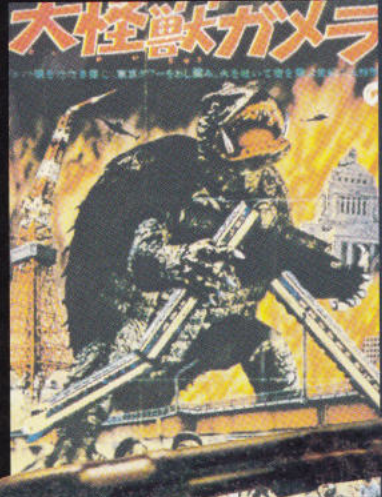


# ORIENTAL CINEMA

## THE HONG KONG GANGSTER ISSUE!

#5



**JOHN WOO! CHOW YUN FAT!**  
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# ORIENTAL CINEMA

## VOLUME 3 ISSUE 5

3

**ED / LETTERS**

4

**HONG KONG GANGSTERS**

6

**TONG MOVIES**

18

**SHING FUI ON**

19

**TONG MOVIES 2ND OPINION**

20

**TERROR YAKI**

24

**KOREAN FLICKS**

27

**ASIAN ODDITIES**

30

**HONG KONG HEROES**

32

**CHANG CHEH PROFILE**

39

**KAIZO NINGEN UPDATE**

### CONTRIBUTORS

Richard Akiyama

Ron Murillo

William Chang

Garo Nigoghossian

Don Coley

Marvin Quan

Kathy Curry

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Kate McMains

EDITOR & CREATOR DAMON FOSTER

PUBLISHER HUGH GALLAGHER

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LAYOUT HUGH GALLAGHER

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left: Wong Wai of GIGOLO CLUB



Recalling exactly when I actually got into HK gangster flicks has proven to be an even greater challenge than sitting through an episode of **FAMILY AFFAIR**. It all depends on just how analytical you're willing to get, and which gangster genre you're talking about. But I suppose for me, the interest started in the 1970s, with the kung fu movement. Of course, not all kung fu flicks are gangster flicks, so I'm eliminating kung fu movies that are about ancient or medieval settings and deal with dynasties & swords, fantasy films about ghosts, dragons, demigods or hopping vampires, and of course, the political stuff: Movies set around WWII, involving ponytailed revolutionaries and invasions by the Japanese. Rival kung fu school themes are to be avoided too, because there's too many of them. Though the evil kung fu students in **FIVE FINGERS OF DEATH** swagger down the streets and make trouble for others, and look & act just like gangsters, the fact remains that this is a tale of rival kung fu schools. Naturally, I'll also steer clear of films about Shaolin Temple, ponytailed revolutionaries and post-Jackie Chan 'training scenes' farces. So what's left? Why, old style HK & Shanghai gangsters of course; gambling, smoking long cigarettes, wearing typical 1930s Chicago gangster hats in combination with traditional Chinese robes, and naturally, performing kung fu, that deadly ballet which brings new meaning to the word Nutcracker.



OC editor & creator Damon Foster (far right).

But in more recent years, the new age in HK gangster films has impressed American audiences; anyone from the holier-than-thou, politically correct art-house types to the slimy, two faced, dog-eat-dog bootleggers who haven't the talent to come up with their own creative endeavors and instead pirate tapes for twenty bucks a pop! Even some of the mainstream critics have suddenly realized it makes them seem 'cool' to write about HK gangster films as though they're something new. Granted, films of the 1980s and 1990s have far superior production values than the 1970s chop socky farces. But here in OC, we try to present as complete a guide as is possible; combining new and old. It's no secret that I'm tired of repetition, and endless reviews of **HARDBOILED**, and everyone always comparing **RESERVOIR DOGS** to **CITY ON FIRE** (enough already!). I appreciate these repetitious reviews like a eunuch appreciates being in a harem. However, my disdain for an over rated genre

can be worthwhile if I make sure OC has more to offer than just another review of **THE KILLER** or **HARDBOILED EGG**, or whatever it's called.

SINCERELY,  
**DAMON FOSTER**  
6 years old

Damon Foster (editor), P.O. Box 576, Fremont, CA 94537-0576

32



I agree that you should give zero coverage to anime, after all, there's millions of zines for people that like the 2-dimensional world as it is. /The problem is, OC has been around for 17 years, and I'm running out of live action stuff to write about! Sure, there are plenty of movies & TV shows I've not gotten to yet, but tracking down them & info on them is difficult! That's why I'm starting to pad out OC with animated crap, until I get a staff of writers or researchers. So far, most people are only interested in HK movies, which are now as commonplace as cartoons! -DF/ You'll be interested to know that you folks

at the U.S. of A. got to see that crappy Ultraman series made here, long before we were inflicted with it. Unfortunately, the "Mighty Muffin Wranglers" have become a big hit here too.

However, I must come to the defense of **NINJA BUTAI GEKO** (or "Phantom Agents" as we know it here). What other show could've inspired me and my friends to hide behind shrubberies in the car-park in the early 1970s and jump in front of passing strangers with handkerchiefs covering our faces?  
Gerard Alexander  
Australia

Reading several back issues of OC consecutively was quite an experience. Of course, I thoroughly enjoyed the old OCs, but I was also struck by what a herculean task it was to put together each issue. It's obvious that a tremendous amount of time and effort went into the magazine, I know you've heard it before, but it's worth repeating, yes, readers really do appreciate your hard work.

So much for the compliments. Now, it's time for some nitpicking. As long as you keep writing about Chinese fantasies and Japanese superheroes, the

(continue on page 46)



# HONG KONG GANGSTERS



Gangsters have always been with us; be it the Italian mafia, the Japanese Yakuza, or mobsters of old Chicago. In China, they're called 'Tongs', though 'Triad' seems to be the word used by most non-Chinese when labeling Chinese crime syndicates.

Here in America, factual gangsters (anyone from Al Capone to John Gotti) have helped personify the image of mobsters in movies. Likewise with Hong Kong triads (and their influence on Chinese movies), there's always been some sort of organized crime groups in China, dating back to bandit armies, feudal clans, renegade warlords, etc. As for traditional HK gangsters in the 20th century, they personified the same stereotypical images as those of Japan, Italy, and the U.S.A.; money, gambling, numbers rackets, babes, and luxury. One need only watch many 1970s kung fu movies, set in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, to get some idea as to what these guys were (and in many cases, still are) all about. Of course, cheap chop sockey films could hardly be described as historically accurate or faithful, but should give you at least a vague idea about the early triads of HK; you at least know what kinds of hats they wore.

But it was in the 1960s that one

of HK's most famous gangsters got his nickname, Limpy Ho (aka Crippled Hau). He actually disliked the name 'Limpy', as it was a nickname only his closest friends dared call him to his face. He really limped, caused by an attack by young men wielding bamboo sticks, they were hired by a rival mob, and jumped him in a res-

taurant (although in *TO BE #1*, they say it happened in a shoot out! A typical example of how these 'factual' movies are so full of shit). My knowledge of HK triad history is as limited as my knowledge of advanced algebra, so I'm not entirely sure how powerful Limpy Ho was before the police finally nabbed him. But I do know

he's the original inspiration behind the movie *TO BE NUMBER ONE* (1990), the first in a genre the HK critics would call the "Big Timer" films. The Big Timer genre was movies based loosely on real life events, therefore they're more dramatic & realistic than action-oriented, and include such films as the *LEE ROCK* series, *LEGEND OF THE CHIU CHOW BROTHERS*, and a series of semi-accurate (at best) movies from D&B Films (usually directed by David Lam) like *PRINCE OF TEMPLE STREET*, Amy Yip's *QUEEN OF THE UNDERWORLD*, *POWERFUL 4*, and Ti Lung's *FIRST SHOT*. As I understand it, *TO BE NUMBER ONE* was fabricated, a fictionalized account of Limpy Ho, who, to this day, is apparently still alive, still in jail!

Rivals of Limpy Ho were drug dealers appropriately called the White Powder Ma Brothers. They ran a printing company as a front for drugs being smuggled into HK, from Thailand. There have been numerous movies about them, including 1980s actioners like *RICH AND FAMOUS* and its sequel *TRAGIC HERO* (both starring Chow Yun Fat, Andy Lau & Alex Man). But in 1990, thanks to *TO BE NUMBER ONE*, the Big Timer films became all the rave, so along came another Chiu Chow Bros. flick, *LEGEND OF THE CHIU CHOW BROTHERS* (with Kent Chang & Ray Lui replacing Lau & Man in the title roles). This could be considered related to *TO BE NUMBER ONE*, sort of existing in the same dimension, except that Ray Lui, who played Limpy Ho in *TO BE NUMBER ONE*, also played one of his rivals; one of the two brothers (the other played by Kent Chang) in *LEGEND OF THE CHIU CHOW BROTHERS*! Because movie producers continued to cast successful stars, continuity between these

## HOW BUSINESS AGAINST VIOLENCE



Jackie Chan, Eris Tsang and others protesting the mob!



potential 'sequels', 'prequels', and 'equels' sucks like a black hole! Regardless, as mentioned on there somewhere, the so-called 'Big Timer' films, which also included **CRIME STORY**, **PRINCE OF TEMPLE STREET**, **QUEEN OF THE UNDERWORLD**, **POWERFUL 4**, and **BIG SHOT** (most are D&B films directed by David Lam, but I already said that), at least tried to tell us about gangsters of the old days, though, to protect the innocent and box office profits, much was fabricated.

There were, no doubt, other gangsters which became movies, and several incidents like the celebrity-lead protest on January 16, 1992. Over 300 workers in the film industry marched in public, fed up with the numbers racketeers who continually harass all filmmakers in HK. Even Americans became targets during the HK filmed scenes for **DRAGON**, **THE BRUCE LEE STORY!** Anita Mui had needed to be placed

under witness protection when she testified against mobsters over a killing in a hospital, Amy Yip was threatened to appear nude in a film (unfortunately, it never happened), and gangsters had kidnapped Andy Lau's agent to force Lau to appear in a tong-backed movie, and Johnny Mak was abducted off a street. Like all industries, the movie business has been extorted and intimidated. People have been threatened by telephone, held at gunpoint, cars are broken into, and many celebrities have been followed in the streets by strangers. Everywhere the filmmakers go these days, there's some gang with their hands out for money. There's actually always been tong involvement in the movie scene, since non-cooperative crews often find their equipment

sabotaged, and wacky distractions like sudden waves of supposed 'autograph hounds', breaking in and hampering productions, and even snakes released onto movie sets! It's been rumored that one actress got gang raped when she refused to do the old tuna-twist of a triad director and another got the crap beaten out of her for declining a film role. Then when a mob stole two reels of 1992's **ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL** (see review in OC's Jackie Chan issue), that was the last straw!

As stated, the anti-triad March in HK was on January 16, 1992, featuring such celebrities as Jackie Chan, Eric Tsang, Tsui Hark, Philip Chan, Amy Yip, Chow Yun Fat, Steve Chow

into obscurity, making me suspect they offered no importance to the history of HK's film industry. The 1950s offered musicals and soap operas, and the 1960s offered sword heroes and maybe an occasional spy farce, but because until recently HK had no institution for movie preservation, finding an old gangster movie is like finding a needle in a hay factory! So it took the chop sockey explosion of the 1970s to bring Chinese mobster movies into the mainstream. **THE CHINESE BOXER**, **ONE ARMED BOXER** and **FIVE FINGERS OF DEATH** are kung fu films, but they deal with rival kung fu schools and/or invading Japanese, so they're not mobster films. **VENGEANCE & DUEL OF**

anything from crude originators like **DUEL OF THE IRON FIST** to slick actioners like **THE CHINATOWN KID**. Often outrageous, over-the-top thrillers where anything goes, the chop sockey genre made up for limited production values by packing in the kicks, punches and knives!

Not all the 1970s gangster movies involved kung fu, some concentrated on gambling and melodrama, though it's the kung fu films which achieved international acclaim in their time.

1980 'Classics': Perhaps the peak in HK mobster movies, with epic production values comparable to those of the U.S.A. HK gangster movies have come a long way since the

schlocky 1970s! Between John Woo's mastery of blood & bullets, Jackie Chan's sensational stuntwork, and Chow Yun Fat's cool persona, the 1980s are full of wellmade masterpieces! The gangster film, in this decade, became 'the action film', not all are



*These are not publicity shots from a mobster film, but actual police busts and raids in Hong Kong!*



Sing Chi, Tony Leung, Andy Lau, Danny Lee, Veronica Yip, John Sham & Joey Wang. At the time, nearly 90% of the film industry was controlled by the tongs, and although things haven't changed much since then, at least the police & public are more aware of the problem. It's speculated that the heavy tong-input is part of the reason HK makes so damn many gangster movies!

Though there have no doubt been mobsters appearing in films as far back as 1920's **THIEF IN THE CAR**, or at least 1933's **BLOODY FIGHTS**, to international audiences, the first HK gangster flick came out in 1970. If there were other important films before 1970, they've long since faded

**THE IRON FIST** were produced during the same years, and they too are kung fu films, but deal with HK or Shanghai mobsters of the 1920s & 1930s. That's the distinction, for this issue anyway, between gangster films and non-gangster films.

While I don't claim to be an expert on Chinese gangster movies, the minimal research I bothered to do (while drunker than a whino in a vineyard, I might add) tells me the best way to sum up the tong genre is by dividing it up into three categories:

1970s Exploitation: Beyond a doubt, the kung fu film was the ultimate exploitation film! Hundreds, more likely thousands of low budget crime dramas came out of China,

necessarily kung fu films.

1990s Reality: Every decade has its genre, and although there are 1990s gangster actioners, not to mention gangster-erotic hybrids, the big hits now seem to be the more realistic 'Big Timer' movies, based loosely on actual characters and incidents which really happened. This is fine if you like soap operas, but as an action fan, I'll stick to oldies like **KUNG FU VENGEANCE** and **A BETTER TOMORROW**. My problem with the Big Timer genre is that they're too fabricated, not authentic enough for educational or historic value. What follows are mini-reviews of flicks from all three decades, presented in semi-alphabetical order, as always.



# TONG MOVIES

Rosamund Kwan  
and Andy Lau.

Here we go, as many gangster films as we had time for! They're presented in alphabetical order, and reviewed by myself, Richard Akiyama, Robert Mallory, Marvin Quan, Ron Murillo, Jeff Goodhartz, Garo Nigoghossian and John Grace.

**A BETTER TOMORROW**- Who hasn't seen this 1986 masterpiece? Ti Lung and Chow Yun Fat as gunslinging gangsters with a heart of gold, who masterfully shoot all these two-timing, double crossing counterfeiters! A masterpiece of tense, dramatic performances and epic gunplay from good old John Woo, which spawned two lame, overrated sequels. \*\*\*\*\* -DF

**A BETTER TOMORROW 2** (1987)- Well, maybe DF (and others) hate this flick but I feel completely the opposite. This incredible, mind boggling, ironic, bullet drenched sequel blew me away so much that to this day (nearly five years after I first saw it), it remains my favorite film, HK or otherwise. So there! Nobody has mentioned that Ching Tsui Tung is listed as 'action director'! Anybody got the uncut 160 min. version? \*\*\*\*\* -Jeff Goodhartz

**A BOOK OF HEROES** Starring Yeung Wai Sang & David Tao, but this wacky, action packed comedy/kung fu extravaganza/masterpiece from 1986 is really saved by Japanese superstars Yasuaki Kurata and Yukari Oshima! A humorous, epic fight-fest as cops try to retrieve stolen bricks of gold from a triad! \*\*\*\*\* -DF

**A GAMBLER'S STORY**- Produced by Marina Luk, and directed by Luk Bong, this 1970s cheapie almost makes me respect **AMSTERDAM CONNECTION**! Yes, it's that bad! Released on video in 1984, it combines drama, lethal boredom, naked prostitutes and of course, gambling. Steer clear of it, I wish I had. -DF

**A KILLER'S BLUES** (1990)- An aging hitman (Ti Lung) becomes embroiled in a gang war after he's released from prison. \*\* -Marvin Quan

**A MOMENT OF ROMANCE** (1990)- A sheltered rich girl's life is changed when she becomes involved with an armed robber. Any Lau. \*\*\*\* -Marvin Q.

**AMSTERDAM CONNECTION**- HK mobsters like Yang Sze are smuggling drugs in or out of Holland. No good points whatsoever, and 1970s movies don't get much worse than

this. -DF

**ANGEL** (1987)- This one seems to be a favorite topic of many a HK movie critic. It's basically a "Charlie's Angels" take-off with gore. A good plot and well executed fights keep things moving. And Yukari Oshima has never been better than in the role of lead villainess Madam Yu who takes great pleasure at torturing and maiming prisoners. This is obviously someone who is constantly P.M.S.-ing. The climactic duel she has with Moon Lee is still the single best female mona-a-mona battle I've ever seen. Hard hitting stuff. \*\*\*\* -Jeff Goodhartz

**AS TEARS GO BY** (1988)- Wong Kar Wai's grim character study of a pair of small time hoods. Andy Lau, Jacky Cheung, Alex Man, Maggie Cheung. \*\*\*\*\* -Marvin Quan

**AVENGING QUARTET** (1992)- Jeez, what a waste of talent this film is! It teams up no less than Cynthia Khan, Moon Lee, Michiko Nishiwaki and Yukari Oshima (who's part seems to be written in at the last moment) for what could have been the battle of the century. But then it dumps them in a dull, mean-spirited tale of stolen paintings and "Thelma & Louise"-like female bonding. And why was Cynthia Khan's character raped? A couple of expectedly good fights, but ... \*\* -Jeff Goodhartz

**BEST OF THE BEST** (1992)- An old family feud is re-ignited when a member (Jacky Cheung) of the HK Swat team becomes involved with a triad boss's daughter. \*\*\* -Marvin Quan

**BIG BOSS**- Bruce Lee in a Thai ice factory, up against brutal gangsters who smuggle dope in ice. Lee's first kung fu movie (1971), and crude & cheap; far from Bruce's best. \*\* -DF

**BIG HEAT, THE** (1988)- Extremely brutal film produced by Tsui Hark. Starring Waise Lee & Kuo Chui in a blood & guts cop tale with scenes of violence that will make you wince. This one caught me off guard. It immediately went for the gonads and never let go. \*\*\*\* -Jeff Goodhartz





**BLACK PANTHER WARRIORS-** Starring Alan Tang, Tony Leung Kar Fai, Simon Yam Tat Wah, Bridgette Lin Ching Hsia, Carrie Ng Kar Lai, Dicky Cheung, Yuen Wah, & Melvin Wong. A disappointment, considering the talent in front and behind the camera. You might think of this as a modern day "Lucky Stars" movie. The story revolves around a bunch of thieves who are hired to steal a file from police but are betrayed by their leader's long-lost brother who wants revenge. Would be more entertaining if the comedy wasn't of the "let's try to get this woman's clothes off" variety. It's still entertaining but it could have been a lot better. \*\*1/2 - Garo Nigoghossian

**BLACK SPOT-** An aging Bruce Le is back in action, in this 1990s adventure! His kung fu is still good, but he doesn't fight as much. Babes & guns, as Le takes on villains all over the world, with a climactic showdown at Vietnam, Cambodia or some place like that. \*\* -DF

**BLIND FIST OF BRUCE-** Blind is right, it's actually Jackie Chan who's getting ripped off this time! That drunken master, Simon Yuen, is teach-



John Woo and his wife.

movie. I have no memory of this one, except that the one I rented had no translation and had Waise Lee dressed as a geeky golfer. -DF

**BLOODY BROTHERHOOD-** A stunning performance by genre favorite Chen Hui Min highlights this well-acted, 1989 tale of male bonding, mistaken identity, betrayal, and revenge. The story is another routine drama about illegal immigrants [from Vietnam & Mainland China] in the 1960s, who sneak into HK and get

ferent backgrounds. If watching women being forced to drink male urine is your thing, enjoy. I personally, can think of better things to do. Yukari Oshima co-stars (for some reason). \* -Jeff Goodhartz

**BRUCE LEE, THE INVINCIBLE-** That's Bruce Li, stupid! Li, Chen Sing, Chung Lick and James Tien go after fascist rebel-turned-mafia kingpin Chen Hui Min. They pursue him to Malaysia, where they kick not only low budget gangsters, but low budget

searching for treasure. \*\*\* -DF

**BULLET FOR HIRE-** Lo Ieh, Simon Yam and Jackie Cheung in a talky, disappointing drama about two hitmen. Depressing. -DF

**BULLET IN THE HEAD-** Another John Woo masterpiece, combining action, disturbing violence, and intense, powerful performances by Jacky Cheung, Tony Leung, and Waise Lee. The three fortune seekers are on the run not only from gangsters, but themselves and the Viet Cong! \*\*\*\* -DF

**BURNING AMBITION-** This 1989 Frankie Chan flick takes much of its plot from the 1978 Sonny Chiba film, **SHOGUN'S SAMURAI (YAGYU ICHIZOKU NO INBO)**. In Chiba's film, the death of a shogun causes a deadly rivalry between the man's two siblings; here, it's the murder of a mob head that leads to a bloody dispute between two sons vying to claim their dead father's position. One of Chan's better directorial efforts, this one boasts a breakneck pace and lots of martial arts & gunplay, courtesy of Chan, Yukai Oshima, Hui Ying Hung and Jeff Falcon. \*\*\* -Richard Akiyama

RICHARD NG



リチャード・ン

Richard Ng  
吳耀漢

**RICHARD NG:**

Born: 1937, Canton [but spent his childhood in HK]

1955: He studied in England for a few years. After college, he studied at CSS&D Acting School and appeared in comedies.

1970: He returned to HK and eventually appeared in the Hui Brothers comedy show.

1977: First appeared in his own comedy series. It was also in '77

that he appeared in the first movie which made him somewhat known, some sort of Pink Panther parody.

Strangely, he's known in Japan as a 'nudie' (?) actor. His movies (few if any involve a lot of nudity) include: **MR. BOO** (1976), **THE POP MAN** (1979), **PICK POCKET** (1982), **TWINKLE TWINKLE LUCKY STARS** (1983), **MY LUCKY STARS** (1985), **GOLDEN SWALLOW** (1987), **MR. VAMPIRE** (1985), **MR. VAMPIRE 3** (1987), and **RUN DON'T WALK** (1989).

ing Bruce Li how to beat up Chiang Tao's mob. \* -DF

**BLONDE FURY, THE-** Rather typical for the 1980s, it's a 1988 thriller with cop Cynthia Rothrock and reporter Chen Hsiao Hou using excellent kung fu & stunts to track down counterfeiters, climaxing in a gripping rescue aboard a speeding diesel truck. Roy Chiao is hilarious as a hypnotised judge. \*\*\* -DF

**BLOOD BROTHERS** (1977)- Two friends rise to positions of prominence in both the underworld and political circles of 1920s Shanghai. Chen Kwan Tai, Wang Tao. \*\* -Marvin Quan

**BLOODSTAINED TRADEWINDS** A catchy title doesn't mean a catchy

involved with the tongs. Andy Lau and the evercool Lam Wai as brothers who get stuck on opposite sides, with tragic results. Enough 1970s-style chop socky (with a certain '1980s flare') and blood to satisfy action fans too. Also featuring Wang Hsieh, Irene Wen & Ti Wei. \*\*\* -DF

**BODYGUARD FROM BEIJING** (1994)- Poorly staged action sequences and uneven direction derails this story of a member of China's elite para-military police who is hired by a HK millionaire to protect his daughter after she witnesses a gangland hit. Jet Li. \* -Marvin Quan

**BRAVE YOUNG GIRLS** (1990)- Flesh peddling scumbags are eventually stopped by a trio of women from dif-

ferent backgrounds. Intended comedy! Low budget does not mean low fun! \*\*1/2 -DF

**BRUCE LEE, WE MISS YOU-** Bruce Li speculates that mobsters killed Bruce Lee. Li's best fight is against Shaolin monks, but the overall film is generally disappointing. \*1/2 -DF

**BRUCE STRIKES BACK-** One of Bruce Le's better films, a salute to **RETURN OF THE DRAGON**. Le in Rome and Paris, dealing with gals and mobsters. Kung fu is very good. \*\*\* -DF

**BRUCE VS. BILL-** Kung fu gangsters are no match for Bruce Le and Bill Louie, in an action packed, highly amusing farce about our two heroes

**CALL HIM MR. SHATTER-** Never cared for British flicks, and ones from Hammer in particular. This mid 1970s crime drama has Stuart Whitman as a hitman up against baddies in HK. It's boring, talky, needlessly technical, with bad (I mean bad) music and only saved by Ti Lung! His English (not dubbed) is pretty good, and is allowed to perform typically Chinese chop socky! He teams up with Whitman/hitman, and gets in about five fights, and all are nostalgically Chinese, faithful to 1970s kung fu movies. Also features Lilly Li, Peter Cushing and Lo Wei. \*\* -DF

**CASINO RAIDERS-** A slow-paced, depressing drama with Andy Lau as a master gambler who (along with Rosamond Kwan) eventually gets killed defending his friend Alan Tam (who also dies at the end) from some of Japan's gambling yakuza (one played by Jimmy Lee, typecast as a sadistic killer yet again). Amazingly, this confusing, dull 1989 movie had at least two sequels, maybe more. \*1/2 -DF

**CASINO RAIDERS, THE SEQUEL** (aka **NO RISK, NO GAIN**)- Andy Lau, back from the dead? It starts off almost watchable, with a bomb scare in a casino causing an evacuation, and friction between Italians and Taiwanese. Scattered well apart are a couple chuckles and an equal number of action scenes. But this is just



another long, dialogue heavy drama with Andy Lau, Alan Tam, Anthony Wong, Shing Fui On and Tien Feng. Titlewise, it's only relation to the other films is Andy Lau and utter boredom. -DF

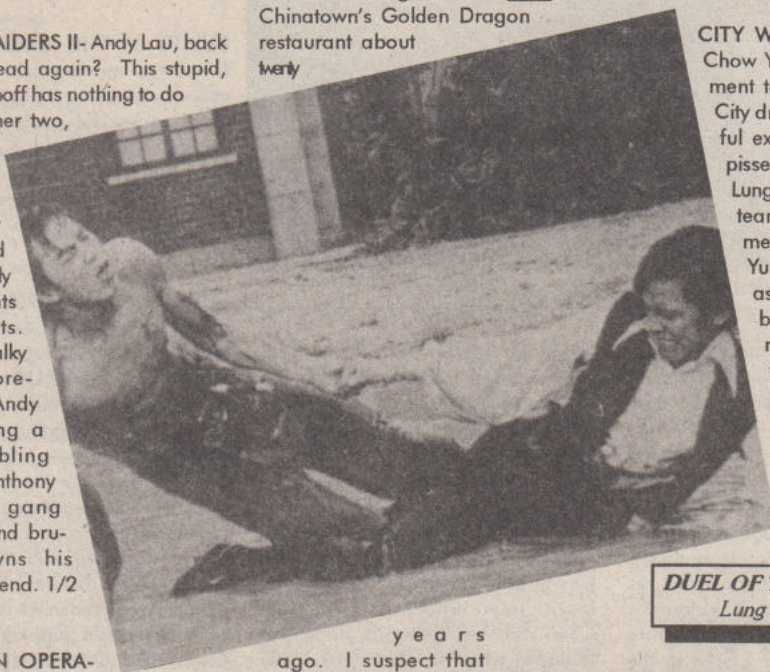
**CASINO RAIDERS II**- Andy Lau, back from the dead again? This stupid, worthless ripoff has nothing to do with the other two, and is worsened by sappy music, over acting and uninterestingly staged fights & shootouts. It's a long, talky heap of boredom with Andy Lau running a little gambling boat until Anthony Wong's gang trashes it and brutally drowns his bitchy girlfriend. 1/2 -DF

**CHAMPION OPERATION** (1986)- Exec. Prod.: Lo Wei. An obvious low budget doesn't keep this exciting actioner (Dir.: Lai Hung Shuen) from being entertaining. A neat premise of illegal aliens from Mainland China battling cops and the mob helps this one rise above the other John Woo imitators. There's some neat stuntwork, bloody gunbattles and compelling characters. One of the few English dubbed gangster flicks available from Ocean Shores. \*\*\* -John Grace

**CHINATOWN CONNECTION**- Some guy calling himself Bruce Ly in an American film, having nothing to do with Chinatown. Fights are few and lame, a terrible movie. -DF

**CHINATOWN KID, THE**- Modern 1970s film from the Shaw Bros., and a must see for HK gangster fans! They say "But still" at least 7 times, and other sentences sound awkward when translated & dubbed in English. Unintended humor aside, this pleasant film is an excellent epic, with (kung) Fu Sheng as a refugee in San Fransissy's Chinatown, and is obsessed with digital watches, eyeglasses, and hot dogs, of all things! But his kung fu spats against mobsters Wang Lung Wei & Kuo Chui are energetic, limber and powerfull!!! Sun Chien guest stars as a Taiwanese student with a knack for tae kwon do (and later a knack for drugs). A young Ti Wei cameos as a minor, background henchman. Both heroes, Fu Sheng & Sun Chien get 'corrupted'

in Chinatown by greed, drugs & babes until Fu Sheng gets a fatal stab from a villain near the climactic free-for-all. Living so near San Francisco, I recall news headlines about a triad-related shooting at what I think was Chinatown's Golden Dragon restaurant about twenty



Who cares?! I've never seen **DOGS**, and never will! **CITY ON FIRE** was bad enough, it's a dialogue heavy, over-acted drama that had me snoring! Chow Yun Fat enters a mob with Danny Lee and gets shot. -DF

**CITY WAR**- An over acting Chow Yun Fat adds amusement to this 1989 Cinema City drama about a vengeful ex-con (Norman Chu) pissed off at the cop (Ti Lung) who jailed him. The team up between policemen Ti Lung and Chow Yun Fat is okay, as well as the performance by beautiful Ien Niu (her name was cut off in the opening credits, that's all I got!), who plays a hooker/singer torn between loves of both Norman Chu and Chow Yun Fat.

**DUEL OF THE IRON FIST** with Ti Lung and David Chiang.

years ago. I suspect that tragic incident inspired this movie, as that's just what happens- Fu Sheng & Kuo Chui machinegun people to death at the Golden Dragon!!! \*\*\*\* -DF

**CHINA WHITE** (aka **THE DEADLY SIN**) (1990)- All out gang war erupts between Chinese triads, Vietnamese gangs, turkish clans and Sicilian mobsters as two brothers attempt to seize control of Amsterdam's drug trade. Russell Wong, Lisa Schrage, Stephen Leigh, Billy Drago, Andy Lau, Alex Man & Shing Fui On. \*\*\*1/2 -Marvin Quan

**CITY COPS** (1990)- It's just a big cop-out as Cynthia Rothrock sleepwalks through her dullest HK cop role. The worst part is the film's criminal misuse Michiko Nishiwaki who all but gets her ass kicked by Rothrock. Yeah, sure. Anyone who's seen **MY LUCKY STARS** knows Nishiwaki is more deadly than this. \*1/2 -Jeff Goodhart

**CITY ON FIRE**- Shut up you geeks, enough already! I'm sick of reading reviews from everyone & his brother, about how this dull film has an American ripoff called **RESERVOIR DOGS**!



