particular example, I'm randomly choosing 1980's DANCE OF DEATH. Naturally, this Angela Mao Ying flick has no similarity, or relation to KISS OF THE DRAGON. But I just reviewed DANCE OF DEATH for another issue, and it's fresh in my mind. The superb video release for DANCE OF DEATH is beautifully letter-boxed, because the widescreen format is necessary to convey the full scope of two or more combatants in action. DANCE OF DEATH, like many kung fu films, relies on long takes of full body shots, so we really see the full battle. We see kicks begin, and kicks make contact with the receiving opponent. We then see the receiving opponent's recovery and retaliation. This goes on a long time, proving major effort on the part of the choreographers. Though I felt DANCE OF DEATH pretty much sucked as a movie, at least they don't skimp on the quality of martial arts, which is exactly what KISS OF THE DRAGON does.

Jet Li plays a Beijing cop who goes to some part of France where everybody (Chinese, Brits, American druggies, Jamaican cabdrivers) speaks English. There he befriends a store owner played by Burt Kwouk (Peter Sellers' sidekick "Kato" in THE PINK PANTHER). Though Li went there to pursue some heroine smuggler, he finds himself framed by a crooked French cop (Tcheky Kayro). This main villain is depicted as both abusive and psychotic. His over-acting rants are suppose to carry the script. If the guy was calm and level headed, they wouldn't have a story. Jet's first series of fights with these bad policemen has an interesting sequence: Jet throws a hand-grenade in a guy's shirt, and although the CGI explosion isn't very convincing, the shot of the characters disassembled legs falling to the floor is. Somewhere along the way, Jet befriends some American hooker/druggie who's always whining about her kidnapped daughter, whom Jet rescues. At the end of this lame movie, Jet finally takes part in the climactic series of fights against the bad cop and his henchmen. For

what it's worth, these are some of the better fights in *KISS OF THE DRAGON*, like where he wipes out a karate class as well as two tall guys who demolish an office before our hero kills them. I forgot to mention Jet is an expert at Acupuncture in this movie, and he kills the bad guy by stabbing a needle in his neck. I admit to liking the villain's savage, painful death: Blood spurts from all facial orifices, and this technique, we learn, is called "Kiss of the Dragon". No thanks, I'll kiss women (and my own hand) instead. -DF

From Japan: COMETO SAN

(AKA: "Comet San", and *Senorita Cometa*)
Kokusai Hoei; 1967, Original Japanese Broadcast: 7/3/67 through 11/23/68, Consisting of 79 episodes (1-19 are B/W, the remainder are in color), Produced and Directed by Yoshikazu Ohtsuki, Nobuo Nakagawa & Eizo Yamagiwa, Written by Mamoru Sasaki, Susumu Takaku, Yukie Sugawara, Cast: Yumiko Kokonoe, Hiroshi Ashino, Tadayoshi Kura, Akioto Kawashima, Mitsuo Azuma, Mari Saitome, Tatsuo Saito, Yoshiyuki Ohkawa, Mitsuo Yagi, Reviewed by Damon Foster

In the 1960s, a number of countries were treated to major releases of Japanese TV shows. We Americans got *ULTRAMAN*, and them Australians got *THE SAMURAI*. As for Mexico, their most remembered Japanese program is this childish fantasy. Actually, I hear the title character of this program is as memorable to Mexican audiences as *Goldar*, because *SPACE GIANTS* aired south of the border too. Known in Mexico as *SENIORITA COMETA*, it's a true pop icon of Mexican TV culture of the 1960s. To the Mexicans, the program is nostalgic and brings back childhood memories. Unfortunately, all the aging Mexican fans can get on this program now are original Japanese language releases from Japan. In 1985, there was a terrible earthquake in Mexico City. One of the structures destroyed was a warehouse which stored master tapes & films of many vintage TV shows. The Spanish-dubbed *SENIORITA COMETA* was one of the casualties; it was lost forever, like a number of other programs. Worse yet, the company (Televisa de Mexico) that owned the series didn't care enough to salvage anything, or re-purchase the originals from Japan to re-release. It's also rumored to have been dubbed in English for release in the states, as *COMET SAN*. However, nobody I know in the U.S. has ever seen it on TV, so I have my doubts. If anybody can prove me

wrong with an English dubbed tape of *COMETO SAN*, I'm waiting. I've also heard rumors that the show aired in Canada where it was dubbed in French, but nobody knows for sure.

Though this silly, quirky show is a big deal to Mexican nostalgia buffs, *COMETO SAN* did little for me, nor did the occasional ballads. Obviously, it's the type of series you had to have seen as a kid, to truly appreciate. I grew up on *ULTRAMAN* and *KIKAI*, it's those shows which bring back fond memories for me. As I sat through a videotape of the ultra-talky *COMETO SAN*, I was bored out of my mind, and annoyed by the obnoxious children which take up much of the series. Mind you, I did not actually hate this goofy series, but it certainly didn't tug at my heart strings the way it has the 30-something and 40-something Mexicans with such fond memories of it. To be fair, at least one of the episodes was amusing, and as a comedy series, I admit to laughing more than once. There do seem to be a few honestly funny moments which can still provoke a chuckle even today. If indeed there really were translated episodes (though it's not the type of program that anybody would bother to subtitle), then just maybe it could be considered entertaining. All in all, *COMETO SAN* is okay. It's not great or even good, but it's both tolerable and watchable. It's a hard series to really give an over-all opinion on, because the quality of the episodes varies. This videotape boasts in Japanese that *COMETO SAN* was the first Japanese TV show to combine drama, FX and animation; an outrageous claim that any *ULTRAMAN* fan, or *SPACE GIANTS* fan will

laugh at.

