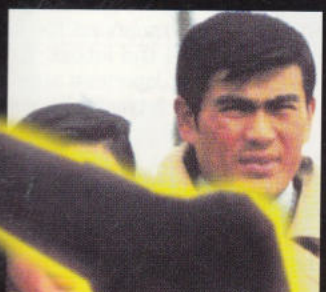
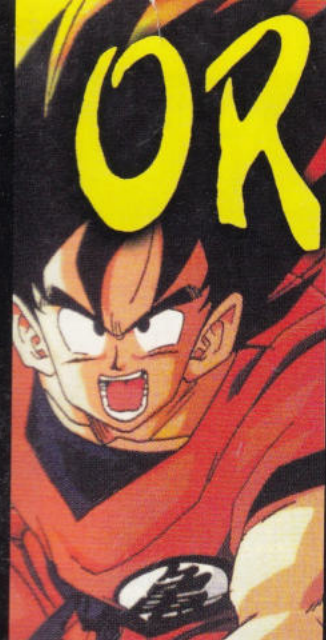


ORIENTAL CINEMA

#13



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**FROM
CHOW YUN FAT
TO THE
MONKEY KING!
H.K. ACTION,
NEW & OLD!
JACKIE CHAN!
H.K. VIXENS
and MORE!**

**PLUS:
MONSTERS,
CARTOONS &
SUPERHEROES
OF JAPAN!
HORROR,
MARTIAL ARTS
& SCI-FI!**



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ORIENTAL CINEMA

#13

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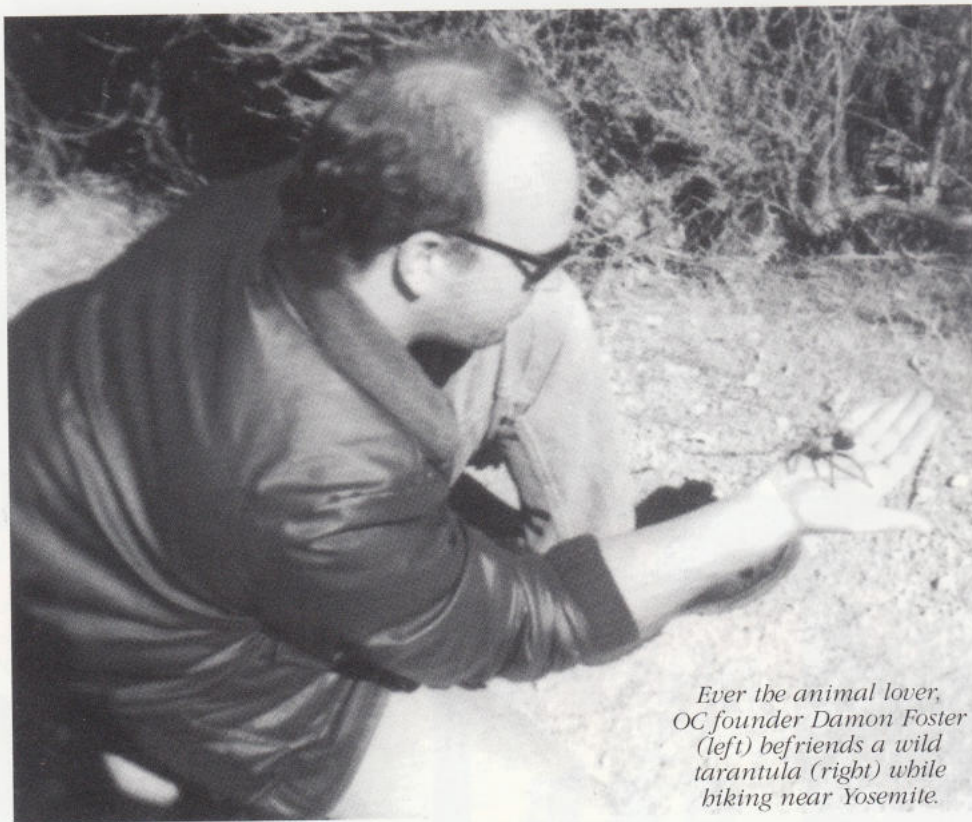
First off, some thoughts on Wondercon 1997, where I was one of three panelists on the Japanese Superhero Panel. It was disappointing when Bob (HENSHIN) Johnson asked how many people in the audience were only in the panel to kill time waiting for the next panel, which was all about even more over-rated, mainstream Hollywood blockbusters due to be released theatrically in a few months. It was distressing just how many dweebs raised their hands! I could sense that Bob was visibly annoyed too, at this point neither of us really wanted to be there. I expected Bob to slam his microphone down, throw his hands up in the air and say "Call me a cab!", to which I was ready to reply, pointing at him: "You're a cab!" But semi-seriously; our panel discussion, which included both info & clips from anything from GORANGERS, to the new Gamera movies, to ULTRAMAN TIGA, to MAJIN HUNTER MITSURUGI had more empty seats than full ones, yet the predictable hype of over-exposed Hollywood crap (trailers & sneak previews on TV a plenty, there's no avoiding them regardless) had a huge line of people going way down the hall! Let me get this straight: Films which are every where, forced in our faces whether we like them or not, are attracting the dorks like magnets. Do people want to learn something new? No. Does the average convention square want to get exposure to a unique topic? Nope. What do the people want? They want un-

imaginative, bigshot-budgeted predictability for the masses, they want Blockbuster Video moronity. All you lame-ass, one-dimensional, narrowminded jerks can just keep whacking off to culturally retarded crap like TWISTER, ANACONDA (recommended for idiots who don't know jack-shit about snakes), and the latest Tom Cruise movie. I'm not saying that you gotta' like Japanese superheroes to be cool (true though it is), but I really think the "selective" mainstreamers are missing out on a lot of fun. Hell, if I went to a convention and heard of an obscure film topic, let's say "Eskimo gangster films", or "Giant Robots of Latvia" (both are non-existent genres I just made up, though if such things existed, my curiosity would be piqued!), I would most certainly check them out instead of something forced in my faced, such as the latest Steven Spielberg or Steven King audacity & hype.

One final comment on Wondercon '97: Though it was pretty fun, it's so funny to see all the HK geeks plaguing the dealers' room. Though anime is still the trendy choice for overweight couch potatoes with bad haircuts, the HK crap is running rampant. I remember the 1980s, when none of these crowd-followers (virtually none think for themselves) would even consider reading OC because it concentrated more on HK films than Japanese cartoons, but my, haven't the times changed! I suppose not everyone can be ahead of

the times like me, but people; show a little integrity once in a while, it's like that old Cure song (before they whimped out and had weak dancefloor hits not unlike a Lawrence Welk tune) says, "You're jumping Someone Else's Train". Though the topic of this paragraph is essentially different from the previous one (the first discussed Superhero panels, this one is about people still "just discovering" HK cinema), the idea remains the same: Predictability runs rampant at science fiction conventions.

Though the praiseful fan-mail letters outnumber the hate-mail letters by about 50-to-1, it's always a chuckle when a negative, attacking letter does arrive. In this case, it was basically an anonymous letter from some whiny little wuss in Brooklyn calling himself "the Iron Monkey". Since my letter's section never includes anonymous mail (what's the point if I can't trash him directly and personally, like he did to me!?), I had no need to keep this unjust list of attacks, so I immediately tossed it in the trash-can; the letter never made it out of the post office. This particular attack had no merit, it was simply a case of: "Foster, you don't like the exact same movies I do, so you're an asshole!" Previous attacks were from the gay community, who had every right to be pissed-- you'll noticed I've eased off the homo jokes! It's one thing to



Ever the animal lover, OC founder Damon Foster (left) befriends a wild tarantula (right) while hiking near Yosemite.

receive vengeful letters from people who feel singled out & ridiculed (jokes which I found funny; they did not-- enough said), but to be condemned because my choice in movie viewing doesn't include a lot of Tsui Hark's wire & pulley movies, and because my taste differs from that of some lifeless whiner who thinks he's called The Iron Monkey? His main gripe is that I criticize the Tsui Harkian, wire-and-pulley movies which flooded the HK film market in recent years, while having OC concentrate on more nostalgic stuff like Godzilla movies and chop socky oldies. I justify this in two ways:

Numero Uno: I can't expect to write about every genre ever produced, and since kung fu & Japan's monsters have always been a part of my life, they're topics which come to me naturally; I'm automatically comfortable in these genres. I have little patience for pretentious, overrated stuff like THE BRIDE WITH WHITE HAIR and most other movies about human yo-yos. If somebody else wishes to review these trendy wire-and-pulley fantasies for OC, fine! But I certainly lack the time & patience for them. Besides, it might be too late for anyone to send such reviews in to me, since I doubt I'll do another OC after this one.

Numero Two-o: OC was always more a retrospective, nostalgia zine dedicated to trying to preserve the past. Every Johnny-come-lately geek and his brother is writing about the trendy hits coming out of HK. I couldn't see turning an original upstart, OC, into one of its fad-obsessed imitators! So for the last time, I must remind everyone that there are endless rags which routinely masturbate to the latest overrated HK movie about gangsters and yo-yos, the supply far exceeds the demand!

Initially, this was suppose to be an issue focusing on the history of Empty-Handed (no swords) Martial Arts Movies. But doing research requires certain things I just don't have: Time, money, and modern computer equipment. I had heard that honest-to-goodness "Karate Movies" were produced in Japan in the 1950s, where the term "Karate Chop" officially appeared. Allegedly, these films greatly influenced the HK kung fu movies of the 1970s. I repeat: Japanese karate movies date back to the 1950s! Does this not concern any of you!? I for one was always eager to expose all missing links in the history of martial arts cinema. Assuming such films really existed, I have never heard of any of them being available on videotape. I did, however, manage to obtain about two, maybe three

minutes of one of Sonny Chiba's B&W, early 1960s TV series, made around the time of his THE DRIFTING DETECTIVE. It's amazing to see this type of action filmed before I was even born! The brief sequence involves a burning house, and Chiba tangling with a number of villains; mostly it's just the usual judo tosses, but there's a nice forward-snap kick, and one which pre-dates THE GREEN HORNET by a few years! It's unexplored frontiers like this which drives OC into existence. You can read about HK crap any where, but without unusual films & unsung heroes to discover, the motivation behind OC just isn't there.

But the fact is that 1950s karate movies are as elusive as the HK hoping vampire films of that period. Obscure genres like this are like mere rumors today, which frustrates me. If OC can't unravel mysteries and introduce you to new, old & obscure stuff, the challenge--much like the profits--is gone. Indeed, I've become very disillusioned in zine-dom this past-year. My attempt to get a successor [to pass the torch to] proved unsuccessful; virtually nobody (pal Alex Strang offered, though his ideas would have made absolutely drastic changes) is up for the challenge! So with severe alterations in my life, it's a safe assumption that there will be somewhat of a gap between this OC and the next. For the time being, my situation is just too pathetic: My ever-malfunctioning computer equipment is ancient and sadly inadequate, and I'm pinching pennies to eke out a meager existence. Needless to say, with the odds against both me and OC, continuing this publication is not exactly high on my list of priorities. So what's upcoming is not known at this point; but one thing is for sure, I have a great, promising future behind me.

So at the last minute, I turned this issue into what's basically another "Monkey King Issue". OC has covered Monkey King movies before, but with the widespread repeatings of the Mainland Chinese, subtitled video series JOURNEY TO THE WEST gaining favor with American video collectors, and at least a couple touring stageplays which recently went across the country, now is the time for a retrospective look at the heroic simian, possibly the world's oldest superhero.

Damon Foster

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Freont, CA 94537-0576



In closing, I wish to commend you for providing me with an entertaining & informative issue. And I wish you continued success. /What do you mean "continued"? -DF/ That's it, that's all.

Peace,
Anthony Kirton
Calif., USA

Dear Damon,

Scott Rhodes here. You may remember that you sent me some info & photos on Kumi Mizuno, Mie Hama & Akiko Wakabayashi last year, for an article I did for Chiller Theater magazine. /Actually, I don't remember this! I used to always try to help out writers & researchers whenever possible, and since I rarely receive any credit or thanks for my work, such help ends up forgotten. Unless of course you're referring to OC's Femme Fatales Issue (it features all the actresses you mentioned) which I guess you might have used as research material. But again, I did try to help out all fellow writers. But it seems that these days I can't keep up-- everyone is a writer. For example, Marsha Clark is living proof that one day, everyone will write a book! -DF/ I also wanted to let you know that I have a book coming out in October entitled Vintage Scream Queens & Femme Fatales (it will be published by Chiller Theater and is a bio & photo book covering the careers of a number of genre-

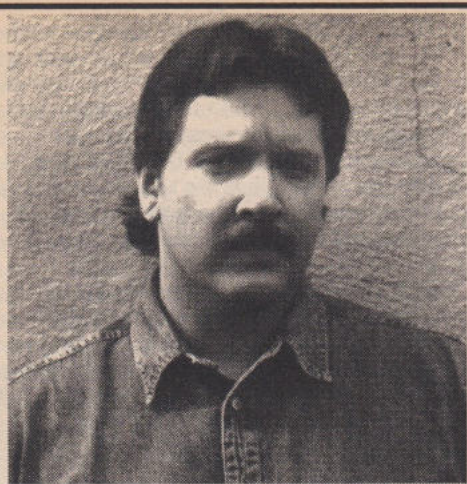
babes from the 1930s through the 1970s; lot's of bikini shots too!). I have included sections on Kumi, Mie & Akiko, and gave your magazine & yourself an acknowledgement for providing some bio info. Thanks again and continued success with Oriental Cinema (one of my favorite magazines).
Scott Rhodes
Calif., U.S.A.

Dear Damon,

I've enclosed the first issue (hot off the presses) of my new HK movie zine, Fists of Fury, I hope you enjoy it. I noticed in the last issue of OC to be released here in Britain, that you've got a zine review column. /The "zine review column" isn't a regular part of OC, it doesn't appear in each and every issue, because I can never keep track of how many Asian-zines are in existence; only a few of these guys send me an occasional review copy--there are probably a hundred other Asian-zines out there which I've never heard of. Speaking of zines, thank you, Nick, for your excellent publication, Fists of Fury! So I'll recommend it to my readers here and now! The fanzine Fists of Fury isn't a typical, HK-drooling, technogeek rag, it's not yet another of the endless, dime-a-dozen magazines plaguing the fandom in the 1990s. Nick's publication has a sense of humor, and the balls to concentrate heavily on the good old days of HK film, though the

Dear Mr. Foster,

During a "Going out of Business" sale at my favorite comic book store I came up on an issue of your magazine. I am not a fan of most oriental cinema, but I love Godzilla, Gamera, etc. I found your filmography invaluable (it was the "Titanic Titans Issue"). It was amazing how I agreed with most of your opinions.



When OC reader Scott Rhodes isn't researching Asian cinema, he kicks ass as a Hollywood stuntman.



ever present Category 3 crap (my one complaint about *Fists of Fury* the mag.) is inevitable. So contact its publishers: Midnight Media, The Barn, Upton Lodge, Hamerton Road, Upton, Cambs, PE17 5TA, England. Tel: 01487 832480, Fax: 01487 832164, Email: paul@midnight-media.demon.co.uk. Hopefully, unlike some British zine-makers I've heard of, these guys will respond. -DF/

To be honest, though, I haven't sent *Fists of Fury* on the off chance of a plug-- I've sent it as a way of saying thanks to you for the years of enjoyment OC has given me. I've only been reading OC since your re-numbered issue "one", but it's still the best Eastern mag I've ever read.

I've been a HK fan since I first saw ENTER THE DRAGON in 1975, but the current state of HK cinema makes me puke. I agree totally with you about Tsui Hark and his fucking terrible effect on the kung fu movie genre. Reading the Eastern mags of the last few years has really driven me up the wall (I'm going to dismember the next cretin who recommends THE BRIDE WITH WHITE HAIR to me!!). I see red when popcorn books, like From Sex and Zen to A Bullet in the Head pour scorn on the HK movies of the 1960s and 1970s, and use kung fu films from this Golden Era as trendy target practice. I love these films.

By now, Damon, you may well ask "What the hell has this got to do with me?". Well, it was reading your pro-1960s and '70s work in OC that convinced me that there were actually other people besides myself out there, who enjoy honest-to-goodness kung fu movies, instead of the in-vogue morons & wires flicks that every other rag seems intent on venerating. So in short (which is

pretty hard on me, as I do like to write), you inspired me to do my own regular mag /Thanks for admitting it! I suspect that my work has inspired a lot of my "competition", though so few are willing to admit it. I willingly admit that my zines were influenced by oldtimers like Greg Shoemaker and Karen Schaub, and I always think it's honest to be respectful to the true innovators who inspired us.-DF/ to fly the '70s HK movie flag, and as a glorious "fuck you" to the post-Hark brigade. I'm just starting writing the second issue--and as far as content goes, the mag *Fists of Fury* will always be 70%-80% 1960s & '70s based, with 20%-30% Category 3 (I'm certainly not averse to watching naked oriental women, and my wife doesn't mind--so I get a chance to air my sleazy side). I'll send you a copy of the 2nd issue when it's done (probably in about three months time). I don't want to dilute my views and ideals, which is why I'm writing each issue; I'm no egomaniac--honest!

Finally, Damon, I can wish you and your family luck in the future. I really hope you continue doing OC, I know you're having a hard time financially; so am I, the job situation is horrendous here, and I'm unemployed (if it wasn't for Midnight Media, who have bankrolled and published the zine *Fists of Fury*, I wouldn't have a mag). But the scene wouldn't be the same without OC. Keep on fighting against the trendy tide /"The Trendy Tide" has already won, note Chow Yun Fat's mug on the cover! -DF/, Damon. And thanks, not only for standing up for your viewpoint, but for doing it for so long, and in such an enjoyable way.

All the Best,
Nick Davidson
Boathpark, Scotland

My Dearest Darling Damon--

Just picked up OC#11 and thought I'd write a wee li'l letter here. First of all, congratulations on the track record. How's it feel to be the "Grand Daddy of Asian Movie Zines?" /It makes me feel so old that I don't have false teeth; but rather, false gums. But it seems not everybody shares your viewpoint, I hear there's some NEW Asian-related zine in the NY vicinity which has the nerve to call itself, "King of the Fanzines", which is pretty pretentious for a publication so recent.-DF/

My first problem with the issue, however, was when I read the review of G-FORCE by Kevin Loneragan. I was glad you interjected a bit, but shouldn't you just edit the stupid crap out, entirely? I mean, mistakes are one thing, but this poor kid got everything wrong he possibly could in that review. A little more explanation of his review's short comings is probably in order. BATTLE OF THE PLANETS was the lame re-edited, dumbed-down version of GATCHAMAN, not the other way around as Kevin claims. It was Sandy Frank who injected 7-Zark-7 and the even more ridiculous 1-Rover-1 into the cartoon in order to make up for all the scenes of fighting and exploding they cut out to protect us

young'uns. So their removal in the version currently showing is hardly a bastardization. That's like some twerp twenty years from now getting pissed because the local channel aired POWER RANGERS original Japanese version, but they cut out all those "cool" juice bar scenes that were in the original, and replaced them with cheap, juvenile scenes of some Japanese kids. G-FORCE may have boring dubbing and music as bad as what was in Ted Turner's version of ULTRA-7, but at least the content--the fights, the people getting killed, and the explosion--are intact. I'm willing to make that trade. I know you try to afford your contributors a high degree of freedom, but you are still the editor, and maybe should flex that particular muscle as often as you flex that simply delightful sense of ironic humor.

As for the rude remarks thrown around in a review or two about the recent book *Sex and Zen* and *A Bullet in the Head*, I should take those personally, since I was a contributor to that book. However, since what I wrote (several Shaw Brothers reviews) was pretty hacked down, and since I didn't see a dime for my efforts, I couldn't care less. I think the book is "okay for beginners", which describes too much of what's going on in print now. Going at it with a guide seems boring and somewhat constricted. I think the way I and others started a long time ago was better--simply go into the video store (you may actually have to go to an ethnic store. Oh my god, my little white darlings!) and grab whatever looks interesting. You sure grab a bunch of crap, but you also grab a bunch of pretty amazing stuff. If you go by some checklist book, how will you ever know to watch MONKEY WAR?

As for that religious freak who keeps writing in--man, Damon, that guy's so goofy I thought it might be you writing to yourself, just to fill space. /I swear this is not the case, the guy really seems to exist. He did include a return address, as I remember, but naturally, I would not write to him! His letters, like other hate mail I've received, are so outrageous that as I copied it down, I feared people would think I'm putting them on! But it's real, the only fake letters are ones signed "Allen Retsof", my alias. -DF/

Anyway, keep up all that good work and everything. You may be wondering why you still haven't gotten a review copy of KUNG FU GIRL, the zine I throw together. The main reason, and the reason I tell everyone who has been waiting for it, is because I'm one lazy son of a bitch. But I will get around to it soon, I promise. I have to finish a new one first, and KUNG FU GIRL has been replaced by GARGANTUA'S LAST STAND (I was tired of getting "Are you a cute girl" letters from the fat guys), but when that happens, you're second on the list.

Have you ever reviewed THE GHOST AND MR. CHICKEN? /No, but I've mentioned it once or twice. It's possible to sit through, which I can't say about many American movies which use an occasional

karate chop.-DF/ It's got better martial arts than most American martial arts films. I bet Don Knotts could whip Van Damme's ass but good.

Keith Allison
somewhere, North Carolina

It was cool to get issue #11 of OC as it became impossible to get your zine over here. But I'll remain an OC fan as long as it exists. I write to you first to express my compliments to you, and everyone else who's involved in OC. It's as diverse as you can get as it covers more genres than any other mag and is funny to read.

Do you plan anything on the new MOTHRA, which seems to be a failure? /I myself haven't the time to obtain the video and review something which, from photos, looks stupid. Perhaps if I get stuck with it as a result of some video trade, and feel the need to fill up space, I'll review this new MOTHRA bastardization.-DF/ The new Sentai series is called MEGA-RANGERS, it's been broadcasting since 02/14/97, Fridays at 5:30 P.M. on TV Asahi, and it doesn't look so good judging by the title and costumes. The Sentai creators are really running out of ideas. /"Running out"? Those money-grubbing backs and toy peddlers haven't had an original concept in well over ten years!-DF/

I also saw ULTRAMAN ZEARTH 2 (is it a movie or a series?), the special video movie OH RANGERS VS. CAR RANGERS, and stills from ULTRAMAN TIGA, the new Ultra-series shown on TBS, Saturdays at 6:00 P.M., which I would really like to see some episodes of. The show looks great, with cool monsters and FX, and from what I gather, Ultraman would have three forms of transformation: Powered Type, March Type and Sky Type. Can you confirm this? /Yes, see my review of ULTRAMAN TIGA elsewhere in this issue. As for ULTRAMAN ZEARTH 2, it's a movie. I haven't seen that either, because I hated the first ULTRAMAN ZEARTH so much, it was every bit as bad as the American and Australian garbage which preceded it.-DF/ That's it for now, and keep up the good work.

Best Regards, Damien Martinet
Montigny, Loing
France

Dear Damon:

Just dropping you a note to say you're still doing the same kick-ass job you've always done covering the Japanese fantasy genre. If by the time this reaches you, your involvement with OC is on hold, I hope whoever is assuming the duties does it with the same conviction!

It's a little disturbing to realize there are

people that are capable of being militant over guys in big rubber monster suits. This is suppose to be entertainment, you fucking morons! I've also noticed that there seems to be a growing number of snotty, uptight fans (primarily nouveau Godzilla fans) who are turning their nose up at shows like KAMEN RIDER and ULTRAMAN! At a recent convention, I overheard two guys (who probably haven't been laid since Reagan was in office) passing by the video table where KAMEN RIDER V3 was showing, and they said, "Look at that shit! How can anyone watch that?" All I can say is, some people just don't get it, and they never will.

I did enclose a detailed flyer depicting Japanese fantasy items I'm interested in selling from my collection. If you're not interested in that /I'm not interested in that. I have no money, and have nothing left to trade; much of my prized collection was sold off just to make ends meet, in these financially pathetic times. Regardless, people interested in purchasing or trading for Godzilla T-shirts, etc., may send a self-addressed-stamped-envelope to Rich.-DF/, that's okay, but maybe you could pass it along?

Sincerely, Rich Cohen
P.O. Box 656566
Fresh Meadows, NY 11365

convention review:

WONDERCON 1997

April 26-28; Oakland Convention Center

When I was invited to attend an actual comicbook convention, I looked around and had a dumb, confused look on my face; rather like O.J. Simpson when the jury announced he was innocent. Normally, I'm as out of place at conventions as a cat in a dog kennel. But on rare occasions, I have found myself attending an occasional con, but only if I'm involved in some creative aspect, some project which makes the drive worthwhile. Back in the old days, when I was a more optimistic youngster with my whole life ahead of me, I was energetic enough to perform in mini-plays, costumed as Japanese superheroes, battling similarly costumed villains on stage for the obligatory masquerades and costume contests. Now days, it's an occasional panel discussion, usually organized by my childhood pals August Ragone and Bob Johnson of the HENSHIN newsletter. For this particular Wondercon, I was one of four speakers for the Japanese Superhero Panel, and was the cameraman who videotaped Bob & August's "Ultraman" Panel.

Other than my own involvement in the two superhero panels, I really didn't get a chance to see a whole hell of a lot, so perhaps this convention is being reviewed by an unqualified individual. I wasn't there for the masquerade, nor did I set foot anywhere near Anime Room nor the art-show, assuming there was one. So the following were the people and/or events which I did glance at once or twice:

1. The huge dealers' room. The type of place it's best to attend with no money at all, which is basically what I did. Christ, it was tempting, looking at all the cool Jackie Chan



film posters, Ultraman dolls, Godzilla stills, etc. Also on hand were of course, absolutely endless comicbooks of every variable topic and sub-topic, plenty of merchandise on both the STARS WARS and TREK, and enough Japanese cartoon crap to satisfy the hunger of even the most obese Japanese dweeb.

2. Minor celebrities. Some old lady from 1950s B-movies I guess, as well as James Hong (BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA, THE JITTERS, etc.) and Richard Hatch, who freely admits (now that takes guts!) his starring in BATTLESTAR: GALACTICA! August Ragone suggested I go up to James Hong and praise his audio dubbing for the English print of THE HUMAN VAPOR. Also on hand was a guy from the 1980s Hasbeen Metal band, Poison. Remember these rockin' transvestites, and their album, "Look What the Cat Dragged In"? Though the record did have a catchy tune or two, I always thought it should have been called "Look at These Cats in Drag".

3. Eye-magnets. Yes, eye-magnets, this is the new term I think I'll use for female breasts. Though the convention did have plenty of nasty-looking females too, there seemed to be an abundance of curvaceous cuties who, at merely a glance, made me feel a tree growing in my lap. Signing autographs was some stacked Elvira wannabe, who must have been wearing the thickest push-up bra in the world. Another stunning model was Leah Samonte, who's flyer advertized, "Live as LAVA". Is Lava a character from HERCULES, XENA: WARRIOR PRINCESS ("Forged in the Heat of Battle", no less), or some stupid sword & sorcery flick? Or is the phrase, "live as lava" an expression [referring to volcanic magma] comparable to "hotter than hell", "cold as ice", "faster than greased-lightning" or "more materialistic than Anna Nicole Smith"? Regardless, Leah Samonte supposedly appears in some book called LAVA #1, "the Book with the Grown-Up Taste".

4. Rival panels occurring in the same room as our superhero discussions. Perhaps "rival" isn't the right term, but since these other geeks attracted larger audiences, I can't help but feel intimidated. Immediately preceding us was a panel of previews for upcoming Hollywood blockbusters. While our discussion only filled up about half the room, the over-rated, mainstream big-shot films had a humongous line of people out front. These non-imaginative, anti-creative, predictable jerks can go drink the jacuzzi-water from a San Francisco bath-house, the bastards! Hell, though we all have our own tastes and preferences, it would be nice to think that at a convention such as this, most people would have some curiosity to know just what the hell is going on besides

(continued on page 52)



WU CH'ENG EN'S "MONKEY KING"



Whether you know the laughable old fable as "Journey to the West", "Hsi Yu Chi", "Sai Yao Kei", or "The Monkey King", this ancient Chinese legend is quite widespread. I assume most Buddhists are at least somewhat familiar with this comical fairy-tale. I pretty much grew up on the story via AKAKAZAM THE GREAT (Toei; 1961), but being an American dubbing, any religious references were eliminated. This really didn't matter to me either way, since I don't necessarily follow any one religion, and tend to reside somewhere between atheist and agnostic. While I'm on this topic, I thought I'd stray a little before going back into the main topic (The Monkey King). If my insightful humor doesn't appeal to you, please skip this and move on to the next paragraph. My question is: When having sex, what do diehard atheist women say during orgasm? Certainly not the common, "Oh god, oh my god!" Do they say: "Oh Darwin"? Perhaps "oh god" is used by most women, since I guess it's more polite than "Yowza!"

Wu Ch'eng En was the author of the ancient Chinese novel JOURNEY TO THE WEST, also known as THE MONKEY KING. This humorous story was written at an early time-period, possibly 7:45 a.m.! This classic oriental fairy tale is by far the most famous fable in the Far East, even more beloved & celebrated than Japan's SATOMI HAKENDEN, which is another old saga that also inspired a number of movies (i.e. MESSAGE FROM SPACE and LEGEND OF THE EIGHT SAMURAI). JOURNEY TO THE WEST is based on an actual pilgrimage which took place in the 7th century. At that time, Buddhism was a religion mostly

only practiced in India. It was a Chinese priest called Tripitaka who figured prominently in bringing this Indian religion into China. Tripitaka was a real person who went on a journey from China to India, to obtain Buddhist scriptures. Tripitaka was truly a revolutionary pioneer, the one who introduced the religion of Buddhism to China. From there, it spread to other Far Eastern countries like Korea and Japan. Tripitaka made the orient what it is today.

By the 13th century, the incidents and situations that occurred on this pilgrimage had evolved into a whole series of legends, and it was on these that novelist Wu Cheng En, in the 16th century, based his story: The novel SAI YAO KEI, translated in English as "The Journey to The West" and "The Monkey King". Exactly how a heroic monkey could get involved in an otherwise factual story is anyone's guess (perhaps in real life, maybe Tripitaka captured a monkey & a pig and kept them as pets, but I doubt it). The story is a hell of a lot more exaggerated than that though; today, the legend has gods, fairies, dragons and demons, and in some variations, sequels and off-shoots, there can be dinosaurs, vampires and giant spiders. My research indicates that no two versions are absolutely identical.

Throughout the centuries, the novel's heroic ape become the topic of many stage shows, appearing in acrobatic plays performed by the Beijing Opera, Acrobats of Canton and other musical, live performers. Eventually, the Monkey King became more well known for his live stage re-creations than the actual novel itself. Ultimately, with the arrival of celluloid, and much later video, the Monkey King and the whole JOURNEY TO THE WEST legacy would become a permanent fixture in entertainment and folklore; no generation is completely unfamiliar with him. Hell, in America today, in some elementary schools, kids have read English translated books on the Monkey King, alongside more wellknown (in the U.S.A., anyway), caucasian counterparts like ALICE IN WONDERLAND and WHINIE THE POOH. The Japanese even included characters from JOURNEY TO THE WEST in a 1986 beer commercial. The TV ad was filmed in Death Valley, Calif., and featured the British new waver Boy George playing Tripitaka. Little is known about the behind-the-scenes of the event, except that inbetween takes, she (I mean he) completely ruined the company's valuable antique robe (which he wore to play the part). Out of curiosity, does anybody out there have this commercial on tape?

Additional Monkey King re-creations are worth mentioning too: Those of us who live near Chinatowns have no doubt seen obligatory Monkey King costumes, floats & props marching in parades for Chinese New Year.

In this issue of OC, I hope to educate all you new comers on China's most famous fairy tale. This issue starts out at the beginning, with an obligatory book review to get you started on the right track. From there, the issue will go on to examine several of the movies and TV shows made throughout this century, depicting different views of this ancient folklore. Regrettably, I must exclude the earliest filmed version of the story. I doubt if 1926's MONKEY FIGHTS GOLDEN LEOPARD was ever released on video, since China does a really terrible job of preserving old B&W, silent films like this. MONKEY FIGHTS GOLDEN LEOPARD is one of the many early filmed-stageshows that has been labeled "the first martial arts film". But Thomas Edison's JAPANESE WARRIORS IN ANCIENT BATTLE SCENES came out in 1908, and France released LESSONS IN JUJITSU in 1918, so it becomes difficult to tell which is the first true martial arts movie. Another elusive Monkey King movie was a full-color, 1970s caper called FANTASTIC FLYING BABY, which allegedly had action and good special effects; but it too was not available for review. There are hundreds, possibly even thousands of live-action and animated versions of this ancient story, so including a complete filmography is absolutely positively definitely certainly impossible.

In recent years, it's annoyed me how many people have suddenly discovered the Chinese video TV series JOURNEY TO THE WEST ("Sai Yao Kei", in Chinese), as though the program is new! Hell, I reviewed it back in 1990, before INSIDE CHINA added English subtitles and broadcast the program all over the place! A few newer readers told me about this "new" series, not aware that I covered it back when OC was a home-made fanzine! Hell, I even made an issue devoted to this topic (OC: The Monkey King Issue; still available from me for \$6.00), back in the 1980s! But despite that issue, there are still people out there unfamiliar with the whole "Journey To the West/Monkey King" legend, so that's one factor which made me include this section.

The other factor is that early 1997 was a good year for Monkey King fans in the bay area, though not necessarily for me. There were three live stage-plays based on this fairy tale. The first one sounded really in-



teresting, being an American adaptation of this old Chinese folk-tale from the Peking Opera. According to local newspaper articles and press info, it was adapted & directed by Mary Zimmerman, who, having grown up in Alaska, fantasized about inventing a machine that could actually record her dreams; in order to wake up in the morning and see her fantasies come to life. Now about 37, "The theater is that machine for me", Zimmerman stated to an interviewer in the December 4, 1996 issue of The Oakland Tribune. Strangely, she also states that the story JOURNEY TO THE WEST is almost voyeuristic and sexual! Huh? "I sit in the audience and say, faster, slower, more, more, more", she stated in the interview.

According to the newspaper article, Zimmerman was at home (in Chicago) watching "The Power of Myth" by Joseph Campbell on TV. The host mentions a mischievous monkey of Chinese literature. It's rumored that even the late Mao Tse Tung admired the tricky ape, and even casted himself as the character in posters and political propaganda. Zimmerman's curiosity got the better of her, so she checked out one of the many English-translated books on JOURNEY TO THE WEST (plenty of translated novels exist, but only a handful of films & TV shows are available in English). So she adapted JOURNEY TO THE WEST from Wu Cheng En's 16th century novel involving the adventures of a traveling Buddhist priest (based loosely on an actual 7th century monk). This Zimmerman adaptation was a collaboration between the Berkeley Repertory Theater and Boston's Huntington Theater Company. The play again told us of monk Tripitaka, who traveled to India to obtain Buddhist scriptures, and along the way, teams up with a mischievous monkey, a fat pig and a river spirit called Sha Monk in this version.

Unfortunately for me, I was unable to see this play when it came to my neck of the woods! It played from Dec. 4, 1996, to January 19, 1997, and by the time I got up off my ass to order tickets, they were sold out for the full final week of the performance! I never would have expected this, not being much of a "live stage-play" type of person myself. I had assumed there would be at least a few empty seats, much like at the movies! Little did I know! A month or two later, an actual Chinese troupe came touring and performed a more authentic, traditional version of it. But once more, I found out too late, and missed out. My third and final opportunity was a shortlived version put on by local performers from something called "Asian Story Theater", it appears to be for children, and was about the Monkey King meeting his Hindu counterpart, in Hanuman and the Monkey King. This in particular would have been thrilling, since the Indian monkey god Hanuman is best known to OC readers for his teaming up with Ultraman in THE SIX ULTRA BROTHERS VS. THE MONSTER ARMY, and it's also rumored (though never proven) that the character was depicted in a Kamen Rider featurette. But alas, the stage-play

only lasted for a few days, and my busy life didn't permit me the luxury of attending.

I have, in fact, only seen one live Monkey King stagemovie. I saw it from the point of view of the Monkey King himself, since I myself portrayed Sun Wu Kung as part of a costume contest at a science fiction convention back in the 1980s. My friends played the other characters: Perry Wong as Wu Ching/Sandy, the late Danny Pastor as Pa Chieh/Pigsy, and Mike Salemi was the Tang Priest/Tripitaka. Keeping in tradition with the original concept, we concentrated on humor until the villainous demons (Ken Ko, Barrie Evans, Tony Del Grosso) attacked us. From this point on, we concentrated

THE MONKEY KING

A Book Review: Author: Wu Ch'eng-En, Edited by Zdena Novota, Translated by George Theiner, Illustrated by Zdenek Shiener, and published by Paul Hamlyn of Westbook House at Fullham Broadway (London), Printed by P.Z. Bratislava (in Czechoslovakia), Reviewed by Damon Foster

After seeing numerous movies based on this ancient tale of magic and comedy, I decided, what the hell, I may as well read the humorous novel, which I thought was called "Journey to the West". So I looked into the computerized data at a local library, to see if they had the book in question. Their selection of novels had no such title. So I key entered the name of the novel's author, Wu Ch'eng-En. I was surprised to see how many Chinese authors listed had "Wu" starting their names. All these Wus got me confused while looking at the vast listings, I felt like I was trapped in a maze; that which you call "corn". But seriously, I was amused that the only entry for Wu Ch'eng-En was a book miss-labled "The Money King", obviously a missinterpretation of "The Monkey King". So I notified the librarian of this error, and then rented the book. How dissapointing to read in the book's credits that this English edition from 1964 was translated into English from the so-called "original Czech version"! In 1961, this Czech edition was taken from the original (?) Chinese version. With the Czechoslovakian publishing company Artia as middlemen, it would help to explain the mysterious change in title from Journey to the West to The Monkey King. Actually, both titles are appropriate. But like that other wellknown novel, The Holy Bible, certain things always end up changed with each translation.

The changes in the case of The Monkey King would appear to be only slight, since it has striking similarities with its equally comedic, theatrical counterparts. The only thing that immediately comes to mind as far as innacuracy goes is in one chapter, there's mention of rifles! I don't believe they had guns in China during the 7th century, though I could be mistaken. But I can safely say that no movies regarding this saga ever used such fire-arms. Otherwise, this 331 page book seemed to fit in with the movies

on martial arts and acrobatics. Our costumes were okay, the dialogue was funny, and the fight was fairly well-choreographed. We didn't receive first, second, third or fourth place, nor did we get any sort of consolation prize or honorable mention. The winner was a lackluster performance. Some frumpy looking girl wearing what resembled a Burger King uniform, but as I understand it, this bland, simple attire was based on some Japanese cartoon called FIVE STAR STORIES. The fact that more people have heard of some obscure cartoon than there are people familiar with a classic, ancient novel is exactly why so much of this issue is concentrating on the Monkey King's JOURNEY TO THE WEST.

on the same subject. As a detailed novel, it is much more intricate and exact than any movie, due to the limited amount of time most movies may last. In 331 pages, a lot more can be said than in a mere feature length film, pressured to be about an hour and a half long, because of the audience's limited attention span, as well as budgetary limitations. The Monkey King was quite useful to me, because it answered many questions I had which were never explained in the movies. But I recall one thing which I didn't like, and that was how briefly and inefficiently Pigsy and Sandy are introduced. In filmed versions, by the time these two important characters set out on their journey with Tripitaka and Sun Wu Kung, we are already familiar with both of them. But in the case of this book, they both just seem to pop out of nowhere, with only a brief discussion of their backgrounds. Movies also usually include Pigsy's proposed marriage to a reluctant Chinese girl, as well as his over-all hornyness (the character is undeniably the most sexually frustrated of the foursome). Both these aspects of the story aren't in this English version of the novel, yet are included in many of the movies. I suppose they were edited out, either in the English or Czech translations. Other minor adjustments may have been made, but on the whole, reading The Monkey King has been an enlightening experience for me. If you are just starting to get into the silly Journey to The West legacy, you may wish to consider seeking out and reading some version of the novel (several English translations & versions exist) before going on to watch a movie like MONKEY WAR.

I really thought the artwork for The Monkey King was trashy. I could draw better than that when I was in 3rd grade. Hell, when I was in 3rd grade, I was told I had the drawing capability of a 5th grader; and I'm proud to say, I still do! It's not enough that the drawings (in this book) are simple & primitive, but they frequently ignore what's in the rest of the story, thereby giving the impression that whoever did the crummy drawings did not follow the written material all that closely. An example of this contradiction is a description of Pigsy claiming he has tusks. There are no tusks on any of the drawings of this character.

The actual story of this funny book can not be squeezed into this article, nor could the whole saga fit in this magazine; there's no way in hell's bathroom that I could possibly afford to make OC a whopping 331 pages long! But I can give a brief plot description, consisting of the basics that helped affect the movies:

Once upon a time in the 2nd century, there was a magic stone created by the legendary creator, P'an Ku, as well as the many other gods in Heaven. This mystical stone was designed to be a savior to the Earth, one which would eliminate evil. It was located on the Mountain of Many Flowers. One day, the rock burst open and gave birth to a stone egg. Fertilized by the wind, the egg came to life and changed into a powerful monkey, who they called the "Stone Monkey". His extreme strength, wisdom & bravery lead him to be the leader of a tribe of monkeys who resided at the Mountain of Many Flowers. His simian followers called him the Monkey King. But this Stone Monkey King wasn't content with being a leader & powerful warrior among mere monkeys. He sought to improve himself, to become invincible, immortal, and a master of magic powers. So the Monkey King left his tribe and traveled to far away lands. In the many years that followed, the monkey learned from the Patriarch Subodhi assorted magical powers, including molecular transformation, cloud-flying (making a cloud which flies and standing on it), and the secrets of being immortal.