But the script is predictable and the characters are sappy. Norman Chu's mob blows Ti Lung's family away so it's our gun-toting duo's revenge. The fist fights are scarce, the gunplay is weak, but it does offer the mandatory shot of Chow firing two pistols at once, as the bodies (including his) pile up. \*\* -DF

**CLAN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS** (1982)-

Rival triad societies unite to defend Shanghai against invading Japanese in the opening days of World War II. Wong Kwan Hung, Yang Wai Sam, Cheung Wah. \*\*1/2 -Marvin Quan

**CLOSE ESCAPE** (1990)- An otherwise average (and bland) gangster drama is elevated by a terrific performance by Yukari Oshima who has a couple of excellent fight scenes. Her presence is almost enough to get a recommendation all by herself...almost. \*\*1/2 -Jeff Goodhart

**CODE OF HONOR** (aka **BROTHERHOOD**)- A typical, though rather interesting drama from 1987, featuring Ti Wei, Chow Yun Fat, Shing Fui On, and of course, a tiny cameo by Danny Lee as a police chief. There's not a lot of action, but it's well acted and kinda' watchable. It's about some aging mobster who regrets his old involvement with mobs, and is ruthlessly pursued by cop Ti Wei. There are a couple gory scenes and a suspenseful chase, but there's a depressing ending. \*1/2 -DF

**CRIME STORY**- Based on a true story, it has Jackie Chan investigating the actions of a crooked cop. The emphasis isn't really on action, yet it's supposedly strong characterizations pleased many, including Jackie himself. Personally, I

wasn't all that impressed. -DF

**CRIMINAL HUNTER**- Were it not for curvaceous Nina Li Chih's superb physique, this movie would be worthless. Dumb comedy, non-compelling characters and the most simple of action scenes ruin this tale of cops (Danny Lee, Eric Tsang) taking on villainous Ti Wei. Again. -DF



**CURRY AND PEPPER (1990)**- A good blend of comedy and action. Stephen Chow and Jacky Cheung are a pair of wise-cracking cops on the trail of an assassin. \*\*\*\* -Marvin Quan

**DARKSIDE OF CHINATOWN (1989)**- Based on an actual incident. Traces the events leading to the 1983 Mei Wah gambling parlor massacre and its aftermath. Lam Wei, Bai Bill, Cao Hung, Kenneth Tsang. \*\* -Marvin Quan

**DAYS OF BEING DUMB**- Yep, being dumb is something these moviemakers know all about. The

tant film in that it is the direct fore-runner of every "Angle"-titled film being made to this day. One of Shaw Brothers very few enjoyable modern-day action efforts. \*\*\* -Jeff Goodhart

**DEATH OF BRUCE LEE**- Stars the 'Black Dragon' himself, Ron Van Clief. Ron travels to HK at the request of a rich Chinese 'businessman' to investigate Bruce Lee's death. Ron hooks up with Charles Bonnet, while a bunch of gangsters try to kill everyone looking into the death of Bruce Lee! The ending raises more questions that it answers, but it is an entertaining film with some exceptional fighting. Also

friends become deadly enemies when one is framed for murder and the other becomes a gang leader. Filmed in San Francisco. Jet Li, Dick Wei, Nina Li, Stephen Chow, Anthony Houk. \*\*\*1/2 -MQ

**DRAGONS FOREVER**- The ultimate 1987 action thriller! Evil mobsters Yuen Wa and Benny Urquidez are manufacturing drugs! Jackie Chan, Yuen Biao, Pauline Yeung and Samo Hung waste these and other villains in their drug lab! The greatest, most death defying kung fu stuntwork ever seen! The battles are stunning, fast and powerful! The comedic touches

throughout the film are okay too. \*\*\*\*\* -DF

**DRAGON'S SHOWDOWN**- [Note: I think I reviewed this one in OC#15, but as "Dragon's Shadow", a mistake on my part.] I don't care if Dragon Lee started out as a Bruce Lee ripper offer, it's his magnificent kung fu which saves this otherwise typically substandard chop sockey yarn. **DRAGONS SHOWDOWN** was not only directed by Godfrey Ho, but produced by Thomas Tang and Joseph Lail! That's like Ed Wood Jr., Ray Dennis Steckler and Dorris Wishman working together on a movie! De-

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マイケル・ウオン  
Michael Wong  
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**MICHAEL WONG:**

Born: 4/16/65, New York.

Raised in the U.S. and Shanghai, so he has a real international sense. His older brother suggested his movie career because of his looks. He joined D&B Films and in 1986 played a lady detective's lover in the film **KOKE SENSHI** (the Japanese title). Also in 1986, he starred in **LEGACY OF RAGE** ("Fire Dragon", in its Japanese version) with Brandon Lee.

He appeared with Do Do Cheng in **TOP LADY** in 1987. He changed his character in each film and showed good versatility, but his caucasian features have (of course) kept him generally typecast as a villain in HK flicks! In 1987, he

played in the Japan vs. HK Soccer tournament! Just a couple of his other films include **THE WITNESS** (one of the "In the Line of Duty" films) and **FATAL LOVE** (not the one with Leslie Cheung), pictured here with Ellen Chan.

first 30 or 40 minutes of this 1992 farce offer some genuinely hilarious moments, like a spoof of yakuza tattoos. But pretty soon, the brilliant scenes of comedy & satire fizzle out, and it becomes just another routine comedy, with Tony Leung & Jackie Cheung as jinxes who con their way into various gangs. As a comedy, there's naturally not much on action, though the climax has a lame shoot-out (all played for laughs) in a warehouse. The story depicts our bumbling duo, who bring bad luck wherever they go, as they scam various triads. \*\* -DF

**DAYS WITHOUT POLICEMEN**- Starring Simon Yam, Yu Li, & Tommy Wong, Dir.: Johnny Lee. Extremely violent tale about a man and a woman trying to rebuild their relationship. It doesn't help that the guy is a cop and that a bunch of angry Mainland China triad are reeking their vengeance on his beat. This movie is definitely not for the faint of heart as the violence gets very mean spirited and explicit. What separates this movie from such garbage as **RUN AND KILL** is the love story in the center. This movie has more of a purpose than just to show disgusting carnage and that's why this movie is a winner. \*\*\*\* -Garò Nigoghossian

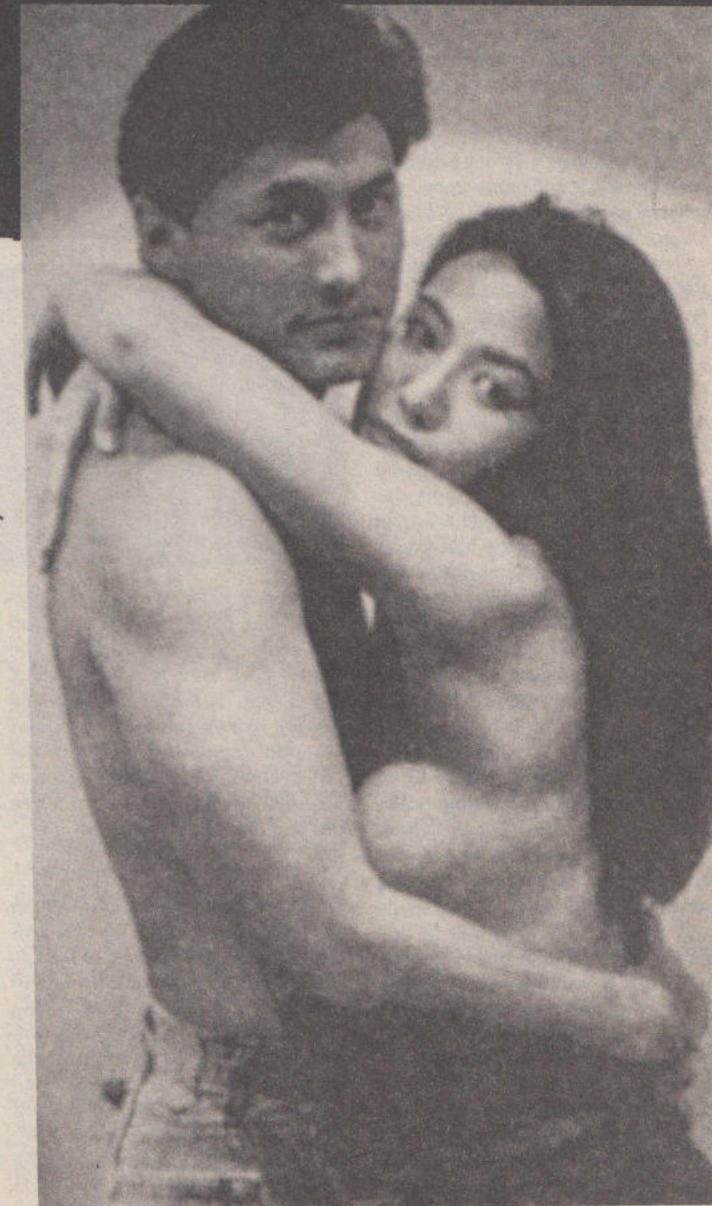
**DEADLY ANGELS (1978)**- An impor-

tant film in that it is the direct fore-runner of every "Angle"-titled film being made to this day. One of Shaw Brothers very few enjoyable modern-day action efforts. \*\*\* -Jeff Goodhart

**DEVIL AND ANGEL**- Producer/Dir.: Lo Lih, Fight choreography: Liu Chia Yung, with Lo Lih, Tang Chia Li, Chen Chin, Tien Feng, & Wu Ma. Ex-con Lo Lih takes revenge on his fellow gangsters who set him up after a dogtrack heist in this dull HK version of John Boorman's **POINT BLANK**. This may have been Lo's directorial debut, since it was obviously made before **CLAN OF THE WHITE LOTUS**. There are gratuitous scenes of Lo walking through the streets of HK, to music lifted from **SHAFT'S BIG SCORE**, an uninteresting romantic subplot and tiresome, swingy-arm fight scenes (despite the participation of the usually dependable Liu Chia Yung). Chen Hui Min has an odd 5 minute cameo consisting of him beating up a few thugs. Lo's performance is good, but everything else is routine. I would guess it was made in 1975. \*-John Grace

**DRAGON FAMILY (1988)**- Three brothers are out for revenge when their family is massacred in a gang war. Andy Lau, Mok Siu Chung, Alan Tam, Shing Fui On. \*\*\* -MQ

**DRAGON FIGHT (1990)**- Two illegal immigrants who were one-time





spite work by three schlocky exploitation artists, this cheap, badly shot flick manages to entertain. Dragon Lee and others go all out, the fights are truly excellent! Mobsters want land that's not for sale, so they kill the poor farmers & peasants who reside there. But the babies grow up to become vengeful Dragon Lee and Cheryl Meng! Point of interest: Villain uses a 'magnetic sword', a futuristic device way out of place in this typical turn-of-the-century setting!! \*\* -DF

**DOUBLE IMPACT-** Jean Claude Van Damme plays identical twins and we get to see Van Damme beat himself up and fight Yang Sze ('Bolo Yeung'). Better than average for a Van Damme flick, most definitely a gangster movie but martial arts are by no means slighted here. \*\* -Ron Murillo

**DUEL OF THE IRONFIST-** One of the earliest gangster movies (Shaw Bros.; 1971) to get an English dubbed, U.S. release. As such, this grim combination of melodrama, stabbing, prostitution, kung fu and gambling is important historically, it really helped set the pace for HK gangster adventures! The early fighting techniques of Ti Lung, Ku Feng, David Chiang & Chen Sing (who cameos as a henchman) aren't pretty; it's all pretty crude, with a heavy emphasis on knives & bloodshed. When recounting the "accident at the peer", notice that Ti Lung's dubbed voice changes in mid-sentence! It's as though the original dubber went on a lunch break, and had some guy fill in for him! But I think this action packed thriller is nearly a masterpiece and/or classic, a must for HK gangster fans! Ti Lung plays the son of a mobster killed by supposed followers. So young Lung goes around stabbing & kicking ten guys at once, through out the film, on his quest for revenge. Later it turns out his co-hero, David Chiang, was paid to kill Ti Lung's father by a treacherous accountant, but both heroes die in their final duel with another gang of knife-wielding villains. \*\*\*1/2 -DF

**DYNAMO-** Confusing tale of Bruce Li playing a Bruce Lee imitator, after all, he should know. But stock footage from other movies confuses what could have been an entertaining actioner. \*\* DF

**EDGE OF FURY-** Suspense mystery with Bruce Li as a chauffeur who eventually takes on Yasuaki Kurata. \*\*1/2 -DF

**EXIT THE DRAGON, ENTER THE TIGER-** Yet again Bruce Li is convinced Bruce Lee was killed by mobsters, and this 1976 romp even has a Betty Ting Pei imitator. But still, good produc-

tion values and Bruce Li's battles make it a lot of fun! \*\*\* -DF

**FATAL LOVE-** This is one of three different HK flicks called FATAL LOVE (though all three films have completely different titles in Chinese). A 1993 "Category 3" movie from Scholar Films with Michael Wong as a wealthy drug smuggler who kills rival gang members while torturing their girlfriends to death. Gorehounds & degenerates will eat up this sleazy piece of filth (no redeeming social values whatsoever) because babes like the gorgeous Ellen Chan (lots of nudity; we see her



Ringo  
Lam's  
FULL  
CONTACT.

breasts several times) are raped & tortured. She plays a doomed, foolish undercover agent assigned to spy on Wong. Ellen Chan is quite beautiful, but the film itself alternates between naively written romance to scenes even too depraved & sexist for me! FATAL LOVE seems anti-female and pro-rape, the villain gets off scott-free after murdering our naive heroine. \* -DF

**FATAL NEEDLES, FATAL FIST-** Wang Tao's team-up with Lo Lih only lasts about the first ten minutes of this action packed, thrill a minute (I take that back! A thrill every five minutes) kung fu saga from 1977. Both play fast-kicking cops during the turn of the century in this typical chop sockey. Unfortunately, Lo Lih is killed off during an early fight, so a confused, disheartened, disillusioned Wang Tao "I don't Care"s his way through unin-

spired situations. Not until he eventually gets his fighting urge back in the latter half does he lay waste to the master of flying needles, smugglers, Mongolians and gangsters. The fights are really cool, and they say "but still" no less than 13 times! \*\*\* -DF

**FATAL TERMINATION (1989)-** Director Andrew Kam (who co-directed the equally effective THE BIG HEAT) scores with this intelligent and very intense story of weapons smuggling, betrayal, murder and all that stuff that makes for a solid actioner. The stuntwork (which includes the shock-

same shots. Chiba's part is minor, as is action. A boring, dreadful crime drama; stay away. -DF

**FINAL RUN (1989)-** Low budget tale depicting the running battle between vicious druglords and the para-military group that opposes them. Most of the action is contained in the second half, which is really a showcase for Yukari Oshima, who shows off some great combat and stunts in the finale. \*\*\* -Jeff Goodharts

**FIRST SHOT (1993)-** Remake of Brian DePalma's THE UNTOUCHABLES. A great cast (Ti Lung, Maggie Cheung, Simon Yam & Waise Lee) cruise their way through this derivative yet exciting film set in 1973 (TV news station announces Bruce Lee's death). Meticulously filmed and just an overall very enjoyable movie. \*\*\*\* -Jeff Goodhartz

**FISTS OF BRUCE LEE-** No fists of Bruce Lee in this generally stupid 1978 saga of an interpole agent (Bruce Li) who defeats mobster Lo Lih, despite the latter's use of a bionic chain-punch (yes, just like in DENJIN ZABOGA and YUUSHA RAIDEEN!). \* -DF

**FORBIDDEN ARSENAL (1991)-** A tired plot is saved by Cynthia Khan who charms the hell out of every scene she's in. Her interplay with Waise Lee (in a rare comedic role) is enjoyable as well. Good, non taxing entertainment. \*\*\* -Jeff G.

**FULL CONTACT-** Chow Yun Fat in biker duds, pursuing homo gang leader Simon Yam in a totally cool, exciting thriller from 1992! Violence and babes galore! \*\*\*\* -DF

**GAME OF DEATH-** The late Bruce Lee and a couple imitators (all edited together in one film) go up against HK's only all American triad! An unintentional comedy, no wonder Gig Young killed himself before its release. Strangely, ripoff/sequels like TRUE GAME OF DEATH and GAME OF DEATH 2 did not star doubles like Gig Old, Gig Yawn, Gig Li or other possible imitators. Also featured Colleen Camp (is that her real last name, or is it just a nickname because she's in this campy farce?), Kareem Abdul Jabbar and Danny Inosanto. \*\* -DF

**GANG OF FIVE (1983)-** Hired gunmen seek revenge on the crime boss who betrayed them. Lau Gee Wing, Luk Yat Sim. \*\* -M. Quan

**GANGS 1992-** Unfortunately, nearly the whole cast of this meandering, tedious film look like winners of an Aaron Kwok lookalike contest. Boredom abounds in an overly talky, point-

ing scene of a little girl dangling outside a speeding car, being held by her hair) will stun even jaded fans. Starring Moon Lee. \*\*\*1/2 -Jeff Goodhartz

**FIGHT BACK TO SCHOOL-** Steven Chow goes undercover in a high school to find his superior's gun. When he finds his superior's gun he also stumbles across a triad gun-smuggling operation. This is just the framework for non-stop action and hilarity. Steven Chow is perhaps the greatest comedic actor in the world and this movie proves it. This movie was so popular that it was the highest grossing movie of its time. Chow also is given great support with his longtime partner Ng Man Dat and Cheung Man. If you're looking for a great entertaining movie, look no further. \*\*\*\* -Garon N.

**FIGHTING FIST-** Don't be fooled by the box cover of this Japanese-Chinese coproduction; Sybelle Hu and Sonny Chiba never appear in the





less yarn about nerdy yuppies who pickpocket, play videogames and gamble, until one day they accidentally see a mob killing and directly or indirectly become targets themselves. This isn't until the film's middle, and although there are a couple action scenes involving Jimmy Lee (as a cop who accepts bribes from a tong), they don't save this dull drama/semi-comedy. \* -DF

**GANGLAND ODYSSEY**- Average for a 1989 action-drama, with Andy Lau & Alex Man as urban mercenaries. In one of the fights, Lau does impressive legwork I previously didn't think him capable of. But it's heroic Chen Hui Min (still in shape, still tattooed) who steals the film as a HK gangster who learned the Yakuza ways while in Japan. But betrayal and the need to avenge Andy Lau's death tells us it's battle time! After a shootout, Chen Hui Min engages in a decent kendo duel with the leading Yakuza (same yakuza as in **GOD OF GAMBLERS**). Also appearing: Shing Fui On, Ng Man Dat, and according to the credits, Allen Tang! But it's not the one I seemed to remember from older films. \*\*\* -DF

**GANG OF FIVE**- Predictable, standard yarn with the sole purpose of helping Chinese videostores' shelves take up space with yet another assemblyline movie. Neither good nor bad, its only value is historical; it's a late 1970s or early 1980s film which bridges the gap between 1970s cheapies (ala Bruce Li) and modern 1980s actioners. By watching **GANG OF FIVE**, you can see the gradual evolution which turned **IMAGE OF BRUCE LEE** into **RIGHTING WRONGS**. Anyway, Wong Ching (star of **EAGLE'S SHADOW FIST** and **'TIL DEATH DO WE SCARE**) leads some thieves who's need for help (one of the five was killed in a casino shootout) gets turned down by their

own mob boss. \* -DF

**GODFATHER'S DAUGHTER MAFIA BLUES, THE**- Don't be put off by this 1992 actioner's ridiculous title, this is an all-out, 1980s-style action/kung fu epic, in the post Jackie Chan tradition! The fights are outstanding, as are the stunts! This movie also features one of the most convincing stabblings I've ever seen (if the actor wasn't a wellknown guy who still makes movies, I'd have thought this was a snuff film) at the climax when a sword is thrown into his chest! A realistic effect! Also check out the ingenious scene of our two heroes doing 'defensive driving', or rather 'defensive hit & run', as they crash into yakuza henchmen! Strangely, lead actress Yukari Oshima plays a Chinese heroine while recognizable Chinese actors play Japanese villains. This tale of "righteous Chinese triad vs. evil Japanese yakuza" also features Alex Man, Ti Wei, and the guy who played the deaf mute ("Abal" "Abal") in **POLICE STORY II**. \*\*\*\*1/2 -DF

**GODFATHER SQUAD** (1976)- While filming a movie in Rome, a martial arts film star runs afoul of an international organization of assassins. Shoji Karada. 1/2 -MQ

**GOD OF GAMBLERS** trilogy- An important genre series about master gamblers Chow Yun Fat, Steve Chow and Andy Lau (though all three never actually appeared together). Part 1 is the most classic and wellmade, and featuring Chow Yun Fat in an impressive shoot out. Part 3 is also quite good, a gut bustin', knee slappin', hilarious comedy with Steve Chow at his best! \*\*\*\* -DF

**GOLDEN DRAGON; SILVER SNAKE**- Dragon Lee in a **GAME OF DEATH**-ish tracksuit, he's the Golden Dragon, the Silver Snake is some Jackie Chan imitation. This Korean

*Robert Clouse's*  
**GOLDEN NEEDLES.**

romp from the 1970s may be action packed, but pretty dumb too. They're protecting a farm from a mob lead by Kong Tao. -DF

**GOLDEN NEEDLES-**

A lame American film from the 1970s, with **WALKING TALL**'s Joe Don Baker as an annoying, boozy gambler trying to keep some golden statue from a HK gang.

Thanks to Jim Kelly and some Eurasian (?) girl, its few fights aren't that bad. One of the many movies to boast, "From the Creators of **ENTER THE DRAGON** (Producers: Paul Heller & Fred Weintraub, Dir.: Robert Clouse, Music: Lalo Schiffrin, etc.), a pathetic gimmick they still seem to use occasionally. Also features Burgess Meredith, Tadashi Yamashita, Elizabeth Ashley, and that guy who said, "It's the doe, Roper! Or we gotta' break something!" and "You gotta' love him." \* -DF

**GOLGO 13: THE KOWLOON ASSIGNMENT**- Sonny Chiba as a hitman, filling HK's triads with led. There have been several Japanese comics & cartoons about Golgo 13, who I suspect influenced many Chinese gangster films (John Woo's included). **GOLGO 13: THE KOWLOON ASSIGNMENT** isn't a great film, but it's from the 1970s, and important historically. \*1/2 -DF

**GUN AND ROSE** (1992)- When the son of a crimelord leaves his triad society after his father's assassination, tragedy and violence follows as his jealous broth-

*Carrie Ng  
and Simon  
Yam.*

ers set out to kill him. Alan Tang, Andy Lau, Simon Yam, Leon Lai, Carrie Ng. \*\*\*1/2 -MQ

**GUNMEN** (1988)- In old Shanghai, two veterans of the Chinese civil war once again find themselves on opposing sides as one becomes a cop and the other becomes the leader of an opium cartel. Tony Leung Ka Fei, Elizabeth Lee, Waise Lee, Wong Gee Keung, Carrie Ng. \*\*\*\* -MQ

**HAPPY DIN DON**- Michael Hui and Cherie Chung in a blatant ripoff of **SOME LIKE IT HOT**. Otherwise, this silly, generally stupid comedy has Michael on the run from mobsters because he witnessed their killing somebody. There's one shoot-out, and a couple laughs, but that's not enough for me. \* -DF

**HARDBOILED**- God's gift to low life gorehounds and sleazy bootleggers. Regardless, this typical John Woo shoot'em up lacks any real emotional intensity or compelling characters. Uninteresting story aside, it delivers enough bullets & blood, as cops Chow Yun Fat and Tony Leung pursue triad leader Anthony Wong in his hospital- now a violent, casualty-ridden battleground! \*\*\* -DF

**HEADHUNTER** (1981)- Early Chow Yun Fat vehicle casts him as an ex-soldier and refugee from the Vietnam War who becomes a hitman. \*\* -MQ

**HEART OF THE DRAGON**- Golden





Harvest's 1985 tearjerker about a hilarious retard (Samo Hung), and his cop brother (Jackie Chan). Near the end, a mistake causes some gangsters to kidnap Jackie's retarded brother, so it's rescue time! Kung fu, gunplay, stunts and a machete figure prominently as Jackie, Mong Hoi, Chen Hsiao Hou & other cops battle the baddies, finally. \*\* -DF

**IMAGE OF BRUCE LEE-** Detective Bruce Li tackles John Cheung and other criminals on the streets (and beaches) of HK. Decent '70s crime drama, but who's that gorgeous starlet who plays the Japanese interlope agent in hot pants? Anybody know? She also played the She-Demon in **INFRAMAN**. \*\* -DF

**INCORRUPTIBLE, THE (1993)-** Like **FIRST SHOT**, Dir.: David Lam attempts to recapture Brian DePalma's **THE UNTOUCHABLES** in a HK vein. Unlike **FIRST SHOT**, this film owes a bit more to Howard Hawk's **RIO BRAVO**. In the 1960s, Ricky Liu is appointed to head an elite unit to bring down the triads, especially an up-and-coming triad leader played by Waise Lee (in a role essentially the same as he played in **FIRST SHOT**). After a fiasco similar to the "Let's do some good" scene in **THE UNTOUCHABLES**, Liu soon realizes his own men are "on the take" and utilizes a hardened cop in the Sean Connery mold and his alcoholic expartner (Simon Yam, who is forced to endure the famous "coin in the spittoon" scene that Dean Martin made memorable in **RIO BRAVO** and played out the exact same way later in this film as it was in the western). Liu and Lee (like Ti Lung and Lee in **FIRST SHOT**) make interesting adversaries, but Lee steals this film as the crime boss. Anita Yuen & Carrie Ng, both of whom would be nominated for their roles in **C'EST LA VIE, MON CHERIE** (for which Yuen would win Best Actress) are practically inconsequential in their roles as Liu's wife and Lee's girlfriend respectively. \*\*\* -Ron Murillo

**JUST HEROES-** Average actioner with Chen Kuan Tai, Danny Lee and a young Steve Chow (in one of his only serious roles). Co-directed by both John Woo and Ng Ma, its decent action scenes don't save an otherwise routine tale of corruption & betrayal in the HK triads. \*\* -DF

**KARADO, THE HONG KONG CAT-** One of the first kung fu films released to America in the early 1970s, but was later titled **SUPER KUNG FU KID** for its 1986 video release. A chop sockey so typical, it's hard to view. Chung Lick (aka Chung Li) battles mobsters, unhampered by bad dubbing & acting. \*\* -DF

**KILLER, THE-** This 'killer' film broke grounds internationally, made serious bucks for John Woo, and generated 99% of my readership. It's what nearly brought HK films into the US mainstream. A thrilling tale of camaraderie and bullets, but anything this hyped is definitely overrated, to say the least. But still, a flick where hitman Chow Yuen Fat and cop Danny Lee blow everyone into bloody pulps is okay by me. A little too deadly serious for its own good, but it's mega fun. Main villain: Shing Fui On. \*\*\*\* -DF

**KILLER'S ROMANCE (1990)-** Internal power struggles and gangland intrigue sparks a gang war in London between the triads and the yakuza. Simon Yam, Joey Wang. \*\*\*\* -MQ

**KING OF GAMBLER, THE-** Incredibly slowpaced 1970s cheapie. The videobox says "The King of Gambler", though on the film itself, it says, "The King of Gambler 2"! This sequel (?) starts off with clips from what I guess is part one, about how Japanese yakuza were disgraced by our Chi-

nese heroes. The movie is typical 'bell-bottoms & ugly shirts' material, complete with music stolen from Britain's UFO series. Danny Lee, Angela Mao and Shih Szu appear in this tale of Japanese gangsters stalking a family of Chinese gamblers. Only a couple of short fights, a bloody climax of bullets, plenty of kung fu-



Steve Chow and Danny Lee.

**KUNG FU COOK-** In the late 1970s, wacky Jackie ripoffs like this were a dime a dozen, and are worth even less today. Villainous gangsters (who're searching for some treasure) like Yang Sze & Chiang Tao are dubbed in thick British accents, and this slapstick comedy has Pink Panther music in one scene! But still, it's an amusing comedy about a chef who adapts his cooking techniques to be an effective yet silly means of self-defence. \*\* -DF

**LAST BLOOD, THE (aka 12 HOURS OF TERROR)-** Andy Lau stars in this violent, 1991 story of the Japanese Red Army invading HK. The jarring cuts between extreme violence and goofy comedy never really succeeds.

**RICKY HUI:**

Born: 1947, Canton.

His eldest brother is Michael Hui, and he's the 3rd of four brothers. After high school, he worked for a newspaper company. He studied at the Shaw Bros. Acting School, and made his movie debut in 1972. He's a good comedian, and appeared in a number of the

\*\* -J. Goodhartz

**LEE ROCK-** I must confess, I was bored silly when I first watched this talky, over two hours long drama. It had at least one shoot out, and even an okay fist fight, but it's dull. Later I heard it's a semi-realistic, semi-faithful biography! Lee Rock, played very well by Andy Lau, was a real person in the 1960s. Though the facts were fabricated to make it more entertaining, the basic story is of a low paid cop who accepts bribes from mobsters. This pays better, so he gets more and more into the gangster scene. By the end, he's old, rich, and more of a gangster than a cop. There were at least two sequels. \* -DF

**LETHAL PANTHERS-** Godfrey Ho directed this HK film set in the Philippines, sort of **THE KILLER** with a mostly female cast. Yoko Miyamoto and Maria Jo shoot all these mobsters in HK, Tokyo and the Philippines before that cameo cop, Sybelle Hu arrests them. Not a very good film, but with enough sex & violence to make it somewhat worthwhile. \*1/2 -DF

**LONG ARM OF THE LAW (1984)-** Johnny Mak's brutal portrayal of big circle (Mainland Chinese) triads propels this story of a gang's attempts to carve out a piece of the bloody action in the HK underworld. Contains some of the most savage and realistic shootouts ever filmed. Bai Bill. \*\*\*\*\* -MQ

**LONG ARM OF THE LAW III {aka ESCAPE FROM HONG KONG}-** Fast moving actioner from 1988, with Andy Lau as a fugitive attempting to rescue his girlfriend from a gang of vicious armed robbers. Mok Siu Chung, Elizabeth Lee, Wong Gee Keung. \*\*\*\*1/2 -MQ

**LOOK OUT OFFICER-** Bill Tung Pui's ghost goes after criminals with help from police general Fiong Shu Fan, and rookie cop Steve Chow. Amy Yip cameos, as do fantasy and/or FX el-

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リッキー・ホイ  
Ricky Hui  
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'hopping vampire' (called jyansu, gyonsi, kyonsi, etc.) movies of the 1980s. He's also wellknown as a singer. His movies include: **MR. BOO's 1-3 (1976-1981)**, **PROJECT A part 2 (1987)**, and more, though these are from a Japanese-language listing: **AMEN OMEN KUNG FU MEN (1982)**, **RENGEN TSUIKI (1983)**, and **KOTEI MITSUSHI (1984)**.



ements. Somewhat decent, a couple laughs. \*\* -DF

**LORDS OF THE CHINA SEA (1993)**- Despite epic production values, a confusing storyline and poor directing ruins this fact-based drama that chronicles the rise to power of 1920s Shanghai syndicate boss Tu Yueh Sheng. Raymond Liu, Cheung Jak Si, Carina Lau. \*1/2 -MQ

**LOVE AMONG THE TRIAD**- Not bad for a well-acted '90s soap opera. Unfortunately, I don't like well-acted (or even badly acted) '90s soap operas. This may be realistic, but it's also a tedious snore-fest about a mobster who cheats on his wife (Veronica Yip). Another subplot (and there are many) has something to do with two half-sisters (Rosamund Kwan & Pauline Wong) who each seem to control rival factions of the same mob, and later, some pop singer's dogs get kidnapped. In the middle of this nonsensical mess is Simon Yam, who fends off a sword-wielding assassin near the climax. It's not very exciting, but one of the all-too-few action scenes in this weak love story. \* -DF

**MAFIA VS. NINJA**- Great, stupid fun! So amusing & ridiculous that it's immensely entertaining! Chopsockey kung fu romp from around 1979-1981 with Wang Hsieh (**INFRAMAN, SUMMONS TO DEATH**) as a righteous Shanghai racketeer. But this kingpin with a heart of gold gets killed by Japanese ninjas, so, heroic Alexander Lou enthusiastically yells: "Reveeeeeenge!" That sums up this action packed, over-the-top combination of excellent fights, outstanding acrobatics, humor, a little love & sex, a dash of gambling and spectacular displays of martial arts! Don't be put off by the typically cheap production values, and the usual English dubbing, this is one cool, slick flick! \*\*\* -DF

**MAGNIFICENT SCOUNDRELS**- Scoundrels Steve Chow, Carl Maka, Amy Yip and Ng Ma outsmart triad guys like Yuen Wa. There's not a lot of action, but Steve Chow supplies big laughs, and Amy Yip supplies big breasts (under black lace negligee, bikini, and a push-up bra). \*\* -DF

**MR. CANTON & LADY ROSE**- Talky, long, but at least it's funny. Jackie Chan plays a mobster leader who sometimes fights other mobsters. The fights (though few) are nice and the stunts are..., well... witty. Actually a semi-remake of Frank Capra's **POCKET FULL OF MIRACLES**, whatever that is. \*\*1/2 -DF

**MS. BUTTERFLY**- There were no English subtitles on the version I saw, and

the only English sentences were uttered in a sex scene. I'm afraid "Fuck me!", and "I'm cumming!" just aren't enough to translate this boring, super-talky, worthless drama with Lau Wai Gun (**WONDER GIRLFRIEND**) as

one of the villain's cars. The action is brief and terrible, even the final car chase sucks. -DF

**MY LUCKY STARS**- Another in a long series of comedies which include



*Veronica Yip of LOVE AMONG THE TRIAD.*

an ex-carjacker trying to go straight. Seems her old mob, lead by Wong Ching (**'TIL DEATH DO WE SCARE**) isn't happy that she now prefers to dress like a drag-racer and work at some car fixer-upper place. So once in a while, the tong raids this garage, so in one scene, she rigs up a trap in

**WINNERS & SINNERS, LUCKY STARS GO PLACES** and others. This time, Jackie Chan helps Samo Hung, Sybelle Hu, Eric Tsang & others to rescue Yuen Biao from gangsters in Tokyo. The comedy drags on forever, but the wild kung fu battles more than make up for it. Big fun! \*\*\*\* -DF

**MY NAME CALLED BRUCE**- Just plain dumb story with Bruce Le as an interpole agent, helping beautiful heroine Christina Cheng track down Chiang Tao & other mobsters in Korea. \* -DF

**NAUGHTY NAUGHTY**- Sam Hui as a conman in this silly film (Golden Harvest; 1974) with an all-star cast: Nora Miao, Wei Ping Ao, Betty Ting Pei, and even then kung fu queen Angela Mao pops in at the end to rescue Sam from gangsters he stiffed. \*1/2 -DF

**NEW KIDS IN TOWN (1985)**- Surprisingly incompetent direction from Liu Chia Liang (of Shaw Bros. fame) combined with a boring plot (sort of a modern variation of **MY YOUNG AUNTIE** with a gangster subplot) makes this one a loser no matter how I looked at it. A young Moon Lee stars. \* -Jeff G.