As for the genre of *COMETO SAN*, I would have to call it "fantasy/comedy". I think it compares well with America's own 1960s sit-coms which involved "magical" and/or "fantastic" elements, along the lines of *I DREAM OF JEANIE*, *MY FAVORITE MARTIAN* and *BE-WITCHED*. Actress Yumiko Kokonoe isn't as hot as Barbara Eden (or even Elizabeth Montgomery) was, but otherwise the programs share a similar premise, with a female having powers which are kept a secret from the majority of the populace, etc. Those programs had canned laughter, and aired primetime, and were aimed more toward family-hour and adult audiences. *COMETO SAN* lacks the laugh-track, and seems to be aimed toward an even more juvenile audience, and looks to me like something which might have been on American TV in the 1970s, but only on Saturday mornings. Though lacking the onslaught of colorful characters of a Sid & Marty Kroft series (i.e. *H.R. PUFF 'N STUFF*), I really can't think of what else to compare it to. *COMETO SAN* is 90% live action, but with occasional anime inserts; cartoon characters abruptly appear and inter act with normal humans in a live action setting. There's another type of animation used sometimes; animated models (ala Ray Harryhausen) and toys.

On the pre-record I watched, are three different episodes: The first episode, the biggest budgetted episode (#20) and the final episode (#79). The pilot ("The House-Maid who came from Outerspace") comes first of course, and it's in B/W. This introductory chapter has some-



thing to do with some sort of outerspace colony of alien humanoids. One of them, Cometo San, looks and sounds just like a Japanese woman! By an amazing coincidence, she gets sent to Earth (and to Japan, no less!) as punishment because her school principal says it will discipline her. So she comes to Japan, here she has trouble adapting. People think she's crazy, and so she gets locked up in a jail for the criminally insane! It may sound tragic, but it's all pretty light-hearted and fun! Though there are some patients who bob their heads back & forth and reminded me of characters in *ONE FLEW OVER THE COOCH'S NEST*, Cometo San makes light of the situation. Using her magic wand, she escapes from her cage and sings a song while dancing her way down the hallway! The male prisoners in the cages on both sides of her are really getting into it (it's really hard to tell if them psychos are turned on by the cute chick, or if they're just really fond of the song she's performing!). It intrigues me that in a series which is so wholesome they could actually poke fun at mentally unstable people who are locked up! Sometimes, even I forget that Japanese TV is a distinctly different culture than American TV! Also in this episode is a cute skit where Cometo San uses her magic on a school biology class, causing things like mounted butterflies to come to life! While the butterflies are flying around, a skeleton starts dancing around the room, and even though the suspension wires are visible, it's still a cute, funny scene! Regardless, the B/W pilot ends, and next on

the tape is "Toy's War", the 20th episode. Not only is this the first episode to be shot in color, but it's the most entertaining one on the tape. Cometo San is now accepted by the Kawagoe family, and appears to live there as a nanny. But the two little boys (Takeshi & Koji) are spoiled, and keep making messes. They throw their toys around and break the arms off a few. Though most of the toys are generic (cars, tranes, planes, etc.), there is a shot of one of the kids playing with a mechanical Baragon doll, and I spotted a Godzilla doll which doesn't get much usage. Anyway, back to the story: For whatever reason, Cometo San decides to get revenge for the abused toys, and brings some soldier G.I. Joe dolls to life! The animation is a little jerky (like in *MAJIN HUNTER: MITSURUGI*), but it's still pretty funny to see Japanese kids being chased by GI Joe dolls! The dolls fire their guns at the two obnoxious brats, causing small explosions and some damage to the house! But after this entertaining chapter of *COMETO SAN*, comes the final episode: "The Great Big Present". This one seems more concerned with wrapping up the story than being funny. So it tends to be the talkiest of the three, and it really just did not hold my attention. I heard long time Mexican fans were sad when they saw this episode, because our beloved heroine gets back on a rocket and leaves earth at the climax, but since I didn't care about the program, my eyes were entirely dry.

** -DF

Yumiko Kokonoe in COMETO SAN.



From America: THE LAST SAMURAI

Warner Bros.; 2003, Directed by Edward Zwick, Writers: John Logan, John Logan Edward Zwick & Marshall Herskovitz, Cast: Ken Watanabe, Tom Cruise, Nathan Algren, Ray Godshall Sr., Billy Connolly, Tony Goldwyn, Masato Harada, Masashi Odate, John Koyama, Timothy Spall, Shichinosuke Nakamura, Togo Igawa, Satoshi Nikaido, Shintaro Wada, Shin Koyamada, Hiroyuki Sanada, Shun Sugata, Koyuki, Sosuke Ikematsu, Aoi Minato, Seizo Fukumoto, Shoji Yoshihara, Kosaburo Nomura IV, Takashi Noguchi, Noguchi Takayuki, Sven Toorvald, Scott Wilson, Yuki Matsuzaki, Mitsuyuki Oishi, Jiro Wada, Hiroshi Watanabe, Yusuke Myochin, Hiroaki Amano, Kenta Daibo, Koji Fujii, Makoto Hashiba, Shimpei Horinouchi, Takashi Kora, Shane Kosugi, Takeshi Maya, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Only in the big-shot world of Hollywood blockbusters could such a preposterous concept come about. Any time some idiot casts Tom Cruise as 'the last samurai' (or first samurai, next-to-last samurai or whatever), the whole premise should be a comedy. This pretentious, dead serious exercise in clichés could have learned a thing or two from the more humorous Eurasian martial arts period flicks like *SHANGHAI KNIGHTS* or *THE STRANGER AND THE GUNFIGHTER*, but instead it passes itself off as 'realistic'. Granted, the story of Japan's wanting to remain independent until the last possible century is accurate, but the idea that some cowboy (Tom Cruise) would go to Japan and become a samurai is just too laughable. Though it might be coincidental, the premise reminds me of *A MAN CALLED HORSE* (scratch out Indians and write in samurai) and of course the *SHOGUN* mini-series.