It took many years to learn all this, and upon his eventual return to his clan of monkeys, he discovered they were being attacked routinely by the King of Demons. In a fair fight, Monkey defeats the King Demon for revenge, but then goes on a power trip. From there, he stole a powerful weapon called an "iron cudgel" (actually a staff) from the undersea palace of the oceanic Dragon King. Now both invincible and undefeatable, Monkey makes a little visit to hell to scratch his name off the death list. From there, Monkey decides to challenge Heaven itself. To keep the egotistical ape under control, the gods agree to hire him there. He chooses his own title, "Great Sage, Equal of Heaven"! The Great Sage causes lots of havoc in Heaven, including eating all the magic sacred peaches in one of Heaven's orchards. This action, and many other thefts causes the disrespectful monkey to get many enemies in Heaven, who insist on disciplining him. Numerous battles occur, as the invincible monkey defeats all comers. He meets his match when he confronts the almighty Buddha. Buddha outsmarts the impulsive simian and as punishment, he has the so-called Great Sage imprisoned under the Mountain of the Five Elements.

Five hundred years later, a Chinese priest called Hsuan Tang has begun a long journey from China to India to obtain a series of Buddhist scriptures known as Tripitaka. So from that point on, Hsuan Tang was to be known by the Indian name, Tripitaka. Yet the

journey to the west would be a hazardous one that the lone priest couldn't possibly survive on his own. During his travels, Tripitaka encounters Monkey, still trapped underground with only his head sticking out. Buddha had placed a magical talisman (piece of paper with a spell written on it) on the ground which kept Monkey from being able to dig himself out. And so the Monkey King pleaded with Tripitaka to remove the seal & release him, claiming he'd repent and accompany the benevolent priest on his long, dangerous voyage. Tripitaka, desperate for a guardian, removes the seal of Buddha and he & Monkey set off on their lengthy pilgrimage to India. Monkey is officially given a religious name, Sun Wu Kung. But despite Tripitaka's releasing Sun Wu Kung, he's still impulsive and violent. To stop Monkey Sun from killing every person who threatens Tripitaka in the slightest, a magical gold ring is placed around Sun Wu Kung's head. Now Tripitaka can force Sun to behave better, by doing a chant which makes the golden headband inflict pain on the monkey's scalp and forehead.

During the course of their journey, the duo is joined by two other magical warriors of dismissed status, who were also exiled from Heaven by Buddha. Both these former angels agreed to assist our two heroes on their long voyage to the west. They are an aquatic cannibal called Sandy, and a pig-demon called Pigsy. The remainder of their story varies in different versions, but what they all have in common is that the characters are always battling evil demons as they protect Tripitaka. It seems that anyone who eats the flesh of this noble priest will become as immortal as the Great Sage himself. So naturally, every demon from China to India would like to take a bite out of him. And so Sun Wu Kung and his magical staff, aided by Pigsy and Sandy, battle and outsmart the denizens of evil until finally reaching India, thus obtaining the long sought after Buddhist scrolls which would then introduce this Indian religion to China. And I assume they all lived happily ever after.

Like I said before, my synopsis of Wu Cheng En's saga is an over simplification. I excluded many details which some may consider important to the story, like Pigsy's weapon being a rake. This is actually an important aspect, since I have never seen any versions of the story which did not feature this detail. However, the character of Sandy seems less defined, there's a little variation in this character, depending on which version you read or watch. Another detail I didn't go into was the battle with the bull-demon and his wife; seems our heroes want this evil couple's magical fan, to put out a massive forest fire. I mention this particular conflict because it seems to be a personal favorite of movie writers; while other chapters (in this novel) are virtually ignored in most scripts.

Regardless, assuming you've just read my condensed version of Wu Cheng En's *Journey to the West*, you now the important basics of this ancient fantasy/adventure.



MONKEY MOVIES

No filmography of Monkey King productions can be complete. To the best of my knowledge, nobody else in the English world has ever tried an undertaking like this; compiling an informative, comprehensive listing of Monkey King programs & flicks. Considering how popular & old the fable is, I find this distressing; to think that virtually not a single soul in the Western world has had the interest in preserving this one-of-a-kind genre, it really concerns me and makes me wonder. I find it more disturbing than Rosie O'donnel in a G-string. But regardless, this selection of Monkey King movies and TV shows is, unfortunately, presented in alphabetical order. This is confusing and difficult, since most versions of the story have the same title-- Chinese name: SAI YAO KEI, Japanese name: SAIYUKI, English name: JOURNEY TO THE WEST. So whenever possible, I tried to present opposing titles & alternate translations to differentiate between them. Good examples are two Japanese productions, both called SAIYUKI. One SAIYUKI is the feature-length cartoon from the early 1960s, and another is the completely different, live action TV show from 1978. Since the 1960s movie is known to us Americans as ALAKAZAM THE GREAT, that's what I'll hereby refer to it as. The 1978 series, however, never got released to America, so although English prints (shown in Europe, Australia and San Juan) are called "Monkey", I'll refer to it here as SAIYUKI (despite numerous Japanese movies with the same SAIYUKI title; confused yet?), to avoid confusion with Chinese movie titles like THE MONKEY and MONKEY WAR.

「西遊記」

ALAKAZAM THE GREAT

A Toei Production; 1961, Scenario: Keinosuke Uegusa, Dir: Taiji Yabushita &

Osamu Tezuka, Written by Osamu Tezuka & Keinosuke Uekusa, Produced by Hiroshi Okawa, Komei Ishikawa, & Kenji Sugiyama, Co-Dir.: Daisaku Shirakawa, Artwork & Color: Hajime Numai, Masaaki Yano, Koichi Maeba, Backgrounds by Eiko Sugimoto, Saburo Yokai, Kazuko Ozawa, Matabi Urata, & Kimiko Saito, American Version by Lou Roussoff & Lee Kressel, Produced by Lou Roussoff, Music: Les Baxter, Sound Editor: Kay Rose, An American International Release, Reviewed by Damon Foster



You all remember this one, don't 'ya? ALAKAZAM THE GREAT is the only version of Journey to the West ever released to America with an English dubbing—not including the loosely related DRAGON BALL Z cartoon; and then of course there's Japan's SAIYUKI TV show from 1979 (English dubbing yes, but never legitimately shown in the USA). ALAKAZAM THE GREAT is a theatrical, feature-length cartoon which was released to America by James H. Nicholson (of American International Pictures) along with other Japanese, animated flicks like ALI-BABA AND THE SEVEN WONDERS OF THE WORLD and SINBAD THE SAILOR in the early 1960s. Its American release was accompanied by a wacky array of promotional products featured at theaters, like 9" tall Amazon plush monkeys, 9" x 10" color posters, hand puppets, and rings featuring pictures of the Monkey King (here dubbed "Alakazam the Great"; hence the title). Managers of the theaters showing ALAKAZAM THE GREAT could rent an 11 foot helium balloon which would hover over the theater advertising: "Alakazam is Coming to Town". One ludicrous promotion gimmick that never actually happened was the idea of American International to have real live caged monkeys on display in the lobbies of theaters! Going a step beyond that cruelty was an impossible idea of selling these unfortunate simians for a mere \$20.00 each!

ALAKAZAM THE GREAT was chosen to be in a book called The 50 Worst Films of All Time made by Harry Medved and Randy Dreyfuss. The flick is no masterpiece, but I disagree with them quite strongly in labeling it one of the fifty worst films. Now, personally, if I were listing my choice of fifty worst films, ALAKAZAM THE GREAT would come nowhere near my list, which would be cluttered with sappy crap like THE CURSE OF BIG FOOT, the BLOODFIST series, PLAN 9 FROM OUTERSPACE, BLESS THE BEASTS AND THE CHILDREN, EVITA, A FISH CALLED WANDA, PETE'S DRAGON, 90% of all the movies in the Philippines, and THE BREAKFAST CLUB (and any other movie featuring Molly Ringworm). Instead the book lists a bunch of movies I've never heard of, like DONDI, THE GOLDWYN FOLLIES, and THE LOST HORIZON. Aside from ALAKAZAM, they also included two other films I enjoyed: HORROR OF PARTY BEACH and the classic (that's right! Classic!) GODZILLA VS. THE SMOG MONSTER, a movie I love, and it's not a "guilty plea-

sure"! So when a book like The 50 Worst Films of All Time has the nerve to trash fun Japanese movies like ALAKAZAM THE GREAT and GODZILLA VS. THE SMOG MONSTER, their viability as film critics is put in jeopardy; these idiots can't be taken seriously because they've not seen the whole picture—they've haven't seen a lot of Filipino & Indian movies. The title of the book should have been Our 50 Least Favorite Movies which Have been Released to America Because We're Lazy Mainstreamers Who don't Know What the Fuck We're Talking About. In short, anybody who's not seen at least five Filipino movies is in no position to judge when a movie is one of the worst.

American film critics didn't have much nice to say about ALAKAZAM either, according to The 50 Worst Films of All Time (if nothing else, the guys did an excellent job at researching their book; even if they're tastes aren't flawless like mine), here are some quotes: "Well, not likely to put Disney out of business. -Philip T. Hartung, Commonweal". "Bomb! Lowest rating! Dull. Japanese cartoon with American actors doing the voices might have been more appealing in Japanese. A bad excuse for children's entertainment. -Leonard Martin, TV Movies." "Grueling, ponderous. -Motion Picture Herald." So much for critics.

I ceased being a fan of Japanese cartoons (or, snicker, uh, "anime", as the geeks & couch potatoes like to call them) at about the same time that overrated UCHU SENKAN YAMATO became STARBLAZERS in America. When I saw those trendy nerds & dorks forming clubs like the Cartoon Fantasy Organization (which, I must confess to being a member of early on; guilty as charged!), I decided that as far as I was concerned, the Japanese animation scene was no longer a chic (a "sell-out" thing; I'm going through it again with all the hype for HK movies today) underground cult, but a laughable fad, full of the squarest bunch of REVENGE OF THE NERDS rejects imaginable. So now I don't think too highly of animation, although ALAKAZAM THE GREAT is one of the better ones, in my often-scoffed-at (and rightly so) opinion. ALAKAZAM has great art & animation, and it's quite colorful and imaginative. Regardless, the advantages cartoons have over live action are evident. The result makes ALAKAZAM seem like the most imaginative of the Monkey King flicks, since

doing all these colorful effects and costumes in real life would have cost a fortune. For the first time, Piggy (Pa Chieh, Hakai, etc.) doesn't look like a man in a costume, but a real pig; though a one-dimensional one.

The fact that it's based on an ancient novel makes it intriguing. For the semi-original Japanese version, none of the original Chinese names (Sun Wu Kung, Pa Chieh, etc.) are kept, since Japanese have such difficulty pronouncing Chinese names. Sun Wu Kung's Japanese name is Goku (sometimes "San Goku"), Pa Chieh is Hakai (pronounced "Hawk-Eye", like Allen Alda's character in M.A.S.H.; one stupid show if you ask me), Tripitaka is Oshu, and Wu Ching is Gojo. The script for this flick is loosely based on the novel, but with nearly the whole story squeezed and condensed to fit the mere length of a theatrical film. The religious story begins with the Stone Monkey (now called Goku) demonstrating his bravery, so he gets to be king of monkeys. There's no flashback to the stone egg he hatched from, as described in the original book. From the point of his attaining status as Monkey King, we see rushed stories about his learning magic and cloud-flying, eating Heaven's peaches, getting imprisoned by Buddha, going on his pilgrimage with Oushu, fighting then befriending Gojo & Hakai and then they all battle the evil buffalo demon and use his magic fan to put out a disastrous volcanic fire. Also present is the obligatory scene of characters getting sucked up by a magical bottle, and when Monkey lets an enemy swallow him to cause stomach pain. The finale depicts our heroes' arrival at India where they're greeted by Buddha. As a comedy, ALAKAZAM unapologetically mishmashes cultures and technology which the story itself predates. Unlikely aspects include TVs, telephones, a groom's suit & tie, and bullfighting. Fortunately, all these advanced traditions are added exclusively as in-jokes, and don't upset an otherwise ancient setting.

The American version, naturally has all the characters names changed once again. In English, the Monkey King is not referred to by any oriental name, such as Sun Wu Kung or Goku. His new American name is Alakazam of course. Tripitaka/Oushu is known as Prince Amat by American fans, and Sandy/Wu Ching/Gojo is now called Max Lupipolo, and the most ridiculous Americanization of all is Piggy's translation from Pa Chieh, then to Hakai, and now, get

this: Sir Quiggly Broken Bottom! The English names of the villains are rather stupid as well. Other changes in the version include the musical soundtrack, though some music remains the same in both versions. An example is the scene where Alakazam/Goku battles the two McSnarl Brothers. In both versions (I watched both the Japanese & English prints, side by side), the same Chinese music is played, the kind of opera music that sounds like somebody rolling a metal bucket down a flight of stairs. Other original Japanese music has been replaced by inferior music by Les Baxter. I do, actually, prefer some of the American ballads over the singing in the Japanese version. The original Japanese songs (did I fail to mention this is a musical?), aside from being in Japanese are just too oldfashioned, so the English version features a few songs by Frankie Avalon as replacement. Frankie Avalon sung a song or two, but contrary to popular opinion, did not dub Alakazam's voice for the dialogue scenes. Alakazam's voice is that of Peter Fernandez (SPEED RACER, INFRAMAN, SON OF GODZILLA and countless other voice-overs).

There were a few edits for the English adaptation, such as two quick cuts removing deaths (in the Japanese version, a deer is covered in lava, and a demon falls into a boiling pot) and another puzzling adjustment: Footage of celebrating demons (from the film's end) was spliced out of its proper spot and placed in the film's beginning for what is meant to be the monkeys having a party of their own as they cheer on whoever is brave enough to jump down the waterfall. It's never explained why the evil demons would play drums and party with the monkeys, who, in the remainder of the film, are rivals! It's a useless, confusing alteration. Equally silly was the drastic change in overall theme: The American releasers were paranoid that the original story about the origins of Buddhism might be boycotted by Christian religious fanatics I guess (yeah right; like a cartoon will

convert kiddies into Buddhists?!), so the whole story was changed from an ancient religious story to a "be nice to your neighbor" story. But then, when you get right down to it, isn't that what Buddhism is all about?

Once upon a time there was a mythical kingdom called Majutso Land (China) which had a tribe of monkeys lead by Alakazam, who got his job by proving his bravery, by jumping off a waterfall. He seeks to better himself so he leaves his kingdom by the waterfall and seeks out Merlin the Wizard (Patriarch Subhodi). After Merlin teaches him "Transformations" (you remember Maya from SPACE: 1999?), magic and self-defense, he decides to become king of Majutsu Land by challenging the mighty King Amo (Buddha), so he goes to the heavenly abode of King Amo and his first stop is a tree of forbidden fruit, which he helps himself to. He's immediately attacked by guards, including Hercules. It's during this series of fights that he obtains his new weapon (cudgel) from an opponent (no mention of the Dragon King or his underwater kingdom that the staff originally came from) and keeps it as his own. Then Alakazam takes on King Amo himself. Like all versions, the ape thinks he's escaped so he leaves his mark on five long pillars which turn out to be Buddha's, I mean, King Amo's hand. Alakazam gets locked in a cave, but there's a small hole to the outside world so that his girlfriend (an ape that's not in any other version) Didi can give him chestnuts to eat. But it's not long before King Amo's wife (Kuan Yin) arrives and announces her son Prince Amat (Tripitaka) is on a pilgrimage. Alakazam will be freed, so he can accompany the priest, I mean Prince Amat. Amat arrives and does a prayer causing Alakazam's imprisoning cave to vanish. The released ape is reluctant to go along, so Amat throws (like a frisbee) a magical gold ring at him. The metallic headband magically hovers around the confused and curious primate and then

lowers itself onto his head, planting itself there. Pain is inflicted if Alakazam refuses to attend the pilgrimage. Shortly after Alakazam bids farewell to Didi, he and the prince encounter the monstrous pig Sir Quiggly Broken Bottom (voice of Johnathon Winters) who is intent on marrying a teenage girl against her will. Alakazam impersonates her and plays games with Sir Quiggly Broken Bottom. When the unaware pig claims he is tougher than Alakazam, the egotistical monkey loses his temper and reveals his true form. After a battle, the magic ape pursues the magic pig to a cave inhabited by three other demons, the McSnarl Brothers and a horned kid (similar to the one in A STORY OF CHINESE GODS) called Fester. Fester escapes, but Alakazam defeats both McSnarl Brothers. Sir Quiggly Broken Bottom surrenders and offers his assistance on the pilgrimage. Fester reports to King Gruesome (an orange-eyed bull) that Alakazam is a threat. By this time, our heroes have been joined by a 4th pilgrim who originally tried to eat them. He's an aborigine cannibal called Max Lulipolo (Sandy, Wu Ching, Gojo, etc.) who's palace was in the middle of a desert (this version ignores other versions, where the character lives underwater). Now that all four heroes are finally united, they team up against King Gruesome and his demonic followers. Fester ends up helping our heroes out, having turned against the villains when cheated. Then the heroes travel again briefly, and reach their destination and are welcomed by King Amo. As a reward for having learned virtue and the like, King Amo makes Alakazam's disciplining ring of pain vanish. The story ends with Alakazam's return to Didi (asleep at the kingdom by the waterfall), where they all live happily ever after, and all that.

** -DF

CHINESE ODESSY PART 1: PANDORA'S BOX

1994, Mei Ah Laser Disk Co., Starring



孫
悟
空

THE MONKEY KING

[a.k.a. Sun Wu Kung, Monkey Sun, Wu-kung, Wukong, Wu-kong, Great Sage: Equal of Heaven, San Goku, Goku, Monkey, Stone Monkey, Alakazam the Great]

According to novelist Wu Ch'eng En's book, SAI YAO KEI, this fictional character, the heroic ape was created by elemental forces of nature to quell havoc, should it occur. So Sun Wu Kung hatches from the earth's rock and instinctively sought to better himself, in order to eventually battle evil (not that he was aware of why he wanted to acquire such powers), since none of Heaven's fates or destinies happen by accident. His arrogant nature and superb magical skills were a bad combination until he was enlightened & disciplined by a Buddhist monk.

Right: Editor Damon Foster as the Monkey King in a stage show.



Stephen Chow Sing Chi, Ng Man Dat, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Most certainly one of the most dreadful Monkey King ripoffs I've had the severe displeasure of sitting through. Though it's obvious that the Monkey King and the Longevity Monk are important points to the script, there's absolutely way too much idiotic filler, pointless meandering and constant distracting; it's a wonder why they even bothered to make this irrelevant mess. Despite minimal involvement of the Monkey King, *A CHINESE ODESSY PART 1: PANDORA'S BOX* is little more than yet another nonsensical period-fantasy about suspension-wires in old China, so what we basically got is a somewhat more humorous version of *THE BRIDE WITH WHITE HAIR*. If, however, you're like 99% of the HK fandom and love the fishing-line exploits of *THE BRIDE WITH WHITE HAIR* and its pretentious ilk, you're really missing out if you've not seen *A CHINESE ODESSY PART 1: PANDORA'S BOX*. However, if you're like me, and have been into HK fantasies nearly your whole life, and were raised on genuine, no-nonsense Monkey King thrillers and kung fu motion-pictures you can pass on this one. Like so many other HK fantasies of the 1990s, *A CHINESE ODESSY PART 1: PANDORA'S BOX* remains a thrill for new-comers exclusively.

But despite the pretentious approach and highly formulized (needless details abound; the writers apparently have a lot of time on their hands) script, the whole atmosphere is nearly saved by the comedic antics of HK's #1 comedy team of cinema; Steven Chiau and Ng Man Dat. Not all their gags in this comedy are funny, in fact most of them fall pretty flat- but there are indeed a couple decent chuckles to be had here. Had the movie been a little shorter, and the abundant dialogue scenes not been so much of a hindrance, *A CHINESE ODESSY #1* could have been damn near watchable; I came very, very close to enjoying it.

The best thing, as always for current HK crap, is the over all production and/or continuity. The lighting, cinematography and photography are as good as that of any Hollywood flick. The special effects are nice too, especially the monsters: Long haired, zombie-like demons (slick make-up appliances guaranteed to scare the little-uns), and taking a little tradition from older, superior Monkey King movies, we have the obligatory bull demon (and his magical fan), plus a couple women who can become monstrous spiders that reminded me of Spiga from *SON OF GODZILLA* (Toho; 1968). These nasty critters, and a few other special effects make this film border on being decent, and I hear there's a chopped-up, condensed English dubbed version of both *PANDORA'S BOX* and its sequel combined, which I imagine is the best version of this story; if ever there was a movie series which needed to be condensed, it's this one!

Granted, the martial arts fights (few and far-between) suck; they're artificial, and rely solely on suspension wires and stunt

doubles- they're every bit as lame as those in the never ending *BRIDE WITH WHITE HAIR* legacy, and all that *FUNG SAI YUK* garbage. But, this is a fantasy, and as such, these oberblown theatrics are forgivable. The kung fu kicks are almost all from mid-air spins and typical wire effects, which, if not overdone such as this, can be quite amusing. Fights like this, and the crazy-ass films which shove them down our throat, are obviously made for people who've never actually taken lessons in kung fu or karate. Though I've not taken a class in well over ten years, I still work out occasionally (enough to consider myself a martial artist), and being a practitioner of the arts, it's so hard for me to accept these gravity-defying stunts. But non-martial artists, like overweight couch-potatos, can more easily accept this bullshit style of fight choreography. My one compliment is on some of the flick's swordplay; when given a chance, them stunt-doubles sure can swing them swords both quickly and skillfully.

Plot is typically overdone with the usual pointless, endless, post-Tsui Hark technicalities and infinitely tedious dialogue which goes absolutely nowhere; and Steven Chow's Cantonese one-liners (hardy har har) don't help matters much. For what it's worth, Chow plays a bandit leader who is suspected of being the reincarnated Monkey King, a stupid concept seeing as the Monkey King was invincible and immortal, he was never to have died! Chow has re-occurring dreams of being the legendary ape, returning to his cave at the waterfall where the tribe of monkeys await his return. Meanwhile, it's briefly suspected that Ng Man Dat, another bandit, is the new Pigsy, though we virtually never see him in full pig makeup. Their pointless shenanigans with their bandit clan are made all the more stretched-out when a couple demonic women, actually monstrous spiders, came to hassle everyone. But things get confusing here, it's hard to tell whether these spider fairies are good or bad, they can't decide whether they wish to kill or romance our two heroes. But wait, there's more confusion; as though we don't had enough un compelling characters to yawn at, along comes some more bull. This can be taken two ways; both as the film being absolutely full of B.S., or the return of the demonic bull and his minions, who are up to no good. Eventually, our two confused heroes (still uncertain of their previous lives) team up with the spider women to battle the monstrous bull army, and it gets vaguely exciting at one point. * -Damon Foster

CHINESE ODESSY PART 2: CINDERELLA

Mei Ah Laser Disk Co., Starring: Stephen Chow Sing Chi, Ng Man Dat, Reviewed by Damon Foster

The first one was pretty bad, but this worthless piece of shit is a classic example of why HK cinema, in the early 1990s, lost whatever reputation it once had implying "The Golden Age of HK Cinema", their cool phase is well behind them. First



YUE HUA 岳華

[Yo Hua, Yueh Hwa]

Year of Birth: 1942

Place of Birth: Canton, China

He made his starring debut in 1965's *THE MONKEY*, aka *MONKEY GOES TO THE WEST*, *SAI YAO KEI*, and *SAIYUKI*, a Shaw Brothers musical/fantasy movie. His comedy, singing, acting and basic martial arts-inspired capabilities in this motion picture made him the most popular star of 1960s sword-fantasies (until Jimmy Wang Yu scored it big). Despite his success as *THE MONKEY*, he became most wellknown for his role as a hero in 1966's *COME DRINK WITH ME*, which, in 1997, was voted (by who I don't know) one of the ten best films in the world. He's been in numerous films and starred in a popular TV drama. In 1990, he and his family immigrated to Canada.

THE WARLORD AND THE ACTRESS (1964)
THE MONKEY (1966)
COME DRINK WITH ME (1966)
INTIMATE CONFESSIONS OF A CHINESE COURTESAN (1971)
SEVEN BLOWS OF THE DRAGON (1972)
PAYMENT IN BLOOD (1972)
AMAZONS AND SUPERMEN (1974)
MONKEY KUNG FU (1976)
IN THE LINE OF DUTY 3 (1988)



of all, just look at the flick's ridiculous title; calling the first one "Pandora's Box" was one thing, I mean, sure, that's dumb too, since Pandora's Box is a myth of western origin— but at least there's an object in the script which is vaguely (at best) similar to Pandora's Box. But to call part two "Cinderella"? Huh? Just what moron wrote this title? And is this the same moron who wrote a long, nonsensical, incredibly talky, needlessly technical script such as this? Nothing in this useless farce makes any sense; most of the time, they're trying to make us believe it's a romantic fantasy, and then, at awkward moments, scenes of humor are thrown in; possibly to break the monotony.

For what it's worth, some of the jokes are funny. Taking a cue from the Zucker Brothers's *HOT SHOTS*, the priest Tripitaka (here subtitled the "Longevity Monk") suddenly just starts singing that old song, "Only You" partially in Chinese. This monk, by the way, tends to annoy all the characters with his Buddhist philosophy and constant rambling; this is a running gag throughout the flick. In the scenes where he's talking to the Bull Demons, and they react by committing suicide, scenes from the first *AIRPLANE* movie came to mind. Also amusing are scenes of characters' personalities being transferred to each others' bodies, though even this gets over done and merely adds to the confusion later on, since the movie is packed with characters, some are sisters, and some die but come back to life.

The only worthwhile elements, in my mind, are the production values and "flash" quick-fix aspects. By now you all know I'm a sucker for action and monsters. In the action department, there are a couple swordfights which are okay. As for the creatures and effects, it's the animal masks, when shown, that almost make the movie worth sitting through. The Monkey King himself finally gets decent screen time to-

ward the end, and there are neat-looking animal masks on some of the creatures, in scenes which reminded me of *ALICE'S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND* (Britain; 1971).

Script? Story? Plot? Forget it! I'm sure a novice, jaded, HK-fanatical techno-geek has enough obsession in his or her brain to watch this mess several times and comprehend every little detail and aspect to this confusing maze (that which you call "corn"), and could honestly give you an accurate description of what the fuck this terrible film is all about. I, however, have a life and can't be bothered with trying to decipher every hairbrain-scripted, moronically written HK film (a description which can be applied to most new HK movies, these days) that comes out this week. But as far as I can tell, the Monkey King is in the form of a reincarnated Steven Chow, who can't decide which of the babes he wants to romance, and in the meantime, can't tell who his friends or enemies are. There are flashbacks, maybe a dream sequence or two, and a little time-traveling, which adds to the headache-inducing tedium. Eventually, he turns back into the Monkey King in time to help rescue Piggy, Sandy, the Longevity Monk, and the Spider Witches (who are his enemies in every other version of the story) from the army of Bull Demons. It's cool when the Monkey King multiplies himself (a staple in the story and several films) into several Monkey Kings, via strands of hair he pulled from his head, to battle the army of bull creatures. But even this is ruined when everyone suddenly decides to forsake *JOURNEY TO THE WEST* for yet another ripoff of *A CHINESE GHOST STORY* in its ilk. So on the whole, despite a couple watchable sequences, *CHINESE ODDNESS PART 2: CINDERELLA* is a miserable farce to be avoided at all costs.

-Damon Foster



Shibayama, Asst. Dir.: Daikijiro Kambu, Dir. of Prod.: Sadayoshi Tominiaga, Layout: Toshiyuki Honda, Art Dir.: Tadamichi Takano, Voices: Nobuyo Oyama, Noriko Obara, Michiko Nomura, Kazuya Takekabe, Kenta Kansuki, Reviewed by D. Foster

Another feature-length cartoon from Japan, but unlike *ALAKAZAM*, this one has no translation. What we have here is sort of a satirical look at the classic Chinese story. And what better way to spoof something than with Doraemon, an icon of modern Japanese pop culture (or at least, he was back in the late 1980s or early 1990s, when this flick was made)? This loveable cartoon character has had his own weekly TV series for quite a while, not to mention a number of theatrical movies such as this one. Doraemon is no superhero, but more of a comedic cartoon character of the same basic idea as Bugs Bunny, Donald Duck, Scooby Doo, Felix the Cat, Crusader Rabbit, Howard Stern, Roger Rabbit, and that stupid mouse with the shorts. I haven't felt compelled to watch *DOREAMON* repeats since my stay in Tokyo (and even then, I wasn't compelled to watch them that often) a great many years ago, nor have I the time to rent the other feature-length Doraemon comedies. Amazingly, my life has still been fulfilling, for the most part. So my knowledge of this cartoon is limited; but then, so is yours I assume, so you won't put up much of a fight. But from watching this here animated movie, I gather Doraemon to be a magical cat from outerspace who somehow ends up living with a family of humans in a typical suburban Tokyo household.



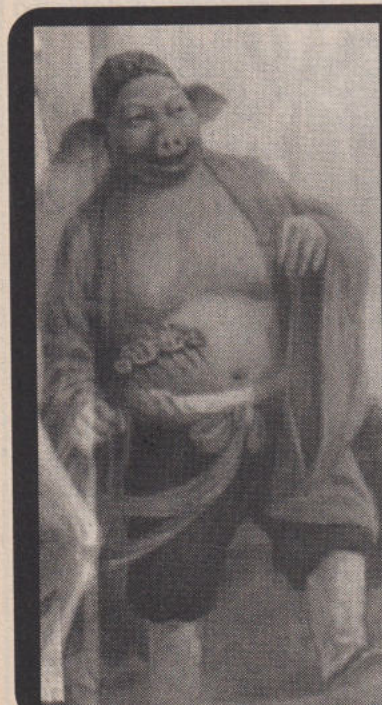
DOREAMON, NOBITA NO PARARERU SAIYUKI

["Doraemon & Nobita's Paralell Journey to the West"] Produced by Toei, Original Writer: Fujio Katsushii, Dir.: Tsutomu

PIGSY

[aka Pa Chieh, Bajieh, "The Pig Demon", "Pig Monster", Hakai, Sir Quiggly Broken-bottom]

A rake wielding pig who also happens to be a womanizer?! Obviously a fictional character! But he's much more than that! A former angel who misbehaved, indulging in gluttony and lust. Angered, Heaven's Jade Emperor banished him to Earth, figuring, "If you'll behave like a fat pig, you might as well be one." Like the monkey, this rake-wielding pig has abundant magic and combat skills.



The artwork is perhaps a smidgen lower in quality than that of most of the post-SPEED RACER cartoons, anything from MAZINGA Z to AKIRA. As a somewhat childish cartoon, the movie prefers a more infantile art style, comparable to ASTROBOY or OBAKE NO Q TARO. The animation comes off as comparatively poor, but that's because I watched this movie at about the same week I sat through AKIRA, which has excellent quality, as far as animation goes (I thought the rest of it sucked). The other interesting production value for DORAEMON NOBITO NO PARARERU SAIYUKI is its writing. The script is ironic, creative and unpredictable, and some of the comedy is effective.

Don't plan on doing anything soon. Whatever plans you've made for the next hour or so will have to be postponed. It's going to take me a while to get through this story. So sit down and relax, kick your shoes off. You ain't goin' nowhere until ah's finished. To understand this script, you just gotta' understand Doraemon. The little clown has this kangaroo-like pouch which is quite magical and defies all laws of gravity, proportion, continuity, and existence. From this unlikely, impossible source, he can pull out damn near anything no matter the size. One such thing is an incredibly amazing, amazingly incredible video game called a 'Hero Machine'. You stand on its platform and all of the sudden you are actually in the game, surrounded by computer generated scenery and villains that you, the hero can destroy, using weapons supplied to you by the game. Sounds like a quick steal from the movie TRON. The Hero Machine has a number of cartridges, depending on what adventure you wish to take part in. There is one which pits vikings against dragons, and another which deals with the SAIYUKI/Monkey King story. Speaking of which, that's what local schoolchildren are performing in their upcoming schoolplay. One kid is Nobito, a regular on the DORAEMON TV show too. At a rehearsal for their upcoming stageplay of SAIYUKI, this four-eyed brat Nobito gets pissed off when he see's that some other classmate gets to play Goku, the monkey king. Since Doraemon happens to be Nobito's roommate, he borrows the blue alien's time machine (another of the cat's amazingly striking devices) and along with other classmates and Doraemon himself, goes backwards in time to meet the real Goku. But contrary to the fictionalized novel Journey to the West, the 6th Century lacks demons, magical pigs and flying monkeys. So while still at the ancient desert between India and China, our heroes make use of Doraemon's Hero Machine (the three-dimensional videogame mentioned earlier, no relation to the time machine) and do mock battles with mock demons and even meet a mock Buddha. Nobita plays Goku, and the other kids represent the story's other characters. Amidst the fun, many of the demons manage to escape from the Hero Machine and reach the outside world! So 6th century Asia becomes populated by the same monsters genetically

created from myth! Doraemon and his pals are unaware of this until they return to their own home and time period. Their teachers, parents and everyone in the Far East has evolved in a very demonic manner, full of bats and other scary stuff. So off we go again, via Doraemon's time machine to rid ancient Asia of the demonic influence first spawned by the magical video game. The real life priest Sando (usually called Oushu by the Japanese, called Hsuan Tang by the Chinese, and Tripitaka by the Indians) is on his pilgrimage, naturally not aided by the mythical heroes (Monkey, Pigsy, etc.) of the fantasy stories. The priest is kidnapped by the video demons. Doraemon and the kids are equipped with SAIYUKI-inspired weapons and uniforms supplied by the Hero Machine, so they set about thwarting the plans of the artificial villains. One bit involves the magical suction bottle (powerful weapon). Later they must put out that massive fire, so they steal a magical leaf-fan from the semi-humanoid wife of a bull-like demon. Eventually Sando (aka Oushu) is rescued, and as for the villains, they all get destroyed or forced back into the videogame. *1/2 - DF

新七龍珠

DRAGON BALL: THE ADVENTURE BEGINS

[aka "Seven Dragon Pearls"] 1991; Produced (in Taiwan) by Yes Films Co. Ltd., Released by King's Video, Starring: Chin Hsiao Chan and Pan San, Reviewed by Damon Foster

A Chinese-produced, live action remake of the popular Japanese cartoon, DRAGON BALL Z. I'm not a fan of that or any Japanese cartoon, but this Taiwanese successor is big fun! DRAGON BALL: THE ADVENTURE BEGINS may be a kiddie film (but then, virtually all Monkey King stories are!), but it's a fantastic one! Although the credits insist it's a production of Yes Films (whatever that is), I suspect the production owes something to Kinko Yinki (aka Kinko Films, and probably a dozen other names, after all, it's still a Chinese film, you know!), the best producers of Taiwan's kiddie vampire comedies. One of the main stars has a name which is probably Chin Tsu Chiyan or Chin Hsu Chan or something else. I first saw this Taiwanese stuntboy many years ago in YUGEN DOUSHI, when he looked like he was about 11 years old. In DRAGON BALL: THE ADVENTURE BEGINS, my guess is he's about 15. Because of YUGEN DOUSHI's whoppin' success in Japan, he'd already toured Tokyo as part of a promotion gimmick (i.e. autograph sessions), and DRAGONBALL: THE ADVENTURE BEGINS gave him the chance to show off in Japan again, along with other cast members of the flick.

So now you know I love this film like a



CHIN TSU CHIYAN 陳子強

[Chin Hsiao Chan, Chan Hsu Chan, Chan Ko Chyan]

Place of Birth: Hi-To City; Taiwan

Date of Birth: October 24, 1975

Skills: Martial Arts, Acrobatics, Acting, Comedy.

Favorite Food: Spaghetti.

Dislike: Sashimi.

Favorite Sport: Baseball.

DRAGON BALL: THE ADVENTURE BEGINS is where this young actor plays the "Goku" role, Goku being a human descendant of Sun Wu Kung, China's legendary monkey king. But this energetic performer can be seen in earlier roles, fantasies where he's normally tangling with Hunan's hopping vampires; perhaps his best-known role that of Chibikuro (this is the name of the Japanese dubbed character) is in RAI RAI KIYONSHIZU (again, a name from the Japanese dubbing of this Taiwanese thriller). The RAI RAI KIYONSHIZU series was chopped up from a Taiwanese movie, as were other Taiwan vampire comedies like YUGEN DOUSHI, HELLLO! DRACULAR, and HAI TZU WONG.



Howard Stern listener loves being a vegetable. Why me think this movie good? Let's start with the technical values: The editing, cinematography, scripting, not the character development, music, scenario and lighting is all done quite efficiently. Comedy: Right, comedy; and lots of it. Rarely does it maintain the standard level of embarrassing stupidity, and averages with vaguely amusing silliness. Hell, a few scenes are (believe it or not) genuinely funny! Shockingly, they don't resort to typically Chinese, tasteless bathroom humor! Action: Lots of this, too! There's swordplay and fistplay, not to mention gunplay, and even sexy girls who make us wanna' do foreplay. All the fights & stunts are fast-paced, exciting, and well choreographed. Special effects: Most of the FX are great. The costumes, pyrotechnical explosions and the super-imposed visuals are a must for anyone who enjoys costumes, pyrotechnics and visuals. However, a couple of shots have awkwardly animated spaceships and the alligator isn't very convincing, that is unless they're trying to convince us that the hero is battling a plastic prop. Oh well, at least we know they didn't slaughter a real alligator. That's another disturbing tendency lacking from this movie: On-screen cruelty to animals, something so common (unfortunately) in Chinese movies.

The over-all entertainment value is both entertaining and valuable! Them Taiwanese party animals didn't waste film on serious drama, they appreciate the finer things in life, like: big firey explosions galore, chases, bullets, swords, laser beams, spaceships, deaths, destruction, acrobatics, kung fu, slapstick humor, slapstick kung fu, cute females, cute males (I assume), monsters, and anything else they could think of. It's a period film! It's a futuristic sci-fi film! It's a comedy! And it's everything else and more! If you like fantasy, see DRAGON BALL: THE ADVENTURE BEGINS, if you like superheroes, see DRAGON BALL: THE ADVENTURE BEGINS, if you like sci-fi, see DRAGON BALL: THE ADVENTURE BEGINS, and if you like romantic love stories, see a psychiatrist.

Though I'm including this review in this whole SAI YAO KEI section of OC, this story is actually only marginally related to the whole Monkey King legend. DRAGON BALL: THE ADVENTURE BEGINS takes place in modern times, and deals with human descendents of the Monkey King, though, considering that the Monkey King himself is immortal, invincible and will live forever, it's a wonder as to why he himself doesn't appear in person to help his offspring. What's also wierd is that the characters in this film are humans, not apes! This means that, somewhere along the line, some person had sex with an ape! This is not advisable, since I hear that it both spreads and creates diseases. So people, remember, if you do have sex with a monkey, use protection! Otherwise, you're having sex with every monkey that monkey has had sex with in the past ten years. But for now, back to the review:

Exactly where this fantasy takes place, I



know not. I assume the setting is somewhere in the orient, because there are so many orientals in it, and because this magazine is called ORIENTAL CINEMA. It's a Taiwanese movie yet the story could just as easily be set in Tibet or some place. Hell if I know. Anyway, there's this Buddhist ceremony involving a glass ball about the size and shape of a ping pong ball, which they call a "dragon-pearl" for some reason. Legend boasts that any dude who brings all seven of them together will summon a magical dragon who'll grant their wish. So during their traditional Buddhist ritual, the monks and villagers are startled to see a fleet of invading spaceships! It's never explained if these attacking monsters are demons or extraterrestrials from outerspace. Or rather, the English subtitles, though ledgible and clear, never explain the origin of the villains. Whatever the darn-heck-gollywillickers-fuck-dang these creatures

are, they bear a striking resemblance to the type of villains who have been appearing in Toei (in Japan) superhero programs over the past ten years, and for at least the next ten years to come. In fact, these high-tech warriors are even better designed than many of their slick Japanese counterparts. Anyway, these bionic soldiers (including an attractive, caucasian blond chick) steal the dragon pearl and for an encore, decide to steal another from a forest inhabitant. He's an old man called Sun Wu Fan. Though human, he's somehow a descendent of the Monkey King. Sun Wu Fan is kidnapped by the bad guys along with his dragon-pearl. So his grandson Sun Wu Kung (Chin Hsiao Chan) is in hot pursuit of the villains. During the course of his comedic yet exciting adventures, Su Wu Kung (no coincidence that this is the same name as that of the Monkey King) befriends a number of other heroes: A female explorer, a little girl called

Jen Jen [who's parents were killed by the aliens], a big fat guy (Pan San) who can change his form, a young swordsman & his parrot, and a goofy, horny wizard who likes wearing an artificial turtle shell and surfer duds. Between all these adventurers, they discover that they now have the remaining six pearls. Once our bizarre managerie of magical heroes cease fighting among themselves, they locate and attack the alien base, now at the same village that was exploded near the film's opening credits. After a series of battles combining martial arts, more explosions, a RAMBO-spoof, futuristic weaponry, and magic, the grandfather Sun Wu Fan is rescued, the monsters are killed, and all seven pearls are reunited. The wonderful dragon materializes and grants Jen Jen her wish: She wishes that there will be no sign of them space demons. The mighty dragon guarantees they'll not show their ugly heads again and even returns to life all whom they killed.