**ORGANIZED CRIME AND TRIAD BUREAU**- This 1994 drama is stylish at times, but with brief scenes of romance & eroticism which fall flat. Produced by Danny Lee's Magnum Films, it of course has him as a cop, determined to get his hands on fleeing mobster Anthony Wong. Wong and his girlfriend (who he cheats on whenever possible) got shot up, their fellow gangsters killed, and Wong takes his own life at the end. Sort of like an attempt to make a duller, boringly 1990s variation of **THE KILLER**, it's slow and generally uninteresting. A brief scuffle in the courtroom is my favorite scene, and even that lasted mere seconds. \* -DF

**ONCE A THIEF**- Disappointing and very light-hearted for a John Woo film. It's a well rounded meal though; comedy, drama, a little kung fu, romance and the obligatory Chow Yun Fat gunplay (though far less blood). So others will definitely like it more than I did. Art thieves Chow, Cherry Chung and Leslie Cheung go after their double-crossing mentor, or something like that. Somewhat watchable. \* -DF

**OUTLAW BROTHERS**- Yukari Oshima as a cop who eventually teams up with car thief Frankie Chan. From then on, it's mega powered kung fu, stunts and fun, as they challenge Michiko Nishiwaki, Jeff Falcon, Anthony Houk and other villains! Highly recommended! \*\*\*\* -DF

**PAPER MARRIAGE**- Samo Hung & Maggie Cheung in an uneven 1986 romp from Golden Harvest. Both play Chinese immigrants trying to make a living in Canada. Maggie





Above: Moon Lee.

occasionally mudwrestles & cries, Samo volunteers himself for medical experiments. Then suddenly, out of nowhere, Samo finds some important briefcase and must fight mobsters. It's only an action film for about the last 15 minutes, but the fights are first rate. \*\* -DF

**PEDICAB DRIVER-** Samo Hung & Mong Hoi don't really take on the baddies until near the end of this 1930s setting drama. The ending battles are excellent, but much of the beginning & middle are slow plots involving rickshaw pullers & prostitutes, and an early appearance by Nina Li Chih. \*\* -DF

**POINT OF NO RETURN-** Not to be confused with the American film of the same name, actually a ripoff of *LA FEMME NAKITA*. This is a HK flick (of course), with more betrayal, melodrama and violence in the underworld, with Jackie Cheung as a hitman accidentally getting Joey Wang involved. The characters are remotely compelling, its few fights are remotely good. \*\*1/2 -DF

**POLICE STORY** trilogy- All three of Jackie Chan's epic battles with HK's urban gangsters are different; #1 is uneven, #3 is about average, and #2 is my personal favorite. Fun, action, comedy, kung fu and wacky stuntwork abounds in all three. \*\*\*\*\* -DF

**PRINCESS MADAM** (aka **UNDER POLICE PROTECTION**)- Main story of this 1990 movie has Moon Lee & police partner bringing down a crime lord. But it takes a backseat to the more interesting subplot of Moon's boyfriend's affair with what turns out to be a very fatal 'Fatal Attraction' with a super tough assassin (Michiko Nishiwaki). Once this entertaining sub-plot is finished, you may as well skip the rest. \*\*\* -Jeff G.

**PROTECTOR-** One of Jackie Chan's worst films. Mostly an American movie with Chan as a New York cop pursuing bad guys in HK. While the fights aren't bad, the movie sucks. Also featuring Bill Wallace, Moon Lee, and in the Chinese version, Li Hai Sheng and Sally Yeh. -DF

**QUEEN OF GAMBLE-** Do Do Cheng on a winning streak in gambling, horse-race betting, and mahjogg. A couple amusing moments don't add much life to this tedious comedy. Also stars Alex Man, Simon Yam, Ng Man Dat and Sybelle Hu, who at least fires a gun and does a kick or two (the remainder of **QUEEN OF GAMBLE** is lame humor and boring drama). 1/2 -DF

**QUEEN OF GAMBLER-** Dreadful, low key talker with cameos by Ti Wei and Ku Feng (as a hopeless drug addict). Just another routine gambling movie, with suspense, gambling, romance, mobsters, drama and a little action. This utter boredom has a couple pretty girls, and about an equal number of fights. Something to do with a female gambler who kicks ass (both in gambling and kung fu) and wears disguises to evade the tongs. Subplot: Man & woman cop team trying to shut down a casino (s), I think. The ending fight on the beach is okay, unlike **QUEEN OF GAMBLER** itself. 1/2 -DF

**QUEEN OF UNDERWORLD-** Not even Amy Yip's ample assets can save this long, talky, incredibly dull tale (set in the 1960s and 1970s) of a waitress who gets 'promoted' to the position of hooker, marries into the mob until her husband cheats on her and then she becomes the leading Madam. Supposedly a 'fact-based' Big Timer movie, yet the climax is typically fabricated revenge as she and 'hench whores' club the main villain to death. Though the hookers appear nude once or twice, sleaze-tease Amy Yip is almost completely covered throughout, not so much as a bikini or lingerie scene. A couple scenes of blood (i.e. suicidal people blowing their brains out), and torture (Yip beaten & tied up) don't make up

for a dull story. 1/2 -DF

**QUEEN'S HIGH** (1990)- Prod.: Dickson Poon, Dir.: Chris Lee. Although affiliated with the *IN THE LINE OF DUTY* series, this film is far from it. Instead of a policewoman, Cynthia Khan is the daughter of a triad boss. When her father is murdered, her brother (Simon Yam) takes vengeance. This leads to a massacre of her family on her wedding day (the sight of Cynthia Khan with a machine gun in her wedding dress shooting hired assassins is unusual, to say the least). Cynthia assumes control, much to the dismay of her stepbrother who is in league with the Japanese crime boss responsible for the slaughter. Actually, not a bad film taken for what it is, a high-octane crime melodrama. Cynthia Khan is not her usual "restrained professional" character, but is given more an opportunity to show range, as well as display her athletic abilities in a knock-down, drag-out climax in a waterfront warehouse. Simon Yam is good as her ill-fated brother. \*\*1/2 -Ron Murillo

**RAPED BY AN ANGEL** {aka **NAKED KILLER II**}- Simon Yam as a good gangster, eventually helping Chingny Yau to outsmart a sinister, cunning rapist. Not much on action, but plenty of sleaze & thrills. \*\*\* -DF

**RETREAT OF THE GODFATHER-** Starring Lam Wai. Action packed, 1980's style classic about a mob who steals smuggled antiques from another tong, and the chaos, double-crossing, kung fu, acrobatic falls, bloodshed and shoot-outs which follow. Ti Wei guest stars as an ex-con, but is also a good guy (somewhat unusual for him) who, like nearly everyone else except Wu Ma (cameo), is gunned down by the film's ending (an exhilarating 'stunt fu' free-for-all



**RETREAT OF THE GODFATHER** featuring Lam Wai (middle)





involving mayhem and a deceitful lawyer). \*\*\*\* -DF

**RETURN ENGAGEMENT** (1990)- An aging triad kingpin, returning to HK from imprisonment overseas, to search for his daughter, finds himself caught up in underworld intrigue. Partly filmed in Vancouver. Alan Tang, Andy Lau, Simon Yam, Carrie Ng, Elisabeth Lee. \*\*\*1/2 -MQ

**RETURN TO A BETTER TOMORROW** (1994)- This is Wong Jing's bogus attempt to resurrect the John Woo-style gangster film. Although it has no direct relation to **A BETTER TOMORROW**, Woo fans will recognize a myriad of scenes and ideas ripped off from various Woo films. It's still a watchable mess, with a quick pace and some well staged shootouts, but those looking for the heartfelt melodrama of Woo's gangster films will be sorely disappointed. This one's all flash and little substance. With Noodle Cheng Yi-kin, Lau Ching-wan, Michael Wong, and Wong Jing regular, Chingmy Yau. \*\* -Richard Akiyama

**RETURN OF THE DRAGON**- These gangsters aren't a HK triad, but typical Italian mobsters in Rome. Bruce Lee directed, wrote, starred and battled many bad guys including Chuck Norris, Wang Ing Sik and Bob Wall in this 1972 kung fu movie. Rather comedic despite Lee's magnifico kicks. \*\*\*\* -DF

**REVENGE OF SCARFACE**- The only connection to the American **SCARFACE** is a quick comparison, when a guy says his boss's scar is like that in the movie, or something to that effect. Otherwise, it's an average, typical tail of another HK mob. They look more like rich yuppies, and parts are rather dull. The few fights & shootouts are okay. The boss's girlfriend is mistaken for him and shot (in bed), resulting in revenge. After the final shootout, H.K.'s 'scarface' gets arrested. \*1/2 -DF

**SEVEN STEPS TO SHOWDOWN** (1984)- Two assassins are caught between the forces of an ambitious interpol chief and an international team of hitmen who have been hired by their ex-boss to kill them. Wong Kwan Hung, Hu Ying Meng, Liu Te Kai. \*\* -MQ

**REVENGE OF THE DRAGON**- Caught this one late night in Spanish, on a local Mexican station. Lots of colorful costumes, energetic fights and cheap photography/editing, but the language barrier kept me from

Elisabeth Lee of **GUN MEN** and **RETURN ENGAGEMENT**.



enjoying performances by Alexander Lou, Liu Han Yi and Lou Chin. I believe there's at least one other movie with this same title, one of which has Chen Sing and was in OC#7. \* -DF

**RICH AND FAMOUS** (Win's Films; 1987)- Fact-based (sort of) movie about the 'Chiu Chow' Bros., and I gather "Chiu Chow" refers to immigrants who escaped Red China in the 1950s and came to HK. Chow Yun Fat's character (Li Ah Chai) was part of this movement too, and hires the two Chiu Chow brothers (Andy Lau & Alex Man) out of loyalty to his people, though in reality, I hear there was no such brotherhood with immigrants in those turbulent times. The 'brotherhood' & 'stick together' motto was fabricated to cash in on the then-popular John Woo actioners of male-bonding. Strange influence, seeing as this semi-factual account isn't about thrills, despite a few nice skirmishes (a little gunplay, a little fistplay). Story has something to do with Alex Man as a conniving double-crosser who turns on righteous Chow Yun Fat's mob, eventually resulting in gripping carnage at a wedding. Shing Fui On and Carina Lau appear, but it's Alan Tam who gives a compelling performance. \*\*1/2 -DF

**RIGHTING WRONGS** (1985)- A spectacular, stunt-filled actioner. A frustrated prosecutor turns vigilante and wages a campaign of terror and assassination against criminals. Yuen Biao, Cynthia Rothrock, Melvin Wong, Yuen Kwei. \*\*\*1/2 -MQ

**ROSE** (1992) [aka **BLUE VALENTINE**]- A stylishly directed love story starring Maggie Cheung as an insurance agent who saves the life of a triad member (Roy Cheung) and then falls in love with him. Not much in the way of action, but very well acted and engaging. Veronica Yip costars. \*\*\* -Richard A.

**ROYAL WARRIORS**- Any HK 1986 film which stars JAC superstar Hiroyuki Sanada & femme fatale Michelle Khan has got to be an action packed masterpiece, right? Wrong, though the action is pretty good, Sanada's skills aren't shown enough. The ending battle with gangsters at a gravel pit is gripping, though the film itself is predictable & stupid. \* -DF

**RUN** (1994)- This thinly veiled remake of **EL MARIACHI** stars Leon Lai as a musician who becomes the target of a Mexican mobster after he's mistaken for a Chinese outlaw who has just broken out of jail and is carrying a guitar case full of guns. Although the villains are an assorted lot of stereotypical dimwits, the movie is

fast paces, attractively photographed, and it provides some very nice moments between Lai and love interest Veronica Yip. This is also one of those rare HK films that actually sports a bigger budget than its American inspiration. \*\* 1/2 -Richard Akiyama

**RUN, DON'T WALK**- Poor excuse for a satire of **A BETTER TOMORROW**. There's a little action, and Ti Lung plays his part okay, but Richard Ng is as annoying as a persistent panhandler. \* -DF

**SHE SHOOTS STRAIGHT** (1990)- Action packed tale about a family of female cops targeted for assassination by a Vietnamese gang. Joyce Godenzi, Tony Leung Ka Fei, Samo Hung, Yuen Wah. \*\*\*\* -MQ

**SOUL BROTHERS OF KUNG FU**- Bruce Li & Carl Scott up against disapproving gangsters like Li Hai Sheng, Chiang Tao and Ku Feng, in gritty, urban HK. Average; no better, no worse. \*\* -DF

**SKINNY TIGER AND FATTY DRAGON** (aka **THE KARATE COPS**)- The second lame team-up of Carl Maka & Samo Hung, the first being the equally disappointing **LUCKY STARS GO PLACES**. Samo Hung's martial arts & Bruce Lee imitations are great, but this is an otherwise routine, badly written 1990 yarn about two HK cops trailing mobsters and maybe an occasional transvestite. \* -DF

**STORY OF A GUN**- Starring Yukari Oshima, Sophia Crawford, and a bunch of other people who don't care about their careers. God damn awful movie that gives new meaning to the word bad. If I were to explain this movie one or two of you might be intrigued to see it, so I won't. It's movies like this that explain why Yukari Oshima is stuck making movies in the Philippines. Now I'll explain some things that are more entertaining than watching this movie. Let's see; having bamboo shoved under my fingernails, sticking sharp needles into my ball sack, and being Ron Goldman. Avoid this movie at all costs. No stars. -Garon N.

**STREETGANGS OF HONG KONG**- Unavailable for review. I rarely review a movie I've never seen, but I gather this is an ultra violent, 1970s chop sockey. However, there was a blurb for it in Ric Meyers' book, **MARTIAL ARTS MOVIES: FROM BRUCE LEE TO THE NINJAS** (Citadel Press; 1985), which said something like, "For a man who made great kung fu movies, Chang Cheh's earlier career is full of screeching clunkers, such as this one. Although Chang Cheh directed and Liu Chia

Liang & Tang Chia choreographed, nothing could save this modern-day turkey in which a young man seeks vengeance for his dad, the night watchman's death. It's one of those in which everybody swings knives around while screeching." Hmmm, it sounds okay to me! Though the review is negative, I tend to think I myself just might like this rarely seen flick. Also, I tend to doubt the reviewer's claim that this is one of Chang Cheh's early films, since he worked on 1940s, 1950s & 1960s films, so see Chang Cheh profile elsewhere in this issue!

**STREETFIGHTER, THE**- Notorious karate film (Toei; 1974) with Sonny Chiba tackling the Japanese yakuza and a Chinese triad. Though Chiba's skills are great, the awful editing, photography, lighting & brutality is too distracting. There were two sequels (the second, **RETURN OF THE STREETFIGHTER** being my favorite), continuing the story of Terry Tsurugi, the ultimate anti-hero. \* -DF

**SUPER GANG**- Uninteresting, talky, confusing, need I say more? A typically terrible modern 1970s movie with Bruce Le and Yang Sze. -DF

**TATOO CONNECTION, THE**- Jim Kelly goes to HK to recover stolen jewels. Tan Tao Liang and Yang Sze appear, but the main heavy here is Chen Sing who outfights everybody! The movie allowed for a sequel which was never filmed, which is a shame, as this could have been a good continuing role for Jim Kelly. \*\* -Robert Mallory

**THREE AVENGERS**- Typical modern 1970s crap, but good modern 1970s crap! Okay, so it's an incredibly stupid movie, but that makes it a guilty pleasure, as fast-kicking heroes Bruce Li, Chien Yuet Sun & Michael Winston tangle with mobsters and their tough leader, Li Hai Sheng. \*\* -DF

**TIGER CAGE** (1989)- A potentially good film that gets ruined by an overly negative attitude (portraying evil as smart and good as dumb). Add to that a non-existent payoff and you have a flick that truly has its priorities screwed up. Donny Yen has a great mid-film fight and Simon Yam is an effective villain, but it's not enough. \*\* -Jeff G.

**TIGER CAGE 2**- Starring Donnie Yen, Rosamund Kwan, Cynthia Khan, Lo Lieh, & Dodo Cheng. Prod.: Dickson Poon, Dir.: Yuen Woo Ping. After the success of the first **TIGER CAGE**, Yuen Woo Ping was hired to make a sequel. Having nothing to do with the first film, it still manages to surpass the original. Unlike the first one, this

was a box office failure. I like to think of this movie as one big brawl as the fights are amazing exciting, & plentiful. This one even tops Yuen Woo Ping's own **IN THE LINE OF DUTY 4: THE WITNESS**. The plot again is simple, Donnie & Rosamund are framed for a murder. They then must enlist the aid of an overseas triad who's just trying to get the truth of the murderer and to find a missing briefcase full of cash. \*\*\*\*\* -GN

**TIGER ON BEAT** (1988)- Fun little action flick that teams Chow Yun Fat and Cona Lee in "Lethal Weapon"-style action. The finale (featuring a yo-yo rifle and chainsaw battle) is great stuff. \*\*\*1/2 -Jeff G.

**TO BE #1**- Unfortunately, the lackluster 'Big Timer' genre starts here, in 1990, with this confusing, talky, long movie set in the 1960s about Limp Ho (here translated as 'Cripple Hau' and 'Crippled Hau'). Supposedly fact-based, but based on too many facts, making it an incoherent mess with way too many characters and subplots. Something to do with a former member of Mao Tse Tung's Cultural Revolution who immigrates to HK, and works in a filthy restaurant. He gets tired of washing dishes at this dive, so he and a few friends become a mob and work their way up, killing competition along the way, before the cops eventually jail them. Despite a couple decent action scenes (but only a couple, the movie is generally all-talk), and a cool effect where a Thai fisherman/smuggler's hand is blown up, I say steer clear of this typical rags-to-riches tale of a HK tong on the rise. It features Ray Lui, Kent Chang, Waise Lee, Cecilia Ip, Lo Lieh, Ng Man Tat, and a smaller role by Amy Yip, in a couple phenomenally sexy shots! \* -DF

**TO ERR IS HUMANE**- While Anthony Chan has a hilarious scene on a busy HK sidewalk, I kept hoping Samo Hung would start fighting the jewel smugglers who keep manipulating him. Nope, no fights in this lame comedy/drama. Features ex-Wynners musician Kenny Bee. \* -DF

**TONGFATHER, THE**- A gaudy disco score 'highlights' this typical early 1970s saga of 1930s Shanghai, just as clumsy, poor kung fu highlights this routine tale of a Chinese triad against a Japanese yakuza. Features revenge, gambling, smuggling, slow kicks, stock music, a rape attempt, oppressive Japanese, and the worst salute to Zato Ichi I've ever seen. I must confess though, the climactic fight pitting two Chinese detectives against more Japs has its moments. \* -DF



**TONGS-** This 1986 American crime drama is a definite must for all Simon Yam fans! He's the main star, and speaks English (though badly! We need subtitles not only for the Chinese language scenes!). There's a little action but it's more of a drama. There are fights in New York which look like typically badly shot (and staged) American stuff, yet a scene of Yam battling gangsters in a HK parking lot is pretty good, obviously choreographed by HK stuntmen! A couple shoot-outs and a sexy lady (upper nudity) in a shower scene add amusement to this interesting yet badly acted (and rather low budget) variation on Fu Sheng's **CHINATOWN KID**. Only this time, the immigrant (Simon Yam) goes to New York's Chinatown, not San Francisco's. Yam plays Mickey Li, who reluctantly gets involved in a Chinatown gang and works his way up, until it's realized the chief of police is bought-out by a local Tong kingpin. Yam unsuccessfully tries to assassinate this corrupt tong leader and gets arrested. Amusing. \*\*1/2 -DF

**TRAGIC HERO-** The fictionalized climax of the infamous Chiu Chow brothers (Andy Lau & Alex Man), a direct sequel to **RICH AND FAMOUS**. This 1988 epic has a few scenes of action & bloodshed, but compelling performances & powerful drama are its strong points. But toward the end, when you're expecting this to continue its generally timid soap opera style, 'good' mobsters Chow Yun Fat & Andy Lau pull out guns and blast away plenty of bad henchmen in an explosive finale, and then Chow dukes it out with Alex Man! Featuring the same all star cast as in the first film: Carina Lau, Pauline Wang, Shing Fui On, and a cameo by Danny Lee (as a cop of course) playing the only character who survives unscathed. \*\*\* -DF

**TRAP, THE (1981)-** Standard revenge yarn with Wong Yuen Sun as a rogue cop who wages a one man war against rival gunrunning syndicates after his wife and kid are killed in the crossfire of a gang war. Pak Ying, Tsang Kong. \* -MQ

**TRIAD STORY-** Compelling variation on the old "once a mobster, always a mobster" theme, about an aging, ex-kingpin who gets out of jail after a 20-year sentence, and is unable to escape his past. His daughter, a really stupid bitch, is dating a young, unbelievably savage gangleader called Jason, who smuggles drugs in or out of the U.S.'s Chinatowns. Great acting and powerful drama until the end when it suddenly has a change of pace; acting becomes ac-

tion and powerful drama becomes powerful kicks! It features not only Wu Ma and Shing Fui On, but even Steve Chow & Ng Man Tat, at least a year before they became HK's hottest comedy team (**TRIAD STORY** is generally serious). \*\*\* -DF

**TRUE GAME OF DEATH-** Shameless ripoff [from around 1980] of **GAME OF DEATH (1979)**, itself a devious flick. \* -DF

**WILD SEARCH (1989)-** Chow Yun Fat



Amy Yip of **QUEEN OF THE UNDERWORLD** and **TO BE #1**.

and Cherie Chung star in this effective and emotional action drama loosely based on the film **WITNESS** (with Harrison Ford). Director Ringo Lam keeps the story interesting without an abundance of action. \*\*\* -Jeff G.

**WINNERS AND SINNERS-** Samo Hung, Jackie Chan, Richard Ng, Yuen Biao, and John Sham in a 1983 film about ex-cons-turned-painters who accidentally get in a brawl with counterfeiters. Stupid comedy, great fights & stunts, including Jackie (who's role

is slightly bigger than a cameo) doing insane, deathdefying stuntwork on a freeway, while riding roller skates! \*\*\* -DF

**WONDER SEVEN (1994)-** Ching Siu Tung's surrealistic actioner stars Lee Ning as the leader of a pro-commando unit that's assigned to destroy an international crime cartel. With Michelle Khan, Wong Gee Keung. \*\*\* -MQ

we all know young John Woo was a production assistant, and it wouldn't surprise me if he worked a little on **VENGEANCE**, and subliminally used this film as the basis for his own gangster films nearly 20 years later! Heavy on the knives, **VENGEANCE** is virtually identical to 1971's **DUEL OF THE IRON FIST**, with the exact same cast. This dated bloodbath tells of a Peking opera performer (Ti Lung) who's killed by mobsters while trying to defend the honor of his far-from-honorable wife. From then on, it's one stabbing after another as David Chiang slaughters half the gangsters in 1930s China! Chen Kuan Tai comes as a henchman, and an unrecognizably young Chen Sing plays a cool dressed sniper (well before Chow Yuen Fat's characters for John Woo, or even Sonny Chiba as Golgo 13!), who most certainly pre-dates **THE KILLER**! Sharpshooter Chen Sing's bullet figures prominently in our hero's death. \*\* -DF

**YELLOW PERIL (1983)-** When the CIA attempts to subvert the American Chinese underworld by pitting Asian gangs against one another, an ex-gang boss and his family are marked for death by both renegade U.S. government agents and Vietnamese gangs. Alan Tang, Tong Lan Wah. \*\*\* -RM

**YELLOW SKIN (1984)-** Black & Italian gangsters declare war on a Chinese crime family after their tong is framed for a ripoff during a drug deal. Filmed entirely in New York. Wong Kwan Hung, Chan Wai Man, Wang Lung Wei. \*\*\* -MQ

**YES MADAM (1990)-** Michelle Khan & Cynthia Rothrock team up to crush the triad in some of the most incredible battles ever! This was both Rothrock's & Khan's first starring roles and, in terms of sheer excitement and hard-hitting brutality, they have yet to top it. \*\*\*\*1/2 -Jeff Goodhartz

**YOGA AND THE KUNG FU GIRL-** Phoenix Chan's great limberness & yoga don't elevate this routine, derivative tale (1970s) up to average. Chi Kwan Chun stars, as do the obligatories: Gambling, sexual harassment, 1920s setting, training scenes, a drunken master/bum, and revenge. I guess Pai Ying plays a villain in this stupid, irritating flick. \* -DF

Jesus Christ! I sure am sore after typing up all that! Interesting to note that the actor who's name seems to pop up the most in the gangster film genre is the little known villain star Shing Fui On. So I continue this gangster section with an interview with this scary-looking superstar!



# “大傻”成奎安的故事

我很醜，但我很溫柔，

我很兇，但我會搞笑！



Mandarin name: Shing Fui On

Cantonese name: Sing Kwai On

## THE STORY OF 'BIG SILLYHEAD' SHING FUI ON-

**I'M UGLY, BUT I'M GENTLE, I'M MEAN, BUT I'M COMICAL  
FROM AGE 15, SHING FUI ON HAD TO SUPPORT HIS FAMILY SO HE  
GOT WORK AS AN ELECTRICIAN FOR SHAW BROS. CO.**

Danny Lee befriended him & got him a job playing the villain in WONG KA FAN (THE LAW ENFORCER, aka BUDY VS. BLOODY), a police actioner. From that time he has cultivated his image as a screen badguy. Shing Fui On's nickname is "Big Silly Head" & his story is quite unique. It's very unusual in HK for a not-so-good-looking man to be popular in films. Shing Fui On's features are so frightening with his bushy eye brows & evil eyes that he once stepped into an elevator and a woman was so scared she got out. Another time a woman passerby verbally abused him on the street. Shing got angry and yelled, "Shut up you bitch!" Several women ran away! But all this happened long ago. Now people know him and realized he's gentle. He adds that, "Because I am more gentle now & more happy my life, maybe I'll do comedy some day", he says half jokingly. He has six brothers & sisters (he's the 4th). After 5th grade he quit school to work. At Shaw Bros. he witnessed a lot of stars' careers rise and fall. He never thought he would be one of them.

He credits Danny Lee for everything. To this day, they are good friends. In the last six years he has made more than 60 movies. He was nominated for best supporting actor for WONG KA FAN & then in 1989 again for the Andy Lau & Cherie Chung Vietnam drama STARS AND ROSES. He feels it's getting tougher to win his honor because lately he's been doing more action comedies. The film THE BLUE JEAN MONSTER with Gloria Yip was written specifically for him. His three favorite of his own films are WONG KA FAN, STARS & ROSES, and MO MING KA TSO. "When I was first approached to do a comedy by noted real life gangster producer Huang Wa Sing, I was shocked. But people like the movie so I'm doing more of that sort of thing now. After all, movie making is the art of deceiving."

Author's note: To be honest, when I sat down to interview Shing Fui On, I was a little nervous, but by the end I realized he's just a very ugly, ordinary person. "I'm the ugliest of all my siblings, but I never blamed by parents. In fact, it's a blessing in disguise. Be-

cause it sets me apart." He's very outgoing & that's why he was able to get a wife & children.

"There's nothing I did to change my face, but I think I changed on the inside. Now when people say I look better, I tell them that's because they know me better. One thing I know about myself is that my temper is better...even when my scene is delayed and I have to wait a long time to shoot, I swallow the anger instead of yelling at the crew. I realize that's my job & blaming people won't help. Maybe I'm just getting older. I'm only 35, but mentally I'm in my 50s. I used

to like to go to discos, drinking & car racing. I used to spend tons of money on car racing. I was born with a slight crack in my spine, and then received an injury on top of that while racing. So now I can't do it. One time my back hurt so bad it took me 30 minutes to walk from a door to an elevator. So sometimes my health problems prohibit

my acting, especially action films."

He was planning to go to the U.S. for an operation but the cost was high, and it offered only a 50% recovery at best. So after seeing a Chinese doctor for several months, he feels 70% cured. Even though he's made a lot of films, he doesn't have that much money. When Shing makes a movie the studio offers maybe 20% up front, then the other 50% after completion. Some how they don't pay up. "Happens all the time", Shing says. But now Ngai Lan is his producing agency & he's happy. "Before I signed with them, I had to do everything myself. Even with their commission, it's worth it."

He acted for free in a movie called YE DOM KWAN YING for his director friend. In addition to acting as the villain & comic relief, he is singing! He appeared on a TVB show surrounded by pretty girls singing the theme song, "I'm Ugly, but Very Gentle", a very popular song from Taiwan. "I am a nice guy with my friends but don't treat me bad or cross me. Because I can take care of myself. But I'm nice to women, yet I'm not looking for romance because I know that kind of scandal can ruin a career." Even though his nickname is 'Big Silly Head', Shing Fui On is not silly at all. {The preceding article originally appeared in CINEMART #11, Nov. 1990, and was translated by Kam Lee and Darren wheeling.}





# TONG MOVIES

Okay, it's like this- I asked all these dudes to contribute gangster reviews for this issue. Since our psychic powers and mindreading capabilities are as accurate and authentic as those on the many bogus Psychic Hotlines, none of use were really certain who was reviewing what. The following reviews are from people unaware that somebody else had 'dibs' on certain films. So even though these flicks were already reviewed in this issue, I'm including them here to represent alternate viewpoints, and to not piss off any and all possible contributors!