If nothing else, it's interesting to see the one and only Hiroyuki Sanada (no stranger to *QC's* earlier issues) in the same setting as *Cruise*, not to mention *Kamen Rider ZX* himself, Shun Sugata. But even with these former action stars, the fight scenes aren't particularly exciting. Though there are a few decent swordfights as Sanada and even *Cruise* take on the bad guys, the over-all premise is more historical than good solid martial arts action. As an actioner, I could have enjoyed this movie if they would have camped it up. But instead they chose the 'realistic' (hah!) route and created boredom. In the end, after *Cruise* has joined the samurai warriors in their pathetic fight against the American guns, he's the only survivor. Not only that, but he gets to meet the whimpy emperor, become a hero to both the yankees and the japs, and gets the girl (who's husband he killed earlier in *THE LAST SAMURAI*). It's watchable and remotely educational at times, but not great or even good. * -DF

HONG KONG HEROES

(DIVIDED INTO FIVE DECADES: The 1960s, The 1970s, The 1980s, The 1990s and The Zero's)

The 1960s:

12 DEADLY COINS

Shaw Bros.; 1969, Prod.: Runme Shaw, Music: Wang Fu Ling, Starring: Ching Li, Lo Lieh, Tien Feng, Wu Ma, Cheng Wen Ming, Liu Chia Liang, Hao Li, Reviewed by Damon Foster

TWELVE DEADLY COINS is a semi-typical, sword caper from the late 1960s. It's pretty good for 1960s sword stuff, and about average for anybody who likes this era of cinema. Though the swordplay might not be as good as that of Wang Yu's epics of that period, it's defi-

nately better polished than Yue Hua's COME DRINK WITH ME. As time went on, Shaw swordfighting movies just got better & better—and at times, the battles in 12 DEADLY COINS hint at the type of martial arts thrillers which would later come out in the 1970s (SEVEN BLOWS OF THE DRAGON was just around the corner!). But on the whole, 12 DEADLY COINS is very 1960s—nobody would confuse it with a 1970s epic.

The main villain (semi-villain; he's not completely evil) has a fake eye. It's kind of eerie looking, but not very convincing. It's suppose to look like his eye was damaged in a fight. Regardless, does anybody know the name of this actor? Even in the 1960s, he was rather old. He's most famous for his role as the kung fu teacher who taught the Iron Fist technique (to Lo Lieh) in FIVE FINGERS OF DEATH; that is, before a treacherous Tien Feng stabbed him in the stomach. Interesting to note that both Tien Feng and this other guy are in 12 DEADLY COINS as well, but the hero/villain roles are reversed.

12 DEADLY COINS isn't without its flaws, however. There are large stretches of dialogue which border on being slightly dull. As is always the case with Shaw '60's videos; the English subtitles don't fit on the TV screen; the far left and far right words are cropped off. There are naively conceived romantic subplots which bog down the tale once or twice. There's also a stupid scene of Lo Lieh hanging because a sword has pierced his shirt to a tree. but it's way too obvious that his real support is a tree branch he's holding. There's a horse riding scene which dragged on too long, I thought.

Lo Lieh plays swordsman Chiao Mao, and seems to be on good terms with two rival groups of martial artists known for throwing coins as deadly as shurikens. All the characters (good & bad alike) have depth, and at times it gets hard to tell who's a hero and who's a villain. i must say, these characters are all interesting and the story caught me off guard; there are plot twists and a trick ending which I never saw coming. But before that, we see a tale of stolen loot and Lo trying to join some traveling convoy. When the goods are stolen from Tien



Feng's convoy, Lo gets the blame and in order to save Tien's tarnished reputation, he seeks out to retrieve the stolen money. Before the climactic battle where both Lo Lieh and Tien Feng die, Lo deliberately chops his own hand off! But this movie's story is too original to be just another rip off of THE ONEARMED SWORDSMAN, and pretty damn recommendable. *** -Damon Foster

The 1970s:

SHOGUN'S SAINTS

L&T Films Corp. Ltd.; 1984, Supervisor: Ng Wing Hwa, Presented by Hsu Kin Chu, Prod.: Ho Se Kong, Cameraman: Liu Man Min, Lam I Bo, Martial Arts Dir.: Chen Se Wai & Li Tai Lung, Music: Chow Leung, Film Processed by HK Color Lab, Screenplay: Shao Yue, Dir.: Kin Lung, Starring: Wang Yu, Kong Bun, Tien Yeh, Sun Kar Lim, Li Chu Yu, Leung Shin Sin, Chen Wai Liu, Kut Shao Bo, Wang Chen, Wang Long, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Thanks go out to Grant Rogers for supplying this elusive, late 1970s (though released here in 1984) kung fu movie! This hard-to-find romp was basically missing from O.C.: The Jimmy Wang Yu Issue. It's nice to finally see this Wang Yu movie, even though it turned out to be absolutely routine and predictable from start to finish. For one thing, the setting is China, in the Ming Dynasty, and despite the innacurate title (intended for American audiences only), there are no shoguns or saints anywhere in the movie—it could have just as easily been called "Cowboy's Gladiator" or "Apache's Viking". Equally stupid is the typical voice dubbing (these guys forgot to add the beautiful words "but still" this time!). In one scene at the climax, when Wang Yu and his co-heroes attack the bad guys' beach cliff fortress, one of the good guys suffers a fatal blow from a villains' sword. As he dies, he laments to his sister (a swordswoman), "I'm dying, avenge me!" I wasn't listening that closely and had to watch that tragic scene over, because I thought he had just said: "I'm a dying bitch!" SHOGUN'S SAINTS has rushed, badly written sequences (i.e. Wang is captured and haphazardly rescued in scenes meant to pad out the movie's middle). Most of the other actors are just Taiwanese extras and are pretty slow compared to a skilled martial arts movie veteran like Wang Yu.