**** -DF

DRAGONBALL Z

Saban Entertainment; 1996, Producers: Toei Animation Co., Presented by Funimation Prod. Inc., Exec. Prod.: Gen Fukunaga & Cindy Brennan Fukunaga, Producers: Daniel Cocanougher, Barry Watson, Story Editor: Christopher Need, Writers: Christopher Need & Chris Forbis, Reviewed by DF

Yikes, here we go. Can you tell I'm really not excited about this review, or the series (serieses) in general? It's way too late for me to get into this humongous "Dragon Ball" genre. As I understand it, this here program, DRAGONBALL Z is a link in a chain, there are at least two other programs in this never-ending phenomenon: DRAGONBALL GT, and just plain DRAGONBALL, not to mention the movies. Of course you already read about the Taiwanese live-action successor, DRAGONBALL: THE ADVENTURE BEGINS, but in Japan, there are no less than a whopping 13 theatrical featurettes! As I understand it, there were also subtitled prints of DRAGONBALL Z broadcasted in Hawaii and even on the International Channel! So lucky fans could see the actual, original Japanese prints with adequate translations! But most good things come to an end, so



Funimation (responsible for the English dubbed episodes which were chopped up for syndication) protested the rare subtitled gems into oblivion. As a non-fan of DRAGONBALL Z, I really couldn't care less, but I sympathize with those who do like this series, they should be allowed to obtain authentic Japanese versions which are graced with English subtitles, instead of being forced to tolerate the edited English dubbings bastardized by Funimation and those sultans of sacriligious tampering, Saban Entertainment.

I got bloody sick and tired of this TV show long before it got dubbed in English and shown on local TV. For a year or two, this incredible hit was plastered all over the stores in both Japan Center and Chinatown! Posters, books, dolls, records, videotapes, you name it! So with over exposure like this, naturally, I never wanted to sit through an episode, and you all know I'm not exactly a lover of Japanese cartoons. But DRAGONBALL Z is loosely related to SAIYUKI, in fact, the main hero, though human, is also called Goku. Therefore, I figure I may as well sit through an episode or two, if only to make this article more complete. I'm watching the show just to educate myself and broaden my horizons. I don't like to admit to watching something this overrated and unjustifiably popular; but then, it's not as overrated as all that lame-ass SAILOR MOON crap. SAILOR MOON makes all the "Dragon Ball" stuff seem outstanding.

Though intended for little kids, the story is surprisingly complex, especially to an outsider like me. Limited time & patience tells me I can only tolerate a few episodes of this confusing cartoon, and I'm afraid that's just not enough to figure this detailed program out! Had I seen several episodes, starting with the first one, perhaps it would all make sense to me. But what I got was a messy mishmash of martial artists, challenges, magical powers and an absolutely endless supply of characters with names like Gohan, Vegeta, Kakarot, Nimbus, Raditz, Piccolo, Krillin, Krolin and countless others. The only one which stood out to me was Piccolo, he's a green alien resembling

a martian and since nobody else really stood out, I guess he's my favorite character in DRAGON BALL Z, for what it's worth.

I've seen clips & coming attractions for some episodes which seem to have decently choreographed- uh, I mean, decently drawn fight scenes, but unfortunately, the episode I sat through just had the characters firing lightning and/or fire at each other; and it all reminded me of a campy, childish version of FIST OF THE NORTH STAR, but not as pretentious. Anyway, the artwork and animation is rather typical for Japanese TV; if not a little on the bad side! I've seen plenty better, both the artwork and the quality of the animation could use improvement. Since I don't plan on watching this show on a weekly basis, I won't bother describing the script, not that I could follow it anyway. * -DF

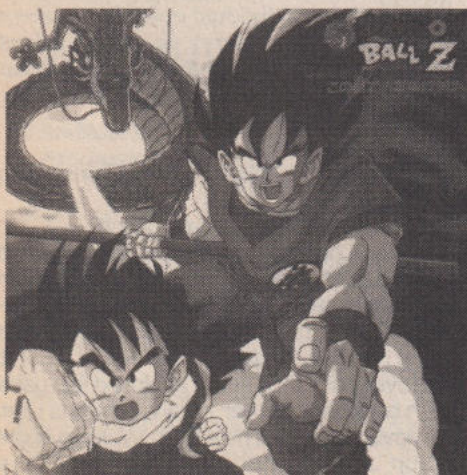
大鬧天宮

HAVOC IN HEAVEN

Produced by: people, Directed by: person, Based on Characters created by Wu Cheng En (that much I know!), Reviewed by Damon Foster (this I'm certain of!)

Another cute little cartoon from Red China, but since the colorful artwork, as well as the animation quality far outdoes 1941's PRINCESS IRON FAN (more Mainland Chinese animation), it's safe to assume HAVOC IN HEAVEN was produced at a much later period (possibly 11:45 P.M!). In fact, I suspect this feature length movie to have been made some time in the 1960s, right around when the Japanese made ALAKAZAM THE GREAT. But little is known about this film, in fact I don't really know the Chinese name of it, "Havoc In Heaven" is an unofficial, word-of-mouth, video-trader-to-video-trader title. It doesn't really matter I suppose.

The artwork is pretty good, it's mainly the traditional Chinese old-style, but with a little bit of "pop culture" overtones, though not as much as ALAKAZAM. Some characters, Sun Wu Kung in particular, are long and lanky. There are plenty of swordfights and magical battles and chases, my favorite being Sun Wu Kung's brief spat with a giant snake. Despite the over-all traditional approach, there aren't many ballads, I'm relieved to say; in fact the only one I recall is sung by the fairies as they come to pick the peaches (not knowing the ape has eaten most of the ripe ones). So I suppose all the statements in this paragraph are positive- yet the fact remains that I'm only giving this animated fantasy one star. Well, unlike ALAKAZAM, it's not dubbed in English, and unlike the JOURNEY TO THE WEST video series, it's got no English subtitles. So the dialogue was boring. I didn't actually need to know each word (I know this story down to the last detail, I know what's being said and done from scene to scene), but not knowing them added to the boredom.



Sun Wu Kung's hatching from the rock is briefly glossed over in the opening credits, before he befriends fellow monkeys living at the waterfall/cave. But there's no training from Patriarch Subhodi, does he inherit his powers of Transformation and Cloud-Flying? However, they did leave in his acquiring of the cudgel, which as we know, he got from the Dragon King at the underwater kingdom. In this case, it's one of those versions where Sun Wu Kung tries out various swords & staffs before he finds a weapon to his liking. Shortly afterwards, it's off to Heaven where the Jade Emperor tries to appease the ape's risky audacity by tempting him with employment in Heaven. Much is made of the Jade Emperor's arrival, what with dancing, frolicking women & flowers, it's a big deal. But not to Sun Wu Kung, who, though he likes the horses at first, isn't happy about being a ranch-hand, at the beck & call of everyone else. So there are several duels between the insulted monkey and the Heavenly Soldiers, alternating with sequences of Sun Wu Kung returning to his monkey tribe, and at times, whole armies of monkeys tangle with the Heavenly Soldiers. Eventually, Sun Wu Kung gives Heaven a second chance and agrees to guard their orchard full of magical peaches. As we all know, he eats them on the evening of the Peach Banquet, therefore making him immortal. This results in more chases and battles, but the fights are more like dances at times. * -DF

JOURNEY TO THE WEST

[Chinese title: "SAI YAO KEL" 1986, Produced by Wang Feng & Ran Ruolin, 25 Episodes, Original Story: Wu Cheng En, Screenplay: Da Yinglu, Zou Yijing, Yang Jie, Director: Yang Jie, Cameraman: Wang Chonggiu, Asst. Dir.: Ma Yunhong, Li Xianfeng, Lighting Engineer: Feng Jingshan, Makeup Artist: Wang Xizhou, Music Dir.: Wang Wenhua, Lyrics: Yan Su, Composer: Xu Jingqing, Soloist: Jiang Dawei, Conductor: Hu Bingzu, Performed by China Ballet Ensemble Orchestra, Costume Designers: Yan Xiumin, Wong Yunji, Ge Baodong, Martial Arts Dir.: Lin Zbijian, Xian Bobua, Cast.... Wukong: Liu Xiao Lingtong, Tang Priest/Monk Chen Xuanzang: Xu Shaobua, Bajie Pig: Ma Debua, Friar Sandy: Yan Huaiti, Reviewed by Damon Foster

I first watched, videotaped and critiqued this popular TV series in 1988, when it aired in the bay area every weekday at noon time, though without subtitles. So at the time, I knew it only under its Chinese name, SAI YAO KEL. Had somebody told me it would have been re-broadcast a few years later with English subtitles, I would have said, "Yeah right, and Fran Drescher has a pretty voice." But yes, it's been shown all over the country in recent years, and, amazingly, it's got English subtitles! This is probably thanks to the otherwise incredibly dull series INSIDE CHINA. For what it's worth, INSIDE CHINA was (or is? It might still be on TV) a weekly, 2 hr. per episode TV show all about Mainland China. It's appaulingly

boring, our three hosts talk about Chinese oil paintings, various folk dances from Taiwan to Shanghai, and probably interview Taipei's most experienced rice picker! In other words, INSIDE CHINA's ultra safe, pleasant reports give us the impression there's not a whole hell of a lot going on in that oppressed-dictatorship we call China. Not surprisingly, INSIDE CHINA seems backed by Chinese Central TV! So the series rambled on about silk making and the Grand Canal, so as to tell us everything is nice & peachy where everyone is forced to either dress like a janitor on the Orient Express, or a reject from MY THREE SONS. So I think INSIDE CHINA itself was kind of dull, though I remember them also subtitled a JUDGE DEE soap opera, and I believe they even showed a kung fu movie or two.

Fortunately, JOURNEY TO THE WEST is not as artificial & theatrical as other Red Chinese variations on the legend. The fights are real fights (not dances) with swordplay and even some punches and kicks: forward-snaps, roundhouses, spinning-backs, etc. Hell, once I saw an episode where the Monkey King (aka Wukong) kicked a bandit and the actor's (Liu Xiao Lingtong) foot

actually made full contact (with a puff of dust) with the stuntman playing the kicked opponent. But the majority of the battles in this videotaped (not film) program are the traditional weapons duels involving staffs, swords, rakes, sticks, etc. The hero's makeup is an appliance not unlike those in the PLANET OF THE APES movies, making Wukong's appearance more convincing than in earlier movies where the actor would simply smear brown shoe polish (if even that!) on his face and call himself a monkey. Where as numerous films had a decent mask (or makeup appliance) for Pigsy, very few have had such for Wukong. Wushu comedian Liu Xiao Lingtong has a genuine, rather realistic ape-mask glued to his face! He plays Wukong in a rather feminine manner, this Monkey King isn't at all like the gruff character portrayed by Masaaki Sakai in NTV's SAIYUKI program. If anything, JOURNEY TO THE WEST's Wukong is a little more reasonable than SAIYUKI's Goku character. But despite the semi-"faggy" performance, Xiao Lingtong's agility and enthusiasm really made Wukong come to life, his energetic, witty performance is quite enchanting. His interpretation of the character has a faithful, traditional high-pitched voice. He manages to sound exactly like the animated monkey in the feature-length HAVOC IN HEAVEN cartoon.

Being a videotaped series, the special effects are reminiscent of Japan's CYBERCOP superhero series (which, ironically, was produced at about the same time). There are the same kinds of super-impositions, double exposures, mattes and occasional explosions. Most of this is pulled off pretty well, and I really came to love this show after a while; I wasn't really impressed at first, but it has certainly grown on me since its creation over 11 years ago. It's not perfect though, and abrupt edits hamper con-

tinuity in every episode—it could use a little polishing at times. Another non-traditional element is that the audio doesn't rely so heavily on historical, traditional Chinese music. Of course, a theatrical ballad is inevitable in any Monkey King fantasy, including this one, but I've seen full episodes which have no singing ballads at all. The ending credits feature a traditional song of that type, but the opening theme song is mostly instrumental.

I imagine very few American fans would even consider watching the original subtitled episodes; this is fair, since we all have different tastes. For example, I suspect Ellen DeGeneres won't eat meat unless there's perfume on it. Anyway, like I said, this period-drama now has English subtitles, making it all the more easy to understand what the hell is going on. Of course, being more familiar with Wukong than Dolly Parton is familiar with back pains, I know the whole story quite well. But the subtitles clarify every scene, situation, and conversation. The subtitles are indeed needed, as this overly talky program can get dull or confusing to we who are Mandarin-language impaired. But the excessive, seemingly pointless dialogue is worth sitting through, as this beautifully taped series has an occasional fight and impressive visual FX too.

Though I think a full hour per episode is way too much, and the overdone dialogue (it gets tedious even with subtitles!) sucks big time, I must say that, on the whole, JOURNEY TO THE WEST is a winner. It's not as fun as 1978's SAIYUKI/Monkey TV show from Japan, but is definitely worth adding to the video collection of any Asian film/culture fan who's got a brain. So I'm giving this over-all series a three star (***) rating, on the whole. But what follows is an attempted episode guide to this videotaped soap opera. Unfortunately, it won't be terribly accurate, since I don't have the whole series, and many of the individual episodes [in my tape collection] lack English titles. I basically have two versions of several episodes, since I tried recording it off the air twice; once in the 1980s, and once in the 1990s. The 1980s episodes have no translations at all, and besides, I think I missed a few. The 1990s re-broadcasts, however, do have subtitles, but unfortunately, were condensed by INSIDE CHINA, who didn't feel the individual episode numbers & titles were necessary! So once again, I have episodes I can't identify. So for what it's worth, here's what happens when I try to make sense of this mess:

Episode 1: "The Monkey King Comes into the World"

First Shot: Waves at some beach.

Wukong hatches from a stone rock and frolicks at the beach. The gods up in Heaven are concerned at first, but the Jade Emperor (Zhang Yushan) says, "So it was just a stone monkey, forget it." You would think it was every day that rocks exploded and gave birth to apes! Another strange thing is that it's never explained how both Wukong and a group of seemingly "regular" monkeys

achieved flight; that's how they get up into their cave near a waterfall. Anyway, when a little old monkey perishes, Wukong gets concerned & seeks out immortality, and ends up on an island populated by humans. They fear then mock him at the village; I've never seen this interaction in any other version. Soon he goes to learn from a wizard normally called Patriarch Subodhi, though in these subtitles, it's spelled "Subhuti". It's here that it's explained what Wukong's full name, Sun Wu Kung means: "Monkey Awakened to Emptiness". Regardless, the students at this school/monastery are interpreted (acted out) by Wushu performers who add in more real kung fu than I would normally expect in such an early setting. Equally fun are the impressive computer super-impositions for when Wukong jumps up and does acrobatic flips in the clouds. But Wukong shows off and that annoys his teacher, who banishes the overly eager ape. That's where the episode ends. Though there's really no fighting to speak of, it explained a lot, and I enjoyed it enough to give it three stars. *** -DF

Episode #2: "Being Appointed Protector of the Heavenly Horses"

First Shot: Wukong doing flips in the air.

Wukong returns home [to the monkey tribe at the waterfall] from his learning under Patriarch Subhuti, only to discover his followers were chased from their homes, by demons. An enjoyable battle has Wukong defeat then befriend the demons. This battle is one of at least a couple great fights which incorporates decent karate kicks; this is a fun episode. At a banquet, a demon advises Wukong to get a sturdy weapon, so he goes to the Dragon Palace in the Eastern Sea, and pressures the Dragon King to give him an almighty weapon here referred to as "miraculous iron", "as you will", and "Gold-Banded Cudgel". But Dragon King states he mustn't take it, and that it was "used by Yu the Great, to fix the depths of the seas when he brought the waters under control long ago", and "it was also used to fasten the Milky Way". But Wukong steals it anyway. His next act of audacity occurs after his death; he causes havoc in Hell and scratches his name off the death-list, reminding everyone he's immortal! His battle in hell involves some interesting, hopping demons, characters we've seen depicted in other films including SHAOLIN INVINCIBLES and KUNG FU FROM BEYOND THE GRAVE. Between Wukong's egotistical shenanigans at Dragon Palace and Hell, the Jade Emperor (up in Heaven) agrees that hiring Wukong might be the best way to keep him under control. Despite confrontations with Marshall Tian Peng and Lord Wuqu, Wukong enjoys his job as "Protector of the Heavenly Horses", until he discovers he's just a "grunt", a ranch-hand. He resigns and assumes his own title, here translated in the subtitles as "Great Sage, Equaling Heaven". ***1/2

Episode 3: "Havoc In Heaven"

First Shot: Sky.

This episode, like the second one, offers

more of the same: Wukong isn't satisfied with the jobs (in this case, guarding the Heavenly Orchard of Peaches), so he makes shambles of things and returns to his home with his fellow monkeys. He takes a bite or two off each immortality peach, gets drunk at a banquet ("Feast of Peaches"), and swallows several "longevity pills". Nobody in Heaven, not even Bodhisattva Guanyin (of the Southern Sea) is capable of defeating the out-of-control primate. The episode is alive with comedy and battles, punctuated by quirky (yet sometimes catchy) music, not to mention cheap video-generated special effects, including a thankfully-brief shot of a stupid looking dragon. Interesting to note that in this particular version of "Havoc in Heaven", they heavenly armies do actually manage to capture Wukong, but attempts at execution prove impossible; he's immortal and invincible. He escapes again, resulting in more swordplay, swinging staffs, acrobatics and an occasional spinning-back-kick. It ends with the Jade Emperor saying: "Get the Buddha to help us". *** -DF

Episode #4: "Internment Under the Five Element Mountain"

FS: Wukong jumping in mid-air.

Buddha wagers to Wukong: "If you can get out of my palm with a single summersault, you'll be the winner." As we all know from having seen several versions of this story, Wukong believes he's won, once he reaches five pillars he thinks hold up the sky, so he thinks he's reached the end of the universe. To prove it, he writes (in Chinese) "The Great Sage was Here", shortly before relieving himself. But it turns out he's still on Buddha's hand, and having lost this wager, Buddha imprisons him under a mountain. Interesting to note that in this particular interpretation, the seal (talisman with a chant written on it) isn't placed on the hill until quite sometime later, when Wukong nearly escapes. Meanwhile, the origins of the Tang Priest, Chen Xuanzang (spelled "Sanzang" later in the episode), are explained as he's introduced. His father, Mr. Chen Guangui was murdered by Liu Hong shortly after the marriage of Xuanzang's parents. The wife was already pregnant when the evil man killed her husband and impersonated him, getting his job [some sort of magistrate or other high position]. So shortly after birth, the baby was placed in a box and floated down river, where he was adopted by monks and called, "River Current Boy". Having been raised at the Buddhist church almost since birth (most monks joined later on in their lives), Buddhism, enlightenment and nobleness were all he knew. So naturally it was he, chosen by the Bodhisattva Guanyin, to go to India and fetch the scriptures. Also, much is made of the cassock he wears and the cane he carries; such details seem trivial, since most other versions don't mention them. ** -DF

Episode #5

FS: Tiger.

Once the lone priest (Chen Xuanzang) locates & releases Wukong, they spend the

night at some family's house. Though there's a decent fight (with blood) between Wukong and bandits, plus a slick sword duel between the White Dragon and Wukong, this episode isn't one of the better ones. If nothing else, it explains in greater detail, the circumstances for the White Dragon (called "Third Dragon Prince" in Shaw's THE MONKEY, and is a female Dragon Princess in 1978's SAIYUKI on NTV); it seems he's a "tortured nephew" (this week) of the Dragon King, and got jealous (some complex social-life thing) and wrecked havoc at the underwater palace. As punishment, he's banished to a remote river and turned into a real dragon--though this lame dragon more resembles a horse; this is appropriate, since Bodhisattva Guanyin has him become a horse to assist Wukong & Xuanzang on their voyage. Meanwhile, Wukong has been given that disciplinary ring so the priest has complete control over him. **1/2 -DF

Episode #6: "Trouble from the Guanyin Monastery"

FS: Monk's shadow, pounding a bell.

This whole script was a little more concise and to the point when the story was filmed [for Japanese TV] eight years earlier on SAIYUKI. But there are similarities between that Japanese episode and this Chinese episode; i.e. Wukong transforms into a pill to gain access to a villain's stomach. Anyway, the saga is basically the same in both versions.....Devious monks allow our heroes lodging at their church, but it's all a scam: The abbot just wants Xuanzang's valuable cassock (robe, cape) to add to his collection. As Wukong and Xuanzang sleep, the corrupt priests set their temple on fire, and during the ensuing chaos, the Black Bear Demon (played by Xiang Han) sneaks in and in turn, steals the pretty cape from the abbot. Wukong gets aid from a heavenly soldier and Guanyin, which not only helps to rescue Xuanzang from the fire, but also retrieves the robe from the demons at Black Wind Mountain. Earlier in the episode, we get a brief look (no makeup appliance, he poses as a monk) at actor Liu Xiao Lingtong, and though I'm an admirer of his work (and I can safely say I'm a fan of his performance), he's even uglier without the monkey mask glued to his face. **1/2 -DF

Episode #7 (?)

FS: Double-doors.

Theoretically, this should indeed be episode number 7, since I know this story quite well; hell, I know JOURNEY TO THE WEST as good as I know how unwise it is to combine loud car-stereos and teenagers! But seriously, I know this is where Pigsy, or Pa Chieh should be introduced. Yet my crappy videotape is cut off just as the episode title fades in, and here's what still made it onto the tape: "e Twenty", "g the J". The remainder of this writing is anyone's guess, but it's obvious the first portion is meant to spell "Episode Twenty", if it were complete. But I know damn well that's an error, since the horny pig Pa Chieh (here called "Zhu Bajie") appears in the show well before the 20th

chapter! Exactly what's going on here, I don't know. What I do know is that Squire Gao's daughter, Blue Orchid is being hassled by the pig demon, who, at first, helped the family out while deceiving them (his magic made him look human; a chance to see actor Ma Dehua with no makeup). After the wedding, he showed his true form, and, unlike Rush Limbaugh's wife, not all women want to get porked by fat pigs. So pig Bajie continually hassled the family and locked up Blue Orchid until Wukong and Xuanzang arrive to save the day. Before they befriend Bajie, it's explained through flashback how Bajie was formerly Marshall Tian Peng (in Heaven), who got drunk and chased the Moon Goddess. That's why the Jade Emperor banished him to Earth as a pig-demon. There are a couple decent fights, and a few cheap effects which add unintended amusement, but it's Wukong's funny antics and maniacal laugh which made this episode fun. *** -DF

Episode 8: "Overcoming Three Disasters on Their Rough Way"

FS: Pilgrims hiking through a forest or meadow.

The first half is pretty action-packed, with Wukong briefly blinded in a battle with a tribe of "tiger-demons". After they overcome this series of obstacles, Sandy, aka Friar Sand and Wujing, is introduced. He's described like this: "This ogre of the river is the mortal incarnation of the Curtain-Lifting General". Wujing himself explains: "As I broke the crystal lamp at the Peach Banquet, I was punished to be thrown down to the underworld. Then I settled down in the Flowing Sands River as a devil". Though there's no mention of cannibalism in the English subtitles, Wujing is an enemy at first, and its Piggy who really goes all out, dueling with him. Of course, they eventually all become friends, and ride a giant gourd (just like in 1978's SAIYUKI) to get across the river. The final misadventure has something to do with angels impersonating women to entice our heroes. This test & trickery is a bit much for Bajie, who ends up humiliated. The "women" blindfold him and have him try and catch them, but he ends up tied up in a net, dangling from a tree. There he's abandoned until our smirking heroes rescue him the

following morning. *** -DF

Episode 9

FS: People walking down stairs.

Pilgrims arrive at temple where Wukong steals more fruit off a tree, which he later knocks over, for some reason. Talky filler abounds until our heroes finally tackle a magic warlord who tries to tie up & crucify our boys; but they escape. Wukong talks to several characters and later Guanyin repairs Wukong's damage to the tree and restores the truth. This is an awful, dull episode which gets no star at all. Part of the problem is that my tape of this edition lacks English subtitles, but I suspect it would be boring even with them. -DF

Episode 10

FS: Dark mountains, zooming in.

Ghoulish demons (from a haunted cave) disguise themselves as human peasants to get close enough to attack the Tang Priest. Wukong is the only one among the pilgrims who can see through this deception. So as the witty ape attacks & defeats each of them, it appears as though he's slaughtering helpless mortals. Inevitable arguments between Wukong and the foolish priest lead to a parting of ways. Amusing super-impositions (Wukong flying all over the place), but not a real fun episode. It seems to end with the Tang Priest leaving Wukong, but in the very next (?) episode I have on tape, they're back together again! Am I missing another episode? 1/2 -DF

Unknown episode (#11?)

FS: Bajie?

Like I said, I don't know for sure what episode number this is, but on my tape, it follows what I suspect to be episodes #10 or 11. I'm also not certain that the First Shot is indeed Bajie, since portions seem to be cut. Regardless, this episode deals with warrior demons with pointy noses who have a sketch of the Pilgrims. Wukong gives some demon (posing as a crippled old man to get the Tang Priest's trust) a piggy-back ride. This trick occupies Wukong while his pals are kidnapped and dragged to a cave. Wukong impersonates a wizard and an old woman (and we see the actor under new costumes), and toys around with one of

them magic gourds that suck people up. * -DF

Unknown episode: #12 (?)

FS: unknown

I never really quite saw this one in its entirety, but the pilgrims arrive at some slave-labor-camp where everyone is treated badly, but then the story abruptly seems to change to something else! From what I can guess, The Dragon King's son-in-law (related to our lovable horse) has hired some "fish-demons" to steal a treasure and poison everyone's drinks using a hairpin. Regardless, from what I've seen, this is a fun episode. There's a lot of fighting toward the end; like an outstanding underwater battle pitting Wukong and Bajie against several aquatic demons. The 3rd Prince (sometimes a horse, sometimes a dragon) returns in human form for more underwater sword-play, as he tangles with two or three sexy sea-maidens. ***1/2 -DF

Unknown episode: #13 (?)

FS: Pilgrims wandering through wilderness.

After escaping from some tree monsters (our heroes are grabbed by trees!), the pilgrims arrive at what they think is a Buddhist monastery, but all the statues come to life, and it gets kind of creepy. It's revealed they're more evil demons, lead by an almighty, powerful warlord calling himself the "Yellow-browed Buddha". He's a nearly invincible villain who learned or stole Buddha's powers, which includes a pouch that sucks people up. The episode is unique in that for once, Wukong is at a disadvantage, as are his helpers and several animal demons (a large group) who come to his aid. There are some really cool battle scenes, but not until Buddha himself arrives and lures the villain into a trap (something to do with a poisonous watermelon) is the previously unstoppable villain defeated. *** -DF

Unknown episode

FS: Pilgrims traveling through a crowded village.

It's absolutely tedious gibberish as Wukong nurses the king of "Purpuria" (a Middle-Eastern-ish village) back to health because he's sick. For an encore, Wukong also rescues the king's queen from an army

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SANDY

[Friar Sand, Gojo, Wu Ching, Wujing]

The product of Wu Cheng En's bizarre imagination! Sandy is another fallen angel who got condemned to lurk in the water of the Sandy River, and he became a cannibal until he joined the holy pilgrimage, along with Tripitaka (the priest), that horny pig-monster and the monkey.



of demons. The lead demon is a slick-looking, fanged monster, and there is a good duel at the end, but the whole episode is bogged down by pointless, stretched-up technicalities involving bells and magic needles. Despite one measly battle, the episode pretty much stinks. * -DF

Episode 14

FS: Some sort of computer-generated image (ball with a tail?) flying in the sky.

Definitely one of my least favorite episodes, and not just because my tape has no subtitles. This one has our heroic pilgrims up against a bunch of annoying little kids; some sort of tribe of boys with bad haircuts. There are a few amusing visuals and other cheap special effects however, and a neat shot or two involving fire [that the leader of the runts spits out]. There's also a nice fight of Wukong battling "grown-up" (regular size, anyway) demons, but otherwise, this chapter is worthless.

Once again, the pilgrims overcome their problems thanks to Guanyin's help. 1/2 -DF

Episode 15

FS: Pilgrims up above a waterfall.

Tang Priest goes to a house (to beg for food), only to discover that the women inside, though pretty, are in fact Spider Demons, as seen in MONKEY WAR! Naturally, we once again see Bajie drooling as these lovely (yet evil) maidens frolic in a creek. When these arachnid-bitches fail to eat the Tang Priest, they request the aid of an evil Taoist called the "Many Eyed Monster", who has several eyes on his chest and stomach. He manages to poison the Tang Priest and Bajie, so Wukong gets a couple antidote cures (pills) from yet another local Bodisattva (the episodes are developing a repetitious pattern). This is a nice little episode, there are a few worthwhile FX (i.e. the spiders and eyes on the guy's chest), and two nice battles as our heroes tackle all these villains. My favorite fight isn't the grande finale (the women can't fight for shit), but an earlier, cross-country duel between Wukong and the Many-Eyed Demon! The fight takes place in a temple, on the ground, in the sky and at a waterfall. *** -DF

Episode #16

FS: Women in a cave.

I had to scan through this untranslated episode, which seems to have the pilgrims spending the night in some house occupied by several women. I guess they drug Bajie and the Tang Priest, which gets them sick. So Wukong seeks out a cure, apparently from some special pond guarded by a warlord or wizard--some guy wearing blue attire. Regardless, it's an enjoyable battle between he and our heroic simian. Unfortunately, afterwards there's a large, talky stretch of absolute boredom as the women try to entice the priest until Wukong and Bajie finally do battle with them; the main weapon of the ladies are these strange-looking musical instruments. * -DF

Episode #17

On my hastily-edited tape, this episode

(17?) just seems to continue from #16, they're stuck together; I detect no noticeable break between them! So I could be wrong, is this really an independent episode, or are parts 16 & 17 eternally joined? Had I not scanned through both of them (boredom abounds!), I could have at least timed them. Anyway, this one tells of the massive fire which can only be put out by a fan owned by Princess Iron Fan, who's married to the leader of a tribe of buffalo demons. For this version, much of the location is some desert. Despite lack of subtitles, it's a watchable episode, there are cool effects (i.e. the orange bull guy, he's got a cool costume) and at least a couple fight-scenes which are always a welcome sight. *1/2 -DF

Episode #18

FS: Pilgrims talking about a girl tied to a tree.

The pilgrims rescue a beautiful woman who was tied to a tree, but she of course turns out to be a hungry demon who eats a couple of monks (decent gore!) at a local monastery. Strangely, she wants to marry, not eat, the Tang Priest, of all people. Wukong outsmarts her by getting in her stomach to inflict pain again. This whole episode is a slow-paced, tedious talker; and at times, quite stupid. I was bored to tears. -DF

Episode 22

FS: Soldiers and monks in some village.

The king of a Middle Eastern village called Yuhua Prefecture is exiling all the monks out of that area just because of some stupid nightmare he had. So the pilgrims dress up as peasants to pass through. Then Wukong's magic makes the king, queen and soldiers become bald, so that monks aren't as easy to identify.

On the whole, this is a pretty lame episode, its only action is where the pilgrims eventually teach some soldiers how to do swordfighting, rake-fighting, etc. 1/2 -DF

Episode 23

FS: Pilgrims traveling across a desert.

Still at Yuhua Prefecture, the king requests the help of the pilgrims in ridding the area of an army of lion demons. Later, it's revealed that the king of the lion demons, the great-grandfather of all of them was originally a pet lion chained up in Heaven. But he escaped to make trouble on Earth where his powers qualify him as a magical warrior, and not just a lion as he is up in Heaven. Anyway, there are at least a couple cool battles in this episode, check them out if you get a chance. **1/2 -DF

Episode 24: "Capturing the Jade Hair"

FS: Pilgrims behind tall bushes, with sky in background.

Beautiful Li Lingyu plays dual roles: Both as a Persian princess of Tianzu Kingdom, and a "Jade Hare" (a Heavenly rabbit who came down to Earth to wreck havoc as a demon, just like the lion in the previous episode) who impersonates her. But I could tell from the start of this episode, when the pilgrims arrived at a monastery and made a big deal about the garden's gold bricks, that this epi-

sode wouldn't concentrate heavily on martial arts.

If nothing else, there's a wierd ballad as the mock-princess sings in anticipation of her upcoming marriage to the reluctant Tang Priest. The music, and even the woman's singing tries to sound Middle Eastern, like something out of one of India's three-hour musicals. But the lyrics are still distinctly Chinese. Anyway, the demonic bunny's fiendish plot is uncovered by the pilgrims so the Moon Goddess catches the rabbit and takes it back to Heaven. There's a remotely entertaining chase between Wukong and the Jade Hare, but otherwise, it's a lackluster misadventure. 1/2 -DF

Episode #25 (the final episode)

Not really exciting for a finale. There's no fighting, instead it concentrates on wrapping up the story. So this episode is far from being one of my favorites, but it maintained my interest because it was interesting to finally see how it all ends (I've seen numerous versions of the story's beginning, but virtually none which show the climax). To make a long story short (a bit late for me to say this!), the pilgrims obtain the scriptures from Buddha and are also promoted: The Tang Priest and Wukong become Buddhas themselves, and Wujing & Bajie are given new positions as heavenly soldiers. Their return to the East is a lot easier and quicker, since they can now travel through the clouds. So it's interesting but not thrilling; the only worthwhile special effects are a giant bird and a giant turtle, though neither is spectacular or convincing. * -DF

THE MONKEY

[aka "Monkey Goes to the West" on the video-rental box] Produced by the Shaw Brothers in 1965, Directed by Ho Meng Hua, Producer: Run Run Shaw, Story: Eng Kang, Film Editing: Chiang Hsing Loo, Music: Ng Fo Ling, Writer: Chung Hung, Sound Recording: Wang Yung, Asst. Dir.: Ang Yang, Set Production: Chen Chi Ruey, Starring: Yueh Hua, Ho Fan, Pan Pen (aka Pan Pan), Tien Sheng, Diane Chang, Chung Wei, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Them thar Shaw dudes made this one in the 1960s, and it's probably one of the first Monkey King movies not to be a filmed stage play or a cartoon. But unfortunately, THE MONKEY has a lingering stench of ballads, left over from the heyday of Chinese musicals. My tape of THE MONKEY has most of the musical song & dance numbers mercifully edited out, thanks to the Pause button on my remote control (which explains why my copy is so short). But for a musical, the sound quality is surprisingly bad. I'm sure the music & sounds would be clearer if the movie were made today, but even in an old movie like this, I would expect a nicer audio recording if they wish to consider this a musical; not that my tape is much of a musical anymore--my print is tidy and to the point! What's left is an enjoyable, fast-paced fantasy. There are numerous swordfights, though crude ones--after all, the only one doing decent sword



Shaw brothers cast and crew portrait. Note cast for *THE MONKEY* (Yueh Hua, Pan Pen & Tien Shen) at far left.

duels back then was Jimmy Wang Yu, in his thrillers. Still, the high speed photography (or editing, however they do it) and occasional acrobatics add to the excitement. There aren't really a whole lot of special effects, but being a Shaw film, they put their money to good use. The makeup, costumes, and sets are quite good for such an old movie. But ya' gotta' suspend your disbelief at the film's unrealistic approach, like the ultra fake underwater kingdom and its ultra-sooper-doooper-fake denizens! Other than the musical performances, I'd say *THE MONKEY* is worthwhile to any fan (all one of us) of the Monkey King. For me, just seeing the righteous efforts of Monkey and Pigsy is exciting, no matter who plays these characters. You probably can't relate to this admiration, because Monkey King's films weren't directed by John Woo, nor do they involve bullets.

The cast is mildly interesting in this film (filmed in Taiwan, but it's still a HK film). Yueh Hua (born: 1942), known more for his singing (amazingly) than his fighting,

plays the title hero. Though unrecognizable under the fake fur, headband and shoe polish they call makeup, this is the same Yueh Hua from *COME DRINK WITH ME* (1965), *MONKEY KUNG FU*, *LUNG WEI VILLAGE, IN THE LINE OF DUTY 3* (1988), *INTIMATE CONFESSIONS OF A CHINESE COURTESAN* (1971), *PAYMENT IN BLOOD* (1972), and of course you know by now he made his international debut in the Italian caper *AMAZONS AND SUPERMEN* (1974) where he starred with Nick Jordan, one of the original *THREE FANTASTIC SUPERMEN*. Pan Pan, who plays Pa Chieh ('Pigsy', in the English subtitles) would later make a cameo in *ENTER THE DRAGON* (1973), in the banquet scene; he eats rice and catches a piece of fruit (and so do Bruce Lee and Yun Wah). His name is also spelled Pan Pen. Also appearing is 1960s beauty Chang Chung Wei (born: 1936), sometimes translated as Zhang Zhong Wen, but better known to us yankees as Diana Chang.

The beginning and ending of *THE MONKEY* (*MONKEY* on the trailer, *MONKEY*

GOES TO THE WEST on the video rental box) seem like two completely different films. The beginning shots in the Demon King's cave where the Third Prince (dragon man) arrives to challenge them (they fight over who gets to eat the priest) seems more or less like a traditional Chinese period film of the 1960s (*ONE-ARMED SWORDSMAN*'s Kao Pao Shu as the 3rd Dragon Prince), featuring adequate swordfighting with even some bloodshed. The ending scenes, however, are set in a cheap underwater kingdom, and remind me of crap in the Vietnamese stinker *TAY DU KI* (by far the worst Monkey King movie I've sat through). The set is tolerable at best, and the super-imposed matte background of fishtank-sized fish meant to look big just looks stupid. Worst of all are the costumes which reflect the theatrical look of the original primitive operas that inspired the movie. The mock-turtle (reminiscent of the one in the British fantasy, *ALICE'S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND*) looks especially artificial; nice shell, but the actor lacks any sort of turtle mask! It really made me wish I was watching a Ninja Turtle movie! Now you know what I mean by "artificial". Also, nobody in this so-called "underwater" kingdom swims, they walk on the ocean floor, breathe underwater and there are no bubbles anywhere. But this is fantasy, not science fiction, so it is pointless for me to be scientifically accurate, since that's what fantasy is traditionally meant to escape from.

The remainder of this review is, amazingly, the plot! You all know I'm not the type who does in-depth script synopses, and that I normally despise magazines which do so; there's really not much point in rambling on about every aspect of the story, not when it can just as easily be basic and to-the-point and should fit in a single paragraph. But I'm making an exception here because this issue of OC will concentrate on several Monkey King movies, and the different approaches (in regards to scripting) from film to film. Rest assured I'm not becoming a lifeless technogeek, reviews of this nature will not plague future



DIANA CHANG 張仲文

(Zhang Zhong Wen, Chang Chong Wen, etc.)

Born: 1936, Hubei

This beautiful actress played a role in *THE MONKEY*. Originally from Hubei, China, the daughter of a soldier. She matured very early and at 16 married, then in 1949 when Communism erupted she escaped to Taiwan. She got divorced in 1953 and enrolled in acting classes the following year. She graduated 'first' in her class. Her first movie *SPRING RETURNS TO MEI KONG* was an instant success, and she earned the nickname of "Most Beautiful Animal On Earth". She had a brief affair with the leading actor of the day, Huang Chung Shing. In 1956, she went to the Asia Film Festival and her movie's premier. In 1958 she was approached to make a HK movie. In 1963 her contract with her Taiwanese movie company expired and then she joined HK's Shaw Bros. She made the huge hit *PANG JING LIEN*. In Sept. 1964 she went to the U.S. premiere of the film. On Feb. 1, 1965, she married a young German in HK and in a few years officially retired from show-business. In all, she had 32 major roles and made 38 movies.

張仲文返港居住

EARLY SEX SYMBOL IN CHINESE CINEMA: • DIANA CHANG RETURNS TO LIVE IN HONG KONG



THOUGH RETIRED FOR MORE THAN 20 YEARS, DIANA CHANG HAS RECENTLY RETURNED TO H.K. FROM EUROPE. NICK-NAMED "THE WORLD'S MOST BEAUTIFUL ANIMAL", DIANA IS STILL AS RADIANT AS EVER. HER FRIENDS SAY SHE HAS SPECIAL WAYS TO STAY BEAUTIFUL. SHE ON THE OTHER HAND SAYS IT'S A BLESSING FROM GOD

MONKEY (one of her last films, though one of Yue Hua's first). Though retired for more than 30 years, Diana Chang has recently returned to HK from Europe, and is considered by some to still be as radiant as ever. Her friends say she has special ways to stay beautiful - she, on the other hand says it's a blessing from God.

Her hair style hasn't changed at all. A few days before this interview, she fell at home and damaged the soft tissue in her right knee. Her husband and three children stay with her every day, even though it's a relatively minor injury. She's a sincere Christian and happy about her life. Her daughters are 16 and 12, her son is 14 years old. The oldest daughter is 5 foot 8 inches tall and is interested in business, not movies. Six



years ago, Chang's husband was transferred to Singapore to work and they lived there for four years. Then he grew ill and could not work so they all moved back to Denmark and he fully recovered. Now they've moved to HK.

Every summer they go back to Hamburg, Germany, to visit Diana's mother-in-law. After leaving the movie industry for so long, she refuses to participate in industry activities, but still is in contact with many industry friends, including the recently departed Lee Han Shiang, accepting Godmotherhood of his daughter. "One day if I get the right script, I might return to films", she admits. In addition to her normal social activities, she has a Chinese calligraphy career, is a painting teacher, and likes to write. She might write her own memoirs but has no 'serious' plans right now.