**BULLET FOR HIRE (1991)**- A professional killer and his young apprentice seek retribution on the mob boss who double-crossed them. Simon Yam, Jackie Cheung, Lo Lih, Dick Wei. \*\*\* -Marvin Quan

**BULLET FOR HIRE (a 3rd opinion!)**- Starring: Jacky Cheung, Simon Yam, Lo Lih, Elaine Lui, & Dick Wei. Simon Yam plays a hitman who has to train a wet-behind-the-ears youngster played by Jackie Cheung. Everything goes well until Simon's former partner (Lo Lih) goes against their boss to save his daughter. At this point Simon & Jacky choose sides but it all ends with good amounts of martial arts and gunplay. An enjoyable action movie that gets mighty grisly at times. \*\*\*1/2 -Garó Nigoghossian

**BURNING AMBITION (1989)**- A family feud becomes an intra-syndicate power struggle. Frankie Chan, Au Jun Hung, Cheung Kwok Keung, Yukari Oshima, Simon Yam, Roy Chiao, Jeff Falcon. \*\*\*1/2 -Marvin Quan

**BURNING AMBITION (A 3rd opinion!)**- Frankie Chan directed this fairly interesting story of gangster in-fighting. The fight scenes are what this one's about though, and the early bout in the garage featuring Yukari Oshima and Hui Ying Hung (of Shaw Brothers fame) is one of the better ones you're likely to see. \*\*\* -Jeff Goodhartz

**CASINO RAIDERS (1989)**- Andy Lau and Alan Tam star as a pair of common gamblers in this uneven but rather likeable melodrama (co-directed by Wong Jing). The film was a huge hit in HK, paving the way for the even more popular **GOD OF GAMBLERS** films. \*\*\*1/2 -Richard Akiyama

**CHINATOWN KID (1978)**- An illegal immigrant fleeing from a murder contract in HK, becomes drawn into a war between rival gangs in San Francisco's Chinatown. Notable for scenes which were thinly disguised re-enactments of real-life events that occurred during the Wa Ching/Joe Fong Boys gang war of the 1970s (i.e. the Golden Dragon Restaurant massacre). Fu Sheng, Wang Lung Wei, Kuo Chui. \* -Marvin Quan

**CITY ON FIRE**- Starring: Chow Yun Fat, Danny Lee, Carrie Ng, Sun Chun, & Roy Leung, Music: Teddy Robin Kwan, Dir.: Ringo Lam. Excellent action melodrama that was later ripped off by Quentin Tarantino for his movie **RESERVOIR DOGS**. /If I have to read this one more time, I'll experience technicolor yawns. -DF/ Quentin has since redeemed himself with his amazing **PULP FICTION**. Chow Yun Fat & Danny Lee both deliver great performances and Ringo Lam directs with a sure hand. This movie was also the motion picture debut for Carrie Ng. If you need a synopsis of this movie then you've been living under a rock, you damn hillbilly. \*\*\*\*1/2 -Garó Nigoghossian

**EDGE OF FURY**- The film that proved Bruce Li could do something other than Bruce Lee ripoffs when permitted to do so, and also his first film that made a million dollars in HK (apparently the Bruce Lee imitator films make the bulk of their money overseas with us dumb gweilos!). Partially a mystery with more realistic albeit roughly choreographed fighting than usual. Quite unlike any other Bruce Li movie I've seen. \*\*1/2 -Robert Mallory

**GANGLAND ODYSSEY (1991)**- This could have been a good film if anyone other than the camera man gave a shit. In other words, it's a good-looking film, but the plot is dull and the actors merely go through the motions. Andy Lau and Cheung Man star. \*\* -Jeff Goodhartz

**GUN 'N ROSE**- Starring Andy Lau, Simon Yam, Alan Tang, Leon Lai, Carrie Ng, Bowie Lam & Loretta Lee. Dir.: Clarence Fok Yui Lung. What starts out as a serious gangster movie quickly turns into an action comedy of outlandish proportions. Alan Tang plays a head triad boss in Taiwan who has to hide out in HK when his brother (Simon Yam) turns on him. Sometimes marred by goofy comedy

but ends up being a highly entertaining mish-mash of genres. This is also one of Loretta Lee's last mainstream movies before she started doing nudie Category 3 movies. Caution: There is another movie called **GUN 'N ROSE** out there in your local video stores, that also stars Simon Yam but avoid this like you would a Hari Krishner. This movie sucks. Make sure the one you rent the one which stars Andy Lau. \*\*\*\* -Garó Nigoghossian

**KILLER'S ROMANCE**- Starring Simon Yam & Joey Wong, Dir. Philip Ko. Like **DRAGON FROM RUSSIA**, this movie was also inspired by the Japanese comic book "Crying Freeman". Simon Yam plays the adopted son of the head of a Japanese yakuza. When his father is murdered, he is named the head of the organization and then tries to find out who killed his father while romancing Joey Wong, who saw him murder. Basic story line is helped out by heaps of exciting action that involve sword fights, car chases, gunplay, and kung fu. \*\*\*\*1/2 -Garó Nigoghossian

**KOWLOON ASSIGNMENT**- Sonny Chiba as the perfect casting for Japanese comicbook character Golgo 13. Etsuko Shiomi has a small role and a lot of the supporting characters are familiar faces from the kung fu movies as this is set in HK. Golgo 13 is a sort of secret agent/hitman who is a law unto himself. Nothing spectacular but an interesting enough plot and barely enough martial arts to qualify for that genre, as well as a gangster film. \*\* -Robert Mallory

**ORGANIZED CRIME & TRIAD BUREAU (1994)**- Stars: Danny Lee, Anthony Wong & Cecilia Yip, Dir.: Che Kirk Wong. Danny Lee is the maverick head of an elite investigation unit that tracks down high priority criminals. Because of his bad attitude and 'break the rules' methods, he is alienated from his peers and investigated by his superiors. Anthony Wong & Cecilia Yip are outstanding as Lee's quarry, a pair of Bonnie & Clyde robbers. The film is bogged down with Lee's conflicts with his own people, the brutality he inflicts on both the public and his prisoners, and his workaholic drive. The more interesting story is that of Wong and Yip, who steal the film. \*\* -Ron Murillo

**RICH AND FAMOUS (1987)**- An-

other Chow Yun Fat gangster flick that, like **CITY ON FIRE** was considered a great flick, but I found it hopelessly boring (a cardinal sin for HK action flicks). Chow is charismatic as always, but I found it difficult to follow (or even care about) the overly talky story. \*\* -Jeff Goodhartz

**RIGHTING WRONGS (aka ABOVE THE LAW)**- A nasty, hard-edged 1986 vigilante pic that benefits from good interplay between stars Yuen Biao (in his most intense performance) and Cynthia Rothrock. The fights and stunts are so incredible and exhilarating that it easily offsets the negative attitude of the plot. \*\*\*\* -Jeff Goodhartz

**SOUL BROTHERS OF KUNG FU (aka KUNG FU AVENGERS)**- Boat person Bruce Li makes a new friend, played by Carl Scott (what is Carl doing these days? He could have been the next Jim Kelly or Ron Van Clief by now). Things really heat up by the second half of the film! Some very interesting views of what life is like in HK and probably Bruce Li's most interesting fights against a boxer, karateka, Eagle Claw stylist, etc. \*\*\* -Robert Mallory

**TIGER CAGE**- Starring: Simon Yam, Jacky Cheung, Donnie Yen, Dodo Cheng, Ng Man Tat, & Leung Kar Yan, Prod.: Dickson Poon, Dir.: Yuen Woo Ping. The first in this Yuen Woo Ping trilogy is an exciting action film that manages not to be a ripoff of **A BETTER TOMORROW**. Yuen Woo Ping is a veteran director of such classic martial arts movies as **SNAKE IN THE EAGLE'S SHADOW**, **DRUNKEN MASTER**, and **SHAOLIN DRUNKARD**. He's also responsible for directing three of the best martial arts movies of the 1990's- **IRON MONKEY**, **TAI CHI MASTER**, and **WING CHUNG**. The plot is simple. There's a special group of police officers but as it turns out, some of them are crooked and are in league with the triad. This simple plot is just a frame work for non-stop action & fun. \*\*\*\* -Garó Nigoghossian

**TO BE #1 (1990)**- Uneven account of the rise and fall of real-life heroin kingpin and Chiu Chau Godfather Ng Sik Ho. Raymond Liu, Kenneth Tsang, Waise Lee. \*\* -Marvin Quan

**TRAGIC HERO (1987)**- This sequel to **RICH AND FAMOUS** dispenses with the endless dialogue scenes and opts for a quicker paced plot. Lots of exciting gunplay in this one, yet the character development is never slighted. The explosive climax nearly rivals that of John Woo's epics. \*\*\*\* -Jeff Goodhartz

(continued on page 45)



# TERROR YAKI



© Toho

Personally, I always found **THE MYSTERIANS** (Toho; 1958) to be stupid and boring, so I wasn't particularly impressed to hear its giant monster, that mechanical Woody Woodpecker is back! He's in **GODZILLA VS. SPACE GODZILLA** (Toho; 1994), which debuted in Japanese theaters December 10th. The beaked robot Mogella (aka Mogera & Mogalla) appears with Godzilla and the latest member of the Godzilla family: Space Godzilla, a horned Godzilla with glaciers sticking out of his shoulders (they're running out of ideas, it

seems) and the ability to freeze things. These monsters battle it out and destroy the Fukuoka district in the process. Both Godzillas look nice, as always, and Mogella looks much better than the clumsy one in the **MYSTERIANS**, in fact he looks so different that were it not for the same name, I'd never have known there was any connection at all. This time, Mogella isn't from Mysteroid, but invented by scientists to combat Space Godzilla. Mothra and Godzilla's son also appear in **GODZILLA VS. SPACE GODZILLA**, which marked Godzilla's

40th anniversary! Toho had a 40th gala party thrown in Godzilla's honor,

festivities of which were held at their Studio 9 where 500 lucky fans (out of 6,000 applicants!) were allowed to participate! Meanwhile, this here edition of OC's continuing look at Japanese sci-fi comes to you courtesy of the Johns Marshall & Emma.

## マタンゴ ATTACK OF THE MUSH- ROOM PEOPLE

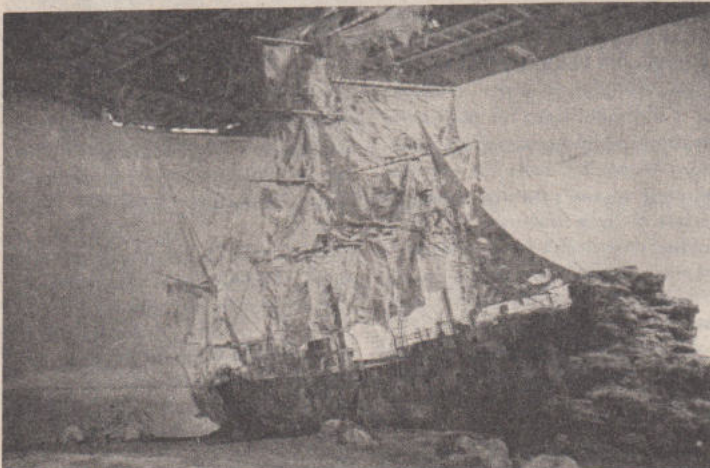
Producer: Tomoyuki Tanaka, Dir.: Inoshiro Honda, Screenplay: Takeshi Kimura from W.H. Hodgson's story "The Voice of Night". Japanese release: Aug. 11, 1963, Released to American TV in 1965, Cast: Akira Kubo, Kumi Mizuno, Yoshio Tsuchiya, Hiroshi Koizumi, Kenji Sahara, Reviewed by John Marshall

**ATTACK OF THE MUSHROOM PEOPLE** is my absolute bestest golly gee fave rave Toho monster movie. Not only does it attempt to deal with several adult themes, it also features a Who's Who of Toho actors, including Akira Kubo, Kumi Mizuno, Yoshio



### ATTACK OF THE MUSHROOM PEOPLE

© Toho







YAMATO TAKERU

Tsuchiya, Hiroshi Koizumi, and Kenji Sahara.

The movie is amazing because it tackles class issues as well as adult relationship and loyalty issues. It's like a psychology lesson with monsters. In fact, Akira Kubo's character is a psychology professor, and has the following exchange with another actor whose name I don't remember. We'll call him Fred. Fred: "Did you know that if you threaten a girl, and then act sympathetic to her, she'll fall for you immediately?" Akira Kubo: "That's how you writers think! That's not psychology!" So this proves Akira's a legitimate psychology professor.

Eiji Tsuburaya's special effects in this story play only a small part, but what there is neat-o, since **ATTACK OF THE MUSHROOM PEOPLE** was made during the heyday of the Toho monster cycle, or "kaiju eiga" for you trendy, pseudo-sophisticated Japanese movie geeks. What was I talking about? Oh, the effects. The boat is very convincing, and the mushroom people come in all shapes and sizes, from deformed humans in mid-transformation to full-fledged giant laughing mushrooms, several of whom sound like the Baltans from Ultraman. As a matter of fact, the final sequence reminds me of a **LOST IN SPACE** episode where Judy (the blonde) was mesmerized by a colony of plants which also laughed loud and long as she walked among them. Himm! Makes me want to bury myself in the dirt and grow leaves. Hubba bubba! Oh that Judy! Yowza! I'll cover the plot right after I change my underwear.

Okay, I'm back. (And #3's briefs in case you ladies are wondering. I know you are. I've always been a lady's man. In fact, the only thing thicker than my 'little black book' is the thing that makes it necessary to have a little black book in the first place!) Here's the story of **ATTACK OF THE MUSHROOM PEOPLE**: A rich bastard (Yoshio Tsuchiya) has

taken a group of friends and acquaintances onboard his yacht. They include a skipper (Hiroshi Koizumi), a first mate (Kenji Sahara), a famous singer (Kumi Mizuno), a mystery writer (Fred, aka Hiroshi Tachikawa-- so that's his name!), a professor (Akira Kubo) and an innocent young girl (Akiko Soma). Hey, wait a minute! A first mate, a skipper, a millionaire, a professor, a young girl, and Kumi Mizuno qualifies as both Ginger and Mrs. Howell!!! Ain't that a kick in the head?! Anyway, they get shipwrecked on an island and faster than you can say either "Lord of the Flies" or "L.A. Riots", they stop acting so civil. Part of the reason is that Kumi's a slut, but a slightly bigger reason is that they're tempted by mind-controlling mushrooms. Hey, this was the 60s, after all! \*\*\*\*\* -John Marshall

## THE PROFESSIONAL GOLGO 13

Produced by Tokyo Movie Shinsha Co. in 1983, Dir.: Osamu Dezaki, Presented by Saito Productions/TMS, Running Time: 94 minutes, U.S. Distributor: Streamline Pictures, Reviewed by DF

Since I'm running out of live action movies to review, I thought I'd check out this slickly drawn, decently animated Japanese cartoon. So there I was at Blockbuster's animation section, and chose this movie in particular because I'd seen Sonny Chiba in the live action **GOLGO 13: THE KOWLOON ASSIGNMENT** (1977; see QC#14's review) movie, so I felt somewhat familiar with this sharp-shooting character. But this cartoon seems to be based on some comic that has pages torn out of it, as there's much unexplained, at least a couple unanswered questions frustrated me. Also, the artsy fartsy visuals don't help much, like the freeze frame portraits which happen whenever they need to

この夏、劇場がRPG体験ゾーンになる!



emphasize an emotion or specific scene.

If that's not annoying enough, there's lots of sex scenes and nudity, the type which so many lame-ass, overweight convention geeks still beat off to. There are a couple rapes and a shower scene, but fortunately, it's nowhere near as explicit as the tasteless, pornographic **UROTSUKIDOJI** ("Wandering Kid") flick reviewed a few issues back. The rushed scenes of romance are unbelievably tacky and pretentious. The dialogue is truly embarrassing. Though Chiba's live action version of master sniper Golgo 13 was no masterpiece either, I'm afraid the likelihood of me ever watching this movie again are equal to Jeffrey Dahmer authoring a top-selling cookbook.

However, **THE PROFESSIONAL GOLGO 13** is not without its good points. As mentioned previously, the artwork and animation are not at all bad, though it looks pretty much the same as any other Japanese cartoon features of the 1980s and 1990s. Also, despite its faults, I can safely say the movie isn't boring. There are interesting characters, and scenes which could almost be considered intriguing, if only they made more sense. Actionwise, there are of course, shoot outs, stabbings, fist fights, and even a car chase set in San Francisco, as Golgo 13 goes up against CIA & FBI agents.

Am I the only one to ever notice a striking similarity between this character and John Woo's movies like **THE KILLER**? Do you think maybe John Woo got a lot of his ideas from old Golgo 13 comic books? Next time one of you interviews John Woo (I won't, even if the opportunity arrived. I'm too busy, and I couldn't think of

anything else to ask him! Everything about him is known), could you ask if he was an avid Golgo 13 reader? It's probably all a coincidence, but there are striking similarities.

It's a gruesome, grim, almost depressing story of that traveling hitman Golgo 13. During the course of this gory, moody, humorless tale, he goes shooting people all over the world! Wow! You think they really filmed this all on location?! Oops, I forgot, he's a cartoon, or rather, 'dimensionally challenged individual' for all you politically-correct anime fans. So let me rephrase that; you think they really drew all these scenes on location? Anyway, some suicidal rich guy called Roberts paid Golgo 13 to kill him. Exactly why he wanted to die is never explained. But the guy's even richer father, Leonard Dawson vows revenge against Golgo 13. While Golgo 13 goes all over the world to have sex with one-dimensional yet wellbuilt females, he also must frequently destroy those who've been hired by Leonard Dawson. These assassins are a colorful, yet savage & psychotic bunch. But one by one, Golgo 13 wastes each and every one of them, via bullets, stabs, punches, handgrenades, kicks, and anything else which causes massive bloodloss (the Japanese artist must have had an excess amount of red paint and needed to use it up). When Golgo 13 finally confronts Leonard, the cornered avenger jumps out the window of a really high skyscraper. As he falls, Golgo 13 still gets the last laugh! As the guy was about to fall the last 200 feet or so, Golgo 13 fires down and hits him between the eyes, well before he hits the pavement! \*1/2 -DF

## ヤマトタケル YAMATO TAKERU

Produced by Toho Co. in 1994. Released Theatrically in July, Producer: Shogo Toyama, Dir.: Wararu Mimura, Cinematography: Yoshinori Sekiguchi, Art Dir.: Fumio Ogawa, Sound: Noboru Ikeda, Lighting: Hideki Mochizuki, Editor: Nobuo Ogawa, Music: Kiyoko Ogino, Costumes: Atsuko Degawa, Dir. of FX: Koichi Kawakita, Model Builders: Yamata no Orochi (Tomomi Kabayashi, Toho EFX unit), Ikusagami (Takafumi Tanibachi, BONECRAFT Co.), Kaishin (Shinichi Wakasa, MONSTERS Co.), Ama no Shiratori (Nobuhiko Ekubo, REPLICCA Co.), Kumagogami (Masakazu Amaki, THANK ALL Co.), reviewed by John Emma

Well! They've done it again. Those good folks at Toho have remade another old movie. You might have seen this as 1968's **THE THREE TREASURES**. This time, it's called



Yamato Takeru (the main character's name). Now, don't get me wrong; I like this movie. It has the feel of the old Majin films, or **THE MAGIC SERPENT**. What bugs me is these guys never write anything new! They just rehash the same old shit. Over and over. Year after year. So, because of that, only 3 1/2 stars.

Orochi. This is a giant fire-breathing, eight-headed snake monster! A huge mechanical model. There's also a couple of robots too; Ama no Shiratori, a kind of metal peacock, and Utsu no Iku Sagami, a huge improved kind of giant Majin. Those two help the good guys, Yamato Takeru and Oto Tachibana

understand each other, let's talk about the animated **YAMATO TAKERU**. This anime is running over here right now (yes, I'm in Japan). Now the movie is great stuff, but this cartoon is just fucking irritating! It's little kids. Little Japanese kids. Little, annoying, Japanese cartoon kids! With big eyes, mouths out of sink even in Japanese,

Now for the movie's story. Back before Japan started making cars and radios, it used to be divided into many small kingdoms. One was called Yamato. Even before that, the sun-goddess, Ametarasu Omikami had a real asshole for a brother. The demon Tsukuyomi. He thought it might be fun to trash the earth, so he turned

into Yama no Orochi, and started some serious ass kicking. He was defeated by a guy called Susano, who had a magic sword, and got his ass tossed out into the ozone (the moon actually). But it was said one day he'd be back, of course. Just what Japan needs; another rubber monster! Well, Takeru is born into Yamato, but his father hates him, so he takes off. On the way, he meets Oto Tachibana, and they head to the country of Kumaso. The head guy thinks she'll be a great sacrifice for their lava god (what an asshole! See a hot babe, let's kill her, guys! Right!) Well, Takeru kills him, rescues Oto. They head for Yomi Land where they're killed by a sea monster. But wait, there's more! They come back from the dead. He's now got Susano's spirit,

and she's got the sun goddess's. Plus the peacock! They fly off to the moon, turn into the big robot, and kick the fuck out of Tsukuyomi, who's turned back into the orochi. Do they live happily ever after? Who gives a fuck?! \*\*\*1/2 -John Emma



Scenes from  
**DESTROY ALL PLANETS.**

©Daiei



Now one thing I will say, the effects in these films are getting better all the time. Kawakita and crew have come a long way. And Yasako Sawaguchi is still great to look at, for all you horny wildmen out there. Some of the kaijus are a Demon made of Lava, a decent sea monster, and the grand finale, Yamata no

(Sawaguchi). The heavies are an old god, Tsukuyomi, and his earthly representative Tsukinowa.

There's also a recent **YAMATO TAKERU** cartoon series. Well, let me start this off right. I fucking hate Japanese cartoons!!! And I don't like any American cartoons after the Hanna-Barbera era began. Now that we

and really childish. After five minutes of the show, I had enough. It's the same old shit as every other Japanese cartoon show. You want the plot, read movie review. And come on anime guys, get a life! If you really enjoy this shit, you've got the brains of a three years old. /Yeah! And give 'em back to that child now! -DF/



## GAMMERA THE INVINCIBLE

Director: Noriaki Yuasa, Producer: Hidemasa Nagata, Screenplay: Nizo (Fumi) Takahashi, from a story by Yonejiro Saito. Monster Designer: Ryosaku Takayama, Japanese Release: Nov. 27, 1965, U.S. version released Dec. 15, 1966. Cast: Eiji Funakoshi (Dr. Hidaka), Harumi Kiritachi (Kyoko), Junichiro Yamashiko (Aoyaki), Yoshiro Uchida (Toschio--not "Kenny"), Reviewed by John Marshall

If you have that worthless home video called GAMMERA, you might as well wipe you ass with it because, buddy, you ain't seen the real thing! I am extremely lucky to have a shitty local TV station, Channel 48, which got hold of a small package of ancient 16mm prints of films. These include PLANET BURG (in Russian with subtitles!) which Roger Corman chopped up into several movies. It also includes the one and only original GAMMERA THE INVINCIBLE, complete with extra "M" and scenes of Albert Dekker and Brian Donlevy. Throughout the picture, Brian is smashed out of his mind and barely able to keep from vomiting all over his "general" suit. But he's still a great presence!

There are so many differences between the original American version and its bastard video offspring, it's like comparing a date with Heather Locklear to an evening at home with Vaseline. First of all, the dubbing is done better in the original than on the crappy prerecord. That's the case when comparing any and all original Gamera films with their awful "Gamera vs. --" video releases. Second of all, the American insert scenes in GAMMERA THE INVINCIBLE are a scream, and often it's intentional. There is an exchange between two scientists on a TV talk show that's SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE material. I'd better clarify that; it's good SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE material. The unpleasant prerecord version features the original scenes of "Americans" shot in Japan with non-actors in various military roles. These were later replaced with scenes of real, red-blooded Americans (Donlevy & Dekker) for the film's 1966 U.S. release. So, in a way, I guess the lousy prerecord is of historical interest as it features footage replaced in the original American version. GAMMERA THE INVINCIBLE is packed with familiar character actors. Albert Dekker starred in DR. CYCLOPS, Brian Donlevy's career peaked with THE GREAT McGINTY and the QUARTERMASS film series. Dick O'Neill is a wisecracking general named O'Neill, while Alan Oppenheimer is hilarious as a pompous talk-show scientist. The "foreign" ambassadors in the Pentagon seg-

ments are a howl, with the Russian guy doing his best "Da Comrade, my country agrees to blah blah blah", and the Japanese ambassador--more like embarrasor--spouting phrases like "Excerent", "Humanry possible", and "Working around the crock".

Various other differences between the original American release and the worthless home video release include: The rockin' Gamera theme in the original American version ("Gam-ruh," neer neer neer neer, Gam-ruh!"); the familiar voice dubbing including several from the SPACE GIANTS TV series; and a credit sequence in the original US release which is superimposed over shots of Gamera. (In the stupid home video version, the credits are at the beginning over shots of ocean water, and the Gamera detail shots appear oddly with no credits over them, a few minutes into the film, making no sense at all.) Got all that? Whew!

Of course, the movie was never exactly brilliant in any case. The second half is long and badly paced, but Japanese monster fans won't mind. I don't! The plot: Plane shoots down other plane causing explosion releasing very big turtle who has jets in his arm and leg holes (never explained) who makes friends with young Kenny (I mean Toschio!) and is locked in a rocket and shipped off to outerspace.

\*\*\* -John Marshall



## DESTROY ALL PLANETS

Producer: Hidemasa Nagata, Dir.: Noriaki (Noriaki) Yuasa, Screenplay: Fumi Takahashi, Cast: Kojiro Hongo (Shimada), Toru Takasuka (Masao), and Kurl Craig--listed as Carl Clay (Jim). Released March 20, 1968 in Jap-land, Sold Directly to U.S. TV the fol-

lowing year or 1969, whichever comes first. Reviewed by John Marshall

This great Gamera film features Viras, an octopus-like creature bent (aren't we all) on world domination. Viras has a TV in his ship on which he watches old Gamera movies, specifically WAR OF THE MONSTERS (or as the less fortunate know it, GAMERA VS. BARUGON) and RETURN OF THE GIANT MONSTERS (GAMERA VS. GAOS). There are some nifty special effects, especially Gamera's battles with various Viras space ships (yellow and black striped globes connected by pipes). DESTROY ALL PLANETS has not been released by those bastards who butchered several other Gamera films.

DESTROY ALL PLANETS stars

Kojiro Hongo, the Akira Takarada of Daiei (meaning he was a frequent genre leading man). Kojiro starred in several Gamera films, RETURN OF GIANT MAJIN, and also in Daiei's super-rare THE WHALE GOD, a drama about a fishing village troubled by a giant whale.

The plot: Oh, does it matter? It's something about two boys who find themselves prisoners on an alien spaceship. Gamera tries to rescue them but falls victim to the alien's mind control device. Highlight of the film: Gamera surfs on top of Viras. Anybody who hates the Gamera films should take note that you'll never see anything as cool as this in a Godzilla movie! \*\*\* -John Marshall

## ZERAM

{aka ZEIRAMU and ZEIRAM} 1991, Script: Hajime Matsumoto & Keita Amamiya, Cinematography: Hiroshi Kidokoro, Lighting: Yoshimi Hosaka, Production: Shigeki Takeuchi & Hiroshi Ichida, Executive Producers: Yoshinori Chiba, Kaichi Sugisawa, Directed by Keita Amamiya, Yuko Moriyama, Kunihiko Iida, Mizuho Yoshida, Sachi Kashino, Satoko Kurenai, Yukijiro Hotaru, Reviewed by DF

My first attempt at seeing ZERAM failed miserably when the local 'art theater's only showing sold out. I was madder than a politically correct activist watching Rush Limbau, since I'd driven an hour to get to the damn place, and had to deal with parking, etc. I'd driven all the way to that urban pusspool, San Francisco, a city which brings new meaning to the words "Parking in Rear", only to stand in line and get turned down because everybody else made it into the theater before me. Only one showing? What kind of idiots booked it into SF's Kabuki Theatre for only a single showing? Whoever you are, I'd shove your ticketbooth up your ass, but you'd probably like it. Regardless, the evening was not a total loss, I simply drove on over to Chinatown to see the then new CITY HUNTER (see review in OC#17, aka "OC #2", I think). I suppose I could have rented ZERAM on video, but unlike the theatrical print which entertained many a San Franciscan 'hollier-than-thou-unless-you-give-me-a-tip-at-the-cappuccino-shop-I-still-work-at' type, Japanese videotapes generally lack English subtitles. So I played it safe and waited a year to pick it up at Blockbuster, now with corny, kinda' stupid dubbing.

The excessive violins in the score sounded like Jewish folk music, but otherwise, I'd say ZERAM is a winner. Most of it is fairly interesting; there's frequent humor (rarely funny though), and an abundance of cool special effects, including- though cer-

tainly not limited too- stop motion FX. In fact, it's the climactic 'dynamation' (as they used to call it in the 7TH VOYAGE OF SINBAD days) which really highlights the film. The costumes, pyrotechnics and super-impositions are fine, but it's the ending animated monster stuff that's so great. Villainous Zeram changes into various crustacean/insect-like forms reminiscent to that in John Carpenter's THE THING remake. Other FX are gooey, typically slimy post-ALIEN stuff. Not only that, but the lead heroine Iia (Yuko Moriyama) does occasional martial arts, but unlike in a HK flick, none of these highlights are fully exploited; ZERAM never goes over the top. While I like the slow-paced, coherent approach, it does tend to drag at times. This can be a blessing or a curse, that makes it a blur.

If anything, ZERAM is unconventional for a Japanese monster movie. No giants battling over a miniature city, no jet planes to chomp on, no scientists annoyed by reporters. ZERAM involves only human-sized characters, and at times, takes on an artsy fartsy look (don't worry, it's not a stupid mess like TETSUO THE IRON MAN!). Most of the 'avant garde' imagery is used at the beginning, although I've never looked up avant garde in the dictionary and am quite possibly using the word completely out of context. Hell, so far as I know, it could be a French Security Guard Company.

As somebody with a life (apparently a rarity in the fanzine community), I wasn't able to take in all the plot, except that a murderous monster called Zeram has escaped its planet or dimension and is hoping to munch on Japanese people (who must be our most appetizing race, according to so many sci-fi movies). Zeram is weird; its tiny, geisha-like face (resembling those old Japanese masks sold at kabukis and puppet shows) becomes a snake when it needs to bite, and it's creepy looking! Pursuing Zeram is an attractive female bounty hunter (played by Yuko Moriyama), and her talking computer Bob. Yuko has typical post-Gavan, Cybercop-ish combat gear. Her explosives, guns and kicks would have been a match for Zeram, were it not for two bumbling electricians who stumble upon the conflict. The two guys get stuck in some alternate dimension and have cat & mouse games with Zeram and its E.T.-like minions (they grow out of Zeram's spores, allowing for some demented, bizarre scenes). Eventually, our tough heroine arrives to save the day, but Zeram's new forms keep popping out, just when you thought it was over. Eventually, she simply blows Zeram away with her pistol. \*\*\* -DF



# KOREAN FLICKS

Okay, so I said last issue I'd no longer have sections on Korean films, and that they'd be crammed in with the films of the Philippines, India and Indonesia. But my Korean correspondent, Alan Westby sent me more Korean stuff, and besides, 1994 marks the 75th anniversary of the Korean movie industry! Though this issue won't be out until early 1995, I'm typing it up in late (very late, nearly 1:45 a.m.!) 1994. Also, I have a strange, sometimes masochistic love of Korean movies, they've definitely got something going for them which Filipino & Indian films lack, and therefore occasionally deserve their own column. Anyway, like other aspects of the culture of Korea, Korean cinematic development was very much affected by political upheavals over the years.

In 1903 came the first Korean movie, **WARRIOR OF JUSTICE**, obviously a B&W silent film, which, like so many Chinese period flicks made way back then, was a filmed stage-play. Though I've never seen it (I'd like to, but old stuff like that is impossible to find), I gather it was actually a series of outdoor scenes that were inserted into a live play to give authenticity to the exteriors (I assume they were prefilmed, and projected for the audience to watch while the actors changed clothes). These awkward play/movie hybrids were called 'Kino Dramas'. **WARRIOR OF JUSTICE** was a success at the box office, as were foreign films.

The Kino Dramas finally evolved into feature length movies in the 1920s, but were censored & under heavy scrutiny by the Japanese, who, from 1910 until 1945, occupied Korea as a military presence. At this point, the more successful flicks of Korea managed to slip nationalist stories past the censors, films like Na Un-gyu's

**ARIRANG** (1926), which portrayed an anti-Japanese 'hero' as a madman! But in the 1930s, the oppressive Japanese cracked down on all forms of dissidence, nabbing many movie makers and forcing others into exile. Fortunately, liberation from Ja-

(1949). But guess what; it was too good to last! This time it was North Korea themselves who decided to be assholes, and the division of North and South Korea came hand-in-hand with the Korean war, which premiered on June 25, 1950! Naturally,

gotta' start all over again, from scratch! But hundreds of new theaters showed the flicks from the new film studios, and about 100 million tickets were sold each year. There were a number of movie genres:

melodramas, morality tales, war movies, action/adventures, mysteries, and high grossing romantic comedies like Lee Byong Il's **WEDDING DAY** (1956). However, once again, it all came to a standstill in 1960, when student-led demonstrations led to the overthrow of President Rhee Syng-man's corrupt government. The chaos strengthened a military revolution which allowed General Park Chung-hee to take control. The new regime once again forced certain rules onto the Korean film industry throughout the 1960s, but was mostly about political messages. So Korean filmmakers were encouraged to make anti-Communism movies, and the military rulers apparently believed that a focus on sexy films would divert the audience's attention from political issues.

But infinitely more important was the debut of Korean science fiction movies in the 1960s. 1967 saw the elusive Korean monster flick **WANG MA GUI** ("King Monster"), an 80 minute imitation of **KING KONG**, about a rubber-clad giant with pointed claws, flapping ears and a face & mask reminiscent of Roger Corman's monster in **IT CONQUERED THE WORLD** (1956). The creature is launched via flying saucers by advanced aliens seeking world domination. First it tramples on Seoul and then burns it down by spewing a death ray onto the city. It's rumored to



**SUPER BATMAN AND MAZINGA V**

pan in 1945 allowed a sudden craze of movie-making in South Korea by directors who'd spent years hiding abroad or in prison. Along came movies like **DAYBREAK OF THE KOREAN PEOPLE** (1947), and **THE NIGHT BEFORE INDEPENDENCE**

they had other things on their minds besides movies. Oh well, the war did bring us the M.A.S.H TV series, a program which is as enjoyable as being in the war itself.

Okay, so the war ends in 1953, and them Korean movie guys have

be a very poor imitation of Japan's monster films, although allegedly made with considerable production resources. The carefully constructed miniature models were photographed by S. Byun, South Korea's expert and pioneer in this type of



work. He also designed the monster. The same year, South Korea also produced DAI KOESU YONG-KARI, the first Korean film to get released to Western audiences: German's know it under the stupid title GODZILLA'S TODESPRANKE, while we yankees remember it as YONGARY, MONSTER OF THE DEEP (see OC#8 if you have it, but it's sold out now). But this movie was done with the assistance of Japan's Daiei company, and can't be considered a 100% Korean production, but was a better imitation of Toho's monster movies.

Real creative freedom and cinematic diversity came in the 1980s, following the assassination of General Park; censorship was abolished in 1985. Finally, Korean films have been appearing in international film festivals all over the world; audiences have sat through: Im Kwon-taek's AJE AJE BARA AJE ("Come, Come, Come Upward") & SURROGATE WOMAN, Lee Doo-yong's EUNUCH & SPINNING WHEEL, and Chung Ji-young's WHITE BADGE & BEYOND THE MOUNTAIN. But at the same time, the acceptance of foreign films has taken a serious toll on Korea's box office. Surveys indicate that as many as nine out of ten Korean movie-goers are choosing to see crap like GHOST or BASIC INSTINCT instead of Korean movies. The same goes for TV, it's mostly the American TV stations they watch, despite the presence of numerous Japanese superhero TV shows also on Korean TV! Go figure. But in a conflicting report, I've heard Korea still considers Japan a threat, and supposedly, Japanese programs aren't allowed in Korea! This doesn't explain the many Japanese superhero/monster merchandise available in Seoul. Hell, POWER RANGERS are hot in Korea too, though it's the American version dubbed in Korean, it seems the 100%

Japanese stuff is outlawed in Korea now, and that POWER RANGERS is under protest because it still features Japanese scenes!