Even in a dime-a-dozen (if you've seen part of one, you've seen them all a zillion times) swordplay caper like this, Wang Yu is charis-

matic. Or is it just his reputation; just knowing it's Wang Yu?! Could it be that I've seen so many of his movies that he's grown on me? If it were some less familiar actor, maybe the awe wouldn't be there. Even so, Wang doesn't waste time; minutes into the movie he's reverse leaping (backwards film) all over a castle, taking on swordsmen, and slickly decapitating a guy. It's action packed with tons of swordplay, and the climax even involved some empty-handed chop sockey where Wang Yu again fails to fully extend those kicks. The simple script, corny voices, love hungry women (we get the point, Wang! You're a stud, enough already!), and the scene of a flying Wang Yu accomplished via dummy on suspension wires all add up to a fun kung fu movie—that makes it another typically great "kung fun movie"!

Since this story of a vengeful swordsman (Wang Yu) avenging his father's death is from the 1970s instead of the 1990s, it lacks the overly abundant suspension wires, over paid film editors and slaughtered animals I had come to inspect. So instead of paying people to pull wires and kill animals (as they would have done were this movie made 20 years later), they hired actual martial arts choreographers, sword experts and other people who were probably unemployed in the 1990s. The script has Wang Yu seeking an evil general who mastered the "Left Hand Eagle Claw". There are some subplots too, like some concubine of the bad guy, who helps the good guys and later gets stabbed for her efforts. Wang gets into several fights with these bad guys, swings on vines like Tarzan, and has a ridiculous fight on what appears to be a Chinese-style wheel barrel. Once or twice, Wang looks like he'll suffer defeat (and de hands), but a brother sister team of swordfighters nurse our boy back to health so he can seek his climactic revenge and live happily after ever, or whatever. *** -DF

HONG KONG FACE OFF

(original title: "Fists of the Double K") Released by Arena/Eastern Heroes Video; 1997 (film English dubbed, John Woo interview subtitled), Cast: Henry Yu Yong & Simon Yuen Siu Tin. Reviewed by Lana Zukowski

This movie was called FISTS OF THE DOUBLE K, when it was part of the tidal wave of Chinese films that flooded American theaters in the early 1970s. If the title seems reminiscent of a western, that's deliberate (as for "Double K", that's presumably meant as a reference to kung fu and karate). Retitled HONG

KONG FACE OFF for its video release, this picture is in essence a spaghetti western, complete with horse-riding lawmen, that just happens to be set in the Ching Dynasty. Was it unique? No, other HK flicks of that era also qualify as "Chinese spaghetti westerns". The most well-known example is Wang Yu's BEACH OF THE WARGODS. Come to think of it, a whole book could be written about what might be termed "samurai westerns" and "kung fu westerns". Granted, it would turn out to be a rather slim volume. Obviously, Jackie Chan's SHANGHAI NOON would be included in such a book, as well as the two films that strongly influenced it, ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA AND AMERICA and RED SUN (a European "samurai western" with Toshiro Mifune).

So what was the rationale for retitling this flick HONG KONG FACE OFF, as it had some connection to John Woo's American film, FACE OFF? Well, an interview with Mr. Woo precedes the movie on the Arena tape; an interview that has subtitles ranging from somewhat readable to downright illegible (the movie itself is dubbed in English). As for what's written on the box about Jackie Chan being the action director and Yuen Wah having a major role in the film, just chalk that up to consumer fraud! /I'm hearing more and more rumors that them "Eastern Heroes" excell at this. -DF/ Actually, FISTS OF THE DOUBLE K/HONG KONG FACE OFF may be one of the scores of films in which Jackie appeared as a stuntman, in his pre-stardom days. Likewise, it's remotely possible that Yuen Wah did some stunt doubling here or a (blink and you'll miss him) bit role. But John Woo (despite what the box claims, and despite his interview being attached to the movie) definitely had nothing to do with the flick whatsoever. The video's credits were presumably excised, because the names Jackie Chan, John Woo and Yuen Wah were not listed in them.

Simon Yuen Siu Tin turns up in the cast but surprisingly, gets no mention on the video box. However, the film's star, Henry Yu Yong, is mentioned. He's a handsome fellow and a first rate martial artist.

Af first, the fight choreography looks like it'll be typical of the early 1970s style—what might be termed the brutal brawling school of kung fu. Henry Yu Young punches and kicks his way through a legion of thugs, including a gent whose favorite weapon is his "killer pigtail" (a 1970s cliché). Of course, there are expected trampoline-assisted leaps too. As the film progresses, the action improves exponentially. The choreographers outdo themselves, creat-

ing fights that are quite imaginative, the star really gets to strut his stuff in scenes of "realistic", non-balletic mayhem. He even gets to use a boomerang! And along with the (excellent) kung fu, lots of judo-style throws are utilized as well.

So, just how good is this forgotten film? It deserves a place on any list of the best early 1970s kung fu cinema (admittedly, it has a major flaw: A clichéd, fatally dull romantic subplot that eats up a good chunk of the running time). And as a bonus, there are lots of familiar faces in the supporting cast (a book on Chinese actors similar to Quinlan's Illustrated Registry of Film Stars would be most welcome. At last, names could be put to all those maddeningly familiar faces). Naturally, the expected 1970s clichés are on display here, including the inevitable gambling-in-a-crooked-casino scene (doesn't HK cinema make it seem as if a Gamblers Anonymous chapter should be located on every street corner in China?!).