At the height of her popularity, her figure was 36-22-39. Her looks and figure helped her become a sex icon of her

day, but compared to today's exaggerated, and surgically enhanced figures, she seems very natural and innocent. She never did any revealing roles and frowns upon those modern so-called actresses that sell their bodies on screen. She made 38 movies in a little more than ten years. She likes her second movie the most. It was the first color musical in China. She loves the script and over-all warm feeling of the film. To keep fit she exercises everyday. "Even though I'm invited to return to films, I will only do it if the script is good, and my husband gives me permission. Because in 1965 I gave up my career to be his wife and I respect his wishes." */This old actress is little known to OC readers; aside from her appearance in THE MONKEY and the info I dug up for this bio, not a whole hell of a lot is known about her. She was popular for her sexy roles, often portraying prostitutes; though later moving on to portray heroines. Regardless, I thank Darren Wheeling, Kam Lee, John Emma, and Setsuko Emma for translating this information into English, from Chinese and Japanese books. The two sources tend to contradict each other, like different years listed for film releases. But hopefully, my sorting through all this was done accurately therefor "picking up the pieces", and that this bio is fairly accurate-perhaps we'll never know. -DF/*



She was born in Hubei, 1936, the daughter of a soldier.

She matured very early and married at 16, then in 1949 when Communism erupted, she escaped to Taiwan. She got divorced in 1953 and enrolled in acting classes the following year. She graduated "first" in her class. Her first movie, SPRING RETURNS TO MEI KONG (1954), was an instant success, and she had a brief affair with the leading actor of the day, Huang Chung Shing. In 1955, she went to the Asia Film Festival and her movie's premiere. She appeared in a 1956 movie, where her passionate love scene caused a sensation. In 1958, she was approached to make a HK movie. In 1963, her contract with her Taiwanese Movie Co. expired and then she joined Shaw Bros. She made the huge hit, PANG JING LIEN. In Sept. 1964, she went to the U.S. premiere of the film. Strangely, she earned the nickname "The World's Most Beautiful Animal", according to translations from both Japanese and Chinese sources covering that period of HK cinema.

On Feb. 1, 1965, she married a rich young German in HK, and a year later, officially retired from showbusiness; shortly after her appearance in THE

issues of OC, unlike some zines I could mention.

It starts off with super-imposed words (not unlike those in STAR WARS) rolling upwards rather crudely, telling us in English how the priest Hsuand Chuang traveled to India during the Tang Dynasty to get the Buddhist scrolls. From there, we see the story starting where Hsuang Chuang (Tripitaka) is already on his way to the West, escorted by helpers in this version. All his companions end up dead as a result of a freak storm. Next up, the lone priest discovers the imprisoned monkey Wu Kung who had been buried by Buddha 500 years ago. Huang Chuang/Tripitaka releases the magical seal (a piece of paper not unlike them talismans used to subdue Hunan's hopping vampires) of Buddha, so the Stone Monkey escapes. As the grateful ape accompanies the priest on his pilgrimage to India, they encounter a man called Third Prince who, like many other evil demons, wants to eat Hsuang Chuang's flesh for the sake of immortality. But even when the guy turns into his true enormous dragon form, he's no match for the Monkey King and his iron cudgel. This dragon looks more like a prehistoric dinosaur than a traditional Chinese dragon, and is one of the film's highlights. This mechanical marvel was obviously inspired by Japanese giants like Godzilla and/or Ultraman's enemies. Anyway, to repent for his sins, the Third Prince is forced by the goddess Kuan Yin to turn into a horse and to assist our heroes on their perilous journey.

Wu Kung must also be disciplined, since he's too bad tempered to get along with the priest. The Heavenly Goddess gives the Stone Monkey a golden ring which he's to wear around his head. Not knowing what it's for, Wu Kung enthusiastically puts it on his head and likes it at first. But then Kuan Yin gives the priest a small jade sculpture with a calligraphy inscription carved into it. When these symbols are read aloud, Wu Kung receives a powerfully intense headache which will help to discipline him, should he behave naughty. Meanwhile, Pa Chieh ("Piggy" in the English subtitles) is intent on marrying an unwilling lady played by Diane Chang Chung-Wen. To relieve the unfortunate girl of this horror (if having sex with an obese pig isn't horror, I don't know what is; just ask the late Althea Flint), Monkey intervenes by impersonating her. What starts off as mere toying around becomes a duel between Piggy/Pa Chieh and Monkey/Wu Kung, and it's made apparent that the two of them already knew each other. Whenever Piggy hits Monkey with his rake, sparks come out. But the indestructible Monkey wins and Piggy agrees to join them on their journey. Among other scenes, there's the obligatory shot of Piggy staring at bathing beauties.

The third and final adventure deals with the introduction of the cannibal from the Sandy River. He too is called "Sandy" (in the English subtitles) and is the leader of an underwater fortress. They manage to

capture the priest and take him underwater, to the kingdom. But Piggy and the Monkey King aren't far behind. Just as Sandy and his aquatic minions are about to prepare for a feast, our two heroes arrive. Despite the artificiality and musical numbers which plagued much of the film, it's still a cool duel, like when Monkey multiplies himself into several monkeys, rather like a whole army of them. As the pig & monkey(s) use their weapons to battle it out with their foes, Sandy grabs the priest's unconscious body and carries him away. After Sandy and the priest reach the surface of the water and travel on land with Piggy and Monkey in hot pursuit, the Goddess arrives once more and confronts Sandy. Fearing the wrath of the gods, Sandy begs forgiveness and offers his assistance to Tripitaka, the Stone Monkey and Piggy on their voyage to India. ** -Damon Foster



MONKEY WAR

Presented by Rei-men Prod., Supervised by Lee Taur Ying Hsiang, Planning: King Chung Liang & Hsiung Hsih Ming, Produced by Lin Chi Fong, Asst. Prod.: Lin Ho Ping, Screenplay: Yao Chin Kang, Starring: Mr. Liu (full name unknown) as Monkey Sun, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Not only is this direct sequel to NEW TILGRIMS TO THE WEST one of my favorite Monkey King films, but it's one of my favorite movies, period! It's a fast paced, lively, colorful comedy with some of the most entertaining battles ever put on celluloid. Being an absolute sequel (both movies very well may have been filmed back-to-back) to NEW TILGRIMS TO THE WEST, its special effects and action choreography are the same as those in its prequel. All the same actors who play the four main characters (Tripitaka, the monkey, Pa Chieh & Wu Ching) return again, attired in the exact same uniforms they first wore in TILGRIMS.

Despite my intense love of this wild & crazy flick, I must admit that the martial arts choreography is a bit slower than that in its prequel. To make up for this one inadequacy, MONKEY WAR has improved special effects. Like its predecessor, MONKEY WAR has a lot of super-impositions depicting fire, lightning, and rays as the forces of good & evil clash. Other flamboyant effects include giant spiders & bats, plus effective flying scenes of winged soldiers who take on Mighty Monkey & Co. during the ultra-climactic duel.

Humor is also quite prominent throughout MONKEY WAR, which is a slapstick comedy, more so than TILGRIMS. Even MONKEY WAR's ballad (sung twice in the movie by veteran actor Wei Ping Ao) is funny, not to mention catchy! On the subject of humorous songs, they also use the theme from the Japanese cartoon STARBLAZERS (aka UCHU SENKAN YAMATO) for many of the scenes depicting the flying warriors. This version of the song is all instrumental, and more keyboard-oriented than the original Japanese trum-

pet version from Hiroshi Miyagawa. A better chance to hear this version of the tune is in the opening credits for the HK sword & sorcery caper, THE THRILLING SWORD.

Plotwise, MONKEY WAR can be divided into three episodes:

1. The Beginning: On their Journey to the West, the foursome arrive at Chu Chi Province and are asked for assistance from a Taoist monk of Chi Kuan Temple. It seems that the taoists are being forced to do strenuous labor and serve two evil yet goofy wizards calling themselves the Deer God and the Goat God (played by Wei Ping Ao of RETURN OF THE DRAGON, STRUGGLE THROUGH DEATH, INCREDIBLE KUNG FU MISSION, FIST OF FURY and BRUCE LEE SECRET). The two magical villains have convinced the king they're good gods because of their ability to control the weather. When Mighty Monkey uses his own magic to thwart that of the evil duo, the king tells the monks not to obey them. Angered, the two evil bunglers summon their minions to battle the king's soldiers and the Taoists. Mighty Monkey, Pa Chieh/Piggy, and Wu Ching/Sandy get in on the action, so the two main baddies retreat.

2. The Deer God and The Goat God inform a group of 'spider-fairies' that San Tsang's (Tripitaka) flesh can cause immortality, so the female spiders kidnap him. Later, the queen (who sometimes wears clothing similar to Malaysian & Indian style) decides to marry the captive priest, rather than eat him. They succeed in doing neither, for it isn't long before the Mighty Monkey and friends come to the rescue, which results in an outstanding battle. Note: During this middle adventure, we see the obligatory scene (also in THE MONKEY) of Piggy watching women swimming.

3. The Deer God & Goat God flee the scene of the battle where all the spider bitches were killed, and stumble up to the bat monsters of Flying Man Valley. The winged men capture the two 'god's, who talk their way out of imprisonment by convincing their winged captors of the advantages (immortality) of eating San Tsang's flesh. But having just destroyed an army of fairies and giant spiders, Monkey is on the alert. So the winged demons take turns changing into peasants which keep wandering by our migrating heroes. Mighty Monkey is the only one among our heroes who can see past the disguises of the baddies, and immediately attacks & defeats each of them. But through the deceived eyes of Tripitaka, it looks as though the monkey is killing innocent peasants! He scolds the monkey, punishes him and finally fires him from his job as the bodyguard. By the time the Mighty Monkey returns to his kingdom of monkeys at the waterfall, San Tsang/Tripitaka and Sandy have been captured by the bat-guys. So Piggy goes to the Monkey King's domain

to ask Mighty Monkey to re-consider and rescue San Tsang, despite the priest's harshness & foolishness. Out of the forgiving kindness of his heart, Mighty Monkey swallows his pride, and he & Pigsy go to Flying Man Valley to battle the villains and rescue San Tsang, who is both embarrassed & ashamed of himself for jumping to conclusions. Mighty Monkey and his fellow pilgrims have again defeated the bad guys, so they once again head to India. ***** -DF

新西遊記續集

NEW TILGRIMS TO THE WEST

Presented by Rei-men Productions, Supervised by Lee Taur & Wang Ying Hsiang, Dir.: Chang Ping, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Yes, "Tilgrims" is a misspelling of pilgrims, it's amazing that such bad spelling is left in this movie's title! Even though it's not their native language, and we commonly expect poor English in the subtitles, I think that screwing up a title like this is inexcusable! Regardless, NEW TILGRIMS (snicker) TO THE WEST is one of my two favorite feature-length, theatrical Monkey movies. The monkey's staff swinging is well choreographed and the special effects are fantastic. NEW TILGRIMS was created sometime in the 1970s, probably shortly after STAR WARS, since some of the photography and special effects are so similar to that of the overrated American blockbuster. Special effects technology at that time was improving in HK rapidly. TILGRIMS indicates the improvements in China's film industry since the 1960s when THE MONKEY was filmed.

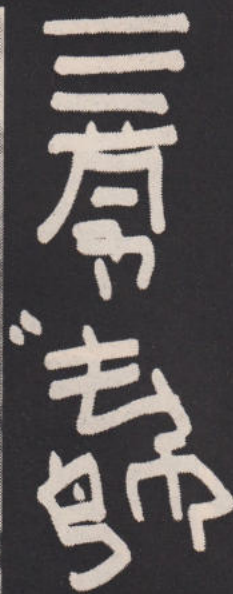
The choreography of the weapons duels isn't absolutely outstanding, but is equal to that of many martial arts costume dramas made at about the same time. I don't know if the actor who played Monkey did his own martial arts & stunts, and I don't know who the actor is (the entire cast is made

up of unfamiliar faces). With all these tricky camera shots (i.e. shots of side views, or characters moving around too quickly to get facial glimpses), it is impossible to tell if it's a stuntman under the Monkey attire. The stunts are very simple, although it takes an experienced gymnast to do that backflip off of the table during the climactic fight. Getting back to Monkey's uniform, I think the makeup was more effective in THE MONKEY, since there was more of it. Sun Wu Kung's makeup in TILGRIMS is rather lacking, so the average person would never guess that this person was meant to look like a monkey. Of all the characters, Pigsy looks the best, but much different than the entirely hairless Pigsy in THE MONKEY. This Pigsy is more reminiscent to the one in TAY DU KI, but more human-like.

Before going heavily in-depth into the script (which is not like me, but I apologize for this exception), let me just say that this immediate predecessor to MONKEY WAR (I'm reviewing them both out-of-sequence; this filmography is alphabetical) is one of the best Monkey King movies ever made. Like its Part-2 (MONKEY WAR), the emphasis is on superhero-style action and comedy. Both films are wacky, fast-paced adventures which really put to shame all the older Monkey King movies which tended to concentrate on song & dance. If you only watch one Monkey King film in your life, I quite heartily recommend NEW TILGRIMS TO THE WEST. Unfortunately, locating tapes of certain old (1970s) HK movies isn't easy, and TILGRIMS is especially difficult to find. I was lucky that not only did I locate a tape of it, but it has English subtitles. The only catch is that my print is a multi-copied tape (5th or 6th gen at least!), so the quality is absolutely horrendous. But a crappy-quality version is better than none at all. The remaining paragraphs are the script:

The very beginning of this spectacular non-musical starts off with what looks like meteors flying around in space. These spe-

cial effects are wonderful, especially for a rather low budget movie such as this. I assume that this introductory sequence is meant to briefly describe the creation of the Stone Monkey, called Monkey Sun and Sun Wu Kon by the English subtitles. I gather that these meteors (as I call them) each represent another element (Earth, water, wind, fire, etc.) figure prominently in the creation and fertilization of the Stone Egg. After this, all of the original novel's details regarding Monkey's rise to the top (learning transformations and cloud-flying, eating all of Heaven's magic peaches, etc.) are skipped, just like in Shaw's THE MONKEY. After the outerspace sequence, we now see Monkey Sun in Heaven preparing to battle the Heavenly soldiers. He's already made his mischief known, having eaten all of Heaven's immortality peaches (they were reserved for a special banquet). He's been generally disrespectful, so the angelic warriors materialize and in an outstanding duel full of marvelous special effects (i.e. super-impositions for laser-like projectiles) with Monkey Sun emerging as victor despite overwhelming odds against him. Since the rampaging Monkey seems unstoppable, the supreme Buddha himself arrives to save the day. The huge god wagers that Monkey Sun can't fly out of Buddha's enormous hand. If Monkey Sun can leave the palm of Buddha, the rebellious simian will be awarded the status of a Buddha himself. However, if Monkey Sun fails to leave Buddha's hand, he must pay for the damage he has caused. His payment will be in punishment, he will be buried in a cave for eternity, or until he changes his evil ways; which ever comes second. Thinking this to be an easy task, Monkey Sun flies onto Buddha's outreached hand. The cocky Monkey then successfully flies off of the hand, or so he thinks. For an encore, he flies on his little cloud long and far until he reaches what he thinks to be the Four Pillars at the End of the Universe. He steps down off his parked cloud and writes his



TRIPITAKA

[Monk Chen Xuanzang, Huang Chuang, San Tsang, the Tang Priest, Oushu, Prince Amat]

"Tripitaka" is actually the Indian name for this actual priest who went on a 7th century pilgrimage to obtain Buddhist scriptures from India and bring them with him, into China.

By the 13th century, the incidents and situations that occurred on this pilgrimage had evolved into a whole series of legends, and it was on these that novelist Wu Cheng En, in the 16th century, based his fictional story: The novel SAI YAO KEI (aka HSI YU CHI), translated in English as "The Journey to The West" and "The Monkey King".

Right: Damon Foster as Tripitaka.



title, "Great Sage, Equal of Heaven". After pissing on another of these poles, he gets back on his little cloud and flies all the way back to Buddha. Then Buddha shows Monkey the hand he thought he'd escaped from, and right there, on one of Buddha's fingers was the graffiti that Monkey Sun had written earlier. This reveals that Monkey was tricked. He had never successfully left Buddha's hand. His punishment was to be buried underground. And it is then that we finally see the opening credits and the title **NEW TILGRIMS TO THE WEST**.

From there, the story starts off just like in **THE MONKEY**, featuring the priest enroute to India with several followers who are again killed as a result of bad weather conditions. This time, Tripitaka is called Sun Tsung and he must now continue his journey to India alone. But the storm has severely weakened Tripitaka, who faints. He's revived and re-energized by a goddess I assume to be Kuan Yin, according to the book. Kuan Yin informs Sun Tsung (Tripitaka) that he is to release Buddha's seal from the ground where Monkey Sun has been buried for five hundred years. She gives Tripitaka the uniform that the Monkey King is to wear, as well as the gold ring which when the monkey places it on his head, he gets disciplined in a painful manner. With these gifts from Kuan Yin, Sun Tsung feels confident in releasing the undisciplined monkey from his tomb. And the disciplining is necessary, according to Sun Tsung/Tripitaka, who is appalled to see the stone monkey mercilessly kill a gang of thieves who had surrounded them. Monkey Sun then gets irritated at Sun Tsung's excessive nobleness and attempts to fly away on his vehicular cloud. But the harsh priest assumes a lotus position and prays, mentally reciting the memorized incantations carved on a plaque given to him earlier by the goddess. After the Monkey Sun's severe headache stops, he attempts to remove the golden headband he so foolishly agreed to put on but it won't budge. Naturally, the vengeful monkey turns on his strict master, attempting to obliterate him with his cudgel (staff). But it's of no use, since Sun Tsung just concentrates with his eyes closed again, and Monkey Sun's pain-inducing ring does its thing. Monkey Sun agrees to obey the priest unconditionally. The two begin their journey and arrive at a household haunted by a pig demon called Piggy who was originally an angel up in Heaven, but was banished to Earth as a pig. Piggy has his eyes on a girl who lives in that house. The family is in fear of the pig. Monkey Sun changes his appearance to that of the fearful fiancé and sets about teasing Piggy. When Piggy realizes he's been had, a spectacular duel occurs between the two animals as Piggy's rake clashes with the monkey's cudgel. Piggy suffers defeat and disappears. The next day, Piggy re-appears to beg forgiveness from Sun Tsung & Monkey. Knowing that the two are on a mission from Heaven, Piggy knows the priest can put in a good word for him in Heaven, possibly gaining Piggy re-acceptance. The trio set off on their

journey and before long encounter the cannibal from underwater called Sandy. Sandy comes off as a silly clown this time, he doesn't take his duel with Monkey seriously. He even resorts to goofy dance movements during their battle. When it becomes clear to him that the monkey is guarding the venerable Sun Tsung, he begs forgiveness and proves his obedient loyalty by using his magic to part the water of his lake so that they can get across it. But this massive procedure triggers the awareness of some hungry demons who know that eating Sun Tsung's flesh will cause immortality. Using a magic gourd (an old-fashioned, organic type of canteen) that sucks up whoever's name is called out-loud, the gruesome demons capture Sandy, Piggy and Sun Tsung. Monkey Sun realizes that it will be hard to conquer these villains, so long as they have this incredible gourd, so by means of transformation and other deceit, he tricks a foolish demon into trading so that now Monkey Sun has the gourd. From there, there's a scene where Monkey Sun impersonates a female demon and eventually rescues his fellow travelers.

Next up is the third and final adventure in **TILGRIMS**. Having defeated all the demons, our heroes set upon their journey to the West. But an old wiseman informs them of a nearly unstoppable forest fire that can only be ended by a magic fan now in the possession of some stingy fairies. In order to put out the massive fire, our heroes attempt to take the fan from the fairies. This serves as an excuse for martial arts-like duels, super-imposed FX, crazy antics such as characters impersonating each other, and a sequence involving Monkey Sun intentionally getting into the villainess's stomach where he dances around, causing the evil fairy much pain. Toward the movie's end, it seems that as the battle takes place in the clouds, not even the combined forces of Monkey Sun, Piggy ("Pa Je"), and Sandy can defeat the Bufallo king (a fairy) and his queen. So then, the same Heavenly soldiers that fought Monkey at the film's beginning arrive and assist our heroes. The villains are defeated, so the heroes get the long sought after fan and with it, they put an end to the forest fire, and once again step onto the road to India. **** -DF

PRINCESS IRON FAN

Shanghai, 1941, Producers: Wan Lai-ming & Wan Ku-Chan, Written by Wang Qianbai, Photographed by Liu Guanxing, Running Time: 65 Min., Reviewed by Damon Foster

This crude, B&W, old example of Chinese animation concentrates solely on the chapter dealing with the princess, her palm-leaf fan, her husband (the infamous demonic bull) and of course, the raging forest fire that Sun Wu Kung must extinguish. Having seen so damn many versions of this often retold story, very little in this adaptation surprised me. The whole time, it was hard for me to imagine that this oldie was in fact, made well before any other version I had seen. I'm sure you've all seen either

ALAKAZAM THE GREAT, Japan's English-dubbed **MONKEY** (NHK's **SAIYUKI '78**) series, or the shot-on-video series **JOURNEY TO THE WEST**, so I won't go into detail about the whole Monkey King legacy.

As a cartoon on the whole, this comedy was never likely to put Disney Productions out of business. Despite the English subtitles, I found myself dozing off. But this isn't to say I disliked this cinematic antique. It's not every day we get to see an old Chinese cartoon (at times seeming as ancient as the saga itself), so this novelty in itself makes **PRINCESS IRON FAN** worth checking out. It's pretty comical, so don't expect an action thriller like **ALAKAZAM THE GREAT**. **PRINCESS IRON FAN** actually reminded me more of other scratchy, grainy, B&W, animated comedies like those involving the original Mickey Mouse and most certainly Felix The Cat. This movie is the work of two brothers: Wan Ku-chan and Wan Lai-ming. They didn't let technical & financial problems stop them from making a watchable cartoon caper. For its time, they used a unique technique, basing their artwork (perhaps tracing from footage) on real people, helping to create a very natural, life-like look, to make the characters' movements seem believable. The animation, though uneven and jerky at times, is pretty full and well done, though some of the artwork demonstrates plenty of room for improvement. The Wan brothers had also made the first silent cartoon for Red China, called **DISTURBING THE STUDIO**, in 1926. I hear it was inspired by Max Fleischer, but then, so was **PRINCESS IRON FAN**. After the war, the brothers emigrated to HK, but in the 1950s, they went back to Shanghai.

The tale starts off with the continuing adventures of our heroic pilgrims (Sun Wu Kung, the pig Pa Chieh, former cannibal Wu Ching, and Buddhist priest Tripitaka), as they march the tiresome walk from China to India. Like I said before, it's the same old story we have seen remade many times since, about the quest for a magic fan, because it's the only way to put out a humongous fire threatening the landscape, and how a princess and her horned husband (here subtitled the "Ox King") try to stop them. In this variation, the fire itself is portrayed as rather a demonic force, with fire-spitting faces! The character of Wu Ching how seems to have an annoying stuttering habit. Pa Chieh, the fat, horny, hungry, rake-wielding, magical pig, seems to be labeled something like "Mullet-head" (not Piggy) in the English subtitles. Two other specific traits for **PRINCESS IRON FAN** include: 1. For once, Sun Wu Kung actually flies like Superman, instead of riding a flying cloud. 2. At no point does the priest have to discipline the ape. There's no punishment, no chanting to cause pain from the ring on the magical simian's head.

**1/2 -DF

「西遊記」

SAIYUKI

Series debut: Oct. 1, 1978, Consisting of 26 Episodes, Produced by NTV & Kokusai Hoei, Dir.: Yusuke Watanabe & Yoshiyuki Kuroda, Costumes: Kotaro Watanabe/Maki, Editor: Yasuo Hiraki, Dir. of Special Effects: Hiroichi Takano & Kiyoshi Suzuki, Photography: Yukio Yoda, Music: Micky Yoshino, Producers: Tsuneo Hayakawa, Muneo Yamada, Tadehiro Nagotomi, Kazuo Morikawa, Ken Umagaya, Lighting: Teruo Lida, Editor: Yasuo Hiraki, Screenplay: Yoichi Onaka, Based on the novel by Wu Cheng En, Screenplay: Mamoru Sasaki, English Adaptation: David Weir, English Version Dir.: Michael Bakewell for World Wide Sound, London, Cast: Masaaki Sakai as Monkey, Toshiyuki Nishida as Pigsy, Shiro Kishibe as Sandy, Masako Natsume as Tripitaka, and also featuring Takao Inoue, Yatsuko Tanami, Emi Shindie, Maci Carcer, Reviewed by DF

I'll never forget that fateful day in 1980 when I turned on the TV on a Sunday at 7:00 p.m. It had been at least three years since either of the bay area's local Japanese TV channels had shown any live action superheroes. So it came as a delight when I tuned in and saw the very first episode of SAIYUKI, a Japanese TV show based on the ancient Chinese novel, *Journey to the West*. There were no English subtitles for translation, yet I watched it faithfully for nearly as long as it lasted, practically a whole year! I found it to be quite a fun series, full of weapons duels and occasional special effects (crude though they are). Unlike many previous (and ones made since then) versions, specifically Chinese ones, of *Journey to the West*, this series is one of pop culture; though the story remains faithful, the presentation is distinctly modern, both the music and humor are fairly current (for 1979, that is). My only complaints are that they (get this) were stupid enough to cast a woman (and a pretty one at that), Masako Natsume, in the role of Tripitaka, and that each episode, being a full hour long, struck me as overly talky because there was no translation whatsoever. Looking back on it, it amazes me that I was able to faithfully sit through so many episodes of this series, since I sure as fuck don't enjoy doing it now.

Little did I know that SAIYUKI would later be dubbed into English and released as "MONKEY" by British people. The English version was of course released to Britain, Australia and maybe even Canada, but has never been released to the U.S. because of copyright problems. I'm not sure why it will be shown anywhere but here, but I suspect it's because NTV (Tokyo) wants to charge American releasers & distributors way more than they charged the other countries. And since the U.S. has the most jaded, absolutely closed-minded audience



in the world (yankee bastards!), SAIYUKI would be a ratings failure out here. It is unfortunate that the English SAIYUKI, now called MONKEY will probably never reach the U.S., despite remotely successful airings of the Mainland Chinese, English-subtitled video series JOURNEY TO THE WEST. As for the quality of SAIYUKI's/MONKEY's voice dubbing, it's quite good. Keeping in touch with the comedic tone of the Japanese series, the dubbers kept it all pretty funny. This is never easy, trying to transliterate humor from one language/culture to another. To compensate for this, British humor was dubbed into the dialogue, which at times, gives MONKEY sort of a WHAT'S UP TIGER LILLY-type of hilarity. The only difference is that, for the most part, SAIYUKI was always meant to be humorous; there's no bastardization in effect here, no disrespect for the original Japanese program. Rather than mock, the humorous voice-overs both salute and highlight the series. The only catch is that it's not always possible to understand what the characters are saying! Think of it; these are British voices trying to sound Japanese, who in turn are basing this concept on a Chinese story. That's one too many accents, and it reminds me of the Malaysian-English dubbings of the "Ultra" programs, though not quite as nonsensical. So, if dubbed in English, this show is excellent, and I highly recommend it. But if all you can locate are the original Japanese versions, don't bother; it's a waste of videotape.

MONKEY/SAIYUKI is an accurate version of the fairy tale, and one that is very entertaining as well. Everything is translated well, with some of the most convincing voice-dubbing I've ever encountered. The voices match the characters well, and in the case of Sun Wu Kung ("Goku" in the Japanese version, "Monkey" in the English version), his dubbed voice is damn near identical to that of the actual Japanese actor playing the heroic ape! He is even dubbed in with accurate imitation of a Japanese accent. The names of all the characters are taken from English versions of the

novel, since Japanese names like Oushu and Goku are too hard for Americans to remember and pronounce. The original Chinese names (Sun Wu Kung, Wu Ching, Pa Chieh, etc.) are not much easier. Taken from the book are names like Sandy, Tripitaka, and Pigsy. In MONKEY, the characters are known by the novel's names which are much better than names like Alakazam, Sir Quiggly Broken Bottom, etc. With ALAKAZAM as its only rival, MONKEY the series is beyond a doubt the best English adaptation of the often-told story. Surprisingly, MONKEY was not well received in all English speaking countries. In the 1980s, some trendy, dumb-shit teenybopper magazine called *Star Hits* labeled MONKEY "useless". These misinformed idiots miss the whole point; the program is the only English dubbed (and accurately, at that) TV series about an ancient Chinese fable. Therefor I can safely say that MONKEY is anything but useless.

Godaigo (also spelled "Godeigo") is the name of the pop band who did the music score for SAIYUKI/MONKEY (all the original tunes are left in the English version as well). They're a mostly Japanese, but part American rock 'n roll band who also supplied music for one of the GALAXY EXPRESS 999 cartoons. Their theme song for MONKEY is entitled "Monkey Magic", and is sung entirely in English (at least I think so, a few lines are unintelligible), even in the Japanese version. This upbeat song represents the state of music in Japan, back in 1978, when the song was recorded. As I listen to it, I can detect that it still has a lot of lame disco in it, but there's also vague trace of heavy metal in the guitars, and it's all mixed in with an oldfashioned "oriental" flavor. Godaigo's ending song is called "Gandhara" (a location, a line goes: "They say it was in India"). In the Japanese SAIYUKI version, much of this slow, mellow song is in Japanese, but the English MONKEY prints seem to prefer more English words. It doesn't matter to me, since this sappy song is even more annoying than "Monkey Magic", which at least has a beat.

As an all-out TV show consisting of many 60 minute episodes, NHK TV (a major Japanese network, and Tokyo's most boring TV station) had no reason to rush the show or cram any plot elements together. This can not be said of any feature-length Monkey movie reviewed in this issue. At last, there's a moving picture (I mean not a flat, one-dimensional book) that is long enough to include all the assorted details, situations & subplots of Wu Cheng En's original saga. I saw almost every episode of this amusing TV series in its Japanese version, plus a few of the English ones, and I must say, they didn't miss a trick! Hell, they had so many ideas that a sequel series (SAIYUKI 2) aired the following season, it first aired on Nov. 11, 1979. I assume this second season had the pilgrims on their way back from India, but I've never seen an episode, so I don't know.

NHK does not normally create & broadcast fantasies like SAIYUKI/MONKEY. As I recall from my four month stay in Tokyo in 1985 (where I even toured the TV station), the network has mostly news and historical soap operas like NHK Taiga Drama (also a favorite with Japanese viewers in the Bay Area). The more imaginative stuff is usually created by TV Asashi and sometimes Fuji TV. But as newcomers to the world of fantasy, they did a decent job at creating SAIYUKI, which lasted two seasons, once as SAIYUKI 2, later on. I suppose that it helped to have Jun Fukuda on the staff. He's worked a lot with Toho and helped to create many of the Godzilla classics. But as far as special effects go, NHK could have learned a thing or two from Chinese movies like NEW TILGRIMS TO THE WEST and MONKEY WAR. The sets and costumes for SAIYUKI are decent, but the series lacks the super-imposed visuals and stunning effects of the two Chinese flicks--both produced at roughly the same period as this here SAIYUKI.

The cast of SAIYUKI has only one familiar face that I could recognize. That was Toshiyuki Nishido, who plays Piggy. He co-starred with Hiroshi Fujioka and Naoya Sei in the Toei TV series SPECIAL CRIME INVESTIGATION FRONT. I also recall seeing lead actor Masaaki Sakai portraying some sort of wrestling robot in that TV show or magazine, a few years back. So on the whole, SAIYUKI has a decent cast; they play their parts well. It's a fun program which, on the whole, deserves a four-star (****) rating. But what follows are individual episode reviews of all the ones I managed to obtain. Unfortunately, since all I have are random episodes, this incomplete "episode-guide" (hah!) lacks any rhyme & reason. Some episodes are in Japanese, some are in English, and some I don't know the episode # or any real translation on the title. So the following are mere reviews of whatever of these rare episodes are available to me. This may cause you some confusion, since I have a habit of referring to the characters as the dialogue labels them. For example, when watching the series in English, I know the characters as Monkey, Tripitaka, Piggy and Sandy. But when I view the same

episode in Japanese, I automatically consider the same people to be called Goku, Oushu, Hakai and Gojo. But first, the opening narration from the beginning of each episode:

"In the worlds before Monkey, primal chaos reigned. Heaven sought order, but the Phoenix can fly only when its feathers are grown. The four worlds formed again and yet again; as endless eons wheeled and passed. Time, and the pure essences of Heaven, the moisture of the Earth, the powers of the sun and the moon all worked on a certain block, old as creation. And it became magically fertile. That first egg was named 'Thought'. Tropicana Buddha, the father Buddha said, 'With our thoughts, we make the world'. Elemental forces caused the egg to hatch, from it then came a stone monkey; the nature of Monkey was irrepressible!"

Episode #1: title unknown

First Shot: unknown

I don't have this chapter of SAIYUKI in its entirety, my tape begins with Monkey returning (from the Patriarch Sumbodhi, I assume) home to battle the Demon of Havoc. From there he gets the "Magic Wishing Staff" ("Iron Cudgel" in the book) from the Dragon King underwater. It's interesting to note passionate Dragon Princess, who will later return to the series as a horse. From there, Monkey is invited to Heaven where he eats the peaches and pisses everybody off. It's here that we're introduced to imperial angels the "Commander of the Host of Heaven" and "Grand Marshall of the Heavenly Host", two bunglers who's foolishness would lead to punishment (from Heaven's Jade Emperor), later changing them into Sandy and Piggy. In Piggy's case, he got drunk and dared to kiss Lady Vega (a "moon maiden"), so the Jade Emperor cursed him by condemning him to Earth as a mutant swine.

Anyway, this episode, being available (consult your local bootlegger) in English, is excellent; it's both educational and entertaining. It accurately answers any questions brought on by inferior translations like AKAKAZAM, and also manages to be fun due to plenty of comedy and swordplay. It ends with Buddha's tricky wager ("five pillars at the end of the universe", etc.) trapping the disobedient Monkey underground. ***** -DF

"Monkey Turns Nurse Maid" Iepisode #21

First Shot: Flowers, weeds blowing in the wind.

Much is made of Kuan Yin's journey to hire Piggy, Sandy and the Dragon Princess (it was a male prince in most other versions); they're to assist Monkey & Tripitaka. In all other versions I've seen, Kuan Yin has a less prominent role. We also get a little insight (for once!) into Tripitaka's origin and upbringing; something to do with being abandoned by his mother (and adopted by monks) and her dysfunctional household. But eventually, Tripitaka releases Monkey, and with the dis-

ciplining ring in place, they're off on their journey, and the dragon becomes their horse. The final misadventure has the two pilgrims stay at a questionable monastery where a devious monk tries to steal their valuable antique robe, and then lock up & burn our heroes. They do escape, but this indirectly leads to Monkey tackling another demon (whom he defeats from inside, by turning into a pill the demon swallows). All in all, this episode doesn't have as much martial arts as the first episode, but there's more better FX; i.e. the giant dragon. This episode directed by Jun Fukuda.*** -DF

"The Great Journey Begins" Iepisode #31

First Shot: Barren Landscape

It's a strange yet action-oriented episode, there are numerous duels, but the episode has no main, consistent, over-all plot. Frequently there's some wierd "guardian raven" guy (who has a Robin Hood-like hat, complete with feather), who pops in occasionally to help our heroes out, and it looks like an inspiration for THE CROW. Later, both Piggy (horny pig wants to screw a woman whom Monkey impersonates) and Sandy (river-dwelling cannibal who actually overpowers Monkey; Sandy looks different than the long-haired Chinese warrior seen in over versions-- this one has a bald head and resembles Friar Tuck) are re-introduced and quickly join the club. There's the obligatory scene of a teased, blindfolded Piggy chasing women who are actually "Spider Fairies" (also in MONKEY WAR), but the script goes nowhere with it. Instead, our foursome ends up in a desert blizzard where they battle a "tiger tribe" (resembling Mongolians) who capture Tripitaka. I got a kick out of what the priest says to a dying villain: "The Buddha within yourself can't forgive you; neither Heaven nor Hell exists except in your mind!" I bet that would piss off Chirstian fundamentalists (no wonder this series was never shown in the U.S.). Funny dialogue and swordplay (i.e. a blinded Monkey imitating Zato Ichi) highlight this episode.*** 1/2 -DF

"Truth and the Grey Gloves Ghost" Iepisode #171

First shot: Sand dunes with dust & wind.

A pointless subplot about some old woman who thinks Tripitaka is her son Hsu Fan. It's pretty stupid filler, and this episode lacks sufficient action. As always, there's funny dialogue, like when Sandy discovers a slaughtered village, full of corpses and says: "Anyone just pretending?" Piggy's involvement is minimal and the cover-ups are conspicuous, I guess actor Toshiyuki Nishida wasn't available. Regardless, there is a little swordplay at the end, when Sandy & Monkey finally confront a gang of bandits lead by the evil "Grey Gloves Devil", who wears black gloves. Watch for a cameo by Ren Yamamoto, that Toho actor who was the boat driver at the beginning of WAR OF THE GARGANTUAS. Here he plays an old woodcutter. *-DF

"Land of the Locusts" Iepisode #181

F.S.: Grasshoppers.

Talky, confusing; this chapter of SAIYUKI is a real mess. It makes little sense, even dubbed in English. Something to do with a lake, a mute girl, and this time it's Monkey and Sandy, not Pigsy, who come off as worn-anizers. This episode had such potential! The villainous "Locust" henchmen wear leotards & tights, and eye-makeup; so they bear a striking resemblance to the Shocker henchmen of KAMEN RIDER (Toei; 1971). But don't expect a lot of 1970s-style, superhero action, its three swordfights are disappointing. The script has something to do with an evil queen (of "grasshopper-guys", attired in Mongolian-looking helmets) who keeps turning people into pigs--go figure. *1/2 -DF

KOIKI KOKU NANUKUJI YOUKAI

F.S.: Mountains with snow.

Being an episode only available to me in Japanese, it's more vulnerable to my scrutiny & attacks. I suppose it would have been interesting if I had an English version of this talky (and how!) chapter. The script has something to do with Hakai ("Pigsy" in English, but this print of mine isn't dubbed) impersonating a slug-demon who wears blue lipstick. Whenever some cute chick (who falls for Oushu) gets mad at these human-mollusks, she throws salt at them. But in the long run, regardless of language, this virtually actionless episode sucks big time. Rating: Zero, no star! -DF

JISHIN YOUKAI! NAMAZU MAO NAZO

F.S.: Volcano erupting.

Another non-translated edition, but at least this one offers a few remotely decent special effects: Miniature temples crumbling (due to some natural disaster), and a giant catfish who swallows our heroes! This huge monster may be of interest to Toho fans. The creature has a secret identity as a semi-human villain, some sort of wizard or warlord. There are also a couple faceless ghosts, but on the whole, it's another dull (unless your Japanese is fluent) episode. * -DF

CHYOSOU! NUKU MA NO IKETAO

FS: Panning up to a mountain.

Goku's climactic duel with a slick-looking, cave-carving demon is okay, but otherwise, this episode is a tedious talker to be avoided. There are, however, a few interesting FX, including the super-imposing of animated birds and several miniature sets. Otherwise, the episode deals with our heroes digging a cave and having some really big argument. Yawns a plenty. 1/2 -DF

YORO TO HIRO NO YOKAI KAIFU FU

FS: The pilgrims walking toward us/camera.

I really came close to liking this episode, since there's plenty of action and it has a few things going for it. An interesting story where our heroes penetrate into some eternally dark dimension inhabited by vampires (it's cool when they suck their victims dry and the bodies decay). These bloodsuckers have some sort of rivalry with an army of soldiers and demonic slavedrivers. Goku falls for some peasant girl [from a nearby village], Hakai falls for the vampiric leader,

and Gojo doesn't. If I had an English print, this would be one cool chapter; that's all I have to say about that. * -DF

SAIYUKI 1993

Broadcast on Nihon TV (Tokyo); 1993, Sponsors: Fuji Film, Sumitomo Visa Card, Reviewed by the One And Only Damon Foster

This weird TV movie is probably one of the most dreadful versions of SAIYUKI I've ever snored at. It's shot on video, which at times makes this feature-length farce resemble the Mainland Chinese JOURNEY TO THE WEST series (complete with similarly colorful costumes and an abundance of video-generated FX), but being Japanese, the over-all approach is more like the 1978 TV show SAIYUKI. But for the trillionth time (and I'm as sick as saying this as you are sick of reading it), the real hindrance is simply the fact that I'm watching an untranslated, long movie. There's plenty of talking, and although I could understand a little of the dialogue, that's not enough to keep my finger off the ever tempting Scan button.

One odd thing about this fantasy is there's more romance and sexually suggestive scenes than I've seen in any other version of this tale; the writers are really taking a different approach. Goku, Hakai and Gojo all seem to have brief though adult relationships with women, and although there's

nothing explicit, it still surprised me to see something so incredibly out-of-place. Even weirder is the introduction of the pig, Hakai. We all know he chases women, and that in most versions of the tale, Goku impersonates a female to tease then trap Hakai. That kind of happens in this version too, only it's bizarre. Okay, let's see if I can figure out this drug-induced nonsense: First of all, here's the real problem-- the priest Oushu is a man, right? Right! That's common knowledge to anyone who's familiar with this often-repeated tale. And, like in 1978's SAIYUKI, this similarly strange Japanese rendition also casts a female in the role of the priest, whom I assume is still meant to be a man despite this androgynous, gender-bending nonsense. But things really get wacky when that horny pig, Hakai, comes on to the priest! That's right, it's the priest Oushu himself (herself?) whom the pig pursues this time, so Goku

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impersonates Oushu to confuse the pig! What's the deal? Is the pig bisexual?