While the 1990s are offering somewhat successful films like THE AGE OF SUCCESS and LOVERS IN WOOLUKBAEMI, what's of interest

stand Korean, but as an action fan, I'll stick to the post-UREME films! For those of you who still don't know, the UREME movies (reviewed in OC#15) of the late 1980s represented probably their first attempts to imitate the superheroes of Japanese TV. Them UREME's inspired other Korean ac-

budget, unintentional comedies made a star out of Shim Hyung Rei (Korea's Pee Wee Herman), who's long since gone on to direct or produce additional science fiction movies like JURASSIC PARK ripoffs. Among other things, one called YOUNG GU AND THE DINO-SAUR-JU JU. Another recent Korean dinosaur flick is TYRANNO'S CLAW

## 영화 II 슈퍼비룡맨 STAR JANGA II: SUPER-BATMAN AND MAZINGER V

{aka "Sta Jyanga 2- Supa Betaman Majinga V"} Life Productions, Released 12/12/90, Starring: Li Gin Su as Super Betaman, Kwong Sang Ho as Wan Nun ('big guy'), Min Da Le as Guong Shun ('tough girl'), Ee Hi Gou as Je Bi (little girl), Chung Sang Chyo as the cat villainess, and Chun Yu Song as Kou Bak Sa, Reviewed by DF

First of all, I've asked three separate people to translate this bizarre title and have come up with three different answers! Is our hero's name 'Super Batman' or 'Super Betaman'? In the final analysis, I guess the Koreans pronounce it Super Betaman (as in Alpha Beta), but this is most likely their poor pronunciation of Batman! But not only might D.C Comics get pissed off at the Koreans, so might Toei & Go Nagai, for stealing the name Mazinga (aka Majinga & Mazinger)! While Super Batman/Betaman superficially resembles Batman, Mazinger Z looks nothing like his Japanese predecessors, known here in America as Robotech.

**SUPER BAT/BETAMAN** is a typical ripoff of the UREME films; there are numerous animated inserts, and the main character Wan Nun is played by comedian Kwong Sang Ho, another fat idiot from the Shim Hyung Rei School of Ineptitude. But this wacky romp is even cheaper than the average UREME film! As always, more than half the movie is stupid, pointless clowning around- childish humor which seems everlasting. Dumb, dumb, dumb.



to me and many OC readers are their new superhero and sci-fi movies. I'm sure 'adult' films like Park Kwang-soo's CHIL-SU AND MAN-SU are find & dandy if you under-

tion/hero movies like HERO FLASH, SPARKMAN, DENG-CHIRI AND TWIN LIGHT, THUNDER BIGMAN, EAGLE MAN, and YOUNG GU AND THE GOLDEN BAT. These low



The title incorporates a '2' (aka "II"), so I assume there's an earlier film I've not seen which explains how Super Batman got his super powers, and also what planet the villainous cat/ballet dancers are from. So this follow up concentrates on irritating

/DF here. I believe 1987's **EUNUCH** to actually be a remake of a 1960s Korean movie of the same name. So I suspect "Eunuch" is probably some old Korean story. The following info came from some article in a Film Festival booklet in N.Y., authored by Dong Sin Hahn: / About the filmmaker: Director Lee Doo-yong was born in 1942 in Seoul. He began directing in 1969 with **THE LOST BRIDAL VEIL** and has since directed over 50 feature films. Lee won Best Director for **MULBERRY** (1985) at the 22nd Paeksang Awards. His film **SPINNING WHEEL** received awards at Cannes and the Chicago

Cartoons. Yep, ever since the first UREME movie, Korean sci-fi has often included out-of-place animated segments in their otherwise live action movies (which you already know, if you've been reading OC for a few years, and if you haven't, well...you're an asshole). In this case, it's just another cheap excuse to avoid

This Korean folk drama, set in the Choson dynasty (1392-1910), centers on the feudal custom which allowed a deceased bachelor's soul to rest peacefully by being married to a living woman. Young Gil-rye (Shin Il-young) becomes both a symbolic widow and wife, and the maid of a noble family. She takes household servant Yoon-bo as her lover, and the two flee when one of the family sons tries to rape her. \*\*



# ASIAN ODDITIES



## FROM THE PHILIPPINES:

### ASWANG

Presented by Regal Films in 1992, Story: Eque Gallaga, Don Escudero & Lore Reyes, Screenplay: Pen P. Media & Joey Lopes Sineneng, Starring: Alma Moreno, Aiza Seguerra, Aljon Jimenez, John Estrada, Manilyn Reynes, With the Special Participation of Janice De Belen & Joey Marquez, Leo Matinez, Dick Israel, Reviewed by Damon Foster

It's ultra gore meets ultra bore in this typically inferior horror drama. Them Filipinos sure like producing terrible movies, and nobody else (except maybe the Mexicans) has perfected this difficult-to-master art of cinematic ineptitude. As someone with a vague interest in Aswangs, Mananangals and other denizens of Filipino folklore, I had high hopes for this movie, and was disappointed, to say the least. We rarely even see this blood-sucking demon, amid endless

characters, dull dramatic subplots, never-ending conversations and other pointless filler which was obviously added for a cheap time-taker upper. The language barrier isn't the only problem, as I've seen plenty of foreign films with no translation, and not all of them sucked as badly as this low budget flick.

For those who don't know, an Aswang is basically a Filipino vampire, legends of which go back about a hundred years at least. Unfortunately, movies have altered the original legends, giving us outsiders a warped view of what these mythical creatures were meant to be. I was of the impression that, like Mananangals and Penangalens, they were either flying heads or flying upper torsos which left their lower half to go flying around in search of blood to suck. But in this chaotically written movie, everything is so dark we never get a good look at the creature in question, which seems to change forms constantly; sometimes it's a lady, sometimes a pig, sometimes an old woman, and occasionally a rather cool-looking monster. This little rubber prop looks like a small puppet, and we never really get a good look at it. That's a shame and a half, because there are

indeed a few truly cool FX scattered throughout *ASWANG*, which most people will never see because the movie itself stinks like milk which has been stale for over two months.

Endless rambling highlights this story of a haunted forest where some Aswang keeps killing people. These few, brief scenes of carnage are surprisingly gory for a Filipino film. In one scene, the Aswang's long, frog-like tongue penetrates the full belly of a pregnant woman and sucks the embryo out! For whatever reason, she (the Aswang) also seems to suck the gew out of snails, it's the 'slug trail juice' (yummy yummy) that, like human blood, seems to replenish her. If this Aswang and possibly other demons (it's hard to tell, they might all be the same creature changing form; we never see two at once) aren't enough of a problem for the local villagers, there also appears to be a savage gang of thieves who brutally slaughtered a family while ransacking their house. If there's a connection to them and the Aswang, I missed it (it's not like this movie had me on the edge of my seat, with my eyes glued to the TV). Eventually, the sole survivor of the gruesome carnage outsmarts & kills all the criminals, and

just when you thought it was safe, she's confronted by the blood-thirsty, snail-juice thirsty Aswang. I guess our strong-willed heroine figures that if this demonic bitch is so into snail crap, she must also be allergic to salt. Our heroine was quite correct. 1/2 -DF

## FROM JAPAN:



### RING RING RING

Produced by Bandai in 1993, Starring Chigusa Nagayo, and Cameos by Bull Nakano, Kyoko Inoue, Aja Kong, Manami Toyota, Reviewed by Frank Strom

Unlike Mexico, Japan has never been known for its Pro Wrestling movies. In fact, other than 1980's *SUPER MONSTER GAMERA* (which starred 1970s wrestling star Mach Fujinami) and the more recent *BATTLE GAL* (with Cutey Suzuki), I can't think of any Japanese films featuring wrestlers in lead roles. Well,



Chigusa Nagayo and Lioness Asuka wrestle in 1993's *RING RING RING*.





**RING RING RING** makes up for it by giving Chigusa Nagayo her first (and probably last) film vehicle. In the 1980s, Nagayo was unquestionably the most successful lady wrestler in the world-- she was half of the popular Crush Gals tagteam along with Lioness Asuka. The Crush Gals were media darlings in Japan. Not just wrestlers, but real celebrities and pop stars with hit records and everything. The All Japan Women's Wrestling organization built the entire promotion around them, drawing huge gates and TV ratings. However, at that time, AJWW had a mandatory retirement age of 25. By the late 80s, in spite of overwhelming popularity, Nagayo was out of a job due to her age.

After several years of maintaining a low profile, Chigusa Nagayo returned to the limelight in this feature film playing a remarkably similar character named...ahem... "Chigusa Nagayo". Chigusa is a blue collar factory worker, who dreams of one day becoming a wrestling champion. Her family puts her down & her father physically abuses her. She gets the chance to show off her skills when AJWW comes to run a show in town. Entering the group as a younger performer, Chigusa does general gofer duties like constructing the ring and doing laundry. Her skills grow with each match and eventually she catches the eye of the Champ (named "Devil"- obviously based on longtime ring veteran Devil Masami), who fears being dethroned by this young upstart. After some lengthy melodrama, Chigusa gets her shot at the Champ and emerges victorious. There ain't a dry eye in the house.

**RING RING RING** was made with the cooperation of All Japan Women's Wrestling and features oodles of cameos by current ring stars like Bull Nakano and Kyoko Inoue. If you're not familiar with the world of AJWW, this film makes for a lousy introduction. It's not very in-depth and other than accurately depicting the toils of the new talent, it's not very truthful either. It could have used more action, and given the amount of wrestling footage that was shot (as shown in the "Making Of" special that follows the film on video), it's a wonder that so much of it wasn't used.

Chigusa gives a decent performance both in and out of the ring. She's in great shape for this film, but some five years after retirement, is a bit rusty on the mat. Her ring persona during her heyday was that of an androgynous tomboy, which she retains here, but in an odd turn, has a few romantic interludes with a male referee (she has a baby by the guy, but never looks pregnant!). It's all kept very low-key, so as not to upset her old fans -- High School girls who found her butch image appealing. Meanwhile, back in real life (or what passes for it in wrestling), Chigusa has returned to the business, but success eludes her since all the new fans are men who are unfamiliar with her. \*\*1/2 -Frank Strom

I hate romantic comedies, that's a common fact. So why the hell did I rent this worthless drama from the Philippines? Just look at it's title, **SWINDLER'S LIST!** With a wacky, satirical title like that, it seemed too good to pass up. So I had expected it to be a spoof of **SCHINDLER'S LIST**, which would be a logical assumption, right? But that's another foolish thought on my part, having never seen **SCHINDLER'S LIST**. So if **SWINDLER'S LIST** is truly a satire, then I guess the Jews who fled Nazi Germany also happened to be disco-dancing Filipino geeks who liked to sing in the moonlight, swindle, gamble, do a lame kung fu move or two, and frolicked with girls on a beach. That Schindler guy sounds like a real party animal!

**AMSTERDAM CONNECTION** and **ROBOT NINJA** (nope, scratch that last one!), two other of the world's worst movies.

Leo Martinez & Nino Muhlach, whoever the hell they are, play bumbling conmen who try to make money in dishonest ways. One minute, they get some girlfriend to pose as a hooker and lure an Arab into having his wallet stolen. The angered Arab discovers he's been had and chases them around a park, in fast motion (ala **BENNY HILL**). Hardy har har. Later, I guess they pose as psychics and perform some mock seance/exorcism where one of them pretends to be possessed by a ghost. Plenty of other tedious, lame foolery goes on before they hear an orphanage might be sold to some

bad guys, leaving the orphans homeless. So eventually, our two swindling heroes have a change of heart and decide to help the poor kiddies. For whatever reason, both idiots dress as nuns, and finally confront the villains in a warehouse. That's right, that staple of HK movie action climaxes, a warehouse. But this is no epic HK film. The battle between the two dumbshits and the mob is the best thing in this movie (aside from numerous pretty actresses), but is not especially entertaining or thrilling. An okay acrobatic, one or two decent kicks and a couple gunshot squibs don't alter the other 99% of the movie, which is complete and utter garbage. Better fun to be had bobbing for apples in a toilet which hasn't been flushed for six months. -DF



The cast of **SWINDLER'S LIST**.

#### FROM THE PHILIPPINES:



#### SWINDLER'S LIST

Presented by Viva Video in 1994, in Association with FLT Films Intl., Director of Photography: Isagani Siusun (FSC), Production Designer: Apu Manansala's Group, Cast: Nino Muhlach, Sharmaine Arnaiz, Elizabeth Tamayo, Nanette Inventor, Jenine Desiderio, Leo Martinez, Noel Trinidad, Trashed by Damon Foster

So it's a safe assumption **SWINDLER'S LIST** just ripped off a cool title, and placed it on yet another no-budget Filipino fiasco which combines dreadfully dull drama with the most pathetically stupid slapstick I've ever seen. I normally avoid entirely untranslated, foreign language movies unless they offer something in the universal languages of horror, action, sci-fi, or superheroes, and since this talky piece of shit offers virtually none of that, it remains a chuckle for Tagalog-language versed individuals exclusively. Were I a Filipino, I might have been mildly amused by this godawful romp. There's no production value whatsoever, the only money they spent was for the buying and processing of celluloid. So this terrible movie makes me long for



#### FROM TAIWAN (2)

#### MAZINGER Z

1973/1976, Toei, Created by Go Nagai, Chinese Language version, Reviewed by Frank Strom

I found this oddity on tape in a Chinatown video store. I rented it without really knowing exactly what it was -- The title on the box clearly read "Mazinger-Z", though the color art was of Mazinga Z's replacement hero, "Great Mazinger". Being a fan



of Go Nagai's mighty robot hero, I figured it would be worth checking out. Turned out that the tape didn't feature episodes of either Mazinger TV series, but rather two harder to come by animated theatrical shorts in crystal clear widescreen.

Both cartoons have fast pacing and dynamic visuals, capturing the look & feel of creator Go Nagai's comics in a way that recent efforts have miserably failed to do (check out the newer versions of **DEVILMAN**, **GEKKO KAMEN** and **GETTER ROBO GO** to see how to make an exciting artist look like a wet noodle). Johnny-come-lately anime-geeks (with no grasp of animation or design) fail to recognize the charm of 60s & 70s efforts, which have more visual credibility than the latest animated nerdfests like **AKIRA** or any of that made-for-video shit.

The first short is the introduction of Great Mazinger. Having defeated his archvillain Dr. Hell in the original TV series, Koji Kabuto (and his giant robot buddy Mazinger Z) faces a new alien menace and the usual army of monster-robots threatening to conquer Earth. Following a series of explosive robot battles (the likes of which

you don't see in these cartoons any more), Mazinger Z is totalled and then replaced by new robot superhero Great Mazinger (with a new pilot), who fends off the bad guys. Poor out-of-work hero Koji would have to settle for playing second banana in Nagai's later robot cartoon **GRANDIZER**. The second short teams Great Mazinger with Nagai's other robot heroes Getter Robot-G and Grandizer (as well as their respective pals & hangers-on) to battle a gigantic monster jellyfish that's terrorizing Japan. Again, lots of colorful & exciting action. The sheer number of rocket-fists, weapons & battle-cries involved makes your head feel like it's stuck in a pinball machine. \*\*\*1/2 -Frank Strom

#### FROM JAPAN:



#### IRON CHEF

Fuji TV, Friday, 11:00-11:50 P.M., Reviewed by John Emma

In the states, cooking shows generally feature a fag lush, or an obese woman wielding a meat cleaver, manically chopping fish or chickens. First class stuff, right? And we also have the Iron Man contest every year, if anyone gives a fuck. Well, the Japanese, with an uncanny sense of the bizarre, have combined these two ideas. Now, don't expect chefs pumping iron, or beefcakes making cheese-cakes. What you've got are three chefs at this cooking school (the iron chefs), each a specialist in some kind of cooking, and they are challenged weekly by a guest chef. He picks which Iron Chef he wants, and they have a cooking contest. Sounds dull, right? Nope. It's hilarious. First off, they are 'deadly' serious. They each have 60 minutes to cook something. But they don't know what, until the contest starts. This is high anxiety for Japanese, who don't like surprises. Now, the host of the show looks like a Japanese Liberace, and he springs the surprise food on the cooks, after an absurdly dramatic speech. The cooks have to use this surprise food in all of their cooking, even desert. (Ummmmm! Fish ice cream! Yummy!) Now a panel of guest glut-

tons judges this stuff, and you guessed it, the iron chef always wins. They also have on the spot reporters, instant replays, etc.

I'll mention highlights of two of my favorites. In one, the guest was a sword master, and he used two samurai swords for his cooking knives! I thought this one had potential, when he'd lost, he'd either commit seppuku, or slice up the other people around him, but no such luck. The funniest one features a challenge by a Buddhist monk. He challenged the French Iron Chef, and all they could use is vegetables. First, this poor addled priest is trying to figure out all the modern kitchen equipment...then, what plates to put it on. And the guest gluttons are gagging on this bland swill he cooked, and trying to be polite about his 'cuisine.'

Now, if this sounds boring to you, remember two things; Japanese TV is unbelievably dull, and this show is so serious, it becomes a total side splitter. I give it 5 stars! (A word of warning: If you are coming to live in Japan, and you like watching TV, don't bother coming. It's AWFUL!!!) Well, so long from the land of the samurai. \*\*\*\*\* -John Emma



THE MAZINGA'S





# HONG KONG HEROES



Well, on Oct. 27, 1994, I went to my first (and hopefully last) HK Film Festival in years.

Why did I waste a few hours of my life to head up to Berkeley's U.C. Theater, using incredible restraint not to spit on the maniacs & panhandlers? Well, the film festival (it was never really called that) actually showed something not available on videotape. But before going into this amusing event, let me just say that it was an irritating experience returning to my old hang out Berkeley, from many years ago, back when I was 100% liberal and even (gaspl) 'politically correct'! Plenty of hippies, yuppies, geeks, homos, art creeps and bums were there; same as always. But there seem to be no more punks, making me feel out of place. Many people there reek of pretentiousness, including, of course, the assholes who sit in the theater and still force out obviously fake laughs at scenes not meant to be funny. Regardless, the posers didn't detract from the fun of the screening, called "HK Swordplay Trailers", rare sneak previews from movies of the period 1967-1972. For nearly two intriguing, enjoyable (except for the fat snobs who consider themselves cool for laughing out loud) hours, we got to see vintage coming attractions (or rather, 'going attractions', today) from old, obscure movies like **WANDERING KNIGHT**, **BLADE SPARES NONE**, **ACE OF SWORDSMAN**, **FISTS FOR REVENGE**, **BEGGAR SWORDSMAN**, **THE EUNUCH** (actually a Korean film), **CHEATING TECHNIQUES**, **ZATO ICHI DIES**, **THE INVINCIBLE EIGHT**, **RINGING SWORD**, **THE VALIANT VILLAIN**, **LAST DAY OF HSIAN YANG**, **KILLER IN WHITE**, **CLAM FAIRY**, **FOUR MOODS**, **BLOODY DUEL**, **THE BOXER WHO KILLS**, **SON OF SWORDSMAN**, and of course, to satisfy the trendies, 1982's **ZU, WARRIORS OF THE MAGIC MOUNTAIN**.

The event was presented by Rolanda Chu and probably Grant Foerster of yet another HK fanzine, which I thought was originally called "Hong Kong Film Monthly". But I suppose they learned quickly that putting out even the smallest of newsletters each and every month is even more



Li Li Hua

difficult than retaining a hard-on while looking at Whoopie Goldberg. Last I heard, the new title of their little mag is **HONG KONG FILM MAGAZINE** (\$3.00 each) this week, and they're also offering a color-covered, thick magazine/book on Jackie Chan called **STAR PROFILE** (\$6.00), it's beautifully designed and has gold, raised lettering on the [full color] cover! At the time of this writing, there are two issues of their smaller fanzine, one focuses on Jackie Chan, and the other is on the many Wong Fei Hong films. So contact them, at: HKFM, 601 Van Ness Ave. #E3728, San Francisco, CA 94102. While not blazingly different than all the other carbon copy HK-zines popping out of the woodwork, HKFM gets my vote as one of the better ones. It's highly informative and too serious for my taste, but they manage to dig up a lot of info which is hard to come by!

Back to the event at the U.C. Theater, which Rolanda Chu herself hosted. Despite a lack of any classic Shaw Bros. & Chang Cheh trailers, this was an excellent look at productions by Golden Harvest, Cathay Studios, Great Wall, and independents who've long since disappeared. It

was a priceless, educational look at an area of Chinese film culture not available in any video stores. Most of the sword films look exactly the same as the mainstream Shaw stuff, and I learned that Tse Yin (see his biography in the previous OC) could do decent swordplay and had an English name, 'Patrick Tse Yin'! Even more amazing was that Shintaro Katsu was in a Chinese film called **ZATO ICHI DIES!** We all know of his teaming up with Jimmy Wang Yu in **ZATO ICHI MEETS THE ONEARMED SWORDSMAN**, but **ZATO ICHI DIES!**? Is there a definitive list of every Zato Ichi movie ever made?! Why does nobody seem to have, know about, or write about Zato Ichi's other, lesser known HK sword film?! I'm curious to know the whole story behind this, like did Katsu's popularity fade in Japan in the late 1960s? Is that why he did at least a couple HK films? What's the deal?

1960S

## THE GRAND SUBSTITUTION

Producer: Run Run Shaw, Photography: Yun Jan Sam, Sound: Wang Wing Hua, Asst. Dir.: Chen Yip Sun, Art Dir.: Chen Chi-Jui, Makeup: Fung Fun, Music: Ku Chia-Hwei, Screenplay: Chan Yip Sun, Film Editing: Chang Sing Loong, Dir.: Yen Chua, Cast: Li Li Hua, Hao Li, Ivy Ling Po, Tien Feng, Yen Chun, Reviewed by DF

Another early 1960s Shaw musical; if fact I suspect this costume drama to be even older than last issue's **LAST WOMAN OF SHANG** (Shaw Bros.; 1962)! Tien Feng cameos briefly as a ninja-like assassin, and actually looks only semi-old! Of course, I've never actually seen him looking young, but this movie has got to be one of his earlier appearances (unless of course, he was a star in 1950s films too). Today, assuming he's still alive, I bet he's so old that when he farts, dust comes out. Li Li Hua also stars, and her youth also makes me suspect this lyrical, lavish drama came out around 1960.

But despite the existence of swords and a scene of a woman's tongue cut out (no, you don't see it happen- just an off camera scream, then a shot of a soldier holding what's meant to be a severed tongue), this should not be confused with the slashing' heroes of Jimmy Wang Yu's post-1965 'prelude to kung fu' phase, instead this is another song-filled, talk-filled, bad subtitle-filled, boredom-filled soap opera. As a Shaw epic, there are, of course, pretty sets, nice photography and colorful costumes though.

Some politician called Duke Ling (or 'Duke King') has been corrupted by his successor, a cruel army general who likes to torture and kill, inbetween his enemies' song & dance numbers, of course. It makes you wonder just how effective a random song might be in such a setting. I mean, think of it, if the bad guys are coming after you, all you'd have to do is sing a song! That would delay them, and if they got in on the song, you could possibly escape while they're serving as backup chorus! Anyway, the Duke is just a whimpy figurehead, too submissive to object to the many killings caused by the soldiers. Hell, if peasants kept sing-



ing around me, I'd probably kill them too. Anyone thought to be unfaithful or out-of-key gets killed, including innocent babies (come to think of it, crying is as annoying as singing, especially if they sing like Jackie Chan)! Fortunately, Li Li Hua's baby, an inheritor to some political power (its father was a well respected minister), was substituted with a peasant baby or whatever. So this child (a prince or princess) grows up to become Ivy Ling Po. This is yet another stupid case of a woman playing a man, only this time, the character is meant to actually be a guy! Once he/she realizes the truth behind his/her father's death, she stabs the evil general and he croaks. 1/2-DF

## 1970S:

### SUPER MAN-CHU

A Golden Harvest Presentation, Music: Wang Chu Jen, Cameraman: Lin Chi Hsin, Sound: Wang Ping, Editors: Kuang Ching & Chang Yao Chung, Martial Arts Instructors: Wang Tai Lai & Lin Feng Chen, Screenplay: Hsiang Yang, Exec. Prod.: Yuan Yung An & Jen Chi Yung, An Action Film from Raymond Chow, Dir.: Wu Min Hsiung, Starring Chang Yi, Tien Mi & Pai Ying, Reviewed by DF

This near-flop should have been part of this issue's gangster section, since it's typical of 1970s gangster farces (extortion, gambling, bad kung fu, revenge, rapes, etc.), but because it's important historically, I thought it deserved a more indepth look, unfortunately for me. You see, this was one of the most hyped chop sockey theatrical releases in my area, back around 1972. Like FIVE FINGERS OF DEATH, it played locally in domestic theaters, and was even part of a contest/giveaway on TV. Though it was well over 20 years ago, I vaguely remember then popular horror movie host Bob Wilkins offering previews on his "Creature Features" show. They had a 'Godzilla Quiz', of all things, and whoever could answer all the questions correctly, would win a large movie release poster for SUPER MANCHU! I knew all the answers to each question (i.e. Real stumbers like "What American appeared in the first Godzilla movie?" "Did King Kong and Godzilla ever appear together?", and "What's the name of Godzilla's son?"), but being so young, I couldn't write! So I couldn't mail my answer in, and never won the poster. But I was very interested in seeing SUPER MANCHU, and now, about 25 years later, I've finally seen it.

Disappointed is an understatement, and I wonder if audiences felt ripped off in the theaters, if they were expecting another FIVE FINGERS OF

DEATH, or Bruce Lee. The movie poster advertised on TV, like the video box, is misleading, making it look like some modern, high-tech spy film, when in fact, it's just another typical chop schlocky romp set before the turn of the century.

The martial arts are rather below average, it's dull, and the production values are poor for a Golden Harvest film. Even the acting sucks; in one scene toward the end, when the coldblooded villains kill two helpless women, one lady manages to stumble her way to a couch to fall on, and that's after her death! The only actor I remember was Pai Ying, who pretty much steals the film as a Clint Eastwood-like drifter, and his fights are the best in SUPER MANCHU.

Hong Ching's (Chang Yi) family was killed by Li Da Yeh and his bandits, so our avenging hero gets out his throwing knives. But evil Li has not only henchmen, a pistol and a whip, but two Japanese friends with Chinese names. So Hong is far from successful in wiping out these baddies. So Pai Ying plays a government agent with skill in throwing coins, out to arrest the villain for being a mobster, running illegal gambling, prostitution, etc. At about the same time Pai Ying and Hong Ching finally team up to slaughter the mob, there's a unique twist: Henchmen revolt from the villain and attempt to become good guys! But they're all wiped out by



Jimmy Wang Yu

mountain. \*1/2 -DF

### A MAN CALLED TIGER

Presented by Raymond Chow, Music: Joseph Koo, Cinematography: Chen Ching-chueh, Martial Arts Instructor: Han Ying Chieh, A Golden Harvest Production, Dir.: Lo Wei, Edited for TV by Larry Benski, Cast: Wang Yu, Kawai Okada, Maria Yi, James Tien, Tien Feng/Fung, Lam Ching Ying, Reviewed by DF

Strangely, this movie didn't leave much of an impression on me back when I first videotaped it at 2:00 a.m. one night around 1982. Back then, my standards hadn't been lowered by seemingly endless movies about flying wire FX and an over abundance of trendy rags drooling over only the latest HK flicks. So now, in 1994, when every geek & his brother is suddenly an 'expert' on HK movie stars, I dig up this old classic! Something I taped well before the current plague of HK geeks would even consider watching a Chinese film! So A MAN CALLED TIGER is a good, honest, solid, back-to-basics movie with Jimmy Wang Yu! There are no flying

one of the Japanese, who displays nice kendo skills as he kills them all (these scenes look right out of a samurai film). But the climactic duel on the beach spells death for both the mobster and the samurai, and our two heroes walk off into the sunset. The sunset is blocked by a mountain, we don't actually see it; so I'm just assuming there's a sunset beyond the

scenes! No slow motion shoot-outs, No suspension wires! This is good honest kung fu, typically set in the modern 1970s (if such a thing exists)!

As always, Wang Yu gives it his all! While his kicks always lacked form, he was quite energetic & fast. In one scene, he actually kicks a villain in the head, full force & in slow motion; you know that had to hurt! James Tien appears too, briefly teaming up with the big Wang until his death near the end.

The script once again has Wang Yu pursuing bad guys in Japan. He gets involved with Yakuza mobsters, female singers in a nightclub, and a dragging casino sequence before the climactic onslaught. But before that, it's a classy crime drama, in one scene, he battles bad guys in a sky-tram, hundreds of feet above a lake, and later survives a very high jump down to the water below (it looks authentic, I don't think Wang Yu was doubled for!). All this plus exhilarating skirmishes makes this a high recommendation for action fans. \*\*\* -DF

### STONER

A Golden Harvest Film, Producer: Raymond Chow, Dir.: Huang Feng, Asst. Dir.: Wu Shin, Screenplay: Ni Kuan, Photographer: Li Yu-Tan, Editor: Chang Yao-Chun, Martial Arts Instructor: Chu Yuan Lun, Music: Tony Orchestra, & Li Shao Hu, Sound Effects: Wang Ping, Unit Manager: Kung Ching Hsian, Sets: Chen Chin Shan, Props: Huang Hsun Chan, Cast: George Lazenby, Angela Mao, Betty Ting Pei, Samo Hung, Koji Takagi, Chin Lu, Wang Ing Sik, Romano Lee Rose, Samuel Peake, Yang Wei, Sun Luan, Hung Shin Chung, Su Chiang, Yuen Wah, Running Time: 88 min., Reviewed by DF

When I first saw this uneven, HK/Australian co-production on TV about 15 years ago, I couldn't get through the whole thing. Either I hated it or fell asleep 30 minutes into the movie. Today I learned this is not a movie to be watched when censored! Much was cut from the TV print, including the gorgeous, bare breasts of blond bombshell Romano Lee Rose! So if you're interested in watching this odd, entertaining thriller, rent the uncut tape (it's available dubbed in English), don't waste time with an edited TV print which makes as much sense as a cookbook authored by Jeffrey Dahmer.

STONER is one fun film, it's nice to finally see a heroic caucasian (many years before Cynthia Rothrock) in a Hong Kongese film. I know little about George Lazenby, but from this film, I gather he's no kung fu master. His fighting is crude and far from graceful. Yet his two-fisted, down &



dirty barroom brawling approach to fighting is effective, all his fights (against dozens of henchmen including Yuen Wa and Samo Hung) are fast-paced and exciting, he definitely gives it his all, and the choreography is great. Speaking of great choreography, Angela Mao does her usual

superb job; unbelievably swift footwork and nice stunts.

But STONER is more than just a kung fu film (though the latter half has chop sockey inspired fights up the yin-yang), it also borders in the direction of being a spy caper (ala SUMMONS TO DEATH), with fancy

sets and weird gadgets. The way these genres inter-mingle (one minute 1930s-style HK racketeers are harassing the peasants, and in the next, high-tech, 007-style villains are plotting nefarious deeds at their futuristic arsenal) is awkward and uneven, but it's all pretty amusing. Continuity suf-

fers, entertainment value does not. Beautiful babe Melanie (Romanolee Rose) died of a drug overdose at some wacky, colorful church runned by a religious cult in Australia. So Detective Stoner (George Lazenby) sets out to find out where this lethal drug (a combination

# 張徹發揮驚人毅力 決定要拍100部電影完成志願

[Note: To close HK HEROES's 1960s section, an article on the man who, in the 1960s, made martial arts movies what they are today, Chang Cheh! The proceeding article was translated into English from CINEMART #270, July 1992. The film list consists mainly of Chinese titles, and includes their direct translation. Whenever possible, we've included the official English language release title too. But such info isn't easy to come by! However, I've been able to figure out the following: 1972's "Water Margin" came here as 7 BLOWS OF

THE DRAGON, 1975's "Shaolin Masters" is the same thing as our FIVE MASTERS OF DEATH, "Mark Polo" means "Marco Polo" or THE FOUR ASSASSINS as we know it, 1978's "Five Poisons" is obviously FIVE DEADLY VENOMS, and "Golden Arm Kid" is KID WITH THE GOLDEN ARMS. Hopefully the following translations will prove useful in laying down the groundwork for an official listing of all titles of Chang Cheh's many films, and that interested parties have at least this as research material to start with. -DF)

## CHANG CHEH IS DETERMINED TO FULLFILL HIS GOAL OF MAKING 100 MOVIES IN HIS LIFETIME

A man who suits his actions to the time is wise, a man who adapts to the changes is exceptional. Chang Cheh is such a man with the courage of the One-Armed Swordsman, and with an iron-will. It is HK's honor, to admire him for that.