Plot: Henry Yu Yong rides into a dusty town that might as well be called Dodge City or Tombstone, since it looks like it was transplanted directly from the American West to China. Bandits are in charge; bandits who ride horses and wear bandanas over their faces (hey I did say this picture was a Western, didn't I?). Our hero doesn't wear a white hat, but his long flowing white scarf makes a nice substitute (ever wonder why so many heroes in HK period films wear white? That's because it's the color of death in Chinese iconography. The white clad warriors are symbolically saying to the audience, "I am the bringer of death to evildoers"). Where was I? Oh, Henry Yu Young climbs off his horse and

pulverizes everyone in sight before confronting the chief villain, who (of course) was responsible for the untimely death of our hero's father. The climax occurs on a landscape that looks eerily like the American West, complete with vultures circling overhead. **** -Lana Zukowski

The 1980's:

RAGING MASTER'S TIGER CRANE

Released by Saturn Productions Inc., Filmark Ltd., Prod.: Tomas Tang, Associate Prod.: Dallie Yeung, Executive Prod.: Dae Yon Chum, Screenplay: John Tsui, Editor: Leung Wing Chan, Titles: Chung Chuen Pui, Photography: Jimmy Yu, Lighting: Irving Lim, Costume: Ann Wong, English Version: Vaughan Savidge, Martial Arts Dir.: Marty Chui, Starring: Wong Cheng Li, Benny Tsui, Stan Yuen, Chris Bo, Perry Lang, Kathy Lee, Billy Chan, Liza Tung, Philip So, Wong Man Bao, William Lai, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Another early 1980s ripoff of Jackie Chan's old "training scenes" (EAGLE'S SHADOW, DRUNKEN MASTER, etc.) movies, and I enjoyed every minute of it. Well, maybe not every minute of it, but I enjoyed most of it. It's got the same bad voices, the same training scenes (i.e. carrying the heavy buckets of water, cooking food for the old master, etc.), and being such a cheap movie, it's got its flaws: The camera's filter was abruptly changed in a scene where villainous Wong Cheng Li roughs up our hero, causing the film grain's tint to suddenly change from red to blue. Also, watch for the first battle, where Wong Cheng Li fights an old Buddhist.

The battle is excellent, but look at the monk's feet— are those Adidas shoes he's wearing in this time period which predates the modern tennis-shoe?! Probably not (it sure looks like it though), because there are old style Chinese shoes which have similar markings, and the old monk is kicking so fast (all the spats in RAGING MASTER'S TIGER CRANE are superb) it's hard to get a good look at his shoes.

Even the most predictable, cliché-packed kung fu movie has its stand-out elements which make it semi-unique. In this case our hero does seek to avenge the death of his kung fu teachers and his brother, but an added twist is that the doomed brother is a painter who gets captured early on and doesn't actually get killed until near the movie's end. My favorite thing about this movie are the leggy babes who do the high kicks and aren't shy about showing their panties! You don't see a lot of spicy stuff like this in this period films, so I wish the hot gals got shown more. I believe the lead villainess (black undies!) to be played by "Kathy Lee" (minus the "Gifford"), one of only two females listed in the opening credits. Of course, most of the names are just romanizations of Chinese actors names, and since this movie is mostly unknowns, there's no way of knowing whether this Kathy Lee chick ever appeared in other movies. She does, however, appear on this issue's cover!

As just another run-of-the-mill clone movie from that master of run-of-the-mill clone movies, Tomas Tang, RAGING TIGER'S TIGER CRANE succeeds— at being another run-of-the-mill clone movie. There are clown-like antics at first (the token Jackie wannabe works in



a restaurant and gets training from an old geezer (and I never knew about this movie when I made the satirical HOT DOGS ON THE RUN), despite the racketeers who kidnap painters and snatch valuable necklaces. I'm actually surprised the villains can distinguish themselves apart from the good guys, since all the young men are sporting Joey Ramone haircuts. Our main hero is "Steve" (everyone has English names lik Steven, Betty and Andy), who eventually gets training from some old bum. Steve gets his training, and after the movie's slow middle, takes his revenge against the bad guys who killed too many people who's deaths are worth avenging. The climactic series of acrobatic, sped-up kung fu duels are absolutely great, featuring nifty stock-music that I couldn't identify, but because it reminds me of BIG VALLEY and GUNSMOKE, it must be from some western. This amusing (though dumb at times) farce ends with heroic Benny Tsui crying in freeze frame; he does manage to single-handedly kill Wong Cheng Li and his squad of bad guys & bad gals, but he still can't get over the deaths of his teacher and brother. **1/2 - DF

1990's:

TWIN DRAGONS

Media Asia Distribution; 1992, In Association with Distant Horizon & Hong Kong Film Directors' Guild, Executive Producer: Ng Sze Yuen, Screenplay: Barry Wong, Tsui Hark, Cheung Tung Jo & Wong Yik, Prod.: Teddy Robin, Dir.: Tsui Hark & Ringo Lam Stunt Coordinators: Yuan Wo Ping, Jackie Chan, Ching Siu Tung &

Tung Wai, Cast: Jackie Chan (starring role), Jackie Chan (co-star), Maggie Cheung, Teddy Robin Kwan, Nina Li Chi, Anthony Chan, Wong Lung Wai, Philip Chan, Sylvia Chang, Alfred Cheung, Jacob Cheung, Cheung Tung Jo, Chor Yuen, John Keung, Ringo Lam, Lau Ka Leung, Lai Ying Chow, Jamie Luk, Pa Shan, Ng Sze Yuen, John Woo, Eric Tsang, Tsui Hark, Tsui Siu Ming, James Wong, Kirk Wong, David Wu, Mars, Reviewed by Damon Foster

I may have reviewed this somewhat substandard Jackie Chan romp when it was new about ten years ago, but I think I liked it less even then, and decided to give it a second chance. TWIN DRAGONS was more enjoyable this time around, mainly because they finally dubbed it in English (the movie was an incoherent mess when I sat through the Chinese-language tape), but also because it was before Jackie had reached an all time low with RUSH HOUR 2. Even though I was mildly amused by TWIN DRAGONS this time, I still don't think it's one of Chan's better movies. Being the work of the HK Film Director's Guild, it's a case of too many cooks spoiling the soup, or however that old phrase goes. With John Woo directing the opening fight-scene in the club and Tsui Hark & Ringo Lam directing other scenes, this fast-paced caper is still a little messy. There are noticeable flaws that I wouldn't expect in a Jackie Chan film: At the beginning, a thug falls onto the top of a van and when he gets down, the van's driver (some extra) walks right into him! After this bloop, we eventually see Jackie fighting oldtimer Wang Lung Wei (here credited as "Wong Lung Wai"), who comes at

Chan with a sheet of glass. When the broken glass comes near Jackie Chan, it's too obvious that it's now just plastic shards. Shortly there after, during a routine motorboat chase, there's another editing botch-up when Teddy Robin finds a fish in a net he's holding and in the very next shot, the fish is miraculously gone.