That odd little twist is typical of this un-faithful bastardization. Everyone's entitled to originality, so the drastic changes [which ignore all tradition] are forgivable. Part of the reason I'll forgive the blasphemous inaccuracies is because there are indeed some enjoyable moments in SAIYUKI 93 (by the way, I added the "93" myself, it doesn't say that on the movie, but I needed to separate it from the other SAIYUKI reviewed here). Like I said, there are computer FX, video super-impositions and trendy morphing a plenty; and although I don't prefer these artificial thrills over the good old stuff (real miniatures, rubber monsters, celluloid format, etc.), let's face it: Computer & video flashiness is better than no colorful FX at all. Then of course comes that topic which, for over 20 years, has won me over almost every time: Martial arts! It's no secret that I'm a sucker for karate kicks and acrobatic flips. This movie does indeed have its share of this, along with the obligatory swordplay and other swinging weapons. I couldn't count all the duels in this, which isn't to say SAIYUKI 93 is action-packed- because it really isn't. Though there are some battles, you gotta' remember that getting to them is a frustrating experience, since there's an abundance of tedious dialogue to sleep through.

Another strange plot-twist happens when Goku appears to kill a couple women who are, in fact, disguised demons. Not knowing these "women" are in fact demons, Oushu basically fired Goku, and goes so far as to remove the disciplinary ring from his head! We don't see this too often. But the scenes of Goku leaving the pilgrims to join old friends is common. Yet there's another twist: He does not go to the monkey tribe at the waterfall; they're not in this film at all! In this misinformed version, he "returns" to a rough and rugged town of humans where everyone seems to be fighting each other. Goku hangs out with human martial artists and tries to romance an ex-girlfriend (human) or two, and is annoyed when one chick doesn't remember him.

The story starts off with Oushu on his (her?) journey, where the lone priest eventually releases Goku from the cave Buddha had stuck him in 500 years ago last Thursday. For this version, the priest actually walks into the cave before locating Goku and delivering a chant which eliminates the power of Buddha's seal. At first appearance, Goku is an eerie sight, that monkey make-up appliance is a neat effect, as are the introductory forms of both Hakai and Gojo. All three look pretty scary at first (scarier than Tina Turner in a G-string), but once they befriend the priest, they adapt dull human appearances, which I think is a mistake. What's wrong with hideous, frightening looking heroes? Speaking of hideous, the actor playing Gojo is pretty scary-looking even without make-up; his head is shaped strangely, as are his teeth. Whoever this actor is, I believe he was also in at least one of the live-action

(continued on 30)

LIVE STAGE-PLAY REVIEW--by Don Coley

THE REAL AND SHAM MONKEY KING

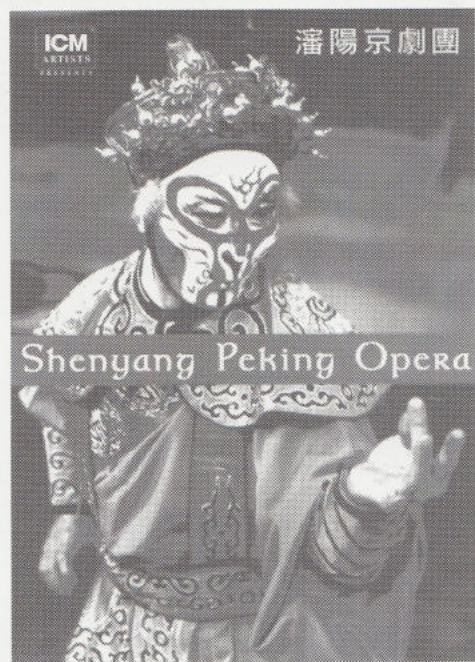
Performed by the Shenyang Peking Opera; Sat. & Sun., Feb. 15-16, '97, at Zellerbach Hall (U.C. Berkeley Campus), Musicians: Yang Dengzun Guo Laixing, Ma Jun, Ni Yuanli, He Zhongsheng, Zhao Yongzhou, Jia Qinglin, Liu Baoguo, Tian Baoxin, Artists: Zhang Hongwei, Qi Zhijian, Liu Ming, Chen Ge, Zhai Bin, Zhao Xiangjun, Zhang Dong, Sheng Li, Guan Yi, Gao Chenglin, Huang Yibin, Zhang Yingchao, Gao Bingyi Li Fang, Ding Suozi, Li Danhong, Principal Cast: Bai Ge as Sun Wukong (Monkey King), Zhuang Yuheng as Sham Monkey King, Wang Bin as Tang Monk (Tang Seng), Huang Shaopeng as Zhu Bajie, Wnag Qingyuan as Sha Monk (Sha Seng), Zhang Aili as Empress, Li Jingwen as Woman General, Reviewed by Don Coley

According to the Chinese lunar calendar, 4694 (1996) was the Year of the Rat. But in Berkeley California, it seemed more like the year of the Monkey King. There were no less than three presentations of the adventures of Sun Wukong and his friends. Since Damon has already reviewed PRINCESS IRON FAN, and since I didn't see the American play, Journey to the West (nor the San Francisco play Hanuman and the Monkey King), this review will cover the year's third Monkey King tale.

The Shenyang Peking Opera company was founded in 1959. Although they specialize in the traditional repertoire of the Tang school, they have, over the years, developed their own new programs. The company has toured extensively in China and Europe, but this was their first journey to the far west, reaching the U.S. and Canada.

"So, what's the story?" you ask. If this had been a movie, subtitles would have helped by mistranslating the dialogue. Fortunately, the company found a low-tech alternative. They inserted a scene-by-scene synopsis into the program.

This Peking Opera production was titled "The Real and the Sham Monkey King". It opens with a micaceous mon-



key who declares his intention to impersonate the Monkey King so that he can seize the holy scriptures and destroy the real Sun Wukong. As the Sham Monkey King exits the scene, Tang Monk and his guardians, the real Monkey King, Zhu Bajie (Pigsy) and Sha Seng (Sandy) enter. They are going to the city of Xi Liang to get their travel papers stamped. Yes, the bureaucracy was firmly in place even in this fantasy land. Men were not allowed to pass through the city, so when they meet a squad of female soldiers, the pilgrims are captured.

When she learns what has happened, the young (30 years old and never been kissed) Empress invites Tank Monk up to the palace for dinner. Of course, she loves the first sight of him and begins making wedding plans. These early scenes contain very little action, mostly singing, talking and gesturing. So, I spent a lot of time looking at the sets & costumes. In the scenes set in the palace the clothing and scenery become progressively more elaborate. The Shenyang Peking Opera Company manages to get some very impressive effects from some drapery and a few well-designed props.

This first big action scene is triggered when our four heroes escape from the love-sick young Empress. The Woman General and her soldiers give chase, but encounter the Sham Monkey King instead. When they try to arrest him, a fight ensues, giving the cast a chance to demonstrate some spectacular martial arts, acrobatics and juggling. Li

Jingwen, who plays the Woman General, won "Best Martial Actress" at the Peking Opera National Competition and this scene belongs to her. She does a great job of defending herself from the Sham Monkey's lackeys, juggling swords and staffs thrown at her by her attackers.

The next big action piece occurred when the Monkey King rescues the Tang Monk, Piggy and Sandy from a gang of bandits. Bai Ge, the actor who plays the monkey specializes in roles that display his martial arts skills. In this sequence, he leaps, tumbles, and juggles his way through a fight with the bandits. Probably the best part of the battle is the way the Monkey King turns the robbers' attacks against them so that they end

up killing themselves.

Although there are a few more action sequences, the rest of the opera gets a lot more plot-heavy. By the end of the play, all four of the pilgrims have confronted and defeated their own doppelgangers. The Sham MK is the last one to be overcome. His impersonation is so good that neither the Goddess of Mercy or the god Tai Bai can tell him from the true MK. The last three scenes of the opera involve attempts to determine which of the two simians is the real MK.

The final scene was the weirdest, as the two monkeys journey to see the Great Buddha. The Enlightened one is portrayed as a being of living gold, dwelling in rather elegant surroundings. He

is attended by a group of very unChinese-looking monks. The Buddha's disciples appear to be symbolic characters. Some have extremely long legs or arms, and big ears. If I knew anything about Buddhist symbolism, I could explain who these characters were meant to be. But since I really don't have a clue to the identity of these folks, I'll just have to say that the final scene in the opera is very surreal.

It's unlikely that many of you ever got a chance to see this Peking Opera production of "The Real and Sham Monkey King". But if it does come to your town, I'd say go see it. -Don Coley

SYNOPSIS:

The Real and Sham Monkey King

The Monkey King, known for his cunning and resourcefulness, is a popular hero in Peking operas. In this fable of good versus evil, the Monkey King is accompanying his master, Tang Monk, on a dangerous journey to bring home Buddhist scriptures. An evil imposter disguised as the Monkey King threatens the completion of their mission.

SCENE 1

A six-eared macacus monkey has transformed himself into the image of the Monkey King. This imposter (Sham Monkey King) pledges to destroy his rival and to seize the holy scriptures.

The real Monkey King and Tang Monk, with disciples Zhu Bajie (Piggy) and Sha Seng (Sandy), make their way to the capital city of Xi Liang, where they must have their traveling documents stamped. The Monkey King is captured and tied up by the Woman General, who informs the group that no men are allowed to pass through the city gates. A scuffle ensues before the Female Courier arrives with word that the Empress has asked to meet Tang Monk in her Golden Palace.

SCENE 2

As soon as she sets eyes on Tang Monk, the Empress is enraptured. Instead of signing the travel papers, she urges him to stay in Xi Liang for a few days. After she leaves, the Female Courier explains that Her Majesty, who is thirty years old and unmarried, has fallen in love with Tang Monk and wishes to wed.

The Monkey King urges Tang Monk to pretend to accept the proposal in order to secure their travel documents. Piggy and Sandy express disgust at the idea — although Piggy volunteers to stay behind to take Tang Monk's place in the nuptial chamber. The Female Courier summons the group to the palace, where a banquet is being prepared in anticipation of the wedding ceremony that evening.

SCENE 3

After the feast, Piggy finds Tang Monk in the Royal Garden. He tells his Master that they have obtained the travel papers and should slip away immediately. The Empress, accompanied by her servants, arrives bearing a royal crown and robe for Tang Monk. Flush with thoughts of love and romance, she tempts him with promises of riches, security and sensual pleasures. The Monkey King pretends to be Tang Monk, fooling the Empress while his party escapes. When the Monkey King flees, the Empress demands that her guards capture them.

SCENE 4

The Woman General and her guards chase Tang Monk and his disciples through the wilderness. The Sham Monkey King appears. The soldiers, mistaking him for the Monkey King, pursue him but he eludes their grasp.

SCENE 5

A group of bandits in the Flying Cloud Hill wait by the roadside to rob passing merchants. Tang Monk, Piggy and Sandy approach. Overcome by the scorching heat, they decide to rest briefly in the nearby forest. When the robbers appear, Tang Monk tells them of his mission and pleads for mercy. The head of the bandits refuses and orders his men to attack. Suddenly, the Monkey King arrives and slaughters the bandits.

Instead of being grateful, Tang Monk berates the Monkey King for his violent actions and banishes him from his sight. The Monkey King asks for forgiveness while Sandy and Piggy defend him. Angry that the Monkey King refuses to leave, Tang Monk recites the spell that shrinks the Monkey King's headpiece. He yells out in pain and is forced to depart to the sounds of Piggy and Sandy's cries.

Tang Monk and his two disciples are parched with thirst, so Piggy leaves to fetch water. Pretending to offer water, the Sham Monkey King appears. He beats Tang Monk unconscious, steals his travel documents and leaves before Piggy returns.

SCENE 6

The Sham Monkey King travels to the Monkey King's homeland. To an audience of lesser monkeys, he boasts of his triumphs and ambitious plans to obtain the holy scriptures. Sandy arrives and requests that the traveling papers be returned to Tang Monk, the only one granted passage with the documents. To Sandy's horror, the Sham Monkey King burns the papers and commands the monkeys to seize Sandy. The Sham Monkey King resumes his journey West.

SCENE 7

The real Monkey King has traveled to see Guan Yin Bodhisattva, the Goddess of Mercy, for advice on how to secure Tang Monk's pardon. Guan Yin is sympathetic to his troubles and encourages him to be patient with his Master, who is not perfect. The Monkey King begs Guan Yin to restore his freedom by removing the shrinkable headpiece, but she explains that only the Patriarch in the Western Heavens holds that power. She says that the headpiece has a purpose: to ensure that the Monkey King protects Tang Monk on his spiritual journey. Only when that goal is achieved will the headpiece be removed.

Guan Yin tells the Monkey King that his Master has encountered a monster and desperately needs his help. At first he is reluctant, but Guan Yin appeals to his sense of duty, honor and selflessness. Moved, the Monkey King vows to save his Master by conquering the demon.

SCENE 8

On their way further to the West, the group is suddenly joined by not only the Sham Monkey King, but Sham Tang Monk, Sham Piggy and Sham Sandy as well. In the chaos and fighting, the Sham Tang Monk, Sham Piggy, and Sham Sandy are killed. In an unsuccessful effort to distinguish between the two Monkey Kings, Tang Monk recites the shrinking headpiece spell, but even that does not succeed in revealing the truth. He then suggests that the monkeys travel to see Guan Yin, who should be able to identify true and false. The monkeys leave.

SCENE 9

Faced with both the Monkey King and the imposter, Guan Yin is unable to tell them apart. She proposes that they travel to the Hall of Heaven to see the Queen Mother.

SCENE 10

God Tai Bai and the Queen Mother discuss the havoc created by the Monkey King and the pretender. The Queen Mother exhorts Li Jing and his troops to defend the palace. When the two monkeys arrive, Li Jing attempts to identify the imposter by using his demon-sensing mirror, but that too fails. Both monkeys leave to seek help from the Great Buddha.

SCENE 11

The two monkeys visit the Great Buddha. He tells them that the imposter is actually a tiny, six-eared macacus monkey, an extremely jealous creature with an obsessive drive to achieve greatness. As the Buddha sings, the truth becomes clear and the Sham Monkey King is transformed back into its original shape. The Buddha restores the travel documents to the Monkey King, who receives them with a bow and departs to resume his mission.



Shenyang Peking Opera Company

Acrobatics, martial arts, traditional Chinese music and larger-than-life acting and effects combine in the art form known as Peking Opera. The Shenyang Peking Opera, with 65 award-winning performers, is the first Company from mainland China to tour the United States in over 15 years. Showcasing the extraordinary virtuosity of its artists, the Shenyang Company spins Buddhist fairy tales and dynastic legends into an incomparable stage spectacle. Its programs include the full-length drama "The Monkey King" the most popular character in Peking Opera, as well as favorite shorter works.



TOKYO MEGAPOLIS movies, I saw him on the videobox cover. Anyway, the heroic foursome travel across vast deserts (I don't think these scenes were shot in Japan, but maybe Tibet or some place) dealing with occasional demons, bandits and other villains. There's some female demon (?) that befriends them, virtually romancing Goku at one point. She's in the movie a lot, and I can't quite say what role she adds to the film. Anyway, the final battle takes place with flamboyant demons in a cave, and involves one of those suction gourds which consumes anyone who responds to when the gourd holder yells the name of the intended target. * -Damon Foster

天美大王

TAY DU KI

Produced by Vietnamese People, Director: Vietnamese Person, Starring unknown, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Having never seen MONKEY FIGHTS GOLDEN LEOPARD, I am not entirely certain exactly what the hell them early opera-like stories [involving Monkey] are like. But in my mind, this Vietnamese movie is a good example of what all those Chinese movies from the 1920s, 1930s, and maybe the 1940s have to offer. Apparently, early Chinese adventures and fantasies were mere stage plays put on film, as though somebody in the front row were filming the live performance with a movie camera. Although TAY DU KI is not a stage play (the movie has real sets and an outdoor shot at the beginning), it does have artificial characterisations, ballads, and its martial arts are entirely dance-oriented.

TAY DU KI is feature-length, and is in full color. The movie is not blatantly cheap, but big budgetted it sure as hell is not! For this type of film, the sets seem to suffice. Everything is fake-looking, just like the original stage plays which inspired the movie.

The simple sets could be a result of their trying to mimick a stage-like atmosphere, or maybe because Vietnamese movie producers, like others in their poor country can't afford a whole hell of a lot. My comments on the sets could be applied to TAY DU KI's costumes as well. The costumes on the human characters look standard for those in most average Chinese period films, but the Monkey King himself looks particularly bad (not that he normally looks good). The one character who's design I liked was Piggy. This is definately one of the best Piggy designs I have ever seen. Where as Sun Wu Kung (Monkey) is just an actor with what looks like shoe-polish on his face, Piggy's detailed face-piece is a large makeup & mask piece, complete with large ears. Other 'animal' costumes are the most unbelievably artificial things imaginable. Some look like what a kid would wear on Halloween, or maybe like something you would expect to see on a contestant on LET'S MAKE A DEAL. Another cheap effect comes when Tripitaka does his chanting to cause Monkey King's golden headband to inflict pain on the poor ape. We see what appears to be sparks coming from the monkey's head as he struggles and suffers. This is accomplished by doing what all us amateur filmmakers learned to do as children when we needed cheap, quick super-impositions that were meant to represent laser beams and rays: We would scratch the film. The fact that Vietnam's professional crew would use this crude method perfectly demonstrates how primitive their technology is. Perhaps by undernourished, poverty-sticken Vietnamese standards, this movie is state-of-the-art. I suppose it's possible, since technology is spreading to everyone. Eventually, prices of film equipment do come down. Everything goes down, except for maybe my girlfriend.

The martial arts are practically non-existent in TAY DU KI. There are many duels involving swords & staffs, but these unexciting battles are too artificial, too dance-like, and too musical. This tends to

take away the suspense which normally accompanies most fights in films. Also lacking is any real sense of emotion, since the opponents are too busy dancing and anticipating each other's choreographed moves to bother to show any anger, rage or fear.

The story takes place after the original JOURNEY TO THE WEST saga which deals with all the introductions of each of the four characters. TAY DU KI begins where all four heroes are already united, and are traveling to India to fetch the Buddhist scriptures. The producers assume everyone is familiar with these wellknown characters, so there's not much explanation on them. TAY DU KI offers one of the many possible adventures that the foursome may have encountered on their way to India. since TAY DU KI has no English subtitles, it's hard to know exactly what's going on. I gather that it's basically just how our heroes encounter more cannibals and pull through a number of tight situations. As I recall, the villainous characters this time are magical fairies who can change their forms into animals such as dogs and frogs (using some of the worst animal costumes imaginable). I'm guessing that the villains want to eat the monk, though he himself is a vegetarian. Many people become vegetarians because they love animals, and can't stand the thought of biting into animal flesh. I was a vegetarian once; but it wasn't because I loved animals. I was a vegetarian because I hate vegetables.

Like I may have said earlier, I've never seen any early Monkey stage-plays, nor have I seen 1926's MONKEY FIGHTS GOLDEN LEOPARD, so until then, this Vietnamese movie serves as a good example in my mind of what all those early films and plays must have been like. Because of its oldfashioned style, TAY DU KI could have been made in either in the 1950s or 1960s, but its semi-modern technology would indicate its creation was either in the 1970s or 1980s. So I guess it's safe to assume TAY DU KI was made some time between the years 1950 and 1988! -Damon Foster



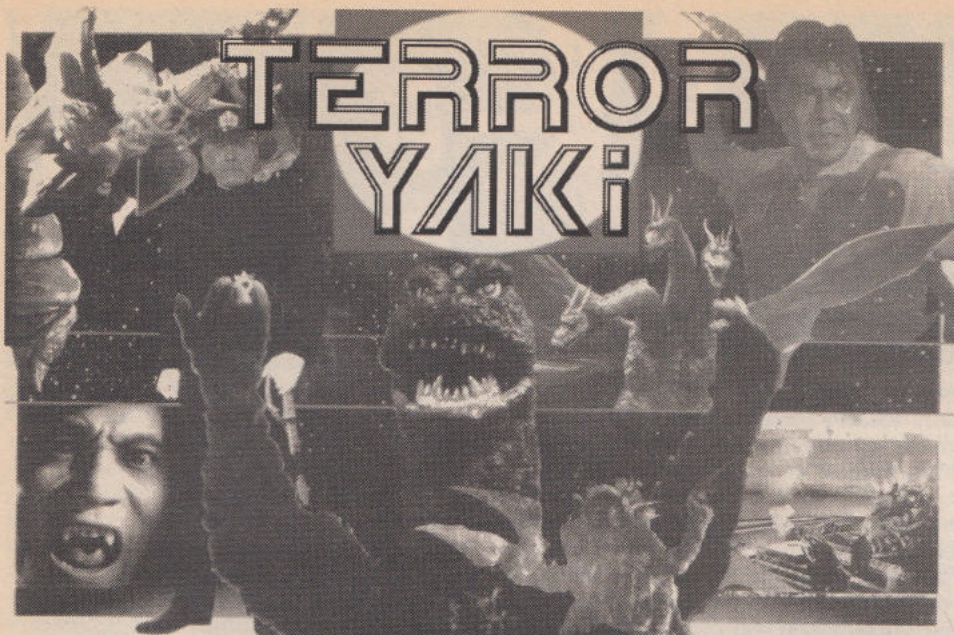
大あばれ孫悟空 1952年9月4日公開 85分

MONKEY SUN

天美大王

殴り込み孫悟空

1954年5月11日公開 84分



東海道お化け道中

TOUKAI DOU-ABU KEDOU CHINUU

[aka "The Eastern Sea Road Goblin"] Produced by Daiei Motion Picture Co.; 1968, Released: 3/21/69, Running Time: 79 Minutes, Executive Producer: Masaichi Nagata, Starring: Kojiro Hongo, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Another excellent horror fantasy from the 1960s, brought to us courtesy of Daiei, who also blessed us with similar period-films reviewed previously, including: YOKAI DAISENZO and of course, the "Majin" trilogy. I suppose this entry is typical of the whole "samurai vs. spirits" genre from Japan, but since I so far liked every one of them, I've nothing but praise for this addition to a long-forgotten, little-known genre. This movie manages to suffice both as a horror film and as a crime drama. In the human department, the villains are dastardly and the main hero, Daiei's #1 '60's star Kojiro Hongo (whatever happened to him?) is as charismatic as always. As for the supernatural aspects, the tale delivers again. The forest demons get pretty chill-

ing at times, and rarely resort to the more comical approach & designs seen in sillier films like YOKAI DAISENZO. So on the whole, it's a pretty coherent, well-rounded movie, the two stories (both earthly and non-earthly) play well off each other.

Such praises from me are unlikely indeed, since, other than a few exceptions (i.e. two of Daiei's Majin movies), such epics aren't available with any English translation. But its being completely in Japanese didn't make the film boring very often, despite plenty of dialogue. I only know a little Japanese (his name is Jiro and he's 4 feet tall!—just kidding), and that didn't help me to understand every line of dialogue, but somehow, the film's approach kept everything interesting. I never reached for the scan button even once, and managed to sit through the full running-time in just two sittings. The ghosts only appear sporadically, and also rather spread out are the man-against-man swordfights, and perhaps a chase or two. Inbetween all these scenes are talky scenes (needed, since the script has complexities), there was always something worth waiting for, be it spirits or swordplay. Perhaps on the whole, the

Tomoyuki Tanaka, 86

'Godzilla' producer also worked with Kurosawa

CAPE COD TIMES

TOKYO — Tomoyuki Tanaka, producer of the "Godzilla" movies and a former chairman of movie house Toho Co., died of a stroke Wednesday at a Tokyo hospital, the hospital said. He was 86.

Tanaka produced 22 movies about a giant lizardlike creature awakened from its long slumber by hydrogen bomb testing in the South Pacific in 1954.

He also produced films with Academy Award-winning director Akira Kurosawa, including "Akahige" (Red Beard) and "Kagemusha" (The Shadow Warrior).

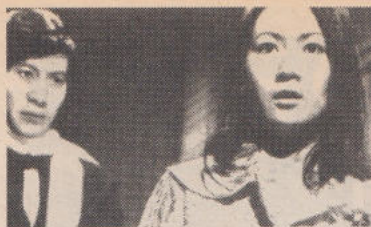
movie isn't action-packed like I would have preferred, but in the final analysis, THE EASTERN SEA ROAD GOBLIN is a winner!

We don't get a really good look at many of the ghosts this time, perhaps this was to preserve atmosphere and mystique, or maybe to hide the fact that many of these creatures may look goofy, a trait which nearly turned YOKAI DAISENZO into a medieval Japanese "Muppet Show"! So with flawed costumes carefully hidden in the dark (no dancing "umbrella-puppets" here!) and behind bushes, these monsters seem actually eerie for once, the unintended humor commonly seen here is lost. Those apparitions that we actually do see up close are only the creepiest ones, denizens of horror which could probably scare little kids and those easily frightened by movies. The grande finale has its share of bloodshed and flying heads, not to mention some truly effective, innovative special effects.

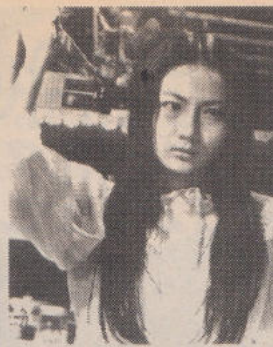
Being generally Japanese-language-impaired, following this script was even more difficult, confusing, contradictory and disjointed than a three-hour speech on Anthropology delivered by Charles Manson! So I won't go into specifics. But we know Kojiro Hongo has a nightmare about ghosts (a message delivered to him, by the ghosts themselves), so he picks up his sword and is apparently guided by the spirits to the village where the evil yakuza are up to no good. It would appear that this gang is after some sort of scroll, what it is I don't know. They're also chasing some little girl throughout the film, she either knows where the scroll is hidden or has witnessed one of several murders that these samurai-gone-bad have committed. Another confusing inanimate prop is a small purse containing a pair of magical dice, and I'm not certain what significance this plays in the over-all script. In-between swordfights (Kojiro Hongo slashes several baddies at different points in the story), and scenes



of heroic yet scary ghosts killing off more villains, there's some sort of subplot where it's revealed that one of the nasties is actually the long-lost father of the little kid that everyone seems interested in capturing. So he becomes a good guy, but again, I'm oversimplifying a plot I'm not at all qualified to describe! Anyway, the story ends happily, since all the villains were either stabbed by heroic Hongo, or killed by the equally heroic ghosts who lurk in the forest, and only kill bad guys. It ends, much like in YOKAI DAISENZO, with our playful spirits frolicking their way back to their haunted forest. **** -Damon Foster



EVIL OF DRACULA



血を吸う悪魔 EVIL OF DRACULA

Toho Co. Ltd.; 1974, Release Date: 7/20/74, A U.P.A. Productions of America Release, Exec. Prod.: Fumio Tanaka, Dir.: Michio Yamamoto, Screenplay: Ei Ogawa & Masaru Takesue, Photography: Kazutami Hara, Art Dir.: Kazuo Satsuya, Music: Richiro Manabe, Film Editor: Michiko Ikeda, Cast: Toshio Kurosawa, Kunie Tanaka, Katsubiko Sasaki, Shin Kishida, Mariko Mochizuki, Mio Ohta, Mika Katsuragi, Keiko Aramaki, Yunosuke Ito, Reviewed by Damon F.

It was twenty years ago that I saw this one uncut, in Japanese with English subtitles, at the now long-gone Kokusai theater in San Francisco. But currently, I'm only familiar with the edited, English-dubbed TV print. Neither version is bad, and since I can hardly remember the untampered-with, Japanese original, I don't feel I'm missing out on much. Perhaps there was a little more bloodshed in the Japanese master, and there was an "upper-nudity" shot of an unconscious woman on a table; this wasn't actually cut out, but was scanned enough in a direction to eliminate the breasts (the vagina was already cov-

ered in the Japanese version, by a strategically located lamp; or some such object). In fact, of any real complaint against the TV version, it's the method of pan & scan, which often ruins whatever effect was generated by the original widescreen format. The worst affect it had on EVIL OF DRACULA was it put a fight (between heroic Toshio Kurosawa and not-so-heroic Katsuhiko Sasaki) off center. But the fight sucks anyway, there's nothing exciting about it and we're not missing much.

EVIL OF DRACULA could be considered part of a trilogy, following two other Toho vampire movies: VAMPIRE DOLL (1970) and LAKE OF DRACULA (1971). Theoretically, LAKE OF DRACULA could almost be considered a prequel to EVIL OF DRACULA because the late Shin Kishida (SUN VULCAN, KAIKI DAI-SAKUSEN, Interpol Agent Nanbara in GODZILLA VS. MECHAGODZILLA) plays the same role as the villainous vampire. But both films can easily be viewed independent of one another, there's no literal link I could detect. As for 1970's VAMPIRE DOLL, I haven't seen it because I know of no subtitled or dubbed versions, and available photos make it look a lot different than LAKE OF DRACULA and EVIL OF DRACULA, both of which are virtually interchangeable.

As for the actual species of vampire

movie, this Japanese movie seems to borrow heavily from the Hammer style of vampire cinema. The setting is modern (or rather, the 1970s; semi-modern!), and obviously the characters are all Japanese ones, but otherwise, the atmosphere, pacing and over-all style seems to imitate the European style of vampire movie-making. This is not necessarily a bad thing, though I've never been a big fan of Hammer movies (except for the abundant cleavage shots!). Part of the problem is the ridiculous romanticizing and erotic bullshit which commonly creeps into the western concept of vampire tales. These creatures are blood-sucking predators and murderers, their bites convert victims by spreading what's basically a disease! Yet pretentious perverts still try to force sexual nonsense into these movies. Do people make "horror eroticism" about serial killers, rapists, space aliens, zombies or dinosaurs? I don't think so, and considering how many diseases are transmitted through the bloodstream, the concept of "pleasurable-blood-slurping" makes this genre all the more ridiculous. I'm so glad the ever-cool, over-the-top hopping-vampires of HK don't have such ludicrous ideas of seduction. I'm relieved that whatever pleasure the women [in EVIL OF DRACULA] derive from being bitten is minimal. Perhaps there's really only one scene where a woman smiles as she's bitten. So the movie doesn't overdue the romantic crap, though you never see any such pleasure when a male vampire attacks another man! So the vague romance is minimal, and it never once degenerates into a crappy art film (i.e. THE HUNGER); you wanna' know the best definition of "art"? Here it is: Anything you can get away with.

For entertainment value, EVIL OF DRACULA definitely delivers. It's not paced very fast, but it's well-written, and manages to remain suspenseful throughout. If somebody can be scared by the average American or European vampire flick, then this one will do the trick too. The concept isn't very foreign to American audiences, since it's all based on European vampirism, the only differences are: 1. No bats. 2. The vampires can be killed by steal things like axes and fireplace poker. 3. This vampire can drink wine, but prefers blood; blood from young female college students in particular (he's got taste, he prefers to bite their boobs, not the neck).

Toshio Kurosawa plays a teacher who
(continued on page 52)

A screen 'giant' passes on

■ The world may not recognize the name Tonoyuki Tanaka, who died Wednesday at 86, but it knows well his creation — the most famous monster of the last 50 years.

SECRET hydrogen bomb testing in the South Pacific first roused it from its ancient slumber. Then in 1954 it chilled the hearts of Japanese moviegoers and science fiction fans around the world when it brought Tokyo to its knees.

Godzilla, the fire-breathing, city-smashing monster turned Japanese pop icon, lost its creator Wednesday with Tomoyuki Tanaka's death from a stroke.

Tanaka was a master of special effects and an influential member of Japan's motion picture industry — with acclaimed director Akira Kurosawa he co-produced a number of film projects. Tanaka's 221 films included some of the most

enduring characters and scenes from the monster genre.

Called Gogira in Japan — a combination of "gorilla" and "kujira," the Japanese word for whale — Godzilla rampaged around the countryside of post-atomic-bomb Japan, a constant reminder to filmmakers of the dangers inherent in a nuclear world.

But once Japan began to flex economic and cultural strength abroad, Godzilla became a kind of national mascot, representative of the distance the nation had come since the chaotic post-War years.

The movie plots changed too, with Godzilla teaming up with other monsters to save the day. In "Godzilla versus Gigan" (1972), for example, a comic-book artist enlists the services of Godzilla and friends, to destroy alien cockroaches that plan to take over the world.

"Godzilla vs. Destroyer," released in 1995, was Tanaka's last directing project and supposed to be Godzilla's last stand. After 41 years of delighting Saturday-afternoon movie crowds, the creature was killed off.

But the world is little safer than it was when Godzilla rose up to fight the civilization that destroyed its rest. For that reason, the monster's "death" may be premature.

ASIAN ODDITIES

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Welcome to "Asian Oddities", the section in OC which I sometimes think is the only regular column [in OC] that matters. It's here that I try to include the miscellaneous stuff which doesn't fit into any of OC's other category's; films & TV shows which are hard-to-find and obscure-both of which mean basically the same thing though spelled differently. Among other things, this edition of "Asian Oddities" includes reviews of BALMAA, HANGGANG SAAN ANG TAPANG MO, TRUYN NINGH VAN NGME VIETNAM, and FULL CONTACT STICK FIGHTING. Though much of

the remainder of this issue is a "Cbow Yun Fat Issue" (whoop-dee-dew), my original intention for this OC was for it to be basically a "Martial Arts Issue", or more specifically, a "History of Empty-Handed Movies Issue". In it, I had hoped to shed more light on all the karate-inspired movies throughout the world which pre-date early 1970s stuff like FIVE FINGERS OF DEATH and ENTER THE DRAGON; movies which made kung fu a household word. So initially, this issue was intended to inform you all about oldies like: LESSONS IN JIJITSU (France; 1918), THIEF IN THE CAR (H.K.; 1920), and of course, the many B&W oldies (i.e. 1949'S THE STORY OF WONG FEI HUNG PARTS 1 & 2) starring Kwan Tak Hing.

I realized early on that actually reviewing any of these old flicks would be impossible, since I doubt many of them were preserved. But I did, however, expect to locate tapes of some of the Japanese karate movies of the 1950s and 1960s, since, believe it or not, it's rumored that such productions existed at one time. But guess what?! Even these groundbreaking predecessors to the 1970s kung fu movies are incredibly difficult to locate! Obviously, there's not much of a market for them, perhaps it's only researchers & writers like me who want to preserve and protect every aspect of the martial arts film.

What I did manage to uncover, and even that was minimal, was a full episode of KEY HUNTER (see review in the Japanese superhero column, Kaizo Ningen Update), and assorted clips from various other Japanese martial arts (empty-handed) TV shows from the 1960s. Sadly, there just wasn't enough material available on these crime dramas, so I sure as hell couldn't fill up a whole issue with it. JUDO ICHO KUSSEN is another classic TV show, important historically for its contribution to empty-handed fighting on TV. It lasted on TBS from 6/22/69 to 4/4/71 and seemed to die once Toei's KAMEN RIDER came

along and re-defined what TV action was all about. But from the many clips and coming attractions ("tune in next week!", etc.) I've seen, JUDO ICHO KUSSEN looks like an entertaining program in its own right. Granted, once again I must point out that I've not seen a complete episode, so I wasn't subjected to lots of Japanese dialogue and character-laden scripts. The story would appear to depict some judo student called Naoya, and his daily life and judo classes at his school. Much of the action is sparring stuff, but there are outdoor fights too. Some of it gets outlandish, like when our heroes take on masked wrestlers, black & American boxers, and maybe a karateka or two, but most of the time, it's all just judo-against-judo. Fuyukichi Maki plays a supporting character, and from time to time, it's not uncommon to see guest stars in certain episodes, like Sonny Chiba, a young Yasuaki Kurata (possibly his debut?) and Shin Kishida.

Earlier crime dramas I've heard of include: THE DRIFTING DETECTIVE, SPY CATCHER J3 (aka "Tulip"), an influential oldie called THE GUARDMAN. These are

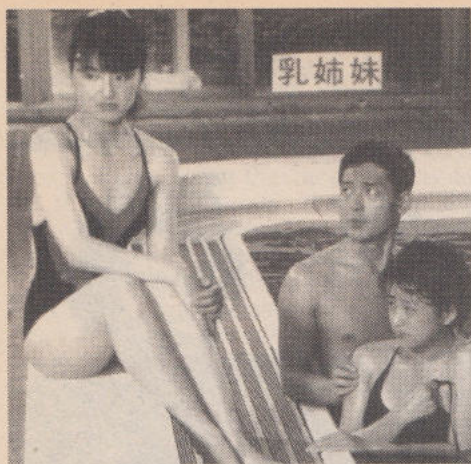


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THE GUARDMAN



pre-KEY HUNTER programs which may or may not have concentrated heavily on action. However, once KEY HUNTER got the ball rolling, exciting crime-dramas filled Japanese TV, programs like: GMEN '75, GMEN '82, THE BODYGUARDS, GUERRILLAS SEVEN, THE DOBERMAN GANG, and of course, WILD 7, which had a HK remake [movie] I've not seen.

Of course, this isn't even the tip of the iceberg. Japanese TV has plenty more to offer than just sci-fi heroes and programs depicting martial arts. If I had my way, I would incorporate every type of dramatic Japanese series in OC, which includes melodrama talkers like AMBITION, MERCILESS LICENSE, NHK TAIGA DRAMA, AGE OF THE EMPEROR, and STEWARD-ESS. Though these don't sound particularly exciting to an action fan like me, and the mere fact that they're of Asian origin isn't just cause to include them (boredom is boredom, no matter the geographic boundary). But the more Japanese TV dramas and action we see, the more we know about Japanese TV shows on the whole, since there's cross-over material: For example, genre fave Makoto Sato (THE H-MAN, THE KILLING MACHINE, WHAT'S UP TIGER LILY, LOST WORLD OF SINBAD, WARRING CLANS, WHIRLWIND, THE EXECUTIONER) also starred in a soap opera in the late 1970s which aired in my vicinity with English subtitles. But I was a kiddy, and the series didn't hold my interest due to a lack of monsters or karate.

Well, now that I've wetted your appetites for Japanese TV action, I gotta' end it here! If nothing else, hopefully just mentioning these enjoyable programs will peak the interests of video collectors and traders, and in time, videotapes of these entertaining TV shows will be accessible to all fans. I don't mean to encourage bootlegging but if the companies won't make these programs accessible to all fans, then the video pirates will be our only alternative. But for now, enough of this introduction and rambling, and on to some reviews:

From India:

BALMAA

Running Time: Two Hrs. & 20 Min., Re-

viewed by Joe Arroyo

Newly introduced to BALMAA's cast of actors, I found the film tolerable. Succinct to say, watch it solely for the Hindi honey who stars in this romance. Although highly westernized, the fashions, music and dance numbers were enjoyable, particularly during what I call the may pole routine: our young Hindu honey, Madu performs her erotic dance in the rain! If no- ass-Demi Moron, I mean Moore, got a million to wiggle her teen-sized tits, I'd offer an entire mint for Madu's true talents!

Fast-paced and fun, BALMAA could have used some violence but all in all, a fine production. Most annoying is when Rishan tries to bed his new bride Madu, who coaxes him onto the couch. Nice guy Rishan grows accustomed to the arrangement only to be tricked into bed, when Madu thinks he no longer desires her (stupid tart!). Loser Rishan agrees to marry Madu (a young rich spoiled virgin; not a bad honey-bun either). They begin their uncertain courtship with distrust and fear. Only when she discovers that her estranged hubby has cancer does she finally grow up.

** -Joe Arroyo

From America:

THE QUEST

Universal Pictures; 1996, A Moshe Daimant Production, Casting: James Tarzia, Music: Randy Edelman, Costume Designer: Joseph Porro, Assic. Prod.: Jack Frost Sanders & Eugene Van Varengurg, Starring: Jean Claude Van Damme, Roger Moore, James Remar, Janet Gunn, Jack McGee, Louis Mandylor, Aki Aleong, Reviewed by DF

Jean Claude Van Damme's movies maintain that ultra low standard, insuring we'll never forget that Americans make the worst martial arts films ever! Van Damme's movies, like most other yankee kung fu flicks, never cease to boggle the mind for complete and utter ineptitude! By now I think I've seen most of his movies, and I think I can safely say that these generally awful pieces of shit are really doing a disservice to martial arts movie fans! For the remainder of this review, I shall abbreviate Van Damme, and refer to him as VD. This is only appropriate, since Venereal Diseases are to health, what the guy's films are to action cinema worldwide.

VD. directed and helped write some of the script, which should have tipped me off right there; and I just thought his acting and speaking English were poor! From start to finish, THE QUEST is an uninteresting, cliché-ridden, uninspiring, boring as fuck, worthless rambler that just meanders on from scene to scene. Its minor attempts at humor don't amount to jack shit, and there's not a single compelling character in this monotonous, dull dreck. The only plus are the production values (an irrelevant statement, coming from a Hollywood film), there's a nice set or two. It seems like he

wanted to make another of his old "tournament films", like he did when his flicks were low budget. They're not low budget (but the entertainment value is further down than just "low") any more, so THE QUEST seems to be rather an updated tournament film, but with a few bucks to back it up. But with all the money they had for production values, you would think that at least some of it would have somehow gone to making this entertaining.

At first I was thinking that VD was actually learning a thing or two now that Jackie Chan has been kicking serious ass in American theaters. In THE QUEST's opening, VD does a climbing stunt (probably a stunt-double) up a wall to elude cops, and even fights using stilts (ala' FIRST STRIKE, though I think THE QUEST beat Jackie to it). There are a couple simple acrobatic flips in THE QUEST, though we never see VD's mug when he supposedly does them. I'm certain this was a double, and although VD has proven to have some degree of martial talent, I began to suspect that in any fight where we don't see his face, it's a stuntman doubling for him. Perhaps I'm going overboard here, but it seems that if it really were VD performing all these kicks (for what they're worth), he would want everyone to know it. Perhaps he's still more concerned with having everyone look at his ass.