Chang Cheh is coming to Taiwan again. This is good news. Although the members of the old Chang crew don't have their past glories anymore, and the students of Chang Cheh are dispersed elsewhere and only a few still support him in spirit, Chang Cheh is an important page in HK & Taiwan movie history.

Finally, Chang Cheh can come to Taiwan now with ban lifted. He has high hopes for future movie industries in Mainland China, HK and Taiwan. He sets a goal for making 100 movies, and we admire him for that. Cheng Cheh has made 96 movies so far. He's about to make his 97th movie. Chang Cheh is a living legend in movie history. He is the founder of the New Martial Arts movies. His student John Woo is a famous international director now.

This time Chang Cheh came to Taiwan, he was welcomed by old friends Li Hsing, Bai Jing-rui, Ding Shang Erh, and Sheng Jiang. He even shook hands with the head of the movie & news department, full of glory. Chang Cheh is a hero, a master, and a scholar in the Chinese movie industry. Although he used buckets of tomato juice for blood under camera, he is well cultured in literature, better than some great culture movie directors.

If Chang Cheh was not a professional director, he would be a great writer. He is good at calligraphy; he can write review articles; and he has written some movie reviews, screenplays and novels. He's very smart. Although Chang Cheh hasn't made any movies lately, his influence is still there. John Woo admitted openly that he changed Chang Cheh's martial arts movies by replacing swords with guns, and that produced A BETTER TOMORROW. Looking upon death as going home, doing anything for a friend: these are the main themes of the martial arts movies 20 years ago.





of heroine and aphrodisiac) came from. His hotheaded investigations lead him to HK, where a top secret organization of smugglers are manufacturing these "Happy Pills". Also on hand is a spy played by Angela Mao. Both our heroes eventually team up, against villains like Betty

Ting Pei, Wang Ing Sik, Koji Takagi, and even a young Sammo Hung, though called 'Hung Chin Pao' in the credits. The underground headquarters of the villains appears to be the same set that Bruce Lee fought Han's henchmen in (the underground scenes), in ENTER THE DRAGON!

No doubt Golden Harvest was once again interested in creating an international blockbuster. Well, they almost succeeded, since although the first 30 or 40 minutes are slow, the climax, where Mao and Lazenby beat up all the bad guys, more than makes up for it! \*\*\*\* -DF

## A GATHERING OF HEROES

Produced by Wong Cheuk Hon, Associate Producer: Luk Tsun, Prod. Manager: Chen Hsi Fan, Starring: Chen Sing, Shang Kwan Ling Fung, Yasuaki

Chang Cheh has many students, a lot of them do pretty well. But he has some regrets. His favorite student, Alexander Fu Sheng died at a young age. His movie company Chang Gong didn't do well. If he had some good financial, distribution & personnel managers, he would be the king of movies, and HK movie history would need to be rewritten. However, Sir Run Run Shaw is very nice to him. He had much glory past in Shaw Brothers' company, and his students are doing well. Chang Cheh definitely has a place in the movie history.

### CHANG CHEH PROFILE

Original name: Chang Yi Yang

Native place: Che Jiang Province, QinTian

Birth: 1923

Pen names: Ho Kuan, Sham Si

Early Career:

1945: He worked with Chang Dao-fan and director Fei Mu in Shanghai.

1947: He wrote scripts for Shanghai Kuo Tai and Tao Tung movie companies. The movies are: LOVE IN A WASTELAND, and FAKED FACE LADY, the first mainland China movie shot on location in Taiwan.

1949: He wrote STORM OVER MOUNTAIN A-LI, and directed it with Chang Ying. This is the first Mandarin movie made in Taiwan. He wrote the lyrics of the theme song, "Evergreen Mountains", which is still popular nowadays.

1950: Worked for Political departments, opera & play associations, movie



magazine distribution, & educational experience department.

1956: Worked as a screenplay writer again.

1957: Came to HK, and actress Lee Mui (aka 'Helen Lee Mei', see page 50 of OC's Godzilla Issue) invited him to direct the HK movie WILD FIRE, which bombed.

1958: He used pen name Ho Kuan when writing movie reviews. He also wrote novels. Used pen name Sham Si when writing articles for United Newspaper, and even wrote martial arts novels!

1960: He became a screenplay writer for HK Tian Yi movie company.

1962: Joined Shaw Brothers!

1963: Directed movie BUTTERFLY WHIP with Yuan Chiou Fung.

1964: Directed movie AVENGERS, and wrote numerous scripts.

1967: Directed ONE-ARMED SWORDSMAN, which broke \$1 million record for Shaw Brothers! He became the top director for sword action movies!

1970: He won the 16th Asian Pacific best director award for the gangster movie VENGEANCE, aka KUNG FU VENGEANCE.

1974: Because of some factors, he went to Taiwan. He started his own movie company, Chang Gong. He still made movies for Shaw

Bros. Because he didn't manage well financially, the company ended in 1976.

1976: He went back to HK and joined Shaw Bros. again as a director. He wrote the column 'Chang Cheh Thinking' for some newspaper. He made some martial arts movies. He wrote scripts with Ngai Hong, traveled with Louis Cha from Ming Pao, and got married.

### CHANG CHEH FILMOGRAPHY

#### 張徹資歷表

Screen Plays He wrote:

1947: 荒園艷跡 (Love in a Wasteland)

假面女郎 (Faked Face Lady)

1956: 永不分離 (Never Separate)

郎心狼心 (Man's Heart)

1961: 無語問蒼天 (Ask Heaven)

1963: 宋宮秘史 (The Secret History of Song dynasty)

1964: 雙鳳奇緣 The Female Prince

血濺牡丹紅 The Warlord and the Actress

魚美人 The Mermaid

鱷魚湖 (Crocodile Lake)

1965: 武松 (Wu Song)

1966: 女秀才 (Female Scholar)

怒海情深 (Angry Sea)

etc.

Movies He directed:

1949: 阿裡山風雲 (Storm Over Mountain A-Li)

(also write screenplay, direct with Chang Ying)

1957: 野火 (Wild Fire) (also write screenplay)

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Kurata, En Ying Fung (?), Eddie Ko (aka Kou Sheng), Reviewed by Damon Foster

Seeing A GATHERING OF HEROES again is like boning the first girlfriend I ever had (but safer!), because this oldie was one of the very first kung fu flicks I saw in a Chinatown theater back when I had at least a remote trace of youth. Back then, I was new to the wonderful world of Chinese movies, so A GATHERING OF HEROES seemed like an epic, action packed adventure! But now, having seen more kung fu movies than I can count (I quit counting after 752,000,000), it's no different; no better or worse than all the others from the early 1970s. The English dubbed tape includes a theatrical trailer which boasts, "A cast of Thousands Extra, Two years in the Mak-

ing, with a Cost of Multi Million Dollars". Needless to say, it fails to live up to that hype! The trailer also mentions some of Chen Xing's (that's how his last name is spelled in the preview, but it's 'Sing' in the movie itself) earlier movies (BLOODY FISTS, TOUGH GUY and THE RAGE OF WIND, also featuring Yasuaki Kurata) and that Shang Kuan Ling Fung was in the original DRAGON INN.

I'll be nice for once, and give this movie three whole stars. That's one star for Shang Kuan Lin Fung, one star for Chen Sing, and since neither Eddie Ko or Yasuaki Kurata is shown quite as much, the third is for both of them to share. Quit fighting over it, boys, there's plenty for both of you!

Eddie Ko (aka Kou Sheng) and Chen Sing as revolutionaries in WWII China, up against a corrupt military presence. Everyone, including female

Robinhood Shang Kuan Lin Fung, is after a treasure chest full of 'silver' coins. They're strange silver coins though, they're the color gold! Perhaps "silver" is an error of some colorblind dubber. Shang Kuan etc. uses her flying daggers (no, silly! They don't fly by themselves, she has to throw them!) to steal the chest from soldiers on a train, so later, villain Yasuaki Kurata (playing a Chinese villain this time!) kills her father. I should point out that all this is dull at first, even the first few kung fu skirmishes are rather slow. But by the middle of the movie, when Chen Sing, Eddie Ko & Shang etc. unite to keep the gold/silver from the soldiers, the battles improve significantly, punctuated by spaghetti western-ish music. Shang etc. guns down Kurata, and Chen Sing is released (I forgot to mention the soldiers locked him up! Ac-

tually, I didn't forget, I just didn't want to waste space telling you!) in time to discover Eddie Ko's greed made him turn evil. As he escapes with the loot all to himself, soldiers fill him full of lead. The joke is on him, the treasure is fake! Shang etc. and Chen Sing have the real thing on a small boat. \*\*\* -DF

## SHAOLIN CONSPIRACY

Exec. Prod.: Joseph Lai, Producers: Nu MU Fu & Tin Qui Wai, Dir.: Roc Tien, Asst. Dir.: Paul Ho, Pro. Mng.: Ma Tai Sun, Photography: Yo Kong, Lighting: See Chung, Titling: Chung Chuen, Sets & Props: Lee Pao Lin, Costumes: Kelly Lee, Music: Stanley Chow, Stunt Coordinator: Holly Man, Martial Arts Dir.: Roc Tien, Screenplay: Chu Hau Kum, English Ver.: Vaughn Savage, Released & Distributed thru Joseph

FOX

## CHANG CHEH FILMOGRAPHY cont.

- 1963: 蝴蝶杯 (Butterfly Cup)  
(also write screenplay, direct with Yuan Chiou Fung)
- 1964: 虎俠殲仇 (Avengers)
- 1966: 邊城三俠 The Magnificent Trio (also write screenplay)
- 1967: 斷腸劍 Trail of Broken Blade  
獨臂刀 The One-Armed Swordsman  
大刺客 The Assassin
- 1968: 金燕子 (Golden Swallow)
- 1969: 大盜歌王 (The King Singer of Thieves)  
獨臂刀王 Return of the One-Armed Swordsman  
飛刀手 (Flying Knife) (also write screenplay)  
死角 (Dead Corner)  
保鏢 (Body Guard)  
鐵手無情 (Iron Hand)
- 1970: 報仇 (Revenge) *Vengeance*  
十三太保 (Thirteen Fighters)  
游俠兒 (Wandering Swordsman)  
小煞星 (Little Daredevil)  
新獨臂刀 The New One-Armed Swordsman
- 1971: 雙俠 (Two Swordsman)  
水仙 (Narcissus)  
拳擊 (Boxing)  
無名英雄 (Hero With No Name)  
大決斗 (Duel)  
鷹王 (King of Hawks)
- 1972: 四騎士 (Four Cavaliers)  
仇連環 (Chain Avenges) (direct with Bao Xue Li)  
馬永貞 (Ma Wing Chen) (direct with others)  
快活林 (Happy Forest)  
群英會 (Heroes Meeting Together)  
水滸傳 (Water Margin) (direct with Bao Xue Li)  
惡客 (Evil Guest)
- 1973: 罪惡陷阱 (憤怒青年) (Evil Trap) (direct with Gui Zhi Hong)  
刺馬 (Spy)  
叛逆 (Rebel)  
警察 (Police) (direct with Cai Yang Ming)  
大海盜 (Pirates) (direct with others)  
大刀王五 (Big Knife Wang Wu) (direct with Bao Xue Li)  
蕩寇志 (Killing Enemy Story) (direct with Wu Ma)
- 1974: 五虎將 (Five Tiger Generals)  
朋友 (Friend)  
方世玉與洪熙官 (Fang Shi Yuk and Hung Hi Kuan)

- 少林子弟 (Shaolin Kids)  
哪吒 (Neh Za)  
洪拳與泳春 (Hung Boxing and Wing Chun)
- 1975: 少林五祖 (Five Shaolin Masters)  
八國聯軍 (Eight-Country United Army)  
紅孩兒 (Red Child)  
洪拳小子 (Hung Boxing Kid)  
逃亡 (Fugitive) (direct with Sun Zhong)  
第三類打鬥 (天上人間地獄) (The Third Kind Fight)  
馬可波羅 (Mark Bolo)
- 1976: 神拳三壯士 (Boxing Trio)  
八道樓子 (Eight-Gate Chamber)  
方世玉與胡惠乾 (Fang Shi Yuk and Hu Hui Gan)  
江湖漢子 (Gong Hu Men)  
傻小子 (蔡李佛小子) (Stupid Kid)  
少林寺 (Shaolin Temple)
- 1977: 唐人街小子 (Chinatown Kid)  
海軍突擊隊 (Navy Shock Brigade)  
南少林與北少林 (South Shaolin and North Shaolin)  
射雕英雄傳 (1-3) (Brave Archer) (Kung Fu Warlords)
- 1978: 生死門 (Live and Death Gates)  
五毒 (Five Poisons)  
殘缺 (Crippled Avengers)  
廣東十虎與後五虎 (Canton Ten Tigers and Later Five Tigers)  
金臂童 (Golden Arm Kid)
- 1979: 街市英雄 (Street Hero)  
賣命小子 (Hard Working Kid)  
亡命功夫 (Run Away Kung Fu)  
殺出地獄門 (Escaping From the Hell)  
雜技亡命隊 (Acrobatics Troupe)
- 1980: 少林與武當 (Shaolin and Wu Tang)  
鐵旗門 (Iron Flag Gate)  
大殺四方 (Killing Around)  
飛狐外傳 (The Young Flying Fox)  
俠客行 (Ode to Gallantry)
- 1981: 碧血劍 (The Sword Stained with Royal Blood)  
沖霄樓 (Cloud High Tower)  
叉手 (Akimbo Hands)
- 1982: 神雕俠侶 (The Giant Eagle with its Companion)  
etc.





Lai's IFD Films & Arts Ltd., Copyright 1985 Telefilm Co Inc. Fighting Fury Video. Cast: Roc Tien, Doris Chen, Tien Ho, Chung Hwa, Kim Kong, Ally Kow, Nance Yin, Clement Yok, Melissa Chuen, Wong Nap, Tin Yeh, Sze Chung Tin, Reviewed by Henry Gandalaria

I managed to find this costume drama called **SHAOLIN FOX CONSPIRACY** in the usual used bin which also by chance held a copy of **FIGHTING DUEL OF DEATH** (see the previous OC). S.F.C. was worth the six bucks I shelled out, but F.D.O.D. was something else. Both were quite interesting, but SFC was a period-type adventure way the hell better. Made by the king of chopsockey quickies Joseph Lai, me thinks the film's origin is mid-1970s to early 1980s.

I'll have to admit I've never seen any of these actors before, but still, the film does feature an interesting cast. Interestingly the actor who plays the hero, Roc Tien, also had a hand in directing and coordinating the fight scenes. Most of those fights were sword duels which dominated the movie too much and not enough fist fights.

On the production side, you got yer terrible dubbing and what I believe is a mis-translation because Roc's character calls one of the female actors a "Horrible nymphomaniac", that has got to be a dubbing fuck-up. As for the sets & props, pretty great looking fake forests & bushes, and sunsets- mostly painted sunsets! Plus your super neat-o-riffic gravity defying cable flying and fantastic, acrobatic stunts. All together it's a fun, fun fun flick if you're in the mood for outrageous kung fu fantasy & shit like that.

Angela Mao in **STONER**.

A police hunter called Liu Soo Fong (Roc Tien) aka Shaolin Flying Fox is searching for a killer & something called the 'purple jade badger' (a statue containing a kung fu magic potion). Using the name of a wellknown master, he infiltrates Chi Ha Villa where Master Luk keeps it hidden, other assassins want this P.J.B., even Heart Break clan Master Luk's rivals. Liu, during investigations, gets framed by Yu Long (HBS spy) who is married to the Yu Hong (Master Luk's daughter). Liu escapes and is pursued by the Chi He Clan and nearly dies. As the film continues, Liu stops an intentional rape scene, kills nearly every Heart Break Clan assassin, gets

poisoned and finally confronts the killer he's looking for. Now Wu Han is the killer and actually belongs to HB Clan, but still, the PJB can't be found until Kow follows Master Luk to his wife's tomb. That's where it's hidden and a duel starts between Master Luk & Kow for the PJB. By the time Liu, Yu Long (he turns good before the film ends) and Yu Hong get to the tomb, it's too late; Kow drank the PJB and is now a green skinned kung fu hulk! Yep, he's invincible, and the trio band together for a final duel. After everyone but Shaolin Fox gets beaten up, Liu leaps into the air, stabbing Kow Wu Han deep in his skull. Me also thinks they all died when the

film goes blank! \*\*\* -Henry Gandalaria

1980S:

## CITY COPS

Produced by Joe Siu, Dir.: Lar Kar Wing, Action Choreographed by Lar Kar Wing, Tsui Po Wah, & Hung Cheung Ta, Starring: Miu Kiu Wai, Shing Fui On, Cynthia Rothrock, Suki Kwan, Kent Tong & Michiko Nishiwaki, Reviewed by Frank Strom

Another of Cynthia Rothrock's mid-80s HK pictures. As always, the energetic Rothrock shows great star-quality and is in top fighting form.





And as usual, the film itself is suspect. Future generations of kung fu/action fans will remember Rothrock as a tremendous performer, but will have a hell of a time trying to point to any of her films as classic entries in the genre (with the exception of **RIGHTING WRONGS**). Certainly her HK efforts have been consistently superior to her US-bankrolled projects, but that isn't to say that they are consistently watchable.

There's nothing terribly original or unique here. Just another cops & robbers kung fu comedy (the 80s were an amazingly prolific decade for this genre) that can't compete with Sam Hung's efforts in the field. With the exception of two minor fights, the first half is plodding and I found myself stepping out for snacks a lot. But! The second half really kicks out the jams and is fast-paced with lots of exciting fights that showcase Rothrock's skills. If you can make it through the first half, the rest of it makes it worth your while. Michiko Nishiwaki is another great asset to the genre, though her career hasn't really gone anywhere and has only made a relatively small handful of films.

In this outing, Rothrock plays an American FBI agent on the trail of Kent Tong, who's fled the US with stolen microfilm containing incriminating evidence against an international gangster/crime lord. Tong lays low in HK, where Rothrock teams up with a pair of comedic cops (Miu Kiu Wai and Shing Fui On) to locate him. The American gangsters hire Japanese crooks to recover the microfilm. The cops tail Tong's sister (Suki Kwan), in hopes of getting a lead...In one painfully humorous sequence, Shing attempts a romantic interlude with Kwan, but the mood is broken when she gets a splinter in her finger. The others, listening in with a bug, think there's more going on ("It's sticking me. I feel painful."). After much

bumbling, the heroes and villain meet in a spectacular battle in (you guessed it!) an abandoned warehouse. Japanese bodybuilder/martial artist Michiko Nishiwaki (**MY LUCKY STARS**, **SPIELVAN**, **LICENSE TO STEAL**, etc.) faces off with Rothrock in the climactic duel. The good guys win, the bad guys lose, the end. \*\*1/2



Right: In Japan on the set of **BLACK CAT**.

**1990S:**

### SEX AND ZEN

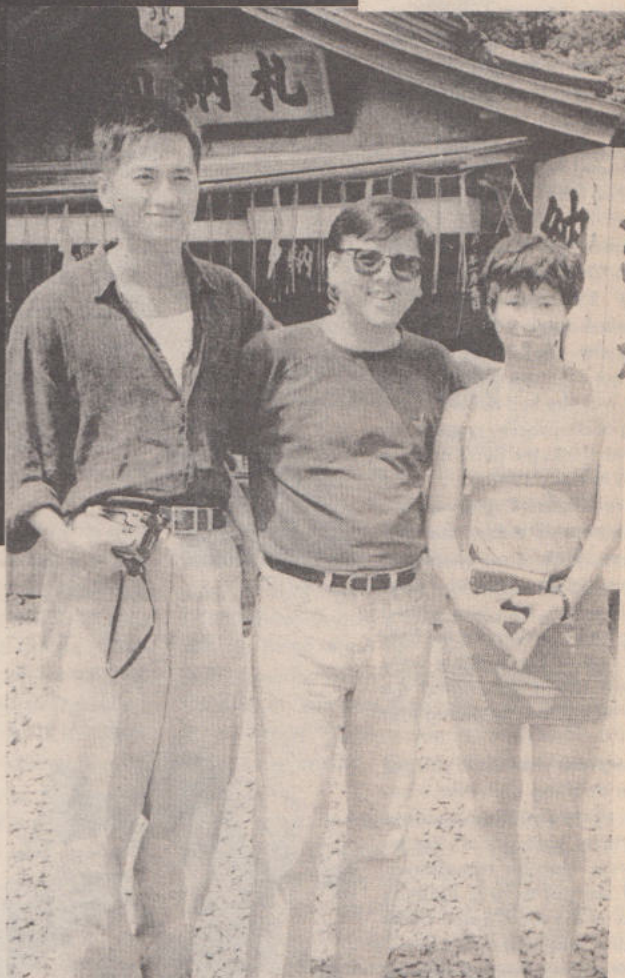
Golden Harvest/Johnny Mak Production; 1992, Dir.: Johnny Mak, Starring: Lawrence Ng, Amy Yip, Tien Feng, Lo Lih, Reviewed by Amy Harlib

This is a movie version of Li Yu's 17th century novel, "The Carnal Prayer Mat". It is an outrageously erotic comedy, set in the Yuan Dynasty (12-15th century, A.D.) with such anachronisms as nail polish and a miniature guillotine a doctor uses for precision amputations. The production is lush, full of gorgeous sets, costumes, music & cinematography to portray the really cute protagonist Mei Yang's (Lawrence Ng) quest for sexual excitement. The sex scenes are as explicit as anything ever shown in pornography filmed in duller, prosaic, modern surroundings! Always the

subtexts were clear: The cruelty to and oppression of women in the patriarchal system; the self-destructive underside of extreme machismo, and the absurdity of sex divorced from love and affection. Meanwhile, the actors gave incredibly believable and uninhibited performances as they enacted some eye-popping sexual gymnastics and ballets, especially Amy Yip (exquisite in what may be the most interesting and substantial role of her career) as the hero's lovely bride whom he erotically awakens and abandons. Veteran HK film buffs will be delighted to spot Lo Lih as the hero's mentor and Tien Feng as the hero's father-in-law. This production was really intelligent erotica as art as well as entertainment, a must see for the openminded and open hearted! \*\*\*\* -Amy Harlib

### LAUGHTER OF THE WATER

Left: Jade Leung



### MARGIN

Directed by some guy who doesn't understand comedy, Starring: Sam Hui, Terry Mo, Ricky Hui, & Ng Man Tat, Reviewed by Garo Nigoghossian  
Sam Hui has been in some great

movies but he hasn't been in one lately. Even though this movie sucks it still made a killing in HK. Since Sam Hui only makes one film a year, I guess everyone in HK must go see it even if it's as bad as this movie.

The first and only laughs come during the first five minutes of the movie as Sam Hui does drunken katas over the opening credits. After that there's not a laugh to be found. Sam Hui really needs a new agent. This movie strives for Steven Chow-type lunacy but doesn't even come close to the greatness that his films achieve. Sam Hui is also not as good a martial artist as he used to be so the few martial arts scenes are embarrassing.

This is all very unfunny and not even the usually reliant Ng Man Tat can help this mess. Unless you have no taste at all, avoid this movie.

Sam Hui is going into town to visit his brother (Ng Man Tat). Along the way he gets stinking drunk and passes out. He then awakes next to a dead tiger that had terrorized the town that his brother lives in. The town

people re-ward him by making him the sheriff. His brother isn't happy to see his brother because he and his wife (Terry Mo) are con artists and they're afraid that Sam will get in the way of their latest scam.

So they have to get rid of Sam or try to con him into helping them. 1/2 - Garo Nigoghossian

**黑猫 BLACK CAT**



A D&B Films from 1991, Executive Producer: Dickson Poon, Line Producer: Shan Tam, Suniny Chan, Produced & Directed by Stephen Shin, Canadian Crew: Assistant Coordinator: Freephy Pang, Asst. Dir.: Irene Lee, Props: Marie Ahle, Make-up Artist: Laverne Basham, Special Effects: Gary Paller, Stunt Double: Trish Schill, Starring: Jade Leung, Simon Yam, Thomas Lam, Michael Parker, Nancy Tong, Reviewed by DF

Though I never actually sat down and watched LA FEMME NIKITA all the way through, even to me, the similarities are obvious when watching BLACK CAT, which some call a remake, and others call a ripoff. I consider it the successor, at least this one has enough thrills. Lack of originality aside, it's a good movie, it maintained my interest throughout. Jade Leung is both sexy and talented, and the film's pace is fast enough to keep the most 'jaded' (pun intended) action fan on the edge of his or her seat. The fist-play is kind of weak (it's basic & brutal, and these fights are short & infrequent. BLACK CAT is not a martial arts movie), but there are some great chases and shoot-outs.

There are problems though. Some scenes are brutal, almost disturbing. The over all film is depressing, and makes me damn glad I'm not a hitman for the FBI. Again, all caucasians are treated as evil. Yet my complaints are minor, it's a classy, stylish film on the whole. A decent budget allowed for onlocation filming in not only HK, but Japan, New York, Canada and British Columbia.

Jade Leung as a troublemaker who gets in a fight with a horny truckdriver one fateful night, and accidentally shoots a cop. But the CIA (or whoever) is impressed at her ability to escape maximum security prisons and fire a gun, so eventually, her death is faked and she's given a new identity as Erica, a hitwoman. Her 'hits' are effective, but I'd have liked to know who she's killing. She kills the young bride at a Jewish wedding, and some guy in Japan, probably a yakuza. Her boss is played by Simon Yam, added to the film so they could have Chinese language spoken in the many scenes set in English-language countries (at least in this one, Americans speak English). But Yam disap-

proves of her nosey new boyfriend because he's too curious about her top secret profession. So Simon Yam demands he be shot dead. Erica shoots him and they leave with her crying, but we're lead to believe the guy actually survives the shooting. \*\*\* -DF

## 黑猫 II BLACK CAT 2: ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT YELTSIN

Presented by D&B Films in 1992, Executive Producer: Dickson Poon,

the first one was more of a far-fetched crime drama, this thrilling adventure goes even further over the top and is more of a James Bondian spy thriller!

So yes, I really think BLACK CAT 2 (oops! I mean "BLACK CAT II", but I think roman numerals are stupid, making it look like "Black Cat Eleven") is an entertaining movie. I could do without some of the ridiculous wire FX & ridiculous leaps, but at least it's not overdone like in so many costume dramas these days. My only other minor complaint (aside from it's being even more depressing & downbeat than the first) is that parts of it get needlessly complex for my limited

himself to apply for the role playing Yeltsin). During the proceedings, there are the usual shoot-outs, explosions, a gripping kung fu vs. shovels fight in a factory, and a couple chases: The obligatory car chase through a city, and a thrilling, stuntfilled chase in the snow! The whole movie is set in the USA and Russia, where, as you know, everyone speaks fluent Chinese, their native language. But eventually, Erica sort of regains her senses when she and Robin develop a mutual interest which doesn't last long. She's badly wounded (as always) in a duel with a blond Schwartzeneger type (who works out in an abandoned

nuclear-reactor, no less!) with lethal secret agent gadgets. Despite his build and high-tech weapons, he gets slaughtered in machinegun fire supplied by a platoon of soldiers. \*\*\*1/2 -DF

## WING CHUN

Produced and Dir. by Yuen Ho-Ping, Starring: Michelle Yeoh/Kahn, Cory Yuen, Catherine Hung, Waise Lee, Reviewed by Amy Harlib

## WING CHUN

stars Michelle Kahn (aka Michelle Yeoh and Michelle King) in the main role with Cory Yuen as the #1 villain. This is a martial arts comedy version of the life of the woman who's credited with creating the famous martial arts style (in the 18th century) that bears her name. There's a [probably not very historically accurate] plot that features a complicated web of mistaken iden-

titles and gags arising from same and from issues of gender relationships. Co-starring the very talented Catherine Hung, Waise Lee, Yuen King Tang & Donnie Yen, the film is great fun and usually stunning with scenic vistas that looked like Mainland China, spectacular regional southern costumes, excellent music and most importantly, glorious martial arts full of intricate, balletic, choreographed action nobody does better than the Chinese (the Yuen family being exemplars of these skills). Typically, some of the fight scenes were 'enhanced' by outrageous and-gravity SPFX &/or the film was speeded up. Still, WING CHUN is a must-see, for Michelle Yeoh/Kahn's marvelous amazon performance and good clean mayhem where the villains get beaten



THE GODS  
MUST BE  
REALLY  
FUNNY  
IN CHINA

Screenplay: James Fung, Sun Xam Ching, Ivy Lee, Original Music: Chris Babida, Editing: Wong Wing Min & Lee Yan Ho, Starring: Jade Leung, Robin Shou, Marc Akerstream, Gary Paller, Tom Felcan, Greg Middleton, Mike Bowen, Paul Bougie, Reviewed by DF

In all honesty, I can't decide which one is better, I think this and the original BLACK CAT are about even. But since most people have said the first one is far superior (for whatever reason) to the first, I'll prefer part two, just to be in the minority for the jillionth time! So let me put it this way: This ass-kicking sequel is an all-out, action packed adventure which really blows away the first one! Where as

attention-span, but it never gets dull.

It's guns & gore again, as Erica (Jade Leung) gets brainwashed by the CIA again, in order to protect President Yeltsin on an American tour. This time, it seems she wasn't allowed to fully recover from the grueling therapy she's submitted to at the film's opening, so she frequently goes out of control (and in one effectively brutal scene, she guns down some innocent old lady in a mall). Fortunately, she gets by with a little help from Detective Robin (Robin Shou), who, along with other cops & agents, is seeking out the assassins intent on killing Yeltsin (the actor playing him looks so much like the real thing that I thought it was actual News footage! Awe hell, with Russia's economy being so bad, I'd have expected Yeltsin



and not killed (blood & guts nearly absent) and the audience gets beautiful, bellicose thrills! \*\*\* -Amy Harlib

## KUNG FU CULT MASTER

Directed by Wong Jing, Action Director: Samo Hung, Cast: Jet Li, Samo Hung, Chingmy Yau Shuk Ching, Cheung Man, Leung Kar Yan & Richard Ng, Reviewed by Garo Nigoghossian

A box office bomb released in HK, it's not as bad or good as you'd think it would be. As a Jet Li movie it's okay. It's not half as good as **TAI CHI MASTER**, but it's better than **ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA 3**. The main problem with this movie is that we're just getting the mid-section of a very long and complicated story. I don't see why they didn't shoot this as a trilogy.

The story is one of those Tsui Hark-type movies where there are so many sects searching for a scroll or sword. But the movie throws a curve by setting up a revenge scenario but then goes nowhere with it. The one thing I can say about this movie is that it isn't boring. There is so much going on that if you blink, you might just miss something. In fact, I had to see this movie a second time just to absorb everything in it.

Jet plays Cheung Mo-Kei. When Mo-Kei is hit by the Jinx palm at an early age he is unable to practice martial arts. But through a series of events that would take too long to describe, Mo-Kei ends up mastering two supreme martial styles. The Great Solar Stance and some other stance that I forget. /Let me guess; the "Flying up into the Tree While Spinning like a Yoyo and causing an Unexplained Explosion for no Reason Stance", maybe? -DF/ It all ends very confusing with Mo-Kei defeating some minor villains with the help of Samo Hung's Tai Chi. \*\*1/2 -Garo Nigoghossian

## THE GODS MUST BE REALLY FUNNY IN CHINA

{or more likely, "The Gods Must be Really Crazy In China", whatever, I don't care} Produced by: people, Directed by: person, Starring Kent Cheng and Nixau, Reviewed by Damon Foster

**THE GODS MUST BE CRAZY** must have been a big hit in HK, because that same Bushman-turned-comedian, Nixau is back in this stupid movie, which I'd hoped would be a sequel to his HK debut **CRAZY SAFARI** (Golden Harvest; 1992). But nope, this inferior flick lacks the fun of that classic comedy, reviewed in OC#14. If all his new films suck as bad as this one, he'd be better off

hunting elephants, moving back to African deserts and staying as far from inept movie makers as possible. But the dancing bears, cute circus dogs and a kung fu chimpanzee are nowhere near as bad as Nixau's dubbed voice! Whatever happened to that distinctive Bushman language with all the 'clicks'? He's dubbed by a Chinese guy, mostly in bad English. Yet the dubber obviously has no grasp of the English language. Worse yet, the dubber has a thick Chinese accent, and is trying to have an African accent. Not only is he unintelligible, but the voice is inappropriate, it's for a much younger guy.

There's a 3 in this farce's Chinese title. If there were two prequels, I haven't seen them, and have no particular desire to do so. But maybe part 2 is **CRAZY SAFARI**, and part 1 is considered **GODS MUST BE CRAZY**? Then where would **GODS MUST BE CRAZY II** fit into all this? I don't know, and I won't waste a second more of my life trying to figure it out.