Maggie Cheung and Nina Li Chi are both a couple stunning beauties, and serve as his romantic leads (Jackie plays twins). In the beginning, a B&W flashback implies Jackie's characters were born in 1965! Though he looked young enough to pass for that age (he did back then, anyway), I think they purposely made the character seem young so that his involvement with the two gorgeous girls wouldn't evoke a feeling of pedophilia. I noticed that while Nina Li Chi is dubbed sounding typically American, Maggie Cheung has an obvious Chinese accent, which adds some authenticity. Since Jackie dubbed himself in English for TWIN DRAGONS, I was beginning to wonder if Maggie Cheung dubbed her own voice as well. But the opening credits list a certain Bai Ling! So now I suspect Bai Ling dubbed in Maggie Cheung. I assume this is the same Bai Ling who was in THE CROW and THE LOST EMPIRE (and many other movies). She certainly gets around. One day I shall have to do a whole issue of OC on her.

The most inventive things about TWIN DRAGON are the camera tricks and digital effects which give the illusion of two Jackie Chans. The Hong Kongese FX technicians did a decent job, but much of the time, at least one Jackie's outline wobbling, showing that as of 1991, they were a little behind the times when



it came to matting and blue-screens. But on the whole, it's all done pretty effectively, perhaps the beginning Chan viewer would think Jackie really used an exact double for these clever scenes.

When you get right down to it, *TWIN DRAGONS* is alright. I wasn't bored, it's consistently entertaining. Not thrilling or hilarious, but this action-comedy is okay. To be fair, there are some amusing mix-ups, which get remotely funny at times; like when the wrong [non-musical] Jackie Chan attempts to conduct an orchestra. Considering how much comedy there is though, I think it should have been funnier. Though there are villains who put our hero (heroes) in life-threatening positions, the over all tone is light-hearted, and there's more than enough clowning around.

The script has something to do with telepathically-linked twins (played by J. Chan and his co-star, Jackie C.) who keep getting in trouble with local thugs. One of the twins is a musician, and the other isn't. The non-piano player Jackie is the one who doesn't know martial arts. Speaking of martial arts, neither the fights nor the stunts are particularly impressive to fans who've seen a lot of Jackie Chan movies. Chan does demonstrate swiftness, agility and accuracy when he jumps into the open window of a car, but a few of his other jumps look like they might have been wire-enhanced. I did see a decent kick or two, and his climactic battle with Wang Lung Wei is good, but the majority of *TWIN DRAGONS* is comedic hijinks centered around love interests Maggie Cheung and Nina Li Chi (who's legs are unforgettable; or maybe it's just the skirt & tights which are unforgettable). ** -DF

The Zero's:

RUSH HOUR 2

New Line Cinema; 2001, Produced by Jay Stern, Jonathan Glickman, Arthur Sarkissian & Roger Birnbaum, Written by Jeff Nathanson, Directed by Brett Ratner, Music: Lalo Schiffrin, Executive Prod.: Andrew Z. Davis, Micheal De Luca, Toby Emmerich, Co-Executive Prod.: Leon Dudevoir, Cast: Jackie Chan, Chris Tucker, John Lone, Alan King, Roselyn Sanchez, Harris Yulin, Zhang Ziyi, Kenneth Tsang, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Aah yes, kung fu movies from the decade I call the zeros. *RUSH HOUR 2* is a "zero" in

more ways than one. I think I liked it more when the Hong Kongese were really making their own action movies. Despite the mainly HK setting, this Jackie Chan disappointment is as American as they come; full of all the same predictable cliches that I've seen a million times. I saw every plot twist coming a mile away, and I can't help but wonder: Just how many years will Hollywood make the same movie over and over again? *RUSH HOUR 2* doesn't stand out in the slightest (except for Jackie's witty fight scenes), and from start to finish, is completely unmemorable. But the typical approach isn't the movie's real downfall. The real downfall is that no-talent nobody, Chris Tucker. He, his bad jokes and aggravating high-pitched voice were bad enough in the first *RUSH HOUR*, but I think he made this sequel even worse. But then again, he's not the comedy writer. Whoever the hell wrote the comedy was aiming for a simple-minded audience, so the jokes are both old and as predictable as the story itself.

For somebody his age, Jackie still proves to be quite a physical marvel. The fight on the scaffolding is innovative, as are his obligatory uses of household items & props during the many spats. I think Chan's witty stunts could have easily made this movie worth two stars (**) or maybe even three stars (***), but Chris Tucker and the bad comedy deducts a star or two. I heard somewhere that some fan had stampered with the movie *STAR WARS: THE PHANTOM MENACE* and chopped out a lot of stupid stuff, resulting in the illegally distributed bootleg *STAR WARS: THE PHANTOM EDIT*. Though I've seen neither version (I don't have that much time on my hands!), everybody who watched the two of them agrees that the fan-made alternate is the better of the two. I think that if a similar treatment (trimming out as much of Tucker as is possible) was given to *RUSH HOUR 2*, it could have only helped the movie. Though Chris Tucker is credited before Jackie in the opening credits, make no mistake about it: Jackie Chan is the real star. There are other prolific Chinese in this movie too. Not only does Zhang Ziyi (of *CROUCHING TIGER HIDDEN DRAGON*) play a villain, but the role of Police Captain Chin is portrayed by none other than Kenneth Tsang. Now here's one guy who's been in a lot of movies! I've seen his name interpreted many different ways, including Kent Tsang, Ken Tsang, Kong Tsang, and Kent Tseng. Using one name or another, he can be

seen in *ANNA AND THE KING*, *THE REPLACEMENT KILLERS*, *LONG AND WINDING ROAD*, *BAREFOOT KID*, *REMAINS OF A WOMAN*, *LOVER OF THE SWINDLER*, *THE KILLER*, *A BETTER TOMORROW* and countless others. He's been appearing in movies since the 1970s. Not only that, but he's also an accomplished director. Hell, I could make a whole issue on Kenneth Tsang and still not feel I've done the guy justice.