Amazingly, it's the tournament duels which offer an occasional ounce of entertainment. Coming from me, this really means something, since I normally find tournament crap to be as fun as masturbating with Super Glue. But since the outdoor fights all suck big time, the matches and bouts offer the only amusement. All the outdoor streetfights rely on yet more of that god-awful "Chop-Edit" style of deceitful editing, staging and choreography, which I've criticized [about U.S. fight flicks] before--it's quite distracting and the endless quick cuts really detract from what just might have bordered on tolerable. VD's duel with two or three pirates on the boat had such potential, didn't these idiots see PROJECT A? There's also a scene where VD duels another American martial artist (I say "another" because I suspect VD's character is also American despite the accent) out at some desert or ghost-town. It's short, and anything but exciting. Fortunately, once Van Damme starts dueling in tournaments, there are a few vaguely noteworthy moves. Very little of the good stuff comes from VD, it's the other martial artists who know what they're doing. The concept of a Japanese sumo wrestler battling an Okinawan karateka is silly enough to be fun, as are flamboyant characters representing their nationalities (i.e. a Scottish martial artist who fights wearing a kilt and learns the hard way that these stupid-looking, plaid skirts don't offer groin protection). The best of these fighters is some Chinese guy who does assorted animal (snake, tiger, monkey) styles, and a Spaniard who combines decent kicks with bullfighting stances!

Roger Moore seems to play some sort of

renegade sailor who tricks VD into getting into tournaments at mythical places like the island of Mutai. There's also some pointless quest for another golden dragon statue, and it's near a rather fancy tournament attended by martial artists from all over the world. There's nothing wrong with this (aside from pathetic attempts to imitate the infinitely superior ENTER THE DRAGON), except that the setting is 1925! They're not going after facts, but I think maybe a tiny bit of historical accuracy would have made this more compelling and less laughable; now, if this were an all-out comedy, such far-fetched oversights would be forgivable. I was not around back in the 1920s, but I really don't think things like kickboxing, kung fu and karate were all over the world at that point. Judo and jujitsu, maybe, but how many westerners (aside from the French, who may have been developing Savate at that point) knew a lot of fancy kicking and stances back then?

Anyway, Roger Moore, VD and a couple absolutely unimportant characters (i.e. some female blond reporter who adds nothing to the film except to have her walk away holding VD, arm & arm at the end) never do get to take that golden dragon statue, even after VD wins the tournament against some brutish Mongolian villain. -DF

From Japan:

ZATO ICHI'S BATTLE DRUM

[aka ZATO ICHI KENKA DAIKO, ZATO ICHI AND THE DRUM, and THE BLIND SWORDSMAN SAMARITAN] Daiei; 1968, Original Story: Kan Shimozawa, Starring: Shintaro Katsu, Yoshiko Mita, Makoto Sato, Ko Nishimura, Miyako Chochi, Reviewed by Damon Foster

I liked this edition of the blind-swordsman legacy; the pacing is decent and there are enough swordfights to make it consistently suspenseful. In all honesty, the phase in my life that I most loved samurai films was during my pre-teens, and up until my mid-teens. But once I got into the absolutely action packed Chinese movies, I could never look back, and never gave Japanese swordsmen a second look. It was pointless to milk a genre for every (sometimes infrequent) martial arts action scene when fighting wasn't always the main theme of the film; and once I got into the HK stuff (at about 14 or 15), I handed Japan's chanbara films to my rearview mirror. So establishing that I'm a fan of more action-oriented (pardon the phrase & pun!) stuff, let's just say that ZATO ICHI'S BATTLE DRUM still managed to entertain me. Though there's not necessarily a swordfight every ten minutes, the subtitled print isn't boring regardless, so I say check it out if you get the chance.

Again, though I enjoyed it, I still have complaints. For example, as Zato sleeps, a woman lunges at him with a knife; this is where I personally have a problem with these films. Though a suspenseful scene, it seems obsolete for a "martial arts film", it

displays no major skill or artistry and is more suited to a slasher film or common melodrama. Though it's powerful drama to some, to me it comes off as a cop-out, as half-ass filler, perhaps I'm the type who fails to appreciate such dramatics. Obviously, these movies are trying to achieve a more realistic (realistic? Hah! See next paragraph) effect than for what I would normally consider a martial arts film.

But this, like all the far-fetched Zato Ichi farces, is uneven: Ichi's acute senses are uncanny (nearly magical), help him gamble and dodge even the most silent of attackers, and yet he's handicapped enough to fall off a bridge into the water! He can hear when some conman called Shin-San steals his food (yeah right; like chopsticks make loud noises!), and yet he can't hear the running water he's about to fall into? Oh well, continuity has never been a high point in these films I suppose, and I would be a technogeek if I scrutinized them that closely. Please disregard this paragraph.

Zato Ichi is tricked by a gambler into joining what's basically a group of bounty hunters, and Ichi kills the man they're after, not realizing the full story. The [now dead] man was an asshole, and deserved to die, but he was basically just protecting his sister, whom yakuza, and local villains like Sawa & Honjin want to shove their dicks up inside of. Though she's pissed off at the mislead Ichi for slaughtering her brother, she eventually forgives him because he feels responsible enough for her well-being that he decides to protect her from numerous villains who want to "do the nasty" with her. During one of Ichi's many confrontations with corrupt samurai, there's a funny scene of him wrapped (completely covered) in bamboo; tied all over him-you'd never know there's a person inside were it not running and dodging swordsmen. There are additional supporting characters, and obligatory subplots too, villains fight & kill each other a couple times, and more than once it's proven that a blind man has the advantage in the dark. The most interesting villain is played by genre fave Makoto Sato of LOST WORLD OF SINBAD, WHIRLWIND, WARRING CLANS, THE H-MAN, MESSAGE FROM SPACE, THE KILLING MACHINE, THE EXECUTIONER, and the opening seconds of WHAT'S UP TIGER LILY. Makoto Sato almost seems like a hero at first despite the grim persona, and he never affiliates himself with any other villains; his a solitary bad guy. But even loners who are evil must die, and Zato Ichi is happy to oblige. *** -DF

From India:

DEEWANA MUJH SA NAHIN

1989, Prod.: Aji, Dir.: Y. Nageshwar Rao, Lyrics: Sameer, Music: Anand-Milind, Running Time: 2:10, Starring: Amir Khan, Madhuri Dixit, Reviewed by Linda Arroyo

From the beginning, DEEWANA MUJH SA NAHIN reminded me of a typical (American) crime drama containing a rape scene

which was interrupted by a motorcyclist in black leather. The hero? No, the heroine, throwing down those pricks hard! I was ecstatic to finally see a Hindi flick with their own "action-heroine"! Unfortunately, the blood rushed away from my already pale face to hear in the background, "Cut!" Damn it, it was a movie-within-a-movie! I was so terribly disappointed, I wanted to shut the film off! But low and behold, I saw cuddleable Amir Khan portraying your boy-next-door/stalker after Madhuri Dixit.

Slow-paced DEEWANA MUJH SA NAHIN was worth watching for earthquaker Madhuri Dixit (India's dance sensation) and tender-eyed Amir Khan who are both in everyone's wet dreams.

The songs were fair, the action more entertaining where popular actress Anita's (M. Dixit) fiancé gangs up on stalker Ajay (A. Khan), because he didn't have the balls to face him alone. To the chicken-shit's surprise, Ajay was no mere "boy next door", showing who really had balls, but was jumped by no-back-bone's henchmen. Though a romantic drama, not my type of film, it was enjoyable to say the least.

A twisted romantic tale about a photographer, named Ajay (A. Khan), lovingly stalking actress Anita (M. Dixit). Refusing his advances towards marriage, Anita soon submits (not surprising) to Ajay's devoted love after being pushed/kicked to the ground by her fiancé's henchmen and a bunch of got-nothing-better-to-do hoodlums. ** -Linda Arroyo

From America:

BY THE SWORD

Starring F. Murray Abraham, Eric Roberts, Mia Sara, Chris Rydell, The Movie Group in cooperation with Columbia Tristar Home Video, presents a Foil/Film Horizon. Approximately 91 minutes, Rated R, Reviewed by Peter Huston

Is Western fencing a martial art or just a strange sport for pretentious, wine and cheese eating pansies who couldn't pass gym class to save themselves? If the answer is "martial art", then this counts as a martial arts film, allowing me the opportunity to submit yet another review to this fine publication. So here goes...

BY THE SWORD is set in modern New York City, a strange place where anything and everything co-exists, including a large, well run, private fencing academy. The students, by and large, are snots. The head instructor, "the maestro", is a snob, who verbally abuses and demeans everyone he meets. Success is everything, to lose is worse than nothing. "To be the best at any cost", seems to be the motto of all who enter the facility.

Early in the film, two newcomers enter the academy. The first is a down on his luck, aging man with a vague unidentifiable European accent (something like Boris Badunov in the Bullwinkle cartoons maybe) and a shadowy past. He wishes to teach fencing, but the younger and more

talented maestro rudely brushes him off, offering him nothing but a position as locker room attendant. The mysterious stranger accepts. He works hard during days, but spends nights suffering from strange, nerve wracking nightmares which concern sword fighting and violence. Could he be a master fencer hiding his past? Does a bear live in the woods? Is the Pope sexually hung up?

The second is an attractive young woman played by Mia Sara, an actress who starred in FERRIS BUELLER'S DAY OFF and a few early episodes of TIME TRACS. She wishes to train to become a fencing champion. She catches the eye of a hyper-competitive, fencing star, the prima-donna of this athletic pressure cooker. ("Hmmm, is that a foil in your pocket or are you just glad to see me?")

From there, one can pretty much follow the course of events. There's a lot of training, some to disco music. There's romances. Naturally, there's a real sword fight near the end. In summary, although this movie is not really bad, the problem is that it just isn't really good. I enjoyed it, but as a critic I just can't help but wonder why so many of the sub-plots were left hanging. In fact, large portions of the movie seem to serve no purpose whatsoever. Just when it looks like a character will develop and become someone interesting, they don't! I imagine that this movie will develop a cult following among fencers. For the rest of us, its passable entertainment if you don't expect much and happen to be in the mood for watching a movie about fencing. -Peter Huston

From the Philippines:

HANGGANG SAAN ANG TAPANG MO

1980s, Dir.: Toto Natividad, Starring Richard Gomez, Cristina Gonzales, Patrick Dela Rosa, Reviewed by Massimo Lavagnini

Social drama distributed by popular cinema company Regal Films, the movie of Toto Natividad starts with an exciting action sequence, as we see young Ruben (Richard Gomez), leader of a juvenile gang, moving on against his neighborhood enemies and slaughter 'em in a bloodbath.

Unfortunately, the excitement ends here, as pretty soon we witness the "talky" (very talky) streetlife of Ruben; he loves his mama, an old whore committed to a mental hospital, and dates a pretty go-go dancer, until police decide to capture the youngster and lock him in jail, where he'll be beaten to death by three ugly mugs. In short, if you don't understand a word of Tagalog you should avoid this film like hell. One final mention to the soundtrack, part of which is stolen from Alfred Hitchcock's PSYCHO! * -Massimo Lavagnini

From Vietnam:

TRUYEN HINH VAN NGHE VIETNAM

1989; Host: Thuy Trinh, Reviewed by Joe Arroyo

Hosted by Thuy Trinh, (an "asian Barbie" who perfectly accentuates the variety show), who's part reporter, part talk-show host, and part VJ. I've watched this show for a couple of years now, and it's the best part of my Saturday morning (airs 9:00 a.m./2:00a.m. on the International Channel). Most outstanding, besides Thuy Trinh, are the live performances and videos delivered by Vietnamese acts.

Male acts, The Son and Don Ho (not the Hawaiian one) in my opinion are forgettable, however Viet-cuties are infinitely more appealing! From the tastefully traditional Ai Van to the mouthwatering modern My Lam, you'll find a most entertaining assortment. Even Anglo-babes like Dalena cash-in on the music scene. There's even a viet-version of the Mothra fairies, only life-size for those with bad eyesight. Most of the songs are sad & melancholy, but lovely. Unsubtitled, any heterosexual male can decipher the body language spoken by these viet-vixens, especially the dance and rock numbers!

No Oriental enthusiast is complete without tuning in to Thuy Trinh's *In case anybody out there is stupid like me, don't mistake Thuy Trinh for Thuy Trang, the Vietnamese-American actress in the first season of POWER RANGERS. The slight similarity in names made me wonder if they were the same person, which they're not.* -DF/ pearly smile. Included for those ready to buy: Adverts for free laser disc, CDs and cassettes from the acts featured. ***-Joe Arroyo

From America:

FULL CONTACT STICK FIGHTING

A review of Panther Productions Full contact Stick Fighting series videotapes, Reviewed by Peter Huston

Hurt me please! I like it! "See Brutal Full Contact Stickfighting Matches." No rules, No judges, The Dog Brothers, a Recently Surfaced Underground Group..." Real live pain, suffering and maybe, if you're really lucky, death itself, promises the sanguinary advertising from Panther Productions, a major martial arts instructional tape producer. "Is this," I wondered, "a Filipino martial arts instructional tape as promised, or, instead, something closer to Christians being thrown to the lions?" Nevertheless, I confess I was surprisingly pleased with them.

This six volume series covers a full contact version of Pekiti Tersia, a Filipino martial artist system. The Filipino martial arts are something of an anomaly among most Asian fighting arts, as they teach the use of weapons, particularly sticks, prior to teaching empty hand techniques. The Dog Brothers are a California-based group who prac-

tice full contact sparring of the art, using the sticks! Participants wear only a fencer's mask and thick gloves, feeling that heavy padding precludes realistic training.

Nevertheless, this well designed and organized, yet highly unusual series explains the techniques, training methods and philosophies of the group in a clear and logical style. The group's leader and primary instigator is Eric Knaus, A.K.A. "Top Dog." Knaus comes across as an educated and intelligent martial artist who believes that a path to growth is through sparring, and the more realistic the sparring the more one grows. Although this might strike many as "macho bullshit", Knaus also believes that such sparring does not preclude friendship and brotherhood among the participants. Therefore, rules are not necessary, as this is not a competitive sport. At the end of the day if one has learned something or made a friend, they state, then a participant has won.

I am afraid that I found this approach perplexing. To see Californians beating each other with sticks in the local park and then hugging and discussing their "growth" afterwards confirmed many of my prejudices about that peculiar state. Here in New York, we only club people we don't like, and when we're through for the day, we either club them again or flee before their friends or the cops arrive, probably with guns. More seriously, I question whether full contact stick fighting is a safe activity. Frequent comments about knocking one another out with stick blows to the skull left me wondering about permanent brain damage among the participants, particularly the sort which only becomes obvious later in life as seen among some boxers.

Although I am sure that the Dog Brothers have learned much from their experiences, both about their art and themselves, I just don't know if the long term price they pay is worth it. Still, a group which uses a motto like, "higher consciousness through harder contact" is something more than your average bunch of thugs. I must admit a grudging respect for the group and its philosophies. They seem to have gained much from this that I will probably never know.

Purists will no doubt be offended by much of the material. Although based in traditional teachings, the producers have attempted only to offer the material that they feel is effective in full contact matches. This material is chosen not only because of its effectiveness, but also, significantly, due to the likelihood that an artist will remember the material in a match where their opponent is swinging at their head with a real stick, really trying to knock them out. (...makes concentration difficult, they say...) The material is well explained and presented. Terms are clearly explained. Drills are offered that one can go out and practice immediately.

Each of the six tapes focuses on a particular aspect of the art of full contact stick fighting as practiced by Knaus and the other Dog brothers. In sequence, these are Power Training (or how to hit hard, fast, and of-

ten.); Footwork, an excellent tape on Filipino martial arts footwork in theory and practice. This tape also includes a discussion of padding and a carpenter looks at rattan; Siniwalli, one of the best in the series, focuses on how to bring the elaborate twirling and twin stick effects of the Filipino arts into a real, full contact match when you're scared, angry, and in pain. Volume 4, Blocks, Punyos, Thrusts, Disarms, and the Snakey Stick brings in a variety of Filipino martial arts stick techniques that the Dog Brothers have found to be useful. Volume 5, Fang Choke & Machado Jiu Jitsu brings in grappling and in particular the non-Filipino art of Brazilian Machado Jiu Jitsu. Strangely enough, the dog brothers have found that in a surprising number of no-rules stick fighting matches, sooner or later one of the opponents will close and grapple rapidly changing the flavor of the match as the fighters find themselves simply too close to one another to swing properly. Therefore, they train in grappling. At the end of the tape a chiropractor discusses pressure points and targets that can be used in a match. Volume 6, Stick VS Other Weapons contains no instructional materials, but instead consists of a variety of matches in which people with Filipino sticks fight opponents with other weapons. These are interspersed with interviews in which the fighters discuss such things as the way the match went, the pros and cons of the weapons involved, and just what a fascinating growth experience the session was and how it helped their spiritual development and California tan line. Once again, the overall impression I was left with from these matches was that the activity was strange but informative, and meant a lot to those involved.

In conclusion, the Dog Brothers know their stuff. Their tapes are well put together and well presented. They've tested their art under conditions which I haven't. Although their full contact matches are not for me, I was forced to respect the group by the end of the series. As they state, "We use no rules and no judges because we do not consider winning or losing to be important. If, at the end of the day, you've learned something or made a friend, then you've won and that's what this is all about." And, even if you don't agree with the full contact sparring, this is still a pretty good series for those interested in Filipino martial arts or stick fighting in general.

All in all, quite a strange, even bizarre, series of tapes. Nevertheless, its surprisingly well done. -Peter Huston

From Undia:

PATTHAR KE PHOOL

Prod.: G.P. Sippy, Dir.: Anant Balani, Running Time: 232, Starring: Salman Khan, Raveena Tandon, Kiran Kumar, Manobhar Singh, Rima Lagoo, Goga Kapoor, Vinod Mehra, Reviewed by Linda Arroyo

Hindi woman's dream-date apparently is American Tom "Homo" Cruise, who can

never top sizzling Salman Khan of India. With more bodd, brains, talent and heterosexual appeal, spicy Khan was the first hero I've seen in Hindi films. Gradually gaining muscularity to compensate his obvious weight increase, Kahn looks as good as he did nearly ten years ago. Hmmm, hmmm, good. Though in this film Salman doesn't throw people through brick walls (his trademark), he does beat up a few hoods occasionally.

Co-starring is Raveena Tandon making her debut appearance in PATHAR KE PHOOL. And just as in KKK, with yummy boyfriend Akshay Kumar, Raveena tries hard to act. I'll give her another five years to loosen up (on her acting skills). Surprisingly, Raveena (a model) is chubby in this late 1980s flick; unfortunately, she lost all the remaining flesh on her body for RAKSHAK with Sunil Shetty.

Finally we come up to Kiran Kumar. Like Amrish Puri, Kiran Kumar is recognizable in any film. Type-cast as villain in nearly every film I've seen him in, besides ARMY (with SriDevi), K. Kumar plays a crimelord's bodyguard. Astonishingly, Mr. Kumar later sides with his enemy (Salman Khan) to take out the real criminals in the film.

Slow pace, slightly dull and annoying theme songs taken from KNIGHTRIDER and BATMAN (the movie) as Kiran Kumar attempts to save Khan's father, PATTHAR KE PHOOL is another tale about lovers (Salman/Raveena) whose parents are at odds (Khan's father a police officer, Raveena's father a crimelord). Only after the death of Khan's father does the crimelord team up with Khan to find his father's killer.

Spicy Khan falls for crimelord's daughter. After discovering his father was killed by his kingpin, he breaks any involvement with Raveena and joins the police to legally fuck-up his enemies. ** -Linda Arroyo

From the Philippines:

JOE PRING- HOMICIDE, MANILA POLICE

Philippines; 1989, Dir.: Augusto Salvador, Starring: Phillip Salvador, Johnny Delgado, Paquito Diaz, Reviewed by Massimo Lavagnini

Would you ever believe if some day somebody told you that Filipinos were able to beat John Woo? Not a chance. But if only you could grab a video copy of JOE PRING, you could see for yourself and tell me if I'm drunk. This film is a friggin' outstanding, ass-kicking piece of an action flick! A legendary trash, possibly the most violent Filipino movie ever made; a rape scene (slightly cut in the TV version), lotsa' gratuitous violence and great ideas which could make John Woo turn pale (in an amazing sequence, Joe Pring rewards a fake blind man with a bullet in the head!).

The plot: Inspector Joe Pring is the most violent cop of the Manila Police District, even criminals respect him. When his partner is butchered by a gang of thugs, Pring

doesn't hesitate to make a clean sweep. Expelled from the police force, Joe is urgently called back by his chief, to catch some dangerous jail-birds. The guys are tough, and to prove it to Joe Pring they decide to knife the stomach the young brother of his girlfriend. Not satisfied, the bastards find Joe's best friend and kill him in cold blood, delivering the severed head - in a block of ice - to the address of our hero. Blinded by rage, Pring will send all the criminals to the mortuary, one way ticket, in the bloodiest ways possible! A real classic, followed one year later by a less inspired sequel. **** -Massimo Lavagnini

From Undia:

DAULAT KI JUNG

1989, Running Time: 230, Reviewed by Joe Arroyo

Beginning as a mundane romance and only likable for its opening songs, DKJ starts to grow on me with the over-protective, loud father, a punk named Raj, leather clad bikers (including a tight-jeaned, big-bunned Hindi biker chick), secret agents, dancing cannibals and the obligatory Hindi honey-bun, who all give entertaining performances. Evenly paced and offbeat, the music and martial arts make it fun. The former's best moment is the temple scene with the dancer who can cause an appetite in any man, natural and unnatural! There's a cannibal ritual scene where our leading honey-bun, Asha, becomes a butt dancing (as opposed to belly dancing) diva. Fight-scenes are moderate but imaginatively silly.

Reason to watch: The dance scenes and soundtrack. The leading lady can shake her tush very well, but she's no Manisha or Sri Devi, however she does resemble Rekha, ten years younger. Asha's love for punk Raj is hindered by her shotgun waving daddy whom hired the services of a suspended bodyguard. Helped by her mom, Asha runs off with the punk and winds up joining bikers for treasure, subsequently meeting up with crooks, agents and cannibals. The lovers recover the treasure and live their life with her daddy's approval. *** -Joe Arroyo

From the Philippines:

BALAWIS

Regal Films; 1996, Post-Production in-charge: Ronald Co, Prosthetics & Creature FX: Maurice Carvajal, 'Balawis' Design & Storyboard: Noel Flores, Sound FX: Rodel Capule, Story & Screenplay: Al Marcelo, Prod.: Ronald Stephen Monteverde, Dir.: Maurice Carvajal, Publicity & Promotions: Glenn Marcelo, Stunt Dir.: Efren Lapid, Assoc. Dir.: Dante Kabigting Prod. Designed by Bing Santos, Cast: Dan Fernandez, Joanne Quintas, Daniel Pasia, Jimmy Fabregas, Jorge Estregan Jr., Dandin Ranillo, Alex David, Rando Amanzor, Dante Belen, Joe Jardi, Bobby Benitez, Mike

Vergel, Rey Bejar, Teddy Chiu, Rhodore Cutierrez, Raffy Zafra, Nonong Talbo, Reviewed by Damon F.

About every approximate year or so (give or take a minute), them ox-tail slurpers in the Philippines crank out a surprisingly tolerable movie which, given a chance, I believe could put Filipino moviedom under the international spotlight. And time & time again, I'm proved wrong! Hey, with these naturally gifted skills of prophecy, I qualify for a job on Dione Warwick's Psychic Hotline! But seriously (yeah right; like I'm capable of that!), BALAWIS, like DUGU NG PANDAY and DARNA ANG PAGBALIK, is quite worthwhile, and if somebody ever dubbed it in English, it's good enough for Blockbuster Video, along side inferior crap like CARNOSAUR!

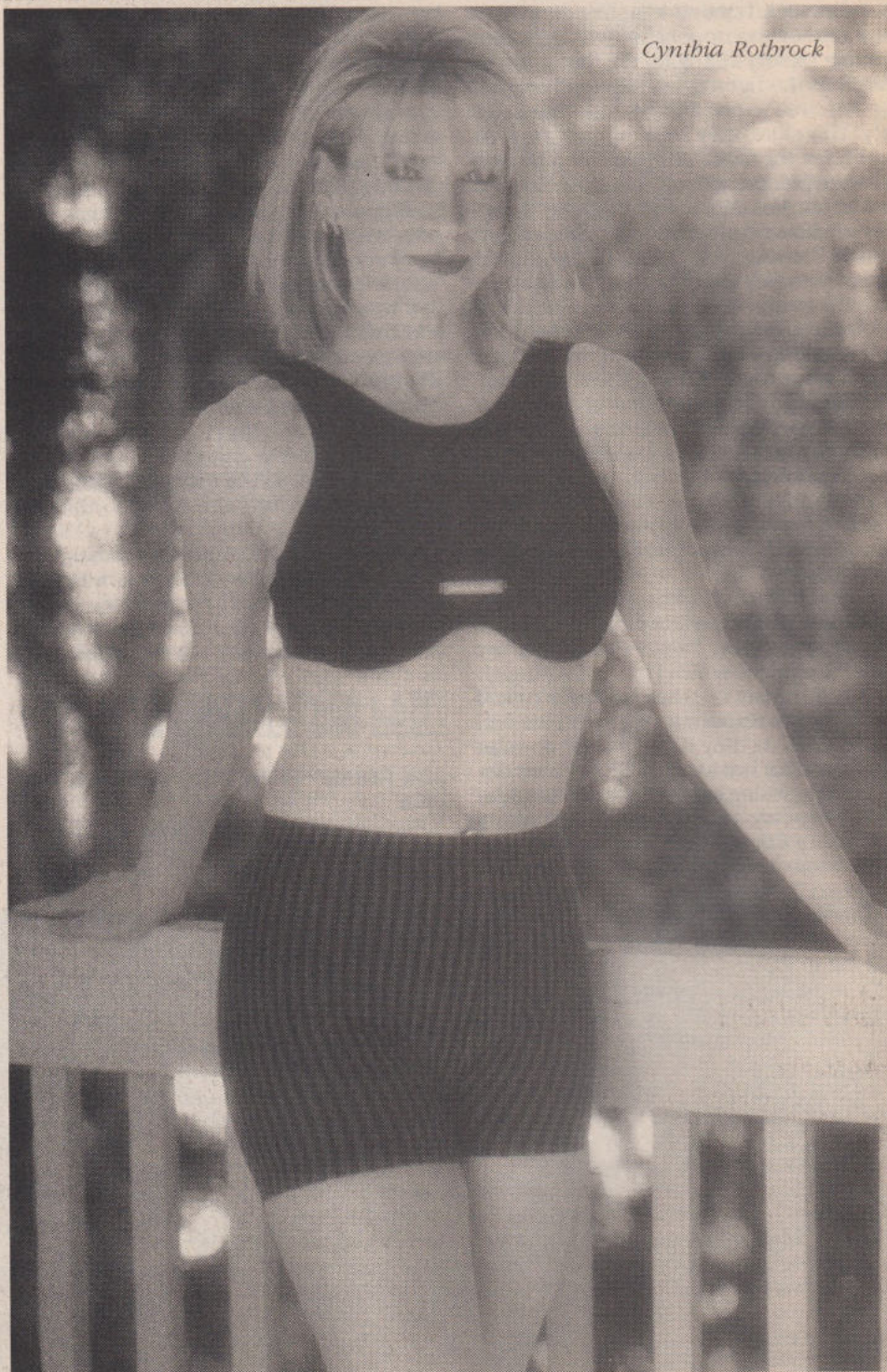
I wish I had known of this *"Jurassic Park-meets-Humanoids from the Deep-meets-Gremlins"* thriller when I puked out OC's abysmal "Reptile Issue"! BALAWIS is a decent little monster movie, even if the dialogue (80% Tagalog, 20% English, and 10% Japanese!) drags on a little too long and we can't [under]stand most of it. Forgiving the language barrier, I was able to concentrate on production values. There's some really nice cinematography, something I rarely expect in a Filipino cheapie. Speaking of cheap, this one isn't blatantly so, especially for a Filipino movie. Granted, the budget doesn't exactly scream "blockbuster" by American standards, but the nature of the resourceful script doesn't require anything near as costly as a big budget movie. Much of the story takes place in a forest and an abandoned bunker, so with the exception of a cave or two, no elaborate sets needed construction.

The monstrous, man-eating dinosaur, Balawis is a nice little design. A rubber costume, but with facial expression (movable lips, eyelids, etc.), make it kinda' slick - almost realistic. In a way, it reminded me of the Sleestaks (but grittier, with saliva) from the 1990s LAND OF THE LOST remake. The video box compared this movie monster to the likes of Godzilla and King Kong (both classics are mentioned in the film itself too; but more on that earlier-uh, I mean later), but Balawis lacks the personality & charisma. Also, Balawis is too damn short, I'd say between 4 ft. and 5 ft! Though the character is menacing and formidable enough to waste dozens of Filipinos, its height makes it seem almost cute, reminding me of GREMLINS ripoffs like THE MUNCHIES, TROLL, LEPRECHAUN, CRITTERS, etc.

The story starts off as a flashback to WWII, with a squad of Japanese (presumably they're invading the Philippines) being slaughtered by resurrected dinosaur Balawis. This opener is fairly atmospheric & chilling, even if it's obvious to me they're not really Japanese. They're Filipino actors, but they speak their Japanese too clearly (the pronunciation is too good; Japanese usually just groan!). Switch to the 1990s, where an expedition has returned to that old army base. The leader of these researchers is some evil round-eyed devil; we know he's bad because he jilted some skumbag

in a devious deal before shooting him. Another supporting character is Sharon, both a cook and a transvestite. As is often the case with gay boys, he's got a cute pet dog with him, in this case a pug. But don't get attached to any of these characters, since eventually they all get eaten up by that hungry midget/dinosaur Balawis, a nocturnal (it absolutely hates light; its main weakness) creature which must eat lots of humans to support its nest of eggs, about to hatch. Though there are a couple off-screen deaths, the majority of the onslaughts are bloody enough to appeal to the average, shit-for-brains gorehound. Interesting to note that, for some reason, the main villain delivers a speech before Balawis sucks the guy dry (a slick effect!) with a straw-like

tongue. It's in Filipino, but this fairwell talk includes words like: "King Kong", "Godzilla", "Time" or "Newsweek"! I suspect the guy was pleading with this dumb lizard, saying something like: "No, don't eat me, I can make you a star! Your name will be in lights, Balawis!" But the movie has good guys too, who use a baby Balawis (taken from the nest) as bait to lure Balawis into a shack rigged up to an explosive charge. One of our heroes dies too, he sacrificed himself to send Balawis to Kingdom Come. But what does that make our world? Kingdom Go? Anyway, the obligatory trick ending (ooh, what a shock; snore) has several infants hatching from Balawis eggs as the ending credits roll. **1/2 -Damon Foster



Cynthia Rothrock

From America:

GUARDIAN ANGEL

Produced by Richard Pepin and Joseph Merbi, Directed by Richard Munchkin. Rated R. Approximately 97 minutes. Cast: Cynthia Rothrock, Daniel McVicar, Lydie Denier, Marshal Teague, & Ken McLeod, Reviewed by Peter Huston

What can you say about a Cynthia Rothrock movie? She's just as blond, just as great a martial artist and just as awful an actor as Chuck Norris. (Plots? We don't need no stinkin' plots!)

Anyway, in this one Cynthia Rothrock plays a cop named Christy McKay. We know she's a cop because she shoots a lot of people. McKay's in love with another cop. (.....?) She and hubby-to-be run around town committing police brutality and random acts of coercive intimidation upon suspected bad guys. (AAAAACCKKK!! And these two intend to actually breed -most likely producing a roost-full of brutal little schoolyard bullies!)

Fortunately for society and the reputation of police officers in general, a gorgeous Frenchwoman named Nina (Lydie Denier) shoots hubby-to-be and kills him. We, the non-police public, are quite relieved, but McKay is upset. Nina is locked up. McKay throws a tantrum and is kicked off of the police force.

Soon she's hired as a bodyguard by a millionaire playboy. He's being stalked by an ex-girlfriend. Coincidentally, the ex-girlfriend is Nina. Pow! Blam! Splat! Holy Sidekick, Batman!

Amazingly, its at this point that things actually began to get interesting. Now I'm not going to claim that the millionaire playboy is a fascinating character, but he's actually the only character who has any depth at all in this entire movie. Much to my surprise, I found myself actually interested in the conversations between him and Rothrock. Not exactly the best movie on the market, but passable if you've got some beer to go with it. */This film has already been reviewed in OC before, but it shouldn't be confused with the HK movie of the same name. For more opinions on the USA-made GUARDIAN ANGEL, see OC's "Femme Fatale Issue", and the "American Martial Arts Issue". -DF/-Peter Huston*

From India:

SAANJAN

Produced in the 1980s, Running-Time: 3 hrs., Starring: Sanjay, Salman Khan, Madhuri Dixit, Reviewed by Joe Arroyo

Unfortunately, not even MahaRani Dixit could help SAANJAN and its boring plot. The choreography & songs lacked real emotion in this, Durga save me, 3 hour love triangle! SAANJAN never exhibits Madhuri's innate talents and only allows her to stroll aimlessly for the duration. A terrible disappointment, SAANJAN excludes a decent fight scene, making it more

of a snore. However, Madhuri mad fans will find SAANJAN has merit with Ms. Dixit strutting in tight clothes, unless someone actually cares to see Sanjay or Salman, that's your problem!

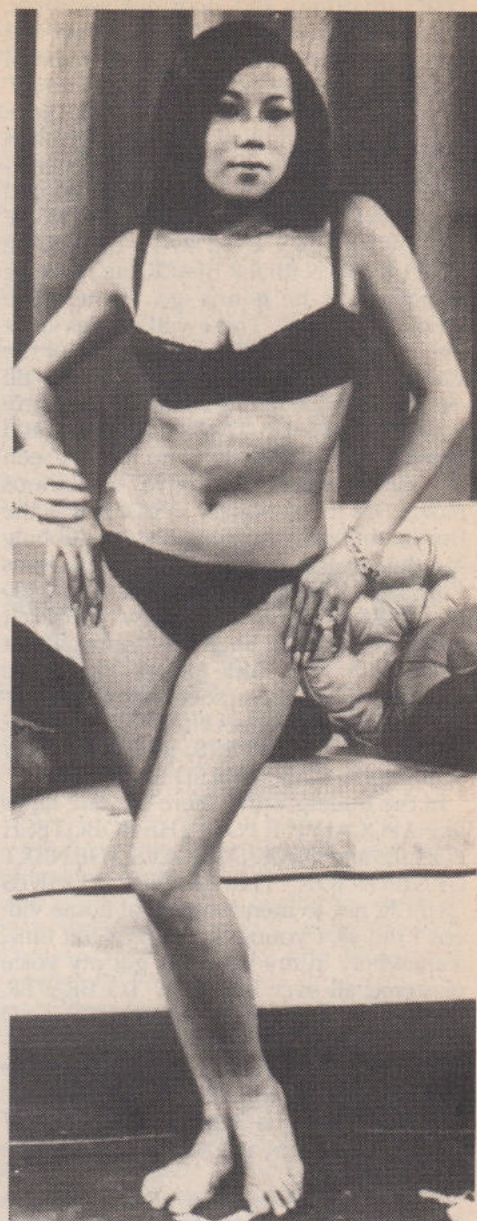
A cripple (Sanjay) falls for a singer (madhuri) whom inturn falls for his stepbrother. When each face each other, brothers become rivals for the ass, I mean heart, of Madhuri. * -Joe Arroyo

From Japan:

WHAT'S UP, TIGER LILY?

[Japanese title: KAGI NO KAGI] Tobo; 1966, Producer: Tomoyuki Tanaka, Director: Senkichi Taniguchi, Screenplay: Hideo Ando, Photography: Kazuo Yamada, Cast: Tatsuya Mihashi as Phil Moskowitz, Akiko Wakabayashi as Suki, Mie Hama as Terry Yaki, Tadao Nakamaru as Shepberd Wong, Tetsu Nakamura as the Grand Sultan of Rasper, and Susumu Kurobe as Wing Fat, Eisei Amamoto as "Cobra", American Version... Exec. Prod.: Henry G. Saperstein, Associate Prod.: Woody Allen, Music: Jack Lewis with Songs by The Lovin' Spoonful, Re-release Dir.: Woody Allen, American Editor: Richard Crown, Eastmancolor Scope, 79 Min., New Screenplay & Voice Dubbers: Woody Allen, Frank Buxton, Len Maxwell, Louise Lasser, Mickey Rose, Julie Bennett, Bryna Wilson, Reviewed by Damon Foster

When I was a little twerp and heard that Woody Allen had the gaul to mock & redub an actual Japanese film, I was a little annoyed; I found it insulting and a real disservice to fans of Japanese cinema. But when I finally saw it, I laughed uncontrollably! That dialogue between Tetsu Nakamura (MOTHRA, THE LAST DINOSAUR, etc.) and Tatsuya Mihashi (THE HUMAN VA-



Above: China Lee in WHAT'S UP TIGER LILY.

Left: Akiko Wakabayashi, Kumi Mizuno, Tatsuya Mibashi and Mic Hama.



POR) involving the map, for example, where Nakamura points to the map and says it's where the villain lives—Mihashi responds: "He lives on that piece of paper!" And the scene of the guys on the boat, dubbed as though they're all singing! Then there was the scene where Mihashi's character is calling out several numbers, and Susumu (ULTRAMAN's Hayata, DESTROY ALL MONSTERS, GHIDRAH, LATITUDE ZERO, KAMEN RIDER BLACK, etc.) Kurobe responds: "Is he gonna' go through the whole alphabet?" These verbal gags absolutely had me in hysterics, and some of the various puns, one-liners and jokes can still evoke a chuckle out of me today. In many ways, WHAT'S UP TIGER LILY was (and possibly still is, to those who haven't seen it a billion times like I have) a hilarious movie. It's revolutionary in that it was the first intentionally humorous voice-dubbing in a theatrical movie, though I believe Hans Conried's B&W TV series FRACTURED FLICKERS predates it by a few years; but then, sometimes I have my doubts about GIGANTIS THE FIRE MONSTER. Since then, there have been several amusing "audio" comedies: Troma's FEARLESS FEMALE FREEDOM FIGHTERS, and Sylvester Stallone's A MAN CALLED RAINBOW.

In the underground, there are rare tapes like APOCALYPSE POO, THE ROBOTCH FOLLIES and DUCK DODGERS: THE NEXT GENERATION, THE EMPIRE STRIKES QUACK, not to mention several home videos I did as a youngster, to pass the time, somewhere in my vault I've got my voice plastered all over LEAVE IT TO BEAVER, ALF, STAR TREK, BATMAN, DAVEY AND GOLIATH and HE-MAN AND THE MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE. Anyway, the point I'm trying to make is that, WHAT'S UP TIGER LILY is a great-granddaddy of funny voice-overs, and still tends to be one of the funniest.

This is not to say that all the jokes in WHAT'S UP TIGER LILY have stood the test of time. The credits say it's got a "No Star Cast" will fall flat to those of us well familiar with Kumi Mizuno, Makoto Sato, Eisei Amamoto and the beautiful Akiko Wakabayashi. And that line about "Naming three presidents"? Huh? How about, "Look at the smoke-stack on that ship". Was this considered funny even back in the 1960s? I really don't care for any of the visual inserts of Woody Allen himself, there are three total, four if you count the silhouettes & shadows in the dragging, irritating, intrusive "projection room scene". Though there is one dirty word (in the gambling scene, a guy says what sounds like: "Egad, fuck!"), I found nothing particularly offensive or over-the-top about the dialogue. Yet on cable TV, no less, there's a censored version! Can you believe it?! In the original version, a woman says something about a vibrator, no big deal; but on TV, she's dubbed saying something about a car! When Tadao Nakamaru mentions that on a certain spot a woman lost her virginity again, the lame-ass TV print says she "disappeared" on that spot! Leave it to American TV to tamper with something

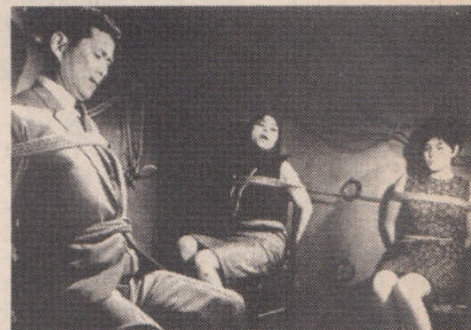
which needs no tampering.

In the 1960s, collaborations between Toho Movie Co. and American International Pictures were as common as eye-glasses in a comicbook store. These mergings usually resulted in the American versions of Japan's Godzilla movies, but WHAT'S UP TIGER LILY was a step in a different direction, for once it was a spy-caper, not a monster movie (though DAGORA THE SPACE MONSTER came close; several same cast members in fact). Henry G. Saperstein (one of A.I.P.'s executive producers) bought the rights to the Japanese spy film KAGI NO KAGI ("Key of Keys"), but AIP found it to be an awful film. Also, since the market was already flooded by plenty of cheap James Bond films, there was no point in releasing yet another. Allegedly, Toho had already made an English dubbed print of it, under the name KEG OF POWDER! Anybody out there have this incredibly elusive, rare print?! I doubt any tapes of it exist today, unfortunately. As the story goes, the AIP executives couldn't take it seriously, and laughed a lot at the dumb dialogue and began shouting responses to the film as they screened it. Considered a "bad" film (not by me), but a good "unintentional comedy", Saperstein decided to alter it into a series of jokes for real. He showed it, with the sound turned off, to Woody Allen, hoping for the inevitable brainstorm which would create the comedy we know today as WHAT'S UP TIGER LILY.