If nothing else, the story has heart and is entertaining. But the endless, over-the-top slapstick really gets annoying. The infantile humor isn't funny, it borders between stupid and silly. This dumb saga has that African bushman running around Beijing carrying a huge coke bottle (why is never explained). He enters some cross-country foot race, where he and other runners befriend forest animals and Chinese natives. The animals are an odd assortment which includes tigers & pandas, but also species that I wasn't aware hung out in forests near China's Great Wall; elephants, talking chimpanzees, and cleanly groomed poodles; obviously show dogs. Anyway, some hunters disguise themselves as Arabs (don't ask me why, no clue!) and try to capture a panda bear. Our heroes don't approve, which at least allows for a few impressive kung fu kicks. But it's mostly bad comedy and endless chases through the forests. \* -DF

## BEWITCHED AREA OF 1000 YEARS

1990, Produced by: people, Directed by: person, in other words, no credits available, but Reviewed by Michael Dugge

There's lots of nudity and gore in this recommended 'trash' classic. I bought it at a convention solely because of its cool box art. I'm glad I did.

A Chinese guy with real long hair is cursed by a cobra and becomes an ugly puss-faced cannibal with snake heads for hands. He attacks young horny couples who always seem to wander into the bewitched area. In

one hilarious scene when the police are closing in on the snake-guy, he slither-slides quickly across the forest floor. \*\*\* -Michael Dugge

## SEMI-GODS AND SEMI-DEVILS

A Win's Movie Production from 1994, Released on video by Tai Seng Video Marketing, Dir.: Chin Wing Heung, Starring: Brigitte Lam (aka Bridgette/Brigitte Lin), Cheung Man, Gong Li, Reviewed by Doug Weldy

The first time I saw this film was at a Hong Kong Cinema festival with another Brigitte Lin film, **THE BRIDE WITH WHITE HAIR**, which was not as good. As I stood in line I noticed everyone was a college geeky type and hoped to God that people passing by didn't think my partner and I fit in with the crowd. When I decided to review this movie, I rented it from a Chinese video store and it came on two tapes, costing me the price of two movies. /DF here, don't you hate when them greedy bastards do that?! It used to only be done when the movie was a full two minutes too long to fit on one tape, but now, it's being done more and more, for no logical reason than to get more money out of us. Yet many of these HK tapes also have plenty of commercials before the film itself! -DF/ The lady at the store said the distributors package them that way, what a bunch of greedy pricks.

I'm not sure where the movie takes place, but it's one of those fantasy-lands where everyone flies and there are lots of rocky mountains, caves, and palaces. As with most movies of this type, the story gets confusing at times, but part of watching these kind of films is trying to figure out who is who and what the hell is going on.

There's some cool battle sequences with limbs and heads flying (is a head considered a limb?) and blood spurting, including one humorous scene where Purple tricks a fellow sect member into chopping off his own leg. Great fun! I thought the special effects were above average (I only noticed suspension wires once) and most of the sets were pretty cool looking, although one scene at the beginning reminded me of the indoor sets used in old Shaw Brothers pics. As a whole, I liked this movie. It's much better than other fantasy films I've seen (**SAGA OF THE PHOENIX**, **ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA**'s, etc.). I give it zero snores.

Anyway, the film is about the Tin San Sect, who's senior or leader (named Siu Yiu-Tze) is poisoned. Different members of the sect battle each other for possession of Yiu-tze's powers. It's sect against sect, monks

against monks, sect junior against sect junior, basically everyone seems to be against everyone. Brigitte Lin/Lam plays dual roles as junior sect members Li Chou-shui and Li Chong-hoi who are twin sisters. Chong-hoi lives with Yiu-tze and Chou-shio has an implied lesbian relationship with another junior sect member named Mo Han-wan. The three of them fight against each other and with each other, adding to the confusion. There's also a girl named Purple who is an elite member of the Sing Suk Sect, who my elite member would like to meet. Half the time, she appears to be afraid of everyone and the other half she wants to be the leader, talk about being undecided. Another main character is Hui-chok, a monk who gains various powers over the course of the film, but never really gets to use them to their full effect. \*\*\* 1/2 -Doug Weldy

## HAIL THE JUDGE

Directed by Wong Jing, Starring: Steven Chow Sing Chi, Ng Man Dat, Cheung Man, Lawrence Ng, Christy Chung, and Turtle Wong, Reviewed by Garo Nigoghossian

Steven Chow has done it again! His second movie this year manages to surpass his excellent **LOVE ON DELIVERY**. Steven Chow has just released a new movie which is a spoof of James Bond movies called **FROM CHINA WITH LOVE**. If you're a Steven Chow fan then **HAIL THE JUDGE** was made for you. The movie concentrates on his smart-ass persona so you can guarantee that you will be laughing like a mental patient before the movie is over.

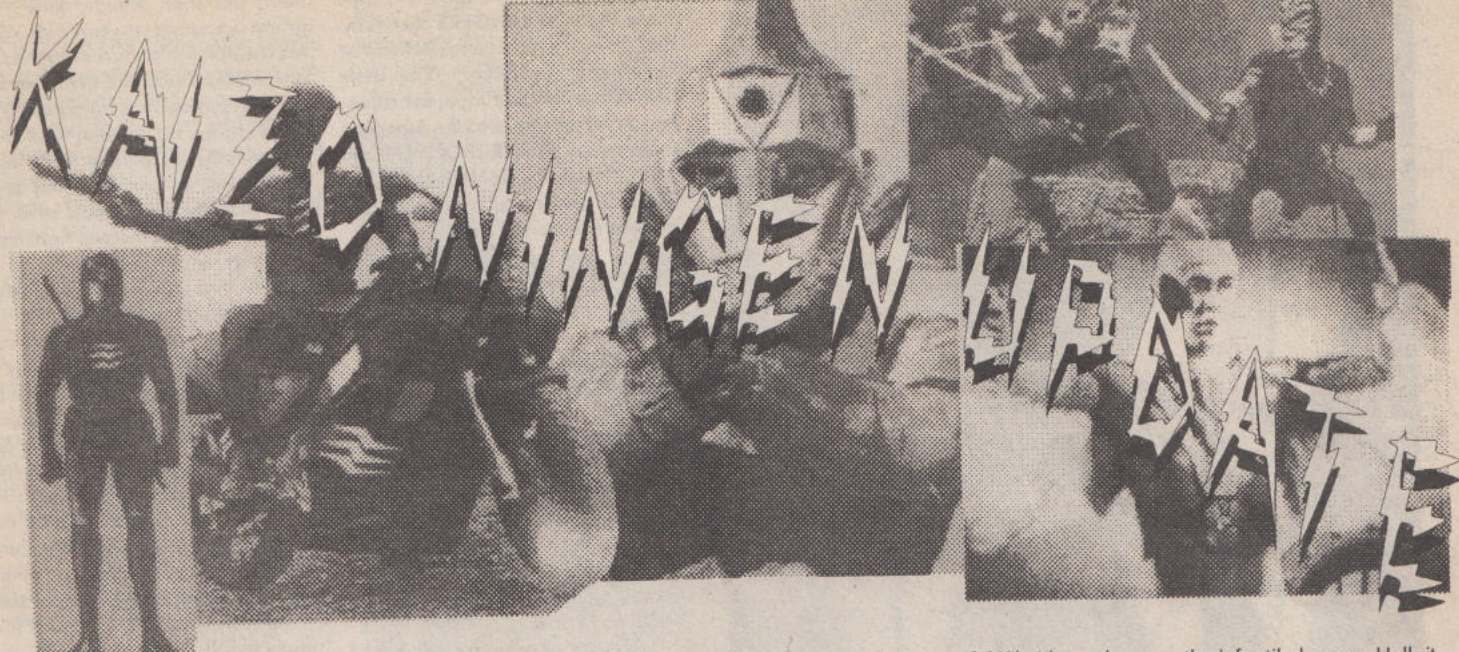
This movie is pretty much non-stop hilarity and a must for all Steve Chow fans. Let's face it, Steven Chow has been putting out better movies than Jackie Chan and Chow Yun Fat lately. He has charisma and timing that most people would kill for. If you haven't yet experienced a Steven Chow movie, then go see one right now. He's the new king of HK cinema.

Steven plays Judge Pao, a corrupt judge who all the townspeople hate. Then one day Pao sees a case of such injustice that he has to be fair. Unfortunately the people around him frame him. So he goes on the run. He ends up working at a brothel and learns how to be a smartass from the madame of the brothel. He then takes his new skill back to the courtroom to clear his name and to judge the previous case fairly. \*\*\*\*\* -Garo Nigoghossian

## THE GREAT CONQUEROR'S CONCUBINE

(1994), Exec. Prod.: Zhang Yi-Mou,





This here intro for "Kaizo Ningen Update", OC's continuing (not to mention groundbreaking and ahead of its time) probe into Japanese superheroes, is being written during my 1994 vacation, on location at Waikiki Beach, at Honolulu, Oahu. As a vacation spot for tourists, horny yuppies, and braindead surfers, Hawaii is definitely all it's cracked up to be;

beaches, jungles, and mega breasted babes all ready to dress up as slutty & sleazy as possible (so long as we heterosexual males don't actually look at them! Got it?! Again, they struggle to squeeze into the sleaziest, skimpiest, tightest outfits there are-

but as they bounce down the beach or street, to look at them is sexual harassment! So eliminate your heterosexual male instincts, dudes!). As an animal lover and/or ecologist, I enjoyed scuba diving to feed exotic fish by hand, and other 'get back to nature' stuff too, like swimming under a waterfall at a tropical rain forest! Cultural events

about the Polynesians (indigenous tribes of natives who originally inhabited places like Hawaii, New Zealand, Easter Island, & Tahiti) offered historical intrigue. However, there's something sadly lacking in Hawaii.....

Superheroes! Trying to find Japanese superheroes in Hawaii is like trying to find pork chops at an Islamic picnic. This is surprising, since 74%

of the people I've encountered in Waikiki are Japanese. Japanese tourists are naturally more interested in nostalgic icons of pop culture from America; shit like The Flintstones, Betty Boop, Warner Bros. cartoons, Muppets, Elvis, etc. Not a single Kamen Rider or Ultraman

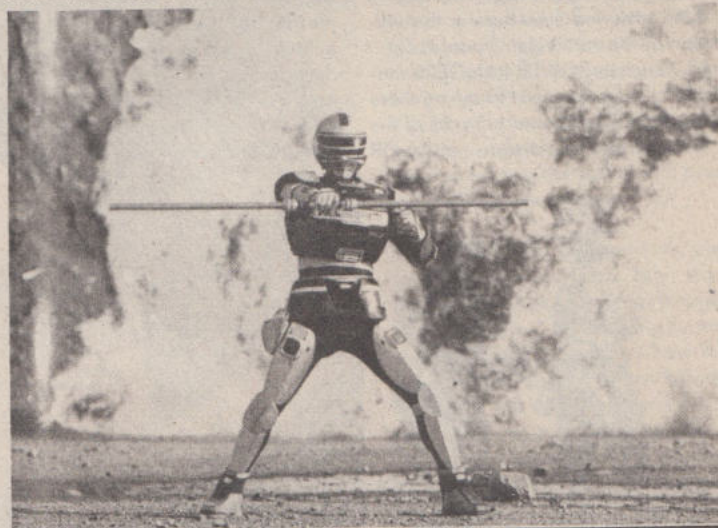
item! Japanese writing in stores & restaurants is common place, but the good old days (the 1970s, when Japanese heroes were supposedly all the rave in Hawaii, thanks to successful broadcasts of KIKAIDA, ULTRASEVEN, RAINBOWMAN, KAMEN RIDER V3, and AKUMAIZER 3!) are long gone. Not so much as a

lingering trace of a successful Kikaida stage show (yes, they had those here too!), or any other superheroes of yesteryear. It's sad that, although old traditions are respected, there's virtually no exposure to foreign pop culture in Hawaii. In this way, Hawaii's cities seem absolutely no different than the mainland (the only noticeable difference is there are endless

down on the infantile humor. Hell, it airs in my neighborhood at 5:00 PM, a slot which also showed STAR TREK at one point! BEVERLYHILLS 90210 airs immediately after VR TROOPERS (same station, even), which is appropriate. Both programs have basically the same types of characters, the major difference being that VR TROOPERS's budget goes to an



Metalder



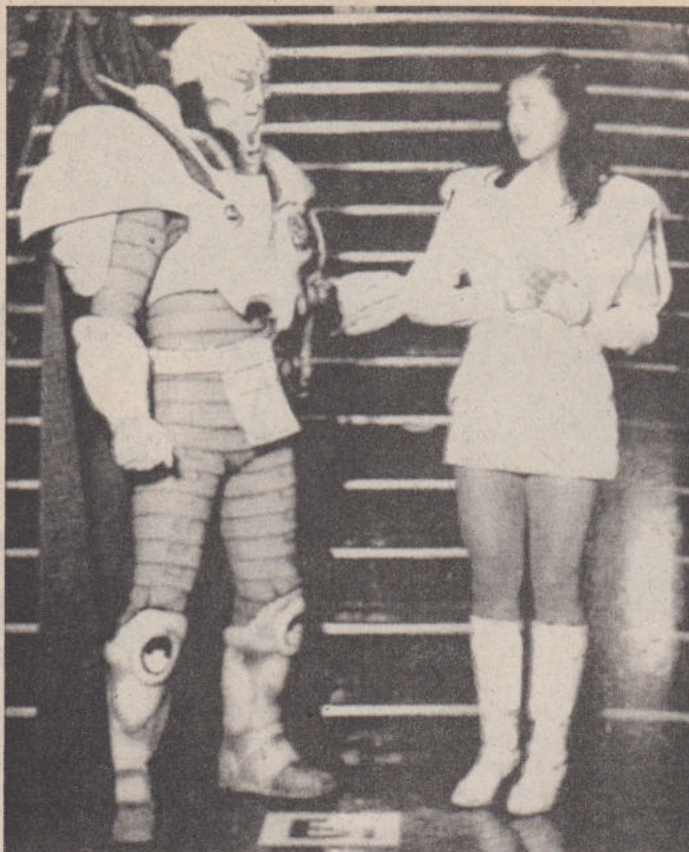
Spielvan and an evil monster exploding.

palm trees, intentionally planted to remind tourists they're at Hawaii, not New York or Idaho).

In other depressing news, have you scoffed at this Fall's new American/Japanese hybrids, of the same deceitful tradition as MIGHTY MORPHIN' POWER RANGERS? The two new deviously edited programs this fall sort of sandwich POWER RANGERS in the middle, quality-wise. VR TROOPERS (Saban Entertainment; 1994) gets my vote as the best of the three, for its 'serious sci-fi' aspects & honorable attempt to cut

abundance of excellent special effects, while BEVERLYHILLS 90210's budget is wasted on actors who are spoiled, overpaid no-talents. Going back down to the unbelievably childish level is SUPERHUMAN SAMURAI SYBER SQUAD (Dic & Tsuburaya; 1994), bewilderingly stupid even in its original Japanese version (GRIDMAN; 1992). A fierce ratings war pits POWER RANGERS against SAMURAI SQUAD (they both air at 4:30 p.m. here, at the time of this typing & groaning). But VR TROOPERS comes on immediately





afterwards, making me suspect Saban didn't want both of their programs to compete with each other. Anyway, enough on these programs, they're both reviewed elsewhere in this edition of "Kaizo Ningen Update".

Back to **POWER RANGERS** mania! I've gotten used to seeing these characters be such a big part of the American mainstream. It's still

strange though, as I've been into these characters (under other titles like **GORANGERS**, **SUN VULCAN**, **BIOMAN**, etc.) for twenty years, and during that twenty years, they were entirely unknown and obscure. For decades I'd buy any and all material on these 'Sentai Rangers' until now, when I can't keep up. Used to be that OC was the only way many read-

ers could see such characters, and my god, have times changed! There's more **POWER RANGERS** merchandise than I'd ever seen for Batman or Superman. The future will be quite interesting, now that Japanese superheroes have conquered the American mainstream. Will **VR TROOPERS** and **SUPERHUMAN SAMURAI SYBER SQUAD** become as over rated and plentiful? Time will tell.

## 超人機メタルダー 時空戦士スピルバン

### V.R. TROOPERS

Producer: Robert Hughes, Supervising Prod.: Tony Oliver, Co-Producer: Ellen Levy-Sarnoff, Starring: Brad Hawkins as Ryan, Sarah Brown as Kaitlin, Michael Jacob as JR, Gardner Baldwin as Ziktor/Grimlord, Richard Ragabo as Tao, annoying Michael Sorich as Woody (who ruins the show), Julian Combs as Professor Hart, Reviewed by Damon Foster

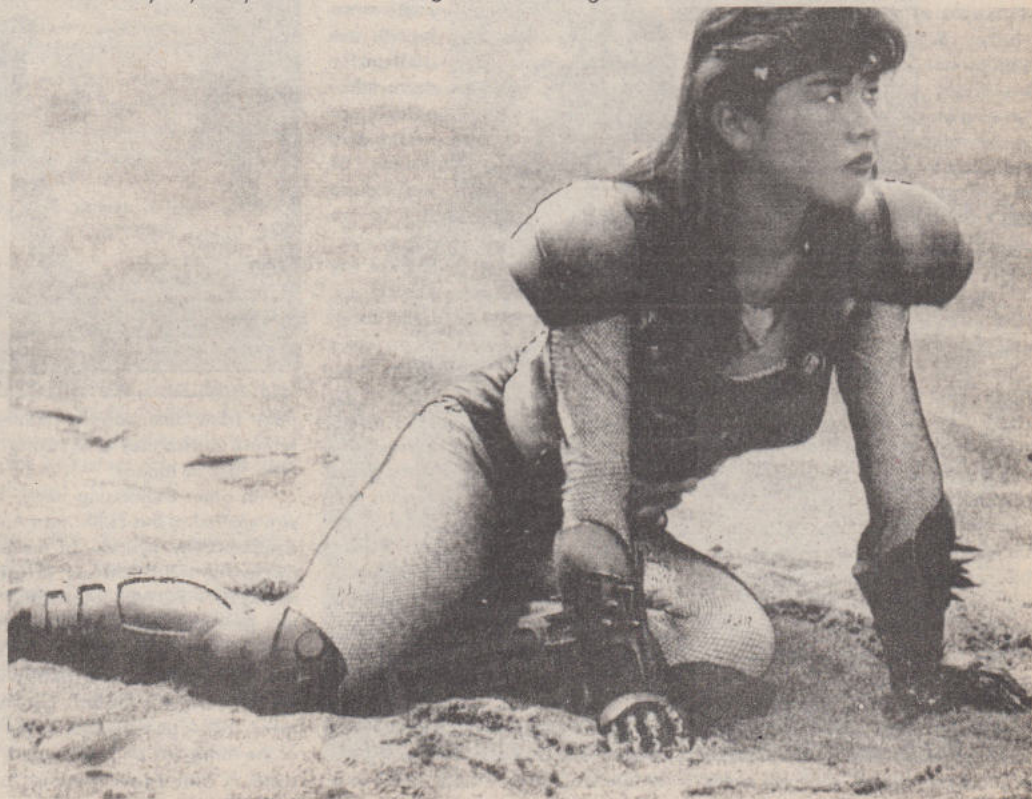
Here we go with another hybrid series. Saban Entertainment, the masters of superhero superseding, bring us their second American/Japanese chop-fest, only this time, U.S. shot footage intermingles with not one, but two older Japanese programs from Toei: 1986's **SPIELVAN** (see OC#'s 10, 14, & 17), and 1987's **METALDER** (see OC#'s 12, 14 & 17). It's rather strange to see both Japanese heroes, Metalder and Spielvan (given new names in the English version) sharing space together, since **METALDER** originally replaced **SPIELVAN** during their Japanese runs! Even though dubbed in English and

heavily edited, the excitement still holds up, even though these programs are nearly ten years old! While **METALDER** was okay, I was never really impressed by **SPIELVAN** (or any post-1983 programs from Japan), so I don't give a damn what the American releasers do to them. How many of you kiddies watching this show have actually noticed you never really see all three heroes fighting in the exact same shot? It should be obvious that they were never meant to be fighting the same villains, and the poor American replacement costumes do little to add continuity or patch up the rough edges. While the American made Metaldar mask is passable (though a little smaller and less shiny), the new Spielvan helmet is pathetic compared to its glossy, Japanese counterpart! Who do they think they're fooling? If anything, they'll confuse some people, wondering if there are three heroes or six!

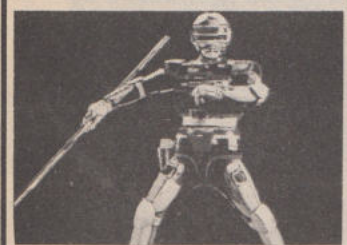
But despite **VR TROOPERS**'s many flaws, I consider it the successor to **SPIELVAN**, and as good as **METALDER**. In the mid-1980s, censorship in Japan put a limit on how much martial arts could appear on Japanese TV, where as American kiddie TV was dull for way too long; so our twerps are ready for lotsa' kicks and flips, the likes of which Japan's brats ain't seen since 1982! The henchmen androids from **SPIELVAN** were originally such whimps, they were weak and sounded like a rapping Woody Woodpecker with hiccups. Now these same android pilots have been reincarnated as 'Scugs', and are capable of doing



Top left: Beautiful Naomi Morinaga, an original cast member in **SPIELVAN**, but edited out of Saban's version. Above and right: This heroine is 'Madonna', one of the numerous **METALDER** characters removed from **V.R. TROOPERS**.







Above: Spielvan's climatic death blow. Below: Cast of characters of Toei's original **SPIELVAN** who didn't survive the English adaptation **V.R. TROOPERS**.



superb martial arts and stuntwork! Hard to believe that characters originally played by J.A.C. members look so much stronger, limber & energetic when portrayed by Hollywood stuntmen! Hell, even their costumes are completely identical to those in the Japanese original.

Of the three bastardized (**POWER RANGERS**, **SUPERHUMAN SAMURAI SYBER SQUAD** and this one) programs, **VR TROOPERS** is the most intelligent & seriously written. At least in my area, it's considered decent

enough to air at 5 P.M., a timeslot previously had by **STAR TREK**! So at times, it comes off as serious fiction and adventure. I hear that kiddies are dismissing **V.R. TROOPERS** as "just okay", and that more adults are getting into it! There's far less corny humor than the other two, and it's nowhere near as embarrassing. Ryan (Brad Hawkins), who becomes what the Japanese called Metalder, is a cool character who wears a leather jacket and rides a motorcycle. He's still a little too goody-two-shoes, but a lot cooler than the geeks of **POWER RANGERS**. Even **VR TROOPERS**'s token black, J.B. (Michael Bacon), aka **SPIELVAN**, is a serious, no-nonsense character who'd never make an ass of himself doing typically stupid "Black Ranger" stuff like breakdancing in the middle of a fight! The obligatory sexy female is a photographer/reporter called Kaitlin (Sarah Brown), she's quite a looker, and without the airheaded valleygirl personality Amy Jo Johnson got stuck playing in

**POWER RANGERS**. All three actors in **VR TROOPERS** are great martial artists, I think it makes these the best fights in an American series since **THE GREEN HORNET**!

Interesting to note that our three heroes have an alternate costumed/hero form, for when they go into "Battle Grid Mode"! Though these scenes don't happen in every episode, they're my favorite scenes in the show! Not only are there costumed heroes fighting henchmen Scugs, but entirely new, all-American costumes and footage! These three new designs were never in any Japanese series, they're domestic products made for the show! While the costumes themselves aren't as cool as the Japanese ones, and

tend to look like cheaper **Power Rangers**, these scenes prove the Americans are catching on! As always for a Saban show, the martial arts and acrobatics are great, the only things lacking are the obviously superior Japanese effects. The set of this 'alternate dimension' looks like a set, like a disguised stage. I hope in the future, Saban can liberate itself from rehashed Japanese footage and do more of their own stuff like this, by scratch!

Storywise, Gardner Baldwin replaces Hirosuke Kayama as the new greedy, corrupt businessman (Mr. Ziktor) who's also surrounded by beautiful women and he can change into a monstrous leader in an alternate dimension. Only this time, the henchwoman look like Robert Plant's backup musicians and become Scugs. When in his monster form, he's called Grimlord (real name: 'God Nelos'). He commands all these different monsters, mutants, robots, etc., who are very very very destructive. But there won't be any explosions, chases, laser beams, karate, stunts, acrobatics, gun-play or

missiles unless we have a team of semi-Japanese heroes to fight them, right?! So young adults Ryan, J.B., and Kaitlin do just that, become superheroes! After all, JB knows all about high-tech things like computers, and all three have black belts in karate, thanks to disciplining at Tao's (Richard Rabago) Dojo! An-

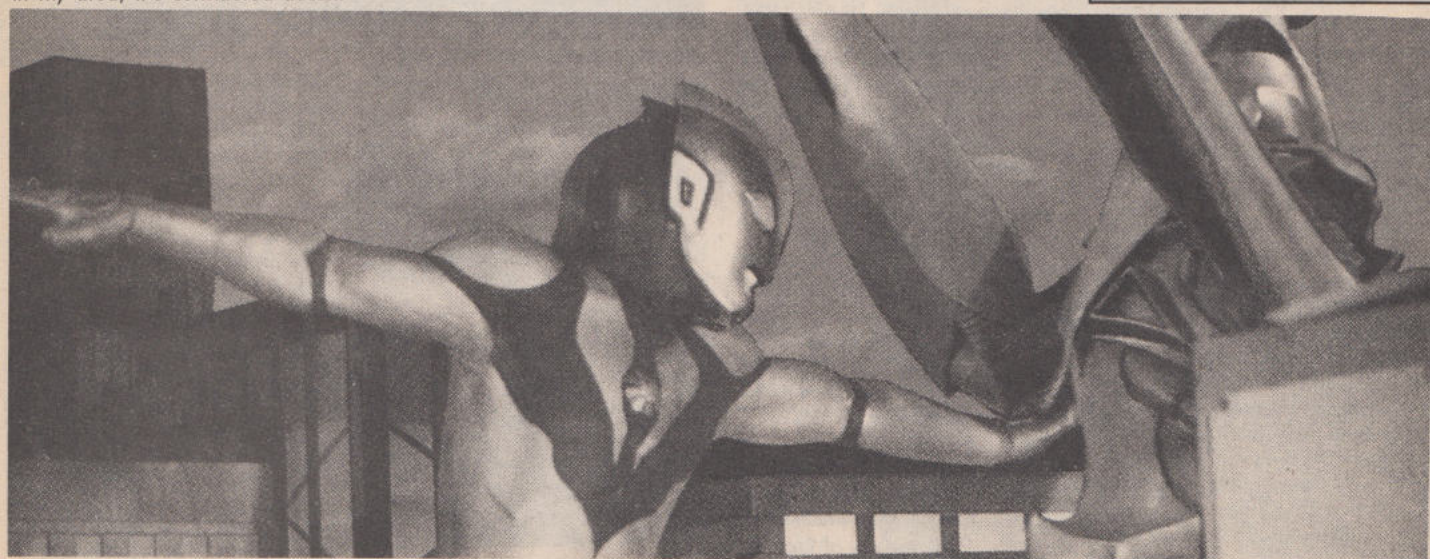
other supporting good guy is Professor Hart (Julian Combs), who's part of a computer dimension (we see him on TV screens only), like Max Headroom or Patrick Macnee's character in **SUPER FORCE**. Hart advises our heroes on their adventures fighting the bad guys. Also on hand is Jeb (aka Zeb) a talking dog replacing Springer, a doberman pincher who spoke Japanese in the original Japanese version (**METALDER**). Despite this large supporting cast, there's still enough room for tons of action and magnificent special effects, not to mention an effective subplot about Ryan's long lost father, who taught him so much (most episodes start with a flashback to Ryan's childhood). \*\*\* -DF

## ウルトラマン パワード ULTRAMAN: THE ULTIMATE HERO

{aka **ULTRAMAN POWERD, THE ULTIMATE HERO**} 1994, Producers: Kazuo Tsuburaya & Shigeru Watanabe, Executive Producer: Noboru Tsuburaya, Production Designer: Aaron Osborne, Directors of Photography: Don E. Fauntleroy, Carlos Gonzales



Above: The Worldwide Investigative Network Response Hawk jet. Below: **ULTRAMAN: THE ULTIMATE HERO**.







*Left & above: Ultraman in action.  
Right top: The monster Kemura  
opens his deadly shell. Middle: The  
WINR team Kane Kosugi, Sandra  
Guibord, Harrison Page, Robyn  
Bliley and Rob Roy Fitzgerald.  
Bottom: The fearsome Red King.*

Barreto, Editor: Nina M. Gilberti, Mechanical Design: Mahiro Maeda, Shinji Higuchi, Toshio Miike, Ultraman & Monster Costumes created by Kevin Hudson, Special Effects Supervisor: Joseph Viskocil, Produced by Juliet Avola, Directed by King Wilder, Starring: Harrison Page (Captain Richard Ebling), Robyn Bliley (Jennifer Young), Rob Roy Fitzgerald (I completely forgot this turkey's name. I believe he's suppose to be the funny guy), Sandra Guibord (Communications Officer Teresa Beck), and Kane Kosugi as Kenichi Kai, Reviewed by Kathy Curry

**ULTRAMAN POWERED: THE ULTIMATE HERO** is about the most uninspiring Ultra series I have ever seen. I really hoped to start this article, "ULTRAMAN POWERED was most excellent!", but can't. It sucked!!!!!!!!!!!! It does not leave me wanting to spend money. I can wait till this guy comes to Channel 44. And then, I will hardly care if they screw up their scheduling. I have been told they're unable to find an American distributor. The American release date has been pushed back from Fall of '93 to Spring of '94, to Fall of '94, to Winter '94, etc. Not even the people who worked on this series know. If I caught this series one night when I couldn't sleep, it would certainly not inspire me to pursue Ultraman further. The Aussies did a better job. I think they tried too hard to recreate the original Ultraman. They used many of the same sound effects. They used an updated ver-

sion of the Science Patrol insignia.

I am convinced that Americans cannot do Ultraman at all. American studios just don't have what it takes to do a Japanese genre. It looked too American. Writer of episode 3, John Douglas said they combined what they liked best from science fiction and tried to give it a look from the Thirties as in old Flash Gordon & Buck Rogers serials. I have news for this moron, this isn't what I like best from science fiction and the look of the Thirties was the result of the technology of that day. They wanted things to look smooth, but they just didn't have the technologies to do it with.

The monsters themselves were excellent. Ultraman's hands had lines in the palms like a real person does.

**Episode one:** Ultraman comes to Earth after Baltan. He chooses Kai as his alter-ego because he's the only Japanese guy on the team. Baltan just stomped around using obviously recycled sound effects. He didn't split in half, produce a spaceship or any of the things he is famous for from the original **ULTRAMAN** (1966). He just walked around as if he were doing a shopping mall appearance.

**Episode Two:** There was no plot. Kemular was even lamer than the Baltan. He was last seen in China in 1976. The software Theresa Beck used to call up his file was also used in **ULTRASEVEN**: "Operation Solar Energy". All he did was pop out of the ground and lie at the base of some southern California hills. To defeat this monster, all Ultraman had to do was open it up so W.I.N.R. could drop a bomb in it.

They chose to film the battles in slow motion because they believed giants move slower than smaller objects. The miniature city of Episode





One was a joke. The actor's reactions to the monsters and Ultraman himself were almost non-existent. They were completely unable to pull off the inspired awe at the end of Episode Two. The cast just went through the motions and recited their lines. Kane Kosugi did no fighting himself. There was no martial arts action whatsoever.

I cannot stand the blond woman, Young. She impresses me as a stupid bimbo who's only function is to fawn over her Ultrahero/lover boy. I just wanted to puke. She did this at the end of Episode Two.

The music was just plain mediocre and forgettable. It was J-pop (Japanese popular music) and some mediocre symphony music. I'm beginning to hate the J-pop sound. I was unable to get a straight answer as to whether these disks would be multi-lingual (i.e. English on one side and Japanese on the other) or not. This disk was dubbed in Japanese. I don't mind most Ultra serieses being in Japanese. I accept it as how the characters talk, but I really hoped these disks would be **MULTILINGUAL** like **ULTRAMAN: TOWARD THE FUTURE**. I wanted to hear the characters speak English because that is how they actually talk. I can pretty much figure out the story for myself. I doubt the original dialogue is going to improve the series.

Quite frankly, I no longer give a shit what they do with Ultraman in America. They're going to fuck it up no matter what they do. They have been releasing them on laser disk in Japan since February of 1994. If you're still interested, Volume Two, Three, Four and Five are already out, and by the time you read this, perhaps the whole show will be released. -Kathy Curry

## FIST OF THE NORTH STAR

1987; To Productions, Distributed in North America by Streamline Pictures, Running Time: 110 Min., Chief Executive Dir.: Satonori Imada, Production Planning: Ken Ariga & Yoshio Takami, Production Scenario: Susumu Takahisa, Based on the Graphic Novel by Buronson & Tetsuo Hara (originally published by Shuensha Jump Magazine), English Version's Voices: John Vickey, Michael McDonnough, Melodee Spivack, Dan Woren, Tony Oliver, Wally Burr, Reviewed by DF

Probably one of Japan's better feature-length cartoons in recent years, not that I'm really in any position to judge (I live a life of reality, not animation). It's got magnificent animation and superb art; or is it magnificent art and superb animation? Oh well, same difference- you get the idea. On the video rental box, it says "Definitely not Recommended

for Children", or something like that. Indeed, there's an ultra violent, disturbing slaughter every five minutes, this is one gory, morbid film. But I don't care, show it to the kiddies anyway! Scare some sense into the lame brats of our country, let them know that people do bleed (but perhaps not that much!!) Normally, when I review an incredibly gory, grotesque film, it's live action, so I debate as to whether the blood looks real. Sorry, anime geeks, but the same standards apply in a cartoon! In live action, red paint isn't convincing, but ketchup (aka cat-sup) usually is. The same rules apply here! The 'blood' (and there's lots of it) in **FIST OF THE NORTH STAR** isn't convincing, they should have used ketchup, they should dip their paintbrushes in it! I suggest those Japanese artists order their supplies from Duncan Heinz.