It's a tale of cops Jackie Chan and Chris Tucker trying to arrest HK triads who are counterfeiting money and bombing U.S. embassies. There are the obligatory hot babes, but also a lot of bad humor which is set around: Chris Tucker tries to learn Chinese culture, and sometimes Jackie tries to learn black culture. The course of the story gets our two heroes in one stupid scene after another, and its only saved because of Jackie's occasional fights & antics. Chris Tucker uses an obvious stunt double because he can't even climb up on top of a truck (with Jackie giving him a boost, no less!). Being an absolutely typical, predictable movie, secret service agents naturally don't want the two cops to keep going after the counterfeiters, so Chris Tucker is deported back to America. But with Chan & Tucker separated, we wouldn't have the same comedy team which made the first *RUSH HOUR* so profitable, right?! So at the airport, Jackie just suddenly decides to fly to L.A. with Tucker—no packing, visas or passports necessary! Hell, he had the money [burning a hole in his pocket] to buy the plane ticket right then and there! Anyway, our two heroes end up in Las Vegas, where all the Hong Kongese villains happen to be too! While Jackie beats up a few more bad guys in some big-ass fancy casino, Tucker is making a spectacle of himself by being the Eddie Murphy wannabe that he is (Tucker's lame antics are all too similar to scenes in *BEVERLYHILLS COP* and *48 HOURS*). The only scene I found funny was where Jackie Chan was being sly and climbing a wall, only to discover that there's a security camera mere inches from his face. The remainder of the movie, such as the climactic battle in the casino, did nothing for me. The bad guys lose because Jackie kicks the main villain (John Lone of *THE LAST EMPEROR*) out the window of a building. But being a gutless, wholesome movie, Chan later points out it was "an accident" even though the villain had killed the father of Jackie's character. * -DF



JINZO NINGEN KIKAIER: THE ANIMATION

(AKA: "Android Kikaida: The Animation Vol. 1") SPE Visual Works Inc.; 2000, Manufactured by Sony Music Entertainment, Presented by "Henshin Video Heroes", Created by Shotaro Ishinomori, Animation by: Radix Studio OX, Reviewed by Damon Foster

I could already tell as I watched the first chapter ("The Lonely Doll") on this tape, that I would have mixed reactions to this particular variation of Shotaro Ishinomori's KIKAIER! Comic book freaks will be happy to know that this English-subtitled cartoon is based largely on some KIKAIER (that's "Kikaida" to Hawaiian snobs who don't understand the concept of transliteration) manga. I never read any of the manga comics about KIKAIER, so the approach of this example of Japanese anime did little for me. I still remember KIKAIER for the early 1970s live-action program starring Daisuke Ban, which is nothing like this dull cartoon, to say the least. The classic Toei TV show was always exciting, with a fast-pace and thrilling battles. Even the opening credits and ending credits both had slick theme songs accompanied by scenes of action: Kikaider riding his motorcycle, flying, fighting, doing martial arts stances, and even crashing through a wooden barricade! But in this disappointing cartoon, the opening credits are unbelievably slow, un-moving and uninvolved! Instead we see fades & still shots, and a cartoon version of Mitsuko Komyoji with no clothes on (and cropped to be clean)! The music for this opening sequence is slow, dead serious, incredibly unmemorable and not catchy in the slightest. Maybe this uninteresting cartoon will impress viewers who never saw the actual KIKAIER program for the Golden Age of Japanese superheroes, but KIKAIER fans should steer clear of this bastardization. Though there are English subtitles, there's not a lot of credit to this tape, except: Created by Shotaro Ishinomori. We normally call him Shotaro Ishinomori, but it doesn't matter because the famed superhero designer died at least a few years before this version was created.

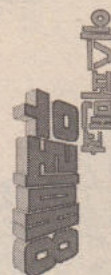
But being that the art is trying to emulate the old comic books of Japan, KIKAIER: THE ANIMATION has its good points. I liked the style of artwork a lot, the way the people (and the eyes!) are drawn reminds me of 1960s style anime art! It brings to mind 1960s cartoons

superhero section: KAIZO NINGEN UPDATE

like ASTROBOY, KIMBA, and CYBORG 009. The characters are beautifully drawn, and it brings back a lot of fond memories. I much prefer these simple drawings with their thick lines (reminiscent to classic drawings by Osamu Tezuka and Go Nagai) over any of the new Japanese cartoons coming out now days.

Amazingly, the script isn't a whole lot different than the live action TV show: Dr. Komyoji, now depicted as a graying old man comparable Pinocchio's "Gepetto" puppet maker, creates the robot superhero Kikaider (called "Jiro" in his guitar-playing, mild mannered form). Naturally, Komyoji's son and daughter (Masaru and Mitsuko) are present, and they're once more being hassled by an empire of monstrous robots called The Dark. This scary army is lead by a blue-skinned flute-player called Professor Gill, who commands monsters like Grey Rhino and Green Mantis. But as far as being similar to the classic program, that's it! This cartoon seems to take a lot from Disney's PINNOCHIO (maybe the comic book does too), which caught me off guard. There are even references to that kiddy movie's Jiminy Cricket! But "Jiminy" is misspelled "Gemini" in the subtitles! This cartoon concentrates mainly on drama and dialogue, such as Jiro's confusion as to just what he is. Jiro does eventually become Kikaider to

battle the monsters, but unfortunately, the battles are short and consist largely of our hero just holding the beasts back so that hot babe (not bad for a cartoon, since mini-skirts look good even in animated form) Mitsuko can escape. If nothing else, it's interesting that this videotape explains that "kikai" means "machine", something I don't think I realized! When Kikaida finally kills Green Mantis, he says "denzi end!", which in the live action version, was subtitled as "The End"! * -DF