Allen's original concept was to trim it down to 60 minutes, since a revolutionary satire like this might not do well if stretched out to feature-length. But the producers wanted something longer, so they padded out the flick with footage of some hick/hippy band called The Lovin' Spoonful (not normally my type of music, but their theme song about the "Holy Cow" has really grown on me!), go-go dancers, and shots from a different Japanese film in the same series,

(continued on page 52)

*Photos from
WHAT'S UP TIGER LILY.*



CHOW YUN FAT and other Hong Kong Heroes

In the topic of H.K. Heroes, the name on everyone's lips seems to be Chow Yun Fat. I saw my first Chow Yun Fat movie in the late 1980s, it was *A BETTER TOMORROW* when it appeared on a Chinese TV station (now days, HK movies on UHF and/or cable channels are more common than beards in Israel, but back then, there was only one Bay Area TV station which showed recent HK films). At that point, I probably never would have rented this movie from a videotape, since I steered clear of anything that didn't involve kung fu or fantasy. But when giving *A BETTER TOMORROW* a shot, I must confess that personally, I found lead star Ti Lung to be the most impressive. I do not agree, unlike many people, that Chow Yun Fat out-staged Ti Lung and stole the film. But I was impressed by Chow Yun Fat's performance none-the-less. Strangely, I thought he was the villain, that he would soon double-cross Ti Lung and be the film's main bad guy. This changed drastically when I saw the stunning shoot-out in the restaurant, brilliantly directed by the one and only John Woo. Not only was it obvious to me that Chow's character was the most righteous of good guys, but I was amazed that, for once, a HK action star had impressed me on the basis of charisma alone, and not athletic ability.

By the time *A BETTER TOMORROW* aired that fateful night, its inferior sequel, *A BETTER TOMORROW 2* was a new release in local Chinese videotapes. Shortly thereafter, out came *A BETTER TOMORROW 3*. Though both sequels also featured Chow, neither movie really did much for me, so I assumed maybe I wasn't really such a big fan of Chow after all, and felt that John Woo's original *A BETTER TOMOR-*

ROW was the only flick which could make Chow look good. I was later bored to death by Ringo Lam's *CITY OF FIRE*, which temporarily confirmed, in my mind, that I didn't really like Chow's work. But then came the Friday night broadcast (San Francisco's channel 26; the same timeslot that had introduced me to *A BETTER TOMORROW*) of Golden Harvest's *THE 7TH CURSE*, an exciting combination of horror and adventure, one hell of a movie! It instantly became one of my favorites. Chow did indeed appear in it, in fact it's he who saves the day when he fires a bazooka at a marauding monster! But still, his role wasn't big, he shared the screen with an all-star cast which included Maggie Cheung, Ti ('Dick') Wei, and Chen Hsueh-hu. So it was not Chow's presence which made the movie great for me, it was the action, voluptuous babes and special effects.

But then, in 1989, when John Woo's epic masterpiece *THE KILLER* came out, I was hooked. Looking back on it, I hate admitting to liking such an over rated, universally liked movie; selling out to the Johnny-come-lately mainstream has never really been something that I, or OC stood for. But a good film is a good film, no matter how many people enjoy it. It could, however, be argued that the main success of *THE KILLER* was John Woo's brilliant directing, but I think we all agree that Chow's charismatic performance helped this action thriller a great deal. Though I had always been into gangster films, and by this time, I had been familiar with Chow's work for a while, *THE KILLER* confirmed that I was indeed a fan, to a certain extent, of Chow. He's not one of my all time favorites, but his influence on the HK movie scene can not be ignored.

In the years that followed, I thought his movies were hit or miss; I would be lying if I said I loved all of them. I couldn't really get into John Woo's *ONCE A THIEF*, but I like *GOD OF GAMBLERS* and absolutely loved Ringo Lam's *FULL CONTACT*. *HARDBOILED* was okay, but by this time, it's hard to take any film seriously that was so ridiculously over-hyped. American critics and the mainstream had finally discovered a good thing, that incomparable teaming of John Woo and Chow Yun Fat. Few of these asskissing critics were into the genre back when a true masterpiece like



A BETTER TOMORROW originally came out, so the next best thing, the way to seem hip was to praise *HARDBOILED* mercilessly.

But there's more to H.K. Heroes than Chow Yun Fat. What follows are reviews of other HK action films, still split into three different categories: 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. -DF

CHOW YUN FAT

(aka Aman Chou, Chow Yuen Fat, Chou Yun Fah)

Born: 5/18/55

Filmography:

THE REINCARNATION (1974)
LEARNED BRIDE THRICE FOOLS BRIDE GROOM (1974)
MASSAGE GIRLS (1975)
THE HUNTER (1976)
THE BUTTERFLY (1976)
THE CROCODILE (1976)
HOT BLOODED (1977)
MISS O (1978)
THEIR PRIVATE EYES (1978)
JOY TO THE WORLD (1980)
POLICE SIR (1981)
HEADHUNTER (1981)
EXECUTOR (1982)
THE STORY OF WOO VIET (1981)
POSTMAN STRIKES BACK (1982)
THE BUND (1983)



THE BUND 2 (1983)
 HARDWORKING MONEY (1983)
 LAST AFFAIR (1983)
 LOVE IN A FALLEN CITY (1984)
 HONG KONG 1941 (1984)
 THE OCCUPANT (1984)
 WOMEN, WHY ME? (1985)
 STORY OF ROSE (1986)
 WITCH FROM NEPAL (1986)
 DREAM LOVERS (1986)
 THE MISSED DATE (1986)
 100 WAYS TO MURDER YOUR WIFE (1986)
 THE LUNATICS (1986)
 A BETTER TOMORROW (1986)
 LOVE UNTO WASTES (1986)
 THE 7TH CURSE (1986)
 A HEARTY RESPONSE (1986)
 RICH AND FAMOUS (1987)
 CITY ON FIRE (1987)
 TRAGIC HERO (1987)
 SCARED STIFF (1987)
 CODE OF HONOR (1987)
 THE ROMANCING STAR (1987)
 AN AUTUMN'S TALE (1987)
 FLAMING BROTHERS (1987)
 SPIRITUAL LOVE (1987)
 PRISON ON FIRE (1987)
 A BETTER TOMORROW 2 (1987)
 8TH HAPPINESS (1988)
 TIGER ON BEAT (1988)
 FRACTURED FOLLIES (1988)
 DIARY OF A BIG MAN (1988)
 THE GREATEST LOVER (1988)
 CHERRY BLOSSOM (1988)
 GOODBYE MY FRIEND (1988)
 CITY WAR (1988)
 ALL ABOUT AH-LONG (1988)
 WILD SEARCH (1989)
 THE KILLER (1989)
 TRIADS: THE INSIDE STORY (1989)
 A BETTER TOMORROW 3 (1989)
 GOD OF GAMBLERS (1989)
 ONCE A THIEF (1992)
 PRISON ON FIRE 2 (1991)
 HARD BOILED (1992)
 FULL CONTACT (1992)
 NOW YOU SEE LOVE, NOW YOU DON'T (1993)
 TREASURE HUNT (1994)
 GOD OF GAMBLERS' RETURN (1994)
 PEACE HOTEL (1995)
 THE REPLACEMENT KILLER (1997)



1960s:

RETURN OF THE ONE-ARMED SWORDSMAN

Shaw Brothers; 1969, Producer: RunMe Shaw, Music: Wang Fu Ling, Film Editing: Chang Hsing Loong, Action Scenes: Tang Chia, Liu Chia Liang, Starring: Wang Yu, Lina Chiao, Essie Lin Chia, Tien Feng, Cheng Lei, Ku Feng, Liu Chia Liang, Ti Lung, Wu Ma, Chen Hsing Chung Fa, Reviewed by DF

Action-packed successor to 1967's *THE ONE-ARMED SWORDSMAN*, which I reviewed in OC's "Sword Hero Issue" (\$6.00) many years ago. I really liked this sequel a lot. Though at times, it's pretty typical of other 1960s Shaw sword stuff, there are occasional elements of flash, hinting about the types of classics the Shaw Brothers would produce throughout the 1970s. There's plenty of swordplay in this gory thriller. About half of these swordfights are the usual crude things we have all seen from HK 1960s films, the types of basic swordplay which has yet to distinguish itself from other species of cinematic swordplay; by that I mean not all of it looks like specifically Chinese martial arts—some basic moves look almost interchangeable with that in a "Three Musketeers" flick or sword & sandal movie. But toward the later half of *RETURN OF THE ONE-ARMED SWORDSMAN*, it finally starts to resemble the 1970s style kung fu movie, though there should still be more sound effects when swords are swung. It's the duels in the later half which incorporate the theatrics and outrageous leaps we now commonly associate with the whole kung fu & swordsman genre from China.

In America, Jimmy Wang Yu is an unsung hero of martial arts films. Everyone out here knows who Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan are (only a moron wouldn't), but Wang Yu, a product of the same genre as Chan & Lee, is conspicuously absent from fame and nostalgia regarding martial arts films. This is a shame, since in *RETURN OF THE ONE-ARMED SWORDSMAN*, as well as many other movies of the 1960s and early 1970s, he goes all out, fighting up a storm, exploiting maximum usage of his admittedly-limited talent. Whenever I watch a movie like this, it annoys me that such revolutionary efforts (this movie came out well before any movie starring Jackie Chan or Claude Van Damme) are ignored and not well remembered at all. The next time some dumb-shit, Johnny-come-lately trendy faddist tries telling *you*, an OC reader, about how Jackie Chan "does all his own stunts", remind this ignorant late-arrival that Jackie did not invent the kung fu film, and that unsung heroes like Jimmy Wang Yu do exist. Anyway, I suppose I shouldn't praise Wang Yu too much, since allegedly, he's a triad leader now and used pressure to hassle Jackie into being in that stupid prison movie, *ISLAND ON FIRE*. Whether it's true or not, I don't know. Regardless of what Wang Yu's current occu-

pation might or might not be, his early efforts to cinema can't be under estimated.

As is often the case with Shaw oldies, the scenes I don't care for are those taking place at night, of which there are plenty. These dimly lit scenes are fine if you're seeing it in the theater, or have a crystal-clear, flawlessly visible pre-record or laser disk, and are watching it on a humongous TV screen. But for most of us, copied videotapes are the best we can do, finding good quality prints is like finding a Richard Simmons' Guide to Masculinity. So the night-time scenes didn't do much for me. Fortunately, there are also some outdoor battles set in the daytime, and with a few bright colors here & there, these scenes highlight the film.

Storywise, this revolutionary link in the history of martial arts flicks tells the continuing story of Fang Kang, the one-armed swordsman of *THE ONE-ARMED SWORDSMAN* (you following all this?). He, like damn near every other experienced swordfighter in China, has been invited to a martial arts tournament put on by an army of villains lead by Tien Feng and the Eight Demon Swordsmen. Fong declines, as do all the other contestants. Insulted, the villains, which includes a cunning, lethal woman, kill several of the intended contestants. When that still doesn't convince the survivors to join the bout, the bad guys kidnap the fathers & other elders of the sword-fighters. One paranoid guy, played by an unrecognizably young Chen Hsing, briefly kidnaps Fong's pregnant wife, hoping to convince Fong to join them in their resistance against the Eight Demon Swordsmen and their countless, ninja-like, black-suited henchmen. But Cheng Lei (another familiar, 1960s face; of which there are plenty here) rescues her. Regardless, one-armed Fong realizes he'll have to put off being a farmer (retirement isn't likely when the martial community is at stake) until the villains are all wasted. And so, to make a long story not quite so long, let's just say that Fong leads an army of white-suited swordsmen to attack the villains, be it in forests, Pawang Manor (a fortress), OR in a nifty little village. The final series of battles takes place at a rotating water-wheel (part of some mill) and it's all pretty neat. Eventually, Tien Feng suffers defeat at the hands (I mean hand; singular!) of Fong, and as this nasty old villain struggles to get up, he's slaughtered by the vengeful fathers [previously held captive] who's sons were either killed or forced to chop their own right arms off (it was part of a complex plot-twist, I lack the time, space and will to go into specifics). **** -DF

1970s:

THE SHAOLIN INCREDIBLE TEN

Presented by Harmony Gold, Producers: Thomas Tang & Joseph Lai, Exec. Prod.: George Lai, Screenplay: Mark Chan, Editor: Leung Wing Chan, Prod. Designed by Thomas Tang Dir.: Arthur King, Starring: Elton Chong, Eagle Han, Sue Lee Mike, Wong David, Man Eliza Tim, Joseph Wan,

First of all, I recall no "Shaolin" mentioned anywhere in the film. As for usage of the word "ten" in the title, it's feasible, as this typical chop-sockey cheapie has more characters than there are pieces of George Bush's fecal matter on Rush Limbaugh's nose. It's an endless parade of characters, mostly female, in THE SHAOLIN INCREDIBLE TEN. Lots of people, lots of actresses. Just read the opening credits (up above), and you'll notice a lot of odd names. Wong David? Eagle Han? Elton Chong? I would say these are pretty strange names, but I once knew this guy called Mr. Jones who's parents were both lesbians, and he was named after his father. So his name was Turkey-Baster Jones. But seriously, as far as the strange names in THE SHAOLIN INCREDIBLE TEN, I pity poor Elton Chong! Anybody know his real name? To be named after such a god-awful pop-star dinosaur, just what deity did poor unfortunate Elton Chong piss off?! Regardless, Elton steals the film-- for what it's worth; about \$16.00, I'd say.

There's not an ounce of originality to be even remotely associated with this absolutely predictable exercise in imitation. From start to finish, it strives to be exactly like every other Chinese kung fu oldie seen on late night TV back in the 1980s. My other main complaint is the absolute stupidity which rears its ugly head every now and then. Stupid dubbing for an equally stupid film; these ridiculous shenanigans are typical of late 1970s, low budget Chinese chop-sockey. The comedy scenes, worsened by what sounds like circus music, are incredibly infantile. The women again disguise themselves (sometimes as "men"; yeah, right) in some of the most ridiculous costumes ever, and yet the idiotic men in the film are generally fooled.

But this is neither a comedy nor an art film, so issues like humor and originality are irrelevant. It's a kung fu film, damn it! And at this, it succeeds. When I want originality, I make it on my own; when I want comedy, I'll stick a sign on some chick's back which reads: "I have sex with migrant farm-workers." But if it's fights I wanna see, this movie delivers the goods! As opposed to a Van Damme flick, which delivers the bads. The script of THE SHAOLIN INCREDIBLE TEN has several characters (I'd say about ten of them), and each of them is introduced with a fight. Many dialogue scenes are brief enough just to establish that two characters dislike each other, and then suddenly, legs are spinning and fists are flying; and it's not set in a leper disco.

Both the quantity and quality of the battles are nice. Like his female co-stars (and their obviously male stunt-doubles beneath the baskets they all wear on their heads), Elton Chong had some considerable kung fu capabilities back then. Sure, he's no Tan Tao Liang or John Liu, but Elton holds his own; his superb legwork more than suffices. Of course, both as a hero and an actor, Elton Chong was far from

being one of the more charismatic of the chop-sockey genre. Yet in this movie, he's given top star billing even though his screentime is minimal. It appears as though all Elton's scenes were shot in just a day or two--the remainder of THE SHAOLIN INCREDIBLE TEN is padded out with even less prolific nobodies; actresses & actors who never made names for themselves, though the name Eagle Han rings a bell. Speaking of names, I still can't get over poor, innocent Chong, to be named after one of my least favorite rock 'n roll stars! Speaking of which, here's a joke..... Q: How do you know Elton John is bisexual? A: Because he likes girls as well as the next guy.

The setting is during the reign of the Manchu Dynasty, not that we see a whole lot of them (the budget won't allow lots of armies & horses). The villain is Li, who's hired his dastardly band of martial artists to steal a golden Buddha statue from a low budget monastery. In this complex story, they also managed to point out that nasty, grey-haired Li killed the parents of at least a couple of the heroines, who, being ex-Buddhist nuns skilled at kung fu, seek revenge against Li and his followers. Much of the script concentrates on these ladies, and after a while, they all started to look alike to me; perhaps that's why they later got into disguises (one played a bum, one played a Manchu general, one didn't, etc.), so we could tell them apart. Every now and then, Elton Chong appears too, to help these women defeat the villains during various battles set in forests and around temples. Though early in the film, some of the fights were obviously speeded up, it's the grande finale which really offers the impressive action! Beautiful spinning-back kicks which blend stunningly with the usual swordplay, acrobatics and bloodshed. What a pity that only one girl, and a kind "old" (an obviously young man with fake white eyebrows, beard, etc.) Buddhist monk are the only survivors. Even Elton himself dies when he falls into a trap; one of those pits with wooden stakes pointing up like boners on the set of BAYWATCH. **

-Damon Foster

DREADNOUGHT RIVALS

American TV distributor: Harmony Gold, A Thomas Tang Prod., Exec. Prod.: George Lai, Screenplay: Tony Sun, Editor: Leung Wing Chan, Titles: Chung Chuen, Make-up: Julia Lei, English Version: Vaughan Savage, Dubbing Supervisor: Benny Ho, Martial Arts Dir.: Kent Park, Dir.: Walter Mark, Starring: Simon Lin, Kent Ko, Louisa Mok, Jose Chin, Vaughan Cheung, Charlie Yuen, Robert Shin, Reviewed by DF

Yet another goofy Jackie Chan ripoff movie of the late 1970s, do these Hong Kongese have no shame?! HK has more movies like this than Thailand has hookers! It's beyond typical, beyond predictable, there's nothing I can say here I've not said a hundred times before: Gambling scene, brothel scenes, endless training routines, bedroom hijinks, lame comedy, annoying

voices, and the obligatory scene of a good guy dishonored by a villain (the bad guy makes our hero crawl under his legs, acting like a dog). Like the previous movie (SHAOLIN INCREDIBLE TEN) that I just reviewed, there's no originality. Hell, I could have reviewed both movies interchangeably, at once! It would be like killing two birds with one stone, or better yet, like killing two diabetics with one candy cane.

Even, so, this derivative ripoff of ripoffs did start out with some promise, it amused me at first; which is important to me--after all, I'm still the most important thing in my life. The beginning of DREADNOUGHT RIVALS tells us of some undisciplined student at a kung fu school who's a complete clown. It's remotely funny to see him acting like a monkey instead of studying kung fu, and when he actually sticks his tongue out and makes a face at his respected teacher. In Asian cinema, it's not common to see guys disrespect their teacher like this. As a disrespectful prankster myself, I can't relate to this discipline; hell, once when I worked in a book-store, I did something just to piss off my [orthodox Christian] boss... When stalking books, I placed The Holy Bible in the fantasy/novel section, right in between Naked Lunch and Alice and Wonderland. Naah, but seriously; getting back to the topic of DREADNOUGHT RIVALS: Later in the flick, a couple attractive women (Louisa Mok, very cute!) use comical kung fu to defeat the local villains. This silly comedy isn't exactly hilarious, but gave me the impression DREADNOUGHT RIVALS would be non-stop fun. But that's like expecting to get groceries from a store and not have to pay.

But the enjoyable pacing lasted about as long as a Michael Jackson marriage; since our hero encounters another pickpocket-type situation which, of course leads to his meeting yet another of them drunken old bums. Therefor we yet again, for the jillionth time, must sit through endless training scenes, as the Simon Yuen-wannabe' teaches the Jackie wannabe' how to do more intricate kung fu: Some sparring, a little stick fighting, a drunken animal technique or two, and of course, them ingenious apparatus-things that always adds an amusing touch to these dumb films. So don't get me wrong (and don't get me right, either), the training scenes, all five-trillion of them, aren't badly done! Actor Simon Lin, our young protagonist is one hell of a kicker and is capable of some speedy handwork. The kung fu and acrobatic stunts are all quite good (and why not! It's a kung fu film, for Satan's sake!), but it's when they try the typically "post-Jackie" usage of common items [as weapons] that it, like all the comedy, gets embarrassing to watch. Regardless, Simon Lin's limberness and agility are truly stunning. But skillful & talented or not, enough is enough! This movie has more training footage than Dolly Parton has back-pain.

Some mean old rival returns to this Chinese village, and he wants revenge against the old drunken master/bum guy who just happens to be training his young student

how to fight like Jackie Chan did a few years before. During this story, there are rambling scenes which attempt at humor, all of which are inconsistent with the plot (what little there is) and lead up to nothing. Portions of it are set in a brothel (a way to add humorous yet attractive female characters), but this amounts to little more than a pointless subplot inbetween fights, gags and training scenes. On the whole, the production isn't bad. But there are minor continuity errors: For example, in a villain-versus-villain fight, one bad guy is about to take on several rivals in a restaurant, but then suddenly they're battling out in some field! Anyway, all these villains end up wiped out by Simon Lin and his old teacher, though yet again, it's obvious that despite the fake grey beard, the teacher isn't a whole hell of a lot older than the student. Note: No Jackie clones were harmed during the making of this movie. *1/2-Damon F.

1980s:

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LITTLE VAMPIRE 2: KIDS FROM ANOTHER WORLD

["JIANG-SHI XIAOZI TIAN WAI"] Produced by Kuo Nan Hong (aka Joseph Kuo; Taiwan, Dir.: Wang Zhi/Chih Zheng, Planning: Gan Meei-Ling, Photography: Tang Yu Tai, Script: Xu Li Min, Supervisor: Jin Chang Liang, Cast: Cheng Tian Ci, Kong Sheng, Lu Feng, Reviewed by Damon Foster

I first tried viewing this gyonsi/jiangshi movie at least about a couple years ago and didn't get far. Ironically, I still have my original notes, which included: "Amusing antics", and "painful-looking falls & flips". I also bothered noting character names and other details I can no longer be bothered with. Obviously, I'm getting cynical & impatient



in my old age—reviewing such flicks seems much more of a chore than a pleasure these days. My heart just isn't in it any more. So a number of questions, both relevant and irrelevant, come to mind: 1. Have Taiwan & H.K. finally stopped making these silly childish vampire comedies? 2. Will the hopping-corpse genre ever start making decent movies again? 3. Does K.D. Lang cough up fur-balls?

Regardless, as a late 1980s or early 1990s gyonsi (here pronounced "jiangshi") film, it's a blatant ripoff of HK's first two MR. VAMPIRE movies, and tries unsuccessfully to be like fellow Taiwanese (yes, this movie too is from Taiwan, not HK, but I'll include it in this column anyway; the differences are microscopic) fantasies from Kinko Films. More hopping vampires (aka gonsi, gyonsi; translated in the subtitles as "Hopping zombies"), Taoist wizards, irritating bathroom humor, some martial arts, and of course, children who befriend a young gyonsi/kyonshee/jiangsu. This derivative imitation has no integrity or originality



what-so-ever and really makes me wish I was the editor of a STAR TREK fanzine.

But for what it is, it's not a whole hell of a lot worse than others in its predictable genre. Unlike stinkers like CLOSE ENCOUNTER OF THE VAMPIRE and MAGIC STORY, at least this caper offers a few fights. The FX, used sparingly, manage to suffice despite budgetary limitations, and the overall pacing is somewhat watchable. I guess I'm just getting old (er) and grumpy; and can't come up with any valid, interesting comments on this one. I feel disillusioned and ancient now. I'm extremely old, yet I can still remember my birth; it seems like only yesterday when the Town-Crier was yelling: "Here ye, here ye! The Foster child is a boy!" But seriously, I guess I'm at a loss for words on the topic of Hunan vampires.

Suffice to say that this movie is so so so Chinese, so within its own universe that to the uninitiated, it will make no sense. So don't bother with this confusing mess until you've seen definitive movies (preferably in this order) like LEGEND OF LIVING GORPS and MR. VAMPIRE. After those innovators have introduced you to the whole "Jiangshi genre", you're ready for something more over-the-top and exotic like this. Perhaps to us adult Americans, a wacky little farce is best seen when we are drunk. If you get home after an unsuccessful drunken binge in your local pick-up pub and/or meat market, check out the likes of LITTLE VAMPIRE 2: KIDS FROM

ANOTHER WORLD. Normally, this is what I'll do if me and friends are going out drinking and driving. Whenever possible, I choose to be the designated drinker.

Familiar stock music a plenty in this stupid kiddie fantasy about Taoists, vampires and kids. The only major twist is that there are rival Taoists (one is good, one is greedy) who duel each other. * -DF

1990s:

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EROTIC GHOST STORY

1990, Paragon Films & Diagonal Pictures Ltd., American Distribution: Tai Seng Video (1-800-888-3836), Starring Amy Yip, Reviewed by Damon Foster

SEX AND ZEN, and EROTIC GHOST STORY, are examples of a type of movie I've got mixed reactions to. On the one hand, I do enjoy period fantasies to a certain extent; I enjoyed the likes of THE FAIRY AND THE DEVIL and CHINESE GHOST STORY. On the other hand, I'm not a fan of Category 3 movies (for those who don't know, Category 3 films were a genre somewhere inbetween our own R and X ratings). The exception to these sleazy films, of course, being if it stars former HK silicone queen, Amy Yip Chi Mei— an actress (or rather, "two actresses") not unfamiliar to OC readers with greasy palms. Yet despite Amy Yip's major roles in both SEX AND ZEN and EROTIC GHOST STORY, I've never really had the urge to see either film—though the fantasy aspect intrigued me, as do women with big knockers, the fact remains that both films are pretentious, cliché-stuffed examples of eroticism, the type of movie I find nauseating. Though I'm a [somewhat] mature adult, who has a healthy attitude toward sex, I guess I've really never been comfortable with explicit films such as this. Perhaps in many ways, I'm too naive to judge; I mean hell, until recently, I thought the term "oral sex" meant talking about it! But seriously—I decided that even if I'm not partial to sleazy films, what the hell, I gotta' include at least one 1990s HK film to fill out Hong Kong Heroes's quota, and since I've had a tape of EROTIC GHOST STORY lying around here for possibly a couple years now, I figure I might as well review it so I can use the tape as a blank once this issue is complete.

Nothing about this predictable flick surprised me, I knew what to expect; trendy, pretentious art-house crap alternating with softcore pornography. Don't get me wrong; I'm as heterosexual as the next guy, and if I didn't have a date tonight (never go to a shoot-out with no bullets), the cleavage shots [scattered throughout EROTIC GHOST STORY] would have me pulling my pud right now. But it doesn't necessarily need to be sex acts or girl-on-girl action to get me off, I'm content with glimpses of tight and/or revealing clothing. With enough interior & exterior padding to make her 35" bust seem like at least 38", it comes as no surprise that Amy Yip, as is often the



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case, is the only one not to give us a complete glimpse of her naked chest. We do see some side-tit during the obligatory lesbian scene in the pool though. This scene, like much of the film's content, is [as mentioned before] definitely fodder for jerking off. I'm being blunt and honest here; were it not for masturbation, Amy Yip's career would be nonexistent. There's nothing embarrassing about slamming-the-old-ham, especially if you do it in a classy, respectful manner like I do. I'm always sure to buy myself flowers first, sometimes even buying myself dinner to be sure that I'll still call myself back afterwards and not feel cheap or taken advantage of.

So having sat through this whole movie, with no subtitles, and having scanned through well over 50% of it, here's what I'm left with: It has its moments, but basically sucks. My opinions of it might be a little higher if I understood the dialogue. Even so, a pretentious film is stupid no matter what. The high points, of course, are the beautiful women. There's nudity of at least a couple of them. But aside from my hormonal urges, the other two aspects I'm nearly qualified to comment on are, again, action and special effects. The quality of action really sucks, normally, even in the worst, most cheapest of HK movies, the stunts and martial arts will stand out. In this case, basic swordplay and the obligatory streaming clothes (women who toss long strips of clothing out from their arms, wrapping up their enemy; common in Chinese fantasies) are all there is to offer, plus the obligatory suspension-wire nonsense. The special effects are a little better, the super-impositions are decent, as are scenes of storm clouds materializing over a pagoda.

If you can take your eyes of Yip Chi Mei's gravity-defying, padded (and how!) push-up bra, I imagine there is some sort of a story here. Yip and a couple other sexy ladies are fairies in some forest who like to

prank local men: In one scene, their beauty lures men into the forest, but during sex acts, the women change into corpses to disgust and terrify the horny men who were hoping to "score some poke". Speaking of which, that's what some lucky scholar or bookworm gets to do when he wanders into the vicinity of this curvaceous trio. He hangs all three of these ghost women (followed by "cute" frolicking scenes in a meadow), but anyone familiar with Taoist horror stories like this knows of the Yin and the Yang. How beings of opposite worlds shouldn't intermix (Lam Ching Ying explained it best in MR. VAMPIRE 3). What basically happens to this dorky womanizer (or "spirit-izer") is he gets the equivalent of supernatural V.D., he gets some sort of curse which turns him into a ravenous, three headed monster! If that's not bad enough, the three stunning cuties end up with hair growing on their chests! Anyway, our heroic trio of occult vixens fail to defeat the flesh-eating monster (the gore scenes aren't real convincing, however) so they get by with the help of an elderly, sword-wielding Taoist wizard guy who just happened to be meditating nearby.

* -DF

超級警察

SUPER COP

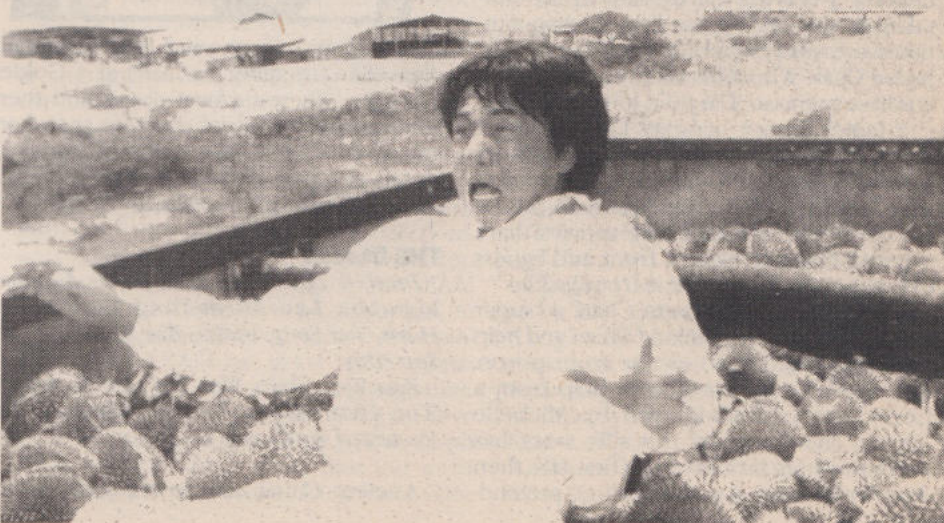
American Release: Dimensional Films & Media Asia Distribution; 1996, Produced by Golden Way Films in 1992, Martial Arts Choreographer: Stanley Tong Edited by Cheung Yiu Chung & Cheung Kar Fei, Dir. of Phot: Ardy Lam, Music: Joel McNeely, Exec. Prod.: Leonard Ho & Jackie Chan, Screenplay: Edward Tang, Filre Ma, Lee Wai Yee, Producers: Willie Chan & Edward Tang, Dir.: Stanley Tong, Cast: Jackie Chan, Michelle Khan, Maggie Cheung, Ken Tsang, Yuen Wah, Bill Tung Pui, Joesphine Koo, Wong Siu, Lowe Kwong, Philip Chan, Law Lit, Shum Wai, Hon Yee San, Sze Tsuen Wai, Tuen Wai Lun, Wong Yue Man, Mars, Reviewed by DF

I've seen & reviewed this 1992 crime-

drama before, but under its original Chinese version, POLICE STORY 3: SUPER COP. This time, I'm reviewing the 1996 English re-release, which I some how missed in the English-language theaters, so I waited (patiently, I might add) for it to come to video. Though this American edit has English dubbing, it's again Jackie who dubbed himself (unfortunately), so at times I think I could understand it more clearly on my Chinese, English-subtitled videotape I picked up a few years ago. There are also some minor editing differences between the American and HK videos, though nothing blatantly different. A bit seems condensed from the U.S. version, I guess this makes up for a much larger opening credits sequence. The Hong Kongese only had a few basic graphics, and then the flick starts.

But of any U.S. tampering, what really nauseated me is the new musical score. It's a matter of taste, of course, and as an avid hater of hip-hop disco, I had to press the TV's "Mute" button nearly every time a character was riding a car; the releasers chose to make us think these people are all obsessed with "gangsta" rap! Additional disco & soul tunes are heard through out the English version, and if you're a fan of that stuff, fine and dandy, you'll enjoy SUPER COP all the more. I had heard that one of my former favorite bands, Devo added music to this version too. But their only song, "Super Cop" doesn't come on until the ending credits. And guess what? It's every bit as techno-disco as the other god-awful tunes in SUPER COP! It's easy to see why Devo bombed and became a bunch of hasbeens; I mean, they're still one of my favorite one-hit wonders, but it seems as though they intentionally bombed, after three slick, rockin' pseudo-punk albums, they seemed to try and sound like Depeche Mode and most of us lost interest.

But on the whole, as a film, SUPER COP is pretty nice, be it English or Hong Kongese. While not an all-out kung fu extravaganza like the first two (superior) POLICE STORY flicks, it's still a nice adventure. It was made when Jackie was older (he's even older now!) than he was in the first two, which explains why the martial arts aren't as prevalent. In fact, all its fights are brief, much shorter than you would



expect in a Jackie movie, you selfish pig, you! However, stunt-wise, SUPER COP delivers. Their incredible feats at the end, jumping from helicopter-to-train, motorcycle-to-train, train-to-car, etc. are truly hairbrained—uh, that is, I mean, hair-raising! These stunts are as amazing as always. I still think the shopping mall massacre in the first one are Chan at his wildest, and the many fights in part 2 are more fun than anything in SUPER COP, but this one is not really a disappointment. A lot of people liked this film, so I wish I hated it, so I could once again cut a film down just to piss everyone off.

So now I'll concentrate on the film's bad points. First of all, the story is badly written, awkwardly conceived, and doesn't offer an ounce of originality (exactly how many times have I said this in the last few reviews?!). Though it's entertaining, the fact of the matter remains that it's tedious, stupid and rambles on. Often HK movies have pointless scripts, but it's a gimmick to get to the next fight and dazzle us with "quick-fix" fun. But as I said before, these are some of the least interesting martial arts fights Jackie has ever put on film, so it all comes off as a rambling affair when we do get to these action scenes. He's done better martial arts and stunts in films made both before and after SUPER COP. I'm not saying the kung fu fights are bad; I mean hey, I did a whole issue of OC on American martial arts films a couple years ago, and therefore, I know a truly bad action scene when I see one. But if you're expecting the kind of explosive action that Jackie Chan, Samo Hung, Yukari Oshima, or Moon Lee were doing in the 1980s, you'll be very disappointed; don't expect lots of kicks, full-contact "powder-puff" hits, or acrobatics. In fact, in the kung fu department, co-heroine Michelle Khan upstages Jackie himself. Jackie concentrates more on elaborate stunts, not spinning-back kicks or wushu stances.

This is not to say that Michelle Kahn (a star in her own right; see page 32 of OC's Femme Fatales Issue, for her biography) doesn't do some breath-taking stuntwork. It's she who drives the flying motorcycle up onto a speeding train, and I don't think she used a stunt double. She also actually falls off a moving car as seen in the outtakes at the ending credits. Ending outtakes are everywhere now, it's not only Jackie Chan who adds them to the ending credit sequences. They did it in the American James Carrey comedy LIAR LIAR. I know this is trivial, but wasn't Burt Reynolds the first to do this? The earliest time I saw this done was in at least one of the two CANNONBALL RUN movies, that's where Jackie borrowed it from, and I guess everyone else borrowed it from Jackie.

Jackie Chan plays Kevin Chan, a "super cop" hired to go to mainland China and help Panther (Yuen Wah) escape from prison. Kevin goes undercover with help from a Communist soldier played by Michelle Khan. The course of this silly story has them traveling around Asia (first HK, then Red China, later Kuala Lumpur), pretend-

ing to be Panther's friend so they can infiltrate a mob who's planning another prison break for the kingpin's wife. There are a couple chuckles, like Bill Tung disguised as an old lady, and amusing antics when Kevin/Jackie's girlfriend, again played by Maggie Cheung just happens to show up and accidentally blow their cover. There's dull, dragging dialogue, a few uninspiring attempts at cuteness and humor, but there are also occasional action scenes to make these bits almost worth sitting through. Fans of BULLET IN THE HEAD will be amused by the scene of Jackie and comrades having a shoot-out (on the border of

place, which is why Xiong Xinxin - cooped up in her heavily-scarred daddy's sword factory full of half-naked, young blacksmiths - decides that the only cure for boredom is to manipulate two of the aforementioned boys into fighting over her, giving herself to the winner. The two she picks - the adopted, parentless pacifist On, and the temperamental, insecure Iron Head - couldn't be worse choices (On is given to blind, homicidal rages, and Iron Head can't figure out whether to kiss, cuddle or kill the various people who cross his path). Not surprisingly, her plan unravels in spectacular fashion as it spills out of bounds and mixes up with the lives of a burly, pugnacious monk; a gang of grimy hunters equipped with generous quantities of bone-crunching bear traps; the killer of On's father (Lung, a homicidal, tattooed Su Tsui Yu equipped with lightning-fast sabres and the ability to fly), gangs of Mongol horsemen, and tough prostitutes (Michelle Reis).

This is Tsui Hark's THE BLADE (1996), his most personal, ambitious and highly-sexed movie since 1993's GREEN SNAKE. Somewhere between RED SORGHUM and Chang Cheh's ONE-ARMED SWORDSMAN, THE BLADE feels like Tsui Hark's attempt to mull over issues that don't make polite dinner table conversation. The issues are mullied in graphic spurting blood, galloping hordes of horsemen, and rooms full of anvil-banging blacksmiths. While the visual style is easily identifiable as Tsui's this time around he carves his visual phantasmagoria of increasingly-surreal images out of earthier stuff - a martial China ala ASHES OF TIME, full of sweat, grit, and funny straw hats. Traditional elements of period kung fu flicks are utilized, but this time around they're rooted firmly in reality. On is Jimmy Wang Yu's one-armed swordsman, but he has a hard time keeping his balance. And Lung can fly, but when he finally unveils his much-whispered about talent its prosaic nature manages to disappoint and dazzle at the same time. Central to the movie is Xiong Xinxin's narration, focusing on her attempts to understand the idea of "Emprise's Field", a notion of a separate world with its own set of laws (like the law of the sea, or the mythical code of the gunfighter). A kung fu extravaganza told from the viewpoint of a young girl is a remarkably rare thing, but you can't imagine the story told any other way. All the more remarkable given the following story told by Tsui Hark:

"The story focused on the two men, and one day on the set Xiong said to me 'Why am I here?' I said, 'Because you are in the movie.' She says, 'But I don't do anything. Why am I here?' I said 'Good question.' I stopped shooting, and went home for one day. I re-wrote the script, re-structured the story, and the next day we started shooting the new movie." Not surprisingly, the movie flopped at the HK box office. **** - Grady Hendrix



Thailand and Cambodia) with drug-peddlers (like an aging Lo Lieh) at a Golden Triangle. There's a boat chase, and there are also brief (too brief) kung fu spats here and there, but it's the climactic series of chases & stunts involving vehicles which make the biggest impression. *** -DF

THE BLADE

Prod. & Dir.: Tsui Hark; 1996, Cinematography: Lau Moon-Tong, Editor: Tsui Hark, Tai Seng Video, 104 Min., 2 Tapes, Starring:

Zao Wen Zhuo, Wai Tin Chi, Xiong Xinxin, Chan Ho, Su Tsui Yu, Michelle Reis, Reviewed by Grady Hendrix

Ancient China can be a pretty boring

KAIZO NINGEN UPDATE

2ULTRAMAN TIGA

Tsuburaya Prod.: 1997, Presented by Mainichi Broadcasting.

Producer: Masato Oida, Hiroshi Morotomi, Hirokazu Ige, Asst. Prod.: Naoyuki Koyama, Hiroshi Morotomi, Hirokazu Ige, Music: Tachimi Yano, Shizuka Tamagawa, Exec. Prod.: Kazuo Tsuburaya, Planning: Kazuo Mitsuta, Yoshihiko Marutani, Minoru Ono, Supervisor: Koichi Takano, Art Dir.: Tetsuzo Ozawa & Hajime Oikawa, Special Stuntwork: Koji Nakamura, Toshio Miyake, FX Dir.: Shinichi Kamizawa, Dir. of Phot.: Takehiro Kuramochi, Lighting: Saisuke Sato, Asst. Dir.: Shigenori Shogase, Special Effects: Yoshihito Takahashi, Masakatsu Izumi, Yuji Tera, Izumi Negishi, Character Design: Hiroshi Maruyama, CAST: Daigo: Hiroshi Nagano, Munakata: Akitoshi Otaki, Shinjo: Shigeki Kagemura, Rena: Takimi Yoshimoto, Yazumi: Yoichi Furuya, Iruma: Mio Takaki, Horii: Yukio Masuda, Also Featuring: Jun Takigawa, Nazuna Yamazaki, Setsuko Kawaguchi, Saburo Kadowaki, Katori Usami, Koji Abe, Kono & Kohei Owada, Reviewed by Damon Foster

If I had only positive things to say about ULTRAMAN TIGA, I probably wouldn't be writing this review, I would figure I might as well have some asskissing, Ultra-geek [with no life outside of TV] critique this newest edition in the Ultra-Legacy. I've heard more than enough praise (and rightly so; I'm not saying it's over rated or that it doesn't deserve the rave reviews) geared toward this series, and for that reason alone, I shall seek out things to complain out; to trash certain aspects of it, if only to put myself back into the minority. Making negative comments about the current Ultra Brother series won't be easy, because I



too, in fact, really do like this series a lot. But let's face it, nothing is perfect, and it's about time somebody offer a few different comments about this show which, though I enjoy the hell out of it, I am a little fed up with people worshipping it as a wonderful new religious experience of enlightenment.