The gruesome violence is a lot of fun (though not for the characters in the film), but its downside is the nonsensical plot, having more holes than Swiss cheese. There are way too many characters, and most are introduced & killed off so quickly I didn't come to identify or recognize them. So many supporting characters look almost exactly alike, confusing matters all the more. But the great thing about an amusing mess like this is that you can miss any part of it, or start at any point and it doesn't matter! It all makes just as much sense, even played backwards! The incoherent script is just an excuse for endless exploding bodies and more red liquid than in a bloodbank. It's as though somebody had drawn all this gratuitous gore and decided later they'd try and link them together via a vague script about a guy who sometimes yells & punches like Bruce Lee, and how he does bloodletting for every overgrown Road Warrior in another barren, nuclear-devastated future. Perhaps this movie would have made a little sense to me if I'd read the **FIST OF THE NORTH STAR** graphic novel, comics, or watched the cartoon TV series, which I didn't.

The holocaustic radiation turned everyone (except two cute brats who ride around in a car and collect flowers) into musclemen and Scanners (yes! They make brains explode, just like in the American movie **SCANNERS**). They, crush, punch, and make each other explode & burst into bloody messes for no reason other than to show us more red than a sunburned Communist. Magic seeds, sought after by people with E.S.P are needed to save the Earth. Some of these scenes are slow-paced, but luckily, even in Scan Forward mode, my VCR still plays sound. So, at twice the speed, I could still here & understand the dialogue, though they sounded like Alvin Chipmunk. Any-

way, the combination of Zen-influenced magic and martial arts are entertaining, but it's that silly arty approach (a main part of Japanime for at least 20 years) and ridiculously far-fetched feats which distract from would could have been cool fights. Our main hero is Ken, who's searching for his girlfriend Julia, who keeps getting kidnapped by leaders of evil empires. And that just about sums it up for the plot; he goes around killing magical musclemen (Road Warriors, Vikings, Knights, Gladiators, etc.) from rival armies, who're also busy fighting each other. Just an excuse for endless slaughters. I was, however, relieved that there's none of this trendy, 'anime eroticism', there's only one brief nude scene, and the chick (Julia) in question has no nipples or pubic hair. The ending, for what it's worth, has Ken battling Rahl the Conqueror, and their martial arts seems to generate lightning bolts which destroys a whole city; but it's never explained if the destruction was intentional. The battle ends up as sort of a tie, Rahl dies, and Ken is badly injured. But he gets better just before the ending credits. \*\* -DF

## GRIDMAN SUPERHUMAN SAMURAI SYBER SQUAD

[original Japanese title: "Gridman"], Executive Producers: Andy Heyward, Noboru Tsuburaya, Robby London, Joe Tritero, Co-Executive Producer: Brad Kreisberg, Supervising Producers/Story Editors: Jimm Magon & Mark Zaslove, Coordinating Producer: Janice Sonski, Executive Special Effects Supervisor: Koichi Takano, Dir. of Special Effects: Kazuo Sagawa, Associate Producer: Nancy May, Casting Dir.: Marsha Goodman, Presented by Tsuburaya, Ultracom and Dic (New Elements: 1994, Original Elements: 1993) Starring: Mathew Lawrence, Glen Betaudin, Troy Slaten, Kevin Castro, Robin Mary Florence, and Tim Curry as the voice of Kilokahn, Reviewed by DF

Of all the Japanese programs to get butchered into American mish-mashes, I'm glad they chose **GRIDMAN**, itself a lame series, one of my least favorite Japanese programs ever! The series was so bad, naturally, this English hybrid is a slight improvement; I mean, it couldn't go lower, right?! Granted, young star Mathew Lawrence is the most irritating little runt since Gary Coleman, but Lawrence actually becomes Gridman ("Servo", as this Ultraman clone is called in America), so that means as long as Gridman/Servo is shown, we don't have to look at Mathew Lawrence! If you recall, in the Japa-

nese version, the heroic kiddie controlled Gridman, so throughout the fights, there were constant cuts to this dumb Japanese boy, at his computer, controlling Gridman's movements. Hell, the Japanese kiddies all looked alike, same hair styles, etc., and sometimes wore school uniforms. At least the young stars of **SUPERHUMAN SAMURAI SYBER SQUADS** have individual personas and personalities, not to mention a sense of humor.

The theme music is that same semi-metallic variety that powered **POWER RANGERS**, which I prefer over the original song from Japan where they sing stupid, pointless 'English' chants like: "Gridman! Baby Dan Dan!" So long as it rhymes, huh? Oh well, both songs are better than that lame theme chant for **VR TROOPERS**, which sounds like retarded rappers whispering while another retard pounds on a coffee table. But getting back to the English version of **GRIDMAN**, the only original Japanese footage that really survived was, as always, the monster battles. The Tsuburaya dudes still continue that post-Ultraman tradition they invented: A cybernetic hero tackling a bulky reptile-like monster on a set of a miniature city. The acrobatics & karate again reign supreme, but the set looks like neon, florescent Tinker Toys, it's supposedly being digital is their excuse for making it look so cheap. If Tsuburaya had the same budget they did in the good old days, you really think they'd have resorted to a gaudy set like this?! Otherwise, the FX (mostly computer crap) are okay, but a far cry from Tsuburaya's golden age of **ULTRAMAN LEO** or **ULTRAMAN 80!**

In critiquing the American version, I think this is worse than **POWER RANGERS** and **V.R. TROOPERS**, both of which come off as powerful, heart-warming dramas compared to this infantile series. It's incredibly immature, for an even younger audience than that for the other two shows. It's perhaps a step or two up from Barney. But if you don't try and think too hard, I think all ages, especially when severely intoxicated, can see the fun in this show. The young actors may be annoying, and are walking advertisements for the necessity of birth control, but seeing them make asses of themselves is amusing, in a pathetic sort of way. Of course, kiddies may find them hilarious, and that's what counts. I myself have an immature streak (which I know must shock you), so I got a kick out of some of the characters' dialogue..... Dork #1: "I once saw Raymond Burr talking to a green monster." Dork #2: "That was Godzilla!" Dork #1: "Hope, I'm sure it was Raymond Burr." In another, the female character (Robin Mary Flo-





rence) boasts she's wearing rubber underwear. In that same episode, Mathew Lawrence has a nightmare that the black principal at his school visits him, attired in bondage-like attire and says he's giving him a detention, "With extreme prejudice!" So yes, even the dorky American footage offers a few unexpected chuckles.

In the digital realm is evil alien invader Kilokahn, who, with the help of some weird kid (Glen Beaudin), is creating computer viruses, actually destructive creatures called Giga Monsters, or something like that. Whatever destruction they cause

within their computer world leaks out, via modems and telephone lines. In order to stop the worldwide havoc that always occurs as a result, a group of irritating, overacting kids from high school can also fly into their computer screens and become the Superhuman Samurai Syber Squad. Mathew Lawrence becomes the main hero Servo/Gridman, and some ugly drummer/jock, a moronic/insane geek, and a girl who wears a stupid hat control these weird spaceship-like air vehicles. These jets can fire missiles at the monster, or become at least two different robots which also take place in the on-screen battles.

\*1/2 -DF

## WILD 7

Broadcast from 10/9/72 until 3/26/73, based on popular stories by Mikiya Mochizuki appearing in SHONEN KING boys comics, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Okay, it's like this, I hear there's a new HK movie based on this old Japanese TV series, or the original comic book. Though I've not had the time to watch the Hong Kongese feature, I thought I might as well find out what the original show from Japan was like. So far, I've only been fortunate enough to see one episode, and was somewhat impressed. But this is one odd show, and virtually forgotten; its abnormal approach seems to have driven it into obscurity.

Here's the basic premiss: Seven secret agents who ride motorcycles and blow all the bad guys to bits using machineguns! This would not be abnormal if it were an adult crime drama (like the many Sonny Chiba did; GUERRILLAS SEVEN, DOBERMAN GANG, KEY HUNTER, THE BODYGUARDS, ETC.), featuring hour long episodes and plenty of vio-

lence (the likes of which, you'd never see on CHARLIE'S ANGELS, MIAMI LICE or any U.S. cop shows!). But here's the twist- This brutal series is treated like a superhero show for kiddies! Half hour episodes, fairly simple scripts, and its music, pacing, acting, editing, writing and sound FX are exactly the same as so many of Japan's more 'traditional' superheroes!

It's quite an oddity, it really fits into neither category, and I can't think of any series to compare it with, except for, maybe 1964's NINJA BUTAI GEKKO (aka "Phantom Agents" to a few select English audiences), minus the ninjas, and with far more bloodshed! So far, from what little I've seen, the show seems worthwhile, though the language barrier made parts of it unclear & dull to me.

Again, I've only seen one episode of this unique, hard to find series. This is one strange series I'll have to look into, and write about it again, if ever I get my facts straight. What follows is the basic idea for the plot of "Machinegun Rock", the only episode I've gotten my slimy paws on as yet!

"Machinegun Rock" seems to be about an ex-cop called Akimoto, who,

## SUPERHUMAN SAMURAI SYBER SQUAD





because of his skill at firing a machinegun, has been hired by an evil, underground army of terrorists called "Black Spider". They're all human (no robots or monsters), but are rather flamboyant. Most of the henchmen wear regular soldier uniforms, but two guards wear weird cloaks not unlike that of a Klansman, or better yet, like characters on Starman's Emerald Planet. Regard-

less, Akimoto blows everyone away (except Toba of the Wild 7) at some wedding, his gun was hidden in the cake. I gather the marriage was for a young cop, and that everyone at the reception was involved in law enforcement and had been getting too close to Black Spider (the main villains in the show). Seeing the merciless slaughter of an innocent, beautiful bride (blood all over her other-

wise white gown) sets the pace for this brutal, yet slick episode! Our heroic Wild 7 (I'm as yet unfamiliar with these characters as individuals, but there's a short guy added for comic relief, who's ridiculously out-of-place) identify & analyze Akimoto's bullets, and discover he's leading Black Spider's henchmen all over Tokyo, committing crimes and blowing everyone away (there are at least 25

deaths in this episode) in the process. But eventually, our heroes' secretary (a pretty girl) locates Akimoto, he's in a diesel truck on his way to another killing. But our heroes arrive and gun down the henchmen before the leader, Toba (the only guy to survive the carnage at the wedding) of the Wild 7 punches Akimoto into submission. But Akimoto's 'self-destruct' belt blows him to kingdom come. \*\*\* -DF

## TONG MOVIES: A 2ND OPINION cont...

TRIAD STORY (1991)- An ex-con tries to prevent his daughter from

following in his footsteps when she becomes involved with Wah Ching gangsters. Stephen Chow, An Jun Hung. \*\*\*1/2 -Marvin Quan

WILD SEARCH- Starring: Chow Yun

Fat, Cheri Chung, & Roy Cheung; Dir.: Ringo Lam. The director & star of PRISON ON FIRE 1 and 2, CITY ON FIRE, and FULL CONTACT bring us this HK version of WITNESS. It's a nice little movie and

the triad element comes in when Roy Cheung tries to kill Chow for an incident that happens early on in the film. \*\*\*1/2 -Garo Nigoghossian

## HONG KONG HEROES cont...

Dir.: Steven Shin, Starring Gong Li, Ray Lui & Rosamund Kwan Reviewed by Amy Harlib

THE GREAT CONQUEROR'S CONCUBINE is a wonderful treat- Pure orgasm for history buffs! It's a cast-of-thousands extravaganza with gorgeous scenic visuals, monumental sets, exquisite costumes, museum accurate art direction, spectacular battle scenes and martial art scenes all totally realistic, delicious dramatic scenes and, true to the historic pageant sub-genre, a voice over narrative to fill in the historical background for the dramatic re-enactments. One literal wrong note: Apparently the director

loved Boorman's EXCALIBUR because he stole the idea of using "Carmina Burana" music during the epic battle scenes- a literally jarring musical wrong note for me (music evocative of medieval Europe) when traditional Chinese music was used appropriately everywhere else.

The events in this movie have been the source for the famous Chinese opera "Farewell to my Concubine" that became the title of a popular recent movie about a Chinese opera troupe that performed this opera during the founding of the People's Republic and after. Gong Li also starred in this film!

The collaborative effort between Mainland China and HK is a 3 hr. long historical epic, a quintessential pageant about the fall of the Chin Dynasty and the subsequent civil wars that ended with the founding of the Han Dynasty in the 3rd century B.C. Ray Lui and Zhang Feng-Yi star as the two generals who start out as sworn brothers, allies in the cause of overthrowing the oppressive Chin rule. They then become bitter rivals as they lust for power, to found a new dynasty. Gong Li is exquisite as Lady Lu, the scheming consort of the man, Kao-Tzu, who will eventually become the founder of the Han hegemony with a

lot of behind-the-scenes help from his shrewd woman but at the cost of the death of he who was once his closest friend. Rosamund Kwan was lovely as the devoted wife of the doomed general. The two women maintain a curious and complex sworn sisterhood even as the men in their lives become deadly enemies, the friendship ends at the very end when a climactic battle scene concludes with the slaughter of Kao-Tzu's rival who heroically persists against hopeless odds. Lady Lu became known later historically as a notorious powermad empress who picked her enemies in jars!! \*\*\*\*\* -Amy Harlib

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## LETTERS cont...

word laser will turn up frequently. Please stop spelling it with a Z, it's not lazer, but laser.  
Lana Zukowski  
Pennsylvania

I've picked up issues of OC, and looking forward to more. It's refreshing for a change to not see lame, kiss-ass coverage/reviews and 'politically correct' essays by overpaid morons! And also to read about some old favorites like Ultraman and the Godzilla movies, which I haven't seen in ages.

I totally agree with you on that **MIGHTY MORPHING POWER RANGERS** or whatever it's suppose to be called. I had the opportunity of watching it on a daily basis when I finished temping, for a whole month! It's interesting to note that the only two nonconformist characters are the 'punk' types, or whatever Saban thinks is punk, and they're portrayed as fat and total losers! I guess the lesson for the five year olds of America is to get all the expensive clothes from the Gap, like everyone else, and you'll be worthy of Power Ranger status! I'm surprised the NAACP hasn't complained about all the token characters, but then I guess they're only being 'politically correct'. Hopefully this will die quickly like the Ninja Turtles, and probably without any credit ever given to Toei.

I also enjoyed the Jackie Chan coverage, that was probably the most I've seen written on him, more than than in any other of the martial arts rags on the stands. It's too bad Jackie is passed over by the likes of Van Damme, who's only good for 'butt' shots! Keep up the coverage of HK film!

Your review of **GODZILLA VS. MECHAGODZILLA** in the Jackie Chan issue was a classic! You joked that the Okinawans were descended from Bloods & Crips! You're not far off. When I was there, there were parts of the city that were dangerous, because of other Marines who still retained their Bloods & Crips ties after boot camp!

The only Japanimation series I watch is **RANMA 1/2**, most of the other stuff is crap; especially pornos like **UROTSUKIDOJI**. You're absolutely on the mark when you rag on the fat nerds that show up at cons to watch those

things! I've only been to one Japanese animation room at a gaming con, & there was this one tub so huge, that no matter where you sat, he blocked the screen! So now I'll avoid those in the future, though I wished that I'd read your review first!

Jeanette Shin  
Virginia, USA

I just recently got into Jackie Chan. After seeing **THE INCREDIBLY STRANGE FILM SHOW** episode on Jackie on the Discovery Channel, and then by running across issue #18 of OC at a local comics shop. I have a question about some films missing from your excellent Jackie Chan Filmography. I've run across movies like **JACKIE CHAN'S BLOOD PACT**, which I rented from a local store. From your brief description of **JACKIE CHAN & THE 36 CRAZY FIST**, I think they're the same film. It looks like Jackie in the opening credits, but the film itself looks like it was recorded from TV & then to further degrade the picture, it's been duplicated on EP speed. It's a real ripoff, whatever the case.

The next title is one called **NINJA THUNDERBOLT**, which I've seen dated anywhere from 1985 to 1987 in various Jackie video lists. I noticed in the cast list Jackie is listed last, making me wonder if this is merely another cameo role or somebody making use of outtakes from another Jackie film. The last title is **ARMOUR OF GOD 2- OPERATION CONDOR**. Dated 1991 on the video box. I found this at a local Vietnamese videostore- no subtitles and apparently dubbed in Vietnamese. I'm assuming it's a sequel to the original **ARMOUR OF GOD**.

Joseph D. Moore  
Arizona

*Dear Joseph, my god, you are new to JC films! Yep, OPERATION CONDOR is a sequel to ARMOUR OF GOD, blah blah blah. I'm amazed I accidentally excluded it from OC's JC issue! How stupid of me! Oh well, I did review it a few years back, in OC#15. I've never seen NINJA THUNDERBOLT, but I figure it, like NINJA: THE PROTECTOR, just uses Jackie's name in the credits for no reason other than to lie to the audience and get a few more bucks. -DF*

In OC's Jackie Chan issue, page 8, Jackie's white outfit makes him look like an angry cook. All that's missing is the chef's hat.  
James Cho  
Pennsylvania, USA

Just picked up some OCs, and mostly enjoyed them. I am not a fan of insult humor, so found many of the jokes falling flat.

**NEKKETSU SAIKYO GOZAUZURAA** ("Strongest Zeal Gozauer"? ) should seem somewhat childish, as it's aimed at elementary school audiences. Coincidentally, to your "Robo Hero" theme for OC#17, toward the end of the series, the male lead Kenichi finds his body becoming more and more mechanical (a development foreshadowed in the first episode's dream sequence). Due to it being faithful to its intended audience (little blood and almost no T&A), it isn't getting any coverage in the U.S. anime zines. So a quick plot synopsis as a public service:

Yet another evil alien race (this one apparently sentient machine life) seeks to bring the universe into clockwork order, with their present target being Earth. However, a benevolent alien reaches Earth at the same time. He reveals to several 5th-graders that these aliens also attacked during prehistoric times; the dinosaurs fought them off at the cost of extinction. To truly defeat the invaders, the fighting spirit of the dinosaurs must be combined with technology and the purity of children in dinosaur mecha called "Saurers". The kids use their Saurers to fight various machine-monsters the invaders mutate into Earth machines. The emphasis is on team play, with the entire fifth grade required to run the robots smoothly. The Saurers go dead when an adult touches the controls, which greatly frustrates the general. He's been in three of these series and still hasn't gotten to pilot a mechal!

Actually, only about 80% of Japanese animation looks the same. However, I don't think the remaining 20% would be your cup of tea either, as they tend to be domestic sitcoms, cooking shows and other such non-superhero stuff.

About your comment in the review of **THE GOLDEN BAT**, about scientists always having daughters, I remember seeing some interesting statistical research which

showed that men who've been exposed to extreme temperatures, unusual atmospheric pressure or toxic chemicals have female children in vast disproportion to male ones. Of course, previous to seeing this research, my theory was that these scientists had made their daughters. After all, you never see a mother, right?

One last thing. Is your use of the word "illusive" an attempt to make a portmanteau word combining the meanings of "illusionary" and "elusive"? Or are you just misspelling the latter word repeatedly? If the latter, I must at least congratulate you on not being lazy enough to proofread with a spellchecker.

Scott Jamison  
Minnesota, USA

*Dear Scott - Thanks for the info on GOZAUZURAA, but no thanks to the Japanese for producing it. You're right, as mentioned before, I've been misspelling 'elusive' for years! I'm indeed lazy enough to use a spellcheck sometimes, but it doesn't always work. Apparently, there IS a word spelled 'illusive', which I've never used in its proper context. I've never claimed to be a great speller. -DF*

Your comments on 'animation' and 'cartoon' were spot on and have long needed to be said. People assume that because some of us know Japanese and specialise in Japan & its cultures that we ought to like anime. I have never liked cartoons much, from whatever culture.

Your remarks about the impact watching **ULTRAMAN** (in OC#18) had on your generation in the early 1970s almost exactly parallels that of kids here in the 1960s watching **THE SAMURAI**- talking about it the next day in school, playing it, being able to pronounce Japanese names, being made aware there was more to life than imported American TV, cricket & rugby. So I could relate to that item, even though I have never seen either **ULTRAMAN** or **ULTRASEVEN (BLAKE'S SEVEN)**, yes...).

The **SAMURAI** article was certainly a lively introduction to the subject and generally gave a pretty good idea of what it was like and what to expect from the tapes from the viewpoint of someone who'd never seen the whole series. So



just a few points to clarify:

There are three tapes available commercially, the third by mailorder. Of the surviving episodes there are perhaps enough to release one more tape. Meantime the people who have them have started scouring New Zealand (as it was shown there, too) as well as HK and Southeast Asia. They did write to Senkosha about obtaining either some or all episodes but were told the cost per episode was something like US\$2000 each (multiply that by 128). As they are not a TV company, there is no way they could afford this. Attempts to get one of the TV networks interested fell through,

partly because it's old and in b&w. They also enquired about the feature films that were made as spin-offs and were told they could have the exclusive rights to screen them, including TV etc., for five years for US\$20,000 per film. Again they could not afford it. The film prints are in good condition.

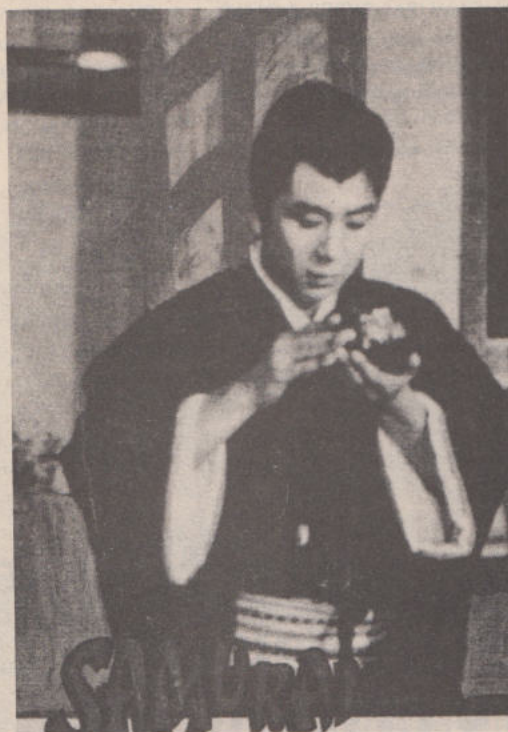
The reason the episodes seem a bit disjointed is that they are simply bits of different stories. The surviving episodes are more or less random episodes. As each story was told in 13 parts and within those 13 parts there were mini-stories told in 2-parts, and in only one case have both parts of one of these mini-arcs survived, it's no wonder they seem incoherent. Especially as it seems that the tapes you've seen have had the contents of all three commercially available tapes randomly edited on to them. The tapes as originally released are as follows.....

Tape #1: "Touch of Death" (from the second Fuma ninja story), "Liv-

ing Death" and the bog-awful interview.

Tape #2: "The Man from Edo" (the one about the Ainu you call 'Contest of Death'), "Poison Dart" and "Revenge".

Tape #3: "Spider", "Master Ninja" and "Magic Bell".



These represent a grab-bag of episodes from all over the place. The first tape has an episode from the 6th story followed by one from the 7th; the second tape has the very first episode of all (1962) followed by the mini-arc from the 13th story (1965). And so on. A point of confusion arises because each story of 13 episodes has an over-all title (both the Japanese version and in the English one). Story 13 (from which the two episodes, "Poison Dart" and "Revenge" come on tape two) is called "Contest of Death" ("Ayakashi Ninpocho"). But each individual episode also has a separate title. So that is why episodes you mentioned have two titles. "Ninja Terror" ("Ninpo Negoro-Shu") is the title of the whole story, and "Living Death" is the name of that particular episode of the story. "Phantom Ninja" is the whole story title, "Master Ninja" is the name of that individual episode. "Pirate Treasure" is the story title, "Magic Bell

is the individual episode title.

In brief, only the first 13-part story made in 1962 didn't feature a ninja. From 1963-1965 they were the sole villains, either working for some rebellious daimyo or for themselves. Each episode had at least one sword fight and lots of leaping in & out of trees or off roofs, hurling shurikens,

main villain which was a further link to the original series as he played its most famous villain, Kongo of Koga, as well as Genzo the Spider and Gensai the Wolf.

Anyway, I don't want to ramble on any longer. Nothing is more tedious than the 'trainpotter fanboy (fangirl?)' mentality. I think you did a good job condensing down a lot of information in an entertaining way. Nikki White Australia

Many compliments on the latest OC- again packed with insight and information, all for a measly \$3.95. I feel like I'm cheating every time I pick up my issues, so feel free to hike the cover price a buck if necessary to keep it coming and on schedule.

You're lucky to be doing what

you enjoy- as long as I've known of your work, you've championed the cause of Asian works purely as a fan and admirer. I know you've gotten a few letters criticizing you for the language and attitudes you've taken in some pieces, but don't let that change your direction. I've found myself laughing out loud at some of your material, and although we haven't always agreed on films, I trust your comments are direct and from the heart. I also know that with your magazine I'm getting far more analysis and info than I'd get from any mainstream magazine of larger distribution.

Gee, the only real complaint I have on OC's Godzilla Issue is that you cut off Robert Brown's rambling but fascinating bio-tirade of actor supreme Nick Adams. I know you only asked for a film plot synopsis and comments on MONSTER ZERO, and instead got a graphic, blow-by-blow of Adams's amazing technicolor self-destruct-



tion, but hell- I kind of liked it. I've always wondered what happened to our golden boy, and now I'll never know.

Oh, and one more thing. Don't let the recent criticism of your AGE OF DEMONS in magazines which trumpet the cause of sick pornography like NEKROMANTIC (probably the most disgusting and poorly constructed piece of garbage I've ever had the displeasure of watching) get to you (as if it could). Many such magazines seem intent on pushing films that exist purely to offend and sicken, and show no real creativity or direction.

Brian Ridgway  
Michigan

*Dear Brian - My point exactly! My videos were never intended for fans of nekrophilia, body piercings or erotic homo flicks. The fact that my taste differs from there's pleases me no end. As for my chopping up Robert Brown's article, it was necessary to conserve*

*space. I knew from the start Robert would go indepth about Nick Adams, and could come up with rare info worth preserving; that's why I chose him to review MONSTER ZERO. But alas, it was OC's Godzilla issue, not a Nick Adams issue! Perhaps eventually, I'll beg Robert to do an article on Nick Adams for OC, with heavy emphasis on MONSTER ZERO and FRANKENSTIEN CONQUERS THE WORLD. -DF*

I got an issue of your zine OC (the Godzilla issue) and I really liked it very much! I like the way you do your mag, you really speak your mind, which is good! No censoring, just straight out, say what you feel like.

I'm a big ULTRAMAN fan. As you know, the badly respected ULTRASEVEN show was on TNT recently, and I'm writing an angry letter to TNT expressing my anger and outrage of how they treated the show. If it's possible could you print my letter in one of your is-

sues? /Well, I don't know. You're asking for a little too much. -DF/ Fans have to know and rally support against these TV networks, to give us fans of Japanese fantasy what we want to see on TV. Plus I agree with you on what you said about the MIGHTY MORPHIN POWER RANGERS, the show is a symbol of racism! Against the original Japanese cast! And even VR TROOPERS and SUPERHUMAN SAMURAI SYBER SQUAD is the same way as well. I don't even watch them on TV. I've been into the Japanese genre for 20 years.

As Ultraman would say,  
"Shooowat!"

Lenell Bridges  
Illinois

*Dear Lenell -- I believe Ultraman himself actually pronounces it, "Swatch", just like the name of those watches. -DF*

You need to to brush up on your Chinese if you're gonna' use

it in your mag, page 25 in the Nov. #4 issue has a headline which reads: "Yesterday is Glamorous, Today is-" It's incomplete. I don't mean to pick your mag apart until it scabs and bleeds but it is the headline. Oh, and the Sally Yeh 'look-alike' in HOLY VIRGIN VS. THE EVIL DEAD is Pauline Yeung (Miss HK '89), who's done a lot of TVB movies, MC hosting, & several HK features like HOW TO BE A BILLIONAIRE WITHOUT REALLY TRYING, and most noticeably, Jackie Chan's love interest in DRAGONS FOREVER, one of your faves. And yes, that's Donnie Yen (IRON MONKEY, TIGER CAGE).

Darren Wheeling  
Virginia

*Thanks for the info, it's amazing that I didn't recognize it's the same actress in both DRAGONS FOREVER and HOLY VIRGIN VS. THE EVIL DEAD! Looking back on it, I guess her resemblance to Sally Yeh is only slight. -DF*

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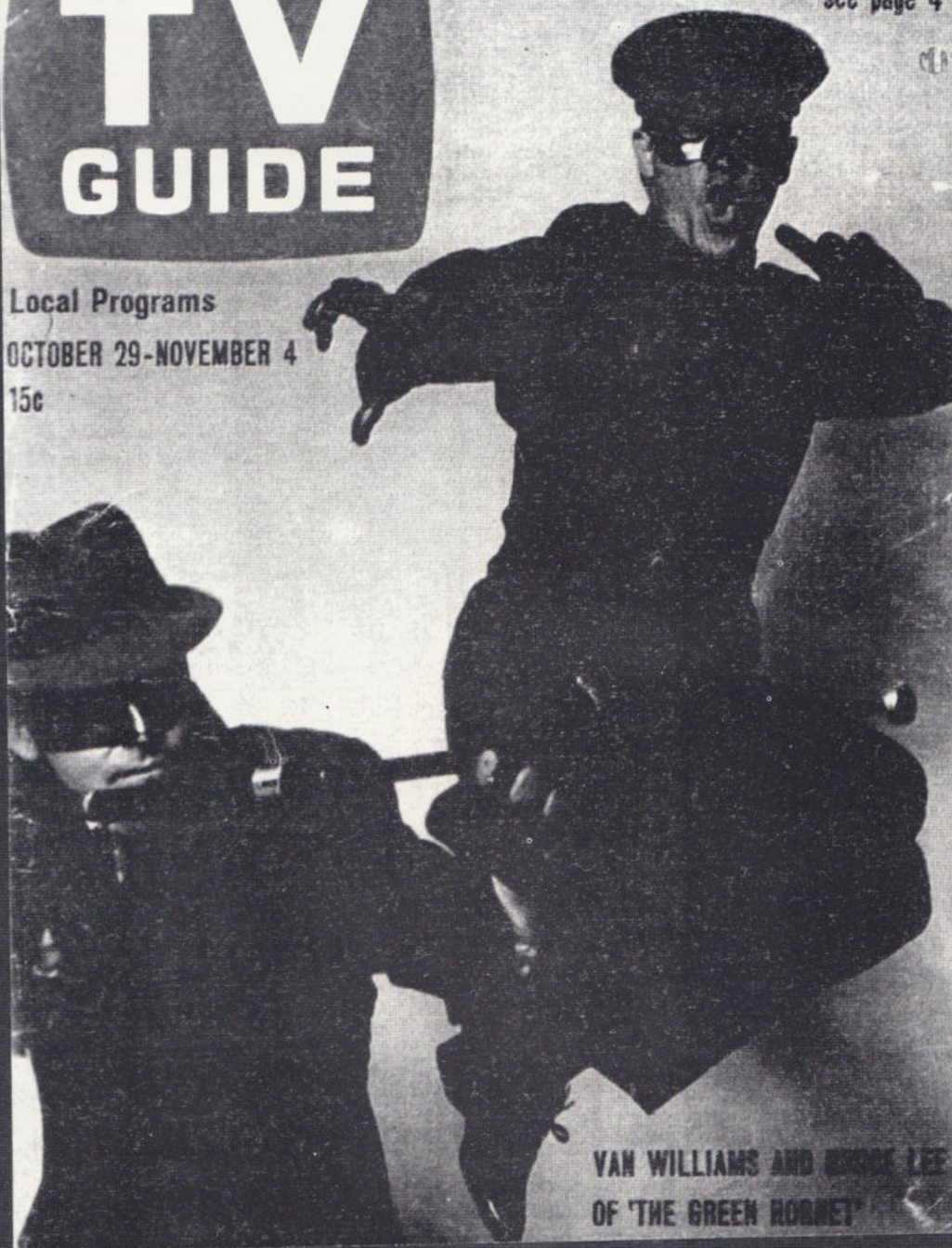
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