ESPERMAN AND UREME 8

(AKA: "Ureme 8", "Esperman Gwa Ureme", "Esperman and Thunder-Hawk") Released: 3/30/93, Directed by Kim Chung Ki, Written by: Kim Chung Ki, Starring: Shim Hyung Rae, Chun Eun Kyung, Kang Ri Na, Kim Hak Rae, Eom Young Soo, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Yet another addition to this never-ending series of Korean movies! UREME has got to be the most confusing superhero series of films ever! Over the years, I've reviewed several of these flicks, and still can't quite figure them out! Long ago, when I first discovered the early movies like UREME 1, UREME 2 and UREME

3, I grew with them and watched them improve with each movie. Then there were bizarre cast changes, as star Shim Hyung Rei (the father of Korean sci-fi!) began to use excessive doubles, causing really jarring continuity errors. I'm just speculating, but I noticed his usage of doubles and stand-ins at almost the exact same time as he had begun making a name for himself in bigger budgetted movies, and of course the formation of his excellent Zero Nine Productions. Though I never really considered him that charismatic, it seems that the movie series suffered financially, whenever he wasn't present. So with him going on to newer and better things, it seems director Kim Chung Ki, still stuck in this floundering series, used every exploitation gimmick he could, to try and make UREME movies where Shim Hyung Rei (AKA Ray Shim) appeared to be the star. There apparently was even some sort of sequel series (much like STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION is a sequel series to the 1960s STAR TREK) called "Fighter Ureme", or something like that. Whatever it's called, it seems that last issue's UNBEATABLE FIGHTER UREME is a part of that series.

As for this here mess, UREME 8 (or whatever), it defies all rationale. This hasty movie looks like it was just thrown together at the last minute, since even the actual full title, ESPERMAN AND UREME 8 is confusing. I don't believe there's a film series called "Esperman and Ureme", even though Esperman himself is in all the UREME mov-

ies. This haphazard production shows all the signs of a dying film series on its last gasp, it's final dying breath. In order to keep just a little cash flow coming in, they created this movie, which is the GAMERA: SUPER MONSTER of Korean superhero movies! UREME 8 has absolutely no new live action footage, the whole thing is stock-footage from the previous movies! They got some "tea kettle robot" (an icon in Korean pop culture, I've seen the character in other movies) cartoon character to host this hasty edit of highlights from the first few flicks. At first I thought this stinker was a documentary of the movies. But upon closer examination, I came to realize they were trying to pass this off as a whole new adventure! Just what idiot would fall for this?! Was anybody fooled by the stock-footage of GAMERA SUPER MONSTER or GODZILLA'S REVENGE?! But apparently, UREME 8 managed to fool enough people to make some money. After all, just a few months after this movie's completion, Kim Chung Ki was able to release a somewhat more "legitimate" movie, UNBEATABLE FIGHTER UREME (see review last issue), which was no classic either, but at least it consisted of all new footage.

What's really wierd is that this farce consists of footage from the first three movies only, and yet on the back of the videobox is a shot from the 4th film! The scene never happens on this tape. I think the real problem is that director/producer Kim Chung Ki simply wasn't paying attention to the UREME series by this

time. In the 1990s, he achieved great success in Korea, with the ROBOT TAEKWON V cartoon series (which emulates old Go Nagai stuff), a program which had a semi-live action movie I reviewed long ago. With this hit TV show under his belt, he understandably spent little time rationalizing the latter UREME movies, and it certainly shows.

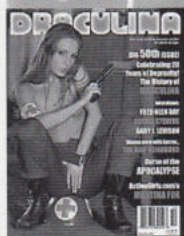
But is showing edited highlights from this exciting film series really such a bad thing? Not really. The martial arts and laughably cheap special effects are always a delight. The UREME series was always full of Ray Shim's infantile clowning around, but this retrospective emits most of that nonsense and just concentrates on the superhero action! So although the quick-fix editing makes the movie fail as a complete, legitimate production, it succeeds as entertainment. There's plenty of laser beams, acrobatic jumps and karate kicks.

After the animated robot talks to us, we see shots from 1988's UREME #3, the ripoff of E.T.: THE EXTRATERRESTRIAL. The scenes mainly concentrate on the relationship that the little boy has with a yong alien stuck in Korea, while his alien parents (a monstrous father and a sexy human wife) try to find him, and battle the superheroes Esperman (Shim Hyung Rei) and Dae Illi (Chun Eun Kyung), even though they later find they're on the same side. Then we go backwards in time, as our two Korean heroes take on the clown-like villains from UREME 1, in a series of high flying forest duels where the suspension wires are clearly visible. It's strange that they included any shots from this crude movie, because the quality of film, matting & FX are so damn bad. After that cartoon robot appears and speaks in Korean, we switch to scenes from UREME 2, where we again see those three short demons (little boys wearing thick, cumbersome monster costumes) bring a hit & run victim back to life. This karate-kicking zombie wears all black and it seems the three mini-monsters are controlling him so that he'll kidnap some bumbling scientist. I guess that in the Korean-language script, they're somehow explaining that all these regurgitated scenes are now "related", even though this wasn't the case when the movies themselves were produced. This movie ends abruptly, after we see the climactic battle of UREME 1, a movie made when their technical skills at FX were at their very, very worst. ** -DF



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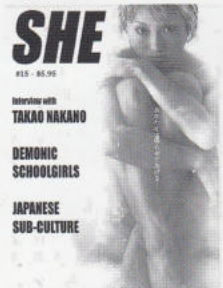
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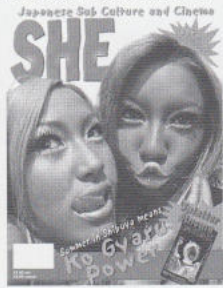
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