So let's face it; what we have got with ULTRAMAN TIGA is another fucking bastardization! We all know that the original Ultraman, and most of his brothers are spacemen from Nebula M78, but this ULTRAMAN TIGA remake has the new Ultraman as an earthling, from a mythical area in Northern Japan called something like Tiga Land! So as a retelling, it's already resembling the two garbage programs, ULTRAMAN: TOWARDS THE FUTURE and ULTRAMAN: THE ULTIMATE HERO; perhaps it's those two god-awful programs which make ULTRAMAN TIGA look so good. But because ULTRAMAN TIGA once again sets its story aside from the predecessors, existing in an alternate dimension, it's unlikely there can possibly be any team-ups, don't expect to see Ultraman Ace, Ultraman Taro, Ultraman Leo or Ultraman '80 appear to add more thrills. I for one love the action-packed team-ups, and I'm a lover of sequels, a hater of remakes. So this shows you where I stand on the program's plot and over-all concept.

Being a slickly produced, sterile 1990s series, there's a glossed-over, light tone to the overall production. It's not as gritty as the older programs, unfortunately for me. The problem is that ULTRAMAN TIGA is shot on video, though they did use "Film Look" to try and fool us. Also, there are of course, several computer-generated, morphing style effects, which is to be expected in any 1990s sci-fi series. This whole clean look may impress some, but I personally prefer the old non-computerized, celluloid look seen in the programs of the 1960s and 1970s.

Okay, I got it off my chest, the complaints are out of the way. I don't see many other flaws to this otherwise impressive series. After absolute trash like the Australian and American programs which preceded it, ULTRAMAN TIGA is most definitely a step back in the right direction. It's got good science fiction, decent superhero action, and tosses in mythology and horror on occa-

sion, so it's everything a Japanese superhero should be. As I recall, I do prefer ULTRAMAN 80 over ULTRAMAN TIGA, and some of the other Ultra shows were more fun, so although TIGA isn't my top favorite of the Ultra programs, it's really very nice, and easily the best superhero series currently airing in Japan (from what I've bothered to see, the competition from Toei is absolute crap). Ultraman has been Japan's hottest superhero for over 30 years, and ULTRAMAN TIGA is Tsuburaya Productions's 11th Ultraman series, produced to commemorate the hero's 30th anniversary.

Ultraman fans won't be disappointed by ULTRAMAN TIGA; hell, I was not disappointed despite the two negative paragraphs which started this review, something I may never live down.

The special effects are great. Though as I type this, the series is still currently airing in Japan (and may be around for a long time, it's a huge hit in the ratings!), so of course I've not seen the whole show. But the episodes I've seen to date are pretty impressive. Though some monsters are more far-fetched than others, I've yet to see any costumes which strike me as overtly stupid or laughable. Perhaps the aliens and demons are more cool-looking than the occasional dinosaurs (i.e. the two lumbering reptiles in the pilot episode, not downright ridiculous, but not neat either). As for Ultraman Tiga himself (themselves), it's an awesome costume, perhaps his design is one of my favorites in the whole Ultra genre. His color changes a little (mainly from red to purple; a first for the Ultramen), as he powers himself into different modes and levels, depending on the situation ("Sky Type", "Multi Type" and "Power Type"). While each of these designs is dandy, it's obviously just a pathetic gimmick to sell a wider variety of overpriced toys. Other effects include the usual super-imposed visuals (rays, laser beams, and so on), and miniature jet-planes, space-craft, and the ever impressive sets of buildings and cities-- the trademark of any Tsuburaya production. No complaints here, except that some of the exploding creatures and flying objects (be they vehicles or Tiga himself) are obviously computer generated, creating an impersonal, artificial, heartless atmosphere. But is it my imagination, or is it mainly in the earlier episodes which relied more on computer-toaster crap? I've seen later episodes where real monster props explode, and flying objects are accomplished the traditional way from the good old days: Miniature props and suspension wires! Perhaps they're re-examining their roots to create the same thrills of the Golden Age of Japanese Superheroes!

In the action department, ULTRAMAN TIGA once again delivers. Plenty of explo-



sions and air-vehicle dogfights as the current Science Patrol-clone, called G.U.T.S., zap and bomb all comers. But of course, the main highlight, as far as action goes, are Tiga's traditional fist-fights, tackling giant monsters a plenty. After seeing Ultraman Powered merely push his enemies in ULTRAMAN: THE ULTIMATE HERO, it's such a relief to see an agile, limber Ultraman like Tiga using some speed and skill to punch, chop, kick and judo toss his opponents, and the occasional acrobatic flip is a welcome sight indeed. It's great that the martial arts are finally put back into the Ultra genre, there's no shortage of spinning-back kicks. The GUTS team, however, aren't as charismatic. The episodes I've seen remain fresh in my mind, as far as Ultraman Tiga and his monstrous foes go. But the human squad of helmet wearing, raygun toting, vehicle driving soldiers left no impression on me; they spend more time talking and piloting than fighting. Perhaps I'm being too hard on them, since they're carrying on with the Science Patrol tradition of being scientists and investigators, the initial concept never said they had to be any sort of Sentai-like team of karate experts (though, it's certainly a lot more fun when they are!). So on the whole, the action scenes involving Ultraman Tiga himself are [as always] the more exciting part - and the GUTS members don't do too much of the fist-fighting. The only thing about them which struck me as memorable is that finally, a liberated woman is the leader. My only other observation on the GUTS team is that some of them over-act too much.

Synopsis: About thirty million years ago last Sunday, when that Japanese place [called Japan] was picked-on by monstrous giants, some of them thar mysterious Ultra Warriors came along and taught these huge creatures how to spit teeth. The Ultramen then made a "Pyramid of Light" in the land of Tiga, where it remained, oblivious to the rest of us, awaiting to be called upon at a later date. In the 21st century, two rampaging reptiles appear (this is officially where the pilot episode starts), and they like to break things. Even the high-tech, futuristic weaponry of GUTS (Global Unlimited Task Squad) can't defeat the two humongous attackers. Demolishing everything in their wake, the two giants make bee-lines for the Pyramid of Light, knowing that the three Ultraman statues inside just might come to life and thwart the villains' spree of destruction. The monsters thrash two of the statues, but Daigo (the GUTS team's most daring member) somehow gets combined with the statue of Ultraman Tiga, bringing the immense superhero back to life. No longer dormant, Ultraman Tiga (alias Daigo) beats the shit out of the two monsters, and several others, during the program's run. When the going gets tough, Daigo uses his Spark Lance (I still say it should be called a "Tiga Capsule") to transform into Ultraman Tiga, the "Earthling Ultraman" (yeah, right) who's as tall as a 20-story building (but which 20-story building?). Ultraman Tiga protects Japan using his powers including flight capability, physical strength and la-

ser beam weapons. *** -Damon Foster

ガ EAGLE RIDERS

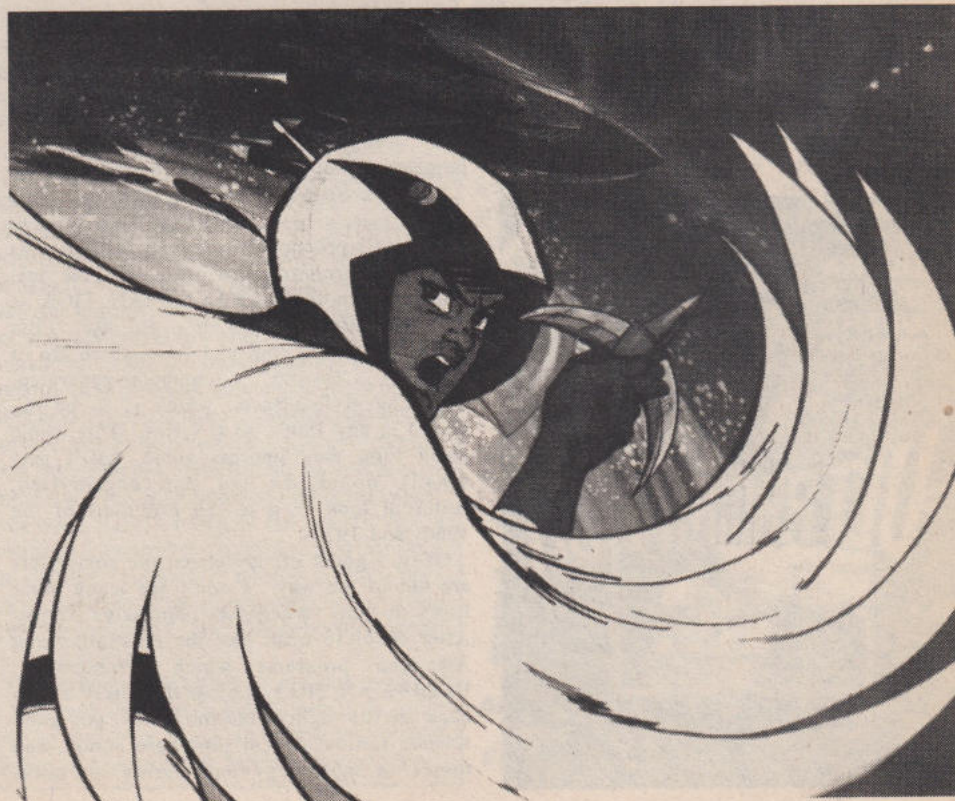
[aka "Saban's Eagle Riders"] Saban; 1996, Underlying Property of Tatsunoko Co. Ltd., Exec. Prod.: Eric Rollman, Prod. & Story Editor: Rita M. Costa, Voice Operators: Richard Epcar, Steve Kramer, Heidi Noelle Lenhart, Michael Sorich, Prod. Asst. & A.D.R.: Coordinator: Gregory C. Ireland, Exec. in Charge of Sound Operations: Clive H. Mizumoto, Music: Shuki Levy, Kussa Mahchi, Voices: Richard Cansino, Bryan Cranston, Heidi Noelle Lenhart, Mona Marshal, Reviewed by D. Foster

More new voices (yet again) for the Japanese cartoon GATCHAMAN, which is pronounced, "Gotcha", man!" Just how many alternate [English] versions are going to exist of this old GATCHAMAN?! The kids in the audience must be so confused, with all these different companies re-releasing the same old series every decade or so, always dubbing in new names for these often-repeated characters! Regardless, American-dubbed GATCHAMAN has entertained three generations of yankee twerps: 1. The 1970s; Sandy Frank releases it to America as BATTLE OF THE PLANETS. As an old fart (though it seems like only yesterday when the Town Crier was yelling, "Here-ye, here-ye; the Foster child is a boy"), it's BATTLE OF THE PLANETS which first introduced me to GATCHAMAN when I was a runt. 2. The 1980's; It comes to America again, as G-FORCE, a name they actually swiped from B.O.T.P.; go figure!. 3. The 1990s; this week it's called EAGLE RIDERS.

As someone too poor (I don't live in the gutter, that's for rich people) to afford cable TV, I'm not really very familiar with the

1980s G-FORCE version I believe to be currently airing on the Cartoon Network (or it was, at one point); but from what I both-ered to see back in happier, more finan-cially stable times, I suspect G-FORCE to be the most faithful, accurate version, and my favorite, even if the monotonous mu-sic (repetitious drums) was overdone. We all know that before Saban's POWER RANG-ERS (and its equally sacrilegious ripoffs) came along, BATTLE OF THE PLANETS (1970s, all versions hopefully destroyed by now) was the worst ever bastardization of a Japanese product butchered for Ameri-can release, even outdoing HALF-HUMAN and VARAN THE UNBELIEVABLE for sheer unholy audacity. So compared to the hor-rendously edited & censored BOTP, I think EAGLE RIDERS is okay. I must confess, however, that I enjoyed it a whole hell of a lot more as BOTP, but only because at that point, I had my whole life ahead of me.

Yet again, there's a whole new music score. Though I don't remember the origi-nal Japanese music all that well, I'm sure it blows away the incredibly bland, unremarkably dull tunes which contami-nate EAGLE RIDERS, really just another half-ass (neither good nor bad, to me) rein-terpretation of GATCHAMAN. It's not that the score is necessarily bad, but there's noth-ing to it; it's synthetic, symphonic boredom. At least the music in BOTP alternated be-tween original Japanese tunes (always catchier and more flavorful than American crap), and Igo Kantor's hilariously bad STAR WARS ripoff music. The lame drumming in G-FORCE at least added unintended hu-mor. As for the songs in EAGLE RIDERS, there's nothing to them at all; it's as though the music doesn't exist. Where as the chant-ing & rapping in the V.R. TROOPERS theme nauseated me, and I could almost rock out





to the themes of POWER RANGERS and SUPER HUMAN SAMURAI SQUAD, the unmemorable songs in EAGLE RIDERS are too bland for words, good or bad.

Interesting to note that Saban added captioning for the hearing impaired. As someone accustomed to watching foreign stuff with English subtitles, I couldn't help but automatically read these captions, even though I could easily hear and understand all the dialogue, it's a habit! But they even caption the "Ah-ah-ah" portions of the sung theme song! You think deaf people really care about this? Hell, this series would be perfect for re-audio dubbing back into Japanese! Anybody have the original Japanese programs on tape? It would be cool, to redub the Japanese music, dialogue & sound FX from Japanese master tapes, because what we would have left would be a faithful, subtitled GATCHAMAN!!

Fortunately, there appear to be additional episodes in America for the first time, sequel programs possibly not seen in the BOTP and G-FORCE variations. There are designs I don't recall from when I was a kid watching BOTP. The main villain, whom I formerly knew as Zoltar, is now called Mellanox, and his uniform is much different. The new vehicle is called the Ultra Eagle ("God Phoenix" in Japanese), and doesn't look a thing like the Phoenix from BOTP. So we can assume that Saban actually made a wise decision (try not to faint) for once, and perhaps for the first time in American history, we can see elusive episodes from the next season or two! I suspect that the episode [of EAGLE RIDERS] I saw to be from either GATCHAMAN FIGHTER or GATCHAMAN 2; virtually the same thing, though spelled differently.

As far as the dubbing goes, it's okay I guess. As with the music, I have no major reaction, good or bad. I'm relieved that the little kid Mickey Dugan (aka Zinpei, Jinpei & Keyop) lacks those annoying chirps (like "Aaar, put, toot-toot; About Time" and "Wrrr, toot-toot, bye bye Namu") which helped make BOTP so aggravating. There are, however, pathetic attempts at humor in EAGLE RIDERS, like: "Something stinks here, and it's not just limburger" (this would be halfway amusing if the setting were a dinner table or picnic, but not in a high-tech control room). The only character I got a minor chuckle (at best) out of was the villainous Mellanox (aka Berg Katsu or Zoltar), who's attempts at one-liners at least imply this bad-guy (bad gal? It's hard to tell, sometimes; the original version had him as transsexual, or androgynous) has a slight sense of humor. The show does have other names, characters like Benson and Jones, but I was amused that occasional Japanese names like Tetsu and Sachiko appear ev-

ery now and then.

Before going into the script (again), I pause here to remind everyone that just because I've demonstrated some tolerance for this Japanese cartoon, I'm not softening up to the anime fans. For the longest time, I looked down at trendy Americans who thought they were "cool" for using Japanese words like "anime" and "manga". But then I had a second look at myself to see if I'm any better than the animation geeks. You know, I've been saying "Sentai" instead of "Superhero Team" ever since the release of SUN VULCAN back in the early 1980s! Granted, a simple term like Sentai is briefer and to the point, and easier to pronounce than any English equivalent. So I'm realizing that cartoon freaks and live action fans aren't as different as I thought. One thing, though: I've seen some of you four-eyed, overweight dweebs when I've been to sci-fi conventions (a rare occasion), and I gotta' tell you needs something-- Do something about your bulks, you're a bunch of heart-attacks-waiting-to-happen. But for now, back to this anime, EAGLE RIDERS:

Decent artwork and animation (average



for any other 1970s, Japanese cartoon) highlights this story of a squad of bird-like superheroes: Hunter Harris (eagle; aka Mark & Ken), Micky Dugan (sparrow; formerly Keyop, etc.), Kelly Jenar (dove; Princess, Jun, etc.), Joe Thax (condor; Jason), and Ollie Kaaawani (owl; Tiny, Ryu), who are commanded by Thaders Keane, whom the Japs knew as Namu, and we called Security Chief Anderson. With their 1990s aliases in place, they're protecting Earth from alien attack by Vorack, formerly the Galactor Syndicate, and at one point Spectra. From there, it's an excuse for average thrills like spaceship dogfights, explosions, jumping around, melodrama, some martial arts and even some decent gunplay. The few episodes I've seen never once implied that the people fired-upon had survived, or that they were robots. So it's got an occasional death, and though I'm sure they cut out any bloodshed, EAGLE RIDERS is worth watching occasionally, but I wouldn't want a steady diet of the stuff. ** -DF

キイハンター

KEY HUNTER

Producers: Toei TV, 1968, lasting from 4/6/68 thru 4/7/73, consisting of 262 episodes, airing on T.B.S. (Tokyo Broadcasting

System), Starring: Tetsuro Tanba, Sonny/Shinichi Chiba, Yozo Nogiwa, Hayato Tani, Hiroshi Miyauchi, Reviewed by DF

A definite precursor to the likes of KAMEN RIDER, this incredible crime-drama program is a superhero series for adults; rather like a Sentai series without funny costumes. However, I must confess that, as yet, I'm very unfamiliar with this great Japanese spy-caper; I've seen very little of it. So perhaps my comments are premature at this point; it's too early to tell and I might not even know what the hell I'm talking about. But the program deserves exposure, and I gotta' start somewhere, so a vague introduction is better than none. Hopefully, this review will amplify interest among video collectors and traders, and in time, plenty of episodes will be available to us and the series will become as big a household word as ULTRAMAN or KAMEN RIDER. Perhaps my early praises here are a little prejudiced, not only because I've seen only bits and pieces from KEY HUNTER, but also because I have always loved Sonny Chiba's TV shows; at least a couple Chiba crime drama programs (co-starring Etsuko Shiomi and Hayato Tani) were shown in my area in the 1970s, and lack of English subtitles didn't stop me from enjoying the likes of GUERRILLAS 7.

Shinichi ("Sonny") Chiba was a big action star on Japanese TV throughout the 1960s (thanks to TV shows like THE DRIFTING DETECTIVE, not to mention theatrical movies like TERROR BENEATH THE SEA and INVASION OF THE NEPTUNE MEN), but it was this exciting KEY HUNTER cops & robbers series which really made him big in Japan and other parts of Asia. KEY HUNTER made him so popular in the Far East, in fact, that mutual acquaintances had arranged a meeting between Chiba and Bruce Lee, about a possible film collaboration, but Lee passed away mere days before the scheduled meeting! Regardless, KEY HUNTER helped make Sonny Chiba a household word, not that he was obscure before that. Other cast members in KEY HUNTER include Tetsuro Tanba, arguably one of Japan's most wellknown, international celebrities (topped only by Toshiro Mifune), having been in YOU ONLY DIE TWICE, SEVEN BLOWS OF THE DRAGON, THE STORY OF RICKY, and countless others; way too many to list. Hayato Tani also stars, he's best known for crime dramas like NETCHU JIDAI KEIJI HEN, KEY HUNTER, OPERATION EYEFUL, OPERATION BIRDIE, and at least a couple others I remember seeing in the 1970s. OC readers may remember him as the heroic leader in MASKMAN. Also on hand in KEY HUNTER, occasionally, is a young Hiroshi Miyauchi, before he went on to achieve fame in the superhero genre, which includes prominent roles in KAMEN RIDER V3, KAIKETSU ZUBAT, GORANGERS, and a few of the more recent, 1980s or 1990s programs.

From the start, KEY HUNTER appears to be a fun series. The opening is great, there's a slick, James Bond-ish theme song (with a

distinctive Shunsuke Kikuchi style) to highlight shots of our heroes battling men in an underground parking lot! This is way ahead of the trendy HK actioners which often did the same thing, in fact Sonny Chiba is seen doing a pre-Jackie Chan stunt where he narrowly avoids a speeding car while hanging from a ceiling's pipe or ploe: Jackie would do the same thing in OPERATION CONDOR a couple decades later. So not only is KEY HUNTER a must see for

superhero fans, but the trendy HK geeks [whose books are plaguing the market] could learn a thing or two from KEY HUNTER too! KEY HUNTER was successful enough in Japan to spawn sequel programs like OPERATION BIRDIE (with Tetsuro Tanba, Yu Fujiki & Hayato Tani) and OPERATION EYEFUL. From here, imitations and copycat programs ran rampant like GMEN 75 (Tetsuro Tanba, Yosuke Natsuki, Yasuaki Kurata) and GMEN 82 (Tanba, Koichi Miura, Kyoko Enami of WAR OF THE MONSTERS). In more recent years, there was SUPER POLICE (Tanba, Tomokazu Miura, Naomi Morinaga).

As a crime-drama series, it's definitely one of the best I've ever seen. The footage I was so fortunate to view incorporated plenty of bombs, helicopters, gunplay, airplanes, motorcycles, martial arts, trains, knives, and even some French woman who kills men by throwing scissors into their backs! There's definitely some occasional bloodshed in this thriller, it's a program which puts to shame literally every American cops & robbers program (but then, what doesn't?); if you watch just ten minutes of KEY HUNTER, you'll never again be capable of sitting through BARETTA, VEGAS, MIAMI LICE, or CHARLIE'S ANGELS (unless you've got the sound turned down and are only into it to "slam-the-old-ham"). Not only does KEY HUNTER seem to concentrate on action, but it's all pretty far-fetched; at times, it's approach goes far enough beyond typical James Bond stuff so that it feels like you're watching KAMEN RIDER without the bug masks.

Of all the different Japanese crime dramas I've seen or seen clips from, KEY HUNTER does indeed strike me as being the best, or one of the best. Mind you, a single episode isn't a lot to go on (and the nature of that particular episode may give me a prejudiced view of things), and since the other programs I obtained are incomplete (mere clips, previews and edited highlights), my opinion isn't really solid at this point. I do have some basic background on the series though: KEY HUNTER was certainly not the first cops & robbers program in Japan, but unlike predecessors like THE DRIFTING DETECTIVE, SPY CATCHER J3 (aka "Tulip"), and THE GUARDMAN, it did seem to set the pace from that point on. Mind you, this is a topic I know little about, but would love to expand on it in future OCs (if there will be future OCs, that is). Another sub-genre I haven't even skimmed the surface of are the pre-SUKEBAN DEKKA woman avenger programs like PLAYGIRL (Toei; 358 epi.) and 009 (Toei; Fuji TV), about a squad of lovelies (wearing skirts & gogo boots) and a logo which bears a striking resemblance to that of the cartoon CYBORG 009.

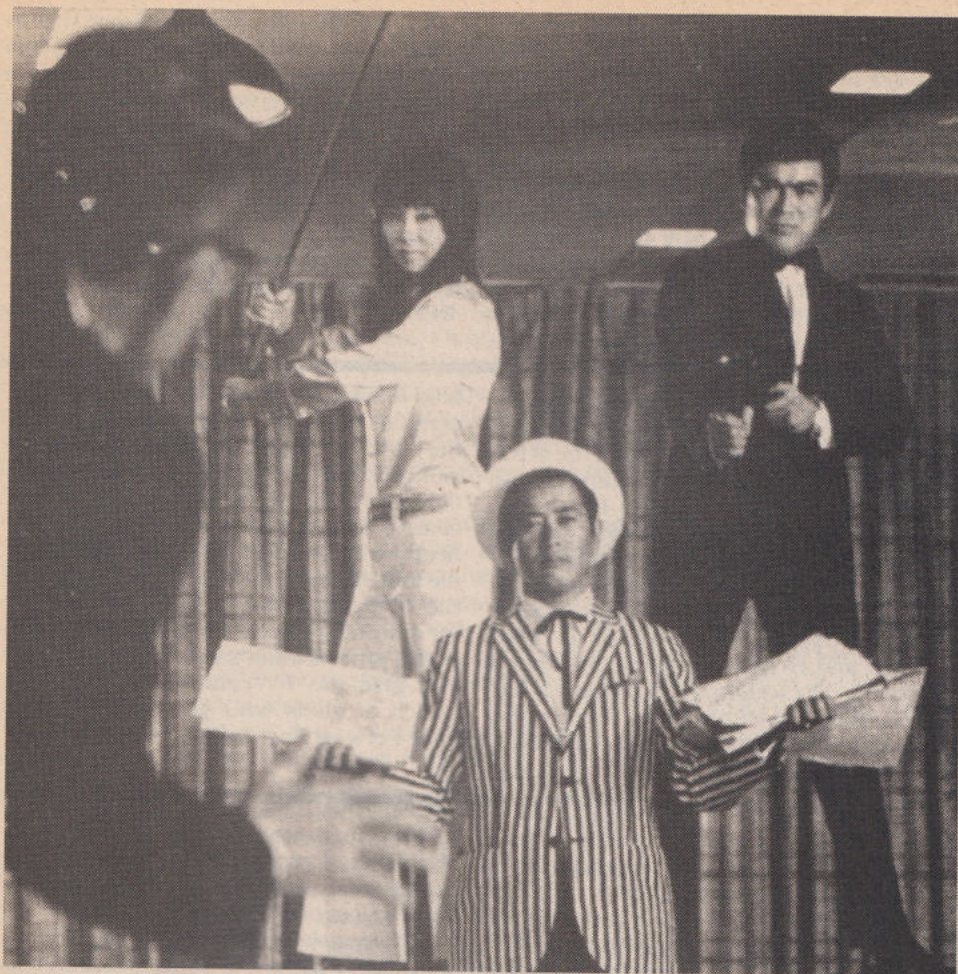
As someone who hasn't seen modern Tokyo, non-superhero action in years (as a kid, I absolutely loved the Sonny Chiba TV shows broadcasted locally in the 1970s, despite language barriers), KEY HUNTER looked to me a lot like the Sentai and/or superhero programs (minus the monsters & funny costumes) which would explode

across Japan a few years later. This is no surprise, since both genres were created by Toei, and involved many of the same actors and stuntmen. The one KEY HUNTER I do have on tape is the final one, which would appear to be a direct continuation of the previous episode, which didn't make it any easier for me! It seems that our heroic squad of "Super Police" are experiencing their own judgment day, it's as though they're in some gloomy court, where the judge & prosecutors wear black robes and pointy hoods. The whole thing reminds me of an episode of WILD WILD WEST, but such outlandish costumes seem strangely out of place in what's suppose to be a crime drama & adventure series, and NOT a fantasy or sci-fi program. But I'm not complaining, because lots of flashbacks make this episode a lot of fun, and definitely worthy of a five-star rating! We see plenty of exciting clips of our heroes in action, doing stunts and battling bad guys in previous episodes. Plenty of explosions, helicopter chases, speeding cars, pre-John Woo gunplay, and martial arts; some of it by our main man Shinichi/Sonny Chiba himself! This grande finale certainly peaked my interest, it makes me want to see more episodes of this show, even though I know not all episodes are action collages like this; I mean, they gotta' have dialogue and plots, right?!

But again, mere clips aren't much to go on; time will tell if these other Japanese cop programs live up to KEY HUNTER, but since most of them don't star Sonny/Shinichi Chiba, I don't think they could possibly be as good. I did, however, see an episode or two of GMEN '82 when I was in Japan, and was impressed, since the episode took place in HK and involved kung fu (hell, GMEN '75 had Chinese kung fu episodes too, so heroic Yasuaki Kurata could clobber villainous Yang 'Bolo' Sze!).

There is of course, a down side to the over-the-top approach, since nothing, not even your taste in reading material, is flawless. Early examples of the same kind of theatrics (ridiculous ones at that) which would creep into many-a-superhero show; i.e. in one KEY HUNTER, our heroes [at some cowboy town!] battle cowboys & indians (all played by Japanese of course), reminding me of episodes of kiddie programs like IRON KING and DYNAMAN. Another episode had some really lame slaps, when one woman slaps another, she so obviously misses her by a mile; this seems out of place in any Chiba production where cool fights are expected. I also got a chuckle out of a scene of two dummies (meant to be real-live men) rolling down a cliff. It's so obvious that actors are being doubled for by suits full of foam rubber. The final episode tried being funny (hardy-har-har) by having our heroes suddenly start singing (and badly!) to annoy a villainous character called Kenji (I think). There are at least two beautiful women as main characters (one of which is Keiko, quite a sultry looker!), and occasionally their over-acting and attempts at acting "cute" can get just plain annoying. Fortunately, Chiba's





character is the least annoying of the bunch, he seems to be the most serious, and doesn't laugh, smile or even talk as frequently as the other characters. Perhaps his unique, distinctive, raspy, scratchy, whisper-like voice is unsuited for comedy.

Having only seen one episode, I can't give an over-all rating for the series as a whole, but from what I've seen, I'm guessing the program is worthy of at least a three star (***) rating, possibly more. Granted, I'm sure the other episodes are a lot more talky, and due to a lack of translation, I'm sure portions could be boring to us yankees. Also, having only seen the one, I can't go into detail about the plot, here's what I know: The members of KEY HUNTER fight criminals. And that's it! What follows is a review of the only episode I've seen in its entirety, and it's the final chapter.

#262

First Shot: Building, and Japanese title.

It appears that the KEY HUNTER squad is being held for trial in a theatrical court reminding me of an episode of WILD WILD WEST I saw a while back, in fact there are indeed similarities between the two programs. The judges in KEY HUNTER wear black robes & pointy hoods, rather like Klansmen, but also resembling characters from Starman's Emerald Planet. It seems the villains have put our heroes on trail, over their past performances in battling bad guys. An attorney called Kenji, their long-time rival, is eager to punish them. The course of the episode is flashbacks, clips of

action highlights throughout the series. There's no new fighting shot for this episode, but considering the episode is packed with classic scenes, none is needed. It ends when it's revealed would be prosecutor Kenji is actually on trial, it's he who gets dragged away and arrested. Then the judges remove their gloomy, black masks, and it's revealed that one of them is heroic Hiroshi Miyauchi! ***** -DF

ARIEL

[aka "Episode 1: Parts A & B"], 1989, Producers: Minoru Murayama, Masaki Sawanobori, Kenji Kume, Prod. Company: Anime Film, Orig. Story: Yuichi Yasamoto, Music: Kohei Tanaka, Orig. Character Design: Masahisa Suzuki, Dir.: Junichi Watanabe, Voices by: Mami Koyama, Yuko Mizutani, Megumi Hayashibara, Hirotaka Suzuki, Kaneto Shiozawa, Reviewed by DF

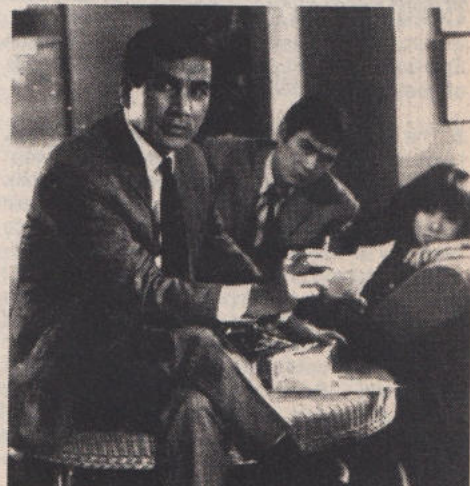
First of all, I have one nice thing to say about this 60-minute Japanese cartoon; the artwork. Though I could never understand why Japanese artists are stupid enough to think Japanese people have huge, fish-like eyes and red, sometimes blond hair, otherwise the quality of the drawings is excellent, just as good as the art for any other of these absolutely identical, dime-a-dozen examples of Japanese animation. But the quality of the animation is basically so-so (between so-so and average), and there's nothing else about this predictable (and how!) cartoon that stood out; there's nothing compelling, nothing original, nothing

to make this any better than anything else in that monotonous infinity of Japanese anime.

I specifically chose this one (as opposed to something dreadfully boring like CAPTAIN HARLOCK or BLUE NOAH) among hundreds for review, because of its traditional "giant-robot-vs.-giant-monster" approach. I had hoped this sterile, bland production would at least try to remind us of the good old days, courtesy of Go Nagai's MAZINGA, etc. But let's face it, the Golden Age of Japanese Superheroes, animated or otherwise, is well behind us. It makes me wonder if anime fans yearn for the "good old days", or if they're completely satisfied with the absolutely endless (no merciful end in sight) plague of animated predictability oozing out of Japan, this inexhaustable source of assembly-line cartoons. As you all know, my days as a cartoon fan ended when STARBLAZERS came out, I mean, as a kiddie, I loved the likes of SPEED RACER and YUUSHA RAIDEEN; but along comes all that SPACE CRUISER YAMATO tedium and the genre exploded and got over-rated-- suddenly, every obese couch-potato with a greasy haircut and unevenly proportion facial structure was an anime expert. So in the topic of Japantasy, I became almost exclusively a fan of live action, which, itself in recent years has gotten equally predictable, formula-packed and cliché-ridden. There are several live action fans I know who will only watch Japanese superheroes of the 1970s (and maybe early 1980s), yet it seems the cartoon fans will watch even the newest dreck pouring out of the festering toilet we know as Japanese anime.

Another reason I chose ARIEL for review was because the video lacked any sort of number after the title, I assumed I was renting a complete story within itself. But I was mislead, once I played the tape, it said I was watching "Episode 1", parts A and B! I believe each episode of this series to be about 30 minutes long, but it seemed much longer.

Script? Plot? What's the fuckin' point? Alien invaders from space at war with a giant Earth robot piloted by Japanese people! That's the script for countless Jap cartoons! It's yet another task to re-tell this story; but what the hell? The same can be



said of any genre, if the comment is coming from an outsider. To somebody not into the topic in question, there's virtually no difference between Godzilla movies, ninja movies, Hunan vampire movies, Ultraman programs, Kamen Rider series, HK gangster movies, or whatever. So I'll exercise a little patience. Okay, let's see..... In this case, the heroic robot in question is Ariel, designed to look like a pretty woman, and coincidentally, it's three pilots are chicks too. It's all pretty talky, since most of these women don't actually like to pilot this huge

battle robot; one gal would rather just go to school and study. Meanwhile, aliens want to attack our planet, and they all look kind of like Vulkans (regular humans with pointy ears; originality is not in these writers' vocabulary). Their inter-action among each other is almost interesting at one point; there's tolerable depth and character development. Eventually, both sides clash and Ariel destroys a giant monster or two. The character which steals the show is a male, human hero called Saber Starblast. Though he carries a common Light Saber (now

called a "Galactor Meteor Sword"), his character's screentime is limited, giving him more mystique-- but not enough to make this stale moronity worth watching. At the end, we hear the obligatory theme sung during the opening credits. Once more, it's some tacky, sappy, quirky, high-pitched voice of some lady, sung to a background of aggravatingly poppy synthesizer crap. One of the worst things about Jap-toons are the Jap-tunes which accompany them. -DF

TERROR YAKI cont...

leaves Tokyo to accept a job teaching at a secluded all-girls school out in the Japanese countryside, not knowing the school's principal (Shin Kishida) is a vampire, as is his right-hand man, played by an equally effective Katsuhiko Sasaki (GODZILLA VS. MEGALON, TERROR OF MECHAGODZILLA). It's not long before the new teacher suspects weird things are happening. In one scene, a vampire woman (the principal's wife) literally cuts the face off a tortured woman and uses the skin as a mask (ala TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE PART 2) to disguise her! It's not explicit,

but chilling regardless. Another supporting character is Mr. Shimamura (who eventually gets killed by the vampire), the actor of which used to be a hero of mine for his role as Kazami Teppei in the 1970s Toei series HAWK OF JUSTICE. Unfortunately, I don't know his name. Anyway, most of the time, the emphasis is more on mystery, as Toshio Kurosawa goes around asking questions, trying to find out why all these teenage, and twenty-something girls keep vanishing. The scenes of the cool, chic, Shin Kishida are pretty atmospheric. Even when he's not in his ghastly vampire form (yes, this will scare the kiddies) with fangs and

blue-ish skin, the talented actor could generate an effective, ominous presence. By the end of the film, there are only two non-vampiric people left, it's Toshio and one of the gals. After a few struggles, chills and chases, Toshio stabs Shin Kishida in the heart, so both he and his wife age rapidly, die and crumble, though I believe some of the decaying process may be edited out for our own protection. Aah yes, that wonderful process known as censorship. Aren't you glad the TV censors think we're a bunch of idiots who can't tell the difference between fact & fantasy? *** -DF

ASIAN ODDITIED cont...

featuring both Makoto Sato and Kumi Mizuno, who don't appear anywhere else in WHAT'S UP TIGER LILY (so in this English print, their appearances look more like awkward cameos). With all this tampering, Allen even sued the producers for screwing up his vision of a perfectly balanced spoof. But then, some of the "tampering" has him in it, though fortunately the end credit sequence has China Lee, a popular Playboy model at the time. Whatever happened to her, what does she look like now? Anybody have new or old info on this stunning Asian beauty?

Like I mentioned before, WHAT'S UP TIGER LILY features a few minutes from a different Japanese film other than KAGI NO KAGI. These scenes happen at the beginning, one sequence being an undubbed (left in Japanese, though the lines are brief) introduction. It features Tatsuya Mihashi and Makoto Sato using martial arts against several villains, to rescue a woman

from being sawed in half. The karate kicks, being from the 1960s, are understandably crude; James Coburn did better in OUR MAN FLINT! The judo tosses are effective, and I guess the karate chops and punches manage to suffice. Lame or not, I love tacky Asian karate fights from the 1960s (see Hong Kong's SUMMONS TO DEATH for more of this!) So I would really like to see this unknown Japanese movie in its entirety. The scene also has some intentional Japanese humor (just as funny as much of Woody's altering), when a welder attempts to open an iron gate. Though it gets unlocked so the good guys can finally get through, the man with the heat-cutter tries to complete the job! There were other movies in this Japanese spy series, but they too are hard to locate. Supposedly, one is THE KILLING BOTTLE, an impossible to find movie that Nick Adams starred in while still in Japan, sometime after MONSTER ZERO and FRANKENSTEIN CONQUERS THE WORLD.

Following a series of jokes and trying to see if there's a script under there isn't easy, but I'll give it a shot. A secret agent called Phil Moskowitz (Tatsuya Mihashi) is helping the people of Rasper, a mythical country (Middle Eastern-looking, like the Himalayan country in GHIDRAH THE THREE HEADED MONSTER, with Akiko Wakabayashi again in a similar role) trying to exist. There's also some rivalry between villains Shepherd Wong (Tadao Nakamaru) and Wing Fat (Susumu Kurobe) which has something to do with the quest for a recipe. Inbetween gags, Eisei Amamoto talking like Peter Lorrie, and irritating splices of Woody Allen and that lame hippy/redneck band, you'll see there actually is a coherent plot--if you're paying attention that closely. It ends after the villains are all shot dead and our heroic Tatsuya Mihashi flies on an airplane, off into the sunset. Though in Woody's dialogue, our hero actually is the plane! *** -DF

CONVENTION REVIEW cont...

the latest offerings by commercial giants Steven Spielberg, George Lucas, and that absolute geek of geeks, Steven King.

5. The "gay fandom table", or whatever it's called. I was mildly curious as August Ragone and I wandered by these homo dealers, seeing comicbooks which blatantly used words like "queer" in their titles. Me and August, however, did not stop to read any of these comics, for a number of reasons: A. Hetero or homo, I don't like comics. B. I would have been embarrassed to be seen there with August. I don't care if some passerby would have thought I was gay, but I wouldn't want them to think I was dating August, the chemistry just isn't there. C. Some queer had already hit on me earlier at the con, so I decided to steer clear. I also don't quite understand why the homosexual community wants equal rights, and to be ac-

cepted, and yet they create their own private community. I mean, hell, is there a subculture called "Heterosexual Comics"? To each his own, I suppose.

6. Last and certainly least, the obese con-geeks with bad haircuts. Perhaps con-geek descriptive terms like "obese", "fat" and "full figured" (applying to guys too) miss the point. How about calling each of them a "Heart-Attack-Waiting-To-Happen"? I noticed two distinct types: Of course, there are the typical ones who have greasy, Moe Howard-style haircuts which so brilliantly take attention from their out-of-proportion, uneven facial features, which in turn are also compensated (another distraction from their four-eyed faces) for with occasional distracting buttons, pins & badges on their T-shirts. Another type of "Heart-Attack-Waiting-To-Happen" nerd are the ones who at least try to be cool by growing their hair long, being Danzig-wannabes, and try

to look like heavy metal head-bangers, though that musical genre is a hasbeen scene which died around 1990. Oh well, at least these ugly cows try to seem not quite so dorky. But let's face it: Grotesque obesity isn't cool, it's downright unhealthy.

So those are my random thoughts on Wondercon 1997. Perhaps not very informative or insightful, but I didn't know I would be reviewing this convention back when I was there. It was a fun convention, and I recommend it to fans of several genres, whether you're into Japanese cartoons, Star Trek/Wars, HK action films, Hollywood blockbusters, endless plagues of predictable comic books, or Godzilla movies. The best part for me was hanging out with friends I don't often get to see, like August Ragone, Nina Kempf, Bob Johnson, Jimmy Robinson, Barrie Evans, Luna Nyx, Don Coley, Eric Yee, Greg Espinoza and Keith Aiken. -Damon Foster

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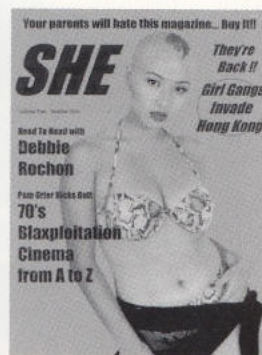
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